

Tianxia



BLOOD, SILK & JADE

BY JACK NORRIS



Tianxia

**BLOOD, SILK
& JADE**

PUBLISHER

James Dawsey

AUTHOR

Jack Norris

ART

Denise Jones

MAP

Marco Morte

EDITING

Nathan Kahler

ART DIRECTION AND GRAPHIC DESIGN

Daniel Solis, with Ruben Byrd

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This book is dedicated to

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CHAPTER ONE

WELCOME TO TIANXIA

OCCURRENCE AT PEACH BLOSSOM BRIDGE

“The right ground can turn a man into an army, and an army into a collection of fools.” Ma Wei Sheng’s father had told him this when he was eight.

His father, the Great General Ma, victor of countless battles fought for his Emperor and the Great Empire of Shénzhōu. He was always right, a fact which comforted and frustrated the young swordsman on alternating occasions. Today, watching thirty swordsmen rush him across the opposite end of the narrow bridge was one of the comforting times.

He had stumbled upon the White Turbans by accident. A murdered farmer, a young child asking for his aid, and a youthful enthusiasm for justice and chivalry had led him to uncover the sect. Their ultimate goal was to overthrow the empire and cast down the priesthoods, replacing both with their heretical theocracy. Wei Sheng had not figured out how the death of the farmer featured in their plot. He might never find out

now, not if the next few moments went against them. Of course, he was not unprepared.

“Swift and thoughtful action saves lives. Swift and thoughtless action ends them.” Another of his father’s sayings, and again, so very appropriate. He had fled the Turbans when he saw their numbers. Not out of fear, but only to find the right ground. He found it at Peach Blossom Bridge.

The bridge was narrow and unimpressive. It crossed a small tributary of the Silk River, little more than a stream but just fast and deep enough to make crossing uncertain. The bridge had been built to allow for the small amounts of traffic between the nearby villages, and it was difficult for more than three or four men to walk side by side. In other words, it was perfect.

Ma Wei Sheng watched as the White Turbans ran across the bridge towards him, all drawn swords and murderous fury and fear. They needed him dead, he

knew, lest he escape, bringing soldiers and magistrates to crush their sect.

Unfortunately for them, escape was not Wei Sheng’s strategy. He did not wish to avoid fighting. He simply wished to find the right place for it—a narrow bridge where their thirty fanatical fighters became rows of three or four pressing against each other with little room to swing their blades. On this little, unassuming bridge, Ma Wei Sheng was the army, and they merely a collection of fools.

The White Turbans slowed momentarily when they realized he had stopped. Perhaps some among them had read the Great General’s works and realized their folly, or maybe they were simply confused their prey had stopped running.

“Wondering on its purpose only kills its utility,” Ma Wei Sheng whispered to himself while moving to meet the mob of thirty armed killers.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Tianxia uses a variety of terms inspired by Chinese history and martial arts drama, especially in the setting material.

To make it easier to follow, we have included this handy list of common terms right up front.

Adherents of the Tao: Also called Dao, this religion makes up one of the three major belief systems of Shénzhōu. Focusing on harmony, balance, and spontaneous and natural actions, Daoists seek peace and immortality through purity of purpose and action. This religion is similar to real world Daoism, but filtered through the *wuxia*/Kung Fu action genre *Tianxia* embraces.

Chi: Internal energies thought to be capable of great feats if properly channeled, manipulated, and cultivated. It is often divided into categories, most notably *Yin* and *Yang*. Also a Skill within the game, revolving around *Chi* use during play.

Da Jiang (“Great River”): One of the largest and most important waterways in Shénzhōu, it runs through the southern provinces and flows east to the sea. As it does not pass through the starting setting of Jiāngzhōu, it is only briefly mentioned in this book, but its importance to Shénzhōu as a whole merits mention here.

Emperor: The ruler of Shénzhōu and member of one of the several dynasties who have ruled the empire since its founding. Also known as *Huangdi*, he is believed ordained by heaven to rule through a complex bureaucracy of ministers, governors, and officials. Sometimes called the Son of Heaven, or *Tiānzǐ*, referencing the Shén belief that he rightly rules all the lands of the world. In various periods of history, this ruler has been an empress.

Eunuchs: A term used to describe both those who have had their sex organs removed and the eunuchs who serve as government ministers and imperial officials. In the land of Shénzhōu, this process involves a mystic ritual, not surgery. Often portrayed as villains in Chinese period media.

Followers of Bodhisattva: Also known as Bodhists, this religion makes up one of the three major belief systems of Shénzhōu. Buddhism has various sects and famed enlightened figures in its past, including its founder and namesake. Bodhists seek enlightenment through the alleviation of suffering by rejecting material attachments. This religion is similar to real world Buddhism, but filtered through the *wuxia*/Kung Fu action genre *Tianxia* embraces.

Gong: Artisans and craftsmen, they make the up part of the “middle class” of Shénzhōu.

Jade Road: A major trade route named for its importance in the mining and production of jade goods, this road extends beyond the borders of Shénzhōu and travels all the way to the major cities in the eastern part of the empire.

Jianghu: Sometimes called the Wu Lin, this is a community and culture of warriors and martial artists. Most *wuxia* fiction takes place in the Jianghu, and it is seen as existing on the fringes of normal society in a place where beggars can best princes if their skills are strong enough.

Jiāngzhōu (“Border Land”): Border province on the western edge of Shénzhōu, this largely lawless land of bandits, gangs, and corrupt officials is the focus of *TIANXIA: BLOOD, SILK & JADE*.

Kung Fu: Catchall term for Chinese martial arts, used in *Tianxia* to describe the various styles and substyles that make up this game’s martial arts rules.

Legalism: The official religion of the empire and one of the three major belief systems of Shénzhōu, Legalism focuses on devotion to duty and obedience of laws and established social order. This religion is similar to real world Confucianism, but filtered through the *wuxia*/Kung Fu action genre *Tianxia* embraces.

Nong: Peasants and farmers, they are the lowest social class that receives any recognition or respect in Shénzhōu.

Security Companies: Businesses employing many mercenaries and warriors in Shénzhōu who can be paid to protect various goods and people. Often respected by, and rivals with, government authorities, these institutions are run by powerful warriors ranging from heroic protectors to little more than bandits.

Shang: Merchants and traders. They form part of the “middle class” of Shénzhōu, though the wealthiest of them mix with the social elite.

Sifu: Honorific given to masters and teachers, much like Master in English or *sensei* in Japanese. Students of Kung Fu are expected to respect their *sifu* even after they have ceased studying with them.

Shén: Collective name for the people of Shénzhōu. Rarely used in many cases, since people are often defined more by the village or province they live in, but the term sees use in diplomatic or government circles. Foreigners often call people or objects from Shénzhōu “Shénese”.

Shénzhōu (“Divine Realm”): Name given to the entire realm in *Tianxia*. Ruled over by a dynastic imperial system supported by countless ministers and bureaucrats, this land is much like ancient China during various periods.

Shi: Nobles and scholars, they rule Shénzhōu and are among its most respected members.

Silk River: A major waterway in Shénzhōu, it passes through Jiāngzhōu and continues east through the empire to the sea.

Tianxia (“Under Heaven”): A concept involving cultural unification once used to refer to all the various parts of the Chinese empire or the world, it is the name for this game as a whole (system and setting).

Wuxia (“Wandering Swordsman” or “Knight Errant”): Both a type of character and genre of media, *wuxia* films and books focus on the lives and struggles of highly skilled warriors. *Wuxia* heroes often have skills and abilities bordering on or crossing over into the superhuman.

Wu Xing: A fivefold system of connected colors, seasons, directions, animals, and other concepts, the Wu Xing features heavily into Chinese culture, folklore, and legends. Everything from medicine to fashion is influenced by the concepts. In *Tianxia*, the traditional animals of the Wu Xing are slightly altered to prevent repetition and for dramatic purposes, with the snake and phoenix replacing the more commonly used tortoise and red bird, and the crane replacing a second dragon present in the framework.

Yang: Term for various “positive” forces. Not seen as inherently good, though this is sometimes misunderstood in the West. *Yang* involves proactive forces, heat, light, masculinity, and other such concepts.

Yi (“Outsider” or “Barbarian”): A term technically referring to anyone from outside Shénzhōu, Yi is used commonly to refer to barbarians, strange foreigners, and those who exist completely outside Shén society. Bandits and wandering warriors are not typically considered Yi, as they are still seen as having some connections to Shénzhōu. This term is not inherently pejorative, but is often used as such. Sometimes the term *Hú* is used, especially for the barbarian tribes living near the borders of Shénzhōu.

Yin: Term for various “negative” forces. Not seen as evil or dark, though this is sometimes misunderstood in the West. *Yin* involves reactive forces, cold, winter, shadow, femininity, and other such concepts.

Zhōngzhōu (“Center Land”): Core province housing the imperial capital city and emperor’s palace. Often used in the west to refer to various eastern areas with strong imperial presence, regardless of their actual location. Despite being located along the eastern shore, it is considered the central point of Shénzhōu due to its historical significance as the central point of early Shénzhōu and its imperial presence.

WHAT IS TIANXIA?

Tianxia (“under heaven”) is a series of rules and setting supplements for the FATE CORE system.

The title of the game comes from both the concept of all the lands and people in Imperial China existing under the purview of the gods and their celestial kingdom and the term used for the imperial unification of kingdoms and cultures to create a central “China” that had previously not existed. The films *Hero* (Jet Li, not Dustin Hoffman) and *The Emperor and the Assassin* present fictionalized but highly entertaining versions of how that unification began.

Just as *Tianxia* the concept was supposed to include everything that existed “under heaven” in real world imperial China, *Tianxia* the game includes everything in our rules and setting materials heavily inspired by Chinese myth, legend, and modern media such as Kung Fu and *wuxia* literature and film.

WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

TIANXIA: BLOOD, SILK & JADE is the core book for Vigilance Press’ *Tianxia* game setting and a martial arts action supplement for use with Evil Hat Productions’ *FATE CORE* system. As such, you will need a copy of the *FATE CORE* rules to play. As of the time this book was written, these rules are available as a “pay what you want” PDF from websites such as Rpgnow.com and Drivethrurpg.com and for purchase from Evil Hat and many fine retailers.

This book is divided up into four main parts. The first is an introduction to *Tianxia*, the *wuxia* and Kung Fu action genres, Player Character (“PC”) roles in the game, and other important genre elements.

The second part is devoted to the setting of Shénzhōu and a detailed description of one of the setting’s regions: the province of Jiāngzhōu. This

includes noteworthy aspects and game statistics for important Non-Player Characters (“NPCs”). Aspects are formatted **LIKE THIS** in the text and are often included in the descriptions of locations and individuals.

This third part is an introduction to the rules for running action-packed martial arts games powered by the *Fate* rules. The bulk of this section presents the Kung Fu system, a modular structure where players select their own Kung Fu style by combining two component Substyles. Lost Techniques that do not fit into existing Kung Fu styles, a new skill, and discussion of genre- and setting-specific rules options are also included in this section.

The fourth section is the Gamemastering section. It provides advice for plotting and running *Tianxia* games, adventure seeds, NPCs templates and examples, and inspirational materials for players and GMs looking for other media to mine for game ideas.

In all four sections, the character write-ups follow the standard format for Aspects established in *FATE CORE*—the first aspect is the character’s **HIGH CONCEPT**, the second is their **TROUBLE** aspect, and then any other relevant Aspects are listed.

Throughout the book, readers will also note various sidebars and examples presented. These either show how a particular rule or concept works in play or provide additional discussion of how to use the materials in this book. The sidebars are all optional information, but can be useful for GMs and players looking for some additional insight or rules variants.

CARDINAL RULES OF CAMPAIGN CUSTOMIZATION

A lot of *Tianxia* is designed to be tweaked, added to, altered, and customized. Throughout this book, and in future supplements, there will be suggestions on how to handle particularly complex, interesting, or polarizing issues. These range from balancing historical realism with issues of gender, race, and sexual orientation to just how crazy and powerful you want characters' Kung Fu to be. With any of these considerations there are a few simple rules:

Step One: Talk it Out

If you are not sure about how to represent something in the game, talk it out. Gamemasters (GMs), talk to your players. Players, bring up issues, desires, and concerns with the other players, especially the GM. Communication gets around a lot of potential pitfalls.

Step Two: Figure it Out

Once you know what you want, decide how to make it work. Do you need to change the setting, the way actions are described, or make some other alteration? Figure out a method to address the issue and make sure everyone knows what it is and is cool with it.

Step Three: Now Go Forth

Got a general idea of how to handle things? Awesome, but do not get too bogged down in such concerns and instead look to playing, advancing the characters and setting through dynamic action, and where things will go from there. You do not need to figure out every little detail or concern up front, either. You can tackle things as they come up.

Step Four: ...and Kick Ass

When in doubt, fight! Or give an awesome speech! Or dive into a dramatic but possibly ill-advised alliance or romance! If the setting is not quite fitting what you want despite going through the other steps, then make adjustments dramatically and show everyone what you are talking about. Dynamic scenarios might lead to the occasional new issue to discuss, but it is a great way to show everyone what sort of fun you want to have.







So there you go: *Talk it Out, Figure it Out, Now Go Forth, and Kick Ass.* You might be surprised what this approach can fix.

WHO ARE THE PCs?

The default assumption in *Tianxia* is that the Player Characters (“PCs”) are wandering martial arts warriors who end up getting embroiled in battles and adventures as part of the Jianghu, a hidden world of martial arts, honor, rivalry, and action. This concept covers wandering monks seeking the mysteries of the universe, warrior bandits seeking fortune and fame, errant nobles looking to prove their worth through heroic acts, and various other concepts. Through play, such characters will likely develop to become more significant in the setting: heading or founding major organizations, developing their own impressive Kung Fu styles, or even achieving enlightenment and becoming immortal! Of course, they might just wander the world forever, having great battles and adventures. The sample characters presented in this book are designed with this character type in mind, and can be used as inspiration or ready-to-play PCs.

Of course, that is far from the only way to play *Tianxia*. PCs can begin as members of static institutions and organizations or already associated with large fixtures of the setting, either those detailed in the setting materials or ones the GMs and players create. PCs could be members of a noble family, army of bandits, or local constabulary. They might be young students in a major martial arts academy filled with mysteries, intrigue, and terrible threats they must rise to face (think *Harry Potter* with Kung Fu), or imperial agents tasked to retrieve an errant Imperial prince from an area infested with bandits and killers following the death of his two older brothers (*Saving Private Ryan*, *Tianxia* style!). There are hundreds of possibilities.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO PLAY?

To play *Tianxia* you will need a few things, starting with a copy of both this book and the *FATE CORE* rules system. Since you are reading this, you have one of them right now and can get the *FATE CORE* rules as a free PDF, or purchase a print copy online (as mentioned above) or at various fine gaming stores around the world. You will also need dice or some way to resolve character actions: these can be Fudge dice, six-sided dice marked with , , and  sides; Fate Cards, a deck available from Evil Hat (the makers of *FATE CORE*) which mimics the same dice, or you can use standard six-siders (treating 1-2 as , 3-4 as , and 5-6 as ).

In addition, you will want a character sheet for each player’s character and GMs will want something to record the statistics of characters they are using. Character sheets specific to *Tianxia* are provided in this book for copying, though you can also find them on the Vigilance Press website. You do not need to use these sheets; you can make your own or just use regular paper, but we think they are spiffy. Throw in some writing utensils and a place to play, and that is all you will need; there are three other things you might want to add, however.

The first is a way to keep track of Fate Points. Since these points get acquired and spent fairly regularly, using something solid to track them is useful. Pennies, dice, stones, or anything else you have handy work just fine. Index cards are also useful, as they can be used to jot down situation, campaign, or other temporary aspects that come up in play. Finally, it might help to have some way of tracking whose turn it is when combat and other dramatic situations come up in play, especially if the players are not sitting in any approximation of their characters’ order in such encounters. This can be anything easily passed around, from an action figure to a piece of paper. Again, you do not need any of this stuff to play, but it can be a real help if the group is having trouble keeping things straight.

WUXIA, KUNG FU, AND GENRE

Tianxia is a mash-up of two distinctive subgenres many people consider the same thing, wuxia and more traditional Kung Fu or martial arts drama.

Wuxia is a Chinese term, meaning “wandering warrior” or “knight errant”, that focuses on the trials and tribulations of transient warriors with great skill as they deal with the conflicts in the martial arts world, a violent subculture involving duels, vendettas, survival and prosperity through martial skill. Even political intrigues and similar struggles are framed by conflicts between powerful warriors. *Wuxia* can usually do incredible things and often have powers and skills that seem superhuman, such as making leaps covering hundreds of feet or knocking volleys of arrows out of the air mid-flight. Good examples of *wuxia* in media are films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Hero*, *The Bride with White Hair*, *Storm Riders* and its sequel *Storm Warriors*, *Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame*, and *Wuxia* (shocking, I know). Chinese comics like *Heaven Sword Dragon Saber* or *Storm Riders* also showcase these types of stories. Various high-powered martial arts dramas from Japan and Korea also share a fair amount in common thematically as well, though there are cultural differences that give them a different flavor.

By contrast, the traditional martial arts drama is usually more grounded. The characters often have powerful fighting skills, but high-flying superpowers and secret martial arts subculture usually gives way to a somewhat more grounded approach. Politics, Kung Fu school rivalries, criminal organizations, and smaller scale interactions feature more prominently in the plots of these stories. Comedy is also more common. The action often favors straight melees and fights over special effects and superheroic stunts, though even

with few or no wires or computer graphics the action can still be jaw dropping and seem almost superhuman. Examples of traditional Kung Fu in media are *Last Hurrah for Chivalry*, *Fist of Legend*, *Five Deadly Venoms*, *36th Chamber of Shaolin*, and pretty much everything Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan ever did.

Of course there is a lot of crossover between these two subgenres, and that is where we find *Tianxia*. The martial arts action is more like *wuxia*, it is over the top, and characters are capable of some pretty crazy feats, especially once they gain some skill. On the other hand, the stories revolve around not just the martial arts world and its inhabitants, but also bandits, criminals, spies, corrupt merchants and officials. This means *Tianxia* characters tend to keep their feet planted more firmly on the ground even when they are punching a mountain in space. This also tends to lead to a very stylized and highly referential feel that mash-up or mixed genre settings sometimes have. Good examples of this mix of over-the-top and down-to-earth are found in Western films like *Bunraku* (though it is more Japanese in flavor), and *Man With the Iron Fists*, as well as Chinese films like *Iron Monkey* or *The Duel*. A list of more inspirational material is provided later in this book.

Naturally, GMs and players can ignore *Tianxia*'s default mixture of these two subgenres to favor one over the other. Mechanically and setting wise, little change is needed. Simply dial up or down descriptions of character actions, focus on different aspects of the setting, and you are good to go.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Due to different styles of translating media into English, fans of Asian martial arts fiction and fantasy are probably used to varying approaches in naming characters. Some stories use Chinese names like Xiao Mei or Leung Zhao, with the family name first and given name second. Others translate a character's name to something evocative or poetic, like Falling Flower or Golden Devil. Still others combine the two and present names like Iron Tsang or Silken Wei, with the second name usually being the Chinese-themed

one. In some cases, the English descriptive name is considered the family name, so a young swordsman named Relentless Hu might be the son of famed Kung Fu master Relentless Han.

Tianxia uses all these options, but will mostly focus on those that use English descriptive names in whole or part. Players and GMs are encouraged to do so as well, as it stays genre appropriate while being easier to invent evocative names without worrying about embarrassing mispronunciations and misspellings.

THE WU XING

A fivefold system of connected colors, seasons, directions, animals and other concepts, the Wu Xing was a core element of many Imperial Chinese institutions, including the arts and medicinal cures.

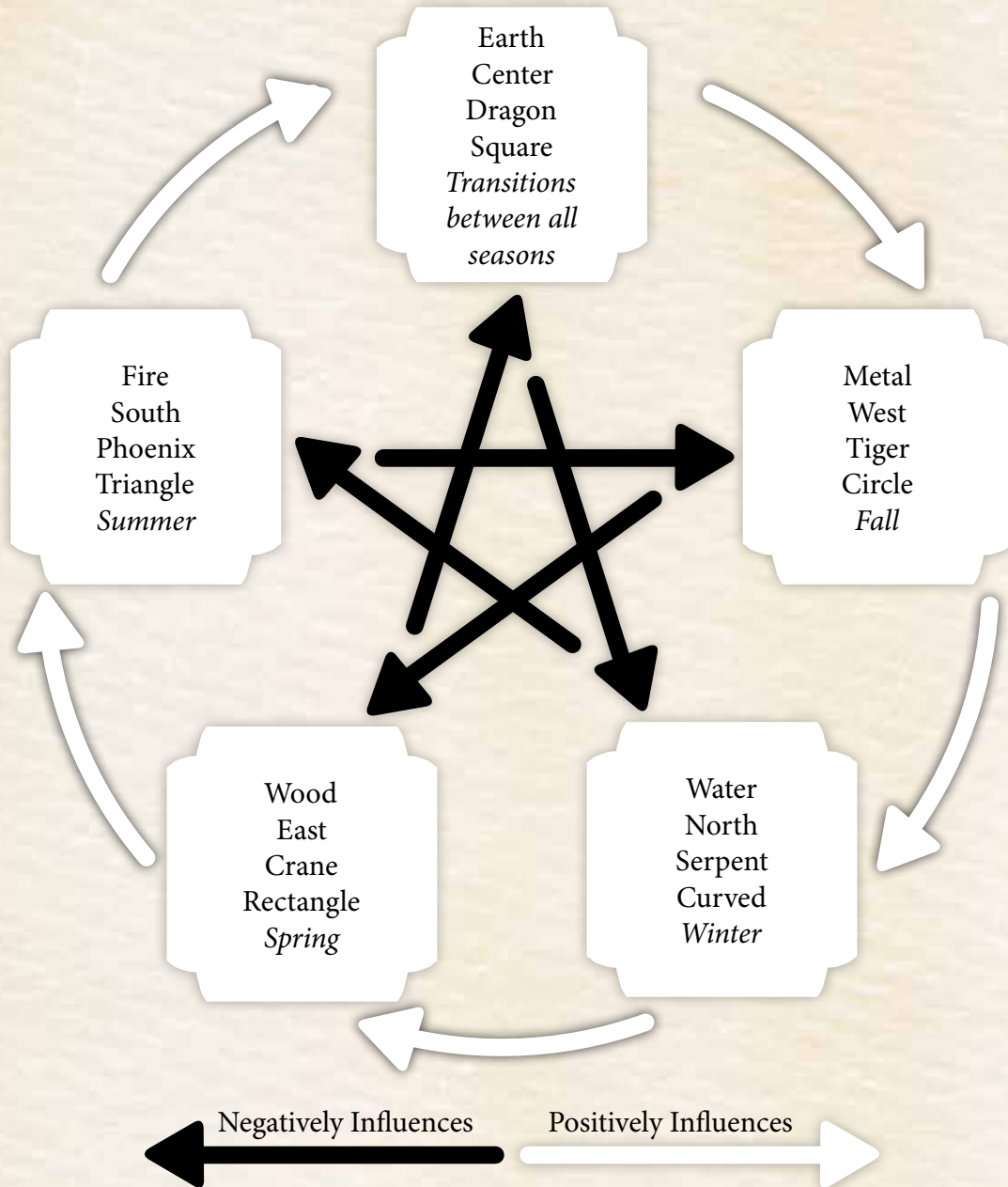
Organized under phases named after the five classic elements of Earth, Metal, Fire, Wood, and Water, the Wu Xing's influence can be seen in *Tianxia's* Kung Fu systems, Substyles, and certain parts of the setting. The Wu Xing presented in *Tianxia* does vary slightly from the classic Chinese version in some respects: the traditional red bird associated with Fire has been replaced with the phoenix, which has strong associations with the empress and other important female figures; the tortoise often linked to the Water phase was swapped for the less commonly used serpent; and the Eastern Green Dragon was replaced by the Crane to keep from doubling up on dragon images and to include a creature with strong associations in Asian art and myth.

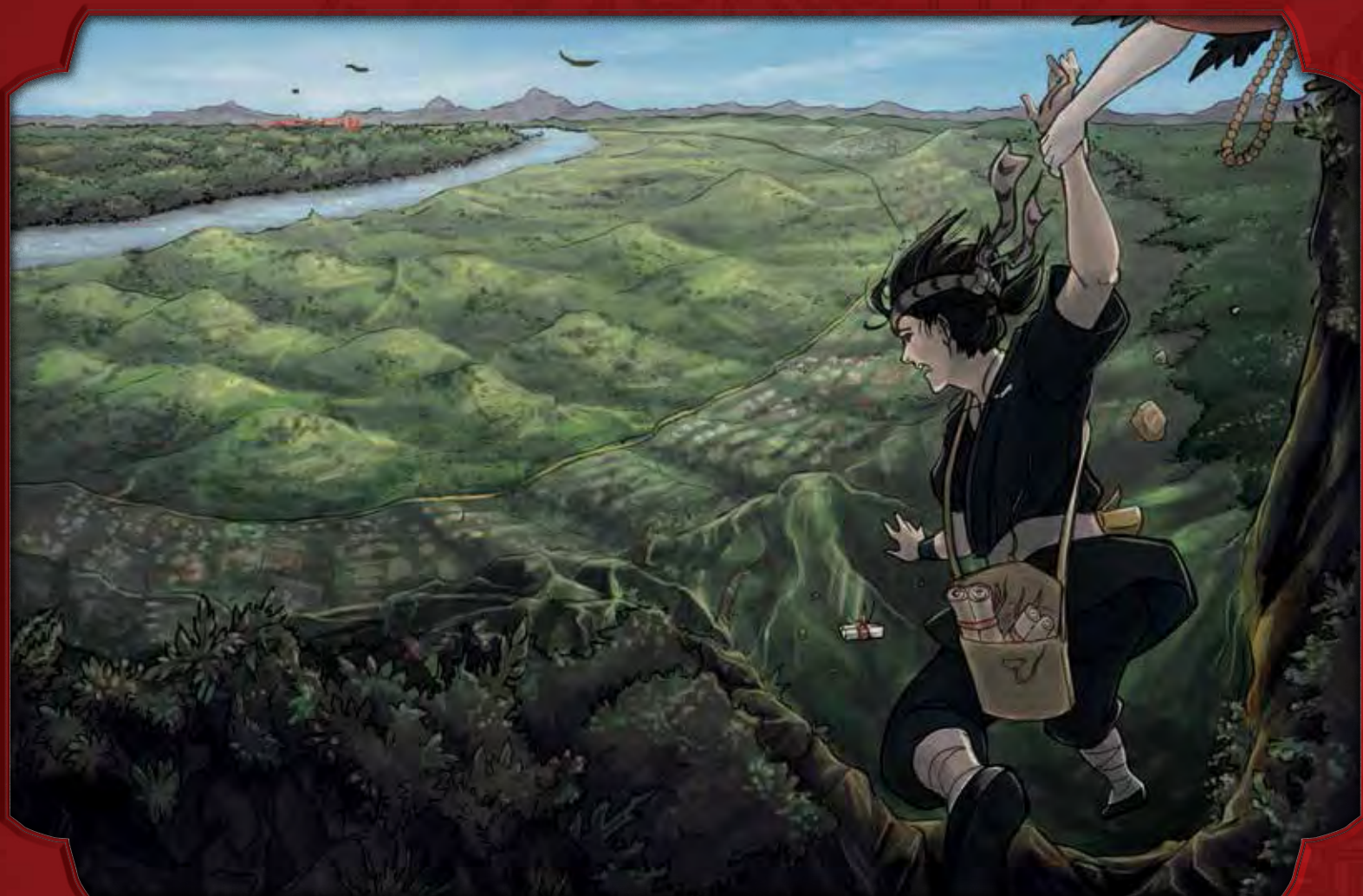
GMs wanting to use this concept can draw elements from the following table and use them to inspire aspects and characters. The related animals, colors and other concepts can be used as well.

Note that, traditionally, the imperial family has been strongly associated with the Earth phase of the Wu Xing, especially the color yellow and the dragon. In fact, the emperor is usually represented by a five-clawed golden dragon, symbolizing his earthly power and connection to all the elements that make up the world, while imperial officials and relatives are

represented by similar dragons with only four or three claws. To continue this theme, great nobles, scholars, and heroes from various regions could be associated with other phases. A northern nobleman might wear lots of black and have the serpent incorporated into his personal banner. A southern pirate queen might fly a triangular red flag sporting a phoenix. GMs do not need to be married to Wu Xing-oriented themes, but they can be a source of inspiration in their games.

The Wu Xing is used for even more than described here. Some Kung Fu styles map their individual movements and theories of attack and defense to its conceptual foundation, have ceremonies that follow forms set by its pattern, and much more. Concepts such as *feng shui* and traditional medicine use a complex interplay between the phases and ideas of what they support, create, destroy, and influence in their use. This sort of cultural saturation is not necessary in a game, but injecting a bit of the Wu Xing into a game can add a nice touch of authenticity and recognizable patterns. For example, the interplay between the phases can be used to explain the crafting of a sword: Earth leads to Metal, Wood is used to make Fire, Fire melts the Metal, which is then quenched in Water, creating the final weapon that required all the elements to come into being.





CHAPTER TWO

SHÉNZHŌU & JIĀNGZHŌU

NICE DAY FOR A FALL

I was falling to my death. I was certain about that. What I was unsure of was why.

I'd been delivering a message for the Black Moons. That was my job, I was a messenger for the Black Moon Security Company. I wasn't much of a fighter, unlike so many of my brothers and sisters in the organization. I wasn't all that smart either, or else I'd probably known why the bandits ambushed me and threw me off the mountain pass. Maybe the answer was in the message scroll I carried but, alas, I'd never read it. It wasn't my job to read messages, only deliver them. Lack of curiosity and the ability to follow orders were two of the things that made me so good at my job. My speed was the third, though it had failed me today.

So there I was, falling to my death. In that moment I looked out over the land. The valley below was of particular import, but as everything seemed to slow as apparently they do right before you plummet to the ground and

break apart in a bloody mess, I noted the Silk River shimmering in the sun, the distant forests, and a handful of villages that lay along the Jade Road. I thought I could even see the capitol, but that might have been just a fleeting flash of romantic fancy. I had a girl there. I hope she'd miss me at least a little.

I was so wrapped up in the picturesque backdrop for my untimely death it took me a moment to realize I wasn't falling anymore. It took a bit longer to realize I was rising very quickly. By the time I rose back over the cliff and saw the alarmed faces of my would-be murders, I noted I was being dragged up the mountainside by a slight figure that gripped my collar with a slim but very strong hand.

My savior threw me unceremoniously to the side as we both descended. I hit the ground, bounced, and rolled to a stop. By the time I recovered enough of my wits to take in my surroundings, I saw the slight figure that had

saved me stood surrounded by my attackers.

I was never the most perceptive and it had already been a rough day, so it took an embarrassingly long look to determine the person who'd leaped to my rescue was a holy man. It took me even longer to realize the holy man was actually a woman. She wore modest Bodhist garb and carried a simple walking staff. She was smiling pleasantly. Beside her stood a golden monkey with a surprisingly serious expression.

"Throwing a man off a cliff invites a fall," she said, pulling off her straw hat and handing it to the monkey before sliding easily into a fighting stance. The bandits looked uncertain for a moment, then one of them charged and his fellows quickly followed. The holy woman, who later introduced herself as Sister Chuntao, shifted her stance ever so slightly. Her monkey hid behind the hat.

I responded quite sensibly given the circumstances. I fainted.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SHÉNZHŌU

The following chapters will present the province of Jiāngzhōu, the default setting for this book, in detail.

This is the default setting for *Tianxia* in the core book, though it is only one of nine provinces in the greater empire of Shénzhōu. The other provinces will be addressed in detail in later supplements, but in the interests of not leaving GMs and players completely hanging, a brief overview of the empire as a whole using Jiāngzhōu as a reference point follows.

Jiāngzhōu is the westernmost central province. The provinces to the east become more civilized, particularly along major trade routes such as the Silk River and Jade Road. From rural farming communities and smaller cities, the land eventually becomes heavily populated near the coast. It is here you will find the province of Zhōngzhōu, home of the imperial capital and emperor's palace. Citizens in the central east are used to the constant presence of imperial officials, magistrates, and the emperor's eunuch advisors. This creates an environment of stability and order, but this also hinders the freedom of many inhabitants. Those seeking more independence travel west to wilder lands such as Jiāngzhōu. This includes many wandering mercenaries, warriors, and bandits.

In the north, the land moves from rich farmlands to barren tundra, hills, and evergreen forests. In addition to the mountains that provide a natural barrier in the northwest, a great wall of interconnected fortresses has been constructed to protect Shénzhōu from barbarian raiders in the north. Large settlements are rare, though many small villages dot the landscape. Northern provinces are filled with hard people used to hard living and many of the people can claim descendants both from Shénzhōu and the barbarian lands beyond. Many workers and craftsmen toil to maintain northern defenses, some of who are criminals sentenced to hard labor. Along the sea the region becomes more temperate and pleasant, but it

still remains less hospitable than the coastal regions to the south.

The lands to the south are generally temperate and in places even tropical. Southwestern Shénzhōu is sparsely populated though among the most ethnically diverse regions, with various indigenous tribes and their descendants living in remote locations on the large plateau that dominates this region. To the extreme southwest a vast mountain range establishes a clear border between Shénzhōu and its neighbors. This region boasts ample natural resources, but with the sole reliable trade route being the Da Jiang ("Great River"), much of the region is undeveloped. The remoteness of this area makes it an attractive haven for rebels, exiles, and other groups who cannot survive in more populated regions.

Moving east along Shénzhōu's southern border one finds many farms, forests, and ever-increasing population, especially along the Da Jiang. Small villages give way to towns and eventually vast coastal seaports. These southeastern regions boast many officials and a strong government presence, but the distance from the capital and a tradition of strong regional cultural identity gives the whole area a more independent feel than the central provinces. Pirates and smugglers are common sights in the ocean waters near the southern coasts.

CHINA IS HERE, MR. BURTON...

Tianxia's setting of Shénzhōu is not meant to present actual Imperial China in any particular dynasty. In fact, it is not in China at all, but an archetypal fantastical place that happens to strongly resemble ancient China. There are many reasons for this but the biggest are space and utility. Even a short period like the Shun Dynasty, which lasted a mere year, has so many power players, battles, intrigues, and rebellions you could drown both GMs and players looking for some fast fun intrigue and action in details and not give many Chinese history buffs their favorite period anyway. Furthermore, ancient China had limited opportunities for females,

despite the legends of Mulan and other female warriors. Making a non-historical setting more egalitarian by default makes it more fun for those who do not want to worry about limiting female characters in such ways.

Instead of representing a particular period of real-world China, the setting focuses on the entrancing and inspiring elements in Chinese martial arts and period action media. This allows most *wuxia* and Kung Fu media set in any period or other fictional locales to provide more direct inspiration. Love the masked killers of *Five Deadly Venoms*? Throw them in and you do not need to worry they are not "period." Want to do a *Man*

With the Iron Fists inspired twist where the land is filled with men and women of various ethnicities? Go for it. Want to open your version of Jiāngzhōu to sandbox-y "hex-crawling exploration"-style adventure? Feel free and you can add hidden tombs, temples, and the like without worrying about real life history or geography.

On the other hand, aficionados of ancient China can certainly use *Tianxia's* rules and set their games in ancient China. It is a very rich and fascinating place with plenty of opportunities for adventure and a wealth of scholarly material available in print and online.

RELIGION IN SHÉNZHŌU

Shénzhōu is home to various spiritual and philosophical beliefs. The official religion of the empire is Legalism, which focuses on spiritual contentment and universal harmony through obedience to established social orders, family loyalty, and following official laws and edicts. However, other faiths are afforded respect from government officials and the populace alike. Chief among these alternate religions are the Adherents of the Dao and Followers of Bodhisattva.

Adherents of the Dao, often called Daoists, look for universal harmony and purity of action in all things. Balancing positive and negative forces is a key element of Daoism, as is acting in natural and often spontaneous ways. Daoist priests live simple lives, often eschewing material desires and seeking immortality and virtue through spiritual purity. Daoism also embraces various folk culture relating to evil spirits and many Daoist priests are often called on to exorcise or protect locations against various demonic forces believed to plague mankind. Daoist priest and holy men often wear simple garments in grays and earth tones, shunning extravagant colors and styles.

The Followers of Bodhisattva, or Bodhists, embrace the philosophies of its founder, a foreign prince who rejected wealth and privilege to embrace a life of introspection and poverty. One of the core principles of Buddhism is, in order to achieve true enlightenment, one must reject material attachment, as this leads to suffering, jealousy, and other negative aspects. Nonviolence and the general reduction of others' suffering are key goals, and a strong emphasis is placed on reasoning, healthy skepticism, and observation. There are various Bodhist factions; some revere Bodhisattva and major religious figures as nigh godlike, while others focus more on emulating the principles of its luminaries without deifying them. Monasteries devoted to various factions can be found throughout the empire, with some taking their life of pacifism and the rejection of material concerns more seriously than others. These factions have their own styles of dress and customs, ranging from simple robes often in orange, yellow, white, or black to more elaborate ceremonial attire in reds and other dramatic shades.

In addition to these main religions, there are various gods, goddesses, demons, and spirits believed to exist. The most exalted of these beings are believed to rule the heavens, while others are thought to menace humanity and torment the wicked in a variety of creative and disturbing hell-realms. Many believe and pay homage to these beings even if they follow other faiths; few in Shénzhōu risk angering such forces just in case the stories surrounding them are more than myth.

That said, the default setting of Jiāngzhōu is among the most irreverent and impious provinces in Shénzhōu. Holy men and women of all sects are afforded respect and many of the common folk hold devout beliefs, but those in power rarely let spiritual concerns affect their pursuit of worldly power, glory, and profit. Many adherents to these faiths practice Kung Fu for personal and spiritual growth and some of the greatest masters in history have been holy men and women. It is even believed by many that it is from these holy men and women that the first Kung Fu styles developed, especially those focusing on unarmed or simple weapons such as staves. This makes priests, priestesses, and monks attractive PC options, as they have a lot of freedom in their actions due to the nature of Jiāngzhōu and possess a strong Kung Fu tradition.

Of course, not all core tenets of these religions embrace stability and harmony. Setting aside the corrupt Legalists, Daoists and Bodhists who use their faith for personal gain, there are numerous cults and heretic sects hidden throughout the empire. Some worship ancient dark gods or demons, others strive to find a sort of twisted purity through evil acts. These characters make great bad guys for *Tianxia* games, as there are few things more fun to beat up on than crazed cultists devoted to human sacrifice, cannibalism, torture, and demon worship.

USE OF RELIGION IN *TIANXIA*

While the religions of Shénzhōu are obviously inspired by real-world East Asian belief systems, they are not those religions and philosophies. They are not supposed to be a deep commentary on real-world religion or the historical influences they had on real-life China. Instead they are fictional setting elements there to inspire cool PCs, NPCs, plots, and adventures. No offense to any real world beliefs is meant with these

fictional equivalents through their portrayal.

Also, religious beliefs for characters in *Tianxia* are meant to be an opportunity, not a limitation. Sure, a character who is a *DEVOUT DAOIST PRIEST* may feel compelled to behave in certain ways that are not always to their benefit, but the goal of this in play is to make things more interesting and fun (as well as generate useful Fate Points). If a player wants to play

a character who is nominally a holy man but worries little for the trappings and common attitudes of his faith they should feel free; movies, books, and film are filled with tales of heretical or irreverent monks or priests who use their Kung Fu and religious training in unconventional ways. Some are even hailed as great heroes or saints!





GENRE, GENDER, RACE AND INCLUSIVENESS

By default, *Tianxia's* setting is more inclusive than Imperial-era China but it still presumes a fair amount of similarity with that period. Thus gender roles are less defined and non-heterosexual orientation is less polarizing, but there are still certain vague expectations. However, this need not be the case.

GMs can tailor gender roles, attitudes towards sexual orientation, and social expectations based around these factors as much as they like. Women warriors are hardly uncommon in *Tianxia* as is, but they can be made even more common if you like. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered characters already exist and are generally accepted by many, but their level of acceptance can match or even exceed what we see in modern society, if desired. Do whatever is most fun and enables play. In fact, a fairly famous *wuxia* movies series, the *Swordsman* Trilogy, revolves around a skilled warrior who learns incredibly powerful martial arts, resulting in the character switching genders from male to female as their internal energies transform their body. So, not only are these ideas totally fine on their own, they are supported by the media that inspires *Tianxia*.

Likewise, the default *Tianxia* setting presumes the vast majority of people are of East Asian ethnicities roughly matching those of China. This is reflected in the art, names, and other setting elements. That does not mean you cannot populate the Shénzhōu setting with people of all ethnic backgrounds; in fact, it will not break anything to make characters white, black, or even reframe the whole setting as nothing but anthropomorphic animals. Such changes might alter the feel of the setting somewhat, but not necessarily for the worse. You can find support for such ideas in the inspirational media, with movies like *Man with the Iron Fists* presenting characters of various ethnicities. There is even another role-playing game, *Jadeclaw*, where the PCs are all anthropomorphic animals in a setting similar to *Tianxia's*.

JIĀNGZHŌU PROVINCE

THE LAND OF BLOOD, SILK & JADE

Detailing and describing everything under heaven is a tall order, and so instead this first book brings to life one part.

This starting setting is Jiāngzhōu, a border region on the western edge of the greater realm of Shénzhōu. Among the wildest of Shénzhōu's nine major provinces, Jiāngzhōu is sparsely populated in terms of permanent residents it has a larger transient population due to trade along the Jade Road and Silk River. This constant traffic makes Jiāngzhōu a chaotic place filled with traveling merchants, mercenaries, and spies. Banditry and crime is rife in the region, with many small towns and settlements controlled by various criminal organizations. These bandits often clash with local trade houses and security companies who hold sway in other parts of Jiāngzhōu. In truth, many of these supposedly legitimate organizations are little more than bandits themselves. As merchants and thieves fight over land, trade, and gold, the common people suffer under the weight of corruption and lawlessness.

This conflict draws all manner of wandering warriors and hired killers. Some are looking for work, others see Jiāngzhōu as a place to escape their past, and still others hope to take advantage of the lack of one ruling authority to hide from past troubles. Monks and priests are also common emigrants, seeking to enlighten or exploit the populace depending on their nature. Scholars, doctors, entertainers, spies, courtesans, and even dispossessed nobility also sometimes come to Jiāngzhōu, all drawn by necessity or opportunity.

This section gives important locations, organizations, and individuals in Jiāngzhōu. It also discusses some important concepts like social class and the law. It is not a complete accounting of every town, landmark, or personage. Plenty of open space has been left for GMs and players to fill in their own games. Any Aspects a location, organization, or NPC has will be noted *LIKE THIS* to make them easy to identify.

FOUR SOCIAL CLASSES AND THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR

People in Shénzhōu are generally thought to be grouped into four categories. In rough order of ascending social importance these are: *nong* (peasant farmers), *gong* (craftsmen), *shang* (merchants), and *shi* (noble scholars). *Shi* are clearly the more respected and powerful of these classes, comprising the nobility and various ministers. However, the wealthiest *shang* can rival or exceed most *shi* in power. Likewise a famed *gong* might be more highly thought of than your average *shang*.

Wu (warriors) are a special case. Many *shi* over the years have been great warriors, but in an effort to promote civil service and the image of stability, Shénzhōu favors downplaying martial skill as part of the social order even while praising a particular swordsman or general. This has helped lead to the creation of the Martial Arts World (*Jianghu*), a subculture of warriors and martial artists that most PCs in *Tianxia* will likely find themselves embroiled in. *Jianghu* is both romanticized and avoided by many in normal society much

like the gunslingers of Old West stories, errant knights and heroic outlaws of feudal European legend, or the *ronin* of Japanese lore and fiction.

Note that monks and priests exist outside this social order completely, but are usually well respected by all for their wisdom and spirituality. Monastic orders with high levels of Kung Fu proficiency are often thought of as part of *Jianghu*, or at least as spiritual associates.

THE JADE ROAD

The main trade route through Jiāngzhōu, this road is primarily used to transport goods to the central provinces and to provide **FAST ACCESS TO THE WESTERN BORDER** in times of war. The road gets its name from the jade mining trade in this region, a job that employs many of Jiāngzhōu's peasants and craftsmen. While paved when passing near or through many towns and cities, large stretches of the Jade Road are simple dirt or roughly covered in crushed stone.

Security traveling the Jade Road is erratic; when troops are moving through or a rich merchant employs a security company to provide protection, it is **FAIRLY SAFE**. This security extends to the road near most towns and cities. However closer to the border or in wilder regions the road **HOLDS MANY DANGERS**, from wild animals to murderous bandits.

THE SILK RIVER

Beginning in the northwest and cutting through Jiāngzhōu on its way toward the sea, the Silk River is named for the silkworm farms that border its banks near to the coast in other parts of Shénzhōu. It is of **CONSIDERABLE DEPTH AND WIDTH** in the region and becomes even more so as it travels east. In Jiāngzhōu, the river is used primarily for transport and trade. River pirates are a major problem on the Silk River, as are some **TREACHEROUS CURRENTS**. While there are about half a dozen pirate gangs in Jiāngzhōu, the worst are the Blue Carp Brotherhood, led by Fish-Eye Cheng.



FISH-EYE CHENG, LEADER OF THE BLUE CARP BROTHERHOOD

ASPECTS

BOSS OF THE BLUE CARP BROTHERHOOD
GREED OUTWEIGHS SENSE
MASSIVE GIRTH
SLAVING PIRATE SCUM
QUICK FOR HIS SIZE
NO REASON FOR A FAIR FIGHT

SKILLS

Superb (+5) Physique
Great (+4) Fight, Provoke
Good (+3) Burglary, Contacts, Will
Fair (+2) Athletics, Deceive, Drive
Average (+1) Rapport, Shoot, Notice

STRESS

4 Physical Boxes
 4 Mental Boxes
 additional mild consequence slot

STUNTS

Blue Carp Leader (May use Provoke instead of Resources for creating an advantage based on pirate followers or plundered goods)
No Mercy! (+2 bonus to attack targets already suffering consequences relating to physical injury or weakness)
Pirate King (+2 Rapport with pirates and criminals)
Tough Guy (2 Armor Rating against attacks which cause physical stress)
Brutal Fighter (Considered Jianghu Rank 1 despite lack of Kung Fu)

Fish-Eye Cheng has been a bandit, killer, and pirate since he was twelve. Believing in the right of the strong to dominate the weak, he and his men plunder and harass merchants and travelers along the Silk River. Many of his victims end up sold on the black market as slaves. Cheng favors a huge nine-ringed saber in battle (+2 Weapons Rating). Many who meet him think him fat and disgusting, but in truth much of his bulk is muscle. However, he is disgusting.

GOLDEN MONKEY TEMPLE

Once a thriving temple servicing the people of one of Jiāngzhōu’s jade mines, the Golden Monkey Temple was abandoned centuries ago when the surrounding mines depleted. The **CRUMBLING STONE WALLS** are now overgrown with vines and the area is home to **VARIOUS DANGEROUS CARNIVORES**. Rumors persist

that something lies buried under the temple and that it might be possible to reach this **HIDDEN CHAMBER** through the **UNSTABLE TUNNELS OF THE ABANDONED JADE MINES**. Outlaws have sought to use the temple as a hideout in the past, but those who do not flee within a week are never heard from again.

TALES OF THE GOLDEN MONKEY TEMPLE

The secret of Golden Monkey Temple is one of those intentional “white spaces” left in Jiāngzhōu. GMs should select a secret or hidden treasure that heroes will find compelling should they venture there. Whatever is buried beneath Golden Monkey Temple it should be hard to get and

interesting enough to be worth the effort. Some possibilities include:

- A cult of cannibal Kung Fu killers who use the Temple as a base of operations.
- The trap filled hidden tomb that holds forgotten treasure from the time of the First Emperor.

- A secret base of operations for Imperial agents or anti-Imperial conspirators planning operations in the area.
- A vault containing a fabled weapon that can give great power to its wielder but is also capable of corrupting their spirit.





HEAVENLY REST INN

The *LAST STOP ON THE JADE ROAD* before the wasteland desert beyond Shénzhōu's western border, the Heavenly Rest services the *NEARBY BORDER WATCHTOWERS* and any travelers entering or leaving Jiāngzhōu by the western Jade Road. The proprietor of the inn, a beautiful woman named Heartless Ai, was once a great swordswoman and hired assassin. How or why she acquired the Heavenly Rest is known only to a select few, and she seems content to brush off potential suitors and tend to her customers. Due to its location and Ai's *NO QUESTIONS ASKED* policy, it is a prime hideout and sanctuary for outlaws, spies, and rebels.

Ai rents rooms to any who can pay or are willing to work off their bill doing chores. She will not expel a patron for political beliefs, crimes, or other outside offenses, but will also not defend them if someone decides to settle old scores or arrest them for their crimes—as long as they agree to *"TAKE IT OUTSIDE"*. Ai and whoever is currently working off their stay

usually deal harshly with any patrons or outsiders who break this rule.

A few patrons and old friends know Ai stays at the inn to wait for a lost lover who left Shénzhōu, seemingly for good. The identity of this lover is left to the GM and players to decide: they could be a great warrior who left the Empire in search of fabled treasure, a banished noble who ran afoul of the current regime, or a strange foreigner who returned to his people. The lover might return changed, for better or worse. Characters with connections to Ai or the Heavenly Rest Inn could be swept up in her tragic tale of love, loss, and longing; some romantic PC might even recover Ai's stolen heart, though this would involve changing her Core Concept—not an easy task.

HEARTLESS AI

ASPECTS

*BROKEN-HEARTED EX-ASSASSIN
HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT
"I'M RETIRED"*

*OWNER-OPERATOR OF HEAVENLY
REST*

*MISTRESS OF THE SCARLET SWORD
WATCHING AND WAITING*

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Fight

Great (+4): Athletics, Stealth

Good (+3): Will, *Chi*

Fair (+2): Physique, Notice

Average (+1): Lore, Resources,
Contacts

STRESS

4 Physical Boxes*

4 Mental Boxes

*Using *Chi* instead of Physique

JIANGHU RANK: 2

**KUNG FU STYLE: IRON
PHOENIX (MASTER),
FOREST TIGER**

*IRON PHOENIX FORM, FOREST TIGER
FORM*

Iron Cleaves the Stone: Ignore 2 points of Armor when making an attack to inflict physical stress.

Flesh Breaks on Iron: When you defend against a Fight attack with style, you may inflict 2 shift hit instead of taking a boost on your attacker.

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

Phoenix Beats its Wings: If you defend with style, you may gain an **OFF BALANCE** advantage on the target, with a free invocation instead of a boost.

Phoenix Calls to Heaven: You may use *Chi* instead of Physique to determine extra stress boxes and consequences. This is in addition to the Armor bonus from having high *Chi*. If *Chi* and Physique are the same rating, you may instead reduce physical stress taken by 2 shifts once per session.

Phoenix Laughs at the Sun: If you succeed at an **Overcome** roll using Athletics or Fight with style, you may create a situation aspect with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

Phoenix Breaks the Anvil: Spend 1 Fate point to add 4 additional stress to shift value of a successful Fight attack. Targets who elect to take at least one consequence can avoid this extra stress.

