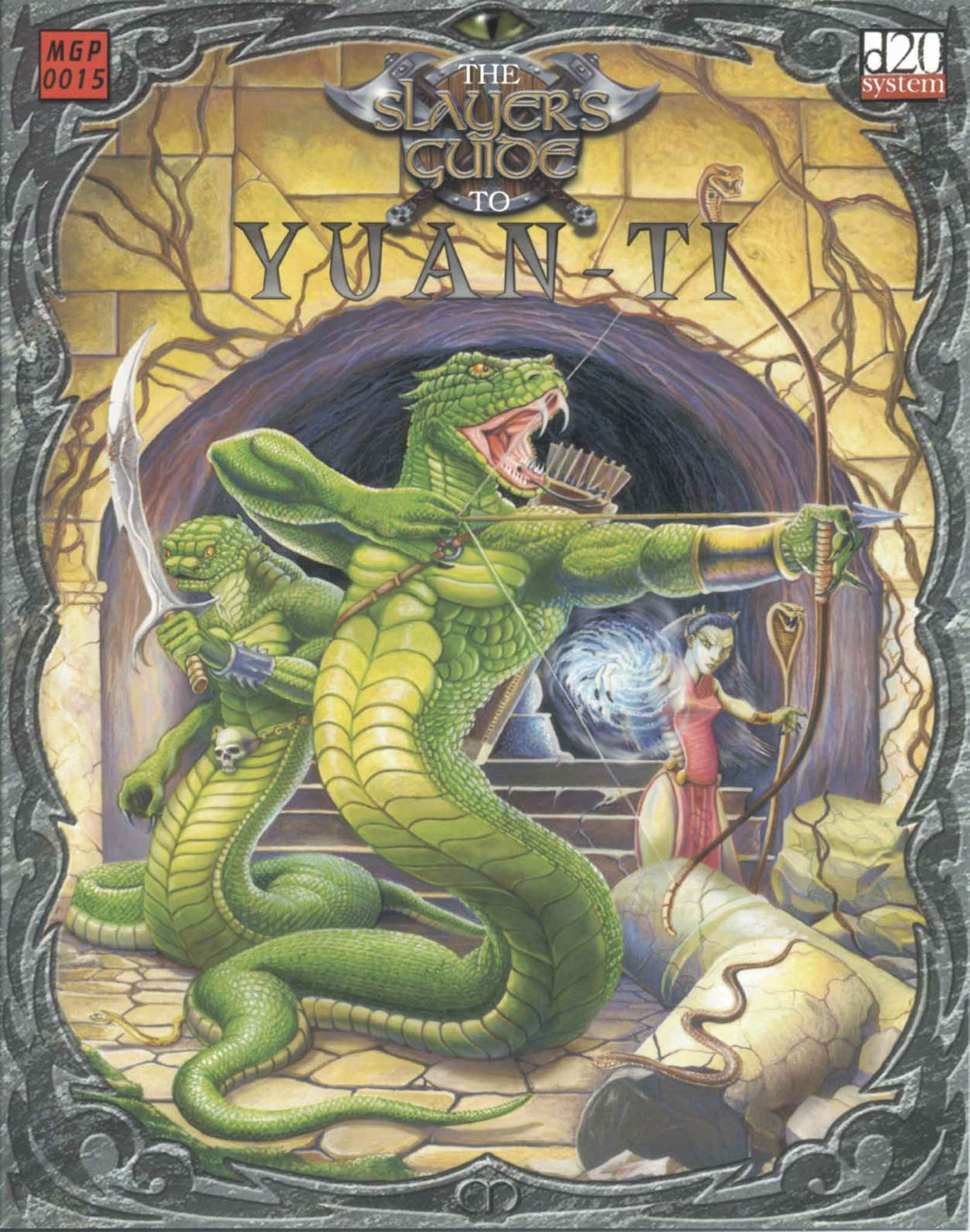


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THE
SLAYER'S
GUIDE
TO
YUAN-TI



Yuan-ti
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The Slayer's Guide To Yuan-Ti

Chris Jones and Michael Babbitt

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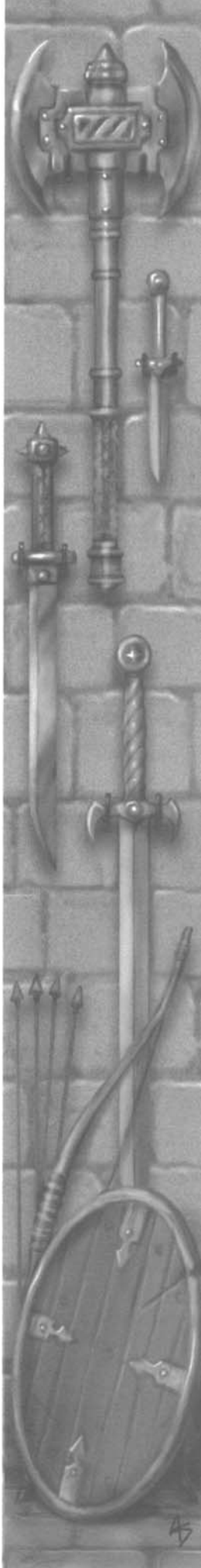
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MONGOOSE PUBLISHING

Mongoose Publishing, PO Box 1018, Swindon, SN3 1DG, United Kingdom

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INTRODUCTION

The Yuan-Ti are often portrayed as sadistic, malevolent creatures intent on dominating the world at all costs. The very image of the scaly, humanoid reptiles with their venomous fangs and malefic, yellow eyes fills most people with dread. For Games Masters, this makes them the ideal antagonists: Alien in both appearance and motivation, they can easily, and with little explanation, be dropped into any campaign or adventure as the fiendish masterminds behind virtually every conflict the characters run up against. Unfortunately, this also tends to make them borderline caricatures of evil, their wickedness resembling nothing so much as the machinations of the moustache-wirling, dastardly villains of yore.

Casting the serpent people in such a superficial, one-dimensional light does a tremendous disservice to them and their timeworn culture, though. They are a society of long-standing tradition, placing as much value in erudition as other cultures might place in martial prowess. Coming originally as they do from the Middle Kingdom, their society is feudalistic by nature, ruled over by a supreme monarch—an Emperor or Empress—and administered by faceless hordes of bureaucrats, scholars and imperial clansmen. Unlike the Middle Kingdom, this ruler is not considered the son or daughter of Heaven but is instead descended from a very real ancestor in their distant past. The Heavens and Hells of the human world abandoned them, and so they literally become their own gods, who are just as multi-faceted, complicated and inscrutable. Inevitably, this stirs up a moral whirlwind that would destroy other cultures with less resilience. Yet, despite the chaos and spiritual ambiguity plaguing their peoples, the Yuan-Ti manage to not only thrive, but to create order and structure from all this. Art and literature are held in the highest esteem. Well-educated scholars come from all walks of life, regardless of breed, birth or social standing, whilst the arcane arts, despite being monopolized by the Ministry of Rituals, make the Yuan-Ti into some of the most formidable spellcasters ever known.

However, sinister times have recently fallen on the Yuan-Ti. Hei An Da Di, the dark lord of the north, makes his presence felt more than ever before. The Empress Wu, temperamental and unpredictable, continues to ignore the council of her advisors and sends legions of her elite soldiers out into the world to panic and terrorize the human kingdoms she so desperately hates. Meanwhile, two

factions have arisen out of the shadows, one embittered by the stagnation of their culture, the other unwilling to change in the slightest in order to save it. Both war over the ideals that will dictate the future course of Yuan-Ti history.

Player Characters will discover a wealth of possibilities hidden within the vast empire of the Yuan-Ti. For the inquisitive, there is a new culture to study; for the diplomatically savvy, there are new alliances and treaties to be negotiated; and for the bloodthirsty, there are new foes aplenty to kill. The Yuan-Ti are not born evil, but enough evil permeates their culture that characters may be busy for years to come just trying to eradicate it.

THE SLAYER'S GUIDES

This series of supplements, designed for use in all fantasy-based d20 games systems, takes an exhaustive look at specific monster races, detailing their beliefs, society and methods of warfare. Typically, these will be races all but ignored by Games Masters and players alike who pay little heed as countless thousands get slaughtered during the acquisition of new levels and treasures.

THE YUAN-TI—CHAOS AMIDST ORDER

As every Slayer's Guide focuses upon a single race of creature, this one takes a hard look at the Yuan-Ti. Inside you'll find information on: their culture and society, from their mythological origins to the state of the empire under the Empress Wu; their biology, uncovering the many mysterious breeds, their mating habits and the habitats where they reside; and their own particular military methodology, describing the brutal methods used to spread their beliefs and ways. While useful to players with an interest in the Yuan-Ti, this book will benefit Games Masters considerably more. Incorporating a compelling villain, much less an entire villainous species, has always been problematic to the conscientious storyteller, and of all the races the Yuan-Ti are probably one of the most difficult. Hopefully, the book you now hold in your hands will make this easier for you by shedding a new light on their beliefs, philosophies and goals, by making the race as a whole more rounded and balanced.

Finally, at the end of the book, you will also find a sample Yuan-Ti outpost called Po Jian, which will give you an idea of how they infiltrate other cultures.

The old man shuffled across the tiled floor of the Phoenix Hall, his silk ceremonial robes hissing with every move. The sound seemed thunderous in his ears. All eyes in the hall were on him, three hundred of the Emperor's own - clansmen, retainers, eunuchs, concubines and consorts. In the interest of making the transfer of power go smoothly, both *huo jiao* and *shui jiao* alike were there, the fire and water factions. The fire faction made him uneasy. They were often disrespectful of the Emperor, unmindful of the traditional ways, uncaring of whom they embarrassed with their oafish mockery of court conduct. But, with the priests nearby, they behaved themselves. Despite the fact that the priests were abominations, their presence reassured him somewhat. Only they, it seemed, were capable of keeping the fire faction in line.

The old man stopped at the center of the chamber. He cleared his throat, turning to face the Emperor on his raised, gilt throne. Bowing from the waist, he said, 'Your majesty,' his voice cracking with age, 'forgive me for not kow-towing, but today you are no longer the Maiden Bai's son.'

The Emperor dipped his head in acknowledgment. On any other day, the old man would have had his head lopped off for not pressing his nose to the ground while in the presence of the sovereign lord, the direct descendant of their race's progenitor the White Snake Maiden Bai Su-Zhen. The crowd was a-twitter with anticipation. It wasn't often that an emperor willingly renounced the throne. This was a day for the history books, one that, if they had their ways, they would all have a hand in writing.

'Today, you are simply Gong Lu,' the old man continued, using the Emperor's given name, 'one of countless Yuan Ti. Today, you shall don the mantle of Heaven and retire forever from the Serpent Throne. Are you prepared to do this? Do you, from your heart, abdicate in favour of your heir, your eldest daughter, the lady Wu?'

All heads turned to regard the Emperor. He was old, but the scales in his skin still shone resplendently. He had aged well over the years. Standing, he nodded. 'Yes, my friend, I am ready. I do this for the future of our people.' Yi-Sheng, the Emperor's number one eunuch, proffered a steadying arm, which he took gratefully. 'I do it freely and with all my heart.'

The old man turned around to face the opposite side of the hall. Younger Yuan-Ti crowded at that end, both fire and water factions mixing freely, unlike the older, traditional retainers at the Emperor's end who were clearly segregated by heritage and ideology. 'Highness, come forward, please.'

The crowd parted, a hint of petulance in their movements and expressions. A beautiful young woman stepped forward, the Emperor's daughter Wu Yu-Tian. She wore the white sackcloth of a nun, the edge of the hood inscribed with ritual blessings. 'Are you prepared for the responsibility, daughter of the Maiden Bai? Are you ready to become the mother of your people, the protector and savior of all serpent-kind?' the old man asked. The purebloods in attendance shifted angrily. He hadn't intended to slight them, but those were the words required by tradition. Some among the fire faction cast disparaging insults at the offended, mocking them.

'Yes,' she replied icily. She cast her gaze at the audience; everyone settled down. The old man knew then, in that one, telling moment the girl had both factions under her thumb. The Yuan Ti were doomed. He looked back at the Emperor, whom he had known since he was a baby - the other man's face told him that he had seen it too. It was too late, though. He couldn't stop now. Tradition demanded that he finish. If he didn't, that sackless bastard Yi Sheng would. The eunuch's grin stretched from ear to ear.

'So it has always been and so it shall always be. Gong Lu, before we begin the Ritual of Shedding, step forward and bow down before your new Empress.'

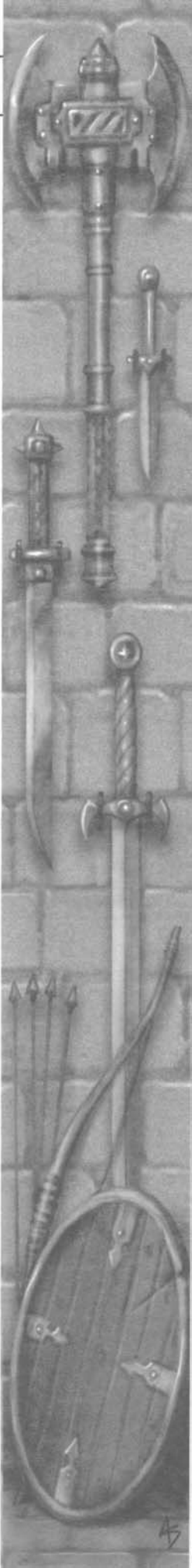
With Yi Sheng's assistance, the Emperor came down from the dais and with great effort knelt on the ground before his daughter. 'Your majesty.'

The old man addressed the Empress. 'Your majesty, have you any words for the poor man that kow-tows so humbly in your awesome presence?'

The girl looked down at her father contemptuously. 'No. He's an impotent excuse for a man. I am ashamed to have ever called him 'father'. Remove him from my sight. Let's get the Ritual over with before we all die of old age.' The young ones laughed. The older ones were shocked by her appalling lack of solemnity.

Guards helped the former Emperor to his feet and escorted him away. The old man sighed, suddenly mourning the cancer that he had been too proud to notice before this evening. 'Let us begin, then.'

As the crowd moved toward the Dragon Hall for the Ritual, he heard the Empress Wu say to her nearest bodyguard, 'Have the old goat put to the sword and fed to the penitents before the sun rises.' A tear fell from his eye. He hoped he'd have time to write one last missive to his wife before the guards came for him.



YUAN-TI PHYSIOLOGY

The Yuan-Ti are an inordinately complex species, biologically speaking. Unlike most species, they did not develop naturally and so never had the benefits of a standard evolution. They are, instead, the result of the union between a snake fairy and a mortal man thousands of years earlier, a hodge-podge of traits from both species. On the one hand, much of this unique physiology of theirs has worked to their advantage, giving them an edge over other species, namely in being able to shape-change into true serpents and being able to blend into the environment around them. On the other hand, almost as much has been detrimental to them, such as their susceptibility to drastic changes in temperature and many of them being born with incredibly odd mutations (like having snakes for arms). The constant inbreeding that occurs within the population at large creates higher than normal incidences of infant mortality and congenital birth defects.

There are three primary breeds of Yuan-Ti, each one exhibiting an uneven mixture of human and serpent physical characteristics in their natural, humanoid forms.

Purebloods are the most human, although they frequently possess superficial serpentine traits, like eyes with vertical slits for pupils, forked tongues, or the slight sheen of scales in their skin. **Halfbloods** have more in common with snakes than do the purebloods, for the most part being evenly split between their serpent and human traits.

Abominations are the third breed, and they are much more serpentine than human, having only one or two human traits. There is also a mysterious, legendary, fourth breed called the **Ash-skinned**. As far as anyone knows, they don't exist within the Serpent Empire, supposedly living in hidden enclaves far to the north, in cold environments that would kill other Yuan-Ti. To most people in the Empire, the ash-skinned are really nothing more than a myth, or bogeymen that they conjure up to scare their children into obedience.

The average Yuan-Ti's life-span depends on its breed: Purebloods live for approximately 200 years, while halfbloods live for 150 and abominations live for almost 300. While they reach physical maturity at about the same time as their human ancestors, they aren't considered socially mature until they are at least 40 years old.

CLIMATE CONTROL

Whether they are in serpentine or humanoid form, the Yuan-Ti share a fair number of traits with snakes, not just appearance. Perhaps the most telling is their inability to fully regulate their own internal body temperature. As such, they tend to live in environments that are warm, where they can use the sun and the shade to help them stabilize their body heat. However, they can live in slightly colder environments, although doing so greatly slows down their metabolisms. If the temperature falls too much, they go into a state of hibernation, generating specialized chemicals to prevent the moisture and vital fluids in their bodies from freezing and subsequently killing them. Temperatures that fall below the hibernation threshold invariably kill them. Conversely, extremely high temperatures are also damaging to them. Too much heat kills them just as quickly as too much cold. To this extent, nearly every Yuan-Ti spellcaster is prone to have at his fingertips a wide array of spells that allow him to alter the environment. Despite their human heritage, the Yuan-Ti must be extremely careful about maintaining an internal balance with the environment around them.

HEAT SENSE

Another trait they share with some snakes is the presence of heat-sensitive pits in their faces. These allow the Yuan-Ti to see infrared heat as well as most species see visible light. Snakes and Yuan-Ti use the Heat Sense ability to bolster their efficiency at tracking prey, letting them see with amazing clarity creatures that might otherwise be hidden due to camouflage or scent masking. In fact, the resolution of this ability is so fine that some of them can see minute blemishes on a person where the heat signature differs fractionally from the surrounding tissue. They can register subtle heat variations as they happen, which has the secondary effect of giving them additional insight into another's emotional state - as a creature's emotions fluctuate, so too does its heat signature. For example: When a person tells a lie, specific thermal spots in his face may increase or decrease in temperature because of changes in the blood flow to them. As a Yuan-Ti learns the intricacies of heat signature fluctuation, it also learns how to adjust its own body heat by means of bio-feedback, although not with enough skill to compensate for temperature shifts in the environment nor to mask itself from others with the heat sense ability. Over the centuries, this talent for manipulating thermal spots on the



skin has developed into a technique for silently communicating with one another, a pidgin language they colloquially call 'Serpent's Cant.'

All Yuan-Ti have the heat pits in serpent form but not all of the population have them in humanoid form. Those who do are most often abominations and snake-headed halfbloods, although purebloods have been known to occasionally exhibit the trait.

There is a 20% chance that any given pureblood will have heat-sensitive pits in both its humanoid and serpent forms; for halfbloods, there is a 50% chance; and for abominations, there is an 80% chance. The pits confer upon the character the following, breed-dependant abilities:

Breed	Ability
Pureblood	Heat Sense 20 ft., Sense Motive +2, Serpent's Cant
Halfblood	Heat Sense 40 ft., Sense Motive +4, Serpent's Cant
Abomination	Heat Sense 80 ft., Sense Motive +8, Serpent's Cant

Heat Sense (Ex): This is the ability to see infrared heat patterns. It works even if all of the character's other senses are blinded. However, it doesn't work if the heat-sensitive pits are blocked or covered. Some creatures, like the undead or the incorporeal, may not have a discernable heat signature, if any at all.

