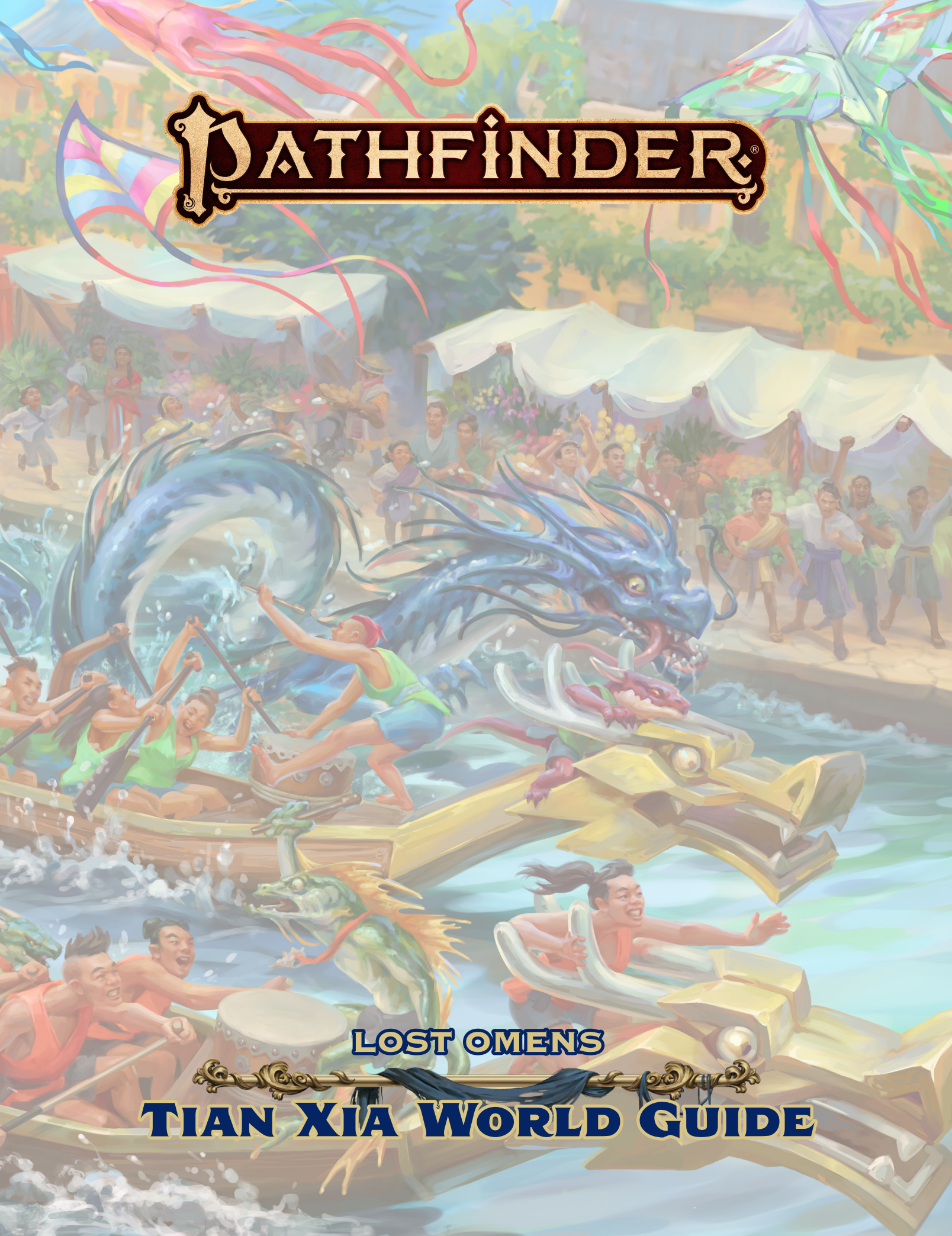

Second Edition
Pathfinder
Lost Omens
Tian Xia World Guide



Lost Omens

Tian Xia World Guide

PATHFINDER

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Olakapuna
Goroyasa
Lakapuna
Pawainui
Valashmai Sea

Introduction

Tian Xia is a vast continent of boundless diversity. Its lands range from the lush vegetation of the Valashmai Jungle to the arid steppes of Hongal, from the undersea depths of the Aya-Maru Trench to the sky-piercing peaks of the Wall of Heaven. Its inhabitants include mighty dragons and the humblest awakened house spirits; families who have dwelled here since the ancient dynasties of Taumata, Yixing, or Shu, to Avistani migrants and their children in the modern era—all equal in their Tian identity. Its gifts span beyond those that might immediately spring to mind—teas, silks, spectacular fireworks—including many so commonplace that those from other lands might forget they're Tian: oranges, goldfish, and paper pages with printed letters.

Tian Xia can't be summed up in a single book; no land can. The following pages offer an outline of the cities, cultures, peoples, places, creatures, flora, and history of what can be found here. It might seem different, but no more different than the nations of the Inner Sea are from one another. Look with a willingness to learn, and you might find as many things in common as there are differences.

For those who wish to play someone who calls Tian Xia home but are unsure where to start, remember first and foremost to treat the person you play well. Remember that they are a person first and of a culture second. Much like Tian Xia, a person can't be encapsulated within a paragraph or a stereotype. The people here might be different than you, but not so much so that they can be summed up by these differences. What they eat and what philosophies they study takes a distant second to who they love, what they hate, their greatest ambitions, and their deepest fears.

For guests who wish to treat Tian Xia with respect, forget what you think you know. Much of what you've learned has likely been passed to you from third- or fourth-hand sources and has become distorted along the way. These preconceptions often hold people back from asking questions or looking with clear eyes at what they see before them. Practice empathy, and don't forget the people here aren't indecipherable to you. The cultural expressions might differ, but they all spring from the same base emotions and desires.

Sharing Our Stories

This book was overwhelmingly written by people of Asian descent, but even so, it can't encapsulate every single viewpoint from the world's largest continent, in the same way this book can't offer every single detail on Tian Xia. It instead offers our myriad experiences and ideas, each a different facet of the larger experience. Whether we were born in an Asian country or have only distant memories of grandparents and family traditions, all of us came from real events in Asian history and the culture that arose around those changes. We now return a piece of our perspective to add to the shared world that is Golarion.

Five Tips for Tian Xia

The tips below are commonplace no matter where you go in Tian Xia—suggestions you might give to a rookie adventurer in town or something a family member might remind you of as you buckle your armor and leave home for your quest.

Celestials aren't always good. Most Avistani are familiar with the departure of Asmodeus from Heaven, a migration that changed him and his followers into devils. The dichotomy between righteous celestials and profane fiends is thus often taken for granted and further enforced by dramatic tales of angels falling from grace. In Tian Xia, a celestial's behavior has little to do with their status as a creature of Heaven. Even a banished godling or a drunken priest can still conjure incredible sacred powers.

Appearances are deceiving. Shapeshifters abound in Tian Xia, and no one can be certain if a priest or merchant they're talking to is really who they seem to be. Kitsune move through cities wearing human faces, tanuki hide as teakettles or statues, and rats who snatch a stray fingernail can turn into someone's doppelganger. Even Tian Xia's goblins, known as dokkaebi, are known to transform into other forms, often appearing as attractive but troublesome members of other ancestries.

Dragons aren't monsters. Heroic tales of Taldan knights facing down dragons are common entertainment in Avistan—but in Tian Xia, dragons aren't massive beasts to slay. They're people, just like humans, nagaji, tengu, elves, and others who live upon the continent. They've served as rulers, advisors, guardians, and spiritual leaders across history, and they're chosen agents of the Empress of Heaven. If a Tian person comes into conflict with a dragon, their first thought usually isn't how to kill it, but how to negotiate with it.

Spirits aren't abstract. Elsewhere in the world, spirits are often insubstantial and thus remain out of mind for the average person. Those who know how to call to these strange entities can wield incredible power, but most will never see a spirit beyond a stray leshy or a summoned eidolon. In Tian Xia, kami walk the forests, anito teem in the jungles, and yakshas help in the villages—tangible beings that feel very real. Offending the spirit of a river is much more serious when that river spirit might manifest as a dragon in response!

The dead are never truly gone. In many philosophies, a soul is judged by Pharasma, then moves on to its final reward. In Tian Xia, ancestors linger, watching their family and affecting their fortunes. Village heroes can straddle the line between ghost and god; sages who cultivate their spirit can even transcend mortality. The Celestial Court of Tian Xia also offers a different path for those who choose it: reincarnation. Much like history, souls move around the universe in circles, and death isn't always a permanent ending.

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History

"Sprout and blossom in spring and summer, wither and wilt in fall and winter; engraved in stone, leave a permanent record, yet against wind and sun, erode into the river."

This ancient poem from an unnamed Shu poet expresses the ephemeral and ineffable nature of history. Time leaves faint marks, but given tens of thousands of years, it can change entire geographical features and civilizations. With Tian Xia lore, piecing together oral traditions, archives, and archaeological findings often illuminates what amounts to a single word of an entire book. However, every Tian Xia resident can recount local tales of mighty heroes and epic deeds, which reflect Tian Xia's rich past in their own way.

Age of Monsters (Unknown)

Ancient myths paint Tian Xia as a land overrun by combative **kaiju**, warring **yaoguai**, and invasive extraplanar beings. Life for humbler folk was chaos incarnate. Northward, yaoguai warlords and upstarts vied for dominance in month-long duels. War raged between **celestials** and **qlippoth** in central Tian Xia, and though the former won, celestials settled near the last portal to the Outer Rifts, accepting that they might be guarding it for the rest of eternity.

Events were more orderly down south as **nagas** and **nagaji** from Vudra moved into the lush jungles. Dwarf-like fire elementals, known as **munsahirs**, escaped from the Plane of Fire and arrived on the continent. Their emerald-flamed emperor soon built a nation that spanned the entire continent's width. This **Jade Hegemon**, named in rejection of the days when munsahirs lived without agency, encouraged order, freedom, and dignity for all his subjects, attracting numerous others to join in otherwise turbulent times.

The Jade Hegemon Empire left few archaeological traces, however. As the Age of Legends arrived in other parts of the world, would-be extraterrestrial conquerors—towering reptilians called the **Valashai**—arrived in Tian Xia with their soldiers. When word of these off-planet invaders reached his ears, the Jade Hegemon hatched a meticulous plan, disassembling the munsahirs' marvelous cities and retreating into the sierras of southern Tian Xia. The Valashai built their empire upon the conveniently available foundations left behind. Many Valashai ruins still stand today, and their influence gave the place its enduring name: the **Valashmai Jungle**.

Age of Dragons (Unknown)

Throughout the Age of Monsters, the imperial dragons lived above the din, shifting mountains and forests, studying the divine or arcane, and rerouting the rivers and seas. When an imperial dragon's life ended in those times, their bodies gave the continent mountains, woodlands, volcanoes, precious metals, and waterways. Tian Xia was thus more than just home to these beings—it was also the dragons' ancestors, a gift, and their destinies.

In the nebulous centuries after the qlippoth's defeat, the goddess **Shizuru**, through her sky dragon herald **Shinonome**, gathered as many imperial dragons as possible at the summit of the Solar Zenith Peaks. The goddess revealed the continent's fate if the yaoguai wars rampaged on: the land would become desolate, ruined, and barren. To save Tian Xia, Shizuru selected humanity as its rightful inheritor. The dragons were to prepare Tian Xia to accept these saviors—due to arrive in 10,000 years—and passively guard them for another 10,000 years, intervening only if a challenge becomes too great for the mortals to overcome.

The dragons were stunned, though they accepted the decree. To them, this protection was more than mere duty; it was about peace after death and preserving a legacy. As they entered the fray, the dragons first recruited

Timeline

–2793 IC	Earthfall. Some Taumata survivors become seafaring nomads.
–2343 IC	Elves emerge from the Darklands and found Jinin.
ca. –1790 IC	Sunlight returns.
–1793 IC	Reestablishment of human and naga civilization.
–1203 IC	Initial contact between humans and nagaji ends violently.
–384 IC	Budugan hailed as khan of Hongal; murdered 5 years later.
–24 IC	Minata devastated by dragon brawl; eruption of Mount Shibotai.
88 IC	Empress Su of Yixing succeeded by her adopted son Aolin.
98 IC	Celestials leave as Tianjing diplomatically joins Yixing.
250 IC	Shizuru's herald confronts Aolin and his siblings.
444 IC	Battle of the Bloodsworn.
450 IC	Birth of Aolin's only child, a female sovereign dragon with vermilion hair.
513 IC	Three years after running away from home, Aolin's daughter reemerges as Pham Toan Nguyen; she agrees to be ruler of Xa Hoi.
1503 IC	Signing of the Ivory Accord between humans and nagas.
1869 IC	City of Yjae stranded in Tian Xia.
2105 IC	Clockwork soldiers attack Nagajor and Xa Hoi. Yixing helps repel the invasion.
2456 IC	The Star Titan lands in the Valashmai Jungle and is slain by Mogaru.

Continued on next page

2501 IC	Aroden ascends, forcing Aolin to relinquish rulership; Aolin finds a loophole and installs a puppet emperor.
2600 IC	Shizuru blesses five families in the region that would later become Minkai.
2612 IC	The Teikoku Shogunate founded following Shizuru's blessings.
2790 IC	The Teikoku Shogunate's expansion stops at the Forest of Spirits.
2802 IC	Yixing founds Chu Ye and absorbs Xa Hoi.
2813 IC	Xhai Xen Xiao founds Goka.
2970 IC	Full trade route from Teikoku to Hongal, the Spirit Road, mapped.
3020 IC	Yixing belatedly absorbs Goka.
3089 IC	City-state of Bachuan founded.
3800 IC	Aganhei executed for establishing trade route to Avistan.
3808 IC	The *Resplendent Phoenix*'s initial voyage; Yixing starts trading west two years later.
4262 IC	Pu Duo establishes the Silk Network to uncover their mentor's death.
ca. 4800 IC	Pu Duo learns of Aolin's conspiracy and deception.
5164 IC	Aolin incapacitated in chaodao ceremony; sealed and written out of history.
5576 IC	The human empire of Yixing collapses.
5589 IC	Hwanggot founded.
5601 IC	Empire of Shu begins as Jiao Deng Shu is crowned.
5723 IC	Tang Mai regains independence and breaks away from Shu Empire.
5786 IC	Jiao Deng Shu dies at age 222.
6116 IC	The Teikoku Shogunate overthrown. Minkai Empire founded three years later.
6191 IC	Jinin slowly opens their borders, making contact

celestials before slaying most of the yaoguai lords and sealing those they couldn't. The survivors of these clashes swore blood-binding oaths to hunt yaoguai who stepped out of line. In the south, dragons took the guise of local nagaji to devise how to pacify kaiju and learned to govern from the munsahir empire, which they practiced on fledgling athamaru city-states. When humans finally arrived—from Sarusan first, then Azlant—they proved quite capable. Civil marvels such as the **Empire of Taumata** confirmed Shizuru's wisdom.

Celestials of Tian Xia quickly recruited skillful and talented humans, and as emotional bonds grew, numerous celestials partnered with mortals to form families. For dragons, however, the thousands of years spent waiting sowed impatience and entitlement. Even early in their preparations, some dragons were creating their own empires of kami, yaoguai, nagas, or any other ancestries they found, with humans as their newest would-be subjects. Earth dragons—or sovereign dragons, as they've become—were particularly flagrant, going from choosing leaders of local nations to becoming them. Even celestial dragons joined in this undue influence, hosting wish-granting rituals to solicit awe and adoration. While not all dragons ruled directly, many relentlessly meddled in human affairs and even grew indignant when asked to stop.

Despite the violations, Shizuru remained silent. The murder of her lover, **Tsukiyo**, and his difficult revival occupied her attention. Disagreements among the dragons thus escalated to wars. Numerous dragons who invested centuries into their realms ended up burying, washing, or burning away these civilizations as their bodies collapsed upon the settlements. With the geography of the mainland changing too quickly, human settlements were thus limited to the Minatan archipelago and the land bridge to Sarusan.

AGE OF ASHES (K2793 IC TO 0 IC)

Though not directly struck by meteoroids during Earthfall, the world-shaking event still changed the face of Tian Xia. Rising sea levels forever submerged the lands west of the **Wall of Heaven**, flooded the valley that became the haunted Sea of Ghosts, and widened the Xidao Channel. The **Minata** archipelago lost more than half its landmass and its land bridge to the continent, devastating the Taumata Empire. Some survivors took to the oceans and became nomadic seafarers. Others resorted to summoning kaiju to preserve themselves.

In **Xidao**, the city-states united to face new dangers emerging from the nearby Aya-Maru Trench. Draconic empires fell, too, as perpetual darkness caused plants to wilt en masse. Some dragons took this signal to step back, though just as many renewed their efforts to help humans, certain that this catastrophe was the "challenge too great" that Shizuru spoke of. Violence between dragons stopped, and along with it, the rapid changing of landscapes that once deterred many human settlers. Any who arrived in this age lived as nomads, however, constantly traveling since they couldn't subsist otherwise.

The volcanoes of the **Chenlun Mountains** sprung to life, disturbing the munsahirs and forcing them to head for the surface. Encountering the common Valashmaian citizens and hearing of their plight, the munsahirs swiftly assisted numerous escapes from tyrannical rulers who intended to forcefully take their people to another planet. Stories among amurruns, iruxis, tripkees, and vanaras tell of their heroic ancestors who defeated cruel Valashai oppressors aided by dwarves with flaming hair, who then took them underground to hide until the day the sun rose again.

The era wasn't all doom and gloom—ashes are fertile land from which new life can sprout, after all. Curious **wayangs** from the Netherworld arrived to explore, befriending those underground by providing news of the surface. Elven refugees from the other side of the planet followed a vein of dawnsilver up through tunnels in the Darklands and emerged in central Tian Xia, where they went on to find their new isolated haven, **Jinin**.

The return of sunlight after a thousand years allowed civilizations to rebuild as if they were newly sprouted trees. As wayangs found caves and tunnels to

hide in, nagas and nagaji returned to the northwestern corner of the jungles south, while the Valashai breakaways settled in the southeast. Humans on the mainland settled permanently as agriculture became possible again. These civilizations, though widespread, were a far cry from the expansive empires of days past. The dragons were inclined to wait, though the violent first contact between humans and nagaji forced many to take on the guise of humans to contain the desire to expand south. It was around these times that the practice of taking humanoid guises became the norm for the imperial dragons.

Given the sparse population at the time, the rise of the first khan of **Hongal**, Budugan, stands out as exceptional. Rumored to be half-giant, Budugan's personal might allowed his tribe to traverse treacherous lands to establish trade and diplomatic relations, which in turn made him a focal point for the Tian-La tribes to gather around. Though Budugan's reign lasted a brief five years, he nevertheless left a proud legacy of tenacity behind to be picked up by the one who would form the first khanate.

Yet just as the scars of Earthfall healed over, a sudden bout of massive quakes, tsunamis, floods, and the eruption of **Mount Shibotai** plagued Minata, reducing the land to further fragments. Instead of some natural tragedy, these disasters resulted from a massive brawl between hundreds of sea dragons and Ihoblyqaerth, an ancient underworld dragon, over a trivial slight of a sea dragon hatchling spoiling an alchemical spring. Ihoblyqaerth's power rivaled that of the celestial dragons, and the battle was a massacre for the sea dragons. In the end, the survivors called upon **Hei Feng** to stop the slaughter, who answered with a single swing of his broadsword. Though Ihoblyqaerth's rampage ended, his subsequent transformation into the Mount Shibotai volcano covered the skies with ash, stoking ancient fears of the horrific and unstable times right after Earthfall.

Fortunately, the skies cleared within months. Some Minatans rebuilt, while others joined the nomadic seafarers who came to save their distant brethren. Numerous naga kingdoms coalesced, and the Valashai escapees settled down among the dangers of kaiju and dinosaurs. As for humans in central Tian Xia, their civilization was about to rapidly develop into one of the largest human empires in the continent's history.

That is, if you believe the massive cover-up story many history books claim as truth.

Age of Ascendancy (1 IC to ca. 7106 IC)

After the Age of Ashes, scholars write that Tian Xia's next era of history was dominated by the incredibly long-living **Yixing**. This claim is, however, a great misconception, though only a handful know the shocking truth: what appears to be the greatest human empire of Tian Xia was, in fact, a myth written to hide the greatest dragon empire of all time.

For comprehension, this section is organized thematically by empires, cultures, or regions. For the exact chronology, consult the timeline sidebar.

Yixing, the Forgotten

As the number of human nations increased, so did the friction between them. While most imperial dragons deliberated what to do, five sworn dragon siblings—outcasts, runaways, or orphans, each of a different draconic ancestry—struck out. Of the five, the blue-scaled sovereign dragon, **Aolin**, excelled in combat, scholarship, and understanding of human motives. In his human guise, Aolin made his way up the military chain of command of a central Tian Xia nation. The childless ruler of the country, dowager Su, adopted Aolin as her stepson. When Su passed peacefully at the age of 88, Aolin was naturally named successor. In honor of her, and reflecting his ambitions, Aolin retroactively titled the dowager First Empress of Yixing, with her birth year set as year 1 IC.

Aolin's siblings acted as his closest advisors, and they discussed the empire's affairs on thrones of jade, ivory, chalcedony, lapis, and malachite.

	with Minkaian explorers first.
6536 IC	Shu dissolves.
6542 IC	Birth of Hao Jin in Goka; her death and resurrection later grants her the power of the phoenix.
6642 IC	Imperial Lung Wa founded.
6751 IC	Diguo-Dashu invades Lung Wa.
6800 IC	Aganhei's maps resurface.
ca. 6800 IC	Valash Raj founded.
6891 IC	Bank of Abadar in Goka recognizes Hao Jin is missing and executes her will.
6898 IC	Lung Wa moves its capital to Changdo; construction of the Eternal Emperor statue begins.
6901 IC	First Ruby Phoenix Tournament.
6980 IC	The Seven Year War. Ultimately, Lung Wa conquers Tang Mai.
7010 IC	Pham Duc Quan accepts the title of Emperor of Xa Hoi from predecessor.
7106 IC	Lung Wa collapses.
7107 IC	Shenmen falls to jorogumo.
7108 IC	Taldor colony, Amanandar, founded.
7109 IC	Floating pirate city, Zo Piaobo, founded.
7110 IC	Hobgoblins seize Kaoling.
7111 IC	Elder kraken Zhanagorr becomes Wanshou's patron ruler.
7113 IC	Oni seize Chu Ye.
7119 IC	Guns reach Tian Xia; use and sale quickly banned.
7126 IC	Bachuan founded.
7152 IC	Oni purge the royal families of Minkai. The Amatatsu family escapes.
7176 IC	Akatori is exiled. He wanders into north Lingshen where he founds Shokuro.
7208 IC	Clockwork horrors of the Clicking Caverns return.

Continued on next page

7211 IC	The Jade Regent of Minkai is overthrown; Ameiko Kaijitsu crowned Empress Amatatsu.
7214 IC	Oprak contacts hobgoblins in Tian Xia.
7217 IC	Shokuro returns to being called Songbai.
7219 IC	Axis releases Hao Jin, who returns to Tian Xia.
7220 IC	Amanandar gains independence and is renamed Linvarre.
7221 IC	Mogaru disrupts the Ruby Phoenix Tournament.
7222 IC	Death of King Huang Shixin.



Their seemingly immortal nature sowed rumors, which they never dissuaded, for it was a useful reputation to have—it helped convince celestials to leave and let their heaven-touched mortal offspring join Yixing as a provincial empire. Using similar tactics, Yixing slowly expanded, swooping in with diplomatic offers or military annexation at the perfect moments. The system of provincial empires Yixing used allowed each province's head administrator to style themselves as emperors or empresses, which was Aolin's strategy to satisfy human egos; in truth, he'd planned decades ahead for these rulers to be overthrown to satiate the ambition of any upstarts. Even if the rebels Yixing secretly sponsored betrayed him after coming to power, the overwhelming imperial army easily crushed traitors for another loyal ruler to be installed.

Trouble came when Shinonome, on Shizuru's behalf, confronted the siblings over their activities. What could've been a peaceful discussion ended when Aolin menacingly took his draconic form to intimidate Shinonome, tersely stating that he would only relinquish rulership when humanity proved they could surpass their fallibility to be as great as the divine. While Shinonome didn't escalate the offense, Aolin's actions sat poorly with his siblings, a sentiment that a conniving mountain yaoguai, **Ougang**, caught wind of.

In 444 IC, Ougang's schemes unfolded in the **Battle of the Bloodsworn**. After duping Aolin and his sea and forest dragon siblings to gather in a city far east of the capital, the yaoguai descended with an army upon Changdo. As the three dragons rushed back, they were ambushed by a worse enemy that the yaoguai allied with: qlippoth forces. Changdo withstood the invasion, but for Aolin and his sea dragon sibling, reinforcements arrived too late. On her last breath, the dying forest dragon made a final request to a Sarenite phoenix monitoring her to take what remained of her life and revive Aolin.

Moved by the heartfelt request, the phoenix too gave its life in the process. Thus, Aolin returned, forever infused with regenerating and self-resurrecting life force. While he ruled Yixing alone after this tragedy, the empire prospered. At the height of Aolin's rule, Yixing's territory was as far east as the coast bordering Xidao, south to the border of Nagajor, and ran along the foot of the Wall of Heaven.

Nagajor, the Kingdoms

After returning post-Earthfall, naga kingdoms grew rapidly as well. Despite sharing the core culture of worshipping **Nalinivati**, nagas warred among themselves even after their feud with humans began. The **Ivory Accord** brought unity and peace, which the naga kingdoms approached as one front, making them an empire on paper and a federation in practice. To an extent, they had to, as the immortal emperor with his massive territories could easily divide and conquer them, though he perplexingly never tried.

Yjae, the Stranded

The Wall of Heaven is likewise an area Yixing avoided, particularly after the flying Shory city of **Yjae** became stranded above Shanguang, heavily damaged by its pass through the enormous mountain range. Conflicting stories exist as to why this crash occurred, though reports from the survivors who later descended to join the **Mutabi-qi tribes** all pointed to some dimensional oddities. Seeing that most in the region saw the mountains as forbidden, Yixing respected their customs and, in return, gained the loyalty of the locals.

Teikoku, the Chosen

In a strange twist of fate, Aroden's ascension to godhood in 2501 IC forced Aolin to relinquish his dominion over humanity, though Shizuran clerics soon discovered that the emperor's appointed successor was a mere puppet. The Celestial Court considered direct confrontation, but Shizuru ultimately tried an alternative. Seeking out five worthy mortal families in northeast Tian Xia where Yixing had yet to reach, she directly blessed them in 2600 IC with the divine right to rule, an act far more direct and clear than the one delivered two ages ago.

The **Teikoku Shogunate** rose within 12 years. Without a dragon buffering their ambition, Teikoku quickly expanded to encompass the entire archipelago, stopping only when the kami of the **Forest of Spirits** forbade them from encroaching further. Knowing they had hit their limit, the shogunate switched their plan to focus on finding a direct trade route to Hongal, whose khanate they hoped to sway to leave Yixing. Their success in 2970 IC inspired many citizens to become explorers, such as **Amatatsu Aganhei**, who would go on to map the famous **Path of Aganhei** between Tian Xia and Avistan. However, seeing Aganhei's work as a sign of ruination, the shogun executed the explorer and destroyed the maps, save for a few that made their way into Yixing with instructions to keep them safely hidden.

Yixing, the Forged

News of this trade path stirred Yixing's competitiveness. The acting empress ordered the empire's best shipbuilders to **Goka**, where they built the massive junk, the *Resplendent Phoenix*. The ship's maiden voyage kick-started trade between Tian Xia and the regions to the west. While Yixing's economy boomed in the centuries following, it became apparent something strange was afoot. Aolin's sky dragon sibling suddenly died in her hermitage in Zi Ha. The dragon's **samsaran** student, **Pu Duo**, was certain she'd been poisoned. While Pu Duo conducted their investigations alone at first, they later sought help from Aolin, who helped them found the **Silk Network** to aid them over the next few centuries as they unraveled more strange deaths and incidents.

In a massive turn of events, Aolin's underworld dragon sibling, incriminated by evidence Pu Duo found, enlightened Pu Duo of the difficult truth—Aolin was the true murderer, and the Silk Network had become one of many tools the immortal dragon used to seize control of all human civilizations on Golarion. While the misanthropic underworld dragon had no qualms about the plan for world domination, Aolin's fratricide and century-long deception couldn't go unpunished. Pu Duo recruited a small, loyal team both in and out of the Silk Network and waited patiently for centuries. During the first imperial tea ceremony of Yixing, the small team struck, incapacitating Aolin, whom they quickly spirited away to imprison in a secret location with the strongest spells, wards, and seals.

Lying to the masses that the "imperial advisor" had retired to nurse an old ailment, Pu Duo forged a number of decrees in Aolin's handwriting before drinking the poison that started it all to force themself into the next life. The decrees rewrote 5,000 years of history. Writing systems throughout Tian Xia were overhauled, forcing revisions. The old writings were branded heretical and burned. Rulers were told that those who could write could curse them, and thus, they kept their populaces illiterate. In time, the erosion and loss of writing became one of many reasons why Yixing collapsed within 10 human generations. The secret of the Eternal Emperor was safe, hidden only in the minds of a handful of beings still alive today.

Shu, the Destined

If Yixing fostered the ambition of the modern successor states, then Shu fostered identity. The empire's first emperor, **Jiao Deng Shu**, was a bureaucrat before becoming a rebel commander and hero; he earned the throne by stopping a would-be tyrant from unsealing a great evil. Before his reign and in the earlier years, Shu relied heavily on his trusted friend and advisor, the strategist **Que Yan Helian**, who predicted Shu was destined for greatness the moment they met. Shortly after Shu was crowned, Helian disclosed that he was in fact a sky dragon ordered by his family to aid humans in the wars that ensued after the collapse of Yixing. While Helian was meant to leave afterward, Shu insisted the dragon stay, citing that dragons were residents of Tian Xia too and should have the right to determine the continent's fate.

This open-mindedness wasn't the only reason Shu was popular. The unconventional but effective ways he handled problems made him a constant subject of discussion. He eased tensions with Nagajor by simply moving his capital to He Ming and changed the direction of written text to overcome fears that writing cursed others. With writing introduced back into society, Shu established a rigorous examination system to seek out the best advisors and policymakers. Stable economic growth led to surplus wealth, which fueled cultural and artistic expression. Citizens proudly proclaimed themselves as Tian-Shu, residents of a respected empire.

Like any human, Shu wasn't perfect, and his ideas changed the older he got. Helian, yet a young heady dragon, started to clash more with Shu on matters of mercy versus formidable appearance, corruption versus leniency. The establishment of **Tang Mai** as a sovereign nation was a particularly sour talking point between the two, for Helian believed conceding to the families showed weakness, while Shu thought giving the country independence created an ally. Though not the final straw, Tang Mai became one of many reasons Helian departed without a word one night, never to be seen again by humans except briefly outside the imperial palace on the day of Shu's funeral.

That Shu lived 222 years was monumental for amassing wealth that his heirs could utilize, though it also fostered an incapability to divorce problem-solving from money. The Shu empire lasted some 15 generations after its founding emperor, ultimately collapsing amid wild accusations of witchcraft among the royal family.

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Many of Shu's provinces had enough resources to run themselves for a time after the fall of the empire. Goka, being a capitalist metropolis, was perhaps the safest from spiraling out of control. That said, a fire in a museum was about to greatly impact Tian Xia's history, for the young girl who perished in the incident, **Hao Jin**, would return with the same resurrection powers as a long-forgotten figure—all thanks to a rare purple flower from the Emperor's Footprint, which that figure created from his fall out of the sky when he last died.

Minkai, the Dawn

As Shu was founded, the Teikoku Shogunate's grip on their country remained strong, though corruption and isolationist policies greatly stifled the nation's potential. Inspired by Shu's flourishing empire, **Kuga Setsuna** rebelled against the stagnant shogunate, burning down the capital in the **Battle of Eight Bridges**. The rebels founded a new empire named **Minkai**, with Kasai, an important trading port, as its capital. Free of past restraints, Minkai opened trade with Shu and nations farther away, celebrating its newfound freedoms with a renewed interest in exploration. The increase in trade and travel brought more traffic past the silver shrines that surrounded Jinin. After reviewing the two stable and peaceful empires beside them, Jinin's elves decided to slowly open their borders as well, with Minkaians being some of their first visitors.

Lung Wa, the Tyranny

After a century and a decade of short-lived kingdoms following the Shu Empire, **Lung Wa** emerged victorious as its successor—or rather, as the only government not on the brink of bankruptcy. In the words of many today, there couldn't have been a worse option, for even in its days as a province, Lung Wa was notorious for its tyrannical laws, corruption, and whimsical administrators. **Wuo Wu Zheng**, Lung Wa's founding emperor, unwittingly started the tradition of relocating the capital every time a successor took the throne, a practice only stopped by Empress Gui a quarter of a millennium later after a seductive dream prompted her to commission the massive **Eternal Emperor** statue in Changdo.

Lung Wa's rule was stable yet brutal. Its harsh and unforgiving taxes fueled its military and corrupt officials alike. Failure to pay was penalized by forced labor or enlistment into an army led mostly by commanders who'd bought their stations. Even wealth brought in by the rediscovery of the maps of Aganhei didn't improve life for the majority of citizens. Whenever unrest grew, Lung Wa leaders deflected blame on ancestral minorities, strictly controlling or erasing any communities, practices, or cultural identities perceived as a threat. During this time, Hao Jin created her famous tapestry to preserve places and people she felt were in danger of being erased from history, an act later highly criticized for being poorly thought-out.

Reliance on local folk heroes emerged from the distrust people had toward the government. At first, these heroes were mostly lone vigilantes who later accepted disciples, formed schools, or passed their skills on to their children. These schools, families, and societies—plus the occasional solitary prodigy—became an avenue for common folk to seek help, right wrongs, or settle differences. Lung Wa officials had mixed feelings toward this force that both pacified the populace and was too popular to move against. Both sides wisely avoided each other, though some families carefully lived in both worlds, providing Lung Wa with just enough competence that its borders could expand as they intimidated, harassed, or invaded nearby territories. For Nagajor, relations with Lung Wa deteriorated so badly that the Ivory Accord was nearly declared obsolete. The rise of **Valash Raj** in the Valashmai Jungle thankfully diverted much of Nagajor's economy such that it could ignore Lung Wa's demeaning trade offers with a hissing but polite no.

Imperial dragons were conspicuously absent during Lung Wa's rule, for several reasons. Weariness was the first. Self-preservation was next due to the Lung Wa imperial family's obsession with trophy hunting, an industry that faded only when the more lucrative **Ruby Phoenix Tournaments** started. The most important reason behind their lack of action or attention, however, was that Shizuru's decree had finally reached its second 10,000-year mark. They were now free to choose: should they act, wait, or abstain?

Age of Succession (7106 IC to Present)

Lung Wa's implosion coincided with Aroden's death, and the many splinters created had wildly different fates. Some, such as Tang Mai, Goka, and Hwanggot, quickly reestablished their old systems of government. Others were seized by monstrous beings or eldritch entities. Lung Wa's strong legacy in military, tradition, and religion fractured into the nations of **Lingshen**, **Quain**, and **Po Li** respectively. The arrival of firearms and foreign armies changed regional dynamics with the restoration of old nations like **Bachuan** and the founding of countries such as **Shokuro** and **Amanandar**. Regions outside of Lung Wa territories also saw an uptick in unrest related to bandit lords, vengeful oni, and even clockwork monstrosities. For even the oldest imperial dragons, events were spiraling wildly beyond their range of expectations.

Some optimistic developments began to appear, particularly after the 7210s began. The power-hungry **Jade Regent** of Minkai was overthrown by a distant heir to the royal family, **Ameiko Amatatsu**, and an allied group of heroes. After assuming the throne, the Avistan-raised Ameiko surveyed the lands to assess the damage left by the Jade Regent. Her proposed reforms swept across topics ranging from politics to agriculture. The military families likely to lose power from these changes left Minkai in a fit of rage, seeking new lands to rule or allies who might influence the young empress in their favor.

Some of these families made their way to the region of Shokuro, which had recently restored its traditional name of **Songbai**. Though tensions between native Songbai people and militant Minkaian families quickly followed, the shogun **Akatori** couldn't assist due to his ailing health. As Akatori's only known heir is a young child, his age and health have left Songbai in constant fear of an imminent crisis. If the shogun fails to appoint a successor before his death, there could be a civil war. Recent sightings of kirin in the region have thus been interpreted as both a blessing and a symbol that a power struggle is about to begin.

Up north, news of the **Ironfang Legion** forming diplomatic relations with **Kaoling** and **Rahk Lo** has put Jinin and Zi Ha on alert. Though Kaoling is experiencing an internal crisis, and Azaersi's influence on the legion is shaky at times, the idea that **Oprak** might provide military forces in exchange for food and seasoned explorers is a tremendous threat. Even Songbai, despite the barrier of the Sea of Eels, wouldn't be immune. There are also fears that empowering the hobgoblins could embolden the oni in **Chu Ye**. The elves of Jinin have begun building fortifications, while Zi Ha's samsarans study how best to make use of their mountainous terrain. **Linvarre** quickly pledged support in the event of conflict, given the history between the three nations. Hongal, however, can't be persuaded to stop trading with the hobgoblins or to prevent them from accessing the Path of Aganhei, as the khanate doesn't want to disrupt the equal trade opportunities offered to law-abiding foreigners within their territories.

Perhaps the most important contemporary figure, in terms of an individual, would be Hao Jin. Initially thought to be a military powerhouse, the legendary woman was in reality a highly reserved scholar focused on repairing her past misguided acts. Her political appointment in Goka was more a call on her to contribute as a dutiful citizen rather than an expression of political intent. Given how heavily many nations rely on Goka to trade with the west, concerns regarding how Hao Jin might influence international relations are shelved for the moment. The influence she can have on lost traditions, knowledge, and culture, on the other hand, is optimistically invaluable. Many nations have extended an open invitation to the Ruby Phoenix—or anyone she employs—to examine local mysteries and curiosities.

Goka celebrated Hao Jin's return by hosting the most extravagant Ruby Phoenix Tournament in the fighting contest's history yet. Though it was interrupted by a kaiju and other unexpected inconveniences, stories of the event have been spreading fast. Within Minata, there's a renewed interest in Taumata, and archaeologists are uncovering the story behind this ancient human empire. Mogaru's inexplicable stampede roused many other kaiju, and the people of Shanguang and the Valash Raj are preparing in advance, as there's no telling if these kaiju are about to go on a rampage against humanity or battle it out with one another.

The death of King **Huang** in Lingshen is the latest explosive news in Tian Xia. Though news of his poor health had long circulated, the fact that he didn't name an heir left Lingshen and its neighbors nervous; Lingshen's main competitors, Po Li and Quain, even stationed troops along their borders. A selection process for an heir is reportedly in place, but there's no telling if any of King Huang's children might resort to military means to prove themself the worthiest successor. Whether that might be a civil war or the invasion of a neighboring country is the question no one wants answers to.



HAO JIN

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The Imperial Dragons

Behold and make way for the imperial dragons! With lifespans stretching over millennia, these powerful draconic shapeshifters are tied to the civilizations, history, landscape, and ancestries of Tian Xia, with many serving as rulers, advisors, and even gods. Tian Xia, also known as the "Dragon Empires," drew this namesake from the imperial dragons that ruled the region after the land's unsteady recovery from the yaoguai wars. The revered dragons draw their power from five interlinking and counteracting elements: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Their growing presence foretells that Tian Xia may be headed for another period of upheaval, causing empires to rise and fall.

Forest Dragons

Forest dragons hesitate to interact with humanity, as they are the ferocious guardians of the balance within wilderness and forests. As mortals continue to encroach on the natural world, these dragons have become increasingly hostile in return. Their lush, mossy hair, tough bark hide, and propensity to provide sanctuary to small critters camouflage their movement and presence high within leafy canopies or down in rich, fertile soil. Signs of these reclusive giants include a trail of thriving natural preserves teeming with bioluminescent fungi, high-pitched songs of insects, and chittering fauna.

Most people of the Valashmai Jungle, Nagajor, Xa Hoi, Minata, and Tang Mai know well to leave these vengeful protectors alone, for a chance encounter with a forest dragon may result in expulsion from a wood or entire villages being swallowed up. Currently, however, the primordial forests that form forest dragon lairs are shrinking. As their sanctuaries vanish due to increased Tian activity, the forest dragons are poised to lunge upon the entire region, clearing out Tian settlements and reseeding their territory with vast forests again.



ARINDHAM

Arindham of the Valashmai Jungle

Resentful nonbinary ancient forest dragon guardian

Arindham is feared among the western Valashmai Jungle locals as "the great guardian." This reclusive and primeval forest dragon protects the shrinking territory their ancestors once nurtured before the elemental geoengineering projects of the Jade Hegemon. It is said their jungle consisted of long stalks of trees and vines that sprung from the titanic scales of ancient forest dragons; the loamy moss and soil were their skin, the jagged boulders and caves were their teeth, and the massive roots and foliage came forth from their veins. Now, Arindham watches and treads silently across the ground floor of the vastly artificial jungle, as their bark-hardened skin and body provide the only oasis for the remaining native plants, animals, and fungi that escaped the era of the Jade Hegemon and the Valashai Empire.

Despite Arindham's vicious forewarning, the recent major excavation of an ancient ruin has leached toxins and rot into the forest of Arindham's ancestors. Desperate times call for desperate measures and Arindham seeks to reverse the damage in their domain and redirect all the rot and toxins back toward the explorers who unearthed it.

Sea Dragons

Sea dragons are unpredictable and potentially calamitous beasts toward those that trust their livelihoods to the weather and vast, open waters. Tians who have studied the constellations and patterns of change in the sea and skies can find safe passages, but most seek to placate the

sea dragons instead. Smaller or younger sea dragons can also be present in different bodies of water, having been found in the floodplains of Songbai until sedentary agricultural settlements used extensive irrigation to change the landscape.

Once having a direct connection with the early rulers of the underwater nation of Xidao, sea dragons were venerated as protectors and guardians. They eventually retreated and became mediators for the developing city-states, possibly due to the widening of Aya-Maru, upticks in raids on Xidao, and the appearance of krakens in Wanshou. Those parts of Xidao that are closer to the surface of the open sea and those that trade with the surface through spires continue to provide offerings to the sea dragons—typically money and jewels—in the hope of safe passage and calm weather. Yet currently, travel to Xidao is unpredictably hazardous for all seafarers and visitors, with the storms surrounding this nation becoming more calamitous.

Luong Phung of Xidao

Grief-stricken and vengeful female ancient sea dragon

Since the Age of Dragons and the first organized city-states in Xidao, Luong Phung has been revered as a tireless and maternal guardian of the sea. It was said that her massive dorsal fins are the white-capped waves that sink threatening armadas and defiant fleets, that her spiny tail causes the riptides that drown foolish sailors, and that her breath releases torrential rain. As the city-states continued to develop, strife and infighting also followed, and it was Luong Phung who stepped in as a mediator, calmly encouraging the various underwater nations to live in—sometimes fraught—peace and harmony.

Recently, foolhardy Tian poachers sought to spear valuable whales and other sea creatures near Xidao, but accidentally slew a young sea dragon: Luong Phung's only child, nurtured to become the next guardian of the sea. Overcome with all-consuming grief, Luong Phung now screams endlessly to the skies, her sorrow taking the form of an unending hurricane. Many sailors and ships entering Xidao have been ripped apart by turbulent seas. As ocean and surface dwellers alike fail to soothe Luong Phung, a small yet vocal faction of young and headstrong sea dragons has risen, rallying around the chaos to push for the reclamation of their species' past glory.

Sky Dragons

Sky dragons are endless coils in the air with immense, nearly omniscient, wisdom. Many Tian people see them as oracles, and will traverse harsh climates and bleak mountain peaks to seek their counsel. While the dragons are benevolent, seekers be warned—sky dragons provide advice shrouded in ciphers and mysterious phrasing. Sky dragons also favor mountainous terrain, making them difficult to reach. Sky dragons don't seek to rule, but are willing to guard the sanctity placed upon mortal thrones.

In Zi Ha, the 12-year-old leader of the samsarans, **Tian Zenwyn**, dared to climb the jaded Mount Tsukiyo during the zenith of the When Earth Touches the Sky Festival. He



fought through frigid and harsh conditions, risking snow blindness and intense blizzards, to seek advice on the future of Zi Ha and the samsaran people. Whatever answer the sky dragon gave, it left Tian Zenwyn pensive and concerned, and he has advocated for the stronger protection of Zi Ha's borders since he returned.

Shen Ra of Po Li

Divine nonbinary sky dragon

Shen Ra, a mysterious sky dragon sage who lives above the billowing curtain of clouds over Po Li, is tied to the nation's history and future. They are known as the one that watches over the Eternal Throne, flying down and torching with a wrathful fury any person they deem unworthy sitting on the Five Dragon Throne in Po Li. Legend claims that the Eternal Emperor of Lung Wa will return to claim his rightful seat of power, though the throne has remained vacant for over one hundred years. Unsurprisingly, history has seen multiple would-be emperors assert their claims, but every one so far has been vaporized by Shen Ra. The most recent attempt involved the Oracular Council of Po Li attempting to bypass the dragon and install their own emperor, in response to the worrying rumors of the Eternal Emperor resurfacing within the nation of Lingshen. Their efforts were in vain, and they watched their puppet vaporize in a flash of light.



PHAM DUC QUAN

SOVEREIGN DRAGONS

Though most imperial dragons involve themselves in Tian affairs only reluctantly, sovereign dragons gain their name by assuming the divine right to rule over humanity, by the goddess Shizuru's decree. Venerated for their strong and swift decision-making, diplomatic neutrality, and masterful negotiation, sovereign dragons have ushered in glorious eras of peace and prosperity throughout Tian Xia. Reminders that these dragons were meant to cede authority to humanity are often ignored by those sovereign dragons still in power.

In Xa Hoi, Pham Duc Quan is the thirteenth of a long line of sovereign dragon emperors, never shedding his human guise. Quan is a mildly controversial ruler within Tian Xia. He is considered a proactive and foresighted emperor by Xa Hoi, allowing his nation to emerge as one of the strongest states after the fall of Lung Wa. Detractors in other nations remain convinced he purposefully allowed other states to flounder and struggle in order to secure Xa Hoi's dominant position. Many also question the prominent role of sovereign dragons in Xa Hoi's government.

Pham Duc Quan of Xa Hoi

Detail-oriented male adult sovereign dragon emperor

Pham Duc Quan is the Supreme Draconic Majesty of Xa Hoi, with an extensive and loyal staff of magistrates that advises him on military, socioeconomic, and political policy. As a wise ruler, Pham Duc Quan plans out his actions and carries them out meticulously. He has personally appointed every acting government official in his nation, down to the town marshal of Nyang Grass Jelly Ranch, a swamp town with a mere population of 84. He carefully guards his feelings behind a human guise and a steely gaze, freely making any controversial choice that he sees as the best for his nation and people.

Pham Duc Quan is a strong believer in harsh justice, absolute truth, and the command of dragons over Tian Xia, appointing his sovereign draconic siblings as trusted generals to his legion and sage advisors to his court. Heavily involved in the affairs of Tian Xia, he asserts his influence and diplomatic relations via exemplary shipyards and trading fleets, and he seeks

to unite people and nations together under peace and prosperity. However, his history of accepting short-term losses for long-term gain has drawn up simmering unrest and resistance in the form of the **People's Reformation Order**, which seeks to de-crown sovereign dragons and remove their far-reaching power. As Quan tours Tian Xia to drum up support, the PRO lies in wait for their opportunity to clip his wings. The most radical elements consider even killing the sovereign dragon.

Underworld Dragons

Underworld dragons are temperamental, unpredictable, and dangerous, just like the natural alchemical catalysts that they ignite. Their movement underneath the earth provides the heat in explosive geysers, the clashing pressure between tectonic plates, and the seismic rumbling for lava to erupt from active volcanoes. Often at odds with treasure hunters and nations with large treasuries, underworld dragons seek to acquire a bounty of precious minerals and gemstones, storing them in deep trenches and caves. The **pixiu** (page 295), despite having a considerable appetite for wealth, have often been employed by underworld dragons seeking to increase their hoard, due to their ability to easily pick up the scent of gold. Near the Szaezan Crags in Bachuan, a prominent underworld dragon, **Li Xian**, has entered into a lifelong treasure-trading relationship with Hao Jin, and rumor abounds that the sorceress once brought him a prize so great it bought her an empire's worth of debt.

Recently, many nations have felt the seismic forewarning of increased underworld dragon activity—escalated volcanic activity, unprecedented earthquakes, and shifting of the tectonic plates. In Zi Ha, the mountain range continues to rise at an unprecedented rate, with an explosion of underworld dragon hatchlings down beneath. In Xa Hoi, the deep and labyrinthine cavern systems lunge and fall deeper towards the world's core. In many volcanic regions, including Minkai and Minata, climbing volcanic pressure is causing lava to froth and boil with menace.

Zhulong of Chu Ye

Relentless nonbinary young underworld dragon rebel

Zhulong is a cunning and ruthless young underworld dragon. Stunted in both their stature and their draconic abilities due to being captured as a small wyrmling, Zhulong has spent most of their upbringing and rearing trapped inside a small, gilded cage in a fortress in the Nightford Mountains. Their captor was none other than the most powerful kishin oni, **Inma**, who relished the inclusion of Zhulong into her menagerie of strange creatures and beasts. Zhulong's captivity also prevented them from reclaiming their domain deep under the earth, which Inma expanded into with unforgiving greed, hiding her massive treasure vaults in the dragon's former lair. After finally escaping when a latch was improperly closed, Zhulong's planned vengeance knows no bounds.

Recently, Zhulong has spent many years hidden in a human guise outside of Chu Ye, building popular support among other underworld dragons to exact revenge against Inma. Finally beginning their assault on Inma's forces, the fearsome clash between godly kishin and underworld dragons has caused yawning quakes and a range of dormant volcanoes in the Nightford Mountains to become active, frothing and boiling over with every battle.



ZHULONG

Factions



THE ANTE



GOLDEN LEAGUE



LANTERN LODGE

When groups of like-minded people reach out and find one another across cities and borders, they can form powerful networks of contacts and resources to work toward their shared goals.

THE ANTE

A confederation of pirates formed out of mutually assured survival rather than camaraderie, the Ante decided if they all hated the same people, they might as well hate those people together. Each ship flies their enchanted colors and mark, a sundered navy saber on a field of seeping blood—an open challenge to any nation who thinks they can govern the open water without consequence. Their admiral and flagship are the ghosts of **Admiral Klahan** and her crew of *The River Full of Prawn*. They are only able to appear in the heart of a tempest, and many a weather wizard is contracted and kept in luxury to call storms for petitioners.

The Ante is primarily anchored in **Minata**. Their flotilla campaigns the western seas and coasts of Tian Xia, levying merchant liners and scuppering navy ships—and the Ante will continue to do so until their dominion is respected and the Hwanggot geobukseon that sank *The River Full of Prawn* is surrendered.

To join the Ante, one simply needs the colors and captain's cap of a ship, pledging to contribute to the collection plate that supports the collective. Staying in the coterie is another proposition altogether—too long without an endowment and a crew will be assigned the vanguard for the next raid without access to Ante shipwrights, armories, or stores.

GOLDEN LEAGUE

A depraved conglomerate of moguls, thieves, and assassins, the families of the Golden League swindle, steal, and slaughter at every opportunity. From their original offices in **Goka**, the league is organized as a flat, decentralized structure, with each branch acting independently toward the organization's mission statement: "Growth at all costs." If any branch were to fall, the others are insulated, which also allows for bouts of infighting between branches while still ensuring the safety of the whole.

Individuals specialized in soft power—rumor mongering, trade, blackmail—are invited to League Administrations as needed. Individuals with a firm grasp on hard power—theft, smuggling, assassination—are folded into Operations. Every Golden League family has dedicated tattooed warriors or assassins, known as **xun**. Once on payroll, recruits receive a signing bonus and a League-leased apartment in expectation of compounding those earnings.

LANTERN LODGE

From their great library and research installations in Goka, the Lantern Lodge pursues knowledge above all. Launching expeditions across Tian Xia, the Lodge seeks to present history as it happened rather than how the victors recall it. While some Lanterns explore the past, others account for the present, with a vast network of sympathetic contacts across the continent embedded in governments, factions, and adventuring parties (including strong ties with the Pathfinder Society). By publishing a free weekly magazine of current events and a quarterly journal of their historical finds, they empower everyone with information.

Unfortunately, dedication to learning without reserve is easily taken advantage of. Forbidden knowledge is a prize far too enticing to the Lantern Lodge, and many have been snuffed out for learning something someone else deems they shouldn't. More than once, the Veils have assassinated a Lodge agent, damning the Lodge's efforts as more dangerous than reasonable. Likewise, Lodge agents are often too clever for their own good. By reading the mud on someone's boots, the grease in their hair, and the words gone unsaid, they can uncover a person's

story without even asking. Such acuity has seen Lodge agents marked as spies by governments and other organizations. That said, anyone who is willing to take the risk and report the truth is welcomed into their light.

THE CUT

Clad in white, trailed by red, the sworn of the Cut are the ugliest reflection of warriorhood. At their warlord **Shao-Ping Kao's** command, their fighters stalk across the continent from their redoubt on the Quain-Lingshen border. Challenging those they perceive as the strongest, they prove their superiority as they clean the blood of the weak from their blades. A rare few that fall to their blades are deemed worthy of debased rituals—roused from death, the fallen join ranks and crusade on for the Cut.

Anyone who kills a member of the Cut in open challenge, providing proof to the fallen's commander, has earned the right to adopt the binds of the order. The same ritual allows one to climb ranks; defeating a superior in an open challenge makes their role the victor's. This strategy is rarely taken uncalculated, as those who overextend themselves make opportunities for others.

SHATTERED LOTUS

A conspiracy of deposed nobles, officials, and the ever-faithful work within the bureaucracies of the Successor States to incite unrest, setting the stage to one day restore the fallen Lung Wa Empire. Theirs is a patient scheme, putting others in situations where acting in the Lotus' interest is the lesser of two evils. Entire states and factions are pushed to action without knowing it came from a whisper in the right ear weeks, months, or even years prior.

Shielded by bureaucracy, even when caught, the agents of the Shattered Lotus are not out of power for long. With this protection, they operate openly within Lingshen, Quain, and Po Li. Those who know the value of information and public opinion are often recruited by the Shattered Lotus; some even play double-agent by joining the Golden League as well. For those who make a sizable donation, Lotus clerks are sure to uncover "legitimate" Lung Wa patents of nobility.

THE WAY OF THE KIRIN

A bulwark for the people challenging the corruption and oppression of the aristocracy, and as strong in military, trade, and politics as any state, the freelancers of the **Kirin Company** were once a force to be reckoned with. Having them by one's side was as good as an edict from Heaven itself, assuring righteousness and victory. Yet the Kirin Company fell at the gates of **Lung Wa** during the collapse of the empire, outmaneuvered by their enemies' ignoble tactics. Now the company has dissolved into disparate squadrons across Tian Xia, less an organized military force than a loose network of partisans.

The followers of the Way remain ever faithful to their mission of rooting out corruption among the markets and governments across Tian Xia. Slowly working to rebuild their numbers, few are turned away from the ranks, but many are expelled if they are found to be even slightly deviating from the Way's accords.

VEILS

Devoted to hoarding secrets, artifacts, and technologies they determine too dangerous for this world, Veil mages abide by no judgment but their own—governments, gods, and adventurers be damned. Observing time and time again the destruction caused by unchecked knowledge and materials, the Veils choose prevention rather than reactive resolution as their function. Some speculate they have gone as far as to erase some magics from history itself, not just removing evidence of the spells' existence but changing reality so that they never existed.

Vaults hidden throughout **Valashmai** keep any ordinance in the Veils's custody well away from civilization. Their ateliers can be found in most cities. One can apply for membership there, upon which applicants are immediately informed of their acceptance or rejection based on pre-conducted vetting.



THE CUT



SHATTERED LOTUS



THE WAY OF THE KIRIN



VEILS

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Religion

The denizens of Tian Xia are polytheistic but also syncretic and pragmatic, mixing and matching beliefs and philosophies to suit their needs. The average person might know a little philosophy and religion, and have a prayer, small personal ritual, or ethos taken from different sources. The old adage—or joke—resurfaces now and again that scholars study the School of Order when successful, the Way of Spirits when their fortunes have fallen, and the Teachings of the River when elderly and approaching death. Yet in day-to-day life, the people rely on the worship of individual deities for blessings, insight, and protection against calamity.

Many people in Tian Xia have a small personal shrine to a favored deity but may pray at communal shrines or temples for general good favor. Even "evil" deities can have a small shrine, with offerings to keep them appeased. Blurring the lines between spirit, immortal, and deity, some villages and towns may have a space dedicated to a local spirit or a hero. Over time, that spirit or hero may even become an immortal.

Mortals conceptualize deities as a mix of spiritual ideals, forces of nature, super-humans, and metaphors. **Qi Zhong**, for example, serves as the template of the perfect physician—yet the phrase "blessed by Qi Zhong" describes one's good health rather than an actual visitation by the god of healing. **Lao Shu Po**, patron saint of thieves, can also be a nickname for anyone who has fallen on hard times. "Susumu's spirit" describes someone with fierce conviction but also a bad temper. "Hei Feng shouting" means bad weather. And one shouldn't forget the thousands of idioms reflecting so many stories of these deities.

Of all of the spiritual holidays, **Ancestor's Day**, known as **Undertaker's Day** in some places and elsewhere by other names, has a special place in Tian Xia society. Ancestor's Day, a time of remembrance and recognition of one's forebears, reflects how community and family continue on after death. Some places on this day also celebrate living elders. Burning paper representations of wealth and home and leaving offerings of food, tea, or liquor keeps the dead happy, loved, and fed. This doesn't just serve a ritual purpose; forgotten or unhappy ancestors can affect both the spirit and mortal world adversely, changing family fortunes to the worse with dwindling business, low birth rates, or a general emotional malaise. Forgetting about one's great-great-grandmother's existence can mean her coming back to literally haunt her ungrateful progeny!

Shrines and temples, as well as their dedicated priests, exist to tend to the spiritual needs of the populace. They also host many of the celebrations and festivals that can be found across Tian Xia. Every shrine has incense to burn when paying respect to a spirit, ancestor, or deity. Food is a common offering. Each deity also has a specific offering depending on context and culture. For **Desna**, it's feeding a traveler; for **Pharasma**, leaving a children's toy at a shrine or grave; and for **Lady Jingxi**, a dedication in the first or last artistic work in a series, depicting her as a subject. Most deities and spirits can ignore the occasional, tiny slight, but repeated disrespect—be it voicing it out loud, mistreating the deity's followers, desecrating their shrine, or leaving their shrine unkempt—can bring calamity upon the offender in the form of curses, bad omens, misfortune, or even a spirit visitation.

Those dedicated to worship usually join a shrine or temple, officially or unofficially. Nations that have a state religion often assign people to tend to that deity's temple. Sometimes a community allows a destitute person to move into an abandoned shrine. As long as they clean it up and make it presentable, the unfortunate can live there and sometimes receive a personal donation in addition to a regular offering.

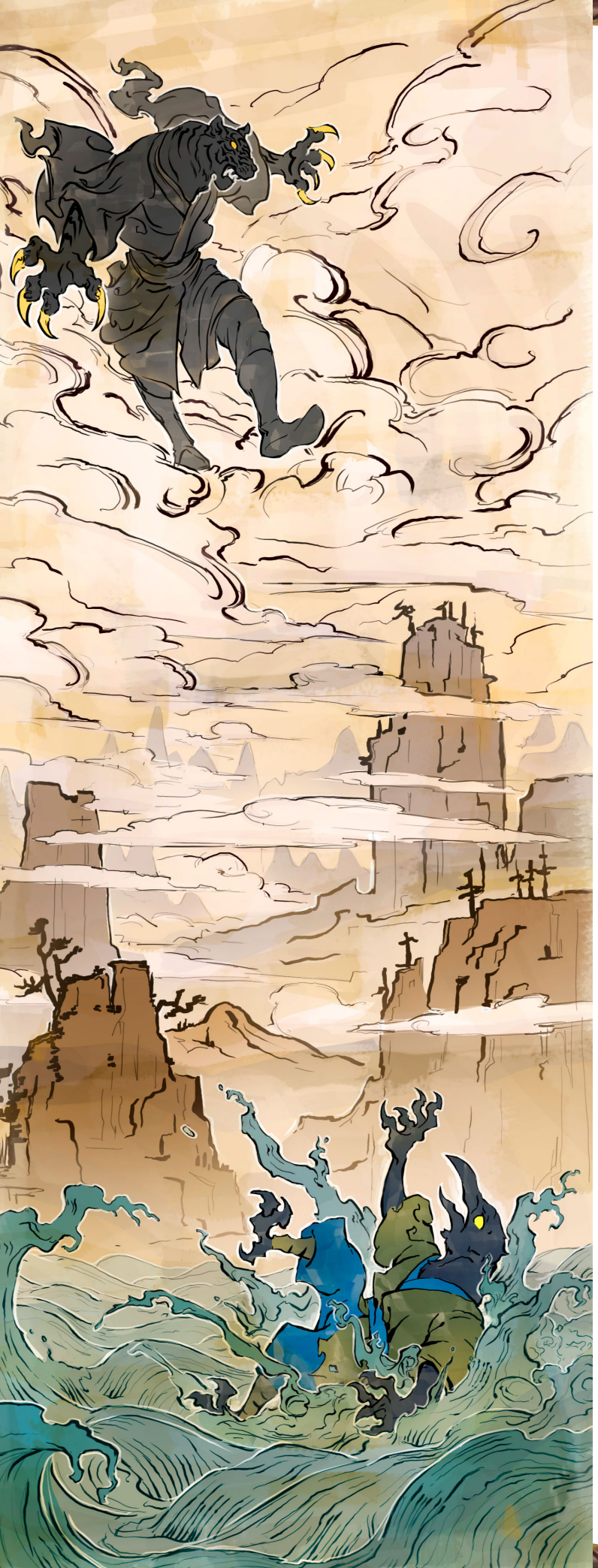
Pronunciation Guide

Deity names are known to change in different regions due to common sounds or lack thereof. The following are commonly used pronunciations for local divinities. These phonetic representations aren't exactly how to say these names, but they're close enough that people will likely understand what is meant and appreciate the effort.

Baekho: beck-hoe
Daikitsu: dye-kee-tsoo
Fumeiyoshi: foo-may-yoh-she
Susumu: soo-soo-moo
Hei Feng: hey fon (like the on in "only"); Hēi Fēng
Irori: ai luo li**;** Ài luō lì
Jin Li: jin (in as inside) lee; Jīn Lǐ
Jingxi: jin she**;** Jīng Xǐ
Nanbyo: nan-bee-yoh (bee-yoh is condensed into a single syllable)
Lao Shu Po: lao (like the lou part of loud) shoo puo; Láo Shǔ Pó
Mugura: moo-goora
Nrithu: nhrit (rhymes with "writ")-too
Nalinivati: nah-lee-nee-vah-TEE
Phi Deva: pee dev-ah
Qi Zhong: chee jon (like the on in only); Qì Zhōng
Shizuru: she-zoo-roo
Srikalis: sree-kah-lees. **Phonetic:** /s(ə)ri/ /ˈkalis/
Sritaming: sree-tah-meeng. **Phonetic:** /s(ə)ri/ /ˈtamiŋ/
Sribaril: sree-bah-reel. **Phonetic:** /s(ə)ri/ /baˈril/
Sun Wukong: swen wu-kong like the on in only); Sūn Wù Kōng
Tsukiyo: skee-yoh
Yaezhing: yi-ai-jen
Yamatsumi: yah-mah-tsoo-mee

Avatar Spells

Many deity entries on the following pages list the abilities a worshipper gains when casting the *avatar* spell. For those in the primary pantheon without *avatar* entries, like Hei Feng and Irori, refer to their entries in *Pathfinder Lost Omens Divine Mysteries*.



CREATION MYTHS

Like most societies, in Tian Xia there are myriad stories about how the world was created and what occurred before mortals walked the Universe. Many of these tales contradict one another, even among storytellers who claim to have asked the truth from their gods. Some believe this is a consequence of attempting to describe events beyond mortal comprehension, while others search for commonalities between tales for an ultimate truth. The following is one of the many stories told across much of Tian Xia.

In the beginning, a giant dragon egg made of chaos floated in a sea of nothing—chaos meaning not raw matter or disorder, but everything that is and will be, all swirling around in this small egg-shaped space. It hatched, and all of creation came pouring forth, but with no rhyme or reason. The dragons reveled in this chaos until Shizuru and her peers ascended and challenged them. The dragons shook the skies and carved up the earth in the fight, yet she and the others refused to yield.

Impressed with the bravery and righteousness of the gods, the dragons agreed to rein in their destruction to see if mortals could follow in Shizuru's stead. To contain the remaining chaos, Shizuru and Tsukiyo took on the task of taming the many suns, chasing away all but two. The other suns became the stars. With the two suns, the land had warm springs, long summers, and clement autumns, with no winter at all. Fumeiyoshi took on the night, but with at least one sun always in the sky creating day, he found his domain small and insignificant. Moreover, Fumeiyoshi had a growing jealousy over the love between Shizuru and Tsukiyo.

Meanwhile, the air caused Hei Feng to sneeze, which made the other deities laugh. Angered, Hei Feng went to war against the air itself until Yaezhing finally flung the tengu into the water. This quenched Hei Feng's temper, and in penance, he took on the sea and the wind as his domain, while Yaezhing resigned himself to watching over his peers, making sure none of them abused their power. Susumu, who had fought by Shizuru's side, tasked himself with keeping the dragons in line, though he may have caused more problems with them than he solved, as he joined the dragons in their bickering.

Many eons of peace came and went, until a calamity fell upon Tian Xia. Fumeiyoshi, overwhelmed with envy and rage, murdered his brother, Tsukiyo—the divine crime of rending existence into night and day, turning one of the suns into the pale moon. Waters flooded the land, mountains spat fire, the sky filled with lightning, and the people of Tian Xia begged for help. While Shizuru sought Qi Zhong to revive her fallen lover, other deities ascended, taking advantage of the chaos or seeking to help regain order: Daikitsu, Jin Li, Lao Shu Po, Nalinivati, Qi Zhong, and Sun Wukong. But that's a story for another day.

THE CELESTIAL COURT

Technically, anyone or anything can become a deity or an immortal. There are many paths to immortality: enlightenment, cultivation, alchemy, and reward. The pursuit of excellence or the recognition of excellence starts a person on that path to immortality, and how one became immortal generally illustrates that being's personality. Enlightenment requires wisdom, cultivation requires discipline, alchemy requires knowledge, raw power requires ambition and strength, and so on. "Goodness" or "evil" has nothing to do with immortality.

Because of this open admittance into the celestial realm, immortal life became quickly chaotic, so a rough organization came about, both imposed and organic. Most of the other deities and dragons followed Shizuru's lead and realized if they were to bring order to the mortal realm, they needed to bring some order to the celestial realm. Over time, Shizuru's initial organization became codified into a **Celestial Court**.

The organization of this divine court assigns its members' tasks based on their method of apotheosis, and overall resembles the meritocratic method of obtaining immortality. Those who became gods through enlightenment are assigned tasks over spirituality or mortal advisement. Those who achieved immortality through alchemy or knowledge maintain the laws and books. Those who ascended through raw power or strength became military commanders. Still, this divine court is in some ways voluntary. Immortals can and have rejected the court altogether, though mostly by avoiding Yaezhing and the dragons' ire. The most famous of these rebels is Sun Wukong, and Yaezhing's attempts to contain the trickster have succeeded and failed in equal measure. Because of this potential for disruption, the dragons and some deities tend to snuff out any immortal ascension before it happens. After ascension, court-sanctioned enforcement can be carried out, but due to the devastating effects of any kind of war in heaven, enforcement often comes through soft power, social pressure, threats, and limited challenges—another reason for elephant chess to not only be a pastime, but a method of conflict resolution.

Running a kingdom or empire, even a heavenly one, requires an administrative body, and a deity needs subjects to exact their desires. While clerics serve this purpose in a mortal sense, the Celestial Court utilizes immortals and spirits in a bureaucratic, celestial sense. This solves two problems at once. The Celestial Court needs an administration to help categorize and organize the court and wayward spirits, and secondly, newly ascended immortals can find purpose and meaning in service. Spirits can avoid withering away if they lose their domain in the spirit or mortal world and be reborn as a sort of clerk or attaché to a deity. Meanwhile, immortals can stay out of trouble and away from Yaezhing's and the dragons' reach.

There are other reasons for this kind of organization. Deities and dragons, due to their raw power and heavenly influence, can be much like using an explosive when one needs a fine needle. Even young immortals can be more of a hammer than a careful instrument. No matter how carefully such a being treads, the appearance of one can cause mortals to spawn false religions or start rebellions and wars. Mortals can be tasked with divine purpose, but this requires a delicate touch in order to not overwhelm the person with divinity. In a pinch, lesser immortals can be preferable compared to the raw might of a deity's mere presence in the mortal world. Spirits can perform tasks or influence the mortal Universe in small ways.

Shizuru's court takes copious notes and closely observes the mortal world for disruptions. This has the side effect of the court having an expansive and detailed record of history, sociology, politics, and science in the Imperial Hall of Records. Sometimes a deity assigns a couple centuries of reading to a newly ascended immortal, both to keep them out of trouble and to educate them on how things work. For some immortals, this is heavenly paradise; for others, hellish punishment. Some rebel immortals and powerful mortals have staged raids into the Hall of Records to obtain a written account of some powerful magic, holy site, or ancient secret.

On rare occasions, a deity can curtail their power and reemerge in the mortal realm, usually disguised in some way. If they must reveal their divinity, they keep these revelations to single individuals to prevent a disruption worse than they want to fix. Of course, since everyone is busy, sometimes one deity or deity's servant may deliver a message as a favor to another. Woe be to the mortal who prays to Lady Jingxi for good fortune on an artistic investment only to have Susumu come thundering in on his winged horse to give them her blessing!

Indeed, a secondary currency of favors and promises ebbs and flows between the deities, and some of the more proper ones keep written records. Those who rely on their memory to recall who they owe or who owes them may forget the details in an inconvenient moment. Those who keep written receipts face their own issues. A few spirits and immortals have gotten into trouble by losing another deity's written promise in the mortal world, only to have a mortal find and redeem that promise!

The formality and restriction don't mean immortals spend eternity reading and filing paperwork. Heaven encompasses other places beyond Tian Xia and Golarion. The laws of reality aren't as solidified as in the mortal world, so deities can study and craft impossible works, like peaches that grant immortality, wooden horses that walk and talk, and people with a hole through their chests. There are also other realms beyond the Celestial Court to explore, and as long as the repercussions don't affect the court or the mortal world, deities and immortals are free to unleash their full power.

Baekho



The Lord of the Seasons

Areas of Concern balance, healing, nature, seasons
Edicts bridge rifts between allies, embrace change, consider all sides of a disagreement before passing judgment
Anathema allow bias to guide your judgment, reject change in favor of stagnation, sow discord between allies, take more than you give
Divine Attribute Strength or Wisdom
Cleric Spells 1st: *thunderstrike*, 3rd: *animal vision* (*Player Core 2*), 6th: *tree of seasons*
Divine Font *harm* or *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy
Divine Skill Nature
Domains change (*Divine Mysteries*), healing, nature, truth
Alternate Domains duty (*Divine Mysteries*), might
Favored Weapon katana

Before he was a god, Baekho was a tiger who protected the forests of Tian Xia. Once, when he was gravely injured, he sheltered under the branches of a persimmon tree. As he experienced the changing of seasons beneath the tree's branches, an innate understanding of the world stirred within him. He awakened as a divine spirit with a human form with white hair, black-tipped white tiger ears, and deep blue tiger eyes. In his feline form, the fur that had once been an inferno of orange became a blinding white. His religious symbol, a snow-tipped persimmon branch laden with vibrant red-orange fruit, represents his awakening as a divine spirit who cherishes harmony.

Baekho selected nine disciples: four claws who fight beside him, two eyes who observe the balance of good and evil, two ears who discern truth from lies, and one heart who heals bonds that have broken. He granted some of his power to each of them so they could help guide his increasing number of followers and aid in maintaining harmony in Tian Xia. The White Tiger's faithful often have a familial devotion to a specific disciple, with unique traditions for showing their devotions, as Baekho believes the intent of worship is more important than the specific rites observed.

While known as the Lord of the Seasons, Baekho is more accurately the lord of the sacred time between seasons—when spring seedlings sprout through the melting snow or the blazing summer sunshine gives way to the vibrant colors of fall. As the protector of this fragile balance, he detests stagnation and believes that change is the natural flow of all things. He sees the union of contrasting values as a necessity for finding balance in the future.

Baekho's worshippers understand that all creatures have the potential for both good and evil. They are often empathetic and strong negotiators who feel contentment in finding common ground and healing rifts.



Avatar

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Baekho gains the following additional abilities.

Baekho Speed 70 feet, fly 70 feet, ignore difficult terrain and greater difficult terrain; **Melee** ❖ katana (deadly 3d8, two-hand d10, reach 15 feet, versatile P), **Damage** 6d8+6 slashing; **Ranged** ❖ tiger's piercing gaze (range 120 feet, mental), **Damage** 6d6+3 mental

Daikitsu

LADY OF FOXES

Areas of Concern agriculture, craftsmanship, kitsune, rice
Edicts ensure the health of crops and vegetation, perfect a craft or trade, leave offerings for foxes, celebrate the turning of the seasons
Anathema mistreat your tools, pass a beggar without giving alms, discriminate against sex workers or the lower class, commit murder or torture, harm an innocent
Divine Attribute Dexterity or Intelligence
Cleric Spells 1st: *pest form*, 2nd: *humanoid form*, 5th: *illusory scene*
Divine Font *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy
Divine Skill Crafting
Domains change, creation, family, nature
Alternate Domains earth
Favored Weapon flail



Daikitsu, the Lady of Foxes, is a capricious yet benevolent god. The deity of agriculture and craftsmanship, Daikitsu is one of the most important members of Tian Xia's pantheon, as her domains encapsulate everything that nurtures civilization. It's said that Daikitsu wears shapes the way a mortal might wear a scarf. She is every grain of rice and every farmer that harvests them, every stroke of a brush and the painter who made them. She is the kindness of the world and the artistry its denizens create, and the kitsune of Tian Xia take their role as descendants of her favored attendants very seriously.

Daikitsu's most ardent followers claim their goddess loves Tian Xia the most, for where Shizuru is the sun and Hei Feng the rain, Daikitsu is the land that nourishes all who live on it. It's said that Daikitsu reached down from the heavens to embroider the land with even rows and thus brought the first fields and rice paddies to Tian Xia. To honor this, when one of her worshippers reaches maturity, they are given a plain cotton garment that they will spend the rest of their lives embroidering, slowly creating a design that spans the whole piece.

To Daikitsu, a beautiful world is one that flourishes. Spring brings colorful flowers, summer luscious fruits, and autumn a bountiful harvest to help endure the endless cold of winter. As such, she tends to surround herself with similar things. This may explain her friendship with Nalinivati outside of the joint vernal fertility festival held in their honor, as well as their rapport despite the latter's prickliness. Altars to the Serpent's Kiss are regularly filled with woven offerings from Daikitsu's followers, left in respect to their odd friendship and to mimic the intricate gifts the gods bestow upon each other.

What Daikitsu despises most is war. War ravages the fields, steals away lives that could have created artistry, and demands attention and resources that could have been used to build civilization. To wield anything sharper than a kama is to shun Daikitsu, and she does not tolerate such a snub.



AVATAR

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Daikitsu gains the following additional abilities.

Daikitsu Speed 60 feet, ignore difficult terrain, immune to immobilized; **Melee** ❖ flail (reach 15 feet), **Damage** 6d8+6 bludgeoning; **Ranged** ❖ spectral foxfire (range 120 feet), **Damage** 6d6+6 mental

Fumeiyoshi



Lord of Envy

Areas of Concern envy, graves, infamy, undead
Edicts punish those who have good fortune they don't deserve, devour the pleasures of the living, encourage resentment, make graveyards supernaturally unsafe
Anathema pass by food without stealing a bite, allow honor or tradition to prevent you from taking what you want
Divine Attribute Constitution or Charisma
Cleric Spells 1st: *grim tendrils*, 2nd: *feast of ashes* (*Divine Mysteries*), 7th: *possession*
Divine Font *harm*
Divine Sanctification must choose unholy
Divine Skill Intimidation
Domains ambition, destruction, earth, undeath
Alternate Domains indulgence
Favored Weapon naginata (*Treasure Vault* 25)



To most, the history of Fumeiyoshi is nothing more than a tale of warning that parents tell their children to teach them that envy and vengeance will only be met with righteous retribution. To those who keep his altars secreted away in dank cellars and hidden rooms, however, Fumeiyoshi represents a hunger for justice that the laws of society will not provide.

In the beginning, Fumeiyoshi was the god of night, with dominion as deep and vast as the sky. When night turned to day, the sun goddess Shizuru would set him softly to sleep before rising as the dawn, then would whisper in his ear to wake him when she set, and for that he loved her. Yet for all his love, their moments together were transient and fleeting. By contrast, his younger brother Tsukiyo, god of the moon, was never without Shizuru's affections. Tsukiyo brazenly flaunted his relationship with Shizuru and was selfish with her light, and for that, Fumeiyoshi grew to despise him.

Fumeiyoshi realized that as long as his brother lived, he would never be first in Shizuru's eyes. So he lured Tsukiyo behind cloud cover, smothered him with his darkness, struck him with enough fury to leave a permanent gash on the moon, and consumed the light from Tsukiyo's body before burying his corpse in the earth. It did not take long for the clouds to part and for Shizuru to see what Fumeiyoshi had done. Shizuru then stripped Fumeiyoshi of his dominions, resurrected Tsukiyo, and entombed Fumeiyoshi in his brother's grave. Never to rise above the ground again, Fumeiyoshi was to spend the rest of eternity without Shizuru's warmth, forever seeking its feeble substitute in food and stolen life.

It is said that the worship of Fumeiyoshi is learned not by teaching or guidance, but by the harsh cruelty of others. A follower of Fumeiyoshi might be an eldest child passed over by their younger sibling, an ambitious merchant who feels they are owed more in life, or a clandestine radical out to change the world. They do so knowing that the risks are great and there are costs to pay, but if they succeed, they may finally find their moment in the sun. And those who have denied others glory may find dark, moonless nights when the sky is filled with clouds particularly treacherous.

Avatar

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Fumeiyoshi gains the following additional abilities.

Fumeiyoshi Speed 60 feet, burrow 40 feet, fly 60 feet; **Melee** ❖ vengeful naginata (deadly 1d8, reach 20 feet, versatile P), **Damage** 6d8+6 slashing; **Ranged** ❖ life-draining stare (range 120 feet), **Damage** 6d6 void + caster gains 5 temporary Hit Points

General Susumu

THE BLACK DAIMYO

Areas of Concern fear, glory, warfare, death
Edicts seek glory in battle, loudly proclaim your victories, protect your possessions and strongholds
Anathema cower from fights, refuse a challenge from an equal, mistreat your weapons, abuse your mount
Divine Attribute Strength or Dexterity
Cleric Spells 1st: *sure strike*, 3rd: *wall of wind*, 4th: *weapon storm*
Divine Font *harm*
Divine Sanctification can choose unholy
Divine Skill Athletics
Domains confidence, destruction, might, zeal
Favored Weapon longbow



No matter what trappings of righteousness it might wear, war is murder. A weapon is a tool to kill, and violence a means of subjugation. The ultimate power is found at the tip of an arrow or the edge of a sword, and the ultimate glory is found in the churned, bloody mud of a battlefield. Anything more is just words.

Just as his half-sister Shizuru represents light and righteousness, General Susumu represents the seething darkness of pride and ambition. He recruits those who find Shizuru's gracious code of conduct too strict and impractical in a world with real battles and monsters. Once lured, General Susumu deftly feeds into this follower's desires for new meaning in their lives by indoctrinating them into the path of war and glory at all costs. As such, General Susumu is the patron of fallen samurai, and constantly seeks to stoke the hubris that hides within even the most stalwart of hearts.

Though he has little concern for his victims or even his subordinates, Susumu has his pride as a warrior, and those who wish to keep his favor must have the same. The tools of battle—mighty weapons and well-trained steeds—are essential and must be well treated; abuse of either is both shortsighted and contemptible. Lands and strongholds must be defended, not out of any duty to their people, but because their loss is a blemish on their lord's reputation. A follower of Susumu must always be willing to stand up to any challenge and prove their worth.

General Susumu is a skilled leader who seeks victory and glory in battle, regardless of the cost. His troops are oblivious to any innocent bystanders as they charge to engage the enemy, and his officers are unconcerned about any collateral damage their armies may cause to cities or villages. Foes who see Susumu's symbol emblazoned on their enemy's battle standards often drop their weapons and run rather than face the General's onslaught.



AVATAR

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of General Susumu gains the following additional abilities.

General Susumu Speed 50 feet, fly 50 feet (when mounted); **Melee** ❖ katana (deadly 3d8, two-hand d10, reach 15 feet, versatile P), **Damage** 6d8+8 slashing; **Ranged** ❖ longbow (range 120 ft), **Damage** 6d6+3 piercing

Hei Feng



Duke of Thunder

Areas of Concern sea, storms, tengu, sailors
Edicts follow your passions, make token attempts to apologize to those you have wronged, respect the power of the sea and sky, encourage flashy entertainment
Anathema fake friendship with those you despise; disrespect Hei Feng or Hei Feng's estranged wife Lady Jingxi; ignore an affront to you, Hei Feng, or Lady Jingxi
Divine Attribute Constitution or Charisma
Cleric Spells 1st: *gust of wind*, 4th: *hydraulic torrent*, 6th: *chain lightning*
Divine Font *harm* or *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose unholy, can choose holy if you are a tengu
Divine Skill Performance
Domains air, indulgence, lightning, water
Alternate Domains destruction, travel
Favored Weapon jiu huan dao (*Treasure Vault* 25)

Hei Feng, the Duke of Thunder, arrives in a surge of wind and a flash of lightning. Depicted as a tengu with smoking black feathers and a nine-ring sword in his claws, Hei Feng is the lord of storms and possesses a temperament as volatile as the raging sea. He boasts a vast array of followers in Kwanlai, where the tengu population has constructed hundreds of statues venerating him along the coast. Smaller figures have also been erected as odes to his four retainers—the Counts of Wind, Rain, Thunder, and Lightning. Outside of Kwanlai, temples dedicated to Hei Feng are present in nearly all of Tian Xia's seaside communities.

Hei Feng does not hide his emotions, and his profanity-laced battle cries, passionate praises of street performances, and cackles of glee while imbibing copious amounts of alcohol are legendary. Instead of agonizing over the unpredictability of existence, worshippers of Hei Feng mimic their god's lust for life, grasping every moment and fully devoting themselves to their passions.



One of the most prominent displays of this fervor occurs in Kwanlai during the Festival of Sea to Sky, a Tian holiday celebrating the Duke of Thunder. During the festival, Hei Fengans parade along the coast, hoisting palanquins bearing cloth and paper figures of Hei Feng and his four retainers above their heads. At every statue and shrine devoted to their god and his entourage, festival participants offer both loud prayers and sips of cloudless lightning, a potent rice liquor renowned for burning throats. Once everyone is properly tipsy, worshippers scatter firecrackers along the road and proceed to march through the explosions. Injuries ranging from singed eyebrows to painful burns are usually endured during this ritual, but to Hei Fengans, the Festival of Sea to Sky is the purest means of celebrating their god's fiery personality. Furthermore, Hei Feng always rewards the most fervent festival participants with fair weather during their next sea voyage.

The Duke of Thunder's faithful wander far and wide, making them common fixtures of both adventuring groups and Tian Xia folklore. Curiously, Hei Fengans are also known for their extraordinarily polite behavior toward the temples and worshippers of Lady Jingxi, Hei Feng's estranged wife. While Hei Feng was never a loving husband, rumor has it that anyone who disrespects Lady Jingxi will face the full extent of the storm god's wrath.