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

Forest Opens Its Paths: If you use Athletics to overcome an obstacle with style, you may turn the obstacle into an advantage with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

STUNTS

Beautiful (+2 when seducing or charming those attracted to women)

Move Without Thought (can use Fight to determine turn order in combat situations)

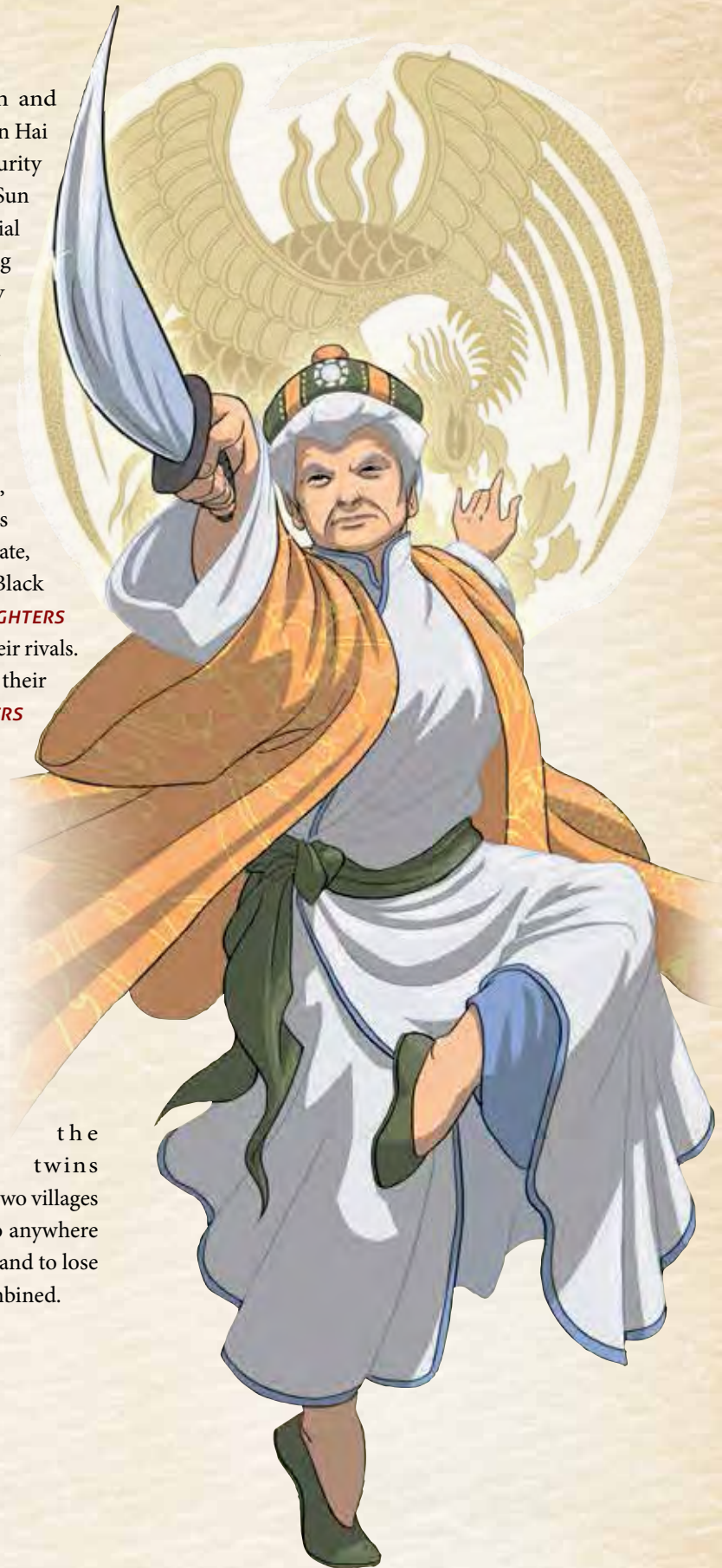
The Sword is My Lover (Add +1 to Fight attack and defense rolls when armed with a sword)

Heartless Ai was once a famed warrior and killer for hire until her profession caused her lover to leave both her and the empire by way of the western Jade Road. She gave up killing and purchased the Heavenly Rest, hoping one day her lover will return and she will get one last chance at happiness. She is a master swordswoman, though she has not used her meteorite-iron forged sword in years. It is currently hidden behind a false panel in the inn's pantry.

NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN HAI

Twin villages along the northern and southern banks of the Silk River, Northern Hai and Southern Hai are home to two security companies run by **RIVAL FAMILIES**. White Sun and Black Moon companies are both martial organizations that specialize in providing security along the Silk River and pretty much run their respective towns. For a modest fee or cut of trade profits, either company will provide security for river journeys. There are rumors that at least one of the companies is tipping off pirates about their rival's protected shipments, leading to **RECENT PIRATE AMBUSHES**. As conflicts between the two companies escalate, the heads of both the White Suns and Black Moons are **LOOKING TO HIRE STRONG FIGHTERS** to both protect shipments and sabotage their rivals. Unbeknownst to heads of either family, their eldest children are **STAR-CROSSED LOVERS** who are planning to run away together.

Both villages have docks serving the riverboats that haul supplies and passengers up and down the Silk River; fortunately, the river is wide enough and traffic robust enough to accommodate the business. Northern Hai tends to focus on trade goods and warehousing, while Southern Hai provides repair and construction. The current mayors of both towns are **IDENTICAL TWINS**, Bohai (Northern) and Bojing (Southern), who share a friendly rivalry that mirrors attitudes of most of the townsfolk. The twins occasionally meet to discuss merging the two villages into a single city, but these talks never go anywhere due to forces in both towns who would stand to lose power or influence if the settlements combined.



the
twins

MOTHER SHEN

ASPECTS**Matriarch of the White Sun****"Those Black Moons are Thuggish Amateurs!"****Never Breaks a Contract****Incredibly Stubborn****Spry for Her Age****SKILLS****Superb (+5)** Will**Great (+4)** Fight, Resources**Good (+3)** Contacts, Deceive, Shoot**Fair (+2)** Athletics, Physique, Investigate**Average (+1)** Rapport, Provoke, Notice, *Chi***STRESS**

3 Physical Boxes

4 Mental Boxes

additional mild consequence

JIANGHU RANK: 2**KUNG FU STYLE: STORM****PHOENIX (MASTER)****STORM PHOENIX FORM****Storm Shakes the Foundation:**

When creating an advantage, you 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 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.

Phoenix Beats its Wings: If you defend with style, you may gain an **OFF BALANCE** advantage on the target, with a free invocation instead of a boost.

Phoenix Calls to Heaven: You may use *Chi* instead of Physique to determine extra stress boxes and consequences. This is in addition to the Armor bonus from having high *Chi*. If *Chi* and Physique are the same rating, you may instead reduce physical stress taken by 2 shifts once per session.

Phoenix Laughs at the Sun: If you succeed at an **Overcome** roll using Athletics or Fight with style, you may create a situation aspect with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

Clouds Embrace the Phoenix: Spend 1 Fate Point to add +1 Weapon Rating and +1 Armor Rating to all Fight attacks and defenses. If you or your opponent moves at least 1 zone on their last action, increase these bonuses to +3. This effect lasts for an entire scene.

STUNTS

Iron-Willed (considered to have 2 points of Armor when suffering mental stress from Intimidation, fear, or shock)

Stony Gaze (May use Will in place of Provoke to make attacks against those with a lower Will)

Vengeful (When you gain a boost against a target who has caused a consequence on you, it instead becomes a scene advantage with one free activation).

Mother Shen took over the White Suns when pirates killed her husband Gao twenty-five years ago. She still blames the Black Moon chief, Black Bao Yun, for failing to protect Gao and then having the audacity to start a rival business. Mother Shen is now in her early 50s and has led a hard life, but she is still dangerous and capable. In battle she favors a long saber. Though she has not been tipping off the pirates about Black Moon shipments, she suspects one of her people is. She is conflicted about this; she finds the practice distasteful but she really wants to put the Black Moons out of business once and for all. Her only child, Shen Gao the Younger, is her second-in-command and unbeknownst to her is in love with Bao Yun's daughter, Bao Mei.

BLACK BAO YUN

ASPECTS**LEADER OF THE BLACK MOONS****"THOSE WHITE SUNS ARE STUBBORN FOOLS!"****ALWAYS KEEPS HIS WORD****FAMILY FIRST****THE PAST STILL HAUNTS ME****SKILLS****Superb (+5)** Fight**Great (+4)** Athletics, Contacts**Good (+3)** Resources, Deceive, Physique**Fair (+2)** Stealth, Will, Notice**Average (+1)** Rapport, Provoke, Investigate, *Chi***STRESS**

4 Physical Boxes

3 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 2**KUNG FU STYLE: STORM SERPENT (MASTER)
STORM SERPENT FORM****Storm Shakes the Foundation:**

When creating an advantage, you 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 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.

Serpent Bites the Hand: If you gain shifts on a defense, you can sacrifice your action next turn to immediately inflict an attack on your opponent using the shift value of your defense as your attack result.

Serpent Strikes First: Use Athletics or Fight (pick one when Technique is chosen) to determine turn order instead of Notice in combat. Apply a +2 bonus instead if both Notice and the selected Skill are the same rank or Notice is greater.

Serpent Strikes Twice: +2 bonus to Deceive rolls to create an advantage based on disorientation, distraction, or unbalancing against opponents you have already inflicted stress on this combat.

Serpent Moves Like Rain: Spend 1 Fate Point after succeeding with style on a Full Defense action using Fight or Athletics. Inflict shifts on your attacker equal to shifts earned on defense plus 2 instead of gaining a boost.

STUNTS

Compassionate Commander (+2 Empathy with those under your command)

Pirate Killer (+2 to Fight attacks when battling pirates)

Black Bao Yun was once the second-in-command for Shen Gao the Elder, head of the White Suns security company. When Gao was killed during a pirate ambush his grieving widow blamed Bao Yun and dismissed him. Reeling from the loss of his good friend and being fired, he formed the Black Moons and set up shop in Southern Hai. Since then Bao's Black Moons and the White Suns have enjoyed tense relations and fierce rivalries. Recently, Bao has begun to suspect someone in his organization is feeding river pirates information of White Sun operations but he is only half-heartedly looking for the culprit. Bao is incredibly protective of his daughter, Bao Mei, and does not know she has fallen in love with Gao Shen the Younger, son of his former commander and friend. Bao Yun is wiry and tall with jet-black beard and wild hair that is now becoming streaked with gray. He favors two long curved knives in combat.

FIVE DEMON FOREST

A well known *HAVEN FOR BANDITS AND THIEVES*, the Five Demon Forest is a large stretch of bamboo forest near a bend in the Silk River. The *TOWERING BAMBOO TREES* have dominated this region since before Shénzhōu grew to encompass the province centuries ago and with the exception of some scattered lumber camps along the river's edge, it is largely untouched by development. Various tales of haunted groves and terrible monsters that lurk in the forest keep most people out, a fact that makes it a great hideout for wanted fugitives and criminals. This makes the area even more dangerous and even the killers and

thieves who make camp have to watch for local wildlife, including tigers and bears. The area takes its name from five legendary evil spirits who were defeated by a band of heroes in ancient times and who transformed into trees and rocks upon their death.

Five Demon Forest also has one other noteworthy inhabitant, an old hermit called Yao Jing. Jing is rumored to be a madman, a reclusive master of Kung Fu, or a former bandit seeking isolation and inner peace. In truth, he is all three. Jing desires only to be left alone, and excepting occasional encounters with foolish bandits and would-be pupils, he generally gets his wish.

YAO JING, THE RED SPEAR

ASPECTS

HERMIT OF FIVE DEMON FOREST
ONE-ARMED FORMER BANDIT
MASTER OF THE SPEAR
"YOU! GO AWAY! LEAVE ME ALONE!"
A LITTLE BIT MAD

SKILLS

Fantastic (+6): *Chi*
Superb (+5): Fight
Great (+4): Athletics, Stealth
Good (+3): Notice, Will
Fair (+2): Burglary, Crafts, Lore
Average (+1): Empathy, Investigate, Physique

STRESS

3 Physical
4 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 3

KUNG FU STYLE: FOREST TIGER (MASTER), FOREST SERPENT (MASTER)
FOREST TIGER FORM, FOREST SERPENT FORM

Forest Hides the Beast: A tie on a Fight- or Athletics-based defense action grants no boost to your attacker.

Forest Opens Its Paths: If you use Athletics to overcome an obstacle with style, you 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, you add +2 Weapon Rating to that attack.

Tiger Moves With Purpose: Move at least 1 zone and make an attack using Athletics or make an Athletics attack on a target 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 Rules the Jungle: You may use Physique or Provoke (selected when you select this Technique) instead of Will to defend against Provoke attacks. If both Will and Physique (or Provoke) are the same rank, or Will is higher, gain a 2 Armor Rating against Provoke attacks instead.

Tiger Stalks the Path: Spend 1 Fate Point on a Fight attack where a tie or better is achieved. If tied, the action now counts as a success with a +4 Weapon Rating. If already a success, add an additional free invocation to

any consequence created by this attack or grant a boost if no consequence is created.

Serpent Bites the Hand: If you gain shifts on a defense, you can sacrifice your action next turn to immediately inflict an attack on your opponent using the shift value of your defense as your attack result.

Serpent Strikes First: Use Athletics or Fight (pick one when Technique is chosen) to determine turn order instead of Notice in combat. Apply a +2 bonus instead if both Notice and the selected Skill are the same rank or Notice is greater.

Serpent Strikes Twice: +2 bonus to Deceive rolls to create an advantage based on disorientation, distraction, or unbalancing against opponents you have already inflicted stress on this combat.

Serpent Strikes from Tall Grass: Spend 1 Fate Point as an opponent is about to make a Fight attack against you. You may interrupt this attack with an attack of your own with a +2 bonus to the attack roll. If your opponent is still active, he may then attack normally.

Lost Technique: Spear Mind

Sutra (Always considered to be carrying a spear that does +2 Weapon Rating damage, even when unarmed)

STUNTS

Crazy Kung-Fu Hermit (+2 to defend against attempts to force him to answer direct questions)

Ghost of the Forest (+2 bonus to evading and tracking characters in forests)

Spear Master (+1 bonus to Fight attacks and defense when using a spear)

Once a good-natured bamboo logger, Yao Jing lost his arm to the false accusations and bloodthirsty actions of a corrupt government official. Determined to avenge the loss of his arm and bring his foe to justice he studied Kung Fu, using a red-lacquered bamboo-shafted spear as his chosen weapon. Working beyond the law as a righteous masked bandit known as Red Spear, he finally destroyed the official. Finding life afterward boring and unguided, he eventually turned to drink and less scrupulous banditry.

After robbing and severely wounding a young priest in a drunken rage, Jing realized he had become the same sort of villain he once fought. Leaving behind his life of drunken outlawry, he settled deep in Five Demon Forest and devoted himself to quiet contemplation and perfection of mind and body. After decades of solitude he has perfected the Spear Mind Sutra, a technique forming the spiritual concept of the spear so deeply in one's mind that the physical form of the spear becomes unnecessary to draw upon the weapon's grace and power. Now half-mad from guilt, loss, and years of solitude, he alternates between considering passing on his skills to a worthy pupil and driving off any who venture too close to his forest home.



HÓNGHŭ HILLS

The high hills and low mountains of Hóngxū (“Red Tiger”) might seem unimpressive compared to the glorious peaks of Tiānqiáo Mountains, but they hide a variety of mysteries. Chief among these is the Tomb of the Ching Lan.

The Tomb of Ching Lan is the *LAST RESTING PLACE OF EMPRESS CHING LAN*, once a beloved imperial concubine who rose to rule Shénzhōu for years as regent and dowager. Known for her ruthlessness and grand ambition, she was buried in secret far from the capital to protect her remains from her many enemies. The tomb’s exact location is secret and it is supposedly *RIDDLED WITH TRAPS OF DEVILISH INGENUITY*. It is also rumored to be one of the possible locations of *The 49 Variations*, an ancient book or scroll that supposedly can teach powerful mystic and martial secrets given to Empress Ching Lan by Mei Xing, her sometimes advisor and alleged lover.

In addition to the Tomb of Ching Lan, the Hóngxū hills are honeycombed with *MANY UNDERGROUND CAVERNS AND CAVES* and have several *SMALL SHRINES TO OBSCURE GODS* nestled in its hills, including a few not worshipped openly in Shénzhōu since before the time of the first emperor. *RUMORS OF STRANGE CULTS* practicing everything from demon worship to cannibalism abound in the area.

WHITE TURBAN RUIN

The name of this former settlement near the Tiānqiáo Mountains has been *WIPED FROM ALL OFFICIAL HISTORIES*. Generations ago, this place was a hotbed of activity for the White Turban Sect, a heretical cult who believed the will of the heavens required they overthrow the Emperor. Rising up in a great rebellion, the cult was eventually crushed and its leaders slain or driven into hiding. White Turban Ruin was the birthplace of, and major base of operations for, one of the sect’s leaders. The Emperor ordered the village destroyed and the earth salted and burned; to this day, *NOTHING GROWS HERE*.

For years, locals have reported seeing the ghosts of the slain White Turban leader and his followers near the site. Whether these are actual unquiet spirits or modern day successors to the White Turban heresy is unknown, but the accounts are too frequent and well documented to be pure fancy.

TIĀNQIÁO MOUNTAINS

Along the northern edge of Jiāngzhōu, creating a natural barrier between it and the neighboring province of Huángzhōu, are the Tiānqiáo (“Sky Bridge”) Mountains. Supposedly home to the earliest forms of Kung Fu, the *NARROW TWISTING PASSES* and *SHEER ROCK FACES* are dangerous to navigate without a guide. Tigers, bears, and other dangerous beasts make their home here, increasing the hazards of traveling the mountains even more. The mountains were once home to the Three Mountain Sect, an order of monks who are said to have mastered three Stone Styles of Kung Fu while living and studying among Tiānqiáo’s peaks. The head of the now near-extinct order is the reclusive Faultless Wu. An old hermit rumored to be well over a hundred, Wu has spent three decades in seclusion perfecting his art. Since his self-imposed exile, he has yet to take on a pupil, but those who could locate the *RUINS OF THE THREE MOUNTAIN SECT’S STRONGHOLD* might persuade him to teach his powerful martial arts once more.

WHITE WIDOW FOREST

This bamboo forest stretches along the southern edge of Jiāngzhōu. Amidst the *SHADOWY MAZE OF BAMBOO* is the occasional *ABANDONED ENCAMPMENT* or *SITE OF AN ANCIENT BATTLE*. The forest is largely unpopulated, though it is home to the White Widow Sect, a cult of women and girls who live somewhere deep in the wild. Though some insist the White Widows are ghosts or demons, they are in reality a collection of women who were outcast or abused by mainstream Shénzhōu society and have banded together for protection and a sense of belonging. These women are all skilled trackers, animal trainers, and martial artists who can occasionally be recruited to aid travelers or warriors if their cause is just and would make the world safer and more pleasant for women both inside the sect and out. However, the White Widows are also known to kill interlopers who enter their territory without cause, so caution is advised.



CHAPTER THREE

THE CITY OF BǎO JIĀNG

OLD HABITS DIE HARD

“Stop, thief!”

Sister Chuntao realized she should stop. She should explain to the Bǎo Jiāng magistrates that she did not rob Deputy Mayor Da’s house; in fact, she was calling on the man to collect a promised donation her departed master had secured to rebuild the dilapidated shrine in one of Jiāngzhōu’s poorer villages. She should stop and explain quite calmly that when she arrived the doors were open, Da was unconscious, and the safe he kept hidden behind that overpriced tapestry had already been emptied by the real thief— whoever that was. Smiling and friendly, she should explain that Sun was not going to keep Da’s coin purse; the little beast simply liked to play with the shiny coins. She should have made them understand that even if her pet kept the purse, it was simply the

universe’s way of ensuring Da’s promised donation was received.

However, old habits die hard, and so Sister Chuntao ran. She ran through the streets and alleys like she had for most of her life. And like much of her life before Master Renshu found her and instructed her in the ways of the Bodhisattva, the authorities were close behind.

“We really should stop...” she told Sun, who looked at her with alarm as he clung to her shoulder while the Bodhist nun dodged between market stalls and ducked past shopper and merchant alike. She considered stopping to explain to the guards, but Sun looked so aghast at her suggestion she simply picked up the pace.

It was then she saw the ladder. Two workmen emerged from a nearby alley, its wooden frame carried between them like a sudden barrier, blocking the way. Sighing quietly to herself, Chuntao

pulled off her wide straw hat with one hand and grabbed Sun in the other. With one motion she flipped her hat over and dropped the monkey inside right before she threw it. It spiraled overhead, Sun gripping its edges as he rode it through the air. A moment later she leapt, sliding between the rungs of the outstretched ladder without slowing. She hit the ground, rolled to her feet and caught both monkey and headgear without missing a beat. She heard the guards collide with the ladder and its carriers a few second later.

Chuntao slowed and turned, seeing the guards shouting and brandishing their weapons even as they struggled to resume the chase. She realized she really should stop.

However, she was having too much fun and could not imagine the order would begrudge her such joyous exercise. It was good for the body and spirit, after all.

This chapter details Bǎo Jiāng, capital and largest city in Jiāngzhōu. It is the only city noted on the map in

this book and is large and important enough to warrant its own section. This does not mean it is the only city in the province, GMs should feel free to add other cities as necessary. As with the landmarks and locales throughout the rest of Jiāngzhōu, the presence of the “Jewel of Jiāngzhōu” is not a bar to expanding the setting through play. Instead, it is just a good if dangerous place to start.

Bǎo Jiāng

The largest city in Jiāngzhōu, Bǎo Jiāng is located between the Jade Road and Silk River roughly in the center of the province.

Sometimes referred to as the “Jewel of Jiāngzhōu”, Bǎo Jiāng is a major trading hub with a modest population of permanent residences and a large number of transients including merchants, mercenaries, and traveling craftsmen. The city authorities are ill equipped to deal with this constant ingress and egress and are often paid well to not even try. In response various organizations, legitimate and criminal, have stepped up to handle various services and affairs. The governor of Jiāngzhōu does not seem to much care about this turn of events, at least as long as he gets his cut. This makes Bǎo Jiāng, and Jiāngzhōu as a whole, a playground for the ambitious, greedy, and powerful

and a dangerous place for the weak, disenfranchised, and oppressed.

Bǎo Jiāng is filled with various important structures, landmarks, and institutions. Various inns, playhouses, teahouses, shops, and other establishments line its bustling streets and dark alleys. Some of the more colorful are detailed in the section that follows, but GMs and players should feel free to add more during play. Customizing it to a particular group’s interest and needs will truly make Bǎo Jiāng shine like the tarnished jewel it is.

WHERE ARE THE KUNG FU SCHOOLS?

Fans of *wuxia* and Kung Fu media know that the conflicts between various Kung Fu-using societies, schools, and academies is a staple of the genre. Thus, it might seem odd that no such schools are detailed here. There is a good reason for that: there is no way to tell what is best to include for individual GMs.

The best rival schools and

Kung Fu Styles are the ones tailored to oppose the Kung Fu the PCs use. If the PCs are all Tiger Style, then sending them up against Crane or Serpent schools would draw a sharp contrast to their own fighting arts. On the other hand, it might be fun to send them up against whatever Tiger Style they are not using, to showcase subtler differences and produce some

common ground. Individual GMs and players are encouraged to consider what approach is best for them and include such school in their version of the setting.

Shénzhōu in general and Jiāngzhōu in particular are lousy with Kung Fu schools, but individual GMs and players should decide where and what they are exactly.

BROTHER BO LIN'S HOUSE OF FINE TEAS

A *SMALL, UNASSUMING TEA SHOP*, this establishment is less famous for its *IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION OF TEAS* than for the impressive job-brokering skills of its proprietor. Still, it is a quaint little place that does brisk business with customers who come from all across the city. Even the governor and various visiting dignitaries are known to send their servants to purchase tea at Brother Bo Lin's.

Bo Lin is a small *HALF-BLIND OLD MAN* who *LOVES SMALL TALK AND SIPPING TEA* who is more than willing to help adventurous individuals looking for work find everything from menial labor to top-secret government assignments. Individuals seeking a job simply come in, order some tea, and ask Bo Lin what opportunities exist for employment. If Bo Lin knows the individual personally or by reputation, that is all that is required. If he does not know them, he makes a few discreet inquiries and tells them to check back shortly. Without fail, the old man always has some potential job offer or task to offer, though it might not always be to the inquirer's liking. Brother Bo Lin usually has a young man or woman assisting him, who he always calls "niece" or "nephew" regardless of whether they are actually related.

Bo Lin's origins are a mystery left for GMs to define as they desire; he protects his origins, as well

as his information sources, through use of his Superb (+5) Contacts. Bo Lin receives an additional +2 bonus when finding the right job opportunity for a particular individual. He will rarely seek someone out, preferring to let prospective employers and employees come to him. He is a great resource for PCs looking for extra cash or to nudge them towards the next adventure.

DEVIL DOCTOR OF FENG STREET

Despite his fearsome title, Devil Doctor Wong is a kindly and compassionate physician. He earned his name for his potent medical skills that some claim must spawn from supernatural sources and his hellish temper when disturbed while treating a patient. He only charges patients what they can afford and keeps his little shop safe from thugs and ne'er-do-wells by offering cheap treatment to members of the various gangs and crime families in Bǎo Jiāng. Wong's clinic is *SMALL AND CRAMPED* and *FILLED WITH EXOTIC MEDICINES AND HERBS*. Devil Doctor Wong has the *GREATEST DOCTOR IN BǎO JIĀNG* and *CANTANKEROUS MEDICAL MIRACLE MAN* Aspects, Superb (+5) Lore, Craft, and Notice Skills, and receives +2 bonuses when it comes to healing, making drugs and medicines, and diagnosing ailments. It is even rumored he knows how to reattach severed limbs or transplant organs to replace damaged ones.



DRUNKEN DRAGON INN, PLAYHOUSE AND BATH

This *IRREVERENT BUT INVITING* establishment sports a sign depicting a pot-bellied dragon drinking spirits from a large gourd. The inn consists of three conjoined buildings, each with its own function and staff. The main building is an inn with a *LARGE COMMON ROOM* where food and drink are served. To the left of the inn is a bathhouse that serves both inn patrons and others seeking a relaxing soak. Everything from a quick wash to the Drunken Dragon's signature *SECRET FRAGRANT HERB BATH* can be had for a modest fee. The Playhouse is actually a *MODEST OPEN-AIR PLAYHOUSE* that hosts traveling entertainers as well as a few regular acts. Some of Madame Li Li Húa employees from the House of Soft Sighs occasionally

perform here as the Jasmine Sisters; their act consists of a mix of titillation, skilled acrobatics, musical performances, and simple comedy. These performers are not actually related and their roster changes fairly frequently, but they are one of the Drunken Dragon's more popular acts.

The Drunken Dragon is run by "Long" Fu Song, a middle-aged, former Imperial officer, and his wife, Fu "Red Devil" Dan, an ex-fighting champion, though you would not know it to look at either of them. Though well past their prime, the pair can still deal with a rowdy customer or two. This is usually unnecessary, as many famous fighters, soldiers, and wandering warriors frequent the establishment.

"LONG" FU SONG

ASPECTS PROPRIETOR OF THE DRUNKEN DRAGON

"WE WANT NO TROUBLE HERE!"
HAPPILY RETIRED IMPERIAL OFFICER
THE CUSTOMER IS USUALLY RIGHT
TOUGHER THAN HE LOOKS

SKILLS

Great (+4): Rapport

Good (+3): Notice, Fight

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

Average (+1): *Chi*, Drive, Physique,
Investigate

STRESS

3 Physical Boxes

3 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE: IRON CRANE IRON CRANE FORM

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

Crane Stuns the Carp: If you succeed on a Fight attack with style, you may create a *STUNNED* advantage on a target with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

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

STUNTS

Dig Deep (+1 to Fight attack and defense rolls when suffering at least one consequence)

Heroic Past (Can use Rapport in place of Contacts to locate those he knew in his old life)

"Humble" Innkeeper (Can use Rapport to keep himself from being recognized as a famous ex-hero)

"Long" Fu Song was the ninth son of a minor noble family who had no choice but to enter the army to advance his prospects. While at first an unremarkable soldier, he distinguished himself by saving a favored imperial relation from a kidnapping attempt by bold but ultimately overreaching pirates. Some time later he was commended for his great heroism fighting rebels under the famed General Ma Rong. Ultimately uncomfortable with the fame he gained through violence and war, he took a commission guarding Jiāngzhōu's western border and eventually retired. Sometime later he bought the Drunken Dragon from its former owner, married, and settled into life as a "humble innkeeper."

FU "RED DEVIL" DAN

ASPECTS

MATRON OF THE DRUNKEN DRAGON
"YOU CAUSE TROUBLE? YOU LEAVE!"
EX-PIT FIGHTER
IRON-WILLED MOTHER HEN
REALLY TOUGH OLD BIRD

SKILLS

Great (+4): Will
Good (+3): Empathy, Fight, Notice
Fair (+2): Chi, Notice, Physique
Average (+1): Contacts, Rapport, Resources

STRESS

3 Physical Boxes
 4 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 2

KUNG FU STYLE: STONE TIGER (MASTER) STONE TIGER FORM

Mountain Does Not Fall: You get 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 such an advantage with free invocations, one less free invocation is granted though the advantage is still created.

Stone Resists the Blow: You gain 2 Armor against any physical attack you are aware of.

Stone Weathers the Storm:

If you defend with style, you may remove your physical 1 stress box or convert another physical stress box to 1 lower instead of taking a boost.

Tiger Moves With Purpose: Move at least 1 zone and make an attack using Athletics or make an Athletics attack 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 Rules the Jungle: You may use Physique or Provoke (selected when you select this Technique) instead of Will to defend against Provoke attacks. If both Will and Physique (or Provoke) are the same rank, or Will is higher, gain a 2 Armor Rating against Provoke attacks instead.

Tiger Comes Down From the Mountain: Spend 1 Fate Point to use the shifts from your last Fight or Athletics defense roll as a bonus to your next Fight attack (minimum +3 bonus). This attack also reduces any Armor Rating the defender has by 2.

STUNTS

Fighter's Eye (+2 bonus to create an advantage based on the weaknesses of opponent's fighting style)

Stony Gaze (May use Will in place of Provoke to make attacks against those with a lower Will)

Wary Proprietor (+2 bonus to Notice checks to detecting danger to the Drunken Dragon, its staff, and current patrons)

Born among the poor of Beggar's Haven, Fu Dan learned to fight first to survive and then as a way to leave her impoverished life. Ruling the underground pit fighting circuit for several years as "Red Devil Fu" she met and fell in love with Fu Song and the two were shortly married. The exact details of their meeting and courtship change with each telling, but in truth it involved a bloody battle, stolen treasure, and the pair deciding they were done with a life of conflict and violence. As fortune has left the couple childless, Fu Dan tends to treat her employees, loyal patrons, and few remaining old friends as her family. She will protect them and her husband by any means.

GOLDEN HARVEST MARKET

There are various marketplaces scattered throughout Bǎo Jiāng, but none are as prestigious as the Golden Harvest Market. Located near the middle of the city, it is theoretically accessible to all social classes, though a regular *PATROL OF GUARDSMEN* is paid well by the wealthiest merchants to keep the poor out. Selling in the market requires the *NECESSARY LICENSES AND PERMITS*, available at prices which vary widely based on the applicant's connections and reputation. Some guards take small bribes to let poorer merchants and craftsmen set up their wares in *OUT OF THE WAY CORNERS* of the market, but most of the business conducted here is done under the umbrella of the Golden Prosperity Alliance, a coalition of wealthy merchants backed by a few "socially conscious" upper class elites who wish to shop and deal without having to mingle with the lower classes.

Those shopping here can find most legally obtainable goods or service, and often can secure information of where other goods can be acquired. Fine silks, expertly crafted weapons and armor, fine food and drink, and more can be had for the right price. The market is also an *EXCELLENT PLACE TO FIND EMPLOYMENT*, as the Golden Prosperity Alliance is always interested in skilled individuals who can protect their business interests or perform the less savory tasks those with wealth and power sometimes require to keep themselves on top of the economic food chain.

FEARLESS SOLICITOR XIŪ

The unassuming Mǎ Xiū is one of the most highly respected and skilled solicitors in Bǎo Jiāng, despite the fact he has been *BLIND SINCE CHILDHOOD*. With the aide of his assistant, the portly and cheerful Wù Dí, he defends those accused of crimes, draws up official documents, and otherwise serves the legal needs of various citizens. A *CHARITABLE SOUL* who is *DRIVEN TO SERVE TRUTH AND JUSTICE*, Mǎ Xiū will often take an active role in a case when necessary, bringing his Great (+4) Investigate and Superb (+5) Notice skills to bear.

Despite his blindness, Mǎ Xiū is a skilled fighter as well. He uses his walking cane and keen senses to control his environment. He may not be a match

for a skilled, sighted warrior, but this **Ghost Crane** practitioner can handle ruffians and lesser opponents with surprising ease. When questioned about the limitations of his blindness, he often explains "**I See in Other Ways**" (+2 bonus to use Notice to Create an Advantage based on senses other than sight. Cannot create sight-based advantages).

HOUSE OF SOFT SIGHS

One of the premiere courtesan houses in the city, the House of Soft Sighs is operated by Lì Lì Húa with the blessing and protection of the 38 Dragons syndicate. The *THREE-LEVEL BROTHEL AND TEA HOUSE* is considered *NEUTRAL GROUND* by most of the gangs, syndicates, and secret societies in the city; few wish to risk Lì Húa's wrath and the denial of the services of the nubile young men and women who work there. Given the realities of their job, Madame Lì Húa treats her "children" very well. She pays for their education, training, and protects them from abusive or repulsive clientele. This includes having a small group of courtesans trained to act as *BOUNCERS AND ENFORCERS* and various *SECRET PASSAGES AND EXITS* to help discretely remove problem patrons and unwelcome guests. Still, incidents occur and Lì Húa often needs enterprising individuals willing to protect the honor and wellbeing of herself, her house, and her courtesans.

LÌ LÌ HÚA

ASPECTS

MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE OF SOFT SIGHS
SO MANY SECRETS
"I WILL PROTECT MY CHILDREN"
PALE SHADOWS OF BEAUTY
WHITE WIDOW ALLY
CONDITIONAL SAFETY

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Contacts
Great (+4): Will, Deceive
Good (+3): Rapport, Resources
Fair (+2): Empathy, Investigate, Lore
Average (+1): Physique, Drive, Stealth

STRESS

2 Physical Boxes
 4 Mental Boxes

STUNTS

"My Children and I Would Be Most Grateful" (+2 to use Contacts to overcome obstacles to finding those to help you)
Mistress of Whispers (+2 bonus to Investigate rolls to create an advantage based on discovering secrets of the staff or patrons of the House of Soft Sighs)
The Pillow Keeps No Secrets (Use Contacts instead of Provoke to create an advantage based on the fear of revealed secrets against any who have visited your establishment or have secrets known to a regular House of Soft Sighs patron or worker)
Powerful Friends (You can use Contacts to attack opponents, inflicting mental stress provided your target has reason to fear the wrath of a known ally, patron, or associate), **Seductress** (+2 bonus when creating an advantage based on seduction)

Once considered among the most beautiful women in Shénzhōu, Lì Lì Húá's looks have faded as she nears sixty. However, she is still attractive, charming, and has a lifetime of experience as a courtesan, madam, and entertainer. Madame Lì Húá truly cares for those who work at the House of Soft Sighs and will not endanger them unless the need is dire. She has even secretly allied herself with the legendary White Widow Sect, sometimes sending young courtesans to them who have drawn the attentions of violent and obsessive individuals. While not a warrior or violent by nature, she will not hesitate to use whatever means necessary to protect herself, her house, and her workers. This usually means finding and convincing others to do whatever is necessary to provide this security, things she is very adept at accomplishing.

UNCLE LUNG'S

A restaurant famous for its **STRONG PLUM WINE** and **SPICY MEAT BUNS**, Uncle Lung's is also the headquarters of the 38 Dragons (aka "Triple Prosperity") crime family, one of the strongest in the city. Uncle Lung Rong is the current leader of the family and his sons, daughters, grandchildren, nephews, and nieces help him run both the gang and restaurant's day-to-day operations. He also owns most of the buildings on his block and staffs these too with his family and other 38 Dragons members. Lung is a **CHEERFUL-LOOKING OLD MAN** who looks like he has had a few too many of his famous buns. He is admittedly **RUTHLESS WHEN NECESSARY** but usually tries to focus on peaceful and profitable ventures

like gambling and smuggling. He stays away from prostitution, content to collect a small tithe and nice discount for services from the House of Soft Sighs in exchange for protection. Uncle Lung has Fantastic (+6) Contacts and Resources, Superb (+5) Rapport and Will and is Great (+4) at Fight and Provoke despite his age and appearance. He also gets a +2 to Will when defending against Provoke from criminals, cops, and bureaucrats (**BEEN AROUND THE BLOCK**) and can use his Resources instead of Provoke when attacking to inflict mental damage on other criminal figures (**AN OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE**). He is an old-school brawler at heart and knows no Kung Fu, though some of his gang has formal training.



BLUE LOTUS

A lower-class and *LOW PROFILE* establishment compared to the House of Soft Sighs, The Blue Lotus is notable because it serves as headquarters for the 9413 Hungry Devils or simply the 9413, the main rival to Uncle Lung's 38 Dragons. A relatively recent newcomer to the underworld in Bǎo Jiāng, the name 9413 is a play on words meaning “nine chances in ten to die”, referencing the lethal nature of the organization. The gang is led by the Three Motherless Killers, a triumvirate of ruthless gangsters who supposedly grew up together orphaned on the streets of the city. Each oversees one aspect of the gangs operation: Black Vulture Jun handles prostitution and the black market slave trade, Iron Shark Kong handles extortion and racketeering, and Poison Fox Fen deals with smuggling and trafficking in illegal goods and murder-for-hire. The three hold the gang together and keep their positions with a mix of force of personality and martial prowess.

The *SUBTERRANEAN TUNNELS AND CHAMBERS* under The Blue Lotus are used for slaving and smuggling operations by the 9413. Important prisoners or objects are also sometimes kept here. As one might expect, *ALL ENTRANCES ARE GUARDED* and this area links up to Di Yu through various *SECRET PASSAGEWAYS*.

THE THREE MOTHERLESS KILLERS

The Three Motherless Killers have known each other since childhood and despite their evil natures and flaws, they are loyal to their partnership. They are the best friends, confidants, and lovers any of them have known, a bond that makes them even more dangerous. All three are adept at detecting and exploiting the weaknesses of others, a skill that has helped them survive and flourish in the cutthroat world of Bǎo Jiāng's underworld.

POISON FOX FEN

ASPECTS

MOTHERLESS KILLER ASSASSIN
CRAZY DEADLY
IT'S ALL JUST A GAME
WICKED JEALOUSY
"JUST A FEW DROPS..."

SKILLS

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

STRESS

3 Physical Boxes
 3 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 2

KUNG FU STYLE: FOREST

TIGER (MASTER) FOREST TIGER FORM

Forest Hides the Beast: A tie on a Fight- or Athletics- based defense action grants no boost to your attacker.

Forest Opens Its Paths: If you use Athletics to overcome an obstacle with style, you 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, you add +2 Weapon Rating to that attack.

Tiger Moves With Purpose: Move at least 1 zone and make an attack using Athletics or make an Athletics attack 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 Rules the Jungle: You may use Physique or Provoke (selected when you select this Technique) instead of Will to defend against Provoke attacks. If both Will and Physique (or Provoke) are the same rank, or Will is higher, gain a 2 Armor Rating against Provoke attacks instead.

Tiger Stalks the Path Spend 1 Fate Point on a Fight attack where a tie or better is achieved. If tied, the action now counts as a success with a +4 Weapon Rating. If already a success, add an additional free invocation to any consequence created by this attack or grant a boost if no consequence is created.

STUNTS

Exploit Weakness (add +2 Weapon Rating to attacks targeting those with at least one consequence known to the attacker)

Poisoner (+2 when successfully creating a poison-based advantage, gain an extra free invocation)

Toxicology (+2 Lore involving poisons and drugs)

Both the "little sister" and "big sister" to the trio, Poison Fox Fen looks out for her partners and jealously guards their relationship. She does not mind if her "brothers" take lovers or have other friends; she simply will not allow any of them to supplant her. She will cut out any weakness among the 9413, remembering too well how her "brothers" and she suffered on the streets whenever they were not united. This ruthlessness serves her well in her dealings with the gang's smuggler, assassin, and pirate allies.

BLACK VULTURE JUN

ASPECTS

*MOTHERLESS KILLER TACTICIAN
WHATEVER IT TAKES
POKER-FACED SADIST
COLD-HEARTED SLAVER AND PIMP
"I'M SURE WE CAN COME TO SOME
ARRANGEMENT"*

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Fight

Great (+4): Athletics, Contacts,
Notice

Good (+3): Provoke, Will, Physique,
Deceive

Fair (+2): Rapport, Resources,
Stealth, Investigate

Average (+1): Drive, Lore, Burglary,
Chi

STRESS

4 Physical Boxes

4 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 2

**KUNG FU STYLE: STORM
PHOENIX (MASTER)
STORM PHOENIX FORM**

Storm Shakes the Foundation:

When creating an advantage, you 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 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.

Phoenix Beats its Wings: If you **defend** with style, you may gain an **OFF BALANCE** advantage on the target, with a free invocation instead of a boost.

Phoenix Calls to Heaven: You may use *Chi* instead of Physique to determine extra stress boxes and consequences. This is in addition to the Armor bonus from having high *Chi*. If *Chi* and Physique are the same rating, you may instead reduce physical stress taken by 2 shifts once per session.

Phoenix Laughs at the Sun: If you succeed at an **Overcome** roll using Athletics or Fight with style, you may create a situation aspect with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

Clouds Embrace the Phoenix:

Spend 1 Fate Point to add +1 Weapon Rating and +1 Armor Rating to all Fight attacks and defenses. If you or your opponent moves at least 1 zone on their last action, increase these bonuses to +3. This effect lasts for an entire scene.

STUNTS

Career Criminal (Gain a +2 bonus to Lore rolls to overcome obstacles or create an advantage where knowledge of illicit activities would be useful)

Disarming Charm (Gain a +2 bonus to create an advantage against a target who has no obvious reason to distrust you)

Vulture's Eye (+2 to when using Notice to create an advantage based on a character's existing consequences)

The "big brother" of the group, slender and wiry Black Vulture Jun is the default leader of the 9413. A cultivated aura of easy-going calm hides a cold-blooded murderer and sadist who desires only to advance himself, his partners, and his gang in roughly that order. Jun never raises his voice to any of the slaves or prostitutes he oversees, which makes the horrible things he does to those who disobey seem all the worse.

IRON SHARK KONG

ASPECTS

MOTHERLESS KILLER ENFORCER
NOT MUCH OF A PLANNER
HUGE BRUTE
BIPOLAR PSYCHOPATH
"YOU WILL PAY
ONE WAY OR THE OTHER"

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Physique, Provoke
Great (+4): Fight, Athletics
Good (+3): Resources, Contacts
Fair (+2): Will, Stealth, *Chi*
Average (+1): Drive, Shoot, Notice

STRESS

4 Physical Boxes
 3 Mental Boxes
 Extra mild consequence

JIANGHU RANK: 2

KUNG FU STYLE: IRON DRAGON (MASTER) IRON DRAGON FORM

Iron Cleaves the Stone: Ignore 2 points of Armor when making an attack to inflict physical stress.

Flesh Breaks on Iron: When you defend against a Fight attack with style, you may inflict 2 shift hit instead of taking a boost on your attacker.

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

Dragon Rules the Fields: When you succeed with style on an attack, gain a boost—with a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2—without reducing the value of your attack.

Dragon Rules the Heavens: Use *Chi* or Fight (selected when you take this Technique) instead of Athletics in rolls involving entering zones or preventing others from doing so. Apply a +2 bonus if both Athletics and the selected Skill are the same rank or Athletics is greater.

Dragon Sleeps in Mist: When you succeed with style on a defense, you may reduce the result by 1 to gain 2 Armor Rating against the next attack in the scene that strikes you in addition to the normal boost.

Scales and Teeth Unto like Iron: Spend 1 Fate point; for the remainder of the scene, any attacker who creates a consequence on you with physical stress does not get a free invocation for creating the consequence. In addition, you gain +1 Weapons Rating to all your Fight attacks.

STUNTS

Blood in the Water (Gain a +1 attack and +1 Weapon Rating on Fight attacks against targets suffering consequences based on physical injury or weakness)

Crushing Grip (+2 to use grapples and holds to create an advantage)

...Or Else (May use Provoke instead of Contacts when creating an advantage based on intimidating others into doing favors for you)

Despite standing nearly seven feet tall, Iron Shark Kong is the "little brother" of the Three Motherless Killers. He looks to his partners for guidance and planning. He is not stupid, but he handles most problems directly and with a lack of the subtlety that is sometimes required. His mental problems make him unpredictable, he can be cheerful and friendly one moment and murderous and violent the next.

DI YU

Named for the legendary countless hells of Shénzhōu, all but the closest levels of this series of underground chambers, catacombs, sewers, waterways, and tunnels underneath much of Bǎo Jiāng are **NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO NAVIGATE**. **COLLAPSED TUNNELS** and **FLOODED CHAMBERS** make travel difficult, and few

spend long in Di Yu without necessity. Less treacherous and better known areas of Di Yu house fugitives and black marketers. Many of the latter work out of the Hell Market, a semi-permanent fixture where nearly anything can be had for the right price.

CRIME AND THE FIVE PUNISHMENTS

While Jiāngzhōu—especially Bǎo Jiāng—is a fairly lawless, corrupt, and chaotic place, it is still part of the greater empire of Shénzhōu. The grand imperial bureaucracy of Shénzhōu has, over the centuries, passed numerous laws, edicts, and regulations covering everything from treason to the sale of goods without proper permits. Violating most minor laws results in modest fines, mild corporal punishment, or a short term of imprisonment. Minor offenses can be anything from starting a drunken brawl to blocking traffic on a major road to disturbing the peace. In the case of illegal business transactions, all or some of the illegal goods are confiscated. Fines are especially popular in places like Jiāngzhōu, where many officials are more

interested in profit than order. The truly influential or dangerous can usually avoid such minor legal entanglements; few magistrates want to anger a deadly swordsman or rich merchant with such trivial matters. By contrast, those with power can influence officials to harass someone with numerous fines and minor offenses.

Historically, serious crimes such as treason, murder, rape, major acts of theft, and similar offenses were punished with Five Punishments: tattooing the victim's face, disfigurement, amputation, death, and castration. Execution of these punishments was often brutal and creative. Recent dynasties have reformed these draconian punishments, leaving them severe but less horrific. They now are: flogging, beating,

imprisonment, exile, and death. Flogging is carried out with a whip or light cane, is painful, and can leave noticeable scars. By contrast, beating is done with a heavy club, hammer, or even by hand, but can break bones and damage internal organs. Imprisonment nearly always includes hard labor, and exile can be to a remote part of the empire or beyond its borders. Generally, the rich and powerful can expect lighter punishment even for serious crimes, though for things like treason or mass murder all bets are off; in fact, treasonous offenders' entire families are often killed—out to several generations—to ensure no corrupting influences remain in the family line.

BEGGAR'S HAVEN

Beggars and other urban poor dwell in this mix of **EXTREMELY DILAPIDATED** surface and underground areas. Beggar's Haven inhabitants are generally left alone as they have **NOTHING WORTH STEALING** and no money to extort. However, when gangs are in need of slaves and a corrupt magistrate needs a scapegoat to placate his superiors, the people of Beggar's Haven are among the first targeted. Beggar's Haven has no official representation in the city government, but there is one person living there everyone respects. He is Peng, the

BEGGAR ABBOT OF BǎO JIĀNG. Rumored to be a former corrupt head of a faraway temple or retired mercenary seeking enlightenment, what is known about his past is **MORE LEGEND THAN FACT**. What is certain is Beggar Abbot Peng is now an **IMPOVERISHED HOLY MAN** who is sworn to **PROTECT THE PEOPLE OF BEGGAR'S HAVEN**. Most believe Peng is a Bodhist due to his dress and general philosophical bent, though he often quotes famed Daoist or Legalist philosophers as well.

BEGGAR, ABBOT, SOLDIER, SPY

The true past of the Beggar Abbot is left up to GMs to decide. Pick something that fits with the themes and central concepts of the campaign. In addition to the two rumors listed in the Beggar's Haven section, some suggestions for Peng's true past are:

- A former general from a rebel army that once tried to overthrow the current dynasty.
- A spy for the Emperor who is merely playing the part to keep tabs on Bǎo Jiāng, but is slowly beginning to care for the poor in Beggar's Haven.
- A member of a heretic religious sect hiding from persecution; this sect need not be corrupt or evil, simply unpopular.
- A former pirate trying to atone for past evil actions.
- A long-lost relative of one of the PCs

In any event, the Beggar Abbot should likely be a formidable martial artist (Master of at least one style of Kung Fu) and keen judge of character. Without these skills, he would not have risen to his "lofty" status as Beggar's Haven's protector and chief luminary.



GOVERNOR'S PALACE

Located on the outskirts of Bǎo Jiāng, this “palace” is more of a sprawling estate. It is home to the provincial governor of Jiāngzhōu, a nobleman appointed by the empire to govern and protect the area. The current governor is Meng Gouzhi, sometimes called Tenth Tael Meng due to his habit of pocketing a percentage of all taxes, tariffs, tithes, and tributes for himself (though not to his face). Meng's house has been the governor's estate in Jiāngzhōu for over a century

and the grounds have *SEVERAL SECRET PASSAGES AND TUNNELS*. The grounds are *WELL-GUARDED BY MAN AND BEAST* and any seeking to infiltrate or assault the estate will have a tough time of it. Most of Governor Meng's official duties are actually handled by Formless Pei, his eunuch minister and aide. Many suspect Pei of being the true imperial power in the region, though the soft-skinned pale man insists he is merely a humble servant.

FORMLESS PEI

ASPECTS

EUNUCH MINISTER

“I AM JUST A HUMBLE SERVANT”

POWER HUNGRY

ALCHEMICAL GENIUS

FORMER IMPERIAL COUSIN

LOYAL SHADOWS

SKILLS

Fantastic (+6): Deceive

Superb (+5): Contacts, Resources

Great (+4): Craft, Will

Good (+3): Chi, Fight, Shoot

Fair (+2): Investigate, Lore, Notice

Average (+1): Athletics, Rapport, Stealth

STRESS

2 Physical Boxes

4 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE:

LIGHTNING SERPENT

LIGHTNING SERPENT FORM

Lightning Crosses the Sky: When you succeed with style on a Fight attack, you may move 1 zone in addition to gaining a boost. If someone or something tries to stop this movement, gain a +2 to rolls to overcome.

Serpent Bites the Hand: If you gain shifts on a defense, you can sacrifice your action next turn to immediately inflict an attack on your opponent using the shift value of your defense as your attack result.

Serpent Strikes Twice: +2 bonus to Deceive rolls to create an advantage based on disorientation, distraction, or unbalancing against opponents you have already inflicted stress on this combat.

STUNTS

Fearful Revelation (Use Deceive in place of Provoke to make mental attacks provided you know one of the target's secrets)

Mystic Eunuch (Treated as having +4 defense bonus against all physical seduction attempts)

Master Alchemist (Gain a +2 bonus when using Craft to create an alchemy-based advantage)

Master Manipulator (when using Deceive to successfully create an advantage based on manipulating someone, gain an extra free invocation)

Formless Pei was a cousin in the Imperial line whose uncle plotted against the throne. Spared due to his youth and innocence, the Emperor regardless ordered him transformed into a eunuch to remove any future challenge to the throne. Pei was trained as a bureaucrat and minister and over time rose to prominence among the imperial eunuchs. Still, his presence unnerved the Emperor and he was sent to serve as chief aide to Meng Gouzhi at the farthest edge of the empire. Pei is efficient, mysterious, and extremely difficult to read. He has a small army of spies and agents he nominally uses in service to the governor and the empire, but which are ultimately loyal to him. Pei usually tries to avoid combat, but if pressed he uses small blades and needles coated with various alchemical mixtures, from incendiaries to poisons.

EUNUCHS AND *TIANXIA*

In ancient China, eunuchs were given a large amount of administrative power and unparalleled access to the Forbidden City. This was largely due to the fact that eunuchs would not have children of their own to favor, could not start a dynasty of their own, and would not impregnate an imperial concubine or wife. Many families would send one of their children to be castrated and trained in affairs of state so that the status of the whole family would be elevated. It was also used as an ancient punishment and a terror tactic during certain periods. Eunuchs held incredible political power, but they were often unpopular with the people and are still used as evil or corrupt villains in historical-

based media to this day.