Sense Motive (Ex): A Yuan-Ti with the heat sense ability gains a breed-dependant skill bonus when using Sense Motive to detect if a member of another race is lying or not, or to interpret the creature's true emotional state if it's not already apparent. They don't gain this advantage using the skill on other Yuan-Ti.

Serpent's Cant: This is a bonus language that may be taken if the Yuan-Ti's Intelligence is higher than 10.

TREMOR SENSE

In their serpent forms, the Yuan-Ti are completely deaf. This is because, like normal snakes, they don't have hearing organs. Instead, they have highly sensitive lower jawbones that they use to sense vibrations transmitted through solid material, such as the ground or tree bark. It's not unheard of for many Yuan-Ti, because of their extreme similarity to serpents, to be born without the ability to hear in their humanoid forms. (Although, on the flip-side of the coin, some are actually born with the human-like ability to hear while in their serpent forms, with ears that resemble the small ear ridges lizards possess.) Deaf Yuan-Ti have the Tremor Sense ability to compensate for their inability to hear, as do normal snakes. Unfortunately, those who are born deaf generally can't cast spells (unless they find some sort of work-around, such as taking the Silent Spell feat) because they never really learned to talk. It should be noted that deaf Yuan-Ti are always proficient at reading lips, having been forced to learn this skill at an early age, and

may therefore take the Read Lips skill as a bonus skill, regardless of class.

While in snake form, a Yuan-Ti character cannot make a conventional Listen check. However, the Listen skill can be used for detecting ground vibrations within a number of feet equal to the character's Listen ranks multiplied by 10.

† There is a 40% chance that snake-headed halfbloods and abominations are deaf in both their humanoid and serpent forms. Deaf characters may use Listen as a Tremor Sense, but only if their feet, hands or jaws are in contact with the ground or the surface in question.

† For every Size rating below the Yuan-Ti's own, the Listen DC increases by +2; for every Size rating above its own, the DC decreases by -2. Huge, Gargantuan and Colossal creatures may give an automatic success to the Listen check unless conditions would warrant otherwise.

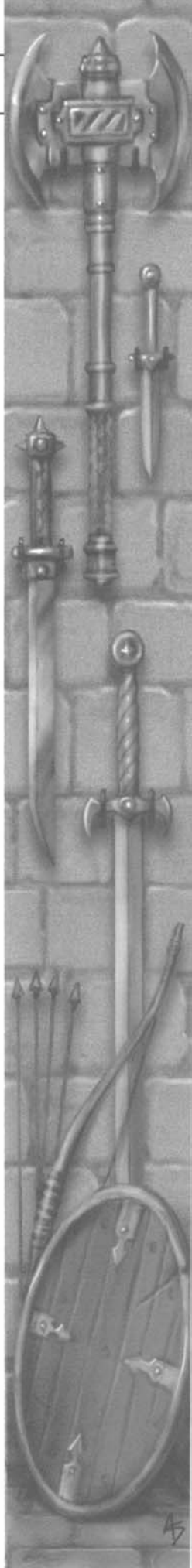
† Attempting to specifically identify the source of the tremor increases the DC by +5. Of course, if the character has never encountered the source before then identifying it is impossible.

† Using this ability while tracking another creature gives the character a +5 skill bonus, but only if its prey is within Tremor Sense range.

† At the Games Master's discretion, deaf Yuan-Ti may attempt to Listen to audible sounds through walls or other solid surfaces. This increases the DC by +10 since audible vibrations lose resolution when passing through solid matter. Tremor Sense may also be used this way in liquid.

THE YUAN-TI DIET

When it comes to food, a Yuan-Ti only eats live prey. Usually this consists of small mammals, birds, amphibians, lizards and even other snakes. When they are in their serpent forms, this diet also includes snails, earthworms and insects. They don't cook their food, preferring it warm, bloody and still kicking. Eating cooked food is anathema to them. It is a social *faux pas* at best and a mark of insanity at worst. That's not to say that they are incapable of consuming cooked food, especially in their humanoid forms; it is just that they find it abhorrent to do so. As with any rule there is an exception: Yuan-Ti who infiltrate other societies are frequently required to eat cooked food in order to maintain their cover, especially if their cover professions send them to court functions or balls. Some of them actually grow quite fond of it, much to the disgust of their friends and family back home. In either serpent or humanoid form, a Yuan-Ti is not entirely loathe to eat dead, raw meat just so long as it's fresh, usually no more than an hour cold.





In serpent form, Yuan-Ti can swallow animals that are many times their own body weight in size. To do so, their lower jaws unhinge and their rib cages and skin expand to accommodate the meal. Because the food is gradually consumed whole, it takes some time for it to break down to such a degree that their bodies can process it. In fact, their digestive system is pretty feeble when compared to other species; fortunately, the undersides of their ribs have sharp projections that act like teeth, 'grinding' the food as it travels down the digestive tract. Preference and digestive physiology generally dictate their eating methods while in humanoid form. Purebloods almost always eat like humans do, as do many halfbloods except for those who are born with snakeheads or exceptional flexibility. Abominations, though, rarely have any choice in the matter, as they are too close to their snake heritage to eat any other way.

Only a small portion of the Yuan-Ti population is born with the ability to engulf their prey whole while in humanoid form. The probability for being able to do this is as follows: pureblood 5%, halfblood 30% and abomination 70%. For halfbloods and abominations, the chance increases by +20% if they possess either a snakehead, flexible torso or snake arms.

Normally, a Yuan-Ti engulfs its prey after it has already stunned or killed it through constriction, poison or both. It can't take any action, in either form, until its prey has been completely swallowed and at least 75% digested. This process requires approximately 1/2 hour for every 2 pounds of the prey's mass. After engulfing its body-weight in food, a Yuan-Ti doesn't need to eat for a number of days equal to its Constitution score multiplied by 2. Inedible material

such as bones, bits of metal and so on get expelled through the usual methods.

MATING HABITS

Of the three breeds, the purebloods are the most numerous, mating primarily with other purebloods but also with humans and even some demi-human races, favoring elves especially. Halfbloods often mate amongst their own kind, unwittingly propagating the deleterious side-effects of consanguinity that characterize a fair number of the race, although high-ranking purebloods aren't above taking halfbloods as consorts or even as low-level wives and husbands. Abominations prefer to take full-blooded snakes as mates, though occasionally they might mate with a member of one of other two breeds, usually to seal a political alliance or as a reward for service above and beyond the call of duty.

As has been mentioned earlier, there is a considerable amount of inbreeding in the Serpent Empire. This stems primarily from the Yuan-Ti's inability to find suitable mates outside of their own society, such as humans, demi-humans or snakes who are willing or physically able to mate with them. Because of this, they often have no choice but to take other Yuan-Ti as mates. The combination of their strange physical heritage, their relatively small population sizes, and the unusual magic that infuses them gives them an increased risk for birth defects, especially among halfblood couples.

Yuan-Ti young are hatched from eggs laid in nests and crèches or from eggs carried within the mother's body. Purebloods can carry up to three eggs in their wombs. When they hatch, the babies are usually purebloods but it's not entirely uncommon that one comes out as a halfblood or even an abomination. Halfblood eggs are laid in nests and number between six and twelve. If they are the product of the union of two halfbloods, all the babies are of the same breed, but if the babies come from a halfblood mother and father from another breed, then they are evenly mixed between the pureblood and abomination breeds. Abominations have about twenty eggs in a single clutch. They can choose to carry them inside their bodies or lay them in nests. Regardless of their mates, their babies are always abominations.

Contrary to the laws of reproduction, if a pureblood mates with a human or demi-human, their babies have an equal chance of being *entirely* human/demi-human or *entirely* pureblood. The same goes for abominations that mate with normal snakes, again with an equal chance of their offspring either being one or the other. In short, there is a mystical limitation that prevents their cross-species children from having fractional quantities of the parents' blood—either they are Yuan-Ti, or they aren't, it's as simple as that. Abominations are incapable of having children with humans and purebloods similarly cannot have children with snakes, regardless of the form they assume attempting it. Halfbloods cannot have children with either true snakes or humans/demi-humans. (Although there is a popular fiction in the Empire that halfbloods can mate with lizard folk,

perhaps maliciously propagated in an attempt to see if any of them actually attempt such an act. If any have, none seem to have survived to talk about it.)

Yuan-Ti eggs have a leathery outer surface and take as long as 12 weeks to hatch. Imperial crèches located in every major settlement increase the survival rate of the newborns: Yuan-Ti nursemaids, who come from all breeds, care for them night and day, ensuring that they remain healthy, educating them in the ways of their culture, and fostering the development of their innate psionic and magical talents. Children stay in the crèches until they reach physical maturity at the age of thirteen, at which time they undergo the Ritual of Becoming. Before the ritual, a child's innate psionic and magical abilities don't often function to their fullest potential. After the Ritual, though, the abilities are awakened and the children are considered full-fledged adults.

Children that aren't raised in crèches have a 50% or greater mortality rate in the first six years of their life; those who survive are nevertheless allowed to undergo the Ritual along with crèche children, though there may be considerable social stigmata against them.

Before the Ritual of Becoming, a pre-pubescent Yuan-Ti can only use its spell-like abilities once every three days (if at all) and its psionic abilities only once per day (again, if at all). It is also incapable of learning any spellcasting skills or techniques. Generally, as the child gets closer to the day of the Ritual, its talents gradually improve. After the ritual, it may use all of its abilities, and learn to cast spells, as per normal. Yuan-Ti that don't undergo the Ritual by the age of 16 have a 90% chance of never being able to learn how to use their innate abilities beyond child-like levels. Those who are so handicapped often go on to become imperial eunuchs since they pose significantly less of a potential threat to the royal family.

SKIN SHEDDING

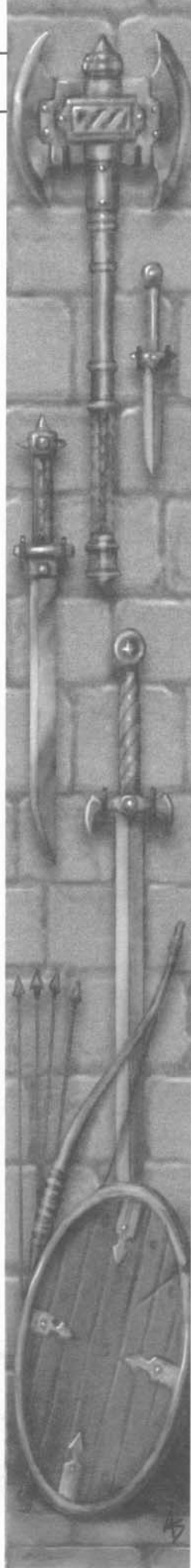
All Yuan-Ti, regardless of breed or form, shed their skins like snakes. The time between sheddings is highly variable, dependent more on environment and diet than anything else. When the time comes, though, it is signaled by the build-up of a white, milky fluid in the eyes that blinds the Yuan-Ti for almost a full day. As it leaks from the eyes, it catalyzes the skin on the face, forcing it to dry up and crack open. For the next 4-12 hours, it must rub against hard, rough surfaces (or use fingers, if in humanoid form) to pull the dead

skin away from the rest of its body and reveal the new skin underneath. Gradually, the entire skin peels away like a sheath.

The interesting thing about the shed skin is that a person from another species can use it to transform into a kind of 'false' Yuan-Ti called a *penitent* (described in Chapter XX). The skin, when enchanted during the Ritual of Contrition, gives the recipient some of the abilities of the Yuan-Ti from which it comes, although this is not without its drawbacks. Spellcasters have also been known to use the skins to perform sympathetic magic that affects the skin's original owner, regardless of how far away from one another they are. Many a Yuan-Ti leader has been violently struck down by enemy mages from long distance using such a shed skin. It is for this very reason that they are highly protective of them and quick to dispose of them in secret once the shedding has been completed.

The time required for a Yuan-Ti to shed its skin (whether in humanoid or serpentine form) is a number of hours equal to 10 minus its Con modifier.

If an abomination's skin comes off 60% or more intact, it can be turned (by an extraordinarily skilled armoursmith) into a tough, flexible armour with the following qualities: Cost 370 gp; Armour Bonus +6; Max Dex Bonus +4; Armour Check Penalty -3; Arcane Spell Failure 15%; Speed 20/15 ft.; Weight: 35 lb. The DC to make it using Craft (armour-smith) is 25. A sufficiently capable spellcaster can additionally draw out the skin's innate Spell Resistance (16). Doing so adds the following criteria to the armour: Caster Level: 12th; Prerequisites: Craft Magic Arms and Armour; Market Price: +5,000 gp.



HABITAT

For the most part, and with the exception of the ash-skinned, the Yuan-Ti build their temples, enclaves, outposts and cities in tropical regions dense with jungles and foliage. Given the considerable amount of ophidian biology they possess, they find the heat of the jungles much more to their comfort than any other climate. The jungles also afford no small amount of protection from outsider species, namely humans, giving the Yuan-Ti the ideal environment with which to camouflage their towns from prying eyes. The sheer variety of life teeming in the jungle canopies is another reason they prefer living in those regions - warm, enticing mammals, other mundane snake species, countless amphibians and an unimaginable variety of avian life all make it their home, providing an ideal, unending supply of fresh food. (The fact that no small numbers of those animals are as dangerous to outsiders as they are to the Yuan-Ti doesn't hurt either.) The Yuan-Ti are particularly fond of settling regions with high concentrations of dinosaurs, lizardfolk and sahuagin. They hunt the dinosaurs for food or train them as mounts and sentries, subdue the lizardfolk for slave labour, and ally themselves with the sahuagin in order to protect their water outposts as well as provide a ready, mercenary army should the need arise.

The further one gets from the capital of the Serpent Empire, the less obvious the Yuan-Ti settlements become, increasingly blending into the local environment in order to disguise their presence from the outsiders they hate so much. Towns are usually built around a central temple, usually dedicated to all the gods in their pantheon but sometimes servicing just a single god (especially in towns built for one purpose, such as taking war to the enemy.) Buildings are made out of treated wood and other plant material such as vines, elephant-ear leaves and bamboo, and are placed up in the canopy high over the jungle floor, disguised to look as much like surrounding foliage as possible. Because of seasonal monsoons, tsunamis and typhoons, the typical Yuan-Ti dwelling is built to be disposable—easily constructed and easily destroyed. That way, when the village is inevitably hit by a killer typhoon, they can rebuild it in as little time as possible. The other benefits to building so high off the ground are: first, the vast majority of insect pests don't inhabit the canopy layer of the jungle and, second, they have easier access to the sun, climbing just a few short feet up into the emergent layer to bask in its warmth.

Larger towns and cities, however, are too massive for the canopy to adequately support them. As such, they are constructed on the jungle floor and are considerably sturdier and more permanent. Usually, these buildings are made out of handcrafted stone, rising as high as the jungle (or in the capital city, higher than both the canopy and the emergent layers), and descending into the ground even deeper. Tropical plant life doesn't typically grow deep into the ground, its roots spreading outward more so than downward, so the Yuan-Ti's subterranean buildings don't have too much negative impact on the jungle. At the outskirts of the stone settlements are wooden scout pavilions as well as the residences of the poorer people, the slave compounds, and animal shelters for mounts, sentries and food.

Some Yuan-Ti villages, especially out on the Empire's frontier, are built over water, erected on stilts sunk into the sand at the bottom of lagoons or some distance out from important islands. The residents of these villages subsist primarily on seafood and tend to excel at swimming. In one of the many contradictions of Yuan-Ti culture, abominations and snake-tailed halfbloods are highly valued in the so-called 'floating villages' because they are the best swimmers. It's not uncommon for them to co-exist with local sahuagin, often times sharing the same village (although the sahuagin ward is always built below the surface of the water). In climatically chaotic areas (such as those that seem to attract typhoons like candles attract moths), the floating villages are constructed in the shadow of island cliffs, or in hollows created by millennia of erosion. Pirates call these Yuan-Ti villages 'deadman coves'. They, like the Yuan-Ti who inhabit them, use the hidden coves for the protection (and secrecy) they offer; unfortunately, when they stumble upon a deadman cove they don't usually live to tell the tale about it, hence the name.

The last place one would normally expect to find the Yuan-Ti is in the heart of human cities. These are infiltration outposts, called 'shadow nests', dedicated to spying on their enemies as well as causing untold havoc. Due in part to their unique physiology, the cities that they infiltrate with the highest frequency are those in tropical or subtropical environments. It is with great reluctance that they will go into colder climes, but not entirely unheard of...if they are outfitted with the appropriate magic and equipment. Purebloods, not so strangely, typically make up the majority of a shadow nest's population.

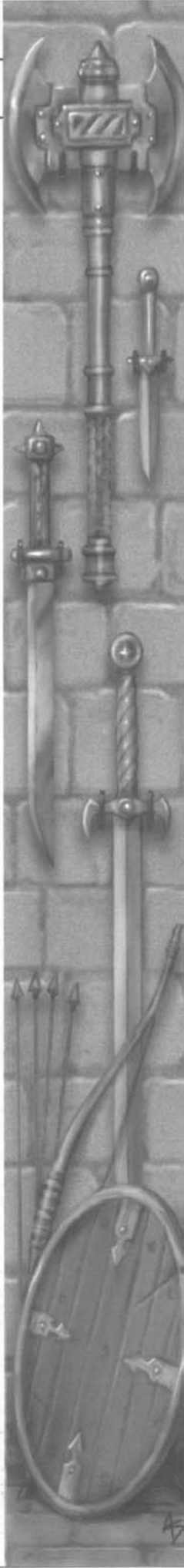
YUAN-TI SOCIETY

The history of the Yuan-Ti, as it is written in the Records of the Unchanging Seasons, goes back approximately four thousand years, give or take a couple of centuries. Of course, this does not mean that they have not been around for far longer, but merely that the current Yuan-Ti society believes this to be the case. Whether it is ultimately true or not is up to the Games Master and how they fit into his campaign, naturally.

The Empire, formally called *She Hua* (meaning 'The Serpent Empire') has its origins in the tale of the snake fairy Bai Su-Zhen ('White Snake Maiden') and how she seduced a poor rice merchant named Bo Li after falling in love with him when he rescued her from the hunting dogs of the regional magistrate. According to legend, a snake fairy can become human only once in its lifetime, and White Snake Maiden took her one opportunity in order to be with Bo. They lived together for many years, happy and prosperous, and she bore him four children: Quan Lan ('Spring Orchid'), the first pureblood and a beautiful girl who favoured her father's people, the humans; a pair of twins named Xian Yang and Xian Yue ('Immortal Sun' and 'Immortal Moon') who favored each parent equally and

together were the first halfbloods; and Qing Yen ('Green Eye') a ghastly looking child who was the first abomination. He was thrown into the river upon hatching from his egg, both parents horrified by his appearance. According to some writings, a blind, disgraced monk found him downstream and took him north to be raised by him and his wife.

