

Tianxia



SPIRITS, BEASTS & SPELLS
BY JACK NORRIS AND RYAN MACKLIN



Tianxia

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& SPELLS**

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WELCOME TO THE MYSTIC WORLD

THE RIGHT KIND OF HELP

“I cannot believe this is happening!” Detective Dishi shouted over the demon’s unholy laughter.

The demon, which took the form of a great twisted old tree, currently had Dishi wrapped in its viney branches and was drawing the young magistrate into its waiting maw.

Maw? That’s so wrong. Trees should not have maws. Dishi could not help but think even as he strained and pulled against being drawn into the grinning, jagged mouth that had opened on the tree’s trunk.

“I can believe it!” his companion Tian Fei remarked. “I mean, I hate it, but I can believe it.” The young pirate had cut herself free of the tree’s fiendish grasp with her karambits and was attempting in vain to dodge past the demon’s flailing branches to cut Dishi free as well.

“Little...help...here,” Dishi said through gritted teeth. He now had each foot braced wide on the tree’s

trunk and fought with all his might against the pull of the demon’s limbs. He felt his strength about to leave him. Faced with a laughing tree-demon about to devour him feet first, he closed his eyes and began a brief but heartfelt prayer to his ancestors.

He never got past his grandparents before he felt the limbs suddenly loosen. His bracing legs turned into an impromptu leap and Dishi flew backwards away from the monster, landing unceremoniously but safely several *li* away.

Dishi opened his eye. Before the tree now stood, Lin Zhong. The exorcist stood stonelike before the demon, one hand on his monk spade and the other raised in some sort of warding gesture. The demon’s laughing maw drooped into a scowl and its vine-like branches shot out at Zhong.

Zhong’s spade flashed through the air, slicing and deflecting attacks. Spraying black sap from

its wounds, the demon tree’s limbs recoiled and it screamed.

Well there’s a sound I’m never going to unhear, Dishi thought.

“See to the others,” Zhong said, never taking his eyes off the demon, “I will handle this fiend.”

“Oh, thank the Bodhisattva,” Dishi muttered. Demons were not his province, and, anyway, he hurt. Everywhere.

“Actually,” Han Ping said, helping him to his feet, “I think he’s a Daoist.”

“Whatever,” Dishi said. He groaned as he stood.

“So will he do?” Ping asked.

“What?”

“You said to ‘get help’ right before that tree tried to eat you. Will he do?” Ping thrust her thumb over her shoulder at Zhong and gave a smug smile. The exorcist was currently carving great rents of suspiciously fleshy looking wood from the tree with each swing of his spade.

“I think we’ll manage.”

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to **TIANXIA: SPIRITS, BEASTS, & SPELLS**. This is a magic-focused sourcebook for the **TIANXIA** game line. As such it is not a standalone product. It requires **TIANXIA: BLOOD, SILK, & JADE** and a copy of the **Fate Core** rules to play.

With *SPIRITS, BEASTS, & SPELLS*, GMs and player are presented with the tools they need to introduce more magical elements into their *TIANXIA* games. While Kung Fu is always at the core of *TIANXIA*, this book expands the range of dramatic and potent abilities outside the martial arts and into the realm of magic. In these chapters are rules for creating sorcerers, prophets, and other mystical characters. In addition,

various supernatural creatures are presented along with some sample PC, adventure seeds, and various organizations and locations in *TIANXIA*'s setting, Shenzhou, that have important mystical significance.

The book begins with a look at the greater role of magic in *TIANXIA* before moving on to specific topics in later chapters.

WHAT IF I DO NOT WANT MAGIC AND GODS AND SUCH?

That is totally cool.

Yes, by default Shenzhou has a mystical world hidden beside, below, and above its own. There are magical beasts, shape-shifting spirits, sorcery, and more demons and gods than can be counted. But this need not be the case.

This does not mean every *TIANXIA* game needs to have a

mystical world filled with gods and goddesses. Groups can have a lot of fun in Shenzhou never touching on anything demonic, godlike, or magical beyond the occasional amazing feats of martial skills and maybe some alchemy thrown into the mix.

The GM can take whatever elements she likes from this

book and leave the rest. Limiting, altering, or ignoring the magic rules found in this book does not break anything in *TIANXIA*. Or developing a personal set of gods and demons. Or assuming the whole thing is bunk and all magic-using characters are doing is learning to focus *Chi* in new and strange ways.

MAGIC IN SHENZHOU

While scholars, priests, and other learned individuals disagree to its exact nature, most people in Shenzhou believe magic exists. They also believe in demons, sorcery, and spirits.

Why? Well these answers vary but they all contain some version of the same core answer:

Because it is real.

The gods? The spirits? Demons and hell? These are largely accepted to be, in some way, part of reality. Of course, not every person necessarily feels that way. There are doubters and skeptics. However, even many

of those tend to be situationally skeptical. They might question if their neighbor saw a river goddess bathing in the forest. After all, he is still alive, right?

Magic and mysticism go back to the early days of humanity. Many believe the rulers and heroes of old possessed great mastery over spirits and spells. Over time, much of this magic was lost. However, there are still sorcerers, mystics, shamans, soothsayers, and others who can channel supernatural forces in strange and potent ways.

FRAMING THE SPIRITUAL AS LOGICAL

Some GMs and players might not want to play in a setting that takes the existence of the divine, infernal, and overall supernatural for granted. They might want everything to have method and logical relations that magic seems to balk at.

Fear not. This approach is covered. If there is anything Chinese—and in this case Chinese

myth inspired mysticism—loves, it is established methods and processes. Heaven has an emperor, ministers, and officials. So does hell. Other spirits tend to be a bit less organized, but even they have their rules and regulations. Even the gods cannot just do whatever they like. That sort of thing got beings like the Monkey King in trouble.

This often bureaucratic and ordered view of the cosmic and mystical means that sorcerers, mystics, and sages are not just channeling random powers on a wing and a prayer. No, they are scientists and scholars following very particular rules set down by cosmic forces who govern, create, and follow these rules as well.

GLOSSARY OF MYSTIC TERMS

A few terms that relate to magic, sorcery, and mystic phenomenon in *TIANXIA* and the world of Shenzhou are collected here for convenience.

Avici: A special hell where sinners who have committed terrible and unforgivable crimes are punished. Unlike other hells, there is no expectation of release from this place. Those sent here are beyond redemption.

Divination: Using special meditations, tools, and observations to predict events or discover secrets. Many diviners use a favored process to channel their abilities, such as reading entrails or bones. The *I Ching* is a popular Daoist method of divination.

Feng Shui: Meaning “wind and water,” this is the study of creating harmony between people and places through channeling and manipulation of *Chi* in an area.

Exorcism: The warding, controlling, and banishing of spirits and demons. Exorcists are often employed to cleanse an area of harmful spirits and may be holy men and women.

Geomancy: Using *feng shui* to manipulate and channel the *Chi* of various locations to create structures that possess celestial harmonies or disharmonies. Practitioners of geomancy are called geomancers.

Heaven: The celestial realm of the gods. Ruled over by Shang Di, the Jade Emperor. Organized with various ministries staffed by various gods, goddesses, and spirits that work to keep the cosmos functioning as it should.

Hell: One of many realms that make up the Underworld ruled by Yama, Lord of the Underworld. Each hell is devoted to punishing a particular sin or transgression. The ultimate goal of the hells is to cleanse a soul so it can be reincarnated and continue its journey toward enlightenment.

Pangu: A primordial giant who is the first being capable of independent thought and action. Instrumental in the creation of the cosmos.

Shentong: Meaning “magical power,” this refers to the amount of unrestricted magical energy in an area. Important for sorcery and magical beings.

Yao Gui: Meaning “strange ghosts,” this term is used for various ghosts and undead, often of the evil or harmful sort.

Yao Guai: Meaning “strange aberration,” this is a general term for malevolent or evil supernatural beings such as demons and hungry dead.

Yao Jing: Meaning “strange sprites,” this term is used for sprites, fairies, and various animal and nature spirits. They are generally considered more mischievous than malevolent, and there are many tales of *yao jing* seducing or being seduced by mortals.

Yao Mo: Meaning “strange demon,” this term is used for the denizens of the various hells, including renegades.

Sorcerer: General term for someone who uses overt magic that comes from channeling mystic energies or dealing with powerful supernatural beings. Sorcerers can be good or evil, and most are attuned to one or two elemental forces that make up the bulk of their powers.



CHAPTER TWO

MAGIC IN SHENZHOU

DREAMS OF FLIGHT AND STRIFE

Wintery Jade watched as the last of her companions, Smiling Ox, collapsed to the ground. His body fell in two halves on either side of her. His killer stood before her, all shadows save for a gleaming white smile.

Then it gestured behind her, and, despite herself, she turned. She saw a road leading toward a city in the distance. Above the mountain circled six great birds of prey, each with wings tipped in a red liquid she knew instinctively was blood. Suddenly the birds broke off and flew toward her. One by one, they dove down at her, veering away at the last moment to instead pluck one of the bodies of her companions from the blood-soaked ground. As she watched, the birds picked the battlefield clean, leaving her alone.

“Soon,” the shadow thing whispered into her ear.

Then, Wintery Jade awoke with a start. Her sleeping clothes were

drenched in sweat and she found it very difficult to slow her breathing below ragged, staccato gasps. It took her several minutes before she could do anything but sit upright in bed. After she finally calmed, she washed, dressed, and went downstairs.

Her companions were already up, eating and talking in the common room of the inn below. She gave them a weak smile and waved, doing her best to hide how badly she had slept and why. She sat down at their table without a word.

“Meat bun?” Smiling Ox said, lifting a massive tray easily to offer her one.

“No. No, thank you,” she muttered. Ox shrugged and proceeded to shovel half a dozen buns onto his own plate.

“Good news!” said a voice behind her. She nearly jumped out of her chair but instead forced a somewhat-surprised-but-still-totally-not-terrified look onto her

face and turned to Ma Wei Sheng, the young man who had spoken. He had been the second to die in her dream, rushing forward to save Han Ping as she fell. It had not helped.

“Yue thinks she’s tracked the cult members,” Wei Sheng continued, referencing the devil-worshipping sect responsible for abductions and murders in the area. “They seem to be using an old abandoned fort on Six Falcons Peak.”

“Six...Falcons?” Wintery Jade was not sure what else to say, her mind racing back to her dream.

“Oh, that’s right. You’re not from around here. It’s one of the lower lying mountains nearby. With luck, we can be there in a day or so.”

“Oh,” was all she could think to say as she stared at Wei Sheng. He smiled with confidence and enthusiasm, but she kept remembering his bloody face as he died in her dreams.

This chapter explores the role of magic, sorcery, and various supernatural beings in the land of Shenzhou.

In the case of locations with mystical significance, the area's Shentong Rating is given. This is covered shortly in **Chapter Three: Mastering the Mystic Arts**. For now, understand that the higher the Shentong

Rating the more mystically active and unrestrained an area is, making sorcery and other powerful magic easier in those locations.

MAGIC IN RELIGION AND SOCIETY

Citizens in Shenzhou tend to view magic and mysticism as compatible with, but distinct from, religion. Bodhist saints or a fabled Emperor chosen by Heaven may perform miraculous feats, but that does not mean the average person considers these things to be magic in the traditional sense. Thus, mages, sorcerers, and other mystics are not afforded the same religious reverence as holy men and the chosen of Heaven.

That does not mean people do not respect, fear, or appreciate magic. They simply view it as a mix of arcane science and esoteric knowledge, which does not automatically carry any presumption of morality or virtue. While most people of Shenzhou understand heretical or corrupt clergy exist, they still believe the average monk or priest is a good person trying to aid them.

By contrast, most people believe alchemists, sorcerers, prophets, and diviners are skilled scholars and sages who *might* be trying to help them. However, they also might be terrible threats, opportunists, or criminals. This realization, combined with the power the supernatural brings, means that most people are respectful but suspicious of magicians and mystics. Exorcists are an exception to this. Enough of them are holy men that their profession is perceived as good and virtuous.

From a gameplay perspective, this means that characters with magical or supernatural aspects can usually invoke them to increase their chances of being

respected and feared by most people, but not to be trusted and loved unless their personal reputations warrant such reactions. This also provides ample opportunity for compels in the form of distrustful officials, paranoid citizens, and even meddlesome investigations when evil supernatural forces manifest near a known mystic.

For the part of Shenzhou's various religions, all recognize magic to some degree. Individual uses, especially of sorcery, are sometimes frowned upon, but there is no widespread condemnation of magic as a concept. While it is highly unusual for an abbot or monk to be a sorcerer, many such individuals have been diviners, prophets, and exorcists. In fact, the Daoist faith in particular boasts some of the finest exorcists in all of Shenzhou. Many Bodhist saints were believed to be great prophets.

The same is true of the government. The Emperor's eunuch advisors include several mystics after all, and those joining their ranks transform into eunuchs through arcane rituals. Geomancers are highly valued for their abilities as are exorcists. Whole Imperial ministries are based around the monitoring, study, and benevolent use of mystic forces.

Despite general acceptance of magic as a concept and possible tool, summoning demons, using magic to cause pain and suffering, blood sacrifice, and other behaviors are grave sins and serious crimes across the Empire. Punishment for evil sorcerers is thorough and often deadly.

MAGICAL TRAINING

Schools or academies rarely teach magical arts in Shenzhou. Instead, study is usually a matter of apprenticeship. This is for two reasons. One, magical aptitude and talent with mystic forces is not common enough to make magical academies practical. Two, a magic school would present too dangerous a target for attacks from evil sorcerers, secret societies, demons, and other threats. The exceptions to this are geomancers, taught in some academies, and exorcism, taught at some temples and monasteries. However, these cases are unusual and even most geomancers and exorcists were once apprentices to a master of their art.

Masters might have more than one apprentice, but most take only one. There is no universal time period or criteria for this training. Some teach only members of their own bloodlines. Others teach whoever pays them. Generally, the more dangerous the art, the more careful the master is in selecting and eventually releasing his apprentice.

MAGICAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

While many organizations and groups employ the services of mystics, especially geomancers and diviners, some are heavily involved with the supernatural and magic. This section details a selection of them.

IMPERIAL EUNUCHS

The eunuchs who make up a large portion of Shenzhou's officials and the Emperor's personal advisors are believed by much of the populace to have strange and mystical powers. The eunuchs encourage these beliefs as it bolsters their reputation and influence within certain circles. The truth of the matter is more complex.

There is no truth to the idea that all eunuchs are mystics. There is no major inherent mystical benefit to becoming a eunuch, though the process of becoming a eunuch does adjust a person's *Chi* in some subtle ways. However, the many eunuchs among the Imperial Bureaucracy and in the Imperial Court spent centuries studying the mystic arts and how best to utilize them. A eunuch seeking to learn magic or study supernatural phenomena has access to some of Shenzhou's best teachers. Thus, the practical truth is

that some of the most accomplished magicians and mystics in the land are eunuchs, but not every eunuch one meets knows magic.

Of course, rumors persist of a *Secret Order of Eunuch Sorcerers* who work from within to control and undermine the government. To date, no evidence of the existence of such a conspiracy has been discovered. Should such a secret society exist, they would have to be quite powerful and very careful to avoid detection within the heart of the empire.

DEVIL-SLAYING SWORD SECT

Often called the Devil Slayers or Devil Swords, the Devil-Slaying Sword Sect is not so much an official organization as a loose coalition. These Daoist monks and priests specialize in exorcism. They travel the land, aiding the populace by fighting demons, banishing evil spirits, and casting wards on important structures to protect them from supernatural forces. Their fees are modest, and they often work for room and board. They take their name from the sword of the Daoist immortal Scholar Lu—a weapon supposedly capable of slaying any demon. Some of the order uses swords in their battles with the supernatural, though many use more traditional monastic weapons.

The Devil Swords are not the only group of this type in Shenzhou. Bodhists have their own variants, and several secular exorcist societies exist. The Devil Swords are merely the most widespread and well-known of these groups.

MINISTRY OF ARCHITECTURE

As the institution in charge of designing and overseeing the construction of all Imperial buildings and structures, the Ministry of Architecture employs some of the empire's finest geomancers. These experts in *feng shui* ensure projects proceed in the proper way and in the right places to ensure maximum positive energy and good fortune.

In addition, the Ministry has another important duty. They must limit mystical energies in important places such as the Imperial Palace. This *Supernatural Security* restricts energy so that sorcerers and supernatural creatures have limited power. This duty requires constant vigilance. Otherwise there would be little to stop a demon or dark sorcerer from strolling into the palaces and government centers of Shenzhou and subjugating, replacing, or destroying heads of state.

Architects from the Ministry often must adjust for seasonal and astrological events that can temporarily alter the energies of a place, as well as take into account how major calamities such as earthquakes or fire affect the *Chi* flow of the entire empire. The appearance of an *Auspicious Comet* might require the relocation of the Emperor's offices within the palace, while the *Destruction of a Distant Monument* might adjust the flow of energy toward the capital, requiring subtle but important redecoration of the Imperial Gardens. For this reason, the Ministry employs a small army

of surveyors, astronomers, and other professionals to aid its duties.

The current head of the Ministry of Architecture is Ren Enlai. He is a *Perpetually Tired* old man who works endlessly to ensure the organization runs properly. He rarely leaves his offices in the capital. Minister Ren takes his role as *Chief Imperial Architect* very seriously, though he privately wishes the Emperor would approve his requests for more resources and staff, so that he may one day take that vacation he has dreamt about for twenty years.

MYSTICAL PLACES

The following are a few of the significant mystic locations in Shenzhou. They serve both as ready to use locations and also as inspiration for GMs and players to add their own creations to campaigns.

DEVIL GATE TEMPLE

High in the Tianqiao Mountains on the very edge of the empire is an ancient temple. Supposedly constructed by the gods in the days of the Second Emperor of Shenzhou, it contains a great vault protected with *Intricate Locks* and *Powerful Wards*. According to legend, the vault imprisons terrible demons the First Emperor banished during his reign. An ancient order of monks guards the temple, which is *Warded Against Evil Magic* and incredibly difficult to reach due to the mountain terrain.

Cultists, sorcerers, and lesser demons have made numerous attempts to breach the temple and open the vault over the centuries. To date, only one attempt has succeeded, and that only partially—freeing only one demon whose current whereabouts are unknown.

SWAMP SAINT GROVE

In the middle of one of Shenzhou's more remote swamps dwells the Swamp Saint. This *Elderly Old Seer* is unknown to most, but to those who study the arts of divination she is recognized as one of the most gifted diviners in this life or any other. Though *Nearly Blind* from advanced age, her skills at fortune telling are as sharp as ever. She is said to know *Secrets Otherwise Lost to Time*. A *Devout Bodhist*, she nevertheless



occasionally enjoys a sip of wine and asks her rare visitors for some.

The Swamp Saint refuses most requests for divination, turning away nearly all who manage to locate her *Unremarkable Little Hut*. Only if someone has a great need and or is already entwined in an important destiny does the Swamp Saint agree to divine their fate. Her predictions are always cryptic but infallible. As payment she takes an item or asks a task that is just important enough to pose a challenge for the payer, but nothing that induces lasting loss or hardship.

WHITE JADE CAVERN

Somewhere underneath the White Widow Forest is a *Hidden Cavern* where the walls glisten with white jade. Even the members of the White Widow Sect who live there do not know its exact location, though some have claimed they visited the cavern when lost or wounded only to be unable to find it again.

White Jade Cavern is *Strong in Positive Mystical Energy*. It is considered to have Wild (4) Shentong for any benevolent or “white” sorcery performed

there. The waters of the *Pristine Pool* found within it are said to have amazing healing properties and are sought by alchemists seeking to craft life-saving and extending medicines.

Two great Fu Beasts guard the cavern, who can also hide the cavern’s entrance from onlookers and casual observers. The beasts allow wounded or otherwise distressed travelers to find and enter the cavern. In rare cases, they even bring those wounded nearby to the cave to heal. The beasts also remove memories of the location of White Jade Cavern from individuals healthy enough to leave. Occasionally, a traveler finds a small piece of white jade among their belongings after departing. These *White Jade Talismans* are believed to bring good fortune to their owners and are highly sought by mystics and scholars.