Eunuchs are much the same in *Tianxia* and the lands of Shénzhōu, but with one key difference. Unlike actual history, the process of turning someone into eunuch is not a surgical one. Instead, it involves a quasi-mystic transformation that removes identifying gender and fertility from a subject. Thus, Eunuch characters can be originally male or female. The process was also used as a punishment in the past, but it is currently out of favor, though rumors of secret rituals used as punishment or to remove romantic rivals or heirs persist. The ritual that creates a mystic eunuch is a closely guarded secret kept by the Imperial Eunuchs themselves. Various theories as to the source of this extreme transformation

are some bizarre and rare herbal or alchemical compound, a specialized form of permanent *Chi* manipulation, or the darkest magic.

Players wanting to be a eunuch PC can do so regardless of their character's original gender. They should take the Mystic Eunuch stunt (see Formless Pei, GMs might consider giving it for free if its advantages are unlikely to come up much in play) and likely have an Aspect to reflect this. Note, some eunuchs in Chinese fantasy are seen to have great mystic or strange martial arts powers. GMs wishing to emulate this should come up with stunts and extras to reflect this. These can include various Lost Techniques, some of which might even require being a eunuch to learn.

FINAL WORDS ON JIĀNGZHŌU AND BǎO JIĀNG

As mentioned earlier, not every possible place of interest or import is detailed in these chapters. GMs and players have plenty of “white space” to fill in with their own locations, interesting NPCs, rumors, and legends. Feel free to replace any group, individual, or landmark with ones catering to the interests and style of a particular campaign. While *Tianxia* may introduce GMs and players to this realm, they are the ones whose actions and decisions will define, shape, and explore it.

Jiāngzhōu is only one of nine provinces in Shénzhōu. Future *Tianxia* products will flesh out

these other areas, while leaving others for individual GMs and players to fill in. Never feel hindered by these additions—alter, tweak, and adapt existing and future material to the needs of your group. Want the Northern provinces to be overrun with barbarian hordes? Go for it. Maybe you want to make Bǎo Jiāng the capital of the whole empire, where a newly risen dynasty rules the lands to the East with an iron grip? Cool. As long as all the players and GM are on board, what you do with Shénzhōu is more important than what the map says.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE RULES OF TIANXIA

WIDOWS AND ORPHANS

The White Widow Sect assassin glared at Detective Dishi as he stood between her and the tong leader, Strangler Heng. She had left her sect's forest stronghold to bring bloody justice to Heng, a killer of over twenty young women and girls.

"He must pay for his crimes!" the woman shouted at the young magistrate.

"On any other day, madame, I would agree. But I need this man alive," Dishi replied. Heng was an evil bastard who deserved death, but he was also Dishi's only lead on a slaver ring that had taken over a dozen children in recent weeks.

"His victims need vengeance!" the Widow shrieked, seeking in vain to find an opening in Dishi's defense which she could slide her sword past and finish Heng before anyone could stop her.

"I need a drink," said Smiling Ox, straining to hold up the broken beam threatening to collapse and topple the entire building down on their heads. The column normally preventing this had been shattered moments earlier by a deflected blow from Ox's demon hammer. The beam cracked under the pressure shortly after. Feeling somewhat responsible, and being

the only one strong enough to do so, Ox took the place of the column. That left Dishi to protect Heng and stop the woman sent to kill him.

"You will not surrender this man?" the White Widow asked.

"Sadly, no. You see he is..." Dishi attempted to explain his reasons, hoping the assassin would delay long enough for him to conduct a proper interrogation. Afterwards? He really did not much mind if Strangler Heng was gutted, shot, poisoned, or fed to hungry dogs. He mused briefly that hanging him would have a certain poetic flair, but he did not really care. He cared about fourteen missing children.

"Then you will die with him!" The assassin thrust her arm out sideways, and a dart nearly as long as her forearm raced from her sleeve and struck the lantern on a nearby table. It toppled over, spilling oil all over the floor. Then the wall hangings caught fire, and soon half the room was in flames. In the time it took Dishi to take in how quickly the fire spread, the White Widow was gone.

"This place is clearly not up to code; remind me to write you a citation," Dishi told Heng, who was still cowering behind him.

"The room is on fire," Smiling Ox noted.

"Ah, Smiling Ox. Famed master of the Demon Hammer...and the obvious," Dishi said.

"Then I do not need to add this whole place will collapse when I let go of this beam?"

"No, but it might put out the fire."

"You are both mad." Heng muttered, bolting past them to the door. He grabbed the door handle, twisted, and pulled. Nothing happened.

"It's jammed! That witch trapped us in here!" The tong leader cried.

"Of course she did, do not be an idiot," Dishi replied, then turned back to Smiling Ox. "How long from when you let that go until the whole place comes down?"

"I'm no carpenter," Smiling Ox answered.

"Well, let us hope it is at least five seconds."

"Why?"

"Because that is how long we will need to escape; however, I will need your hands free to do it."

Smiling Ox grinned through the smoke and the strain, "Just say the word."

The next two chapters introduce and explain the rules specific to *Tianxia*, including character creation

guidelines and how characters can use and master Kung Fu in play. These rules are not a replacement for the basic rules of *FATE CORE* (though they often customize and modify them) and a copy of those rules will be needed to play. In addition, various sidebars containing optional rules and discussion of various concepts and ideas for *Tianxia* games are included. None of these are required to play, but they can be fun or useful.

USING DIFFERENT DICE SYSTEMS

Like *FATE CORE*, *Tianxia* is designed to be used with standard Fudge Dice, which generate a range between +4 and -4 to the appropriate skill, with 0 being the average. If you do not like this range, do not have any Fudge dice, and do not want to use d6s to emulate them (roll 4d6 and tally results; results of 1-2: -1; 3-4: 0, 5-6: +1), you can use other dice mechanics.

The easiest and most recommended option is to use 2d6 and subtract the result of one die from the other. This will generate a range of -5 to +5 with 0 being the average. This creates a slightly wider range of results than the default Fudge dice. *Tianxia* works very well with this variant because that is not necessarily a

bad thing. Characters in *wuxia* and Kung Fu stories tend to have some pretty dramatic ups and downs; more range in die results could help emulate that.

You could even use 2d8 and generate a range of -7 to +7; just be aware this nearly doubles the range of traditional *FATE* rules and will result in characters capable of doing amazing things but able to get taken out of a fight by a lucky shot from a lesser foe. While not generally recommended, this is presented as an option for those who want games with wildly variable results.

An alternate resolution to dice also exists. Evil Hat Productions has released the *DECK OF FATE*, a set of cards that simulate *FATE* dice rolls. The deck also has

some recommended aspects and other elements that can jazz up your game, should you like card-based resolution. For *DECK OF FATE* users who want to tailor things to *wuxia* a bit more, a set of alternate Major and Minor Arcana cards for the deck exist, which provide some interesting variations on the standard *DECK OF FATE* Arcana tailored more towards the traditional virtues and flaws seen in various *wuxia* and kung fu stories, especially those that focus on the “code of the Jiang Hu”: chivalry, gallantry, virtue, righteousness, loyalty and related concepts such as charity and devotion to martial excellence.

EXISTING SKILLS IN TIANXIA

Most Skills in FATE CORE work the same in Tianxia, though logically adapted to the setting.

So a character would use Lore to reflect academic study and general knowledge about various subjects, but it would not cover computers or modern engineering since that is not part of the default setting.

Likewise, Drive can be used for riding horses, driving carriages or carts, and even sailing a ship, but you cannot use it to actually drive a car. Any GMs who include high-tech elements in their *Tianxia* games can of course ignore these guidelines, but that is the default.

Certain Skills do provide some additional bonuses or have special uses in *Tianxia*. This reflects how those certain abilities work in the *wuxia* and Kung Fu action genre. These Skills and their new rules are:

ATHLETICS IN TIANXIA

Characters in *Tianxia* are capable of some pretty impressive feats of physical prowess, especially those trained in Kung Fu. Some of this is reflected in the bonuses given from having a high Jianghu Rank (page 63), but being exceptionally Skilled in Athletics helps all by itself. Characters with Athletics of Good or Great can move 1 extra zone in addition to the free one all characters get if they are not blocked by obstacles or other characters' actions. Athletics of Superb or above allow the character to move 2 extra zones instead. Characters with Epic or Legendary Athletics can move 3 extra zones.

Wolf-Eyed Yue is a highly skilled acrobat in peak physical condition, reflected by her Great Athletics skill. When not impeded by obstacles or being prevented from moving by another character, she can move 2 zones instead of 1 as part of her free movement during her turn.

Characters can only move these extra zones when moving under their own power. So riding a horse or sailing a ship do not count. However, GMs can allow similar bonuses for characters with high Drive skills when using mounts or vehicles.

PHYSIQUE AND WILL IN TIANXIA

So much of *Tianxia*'s physical conflicts revolve around melee battles. Even the majority of ranged combat is based around thrown weapons or other projectiles that at least partially rely on muscle-power and extreme physical conditioning. While most *wuxia* and Kung Fu media puts a strong emphasis on skill and speed over pure physical might, they do not ignore the idea that getting hit by a big strong guy hurts. This is reflected as using one's Physique to create an advantage in physical conflicts. Physique does not just mean physical strength either, it also reflects overall conditioning and health.

Likewise, a character's force or will or fighting spirit is a big deal in *Tianxia*. A character with intense amounts of willpower might not be the most charming or influential person, but others can feel the raw power of their spirit when they speak or act. Thus it is often very appropriate to create an advantage based on Will to help with such situations.

Creating an advantage using Will or Physique in such situations works just like any other **Create an Advantage** action in *FATE CORE*, but it is worth noting as a player and as a GM, as it is very genre and setting appropriate.

NEW SKILLS IN TIANXIA

Tianxia uses the default FATE CORE skill list (FATE CORE, p.97) with only one addition, the Chi skill.

This skill covers the cultivation and manipulation of internal energies or spiritual power, a common theme in the inspirational media for *Tianxia*. GMs wishing to expand the skill list further should feel free to do so, perhaps splitting Lore into Academics and Medicine or Craft into categories like Arts and Smithing. If going this route, consider giving characters more skill selections at creation to account for the increased options.

NEW SKILL: CHI

The cultivation and utilization of *Chi*, or internal energies, is key to various spiritual disciplines and martial arts in *Tianxia*. A character with strong *Chi* can accelerate his healing, better focus his body and mind, and function with increased harmony with his environment. Scholars believe *Chi* is divided up into various categories based on elements and concepts. Chief among these divisions is *yin* and *yang* aligned *Chi*. *Yin Chi* is related to darkness, reactionary forces, stillness, and cold. *Yang Chi* is related to light, proactive forces, aggression, and heat. *Yin* is also seen as feminine in contrast to the more masculine *yang*, but both genders are thought to possess *yin* and *yang* elements. These two forces serve to complement and strengthen each other, and severe imbalances in *yin* or *yang* can cause mental or physical ailments (or stress and consequences). The *Chi* skill also covers meditation and understanding how spiritual energies affect the body and spirit.

✿ **Overcome:** *Chi* allows you to overcome any obstacle relating to imbalance of internal forces. It is also used to help a character find focus or introspection amidst chaos, making it useful to work through various distractions. *Chi* can even overcome the negative effects of poison, disease, or injury, though usually this respite is only temporary and proper treatment must still be received. It can also be used to detect strong

or weak *Chi* in others, overcoming attempts to conceal one's inner strength.

- ✿ **Create an Advantage:** *Chi* allows you to focus your energies to various advantageous effects for yourself and others. Aspects like **MEDITATIVE FOCUS** or **MY ENERGIES ARE ALIGNED** can be created to aid in various mental and physical activities. Advantages can also be used to complement Kung Fu defenses or attacks, especially when dealing with powerful martial artists whose strength is often as much about powerful *Chi* as physical might.
- ✿ **Attack:** *Chi* is not generally used for attack, but various Kung Fu Techniques and other special abilities change this.
- ✿ **Defend:** *Chi* can defend against mystical attacks and those relying on *Chi* as part of the attack, like some Kung Fu Techniques.
- ✿ **Special Effect:** Characters with high *Chi* skills can deal with stress much better than others. At the beginning of a scene any character with a *Chi* skill of Average or better gets a free attempt to make a special **Create an Advantage** action to create a **CHI ARMOR** advantage. Each invocation can be used to gain a +2 Armor Rating against a successful attack against them. Characters can also use Fate points to invoke **CHI ARMOR** once these invocations are gone or use an action during their turn to create an advantage to add new invocations. You cannot do this in addition to making an attack or other action; you need to take an action to center your character's energies and revitalize their **CHI ARMOR**.

The difficulty for creating **CHI ARMOR** is based on the opposition's highest Jianghu Rank, as described in the **Hierarchy of the Martial World** section, though the GM may adjust this difficulty if a character is surprised, exhausted, impaired, or if a scene involves

unique properties that might disrupt internal energies, such as a **CURSED TEMPLE** or **TOXIC GASES**.

Special Effect: Characters can use *Chi* to do a recovery action on themselves without the normal 2 step penalty (*FATE CORE*, p.164). Also, characters with Good or higher *Chi* can rename recovering consequences with more fluidity. Thus where a Fair *Chi* character who gets a **BROKEN ARM** in a fight might rename it **BANDAGED AND SORE ARM** while recovering, a character with higher *Chi* who can accelerate his healing might rename it **ABUNDANT YIN** to reflect his injury is already physically healed, but the focus required has burned much of his *yang*, leaving him temporarily more reactionary and passive. Such consequences are often harder to detect and thus exploit unless an attacker also has strong *Chi* or his highly perceptive.

“IT’S ALL IN THE REFLEXES...”

To keep things appropriately unpredictable during battles and action scenes, *Tianxia* determines turn order by rolling the relevant skill—usually Notice—and using the resulting total rather than the raw Skill rating. This roll occurs at the start of a scene, when characters determine starting **CHI ARMOR**. If the GM or players prefer a different method, they can use the default *FATE CORE* turn order mechanics (*FATE CORE*, p. 158) or Dramatic Initiative (p. 147).

LORE BY ANY OTHER NAME...

Tianxia adds only one skill to the default list (*FATE CORE*, p.97) and this book uses the default skill names for simplicity, but GMs seeking to add a bit of flavor to their games are encouraged to rename various skills to fit the martial arts action setting. Below are some suggestions for alternate names for various skills.

Note that not all the default skills have renaming suggestions. Some, like Contacts, are fine as they are or any renaming suggestions (like Allies, Socialize, etc.) are not really inherently any more appropriate for *Tianxia*.

- **Athletics:** Acrobatics, Training
- **Burglary:** Banditry, Outlaw
- **Crafts:** Artisan, Craftsman, *Gong* (social class related to artists and craftsmen)
- **Deceive:** Intrigue, Misdirection
- **Drive:** Horsemanship, Ride
- **Fight:** Gung Fu, Kung Fu (work requiring diligence and devotion), Wushu (war arts); since *Tianxia* uses Kung Fu as the term for the martial arts Styles system, doubling up on that term might be confusing to some.
- **Investigate:** Detective, Magistrate
- **Lore:** Scholar, Scholarship, *Shi* (social class relating to scholars)
- **Physique:** Conditioning, Health
- **Rapport:** Charm, Diplomat
- **Shoot:** Archery, Marksmanship
- **Resources:** *Shang* (social class relating to merchants and trade), Wealth

Renaming the skill does not necessarily change its scope. If Shoot is renamed Archery, it will still work with thrown weapons unless the GM decides to expand the skill list by adding a Throwing skill. Likewise, if Drive is renamed Ride, it can still be used with boats unless a Sailor skill is added.

CHARACTER CREATION IN TIANXIA

Heroes in Tianxia normally use the default FATE CORE System character creation guidelines with the following additions:

- ✿ Every starting Hero gets 1 extra Refresh. It is strongly recommended this be used to buy a Kung Fu style (which gives you the style **FORM** and 1 Technique), but it is not required.
- ✿ You can spend 1 Refresh to get 2 Kung Fu Techniques for an existing style or one of their free Stunts to gain one Technique. Note that you can spend enough Stunts and Refresh to gain all the techniques in a style, putting you one milestone away from becoming a Master, which comes with a boost in Jianghu Rank (see page 63). However such characters will have few other Stunts and start with fewer Fate Points, so it might not be an ideal option for many characters.

GMs and Players wanting more powerful starting characters should add more Refresh, extra Skills, grant free Kung Fu Techniques, and so on. They can also allow PCs to begin as Masters in Kung Fu simply by having all the other Techniques in a style and forgo the need for a milestone at character creation. This last option can allow characters to start off right away doing jaw-dropping feats of amazing Kung Fu, but for some groups this might diminish the sense of accomplishment from mastering a Kung Fu Style during play. GMs can either charge an additional Refresh for becoming a Master at creation or grant it for free to any who purchase all six Techniques of a Style during play. Either option works fine, but to be fair to everyone pick one before character creation and stick with it.

HIERARCHY OF THE MARTIAL WORLD

In *Tianxia*, martial arts training and mastery allows for incredible feats. A trained fighter of any style can defeat dozens of lesser opponents with ease. To reflect this, every character has what is known as a Jianghu (Martial World) Rank, determined by how

much Kung Fu the character knows. If a character has a superior rank to an opponent, it has two effects:






- ✿ Gain one free invocation of their Kung Fu Style **FORM** when facing opponents of a lower rank, once per scene. They cannot use this invocation against an opponent of equal or greater rank, even if lesser-ranked characters are present. However, they still receive the invocation to use against those lesser opponents.
- ✿ No opponents of lower Jianghu Rank can receive Teamwork bonuses against a superior-ranked character in a conflict involving martial arts, fighting spirit, or Kung Fu prowess. Ever.

In addition, superior Jianghu Rank grants a free bonus to movement. A character with Jianghu rank 0 moves 1 free zone as normal, barring bonuses for having a high Athletics Skill (see page 59). Characters with rank 1 or higher can move additional zones and gain a +2 bonus to overcome obstacles created by lower-ranked foes that would prevent them from moving between zones.

Finally, an opponent's Jianghu Rank is passive opposition to using the *Chi* skill to create **CHI ARMOR** (page 60). The highest Jianghu Rank among all opponents is used to determine this opposition; this means that an army of thugs led by a higher-ranked opponent is more dangerous because of the increased difficulty in providing **CHI ARMOR** invocations to mitigate damage. This models how a gang of thugs led by the big boss of an adventure is generally a bigger problem than the thugs all by themselves. These thugs still cannot gang up on superior opponents using Teamwork, but are more likely to get in a lucky shot.

The ranks, complete with commentary from famed Grandmaster of the Three Mountains School, Faultless Wu, are:

THE RULES OF TIANXIA

	JIANGHU RANK	HOW GOOD IS YOUR KUNG FU?	FAULTLESS WU SAYS...	MOVEMENT BONUS	PASSIVE <i>CHI ARMOR</i> OPPOSITION
	0	Knows No Kung Fu	Pathetic! My sickly grandmother could best you!	None	+0
	1	Knows one or more Kung Fu Styles	Passable; you may not be a complete loss	+1 zone	+1
	2	Has Mastered one Style of Kung Fu or knows at least 8 Techniques in two or more Styles (Including Lost Techniques)	Ah, you are finally learning what it means to do Kung Fu!	+1 zone	+2
	3	Has Mastered two or more Styles or Master of one style and knows 12 total Techniques (including Lost Techniques)	Yes! An opponent worthy of respect!	+2 zones	+3
	4	Grandmasters Only. Legendary immortals and users of some powerful forbidden Lost Techniques are rumored to occupy this rank as well.	A true peer in the Martial World!	+2 zones	+4

Some characters might be treated as having an effective Jianghu Rank even if they do not know Kung Fu and operate outside the Martial World in general. These rare but fearsome opponents have stunts or other abilities that note this and include ferocious barbarian chieftains, bandit bosses, and fearsome beasts.

The free invocation of one's Kung Fu **FORM** granted by Jianghu Rank can come into play whenever mastery of the fighting arts, study of martial arts, or general fighting spirit is relevant. Even an old, crippled master of Kung Fu possesses a level of learned skill and carefully cultivated spirit that persists to their dying breath, and their ranks here represent this. Jianghu is not simply an additional bonus to Fight checks or physical attacks and defenses; it is a way of life for those who pursue it. Thus, a character with superior Jianghu Rank will not only be able to more easily deflect or deliver a blow, but they can better resist attempts to intimidate or distract them with another's martial prowess, defend against special techniques designed to weaken their internal energies, deal with attempts to distract or outmaneuver them, and other such situations. This is not an insurmountable edge to the superior trained fighter; it can be overcome with skill, persistence, and good fortune. However, it is a constant and noteworthy edge to all who devote their lives to the mastering of Kung Fu.

Of course, Jianghu Rank is not always relevant. Social pressures, emotional pleas, natural disasters, financial crises, disease, and many other problems are not simply brushed away by one who is skilled in Kung Fu. If, for example, the Emperor demands an audience with a master or even a grandmaster, they cannot use their free invocation from Jianghu Rank to resist the call of the Son of Heaven. Likewise, one cannot build a temple or feed the poor with a single blow, no matter how powerful the one delivering it

may be. GMs are encouraged to work with the other players to determine just how one may apply this invocation, though there should definitely be limits. Kung Fu may be king in Tianxia, but it is not a tyrant that can exert its might on every problem.

Grandmaster Faultless Wu (Jianghu Rank 4) finds himself confronted by a gang of bandits who believe the old man to be an easy target. The bandits are ignorant of Kung Fu, possessing no Styles, and thus have a Jianghu Rank of 0. Despite—or maybe because of—this, they decide to try and beat up the aging Grandmaster and take his valuables. As Grandmaster Faultless far outstrips these pathetic thugs in his martial prowess, he gains one free invocation from among the multiple Kung Fu **FORMS** he can use in this scene on any action involving his superior skill and dauntless fighting spirit. He uses the bandit's rank to determine the passive opposition when he uses his *Chi Skill* to create **CHI ARMOR**; in this case, a +0. Furthermore, no matter how the thirty or so bandits try and attack the old man, they can never use Teamwork to gain bonuses to their attacks or other actions to defeat him in combat. While it might take him a few actions to work his way through this many fools, the outcome of this encounter is never really in doubt. If he gets bored beating on these bandits and decides to leave, Faultless Wu can move 2 extra zones in addition to the normal 1 free zone all characters get, and will receive a +2 bonus to overcome any foolish attempts by the bandits to stop him. And no, they do not get to use Teamwork to try and prevent it, either.

ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY

Kung Fu schools in Shénzhōu are organized around a family-like structure. The master of a school is typically referred to as *sifu*, a term of respect and deference. Though the term has some relation to a paternal relationship, female masters are also called *sifu* since the term is about respect and recognition of skill, not gender.

Other terms are less common but still get a lot of use; these follow a family structure. Your *sifu*'s

sifu is your *sigung*, or "grandfather teacher". A peer of your *sifu* who studied with him would be *sisok* or *sipak*, depending on if he is junior or senior to your *sifu*, respectively. Both terms means uncle, but can be used for females related to your *sifu*. Among a character's fellow students, *sije* ("elder sister") and *sihing* ("older brother") are used for senior students, while lower or same-ranked students to a character are *simui* ("younger

sister") and *sidai* ("younger brother").

GMs and players wanting to spice up their games can throw these terms in as they see fit. If not, you can just call your fellow students "brother" and "sister", your respected elders "auntie" and "uncle", and your *sifu* "master", which many English translations of Chinese novels, films, and comics do. Do *not* call *sifu* "My Kung Fu Daddy". He hates that.

WEAPONS

Unlike some *FATE CORE* settings, *Tianxia* does not assume weapons and armor add or subtract damage unless they are truly exceptional, like master-crafted ancestral swords or armor made of rare materials; most weapons in *Tianxia* are only as good as the people using them. Players are encouraged to give their PCs any weapons they want, from swords and staves to bizarre martial arts weapons like the meteor hammer or three-sectioned staff. This also means they can have fun using improvised weapons or mundane objects without worrying they are limiting their effectiveness. Characters who are exceptionally skilled with certain weapons or defenses should take Aspects reflecting this. Truly strange or fantastic weapons should either be Aspects or built as Extras.

This, plus the existence of Armor Ratings from high *Chi* skill and certain Techniques, means characters in *Tianxia* are generally harder to hurt, especially physically. This is not by accident. Heroes in *wuxia* and Kung Fu stories often take incredible punishment or fight off small armies of lesser foes

before going down. Higher defenses help simulate this genre convention. It also means evenly matched characters need to work harder to bring the other down in a fight. Again, this is true to the source material that inspires *Tianxia*. Using Stunts, Aspects, creating advantages, and employing Techniques becomes important, as that is where characters will get the bonuses to generate fight-ending die rolls. A high Physique can help, but the bonuses it provides are somewhat inferior to various defenses and, since it cannot usually be used for attacking characters directly, having Physique as your highest skill means a lower relative Fight skill until a character advances beyond its initial creation.

If this does not reflect the sort of game the GM and players want, but they do not want to mess with creating a list of Weapons with their own ratings, consider giving all characters (or at least those who know Kung Fu or have Good or better Fight, Shoot, or other similar Skills) a default +1 Weapon Rating, perhaps increasing it for very high Skills or becoming a master of Kung Fu.

WEAPON AND ARMOR RATINGS

Despite not worrying too much about actual weapons and armor by default in *Tianxia*, this game makes fairly heavy use of the Weapons and Armor Ratings described in *FATE CORE* (*FATE CORE*, p.277). These are usually used to reflect potent attacks and defense of a character's Kung Fu abilities, though some other uses also occur. Though various alternative Weapon and Armor Rating systems are described in the *FATE CORE Toolkit* and other products, *Tianxia* is designed so Weapon and Armor ratings work as follows:

- **Weapon Rating:** For each rank of Weapon Rating,

add 1 shift of damage to a successful attack, usually a Fight-based attack inflicting physical stress, though various exceptions exist. So a successful attack with a 1 shift result and a Weapon Rating of 2 would result in the defender suffering 3 shifts total of damage they must mitigate with stress or consequences.

- **Armor Rating:** For each rank of Armor Rating, remove 1 shift of damage from a successful attack, usually physical attacks though some Armor (such as using *CHI ARMOR*) will protect

against other types of damage as well. So a character with an Armor Rating of 2 being struck by a 3 shift hit would only need to actually deal with 1 shift of actual effective damage.

So this is what *Tianxia* means when it says Weapon or Armor Rating. Other variants of the Armor and Weapon Rating can work fine with the game, but GMs and players should note they might yield different results at times and small alterations to certain abilities involving these rules might be in order.

SIDEKICKS, SERVANTS, PUPILS AND PETS

Some players might want their characters to have supporting characters that follow them around, helping them out in various ways. Some NPCs might have the same. These supporting characters can come in a variety of forms, from stalwart servants to goofy sidekicks to well-trained pets. Just as there are many variations of such characters, there are various ways of representing them in play. This section discusses the three main options.

First, a supporting character can be an aspect. This works best for characters who occasionally pop up to provide assistance to their masters but do not really do much on their own. A character might have a *JADEWING*, *MY HUNTING FALCON* or *HONG, THE KINDLY OLD MANSERVANT* they can use to provide a timely boost or as a source for Fate Points through compels when the supporting character gets in trouble. As an aspect, this supporting character is considered a part of another character and cannot be killed, lost, or permanently removed without using a milestone to change the aspect. This can be a dramatic change for a character, who might find themselves changing their pet or servant for *YOU WILL BE AVENGED, MY FRIEND!* or something similar.



James has decided he wants his character, a young monk who has left his monastery to seek enlightenment and adventure, to have a pet. He does not see this critter as being a major part of his character but does want him to be represented somehow. After some consideration he takes *KANG THE RAVEN*, saying it is a particularly clever and mischievous bird with a penchant for pilfering shiny objects. James's monk found the bird, injured, during his days at the monastery and nursed it back to health. Now it follows him everywhere. When Kang's presence aids the PC, James invokes this aspect to gain a bonus. When the bird gets his master in trouble, he can compel this aspect to gain Fate Points.

Another method is to make a supporting character a stunt or a combination of a stunt and an aspect. This is appropriate for supporting characters with very particular skills or more useful than the aspect-only version. Stunts that let the character use some skill remotely or oppose attempts to overcome obstacles they create even if they are not in the scene are good choices for such a support character. These supporting characters take up more space on the character's sheet, though, which means the main character by himself is less competent without his faithful companion. This option is especially useful for characters with a pet or sidekick they have trained to fight alongside them, increasing their combat or other abilities while the pair is together.

Priscilla's character has a companion in the form of a massive wild dog she adopted and trained to fight alongside her. She represents this by taking both the aspect *ZHONG THE DEVIL HOUND* and the stunt *GIRL'S BEST FRIEND*, which gives her +1 bonuses to Fight attacks and preventing opponents from moving in and out of a zone when she and her dog are together. When Zhong is not around to help, she cannot use this stunt. She may also compel the aspect in order to generate a Fate Point when Zhong is in trouble.

The third method is to treat the supporting character as its own character completely. The main character would have some serious influence over characters designed this way, but they will still ultimately be an NPC controlled by the GM. This option is the most affordable, perhaps requiring nothing to acquire but some aspects or skills suggesting the supporting characters existence. For example, a character with Great Fight, some Kung Fu, and a *CANTANKEROUS SIFU* aspect might be allowed to have a pupil or mob representing a bunch of novice students available to reflect those he instructs in the martial arts. Regular followers might also require a certain level of Contacts or Resources to justify locating and taking care of these characters. If Troupe play is being used (see page 145) these support characters may even be ancillary characters for another player.

Jim's PC is a former imperial officer who has a valet who is a former soldier who has served him since his days in the army. The valet is not always around, but when he is he is competent, helpful, and has a fairly wide variety of skills. The GM lets Jim have his valet as a logical side-effect of his *FORMER IMPERIAL OFFICER* aspect and his Good Resources, both of which suggest he could acquire and afford such a servant. However, as his valet is a fully statted NPC controlled by the GM, he will occasionally make decisions that run against the PCs wishes and should he be captured, killed, or removed from play, the PC will receive nothing in compensation for the loss. That said, if this NPC is removed by death or misfortune, it could provide excellent justification for Jim's character to change his aspect or acquire a new stunt with a milestone.

GMs should feel free to limit any of these options that make play unwieldy or disrupt the game. PCs with the occasional pet or sidekick can be a lot of fun, but those who drag along a whole entourage to deal with every problem might become more annoying than entertaining.

FIGHT WITH YOUR HEAD, NOT JUST YOUR DICE

Before we move on to Kung Fu and other *Tianxia*-specific mechanics devoted to martial arts action, it is worth taking a moment to discuss how to use a character's Skills, stunts, aspects, and actions to not just survive in the game, but to triumph. As noted earlier, *Tianxia* grants a slight but definite edge to defense over offense. Many Techniques grant defense bonuses and Armor Ratings, and the ability to create **CHI ARMOR** at the beginning of a fight means characters often have initial defenses that need to be battered down. This is a solid genre convention in *wuxia* and Kung Fu action—turn on any movie in these genres and you see characters throwing out dozens of attacks for every one that hits. Most blows are parried, dodged, or simply taken with a grunt, a smug smile, and a “is that the best you can do?” Only the really dramatic, effective, or ingenious attacks tend to succeed.

In play, this means battering away at an opponent of roughly the same power level by rolling the same attack over and over is not just dull, it is not very effective. Characters who outclass their foes can steamroll over them with minimal effort, but facing characters that match or exceed a character's own ability requires a different approach.

Players should use their Techniques, aspects, stunts, and anything else at their disposal to push past that defensive edge and bring the hurt to their opponents. When a character gets an edge through luck or clever play, pressing it can be the key to victory. Compels might be needed to generate Fate Points to accomplish this, which is very appropriate for the *FATE CORE* system, the setting and genre. A powerful but angry fighter might open himself up to nasty counterattacks even as he batters away at his target with a flurry of raging blows. This makes a battle between equals or against superior opponents in *Tianxia* more of a challenge than it is in some games. The good news is it also makes winning these battles feel really good and gives the battles themselves some added significance.

Kevin's character Gracious Leopard is facing an enemy of roughly equal skill to his own. As both combatants have Great (+4) Fight, Good

Chi (+3), and Good (+3) Athletics, if all Kevin and his foe do is roll Fight checks against each other they could literally battle all day and see no real effect on their foe, as even a success of one or two shifts might not get past the other's defenses. Fortunately, that is not all Gracious Leopard can do to battle this formidable foe.

Instead of just throwing Fight attacks up against his opponent's defend rolls repeatedly, Kevin has Gracious Leopard create advantages to reflect sudden feints, powerful counterstrikes, and outmaneuvering his target. He works his stunts and the Techniques of his Kung Fu style to provide extra bonuses. He invokes his Style's **FORM** and other aspects to get bonuses at opportune times. He also uses compels to reflect his own weakness to generate the Fate Points necessary to fuel this assault. Whenever he succeeds with style on an attack or defense, he presses this advantage and soon is able to deliver a punishing blow. It is a tough fight, but he eventually succeeds not because he has a superior Skill ranking or just got lucky, but because he actually outfought his foe.

Of course, NPCs can use the same tactics to overcome a PC's defenses. And they should, especially if they are wise, skilled, or well prepared. Battles against such opponents should be tough, and overcoming a truly impressive foe through superior tactics and skillful use of one's abilities can be the stuff milestones are made of.

Other characters can play an important roll in such conflicts as well. Even if a PC is not fighting alongside their companion, they might be able to use Teamwork based on past sparring lessons, good advice, distracting foes, or even just old-fashioned cheerleading. The Skill used to provide this support varies based on the method used, with Fight, Notice, or Lore being especially appropriate for insight and tactical advice, Rapport or Empathy for emotional support, and Provoke or Deceit for creating distractions to be exploited. The character's opponent usually defends against this attempt with an appropriate skill, though if they have their own backup these other characters might defend for them.

Lauren's PC, Gracious Fox, watches Gracious Leopard duel a hired killer named Bloody Hai. As her and Kevin's PCs are siblings who served under the same master, she decides she can help out her brother by reminding him of the childhood training. She will attempt to create an advantage called **REMEMBER OUR TRAINING!** and gives the free invocations she generates to Gracious Leopard to use in his battle.

Of course again, NPCs can use these same tricks. This is especially appropriate when PCs find themselves facing the students or followers of a major foe who is nearby to direct, advise, or motivate his subordinates. Note if the Teamwork attempt fails, the character's opponent may gain the benefit of the failure even if they are not directly involved in the die roll.

When Gracious Fox attempts to create an advantage for her brother, she finds herself resisted by Bloody Hai's lover and partner, a lethal swordswoman named Deadly Song. Gracious Fox fails her **Create an Advantage** roll. In this case, the GM decides the **REMEMBER OUR TRAINING!** advantage is still created, but it is Bloody Hai who receives a free invocation. This reflects Song managing to distract Gracious Leopard, allowing her lover to exploit an opening in Leopard's fighting style. Angered at this development, Gracious Fox draws her weapon and moves to challenge Song....

Exploiting opportunities and creating new ones in combat is not merely a good idea, it is in genre and will speed play. Warriors of great skill, like the ones commonly encountered in *Tianxia*, will often admonish foes who repeatedly attack without a plan or strategy. In fact, GMs can even use this to subtly hint a player should consider changing things up to get better results. In other words, when your opponent laughs off repeated attacks and tells you "your Kung Fu is weak!?" He might have a point.

OPTIONAL RULE: DEADLY ARTS OF KUNG FU OR THE 1 STRESS MINIMUM

GMs and players wanting to speed up fights or finding that—even with using advantages, aspects, and stunts—their fights are dragging can implement an optional rule where a successful attack does a minimum of 1 Stress, regardless of Armor or other factors that reduce stress. This does undercut the "we could do this all day" genre elements, limiting most fights to a certain number of successful attacks and making heavily defensive characters less impressive, but it can speed play. There are a few ways to implement this rule, and each comes with their own upsides and downsides:

VERSION ONE: 1 STRESS MINIMUM FOR EVERY ATTACK

This will speed up every fight in the game, but it also has the side effect of making mobs and lesser foes more dangerous, since they will do 1 stress with a successful attack. This is good for more realistic games but makes high-end action with master martial artists easily fighting off armies of foes tougher to pull off.

VERSION TWO: 1 STRESS MINIMUM FOR OPPONENTS OF EQUAL OR GREATER SKILL

This version only gives the 1 stress minimum to characters at the same or greater Jianghu Rank than their opponent. This allows skilled fighters to still ignore most attacks from inferior foes. It makes the classic "a group of young heroes team up to face a dangerous and powerful villain" harder, since such characters can chip away at their stress and they might not be able to harm his.

VERSION THREE: 1 STRESS MINIMUM ONLY IF YOU KNOW KUNG FU

This version of the rule only lets a character take advantage of the 1 stress minimum if they know a Kung Fu Style. This does a good job of showcasing the power and effectiveness martial arts are usually given in wuxia and Kung Fu stories, but further penalizes characters who already lack Kung Fu, making them

less fun to play. This might not be a problem in many *Tianxia* games, at least on the PC side, but it is something to consider.

VERSION FOUR: 1 STRESS MINIMUM IF YOU SPEND A FATE POINT

This final version lets a character inflict stress with an attack normally stopped by a target's armor by spending a Fate Point after the attack connects. This keeps this ability from being overused, but it also creates another use for what is already a precious commodity in play. It is not necessarily an optimal use of Fate Points, even if you can guarantee some minor stress; often it would be a better idea to use that point to invoke an aspect and grab a +2 bonus to your roll or re-roll a low rolling die total.

One thing to consider about using a Minimum Stress option is they partially or completely remove the ability to add free invocations to one's *FORM* for successful attacks that end up dealing no stress or consequences (see **Forms**, page 75), thus removing some potential for timely bonuses in exchange for steady, more reliable damage potential. Again, this rule is optional and does not need to be used at all in any variation; while not ideal for every group, it can help speed up fights if GMs and players find their play style results in too many stalemates among combatants.

WEAPONS WITHOUT NUMBER

While none but the most exceptional weapons provide a mechanical bonus to combat, weapons are an important part of the *wuxia* and kung fu action genre. Chinese history is filled with numerous strange and exotic martial arts weapons, as well as likely fictional weapons like the flying guillotine. Picking an interesting or important weapon for a character can help define them or symbolize something important about them; from metal claws attached to a chain to brass maces shaped like a man, there is room in *Tianxia* for a number of strange, exotic, and esoteric weapons.

In *Tianxia*, characters might use a particular weapon for a variety of reasons: to augment a Kung Fu Style's strength or weakness, to honor an important

concept or person, or just to stand out in a crowd. If a weapon is particularly important to a character it can be part of an Aspect, Stunt, or both. Also, just because a weapon is impractical or did not exist in actual history does not mean it cannot be used in *Tianxia*. Spring-loaded staves that snap to their full-length with a flick of the wrist, iron flutes or pipes that can fell an army of thugs and still function perfectly, and any number of other deadly but odd implements can find a home in *Tianxia*.

It is also worth noting that most heroes and villains in *wuxia* and kung fu action stories use swords (*jian*), sabers (*dao*), staves (*gun*), and spears (*qiang*). They are effective, they work, and they often have strong cultural significance. In fact, they are so important they are referred to as the General (saber), Scholar (sword), Grandfather (staff) and King (spear) of weapons. So when in doubt, go with one of the classics.

MOBS IN TIANXIA

Mobs in *Tianxia* have it rough, especially in a fight. They generally have no Jianghu Rank and cannot use Teamwork against most PCs or formidable NPCs—mobs of Kung Fu students, vicious animals, or elite soldiers may be exceptions—and thus are not much of a challenge, serving only to slow them down, harass unskilled peasants and weaker characters, and maybe score the occasional lucky hit. This is completely intentional.

Mobs, even in large numbers, are not generally there to defeat characters who occupy a place of note in the Martial World *Tianxia*'s action takes place. They are there to get beat on, showing how badass the PCs and other skilled characters are.

As Jianghu Rank removed one of the key advantages of mobs in combat, using Teamwork to gang up on superior foes, there is less reason to break them up into smaller mobs than presented in *FATE CORE*. However, that doesn't mean there is *no* reason: spreading mobs out over multiple zones having them attempt to Create an Advantage to aid others, making it easier to engage multiple characters, and simply not having one massive 30 man mob to keep track of are still good reasons to break them up. In fact, one massive mob is often easier to deal with

and PCs might find creative ways to force mobs to operate in this fashion.

Of course, if a mob is lucky enough to have a Jianghu Rank above 0, they are a more serious threat, and half a dozen Lin Kuei assassin can be a threat to a PC in a way forty thugs are not. Most of the time, though, mobs are just bodies that have not hit the floor yet.

GMs who want to make groups of unskilled opponents some danger to PCs with superior Jianghu

Rank should invoke aspects and create advantages to generate bonuses that make them more of a threat, or use them in ways where Jianghu Rank does not apply, like threatening innocents or absconding with important items. In such cases, Teamwork bonuses would apply and a mob might be able to have a noticeable effect. However, once a fight breaks out or they attempt to directly intimidate their betters? They are back to being at a serious disadvantage.

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN PISTOL

By default, neither *Tianxia* nor the Shénzhōu setting have guns or do anything mechanically special with firearms. While the military might use rockets or explosives, there are no muskets, rifles, and certainly no revolvers or automatic weapons. That does not mean your version of *Tianxia* cannot have them. Of course guns are usually a game changer in most stories, so GMs might want special rules to deal with them.

The easiest way to do this is to give guns a Weapons Rating and some ability to pierce armor. Since few weapons in *Tianxia* have Weapons Ratings, this makes them

dangerous and special. It also means they are only dangerous if they hit. Characters with good defenses do not usually need to worry about being taken out by mooks with pistols, but a lucky shot or an expert marksman could be a real problem.

Using these rules, most light pistols would have a Weapon Rating of 1 and ignore 1 level of armor (*Chi*-based or otherwise). Heavy pistols and smaller caliber rifles would be 2, with 3 and up reserved for very large caliber weapons or those capable of high rates of fire. These are just quick and dirty guidelines, GMs can

vary Weapons Rating and armor penetration and even add aspects to particular types of guns if they like. GMs and players wanting a more realistic approach to all ranged projectiles can give similar advantages to bows and crossbows as well.

The other factor to consider with guns is range. Guns can kill from several zones away. In *Tianxia*, where many characters cross great distances with a leap this is not as potent an advantage as it would be in some settings, but it can still be a problem for PCs used to fighting their foes hand to hand.



CHAPTER FIVE

THE DEADLY ARTS OF KUNG FU

DO NOT LOOK DOWN

“You can’t be serious”, Han Ping said, regarding her *sifu* with a look of utter incredulity.

Master Quan did not say anything; he merely whacked her on the head with his stick. It was a motivational technique Ping was very familiar with.

“All right, all right.” She took a deep breath and looked up at the pillars. Each one was at least ten feet tall and no wider than a dinner plate at the top. Some were taller and narrower, and it was to one of those Master Quan pointed with his stick.

Quan’s other senior students were already perched on the tops of various poles. Each held a training weapon and a look of utter determination.

Ping leapt into the air, lighting on the top of the pole her master had selected. She instinctively found her footing and soon stood balanced on one leg as easily as if she was on solid ground. She flashed her *sifu* a defiant grin.

Master Quan smiled thinly, tapping his stick on the ground twice—the signal to begin. The other students erupted in a flurry

of action. All came after Ping. Some were steady, balanced, and skilled; she narrowly avoided these. Others were clumsy, hesitant, and unbalanced, and she avoided these without thought, using the openings they created to deliver swift counterattacks. Several students fell from their perches while their more skilled classmates skipped from pole to pole. They surrounded Ping, but still she blocked and dodged their blows. She flipped, stepped, and leapt from one pole to the next. Occasionally she saw an opportunity and sent another student tumbling to the ground. Mostly she just tried not to fall.

Then one of Master Quan’s best students, Shining Pearl, nearly took her legs out from underneath her, while another sent a blow to her head. Ping dropped completely off the pole to avoid both, grabbing its edge with her hand. She was preparing to pull herself up when she happened a glance downwards.

The ground seemed alarmingly far, and the dazed and moaning figures of fallen students gave her pause. That was all the

opening Shining Pearl needed; he rapped her hand hard across the knuckles with his training weapon and waved cheekily as she fell.

Master Quan watched the whole exercise in silence. When Ping fell, he tapped his stick twice. It was the signal to stop, but to Ping it only sounded like failure.

Master Quan regarded her with a stern stare and finally asked, “What was your mistake?”

Ping knew he hoped she would grasp some larger truth in his simple question, but she did not have a clue what it was.

“I looked down,” she answered. Master Quan stroked his beard dramatically, as if he was seriously weighing the value of the answer. Then he did something Ping dreaded. He smiled.

“Well, if that is all then it is easily fixed.” His hand snapped out and a strip of cloth appeared seemingly from nowhere. He walked over to Ping, slid the cloth over her eyes, and tied it behind her head.

“Now that we have solved that problem, the second time should be easy.”

Kung Fu in *Tianxia* is divided up into styles. Styles are a bit like stunt families (**FATE CORE**, p.94) and a bit like extras (**FATE CORE**, p.269), representing a character's training and fighting techniques learned through studying the martial arts.

Each style is constructed of two substyles. The first is Element. Element substyles are about method and tactical applications of the style. Does the style strike fast and direct or is it subtle and steady? Is it focused on cultivation of *Chi* and spiritual development or is it centered on physical training and hardening one's body? Element substyles usually have names suggesting actual elements like fire or water, though some are based on things like toxins, spirits, or emotional states.

The second substyle is Body. Body substyles are about execution and physical manifestation of the style. Does the style use sweeping kicks and openhanded strikes to disorient and disable a foe or does it use

direct linear strikes designed to punish and pummel? Is it focused on graceful parries and deflecting blows to avoid damage or painful locks and nerve strikes that hinder a foe's ability to attack? Body substyles usually have names suggesting animals, body parts, or objects, though some are based on philosophical states or influential individuals. All the styles in this book are named for animals, but styles based on other concepts are also appropriate.

To build a Kung Fu style, spend a Refresh and select an Element and Body substyle and combine them. This creates a style with six Techniques (three Techniques from each substyle). Select one Technique from the style. You also gain the **FORM** of the style for free. There is also one Secret Technique for each style available to characters that have mastered the style. **FORMS** and Mastering a Style will be discussed shortly.

Nathan wants to take Kung Fu for his character, Han Po. He wants a tough, hard-hitting fighter who can deal a lot of damage but is not particularly subtle. Looking over the substyles he decides the Iron Element and Tiger Body substyles best suit this approach. He spends 1 Refresh and notes Han Po now knows Iron Tiger Kung Fu. He selects as part of this purchase a Technique, **TIGER RENDS THE FLESH**, and notes he has **IRON TIGER FORM**.



FORMS

A FORM is a series of practiced movements, strikes, counters, and defenses at the core of a style.

A character's **FORM** can help shore up their strengths but it also includes weaknesses a savvy opponent can exploit. In play, a **FORM** operates as an aspect that is active when fighting with that Kung Fu style. **FORMS** are named after the style by default, but feel free to rename or tweak a **FORM** name to something more personalized. This should not change the **FORM**'s general strengths and weaknesses, but can make it easier to invoke in situations involving the character's specific Kung Fu training and personal fighting methods, for good or ill.

Han Po knows Iron Tiger Kung Fu, so he also knows **IRON TIGER FORM**. Wanting something catered more to Han's personality, Nathan renames this Form **RED TIGER STANCE** and decides it is more focused on short-ranged attacks and higher-risk, higher-reward maneuvers than other versions of Iron Tiger. It still functions much the same as the default **IRON TIGER FORM**, but is now more applicable where Han's personal use of Iron Tiger is important. Whenever he uses his Iron Tiger Kung Fu, he is considered to be in **RED TIGER STANCE**.

Remember that characters can use another's **FORM** as the basis for creating an advantage, using the style's weaknesses against them, and characters can generate compels based on the **FORM**'s weaknesses to gain Fate Points.

A character gets a free invocation usable with any **FORM** they know once per scene if they are facing an opponent with a lower Jianghu Rank. This can be used on any action where the character's martial skills or fighting spirit would be useful. Any attempts to use Provoke or other skills to physically intimidate a character are always an appropriate times to use this invocation. Using **Create an Advantage** to add invocations to a **FORM** is also possible, and those

invocations can be used against any opponent, not just those of a lower Jianghu Rank.

Han Po's Master, Two Tigers Wei, is a Master of both Iron Tiger and Storm Tiger Kung Fu and thus knows the **IRON TIGER FORM** and **STORM TIGER FORM** and has Jianghu Rank 3 for mastering two Styles. When facing opponents of Jianghu Rank 2 or less, he gains a free invocation once per scene, usable in an action against such opponents as long as it relates to his mastery of Kung Fu in some logical way. Two Tigers Wei can also create an advantage to gain additional invocations to either **FORM**—usable against any opponent—and combine these with his free invocation on an appropriate action, if he wishes.

FORMS also have another way to gain invocations. If you attack a character successfully using your Kung Fu Techniques, Fight skill, or other abilities involving martial arts training and skill and end up inflicting no stress or consequences due to the defenders Armor rating or other abilities? You add another free invocation to your **FORM**, reflecting overall martial prowess and building momentum in a fight.

Han Po is having a tough time against Silver Turtle, an extremely tough fighter whose *Chi* and potent Kung Fu abilities give him an Armor Rating of 4. He can successfully attack his opponent fairly reliably, but he is having difficulty generating enough shifts to overcome Silver Turtle's armor. However, each successful attack that does no damage grants him a free invocation on his **RED TIGER STANCE** (his own personal **IRON TIGER FORM**, see above). Undeterred by this temporary setback, Han Po delivers four solid but seemingly ineffective blows during his fight with Silver Turtle, adding a free invocation to his **FORM** for

each one. Just as his opponent cockily declares Han cannot hope to overcome his awesome defense, Han coils like the fearsome tiger and launches a Fight attack and spends all four of his accumulated invocations for a whopping +8 bonus. It seems Silver Turtle's confidence is misplaced....

Gaining **FORM** invocations in this way is important both because it provides attackers with a reward for even seemingly ineffective attacks and helps simulate the pacing and tempo of combat in the *wuxia* and Kung Fu action genres, where eventually a skilled and persistent combatant can often overcome even seemingly impenetrable defenses.

CREATING ADVANTAGES, FORMS, FLASHBACKS, AND THE MONTAGE

A staple of *wuxia* and Kung Fu is the scene where the hero faces down a foe and then flashes back to how he learned the technique he is about to use, some earlier

conflict that led to the current battle, or some other significant moment. Sometimes these are a montage of several scenes spanning years.

The best way to reflect these is by using the **Create an Advantage** action (see *FATE CORE*, p.136). Invocations earned in this fashion can be used to create a new aspect or can be added to existing ones. A character's **FORM** makes a great place to use these invocations, as it deals directly with their fighting style.

Han Po is facing Nine-Fingered Li, a lieutenant in the Red Banner Brotherhood whose murder of a family of merchants Han seeks to avenge. Nathan rolls to create an advantage using his Fight against Li and succeeds. He describes this as Han Po flashing back to his discovery of the bodies of Li's victims and realizing the pattern of blows on the bodies suggests Li's sadistic attacks linger as he savors the victim's pain. He adds his free invocations to his **FORM**, since he can now invoke it to use the speed and power of his style to exploit this weakness.

Flashbacks and montages can also be used as justifications for compels. If your PC is **SWORN TO AVENGE HIS SISTER'S DEATH** then meeting one of the men who killed her could cause him to lose his cool, perhaps making some actions more difficult.

Flashbacks and montages are usable outside of combat too. A superior detective might use them to create an advantage before rolling Investigate, invoking them and explaining how his superior observations and training fuel his current efforts. Scholars might have montage of years spent in intense study to create an advantage for an upcoming Lore roll. Basically, if you can tie the current situation into the past in a fun way, you can justify a flashback or montage. Characters might even have stunts giving bonuses for using montages and flashbacks in a certain way. Just be careful it is not a trick you overuse, or it loses some of its magic.