For many years, Bai Su-Zhen, Bo and their children lived happy lives until the day the magistrate's dogs were found murdered and half-eaten. He blamed the woman and her vile children, no longer able to tolerate their unnatural existence. Leading the village's strongest men, he attacked the Bo household, mortally wounding Bai. Fortunately, their children had been safely hidden at a neighbour's house. As she lay dying, Bai made her husband vow that he would take the four babies as far away from the humans as possible, to protect them, because she could not trust humans not to eventually give in to their deeply ingrained fears of the unnatural and unknown; she knew in her heart that the humans would never rest until her children were dead. Bo swore he would and the next day they disappeared into the southern jungles. Many generations and many hundreds of years later, after suffering almost constant assaults from nearby human kingdoms, a pureblood descendant of Quan Lan named Featherscale united the twelve cities of his people that had emerged in the wake of Bo's flight and declared himself the first king of *Xuan Guo*, the Hidden Kingdom. This marked the nascence of the formidable Empire to come.



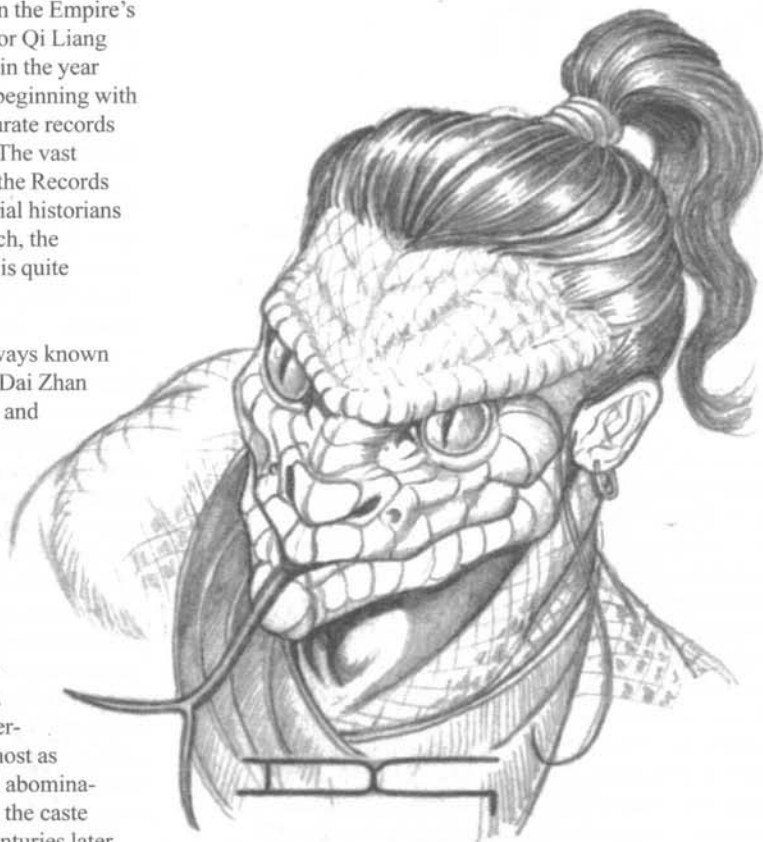
YUAN-TI SOCIETY

Countless noteworthy events have occurred in the Empire's history since then. Unfortunately, the Emperor Qi Liang had every document in the Empire destroyed in the year 2590 (according to Yuan-Ti calendar, year 1 beginning with the birth Quan Lan) and so there are few accurate records left from that time to give accounts of them. The vast majority of the information contained within the Records comes from secondary sources that the imperial historians have never been able to truly confirm. As such, the distinction between historical fact and fiction is quite nebulous to say the least.

The Yuan-Ti, it should be noted, have not always known themselves by that name. Until the Emperor Dai Zhan re-unified the Empire after centuries of chaos and strife, they were known as the *she jing*, or snake fairies, after their ancestral mother's people. But, when Dai Zhan became Emperor (in the year 1330 of their calendar), he declared that no species, especially the humans who had always persecuted them, stood above them. They were superior in all ways and that henceforth they would be known as 'the pre-eminent rulers,' the Yuan-Ti. Dai Zhan was a colorful and charismatic figure and his counter-hatred for the humans was legendary, but almost as strong was his disgust for the halfbloods and abominations of his own kind. It was he who created the caste system that segregated the breeds by law. Centuries later, an abomination named Dao Ming led an uprising against the throne which ultimately resulted in him becoming Emperor and the dismantling of the caste system. Even so, the legacy of the caste laws is still felt today.

Another critical juncture in Yuan-Ti history was the Faith Plague. From the very beginning, the Yuan-Ti had worshipped the gods of the lands they shared with other races. These were mostly the human gods of their ancestral father, but after centuries of petitioning by human priests those gods finally turned on their Yuan-Ti worshippers. On a holy day once known as *the bone dusting*, Yuan-Ti priests all over the Empire fell victim to a vicious disease inflicted upon them by the gods, and died within hours of contracting it. It was a warning to the Yuan-Ti, a message that said the human gods were forbidden to their kind, that their unnatural existence was an offence to the world's powers that be. The night after the plague struck, an incarnation of White Snake Maiden visited the Emperor Gao Shan in his dreams where she taught him *lin dao*, the Way of the Scale. More importantly, she taught him the Four Great Rituals, of which the most important was the Ritual of Shedding. This would allow worthy emperors and empresses to ascend to heaven and become their people's new gods and goddesses.

The current year according to the Yuan-Ti calendar is 4004, and the ruler of the Serpent Empire is the Empress Wu, daughter of the Emperor Tai Dun who just recently abdicated so that he might undergo the Ritual of Shedding. In recorded Yuan-Ti memory there have been two major



cultural, technological and magical renaissances; many scholars consider the Emperor Tai Dun's long, benign reign, although plagued at the end by overt warring between the *huo* and *shui* factions, to be the beginning of a third one, but only time and the Empress Wu's reign will tell. So far, though, things aren't looking good. Like most Yuan-Ti, the Empress hates the humans for their relentless persecution of them and resents them for countless other reasons. She is determined to decimate their kingdoms, to enslave or murder every last one of them and since taking over the throne, has redoubled the Empire's war efforts against them.

THE IMPERIAL COURT

It is the enlightenment that awaits one at the centre of a sacred mandala, the beating heart in the chest of the beast, the spark at the center of a blade of fire and, quite literally it is the head of the serpent. The imperial court of the Yuan-Ti is all of these things and more. Without it, the Empire wouldn't exist.

Above all else sits the Empress (or, as the case may be, the Emperor) on her gilt throne emblazoned with the stylized images of the serpent goddess Xing Long. She is known simply as *chao di*, which literally means 'ruler of the nest,' or more specifically as *chao hou*, the 'queen of the nest,' both of which are archaic holdovers from the earliest days of the Empire. The Yuan-Ti also refer to her by the

colloquial name *bai nu* - the White Lady. The current Empress, Wu Yu-Tian, is a pureblood albino from the Lu clan, her birth name being Lu Hui but changed for reasons of auspiciousness seven years before her father abdicated the throne. The Lu clan, which has been the imperial clan for the last four generations, is one of the larger clans in the Empire. While it is certainly true that many positions of power are awarded to those who are most deserving (see the Aristocracy of Merit below), the clans still make up a large percentage of the royal courtiers, who, if they are not eunuchs or bureaucrats, tend to be nothing more than an entourage of petty, bickering harpies. Although, those from the more affluent clans seem to garner more of the Empress' time. The four wealthiest, and therefore most prominent, clans are descendants of the so-called 'honor nests' who were later awarded the Four Dukedoms by Featherscale's grandson the Emperor Han Suo in the year 647 (Yuan-Ti calendar). In addition to empowering non-imperial families and creating steadfast allies who would support the ruling clan against its enemies inside the Empire, it marked the beginning of the imperial bureaucracy. Since then, prominent clansmen and women have frequently received grandiose titles that are, in truth, empty; titles that pay a hefty annual stipend but offer little else of practical value. Rarely are clansmen actually given tangible authority—those who do receive it, however, tend to be more driven, ruthless and capable than their peers, the other high-ranking bureaucrats. This is probably because they feel compelled to prove themselves worthy of a job they did not really earn. They also might be motivated by the fact that those who fail catastrophically at their assigned post end up as food for the penitents, relationship to the Empress notwithstanding.

Surrounding the Empress and her courtiers are the Palace Attendants, eunuchs who manage the day-to-day affairs of the palace, and the Grand Councillors, the highest-ranking bureaucrats, advisors and ministers from all corners of the Empire. To outward appearances, the Grand Councillors are the most powerful men and women in the Empire, able to bend the sovereign's ear to their will with a few choice words. On the contrary, in the past it has always been the Palace Attendants who ruled with a silken fist from behind the scenes and in the shadows, cleverly manipulating generations of sovereigns with honeyed words and promises of incomprehensible wealth, influence and worldly might. Numerous times in history, cunning rulers have mercilessly wiped out the eunuchs and reformed the office that controls them. Unfortunately, the changes seldom last more than a few generations. Because the eunuchs pose no threat to the sanctity of the Maiden Bai's unbroken line of descendants (as traced through her daughter Quan Lan), they are the only ones allowed to attend on the royal family, including the heirs. Once they gain influence over future heirs, it becomes very difficult to curtail the machinations of the foul fraternity.

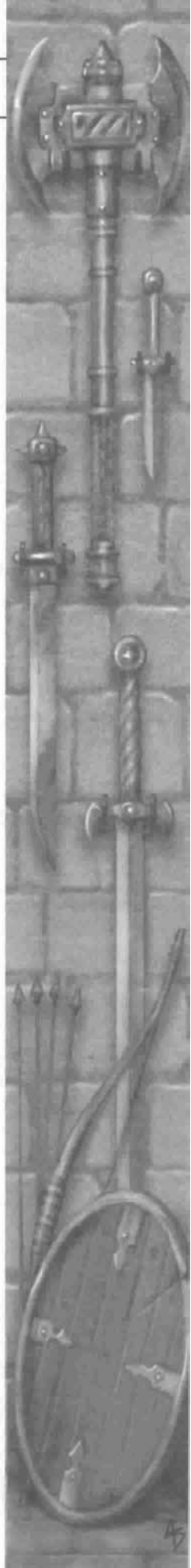
Aside from the aforementioned Palace Attendants and the Grand Councillors, there are three other high-level bodies directly associated with imperial court: The Ministry of Rituals, The War Banners and The Directorate of Nests. All

other bodies, while technically falling under her aegis, do not necessitate the Empress's constant attention - responsibility for them belongs to the bureaucracy described in the next section.

The Ministry of Rituals manages the religious and philosophical lives of the Yuan-Ti. They are the priests. They also regulate arcane magic, issuing permits to those whom they allow to study it, monitoring and regulating the distribution of arcane knowledge and information, and training those they think have a high potential for arcane might. Their oversight of arcane magic began almost 300 years ago when the Emperor Song put down a rebellion of especially powerful mystics. Initially, he outlawed all arcane magic but his priests convinced him that this would be unwise, that it would be better to control it for their own purposes rather than wipe it out altogether; otherwise, outsiders would have clear advantage over them in their ongoing wars against the Yuan-Ti species. Song relented and awarded to the Ministry a monopoly on magic. While one might think this would hinder spellcasters, the Ministry has instead made them frightfully good at what they do. Those permitted by it possess an unswerving fealty to the throne that many critics of the system decry as brainwashing. Those protestations, however, fall on deaf ears within the imperial court. As long as the court does not have to fear another mage rebellion, and their mages are unrivaled anywhere, then they are content, critics be damned. It must be noted that eunuchs are forbidden by law to practice any form of magic, a crime punishable by immediate death if caught. The Empress is considered the head of the Ministry; she is the supreme Yuan-Ti priestess and the voice of their gods. In due course, if she proves herself worthy, then she will also become one.

The War Banners are the collective armed might of the Empire, ruled over by nine banner lords who report directly to the Empress. While she doesn't really bother herself with the daily operations of the army, she is nonetheless their supreme commander, her word overriding everyone else's in the chain of command. For the most part, she places her absolute trust in her banner lords, their decisions and the men they have under them. Only one time since taking the throne has she had one stripped of his privileges and fed to the penitents, suspecting him of colluding with the ash-skinned to overthrow her.

The other body of which she is the titular head is the Directorate of Nests. It is responsible for the welfare of the Yuan-Ti species and manages the imperial crèches found in every significant settlement, outpost and city. It has been well known for centuries that they, as a species, are extremely fragile. Therefore, the Directorate, one of the oldest imperial bodies, was founded to keep the species strong by any means necessary, such as arranging marriages that would result in stronger young, requiring that Yuan-Ti children be raised in the crèches until they are healthy enough to survive on their own, and punishing those who knowingly endanger the species, just to name a few of its responsibilities. Of all the imperial bodies, it is the one that



has seen the least reform, mainly because it works quite well the way it is. The Empress takes her consorts and concubines from the Yuan-Ti males selected by the Directorate. Caring for the children of their sovereign is, above all else, their number one duty. The Directorate also selects and trains eunuchs, although once the eunuchs graduate into the Office of Palace Attendants they no longer take responsibility for them.

Finally, some mention should be made of the factions and their role in the court. In recent years, both the fire and water factions have garnered equal representation in the Empress' inner circle. Some say she has deliberately allowed this, drawing her enemies in close to her so that she can keep them under her thumb. Others say that she has become enticed by what both sides can offer her, and that she is being pulled back and forth in an ideological tug-of-war. Both factions have gained considerable clout in the Empire over the last few decades, so alienating one could likely result in strife and civil war. To all appearances, she has managed to deftly juggle the two factions, allowing neither side to gain the upper hand or the better of her. No one knows exactly what game she is playing, not even the faction leaders, but everyone is fairly certain they will soon find out. As she redoubles the Empire's efforts to subvert and conquer the human kingdoms, the factions are preparing the battalions sympathetic to them to turn on her, their leaders even going so far as to select their candidates for the throne in anticipation of its imminent vacancy.

AN ARISTOC-RACY OF MERIT

Unlike most feudal societies, the Yuan-Ti do not restrict people of one social class from moving to another. In fact, it is actively encouraged. They believe that it is only through personal merit that an individual succeeds, and when an individual succeeds the Empire ultimately benefits. In 1590 (Yuan-Ti calendar), the dying Emperor Dao Ming appointed as his heir the one person in the Empire he thought most worthy of the position. He chose a renowned scholar from a distant Yuan-Ti colony who had, many times in the past, refused various high-ranking, high-paying posts in the capital because he felt that his duty required him to stay in the provinces. The man, named An Lo, steadfastly refused Dao Ming's initial offers, claiming he was unworthy of such an honour, but after receiving a private letter from the emperor, he finally

relented. The content of the letter remains a mystery to this day; suffice to say it had its desired effect on An. Despite the vocal protestations of the Grand Councillors, he soon became the Emperor Tan Xiu. Within a year, he instituted widespread social and bureaucratic reform, culminating in the annual examination system, an idea he adopted from one of the northern human kingdoms with whom they were perpetually at war. Regardless of social background, a citizen could participate in the exams with the hope of proving himself worthy of a higher post. It opened the doors to the highest posts in the Empire to the best candidates. In addition, once accepted into the bureaucracy, anyone could eventually be promoted to any position if they merited it. In no time at all, the Empire thrived with efficiency. The nobility raised few objections because their pensions and titles were still secure, but the Palace Attendants came to realize that the newly created bureaucracy would be the bane of their existence. The Grand Councillors, as the highest-ranking bureaucrats were known, threatened the eunuchs' previously implacable grip on the throne. The Grand Councillors similarly realised the threat of the eunuchs. Since then, the political skulduggery between the two groups has been non-stop, at times breaking out into open conflict as members from one group engage in vicious assassination attempts as a means to secure power, and the members of the other group naturally retaliate.



By the Empress Wu's time, the bureaucracy has become a monolithic, plodding machine teeming with subterfuge. The population of the Empire is larger than ever, and the myriad ministries, directorates, offices and bureaus have become so convoluted that many wonder if the entire system is beginning to break down after all these centuries. Magistrates from the outlying provinces or even more distant colonies cannot get the supplies, troops or medicines they need to keep their communities going; the imperial mail system, once the pride of the Yuan-Ti, is cracking under the strain of the constant flow of paperwork coming into and going out of the capital; and corruption has become the norm rather than the exception. Increasingly, young, impatient Yuan-Ti hungry for prestige and influence are bribing their way through the exams, or bypassing them altogether and simply purchasing the posts they desire. The imperial clans, long aware of their vestigial status, are some of the primary culprits behind this corruption, using the bureaucracy that originally excluded them as a means for their own ends. Then there is the army - at least three of the nine banner lords have completely abandoned the old operational system and have instituted their own methods for getting things done. In an odd show of unity, both the Grand Councillors and the leading Palace Attendants have encouraged the Empress to put a stop to this egregious display of independence, warning her that if they gain too much free reign, they could turn on her at a moment's notice and depose her.

Yuan-Ti who are deeply entrenched in the imperial bureaucracy may take the Skill Focus feat every 4 levels as a bonus feat. They may not take this multiple times for the same skill. As soon as the character leaves the bureaucracy, then he no longer receives this bonus.

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

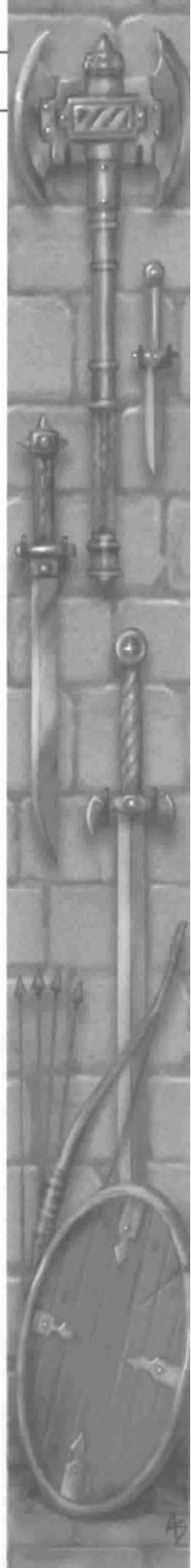
Unlike the humans they constantly war against, the Yuan-Ti never originally had gods of their own. Even the White Snake Maiden, whose avatar has appeared twice in the existence of the species, is not a goddess. They do not know what she is, only that she is a mysterious force to be reckoned with and that she loves her children unconditionally. Unfortunately, she seems powerless to help them in their efforts to rid themselves of human oppression. The first time she appeared was the night after the Faith Plague, when she revealed herself to the Emperor Gao Shan in his dreams. She taught him many things that night, but the two most important were the Way of the Scale and the Four Great Rituals, including the most sacred, the Ritual of Shedding.