Who set the beasts to guard White Jade Cavern, and what higher purpose it serves is unknown. Some claim it is the earthly refuge of a god. Others claim it is actually the entrance to a great underground city of jade from before the days of mortals. So far, no one has discovered the truth.



GODS, GODDESSES, SAINTS AND DEMONS

Throughout its history, various dynasties and cultures in Shenzhou have paid homage to countless divine powers. They have also detailed countless dark spirits and demons who exist to torment and endanger humanity. The populace even deifies honored or infamous ancestors, rulers, and holy figures. The result is a rich tapestry of interlocking gods, goddesses, saints, and demons worshipped and feared by the lowliest peasant and most esteemed royalty. Many of these beings grant powers or blessings if the proper incantations or rituals are performed, and any of them may take interest in troublesome mortals who deal in powerful magic.

This section details some of the more prominent and influential figures in Shen mythology. It is in no way a comprehensive list. GMs and players are encouraged to add their own deities, demigods, and devils to the setting as desired.

THE EMPEROR OF HEAVEN

Known as Shang Di, the Jade Emperor, or the *August Ruler of Heaven*, this divine patriarch rules over the heavens as his earthly counterparts rule Shenzhou. Seen as *Impossibly Wise and Nigh-infallible*, Shang Di is the personal patron of the rulers of Shenzhou. Without the will of Shang Di, it is believed the Emperor of Shenzhou's rule becomes unrighteous and flawed. This justification is often used to explain why historic dynasties fell, though earthly upheaval and rebellion are usually the direct cause. Shang Di is normally seen as a god of the sky, though his powers extend well beyond this domain to touch both heaven and earth.

THE EMPRESS OF HEAVEN

Tian Hou, or the Jade Empress, is the honored wife of Shang Di. She is usually seen as the Emperor's first wife, though some believe she is his only true spouse. A *Goddess of the Seas* alongside her daughter Tian Fei, she is praised for her spirit, beauty, and the wisdom she uses to rule beside her husband. Progressive theists

and scholars in Shenzhou paint Tian Hou as largely equal to her husband, while others portray her in a more traditional role. In any event, she is respected as Empress and one of the most important goddesses in the heavens.

THE GODDESS OF MERCY

Guan Yin, the *Goddess of Mercy and Compassion*, is a source of much dispute among holy men and scholars. All respect her, but disagreements of her origins abound. Some claim she was always a goddess. Others claim she was a Daoist immortal or mortal woman elevated to godhood for acts of supreme kindness and mercy. Shrines to Guan Yin are found throughout Shenzhou, from the smallest village to the imperial palace. Her blessings are sought to ease suffering, maintain good fortune, and protect the innocent. Many virtuous warriors hold her in extremely high regard, paying homage to her by protecting the weak and giving mercy to fallen foes.

THE THREE AUGUST SOVEREIGNS

Also known as the August Ones, these three figures were mortal monarchs who displayed such great heroism and virtue they were elevated to the Court of Heaven. They serve as agents and *Advisors to the Rulers of Heaven*. Their mortal lives included acts of great invention, the banishment of armies of demons and evil spirits, and the establishment of order and peace throughout the land. The exact identity of the August Sovereigns varies from story to story, but all agree they are important figures in the history of Shenzhou who now dwell among the gods. They are generally referred to as the *Heavenly Sovereign*, *Earthly Sovereign*, and *Human Sovereign* regardless of their mortal origins. Despite once being rulers of the land, they are often portrayed as having strange physical characteristics such as *Multiple Heads* or dragon and animal-like traits.

THE DRAGON KINGS

The four Dragon Kings are *Great Rulers of the Undersea Kingdoms* who possess tremendous power and influence in the world. Able to change their shape and perform great acts of magic, they hold their own huge courts beneath the oceans of the world. They are worshipped and respected as bringers of storms, masters of the oceans, and relievers of drought. The four Dragon Kings are:

- ✿ **Ao Guang**, Dragon King of the East Sea
- ✿ **Ao Qin**, Dragon King of the South Sea
- ✿ **Ao Run**, Dragon King of the West Sea
- ✿ **Ao Shun**, Dragon King of the North Sea

Traditionally, the East and South Seas refer to the oceans that surround Shenzhou. The location of the North and West Seas are more fluid, though they are traditionally believed to be two huge lakes that lie beyond the current borders of the empire: the great Northern Pearl Lake and the Western Blue Sea. Each Dragon King holds court in a *Great Crystal Palace* in their native waters, though they sometimes take human form to move among mortals.

Many tales tell of the sons and daughters of a Dragon King falling in love with a great hero, demigod, or god. These stories sometimes end tragically, but other times conclude with everlasting love. More than one great hero or villain in Shenzhou's history has claimed to be descended from such unions.

THE FIVE EMPERORS

Below the August Ones are the Five Emperors. Each is an Emperor or Empress who, in ancient times, performed great acts and led Shenzhou in times of great prosperity. They are now *Demigods in the Court of Heaven*. Serving as advisors and generals for both the August Ones and the rulers of Heaven, they now possess powers and influence based upon their mortal accomplishments. For example, an Emperor credited with destroying a plague of demons is now seen as a *Patron of Exorcists, Warriors, and Mystics*, while one who created great public works and laws is seen as a *Patron of Scholars, Builders, and Lawmakers*. Like the August Ones, the exact membership of the Five Emperors varies with whom one asks. Often, a ruling dynasty elevates one of their ancestors to membership—an act which has occurred often enough in the imperial histories that the true identities of the

Five Emperors are hard to determine. However, nearly all believe that among their number is the famed Yellow Emperor: the first ruler of Shenzhou in ancient times.

THE LORD OF HELL

The dark god Yama *Rules the Underworld*. This place of several hells is devoted to punishing the wicked and stripping away sin and mortal attachment so that a spirit may eventually pass on to its next phase of existence. Also known as Yan Wang, he is typically depicted as a giant, blue-skinned man in red robes, often riding a giant, mystic, water buffalo-like creature. Recognition of Yama is widespread. Even in lands and kingdoms beyond Shenzhou, some version of Yama is believed to rule the lands of hell and the dead. Unlike death gods in some cultures, Yama is generally *Greatly Respected and Admired* for his vital place in the celestial bureaucracy, meaning many exorcists and mystics invoke him to help contain renegade demons and ghosts.

OX-HEAD AND HORSE-FACE

These two demons serve as *Yama's Chief Ministers and Enforcers* in the underworld. Powerful supernatural beings, the two indeed appear as ox- and horse-headed humanoids, respectively. Both demons oversee the actions of thousands of lesser demons and evil spirits. They are charged with preventing damned souls from escaping the hells.

THE MOON GODDESS

Distant, beautiful, and possessing great magical powers, Chang'e dwells on a great palace on the surface of the moon. She is a central figure in many legends, chief among them the tale of Hou Yi, the Great Golden Archer. In this tale, Yi saves the land from ten fiery birds that burned the land and is granted an elixir that grants immortality. Instead of claiming it for himself, he gives the prize to his beloved wife, Chang'e, to safeguard. When Hou Yi's apprentice tries to steal the elixir, Chang'e drinks it to keep it from him. This act transformed her into a goddess, and she selected the moon as her domain to watch over her husband from afar. In some legends, Yi eventually gained immortality from further heroic deeds and joined his wife. In others, he went mad with loss and became a tyrant.

THE MONKEY KING

There are few characters in the legends of Shenzhou as divisive and dramatic as Sun Wukong, the fabled Monkey King. In different stories, he is a demon, trickster, hero, champion, and thief. He has been *Hailed as a Hero* and *Cursed as a Rebel* by the Jade Emperor and other important figures in the celestial bureaucracy. A mighty warrior who uses a magic staff, he is particularly admired by many Daoists for his daring and independence. He knows many mystical wards and transformations, though his shapeshifting is limited by his inability to hide his monkey tail in any form. Like Yama, versions of Sun Wukong appear in neighboring cultures.

THE EIGHT IMMORTALS

The legend of the Eight Immortals is firmly Daoist in origin, though many Bodhists have stories of immortal saints who aid humanity as well. The Eight Immortals gained their powers through mastery of various arts or deeds of great heroism that led to their enlightenment and immortality. All the Immortals are seen as exemplars of virtue and expertise. Many in Shenzhou invoke or honor them in hopes of gaining their blessings. Though some stories differ as to their exact identities, the traditional Eight Immortals of Shenzhou are:

- ✿ **He Xiangyu**, depicted holding a lotus flower and knowing many methods to heal wounds and grant good health.
- ✿ **Imperial Uncle Cao**, depicted carrying a jade tablet as a *Patron of Art and Acting*.
- ✿ **Iron Crutch Li**, a *Grumpy but Benevolent Healer* with a *Crippled Leg*. Li is particularly revered by beggars and vagabonds.
- ✿ **Lan Caihe**, a youth often seen riding a mystic swan and carrying a flower basket, Lan's gender and age can change with each appearance.
- ✿ **Scholar Lu**, often considered the *Leader of the Immortals*, he is a great scholar who has slain many demons with his sword.
- ✿ **Han Xiangzi**, musician and pupil of Scholar Lu, Han is a *Patron of Musicians and Poets*. Often depicted carrying a bamboo flute.
- ✿ **Hermit Zhang**, depicted as an old woman riding a white mule and carrying a drum, she is considered

a patron of long life and is a *Master Winemaker* whose creations can prolong life.

- ✿ **Zhongli Quan**, depicted as carrying a fan and possessing the ability to raise the dead and transmute elements. He is a *Patron of Alchemists*.

The Eight Immortals are generally recognized and respected even by non-Daoists, particularly those seeking their aid. However, they feature primarily in Daoist inspired art, and their images decorate many Daoist shrines and temples. Other great Daoist sages and scholars are at times elevated to similar status, especially the earliest founders and adherents.

THE FIRST OF MANY

Before the creation of the cosmos, there was nothing but formless chaos. In the chaos, a giant egg formed and from it emerged the *First Independent Being*, Pangu. Pangu is a hairy horned giant who used his great axe to separate the forces of Yin and Yang, push the heavens and earth apart, and create the base form of the universe as it now exists. His role in creation is widely accepted and respected, though he does not receive the attention and devotion the Jade Emperor does in most of Shenzhou. However, some tribes revere him as their patron deity, believing he wed the daughter of one of the Dragon Kings and created their ancestors. Most of these tribes left Shenzhou generations ago under a cloud of political upheaval and ethnic persecution, but pockets of them still remain.

THE SNAKE GODDESS, CREATOR OF HUMANITY

The daughter of Shang Di, Nu Wa is credited with the creation of humanity. A beautiful maiden with the lower body of a great snake, she formed the first humans from fine clay and protected them from many calamities. She has patched holes in the sky, repaired the pillars of heaven, and even slain monsters on behalf of humanity. However, Nu Wa's patronage is fickle, and she is credited with causing the downfall of at least one mortal dynasty when its ruling emperor displeased her. Her chief servants are three powerful and often vengeful spirits who frequently take the form of young, beautiful women while retaining numerous divine powers.

BODHIST SAINTS

Bodhisattva, the enlightened figure credited with the founding of Buddhism, is a divine figure to many in Shenzhou. Most believe that after their mortal deaths, Bodhisattva and other exalted Buddhist holy figures become saints that aid and inspire others to

seek enlightenment through principled living and a rejection of attachment and suffering. Some return to Earth in mortal form to aid people directly, while others dwell in the heavens and act from afar. Some few saints are even said to dwell in hell, trying to aid damned souls in seeking the next cycle of existence.

BLESSINGS AND CURSES OF THE HEAVENS

Just how much gods, goddesses, demons, and saints affect the mortal world depends heavily upon the sort of campaign a GM and players have. In some games, the gods constantly interfere with the affairs of great heroes such as the PCs. In others, they are present only in stories, parables, and the arts. Divine beings may grant their blessings to a favored mortal or curse one who offended them. They may also refuse to interfere except in the most dire of circumstances—and then usually in very minor ways. They might not even exist, being only stories people tell to make sense of the world around them.

As such, direct blessings and curses of divine or hellish beings can be handled in numerous ways. The easiest way is with aspects, both personal and setting. A PC who is **FAVORED BY THE GUAN YIN** could invoke this aspect when the goddess's power or insight would aid them. A great war or rebellion may be **OF GREAT INTEREST TO THE FORCES OF HELL**. When this event affects the desired outcome of Yama and his subordinates it may be invoked. Some characters might even have stunts in the form of special blessings or Lost



Techniques they learned from a divine source.

GMs should discuss with their players or at least get a feel for their preferences before eliminating or integrating divine powers in a campaign. Wars and struggles among the heavens can be the source of great heroics, but it can also make PCs feel insignificant or unimportant. Religion and gods are an important part of the culture and history of Shenzhou, but the truth behind these stories is for

individual GMs and groups to determine.

Note that a lack of divine influence does not mean the elimination of magic such as alchemy or divination. Magic is thought to be the manipulation of cosmic forces and transformation and channeling of powerful energies. These forces and the individuals who use them can exist whether gods walk the earth, watch from the heavens, or exist only in stories and myths.

HELL AND SHENZHOU

Hells play a big role in the mythology of Shenzhou. They are places where the souls of the damned are tormented and demons mete out a nearly endless variety of creative and gruesome punishments. The suffering of each sinner is tracked and measured meticulously to ensure each prisoner of hell suffers exactly as much as is warranted based upon their various crimes, sins, and transgressions.

Occasionally, powerful and twisted souls escape the hells, becoming evil ghosts and other supernatural threats. Exorcists and mystics in Shenzhou are humanity's first line of defense against such dangers, though some are eventually destroyed by great heroes or even direct intervention of the gods.

TIME SERVED

With the exception of the Avici Hells, all spirits doomed to suffer in the hells of Shen mythology eventually earn a chance at redemption. A sinner's crimes are weighed against the pain and suffering they endure. When they have endured enough, they are released. These souls often reincarnate as a lower form of life in hopes of eventually growing to achieve enlightenment through virtue and compassion. Many souls eventually transgress again in their new lives, though ideally these crimes lessen over multiple incarnations until they eventually become virtuous and enlightened. This process can take tens of thousands of years and hundreds of lifetimes if it even occurs. Spirits and supernatural creatures can be damned to hell as well.

For the most part, gods and demons who oversee the hells are unconcerned whether a given sinner ever escapes the cycle of punishment, rebirth, sin, death, and a return to hell. They focus instead on doing their part: ensuring damned souls endure appropriate punishment and do not escape or avoid their fate.

Despite this, some renegade demons escape hell. Hell is unpleasant even for its wardens, guards, and jailers, and some ambitious demons dream of a better existence. These entities usually flee to the darkest corners of the earthly realms, seeking power

and freedom. They must typically be defeated by exorcists, demon hunters, or great heroes who protect the populace from such threats.

AVICI HELLS

There are some hells removed from the normal process of damnation and redemption. Reserved only for the worst sinners, greatest criminals, and beings of irredeemable evil, anyone condemned to these hells is never released. Called the Avici Hells or simply Avici, punishments here are gruesome and eternal.

Any sinner doomed to Avici is a lost cause. They are also often extremely dangerous. Terrible murderers, cruel warlords, and the worst traitors populate Avici. Should the souls of these sinners ever escape, they would pose a terrible threat to humanity and the stability of the celestial bureaucracy.

HELL OF THE HUNGRY WOLVES

Demonic wolves with razor sharp jaws tear sinners apart here. Once ripped to pieces, they painfully reconstitute and the process begins anew. The hell is overseen by two demons who resemble great wolves, one white and one black. Not to be confused with Hell of the Hungry Tigers, which is basically the same—just with tigers.

HELL OF THE FIRE BULLS

Giant, bull-like demons made of fire trample and burn sinners in this hell. Those who attempt to escape are run down by the bulls. Once trampled and reduced to cinders, the inhabitants are returned to flesh to begin again.

HELL OF THE FIRE DOGS

Sinners here are forced to ride naked on the backs of great flaming hounds. When they eventually fall off due to the terrible pain from the burns they receive, they are devoured by the beasts. Then the process begins anew.

HELL OF BROKEN KNEES

Blue-skinned demons hold down sinners here, as their knees and legs are methodically broken over and over. Once a sinner's legs are nothing but pulp, they are healed, so their torment can be repeated.

HELL OF BOILING OIL

This is pretty much what is says on the label. Demons push sinners down into great cauldrons of boiling oil, while keeping them from escaping. Flesh burns and bubbles, but the sinner's nerves are never destroyed, and they feel every moment of agony during their time here.

HELL OF RAINING NEEDLES

The sky in this hell rains contain shards of sharp metal that cut and pierce the flesh of sinners. There is nowhere to escape this downpour, though variation in the frequency and strength of the rain

makes it impossible to ever grow accustomed to this punishment.

HELL OF CLIFF FLINGING

From the high cliffs that form the entrance to this hell, demons throw sinners to the jagged rocks below. After impact, those thrown from the cliffs lay broken and unable to move as more bodies fall upon them, eventually burying and slowly suffocating them. After a time, the demons retrieve the bodies, repair them, and start over.

HELL OF WASPS AND SCORPIONS

This is not a metaphor. It is that terrible.

SHENZHOU'S GOT A LOT OF HELLS, JACK

Like the Chinese myth it models, Shenzhou mythology has a lot of hells. A lot. From the somewhat mundane to the creatively terrifying, there are as many hellish realms of torment and punishment as a GM or players would ever need—and then some.

Many are detailed with alarming specificity and vigor by scholars and mystics.

This volume does not present a detailed hierarchy or list of the various hellish realms. Instead, a few examples provide immediate use and inspiration for a campaign's

unique hells. GMs and players of PCs with mystic knowledge are encouraged to get creative when devising or describing these realms of torment—at least as much as they feel comfortable doing.





CHAPTER THREE

MASTERING THE MYSTIC ARTS

FOR WANT OF A HAT...

“You fools! You think to stop me?” the sorcerer screamed. His hands blazed with blue flame, as he lifted them to gesture at them.

“Is it a prerequisite for every evil sorcerer to talk like that?” Wolf-Eyed Yue asked.

“Apparently,” said Sister Chuntao.

“Even if they don’t, this guy is making up for everyone who doesn’t.” She hated magic. If it were not for the fact this guy could throw fire, she would have had this fight ended by now.

They had tracked the sorcerer and his cult to the temple ruins early that day. The sorcerer—a local tailor who had made some sort of pact with demonic powers—had managed to convince a collection of local toughs to follow him. Since then, the sorcerer had been exploiting the locals, cursing or burning anyone who stood against him.

“Enough insolence!” the sorcerer shouted, “Die!”

From his hands great goutts of blue flame shot across the temple ruins at the two women. They scattered, Chuntao rolling right, Yue left.

Yue threw her spear at the sorcerer, as soon as she came to her feet. It stopped before it struck, bursting into flames.

“Damn, I really liked that spear,” Yue said, pulling her blades from her belt.

“Now, Sister Yue,” Chuntao said, “you know that attachment to material things leads to suffering and...”

“Argghhhh!!!” the sorcerer, clearly tired of being ignored, fired another blast of fire at Chuntao. She flipped out of the way and landed nearby with a satisfied smirk—until she noticed the burning mass of straw and cloth where she had been standing. It was her hat.

“Now, Sister Chuntao, attachment to material things leads to suffering,” Yue chided.

For a moment Chuntao stared at her smoldering headwear. Then her head swiveled and she locked eyes with the sorcerer. Her fists clenched and she took a step forward, falling into a wide fighting stance.

“That. Was. My. Hat.”

The sorcerer, suddenly aware he was the subject of a very intense and very un-Bodhist glare from the young nun, faltered. The blue flames about his body flickered and dimmed only slightly, but definitively.

“You will be thus destroyed?” the sorcerer retorted. He tried to sound fierce, but his voice lifted upwards at the end, turning his threat into a question.

“Not today,” Yue replied, smirking.