THE ART OF FIGHTING WITHOUT FIGHTING

Sometimes a character wants to defeat an opponent without physically hurting him. In many genres, this is accomplished by intrigue, intimidation, seduction, or other social actions. These work fine in *Tianxia* as well, though truly awe-inspiring acts of martial prowess can also be used to similar effect. Wuxia films are filled with conflicts where two masters fight a battle in their minds, imagining strikes, blocks, and dodges until one admits the other is the victor. Other stories have a hero carving a poem into the mountainside with their sword to demonstrate their skill or stopping a death blow inches from an opponent, acts which shock their foes into submission. Opponents so defeated are often demoralized, unable to properly fight their opponents in physical combat effectively once their inferiority is revealed.

GMs wanting to emulate this have four options.

Option 1: Assume such actions are actually expressions of another

skill, such as *Provoke* or *Chi*. This works fine, and is balanced with the *FATE CORE* rules, but it means truly awe-inspiring fighters need high *Provoke* even if they are otherwise unexceptional in that skill. If you use this option, grant characters doing such martial prowess-based rolls a +1 bonus for every Jianghu Rank they are above their foes.

Option 2: Treat such displays as a **Create an Advantage** action. This works great, but is more indirect since a character will still need to be attacked with some other Skill like *Provoke* to inflict mental stress. Still, this gets around the need for high skills for skilled fighters who only want to use a skill for this purpose, as they can invoke the advantage to boost even mediocre skills. Like option 1, you should grant bonuses to characters whose mastery of Kung Fu exceeds their opponent.

Option 3: Simply have characters fight as normal and assume all stress inflicted by such displays of superior skill is mental

instead of physical. This is dynamic, fun, and lets characters switch easily between actual and spiritual domination of their opponents. Unfortunately, this also allows characters to do both physical and mental stress with their Fight attacks and can undermine the utility of skills like *Provoke* and *Deception* if overused. It also allows cagey characters to always attack opponents where they are weakest, by switching between attacks doing physical and mental stress at will.

Option 4: As per option 3, but charge characters who wish to do this by requiring a stunt or extra that allows them to use their Fight Skill to inflict mental stress and without needing to engage in actual physical combat.

The game will not break if you use any particular option. Just be aware of the advantage and disadvantages to the option you use and be consistent in its application.

LEARNING NEW TECHNIQUES

Characters can learn new Techniques in a style during character creation by spending one Refresh to gain two Techniques or using a free Stunt to gain one. After creation, a new Technique may be added by using a Significant Milestone (*FATE CORE*, p.258). This is done instead of increasing a Skill.

Nathan decides he wants to start with a few more Techniques. He spends an additional Refresh and selects two new Techniques for Iron Tiger, Iron Cleaves the Stone and Iron Body, Iron Mind. When he wants to gain more Techniques during play, he will need to spend Significant Milestones.



Though Techniques are mostly akin to Stunts in effectiveness and mechanics they are somewhat easier to learn due to the structure the style provides so they use Significant and not Major Milestones for advancement. This is balanced out by the limited choices within the style itself and better emulates the *wuxia* and Kung Fu genres, where learning or even revealing a character always knew certain martial arts maneuvers takes place at significant points during an overall story and not just after things are resolved.

After helping defeat an important lieutenant of the Red Banner Brotherhood, the GM decides Han Po has achieved a Significant Milestone. Nathan uses this to give Han a new Technique, selecting Tiger Rules the Jungle from the list of Iron Tiger Techniques and moving one step closer to becoming a true master!

MASTERING A STYLE

Once a character has all six Techniques of his style, he can spend the Refresh gained from a Major Milestone to become a master and learn the style's Secret Technique. Secret Techniques are unique to each style and are extremely powerful closely guarded secrets of the masters of a style. In addition to spending the Major Milestone benefit to master a style, GMs may require a character rewrite an Aspect to reflect his new status in the martial arts world using the Minor Milestone benefits that come with the Major. In any case, it is a good idea. Becoming a master is an important part of a character. Masters also move up one Jianghu Rank. This makes them much harder to defeat or oppose by anyone not themselves a master.

After many battles and rigorous training, Han Po finally defeats Master Yu of the Red Banner Brotherhood and assumes control of the organization, intent on redeeming the once heroic society from years of corruption and

decay. This is a Major Milestone for the campaign. Already possessing the six normal Techniques for his style, Nathan decides Han should become a master of Iron Tiger Kung Fu, as he will need that power and prestige to protect his new position. He uses the Refresh gained from the Milestone to become a master of Iron Tiger, gaining the Secret Technique Tiger Caged in Iron. He also uses the Minor Milestone effect that comes with the Major to rewrite his *DISCIPLE OF TWO TIGERS WEI* (Han Po's *sifu*, an Iron Tiger master himself) Aspect to *KING RED TIGER*, his new title as both head of the Red Banners and the newest master of Iron Tiger style, and the Significant Milestone to increase his Resources by one rank to reflect his new position as head of the Red Banners.

GMs might wish to allow starting PCs, especially in high-powered games to begin as Masters of a Kung Fu style. This is totally fine and if allowed, simply have the player spend 1 Refresh to gain Master status at the start of a game; the GM may even allow it for free if the PC has all six Techniques in a Kung Fu style at character creation. PCs will usually have starting aspects reflecting this mastery, but it is not required.

In Jack's upcoming *Tianxia* game, he has decided to give all the players 5 starting Refresh instead of *Tianxia's* typical 4 and allow any characters who know all 6 Techniques in a style to begin as a Master free of charge. Jon decides he wants to play a master of Lightning Serpent Kung Fu and spends 4 Refresh. The first Refresh gives the PC a Style and 1 starting Technique, the other 3 grant him 6 additional Techniques (2 per Refresh) in any Style he knows, in this case Lightning Serpent. Jon only gains 5 actual Techniques, as he only has that many left to learn in the style, but he becomes a Master of Lightning Serpent Kung Fu for free due to the optional rules of the campaign. This gives him the Lightning Serpent Secret Technique and moves him up to Jianghu Rank 2; all said, it is a pretty good deal.

GRAND MASTERS

In the rare event a character masters more than one style, they can become a Grand Master, incorporating their various styles into a new, more powerful art. Becoming a Grand Master requires spending the Refresh gained from a Major Milestone and allows the character to develop their own styles, *FORMS*, and even their own Secret Techniques! Such styles should be a hybrid of what the character already knows and catered to the particular character, thus players and GMs should work together to come up with their own styles and Secret Techniques using those in this book as a guide. Again, you should rewrite your character's high concept to reflect this rare and momentous occasion in the martial arts world! Particularly potent developments might require further Milestones to develop and perfect these powerful new abilities. Grandmasters also move up to the very top of the Jianghu Rank, making them superior even to masters of multiple Kung Fu styles and legendary warriors who have not achieved this final level of martial perfection.

After years of study, training, and contemplation, Han Po is now a master of both Iron Tiger and Lightning Tiger Kung Fu. Spending a Major Milestone to become a Grandmaster, Han develops the powerful Red Tiger Kung Fu style with its dreaded Secret Technique Tiger Clad In Burning Iron. Nathan and his GM design the style, taking six total Techniques from both Iron Tiger and Lightning Tiger, then design a *FORM* and a Secret Technique. He also rewrites his *KING RED TIGER* Aspect to *GRAND MASTER OF THE RED TIGER SCHOOL* to reflect his new status. He also moves to the 4th and final Jianghu Rank, superior even to his old master, Two Tigers Wei!

Note that styles sharing substyles, like the example above, will have very similar Technique sets because of the styles they draw from. This makes a character's personal style feel less like its own completely separate thing and more of an extension of his other styles. It also makes it easier to master similar styles as characters need fewer Techniques to do so, sacrificing versatility

for expediency. This could be a good or bad thing depending on what the player wants for his character. Regardless of how close this new style is to others, the *FORM* and Secret Technique should definitely be tailored to the character, his experiences, and outlook.

MASTERY, GRAND MASTERY, TRAINING, AND TIME

Tianxia does not set a hard and fast amount of time one must train and study to learn new Techniques, master a Kung Fu style, or become a Grand Master. This is because there is no hard and fast schedule adhered to in the media *Tianxia* uses as inspiration.

Some stories have a young hero developing a whole new and potent Kung Fu style by studying secret scrolls in a cave for several months. Others make it clear that only after decades of study and devotion can one hope to become a Grand Master of an art. GMs and players should figure out what time frame works best for them. On average it takes a few weeks to months to learn a new Technique, a few months to a year to master a style and learn its Secret Technique, and years to become a Grand Master and make your own style. However, feel free to shorten or lengthen these times based on how difficult you want to make learning and mastering Kung Fu.

RAPID ADVANCEMENT OF KUNG FU

GMs and players desiring more rapid advancement of Kung Fu from the learning of a style to Master and even Grandmaster can make one simple change to these rules. Simply allow a character to take a new Technique or achieve Master or Grandmaster status in addition to the skill advancement or Refresh gain of Significant and Major Milestones, rather than instead of. Thus upon achieving a Significant Milestone a character can learn a new Technique and

increase a Skill. Upon achieving a Major Milestone they can become a Master of style they have all the Techniques of and gain one Refresh, as well as gaining a new Technique if allowed and another skill increase from the effects of a Significant Milestone.

This sort of advancement can result in fairly sudden leaps of PC ability, but this is not particularly wrong for the genre. Many *wuxia* and Kung Fu stories, particularly in movies, have characters growing

fairly quickly in ability. In fact, certain stories show characters learning incredible Kung Fu skills in weeks or months of intensive study or even by having an important revelation during a battle with an opponent! So GMs and players should find out what speed of advancement works for them and then run with it; it will result in somewhat different but equally valid progression and campaigns.

SUBSTYLES

The following section details six Element substyles and six Body substyles for use in building styles.

Each entry includes a brief description of the substyle, alternate names the substyle is sometimes known as, three Techniques attached to the substyle, and alternate names the substyle might be known under.

Many of these Techniques give bonuses or allow for the creation of advantages with free invocations. These Techniques all stack, and created advantages may also add invocations to an existing advantage if it would make more sense.

Iron Wing Zhou is an Iron Crane Kung Fu expert with the Crane Stuns the Carp and Iron Cleaves the Stone Techniques. He can use the techniques together if he wishes, allowing him to ignore 2 armor while attacking and, if his attack succeeds with style, he can elect to apply a **STUNNED** advantage to his target with a free invocation instead of a boost. If he keeps landing attacks with style, he can keep adding free invocations to the **STUNNED** advantage as long as it is active; he does not need to create a new one each time.

When an effect is granted by a stunt instead of giving a boost (such as for succeeding with style), the character must pick one applicable Technique.

Jade-Eyed Jingfei is a mistress of Iron Phoenix Kung Fu who possesses both the Flesh Breaks on Iron and Phoenix Beats its Wings Techniques. As both of these allow her to pick a special effect instead of a boost when she succeeds with style, she has to pick one Technique each time she does this.

Finally, if a character has a Stunt, Technique, or Extra allowing them to substitute another Skill for Fight, they can use that skill with any Technique using the Fight skill.

Black Gardener Gao is a Stone Crane practitioner with the Gardens of War Stunt, letting him use Lore instead of Fight as long as he is using his iron rake or some other similar tool. When using his Crane Stuns the Carp Technique, he can gain the benefits of this Technique while using Lore to attack, as long as the conditions of his stunt are met.

ARCHERY, RANGED ATTACKS, AND KUNG FU

By default, Kung Fu styles are usually used with close combat and primarily employ the Fight and Athletics Skills. However, some martial arts stories have archers and masters of thrown weapons able to use their skills in ways akin to Kung Fu masters. GMs wishing to allow this have three options:

- Simply allow Shoot to be used in addition to Fight for Kung Fu Techniques. This is the simplest option, but it might create problems if

cagey characters stay several zones away from close combat fighters.

- Allow characters to take a Stunt allowing them to use their Shoot and ranged combat with their Kung Fu or using their Fight to make ranged attacks. This gets around the problem of ranged combat being potentially exploitative, but it does end up charging archers and thrown weapons masters more to compete with

their close combat brethren. Still, the general balance of this approach makes this the default rule for using Kung Fu and ranged attacks in *Tianxia*.

- Design substyles explicitly for Shoot-based actions. This will be balanced and gives such characters access to unique Techniques and *FORMS*, but it is the most work for GMs and players.

ELEMENT SUBSTYLES

This section details the six Element Substyles included in this book. They form the basis for the 36 different style options.

FOREST

Alternate Names: Bamboo, Hidden, Clouded, Wood

Forest substyles seek to adapt to their environment, using their surroundings as a weapon and shield. Practitioners understand their surroundings are not obstacles, but opportunities. Like their namesakes, Forest stylists integrate and work in harmony with their environment to resist, survive, and prosper.

FOREST TECHNIQUES

Forest Hides the Beast: A tie on a Fight- or Athletics- based defense action grants no boost to your attacker.

Forest Opens Its Paths: If you use Athletics to overcome an obstacle with style, you 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, you add +2 Weapon Rating to that attack.

GHOST

Alternate Names: Spirit, Heaven

Ghost styles focus on cultivating internal energies and subtle movements that are deceptively swift and effective when used in combat. They become an empty place in the universe that is difficult to predict and perceive. The stylist's own *Chi* energy is used to fuel most attacks and defenses, and weaknesses in an opponent's spirit are capitalized upon at every opportunity. Ghost stylists rely on random, subtle shifts to move effortlessly from attack to defense, making them unpredictable and adaptable.

GHOST TECHNIQUES

Exalted Ghost Body: When using Full Defense, you do not use up an invocation to use **CHI ARMOR** if the attack against you still succeeds.

Ghost Haunts the Shadow: You may use *Chi* instead of Stealth to create an advantage based on moving silently or remaining unseen. Apply a +2 bonus instead if both *Chi* and the selected Stealth are the same rank or Stealth is greater.

Ghost Strikes the Spirit: Ignore 1 point of Armor when making Fight attacks and add +1 Weapon Rating to any Fight attack against opponents with a lower *Chi* skill than the attacker.

IRON

Alternative Names: Brass, Copper, Gold, Silver, Steel

Iron styles focus on being unyielding on both attack and defense. Stylists cultivate their bodies and minds to resist trauma and deliver punishing attacks. Even on defense, many practitioners can be dangerous. Iron styles are favored by soldiers, bandits, and mercenaries for their aggressive nature and harsh but straightforward training methods.

IRON TECHNIQUES

Iron Cleaves the Stone: Ignore 2 points of Armor when making an attack to inflict physical stress.

Flesh Breaks on Iron: When you defend against a Fight attack with style, you may inflict 2 shift hit instead of taking a boost on your attacker.

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

LIGHTNING

Alternative Names: Burning, Fire, Flame, Sun

Lightning stylists believe speed is supreme both in attack and defense. Quick reactions allow avoidance or decisive resolution of dangerous conflicts; this is often the difference between controlling the battlefield and just being a participant on it. Of course, speed is useless without power, and so practitioners of Lightning substyles try to cultivate both.

LIGHTNING TECHNIQUES

Lightning Crosses the Sky: When you succeed with style on a Fight attack, you may move 1 zone in addition to gaining a boost. If someone or something tries to stop this movement, gain a +2 to rolls to overcome.

Lightning Splits the Tree: When you succeed with style on a Fight attack, you may remove an invocation on an existing advantage affecting you instead of taking a boost.

Lightning Strikes Without Pause: Gain a +2 bonus to Notice (or other skill) used when determining turn order.

STONE

Alternative Name: Earth, Mountain, Rock, Unmoving

Stone styles focus on deliberate, uncompromising actions based on solid foundation movements and core philosophies. Unlike Iron, Stone seeks not to re-forge a stylist into a living weapon but instead refine what gifts are already there. Defenses are the primary focus in all Stone styles and even the most aggressive Stone practitioners use defenses that allow them to outlast and overcome foes.

STONE TECHNIQUES

Mountain Does Not Fall: You get 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 such an advantage with free invocations, one less free invocation is granted though the advantage is still created.

Stone Resists the Blow: You gain 2 Armor against any physical attack you are aware of.

Stone Weathers the Storm: If you defend with style, you may remove your physical 1 stress box or convert another physical stress box to 1 lower instead of taking a boost.

STORM

Alternative Names: Flowing, Moon, Sea, Water
Storm styles embrace fluidity and adaptation. Just like their namesake, their movements and techniques change and flow around obstacles to cause surprising devastation to targets. Storm practitioners seek to be unpredictable, retreating just before an attack or attacking as part of a defense.

STORM TECHNIQUES

Storm Shakes the Foundation: When creating an advantage, you 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 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.



BODY SUBSTYLES

This section details the six Body Substyles that form the second half of the 36 different styles included in this book.

CRANE

Alternate Names: Heron, Stork, White Crane

Crane styles focus on fluid movements, misdirection, and redirection of an opponent's movements. Sweeping blocks and counterstrikes combinations, throws, and graceful and precise strikes to vulnerable areas define Crane styles in combat. Like their namesakes, Crane stylists rely on swift counterstrikes, strong defense, and allowing opponent's to rush to action and thus reveal their vulnerabilities.

CRANE TECHNIQUES

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

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

Crane Stuns the Carp: If you succeed on a Fight attack with style, you may create a **STUNNED** advantage on a target with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

DRAGON

Alternate Names: Drake, Lung, Quilin

Dragon styles focus on a balance of power and speed, versatility and simplicity. Strong attacks, solid stances, and sudden evasion are the trademarks of a Dragon style. Dragon styles borrow from other fighting arts more than other styles, with practitioners using Tiger-like claws or Serpent-like shifts and rapid jabs. Some Dragon stylists develop a breathing technique that sounds like a hissing serpent and is said to greatly increase their *Chi* flow; it also can greatly unnerve an opponent.

DRAGON TECHNIQUES

Dragon Rules the Fields: When you succeed with style on an attack, gain a boost—with a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2—without reducing the value of your attack.

Dragon Rules the Heavens: Use *Chi* or Fight (selected when you take this Technique) instead of Athletics in rolls involving entering zones or preventing others from doing so. Apply a +2 bonus if both Athletics and the selected Skill are the same rank or Athletics is greater.

Dragon Sleeps in Mist: When you succeed with style on a defense, you may reduce the result by 1 to gain 2 Armor Rating against the next attack in the scene that strikes you in addition to the normal boost.

MONKEY

Alternate Names: Baboon, Ape

A collection of unconventional, acrobatic styles, Monkey styles are based on acrobatic evasions, quick strikes, and distracting movements and even animal-like noises designed to disorient and frustrate opponents. Stylists move quickly and erratically on attack and defense, with rolls and leaps flowing into dodges, punches, and kicks. Striking vulnerable points on a target is emphasized, as is turning or rolling away from blows to protect one's own vital areas.

MONKEY TECHNIQUES

Monkey Grabs the Peach: Add +2 Weapon Rating to an attack where you also invoke a consequence the defender has.

Monkey Dances in Moonlight: When succeeding on a defense with style, you may create a **DISTRACTING MOVEMENTS** advantage with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

Monkey Rolls Away: When invoking an aspect or advantage during a defense roll, gain 2 Armor Rating against the attack if it succeeds.

PHOENIX

Alternate Names: Firebird, Peacock, Rooster

Phoenix styles focus on balance, agility, redirecting an opponent's attack, quick recoveries and counterattacks. Leg sweeps, pushes, nerve strikes, and other such maneuvers keep an opponent off balance and unable to attack effectively. Circular movements are common in both attack and defense. The earliest Phoenix styles were mostly practiced by women, though today there are many male Phoenix stylists as well.

PHOENIX TECHNIQUES

Phoenix Beats its Wings: If you **defend** with style, you may gain an **OFF BALANCE** advantage on the target, with a free invocation instead of a boost.

Phoenix Calls to Heaven: You may use *Chi* instead of Physique to determine extra stress boxes and consequences. This is in addition to the Armor bonus from having high *Chi*. If *Chi* and Physique are the same rating, you may instead reduce physical stress taken by 2 shifts once per session.

Phoenix Laughs at the Sun: If you succeed at an **Overcome** roll using Athletics or Fight with style, you may create a situation aspect with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

SERPENT

Alternate Names: Cobra, Snake, Viper

Like the animal they emulate, Serpent stylists are often admired for their speed, efficiency, and formidable nature while simultaneously being feared and despised for their ruthless lethality. Focusing on speed and strikes to vulnerable areas, Serpent practitioners use rapid jabs, open handed blows, and quick kicks to disable and destroy their foes. Relying on speed and avoidance for defense, they prefer dodging, slipping, weaving, and feinting until they can find an opening to strike.

SERPENT TECHNIQUES

Serpent Bites the Hand: If you gain shifts on a defense, you can sacrifice your action next turn to immediately inflict an attack on your opponent using the shift value of your defense as your attack result.

Serpent Strikes First: Use Athletics or Fight (pick one when Technique is chosen) to determine turn order instead of Notice in combat. Apply a +2 bonus instead if both Notice and the selected Skill are the same rank or Notice is greater.

Serpent Strikes Twice: +2 bonus to Deceive rolls to create an advantage based on disorientation, distraction, or unbalancing against opponents you have already inflicted stress on this combat.

TIGER

Alternate Names: King Tiger, Lion, White Tiger

Tiger styles are about power, ferocity, and damage, both inflicting and resisting. The "Tiger Claw" strike is universal among all Tiger styles, though powerful kicks, punches, and hard blocks that can themselves damage foes are the weapons of the Tiger. These moves are usually linear, relying on speed and power to batter through defenses. Practitioners of this style keep themselves in peak physical condition and incorporate their prowess into their attack and defense.

TIGER TECHNIQUES

Tiger Moves With Purpose: Move at least 1 zone and make an attack using Athletics or make an Athletics attack 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 Rules the Jungle: You may use Physique or Provoke (selected when you select this Technique) instead of Will to defend against Provoke attacks. If both Will and Physique (or Provoke) are the same rank, or Will is higher, gain a 2 Armor Rating against Provoke attacks instead.

DESIGNING YOUR OWN SUBSTYLES

Designing a substyle is fairly easy—you just need a theme and three Maneuvers. Using the Maneuvers above as examples should make it easy. The trickier part comes when designing the styles these substyles help make. For each style created, you will need a *FORM* and Secret Technique. *FORMS* are important because anyone with the style can use them right away and the description of the style's methods and strengths shows how it can be invoked or compelled in play. You might

not need the Secret Technique immediately if masters of the style do not show up right away in play, but you will eventually want to design your own. Remember: you only need to design Styles that show up in your games. In fact, it is possible some substyle combinations have never actually been created.

While making new styles and substyles is a lot of fun, be careful of adding too many substyles to your game. Each added substyle creates multiple styles by virtue

of the way this system works; if you added five Element and five Body substyles to the five provided for each, that is one hundred different styles of Kung Fu right there! Which is pretty awesome, but possibly overwhelming for many games.

Future Vigilance Press products will provide more martial arts and complementary rules and abilities for Kung Fu styles. If you would like to see this or anything else, please let us know!

STYLES

The following section gives a brief description, the FORMS, and the Secret Techniques of each substyle combination.

Some Secret Techniques allow for one powerful attack or defense, while others give smaller bonuses that persist for an entire scene. In any case where a Fight contest, attack, or other roll is mentioned, these Techniques will also work against a foe that possesses a Stunt, Technique, or other ability that allows them to substitute another Skill to make or defend against physical attacks or martial arts maneuvers.

FOREST CRANE

FOREST CRANE FORM

Forest Crane stylists merge situational awareness, circular movements, and defensive posture to create a reactive style that uses the environment and an opponent's own aggression against them. Forest Crane practitioners are among some of the most graceful and balanced fighters around.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: CRANE STANDS AMONG THE REEDS

Even situations supposedly advantageous to their foes pose no challenge to the Forest Crane master. They instinctively use poor footing, darkness, or cluttered battlefields to their advantage, even when on defense.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to gain a +2 bonus whenever a character (you or an opponent) uses an Aspect in a Fight contest you are involved in based on the physical environment. This lasts for the rest of the scene.

FOREST DRAGON

FOREST DRAGON FORM

Forest Dragon practitioners stand proud and powerful in the center of any situation, relying on their solid stances and powerful blocks and strikes to direct a conflict. They seek firm footing and advantageous positions, allowing their foes to come to them and only moving when their actions create new opportunities.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: DRAGON WAITS IN THE TREES

Forest Dragon masters learn to see strong and weak avenues of attack and defense in every situation. They can adjust their tactics instantly to exploit these openings.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate point to create an advantage with a +2 bonus against an opponent who has just failed a roll in a Fight contest involving you. This can also be a defense against your own attack using Athletics or any attempt to create an advantage against you during physical combat (such as using Deceive to feint or disorient).

FOREST MONKEY

FOREST MONKEY FORM

To the Forest Monkey practitioner, everything in the field of battle is part of it. Walls provide springboards and striking surfaces to shove or push an opponent into. Common objects become distractions, impediments, and even weapons. Even their opponents can be maneuvered and repositioned to augment the Forest Monkey's acrobatic defenses and attacks. While others seek to avoid or work around such obstacles, the Forest Monkey stylist swings and capers effortlessly among them.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: MONKEY SWINGS FROM THE TREE

The Forest Monkey master has conquered his environment, using it to his advantage to baffle his opponents. No obstacle or hazard can be used to aid against the master's attacks and defenses, and his opponents often feel as if they are fighting not just the master, but their surroundings as well.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to invoke an environment-based advantage or scene aspect in a Fight attack or defense. Instead of the normal +2

bonus, this invocation receives a +3 bonus and does not use up any free invocations possessed, though these may be used in conjunction with this technique. If the attack or defense using this advantage or aspect succeeds with style, you may add a free invocation to it instead of taking a boost.

FOREST PHOENIX

FOREST PHOENIX FORM

Few can match the Forest Phoenix stylist for fluid defense and opportunistic attacks. Moving easily throughout any terrain, they use constant motion and evasion to keep opponents off-balance. Kicks, sweeps, nerve strikes, and other attacks that keep foes at a distance and disadvantaged are favored. What they lack in raw power, Forest Phoenix practitioners make up for in grace and technique.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: PHOENIX SWOOPS BETWEEN THE TREES

Forest Phoenix masters can use agility and positioning to avoid deadly blows. They can even defend others with their skill.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to re-roll the effects of a Fight or Athletics defense action. Treat this new roll as if it was a Full Defense action, but without having to sacrifice your next action.

FOREST SERPENT

FOREST SERPENT FORM

Practitioners of Forest Serpent use speed and misdirection in ways that make them some of the cagiest fighters in the land. They will never commit to an action or position they cannot quickly retreat from and prefer to lure opponents into situations where they can finish a fight with a series of quick, precise blows. Any vulnerability in a foe is to be identified and exploited the moment it is safe to do so.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: SERPENT STRIKES FROM TALL GRASS

Forest Serpent masters have perfected the preemptive counterstrike. An opponent moving to attack must contend with being struck along whatever lines his own attack opens up.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point as an opponent is about to make a Fight attack against you. You may interrupt this attack with an attack of your own with a +2 bonus to the attack roll. This attack does not count against your next action. If your opponent is still active, he may then attack normally.

FOREST TIGER

FOREST TIGER FORM

Forest Tiger stylists are easily the most dangerous of the Forest styles, but among the most reserved of Tiger styles. They focus on situational defense and positioning, but only to set up an opponent for a deadly counterassault. Forest Tiger practitioners are a mix of calm patience and explosive aggression, a challenging mix to deal with.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: TIGER STALKS THE PATH

Forest Tiger masters are the kings of exploiting a temporary weakness in an opponent's position or stance. Once they identify such flaws, they move in with a precise but brutal attack that usually finishes the fight and can even injure those with competent but imperfect defenses.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point on a Fight attack where a tie or better is achieved. If tied, the action now counts as a success with a +4 Weapon Rating. If already a success, add an additional free invocation to any consequence created by this attack or grant a boost if no consequence is created.

GHOST CRANE

GHOST CRANE FORM

Ghost Crane practitioners use sweeping movements that seem deceptively slow but are in fact swift and effective. This seeming weakness of their style creates gaps in their opponent's attacks and defenses, who find themselves unbalanced and striking or blocking just a moment too late. Nerve strikes, sweeps, and maneuvers that redirect an opponent's momentum are common. Despite their solid footwork and effective defense, Ghost Crane stylists rarely hold position and instead flow through the battle like a graceful spirit.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: CRANE FLIES THROUGH HEAVEN

Ghost Crane masters seem to shift almost instantly away from incoming attacks as if they were never in their path in the first place. Attuning their internal energies with an incoming attack, they repel and avoid it by matching its power, speed, and technique with an effective counterpoint. Masters may shift subtly to avoid an attack to evade with a sweeping block or acrobatic dodge, but the end result is the same, the blow does not land.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to re-roll a defense against a physical attack, adding a +2 bonus to defense. Any aspects or advantages invoked in the previous roll are kept. If this defense was not previously a Full Defense, you may now do so for the normal +2 bonus.

GHOST DRAGON

GHOST DRAGON FORM

More than nearly any other style, Ghost Dragon seeks to find a balance between physical and spiritual, attack and defense. Stylists use cautious but powerful strikes, locks, and sweeps combined with blocks and evasions that use no more movement than necessary. Ghost Dragon practitioners exude confidence and subtle menace; a warning to opponents who seek to defeat them by deception or misdirection. A Ghost Dragon may be outfought, but he is rarely overwhelmed by all but the mightiest of foes.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: DRAGON STANDS IN HEAVEN

Ghost Dragon masters cultivate a presence on the battlefield that demoralizes lesser foes and even

gives opponents of equal or greater skill a subtle pause that can be exploited. Showing no fear, hesitation, or trepidation, the master creates opportunities for decisive action and implements them with terrible certainty. The master appears to be a solid, unrelenting constant in the middle of the chaos of battle and the effect is unnerving to all who witness his confidence, power, and stoic acceptance of his dominance.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point and make a **Create an Advantage** action with a +2 bonus using Will, *Chi*, or Provoke (character's choice when learning this technique) with a difficulty equal to the highest Jianghu Rank among your opponents. Success creates an **UNNERVING CONFIDENCE** advantage with an additional free invocation.

GHOSH MONKEY

GHOSH MONKEY FORM

Ghost Monkey concentrates on the mastery of internal energies to augment the style's acrobatic defenses and attacks. Pushes, feints, sweeps, and pressure point strikes hinder an attacker, making him easier to outmaneuver and subdue. Rolls and dodges keep opponents at a distance until the practitioner can find the right opening to finish the fight with a disabling strike or grapple. One of the most physical of the Ghost styles, many underestimate the inner power of the capering, mocking Ghost Monkey.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: MONKEY LAUGHS AT THE GODS

Ghost Monkey masters can channel their internal energies to propel their bodies out of harm's way with alarming speed and agility. Even seemingly unstoppable attacks can be avoided by removing the master from their path with a nigh-impossible dodge, leap, or rolling evasion. Furthermore, the Ghost Monkey's attunement to the spiritual allows them to position themselves most effectively to deliver a perfect follow-up attack. Even aging or frail masters of this style can perform amazing acrobatic defenses, their *Chi* pushing them to places their muscles alone cannot.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point and use your *Chi* in place of Athletics to defend against a physical attack by dodging or evading. This defense roll gets a +2 bonus (+3 if your Athletics is great or equal to your

Chi skill) and if it succeeds with style you gain a +1 attack bonus and +1 Weapon Rating to your next attack against your attacker in addition to the normal boost.

GHOSH PHOENIX

GHOSH PHOENIX FORM

Ghost Phoenix practitioners embrace the transitory nature of battle, seeking ideal pathways for their attacks and defense. Observing foes closely, they align their movements with an opponent allowing them to deliver disabling nerve strikes, sweeping kicks, and unbalancing push attacks not where their opponent is, but where they will be when the blow lands. Their sliding dodges and deflecting blocks work similarly, moving past or along with attacks to avoid contact. Easily one of the softest and most spiritual styles, Ghost Phoenix is nevertheless very effective.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: PHOENIX DIVINES THE HEAVENS

Ghost Phoenix masters learn to instantly attune themselves with the internal energies of an opponent, allowing them to read intended action with a quick glance or light touch. Once so aligned, they move in tandem with their foe, providing an appropriate response to each attack or defense. The Ghost Phoenix master is not consciously reading his opponent's movements, but instead yielding to the spiritual attuning to become his foe's perfect counterpoint, the *yin* to their *yang*.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point and engage in a contest against a target using *Chi*. Gain a +2 bonus to rolls in this contest and resolve it before any further actions are taken. If you win the contest by scoring 3 successes before your opponent, gain a +1 attack and +1 defense bonus in physical combat against that foe for the rest of the scene. If you are not defeated by this opponent, you may spend 1 Fate Point to receive these bonuses in future scenes without need for another contest.

GHOST SERPENT

GHOST SERPENT FORM

Ghost Serpent practitioners are some of the most elusive, graceful, and unpredictable fighters. Their swift, smooth strikes slide past defenses to find vital points in an opponent and their subtle shifting dodges and blocks turn aside blows that seemed would connect. Feints and locks augment these methods and allow the stylist to control a battle, keeping an opponent from bringing his full power to bear on the Ghost Serpent. Practitioners favor speed and precision over power, eschewing powerful but slower methods for a flurry of well-aimed and timed techniques.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: SERPENT POISONS THE SOUL

Ghost Serpent masters have learned the secrets of hindering one's opponents by disrupting or "poisoning" their *Chi* flow. By striking with incredible precision and speed, the master channels his own internal energies through his blow and causes his opponent's own energies to work against them, locking joints, slowing reflexes, and otherwise restricting their ability to fight. While not lethal by itself, this technique can render a powerful foe so impaired they can be easily disabled or killed by the Ghost Serpent.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point and make a Fight attack against a target with a +2 bonus. If the attack succeeds with at least 2 shifts, the defender must take a **POISONED CHI** consequence to deal with the damage even if they have stress boxes available or be taken out of the exchange, their body paralyzed and useless. The consequence can be any severity available to the character but it must affect all the shifts inflicted. Any further uses of this Secret Technique against the same opponent will add a free invocation to this consequence per two shifts instead of doing stress and consequences normally for as long as the character possesses this consequence.

GHOST TIGER

GHOST TIGER FORM

Those who practice Ghost Tiger combine ruthless aggression and a finely honed fighting spirit into a deadly combination. Punishing kicks, punches, and open hand claw strikes to vital areas assault both

their opponent's bodies and spirit. Blocks and well-timed counterblows provide a potent defense even as the stylist continues his steady, brutal assault. Any weakness in an opponent is exploited with the goal of ending a conflict quickly and decisively.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: TIGER RENDS THE SPIRIT

Ghost Tiger masters learn a powerful variant of the common Tiger claw strike that not only does grave physical harm, but also damages an opponent's *Chi* by rending not only their body but also their spirit. This attack is rumored to even be able to harm ghosts and other supernatural creatures thought to be immune to physical force.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to make a Fight attack with a +1 bonus and +2 Weapon Rating. You may choose to do either mental or physical stress with this attack. Also, this attack can be used to harm gods, spirits, and other beings normally immune to physical attacks.

IRON CRANE

IRON CRANE FORM

Iron Crane stylists are a strange mix of hard and soft, linear and circular movements. They remove many of the flourishes and distracting motions that accompany other Crane styles, preferring stripped-down, no-nonsense fighting that focuses on disabling foes quickly with pressure point strikes, hard counterattacks, and throws. Iron Crane is favored by many bodyguards and magistrates for its defensive powers and simple yet effective attack postures.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: IRON- BEAKED CRANE BREAKS CHARGING TIGER

Iron Crane masters train to deliver blows to vital points capable of bringing down even seasoned fighters with a single blow. They use their opponent's own movement and attacks to further fuel this attack, making it dangerous even when minimal force is applied.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point when you succeed with style on a Fight or Athletics defense. In addition to the normal boost, inflict a number of physical stress shifts

equal to the rating of your opponent's Physique plus 2 additional physical stress for each zone the opponent moved in their last action (minimum +2 stress shifts).

IRON DRAGON

IRON DRAGON FORM

Iron Dragon stylists are some of the toughest fighters around. Eschewing fancy maneuvers for strong blows and hard blocks, the style favors taking lesser blows to open a foe up to a disabling lock or punishing strike. What the Iron Dragon lacks in subtlety, he makes up in majestic power.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: SCALES AND TEETH UNTO LIKE IRON

Hardening his skin to deliver terrible blows and withstand incredible punishment, the Iron Dragon master is a terror in combat. He can rend flesh with a blow or shrug off mighty blows with conditioning and superior Kung Fu.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate point; for the remainder of the scene, any attacker who creates a consequence on you with physical stress does not get a free invocation for creating the consequence. In addition, you gain +1 Weapons Rating to all your Fight attacks.

IRON MONKEY

IRON MONKEY FORM

A mix of impressive circular defensive movements and linear striking techniques, Iron Monkey practitioners employ sweeping blocks and evasions that flow into potent kicks, punches, pushes, grabs, and open hand claws. To the practitioner, a roll or dodge is not just a defensive action but also the beginning of an attack that drives outward from them with surprising force. Like the monkey, these stylists have surprising physical power and rely on quickly bringing that to bear to overcome opponents.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: MONKEY ESCAPES THE CAGE

Iron Monkey masters learn to use the momentum and positioning of an incoming attack to power their own follow-up strike. The master flips, slips, or otherwise avoids their attacker and meets them with a forceful and well-placed acrobatic strike while their

opponent is off-balance or out of position.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to defend against a physical attack with a +2 bonus to Fight or Athletics. If the defense succeeds, you gain a +2 boost and +2 Weapon Rating to your next Fight attack against your attacker. If you tie instead, neither you nor your attacker gains a boost, though you still get +2 Weapon Rating for your next attack. If you succeed with style, you may create a **SUPERIOR POSITIONING** advantage with a free invocation instead of a boost.

IRON PHOENIX

IRON PHOENIX FORM

Favored by female warriors and those desiring a mix of power and maneuverability, Iron Phoenix provides a mixture of strong fundamental attacks and defenses and elaborate evasions and feints. Practitioners of this style seek to strike an opponent's vital areas with disabling force and avoid damage by combining efficient dodges and misdirecting blocks.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: PHOENIX BREAKS THE ANVIL

Iron Phoenix masters learn to strike a foe with both pinpoint precision and alarming power, delivering a blow that not only shuts down a target's *Chi* flow, but also damages their body. This attack leaves lasting effects, requiring time for the target's spirit and body to heal.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate point to add 4 additional stress to shift value of a successful Fight attack. Targets who elect to take at least one consequence can avoid this extra stress.

IRON SERPENT*IRON SERPENT FORM*

Iron Serpent practitioners use power and speed to compensate for direct defense. They seek to end fights quickly with a series of quick jabs, kicks, and grabs that all have surprising power behind them. Evasion and blocking are not ignored, but few movements are used that do not also set up the stylist for their own attacks.

**SECRET TECHNIQUE:
SERPENT SWORD BLOW**

The Iron Serpent master delivers a fast blow that weaves past a foe's defenses and cuts deeply into him. Even barehanded strikes using this attack can cut or stab, so great is the speed and power of this blow.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point before making a Fight attack to get a +2 bonus and +2 Weapon Rating. This attack does 0 stress + Weapon Rating on a tie in addition to the normal boost.

IRON TIGER*IRON TIGER FORM*

The dreaded Iron Tiger practitioner is thought to be one of the most aggressive, lethal fighters around. What Iron Tigers lack in maneuverability and flexibility they make up for in physical power, toughness, and aggression. This style eschews many of the tactics and principles of softer styles to focus purely on hard-hitting blows, disabling strikes, painful locks, and linear but effective defenses.

**SECRET TECHNIQUE:
TIGER CAGED IN IRON**

Assuming a powerful and aggressive stance, the Iron Tiger master unleashes a terrible attack on his opponent with the force to shatter bone and burst blood vessels. So strong is the blow that blocking is no defense, only avoiding the blow will save the target.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point and make a Fight attack against a target, with a +2 bonus if they use Fight to **Defend**. Regardless of what the target uses to defend with, also add a +4 Weapon rating to the attack.

LIGHTNING CRANE*LIGHTNING CRANE FORM*

Lightning Crane stylists rely on quick deflecting blocks and subtle but effective evasions executed quickly and without wasted energy. Attacks come in the form of quick hand strikes, low kicks, and the occasional sweep or throw. A Lightning Crane practitioner's footwork is key to its success, as balance and solid footing lets them throw their entire bodies behind bursts of speed in attack and defense. In many ways this style seems like a stripped down speeded up version of other Crane styles despite being a fully developed style of its own.

**SECRET TECHNIQUE:
CRANE STEPS BETWEEN
THUNDERSTRIKES**

Lightning Crane masters epitomize the values of the marriage of alacrity and energy conservation. They do not move unless they must, but when they do, it is fueled by the energy they save by staying still. This allows them to easily exploit an opponent who overcommits himself on attack and cannot recover in time to properly defend himself.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point when an attack against you fails. You can immediately roll Fight or Athletics to create an advantage against that attacker with one-time bonus equal to your total shifts in defense +1. If your defense also succeeded with style you gain an additional free invocation to the created advantage in addition to the normal boost benefit.

LIGHTNING DRAGON*LIGHTNING DRAGON FORM*

While many Kung Fu styles trade speed for power or power for speed, Lightning Dragon teaches practitioners to find power in speed. Twisting strikes and coiled movements generate fast movements that fuel strong attacks, with punches, open-palmed, pushes, and claw-hand blows favored over most kicks. Defenses are a solid mixture of blocks and circular evasive movements. Despite a general lack of far reaching attacks, Lightning Dragon stylists are considered some of the more balanced fighters around.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: DRAGON BREATHES THE LIGHTNING

Lightning Dragon masters have learned to build their power with every movement in a conflict. Each step, shift, or blow adds to their internal power. When the moment is right, the master unleashes this energy, bursting forth with powerful blows that sends his opponent reeling and quickly wears down their defenses.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point; you may “bank” 1 shift from any Fight or Athletics roll made until the end of the scene. These shifts do not count toward their initial roll but can then be added to any successful Fight attack roll for the rest of the scene. There is no limit to how many shifts you can bank and use at once, but any unused shifts go away at the end of the scene.

LIGHTNING MONKEY

LIGHTNING MONKEY FORM

Lightning Monkey practitioners use their agility and speed to provide alarming attacks and frenetic defense. Each movement flows into another with incredible swiftness. Rolling evasions become quick strikes which transform into spinning blocks and dodges. Rarely occupying one place in a battle, these stylists instead seem to be everywhere at once. Sweeps, slaps, and pushes keep their opponents off balance and distracted, allowing the Lightning Monkey stylist to overwhelm them or escape the fight if necessary.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: MONKEY SLAPS THE SKY

Lightning Monkey masters can deliver an open-handed blow, twisting throw, or quick sweep that lands so quickly it stuns a foe, leaving them open to other more powerful attacks and briefly hindering their ability to mount a proper offense. This attack by itself can rarely end a fight, but it is often the catalyst for shifting the battle to the Lightning Monkey master’s favor.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point and perform a **Create an Advantage** action against a target, using Fight against the defender’s Notice with a +2 bonus. Success creates a **STUNNED** advantage which, when invoked against this target, also adds a +1 Armor Rating (when invoked on defense) or +1 Weapon Rating (when invoked on an attack).

LIGHTNING PHOENIX

LIGHTNING PHOENIX FORM

Lightning Phoenix stylists understand that mobility grants opportunity and victory. Using evasion, sweeps, and circular strikes they create new avenues of attack and retreat exploitable by swift strikes and sudden movements. Practitioners rarely commit to all-out attacks, instead focusing on setting the tempo of a conflict until their foe is at their mercy.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: PHOENIX RIDES THE LIGHTNING

Lightning Phoenix masters learn to capitalize on the moment when a foe switches between attack and defense. This allows them to avoid and strike more effectively, using their own speed to stay one step ahead of their opponent. Few can match a Lightning Phoenix master who controls the battlefield.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point after you succeed with style on an Athletics or Fight defense. In addition to the normal boost, gain a +1 attack and defense bonus against this opponent for the rest of the scene. This effect may be stacked through multiple uses of this Secret Technique. When applied to mobs, these bonuses affect all members of a mob.

LIGHTNING SERPENT

LIGHTNING SERPENT FORM

There are no faster fighters than the Lightning Serpent practitioner. Favoring speed above all else, stylists train to be fast on attack, fast on defense, and fast to gain and give ground. Jabs and swift kicks are key to wearing down a foe with a flurry of attacks or quickly disabling lesser opponents. The best Lightning Serpent stylists seem to barely move at all except in blurring jerks, so quickly do they strike, dodge, and step.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: SERPENT STRIKES LIKE LIGHTNING

The master of Lightning Serpent has the ability to channel his mind and body to deliver a blow so quickly even thoughts cannot beat it. This blow has no flourish or extra motion, everything is a perfect line between attacker and defender at maximum speed.

Effect: After any character's action in a turn has occurred, spend 1 Fate Point to make a Fight attack with +1 bonus that ignores 2 points of Armor Rating. This attack occurs immediately, regardless of normal turn order.

LIGHTNING TIGER

LIGHTNING TIGER FORM

Lightning Tiger practitioners learn that fast movement and powerful attacks dominate a battleground. Mixing quick close attacks and leaping or rushing distance strikes, this style forgoes elaborate defenses in favor of simply outpacing or evading most attacks. Stylists prefer to stay on the offensive, wearing foes down under a barrage of relentless blows.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: TIGER STREAKS THROUGH SKY

Lightning Tiger masters find opportunity in the chaotic rush of battle. Where practitioners of other styles often must open up their defenses to leap or run and reestablish footing to properly attack, they have trained to defend themselves if intercepted in mid-leap or adjust their attacks in mid-stride. This awareness also aids them with highly mobile foes, allowing them to catch a swift moving attacker or defender unawares.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point, for the rest of the

scene gain a +2 bonus of Fight attacks and +2 bonus on Fight or Athletics defenses any time you act after moving at least 1 zone or your opponent has moved at least 1 zone on their last action. This effect lasts until the end of the scene.

STONE CRANE

STONE CRANE FORM

One of the most defensively solid styles, Stone Crane relies on solid stances and limiting an opponent's ability to attack. Practitioners use blocks, circular evasion, locks, and pressure point strikes to avoid attacks and hinder opponents. Weaker on attack, Stone Crane stylists wait until the right opening and put an attacker down hard and fast.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: CRANE FLIES BEHIND MOUNTAIN

Crane Stone masters learn to create solid, nearly impenetrable defenses designed to open an attacker's defenses without weakening their own. This focus makes direct attacks against them unwise, as they will eventually lead to an attacker's undoing.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point after you succeed on a Fight or Athletics defense with style. In addition to the normal boost or effects from other Techniques, create a *CRANE STRIKES FROM THE MOUNTAIN* advantage with two free invocations usable to defend against, attack, or hinder your attacker.

STONE DRAGON

STONE DRAGON FORM

Stone Dragon stylists favor power and defense, using a foundation of strong defensive stances and blocks to protect from opponents. On attack, they are careful not to overcommit and use sweeps, low kicks, and short-ranged strikes to avoid giving openings to an opponent. Practitioners endeavor to outlast and overcome opponents instead of crushing them, making locks and grapples popular.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: DRAGON GLIDES BETWEEN PEAKS

Stone Dragon masters control the battle by keeping their foes unable to effectively attack. They keep contact as close as possible, allowing them to feel

and anticipate attacks before they begin, making them easier to avoid and easier to grapple or lock down.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to gain a +2 bonus to defense rolls against all Fight attacks you are aware of and +2 bonus on all attempts to grapple, entangle, or lock down a defender. These bonuses only apply against targets that begin their turn in the same zone as you. This effect lasts for a scene.

STONE MONKEY

STONE MONKEY FORM

The most static and conservative of the Monkey styles, Stone Monkey practitioners rely on balance and precision to win the day. Thrusting kicks, punches, and claw-like strikes are delivered with solid force that nevertheless does not overcommit the stylist. Straightforward simple evasions and blocks provide a solid defense augmented with well-timed rolls and flips that allow the stylist to move from one solid position to another without exposing themselves to attack. This combination of solid basics and the Monkey's trademark agility makes them hard to hit and even harder to harm.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: MONKEY SITS ON THE MOUNTAIN

Stone Monkey masters have learned to perfectly time their defenses to flow together, creating a solid mix of motion and stillness where the master is never truly vulnerable despite appearances. Like a monkey perched on a high peak, the master is difficult to reach before he scampers away to safety.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to re-roll a failed Fight or Athletics defense roll. Add a +2 bonus and +2 Armor rating to the re-rolled result.

STONE PHOENIX

STONE PHOENIX FORM

Viewing the earthen element of their style as more philosophical and spiritual, Stone Phoenix practitioners are easily the most mobile of the Stone styles. Stylists use retreating movements and circular evasions to add effectiveness to blocks and dodges. High kicks, spinning strikes, and sweeps keep foes at a distance but still within range of the practitioner's attacks.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: PHOENIX RETREATS TO CLIFF

Stone Phoenix masters learn to divert the power of a foe's attack by moving away from it. They yield ground on the battlefield but in doing so avoid damage and place themselves in a position to recover and reassess. Combined with the mobility of the style as a whole, this is often a very effective tactic.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to gain a +2 bonus on a defense action and move 1 zone away from an attacker. You also gain a +4 bonus to defend against attempts to stop you from leaving the zone. If your defense succeeds with style you may create an advantage with one free invocation based on perspective or superior positioning in addition to gaining a boost.

STONE SERPENT

STONE SERPENT FORM

Stone Serpent stylists stand their ground as much as possible while still slipping and moving to avoid various blows. Attacks are straightforward and quick, with locks, grapples, and disabling strikes being common. This is not to say practitioners do not move in combat, they simply flow from one solid stance to another and only when it is safe to do so. Stone Serpent stylists are cautious, defensive, but highly effective fighters.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: SERPENT RETREATS TO CAVE

Stone Serpent masters have cultivated incredibly fast reactions, especially on defense. Even a blow that seems to be on target and devastating can be slipped at the last minute, avoiding or eliminating the impact.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to gain +1 defense and 4 Armor Rating against a Fight or Shoot attack you are aware of. If the defense is a tie, you do not grant a boost to the attacker.

STONE TIGER

STONE TIGER FORM

Stone Tiger practitioners meld solid defenses and aggressive attacks into an erratic but effective style. There are few movements in Stone Tiger that are not designed to block a blow or crush an opponent, making it a disconcerting mix of stillness and savagery. Stone Tigers favor strikes that can be easily and effectively delivered following a defense, including low kicks, short-ranged punches and open hand claw strikes.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: TIGER COMES DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN

Stone Tiger masters learn to stay on defense and bide their time. Then, without warning, they will launch into a savage all-out attack to catch an opponent off guard and overwhelm his defenses. Few are prepared for this assault, making it very difficult to counter.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to use the shifts from your last Fight or Athletics defense roll as a bonus to your next Fight attack (minimum +3 bonus). This attack also reduces any Armor Rating the defender has by 2.

STORM CRANE

STORM CRANE FORM

One of the most fluid and adaptable of styles, Storm Crane favors soft deflecting defenses mixed with circular redirection of momentum leading to attacks. Practitioners use their superior balance to turn dodges and blocks into sweeping counterblows and use throws and pushes to keep targets at a distance, requiring them to telegraph attacks and open defenses by moving to close with the Storm Crane martial artist.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: CRANE PUSHES OUT THE TIDE

Storm Crane masters are able to send opponents flying with a soft shove and throw foes many times their size. Using redirected momentum and leverage, they can send targets tumbling to the ground, slamming into walls, or off nearby heights.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point after succeeding in a Fight attack or Fight or Athletics defense with style. In addition to the normal boost, throw a target 1 zone

in any direction and create a *STORM CRANE PUSH* advantage with on free invocation to reflect target being off balance and possibly prone. Character can use their boost to throw target 1 additional zone instead of the usual bonus. Being thrown into other zones could cause the target trouble if they go over a great height or into a hard surface (GMs judgment, though target should be allowed to defend).