Irori

Master of Masters

Areas of Concern history, knowledge, self-perfection
Edicts be humble; help others perfect themselves; hone your body, mind, and spirit to a more perfect state; practice discipline
Anathema become addicted to a substance, destroy an important historical text, repeatedly fail to maintain self-control
Divine Attribute Intelligence or Wisdom
Cleric Spells 1st: *jump*, 3rd: *haste*, 4th: *mountain resilience*
Divine Font *harm* or *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy or unholy
Divine Skill Athletics
Domains knowledge, might, perfection, truth
Alternate Domains change, vigil
Favored Weapon fist

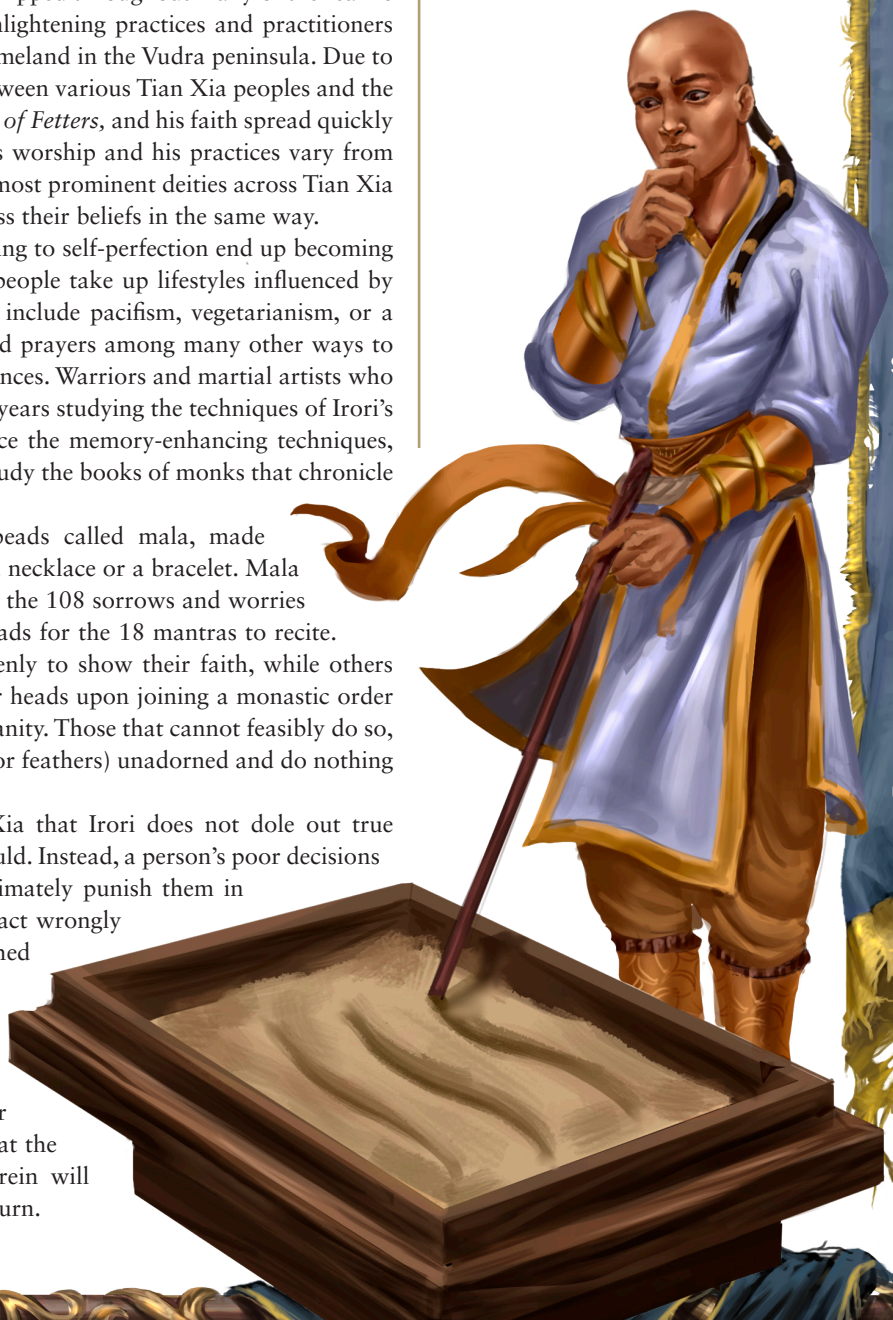


Though the Master of Masters is worshipped throughout many of the realms of Golarion, Tian Xia is where his enlightening practices and practitioners are most widespread outside of his homeland in the Vudra peninsula. Due to strong trade and cultural influence between various Tian Xia peoples and the Vudrani, Irori's sacred text, *Unbinding of Fetters*, and his faith spread quickly across the continent. Though both his worship and his practices vary from country to country, Irori is one of the most prominent deities across Tian Xia and its peoples. No two nations express their beliefs in the same way.

While only those with a devout calling to self-perfection end up becoming monks and ascetic wanderers, many people take up lifestyles influenced by Irori's teachings. These lifestyles may include pacifism, vegetarianism, or a dedication to learning, meditation, and prayers among many other ways to improve upon one's self and circumstances. Warriors and martial artists who desire physical perfection often spend years studying the techniques of Irori's monastic orders. Scholars may practice the memory-enhancing techniques, recite the mantras for the mind, and study the books of monks that chronicle the history of Tian Xia and beyond.

Many worshippers wear prayer beads called mala, made from seeds, wood, or stone, either as a necklace or a bracelet. Mala necklaces have 108 beads to represent the 108 sorrows and worries of life, while the bracelets have 18 beads for the 18 mantras to recite. Some wearers display their beads openly to show their faith, while others keep theirs hidden. Monks shave their heads upon joining a monastic order to show their dedication and lack of vanity. Those that cannot feasibly do so, such as tengu, simply keep their hair (or feathers) unadorned and do nothing to bring attention to it.

It is commonly believed in Tian Xia that Irori does not dole out true punishments like many other gods would. Instead, a person's poor decisions and their lack of self-control will ultimately punish them in the end. In the same way, those who act wrongly in the monastic orders are not punished like many criminals might be. Rather, restorative justice is undertaken to alleviate the harm caused by the wrongdoer and to rehabilitate them. In the worst scenarios, the wrongdoer is cast out of the order in the hope that the rigors of life and the challenges therein will humble them by the time they may return.



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Jin Li



The Golden Dragon Carp

Areas of Concern challenges, dares, promotions, self-improvement
Edicts take up dares and challenges in good faith, persist with creativity and tenacity, own up to your failures as a way to improve oneself
Anathema give up without trying, dismiss or mock someone's effort, take success for granted, discount the power of beginner's luck or luck in general
Divine Attribute Strength or Wisdom
Cleric Spells 1st: *jump*, 3rd: *feet to fins*, 4th: *hydraulic torrent*
Divine Font *heal*
Divine Sanctification none
Divine Skill Athletics
Domains ambition, change (*Divine Mysteries*), might, toil (*Rage of Elements* 97)
Alternate Domains water, luck
Favored Weapon sansetsukon (*Treasure Vault* 25)

Once a humble carp, Jin Li is the god of the determined and the hardworking. Just as he worked day after day to successfully jump a waterfall and ascend to godhood, he guides those who look to improve themselves and face challenges head-on. For Jin Li, there is no success without hard work, tenacity, and a little bit of luck. Failure and weakness are not something to be ashamed of, but rather opportunities to learn and grow. Success is also not a one-time thing for Jin Li, and once he has achieved one goal, he soon sets his eyes on another. The road to self-improvement doesn't end with godhood, after all.

As Jin Li's influence has risen, there has been an influx in competitions across Tian Xia. People invoke Jin Li's name to legitimize challenges and dares, praying for him to oversee the competition and ensure good sportsmanship from all participants. The symbol of the dragon carp and the worship of Jin Li have become synonymous with a community of people who support and push each other to be their best selves.

Bureaucrats who worship Jin Li as the god of promotions have started keeping large ponds with carp, hoping that by taking care of the fish, Jin Li will look upon them favorably. It has become a challenge in itself, with competition forming between carp owners as they try to make their fish the biggest, healthiest, and most beautiful of them all.

For Jin Li and his followers, the dragon carp is not an untouchable figure on a pedestal, but a companion on the journey to self-improvement. Jin Li is there, struggling alongside the student who burns midnight oil to get through another study sheet, the potter who tries a new technique to form their clay, and the tinkerer who creates the hundredth iteration of their invention. He walks alongside the child who wants to go from crawling to running, does drills alongside the hero determined to better protect their peers, and bears witness to the adventurer who overcomes the most legendary of challenges and perils thrown in their way. While Jin Li continues to pursue new challenges to overcome, he's always there for those looking to join him in leaping up their own personal waterfalls.

Avatar

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Jin Li gains the following additional abilities.

Jin Li Speed 30 feet, swim 60 feet, ignore difficult terrain and greater difficult terrain, can breathe underwater; **Melee** ❖ smashing flop (backswing, reach 15 feet, shove), **Damage** 6d8+6 bludgeoning; **Ranged** ❖ mighty splash (range 60 feet), **Damage** 4d6+3 bludgeoning plus 1d6 bludgeoning splash damage. The caster is immune to this splash damage.

Kofusachi

THE LAUGHING GOD

Areas of Concern abundance, discovery, happiness, prosperity
Edicts support local businesses, bring prosperity to your community, sample life's pleasures
Anathema become tied to one location, judge another based on sexual desires or gender roles, harm innocents, spread despair, commit murder
Divine Attribute Dexterity or Constitution
Cleric Spells 1st: *soothe*, 2nd: *laughing fit*, 8th: *uncontrollable dance*
Divine Font *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy
Divine Skill Performance
Domains luck, passion, travel, wealth
Alternate Domains fate
Favored Weapon staff

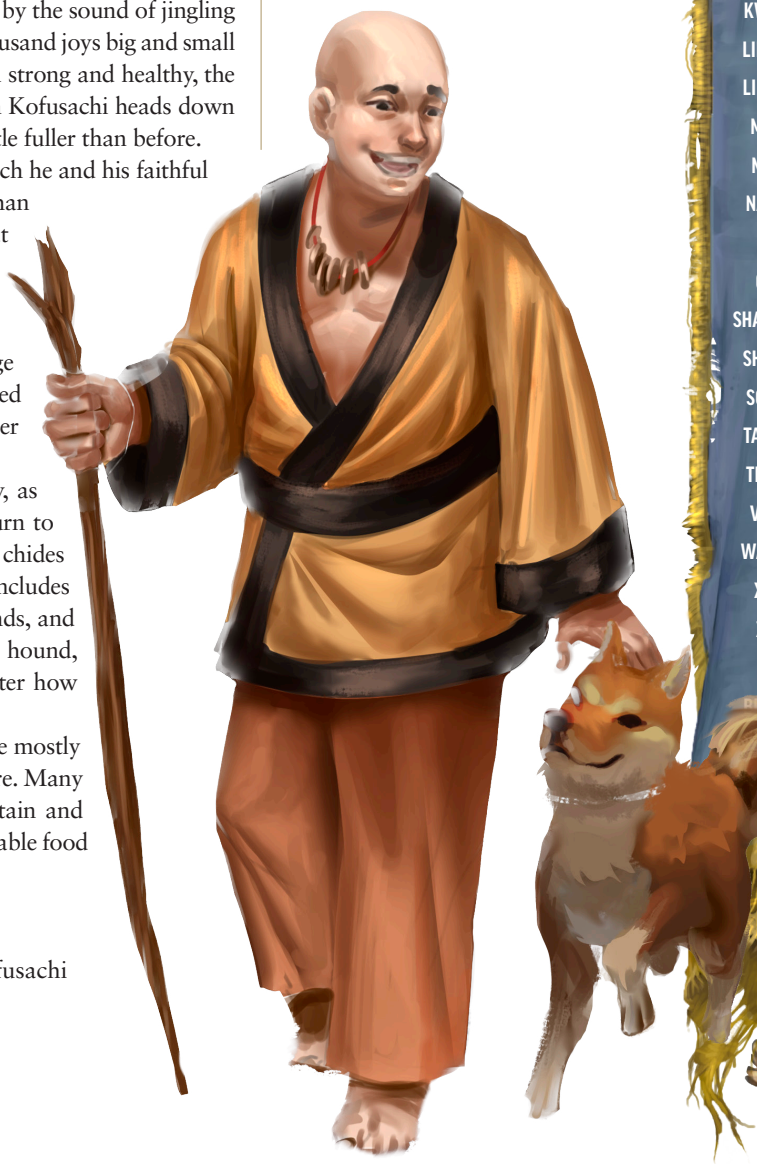


Kofusachi lives by a simple code: The road ahead should lead to your happiness, and the road behind should be more abundant for your passage. Unexpected but always appreciated, his arrival in a town is heralded by the sound of jingling coins. For a few days, the town bursts into smiles as a thousand joys big and small fall into place—a sale may go well, a baby may be born strong and healthy, the skies may clear just for the night of a festival—and then Kofusachi heads down the road once more, banks, storehouses, and hearts a little fuller than before.

Kofusachi is the god of prosperity and happiness, which he and his faithful see as distinct but intertwined. While he knows better than to teach that coins can buy joy outright, he knows that one's laughter can be drowned out by the growling of a starving stomach. Kofusachi sees it as his mission to bring both abundance and joy to as many as possible, usually by connecting people and their desires: he'll nudge a wealthy but hungry merchant toward a poor but talented chef's new restaurant or push two shy neighbors together at a local dance.

For all his generosity, Kofusachi is somewhat flighty, as no sooner has he found one happiness than his eyes turn to the horizon for the next. Shelyn in particular sometimes chides Kofusachi for his list of short-term lovers, which includes numerous deities and mortals of all genders, backgrounds, and walks of life. His only true companion is his traveling hound, Namsoon, a boisterous jindo whose fur shines no matter how many ditches he rolls in.

Following their deity's example, Kofusachi's clergy are mostly wandering or itinerant monks, with little formal structure. Many towns have a small travel hut that Kofusachans maintain and leave unlocked, cleaning it and leaving behind nonperishable food and seven coins for anyone who needs them.



AVATAR

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Kofusachi gains the following additional abilities.

Kofusachi Speed 70 feet, fly 70 feet, ignore difficult terrain and greater difficult terrain; **Melee** ❖ walking staff (reach 15 feet, two-handed d8), **Damage** 6d4+6 bludgeoning; **Ranged** ❖ springing jindo bite (range 60 feet), **Damage** 5d6+3 piercing plus 1d6 persistent bleed

Lady Jingxi



The Poet of Dawn and Dusk

Areas of Concern daybreak, liminal spaces, twilight, solitude
Edicts create art with words, master the written language, display the soft beauty of natural colors
Anathema destroy a natural plum tree, drink excessive amounts of alcohol, act rude or boorish, commit torture or murder, knowingly harm an innocent
Divine Attribute Intelligence or Wisdom
Cleric Spells 1st: *dizzying colors*, 3rd: *enthrall*, 7th: *project image*
Divine Font *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy
Divine Skill Performance
Domains creation, glyph (*Divine Mysteries*), knowledge, repose (*Divine Mysteries*)
Alternate Domains moon, nature, sun
Weapon fighting fan (*Treasure Vault* 25)

A gentle tengu woman wrapped in white with flowers adorning her feathers, the Poet of Dawn and Dusk is the patron of all who feel at home within the quiet, liminal spaces of the world. The elegance that exists in a plum blossom yet to fully bloom; the peace of a mountaintop bathed in dissipating dawn mist; the fading trail of a shooting star as it vanishes beyond the horizon—all are instances of the subtle grandeur and transience that Lady Jingxi loves. Attempting to encapsulate this beauty while acknowledging that transience can never be fully captured is a vital element of Lady Jingxi's poems, and those who worship her tend to be artists and writers who empathize with this struggle.



Once known as the Lady of Lightning, Lady Jingxi previously worked alongside her rowdy husband, the storm god Hei Feng. Using her collection of magic mirrors, she shone light on the world, amplifying each of Hei Feng's lightning bolts with a blisteringly bright burst. The constant noise brought her no joy, and her true passion came from composing poetry in the fields of her plum tree garden. On one fateful day, Hei Feng summoned a bevy of lightning bolts and destroyed the garden in a drunken fit. A distraught Lady Jingxi left her husband and traveled across the cosmos, taking a magic mirror with her. She finally found contentment when she used the mirror to reflect color into the heavens, creating sunrise and sunset. Lady Jingxi has used this mirror every morning and evening since to bathe the world in calm hues of pink and purple, and the poems that she scribes during these ephemeral moments are legendary in their grace.

Temples honoring Lady Jingxi can be found in Goka, Jinin, Kwanlai, Linvarre, and Minkai, and smaller shrines are scattered throughout Tian Xia, usually in regions off the beaten path.

Avatar

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Lady Jingxi gains the following additional abilities.

Lady Jingxi Speed 50 feet, fly 50 feet, ignore difficult terrain and greater difficult terrain; **Melee** ❖ lotus fan (deadly 3d6, finesse, nonlethal, reach 15 feet), **Damage** 6d6+6 slashing; **Ranged** ❖ cascading twilight curtain (nonlethal, range 120 feet), **Damage** 6d6+3 mental

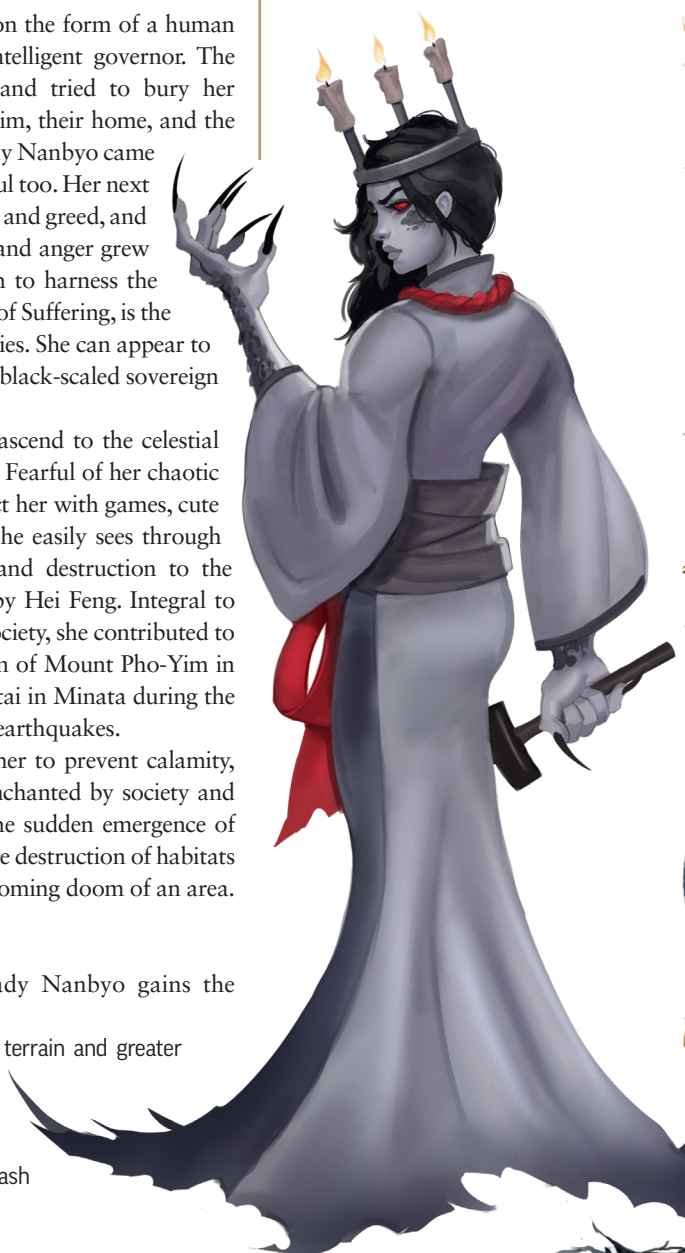
Lady Nanbyo

THE WIDOW OF SUFFERING



Areas of Concern earthquakes, plagues, fire, suffering
Edicts revel in destruction, make natural disasters worse, allow natural disasters to take their due
Anathema allow a natural disaster to completely destroy a community or leave a group with no survivors
Divine Attribute Strength or Constitution
Cleric Spells 1st: *breathe fire*, 5th: *control water*, 6th: *phantasmal calamity*
Divine Font *harm*
Divine Sanctification must choose unholy
Divine Skill Nature
Domains destruction, fire, plague (*Divine Mysteries*), water
Alternate Domains dust (*Divine Mysteries*), earth, lightning (*Divine Mysteries*), sorrow (*Divine Mysteries*)
Favored Weapon warhammer

Once a trusting sovereign dragon, Lady Nanbyo took on the form of a human woman after falling in love with a handsome and intelligent governor. The governor selfishly sought her immortality, however, and tried to bury her alive. Transforming into her full dragon form, she set him, their home, and the surrounding land ablaze. After surviving the disaster, Lady Nanbyo came to love another man, but this one was unkind and harmful too. Her next lover, and the next, all followed this pattern of selfishness and greed, and so every lover met a tragic end. In her grief, vengeance and anger grew in her, until they consumed her and allowed her wrath to harness the power of natural disasters. Lady Nanbyo, or the Widow of Suffering, is the goddess of earthquakes, plagues, fires, and other calamities. She can appear to others as a graceful woman, shapeshifting into a vicious black-scaled sovereign dragon with over a dozen legs.



It was Lady Nanbyo's cunning that allowed her to ascend to the celestial court, disguising herself in a storm created by Hei Feng. Fearful of her chaotic motives and mastery of strife, many deities try to distract her with games, cute animals, and companionship—usually unsuccessfully. She easily sees through their ruses and slips away, adding death, suffering, and destruction to the volcanic eruptions by Yamatsumi or tsunamis caused by Hei Feng. Integral to the constant reshaping of Tian Xia's environment and society, she contributed to the devastating fall of the Lung Wa empire, the eruption of Mount Pho-Yim in Tang Mai in 7099 IC, and the eruption of Mount Shibotai in Minata during the Shu empire that caused widespread drought, pests, and earthquakes.

Those who fear her wrath and destruction pray to her to prevent calamity, but those who reverently worship her are usually disenchanted by society and look to cleanse anew with destruction and anarchy. The sudden emergence of yakshas, guardian spirits manifested to protect against the destruction of habitats and people, can often be a sign of Lady Nanbyo's forthcoming doom of an area.

Avatar

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Lady Nanbyo gains the following additional abilities.

Lady Nanbyo Speed 70 feet, fly 70 feet, ignore difficult terrain and greater difficult terrain; **Melee** ❖ destructive warhammer (disarm, reach 15 feet, sweep, trip), **Damage** 6d8+6 bludgeoning; **Ranged** ❖ sufferable storm surge (air, electricity, range 120 feet, water), **Damage** 4d6 bludgeoning plus 1d6 electricity splash damage. The caster is immune to this splash damage.

The Lady of the North Star



Mother of Secrets

Areas of Concern secrets, remembrance, winter, immortality
Edicts seek lost knowledge, uncover hidden mysteries, honor that which is forgotten, pursue immortality
Anathema destroy sources of knowledge, make public that which should remain secret, desecrate a memorial, grow complacent about one's ignorance and mortality, commit torture or murder, knowingly harm an innocent
Divine Attribute Intelligence or Wisdom
Cleric Spells 1st: *penumbral shroud* (*Divine Mysteries*), 2nd: *stupefy*, 6th: *blanket of stars* (*Player Core 2*)
Divine Font *harm* or *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy
Divine Skill Occultism
Domains cold (*Divine Mysteries*), darkness, secrecy, vigil (*Divine Mysteries*)
Alternate Domains change (*Divine Mysteries*), star (*Divine Mysteries*)
Favored Weapon glaive



A goddess whose name has been lost to time (or purposefully obscured), the secretive Lady of the North Star is referred to only by her countless epithets. Despite the efforts of Pharasma's faithful to scrub the Lady's name from the annals of history, a few scattered sects still worship her and transmit her teachings. Their ranks are often closed to outsiders, and their initiation rituals are arduous and famously cryptic. In spite of the Lady of the North Star's love for secrecy, she has one famous weakness: her empathy for those nearing death. She has been known to take pity on those afflicted with incurable curses and ailments of all kinds, appearing to prospective followers through dreams and visions. There, she presents them with a final challenge: to uncover her lost path to immortality before their time runs out.

According to legend, the Lady of the North Star once descended to the mortal world, disguising herself as a human. She witnessed firsthand the horrors of mortality as her newfound friends grew old and weak with time, with even the strongest warriors ultimately succumbing to illness and infirmity. Her frigid heart was moved. She took such pity on the mortal peoples of the world that she conspired to create a forbidden ritual, strong enough to grant immortality to any mortal skilled enough to execute it. She split the mysterious ritual into nine stages, hiding the nine fragments across the land of Tian Xia.

The truth of the ritual has been lost to time, but all her sects agree that upon successful completion, the performer will ascend to join the Lady and her mysterious court of immortals that lies far beyond the stars to the North, shielded from mortal eyes and cloaked in impenetrable darkness. There, the wintry night is cold enough to freeze even the wheels of time, preserving her followers' immortality for all eternity.

Avatar

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of the Lady of the North Star gains the following additional abilities.

Lady of the North Star Speed 70 feet, fly 70 feet, ignore difficult terrain and greater difficult terrain; **Melee** ❖ glaive (deadly d8, reach 20 feet), **Damage** 6d8+6 slashing; **Ranged** ❖ chilling revelation (range 120 feet, versatile cold), **Damage** 6d6+3 mental

Lao Shu Po

OLD RAT WOMAN

Areas of Concern night, rats, thieves
Edicts work quietly toward your goals in the shadows, steal what you need, keep an ear among the ignored and downtrodden
Anathema work honestly for something you could steal instead, risk too much for another creature
Divine Attribute Dexterity or Intelligence
Cleric Spells 1st: *summon animal* (rodents only), 2nd: *knock*, 3rd: *veil of privacy*
Divine Font *harm*
Divine Sanctification can choose unholy
Divine Skill Thievery
Domains darkness, luck, swarm (*Divine Mysteries*), trickery
Alternate Domains secrecy, wealth
Favored Weapon dagger



Few gods are viewed with such dual love and repulsion as the Old Rat Woman, Lao Shu Po. Most often depicted in the form of an enormous six-legged rat, Lao Shu Po is the patron of rats, thieves, and those who linger under the veil of night—figures of shadow who pray to her for protection from the shining light of justice and truth. Hers is perhaps the most brazen claim to godhood: though Lao Shu Po was born a common rat, she sought out the grave of Tsukiyo, god of the moon, and consumed his flesh, thus assuring her apotheosis. Soon after achieving godhood, she snatched the domain of night from Fumeiyoshi as he was banished from the heavens, ensuring her role as protector of thieves as well.

Some view these actions as crookedly aspirational, the story of a creature so determined to rise above her rank that nothing could be seen as too vile. Others regard it as theft at best and sacrilege at worst, a revolting act that twisted the court of the gods immutably. Lao Shu Po cares not what others think of her, so long as those who follow her succeed in their own right. Those who have found themselves ground under the heel of society seek solace in her shadow, for who else truly desires their benefit?

Lao Shu Po has never been one for outward worship; such pageantry is far too attention-seeking for her machinations. It's more common for her followers to carve her symbol into the soles of their shoes than to wear it proudly on a medallion. Ysoki in the Darklands (page 68) honor Lao Shu Po, yet they claim her as their ancestor and not their goddess to avoid being targeted by her detractors. Though many gods would be offended by this apparent slight, Lao Shu Po doesn't mind.

Despite her self-serving attitude, Lao Shu Po is kind to those who follow her, casting the cover of nightfall over them so they may escape into the darkness, granting them her blessing to live until the next dawn. Perhaps she knows she stands to gain from them, or it could be out of a shred of mortal sympathy for their plight. After all, Lao Shu Po doesn't want destruction, or chaos, or apocalypse. She just wants to survive and thrive.



AVATAR

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Lao Shu Po gains the following additional abilities.

Lao Shu Po Speed 70 feet, climb 70 feet, immune to frightened; **Melee** ❖ bite (reach 15 feet), **Damage** 6d8+6 piercing; **Ranged** ❖ nightmare rat swarm (range 120 feet), **Damage** 3d6+2 piercing plus 3d6+2 mental

Mugura and Nrithu



THE DIVINE DANCERS

Areas of Concern dance and storytelling, lovers and rivals, fame and gratitude
Edicts practice until perfect, create stories and relationships, trust and listen to your partner
Anathema steal credit from others, upstage or sabotage, spread rumors to get ahead
Divine Attribute Dexterity or Charisma
Cleric Spells 1st: *shockwave* (*Divine Mysteries*), 3rd: *hypnotize*, 4th: *mirror's misfortune* (*Secrets of Magic* 117)
Divine Font *harm* or *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy or unholy
Divine Skill Performance
Domains ambition, freedom, passion, repose
Favored Weapon fist

Mugura and Nrithu are a pair of lovers turned rivals, eternally locked in dance, forever testing each other. Theirs is a cautionary tale, one of love and hubris. Mugura was the rambunctious child of a raja and Nrithu was a shy street rat. Their worlds collided due to a passion for dance and both being unable to speak. The two of them quickly grew close, sharing a language of motion and rhythm, exchanging stories of lives worlds apart. Together, they became a beautiful dance duo across Tian Xia, entertaining streets and palaces alike and learning from each corner of the continent. As they grew in talent and fame, so did their devotion to storytelling and each other. Likha, the Teller god, saw this devotion and gave both a boon of godhood to perform together for eternity as well as tell stories to the gods. But then their relationship grew dark. The whims of their followers drew them away from each other and a deep love turned ugly as they bickered over the domains they blessed. With eternity to perform, they each became harsher on the other. Small mistakes compounded as standards grew. Bitter rivalry replaced love as they sabotaged each other in small ways on their cosmic stage, gajjelu ringing out like clashing blades with each step.



Mugura and Nrithu are depicted as dancers in mirrored poses, their genders open to interpretation. Bells and powder adorn their shrines, and vibrant cloth is wrapped around their statues, always together and always in mirroring colors. Most followers of the Divine Dancers are pairs who give themselves to all forms of dance, dedicating their performances to the gods in hopes of finding their prolific success. Dancers will have their gajjelu blessed at their first recital and will thereafter speak to their partners solely in dance to attain perfect synchronization.

While Mugura and Nrithu are primarily gods of dance, their followers are diverse. Any strong pairs often seek the gods' favor. Children gleefully play as the two, while adults tease those in bickering relationships to learn from Mugura and Nrithu's story. People who hate each other but are forced to work together often feel cursed by the two gods. Those who have lost or can't find their voice gain special strength and love from Mugura and Nrithu and are always welcome in their temples.

AVATAR

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Mugura and Nrithu gains the following additional abilities.

Mugura and Nrithu Speed 60, fly 70 feet; **Melee** ❖ sweeping leg (agile, finesse, reach 15 feet), **Damage** 6d8+6 bludgeoning; **Ranged** ❖ echo of bells (range 120), **Damage** 6d6+6 sonic

Nalinivati

THE SERPENT'S KISS

Areas of Concern family, fertility, snakes, sorcery
Edicts seek out magic and use it, use poison, heal poisons, bear or adopt children, raise snakes
Anathema kill a harmless snake or swan, spurn friends due to jealousy or romantic competition, betray your offspring, separate lovers
Divine Attribute Wisdom or Charisma
Cleric Spells 1st: *charm*, 2nd: *invisibility*, 3rd: *lightning bolt*, 4th: *reflective scales* (*Divine Mysteries*), 5th: *subconscious suggestion*, 6th: *mislead*, 7th: *contingency*, 8th: *confusing colors* (*Player Core 2*), 9th: *wrathful storm*
Divine Font *harm* or *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy or unholy
Divine Skill Arcana
Domains magic, naga (*Divine Mysteries*), passion, wyrmkin (*Divine Mysteries*)
Alternate Domains family, glyph (*Divine Mysteries*)
Favored Weapon jaws or urumi (*Treasure Vault* 25)





Nalinivati is an unusual daughter of Ravithra, born a simple snake rather than a naga. Her ascent to godhood is a story of dedication to craft, knowledge, and community. As a powerful sorceress, she became the first queen of Nagajor. She cared deeply for her lovers and even deeper for her children. She also cared for the snakes around her and took in those who were lost and without family. She created communities with structure that helped sustain her ambitions and pushed others to pursue magical knowledge. She later transformed herself into a naga to further protect and nurture those she loved, proving to herself and everyone else that dedication and curiosity, with a sprinkle of strong magic, can break all barriers. Upon reaching godhood, she saw to reward those who wished to also care for others, give their next generation a life of love and ambition, and take in those less fortunate.

Nalinivati is depicted as a large naga with colorful scales and features, her body shimmering in mesmerizing patterns. Her body fluidly shifts between more humanoid or more snake-like depending on who she's communing with and whether she wishes to comfort or to terrify them. Nalinivati is adorned with jewelry and flowers given to her as gifts from her worshippers, while trinkets, crafts, and books hang off her waist. She is also often paired with Daikitsu, the Lady of Foxes, with whom Nalinivati shares a long history of intimate platonic friendship. They are honored as deities of fertility, and Daikitsu's shrines are often adorned with colorful scales or books as a sign of respect between goddesses.

Many people pray to Nalinivati when trying to start a family, giving offerings of meat and milk to wild snakes. Those same families will continue to pray to her when their children begin their studies. Adherents who pursue arcane studies will keep pet snakes as familiars to gain Nalinivati's sorcerous favor.

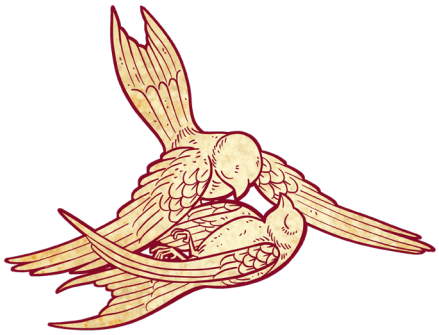
Nalinivati's thirst for arcane knowledge and her own ascent into godhood eventually led her to her own act of creation: nagaji. Inspired by, and a little in spite of, Daikitsu's affection and relationship towards her kitsune, Nalinivati quickly poured her love and care into her creation of nagaji, giving them the image of her own ophidian ancestors.

AVATAR

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Nalinivati gains the following additional abilities.

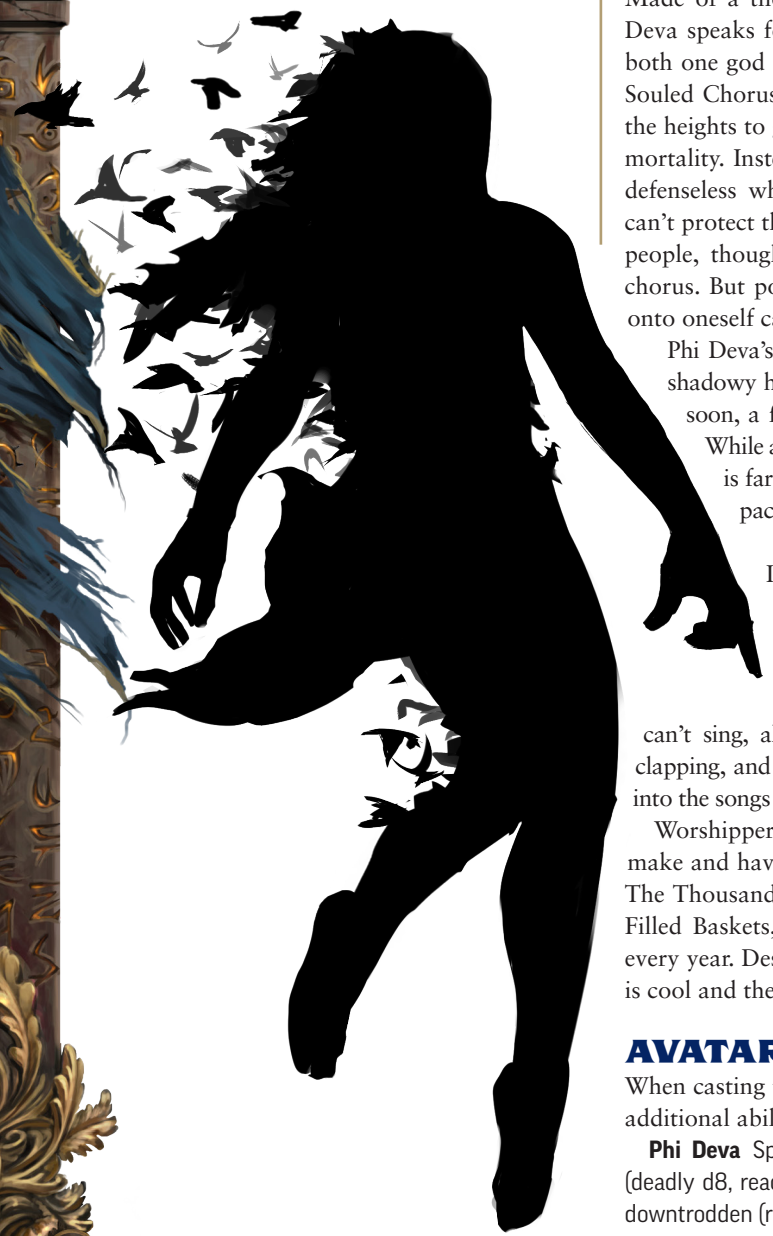
Nalinivati Speed 70 feet; **Melee** ❖ tail swipe (finesse, reach 15 feet), **Damage** 6d8 bludgeoning; **Ranged** ❖ venom spit (range 30 feet), **Damage** 5d6 poison plus 1d6 persistent poison

Phi Deva



The Thousand-Souled Chorus

Areas of Concern people, the defenseless, the collective good
Edicts protect the defenseless, assist those who ask for your help, put the collective above yourself
Anathema harm the innocent, take more than you need, overturn a collective decision
Divine Attribute Constitution or Wisdom
Cleric Spells 1st: *soothe*, 4th: *flicker*, 7th: *project image*
Divine Font *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy
Divine Skill Medicine
Domains family, healing, protection, repose (*Divine Mysteries*)
Alternate Domains freedom, nature
Favored Weapon shortbow



Made of a thousand nameless faces and a thousand nameless voices, Phi Deva speaks for and defends those who can't protect themselves. They are both one god and a thousand, both mortal and yet infinite. The Thousand-Souled Chorus is neither a god of a single soul nor a mortal who ascended the heights to godhood, for that would imply they rose out of exceptionable mortality. Instead, they are a god borne of blood, sweat, and death, of the defenseless who were not protected and now seek to protect those who can't protect themselves. Phi Deva is most often worshipped by the common people, though anyone who seeks their protection is welcomed into the chorus. But powerful figures beware, for bringing the sights of the Chorus onto oneself can be dangerous for those who do not check their own power.

Phi Deva's appearance is never a settled thing. To some they appear as a shadowy humanoid; to others, they may appear as someone who died too soon, a flock of birds, or however one might imagine a god to appear. While a defender of those who are unable to defend themselves, Phi Deva is far from a pacifist god. To the Chorus, defense is not best served by pacifism or inaction but instead by forceful action.

Worship of Phi Deva is commonly carried out through song. Intricate and ever-weaving, the songs sung often are those meant to comfort and allay, though some are songs of conflict, meant to strike fear in the hearts of one's enemies. Most often, these songs have been sung in hopeless battles and against armies of empires, where both prayer and fury coalesced into one. For those who can't sing, alternative methods of noise making are offered—instruments, clapping, and dancing are all welcome in worship, and often directly written into the songs themselves.

Worshippers of Phi Deva do so in a communal way, gathering together to make and have a meal, or working together to assist a community member. The Thousand-Souled Chorus's most well-known holiday is the Festival of Filled Baskets, a holiday intersecting with the longest day of the summer every year. Despite this, the holiday is only celebrated at night, when the air is cool and the crickets sing.

Avatar

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Phi Deva gains the following additional abilities.

Phi Deva Speed 60 feet, fly 60 feet; **Melee** ❖ thousand grasping hands (deadly d8, reach 15 feet), **Damage** 6d6+6 bludgeoning; **Ranged** ❖ grudge of the downtrodden (range 120 feet), **Damage** 6d6+3 mental

Qi Zhong

MASTER OF MEDICINE

Areas of Concern cycles, elements, health, medicine
Edicts teach knowledge to others, relieve suffering despite personal difficulty, heal sickness and injury
Anathema deal lethal damage to another living creature (unless as part of a necessary medical treatment)
Divine Attribute Intelligence or Wisdom
Cleric Spells 1st: *soothe*, 2nd: *false vitality*, 4th: *containment* (*Player Core 2*)
Divine Font *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy
Divine Skill Medicine
Domains healing, knowledge, magic, protection
Alternate Domains air, earth, fire, nature, water
Favored Weapon mace



Long ago, in a distant past not found in any current history books, a traveling medic walked the winding paths between settlements with their apprentice, treating the ailments, aches, and pains of those they came across. Despite being implored to stay, the pair would never impose themselves for longer than a night. They were always gone before the first light of the next morning, even if numerous armed guards stood in their way. While scholars can debate whether this folklore had a particular moral to instill, the story accentuates the hope medicine can bring to those in need of it, and thus its importance in society and civilization. Unbeknownst to mortals, the apprentice in said story is the very same individual they worship as the Master of Medicine today. Qi Zhong documented his life and choices in his memoir, *The Eight Hundred Years of Qi Zhong*. What parts of the book that survived today serve as the god's sacred text, advising his worshippers on healing techniques and living philosophies.

Qi Zhong's teachings focus on understanding one's place among the flow of the elements. He espouses resolution, absolution, patience, and taking life slowly but not lazily. A pacifist by nature, his writings also contain insights into psychology, governing, and rulership. Thus, many academics and rulers also worship the god, along with elemental casters, healers, and medicine growers and makers.

Regular folk also seek out the god's crane-filled temples when they have difficulty curing their ailments. It is believed that if one were to offer five-colored grains to these birds, Qi Zhong will send one of his priests on a pilgrimage to the petitioner with the exact cure they needed. In northern Tian Xia, such as the regions of Chu Ye, Kwanlai, and Wanshou, some settlements keep the custom of making a major offering to Qi Zhong every 12 years of one's life, as well as celebrating the Festival of Longevity, where communities will host a feast to honor those who are older than 96.

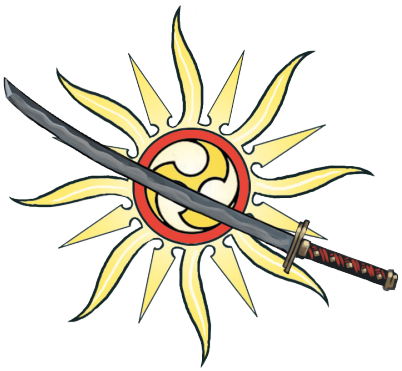


AVATAR

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Qi Zhong gains the following additional abilities.

Qi Zhong Speed 50 feet, ignore difficult terrain; **Melee** ❖ mace (nonlethal, reach 15), **Damage** 6d6 + 6 bludgeoning; **Ranged** ❖ acupoint strike (nonlethal, range 120 ft), **Damage** 6d6+3 piercing

Shizuru



Ruler of Heaven

Areas of Concern ancestors, order, the sun, growth
Edicts practice your chosen skill every day, honor your ancestors, protect nature and society from corruption and destruction
Anathema abandon a companion in need, harm the innocent, disrespect your ancestors, parlay with truce breakers, separate lovers, cast an unholy spell
Divine Attribute Strength or Wisdom
Cleric Spells 1st: *sure strike*, 4th: *reflective scales* (*Divine Mysteries*), 7th: *planar palace*
Divine Font *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy
Divine Skill Society
Domains duty (*Divine Mysteries*), perfection, sun, vigil (*Divine Mysteries*)
Alternate Domains sorrow (*Divine Mysteries*)
Favored Weapon katana

Just as the sun defines natural order on earth, Shizuru holds dominion over the divine and mundane as the Ruler of Heaven. She is worshipped widely and, over the centuries, has taken on different guises and associations. In some regions, she is depicted as a golden dragon surrounded by brilliant light, while more often she is a woman with long, untied hair and armor emblazoned with a rooster. She has been characterized as a committed ruler, an exceptional warrior, a sorrowful lover, and an exacting judge, depending on which source one consults. Although sometimes contradictory, Shizuru accepts her myriad representations as long as the foundational principles of order and growth remain unchanged. She feels little need to justify herself or address how her actions are understood.



For Minkai, Shizuru directly influenced history by giving the imperial families the divine right to rule. Yet her place in Minkai society is not limited to the Imperial Palace, and numerous sects have developed around her mythology. In recent decades, followers have increasingly focused on the separation of Shizuru from Tsukiyo as a story of devotion and love, much to the annoyance of a minority of scholars who see this as an overly romantic reading. Older interpretations found in the archives of Minkai see the division of the sun and moon as an inevitability of the universe. Philosophers were particularly fond of debating why Shizuru would defy the natural order by returning Tsukiyo from death in the first place, but no one ever managed to propose a satisfactory explanation.

This emphasis on order by early Shizurans is evident in the daily rituals and annual ceremonies of Minkai. The sun determines the rhythms of life and provides the nurturing light necessary for growth. For these reasons, followers strive to live structured lives and dedicate time each day to practicing a beneficial skill. The most significant event in the Minkai calendar is the summer solstice, the longest day of the year. Everyone from the poorest fishers to the imperial elite participates in the Itariten Festival, the Festival of Ruling Sun, a celebration of accomplishments and an exuberant request for a bountiful growing season. The festivities officially begin at the first sign of light, but many have already been awake for hours preparing food and drink for the vendors that will serve a non-stop flow of specialty dishes. Towns will buzz well into the next morning, fueled by local sake and sparklers.

Srikalis, Sritaming, and Sribaril

THE THREE-HEADED GOD OF RAIDING AND WAR

Areas of Concern raiding, treasure, war contracts, warriors
Edicts die in battle, revel in protective violence, support what is yours
Anathema lay waste to nature, kill indiscriminately without reason or conviction, choose not to raid when it is needed
Divine Attribute Strength or Dexterity
Cleric Spells 1st: *sure strike*, 3rd: *haste*, 5th: *control water*
Divine Font *harm*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy or unholy
Divine Skill Society
Domains ambition, passion, perfection, zeal
Alternate Domains duty (*Divine Mysteries*), freedom, pain
Favored Weapon kris (*Pathfinder Lost Omens Impossible Lands* 221) or arquebus (*Guns & Gears* 152)



It is said that this triad of deities, known together as the Dewangayaw—Raiding God—sails the sea and sky upon a grand royal war barge. While they do not answer directly to the pleas of their followers and devotees, they very often appear at random, choosing to inflict violence upon those that deserve it. These events, known as god raids, are feared across Tian Xia. They can appear seemingly at random and are heralded by thunderstorms and sudden rains.

The Triad War Gods are the ancestors of the Tian peoples. They were the first warriors to roam the seas and lands of the archipelago and the great continent. They crafted the first war barges and sailed across the world. At the end of it, they realized the great lie of war: war is not needed, but violence must be inflicted. Violence is force and change, and The Triad understands violence must be used to reach Heaven. To force and change oneself is to turn oneself into a diamond. This philosophy is known to almost every warrior in Tian Xia: a concept they call Jamalawas, the Diamond Body, the act of perfecting one's body, spirit, and mind to become a better member of their community.

Tian Xia is a violent place, and the Dewangayaw gives warriors, mercenaries, raiders, and pirates a spiritual avenue to channel their killing instincts. More recently, the Dewangayaw has been appearing to help revolutionaries throughout Golarion who are resisting oppression and encroaching imperialism. The Dewangayaw live in protective violence as well, after all.

The Dewangayaw does not have monks or monasteries. Their priests create boats that are shrines and altars in and of themselves. The act of honing oneself through the martial arts and the crafting of weapons is another act of worship to the Dewangayaw. The Triad lives in all these things.



AVATAR

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of the Dewangayaw gains the following additional abilities.

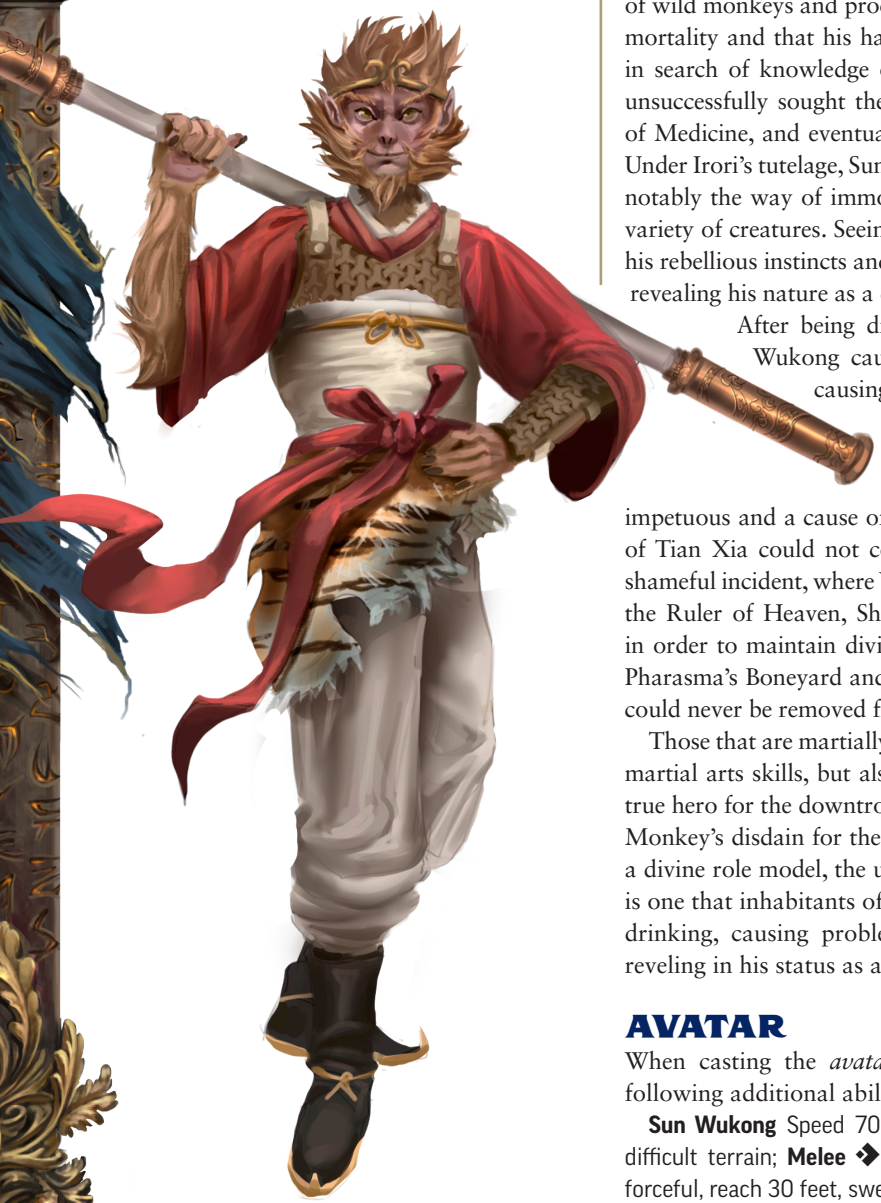
The Dewangayaw Speed 60 feet, swim 120 feet, immune to immobilized; **Melee** ❖ six-part weapon (agile, deadly 1d10, reach 30 feet, versatile B, P), **Damage** 6d10+5 slashing

Sun Wukong



The Monkey King

Areas of Concern drunkenness, nature, trickery
Edicts live life freely, drink, play pranks
Anathema refuse a reasonable bet or duel, let social pressure change your behavior
Divine Attribute Strength or Charisma
Cleric Spells 1st: *jump*, 3rd: *mad monkeys*, 4th: *creation*
Divine Font *harm* or *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy or unholy
Divine Skill Acrobatics
Domains indulgence, might, nature, trickery
Alternate Domains freedom, magic, protection, travel
Favored Weapon bo staff



Sun Wukong, also known as Monkey or the Monkey King, is a god famed for his rebellious nature and legendary martial exploits. Monkey was born from a magic stone atop a sacred mountain, where he grew up among a community of wild monkeys and proclaimed himself the Monkey King. Realizing his own mortality and that his happiness would eventually end, he left the mountain in search of knowledge on how to beat death. During his travels, Monkey unsuccessfully sought the secret of immortality from Qi Zhong, the Master of Medicine, and eventually became a disciple of Irori, the Enlightened One. Under Irori's tutelage, Sun Wukong would learn the magical and martial arts—notably the way of immortality, cloud leaping, and how to transform into a variety of creatures. Seeing flaws in the Monkey King's character, particularly his rebellious instincts and contempt toward authority, Irori forbade him from revealing his nature as a disciple.

After being dismissed by Irori for his lack of self-restraint, Sun Wukong caught the attention of the gods by slaying demons, causing mischief, and stealing sacred fruits. The gods saw his hatred of evil and scorn for authority as a sharp contrast to his whimsical, optimistic, and tolerant personality, and his free heart was considered impetuous and a cause of heavenly havoc. Despite their best efforts, the gods of Tian Xia could not control Sun Wukong's behavior. After a particularly shameful incident, where Wukong accidentally set the celestial orchards ablaze, the Ruler of Heaven, Shizuru, had no choice but to sentence him to death in order to maintain divine order. Against all odds, Sun Wukong traveled to Pharasma's Boneyard and erased his name from her records, ensuring that he could never be removed from existence.

Those that are martially inclined often worship Sun Wukong not only for his martial arts skills, but also his resourcefulness, tolerance, and loyal nature, a true hero for the downtrodden. Rogues and scoundrels often gravitate toward Monkey's disdain for the law and authority figures and view Sun Wukong as a divine role model, the ultimate trickster. Of all the Tian gods, Sun Wukong is one that inhabitants of the mortal Universe are most likely to encounter—drinking, causing problems for authority figures, helping the weak, and reveling in his status as a legendary hero of the common folk.

Avatar

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Sun Wukong gains the following additional abilities.

Sun Wukong Speed 70 feet, fly 60 feet, ignore difficult terrain and greater difficult terrain; **Melee** ❖ *Ruyi Bang, the Extending Cudgel* (backswing, finesse, forceful, reach 30 feet, sweep), **Damage** 6d8+8 bludgeoning

Tsukiyo

PRINCE OF THE MOON



Areas of Concern jade, the moon, spirits
Edicts provide aid and counsel without judgment to those who seek help, help the dead find their rest, amplify or help speak for the powerless and demonized
Anathema harm another out of envy, force aid on those who do not want it, inflict harmful mental effects on others as punishment, knowingly hurt the innocent, commit murder
Divine Attribute Constitution or Intelligence
Cleric Spells 1st: *soothe*, 4th: *peaceful bubble*, 5th: *hallucination*
Divine Font *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy
Divine Skill Occultism
Domains delirium, moon, repose (*Divine Mysteries*), soul (*Divine Mysteries*)
Alternate Domains change (*Divine Mysteries*)
Favored Weapon spear

Tsukiyo has always been considered a complicated god in Tian Xia, constantly changing like the phases of the moon. As with any other god, the Prince of the Moon is understood in different ways depending on time and place, which he views as mortal concerns rather than something he should control. Tsukiyo has little impact on state functions or annual events, but his influence runs deep in the daily lives and perspectives of Minkai. He is the Prince of the Moon, representing the night and the natural changes everyone experiences in life.

For the average person, Tsukiyo is worshipped quietly through self-reflection and meditation. In recent decades, his story has become primarily about trauma and transformation, where the boisterous lover of Shizuru is murdered out of jealousy, then resurrected as a distant and contemplative man. It is thought that his death and return caused him to drift from his old life, making him a wandering guide for social outcasts and lost spirits. Based on this view, the most devout of his followers join a priesthood dedicated to counseling and social support for the misunderstood. Priests of Tsukiyo often travel widely for the first five years of their training, observing the diversity of the world's peoples. With the understanding that there are no quick fixes to prejudice or exclusion, they eventually settle in a community where they believe they can provide stability and steady guidance.

In the ancient records of Minkai, there is an entry that suggests Tsukiyo's older brother, Fumeiyoshi, was not solely driven by jealousy over the depth of Tsukiyo and Shizuru's relationship. Fumeiyoshi truly believed that he and his brother must have something in common, and that what was good and warm about Tsukiyo was ultimately just a reflection of Shizuru's light. Although there was no proof of this, his resentment and jealousy ultimately combined and led to him murdering his younger brother. For this reason, the annual Jukukō festival is held every winter solstice to not only show devotion to Tsukiyo and practice self-reflection, but also to consider the harm caused by unfounded judgments. Beyond Minkai, Tsukiyo is an important patron to samsarans, who seek enlightenment through reincarnation and learning from the past.



Yaezhing



The Minister of Blood

Areas of Concern harsh justice, murder, punishment
Edicts commit assassinations for hire, strike unseen, carry out punishment for convicted criminals
Anathema show mercy to a target, take credit for your assassinations, refuse to punish a lawfully convicted criminal, slaughter indiscriminately
Divine Attribute Dexterity or Intelligence
Cleric Spells 1st: *sure strike*, 2nd: *invisibility*, 6th: *mislead*
Divine Font *harm*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy or unholy
Divine Skill Stealth
Domains death, duty (*Divine Mysteries*), pain, trickery
Alternate Domains darkness
Favored Weapon shuriken

When the gods of the Celestial Court were given their divine duties, it was Yaezhing who was assigned the title of Minister of Blood, the punisher of the gods, and the enforcer of divine justice. When Fumeiyoshi was found guilty of murdering his brother Tsukiyo, it was Yaezhing who was tasked with burying him alive and making an example of those who would cross the Court. When assassins and executioners are hired to carry out capital punishments, it is Yaezhing who they pray to for a steady hand and the conviction to follow through.

As the god of assassins and executioners, Yaezhing oversees contracted death and guides those who are tasked with the duty of killing others. He is also seen as a figure of justice, meting out bloody punishment to all who deserve it, whether godly or mortal. Judges and constables pray to him for criminals to be convicted and given the harshest sentences. Those who have been wronged by the corrupt courts of mortals beg Yaezhing for divine justice to be doled out by his hand. Most people and gods are wary of Yaezhing, seeing him as a necessary evil at best and a force of murderous destruction at worst. Yaezhing doesn't see a need to clear up any misunderstandings, the same way that a sword or shuriken doesn't need to explain itself to the people who wield them.

Despite his gruesome title and task, Yaezhing does not partake in wanton murder. In his eyes, the act of killing is not done for pleasure or glory, but to fulfill a binding agreement that has been made between executioner and law or assassin and client. Once the contract is made and the payment is finalized, it becomes the sole duty of Yaezhing and his followers to bring about the death of the target.

Yaezhing doesn't concern himself with determining who is guilty and who should live or die. For him, there is no difference between legally approved executions and contracted assassinations. They are simply two sides of the same coin, where death is the greatest equalizer, and Yaezhing is duty-bound to be its wielder and weapon.

Avatar

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Yaezhing gains the following additional abilities.
Yaezhing Speed 70 feet, immune to immobilized; **Melee** ❖ hidden blade (agile, reach 15 feet, versatile P), **Damage** 4d6 slashing plus 2d6 persistent bleed; **Ranged** ❖ bo-shuriken (reach 50 feet, versatile P), **Damage** 6d6+3 slashing

Yamatsumi

THE MOUNTAIN LORD

Areas of Concern mountains, volcanoes, winter
Edicts strive to be self-sufficient, respect nature, test yourself against the elements
Anathema become reliant on civilization, destroy something without creating or growing something in its place
Divine Attribute Strength or Wisdom
Cleric Spells 1st: *shockwave* (*Divine Mysteries*), 3rd: *shifting sand* (*Divine Mysteries*), 7th: *volcanic eruption*
Divine Font *harm* or *heal*
Divine Sanctification can choose holy
Divine Skill Athletics
Domains cold (*Divine Mysteries*), earth, fire, might
Favored Weapon greatclub



Yamatsumi watches over his followers from high atop snowcapped mountains and volcanic peaks. From these vantage points, he can easily observe his followers work the land and set up temples and shrines to his glory on the numerous peaks that crisscross the world. At times when he is displeased at how his people have misused the fertile valleys, fed by mountain streams, Yamatsumi will remind his followers of his wrath with a minor avalanche or a belch of dark smoke from a volcano. His followers once failed to heed such warnings, and Yamatsumi caused Mount Kumijinja in Minkai to erupt mightily to demonstrate his anger, covering the continent in ash, and darkening the skies for months. While a horrific event, the tremendous heat melted the glaciers on the mountain, further feeding the rivers running through the green valleys, and the ash from the eruption provided fine fertilizer for the earth below. As such, once his wrath was satiated, the land again began to renew and grow back even more fruitful than before. Some fear such eruptions might herald a repeat of the catastrophes that caused the Age of Ashes almost 10,000 years ago, though Yamatsumi has vowed not to allow his wrath to extend that deep. Even so, his followers—from ascetic mountain monks to people from all walks of life—pray to Yamatsumi to avert his ire when the first winds of winter blow or a nearby volcano begins to smoke.

While his presence can be felt on any mountaintop, Yamatsumi is especially pleased when followers ascend the tallest and most challenging peaks to build temples and shrines in his name. Should such followers falter altogether, Yamatsumi preserves them where they fall in solid ice, a monument to their courage.

Priests of the Mountain Lord eschew the comforts of civilization for a life of asceticism. They seek tall peaks to build simple dwellings and sturdy temples for worship. From their lofty positions among the mountaintops, they take in the grandeur of nature, and their solitude enables them to see the pettiness of the dealings far below. When Yamatsumi chooses to appear, he does so as a giant man with ice for skin, lava for hair and a beard, and two pairs of ram's horns on his head.

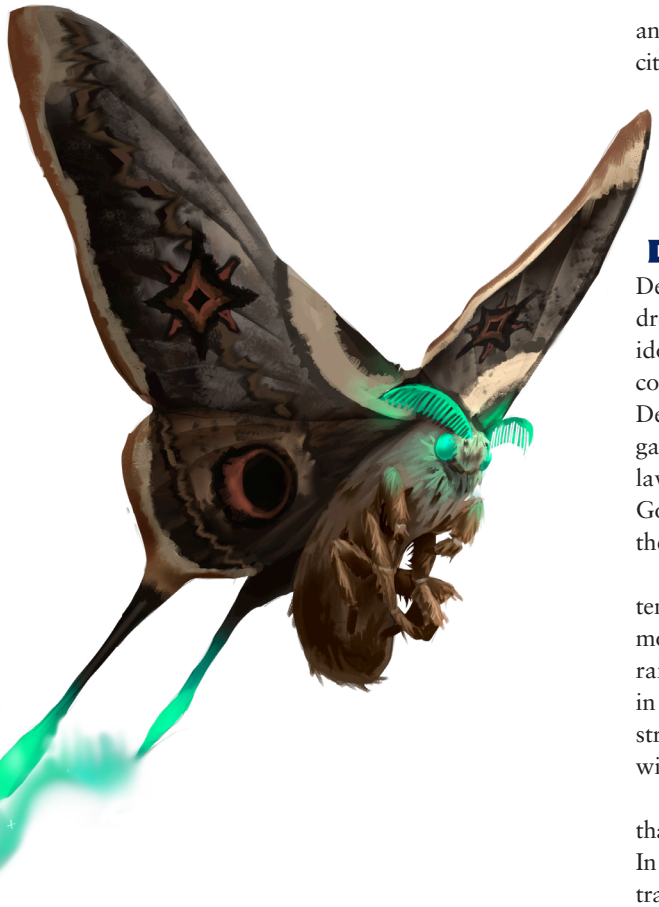


AVATAR

When casting the *avatar* spell, a worshipper of Yamatsumi gains the following additional abilities.

Yamatsumi Speed 50 feet; **Melee** ❖ greatclub (backswing, reach 15), **Damage** 6d6+8 bludgeoning; **Ranged** ❖ molten boulder (range 80 feet), **Damage** 3d6+3 bludgeoning and 3d6 fire

Other Gods



While Tian Xia boasts its own extensive pantheon, gods revered on Golarion's other continents are also common fixtures. Tian methods of worship may differ from those practiced thousands of miles away in Avistan, but faith is universal, and these deities all command sizable followings in the Dragon Empires.

Abadar

Abadar is called the God of Walls and Ditches in Tian Xia, and the order he brings to bastions of civilization via walls, earthworks, and other defensive fortifications makes him highly admired. Abadar shrines exist in nearly every major city, and it is common practice for architects and urban planners to place his motif of a golden key on gates, governmental buildings, and watchtowers.

Abadar is usually depicted in local art as a handsome Tian-Shu man clad in elegant robes that are muddied along their lowest edges, with a crossbow in his hands. Alternatively, he is also shown wearing a tasseled helmet and intricately detailed golden armor, holding a coin shaped like a knife. Both likenesses are occasionally carved on opposite sides of doors in order to keep away intruders and evil spirits—a tradition that has given Abadar the nickname of the "door god" in the Dragon Empires.

Goka's founder, Xhai Xen Xiao, was a devout worshipper of Abadar and took inspiration from the God of Walls and Ditches when overseeing the construction of the only city defended by the impenetrable Wall of Heaven. To this day, motifs dedicated to Abadar are found throughout the City of Wonders, and the massive ziggurat of the Grand Bank of Abadar is regarded as one of the most impressive structures in all of Tian Xia.

Desna

Desna is an ancient goddess celebrated as the deity of dreams, travel, luck, and stars. Adventurers and explorers idolize her, while seafaring navigators looking to the constellations invoke her name. Whispering a prayer to Desna while rattling dice is also a common habit among gamblers, and to encourage those testing their luck, the lavish casinos on the Island of Endless Fortunes near Goka incorporate the goddess's butterfly symbol into their architecture.

Butterfly colonies can be found in many Desna temples, along with caterpillars and silk-producing moths who weave shimmering scarves that are sold to raise money. Desna is so associated with these silks that in Tian Xia, she is often depicted as a giant moth—a striking departure from her usual portrayal as a woman with butterfly wings.

Tian philosophy also frequently references Desna, thanks to the acclaimed Lung Wa scholar Zhong Shuqing. In 6799 IC, Shuqing experienced a dream where Desna transformed her into a caterpillar, guided her through her butterfly metamorphosis, and watched over her until she died and became one with the earth. Upon awakening, Shuqing would expound upon this dream in a treatise, citing it as an omen that everything in this world, from creatures like butterflies and humans to the soil itself, possesses a soul that is valued by the gods.

Lamashtu

Known as Grandmother Nightmare, Lamashtu commands numerous worshippers in Shenmen. There, devout jorogumo whisper her universal aphorism—"The three-eyed gaze sees you"—to humanoid prey incubating their eggs, ensuring that these victims are aware that their sacrifice ensures the growth of Lamashtu's brood. Devout Lamashtans can also be found in Wanshou, where boggards and kappas have formed alarmingly zealous sects, carrying out sacrifices in undisclosed swamp locations to avoid attracting the attention of the nation's kraken god-king, Zhanagorr. Orders dedicated to Lamashtu emerge in the hobgoblin nations of Rahk Lo and Kaoling on occasion, though most are stamped out quickly and lambasted by the populace of both civilizations. The same cannot be said for Goka's extremist Lamashtan cults, which contribute to crime and are rumored to have links with the deepest levels of the city's Undermarket, leading down into the Darklands.

The sands of Shanguang are also home to a handful of fringe Mutabi-qi communities who believe that the two kaiju in the region—Yorak the Horned Thunder and Bezravnis—are the ultimate manifestation of Lamashtu's monstrous progeny. These zealots follow Yorak as the kaiju wanders on his migratory path and are often crushed by the landslides in his wake. They also pray that Bezravnis will swiftly awaken from hibernation to bring destruction to the world, giving birth to a new age of monsters. Whether Lamashtu truly has any connection with the esoteric movements of these gargantuan beasts remains a mystery to all.

PHARASMA

Pharasma wields considerable influence in Tian Xia as the cosmic judge of the departed, the keeper of the Boneyard, and the Mother of Souls, who oversees all births. A vast percentage of her worshippers are expectant parents and midwives, and in some nations, mothers are encouraged to rest indoors for 30 days after bearing a baby, ensuring that Pharasma has enough time to "meet" the new life they've borne. Stillborn and miscarried babies are also honored at Tian Xia grave sites with small statues sculpted in the shape of children, each with Pharasma's spiral of light emblazoned on the forehead.

Cremation is more prevalent in Tian Xia than in other lands, and families display jars containing the ashes of deceased loved ones in their homes alongside a Pharasma shrine. When it comes to buried family members in Bachuan, Lingshen, Po Li, Quain, and Tianjing, it is common practice to sweep the tombs of relatives during the fifth day of the first month of spring, typically called Ancestor's Day or Undertaker's Day. The sweeping is seen as keeping the essence of the deceased clean as it travels along the River of Souls, and it also serves as a deterrent against the god of graves, Fumeiyoshi. Offerings of the deceased's favorite foods are placed around the tomb to nourish the soul before its final judgment, and charms bearing Pharasma's spiral, called "Soul Coins," can be purchased and burned alongside incense, supposedly ensuring the deceased a greater chance of wealth in the next life. When these coins melt, their minor enchantments create smoke resembling the loved one's face for a split second.

Priests who raise weapons in the name of Pharasma are not unheard of in Tian Xia, particularly when it comes to battling jiang-shi. Pharasma's hatred of the undead means that these warriors inevitably come into conflict with the followers of Fumeiyoshi, and Gloom Warders—exorcists in Shenmen who protect the local populace from creatures of the night—keep the Mother of Souls' name on the tip of their tongues.

SHELYN

In Tian Xia, Shelyn is known as the Lady of Chrysanthemums. The flower carries associations of vitality and steadfastness in most Tian nations, and these qualities align with Shelyn's belief in deep, long-lasting love that weathers the passage of time. Poems, paintings, and dance performances featuring chrysanthemums are produced daily throughout artistic communities in the Dragon Empires, and Shelyn commands importance in the traditions of calligraphy, flower arranging, and tea ceremonies. Lingshen scholars with ink and brush are commended if they can channel Shelyn's beauty into their strokes; chrysanthemum arrangements are present at many Po Li weddings; and cups of chrysanthemum tea are placed in prominent alcoves in Minkai tea houses. Aside from these nations, Linvarre's Temple of the Eternal and Exquisite Rose is one of the largest houses of worship devoted to Shelyn in all of Golarion, rivaling Taldor's Temple of the Upheld and Golden Rose.

Shelyn's preference for relationships over trysts means that she occasionally shakes her head at Kofusachi's comparatively promiscuous behavior. Nevertheless, the two deities are old friends who enjoy each other's company, as well as the occasional debate over the meaning of true love. Shelyn also has a sisterly bond with Lady Jingxi, who shares a similar appreciation for art. Despite her affinity for marriage, Shelyn supports Lady Jingxi's desire to stay separate from her boorish husband Hei Feng.



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Philosophies

Tian Xia's lengthy history has given rise to a varied and rich intellectual landscape, dominated by a few ancient schools of thought that have survived into the present. Over time, these schools of thought have spread throughout the continent, taking unique forms in different areas of Tian Xia. While not religious in and of themselves, these philosophies exist alongside and in tandem with religious beliefs, and often inform how a devotee might conceive of their deity's divine nature. This syncretic system has led to the formation of countless unique sects, each devoted to a unique combination of philosophical and religious beliefs. Thousands of religious writings have spawned from this proliferation of ideas. Scholarly adherents to these schools of thought regularly travel across the land to participate in annual debates, discussing everything from the nature of the afterlife to the meaning of mortal suffering.

A number of ancient philosophies have found widespread popularity across the vast continent of Tian Xia. However, each of these philosophical schools is only a broad category of beliefs about the way the world works, and is not necessarily mutually exclusive. Furthermore, followers of each philosophy often disagree among themselves, and various offshoot schools have since formed from the varied interpretations of these schools' original teachings.

The School of Order

As the name may suggest, the School of Order proposes that the universe is inherently structured. This structure arises spontaneously and permeates all of nature, from the symmetry of a snowflake to the formation of Tian civilization: as droplets of water vapor naturally condense into clouds, so too do living creatures organize themselves into societies. Followers of the School of Order aspire to live their lives in accordance with the natural order of the universe by ensuring the flourishing of a well-running and balanced society.

Traditionally, the School of Order puts forth no beliefs on the nature of the afterlife. This reticence is on purpose: the philosophy encourages its followers to focus instead on their current life, contributing as much as they can to society during their limited time alive. Fame and renown, to the School of Order, are as good as immortality—the highest honor a mortal can achieve is to be noted down in the annals of history. Thus, the widespread practice of ancestor worship, encouraged by the School of Order, is not a religious practice but rather an edifying one, a ritual meant to remind oneself to uphold and maintain the glory of past generations, keeping the stories of their valiant deeds alive.

Pao-Lung

One of the most famous philosophers of the School of Order, Pao-Lung's teachings would lay the foundation for what would eventually become the state religion of Lung Wa, carried on into the present in the nation of Po Li. In the eyes of Pao-Lung, relationships, duty, and responsibility were what held society together. The relationships between ruler and ruled, between lord and vassal, and between elders and youths were all parallels to one another, spokes of the grand wheel of society. In the center of that wheel sat the emperor, the bridge between the Heavenly Bureaucracy of the Celestial Court and the mortal bureaucracy of the state. Relationships, however, went both ways: respect for one's superiors was important, but equally important was the duty of a parent to a child, a lord to their vassal, or a ruler to their people.

This emphasis on the importance of the emperor eventually created the faith of The Eternal Emperor, the ruler of Lung Wa who was believed to reincarnate into each successive emperor of the land. After the last emperor of Lung Wa perished, however, this branch of philosophy has been in decline outside of Po Li.

Ichimeiyo

In Minkai and its surrounding states, an offshoot of the School of Order—called Ichimeiyo—has become a popular philosophy, especially among adventurers and warriors in the public eye. To followers of Ichimeiyo, the natural order of Heaven that should be mirrored by humanity is a system of loyalty and of debts repaid. Pledges and promises are the sacred threads that keep the fabric of society knit together; for better or for worse, one's word is their bond. A true hero ensures that every kindness is remembered, as is every slight. Throughout history, however, detractors have criticized Ichimeiyo, and the School of Order more broadly, for enforcing a certain status quo, glorifying warlords, and binding warriors to unsavory lords.

The Path of Mysteries

The ancient teachings of the Path of Mysteries frame fate as a primal force of nature, one that trumps even the most powerful deities. Followers of the Path of Mysteries recognize their own relative unimportance in the cosmos. Even the grandest of empires, in the end, is only a grain of sand in the infinite universe. To strive for fame and fortune is a meaningless endeavor: after all, what use is glory to the dead? These revelations are far from discouraging, however. To the followers of the path, the recognition of one's own ephemeral unimportance is the most important realization of all. Though some aspects of the Path of Mysteries are universal, a fork in the road exists, dividing the Path's followers into two main schools of thought.

The Path of the Valley

The Path of the Valley lies in each and every person, in their innate, original selves. Its followers seek to liberate themselves from mundane, earthly concerns, becoming content with riding on the waves of fate, wherever it may take them. They live life to the fullest, treating every day as a new opportunity for adventure and discovery. Death is but another transformation, one that opens new doors—and the living may never truly know what lies beyond the veil. Instead of wasting time worrying about the inevitable and the unknowable, one should strive to understand the natural, primordial will of the world and act in accordance with it. Followers of the Path of the Valley often live an itinerant lifestyle, wandering where the wind takes them. Most pay no mind to societal norms and the expectations of others, aiming to become their most genuine and authentic selves.

The Path of the Summit

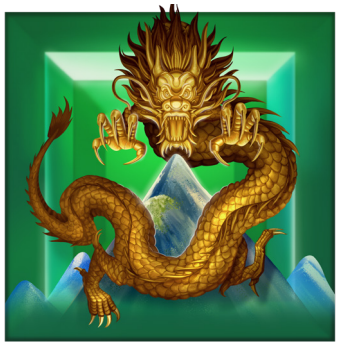
A far cry from the easygoing nature of the Path of the Valley, the Path of the Summit is strenuous and exacting, demanding nothing less than perfection from its followers. This path takes a hard stance toward death. The afterlife, if it exists, is nothing more than a continuation of the endless tedium of mortal life—or at worst, a never-ending return to it, through the cycle of reincarnation. Yet since time immemorial, there have been tales of mortals ascending to godhood. The Path of the Summit teaches that this should be the goal of existence: transcending one's mortality to escape mortal existence. Followers of the Path of the Summit range from powerful cultivators to brilliant alchemists, all driven to some extent by the desire for self-perfection and deification. Often, they will form secretive sects with like-minded individuals in the hopes of discovering a successful path to immortality.

The Teachings of the River

Those who follow the Teachings of the River, also referred to as Sangpotshi, believe that the soul survives death and that the consciousnesses of the dead condense like vapor to trickle back into the ghostly River of Souls that flows through the afterlife. These souls mingle and collide in the vast waters, loved ones reuniting briefly in the space between worlds, before they tumble down the waterfall at the River's end to be born anew. Followers of the Teachings of the River believe that over countless lifetimes, souls accumulate merit, slowly rising above the cycle of reincarnation itself. They aim to live virtuous and altruistic lives, leaving a positive impression on the souls around them and encouraging others to do the same, with the hope of one day escaping the endless cycle of rebirth and the suffering inherent to mortal existence.

The Way of Spirits

Followers of the Way of Spirits believe that most things in the universe can take on a spirit and become sentient, developing minds of their own. Most living plants and animals are born with these spirits, but even seemingly "inanimate" objects like stones, rivers, seas, possessions, and cities can come to develop spirits over time. Esteem and veneration hasten this development, and a prized family heirloom, for example, may develop a mind of its own after generations of care and attention. Accordingly, temples where offerings can be made to spirits can be found all across Tian Xia, from its densest forests to its largest cities. The Way of Spirits teaches that all spirits should be afforded the respect they deserve, with a particular emphasis on protecting and preserving the natural world, as the primal force of nature itself is believed to be the catalyst for most spirits' first awakening.



THE SCHOOL OF ORDER



THE PATH OF MYSTERIES



TEACHINGS OF THE RIVER



THE WAY OF SPIRITS

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Tests of Virtue

Many Tian rituals are told not in whispers around a campfire, but instead through song and poem. More than the knowledge of secret chants and arcane practices for bestowing mighty gifts, the gods of Tian Xia instead look to test the virtue, cunning, and will of ritual seekers. These tests grant restrictions as well as power, with one lasting only as long as the other is upheld.

Tests of Virtue Rituals

Perfection of Essence — Ritual 10

RARE TRIAL

Cast 1 day; **Cost** special foods, herbs, and minerals worth a total value of 45,000 gp; **Secondary Casters** 1

Primary Check Crafting (expert); **Secondary Check** Medicine or Religion

Duration see text

Many have pursued alchemical means to immortality, and most haven't survived the attempt. The most common manner of purifying one's essence requires ingesting the following poison, and surviving the effects unassisted for at least a day.

Saving Throw DC 43 Fortitude; **Onset** 1 hour; **Maximum Duration** 5 days; **Stage 1** 7d12 spirit damage plus doomed 1 (1 hour); **Stage 2** 9d12 spirit damage and confused for 1 minute once every 1d4 minutes, plus doomed 2 (1 hour); **Stage 3** 9d12 spirit damage and doomed 3 (1 day); **Stage 4** death

Anathema for this ritual is determined at the time of the ritual. You choose 1 anathema, and the GM chooses 2 anathema. You're aware of all of your anathema. Appropriate anathema might include avoiding physical contact with a certain creature or substance (such as members of your bloodline or jade), eating certain foods (such as meat or grains), or wearing certain items or materials (such as silk or cotton). If the ritual is ended in this way, you must conduct an *atone* ritual before attempting this ritual again.

Critical Success As success, except you choose 1 anathema and your GM chooses 1 anathema.

Success You've purified your body enough to attempt to attain immortality. You're bound by the ritual's anathema and must ingest the final potion to complete your apotheosis. Once you've withstood the effects of the poison for 1 day or completely recovered from the poison's effects without outside assistance, you gain immortality as follows: you don't age unless you wish to. You can't die except due to old age; if your dying or doomed condition would increase to a high enough value to kill you, it doesn't increase, and any effect that would instantly kill you instead just reduces you to 0 Hit Points. If you ever truly die and aren't returned to life within 1 year, you descend from the Heavens as an adult into a new mortal body somewhere in the world.

Failure Your actions don't achieve immortality, and you automatically fail the first save against the poison.

Critical Failure As failure, except the poison is also virulent.

Power of the Beasts — Ritual 2

RARE TRIAL

Cast 1 day; **Cost** bones, teeth, or claws of beasts worth 150 gp; **Secondary Casters** 1

Primary Check Athletics (expert); **Secondary Check** Cooking Lore, Crafting, or Religion

Duration see text

To simply kill the magical beasts who populate Tian Xia is needless and wasteful. The gods reward a hunter who seeks to truly understand their prey, approaching the creatures on their own level and seeking to gain their strength. Powdering the bones of strong beasts, for use in a soup or wine, is often the first step in the process of capturing part of their power.

Using weapons is anathema to this ritual and immediately ends its benefits. If the ritual is ended in this way, you must conduct an *atone* ritual before attempting this ritual again.

Critical Success As success, except you can defeat three enemies that are only one size larger than you instead.

Success The power begins to take root. Once you've defeated an enemy two or more sizes larger than you in single combat, you gain the Titan Wrestler feat (*Player Core* 263).

Failure You drink the soup or wine, but the understanding eludes you.

Critical Failure The drink contains shards of bone you didn't grind down properly. You're sickened 2 for 1 week, during which the condition can't be reduced.

Seed of Mercy — Ritual 3

RARE TRIAL

Cast 1 day; **Cost** potent medicine valued at 200 gp; **Secondary Casters** 1

Primary Check Medicine (expert); **Secondary Check** Nature or Religion

Duration see text

The gods who value benevolence and the caretaking of small and vulnerable beings also value those qualities in the mortal adventurers who journey through the lands of Tian Xia. You demonstrate your willingness to aid even the most helpless of life by nursing a small, injured bird to health and allowing it to fly away to freedom, earning in return the protection of the natural world. If you're able to nurse the bird to health, it will return to you with a seed, which will grow into a sprout bearing a single flower.

The sprout withers if you don't personally water it with at least 1 Bulk of pure spring water a day or if it's left unattended in dangerous circumstances. It's anathema to this ritual to let the sprout wither, and doing so immediately ends its benefits. If the ritual is ended in this way, you must conduct an *atone* ritual before attempting this ritual again.

Critical Success As success, except the sprout also grows a single fruit after you've cared for it for a week. Removing the fruit causes the sapling to wither, but the fruit can be eaten as a *moderate healing potion* (*GM Core* 259).

Success You nurse the bird to health. It returns to you with a seed that, when planted and watered, grows into a sprout with a single flower. Once you've cared for it for a week, you gain the Toughness feat (*Player Core* 263). If you lose Toughness due to violating the ritual's anathema, you lose a number of Hit Points equal to the decrease in your maximum Hit Points.

Failure You aren't able to heal the bird, but you help its passing to be as painless as possible.

Critical Failure Your attempt to heal the bird causes greater suffering. Another bird brings you a seed that, if planted, will grow into a gourd that releases a small demon to attack you.

THE UNSEEING BLADE MASTER — RITUAL 6

RARE TRIAL

Cast 1 day; **Cost** rare incense worth 1,500 gp; **Secondary Casters** 1

Primary Check Perception (master); **Secondary Check** Religion or Warfare Lore

Duration see text

There are many legends of blade masters who, not wanting to rely on flawed mortal eyes, learned to fight through reliance on both their other keen senses and knowledge from the universe itself. Those who intentionally seek out the path often do so by running through forms in thick clouds of incense.

Making a Strike against an enemy you can see is anathema to this ritual and immediately ends its benefits. If the ritual is ended in this way, you must conduct an *atone* ritual before attempting this ritual again.

Critical Success As success, except you can instead defeat an enemy in single combat that both uses a sword and is higher level than you.

Success You call a blessing into your sword to guide you on the path and are bound by the ritual's anathema. Once you've used that sword against 20 enemies, each significant enough to grant XP, you gain the Blind-Fight feat (*Player Core* 145).

Failure The incense is dispersed by a strange gust of wind and you learn nothing.

Critical Failure The sword you're intending to use for the ritual becomes broken. If you aren't permanently blind, you're instead blinded for 1 month and can't repeat this ritual during that time.

WILD ALLEGIANCE — RITUAL 3

RARE TRIAL

Cast 1 day; **Cost** animal food worth a total value of 150 gp; **Secondary Casters** 1

Primary Check Diplomacy (expert); **Secondary Check** Nature or Religion

Duration see text

To many, the animals of Tian Xia are simply beasts to be conquered or harvested, but this isn't how all of the gods intended it. You approach, feed, and commune with the most notably hostile beasts in an effort to forge a true friendship and allegiance with the natural world.

Wantonly attacking or killing animals is anathema to this ritual and immediately ends its benefits. If the ritual is ended in this way, you must conduct an *atone* ritual before attempting this ritual again.

Critical Success As success, except you can instead resolve a conflict with one animal of level 15 or higher.

Success You declare your allegiance to the wild and are bound by the ritual's anathema, but you still must prove yourself. Once you've nonviolently resolved conflicts with three different animals of a higher level than yours, you gain the Animal Empathy feat (*Player Core* 127).

Failure Your actions don't impress the gods of the wilds.

Critical Failure You deeply offend the gods you were trying to impress, and they send a sign of displeasure, often an animal attack. You must conduct an *atone* ritual before attempting this ritual again.

KEY TERMS

You'll see the following key term used in the rituals presented here.

Trial Rituals with the trial trait extend beyond the initial checks necessary when the ritual is first performed, and they typically have a following condition or set of conditions that must be met before they grant their full benefits. The particulars of the conditions are specified in each individual ritual and can vary from defeating a set number of a particular type of monster to performing some other notable deed or accomplishment.



Bachuan

Nations

BACHUAN
Capital: Peijia
Government: Autocratic Council
Ruler: Grandmother Pei



Peoples

Catfolk
Goblins
Humans
Kitsune
Kobolds
Lizardfolk
Ogres
Oni
Ratfolk

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Ore


Produce


Seafood


Spices


Stone


Tea


Textiles

TAPESTRY OF AMBITIONS

Founded in 3089 IC as a Yixing city-state, Bachuan expanded beyond its walls after its founding empire's fall. During the Shu Empire, it served as a critical trading point between the inland provinces and Xidao, Minkai, and Minata. This became the reason **Lung Wa** spent two centuries chipping away at the region's independence. Taking over the nation in 6802 IC and derogatorily renaming it, Lung Wa bled Bachuan dry, reaping the profits of its trade routes while leaving its people impoverished.

Such suffering planted seeds for an ideal communal society in the mind of a young farmer. Later hailed as **Grandfather Pei**, the farmer-turned-philosopher-turned-revolutionary restored Bachuan's name after overthrowing the lingering Lung Wa governors, creating the Republic of Bachuan in 7126 IC. Alas, it was a republic in name only. Effective as a leader of a movement but not necessarily as a head of government, Grandfather Pei's insistence on creating his idealized society dragged Bachuan through decades of bloody societal and cultural purges.