“Not by you,” Chuntao said. Yue was not sure whether Yue added something under her breath about avenging her hat, as that might have just been wishful thinking.

This chapter presents rules for making sorcerers, exorcists, diviners, prophets, and geomancers. It begins with a look at how skills operate and interface with mystical elements and creatures.

SKILLS & THE MYSTICAL WORLD

When using *Spirits, Beasts & Spells*, some of the skills are worth special note, because they can interact with the human, wild, and supernatural worlds differently. In general, using a skill in a completely alien environment or situation—like being in the spirit world without experience navigating it—characters roll those situations as Mediocre until they can justify in the story (or with character aspects) how they gain competence. This is **acting at a disadvantage**, a rule that should only be used in these circumstances.

Such situations of relative powerlessness make for great potential compels when tied to a character aspect. Situation aspects can be compelled too, of course. They do not highlight the vast difference between the character and the world like character aspects do, but they fuel the action in strange and supernatural environments until characters get their bearings.

The following skills have added context when using rules in this book. Elements of magical training, such as being a sorcerer or exorcist, add even more to various skills. This is just the base.

ATHLETICS

In a spiritual realm, moving does not necessarily work as it does in the mortal realm. Characters are just as likely to leap a great chasm as to step into a dangerous sliver of space.

BURGLARY

Burglary goes beyond picking normal locks and sleight-of-hand efforts. Someone who has a keen understanding of the spiritual world may defeat locks of arcane nature or other mystical barriers.

To do so, a character must have an aspect or experience in play that justifies this use. With that experience, a skilled thief could even steal from the gods.

CHI

Chi is used with rules from the various mystical abilities presented.

CONTACTS

By default, the Contacts skill covers a group among the character's own kind—humans know other humans and supernatural beings know other supernatural beings—but that does not have to be the case. When selecting Contacts, players can decide the applicable, general situations. Is the character a part of the Imperial Bureaucracy? Does she have an affinity for creatures of the forest, and know many by their true names? Perhaps she has made a pact with a demon, and others come to her aid—for a price. Contacts handles all of those situations.

Use character aspects to justify and reinforce why these connections. If the player wants to be especially broad—Contacts for wild animals and the Imperial army—that is one skill but has two different aspects to deal with those groups—examples for that case could be *Friend of Beasts* and *Royal Imperial Scout*.

CRAFTS

Crafts is touched upon in the way sorcerers handle performing rituals under pressure. Crafts is used for an alchemist's Alchemy skill and an exorcist's Exorcism skill.

DECEIVE, PROVOKE & RAPPORT

Social skills become complicated when using them against beings of completely different minds, whether trying to deceive a beast or cheat a spirit. Most do not have any problems with humans, though, as any creature appearing in the story has probably had to deal with humans before encountering the PCs.

ACTING AT A DISADVANTAGE

Acting at a disadvantage, where a target is temporarily reduced to Mediocre in a skill, can be a useful game tool, especially when strange and unfamiliar situations or entities are involved. It represents a temporary setback, justifies a compel or two, paces a scene or encounter, or generally places temporary obstacles in a character's path that they can heroically Overcome.

However, feeling powerless is infuriating. It is especially infuriating for players who have dealt with unfair applications of similar rules in the past. Given this, GMs must remember that nothing that speaks to a character's aspects fades from prominence unless actively compelled. Thus a **MASTERFUL ACROBAT** is not going to lose her balance even in the **HELL OF VANISHING FLOORS**, unless

that aspect is compelled so she does. An **IRON-WILLED MONK** may not enjoy the **ARCANE WHISPERS AND DISTANT SCREAMS** that haunt a cursed temple after sundown, but he does not break down and cry. Further, his Will, *Chi*, or similar skills do not drop to Mediocre unless his player decides to take a compel to represent the rare and incredibly dramatic time the character's legendary resolve wavered.

DRIVE

Drive (or Horsemanship or Ride) covers typical mounts and vehicles. Riding a magical beast or otherworldly creature is sometimes a different prospect, one where the character is not so much in control as politely suggesting courses of action and direction. Those trying to ride strange beasts of typical animal intelligence must learn to adjust before being able to use their Drive rating.

EMPATHY

Empathy is the skill of reading other's emotions and intent, regardless of the target. A wolf with high Empathy is good at reading which humans are immediate threats and which are not. A hunter with a high Empathy could tell if a wolf is aggressive because it is hungry, wounded, or defending its territory. A monk might tell when a demon is lying—which is easy: assume it is—but also what deception is under the surface.

If the character has never encountered a sort of being before—such as meeting a ghost or a ferocious bear for the first time—he is likely at a disadvantage. This comes up in stories, where a demon easily fools an acolyte monk when they first meet.

INVESTIGATE

Most characters with Investigate look toward mundane sources or clues. For the most part, mundane clues help in supernatural investigations: canvassing witnesses, bribing the right source, finding some small scrap of cloth at a scene, and so on. Even so, someone who understands mysticism can find evidence the uninitiated would not see.

LORE

Lore is a broad skill, covering subjects such as law, history, and local legends. Typically aspects regulate things a character's Lore skill makes sense for on the spot versus when there is time to research. This remains true when using Lore for the various arenas of mysticism.

NOTICE

While anyone with a high Notice skill could sense if they are being watched or hear a strange noise, those who understand mysticism glean more insight from what they sense.

PHYSIQUE

In the spirit world, Physique may not act as expected. Acts of strength may require Will, as that is the true measure of power in ethereal spaces. In such places, physical stress boxes are unlikely to be used, leaving the high Physical, low Will character in a dangerous situation indeed.

RESOURCES

Resources covers the ability to acquire material goods and labor—in other words, wealth. In the human world, wealth means money, holdings, and credit. Those do no good when lost in a forest on the edge of reality.

Demons may have Resources as well, either with human wealth—perhaps from manipulating humans—or some currency in the demon realms.

STEALTH

Since Stealth is about the environment, it is sometimes contextual. Anyone trying to stay silent rolls Stealth as normal, but a wild animal trying to hide in a crowded city center may be at a loss, just as an urban thief might be powerless in a haunted forest.

Demons and other supernatural threats are never at a disadvantage with Stealth due to their environment.

WILL

Will is one of the skills often used by mystical characters. It is the skill mainly used to Defend against sorcerous influences, which anyone can attempt.

MAGIC WEAPONS AND ITEMS

Outside of alchemical creations, *SPIRITS*, *BEASTS*, & *SPELLS* does not devote discussion to magical weapons and items common to other fantasy settings. The reason for this is simple: creation of special and legendary items is already discussed in *TIANXIA: Blood, Silk, & Jade* (page 124). Magical weapons are functionally no different from other fabled or legendary items. They are just inherently magical. This is reflected in how whatever abilities and aspects they possess are defined. For example, an enchanted blade crafted by the gods to slay demons might possess the aspects *God-Crafted Blade* and *Demon-Slaying Enchantments*. Powerful items might have stunts or extras that mimic the effects of sorcery or other mystic arts. Generally, such weapons are considered the same as other legendary weapons in *TIANXIA*.



SHENTONG: THE RIVER OF MAGIC

Where magic can have an impact on how skills work, location can have an impact on how some magic works, especially sorcery. Different places in the world of *TIANXIA* have varying degrees of supernatural allowance, known as **Shentong**. This relates to a place's *feng shui*—the flow of *chi* within the land—which geomancers monitor and influence (see page 49).

Just as combatants have Jianghu ranks, places have Shentong ratings. This is a quick way of determining what limitations or benefits sorcerers (see page 29) must deal with, but has no effect on mortal magic like alchemy or exorcism.

Shentong is split into five overall ratings. From weakest to strongest:

Shentong Rating	What This Means	Effects on Sorcery
Choked (0)	There is no <i>chi</i> flow allowing for magic, including that needed to heal magical beings. It takes considerable effort to keep a place choked, as <i>chi</i> wants to flow into such voids, so only small places can remain this way for long.	No sorcerous-level magic is possible. Purely magical beings cannot clear physical stress tracks or address physical consequences, and they are Sickened (or similar) while in such a place. This persists until they spend time recovering in a place with Normal or stronger Shentong. Sorcerous techniques do not count for Jianghu.
Dulled (1)	There is enough <i>chi</i> flowing into the area to allow a small amount of sorcery to happen.	Success with style cannot happen with sorcerous actions, and Attacks do at most 2 stress. A maximum of two sorcerous techniques count toward a sorcerer's Jianghu.
Normal (2)	The <i>chi</i> flows as nature intends, with nothing blocking it or causing it to wellspring. (Normal places do not have a Shentong aspect, so there is no invocation or compel for sorcerers and creatures.)	Sorcerous actions have no limitation or benefit.
Rich (3)	In such places, the <i>feng shui</i> causes the <i>chi</i> to pool—like a spring. There is always something marking a rich area, such as a bone-chilling fog or exceptionally vibrant plant life.	Everyone capable of sorcery has one free boost in that location per session, usable only for sorcery actions.
Wild (4)	If a Rich area is a spring, a Wild area is a geyser, ever-bursting forth with power. These places are unmistakable in their nature, due to supernatural effects that just naturally occur.	All sorcerous actions have an inherent +2 bonus. Individual areas may have specific benefits, either in addition or as a replacement.

Note: Shentong is not an aspect on a place, but it can inform aspects that a place has. Being a magical creature in a place with weak Shentong could be a rationale for compelling that creature's high concept aspect.



SHENTONG IN ZHONGZHOU

The imperial capital in Zhongzhou is Dulled, and the emperor's palace is Choked. Other cities in the empire conform to the building tenets of the Ministry of Architecture, so typically have a rating of Dulled even if magistrates

are not there to enforce *feng shui*. Villages are usually Normal, as are most places away from civilization. It's only special places that have Rich or Wild Shentong. Mystical cabals always seek out artifacts or secrets that

would allow them to work magic in Choked places, especially in the emperor's palace. Ways of working around Shentong are always short-lived, like water bursting from a balloon.

POCKETS OF VARYING SHENTONG

Within a city or wilderness, there can be spots of weaker or stronger Shentong. They are always noticeable to anyone trained in or attuned to the supernatural world. It is highly unusual to have a pocket more than one rung away from the outlying area. Magical energy is like a raging river: difficult to dam and flowing toward voids.

POTENT AREAS

Places with Rich or Wild Shentong must have a location aspect that reflects their magical abundance, either covering why magic is so powerful here or an unusual result of that magical wellspring. Examples: *Powerful Chi Site*, *Strong Attunement to Fire*, *Thin Veil Between Worlds*.

ELEMENTAL SHENTONG

Most of the time, a place's Shentong rating covers all sorcerous elements (see [page 31](#)) equally, but there are places where a Shentong rating is higher for one element. When true, it is expressed as a specific rating for that element and as an aspect. When writing a place's rating, add any special notes in parentheses, like "Dulled (Normal for water)." Places with a general Shentong rating of Choked or Dulled can only shift up to Normal, but others can be of any amount up to Wild.

These places have aspects reflecting elemental attunement, such as *Hallowed Pool of Water* or *Dead Forest Devastated by Fire*.

While even less common, it's possible for a place to be weaker for a given element than it is for others.

MOMENTS THAT CAN INFLUENCE SHENTONG

Particularly auspicious days and events can raise a place's Shentong. Huge meteorological moments like eclipses affect a vast area. Local events naturally only affect that area, but curiously Empire-wide events only affect cities and villages that observe them. That is to say nothing of omens fabled to cause the forces of magic to rise.

During such times, exorcists are especially vigilant.

CHANGING SHENTONG OVER TIME

Given enough time and working on a large enough scale, geomancers can strengthen or weaken a place's Shentong. It is the curious relationship with sorcery and mortals: only mortals possess the potential to alter the world in such ways. Achieving this is discussed further in the geomancy section on [page 49](#).

SORCERY

Sorcery is the greatest of magic: the power to bend the elements and transgress natural laws. A sorcerer can cause the winds to howl, fires to rage, seas to rock, and earth to tremble. He can twist the form of himself or of another. He can throw curses, cast illusions, and do a host of other acts whether minor or vast.

Sorcery comes from a being's essential nature. Demons have blood, spirits have their ghostly essence, and other magical creatures have what makes them inherently magical as a bond to sorcery. Mortals can have a sorcerous bond only through being a descendant of a demon (no matter how far back), by committing a ritual that infuses them with such essence, or by bargaining for power from a supernatural being.

The word “sorcerer” as a game term covers anyone wielding sorcery, regardless of whether they are mortal, demon, ghost, or other creature.

BENEVOLENT & MALEVOLENT SORCERERS

Whether mortal or supernatural, sorcerers fall into one of two general sorts: benevolent (or “light” or “healing”) sorcerers and malevolent (or “dark” or “profane”) sorcerers. Both sides use the same rules and have access to the same abilities—the difference is purely how they use the tools they have. Some techniques and rituals are more helpful or vile, but simply having the power to curse someone does not make a being evil nor does the power to heal make one good. A heroic sorcerer might curse a killer or demon to punish them for their crimes, while an evil sorcerer might heal loyal minions and allies so they can better serve their interests.

This means playing a sorcerer in *TIANXIA* is flexible. A player can play a dark sorcerer striving on the path of redemption (and living with a trouble aspect like *Haunted by My Past Crimes*). Similarly, heroes might have to track down a sorcerer who was once benevolent but somehow became corrupted.

CREATING A SORCERER

Having sorcery requires three things: a sorcerous bond, a telltale sign, and a base sorcery stunt.

A sorcerous bond is part of a character's high concept that justifies how that character has sorcery. Aspects like *Water Demon* or *Vengeful Ghost* work for nonhuman beings. Human sorcerers need an aspect like *Inheritor of a Sorcerous Lineage* or *Powers Bargained*. GMs should generally be permissive when determining if a high concept allows for sorcerous powers and training. If a campaign has stricter requirements along these lines, players must be aware of them to properly build their characters.

Each sorcerer has some telltale sign of their sorcerous bond, including demons in human form and mortal sorcerers. Eyes may be unnaturally green, skin has a hint of scale, voice carries a hiss or sound of metal, and so on. Many do not notice it, but those with a *Chi* of at least Good (+3) have a chance of spotting the character in a crowd, and those the character interacts with personally or intimately have a chance to notice this sign even with even Average (+1) *Chi*. This detection is automatic unless the character is trying to hide their mystic nature. Then, it is an opposed *Chi* test between the parties, success by the observer meaning they have identified the individual as having mystical abilities. Success with style on this test also gives an indicator of the being's true nature (e.g. mortal sorcerer, demon, etc.).

Finally, every sorcerer must have a stunt from their sorcerous element as described below.

TEMPORARY SORCERY

A character might convince a powerful supernatural force to lend her a portion of its strength for a short time, not unlike asking to borrow a legendary item. This process is one of the more common ways such forces grant power and blessings to mortals. This is possible, with the following rules and catches:

- ✿ This is a simple ritual (page 38) that can be performed with a patron who has at least six sorcerous techniques. In addition, gods, goddess, and similarly powerful supernatural entities can always perform this ritual.
- ✿ The recipient must always choose this. Temporary sorcery cannot be forced upon characters, though they may be seduced, coerced, or fooled into accepting it.
- ✿ The patron must adhere to whatever stipulations are agreed upon, to the letter.
- ✿ While empowered by another being, the character has the aspect **BOUND TO ANOTHER**. The patron has a free compel once per refresh—meaning it does not have to pay the character a fate point. The empowered character can spend a fate point to refuse the compel, in which case the patron can do another free compel later until the character accepts it.
- ✿ A patron can grant a character up to 2 refresh worth of abilities, which temporarily lowers the recipient's refresh. The patron chooses what techniques to gift have from its own collection.

The recipient cannot go below 0 refresh. If the recipient remains at 0 refresh for more than two sessions and does not strive to remove the bond, the character becomes an NPC lost to the power.

- ✿ The empowered character takes on telltale signs of being bound to another, just as all sorcerers have a telltale sign of being supernatural. The telltale sign is somehow related to the patron's nature.
- ✿ The patron can willingly disband the bond, but the recipient cannot without someone else disrupting it through a ritual.

Likely, the patron requires something in return, so characters must be wary of the terms of the agreement. Wise ones make stipulations involving how long they can be bound, as there are stories of sorcerers cursed to never die, wandering and doing as commanded. Some would say that wiser ones do not engage it such deals at all.

If a character takes on temporary sorcery in play and survives it, that is definitely justification for acquiring sorcery after a later milestone!

SORCEROUS STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

Though sorcery strengths and weaknesses by default offer no automatic bonuses or penalties, this need not be the case. GMs wishing to grant styles bonuses for interactions can grant a +1 bonus for sorcery that logically would be more effective against another type. For example, a fire-based Attack might be more

effective against frost-based protection, granting a bonus to Attacks, Overcome an Obstacles, or Create an Advantages. However, earth based magic might gain a bonus to Defend against fire. Storm sorcery might disrupt nature magic, but be less effective against frost.

Codifying such bonuses makes sorcery battles more

consistent and tactical, but it risks discouraging some players from pushing their powers to unusual and creative places in favor of chasing static bonuses. The GM should consider this when determining if static bonuses for sorcery strengths and weaknesses is right for their campaign.

THE SIX SORCEROUS ELEMENTS

There are six common elements of sorcery: earth, fire, frost, nature, soul, and storm. These are not the classic five elements as scholars understand, but more akin to mystical affinities or even families of powers. All sorcerous bonds inherently belong to one of these elements.

Each element is taken as a stunt that grants some innate powers and unlocks a class of sorcerous techniques (page 33). Having a sorcerous stunt is required to perform rituals (page 38). Each sorcerous element has its own strengths and weaknesses. These grant no automatic or inherent bonuses, but they make excellent and consistent justifications for Create an Advantage actions.

EARTH

Earth sorcery is tied not just to rock and stone but to the hidden places of the earth. Powerful practitioners of this style of magic can even become as stone to resist damage and weather overwhelming force, but they lack the flexibility of storm or flash of fire sorcery.

Telltale: Those of earth often have rocky or ashen skin.

Basic Powers: Earth-bonded are able to find hidden truths—they often say, “The ground cannot lie.” So long as an earth sorcerer touches the earth, she has an innate sense of everything else connected to the ground: where people are, which crates are empty and which conceal something heavy, structural supports and faults in a building, and so forth. This lets the character use Notice and Investigate to find clues others could not. The sorcerer does not know who is standing behind a door or the title and contents of a book hidden in a locked desk, but she knows that those things are there.

FIRE

Fire sorcery is fast, powerful, but inconstant. It can generate heat and flame to both protect and harm, but it lacks the enduring defense of earth or adaptability of storm sorcery.

Telltale: Those of fire often have a red hue to their skin or the faint hint of sulfur.

Basic Powers: Fire or heat cannot impact or harm the fire-bonded. They are not unaware of

temperature changes and flame, just invulnerable to them. A fire sorcerer cannot have such aspects invoked or compelled against him. Attacks primarily based on fire have no effect on him. A fire-bonded can always choose to extend this to his clothing and personal effects, or allow them to be burned away for dramatic effect.

FROST

The opposite energy of fire, frost can burn a foe or shelter a practitioner who has mastered its secrets. It is an insidious force, capable of freezing physical forms and emotions alike, though it lacks the endurance of earth and is in many ways the antithesis of nature sorcery.

Telltale: Those of frost often have pale skin or breath that always slightly fogs.

Basic Powers: Cold or ice cannot impact or harm in any way the frost-bonded. They are aware of temperature changes and the dangers but are invulnerable to them. Such aspects cannot be invoked or compelled against a frost sorcerer. Attacks primarily based on ice have no effect on her. Frost-bonded can walk over any icy or snowy surface without problem leaving no footsteps behind.

NATURE

Nature sorcery is flexible and vibrant, attuning a sorcerer to the flow of life found in plants, animals, and wild places. It surpasses many other styles for its ability to manipulate one’s environment without destroying it, but lacks the raw destructive power of fire or storm sorcery.

Telltale: Those of nature often have skin that hints at an animal—typically scales, fur, or feathers—or some other bestial feature.