STORM DRAGON

STORM DRAGON FORM

Practitioners of Storm Dragon Kung Fu devote themselves to balancing attack and defense, persistence and restraint. Flowing, fluid defenses lead into strong kicks and fist techniques and locks, throws, and holds let the Stylist dictate the tempo and range of most battles. Strong in many ways but strongest in none, Storm Dragon relies more on having fewer pronounced weaknesses and many potent elements than a few overwhelming strengths.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: DRAGON CONQUERS THE STORM

Storm Dragon masters learn to follow strength with speed, speed with strength. This approach makes them very difficult to overcome should they gain even a brief advantage in combat. Those fighting a Storm Dragon master soon find they are striking, moving, and defending at a pace set by the master and, unless they can break that pattern, have little chance of victory.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point; each time you succeed with style on a Fight attack or Fight or Athletics defense, any boost you receive counts as a +4 bonus instead of the normal +2. This effect lasts for an entire scene.

STORM MONKEY

STORM MONKEY FORM

Always in motion, Storm Monkey practitioners strive to be everywhere opponents are not. Rolls, controlled falls, and dodges help the stylist flow around incoming attacks. Punches, kicks, and sweeps are delivered with acrobatic finesse that allows them to come from unpredictable angles. Feints, counterblows, slaps or claws to the face or eyes, and even monkey-like screeches are employed to misdirect and confuse. These methods all combine to transform the stylist into a tempestuous flurry of motion who is very difficult to defeat.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: MONKEY GRASPS THE CLOUDS

Storm Monkey masters have perfected the art of the feint and sudden misdirection. They attack with screeching fury and impressive acrobatic prowess only to redirect their attack at the last minute, moving to intercept their opponent as they move away from the false attack. This puts the master in control of both himself and his opponent's movements, if only for a few vital moments.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point after failing with a Fight-based attack to instead re-roll with a +2 bonus. Apply the second result as a **Create an Advantage** action to create a **STORM MONKEY FEINT** advantage instead of the original attack.

STORM PHOENIX

STORM PHOENIX FORM

Often seen as a feminine style even among the Phoenix styles for its grace and reliance on maneuverability, Storm Phoenix stylists are nevertheless found among men, women, and eunuchs. Acrobatic strikes and dodges flow into low sweeps and quick counters to create a fluid style with its own unique rhythm. Practitioners rarely stand still, instead using movement to enhance attack and defense, as well as luring opponents into making crucial errors.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: CLOUDS EMBRACE THE PHOENIX

Storm Phoenix masters learn to use motion itself as both shield and weapon. Complex acrobatics and swift movement across the battlefield grant power to the master's attack and grace to their defense.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point to add +1 Weapon Rating and +1 Armor Rating to all Fight attacks and defenses. If you or your opponent moves at least 1 zone on their last action, increase these bonuses to +3. This effect lasts for an entire scene.

STORM SERPENT

STORM SERPENT FORM

Storm Serpent style users prize flexibility and speed over all. Using swift strikes, twisting locks, and nerve strikes they seek to slow opponents to better exploit their weaknesses. Practitioners are cautious not

to overcommit on attacks and rely on evasion more than blocking incoming attacks. A Storm Serpent fighter does not strike until he is ready, when he does, he does so with alarming effectiveness.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: SERPENT MOVES LIKE RAIN

Masters of Storm Serpent Kung Fu learn to stay close to their opponents, sensing the ebb and flow of attacks before they begin. This allows them to set up a foe for a disabling attack delivered at precisely the right moment.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point after succeeding with style on a Full Defense action using Fight or Athletics. Inflict shifts on your attacker equal to shifts earned on defense plus 2 instead of gaining a boost.

STORM TIGER

STORM TIGER FORM

Storm Tiger practitioners learn to direct and employ force and energy against their foes in a number of ways to keep them off balance and operating at diminished strength. Pushes, nerve strikes, disabling claw hand strikes, sweeps, and twisting joint locks allow the Storm Tiger stylists to strike at their opponents' willingness and ability to fight. Mixing hard blocks with flowing movements allows them to absorb powerful attacks without yielding ground.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: TIGER ROARS LIKE THUNDER

Storm Tiger masters learn to cultivate their internal energies and release them in powerful bursts of energy that disorient and disable opponents. The most common method is a great roaring shout or clawing strike to various pressure points, though different masters develop other maneuvers to channel these energies as well.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point and use *Chi* to create a **THUNDERING TIGER** advantage with a +4 bonus to the roll that disorients or disables your opponent. If you follow this immediately with a Fight attack against the same opponent on your next action, you may invoke this advantage once without using up a free invocation.

STYLE RARITY

Tianxia assumes all the styles included in this book are of roughly equal rarity and availability. Thus, if a character wants to know Forest Tiger or Iron Phoenix, it might require some travel or cajoling to find a teacher but it is not any more difficult than learning Stone Crane or Storm Dragon. However, it need not be this way in an individual campaign.

GMs and players are encouraged to work together to determine which, if any, of the styles are rare or even supposedly

extinct. In an individual campaign, it is possible a PC is *THE LAST STUDENT OF FOREST DRAGON KUNG FU* or *SOLE SURVIVOR OF THE STORM CRANE SCHOOL*. NPCs might also know rare or mostly unknown styles, making them exceptional villains and allies for the PCs. In cases of both PCs and NPCs, knowing a rare style is worth an aspect noting this. GMs whose campaigns use this option might want to alter the aspects of and styles known by some of the NPCs in the setting if they are going to

still know a rare style..

Also note that Lost Techniques combined with existing styles can be used to make unique and rare fighting methods even if the basic styles are equally available. So even if Iron Tiger is common, there might be only one master who teaches the Golden Blood Tiger variant, which includes not only the Techniques, *FORM*, and Secret Technique of Iron Tiger, but also the Feast of the Golden Vampire Lost Technique (see page 99).

LOST TECHNIQUES

Lost Techniques is a misnomer, but it is shorter and easier than “Techniques thought lost to the ages and now only known by select individuals.”

Lost Techniques are also generally unconnected to a particular substyle or style; they might have been once, but the lore or art surrounding them was since lost, though particular sects or schools within the style may know them. Each individual Lost Technique has a description, cost, and list of effects. These effects vary wildly. Lost Techniques costs vary based on the effectiveness of effects, there is no uniform standard. To learn one of these Techniques, a character must find a teacher, Kung Fu manual, or other way to learn it and pay its cost.

In play, Lost Techniques are a way to tie an Extra, Stunt, or Aspect into a character’s training, martial arts skill, and the setting as a whole rather than a distinct class of abilities like a Kung Fu style. Several sample Lost Techniques are provided in the rest of this section; they serve both as selectable Lost Techniques and as guidance for players and GMs seeking to design their own Lost Techniques. Some Lost Techniques are not even related to Kung Fu, but are instead a product of advanced and esoteric study of disciplines such as medicine, theology, smithing, or even cooking.

DRUNKEN IMMORTAL FORM

While Drunken Kung Fu styles exist such as Drunken Monkey and Tiger, Drunken Immortal can be integrated into any existing style. Supposedly created by an immortal warrior who gained enlightenment through drink, this technique applies the “divine methods of the Drunken Immortal” to any existing style. Studying this technique requires a teacher who is already a follower of this path and a lot of drinking. Rumors persist of versions of this technique using other mind-altering substances or even controlled self-poisoning, but their existence is unconfirmed.

Cost: Must take an Aspect like *DRUNKEN IMMORTAL STANCE* or *COME DRINK WITH ME!*

Effect: Acts as a normal aspect, though one only applicable when fighting while drinking, drunk, or

acting drunk. Opponents cannot create an advantage on you based on exploiting your intoxicated state, and any invocations usable with Kung Fu *FORMS* may be used with Drunken Immortal Form as well.

ENFLAME CHI

Practiced by the greatest physicians, scholars, and mystics, this technique allows the user to use his knowledge and mastery of *Chi* to aggravate the injuries, imbalances, and afflictions of others. A master of this technique can cause the nerves of a sore arm to erupt in agonizing spasms, or turn a mild imbalance of *yang* into a raging fever. The effects of poisons and drugs can also be augmented by weakening the body’s natural resistance to toxins, allowing these substances to ravage the body. Care should be taken when using Enflame *Chi* if the user suffers from injuries or afflictions himself, as improper application causes an unpleasant backlash.

Cost: 1 Refresh; *Chi* and Lore Skill of Good or higher.

Effect: Use your *Chi* to create an advantage with a +2 bonus against a target with a consequence; the defender uses his *Chi* skill to defend. You may use these invocations normally, or may trade them in to inflict 2 physical stress per invocation during this or subsequent turns. *CHI ARMOR* invocations can be used to protect against this stress, but other forms of armor cannot unless it states it acts like *CHI ARMOR* for defense. As you need to have some existing condition to work with, this Lost Technique has no effect against a target currently suffering no consequences. If you fail this roll and suffer a consequence yourself, your target gains one free invocation to use with this consequence.

FEAST OF THE GOLDEN VAMPIRE

This technique was thought lost when the Golden Vampire Cult, a cult of blood-drinking killers and

assassins, were wiped out centuries ago. Study of Feast of the Golden Vampire greatly increases a subject's internal energies and external power, but it comes at the expense of causing a subject's *yin* energies to dangerously overreach his *yang*. To balance these energies to proper levels, the subject must consume fresh blood to increase his *yang*, warming his body and spirit. Without a steady diet of fresh human blood, the subject is cold, pale, and lethargic. Golden Vampire practitioners do not need to kill someone to drink their blood, but many who use this Technique care little for the source of their increased power.

Cost: 1 Refresh and must take an Aspect like *GOLDEN VAMPIRE KILLER* or *BLOOD FEEDS MY POWER*.

Effect: Increase your Jianghu Rank by 1 if you have fed on at least 1 pint of human blood in the past 24 hours. The blood must be warm and fresh. If you go more than 3 days without blood, you gain *OVERABUNDANT YIN*, a minor consequence which makes you lethargic, easily exhausted, and can only be recovered by drinking 1 pint of fresh blood for every day you went without. Drinking a mixture of 1 pint of preserved blood and special herbs requiring at least Fair Lore or Resources to acquire will stave off the negative effects for an additional day. However, each day the character must consume an additional pint of this mixture, and days using this mixture still count as days without fresh blood once it runs out, making it a dangerous respite.

GEMINI UNION

Through years of training with another, you and a specific partner fight better as a team than alone. Your strengths and weaknesses complement each other to create a mighty whole greater than the sum of its parts. Many Kung Fu experts who know Gemini Union live together for years while learning this Lost Technique. Several also have a strong personal connection such as being twins, siblings, or husband and wife, but this is not required to learn the style. Legends persist of variants on Gemini Union that allow three or more combatants to train for similar benefits, but such fighters are unknown in Shénzhōu today.

Cost: 2 Refresh; you and your partner must both take *GEMINI UNION* or another aspect denoting your strong connection to each other.

Effect: You and your partner fight as one. Gain a +1 attack bonus fighting the same opponents and a +1 bonus defending your partner in combat while you are both active and capable of action. Users of this Lost Technique performing Teamwork actions (*FATE CORE*, p.174) gain an additional +1 bonus to their Skill rolls and treat the lowest Jianghu rank of the pairing as one higher for purposes of using Teamwork bonuses against an opponent. Partners can share free invocations (including *CHI ARMOR*) and boosts between one another as if they were one character in situations where it is relevant and appropriate to do so. These Effects only work with specific sets of characters who know Gemini Union and are regular partners, not any character who might use this Lost Technique as part of a different pairing.

THE HEART OF HELL

Those who reject the ways of Heaven and Earth and embrace the Hell path can gain great power, but at the cost of poisoning their spirit. This Lost Technique grants those who reject compassion and virtue and embrace sadism and corruption the power to feed off the tainted energies released when they inflict suffering on others and use it to keep themselves healthy and vital. Few who are considered heroes would ever pursue such knowledge voluntarily, though some obsessive or desperate people with good intentions have found themselves learning the Heart of Hell Technique.

Cost: 1 Refresh or free Stunt pick; must have a High Concept that involves corruption, evil, sadism, or some other hellish impulse, like *SLAYER OF THE INNOCENT*, *EVIL EUNUCH MINISTER*, or *SADISTIC WOULD-BE CONQUEROR*. You must also have a Trouble Aspect that involves either a flaw in your corrupt nature, like *MEGALOMANIACAL URGES*, or some lone and withered virtue that can be exploited, such as *TWISTED SENSE OF HONOR*.

Effect: When you inflict stress with an attack that causes terror, despair, or intense and unnecessary suffering, you may reduce the stress inflicted by it to remove stress you have taken. You must still inflict at least 1 stress on your target, though you can spend any or all remaining stress to either remove a filled stress box equal to the stress you reduced the attack by or

convert a stress box to a smaller one by reducing stress inflicted by the difference between the two stress boxes.

DIVINE KITCHEN SAGE

While *Tianxia* is home to many talented chefs, perhaps one in a generation learns the secrets of infusing their culinary creations with the invigorating energies of the Divine Kitchen Sage. Not only are the masters of this techniques dishes flavorful, they can boost the *Chi* of those who consume them. The food they prepare also tends to keep longer than most, though it will still spoil over time. Some master brewers are rumored to possess a variant of this technique as well, and meeting such an individual is the lifelong goal of many followers of the Drunken Immortal Form.

Cost: 1 Refresh or free Stunt; must have Craft at Good or better and an aspect relating to cooking such as **MASTER CHEF** or **LIVING GOD OF COOKERY**.

Effect: You may use your Craft skill to create an **INVIGORATING NUTRITION** advantage for anyone who eats one of your dishes as if you were using Teamwork with them. You do not have to be present in the scene to do this, just the food you prepared. This aspect can be invoked to counteract toxins, stave off fatigue, and speed healing. The brewing version of this Lost Technique functions similarly, but goes by different titles such as Illustrious Wine Saint or Heavenly Brewer's Method, the advantage it creates is called **INVIGORATING INTOXICATION**, and it requires aspects referring to brewing alcohol instead of cooking.

MOUNTAIN-SHATTERING SHOUT

Those who know this Lost Technique have conditioned their throat and lungs to channel their inner power into mighty shouts that can break bones, shatter stone, and rend flesh. The most powerful of these individuals are rumored to speak only in whispers lest their voice inadvertently harm those around them. Rumors persist of similar Lost Techniques using weapons strikes so powerful they push waves of energy at distant foes or even whistling or instruments to harm targets with *Chi*-infused musical notes.

Cost: 1 Refresh; *Chi* and Physique must be Good or better.

Effect: You may use your *Chi* skill to make ranged physical attacks using your voice. These function as normal attacks and can attack foes up to 3 zones away. Also, you may also make your voice clearly heard at great distances (up to several miles), giving you a +2 bonus attempting tasks which would benefit from this ability such as warning distant comrades of an ambush or scaring away skittish animals with a mighty roar. Variants using other methods to channel energies to strike distant foes use the same mechanics, but may require a different skill than Physique at Good or better to learn and would have different names.

SAINT'S PALM

Enlightened masters are reputed to have the ability to channel the might of the heavens through their physical blows. Supposedly developed by a young priest who was returned to Earth after his enlightenment to aid the spiritual growth of others, the Saint's Palm is an open handed blow that appears slow and even weak but strikes with incredible force, sending a foe reeling and striking at his very soul.

Cost: 1 Refresh; you must have an Aspect that denotes achieving or seeking enlightenment such as **SEEKS THE HIGHER PATH** or **ENLIGHTENED WARRIOR PRIEST**. *Chi* of Good or higher is recommended, but not required.

Effect: Spend 1 Fate Point and make an attack against an opponent using your *Chi* skill. Your opponent can defend with Athletics, Fight, or *Chi*. The attack does mental damage with a Weapon Rating based on the *Chi* rating: Average or Fair: 2; Good or Great: 3, Superb or greater: 4. Succeeding with style also sends the opponent flying back into an adjacent zone and even a tie results in the target taking 1 mental stress as the heavenly power of the blow echoes through him. **CHI ARMOR** or abilities that state they function as **CHI ARMOR** protect as normal, but other forms of Armor do not.

DESCRIBING THE ACTION AND POWER LEVEL

A lot of the “power level” of Tianxia, when it comes to powerful martial arts maneuvers and acrobatics, has more to do with description than strict mechanics.

A campaign focused on more grounded martial arts actions, one devoted to cinematic *wuxia*, and another pushing things into the superheroic could all use the same Technique but, based on how it is described, could have a very different feel. Zones can vary in size from a small room to a battlefield, and a consequence might be described as anything from a few cracked ribs to having a piece of your soul torn out by the sheer power of your enemy’s Kung Fu. GMs and players should figure out their expectations of how their games will feel with regard to action and tone.

Example 1: While playing in a fairly grounded Kung Fu action game of *Tianxia*, Denise uses her character’s **Phoenix Beats its Wings** Technique to throw an opponent off-balance and create an **OFF BALANCE** advantage when she defends with style (see p. 85). Keeping in the spirit and tone of the game, she says, “I step past him as he attacks, slipping the blow and tripping him as I move. I spin as he stumbles to regain his footing a few feet away.”

Example 2: While playing in an over-the-top, high action *wuxia* style game of *Tianxia*, Denise uses **Phoenix Beats its Wings** Technique to throw off her opponent’s balance. Matching the tone of this type of game, she says, “I meet his attack in midair, redirecting my leap to roll over the blow. As I pass, I hit four pressure points on his back and neck, disrupting his *Chi* flow and making it harder for him to keep his equilibrium. I spin to face him right before I land, sliding to a halt in a ready stance twenty yards from him.”

See? Same Technique, same action, same mechanical effects, but a *very* different feel, and the zones in both cases are different as well; with the acrobatic, fast-moving action of high-end *wuxia*, what is a few feet in a more realistic battle becomes dozens or even hundreds of feet. Experimenting with this sort of rules-independent “scaling” can make your games as realistic and gritty or cinematic and superheroic as you like without having to tack on a lot of new rules to learn. That helps keep the action fast, focused, and fun.

WHEN IN DOUBT, PLAY THE FIGHTER...

An old adage of various roleplaying games is that if you want to have some fun and you are at a loss as to what else to play, go for a character that likes to hit things and is quite good at it. This is an especially appropriate tactic for *Tianxia* with its epic Kung Fu battles and dynamic combat. Of course, the question arises as to how to make a simple effective fighter in *Tianxia*. There really is not one right answer to this, but there are some guidelines.

Unsurprisingly, Fighter-types in *Tianxia* almost always have a high Fight skill. This is their bread and butter skill used for punching, kicking, blocking, and otherwise putting some hurt on opponents in hand to hand combat. High Athletics also helps with dodging and moving around the battlefield. In addition, a good Physique skill makes it easier to take and deal physical damage, a strong *Chi* skill can provide some protection

in the form of *CHI ARMOR*, and a decent Will can keep a physically powerful character from being brought down by mental attacks. You do not need to have all these skill at a high rank, but one or two will go a long way towards making a character an effective combatant.

Kung Fu styles are also important. While all the styles are powerful if used correctly, some are simpler to implement for starting players or those who just want to roll dice and hit things. The various Iron and Tiger Styles are good candidates here, as are Dragon and Stone. For quick or sneaky fighters, Serpent and Lightning Styles are good choices but can be trickier to get the hang of since some of their best abilities rely on timing or effective use of defense and creating advantages. None of these Styles are necessarily better than others—you can do a lot of damage with Forest Phoenix or Storm Monkey if you work their

strengths. They are just easier to get working for a character by rolling some dice and invoking an aspect or two.

Most characters in *Tianxia* will likely have some skill in combat; it is possible to play a noncombat character with no Kung Fu, but it is pretty rare in the genres *Tianxia* uses as inspiration. Really potent warriors and martial artists take their skill a step beyond to become terrors of the battlefield whose fighting prowess is the stuff of legend, so unless a player has a really great idea for a support-based or noncombat character, it is a good idea to have at least some combat ability. This does not need to be the primary focus of the character to be effective. *Wuxia* and Kung Fu action movies and stories are filled with characters who are doctors, detectives, spies, courtesans, monks, or even beggars with potent Kung Fu abilities.



CHAPTER SIX

SAMPLE CHARACTERS & EXAMPLE OF PLAY

SLAVE PITS OF THE UNDERCITY

“This might be the worst idea we’ve ever had,” Detective Dishì said as he helped herd the freed slaves into the tunnel where Sister Chuntao and Smiling Ox waited. The big man held a badly wounded Han Ping in his arms. Behind him, Wolf-Eyed Yue and Ma Wei Sheng stood with weapons drawn, ready to fend off the slavers who burst from the opposite tunnel to attack.

“Come now, my friend,” Ma said, “This isn’t even the worst idea we’ve had today.”

“How’s Ping?” Dishì asked.

“Just peachy,” the young woman answered weakly. “Let me at ‘em.”

Sister Chuntao smiled at her companion, “I believe it is best if you conserve your strength.”

“She was kidding, Sister,” said Dishì.

“No, I wasn’t,” protested Ping, but her voice grew weaker.

“Can you hold them off?” the Detective asked Ma and Yue.

“If by hold off you mean slaughter them like pigs, then yes,” answered Yue, her hands tightening on her long knives.

Dishì swallowed a wry comment and simply said, “Great. Sister, you know the way out?”

“I am familiar with this area,” The young nun responded. Thus far this had held true, Sister Chuntao seemed to know the tunnels under Bǎo Jiang as if she was born in them. How she came by this knowledge was a secret she had not shared.

“Then lead the way,” Dishì scooped up one of the freed slaves, a child of no more than eight and followed his companions and their charges down the tunnel.

The slavers flooded into the emptied slave pits in waves. They were all members of the 9413

Hungry Devils, one the most powerful and deadly syndicates in Jiāngzhōu, perhaps all of Shénzhōu.

“If this is the end, it’s been a pleasure fighting beside you.” Ma said, nodding to Yue.

“If this is the end, then we suck.” Yue snapped, and then added more softly, “But thank you.”

“So...ladies first?”

“I see no reason to be picky. Just kill them as they come.”

Ma started to explain his meaning but instead simply smiled and nodded, “Of course, one need not pick the order of death, the dead will pick it for you.”

“Another of your father’s sayings?”

“No, I just made it up, in fact.”

Yue smiled, showing her teeth to the approaching mob, “I like it. Let’s test that out.”

This chapter provides six characters suitable for use as PCs in Tianxia. They can also be used as foils, rivals, or inspirations for other PCs. Also provided is a detailed example of play to show how all the rules of FATE CORE and Tianxia work together to provide exciting wuxia/Kung Fu action-style play.

SMILING OX

ASPECTS

MASTER OF THE DEMON HAMMER

BOASTFUL BRUTE

EVERYTHING IS A NAIL

"EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY!"

STRONG AS AN OX

SKILLS

Great (+4): Physique

Good (+3): Fight, Provoke

Fair (+2): Athletics, Will, Rapport

Average (+1): *Chi*, Investigate, Notice, Contacts

STRESS

4 Physical

3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE: IRON TIGER

IRON TIGER FORM

Tiger Rules the Jungle: You may use Physique instead of Will to defend against Provoke or Rapport attacks

Iron Cleaves the Stone: Ignore 2 points of Armor when making an attack to inflict physical stress

Flesh Breaks on Iron: When you defend against a close combat type attack with style, you may inflict 2 shift hit instead of taking a boost on your attacker

STUNTS

Demon Hammer (Add +2 Weapon Rating to Fight attacks made with Demon Hammer)

Mighty (+2 Physique bonus to Overcome actions)

Tough (Use Physique instead of *Chi* to for tests to determine **CHI ARMOR**)

Refresh: 2

Born in southern Shénzhōu, Smiling Ox was always bigger and stronger than most around him. As he grew older, his reputation for physical might grew as did his appetites. Studying Kung Fu, he soon became known for his powerful blows and mastery of the Demon Hammer, a twenty-pound brass demon head on a thick chain. Ox claims the weapon is the head of an actual demon he slew with his bare hands, which turned to brass after its death (it is not). Now working as a bounty hunter, bodyguard, and enforcer in Jiāngzhōu, Ox spends most of his earnings on wine, food, and companionship. He is a regular at the House of Soft Sighs.

Note: *Smiling Ox's Demon Hammer is covered by his **MASTER OF THE DEMON HAMMER** aspect and **Demon Hammer Stunt**. GMs using weapons rules should consider giving it a Weapons Rating (possibly increasing it to 3 or even 4) and give Smiling Ox a different stunt to balance things out.*



WOLF-EYED YUE

ASPECTS

WILD WOMAN OF JIANGZHŌU

SHADOWS OF THE PAST

WHITE WIDOW FOUNDLING

"I CAN TRACK ANYTHING"

SAVAGE BEAUTY

SKILLS

Great (+4): Athletics

Good (+3): Fight, Stealth

Fair (+2): Notice, Physique, Will

Average (+1): Lore, *Chi*, Shoot, Provoke

STRESS

3 Physical

3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE: FOREST SERPENT

FOREST SERPENT FORM

Forest Opens Its Paths: If you use Athletics to overcome an obstacle with style, you may turn the obstacle into an advantage with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

Serpent Bites the Hand: If you gain shifts on a defense, you can sacrifice your action next turn to immediately inflict an attack on your opponent at the shift value of your defense.

Serpent Strikes First: Use Athletics to determine turn order instead of Notice in combat. Apply a +2 bonus instead if both Skills are the same rank.

STUNTS

Leave No Trace (+2 to Stealth in wilderness regions)

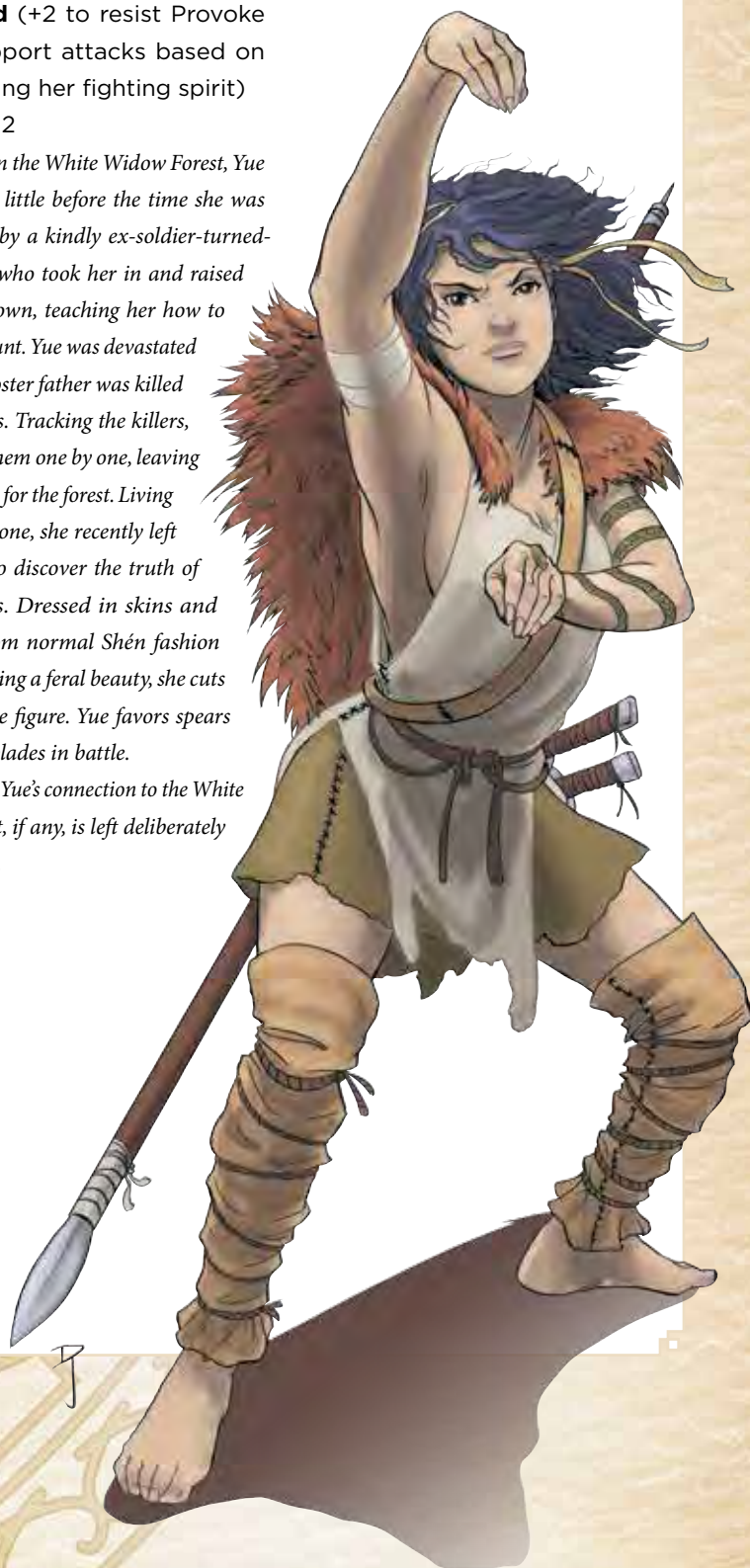
Mistress of the Wild (+2 to Lore rolls involving survival, tracking, and woodcraft)

Untamed (+2 to resist Provoke or Rapport attacks based on hindering her fighting spirit)

Refresh: 2

Left to die in the White Widow Forest, Yue remembers little before the time she was discovered by a kindly ex-soldier-turned-huntsman who took her in and raised her as his own, teaching her how to fight and hunt. Yue was devastated when her foster father was killed by poachers. Tracking the killers, Yue killed them one by one, leaving their bodies for the forest. Living for years alone, she recently left the forest to discover the truth of her origins. Dressed in skins and furs far from normal Shén fashion and possessing a feral beauty, she cuts a distinctive figure. Yue favors spears and short blades in battle.

Note: Yue's connection to the White Widow Sect, if any, is left deliberately ambiguous.



DETECTIVE DISHI

ASPECTS

ONE GOOD COP IN A BAD TOWN
PROBLEM WITH AUTHORITY
BǎO JIĀNG'S GREATEST DETECTIVE
NEVER GIVES UP
UNCONVENTIONAL METHODS

SKILLS

Great (+4): Investigate

Good (+3): Notice, Will

Fair (+2): Fight, Lore, Rapport

Average (+1): *Chi*, Deceive,
Contacts, Athletics

STRESS

2 Physical

4 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE: STONE CRANE STONE CRANE FORM

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

Crane Stuns the Carp: If you succeed on a Fight attack with style, you may create a **STUNNED** advantage on a target with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

Stone Resists the Blow: You gain 2 Armor against any physical attack you are aware of.

STUNTS

Burden of Proof (Use Investigate in place of Provoke on targets you having damning evidence against)

Elementary! (+2 on Investigate **Overcome** rolls)

Just the Facts (do not grant a free invoke to an opponent when failing to use Investigate to create an advantage)

Refresh: 2

Lanky and vaguely awkward looking, Detective Dishi nevertheless might be the greatest force for justice in Bǎo Jiāng. A junior magistrate whose unwillingness to take bribes or look the other way when crimes are committed by the wealthy or powerful, this young man has already made a lot of enemies. He has also got a few friends, a mix of soldiers, merchants, and local luminaries who help keep Dishi from catching a dagger in the back. Dishi favors nonlethal methods, but when called on to defend himself, he wields his iron judge pen and reinforced fan with skill and enthusiasm.



HAN "DRAGON DOG" PING

ASPECTS

WORKING CLASS HEROINE

LEAP BEFORE YOU LOOK

MASTER QUAN'S BEST STUDENT

MASTER QUAN'S WORST STUDENT

"DON'T CALL ME CUTE!"

SKILLS

Great (+4): Fight

Good (+3): Athletics, Physique

Fair (+2): Rapport, Empathy,
Crafts

Average (+1): *Chi*, Notice, Drive,
Will

STRESS

4 Physical

3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE: STORM DRAGON

STORM DRAGON FORM

Dragon Rules the Fields: When you succeed with style on an attack, gain a boost—with a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2—without reducing the value of your attack.

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.

STUNTS

Interesting Developments

(give an opponent a free invocation on an advantage you successfully created to gain another free invocation yourself)

Such a Nice Girl! (Use Rapport instead of Contacts when dealing with peasants and craftsmen)

Refresh: 3

Desiring a more exciting and adventurous life than toiling on her parent's farm, Ping sought to study under the famed Master Quan, a Master of Storm Dragon Kung Fu. At first Quan resisted, finding the young girl too talkative, reckless, and, overall, somewhat annoying. However, repeated pleas for teaching finally wore down the old man's resistance and he accepted the young woman as a pupil. Ping proved a natural fighter, though her impulsive nature and desire for adventure often frustrated her teacher and fellow students. This attitude earned her the name "Dragon Dog", as she was well meaning, loyal, and friendly but also annoyingly persistent and lacking in culture or manners. Sent away by her master on a quest to "learn something useful before coming back and bothering me again!" after an incident involving Quan's wine supply, she is determined to prove her worth. Ping does not usually use weapons in combat outside of her hands, feet, and a simple staff. Ping is sensitive about her youthful appearance, often blaming it instead of her behavior for people not taking her seriously.



MA WEI SHENG

ASPECTS

WANDERING NOBLEMAN

"I WILL PROVE MY OWN WORTH"

SON OF THE GREAT GENERAL MA

MY FATHER'S ENEMIES

GIFT FOR BATTLE

SKILLS

Great (+4): Fight

Good (+3): Athletics, *Chi*

Fair (+2): Lore, Will, Resources

Average (+1): Deceive, Drive,
Notice, Physique

STRESS

4 Physical

3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE: STORM PHOENIX, IRON PHOENIX

STORM PHOENIX FORM

IRON PHOENIX FORM

Phoenix Beats its Wings: If you **defend** with style, you may gain an **OFF BALANCE** advantage on the target, with a free invocation instead of a boost.

Phoenix Calls to Heaven: You may use *Chi* instead of Physique to determine extra stress boxes and consequences. This is in addition to the Armor bonus from having high *Chi*.

Storm Flows Around Mountain: If a target uses Full Defense 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.

Iron Cleaves the Stone: Ignore 2 points of Armor when making an attack to inflict physical stress.

STUNTS

Guarded (+1 defense bonus against attempts to create an advantage based on detecting or exploiting personal weaknesses and vulnerabilities)

Prestigious Family (Use Resources in place of Contacts to locate family friends and allies)

Teachings of General Ma (+2 bonus to use Fight to create an advantage based on exploiting known weaknesses in opponent's fighting style or tactics)

Refresh: 1

Second son of the famed general and strategist, Ma Rong, Wei Sheng was a dutiful son and up and coming officer until it was revealed to him how his many opportunities were more due to his parentage than skill. Determined to prove his own worth, he left home and began to wander Shénzhōu, testing his skills against ever increasing dangers. He has sworn not to return home until he is "a man of my own making." A handsome youth with a strong sense of justice and some naiveté when it comes to life outside the court or army, he often finds himself embroiled in various adventures. Also, rivals and old foes of his father have discovered the young man's quest and seek to hinder or even eliminate him. We Sheng is proficient in most martial weapons, but he favors the jian, or double-edged straight sword.



SISTER CHUNTAO

ASPECTS

YOUTHFUL BODHIST NUN

MOSTLY REFORMED THIEF

DISCIPLE OF MASTER RENSHU

"LET'S NOT FIGHT ABOUT THIS"

SUN THE GOLDEN MONKEY

SKILLS

Great (+4): *Chi*

Good (+3): Athletics, Will

Fair (+2): Burglary, Fight, Lore

Average (+1): Empathy, Notice,
Physique, Stealth

STRESS

3 Physical

4 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE: GHOST MONKEY

GHOST MONKEY FORM

Ghost Haunts the Shadow: You may use *Chi* instead of Stealth to create an advantage based on moving silently or remaining unseen.

STUNTS

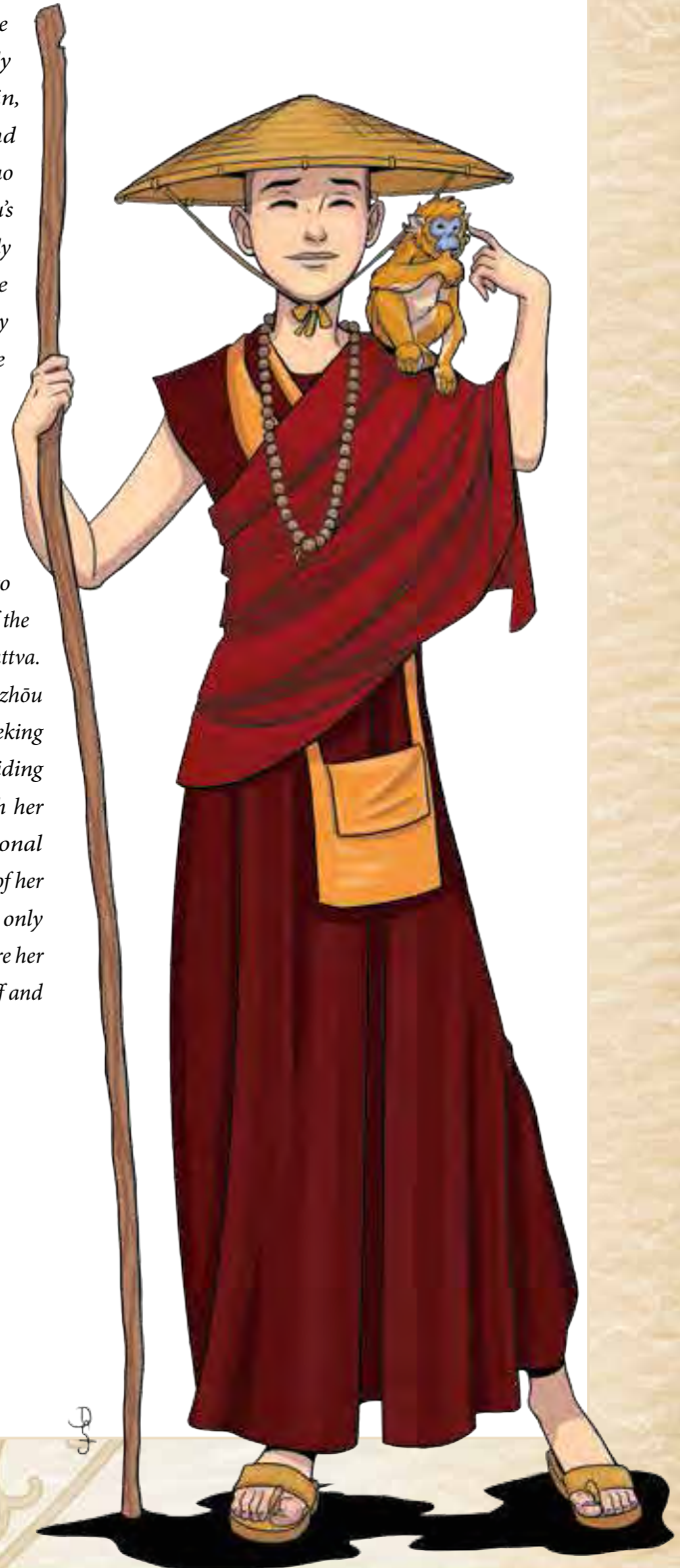
Cheerful (+2 bonus to Will when defending against mental attacks based on despair and fear)

Child of the Streets (may use Burglary in place of Rapport when dealing with urchins, beggars, and thieves)

Monkey Business (+2 bonus to pilfer small objects when Sun is in the scene; this can be attempted even if Sister Chuntao is not present)

Refresh: 3

Born into a life of crime and poverty on the streets of Bǎo Jiāng, Chuntao survived as a thief and beggar until she tried to pick the pocket of an aging Bodhist monk Master Renshu when she was ten. Instead of punishing the girl or turning her over to the authorities, the kindly old monk took her in, giving her food and shelter. At first Chuntao was suspect of Renshu's intentions, but the holy man's compassionate and simple ways quickly won her over. By the time the old monk finally passed on, Chuntao had become a nun in the Bodhist tradition both to honor her teacher and due to her true appreciation of the teachings of the Bodhisattva. She now wanders Shénzhōu as her teacher did, seeking enlightenment and aiding the less fortunate with her training and occasional judicious applications of her street thief skills. Her only constant companions are her master's well-worn staff and her pet monkey, Sun.



EXAMPLE OF PLAY

The following example brings all the elements discussed in the previous chapters together, using some of the sample characters to show how these rules work in play.

In this example, James is playing Smiling Ox, Jason is playing Detective Dishy, Lauren is playing Han “Dragon Dog” Ping, and Priscilla is playing Wolf-Eyed Yue; Jack is the GM. The four heroes are on the trail of a heretic cult—led by the fiendish Storming Snake—who kidnapped the child of a local merchant and seek to sacrifice him to their demonic masters. Tracking the cultists to their lair in an abandoned jade mining camp, our heroic quartet prepares to liberate the captives and destroy the evil sect!

The Fate Point totals at start of this scene are: GM 4, Ping 3, and everyone else 2.

Jack the GM (GM): Okay, you managed to reach the cultist’s hideout without too much trouble...

Lauren as Han “Dragon Dog” Ping (DDP): If we don’t count all those times Ox stopped for lunch.

James as Smiling Ox (SO): Hey!

Jason as Detective Dishy (DD): To be fair, you are a man who loves his lunch.

SO: Well, a warrior needs his sustenance.

Priscilla as Wolf-Eyed Yue (WEY): Hey, not to distract from conversations about Ox’s crazy appetite, but shouldn’t we be looking out for cultists and kidnapped kids? Course now they probably know we’re here.

DD: They probably knew that anyway, we are not that lucky. In fact, since I am *THE ONE GOOD COP IN A BAD TOWN*, I am sure some guardsman or fellow upstanding magistrate tipped them off and they know we are coming.

GM: I can’t argue with that. So I won’t. (Tosses DD a Fate Point)

WEY: Wait a minute—he got the Fate Point, so they know *he’s* coming, right?

GM: Correct. He’s compelling that aspect to make things harder on him, but yeah, technically it really only affects him.

WEY: Cool. I’m gonna quietly fade into the shadows before things get bad.

GM: Okay, you’ll be able to try and hide. You other two?

DDP: Nope. In fact, since I *LEAP BEFORE YOU LOOK*, I’m gonna run ahead and separate myself from everyone else!

GM: Of course you are. (tosses her a Fate Point)

DD: And thus goes every plan we ever have...

SO: Fear not, brave Detective, I will stand by you even as our fair companions indulge their fickle whims!

DDP: Hey! I heard that!

SO: Of course, I said it very clearly!

WEY: Shouldn’t have made fun of him eating so much. (to the GM) I whisper that...

GM: No problem. Ox, take a Fate Point as well for *BOASTFUL BRUTE*, provided you’re going to keep being this loud, cocky, and unsubtle, as I’ll compel that.

SO: Always! (takes a Fate Point)

GM: Okay, so Ox and Dishi are at the entrance to the old abandoned camp, Ping has run ahead, and Yue has vanished into the nearby underbrush. And Ping and Ox are shouting to each other across the camp.

DD: And thus goes every plan we ever have...

GM: As you take in the scene, you see the camp is filled with *DISCARDED MINING EQUIPMENT* that lay among the tattered tents and long abandoned remnants of cooking fires. *ROCKY WALLS AND CLIFFS* surround the camp on two sides. The main entrance to the mine is nearby, and all seems quiet at first. Ping is 1 zone away from the rest of you.

WEY: Before we go on, can I try and create an advantage to see how well hidden I am?

GM: Sure, it'll help if anyone tries to spot you. Hrm, plenty of places to hide but these guys are expecting trouble and you did come in with the shouty twins...Roll your stealth against a Good difficulty (+3).

WEY: Gotcha. This counts as a wilderness region for my *Leaves No Trace* stunt, right? It's a +2 bonus if it does.

GM: Yeah, I'd say so. Especially since you said you were hiding even before you guys entered the camp itself.

WEY: Here goes (rolls). Wow! +4! That's my Good Stealth (+3), my stunt bonus (+2), and that awesome roll (+4), so, +9! That succeeds with style, right?

GM: Easily. Yue has basically become one with the shadows. That's an advantage with two free invocations. What are you going to call it?

WEY: I like *BECOME ONE WITH THE SHADOWS*; that work?

GM: Of course. You can invoke those when hiding, striking from ambush, and that sort of thing. Yue is nowhere to be seen when a slow murmuring sound begins to echo off the rock walls. It rises and grows, pitching up and transforming into the familiar sound of laughter.

DDP: Happy, fun laughter?

GM: More like evil, "you heroic fools have walked into my trap" laughter.

DDP: Ah, so what happens next?

GM: As you look on and try to locate the source of the laughter, figures begin to appear from behind half-ruined tents, from the shadows of the cliffs above, and from the entrance to the mine. Soon, you're facing a small army of armed men and women, all bearing the same brand as that assassin who tried to poison you at the inn a few days ago.

SO: Foul cultists! I owe them for ruining my meal!

DD: And thus goes every plan we ever have.

GM: The cultists move in unison as they fill the area. A group of them moves between Ping and the others, cutting her off. We'll treat where Ping is and where everyone else is as two different zones. The cliffs and rock walls are a third zone. None of these can currently be moved through without needing to overcome an obstacle. Above you all, on the cliff, is the source of the laughter. You see a tall man in a bronze mask depicting some demon or dark god. He holds the missing child in his hands.

DD: I will handle this. Storming Snake, I presume?

GM: The cult leader stops laughing, the echoes of it still ringing as he speaks. "Ah, the esteemed Detective Dishi. I was told you would be coming."

DD shoots everyone a "see, told you!" glance

- DD:** We cannot have you kidnapping a child, Snake. It sets a bad precedent. Now, if you want to surrender and tell your people to lower their weapons, I promise you a fair trial.
- GM:** (evil laugh as Storming Snake) You walk into our lair with only two companions against my loyal legion and demand my surrender? Such pride! You will make a glorious sacrifice to our dark lord!
- DD:** Yes, I am going to have to pass on that. I am kicking a stone up into the air with my foot and launching it at him with a spin kick.
- DDP:** But...won't he drop the kid?
- DD:** ...
- GM:** Well, too late now. We're into the scene! Everyone make Notice rolls to determine turn order unless you have some stunt or technique that lets you do otherwise. And if you're going to make a roll to create a **CHI ARMOR** advantage, now's the time—at Fair (+2) difficulty because of Storming Snake's Jianghu Rank. I'll be rolling turn order for Storming Snake and his minions. I've got... a 3 for him and a 2 for the cultists. Not bad for the cultists, but pretty terrible for Snake; apparently you caught him monologuing.
- DDP:** Beats my 1. Got **CHI ARMOR** with 1 invocation.
- SO:** I've got a 1, too. And **CHI ARMOR** with 1 invocation as well.
- DD:** 5, looks like I am going first. No **CHI ARMOR** for me, though.... Ouch.
- WEY:** Not so fast, copper. 6. And **CHI ARMOR** up with 1 invocation. Let's do this.
- GM:** Okay, Yue's first.
- WEY:** I'm going to try and move unseen to get close to this guy. I'm rolling Stealth and does my stunt still work?
- GM:** How are you moving?
- WEY:** Figure I'll scale the rock walls and go around and above. In fact, I'll invoke that **ROCK WALLS AND CLIFFS** aspect with a Fate Point and use one of **BECOME ONE WITH THE SHADOWS**'s invokes. That will give me a +2 bonus for each.
- GM:** Yeah, I'll allow the stunt bonus, so that's Stealth with a +6 bonus for an overcome action with a difficulty based on having to cover the rough ground, the cult leader's Notice, and some other factors for a +4 total. If you succeed you can move across the 2 zones intervening and get within striking distance of him. Normally you'd only be moving one zone, but having Great Athletics and being Jianghu Rank 1 means you can move additional zones, so the distance is no problem. Roll 'em.
- WEY:** Cool. (rolls) So...+1, for +10 total.
- GM:** Yeah...you're a ghost. You also get a boost to your next action since you succeeded with style. But first...Dishi.
- DD:** I'm going to try and create an **ANALYZE STYLE** advantage on my attack, using Investigate. I do not think I am gonna hurt this guy by kicking a stone at him, but I want to get the measure of his style and skill.
- GM:** Fair enough, you'll be rolling against his Deceive.
- DD:** (rolls) Got a +1, so...+5 total.
- GM:** (rolls) +2, and his Deceive is Great, so +6. You create the advantage, but he'll get a free invocation unless you want to succeed with a cost.
- DD:** No, that is fine. But he will not gain the invocation since my **Just the Facts** stunt prevents me from granting those on lost Investigation attempts to create an advantage.

- GM:** Well played! Storming Snake laughs as he catches the stone sailing towards him. You can determine nothing of note from his reaction. Then the cult leader clenches his fist and the stone crumbles to dust. He opens his hand and lets the dust scatter, then makes a motion that clearly signals his men to attack. And...bad guys' turn! We've got three mobs of ten cultists each, since they knew you were coming, each one attacking everyone but Yue. Snake will use his action to create an advantage for his mobs by inspiring them to tear you guys to pieces. Hrm...I figure whoever has the highest Provoke will defend against that, as you'll be giving the bad guys pause.
- DD:** Normally that would be Ox, but I have the **Burden of Proof** stunt that lets me use Investigation in place of Provoke against those I have damning evidence on.
- GM:** Yeah, I think having him dangle his kidnap victim and brag to you about how his minions are going to murder you will be pretty damning if this ever gets to court. (rolls) He has a +2 but he's got a stunt that applies, so +4 total.
- DD:** (rolls) +1 for +5 total. He can create his **OVERWHELMING ODDS** advantage or whatever, but I get the free invocation.
- GM:** Sure do, and we'll keep that name since you won. Okay, the mobs of cultists move in, trying to do their master's bidding. Let's start with Ping. The cultists close in and stab at you with their knives, cleaving blades, and spears. These guys only have Fair (+2) Fight and they can't use Teamwork because your Jianghu Rank is greater. However, since you compelled **LEAP BEFORE YOU LOOK** and got yourself surrounded, I'm giving them a +2 bonus for this attack as well. (rolls) +2 on the roll, so you're looking at a +6 total on their attack roll.
- DDP:** Yowsa. Need to take these guys down. Okay, I'm going to block and parry their blows, moving to get one weapon in the way of the other, as I stand in the middle of their furious attack and still manage to dominate the area with my superior skill. These guys are below me in rank, right?
- GM:** Jianghu Rank? Oh yeah, they're all 0 and you're a 1; you're better.
- DDP:** So that gives me a free invocation to use against them, right?
- GM:** Well, you get one free invocation per scene when using your Kung Fu against someone of a lower Jianghu rank. You can use it now if you like, but that's your only freebie for the scene. You can wait until after you roll, though.
- DDP:** Sure, though it sounds like a good time since I'm betting this Snake guy is at least my rank or higher. That's my Great Fight (+4) and (rolls) -2; +2 total. Well, poo...Okay yeah, time to use that invocation; that will bring it to +4. So they beat me by 2.
- GM:** And they have a Weapon Rating of +1 if they hit, so that's actually 3 shifts to you.
- DDP:** Yeah, gonna use that Chi Armor I got, too. So, 2 Armor and bring it down to 1 stress box, right?
- GM:** Yep. What happens?
- DDP:** Ugh, I get shoved around a bit and take a small cut right under my eye from some maniac's weapon, but I'm mostly okay (checks off 1 physical stress box and notes she's spent her free **CHI ARMOR** invocation).
- GM:** Okay, the mob attacking Ox is next. Same stats, and I'm giving them another +2 because you just barreled in there, too. (rolls) They get a +4 result total.