The Way of the Scale, called *lin dao* in their language, teaches that life, death and everything in between are dictated by the principle of transformation. The universe at large has been in a constant state of flux from the first, primordial moments it came into being. Everything changes, from second-to-second, day-to-day, month-to-

month, year-to-year. Water changes to ice when it becomes cold, to steam when hot; wood changes to air (smoke) and earth (ash) when it is burned; the air turns plants and animals to dust when they die, or becomes part of their lifeblood while they live; and so on, *ad infinitum*. Change, transformation, metamorphosis, regardless of the name applied to it, is the most important constant. However, there is a second principle in *lin dao*: that of balance, which often takes a significantly secondary role in the religion. Without balance, the universe becomes pure chaos, an uninhabitable, hostile place that destroys more than it creates. The agency of balance regulates the ebb and flow of transformation.

The Yuan-Ti see themselves as the epitome of the principle of transformation due to their special physiology, their ability to migrate between human and serpent forms. The principle of balance is also well represented in them, with their halfbloods trapped in a perpetual state of in-between, their purebloods tipping the balance in favor of their human heritage, and the abominations doing the same for the Yuan-Ti's serpent heritage. The Way of the Scale teaches that the species as a whole represents the next stage in life, a step above mere humans and animals. While their ancestral parents initiated the transformation by mating with one another, they do not expect that a new species of Yuan-Ti will someday arise out of their own: Adherents to the Way of the Scale believe quite firmly that the next evolution occurs during death as their souls cross from this existence to the next.

The Four Great Rituals are the means by which this change is effected, the final gift from the White Snake Maiden to her children. Performed in order, they allow a Yuan-Ti's soul to become stronger, to become better prepared for the trials and tribulations of the next world. The First Great Ritual is given when a Yuan-Ti child is ready to leave the crèche. It is called the Ritual of Becoming and represents the child's emergence into Yuan-Ti society, the change from being a non-entity to becoming a real person—because so many children die before they leave the crèche, it is very difficult for adult Yuan-Ti to regard them as distinct individuals, willing only to invest themselves emotionally when a child's survival is assured. The first ritual also fully awakens their innate psionic and magical talents. The Second Great Ritual, called the Ritual of Union, is performed when two or more Yuan-Ti become life-mates, symbolizing the emotional, social and biological change one undergoes in order to raise a family. This ritual creates a significant spiritual bond between them, one that is so potent that few Yuan-Ti can actually survive it. As a result, the ritual is not performed all that frequently. Instead, a different, less dangerous one is used for common marriages and unions - it is widely believed that those who do not undergo the second ritual cannot possibly transmigrate upon death, and that they are reborn as Yuan-Ti in their next life. The Ritual of Rebirth, the Third Great Ritual, is performed while a Yuan-Ti lies dying. The priests performing the ritual guide the soul through the last stages of death and into the afterlife. If that Yuan-Ti is found to be worthy, it is reborn as a spiritual creature called a *tian huo*, a celestial flame,



beginning the process of transformation all over again in a new world that is just as complex and enduring as this one, but one that exists on a higher spiritual plane. Eventually, ultimately, and hopefully, it may become a god, though so far as anyone knows this has never happened (all the known Yuan-Ti gods come from past emperors and empresses.) If the Yuan-Ti is found completely unworthy, then its soul is reborn back into this world as either a snake or a human; in other words as a lesser creature. This is punishment for the sins it committed in life that make it incapable of being born again as a Yuan-Ti until such a time that it has atoned. The final ritual, the Ritual of Shedding, is reserved only for an Emperor or Empress. If the sovereign proves to be an exceptionally worthy soul, this ritual aids the soul in shedding its mortal skin, bypassing the next stage of existence to become a young, new deity in the Yuan-Ti pantheon. This is the highest honour a person can receive in their society, representing the pinnacle of transformation. In all their history, this ritual has been successfully performed only five times.

There are five known Yuan-Ti gods, all, at one time, either Emperors or Empresses of the Yuan-Ti who underwent the Ritual of Shedding before dying. They are, in order of ascension, as follows: **Dai Sun**, who was the ruthless Emperor Dai Zhan and the first to undergo the ritual, the god of war and the enemy of all human kind; **Yi Mi**, the god of knowledge and law, formerly the Emperor Tan Xiu; **Mei Guan**, who arose from the Empress Huang Mei to become the goddess of mercy; **Xing Long**, the star dragon, the goddess of serpents, who was the Emperor Wei Chen (she spent her life hiding her true gender, which only became apparent at her death); and finally, **Yen Wang**, the king of hell, who was the notoriously wicked Emperor Luo Bing.



Not all of them were good, but they were all considered worthy, and that, more than anything else, is what the Yuan-Ti value. Although the priests today will not comment on it, much less admit they know anything about it, the one Emperor who wasn't worthy of deification but nevertheless underwent the Ritual came to a very, very bad end. Before the Empress Wu took the throne, her father, the Emperor Tai Dun successfully underwent the ritual, but it will be some time before he makes his presence known as newly-ascended gods or goddesses usually reveal themselves after two or three generations have passed. That may be why the Empress Wu feels she can get away with dishonouring his memory to the extent that she does.

Dai Sun: Dominion, Strength and War - Lawful Evil

Dominion Domain Spells: 1. *Command* 2. *Enthrall* 3. *Suggestion* 4. *Status* 5. *Greater Command* 6. *Banishment* 7. *Mass Suggestion* 8. *Greater Planar Ally* 9. *Miracle*

Granted Power: The cleric gains a *regal aura*, which gives him a +1 to his Charisma modifier.

Strength Domain Spells: 1. *Endure Elements* 2. *Bull's Strength* 3. *Keen Edge* 4. *Divine Power* 5. *Righteous Might* 6. *Telekinesis* 7. *Tenser's Transformation* 8. *Iron Body* 9. *Bigby's Crushing Hand*

Granted Power: The cleric gains *solar majesty*, which gives him a +1 to his Strength modifier.

War Domain Spells: 1. *True Strike* 2. *Aid* 3. *Magic Vestment* 4. *Greater Magic Weapon* 5. *Passwall* 6. *Blade Barrier* 7. *Blasphemy* 8. *Unholy Aura* 9. *Summon Monster IX*

Granted Power: If the cleric does not already have it, he gains the Martial Weapon Proficiency feat and the Weapon Focus feat for Dai Sun's favoured weapon, a kind of half spear called a *pu dao*.

Yi Mi: Knowledge, Justice and Magic - Lawful Neutral

Knowledge Domain Spells: 1. *Comprehend Languages* 2. *Detect Thoughts* 3. *Locate Object* 4. *Divination* 5. *Commune* 6. *Legend Lore* 7. *Greater Scrying* 8. *Discern Location* 9. *Foresight*

Granted Power: The cleric gains *uncommon genius*, which gives him a +1 to his Intelligence modifier.

Justice Domain Spells: 1. *Sanctuary* 2. *Zone of Truth* 3. *Speak with Dead* 4. *Discern Lies* 5. *Mark of Justice* 6. *True Seeing* 7. *Vision* 8. *Trap the Soul* 9. *Time Stop*

Granted Power: The cleric gains a *just mind*, allowing him to cast justice domain spells at +2 caster level.

Magic Domain Spells: 1. *Identify* 2. *Arcane Lock* 3. *Dispell Magic* 4. *Imbue with Spell Ability* 5. *Spell Resistance* 6. *Analyze Dweomer* 7. *Spell Turning* 8. *Mind Blank* 9. *Teleportation Circle*

Granted Power: The cleric gains the Spell Focus feat for free. He can choose one school of magic to focus on (or, if he's already got the feat, he can choose another school).

Mei Guan: Healing, Luck and Protection - Neutral Good

Healing Domain Spells: 1. *Cure Light Wounds* 2. *Cure Moderate Wounds* 3. *Cure Serious Wounds* 4. *Cure Critical Wounds* 5. *Healing Circle* 6. *Heal* 7. *Regenerate* 8. *Mass Heal* 9. *True Resurrection*

Granted Power: The cleric gains *self-sacrifice*, allowing him to exchange his own hit points to heal another character by a corresponding amount. He may do this a number of times per day equal to half of his class level, with a minimum of 1.

Luck Domain Spells: 1. *Doom* 2. *Aid* 3. *Prayer* 4. *Bestow Curse* 5. *Break Enchantment* 6. *Mislead* 7. *Limited Wish* 8. *Sympathy* 9. *Miracle*

Granted Power: The cleric gains a *luck pool* equal to half of his level, with a minimum of 1. He may use this pool to adjust die rolls, spending at least one point from the pool to make a one-point adjustment, or he may spend more points, up to a maximum equal to his luck pool total, to make larger adjustments. For example, a 7th level cleric has a luck pool of 3 points. During combat, he may alter another character's attack roll by up to 3 points - if a character rolls a 19, the priest can reduce it to 16, or increase it by the same amount to 22. The luck pool refreshes after the cleric has had eight hours of rest.

Protection Domain Spells: 1. *Shield of Faith* 2. *Shield Other* 3. *Protection from Elements* 4. *Spell Immunity* 5. *Spell Resistance* 6. *Globe of Invulnerability* 7. *Spell Turning* 8. *Holy Aura* 9. *Prismatic Sphere*

Granted Power: The cleric gains *shield cohort*, allowing him to imbue other characters with a temporary damage reduction by sacrificing his own life energy. The damage reduction value is equal to the number of hit points he burns to imbue the other character with the ability, and lasts for a number of rounds equal to half of his level, with a minimum of 1.

Xing Long: Chaos, Nature and Renewal - Chaotic Neutral

Chaos Domain Spells: 1. *Entropic Shield* 2. *Undetectable Alignment* 3. *Gust of Wind* 4. *Chaos Hammer* 5. *Insect Plague* 6. *Animate Objects* 7. *Word of Chaos* 8. *Cloak of Chaos* 9. *Implosion*

Granted Power: The cleric gains a *chaotic mind*, allowing her to cast chaos domain spells at +2 caster level.

Nature Domain Spells: 1. *Detect Animals or Plants* 2. *Speak with Animals* 3. *Speak with Plants* 4. *Control Plants* 5. *Commune with Nature* 6. *Stone Tell* 7. *Control Weather* 8. *Command Plants* 9. *Shapechange*

Granted Power: The cleric gains *nature's grace*, giving him the equivalent of the Extend Spell feat for all nature domain spells. Spells affected by this power do not require a higher spell slot.

Renewal Domain Spells: 1. *Goodberry* 2. *Consecrate* 3. *Desecrate* 4. *Restoration* 5. *Atonement* 6. *Heroes' Feast* 7. *Greater Restoration* 8. *Earthquake* 9. *Meteor Swarm*

Granted Power: The cleric gains *heart of renewal*, giving him the equivalent of the Maximize Spell feat for all renewal domain spells. Spells affected by heart of renewal do not require a higher spell slot.

Yen Wang: Death, Destruction and Tyranny—Chaotic Evil

Death Domain Spells: 1. *Deathwatch* 2. *Death Knell* 3. *Inflict Serious Wounds* 4. *Death Ward* 5. *Slay Living* 6. *Circle of Death* 7. *Finger of Death* 8. *Unholy Aura* 9. *Wail of the Banshee*

Granted Power: The cleric gains *hellsmite*. Creatures and characters killed by him may not be resurrected, reincarnated or in any other way brought back from the dead short of a *miracle* spell.

Destruction Domain Spells: 1. *Burning Hands* 2. *Shatter* 3. *Fireball* 4. *Ice Storm* 5. *Flame Strike* 6. *Disintegrate* 7. *Destruction* 8. *Incendiary Cloud* 9. *Storm of Vengeance*

Granted Power: The cleric gains *weaken structure*, allowing him to reduce a structure's total hit points by 2 per level and its hardness by 1 per level. He may use this ability a number of times per day equal to half of his level, with a minimum of 1.

Tyranny Domain Spells: 1. *Bane* 2. *Hold Person* 3. *Magic Circle against Good* 4. *Shout* 5. *Dominate Person* 6. *Forbiddance* 7. *Forcecage* 8. *Binding* 9. *Energy Drain*

Granted Power: When the cleric uses mind-affecting spells against others, the DC to resist increases by a number of points equal to half of his level in the class, with a minimum of 1.

EVERYDAY LIFE

For most Yuan-Ti, everyday life is rather unexceptional. Like the people in most societies, they spend their time just getting by and come from all walks of life. They are merchants, bureaucrats, mothers, fathers, soldiers and citizens. Their concerns are not usually on the larger issues that dominate the imperial court, but instead on their own lives, their own wants and desires. Most live day-to-day, hoping to earn enough coin to make an adequate life for themselves. As more and more of the fire faction Yuan-Ti return to the cities and villages of the Empire, those who identify with the water faction foster an increasing resentment toward them. Recently, there is a considerable amount of segregation and discrimination against those from opposing factions, with parts of some cities closing their gates off entirely to their members. Unfortunately, the Empress has done nothing to discourage this.

Art and literature have played pivotal roles in Yuan-Ti society, and as such are held in very high esteem. There are even specific ministries created expressly to foster the development of the arts. In fact, more booksellers, scroll weavers and art dealers probably exist in any given city than rice merchants and night market hawkers. Ink stones are imported from exotic lands most Yuan-Ti have never heard

of; brushes are made with the hair of creatures that only exist in their wildest imaginations; and paper-making, which originated with the human kingdoms, is an art unto itself. The ability to paint well or compose poignant poetry is a true mark of the gentry. On the other hand, crafts are considered the commoner's province, though they may also be highly appreciated or sought after. Yuan-Ti take great pride in their artistic endeavours; those that meet 'official standards' are marked with the seal of the approving party. In some instances, particularly well-renowned works have made it as far as the Empress and bear her personal seal. These mandated works of art are some of the Empire's most prized treasures.

Rising out of the detritus of a failed rebellion almost 200 years earlier are two powerful Yuan-Ti movements, or 'factions', called the *huo jiao* ('fire teaching') and the *shui jiao* ('water teaching'). At first, they began as secret societies dedicated to specific principles of the Way of the Scale. The fire faction favors change, sometimes drastic or radical change taking the principle of transformation as taught by The Way of the Scale to an extreme sometimes. They have no patience with the sluggish, hopelessly labyrinthine imperial bureaucracy, its inherent corruption, and the endless backstabbing that it engenders. The faction members, colloquially called *huo lin* (or 'followers of the fire teaching'), constantly seek reform, and in recent years have engaged in a covert guerilla war against those who disagree with them, namely the Yuan-Ti who subscribe to the philosophy of the water faction. The water faction,

whose members are called *shui lin* ('followers of the water teaching'), favours the principle of balance. Water, in all its incarnations, is essentially always the same. It is static, unchanging and is the balance against the chaos of fire, which is never the same from one instant to the next. They are not opposed to transformation *per se* but they are opposed to unchecked transformation. Unbridled chaos is, in their minds, more dangerous than resolute stagnation. In fact, they realise that true stasis is impossible to achieve, and so the *shui lin* make no pretensions of aspiring to it. All they seek is balance, but unfortunately for their society the *huo lin* seek just the opposite. For every move the fire faction makes, the water faction has a counter-move. The fire faction often resorts to brute force, while the water faction is subtler, more subdued and definitely more clandestine, blending into the landscape like a river blends around a mountain. The factions are so pervasive nowadays that most Yuan-Ti pay lip service to one or the other at the very least (or even both, sometimes). Maybe one in ten has a commitment to one faction's philosophy; of that number one-third might be violently zealous.

The common language spoken by the Yuan-Ti is indeed the common tongue of the region from which they originate. If using a Middle Kingdom type of country as their homeland, then the common language is *guo yu*, meaning 'national language'. This is used in official correspondence and documentation, and comes from a single ethnic dialect, usually that of the ruling family. The Yuan-Ti speak a version of *guo yu* that is ancient and archaic by the standards of the humans living in the same region as they do, stemming as it does from an obscure, long-dead dialect called *meng yu*, after the Meng people of their ancestral father. They also sometimes speak a language that originates with their ancestral mother's people, the snake fairies, called *jing hua*, or 'fairy speak'.

IMPERIAL SLAVES

The Empire is not one built upon the sweat and blood of the subjugated – Yuan-Ti pride wouldn't stand for it, and hating their enemies as much as they do, they normally do not let them live long once they have been captured. Nonetheless, slaves do exist in their society. Many are Yuan-Ti criminals sentenced to slavery as punishment (not so much for committing the crime, as it were, but rather for getting caught); others might be the prisoners of war that were taken alive because they were valuable, either as hostages or as sources of information. In some outposts, slaves from lizardfolk, human or demi-human stock are a necessity because the soldiers manning them cannot afford the time required to farm the fields or fish the rivers for themselves, for example.

Yuan-Ti slaves bear mystic brands that have a permanent *geas* spell embedded within them that prevents them from escaping or doing harm to their wardens. Because of this, most are given free reign in the cities and towns to do as they please just so long as they carry out their mandated duties first. Human slaves are similarly branded but their marks are different in that their heat signatures are altered in such a way that a Yuan-Ti looking at them with the Heat



THE ART OF WAR

The Yuan-Ti are a unique breed of warriors. Their martial skill has developed over the years as a result of the environment they dwell in, the socio-political structure they live by and the ever-present, underlying amalgamation of their human and serpent fairy blood. Steeped in tradition and hierarchy, like nearly every other aspect of Yuan-Ti life, warfare actually exists in a strangely half-respected state. Bureaucracy, endless documentation and political machinations are the preferred tools of most Yuan-Ti but the warrior shuns this, the warrior casts this aside, the warrior has a job and wants to get it accomplished. This is the primary reason why the warrior caste is seen by the rest of the race as a necessary evil. They occupy the lowest rung on the ladder of Yuan-Ti life, but since they accomplish a job for which even the bureaucracy recognizes the need, they are tolerated. However, their status is also misleading. While they are regarded as social pariahs, they also command a great deal of begrudging respect from the citizenry and the aristocracy. As the empress's left hand, they may be the worst sort of undesirable, but they also complete the Empire; without them it would probably crumble and die overnight.

While this conflicting perception of them has led the warriors to be shunned by nearly every other part of Yuan-Ti society, the soldiers actually prefer it this way. Criminals, asylum seekers and those with no hope of advancement in a normal life are the mettle that make up the Yuan-Ti military. Of all the facets of Yuan-Ti life, the military is the one in which anyone can advance on the strength of merit *alone*. It is true that the bureaucracy would love the Empire's citizens to believe that they can get anywhere in society on merit, but most people know without a shadow of a doubt that the infinite, infamous bureaucratic red tape is easily capable of delaying – indefinitely, if necessary – a person's chances of success. Compounding this is the many layered face game, where exchanging vapid social pleasantries, gifts, bribes and favours does more to ensure rapid promotion than earning it through diligent work. Of course the military has its share of politics and squabbling, especially amongst the higher ranks, but at the end of the day all that really, truly matters is whether the job got done, who did it, and how well they did it. Practical accomplishment, prowess and ability are the fundamental ideals for which the military stands, ideals that can be quite brutal as the weak, the inefficient, the lazy and the undisciplined are weeded out by the most extreme measures imaginable.

As jungle dwellers the Yuan-Ti are not apt to wage large-scale warfare, at least not to the extent of other cultures (this, however, in no way means that they are incapable of operating in conventional warfare – it just is not preferred.) Instead, they are more prone to engaging in the tactics of guerilla warfare.