After his death, Pei's young widow, **Pu Yae Men**, took over. Styled Grandmother Pei after her predecessor, the indoctrination Men underwent as a child in Pei's infamous reeducation camps made her unrealistically optimistic in Pei philosophy and willfully ignorant of the structural weaknesses Bachuan had accrued. Her incitement of zealotry for Pei ideology both within and beyond Bachuan exacerbated these issues as the nation's reputation slipped, and its role in intracontinental trade steadily slowed.

By 7210 IC, Bachuan faced dire challenges. It fell below self-subsistence agriculturally, and more people were fleeing the country than the border guards could keep up with. The Sun Chamber's meager treasury could not fund even basic monster population control. Furthermore, Grandmother Pei stopped attending council meetings, which sowed rumors about her health. Pei family members fractured the Sun Chamber council into six factions, and revolutionaries geared up, stockpiling firearms. All that was needed now was a spark—a storm, an infestation, or a drought.

What came instead in 7215 IC was an oracle from Po Li who claimed to be a mathematician named **Shui Jing**. The Tian-shu woman charmed her way into the Pei family's social circle and helped them reconcile for long enough to draft several new policies. Among them were three fundamental changes: first, all enforcement and proselytizing of Pei philosophy would no longer be imposed. Second, save for its capital, Bachuan would be divided into six municipalities, each relegated to a faction to rule. Third, Bachuan would rewrite their tax and property laws to encourage private ownership and attract foreign investors, and profits for the next decade would be taxed minimally.

Within months, ambitious businesses came in droves, filling Peijia before spilling into the municipalities, some of which completely waived the municipal tax for the next few years. The sorceress **Hao Jin** became one of Bachuan's largest investors when she placed a century-long lease on a large portion of the Szaezan Crags, which she then gave to those who once lived in her tapestry demiplane; the **Tapestry People** had grown weary of living under Po Li's religious doctrines and wanted a new home. Reportedly, choosing the Crags involved Hao Jin collecting a favor from a powerful dragon in the region, whose aid she wanted so she could safeguard the Tapestry People.

During this influx of wealth and migration, Shui Jing took her leave, leaving behind only a letter in which she confessed to concealing her oracular abilities out of fear that Bachuan would not accept her otherwise. While the mystery of her identity remains, change is without a doubt developing in Bachuan.

GEOGRAPHY

Bachuan's most prominent feature is its incredibly long coastline, which spans the **Sea of Ghosts**, **Benchu Bay**, and **Naikang Bay**. The beaches of the coasts differ greatly. Milky-pale palm-sized rocks make up the western shores,



SHUI JING



where high humidity invites the growth of fragrant and occasionally hallucinogenic moss. Visions of ethereal ships sailing on the Sea of Ghosts are thus common, though it is likely that these visions are actually real.

The northern coasts are a mix of fine gray pebble and driftwood broken up by salt marshes and mangroves. Ancient documents claim that **Tianjing** and Bachuan were once connected by a land bridge, the remnants of which still appear during the double full moons. When the land bridge broke during Earthfall, seawater flooded inland too quickly for many to escape, resulting in what is now known as the Sea of Ghosts. The shores to the east, which face the Naikang Bay, have beaches with fine sand of seashells and coral eroded down to microscopic dust. The quality and consistency of this sand, once dried, can fetch a high price on the magic components market, and it is regarded as a precious mineral under Bachuan laws.

Bachuan's southern border runs along the muddy **Xiong Dao River**. Natural root bridges used to span this river in the **Chang Liao Jungle**, acting as foot passages. None of these bridges remain in recent years, however, suggesting they were lost to weather or intentionally destroyed to secure the nation's borders. Meanwhile, the eastern half of Xiong Dao is sparsely vegetated due to frequent overflow whenever it rains. These clay-based flood banks would make excellent self-maintaining paddy fields if not for the political strain between Bachuan and its neighbor, **Hwanggot**.

In terms of its land, the western third of Bachuan is taken up by hills and ravines that lead up to the **Szaezan Crags**. The area is rich in precious stones and minerals easily mined from the loose soil, but mudslides during the rainy seasons are a common threat. During Grandfather Pei's rule, reforestation efforts to reduce soil erosion created wild havens that both animals and monsters alike hide within today. In rockier regions, there has been a recent increase in fumarole, geyser, and hot spring activities. Locals report a rise in oni and ogre sightings, and rumors of them rallying under an underworld dragon circulate the countryside.

The rest of Bachuan are flat lands covered in grass and tropical lowland trees. While there are no significant permanent rivers or bodies of water, the long rainy season keeps plants well quenched and often creates small streams and reservoirs. Some debate has arisen recently about whether these streams and ponds are natural, as the Tapestry People have pointed out traditional riverbed engineering techniques near and around the site of these bodies of water.

A DAY IN BACHUAN

Life in Bachuan yet runs on a tight schedule. Most communities rise at dawn for a sip of energizing tea, which keeps them going until the midday sun makes it too hot to work. At this time, people retreat to a shaded area beneath a tree or a nap shed for a light meal. Depending on the

nature of work involved, some might have the liberty of a nap, while others return to work right away. In some towns, there is a tradition of playing a few rounds of **zoubing**, a popular Bachuan board game, during this break. The most skilled players can keep a game going for days.

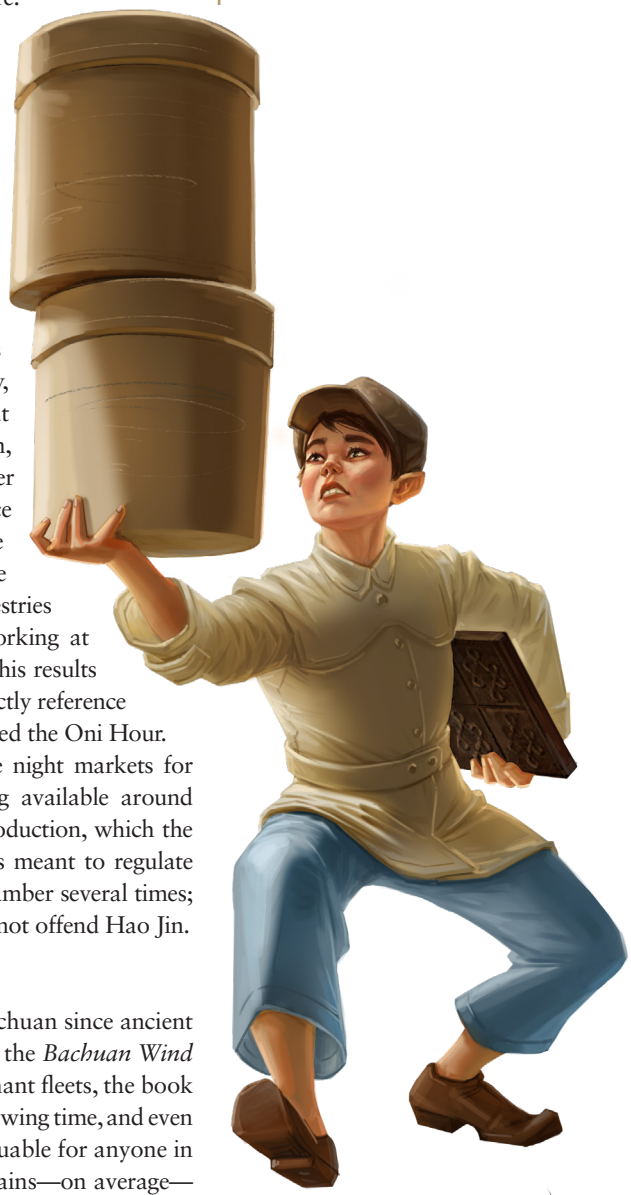
Work in the afternoon continues until sunset, though is often cut short by afternoon storms. After heading home, folks eat their largest—and sometimes single—meal with their family or community. Meetings to convey important news might happen after dinner, when people have a full stomach and are at their most cordial. Many places then follow the national curfew, after which only the night guard and designated essential workers are permitted to be outside. While not as strictly enforced today, most of the countryside keeps to the curfew so as not to risk running into unknown dangers.

Bachuan's cities and townships work on a different yet equally structured routine. A regular workday is broken up into eight shifts, which are signaled in most communities by the tonal combinations of four bells. The businesses of different sectors open at the shift that best maximizes their individual productivity and efficiency. A breakfast stall is expected to be open to feed bankers, who must be ready before the merchants begin trading, and so on. Now that the enforcement of many laws has relaxed, many businesses have been experimenting with when they open. Some, like eateries, have found incredible success with odd hours, while others have understandably ended in spectacular failure.

Farmers and fishers are an exception. Due to unpredictable elements, the two groups run on loose timelines determined the day or half-day prior by an experienced team leader. With flexibility comes downtime for leisure. As such, many Bachuan songs, poems, and art have an agricultural or fish theme, both because these workers are generally those with time to create and because the freedom of these jobs has attracted those with a desire to express themselves creatively.

The lifestyles of the Tapestry People are both varied and flexible, likewise a relic of the past to accommodate living in the unpredictable demiplane. A person arranges their schedule as they see fit, factoring in their ancestry, vocation, needs, and wants. Day hours focus on work that requires sight, such as planting crops, crafting, construction, or repair. Hunters, scavengers, and scouts who need cover and silence act at night. While the bustle of activity dims once night arrives, many citizens yet run endlessly around the hourglass. A fifth of Tapestry shops are always open, while a tenth run exclusively during the night. As certain ancestries among the Tapestry People naturally gravitate toward working at night while others are drawn toward working during day, this results in a time system and in time-associated expressions that directly reference ancestries. The darkest hour of the night, for example, is called the Oni Hour.

While some Bachuan locals blamed the activities of the night markets for attracting monsters, others reveled in entertainment being available around the clock. Some regions even saw a drop in agricultural production, which the commoners chuffed at while officials took seriously. Drafts meant to regulate entertainment hours have been brought before the Sun Chamber several times; so far, all were struck down with a reminder that they must not offend Hao Jin.



A YEAR IN BACHUAN

Seasonal patterns and weather have been predictable in Bachuan since ancient times, which are all recorded within an almanac known as the *Bachuan Wind Guide*. Originally meant to predict wind patterns for merchant fleets, the book contains information about rainfall levels, the flood season, sowing time, and even animal migration paths or monster sightings, making it valuable for anyone in the region. Based on the book, it is known that Bachuan rains—on average—

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Under Grandfather Pei's direction, Bachuan's languages were deliberately restored to older styles of pronunciation and spelling. Most people from surrounding nations consider the Bachuan accent to be distinctly thick. Interestingly, Bachuan's people communicate extremely well with the Tapestry People, while other nations seem to have much more trouble.

Iyunn: EE-yun
Pei: pronounced the same as "pay"
Shui: shueh
Szaezan: schay-zan
Wei: same as "way"
Xiong: siong
Zoubing: zo-bing

about 150 days of the year, with the majority of these being light morning showers in late spring, and heavy afternoon thunderstorms in early summer. During autumn, the average person may experience bouts of hurricanes, while winters are almost always snowless. Bachuan's average temperature reaches 95 degrees Fahrenheit in summers and 72 degrees in winter. Additionally, the *Wind Guide* says that Bachuan, particularly along the Xiong Dao River, experiences a bout of drought at least once every 20 to 25 years, though why is never explored or explained. Those who work outdoors use the *Wind Guide* nearly religiously, which luckily escapes the scrutiny of Pei's philosophy.

Bureaucratically, Bachuan uses an official calendar with a specific number of workdays, breaks, and public holidays. Most establishments used to work twelve continuous days followed by two days of rest. Recently, the municipalities have tried to implement 6 workdays followed by a day of rest or alternating between 12 and 6 workdays. Reactions to these changes have been mixed, though fields that make use of hard labor have seen an increase in productivity.

A number of the mandated public holidays celebrated are related to the country's founding and founder, such as Bachuan's **Founding Day** and **Grandfather Pei's Death Anniversary**. Others include holidays dedicated to particular occupations, such as **Miner's Day** or **Banker's Day**. After Bachuan's recent administrative restructuring, the responsibility of organizing these performances fell on the municipalities, most of which decided to stop hosting the performances to keep expenditures low. Thus, these political holidays are now acknowledged with merely a break from work. Loosening the rigidity of the calendar also saw the return of old religious and traditional holidays, as citizens have begun to openly practice their beliefs in the gods and in old folk heroes once again. Holidays associated with **Hei Feng**, **Kofusachi**, and **Qi Zhong** made a revival, along with old traditions such as the **Pacification of the Watery Ghosts** along the western shores of Bachuan.

The Tapestry People have their own myriad of traditions and holidays. Coming-of-age traditions are one of the most common practices, which often require youth born in the same year to complete a specific task or challenge collectively. Successfully passing one's trials and arriving home with trophies earns the newly inducted adult the right to bear or wear certain items, clothing, or body modifications such as tattoos. A **Harvest Festival**, particularly that of grain, is the next most important festival held, with bountiful harvests permitting the production of spirits used in sacred ceremonies. Flower festivals are also common; rather than celebrations, these festivals are about setting aside time to gather and enjoy the blooms over food, drink, public art, and performances. Lastly, there is also a day dedicated to ancestral worship and visiting the graves of one's family. Bachuan incidentally shares this tradition, though during the course of recent history the name has been changed to **Undertaker's Day**.



TAPESTRY WOMAN

Initially, the colorful and boisterous festivals of the Tapestry People left the people of Bachuan with the impression that their new neighbors were indulgent and gluttonous, qualities abhorred under Pei philosophy. Yet as time passed, the people of Bachuan learned that the Tapestry People were taking part in dedication, not decadence. Work calls for work, but when it is time to celebrate, one must do so to the fullest. This has inspired a social movement in Bachuan that considers why people work and for what when it comes to themselves as individuals, rather than a collective.

CULTURE

Folks from Bachuan can be quickly identified by their clothing, which was highly standardized to be of an exact cut and color by industrial labor sewing houses owned by the government. Made of beige flax, Bachuan attire was of unisex design: a top shirt which never went past the thighs, and sleeves and pant legs so loose they could be rolled up easily and held in place by cords sewn into the seams.



Government officials wore the same clothes, though dyed blue to match the flag of the country. Hair was expected to be short across genders, and facial hair was discouraged.

The uniformity was about control, of course. Rebels and anarchists were thus easily spotted for shaving their heads or growing out their hair and making dramatic cutouts in their clothes. Nevertheless, the base of their clothing's design became closely associated with Bachuan's identity as a whole and remains the template that its now-private dressers build up from as they try out different fabrics, embroidery, dyes, or prints.

Bachuan buildings focus more on utility and efficiency of assembly, a style known as Bachuan minimalism, and feature uniformly painted walls of a white-grayish clay, wooden floor slats, round windows divided into four by a cross shape, and woven furniture of bamboo or rattan. This image is a stark contrast to Bachuan's cuisine, which is famous for its incredibly spicy side dishes and condiments that help one perspire despite the area's high humidity and heat. Fish is more commonly served than meat—despite ample access to shellfish and crustaceans, these are almost never seen on dining tables. Consuming these particular foods was prohibited in the past due to their association with wealth, which led to the practice of sailors eating any they caught before returning to port.

Alcohol is rare in Bachuan, as the collection and equal distribution of grain often left none for brewing. Tea is therefore the national recreational drink, though it's often brewed from grasses and herbs harvested from the wilds rather than deliberately cultivated. Licorice grass drinks, in particular, are common for their cooling effects. Some regions even add in bitter melon extract to provide them with an extra invigorating kick. While betting how many of these drinks one can chug is a common dare among adolescents, this is inadvisable as it has laxative properties.

Teaching and learning have been a contentious issue in Bachuan, as many folk associate institutional education with indoctrination, brainwashing, and cruelty. Learning through schools is thus highly mistrusted regardless of who runs them, particularly in rural areas where labor is often short-handed. Most children today are taught by family members or the local community on a need-to-know basis. While sufficient for instilling morals and ethics, it is predictably insufficient on the knowledge front. How to teach those with innate magic is a greater headache, as magic was shamed under Pei philosophy and regarded as inherently corrupting, which forced many to flee to another nation or join the revolutionaries. While some municipalities have created numerous job postings requesting teachers, these methods haven't proven effective just yet.

Becoming familiar with Tapestry cultures is an ongoing endeavor for Bachuan residents living close to these new neighbors, particularly because they are as diverse as possibly the entire continent of Tian Xia itself. Many young Tapestry People have ancestors from three or more different cultures and thus wear clothing, speak languages, and



GRANDMOTHER PEI



SUOKASU



TONEBU IHKAPAMUMU



IYUNN

practice traditions from all of them. The tribes and ethnic groups of the Tapestry People differentiate themselves mostly by the color schemes and weaving patterns of their clothing. Adornments and accessories are often made from tree seeds and animal parts such as pelts, fangs, or feathers. Their diets vary based on whether each society relied more heavily on hunting and foraging or agriculture. Notably, the Tapestry People share food quite readily with one another, even greeting each other by asking if they've eaten yet. As resources were scarce, other than ancient artworks transported along with them, most of the Tapestry People's artistic endeavors are intangible—song, dance, and theater—and place an emphasis on harmonizing, group movements, and active audience response.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

Grandmother **Pei** (distant female human monk) is the current leader of the **Sun Chamber** and of Bachuan as a whole—at least on paper. Items that must be signed by her are delivered to the austere and severe Pei Estate several blocks from the Sun Chamber Council Building in Peijia, and then are returned within a couple of days, signed. Whether it was by her hand or another's is anyone's guess. Though there haven't been signs of forgery yet, rumors abound throughout Bachuan—they say a woman resembling Grandmother Pei boarded a ship bound for Linvarre, supposedly headed to a monastery in Zi Ha.

In a rare exercise of restraint, the Sun Chamber hasn't addressed any rumor about Grandmother Pei. However, as Shui Jing is no longer around, the factions have begun competing maliciously with each other again. Recently, the accidental overdose of one of the faction leaders, **Pei Wei Ye** (scheming female human ghost), rocked the Sun Chamber and all of Peijia. Printed copies of her testimonies of her life as a member of the Pei family were scattered by masked figures in the city streets. In her tell-all confession, Wei Ye revealed how Grandmother Pei turned Grandfather Pei against his other wives and the children of these wives, and that as the only stepmother to survive him, she ruthlessly interfered in her stepchildren's lives. This was why Wei Ye was the last surviving child of all the Pei children not born to Pu Yae Men, as many chose death over living under Men's control. While this story is only half true, the streets only care for the salacious content. Protests rose, demanding the Pei family leave politics, which the ghostly Wei Ye watched from the Pei Family Ossuary, plotting how else she could further this chaotic storm.

This drama barely made an impact outside the capital, where the new municipalities struggled to implement a slew of new policies. As these changes were too slow to come to pass, revolutionaries like the **Nine-striped Tigers** took action. The Tigers' leader, **Suokasu** (commanding female catfolk revolutionary), negotiated for pardons for what her group was about to do, then proceeded to liberate political prisoners, close re-education institutes, and shut down labor camps. What the Sun Chamber could not do, the Tigers completed within three years, earning them the status of local heroes. Suokasu has turned the Tigers' attention to Bachuan's growing monster problem now, though given their inexperience, she wishes to make contact with the Firebrands to see if they have any advice to give.

The **Seven Tongues Elders** consists of the oldest leaders from among each of the seven major language groups of the Tapestry People. They ruminate over who best to send on a search for their ancestral lands. The old are important historians too precious to risk, and the youth are important defenders and negotiators. Many potential youngsters have openly expressed a lack of desire to travel, such as **Tonebu Ihkapamumu** (dutiful male kobold Tapestry People blacksmith). Like many other heirs, Tonebu has spent years preparing to become a worthy leader. Only news of novel weapons and firearms appears to have tempted him to leave.

Tapestry People with no leadership duties have been permitted to travel as they wish to anywhere they'd like. Entertainment troupes such as the **Storysingers**, led by **Iyunn** (elderly traditionalist female human Tapestry People storyteller), have thus begun to tour the countryside near the Tapestry lands, incidentally

spearheading diplomacy between the Tapestry People through Bachuan and beyond.

LOCATIONS

The following are a sample of some prominent locations that can be found in Bachuan.

Baifen, the Tapestry Town

While individual Tapestry communities are scattered within the lands that Hao Jin leased, they collectively built a small town up a hillside to serve as a central gathering spot for both general occasions and the Seven Tongue Elders. Run day in and out by a hundred families, Baifen soon became a popular holiday location due to their hot spring bathhouses, delicious night markets, and public theater performances. These range from traditional operas, puppetry acts, acrobatic displays, magic shows, and comedy sketches. Baifen has also attracted historians from all across Tian Xia—and adventurers who long to solve ancient mysteries—who hope that someone in Baifen might understand an ancient dialect or know of a traditional legend that can help fill a piece of the historical puzzle.

Peijia

The capacity of Peijia, the perfectly planned capital of Bachuan, has always outstripped its number of occupants. After years of being unoccupied, many buildings have become infested with urban monsters, magically resistant plants, and groups of squatters. While the new influx of businesses cleaned up many buildings, some are met with unexpected difficulties. The southern dock warehouse district, for example, has reportedly become the home of a sea drake, **Illycis** (organized nonbinary sea drake tenant), who had resided in the area with a tribe of grindylow. In Illycis's own words, they legally bought the land long ago and have been paying property tax as a proper citizen should. The Peijia city hall is looking to drive them out to rent the warehouses at a marked-up price. This unusual case is headed to court soon, and while documentation is highly in Illycis's favor, the drake is having a difficult time locating a lawyer to represent them.

Ten Thousand Summer Palace

This magically warded Lung Wa winter palace was impenetrable until Hao Jin approached the gates with five other companions, holding a chest containing a partial set of Lung Wa imperial treasures once thought lost: six of the twelve bronze statuettes based on the zodiac. With this gift, the group entered the palace, escorted in by guards and servants wrapped from head to toe in cloth bearing mystical runes. After two anxious hours, Hao Jin and her friends returned outside unharmed, all bearing wide smiles like they had learned something important. Rumors soon circulated that a direct heir to the imperial throne of Lung Wa resided within the palace, who lengthened their life span by entering temporal stasis for all but one day of the year. Being a direct Lung Wa heir meant knowing the twelve true names of the beasts the statuettes portrayed. Bounties for the remaining six statues have sprung up all over Tian Xia. Some were issued by wealthy collectors, others by eager wizards or ambitious politicians. A few, however, promise that each statue will allow a person to enter the palace, and ask in exchange for a single item or answer that those residing within can provide.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Bachuan's relationship with Hwanggot and Po Li are icy, though Hwanggot has agreed to a water treaty regarding the Xiong Dao River. Po Li diplomats also recently informed their Bachuan counterparts that Shui Jing is the name of a popular fictional character in their country, throwing the identity and motive of the self-proclaimed "oracle" who instigated Bachuan's changes into further doubt.

The regions that maintained trade with Bachuan during its toughest days, Kwanlai and Wanshou, are hoping to ride along the nation's current rising economy. Ambitious diplomats hope to get the two to assist Bachuan in preemptively disabling the menace Shenmen poses across the Sea of Ghosts.



BAIFEN, THE TAPESTRY TOWN

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Chu Ye

Nations

Chu Ye
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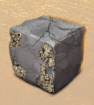
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Weapons

EMPIRE OF BLOOD

Chu Ye's history is perhaps best summarized by the saying, "kind hearts attract poisoned blood." Acupuncture began in the region, and its medical innovations delivered miracles compared to traditional remedies. That success planted the seeds for its doom—malevolent oni from the **Forest of Spirits**, disguised as humanoids, infiltrated the nation to take advantage of its kindness. When Imperial Lung Wa fell, these corrupted nature spirits saw an opportunity to reveal their true forms and conquer the nation. A century of their cruel rule has brought Chu Ye to the brink, its healing hands now sticky with its own blood.

Today the region is a land of extreme contrasts. The oni and their favored mortals cavort amid a dragon's hoard of wealth while 90 percent of the population don't have a copper to their name. Propaganda praises Chu Ye as a land of opportunity where hard work can earn any humanoid a position in the ruling ranks, but authorities also warn that jealous neighbors besiege the nation from all sides. Paranoia permeates the land, breeding discontent and belying the veneer of stability offered by its immortal ruler, Shogun **Tsuneni**. No one sleeps easy in Chu Ye.

Most of the population is human, consisting of Tian-La, Tian-Min, and Tian-Shu. Oni are five percent of the population. Giants and ogres support the ruling oni, but no census of their homes in the **Nightford Mountains** has ever reported back. Enclaves of kitsune and samsarans exist as well, but keep a low profile.

Shogun Tsuneni markets Chu Ye as a tourist destination for "distinguished guests." Such guests include jorogumo seeking interesting prey, wayangs desiring a place to live, and yaoguai adventurers looking to win and spend treasure. Wealthy humanoids are also welcome. The city of **Kirahata** is a playground for the rich and powerful. Casinos, pleasure palaces, and hunting lodges line its beaches. Some powerful visitors enjoy Chu Ye's excesses so much they become permanent residents. Human-appearing oni compete to lure the wealthiest to become ranking officials in their municipalities, enabling the oni to run grifts as low-level authorities.

Meanwhile, a rebellion is taking shape in the shadows. **Mizu Ki Hikari** is a human resistance organization based in **Chuyokai Forest**. The darkness deep within is so terrible it keeps the oni away, and an ambitious general seeks to weaponize it. Humans have also found unlikely allies in immigrant wayangs who find themselves empathizing with the oppressed. Tengu from **Kwanlai** seeking to preserve Chu Ye's medical knowledge are smuggling supplies in by sea while the rise of an underworld dragon under the Nightford Mountains destabilizes oni power. Life for humanoids in Chu Ye can barely be called such, but a glimmer of hope survives.

GEOGRAPHY

Chu Ye is trapped by **Zi Ha's** mountains, **Hongal's** tundra, and a long coastline. The only destination for refugees is the southern border with **Wanshou**. That journey is a perilous one through Chuyokai Forest, which shrouds the southern half of the nation. Then there are the **Nightford Mountains**, a once-dormant volcano range that now paints the sky red and the earth ashen. The diverse geography yields many natural resources, but Chu Ye's decaying infrastructure leaves it unable to benefit. Potholes and overgrown roads hinder transportation from mountain mines. Mismanagement of crop rotation has rendered farms in the north unproductive. Seafood is the country's primary source of nourishment, but poorly maintained boats make every fishing trip a deadly gamble.

No kami remain in Chuyokai Forest. When the god **Fumeiyoshi** slew his brother, he stole **Tsukiyo**'s dying breath so that none who loved Tsukiyo could have it. He trapped the *Jade Breath* in a shrine deep inside Chuyokai, corrupting



TSUNENI



it to usurp Tsukiyo's control over spirits. This new power enabled him to kill and revive Chuyokai's kami as **grave kami**, ghosts who protect burial sites. They no longer abide by divine laws, but their hatred of oni persists. The presence of any oni sends grave kami into a killing frenzy.

An eerie silence dominates Chuyokai. The stench of rotting flesh rises with each step upon the soft forest floor where bodies of undead animals wait beneath fallen leaves. Occasionally a sob might break the quiet: the cry of a grave kami remembering its past. Those who hear it would do well to take cover, otherwise the kami might initiate a hunt for living prey, its every move accompanied by the sound of cracking joints. Every member of Mizu Ki Hikari carries incense or paper money to burn—such offerings are the only way to placate a grave kami ready to attack.

Mining shafts riddle the Nightford Mountains. Some emit smoke from fire giant forges, while others lay abandoned for ogres or wild animals to claim as homes. Wide, carved paths connect giant enclaves, and teams of fire and cloud giants work to keep them open through summer mudslides and winter snowstorms. Big game such as mammoths and elk live on plateaus between the peaks. Rumors place mythical creatures like kirin, inmyeonjo, and even phoenixes atop the crags, but no living human has sighted one. Volcanic eruptions began five years ago and disrupted the ecosystem—earthquakes collapsed passages to entire regions and spawned earth and fire elementals that wreak havoc on settlements. Strange new creatures roam the land, consuming caravans and entire frost giant patrols.

The source of the chaos is **Zhulong** (page 17). **Inma**, the most powerful kishin oni in Tian Xia, imprisoned them as a wyrmling in her fortress in the Nightford Mountains. Every year Inma expands her fortress farther underground, intruding into the **Darklands** itself. Zhulong escaped and spent centuries gathering allies and magical artifacts to challenge the oni demigod. They won't be satisfied until they've driven Inma out of Chu Ye and claimed her fortress's treasures for themself. Each clash between dragon and kishin shakes the mountains and cracks open cells in Inma's treasured menagerie of beasts and aberrations.

A DAY IN CHU YE

If damnation is an endless pursuit of one's desires and never finding satisfaction, then the oni have created their own hell. They are coming to that realization, even if this epiphany is but a seedling in their subconscious. In the cold peaks of Nightford, snow oni reread ancient monk texts and train their bodies until days blend into years, but for how many hours can one flex at one's own reflection before realizing an immortal at peak fitness has simply stagnated? How many decades can caldera oni inhale the sulfur of fire giant forges, honing their war cries and polishing their weapons, before wondering if glorious war will ever come?

Gods come in and out of fashion, mainly due to Kirahata's brothels. **Lymnieris** was popular before oni took control, but they took his iconography down once they realized he frowned on all the evil deeds they commit. **Calistria** lasted several decades, though **Lady Nanbyo** could claim an equal stake with all the flooding and shaking that occurred. **Fumeiyoshi** had a decent run after oni complained that the most experienced and talented humans kept dying, until the smell got to be too much. Desperation led to hiring other oni, enticed by good money in the business, but that led to the **Cayden Cailean** years, which went by in a blur. Recovering from that era has meant that lustful oni can no longer blame hangovers for climaxes feeling like nadirs. Worship of Lymnieris and **Arshea** has crept back in as the sea oni, favoring decadence in all things, hypothesize that pleasure is better when all parties involved experience it.

That mentality is spurring a renaissance everywhere, giving humans hope they can improve their lot in life. Dancers begin their days with stretching and a full meal, emphasizing health as much as form. Sea oni guard their favorite artisans to ensure they have nothing to fear, recognizing steady hands lead to beautiful melodies, soft weaves, and innovative paintings. Even in blood sports, fighters give their all, hoping the shogun's agents will choose them for the elite guards. A guard's day ends with a bow and encouragement to improve, rather than a brutal death. The shogun has acknowledged that these new recruits are better sparring partners, having the luxury to develop skill when they aren't replaced every day.

The oni rulers also discovered that creating a favored class solidifies their power. Posters and town criers used to threaten punishment for disobedience, but now they promote beautiful celebrities and vacation destinations. If someone is poor, they imply, that's their personal failing. Oni elites have rebranded themselves as benefactors, not dictators. Night oni shepherd giants into cities to repair infrastructure, basking in the praise they receive for their subordinates' labor. There's just enough hope for a better life to distract the citizenry from rebellion. Now, they fight each other to maintain their scraps of success.

A YEAR IN CHU YE

The seasons in Chu Ye are as harsh as the oni. Cold, dry northern air sweeps down from Hongal's tundra for half the year, creating autumn frosts that evaporate into desiccated winters. Spring delivers a reversal of fortune as southeastern winds bring monsoon rains from Xidao's sea. Summers are so humid that laundry remains damp under the noon sun.

Citizens without access to magic are at the mercy of the weather and plan their lives accordingly. Those who pay their oni overlords or licensed spellcasters for relief often find the price higher than they anticipate. Some oni crave the flesh of humanoids while others find thrill in hunting them, but the shogun imposed a limit on such behavior to keep their lifestyle sustainable. Now each region holds a sacrificial lottery each equinox to cull one percent of the population. Noble or foolhardy humanoids may volunteer to replace someone whose name comes up. Any selected humanoid who survives the hunting grounds until the next equinox returns home having earned immunity from the lottery for themselves and their immediate family. A lucrative black market exists to find debtors willing to volunteer for the lottery in exchange for paying off their bills.

Rice is a major crop thanks to early summer floods followed by meltwater from the Nightford Mountains. Many annual festivals revolve around tilling and harvesting, but have been twisted by oni influence. What used to be the spring planting festival is now a week celebrating the military and the sacrifices people make for Chu Ye. Soldiers in dress uniforms parade through each city alongside the latest siege weaponry. Ordinary citizens prepare for weeks to sing and dance in public squares under the gaze of their oni overlords. They then rush home to work their fields by moonlight.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Chu Ye's humanoid population are settlers who colonized the region under the Yixing and Lung Wa empires. Oni names reflect the oni's ties to Minkai.

Chu Ye: choo (pronounced like "true" without the "r") yeh
Jyito: JEE-toe
Tsuneni: TSOO-neh-nee
Kirahata: kee-RAH-hah-tah
Nokkaichi: nohk-KAI-chee
Tsukiwa: TSOO-key-wah
Mizu Ki Hikari: MEE-zu kee hee-KAH-ree
Giwas: chee-VAHS
Walis: wah-LEASE
Den Taijian: duhn tye JEE-uhn (condensed into one syllable)



Ghost Month occurs at the peak of summer and doubles as a sacred time for Fumeiyoshi. Legend holds that the gods agreed even the worst spirits deserve respite from their fates. Thus the dead visit during the month when daytime lasts longest, limiting the damage hungry ghosts can do. During this time, even oni avoid leaving their homes at night, believing that ghosts can trade places with the living—an evil spirit can stay when the month ends if they claim a victim to return to the Lower Planes in their stead. Good spirits can also return, and people make shrines in their homes to seek guidance from ancestors and lost friends.

Few ever report seeing a ghost, causing skeptics to hypothesize that Ghost Month is a superstition. Most Ghost Month deaths appear to be accidental drownings in rice fields. Shogun Tsuneni and his inner circle know better, and secretly make sacrifices throughout the month at the tree line of Chuyokai Forest to prevent Fumeiyoshi from unleashing his full undead might beyond its borders.

The **harvest festival** is a time for feasts, and fresh mochi is the highlight. Each village has a signature flavor and tithes a portion to ruling oni. Talented mochi makers might acquire an oni patron and emerge unscathed from the semiannual lotteries. Rice cakes and boat races are popular along the coast, while kite battles entertain those inland.

An **ice festival** is the highlight of winter. It originated from the practice of bringing ice slabs down from the Nightford Mountains to replenish water supplies. Bored villagers carved them into sculptures to decorate the streets while melting. The practice has become extravagant under oni rule, to please oni sensibilities and forestall death at their hands. Every region competes to make the most intricate sculptures. The most prized slabs come from the **Sapphire Sound,** where minerals and algae form beautiful turquoise ice.



CULTURE

An oni's sense of self-worth doesn't derive from the gods. The gods abandoned them, after all, punishing them for failures beyond their control. They see their accomplishments as personal triumphs that they achieved despite starting at a disadvantage. This perspective leads oni to view failure and misfortune as the result of personal deficiencies. All of Chu Ye now labors under this value system so oni can congratulate themselves for being born more powerful than those they dominate.

The oni do worship one god, but it's a mutually beneficial relationship born from shared grievances. Fumeiyoshi, Lord of Envy, is also exiled from the heavens. His desire to exact revenge upon his fellow gods appeals to oni. Those who pledge themselves wholly to Fumeiyoshi can channel his divine powers, but few go that far. Fumeiyoshi is a jealous lord and any disloyalty, real or perceived, results in death. Yet Fumeiyoshi is also a fickle patron—he believes oni have become so enamored with their new lifestyle that they've neglected him. He has convinced one of Mizu Ki Hikari's leading generals, **Duen Fuyan**, to serve him in exchange for his help destroying the oni rulers, not revealing that he plans to do so with an undead human army.

The social structure among oni has evolved over time. They used to avoid each other, but such behavior—alongside their penchant for wanton slaughter—became untenable once they decided they wanted to rule over a nation instead of a graveyard. Oni now follow a hierarchy with detailed rules of etiquette to structure their interactions and prevent conflict. Oni are typically classified by their physical forms, but those who prove stronger or cannier than expected earn titles that elevate their station.

Humans

Widespread slaughter in the early years of oni rule destroyed much of the nation's cultural legacy. Oni



burned all but the most valuable books, and locked those in personal collections. The initial violence didn't target any specific demographics, but Shogun Tsuneni consolidated his power by eliminating older generations and brainwashing younger ones.

Most of the human population is illiterate and struggles to survive from day to day. Generous bounties for reporting suspected rebels eradicated most resistance efforts, but the rebels regrouped and realized they needed to offer people a tangible reason to risk their lives for freedom. The resistance has a new strategy that focuses on three elements: stage high-profile robberies to make oni look weak, redistribute their stolen wealth to improve the lives of humanoids, and look impressive while doing it. Operatives wear immaculate white robes with red trim, and veiled conical hats to protect their identity. They speak rarely and make grand entrances, timing their appearances to avoid run-ins with authority figures. This strategy caused their popularity to soar, and even humans who cast their lot with oni often politely ignore rebel activities.

Acupuncture originated in Chu Ye, alongside the study of **qi**, the energy that flows through meridian lines in the body. Some external forces such as disease or poor eating habits slow down or block qi, while others such as heat can energize it. Chu Ye's medical studies focus on targeting key meridian points on the body to regulate the flow of qi, quickening or slowing it depending on the malady. Practitioners achieve these effects through techniques such as acupuncture, massage, cupping, and moxibustion. The most knowledgeable healers fled Chu Ye when oni took over; those who stayed entrusted their secrets to samsarans.

Kitsune and Samsarans

Both kitsune and samsarans face uncertain fates if captured—they could become pampered prisoners or the main course of a holiday feast. With the border to southern Zi Ha quite porous due to its proximity to Chuyokai, expatriates remain in close contact with Chu Ye's populations.

Samsarans have been key to preserving Chu Ye's culture because they maintain hazy impressions of past lives. They create clues only their future selves would recognize to rediscover the hiding places of important documents and resurrect their details. A refugee village in Zi Ha built a library for Chu Ye's recovered history. They copy key medical and martial texts into scrolls that they then hide inside Chuyokai's trees for rebels to retrieve when needed.

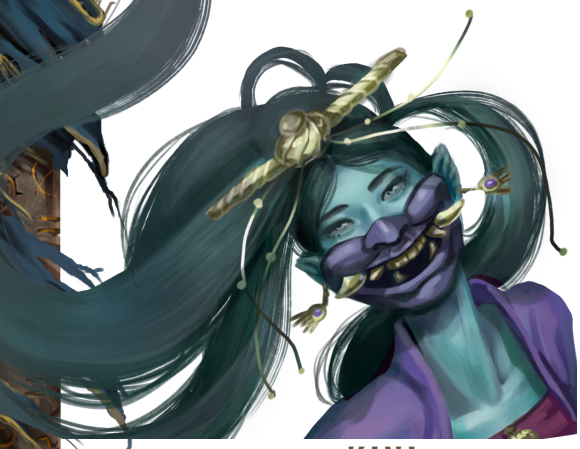
A recent development among Chu Ye's kitsune is the worship of Fumeiyoshi. Those who slay an oni who has offended Fumeiyoshi and bring their head to the god's shrine gain the ability to assume an oni form. Some have used this power to replace oni officials and aid the rebellion. Others enjoy their lives as oni so much they either turn their backs on their fellow kitsune or act as double agents, betraying their resistance allies and potentially finishing their transformation into oni.



DUEN FUYAN



KALO KOMOD



KANA



TAMAMI

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

A civil war rages in Chu Ye. Visiting diplomats see a nation dominated by the oni shogunate, but their minders curate their itineraries to give that impression. The military is quick to respond to open rebellion and makes an example of any rebel they identify. Oni execute not just those caught supporting rebellion, but their entire extended family as well, a policy they call "ripping out weeds, root and stem."

Shogun **Tsuneni** (tyrannical male void oni voidlord) is the undisputed ruler of Chu Ye, and no one has come close to challenging his power. He convenes a ruling council in the capital city of **Jyito** once a year to discuss affairs of state. It is a lavish event that appeals to the hedonistic nature of oni, making its attendance something officials desire instead of dread. Two lieutenants manage day-to-day governance: Stewards **Imora** (brutal female storm oni marshal) and **Tanyo** (precise male void oni councilor). Imora oversees the military while Tanyo manages bureaucrats. Fumeiyoshan fanatics follow **Kana** (bombastic female merfolk cleric), who preaches devotion to the Lord of Envy above all.

Several factions exist among the ruling council. Tsuneni enjoys pitting them against each other and finds their differing opinions useful in determining the best direction for the nation. **Uno** (impatient nonbinary caldera oni governor) leads the militaristic **daiyoku** faction. They feel Chu Ye isn't big enough for their ambitions and want to conquer all of Tian Xia. On the other side of the political spectrum sits **Shiga** (contemplative male storm oni governor). His **shinkaze** faction consists of former kami who lost their position due to failures beyond their control. They hope either to redeem themselves and become kami again, or to create a new order of gods who accept them despite their failings. This faction is isolationist and focuses on spiritual evolution. **Tamami** (debauched female village oni governor) leads the hedonist faction and is the only councilor who doesn't want to be shogun—it's too much work.

The kishin oni **Inma** (self-absorbed female kishin oni demigod) has emerged from her solitude for the first time in centuries. Though she doesn't care about Chu Ye's politics, she needs assistance to combat Zhulong, the underworld dragon attacking her fortress. Yet while Inma doesn't fear any oni in Tian Xia, her pride prevents her from admitting she needs help. The self-styled Empress of the World's return has sent shock waves through oni society. Some believe she and Tsuneni plan to combine forces and conquer the rest of Tian Xia while others curry her favor, assuming she's looking to replace the shogun. Resistance spies report that she is in fact requisitioning resources to defend her home, a shocking sign of weakness. Mizu Ki Hikari has deployed kitsune volunteers into the Darklands to propose an alliance with Zhulong.

Mizu Ki Hikari

Mizu Ki Hikari is the resistance movement in Chu Ye. They originally used the name Tethoke, which had ties to nationalist movements that advocated independence from Lung Wa. The name limited their appeal due to negative connotations for those descended from imperial immigrants. The new name comes from oni naming traditions to remind people to stand united against the true threat. Its leaders maintain that their sole goal is driving all oni out of Chu Ye, stating, "We can define our government once we have one."

Mizu Ki Hikari maintains hidden fortresses along the edge of Chuyokai, which house five well-known generals. These leaders constantly move between their strongholds to avoid assassination attempts. **Kalo Komod** (insightful male human general) is a cautious tactician whose strategies keep the organization alive but frustrate those who favor more direct confrontation. **Duen Fuyan** (furious female human general) is the youngest of the five and pushes a scorched earth policy. **Den Taijian** (soft-spoken nonbinary human diplomat) mediates disputes and brokers alliances with foreign powers, like tengu leaders in Kwanlai. **Lee Mingchuen** (vengeful male kitsune spymaster) and **Giwas Walis** (resourceful female human quartermaster) provide support from the shadows.

Cities and Locations

The following are a sample of some of the prominent locations in Chu Ye.

Jyito

The capital of Jyito is in ruins after two waves of destruction under oni rule—the first when Chu Ye fell, the second when Tsuneni consolidated power to become shogun. Most residents live in shantytowns built around the ruins of the original city. The wealthiest part of town is off the coast and underwater, occupied by merfolk and sea oni. The only structure fully standing in old Jyito is the shogun's castle, its silhouette looming against the sky like a giant surveying their kill. Tsuneni was content with this arrangement when oni ruled through terror alone. Now he believes the capital must be modernized to keep up with his government's new, softer approach, as well as the increasing opulence of Kirahata.

Kirahata

Kirahata remains the tourism center of Chu Ye for now. Its governor, Tamami, has enough wealth to challenge Tsuneni, but ruling the nation is dull compared to her city's delights. She loves meeting creatures of novel ancestries, often arranging to greet them as they arrive in port. Many humans move here hoping to be the next big attraction, though one wrong move could end their dreams—and lives. Nevertheless, the hedonistic excess is such that picking through trash in Kirahata yields more treasure than working a month in another city.

Nokkaichi

This coastal city began as a fishing village and sits where the tundra meets the tides of the Sapphire Sound. The Sapphire Sound is home to a wealth of aquatic creatures thanks to a robust and magical cold-water reef that is almost an extension of the Forest of Spirits, complete with underwater kami. Those kami are now hostile to fishers, responding both to oni presence and overfishing due to Chu Ye's agricultural collapse.

Tsukiwa

A former mining town, residents of Tsukiwa chose to dig deeper rather than move on when the iron veins on the surface ran out. The town's inhabitants joined forces with nearby stone and cloud giants to expand the shafts into a cosmopolitan city inside a mountain. Tsukiwa's strong community and isolation from the rest of Chu Ye prevented oni from infiltrating them—one named **Hisui** (hapless male caldera oni governor) managed to enter, but authorities captured him as soon as he revealed his true form. Tsukiwa remained independent until Tsuneni launched a three-year siege that resulted in a stalemate. Its leaders used that outcome to negotiate favorable terms for reintegration with Chu Ye: Hisui would become governor and bring in three mountain oni to assist him, but they are in fact Tsukiwa's hostages. The city promised to resume supplying the nation with ore and precious gems so long as the oni government doesn't attempt to assert further control over it.

Tsukiwa can't appear sympathetic to Mizu Ki Hikari for fear of resuming hostilities with oni, but they know oni leaders won't tolerate their independence forever. Zhulong's rise has provided cover for Tsukiwa to dig a network of secret passages, and spies now communicate regularly with both the resistance in Chuyokai and Zhulong's army.

International Relations

The diplomatic presence Chu Ye maintains in other nations focuses on attracting tourists. Oni focus their attention to the east, where they have allies in the Forest of Spirits, enemies in Minkai, and both in Xidao. Hongal has closed its border and turns back all Chu Ye refugees, making Wanshou their destination instead. The kraken's nation is not much more hospitable.



GIWAS WALIS

Darklands

Nations



DIGUO-DASHU
Capital: Hiu-Nuo
Government: Near Anarchy
Ruler: Guxiya

PAN MAJANG
Government: Unknown

RAHK LO
Capital: None
Government: Military Autocracy
Ruler: General Yaluze

Peoples

Brain Oozes
Cave Giants
Haunted Clockworks
Hobgoblins
Myceloids
Oni
Ratfolk
Seugathi
Xulgaths
Underworld Dragons

Languages

Aklo
Sakvroth

Religions

Lamashtu

Lao Shu Po

Resources

Gems

Ore

Technology

MONSTERS AND MYSTERY

Below the surface lies a tortuous system of caverns and tunnels, opening up into subterranean vaults and unnatural ecosystems thousands of miles beneath the earth. Known collectively as the Darklands, this realm is often ignored by those who live above, for the simple reason of its hostility toward non-natives—humans are notoriously poor at seeing in darkness, and even those without such limitations must deal with a plethora of danger for very little profit. Life adapts, however, and the Darklands has its own civilizations that burst upward with erratic frequency.

Underworld dragons claim sprawling fiefdoms beneath the earth, the machinations of the most ambitious reaching onto the surface of Tian Xia. **Kou-Shanguang** lurks in the tunnels beneath the Wall of Heaven, her realm a maze of dripstones filled with flickering and dancing lambent lights. **Zetzubio** rules a network of caverns inhabited by blind, amphibious oracles; he is known to have meddled with the oracles of Po Li on more than one occasion. **Geojibom** takes great pride in her inverted forest of stone trees, which she individually carved from stalactites. She has made a habit of forging alliances and starting wars among the nations of Sekamina in equal measure.

Scholars who study the Darklands separate the subterranean world into three zones: **Nar-Voth**, the closest layer to the surface; **Sekamina**, the middle layer inhabited by many civilizations; and **Orv**, the deepest and most mysterious of layers. Most openings into the earth don't reach deep enough to connect even to Sekamina, or are simply unconnected to the Darklands by virtue of chance. While there are multitudes of entrances to the world below scattered across Tian Xia, most are obscure or remote.

Three particular Darklands entrances are well known. **Mount Kumijinja**, an extinguished volcano in northern Minkai, holds a series of ledges called the **Ghost Path** in its caldera, leading straight down into Sekamina. The **Clicking Caverns** sit on the border of Xa Hoi and Nagajor, periodically erupting with haunted clockwork machinery that is hostile to its surface neighbors. Finally, **Jinin** protects the entrance to the Darklands that the elves emerged from millennia ago.

DEEPMARKET

Located beneath the lowest levels of **Goka's** Undermarket, Deepmarket's unworked caverns host a shadowy community of ratfolk, calignis, wayangs, xulgaths, and more. While not deep enough to reach the upper levels of Nar-Voth, Deepmarket is too deep underground to be considered anything but part of Tian Xia's Darklands. The path between Undermarket and Deepmarket is long and hard to find but is relatively stable, making Goka one of the primary trading points between the underground and surface communities. Savvy smugglers use Deepmarket as a convenient stash for contraband that is too risky even for Undermarket, giving the community a tarnished reputation, but the vast majority of goods exchanged are of the mundane variety. Clay cook pots, fine cloth, and steel swords are exchanged for gems, raw ore, and scavenged artifacts from Tian Xia's past. Food is also a major import, as Deepmarket sends for pickled vegetables, dried noodles, and prime cuts of meat from Goka. Undermarket generally has less demand for Darklands cuisine, though Deepmarket's snake and scorpion wines have become popular among Golden League xuns who are looking to appear tough.

PAN MAJANG

No one is certain who once inhabited the ever-shifting metropolis of Pan Majang, in the **Clicking Caverns** of Sekamina deep below the nations of **Nagajor** and **Xa Hoi**. Whatever forgotten civilization existed here has completely perished, yet linger on malevolently in spirit.



Their ghosts possess elaborate constructs, ticking clockworks that were built to serve Pan Majang when it lived and that now host the sadistic souls of their former masters. These haunted machines are flesh-eating monsters that chronically attack their neighboring nations. In 2105 IC, clockwork horrors poured from the Clicking Caverns and attacked both **Xa Hoi** and **Nagajor**. In 7208 IC, the nagaji hero **Zethivaxus Djeed** led an ill-advised expedition into the Clicking Caverns, hoping to end the constant threat to his homeland. When he returned, it was in the form of a haunted clockwork, as he led an invasion of the highlands of western Xa Hoi.

Pan Majang is impossible to map, even for those brave explorers who have found it and returned alive. The city itself is made of clockwork, and it constantly shifts to the whims and rhythm of an unknown maestro. The necropolis might possibly even move on its own, as its exact location is notoriously hard to pin down. The uncanny movements of some of its buildings have led some to theorize they are possessed by ghosts, just like their smaller clockwork counterparts.

The rulers of Pan Majang are neither undead nor clockwork but something in between. Their existence is only known due to scouts and eavesdroppers—no one has managed to see the shadowy council and return while still wearing flesh. Scholars from both Nagajor and Xa Hoi ponder whether there is some means to placate these beings and put them to rest, but determining how is another matter, especially when these cursed entities are so keen on capturing skilled agents and reforging them to serve the clicking city.

SHIROGOKU

The spiral-shaped city of Shirogoku lies beneath most of northern **Minkai** and the **Forest of Spirits**. Pallid oni rule the realm in a mockery of the kami above them, performing unsettling rituals on themselves and unwilling victims. These oni are not the creatures of vengeance and appetite that most on the surface are used to—instead they seem driven to act in service to some greater purpose. Survivors of their rites describe constant nightmares of spiraling downward, and they usually die early deaths from stress and lack of sleep.

ORV

The deepest layers of the Darklands are absurdly dangerous, even compared to the constant perils above. Only a few storied explorers have managed to find Orv and return again, and it's difficult to separate them from mere braggarts and drunks. One scholar of Tsukiyo claims to have discovered in the midnight depths a three-headed giant, who spoke of a ruined home destroyed by an undead sun. Other stories tell of oceans of sentient oils babbling mindlessly to parasitic creatures within their perfumed depths, portals to qlippoth-infested regions of the Outer Rifts, and unfathomable anti-living beings that have crawled out from the Void.

DIGUO-DASHU

In 1251 IC, a legion of ratfolk spilled forth from Sekamina, set on the conquest of imperial Lung Wa. The invaders conquered over a dozen cities before the fully mobilized might of Lung Wa's armies beat them back, forcing the ratfolk to retreat into the tunnels of the Darklands. **Hao Jin**, seeking to bloodlessly end the conflict for good, severed the entire sphere of earth the ratfolk army occupied and sealed it within her personal demiplane. The threat was gone, but the nation that spawned it remained: Diguo-Dashu, the kingdom deep beneath the earth.

Though known in Tian Xia as the Empire of the Rat, **Diguo-Dashu** is too chaotic to truly lay claim to the name. The massive force that invaded Lung Wa was one of the largest unifying efforts in the history of the nation, and the loss of that army broke any semblance of organization among the ratfolk for at least a century. Diguo-Dashu persists as a sprawling group of warring families, who survive due to their size, resourcefulness, and by—reluctantly—favoring each other over other Darklands civilizations.



Diguo-Dashu never sleeps. With no sun or stars to track the days and no official quiet hours to mark a time for rest, residents retire when they wish and wake when they wake. As the surrounding Darklands has no schedule either, this works well enough for the ratfolk, or ysoki, as it ensures that someone is alert whenever danger or opportunity presents itself. Timekeeping in the kingdom is inherently chaotic, as each family has their own method of keeping track of such things. While it is sometimes possible to sync historical records by comparing major events, such records tend to be rare, with ysoki relying on stories and oral traditions instead. Oftentimes vast genealogies and crucial information is stored only in the heads of a few local elders, and while some of these elders have minds like a steel trap, discerning who among them is

correct is a challenge beyond most. Arguing over which version of a tale is the right one is an honored tradition in the Empire of the Rat, and history is usually determined by who yells the loudest.

Citizens have a strong sense of community values and provide a roughly even distribution of necessities to those around them. This system means that whenever there is work to be done, someone will do it, as to do otherwise risks everyone going hungry. In times of plenty, when the ratfolk don't have to risk the Darklands, people tend to entertain themselves with stories or games. Gambling is extremely popular, especially given the community will bail chronic debtors out of destitution time and time again.

Survival in Sekamina is a community effort, and the ysoki of Diguo-Dashu do so by scavenging, stealing, and hunting whatever they can get their hands on. While some try their luck at farming Darklands mushrooms and others pull up blind fish from cold underground lakes, every citizen of the nation is a pure opportunist. Their diet is heavy on meat, with giant bats and massive whip spiders being popular meals. Indeed, these ysoki are notorious for eating anything that won't outright poison them—a Diguo-Dashan will eat a myceloid, seugathi, or even a dragon steak without blinking an eye. While they often shrug off objections to this practice as pointless pearl clutching, they are not immune to concerns about angry ghosts arising from being denied a proper burial. As such, priests of **Lao Shu Po** work hard performing religious rituals, symbolically sending unquiet spirits on for the Old Rat Woman to eat so that they don't bother her faithful children.

Workers are usually capable of making the tools they need to go about their business, but due to conditions in the Darklands, textiles are more of a challenge. Most ysoki in Diguo-Dashu wear fur or plates of chitin that have been fashioned into armor. The finest clothes are stolen or traded for from the surface and passed down over generations. The nation has a stable industry for cloth repair, serviced by some of Tian Xia's finest artisans. It is said a master Diguo-Dashan tailor can repair a torn garment to perfection using nothing but a needle and spare threads. Wealth in Diguo-Dashu is represented by the gems mined in from Sekamina. Many ratfolk create necklaces, bracelets, and other jewelry based on what precious stones they can find, even if the color schemes don't make sense alongside one another.

Family is the ultimate priority in Diguo-Dashu. Expectations of familial loyalty can be crushing. On the flip side, there is almost nothing a ysoki can do that will cause their family to abandon them. For those unfortunate enough to lose their own kin, it is easy to find another family willing to take them in, and adopted family is considered no different than those with blood ties. This system has virtues and vices in equal measure, as no ratfolk in Diguo-Dashu is left without a support network—yet likewise, there is no socially acceptable means to part with the most abhorrent of one's relatives. This often ends in feuds between families, as people chose loyalty to kin over justice and deescalation, which can turn into grudges that last centuries.

This emphasis on family may be why Diguo-Dashans refer to Lao Shu Po as their ancestor, not as their patron goddess. It might also be to distance themselves from the deity's more ruthless aspects, or to avoid being targeted by the goddess's detractors. Whatever the case, the Old Rat Woman is the god of Diguo-Dashu in deed, if not in word. Lao Shu Po teaches the ratfolk to survive and rise above what life has handed them by whatever means are needed, without being weighed down by shame inflicted by the privileged or the bitter. Her clergy soothes those suffering from survivor's guilt or experiencing pangs of unwelcome conscience. While her doctrine appeals most to the selfish, conditions in Sekamina mean that many ysoki are tormented simply by surviving when their loved ones didn't, either due to fleeing a dangerous situation or simple luck. Lao Shu Po tells these people they were right to live, and so she is beloved among this nation of survivors.

Officially, Diguo-Dashu is ruled by **Guxiya** (self-interested female ratfolk leader) from the seat of power in the capital city of **Hiu-Nuo**. In reality, no one follows the laws and mandates that the government puts out. All politics in the nation are local, with regulations and



DIGUO-DASHU

TIAN XIA WORLD GUIDE
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LINGSHEN
LINVARRE
MINATA
MINKAI
NAGAJOR
PO LI
QUAIN
SHANGUANG
SHENMEN
SONGBAI
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GLOSSARY & INDEX

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Much as Tien is used as a trade language above, most residents in the Darklands know at least a few words of Sakvroth.

Diguo-Dashu: dee-gwoh dah-shoo
Guxiya: goo-shee-yah
Hiu-Nuo: hee-wu nwo
Orv: similar to "orb"
Sekamina: seh-kah-MY-nah
Nar-Voth: nar VOTH
Rahk Lo: rahk loh
Yaluze: yahl-loo-zuh
Shirogoku: she-roh-goh-koo

conditions determined solely by the most influential families in an area. Guxiya doesn't mind this, as the nation has been this way before she ascended to rulership and will be this way after she passes on. She instead pursues her own interests with what power she has, keeping an ear to the ground for anything that might help her or the kingdom as a whole. Currently, Guxiya has been intrigued by rumors of **Round Mountain**—the sphere of earth that Hao Jin stole with Diguo-Dashu's army trapped inside—returning to Tian Xia. Scouts claim the descendants of that army still live in and around Round Mountain, and while the two groups have been separated by hundreds of years, distant family is still family. Cloaked ratfolk have been making the perilous journey to the surface to explore leads on these returned ysoki, as well as information on the Pathfinder Society, the Aspis Consortium, and Hao Jin herself. If these agents happen to find opportunity along the way, well, there's no point in having to make a second trip.

RAHK LO

Rumors of a hobgoblin nation buried deep in the earth have persisted in Tian Xia for at least a century. It was only recently that these rumors were at last confirmed, however, and by an unlikely source. **General Azaersi**, founder and ruler of the hobgoblin nation of **Oprak** in Avistan, sent skilled explorers to make contact with the empire of **Kaoling** to forge an alliance. Her chosen method of travel for these scouts was through the magic of the *Onyx Key*, an artifact that can connect locations using dimensional tunnels through the Plane of Earth. While attempting to locate Kaoling on an unfamiliar continent, General Azaersi's agents accidentally stumbled across a second hobgoblin nation residing in Nar-Voth, almost directly below their intended destination. Using magic and a fair amount of old fashioned digging, the three hobgoblin nations made contact, and the residents of Rahk Lo emerged onto the surface.

This contact has caused its share of growing pains. The hobgoblins of **Rahk Lo** haven't competed with humanity or other surface peoples for over a century, and they are far more interested in allies to help them survive their sparse and dangerous homeland than grand visions of nationalism or conquest. Their welcoming behavior toward non-hobgoblins has often left both Oprak and Kaoling at loose ends on how to deal with their kin—and likewise surprises many Tian nations who are used to Kaoling's expansionist threat. Azaersi has managed to lure the hobgoblins of Rahk Lo into helping her scouts explore the Plane of Earth, much to **Warlord Tsung-Cha Kavangaki**'s consternation, but her requests for clockwork and dangerous monstrosities from the Darklands has largely been met with disinterest.

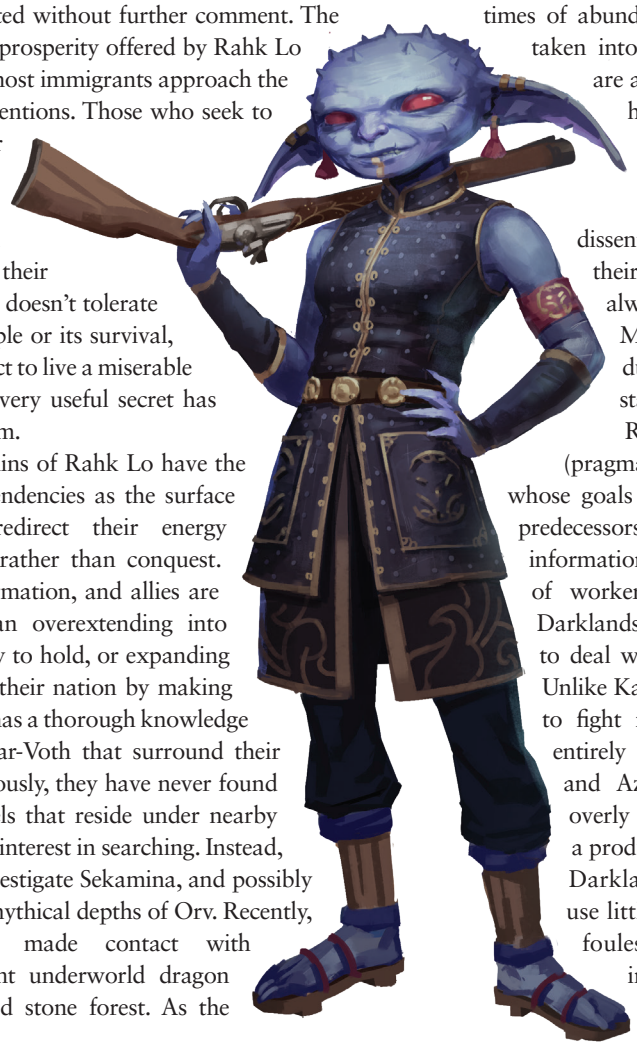

RAHK LO

The hobgoblins of Rahk Lo share the same ordered tendencies as their surface kin, even if directed in a different manner. With no sun or moon visible below ground, timekeeping has become something of a national obsession. Every house and city square has a water clock, and official government **bellwatchers** constantly make the rounds to ring the hours and ensure that public timepieces are kept running. Chandlers scrupulously sculpt tallow candles that burn for an hour and not a second longer. Despite these exacting measures, Rahk Lo years are extremely erratic, much to the dismay of their fellow hobgoblins. Rahk Lo marks the start of their new year in the spring, when runoff from Zi Ha's melting snow packs causes the underground **Dzunghe River** to

reach a specific water marker—an event that occurs at different times depending on weather conditions. While Rahk Lo's extensive record keeping means these years can be matched to surface dates, the effort involved causes Kaoling's historians no end of disgust.

Rahk Lo's other national obsession is alchemy. The Darklands are short on crops and wild game that could feed a nation, but they're filled to the brim with potential alchemical reagents. Rahk Lo's army of farmer-alchemists is swift to use the abundance of one resource to fix the lack of another. Bottled sunlight and alchemical fertilizers allow plants to grow in sunless, sandy caverns. Pheromones and other concoctions attract and tame the giant bats and centipedes that serve as guards and mounts for hobgoblin soldiers. Rahk Lo's people are exceedingly generous with their knowledge, sharing their methods with others to better the lives of everyone in the Darklands. The hobgoblins see no advantage in living one disaster away from starvation, even if it means feeding potential enemies.

This friendliness means that Rahk Lo has non-hobgoblin citizens who have joined of their own volition—and unlike Kaoling, are loyal to the nation of their own free will. Non-hobgoblins who want to join Rahk Lo are given a probation period of 3 years, where they are expected to work as a normal citizen would. If the person performs their tasks and still wants to stay after this period, they are granted full rights and accepted without further comment. The equality and relative prosperity offered by Rahk Lo is enough to ensure most immigrants approach the nation with good intentions. Those who seek to infiltrate Rahk Lo for nefarious purposes are quick to discover its hobgoblins can be just as brutal as their surface kin. Rahk Lo doesn't tolerate any threat to its people or its survival, and traitors can expect to live a miserable half-existence until every useful secret has been pulled from them.



While the hobgoblins of Rahk Lo have the same expansionist tendencies as the surface hobgoblins, they redirect their energy toward exploration rather than conquest. New resources, information, and allies are far more useful than overextending into territory that is costly to hold, or expanding the list of threats to their nation by making enemies. The nation has a thorough knowledge of the tunnels of Nar-Voth that surround their nation—though curiously, they have never found the Darklands tunnels that reside under nearby Jinin, and show little interest in searching. Instead, Rahk Lo seeks to investigate Sekamina, and possibly even break into the mythical depths of Orv. Recently, scouts accidentally made contact with **Geojibom**, an ancient underworld dragon lairing in an inverted stone forest. As the hobgoblins were not eaten on sight, the nation considers the dragon to be reasonably friendly, and is continuing to make friendly overtures when circumstances allow.

With darkness in ample supply, much of Rahk Lo's culture focuses on senses other than sight. Alchemical toys and fireworks are popular when available, but most alchemical compounds are reserved for the critical work of survival. Instead, tactile entertainment is built into the cities. Many of the stone walls and buildings are inlaid with metal or carved with patterns that are pleasant for passersby to run their fingers across them. Extra attention is paid to every item of clothing, as tailors combine silky fabric, twirling embroidery, and smooth leather into comfortable outfits. With the lack of reliable color vision, Rahk Lo fashion is often asymmetrical, adding a personal flair to otherwise pragmatic outfits. Scent and sound can be found as well. The constantly dripping water clocks are often designed to play musical tones. Perfumed candles and incense are considered luxurious among Rahk Lo's hobgoblins, though the sharp and earthy odors that are common in the Darklands have proven unpopular on the surface.

Rahk Lo's prosperity comes from its organized nature and rigid societal roles. Children learn via working as assistants for adults. Adults are assigned to specific roles within Rahk Lo society, be it soldier, farmer, or miner. In times of abundance, personal preference might be taken into account, but most often residents are assigned to whatever role needs extra hands. There is little chance to change a role once it's been assigned unless people are needed elsewhere, though hobgoblins rarely need to quash dissent—after all, if a person doesn't like their lot or doesn't want to work, they're always free to leave and go elsewhere. Most citizens quickly find they prefer dull security in Rahk Lo over brutal starvation in the rest of the Darklands.

Rahk Lo is led by General **Yaluze** (pragmatic nonbinary hobgoblin general), whose goals remain the same as those of their predecessors: organization, survival, and information gathering. They have an assortment of workers who mine and forage in the Darklands, and a small fighting force trained to deal with the threats of the underground. Unlike Kaoling, they don't specifically prepare to fight neighboring cities, focusing almost entirely on defense. While both Tsung-Cha and Azaersi consider the general to be overly trusting, Yaluze's generous nature is a product of their environment. In the Tian Darklands, the most dangerous threats use little in the way of guile, and even the foulest of internal treachery often pales in the face of the creatures that lurk in the deep.



Goka

Nations

GOKA
Capital: Goka
Government: Constitutional Parliament
Ruler: Empress Nai Yan Fei



Peoples

Aiuvarins
Caligni
Drakes
Dromaars
Dwarves
Elves
Gnomes
Halflings
Humans
Kitsune
Kobolds
Merfolk
Nagaji
Nephilim
Oni
Ratfolk
Samsarans
Tengu
Xulgaths
Yaoguai
Wayangs

Languages

Draconic, Hongali, Hwan, Kelish, Minatan, Minkaian, Nagaji, Samsaran, Taldane, Tang, Tengu, Tien, Sakvroth, Vudrani, Wayang, Ysoki

Factions

- Aspis Consortium
- Golden League
- Lantern Lodge
- Pathfinder Society
- Way of the Kirin

Religions

- Abadar
- Daikitsu
- Desna
- Fumeiyoshi
- Hei Feng
- Irori
- Lady Jingxi
- Lady Nanbyo
- Lamashtu
- Lao Shu Po
- Pharasma
- Shizuru
- Sun Wukong
- Tsukiyo
- Yaezhing

Resources

- Alcohol/ Drugs
- Armor/ Weapons
- Books/ Lore
- Coffee
- Dye
- Gunpowder
- Jewelry/ Gems
- Livestock
- Luxury goods/Art
- Magic items
- Mercenaries
- Milk/ Cheese
- Produce
- Seafood
- Ships
- Spices
- Tea
- Textiles

CITY OF WONDERS, GATEWAY TO TWO WORLDS

Famed for harbors teeming with a thousand fleets, Goka is one of Tian Xia's wealthiest and largest city-states. Every passing day witnesses new exchanges of commerce and culture, as vessels heavy with spices and tea sail from Goka for **Casmaron**, **Avistan**, and even more distant places. Just as often, ships arrive at the City of Wonders, debarking passengers who delight in its bazaars and gardens and admire the immaculate beauty of its palaces and skyscrapers. Goka's many wonders and contradictions, exemplified in its unique architectural juxtapositions of bustling tradition and cosmopolitan majesty, often overwhelm many first-time visitors to Tian Xia, where incomprehensible extravagance and indolence can be held in the same gaze as backbreaking squalor and unenviable fortitude.

Founded millennia ago by the ingenious Abadarite **Xhai Xen Xiao**, Goka is a city of wealth and privilege, sometimes referred to as Tian Xia's bank and clearinghouse. Goka's tycoons and ministers manage the city's economic influence by exploiting regional opportunities with ruthless acumen. As wealth draws wealth, Tian enterprises seeking overseas expansion as well as foreign organizations interested in the continent's resources often find their way here, and their investments fatten the city coffers' glistening bulk. Historically, some of Goka's backers included Yixing governors, Vudran potentates, and Qadiran satraps. Today, Pathfinder agents, Katapeshi factors, and Aspis executives are just some of the venturesome individuals drawn to Goka.

Yet the City of Wonders is not only a land of capital and influence. Beyond that, it is also a city of workers and work, its destiny written in the dreams of its citizen professionals and migrant laborers. Goka's educated citizens prove suitable for advancing the strategies and operations of foreign investors, while its wealth attracts and retains specialists and laborers from all across Tian Xia. Goka draws the likes of Minatan storm-chasers, Hwanggot master fermenters, Zi Han inner alchemists, Lingshenese armorers, and Hongali hoof-healers without having to lift a figurative finger to gain these highly valuable skills. Goka's knowledge base thus grows, deepening in expertise even as it broadens in versatility, allowing the city to stay ahead of its challengers. Even a recent kaiju attack could not shake the city for long; within scant weeks, it was back to business as usual, testimony to the toughness and industry of Goka's workers.

These two interwoven factors—of foreign investment and humanoid resources—are the dynamos driving and sustaining Goka's growth, and the forces compelling the formation of Goka's many discordant wonders. As uncertainties swell and polities transform during this Age of Lost Omens, many other Successor States draw lessons from the city-state's melding of power, privilege, and passion into profitable peace, and wonder if Goka's ways provide a glimpse into the future of Tian Xia.

GEOGRAPHY

It is a truism that for Goka, geography is destiny. Such statements, originating from Yixing-era discourses, highlight how Goka occupies the only developable niche along westernmost Tian Xia. While the **Gokan Valley** indeed has sufficient arable land and natural resources for settlement and agriculture, this terrestrial emphasis reveals a mainland-centric imperial bias, and downplays wind and water's significance in Goka's development.

Goka's proximity to the confluence between the northern trade winds billowing down the **Wall of Heaven** and the southern trade winds rushing up the **Valashmai Sea** benefits its merchant fleets immensely. The seas bring Goka immense opportunities for trade and profit, as investors from Tian Xia and beyond sink untold fortunes into developing Goka, all the better to capitalize on its nautical blessings. Reliable easterlies propel ships westward along the **Embaral Ocean**, enabling regular contact with **Casmaron** through the **Obari Ocean.** The Embaral also connects to the northern Ivory Sea, and Goka's ready harbors attract Casmar fishing vessels in need of repairs and resupplies.

Along Goka's coastline, a scattering of islands stand atop the Embaral's cerulean foam, welcoming ships into **Xu Hong Bay**'s halcyon waters. These islands' names hearken to Goka's legendary origins as the site of a foolhardily indulgent dragon's demise. The appropriately named largest island, **Dragonhead**, supports opulent integrated resorts—a





mix of casinos, restaurants, theaters, and shops—catering to travelers and residents alike, while the **Dragon's Tail Archipelago** houses the city's crews who service its many fleets, and the fishers who feed the city's inexhaustible appetite for seafood.

Visitors from temperate climes often complain Goka has only one season, summer. Amused locals quip they enjoy three distinct seasons: hot, wet, and hot and wet. Arid winds funnel sharply from **Shanguang** into Goka. As the simoom abuts sea breezes, an incredibly humid tropical climate ensues. During the middle and end of the year, monsoons swell, heralding typhoons and floods. After these rainy months, oppressively hot and dry spells inevitably follow, and the Gokan weather's relentless vacillation often staggers unwary newcomers.

The most expensive districts of Goka are situated along the twin northern foothills; the difference in property valuation is due to these hills' cooler sub-tropical climate and protection from flooding. One foothill, the **Diamond Knoll**, houses the lavish **Gokan Palace**, while the other, **Blue Stone**, houses the wealthiest shipping dynasties. The **City Center**, unsurprising for such a diverse metropolis, is situated right along the **Viridian River's** northern shore and hosts countless godowns, offices, and eateries serving Goka's brokers and bureaucrats. The southern waterfront of **Oldtown** and **Oldport**, while prone to flooding, is also the recipient of fertile alluvial deposits dredged from atop the Wall of Heaven right to Goka's doorstep, which sustain its farms and plantations.

A DAY IN GOKA

A Gokan day begins in the dimness before dawn. The first to rise are the fishers and farmers. Before Shizuru summons the day's first light, fishers cast their first net while farmhands compost the soil. Children wake, dress for school, and take a nibble of the morning meal; at their elders' exhortations, they reluctantly down some more. For Tian-Shu families, these communal meals might be leavings of last night's supper warmed and eaten alongside watery rice gruel, or steamed buns filled with roast meat or lotus paste. Tian-Sing families share triangular pastries stuffed with curried potatoes or spicy sardines, or coconut-seasoned rice with shrimp-steeped chili and this morning's anchovies.

As sunlight spills through Goka's skyscrapers, children and adults leave for school and work. For most, an inordinately long amount of time is spent every day on these journeys back and forth. Commonfolk simply walk, taking hours to reach their destinations, while wealthier citizens trot through the streets with carriages and steeds. Truly prosperous Gokans travel via opulent drake-drawn sky chariots, darting beneath clouds and steeple shadows to avoid the rising sun's glare.

By noon, the sounds of construction fill the air, for somebody somewhere is always building something.

Attacks during the recent Ruby Phoenix Tournament—attacks by oni, rampaging elementals, and the kaiju Mogaru—necessitated the rebuilding of many buildings and roads, as well as the restoration of many beloved monuments like the **Empress Yin Opera House**. By day's end, the din of sawing and hammering reaches a pummeling crescendo, stops briefly, and continues once again as many work crews pull double shifts at night on other projects.

A major employer of these night crews is Lady **Nai Yan Fei**, Goka's ambitious and compassionate emperor, who hires them to work on urban renewal projects. Rumor has it that Lady Fei had long been vexed by Gokans' exhausting daily commutes. If one believes the tales, the common folk's long travel times motivated Lady Fei to decree **Surepath**, an ambitious project of bridges and thoroughfares connecting **Oldtown** with the **City Center**. Lady Fei hopes to achieve what no other emperor could: a viable Gokan public transportation system. Despite support from the Nai clan and the **Grand Abadar Bank**, progress on Surepath stalled as many residents and landlords opposed this urban restructuring. Assistance from the dreaded **Golden League**, who recently won an elected seat in Parliament with Lady Fei's backing, allowed work to proceed recently, but progress has been stymied again by the recent kaiju rampage.

None of this dusty chaos is of concern to the wealthy whiling away at casinos on the northern islands, or to the patricians of Goka's universities and ministries. Day or night means less to these elites in their gilded resorts and ivory towers; wealth brings privilege, and the greatest privilege for mortals is time itself.

Evening heralds the appearance of street storytellers, who emerge to inform and regale their peers. Drawn from the ranks of failed literati and dissipated nobility, these storytellers foreground performances with summarized readings of Goka's major broadsheets. First, they read aloud parliamentary edicts and Tian news, all the while offering commentaries; then, they read the winning bets for the city's ever-popular drake races and martial contests. Attracting large crowds by this point, orators then dramatically perform popular tales in different Tian dialects, enthralling listeners with heroic classics like *The Songbai General's Pride*. These performers place circles of stools before them; listeners who stand listen for free, but once a listener sits, they have to pay the tale master's fee.

A YEAR IN GOKA

The end of the year in Goka heralds what is humorously called Gokans' favorite pastime: queuing. In winter, the murmur of new beginnings reverberates through the city, as snaking lines of parents queue for balloted chances to enroll their children in City Center and Thousand Mile's prestigious primary schools, beating off the monsoon rain and occasional hail with their waxed-paper umbrellas for hours on end. Similar crowds of devotees and pilgrims, hoping to gain divine favor for the coming year, throng jetties for seats on the boats and barges traveling to the islands of the famous statues of **Shizuru** and **Tsukiyo**.

Harmonious Spring is the official beginning of the Gokan new year; the preceding festivities and fanfare are, as local wits like to quip, the lineup for the main event; in bustling Goka, even the festivals queue up for other festivals. Spring's pleasantness heralds another round of queuing, as crowds swell around the city's shrines and temples, garnering blessings of health from **Qi Zhongite** doctor-sages, insights into agricultural investments from diviners invoking **Daikitsu**,

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Tian languages and dialects meld into Goka's trade tongue, a fast-paced variant of Tien with a surprising amount of syntax and loanwords from Casmar and Tian-Sing cultures. Avistani languages are also commonly understood and spoken.

Bao Ting: bow (rhymes with "ow") ting
Biwa: bee-wah
Goka: go-kar
Goyao: go-yah-ow
Kopi-tiam: koh-pee-tee-yam
Nai Hu Buo: nai hoo bu-oh
Nai Yan Fei: nai jan (like the European name) fey
Qiu: chee-you
Sanxian: san-shee-yan
Xhai Xhen Xiao: zhai zhen xi-yao



ROSIN SINGER

and spiritual protection from ghosts and fiends through the ecstatic, whip-dancing mediums of **Sun Wukong**. These flurries of activity are echoed with emergent pockets of silence and stillness; as the spring celebrations are a time of familial reunions, Goka's armies of migrant workers often return to neighboring villages and distant hometowns to be with their loved ones during this period, transforming entire neighborhoods into temporary ghost towns. During this time, bakers and snack makers enjoy roaring profits. Migrants returning home bring these pasties as family gifts, while residents staying in the city offer these sweets and treats at their household statues of **Abadar**, hoping to earn favor from the God of Ditches and Walls.

Summer sees the return of unbearably hot and dry days, interspersed with sudden storms and typhoons. It's easy to fall sick during this period, and so to avoid the twin woes of fever and flood, many schools in Goka give students a long summer break. It's not really a break, of course, because Gokan parents simply enroll their children in tuition centers and cram schools, to prepare for the coming term's examinations. While many Gokan children dutifully attend such lessons, having internalized the city's respect for the opportunities education supposedly bestows, just as many rebel from this constant pressure. The more innocuous hide away and read comics in streetside libraries, while others fish and hike in Goka's many streams and foothills.



The fall brings cooling respite from the tempestuous weather, and as the city heaves a collective sigh of relief, Goka comes alive with a bevy of concerts and other entertainment events. Music festivals, dramatic performances, and martial arts tournaments entice the city, so cooped up by heat and lassitude for the past few months. Adults allow themselves some reprieve with these diversions, while children prepare for the year's preliminary examinations. Fed up with incessant schoolwork and a system rigged against them, enticed by hypocritical adults' glitzy world of privilege and pleasure, many youths get into brawls during these concerts, as simmering tensions and school rivalries explode into festivals of outright violence.

CULTURE

The intensity and competitiveness of Goka, famed through Tian Xia, results from the city's relentless pursuit of progress. This pulse is invisible yet palpable, coiling through the smoke of roadside hawkers' fritter-frying woks, dancing through sleepy children's mumbled sums in stifling classrooms, thundering through chastised bureaucrats' suppressed tears and ministers' undeserved rebukes, and taking root into Goka's earth with every hammer's blow of a double shifting bricklayer.

It seems everybody in Goka is working to get something, reach somewhere, or become someone; the city's boundless dynamism is the by-product of so much aspirational labor. Many Gokans endure immense hardship to reach their dreams, be they dreams of earning enough to place one's children into a prestigious Willow Branch-affiliated school, earning enough to move out of one's Undermarket hovel, or earning enough to become one of Blue Stone's carefree dynasts. While many never quite achieve their goals, their lives still blaze and shine with the ardor of their struggles.

However, this anxious energy has a flip side. Increasingly, many feel worn out and let down by a society consumed by capital and industry. As physical and emotional tolls mount, matched by spiraling global uncertainties, younger Gokans are beginning to question the wisdom of leading such interminably taxing lives. Many older Gokans, products of a bygone prosperous era, display little sympathy for their younger countryfolk, and decry them for lacking the fortitude to increase personal and national prosperity.

Shopping for clothing in sartorially sharp Goka can be one of the city's most exciting experiences. Goka's high street of fashion, **Bamboo Walkway**, is where the city's most prestigious couturiers hold court over the horizons of cosmopolitan Tian Xia style. In addition to more established



artisans' works, each quarter's **Bamboo Walkway Festival** showcases new designers' works. Also of interest to textile aficionados is the shockingly pricey **Songbird's Silk**, solely produced by local Shelynite weaver-priests at the seaside **Shelyn's Comb**, and traditionally sold only to those making nuptial dresses and suits.

The joy of many Gokan youths (and the despair of their parents) is **Alley Basher**. These gaming tables, found in **basher arcades** nestled within slums and warehouses, utilize advanced clockwork and magic to generate phantasms reminiscent of the city's **alley bashers**, flamboyant gangs of tattooed brawlers. Through adroit handling of levers and buttons, players direct illusory bashers in outlandish martial arts duels. Alley Basher has taken Goka, a city enamored with martial arts, by storm.

Ironically, basher arcades are run by actual alley bashers; with the Golden League's increasingly violent takeovers, many have been driven from more traditional underworld businesses, and now resort to these innovative amusements. It remains a mystery how the criminal bashers were able to discover or create devices as intricate as these gaming tables, and the bashers definitely aren't telling. While conservatives decry the games' criminal associations, it doesn't look like these games will be going away anytime soon, as many stressed-out students and burnt-out workers find catharsis and relief in these virtual battles.

Goka's bustling international connections allow it to keep pace with music's hottest trends and techniques. The **beautiful garden** genre of all-male singer-dancers, exemplified by Rosin Entertainment's famously handsome Tian-Hwan bands, finds not only incredible success with Gokan audiences, but also wild success in cities as distant as Absalom, Ilizmagorti, and Merab. Many students also enjoy smaller, more intimate **goyao** concerts, often held on Goka's rolling campus grounds.

Goka is famous for the richness of its casual dining landscape; migrants bring their homelands' flavors to the city's many streetside coffee shops known by the multilingual portmanteau **kopi-tiams**. A dazzling array of snacks from across Golarion can be found at kopi-tiams. When Goka's sun and rain become unbearable, workers often take a short break at these roadside eateries; plopping down on stools, they quickly wash their orders down with strong Kelish coffee. Kopi-tiams also serve more substantial meals. For many Gokan workers unable to eat with their families, quietly eating one's meal at the kopi-tiams' tables among strangers might be their closest approximation of communal dining.

Today's biggest fad in Gokan kopi-tiams, ironically, isn't coffee, but tea. Originally a seasonal novelty in Gokan teahouses, **sparkle tea** is in such great demand that many kopi-tiams have pivoted to serving this popular beverage. A chilled blend of Linvarran goat milk and Songbainese tea, sparkle tea is suffused with jellied fruit, sweetened azuki, and chewy tapioca.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

Goka's complex politics are a matter of confusion for most visitors, and indeed, for many residents as well. The two-body Parliament comprises 108 members in total; half are held long-term by the **Foundation Stones** dominated by the old rich's peer networks, and the other half is the transitory domain of the **Ridge Boards**' five-year nominees drawn from wider vistas of Gokan high society. While both bodies are technically equal—each body holds equal numbers of votes, and all members' votes hold equal weight—the kingmaking Foundation Stones have the ability to lock in or shut out nominees for the Ridge Boards. Wrinkling the issue is the social capital Ridge Board members bring to Parliament. Connecting more easily with younger Gokans due to similar experiences, savvy Ridge Boards can wield their public appeal effectively to exert soft power upon more conservative Foundation Stones.



GOTEN MUZOSHI

Most puzzling of all is the role of parliamentary leader, an arbiter elected by Parliament members every 25 years, variably referred to as Emperor, Empress, or Liege. Many inside and outside Goka misunderstand this position to be a monarchical, rather than an elected one. Recent affairs have made this mistake even more common, as the present Empress, Lady **Nai Yan Fei** (sophisticated and multifaceted female human assassin), inherited the title from her grandfather, former Emperor Nai Hu Buo, when he perished mid-term. While Lady Fei did so on a legal technicality, she has become Goka's most popular Empress of late, cementing her position and reputation as a bona fide Empress among today's Successor States.