- SO:** I'll defend with Fight, swinging my Demon Hammer. (laughs) Pathetic villains, you cannot hope to stand against the might of the great Smiling Ox! I've got Good Fight (+3), and rolled a +2! So, +5 and (tosses in a Fate Point) I'll invoke *EVERYTHING IS A NAIL* since I'm using my hammer and brute force to keep them back. That's success with style which, because of my **Flesh Breaks on Iron** Technique, lets me do a 2 shift hit instead of a boost when I defend with Style, as the whirling hammer catches some of these fools! That works, right?
- GM:** Yes; though it kinda sounds like an attack, it's actually just a cool way to describe the Technique working with your defense. The cultists charge in, but your swinging hammer catches the first group of attackers, dropping them and driving the rest back (applies 2 stress to the mob). They have an Armor Rating of 1 due to their fanatic furor, but that still takes one out. The last mob tries to attack Dishu. (rolls) They've got a +2 with their Fight and... (rolls and sees -1 come up) that's a whopping +1 on their attack.
- DD:** Clearly, they are distracted by my kicking a rock at their illustrious leader's head. I have **Stone Resists the Blow**, a Technique that gives me 2 Armor against attacks I see coming, just in case. (rolls and sighs) -4 plus my Fair Fight (+2) is -2. Apparently I was distracted, as well, and no *CHI ARMOR* for me.
- GM:** Ouch. They hit for 3 shifts plus their Weapon Rating of 1. That's 4 shifts against your Armor Rating of 2, or 2, ultimately. It's also a success with style, so they'll get a boost next time. They close in on you, pressing the attack and, through sheer numbers, manage to push you back and score a hit. You're out of position, surrounded, and have seen better days.
- DD:** I stumble backwards and catch my breath, looking for a moment at the bloody gash in my robe (checks off his 2 physical stress box).
- GM:** On the plus side, Ox and Ping get to go.
- SO:** Excellent. I'm pressing my attack. (laughs) If you fools cannot stand up to the great Smiling Ox when he is evading your pathetic blows, how can you hope to stand against his glorious attacks?
- GM:** Please tell me you're invoking *BOASTFUL BRUTE* on that.
- SO:** We'll see how it goes, but that's the plan. So, a Fight attack on the mob.
- GM:** Yep. And they'll defend with their Fight for a +2 as they try to outmaneuver you and block your attack with their weapons.
- SO:** Ah, makes sense. Okay, so Good Fight for +3, plus (rolls) +3. Let's throw in my free invocation for being a greater Jianghu Rank, and I'll invoke both my *BOASTFUL BRUTE* and *MASTER OF THE DEMON HAMMER* aspects (throws in 2 Fate Points). That's +10 total. Oh, and my **Iron Cleaves the Stone Technique** ignores up to 2 Armor Rating, and I get a Weapon Rating of +2 when attacking with my Demon Hammer.
- GM:** Ouch. They'll get a (rolls) +3 total. That's 7 shifts plus another 2 for the hammer and...okay, yeah, you'll take down the whole mob and succeed with style for a boost later. Tell us how you do it.
- SO:** Easy—I advance menacingly, swinging my hammer overhead, and laugh as I bring it around in a wide arc that catches half of them in one blow. Then on the backswing I take most of the rest, who foolishly thought they'd escape my might! I actually miss one lone cultist with the hammer, but his relief is short-lived as I kick him squarely in the gut and he drops!
- GM:** Cool. Ping?
- DDP:** Yeah, forget this. Ox and Dishu can handle these guys. I'm going after the boss.

- GM:** So you're trying to move past the mob and close on the cult leader? That'll be an overcome against the mob and (spending a Fate point) the **ROCK WALLS AND CLIFFS** scene aspect. You're looking at an Epic (+4) Difficulty there.
- DDP:** No problem. I have Good Athletics and (rolls) and a 0, so +3. But hey! I'm also **MASTER QUAN'S BEST STUDENT!** I'll invoke that. And clearly I'm doing that whole **LEAP BEFORE YOU LOOK** thing again (spends 2 Fate points to invoke these aspects). That's +7. Let's say I do this with style, leaping over the cultists, then spring-boarding off the head of one and running straight up the rock wall to where the big bad guy is!
- GM:** Nicely done, you'll also get a +2 boost to your next action.
- DDP:** Yeah I will! Gonna kick this evil cult dude in the face... wait, let me say that in character. Okay, Evil masked guy, I'm gonna kick your evil in the face!
- GM:** Right. But first, we're on to the next turn. Yue?
- WEY:** All ready to go! I'm going to attack the leader from the shadows!
- GM:** What about the kid?
- WEY:** Oh, yeah... well, I'm sure Ping can catch him if he gets dropped. If not... it'll toughen him up.
- DD:** That is our Yue...
- WEY:** Let's start with my Good Fight and (rolls) a +3 on the dice. So, +6. Yeah, I'm dropping my other **BECOME ONE WITH THE SHADOWS** invocation on this. And I'm invoking my **WILD WOMAN OF JIANGZHŌU** aspect (spending a Fate Point) and using that bonus from my last roll for +6 more. So, +12 total. I come out of the shadows off the rocks with my two blades out, launching myself at this masked joker with everything I've got. And screaming, I'm sure I'm screaming...
- GM:** Yeah, damn. He's one Jianghu Rank above you, so he can use a free invocation on you if he wants but you've still got the drop on him.
- WEY:** Can he even defend, really? I mean, I was all sneaky.
- GM:** That's what your **BECOME ONE WITH THE SHADOWS** invocation represents, but he still might see it coming, being a Kung Fu master and all. Roll the dice and let's see how it comes out.
- WEY:** Okay; still, +12 is pretty great.
- GM:** Indeed. He's defending with his Superb (+5) Fighting as he seeks to use his mastery of Lightning Serpent Kung Fu to move with amazing speed and deliver a counterblow that will push your attack off target. (rolls) Well, that's a -2, so he's at +3. But I'm using that free invocation and (spends a Fate Point) I'm also invoking his **VICTORY AT ALL COSTS** aspect, so he's got +7. He spends an invoke he's got from his **CHI ARMOR**, so he's got 2 Armor Rating against this attack as well. You do 3 shifts.
- WEY:** I still succeed with style though, right?
- GM:** Totally, though you would need to reduce this hit by 1 shift to get that, so he'd take two instead of three. You want to?
- WEY:** Yeah, let's do that. Man, I was hoping for more!
- GM:** Hey, you just went toe-to-toe with a ruthless killer Kung Fu master and hurt him (checks off Storming Snake's 2 Physical Stress box). Now it's his turn. Oh, and he drops the kid, so the merchant's child is cast off into the air and will soon fall to his death on the rocks below. (throws in a Fate Point) That's a new obstacle to overcome in the scene. Anyway, his attack...
- WEY:** Wait, what? Doesn't Dishu go next?
- GM:** Normally yeah, but (spends another Fate Point), Snake has the Secret Technique for **Lightning Serpent**, which lets him make an attack immediately if he spends a Fate Point.
- WEY:** Well...crap.

- GM:** He's got Superb (+5) Fighting. His Secret Technique gives him an additional +1 bonus and lets him ignore 2 Armor Rating, as well. (rolls) +2 and (throws in a Fate Point) I'll invoke his *LIGHTNING SERPENT FORM* as he moves with amazing fluidity and speed to deliver a flurry of blindingly fast three-fingered strikes aimed at your heart. So, +8 on the roll and +2 from the *FORM* for +10 total.
- WEY:** Ouch, I'll defend with Athletics and use that boost. So, +6. This is gonna hurt. (rolls) And 0 for me. That blows. He beats me by 4 shifts, and you said he can ignore 2 Armor, so no point using *CHI ARMOR* now. Ouch. I need consequences and stress boxes to total that?
- GM:** Yep, and you can only tick off one stress box per attack.
- WEY:** Ugh. I'll hit my 2 Physical Stress box and then take a 2 point consequence—that's a mild one?
- GM:** Yeah. *BRUISED RIBS* sound good?
- WEY:** No! But yeah, that makes sense (marks her mild consequence). I twist out of the way of him trying to Kung Fu me in the heart, but he catches me in the side. Wait, didn't he succeed with style and get one of those boost things?
- GM:** He could, but he would have had to do 1 less shift and he decided not to. So no boost for him next time. But right now, it's Dishi's turn.
- DD:** All right, I have these crazies to deal with and... wait, Ping, are you going to catch that kid?
- DDP:** What? Oh, well I was gonna kick this guy in the face but I guess I could do that.
- GM:** Wait, aren't you also *MASTER QUAN'S WORST STUDENT* (slides a Fate Point into the middle of table)?
- DDP:** ...Damn, I really kinda am. (takes the Fate Point) Sorry, guys.
- WEY:** Wait, what just happened?
- DD:** Our beloved Ping was so intent on rushing to "kick the bad guy in the face," as she puts it, that she has forgotten about the child for the moment, who is still going to go splat. Or in other words, Jack just compelled her aspect and now someone else is going to have to deal with saving the kid—because he's a bastard.
- GM:** (smiles) Basically, yes.
- DDP:** At least I got a Fate Point to use for righteous face-kicking!
- DD:** (sighs) How long until the kid hits the ground?
- GM:** The turn after this one, when the bad guys go.
- DD:** Therefore I have 1 turn to deal with these cultists, then another to grab the kid right before he hits the ground. Ah well, if Ox can clean up like he did last time...
- SO:** Actually, I'm currently out of Fate Points.
- DD:** And so goes every plan we ever have...

Play continues from here. Can Ping and Yue together defeat a deadly Master of Kung Fu? Can Dishi save the child? Will Ox get revenge for his spoiled dinner? Only time will tell...





CHAPTER SEVEN

GAMEMASTERING TIANXIA

RESISTING ARREST

“I think it goes without saying you are all under arrest,” Detective Dishu said as the pirates of the Blue Carp Brotherhood thrust him into the clearing. His hands were bound—and remarkably well—he noted.

“Ah, the meddling detective. Always the joker,” boomed a voice from the shadows, as a massive man stepped into view. He towered over his subordinates, a behemoth of muscle covered in silks, gold, and fat. One eye was noticeably malformed and it stared at Dishu as he moved closer.

Cheng nodded to his men, and Dishu felt something hard hit him behind his knees, forcing him to the ground. His superior balance was all that kept him from planting his face into the stony ground of the forest clearing, but it still hurt.

“Fish-Eye Cheng, leader of the Blue Carp Brotherhood. Wanted for murder, piracy, torturing innocents in various unspeakable manners, and thinking a blue fish

would be a scary symbol for your pirate gang...you are definitely under arrest. Now if you would all just surrender and put down your weapons, I promise to go easy on you.” Dishu shifted his hands and tried to work the knots in the rope holding them. No good, but then that made sense. Damned sailors.

Fish-Eye Cheng stared at Dishu with his uneven gaze and, after what seemed like a short eternity, he burst out laughing. His men joined in. After a somewhat longer eternity, the laughing died down. Cheng, still chuckling softly to himself, drew his weapon. It was a massive saber with nine brass rings set along its blunt edge. The rings jingled as the king of the river pirates hefted it.

“Hold him,” Cheng said, and two burly pirates grabbed Dishu as Cheng brought up his weapon and took aim at the young magistrate’s neck.

Dishu sighed, then spoke, “Now would be a good time.”

Cheng chuckled, “Better be, it’s all you’ve got left...”

“Oh, I was not talking to you, oaf,” Dishu replied as he looked over the pirate’s massive shoulders, “I was talking to her.”

Before Cheng could turn to follow Dishu’s gaze, a scream split the air as a fur-clad, spear-wielding warrior woman burst from the forest, hurling herself at the pirate king. Dishu used the distraction to stomp the knee of one of the men holding him. There was a sickening crunch and, as the pirate dropped, Dishu twisted away from the other’s grip and landed three lightning-fast kicks to the other. In the second this took, Yue had crossed the clearing, cut down three of the pirates foolish enough to get in her way, and now soared through the air towards the still stunned pirate leader.

“Fish-Eyed Cheng, meet Wolf-Eyed Yue,” Dishu remarked. “You really should have let me arrest you....”

RUNNING TIANXIA

Tianxia games focus on action, intrigue, romance, and personal struggles against a backdrop of a vast and mysterious world.

GMs seeking to emulate the tone and feel of *wuxia* or Kung Fu media will want to focus on these elements in their games. This section will discuss some tricks and tactics that will help GMs achieve this goal.

GETTING STARTED AND MOVING FORWARD

Action is king in *Tianxia*. When in doubt, fight or have someone show up threatening a fight. Have a daring chase or obstacle pop up to be overcome. Drop a dead messenger or panicked courier into your PCs' lap with a vital message and have bad guys show up looking for them. This lets your cast of Kung Fu warriors and scholars show off their superior Kung Fu and either punish the wicked through the use of righteous force or exert their superior power on the weak, depending on their character. It also gets them engaged right away.

However, it is not always about fights; it is also about things that make people want to fight even harder. Love, lust, and romance can motivate beggars and kings alike to both great and terrible achievements. Money can make strong men weak and give weak men the power to send an army against a powerful opponent. Intrigue is common, as is the search for spiritual enlightenment. Loyalty in particular is a powerful motivator: to your comrades, school, master, family, or nation. Many times these motivations will clash with each other and exploring those conflicts is at the heart of many great stories in the genre. Often these motivations will be rather obvious from the start, but usually there is even more lurking under the surface for PCs to discover and react to.

CORE GENRE ELEMENTS IN PLAY

Tianxia, and the media that inspire it, operates on some definite genre conventions. Not every story, plot, or adventure hits all of these perfectly, but they are common themes and guideposts. Using these elements and keeping them in mind while running *Tianxia* will keep things feeling like a *wuxia* or Kung Fu action tale.

ELEMENT ONE: ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE, GOOD OR BAD

Wuxia and Kung Fu stories are pretty much never about how one person cannot change anything and is doomed to live in a world beyond his control. The main characters are major personalities with a lot of power, personal or political. Even if not the strongest, richest, or most powerful people around, they are still important and have potential to be even more so. *Tianxia* games should be the same.

Characters desiring major changes in the setting or their lives will have to work very hard, but it is never impossible. Of course, change is not always good and even well meaning goals can have unintended negative consequences or require tough choices. A PC might want to overthrow an evil tyrant to help the people, but what will he replace this villain with? Does he know? Does he care? What will he sacrifice to make these changes? His honor? His friends? His very life? A PC might desire ultimate Kung Fu power, but is he willing to reject his loved ones or embrace a corrupt and evil path to achieve it?

The path to glory is not always virtuous, and heroism is often a tough road. However, if willing to sacrifice or struggle a single character can do incredible things. A PC martial artist might need to leave their family, enduring rigorous or even brutal training, and sacrifice various material needs but they can learn the

Kung Fu secrets needed to avenge their murdered master. A heroic bandit PC might lose many followers, see his allies imprisoned or killed, and have a king's ransom on his head, but he can overthrow the corrupt official who is abusing the populace and poisoning the true spirit of Shénzhōu.

GMs should throw abundant obstacles in the PCs way as they push to achieve their goals to reflect these genre conventions, but keep it fair and always provide them with a chance to eventually succeed. It is also okay to require the PCs to buy this success with sacrifice and struggle. In fact, it is very genre appropriate. Also, these guidelines only really apply for big goals and important events. By contrast, protagonists in *wuxia* and Kung Fu stories can and should be allowed to show off their prowess by defeating mobs of lesser foes and winning numerous smaller victories. Basically saving the village from bandits is easy, wiping out banditry in the region is harder.

ELEMENT TWO: HEROIC ISN'T ALWAYS GOOD

Protagonists in *wuxia* and Kung Fu dramas are not always champions of justice and right; they can also be selfish, vengeful, and violent. Often these are character flaws to overcome, though they can be ever-present traits characters never move past yet still manage to become legends. Aspects are a great way to represent these personality traits and flaws. A **VENGEFUL KUNG FU FIGHTER** obsessed with gaining enough power to destroy the corrupt warlord who killed his family might lie, cheat, steal, and basically **DO WHATEVER IT TAKES** to reach his goals. A bandit might be a **CHAMPION OF THE DOWNTRODDEN**, but he might cut through guards and magistrates like a scythe because he is **RUTHLESS TOWARDS TOOLS OF CORRUPTION**. This does not need to be what every character in a *Tianxia* game is like, but if they are? That is okay. GMs should not discourage this behavior if that is the sort of characters the players want their PCs to be. It will result in a different tone for the game, it might even bring PCs into conflict with each other, but the results of such interactions can make for very interesting games.

Also, such characters make great NPC foils and antagonists for more righteous PCs. **TRAITOROUS IMPERIAL OFFICER** who is still **LOYAL TO HIS FAMILY** and **LOVES HIS WIFE DEEPLY** fits into the genre just as well as a **MURDEROUS HONORLESS KILLER**. In fact, GMs will probably want a mix of both types of characters, as a bit of moral ambiguity goes a long way. Do not hit the PCs with only anti-heroes and characters that are great heroes from a slightly different point of view; throw in the cannibal Kung Fu cultists and evil slavers, too.

ELEMENT THREE: THE BEST REWARDS DO NOT ALWAYS GLITTER

While some protagonists and major antagonists in *wuxia* and Kung Fu stories are after wealth and fame, many seek less obvious and common riches. Respect, rare secrets of Kung Fu, true love, and revenge are more commonly desired than money. Ambitious characters might desire to rule a great clan, organization, or even a nation. Rarely is “I want to be rich just because that'd be awesome” a character's prime motivator. This sets the main characters in the genre apart from the supporting cast and extras, who often just want prosperity and the peace and comfort it brings.

GMs and players seeking to emulate this genre convention should focus less on material gain and wealth and more on other gains in their games. This is not to say you might not have a greedy character that desires great wealth, but often this is a flaw to overcome rather than a goal to be realized. Many wandering swordsmen and martial artists are quite poor and rarely seek great fortune. This does not mean every PC in *Tianxia* should ignore the Resources Skill; they should just endeavor to do really cool things with it.

Material gains featured in the genre are often unique or exist to serve a very specific goal. A character might want enough gold to raise an army to oppose the government or desire the exact jewel stolen from his family generations ago. Unguided desire for material things is seen as a weakness, but a desire for particularly important material things can be a virtue. Even bandits and thieves often have lofty uses for the fortunes they desire in mind.

ELEMENT FOUR: EQUIPMENT IS IMPORTANT

Despite their general lack of mechanical benefit in *Tianxia*, arms, armor, and other equipment are often important. They tell a lot about the character using them. A character favoring poison darts and serrated blades probably enjoys inflicting pain and crippling injuries on his foes. A character that dresses humbly and carries only an unadorned sword might be seeking spiritual growth through rejecting materialism. You can even define a character by what equipment he refuses to use; a swordsman seeking to internalize the nature of the sword to better develop his skills might refuse to carry his own blade, relying on wooden training weapons or taking weapons from

his foes when needed. Really important pieces of equipment are usually an aspect of the character. A young noble from an exiled clan carrying *MY GREAT GRANDFATHER'S BROKEN SWORD* and invoke it when family history is relevant to play.

The same is true of other set pieces like locations and terrain. High mountains hide secret temples and strange old hermits. Humble villages show the struggle of the underclasses and the purity of their simple existence. Evil sect strongholds emanate corruption and decadent ambitions. There are few things in *Tianxia* that are just, “this place we are hanging out between fights.” If PCs do find themselves somewhere like that? It is time for something interesting and significant to happen.

LEGENDARY WEAPONS AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

While most weapons and equipment in *Tianxia* do not really have a mechanical effect, sometimes weapons or other equipment is so unique, powerful, or special it deserves to be represented as something other than flavor and pieces. There are many ways to represent such special items, and the best approach depends largely on what the character possessing it expect it to help with.

Many special weapons and armor can simply be taken as aspects. A character wearing the fabled *JADE ARMOR OF GLORIOUS TENG* might invoke that aspect on a Defend roll to reflect how their special armor helps protect them from harm. They might also use it to impress those aware of the item's history, as only an

exceptional warrior or important personage would normally wear such a thing. They can also use it as a compel when the armor gets in the way or is not readily available, like if the character is trying to hide in a crowd or gets attacked while in the bath.

Special items can also be represented by stunts, appropriate for really potent weapons or armor that usually helps its user. For example, a character using a special bow with exquisite craftsmanship might have the **Five Heavens Bow** stunt, which gives him a +1 bonus to Shoot attacks made with it and can shoot 1 zone farther than other bows. Since item-based stunts can be temporarily taken away by depriving the character of their item, they can be more potent than a normal stunt. However, do not

go overboard since, as part of the character, the weapon can never truly be permanently removed; if it is, it should be replaced with some similar item or another stunt.

Really special items, the kind that can generate whole campaigns based around their acquisition and mastery, can be built as potent extras or even characters themselves. A famed weapon such as Guan Yu's Blue Dragon from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* might be an extra providing aspects, skill bonuses, and stunts to reflect its power and glorious history. Buying these items at character creation or permanently acquiring them during a game will usually cost at least several Refresh or stunts with the exact cost depending on the item's power.

After watching *Red Cliff* and seeing Guan Yu use his halberd Blue Dragon to send dozens of troops flying with a single swing, Nathan decides he wants something similar for his new character. Working with the GM, he decides he wants Emerald Dragon, his character's long-bladed spear, to do +3 Weapon Rating, provide a +1 attack bonus to all Fight rolls using the weapon with a +2 bonus against mobs, and desires the spear to be famed and feared throughout the land. Jack, the GM, looks at these abilities and assigns Nathan a cost of 2 Refresh or 2 of his free stunt picks for the weapon (1 for the Weapon Rating, another for the other bonuses) and tells Nathan he will need to take an aspect involving the spear. Nathan takes the **MASTER OF EMERALD DRAGON** as an aspect and pays 1 Refresh and 1 of his starting stunts and now has his fearsome weapon.

A sword holding the spirit of a powerful demon might be a character all by itself and operates as a companion to the wielder, using its potent abilities alongside its master's own. Such items often

have their own destinies and come with a bunch of interesting problems that any who acquire them get mixed up in. This tends to make them deceptively cheap or even free to acquire, but their wielders often find they will eventually pay some steep cost to possess such an item.

The PCs in Jack's *Tianxia* game find a saber buried beneath a statue of the first emperor of Shénzhōu during their adventures. The weapon is the legendary Nine Devil Saber, a weapon possessing both great power but also a corrupt and evil aura that can infect its wielder. The Nine Devil Saber is treated as its own character, with Fight, *Chi*, Will, and Deceit skills independent of its wielder. It also has a +2 Weapon Rating for all Fight attacks using the saber. The weapon's wielder can use the weapon's skill in place of its own or treat their skill as one higher if it is the same or greater than Nine Devil Saber, but they must pay 1 Fate Point for every scene they do so. Also, at the end of every scene this occurs or every week the sword is kept by its wielder, the sword makes an attack using

its *Chi* against the wielder's Will or *Chi*, whichever is lower. Any consequences taken by the wielder from this attack involve corrupting or weakening the wielder as the weapon exerts its foul influence. If a character is ever taken out by such an attack he is not killed, but is taken over by Nine Devil Saber and engages in terrible acts of murder and mayhem. Also, the wielder gets a free **PATRON OF NINE DEVILS** aspect that can be invoked to channel the saber's power and reputation, but also means the wielder is a target of the dark forces lusting for a weapon of such power. Jack tells the PCs they can have the powerful weapon for the cost of the Significant Milestone created by discovering it, but whoever takes this deal may find it is not the bargain it seems.

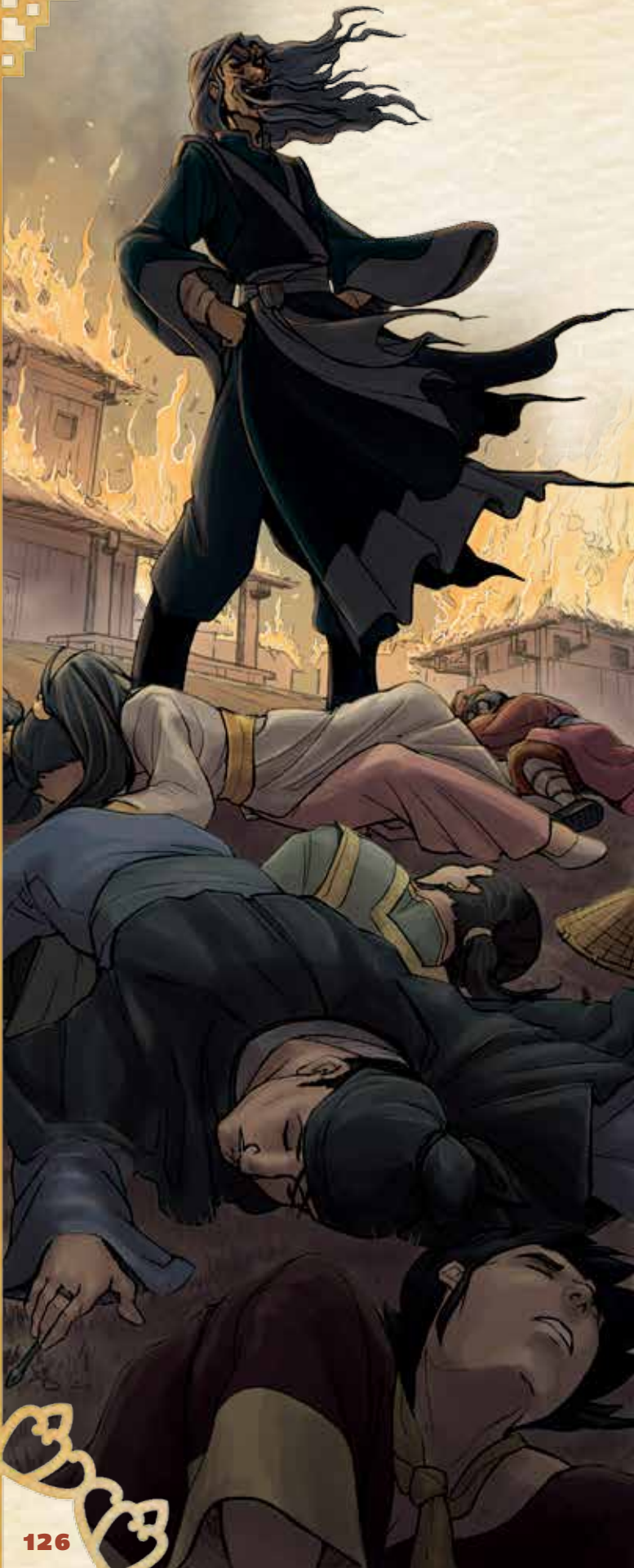
Special items and equipment in *Tianxia* are just that, special. They should not just be a collection of bonuses and special abilities; they should have their own history, destiny, and can make their mark on a campaign in positive and negative ways depending on their exact nature.

ELEMENT FIVE: IT'S OKAY TO LOSE, AND SOMETIMES YOU WILL

Watch more than a couple of *wuxia* or Kung Fu movies or TV shows and a pattern will emerge. Protagonists often tend to lose, and lose significantly, right up to the point they ultimately win. This is sometimes trickier to pull off in a game as players often hate to lose and some even have bad experiences with past GMs throwing threats at them they cannot handle to just watch them fail and die. However, if you can pull this genre convention off in your games it leads to some really great experiences.

The biggest factor in setting up such a scenario is to not worry about outclassing the PCs with an important antagonist at first, but to give them an out or escape so they can retreat, regroup, and change their tactics. Also, such powerful foes need to have some sort of weakness that can be learned or exploited or the game needs to include opportunities for the PCs to increase their own abilities to help them defeat their foes. The PCs can then return to oppose their foes and defeat them in a climatic final battle.

Note this idea goes both ways. GMs should realize powerful and important antagonist NPCs can and likely will lose, often to the PCs. That is totally okay. That is what they are there for. This might not happen when you think, either. An evil Kung Fu killer you thought would be the final boss of a campaign arc might get cut down by a creative and lucky PC. That is totally fine. Let it happen. Sure, it will change the GM's plans but there are tons of options: maybe it was the real villain's evil double, maybe the true threat has yet to be revealed, maybe the villain barely survived his fate and will return later with nasty scars and a vengeful attitude, or maybe this adventure simply reached its dramatic end early. Basically, do not be afraid to let the PCs win, but do not be afraid to make them work for it either.



THE BRONZE RULE AND TIANXIA

One of FATE CORE's more popular and innovative ideas is what is called the Bronze Rule (also known as the Fate Fractal): nearly anything in the game can be treated as a character mechanically.

A burning building can have stress, skills, stunts, and consequences to reflect its desire to burn uncontrolled and consume all within it. A deadly poison can be treated as a character that attacks those who ingest it and is flushed from the system when stressed out of the scene. A burning building can be modeled as a character seeking to trap innocents within and harm those who try to put out the fire. It is a great option that lets GMs give color and drama to various challenges many RPGs usually make the purview of physical combat. *Tianxia* embraces the Bronze Rule, and this section will discuss some interesting and genre appropriate ways to implement it, first with a detailed example of using it in play and then with various other examples of appropriate uses of the concept.

As a general guidelines, the Bronze Rule is at its best when the concept is not only something the character will act to influence but when it has serious ability to influence the character as well. This influence usually takes the form of stress and consequences and can represent anything from moral crisis to confusion to physical injury. If this sort of interaction is unlikely, it is often faster and easier to simply run such events and situations as skill tests and challenges.

The PCs in Matt's game are traveling to a small village in the southeast of Jiāngzhōu next game. Matt knows the village is currently suffering under a mysterious and deadly plague spread by a corrupt cult. Realizing one of the PCs is a doctor, he creates the plague as a character using the Bronze Rule since he envisions the struggle against the disease and the PC's probable attempt to cure it. The disease will perform

actions based on infecting others and even giving those attempting to cure it serious moral crises if they fail or too many die from the plague before it is cured.

Matt reasons that even if there was not an evil cult responsible it would still be an interesting and dynamic to portray the disease in this way so he builds it using the Bronze Rule. If no one was a doctor or he expected the PCs to mostly ignore and avoid the infected region, there would have been no reason to go this route.

It is probable the concepts, events, and ideas treated as characters will develop as an organic part of ongoing play. A PC group filled with scholars and detectives might merit treating most mysteries, riddles, and philosophical quandaries as individual characters for the purposes of mechanics and play. By contrast, a group based around a bunch of bandits and thieves might address the same content with some skill tests or contests on occasion, but treat villages and wealthy merchant guilds as characters to rob and plunder.

The following section will give examples on various uses of the Bronze Rule in *Tianxia* as well as examples of different situations, objects, and phenomena presented as characters. When creating such characters, GMs do not need to worry about the usual character creation guidelines and skill pyramid: just provide statistics fitting the concept and appropriately challenge the PCs.

MYSTERIES

Most people love a good mystery and the really great ones even take on a life of their own. For such mysteries, the Bronze Rule is very useful. A brutal crime, criminal conspiracy, or strange unexplainable quandary can be modeled as a character whose goal is to protect its secrets and defeat any who seek to uncover them.

Mysteries do not need the wide number of skills regular characters do. In fact, most mysteries can get pretty far with three special skills in addition to aspects and the occasional stunt. These skills are Secrets, Lies, and Shock. Secrets represents how deep, unfathomable, and difficult to comprehend the mystery. Lies represents whatever deceptions or missing evidence makes clues and facts surrounding the mystery hard to uncover; it is usually used to defend against attempts to uncover the mystery. Shock is all about the startling revelations and brutal realities of a mystery that discourage investigation; it is usually used to attack characters seeking to uncover it. Stunts often let the mystery use these skills in particular or unique ways.

Stress, consequences, and concessions for mysteries are not handled quite the same as other characters. Mysteries do not have physical stress at all and are usually immune to such attacks; you

cannot punch out a mystery. Consequences represent revelations about the mystery that make it easier to solve, but alone do not reveal everything going on. Similarly concessions reveal major clues and pieces of evidence, but the overall mystery is still unsolved in any scene where it concedes. Of course if a mystery concedes enough times, the characters attempting to solve it might figure it out based on the clues revealed, but that is totally fine.

Mysteries get stress boxes and concessions based on their Secrets skill. Average to Fair grants 3 stress boxes, Good or Great 4 stress boxes, and Superb or higher grants an additional mild consequence.

Detective Dishi is investigating the murder of a merchant. The man was only modestly wealthy and had no known enemies, but Dishi suspects the merchant's death is somehow connected to some larger conspiracy or crime due to fact the man's shop was ransacked and he was stabbed with an ornate dagger of unknown design. The GM knows Dishi's suspicions are correct, and decides investigating and uncovering this mystery is a good time to use the Bronze Rule. He creates a character stat block for the mystery with the following abilities:

THE CASE OF THE MURDERED MERCHANT

ASPECTS

*"WHY WOULD ANYONE KILL
MERCHANT HA?"*
MESSY CRIME SCENE
DISTINCT MURDER WEAPON

SKILLS

Great (+4): Lies
Good (+3): Secrets
Fair (+2): Shock

STRESS

4 Mental

STUNTS

Meddling Relatives (+2 bonus to use Lies to create an advantage based on greedy, interfering, or suspicious acting relatives of the deceased)

Hidden Forces (If **Defend** roll succeeds with style, create an advantage with one free invocation based on hidden influences instead of taking a boost)

The Case of the Murdered Merchant will be defeated when Dishi either inflicts enough stress to ultimately defeat it through use of Investigate, Contacts, and other appropriate skills, or when enough clues have been revealed through consequences and concessions that Dishi's player can solve the mystery himself. If Dishi is bested by the mystery, he will take consequences and stress based on being plagued by failure, lowering of his confidence in his detective skills, or the like.

KUNG FU CHALLENGES

Some of the greatest tests of a character's Kung Fu and martial spirit are not necessarily other people. Sometimes a great physical challenge, hidden chamber built to test one's abilities, or other event can break a mighty warrior as easily as a punch or kick. Of course, many such events usually enlighten and empower those who overcome them, proving they are among the elite warriors of the Martial World. The Bronze Rule can be used to model these challenges, with the test before a character seeking to break him if he is weak or unready.

Kung Fu Challenges can usually be represented with a handful of skills, aspects, and stunts. In most cases four unique skills will handle everything a Kung Fu challenge needs to do mechanically: Hazards, Puzzles, Complexity, and Depth. Hazards represent physical obstacles hindering and endangering those who attempt to complete the challenge. Hazards can perform physical attacks as well as create an advantage based on physical elements of the challenge. Puzzles work the same, but for mental elements of the challenge such as riddles, hidden pathways, and of course, puzzles. Complexity is used to defend against attacks and attempts to create an advantage to exploit the Challenge's weaknesses. Depth represents how complex, difficult, and layered the Kung Fu Challenge ends up being. Depth at Average of better gains bonus mental and physical 3 stress boxes; Good or better adds 4 stress boxes as well. Truly difficult Kung Fu Challenges also have an Armor Rating to make them even more challenging to overcome.



When facing a Kung Fu Challenge, it tries to ultimately defeat the character facing it by inflicting enough mental or physical stress to render them mentally or physically incapable of completion. If the characters instead defeat the Challenge, they have bested it and achieve whatever end reward is present.

Han Ping has been tasked by her *sifu*, Master Quan, to scale Four Storms Peak and retrieve the rare Fire Orchid that grows there before he will teach her the final secrets of Storm Dragon Kung Fu. Four Storms Peak has a narrow, icy path ultimately leading to a sheer climb of hundreds of feet. Few have ever reached its summit and many have died or been crippled trying. The GM decides Four Storms Peak merits using the Bronze Rule, and gives it an Armor Rating to reflect how hard this task is to complete:

FOUR STORMS PEAK

ASPECTS

HOME OF THE FABLED FIRE ORCHID
NARROW ICY PATHS
SHEER SURFACES

STRESS

4 Physical
 4 Mental
 Armor Rating 1

useful handholds and climbing-based assets)

Tales of the Fallen (+2 bonus to mental attacks using Puzzles based on causing doubt and fear)

SKILLS

Great (+4): Hazards
Good (+3): Complexity, Depth
Fair (+2): Puzzles

STUNTS

Difficult Climb (+2 bonus to defend against attempts to create an advantage based on

As a character, Four Storms Peak will attempt to overwhelm Han Ping by creating advantages based on its icy cliffs, sheer surfaces, and even the legends of mighty warriors who perished attempting the scale it. If Han can defeat it, she will have scaled the treacherous peak, retrieved the flower, and shown her master she is ready to advance in her training.

Defeating a Kung Fu Challenge usually gives great rewards in the form of specialized knowledge, milestones usable for character advancement, and access to special abilities like Lost Techniques.

EPIDEMICS AND AILMENTS

While an individual instance of disease or poison can be dealt with as a regular test or challenge, truly widespread epidemics, plagues, mass poisonings, and other similar problems can benefit from the Bronze Rule. Such threats try to weaken and kill the infected and stymie and frustrate those who seek to cure it.

Such creations use stunts and three unique skills to reflect its abilities: Potency, Resistance, and Symptoms. Potency is used to attack a target physically, inflicting stress and consequences as the disease ravages the body. Symptoms are used to create an advantage based on effects of the ailment such as *SEIZURES* or *INFECTED BLOOD*. Resistance grants additional stress boxes and consequences to the ailment reflecting how hard it is to cure: Average or better adds a 3 Physical Stress box, Good or better adds a 4 Physical Stress box, and Superb or higher adds an additional mild consequence. Ailments only have physical stress tracks, though they might inflict mental stress due to fever, dementia, or simply despair based on seeing the suffering of others.

The PCs come across a village suffering under a terrible plague and decide to attempt to cure it. The disease itself is not terribly deadly, but the terrible visions and hallucinations it causes have already resulted in several deaths. The GM decides to create the disease using the Bronze Rule:

MYSTERIOUS PLAGUE

ASPECTS

DISABLING DISEASE
SPREAD BY INSECTS
CAUSES VIVID HALLUCINATIONS

STRESS

3 Physical

free invocation to any tie or success)

Hard to Cure (gain 2 Armor Rating against any attacks meant to cure the disease)

SKILLS

Great (+4): Symptoms
Good (+3): Resistance
Fair (+2): Potency

STUNTS

“Did You See That?” (When using Symptoms to create an advantage based on hallucinations, add an additional

The disease will attempt to infect the PCs, harm others to demoralize them, confuse infected with strange visions, and will defend itself to resist being cured. If the PCs are defeated, the plague will grow and infect other villages and may claim one or more of the PCs as its victims as well. If defeated, the PCs will have won the gratitude of the villagers and possibly a new enemy if some insidious threat is behind the release of the plague.

Consequences and concessions taken by ailments and diseases can represent temporary remission or an outbreak subsiding without the disease itself being totally cured. This can be enough of a victory in many cases, especially with exceptionally deadly plagues and poisons. While Lore skills relating to medicine are a common way to attack and defeat a disease, even non-medically-adept characters can do wonders by helping quarantine the infected, locating untainted water and food supplies, and helping control pests and vermin who might spread the epidemic. In most cases, characters with high *Chi* or *Physique* can use these skills to resist attacks by the ailment, though in the case of diseases that cause madness or dementia, *Will* is perhaps more appropriate.

CORRUPT CHI, TAINTED KUNG FU, AND OTHER THREATS

The Rules for Mysteries, Kung Fu Challengers, and Epidemics can also be used to represent forces that taint or corrupt a character's martial spirit. This is a popular menace in some *wuxia* stories, where certain secrets and powerful martial arts come with the danger of turning its user into a demonic force of rage and evil. The exact type of danger affects how it would be represented mechanically. Some examples include:

- ✿ A manual of powerful but corrupt Kung Fu might be created as a mystery that seeks to corrupt the reader even as they seek to plumb the book's secrets.
- ✿ A secret form created by a powerful but fiendish Grandmaster might provide serious benefits in

battle to those who learn it, but could corrupt the ignorant and create exploitable weaknesses and vulnerabilities in their style.

- ✿ A tainted mystic spring might grant great physical power but could eventually infect and kill all those not strong enough to channel its energies properly.

GMs might want to add a special skill, *Corrupt*, to such phenomena. This skill is used to taint, corrupt, infect, or convert a target. This is done both through **Attack** and **Create an Advantage** actions. Attacks with *Corrupt* are often mental, but a powerful and deadly corruption might physically transform a target as well. If defeated by such a danger, the character is changed in some specific and dangerous way. This usually involves some pretty hefty consequences, though rewriting aspects and adding extras with some serious costs and negative effects are also common.

In an effort to increase his skills so he may defeat a corrupt Kung Fu master, Ma Wei Sheng has sought the fabled *Book of the Baneful Sword*. The book is fabled to provide a special sword form rumored to be nearly unbeatable. Unfortunately, the book also contains lengthy passages on conduct and philosophy that seem innovative and spiritually righteous but actually place the reader on a spiritual path lauding murder as art and imparting extreme contempt for the weak and innocent. The GM creates the *Book of the Baneful Sword* using the Bronze Rule, using Mysteries as a basis:

THE BOOK OF THE BANEFUL SWORD

ASPECTS

FABLED KUNG FU MANUAL
CORRUPTION HIDDEN BETWEEN
THE LINES
THE WEAK DESERVE THEIR FATE!

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Corrupt
Great (+4): Lies, Secrets

STRESS

4 Mental

STUNTS

False Revelations (+2 bonus to create an advantage based on revealing a “virtuous truth” that is in fact a corrupting influence)
Honeyed Lies (Spend a Fate Point

after succeeding on a Corrupt attack with at least 2 shifts, forcing the defender to take a consequence instead of using stress boxes. This consequence must reflect corruption and unvirtuous attitudes)

As the book seeks to seduce and not terrify or scare, the GM gives it no Shock skills, replacing this with the more subtle but equally dangerous Corrupt. The GM decides if Ma Wei Sheng can master the book, he will learn the *BANEFUL SWORD FORM*. However, any consequences he incurs during this conflict will remain, reflecting the subtle but hopefully temporary taint of the book. If he is defeated, his chivalrous nature will be corrupted, granting him a lesser version of the *BANEFUL SWORD FORM* but also requiring him to rewrite aspects based on courage, virtue, and benevolence to reflect his new violent, cold-blooded attitude.

Conquering such a threat is either a milestone or otherwise provides an increase in the character’s martial ability. Corrupted characters often gain similar benefits, but they also have to suffer the effects of losing this conflict. Occasionally the loser even gains incredible power, but in such cases the cost is terrible and turns the character into a force of murder, evil, or corruption. Such effects might render the character effectively unplayable in the group, transforming them into a powerful NPC who will menace the former PCs’ friends and allies. Use this option sparingly; it can be very dramatic but it can also cause problems unless all the players are on board with this development.

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF ZONES

Zones in FATE CORE are an easy way to mark off distance and territory without counting feet or meters.

This mechanics allows for range and territory to matter without too many rules. This approach is especially useful in *Tianxia*, as characters often possess the ability to run or leap several zones with ease. A starting PC with a Kung Fu style can cross 2 zones unhindered due to the rules under **Hierarchy of the Martial World**, reflecting the ability of skilled characters in the genre to routinely perform amazing acrobatics and a swift movements.

This means managing zones is of particular importance to GMs in *Tianxia*, as their general size and form will set the tone for your games. If zones are small, covering a room or town center in a small village, characters will cover less territory and the action will seem more grounded. If zones are larger, encompassing whole buildings, stretches of wilderness, or city blocks, the action will take place over a larger area and character’s mobility will be more impressive

and awe-inspiring to the average person. There is no right or wrong way to handle this, it is just something to consider when describing the zones in a scene. Note a hybrid approach is possible, allowing for smaller zones in tight quarters and larger ones when characters are out in the open.

Zones do not need to be universal for every character and action, either. The number of zones an archer might need to shoot across to hit a target might be fewer than those his target needs to cross to attack the archer in melee combat. This can provide tension and drama to a scene, where a PC has to dodge and evade a hail of arrows or thrown weapons before he can reach his attackers. Likewise, a mounted attacker might be able to treat a field as 1 zone where a character on foot treats the same area as 2 or more.

In Jack's game Lauren's character, Gracious Fox, is fighting off an ambush in a teahouse while Jon and Kevin's PCs, Black Tiger Hong and Gracious

Leopard, are running down the street outside while archers rain arrows down upon them from the nearby rooftops. Jack rules the teahouse itself is a zone, allowing Lauren to attack any enemies within it with ease. He also states Black Tiger Hong and Gracious Leopard must cross 3 zones to reach the teahouse. He further declares each zone outside the teahouse has a mob of archers who can treat the area outside the teahouse as within range of their arrows. This results in a dramatic scene where Black Tiger Hong and Gracious Leopard leap between streets, alleys, and rooftops cutting down groups of archers as they pass while Gracious Fox seeks to hold off a small army of foes inside the teahouse until her friends arrive.

This option can get confusing, however, and GMs should only use it if they are comfortable with the added complexity this approach creates.



OPTIONAL RULE: BREAKING AND MAKING ZONES

Zones are usually set by the GM based on terrain, space, and the needs of the scene; however, many characters in *Tianxia*, including the PCs, often have abilities capable of affecting dramatic changes to the scenery at a moment's notice. A swordsman might fell a tree with a mighty blow, dividing an open clearing, or a powerful fighter might bring down a wall with a kick, bridging the gap between two rooms.

GMs who want to allow this sort of action-oriented *feng shui* can allow characters to make an **Overcome** action to either divide an existing zone or merge two adjacent ones. Basically, the character is overcoming the obstacles marking the zones and, in doing so, reframing them. The difficulty of this action is based on

how drastic the change is and how they are going about it. Knocking out a wall in a flimsy hut is easier than dividing a battleground by causing a rockslide. All the normal effects of an **Overcome** action apply when used in this manner.

Kevin's character, Gracious Leopard, is fighting bandits in a bamboo forest. The clearing where the battle is taking place is considered a zone, but Kevin wants to break this up so he can more easily use some of his Techniques that rely on moving between zones. He describes Gracious Leopard slicing through several nearby trees with his saber, causing them to fall into the clearing and turning the zone into two. Jack, the GM, decides this is a Great (+4) difficulty, as it requires considerable power and

skill. Kevin rolls his Great Fight and manages a tie. He succeeds, but there is a minor cost. Jack decides Gracious Leopard misjudges one of his cuts and a falling tree narrowly misses him, snagging the sash he was wearing and ripping it. This might not normally be a big deal, but since the sash was a gift from a noblewoman Kevin's character is romancing, it is likely to be a problem later on.

If a GM decides to use this rule, remember NPCs can use this tactic too, allowing them to separate PCs or making a timely escape easier. Also feel free to add situation aspects as appropriate to merged or separated zones just as you would zones declared at the beginning of a scene.

MAKING THE SETTING WORK FOR YOU

Tianxia's setting of the empire of Shénzhōu is there to provide adventure and excitement for the GM and PCs in their games.

The setting is designed with plenty of cool places to go, interesting characters to meet, and opportunities for adventure. However, just as important is what is not there.

Jiāngzhōu, and all other parts of Shénzhōu appearing in future supplements, are designed with plenty of "white space" for GMs and players to fill. Sure, Bǎo Jiāng is a big bustling city of intrigue and vice filled with ruthless gangs, corrupt magistrates, and danger. It

has also got plenty of room to add additional factions, individuals, and locations to help personalize a GM's game. Northern and Southern Hai are two distinct villages with their own problems and personalities, but they are plenty of other settlements throughout the land to explore Working with their players, GMs can and should add whatever they need.

The easiest way to add something to the setting is to take a general concept, break the important parts

down into significant scene Aspects and run with it. You can even place these creations on the map, filling out the details of your setting through play. Players are an invaluable resource here; through their actions and play they will naturally create ideas and opportunities to add new content.

Jon's character in Jack's game, Black Tiger Hong, is a wandering swordsman who hails from a small mountain village in northern Jiāngzhōu. When the heroes' actions take them to this area, Kevin's character, Gracious Leopard, asks Jon's what his village is like. As Jon tells a tale of growing up in Little Tiger (Xiao Hu) Village, Jack makes a quick note on the map and assigns **EVERYBODY KNOWS EVERYONE**, **SMALL MOUNTAIN VILLAGE**, and **POOR BUT PROUD** Aspects to the location. When the PCs visit this newly added part of the setting, they may find these Aspects important to what events occur there.

You do not need to do this for every backwater village or roadside shrine the heroes encounter. If it is not important to play, skip it and keep things moving. Save this for places that matter to the PCs, events of the game, or campaign as a whole and quickly the campaign's version of Shénzhōu will take on a unique life all its own.

Also remember the Bronze Rule of *Fate*: You can treat anything in the game world like it is a character. Some places or organizations might merit getting their own write-up with Skills and Stunts to reflect how they act on or are acted upon by the PCs and other characters. GMs can even allow players to use milestones to change or upgrade these "characters" when their actions justify it. To use the above example of Little Tiger village, if it became important enough it might have the following stats:

LITTLE TIGER VILLAGE

ASPECTS

EVERYBODY KNOWS EVERYBODY,
POOR BUT PROUD, **SMALL**
MOUNTAIN VILLAGE

SKILLS

Fair(+2): Crafts, Will
Average (+1): Fight, Notice

STUNTS

Naturally Defensible (add +2 to
Fight when defending against
invaders)

When assigning Skills to setting elements, you need to think about it slightly differently than with a normal character. In the above example Will might represent the people's general stubbornness and pride where Notice helps them discern the nature of dangers or outsiders in their midst. Crafts represent goods and services while the lack of a Resource Skill reflects the impoverished nature of the village.

Scale can be used when necessary to reflect especially large or powerful settings elements requiring

a lot of effort to alter, influence, or shut down. In some cases, conflicts will need to be reframed and altered, though it is not out of genre for an evil Kung Fu Master to come into a village and lay waste to the area by inflicting stress and consequences directly on it. A future supplement for *Tianxia* might explore this concept in more detail, but you can do a lot with this concept using the *FATE CORE* rules as written.

CAMPAIGN ASPECTS

If the GM is planning on organizing his game into big epic arcs focusing on various genre themes and elements, it is not a bad idea to set these up ahead of time.

They could even become campaign aspects to be invoked when appropriate throughout an entire plot arc or even the whole campaign. These are similar to setting issues discussed in *FATE CORE* (see *FATE CORE*, pp. 251-267). Campaign aspects can be used alongside, or instead of, setting issues. Campaign aspects are generally broader and more thematic than setting issues, often having conceptual or metaphysical themes like **THE ROAD TO ENLIGHTENMENT IS ROCKY** or **POWER REVEALS ONE'S TRUE SELF**. So where a setting issue might be **A DARK CULT THREATENS THE PEACE**, a similar campaign aspect might be **PEACE IS AS BEAUTIFUL AND FRAGILE AS A FLOWER**.

Campaign aspects also tend to change less frequently than setting issues. To use the previous example, defeating the cult menacing the land might require generating a new issue, but the elimination of one threat, no matter how great, will not change the ability of other forces to cause instability. Campaign aspects are often tied to a particular genre convention or subgenre that defines the game's focus and central themes.

When selecting campaign aspects, a GM should think about the sort of game they want to run. Player input can be invaluable here. After all, their actions will drive much of play and using player expectations and desires to create campaign aspects helps insure they will be interesting, useful, and appropriate.

Jack is getting ready to run *Tianxia*. After talking with his players, he decides a few themes are going to run through much of the game—namely, the idea of conflicting loyalties and achieving excellence through righteous action. He tells his players that until the focus changes, the game will have the campaign aspects **YOU CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS** and **THE RIGHTEOUS ARE STRONG**.

When using campaign aspects, there are two additional things to consider. First off, both PCs

and GM can use them. In the above example, an enemy might be able to invoke **THE RIGHTEOUS ARE STRONG** when facing a PC if his cause serves some just purpose. This does not keep the PC from doing the same if his goals are equally virtuous, and such tragic conflicts are often seen in *wuxia*, Kung Fu, and classic Chinese historical dramas. Thus it is a good idea to make campaign aspects that will see use by GMs and PCs alike.

Secondly, campaign aspects can change. A GM might decide to change them when major setting changes shift the tone and theme of the game. PCs might change them through their actions. In the latter case, this would be part of a Major Milestone (in addition to other benefits). Of course if two players with Major Milestones do not agree on what they want to change, they should talk it over with the GM and work out a compromise or perhaps add a new campaign aspect. Some truly significant changes might require all the PCs using their milestones to change or add campaign aspects.

After defeating a major pirate gang and uniting two rival factions, Jack's players decide they have altered the campaign's focus. They use their Major Milestone to change **YOU CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS** to **UNITY IS POWER, DIVISION IS WEAKNESS**. Talking with the GM, they work out that, where the focus was on the conflict between trying to serve various interests, now the PCs will explore how trying to unite various goals and purposes makes everyone stronger. Conversely, division and disagreement can weaken people and organizations. Jack thinks this will make for some very interesting stories, and is already considering how to work this into upcoming games.

The goal of a game is to have fun. Do not change a campaign aspect in a way that is going to anger or

upset everyone else. If this happens, the GM should work with the players to figure out the problem and make the necessary changes.