They are skirmish fighters, extremely patient warriors with an uncanny silence and awareness unmatched by any other warrior. One thing that sets them apart from their human adversaries is that they are willing to wait in the darkened depths of their jungle canopies for years, decades even, before striking at the heart of an enemy. When they do, it is with such alarming alacrity that the enemy forces are vanquished before they even realised they were at war.

If drawn into conventional warfare, then they are more than capable of arranging large-scale cavalry operations to bolster their troops and to battle their human adversaries on an equal footing, as it were, using giant lizards or trained dinosaurs as their primary means of mobility and assault. Cavalry units normally represent a small fraction of the army and exist in their own specialised units – in fact, at least one *yung* (or battalion) in each of the nine war banners is devoted exclusively to cavalry operations.



A WARRIOR'S WEAPONS

In their mastery of the art of war, the Yuan-Ti have become quite devious with their weapons, designing them not so much to outright kill enemies but rather to seriously wound or cripple them. This forces the wounded enemy's comrades to stop and care for him (especially in the case of humans, most of whom are soft with this kind of compassion for their comrades). Once an enemy unit has been hobbled, then the Yuan-Ti strike, emerging out of the jungle to decimate them and land the *coup de grace*.

Booby Traps: These weapons are designed for one-time use and to do as much damage as possible in the process. They are most effective in either strategic defense positions or to supplement a hit-and-run operation. Booby traps come in all shapes and sizes, from the magical to the mundane, and the Yuan-Ti have an infinite variety of them. It is said that many generals actively recruit human criminals to teach their soldiers the most effective ways to use such weapons against the human enemy, enticing them with pledges of great wealth in return. Somewhat ironically, the generals almost always make good on their promises: Infiltrating human cities becomes so much easier when the criminal element is on their side, and keeping their word goes a long way toward facilitating this.

Lacquered Armour



Xing Lin (Star Scale)



YU GOU (Fish Hook)



New Weapon: Yu Gou (Fish Hook)

Category: Exotic Weapons - Melee

Size: Medium

Cost: 40 gp

Damage: 1d8/3d8*

Critical: x3

Range Increment: 10 ft.

Weight: 18 lb.

Type: Piercing

This is a favourite weapon of troops who frequently participate in hit-and-run missions, used mostly in pursuit of a fleeing enemy. It is a secondary weapon and never used in hand-to-hand combat, consisting of an extremely thin, durable chain approximately 20 to 40 feet in length. It has a weight on one end, a circular, weighted joint in the middle, and a long, three-pronged hook, much like a fishing hook, at the other end. Each prong is about 4 inches long. The weapon is an exotic weapon, requiring the Exotic Weapon Proficiency feat in order to use it successfully, and as it is two-handed the user suffers all the penalties as if he were wielding a Medium-size weapon in one hand and a Light weapon in his off-hand. It can be used similarly to many other chain weapons but it is in the jungle where this weapon really shines. It is held coiled in both hands, with the weight distributed evenly and the joint dangling in the middle. The weighted end is sent into an overhanging tree limb or vine in the victim's path, while the hooked end is sent after the intended victim. The joint in the middle allows the two ends of the chain to be spun independent of one another. Two attack rolls are made, each based on the appropriate Armour Class of the targets. If the first is successful, the weighted end snags the tree limb or vine. If the second is successful, the hooked end is embedded in the intended victim's backside, neck or face. The result is that the tree limb or vine anchors the victim and his forward momentum causes an incredible amount of secondary damage. Most of the time, the chain is thrown one end at a time while in pursuit of a victim, but exceptionally skilled users of it have been known to throw both ends simultaneously, almost like a bolo.

*The weapon does 1d8 damage on the round of attack as long as the attack roll with the hook is successful. On the victim's next initiative, the secondary damage is applied as the chain pulls the victim taut against it. Critical damage applies to both damage rolls.

New Magic Weapon: Xing Lin (Star Scale)

Category: Exotic Weapons - Ranged

Size: Tiny

Cost: 13,800 gp

Damage: 1d4*

Critical: x2

Range Increment: 15 ft.

Weight: ½ lb.

Type: Piercing

This is a large, palm-sized scale taken from a giant snake or dinosaur, enchanted to inflict fire damage upon its target. It is thrown like a shuriken; as it spins through the air it glows brightly, alternating colours two or three times while in

flight. Some craftsmen also perforate the scale, which makes it whistle in transit. Any creature struck by one takes damage normally. Additionally, if struck, the target must also make a Fortitude save (DC 14) or take an additional 1d6 points of fire damage. On a critical strike, or if the victim rolls a critical failure (1) for his Fortitude saving throw, then he is also poisoned, taking 1d4 points of fire damage per round for 4 rounds while the fire crawls through his veins toward his heart. On the fourth round, he must make a second Fortitude save (DC 20) as the fire poison reaches its destination. Failure results in 3d6 temporary Constitution damage (there is no secondary damage). A success means he only takes half damage. *Dispel magic* and *neutralize poison* will both prevent the poison damage.

Caster level: 12th; Prerequisites: Craft Magic Arms and Armour, *contagion*, *fireball*. Market Value: 13,800gp.

Armour: Given the hot, entangling elements of the jungle lands in which the Yuan-Ti live, armour is usually an after thought. Most warriors will forgo the use of armour for better mobility, with the infrequent exception of the armour created from shed abomination skins or magical armour designed to confer upon the wearer additional abilities or bonuses. In war, when armies of Yuan-Ti warriors clash with the steel-clad human soldiers they might wear lacquered bamboo armour. Generally, though, metal and hide armours is far too cumbersome and ill-suited to the hot, humid jungle.

New Armour: Lacquered

This armour type is unique to regions where the environment is unbearably hot and humid, preventing warriors from using metal armour for protection in combat. It is made from treated strips of bamboo beautifully lacquered with hard resins, ceramic and fine, light-weight metal wire. It is surprisingly durable when struck and not only affords the wearer a modicum of protections but also mobility, which is critical in the lightning-fast battles that the Yuan-Ti, and soldiers from other jungle cultures, habitually engage in. Often, lacquered armour is decorated with the heraldic symbols of the unit from which the warrior hails, as well as his rank and any other important, personal information. Others may decorate it with horrifying images designed to instill fear in the enemy and weaken his resolve and will during battle.

Lacquered armour possesses the following attributes: Cost 20 gp; Armour Bonus +3; Max Dex Bonus +5; Armour Check Penalty -2; Arcane Spell Failure 20%; Speed 30/20 ft.; Weight: 15 lb.

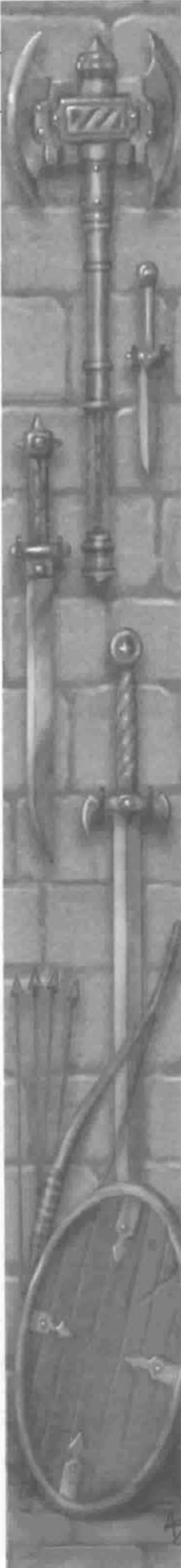
A WARRIOR'S BLOOD

In the jungle, temperatures are most tolerable at night. Therefore, most Yuan-Ti warriors live an exclusively nocturnal lifestyle. A soldier's day begins an hour or two before sunset. If they are not deep-cover infiltrators, then they are awakened from their garrisons, lairs, or homes (depending on both locale and mission type) to perform a

routine that is tedious and uninspiring, but punctuated by the moments of action that are the lifeblood of every warrior. Each warrior is responsible for his own food. He is also responsible for the upkeep of his weapons. Given the self-sufficiency of each unit, whether squad, contingent, or battalion, each unit maintains a joint coffer in which half of all plunder is placed. This coffer is used as a fund for the unit and allows for the purchase of new equipment and food for missions.

Warriors are not paid. They do not receive a stipend, and most of them, having cut all ties from their former lives, do not have savings. Instead, the leader of any given unit is responsible for keeping the coffer fluid. Whereas individual warriors might receive bounty from raids and such, the unit commander, as part of the responsibility of command, will bid for non-critical missions. This bidding starts at the top echelon as missions are issued from the capital and passed down through the chain of command. A Yuan-Ti general may bid for a non-critical mission that the bureaucracy has waiting in the wings, and then it will trickle down to eventually be bid upon by the units that the commander feels will be able to successfully complete the mission and turn a sizeable profit in the process. This creates a chain of military commerce that allows the independent, self-sufficient units to thrive and grow. It also weeds out the weaker and less competent units. Units are allowed to keep 90% of the plunder taken on missions that were bid for; on critical missions, which are assigned and not bid upon, then 80% of the plunder is sent up the chain of command, with each leader taking a small percentage of the take but with the lion's share going into the imperial coffers. Naturally, all sorts of skimming goes on, but most bureaucrats, if kept in the loop by means of bribery, will happily overlook it.

The Yuan-Ti firmly believe that no soldier retires, much of this stemming from the paradoxical socio-political position they hold. However, it is also a result of their sheer practicality: Yuan-Ti warriors are capable of one thing and that is *warfare*. Outside of a military environment, they quickly find themselves in unfamiliar territory, sometimes approaching even the most mundane situation with a life or death gravity. For the hardened Yuan-Ti warrior, there is only life or death and everything in-between is just an obstacle to be conquered and destroyed. As can be imagined, this makes most social situations rather awkward for many of them, especially when trying to get along with those who do not come from a military background. Another problem they have in retiring to civilian life is that the omnipresent bureaucracy refuses to relinquish its power and soldiers pose a potential threat to this power with their relentless do-or-die attitude. So, bureaucrats will often find ways, usually by creating great reams of so-called red tape, to keep a soldier past his prime in the field. Most soldiers realise this, and are therefore resigned to dying on the field of battle one day rather than in the comfort of home.



ROLE-PLAYING

First and foremost, the Yuan-Ti hate humans. Since the time their ancestral mother and father consummated their sacred union to give birth to the four original Yuan-Ti progenitors, humans have relentlessly persecuted them, and for that their hatred knows no bounds. Four thousand years of conflict between the two species has resulted in this deep, bitter animosity. Initially, the Yuan-Ti were more confused than angry at the humans, unable to understand why they (and often all the other humanoid species) reviled them so much. The humans, driven by fear of the unknown, by an almost instinctual terror of the alien, have done everything in their power to rid the world of the Yuan-Ti, engaging them in two devastating wars, both called the War of Chains. The Yuan-Ti defended themselves, which was to be expected, but also responded by retreating deeper and deeper into the southern jungles in an effort to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the humans. Unfortunately, the humans reproduce faster than rabbits and so continually encroach upon the Empire's borders. The Yuan-Ti no longer care why the humans detest them, because their hatred for humans is already so pervasive, so abiding, so deep-seated that all they really want is for them to go away and die. It's just that simple. Of course, this is something of an over-generalization, and one will always find individuals who don't conform to the stereotypes, but, at the end of the day, most Yuan-Ti consider humans enemies and treat them accordingly.

Yuan-Ti rangers almost always take humans as their racial enemy. The only exception to this is in those remote colonies where humans and Yuan-Ti might actually co-exist semi-peacefully, or in the northlands where there are large populations of ash-skinned Yuan-Ti.

Looking inside the Empire, one finds a society consistently driven by ruthlessness. In fact, their 'morality' is perfectly malleable, changing on a whim to suit an individual's need. What other people would normally consider evil is considered by them to be an insatiable drive to succeed. The end always justifies the means in their culture. Naturally, there are varying degrees of this attitude, with some Yuan-Ti more driven to succeed at all costs than others. Many members of society do not subscribe to this philosophy at all, although they are typically found amongst the infrequent ranks of Mei Guan worshippers. Even scholars, the one group a person might think would be relatively free of this callous belief, do what it takes to score high in the imperial exams or to secure an especially valued post, including resorting to cheating and bribery. At the top of this food chain of social cannibalism is the Empress Wu, perhaps the most calculating sovereign in many a generation. Of all the prominent personages in the Serpent Empire, she exemplifies this selfish philosophy to such an unparalleled degree that most Yuan-Ti, regardless of whether they agree with her motivations or not, admire her deeply.

The Yuan-Ti also harbour substantial enmity toward members of breeds other than their own. There has always

been dislike directed at the abominations, stemming primarily from the fact that they are perceived as decidedly imperfect, being an ugly cross between their parent species. Halfbloods are next in line for almost the same reason. Added to this is the fact that they create more defective babies than either of the other two breeds combined. Their inability to breed with humanoid or serpent outsiders is also seen as a major flaw, making them unable to contribute to the well-being of the species by introducing new blood. Purebloods, being the closest to the ideal of White Snake Maiden (almost perfect human form, almost perfect snake form), unsurprisingly hold themselves in higher regard than the other breeds. That they are the most numerous of the Yuan-Ti also helps, giving them the infrastructure to promote their ideology without too much fear of reprisal. As can be expected, both halfbloods and abominations resent the purebloods, the halfbloods more so since they tend to find a strange sort of acceptance from the abominations. Strangely, abominations tend to be surprisingly serene despite the social stigma attached to them. They, more than the other two breeds, find themselves ideally suited to the priesthood because of this harmonious outlook on life.

Finally, there is the issue of *guan xi*, or 'relationships'. This is one of the most important aspects of Yuan-Ti society. In a community that is as closely knit as theirs, an individual's relationships with those around him are critical to his social well-being and standing. The idea of 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours' succinctly sums up the concept of *guan xi*, but not necessarily the true depth of it, which tends to be vast and subtle. It is 'played' like a game of chess, where moves are planned well in advance of their fruition.

LAW AND CHAOS

For many, the distinction between Law and Chaos is a clear one, but not so with the Yuan-Ti. Superficially, their entire society is structured around the imperial bureaucracy and their religion, a hierarchy seemingly set in stone if there ever was one. But, once someone scratches below the surface, their chaotic inner nature becomes evident. They have an insatiable desire to succeed, and as such do not let the hierarchy stop them from doing what they will, circumnavigating it with a finesse stemming from four thousands years of practice. In fact, it is the hierarchy's very framework that paradoxically facilitates this behaviour, providing the Yuan-Ti with more opportunities to politick, machinate and manipulate than they would otherwise have. In different circumstances, their society would most likely collapse into smaller, less stable enclaves characterized by petty, internecine warring. It is only through the strength of the imperial clan's will, the domination of all divine and arcane magic by the Ministry of Rituals, and the ambition of the Empress's generals that Yuan-Ti society stays intact – that, and the perceived inviolability of their species' origin. Should any one of those elements weaken irreparably, their society would disintegrate. Fortunately, despite the myriad backstabbing and squabbling that plagues day-to-day life, they have one cause that helps to keep them united: a nearly universal hatred for the humans, who have been hell-bent on the Yuan-Ti's absolute and utter destruction since the species was born.

SCENARIO HOOKS

Presented here are five scenario hooks you can use as the seeds of adventure for your players. They range from the mid-to-high level, and are hopefully flexible enough that they can be run either as one-shots or expanded into full-blown, multi-session adventures. It is not recommended that players lower than 8th level go up against the Yuan-Ti because chances are that they will not survive.

ENEMY MINE

The adventurers stumble upon the aftermath of a terrible battle. It becomes quickly apparent that two small armies met at a crossroads and one was annihilated. However, one soldier remains; an odd-looking humanoid with snake-like eyes and scales on its neck. The soldier is barely alive and tells them a contingent of unaffiliated human mercenaries ambushed his troops while they were escorting critica aid to a besieged city in the west. He begs the adventurers' help to return him to his unit's base, not fifty miles from there, so that he might report the assault and arrange for another shipment.

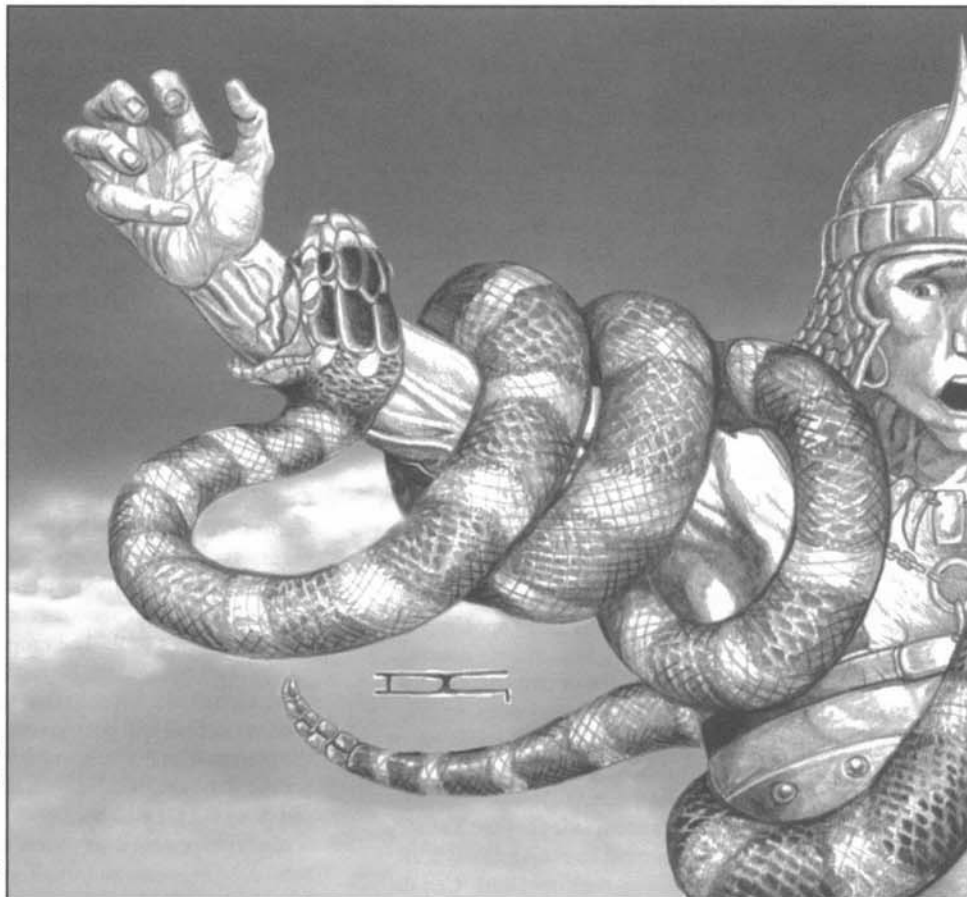
In reality, this is one tactic used by the Yuan-Ti to gauge and retrieve information concerning the local human population. On the way back, the soldier will ask many unassuming questions about the land and its people in the hope of gaining useful intelligence. However, this is a young Yuan-Ti soldier, fresh and fairly green himself. If the adventurers treat him well, without suspicion, he may actually be swayed to sympathize with them by either warning them of the upcoming invasion or asking them to leave him somewhere before the rendezvous with his unit. But, his own commander, who suspects the young Yuan-Ti might not have what it takes, has outwitted the soldier. The rest of unit will be watching the adventurers' every move from the time they meet the

soldier until the time they deem enough information has been gleaned, then they will strike without mercy, killing everyone, including their former comrade.