A number of recent Parliament members have rapidly risen in awareness among the city's political hobbyists. The expiration of Drakemaster Palo's term opened a spot for **Mina Helian** (disguised pangender sky dragon cleric of Shizuru) as the parliament's first Drakespeaker, who has fashioned themselves into an ardent advocate for Goka's hard working drakes. In a landmark election that bewildered the parliament, Lady Fei cast the tie-breaking vote to turn over a vacant Foundation Stone position and grant it to **Goten Muzoshi** (corrupt male Tian-Min crime boss), a mid-ranking member of the Golden League—Goka's notorious crime syndicate. Rumors of blackmail and corruption faded quickly under the lady's silent glare. Lastly, **Jijigu** (expressive female wayang author), a flamboyant and renowned local poet, has made herself an indispensable presence in the parliament in only 2 years. The silver-tongued Minatan can cut right to the heart of contentious social issues with her mastery of nearly every Tian dialect.

Lady Fei's growing power is supported by the timely reappearance of the Ruby Phoenix, **Hao Jin** (*Pathfinder Lost Omens Legends* 46). This illustrious sorcerer's incredible prowess and storied past add a momentous frisson of destiny to Lady Fei's authority; these two powerful women have become fast allies, this amity only deepening with Hao Jin's recent unequivocal appointment as a Ridge Board. Despite all her accolades and supernatural might, however, Hao Jin often feels alone and powerless, a despondency rooted as much in the vestiges of her longstanding feelings of guilt as it is in the traumas of aeon-induced memory loss. The ancient feuds and debts of fellow archmages have also slowly eroded the lightness of Hao Jin's once-easy smile.

Fortunately, the Ruby Phoenix is blessed with two unlikely friends who do their best to bring warmth and cheer into her life. The awkwardly emphatic **Qiu** (troubled and canny nonbinary kitsune barrister), a reformed brigand who wisely declined to rob Hao Jin during her foray into their territory, had initially followed the Ruby Phoenix to reunite Tian communities ravaged by war and disaster. Leaving banditry for law, Qiu now aids the Ruby Phoenix as her parliamentary assistant. Ostensibly, Qiu's duties are to take notes and schedule meetings, but the ex-bandit has also taken on the duty of deflecting the manipulations of social climbers and predatory opportunists.

Sharp-witted, self-assured **Bao Ting** (bossy female yaoguai comb-spirit) is an old friend of the sorcerer. This yaoguai was originally a fine-toothed comb of red fir inlaid with rose gold and spinel, a gift from Hao Jin's parents to reward their daughter's academic excellence. This comb should have been reduced to ashes in the very same Empress Yin Museum fires that took Hao Jin's life, but by some cosmic quirk, the comb was untouched by the flames. When Hao Jin returned to life, her sorcerous powers awakened and transfigured her hair into living fire, and this comb transformed as well, becoming dawn-red and fire-tongued Bao Ting. Thus, the comb-spirit is both Hao Jin's treasured keepsake of her parents as well as her oldest surviving friend.

LOCATIONS

The following is a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Goka.

Ivory Port

Yixing's archives claim Goka's predecessor, Ivory Port, was founded to honor the landmark **Ivory Accords**, which shepherded peace between Yixing and Nagajor. Local histories dispute this account, instead asserting how Tian-Sing and Tian-Shu sailors had built Ivory Port before the Ivory Accords. Ivory Port's heritage remains in its Tian-Sing kelongs, Tian-Shu pagodas, Keleshite minarets, and Vudran stupas. Today, two groups reside here: workers employed in the nearby **Industrial Sector**, and students of the prestigious **Five Pillars Academy** (or its less august satellite colleges).

Public Gardens

Plant life flourishes in tropical Goka, and horticulturalists take advantage of the balmy weather to craft lush landscapes. Gardens and parks feature prominently in the city, accentuating its architectural majesty with pleasing verdancy. The greenhouse wonders and terraced pavilions of the **Parliamentary Gardens** are a collaboration between Parliament, Abadarite Grand Bank, and Qi Zhong's gardener-priests. Medicinal herbs, heirloom grains, brilliantly hued flowers, and imposing rain trees are draped in the shadows of the monolithic Parliamentary Hall.

Undermarket

A gyre of abandoned residences, boxed-in streets, and collapsed godowns, Undermarket is Goka's shadow, a sagging titan of choked cul-de-sacs and tumbledown tenements. Everybody knows Undermarket exists, but getting there is another matter entirely. Lao Shu Po's black-furred priests occlude passages to the Undermarket, only revealing them to seekers who whisper heartbroken secrets into the night.

This subterranean expanse houses Goka's hidden economic powerhouse and its legions of urban underclasses and gray-market migrant workers. By day, these transients emerge to run shops and restaurants, staff construction crews and brothels, and teach or study at its cram schools. Unable to afford Goka's notoriously high rents, many rest nightly within Undermarket's crumbling labyrinths.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Goka enjoys a tenuous peace with neighboring Lingshen. The goods and people entering Goka through overland routes bring lucrative tolls and tariffs to Lingshen's ports and inns. Yet Goka's wealth also makes it the target of Lingshen's saber-rattling envy. For now, Hao Jin's return, along with King Huang's recent death, have poured cold water on such imperial fantasies.


NAI YAN FEI



Hongal

Nations

HONGAL
Capital: Ordu-Aganhei
Government: Khanate
Ruler: Kiriltai Khan



Peoples

Catfolk
Giants
Humans
Kami
Kitsune
Ogres
Samsarans

Languages

Hongali
Minkaian
Tien

Religions

Abadar
Blue Faith
Desna
General Susumu
Green Faith
Irori
Yamatsumi

Resources

Gems
Livestock
Milk/Cheese
Textiles/Furs

HOME OF THE HORSE LORDS

In the northern reaches of Tian Xia lies a vast, open steppe populated by furious winds and untamed wilderness. Nomadic tribes ride on the land's finest horses, herding flocks of animals across the tundra, ever in search of the next green pasture. This is Hongal—a land under the sovereignty of the horse-lords of the Tian-La khanate, and home to one of the world's greatest trade routes. Hongal began centuries ago with **Budugan**, a man who proclaimed himself to be half-giant and the land's first Khan. Budugan rose to his throne in –384 IC, fighting back the land's greatest dangers and protecting its divided people with a massive red spear granted by the sky spirits above. For the next five years, Hongal's first tribe grew empowered and strong-willed, learning to survive off the steppe's few resources. Budugan's four brothers grew to hate and envy Budugan for his strength and position, however. Five years later, just as mighty beasts can be felled with surprise and greater numbers, so too did the brothers cut Budugan's rule short with blades in the night.

Budugan's tribe refused to pay loyalty to these false Khans. They chose instead to go back to their isolated lives before Budugan, leaving the traitorous quartet with naught but a handful of the vilest members to search for a new source of power.

In 164 IC, the brothers returned with dark magic that granted them unnaturally long lives and an army of ogres and giants from the Nightford Mountains. They razed the land and decimated the scattered tribes in the area. One tribe leader, **Ikhnazan**, fled north in a desperate bid to bring Hongal's tribes together, just as Budugan had done. Ikhnazan's pleas gained not just the favor of the tribes, but also Hongal's founding spirits, who blessed his army with the speed of wind. With enchanted arrows borne from Budugan's spear itself, Ikhnazan vanquished the brothers, driving their dark army back into the mountains. Ikhnazan named the final battleground **Maiaji, The Spear of the Steppe**. Here, Tian-La once more gathered together under a single banner and chose Ikhnazan as their leader, the New Khan, and began the khanate system.

Today, Maiaji is in ruins, the Spear broken by an ettin and his army of giants. The southern lands have been all but abandoned, save for bandits and a small force of rogue tribes that have denounced the khanate. **Ordu-Aganhei**, Hongal's trade capital, is in chaos, as **Prince Batsaikhar** is missing following an uprising. Spiritual leaders stay in **Muliwan** to help travelers passing through the Spirit Road and follow the will of Hongal's great spirits. All the while, the Tian-La tribes continue their nomadic ways, surviving the land's increasingly dangerous windstorms. The winds bring change all across Hongal, though whether for good or ill remains to be seen.

GEOGRAPHY

Situated at high altitudes, Hongal's steppe is a vast wilderness with blue skies that last most of the year. To the north lies the Tian Qiang, the **Wall of Heaven**, an enormous mountain range that shields the width of the land. The far east borders the **Forest of Spirits**, while western Hongal is separated from **Shanguang** by rolling hills and the **Ikhlyn River**. Southern hills have dried up, giving way to fissures and canyons with strange rock formations, named the **Evdergaz Chasm**. The chasm acts as a natural barrier for nomads, as many would prefer not to venture too close to Maiaji. Within its walls are beautiful rock structures, standing as if carved by hand, though no one knows who could accomplish such a feat. Brave travelers venture through its passages to see the rocky wonders, while bandits and independent tribes in the south sometimes camp inside, though all must be careful to avoid the many strange creatures that have made the chasm their home.

The rest of Hongal is flat plains of grass and shrubland, with dangerous windstorms racing across the steppe year-round. Most feared is the **quqotengir**, a seasonal storm that leaves behind strangely mutilated corpses. Hongal is ill-suited for crop growth, and its people subsist by moving grazing herds from pasture to pasture. Even the southeastern border with the waters of the **Sapphire**



KIRILTAI KHAN



Sound isn't safe from the harsh winds, turning what should be significant fertile land into a small strip of forest.

In the northeastern hills of Hongal, a massive iron pole bores deep into the earth and pierces the heavens. This **Shampa Structure** is a site of pilgrimage for shamans throughout Hongal, as they believe it was used when the Great Sky Spirit **Tenengir** split the sea and sky to create the land between. Stories say that the Shampa Structure acts as the convergence point of all energy in the mortal universe and can be used to travel throughout the planes. However, few remain who are privy to the ancient knowledge.

The **Rock of Zamuul** is a massive blue rock formation famous both for being visible only under special circumstances and for changing its location. Legends tell of a dragon, sent as a heavenly messenger to aid a previous Khan during a time of great trouble, that now resides here. Stories differ in details, with different claims saying the dragon has anywhere from three to twelve heads. All legends agree, however, that should one encounter the Zamuul, they will be given a task by the dragon. Completion rewards them with a unique gift and blessing, while failure means becoming cursed to live in the rock for all time.

A DAY IN HONGAL

There is a saying that Hongal has two rising suns—first is the sun of the nomad, and second is the sun of the settler. Though said mostly in jest by nomadic members of the khanate, this saying highlights the distinction between the two ways of life.

A nomad's morning begins with waking in their family's communal **ger**, or tent, to the bleating sounds of animals. A small prayer is offered at the ger's northern altar, and then the work begins to complete chores and milk animals before breakfast can be made. The morning meal consists heavily of dairy products, which can include dried milk curds, clotted cream, and yogurt, and is often paired with boortsog—fried butter cookies—when available. Next comes rounding up the herds to shepherd across the pasture for grazing, before returning to camp under the high sun for the midday meal. In warmer months, meals and snacks primarily consist of dairy products, sometimes paired with small amounts of potatoes, vegetables, bread, noodles, or dried meats. During colder times, many prepare hearty, warming meals of roasted mutton and goat, paired with dried cheese curds and animal fat. Regardless of the weather, nearly every meal is served with milk drinks: either suutei tsai—a tea made with leaves, mare's milk, water, and salt—or a Hongali favorite aareg, fermented mare's milk.

The day's remaining work varies, from multiple milkings to keep up with food production, to equipment repair, to preparing clothes, gifts, or goods for the next big event. Camping near a river or hot spring offers a chance for relaxation. Training is common, both for children and hopefuls looking to take first place in upcoming

competitions. Horseback riding and wrestling are the biggest sports, followed by archery training with the Hongali hornbow—a composite bow with a shorter range than a traditional shortbow but with the power of a longbow—and weapon training with spears, axes, and knives. The tribe's leader, the **baga bohd**, hears any requests or petitions from the community, while their circle of spellcasting advisors, the **dovlokhuud**, listen in or spend time training young apprentices. Long days culminate in gatherings by community fires to play games, sing, dance, or offer prayers before retiring back to their gers for the night.

Life is starkly different in Hongal's cities. Businesses open daily at the irregular whims of their owners, a unique quirk that takes some adjusting to, for most of Hongal's Tian-La view punctuality on larger scales of hours and general time of day rather than minutes. In Muliwan, temples start morning services, while Hongal's few farmers on the outskirts begin their day on the field. Travelers on the **Spirit Road** or the **Path of Aganhei** prepare for a day of travel or trade, while caravansaries outside of Ordu-Aganhei set up open-air markets.

The smell of cooking permeates the air as restaurants attempt to draw in travelers with Hongali delicacies—spiced soups and animal intestines, fried milk skin, candied fruits or fungus, and more. Specialty merchants offer local meals from other Tian-Xia countries, or tantalizing Avistani meals at exorbitant prices to prey on homesick travelers. At midday, the city's street performances, trading, and religious activities ramp into full gear. In the evening, Ordu-Aganhei's famous central hot spring and its surrounding magically maintained forested park see crowds of people coming to relax, socialize, and either celebrate the trading day's good fortunes, or wash away its bad luck.

At night, paper lanterns light Muliwan's broad paths and Ordu-Aganhei's narrow streets. Muliwan's atmosphere is more subdued, with noise concentrated on its inns, nightly religious ceremonies at various temples, and the occasional kitsune mischief. In Ordu-Aganhei, nighttime activities of nearly any sort imaginable are offered somewhere. Establishments use different colored flames and lantern shapes to advertise their nightly entertainment, which includes gambling dens, shadow puppet theaters, increasingly popular underground firearm ranges, and more. Among the most beloved are performances of Hongal's traditional multi-tonal throat singing, khoomei, paired with a two-stringed horse-head fiddle, a morin khuur. Masters of the musical arts are said to conjure lifelike images of natural wonders, from windstorms whistling through tall grass to a battalion of horses racing across the steppe.

A YEAR IN HONGAL

Winter in Hongal is long, harsh, and dark, with heavy snowfalls in the mountains while the rest of Hongal is beset by frosty windstorms. Nighttime temperatures can reach dangerous sub-zero levels that threaten lives and livelihoods. Most tribes move north, using the mountains as cover from the worst of the northern winds. Many use this time to camp close together, staying warm with meats, soups, and the joy of each other's company. Winter's last month is spent preparing for one of Hongal's most important celebrations, **Tsagaan Sar**, the lunar year. Families make thousands of buuz, folded dumplings with minced meat and spices, prepare gifts, and get ready to show off their finest attire and horses. Tsagaan Sar lasts three days, each with feasts of specially prepared meats and dairy. Each day has various rules to follow, lest one negatively impact the upcoming year's experiences.

Spring is marked by the arrival of the **quqotengir**, the most dangerous of seasonal storms. Temperatures start to rise and days start to get longer, bringing the steppe's animals out of hibernation. Tribes say their goodbyes before moving to spring pastures on lower ground near rivers and scattered oases. The season is spent keeping herd newborns alive, as predators and windstorms present significant danger. Animals are

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Ordu-Aganhei: ORd (like o in "dog") AGan-hi
Maiaji: MY-yee (j's pronounced like y's)
Muliwan: MULL-one
Kiriltai: KEY-ril-tai
Batsaikhar: BAHT-sai-kher
Dovlokhuud: dahvl-KHOOD
Aareg: AAH (like the a in "art")-rig
Jaxandra: YAHCK-under (condensed into one syllable)
Baatengaar: BAA-tin-ger



DOVLOKHUUD

shorn to get fine wool and cashmere, travelers in Ordu-Aganhei begin trekking the Path of Aganhei, and citizens of Muliwan welcome warmer winds from the Sapphire Sound to begin their growing season.

Summer is busy, and it is likely the time that travelers remember most. Tribes make their way to greener central pastures as the weather warms to temperatures as hot as the winter was cold. Free time is spent preparing for the **Andaam**, the season's most anticipated event of competition and celebration. All participating tribes gather at the Khan's tent at a location determined at last year's Andaam. For three days, there is a massive market and competitions for nearly everything—fashion shows, performances, magic duels, and many more. The most anticipated events, however, are the year's biggest competitions of horse racing, archery, and wrestling. The winners of these events gain a title, a special boon from the Khan's dovlokhuud, and the undying glory of being the best.



Autumn is a beautiful time for travel, as the weather cools down and massive flocks of migrating birds fly across the blue sky. Crops in Muliwan are harvested, and northern forests change colors. For nomads, autumn is a time to prepare for the upcoming winter. Herds are shepherded to secluded pastures to get fatter in peace. Food for people and animals is prepared, as are insulated materials for clothes and gers. The herd's members least likely to survive through the winter are slaughtered and their meat preserved. Most celebrations on the steppe at this time are small, local events, while Ordu-Aganhei and Muliwan hold their largest city celebrations for the influx of travelers. The second coming of the quqotengir signals the beginning of the trek north as the tribes prepare to weather another five frozen months.

CULTURE

Despite Hongal's remote location, many ancestries are proud to call the steppe their home. Bronze-skinned Tian-La humans are the most common sight in the nomadic tribes, with wind-weathered faces and braided hair. Souko kitsune are a regular sight in Muliwan, safeguarding the Spirit Road. Other magically inclined kitsune often occupy spots in a tribe's dovlokhuud. Samsarans seeking a quiet place to embark on personal journeys into their past reside among Muliwan's monks and temples, while those seeking a more physical journey join the nomadic tribes for opportunities to visit places from their past lives. Amurruns are a rare but welcome sight when they come down from their mountain homes. These winter catfolk have distinctly large eye-like patterns on their backs and are widely known as Hongal's greatest practitioners of eagle hunting, creating bonds with the mountain birds and hunting alongside them. The sight of catfolk holding massive golden eagles on a thick leather glove making their way around an Andaam never fails to draw in massive crowds of spectators. Meanwhile, Ordu-Aganhei sees travelers of nearly every background trying their hand at making a fortune.

Nomads, by necessity, must be conservative with what possessions they have. So, everything inside a camp serves some purpose and must be able to be packed with relative ease for moving locations. Families share a single ger which is always set up in a specific way. In between the center poles is the hearth, a sacred place. The northern area holds shrines, altars, and precious items, while the south is where guests are seated. In the west are areas for sleeping and storage, while the east holds the kitchen and dedicated areas for cooking and cleaning. Items that the family typically sells can be found hanging on the ger walls, along with tapestries, ornaments, and decorations.

Clothing also plays an important role. The most famous of traditional Tian-La clothing is called a **deel**, a one-piece robe with long sleeves, a high collar, and a wide, overlapping flap that buttons on the right shoulder, or diagonally across the chest to signify important religious figures. Seasonal deel are made with appropriate materials, with wintertime deel covered by sheep or goat skin and often including sleeve extensions that act as gloves. Daily



wear is generally of darker, earthier colors while deel for special occasions are ornamented and brightly colored, from sky blues to grassy greens, to the orange of a sunrise, and everything in between.

Nearly all industry relies on animal husbandry, thus a tribe's herds are their life. Horses, sheep, goats, camels, and cattle can all be found grazing on the steppe. By far the most valuable of these are a tribe's horses. Each tribe prides themselves on raising their own special breed of horse, prioritizing speed, power, or other traits. Children learn to ride before they learn to walk, and their horses are sometimes better treated than other family members. Horse meat, a rarer meal than most believe, is eaten on special celebrations, through hard winters, and as part of medical treatment, as it is believed to be considerably rich in vitamins and healing properties. Hongali horses are sought after the world over, and constitute a significant portion of a tribe's income at markets held throughout the year, with the greatest bloodlines selling for small fortunes.

The remaining animals are used for food and materials, particularly goat cashmere, which is used to make beautiful clothing. Wild yzobu are common on the steppe, but less so as part of a tribe's herd due to their pungent stench and aggressive nature. Reindeer are kept only by small, more reclusive tribes in the northeast who believe they were chosen by Tenengir to protect his most prized relics, and are blessed with an unnaturally long life. There are other such specially bred herds, chief of which is the herd of prophecy—a group of cattle said to see the future and whose milk is said to grant prophetic visions; their location is known only by the Khan and his dovlokhuud. The milk of prophecy is rarely sold to outsiders except in the greatest of trades, and thus demands enormous prices, as well as being a commonly counterfeited product for swindlers.

A wide variety of faiths are practiced in Hongal, chief among the tribes being the **Green Faith**, and a Hongali variation called the **Blue Faith**. This variant focuses on Great Sky Spirit Tenengir, believed to be the sire of Hongal's great spirits of earth, sea, and wind. Blue Faith practitioners see Shanguang's Tian-La as closely related cousins in faith, and are welcoming of any visitors from the west.

Desna is revered by many who ask for her blessings during their travels around the steppe. **Kofusachi** is invoked during festivals to bring laughter and good fortune to all, while those in the mountains pay respects to **Yamatsumi** for his protection. Among soldiers and the more serious Andaam competitors, **General Susumu** is a favored figure, called upon to bless their horses with the wind's speed, their arrows with the hawk's precision, and their names with undying glory. Muliwan houses altars and temples to a plethora of deities and faiths popular in Tian Xia, the largest being **Daikitsu** and **Irori**. By no surprise, **Abadar** is heavily venerated in Ordu-Aganhei. A massive temple marks the transition from the city to the Path of Aganhei proper; all merchants must pass through it to ask for prosperity and give Abadar his due of the trade.



BATSAIKHAR



JAXANDRA



TIRGATUN



TUJAAN

Increased trade and travel into Hongal have changed a lot for its people. Where once the tribes would barely suffer the presence of outsiders off the Path of Aganhei or the Spirit Road, many now are happier to welcome guests with whom to share their unique way of life. Merchants in Ordu-Aganhei have even adopted a manner of politeness that can be off-putting for new travelers. Questions asked of a local will always receive a response, whether they truly know the answer or not. However, willful disruptions to strict traditions and customs, such as during holidays, crowning a new Khan, or a tribe's judiciary process, are still met with strict dismissals.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

A tribe's leader, the baga bohd, is elected by that tribe upon the predecessor's passing. Advising a baga bohd is their **dovlokhuud**, a council of spellcasters, traditionally containing oracles and sorcerers but which has included druids, psychics, and more. Attitudes of baga bohds often clash, with smaller tribes deferring to larger ones, but all are bidden to follow strict codes of behavior for the collective good of the tribe. Great respect is paid to the baga bohds of the largest and eldest tribes, though all stand equal under the head of the largest tribe and entire khanate, the Khan. The Khan is elected by the baga bohds and the previous Khan's dovlokhuud. The current sovereign, Kiriltai Khan, rules from inside a massive ger with comforts rivaling a city home, traveling on a route known to all baga bohds. Both Ordu-Aganhei and Muliwan are under the Khan's rule, though he does not stay there. Tradition decrees Ordu-Aganhei be ruled by a sibling of the Khan, currently Prince Batsaikhar, Kiriltai's younger brother. The position of Muliwan's ruler, presently filled by **Tujaan** (serene female samsaran monk), is appointed by the Khan's dovlokhuud in conjunction with representatives from the Forest of Spirits.

Aiding in the momentous task of governing the widespread people of the khanate are the **Barakhuul**, mobile protectors, and army of the steppe under the Khan's authority. Each major road, border, and encampment site is assigned to the jurisdiction of a troop of riders, called a **nutem**, that strives to keep the plains safe from bandits, ill-meaning outsiders, and predators. A nutem's leader can act as an impromptu adjudicator, though if inside a tribe's camp, they must defer authority to the baga bohd.

Kiriltai Khan (imposing male human cavalier) holds a well-deserved reputation for voraciousness and a short temper. His most defining trait, however, is a honeyed tongue; he is said to be capable of talking a horse out of its skin. Kiriltai is loved by the khanate for his firm hand, which they hope will be the key to reclaiming southern Hongal. Kiriltai knows that Maiaji's ettin leader Nghiem is amassing an army, but is hesitant to send the Barakhuul on such a dangerous mission while Ordu-Aganhei is in chaos.

Jaxandra (soothing female kitsune oracle) is a highly respected member of Kiriltai's dovlokhuud, as well as a long-time friend that helps to reign in Kiriltai's temper when it threatens to boil over. Jaxandra is also the head of the **Silent Storm**, a secret information network currently tasked with investigating rumors of treachery, and strange activity in the northeast around the Shampa Structure.

Batsaikhar (hedonistic male human aristocrat) is the perpetually smiling appointed ruler of Ordu-Aganhei. He is well known for his massive appetite for both food and women, and his habit of beheading followers given any opportunity—a habit that has caught up to him, as Ordu-Aganhei's residents are fed up with cowering under his frivolous whims. He is currently in hiding along with his royal advisor Chua, as the palace has been overtaken by the **Silver Ospreys**, a group of protesters calling for Batsaikhar's head on a spear.

Tirgatun (righteous female human champion of Tsukiyo) is the leader of the Silver Ospreys, despite all attempts to shrug off the title. After Batsaikhar beheaded her family, Tirgatun gathered the city's disgruntled residents to the palace in protest. Young though she is, Tirgatun has a strong spirit, and is prepared to do whatever is necessary to change Ordu-Aganhei for the better.

Cities and Locations

Hongal claims only two permanent settlements, but there are plenty of other significant stops around the country.

Muliwan

This permanent settlement is located at the intersection of land, forest, and sea. Muliwan is a vital stop for travelers looking to walk the Spirit Road to Minkai through the Forest of Spirits. The town exudes a calming air, its serenity a stark contrast to Ordu-Aganhei's hectic streets. Small temples, shrines, and monuments to numerous deities, spirits, and kami adorn the roads in between neatly displayed shops. Though Muliwan looks to be a town comprised primarily of humans, the majority of residents are actually Souko kitsune who walk the streets in their tailless forms, acting as guardians and liaisons of the forest kami. Potential travelers on the Spirit Road are under constant scrutiny, screened for any harm they might cause to the forest.

Maiaji

Once a site of triumph, Hongal's first settlement now houses only violence. Dilapidated gers and decrepit ruins lie scattered on the plain, populated by the ettin **Nghiem** (brutal male ettin warlord) and his host of ogres and giants. The army's refuse has destroyed what little crop soil there was and threatens to creep into the Sapphire Sound. The plains around Maiaji are home to hosts of bandits and rogue tribes that are attempting to take back the settlement themselves instead of waiting for Kiriltai's orders.

Nogoten

A place of monumental importance, Nogoten is home to hidden breeding grounds for the greatest of all horses, with coats the color of sapphires, blessed by wind spirits, and a pedigree dating back to Budugan's time. The secret access method is known only to Khans and those who work within the grounds. Within the first year of appointment, new Khans must affirm their position by traveling here and forging a bond with a stallion—a difficult feat that not all would-be Khans have accomplished.

Ordu-Aganhei

The road to the west and the trade capital of Hongal, Ordu-Aganhei is defined by the ever-present but strangely comforting din of money trading hands. Goods and services of all kinds, mundane and magical, can be found on the narrow streets, so long as one knows where to look. Despite the struggle between the Silver Ospreys and Batsaikhar's loyalists sometimes spilling onto the streets, the city's residents remain as hospitable as ever, taking any strange interruptions in stride and guiding customers around the worst of the chaos. Visitors can unwind after a long day in the city center's famous hot spring lake, either in public or private sections.

International Relations

Baga bohds of only a generation past would scorn lost travelers on old principles of seclusion. Some previous groups of Tian-La were driven to live in Shanguang instead, to be free from the khanate's strict regulations. Now, increased trade through the Path of Aganhei and interest in nomadic culture have spurred a more hospitable environment. Travelers from Kaoling and Zi Ha use special paths through the Evdergaz Chasm to cut into the central plains or up to Ordu-Aganhei, while Minkai has special agreements with Muliwan. Travelers from Chu Ye, however, are still turned away, as bitter memories of war have yet to heal.



Hwanggot

Nations

HWANGGOT
Capital: Haseong
Government: Monarchy
Ruler: Queen Hyeon Geon-ji



Peoples

Goblins
Humans
Imugi
Kitsune
Merfolk
Spirits

Languages

Goblin
Hwan
Tien

Religions

Baekho
Desna
Hei Feng
Jin Li
Kofusachi
Shelyn
Spirit Worship
Sun Wukong

Resources

Alcohol/ Drugs
Books/ Lore
Ceramics
Dye
Livestock
Lumber
Luxury goods
Magic items
Produce
Seafood
Tea
Textiles
Weapons

KINGDOM OF FLOWERS

Hwanggot is a small country bordering **Bachuan** and **Po Li** that was founded shortly after the fall of **Imperial Yixing**. It is rich in natural resources, much of it borders the sea, and the temperament of its people is inclined toward stability and peace. Before being conquered by **Imperial Lung Wa**, Hwanggot was well-regarded as a nation of adept diplomats and known to value coexistence and prosperity above all else. Only recently has it managed to shake off the damage from the collapse of Imperial Lung Wa, continuing its goal of cultivating a prosperous and independent nation.

Many saw the bloodless conquest of Hwanggot and saw a nation of fools and cowards, selling their very souls for a hollow peace. Many Tian-Hwans within the nation left to fight in rebel armies, seemingly out of protest. However, emerging out from under the shadow of Imperial Lung Wa is a nation untouched, holding onto its unique character, nary a sign of Imperial influence to be seen. Outside scholars may quibble about how a small nation could muster such a feat, but those familiar with its politics know that changing the minds of a Tian-Hwan is akin to plucking the hairs out of a sleeping tiger's hide. Tian-Hwans despise being lorded over by an external power, greatly valuing their own sovereignty, but they also recognize that much of conquest is a game of pride and that history favors those with the patience to endure.

Those who visit Hwanggot can see a rich tradition of art, dance, and pottery on full display. They are welcomed with open arms and given the comforts and warmth of a community. They stand in awe at the impossibly blue skies blending with the white peaks of the Eunja Mountains, the bountiful fruits, and freshly caught seafood. The Tian-Hwan people love the company of others and will do everything in their power to put them at ease.

When it comes to Hwanggot as a nation, however, it maintains a careful distance from others, rarely agreeing to any arrangement that would put it at odds with another. This would be impossible without the deftness of its diplomats, who work tirelessly to salt the seeds of conflict before they have the chance to take root.

When others see Hwanggot, they see a nation of smiling faces, bustling ports, and vibrant celebrations. What the Tian-Hwan see is quiet determination, an unbreakable spirit, and a rightfully earned homeland. In the words of its queen, "Those that threaten you see only your blunted fangs and hidden claws. They see only prey, a rabbit running from inevitable fate. Little do they know: you hide a tiger in your heart."

GEOGRAPHY

Much of Hwanggot is mountainous and deeply forested, populated by trees old enough to be known by the imperial dragons. These forests continue uninterrupted up and down the mountains, only thinning out near the coasts where the sand proves ill-suited for their roots. Rivers and streams trace this pattern, carrying meltwater from clear mountaintops out to sea. Located near the coast is the capital of **Haseong**, a beautiful and intricate city, whose buildings are shingled with intricate clay tiles. The structures are grand, impassively tall, and sprawl out in complexes with plenty of open-air space between them for its people to remark upon the beauty of the winds passing through ancient branches.

The mountains of Hwanggot are primordial, powerful, and deeply respected. Enclaves of dokkaebi make their home here, spirits wander freely, and the elusive **Taljjae** (*Pathfinder Lost Omens Monsters of Myth* 100) is said to create nests in their numerous caves and sprawling tunnels. It is said that treading into the mountains is akin to taking one step into the next world, so much so that "crossing the foot of the mountain" endures as a saying about the passing of loved ones.

The most sacred of these mountains is **Halleun Mountain**, said to be the place





where the Great Sages found a path to immortality. Though this claim has never been verified, often spoken of in terms of "my great-great-great-grandfather's brother was a Great Sage…", it is nonetheless a popularly held belief. The largest dokkaebi village in all of Tian Xia, **Eongman Bog**, is located along the **Gwang River** that runs down Halleun Mountain.

Hwanggot is broadly inhabited, and many rural communities exist throughout the nation, whether they are dedicated to farming, fishing, foraging, or even to the singular pursuit of a craft (like the pottery for which Hwanggot is so well known). Even deep within the **Chang Liao** jungle, there are Tian-Hwans who bustle away from the busy pace of Hwanggot's more populated areas, choosing to live closer to the spirits of the land. While they hold no ill will towards the metropolitan areas, they simply find it hard to hear the voices of the land among the hustle and noise of the city.

Scattered across the land are the **Tombs of the Poet Kings**, burial sites for Hwanggot's most renowned and legendary poets, philosophers, and spellcasters—the distance between them is because, of those who were contemporaries, the Poet Kings famously despised each other. Eight tombs exist dedicated to these legendary orators, and it is a common rite of passage for bards in Hwanggot to visit each one before being considered eligible for graduation. Rarely, some are chosen to carry the will of a Poet King upon visiting a tomb, receiving a vision of future greatness.

A DAY IN HWANGGOT

The first people awake in any given household are often the grandparents, who maintain the home and watch any children while the parents are out working their respective jobs. They prepare a hearty rice porridge, accompanied by dried fish, grilled briefly over the stove's flames, and an array of preserved vegetables prepared in large clay jars kept outside the home. Oftentimes, a soup is also present, made either from fermented bean paste or ox bones. Any parents eat first, before the sun rises, then head off to work. After the sun has risen, the children wake and are fed the same, eating at the same table as their grandparents.

In most settlements, rural days are relatively quiet as people go about their necessary tasks. Those with less to do gather around restaurants that are opening their doors for lunch, chatting and gossiping about the latest news to reach their ears. In more metropolitan areas like **Haseong**, the daytime is full of the tumult of a large trading city, with its wide streets filled with all kinds of cargo hauling to and fro. Vendors shout excitedly at passersby, and restaurant owners corral customers with the promise of cold drinks.

Much of the day is dedicated to work, and the Tian-Hwan work hard. Open-sea fishing, logging, carpentry, pottery, study, philosophy—the people push their minds and bodies not simply out of obligation, but because many find purpose and satisfaction in what they do.

Performances of all types play constantly, from street musicians and dancers, to plays and poetry. The most competitive hours for artists are near lunchtime, when most are looking for break time amusement. The city began issuing permits after a disagreement between two performers ended in spells being slung in the middle of a busy square, but the fervor with which parties now pursue these permits has created a kind of underground turf war.

Lunch typically consists of filling, nutritious foods meant to provide a second wind for day laborers. Most eat lunches that were packed in the morning: wrapped parcels containing rice, various pickled vegetables, and some form of preserved meat, usually dried fish or soy-sauce braised beef. Plenty of establishments also serve hot lunch, usually a bowl of noodles or rice with plenty of side dishes, known locally as banchan.

While others might assume that daytime would be the most hectic period, it is at sunset that the city truly comes alive. The streets become flooded with vendors and stalls hauling out chairs and tables, the wafting scent of sizzling meats on open-air grills, and promises of ice-cold liquor to ease the weariness of a hard day's labor. People in Hwanggot have a proud history of making alcohol and an even prouder history of drinking it. Distilled liquors, rice wines, fruit wines, and even medicinal herb wines are all favorites. Those in Haseong enjoy the latest innovations in magic-assisted drinking culture—enchanted barrels that keep liquor as cold as possible, animated pitchers that serve customers with the wave of a hand, and cups that never spill. Meanwhile, most households in rural areas distill their own spirits, and those that do so well are popular places to gather once the sun sets.

It is a common belief that loud noises and raucous celebration wards off night spirits, and so the people of Hwanggot drink and make merry late into the night hours, contentedly snoring once they can keep their eyes open no longer. The final two hours of the night, right before people begin to stir, are the quietest, most peaceful hours. These are also the hours where ghosts and night creatures are most likely to appear, glowing eyes piercing through the darkness and staring with singular focus.

A YEAR IN HWANGGOT

As is common throughout Tian Xia, the New Year is heralded in Hwanggot with elaborate festivals and celebrations, starting on the second new moon after the winter solstice. The **Hwan New Year** is a three-day celebration during which many different rituals take place, highlighting the importance of the passage of time. Ancestral rites are of the foremost importance: giving one's respect to those whose time has passed with grave visits, offerings of food and incense, and deep, formal bows to the living elders of the family. Traditional board games are played, kites are flown, and merriment is had as a way to enjoy the present moment. Then sliced rice cake soup is eaten—the sliced rice cakes resembling gold coins are seen as a symbol of good fortune—and pocket money is given to the children, as a gesture of welcoming the coming future. These celebrations are taken into account when planning business or governance in Tian Xia, as they tend to be the only thing happening for about a week as the festivities roll onward.

The winters are cold in Hwanggot and snow locks down all but the hardiest of crops, leading the diet of the Tian-Hwan people to trend toward root vegetables and tubers, sweet beans, and fermented foods. Despite the barrenness of the fields, a culture of preserving the bountiful autumn harvests leads to ample food supplies in the winter, as the locals just dig up the earthenware vessels they buried earlier that year.

Springtime brings abundance and brightness. The snow cloaking the land begins to melt away, giving rise to new growth. More fresh greens, herbs, and foraged plants are found on dining tables. Spring is also when everything in Hwanggot comes to life. It is the most active period for animals coming out of hibernation,

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Tian-Hwan pronunciation is fairly straightforward, as each combination of vowels typically only has one reading. K and g are really the same sound, a consonant that exists halfway between k and g. Eo is pronounced like "uh."

Hwanggot: hwan (like the name Juan)-ggot (like "goat" with a shorter vowel sound, and a softer t)

Halleun Mountain: hall-nn

Hyeon Kyeong-ok: he-yuh-n kg-yung-ok (like "oh" if the sound stuck in the throat)

Onggi: oh-ng-kgi

Taljjae: tall-jay ("j" is halfway between "j" and "ch")

Yi: ee



monsters drawn by the scent of new prey, and when the rivers and oceans come alive with activity, becoming dense with aquatic life. In rural settlements, residents will also typically hold a festival dedicated to Taljjae with traditional drums and dance.

Native to the region are **imugi**, serpent-like creatures with a strong connection to the imperial dragons of Tian Xia. They are able to exert control over the weather, namely by calling rain and storms. It follows, then, that the humid and rainy summers of Hwanggot are commonly considered to be the imugi's season, where they are the most active. Some villages located near pristine streams and rivers count on the very real movement of imugi to call forth enough rain for their crops.

As with many societies across Golarion, autumn is the most important season in Hwanggot. It is a time of bounty and celebration, but also a time of industriousness and preparation for the coming winter. A string of holidays continues throughout the entire season, from ones that call for blessings for a good harvest, to harvest festivals, to days dedicated entirely to preparing food and clothing. More children are born in this season than any other, and great care is taken to ensure that families have sufficient means for the colder, harsher months.



Dokkaebi, the magical goblins native to Hwanggot, are most active during the autumn as well, holding all their festivities during this period. Their raucous celebrations often coincide with the harvests of the Tian-Hwan, leading to superstitions about dokkaebi controlling the fortune of a particular harvest. As a result, most villages live harmoniously with nearby dokkaebi enclaves, sharing and trading food and wealth freely. The earthenware pots the dokkaebi create, called **onggi**, are particularly prized for their craftsmanship and durability, able to hold and ferment food perfectly for years at a time. Many Tian-Hwan have passed down onggi in their families for generations, traded eons ago by their ancestors.

Though autumn is the busiest time of the year, it is also the time when one can witness the true face of Hwanggot. The people work tirelessly together to prepare for and secure a future. It is one thing to have the patience to endure a trial—it is entirely another to prepare for life after it. But as sure as the spring follows the winter, the Tian-Hwan persist, always prepared for the coming future.

CULTURE

The people of Hwanggot are passionate, proud, and unyielding. It is said that all of its people harbor a burning fire in their souls, the only difference being between those who carry it within their hearts and those who bring it to bear against the world. Tian-Hwans prosper in any endeavor that requires rigorous dedication and seem twice as determined when under crushing pressure. They have little patience for obtuseness and trickery, often barreling through obstacles with sheer force of will, astonishingly so at times.

Any amount of time spent with Tian-Hwans reveals they are a boisterous, almost overbearing sort, meddling and chiding even to those with whom they share no relationship. They care for those around them and are fiercely loyal to those they consider part of their community. Local communities are strongly intertwined, with rural ones having robust autonomous governance. It is common to ask if others have eaten as a sort of greeting, and to proceed to try to feed them if they haven't. Having lived long under the rule of less-benevolent empires, Hwanggot and its people know what it means to go without food, a quality that rears its head even in more prosperous times. For the Tian-Hwan, hardship is best weathered together.

National clothing, broadly known as **hanbok**, varies greatly between the different peoples of Hwanggot. Commoners wear cotton hanbok, often undyed, woven to be sturdy and easy to move in. Upper-class folk have access to both the wealth and resources to wear brightly colored silks, beautiful pieces of deep blue, fiery red, bright yellow, and other flashy hues. In addition, the hanbok of the aristocracy may be embroidered with lotus flowers, tigers, and cranes. Court officials wear translucent black horsehair



hats known as **gat**, and wearing one without the proper standing is grounds for criminal conviction.

Though Hwanggot is known nowadays for its diplomatic finesse and peace brokering with surrounding powers, an impressive military history lies buried within its borders, hopefully never to be needed again. Hwanggot has experienced countless conflicts since its inception, both from inside and outside its walls, but through unyielding defense, they maintained their place in Tian Xia. The Great Generals rest peacefully, buried under fields of buckwheat flowers swaying in the wind or scattered to the seas, unmarked and unnamed as they wished to be on their deathbeds.

High-quality ore is scarce in Hwanggot, and historically, only decorated military officials had enough standing to be granted a sword by the master smiths that reside in rural mountainside villages. The swords created by these smiths are said to banish evil. In lieu of the variety of sword styles commonplace in other places, Hwanggot developed a great diversity of archery forms. In ages past, the prowess of Tian-Hwan's archers allowed them to defend against numbers far exceeding their own.

The people of Hwanggot greatly revere tigers, beings said to once have been powerful enough to rival the imperial dragons. The reverence for dragons held by Tian Xian empires past have imbued a mythological importance this underdog symbol. As an ancient Tian-Hwan proverb goes, "those who rule the heavens know not the strength nor fury of those who stalk the earth." This saying originates from the image of a tiger piercing a dragon's neck with its fangs, a motif that is used to express the strength of the Tian-Hwan people in the face of tyranny.

Many of the things the Tian-Hwan are most known for, such as kimchi and onggi, originate from the dokkaebi that live in the region. In the distant past, it was thought that dokkaebi were mischievous spirits, given their propensity for sleeping in perfectly crafted onggi on the side of the road, challenging passing Tian-Hwan to wrestling matches, and building normally reclusive settlements that can be difficult to find without being welcomed.

Time is a very concrete, tangible concept for the Tian-Hwan people. Both the foundations of the past and the foundations yet to be laid for the future are important. Patience comes naturally to those who live life out of fermenting jars, as the very act of preparing their foods is an act of preparing for the future. An onggi is a bold, defiant statement that, tomorrow, Hwanggot too will persist, one family at a time.

As a result, death is likewise an important aspect of Tian-Hwan culture. It is said that once one dies, their memories are erased so as to remove all earthly attachments and allow their soul to be guided to the afterlife. Yearly ceremonies known as ghost feasts are held to honor one's passed relatives, a solemn ritual that involves sharing food with the spirits of the deceased.



YI JINWOO



CHANHEE



OH GARAM



TSUKIMI

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

The central government of Hwanggot is a matriarchal monarchy supported by neatly divided government offices filled with members of the noble scholarly class, known as **yangban**. Traditionally, the Queen of Hwanggot rules for as long as she is willing, oftentimes until her death, but occasionally some leave matters to their successor and retire to a life of peace and comfort. With the passing of Queen Yeon Eun-sook after 60 years of rule, her eldest daughter ascended to the throne, officially crowned as Queen **Hyeon Geon-ji**. While the diplomatic policies of her predecessors were essential in revitalizing Hwanggot after the fall of Imperial Lung Wa, the current queen seems more interested in reigniting the feud between Hwanggot and **Bachuan**, or at least reinforcing the already fraught borders. She pushes for the restoration of Hwanggot's past military might, perhaps in fear of a potential conflict, perhaps to invoke some kind of patriotism in her people.

Though the seat of the queen is a powerful position, many think of the various government offices underneath the crown as the real mechanism of the country's governance. It is here in the court halls that laws are drafted, guidance is given to the queen, diplomats are trained, and other functions of the nation are performed. Broadly speaking, the offices are divided into three departments: the **Chancellery**, which advises the Queen and guides her; the **Central Secretariat**, in charge of drafting policy; and the **Department of State Affairs**, an executive body in charge of six smaller ministerial agencies. The ministries are in charge of Finances, Personnel, Rites, Military, the Courts, and Public Works. Hundreds of positions are filled with hundreds of yangban, where they serve a term, usually a couple years, before moving on. Though technically, any and all citizens of Hwanggot are allowed to take the literary exams necessary to fill these roles regardless of class, it is materially impractical for those who do not already have the resources to study productively, and thus the yangban class continues to reproduce itself.

The authority of this central government is largely upheld in populous centers like Haseong, Maecho, and Cholok, but the sway of the government is equally held in balance by the power of rural villages' local governments. These local community-led committees were instrumental in resisting the influence of Imperial Lung Wa, but have always been headache-inducing for the aristocracy. The threat of collective action bordering on rebellion keeps even the most ardent nobles from doing as they like with the people within their territory. Almost like the dealings between two different countries, Hwanggot gets plenty of practice in diplomatic affairs even within its own borders.

Queen **Hyeon Geon-ji** (militaristic female human monarch) is particularly gifted at archery, and perhaps some kinship for the Great Generals of the past is what drives her to push for the revitalization of the Military Ministry. Nevertheless, the almost fervent temper with which she approaches relations with Bachuan is of some concern both to the members of the Chancellery and to the general populace, who fear her actions may reignite open conflict.

Yi Jinwoo (indefatigable male human elder) is the village leader of the Tian-Hwan people who live in the Chang Liao Jungle, a tall and burly man weathered by decades of activity. He is said to be the "one closest to Taljjae," a title that he wears reluctantly. When Taljjae's presence becomes known, it is common for Jinwoo to be made aware, and when Taljjae begins to rampage, he departs from the jungle depths and makes the trip to calm the creature with offerings of buckwheat jelly and ceremonial dance.

Chanhee (reclusive female goblin elder) is a particularly old dokkaebi who lives in Eongman Bog. She is a master of traditional methods of forming earthenware, but is also well-known beyond the village for forging some of Hwanggot's most legendary blades, capable of banishing wayward spirits and malevolent fiends with a single slash. She never ventures far from home and rarely receives visitors, but in the past, warriors from all over Tian Xia would seek out her work, if they could provide the materials.

Oh Garam (perfectionist nonbinary human artisan) is the Master of Haseong's Pottery Guild, and in charge of the distribution and logistics of the guild's

operations. They deal often with the various dokkaebi enclaves throughout Hwanggot, exchanging techniques, pieces, and knowledge. They are greatly respected both as an artist and as an administrator, but, at the moment, their greatest concern is choosing which of their disciples will take over once they retire.

Tsukimi (secretive female human mysterious merchant) is originally from Minkai, but has currently set up shop in Haseong. Her hair is a stark, ghostly white that looks as if it has never known a blade, and regardless of the season, she is bundled in layers upon layers. Tsukimi's shop is tucked away in a quiet corner, and the scent of incense lingers even outside its walls. Rumors say she is involved in the underground turf war for the permits needed to perform in the city, though none know how deep her roots go or for what reason.

EXPLORING HWANGGOT

The following is a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Hwanggot.

Haseong

Haseong is the capital city, located near the coast of the nation. It benefits greatly from trade and the many different people who walk its streets, marveling at the architecture, the performances, and the food. The noise is constant, seemingly only getting louder and wilder the later in the day it gets. There is always something to do in Haseong, whether it's drinking in the countless inns and liquor halls, watching master artisans craft pottery and metalwork, or getting involved in the local politics. Due to heavy investments in cultural funding, Haseong boasts one of the most diverse and interesting art scenes in Tian Xia, and masters of their trade are always looking for passing adventurers to help in the acquisition of materials or transporting goods safely.

Maecho

If Haseong is the busy metropolitan center of the nation, Maecho is the calmer, slower-paced destination for those looking to relax. Located near the mountains, the city's largest draw is its countless hot springs, said to be able to cure, or at least ease, any ailment. The people here are kind, gentle, and have a quiet dedication to their work that seems to put others at ease. Perhaps due to its proximity to the mountains, Maecho is far more prone to incidents involving malevolent ghosts, stray spirits, and strange creatures.

Eongman Bog

It would be impossible to speak of Hwanggot without speaking of Eongman Bog, the largest dokkaebi enclave in all of Tian Xia. As a result of its location in the middle of the Tian-Hwan's sacred mountain, the village receives few human guests, but plenty of dokkaebi come to visit distant relatives. The houses here are made of wood, soil, and stone, roofed with both clay tiles and straw. Perfectly crafted jars lay strewn about outside homes, buried in plots in the ground, and clustered inside homes. These vessels contain doenjang, gochujang, and kimchi that have been fermenting for years, much longer than would be palatable for most Tian-Hwans. Every year, Eongman Bog hosts a grand festival where dokkaebi crack open jars of kimchi and engage in an eating competition.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Hwanggot maintains friendly, but measured, diplomatic relationships with most Tian Xian nations and some overseas. It is only with its direct neighbors, Bachuan and Po Li, that the kingdom finds itself struggling. Though it has recently signed a water treaty with Bachuan, signaling the end of tense hands ready to draw weapons, this peace is a fragile one.



HYEON GEON-JI



Jinin

Nations

JININ
Capital: Ayajinbo
Government: Shogunate
Ruler: Jininsiel Ikanthi



Peoples

Aiuvarins
Elves
Humans
Samsarans

Languages

Elven
Minkaian
Samsaran
Tien

Religions

Alseta
Desna
Daikitsu
Gozreh
Kofusachi
Lady Jingxi
Qi Zhong
Sarenrae
Shelyn
Shizuru

Resources

Alcohol
Books/Lore
Luxury goods
Magic items
Ore
Produce
Spices
Tea
Textiles
Weapons

THE SILVER WOODS

The forest realm of Jinin, home to the elves of Tian Xia, is a land of magic and mystery, visited by many but fully understood by few. It was founded by elves fleeing **Earthfall**, an event that destroyed the region's existing ecosystems and gave the elves the opportunity—and, they felt, the obligation—to restore life to a wounded landscape. The result is a place like nowhere else in Tian Xia, where ancient native flora has been preserved by elven magic and interwoven with living **dawnsilver** to create a vibrant tapestry unique in all Golarion.

Jinin's founders were among the elves who retreated from the surface of **Avistan** during Earthfall, going deep underground in search of sanctuary. During their decades in darkness, some of the elves came to follow a charismatic oracle named **Jininsiel**, who spoke of a vision of a silver tree that would lead her people to safety in a new world. Jininsiel's followers broke away from the main elven host, risking their lives to follow her vision. After long hardships, they discovered a massive dawnsilver formation that stretched its lodes, like tree roots, into the earth. By following these dawnsilver roots, the elves eventually arrived in Tian Xia. Upon reaching the surface, Jininsiel's people found a once-beautiful land that had been ruined by Earthfall. They set about restoring it and named their new land "Jinin" in honor of their leader. Their former comrades, meanwhile, continued deeper into the Darklands and were not heard from again. Jininsiel once sought to divine their fate, but fell unconscious from the backlash and could not recall her visions when she awoke.

For centuries, Jinin hid behind protective illusions and forbidding flora. Initially, the elves did not wish to reveal themselves to their neighbors because their own settlement was fragile and could easily have been overwhelmed by others. Over time, this attitude calcified into isolationism, and that legacy still influences some of Jinin's relations with its neighbors. However, even from the beginning, Jinin never fully closed itself to the outside. The elves weren't callous enough to ignore the suffering they saw, and they established a ring of **aiyawu**—silver-chased shrines set on stone plinths and draped with fragrant starflower vines—where they left gifts of food, tools, and healing magic to help the humans survive.

The beneficiaries of these aiyawu swiftly discovered that their silver guardians' blessings would vanish if they, or anyone else, encroached upon the mist-veiled forests. They became highly protective of these sacred places, appointing themselves border guardians. Between local superstition and the armed determination of surrounding villagers to prevent anyone from trespassing into the silver woods, Jinin maintained its secrecy for millennia.

As the outside world began to recover and then flourish, though, the elves became fascinated by developments in other cultures' dress, cuisine, art, and magic. When the world seemed safe enough, they revealed themselves as the architects of the aiyawu and opened diplomatic relations with neighboring powers.

This decision wasn't motivated solely by curiosity. The elves were interested not only in trade, but also strategic military alliances. The land they'd claimed in Jinin contained threats that the elves had never fully resolved, including some of their own inadvertent creation. Once their neighbors regained enough strength to be valuable as potential allies, the elves hoped that they might help deal with these evils. Additionally, as militaristic hobgoblins rose to power in **Kaoling**, Jinin sought to bolster its western defenses against that potential threat.

Today, Jinin is a well-established and respected power, generally viewed favorably by its neighbors. Elves remain



JININSIEL



an unusual sight in much of Tian Xia, but they are widely recognized, albeit also widely stereotyped as wise, enigmatic sages and swordfighters.

GEOGRAPHY

Jinin is unusual in that almost as much of it lies below ground as above. The elves who founded the kingdom arrived through the **Darklands**, tracing the veins of a vast dawnsilver lode up from the depths into the forests of a dying world. The tunnels that brought the elves to Jinin remain an important part of their homeland, and their dawnsilver mines continue to provide the foundation of the realm's prosperity. Many of the older caverns, where the elves sheltered in the years following Earthfall, have been transformed into haunting, dawnsilver-laced memorials to the history and culture of Jinin. Some, however, have been sealed off against incursions of hostile creatures from the Darklands.

The creatures of the deep are an ancient threat, but not the only danger Jinin must contend with. A swath of tunnels known as **Mournhollow Mine** beneath the eastern mountains have been sealed with powerful wards, for there dwells **Isyldun the Unmourned,** an undead elven exile.

The capital city, **Ayajinbo**, sits in north-central Jinin, near the **Seythuri River** and atop the immense, subterranean dawnsilver formation known as the **Silver Tree**. It's a serene and lovely place, built in flowing natural forms that incorporate the streams, trees, and wildflowers the elves found when they arrived. **Lathrellai**, sometimes translated as "springs of thought," are the silver-streamed public meditation gardens built around natural springs or fountains. They are unique to Jinin and can be found throughout its capital city. Other major settlements include **Hevara**, **Kyorasa**, and **Yinzushan**. Each of these echoes the architecture of Ayajinbo but are adapted to its local landscape. All of these cities, as well as Ayajinbo, are concealed in the dense, old-growth **Silvermist Wood**, which covers Jinin's heartland.

Northern Jinin, bordering the mountainous realm of **Zi Ha**, is the wildest and most perilous part of the kingdom. Vicious monsters claim territories amid these rocky, windswept slopes, as does the demon-cursed renegade **Theyamori**. The elves seldom set foot in these dangerous lands except to maintain hidden outposts from which their rangers monitor potential threats and sometimes rescue foolish travelers. To the west, Jinin has fortified itself against possible incursions by the militaristic hobgoblins of **Kaoling**. Their defensive measures range from dawnsilver-reinforced fortresses, both above and below ground, to thickets of deadly carnivorous plants and nets of disorienting magic. Merchants and other civilians are discouraged from traveling in that direction, for their safety cannot be assured unless they keep strictly to the elves' guarded trade roads.

A DAY IN JININ

Daily life in Jinin begins in the small hours before dawn, when bakers start their early fires, refuse haulers carry their loads out of the city, and night scouts return from their rounds. A few hours later, most elves awaken to birdsong, the quiet music of the nearest lathrellai, and perhaps the sounds of morning devotions if there is a temple nearby. Unless work or prayer calls, most of Jinin's elves observe a leisurely morning routine. After waking, they perform light, restorative exercises, either alone or in one of the many group performances held by teachers in public spaces. These sessions are considered important for bringing the community together, and so it's understood that neither study nor work should begin until after each citizen has observed this morning ritual.

Morning exercises are followed by a light meal, usually of fruit, vegetables, and sweet rice porridge or red bean buns. Jinin's artisans pride themselves on their intricate designs, usually mimicking flowers and accented with honeyed glazes or colorful tea- and fruit-based powders, that they stamp on their morning buns. Finally, about two hours before noon, the public life of Jinin fully unfolds. Shops open, schools begin session, and government offices unlock their doors. While the elves only work a few hours, they set themselves to their tasks with remarkable speed and efficiency once they begin. It isn't difficult to get things done in Jinin, provided one works within the appropriate hours. Nevertheless, this sometimes frustrates foreigners unaccustomed to elven ways.

Lunch is usually eaten with friends or colleagues, rather than at home, and is generally taken at one of the city's teahouses. These are located near lathrellai, so that their patrons can enjoy a meditation walk before or after eating, and serve a variety of teas, juices, and light wines accompanied by flower-petal salads, spiced dumplings, and rice noodles topped with finely chopped vegetables, fish, and meats. Heavier fare is seldom offered, and it's not uncommon for foreign visitors to begin grumbling about elven food around this time of day.

If their duties allow, most elves like to take a meditation walk in the latter half of the day, either through the Silvermist Wood or a nearby lathrellai. In these gardens, water flows through a series of dawnsilver sculptures, which vary in design but always tell the tale of the elves' journey through the Darklands and their discovery of the Silver Tree. The waterway begins in a grotto, continues through sculpted subterranean passages, and eventually rises up to a garden beneath the sun. All lathrellai include sculptures that channel the water across dawnsilver to create a subtle music, and all are designed to invite relaxed contemplation. Elves who leave Jinin often find themselves missing the serenity of lathrellai, which have no equals in human lands, so the gardens of Minkai are frequent haunts for homesick elven visitors.

In the evening, elves share dinner with friends or family then spend the last few hours of their day in creative pursuits: reading, playing music, painting, or going to watch or perform in one of the city's nightly shows. Art is deemed essential to a balanced and satisfying life, and every elf tries to regularly engage in at least one form.

A YEAR IN JININ

Elven culture often emphasizes attunement to nature and living in harmony with its rhythms, and Jinin is no exception. In spring, its people wear silken robes in green and gold, which blossom into floral colors, embroidery, and layered designs as the season matures. Summer brings richer greens, accented with silver, gold, and brilliant jewel tones. In autumn, the elves shift toward amber, red, warm browns, and honey tones, while winter brings out fur-trimmed garments in white, blue, and gray. Jinin's gardens, public orchards, and temples follow

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Jinin's primary language is Elven, and although its modern tongue is derived from a pre-Earthfall form of the language and has developed separately over millennia, the elves of Jinin can still converse with their cousins in Kyonin and other elven civilizations—although each might be amused by the other's accent. Most words are mellifluous and polysyllabic. Vocal cadences tend to be even and rhythmic, with few excited inflections. The elves like to adopt loanwords from other Tien languages for novel objects and concepts. They also shamelessly borrow personal names that they find beautiful. They strive to pronounce these as authentically as possible, and will sometimes hold spirited arguments about whose rendition is most accurate.



the same patterns, changing their plantings so that entire cities and villages change color seasonally.

The new year in Jinin officially begins with the Night of No Stars and the Day of the New Sun, which commemorates Jininsiel's arrival in Tian Xia and her followers' return to the sunlit world. The **Night of No Stars**, which begins the festival cycle, occurs on the third new moon of the lunar year. It is a solemn time of mourning and remembrance for all that the elves' ancestors endured during their journey through the Darklands. Neither fire nor mage-light is permitted from dusk till dawn, and most elves observe a period of silence that is broken only by urgent necessity. At midnight, around a communal grave, each elf ritually smashes and buries a fragile, valuable handicraft that they labored over for hours. This is a gesture of respect for their ancestors' sacrifices on the journey, and a commemoration of the elves who died along the way.

The next morning, the celebrants don ceremonial garments of white and silver, as well as their **idinsylle**, the dawnsilver tree necklaces that each elf receives at birth, symbolizing their connection to Jinin. These necklaces are not usually worn in everyday life, but they are always brought out for the **Day of the New Sun**. Together, the elves greet the sunrise, receive a ritual benediction from a priest or respected elder, and share a meal that always includes a dish of unseasoned, bitter white radishes and a sweet cake decorated with the first spring flowers. Finally, each elf shares a community-benefiting hope or promise that they will work toward over the coming year, and the other elves agree to honor and aid this endeavor, for it was only by such cooperation that their people survived the long dark.



This spirit of harmony persists throughout the year. From planting to harvest, mining to forging, the elves work in accordance with the needs of the season and their people. Jinin's climate is temperate and gentle, and its lands are exceptionally fertile after millennia of careful tending, so elven life tends to be calm, safe, and orderly. The Silver Tree provides an additional bulwark of prosperity, though its people draw upon its dawnsilver stores sparingly, recognizing that it's a limited resource. Thanks to their good fortune and foresight, the elves enjoy the luxury of time and freedom to perfect their arts, such that in Jinin, the humblest home is brightened by music and beauty that, in less happy lands, is denied even to monarchs.

CULTURE

Jinin's culture is a mixture of pre-Earthfall elven traditions combined with bits and pieces borrowed from neighboring realms, most notably **Minkai** and **Lung Wa**. Echoes of Avistani customs and beliefs can still be glimpsed in the elven kingdom, although these are so archaic in origin that they would scarcely be recognized by most Avistani people today. To the extent that Jinin maintains any cultural legacies from Avistan, they are rooted in a world that vanished with Earthfall and would likely be incomprehensible to anyone outside **New Thassilon**, **Nidal**, and perhaps a few lore-steeped sages in the **Five Kings Mountains**. The most recognizable connections survive in the elven language, the crafting of their weapons, and the flowing designs of elven architecture. Some of Jinin's flowers also hail from Avistan, although they are species that no longer survive on that continent. The vibrant blue sindesil, fragrant bells of rainblossom, and climbing vines of peacock's love, with their profusions of perfumed gold and violet, are all extinct outside this kingdom. Elven gardeners preserve these flowers as a priceless part of their heritage. Other seeds and specimens come from surrounding lands, where it is well known that rare plants command high prices in Jinin.

Flowers are an important motif among the elves, who weave them into their clothing, imitate them in jewelry, and write poems celebrating their transient glory. Almost all swordfighting styles are named after flowers, for the elves prefer swift, graceful, and lightly armored techniques that are as aesthetically pleasing as they are deadly. Warriors leave broken flowers of their chosen type on the bodies of their enemies to mark their kills. Floral personal



names are also common, and many elves wear flower-based perfumes, especially lilac and rose. Due to the popularity of the *Saga of the Fallen Sword*, an epic tragedy from Minkai that made little impact in its homeland but was beloved in Jinin, white jasmine is associated with a certain doomed, romantic masculinity, while red-streaked yellow roses are the signature of stage villains. Chrysanthemums are associated with death, and are rarely worn, although they are prominent in funerary art.

Even Jinin's cuisine is full of flowers. The elves prize fragrance and color in their food, and have happily adopted ginger, ginseng, white pepper, and star anise from Tien cuisine. Tea and rice wine are also popular, although the elves flavor theirs heavily with fruit, lime leaf, and flowers, and sweeten them to the point that their versions can be something of an acquired taste for outsiders.

Another relic of Jinin's past is that it's one of the few places in Tian Xia where Avistani gods have significant followings. However, only deities that existed before Earthfall are widely worshiped in Jinin. **Gozreh**, **Sarenrae**, and **Alseta** have major temples, but deities such as **Cayden Cailean** and **Iomedae** are considered foreign novelties. Several Tien deities have attracted elven worshippers over the years. **Daikitsu**, **Lady Jingxi**, **Kofusachi**, **Qi Zhong**, and **Shizuru** are all venerated in Jinin. **Hei Feng's** fireworks are appreciated for their beauty, but the elves don't care for their noise and smell, and so prefer to mimic them with magic, paper, and living flowers.

The elves' origin also created a strong cultural association of the Darklands with peril, loneliness, and destruction. Legendary oracles have undertaken pilgrimages into the "eternal night" for centuries in search of transformative wisdom. Young warriors venture into the dark to test their courage, and embittered exiles have fled there after renouncing their kin. The Darklands, in short, occupy a place in Jinin's culture similar to the role that harsh deserts and wide oceans have played among other peoples.

Because the deep earth is linked to horrors and nightmares, burial is considered abhorrent in Jinin. Dead elves are dressed in white, garlanded with chrysanthemums, and cremated on incense-laced pyres. Their ashes are scattered in memorial gardens, where the flowers are believed to convey messages from the spirits of the dead.

Half-elves are common in the towns and villages on Jinin's outskirts. In Jinin, half-elves are treated on roughly the same footing as their human ancestors: respectfully, and more or less as equals, but with an underlying assumption that they can't hear the true music of the lathrellai or experience the subtler nuances of elven art. To add to the injury's sting, those assumptions are usually true, though more often due to lack of training than any genuine difference in perception. Regardless, half-elves tend to stay in border towns or leave Jinin altogether rather than be surrounded with constant reminders of a culture they aren't considered to fully share.



MELYANOS SILVERFELL



ASADAO RAINBLOSSOM



SPYMASTER TADAIYO



EVELANTHE AESARIL

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

Jinin is a semi-feudal nation ruled by a **cathdaran**, sometimes translated as "shogun" or "sword-Seer," and a twelve-member governing council known as the **Court of Silver Leaves**. Each member of the council comes from one of the kingdom's powerful noble houses and is responsible for the governance of their house's district. The dawnsilver mines that undergird Jinin's wealth are controlled directly by the cathdaran, but these funds support the prosperity of the entire people and are not the ruler's personal treasury.

The current cathdaran is **Jininsiel Ikanthi** (stoic female elf general), who took office five years ago following the retirement of her cousin, Jininsiel Ryuikiatsu. Cathdaran Ikanthi is a calm, observant woman in late middle age, whose governing philosophy is to listen carefully and reveal little of her own intentions. She views her duty as safeguarding Jinin's natural resources, prestige, and security, while collecting new ideas that might be of value to her people.

Jinin's swordmasters are renowned, and the most acclaimed living master is **Melyanos Silverfell** (social male elf warrior), a young swordsman gifted with grace, good looks, and extraordinary skill with the blade. Because any respectable elven warrior must be skilled in poetry, flower arranging, and calligraphy as well as bladecraft, Melyanos dutifully practices these arts, but in fact he has no talent for any of them, and his poetry is downright abysmal. Nevertheless, Melyanos is so handsome that he draws swooning admirers to every poetry reading, no matter how terrible the verse. His touchy temper, combined with his extreme lethality, ensures that his critics stay quiet.

Asadao Rainblossom (loyal female human magus) is the headwoman of **Nightswallow's Rest,** a town on Jinin's southern border. She is heir to a storied legacy: long ago, when local humans survived Earthfall with the aid of mysterious gifts left at the silver-chased shrines known as aiyawu, they appointed themselves guardians of these sacred places. Even after they learned the truth—that it was not spirits who saved them, but elves—these families maintained a tradition of protecting Jinin and its secrets. Many learned the ways of elven swordfighting and received dawnsilver blades from the elves, which became treasured heirlooms. They chose family names based on the elves' unique flowers and wore these names with pride. In an age of openness and cultural exchange, however, these families found their role as guardians changed. Now, they do not warn strangers off at blade's edge, but assess them for potential threat or benefit as foreigners pass through the human towns bordering Jinin to enter the kingdom proper. Well versed in sword and spell, Asado gauges newcomers with an expert eye and may arrange a sparring match under the guise of a "friendly village tradition" if she suspects one of being particularly skilled. She reports to **Spymaster Tadaiyo** (mischievous male elf mastermind) and can be a valuable point of contact with the shadowy side of Jinin's government.

Not only must Jinin patrol its above-ground borders, but it must watch for threats from the Darklands. Captain **Evelanthe Aesaril** (diligent female elf commander) of the **Silverleaf Guard** is in charge of the kingdom's subterranean defenses, which stand ready against both Darklands marauders and spies and saboteurs who might target the dawnsilver mines. Captain Aesaril sometimes finds it advantageous to contract independent agents for certain missions, particularly when elven troops might be at a disadvantage, when political considerations are especially acute, or when specialists with unique skills are needed.

Not everyone was able to accept the truth of the aiyawu when the elves revealed themselves. The legendary monk **Theyamori Rainblossom** (fanatical male undead blight), an ancestor of Asadao Rainblossom, was so enraged at the revelation that he'd dedicated his life to a lie that he rebelled against his family's traditions and attempted to destroy the aiyawu. This caused the **Wars of the Shattered Shrines**, in which the guardians of the aiyawu split into warring factions, and families split violently asunder as sibling raised arms against sibling, parent against child. Theyamori's faction lost, in part because

Jinin's elves supported the loyalists. Swearing vengeance, Theyamori fled into the northern mountains, where he emerged periodically to strike down elves and desecrate aiyawu. When finally he suffered a mortal wound, the dying rebel swore eternal loyalty to **Lady Nanbyo** if she would grant him the power to inflict continued suffering on his foes. She answered his call and transformed him into a monstrous walking blight. To this day, Theyamori hunts the mountains, slaughtering elves and their friends, casting a lasting stain on his family name.

Cities and Locations

The following are a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Jinin.

Ayajinbo

Jinin's capital city, like the nation itself, is a mixture of archaic elven architecture and newer forms adapted from centuries of Tian civilization. These have been thoughtfully placed to fit the city's aesthetic and further harmonized with dawnsilver accents and living plants. Thus, although there are many countries and time periods represented in every neighborhood, the effect is of unity rather than chaos.

Visitors to Ayajinbo often feel overawed by the history around them, which extends so far back that human minds can scarcely grasp it. Yet unlike the weathered ruins that stand crumbling in other lands, this history is warm and living. The elves have preserved a rare oasis of peace, and when one sets foot in its heart, it isn't difficult to understand the determination to protect it.

The Pavilion of Falling Flowers

By the mountainous headwaters of the Seythuri River stands the elegant Pavilion of Falling Flowers, Jinin's preeminent school of swordfighting and battle magic. The elves' ancestral traditions are preserved here, and the newest innovations from other lands are carefully studied for every possible advantage. Entry is difficult even for elves, and nearly impossible for foreigners, but proven masters and exceptional students are occasionally permitted to pass through its gates.

The Silver Tree

Beneath the Palace of the Silver Leaves is the Silver Tree: the immense dawnsilver formation whose rootlike lodes led the elves' ancestors back to the surface. Its upper caverns have been converted to a memorial where water flows through graceful dawnsilver sculptures and natural rock formations, some of which have been subtly shaped to emphasize their innate beauty. Branching pillars inscribed with elven runes tell the tale of the elves' survival, and bear witness to the fallen. The Silver Tree is considered a holy place in Jinin, though it's entirely secular.

The lower caverns still connect to the Darklands, and these are heavily fortified and patrolled, for should any enemy ever breach those tunnels, they would have a direct path into the heart of Ayajinbo and could potentially decapitate Jinin's leadership with a single attack. Accordingly, the lower reaches of the Silver Tree are perhaps the most heavily guarded part of the realm.

International Relations

Jinin is a wealthy, peaceful nation that readily lends aid to its neighbors, partly out of kindness and partly because it doesn't want their problems to spill over into its own borders. It engages eagerly in cultural exchange, sometimes to the point that other nations exaggerate their influence within Jinin. Jinin trades actively with all peaceful nations in Tian Xia, and even imports lumber from Shenmen and delicacies from Kwanlai, although they have considerable philosophical disagreements with both countries. Their relations with Shogun Tsuneni of Chu Ye are strained, and they have fortified their western border with Kaoling in anticipation of hostilities.



JININSIEL IKANTHI



Kaoling

Nations

KAOLING
Capital: Dhucharg
Government: Military Council
Ruler: Warlord Tsung-Cha Kavangaki



Peoples

Elves
Ettins
Giants
Hobgoblins
Humans
Ogres
Samsarans

Languages

Goblin
Jotun
Tien

Religions

General Susumu

Yaezhing

Resources

Armor/Weapons

Livestock/ Leather

Mercenaries

Ore

Seafood

INEXORABLE CONQUERORS

Kaoling's origins are riddled with war and battle, rising from the ashes of the **Lung Wa Empire** in 7106 IC. A constant threat during Lung Wa's rule, the hobgoblins of northern Tian Xia surged forth when the empire collapsed and destroyed six of the squabbling Successor States that had fragmented off from the former superpower. In 7110 IC, the hobgoblins founded a nation and cemented their authority in Tian Xia.

Most people in Tian Xia viewed the hobgoblin's aggressive rise to power as the beginning of an evil empire. The battles that led to the formation of Kaoling have been nicknamed the **War of the Widow Makers** due to the deadly tactics that the hobgoblins used. Stories spread across Tian Xia about the deadly hobgoblins who took advantage of weaker nations—some stories exaggerated, and others definitely true. While the hobgoblin army was unarguably brutal, historians and scholars often overlook much of the civil war and strife that followed in the wake of Lung Wa's collapse. Kaoling just happened to be victorious in a very public and bloody fashion.

The hobgoblins' victory came from their unity. Their enemies spent more time squabbling over boundary and territory lines with each other than focusing on their infrastructure and defense. Hobgoblin warlords, led by **Moyoshi Shoda**, planned speedy assaults that obliterated their foes' defenses before their enemies could mobilize. The War of the Widow Makers lasted only a few short months before the official declaration of Kaoling's borders and the founding of **Dhucharg**, the capital of the new nations.

Moyoshi Shoda used a philosophy that is now ingrained in Kaoling's culture, based on outsmarting an opponent without engaging in many battles—and, if one must fight, how to minimize casualties. In the War of the Widow Makers, Shoda's strategies focused on destroying defenses and morale rather than pointless massacres. Shoda timed well-planned attacks on strategic military buildings and killed prominent leaders, causing the armies to collapse into disarray. While some soldiers continued to fight back and were put to death, Shoda allowed them to lay down their weapons by becoming workers for the kingdom of Kaoling, a promise he intended to keep, and did so successfully.

This philosophy of battle became a structure for the developing culture in Kaoling. It guided the policies that are ingrained within the law. Shoda emphasized that he wanted the government to create policies to minimize casualties and prevent conflict among hobgoblins. Now, Kaoling is led by Warlord **Tsung-Cha Kavangaki**, and the spirit of Shoda's philosophy still exists within the government and culture of Kaoling. Justice is a swift process, and people always seek to overcome obstacles without committing crimes. Thus, Kaoling hobgoblins do not have much infighting, as conflicts are resolved quickly within most leadership structures. This unified front is the expansionist kingdom's deadliest weapon.

Yet the cruelty of the hobgoblins was not a complete exaggeration. The people who survived the War of the Widow Makers were offered a choice: they could stay and work with Kaoling and build the new hobgoblin empire or be offered an honorable death. Many people, believing they may be liberated, decided to stay and offer their services to the new government. The cities of Kaoling were built on these people's backs; the only way to leave was to escape or die. Conditions were not kind to these laborers, and to this day, the only way for them or their descendants to leave is to be given an honorable death.

GEOGRAPHY

Kaoling has a great expanse of flatlands that extends through most of the kingdom, a boon for the movement of cavalry to support its borders. Throughout this land, there are small cities and military outposts. These open plains have grasslands, which are primarily treeless and rarely change elevation. These open fields allow government-run farms and livestock to flourish with excess space. For many citizens of Kaoling, the landscape symbolizes endless possibilities and freedom in their new power.

Kaoling also borders the **Sea of Eels** and has many fishing villages, along with Kaoling-funded navy towns to help protect fishers from the titular giant eels. Dhucharg, the capital of Kaoling, sits on this coast. Despite the name and size, the body of water is relatively shallow, meaning all the dangers rise to the surface. The Sea of Eels is also a trade route, but Kaoling does not have the most robust



TSUNG-CHA KAVANGAKI



trade relationship with their neighbors, instead conducting business with trading companies.

To the west of the coast are wild marshlands that feed off the water plains. While not particularly dangerous, there is a fair amount of overgrown flora. Kaoling has decided to keep this land untamed to take advantage of the natural defenses the damp wetlands provide against armies. However, there are roads for small bands of travelers to make it to cities, towns, and settlements unhindered.

Kaoling is riddled with ruins from the towns and cities of the Successor States that Moyoshi Shoda destroyed. Some of these places were repurposed as outposts or towns, but numerous sites remain abandoned. An adventuring group may find a keep that has been looted and destroyed—however, there are always hidden rooms that have yet to be seen by the aspiring treasure hunter.

There are rumors of hobgoblin entrances to the Darklands, and there is talk of Kaoling trying to establish its presence with their Darklands allies. Someone traversing the land may find a group of Kaoling soldiers seemingly guarding nothing. Upon closer inspection, these infantry guard cave entrances that descend into the dark.

A DAY IN KAOLING

The citizens of Kaoling have a very rigid schedule, and that schedule has a set time to work and a time to relax. Before the sun rises, hobgoblins openly perform their typical daily preparations, which for many include meditation and exercise, before breaking their fast. Meditation is expected to be a way to control one's emotions before the workday, as reflected by the teachings of Moyoshi Shoda. Exercise is intended to get the blood flowing rather than for physical improvement. These practices are believed to be necessary for productivity during the day.

Food in the morning is usually dry and easy to assemble, as cooking in the morning is considered a wasted effort. Some noble houses have non-hobgoblins show up early to prepare a morning meal instead. Hobgoblins are out the door when the sun rises to prepare for the workday, and they work the entire time the sun is out. During this time, a hobgoblin rarely takes breaks, only taking a quick meal if they need it to concentrate.

At dusk, hobgoblins go to the bathhouse before heading to a restaurant or tavern to participate in the night's revelry. This is reinforced by participating in an "all-meal," where many hobgoblins fast or eat small snacks throughout the day until their evening meal, which is filled with meat, hearty vegetables, and a mountain of carbs. Remarkably, many hobgoblins do not consume alcoholic beverages with their entertainment and meals, as they desire to keep their minds and senses sharp. After a fun evening, hobgoblins return to their residence to sleep, and an eerie silence overcomes the cities. The only sound is that of the passing guards or workers preparing for the next day's agenda.

Hobgoblins rarely take a day off, only stopping for religious, health, or emergency reasons. Those visiting a city in Kaoling should plan to visit when the sun is out to get any official business done—those who try to contact someone after hours might be received but will lose the respect of the working people, as only the unprepared can't get their work done during the day. Those who aren't of hobgoblin heritage or don't speak Goblin are likely to be turned away at most businesses. If such visitors stay for extended periods, they risk catching the attention of the wrong political figure or faction within the cities.

Additionally, Kaoling hobgoblins are highly competitive and regularly participate in games of chance and sparring. Almost every evening, there are unofficial tournaments. During the colder season, this includes card or dice games. At warmer times, archery, marksmanship, brawling, and weapons sparring are rampant within households and official dojos. Performances of sword dancing are sponsored by the government, reinforcing the teachings of Moyoshi Shoda several times a week and nightly in the major cities.

Non-hobgoblins have a much different pace of life. Servant workers generally have the reverse schedule of hobgoblins, sleeping during the day and staying up at night to tend to the needs of full citizens. A farmer is up before sunrise and works until the job is done, regardless of how much light there is. A cook works at the whims of the hobgoblins' celebrations and diet. If there is a tournament, a blacksmith may receive a stern wake-up call to repair a set of armor at the last minute, or a stable master may find their dinner interrupted if a general wants to go for a last-minute ride. Non-hobgoblins are expected to work without vocal complaint, though they often wear a scowl on their face due to the circumstances. Smiles aren't required, but vocal complaints can be considered a punishable offense if expressed to the wrong person.

Kaoling hobgoblins often pay their respects to the Black Daimyo **Susumu** and the temple of **Yaezhing**. The devout take time out of their day to watch the executions that the priests of Yaezhing perform, which often happen at the whims of the hobgoblin leadership.

A YEAR IN KAOLING

Kaoling only celebrates four holidays a year. They celebrate the summer and winter solstices, sharing abundance and participating in festivities. These three-day celebrations feature participation in some revelry and a break from diet. Hobgoblins are split into three groups; each group works for one day during the festival and has the other two off. During this time, an assortment of competitions are held. People participate in brawling matches, board games, and games of intelligence for entertainment and fun. The main event is the dances performed by the various sword dancing troupes around Kaoling. It is a celebration of art, movement, and expression.

Once a year, hobgoblins come together to commemorate the founding of Kaoling with a reenactment of the War of the Widow Makers. This particular event pits the hobgoblin nation against the non-hobgoblin citizens of Kaoling. Citizens cheer for the quick obliteration of each nation that hobgoblins take over. This event is usually filled with magic, large explosions, and deadly combat, and it is not unheard of for hobgoblins to accidentally kill one of the non-hobgoblin actors in this passionate reenactment.

Whoever gets the honor of playing Moyoshi Shoda in this celebration earns a life-long legacy of praise, not only for themselves but also for their family. About nine months before the event, students compete in studies of Shoda's teachings for the honor of representing him. The winner of the competition then trains in a rigorous physical and mental routine for six months to prepare for the role. A good performance earns them enough reputation to join any army, political leadership position, or academic position anyone could want.

Kaoling also celebrates the **Lunar New Year**. From the perspective of Kaoling's residents, it is a recognition of another year of life. While the day's work does not

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Genji Yamada: gen-jee yah-mah-dah
Himoko Na-ichi: hee-moh-koh nah-ee-chi
Moyoshi Shoda: mo-yoh-shi shoh-da
Sun: pronounced like "soon"
Tsung-Cha Kavangaki: sung cha ka-wan-gah-kee
Wei: pronounced like "way"



stop during these festivities, they celebrate by drinking in honor of the next stage of life and by eating cakes.

Over the last few years, Kaoling has acknowledged that keeping their non-hobgoblin population content could go a long way. To that end, once a year, non-hobgoblins get a day off to celebrate as they please. This is supposedly meant as a show of appreciation. In reality, it helps give the illusion that hobgoblins care for the people they subjugate. During this time, people eat and drink as if they were celebrating hobgoblins. They can visit the theater and walk freely around the city. For the day, they can act like an actual citizen.

Lastly, every first weekend of the month, the army holds a tournament. The people of Kaoling put their best and brightest forward to compete. This allows hobgoblins who are not nobility, or who live in one of the smaller villages, to show their skills and abilities. This tournament features several smaller events, like archery, horseback riding, and strategy-based board games, but the main event is a fighting tournament. There are two categories: one-on-one fights—separated into magic duels versus physical combat—and another in which teams of four can sign up to compete against other teams of four. After the initial qualifier round, the matches take on a fight-to-the-death mentality, which excites the hobgoblin nation. Medics, clerics, and healers are on the sidelines to heal the people who surrender or are incapacitated during these tense moments.



Beyond these events, nothing else is celebrated in Kaoling. Things like birthdays, anniversaries, and monumental events are just dates on the calendar. While it may be marked with a toast at the end of the workday, most people don't find it a cause for celebration. Achievements are celebrated more than the passing of time.

CULTURE

Kaoling's society is exceptionally rigid during working hours. Hobgoblins are respected for their productivity and tireless work ethic. There is an expectation that an individual must be productive for society. Respect is earned by the outcome rather than the individual. This mindset has led to a high volume of work throughout Kaoling's history, but it only praises the skilled and talented, allowing only the best to be honored. A less productive worker is considered a nuisance and is subjugated to basic labor with little room for career growth.

The same holds true for intellectuals. Scholars and academics of Kaoling are encouraged to publish their works within the kingdom. Those writings are often kept in Kaoling and not accessible to the rest of Tian Xia. Rumor has it that the scholarly essays on the war tactics and leadership of Moyoshi Shoda are especially precious. Other fields include the natural sciences and the practical use of magic—while Kaoling hobgoblins have a general disgust toward magic, those who practice the art are lauded for the sacrifice they make for the good of the country.

Kaoling business follows as rigid a leadership as Kaoling's military and government. Worker roles and responsibilities are clearly laid out, and rarely do workers stray outside of their assigned tasks. The supervisor delegates tasks, which are assigned based on perceived difficulty; the rest of the work is given to the non-hobgoblin population of Kaoling. Workers have a uniform made from simple materials in dull colors appropriate for the job. They wear specific stones or gems on their cuffs to represent their status: hobgoblin leaders wear precious stones, hobgoblin workers wear bits of semiprecious stones, and non-hobgoblins wear small bits of rock. While the exact stone depends on the business's wealth, these basic rankings are synonymous with Kaoling.

After a workday, hobgoblins dispense with their work uniforms in favor of more vibrant and unique clothing. These outfits are adorned with jewelry and have a plethora of colors. While the clothes have individual cuts and styles, there is still an element of comfort and practicality. If someone cannot move comfortably within their clothing, it is often discarded for something more fitting. The exception to this is the military, which wears heavy armor. Generally, armor is made from metal or stone scales, stitched or riveted together, and reinforced with rawhide, shells, and other animal materials. Armor decorations are decided based on the preferences of generals, and typically include ceremonial bronze masks to intimidate enemies.



Education is critical in Kaoling culture. All hobgoblins start school at the early age of five and continue until the age of sixteen. Their education involves indoctrination into Moyoshi Shoda's early teachings and an emphasis on literature, history, and the military. Performance in these subjects generally affects job prospects later. There is also teaching on various art forms, including painting, ceramics, basic architecture, and dance. Kaoling has created a unique dance style where they attach multicolored ribbons to their bodies and wield a sword. The ribbon colors represent certain emotions, and transitions from rigid to fluid movements represent balance. The dance may be performed with or without musical accompaniment and is often used to tell a wordless story. The most common stories represent the teachings of the early military heroes and often provide messaging that is heavy on Kaoling nationalism. Sword dancing is a part of hobgoblin military education, as learning when to be strict and when to be relaxed is a huge part of the artistry of war. This form of dancing is considered fluid, while other aspects of education tend to be rigid. It reminds the student to continue to be flexible in their leadership.

While most Tian historians refer to Kaoling's beginnings as the War of the Widow Makers, hobgoblins refer to the battle as the **War of Redemption**. The hobgoblins looked for official standing for their way of life rather than living as simple raiders and bandits, and the creation of their nation redeemed their name.