Basic Powers: The wilds extend hospitality to the nature-bonded, giving a sense of deference. Nature sorcerers can commune with nature for information, allowing them to use Investigate or Rapport with animals and plants. Nature-bonded may even ask for gifts from nature, though like any hospitality, it can be abused. The natural world is also quick to inform a sorcerer when he is about to cross a line.

SOUL

Soul sorcerers learn to attune and commune with spirits and affect the immaterial as if it were flesh and blood. This path is ill-suited to dealing directly with the inanimate, unlike earth, fire, or frost sorcery. However, it is powerful in its realm and can allow a practitioner to affect such things indirectly by interacting with spirits related to places and natural phenomena.

Telltale: Those of soul often have features that mix youth and age, like young skin contrasted by wrinkles around the eyes and on the hands.

Basic Powers: Soul-bonded see invisible things and know the true nature of those they perceive—whether someone is a normal mortal, sorcerer, demon, spirit, or other being—and if they have low or high *Chi*. That is, unless they disguise themselves through illusion or other magic, which must be contested with Notice.

STORM

Storm sorcery is one of the flashier and more immediately powerful styles. However it lacks the focused destruction of fire and the enduring effects of nature or earth.

Telltale: Those of storm may have wind-burnt knuckles and face, ever-damp hair, or other traits associated with exposure to harsh weather.

Basic Powers: Weather does not slow or stop the storm-bonded, nor does it dull their senses—a storm sorcerer hears perfectly through the roar of wind and sees just as well through a monsoon’s downpour. She can use Rapport to ask favors of a storm, such as permitting comrades to pass through unharmed or assault a pursuer.

BEING OF TWO ELEMENTS

It is entirely possible, if somewhat uncommon, for a sorcerer to take on a second element. For supernatural beings, a second element requires another character aspect related to the second element. A being of fire and frost might have **INNER CHI TURMOIL** as a trouble aspect. A character could take the soul element as a **GHOST UNABLE TO MOVE ON**, to complement **TOUCHED BY THE GREAT STORM** as the aspect from phase one of character creation. A second element also costs a second stunt, which grants a technique as part

of that stunt.

For mortals, fulfilling those requirements is an even rarer occurrence. GMs should consider the cost of such sorcery. This is akin to learning a Lost Technique of Kung Fu, requiring special training or a unique background to explain these powers. Of course, GMs wanting sorcerer PCs and NPCs to throw around fire and ice or command earth and spirits are free to allow these things more easily, but doing so risks of making **TIANXIA** about sorcery instead of Kung Fu and *wuxia* action. This is

not necessarily a bad thing, but it is something to consider before allowing characters with multiple sorcerous elements.

Generally, few beings are able to take on more than two elements. Only the most powerful mystical beings can hold within themselves such contrary natures. Any PC sorcerer who could master three or more elements would be the mystical equivalent of a Grandmaster of Kung Fu. Powerful spirits, demons, and gods could actively oppose the idea of a mortal wielding so many powerful forces.

SORCERY IN ACTION

Sorcery is not a skill in and of itself, but a power that extends the range of many skills. Having sorcery extends the following skills (beyond the **Skills & the Mystical World** section on page 24). Those without sorcery do not have access to these extensions.

- ✿ *Chi* can be used to address sorcerous afflictions on the character.
- ✿ *Crafts* covers understanding and enacting sorcerous rituals (page 38).
- ✿ *Investigate* and *Notice* benefit from an intimate awareness of the supernatural world. Things that a normal mortal might not be able to detect may potentially reveal themselves.
- ✿ *Lore* covers esoteric knowledge regarding sorcery. Though it normally covers this, having sorcery means the GM may consider knowledge that a non-sorcerer does not readily possess.
- ✿ Social skills (*Deceive*, *Empathy*, *Rapport*, and *Provoke*) are not necessarily disadvantaged (page 24) against supernatural beings.
- ✿ *Will* is used to resist sorcerous effects directed at the sorcerer that are not physical in nature.

Additionally, sorcerous techniques often extend skills, including physical conflict skills (*Athletics*, *Fight*, *Physique*, and *Shoot*). These are otherwise used as normal. Sorcerers are not inherently better at Kung Fu than non-sorcerers, but with the right techniques can broaden their options and exploit unique interactions.

THE CATCH: SORCERY RESTRAINED

Sorcerers can be wildly powerful beings and none are to be taken lightly, but the power they command is governed by the area's Shentong rating (page 27). Sorcerous techniques and rituals do not work in a place of Choked Shentong, are hampered by a Dulled Shentong, work as described in this section in a Normal Shentong, and are bolstered in a stronger Shentong. This is not true of Kung Fu or other types of special training. Sorcerers overcome this restriction with henchmen and minions or study Kung Fu or other arts to protect them when their magic is restricted.

SORCEROUS TECHNIQUES

Having an element grants access to that element's techniques, which works like Kung Fu techniques and are gained by spending refresh or free stunts, just as Kung Fu techniques are and with the same costs as learning Kung Fu (2 Techniques for 1 Refresh, 1 Technique in exchange for a free stunt). Sorcerous Techniques are always counted as individual Techniques rather than part of a Style determining Jianghu Rank (see *TIANXIA: Blood, Silk, & Jade*, pages 62–63).

Example: *Black Hand Shen is a skilled hedge sorcerer and minor Kung Fu practitioner. He knows Iron Crane Kung Fu and two techniques for the style, but the bulk of his training is in sorcery. Shen possesses two Earth Sorcery Techniques as well as two general Sorcerous Techniques. If these six Techniques were all in a single Kung Fu Style, Shen would be considered a Master of that Style and thus be Jianghu Rank 2. However, since his Sorcerous Techniques do not count as part of any particular Style, he needs to learn a total of 8 Kung Fu, Sorcerous, Lost, or other Techniques to qualify for that Jianghu Rank.*

A sorcerer without the prerequisite master of at least a single Style of Kung Fu must learn all the Sorcerous Techniques of one Element before achieving Jianghu Rank 3 in addition to the other requirements.

Example: *Eventually Black Hand Shen gains more knowledge, training, and power. He learns four Kung Fu Techniques in Iron Crane, but does not master the Style. This means he must learn all of one Sorcery Element and twelve total Techniques to assume Jianghu Rank 3. He eventually achieves this when he learns all three Earth Sorcerous Techniques, four general Sorcerous Techniques, and one Lost Technique.*

Elemental techniques that inflict stress or aspects do not affect sorcerers and other beings of the same element. They gain a +2 bonus to defend against such techniques.

GENERAL SORCEROUS TECHNIQUES

In addition to Elemental Techniques, all sorcerers can take the following techniques, regardless of their bond.

Simple Shapeshifting: The sorcerer can twist his *Chi* so well, he can even shift into another shape. If human, the character can use this to appear as a different person. Nonhumans can transform to and from a single human shape. Shapeshifting costs a fate point and lasts for a number of hours equal to the sorcerer's Will rating before he is forced to transform back. The character can transform back at any time by choice, which does not cost a fate point. Sorcerers and exorcists can attempt to pierce the shapeshifter's guise with Notice or Empathy, which the sorcerer Defends against with Deceive.

Advanced Shapeshifting: Learning to change into an animal or other nonhuman shape as a human sorcerer requires training and mastery of one's body and spirit. Such forms are considered a magical Lost Technique with each one granting special stunts, extras, and possibly changing or adding additional aspects to the sorcerer while they are in that form. The exact cost of each Lost Technique varies depending on the exact abilities of the form one can assume. A couple examples of possible Shapeshifting forms are:

Demon Tiger Form

The sorcerer who knows this Lost Technique can assume the form of a large and fearsome tiger. They gain the strength and power of a big cat but lose the ability to manipulate objects and perform tasks suited to a human when in this form. This form often looks somewhat unnatural, though the sorcerer can pass for a normal animal at a distance or under casual scrutiny. Alternate versions of this ability exist that allow a sorcerer to transform into other big cats, a great wolf, and other larger predators.

Cost: 1 refresh, must know the Shapeshifting Sorcerous Technique. The sorcerer must also have a *Chi* skill of Good (+3) or higher or know any Tiger Kung Fu Style.

Effect: Spend a fate point to assume the form of a tiger. In this form, gain a +1 bonus and +1

Weapon rating to physical Attacks. In addition, gain the **DEMON TIGER BODY** aspect and a +2 bonus with Create an Advantage actions involving this aspect. In addition, the sorcerer can treat their Athletics skill as two ranks greater when determining if they can move additional zones. The sorcerer can transform back to normal form at will, and automatically turns back to normal in areas of Choked Shentong. In this form, a sorcerer can use any Kung Fu Techniques they possess. Furthermore, any Tiger Style Forms the practitioner knows gains a free invocation at the start of a scene.

Mask of the Eagle

This Sorcerous Lost Technique lets a sorcerer transform into an eagle or other large bird of prey. This form is useful for traveling long distances unhindered or escaping situations from which a bird could easily fly. Alternate versions of this technique enabled turning into a large bat or other flying creature.

Cost: 1 refresh, must know the Shapeshifting Sorcerous Technique and have a *Chi* of Fair (+2) or greater.

Effect: Spend a fate point to assume the form of an eagle. The sorcerer may also leave the scene at this time, flying away. Instead of normal movement, the character may fly moving two zones more than normal movement and gaining a +2 bonus to Defend attempts to prevent entering or exiting a zone. The character gains the **ON THE WINGS OF EAGLES** aspect while shapeshifted. When reassuming normal form, the sorcerer may enter any ongoing scene at that time if it would be possible to arrive by flying as an eagle. The shapeshifter automatically turns back to normal in areas of Choked Shentong.

Other Lost Techniques for different forms exist or could be developed by skilled sorcerer characters. GMs and players should work out the exact benefits, cost, and limitations of each form. Barring some powerful and undiscovered magic the shapeshifted sorcerer cannot to maintain their altered shape in areas of Choked Shentong.



Cursed Touch: The sorcerer can curse another, bending their *Chi* with a touch by manipulating magical energies or with the aid of minor spirits. This must be more than a passing brush of the hand or punch with a fist, though a simple clasping of hands is adequate. Create an Advantage, rolling Will against the target's *Chi*. Success grants an aspect relating to the curse inflicted. The exact nature of the curse is up to the sorcerer, but common curses sicken, weaken a limb or a particular sense, trigger hallucinations or distracting visions, or simply cause bad luck.

The curse can manifest right away or within the hour, as the caster desires. Those trained to spot such assaults—including all sorcerers and exorcists—may notice immediately. Others do not notice until the effects set in. The sorcerer can dismiss the curse as a simple thought; otherwise, a healer can rebalance the target's *Chi* as though addressing a mild consequence.

Inner Wellspring: The sorcerer can flow her *Chi* into another, to rebalance and heal. She can use *Chi* to address any physical or mystical consequence or aspect. She can even choose to take a mystical or emotional ailment from another; accepting that consequence in the appropriate or higher slot or assuming an aspect as a mild consequence. The transferred consequence is considered addressed by this action, so the sorcerer needs only live with it until it naturally goes away.

Spirit of Truth: Sorcerers with this Technique pierce through illusions and other mystical deception, sensing *Chi* on a much deeper level than most. The

sorcerer gets a vague feeling when someone or something nearby uses magic to hide or deceive. Further, the character has +2 to Empathy and Notice rolls to Overcome an Obstacle against them.

EARTH TECHNIQUES

Earth-bonded can take any Iron or Stone Kung Fu technique as an Earth technique.

Ripples in the Earth: The ground speaks to the sorcerer through her feet. She can sense when others are approaching as she feels their footsteps, even while asleep. The sorcerer can use Notice in those situations even if others could not and gets a +2 to her Notice roll when others could attempt to notice as normal. Additionally, by concentrating she can use Investigate to uncover more information—how many people are approaching, what rooms or caverns exist nearby, any underground streams, and similar feats of perception.

The Rock Turns All Blows: When the sorcerer succeeds at charging her *Chi Armor*, she gains an additional free invocation. Non-mystical blades cannot cut her. They can still inflict stress as a normal Attack, but they get no advantage of any aspects or other benefits from being a blade, cannot be used to poison her, or similar effects.

Unmoving Pillar: While touching solid earth, the sorcerer adds his *Chi* to Physique actions to Overcome an Obstacle or Defend against being grappled, shoved, or otherwise moved. Even earthquakes, boulders, and other acts of nature cannot move him so casually.

HOW MYSTICAL DO YOU WANT?

There are two broad modes to mystical elements in *TIANXIA*: **subtle** and **explosive**. A subtle theme assumes that sorcerers and other mystical beings have to overcome minor inconveniences and major hurdles. Earth sorcerers need to touch the bare ground without shoes to use their techniques, fire sorcerers can only

manipulate fire and not conjure it from nothing (such as scooping up a flame to throw it), and other Sorcerous Elements face similar restrictions. If the PCs are sorcerers and the game does not focus on high-flying exorcists fighting sorcerers, use this theme.

The explosive theme takes a liberal approach with sorcerous

constraints. Earth sorcerers are only disadvantaged if thrown into the air or treading water. Fire sorcerers can create flame with their very minds. This theme is fun for PC sorcerers and cultivates an action narrative for those who have sworn to fight sorcerers.

FIRE TECHNIQUES

Fire-bonded can take any Lightning Kung Fu technique as a Fire technique.

Ball of Flame: The sorcerer can redirect or throw fire. Use Shoot to Attack. If the Attacks tie or miss, wherever it lands is **On Fire**, which has a free invocation. (This has no effect if it was already **On Fire**.) This technique can also create fires at a distance without specifically Attacking, though pinpointing a specific spot at a significant distance requires a Shoot roll.

Fiery Armor: When channeling **Chi Armor**, the sorcerer is sheathed in flame. When the character has a free invoke on **Chi Armor**, Attackers take 1 stress when Attacking—whether they succeed or fail—unless they are immune to fire or are Attacking from distance. Even a spears-length is enough avoid the stress, though that spear may become engulfed in flame.

Firewalker: The sorcerer can walk into one fire, and appear in another fire within line of sight. If both fires are large enough to engulf the fire-bonded, this costs an action. If either fire is smaller, this also costs a fate point, as the sorcerer must exert burning energies to travel through such a small space.

FROST TECHNIQUES

Frost-bonded can take any Iron or Storm Kung Fu technique as an Frost technique.

Hands of Frost: The sorcerer can freeze another's **Chi** when Attacking in melee. If a target suffers more stress on a single close physical Attack than their **Chi** rating, they also take the **Chilled** aspect—without any free invocations. They move one fewer zones and lose ties on Fight and Athletics Defend tests until they address the consequence with warmth. The frost-bonded can also use frost powers to Create an Advantage in a variety of ways.

Fire sorcerers and fiery beings address the consequence naturally at the end of their next turn, so they are still affected for a moment.

Heart of Ice: The sorcerer's **Chi** is truly ice, numbing him to the manipulations of others. He has +2 to Defend against social interactions (namely Provoke, Rapport, and Empathy).

The frost-bonded can touch another person and convey this chill to them, moving this benefit from himself to them. They can Defend with Will against the sorcerer's **Chi**, if they desire. If the sorcerer transfers the benefit ability, he loses the benefit and cannot regain it to transfer it to another until he has a few minutes to rest and regain it. Gifted targets lose this benefit at the end of the scene or when the frost-bonded regains it, whichever comes first.

Snow Wisp: The sorcerer can briefly turn into a snow flurry, becoming an incorporeal being that physical weapons cannot harm. The frost-bonded automatically does this on a Defend success with style but can also choose to become incorporeal at will. The effect only lasts for a moment, and the sorcerer cannot control her movement while in this form—she is at the wind's mercy.

NATURE TECHNIQUES

Nature-bonded can take any Forest Kung Fu technique as a Nature technique.

Master of the Forest: The sorcerer can call upon the spiritual nature within plants to do her will. She can command vines to entangle foes, speak to the spirits within to gain insight they may possess, tell dense foliage to allow her passage, and so on. Roll Will when using this technique to Create an Advantage.

Tiger Monarch: Animals are mystically connected to the sorcerer. Most wild animals regard him as an alpha, and he can call upon them as allies. The nature-bonded can also bond with a willing normal animal, allowing it to transfer its senses to his and to communicate with him over a distance. This bond takes a few minutes to forge and lasts a number of hours equal to the sorcerer's **Chi** rating. A nature-bonded can only have one bond at a time, but can dismiss it with a thought.

Unseen Hunter: In the wilds, the sorcerer naturally moves without leaving a trace, though she can choose to leave a trail if she desires. In any locale, while the nature-bonded's **Chi Armor** is active she can use it to blend into her surroundings. This means she can use it to justify Stealth even in unlikely situations, and invoke it to aid such rolls.

SOUL TECHNIQUES

Soul-bonded can take any Ghost Kung Fu technique as a Soul technique.

Blend into Walls: The sorcerer can move through walls and other non-living things, though she cannot sink into the ground or fly for very long. Moving through matter *quickly* requires overcoming the material with Athletics, at a difficulty Good or higher. By spending a fate point, the soul-bonded can bring a willing person with her.

Fade into Mist: The sorcerer can use Stealth to remain unseen—even if someone is staring right at him—by appearing to turn into mist. This does not make the soul-bonded truly incorporeal. Normal mortals use *Chi* or Notice to spot the sorcerer, whichever is lower. Sorcerers, exorcists, and the like can use the higher of the two skills.

Ghost Fist: The sorcerer's very fists can exude hostile spiritual energy. When Attacking in melee, bypass any physical armor and advantages that are purely physical, which does not include *Chi Armor*. The soul-bonded can touch and Attack ghosts and other incorporeal beings and objects.

STORM TECHNIQUES

Storm-bonded can take any Lightning or Storm Kung Fu technique as a Storm technique.

Kindred of Air: The sorcerer is one with air spirits. She can will herself to be without weight, allowing the air to pick her up, carry her away, and to land safely from any fall. Controlling where she flies is not trivial, though; use the Drive or Athletics skill (player's choice) to direct air spirits to where the storm-bonded needs to go. Additionally, the sorcerer can request air spirits to help her Overcome an Obstacle or Create an Advantage, such as blowing something into her reach or making a noise. These are Rapport actions, and cannot be used to Attack or Defend unless the interaction takes place in the middle of a massive windstorm.

Raging Armor: The sorcerer's *Chi Armor* takes the form of a raging storm around him. If the storm-bonded succeeds with style on a Defend, rather than generating a boost, the Attacker takes 1 stress as the tempestuous *Chi* shreds at them. The sorcerer can also use his *Chi Armor* to add to an assault, provided

the target is within the reach of his fists. Fire cannot hit the storm-bonded while his *Chi Armor* is active.

Sea is my Fist: The sorcerer can command water as a weapon, shaping it into a deadly strike. Even a pot of water is enough to allow for a Fight roll at a distance—not Shoot, because it is not an Attack coming from the character. With a large body of water—a vast lake, raging river, or harbor—the storm-bonded can Attack everyone in the same zone, or focus all of that power on a single target to get +2 to the Attack.

RITUALS

Rituals are at the heart of stories about sorcery, as elaborate and lengthy methods by which a sorcerer can manifest an immense change. In *TIANXIA*, rituals are treated as dramatic moments. They are either something sorcerers strive to achieve for some grand goal, undo the harm caused by a ritual, or stop from happening before it is too late.

These ritual rules are from the PCs' point of view. The enacting rules are only for PCs undertaking a ritual or assisting a sorcerer in enacting one. Foes do not need the rules for enacting, as from the PC lens, the active characters are either trying to interfere with a ritual or undo one that has been completed. Their foes are nearly complete or have accomplished their ritual. Of course, foes could use the rules for interfering with rituals, such as during a climatic conflict where an evil force is trying to keep PCs from banishing it.

ENACTING RITUALS

For PCs enacting or aiding a ritual, the focus involves the acts and components needed to undertake it. Once everything for the ritual is gathered or achieved, and the time and energy has been spent, the ritual comes to pass. That is, unless someone interferes with it, as described later on [page 40](#).