This adventure hook lends itself readily to the possibilities of opening a long-running campaign based around the Yuan-Ti. If the adventurers do befriend the young Yuan-Ti and successfully fend off his unit, they will have an interesting ally who might offer them more knowledge about the upcoming invasion, thereby preparing the local human population.

THE HEART OF DARKNESS

A region's somewhat infamous oracle, a woman named Hyliata, summons the adventurers to her home one day. She tells them that she has foreseen the awakening of a long-dormant evil and that they are the only ones who can put a stop to it. Should they accept their fate, they must steal an artefact called *The Heart of Darkness* from a secret Yuan-Ti temple to the south. This artefact possesses the power to awaken an evil, brutish creature if used in the proper ritual. By depriving the Yuan-Ti of the device, the adventurers will prevent their priests from summoning the creature, thus saving the region from untold havoc.





The truth is that the oracle is a pureblood Yuan-Ti sorceress in disguise and the artefact is nothing more than a *penitent's stone*, a minor magic item that allows their priests to create an unending supply of penitents for use in the war against the human kingdoms. Hyliaata comes from a rival temple and would like nothing more than to discredit her enemies. Should they lose their *penitent's stone*, the magistrates will summon them back to the capital for punishment and her temple will ultimately gain more status and responsibility.

WAR AND PEACE

A Yuan-Ti enclave in a region far from the heart of the Empire has petitioned the local human lord to open diplomatic channels with them, intent on suing for peace. The two sides agree to mediations on neutral territory. The adventurers are hired to safely escort the lord's appointed representatives, including a pompous, bloodthirsty general known more for his prowess at the dinner table than on the battlefield, to the meeting. Unknown to both sides, splinter factions within each community want to see the negotiations end poorly, preferably in bloodshed. The Yuan-Ti splinter faction works directly for the Empress Wu's senior banner lord while the faction from the human side sees the Yuan-Ti as an insurmountable threat that must be extinguished at all costs, even if that means sacrificing their own lord. Can the

adventurers help steer the enclave toward peace or will either splinter faction approach them to join their cause?

THE SNAKE SKIN BLUES

A Yuan-Ti spy has been discovered impersonating a prominent member of the city council. Angered, the council decides to retaliate by sending spies of its own to infiltrate the nearest known Yuan-Ti enclave, a remote, difficult-to-reach village called Seven Springs. They hire the adventurers to undertake this task, who are asked to get as much information as possible on all Yuan-Ti troop movements, plots and enclave locations and then return to the city. The council members hope to use the information against the snakes, to attack first before they themselves are wiped out. A local wizard uses the dead spy's corpse to create amulets that allow the adventurers to disguise themselves as Yuan-Ti soldiers—they are also given forged transfer papers from the Yuan-Ti capital, many weeks journey from the enclave, affording them time to conduct their spying before word gets back that they are imposters.

The enclave of Seven Springs is small, containing only 80 members: 18 of them are abominations, 50 are purebloods, and 22 are halfbloods. The commander of the enclave is a ruthless halfblood named Bloodsky Irontail. He is a neutral evil, 7th-level Druid whose mission is to eventually destroy the city the adventurers have been hired to aid.

THE LAST GAMBIT

A human mage has discovered the afterlife where White Snake Maiden's soul resides. His sovereign, a king from one of the realms perpetually at war with the Yuan-Ti, hires the adventurers to travel to that plane and destroy her at all costs. He reasons that if she is destroyed it will devastate the collective Yuan-Ti psyche, maybe killing them but at the very least providing a distraction long enough for his armies to invade unhindered, to wipe out the vile serpent folk once and for all. The king offers the adventurers every resource they might require in order to raise an inter-planar army. Cao Yun, Emperor of the ash-skinned Yuan-Ti of the north, learns of this plot from his spies. In an act of desperation, his emissaries reveal themselves to the Serpent Empire's imperial court and offer up a temporary alliance so that they can unite their forces and prevent the annihilation of White Snake Maiden's soul. The Empress Wu accepts. If the adventurers rejected the human king's offer, then her representatives approach them with a similar offer, but their mission instead will be to protect White Snake Maiden from the mercenaries that will inevitably come for her. If they accepted the king's offer, then her generals raise their armies (working for the first time with ash-skinned generals and soldiers) to protect their ancestral mother. Squads of the most elite assassins and small, superbly-trained platoons from the side they reject are sent after the adventurers.

PO JIAN

According to the *Art of War* written by the Emperor Dai Sun before his death and subsequent ascension to godhood, sometimes the best place from which to spy on an enemy is right out in the open beneath his very nose. Such is the purpose of the shadow nest known as Po Jian ('Broken Sword'). It was established in the human capital city almost eight decades ago with one Yuan-Ti infiltrator masquerading as a diplomat from an unknown kingdom far across the sea. In fact, the kingdom is entirely fictional but those whom the members of Po Jian are spying upon have no idea, much less do they care. As long as the 'black ships' (so nicknamed because of the black, waterproofing pitch staining their hulls) arrive on time and their cargo holds are filled with exotic spices, silks and goods, the humans are more than content to accept the ambassador's good will on behalf of his remote king.

Today, Po Jian consists of sixty infiltrators – three 'diplomats,' twenty-seven assorted embassy compound guards, and three subversion squads that have been slowly planted in the city over the last forty years with a total of thirty members between them. The three diplomats are the sub-leaders of the mission, all reporting to an overly-cruel abomination priest named Xie Quan ('Blood Fist'). They are two pureblood females named Jade and Ku Sha ('Weeping Sand') and a pureblood male named White-Eyes. The compound guards are composed of three elite squads that provide military back-up while acting as an integral part of their cover by pretending to be servants and relatives of the diplomats. One of their sergeants, a happy-go-lucky fellow named Gong, is the only other abomination in the nest in addition to Xie Quan. The others are purebloods and halfbloods. Gong stays out of sight of the city's residents, as his squad typically takes the night watch and covert reconnaissance missions. The halfbloods also stay hidden, assigned to their own secret missions that send them deep into the city's extensive, underground network of sewers more often than not. While Xie Quan controls the overall scope of the mission, he leaves its day-to-day management to the diplomats, spending much of his time outside of the city for reasons he keeps to himself.

In short, the shadow nest is to all appearances a well-oiled machine.

THE EMBASSY

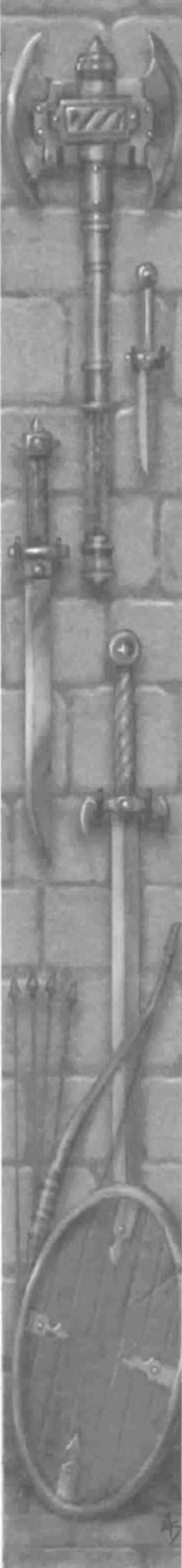
As mentioned above, the embassy was founded nearly eighty years ago when the representative of the king of 'Uppon Nihai' floated into port with an entourage of ten beautifully appointed ships. The city's rulers did not know what to make of him, nor of his claims that the lands he hailed from were many month's journey around the other side of the world, places their own people never even knew existed. Their doubts, however, were dispelled when the representative presented them with a gift of five exotic suits of armour worth almost a million gold pieces total. All he,

and by proxy his king, asked in return was the right to trade and permission to establish a diplomatic mission. With the concessions granted, the Yuan-Ti had irreparably sunk their fangs into the city. The following year, the black ships had begun their bi-annual journey to the city, bringing to market thousands of bolts of raw silk, cases of the purest jade, crates of exotic fireworks, weapons of amazing quality, and other miscellaneous goods.

The embassy building that the city awarded them was once the residence of a famous figure in its history, an honour that the city rulers felt befitted the curious, strange Nihai. It is a massive, three storey manse located in the city's wealthiest ward, bedecked with imposing gargoyles on the corners, stained-glass windows, ornate columns and stonework worthy of the greatest dwarven craftsmen. A narrow yard surrounds the building, as does a high, spiked wall. The main gate is quite sturdy. Sitting nearby is a squat guardhouse built half underground and half above and always manned with at least two guards. Four more guards regularly patrol the grounds, each escorting a trained mastiff capable of ripping the throat of out any mundane intruder. In addition to the guards, there are also numerous mystical wards, alarms and traps placed at strategic locations. To date, these measures have managed to keep out every thief that has ever tried to steal into the embassy compound. At least, the ones they know about. If any thief has ever uncovered their secret, they have yet to reveal it to anyone. (One of those in the local thieves' guild, a taciturn and gruff loner named Madrok Loerin, has made it his personal mission to uncover what he is certain is a grand conspiracy going on behind the closed doors of the compound. So far he's only reached the central grounds before the guards chased him off. He knows something is not right and, despite the fact that no-one else in the thieves' guild believes him, he is determined to find out what it is.)

At the back of the compound are two very large liveryies. One is used as it normally would be - to store horses, feed and carriages; the other is kept locked at all times and is used for the Yuan-Ti's own food supply, which consists mostly of horses and other livestock (so as not to raise suspicion by the sounds coming from it). Occasionally they kidnap street urchins and keep them tied and gagged here as well. A local delicacy that the operatives have become fond of over the years is spiced elf meat, but they don't kidnap elves too often. Eating the locals is a dangerous game, and the three mission leaders actively discourage it.

The first floor of the building contains the public rooms - a foyer, a very well-stocked library for receiving guests of importance, a dining room, a moderately-sized ballroom, a kitchen and food store, a small parlour for intimate conversations, and the ambassador's office. Heavy, exotic tapestries adorn the walls, and similar rugs lay on the floors, keeping the cool breezes that have a habit of sneaking in through the seams to a minimum. Teak and rosewood furniture decorates each room, as do paintings of Uppon Nihai landscapes and historical figures. A grand staircase in the foyer leads to the second floor, as does a narrow, spiral



staircase in the kitchen that goes to a dining room on the second floor. The house chef, a corporal named Liao, is quite skilled at making local foods with which to serve visiting nobility, royalty and other guests of less importance.

The second floor contains the residences of the mission leaders, a foyer, a common room, a small library, a parlour, a private dining room, rooms for the sergeants, and a secure vault where the embassy wealth is stored. As with the first floor, the second is very well-appointed. One odd thing about the second floor is the presence of security gates in the stairwells. The main gates are disguised by tapestries and can be slid into place at a moment's notice to block the second floor entrance from intruders. The staircase in the private dining room has a floor gate, which can be locked in place over the stairs rising up from the first floor. Stairs to the third floor rise out of the foyer, but terminate in a very solid, locked, oak door at the top.

The third floor has no windows whatsoever. Of any place in the house, it is the most 'Yuan-Ti'. It is also the most spartan. As with the first two floors, there is a common room, which the soldiers use for training and keeping up their battle skills, numerous smaller cramped rooms (the soldiers bunk together in threes or fours), a narrow mess hall, and storerooms. There are no doors, and all the entrances are circular in the tradition of their homeland. A ladder ascends to the roof through a normally sealed trap door. The roof is sloped and shingled with lacquered slats, making it difficult for would-be intruders to keep their footing. There are two archer nests up here, which the soldiers use for watching the compound below as well as the streets and buildings surrounding them.

THE SUBVERSION SQUADS

While the thirty operatives constituting the subversion squads file their monthly status reports through Jade, they really answer only to Xie Quan. Her job is to maintain the embassy's public face while the abomination's job is to maintain and support the deep-cover infiltrators. In theory, the subversion squads are unaware of each other's existence. Their members are highly trained in subterfuge and infiltration, each one possessing a unique and detailed alter ego. The public identities of these 'false natives' are cultivated for many years before Xie Quan moves them into their respective squads. In fact, at the heart of the Empire there exists a secret, well-guarded village that he uses as the training ground for these infiltrators. The last test a potential squad member must pass before being graduating into his squad is to spend one year in this village. He knows no one else there, and everyone appears human. Some truly are humans who have joined with the Yuan-Ti. What she doesn't know is who they are; they, similarly, don't know who the Yuan-Ti moles are. The test is to live completely in his public identity for a year without being discovered or arousing suspicions of his true nature. If he succeeds, he is

awarded a position in a squad and moved to the city. If he fails, he is simply executed.

The Litany of the Pen

This entire squad owns and maintains a temple dedicated to the local god of Mercy and was the first to be brought over by Xie Quan. The original temple priests were murdered and replaced by the current doppelgangers one night thirty-eight years earlier. While to all appearances they preach the doctrine of that god, all their magic really comes from Mei Guan, the Yuan-Ti's own goddess of Mercy. As can be expected, of all the subversion squads this one is the least dangerous simply because their faith prevents them from engaging in morally questionable behaviour such as murder or sabotage. Instead, they specialize in information gathering, particularly in learning the local cultures and languages. In addition to the accumulation of information, the squad is slowly but surely subverting the beliefs of the god that they pretend to represent. During sermons or blessings, they might subtly alter an important concept or doctrine to reflect the teachings of Mei Guan more than the other. Over time, human adherents to the faith who worship at their temple will become initiates of Mei Guan in body and soul. When that happens, Xie Quan intends on taking full advantage of them, probably by sending them out to other human cities and opening the doors to infiltration there.

There are eight Yuan-Ti pureblood priests of Mei Guan in this squad. Twenty-two local humans are part of the temple as initiates. Many of them will be fully ordained within the next year or so, at which time Xie Quan will take control of them. Because they have such an overtly public disguise, the Litany of the Pen has the highest potential for discovery. The squad's leader takes extra precautions when accepting humans as initiates and the other members do what they can to draw as little attention as possible to themselves. Yet, priests from temples dedicated to different gods and those priests from other cities who worship the god the Yuan-Ti claim to represent all have their suspicions about the temple. It is rumoured amongst the suspicious that inquisitors from the main temple have been sent to the city to investigate the so-called imposters, but what they do not know is that Xie Quan has already taken care of them en route. Whether more are on the way or not remains to be seen; if they are, then he will deal with them similarly.

The Litany of the Dagger

Where the previous squad focuses on infiltrating the common people of the city, this one is dedicated to working the local thieves' guild. Most of the squad members have covers that place them in the heart of the seediest wards, usually as independent, 'small-time' thieves, cutpurses, smugglers and fences. Like any penny-ante operator in the underworld, the thieves' guild has noticed them and collects weekly 'licensing' and 'protection' fees in return for not murdering them in their shanties. In the twenty years of the Dagger's existence, not one operative has yet been initiated into the thieves' guild – the humans are just too cautious and

paranoid. However, two of the squad have recently garnered enough attention, respect and trust that they could be initiated any day now, thus breaking the trend.

There are six members in this squad, all accomplished rogues and disguise artists. Luckily, they've been able to maintain their covers extremely well and no-one so far suspects that they are not who they claim to be.

The Litany of the Wheel

This is the largest of the three squads, consisting of sixteen infiltrators and founded twenty-five years earlier. Their cover is that of independent merchants and traders. While they are all capable soldiers, mostly rangers, they are also skilled craftsmen. Some are coopers, cobblers and bakers, others are gem cutters and armoursmiths, just to name a few of their chosen professions. Early in the squad's existence, Xie Quan encouraged its members to buy up as much of the property on one of the secondary trade avenues as they could reasonably afford. Today, they own almost the whole street, renting out those properties they cannot use to humans they have been working on subverting for decades. Even though much of the income for the embassy's operation comes from the goods brought on the black ships, the individual squads are solely supported on the income generated by this squad.

While their cover is seemingly watertight, the squad leader inadvertently created a gaping hole in it when his *silver serpent charm* (see below) was stolen. He recovered it in short order, but during that time a mage in the employ of a city councillor learned something of his true identity while purchasing spell components from him. Neither he nor the other members of the squad realise this detection happened.

THE MISSION

The embassy's mission in the capital city is a long-term information gathering one. The current ambassador is the pureblood female Jade (whose cover is that of Todaiwa Umeiko, grand-niece of the current Uppon Nihai emperor) only recently arrived with her two assistants, Ku Sha (as Matsushita Yuko, Umeiko's cousin) and White-Eyes (masquerading as Bondame Zenzo, official representative of the seven Nihai merchant clans). Together they and the infiltration teams before them have spent the last eighty years collecting information on the military might of the city and the kingdom to which it swears fealty, in addition to all other relevant cultural, socio-political and economic information. So far, an invasion is many decades away, if not centuries; when it comes, though, the Yuan-Ti will be better than prepared. One of their long-term goals is also to subvert the rulers of the capital city so that they can use the existing infrastructure to supplement their base of operations with little fear of reprisal from the locals, since they will, in effect, control them. Another short-term goal is to convince the city to send its own diplomats to Uppon Nihai aboard the black ships. This will allow the Yuan-Ti the opportunity to study them in-depth and then send doppelganger agents back in their stead when an

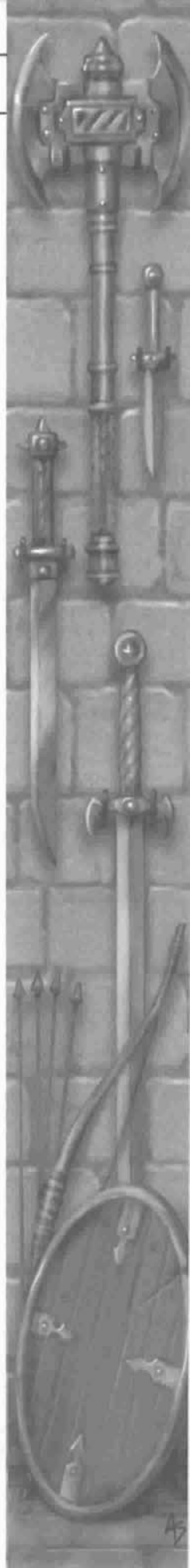
embarrassing 'incident' forces the Nihai to expel the foreign barbarians.

Unbeknownst to Xie Quan, Ku Sha or White-Eyes, Jade has been charged with a secondary mission by the Empress Wu's head eunuch, Yi Sheng - she is to make contact in the city with a man called Samuel Worthing and then follow his instructions to the letter. What she does not know is that he is an ash-skinned agent intent on using her, and her team, to further his own Emperor's nefarious plans.