It is a good idea to limit campaign aspects to one or two, especially if the game also uses setting issues. If setting issues are not being used, a few more campaign

aspects can fill that void nicely. Just take care not to load up a campaign with so many setting issues or campaign aspects that either many of them do not see use or keeping track of them gets confusing for everyone. When in doubt, start small; you can always add more later, if desired.

CAMPAIGN ASPECTS AND SUBGENRE

Campaign aspects are a real boon to GMs and players desiring a particular feel or tone for their games, especially if they want to explore a certain subgenre of *wuxia* or Kung Fu action, like comedy or horror.

To keep things from getting too complex, there should be no more than one or two Campaign Aspects. If you are using these instead of **Setting Issues**, a few more might be appropriate but be careful of adding so many some never come up. Some sample subgenres and Campaign Aspects particularly appropriate for them are:

COMEDY

Comedic games are about goofy fun. The PCs and other main characters are usually heavily flawed in amusing and often fairly harmless ways. Stereotypes such as the angry mother-in-law or crazy old Kung Fu master are also common. The action can be of any level, from the fairly grounded but jaw dropping *Drunken Kung Fu* of *Drunken Master* to the over the top superheroics of *Kung Fu Hustle*.

Campaign Aspects: *DEATH ISN'T FUNNY...MISFORTUNE IS, YOU JUST CAN'T CATCH A BREAK, SILLY TRUMPS SERIOUS*

EPIC

All *Tianxia* games are pretty epic, but the Epic subgenre takes it to a whole new level. Mass battles, world-spanning threats, and other elements are common. An antagonist that might be the basis for a whole campaign in most games is a mid-level boss in these games. The power level of characters in this sort of game is usually higher than normal, though lower powered games based around large rebellions and wars are also Epic.

Campaign Aspects: *MARKED BY DESTINY, FIGHTING FOR THE FATE OF THE WORLD, EVERYTHING IS BIGGER*

HORROR

Horror-themed martial arts are more common in a modern setting, but there are plenty of tales of demons, evil spirits, and vampires with strong *wuxia* or Kung Fu action elements. The esteemed *Chinese Ghost Story* trilogy is a great example of this subgenre, as is the less amazing but still fun *Shaolin v. Evil Dead*. Unlike horror stories featuring mundane or low-powered protagonists, this subgenre usually keeps the protagonists skilled and dangerous, counterbalanced by throwing evil beings of godlike power and hordes of monsters at them.

Campaign Aspects: *FORCES OF EVIL ARE EVERYWHERE, DEMONS CORRUPT AND PLAGUE HUMANITY, HUMANITY'S FEARS GIVEN FORM*

INDIE

While a minor subgenre, films like *Ashes of Time* present small-scale, highly personal stories of *wuxia* and Kung Fu action that explore internal conflicts, complex relationships, and the nature of humanity. While these themes are present in many stories, they are at the forefront of the Indie subgenre, and grander tales of terrestrial gains take a backseat to these tales.

Campaign Aspects: *YOUR OWN WORST ENEMY, VIRTUE AND SIN ARE MIGHTIER THAN ANY SWORD*

ROMANCE

Romance is common in *Tianxia* and the media which inspires it, but star-crossed lovers and stories of love, loss, obsession, and longing are the main focus of this subgenre. In this sort of campaign, love is the most powerful force in the world and can lead to great triumph and tragedy. *House of Flying Daggers* and *The Promise* are good examples of this subgenre and show how often the endings of characters in Romance-heavy campaigns are bittersweet or tragic.

Campaign Aspects: *LOVE CONQUERS ALL, LOVE COMES AT GREAT COST, DUTY IS THE ENEMY OF ROMANCE*

CONCESSIONS IN TIANXIA

In FATE CORE, not every contest needs to end with stress or consequences.

A GM or player can always grant a concession before the dice in a test are rolled to accept a negative result of the test but also influence how badly this result affects them. This also nets the conceding party a Fate Point.

This is a great way to keep every conflict from turning into a knock down drag out fight to the death and can keep momentum going when a scene is mostly resolved. This is an especially important in *Tianxia*, where many early conflicts in the game are previews for bigger battles to come and help motivate the losing party to try harder in the future. Granting a concession at the right time not only keeps things moving, but it also provides a Fate Point to the loser to be used at a more opportune moment later.

Early in a game session, Gracious Fox is fighting a Lin Kuei who is attempting to cut her down and take the sacred scroll the hero has been hired to protect. The fight is going badly for Fox, who has already filled in all her stress boxes as a result of her opponent's skillful attacks. Not ready to gain consequences that will bog her down later, and facing a nasty attack from the Lin Kuei with some hefty bonuses, Gracious Fox's player concedes the contest before the GM has a chance to roll. The GM states that her opponent wants the scroll, and needs Fox out of the way so she can take it and escape. Fox's player agrees to this, saying her opponent's attack flings her into a nearby hut and collapses the whole structure on her. The scroll flies from her robes and lands on the ground near the Lin Kuei. Fox is out of the fight and temporarily trapped, but she is not seriously injured and her opponent cannot reach her to continue attacking. The GM agrees this is a suitable concession, gives her a

Fate Point for the concession, and ends the scene with a description of the Lin Kuei grabbing the scroll and fleeing into the night.

Concessions are also a great way for characters to remove themselves from a scene where another character is more prominently featured and gain a Fate Point to spend for a later scene where it is their turn to shine. This is a great option for players or GMs who want to let their allied PCs duel a rival, confront a hated foe, or shorten a contest that is dragging. In many cases, this can be combined with compels to gain extra Fate Points, as the troublesome elements of a character's aspects helps remove them from the contest.

Gracious Fox and her brother, Gracious Leopard, have finally tracked down the Lin Kuei who stole the scroll. Leopard's player notes Fox's player really wants to take down this foe by herself and decides to help make that happen. Racing past his sister to engage the Lin Kuei, Leopard's player waits until the assassin tries to attack him and immediately concedes, explaining that his **PROTECTIVE OF HIS SISTER** compels him to charge in without thinking, which allows his foe to tag him with a poisoned dart that renders him unconscious for the rest of the scene. The GM agrees with both the compel and the concession, awarding Leopard's player 2 Fate Points. Leopard does not take stress or consequences from this result, which he explains as his superior Chi energies allowing him to mitigate the worst effects of the Lin Kuei's poison, but he is out the fight and it is now all up to Gracious Fox to defeat their opponent.

DEATH, THE ULTIMATE COST

FATE CORE allows players to “buy” success by suffering a negative cost for their character on a test that would otherwise be a failure.

Usually this is a significant but temporary problem: you suffer a wound while pushing through an obstacle or gain a significant resource but give your opponent an opportunity to rally an alarming array of forces against you. These are dramatic, but they do not mean the end of your character.

However, what happens when it does? What happens when, to make a lasting and ultimate change to the game, setting, or story, a player needs to logically end their time playing that character? What if, to win, they need to also lose big and permanently? Will they sacrifice themselves to achieve that end?

That is up to the players; but not only can the GM allow this, the genre and style of *Tianxia* suggests you even encourage it. Heroic sacrifice is huge in *Wuxia* and Kung Fu stories. Heroes sometimes suffer tragedies or changes that end their adventuring days forever in the pursuit of their goals. Sometimes this is death, but it could also be permanent retirement, crippling injury beyond the scope of even powerful Kung Fu to overcome, and so on.

In Jack's *Tianxia* game, Jon's character Black Tiger Hong is facing down the leader of the nefarious Silver Devils Sect. The other PCs are already out of the fight and things look pretty bleak for our heroes. When a vital roll does not go his way while fighting the cult leader on the edge of a great chasm he decides he really needs to put a stop to the Silver Devils and their plans at any cost. Jon tells Jack he wants to win the roll anyway, and proposes sacrificing himself to utterly defeat his foe. The Silver Devils leader buries his sword in the PCs' chest, flashing a wickedly triumphant grin as he twists the blade. With a sad smile of acceptance, Black Tiger Hong locks his hands around the villain's wrist in a death grip and

flings them both into the chasm. The other PCs look on as their friend and companion drags their foe into the abyss, defeating the threat at a terrible cost.

Of course, if this sort of thing is going to happen, it should be worth it for everyone concerned. Any player willing to kill off or otherwise remove their character from the game should receive one heck of a win. It is a big downside so the upside needs to match. Such costs can also result in changing genre and campaign aspects or creating new ones characters touched by this sacrifice can draw on when needed.

In addition to defeat the head of the Silver Devils, Jack considers what the recent sacrifice means for the game. After talking it over with Jon he decides to add a campaign aspect to the game, *THE HIGH COST OF VICTORY*, which can invoke to inspire and influence others who have heard of the defeat of the Silver Devils and the cost of vanquishing such an evil.

On the other hand, sacrifices need to matter to the players or it is cheap. GMs who allow a revolving door of self-sacrifice may find their games devolving into parody. Also, if a GM ever has the end result of such a contest partially or wholly negated, they can also negate the cost to the PC. This allows for a dramatic return from supposedly certain death or for a character to return from “permanent” retirement. Again, this is very genre appropriate; sometimes heroes return even from beyond death when an old enemy or threat resurfaces. Of course, it is okay to make the PCs work for bring back their lost comrades.

Eventually Jack decides to bring the Silver

Devils back, even going so far as to resurrect their leader as a fiendish half-alive warrior kept alive by corrupt *Chi* manipulation. Talking it over with Jon, he also introduces the Silver Devils' new top assassin, a masked killer who is shortly revealed to be Black Tiger Hong, who died defeating the evil sect and is now clearly a mind-controlled agent of the bad guys. Can the PCs save the companion they thought dead? Jack keeps the campaign aspect created by the PC's original sacrifice in place for now, figuring it still applies in a lot of ways.

This sort of heroic self-sacrifice can also be handled as a supercharged concession, where the player says, "Okay, never mind the dice. I'm gonna lose, forever. But in exchange, I get to tie that end to a big win." In this case, PCs do not even need to wait for the dice to roll—they can simply declare a willingness to permanently take themselves out for the win. Whether this option is appealing depends on the GM and players. Some want to try their luck first then pay the price, while others believe it is more tense and dramatic to handle such acts of self-sacrifice without dice. Either way will work, and both can even be used in the same game so long as everyone's comfortable.



RELATIONSHIP AND PLOT TRIADS

Not to be confused with the Chinese organized crime syndicates, triad-based relationships and plots are at the core of Hong Kong and Chinese action media.

Rarely is a story just about two brothers, enemies, lovers, or any other paired combination. Likewise, rarely is a plot simply about two warring clans, opposing armies, or a conflict between two Kung Fu masters. Instead, the interactions are arranged in a series of interlocking triads, with characters, organizations, and plot elements relating to each other in a three-way interplay where all parties act on and are acted upon each other.

Thus, the story is not about a swordsman and swordswoman whose duty and life of battle has kept them apart. It is about a swordsman, a swordswoman, and the spoiled princess whose desire to escape her sheltered life causes her to steal the prize sword belonging to the swordsman, which the swordswoman swore to protect. And the killer who trained the princess in the martial arts and killed the swordsman's master. And the bandit king who loves the princess but promised to stay with her master. These sorts of interlocking triads create the complex plots and relationships at the center of so many *wuxia* and Kung Fu stories. A story might seem confusing when summarized like that, but that is the basic plot of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. So it does work.

Some relationship triads are easy to develop in games. If you use the Phase Trio part of creation for PCs, you already have the makings of *at least* one triad between the PCs who shared their previous adventures. This can be reflected in Aspects or simply as part of the PCs shared experiences. Either way, it is a great building block to start with.

Jack is running *Tianxia* for Kevin, Lauren, and Jon. During the Phase Trio part of character creation, Kevin and Lauren decide their PCs are Gracious Leopard and Gracious Fox, siblings who studied under the same Kung Fu master. Kevin

also knows Jon's PC, Black Tiger Hong, from his time working as a mercenary for the Black Moon Security Company. Black Tiger Hong, who was working for Black Moon's rival, the White Suns, encountered Gracious Fox when the pair fought off a pirate raid. The two were allies in battle, though at the time Gracious Fox was spying on the White Suns for the Black Moons. Jack notes the three have already formed a relationship triad: two siblings and their associate, a former rival to one and ally to another.

To this, add villains, rivals, relatives, influential figures, organizations, and even important objects that interact with other characters to form fun, interlocking relationships. Do not go crazy; stick with what you are comfortable with, as just a few triads can generate enough drama and game ideas for several sessions.

Jack also notes several potential triads that might come up in play. The siblings share a master who no doubt dealt with each of them differently, perhaps favoring one to succeed him over another. Lauren and Jon's characters could easily draw the ire of the dread pirate king, Fish Eye Cheng, who might desire to humble beautiful swordswoman Gracious Fox and kill upstart mercenary Black Tiger Hong, who killed so many of his men. The siblings share a relationship with the Black Moons and their leader, who employed one as a sellsword and the other as a spy. Of course, the White Suns and Black Moons are themselves rivals, though neither is fond of Cheng's pirates. And if the siblings' master knew the White Suns founders, Mother Shen and Black Bao Yun, from their youth....

With these basics laid out you will find plenty of inspirations for events, plots, and scenes for your games, and the end result will feel very much like the source material. Adding new individuals to the mix will grow things more, but again, start by focusing on a few triads and the ideas they generate; you can always come back to unused ones later.

Brain spinning from dozens of potential ideas for games based on character creation and the basic setting material alone, Jack decides the first game will deal with a plot triad between Fish Eye Cheng's river pirates and Black Moon and White Sun security companies. He will leave the siblings' master and any other possible connections for later. Competing for a lucrative protection job with a wealthy merchant involved in riverboat shipping, the tension between the Black Moons and White Suns is growing (hey look, another triad!). In an effort to sow dissent, get revenge, and undermine the greatest threats to his pirates, Fish Eye Cheng has decided to poison a popular White Sun lieutenant and frame Lauren's PC, as she is known to be a former Black Moon spy and Cheng already has reason to hate her (yet another!). Of course, will Black Tiger Hong help his old ally or his old boss (and again!)? And how will Gracious Leopard react to an old rival sniffing around his sister Gracious Fox right after she is framed (and...you get the picture)? Interesting times are coming....

It is a good idea to design scene or setting aspects around these triads when possible. They can provide great mechanical advantage when relevant and are a good reminder of how various parties relate to each other.

Jack thinks about the interlocking triads in his first game and throws out some aspects that reflect the current situation. He selects *OLD RIVALRIES RESURFACE* for the Black Moon and White Sun rivalry, and *ATMOSPHERE OF PARANOIA* to reflect how much suspicion and distrust is around while the two companies compete for business even as pirates seek to sabotage them

both. He figures Cheng will be working to create *DAMNING EVIDENCE* against Lauren's PC, but he prefers to develop that in play to give the PCs a chance to prevent the frame-job if they get wind of it.

You can even allow each PC to build their own web of relationship triads and invoke these as aspects when appropriate. It requires more bookkeeping, but if everyone is on board it can be a lot of fun. After a few games, you will probably want to revisit the triads to see how they have changed or ended. This can help you come up with new ideas going forward, or simply show you what concepts or plot elements have outlived their usefulness.

After several games, the PCs in Jack's game have defeated Fish Eye Cheng's pirates and caused the Black Moons and White Suns to cease their rivalry and form one unified organization. The PCs have moved on from the area and are now exploring the White Widow Forest, searching for a fabled flower which can cure any poison after Jon's PC was hit with a deadly, but slow acting, toxin. Jack figures most of his early triads are played out—save those between the PCs themselves—and now wonders how he might tie the siblings' master to the fabled flower and the White Widow Sect who protects the grove where it grows. Plus there is the matter of that traitorous Black Moon who poisoned Jon's PC and swore he would kill Kevin's PC for cutting out his eye...

The triad format can seem intimidating and confusing at first, but is really about breaking things down into manageable pieces and sticking them back together to grow the plot and setting in your games. In many cases, watching films in the genre with triads in mind or evaluating how PCs and NPCs are already interacting can really help with this. So can sketching out major triads on a piece of paper and seeing how they fit together. Do not be afraid to ask your players for input, as they likely have many ideas about how their characters might interact with each other and other important characters or setting elements.

Note that triads are not required; it is just one way of emulating the basic structure of the source material and crafting games that model this. If you do not like them or have a better idea of how to handle it? No problem—do what works best for you and your group. However, even if you do not use them in games,

considering how an additional character, faction, or group might add interesting complications and events to an otherwise binary conflict between two opposing forces can still be worthwhile.

SEXISM, STRUGGLE, AND TIANXIA

While this was addressed elsewhere in the book in some detail, this is a topic that warrants more attention. Imperial China, the major historic inspiration for Shénzhōu, was often not a good place to be a woman. From arranged marriages to foot binding, there were numerous practices that led to females struggling more than their male counterparts. The ever-present specter of sexism and gender-based discrimination can be interesting to include in a game setting, giving female characters something to oppose and overcome and sympathetic male characters something to help women fight against. The classic Chinese female heroine Mulan's tale hits a lot of these issues head on...with a sword.

So it can be fun to include; it can also really suck.

Not everyone wants to deal with real-world issues like sexism

in their games. After all, while fighting real-world problems in a game can be fun since it is easier to affect lasting worldwide change, it can also be a real drag if you are playing to escape such things. That is why these issues can be part of Shénzhōu and there will occasionally be some setting elements that suggest such problems, but they are not central to the setting. For example, the White Widow Sect exists in part to protect women and train them to fight. However, they work just as well as a group protecting women from specific harms and crimes in a more egalitarian society, too.

GMs and players should figure out how much they want to address sexism in their games. They can completely ignore it, focus heavily on it, or split the difference and assume that while much of Shénzhōu is fairly sexist, the Jianghu generally cares little

for a warrior's gender, just their virtue and skill. This goes for other real life social issues as well; *Tianxia* and the Shénzhōu setting should be tweaked as needed to address or gloss over problems so the GMs and players get the game they want.

GMs and players wanting to address these issues can use aspects as a sign of both how and how much. Generally, a PC with an aspect like *"I CAN FIGHT AS WELL AS ANY MAN!"* suggests the player wants to at least touch on these issues in ways a PC with *ESTEEMED EX-IMPERIAL OFFICER* does not. Campaign aspects can also revolve around these themes if they are going to be heavily involved in the whole campaign. A group of PCs in a campaign with an aspect like *EQUALITY THROUGH MARTIAL EXCELLENCE* will have a different focus than one without.

DYNASTIC PLAY AND INHERITANCE

Most role-playing game campaigns deal with one part of the characters lives. They might have done things before the game, often defined by aspects, skills, and other elements on their character sheet. They might do things after the game has ended too, but the focus is on the time period the campaign covers, which is usually a few years at most. However, campaigns do not need to end with those adventures, they do not even need to end when the characters all die in battle or from old age. Some games run through the lives of generations of characters, and that is what is meant by dynastic play.

In a dynastic campaign the characters start out, adventure, and eventually pass out of active use. The campaign continues though, with the players adopting new characters representing the children, pupils, and protégés of their previous characters. Sometimes players might even switch things up, with a player playing the son or daughter of another players old PC. These transitions do not need to be all at once either; a player might play the pupil of a character while another is still playing an older more experienced PC. This is fine; in fact it is totally cool and there are a couple of ways to approach this.

The first is simple: new PCs are made just like any other. Connections to previous characters are dealt with through aspects and might influence character generation but they do not provide additional bonuses. Thus you might have *SON OF SMILING OX* as an aspect, but you do not get any bonuses beyond how cool it is to have something you can use to reference past PCs.

The second option is more involved but comes down to this: new PCs inherit something cool from their previous incarnations. Characters are still generated normally and should be built with their parent, master, or mentor in mind but they also get some extra benefits. Using this option a character can select one Skill, Stunt, Technique possessed by the previous character and add it to their new character. If selecting a Skill, they get it at one rank lower than their predecessor but this can break the usual skill pyramid structure if you want. If selecting a Technique, they need to meet all the regular requirements for it but pay one less Refresh or spend one less stunt to acquire

it. This means really potent abilities still require some focus or need to be trained up to match the mastery of the previous character, but it is a nice bonus to reflect their ties to past generations.

Lauren is playing in a dynastic campaign when her character Gracious Fox finally retires and goes into seclusion to contemplate the true meaning of existence. She decides to play her own daughter next, a seventeen-year-old swordswoman named Gracious Echo. Deciding her mother's mastery of the martial arts was passed on to her, she decides to inherit her mother's Fight Skill. Gracious Fox's Fight was Superb at the time of her retirement, meaning Echo gets it at one rank lower. Lauren records her new PC has Fight at Great in addition to everything else she selects at character creation. This includes the core concept aspect *DAUGHTER OF GRACIOUS FOX*, which she can invoke when using her mother's teachings and experiences in play and suggests her mother's influence will be a major part of Gracious Echo's own tale.

A PC might have additional similarities to a previous character, but they only get one freebie. If the game continues on to another generation, GMs and players should decide if they want to allow multiple freebies or stay limited to one. As a guideline, more than two freebies gets unwieldy and creates really powerful descendants who are more about pedigree than personal accomplishments. So you might know your grandfather's Lost Technique and have your father's sword, but adding more dilutes the awesomeness of that inheritance.

Dynastic play usually covers a lot of time and sometimes months or years might pass between game sessions. Generally these are thought to be uneventful periods where the PCs behave in typical ways and where important events are dealt with through short "cut scenes," montages, or other tricks often seen in fiction. GMs might allow for occasional rewriting of aspects and other small alterations to PCs during these periods, though the really dynamic stuff should be saved for active play.

During a dynastic game, Lauren's new PC, Gracious Echo, spends five years working as a guardian for a small village. She fights off some bandits and teaches a few of the locals a couple of moves, but not much else happens. Still, to reflect the passage of time and the PC's years of growth, the GM lets her rewrite her **AMBITIOUS YOUNG SWORDSWOMAN** aspect to **SEASONED SWORDSWOMAN**. Everything else on her character sheet remains the same since no milestones were hit during this period of downtime to suggest further growth.

TROUPE PLAY

Players usually control one PC at a time, but that is not an ironclad rule. In troupe play, players create and control multiple characters and switch between them based on what makes the most sense for the current campaign situation. There are a couple of ways and approaches to doing this.

The first way is to have many equally effective and important characters, each distinct and desirable because of the focus of the campaign. A game covering a war between rival factions that seeks to represent all sides equally and involve adventures with each group might have each player playing a PC from each of the involved factions. In time, these games often pair down this PC cast as factions unite or are eliminated, leaving a core group of PCs that move forward as the campaign progresses.

The second way is to have players taking the roles of weaker or supporting characters that augment or attach to a primary PC in the game. If one of the PCs is a bandit king who only sometimes teams up with the other major PCs, the other players might play his followers and subordinates when play focuses on that PC's adventures away from his peers. These subordinate PCs are usually made intentionally weaker than normal PCs, with fewer skills, refresh, and stunts. A good rule of thumb is to knock off the Great Skill and reduce starting Refresh and stunts by one, but other methods exist. Players might even play a mob accompanying a major PC, providing support and color to the campaign while taking a backseat to much of the action in scenes where their main PCs are not present.

Troupe play is not for every group—it involves tracking the progress and milestones for multiple characters and can bog things down. However, for groups wanting to delve deeply into multiple organizations or have adventures taking place concurrently across the campaign setting, it can be a real boon. As always, do what works best for the GM, players, and the specific campaign.

The players in Jack's upcoming *Tianxia* game are playing the members of Heaven's Shadow, a secret order seeking to bring justice to the martial world. Each player creates three characters: A Kung Fu Master, a Star Pupil of one of the Masters, and a Trusted Servant with a unique and useful skill. The players alternate between these characters as needed, and all agree that they should play the Pupil and Servant of a Master other than their own PC.

The first game involves answering a summons from the sister of Kevin's Master, so he plays his Kung Fu Master, Clouded Tiger. Priscilla plays his Pupil, Scarlet Ron, and Jason adopts the role of the Servant Cáí, a nondescript porter adept at eavesdropping and disguise. Lauren decides to bring her own Master, Shining Moon, along for this adventure, just in case the situation gets dangerous.

OPTIONAL RULE: INTERESTING TIMES

There is an ancient Chinese curse that says, "May you live in interesting times." In other words, situations inflicted on people through the random vagaries of chance are definitely interesting and memorable but are often that way because they are painful, tragic, or just a hassle to deal with. This concept is very appropriate for the *wuxia*/Kung Fu action genre. Watch enough movies or read enough stories in these genres and you will notice a pattern where conflicts or tense situations are often complicated by coincidence, destiny, or just plain bad luck. For example, your battle with a gang of bandits will cause the warlord worried about some ancient prophecy to realize you are the person who is prophesized to kill him. This sort of thing goes from a regular occurrence to a forgone conclusion if the parties involved are major characters. That famous assassin attacking you? It is your long lost sister or the son of the first man you killed or your future spouse. It is never "some dude with a sword paid to kill me." While these twists and turns can be a problem, they also make great fodder for roleplaying and dealing with these situations in play can be a lot of fun. The *INTERESTING TIMES* options in *Tianxia* cover how to reflect these situations mechanically.

In essence, *INTERESTING TIMES* is an extra mild consequence each player can use once per session in one of two ways. First, they can use it to deal with stress they have just taken instead of using one of their own consequences or stress boxes. This represents a temporarily fortuitous event that ends up causing trouble later. Alternatively, the *INTERESTING TIMES* consequence can be taken to gain an extra Fate Point. This can even be done at the start of a session. This represents something that will come up during play to complicate matters. Once in play, *INTERESTING TIMES* acts like any other consequence and it can be invoked as normal. The GM receives one free invocation of *INTERESTING TIMES*, though he can spend Fate Points or create an advantage on it just like it was any other consequence.

The big difference between using *INTERESTING TIMES* and other consequences is that by doing so, the player is voluntarily surrendering a lot of control over what form the consequence takes. He is basically telling the GM "I want you to screw with me later and not tell me how, yet; just make it interesting and fun." It is the GM who will make the call as to when and how this comes up; the player will not know what is going on until it happens. Of course, players can make suggestions as to

how *INTERESTING TIMES* manifests, but it is the GM who implements it. *INTERESTING TIMES* also recovers differently than normal consequences: it lasts until the end of the session, then goes away without a need for recovery tests. However, its aftereffects could be felt for some time to come and might even count as new uses of *INTERESTING TIMES*.

Since *INTERESTING TIMES* is only a mild consequence, its effects should not be too serious. A character might find out he is a dead ringer for a wanted fugitive, but should not get immediately swarmed by guards and beheaded the instant he hits town. An enemy might be revealed to be a lost relative or old friend, but should not murderously attack beyond reason or interaction. The goal is to spice up the game with some fun twists and reward the PCs for leading further complicated lives, not punish them for being open to some trouble.

INTERESTING TIMES is a tool for the players but, if the group is amiable, major NPCs could also make use of it. In this case, the GM uses it for the character, and the players get to determine what twist is making the NPC's life difficult. This option is not for everyone, and it can slow down play if players cannot decide what problems an NPC develops.

OPTIONAL RULE: DRAMATIC INITIATIVE

Instead of determining turn order by using Notice or Empathy as per the *FATE CORE* rules (see FC page 158), GMs and players may decide who goes first based on the situation at the start of every scene, then the active player picks who goes next. GM characters all go at once and are selected in the turn order just like the PCs, with the GM deciding who goes next after the NPCs have acted. After everyone has had a turn, the last player picks who goes next at the start of the next exchange.

Jack is using Dramatic Initiative in his game. When the PCs are cornered by a gang of bandits, he decides Kevin's PC, Gracious Leopard, who was already expecting trouble, goes first. After Kevin finishes Gracious Leopard's action, he passes the turn order to Jo's PC, who then decides to let the bandits go so

the GM does not get to pick who goes first in the next exchange. After the GM acts for the bandits, he passes the turn to Lauren's PC. After her PC is done, she will decide who goes first in the next exchange. Hoping to capitalize on the advantages created by her last action, she elects to go first in the new exchange.

This can allow for some dramatic opportunities and fun tactical play in a scene, but it requires some alterations to certain rules, namely Techniques and stunts that allow characters to use different Skills to determine their turn order. The easiest way to handle this is to give any character with a technique that affects turn order an "interrupt" action they can use once per scene to circumvent normal turn order and act immediately. Some Secret Techniques already function in

this manner, allowing a character to immediately make an attack or other action out of sequence; these would still work as described. GMs wishing to mix things up even more can allow these interrupts to refresh during a scene if a player spends a free invocation or bonus to do so. If this option is used, the invocation or bonus does not provide its usual benefits; it refreshes the interrupt instead. GMs who find they usually only have one combat per session might limit these interrupt abilities to one use per session, but take care not to make these abilities so weak they effectively punish those with them.

Dramatic Initiative can be a real blast, but it is a game changer. GMs and players who want to try it out should not be afraid to abandon later it if they find it is not for them.



CHAPTER EIGHT

ANTAGONISTS

A CURE FOR BOREDOM

“By the gods, I am so bored...” Han Ping exclaimed for the tenth time in an hour. This time she dragged on the last word, making it last through three pole strokes of the raft.

“You could try grabbing a pole.” Suggested Smiling Ox. He said it with a smile as his massive arms drove the wooden shaft through the water and into the riverbed to propel the raft forward, but there was an uncommon edge of irritability in his voice.

“I will help,” Ma Wei Sheng said. He had finishing stripping his armor to better handle the muggy summer night, “We should be getting close, correct?”

“This is the way the monk said. And I certainly haven’t stopped.” Ox noted, casting a glance at Ping, who was now watching fireflies buzz slowly around them and aggressively not poling the raft.

“No sign of the ‘terrible dangers that will rise up to challenge us,’ though” Ping said, her voice dripped with disappointment.

Ma was about to respond when something caught his eye. A shadow under the water, barely visible in the dim light. He scanned the water and saw another, and another. He heard a small creaking of the branches that hung over the water from the nearby trees.

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that.” He replied and stabbed his pole hard into the water at one of the shadows nearest the boat.

The pole struck nothing but the river bottom and suddenly the water around the raft erupted. A dozen armed figures shot into the air even as several more leapt from the nearby trees. Their faces were those of snarling demons.

“Forest Demons!” Smiling Ox exclaimed.

“Lin Kuei” Ma corrected, noting their attackers were in fact human assassins wearing intricately carved masks.

“Finally!” yelled Ping, leaping to her feet, all smiles and clenched fists.

The following section presents some individual mid-level foes and mobs of low-level baddies to throw at PCs, as well as some dangerous animals common to the wilds of Jiāngzhōu. Unless otherwise noted, mobs are all characters that occupy the lowest scale of the Jianghu, while mid-level characters follow the same rules as PCs.

FORMIDABLE INDIVIDUALS

The antagonists here are presented without names or backstory, only a general description of their abilities and affiliations.

GMs should customize these examples as needed to create unique, interesting antagonists for their campaigns. Even slapping an interesting name and description on these game statistics will go a long way towards giving these bad guys some extra color. Because of the general nature of these characters, only

two or three aspects are included. Likewise, these characters usually have only two stunts instead of the three PCs typically start with. GMs can add more stunts, aspects, and increase skills as needed to flesh out the personality, role, and significance of the character.

BANDIT LEADER

ASPECTS

LAWLESS BRIGAND
MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY
RUTHLESS RENEGADE

SKILLS

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

STRESS

3 Physical Boxes
3 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE: IRON TIGER IRON TIGER FORM

Iron Cleaves the Stone: Ignore 2 points of Armor when making an attack to inflict physical stress

STUNTS

Bandit Leader (Can use Provoke to create bandit-based advantages)
Tough Guy (gain 2 Armor Rating against physical attacks)

While most brigands and bandits are dangerous criminals, the Bandit Leader rises above the rest. He is tough, ambitious, and keeps his subordinates in line with a mix of brains and brawn. He has also learned just enough Kung Fu to make him dangerous, though he lacks the discipline to finish his studies. This character can also represent mid-level officers and lieutenants in a large bandit or pirate organization.

BARBARIAN CHIEFTAIN

ASPECTS

LEADER AMONG THE HORDES

"IT IS MY DESTINY TO CONQUER!"

SAVAGE HONOR

SKILLS

Great (+4): Fight

Good (+3): Physique, Shoot

Fair (+2): Athletics, Drive, Provoke

Average (+1): *Chi*, Notice, Will, Resources

STRESS

4 Physical Boxes

3 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE:

FOREST DRAGON

FOREST DRAGON FORM

Leaves Like Razors: When invoking a situation aspect or environment-based advantage in a Fight attack, you may gain a 2 shift bonus to all physical stress inflicted.

Dragon Rules the Fields: When you succeed with style on an attack, gain a boost—with a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2—without reducing the value of your attack.

STUNTS

Barbarian Ways (Gain 2 Armor Rating against mental attacks based on manners, Shénzhōu customs, etc.)

Blood of Chiefs (May use Provoke instead of Contacts with barbarians)

Horseman (+2 bonus to create an advantage or overcome obstacles with Drive while riding a horse)

Among the mightiest of the wild men who live beyond the borders of Shénzhōu, the Barbarian Chieftain leads his forces against Imperial troops, rival clans, and any who would dare stand against them. His savage fighting style and bizarre customs are strange to outsiders, but there is skill and honor in them. If he or one of his rivals can ever unite the fractured clans of barbarians who dwell beyond Shénzhōu borders, the empire will weep.

BARBARIAN SHAMAN

ASPECTS

TRIBAL MYSTIC

"I WILL CONSULT THE SPIRITS!"

TRIBAL TABOOS

SKILLS

Great (+4): *Chi*

Good (+3): Lore, Medicine

Fair (+2): Contacts, Notice, Will

Average (+1): Athletics, Fight, Provoke, Rapport

STRESS

2 Physical

3 Mental

STUNTS

Mystic (+2 bonus to using *Chi* to create advantages based on charms and curses),

Shamanic Lore (+2 to Lore rolls involving tribal customs and medicine)

*Wise men and women of various barbarian tribes, the shaman is a spiritual advisor and leader to their people. Though lacking the cultivation of their energies afforded students of Kung Fu, they nevertheless have learned how to channel and manipulate *Chi* in various ways. These characters can be allies or enemies depending on their own motivations and how others treat their customs and people.*

BIG BRUTE

ASPECTS

MUSCLE-BOUND MENACE
NOT THAT BRIGHT
"THAT DIDN'T HURT!"

SKILLS

Great (+4): Physique
Good (+3): Fight, Provoke
Fair (+2): Athletics, Drive
Average (+1): Chi, Shoot

STRESS

4 Physical Boxes
 2 Mental Boxes

STUNTS

Bully (+2 bonus to Provoke attacks based on fear and intimidation against targets with lower Physique)

Powerful Brawler (add +2 Weapons Rating to Fight attacks using bare hands or large heavy melee weapons)

Hulking, scary-looking, and tough, Big Brutes get by on raw power where others use skill or smarts. They are often not particularly good fighters or tacticians, but they can soak up and do a lot of damage. Many Big Brutes work doing hard physical labor, acting as enforcers for criminal organizations, and being bodyguards for undiscerning parties who think size and might are the best measure of martial power.

EVIL EUNUCH

ASPECTS

EVIL EUNUCH MINISTER
TREACHEROUS AMBITION

SKILLS

Great (+4): Deceive
Good (+3): Contacts, Resources
Fair (+2): Chi, Empathy, Provoke, Lore
Average (+1): Fight, Will, Notice, Rapport, Stealth

STRESS

2 Physical
 3 Mental Boxes

STUNTS

Mystic Eunuch (Treated as having +4 Defense bonus against all physical seduction attempts)

Secrets and Lies (Use Deceive instead of Investigate to discover secrets and scandals)

Mystically de-gendered advisors and ministers of the empire, eunuchs range from well-intentioned civil servants to treacherous abusers of powers. This character definitely falls into the latter category, desiring to hoard terrestrial riches and power at the expense of the people. While not a physical powerhouse, this antagonist is adept at using deception and influence to make things difficult for any who oppose their schemes. Some eunuchs know powerful martial arts; to represent this, increase Fight and add Kung Fu styles and Lost Techniques.

LIN KUEI ASSASSIN

ASPECTS

FOREST DEMON ASSASSIN
SHADOWY KILLERS
NEVER ABANDON A CONTRACT

SKILLS

Great (+4): Stealth
Good (+3): Athletics, Fight, Shoot
Fair (+2): Burglary, Notice, Deceive
Average (+1): *Chi*, Investigate, Physique, Will

STRESS

3 Physical
 3 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLES

Forest Serpent
FOREST SERPENT FORM

Forest Hides the Beast: A tie on a Fight or Athletics based defense action grants no boost to your attacker.

Leaves Like Razors: When invoking a situation aspect or environment-based advantage in a Fight attack, you may gain a 2 shift bonus to all physical stress inflicted.

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

STUNTS

Assassin's Strike (+2 attack bonus to physical attacks against unaware targets)

Master of Disguise (Spend 1 Fate point to be in a scene disguised as an extra)

Legendary masked killers, assassins, and spies, the Lin Kuei ("Forest Demons") operate from hidden cells and strongholds across Shénzhōu. Known for never abandoning a contract and using any tactic to silence a target, Lin Kuei employ Kung Fu, poison, treachery, and disguise. A Lin Kuei on a mission could appear as anyone; a farmer, a guardsman, or an old, blind beggar woman. They will not reveal themselves until there are ready to strike; a fair fight is a ridiculous notion best avoided to these assassins. Some of the Lin Kuei have mastered various archaic martial arts, such as the fabled Shadow styles of Kung Fu, though many use more traditional fighting arts combined with ambush and stealth to eliminate their opponents.

SENIOR MAGISTRATE

ASPECTS

SERVANT OF THE STATUS QUO
GETTING TOO OLD FOR THIS CRAP
"I AM THE LAW!"

SKILLS

Great (+4): Investigate
Good (+3): Notice, Will
Fair (+2): Empathy, Fight, Lore
Average (+1): Contacts, Deceive, Physique, Stealth

STRESS

3 Physical
 4 Mental Boxes

STUNTS

Streetwise (Use Investigate instead of Contacts to deal with informants and magistrates)

"Sick of Your Screwball Antics" (Use Investigate instead of Provoke against suspects and subordinates)

Arbiters of law and investigators of crime, the Senior Magistrate is in charge of keeping order in a particular area. He usually has a number of junior magistrates working under him, though in remote areas his resources might be stretched thin. This character could be a beleaguered idealist or a corrupt cop looking to fund his retirement. In either case, he is a dogged pursuer of any who get in his way and can be a potent ally or enemy, depending on the situation.

RED BANNER BROTHER

ASPECTS

RED BANNER AGENT
BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY
LOYAL TO THE CAUSE

SKILLS

Great (+4): Will
Good (+3): Chi, Fight
Fair (+2): Athletics, Contacts, Physique
Average (+1): Deceive, Resources, Shoot, Stealth

STRESS

4 Physical
 4 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLES

Pick any Style; add the *FORM* and three Techniques

STUNTS

Loyalty Unto Death (+2 bonus to resist attempts interrogation and torture)
Under the Red Banner (+1 to Fight attack and defense when fighting alongside other Red Banner members)

Originally made up of rebels and exiles from a deposed dynasty, the Red Banner Brotherhood has lost its way over several generations. Where once they sought to overthrow what they believed were corrupt usurpers to their rightful rule, the Brotherhood's gathering of power to further their goals means most of their current leadership is corrupted by greed, ambition, a shift from politics to cult-like dogma, and the abuse of forbidden Kung Fu lore. If some of their former idealism and altruism returns somehow, they could be a great force for good. As they are, the Red Banners are a dangerous threat to any who oppose them. The statistics above represent a well-trained Red Banner agent and soldier, but their agents and spies come in many forms.

SLAVE RING BOSS

ASPECTS

DESPICABLE SLAVER
"I WILL BREAK YOU!"
PEOPLE ARE CHATTEL

SKILLS

Great (+4): Provoke
Good (+3): Fight, Physique
Fair (+2): Athletics, Contacts, Shoot
Average (+1): Burglary, Investigate, Notice, Will

STRESS

4 Physical
 3 Mental Boxes

STUNTS

Slaver (+2 bonus to use Provoke on slaves and former slaves)
Submission Fighting (+2 bonus to grappling and restraining foes)

Slavery is of questionable legality in Shénzhōu, but that does not stop it from being a common and profitable practice. The Slave Ring Boss often claims his stocks are indentured servants or debt laborers, but they are really just slaves. Used to slapping around broken slaves and prospective stock, he is not much for a straight up fight. However, if he can get a character under his power, it is a whole other story.

WHITE WIDOW ENFORCER

ASPECTS

WHITE WIDOW SECT SISTER
DISTRUSTFUL OF MEN
STRENGTH THROUGH SISTERHOOD

SKILLS

Great (+4): Athletics
Good (+3): Fight, Shoot, Stealth
Fair (+2): Chi, Notice, Will
Average (+1): Empathy, Investigate, Physique, Contacts

STRESS

3 Physical
 3 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLES

Pick Any Forest style and add the **FORM** and 3 Techniques

STUNTS

Unity of Sisterhood (+2 bonus to using Contacts with female characters)

Spirits of the Forest (+2 bonus to hide and evade pursuit in forest environments)

Driven to the White Widow Sect by abuse, neglect, or other ill treatment, the typical White Widow Enforcer has good reasons to be wary of men. Living and training in the Sect's secret compound deep in the forest, they train to protect their sisters and take revenge on those who wrong them. They are also known to act as bodyguards for characters whose actions help promote equality among the sexes. The White Widows are feared in much of Shénzhōu, though many secretly admire their goals if not always condoning their violent methods.

AGENTS OF THE EMPEROR, GOVERNMENT SPIES, AND SECRET SOCIETY MEMBERS

One character type left off the list of example antagonists was the agent working for the Emperor, the imperial bureaucracy, or even some hidden faction within the government. It is not that these agents do not exist (they do), or that they are not milling around Jiāngzhōu (they are), or that they probably will not take interest in the PCs' actions (they will). No, the reason there is no example of such a character is that they do not conform to any standard type. The innkeeper who rents the PCs a room? He might be a spy for the Emperor. The incorruptible

magistrate who helps them out of a jam? He might have been sent from the capital city to keep tabs on unrest in the region. A character's own master, brother, or friend might work for a secret society. The PCs themselves might even be such agents if they want. After all, if spies and secret agents had a "type," they would be pretty easy to spot.

Making a character, NPC or PC, an agent of the Empire or some other influential faction with no real uniform type of member is as simple as giving them an interesting idea along those lines

and having an aspect describing this role, like *SECRET AGENT OF THE EMPEROR* or *"I COULD TELL YOU, BUT THEN I'D HAVE TO KILL YOU..."*. Characters with strong ties to their hidden masters might have more than one aspect describing this relationship as well as high ranks in skills like Contacts, Deceive, and Resources. Such connections can generate a lot of drama, adventure, and tension in a *Tianxia* campaign and, if used properly, can give the game a feeling of larger scope even if the PCs rarely leave their local area.

DANGEROUS MOBS

CITY MAGISTRATES

ASPECTS

MINOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
ROUND UP THE USUAL SUSPECTS!

SKILLS

Fair (+2): Investigate, Notice
Average (+1): Provoke, Fight

Often underpaid and ill equipped, these guys do their best or worst depending on their inclination. They are often under the command of a more skilled and influential senior official. Magistrates range from the idealistic to the corrupt, with most falling somewhere in between.

COURTESANS

ASPECTS

"COME UP AND SEE ME SOMETIME!"
LET ME HANDLE IT
LOVER

SKILLS

Fair (+2): Deceive, Notice
Average (+1): Rapport, Empathy
Special: +2 bonus when using Deceive to seduce or charm those attracted to them.

An example of a non-combat mob, these attractive ladies and gentlemen of the evening can be used to distract both the lecherous and prude. These folks cannot fight, but they can definitely hold more than their own in other areas. For courtesans trained to fight, like Li Li Húa's enforcers (see House of Soft Sighs, page 46), add Fair Fight and Average Athletics.

EVIL CULTISTS

ASPECTS

RELIGIOUS FANATICS
"WE ARE THE FAITHFUL!"

SKILLS

Good (+3): Provoke
Fair (+2): Fight, Stealth
Average (+1): Chi, Deceive
Special: Fanatical Fervor gives them 1 Armor rating against physical and mental attacks and +1 Weapon Rating with their own attacks.

Obscure cults are scattered throughout Shénzhōu, ranging from the twisted and corrupt to eccentric and mostly harmless. The stats here are for the scary, fanatical types who practice things like demon worship, blood drinking, and human sacrifice. Depending on the nature of the cult and its leadership, Cultists can be easy-to-identify, knife-wielding maniacs or quietly menacing infiltrators who strike without warning.

GANGSTERS AND BANDITS

ASPECTS

LOCAL TOUGH GUYS
"SURE THING
BOSS!"

SKILLS

Fair (+2): Fight
Average (+1): Provoke, Physique

Called gangsters if they operate in a city and bandits if they do not, there is not much difference between these guys in mechanical terms. They are undisciplined, but violent and ruthless. Really well-trained or elite gangsters and bandits will have higher and more skills, possibly even a Kung-Fu style.

IMPERIAL SOLDIERS

ASPECTS

PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER
"WE SERVE THE EMPIRE!"

SKILLS

Good (+3): Fight
Fair (+2): Athletics, Shoot
Average (+1): Drive, Notice
Special: Have Weapons and
 Armor Rating of 1

Military men sworn in the service to Shénzhōu, these vary in quality based on experience and morale. The statistics here represent the average soldier, skilled and loyal but not especially so. Imperial soldiers are often posted to garrisons or found in camps, but they can also be assigned to protect officials, important shipments, or patrol dangerous areas. Specialized troops might have different statistics: Archers might swap Fight and Shoot or Cavalry might have a higher Drive skill.

PIRATES

ASPECTS

A PIRATE'S LIFE FOR ME!
SCOURGE OF THE RIVERS AND SEAS

SKILLS

Good (+3): Fight
Fair (+2): Drive, Provoke
Average (+1): Athletics, Deceive

Pirates in Jiāngzhōu are usually of the river-dwelling variety, though these stats can easily be used to reflect their sea-faring brethren. These guys are ruthless and fairly well organized, but they do not know Kung Fu.

RAIDERS

ASPECTS

BARBARIAN MARAUDER
"FOR THE HORDE!"

SKILLS

Good (+3): Drive, Shoot
Fair (+2): Fight, Provoke
Average (+1): Athletics, Notice

More common in northern Shénzhōu, these barbarians sometimes still menace the borders in other regions. Skilled horsemen and archers, they come from various tribes and bands. GMs wanting to provide some color to their hordes of marauding outsiders can vary the skills and aspects presented here as necessary.

RIVAL SCHOOL STUDENTS

ASPECTS

FOR THE HONOR OF SIFU AND OUR
SCHOOL!
KUNG FU FORM (BASED ON STYLE)

SKILLS

Good (+3): Fight
Fair (+2): Athletics, Chi
Average (+1): Rapport, Provoke

*This mob is a bunch of lower-tier students from one of the many Kung Fu schools in Shénzhōu. They have not learned any Techniques of note, but they do have the **FORM** of their chosen style and are considered to be Jianghu Rank 1.*

FIERCE CREATURES

BEAR

ASPECTS

DANGEROUS BLACK BEAR
TERRITORIAL TEMPERAMENT

SKILLS

Great (+4): Physique
Good (+3): Provoke
Fair (+2): Athletics, Fight
Average (+1): Notice, Will

STRESS

4 Physical
2 Mental
Armor 2 (thick hide)

JIANGHU RANK: 1

STUNTS

Massive Beast (if a target smaller than you defends against your Fight attack with their own Fight skill, gain a +2 bonus)
Tooth and Claw (add Weapon Rating 2 to all Fight attacks)
Ursine Might (+2 to Physique rolls involving brute animal strength)

Reminiscent of the Asiatic black bear, these creatures are solitary, territorial, and temperamental omnivores. They avoid humans when possible, but hunger or sickness can make these creatures quite hostile and dangerous. Due to their size and power, they are considered to be Jianghu Rank 1, putting them on par with most starting PCs in Tianxia.

HORSE, RIDING

ASPECTS

"GIDDYUP!"
SKITTISH BEAST

SKILLS

Good (+3): Athletics
Fair (+2): Physique
Average (+1): Fight, Notice

STRESS

3 Physical
2 Mental
Armor 1 (tough hide)

STUNTS

Fast (can cross two zones for free if not hindered by obstacles and gets a +2 bonus to overcome physical obstructions to movement that can be raced past or jumped over)

HORSE, WAR

ASPECTS

FAST AND FURIOUS
TRAINED FOR BATTLE

SKILLS

Good (+3): Athletics, Physique
Fair (+2): Fight, Will
Average (+1): Notice, Provoke

STRESS

4 Physical
3 Mental
Armor 2 (tough hide and barding)

STUNTS

Battle-Trained (+2 bonus to defend against Provoke attacks as long as rider is present)
Fast (can cross two zones for free if not hindered by obstacles and gets a +2 bonus to overcome physical obstructions to movement that can be raced past or jumped over)

Fast, rugged, and powerful, the horse is important to Shénzhōu land transportation and infrastructure. Common ponies and horses see use in farming and labor, with warhorses and other types often used by the wealthy and nobles. Many cannot afford to care for and keep such animals,

making them something of a status symbol, particularly in the case of thoroughbreds and trained war steeds. They are more common in the west and north, where trade with the horse-riding tribes from beyond the border makes them easier to acquire.

Horses are also rare in wuxia and Kung Fu stories, as heroes can cover great distances with their powerful Kung Fu skills. As they are easily spooked without special training, they can be ill-suited to use in the middle of a fight. However, many heroes ride these animals across great distances, especially in tales set in more barren areas or that cover large sections of geography. The statistics provided here are for an average riding horse and a trained warhorse.

ANTAGONISTS

RAT SWARM

ASPECTS

HUNGRY HORDE
THEY ARE EVERYWHERE!

Armor Rating of 1 against most weapons or attacks, except those covering a large area.

can drive whole colonies of rats from their lairs to swarm out, attacking any who cross their path. The Di Yu underground in Bào Jiāng in particular sees hordes of these animals driven out of some collapsed or flooded area periodically.

SKILLS

Fair (+2): Fight, Stealth
Average (+1): Athletics, Notice
Special: Treat them as having

Rarely encountered in large groups in the wild, rats are a concern in large cities or recently abandoned settlements, especially in subterranean areas. Various calamities

SNAKE (VENOMOUS)

ASPECTS

DEADLY POISONOUS SNAKE
EASILY STARTLED
QUICK AND QUIET

STUNTS

Deadly Venom (After succeeding with a Fight Attack, Spend 1 Fate Point to make an extra Good ranked attack each exchange against the target's Physique until the defender succeeds with Style on his defense. **CHI ARMOR** protects stress taken but normal armor does not)
Fast (use Athletics instead of Notice to determine turn order)

You know the kind of snake that is harmless to humans? This is not that kind of snake. Shénzhōu is home to many of these poisonous reptiles, from vipers to cobras. Their venom, either raw or refined, is often used by assassins and some eccentric killers even keep and train snakes to attack others. These statistics serve for most poisonous snakes, though some like the deadly Hundred Step Viper have bites which are even deadlier.