Rituals are graded in complexity, based on what the sorcerer is trying to achieve. There are three grades, from easiest to most daunting: **powerful**, **mythic**, and **world-shattering**. Anything less extreme than a **powerful** ritual can be achieved through alchemy ([page 41](#)) or other mystic techniques. Examples of each ritual tier are:

- ✿ **Powerful:** Warding a location against demons or spirits. Healing grievous or long-lasting injuries. Altering or erasing an important memory.

Learning the location of a potent artifact or item. Transporting a willing target to heaven, hell, or another supernatural realm.

- ✿ **Mythic:** Summoning a powerful demon or dangerous spirit to do one's bidding. Crafting a supernatural prison to hold a minor god or powerful spirit. Compelling the spirit of a dead sorcerer or Kung Fu master to reveal their secrets. Curing a traditionally incurable ailment or restoring a severed or crippled limb. Causing famine or plague in a region. Transporting an unwilling but subdued target to hell, heaven, or another supernatural realm.
- ✿ **World-Shattering:** Raising the dead. Stealing the power of a captured god, demon, or immortal. Causing a massive storm or earthquake. Opening a lasting portal to the hells or another supernatural realm. Note that, as a rule, the gods do not allow such a portal to the heavens.

COMPONENTS

The GM decides what acts or **components** are needed for a ritual. As a general guideline, a powerful ritual needs three components, a mythic ritual needs six, and a world-shattering ritual needs ten. Some truly impressive components, such as the tears of a demon or dreams of an immortal may reduce the number required. Each piece is worthy of being an adventure in its own right. Some examples include:

- ✿ **Acts:** Cleansing a site with strong negative Shentong. Spending prolonged periods in prayer or meditation. Performing a great deed to gain favor with the gods. Ritual purification.
- ✿ **Aid:** Convincing a powerful spirit or demon to assist. Securing the blessing of a god or mythic creature. Gathering a large following or cult to help channel or perform the ritual.
- ✿ **Objects:** A cup of water from a sacred spring or a rare flower from atop a treacherous mountain. An artifact belonging to the first Emperor. A fabled weapon used to wound a god or other supernatural being.
- ✿ **Sacrifice:** Human, supernatural being, or animal, often with additional criteria depending on the exact ritual. Large-scale sacrifices may count as multiple components.

- ✿ **Self-Sacrifice:** Binding oaths or vows that cannot be broken—usually taking the form of a character aspect. Self-mutilation. The surrendering of the ability to feel certain emotions or a permanent alteration to one's destiny.

- ✿ **Time:** The ritual occurs at a certain time. Festival Days are common, as are eclipses, full moons, and during other astronomical phenomena.

For mythic or world-shattering rituals, the final component is always the required time when the ritual can be cast. Examples include the height of a blood moon or on an auspicious anniversary.

A powerful ritual can be done on a site of Rich or Wild Shentong, while mythic and world-shattering rituals can be done only on a site of Wild Shentong. Note that in some cases a ritual might be impossible in a location normally, but a particular phenomenon or event changes the Shentong Rank temporarily. In such cases, the ritual must be performed and completed during this period or it fails.

Example: After assassins nearly kill and grievously wound his daughter and sole heir, a powerful royal duke seeks out the sorcerer Black Hand Shen to restore the girl to health. The child's injuries are severe, requiring the reversal of permanent damage to several internal organs. The GM informs Shen's player that this requires a Mythic ritual needing six components: ritual purification followed by spending a week in solitary prayer and the girl's father must erect a shrine to one of the patron gods of healing (three components). Shen must obtain a rare flower that only grows on the westernmost peak of the Tianquiao Mountains and the heart of a great serpent (two components). The ritual can only occur during the last day of the upcoming Spring Festival (one component). Shen plans to perform the ritual at his hermitage deep in the forest, which is Rich Shentong Rank normally but rises to Wild during the Spring Festival. However, if any of these components is missing or something disrupts their acquisition the ritual fails and Shen must contend with a very distraught, angry, and powerful father. Hopefully, the assassins do not return to disrupt it...

UNDOING RITUALS

Undoing a completed ritual is a ritual in and of itself. The dissolution must be at least as complex as the original ritual, and the components are either thematically related or thematically opposite to those of the original ritual. Otherwise, use the rules above for enacting rituals.

INTERFERING WITH RITUALS

Sometimes a sorcerer just has to be stopped, which might include the PCs! There are two overall ways to interfere with a ritual: stop someone from acquiring one of the components needed for the ritual, or interrupt the ritual as it is performed. The former is handled simply through normal gameplay, but the second needs a bit more work to accomplish.

SETTING UP THE CONFLICT

Interfering with rituals is part of a conflict, where the people who seek to stop the ritual are trying to overpower the sorcerers—or force them to concede—before the ritual is completed. Use the conflict rules with the following additions.

The ritual works like a Fate contest, in that the sorcerer needs to achieve a number of victories to complete the ritual. The required number of victories is based on the ritual's complexity. For dramatic purposes, the interferers always arrive just as the ritual could be completed—and that is when the sorcerers may begin making tests to complete it. A powerful ritual requires five victories, a mythic ritual ten victories, and a world-shattering ritual fifteen victories.

The GM may adjust the number of victories and the base difficulty (noted below) as needed for dramatic tension and to reinforce the story of the moment.

PROGRESSING THE RITUAL

Once per exchange, a single sorcerer can attempt a Crafts roll to advance the ritual's process. This uses their action in that exchange. Other sorcerers can aid with teamwork, giving the +1 bonus by giving up their action as well, though the main sorcerer cannot benefit from a bonus higher than their Crafts rating.

The difficulty of the Crafts roll is normally Fair (+2). However, if an interfering sorcerer tries to disrupt the forces and *chi* being manipulated, they can roll Crafts to oppose. In either case, if the main

sorcerer succeeds, they score a victory; succeeding with style scores two victories. Tying gives them a **Gathered Energies** boost to any upcoming sorcery roll—certainly valid for the ritual, but could be used for some other sorcery action like Defending against an Attack. The sorcerer can opt to succeed at a cost if they fail or tie, but the cost is always paid by taking a consequence. Succeeding at cost cannot be used to complete the ritual, though.

If the ritual scores enough victories, it happens! The GM and the story dictate the precise effects. At minimum, it means those opposing the ritual should retreat and work on their own ritual to undo what has been done, as described above.

If the side attempting to conduct the ritual is defeated, all of the components are ruined or consumed, and the effort to perform the ritual is discarded. Some components may be easy to regain, such as the aid of that forest spirit. Others may be just as challenging as before, such as getting another flower or cup of sacred water. Of course, the omen needed for the ritual must occur again, which could be a month, years, or even centuries from now.

COUNTERING THE RITUAL

Normally, an opponent can only attempt to stop a sorcerer from completing the ritual but cannot undo the energy put into it. However, if an opposing sorcerer, who has gathered components that spiritually counter those for the ritual, may be able to disrupt the energies as part of interfering with the performance.

When rolling Crafts to oppose the ritual roll, a success with style removes one victory. A ritual cannot have fewer than zero victories, and even with zero victories the ritual remains a threat. Even if a countering sorcerer fails, they can succeed at cost to simply block the sorcerer from scoring victories on that roll, but that consumes or ruins the opposing components. From that point on, the countering sorcerer can only block as described above and not decrease victories.

Note that only the side who actually failed the exchange can succeed at a cost. A sorcerer cannot succeed at a cost on a roll where the opponent decided to succeed at a cost first.

ALCHEMY

Alchemy is the closest non-sorcerers come to performing magic. Truthfully, many confuse the two, but they are distinct arts with their own capabilities and rules. Sorcery is limited to those able to touch and channel mystic energies. The alchemical arts are not easy to master, but their secrets are open to anyone who studies and understands them. Alchemists are part-healer and part-troubleshooter, as their talents with herbs, brews, pure elements, and a penumbra of other reagents give them insight into many fields.

CREATING AN ALCHEMIST

An alchemist must have an aspect like *Apprentice Alchemist* or *Town Sage*, as well as taking the Alchemy skill at Average (+1) or higher. No particular heritage or innate ability is required, so this aspect need not be a character's high concept, though it often is.

NEW SKILL: ALCHEMY

All alchemists can use their talent for three things: giving medical treatment (for good and ill), making or altering conventionally useful substances, and understanding another's alchemy. This is covered by the Alchemy skill, which works similar to Crafts. Only those who take this skill at Average or higher can use it, and its use requires access to equipment, ingredients, and sufficient time to prepare most alchemical reactions.

Overcome: Alchemy allows a character to create and evaluate concoctions. Many alchemical creations are meant to overcome problems through medicinal use, whether addressing consequences or removing a situational aspect like *Sickened* or *Drunk*. Alchemy also covers deciphering another's alchemical formula through either its effect or from a sample—to replicate it or create an antidote for it.

Create an Advantage: Alchemy's chief goal is to give mortals a way to create lasting change just as sorcery can. Most alchemists are unable to achieve permanence, beyond using their craft to kill someone, but they can create brews that grant or inflict a target with an aspect like *Invigorated*, *Poisoned*, or *Sleepy*. Delivery is often through consumption, but some

alchemy works through inhalation, skin contact, or other vectors.

When it comes to poisons and other harmful alchemy, characters passively resist with Physique (without rolling dice or invoking aspects or boosts). If the Alchemy roll beats the victim's Physique rating, the effect happens. If it ties, the effect happens but is shorter-lived or otherwise weaker. If the roll succeeds with style, the effect is longer-lived or otherwise greater.

As much of alchemical theory centers on manipulating the target's *Chi* for good or ill, those with *Chi* at Fair (+2) or higher who are aware of being alchemically poisoned can actively resist poison instead.

Multiple doses of a poison given within a short time frame—"short" being based on the nature of the poison, usually a scene or a day—grant teamwork to the new one.

Attack: Alchemy cannot be used to directly Attack. However, a potion can be made so that if drunk, instead of inflicting an aspect, it inflicts stress based on the result of the Alchemy roll versus the Physique Defense. Such effects require intimate contact, like consumption or inhalation.

Defend: Alchemy cannot be used to Defend, though it can be used to recover from consequences and aspects.

CREATING ALCHEMICAL WORKS

Creating alchemical works takes time. A simple work could take an hour, and more complicated works take at least a day. The true limiter is having adequate supplies. A character with a lab is assumed to have basic materials on hand, though retrieving or purchasing exotic material counts as having aspects to invoke.

Concoctions that grant short-lived aspects, like *Sickened*, *Overabundance of Yin*, or *Full of Spirit*, require at least an Average (+1) result. These concoctions take roughly an hour to make, and their effects typically fade when a scene is over.

Some effects are multifaceted, like *Overabundance of Yin*, which could be invoked for actions bolstered by powerful Yin energies, or invoked against that

character or be the source of a compel. With such effects, the alchemist decides whether the initial free invokes for the aspect are beneficial or detrimental.

Concoctions meant to grant longer-term aspects, like *Weakened*, require a Good (+3) result, and take at least a day to make. These typically need reagents not commonly found in the average market.

Concoctions that address consequences take roughly an hour to complete for mild or moderate and a day for severe. The difficulty is based on the consequence (*Fate Core* page 164). These can be prepared in advance, though the potion would have to thematically match the consequence taken.

Concoctions that inflict stress take roughly an hour to prepare. Though effects are Defended against with the target's Physique or *Chi* as described above, the Alchemy roll must be at least Fair (+2) or the work fails.

Increasing the time spent making concoctions (from an hour to half a day, a day to two days, or similarly proportionate extensions) grants a *Taking Time* boost to the roll.

ALCHEMISTS ON THE GO

Alchemists are not known for walking into adventure empty-handed. These characters can invoke their high concepts to declare that they have a potion or poultice on hand that addresses the situation. Treat the rating of the concoction as if the alchemist rolled +0 on the dice to create it, though the character can invoke aspects to increase it as if rolled. If Alchemy skill is at least Good (+3), the alchemist has one free invoke per session for this purpose. The GM might restrict this based on the story, such as if the character has been away from the lab for weeks.



ALCHEMY STUNTS

Masters of alchemy can perform greater acts with their works, even ones that transgress what many believe are laws of nature.

Exotic Alchemist: The character works with sorcerous ritual components (see page 39), like the blood of a dragon or a rare lotus that holds innate properties. When working with such materials, each one is treated an aspect with an extra free invocation for Alchemy actions when making ordinary works.

The alchemist can use those ingredients to create a masterwork capable of violating laws of nature: turn lead into gold, cause diseases that slowly transform a human, and so on (the details are left to GM discretion). These potions take a week or longer of focused time to create and require at least Great (+4) rolls to succeed. If intended to Attack, treat the result as three lower for the purposes of overcoming Physique—a Superb (+5) result to infect someone with *Lizard-Skin Transformation* can be Defended against as if Fair (+2).

Masterful Crafts: The alchemist is as adept at alchemy as at other crafts. She can use Crafts in place of Alchemy, giving her both skills together at the same rating.

Natural Alchemist: The character's alchemical talents come from within, not from years of study. He uses *Chi* for Alchemy, and has +1 to *Chi* when Defending against alchemical effects. However, he cannot use this still to study another's alchemical works. He can attempt to counteract others' effects but cannot deduce anything about the work or the alchemist.

Skilled Poisoner: The alchemist is particularly adept at making toxic substances. She has a +1 bonus to Overcome an Obstacle checks when opposing poisons and any poison-related Advantages she Creates with the Alchemy skill treat their invocation bonus as +3 instead of the normal +1. Similar stunts exist for skilled medicine makers, solvent and glue crafters, and so on.

Wild Brewmaster: The alchemist learned the skill in the wilds and does not need a lab. He can easily identify herbs and other reagents nearly anywhere and knows how to make them work with those possessions he regularly carries. This means that when in a lab, the alchemist is able to better work, receiving a +2 to Alchemy actions in optimal conditions.

RECIPES AND COMPONENTS

Some GMs and players may love the idea of an alchemist character but have trouble deciding what sorts of medicines, poisons, and exotic substances these characters regularly craft. This can cause a block to using the character effectively. For this reason it can be worthwhile to write down a list of things that the character carries with them or recipes they have mastered so that there is always something to quickly default to during play. These components and recipes are not stunts, aspects, or actions themselves, but they can serve as an outline for all of these things. Some examples of using recipes and components in play include:

- *A wizened old alchemist carries a "spirit bag" filled with components and concoctions. When he needs one, he consults the contents of his bag and uses it to Create an Advantage or justify invoking an appropriate aspect.*
- *A wandering hedge wizard gathers blossoms of a particular tree while on an adventure, noting "they have useful tranquilizing properties." She does not necessarily need to Create an Advantage for that at the time. Her player simply makes a note to use later when she is in need.*
- *A scholarly alchemist records every use of the Alchemy skill they do or study into one grand tome to reference later. Such an effort might even be its own stunt or aspect, though it could simply be fun and useful character building.*



DIVINATION & PROPHECY

Divination and prophecy are twin arts that reveal what cannot be known—secrets of the heart, the mind, and even of time. Such ways are fickle on the best of days, but many still study the art of divining or are cursed with the gift of prophecy. They are closely related, and a character could be both a diviner and a prophet with just an appropriate aspect.

DIVINERS

Those who practice divination have a number of methods available. From reading the lines and movements of someone's face to studying their palm there are numerous methods to determine a person's future. Diviners spend years studying their art and most have specialized devices for divining. Some may even have unique methods they have refined or created.

Most popular methods involve studying the Four Pillars of Destiny surrounding a date or event. These pillars are the year, month, day, and hour of an event. The way they combine and interact with each other and the world at large gives a skilled diviner insight into a person's future and destiny. Belief in the Four Pillars method is dominant in the empire, and many diviners consult regularly on matters of scheduling and event planning. No one wants to find they scheduled their wedding or feast for a day that invites calamity to the attendants!

Being a diviner requires an appropriate high concept, such as *Market Stall Seer* (and not *Market Stall Charlatan*). Diviners use the Lore skill as a specialized form of Investigate, forecasting to learn secrets that take the form of vague and often-metaphorical aspects the GM declares. Examples include *A Black Crane Brings Death* or *Treasure Hidden in the Fog*. Diviners must have Average (+1) Lore. Divining almost always Creates an Advantage or Overcomes an Obstacle—the diviner either creates advantageous insight into a future event or tries to solve a mystery.

MASTER DIVINERS

A diviner could take the stunt below to reflect a genuine attunement to natural law, one that allows her to see more clearly into clouded and hidden things.

Master Diviner: The character has +2 to divining secrets with Lore, provided she spends several minutes communing with a specific ritual, which requires something specific—a certain place, implement, time of day, activity, etc. On success with style, along with the additional free invocation, the GM might give a divination aspect that is far more broadly applicable or less vague.

PROPHETS

A prophet has an unconscious connection to the spiritual world, revealing answers to questions unasked and hints to futures unsought. Being a prophet requires an appropriate high concept or trouble, like *Revered Prophet* or *Make the Dreams Stop!* Prophecy is not a skill. It is handled as invocations and compels on the prophecy aspect.

To use prophecy for revelatory visions, the prophet pre-pays a fate point for a free invocation on the aspect and asks the GM to share a vision soon that reveals an important fact or mystery that proves useful during the session. Note “visions” is a general term, prophecies can include one or more senses.

Example: *Murmuring Moon is a Haunted Prophet who hears whispering ghosts reveal great secrets. Moon's player, believing a coming royal wedding holds unknown danger or intrigue, spends a Fate point for a prophetic vision. Shortly before the wedding, the GM tells him he hears a whisper to “beware the red woman.” Whether this means the bride, a woman whose name or profession invokes the color, or even that a female member of the Red Banner Brotherhood has infiltrated the event is unclear.*

In addition, after the prophet has a vision they may use that free invocation normally, provided its use is related to the vision. The character may also Create an Advantage to add more invocations for use in this fashion, but the invocations must relate true meaning of the vision and must use a skill that logically allows for exploring or better understanding the prophecy, such as Notice or Investigate. The difficulty for Create an Advantage is usually equal to the +4 minus the current Shentong Rank of an area.

Alternatively, the GM could compel the prophet to have a vision, but instead of gaining a fate point the character gains a free invocation on their aspect—which limits when it can be used. This compel could happen at an inconvenient time or could wake the prophet from sleep and give an aspect like *Restless Night*.

As with divination, the prophecies are vague. The character may get a flash of someone aiming a bow at from the shadows but not the archer's identity or purpose. They might not even be aiming at at the prophet but at an assassin creeping up behind the character.

POWERFUL PROPHETS

Some prophets are so powerful that they can focus their will to have a vision. This takes meditation or another trigger to occur and requires the following stunt.

Powerful Prophet: Once per session, the prophet can summon a vision that answers a specific question. If the GM grants the vision coming true, the character gets an aspect with two free invocations based on it (or possibly based on a related question that, unbeknownst to the prophet, is relevant). If no vision is had, the prophet instead gains a fate point.

BEING A PROPHET & DIVINER

Characters can be both a prophet and a diviner by choosing aspects that fit both ideas and having Average (+1) Lore. Some prophets turn to divination as a way to understand their talents.

HANDLING MYSTERIOUS ASPECTS IN PLAY

Mysterious divination and prophecy aspects pose a challenge during the game and require a great degree of trust between the players and the GM, even for a Fate game. The GM can deny invocations on such aspects if the character is using the aspect incorrectly but must not do so lightly. Gameplay is often more fun with a “no, but...” style of play instead of just flatly denying an invocation. This is especially true if the invocation is made with genuine-but-erroneous belief that the aspect applies. The GM should return the fate point or

free invocation and show in the story why that invocation does not work. This approach moves the story forward while still presenting utility for the mysterious aspect.

Players who keep trying to casually invoke an aspect to see what happens may feel stuck and are grasping at straws. Freely deny those invocations, but follow up with some way of moving the story forward.