Of course, Xie Quan has his own plan as well. He has become impatient with just collecting information and really wants to bring the city to its knees. A year ago, he sent a request to his liege lord asking him for five additional squads as part of a preliminary invasion force, but was flatly refused. Naturally, that made him unhappy. He decided that if the Empire wouldn't support him with an army he would just have to raise his own. The time he spends outside the city in the wilderness has been occupied with creating a nest of Yuan-Ti penitents loyal only to him, which he will eventually use as his main unit to attack the city from within.

THE SUBTEXT

As happens so often on long-term infiltration missions, many of the undercover Yuan-Ti have started going native. At least half of the compound purebloods keep part-time residences outside of it, spending considerable amounts of time in the local taverns or with their lovers. They have been stationed at the embassy for the last five years and resent the mission leaders, especially the abomination Xie Quan. While he is generally a 'hands-off' leader, during the times that he deigns to be more proactive and hands-on he becomes like a typhoon trapped in a tea house - uncontrollable, unpredictable and unmerciful. His rage seems to know no limits and everyone is terrified of him, including the three diplomat purebloods. The mission would probably fail due to his mercurial nature were it not for the fact that he appears to be content letting the diplomats run the show. Jade is a competent leader and ruthless in her own right. The soldiers, though, cannot stand her in-so-far as her repeated attempts since arriving in port to rein-in their more banal habits has really rubbed them the wrong way. She is nothing if not a hypocrite, and while she condemns and punishes those whose behaviour she deems questionable, she is not above kidnapping a pretty young boy every two weeks or so and sacrificing him upon a makeshift altar dedicated to the death god Yen Wang. The other female diplomat, Ku Sha, regularly cavorts about town, flitting from one high society party to another as 'Yuko' or visiting the more discerning drinking establishments disguised as a nobleman. Half of the young aristocratic darlings in the city are convinced that she is not only a man, but also that she is smitten with them. The wizard White-Eyes worries them as well because of his obvious obsession with magical power and his equally obvious distaste for the others in the compound. The sergeants, especially, are unhappy with this latest batch of diplomats, and they rarely complain about anything if it is



not pertaining directly to the soldiers beneath them. They are convinced that these three will bring the mission down around everyone's heads. (They don't think highly of Xie Quan, either, but he has been around a lot longer and the have become accustomed to him. They are also too afraid of him to express their doubts even in private amongst themselves.) Gong, whom everyone except for the three new arrivals knows is a spy for a prominent Palace Attendant back home, has already written secret letters to him expressing his doubts that were taken on the last black ship to leave port.

Jade senses the resentment from the soldiers but she does not care, focused as she is on the two missions she has been assigned (both the legitimate one and Yi Sheng's). The one problem she worries about is White-Eyes' apparent obsession with Ku Sha. It began on the long, six-month voyage over and has grown quite serious in recent weeks. He has taken to following her wherever she goes, sometimes confronting her in a jealous rage when he catches her being intimate with any one of her myriad lovers. As such, Jade as assigned him to finding out all information available about the local thieves' guild. Lately, their burglars have been making more frequent incursion attempts against the compound, so she has decided to put an end to it once and for all, one way or another. If that means making a peace overture to them and paying a monthly bribe, then so be it, just so long as they do not interfere with the mission. It also means that should they refuse her considerable generosity, then the embassy soldiers will be sent out to destroy them in as public and vicious a manner as possible, as a warning to the smaller guilds that can inevitably be found waiting in the wings for the big one to fall.

Meanwhile, Ku Sha is plying the aristocrats, switching gender roles as often as other people switch clothes, working both the noblemen and noblewomen under two different aliases. Sometimes she is 'Todaiwa Umeiko's' cousin, other times she is the ranking officer in the compound, a noble warrior named Iishiwa Satoyachi, three-times removed from the Uppon Nihai emperor. She knows that White-Eyes is insanely jealous; in fact, she fosters his jealousy at every available opportunity, more out cat-and-mouse cruelty than anything else. The one thing about her is that she is completely incapable of feeling any emotion, whether it is love, pain, greed or hate. She just will not allow herself to feel, though no-one, not even Jade, knows why. Of course, speculation runs rampant, with the most popular theory being that she was raped by her father as a child and suffered tremendous psychological damage as a result. The soldiers propagate this rumour and she know it. Suffice to say that one day they will get what they deserve.

White-Eyes, despite his juvenile fawning over Ku Sha, is a very talented wizard who was sent on the mission because he made quite a name for himself back in the Empire with his relentless talent for extracting information from unwilling detainees. He relies heavily on the black arts of magic mixed with a healthy dose of unbridled creativity, something he has in abundance. In the months since they

have been on this foreign shore, he has learned a lot about the humans here, more than he lets on to the two women. He plans on leveraging as much information as he can to get what he wants from Jade, the soldiers and even the locals. He has already made an important informant out of a senior member of the city's ruling council, from whom he has learned that at least three of its members suspect the Nihai are not who they say (no big surprise there, really). One has even casually mentioned the word 'Yuan-Ti', though it is still unknown where he learned it. Whether White-Eyes intends to reveal this crucial piece of information to Jade or Ku Sha remains to be seen. Frankly, it would not bother him in the least to see the mission fail – he would be more than happy to blend into the local culture of this land and forget about the Empire entirely.

Finally, there is Xie Quan. Neither the embassy Yuan-Ti or those in the subversion squads really know much about him. He is decidedly vicious at times, usually taking out his anger on whomever or whatever happens to be closest. Fortunately the subversion squads do not have to deal with him all that often. Being as deep undercover as they are keeps them from having much interaction with him beyond picking up their encoded orders from a mutually-agreed upon place. Those in the embassy compound, on the other hand, must work with him whenever he is not off cavorting in the woods doing whatever they think it is that he does there. Thankfully he has been increasingly preoccupied with his secret life outside the city rather than with monitoring the mission, the diplomats or the soldiers. None of the three diplomats really cares what he is up to, just so long as it does not interfere with their work. Plus, they know exactly how clever Xie Quan is and they dare not risk trying to find out, because it would only be a matter of time before he discovered and then killed them. In fact, everyone is pretty sure that this was the fate of the diplomats who were in place before the new ones were assigned to replace them.

USING PO JIAN

This Yuan-Ti shadow nest can be dropped into any standard campaign city by the Games Master, preferably a capital city or one with a major port (or both). If the city you choose does not have a port, then the black ships arrive somewhere else and an escorted caravan brings the goods to the embassy's warehouses in the city. The one fact that should be evident is that Po Jian is not the kind of nest characters want to assault head on, for they will certainly die if they do. Not only is the building heavily fortified and booby-trapped, but so are the compound walls. The Yuan-Ti soldiers are also extremely capable and numerous. The best chance the characters have against the nest is through subterfuge and diplomacy. The Yuan-Ti are very intelligent and cunning, so one must approach them with the utmost care; they are the masters at social intrigue, playing every encounter like one would a game of chess.

Some things to keep in mind when running the Yuan-Ti of Po Jian: If the characters can give them a clear advantage

over, or leverage against, the city council, the aristocracy or the militia, then the Yuan-Ti may try to recruit them to their cause if it looks like the nest is about to be exposed. The city council, on the other hand, will be hard pressed to believe that the Nihai are anything but what they claim without some sort of hard evidence. If the campaign is such that the Yuan-Ti have not been used before (or, at the least, used *extensively*), then the humans will have an even more difficult time accepting that the Nihai, whether they are truly serpent or human or some strange hybrid in between, are as evil as the characters may claim. Three members of the city's nobility have found out about the Yuan-Ti, though they do not seem ready to expose them. After all, the Nihai, regardless of their true identity, bring more money into the city than all their other trade partners combined. That is hardly something to be cast aside lightly.

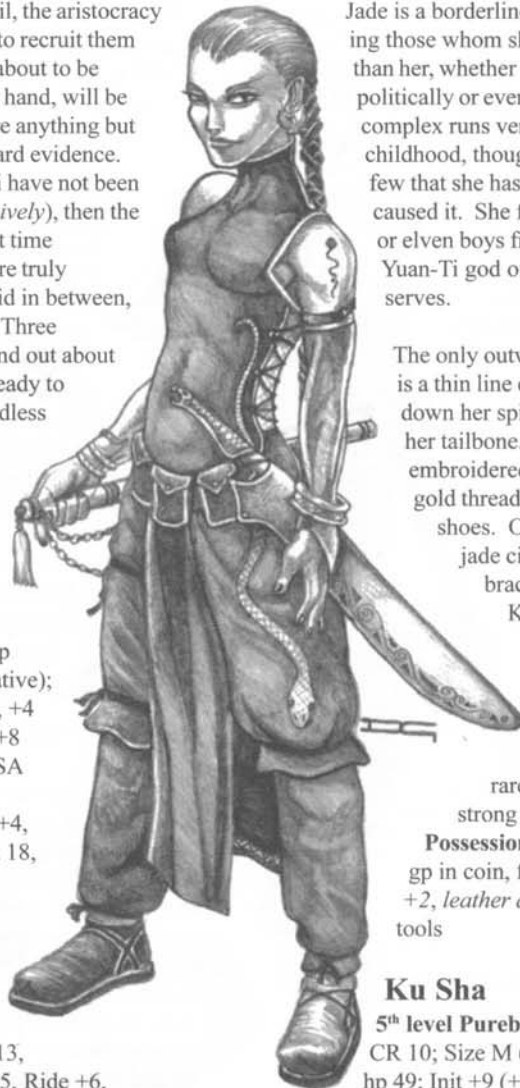
Jade

5th level Pureblood Yuan-Ti Rogue

CR 10; Size M; HD 6d8+6 + 5d6+5; hp 59; Init +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 19 (+4 Dex, +1 Natural, +4 armour); Attack +12/+7 melee, or +13/+8 ranged; Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Spell-Like Abilities, Psionics; SQ Heat Sense, SR 16, Tremor Sense; SV Fort +4, Ref +13, Will +13; AL LE; Str 13, Dex 18, Con 12, Int 26, Wis 24, Cha 18
Skills: Balance +12, Concentration +10, Decipher Script +15, Diplomacy +12, Disguise +16, Escape Artist +12, Hide +12, Intuit Direction +15, Knowledge (culture) +13, Listen +23, Move Silently +14, Open Lock +13, Perform +11, Profession (diplomat) +15, Ride +6, Search +16, Sense Motive +15, Speak Language +3, Spot +23, Use Magic Device +11, Use Rope +5

Languages: Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Giant, Goblin, Halfling, Ignan, Infernal, Orc, Serpent's Cant, Sylvan, Terran, Undercommon

Jade is a very attractive young woman about 25 years of age, with long black hair that hangs to her waist, a pleasant enough smile but eyes that become very, very hard when she lets her guard down or is in the company of 'friends'. She was born in the capital of the Serpent Empire to a wealthy family of imperial clansmen distantly related by blood to the Empress Wu, and closely related to her by finances - her family, the Zhang clan, is one of the wealthiest the Empire has ever seen and their money is able to buy substantial influence amongst the members the imperial court (as well as amongst the Palace Attendants and no small number of Grand Councillors). When a rival family brutally assassinated her father, Zhang Hao, she spent a year of her life wiping out every last one of that family's members. She was recognized for her relentless determination and promptly given a high-salaried post close the court.



Jade is a borderline psychotic. She enjoys murdering those whom she perceives as being stronger than her, whether that means socially, economically, politically or even physically. This inferiority complex runs very deep, stemming from her childhood, though none who know her well (the few that she has let live) can understand what caused it. She frequently kidnaps young human or elven boys from the city to sacrifice to the Yuan-Ti god of hell, Yen Wang, whom she serves.

The only outward sign of her serpent heritage is a thin line of emerald green-scales that runs down her spine from the base of her skull to her tailbone. She favors expensive silk, embroidered tunics, usually maroon with gold thread, matching pants and black, silk shoes. On her left wrist is an expensive jade circlet, on her other wrist is a silver bracelet identical to the ones worn by Ku Sha and White-Eyes, and in her ears she wears gold phoenix earrings with tiny, jade feathers set into them. When she speaks, she chooses her words carefully and deliberately, rarely speaking out of anger or strong emotion.

Possessions: 600 gp worth of jewelry, 120 gp in coin, fine clothes, *silver short sword* +2, *leather armour* +2, masterwork thieves' tools

Ku Sha

5th level Pureblood Yuan-Ti Bard

CR 10; Size M (5 ft., 4 in. tall); HD 6d8 + 5d6; hp 49; Init +9 (+5 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 20 (+5 Dex, +1 Natural, +4 *Leather* +2); Attack +11/+6 melee (*silver katana* +2, d10+2/crit 19-20) or +10/+5 melee (*silver dagger* +1, d4+1/crit 19-20) or +14/+9 ranged; Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Spell-Like Abilities, Psionics; SQ Heat Sense, SR 16, Tremor Sense; SV Fort +3, Ref +14, Will +14; AL NE; Str 11, Dex 20, Con 11, Int 19, Wis 20, Cha 22
Skills: Concentration +9, Craft (instrument-making) +12, Disguise +7, Hide +11, Innuendo +6, Knowledge (culture) +13, Knowledge (religion) +10, Listen +21, Move Silently +6, Perform +11, Pick Pocket +13, Profession (gambler) +12, Sense Motive +11, Sense Motive +11, Speak Language +8, Spot +16, Tumble +13

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Dodge, Expertise, Improved Initiative
Languages: Abyssal, Aquan, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Giant, Goblin, Jing, Meng, Orc, Serpent's Cant, Sylvan, Terran, Undercommon

Ku Sha was born in the provinces to a poor family of livestock herders. Growing up, she would frequently make the arduous twelve-day journey through the dense jungles to

the capital city with her father as he drove the herd of giant lizards there to sell as food. It was on one such journey that she met Jade in a night market and they soon became fast friends. Once a year for the next six years they would meet and catch up on each other's lives. When she turned seventeen, her father gave her his life savings and told her to go to the city to become someone important, to become someone better than a simple herder. She left and within a couple of weeks found herself living in a seedy part of town learning the musical arts from a human slave named Yao. She has always had an affinity for music but it was not until then that she acted upon it. In no time at all she became one of the most renowned poets and entertainers in the city.

She and Jade kept in constant contact while they each made their way in the world. When the other was given a lucrative undercover assignment in a remote human kingdom last year, she invited Ku Sha along, knowing full well that her talent for acting and performance would be a great benefit to the mission. Ku Sha happily accepted and now here she is, on the other side of the world in a land where she can be whomever she wants and no one will be the wiser. On the long sea voyage, she and the wizard White-Eyes had a brief affair, but she ended it when he became too clingy. It takes all her cunning just to keep him away from her, even though some part of her really enjoys tormenting the fool.

Ku Sha was born with pure white hair, which she cuts short to just below her ears and usually wears tied back in a short ponytail. Otherwise, she enjoys sporting a wide variety of wigs, both male and female according to whichever disguise she happens to be adopting at the time. She likes to wear the local fashions of the city's aristocracy more than the traditional Middle Kingdom or Yuan-Ti clothes. The serpent charm she wears out of sight, usually around one of her ankles or her upper arm.

Bard Spells per day: (3/5/3); DC 16+spell level: 0th *detect magic, light, mending, open/close, read magic, resistance*; 1st *feather fall, identify, mage armor, sleep*; 2nd *cure moderate wounds, mirror image, see invisibility*

Possessions: 200 gp, fine clothes, *bag of holding* (bag 2), *silver katana* +2, *leather armour* +2, masterwork recorder-flute, *silver dagger* +1



White-Eyes

4th level Pureblood Yuan-Ti Wizard

CR 9; Size M (5 ft., 8 in. tall); HD 6d8+12 + 4d4+8; hp 64; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+2 Dex, +1 Natural, +2 ring); • +8/+3 melee (*Silver Dagger* +1, d4/crit 19-20), or +10/+5 ranged; Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Spell-Like Abilities, Psionics; SQ Heat Sense, SR 16, Tremor Sense; SV Fort +5, Ref +8, Will +14; AL CE; Str 9, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 26, Wis 21, Cha 17

Skills: Bluff +5, Concentration +15, Forgery +10, Gather Information +12, Hide +8, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (history) +15, Knowledge (nature) +15, Knowledge (religion) +13, Listen +16, Move Silently +2, Perform +5, Pick Pocket +5, Profession (Torturer) +16, Ride +3, Scry +15, Speak Language +1, Spellcraft +15, Spot +16

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Profession – Torturer), Scribe Scroll

Languages: Abyssal, Auran, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Giant, Infernal, Orc, Jing, Serpent's Cant, Sylvan, Undercommon

White-Eyes is so named because of the milky cataracts that cover the pupils and sclera of his eyes, giving him the appearance being blind. In fact he should be but, as a child, his stepfather, a prominent cleric in the Ministry of Rituals, treated him with a spell that would permanently allow him to see like everyone else. Before long he fell in love with the arcane arts, growing up in the expansive, opulent halls of the Ministry building buried deep beneath the ground of the Yuan-Ti capital. To him, magic is the key to everything, literally. With it, he believes no physical, social, philosophical and mystical doorway can remain shut from his prying eyes for very long. Ultimately, he hopes to use it to transcend the world and become a god, for he knows that that the Ritual of Shedding is forever beyond him.

On the way over to this continent, he and Ku Sha had a wild affair but when he caught her admiring her friend Jade in a way above and beyond the call of simple friendship, a sudden jealous rage filled him and he tried to punish her with his magic. She resisted, and then beat him for even thinking about it. She also told him that if he ever tried anything as stupid as that again she would kill him. He does not know why he is unable to let her go emotionally. She drives him crazy, filling him with rage every time he catches her with another lover, flirting with the local nobility or just speaking to a human. Lately, he has been taking his anger out on the humans near the embassy, murdering them in such sick and twisted ways that the city militia fears it might have a blood-crazed vampire on its hands.

Aside from his eerie orbs, White-Eyes look just like a typical Middle Kingdom human. He wears his hair long, tied back in a queue after the manner of some human kingdoms north of the Serpent Empire. For this, the



soldiers are constantly haranguing him. Pretty soon, his resentment for them will reach the boiling point.