The primary industries of Kaoling are weapons, armor, and siege equipment. These goods are sought after by many trading companies and mercenary troops as these weapons are both common and prove to be sturdy, sharp, and well-balanced. Fighting equipment is the city's primary export. Kaoling also has a plethora of farms and ranches that provide food and livestock to the whole kingdom. The nation is relatively self-sufficient, but looks to purchase alchemical potions and elixirs when available.

Kaoling hobgoblins aren't the most religious people but often participate in spiritual formalities. They meditate on the code of Moyoshi Shoda in preparation for the day's work. This allows them to sort through their emotions and make unbiased and logical decisions. Hobgoblins who participate in religious activities may include these meditations in their daily preparations and rituals.

As an outcome-based culture, Kaoling is known for its hyperfixation on its goals. This may be reflected in nationalistic endeavors or a religious focus on General Susumu, the Black Daimyo, and Yaezhing. Often, people are simply trying to improve their work; they continually study and strive to better themselves.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

Shoda created the **Council of Nine**, which was initially comprised of the generals who participated in the War of the Widow Makers. Originally, Shoda planned to



GENERAL FEI HONG



GENERAL SUN ZHEN



GENERAL DAI JIA



GENJI YAMATA

take on the mantle of sole emperor but realized that this decision might cause controversy among his allies. Instead, he elevated his closest allies to power and became their figurehead, keeping near-complete control of the nation while avoiding any political enemies within his rule. After the nation's founding, he soon took his generals and settled the seat of government in the new capital of Dhucharg.

The government allows the eight military generals to vote on the most significant decisions, with the emperor serving as the tiebreaker. However, Shoda ensured that only the most prominent choices ever reached the Council, and distracted each General with their own responsibilities to the nation. Today, Warlord **Tsung-Cha Kavangaki** (controlling male hobgoblin cavalier) is the figurehead of the Council of Nine and until recently had the unanimous support of his council. Kavangaki relies heavily on his partner, General **Fei Hong** (convincing male hobgoblin rogue), who also sits on the council. Fei Hong acts as Kavangaki's mouthpiece in day-to-day matters and gathers allies to help guarantee the vote goes Kavangaki's way.

A few years ago, a vacant seat allowed General **Sun Zhen** (egalitarian nonbinary hobgoblin magus) to join the council. The generals worked to get Zhen a seat because they were an expert in arcane affairs—while most Kaoling hobgoblins hold a distrust of magic, the power of spells proved undeniable as an asset to the military. Kavangaki also wished to leverage Zhen's resistance to expansionism, to help stymie the influence of his powerful rival, **Himoko Na-ichi** (charismatic female ja noi assassin). Zhen began pushing their goal of providing a path to citizenship for the non-hobgoblins living in Kaoling, citing Shoda's philosophy that providing prisoners of war with more rights creates a more productive society. They have managed to convince General **Dai Jia** (legalistic female hobgoblin fighter) to see their point of view, prompting Dai Jia to write a plan to provide better conditions and an education system to achieve citizenship. The council has been in constant debate, with many of its members believing that they can make concessions to non-hobgoblins but not to the extent Sun Zhen suggests. Fei Hong dislikes the direction the council is taking and is looking for permanent solutions to solve the problem.

The faith of the Black Daimyo, General Susumu, has its own palace within the capital of Dhucharg, which is run by **Kirino Tsu-Chang** (proud male hobgoblin warpriest). Kirino has the largest non-military force in Dhucharg and is loyal to the city leadership and Warlord Kavangaki. Rumor has it that he wants a place within the Council of Nine, and plans are already in motion for him to join. Additionally, **Genji Yamata** (sinister male hobgoblin cleric), the high priest of Yaezhing, is in charge of the public executions within Dhucharg. While primarily working out of the Ministry of Blood in the capital, his priests can be seen performing executions all around Kaoling.

Recently, the Ironfang Legion and General **Azaersi** (*Legends* 26) contacted Kaoling through extraplanar tunnels. She placed a magical onyx shard in the care of the Council of Nine that allowed them to put a secret tower within the capital city of Dhucharg. This tower is a gateway to the Onyx Citadel, the hidden capital of the nation of **Oprak**. General Azaersi took a particular interest in Kaoling and has spent time learning the city's philosophy. In turn, the Council of Nine accepted a tentative treaty with General Azaersi. During their talks, General Azaersi asked for resources native to Tian Xia and questioned the weaponization of kaiju, while Kaoling has considered expansion beyond their continent and even plane. Some of the generals have suggested recruiting General Azaersi to the Kaoling flag, perhaps even offering her a seat in the Council of Nine. Warlord Kavankgi has heard about General Azaersi's motivations and finds her methods to be unfavorable, but her *Onyx Citadel* provides a power that Kavangaki can't ignore. Despite this desire, he does not wish to start any hostile actions toward the Ironfang Legion and is concerned about reprisal from General Azaersi if they attempt any political moves against her.

Cities and Locations

The following is a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Kaoling.

Dhucharg

The epitome of hobgoblin rule stands within the capital of Dhucharg, a city filled with utilitarianism and military prowess. It is surrounded by reinforced stone walls and has a plethora of watchtowers. Nine gates lead into the city, representing the Council of Nine. Once inside, a wide moat acts as a canal system and transports people and goods among the city's districts. The city has little to no crime, and the economy is primed for trade due to its location by the Sea of Eels. The city is primarily built with gray stone, though people place colored lanterns and paintings to provide some decor. Black clouds rise into the sky as the artisans work hard to make weapons for the kingdom.

Perhaps the most awe-inspiring building is **Dhucharg Castle**, which sits in the city's center. The palace is surrounded by five towers that are capped by red roofs and protected by winding paths. The **Pagoda of the Nine** is near the castle, where Kaoling's ruling council meets.

Grave of Moyoshi Shoda

Near the center of Kaoling lies the grave of Moyoshi Shoda. The shrine features four statues of Moyoshi throughout his life: as a child, as a young war leader, as the Warlord of Kaoling, and as an older advisor. There is also an entrance to a crypt that holds his bones and the bones of the War Generals in his Council of Nine. Surrounding the crypt are the gravestones of the people who died in the War of Redemption. Many military leaders make a pilgrimage here to pay their respects, and it is considered an honor to be called to guard or care for this temple.

Spiritscar

In the northern section of Kaoling, a set of rolling hills houses the Spiritscar, a rift that holds the ruins of a large monastery of **Lady Nanbyo**. Hobgoblins tried to claim the sanctuary during the reign of Shoda, but a mysterious earthquake created a crack that sank the monastery and an entire hobgoblin army. Only a 900-foot-deep, 7-mile-long rift remains. The rift is haunted by ghosts and cultists, and the surrounding hills are inhabited by magic creatures. Some of the wildlife became charged with the energy of the long dead, causing issues for unsuspecting travelers.

Qintong

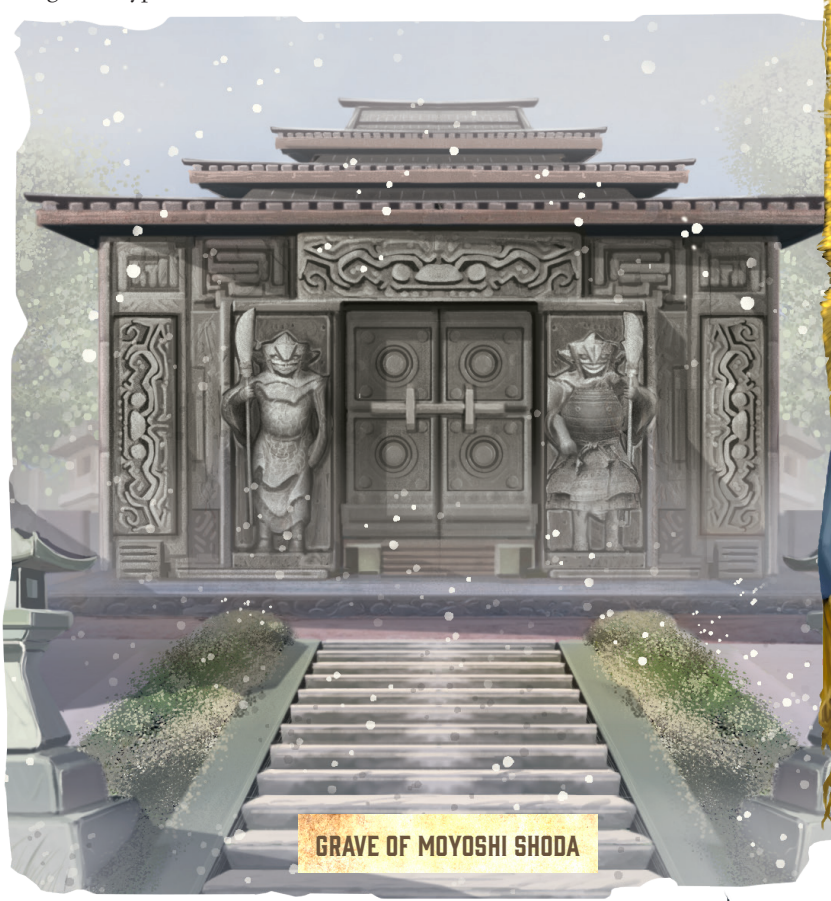
Qintong is a significant city run by Sun Zhen, a member of the Council of Nine. This city differs because of its treatment of non-hobgoblin peoples. While they do not receive rights recognized by the government, Qintong introduced a unique ranking system that allows for upward mobility into many of the ruling councils. Many of the Council of Nine consider this town dangerous for Kaoling tradition and feel it needs to be reformed. However, an attack on a councilor's home city may be seen as a sign of weakness and invite more hostility than Kaoling can handle.

Qintong itself lies near the eastern border of the rolling plains. It has the same gray stone wall as Dhucharg, but the building architecture features more wood, giving it an earthy feel. The surrounding area has farms dedicated to livestock, as well as a school of military thought and training, which researches a wider variety of subjects than most other Kaoling learning centers.

International Relations

Due to their expansionist aspirations, Kaoling does not have great relationships with many nations in Tian Xia. Lingshen is the usual target of their ambitions, as Zi Ha and Jinin have disadvantageous terrain for an invasion. Kaoling has a trading treaty with Nagajor, many of the people that humans consider "monstrous," and unaffiliated trading companies. Despite this, Kaoling remains neutral or hostile to most non-hobgoblins.

Outside of Tian Xia, Kaoling is currently allied with the Ironfang Legion and General Azaersi, as well as the hobgoblins of Rahk Lo in the Tian Xia Darklands.



GRAVE OF MOYOSHI SHODA



Kwanlai

Nations

KWANLAI
Capital: Hisuikarasu
Government: Clan Council
Ruler: Lady Sutarai-Gongen



Peoples

Athamarus
Dragons
Humans
Kitsune
Merfolk
Nephilim
Tengu
Yaoguai

Languages

Minkaian
Tengu
Thalassic
Tien

Factions


Way of the Kirin

Religions


Desna


Lao Shu Po


Hei Feng


Sun Wukong


Lady Jingxi

Resources


Alcohol/ Drugs


Coffee


Dye


Jewelry/ Gems


Music/Lore


Ore


Produce


Seafood


Spices/Salt


Stone


Tea


Technology


Weapons

Stormcrow's Haven

One of Tian Xia's last nations to find its footing after the collapse of **Lung Wa**, Kwanlai is the ancestral home of the tengu. Even 105 years later, it still struggles to overcome the chaos the Lung Wa empire inflicted upon it. With so many held prisoner by poverty, prosperity lies beyond Kwanlai's talons; the clans fight among themselves, so desperate to secure better lives for their members that they miss the larger picture. Cooler heads seek to restore the peace and cooperation of their pre-imperial folktales before those stories fade from their beaks.

Kwanlai's history is awash with squabbling tengu clans, unable to cooperate long enough to establish any government larger than a city-state. In the wake of the **Shu Empire**'s collapse, the Nureba clan rose to prominence, establishing the state of **Ootoya**, ruling through a delicately balanced council of clan elders. In 6780 IC, the Lung Wa empire crushed the nation, slaying the council members and razing the capital, the City of Whistling Swords. Afterward, the empire absorbed Ootoya into their territory, renaming it Kwanlai. Despite this annexation into the empire, most residents continued calling themselves Ootoyans.

Over the following centuries, the Lung Wa taxed the Ootoyans into near starvation and treated the nation as a dumping ground for undesirables. The empire knew killing the leaders of seditious factions might inspire rebellion and instead exiled over five hundred thieves, assassins, and political enemies to Kwanlai. Lung Wa's plan was to fracture dissident groups across Tian Xia, solidifying their stranglehold on the continent.

They failed. Instead, the rebels joined the local clans, sharing their skills and ire for the empire. At the same time, the priesthoods of **Hei Feng** and **Desna** forged an uneasy alliance and founded secret training camps for their warrior priests. In 7106 IC, the clans and priests rose up during the **Feather and Starlight Rebellion**, capturing or killing every imperial officer in simultaneous midnight raids across the country. Shortly afterward, the region collapsed into its pre-Ootoya factionalism; brief but intense clan skirmishes and guild rivalry slew hundreds. Luckily, a new foe united them once more.

Wanshou launched two invasions, seeking to flood the often rainy land and use it as a base to take control of the sea from **Xidao**. Initially, the Ootoyans' efforts were chaotic and almost counterproductive, with clans tripping over each other and failing to coordinate their defenses. Soon, they relearned how to coordinate and repelled the invaders. Since then, Kwanlai has constructed a robust series of forts, battlements, and dry land, making the border crossing challenging for aquatic peoples.

Over a century after the fall of their oppressors, Kwanlai cherishes its sense of community, but still struggles with cooperation. The leadership of Lady **Sutarai-Gongen** gives them hope for the future. If they can continue forging a national identity, the Ootoyans may once again have a home.

Geography

The terrain of Kwanlai, like its history, is tumultuous, with rolling hills, punctuated by valleys, draws, and spurs. Traveling through the nation is challenging, as there are few flat areas. At best, the endless hills slow travel; at worst, they break wagon axles. Kwanlai's rivers aren't much more help, as few of them are deep or wide enough for anything but the lightest riverboats.

Geopolitically, Kwanlai's southern border with the friendly **Tianjing** is its longest, though most of the border is in the **Kimu Mountains**, hampering trade and attempts to define a precise boundary. Lurking in the north is **Wanshou**,



SUTARAI-GONGEN



Kwanlai's greatest threat. To the west are **Linvarre** and **Shenmen**. Kwanlai enjoys an uneasy peace with them, as the impoverished nation has little their neighbors want and the mountains serve as an effective barrier. To the east is the Xidao Gulf, home of **Xidao**, Kwanlai's only true ally. Across the gulf is **Minkai**, an important trading partner.

The City of Whistling Swords is the ancient, ruined capital of the Ootoya. The tengu now shun this city, telling folktales of ghosts, malevolent spirits, and other dangerous beings. Only some of those tales remain true; hundreds of ghosts still haunt the streets, but they're far from the gravest danger these days. An underworld dragon named **Mujihi** rules the palace grounds from his cave beneath it. His rat king and oni servants take refuge in the crumbling marketplace and university, respectively, foraging for food and robbing those who wander too close.

A well-used pass through the Kimu Mountains leads to Tianjing's **Kaimuko Wood**, providing a slow but reliable trade route greatly benefiting both sides. While violent robbery is uncommon, few traders make it through the mountains without stealthy bandits lightening their carts. Another pass leads to Shenmen's **Specterwood**, though it's poorly maintained, as only a tengu with extremely urgent business would dare travel into the land of the jorogumo.

In central Kwanlai, near the foot of the Kimu Mountains, lies the **Vale of Green Spears**. This dense forest of bamboo is the legendary site where **Tian Shen** convinced a wizard to plant 100 million trees, either as a test of the hero's abilities or to provide homes to millions of displaced birds, depending on the legend. Centuries later, the forest has its own claim to fame. Here, the oldest bamboo trees tower over all but the oldest dragons. The stalks' impressive scale makes them prime material for large drums, and the fresh shoots are a delicacy prized throughout Kwanlai. Harvesting the bamboo is not without peril, however. Until recently, **Genseirin**—the titanic forest dragon—protected the old growth center with deadly efficiency. Now, her young prowl the largest stalks, seeking prey.

A DAY IN KWANLAI

Kwanlai days don't start until the first flute melodies break the morning stillness, and the nights don't end until the midnight drums shake the energy from the air. The Lung Wa empire curtailed music, nearly regulating tengu instruments out of existence; **qanaghis**, Kwanlai's thirteen-string zither, have only recently returned to Kwanlai thanks to the Ootoyan diaspora bringing them back. For four centuries, the empire only permitted a single musician per settlement to greet and bid farewell to the days. Immediately after the overthrow of Lord Som Heu Wa, Ootoyans scrambled to craft as many flutes and drums as they could, creating the now cacophonous mornings and evenings.

Once the flutes start the day, work begins across the nation. Ootoyans descend from their stilted homes and

make their way to school, work, or simply their favorite hangouts. Shopkeepers begin setting up their stalls in the local markets, though permanent shops are becoming common. Farmers, wood cutters, and other field laborers head out to begin their work. Even in cities, where indoor jobs are more common, the flutes draw most people out of their homes; few people remain in their houses during the day. The only real exceptions to this are people who live and work in the same place, like innkeepers. Elders and the local thieves' guild protect everyone else's homes from theft.

Since Ootoyans' schedules and dietary needs vary widely, they've migrated away from the idea of discrete meals at fixed times, with the notable exception of dinner. Instead, Ootoyans snack throughout the day. Visitors expecting a hearty breakfast are in for disappointment, as Kwanlai still runs on grains and seeds, with relatively little fruit, vegetables, or seafood, and almost no meat of any kind. However, over the last century, prosperity—relative to the centuries of subjugation, at least—has diversified Ootoyan palettes. Though red meat remains virtually nonexistent, fish-based snacks and meals have become affordable and popular, thanks to Kwanlai's alliance with Xidao. The lack of formal daytime meals, coupled with steadily rising incomes, means that street vendors and hawkers selling snacks and treats are everywhere, even in rural settlements. Takoyaki, battered and fried octopus, has become a national favorite ever since Wanshou's attacks.

After the sun sinks behind the Kimu Mountains, Kwanlai truly comes alive. Ootoyans have learned to prize their leisure time, and crowds gather to enjoy performances of all sorts. Listening to stories told by elders is the oldest and most common way to pass the early evenings. Traditionally, this art form involves call and response couplets, ensuring each generation knows the stories word for word, though this practice is losing favor. Plays and concerts have begun rivaling the elders' tales, much to the chagrin of traditionalists. Creative elders in Hisuikarasu now blend the art forms; their productions retain the oral traditions and add performers to physically embody the stories. Those who prefer less public relaxation flock to tea houses, though these, too, are often noisy.

While Kwanlai nights begin with a frenzy of activity, they taper off before midnight. Most Ootoyans are home before the midnight drums that signal the end of revelry and the beginning of dinner. While most Ootoyans live with their extended relatives, they often perform different work during the day and do not see each other; dinner is the only consistent time for families to bond. This importance means that missing dinner is usually a sign of trouble or impending marriage. Either way, the absent diner can expect badgering questions upon their return.

The intensely familial nature of Kwanlai dinners closes them off from most guests. Innkeepers often provide dinner for their customers, but lodgers are expected to eat in their rooms. Anyone invited to eat dinner in Kwanlai has effectively been adopted by the family. Naturally, turning down such an invitation is one of the gravest insults in the country.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Tengu is not a tonal language, but presents different challenges for some: differentiating between c, k, q, and kk, with c and k sounding like the c in "scar" and the aspirated k in "kite," respectively. The q and kk sounds have the same relationship as c and k, but with the tongue further back. Tengu also separates g and gh, as well as ch and tch, with gh and tch being the aspirated versions. The only other troublesome sound is the ai sound, which is a diphthong similar to the ie in "science."

Aikio: ie-Kee-oh
Aicio: ie-kee-oh
Hei Feng: hay fehng
Hisuikarasu: hee-soo-ee-Kah-rah-soo
Kimu: Kee-moo
Kwanlai: Kwahn-lie
Nagaiyamatsu: nah-gie-yah-mah-tsoo
Qiki Yamate: qi-Ki yah-mah-teh
Seidoyaji: say-doh-yah-jee
Sutarai-Gongen: soo-tah-rie gohn-gehn
Todorokaze: toh-doh-roh-Kah-zeh
Xaikon: shie-Kohn
Xaicon: shie-kohn



TODOROKAZE

A YEAR IN KWANLAI

As a coastal, tropical nation, Kwanlai has warm and humid weather most of the year, making it hard to tell the season without a calendar. The start of the growing season is unmistakable, however. Warm sea breezes from Xidao swirl with cool mountain air from the Kimu Mountains, summoning torrential rainfall nearly every day from late summer to late autumn. The clouds' bounty floods the fields and reminds everyone why their homes stand atop stilts. Even in modern Kwanlai, yearly life revolves around the rainy season; its artisanal and mineral exports still pale in comparison to its agricultural industries.

Alcohol, coffee, and tobacco are Kwanlai's chief exports, all entirely dependent on the year's rainfall. The nation's tobacco, requiring better drainage than Kwanlai's soil can provide, is grown in thick, raised planters on Kwanlai's traditional stilted buildings. Once harvested, the cash crop is dried in huts above the smoky bamboo fires that give Ootoyan tobacco its characteristic flavor. Though Kwanlai exports very little rice or buckwheat, the grains fuel the alcohol industry, particularly kwanlaishu (rice wine) and mugiski (buckwheat whiskey).



The official end of the rainy season is not the first sunny week, but **Hatchling Week** in Neth. Despite the name, the celebration also honors the farmers and elders of each settlement. For the first two days, Ootoyans lavish hatchlings and young children with gifts and games. Sneakball games are particularly popular. Most cities begin a children's tournament just before Hatchling Week, using the final game to kick off the first day. The middle day recognizes the hard work of farmers, with each person receiving a single kernel of rice or buckwheat from a ceremonially harvested stalk, thanking the farmers, and eating it. The final two days see the younger generations reciting and reflecting on their elders' deeds and stories.

After the merriment of Hatchling Week, farmers begin the arduous task of harvesting their crops and preparing them for transport. By mid-autumn, thousands of farmers take to the roads, hauling tons of crops to larger towns. There, wholesale merchants buy and aggregate harvests, splitting off some shipments for local consumption or processing and sending most of the rest south to Tianjing or east to the coast. In the winter, the roads teem with traders and merchants hauling their wares to the next leg of their journey. Early spring is a time of great wealth for Ootoyans, and Kwanlai's most important holidays create obvious opportunities for spending.

In late Pharast, Kwanlai commemorates the overthrow of the Lung Wa with a pair of holidays on the final Oathday of the month. The first, **Feather Day**, celebrates the coming together of the five largest clans to form a collective fighting force, much as feathers form wings. Feather Day is a day of national unity, intended to bring together the clans and erase the divisions that pull at the fabric of Kwanlai. It is a secular holiday, with adherents of all faiths celebrating the victory together, contrasting with its sister holiday, held in the evening.

Starlight Evening bears heavy religious overtones. Though all Ootoyans are welcome and most participate, the Hei Feng and Desna-centricity of the holiday is impossible to ignore. Priests of both religions regale crowds with accounts of local heroism during the Feather and Starlight Rebellion, being sure to point out moments where victory stemmed from Hei Fengan unpredictability or passion as well as Desnan artistry or luck. In cities, the priests begrudgingly include more stories from the clans' warriors, though even these tales bear at least a mention of the gods.

CULTURE

The site of suffering and atrocity, Kwanlai shakily rises above the ashes of its past, becoming the land of broken dreams being cemented back together. The work doesn't bother the Ootoyans; they're used to hard times, making do with less, and turning that less into treasure. The Kwanlai idiom "hands are golden," means that through time and labor, they can overcome inequity. Wealthier nations might build



dams to shape the flow of rivers away from cities, but Kwanlai can simply put their buildings on stilts and let the water flow beneath. Such construction is just as difficult, but instead of expensive concrete, builders merely need more bamboo, and there's always more of that.

These stilted buildings are a characteristic feature of Kwanlai, and still stand tall even in cities with robust drainage systems. The only places in Kwanlai without stilted buildings are Kwanlai's mountain communities. There, tall construction presents a challenge to Hei Feng, one he's all too eager to meet.

Other Ootoyans' adaptations to harsh circumstances include their notorious candor and assumption that everyone accurately conveys their needs. When every crumb is precious, anyone too polite to ask for food starves. Some outsiders might view the patrons shouting for service in tea houses as just another facet of Kwanlai's noisy evenings, but they quickly learn otherwise, as servers repeatedly pass them by until they voice their needs.

Ootoyans tend to be religious, with Hei Fengans and Desnans drastically outnumbering all other worshippers. Several Kwanlai holidays explicitly focus on Hei Feng and Desna worship, or at least extol the deities' deeds. While hard-line factions like the Hei Fengan **Sunderstorm Covenant** see this as their path toward a Hei Feng theocracy, nationalizing religious holidays is actually encouraging a growing number of Ootoyans to observe more than one faith.

The expulsion of Lung Wa also brought alcohol to the forefront. While Ootoyans don't consume much alcohol as a country, they produce a massive amount of it. The traditional beverages are kwanlaishu rice wine and mugiski whiskey, but they've been losing ground due to a joint venture between the Kwanlai and Bachuan governments: dragon's tongue. The liquor is composed of a blend of kwanlaishu, mugiski, peppers, and spices, creating a fiery beverage that appeals to Ootoyans' often tremendous spice tolerance. The governments encourage tourism and consumption with an annual dragon's tongue drinking competition in the spring.

Ootoyans approach clothing as they do most things: intensely pragmatically. Nothing buttons when a cord or knotted belt could do the job, and loose, adjustable clothing rules over layers. Straw and bamboo shoes or tengu geta round out daily wear in Kwanlai. Because Kwanlai has few farmed mammals and no cotton, virtually all clothing is composed of bamboo, straw, wood, or wood cloth, with the latter being the most common by far. Only wealthy Ootoyans wear fur, leather, or ray skin. Wood cloth exemplifies the tengu philosophy that "hands are golden." Without the money for imported textiles, Ootoyans decided that beating bamboo and pine trees into fibers, spinning them into yarn, and weaving them into cloth was the easiest path. While unconventional, wood cloth performs as well as any other textile and its raw materials cost nearly nothing.



YAMATE QIKI



NUREBA



NOYAKI FUUN



SUSUME KENKO

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

The clans of Kwanlai are systems of family, but these familial networks treat blood and adopted relatives equally. The nephilim, kitsune, athamarus, Tian-Mins, and Tian-Shus that Lung Wa forcibly resettled in Kwanlai are now as much a part of Ootoyan clans as anyone. Just five years ago, Councilor Ure Utsubo of Seidoyaji made Kwanlai history as the first athamaru to become a voting member of the Seven-Fold Council.

Kwanlai is ostensibly led by the **Seven-Fold Council**, the misleadingly named council of elders, as Lady Sutarai-Gongen holds the real power, steering discussions and influencing votes. Fortunately for Kwanlai, Sutarai-Gongen has proven benevolent. The Seven-Fold Council itself represents twenty-five clans, though only five major clans have full membership. The other twenty recognized clans share two votes. Clans not officially recognized don't even have a token role in national governance. Though none of them have pressed the issue, resentment simmers.

A woman of celestial and tengu descent, Lady **Sutarai-Gongen** (righteous female half-celestial tengu cleric) hails from the priesthood of Hei Feng. She's traveled Golarion as a healer and warrior, meting out violence and compassion as necessary. Some claim she first materialized as the lightning bolt striking Hei Feng's old shrine in Todorokaze, burning it to the ground, but sparing the priests and worshippers within. As a national leader, she presents a warm image transcending religious differences. Despite her devotion to Hei Feng, she's popular among Desnans, followers of the **Monkey King**, and Ootoyans who don't commit to a single deity. Ironically, her greatest detractors come from her own priesthood; hard-line members of the Sunderstorm Covenant regularly demand she make Hei Feng Kwanlai's official god. When they do, she simply smiles, politely listens, and continues with her work: building a stable political and economic base for Kwanlai, shoring up its weaknesses, such as the rifts between clans, and continuing to prepare for Wanshou's inevitable third invasion.

Head of the Kimu Mountains' Yamate clan and voting member of the Seven-Fold Council, Councilor **Yamate Qiki** (uptight female tengu general) guards Kwanlai's western borders, a duty she takes more seriously than is healthy for anyone. Her scouts have been reporting signs of Shenmen incursions for years, but she's unable to take real action without provoking a deadly diplomatic or military response. Compounding the issue, smugglers operating out of Todorokaze regularly exchange contraband with the Shenmen.

Charged with defending Kwanlai's most dangerous border, Councilor **Wanami Kkou** (gleeful nonbinary tengu artillerist) and their clan face down Wanshou. Trained as a construction foreperson, they're accustomed to martially focused people underestimating them, something they exploit with unconventional solutions to military problems. Unfortunately, experimental border defenses require thorough testing, something impossible to perform at the border without tipping off Wanshou. Of course, they don't just need field testers they can trust; they're also hungry for new technologies.

The wealthiest person in Kwanlai and the leader of the clan that founded Ootoya many centuries ago, Councilor **Nureba** (canny male tengu kachou) goes by his famous surname only. When not on council business, he's Hisuikarasu's governor. There's hardly any enterprise that he's not connected to somehow. Getting into his good graces—or successfully convincing others of his approval—is the surest way into any deal. Of course, that's only for the legal side of Hisuikarasu's economy. The city's two thieves' guilds have no love for him and want to embarrass him. The dock-based **Karasuguchi** guild would love to steal his ship. On the other side of town, the **Kind Faces** dream of pulling a con on him, but his bodyguards are entirely too familiar with their membership.

An elder of the Noyaki clan, **Noyaki Fuun** (pensive male tengu storyteller) trusts in the power of Ootoyan oral tradition. Unfortunately, an increasing amount of new knowledge is recorded only on paper, leaving traditionalists like him out of the loop. Worse, the modern shift from oral knowledge to paper has meant the

knowledge of some of Kwanlai's elders is at risk of being lost. Fuun doesn't have the resources to make transporting stories from remote villages to him profitable, but he can offer a few gold pieces, as well as his considerable store of information on people from across Kwanlai.

As a priest of Sun Wukong, **Susume Kenko** (incendiary female tengu provocateur) knows that getting ahead of everyone else is the only way to get what you need. To that end, she's on a mission to stir up resentment among religious extremists like the Hei Fengan Sunderstorm Covenant. By provoking them into doing something rash, like denouncing Desna and other deities, Kenko hopes that they'll lose all public support, disempowering the extremists.

Cities and Locations

Aside from Kwanlai's heavily militarized northern border with Wanshou, Kwanlai's hills and mountains teem with farming, logging, and mining communities. Though few of these settlements garner much attention, one rose to infamy several years ago: **Yiangma**, a small mountain town briefly corrupted by a **qlippoth**. As the nation has few rivers suitable for shipping and the hilly terrain makes overland shipping slow, its most prosperous region is its coast, as evidenced by its many port cities.

Hisuikarasu

Centrally located on the coast, the capital of Kwanlai is symbolically powerful for Kwanlai's people. As the former seat of Imperial Lung Wa's control, the Feather and Starlight Rebellion's victory here ensured that Lord Som Heu Wa was powerless to stop the rest of the uprising. In addition to Kwanlai's leadership, the capital also houses the mostly submerged Xidao embassy. Having a diplomat on hand has fueled the alliance between Kwanlai and the oceanic kingdom. Minkai and Tianjing also have embassies here, though theirs are decidedly less wet.

Beyond its historical and political importance, Hisuikarasu leads Kwanlai in tonnage flowing in and out of its harbor. On any given day, around 100,000 gp worth of cargo rests in the city's harbor, only some of which is stolen without the approval of Karasuguchi, the thieves' guild for the docks. Surprisingly, members of the Kind Faces, Hisuikarasu's other thieves' guild, are rarely to blame for that, as they concentrate more on fleecing tourists in the theater district than burglary.

Nagaiyamatsu

This medium-sized city straddles the **Sanga River**, Kwanlai's widest and deepest river, making Nagaiyamatsu the only freshwater and saltwater port in Kwanlai. The port also has the dubious honor of being the city closest to Tianjing's infamously haunted **Kangshur Island.** While prosperous, Nagaiyamatsu's history halts further growth. Nagaiyamatsu began as a cluster of river delta farms, but the imperials forcibly relocated them, replacing them with a hybrid city of stone and floating bamboo. Since then, the city's edge abuts the displaced farms, whose owners refuse to yield more ground.

Todorokaze

As the only city in the Kimu Mountains, Todorokaze draws scores of travelers; it's an essential stopping point for any caravans shipping goods through the mountains. More importantly, it boasts the largest Hei Feng shrine in Tian Xia. Tempestuous weather rules Todorokaze's nights. Lightning rods dot the city, flanking all roads within city limits. During storms, they glow under curtains of lightning.

International Relations

With the shared threat of Wanshou's hunger for territory, Xidao and Kwanlai are strong allies. Beyond mutual defense treaties, they support each other's maritime trade. Kwanlai also enjoys close relations with Tianjing; beyond commercial interests, they also have an intellectual exchange program, with dozens of creative, religious, and scholarly experts crossing the border each year on 5-year fellowships.



WANAMI KKOU

Lingshen

Nations

LINGSHEN
Capital: Xiwu
Government: Monarchy
Ruler: None



Peoples

Humans
Kitsune
Nagaji
Tengu

Languages

Nagaji
Tien

Factions

The Cut

Shattered Lotus

Religions

Abadar

Irori

Hei Feng

Yaezhing

Resources

Armor / Weapons

Ceramics

Livestock

Ore

Produce

Seafood

Stone

EMPIRE OF ETERNAL ARMIES

Lingshen is a nation with a proud warrior tradition. Its former king, King **Huang Shixin**, made Lingshen powerful and feared after the fall of the Lung Wa empire. He, along with his 11 children, once ruled the land with military might and the absolute certainty that force would win the day. Now King Shixin is gone. Lingshen continues to show a strong facade to the world, but behind closed doors, it finds itself uncertain how to move forward. It attempts to project stability but stagnates, its readiness turning to hesitation.

Modern Lingshen is in a state of detente, continuing to train and develop its military but unwilling to make overt advances against its neighbors, who have become strong in their own right. With the nations of **Kaoling**, **Songbai**, **Quain** and more pressed closely against its borders, Lingshen bides its time. During his life, King Shixin likewise encouraged his children to plot and fight against one another, rewarding whoever proved strongest. After his death, the royal heirs continued to fight. Lingshen now suffers from the lack of a single strong leader.

Upon the announcement of Shixin's death, royal counselors unsealed his final proclamation of inheritance. None of his children would ascend to the throne by birthright alone; instead, feeling that no particular candidate was strong enough to inherit based upon their own merits, Shixin instructed his royal engineers to build a machine that would be capable of testing the endurance of the next ruler of Lingshen—the ***Keystone***, a stone hexagon three feet across. When at rest, it's kept atop a sturdy pillar of striated white marble at the center of the palace in **Xiwu**, directly in front of the royal throne. To attempt the challenge, one must lift the *Keystone* from its pedestal. It can be held overhead, cradled, borne across the back, or elevated by any other method of lifting the stone using only one's body. No external magical or supportive items are allowed beyond simple, non-magical clothing. However, lifting the *Keystone* is no easy feat. While there are no physical connections, the *Keystone* has a magical connection to the lands of Lingshen, supporting six powerful pillars placed along the edges of Lingshen's territory. Lifting the *Keystone* for more than an instant is impossible for any normal person, as each of Shixin's children found when they attempted the feat.

Though the royal heirs don't know it, this is all part of King Shixin's final plan. Upon his death, his soul was placed inside a unique constructed body, one that was prepared using the most advanced magics his wizards commanded. Shixin retains his personality and intelligence but has gained the immortal body of an unstoppable construct. Though this feat was long thought impossible, the most brilliant minds of Lingshen found the application of **sun orchid elixir** to the body in the moments before death allowed for a reinvigoration that kept Shixin strong and focused, ready to be transferred to a new vessel. Now, he bides his time, planning to lift the *Keystone* with his renewed strength and prove to all that he's still the strongest of his bloodline.

Unfortunately, King Shixin's mind, while strong, has been twisted by the process used to transfer his essence into a new body. His ambitions have grown beyond merely ruling of Lingshen. Instead, he considers himself a true immortal and plans to rule Lingshen forever and someday supplant the **Eternal Emperor**. He now gathers power for himself, obsessed with a grand rebirth that will prove his reign has been favored by the heavens. He has settled on the day of an upcoming solar eclipse as the most fortunate time to reveal himself. In the meantime, Shixin has instructed his operatives among former and active members of the military to gather a faction of ultra-loyal soldiers willing to follow their king beyond death.

GEOGRAPHY

Lingshen lies in the central west region of Tian Xia, bordering many prominent nations. To the north lie the



HUANG SHIXIN



Shanguang Desert and **Kaoling**, to the east are **Songbai** and **Shenmen**, and to the south are Lingshen's rival Successor States, **Po Li** and **Quain**. Its northern border runs across the **Sea of Eels**, while its western border ends with the **Sea of Ghosts**. The nation's northern border is denoted by the **Tuunma River**, and the **Black Pine River** flows from the Sea of Eels through Lingshen and into the **Wall of Heaven** mountains.

In the eastern reaches of Lingshen lies **Danjing** and the site of a gigantic crystal pillar that predates all known Tian Xia history. While it could possibly be a natural growth, its perfection makes the notion seem impossible. It emits a gentle hum that many people find calming. Nagaji have settled here in large numbers. Curiously, no other crystals are to be found near Danjing—no mines, no caves. The crystal stands alone. Many wizards, sorcerers, and alchemists have traveled to Danjing, claiming the crystal is a magical item or promotes the development of magic. The claim would be hard to disprove with so many practitioners of magic having made the city their home. The result is that unlike most of Lingshen, Danjing is less technologically dependent and has more access to magic. It's also more diverse, attracting many outsiders. Sometimes the wealthy or influential will sponsor a team to try and solve some mystery of the crystal, seeing how far it extends under the ground or if it can be drilled into. Thus far, the crystal has resisted all such attempts and seems to be impermeable.

In the north lies **Heisong Forest**, known for its splendid groves of pine trees that give the land a fragrant air and carpet it with needles. This region caters to craftspeople and lovers of trees. Many tengu and kitsune can be found in Heisong, among communities that blend a love of nature with skillful architecture. Heisong has a strong artistic collective that makes music, poetry, and paints. It's said by the people of Heisong that the Lingshenese love of calligraphy began here when a noble of the court attempted to build a squat castle inside the city boundaries. A local artist resisted the attempt by writing their argument in such a beautiful hand that the noble immediately abandoned the plans to build. Of all the regions of Lingshen, Heisong is the least fortified, but many powerful magicians and devotees of nature of make Heisong their home. When threatened, the trees and plants rise up to defend their cities. Deer, elk, boars, and bears have been seen patrolling the forest bounds. The people of Heisong know their love of the land makes them strong.

A DAY IN LINGSHEN

Life in Lingshen requires a strong sense of nationalism. Its people are quick to challenge one another over most topics. Common mishaps like jostling a stranger can lead to exchanges that seem hostile to outsiders—raised voices, aggressive postures, and strong eye contact are typical, but rarely do such confrontations become serious. Lingshenese

enjoy these moments of challenge and response, showing respect to those who display confidence and wit. Despite this seeming volatility, the people of Lingshen are unlikely to be involved in duels, a ritual whose weight and significance they understand. The most severe offenses could be resolved by duels, but more commonly, they're hashed out in contests of wrestling, archery, or even calligraphy. In general, Lingshenese highly prize skill, and when given a chance to show their superiority, they'll take it.

Most of those employed in common professions live a life similar to laborers elsewhere, rising before dawn and working into the evening. Little attention is paid to those in labor professions, who in turn often do their best to avoid being caught up in the machinations of warriors and nobles. Laborers are often paid in scrip or company money whenever possible, but legally, this compensation must have a value in Lingshenese coin. Wealthy property and asset owners use gold for currency, while wealthier sculptors and potters use common coins made of bronze.

Young people in Lingshen train in the common arts from an early age. By age 10, every Lingshenese should know how to wrestle, how to hold a spear, and how to shoot a bow. Those with the resources to do so will practice horse riding as well. By age 13, Lingshenese interested in military service can either join the common ranks—applying directly for military service, where they receive state lodging and begin daily training—or join a military academy, which will prepare them for more specialized service. Most academies are intended for officers and focus on tactics. More specialized schools focus on particular aspects of war, with magic and siege weapons being more common. The rarest of these institutions focus on spy work, assassination, and infiltration. At least one academy in Lingshen specializes in developing assets who can blend in with people of other lands perfectly, teaching dialect, modes of dress, and even specific regional specialties.

The officer ranks aren't only for those who attend an academy. The Lingshenese military doesn't hesitate to promote from within. For a soldier to become an officer, their commander must recognize their skill and dedication, or they must win a military trial. The trials that allow promotions occur frequently, usually no less than once per moon. These trials are held near the military company's barracks; each soldier who's interested receives a chance to compete in wrestling, spear fighting, and archery. While wrestling typically pits candidates against an opponent, spears and archery are practiced against targets. Those who score enough points in these skills are then allowed to demonstrate their riding on a fixed course, where they're expected to avoid obstacles and shoot arrows while maintaining a high speed. For the midrank officer trials, they must also compete against another midrank officer, attempting to unseat their opponent from a horse using wrestling, sword fighting, or archery, the latter two being practiced with blunted weapons. Their opponent will attempt to unseat them as well, and midrank officers tend to relish the challenge.

Common food in Lingshen is based around wheat and breads. Protein is scarce but important, with the greater share being kept by the government for the military. Most civilians make do with eggs, peanuts, and some fish or meat. Popular foods include steamed bread buns, ground wheat prepared into porridge, and dumplings.

After work or training, Lingshenese spend their leisure time gambling at cards and dice, wrestling, riding horses, and practicing archery. While these activities have a military application, they're also practiced for fun. Trick shooting, steeple riding, and more keep the people of Lingshen entertained.

A YEAR IN LINGSHEN

Many of Lingshen's holidays are military parades that follow no schedule beyond a noble's jingoistic whims. Instead, most citizens measure the year by the arrival of agents from Lingshen's most prominent government branches:

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Lingshen schools attempt to standardize Tien across both the nation and the continent, aided by very standard pronunciation rules in their dialect.

A sounds like 'Aw', as in the English words 'swarm' and 'awful.'

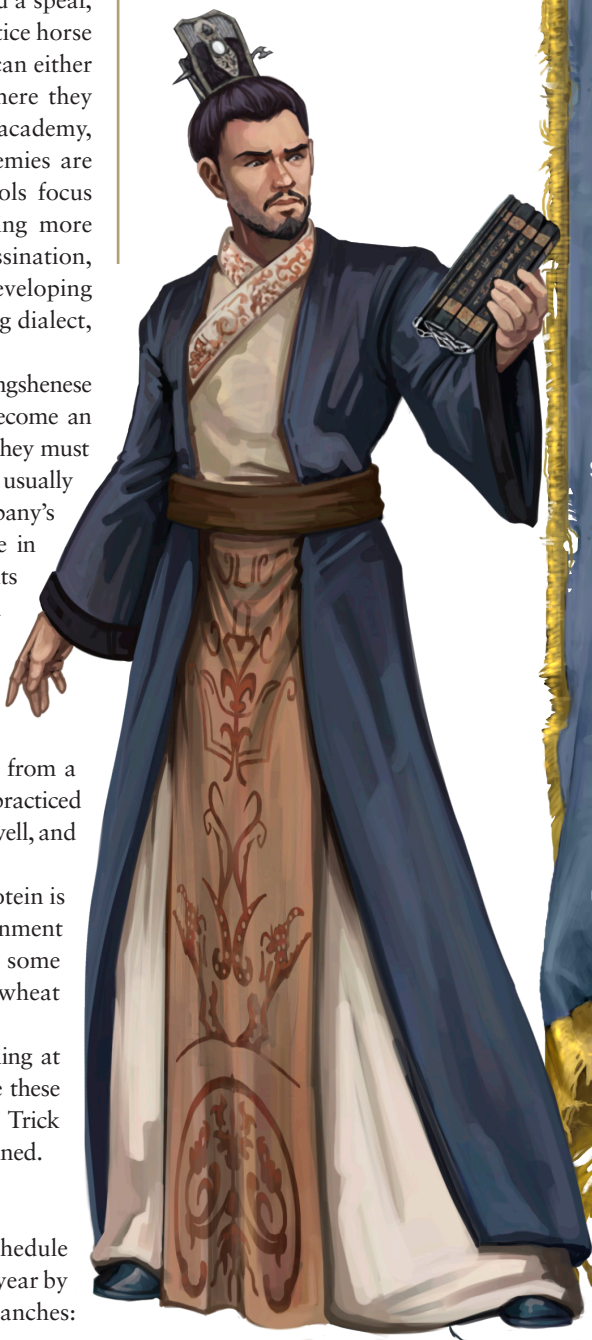
C sounds like the 'cz' in 'czar.'

I sounds like the 'i' sound in 'in' or 'it.'

X sounds like the 'sh' in 'sheep' or 'hush.'

Y sounds are subtle; generally, **Yi** sounds 'y' like in 'yip.' The emphasis is on the 'i' sound, so more 'yIp' than 'Yip.'

Zh sounds like the 'j' in 'jump' or 'just.'



the **Bureau of Assessment**, the **Judicial Magistrates,** and the **Inspectors of Conformation**.

The Bureau of Assessment deals with taxes and the value of personal property. All citizens are required to pay taxes, but the vast majority of the working class can't do so in coin. Farmers, hunters, and fishers must present a portion of their catch to a local assessor to receive credit for their contribution. Laborers of most kinds have their taxes removed from what they would be paid before they ever receive a single chit or scrip.

The Judicial Magistrates uphold the law of the realm. At the highest level, judges examine cases for legal merit and bring the most interesting or necessary points before the royal heirs to determine what must become law. The cases these senior judges debate come from mid-level judges who read the reports and hear the orations from local judges at the lowest level, who typically deliver them after a judgment has already been rendered. The local judges are responsible for hearing cases from government officials and the people. In cities, these judges have a particular district they represent throughout the year. In rural areas, judges have to travel a circuit, which includes traversing a portion of the state with a group of military bailiffs; in each place they visit, they take up lodging in a state house or inn for a few nights. During that time, they'll judge any criminals awaiting sentencing, hear any arguments from government officials regarding civil matters, then listen to any petitions from the citizens.



The Inspectors of Conformation are tasked with making sure Lingshenese goods and services are of expected quality. The common saying attributed to the inspectors is, "If you make nine good arrows and one bad, throw them all out." Both the military and civil government of Lingshen operate on such a large scale that quality control is considered extremely important. Food must be edible. No counterfeit or substitute meats can be sold. Furthermore, goods must be of the same quality—not to say they must be excellent, but they must all be the same.

The people of Lingshen tend to praise the inspectors out one side of their mouths and curse them out the other. Most appreciate clean food and reliable goods, but the added pressure of an inspection makes it difficult for the poor to make a living. Farmers must take extra care with the grain they sell, and crafters must advertise their wares cautiously. The inspection system favors larger merchants who can afford to make extra product and throw away substandard wares. In cities, the inspectors have a large presence and regularly visit markets. In rural areas, they travel in large groups, choosing their targets carefully and meticulously auditing them before moving on to another.

CULTURE

A common Lingshenese idiom is "Forged metal makes strong spears," meaning that refining something makes it stronger. A large swath of land in the country's center is known as the **Battle Forges**, where the military has built its center of development and training. Weapons are inspected, stored, and distributed from here. Siege engines are constructed. The military prides itself on practicing the classical arts of war: grappling, spear fighting, and archery—the common arts that every soldier must develop. Officers must also practice horse riding, swordplay, and mounted archery. Those who wish to command train in tactics that include large-scale magic, battalion movements, espionage, and siege weaponry.

The Battle Forges are also a proving ground, home to many military academies and the state engineering college. In the latter, physics, mathematics, navigation, and other scientific pursuits are taught, and there, academics must make a difficult choice: let their work support the state and help foster war, or stop their research. Many innovations have come from the college, not only those that apply to war, but also to civil engineering and improving the lives of citizens. Such developments keep Lingshen safe, but the true focus of the college is developing and perfecting weapons.



Lingshenese place a high value on relationships. They understand the importance of family, partnership, and community; when one Lingshenese speaks of a relationship to another, the common response is, "Does it make you strong?" to which the best answer is yes. Another common way to express this sentiment is, "What makes you strong?" The responder is invited to answer with details about their partners, their offspring, and so on.

Outside of the Lingshen, the most infamous aspect of its culture is the **Cradle of Immortality**, the birthplace of the nation's **terra-cotta soldiers**, which are the most important part of Lingshen's military strategy. The nation has long depended on these constructs, animated by the spirits of fallen Lingshenese soldiers. For each living soldier who falls in battle, a new construct is raised and then animated by their spirit. The particulars of the process are a state secret known only to a select few.

When people gossip about Lingshen, the terra-cotta soldiers come up frequently, for not only are they formidable, but there seems to be an endless supply of them. Many fear the magic that makes such a feat possible, for no one has ever witnessed Lingshenese wizards scouring the fields after a battle, plucking up souls. The method that raises these spirits remains a mystery. Even soldiers who have long retired from service are candidates for reanimation. For those who serve Lingshen with pride, the opportunity to become a terra-cotta soldier is a worthy goal—even the injured or elderly can be of use to the nation once again.

Around the Cradle, there are hundreds of quarries that gather the clay needed to produce these soldiers. The Cradle itself is a series of long buildings clustered together. Inside each one are hundreds of terra-cotta soldiers being formed by craftspeople from raw clay. It's said that at first they all look alike—not identical, but similar in shape and form. They're typically separated by ancestry so that there are large buildings full of humans and others filled with a elves, kitsune, tengu, and more. Each wears the uniform and armor of the military and the standard arms of a Lingshenese soldier, all rendered in clay.

When the crafters have done their job, enchanters take over. Each casts protective spells on the clay that keeps it supple, allowing the spirit that will animate it to give the soldier the appearance the soul had in life. The process that animates a soldier is unknown to all but the most senior workers at the Cradle, who know that, below the surface, there's a great cavern that has been made into a magical repository, taking in the souls of fallen Lingshenese soldiers and inserting them into prepared terra-cotta vessels.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

The chancellors, envoys, and courtiers of Lingshen have one goal in mind: to keep any issue from becoming large enough to require a royal decree. King Shixin's heirs make every vote difficult, and anything they handle becomes fractured or worse, since they fight over any morsel of



HUANG ZHIWANG



HUANG YINGHUO



SHAN ZHIMING



LI MINGXIAN

power. Instead, the counselors work out whatever issues they can, spending state funds freely to allow important matters to be quickly dismissed. The result: a state in which anything can be accomplished if done quietly. For those counselors who fail to properly disguise or diminish their issues, they can be assured the royal heirs will treat them poorly.

King **Huang Shixin** (warmongering male formerly human construct fighter) was the most ruthless and powerful king in Lingshen's history. Always determined to be the strongest, Shixin slew each of his siblings despite the fact that they had no interest taking the throne. After a long and renowned reign, Shixin finally succumbed to the thralls of old age, but rather than dying peacefully, he had his soul secretly transferred into a specially prepared construct. A special elixir made with sun orchid flowers allowed Shixin to join with the vessel fully, his entire consciousness preserved. He plans to take the throne once again, as soon as the time is right. In the meantime, his loyal agents spread rumors of the **Eternal Emperor**'s impending return, a role that King Shixin intends to step into when he reemerges as a stepping stone to take over Po Li.

While none of Shixin's children has gathered the political clout and military might to declare themself the ruler of Lingshen, they all agree the country must stay united. Until a single heir emerges, they rule by committee. Of the 11 heirs, nine remain within Lingshen. To handle the most important matters of state, they cast lots with the majority winning the issue. Alliances are brief and bitter. Each of the heirs was forced to fight the others at some point; any respect they have for each other has been hard won.

Huang Rufei, the Shining Star (ruthless female human royal princess), is an unmatched general, peerless athlete, and ruthless fighter. From her long years acting under her father's command, Rufei never gives an opportunity to an opponent. She has sparred against her siblings for years and knows their strategies. Rufei's greatest failing is her strength, however. Each of the royal heirs knows that victory for her means defeat for them all, so whenever she comes close to winning, they team up against her.

The greatest reason that Huang Rufei isn't ruler of Lingshen, *Keystone* or no, is her brother **Huang Zhiwang**, the Cunning Spider (manipulative male human royal prince). His siblings all agree Zhiwang can tell someone exactly what they need to hear, but only when he wants them somewhere. Zhiwang is a peerless strategist but refuses to go to war in person. Many assassins, including those sent by his own siblings, have attempted to kill him, only to find themselves confronted with the most bizarre circumstances—a belt that falls off, dropping a poison blade to the floor; a crossbow bolt's head replaced with a blunted one; a length of garrote that gets snagged inside a pouch. The royal heirs speculate that Zhiwang is a sorcerer or that he has some captive spirit that keeps him safe. Whatever his power, they've yet to best the Cunning Spider.

Huang Yinghuo (determined female human royal princess) always understood that the challenges of royalty begins early. She withstood her first assassination attempt while still in the cradle, somehow managing to survive the bite of a venomous spider. Sixteen years later, after having survived through childhood, Yinghuo has made it her mission to keep the youngest and most vulnerable of the royal heirs alive: **Huang Yeban** (impressionable male human royal child), the youngest boy at 10; **Huang Yiwai** (athletic female human royal child), the nine-year-old girl who rides horses whenever she can; **Huang Jingcai** (picky female human royal child), eight years old, who'll only eat boiled noodles and sliced fruit. Unfortunately for Yinghuo, her efforts to keep her younger siblings alive doesn't mean they reciprocate her affection. Their other siblings regularly sway Yeban, Yiwai will agree with anyone who offers her a horse ride, and Jingcai hates change and votes against anything new—or anything that requires effort. Yinghuo does her best to keep them occupied, continue their training, and keep the other royal heirs away from her young charges.

The necromancer of the Cradle of Immortality is called **Laochong**, a nickname given by King Shixin. The "Old Worm" is responsible for the spells

that bring terra-cotta soldiers to life, but Laochong's true nature has never been made clear. Late at night, when sleep refused to come, King Shixin used to throw oracle bones to determine the truth, but he never found an answer. What's known is that Laochong has tremendous magic and uses it openly for only one purpose: to capture the souls of Lingshenese soldiers. When a soldier swears their oath to the crown, they're pricked with a needle that will bear a single drop of their blood. Laochong takes that blood and uses it to bind their souls to constructs upon their death. Laochong remains in their laboratory below the Cradle of Immortality, calmly taking pins one by one and casting spells that will catch souls into their apparatus. A few souls go missing every year. The record keepers can tell, but they wisely say nothing.

Li Mingxian (brilliant nonbinary human engineering college professor dissident) has served at Lingshen's engineering college for a number of years. Unfortunately, their work has been used for various military applications, which was never their intention. Therefore, they've decided that Lingshen must fall. Mingxian works with partners in Goka and Songbai to share important weaknesses in Lingshenese designs, weaknesses they ensure are propagated throughout the siege equipment likely to be deployed.

Shan Zhiming (exploitive male nagaji assassin), King of the Cinnabar Market and master of poisons, is a skillful rogue whose nagaji ancestry has led him to obtain a greater understanding of poisons than almost any other. Just as important is his familiarity and strong connections with the merchants of the **Cinnabar Market**. Every merchant there owes something to Zhiming, allowing him to easily move about with impunity.

Exploring Lingshen

The following are a sample of the prominent locations that can be found in Lingshen.

Cinnabar Market

A famous market known for the potent crimson stone that's emblematic of the spirit of the Lingshenese people. This stone is worn with pride by merchants working the stalls, a badge of their spirit and commitment to serving their nation. The Cinnabar Market serves two purposes: outwardly, as a market for raw goods and specialty wares and secretly, as a meeting place for thieves, assassins, forgers, and other rogues.

Xiwu

The capital of Lingshen, Xiwu is an immense fortified city crowned with towers. Its several ringed districts each requires passage through massive gates. The most famous district is Xiwu's Thousand Gables, whose roofs are all designed together to link and allow water to runoff so that people can walk without fear of getting wet in all but the most severe storms. It also stays cool and shady when it's sunny, a welcome change for the sweltering summers.

Xiwu's **Heron Bridge** is one of the largest wooden bridges in Tian Xia and an architectural marvel of the continent. Clever joints and machinery allow the bridge to fold up like a heron's leg in the event of floods, invasion, or other crises.

International Relations

Generally seen as the strongest of Lung Wa's Successor States, Lingshen is also the most bellicose, making its presence a threat to most other nations. With the fractious response of King Shixin's royal heirs, no central ruler exists to make diplomatic overtures, and other governments have little interest in bringing attention to themselves while Lingshen stays neatly distracted squabbling among itself.



HUANG RUFEI



Linvarre

Nations

LINVARRE
Capital: New Oppara
Government: Military Stratocracy
Ruler: General Jiayi Vannisar



Peoples

Elves
Humans
Planar Scions
Samsarans
Tengu

Languages

Taldane
Taltien
Tien

Religions

Abadar
Baekho
Irori
Lady Jingxi
Pharasma
Qi Zhong
Shelyn
Shizuru

Resources

Armor/Weapons
Books/Lore
Cheese
Grain
Iron Ore
Livestock/Wool
Mercenaries
Ships
Stone
Technology/ Gunpowder

KINGDOM OF THE REBORN LOTUS

Of all the Successor States in Tian Xia, Linvarre was the only one founded by a foreign power—and now the only one free from these restraints to shape its fate. Originally known as Amanandar, Linvarre was founded by **Taldor's** Eighth Army of Exploration under the command of General **Orphyrea Amanandar**. Desperate for her homeland to reclaim its former glory, Orphyrea sincerely believed forging a colony in the Dragon Empires was the key to rejuvenating Taldor. Despite this audacious plan, Orphyrea and her storm-battered fleet arrived in Tian Xia in 7108 IC, only two years after Imperial Lung Wa crumbled, and found the continent unpredictable and inhospitable. They sailed up the **Sea of Ghosts** and made landfall in **Shenmen**, where a series of undead ambushes forced them inland. Finally, they stumbled upon **Kamikobu**, an abandoned trade city that had become a battleground for bandit warlords, and an alliance of **Tianjing's** celestial-touched and **Zi Ha**'s samsarans barely contained the violence these ruffians unleashed. Seeing a means to an end, Orphyrea pledged her assistance in routing the bandits, requesting that she be allowed to create a new nation atop Kamikobu's wreckage.

This brazen appeal baffled Tianjing's and Zi Ha's representatives. Nevertheless, while the Taldans were exhausted and far from home, they still had enough numbers to tip the scales of combat. After the bandits' defeat, both states granted Orphyrea her wish, sensing opportunity with the arrival of these foreigners. Tianjing's celestial-touched children, keen to rebuild in the aftermath of Lung Wa's fall, realized that the Taldans could serve as a useful buffer between their land and Shenmen. Meanwhile, Zi Ha saw a possible place for the human offspring of samsarans to safely grow. And so Orphyrea received a wide swath of formerly lawless territory, and naming it after herself, **Amanandar** was born.

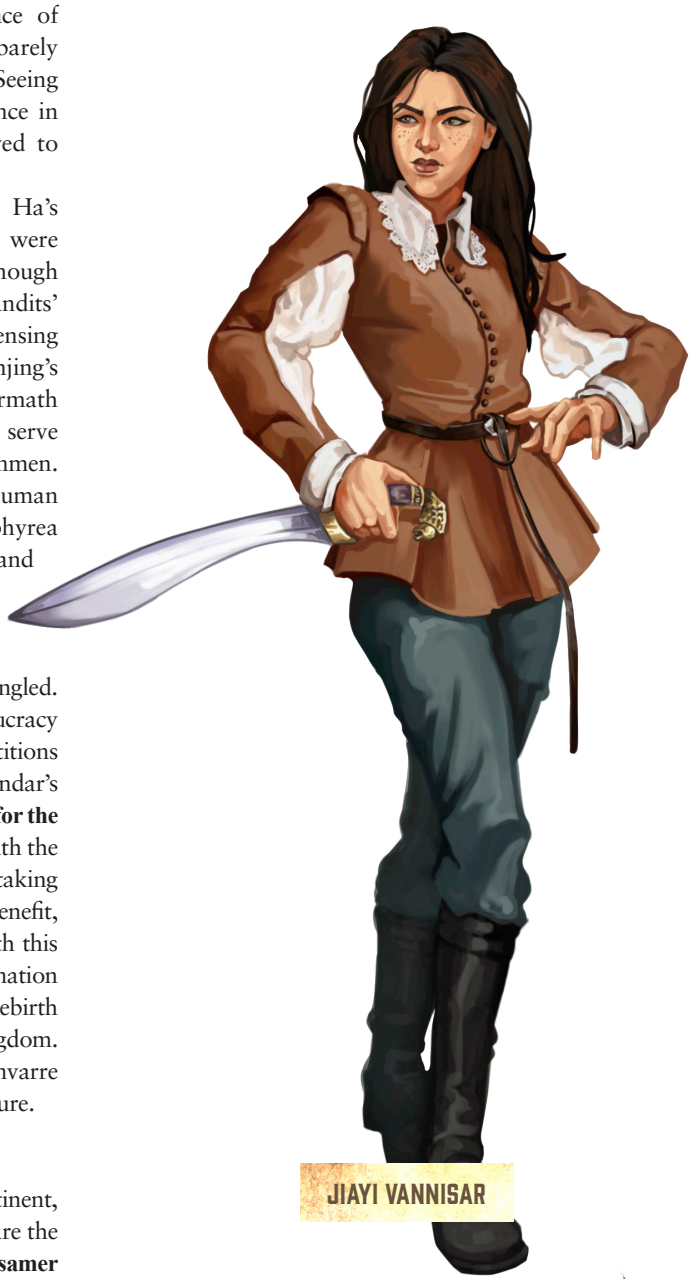
Amanandar never fulfilled Orphyrea's dream of a Taldan renaissance, but it still grew into a vibrant hub of mixed ancestries as Taldans and Tians intermingled. Over time, the locals became exasperated with bureaucracy and taxation from a land halfway across the globe; petitions for self-governance emerged following Amanandar's centennial. Taldor ignored these voices until the **War for the Crown** plunged the country into civil strife, ending with the progressive Princess **Eutropia Stavian** (*Legends* 42) taking the throne. Her ascension was to Amanandar's benefit, and the colony became independent in 7220 IC. With this independence came a new name: **Linvarre**, a combination of the Tien word for lotus—a flower associated with rebirth in Tian Xia—and an old Taldane word for kingdom. Now dubbed the Kingdom of the Reborn Lotus, Linvarre prepares for a bold destiny as it looks toward the future.

GEOGRAPHY

Linvarre lies at the heart of the Tian Xia continent, surrounded by three mountain ranges. To the north are the Zi Haian **Kelsang Mountains**, while Shenmen's **Gossamer Mountains** and Kwanlai's **Kimu Mountains** lie southward. The **Enlightened River**, typically called **Ilushe** by the Linvarran, weaves a vertical line through the state and serves as its main water source.

All of Linvarre's major cities are located within a day's march of the Ilushe, beginning with **New Oppara**, the capital. Built on the remains of Kamikobu, New Oppara is sheltered under Zi Ha's peaks and bathed in the Ilushe's mist as the river cascades down the **Enlightened Mountains**. Other major settlements include **Funako**, **Mallaru**, **Okim**, **Toduc Wa**, and **Vannisaria**. Of these communities, Mallaru has expanded the most to encompass land reclaimed from Shenmen and now occupies a position as Linvarre's only seaport.

Linvarre's climate is comparable to that of Taldor, with four seasons evident all year around. Ocean breezes from the Sea of Ghosts bring a welcome respite during hot summers, while cold winds blowing from the mountains



JIAYI VANNISAR



punctuate the winters. The pastures that spread beyond the Ilushe's banks are conducive to raising sheep and goats whose ancestors were brought to Tian Xia as part of General Amanandar's expedition. Wool and goat's milk are popular exports, only rivaled by mercenary services and the trade of Taldan-made goods.

A climate shift becomes evident near Linvarre's southern border, where the edges of Shenmen's **Specterwood** touch the Gossamer Mountain foothills and the remains of **Daigaki Castle**. This area is the former stomping grounds of **Tsubokandu**, one of the bandits who ruled Kamikobu. His spirit raised an undead militia a century after his defeat; while he was ultimately beaten again, the land around his castle remains colder than the surrounding bluffs. Soldiers from Mallaru cordon this area off and warn visitors to steer clear.

A DAY IN LINVARRE

A typical day in Linvarre is filled with rituals, foods, and conversations that all point to the Kingdom of the Reborn Lotus's special combination of cultures. Parents living in New Oppara or Toduc Wa, for instance, might rise with the dawn and prepare a meal of congee mixed with eggs, green onions, and slices of **tuam**—a pinkish meat made from salted pork that lasts for long periods of time and was introduced to Tian Xia by General Amanandar's army. Once the children rise, the whole family enjoys breakfast while chatting in **Taltien**, Linvarre's lively pidgin dialect that mixes words from both Taldane and Tien. Once breakfast ends, the children are off for a day of learning. Schooling became compulsory when Linvarre's current leader, General **Jiayi Vannisar**, ascended to the head of the country. Classes consist of reading, writing, and mathematics, along with Taldan and Linvarran history. Instructors conduct lessons in either formal Tien or Taldane and urge pupils to "speak properly," which inevitably fails as students revert to Taltien during the precious moments between class.

Each day has an hour of physical activity built into it, and most schools employ former soldiers who teach fighting styles. Typically, these styles include the buckler and falcata art known as **rondelero** and the battle techniques of the **Order of the Stalwart Fist**. Both align well with a nation of mixed ancestries since the first combines peasant dances with weapons traditionally used by Taldor's nobility, while the second fuses Tian and Qadiran fighting forms.

With their children away, parents depart for their jobs at one of Linvarre's thriving hawker centers. Eateries, forges, and all manner of shops that might lie scattered throughout towns in other nations are neatly organized in massive marketplaces throughout Linvarre. These centers function as the mercantile heart of the Kingdom of the Reborn Lotus. Most are open day and night, lending credence to the local saying: "Taldans sleep while Tians wake, but Linvarrans are up 24 hours a day."

As the sun sets, children and parents reunite for dinner, either at a hawker center or in the quiet of home. Evening gives time for families to bond, pursue hobbies, enjoy the arts, or engage in prayer, usually to a mixture of gods with large followings in Taldor—**Abadar**, **Irori**, and **Shelyn**, for instance—along with deities predominantly worshipped in Tian Xia, like **Lady Jingxi** and **Shizuru**.

Countryside living proceeds in a similar fashion, though rural Linvarrans spend a larger portion of time tending to crops and worshipping **Baekho**, the Lord of the Seasons, whom they thank for Linvarre's balanced climate. While even the smallest villages now have at least one elder sanctioned by the government to teach lessons, rural children generally receive less schooling than their urban peers due to the demands of agricultural life. Many supplement family income by working on the Ilushe ferries that extend from Mallaru and allow people and goods to flow from one end of Linvarre to the other.

A YEAR IN LINVARRE

A 12-month period in Linvarre is bookended by Founder's Day and the Grand Day of Independence, which respectively take place on the 7th of Abadius and the 23rd of Kuthona, serving as convenient markers for the beginning and end of the year. **Founder's Day**, also called Orphyrea's Day, marks when General Amanandar and her troops erected Taldor's flag on what had once been bandit territory. A giant mural of that historical moment, with the flag waving in the wind as Taldans stand alongside Tianjing's celestial children and Zi Ha's samsarans, is present in New Oparra's **Ten Thousand Lotus Temple**, which holds the ashes of Orphyrea and her army. Visiting the temple is a popular tradition for capital-dwellers, and elsewhere floating paper lanterns are lit and placed along the Ilushe as an ode to those who died in the battle against Kamikobu's warlords.

The **Grand Day of Independence** takes on a more festive veneer with the skies above every Linvarran city erupting with colorful fireworks, military units parading the streets, and marching bands constantly blasting the national anthem. The lion dance, which gained popularity in Amanandar thanks to the significance of lions in Taldor, is a common expression of celebration, and troupes can be seen and heard from dusk to dawn.

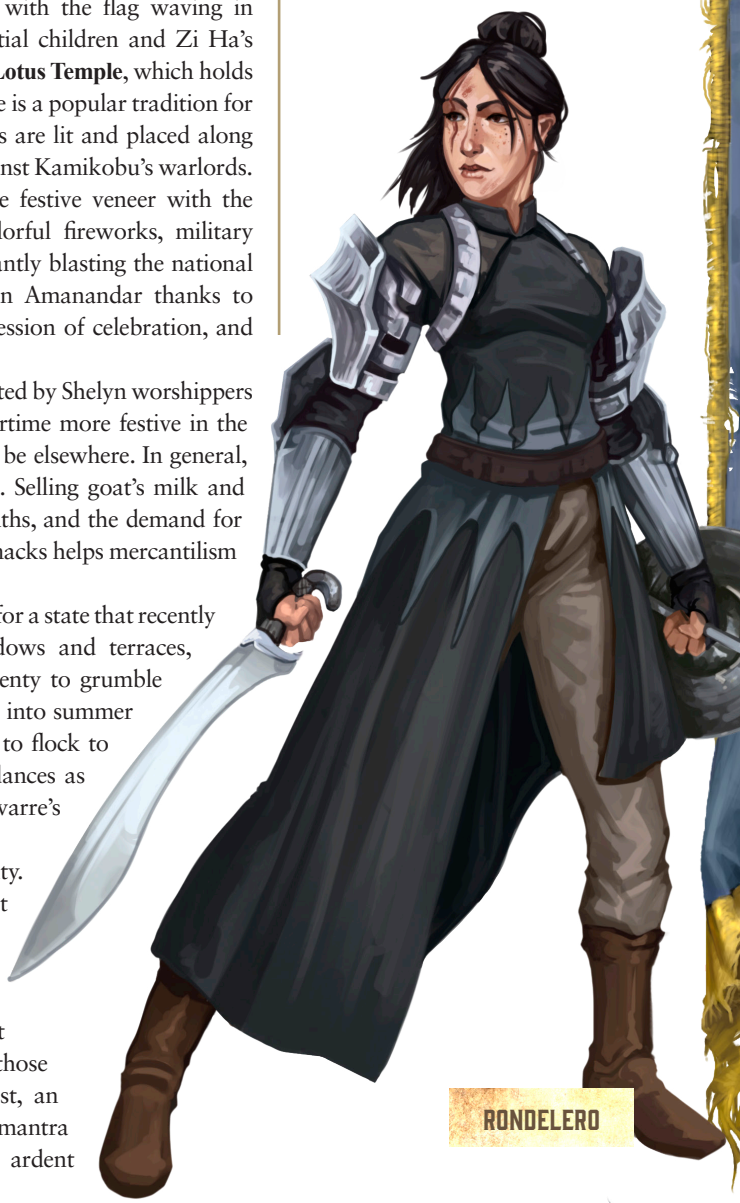
Both holidays, along with **Crystalhue**—a day venerated by Shelyn worshippers and devoted to courtship and romance—make wintertime more festive in the Kingdom of the Reborn Lotus than the season might be elsewhere. In general, winters aren't as harsh in Linvarre as in other states. Selling goat's milk and wool keeps local farmers aloft during the snowy months, and the demand for Linvarran weapons, armor, and other assorted knickknacks helps mercantilism flourish all year around.

Spring is regarded as a season of rebirth appropriate for a state that recently reinvented itself. Lotus petals are hung from windows and terraces, covering roads in pink and giving street sweepers plenty to grumble about at the end of each day. This tradition continues into summer when nearly the entire population of Linvarre seems to flock to the Ilushe's banks. Grandmothers practice riverside dances as youngsters frolic in the water, and members of Linvarre's military perform drills just a short distance away.

Autumn is a vital period for the farming community. **Market's Door**, a Church of Abadar holiday that celebrates the fall harvest, extends into an all-season affair in Linvarre's hawker centers. Fall also tends to be when mercenaries embark on quests and hawk their services in other Successor States. Linvarre's most famous adventurers in recent times numbered among those who assisted in the exorcism of Tsubokandu's ghost, an event that occurred in autumn. Since then, a popular mantra has emerged: "Falling leaves settle on the ground as ardent hearts leave home."

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Linvarre: lin-vaar
Audrya Vannisar: au-dri-yah van-ni-sar
Daigaki: dai-ga-kee
Funako: fu-na-ko
Gennius Bursio: jen-eh-us bur-si-oh
Ilushe: il-us-huh
Jiayi Vannisar: jya-yee van-ni-sar
Kamikobu: ka-mi-koh-bu
Kestrel Zentria: kest-ruhl zen-tri-ah
Kindra Vannisar: kin-drah van-ni-sar
Mallaru: mal-ya-ru
Orphyrea Amanandar: or-fuh-ri-yah a-man-an-dar
Oppara: oh-pa-ra
Stefanos Zentria: stef-an-os zen-tri-ah
Tagamallaru: ta-ga-mal-ya-ru
Tsubokandu: su-bo-kan-du
Toduc Wa: tu-duk wah



RONDELERO

CULTURE

Linvarran culture is an amalgamation of Taldan and Tian traditions, a fact reflected in the redone flag, which was adopted on the first Grand Day of Independence and designed to acknowledge Linvarre's heritage while distancing the state from its imperialist origins. When Linvarre was still known as Amanandar, its flag took inspiration from Taldor's, featuring green and blue halves punctuated by a throne and a crown. The current flag incorporates the same colors to pay tribute to Linvarre's roots, but five stylized lotus petals have replaced the regal symbols of Taldan leadership as a nod to the flower's local association with awakening and renewal.

The national anthem also reflects the country's unique heritage. The song can be sung in either Taldane or Tien, and both versions have the same refrain: "United together, our blood combines/We are Linvarre, may our glory shine." "Our blood combines" was specifically included in the medley to pay homage to Linvarran multiculturalism. According to New Oparra's bards, Jiayi Vannisar—who holds Taldan heritage from her mother and a blend of Tian-Shu and Tian-Hwan backgrounds from her father—requested that the composers insert this lyric to reflect what she felt was her nation's greatest strength.



When Linvarrans travel abroad, they're often described as a folk who look somewhat Avistani and somewhat Tian. Two out of every three Linvarrans have mixed ancestry, and intermarriage is a common occurrence. Taldans and Tian-Shus comprised the largest ethnicities for decades, but recent years have seen the explosive immigration of other groups. Elves and tengu currently constitute the largest growing percentages of the population, and Linvarre also has significant celestial-touched and samsaran enclaves thanks to the country's longstanding relationship with Tianjing and Zi Ha.

The Taltien dialect has achieved a degree of international notoriety. Some denigrate it as a wild mix of Tien phrases shoddily translated into Taldane, or Taldane words squeezed into the confines of Tien grammatical structures. Linvarrans take great pride in their linguistic mashup, though, and local scholars have pushed for Taltien's adoption as a global trade tongue, calling it the link between the two common trade languages in Tian Xia and Avistan. While one can rarely encounter an outsider fluent in Taltien, most foreigners can understand about 50 percent of a conversation if they strain their ears, and Linvarre's immigrants generally pick the language up within six months to a year.

There are a few major pastimes in Linvarre that serve as apt representations of the Successor State's distinctive traits. The first is the lion dance since the stylized creatures held by performers either resemble the **Grogrisant**, Taldor's legendary six-eyed lion (*Monsters of Myth* 30), or Baekho, who's depicted in Linvarre as a liger—a cross between a lion and a tiger. Dragon boat racing, a tradition imported from **Xa Hoi**, is practiced along the Ilushe during the summer months, but instead of featuring imperial dragons, Linvarre's dragon boats bear visages of the Avistani wyrms defeated during Taldor's **Dragon Plague**. Finally, the most popular game in Linvarre is **Coats of Arms**, which was one of the few amusements for Orphyrea Amanandar's troops during their long voyage from Avistan. Originally played via cards decorated with the heraldry of Taldor's nobility, the Linvarran variant of this dueling game bears the flags of Tian Xia's Successor States.

When Linvarre was still called Amanandar, all citizens between the ages of 16 and 45 were required to complete at least five years of military service, though these years didn't need to be fulfilled all at once. Locals were encouraged to keep armaments in their households and train regularly, and the threat of bandits attempting to reclaim the state was touted by the government as justification for constant vigilance. This mentality gave birth to a strong culture of sellswords renowned for their tactical prowess.



A cultural shift became evident in the decade prior to independence with the younger generation arguing that their home needed to progress beyond the image of a martial powerhouse. General Jiayi Vannisar solidified this change by ending conscription. Instead of army service, Jiayi instituted mandatory education, declaring that an erudite, well-rounded populace would prove 10 times more valuable than one that only valued swordplay. Linvarran children are now required to attend school until the age of 13, and further education is available to those with means.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

Orphyrea Amanandar founded her nation as a stratocracy, and Linvarre still retains this form of government—for now. The head of state is called the General, and when they die, rule passes to the second highest military officer in command, and so on down the line. For over a century, only those with Taldan heritage had access to these high-ranking positions, though all citizens could serve on a council of advisors called the General Staff.

Following the death of Audrya Vannisar, a matriarch descended from a noble Taldan bloodline who ruled for nearly three decades, her 27-year-old daughter became the youngest General in history—the same year that Linvarre gained independence. General **Jiayi Vannisar** (progressive female Linvarran human fighter) had risen through the military with such speed that it inspired claims of nepotism, but few could deny the young woman's tactical genius. Her tutors regarded her as a prodigy since childhood, and in the fight against Tsubokandu's undead, her battle plans turned the tide and helped Linvarre emerge victorious. Following her ascension, conservative General Staff councilors bristled that they needed to take orders from someone so young, but most assumed that her strategic know-how would at least ensure Linvarre's continued success.

Much to everyone's surprise, Jiayi's decisions in the first years of her reign included ending conscription, promoting Linvarran officers without Taldan blood to prominent army roles, and engaging in an open dialogue with the **Tagamallaru**, whose concerns regarding Linvarre's treatment of Mallaru had long gone ignored. Jiayi has also vocalized her intent to transition Linvarre into a democracy within the next decade, possibly with an elected committee leading the country. These actions have made avant-garde members of the population compare her favorably to Taldor's Eutropia Stavian. Others scoff at her ideas, muttering that Jiayi is likely to run the country into the ground. Like many other facets of the Kingdom of the Reborn Lotus, the foundations of government teeter on the brink of evolution.

Opinions about democracy are mixed. Proponents argue that elections are the next logical step after winning independence, while opponents insist that turning Linvarre's administrative reins into a free-for-all, decided upon by everyone from the blacksmiths of Funako to

Mallaru's resistance leaders, is ill-suited for a nation that has remained safe for so long thanks to its current government. These detractors also push for the reinstatement of conscription, pointing out that Tsubokandu's eldritch army would've devastated Linvarre's south if it hadn't been for a well-trained general public. Shenmen's undead are brought up as another noteworthy threat, and radical voices have argued that Linvarre should expand southward beyond Mallaru on a mission to liberate Shenmen's living populace. Jiayi has been extremely resistant to this notion, arguing that cries for "liberation" are only thinly veiled hopes to maneuver Linvarre back on the path of imperialism.

Jiayi's closest ally in furthering her agenda is Lieutenant General **Gennius Bursio** (erudite male Taldan human spy), an old friend of her mother's. Gennius serves as the head of the **Liger Spears**, an elite espionage organization that's roughly the Linvarran equivalent of Taldor's Lion Blades.



Despite his advancing age, the 70-year-old statesman remains a spry warrior who would lay down his life to protect Jiayi if need be. Beyond the political sphere, Jiayi relies on the wisdom and encouragement of **Kindra Vannisar** (caring female Taldan/Tian-Shu human priest), her older cousin and a strong proponent of de-escalating Linvarre's military. Kindra is the leader of the **Society of the Five-Spoked Wheel**, a sect of **Qi Zhong** worshippers who care for the human children of Zi Ha's samsarans, ensuring that all are adopted by devoted Linvarran families.

The most prominent of Jiayi's opponents is Major General **Kestrel Zentria** (prideful female Taldan human fighter) the oldest daughter of the Zentria family, which can still trace its lineage back to the Principalities of Taldaris. Kestrel is two years Jiayi's senior, and the women shared a rivalrous camaraderie for much of their youth, especially as fellow trainees in Toduc Wa's **Monastery of the Blended Forms**. What was previously friendly competition became venomous when Jiayi shot through the ranks and assumed her role as Kestrel's superior. Rumor has it that Kestrel's father, the crafty General Staff member **Stefanos Zentria** (conniving male Taldan human politician), has fueled this conflict by urging his daughter to unite Jiayi's detractors under her wing.

At every chance she can, Kestrel questions Jiayi's rationale for ending conscription and challenges her former friend to develop a sustainable plan for instituting democracy. She performs a careful dance that toes the line of insubordination but never quite crosses it. It's no secret that Kestrel hopes to one day mold Linvarre to her liking, and whether democracy in the Kingdom of the Reborn Lotus ever becomes a reality, a face-off between Jiayi and Kestral seems inevitable.

Cities and Locations

Linvarre is filled with locales as diverse as its populace, ranging from the shining capital of New Oppara to Mallaru's gothic streets.

Daigaki Castle

This now-ruined fortress was once the hideout of the sadistic warlord Tsubokandu. General Orphyrea Amanandar and her troops first slew him in 7108 IC, but due to a necromantic ritual, his vengeful spirit manifested 100 years later and recruited an army from the Specterwood. Forces led by Audrya Vannisar and a young Jiayi Vannisar exorcised him in the final months of 7211 IC. Both Daigaki Castle and the surrounding area are considered desecrated ground, and patrols monitor the region to ensure that the warlord remains a memory.

Funako

Funako is the closest settlement to the Jinin border, home to the majority of Linvarre's elves, and an important destination for trading **dawnsilver**. Blacksmiths in the city have developed a reputation for honing Jinin's dawnsilver forging techniques, and Chuanmar Hawker Center is a top destination for visitors seeking elven-made weaponry.

Mallaru

Mallaru, the City of Indigo Flowers, is the ancestral land of the Tagamallaru—an ethnicity concentrated near the Specterwood and Sea of Ghosts. It was once a collection of riverside communities dependent on the river for their entire lives until General Orphyrea Amanandar defeated Tsubokandu's undead battalion. Orphyrea seized the opportunity to "save" the entire region, which had been brutalized in the battle, by claiming the river communities under the name "Mallaru," a single village name applied to a hundred cultures. The Tagamallaru were excluded from decision-making processes, which led to the formation of a resistance that argued neither ghostly warlords nor Amanandar "saviors" had the right to decide their future.

Mallaru is a graveyard of its former cultures, but its people—who smile as they intermingle foreign and local gods—are the flowers who beautify it. Many of its buildings were constructed by Taldans, who saw the river communities as an opportunity for wider open sea trading. Mallaru's culture is thus built upon the intermingling of Tian, Tagamallaru, and Taldan traditions, forming into something unique. Mallaru's architecture presents a unique blend of tropical gothic and earthquake baroque: large houses built upon stone posts and churches with pillars built around imperishable trees. Tian beliefs of ancestor worship and spirit shrines were transferred into churches and the worship of Taldan gods as well as local saints. Mallaru cathedrals serve as the center point of communities, with residential houses spiraling out from the churches and community gatherings and markets happening in their front plazas. Here, Mallaru fiestas perform a tender act of necromancy: painting pre-Taldan local cultural tradition with Taldan aesthetics, creating a beautiful exhumation of the skeleton of what once was.

New Oppara

New Oppara is the capital of Linvarre. Basked in the Ilushe's spray, the city is a stunning mesh of Taldane and Tian architecture, from the stone cat sentinels that mirror Taldor's Lionsgate to the Ten Thousand Lotus Temple, a pagoda that towers above all other buildings. Other prominent locations include Raocado Market, the largest hawker center in Linvarre, and the Ocallio Institute, a school for magic practitioners.

Okim

Okim, once a nondescript military outpost, is now best known for producing fireworks. The soot and explosive clouds that frequently cover Okim have given it something of a rough and tumble reputation, and rumor has it that thieves guilds from the Kwanlai cities of **Seidoyaji** and **Todorokaze** have found footing here, selling black powder to unsavory types throughout the country.

Toduc Wa

Once Linvarre's largest settlement, Toduc Wa is home to the Monastery of the Blended Forms, Linvarre's premier martial arts retreat. This monastery was constructed by soldiers inspired by Taldor's **Monastery of the Seven Forms**, originally founded by Tian migrants from the **Order of the Stalwart Fist**. Creating a similar haven on the opposite side of the world posed a fortuitous, full-circle opportunity, and today, those who wish to excel in combat spend at least six months in the Monastery of the Blended Forms.

Vannisaria

Founded by Jiayi Vannisar's great grandfather, a cleric named Brutus Vannisar, Vannisaria was designed as a refuge for those who preferred a life far from New Oppara's bustle. The birthplace of multiple generations of the Vannisar family, Vannisaria also houses the **Temple of the Eternal and Exquisite Rose**, the largest place of worship devoted to Shelyn in Tian Xia.

International Relations

Linvarre might be independent, but Taldor remains its staunchest global ally. Jiayi Vannisar has met Princess Eutropia Stavian on five occasions, and the two have a good friendship. Trade with Taldor also reached new heights after Mallaru morphed into a port, finally ending Linvarre's landlocked status. Closer to home, Linvarre maintains its strong alliance with Zi Ha and Tianjing, and it welcomes the immigration of elves and tengu from Jinin and Kwanlai.