The GM must not be afraid to have visions or predictions swerve in unexpected ways, especially based on what the characters are actually doing and what interests

the players. Characters do not always have to be right in their assumptions, but sometimes it is useful to adjust the game to incorporate their ideas. If a character gets a vision she will, “Find a great tiger to quench a river of flame,” and she decides this means she must seek out a fabled Tiger Kung Fu master they befriended in a previous adventure to help defeat the evil fire demon cult tormenting the populace? Consider running with that and leave the White Tiger Ghost of Snowy Grotto for another time.

DEMON-HUNTING & EXORCISM

Even while the Imperial Ministry of Architecture (page 13) secures the populace from sorcery, many still fear the otherworldly. This is when the wandering monk or professional demon-hunter, collectively known as exorcists, comes into play. Exorcism is the art of combating demons and spirits—not just drawing them out of a mortal's body, but nullifying their sorcery and even banishing them to the planes from whence they came. Exorcists also protect against a mortal sorcerer's magic.

CREATING AN EXORCIST

Exorcists can uncover causes for mystical effects and counter them, as well as hold their own against fierce sorcerers. Being an exorcist requires a high concept like *Mercenary Demon-Hunter* or *Devout Bodhist Priest*. Exorcists must also have at least Average (+1) Exorcism skill (see below).

Generally, sorcerers cannot also be exorcists. Though, someone of sorcerous blood could turn away from that path to instead become an exorcist and fight their own kind, which would be reflected in their high concept and lack of sorcery stunts. GMs may change this in their campaigns—simply be aware that giving one character the ability to both exorcise spirits and perform sorcery might be unbalancing or thematically unsatisfying for the campaign.

EXORCIST PATHS

An exorcist must choose from the faith or lore paths. Each has benefits and drawbacks purely from a story perspective—which are fodder for compels—and they use different skills for exorcism.

Faith-based exorcists use their inherent spirituality to combat sorcery. They need only minor tools of their faith, such as prayer papers and chants, and the knowledge that there are foul forces at work in the world. They must strictly adhere to the tenets of their

faith. If sullied or made impure, they must purify themselves before being able to exorcise again. Faith-based exorcists use Will as their core skill for exorcism.

Lore-based exorcists use teachings of demonology and other occult knowledge to combat demons. They need more tools and texts to fight than those who wield faith, but they do not need spiritual purity. Lore-based exorcists use Lore as their core skill for exorcism.

No exorcist can be both faith-based and lore-based. Many exorcists learn Kung Fu to help defend themselves and fight physical manifestations of spirits and demons, as well as possessed individuals.

EXORCISM IN ACTION

Faith-based exorcists use Will in exorcism actions, and lore-based exorcists use Lore. As shorthand, the text refers to this skill as Exorcism, though that is not a separate skill from Will or Lore. Exorcists add the following features to the actions their Exorcism skill does.

Overcome: This skill works against mystical ailments and effects and can address sorcerous consequences. *Burned* or *Frightened* are not inherently sorcerous consequences, and Exorcism does not help with them. *Cursed* and *Charmed* are, however, always sorcerous consequences.

Create an Advantage: Exorcists can chant prayers or create charms (see below) to help others resist or ward off sorcerous influence.

Attack: This skill covers Attacking spirits and creatures that can be banished or exorcised. Stress done with Exorcism is mental stress against those beings, and cannot be blocked or mitigated by purely physical armor or other mundane defenses.

Defend: This skill does not protect the exorcist from sorcerous assault, though it can protect others by overcoming sorcery. (See **Other Important Skills for Exorcists**, below.)



EXORCISM CHARMS

Exorcists can take time to prepare charms and prayer scrolls in advance. Use the rules for the Alchemy skill on page 41, with the following adjustments:

- ✿ Charms use the Exorcism skill.
- ✿ Charms only affect supernatural creatures. When creating a charm, the exorcist must choose a type of foe it effects, such as a ghost, vampire, or demon.
- ✿ Charms cannot cause stress but can inflict a debilitating condition like *Paralyzed*.
- ✿ Charms are resisted passively with Will or actively with *Chi*.

EXORCISM TECHNIQUES

Characters who take Kung Fu techniques can also take exorcism techniques. They count as Kung Fu techniques for determining Jianghu rank, whether or not the character is fighting a demon at the time. Like Kung Fu techniques, you gain 2 Techniques per Refresh spent and can exchange a free stunt selection for a Technique if desired.

GENERAL EXORCISM TECHNIQUES

Some of these techniques allow a character to use Exorcism in place of other skills. If the normal skill is higher than Exorcism, and the character has at least Fair (+2) Exorcism, the technique instead gives +1 to those actions.

Poisoned Mirror: The exorcist can redirect the energies sorcerers throw back to them. Success with style on a Defend against a mystical Attack, lets the character describe turning the Attack back at the foe. Instead of generating a boost, inflict 1 stress on the attacker which cannot be blocked by any armor. Even though sorcerers are immune to Attacks of their element, the deflection infuses disruptive energies that they cannot ignore.

See with Eyes Unclouded: The exorcist's senses and intuition are honed to the supernatural. He can use Exorcism in place of Notice or Investigate when it comes to such matters.

Spirit-Fighter: Even if normally unskilled at fighting, the character is adept at conflict against demons. She can use Exorcism in place of Fight or Shoot when battling supernatural creatures—though not to Attack mortal sorcerers, animals or people under spiritual command rather than possessed, or similar mundane foes. The character can use Exorcism to Defend against mystical-based assaults.

Steeled Against Influence: When a spirit or demon attempts to influence the exorcist with magic, she has +2 to Defend or Overcome an Obstacle.

BANISHING EXORCISM TECHNIQUES (FAITH)

Those who wield faith-based exorcism are often stronger at banishing spirits.

Ghost Hands: The exorcist can choose to touch incorporeal beings and objects. That naturally includes balling hands into fists to Attack them, so the character can use physical means (such as Fight) to exorcise spirits as desired.

Indomitable Demands: If the exorcist inflicts a consequence on a banishable spirit, the only way it can address the consequence is to seek forgiveness or return to its native realm.

BINDING EXORCISM TECHNIQUES (LORE)

Those who wield lore-based exorcism are stronger at binding spirits.

I Have Just the Thing! The exorcist always carries charms or devices. Twice per session, she can declare that one relates to the exorcist or demon-hunting crisis of the moment. These are aspects. Each has a free invoke when declared.

Spirit Commander: If the exorcist takes a spirit out, instead of banishing it outright, he can force it to perform a task before it departs. The supernatural being executes the task to the letter, but cannot harm or act against the exorcist. Once it completes the task or is released from service, it is banished.

DEALING WITH POSSESSION

Possession in *TIANXIA* is handled in a brief fashion. Either an entity is trying to possess another, or someone is trying to exorcise a possessed being. Both are handled as conflicts where characters deal mental stress to their opponents.

FIGHTING OFF POSSESSION

A spirit cannot possess someone warded against possession. This includes exorcists, unless they are conned into removing their wards. The following rules only matter if the possession takes place as a scene of a game session. For NPCs possessed out of view of the story, the possession simply happens.

Against an unwarded target, the spirit engages in a conflict with that person's soul. The spirit rolls Will against the intended victim's *Chi*, because *Chi* protects the soul. Stress inflicted is mental stress, and being taken out means being possessed. Conceding also means being possessed, but targets who concede can struggle to occasionally get momentary control over their bodies.

If the victim successfully Defends itself three times in a row, the spirit is unable to take possession.

An exorcist in the scene—including the potential victim—can actively fight back as described in **Handling Exorcism** below.

HANDLING EXORCISM

An exorcist can Attack the spirit inside a possessed person. The exorcist Attacks with Exorcism and the spirit Defends with Will. Success deals mental stress. If the spirit is taken out, it is banished entirely, though it can choose to concede, leaving the body and the scene. The spirit cannot inhabit the person again, assuming the exorcist properly wards the victim from further incidents.

The spirit has two ways to defend itself: fight back and try to take out the exorcists first or flee in the body. The GM may select any set of the chase rules, such as the ones in the *Fate System Toolkit*. If the spirit is caught, it is automatically exorcised. A spirit that fears the exorcist enough to flee has given up the option of fighting once captured and is banished.

GEOMANCY

Chi does not just flow between people. There is *chi* in the wilds. Power flows from the very earth itself and shapes the mystical landscape as surely as wind and river shape the physical world. Understanding the ways of this flow is the realm of geomancy.

Geomancers are like mystical investigators and troubleshooters. Their talents reveal anomalies or strange properties of a location. They use this talent to learn how to solve a problem or change a place's inherent nature.

CREATING A GEOMANCER

Being a geomancer requires a high concept like *Wandering Geomancer* or *Minister of Architecture*, as well as two Geomancy-related skills at Average (+1) or higher. The skill choices are Investigate, Lore, and Notice.

USING GEOMANCY

Any geomancer can divine the *chi* flow of a large area by surveying it and consulting books and tables on the area's *feng shui*, and thus its Shentong rating and aspect. *Feng shui* relates not only to the *chi* that sorcerers and beasts need to thrive. It can tilt one's luck for good or ill, cause people to feel more or less at ease, and have other, subtler effects that geomancers are trained to notice.

Geomancy affects three skills: Investigate, Lore, and Notice. Geomancers use Notice to passively discover peculiar *feng shui*, which may reveal a site's aspect or, more often, reveal that an aspect exists and requires further diagnosis. Geomancers use Investigate to uncover more about the *feng shui*—not just the aspect itself, but what may cause it and what effects it triggers.

Geomancers use Lore to know how to change a place's *feng shui*. Unlike using Investigate to discover what causes something unusual, Lore is used to create an unusual area—magical or mild. It does not take sorcery to alter a place's Shentong rating, no more than that the otter must bend water to create a dam. The Imperial Ministry of Architecture uses geomancy to choke *feng shui* that allows magic to thrive, though a

local lord may have a personal geomancer handle this—either with the blessing of the Ministry or in secret.

GEOMANCY & SHENTONG

Long-term manipulation of *feng shui* can raise or lower a location's Shentong. Most geomancers nudge and tug at *feng shui*, like carving or blocking a stream. Changing Shentong is like carving or blocking a vast, raging river—something that can be done over time with effort and the right tools.

Geomancers trying to affect Shentong require a long-term plan. At major milestones, a place's Shentong may be affected based on the actions of the characters—whether in their favor or not. A significant milestone could signify a small enclave within a larger area having a different Shentong rating. Minor milestones are not enough to change the course of the raging river.

GEOMANCY STUNTS

Nearly all geomancers are able to work their profession with the above rules, but a few have enhanced talents.

Action Geomancer: The geomancer's understanding of *feng shui* works at much smaller scales, even that of a room. She can quickly change a room's *chi* flow to benefit or detriment. She can use Lore to Create an Advantage like *Lucky* or *Unlucky*—which either requires a Fair (+2) result or the target Defends against with *Chi*, depending on the situation. When using this, the geomancer must describe the change to the room, and it must be dramatic in order to affect the *feng shui* so quickly. She cannot place such an advantage on herself.

Known Among Architects: The geomancer has +2 to Contacts and Rapport when dealing with the Imperial Ministry of Architects. Given their extensive connections, this perk extends far beyond asking about geomancy.

Something Isn't Right Here: The geomancer gains a +2 bonus to detect hidden chambers, traps, or other secret spaces and alterations to an area.



CHAPTER FOUR

DEMONS, SPIRITS, AND MAGICAL BEASTS

AMBUSHING THE NIAN

"I cannot believe I let you talk me into this," Sister Chuntao hissed, watching the wrapped bundle in the grove coo and wriggle.

"It was this or Qi," Ma Wei Sheng replied.

"Well..."

"No," Slumbering Hound said.

"I wasn't suggesting..." the nun began.

"No," was all the older warrior said.

"Quiet," hissed Wolf-Eyed Yue, "This is like planning an ambush with my sister's kids."

"You don't have a sister," Wei Sheng said, smiling.

"I will end you, soldier-boy," Yue said, but she probably did not mean it.

"Quiet! it comes," Jin Zhong spoke. It was the first thing he had said in ten minutes and his companions had almost forgotten he was there.

And come it did. The trees on the opposite side of the grove groaned and creaked as they were pushed aside by the great beast. It was a nian; a mountainous, man-eating,

magical beast. It was particularly fond of the flesh of children, hence the bait for the group's excursion.

The nian was massively muscled like an ox, but easily twice the size of normal beasts of burden. Its head, however, invoked the image of a lion or another great predator beast. It was brightly colored and beautiful in its own blood-chilling way.

The beast approached the mewling bundle carefully, its great fearsome face sniffing. It caught the scent of the baby on the blankets and its focused shifted. With more confidence, it walked further into the clearing.

It was right over the wriggling bundle when Jin Zhong spoke again.

"Now!" he shouted.

Suddenly from the blankets, a small simian form popped up holding a red cylindrical object. Sun, the golden monkey pet and constant companion of Sister Chuntao, pulled the specially crafted top from the cylinder and dropped it at the nian's feet before he scampered

away. Before he fled, he threw the now empty baby blankets in the beast's face, temporarily blinding it.

The beast shook the blanket off in an instant, but that was all the time needed. Before the nian could react, the firework sparked, lit, and exploded in the monster's face. It reeled back, physically unharmed but disoriented and terrified. As the beast thrashed blindly, the assembled warriors moved to attack. They all wore red—robes, sashes, or, in the case of Yue, war paint.

"Nian," Slumbering Hound commented as he moved to flank the beast. "Big and scary. Loves the flesh of children. Hates loud noises and the color red. Go figure."

"As long as it works," Wei Sheng said, moving to face the beast head on.

"Works better than talking about it," Yue snarled, rushing past Wei Sheng, using his shoulder as a step to leap further into the air to drive down onto the beast from above. "Now let's get to it!"

SUPERNATURAL CREATURES

Supernatural creatures in *TIANXIA* are broken up into a few major categories: *yao gui* (strange ghost), *yao jing* (strange fairy), and *yao mo* (strange demon). Many nature and animal spirits are considered *yao jing*, while human ghosts are *yao gui*, and those who are neither are often *yao mo*. The term *yao guai* (strange aberrations) is often used as a catch-all term for many demons, spirits, and sprites of malevolent intent.

These creatures are all considered inherently magical, and because of this they are often resistant to purely physical Attacks or obstacles. This means that any beast, spirit, devil, or monster aspects can be used to provide bonuses if not outright immunity to certain effects. Thus, try as one might, a **Hopping Reanimated Corpse** cannot be drowned nor can a **Mischievous Fire Sprite** be burned to death. Likewise, a **Murderous Ghost** cannot be kept out of a house with normal walls and doors. GMs should not abuse logical immunities and resistances by stretching them to ridiculous extremes, but they can and should use the challenge such abilities present to make things more fun and challenging during play.

The following section details various supernatural creatures and other mystic threats for *TIANXIA* campaigns. These monsters can be included in the setting with or without utilizing the magic rules present elsewhere in the book, though PCs may find some threats very potent without access to exorcism or other mystic arts.

Note that most characters presented here have only two to four aspects instead of the usual five. This is intentional and GMs are encouraged to customize the characters to fit their individual sessions and campaigns. In some cases, possible aspects based on variations or legends about a creature are included in their descriptions. Also, many powerful supernatural or otherwise formidable creatures may be considered to have a Jianghu Rank of 1 or higher, even if they would not otherwise possess it. This represents a creature or being who is so naturally formidable they are similar in prowess and power to a trained warrior of the Jianghu.

IS KUNG FU MAGIC?

Readers may note that some supernatural creatures have stunts that give them Armor Ratings or other benefits against nonmagical Attacks. This represents situations where a big, scary demon might have to worry about facing down a sorcerer or exorcist, but they are generally unconcerned about the swords, arrows, and spears of most mortals.

However, the question arises: where does Kung Fu fall on the magical/nonmagical divide? Many Kung Fu techniques involve channeling or using *Chi*, which is strongly tied to spirits and magic. Is that close enough to magic to allow a Kung Fu practitioner the ability to effectively use their arts against demons and monsters?

The default answer to this question is no. Kung Fu is still too physical and too mortal to affect a supernatural creature as if it were magical. That is why people needing to banish demons or ghosts seek an exorcist or white sorcerer and not a warrior.

Kung Fu practitioners may be able to hurt some creatures. They simply do not get any extra benefit using Kung Fu to do so. Unless a character is supernatural or is using a Technique that explicitly lets them interact with supernatural and magical creatures as if they were magic, they—and their Kung Fu—are considered nonmagical.

Of course, high-powered campaigns where PCs regularly fight hordes of demons or where the heroes have mystic weapons or special training may adjust this assumption.

DEAD MAN'S PARTY

There are a lots of variations on the hungry dead in Chinese culture, meaning there are many in Shenzhou. While the statistics for most of these creatures are similar enough to be served by the statblock for hungry dead, it is worth noting some of the more common variants for roleplaying purposes.

- ✿ **Venomous Ghosts** (*Gudu Gui*): Hateful and terrible to others in life, they often manifest as swarms of insects.

- ✿ **Plague Ghosts** (*Li Gui*): Vindictive in life, they now spread disease and rot.
- ✿ **Drought Ghosts** (*Ba Gui*): Darkly lustful and carnal in life, they now destroy crops and plants.
- ✿ **Nightmare Ghosts** (*Yan Gui*): Liars and frauds, they now exist as being of living darkness.
- ✿ **Drowned Ghosts** (*Shu Gui*): Murdered in water, they now seek to torment and destroy the living, often by dragging them into the depths to die.
- ✿ **Nan Gui and Nu Gui**: call-all terms meaning “male ghost” and “female ghosts,” these individuals were severely wronged or abused in life and have returned to take their vengeance. Often dressed in red.
- ✿ **Grieved Ghosts** (*Yan Gui*): Ghosts who died wrongful deaths. Rarely directly violent, they make a nuisance and cause trouble until the crimes against them are redressed.

Typically, the Spectral Forces stunt (see **Hungry Ghost**) covers various Attacks and offensive abilities these ghosts perform. In some cases, additional stunts or sorcery techniques make these threats more distinctive, though the GM can cover strange powers and abilities by having the creature Create an Advantage using *Chi*. Ultimately, the concept and visceral impact of an encounter with the hungry dead is more important than its mechanical representation.

WARDING OFF THE HOPPING DEAD

Chinese legends and media are filled with different methods to ward or repel jiangshi and other reanimated corpses. Other stories tell of substances or elements that are particularly effective at destroying the creatures. Some popular methods of combatting jiangshi include:

- ✿ Weapons made of peach wood can repel or deal serious wounds.
- ✿ Fire can consume the jiangshi and they flee its presence
- ✿ Gluttonous rice laid in a circle or across a threshold prevents the creatures from crossing.
- ✿ Ringing a monk or priests’ bell repels the monsters.
- ✿ Readings from holy texts cause the creatures to retreat or flee.
- ✿ The scent of vinegar repels them.
- ✿ Blood of a black dog burns the creatures as if it were acid.
- ✿ When a rooster crows, the jiangshi flee.
- ✿ Mirrors repel a jiangshi who sees its reflection and may even cause spirits animating the corpse to abandon it.
- ✿ Seeds of a date tree driven into seven pressure points on the monster’s back can render it inert.

The GM should consider which, if any, of these methods actually work. The GM can also devise unique methods to repel or destroy jiangshi. The GM should pick only a handful of effective methods. Otherwise, jiangshi and similar threats go from dangerous to easily avoided encounters.

WHERE BE DRAGONS?

Some readers may be wondering where the entry for dragons is in this chapter. Dragons feature prominently in mythology and are even on the Imperial Seal of Shenzhou. So clearly, dragons would be a worthy addition to this bestiary.

Well, yes and no. Dragons are incredibly significant spiritual and supernatural creatures in both Chinese myth and the Chinese-inspired culture of Shenzhou. However, they are also incredibly powerful, nigh godlike, and generally not antagonistic. Encounters with a dragon are epic roleplaying opportunities, but do not carry a lot of character-on-character conflict.