Wizard Spells per day: (4/5/4); DC 18+spell level; 0th *arcane mark, dancing lights, daze, detect magic, detect poison, disrupt undead, flare, ghost sound, light, mage hand, mending, open/close, prestidigitation, ray of frost, read magic, resistance*; 1st *burning hands, charm person, identify, magic missile, shield, shocking grasp, sleep*; 2nd *darkvision, ghoul touch, mirror image, rope trick, web*

Possessions: Fine silk robes, *ring of protection* +2, bamboo and parchment spellbook, *silver dagger* +1

Xie Quan

10th level Abomination Yuan-Ti Priest of Dai Sun
CR 17; Size L (7 ft., 11 in. tall); HD 9d8+36 + 10d8+40; hp 168; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 26 (+2 Dex, -1 Size, +10 Natural, +5 lacquered armour); Attack +22/+17/+12/+7 melee (Masterwork Quarterstaff, d6+6/crit 20), or +21/+16/+11/+6 melee (Silver Dagger, d4+6/crit 19-20), or +17/+12/+7/+2 ranged; SA Constrict, Improved Grab, Poison, Psionics; SQ Heat Sense, Human Arms, SR 16, Tremor Sense; SV Fort +14, Ref +11, Will +19; AL LE; Str 22, Dex 14, Con 18, Int 20, Wis 22, Cha 22

Skills: Alchemy +5, Concentration +12, Craft (painting) +13, Diplomacy +18, Heal +14, Hide +9, Knowledge (Arcana) +16, Knowledge (culture) +10, Knowledge (religion) +18, Listen +17, Profession (torturer) +19, Scry +11, Spot +17

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Craft Magic Arms and Armour, Dodge, Endurance, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Leadership, Power Attack

Languages: Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Giant, Gnoll, Jing, Serpent's Cant, Undercommon

Cleric Domains: Dominion, Strength

Cleric Granted Powers: Regal aura, feat of strength (+10 Str for 1 round)

Cleric Spells Memorized (6/6+1/6+1/4+1/4+1/3+1); DC 16+spell level: 0th *cure minor wounds, detect magic, inflict minor wounds, light, mending, read magic*; 1st *bane, command, comprehend languages, cure light wounds, detect good, inflict light wounds, protection from good*; 2nd *bull's strength, cure moderate wounds, darkness, death knell, desecrate, inflict moderate wounds, silence*; 3rd *bestow curse, cure serious wounds, inflict serious wounds, magic circle against good, suggestion*; 4th *cure critical wounds, death ward, inflict critical wounds, sending, spell immunity*; 5th *circle of doom, dispel good, greater command, unhallow*
Xie Quan is a towering man in human guise, standing nearly six-and-a-half feet tall, using his *ring of humanity* to maintain this guise nearly 24 hours a day, seven days-a-week. The only telling physical clue to his true nature is in the rather unique amber colouration in his eyes, but everyone who meets him simply chalks this up to the typical variance of the human species. In his true form he is utterly terrifying with his large black and red serpentine body and thick, muscular humanoid arms. The piercing blood- and amber-coloured eyes set into his broad serpent's head burn with absolute hatred; the lambent purple shading on his underbelly extends to his insidiously-long, forked tongue, which flickers constantly as he tastes the air for potential prey and enemies.

Since his birth, the Empress herself personally oversaw his training, her best advisors spending years grooming him for great and inspiring things. He owes no family allegiance, and friendships to him are simply a means to further the glory and might of the Empire as well as his own goals. He is ruthless and unswerving, his mind forever calculating each and every avenue he must take to accomplish the task at hand and bring down the tyranny and evil of the human race. In many ways he sees himself as the personal saviour of the Empire and knows that this mission is far more important than any other. He has no idea that he is simply another pawn in the game of chess the Empress plays, his ego so swelled that he has become blinded to the manipulations of those far more clever than he and maddened by the holy duty he thinks has been laid upon his scaled shoulders.

Lately he has been obsessed with bringing down the human city. While part of him knows full well that doing so will ruin the Yuan-Ti's chances of ever subsuming this kingdom, he cannot help raging at the offensiveness of the humans' very existence. So, he has built a secret sanctum for himself a day's ride away in the heavily-forested foothills. There, he takes kidnapped travelers stolen from the highways and byways leading in and out of town and transforms them into his twisted, brain-dead slaves through a combination of the Ritual of Contrition and other dark magic.

Possessions: 2,345 gp, excellent silk robes, lacquered breastplate and spaulders +2, *ring of invisibility*, *ring of humanity* (*polymorph self* into a human only, 2x/day as 12th level sorcerer), quarterstaff, silver dagger

YUAN-TI REFERENCE LIST

The Yuan-Ti are an extremely intelligent species and as such are not content just to sit on their hands (or tails, as the case may be) and do nothing with their lives. Most follow a profession, while many take on a character class. Listed on the following pages are sample Yuan-Ti that player characters are likely to encounter.

Soldier, Fen Wei (Private)

1st level Yuan-Ti Pureblood Ranger

CR 6; Size M (5 ft., 0 in. tall); HD 6d8 + 1d10; hp 34; Init +9 (+5 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 19 (+5 Dex, +1 Natural, +3 Studded Leather); Attack +10/+5 melee (Masterwork Longsword d8+2/crit 19-20), or +13/+8 ranged (Masterwork Short Bow d6/crit 20/x3); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Spell-Like Abilities, Psionics; SQ Heat Sense, SR 16, Tremor Sense (serpent form only); SV Fort +4, Ref +10, Will +11; AL NE; Str 14, Dex 20, Con 11, Int 13, Wis 23, Cha 19

Skills: Concentration +9, Craft (bowyer) +6, Disguise +6, Handle Animal +6, Hide +10, Jump +4, Knowledge (nature) +6, Listen +17, Profession (hunter) +8, Ride +9, Spot +17, Wilderness Lore +10

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Dodge, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Track, Two-Weapon Fighting

Languages: Common, Meng, Serpent's Cant, Undercommon

Possessions: 6 gp, backpack, bedroll, flint and steel, average tunic, trousers, belt and boots, masterwork longsword, dagger, masterwork shortbow, 30 arrows, lacquered breastplate and spaulders

Soldier, Shang Wei (Captain)

8th level Yuan-Ti Abomination Ranger

CR 15; Size L (8 ft., 4 in. tall); HD 9d8+36 + 8d10+32; hp 177; Init +9 (+5 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 28 (+2 Dex, -1 Size, +10 Natural, +6 Chain Mail +1 of *Silent Moves*[†], +1 Small Wooden Shield); Attack +22/+17/+12/+7 melee (*Greatsword +1 of Defending*, 2d6+6/crit 19-20) or +21/+16/+11/+6 ranged; Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./10 ft.; SA Constrict, Improved Grab, Poison, Psionics; SQ Heat Sense, Human Arms, SR 16, Tremor Sense (both forms); SV Fort +13, Ref +13, Will +13; AL CE; Str 21, Dex 21, Con 18, Int 21, Wis 20, Cha 17

Skills: Concentration +19, Craft (armorsmithing) +10, Handle Animal +14, Heal +16, Hide +8, Intuit Direction +14, Jump +11, Knowledge (nature) +10, Listen +16, Move Silently +0 (+10[†]), Spot +25, Use Rope +10, Wilderness Lore +14

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Deflect Arrows[†], Dodge, Endurance, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (Conjuration), Track

Languages: Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Giant, Jing, Meng, Serpent's Cant, Undercommon

Ranger Spells Memorized (3/1): DC 15+spell level: 1st alarm, detect snares and pits, magic fang; 2nd snare

Possessions: 2,045 gp, backpack, bedroll, flint and steel, chain mail of silent moves +1[†], shield of arrow deflection[†], greatsword of defending +1

Imperial Bodyguard

12th level Halfblood Yuan-Ti Monk

CR 17; Size M (5 ft., 5 in. tall); HD 7d8+7 + 12d8+12; hp 112; Init +9 (+5 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 140 ft.; AC 29 (+5 Dex, +7 Wis, +2 Monk, +1 Natural, +4 Fine Silk Clothes +4; Attack +21/+16/+11/+6 melee (dagger, d4+2/crit 19-20), or +18/+15/+12/+9/+6 melee (kama, d6+2/crit 20), or +19/+16/+13/+10/+7 melee (unarmed; d12+2, crit 20), or +21/+16/+11/+6 missile (dagger, d4+2/crit 19-20); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Psionics, Spell-Like Abilities; SQ Heat Sense, Scales, SR 16, Tremor Sense (serpent form only); SV Fort +11, Ref +18, Will +22; AL LE; Str 15, Dex 21, Con 12, Int 18, Wis 24, Cha 16

Skills: Balance +22, Climb +19, Concentration +11, Diplomacy +17, Heal +10, Hide +26, Intimidate +5, Jump +17, Knowledge (history) +9, Knowledge (religion) +12, Listen +24, Move Silently +20, Spot +18, Tumble +17

Feats: Ambidexterity[†], Blind-Fight, Deflect Arrows, Dodge, Endurance, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Improved Unarmed Strike, Iron Will, Mobility, Two-Weapon Fighting[†], Weapon Finesse (dagger), Weapon Focus (unarmed strike)

Languages: Common, Draconic, Giant, Goblin, Jing, Meng, Serpent's Cant

Monk Abilities: • Stunning Attack (13 times per day; DC 23), Still Mind, Slow Fall (50 ft.), Purity of Body, Wholeness of Body, Leap of the Clouds, Improved Evasion, Ki strike +1, Diamond Body, Abundant Step

Possessions: Fine silk clothes (enchanted) +4, monk's belt[†], boots of striding and springing[†], kama, dagger

Infiltrator

6th level Pureblood Yuan-Ti Rogue

CR 11; Size M (5 ft., 10 in. tall); HD 6d8+6 + 6d6+6; hp 53; Init +9 (+5 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 19 (+5 Dex, +1 Natural, +3 Leather +1); Attack +10/+5 melee (Short Sword, d6/crit 19-20), or +10/+5 melee (Dagger, d4/crit 19-20), or +15/+10 ranged (Dagger, d4/crit 19-20); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Spell-Like Abilities, Psionics; SQ Heat Sense, SR 16, Tremor Sense (serpent form only); SV Fort +5, Ref +15, Will +11; AL CE; Str 10, Dex 20, Con 13, Int 20, Wis 19, Cha 18

Skills: +14, Bluff +14, Climb +10, Concentration +10, Craft (locksmithing) +10, Diplomacy +10, Disguise +9, Gather Information +12, Hide +15, Intuit Direction +13, Jump +13, Listen +20, Knowledge (culture) +10, Move Silently +10, Open Lock +15, Profession (locksmith) +8, Sense Motive +13, Spot +21, Tumble +21

Feats: Alertness, Ambidexterity, Blind-Fight, Dodge, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (jump), Track
Languages: Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Giant, Goblin, Meng, Serpent's Cant

Possessions: 500 gp, fine clothes, thieves' tools, *rope of climbing*, *bracers of armour +1*, *leather armour +1*, short sword, boot dagger

Priest of Death, Hierophant

15th level Abomination Yuan-Ti Cleric

CR 22; Size L (8 ft., 10 in. tall); HD 9d8+54 + 15d8+90; hp 274; Init +4 (+4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 19 (-1 Size, +10 Natural); Attack Attack +25/+20/+15/+10 Melee (*Rod of the Viper*; d8+5) or +24/+19/+14/+9 Melee (Adamantine Dagger; d4+5/crit 19-20) or +20/+15/+10/+5 Ranged (Adamantine Dagger; d4+5/crit 19-20); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./10 ft.; SA Constrict, Improved Grab, Poison, Psionics; SQ Heat Sense, Human Arms, SR 16, Tremor Sense; SV Fort +18, Ref +11, Will +24; AL CE; Str 19, Dex 11, Con 22, Int 16, Wis 29, Cha 20

Skills: Concentration +31, Craft (tattooing) +15, Diplomacy +7, Hide +8, Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (religion) +20, Listen +20, Profession (herbalist) +15, Spellcraft +19, Spot +20

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Brew Potion, Craft Staff, Craft Wondrous Item, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Maximize Spell, Silent Spell, Skill Focus (concentration), Weapon Focus (Heavy Mace)

Languages: Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Infernal, Jing Hua, Serpent's Cant

Cleric Domains: Dominion and War

Cleric Granted Powers: Regal Aura, Weapon Focus (Heavy Mace)

Cleric Spells Memorized (6/8+1/7+1/7+1/6+1/6+1/4+1/3+1/2+1); DC 19+spell level: 0th *create water*, *detect magic*, *inflict minor wounds x2*, *light*, *read magic*; 1st *bane*, *cause fear*, *command*, *curse water*, *deathwatch*, *detect undead*, *inflict light wounds*, *obscuring mist*, *protection from good*; 2nd *darkness*, *desecrate*, *enthrall*, *hold person*, *inflict moderate wounds*, *shatter*, *undetected alignment*, *zone of truth*; 3rd *animate dead*, *bestow curse*, *contagion*, *dispel magic*, *inflict serious wounds*, *magic circle against good*, *magic vestment*, *speak with dead*; 4th *death ward*, *dismissal*, *divine power*, *inflict critical wounds*, *poison*, *spell immunity*, *summon monster IV*; 5th *circle of doom*, *dispel good*, *flame strike*, *greater command*, *righteous might*, *plane shift*, *slay living*; 6th *antilife shell*, *blade barrier*, *create undead*, *forbiddance*, *greater dispelling*; 7th *blasphemy*, *destruction*, *greater restoration*, *resurrection*; 8th— *create greater undead*, *greater planar ally*, *unholy aura*

Possessions: Excellent ceremonial robes, *bag of holding (bag 4)*, *wand of unholy blight (43 charges)*, *rod of the viper*, adamantine dagger

Arcane Erudite

10th level Halfblood Wizard

CR 15; Size M (5 ft., 5 in. tall); HD 7d8+21 + 10d4+30; hp 108; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+3 Dex, +1 Natural); +18/+13/+8 Melee (*Dagger*

of Shock, 1d4+6+1d6 electrical; crit 19-20) or +18/+13/+8 Ranged (*Dagger of Shock*, 1d4+6+1d6 electrical; crit 19-20); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Poison, Psionics, Spell-Like Abilities; SQ Heat Sense, Snake Arms, SR 16, Tremor Sense; SV Fort +8, Ref +11, Will +18; AL NE; Str 16, Dex 16, Con 17, Int 25, Wis 22, Cha 19

Skills: Alchemy +20, Concentration +23, Craft (bookbinding) +13, Handle Animal +8, Hide +10, Intimidate +9, Intuit Direction +9, Knowledge (arcana) +23, Knowledge (history) +20, Knowledge (religion) +20, Listen +21, Profession (bookseller) +20, Scry +17, Spot +17

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Craft Rod, Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge, Enlarge Spell, Expertise, Heighten Spell, Improved Initiative, Maximize Spell, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell

Languages: Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Giant, Goblin, Infernal, Jing Hua, Serpent's Cant, Undercommon

Wizard Spells Known (4/6/6/5/5/3); DC 18+spell level: 0th *arcane mark*, *dancing lights*, *daze*, *detect magic*, *disrupt undead*, *flare*, *ghost sound*, *light*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*, *read magic*, *resistance*; 1st *burning hands*, *change self*, *charm person*, *feather fall*, *grease*, *hypnotism*, *identify*, *magic missile*, *shield*, *shocking grasp*, *sleep*; 2nd *blur*, *flaming sphere*, *invisibility*, *knock*, *levitate*, *locate object*, *misdirection*; 3rd *fireball*, *flame arrow*, *fly*, *haste*, *summon monster III*; 4th *charm monster*, *hallucinatory terrain*, *improved invisibility*, *minor globe of invulnerability*, *polymorph other*, *shout*; 5th *animal growth*, *dominate person*, *wall of force*, *wall of iron*
Possessions: 560 gp, excellent robes, alchemy lab, *dagger of shock +3*, spell book, scroll of *teleport*, scroll of *shadow evocation*, 2 scrolls of *improved invisibility*, 2 scrolls of *polymorph self*, 2 scrolls of *summon monster IV*, 3 scrolls *clairaudience/clairvoyance*

Imperial Clansman

4th level Halfblood Yuan-Ti Aristocrat/5th level Warrior

CR 13; Size M (5 ft., 9 in. tall); HD 7d8+21 + 4d8+12 + 5d8+15; hp 133; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC16 (+1 Dex, +1 Natural, +4 *Lacquered +1*); Attack Attack +22/+17/+12 Melee (*Longsword +1*; d8+6, crit 19-20) or +20/+15/+10 Melee (*Dagger*; d4+5, crit 19-20) or +17/+12/+7 Missile (Masterwork shortbow d6, crit 20/x3); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Psionics, Spell-Like Abilities; SQ Heat Sense, Scales, SR 16, Tremor Sense; SV Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +14; AL LE; Str 21, Dex 13, Con 17, Int 15, Wis 19, Cha 19

Skills: Alchemy +3, Appraise +8, Climb +12, Concentration +13, Craft (blacksmithing) +7, Forgery +7, Hide +9, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (history) +8, Knowledge (nature) +9, Listen +21, Move Silently +1, Ride +4, Spot +15, Swim +8, Wilderness Lore +10

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Dodge, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Shot on the Run, Weapon Focus (longsword)

Languages: Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Meng Yu, Serpent's Cant

Possessions: 432 gp, fine clothes, lacquered armor +1, longsword +1, dagger, masterwork shortbow, 30 arrows, 2 slave attendants (human)

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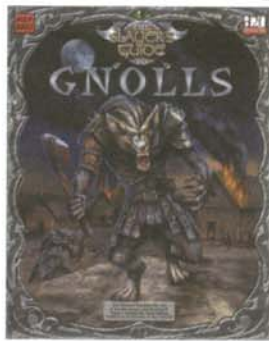
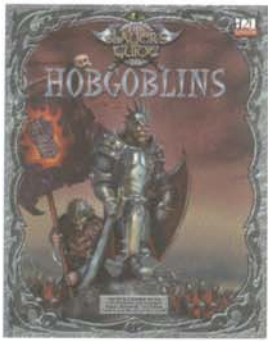
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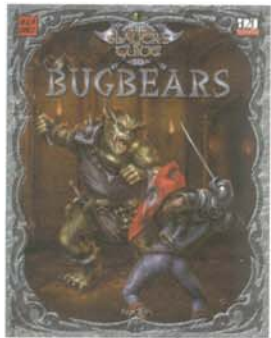
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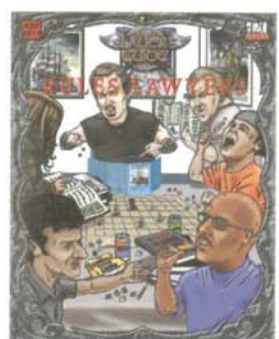
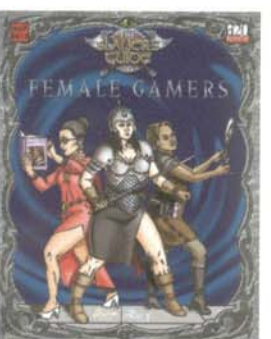
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TO

YUAN-TI

Chaos Amidst Order

The Yuan-Ti are often portrayed as sadistic, malevolent creatures intent on dominating the world at all costs. The very image of the scaly, humanoid reptiles with venomous fangs and wicked, yellow eyes fills most people with dread. For Game Masters, this makes them the ideal antagonists: Alien in both appearance and motivation, they can easily, and with little explanation, be dropped into any campaign or adventure as the fiendish masterminds behind virtually every conflict the characters run up against.

They are a society of long standing tradition, placing as much value in erudition as other cultures might place in martial prowess. Players and Games Masters alike will discover a wealth of possibility hidden within the vast empire of the Yuan-Ti. For the inquisitive, there is a new culture to study; for the diplomatically savvy there are new alliances and treaties to be negotiated; and for the bloodthirsty, there are new foes aplenty to kill.

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