TEMPLE OF THE ETERNAL AND EXQUISITE ROSE

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Nations

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Lizardfolk
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Ysoki

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Mugura and Nrithu
Srikalis, Sritaming and Sribaril
Sun Wukong

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Guns/ Gunpowder
Lumber
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Medicine
Mercenaries
Produce
Seafood
Ships
Spices
Tea
Textiles

THE WANDERING ISLES

Those who know Minata best say that it has as many faces as it does islands. Equal parts tropical paradise and impenetrable fortress, the Wandering Isles are home to over a hundred Tian-Sing nations and regional dialects. The same people say that the archipelago has as many secrets as it does kings, for hiding among its volcanic mountains, sprawling jungles, and perilous reefs are the last surviving ruins of the **Taumata Empire** and human settlements dating back to Earthfall.

While Minata's transformation was relatively minor during the Age of Dragons, it was not left unchanged, for the dragons of the sky and sea feuded over which of their clans would guide its development. On one side was **Lihulan**—an extraordinarily radiant lunar dragon—and her seven sisters, and opposing her was **Mugayan**, a capricious young sea dragon with one hundred siblings of his own. The two sides soon came to blows, but their conflict awakened **Baku**, a serpentine kaiju of unimaginable size who had been sleeping beneath Minata since the Age of Monsters. Lihulan and Mugayan could only watch as Baku rose from the depths, swallowing dragons like krill and uncoiling his body with a force that shattered mountains and churned the sea like a mortar and pestle. The deaths of so many sea dragons in the waters around Minata created the great barrier reefs that have surrounded it ever since. Once sated, Baku returned to his resting place at the bottom of the ocean, and Lihulan and Mugayan agreed to abandon Minata, knowing that it would forever belong to Baku. Stories of "Baku the Moon Eater" have persisted throughout the Wandering Isles, cautioning that he could awaken again at any time.

In the ages that followed, many kingdoms dreamed of possessing Minata's seemingly endless well of untapped riches—caverns bursting with rare and precious metals and untouched treasures from a forgotten past—but none have succeeded at plundering the islands or their people. The **Teikoku Shogunate** of Minkai was not the first to try, but they were the last. Despite their best preparations, Minata's hidden reefs immediately dashed their warships to pieces and capsized entire fleets. The few who survived were no better off, reaching its shores only to be hunted by fierce and territorial nature spirits or ambushed by seafaring warrior-kings at home on the reef. The Teikoku Shogunate conceded the battle and abandoned their campaign, proclaiming Minata unconquerable and signaling the end of further attempts by any kingdom.

GEOGRAPHY

Minata is in the southeastern corner of Tian Xia, separated from **Xa Hoi** and the **Valashmai Jungle** by a formidable stretch of saltwater, hidden shallows, and treacherous coral reefs. Further in, the islands are teeming with nature spirits. Alternately vicious or playful, the local name for these spirits is **anito**, and those who don't observe their customs while traveling may find themselves lost, misled, or something worse. Minatans have learned to coexist and even honor them with small tributes or gifts.

Despite its many islands—of which its inhabitants have counted over 1,000—Minata is commonly separated into three major regions.

Atas Pulu

Atas Pulu is the northernmost region and was once a single land mass before being shattered by the eruption of **Mount Shibotai**, known locally as **Mount Duyan**. Even separated, the region's mountains are immediately recognizable, with rice terraces carved into them over hundreds of years by its earliest inhabitants.

The islands surrounding the volcano are called the **Shibobekas**, alternatively known as the **Magkasintahan**. This is because the two large islands nearest Shibotai resemble human figures lying on their sides. Legends call them **Tiago** and **Sambac**, who were forbidden to love and fled to a remote valley. When their families found them,



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they pleaded for help, and the spirits transformed them into mountains. Shibotai, once in their embrace, was said to burn with the fire of their undying love.

Tengah Pulu

Tengah Pulu is Minata's central region, and its seafaring people can easily be counted among the most skilled ocean voyagers in all of Golarion. Its sprawling jungles are home to many unique and brightly colored wildlife species, and its mountains include many of the archipelago's tallest peaks.

The largest of Tengah Pulu's islands is **Belem**, famous for its waterfalls, hidden coves, and perilous coastlines, but best known for the fortified city on its western shore. Another significant location is **Bukorang**, a hammer-shaped island with no human inhabitants. Once thought to be solely inhabited by **wayangs**, it is now known to also be home to certain **sarangay** communities and enclaves of **manananggal**.

Rendah Pulu

Rendah Pulu in the south includes many of Minata's largest islands, with some of the densest jungle and most extensive wetlands in the archipelago. Two islands, **Lakapuna** and **Olakapuna**, are known to hide the best preserved Taumatan ruins in Tian Xia, but the inhabitants of Rendah Pulu fiercely guard their locations. Many clans in this region claim to be direct descendants of the Taumatan people, and rumors abound that they possess knowledge and magic thought long forgotten. If true, this knowledge would be considered Minata's greatest treasure.

A Day in Minata

Daily life in Minata revolves around the extended family and the clan, with multi-generational dwellings being the norm throughout the archipelago. Depending on their local climate and lifestyle, Minatan people often live in stilt houses, lean-tos, tree houses, and stone huts with thatched roofs. Some clans even live out on the sea in houseboats and flotillas.

Most Minatans rise with the sun to perform their labor before it reaches its zenith. For many, this part of their day can be dedicated to fishing, hunting, growing or harvesting crops, collecting fruit, chopping bamboo or other wood, martial arts training, or other labor that directly contributes to the ongoing livelihood of their families and communities. For tradespeople and artisans, this is when they typically collect materials, such as clay from the riverbanks or plants to spin into fibers. Most people start their morning with a dumpling or other snack, and when the sun reaches its zenith, most families come together to share their first full meal of the day—and the largest—which often includes tubers or rice paired with a fish, beef, or vegetable stew. Boar meat is rarer and more prized in many regions of Minata.

After this meal, the afternoon sun peaks, and it often becomes too hot to continue working. At this time, most Minatans play games, pursue hobbies, sort through personal affairs, or lounge in the shade. These activities are also the ones most often witnessed by late-rising visitors who are unused to the hot island sun, and many return to their homelands with the impression that things happen slowly in Minata. As the sun crests and things begin to cool, Minatans focus on the less laborious parts of their work that can be performed indoors or in the shade. Weaving, fermenting, preserving food, bookkeeping, and woodcarving are some examples of regular evening work.

The days in Minata are long almost year-round, and people take their final meal as the sun begins to set. With their daily work completed, they share this meal most often with friends and extended family. In some villages, the evening meal includes the entire community, allowing them to tell stories, receive news, and find solace in each other's company.

The average day can play out differently in larger towns and cities, whose influential rulers and governors must contend with the politics of trading and feasting. Instead, much of such individuals' day can be dedicated to receiving guests, mediating within their communities, negotiating trade between clans, traveling, and staying aware of potential threats. While warfare and raiding commonly happened during more turbulent periods of Minata's past, political feasting has practically replaced these practices in recent decades. Make no mistake, many would prefer the simplicity of combat compared to the favors, sleights, drama, and intrigue these feasts entail. To be invited to such a table is to enter an arena where alliances are forged and rivalries are made.

Spiritual observance unites all levels of Minatan society. The worship of gods is less prevalent, with people paying more homage and reverence to their local anito, hoping for favorable weather, safe travels, and continued prosperity. Though unseen, some anito are known to be easily ruffled, and it's considered common courtesy to say "excuse me" or "pardon me" while moving through brush and overgrowth. Likewise, failing to ask permission before felling trees can provoke the wrath of vengeful forest spirits. The practice of leaving offerings varies widely throughout the archipelago, with some people laying small tributes at the bases of trees or mountains and others leaving offerings or burning incense in spirit houses or shrines. These aspects of living alongside spirits have become ingrained in Minatan life, and those who live there consider it second nature.

A YEAR IN MINATA

Minata's tropical climate is consistently warm and humid year-round, and regions experience alternating wet and dry seasons with different degrees of intensity based on their relative proximity to the summer monsoons. In most places, rainfall is frequent and heavy during most times of the year, with temperatures that stay high even during the winter months. Despite relatively consistent weather, annual dry seasons impose a familiar cycle of sowing and harvesting, and festivals mark the final harvest throughout the archipelago. Many Minatans celebrate the same holidays as other parts of Tian Xia, but several are unique to the islands.

The first major holiday of the year is **Benga**, a month-long flower festival celebrated during Calistril in Atas Pulu. Influential clans host lavish celebrations with displays of elaborate gardens, flower-inspired costumes, dancing, and competitions, drawing travelers from across the region and sometimes even further. A common custom for those who plan to embark on a new venture in the coming year is to place a star blossom behind their ear on the full moon that falls during the festival month—if it lasts until sunset without losing any petals, then the venture will be successful.

The next Minatan holiday is **Suha-Suha**, which falls in the middle of Desnus. Celebrated throughout Minata, Suha is a harvest festival with uncertain origins. It's foremost about giving thanks to the local spirits, often involving extended families or small communities trekking to nearby jungles or mountains to leave

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Anito: aa-NEE-toh
Ariki: aa-REE-kee
Atas Pulu: AAT-aas POO-loo
Belem: BEL-em
Benga: BEN-gaa
Bukorang: boo-koh-RAANG
Buwayang: boo-WAA-yaang
Ilutakami: ee-loo-taa-KAA-mee
Inahiyi: ee-naa-HEE-yee
Jainai: JAI-nai
Kalibi: kaa-LEE-bee
Katigulangan: kaa-tee-goo-LAA-ngan
Lakapuna: laa-kaa-POO-naa
Lambanog: laam-baa-NOHG
Lihulan: lee-HOO-laan



MARINGALAN

Magkasintahan: maag-kaa-sinh-TAA-haan
Manananggal: maa-naa-nang-GAAL
Maringalan: maa-rinh-GAAL-aan
Mugayan: moo-GAA-yaan
Olakapuna: oh-laak-aa-POO-naa
Owairua: oh-wai-ROO-aa
Pawainui: paa-wai-NOO-ee
Rendah Pulu: REN-daa POO-loo
Sambac: SAAM-baak
Sarangay: saa-RAANG-gai
Suha-Suha: SOO-haa SOO-haa
Tamung: TAA-moong
Tau Nui: tau NOO-ee
Taumata: tau-MAAT-aa
Tengah Pulu: TEN-gaa POO-loo
Tiago: tee-AA-go
Waunomani: Wau-noh-MAA-nee
Wayang: WAA-yaang



TAU NUI

tributes. These offerings are usually laid on the ground or arranged in spirit houses or shrines. The rest of the festival involves colorful displays of fragrant harvests comprising various fruits and vegetables. These goods are traded or sold in markets, alongside street foods and games, and many islands have their own traditions involving music or contests.

Tamung is a celebration unique to Tengah Pulu that occurs annually starting on the last Sunday of Lamashan. It's a roving carnival, where a procession of celebrants clad in elaborate masks and costumes make their way from village to village, bringing with them music, dancing, and cheer. Villagers gather to watch them and join in the merriment by enjoying festival foods and copious alcoholic drinks, including a potent coconut palm liquor called **lambanog**. Some villagers prolong their celebration by briefly accompanying the carnival on their route, which often lasts for as long as the procession can keep going.

The last holiday of the year is **Katigulangan**, which takes place during Kuthona on days that vary regionally. This celebration honors one's ancestors and the great heroes of Minata's past. The recounting of these hero stories often involves reenactments performed by dancers with musical accompaniment. This holiday tends to be an insular celebration, focusing on family and communities. Family members and friends are often remembered and honored with the telling of stories and the sharing of food.

In addition to observed holidays, the feasting customs in many regions require influential leaders and families to travel at various times throughout the year, often rotating which of their communities will host on such occasions. These arrivals can be celebratory in their own right since these cities and towns will do their best to impress with the quality of their performances and food. Their leaders often greatly reward those who manage to do so, as awe-inspiring displays can elevate their prestige among their peers and lead to favorable exchange.

CULTURE

The Wandering Isles are home to many different people. While humans, lizardfolk, and sarangay are widely known to outsiders, they're far from the only ancestries in Minata. Scattered throughout the archipelago in hidden villages and remote communities are wayangs, leshies, barrow goblins, tusked cyclopes, and bat-winged humanoids with mixed tanggal heritage.

Minata has no single government, but a loose structure of independent clans and kingdoms whose leaders bear regional titles such as **datu**, **lakan**, **ari**, or **ariki**. Because of the structure of Minatan society, reputation is paramount. Impressive achievements earn admiration and praise and, in times of peace, might lead to the establishment of alliances or trade agreements. For example, pots made from Mount Shibotai's volcanic clay are highly prized in Minkai and considered the best in the world for storing rice wine and tea leaves. Other common trade goods include rice, wax, honey, silk, gold, pearls, and medicinal herbs. The high quality of Minatan artisanry also makes finished goods highly sought after, and traders from **Xa Hoi** and **Hwanggot** sometimes send their goods to Minata to be processed.

In addition to its political leader, every powerful clan must also have a great shaman to lead its community in matters of the spirits. Such figures take on the roles of healer, spiritual medium, diviner, and sorcerer, overseeing rituals such as births, marriages, and funerals. The most powerful shaman in history is said to have been a transgender woman named **Tadhana Anitera**, who inked Ang Iloka Luag's magical tattoos and foretold the coming of the meteorite Ang Iloka Luag used to forge his unstoppable blade. Since then, the people of Minata have considered transgender children an auspicious sign for their communities, where they grow up with no shortage of support and offers of apprenticeship.

The most influential Minatan clans are listed on the following page.



The Ilutakami

The Ilutakami clans inhabit the islands and coasts of Atas Pulu, where they once prospered in the mountains surrounding Mount Shibotai. Their ancestors carved sprawling rice terraces throughout the region, using the fertile volcanic soil to grow their crops. They now account for most of Minata's foreign trade, having become prosperous under the leadership of their sovereign council, the **Komite**.

Ilutakami communities favor colorful, woven clothing decorated with intricate beadwork and other ornaments, as well as copious amounts of gold jewelry. It's said that even the poorest Ilutakami can still decorate themselves in gold. Their men also tend to wear their hair shorn, unlike their neighbors; when faced with a difficult feat, they sometimes vow not to cut their hair until they've accomplished it. Like many Minatans, the Ilutakami practice ritual tattooing, inking their members with elaborate geometric designs to convey their status and achievements and favoring intricate chest pieces for their most renowned members. They're also fond of chewing on a type of tree nut that stimulates alertness and stains the teeth black, which has become so prevalent that, on certain islands, white teeth can be considered a sign of youth and inexperience.

The Maringalan

The Maringalan comprise the most extensive political alliance in Minata, with clans spread across the rivers, lowlands, and coasts of Atas Pulu and Tengah Pulu. They are renowned for their master shipbuilding and naval power and have a long history of conducting sea raids on colossal outrigger warships. Their resistance was instrumental in turning back the Teikoku Shogunate's attempted invasion, and their warriors are well known for wielding distinctive single-edged greatswords instead of shields or spears.

People from Maringalan communities tend to wear their hair long regardless of gender and are fastidious in their grooming. Men often bind their foreheads and temples with long, narrow strips of cloth. Like their neighbors, the Maringalan favor brightly colored fabrics but prefer open jackets or robes over other torso coverings. They ornament themselves with intricately patterned necklaces and armlets made of gold, sometimes set with precious stones. They also possess their own unique system of geometric tattoos, which often run down the lengths of the arms and legs or encircle the wrists and other extremities.

The Nisama

The Nisama are nomadic, seafaring people living in houseboats off the coasts of Rendah Pulu and parts of Tengah Pulu. Nisama houseboats typically accommodate single families and travel with other houseboats in flotillas, often including the houseboats of extended family members or other close relations who go on fishing expeditions together. Larger communities consist of many flotillas that anchor at common gathering areas several times during the



IKLUSS THE GHOSTMARKED



MANGAPIT



SIDONIS



TIYA/TIYO STORIES

year. Nisama clans are named for the regions they roam, such as the Nisama of the Southern Shores or the Nisama of the Valashmai Sea.

Nisama clothing is light and breathable but has full coverage to protect the wearer from the sun. Headwraps and turbans are favored for this reason, often covering the shoulders. The Nisama people use wax-resist dyeing when making their fabrics, which are often silk or cotton, and the resulting patterns can convey a wide range of meanings to those well versed in the art form. They can express someone's clan or territories, be used to communicate with nearby vessels, or leave messages by leaving strips tied to buoys. Nisama communities also produce a sunblock paste using rice and turmeric, which other sailors prize.

The Tau Nui

Many of the Tau Nui people of Rendah Pulu can trace their ancestral lineage directly to the Taumata Empire, and the once nomadic people now live in fortified villages. Many Tau Nui clans have sworn to protect the remaining Taumatan ruins in Minata, often by keeping their locations secret. Tau Nui communities can therefore be skeptical of travelers or strangers and rarely participate in trading goods or political alliances.

Tau Nui hairstyles often involve elaborate top knots and braids, and their garments, subdued in color, are elaborately patterned using plaiting and weft twining techniques. They're widely known for their elaborate cloaks, woven from fine flax fibers, with animal skins, fur, and feathers decorating more prestigious versions. People from Tau Nui communities are also known for their elaborate face tattoos, which often incorporate curved or spiral designs and represent each individual's life journey.

Government and Important Faces

The Wandering Isles have a loose network of clans and nations instead of a central government. Each clan head governs their territories by making decisions, mediating disputes, maintaining defenses, and brokering political and trade relationships. While the responsibility of rulership is hereditary in some clans, succession rarely happens in this way in Minata. Instead, clan members will back the person they believe is best suited. While skilled leaders often take on that position for their lifetime, it's expected that an unfit ruler will be deposed by their people.

If neighboring clans are of similar size and influence, they commonly enter political alliances as equals. However, if the difference is more significant, the smaller clan is more likely to become a vassal of the larger one. Travelers in Minata are rare enough that visiting adventurers can expect to be met and paraded for influence by savvy rulers. However, visiting with one clan while ignoring its neighbors might be taken as a slight that leads to long-term resentment.

Important Figures

Ariki Heihenari (insouciant male human noble) is the firstborn son of **Ariki Tewari**, the beloved leader who once united the Tau Nui clans and permanently settled in Rendah Pulu. Since Tewari's passing, Heihenari has ascended to his father's throne. However, Heihenari is widely regarded as a poor potential leader—barely a grown man, his people see him as a reckless youth who spends his time dancing, smoking tobacco, and playing dice games with his friends.

Danak the Blood Witch (horrific female half-manananggal human witch) is a bat-winged transgender woman who has terrorized the people of Atas Pulu and Tengah Pulu for nearly a decade. Her clan of mixed tanggal women sharpen and stain their teeth to appear more ferocious because, without the tanggal power to disguise their nature through shapeshifting, they must instead work together to raid human and sarangay settlements for food and other supplies. While raiding, they've been known to sow terror and chaos through blatant acts of cannibalism.

Ikluss the Ghostmarked (dauntless female lizardfolk headhunter) is the self-styled Warrior-King of Buwayang. The lizardfolk matriarch strikes an

imposing figure, reaching over eight feet at her full height, with white scales covered in long-healed scars and cloudy gray eyes that give her the appearance of a specter when she cuts through the water. She's said to have never lost a battle, and from the ceiling of her hall hang the sun-bleached skulls of both monsters and foes.

Datu Mangapit (cool-headed male sarangay noble) is the wise and peaceful ruler of Jainai, a sarangay city on the island of Bukorang. A transgender man known for his patience and good judgment, Mangapit was appointed leader through the confidence of his people. Mangapit can be slow to make decisions and is stubborn once his mind is set, but he'll always listen to reason.

Lakan Sidonis (methodical male human noble) is at the heart of the Ilutakami clans. Although the Ilutakami are governed by a council of five sovereign leaders, practically no decisions are made without consulting Sidonis. This deference is because his analytical mind is well-suited to managing affairs of state and trade agreements.

Tiya/Tiyo Stories (legendary genderfluid wayang storyteller) is thought to be the oldest wayang in the island nation of Inahiyi, but not even her relatives know her true age. It's said that he knows every story ever told, and that he once stopped Mount Shibotai from erupting by telling a story so enthralling that it was forced to stop and listen. Peddling more than tales, she's believed to be one of the most knowledgeable beings on Golarion, but for this knowledge, she commands a steep price.

Pirinihi Kahukura (compassionate female human noble) is Ariki Heihenari's cousin. She is a thoughtful leader, beloved by her people, and a growing number of Tau Nui clans have come out in support of naming her Ariki Tewari's successor, despite Kahukura's reluctance. This situation has created a widening divide among the clans of Rendah Pulu, with many fearing civil war.

Cities and Locations

Below are descriptions of several places that most travelers in Tian Xia would be familiar with.

Kalibi

Kalibi is the largest trade city in Atas Pulu, at the crossroads of the five great Ilutakami clans, and goods from across Tian Xia can be found in its markets. Whether trade involves gold, rarities, or information, Kalibi is the place to find what one seeks, but one must always be ready to pay the price. On rare occasions, a shop appears on the nearby waters, where a mysterious woman trades in lost things.

Pawainui

Pawainui is a four-walled city built atop the steep hills of Lakapuna, serving as home to the ruler of the Tau Nui people. In ages past, this ancient structure saw many wars and was considered the most secure city in Minata. Also called the city of totems, over 1,000 carved columns are on display throughout Pawainui's opulent interior and tell the storied history of the city and its families.

Waunomani

Waunomani is the Tau Nui name for the city alternatively called Silungan. This fortified city in Belem has inhabitants of many different ancestries. This city boasts the largest fleet of warships in the Wandering Isles, both in terms of number and size. Politically neutral, these fleets are only to be launched in defense of Minata.

Zo Piaobo

Zo Piaobo, the pirate city, was first created when the wreckage of innumerable ships torn to pieces by Minata's reefs collided and formed an artificial island. Floating on the outskirts of the Wandering Isles, it's the only location easily reachable without a guide; consequently, Zo Piaobo has become the point of entry for foreign merchants and dignitaries. In fact, "pirate city" is a misnomer, as Minatans use the same word for pirate and foreigner. Able to be moved—with some effort—the city has become renowned for its trade and nightlife.



NISAMA

Minkai

Nations

MINKAI
Capital: Kasai
Government: Monarchy
Ruler: Empress Amatatsu Ameiko (Ameiko Kaijitsu)



Peoples

Gnomes
Halflings
Hobgoblins
Humans
Kami
Kitsune
Kobolds
Leshies
Merfolk
Nephilim
Oni
Poppets
Ratfolk
Sprites
Tanuki
Tengu
Tripkees

Languages

Minkaian
Tien
Tengu

Religions

Daikitsu
Desna
Fumeiyoshi
General Susumu
Hei Feng
Irori
Lady Jingxi
Shelyn
Shizuru
Spirit Worship
Tsukiyo
Yaezhing
Yamatsumi

Resources

Alcohol/ Drugs
Dyes
Gems
Gunpowder
Livestock
Lumber
Luxury goods/Art
Medicine
Ores
Produce/ Grain
Seafood
Tea
Textiles

EMPIRE OF A NEW DAWN

The people of Minkai have faced numerous trials since their nation's founding. After the fall of Lung Wa, Minkai was best positioned to be its successor—its five imperial families had been blessed by the goddess Shizuru herself. Internal turmoil put an end to such thoughts. With so many ambitious eyes turned to the throne, it was only a matter of time before the imperial families were confronted over their right to rule. The tumultuous recent coup and reign of the **Jade Regent** were but another event in a long history of continuity and change. As the culmination of a plot led by **Anamuramon** and the **Five Storms**, the Jade Regent removed all opposition and was free to do as he wished with the people and lands of Minkai. Many feared that the nation had lost its connection to Shizuru and her heavenly court. Unknown to all, a rightful heir to the empire was serving pints and settling bar fights halfway across the world in **Sandpoint**.

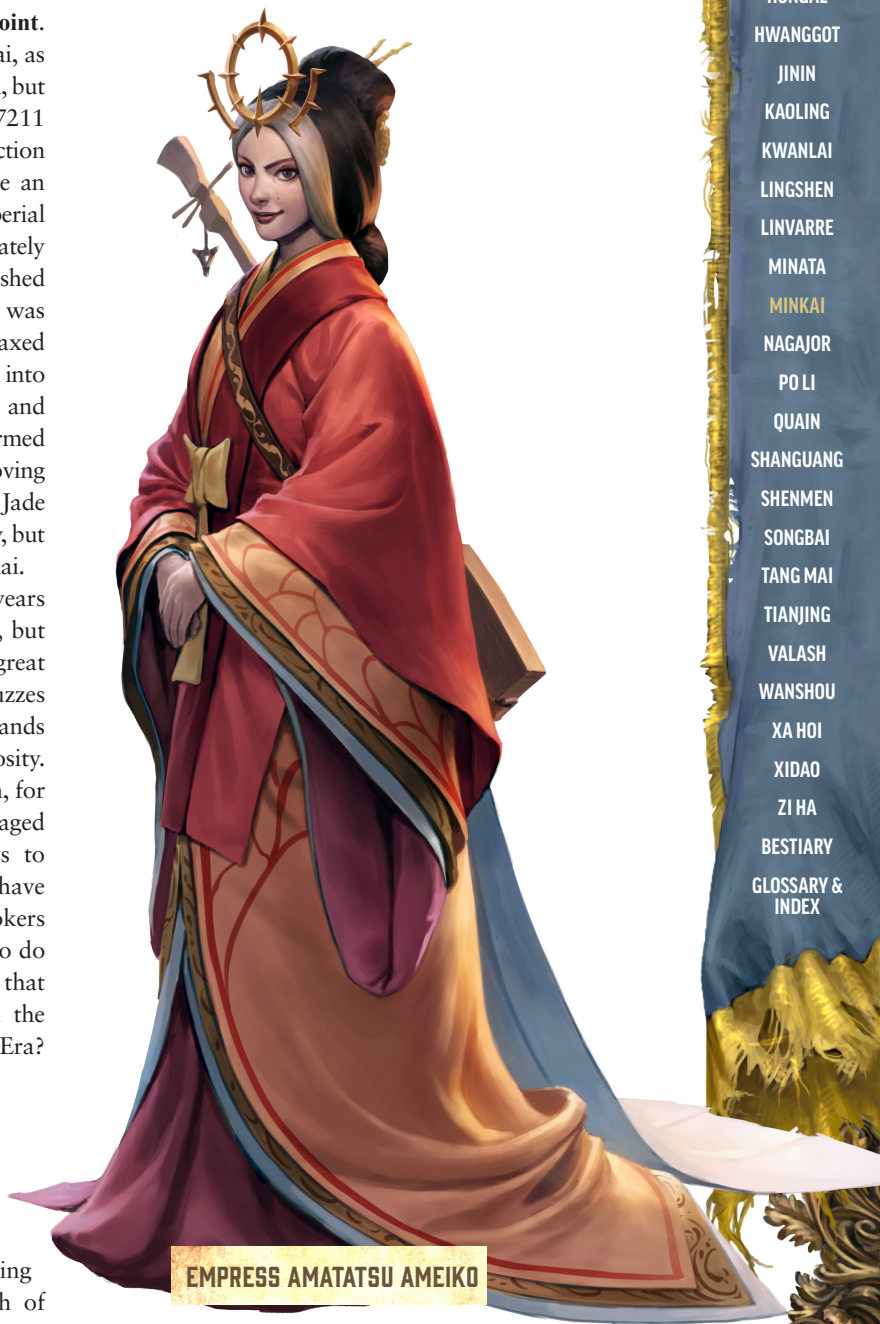
Ameiko Kaijitsu knew she had recent ties to Minkai, as her family was clearly Tian-Min to the average Avistani, but the magnitude of her heritage remained a secret until 7211 IC. With a few documents and an imperial seal, the direction of Ameiko's life dramatically changed as she became an **Amatatsu**, the sole surviving heir of Minkai's imperial families. Always a person of action, Ameiko immediately set out for Minkai, following the trade route established by her ancestors. What she found on the other side was destruction and imbalance. The Jade Regent had taxed the provinces into starvation, bullied the populace into obedience, and soured every relation between Minkai and other Tian nations. Rather than despair, Ameiko formed alliances, faced ancient tests, and succeeded in removing the regent from his tenuous place on the throne. The Jade Regent's reign was short in the grand scheme of history, but his influence spread deep and fast in the veins of Minkai.

Many expected the nation to be left reeling after years of corruption and the loss of four imperial families, but the hopes placed in Empress Ameiko have formed a great wave of optimism in the new **Ondori Era**. Minkai buzzes with possibility, attracting people from across the lands who are eager to benefit from the Empress's curiosity. The positive outlook hasn't reached everyone though, for Minkai is deep in the process of repairing its damaged relations across Tian Xia and searching for ways to rebuild a broken infrastructure. Food and funds have understandably been a priority, though invested onlookers are beginning to wonder what the Empress intends to do with the unclaimed imperial crests. While it's true that traditions only survive if they serve a purpose in the present, how much will be changed in the Ondori Era? Reform is exciting, but it also breeds resistance.

GEOGRAPHY

Minkai is a large peninsula in the northeast of Tian Xia, connected to the mainland by the **Forest of Spirits**. Despite this bridge to **Hongal**, the nation has typically had the mindset of an island, preferring self-sufficiency based in its many resources. Much of Minkai's landmass is an imposing mountainous spine, collectively known as the **Kyojin Mountains**, which roughly divides the nation into two disparate realities. The western coast has grown prosperous from centuries of trade access through **Xidao**'s waters and the northern **Path of Aganhei**, leading to heavily populated areas. In particular, a built and manicured environment surrounds the nation's capital, **Kasai**. In contrast, the eastern coast faces the harsher conditions of the **Okaiyo Ocean** and often feels disconnected from the bustling city centers on the opposite side of the looming peaks. In addition, the length of the peninsula contributes to a marked variation from the snowy north to the almost tropical south.

Bordering on the Forest of Spirits are the **Osogen Grasslands**, a cold and windy plain with scattered but robust settlements. To either side of the grasslands are the



EMPRESS AMATATSU AMEIKO



Sankyōdai and **Kamifushi Mountains**, which contribute to the north's reputation as the center of mining and hot springs. The winters might be harsh compared to other regions, but the temperate summer attracts droves of tourists looking to indulge in medicinal baths as well as travelers seeking the ancestral powers of its ancient woods and liminal mountains. This region overflows with beings drawn toward or spilling from the Forest of Spirits, creating a storm front of supernatural forces.

Central Minkai has a moderate climate and is largely sheltered by dense forests. The wide **Tagiryu** and **Warashi Rivers** cut from the mountains to the coast, slowing only briefly as they pass through large wetlands near Akafuto and the **Seseragi Forest**. Spirits heading north have been known to get lost in these woods and waterlogged expanses.

The southernmost reaches of Minkai have only ever seen snow on the distant peaks of the Kyojin range, and there's no question that water is the prevailing force of the region. The boundaries between the ocean, sky, and land are thin to nonexistent here, as the air is thickly laced with moisture and the horizon is often imperceptible. The rivers of this region overflow early in the spring, subsiding to reveal fertile floodplains that make south Minkai's most important farmlands. Along the coast, the colder currents from the north mix with the warm waters rising from Minata, supporting an abundance and diversity of life in the sheltered waters of the **Sorui Gulf** and **Aogaito Island**.

A DAY IN MINKAI

In ancient times, life in Minkai fully revolved around the sun. Everyone would be awake to witness the dawn and perform their rituals of devotion before going about their business until sunset. The dark hours were for loved ones, stories, and quiet reflection. Now, the nation's shared experiences mainly involve random explosions from imperial experiments and the presence of unusual visitors.

In rural areas, the ancient rhythm of the day still holds true. Farming families rise to greet the sun, seeking blessings for their fields and orchards with the **Hinode no Inori**, the Sunrise Prayer. Fishing communities gather on the shores to request success on the water, meeting the boats that have been out in the night catching species attracted to lantern light. These early hours are serene but far from silent, as the ceremonial roosters kept at every homestead crow their reports to Shizuru. When the inori ends, towns properly come to life, with businesses opening and children heading to their lessons. Breakfast is simple and eaten at home, typically consisting of **asachawan**, a hot porridge made with cold rice, hot tea, and various pickles. The other daily meals are more varied, from coal-grilled meats to chilled noodles dipped in sauces. Taking a break from the midday sun is a necessity in the south, and one can easily find eateries and shaded market stands that are open for lunch.

Once school or training finishes for the day, children and youths are expected to tend to the numerous shrines across

town. Spirits often require attention to keep them happy, and no one is eager to have neglected kami parading through their homes. Ancestors are offered fruits and sake at sunset since evening meals are meant to be shared. Families and friends commonly gather for dinner and storytelling, but everyone heads home when true darkness sets in, and the ensuing silence is broken only by the lapping of waves or rustling of nocturnal creatures.

In the mountains and rugged areas of Minkai, daily habits don't center around fields or fish. In these places, the locals think in terms of symbiosis more than stewardship, so the Sunrise Prayer is combined with offerings to the elements and nature kami. The first meal of the day is relatively late, since the care needed to appease the aforementioned forces keep some awake well after midnight. Many people plan ahead by burying sweet potatoes in their hearths at dawn, letting them slowly roast in time for breakfast. Most children receive lessons by shadowing their parents or a mentor while they tend to their daily duties, such as trading, herding, or scavenging the shore. The more academically inclined must head to a nearby city, which has become a much easier pursuit during the Ondori Era, yet most still struggle to adjust.

In their home settlements, the afternoon meal is the most important and when people can gather to catch up or forge new agreements. **Oimowakakimo stew** is a widespread favorite, even though the ever-changing ingredients mean this simmered dish is rarely the same from one sitting to another. In contrast, dinner is light and eaten quickly when the opportunity arises. Sunset to late night are the busiest hours for the village **ongakuka**, the resident musicians who move between shrines, softly playing their tunes to lull the spirits and amuse the kami.

Meanwhile, the major city centers are loosely ordered chaos. Day and night are less distinct, as people work and live on individual schedules that keep the streets awake at all hours. The moment regular businesses close their doors, late-night establishments turn on their lights and will only bring in their signs when their neighbors open for the morning. Elaborate entertainment, large markets, and specialized services are best found in these cities, as are the national academies that educate Minkai's young hopefuls.

Below the shiny exterior of the urban landscape is the shady world of crime and sedition, which can hide more easily among the distracted crowds. The numerous demonstrations of new technologies and magic from distant lands have especially helped cover unsavory dealings. It isn't a challenge to find sympathetic ears when the cities have the clearest inequality. The wealthy and poor alike always search for lucrative opportunities.

A YEAR IN MINKAI

From the smallest towns to the busy Kasai districts, the beginning of the new year is marked by the **Nozomi Festival** at the end of the dark days. The people of Minkai prepare for this weeklong celebration by cleaning their homes and gathering the seasonal ingredients needed to make dishes infused with good fortune. As the New Year begins with the **Shonichi Dawn**, all business and serious work is expected to halt until the holiday ends. This expectation, of course, excludes the many shrine attendants and oracles needed to help people start the year blessed and forewarned. Braving the cold, everyone in Minkai heads to their local Shizuru shrine before starting a nonstop rotation of visits with friends and family. Harsh weather during the Nozomi Festival is considered a bad omen for the coming year, but it's a lucrative time for the diviners and seers who expect prompt payment once the celebrations are over. On the final day, Empress Ameiko must perform an elaborate ceremony in the privacy

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

The names of the people and places from Minkai use very standardized pronunciation rules. Consonants are paired with vowels, with only "n" and vowels appearing alone (ex. Mi-**n**-ka-**i**), and the sounds are consistent. Consonants are hard, and the vowel sounds are always as follows.

a: "ah" like in mamba or father
i: "ee" like in beet or heat
u: a very short "oo" like in shoe or flu
e: "eh" like in fey or sleigh
o: "oh" like in slow or pro

Vowel combinations merge these sounds, though a few indicate an extended sound.

ai: "ah+ee" said quickly like in eye or sigh
ei: "eeh" like e but with slightly more emphasis
ou (ō): "ooh" like oh but with slightly more emphasis
uu (ū): a longer and more audible "oo"

Example pronunciations:

Ameiko: Ah-may-koh
Ondori: Ohn-doh-ree
Sugiyama Seiji: Soo-ghee-yah-mah Say-jee
Wada Haruhi: Wah-dah Ha-roo-hee



of the Imperial Palace shrine prior to appearing before the nation with her **Nozomi Address**. This is one of the few times the Empress is guaranteed to be at the Imperial Palace.

The winter weather gradually eases after the Nozomi Festival, with the spring equinox marking the **Midori Season**. This is an important time of year in the southern farmlands, where the warmer climate means the start of the growing season. Mornings remain cool, but as soon as the nights lose their frosty edge, it's time to sow the fields. The goal is to finish planting by **Atarashine**, a regional festival held across the Kokuso and Hogosareta Provinces. On this day, farming households bring their Atarashine offerings to the shrines of Daikitsu, presenting them with a portion of the previous year's yield. This ceremonial reserve represents an abundance that they hope to recreate every year, always harvesting more than they need to simply survive. The remainder of the day is dedicated to friendly competitions and revelry, as well as demonstrations by merchants promoting magical contraptions for the Ondori Era. Children born around this day are considered auspicious.



DOKAIGAN PROVINCE CLOTHING

A few weeks later, the rainy season sets in across the peninsula as the temperature rises. The summer storms are good for the fields, but they make regular fishing activities risky. Boats tend to stay closer to shore until the waters calm, and shellfish becomes the main ingredient in the dishes on southern tables. The rainy season typically ends by the summer solstice, when the **Itariten Festival** is held. Most in Minkai will head to the cities for the longest day of the year, ready to show how they've improved their skills. Once their performances end, they can indulge in the food, drinks, and fireworks that make this festival a highlight of the year. For many students, the festival also marks the end of their initiation term in the academies, with their performances acting as the final component of their placement exams. While the results are determined, the schools and higher academies are temporarily closed. Families in southern cities often take this opportunity to escape the heat by heading north to rental estates or onsen.

The fall equinox is a busy time for harvesting and last-minute cramming. This time of year is now the designated period for academy entrance exams, and the collective stress of young hopefuls is palpable. The pressure is high, as these exams could decide their futures, and the results will reflect on their families. The results are posted immediately before the **Aisuruhito Ceremony**, a holiday dedicated to the ancestors. This holiday is relatively subdued, though families are expected to gather late into the night to entertain their predecessors.

Such dinners are boisterous compared to the final major event of the year, **Jukukō**. During the winter solstice, the longest nights of the year, the people of Minkai spend their nights in focused reflection. Daily activities remain the same, but for three nights, the land goes into quiet devotions to Tsukiyo. In the north, Jukukō is extended by two days of the **Chiheisen Vigil**, a time when large fires are burned throughout the night to coax the sun from its repose. Many watch the skies to make sure the days grow longer once more.

CULTURE

The people of Minkai are many and varied, with a noticeable increase in nationwide diversity since the beginning of the Ondori Era. Visitors from across Golarion have become common among the masses in the capital, and large numbers of citizens have been moving from rural areas seeking new fortunes in the void left by the extinct samurai class. Despite massive political shifts across the nation, mundane life in most regions continues to revolve around family and community, which are sources of connection and identity. The largest cities are less predictable.

The prevailing culture of Minkai is heavily influenced by the southwest core, which itself has been shaped by



Shizuran beliefs for millennia. Order and self-discipline have become ingrained in everyday life with the Ruler of Heaven's influence, but no single deity has a monopoly over the people. It's common for the average individual to worship multiple powers for different purposes, particularly when they need to embrace chaos in the face of unpredictable conditions. **Daikitsu**, **Irori**, and **Tsukiyo** are popular choices for devotion, though outside urban settings, they're outnumbered by a cacophony of gods and spirits imported from distant locales or born from the depths of Minkai's landscape.

While Tian-Min humans continue to be the majority, there have long been large populations of **kitsune** and **tengu**, as well as Tian-Shu and Tian-Hwan peoples. Given this fact, there are few physical commonalities that can be used to identify someone from Minkai. Instead, the particularities of their dress and cultural practices reveal they're Tian-Min, and even the region from which they hail.

In southern Minkai, villagers spend warm days tending fields and harvesting the waters to supply the nation with seafood, seasonal fruits, grains, and sake. Generations working in the humidity have led to a common fashion of durable but light clothing that fits loosely around the body. The preferred materials might be less flashy than in the city, but locals gravitate toward brightly colored patterns that stand out against the perpetually blue backdrop of sea and sky. Pants and footwear are optional, especially during the rainy months when such items would be instantly soaked or muddied. Many here choose to wear their hair shorter than in the capital, and makeup is reserved for formal occasions or ceremonies since it doesn't survive long in the heat. Select groups keep their hair closely clipped under distinct caps, marking them as inheritors of closely guarded cherry orchards, peach groves, and sake breweries. Everyone, regardless of age or occupation, has an elaborately printed length of fabric draped across the nape of their necks or covering their heads, acting as sun protection and a handy all-purpose handkerchief. Each town produces a unique design that incorporates symbols of protection and prosperity with legendary figures, making them a popular souvenir for travelers. Less appealing to visitors, but essential for locals, are the rain-repelling garments made from the straw remains of the annual grain harvest. These garments appear utilitarian but have spells woven into them as wards against the many water spirits in the region.

This local preoccupation with the forces of water can also be seen in the numerous shrines that line the docks of **Shogokabe**. While no one resident can name all the deities, they show each of them the reverence they deserve. The Ondori Era has led to few changes on the fishing-dominated coast, though an adventurous few have been sailing further and delving deeper in search of fortune. In contrast, the agricultural fields have been set upon by teams of imperial experts, experimenting with new species and unfamiliar sorcery aimed at enhancing annual yields and extending the harvest season.

In the capital city of **Kasai**, life never seems to slow for a minute. A myriad of traditions, cultures, and fashions can be seen in every sector, especially now that Minkai has made an open call to any who might help with its reinvention. Typical of a metropolitan city, the diversity of residents and access to far-flung markets mean that all forms of dress and ornamentation can be found here, often blending styles from across Tian Xia. Jewelry, perfumes, and cosmetics are particularly sought after, especially for the less fashion adventurous. Recently, merchants have expanded their sales of accessories for familiars and eidolons, as such things have become surprisingly trendy.

The capital is also where traditional wares made of silks and fine cottons are most likely to be seen, even though these garments are mistakenly seen as standard Minkai clothing outside of the nation. While deeply treasured, this style of dress is primarily reserved for formal occasions, government officials, and high-ranking religious figures who show their position and allegiances through swaths of rich-colored materials. Since the **Ondori Reformation**, the armored regalia of the samurai class has been much less noticeable, only appearing on military personnel or those headed to open conflict. In contrast, practical clothes cut in Avistani styles have risen in popularity among a wide group in the capital as an emulation of Empress Ameiko's travel attire.

The pace feels slower in the north, but there's a sense of depth in place of the immediacy felt in the south. Rather than dampening the thrum of life, the cooler climate is ideal for the mining, forestry, and tourism industries that support its settlements. Local clothing is worn in layers, with the deep blue of indigo-dyed fabrics standing out on the snowy landscape in winter. Heavy, quilted jackets are essential for the coldest months, though the intricate stitch patterns handed down through generations are meant to protect against more than the weather. Leather garments are common for work and fashion as well, blending the practical needs of industry with a sense of northern identity.



In the Osogen Grassland and **Dokaigan Province**, clothing-grade material isn't as readily available, but people have learned to make beautiful patch-work robes that are thick, easily mended, and can conceal many tokens and talismans. Hair tends to be worn short in the north since it regularly needs to be bundled under a hat or hood. Any personal ornamentation is modest outside of the wealthy enclaves of trade and tourism; many people tuck their necklaces into their clothing layers, and rings or earrings are simple iron or bronze. Whereas the south worships the forces of water, the north lives in tandem with the spiritual power of its mountains and the nearby Forest of Spirits. Residents are accustomed to the kami that are too abundant to hide here, and many local traditions include small rites to address the thin veil between this realm and the otherworld. Lately, however, supernatural activity has been strangely high, and some believe the Ondori government's experiments in mining and Avistani magic have stirred primordial forces.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

The current government of Minkai bears little resemblance to previous generations. While governors continue to administrate provinces, the weight of national rule falls solely on one imperial family for the first time since the fall of the **Teikoku Shogunate**. With the Amatatsu family's long line of explorers and reformers, many known to be adventurous, it came as no surprise then that their heir would be the one to bring about great change.

Outside its borders, Minkai is said to be in the Post-Regent Period, but the general population prefers to call it the Ondori Era. According to folk beliefs, the rooster—ondori—is a symbol of change and new beginnings. Roosters are the heralds of Shizuru, crowing to signal when the sun has returned, while also sending reports to the Ruler of Heaven. Most of Minkai's residents are greeting this era like a new day, excited about the potential of the untouched hours. Yet, they're also nervous about the sheer magnitude of the revitalization efforts, as their worldview has always emphasized steady growth through dedication and self-reflection.

To older generations, Empress **Amatatsu Ameiko** (daring female human bard) seems positively impatient, though she has proven to be a dedicated and competent ruler. She came to Minkai with the imperial lessons of her youth, but little emotional attachment to the nation's traditional court life. Instead, she saw a system that relied too heavily on warlords and samurai elite—in her opinion, this system is what allowed the Jade Regent's rise to power, and it wasn't how Minkai would meet the future. She made her perspective clear in the

fifth year of her reign, when she officially announced her plans to reduce the privileges of the samurai class, requiring all who sought positions of power to demonstrate their qualifications through examinations and appropriate experience. With over 10 years on the throne now, she hasn't changed her mind and is living up to her reputation for being stubborn. Ameiko is often away from the Imperial Palace, preferring to conduct diplomatic visits and regional surveys in person. Rather than make the people come to her in the throne room, she goes to them; no one is entirely sure if this is to curry favor with the general population or simply because she can't stand being closed up inside for days on end.

Needless to say, there were and are numerous protests within the upper echelons of society, who are still accustomed to being selected as civil servants and ministers without challenge. Many opted to write treatises about Ameiko's questionable ability to rule, but the most militant simply left in search of sympathetic nations that would allow them to reclaim their positions and plot their revenge. Ameiko must be on guard for signs of invasion and sabotage but has found that these concerns distract her from the greater cause. The burden of monitoring for internal and external threats has thus fallen to her trusted advisor, **Hisae** (perceptive female kitsune druid). As the eldest child of **Miyaro** (mystical female kitsune rogue), who assisted Ameiko in reclaiming the throne, Hisae has become an emissary of the north and a staunch protector of the Forest of Spirits. She's outspoken when alone with friends and family but tends to be quietly observant in public. She reads the small details of the world, whether in the busiest city or the deepest wilderness. Some suspect she has ancient magic running through her veins, as kami and other spirits accumulate wherever she goes. With her trust in Hisae, Ameiko has begun the onerous task of finding replacements for the fallen imperial families. In the past, these inheritors provided Minkai with balance by representing core elements of its society: the scholarly Higashiyama, the spiritual Shojinawa, the diplomatic Sugimatsu, and the traditional Teikoku.

Only two candidates have appeared so far, though neither is aware that Ameiko views them as potential candidates. **Sugiyama Reiji** (resourceful male human investigator) currently resides in Sakakabe but hails from Mizumori Province in central Minkai and is well-versed in the histories and mysteries of the land. He's currently knee-deep in investigating the overwhelming resurgence in ghost stories and supernatural activity in the Ondori Era. Reiji has traveled widely, making him well known for his insatiable need to collect tales as well as his captivating performances of the lore he has learned along the way. Many of his ancestors were close to the Higashiyama and Sugimatsu imperial families, taking the family name Sugiyama as a nod to these relationships.

The less obvious candidate is **Wada Haruhi** (nosy and diligent female kobold sorcerer), an elderly fortune teller who has become more widely respected than any governor in the south. Haruhi is a long-time resident of Oda, the diverse capital city of the most productive farming region in Minkai. No one is sure how old Haruhi is, but the breadth of oral history in her possession and the number of locals claiming shared blood suggest the number is very high. As a popular representative of the south, Haruhi insists on meetings with local officials, imperial envoys, and even the empress when she's in the area. Haruhi is as stubborn as Ameiko, sometimes troublesome, but always thinking of cosmic order as a devout follower of Shizuru.

CITIES AND LOCATIONS

Minkai is divided into eight provinces and three semi-independent territories, known as the Osogen Grasslands. Higashita Coast, and the Ikakku Peninsula. While Kasai is considered the heart and jewel of Minkai, several large cities have garnered more public attention than the capital during the Ondori Era.



HISAE



MIYARO



SUGIYAMA REIJI



WADA HARUHI

THE PROVINCES OF MINKAI

Sankyōdai Province: Capital Sakakabe; known for silver, terraced cities, entertainment

Mizumori Province: Capital Akafuto; known for trade, lumber, connections to Tian Xia

Hosekikozan Province: Capital Enganoka; known for silk, gems, and dyes

Dokaigan Province: Capital Hiyosai; known for copper, bronze, coral ruins

Chushin Province: Capital Kasai; known for tourism, diplomacy, imperial court

Hogosareta Province: Capital Wanshi; known for rice, sake

Kokuso Province: Capital Oda; known for farming, orchards, foreign residents

Hofunawan Province: Capital Shogokabe; known for fishing, cotton fabric, international port

Akafuto

Akafuto is the second largest trade port in Minkai, drawing its wealth from the export of timber. This is also the home of the **Taiyōkōsen Monastic Academy**, an institution once renowned for training the children of samurai families. It has been forced to reconsider its admission process for the imperial clerk programs. Akafuto's importance for foreign relations and agriculture make it a clear choice for Ondori development, but there's palatable tension from the city's connection to the Jade Regent. Governor **Moniwa** was the first supporter of the tyrant's regime, which left Mizumori Province relatively unaffected. On the day Ameiko was conferred as empress, the governor went missing, and large areas of the city were destroyed. According to witnesses, the damage was caused by the powerful crowing of the **Divine Rooster**, a giant bird with feathers as black as bitumen and three golden legs. Skeptics suggest this was merely a mass hallucination, perhaps from underground gases, but most see this event as a strong message from Shizuru.



Hokkōshi

Counter to popular belief in the south, the Osogen Grassland isn't desolate, as it's populated by deep-seated cultural groups with established communities. Travelers are discovering that Hokkōshi, the largest northern city, is an ideal last stop before venturing toward the Forest of Spirits. Not only are there local delicacies made from northern resources, the city also has a growing population of Spirit Road guides ready to help tourists and hardened adventurers alike. Diplomatic relations with the far north have improved during Ameiko's reign, since the region significantly assisted the Empress in removing the Jade Regent. She likewise views Hokkōshi as the territory capital and not just a windswept outpost. Kami have been overflowing from the Forest of Spirits as well, roving across the Osogen Grasslands and popping into Hokkōshi.

Sakakabe

The capital of Sankyōdai Province, this bustling coastal town is nestled on a series of terraces, with its port supported by ancient ruins. The wealthiest residents live on the highest terrace, made rich by generations of trading pearls and silver. The middle tiers are dedicated to world-class entertainment, while the nearby foothills offer scenic onsen. Lately, however, many visitors have been bypassing these bright districts—much like Sugiyama Reiji, adventurers seek the mysteries of the mountains. Traditional lore tells that the wooded peaks of Minkai are gateways to an otherworld and are where the veil between worlds is thinnest. The three volcanoes that give the province its name support this belief, as Sakakabe has been experiencing higher than normal supernatural activity. The local hot springs haven't become superheated like in the Kamifushi Mountains, but visitors are unlikely to enjoy a soak without intruding spirits.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Empress Ameiko is looking to rebuild past relations with nations, such as Tianjing, Jinin, and Hongal. On the other hand, Minkai's detractors continue to watch for a moment of weakness. The Ondori government is most concerned about Songbai, as it has recently welcomed many of Minkai's most disgruntled samurai families.



Forest of Spirits

To the north of Minkai looms a stretch of dense woods known as the Forest of Spirits. While this might not be a place for the average person to settle, it's a wellspring of spiritual power as the birthplace of kami. Folktales in Minkai refer to the Forest as the **Gennotane**, a mythical space that once covered all of Minkai. It's the original seed from which all other forests originate, and every stand of trees contains some of its mystery. For those accustomed to the structure of towns, it's a dangerous space filled with unfamiliar sights and sounds. Most Tian-Min consider the region to be haunted and will go nowhere near it. Yet, others know that if the forest is treated with respect, it's a wondrous place worthy of the protection it receives.

The most common way to view the forest is from the **Spirit Road**. This segment of the Path of Aganhei connects Minkai to Hongal along the peninsula's southwestern coastline and has become dotted with small settlements. Officially, the Forest of Spirits is considered part of Minkai, but the mortal residents live by a blend of traditions, and the entities here are older than any nation. **Kami** make up the greatest proportion of the population, and it's understood that they only allow villages and visitors as long as the balance of nature isn't threatened. Each settlement has a number of agreements with its neighboring kami, designating where and when resources can be taken. Too much of Tian Xia's landscape has already been claimed by towns, making the spirits strongly territorial about their place of birth and remaining retreat. The last person to overstep was a samurai named Zaokoyu, who lived during the Teikoku Shogunate. Zaokoyu claimed too much land and timber to fuel his growing army and was struck down by the watchful kami who sensed his threatening ambition.

The example of Zaokoyu has become an ancient folktale, but for those living near the Forest, it's a daily reminder. Offerings and reverence are given freely by every human, kitsune, and tengu who call the region home, and they do their best to teach newcomers that it's always better to seek permission than ask forgiveness from the kami. Everyone will likely need spiritual assistance at some point, with the lurking oni or lingering spirits of the dead that haunt the darker pockets of the Forest. Help has been in high demand lately, given the newfound public interest in the otherworld and its denizens across Minkai. Many have been arriving in the Spirit Road settlements looking for guides that can help them with their curiosity and quests for personal gain.

Locations

The Forest of Spirits appears like a barricade of plant life when viewed from the outside, leading many to believe that it's an impenetrable mass of trees and understory, with only the winding **Bunkatsu River** to break its singularity from northwest to southeast. As one crosses the threshold of the forest's edge, it becomes clear that the region is more a tapestry than a homogeneous entity.

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For every shadowy recess full of threats, there exists an equally magical hollow with sweet fruits and playful kami. Between day and night, a constant dance happens between forces, and many deities have a place among the trees, including **Daikitsu**, **Desna**, and **Sun Wukong**.

Most people will never venture into the Forest, preferring to experience its majesty and danger from the relative safety of the Spirit Road. This long, well-traveled trade route runs along the southwest coast of the peninsula, looking onto the **Sapphire Sound**. Small settlements and temporary camps can be found along its length, but the largest village is **Ohira**. Similar to other Spirit Road towns, Ohira displays a blend of Hongal, Minkai, and local cultures developed from its proximity to the Forest. Time moves differently here, largely due to the erratic nature of Tian-La scheduling, but also the unwritten rules of the kami. Local dishes are hearty and present rare instances when Tian-Min style cuisine will incorporate cheese and yogurt. Lately, a constant flow of travelers has been stopping to trade, acquire supplies, rest, or hire an expert guide. Its position on a Bunkatsu River delta has made it particularly popular as a launching point for adventurers who want to delve deeper into the woods. Long-time residents have been shaking their heads at the new wave of interest in the Forest, worrying that the outsiders will damage the peaceful agreement forged by their ancestors. At the same time, prosperous merchants are enjoying the financial boon from their sales of advice, gear, and kami-approved offerings.

At the Forest of Spirits' northern extent is the border with Hongal and the Wall of Heaven, leading to a higher elevation, cooler temperatures, and heavy snowfall near the coasts. The evergreen trees stand in stark contrast to the snow most of the year, and the thick carpet of conifer needles contributes to an eerie hush that pervades these woods. Guides refer to this area as the **Chinmoku**, and very few are willing to walk within its borders. Many lost spirits of the unquiet dead wander this part of the forest, though travelers are more likely to see the little snow sculptures made by unknown creatures. Villagers along the Spirit Road tell tales of adventurers who have wandered into this sorrow-chilled region by mistake, only to be waylaid by unhappy spirits and transformed into mysterious snow bodies. Others suggest the sculptures are made by the spirits who long to regain a physical form, drawing power from their resentment and regrets to affect the material world. The borders of the Chinmoku are kept in check by the protective kami who reside around the **Hyōgikai Clearing**, a circular meadow with soft grasses and an open view of the sky. It's here that the kami meet to discuss important matters and where forest inhabitants go if they require assistance from greater powers. Rarely does the council of kami reveal themselves to outsiders, but rumors suggest Empress Ameiko once witnessed such an event.



Counter to Tian Xia understanding, there's a thriving population of mortal residents living far from the eyes of Minkai and Hongal in the shelter of **Yagi Bay**. This northeastern coastline is steep and rugged, but it's topped with a flat terrace that's ideal for the surprisingly large number of interconnected settlements. **Hamanasuno** is one of the westernmost villages and is fairly typical of the region. Its 15 or so structures are arranged in loose rings around a central plaza and communal hall, referred to as the **village heart**. Every dwelling entrance faces toward the heart, although few can actually see the plaza when they're indoors. The floor of a Forest home is sunken into the earth by a few feet, with wooden posts to support a roof thatched with thick layers of dried grasses and reeds. The earthen floors keep the dwelling cool in the summer, while the sweet-smelling thatch insulates against the cold winds of winter. This design is a perfect balance between a need for protection and the **Kyōzon Mandate** to leave the woods unharmed. Villagers are allowed to hunt and fish around their settlements as well as gather the abundant plants that grow along the forest edges. They're expected to take only what they need, and to ensure that their little gardens and domesticated animals don't overtake areas outside the village. Foresters perform a wide range of rituals and dedications to the kami throughout the year, regularly offering music and dance to entertain the spirit world.

After countless generations, locals maintain the mandate and a healthy relationship with the kami with little effort, even at the largest settlement. **Maruyama** is located on the eastern side of Yagi Bay, well within reach of the coast and an oxbow of the Bunkatsu River. This position between multiple resource-rich



zones has made Maruyama a capital of sorts, where folks from any settlement can come for trade and regional events. The population is a diverse blend of ancestries, spirits, and kami, but visitors from outside the Forest of Spirits are rare and tend to stand out. An increasing number of travelers have been noted lately, though most have been redirected from the settlements by mischievous kami and illusions. The Elder Council has been keeping a close eye on the surrounding area with the **Risuchō**, a widespread network of squirrel-like creatures that gather intelligence and run communications between the villages. Reports have been pouring in about the developments within Minkai as well as a mysterious force that has been drawing kami and the unquiet dead across the borders of the Forest. The Elders are concerned that the rapid changes to the south, combined with the increase in adventurers wading into the woods, are disrupting the boundaries between worlds. They suspect that the visitors from Minkai are seeking ancient magic through contact with the kami, or that they might be looking to obtain one of the potent relics guarded by carefully selected druids and sorcerers scattered among the settlements.

The climate warms toward the southern border, and the Forest becomes covered by broad-leaf trees and a rich understory of ferns, shrubs, and slender climbing vines. This part of the woods feels far less oppressive than the Chinmoku, with the many groves and riverbanks appearing like whimsical illustrations of the Gennotane in children's books. The sun shines through expansive leaves, highlighting colorful sprays of wildflowers in a dappled light tinged with green. These clearings are inviting, but many travelers have noted the disorienting nature of this area. It's almost impossible to find the same grove twice, and villagers from the Spirit Road believe that the woods constantly shift as the two branches of the Bunkatsu River flick across the landscape like restless tails. The animal comparison is appropriate here since small forms flit and gambol in the peripheries of every clearing. Forest creatures mingle closely with numerous kami, who tend to be smaller and younger compared to the beings further north. Many of these kami are tied to the thousands of items discarded by the people of the Spirit Road and Minkai. Though the practice has been largely abandoned today, past generations believed that ritually disposing of objects in the Forest would protect against vengeful spirits, especially tsukumogami.

The number of discarded things decreases dramatically toward the river edges, and it seems none were ever bold enough to venture across the Bunkatsu River. Their reluctance means that **Dokikotsu** hasn't been seen by non-Foresters since Aganhei supposedly looked upon the ceremonial site. In one of his confiscated travel logs, he described a broad, grassy terrace overlooking the **Aokori Gulf**. Staring into the watery expanse were the hollow eyes of five massive skulls that Aganhei couldn't

identify—the beasts might have resembled bears based on their cranial structure, but with boar-like tusks and large orbitals suggesting a preference for darkness. They now sit in a semi-circle formation just before the sheer drop off a coastal cliff face, monitoring every approach to the Forest of Spirits by sea. Despite their positioning, Aganhei reported that they weren't necessarily viewed as guardians of the land. Rather, they're a perpetual offering to the sun and water as the essential elements for continued life. Foresters refer to them collectively as **Yōkyō**, which Aganhei translated as **the Request**. Carefully arranged around the base of each skull were many stone circles and caches of buried clay figurines, while a large hearth lay at the center of the semi-circle. According to his guide, representatives from the various residents of the Forest would gather here to celebrate the changing seasons, and individuals would come here seeking guidance for their problems. To make a proper request, they would craft a clay version of themselves to offer the Yōkyō. Once their issue was considered resolved, they had to return to Dokikotsu to bury their clay self if they wanted to avoid further misfortune. Aganhei didn't get the chance to make a request but briefly noted his suspicion that the skulls marked a substantial portal.

IMPORTANT FACES

Despite the local settlements, the Forest of Spirits isn't a nation since it doesn't have an economy or political structure like other regions. The shared culture focuses on the belief that the land is sacred and that harmony must be protected. Kami make up the majority of the population, and they have no need for formal institutions or social strictures. Other spirits are also common but are widely considered to be passing visitors and are closely watched by the more powerful nature kami. Smaller groups within the Forest consist of kitsune, tengu, and oni, who have maintained their settlements amid the trees. Regardless of ancestry, locals refer to themselves as **Ringyōsha,** or Foresters. Humans are uncommon as residents, though not unheard of, and are mostly known to pass through looking for spell components, mythical artifacts, or the kami's favor.



OKOJOKAMI

Arguably the best-known human to frequent the Forest is **Chono Oshima** (introverted male human hunter). Born in Ohira, he grew up traversing the length of the Spirit Road with his Tian-Min father and searching the Forest for valuable resources with his Tian-La aunts. He is now middle-aged and has little patience for the thrill-seekers and unprepared adventurers who have come to the Spirit Road looking for forest guides. He believes these reckless visitors are a risk to everything his ancestors worked for and could lead to the destruction of every settlement that borders the Forest. For this reason, Chono has become surly with strangers and is rarely convinced to help others move through the woods. He has moved further north on the Spirit Road, living with his dogs in a small town known as **Shimo**. For the past decade, he has been working with the **Yūrei Shakai**, an organization dedicated to helping misguided spirits move on from the Chinmoku. Chono regularly lends them his expertise in tracking and survival, leaving the spirit side of things to his more magically inclined society members. He's highly respected by his colleagues, though he has yet to tell them why they found him roaming through the snowy silence all those years ago.

The Yūrei Shakai have been fortunate that they haven't yet met the other occupants of the Chinmoku, who fall outside their methods for protection and appeasement. Prior to the escape of Anamuramon and the Five Storms, countless oni and hobgoblins were kept sealed within a prison not far from the Hyōgikai Clearing. Most of the oni joined in Anamuramon's plot to rule Minkai, while a select few stayed behind to keep their leader's secrets from the nosy kami. However, not every oni was eager to go to war—not because they had some moral objection to destroying the imperial system of Minkai, but rather, they simply felt like it was too much work. It was easy enough to go unnoticed while in prison, but their lack of ambition would mean their demise if it caught the attention of Anamuramon when his plan was in motion.

Shinkin (boisterous male oni brawler) was the eldest oni of the group, so he became the new leader of the rowdy crew. He dragged them into the middle of the Chinmoku, crossing the river to find a flat clearing that was ideal for building a shelter. Shinkin is now the head of the large, communal house, **Onikoya**, with the help of his partner **Kabi** (irresponsible female oni

brawler), who's one of the greatest contributors to the chaos of their daily lives. Far from being bloodthirsty demons, the occupants of Onikoya love the idea of guests coming to their somewhat filthy home. They have no intention of harming travelers, but their rough lifestyle and outrageous games are guaranteed to cause injuries. Gambling is one of their favorite pastimes, and Shinkin is personally fond of dramatic tales. For a brief time, they heard many of the unquiet dead bemoaning their fates under the Jade Regent, but they know little about Ameiko and the Ondori Era. They believe Anamuramon is still doing great.

On nights when the wind blows in the right direction, the drumming at Onikoya can be heard at Hamanasuno. Foresters know better than to follow the sound of drums in the darkness, but **Umi Matsui** (mischievous female kitsune druid) carefully monitors the northwest whenever the sound reaches town. She developed her animal whispering abilities as a small child and has since been charged with managing the local Risuchō station. She was born and raised in Hamanasuno by her kitsune mother, **Chiya**. Her father was killed in an accident before her birth, leaving her mother alone in a Spirit Road settlement. Rather than live in a human-dominated area, Chiya returned to her home village where she could remain in her true form without judgment. Umi has only ever known the Forest but has enjoyed her interactions with the few adventurers and guides she has met so far. She finds visitors' unfamiliarity with Forester ways amusing, though her teasing is more playful than mocking.

One of her contacts is **Tamayo Kimoto** (bizarre female tengu sorcerer) in Maruyama. Although her erratic behavior can be confusing to the wider community, Tamayo has proven to be a valuable member of the Elder Council. Villagers know that her knowledge and understanding of the universe means she won't do anything to threaten cosmic order. Tamayo is always accompanied by a being that she calls **Osekkai-san**, a kami in the form of a human man who's attached to her walking stick. She found him in the Chinmoku when she was journeying to Hongal; he was trapped by his sorrow and resentment, along with the other lost spirits. While reasoning with the unquiet dead isn't advisable, she decided to simply state her reason for passing through the woods—to return to the Path of Aganhei. Osekkai-san followed her from that point on, and Tamayo was curious to see where this haunting would go. Gradually, his features became less wraith-like as he drifted between trading outposts, concealed in Tamayo's staff. He eventually transformed into a kami, and she considers him essential to her village duties. In particular, they watch over the **Celestial Codex**, an ancient volume of complex astrological calculations used for divination.

Of all the kami in the Forest, the most powerful is **Okojokami** (majestic male kami elder). Many consider him to be the primary guardian of the Forest of Spirits because of his age and the size of his domain. In reality, Okojokami is the kami of the Bunkatsu River, with his head resting in the north and his two tails in the south. He is rarely seen and is thought to only take physical form when not at rest. Illustrations depict Okojokami as a gigantic ermine whose head crests the tops of the trees and body runs the length of the peninsula. Plush fur as white as fresh snow covers him, except for his tails, which are tipped with wiry, black hairs that perpetually burn with a deep orange fire. His thick fur ends where his four legs meet the river, revealing dragon-like feet covered in scales that gleam like burnished red lacquer. Anyone fortunate enough to get an audience with Okojokami will find themselves looking into eyes blacker than ink and thick whiskers that flicker with the eerie blue light commonly seen outlining powerful kami. Some believe he's related to the water dragons, and one scholar was bold enough to suggest that Okojokami was responsible for punishing Zaokoyu's ambition.



CHONO OSHIMA



SHINKIN



UMI MATSUI



TAMAYO KIMOTO

Nagajor

Nations

NAGAJOR
Capital: Zom Kullan
Government: Ophidian Matriarchy
Ruler: Varies by Nation



Peoples

Catfolk
Gnomes
Hags
Humans
Halflings
Kitsune
Lizardfolk
Nagas
Nagaji
Tengu

Languages

Aklo
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Tien

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Desna
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Nalinivati
Ravithra
Tsukiyo
Yaezhing
Yamatsumi

Resources

Armor/ Weapons
Books/ Lore
Coffee
Gems
Lumber
Luxury Goods
Magic Items
Mercenaries
Ore
Produce
Spices
Technology/ Clockwork
Textiles

THE THOUSAND SCALES

The Forbidden Kingdom, the Slithering Lands—Nagajor's historic inhospitality and relative accessibility from the **Embaral Ocean** have granted it as many names as it has received explorers. While relatively modest and unassuming in terms of wealth and splendor compared to the rest of Tian Xia, Nagajor's ophidian matriarchy remains the oldest unbroken hierarchy of governance in the entirety of the continent, nearly reaching as far as the founding of the Yixing empire, over 5,720 years since the Ivory Accords in 1,503 IC. It's a diverse land steeped in ritual and tradition, and the bonds of a historic pact opens roads for the savvy as easily as they close jaws over the unwary.

Nagajor has been inhabited by naga and nagaji since prehistory. Religious texts imply they were briefly driven into the **Darklands** by Earthfall, but outside that temporary displacement, they've never expanded from Nagajor's jungles nor been expanded into by any major power in history. Nagajor temple orthodoxy maintains that **Nalinivati** alighted upon the land, decided it was truly blessed and fitting for a god's chosen people, and gathered the naga to cultivate it. At some point, she or the naga also created nagaji to fill the jungles with life and civilization and protect it from usurpers. And usurpers did come—a thousand years before the founding of Yixing, the naga had a violent first contact with humanity that soured relations between them for over 2,000 years.

Eventually, Yixing forged the **Ivory Accord** with the naga kingdoms, and they united under a centralized alliance to sign their end of the contract, birthing the Nagajor Empire. Not only did it open the borders for all peoples to travel through Nagajor's lands, it marked the rise of the **First Mother** to power and the pillars of law binding all the naga kingdoms against warring with each other ever again.

Nagajor has always been a federation of hundreds of flowing transient kingdoms—while the naga never left Nagajor's borders for conquest, they had no such qualms about warring with each other. After the Ivory Accord, war between the kingdoms was put to rest, and their armies dissolved into a peacekeeping force operating directly under the First Mother **Vassath Apshara**. This change only exacerbated the internal diversity of the Empire. Now that it was possible to peacefully secede into small enclaves and individual villages without having to worry about being rolled over by the nearest kingdom's army, the "hundreds" of naga kingdoms exploded into thousands.

GEOGRAPHY

Nagajor is almost completely covered in wetlands and mangrove forests, nestled around the central **Kullan Dei** mountain range, with trade flowing outward and inward through winding river systems. As a result, much of the travel within Nagajor is via boat, with the occasional halts to portage across strips of jungle to access the next navigable body of water. When rising into the mountains, the wetlands give way to a unique biome within Tian Xia—the **Great Banyan Forests**. With trees regularly growing up to 300 meters tall, the ground is covered in perpetual shade from the choking foliage, and entire ecosystems live and die purely within the upper heights of the trees, moving from branch to branch. Kingdoms are built out of tree houses well above the forest surface, leading to complex three-dimensional political boundaries.

Eventually, the banyan forests give way to pure snowy mountainsides. The peaks of Kullan Dei rise well above the snow line, and while they haven't been volcanically active since Earthfall, long-dead magma chambers create deep cave networks that can reach all the way down into the **Darklands**. Some of those caves aren't empty—the remnants of Valashai artifacts and architecture litter the mountain crevasses, a testament to Nagajor's pre-Earthfall past as the outer colonies of the once great Valashai Empire. While everything has been slagged beyond recognition and archaeological interest, they still serve as the foundations for many mining towns seeking to recycle rare metals and materials.



VASSATH SHETHAGRI

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Toward the east, the mountains dip down below the snow line as they approach the borders to **Xa Hoi**. Here, flanked by kaiju-ranged jungle to the south and the **Sikhyeu Rainforest** to the north, the badlands hide a thousand tiny cracks and entrances that lead down into the **Clicking Caverns**, a dangerous cave system full of extremely aggressive clockwork creatures. Every year, the clockwork legions spill out from the caverns to do battle with the surrounding garrisons, and as a result, every year the ground grows more unstable and perforated with fresh holes to fear.

A DAY IN NAGAJOR

Nagajor is a hot and humid land, bursting with life from every corner and crevice. The cries of crows, the sound of temple bells, the hawking of street vendors. The smell of rain, perfume, and spices. Trees tower into the skies, flocks of songbirds dance and dive through pouring rain, and mosquitoes breed anywhere one can find still water—which is everywhere. Many attempts have been made to carve pockets of ordered civilization through the jungles, but the fight against nature is endless, and most cities are losing. Tree roots burst through paved roads, peacocks and cows roam through busy streets, and troops of monkeys fight murders of crows for dominance over the city rooftops.

In turn, Nagajor's kingdoms have long adapted to take this environment in stride. Cities are in constant states of reinvention and rebuilding as vines grow and tear through the works of yesterday. Philosophically, many compare it to the evolving borders and natures of the kingdoms themselves, a cycle of death, redefinition, and rebirth that's reflected on all levels of Nalinivati's sacred lands. Ad hoc city markets flourish in the ruins of castles that were built on the foundation of temples, and so on and so forth, new strata building happens with every generation and every turn of the seasons.

City life is peaceful. In the morning, crows wake up sleeping citizens at the crack of dawn, after which residents bathe and recite their morning prayers at their household or public shrines. Then it's breakfast, after which everyone heads out to work, where they'll remain until the sun begins to set. Mealtimes are communal and coordinated by temple bells, with everyone crowding around public eating halls and forums for midday meals. Diets are generally vegetarian and based on wild vegetables foraged from the surrounding countryside; proper farmland is nearly impossible to cultivate thanks to the aggressive vegetation chewing at the city borders every year.

There is one place where respite can be found from the endless war with jungle and rainforest—the mountain range of Kullan Dei. Climb past the great banyan trees that ring them, and one will eventually reach the snow line, an impassable barrier to most of Nagajor's biodiversity. These cold peaks are covered in tough grasslands and herds of

goats, shepherded in and out of sprawling ringed cities with the seasonal ebb and flow of snow. The settled cave systems within Kullan Dei are dry and hot with the heat of metallurgy and industry, the sole source of the modern weaponry that the temple guard sorely need.

If an adventurer traveling through the lush wilderness below is truly lucky (or unfortunate), they might run into Nagajor's greatest agents of change, the naga. The towering serpents shape rivers with their bodies, ecologies with their magic, and kingdoms with their words. The naga only fight in self-defense, and to attack one is a great sin against the temple orthodoxy—but if anything, that might only make them more dangerous, as they're happy to talk wayward travelers into their schemes and alien games against other naga they consider rivals.

A far greater—although mercifully more predictable—threat to travelers is Nagajor's rain. Outside the Kullan Dei mountains, Nagajor's seasons don't meaningfully map to Golarion's summers and winters; instead, they map to dry and wet. While sudden showers can happen year-round, monsoon season drenches the jungle under a small ocean of water on a nightly basis. Riverbanks flood, firm footing turns to mud, landmarks are blasted away, and the thick mists make seeing more than a dozen feet in any direction impossible. It's customary to seek blessings and divination from temples to ward oneself from the showers. Temple priests can help plot paths of auspice and foresight through outright floods with enough experience and compensation.

A YEAR IN NAGAJOR

Due to its relatively unique climate and historic isolation from the rest of Tian Xia, Nagajor divides its year into six seasons.

- **Spring.** Essentially the same as everywhere else, when spring harvests occur along with harvest festivals.
- **Summer.** Also equivalent to Golarion summer, with the summer solstice. Marriage season and rites of passage.
- **Monsoon.** The rainy season, when torrential rains flood the entirety of Nagajor and renew the earth.
- **Autumn.** Autumnal equinox, and the first autumn harvest festivals. Nagajor's tropical jungle trees don't shed their leaves, but the forests on the Kullan Dei mountains do change their color.
- **Cool.** A pre-winter season, with calmer weather. Nagajor's calendar celebrates its new year in the cool season, and that makes it a season for bureaucratic and religious holidays.
- **Winter.** The coldest months, winter solstice. Many trees in the jungles shed their leaves in this season, making it something like a tropical equivalent of Golarion autumn. The Clicking Caverns strike.

By far the most important season is the monsoons. The physical and spiritual ecosystems of Nagajor depend on the thick storm clouds of the Embaral Ocean sweeping into the Kullan Dei mountains and drowning the mangrove forests and wetlands every year. Not only does it affect every cycle of wild foraging and systemic agriculture, but it also opens and closes trade and travel routes between the various kingdoms of the empire, flooding roads and refilling rivers. It also tends to wash the traditional milestones used for kingdom borders into new and aggravating positions, causing arguments and regional scuffles between neighbors.

Behind the monsoon season in importance are the summer and cool seasons. Summer is the season of life and plenty, one associated with a suffusing sense of excitement and optimism for everyday people. For adults, it's marriage season, and for kids, it's the season for coming-of-age rituals, when adolescent nagaji take on trials to join the various castes of the temple orthodoxy. These trials tend to be elaborate sports festivals and martial arts tournaments, always open to spectators, both nagaji and not. Summer is the season for forming memories and making foolish promises,

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Nagajor has a few simple rules of thumb to best approach the intended pronunciation of words. "Th" tends to correspond to a short, hard "t" sound, like a tighter version of the "th" in "thick". The "d" and "dh" tend to correspond to a short, hard "d" sound, just like the "th," but with some stress into it, like there's a hard "h" behind it. The "a" in words usually corresponds to an "uh" sound, like in "runt," but sometimes can be an "ah" sound. R's are always rolled.

Nagajor: Nuh-guh-joe-rruh (with the "r" rolled)
Naga: Nuh-ghuh
Nagaji: Nuh-gah-jhi
Anandya: Uh-nun-dH-ya
Thulsadus: tH-ul-sah-dH-us
Yama: Yah-mah



with the monsoons just around the corner to wash away any youthful indiscretions.

Behind the summer season, the cool season is much statelier. As the nights lengthen, astrologers begin their greatest rituals, and temples lead congregations in candlelit prayers for the foresight and discipline to have a prosperous new year. The mountain waters are re-blessed to please the naga and make sure the Valashmai **kaiju** stay on their side of the rivers. The First Mother rarely steps out from her temple at the peak of Zom Kullan to address her followers, but if she does, it'll be on an occasion such as an anniversary of the Ivory Accords. There's a solemnity to the season, both from religious significance and grim expectation. Winter approaches, and every winter, the clockwork legions from the **Clicking Caverns** attack.

To outsiders, most of the seasons might feel invisible—barring the monsoons, anyway. The temperature variation is so small that to many travelers, the land simply progresses through cycles of hot and humid to hot and dry. Food is fresh and cultivated throughout the year, with different crops reaching the markets every month and harvest festivals being held in both summer and autumn. With no need to rush to stockpile for cruel winters, the kingdoms are a constant buzz of waxing and waning activity, relaxed but ever flowing.

With increased trade from the rest of Tian Xia, this pattern is starting to ever so slowly change. Border cities like **Thulsadus** celebrate foreign religions, and every port prepares for traders to arrive on their own, foreign schedules. As Nagajor integrates into the rest of the continent, cultural exchange brings new rites and festivals to the sleepy serpent kingdoms.



CULTURE

Nagajor's people are broadly split into four groups, corresponding to how long they've been a part of the historic empire, forming a strict hierarchy: the naga above, the nagaji below, and two sets of immigrants—peoples allowed in before the Ivory Accord and the peoples who finally got to enter after.

The Naga

Nagajor's ruling caste are exclusively naga. And vice-versa: to be a naga is to be a ruler, even one with no subjects. Directly under the First Mother, the naga of Nagajor are found throughout the land, tending to shrines, coiling upon mountaintops waiting for adherents, and sanctifying various ponds and rivers with their presence. They're also, to the last, pacifists. Naga minds have always been inscrutably warded against the interrogations of scholars and mages throughout Golarion, so whether their cooperative nonviolence in Nagajor resulted from philosophical concord or hive-minded magic has been a question debated for millennia.

Functionally, the naga act as small gods and necessary functionaries for the pseudo-sovereignty of Nagajor's many kingdoms and satrapies. How does one form a new kingdom? One finds a naga to vouch for it. How does one secede from one? One asks politely—or argues vociferously—to one's ruling naga to let you go. What happens when naga disagree? Ostensibly, it never happens. In practice, lines are drawn, bets are made, and the challenges often fall to the peoples below them to prove their points.

The Nagaji

Despite only making up a third of Nagajor's population in the modern day, nagaji are the backbone of society across the land's myriad kingdoms. They form the central military, the various temple guardian clades, and fill the ranks of government and temple functionaries that keep the empire running. Nagaji have a complex system of elective castes that they train throughout their childhood to join. Coming-of-age ceremonies are part calendrical convergence, part test of mettle. It's possible for a nagaji to take the time and training to join additional castes later in their life, but these "prismatics" are quite rare. There are also established rites for relinquishing one's family lineage and religious responsibilities to Nagajor—originally a carefully negotiated exit strategy for pilgrims to **Po Li**, now a well-trodden path for emigrants and individuals chafing under the First Mother's strictures. Many an adventurer has been born through the rite of seeking, and once they leave Nagajor's borders, they seldom return.

Appearance-wise, Nagajor nagaji wear waterproofed silks and cover themselves in jewelry as their primary form of dress and self-expression. There's very little need to



protect themselves from the elements, and it isn't scandalous for them to go completely unclothed. Due to their tight ties to the temple guardians and the religious orthodoxy, the jewelry also serves as caste and rank markers toward fellow adherents, something like a uniform or medal system.

The Blessed Children

Nagajor's ancient war with humanity left a very selective impact on the naga queens' outlook on the ancestries of Tian Xia. While Nagajor effectively closed its borders to humans and a host of other humanoid ancestries, the nagas found kinship in other peoples they considered to be equally touched by nature, like tengu, amurruns, and kitsune, or whomever they considered to be fellow victims of humanity's oppression, like orcs, kobolds, and hags. For 2,000 years, these peoples were granted a major head start in assimilating into Nagajor and helping it interface with the rest of Tian Xia. Nalinivati's "Blessed Children" settled the corners of Kullan Dei the nagas couldn't, traded books and spices between Nagajor and the human lands, and assimilated permanently into the naga kingdoms as refugees from neighboring kingdoms in times of crisis.

Even after the Ivory Accord, this head start positioned the blessed children in religious roles and positions of cultural stability not shared by humans to this day. Tengu alone outnumber all the other ancestries aside from nagaji and the naga, and travelers find easier passage should they bear scales, fur, or feathers. Appearance-wise, the blessed children wear cooler and lighter clothes that can withstand rain, such as waterproof silks, just like nagaji. Unlike nagaji, they're much less likely to adorn themselves with complex jewelry due to its relationship to the temple guardians.

The New Children

Nearly 6,000 years have passed since the Ivory Accord was forged, and head start or not, humanity has been busy. Not just humanity either—the naga kingdoms drew very loose lines around the peoples they considered to be human-like enough to be at war with prior. Humans, dwarves, elves, gnomes, and halflings all found themselves locked out until the rise of the First Mothers to power. While these "new children" were late enough to the party to only have limited success integrating as fully assimilated residents of the region, they found a ready-made societal niche to fall into: mercenaries and adventurers.

It all started with the Clicking Caverns. Legions of clockwork spiders started pouring out of the mountains between Nagajor and Xa Hoi to assault both lands. While the Kullan Dei nagaji guard were well prepared to defend their ancestral lands from invaders, pushing back into the Caverns posed another challenge entirely. Over time, the First Mothers settled into a pattern of hiring the services of foreign troops, who had fewer religious restrictions on leaving their homeland and were better physiologically adapted to fighting deep in the dry underground, away from Nagajor's rivers and swamps.

To this day, the new children are prized adventurers and bodyguards throughout Nagajor. Whether it's defending caravans from bandits or helping quietly resolve border disputes, there's just a lot more room for mysterious outlanders to solve problems when tradition ties up the empire's citizens. Their diversity in appearance is unparalleled in the kingdoms. Frequently, fresh immigrants don't receive much opportunity to integrate into the stylistic norms of Nagajor's ruling classes, so the new children garb themselves in a riot of dress codes, makeup styles, and accessories from every corner of Tian Xia.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

Nagajor's current government is the same as its dominant religion. While nameless within Nagajor, it has many names outside it—often translated as the **Serpent's Embrace** or the **Countless Coils**. This syncretic system mixes worship of Nalinivati, the strict adherence to a divinely ordained hierarchy that promises peace and order, and a philosophical model of virtue and excellence where one sloughs off their material needs and sins and leaves them behind, just as Nalinivati's skin was shed to form the foundation of the world. By studying the world and the missing gaps within it, students can learn what they could leave behind to seek transcendence from the coils of death and rebirth that bind all who can't yet see the path.



CAPTAIN ANANDYA

The spells don't hurt and divine magic seeps the land, fitting seamlessly into otherwise mundane ceremony and observance. Some see it as a strength of the empire, others as a crutch. Regardless, none who visit escape its subtle influence.

First Mother **Vassath Shethagri** (eldritch female royal naga sorcerer) is seen by outsiders as the ruler of Nagajor but serves more as a first among equals and the authority most responsible for dealing with the region's foreign relations. The **temple guardians** are an ancient order, stretching deep into Nagajor's prehistory and entirely staffed by the empire's nagaji. Nagaji are arranged into four major castes (and also a dozen other local small ones), and they're elective. Every child is born casteless, chooses the one they want to join as part of the traditional coming-of-age ceremony they go through in their early teens, and then trains until early adulthood to pass the tests they must undertake to properly join its ranks. The major castes are as follows.

The Eyes: The teachers, scholars, and priests of the temple. Those of the Eyes caste are meant to see further than their peers and help guide the actions and long-term plans of the other castes through sage advice and shrewd analysis. In the rare absence of any local naga who holds jurisdiction over any given plot of land, they also act as the de facto ruling caste.

The Scales: Artisans, architects, and artificers of the temple. Whether it's supplying the Fangs with more weapons, or excavating and erecting new cities for Nagajor's growing population, there's always room for more engineers.

The Fangs: The military caste, the one most familiar to anyone not nagaji. Their purview includes all policing and order within the kingdom, along with their near-complete jurisdiction over interacting with anybody not from the temple. The Fangs are essentially synonymous with the temple hierarchy to everyone outside it. That's where the term "temple guardians" came from in the first place—a name that has now spread to every casted nagaji.