SKILLS

Good (+3): Athletics, Stealth
Fair (+2): Fight, Notice
Average (+1): Provoke, Physique

STRESS

3 Physical
2 Mental Boxes

TIGER

ASPECTS

KING OF BIG CATS
FEROCIOUS PREDATOR
SILENT HUNTER

JIANGHU RANK: 1 OR 2

STUNTS

Tooth and Claw (add Weapon Rating 2 to all Fight attacks)
Wild Hunter (+2 to Stealth rolls to stalk and ambush prey in the wild)

*presents itself. Most tigers are a tawny orange, though their white-furred cousins can be found in colder regions. Tigers are usually Jianghu Rank 1 due to their Fight Skill, though the exceptionally dangerous man-killers might be treated as Rank 2. There are some rare beasts whose prowess is so great, it is considered akin to Kung Fu. To create such a rare and magnificent tiger, apply Techniques from the Tiger substyle to the statistics here and increase their Skills as appropriate. An example of such a beast, **Jade-Eyed Demon**, is found in the **Seeds of Shénzhōu** section (page 163).*

SKILLS

Great (+4): Fight
Good (+3): Athletics, Physique
Fair (+2): Stealth, Provoke
Average (+1): Will, Notice

Deadly, fierce, and stealthy, these big cats inhabit the forests and mountains of Shénzhōu. Their power and ferocity is the inspiration for the Tiger styles of Kung Fu, and they have been known to stalk and kill humans when the opportunity

STRESS

4 Physical
2 Mental
Armor 1 (thick hide)

WILD DOG/WOLF PACK

ASPECTS

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS
THEY'VE GOT YOUR SCENT

PROVOKE

Special: Treat them as having a Weapon Rating of 1 due to their bite; May use Teamwork to gain a +1 bonus against opponents of a higher Jianghu Rank (total, not per mob member).

One of the more common nonhuman mobs PCs might encounter, these beasts are either trained to attack humans or merely hungry and desperate enough to do so. Despite their lack of human intellect, these animals are skilled at using pack tactics to bring down much larger prey and should not be taken lightly.

SKILLS

Good (+3): Athletics
Fair (+2): Fight, Notice
Average (+1): Physique

PLAYING ANIMALS AS PCs

While it is exceedingly rare in the inspirational media, there is nothing preventing a player from playing a special or clever animal as a PC. These characters are built the same as any other, with their stunts and aspects used to show how they are different from not just other characters, but humans in general. Such PCs will take on a very particular and often supporting role in games, but that is a completely valid option for players who want that sort of experience.

Players desiring to play an animal as a PC should talk this out with the GM and other players. Some groups will love the idea; for others it will break their sense of immersion or credibility. How the animal is portrayed can make a big difference—a player who decides he wants to play another character’s reliable and surprisingly clever animal companion gives a whole different impression than a mystical monkey who can talk. Aspects can really help define these differences here, as *WONDER DOG* and *REINCARNATED SAINT IN A MONKEY BODY* will provide greatly different play experiences not just for the player, but for everyone in the game.

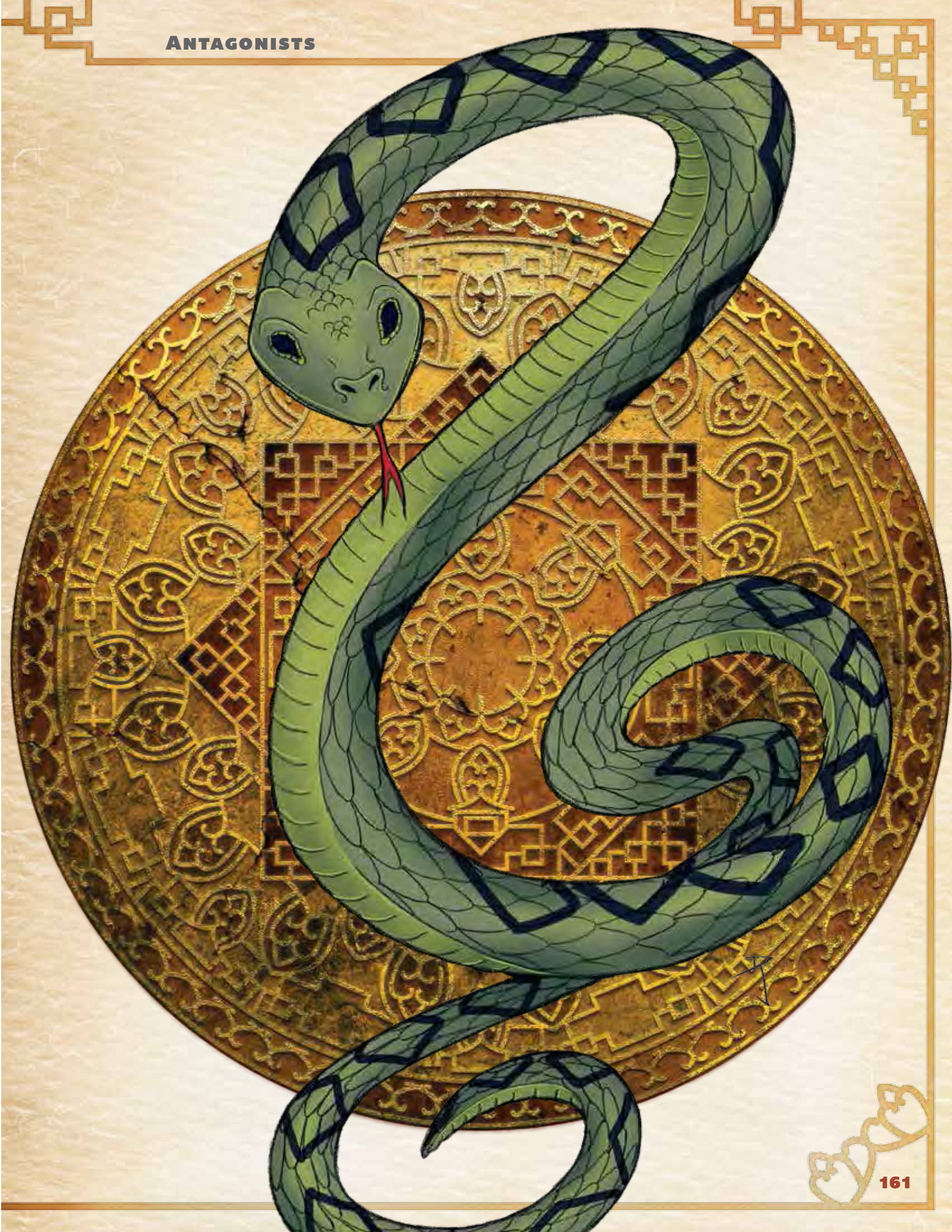
Another consideration in playing an animal is skills. Some skills will be hard to justify

for animals that do not have thumbs like Craft and Drive. *Chi* and some skills like Rapport or Provoke become more general, not usable much for finely cultivated applications but representing general spirit and the ability to charm or terrify. This can give such characters a foreleg up in some ways as players feel free to focus on things animals can usually do well that also come up in action-oriented games a lot like Fight, Notice, and Athletics. However, it can also make such characters very limited in play. If this is not desired, consider giving animals a special Instinct or Animal skill that can be used to **Overcome**, **Create an Advantage**, and **Defend** in situations where the beast’s natural abilities would be a real boon. If you use this option, do not let it replace existing skills or it will throw off character balance; a tiger that wants to be a fierce fighter needs a high Fight, but they might be able to use Instinct to create an advantage based on finding the best way to approach their prey.

Kung Fu is the final consideration. At first blush, the idea seems silly. Animals cannot generally train and adapt the way humans do. They might learn some tricks, but this is not the same as studying martial arts for years.

Then again, all the Body Kung Fu sub-styles in this book are named after animals. They are designed around mimicking and emulating the movements and methods of an animal with the human body. So if a human could learn to deliver a punishing blow with a “tiger claw” hand strike, imagine how well a tiger could do it! By default, *Tianxia* assumes special animals, PC or NPC, can learn styles relating to their own nature and environment. Thus a dangerous tiger from a mountain region might be able to take Stone Tiger to represent how generally dangerous and mighty he is. Animals who do not have a sub style relating to their own species might develop a variant of a similar one; so a powerful wolf might use something like Tiger to represent his powerful abilities. This might not be exactly the same as the Kung Fu a human PC learns, but it functions identically mechanically.

Again, do not do this if it is going to disrupt play, but if everyone is cool with it a player can totally play a monkey PC who learned Kung Fu by watching his master practice every day (*MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DO*, after all) and now seeks truly bizarre revenge on the villains who murdered his master.





CHAPTER NINE

SEEDS OF SHÉNZHŌU

THE OX & THE TIGER

To those who knew him, the idea of Smiling Ox being nervous was as ridiculous as the idea of him being small and thin. The laughing warrior who had faced death a hundred times? The man who had defeated the Ivory Claw Killers? The ten-time victor of the Drunken Dragon's annual meat-bun eating contest? The very idea of *that* Smiling Ox creeping tentatively through the forest, jumping at every sound was ridiculous. It was a fairy tale, a joke. And not even a good joke, because it was so patently absurd it moved beyond funny to alien and unsettling.

So, as Smiling Ox crept tentatively through the forest, jumping at every sound, it was fortunate no one could see him. To be fair, though, this was not the Smiling Ox of those stories. This was another Smiling Ox. Sure, he looked like the massively muscled and dangerous warrior of those tales but as he crept through the underbrush, he was very much a ten-year old boy staring in terror at the mauled remains of town doctor.

It had been a tiger those years ago, just as it was now. And when the villagers pleaded with Ox to defeat the beast currently plaguing their little town and dragging off their neighbors screaming into the night, he had of course said yes. Especially when they offered to pay and feed him. He had even laughed at the danger the village elder swore the beast presented.

"This is no ordinary Tiger, warrior." The old man had said, "He is a demon in tiger shape, an green-eyed eater of men, and a terror to all who behold him."

Smiling Ox had laughed at this too. He had kept laughing as he set off into the forest in search of the beast's lair. He had even been chuckling a bit when he found it. His laughter stopped when he saw the tiger's victims. Dozens of them, gnawed to the bone, flesh licked off so the beast could drink their blood, and often torn to shreds. Every single face Ox could pick out, and there were mercifully few, held expressions of sheer terror.

That's about when things stopped being funny. It was that moment ten-year old Smiling Ox popped up and told the big bad warrior he had grown into, "What are you, crazy?"

However, a job was a job. He had given his word and taken half his pay. So there was nothing left to do but the task at hand.

This was how Smiling Ox found himself staring into the brush at a green-eyed shadow as it crept ever closer.

"At least I saw it coming" Ox lied. He had not, really. Not at first. Instead, he had smelled the beast's kill, lying dead somewhere in the underbrush.

With great difficulty, he pushed this thought aside. He took up his Demon Hammer and began to swing it in a steady, ever-quickenning arc. He stopped thinking about that scared ten-year old boy. Mostly. He even managed a smile.

"Let's do this, kitten." He said.

And with that, the tiger leapt at him.

The following plot and adventure seeds can provide plots and adventures for PCs to explore. Given the

player driven nature of *Fate*, these ideas are kept as general as possible and GMs should tweak them as needed. After all, a group of PC bandits and mercenaries will deal with a situation much differently than one filled with scholars and magistrates. Also included is a chart to help GMs generate even more adventures for PCs to experience.

TO LIVE AND DIE IN BǎO JIĀNG

Forger Bai, a master counterfeiter who works out of Bǎo Jiāng has a new gig.

Contracted by a mysterious benefactor, he has been charged with duplicating an imperial seal. This supposedly impossible task involves getting one's hand on an official imperial seal, something both rare and closely guarded. However, such a seal is coming to Jiāngzhōu in the hands of Princess Ju, an imperial cousin who is touring the province at the behest of the emperor.

The PCs can get involved in this affair in a number of ways. They could be hired to steal the seal, charged with protecting Princess Ju, or are framed for the crime to take heat off the actual culprits. They could even become involved after an attempt to secure the seal when Princess Ju escapes the assault and flees. In this scenario, the Princess will travel disguised as a commoner to avoid detection until she can find dependable allies to escort and the seal to safety. It is a trick she regularly used to sneak out of her parents' estates when young and she is pretty good at it. However they get sucked into this plot, they are

likely to be considered loose ends or problems to be eliminated once the seal is stolen. After all, duplicating something that can be used to sign death warrants, transfer property, and undermine the state's authority only works if nobody knows you have it.

There is of course the question of who wants the counterfeit seal. Such an object is incredibly valuable and the list of possible culprits is very long. Chief among them is Governor Gouzhi, Formless Pei, or the Three Motherless Killers, or any number of rebellious factions in Shénzhōu who wish to overthrow or undermine the emperor. Any of these parties will murder, lie, and steal to secure this object. And if the seal is created and the PCs end up with it, what will they do with it?

FORGER BAI

ASPECTS

*GREATEST FORGER IN JIĀNGZHŌU**HARD BARGAINER**LOVES A CHALLENGE**PROFESSIONAL PRIDE**"YOU CAN'T RUSH PERFECTION"*

SKILLS

Great (+4): Crafts, Lore**Good (+3):** Will, Contacts**Fair (+2):** Resources, Investigate**Average (+1):** Burglary, Notice,
Stealth, Fight

STRESS

2 Physical

4 Mental

STUNTS

Counterfeit Goods (use Craft instead of Resources when creating an advantage based on counterfeit items)**Good as the Real Thing** (can oppose rolls to overcome detecting his forgeries even when he is not in the scene and no matter how much scrutiny and time taken to detect the fake)**Master Forger** (+2 bonus when creating forged documents or items)

PRINCESS JU

ASPECTS

*PRINCESS OF SHÉNZHŌU**DISARMINGLY ATTRACTIVE**SPOILED IDEALIST**TRAINING OVER EXPERIENCE**"YOU WILL DO AS I SAY!"*

SKILLS

Great (+4): Contacts**Good (+3):** Will, Rapport**Fair (+2):** Empathy, Fight,
Resources**Average (+1):** Athletics, *Chi*,
Notice, Will

STRESS

3 Physical (using *Chi* instead of
Physique)

3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE:

STONE PHOENIX

STONE PHOENIX FORM

Phoenix Beats its Wings If you defend with style, you may gain an **OFF BALANCE** advantage on the target, with a free invocation instead of a boost.**Phoenix Calls to Heaven** You may use *Chi* instead of Physique to determine extra stress boxes and consequences. This is in addition to the Armor bonus from having high *Chi*. If *Chi* and Physique are the same rating, you may instead reduce physical stress taken by 2 shifts once per session.**Stone Weathers the Storm** If you defend with style, you may remove your physical 1 stress box or convert another physical stress box to 1 lower instead of taking a boost.

STUNTS

Beautiful (+2 bonus using Rapport with those attracted to you)**Common Disguise** (use Rapport instead of Deceit to impersonate commoners)**Imperial Cousin** (Use Contacts instead of Resources to create an advantage and overcome obstacles when throwing around your imperial connections)

GAMES OF DEATH

The Tournament of Shadows is taking place in Jiāngzhōu and one or more of the PCs have been invited.

This contest is part mid-range martial tournament, part recruiting drive for various parties in the region, and part gambler's heaven. Conducted in secret in an arena hidden deep within Di Yu, those who acquit themselves well enjoy fame, opportunities to work for various syndicates, security companies, and mercenary companies, and prizes ranging from master-crafted weapons to expensive objects and money. The Tournament has few rules, and many of the competitors will resort to sabotage, intimidation, and poisoning to get an edge. Worst among these parties is Da Go, last year's champion. Da Go, a former pit fighter now working as an enforcer for the 9413, is known for his ruthlessness and willingness to cripple or kill on a whim. Da Go has become accustomed to the fame and adoration due a champion and recent struggles between the 9413 and other gangs have him

desperate to prove he is an asset worthy of promotion and favor.

If one of the PCs wins the tournament or even survives and does well, they will generate interest among various organizations and this could lead to new opportunities. Of course, if they start to do well and the odds turn in their favor, various gamblers and gangs will be interested in them as well. They might be asked to take a dive in a fight, or offered illicit help to hinder opponents. What the PCs do with these opportunities is up to them, but their behavior will do a lot to set the tone of future adventures. It is also possible some Kung Fu master is watching the fights, looking for a worthy pupil to pass a valuable Lost Technique to!

DA QO

ASPECTS*DEVIL DRAGON OF THE 9413**HONORLESS DOG**"I WILL BREAK YOU!"**MASSIVELY MUSCLED**VICTORY AT ANY COST***SKILLS****Great (+4):** Fight, Physique**Good (+3):** Provoke, Athletics**Fair (+2):** *Chi*, Will, Notice**Average (+1):** Resources, Stealth, Contacts**STRESS**

4 Physical

3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 2**KUNG FU STYLE: IRON****DRAGON (MASTER)***IRON DRAGON FORM***Iron Cleaves the Stone:** Ignore 2 points of Armor when making an attack to inflict physical stress.**Flesh Breaks on Iron:** When you defend against a Fight attack with style, you may inflict 2 shift hit instead of taking a boost on your attacker.**Iron Body, Iron Mind:** +2 bonus to create an advantages relating to resisting or coping with pain, intimidation, or fear.**Dragon Rules the Fields:** When you succeed with style on an attack, gain a boost—with a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2—without reducing the value of your attack.**Dragon Rules the Heavens:** Use *Chi* or Fight (selected when you take this Technique) instead of Athletics in rolls involving entering zones or preventing others from doing so. Apply a +2 bonus if both Athletics and the selected Skill are the same rank or Athletics is greater.**Dragon Sleeps in Mist:** When you succeed with style on a defense, you may reduce the result by 1 to gain 2 Armor Rating against the next attack in the scene that strikes you in addition to the normal boost.**Scales and Teeth Unto like****Iron:** Spend 1 Fate point; for the remainder of the scene, any attacker who creates a consequence on you with physical stress does not get a free invocation for creating the consequence. In addition, you gain +1 Weapons Rating to all your Fight attacks.**STUNTS****Grappler** (+2 bonus using Fight when grappling or restraining opponents)**Heartless Bastard** (Can use Provoke to defend in Rapport contests)**Underworld Ties** (+2 bonus to using Resources to create an advantage based on criminal actions and individuals)

THE JADE-EYED DEMON

A small village is being plagued by a fearsome beast—a massive green-eyed tiger, called Jade-Eyed Demon by the locals, is attacking the villagers.

It has even begun coming into the village at night and dragging people off. Nearly twenty have already been killed, and it shows no signs of stopping. The local officials are helpless to stop the animal, and the government seems indifferent to the struggles of the small, poor settlement. Can the PCs stop the Jade-Eyed Demon and save the village?

The PCs can face the tiger how they choose, either tracking it to its lair or waiting for it to strike again. Both present unique challenges. Tracking it is difficult, as the beast possesses impressive cunning and stealth. Unwary PCs might soon find themselves the hunted instead of hunters! Waiting for it to strike again eliminates this problem, but requires the PCs to be able to swiftly respond to an attack that could originate from anywhere in the village and its small collection of surrounding farms. Either way, when they face the beast they will find it an impressive foe; the tiger is so consumed by hunger and savagery, it essentially embodies the power of the Forest Tiger school of Kung Fu, making facing it akin to fighting a master of that style!

UNCONQUERABLE TIGER SPIRIT

By studying the great tiger you take his ferocity and power into yourself. The purity of purpose and deadly instincts of the animal are duplicated in those who learn this Technique, making them incredibly dangerous opponents. However, to mirror the power of the tiger, they must mold their spirit to emulate this proud and deadly beast.

Cost: Significant Milestone, must defeat a great cat or observe its defeat, and must know a Tiger style of Kung Fu. The character must also change an Aspect to reflect embracing the fierce nature of the Tiger, such as *EYE OF THE TIGER* or *TIGER ON TWO LEGS*.

Effect: A character with Unconquerable Tiger Spirit can treat himself as if he was 1 Jianghu Rank higher for movement bonuses and for his foes to determine the passive opposition for creating *CHI ARMOR*. If they use it for a Fight attack or Provoke action based on physical intimidation, they can gain one free invocation of any Tiger-based Kung Fu Style *FORM* to use against opponents of his own Jianghu Rank or lower once per scene.

JADE-EYED DEMON

ASPECTS

MAN-EATING TIGER OF JIANGZHŌU
FEARS NO MAN
APEX PREDATOR
PLAYS WITH HIS FOOD
STRIKES WITHOUT WARNING

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Fight
Great (+4): Athletics, Physique
Good (+3): Provoke, Stealth
Fair (+2): Notice, Will
Average (+1): Chi, Deceive

STRESS

4 Physical Boxes
 3 Mental Boxes
Armor 2 (thick hide and powerful primal spirit)

JIANGHU RANK: 2**KUNG FU STYLES**

Forest Tiger (Master)

FOREST TIGER FORM

Forest Hides the Beast: A tie on a Fight- or Athletics- based defense action grants no boost to your attacker.

Forest Opens Its Paths: If you use Athletics to overcome an obstacle with style, you 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, you add +2

Weapon Rating to that attack.
Tiger Moves With Purpose: Move at least 1 zone and make an attack using Athletics or make an Athletics attack 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 Rules the Jungle: You may use Physique or Provoke (selected when you select this Technique) instead of Will to defend against Provoke attacks. If both Will and Physique (or Provoke) are the same rank, or Will is higher, gain a 2 Armor Rating against Provoke attacks instead.

Tiger Stalks the Path Spend 1 Fate Point on a Fight attack where a tie or better is achieved. If tied, the action now counts as a success with a +4 Weapon Rating. If already a success, add an additional free invocation to any consequence created by this attack or grant a boost if no consequence is created.

STUNTS

Killer Beast (may spend 1 Fate Point when inflicting a consequence with a Fight attack

to increase the consequence by one, if the target was already going to take a severe consequence they must take an additional consequence as well or be taken out)

Tooth and Claw (add Weapon Rating 2 to all Fight attacks)

Wild Hunter (+2 to Stealth rolls to stalk and ambush prey in the wild)

Despite being treated as a Kung Fu master, Jade-Eyed Demon is still a tiger; he cannot use weapons or do things a tiger cannot reasonably accomplish, but his might in battle is awe-inspiring. GMs looking for inspiration of just how terrifying and dangerous a big cat can be even to seasoned warriors should check out the Korean martial arts film War of the Arrows (2011) and the African adventure movie The Ghost and the Darkness (1996). The latter is based on a real life incident from 19th century Africa involving two lions and provides GMs with a great twist if the PCs are finding dealing with the tiger too easy: there could be two tigers! This could be a brother or mate, and GMs using this option can use Jade-Eyed Demon's stats for both beasts.

PCs who manage to defeat him might discover that, by meditating on Jade-Eyed Demon's animal nature and power, they can develop a powerful Lost Technique that channels the power of the tiger. However, this path is dangerous, and those who follow it run the risk of becoming little more than a beast in human skin themselves.

BLOOD OF THE MASTERS

The Shining Vampire Sect, a Kung Fu cult, is seeking the secret of ultimate martial power.

Through treachery and deceit, they have captured numerous Kung Fu masters from around Shénzhōu. They plan to sacrifice the masters and drink their blood during the next full moon, an act they believe will permanently transfer the masters' might and skill to them. Can the PCs save these exalted practitioners of the martial arts and defeat the cult? If they do, the masters and any pupils and allies they have will be

very grateful. Not only will the PCs be hailed as heroes among the Jianghu, but they might also gain access to powerful Kung Fu secrets and training.

The cult is led by Sister Orchid and Brother Lotus, fraternal twin martial artists who already use the blood of their victims to augment their prowess. However, their new plan is far more ambitious and they will do anything to ensure its success.

LEADERS OF THE SHINING VAMPIRE SECT

If they manage to pull off the sacrifice, grant the twins a +1 Armor Rating, treat them as having +1 Weapon Rating for all attack rolls (mental and physical), and grant them the ability to spend 1 Fate Point to remove a minor consequence or downgrade a greater consequence by one level.

Such an adventure could lead to whole

*campaign arc, especially if members of the cult escape (made easier for the twins due to their Escape Route stunt). There might exist other factions of the Shining Vampire Sect somewhere. It is also possible power-hungry PCs might delve into the blood-drinking secrets of the cult themselves. This would allow them to gain the **Feast of the Golden***

Vampire Lost Technique (see [page 99](#)), but could easily lead them down a dangerous path. GMs wanting to run a more realistic game might decide the cult's ritual will not actually give them the power they seek, but they still carry out their plan based on the belief it will.

SISTER ORCHID

ASPECTS

*SHINING VAMPIRE SECT LEADER**CRUELLY PLAYFUL**DEADLY SEDUCTRESS**DEADLY TWIN**"NO ONE RESISTS MY CHARMS!"*

SKILLS

Great (+4): *Chi*, Will**Good (+3):** Athletics, Fight, Provoke**Fair (+2):** Empathy, Rapport, Stealth**Average (+1):** Physique, Notice, Resources

STRESS

3 Physical Boxes

4 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 2

Kung Fu Style: Lightning Serpent
(Master)*LIGHTNING SERPENT FORM***Lightning Crosses the Sky:** When you succeed with style on a Fight attack, you may move 1 zone in addition to gaining a boost. If someone or something tries to stop this movement, gain a +2 to rolls to overcome.**Lightning Splits the Tree:** When you succeed with style on a Fight attack, you may remove an invocation on an existing advantage affecting you instead of taking a boost.**Lightning Strikes Without Pause:** Gain a +2 bonus to Notice (or other skill) used when determining turn order.**Serpent Bites the Hand:** If you gain shifts on a defense, you can sacrifice your action next turn to immediately inflict an attack on your opponent using the shift value of your defense as your attack result.**Serpent Strikes First:** Use Athletics or Fight (pick one when Technique is chosen) to determine turn order instead of Notice in combat. Apply a +2 bonus instead if both Notice and the selected Skill are the same rank or Notice is greater.**Serpent Strikes Twice:** +2 bonus to Deceive rolls to create an advantage based on disorientation, distraction, or unbalancing against opponents you have already inflicted stress on this combat.**Serpent Strikes Like Lightning:** Spend 1 Fate Point to make a Fight attack with +1 bonus that ignores 2 points of Armor Rating. This attack occurs immediately, regardless of normal turn order.

Lost Techniques:

Feast of the Golden Vampire: Increase your Jianghu Rank by 1 if you have fed on at least 1 pint of human blood in the past 24 hours. The blood must be warm and fresh. If you go more than 3 days without blood, you gain *OVERABUNDANT YIN*, a minor consequence which makes you lethargic, easily exhausted, and can only be recovered by drinking 1 pint of fresh blood for every day you went without. Drinking a mixture of 1 pint of preserved blood and special herbs requiring at least Fair Lore or Resources to acquire will stave off the negative effects for an additional day. However, each day the character must consume an additional pint of this mixture, and days using this mixture still count as days without fresh blood once it runs out, making it a dangerous respite.**Gemini Union:** You and your partner fight as one. Gain a +1 attack bonus fighting the same opponents and a +1 bonus defending your partner in combat while you are both active and capable of action. Users of this Lost Technique performing Teamwork actions (*FATE CORE*, p.174) gain an additional +1 bonus to their Skill rolls and treat the lowest Jianghu rank of the pairing as one higher for purposes of using Teamwork bonuses against an opponent. Partners can share free invocations (including *CHI ARMOR*) and boosts between one another as if they were one character in situations where it is relevant and appropriate to do so. These Effects only work with specific sets of characters who know Gemini Union and are regular partners, not any character who might use this Lost Technique as part of a different pairing.

STUNTS

Cult of Personality (Use Will instead of Resources to create a cult-based advantage)**Escape Route** (Use Stealth instead of Burglary to escape confinement or create an advantage based on escape plans or hidden passages)**Power Mad** (+2 to Will rolls to resist Provoke attacks as long as they are acting in pursuit of power)

BROTHER LOTUS

ASPECTS

SHINING VAMPIRE SECT LEADER**OBSSIVE SADIST****"I WILL NOT BE DEFIED!"****MEGALOMANIACAL ZEALOT****DEADLY TWIN**

SKILLS

Great (+4): *Chi*, Will**Good (+3):** Athletics, Fight, Provoke**Fair (+2):** Empathy, Rapport, Stealth**Average (+1):** Physique, Notice, Resources

STRESS

3 Physical Boxes

4 Mental Boxes

JIANGHU RANK: 2

Kung Fu Style: Lightning Dragon
(Master)**LIGHTNING DRAGON FORM****Lightning Crosses the Sky:** When you succeed with style on a Fight attack, you may move 1 zone in addition to gaining a boost. If someone or something tries to stop this movement, gain a +2 to rolls to overcome.**Lightning Splits the Tree:** When you succeed with style on a Fight attack, you may remove an invocation on an existing advantage affecting you instead of taking a boost.**Lightning Strikes Without Pause:** Gain a +2 bonus to Notice (or other skill) used when determining turn order.**Dragon Rules the Fields:** When you succeed with style on an attack, gain a boost—with a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2—without reducing the value of your attack.**Dragon Rules the Heavens:** Use *Chi* or Fight (selected when you take this Technique) instead of Athletics in rolls involving entering zones or preventing others from doing so. Apply a +2 bonus if both Athletics and the selected Skill are the same rank or Athletics is greater.**Dragon Sleeps in Mist:** When you succeed with style on a defense, you may reduce the result by 1 to gain 2 Armor Rating against the next attack in the scene that strikes you in addition to the normal boost.**Dragon Breathes the Lightning:** Spend 1 Fate Point; you may “bank” 1 shift from any Fight or Athletics roll made until the end of the scene. These shifts do not count toward their initial roll but can then be added to any successful Fight attack roll for the rest of the scene. There is no limit to how many shifts you can bank and use at once, but any unused shifts go away at the end of the scene.

Lost Techniques:

Feast of the Golden Vampire:Increase your Jianghu Rank by 1 if you have fed on at least 1 pint of human blood in the past 24 hours. The blood must be warm and fresh. If you go more than 3 days without blood, you gain **OVERABUNDANT YIN**, a minor consequence which makes you lethargic, easily exhausted, and can only be recovered by drinking 1 pint of fresh blood for every day you went without. Drinking a mixture of 1 pint of preserved blood and special herbs requiring at least Fair Lore or Resources to acquire will stave off the negative effects for an additional day. However, each day the character must consume an additional pint of this mixture, and days using this mixture still count as days without fresh blood once it runs out, making it a dangerous respite.**Gemini Union:** You and your partner fight as one. Gain a +1 attack bonus fighting the same opponents and a +1 bonus defending your partner in combat while you are both active and capable of action. Users of this Lost Technique performing Teamwork actions (*FATE CORE*, p.174) gain an additional +1 bonus to their Skill rolls and treat the lowest Jianghu rank of the pairing as one higher for purposes of using Teamwork bonuses against an opponent. Partners can share free invocations (including **CHI ARMOR**) and boosts between one another as if they were one character in situations where it is relevant and appropriate to do so. These Effects only work with specific sets of characters who know Gemini Union and are regular partners, not any character who might use this Lost Technique as part of a different pairing.

STUNTS

Cult of Personality (Use Will instead of Resources to create a cult-based advantage)**Escape Route** (Use Stealth instead of Burglary to escape confinement or create an advantage based on escape plans or hidden passages)**Power Mad** (+2 to Will rolls to resist Provoke attacks as long as they are acting in pursuit of power)

ADVENTURE MENU

In addition to the adventure seeds included in this book, the following menu of plot elements can be used to generate even more ideas for adventures in Tianxia.

Simply pick an item from each column and combine them into a new and exciting adventure for your PCs! For a more elaborate or deluxe adventure idea, pick multiple options from one or more categories. However, do not overdo it; too many ingredients will muddle the flavor of the whole dish.

Some options require more creativity to make work than others, but with a little effort this menu can provide numerous ideas. Also, GMs should feel free to add to this list or use this format to spark their own ideas for adventure.

Having just finished a big campaign arc with multiple adventures, Jack wants to throw in a quick adventure for the PCs as a change of pace. Having just watched a couple of British crime caper films, he wants something with some comedic value that will still present a challenge. Looking at the Adventure Menu, he picks an item from each column and creates an adventure where "Ambitious thugs attempt to steal the family heirloom of a Triad boss that can be sold for a small fortune and the PCs are framed for the scheme!" Jack decides a local gang of hoods steal the jade urn holding the ashes of a honored ancestor of a local Triad boss. These same hoods then go to the Triad boss and swear they saw the PCs do the deed. The Triad boss is out for blood and the PCs will have to either defeat his forces or discover the real culprits and smooth things over...or perhaps both!

You can also try randomly determining some or all of the elements of an adventure. Using a random number generator, dice, or even just closing your eyes and pointing can lead to interesting, if sometimes strange, adventures.

Jack is pressed for an adventure for his upcoming game since one of his players cannot make it and he does not want to dive into the next big adventure without them. Looking at the Adventure Menu, he closes his eyes and picks a random element from each column. He gets "Corrupt officials kidnap the children of a Kung Fu master to satisfy an age-old debt but an ally of the PCs is hired to stop them!" Considering these events briefly, he comes up with an adventure involving a eunuch minister whose only siblings were killed years ago in a duel with a famous Kung Fu master, thus exterminating their family line. The eunuch now seeks to kidnap and do away with the children of the aging master, thereby condemning him to the same fate. As an added twist, a young friend of the PCs has been training with the master and is present when the eunuch's agents attack. Their friend is severely wounded and the children are taken, making our heroes doubly motivated to ending this evil plot!

ADVENTURE MENU

WHO

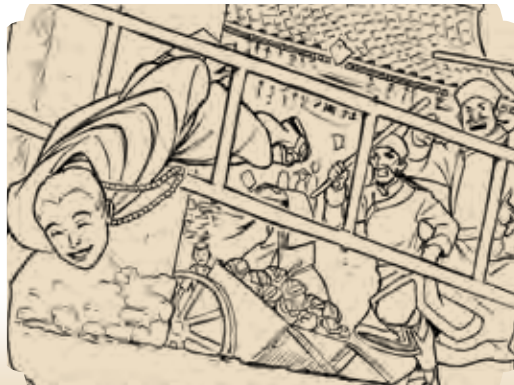
- Ruthless bandits
- Evil cultists
- Corrupt Officials
- Despicable pirates
- A desperate lover
- Misguided monks
- Amoral mercenaries
- A Kung Fu school
- Barbarian raiders
- Fiendish slavers
- Lin Kuei assassins
- Red Banner rebels
- Triad Gangsters
- Ambitious Thugs
- Imperial spies

WHAT

- Want(s) to steal the family heirloom
- Seek(s) the journal
- Want(s) to destroy the reputation
- Raid(s) the holdings
- Attack(s) the establishment
- Seek(s) the secrets
- Kidnap(s) the children
- Seek(s) the skills
- Seek(s) the location of a lost treasure
- Seek(s) the aid
- Is/Are seeking the true identity
- Plan(s) to ambush
- War(s) with the allies
- Seek(s) the replacement
- Plot(s) the murder or abduction

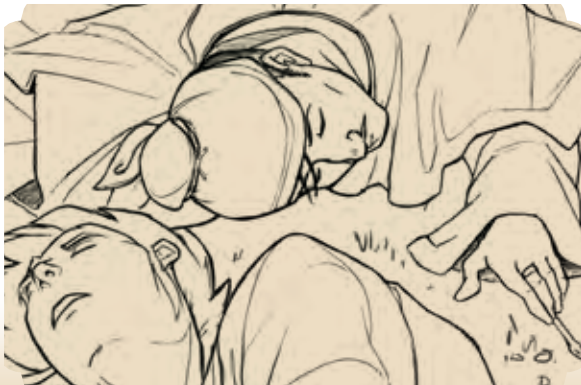
OF

- A wealthy merchant
- A nobleman
- A holy man or woman
- A security company
- A Kung Fu master
- A famous warrior
- A beautiful courtesan
- A famous craftsman
- A Triad boss
- A bandit chief
- A humble peasant family
- A local celebrity
- A senior magistrate
- A famous scholar
- The PCs



THAT/TO

- Satisfy the wishes of their master
- Ensure their loyalty or love
- Is due to a big misunderstanding
- Prove their superiority
- Has foiled them in the past
- Discover secret Kung Fu knowledge
- Can be sold for a small fortune
- Ultimately swell their ranks
- Complete their revenge
- Grow their influence in the area
- Complete an ancient prophecy
- Fund their future schemes
- Satisfy an age-old debt
- Could ruin a good person's reputation
- Power a terrible ritual



BUT

- The victim actually desires this outcome!
- A stubborn magistrate is on their trail!
- The whole plan is a ruse!
- An ally of the PCs is hired to stop them!
- Secret lovers on both sides get involved!
- Another group has the same plans!
- A Kung Fu master has taken interest!
- First a duel must be arranged!
- The PCs are framed for the scheme!
- The victim hides a terrible truth!
- A hapless youth witnesses everything!
- The imperial army is also involved!
- Their actions could start a war!
- The fallout will destroy many lives!
- Time is of the essence!





CHAPTER TEN

INSPIRATION

AFTERMATH

"I can't believe it's over," remarked Han Ping, chewing loudly on her meat buns as she spoke.

"Yeah," said Ma Wei Sheng, his head resting on his hand as he slouched over a plate of half-eaten food.

"Indeed, it was a mighty battle!" Smiling Ox said between bites of whatever beast had given its haunch for him to chew on.

"At least we survived," said Detective Dishu calmly as he sipped his wine and looked about for a waitress to refill his quickly disappearing beverage.

"Mostly," grumbled Wolf-Eyed Yue, eyeing her shattered blade that lay on the table in front of her.

"It served you well," said Sister Chuntao, trying unsuccessfully to console the wild warrior woman.

"I know a good blacksmith," said Dishu, "He owes me a couple

favours, I am sure he can fix it good as new..."

"Yeah," Ma replied, sitting unmoving and exhausted.

"I mean, I was just getting started. I could have taken a least a dozen more!" Ping boasted, swallowing her mouthful of food, pausing briefly, and then attacking the dwindling pile of buns before her.

"Oh, surely two dozen!" Added Ox, gesturing with a food-filled fist.

"I have to admit, Sister," said Dishu, "the monkey was a big help."

Sun, Sister Chuntao's little companion, lay before her on the table passed out. He made a small noise at mention of his contributions and then curled back around the half-eaten melon he had received as his share of the adventure's bounty.

"Yeah," Ma mumbled, wearily taking a drink while still

supporting his head with his other hand.

Yue sighed, "Yes, the little beast was actually useful for something..."

Dishu looked off into the distance for a moment and then spoke up, "You know, I do not think I am going in tomorrow. I think I am taking the day off. If nothing else, I need to get these laundered." He gripped the bloodstained collar of his robes for emphasis.

"A holiday sounds lovely," replied Chuntao, "Don't you think so, Ma?"

There was a moment of silence and all the others turned to look at their companion. He was asleep, his head still resting on his hand.

"Yeah," the others all replied in unison.

Tianxia draws heavily from Chinese martial arts media and a handful of Western films and books it has inspired.

The following are just a few of the films, comics, and books that GMs and players might find useful for ideas for characters, plots, and locations in their *Tianxia* games. Getting a group together to watch a couple of films might take time, but it is a fun experience that can really help introduce everyone to the genre, themes, and ideas that run throughout *Tianxia*.

FILMS

DETECTIVE DEE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE PHANTOM FLAME (2010)

Part *wuxia*, part mystery, this film details the adventures of famed Imperial Chinese sleuth Detective Dee as he investigates a series of bizarre murders. The film is directed and written by Tsui Hark and stars the incredibly talented Andy Lau, who is famous across China for various roles in everything from martial arts epics to romantic comedies. A stellar cast, including Li Bingbing, Carina Lau, Tony Leung Kar-Fai, and Deng Chao, joins Lau. *Detective Dee* was a major inspiration for parts of the setting, especially the Di Yu underground, the Detective Dishu sample PC, and former Shénzhōu Empress Ching Lan. The latter is based on both real-life Empress Wu Zeitan and Carina Lau's memorable interpretation in this film. This movie is a great example of how western and eastern cinema build off and inspire each other, as comparisons to Detective Dee and Robert Downey Jr.'s portrayal of Sherlock Holmes are hard to miss, and may inspire GMs to mix stories, plots, and themes in similar ways in their campaigns. This film also features the best Kung Fu deer fight ever (no, really).

HERO (2002)

Based on the legendary assassination attempt by Jing Ke of the King of Qin in 247 BC, *Hero* tells an interlocking story of various martial arts masters embroiled in romance and intrigue. Jet Li leads an all-star cast of Chinese film stars. This film has some amazing effects and scenes. If you can get your hands on the HK or Chinese import version, the subtitles are more dramatic and interesting, though Miramax's version got wide release thanks to the influence of

Quentin Tarantino and is also excellent. *The Emperor and the Assassin* (1998) has less action and more drama, but covers the same events and is also highly recommended. Both are major inspiration for the title of this game.

STORM RIDERS (1998)

Based on the manhua (comics) of the same name, this film was one of the first CG heavy *wuxia* films. Telling the story of martial arts heroes Wind and Cloud, the effects are dated and the action highly stylized, but it is a solid example of high-powered *wuxia* and relationship triads. Veteran actor Sonny Chiba plays an incredible, over-the-top villain. Its sequel, *Storm Warriors* (2009), is prettier and more modern, but is hard to follow if you are not familiar with this movie or its source material.

BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA (1986)

John Carpenter's rollicking romp about an everyman hero fighting forces well beyond his understanding, this film is not exactly a *wuxia* or Kung Fu film, but it has lots of wire work, martial arts actions, ancient Chinese demons, Taoist sorcery, and much more. It is not hard to imagine Lo Pan and his cronies as Kung Fu powered criminals or cultists in Shénzhōu and the film strikes the right chord between comedic and action packed. A modern *Tianxia* game might look a lot like this film, especially if you mixed in some non-Kung Fu using heroes with guns.

ENTER THE DRAGON (1973)

If you do not mention Bruce Lee's classic in a game about martial arts, you go straight to the Hell of Failed Movie References (Chinese got a lot of hells, Jack). Though not a period piece, this film is filled with fun characters, amazing Kung Fu, and a great villain who could easily be ported into *Tianxia*, metal claw hand and all.

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON (2000)

One of the films that introduced *wuxia* to much of the West, Ang Lee's martial arts epic does not have the best action, but it is solid and with a few truly amazing stand outs, the story is very compelling, the acting is superb, and Peter Pau's cinematography is amazing.

BUNRAKU (2010)

An indie action gem, this post-apocalyptic film is set in a world without guns and inspired by Japanese puppet theater. While neither Chinese nor strictly *wuxia* or Kung Fu, the film's cast and unique stage sets make it worthwhile for anyone who likes warring gangs, mysterious strangers, and revenge epics. The cast is remarkable, with Ron Perlman and Kevin McKidd leading a group of villains who would fit right into *Tianxia* with minimal alteration and Josh Harnett and Japanese heartthrob Gackt hitting all the "mysterious stranger on a quest for revenge" notes. Demi Moore and Woody Harrelson round out an impressive cast. Watch for Harrelson's veiled Spider-Man reference as a fun example of how to adapt heroic tales to different genres.

DRAGON INN (1992)

A true *wuxia* classic, it is one of the main reasons for this book's wild outlaw territory setting elements and Heartless Ai and the Heavenly Rest Inn; the others are Chow Yun Fat's *Peace Hotel* (1995) and Leslie Cheung's *Ashes of Time* (1994). The film is packed with Hong Kong film stars of the period, including Maggie Cheung, Brigitte Lin, and Donnie Yen. Two versions of the same story, *Dragon Gate Inn* (1967) and *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* (2011) are also worth checking out, but this is the author's favorite version.

THE MAN WITH THE IRON FISTS (2012)

Wu-Tang Clan alumni the RZA's Kung Fu homage, this film is silly, strange, and at times ridiculous. It is also an unabashed love letter to Kung Fu films that has some fun performances and crazy action. The soundtrack is totally worth it for anyone who even likes hip-hop a little bit and while the RZA is not much of an actor, his direction and writing allows the rest of the cast to shore up this problem nicely. Warning: this film is fairly bloody.

DUEL TO THE DEATH (1983)

An older *wuxia* film that pulls no punches when it comes to strange and occasionally silly martial arts action, giant ninjas and all. This story of a duel between the greatest swordsmen from China and Japan jumps between poignant and goofy, but somehow it all works. Warning: the soundtrack is pretty terrible.

THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR (1993)

This film's story of star-crossed love and loss is a personal favorite, and includes more amazing Peter Pau cinematography and great direction by Ronny Yu. The female main character was a major inspiration for the White Widows in *Tianxia* and GMs and players looking for inspirations for compelling Aspects and Lost Techniques will find a lot of ideas here. The sequel, *The Bride With White Hair 2* (1994), is not as good but it ties up the loose ends of the first film and is still worth checking out.

BOOKS

OUTLAWS OF THE WATER MARGIN

A classic tale of martial arts, banditry, romance, and action, this book has inspired countless films and other novels. It can be dense at times, with a lot of characters to keep track of, but this tale inspired by outlaw Song Jiang and his 36 Companions is worth the effort.

ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS

More of a historic military epic than most *Tianxia* games are likely to be, this classic of Chinese literature is still worth reading for anyone interested in looking at how culture, legend, and history can combine to tell thrilling and interesting tales. Films like *Red Cliff* (2008) detail some of the main events of this book as well.

HEAVEN SWORD, DRAGON SABER

Both a novel by famed *wuxia* writer Louis Cha (aka Jin Yong) and a comic series, this story of martial arts, family, loyalty, and warring factions was a major influence for *Tianxia*. All of Cha's work is worth checking out, but this one is a favorite. Translations of both the novel and comic might be hard to find, but they are worth the effort.

STORM RIDERS/FUNG WAN

Famous comic series by the incredibly talented Wa Wing-Shing, the early volumes of this series were released in the US some years back and can still be found with some effort. The martial arts in this series were one of the major influences for the Jianghu Rank scale and the series is a gold mine of ideas for strange Kung Fu styles and powers, including a baby-faced old man who uses a rocking horse as a weapon.

VIDEO GAMES

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON (2003)

This game tie-in with the far superior movie was only so-so, but you can find it very cheap. Chiefly mentioned here for the fighting system that focused on finding a rhythm on attack and defense which might provide some insight into how *Fate's* mix of **Attack**, **Defend**, and **Create an Advantage** might look in real time.

DYNASTY WARRIORS (1997-PRESENT)

This series of games began as an over the top action game using characters from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* novels. Eventually it spawned various spin offs and hybrids, but the core gameplay pitting one hyper-competent character against legions of foes never really changed. It is not really *wuxia* or Kung Fu, but it serves to showcase the "one skilled warrior vs. a thousand lesser foes" concept that often pops up in the genre.

HEAVENLY SWORD (2007)

An early PlayStation 3 title, *Heavenly Sword* followed the adventures of a red-haired warrior maiden Nariko and her somewhat unstable sidekick, Kai. The game is fairly short and draws at least as much from Japanese as Chinese culture, but the action and cut scenes are good inspiration for *wuxia* style action.

JADE EMPIRE (2005)

A late last-gen RPG from Bioware (makers of *Mass Effect*, *Dragon Age*, and other titles), *Jade Empire* was an action-RPG hybrid game set in a fictional empire filled with demons, ghosts, and Kung Fu. It drew heavily from Chinese culture and media for inspiration, and its story of betrayal, love, and the cost of defeating corruption is fine *Tianxia* plot fodder. It is easily the author's favorite of this list and worth checking out.

AUTHOR'S AFTERWORD

People like to say things like “a game over 20 years in the making!”, but in the case of *Tianxia* this is actually true. Despite technically starting production in the final days of 2011, the “heaven” that is *Tianxia* goes back well before that and hopefully will continue for some time into the future. A product of a decades-long love affair with Kung Fu and *wuxia* films, comics, and literature, this was nearly published around 2000 under the name Four Kingdoms. That version had a different, somewhat fiddlier system, though the basics remain the same and many of the ideas from that earlier attempt found their way into the game you are reading now. For various reasons this earlier version did not happen, but looking at it now, I think it all worked out for the best. I needed the time, experience, and resources to make this work, to do it right, because it was something too near and dear to mess up.

But I did not do it alone. Far from it. Without the help of James Dawsey and Vigilance Press, this would still be on my “maybe someday” list of projects. Without *FATE CORE* and Evil Hat Productions, I would still be looking for a system to handle the basics of play that would gleefully get out of the way and allow me to inject my own brand of *wuxia* and Kung Fu action ideas. Without my editor, Nathan Kahler, you

would probably be sick of my typos and writing eccentricities by now. Without the amazing art style of Denise Jones and the wonderful layout skills of Daniel Solis, this whole thing would not be nearly so pretty and thus not nearly as effective as a finished product. Lacking my friends, family, and peers in the gaming industry, and players past and present, I would be at a loss on how to push through all the hurdles of writing something like this. And, of course, without the fans and customers this would all be a nice idea that never gets to realize its potential. So from the bottom of my heart, thank you all. I could not have done any of this without you, and you were always in my thoughts as I worked on this. Sure, I typed out the words and designed the rules myself in the most technical sense, but I surely did not do it alone.

Thus ends *TIANXIA: BLOOD, SILK & JADE*. But the journey is not over yet. There are campaigns to play, stories to tell and hear from others who play and enjoy this game, and hopefully further journeys into the land of Shénzhōu and perhaps even beyond. There is a lot under heaven to explore, and I'm happy to keep looking as long as you are.

— Jack Norris, 2013

APPENDIX

PLAY AIDS

TIANXIA CAMPAIGN SETUP SHEET

.....

CAMPAIGN NAME:

CAMPAIGN ASPECTS:

SUBGENRE ASPECTS:

STARTING REFRESH (DEFAULT 4):

STARTING STUNTS (DEFAULT 3):

START AS MASTER?

Y / N

(can PCs with all 6 Techniques in their Kung Fu Style begin the game as a Master)

- Spend 1 additional Refresh at character creation to become a Master or...
- Achieve Master rank in a Kung Fu Style for free if all 6 Techniques are purchased during character creation.

OPTIONAL RULES:

DRAMATIC INITIATIVE?

Y / N

+D6-D6 DICE RESOLUTION?

Y / N

MIN. 1 STRESS PER SUCCESSFUL ATTACK?

Y / N

- 1 Stress Minimum on all attack or...
- 1 Stress Minimum on attack by characters at same or higher Jianghu rank or...
- 1 Stress Minimum if attacker has equal or greater Skill or...
- 1 Stress Minimum if a Fate Point is Spent.

RANGED COMBAT CAN USE KUNG FU?

Y / N

- Choose Shoot instead of Fight when learning Style or...
- Requires Stunt to use Shoot instead of Fight for Kung Fu.

MAKING AND BREAKING ZONES?

Y / N

RENAMING SKILLS

Fate Core Skill Name Tianxia Skill Name

.....
.....
.....
.....

STYLE RARITY

(detail which if any Styles or Sub Style are uncommon or rare in the game)

.....
.....
.....
.....

ALTERNATE STYLE NAMES

(which if any Kung Fu Styles and Substyles are known by alternate names in the game)

.....
.....
.....
.....

LOST TECHNIQUE RARITY

(detail which if any Lost Techniques are rare or disallowed in the game)

.....
.....
.....
.....

DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU? Y / N
(all physical attacks have a default +1 Weapon Rating)

FIGHTING WITHOUT FIGHTING Y / N
(may use Kung Fu attacks to inflict stress on opponents through impressive displays of martial prowess)

- Use Skills other than Fight to achieve this (Provoke, Chi, etc....) or...
- Treat as creating an advantage based on impressing or intimidating a foe or...
- Run fights as normal but damage inflicted in such contests is mental instead of physical or...
- Requires Stunt to use Kung Fu and Fight to inflict mental stress in this manner.

RAPID ADVANCEMENT OF KUNG FU? Y / N
(can gain new Technique in known style in addition to Skill increase from Milestones rather than instead of)

DYNASTIC PLAY? Y / N

TROUPE PLAY? Y / N



Tianxia

CHARACTER SHEET

ID _____

NAME: _____

DESCRIPTION: _____

REFRESH

JIANGHU RANK

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: _____

TROUBLE: _____

KUNG FU

STUNTS

SKILLS

SUPERB (+5) _____

GREAT (+4) _____

GOOD (+3) _____

FAIR (+2) _____

AVERAGE (+1) _____

CONSEQUENCES

2 MILD _____

4 MODERATE _____

6 SEVERE _____

PHYSICAL STRESS

(PHYSIQUE)

1

2

3

4

MENTAL STRESS

(WILL)

1

2

3

4

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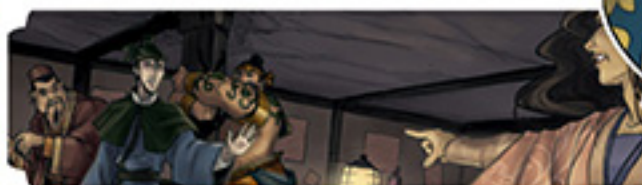
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