If a character encounters a dragon it is like encountering a talking storm or river. If a dragon needs a particular skill as part of a challenge or conflict? The GM should assign what seems fair based on the creature’s history and nature. For example, just moving a dragon out of the way if he blocks the path would be an Epic (+7) feat. Actually hurting one would involve fighting his head, body, and tail as separate entities, all with very high statistics, each working in tandem and with all sorts of nasty abilities. Mental challenges and social manipulations might fare better, but remember these creatures have existed for a very long time. Many have lived among mortals in disguise, and most count spirits and gods as peers.

Of course, heroes do not need to kill or even fight dragons in *TIANXIA*. Even if they take issue with characters' actions, dragons invoke envoys or level curses on them. If the offense is great enough, the dragon may punish the mortal by causing a flood, earthquake, or similar disaster.

That is the general level dragons on which operate in Shenzhou. In fact, a character who did best a dragon in even a minor way would be the stuff of legends. The gods would take notice, the dragon might even lend its aid to the character out of recognition of the character's glorious deed and the obvious favor the

fates hold them in. Because dragons are generally like that. Powerful, aloof, maybe a bit arrogant, but not terribly aggressive or combative. Probably because they do not need to be.

None of this is to say that an evil sorcerer or demon might not turn into something that looks like a dragon. Or someone might mistake anything from a large crocodile to a sea monster for one. PCs might end up fighting such threats, but those would be minor characters with various stunts and extras and not an actual dragon.

BA SHE

ASPECTS

GIGANTIC SERPENT
ANIMAL CUNNING
POWERFUL COILS

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Physique
Great (+4): Athletics
Good (+3): Will
Fair (+2): Notice
Average (+1): Fight, Stealth

STRESS

4 Physical
 3 Mental, 1 additional mild consequence

JIANGHU RANK: 2

KUNG FU STYLE

None, but some special or powerful ba she may have abilities akin to various Serpent Styles as well as increased Fight, Athletics, and *Chi* skills.

STUNTS

Constrict (Use Physique instead of Fight to make physical Attacks based on grappling and squeezing)

Terrifying Size (Use Physique instead of Provoke to make mental Attacks based on fear or intimidation)

Tough Scales (2 Armor Rating against physical Attacks)

*Found mostly in southern lakes and jungles, ba she are monstrous snakes large enough to swallow an elephant and believed by many to be the creation of an ancient god or demon. Great constrictors, ba she have no venom, instead swallowing or crushing their prey. Even larger versions of the reptile are rumored to exist in remote places. Tales of a **Lost Valley** where the King or Queen of these snakes dwells surface from time to time. Ba she are cunning, and some scholars believe they are even **Highly Intelligent**, but this is unconfirmed.*

*Some **Serpent Cults** worship ba she and similar large reptiles, believing them to be the physical forms of powerful gods or spirits. These cults offer regular sacrifices to the snakes and pray to their god for guidance and power. Whether these cultists truly gain favor and power from this worship is left to individual GMs to decide. In any case, many cult masters and assassins are dangerous warriors, often trained in one or more Serpent Styles of Kung Fu*



DEMONS

ASPECTS

FEARSOME DEMON WARRIOR
SWORN TO OBEY
HELLISH APPEARANCE

SKILLS

Great (+4): Fight, Physique

Good (+3): Chi, Will

Fair (+2): Athletics, Provoke

Average (+1): Notice, Lore,
 Contacts

STRESS

4 Physical, 3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

Sorcery: Any 4 Sorcery Techniques from general sorcery and the appropriate element for the type of demon (Fire sorcery for fire demons, Frost for Ice demons, etc...)

STUNTS

Demonic Armor (2 Armor rating against nonmagical Attacks)

Demonic Might (+2 to Physique Overcome an Obstacle actions based on brute force)

The statistics above represent various “guardian devil” creatures that serve higher supernatural forces as warriors and guardians. They are not the only form of such creatures, simply one of the more common.

In fact, there can be no one standard description or statblock for demons in TIANXIA. As denizens of the hells and servants of the underworld, there is as much, if not more, variance among

*demonkind as humanity. Some demons are huge hulking monsters, others are sly and seductive, and still others look like animals or people with only small physical differences and strange powers. Often, a demon taking physical form is similar to a formidable animal or human with altered aspects and additional stunts to reflect their demonic nature. For example, a demon who takes the form of a great infernal bear might have **Giant Demon Bear** as its core concept, **Hellish Strength** as an aspect, and the stunt **Demonic Fortitude** (Possesses Armor Rating 2 against all nonmagical Attacks). For a truly dangerous demon, upgrade the bear’s **Ursine Might** and **Tooth and Claw** stunts (see TIANXIA: Blood, Silk, & Jade, page 158) to provide additional bonuses.*

Many demons have access to sorcery or powers so similar they are mechanically indistinguishable. This is especially true of demons connected to a particular element. In fact, powerful fire demons or similar entities have powers beyond the dreams of mere sorcerers.

Demons often seek true immortality and freedom from celestial obligations. While demons do not sicken or age as humans, they can be destroyed. Most live in fear of this fate should they displease the god, demon lord, or other supernatural power they serve. A demon who can gain immortality would become a powerful and dangerous god or demigod, a fact that troubles many exorcists and demonologists.



FAIRY MAIDENS

ASPECTS

FAIRY WARRIOR MAIDEN
SWORN TO OBEY HER SUPERIORS
CURIOUS ABOUT MORTAL LIFE
UNEARTHLY BEAUTY

SKILLS

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

STRESS

3 Physical
 3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 2**KUNG FU STYLE:
STORM CRANE****STORM CRANE FORM**

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

Storm Shakes the Foundation: On a Create an Advantage action, the character may trade free invocations to remove free invocations from another character's advantage.

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

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

Sorcery: Frost (Immune to cold and ice, leave no tracks on ice or snow), Storm (Immune to the ill effects of harsh weather, may ask favors of weather and storm spirits)

Hands of Frost: If the sorcerer inflicts more stress on a single close physical Attack than target's *Chi* rating, they take the *Chilled* aspect, moving one fewer zones and losing ties on Fight and Athletics Defend tests until they address the consequence by warming up. The frost-bonded can also use her frost powers to Create an Advantage in a variety of ways.

Heart of Ice: The sorcerer has +2 to Defend against social interactions (namely Provoke, Rapport, and Empathy).

Kindred of Air: Fly using Athletics. Additionally, the sorcerer can request air spirits to help her Overcome an Obstacle or Create an Advantage using Rapport.

Snow Wisp: The sorcerer can briefly turn into a snow flurry, becoming an incorporeal being that physical weapons cannot harm. The frost-bonded automatically does this on a Defend success with style but can also choose to become incorporeal at will.

STUNTS

Magical Gifts (The character may use *Chi* to Create an Advantage in the form of mystic trinkets and gifts from her superiors)

Supernatural Parentage (+2 to Contacts actions based on calling on her mystical relatives and their allies)



Children of gods, demigods, devils, and spirits, these unearthly beauties feature in many stories and legends across Shenzhou. Typically possessing powerful magic or incredible Kung Fu skills, fairy maidens often have partial human parentage.

Being children of two worlds raised in supernatural realms, fairy maidens are often drawn to interesting, dynamic, or attractive mortals. Generally they are agents of a higher power, sworn to obey and used as envoys, assassins, and enforcers. These powers may be parents or relatives but not always. They are invariably well trained in the mystic and fighting arts for their own protection and to better perform their duties.

Fairy maidens are traditionally portrayed as female in many legends and stories, hence the name. However, this is not necessarily universally in Shenzhou, where these "maidens" are not restricted to a single gender. Mechanically, fairy maidens can vary wildly, possessing an array of powers and knowing strange and esoteric magic and Kung Fu. The statblock above is for a common fairy maiden, the ice or snow maiden. For other variations, change the Kung Fu and Sorcery to fit the elements more in tune with their nature.

HUNGRY GHOSTS

ASPECTS

BALEFUL GHOST
UNFINISHED BUSINESS
DRIVEN TO KILL

SKILLS

Superb (+5): *Chi*
Great (+4): Will
Good (+3): Provoke
Fair (+2): Notice, Stealth
Average (+1): Empathy, Lore

STRESS

0 Physical (see stunts)
 4 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

Sorcery: None, though many ghosts possess the ability to assume human forms, control animals, start fires, or other powers based on their natures.

STUNTS

Ghost (Immune to all nonmagical, physical damage and barriers, takes magical physical damage as Mental with a 2 Armor Rating against)

Spectral Forces (Attack any target within 2 zones using *Chi*, damage is either mental or physical.*)

Unholy Manifestation (+1 bonus to fear based Provoke Attack or Create an Advantage actions if it reveals its ghostly form to the target)

*pick one based on the hungry dead's background and concept. For example, a ghost burned to death in a fire may project mystical flames doing physical damage, while a ghost tortured to death might project waves of fear and pain doing mental damage.

More a category of creature than a specific type, the hungry dead are spirits who seek to take the lives of the living. Many do this to feed their own corrupt existence, though some are ghosts seeking revenge for a particular slight or wrong done to them in life. The hungry dead are dangerous and often require the skills of a trained exorcist or exceptionally skilled warrior to deal with them. Many hungry dead have escaped hell and fight ferociously to prevent from being returned there.

When using the hungry dead in a campaign, GMs should alter or tweak the default statistics provided here as necessary to provide a challenging and frightening encounter. For example, a ghost of a woman who went mad and drowned her children might have the ability to control water or compel others to drown themselves. By contrast, a ghost of a murderer who strangled his victims in their sleep may have the ability to draw the breath from sleeping mortals, causing them to suffocate.

Ghosts of truly powerful individuals should be unique, often possessing their own powers and vulnerabilities, possibly including potent Kung Fu or Sorcery.

In many cases, the key to defeating the hungry dead lies along two paths. First, a skilled exorcist can use enchantments, prayers, and divine blessings to banish these spirits. Second, if the identity of a particular spirit can be determined, this can be used to banish or destroy it. This is either done through rituals of purification or by discovering the hungry dead's ultimate desire and using that to banish or destroy it.



JIANGSHI

ASPECTS

HOPPING REANIMATED CORPSE
HUNGERS FOR LIVING SOULS
RESTRICTED MOVEMENT
NOT VERY SMART

SKILLS

Good (+3): Athletics, Fight
Fair (+2): Will, Physique
Average (+1): Chi, Notice

STRESS

3 Physical
 3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1**KUNG FU STYLE**

Hopping Corpse Style (Unique to Jiangshi)

Hopping Corpse Form

Lurching Corpse Strike: Adds +1 Weapon Rating to all Fight Attacks.

Life Draining Blow: If it succeeds with style on a Fight-based Attack, it recovers a 1 stress box or reduces a 2 or 3 stress box by 1 instead of taking a boost.

STUNTS

Reanimated Corpse (1 Armor Rating against all nonmagical Attacks)

Note: In higher-powered games, hordes of jiangshi make excellent mobs. Use their stats above, but give them stress tracks as per the mob rules.

Spirits possessing the corpses of the recently dead, jiangshi are hungry monsters known for their peculiar mode of travel. Unable to properly bend their limbs in death, jiangshi use their supernatural strength to hop or leap instead of walking or running. This gives them a somewhat comical gait, though their malevolence and physical might make them dangerous. Jiangshi attack living being to feed on their Chi. Characters with exceptional Chi skills, potent Kung Fu, or mystical powers make tempting targets. Fortunately, these individuals are also best equipped to battle these creatures. Jiangshi are usually inactive or dormant during the day, animating at night to feed.

Jiangshi can often be controlled by prayer strips affixed to their foreheads. This keeps the spirits possessing the corpse docile and obedient to simple commands. Any sorcerer or exorcist and any holy men and women with Fair (+2) Lore can craft prayer strips. Other means of controlling or repelling jiangshi are rumored to exist, though many scholars disagree on which methods are effective and which are merely folk legends.



NIAN

ASPECTS

POWERFUL MYSTIC BEAST
EASILY STARTLED
DANGEROUS MAN-EATER

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Athletics
Great (+4): Fight, Physique
Good (+3): Notice
Fair (+2): Stealth
Average (+1): Chi, Will

STRESS

4 Physical
 3 Mental, one extra mild consequence

JIANGHU RANK: 2

STUNTS

Alarming Speed (May move 1 extra zone than normal and gains a +1 bonus to move through blocked or obstructed zones)

Magical Fortitude (2 Armor Rating against all nonmagical Attacks)

Mighty (Fight Attacks have a +2 Weapons Rating)

Great beasts who live in remote rivers, lakes, and mountains, nian appear in the spring around the time of the new year to hunt humans. They prefer the flesh of children, and a single nian can devastate a whole village. Despite their speed, strength, and ferocity, nian are said to be repulsed by the color red and loud noises. To prevent nian attacks, most towns and settlements host festivals during this time of year which features fireworks, loud music, chanting, and during which most participants dress in red. These tactics keep nian away from populated areas, though attacks in remote areas still occur.



Nian have large heads with powerful jaws, blazing eyes, and a body that resembles a mix of lion and ox. They are often covered with thick fur or glimmering scales. Horns and lion-like manes are common as well. They move very quickly, bounding over obstacles with ease. Nian who make their lairs near or in water are excellent swimmers.

OGRE

ASPECTS

BRUTAL GIANT
SIMPLE-MINDED
SUPERHUMAN MIGHT

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Physique
Great (+4): Provoke
Good (+3): Fight
Fair (+2): Notice
Average (+1): Athletics

STRESS

4 Physical
 4 Mental, one extra mild consequence

JIANGHU RANK: 1

STUNTS

Hits Very Hard (Add Weapon Rating 4 to all Fight Attacks)

Hard to Hurt (Armor Rating 2 against all physical Attacks)

Ogres are a catch-all term for large, brutish, supernatural humanoids. Most are malevolent, though there are tales of female ogres showing great respect to saints or holy men. These tales are far rarer, however, than tales of flesh-eating giants who prey on human and animal alike.

While it is not the norm, some ogres show talent with sorcery and other mystical arts. These individuals are wiser and more powerful than the norm. They possess exceptional Lore, Crafts, and Notice as well as magic stunts and techniques.



QILIN

ASPECTS

CELESTIAL HERALD BEAST
RECLUSIVE
ATTUNED TO THE HEAVENS

SKILLS

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

STRESS

4 Physical
 4 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 3

STUNTS

Celestial Flames (When you succeed with style on a Defend action against an attacker using Fight to attack you, you may inflict 2 Stress on that attacker instead of gaining a boost)

Cosmically Aware (use *Chi* instead of Lore for knowledge related to the heavens and supernatural)

Flight (Can fly, traversing any direction on air as if it were solid ground)

Mystic Protections (3 Armor Rating against all nonmagical Attacks)

Benevolent and rare, the qilin, are hooved celestial animals wreathed in divine flames. Though fearsome in appearance, qilin are generally no danger to humans save the most evil and wicked. They are rarely seen, though seeing one is an omen of the death of a great sage, emperor, or other important dignitary. A qilin at times appears to aid a great hero, scholar, or innocent, especially if dangerous and evil supernatural creatures menace them. Powerful qilin have powers and abilities akin to sorcery or divination.



FU BEASTS

ASPECTS

HEAVENLY GUARDIAN BEASTS
DUTY-BOUND
HATES EVIL SPIRITS & SORCERY

SKILLS

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

STRESS

4 Physical
 4 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

STUNTS

Holy Guardians (Use *Chi* instead of Fight when battling demons or evil spirits)

Perfect Guardians (+1 bonus to all Fight or Notice rolls when protecting the subject of its assigned duty)

Powerfully Built (possess 1 Weapon Rating when making physical Attacks and 1 Armor Rating against physical Attacks)

Statuary Disguise (Use *Chi* instead of Deceive to disguise itself as a statue or landmark)

Fu beasts are supernatural animals chosen by the gods to guard important shrines, temples, and other locations. They are intelligent, powerful, and usually

reasonable, though they do not allow pesky humans to interfere with their duties. Fu beasts generally dislike demons, evil spirits, and other evil supernatural beings—they sometimes aid heroes in fighting these monsters. Fu Beasts typically resemble a mixture of dog and lion and are also known as Lion Dogs or Guardian Lion-Dogs. They tend to operate in pairs.

Many temples and shrines have statues of Fu Beasts at their entrance as symbols of protection and respect for the Heavens. Many demons and evil supernatural forces avoid places thus marked and with good reason: sometimes these statues are actual Fu Beasts taking the form of statues until they are needed.

SEA MONSTER

ASPECTS

TERROR FROM THE DEPTHS
TERRITORIAL & HUNGRY
INHUMANLY POWERFUL

SKILLS

Fantastic (+6): Physique
Superb (+5): Provoke
Great (+4): Fight
Good (+3): Will
Fair (+2): Notice
Average (+1): Athletics

STRESS

4 Physical
 3 Mental, additional mild consequence

JIANGHU RANK: 2

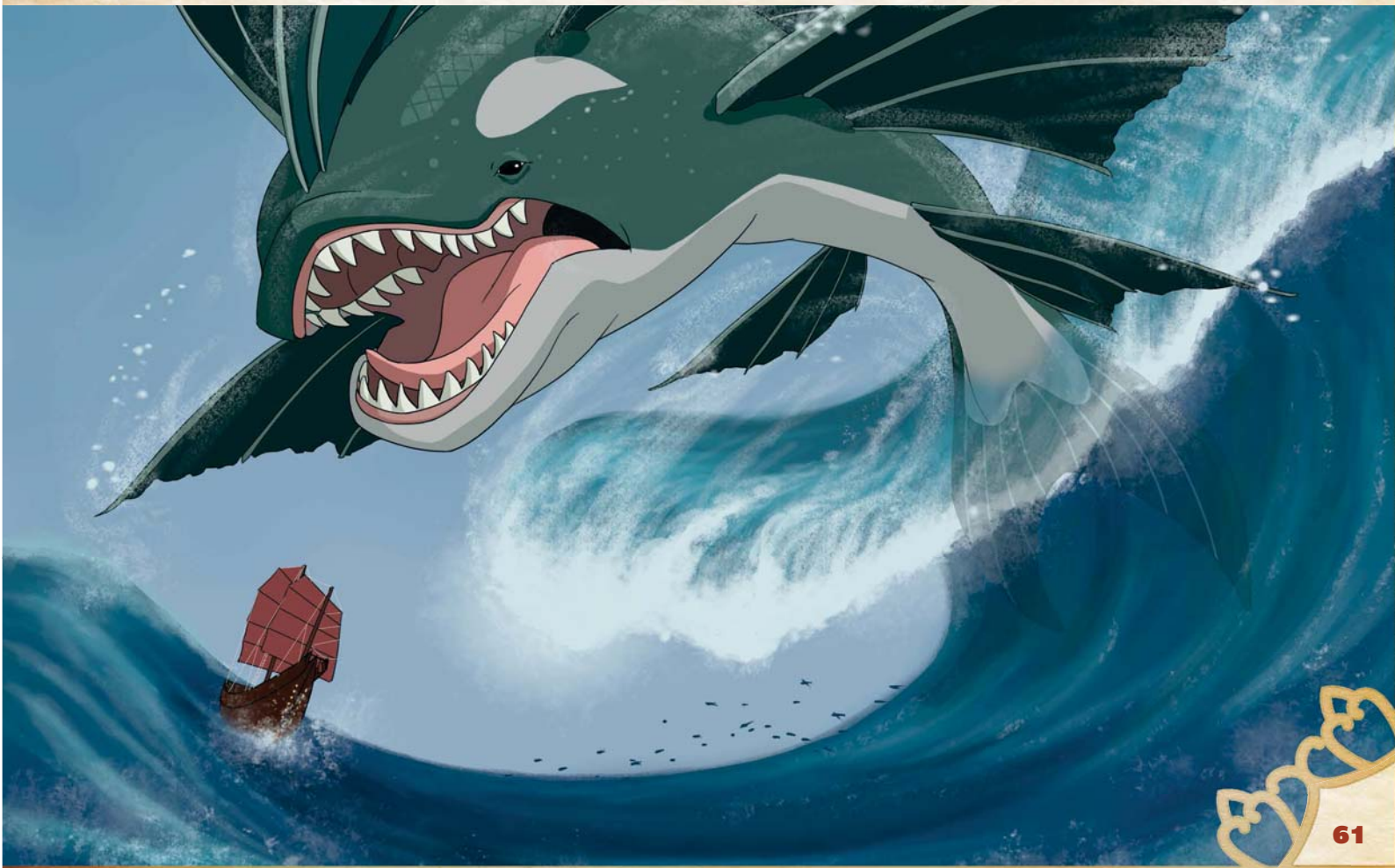
STUNTS

Aquatic (+1 bonus with physical Attacks and Defend when fighting in water against non-aquatic characters)
Monstrous Fortitude (Armor Rating 4 against all physical Attacks)
Sheer Size (May use Physique to Defend against physical Attacks, all physical Attacks have a +4 Weapon Rating)

There are many legends of giant hungry beasts that live in the deepest oceans and even lakes in Shenzhou. These creatures often resemble giant serpents and fish, though they are greater and more terrible than both. Sea monsters may serve a higher power, or they may be a dangerous creation of supernatural forces let loose upon the world. The statblock above is for a typical

specimen, but individuals may be larger or more dangerous.