The Tail: The Tail caste was once the agricultural and unskilled labor force of Nagajor, the winding muscles that metaphorically push the whole snake forward. While a major part of society before the Ivory Accords, their role within the kingdoms has been increasingly supplanted by the new children. Over the millennia, stiff competition combined with the unexciting promise of doing miscellaneous odd jobs has pushed the caste into steady decline.

Black Pearls Sing Silence (scheming male clouded naga governor) is a clouded naga who has laid claim to the northernmost island off the western tip of Nagajor's shores—**Vannarak**. Under his rule, the island has seen an economic boom, and under his loose laws, pirates have been allowed to freely come and go as long as they commit their crimes outside Nagajor's borders. Rumor has it that he's organizing and funding a mercenary expedition to the Wall of Heaven, hoping to breach Iron Mountain from the shores and, presumably, access its twin gates to Heaven and Hell. For what purpose, one can only speculate.

CITIES AND LOCATIONS

The following are a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Nagajor.

Camp Yama

Fourteen years ago, after the nagaji hero **Zethivaxus Djeed** emerged from the Clicking Caverns, a group of adventurers stumbled upon an artifact in a newly exposed section of the caves—a massive clockwork heart. It repelled the clicking legions, who couldn't acknowledge or approach it. Since then, Nagajor and Xa Hoi have been tripping over themselves with haste to set up an invulnerable forward base around the artifact.

Camp Yama is a new city and extremely artificial. It has a very specific radius of about a mile in all directions beyond which it can't expand permanently, and organizationally, it's administered by **Captain Anandya** (serious female nagaji commander) and the Nagajor temple guard—at least, when it isn't being administered by generals sent from Xa Hoi's Dragon King. Speed and logistics were the first priorities in founding the camp, diplomacy and clear chains of command a distant second. As a result, there's constant friction between the two cramped forces, further exacerbated by the significant population of mercenaries and adventurers hired by the First Mother to actually plumb the caverns' depths.

Vannarak

One of Nagajor's newest cities, Vannarak is a mining town that was hastily established on the northernmost island off the west coast of Nagajor. Originally a windswept bluff with no natural resources, it had a brief gold rush after a kaiju beached itself on the island's shores. Now, there's a thriving town built around and into the main body of the dead beast. Vannarak is populated by more than just butcher-miners—the kaiju's body is so immense that it still hasn't been fully "explored," with depths that promise secrets of great interest to wizards and academics throughout Tian Xia.

Zom Kullan

The de facto capital of Nagajor in the eyes of foreign interests, Zom Kullan is where the First Mother resides and does business with other nations' diplomats. The fact that the city is built into an active volcano means that diplomatic business is kept short. Despite the overtly looming threat, an intricate web of enchantments protects the city from the heat and lava—the First Mother and her attendants likewise claim to keep the entire region safe by placating the volcano with rituals. True or not, no one is inclined to risk arguing. For those brave enough to linger, Zom Kullan is an architectural wonder, consisting of towering temples and twisting lava. Almost every surface is carved with reliefs and magic glyphs, ensuring the comfort of and celebrating the magical heritage of all the citizens who reside within. Residents take an unusual pride in the city's porous basalt, and they often wear jewelry and charms made from the black rock.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Nagajor's political strategy has always been to be absolutely impregnable and neutral. As a result, Nagajor has quietly slipped out of the minds of politicians in northern Tian Xia, a perception that suits the First Mother just fine.



THE EYES



THE SCALES



THE FANGS

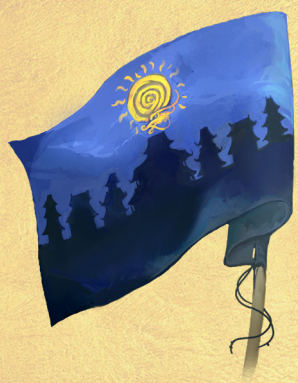


THE TAIL

Po Li

Nations

Po Li
Capital: Changdo
Government: Theocracy
Ruler: The Oracular Council



Peoples

Humans
Kobolds
Nagaji
Samsarans

Languages

Draconic
Nagaji
Samsaran
Tang
Tien

Factions

Shattered Lotus

Religions

The Eternal Emperor

Resources

Books/ Lore
Dye
Livestock
Lumber
Magic Items
Produce
Seafood
Textiles

THE WAITING THRONE

Though Imperial Lung Wa has been gone for over 100 years, some of its scions still await the return of its reincarnated emperor and its glory. Following the collapse of Lung Wa, the Successor State of Po Li was established, holding onto its cultural touchstones and imperial roots. Occupying the former imperial capital of **Changdo**, the people of Po Li devoted themselves to faith in the reincarnation of the **Eternal Emperor** of Lung Wa through the guidance and leadership of a governing council of oracles and high-ranking politicians. Legend tells of the Eternal Emperor's sacrifice during the fall of Lung Wa that prevented a greater catastrophe, as reaffirmed by the **Oracular Council**. A mighty throne awaits the Eternal Emperor's promised return; always empty in council gatherings and meetings, only the true imperial heir may sit upon the jeweled seat.

Hopeful parents often present their children to the Oracular Council with claims of divine signs and miracles. While most claims are usually dismissed, some children show true potential or possess divine signs of a greater destiny ahead. The oracles might adopt these youths and raise them into adulthood among their ranks, training them in the **Path of Numbers** and their political ways. Such individuals might eventually become members of the Oracular Council, but most become agents and secret defenders of Po Li and beyond. Ultimately, they act on behalf of the state and further the oracles' agenda. The Oracular Council's true intentions remain as mysterious as their prophetic Path of Numbers.

Religious iconography, talismans, and a developing tourism complex keep Po Li's coffers plentiful for preserving its historical and religious sites. The nation is home to several holy sites and artifacts, such as the **Emperor's Footprint** located in the Chang Liao Jungle or the incomplete statue of the Eternal Emperor located in the heart of Changdo. The Oracular Council frowns heavily on fake or blasphemous relics, often imprisoning the offenders, yet conceals the fact that many of the relics in its museums and galleries are also fakes.

Over the years, the state of Po Li has grown increasingly isolated compared to its neighbors, despite any previous inclinations toward unifying a fractured empire. While divine magic is revered in Po Li, worship outside the Eternal Emperor is forbidden, especially within the Imperial City. The Po Lian people continue to live within the same relative comforts as before the fall of Lung Wa, despite the political and religious ramifications. Still, citizens are generally welcoming and offer simple hospitality where possible. Visitors and pilgrims who flock to Po Li to visit its many religious locales experience a glimpse into the past, as most of the region's infrastructure remained intact upon Imperial Lung Wa's collapse.



LAPIS WATCHER

GEOGRAPHY

Po Li is located in central Tian Xia, with the capital city of **Changdo** sitting in the continent's geographic center. The **Sea of Ghosts** runs along its northern shores, nearing the edges of the **Chang Liao Jungle**; the area is comprised of stone-ridden shores covered in vast overgrowths that lead into the tall jungle tree lines. The Chang Liao Jungle encompasses nearly half of Po Li, from its northeastern borders near **Hwanggot** to where **Nagajor** and **Tang Mai**'s borders meet. Officially, the Oracular Council maintains a hands-free policy on the jungle to preserve it as a sacred heritage site, though this approach might have more to do with the deadly creatures that dwell deep in the tangled undergrowth. The **Xiong Dao** river snakes between **Bachuan** and Hwanggot before splitting into two smaller river branches where the three countries' borders meet and rejoining at its penultimate journey—the **Emperor's Footprint**, a massive sinkhole several miles wide surrounded by waterfalls and emerald hanging vines.

The Emperor's Footprint is a religious pilgrimage site that beckons visitors annually from neighboring regions. Pilgrims must trek and survive the journey through the lush jungle to reach the Footprint, typically a two-day excursion with no markings and only faith as their guide. Divine magic casters and oracles believe the site connects with the will of Heaven in the form of communion with their patron deity or the spirit of the yet-to-be-reborn Eternal Emperor. Local legends also tell of a rare purple flower that supposedly blooms within the sinkhole once every 144 years, with powers ranging from a magical geas to resurrection, depending on the moral of the story.

The remaining half of the country consists of the **Po Lian Plains**, which has much of Po Li's crops and fertile soil. Po Li sees ample rainstorms during its warmer months due to its relatively high humidity, but can still experience some frigid winters. During the warmer and rainier months, the plains are partially flooded in some areas to allow for rice cultivation. As one approaches the former imperial capital, well-maintained roads leading to various hamlets and farms keep the food supply steady. This stability allows Po Li to remain a society poised to regain its former glory.



Following the fall of Lung Wa, the Successor States of **Quain** in the west and **Lingshen** in the north continued to share a bitter rivalry with Po Li. According to the Oracular Council, the other factions were resentful of Po Li's preservation of Changdo and the legacy of the Eternal Emperor. Other neighbors include Bachuan to the northeast, Hwanggot in the east, Tang Mai in the southwest, and Nagajor in the southwest.

A DAY IN PO LI

Life within Po Li remains relatively untouched by Lung Wa's collapse. Although certain amenities are no longer freely available, the fertile farmlands south of Changdo remain preoccupied with their harvests and agricultural projects. Most commoners outside Changdo typically rise an hour before dawn and tend to their domesticated livestock. Villagers along the country's northern borders gather their casting nets and small wooden boats to fish along the river connecting the **Sea of Ghosts** to **Meiguan Lake**. The city of Changdo routinely greets the new day with a musical accompaniment as priests traverse from the forbidden inner zone to the outer zones, where merchants and laborers reside.

Other settlements, such as **Jitai**, **Tuotuo**, or **Yuming**, have followed established routines and traditions since the times of Lung Wa. Jitai typically opens its central temple at dawn to allow devoted followers of the Eternal Emperor to place offerings. On the other side of Po Li, Tuotuo starts with a quieter routine that involves its many museums, shrines, galleries, and educational centers lighting candles and incense to invite bright minds into the many hallways and corridors of the city. Yuming fishers usually have their boats on Meiguan Lake hours before sunrise, and many return to port before the early morning prayers start.

By midday, a prayer to the Eternal Emperor is ushered into Changdo with a resounding bell that can be heard across the plains. As a sign of respect, laborers must cease all work to allow anyone to follow the prayer. Afterward, everyone in Changdo is encouraged to spend up to two hours resting, including a meal and a frequently enjoyed nap. In other cities, it isn't uncommon for family members to return home during the midday prayer and share a meal, while smaller settlements enjoy communal luncheons. Another bell sounds across Po Li, and the remainder of the workday commences until dusk. Farmers and laborers on the plains typically retreat to their homes to prepare their evening meals after a long day. Children usually spend half of their days in vocational schools to learn useful skills and trades; the other half is spent in spiritual classes to learn about the Eternal Emperor and the faith's many prayers. Aspiring oracles and investigators follow strict routines and regimens in their training since they'll eventually work for and possibly be in the Oracular Council.

During the evening hours, families typically gather together for their meal, which begins and ends with a prayer for the Eternal Emperor's swift return. The evening meals are considered a cherished time in Po Li and a sacred custom to reinforce familial bonds and strengthen ties with neighbors, especially among smaller villages outside Changdo or Po Li's other major settlements. In Changdo, dozens of large lanterns float around, illuminating the incomplete Eternal Emperor statue towering above the city's walls. As the late evening hours draw closer, many Po Lian citizens enjoy a final meditation, seeking spiritual strength from the Eternal Emperor to prepare for the upcoming day.

A YEAR IN PO LI

Religious holidays and agricultural rotations mark and highlight the passage of time in Po Li. Po Li honors the **New Year** with religious parades to honor the Eternal Emperor in Changdo, with similar practices in the larger settlements of Jitai, Tuotuo, and Yuming. At the same time, smaller villages perform dances or shorter parades. Icons and effigies of the Eternal Emperor are typically seen in abundance in shops and curios; paper talismans and incense are burned in the hope of centering the Eternal Emperor's wandering spirit back into the living world again. Offerings of food are often placed on altars in temples or shrines to the Eternal Emperor and later collected by the caretakers to feed the needy. Families are encouraged to spend time together in their homes for at least two days, starting with mild fasting the day prior as a symbol of purging the troubles that ail the spirit from the previous year, reinforced with prayers and meditations. A large feast or banquet is prepared to be shared the following day to celebrate and welcome the new year. The new year celebrations typically happen alongside the first crops being planted when the late spring and summer months bring rain to the irrigation systems scattered throughout the Po Lian Plains.



Near the end of spring, the **Festival of Fireflies** celebrates the birth, death, and rebirths of all previous Eternal Emperors, with families typically paying respects to ancestral spirits simultaneously. The festival is a moment of contemplation and reverence for the divine wisdom given to the Tian-Shu by the Eternal Emperor. Changdo and Yuming sit along the coastal borders of Po Li and traditionally release paper lanterns both on the lakes and rivers, while inland settlements release the lanterns into the air. The lanterns are meant to guide lost and wandering deceased spirits back to their eternal rest while acting as a beacon for the soon-to-be-reborn Eternal Emperor to beckon them back to their homeland. In addition, offerings of dumplings or steamed buns stuffed with vegetables are placed near shrines, outside homesteads, and shared among community members.

The **Festival of Heaven's Tears**, or the **Festival of Rains**, marks a three-week celebration for farms and agriculturists at the end of summer. At the same time, oracles and acolytes retreat into meditative contemplation. By the end of the three-week celebration, oracles travel from their conclaves to smaller settlements to predict rainstorms and optimal harvest times, an important practice since the days of the Yixing Empire. In the streets of Changdo, operas and shows are held to highlight Po Li's legacy with stories featuring the Eternal Emperor, while in Jitai, temple visitors read elegies to the shrines dedicated to the Eternal Emperor in accordance with customs. Tuotuo offers educational seminars and workshops for traders and farmers during the festival, a popular convention given Tuotuo's view of the **Kullan Dei** mountain range in Nagajor. As Yuming started as a fishing village, it prominently features boat races during the festivities and large cookouts and seafood boils organized by local communities.

Near the end of autumn, the **Dragon Temple Festival** occurs. An entourage of divine scholars, priests, and oracles tours through the major cities and outlying settlements for a month to showcase Po Lian culture, history, and the legacy of the Eternal Emperor. Citizens frequently use the festival as an

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Along with Quain and Lingshen, Po Li is considered to have the most "classic" Tien by which other countries' languages are compared—despite notable differences in the three nations' pronunciation and grammar.

Po Li: poh-LEE
Changdo: CHANG-dew
Chang Liao: CHANG-leeow
Meiguan: may-GWAN
Tuotuo: tow-tow
Jitai: gee-TAI
Yuming: YOU-ming
Zhao Meng: jow MENG
Zhuge Shuang Ying: joo-GE swung YE-ng
Auyoung Fong: AH-young fong
Wang Jing: WAH-ng GI-ng
Shi Yin Ling: she YIN ling



opportunity to bring a young child in front of the oracles in the hopes that they could be the Eternal Emperor reborn. While many parents leave disappointed, some of the children are adopted by the Oracular Council to train their potential and are compensated by the state. It's also customary during the tour for the priests and oracles to hand out talismans and relics to safeguard the populace. Such items are typically designed to ward off foul or malignant spirits or beings from one's household or dwelling. The tour starts from Changdo, heading south to Jitai and then west to Tuotuo, with its final stop at Yuming, located along Po Li's northwestern border.

CULTURE

Everything in Po Li centers around the Eternal Emperor. Outsiders traveling in Po Li quickly realize the influence of the monotheistic faith. Every household, business, shop, and administrative building has scrolls, iconography, and small altars dedicated to the Eternal Emperor. While the religion has no clergy, instead following the declarations of Po Li's oracles, there are temples and shrines dedicated to the Eternal Emperor scattered in different settlements managed by "priests" to confer a familiar semblance for visitors from other nations. These priests are state-appointed, blue-robed oracles or red-robed agents tasked with maintaining these sites and providing similar divine services found elsewhere in other Tian nations. Practice or worship of other faiths within Po Li is strictly discouraged and considered a criminal act in larger settlements, especially in Changdo, where vigilant **Lapis Watchers**—the Po Lian secret police—might arrest and subdue perpetrators. In addition, in many instances, magical practices by unauthorized individuals often result in a penalty or incarceration.



Po Lian culture prides itself on being a window into Lung Wa's past as a unified empire; many of its political leaders and citizens consider themselves preservationists until the Eternal Emperor's reincarnation. Po Li values education and divine magic as a means to uncover the greater will of Heaven. Educational centers teach a glorified history of Lung Wa alongside doctrines from the monotheistic faith. As a theocracy, policies and mandates are centrally dictated from divine scriptures, prophecies, and even excerpts of wisdom from previous emperors, usually in that order. An oracle's judgment is considered final and absolute when their wisdom or expertise is employed. They believe that once a mystery is observed, it becomes real, like any truths it bears. Once a child's potential is read during a **Test of Fate** (page 173), it can't be unread, and their fate is forever tied to the interpretation of the oracle that administered the test.

One of Po Li's largest exports is divine or holy relics. Talented and gifted oracles are known to weave powerful relics that can ward or protect wearers and provide charms and trinkets that sway luck or bring fortune. Counterfeiters and forgeries are a common issue, with varying degrees of punishment based on the severity of the religious offense. Due to the high profitability, despite strict regulation, new small forgery groups form easily in weeks or months, creating a perpetual cycle of discovery to prosecution to punishment.

Despite lacking a large military presence, Po Li has a small armed force to maintain its sovereignty. Lapis Watchers monitor insurgencies, political spies, and religious usurpers, sometimes acting in the best interest of high-ranking oracles and their schemes. Such individuals might appear in civilian, military, or political positions and even as laborers in rural settlements. Most Po Lians believe that the organization is mostly rumors or paranoia spread by worried critics, as the Oracular Council has never declared the group's existence openly.

In larger settlements, local culture remained relatively unchanged even after the fall of Lung Wa. However, certain aspects were affected, such as supply chains and accessibility to resources. Only the Oracular Council and their servants remain in the same dress since Lung Wa. Oracles typically wear blue robes, but their station and rank are easily recognizable from the ornamentation of stitched images and icons. The servants of the oracles will often



be seen wearing yellow or dark green robes with different sashes to indicate their particular roles or functions. Non-caster agents of the council typically don red robes, while educators typically wear red and black robes.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

The **Oracular Council** rules from Changdo and acts as the governing body of Po Li following the collapse of Lung Wa. The council is comprised of clerical and political leaders whose influence filters into the lives of everyone in the nation. Since ancient times, the council has employed a sacred numerological system of divination called the **Path of Numbers**, combined with other practices, to extract wisdom and prophetic insight. High-level oracles believe they can determine one's potential by the time and date of birth, zodiac sign, and astrological configuration at the moment of conception and birth through a **Test of Fate**. The test is a special divination that outlines a person's entire life like a map, indicating their absolute potential, and is considered solidified upon examination. Many critics view the tests as deterministic and violating the notion of free will, often slandering the practice as a death sentence for many "ill-fated" individuals. The Oracular Council defends the practice, citing such potent skills will allow them to know when the Eternal Emperor has reincarnated, an edict constantly reaffirmed through their monotheistic religion.

Over a century since Lung Wa's collapse, the Oracular Council holds a firm grip over Po Lian policies and seems unwilling to relinquish their political control. Despite recent stirrings from Lingshen and rumors of a purported return of the Eternal Emperor, every attempt to install a false Emperor has been met with the wrathful fury of the sky dragon, **Shen Ra**. Ultimately, the faithful continue to hold out offerings of hope and believe the lack of an imperial heir signifies the council's due diligence in finding the fated individual to lead them into glorious victory.

The Oracular Council

As the sole ruling body of Po Li, the Oracular Council portrays themselves as stewards or wardens of the Five Dragon Throne, Tian culture, and the faith of the Eternal Emperor. Within the Oracular Council are two distinct levels of authority, commonly referred to as the **Lower** and **High Oracular Council**. Most of the nation's logistical apparatus is centrally managed by the Lower Oracular Council, consisting predominately of lower-ranking oracles, secular lords, bureaucrats, and politicians. The High Oracular Council consists of five members (or ministers) that drive and safeguard the sanctity of Po Li's culture and political agendas, along with their primary role of awaiting the Eternal Emperor's reincarnation.

Presently, **Zhao Meng** (astute male Tian-Shu human oracle) holds the title of **Grand Oracle** within the High Oracular Council and effectively acts as regent. A shrewd elderly man who sits at the rightmost seat of the Five Dragon Throne, Meng exerts a methodical presence to ensure that Po Lian society remains strong despite the lack of the

Eternal Emperor's return. Meng's first loyalty is always to Po Li and its sovereignty, which many misinterpret as political ambition to ensure an extension of his tenure.

Behind the Grand Oracle, the **Minister of Internal Affairs** ranks second in overall authority within Po Li. That honor and distinction currently belongs to **Zhuge Shuang Ying** (efficient female Tian-Shu human investigator). Ying is the director of the Lapis Watchers and, by extension, the rest of the Bureau of Numerology regarding Po Li's internal stability and security. An entourage of oracles out to verify another claim of the Eternal Emperor's return found Ying as a young orphan and evaluated her fate and potential. She was later inducted into the Bureau of Numerology as a Lapis Watcher candidate. The organization experienced an extensive overhaul under Ying's tenure during the past decade and a half. Her overall success and triumphs, especially her upbringing, inspire inductees of the Bureau, though she frequently clashes with **Wang Jing** (bombastic nonbinary Tian-Shu human oracle), the **Minister of Faith**.

As Minister of Faith, Wang Jing professes and maintains Po Li's religious traditions, practices, and heritage from the Lung Wa Empire. During major holidays, Jing is the religious voice of prayer and sermons, a role that plays into their charismatic narcissism and vanity. While Po Lian citizens largely believe in the Eternal Emperor and their eventual reincarnation, Jing doesn't take kindly to dissent or the unfaithful. Jing and the previous Minister of Internal Affairs organized the eradication of reportedly heretical dissidents for national security.



ZHAO MENG

Shi Yin Ling (studious female Tian-Shu human oracle) acts as the **Minister of Truth**, presiding over education and historical preservation. With the steady arrival of pilgrims and tourists in Po Li, Ling must ensure the authenticity of religious and historical iconographies. Forgeries and false religious items frequently plague Ling and her regulators. Ling's chief priority remains the city of Tuotuo and its sacred archive, available only to high-ranking oracles and officials. **Auyoung Fong** (optimistic female Tian-Shu human oracle) is the overseer of the hundreds of written prophecies and mysteries connected to the Path of Numbers, many of which are stored in Tuotuo's archives left by ancestral Lung Wa seers and soothsayers. Unbashful in her faith and devotion, Fong is preoccupied with deciphering the coded divine mysteries and signs for the Eternal Emperor's next reincarnation. Recent rumors from Lingshen have upset Fong and sent her searching through scroll racks, following frightful connections drawn from the Path of Numbers and references to an impending solar eclipse. Both Ling and Fong are infrequently present for most council meetings due to their cloistered pursuits unless ordered by Zhao Meng.

The Bureau of Numerology

At the heart of the Oracular Council's influence and political power, the Bureau of Numerology is a venerable army of special operatives, seers, and agents tasked with protecting Po Li and its sovereignty from external and internal threats. The Bureau consists of five distinct branches, akin to the five gemstones or materials found on the Five Dragon Throne. The **Lapis Watchers** answer only to the High Oracular Council and handle any internal strife. The **Chalcedony Syndicate** are state-recognized oracles, many found by other oracles based on their latent potentials. They administer Tests of Fate for families, connect with ancestral spirits, and provide other religious services. The **Ivory Guards** are the common law enforcement and magistrates for villages, outposts, and townships, typically trained to handle local disputes and inquiries. The **Malachite Battalion** is Po Li's standing army and active military force, though smaller than other Tian Xia nations—a necessary aspect of upholding the country's sovereignty after Lung Wa's collapse. Finally, the **Jade Warriors** are elite guards from the Imperial era dedicated to protecting the city of Changdo and are outside even the Oracular Council's authority, as the Eternal Emperor founded them over 300 years ago. Membership is based on individual evaluations, and selections are a lifetime commitment upon induction.

CITIES AND LOCATIONS

Po Li is home to the former imperial capital and is considered the spiritual stronghold of Lung Wa. Its largest cities offer a glimpse into the past, and the country also hosts several important religious heritage sites.

Changdo, the Imperial City

The former capital city of Lung Wa, Changdo serves as the current seat of power for Po Li. The Oracular Council presides over the country's daily operations and bureaucracy. The Imperial City is also home to a colossal statue of the Eternal Emperor and the Five Dragon Throne.

The Eternal Emperor's statue has been under construction for more than 300 years, raising the structure higher with each successive generation of builders, engineers, and sculptors. The main figure is made of polished metal supported by stone and wooden interior beams; large marble columns sit at the structure's base with carved epithets of the Eternal Emperor's many incarnations and an incomplete face. In recent decades, locals have begun to believe that the Eternal Emperor will only reincarnate after the face of the statue is completed, revealing their new mortal form.

The **Five Dragon Throne** is a great seat made with jade, ivory, chalcedony, lapis lazuli, and malachite, all carved to resemble dragons, that sits atop the large meeting room within the central palace. Many speculate the throne possesses dormant magic accessible to anyone able to sit on it, but most aren't foolish enough to dare invoke the wrath of the artifact's protector. The legendary sky dragon, **Shen Ra** (page 16), lives above Changdo behind billowing clouds and acts as the watchful protector of the imperial throne. Those found unworthy or deemed false emperors suffer the dragon's legendary wrath. Indeed, a recent ploy by the Oracular Council to install a puppet emperor on the throne, in response to increasing rumors from Lingshen, enraged the sky dragon—who reduced the council's pawn to ashes with a beam of lightning and light.

Tuotuo, the Enlightened City

In Po Li's southwest, the city of Tuotuo overlooks the Nagajor border atop a plateau separated by three zones, similar to the Imperial City. While Changdo is the bureaucratic center of Po Li, Tuotuo is the historical and educational center of the nation. Its innermost zone contains several ornate golden libraries; referred to as the Sacred Archives, they contain racks of prophecies and writings from previous high-ranking oracles, accompanied by an enormous observatory.

Emperor's Footprint

This enormous sinkhole, surrounded by towering waterfalls and hanging vines, is considered an important religious and cultural heritage site. Many scholars believe the name is derived from legends of the Eternal Emperor's first appearance, claiming their earthly landfall led to the sinkhole—an embellishment for the asteroid that struck the region thousands of years ago during Earthfall. Some speculate that the Eternal Emperor acquired their immortality through a flower that bloomed after the asteroid's fall. Another legend mentions the Emperor's Footprint as the site where the Eternal Emperor shifted into a mighty dragon's form, fought, died, and was resurrected.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Po Li's rivalry with Quain and Lingshen continues, though rumors regarding the Eternal Emperor resurfacing in Lingshen have the Oracular Council gravely concerned. Education exchanges between Po Li and Nagajor continue favorably, with recent medicinal discoveries modernizing pathological processes for both nations. Po Li has modest relations with Bachuan and Hwanggot, though the gap between them has remained since Lung Wa's collapse. Due to the icy stalemate between Bachuan and Hwanggot, Po Li has opted to remain neutral, though many suspect the Oracular Council might have already divined the victor.



ZHUGE SHUANG YING



WANG JING



SHI YIN LING



AUYOUNG FONG

Quain

Nations

QUAIN
Capital: He Ming
Government: Martial Monarchy
Ruler: Monarch Emeritus Nelongso



Peoples

Humans
Kitsune
Nagaji
Tengu
Yaoguai

Languages

Nagaji
Tengu
Tien

Factions

- Cloud Crane School
- Divine Chaos Cult
- Enduring Jade Clan
- Shadow Tongue Temple
- The Cut
- Shattered Lotus

Religions

- Baekho
- Irori
- Jin Li
- Lady of the North Star
- Mugura and Nrithu
- Qi Zhong
- Shizuru
- Sun Wukong

Resources

- Gems
- Lumber
- Mercenaries
- Ore
- Produce/ Grain
- Seafood
- Stone
- Tea
- Textiles

LAND OF A THOUSAND HEROES

Martial arts. Feuding sects. Cultivation. And at the top of it all, a monarch emeritus who relinquished their power as a grandmaster to rule without greed.

Of the three great Successor States, Quain is the poorest in military might and spiritual fervor, but the richest in true heroes. Life in Quain revolves around martial arts. **Cultivators**—skilled hand-to-hand fighters who can leverage qi—roam the wilderness and roads, eager to prove their skill against worthy opponents. Formal duels are common. Martial artists who shirk their due are spurned, punished, or made into **recanters** and forbidden from practicing cultivation. Martial arts sects fight for control over settlements, where their rule is sovereign and their word is law. Every village has their own batch of champions, their own sect in charge, and their own set of techniques and martial practices. Among these myriad factions, the **Four Great Sects** stand as the strongest, bending the knee only to the **monarch emeritus**.

Everyone wants to be a hero, but only a thousand can ascend to true mastery. These martial artists are known as **grandmasters**, and the tales surrounding them are legendary. A mysterious, magical force known as the **Balance** keeps the number of true masters at exactly one thousand, ensuring fierce competition and constant innovation. When grandmasters clash, the earth splits, tides heave, and the skies explode with mythic force. When one grandmaster falls, another one rises to keep the Balance intact. **Ascension**—the process of becoming a grandmaster—is long and dangerous, and there's no sure path. When a cultivator ascends, they undergo an intense transformation that alienates them from commoners and lower-ranking martial artists. Seeking kindred souls, many grandmasters partake in volatile and intimate entanglements with each other. One day, a pair of grandmasters might be best friends; another day, enemies; another, lovers.

However, even the common folk of Quain are skilled practitioners of martial arts. Farmers blitz down rows under heavy yokes, tilling the earth in explosions of dirt, outstripping their own astonished oxen. Fishers catch squid, crabs, and carp by hand, harvesting more efficiently than purse seines. Woodcutters sharpen axes against their own arms, gritting their skin with qi to become excellent whetstones. A single cook works seven different stations at once, balancing pots on knees, juggling knives, and slicing ingredients in midair. The wisdom of cultivation suffuses every aspect of daily life in Quain, and all citizens benefit—not just the masters.

Much of the kingdom's martial literacy can be attributed to the **Council of Recanters**, a staff of governmental aides oathbound to never practice cultivation. Recanters serve the monarch emeritus as civil servants with two primary goals: to ensure that no one sect monopolizes cultivation and to improve Quain's prospects. Key to both objectives is the **Wish-Cycle**, a magical process that occurs every 12 years to designate the next monarch emeritus.

GEOGRAPHY

A kingdom neither notably large nor small, Quain spans a mere 2,000 miles across. However, the country makes up in lushness what it lacks in size. Rich farmland populates the shores of bountiful rivers, which teem with life. Locals joke that three Fs bind Quain: farming, fishing, and fighting.

The earth of Quain is dark, pliable, and conducive to yielding all kinds of crops. Farmers claim they can grow just about anything in their soil, even flora from realms beyond Tian Xia. As many non-native herbs contain magical and medicinal properties that aid in martial arts mastery, they've had plenty of opportunity to put their boasts to the test. Quain's emerald hillsides bristle with myriad harvests, ranging from Taldoran lilies to Thuvian orchids. Of course, the land here is also rich with native crops like rice, sweet potato, cabbage, and fragrant onions.

Quain's most prominent waterway is the **Golden River**, one of the longest rivers in Tian Xia and Quain's primary trade route. Legend says that the Celestial Dragon, tired from creating new stars, perspired onto the earth to form





the Golden River, whose waters turn gold at dawn and dusk. Locals living on the northwestern border sprinkle painted pebbles onto the shores of the Golden River, claiming that such stones are nuggets of pure gold. These nuggets are then sold at a premium to ignorant outsiders. It's an effective grift, and everyone in the area is in on it.

The Golden River has many tributaries, but its most well-known is **Dragon Sweat Run**. This glistening offshoot gushes outward from the Iron Mountain, carrying fertile silt and valuable mineral deposits in its current. During floods, precious ores bubble to the surface, beckoning eager prospectors to its shores. Locals claim that a massive river serpent guards the Run's coveted waters, summoning thunderstorms to signal its displeasure at outsiders farming its home for treasures.

North of Dragon Sweat Run is the misty **Eryiu Forest**, a thick and temperate wood that produces most of the kingdom's lumber. Its iridescent depths bristle with fir, larch, bamboo, redwood, and willow. Local conservationists like to boast that 90 percent of the wildlife in Eryiu is indigenous to Quain. The forest's most famous fauna are the playful xiaotou, a species of highly intelligent gibbon known for snatching items, weapons, and even clothes off the backs of travelers.

Beyond the **Iron Mountain**, a finger of the **Embaral Ocean** probes inward, creating the **Embaral Rift**—a saltwater inlet that separates Quain from the northern shores of **Nagajor**. The Rift teems with storms, fog, and flesh-hungry sea monsters that lurk in the deep. Southbound travelers are advised to take the overland route through **Lingshen** and **Po Li**, although such a path adds days, if not weeks, to their journey. Few who cross the Rift live to tell of it, and those who do are always changed.

A DAY IN QUAIN

Before the rooster crows, many cultivators in Quain have already been up for hours, honing their bodies in temple squares, running drills under roaring waterfalls, and steeling their minds with meditation. To accommodate their most valuable customers, hundreds of shops follow the rhythm of this early morning training. Many restaurants, ranging from hole-in-the-wall inns to ritzy establishments, offer breakfast specials that promise to improve one's cultivation. These specials vary depending on the region. Popular offerings include "qi-hardening" beef noodle soup, "mind-focusing" tea-steeped eggs, and "breath-expanding" blanched bok choy.

Also early to rise are the hardy folk who work the land and water. Before the sky brightens, farmers are knee-deep in their fields, turning out their animals, pulling weeds, watering crops. So, too, are fishers' boats on the water before dawn. A couple of these dedicated workers are retired martial masters, but most are commoners, uninterested in dedicating their lives to cultivation.

As the sun continues to rise, temples open, streets thicken, and market squares bloom. Young hopefuls head toward training halls, joking with their schoolmates, while old masters bark orders, proud to pass on their legacy to the next generation. From noon until four, manual laborers take an extended, government-mandated lunch break; it's far too hot to farm or fish, and people need to recharge. During this period, cultivators also frequent town hubs, researching new techniques, gathering materials, or attending formal duels. As a result, stores enjoy the heaviest foot traffic in the early afternoon. The most popular establishments during the day include restaurants, specialty shops for cultivators, massage parlors, and grocery stores.

As the sun dips toward the Golden River, students return home and workers embark on the next labor cycle. Farmers perform evening chores: returning animals to pens, cleaning up, watering, feeding, and preparing for the next day. Some shops close, mostly artisan stores like libraries, smithies, and conservatories. Others open. As afternoon bleeds into night, a "second day" sweeps through Quain. Dance theaters, gambling houses, and bars raise their shutters, catering to evening-bound clientele. A popular pastime is watching martial dance, where performers expertly mimic cultivation forms to tell a kinetic story about Quain's history, culture, or society. Many such performers are martial artists themselves, but instead of striving for power, they seek to make art with their cultivation.

Additionally, some trades are only accessible during nighttime. Parts of the Golden River teem with freshwater squid, which hide in rocky crevices during the day and come out to feed at night. Squid fishers work from dusk until dawn, wading into bobbing surf with tireless dedication. Certain flora are only available after dark, too, such as the elusive crystal moonflower—a plant used in many potions, salves, and poultices that aid in cultivation. It only blooms under the light of the moon, so harvesters must wait until nightfall. To complicate matters, many beasts are drawn to the scent of the crystal moonflower, including elananxi and hodags. Harvesters must have keen eyes to spot these flowers and a rigorous understanding of self-defense to harvest them.

Some cultivators are "night bats": martial artists most active in the dark. Night bats rest during the day and come alive at dusk, practicing techniques that rely on shadow, deception, or poison. Many night bats learn to see without seeing, cultivating a strong sense of hearing, smell, taste, and touch. These martial artists often find work as assassins and are among some of the most feared cultivators in all of Quain. Many civilians light incense in their windowsills to ward off night bats. Some even place offerings of silver, fruit, and precious gems on their front stoop, hoping to avoid trouble. However, no one's safety is guaranteed, not until the rooster crows and the day starts anew.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Language in Quain matches many of its Successor State rivals, though the long lives of cultivators and grandmasters means that both the written and spoken word skew toward the more archaic.

Eryiu: arr-yew; **Pinyin:** Èr Yú

He Ming: huu (a sound between "who" and "huh," with a soft consonant like blowing through your teeth) ming; **Pinyin:** He Mìng

Konton: con-ton (rhymes with "John")

Nelongso: neh-long-so

Quain: kwee-ayn

Qi: chi; **Pinyin:** qì

Yu: yeeu (make an "ee" sound, then round your lips as if saying "oo"); **Pinyin:** Yù

Yu Hua: yeeu (like above) hoo-ah (said together, as a single syllable); **Pinyin:** Yù Huō

Yu Ma: yeeu (like above) mah; **Pinyin:** Yù Mō

Yun E: yun (rhymes with "win") uh; **Pinyin:** Yún É

Wu Ku: woo-coo (like "cool," but drop the "l"); **Pinyin:** Wú Kō

A YEAR IN QUAIN

Like many kingdoms in Tian Xia, Quain experiences four seasons throughout the year: spring, summer, fall, and winter. Each season is dominated by one of the **Four Great Sects**, the strongest martial arts factions in Quain: the Cloud Crane School, the Divine Chaos Cult, the Enduring Jade Clan, and the Shadow Tongue Temple. The power of each sect is linked to one of the four seasons, drawing upon the magic that suffuses nature itself to accentuate their cultivation. When their season arrives, the related sect experiences a surge in power, allowing their practitioners to make brilliant discoveries, cultivate new techniques, and ascend to greater heights. Each of the Four Great Sects is headed by a grandmaster and espouses a different school of martial technique.

Spring is the purview of the **Cloud Crane School**, the preeminent academy for aspiring cultivators that boasts an ascension rate of one percent: that is, one percent of all students become grandmasters. Given that several hundred pupils graduate every year, and tens of



thousands apply to the school, this number is staggering. Dozens of grandmasters trace their beginnings to the Cloud Crane School, crediting their unparalleled education as a major contributor to their ascension. Practitioners wear long, flowing robes reminiscent of a heron's wings. They also tie white ribbons around their wrists that twirl artfully as they fight. Its teachers seek to cultivate young minds, viewing their pupils as new growth after winter.

Summer is the playground of the **Divine Chaos Cult**, an unconventional, quasi-religious sect that worships multiple deities, practices multiple techniques, and branches into multiple disciplines. Their central philosophy is that they have no central philosophy. Instead, practitioners of Divine Chaos cherry-pick their favorite cultivation styles, smashing them together in dissonant harmony to reach dizzying—and unstable—new heights. Accentuating the haphazard, unpredictable style of their technique, aspirants of Divine Chaos wear mismatched armor. The cult's high-risk, high-reward approach creates grandmasters, but it also makes abominations. In the height of summer, monster attacks surge as some Divine Chaos cultivators evolve into beasts, a result of their drastic, magically empowered experimentation.



Fall is controlled by the **Enduring Jade Clan**, a vast dynasty that passes its secret techniques from parent to child. The beating heart of the Enduring Jade Clan is the **Yu Family**. There are only three ways to join this exclusive lineage: be born a Yu, befriend a Yu, or marry a Yu. Each generation builds upon accumulated ancestral knowledge, learning from past mistakes and generating new breakthroughs. As the Yu family saying goes, "Like jade, our color deepens with time."

When fall arrives, the Enduring Jade Clan hosts the annual **Four Winds Conference**, a convening of martial arts masters to forge new bonds, gauge their rivals' improvements, and trade techniques. To ensure proper behavior, the Yu Family upholds a strict "no duels" rule. The conference is a place to share wisdom in the spirit of siblinghood, not test one's mettle. Even so, an invitation to the Four Winds Conference is highly coveted, a testament to one's skill and repute.

Finally, winter is the domain of the **Shadow Tongue Temple**, the most feared of the night bat sects—an impressive feat by itself. Garbed in sleek black robes, apostates of the Shadow Tongue move through the night with a singular purpose: to strike terror in the hearts of their enemies. These cultivators paint their faces white with rice paste, daubing blotches of vermilion on their cheeks and jaws to indicate rank and purpose. Practitioners of the Shadow Tongue believe that fear, pain, and misdirection are a cultivator's greatest weapons against evil. Many of their techniques funnel toward mastering pain and inflicting it upon others. New initiates are required to split their own tongues with no numbing agents. The brave few who tough it out are rewarded with unique facial markings made from their own blood.

CULTURE

Life in Quain revolves around martial arts. Countless sects, schools, temples, and factions populate the kingdom, each espousing their own style of fighting as the pinnacle of cultivation. As the saying goes, "There are more martial techniques than stars in the sky—and they all think they shine the brightest." Although the highest forms of heroism are reserved for grandmasters, even farmers and chefs know how to throw a punch. Many regular folks in Quain can hold a competent conversation about martial arts theory, cultivation, and the latest techniques, surprising outsiders who wander in expecting brilliant heroes amid a hapless and duller citizenry.

Because areas are controlled by sovereign sects, no two towns are exactly the same in terms of culture or history. A village's ideals are inextricably linked to the faction that controls it. When an old sect is ousted and a new one moves in, friction arises. Original inhabitants are often forced to adhere to different laws than they're used to, which creates stress—



and sometimes resentment that could bubble into sedition. Clever leaders know they must win not only martially, but also socially.

Even laws differ based on the area. Killing might be strictly forbidden in one village but freely indulged in another. Theft might be harshly punished by one sect and openly encouraged by another. These regional laws only apply to a faction's sphere of influence. Outside of this sphere, the **Common Edicts** take hold. These universal laws apply everywhere in Quain, including the wilderness, neutral zones, and contested areas. There are several dozen Common Edicts, which include "No killing," "Honor your word," and "Duelists must abide by their terms." However, specific beats general. If a locale's rules directly contradict a Common Edict, then the former holds. The only exception are the **Three Golden Laws**, which supersede all.

- Your greatest allegiance is to Quain.
- The word of the monarch emeritus is law.
- The Wish-Cycle of Quain must be honored.

Quain's **grandmasters** represent the cream of the martial crop, and despite their separation from the average citizen, they have a massive impact on the nation. These master cultivators dominate the martial arts. A single grandmaster can defeat a thousand warriors, split a mountain, and strike a god—or so they say. There are exactly 1,000 grandmasters in Quain. When one rises, another one falls; when several die, several more ascend. This magical phenomenon is known as the Balance. Some legends claim that the Balance was a gift to the first monarch emeritus by the Celestial Dragon, but no one knows for sure. How the Balance came to be, how it sustains itself, or if it will ever end remain mysteries to this day.

Because so few cultivators ever reach this level, the community of grandmasters is insular and volatile. When new grandmasters ascend, the current ones can feel it; such an occurrence has been described as a ripple through the Balance, a tugging sixth sense. Ousted grandmasters become black sheep, spurned from this elite siblinghood until they reclaim their place or die trying.

A grandmaster's command over cultivation is so absolute that it's hard for them to connect with people of lower martial skill. Few truly understand what it's like to be a grandmaster aside from other grandmasters. To fill this gnawing hole, many grandmasters nurture long, complicated, and explosive relationships with each other. One day, a pair of grandmasters might be best friends, swearing sacred oaths upon their own graves; the next, they're enemies who fight to kill; and a year later, they're lovers, their deepest secrets hidden to all but each other.

Many outsiders travel to Quain in search of powerful techniques, spurred by rumors of martial secrets, feuding sects, and champion combatants. Given Quain's tense history with the other Successor States, anything that smacks of a potential military probe raises the kingdom's hackles. If outsiders don't cause trouble, then the people of Quain live and let live.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

On a local level, specific martial sects control settlements of Quain and uphold different laws and customs. Turf wars are common; formal duels, spontaneous skirmishes, and planned insurrections happen daily. Among these warring factions, the Four Great Sects stand apart as the most powerful institutions in all of Quain.

The headmaster of the Cloud Crane School is **Yun E** (sagacious agender samsaran instructor), a samsaran who has been alive for 12 incarnations and a grandmaster for 10. Terrifyingly insightful, Yun E has been known to observe someone for several minutes and then make an off-handed remark about their deepest, most hidden insecurities.



NELONGSO

The leader of the Divine Chaos Cult is a cunning, easy-going grandmaster named **Konton** (sly male kitsune cultivator). As a kitsune, Konton strikes an intentionally unsettling balance between his human disguise and his true anthropomorphic form—half of his face is that of a cherubic, gorgeous human man, and the other half is a fox's, with a low-slung tunic that reveals top surgery scars. Konton delights in disturbing other cultivators with his strange appearance.

The head of the Shadow Tongue Temple is **Wu Ku** (detached female human slayer), a Tian-Shu grandmaster who cuts an imposing figure at six and a half feet tall. A muscular, stoic woman with eyes like thunder, Wu Ku has a shaved head, broad shoulders, and more scars than the eye can count. When Wu Ku embarked on her journey of ascension, she swore to give herself a wound for every life she took. Soon, she ran out of space—so she carved over old scar tissue.

The Enduring Jade Clan is led by **Yu Hua** (icy female beastkin elf martial artist), a half-tengu grandmaster and immovable matriarch of the Yu Family. The edges of her face bleed into coal-black feathers, which ripple down her spine to form tail feathers. Her Enduring Jade scions are taught from a young age to only associate with peers of similar rank—after all, they're destined for greatness. Friends who fail to measure up are swiftly ejected from the Yu Family social circle.

However, even the Four Great Sects answer to a higher power: the **recanters**, former cultivators now magically barred from ever practicing martial arts again. These spiritless bureaucrats handle everything from paperwork to border security, trade, and national relations. Becoming a recanter is never an accident; it's always a choice, or—in some rare cases—a second chance. The majority of recanters are retired martial artists who still want to effect change in Quain. Others are cultivators who committed terrible deeds and had their ability to cultivate taken by force. After a restitution period, these reformed villains are given the opportunity to restore public faith by serving Quain as a recanter.

The only force more powerful than the recanters is the monarch emeritus, a former grandmaster and the ruler of Quain. Every 12 years, the monarch emeritus passes their title to a chosen grandmaster successor, selected sometime during their reign. Being chosen is both a great honor and a deep sorrow. Upon taking the throne from their predecessor, the new monarch emeritus must make a perilous journey to the peak of the Iron Mountain and summon the **Celestial Dragon**. The Monarch trades their accumulated cultivation for a single celestial pearl that grants the power of a wish, used to ensure Quain's prosperity. For the next 12 years, the monarch emeritus rules Quain as a non-cultivator. This process is known as the **Wish-Cycle**, and the people of Quain consider it to be the most sacred and divine of their traditions.

Quain wasn't always ruled by a monarch emeritus. Until recently, Quain was governed by a king and his lineage of daughters. Every 12 years, a royal maiden

exchanged her heart for a celestial pearl, dying painfully in the process. After the events of one of the Ruby Phoenix Tournaments, the recanters of Quain discovered that a celestial pearl of even greater quality could be produced if a grandmaster willingly gave up their ability to cultivate. Thus, a royal maiden could be spared, and the kingdom would flourish.

The current monarch emeritus is **Nelongso** (sunny nonbinary wayang grandmaster), an ebullient and dedicated wayang who was once a star pupil of the Cloud Crane School. Originally hailing from Goka, Nelongso was chosen by the previous monarch emeritus for their stalwart commitment to heroism, their unflagging optimism, and their faith in Quain's institutions. When they ascended to grandmastery, Nelongso grew to the size of a human, their gaunt edges filling out with muscle. Instead of dwelling on their lost grandmaster status, Nelongso throws themself into their duties, proud to serve a kingdom that took them in so readily all those years ago.

Cities and Locations

The following are a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Quain.

He Ming

Home to the Vestal Throne of the monarch emeritus, the capital city of He Ming is the beating heart of Quain's bureaucracy. It's also the ancestral home of the Enduring Jade Clan, whose forebears founded the capital hundreds of years ago. A statue of the Yu Family's progenitor, Yu Ma—one of the first grandmasters to ever walk Quain—stands in the town square. As a bustling hub of trade, education, and politics, He Ming teems with all kinds of activity, including destruction. Much to the city's annoyance, dueling cultivators eagerly destroy tea houses, market stands, and libraries in full-throated brawls. To curb this disruptive behavior, the Council of Recanters has recently erected multiple sanctioned arenas for formal duels. Even so, carpenters and masons throughout Quain have a saying: "To grow rich, move to He Ming."

Temple of the Whispering Spider

Draped in the grave-sweet smell of rot, this wilting temple crouches in the emerald depths of the Eryiu Forest. Once an unholy shrine dedicated to Lao Shu Po, the **Temple of the Whispering Spider** now serves as the dilapidated lair of a giant arachnid. Fables say the monster was once a royal maiden, chosen to exchange her heart for a celestial pearl; when she tried to reject her fate, she was cursed for her insolence and turned into a spider. Nearby villagers revere the arachnid, believing its existence to be a testament of righteous defiance in the face of evil. These locals even believe that the Whispering Spider protects their town from dark spirits that lurk within the temple, and so they place regular offerings of silver, forage, and meats at its entrance.

International Relations

Quain's biggest rivals are its fellow Successor States, Lingshen and Po Li. In recent years, especially after the establishment of the first monarch emeritus, Quain has adopted a neutrally agreeable attitude when it comes to international relations. The kingdom's main priority is to restore public faith in its institutions—a faith that was shaken when Quain discovered that royal maidens had been needlessly dying. To that end, the Council of Recanters is intent on massaging relations between its neighbors, wary of tensions during a fragile and crucial time.

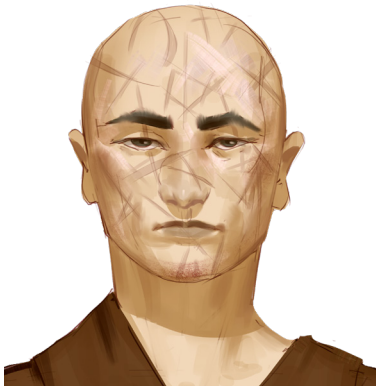
Sometimes, the quest to become a grandmaster brings cultivators to other kingdoms: Lingshen to the north, Nagajor to the south, and Po Li to the east. Sects and individuals interact with citizens of foreign nations on their own terms, for though a sense of kingdom pride exists, the journey to ascension almost always takes precedence. It takes a kingdom to raise a grandmaster, however, and the most successful pursuants of ascension do well to keep that mind.



YUN E



KONTON



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GLOSSARY & INDEX

Shanguang and the Wall of Heaven

Nations

SHANGUANG
THE WALL OF HEAVEN
Capital: None
Central Government: None



Peoples

Dragons
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Languages

Aklo
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Desna
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DESERT OF THE OPEN SKY

The **Wall of Heaven** is perhaps the grandest natural wonder in all of Golarion. This mountain range stretches from the arctic circle to the equator, neatly dividing the northern hemisphere. Even its smallest peaks rival the Five Kings Mountains, with its tallest breaking through the clouds above. Some of its mountains even reach high enough to scrape against the fabric of the Universe itself, creating liminal spaces and gateways to **Heaven**, the **Plane of Air**, the **Netherworld**, and beyond.

Most of the Wall is inhospitable to humanoid life. Predatory beasts and monsters dominate its lower reaches, while ancient dragons, divine servitors, and powerful elementals rule the peaks. However, small pockets of civilization persist on these unforgiving mountains. The **Lamjung Pass Monastery** is home to hundreds of Iroran monks, and devotees of other faiths make pilgrimage there each summer.

However, the oldest surviving civilization on the Wall of Heaven belongs to the yetis. Commonly referred to as **The Keepers**, they aid peaceful travelers across the mountains. Yetis move through the snowy heights more easily than most and know the mountain passes better than anyone, making them ideal guides. Travelers who disrespect nature or treat the yetis poorly are far more likely to draw their ire.

To the east of the Wall, the vast **Shanguang Desert** stretches for nearly the length of the mountain range. The Wall cuts off nearly all rain and wind coming from the sea, leaving wide swathes of arid, tranquil landscape. Historically, there has been minimal effort to explore the desert. It holds little in the way of natural resources, and roving monsters make it nearly impossible to build any manner of permanent settlement. No empire has made more than a single attempt to map the desert, and each ended the same way—with the initial scouting party reporting that there was nothing of value to chart.

This disinterest in the region has made it the perfect refuge for those who wish to live outside of the grasp of empires and lords. The nomadic **Mutabi-qi** have spent generations traveling Shanguang and openly welcome kind-hearted outsiders. Shanguang has no official borders or central government, allowing each Mutabi-qi tribe to decide on their own laws. The desert has also been home to many fearsome **kaiju** throughout history. The vast, open landscape and lack of permanent settlements make it ideal for kaiju who wish mainly to be left alone. Currently, three kaiju roam the sands—**Yorak, the Horned Thunder**, the slumbering **Bezravnis**, and the centipede queen **Zimibra**. While there's some rivalry between them, they manage to mostly avoid one another and have even fought side by side in the past.

GEOGRAPHY

Those who live along the Wall of Heaven boast that they've bested heats greater than that of Osirion and cold that could kill an Irriseni. The desert sun scorches the sands in the mornings; at night, wind sweeps from the frozen tundra of the north like winter's blade. Salt flats demand respect from even the most seasoned travelers, and a false step on the stony crags that dot the east can easily claim a life. Even the sands thirst for blood—Yorak's thunderous wanderings leave razor-sharp glass in his wake. To thrive here, it's best to travel between the oases that dot the landscape.

Weather isn't the only reason to stay near the oases. Monsters prowl throughout the Wall and Shanguang alike, many seen only here or in the Netherworld. Learned arcanists theorize that there must be a portal to the Netherworld nestled deep within the heart of the mountains. Mutabi-qi legends say that fewer monsters roamed the desert in the time before the Sky People came. Nights on the desert's eastern border are marked with the eerie whistling of **namorrodors**, man-eating horrors who always seem to travel toward the Fallen City.

For those who brave the mountains, hidden secrets lie waiting to be uncovered. Every 12 years, a woman of Imperial blood might choose to climb the ruddy peaks of the **Iron Mountain**, where a Celestial Dragon will grant any one of her wishes—if she correctly guesses which of the two portals there leads to Heaven and which to Hell. On the appointed year, the mountain passes are packed with





women who hold claim, whether real or imagined, and want to see their dreams made true. The locals call these **Princess Processions**. It isn't uncommon for a particular tribe to have a "favorite" princess, much in the way of sports teams. Despite the pomp, granted wishes are rare.

Altan Zuud, the Last Pass, connects the **Crown of the World** to **Hongal**. Crafty Tian-Yae set up shop nearby to provide travelers whatever they might need for their journeys. Some volunteer their services as guides only to later disappear. Legitimate guides charge steep costs and tend to be choosy. A traveler's reason for wanting to make the journey is just as, if not more, important than their coin.

MUTABI-QI

Mutabi-qi is the collective name for the dozens of nomadic tribes that populate the Shanguang desert. While they appear predominantly Tian-La, they're actually made up of several ethnic groups that have been unified by a set of shared cultures and practices developed over generations.

Each tribe has a distinct route that they follow from year to year, making small adjustments over time. Most of these routes are planned around making the most of the desert's limited natural resources. Mutabi-qi have learned how to get everything they can out of the harsh landscape, but domesticated camels and sheep provide most of their clothing and food, and fermented milk products serve as a common staple.

The people of the desert wear loose-fitting clothing to keep the sun off of their skin. They wear little jewelry or other ornamentation. Instead, they make bright, jewel-toned dyes out of certain desert plants and insects, and sew elaborate patterns into ceremonial clothing and tapestries. As some of these dyes are found only within the desert and the patterns are labor intensive to make, Mutabi-qi textiles can fetch a high price at the right market. Many who leave the nomadic life find that their traditional weaving skills make their work highly sought after. In areas further north where the desert grows cold, Mutabi-qi wear heavy, fur-lined coats and borrow more from Hongali fashion. These groups tend to favor horses over camels.

Mutabi-qi have limited trade with **Lingshen** and **Kaoling**, though tax collectors trying to extract payment from the Mutabi-qi have never had an easy time. If they even manage to find a tribe, they'll often be met with curiously intricate scrolls asserting the Mutabi-qi very much did pay their taxes, per an arcane 70-year-old agreement. Trade with **Hongal** is more common. Meetings with their distant cousins are always marked with parties and contests. Aareg flows, music plays, and competitors prove their mettle. While there might be fiery words between the two at such times, it's usually all in good fun. On the occasions it isn't—well, there's always a contest to try and settle matters.

While tribes usually give each other a wide berth to avoid competing for resources, they often cross paths at carefully

curated oasis gardens. These pockets of lush vegetation have been bred to survive on little water, including unique breeds of figs and pears. Maintaining these gardens is a communal responsibility, and causing permanent damage to any of them is a capital offense. When two or more tribes find their routes overlap unexpectedly, their leaders decide on a contest to settle matters. Tribes with more Hongali lineage tend toward wrestling matches or archery; others prefer matching their tribes' drummers against one another.

Mutabi-qi typically avoid getting too close to the Wall of Heaven, as many territorial monsters claim the region, but brief, careful excursions can be worth the risk. Death worms often dredge up minerals from deep underground, leaving rich veins of ore in their recently abandoned tunnels. Smokeshade essence can be purified and used for *invisibility* spells, or left as is and used to poison dangerous creatures. Crushed gloomwings make for precious dyes.

Some tribes have a symbiotic relationship with kaiju. After their ancestors discovered that Yorak, the Horned Thunder could be calmed with music, it became a common practice to sing whenever the kaiju was spotted in the distance. Now these encounters have become regular enough to plan around and have grown into grand festivals. These festivals seem to bring Yorak great joy—the perpetual storm that follows in his wake turns into heavy rain clouds that persist for days after his passing. This, along with Yorak's propensity for dispatching evil, has led certain Mutabi-qi to worship him as a patron deity, but this practice is uncommon.

Mutabi-qi cooking takes its cues from Hongal in many places, though with their own twists. Without as much access to dairy, it's harder to make boortsog, but that doesn't stop the Mutabi-qi; they've developed clever butter substitutions to get by. Often the fat from their hunts is kept just for this purpose. Most dishes are designed to travel well. Palm leaves from the oases are highly prized transporters and often dried in between trips. Tribes often trade valuable ore or animal products for spices from the South. Mutabi-qi chefs like to brag that they can make all the dishes in the east—and make them to go. That said, aareg is a highly sought after trade item.

All Mutabi-qi tribes place great value in music, with drummers holding the highest honor. Tribes can identify each other from miles away thanks to distinctive rhythms and time signatures. Certain rhythms are shared between the tribes, however—those used in case of emergencies. In this way, one tribe can warn another of sickness or famine ahead without having to meet face-to-face.

Mutabi-qi favor titles over names where possible, but they do have personal names they'll share with close friends and use in government contexts. Much like the Mutabi-qi themselves, their names show a wide influence from different cultures. For those within the tribe, there are also nicknames. Everyone has one, usually given in their adolescence, which follows them to the present day. The use of a person's birth name by anyone save their immediate family is considered deeply rude. Contrary to novels written by tourists, nicknames aren't always fearsome. In most cases, they describe the person's interest or a thing they're well known for doing. Sometimes it's just a twist on their given name, or a reference to their place in a family. For every "Strongarm," there are 20 "Two-Step" or "Small Bataar." Transgender Mutabi-qi adopt a new name and nickname in a special ceremony.

Curiosity is prized among Mutabi-qi. One of their greatest folk heroes, **Khaidu**, is renowned as a discoverer of secrets who outwits and befriends his enemies. Khaidu rarely resorts to violence, but he has been known to use his drum to dazzle and disorient. On the longest night of the year, Mutabi-qi gather around the fire to exchange secrets they've learned in his memory. After the children have gone to bed, adults share secrets they've learned about one another in hopes that they might face the coming year clear-eyed. Should a secret upset its listener, the tribe's elders will take the two aside and try to settle matters peaceably.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Mutabi-qi primarily speak Hongali, and even those tribes with their own language know Hongali so as to communicate with their fellow Mutabi-qi. Proper tone and emphasis are crucial to making oneself understood in the Shanguang desert. This is the primary difference between Mutabi-qi and Tian-La speaking Hongali. Mutabi-qi insist with great pride that they make Hongali sing.

Tian-Yae speak a blend of Hongali and Shory. Most speak both languages with some level of familiarity, though their Shory isn't always mutually intelligible with that of Yjae after centuries of drift.



TIAN-YAE

The Tian-Yae are people with mixed Shory and Mutabi-qi ancestry, although the word is often incorrectly attributed to anyone with a mixed Garundi and Tian heritage. Tian-Yae typically have darker brown skin and curlier hair than other Mutabi-qi, but their features can vary greatly from person to person. It isn't too uncommon for even siblings to have different skin tones, hair textures, or facial features. Visitors who have spent time around the Tian-Yae often try to extrapolate the entirety of Tian-Yae culture from a single tribe. Yet, as the Tian-Yae sometimes say, "No two stars are alike, no matter how it might seem from a distance."



When the Shory city of **Yjae** crashed into the Wall of Heaven, its leaders decreed that their survival must be kept a vital secret. They feared that the inhabitants of this land might covet their technology, and in their weakened state, they would be unable to defend themselves from outsiders. However, after generations of isolation and struggle, many Shory began to view saving the city as a doomed venture. For years, they'd observed the Mutabi-qi from a distance—mostly out of fear. What they saw were resourceful, community driven people who had eschewed the imperialistic mindset that led their ancestors to ruin. Centuries ago, several Shory families chose to abandon Yjae and venture into the desert to form an alliance with the **Thousand Songs** tribe of the Mutabi-qi.

As more families saw their cousins gladly welcomed, they began to leave their home. Some, worried that the Mutabi-qi wouldn't accept them on their own merits, brought with them old Yjae technology. Generations taught one another how to maintain it—and how to repurpose it for use in the harsh desert climate. Over time, some of the technology has been explained away as the work of this god or that, but plenty of Tian-Yae remember well their origin. Many, too, are the inquisitive Tian-Yae who have left the desert in search of even more wonders.

While most Tian-Yae people consider themselves members of the Mutabi-qi tribe they're born into, they wear their Shory heritage proudly. Gold rings, necklaces, and other pieces of statement jewelry are often passed down between family members as a sign of their lineage. They often incorporate elements of Garundi fashion and aesthetics into their crafts, use Mwangi slang, or learn to play Garundi instruments. Garundi drumming, in particular, has come through the generations virtually unmodified, but thumb-harps and leather flutes have also stood the test of time.

After the initial exodus, other Shory continued to leave the city in smaller numbers over the generations. There's often an unspoken divide between newly arrived Shory and Tian-Yae who are many generations removed from life in Yjae. Tian-Yae cultural fusion can be jarring and confusing to Shory, while Shory might sometimes come across as condescending to Tian-Yae. These impressions can make relations between them tense, but they rarely hold any true animosity toward each other. Matters are more complicated between newly arrived Shory and the Mutabi-qi. Tian-Yae sometimes have to serve as arbitrators between the two. They aren't always happy about serving in this role, especially if it's something their companions come to expect of them. Practice in a skill don't mean they're always inclined to use it.

Not all Tian-Yae join Mutabi-qi tribes. There are those who, with their dual heritages a weight on their shoulders, sought to form their own groups. These smaller Tian-Yae tribes carry on many of the blended traditions they've come to cherish—but also shed those they've found restricting. Strict superstitions and ideas



about marriage are often the first to go. When a new tribe forms, they tend to participate in a ritual that binds them all to one another as family. This ritual involves taking strands of their hair, braiding them together, and lopping off the braid. It hangs alongside the tribe's banners, soaking in both the wind and the starlight. Making a banner is also an important part of the process. Banners can take any shape. Common motifs include geometric patterns, desert creatures, stars, and other celestial bodies.

Tian-Yae also tend to have an affinity for air magic, which typically only manifests in those who dedicate intense study to spellcraft. In rare cases, some might be born with special abilities. Some Shory parents might try to suppress these abilities out of fear that they'll lead to hubris and misfortune, while most Tian-Yae view them as a sign of good luck and prosperity.

Though all the Tian-Yae have differing ties to their homeland, most share some superstitions about the weather. Rain from a clear sky is a terrible omen, but snow from a clear sky is even worse. While some keep such beliefs to simple rituals, like wearing something blue on their person at all times, others have taken it to a scientific degree. In a land where knowing whether to make camp to get through a freezing night or to press on until morning might be the difference between life and death, Tian-Yae forecasters are the most trusted in the desert.

Tian-Yae with familiars or companions usually prefer birds. Especially prized are falcons, which make for fine hunting companions and scouts. This being said, Tian-Yae only accept birds who come to them and don't go hunting them out. Only if a person sees the same bird three times should they then consider binding them.

When it comes to religion, many Tian-Yae find comfort in the worship of **Desna**, whom they refer to as the Guiding Star. Others worship gods favored by the Mutabi-qi or mainland Tian gods.

Most Tian-Yae consider ancestral legends of their origins from a flying city caught in a never-ending war little more than a grandmother's fairy tale. However, there are those who venture into the mountains searching for the city of their ancestors. Most return with tales of adventure but never make it far enough to discover Yjae. A few never make it back. For their families, it's often most comforting to believe that they succeeded in reaching the lost city.

Many Tian-Yae feel a sense of restlessness even among their fellows. While it isn't so strong as the Calling that leads changelings to search for their mothers, the condition has a name: a Tian-Yae who feels they must leave a place announces it by saying they plan to walk the skies. After they let the rest of their clan know what's going on, each member gives them a gift to bless their going. All manner of things might count as gifts—food, tools, handcrafted weapons, and keepsakes are common, but so are secrets to carry forward and treasured advice.

YJAE

During the height of the Age of Destiny, the **Shory Empire** was one of the largest and most powerful in existence. They possessed unparalleled magic and technology and conquered the sky with grand, flying cities. However, even at the height of their power, they couldn't defend themselves against the **Spawn of Rovagug**. What they did to draw the ire of these monstrous creatures has been lost to history, but one by one, their cities were destroyed and brought low.

The rulers of Yjae, desperate to escape their kin's fate, moved the city to the east. Even as they crossed continents, the Spawn pursued them, until they reached the **Embaral Ocean**. Unwilling to turn back and risk the beast's ire, they continued until they reached the Wall of Heaven. While the lowest of these peaks reached higher than their city could travel, they believed that they could find passage. Unfortunately, Yjae got caught in a magic storm and crashed onto the rocks. The resulting devastation killed thousands and left Yjae's engine's inoperable.



Now, the last great Shory city is little more than a ruin, floating with the wind above the desert. The city was once divided into several organized districts, but only three remain. The partially destroyed western quarter, still embedded in the cursed mountain, is engulfed in a constant storm of umbral energy, whipped into a frenzy by malfunctioning aeromancy engines. The night oni known as the **Avalanche King** rules this area, along with his army of oni. Powerful wards prevent the full force of this army from pouring into the rest of Yjae, but the defenses get weaker every generation.

The eastern half of the city is under the protection of the immortal **Sky Masters**, the city's ruling triumvirate, and many citizens of Yjae can live relatively normal lives here. Still, keeping the city in order is tireless work. The city gardens provide barely enough food to go around, and frequent expeditions into the mountains are required to keep the city stocked on supplies. Many complex operations have become almost impossible to maintain, as experts are either lost to conflict or increasingly choose to abandon the city.

The rest is a battlefield. Shory warriors patrol the barrier wall, maintaining the wards and hunting down any oni that manage to bypass them. The clashes between the Avalanche King and Sky Master Mustafi are the stuff of legends, but neither have ever managed to land a decisive blow.

Lokoa the Radiant (disciplined male human monk) is the eldest of the Sky Masters, although nothing about him betrays his age. His tall, muscular physique is sculpted by rigorous exercise and meditation. He wears only a white loincloth, an ivory mask, and gauntlets. While he considers himself the moral leader of the Shory, his lack of decisive action is a source of great discontent among the people.

Mustafi the Burning (visionary male human general) is the general of Yjae's armies, and the only one of the Sky Masters who still believes that martial victory over the Avalanche King is a viable option. Mustafi's true appearance is a mystery to all but the other Sky Masters, as his face and most of his torso are perpetually wreathed in bright, blue flames. His martial prowess is unrivaled, but his powers of aeromancy are all but nonexistent.

Shebe the Tempest (diligent female human archmage) couldn't be more his opposite. As the most skilled wizard in Yjae, she dedicates most of her energies to keeping the remains of the city afloat, powering the surviving spells and artifacts single-handedly. This effort leaves her weakened and exhausted, so she rarely makes public appearances.

KAIJU OF SHANGUANG

There are monsters in Shanguang—and then there are the kings of monsters. The expansive deserts are home to towering creatures as powerful and inevitable as the dawn. On the rare occasions outsiders arrive looking to strike these creatures down, they're first warmly welcomed and given friendly advice, then sternly warned, and finally sent off with a smile to face their certain death.

Of the three kaiju that roam the desert, **Yorak, the Horned Thunder** has garnered the most fondness. It isn't uncommon to find children playing with figurines made in his fearsome image. On clear days, a clever observer can spot his gargantuan form from almost anywhere in the desert. All one needs to do is search for the gathering of storm clouds and the gleam of jade. Yorak's horn dares to rake against the skies themselves; he's second in height only to the Wall itself. Legend has it that whoever ascends to the height of this horn gains an affinity for thunder. Many have tried over the years, but only musicians have succeeded.

Yorak is as fond of music as storms are of him. Centuries ago, the drummer **Yisinshizir** discovered that by playing her drums in time with Yorak's step, she could distract him from his rampages. Legend has it that for two days and two nights, she played nonstop so that the rest of her clan could find safety. Three days after that, she returned to them with white hair and white eyes, claiming that Yorak himself allowed her to climb his horn. Tales of Yisinshizir's bravery and dedication spread through the desert. For this reason, musicians are some of the most respected and integral members of Mutabi-qi tribes.

Where Yorak's coming is foretold by his thundering footsteps, **Bezravnis**'s attacks are heralded by the coming of the **Inferno star**. Every 273 years, a great three-tailed scorpion emerges from its fiery subterranean cave. Bathed in eerie flame, it heads straight for a single nearby settlement. Only after razing no less than two-thirds of its target area does it return to its slumber. In all the centuries of the desert, Bezravnis has never deviated from this cycle. The years of Bezravnis's awakenings are called **Inferno Years** among the Mutabi-qi, and settlements do everything they can to try to draw its attention away from them. Unlike Yorak, Bezravnis isn't so easily swayed.

Bezravnis's ties to the comet are as undeniable as they are mysterious. Some claim Bezravnis is homesick for a red world, and the sight of the comet inflames despair to wrath. Others claim that it strikes only those who have dabbled with the Netherworld's magics. Shadow creatures do tend to give the ruins of these settlements a wide berth. Tian-Yae superstition holds that if Bezravnis misses a year's rampage, a tear will open in the Wall of Heaven.

Oldest and most mysterious of all Shanguang's kaiju is **Zimibra**, the Coiling Death. Though she's rarely seen today, she features in many Mutabi-qi creation myths. The sprawling Darklands beneath Tian Xia lend credence to the stories and her might—legend has it that she wore herself to exhaustion creating them and now wakes only when her territory is threatened. Memories of her last rampages survive only in stories of the Great Kaiju War. These tales say that the kaiju who thought to threaten her now serve as bones to reinforce the walls of Zimibra's tunnels.

While Mutabi-qi have learned to use Zimibra's venom as a cure all, careless exposure to it can kill. Recently, a desperate Taldan lord sent an expedition to the desert for a vial of the substance. He and his coterie all died miserably, howling in their beds from the centipedes devouring their flesh. Some foreigners have called for Zimibra's execution as a result—but should they dare attack her, they'll have to get through Yorak first. Stories hold that he swore to protect the queen as she once protected him.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Mutabi-qi welcome nearly anyone to their fires. However, their beneficent attitudes and cliched portrayals have led them to be stereotyped as fools. They're happy to subvert such assumptions, especially when it comes to snide Taldans and arrogant Chelaxians.





Shenmen

Nations

SHENMEN
Capital: Yin-Sichasi
Government: Monstrous anarchy
Ruler: Lady Lang Loi



Peoples

Fey
Ghosts
Humans
Jorogumo
Wayangs
Yaoguai

Languages

Aklo
Empyrean
Fey
Tien

Religions

Fumeiyoshi
Lao Shu Po
Lady Nanbyo
Pharasma
Lamashtu

Resources

Dyes
Lumber
Medicine
Ore
Stone
Tea

CURSED LAND OF GHOSTS

At the center of Tian Xia stands Shenmen, a damp and gloomy land perpetually shadowed by heavy rain clouds. Violent storms frequently lash Shenmen's dense forests, and even calm days possess a gray melancholy, soaked through with drizzling mist. Few roads snake through its forbidding woods and steep mountains, for this land has resisted most attempts to tame it, with only a handful of isolated settlements clinging to existence against constant hostility and oppression.

Life in Shenmen is hard. Most of its people are villagers who survive by subsistence farming, foraging, and occasional sales of lumber and silver to outside brokers. They've learned to be fiercely self-sufficient, for Shenmen's government is nearly nonexistent beyond a cruel parody half-remembered by the ghosts of imperial bureaucrats. Bandits prey upon the vulnerable, as do giant spiders, evil fey, and strange monsters that lurk in the rainy woods. Mysterious undead wander throughout the gray land, tormenting its mortal inhabitants. Yet, all these dangers pale beside the horrors of the **jorogumo**, terrible shape-shifting spider women ruled by the witch-queen Lady **Lang Loi**. They're the true threats at the heart of Shenmen, and they grip the rest of the country with cold, envenomed claws.

Recently, Shenmen lost the northern **Specterwood** to **Linvarre** after a brief and half-hearted battle. The jorogumo had little apparent reaction to this loss, causing many to believe that they must have intended for Linvarre to annex the territory. Perhaps the jorogumo meant for Linvarre to swallow the territory as poisoned bait, enabling their influence to spread into the neighboring land; perhaps they had other reasons for accepting the loss. While the logic behind the jorogumo's apparent apathy remains unclear, those who live in Shenmen have learned that the machinations of Lady Lang Loi and her monstrous court aren't to be underestimated. Their defeats always prove to be deceptions, their mistakes merely feints. Some of this so-called maneuvering might be propaganda, but the people of Shenmen have seen enough with their own eyes to fear challenging, or even doubting, the spider women.

For now at least, the loss of the northern Specterwood has done little to change daily life for most of Shenmen's inhabitants. The rain-soaked heartlands and the misty mountains are as treacherous and beautiful as they ever were, and the nation remains enmeshed in Lady Lang Loi's gossamer toils. Few dare to dream of a better life, and even those who do can't see a clear way forward, with so much of their future clouded by specters and spiderwebs.

GEOGRAPHY

Shenmen sits at the heart of Tian Xia, south of **Linvarre** and east of **Songbai**. The **Gossamer Mountains** run down the center of the nation like a stony spine, capturing the sea-blown storm clouds that cloak Shenmen in fog and rain. Waterfalls and whitewater gorges roar across their harsh and rain-washed rock, occasionally broadening into hidden meadows and mountain valleys of unexpected beauty. For the most part, however, the Gossamer Mountains are wild and unsettled save for a few tiny villages and lonely monasteries.



LANG LOI



Lowland forests grow dense and dark, despite the relative lack of sun. Broad-leaved deciduous trees crowd against each other, vying for what little light pierces Shenmen's clouds, while beneath them a panoply of shade-tolerant herbs, fungi, and lichens thrive. Delicately sweet moonberries hang in white clusters, and fragrant carpets of tiny blue nymph's tears bloom over the damp leaf loam. Moisture-loving mushrooms, mosses, and marsh weeds thrive in the hills and on gentler mountain slopes. There, gnarled mountain trees are veiled in mist and draped with long beards of hanging **graymoss**, a local plant prized for its ability to stop bleeding when packed into wounds.

On the southern face of **Stormcaller's Peak** in the Gossamer Mountains stands an immense bronze gong suspended between a pair of 50-foot-high stone pillars capped in steel. Prayers to Hei Feng are inscribed in the rings upon its face in archaic script, and the bare rock beneath it is scorched by countless lightning strikes. No organized worship of Hei Feng has existed in Shenmen since Lady Lang Loi rose to power, for jorogumo hate tengu and murder them on sight. Since the jorogumo claimed the country, Hei Feng's tengu worshippers have been exiled or killed, and his temples have fallen into disrepair. Nevertheless, the gong still stands, drawing lightning strikes on its mountaintop. It's said that when the gong peals in response to a storm's blow, the powers of all jorogumo within earshot are broken until the sound dies down.

Rising from the cold, crystalline waters of **Rainmirror Lake** is an oblong boulder of silver-veined quartz within which, on nights of the full moon, fishers sometimes glimpse the silhouette of a sorrowful young woman. Locals believe that the stone, which they call the **Silver Maiden**, contains the spirit of a girl who died fighting to save her betrothed from jorogumo. Her spirit lingers in the stone, granting strength and courage to others who would stand against the monsters. A few say she even provides visions of how the jorogumo might be defeated, though none who has received such wisdom has had the temerity to act on it, or even speak of it openly. Perhaps there's some truth to this tale, for jorogumo avoid the lake's waters, yet weave thick webs about its shores to prevent their enemies from reaching the stone.

Veins of silver run through the Gossamer Mountains, providing much of Shenmen's limited wealth. Most of the silver mines are small in scale and close to the surface, as the industry is relatively unsophisticated in this country. The wasteland known as **Thousand Tears Mine**, however, burrows deep into the mountains. During the reign of Lung Wa, incarcerated laborers dug its ore, and little thought was given to their safety. If they were maimed or died, such outcomes were considered a hazard of their sentence.

Since the rise of the jorogumo, conditions have only grown worse, as the spider women are even less concerned with their workers' welfare. Much of the original mine

infrastructure dates back to Lung Wa and has barely been maintained since its fall. Collapses and tunnel floods are common, marauding monsters prey on work crews, and trapped miners are routinely abandoned to their deaths. With every rain, more unchecked pollution is washed from the mine, and the surrounding waterways are visibly stained with its poison. Even the river stones look sickly, blighted by pollution and the supernatural spiritual malaise that grows ever stronger around Thousand Tears Mine.

A DAY IN SHENMEN

For most of Shenmen's citizens, daily life revolves around farming, fishing, foraging, and harvesting silver or timber for the jorogumo to sell. On low mountain slopes, villagers plant terraces of barley and pale yellow sweet potatoes and grow bluestem tea bushes on their best-drained soil. They cultivate fish in stormwater ponds and gather edible fungi and herbs from the forests, which provide abundantly despite the perils within.

Most people work close to the land, their lives dictated by its seasonal rhythms, and seldom encounter outsiders from beyond their own villages. Settlements in Shenmen are small and scattered, since Lady Lang Loi and her coterie fear that an educated populace might be able to overthrow them. Wizards and clerics are viewed as particular threats, so much of the population is kept illiterate, and what magical traditions have survived are passed down orally within families as close-held secrets.

Days often begin and end with rites of propitiation, such as feeding a cricket to a kitchen spider. The cricket, as a noisy insect, represents village informers; the gesture is meant to both silence potential spies and keep the spider, representing the jorogumo, satisfied so that it won't ask for more. Almost all households feed spiders that take up residence in their homes, believing that these gestures will appease the jorogumo.

After morning rites, the bulk of the day is taken up with work. Most tools in Shenmen are made of stone, wood, or bronze, for the jorogumo fear cold iron and prohibit villagers from practicing any advanced smithing that might enable them to craft weapons of that metal. Local constables are equipped only with wooden staves. To resist the bandits who hunt their roads, villages train every able-bodied member in unarmed combat, and whenever people have a moment to spare from their other work, they can be found practicing in the market square. The peasants of Shenmen also pride themselves on being deadly accurate with slings and stone-tipped arrows. The jorogumo, who have little to fear from such weapons, permit villagers to practice these skills freely.

Afterward, tired villagers might gather for communal songs and storytelling, though these entertainments are always carefully chosen to avoid any appearance of political commentary. Villages located close to silver mines dust their perimeters with carefully hoarded silver dust, which is supposed to keep wandering undead at bay. The fragrance of the night-blooming Tsukiyo's Lotus is also thought to repel undead, so villagers plant it in retention ponds and fish pools, taking care to keep the flowers flourishing.

While many peasants work in silver mines and cut timber, only the jorogumo's favorites are permitted to sell these materials to foreigners. These few trusted intermediaries, who are themselves closely policed by other agents, might learn how to read and write, and only they are allowed to speak to outside merchants. Lady Lang Loi and her court keep all the proceeds for themselves, indulging in the finest foreign luxuries while leaving the common folk to starve.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Centuries of isolation, even before the arrival of the jorogumo, left Shenmen with a patchwork of village dialects, archaic mannerisms that would've been considered old-fashioned even in Lung Wa, and sibilant, lisping affectations patterned after the jorogumo's inability to pronounce certain sounds in their hybrid spider-woman forms. However, as a general rule, "ch" is pronounced "sh," "s" and "x" sounds are drawn out into extended hisses, and "j" is pronounced as "zh" at the beginning of words.



JIAN KAILU

A YEAR IN SHENMEN

Life in Shenmen unfolds according to a predictable pattern. Spring is the season of planting and renewal, of spawning fish and budding flowers. As the days lengthen and the nights grow shorter, fear's grip on the peasantry relaxes, for spectral undead shy away from the sun, and so life in this ghost-plagued nation becomes safer as the seasons warm. Though no time of year is truly safe in this benighted land, the **spring equinox** is still one of the happiest nights in Shenmen, celebrated with fragrant buds of Tsukiyo's Lotus woven into hairstyles and feasts of steamed barley cakes filled with lotus seed paste and honey.

In summer, peasants tend their fields and work the forests, cutting as much timber as they can while the days are long and the woods relatively safe. This period is also the high season for bandits, for the same reason that all mortal life relaxes slightly in the summer—it's the least dangerous time to be out on the road. Although bandits are generally feared and despised by commoners, they're sometimes viewed as more ambiguous figures: heroic rebels who have escaped the jorogumo, intrepid tomb robbers who aren't cowed by the ghosts of long-fallen Lung Wa, and wanderers who travel a dangerous land freely. Thus, villagers sometimes approach bandits for help, asking them to carry letters to relatives or petitioning them for assistance with troublesome monsters. These entreaties are usually met with brutal indifference or demands for money in exchange for the bandits' limited and unreliable efforts, but the desperation of the common people is such that they still occasionally try.


HAO

Autumn brings preparations for danger. Peasants store food against the coming winter. Because Shenmen's damp climate makes drying and smoking impractical, and salt is difficult to come by in large quantities, most people rely on pickling and fermentation as their primary preservation methods. Every home has a storage cellar packed with large clay urns holding pickled cabbage, fermented fish, and brined vegetables. Similar vessels, sealed with wax against the damp, hold grain, salt, and other dry goods. The lengthening nights also herald an increase in undead activity, which commoners try to stave off by enlisting the help of traveling shamans, exorcists, and the few clerics—mostly Pharasmins—that the jorogumo allow.

The autumn equinox, known throughout the region as the **First Long Night**, is a time of solemn remembrance and collective girding against peril. Villagers check their stocks of powdered silver, holy water, dried lotus petals, red thread, and other protective measures against the undead. They invite shamans to bless their stone-tipped arrows and anoint them with sacred oils, and they try to bribe bandits for special weapons proscribed by the jorogumo.

Winter is the cruelest season, for this is when the jorogumo and their agents come to collect their annual tithes. Villagers must pay in silver, food, timber, or people—particularly handsome young men, whom the jorogumo use and consume. To avoid sacrificing their own, village chiefs sometimes waylay travelers or get bandits drunk enough to capture. Most commoners regret this necessity but see no way out of it. Either they find strangers to give the jorogumo, or they lose their own children.

So cruel are the jorogumo's depredations that some parents even scar their own sons to make them less attractive and mar their daughters to prevent the spider women's jealousy. This, too, is done in winter so that the young people can enjoy one last summer with unmarked faces and can recover from the scarring behind winter scarves before showing themselves again in spring.

CULTURE

Shenmen's society is divided between rural villagers, who comprise the majority of the population, and a small number of city dwellers, who live in closer proximity to the country's inhuman rulers and are often used as playthings for their whims.



Village culture is agricultural, superstitious, and largely ignorant of anything outside the settlement and its immediate environs. This is by Lady Lang Loi's deliberate design: simply by leaving the roads ill maintained and unpatrolled, she can ensure that people stay huddled in fear behind their bamboo walls. The handful of malcontents who dream of different lives usually become bandits, as few other alternatives exist for dissatisfied countryfolk. This choice puts them at risk of being hunted down by their own neighbors, and so she seldom has to bother with eliminating them herself.

Most villagers, however, stay close to home, family, and the relative sanctuary of their walled villages. The common people use various practices to avoid misfortune, sprinkling silver dust and growing fragrant lotuses around their homes to deter undead, wearing plain clothing and unflattering hairstyles to avoid attracting a jorogumo's desire or envy, and generally eschewing vanity. Pride is considered dangerous in Shenmen because pride draws attention, and it's never wise to draw the attention of the monsters in their world. Piety, too, is a key virtue. Commoners pray for divine protection and intercession, for they have few other resources to draw upon.

Pharasma's worship is common throughout Shenmen, as is veneration for one's ancestors. The jorogumo also permit the worship of Fumeiyoshi, Lady Nanbyo, and Lao Shu Po, and each of these deities commands some fealty from commoners, but ordinary people are more likely to pray for these gods to show them mercy and spare them from calamity rather than being actively dedicated to their malign ends. However, misery begets misery, and there are certainly many in Shenmen who have fully embraced these deities' most sinister aspects.