*In place of a normal Severe consequence, targets in battle with a sea monster may choose to accept a special **Swallowed Whole** consequence, which mitigates 6 shifts of damage. This does not necessarily mean death, but any who suffer this fate must be rescued or find a way to escape. Until they do, they cannot interact with anything outside the monster's insides. Breaking or cutting oneself out of the beast's stomach requires success on a Fantastic (+6) Overcome action, though success usually convinces the beast to flee to tend to the wounds inflicted in the escape. The GM is encouraged to allow characters to attempt more creative methods of escape as well. Ending a PC's adventures in the gullet of a sea monster is hardly fun.*



TRICKSTER SPIRIT

ASPECTS

SUPERNATURAL TRICKSTER
CURIOUS TO A FAULT
CARELESS WITH MORTALS

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Deceive

Great (+4): *Chi*

Good (+3): Athletics, Will

Fair (+2): Contacts, Notice, Fight

Average (+1): Lore, Rapport, Physique

STRESS

3 Physical

4 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

Sorcery: Nature (The sorcerer can commune with nature for information, allowing him to use Investigate or Rapport with animals and plant).

Unseen Hunter: pass unnoticed in the forest, can use **Chi Armor** to blend into surroundings.

Shapeshifting: Can assume various human forms. Telltale feature of true nature remains.

STUNTS

Tricks & Illusions (may use Deceive to Create an Advantage based upon illusions)

Strange Charms (+2 bonus to charm or seduce mortals with Fair (+2) *Chi* or lower)

Spirit (2 Armor Rating against nonmagical Attacks when in physical form, immune when in spirit form)

Note: Sorcery stunts and techniques presented are for a common nature spirit trickster, other types of spirits would have different abilities.

Trickster spirits are typically animal spirits, especially fox spirits. However, they could be mischievous nature sprites or even demons of other types. Known for

their curiosity and love of trouble, trickster spirits often take human form to interact with the mortal world. This disguise is imperfect. Even in disguise, the spirit has a feature that betrays their true nature such as a tail or their reflection shows their true form.

Trickster spirits are not usually evil, but can be vindictive and careless. A fox spirit who falls in love with a mortal warrior is not going to take rejection well, nor does a water nymph always remember that her mortal friends cannot breathe underwater. These failings often result in tragedy and fear. Such problems is why many villages and settlements look to exorcists to destroy or drive off trickster spirits when they discover them. Trickster Spirits used as envoys and attendants for more powerful entities often have Kung Fu and superior combat skills.

PLAYING A SUPERNATURAL CREATURE

In some games, a player is going to want to play a supernatural creature. This may be a demon, a sprite, a transformed animal, or even a demigod! While some campaigns do not have the appropriate tone or themes to support this, it can work well if the GM and other players are on board with having supernatural PCs in the game.

Of course then the question arises: how does *TIANXIA* portray a supernatural PC? The answer usually involves three steps.

The first is to decide the sort of supernatural creature the character and its meaning in play. The player may already have this chosen, but if not they

should decide what sort of creature they are playing. Is it a demon or a spirit? Has it always been a supernatural creature or was it mortal once? Where does it come from originally? Why is it no longer there? The GM and other players can be a real help here, suggesting ideas and helping to refine the concept.

Example: *In Jack's new TIANXIA game, Priscilla asks if she can play "a Tiger." Though it was not originally envisioned that anyone would be playing nonhumans, after a short discussion it is decided that would be a neat character to have in play. The idea is refined as a tiger spirit who*

has found a way to take human form and seeks to investigate the human world.

Second, create a core concept and other aspects to define and showcase their mystical nature. The supernatural must touch a supernatural creature's core concept and likely its other aspects. It is just too important a character element to not be covered in this manner. The exact aspects go a long way to defining the character. A **Transformed Tiger Spirit** is going to be a different character from a **Renegade Demon** or a **Cursed Demigoddess**. As with all aspects, do not try to fold everything special about the character into a single one. Most supernatural characters have multiple aspects that touch on their inhuman or mystical nature.

Example: *Priscilla's character easily justifies the **TRANSFORMED TIGER SPIRIT** core concept and she also takes **FELINE PROWESS** to represent her tiger-like senses, strength, and agility. In addition, she takes a **MYSTIC AMULET** that allows her to assume human form. She also plans to take the amulet and its powers as a stunt, but it is important enough to her character to be both a stunt and an aspect.*

Finally, take the skills and stunts needed to justify and refine the character's supernatural abilities. This usually includes something that helps a character blend in with humanity unless their aspects already covered that. This is not a strict requirement, but if the **Three-Eyed Demon Warrior** can never go into town with the rest of the PCs, it may be less fun for the player. If a power or ability is too broad to be covered by a single stunt, build it as a Lost Technique or extra. In many cases, sorcery can represent supernatural powers. For animal spirits and supernatural warriors, Kung Fu is often appropriate.

Example: *Priscilla takes Forest Tiger Kung Fu for her character, defining it as a blend of her natural abilities and training. She also takes two Stunts: **AMULET TRANSFORMATION** (Use Chi to disguise the character as a human, +2 bonus to Defend against attempts to see through this disguise) and **TIGER MIGHT** (+1 Weapon Rating to unarmed physical Attacks, raise to +2 if in Tiger form).*

To make herself feel sufficiently tiger-ish, she makes sure her character has sufficient Athletics, Physique, Fight, Stealth, and Provoke. She also plans to expand and boost those skills with future advancements, but for now she is ready to play.

It is that straightforward. Even incredibly powerful demons and spirits can be built in this way provided there is enough refresh for power creation and they are campaign appropriate.

Many supernatural beings have to worry about Shentong Ranks in a region and measures to ward off or control supernatural beings. For example, a demon or spirit feels distracted or sick in areas with extremely limited Shentong. Most supernatural beings cannot heal in Choked (0) Shentong regions, and their powers may not function properly, often resulting in opportunities for compels but also limiting their effectiveness. This is balanced by access to mystical abilities most mortals never know or even understand.





CHAPTER FIVE

SAMPLE PCs

MEETING THE SWAMP SAINT

“Are you quite sure this is the place?” Jin Zhong asked. The tall, powerfully built monk was rarely open with his feelings, but his skepticism as he eyed the tiny thatch and mud brick hut was hard to hide.

“Positive,” Wintery Jade replied. She was not used to having her visions questioned. Yet since leaving her village she suspected in the rest of Shenzhou some variation of, “Are you sure?” was a required response to every statement.

“This is where we will find the Swamp Saint? The greatest seer living today lives...” Zhong let a wave of his hand in the direction of the hut complete his statement.

“Must you question everything I say?”

“Not everything. Just things that seem questionable.”

“A wise policy,” a voice said from behind them. “Though in this case, the young shaman is right. Though, I don’t know about all that greatest living seer stuff...”

The two turned to see an old woman. She was short and round with stringy gray hair and carried a clay water jug she thrust into Zhong’s hands as she walked

past and the continued on toward her hut.

Zhong shot Jade a look. She shot one back. Both said the same thing. Where had that old lady come from and why had they not noticed her?

“Ghost?” Whispered Jade to her companion.

“No, and not deaf either, dear. Now come inside before you get rained on.”

Wintery Jade moved quickly to follow the old woman known as the Swamp Saint. Jin Zhong paused and looked up.

“But it’s not raining,” the monk said.

It started raining moments after Wintery Jade and the old woman entered the hut. Jin Zhong caught the beginning of the downpour—just enough to get his hat wet.

“We seek your counsel, wise woman,” Wintery Jade said. She knew more than most how prickly old seers could be. “Someone has taken our friends and I cannot see where. We thought perhaps you...”

The old woman cut her off, “Is this the manners of today’s youth? All nice and pleasant until you let them in the door and then it’s ‘we want, we thought?’” The Swamp Saint scowled, though Zhong

felt it was more of an act, like he was watching a performance of someone playing at irritation.

“We sit, we eat, we have some tea. Unless you brought wine?” The old woman eyed the two—a monk and a shaman. “I supposed not,” she muttered.

“We don’t have time for...” Jade attempted to interject.

“I ask you questions before I answer yours. Can’t be giving valuable information to the wrong sort, can I?” the old woman continued. “Now you, Shoulders,” she said, casting a glance at Zhong. “Get the fire going. I’ll find my tea kettle,” she motioned to a nearby makeshift crate filled with pottery, pans, and various containers.

Zhong looked at Jade and the old woman, and then simply shrugged, nodded, and moved to the fireplace.

“I will say this. You’re wrong about your friends.” A shadow passed over the old woman’s expression.

Wintery Jade raised an eyebrow. “Someone has not taken your friends. Something has.” The old woman left the comment sink before asking, “So tea for everyone?”

The following characters are included to add to the Sample PCs found in *TIANXIA: Blood, Silk, & Jade*. They are created using the special rules in this book, to better showcase how to add mystic-oriented characters to *TIANXIA* games.

WINTER Y JADE

ASPECTS

SHAMAN PRINCESS OF A LOST TRIBE
HAUNTED BY TERRIBLE VISIONS
USED TO BEING IN CHARGE
OUT OF HER ELEMENT
MYSTICAL HERITAGE

SKILLS

Great (+4): *Chi*
Good (+3): Lore, Will
Fair (+2): Fight, Contacts, Empathy
Average (+1): Athletics, Investigate, Notice, Rapport

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE:

GHOST PHOENIX
Ghost Phoenix Form

Exalted Ghost Body: When using Full Defense, the character does not use up an invocation for **Chi Armor** if the Attack against her still succeeds.

STUNTS

Master Dreamer (The character has +2 to divining secrets with Lore while dreaming. On success with style, along with the additional free invocation, she gains additional insight into the nature of her vision)

Powerful Prophet (Once per session, focus to have a vision that answers a specific question. If the GM grants the vision

coming true, gain an aspect with two free invocations based on it. If there is no vision to be had, gain a fate point)

Shamanic Training (Use Lore instead of Crafts when making herbal elixirs and medicines)

Refresh: 3

Note: The “Shaman” component of Wintery Jade’s core concept is sufficient to justify her divination and prophecy abilities. In high-powered games, it might justify additional powers such as sorcery as well.

Wintery Jade was the princess of an isolated offshoot of the Bai people from the southwestern plateau of Shenzhou. Her tribe possesses a strong mystic tradition, with the leaders of each generation being those who had both a strong bloodline and deep connection to the mystic world. As the daughter of the chieftess and a skilled shaman, Jade was her tribe’s heir apparent. Unfortunately, a terrible vision forced her to leave her people, seeking a way to prevent or reverse its foretold events. She left her people, knowledge, and allies in the outside world. Until she has ended the threat she has forseen, she cannot return home.

Since leaving her tribe, Wintery Jade has been having some trouble adjusting to the world at large. She is used to a small, intimate community of people living in strong connection to the spirits and nature. She is also used to being in charge and

having people defer to her desires and views. In the world outside her home, she is finding things to be very different. Her habit of wearing white, a color her people consider auspicious and most of Shen associates with death, has not helped her fit in, nor have her unusual accents and proverbs known only to her people. In combat, she favors wind and fire wheels—circular weapons with flame-like bladed projections.

Note: *Wintery Jade’s vision is left for individual players to define and develop. A vague but unmistakably dangerous foretelling hints at a calamity that threatens war, chaos, and death.*



STRESS

2 Physical

4 Mental

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild
 4 Moderate
 6 Severe

2 Mild

LIN ZHONG

ASPECTS

FORMER DEVIL-SLAYING SWORD EXORCIST

HAUNTED BY PAST FAILURES

BUILT LIKE A TIGER

REMARKABLY STOIC

SWORN ENEMY OF DEMONS

SKILLS

Great (+4): Will

Good (+3): Fight, Physique

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

Average (+1): Empathy, Notice, Crafts, Investigate

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE:

STONE TIGER

Ghost Tiger Form

Tiger Rules the Jungle: Gain 2 Armor Rating against Provoke-based Attacks.

Exorcism: Faith-Based

Ghost Hands: The exorcist can choose to touch and physically Attack incorporeal beings and objects.

Spirit-Fighter: Use Will instead of Fight and Shoot when battling the supernatural.

STUNTS

Demon Fighter (When invoking **Sworn Enemy of Demons** aspect in an Attack or Defend, get 1 Weapon or Armor Rating in addition to the normal invoke bonus)

Painful Lessons (Twice per session, check any unchecked mental stress box to gain a free invocation on **Haunted by Past Failures**)

Spiritual Rock (+2 to defend against Provoke attacks related to supernatural sources).

Refresh: 2

A skilled exorcist and devout Daoist, Lin Zhong's master was a member of the famed society of exorcists, the Devil-Slaying Sword Sect. When his master was killed during a particularly dangerous exorcism, Lin Zhong took his place in the sect. Unfortunately, the young exorcist was not ready to replace his teacher, and he badly botched his first mission. The resulting chaos unleashed a demon that took many lives. Though he aided in the demon's eventual banishment, Lin Zhong was unable to move past his failure. He left the Devil-Slayers and sought a simple life.

A recent encounter with the supernatural has drawn Lin Zhong back into the fight. He has rededicated himself to the life of an exorcist and the

fight against evil supernatural creatures. He has a special grudge against demons given his past. Lin Zhong is a powerfully built man of average height who dresses in the simple attire of a Daoist monk. He carries his master's sword as a matter of respect, but he generally prefers his own monk's spade in battle.

Note: *The exact nature of the encounter that convinces Lin Zhong to again take up his trade is left open for the player and GM to define. It should ideally be something that matters to the themes, issues, and events of the specific campaign.*



STRESS

4 Physical 1 2 3 4

4 Mental 1 2 3 4

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild

4 Moderate

6 Severe

2 Mild

SEEDS OF SHENZHOU

The following plot hooks and seeds can be used for adventures or the start of a campaign arc. They are all centered around mystic themes and concepts.

HUNGRY LIKE THE DEAD

A year ago in a small village, a young pair of star-crossed lovers, Wing and Liling, were murdered, and their bodies were dumped in the nearby forest. Now, on the anniversary of their murder, the two spirits have returned and are tormenting and terrifying the populace.

Coincidentally, the ghosts claim their first victim, a hapless old peddler, at the same time the PCs are

passing through the region. They may even see the ghosts or be suspected of killing the peddler by local authorities—at least until the ghosts strike again.

Banishing the ghosts requires one of the following tasks: exorcism, for the heads of their two families to publicly celebrate and endorse their union, their murderer must be found and executed or brought before them to face a gruesome end, or for their remains to be found and put to rest with full funerary honors in the same location. If any of these tasks are accomplished, the ghostly couple troubles the village no more.

Finding the ghosts' bodies proves difficult. The trail is a year old, and, even then, most locals assumed the two ran off together. No one looked very hard for them. Even if the PCs can determine where to look, finding clues is a Great (+4) difficulty and a task fit for a truly masterful detective or tracker. Convincing the ghosts' families to endorse their union is not any easier. The leaders of both families, Father Aiguo and Father Shan, are *Bitter Rivals* who detest each other over an *Age-Old and Petty Dispute* involving two oxen. Should the PCs seek the couple's killer, it is Liling's cousin Hou. Hou was in love with Liling and murdered her and her lover. He buried the axe he used to kill them in his garden wrapped in his blood-soaked clothes from that night, though finding it requires great detective work or perhaps divination.

The exact village and location for this adventure are left open for the GM to determine. It could be either an established location in the setting or a new place the PCs just happen to be passing through when the trouble hits. Wing and Liling's ghosts are typical hungry dead, with their Spectral Forces and other offensive abilities manifesting as ghostly mists that slash and hack their targets.



LOVE IS A BATTLEFIELD

One of the PCs has drawn the attention of a fairy maiden, Golden Fox, who has become smitten with them due to their martial prowess, virtuous nature, dashing good looks, or some combination of all three. She has decided that the PC is destined to be her lover and mate, and she is not interested in taking no for an answer. To her credit, Fox is capable, charming, attractive, and sincere. Unfortunately, she is also naïve, completely unaware of mortal customs and culture, and used to being treated like the mystic agent of a higher power. Does the PC return Golden Fox's affections? If so, what happens when Fox's family comes looking for her? Also, what higher duties is Fox setting aside to be with the PC, and what problems could those cause?

Golden Fox's divine parentage should be selected by the GM for maximum drama and mischief. She could be the daughter of a demon lord, a powerful nature spirit, or even one of the great lords or ministers of Heaven! In any event, her supernatural parent is unlikely to want their child to abandon various duties and marry a mere mortal. How they discourage this depends on their nature, but assassination, bribery, intimidation, and direct assault by supernatural forces are on the table.

Golden Fox uses the Fairy Maiden statistics in this book, possibly altered to reflect the nature of her supernatural heritage. Note that Golden Fox does not have any particular sexual preference, nor is it required that Fox herself be female. This adventure works just as well if Fox is pursuing a female PC or if Fox is male.

ADDITIONAL INSPIRATION

Readers interested in some new inspirational media to provide ideas for their *TIANXIA* games should check out the following. As always, this is not an exhaustive list, just a sampling.

FILMS

CHINESE GHOST STORY (1987)

One of the classic stories in Hong Kong film about love and the supernatural. A sort of romantic comedy horror film, it tells the story of a young hero and his love for a ghost. Leslie Chung is fantastic as a debt collector turned hapless hero, and Joey Wong is

his ghostly lover. However, *TIANXIA* players and GMs may be most interested in Wu Ma's highly entertaining exorcist swordmaster—a fine portrayal of an exorcist hero. This film spawned two sequels, a TV show, an animated version, a remake, and countless imitators.

MR. VAMPIRE (1985)

This film is another horror comedy, but it notable for being one of the big films in the jiangshi (hopping vampire) subgenre of horror in Hong Kong. Produced by comedic Kung Fu icon Sammo Hung, this film has that peculiar 80s Hong Kong slapstick mixed with campy horror that might not be for everyone. It does show how horror and the supernatural can be used for a fun, wacky experience for those so inclined.

PAINTED SKIN (VARIOUS)

Three versions of this film exist. The original King Hu version is about a ghostly maiden, an evil demon king, and the priests who help defeat the evil and help the maiden. This version stars the beautiful Joey Wong as a ghostly woman (again) and is a great example of the supernatural action films coming out of Hong Kong in the early 90s.

The other two are mostly unrelated to the 1993 version, save all of them being loosely based on the same stories. In these, beautiful, heart-eating fox spirits fall in love with mortals and cause the problems that such romances always do. Both are lavish and melodramatic affairs filled with love, romance, demons, and magic. Highly recommended.

SORCERER AND THE WHITE SNAKE (2011)

One of several tellings of the classic Chinese legend of the White Snake, this is a high-budget, effects-laden spectacle with Jet Li playing an exorcist monk who works as a sort of divine bounty hunter, seeking to banish errant demons in the hopes they might one day redeem themselves. The titular White Snake is one of a group of charming snake demons who find themselves drawn to humans, notably a benevolent physician played by Raymond Lam. The pacing is occasionally a bit off, but the characters and effects make up for it.



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