In the subterranean city of **Yin-Sichasi**, life is very different. Here, gossamer veils of spider silk dyed in a thousand shades of green, blue, and violet drift on carefully channeled winds piped through hidden air shafts and tinged with rare perfumes. A sea of spider silk covers the cavern floors and muffles the walkways, imposing a suffocating serenity on the city. Glowing strands of woven crystal illuminate the delicate, spired buildings, and decorative fountains are also lit from below so that their water sprays like incandescent diamonds through the air. Rare delicacies and luxurious clothes are sold at every turn, although these commodities are restricted to the jorogumo and their favored pets—usually a harem of that year's chosen males, who are pampered and coddled until their mistresses paralyze them for egg fodder.

Despite its beauty, Yin-Sichasi is a terrible and treacherous place, rife with deceit and murderous intrigue. The jorogumo delight in spinning complicated plots against one another and sacrifice their mortal lackeys as pawns without a second thought. Casual murder and torture are viewed as minor indulgences: an entertainment to enliven a dull evening or an easy way to vent frustration. Of course, for a human or other "lesser creature" to raise a hand against

a jorogumo would be unthinkable, and transgressors are punished with the cruelest death imaginable.

A mortal who belongs to one of the jorogumo is marked by a **signet collar**, which is made of silver and welded around the mortal's neck so that it can't be removed. These collars are avidly sought, for they indicate that the wearer is permitted to travel freely, might be able to read and write, and enjoys a degree of autonomy that few commoners in Shenmen can claim. Other than signet collars, mortals in Shenmen are permitted little jewelry. The jorogumo ornament themselves lavishly and sometimes decorate the young men in their harems (although such gifts are always temporary since these consorts only live a few months), but lesser creatures who presume to touch their wealth are severely punished. Even money is seldom seen in Shenmen's villages, which rely on barter and pay tribute in kind, because money would make it easier for villagers to procure outside goods and perhaps even mercenary aid. Therefore, Lady Lang Loi has decreed that villagers can't use coins, and possession of cash by mortals is prohibited without permission.



GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

A peculiarity of Shenmen's government is that the country is beset by the ghosts of imperial officials who believe that the empire of Lung Wa still stands and that they play crucial roles in its bureaucracy. All of these ghosts seem to be afflicted with a shared curse that prevents any of them from showing even the faintest semblance of capable administration. They're always wildly inconsistent, prone to erratic rages, and cruel while also being unshakably convinced of their own rightness.

The true ruler of Shenmen is Lady **Lang Loi** (sadistic female jorogumo witch), witch-queen of the jorogumo, whose silken throne sits in the hidden city of Yin-Sichasi. She's a surpassingly graceful, vain, and malevolent creature, interested only in wrapping herself in luxury and amusing herself with intricate plots against her rivals and enemies. As far as outside observers can determine, she has no interest in advancing Shenmen's international position or glorifying any deity or creed. She has no true friends, nor even any cherished pets; all, to her, are disposable. Her only interest lies in filling her own coffers, toying with the loyalties of her sycophants, and spiting her endless list of enemies.

The deadliest rival to Lady Lang Loi is Lady **Jian Kailu** (mystical female jorogumo mastermind), a silver-haired jorogumo known for her prowess with bladed weapons and her strange rapport with the ghosts that haunt Shenmen. Lady Jian Kailu seems to have some alliance with the delusional shades of imperial officials as well as with the veiled **Path Maidens**, the apostate Pharasmin shades who hunt the living in the Gossamer Mountains. The lady provides the ceremonial garments and perfumes that protect her favored servants from the hungry undead and the red-stamped passes that the imperial ghosts accept as valid. She guards the secrets of this protection jealously, for her semi-alliance with the undead of Shenmen is her primary advantage in her rivalry with Lady Lang Loi.

Foremost among the living humans of Yin-Sichasi is Chancellor **Hao** (self-loathing male human administrator), a middle-aged functionary who has survived nearly three decades of service to the jorogumo by being unfailingly fastidious, effective, and subservient. Chancellor Hao's greatest secret is that he hates the jorogumo, especially Lady Lang Loi, and would like nothing better than to see them destroyed. Though he knows their secrets and has access to their private spaces, he has no real capability to hurt them, and he doesn't have the courage to gamble on anything less than their sure and total destruction. This cowardice is, of course, exactly why the jorogumo have permitted him to continue in his trusted position, and the humiliation of his own nature gnaws at him every day.

The fishing village of Five Branches is led by Chieftain **A De** (exuberant male human organizer), an energetic and charismatic idealist who has instituted a number of shared projects with neighboring villages, including improvements to a communal system of stormwater flood ponds and a new bridge over a previously impassable gorge. Chieftain De believes that much more is possible for Shenmen's villages, but this conviction has worried many of his people, who fear that their beloved leader might soon be targeted for removal if they don't temper these ambitions.

One of the most infamous bandit chieftains in the rainy lowlands is **Yai the Red Mist** (enigmatic female human brigand), so called because she obliterates her enemies in a bloody haze and, according to local legend, vanishes before the crimson fog dissipates. Yai's band mostly targets the tax caravans of the jorogumo, and they're merciless in these attacks, killing even the hapless cooks and porters. For such acts, Yai has earned a well-deserved reputation for brutality. However, that reputation is complicated by the fact that she has also been known to pay villagers for supplies and refuge, offer protection, or take on the occasional quest for retribution, for a village who treats her band well. Part folk hero, part bogeyman, Yai exemplifies the contradictory roles that bandits play in Shenmen's rural culture.

Cities and Locations

Although most of Shenmen is rural, larger population centers do exist.

Sze

In ancient times, Governor **Chou Mingxia** was assigned by the Imperial Court of Lung Wa to oversee the city of Sze. Governor Chou was infamously corrupt and incompetent, disguising her ignorance of the law with harsh, arbitrary punishments for anyone who questioned her rulings. The governor's palace became an execution ground, and the unjust sufferings of her subjects permeated it with misery.

Centuries later, during the flood of malign magic that accompanied the jorogumo's arrival, Governor Chou rose from her grave as a ghost. Believing that she was still serving Lung Wa, she reimposed an even more confused interpretation of its archaic laws on the populace. Now, mindless skeletons and malevolent wights dressed in rotting parodies of imperial soldiers' uniforms enforce her edicts. The few people left huddling in the dripping ruins of Sze live in terror of the palace, a hellish, rain-pooled wreck where innocents are dragged away for imaginary offenses.

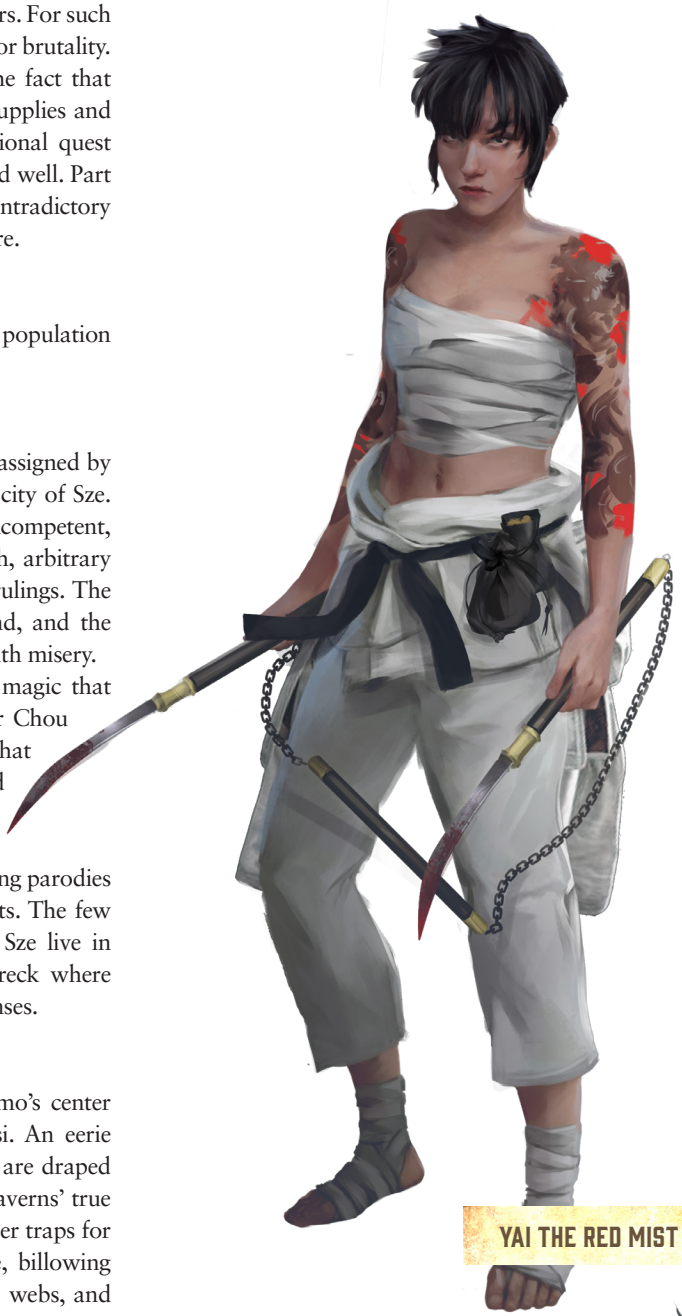
Yin-Sichasi

Hidden from the surface world is the jorogumo's center of power, the subterranean city of Yin-Sichasi. An eerie hush pervades the city, where walls and floors are draped in sound-muffling spider silk that conceal the caverns' true contours. Fang-filled pits, sticky snares, and other traps for the unwary all lie hidden within this fog-like, billowing mass. Half-buried lights glow from within the webs, and gleaming baubles are strung from their threads, filling Yin-Sichasi with sinister beauty.

The palaces of the jorogumo occupy promontories rising above the sea of spider silk and are connected by suspended bridges that arch above the pale, cloudlike froth. Many of these palaces are built on foundations of bleached and polished human bone pieced together in intricate designs, for the jorogumo find its appearance pleasing, and there's no shortage of such material to be seized from the unhappy people of Shenmen.

International Relations

The reputation of Shenmen's monstrous rulers and ghost-plagued hinterlands has, historically, been sufficient to deter its neighbors' aggression. The annexation of the northern Specterwood is a rare exception to this rule, and it remains to be seen how Shenmen's rulers will respond.



YAI THE RED MIST



Songbai

Nations

SONGBAI
Capital: Mukinami
Government: Shogunate
Ruler: Sun Shogun Shokuro Akatori



Peoples

Humans
Kitsune
Nagaji
Tengu
Yaoguai

Languages

Elven
Minkaian
Tien

Factions

Golden League

Religions

Abadar
Daikitsu
General Susumu
Jin Li
Pharasma
Phi Deva
Qi Zhong
Shizuru

Resources

Alcohol/ Drugs
Armor/ Weapons
Cheese/ Milk
Livestock
Mercenaries
Produce
Seafood
Spices/Salt
Tea

EVERGREEN REALM OF WAR AND PEACE

Blessed with fertile plains and shining rivers, Songbai is Tian Xia's agricultural heartland. Its fields provide abundant rice and sorghum, while its fabled trees hang heavy with lychees and pomelos. Lung Wa historians record how kirin, drawn to the land's elegance, descend periodically from Heaven to sip its pristine waters, and Lung Wa artists praise its blissful gardens where mortals age gracefully and immortals frolic eternally.

This beauty belies manifold troubles, past and present. Songbai's agrestic productivity and central position make it a plum prize for rival Successor States seeking to unify Tian Xia. Over a century ago, after Lung Wa's collapse, Songbai was sundered first by internal rivalries, then impaled upon **Lingshen's** imperial ambitions. Lingshen's boorish generals, favoring the crude discourse of pillory and lash, worked Songbai's farmers to half-dead desperation. These imperial authorities answered protests with maiming or murder and rewarded outright resistance by eradicating entire bloodlines. Despite such castigation, rebellions persisted; disenfranchised landowners and peasants alike pursued audacious guerrilla campaigns. Songbai's fields became watered with blood and tears, and the only light glinting off its storied rivers came from the gleam of clashing blades. Rather tellingly, during this time, no kirin were sighted.

Nearly 50 years ago, **Akatori**, a charismatic Minkaian samurai exiled for a cruel lord's regicide, arrived to aid the Songbainese rebellion, bolstering the nation's irregulars. Akatori brokered an alliance between his samurai followers, local rebels, and forces from neighboring **Jinin** and **Linvarre** (then known as Amanandar). After the grueling **Lingshen War**, this coalition shattered the Lingshenese offense. At the behest of Songbai's nobles, Akatori remained to protect the newly liberated realm as the Sun Shogun and established the new government of the **Shokuro Shogunate**.

Akatori understood the need to temper strength with grace. Even as he oversaw fortifications and garrisons, he also managed tensions and navigated traditions with benevolence and sensitivity. Balancing all professions' concerns, he reassured local Tian-Shu peasants and merchants that the new regime wouldn't unduly privilege Tian-Min samurai warrior-scholars. Over the ensuing decades, the Shogunate witnessed and forged enduring bonds across the land's diverse cultures and social classes.

However, despite Akatori's efforts, Songbai seems destined for chaos once more. Turmoil engulfed the court five years ago when a curiously persistent illness left the elderly shogun bedridden. Having devoted his life to statecraft and community building, Akatori married late and left no adult heir to assume his responsibilities; now, rival vassals prepare to seize power to preserve the Shogunate. Anticipating the likely civil war after the shogun's impending death, provincial lords have raised levies and taxes for armies and arsenals. Discontent surges, and downtrodden peasants wonder if the time has come for yet another round of rebellions. Amid such uncertainty, perhaps hope yet exists, for kirin have been sighted again.

GEOGRAPHY

Pastoral Songbai wasn't always habitable for humanity. Before 6799 IC, Lung Wa historians called this land **Qianlei**, a phrase meaning "Thousand Tears," for the countless flooding rivers crisscrossing the Sea of Eels. During that time, the inland sea was much larger; in the rainy seasons, such as the **Embaral** monsoons and the **Shanguang Desert**'s summer storms, Qianlei's surging rivers drowned the land in sediment. While Lung Wa philosophers argued against settling Qianlei, warning Heaven's will forbade it, many Lung Wa emperors wished to exploit this nutrient-rich soil. Their large-scale projects were invariably washed away in the rain, and only nomadic kitsune—known to the Lung Wa Empire as huli jing—cultivators had any success working this wild land.

Lung Wa historians credit Duke **Huang Liang**, a distant ancestor of Lingshen's ruling dynasty, as the luminary responsible for transforming the trackless lands of Qianlei. Quasi-legendary accounts state Duke Huang beheld kirin sipping at Qianlei's waters, which subsequently calmed.





Interpreting this vision as a celestial mandate to quell the floods, Huang sought enlightenment atop Qianlei's **Eastern Mountains** to solve this quandary. While surviving records have proven enigmatically sparse, the duke apparently succeeded, for Lung Wa thereafter gained innovations in irrigation and drove out muddy Qianlei's native huli jing to cultivate today's gold-green Songbai.

This agricultural verdancy has survived Lung Wa's collapse and Lingshen's annexation. Today, Songbai remains a portrait of plenty. Boasting both subtropical and temperate climates, a dazzling variety of fruits and grains grows across different seasons. The sun-drenched **Plum and Arhat Fields** are famed for the sweetness and size of their namesake plums and arhat fruit, while the rain-kissed **Ooame Valley** hosts Shogunate-owned distilleries brewing Songbai's finest spirits and rice wines. Controlled flooding of the **Sea of Eels** into the **Qianlei Plateau**'s waterways reduce cataclysmic deluges while allowing multiple yearly plantings. Dragon-eels swim into the sea to spawn, providing foolhardy fishers with catches of incredible size—or dagger-fanged death. Salt fields and fisheries also ring today's shallowed Sea, producing useful minerals as well as valuable hauls of fish, crustaceans, and mollusks.

With the receding floods, the **Longma Plains** emerged in the south. Originally grasslands used for horses and livestock, these plains became sites of historical battlefields for more than a century of conflicts through Lung Wa's collapse, Lingshenese occupations, and Songbainese rebellions. Even though this region is ideal for settlement, served by rivers yet sheltered from storms by Shenmen's eastern mountains and protected from erosion by Lingshen's **Heisong Forest** across the southwest, few wish to make homes here. The innumerable lives lost in the region during the decades of war have given it a grim reputation for hauntings, and many claim sightings of ghosts and evil spirits. Today, it remains underdeveloped, with only horse-tamers, envoys, traders, mercenaries, and the occasional bandit gang or five plying its emerald fields.

A DAY IN SONGBAI

Songbainese use the Yixing-era method of dividing each day into a dozen double-hours, with each double-hour corresponding to different directions and astrological significance. Peasants wake before dawn to ready their day; caring for crops, clearing weeds, milking, and fishing are all best done early, as it's more comfortable toiling in the chillier periods preceding daybreak. Since waking late invariably means longer labor under the blazing sun, it's a sign of courtesy for many Songbainese commoners to belt out folksongs when preparing breakfast to discreetly awaken any sleeping neighbors and remind them to begin their daily endeavors.

Soldiers also wake early, rising at dawn, one double-hour after the farmers, to take similar advantage of the cooler

morning to train and prepare. Samurai begin their day with extraordinarily tough austerities to build endurance and focus, from armor-clad cross-country runs to meditating under waterfalls. Lower-ranking soldiers conduct conditioning exercises or weapon practice, wait for the samurai to conclude their elaborate exercises, and place bets on who has to cook that day. To preserve harmony—and more importantly, gustatory welfare—winners usually chip in to pay for the ersatz cooks' refreshments.

One double-hour after dawn, as the sun approaches its summit, merchants and scribes open their shops to customers and visitors. As these indoor professions are sheltered from the elements, it's unnecessary for them to plan around the sun's glare. In fact, these industries place great value in these sunlit hours since natural daylight saves shopkeepers and scholars alike minor fortunes in candles and lanterns. Songbai's ports and posthouses are also busiest at this time of day with tallying and checking duties, as boats and carriages carrying various cargo and passengers come and go.

In the afternoon, when the sun's heat is most oppressive, many peasants and soldiers stop to have a break, while businesspeople and academics get most of their work done. To beat the heat, many turn to sweet-sour dried fruits (such as plums or apricots), which are either eaten as is or boiled with arhat fruit and candied winter melon into refreshing broths. While some devout Shizurans advocate for midday exercises to absorb the solar goddess's blessings into one's body and spirit, most disavow such practices as injurious to one's qi. For many, midday simply presents a time to stay indoors for commerce, study, and less strenuous work, such as drying foodstuffs or weaving nets.

With recent peacetime prosperity and ensuing upticks in disposable income, midday has also become a time of leisure. The last few decades have seen growing popularity of eateries catering to professionals and youths. These diners typically serve light snacks alongside tea; many also proffer alcohol and other legal drugs. As meals are eaten communally in Songbai, these businesses market themselves as teahouses to draw customers and avoid conservative ire—instead of going out "to eat," Songbainese instead go out "for tea." This saying still annoys older Songbainese because many households have their own tea stores, and they grumble about the young wasting hard-earned money.

As evening approaches, most retreat to their houses' safety, a cautious habit developed during the Lingshenese occupation's curfews. After dinner and chit-chat, some stay up to socialize or study. Most turn in early to save lighting expenses and rest before the next day's exertions. Increasing numbers sneak out to nearby towns, tempted by their plethora of gambling houses, wine joints, and pleasure dens. This nocturnal world is the domain of the infamous **Golden League**, which put down roots in Songbai during their flight from Minkai over 150 years ago. The League profits from catering to legitimate and illicit appetites of samurai and peasant alike, and their employees assiduously collect information and debts for blackmail. Crime rates are low, for the League captures and sends felons and bandits to Shogunate detectives. Tongue-wags too deep in their cups, who gossip about how such cooperation between the League and Shogunate reflects a deeper bond, have usually gone missing.

A YEAR IN SONGBAI

The year formally begins with the **Daikitsu-Dressing Festival** to welcome spring after winter. During snowy months, rural families weave strings of hued rice into dazzling garments and use bamboo and wood to craft statues honoring the Lady of Foxes. After solstice, parents and children dress the statues in these vibrant rice robes, then carry the dressed statues to the frozen fields. Volunteers disguised as outlandish snow monsters would mock-rampage across the villages; upon seeing the rice-cloaked Daikitsu statues, they feign terror and flee, symbolizing vitality's return to the land.

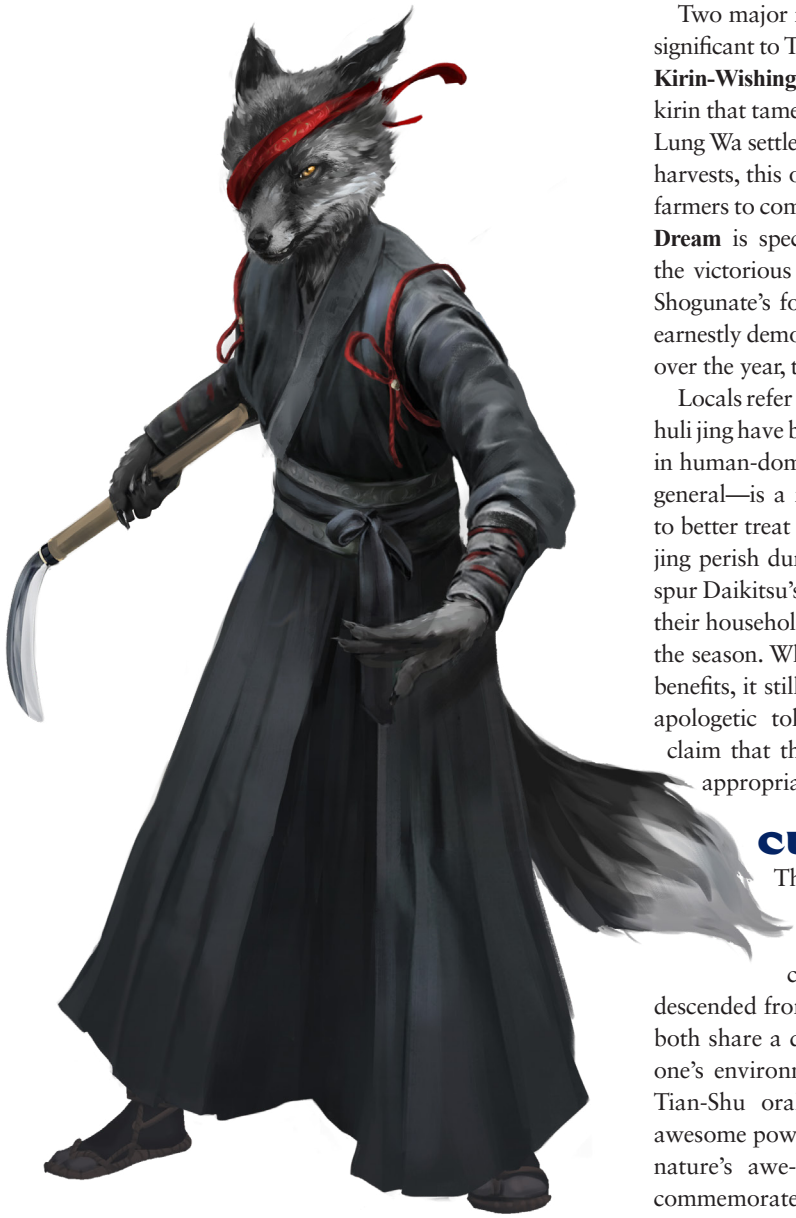
PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Akatori: ah-ka-toh-ree
Gao Bie: gau-bier
Gongsun: gong-soon
Huang Liang: hoo-ahng lee-ahng
Ma: mah
Masanori: mah-sah-no-ree
Mukinami: moo-kee-nah-mee
Ooame: ooh-ah-may
Qilinzhen: chi-lin-zheng
Sadao: sah-da-oh
Shizuka: SHEE-zoo-kah
Shokuro: shoh-ku-roh
Songbai: soong-bye
Tomoni: toh-moh-nee
Yecha: yay-cha
Xiaoliang: she-yao-lee-ahng



Spring Harmony, a month of reunions and feasting, announces spring. All Songbainese try not to miss this festival, and emigrants often take great efforts to rejoin families in their ancestral homes. Peasants use this time of gathering to utilize all available family members to prepare ancestral rice fields for planting. At festival's end, when the family separates again, the rice everyone planted together can still be eaten by remaining relatives. In this way, Songbainese families think of each other and preserve their bonds. Last year's crops are prepared as glutinous cakes and sweets and enjoyed alongside bright fruits, such as oranges, pomelos, and peaches.

In summer, Tian-Shu families venerate Pharasma and Abadar during **Ancestor's Week**, a longer variant of Ancestor's Day, when they offer prayers to their forebears, clean ancestral graves, and ensure grave sites remain undisturbed. Songbai's summers usually saw heavy fighting during the Lingshen War. Conscripts favored summer campaigns since they planted crops in spring and hoped to return for the fall harvests. Many Lingshenese generals observed these rhythms in fear of having no crops to ransack otherwise. Despite being a somber occasion, as nearly everyone lost somebody to the war, it's also a time of love and shared bonds. Families light incense and share steamed sourdough rice cakes—symbolizing life's sweetness that follows its sourness—in impromptu picnics near the cemeteries, reassuring their loved ones they won't forget each other.



Among Tian-Min communities, the **Smiling Sun** is celebrated on the brightest day of summer. During this coming-of-age ceremony, Shizuran priests bless Tian-Min samurai youths as they begin their journeys of adulthood. These new adults display their proficiency in aesthetic, martial, and scholarly arts, to their elders' and teachers' beaming approval. Shogunate patrons, leaning toward both Shizuran and Susuman philosophies, also attend these ceremonies, competing with one another to nurture a new generation of samurai. After Smiling Sun, many young samurai will enter a lord's service and wield swords in deadly earnest for the first time.

Two major festivals take place during autumn, one each significant to Tian-Shu and Tian-Min. Among Tian-Shu, the **Kirin-Wishing Festival** is a relic of Lung Wa–era legends of kirin that tamed the wild floods and eventually allowed the Lung Wa settlement. As Songbai's climate allows for double harvests, this occasion also serves as a planting festival for farmers to commence their second yearly crops. **Scabbard's Dream** is special to Tian-Min groups; it commemorates the victorious ending of the Lingshen War as well as the Shogunate's founding. During this festival, many samurai earnestly demonstrate new nonviolent skills they've learned over the year, to their peers' sincere applause.

Locals refer to winter as **Fox-Home**. While the indigenous huli jing have been, intentionally or otherwise, marginalized in human-dominated Songbai, this festival—and winter in general—is a rare time when humanity crudely attempts to better treat the foxfolk. Farmers strive to ensure no huli jing perish during winter, believing these occurrences will spur Daikitsu's wrath. Thus, many invite huli jing to stay in their households, clothing and feeding their guests through the season. While these acts bring huli jing some practical benefits, it still rankles of anthropocentric indulgence and apologetic tokenism, especially as some older foxfolk claim that the Daikitsu-Dressing Festival is still human appropriation of huli jing traditions.

CULTURE

The Tian-Min and Tian-Shu ethnic majorities influence Songbainese culture. Many of these different ideals appear superficially commensurate. For example, Tian-Shu descended from Lung Wa pioneers, and Tian-Min settlers both share a deep appreciation of nature and respect for one's environment. On a closer look, variances emerge; Tian-Shu oral histories cautiously emphasize nature's awesome power, whereas Tian-Min records instead praise nature's awe-inspiring beauty. Many Tian-Shu people commemorate lives lost to the Qianlei's deluges in story



and song, while Tian-Min paintings and verses capture Songbai's post-war panoramas.

Historically, Songbai followed a culturally homogeneous imperial regime, where royalist Lingshenese Tian-Shu warriors enjoyed power over feudal Songbainese Tian-Shu farmers; thus, political divisions were drawn along social class, rather than ethnicity. This dynamic has changed today due to the culturally distinct institution of the samurai-led Shogunate inevitably spurring new awareness of political and ethnic differences. Recently, the immigration of conservative Tian-Min warrior-nobles, disenfranchised by Minkai's Avistani-influenced reformation, have highlighted these differences even more starkly. These new, wealthy Minkaian exiles, with their excellent pedigrees and martial skills, have attained great prominence and influence within the Shogunate. Consequently, many Tian-Shu youths and Tian-Min anti-militarists have begun to wonder if they have a future within their homeland.

Perhaps as a convenient fiction to bury tensions, many people, whether Tian-Shu or Tian-Min, stridently claim no racism exists in Songbai. Its minorities might disagree, including expatriate elves from Jinin and diaspora Linvarrans (Lingshen War veterans and their families), indigenous kitsune (from pre–Lung Wa floodlands), and **Qiaos** (Tien for "bridges," a colloquial term for bi-ethnic Tian-Shu and Tian-Min Songbainese). Jininese and Linvarrans often experience exoticism and positive stereotyping as war heroes, while kitsune unequivocally suffer from humanity's encroachment since Lung Wa settlers and Lingshen soldiers have terraformed their lands, displaced their communities, and appropriated their traditions. Though not overtly mistreated, Qiaos are often seen as outsiders among Tian-Shu and Tian-Min communities, and many can't find acceptance amongst either. Some Qiaos migrate to **Linvarre**, hoping to find better opportunities in that multicultural polity.

For everyday dress, Tian-Shu favor **shufu**, the traditional Shu flowing robe and skirt. In agrarian Songbai, where people labor everyday under rain and sun, shufu are tailored and layered on to allow more protection from the elements, or are taken off for a more cooling garment. As shufu is a homonym for a Tien phrase for comfortable, shufu, local wits often quip Songbai's shufu are indeed the most shufu of all.

Many Tian-Shu consider their hair a gift from their parents and wear it long, fastening it into topknots with ribbons or pins. Tian-Min also wear their hair in topknots. More traditional samurai keep the top and front of their heads shaved. Tian-Shu and Tian-Min tend to keep their fingernails trimmed, with the exception of tycoons and courtiers who choose to keep their nails long to flaunt the fact they have no need to perform manual labor.

War Memories

Nearly 50 years on, the Lingshen War's shadows linger. Memories and traumas of this conflict shape contemporary

Songbainese discourse on warfare and security. As in so many other things, different communities construct and invoke these memories according to their particular customs. While older Tian-Shu soldiers fought in this war, many eschew patriotic displays or nostalgic fervor. Tian-Shu veterans often possessed complicated relationships with the Lingshenese they fought and slew; conscripts on both sides might have been estranged kinfolk or former friends caught in feudal strife. Many remember the war as part of a long occupation where sacrifices and betrayals were made for survival. When interviewed about their experiences, some Tian-Shu elders simply cry and refuse to elaborate further.

This reaction is at odds with how many Tian-Min veterans, along with their allies from Jinin and Linvarre, perceive the war. Without commonalities of geography or heritage with Lingshen, they remember the war more straightforwardly as a glorious campaign of liberation from tyrannical imperialists. For many samurai, victory in this war is doubly eminent, for it redeems their lost honor as Minkaian exiles and marks the Shogunate's inception.


SHIZUKA

Many kitsune, having lost so much to humanity, keep their opinions to themselves. Some kitsune served as scouts and auxiliary troops for one side or another in the war, only to incur the opposing faction's wrath upon their communities. Thus, the foxfolk have learned the hard way to keep to themselves when human armies throw down.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

Songbai's ruling institution is the **Shokuro Shogunate**, a military government established by inaugural Sun Shogun **Shokuro Akatori** (righteous male human samurai) and supported by his fellow Minkaian samurai and local landowner clans. While the elder Akatori has recently become frail from disease, memories of his quiet humility and sincere charisma hold the land together. **Shokuro Himari** (curious female Tian-Min toddler), Akatori's daughter, is too young to assume power; thus, the **Seven Radiances**, Akatori's trusted sworn siblings from the Lingshen War, oversee state affairs. However, as they're also quite aged, this interim council isn't viable long-term.

While Akatori's political vision inspired his retainers, his new Shogunate lacked financial backing. Akatori brokered support from the **Four Notables**, four families of Tian-Shu provincial Songbainese lords antedating Lung Wa's collapse: the **Gongsun**, supposed descendants of deposed Yixing royalty; the **Hu**, intrepid harbormasters along the Sea of Eels; the **Ma**, peerless riders and tamers of horses; and the **Yecha**, unconventional ceramicists of the Eastern Mountains. In exchange for their monetary backing and support with Tian-Shu cultural matters, the Four Notables gained advisory positions adjacent to the Shogunate, able to influence and veto Shogunate decisions through their financial and social power. Many Tian-Min samurai, steeped in heroic idealism, resent the Four Notables' nepotistic sway.

Sadao (troubled male Tian-Min summoner) and **Shizuka** (reliable female Tian-Min magus) are siblings locked in a silent struggle that could spell the troubled land's salvation or its undoing. Both are Akatori's grandchildren from an earlier dissolved marriage. Upon Akatori's exile, he divorced his spouse **Tomoni** (reclusive female Tian-Min oracle), hoping to spare her punishment but unaware she was with child. As Akatori redeemed his honor overseas, Tomoni—already feared for her supernatural visions—suffered society's disdain twice over, both for being divorced and for her links to a criminal. When victorious Akatori didn't contact Tomoni, she journeyed alone to Songbai; in obscurity and hardship, she started a new life as a village healer and single-handedly raised her newborn daughter. Later, this child, **Kaiyo** (self-sufficient female Tian-Min herbalist), would have progeny of her own, the twins Sadao and Shizuka who inherited their grandparents' aptitude for steel and spell—yet knew nothing of their family's past.

Upon recently reaching adulthood, the twins learned of their origins from the kind-faced **Masanori** (pragmatic male Tian-Min underboss), a long-time family friend and Golden League xun who helped school and protect Kaiyo's family. Masanori encouraged the twins to present themselves to the Seven Radiances, promising League aid in nominating them as Shogunate viceroys to preserve the land's fragile peace. Apprehensive of the recent exodus of Minkaian militarists into Songbai, Masanori fears these militarists, and his League rivals, will make a play for power soon and suspects their involvement in Akatori's persistent illness.

However, Masanori had underestimated Sadao's rage. Shortly after Masanori's announcement, Sadao disappeared, driven by bloodthirsty contemplation of kidnapping or slaying his young aunt, Himari. This act would hasten civil war to destroy the Shogunate that had robbed his family of happiness and also strike directly at his ailing grandfather's heart. Shizuka, sensitive to her twin's bitter ruminations, has also left to pursue Sadao, hoping to prevent his resentment from consuming his soul.

Cities and Locations

The following are prominent locations in Songbai.

Dragon-Eel Port

An enclave of the Four Notables' Hu clan, Dragon-Eel Port overlooks the Sea of Eels and controls Songbai's maritime trade. Representatives from the Shogunate and Four Notables collaborate to coordinate prices for grain and other commodities. Recently, Gokan advisors have arrived to help the Shogunate, reducing their reliance on Notable brokerage. As Shogunate–Notable cooperation has subsequently fallen, tensions have conversely risen.

Gao Bie

If Dragon-Eel Port is Songbai's maritime lifeline, then Gao Bie (named after a Tien phrase for "goodbye") is the trade way serving the humbler overland and riverine routes. In today's peacetime, traders replenishing supplies rub shoulders with soldiers on unofficial furlough. Every inn brews its variation of the town's famed gaobiejiu, a potent sorghum liquor said to dull the ache of farewells, and pairs them with peppercorn-fried meat dishes. Security is surprisingly lax so close to the Lingshen-Songbai border; both states avoid over-patrolling to avoid international incidents. Gao Bie is understandably popular with bandits, fugitives, and thus, adventurers.

Mukinami

The Shogunate's capital, built on a ruined ancient city destroyed during the Lingshen War, faces the inland Sea. Reflecting the city's main ethnic composition, architecture here mixes Tian-Shu and Tian-Min buildings, where Shogunate castles and shrines stand beside Songbainese courtyards and pagodas. In addition to Shogunate palaces and offices, Mukinami also boasts Songbai's best academies and archives. At reasonable rates, scholars assist with research in specialized subjects, from early Yixing sovereign dragon art to contemporary Alkenstar meteorology, and scribes ghostwrite dissertations and assemble almanacs. Jianghu rumors claim that the Four Notables' erudite Gongsun clan, masters of the old city, read and record every word for future blackmail.

International Relations

Songbai has the deepest bonds with two of Tian Xia's most prominent Successor States: the Shogunate's homeland of Minkai and their former subjugators in neighboring Lingshen. Songbai's and Minkai's elites enjoy guarded kinship, though it might soon change. Akatori's victory over Lingshen filled Minkaian war hawks with pride; if even Minkaian exiles could overcome Lingshen, what more could *actual* samurai achieve? If the Shogunate finds this patronizing, it raises no complaints.



SADAO



Tang Mai

Nations

TANG MAI
Capital: Surat Prakan
Government: Confederacy
Ruler: Kamraten Khemkaeng



Peoples

Dragons
Humans
Nagaji
Yakshas

Languages

Nagaji
Tang
Tien

Religions

- Hei Feng
- Nalinivati
- Pharasma
- Phi Deva
- Yamatsumi

Resources

- Alchemy
- Books/ Lore
- Dyes
- Lumber
- Luxury Goods
- Magic Items
- Medicine
- Seafood
- Songbirds
- Spices/Salt
- Tea

KINGDOM OF THE FIVE SISTERS

When people speak of Tang Mai, they most often speak of their magical abilities and knowledge, but when they don't, they make mention of the land. Tang Mai is steeped in magic, full of birds with fiery feathers and forest dragons. It's this abundance of magical resources that first brought **Lung Wa** to the kingdom's doorstep and, according to those in Tang Mai, began the end of Lung Wa.

How Tang Mai came to be is a story lost and left to imagination. Most tales start with its people reclaiming their independence from the **Shu Empire**. Tang Mai had been pulled into the ever-expanding orbit of the Shu Empire and, while treated well, had no wish to stay. Representing their people, five noble sisters walked up to the Emperor and demanded their freedom. The Emperor, a longtime friend, granted it to them, wishing them to go in peace. From there, Tang Mai grew.

Each sister was granted their own region to rule over; they created the title of **Kamraten** and the powerful ***Cinnamon Throne*** to rule everything, agreeing that the position would change every five years to ensure no one could rule in tyranny. While the system would work in the long term, it was nonetheless tested in the interim. In 6387 IC, after the five sisters became five families, the **Sudachan** family attempted a coup upon the other four, hoping to maintain a hold on the *Cinnamon Throne*. This civil war ended in favor of the other four, with the Sudachan family being banned from becoming leaders at all—including from any seats among the **Chaophraya**—for the next 15 generations. Between petty foibles and the increasing impatience of the commoners, each noble family slowly dropped from prominence. The world after long periods of division tends to unite, however, and after long periods of union, tends to divide. Before the 15 generations came to pass, Lung Wa invaded, beginning years of war and then a slow recovery.

Lung Wa openly coveted the lush jungle forests of Tang Mai, along with the native songbirds, luxury hardwoods, rare spices, and natural perfumes. Tang Mai's powerful sorcerers saw the empire foiled time and time again, invasion after invasion. These defeats were a shame Lung Wa couldn't tolerate, and after a particularly devastating seventh war, Tang Mai finally surrendered. The war cost Lung Wa dearly, and the empire fell only two decades later. Tang Mai reclaimed its independence with Lung Wa's fall, yet it still hasn't fully recovered from the overwhelming defeat so many centuries ago.

Since the end of Lung Wa's occupation, Tang Mai's politics have become volatile like the recently reawakened volcano Pho Yim. While many call for Tang Mai to recede into full isolation, others argue for Tang Mai to create stronger ties and allies with the outside world. At the same time, those loyal to the old noble families seek a way to return them to the five seats; the commonwealth factions oppose them at nearly every step and argue that the nobility have lost their magic.

Quietly behind the scenes, the Kamraten seeks for a way to create new relics by which to establish Tang Mai's prominence and secure its safety. They're no longer satisfied with the scraps that one can find in temples or the magic created by mortals. Whatever comes next, Tang Mai is making plans to change magic as it's known.

GEOGRAPHY

Following the fall of Lung Wa, the Successor States arose: **Quain** lies in the west, **Lingshen** in the north, and **Hwanggot** in the east. **Bachuan** lies in the northeast, **Xa Hoi** in the southwest, and **Nagajor** in the southwest. An ocean sits along the coast of northern Tang Mai, shining an ever-clear blue, though ready to whip itself into a storm when called upon. Not far away is the **Tian Shen Tower**, a limestone monument said to have been formed when the hero Tian Shen was thrown across the country before sliding to a stop to create a monument in the ocean.

Tang Mai is a warm kingdom, with just two seasons: the monsoon season and the dry season. However, the southern regions of Tang Mai are far cooler than the north.





In the southwest of Tang Mai lay the fields that feed the capital city. Looming constantly above much of the south is **Pho Yim**, nestled in the **Kullan Dei** mountain range, a constantly smoking volcano that threatens to wipe away what it helped create. Sitting at the foot of this volcanic monolith is **Surat Prakan**, the seat of the *Cinnamon Throne* and capital of Tang Mai. Despite the danger Pho Yim poses and the proximity of the south to the stomping grounds of **kaiju**, Surat Prakan remains protected by the unspoken agreements and combined magic of the five seats, shielding the southern region from its ever present danger.

Perhaps the most notable geographical marker is the **Sikhyeu Forest** that covers the country. Tian songs of this rainforest often begin with adventures, people seeking their fortunes in the lost temples and unique fauna only found in Sikhyeu, ultimately to find their death. For those from Tang Mai, the songs begin with the spirits of the woods: In the **Sak Yai** grove, the trees sing at night. They call on towns to remember those who have passed, then swallow them whole, leaving behind nothing but memories etched on leaves.

Other stories tell of the creatures that live in Tang Mai's forests, including the forest dragons and the variety of birds that swiftly navigate the thick canopy. Despite the size of the Sikhyeu Forest, navigation remains easy thanks to the sprawling and well-organized network of rivers, canals, waterways, and aqueducts built within. These waterways serve as highways connecting nearly all towns in Tang Mai, including the four regional capitals, and as a testament to the nation's magical knowledge.

Not all have recovered from Lung Wa's rule. The rice fields found across Tang Mai lie on the flooded remains of clear-cut forests, chopped down by imperial edict. Many in Tang Mai also blame Lung Wa for the devastating reawakening of Pho Yim in 7099 IC, citing the empire's unbalancing influence. In the heart of Tang Mai, the forest still recedes from the last time Pho Yim exploded, when sparks caught the trees and burnt them down.

A DAY IN TANG MAI

While their schedules vary, when people in Tang Mai have breakfast, they most often eat **jook**; though typically made from rice boiled in a large amount of water, how it's prepared often varies by ancestry. Many Tian-Tang people serve jook with juicy pork meatballs, crispy fried onions, mouth burning chilies, and pungent fish sauce with the rice thick enough to leave a spoon standing. In Tian-Shu culture, jook is known as muay, and is served with aged eggs steeped in tea, salty fish floss, and pickled vegetables, and the rice taken far thinner.

Following breakfast, schedules split for Tang adults. For those living outside of the cities, the morning begins before the sunrise, while the air is still cold, with most going to work—whether it be farming, keeping the village,

or maintaining the waterways. Outside the cities, much of the work is done out in the sun and is often far more structured than work in the city. Strict timelines need to be met lest Tang Mai fall apart due to the dysfunction of the waterways.

Those living in the cities are typically employed in a specialized craft, are a mage of some renown, or work in the service industry. Much of the day is spent indoors, though the streets stay filled with people as pedestrians run back and forth, handling errands, transporting food, and delivering messages. The weather is endlessly hot, but most are used it. In more recent years, a new type of business has emerged: **runners stalls** offering slightly solid, icy drinks. Runners stalls are named for their mobility and the fact that they can sometimes be found running alongside the harried errand runners, serving drinks to all those who'll pay.

For children, schedules are far more consistent no matter where they live. From the ages of 6 to 15, most children in Tang Mai attend school from after breakfast to two hours after the midday heat. Schooling in Tang Mai, while including a little bit of everything, predominantly focuses on magic, often with the intent of finding the next great mage. Teaching rudimentary magic to all serves a secondary purpose of ensuring that magical literacy rates remain high. After all, everything from handicrafts to waterway maintenance requires an understanding of magic in Tang Mai. Children who are particularly gifted are often placed in special programs aimed to teach them more magic and eventually prepare them for positions as government officials.

No matter where people live or what they do, one thing remains consistent in their day: the midday break. During these hours, hard work and spending too much time outside can be dangerous, even to those used to the humid heat. Thus, the people of Tang Mai have developed rituals around sharing the afternoon hours. While some choose to cloister themselves, tackling paperwork and things that can only be done inside, many more gather in large groups to share a meal, play games, and enjoy each other's company. The midday is treasured between groups, often being one of the few meals of the day that everyone can share together consistently. It's likewise commonly used as a time of deal-making in Tang Mai, an opportunity for scholars, tradesmen, and officials to meet up and create new connections. Giving up the midday meal to meet with a potential new partner is seen as a sign of dedication to the relationship and an offering of friendship, or even familial-like bonds. From these relationships and deals the phrase "midday friends" has emerged, a shorthanded way of referring to a friendship in which both parties are contractually getting something out of it.

Even as night descends, Tang Mai is far from quiet. While work ends later for those in the cities, it simply means that nightlife lasts longer. Night markets, taverns and bars, casinos, parties, and more take root with neon magic signs lighting up and their patronage spilling onto the streets.

A YEAR IN TANG MAI

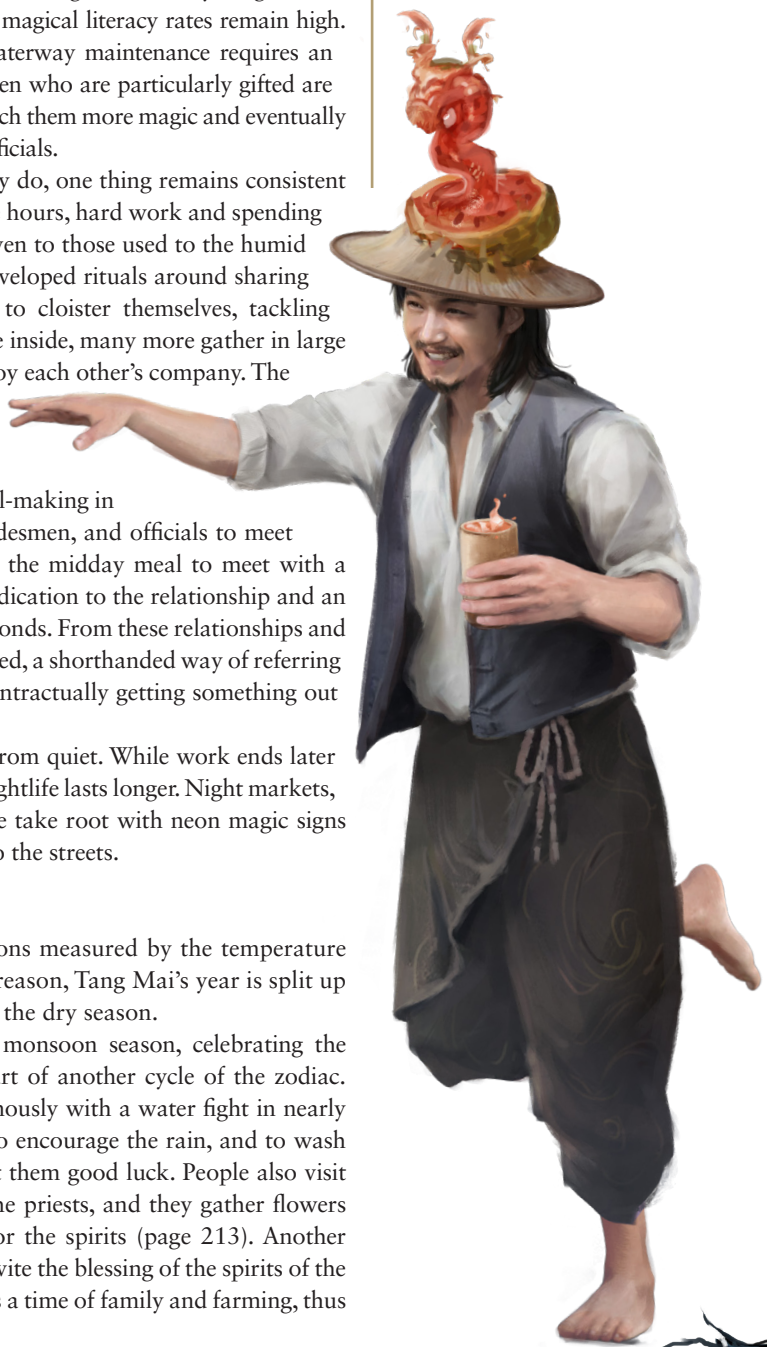
Tang Mai isn't so much a place with seasons measured by the temperature so much as measured by the rain. For this reason, Tang Mai's year is split up into two seasons: the monsoon season and the dry season.

Tang Mai's year begins at the start of monsoon season, celebrating the life that comes with water as well as a start of another cycle of the zodiac. Tang Mai welcomes the new year most famously with a water fight in nearly every city and town. The goal is twofold: to encourage the rain, and to wash people clean of the previous year and grant them good luck. People also visit the Jai Ban of their town to pay alms to the priests, and they gather flowers to decorate the local yang na tree to honor the spirits (page 213). Another common tradition is to release animals to invite the blessing of the spirits of the land on the upcoming crops. The new year is a time of family and farming, thus

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

When an 'h' is written after a consonant in Tang (except for c), then it denotes an aspiration or emphasis of the consonant.

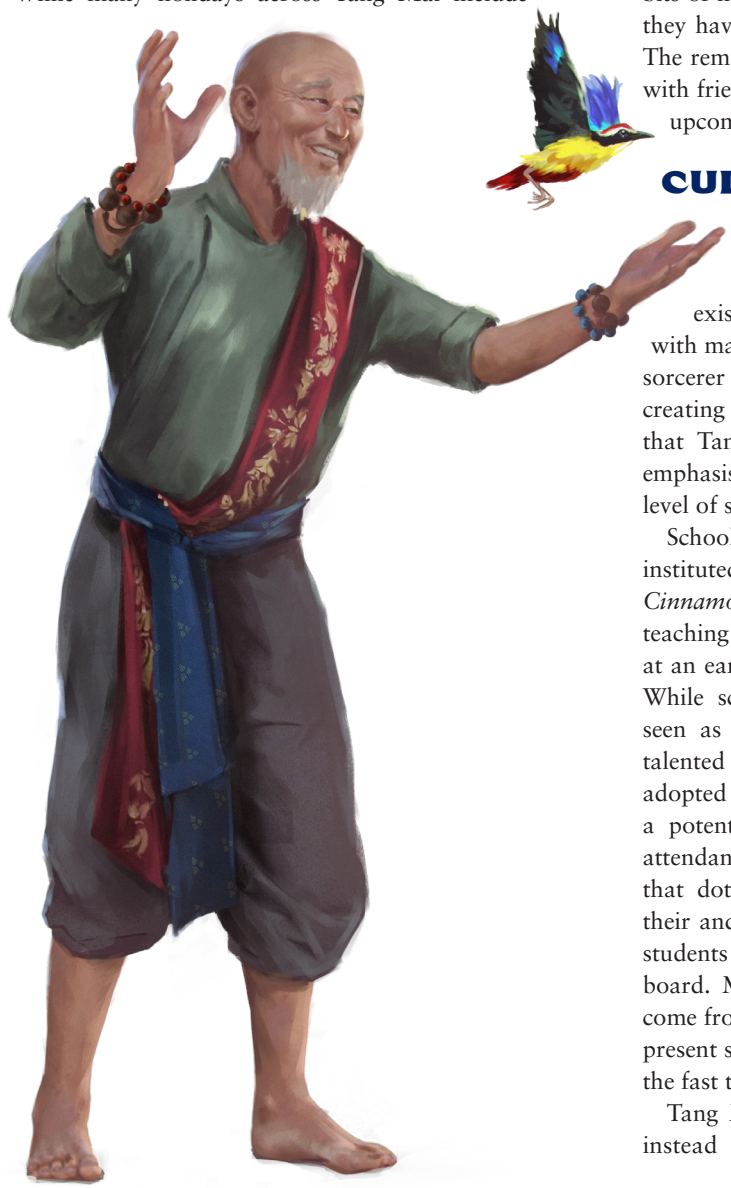
Tang Mai: tang-MY
Surat Prakan: sue-RA-ht pra-KHAN
Indraracha: in-DRA-raw-cha
Chaophraya: chow-PRY-a
Khemkaeng: Kem-Kang
Adidaya: Ah-DEE-die-ya
Huaburi: Hwa-bury
Sikhyeu: seek-hew
Thap Samut: Tahp sahm-oot
Ahs-knee: ahs-knee
Yiphraya: yee-PRY-ah
Uthong: OO-tong



bringing many home. With the end of the new year's day, monsoon season begins—as does farming season, since farmers wait to ensure there will be enough rain that year to support the harvest.

The **Festival of the Five Sisters** takes place in the middle of monsoon season. While only celebrated for two weeks in modern days, in the past it lasted far longer. The Festival of the Five Sisters celebrates the founding of Tang Mai and the five sisters who reclaimed its independence from the Shu. These days, many also celebrate Tang Mai's independence from Lung Wa. During the holiday, people fly kites and free animals to celebrate their own freedom. Businesses and schools stay closed for two days, and people show reverence to all those who were lost fighting for Tang Mai's freedom. After these two days, the country reopens into a grand festival with games, parades, and magical talent shows. The winners of the talent shows obtain bragging rights, and in the cities, name recognition for their excellent magical skills.

With the dry season comes **Ancestor's Day** to honor the dead and say goodbye to the water that brings life. While many holidays across Tang Mai include reverence of the dead, Ancestor's Day is focused solely on respecting the departed. The night before Ancestor's Day, people dress up as ghosts, wearing patchwork outfits and tall and colorful masks made of wood. People march through towns to the graves with cowbells and firecrackers, hoping to wake the dead and prepare them for tomorrow's visit. During the light hours of Ancestor's Day, people visit the graves of their family, sweeping away the dust and laying out offerings. People often talk to their deceased kin during this time, offering updates and picnicking, making sure to bring the dead's favorite foods. At the end of the day, people often play calming songs to lay the dead back to sleep again.



In the middle of the dry season, when it feels the most like water might not come back, comes the **Lantern Festival**—a time not for mourning, but for guidance and life. Unlike the other holidays, people often spend this festival alone or with their friends, reflecting on where they are in the here and now. The Lantern Festival lasts for three days. During this time, people release lanterns onto what bodies of water remain, leaving notes and bits of hair in the lanterns while speaking of the wishes they have and the things they would like to relinquish. The remaining time is spent resting, quietly catching up with friends, or in contemplation as fortification for the upcoming second half of the dry season.

CULTURE

Ask nearly anyone to tell you something about Tang Mai and they'll speak of its magic. While Tang Mai exists outside of magic, it certainly exists because of it. Not only is the land itself filled with magical plants, but Tang Mai was founded by five sorcerer sisters. These sisters pledged to rule together, creating the five seats and establishing the mageocracy that Tang Mai runs on to this day. Because of the emphasis on magic in Tang Mai, it's used at nearly every level of society.

Schools teaching basic education and magic were instituted by the ruler Yiphraya while holding the *Cinnamon Throne*. Education in Tang Mai focuses on teaching the basics of magic, introducing magical theory at an early age and practical application not long after. While schools do teach other subjects, they're often seen as secondary to one's magical education. More talented and ambitious spellcasters are often temporarily adopted by noble families seeking to gain renown from a potentially prodigious talent. These sponsors fund attendance to one of the many universities or institutes that dot Tang Mai, allowing magic users to expand their and the nation's knowledge. Upon graduation, all students must present a new finding before the academic board. Many of the greatest inventions in Tang Mai come from students' graduation projects, and those who present something of particular interest are often put on the fast track to eventually holding one of the five seats.

Tang Mai isn't a particularly religious place; many instead worship the spirits of the dead and land.



Gods are viewed as powerful spirits, still worthy of worship and recognition, but not more than that. More important than any theology is leaving offerings to the spirits. Religion therefore is fairly unstructured; the average town has anywhere from one to three priests, with the center of the settlement often being dedicated to the **Jai Ban**, or the town's heart and soul. A **yang na tree** is also often found there, representing longevity and prosperity and serving as a landmark to all those who pass through. Every time a new settlement is founded, a cutting from the yang na tree in the capital is planted in the town's newfound Jai Ban to show its connections to Surat Prakan and Tang Mai. Despite these practices, priests still play an important part. While they don't oversee worship, they instead assist worshippers who might be unable to do the rites themselves, guide chants and prayers, and bless those who ask for it. They're also central to the upkeep of the Jai Ban and the yang na tree, ensuring its health and thus the health of the town.

Despite a century of hardship and years of war, the people of Tang Mai take heart in their pride and ability to scare off most enemies that come their way. While most customs come from the dominant Tian-Tang culture, Tian-Shu culture still influences everything from food to fashion across the country since many Tian-Shu people immigrated to Tang Mai during Lung Wa's invasion. Because of the widespread acceptance toward their new Tian-Shu neighbors, Tang Mai has gained a reputation for being an open and welcoming culture. The majority of Tian-Shu people reside in the regional capitals, often working in specialized trades, such as smithing and tailoring.

Fashion in Tang Mai, while still extravagant, often focuses on trying to withstand the heat. Short hair is considered more fashionable as well as practical; a popular choice is to have both sides of the head shaved and two thin pieces of hair in front kept long. Many, especially Tian-Shu people, still wear their hair long, however. Throughout Tang Mai, individuals of every gender wear breezy pants and sarongs tied from large fabrics, and laborers often style their sarongs into pants as well. Shirts are optional, though many wear a pha biang—a wide piece of fabric draped across and around the chest with the remaining fabric falling down the back. Bright paintings of Tang Mai's unique magical flora are often done on fabrics as devotion to the spirits of the land, though scholars and laborers tend to favor undyed fabrics as a sign of piety and practicality, respectively.

Food in Tang Mai often takes advantage of the nation's natural climate and many magical resources. The most commonly used plants are ones that cool people down, encourage good health, and slow aging. Many cook with the philosophy that meals are like potions. Food is often spicy and prepared using fresh ingredients. Curries, noodles, and sweet rice are especially popular.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

Tang Mai is a mandala of various mini states ruled by five seats. Each seat serves as the head of its respective region. These rulers are called the **Chaophraya**, and they are expected to be familiar with all that occurs in their respective regions as well as the general affairs of all of Tang Mai. Above all of them sits the *Cinnamon Throne*, or the **Kamraten**, ruling the entire nation. The position rotates every five years with no one being able to hold it again until all other seats have held it once. The selection of the *Cinnamon Throne* is held in the catacombs beneath the capital, **Surat Prakan**, through a process unknown to all those who aren't Chaophraya. No matter who holds the title of Kamraten, the capital doesn't change; it remains always in Surat Prakan. Seats are held until death—though there have been exceptions, such as the **Sun Coup** in which Kamraten XIII was overthrown—and upon death, the successor automatically ascends. Ruling positions were historically filled with the direct descendants of the five sisters, though more recently, this hasn't been the case.



KHEMKAENG

In Tang Mai, politics and academics are more or less the same, as only the most powerful magicians can hold a seat. Political factions are formed from sorcerous bloodlines, namely the four bloodlines from which the sisters drew their power: imperial, draconic, psychopomp, and nymph. These factions have the greatest say over politics, trade, innovation, and the state of magic within Tang Mai. The weaker ones serve as no more than social clubs.

At a lower level of government, smaller cities and towns are overseen by a hereditary leader. In even smaller settlements, priests hold social capital; they often work as religious leaders and teachers and, occasionally, as the settlement's leaders.

Kamraten and Chaophraya

Patcharin (deceptive nonbinary Tian-Tang human imperial sorcerer), Ruler of Uthong, is a smooth-voiced illusionist. She's best known for her isolationist views but can often be found disagreeing with the Kamraten over the exclusivity of universities. Patcharin likewise stands in favor of bolstering Tang Mai's defensive forces into a full army, a stance with growing popularity as many worry if war will arrive on their doorstep again.

Suriya (cheerful nonbinary Tian-Tang human psychopomp sorcerer), Ruler of Thap Samut, is a joyous middle-aged person and leader of the psychopomp faction who rose to the Chaophraya. When looking for a business deal, one need not look further than Suriya. The most levelheaded of the Chaophraya, they often mediate arguments with the Kamraten. Many worry about Suriya's more shady dealings, however, and whether their loyalties lie with their fortune or Tang Mai.

Piyapon (pious nonbinary Tian-Shu human draconic sorcerer), Ruler of Adidaya, keeps their eyes pointed toward one thing—the divine. Going against the tide, Piyapon is the first religious leader to be appointed as Chaophraya. They seek to transform Tang Mai into a state that truly turns its face toward the gods, something Duangkamol often argues with them about.

Duangkamol (egalitarian female Tian-Tang human nymph sorcerer) serves as Ruler of Huaburi. Despite being one of the few members of the nobility, Duangkamol is beloved by the people for her constant advocacy for all the people of Tang Mai, especially those without magic. She

has recently started pushing for universities to offer non-magical studies and stands against the divine, still scarred by the war with Lung Wa.

Khemkaeng (bullish male Tian-Tang human draconic sorcerer), Ruler of Surat Prakan, is the hotheaded and stubborn young Kamraten who represents anti-noble sentiments. Most note his reign has been quiet with a focus on research concerning the divine and expanding acceptance into Tang Mai's schools. He believes exclusivity to be a sign of stagnation and wishes to drive the country toward a dependable future.

CITIES AND LOCATIONS

The following are a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Tang Mai.

Indraracha Institute

The most well-known university in Tang Mai, Indraracha Institute has graduated many of the Chaophraya and the best magic users in Tang Mai. Here, people study both the theoretical and practical applications of Tang Mai's various flora and fauna, looking into everything from magical remedies to ways to increase magical aptitude. Others come to the institute to study their bloodlines, as Indraracha stores hundreds of records of most sorcerous bloodlines in Tang Mai and thousands of pages on potential skills, tests, and whatever else one might want to learn.

Surat Prakan

Nestled into the base of Pho Yim, Surat Prakan is the gleaming capital city of Tang Mai, a pink and white city with sharp towers that spiral up into the sky, capped in gold. Despite not having the largest Tian-Tang population, Surat Prakan retains many Tian-Tang architectural features, as many of its leaders have been Tian-Tang. Upturned roofs with dragons and nagas decorating their caps and courtyards, reminiscent of Tian-Tang culture, are common throughout both the residential and administrative neighborhoods of Surat Prakan. Despite the recent eruption of Pho Yim, Surat Prakan has remained largely untouched due to the magical prowess of Tang Mai's mages.

Thap Samut

The northernmost city of Tang Mai, Thap Samut also serves as the largest port city in the nation. With its clean architecture and accessible ports, Thap Samut has quickly grown in wealth and prestige, where the nouveau riche rapidly build—and destroy—their fortunes and social status. All these qualities have earned Thap Samut the nickname of "little capital," both praising its economic accomplishments and decrying its unfettered ambition.

Uthong

Despite Tang Mai having no standing army, that has hardly stopped Uthong from acting otherwise. While the *Cinnamon Throne* might sit in the capital, it's here that the five major political factions place their seats, and where the unofficial army of Tang Mai stands. The existence of an army in Uthong, no matter how unofficial it might be, has led to disagreements that have slowly been rising in quantity and frequency. While the Chaophraya sit content with the army's presence, many others question its place in Uthong and Tang Mai at large and note the slowly rising abuses of power from the army.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Tang Mai is a neutral state that aims to remain in isolation in all matters that don't threaten its borders or trade—meaning all business except that which involves Lung Wa's successor states. In such matters, Tang Mai's government keeps its eyes turned outward, all while maintaining silence on whatever newest weapons it might have forged.



PATCHARIN



SURIYA



PIYAPON



DUANGKAMOL

TIAN XIA WORLD GUIDE
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GLOSSARY & INDEX



Tianjing

Nations

TIANJING
Capital: Zetang
Government: Conclave
Ruler: Secretary Etsul Genpo



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BELOVED OF HEAVEN

In an age long forgotten, before the reign of humans or even dragons, Tianjing was the site of a great war. The malevolent extraplanar monstrosities known as **qlippoth** battled with a host of holy beings who came from the heavens to fight them. Their titanic battles tore apart sky and sea, reshaping the primordial landscape with incomprehensible force.

The celestials won. The qlippoth were defeated and driven back, but the world had sustained so much damage, and the celestials had suffered such losses, that it became impossible to repair the rift through which the qlippoth had come. All the heavenly host could do was seal the wound in the earth and then guard it. This task they did for untold thousands of years, exiling themselves to the Universe while the world changed around them. Mountains rose and wore away. Seas rushed in and dried up. The Age of Dragons dawned, and Tian Xia's Age of Ashes fell. Mortals spread over Tian Xia, and in them, the celestials found some sin, but also much to admire.

Over centuries, the celestials intermingled with mortals and found their descendants to be braver and purer still. As those descendants multiplied, the celestials believed that they could finally entrust the guarding of the qlippoth's prisons to their children. Gradually, the celestials ceded responsibility to their descendants before finally departing for their extraplanar homes.

The territory that the celestials had once protected became known as Tianjing. While it has extraordinary natural beauty and kind people, there lurks a perpetual sense of wariness beneath the tranquility of this eerie, temple-dotted land. Outsiders who linger in Tianjing often feel, initially, that they've arrived in a place of heavenly perfection. After a few days, however, visitors come to feel that some unease looms just out of sight at all times—which isn't far from the truth. Tianjing's radiance has always come with a palpable, unseen shadow.

Because of this atmosphere, and because the celestial-touched who dwell in Tianjing are formidable beyond their numbers, no outside empire has ever conquered the nation. Lung Wa never even threatened Tianjing, choosing instead to send gifts of food and supplies in honor of the celestial children's duties. When the empire fell, however, its tribute ended, and Tianjing, which had grown dependent on Lung Wa's gifts, had to fend for itself. Scarcity, turmoil, and banditry followed. Parts of the country nearly collapsed.

In the past few decades, Tianjing has finally recovered from that loss and regained its self-sufficiency, but at considerable cost. Its people have had to divert their attention away from the temples and seals to rebuild their nation, and due to their failure to renew the wards' sustaining rituals, the magic has weakened. Worse, bandits and profiteers looted some of the holy sites, damaging them even more grievously.

Today, Tianjing faces a graver threat than has existed since its founding. Its wards are weakening, and its people are hard-pressed to sustain them. Malign magic has begun seeping out through the failing seals, its presence growing stronger by the hour, yet the ruling council huddles in Zetang, unable or unwilling to acknowledge their failures.

GEOGRAPHY

The terrors that lie beneath Tianjing's soil aren't obvious from above. The region enjoys a temperate climate, sheltered beaches along the **Sea of Ghosts**, **Benchu Bay**, and **Naikang Bay**, and the riches of the **Kaimuko Wood**—a vast old wood that the celestials seeded with incense cedars, sweet muskwood, and other trees valuable for lumber or resins. The landscape is uncommonly lovely with green hills and firefly-specked forests. Gentle winds and brilliant sunsets grace Tianjing, and the scent of burning incense perfumes its breezes.

An air of holiness suffuses the land. It was this supernatural feeling of sanctity, warm as sunlight, that convinced an early emperor of Lung Wa to send regular



BULAKHO



tributes to Tianjing. The country's borders are obvious and have never been seriously contested because of Tianjing being defined by its consecration. One step in either direction, in or out, and anyone can feel the difference.

Following Lung Wa's fall, bandits, pirates, and civil turmoil damaged some of Tianjing's holy sites. In other places, people, stretched thin by other needs, couldn't maintain their consecrated magic, weakening these holy sites further. Though invisible to outsiders, its people are uncomfortably aware that holes have begun appearing in the aura of sanctity that pervades their land.

In the depths of the Kaimuko Wood, which covers the country's western half, fresh rifts have opened in the earth. Some of the trees exposed to their foul vapors have developed weeping wounds, and animals who tread too close to the oozing soil quake in the grip of strange diseases. These corruptions haven't reached the forest's borders, and none are visible from the gilded temples that dot the wood, but those who venture into the wild depths have seen ominous signs emerge.

Northern Tianjing, bordering **Kwanlai**, is a mountainous region where entire peaks have been hollowed into monasteries, crowned with palatial temples whose stepped roofs gleam green and red in the sun. Renowned centers of religious and martial learning, such as **Senhang Monastery** and **Doro Tipil**, await seekers willing to brave the steep and snowy roads that lead to their remote perches. Here too, however, alarming portents have begun appearing in the monks' meditations and darkening the stars in their celestial observatories.

Salt water surrounds Tianjing on three sides: east, south, and west. **Point Aykishe**, on the east coast, holds the capital city of **Zetang** and overlooks three excellent natural harbors. As the center of Tianjing's trade, Zetang serves as the country's primary point of contact with the outside world and as the shining jewel of its society. Long ago, a flotilla of pirates attacked Tianjing. The gods punished them for their impiety, and the wreckage of their fleet lies beneath the shining blue waters of the eastern bay. Ocean currents carried many of their ships' skeletons to the shores of **Kangshur Island**, outside Tianjing's holy aura, where the angry ghosts of those pirates rise on winter nights.

A DAY IN TIANJING

Bells and gongs, pealing from monasteries in every city and village, announce the sunrise in Tianjing. At daybreak, mountain temples open their painted wooden shutters to release feathery clouds of red-breasted white birds known as **duo jalang**, a name that roughly translates to "god's truth eyes." These birds, which are believed to be blessed with the ability to unerringly see corruption, fly over the length and breadth of Tianjing before returning to their roosts at night, when it's said that they report all they've

seen to the monks. For ordinary people, seeing a duo jalang pass overhead is a powerful omen. Few are ever so unlucky as to see a dead duo jalang, but it's a terrible symbol of calamity if one does.

Upon waking, all Tianji are expected to recite the **Ushtung Mantra**, a ritual prayer that strengthens Tianjing's holy aura with each syllable uttered. The scholars of the **Lamkeutsang Temple** spend decades studying scriptures and omens to adjust the Ushtung Mantra, and every generation or so, the prayer is minutely altered to bring its magic back in line with changes in Tianjing's celestial and earthly alignments. After reciting the mantra, everyone who's able to do so is expected to perform a ritual morning cleansing, followed by an hour of calisthenics and arms practice. The ancient fighting style of Tianjing wasn't designed for use against people, but against a many-shaped enemy of unholy might, and sacred words of power accompany each movement. Sometimes these words are only a syllable or two, but they must be practiced until they become as reflexive as a basic lunge or parry.

Only after completing the Ushtung Mantra and their daily conditioning are people supposed to eat breakfast and begin their regular work. In practice, however, many Tianji are so busy, and so unconcerned with a remote, mostly forgotten threat, that they rush through parts of this routine, or skip it entirely, rather than spend over an hour on seemingly pointless exercises each morning. Most do their best to put in at least a partial effort, but actually following the entire ritual every day is increasingly viewed as old-fashioned nonsense that only eccentric grandparents endure.

The rest of the day proceeds much as it does in any other land. Fishers ply the seas, farmers tend their crops, glaziers sweat over their furnaces, and monks chant. Merchants and pilgrims stream through Zetang's golden gates, and the bulakho who tend the shrines of the Kaimuko Wood write painstaking reports on the unsettling things they've witnessed, even though they suspect—correctly—that these reports are destined only to be ignored by a timorous and myopic ruling council.

At night, a hundred thousand incense sticks light up across Tianjing, and a hundred thousand prayers are whispered into their smoke. The duo jalang return to their snowy monasteries, crooning to their handlers of all they've seen. In the temples, dedicants light their holy fires, and acolytes with fresh-shaved heads prepare to stand vigil until dawn, when they'll ring the bells and hammer the gongs again. In the deepest hours of the night, far below the sleeping Tianjing, a buried evil stirs, stretching oozing tendrils full of faces against the burning wards that bind it. Soon, it knows, it will find a crack. It can feel the magic's weakness. Soon, it will be free.

A YEAR IN TIANJING

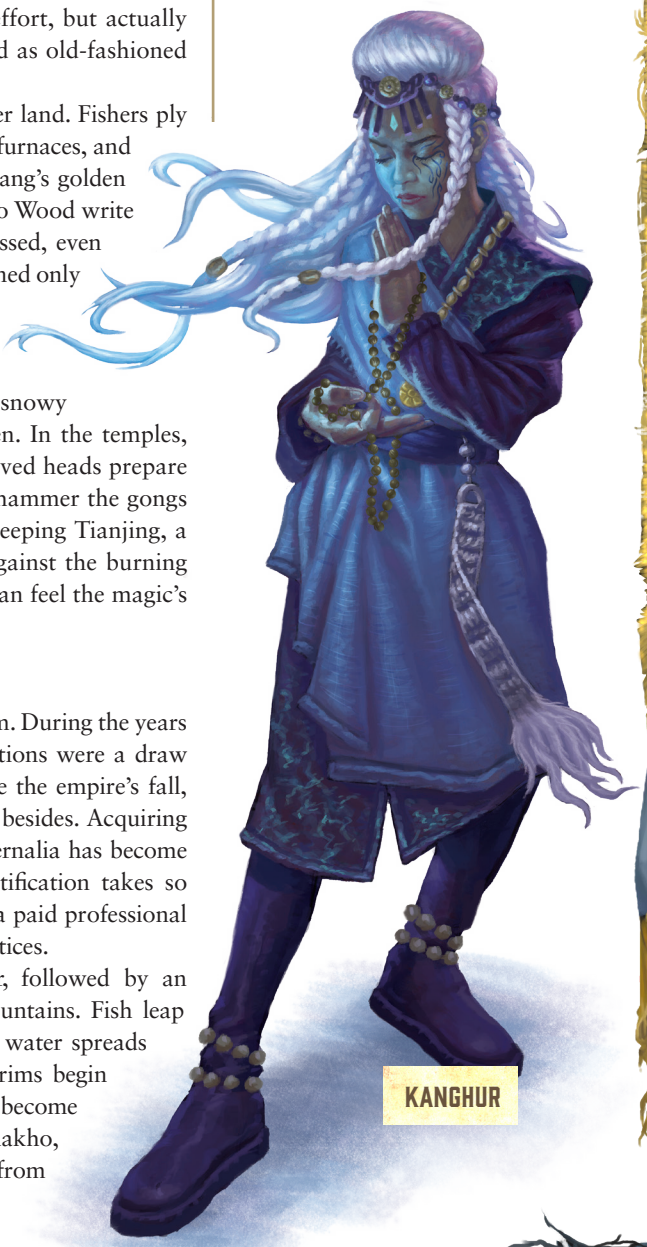
Holy days define Tianjing's calendar, and it has many of them. During the years that Lung Wa supported the nation, the continual celebrations were a draw for tourism and a delightful luxury for residents, but since the empire's fall, only the first has remained true, and isn't always the case besides. Acquiring incense, festival foods, candles, banners, and other paraphernalia has become burdensome financially, and performing the rites of sanctification takes so much time that Tianji have increasingly delegated them to a paid professional class of **kanghur** rather than devote their days to these practices.

Spring in Tianjing begins with a softening in the air, followed by an invigorating rush of snowmelt streams from the high mountains. Fish leap from the cascading streams, and fields turn green as fresh water spreads through the villages' irrigation systems. Students and pilgrims begin traveling up to the mountain monasteries as the roads become passable. Meanwhile, the winter's class of newly minted bulakho, armed with prayer sticks and painted arrows, comes down from their temples to begin their first assignments.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Both Empyrean and Tien are commonly spoken in Tianjing. Inability to pronounce Empyrean correctly sometimes raises eyebrows because, in the past, certain holy phrases were used as tests to root out qlippoth agents. Those who couldn't speak the sacred words without burning their tongues could be identified as infiltrators, and to this day, such tests are sometimes used in temples' restricted areas.

"Ts" and "dz" sounds occur frequently in Tianjing dialects, as do short vowels such as the "uh" in "hut." Beyond the Empyrean influence, however, pronunciation is much the same as in Lung Wa's Successor States.



KANGHUR

Summer is a season of growth and repair. Once the crops have been planted, farmers can turn their attention toward maintaining Tianjing's shrines. These tasks entail not only replacing missing tiles and repainting faded pillars, but also renewing the **Skywheel Crystals** that store sunlight to shield and strike against unholy enemies as well as gathering ja gyun flowers in the three days before and after the summer solstice. These annual observances are of critical importance, for they must be completed when the sun is at its strongest for the temples' magic to remain at full power. Even an hour or a day's delay would substantially weaken the spells.

Perhaps it's no coincidence then that, in the past few years, bandits and monsters have attacked Tianjing's smaller villages just as their people began to prepare for the summer rites. Some of these menaces have borne rough white scars and carried abominable symbols, and they didn't seem to be entirely in control of their own actions. The bulakho have chronicled these incidents in their reports, but as of yet, no significant help has come from the capital, and so some villagers have chosen to spend their summers fortifying their defenses rather than chanting old prayers. The prayers do no obvious good, but a spiked wall provides solid protection.



ETSUL GENPO

In autumn, the people bring in the harvest, tap into early summer wines, and preserve food for winter. Wooden racks hold sliced fruit to dry under the sun, small fish and shrimp dry into salty curls, and villagers fill their granaries with rice, barley, and wheat. The monasteries press and ferment tofu for sale to nearby towns and villages, as Tianji mostly avoid meat. While fish is a major part of some regional diets, especially in seaside villages, red meat and poultry are seldom eaten.

Winter is a quiet period of meditation, reflection, and self-improvement. It's also a dangerous time, for the shrines' magic is at its weakest during this season, and bandits are at their most desperate. Thus, tradition holds that winter is when the common people devote themselves to learning prayers and fighting techniques from the bulakho and to practicing the Seven Tests of Courage during the long, cold nights.

These traditions, at least, have been maintained faithfully even through Tianjing's recent troubles, for their necessity is clear to all. Yet the bandits grow bolder, and the Seven Tests grow harder; many feel that winters are more menacing now than they used to be.

CULTURE

The ancient war of the celestials has defined Tianjing since before its founding. Its legacy is bred into the people's blood and carved into their seas and mountains. Some of the oldest temples date back to the founding era, and though they've been rebuilt so many times that little beyond a handful of foundation stones and mountain-face statues remain from the original structure, an atmosphere of incalculable age pervades their hushed stone halls.

In this land, duty and religion are woven into the fabric of everyday life. Children learn the Ushtung Mantra, in its original Empyrean, as soon as they can speak. Temple gongs bear mandalas inspired by divine blossoms and laced with protective runes, and these same motifs repeatedly appear in clothing and jewelry.

Celestial-touched make up most of Tianjing's populace. Their lineage shows in various ways: an inclination toward orderly and virtuous behavior, an affinity for holy faiths, and physical characteristics like metallic hair, radiant eyes, feathered tufts at the temples, and more. Due to the diversity of the heavenly host, there's no uniformity among their descendants' celestially derived features, and this variability has only increased with millennia of intermixing.

The unusual features exhibited by Tianjing's people aren't always the result of celestial blood. Some individuals also descended from qlippoth. For millennia, the celestials, and their children after them, hunted down every scion of these bloodlines they could find. Unsurprisingly, it forced many qlippoth-born into hiding. Today, those who are



aware of their heritage keep it a closely guarded secret. Most, however, believe themselves to be "ordinary" Tianji and have no idea of the truth.

All Tianji, regardless of their heritage, are taught from birth that it's their lifelong duty to maintain the magic that suffuses their land. Every youth is expected to serve as an acolyte in the local monastery for two years upon coming of age, and the pious often dedicate themselves to 10-year terms as **bulakho**. The bulakho enable Tianjing to maintain its sacred wards, serving as the first line of defense against any breach in those wards. They train in the temples for three years, studying holy texts and learning to fight. They know how to discern when a ward has been weakened and how to reinforce it with incense, prayers, ja gyun petal powder, and Skywheel Crystals. Dressed in blue robes and sandals, their heads ritually shaved except for three braids at the nape of the neck, the bulakho leave the monasteries each spring to begin their assignments. Some journey throughout Tianjing, traveling far-flung circuits, while others are dispatched to specific temples or communities. Tradition holds that the bulakho must always be helped and shown hospitality, for their work protects the world.

Kanghur, paid worshippers, are a more recent phenomena, rising to prominence after the civil strife that followed the collapse of Lung Wa. They're distinguished by their yellow-painted wooden medallions, which they wear prominently to advertise their profession. While some kanghur take their duties seriously enough to seek out temple sages and bulakho for training, others don't bother, because the only real qualification to become a kanghur is a willingness to perform a layperson's role in a holy ceremony. Most of Tianjing regards these ceremonies with reverence, so it's rare for a kanghur to be completely lackadaisical in their performance. The fact remains that they're performing the prayers for money, and this exchange unavoidably weakens the strength of their faith.

Tianji aren't blind to this problem. However, those who employ kanghur view them as an unfortunate necessity, one that has become more socially acceptable in the last few generations. Tianjing has never been an especially populous nation, and it lost much during its civil turmoil. Rebuilding has taken an enormous effort, and though the nation has stabilized, much work still remains to be done. The sheer number of daily prayers and religious holidays would be onerous under the best circumstances, and it proves overwhelming for people struggling to feed and shelter their families. Most citizens try to carry out their ritual obligations as best they can and hope it's enough.

Tianjing meals are built around rice, vegetables, tofu, and fish. Fruit is the centerpiece of festival tables, particularly peaches, apricots, and crisp round pears. The country's farmland lies in the south and east, where wheat and barley are also staples. A few mountain villages raise sheep and goats for meat and milk, but most Tianji refrain from eating meat due to long-standing vegetarian traditions.



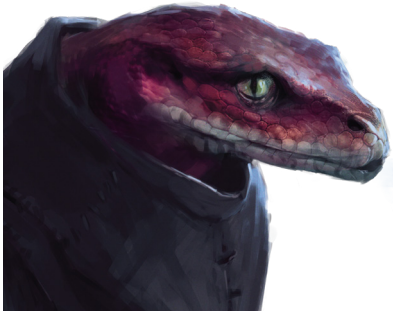
CHOGYEL



MEKHAR



TUNYO



APRAD VARJA

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

The **Nyenreng Conclave** rules Tianjing from the capital city of Zetang. The Conclave is comprised of the most learned and revered sages from the country's temples and monasteries, for these individuals are believed to be best versed in the guardian tradition and therefore best equipped to guide it forward. However, even those touched by the Heavens aren't immune to the frailties of age, and few members of the Conclave remain capable of journeying far from the capital. All real power lies with the Secretary of the Conclave, who translates the councilors' pronouncements into concrete actions.

The current Secretary of the Conclave, **Etsul Genpo** (pragmatic male human nephilim bureaucrat), views the risk of qlippoth breaking through the holy seals as far-fetched, perhaps even allegorical. The wards—if, in fact, they're literal wards, and not metaphors—were made by celestials, so wise and powerful that they might as well have been gods. How could they fail? What isn't allegorical, however, is that Tianjing's people still starve in hard winters, lose their homes to spring floods, and suffer bandit attacks year-round. Therefore, no matter how many reports of unsettling but ambiguous phenomena the bulakho submit to him, Secretary Genpo is less interested in their groundless anxieties than in alleviating his people's very real sufferings.

The bulakho for **Tamdrin Vale**, a small village in the Kaimuko Wood, is a young celestial-touched human named **Chogyel** (diligent nonbinary human nephilim priest) who's only two years out from their training in Senhang Monastery. During those two years, however, Chogyel has seen increasingly disturbing signs of supernatural activity: voices that emanate from blistered stones, whispering syllables so foul that they make the listener's ears bleed; deformed plants with weeping eyes running down their leaves; and oily colors that stain the streams after heavy rains and sicken those who drink the water. Chogyel has dutifully reported all these phenomena in their reports to the Nyenreng Conclave but has never received any reply. They tried sending water samples and plants to prove their observations, but the water somehow became fouled with algae within hours and transformed into ordinary swamp water, and the plants shriveled and rotted almost as soon as they were picked, leaving no evidence for the eyes.

In Zetang, a humble cobbler's shop is owned and run by a stooped, seemingly harmless old man named Mekhar. In reality, **Mekhar** (murderous male human fanatic) is a cell leader in the **Brotherhood of the Splintered Word**, a cult devoted to undermining Tianjing's sacred seals and bringing about the return of the qlippoth. Some of the Brotherhood's members are qlippoth-blooded and believe their distant ancestors will elevate them to positions of wealth and power in the new regime—a foolish hope, but one that Mekhar encourages. Others simply hate the celestials and want to see them suffer. Mekhar numbers among them: a human who has always felt like a second-class citizen among the celestial-touched, unable to match their grace or beauty and filled with resentment for their seemingly effortless happiness. Each passing year, as his life grew shorter and his prospects grew dimmer, Mekhar's envy and hatred swelled. Now, he hopes only to see Tianjing suffer some grievous blow before he dies.

The headman of **Hari Village** is **Tunyo** (generous male human administrator), called the "Full-Handed" because his people always have granaries full of rice and cellars packed with dried fish and pickled vegetables. He claims that this generosity is possible because Hari Village receives an annual grant from Zetang, but it's a lie. In fact, Tunyo and a few of his trusted confidants have been quietly stripping and selling golden mandalas and rune-scribed stones from a crumbling old cave that one of the fishers found after getting swept off course in a storm. Tunyo rationalizes the looting as acceptable because the cave was clearly abandoned. Therefore, its original purpose must already be obsolete, and its artifacts might as well be returned to active use. Late at night, though, doubts keep Tunyo awake. His people have come to depend on him for

help, and he can't bear the thought of letting them down, but some part of him wonders if taking the objects from the sea cave is really as harmless as he has told himself.

The bandit chieftain **Aprad Varja** (willfully oblivious female nagaji raider) hails originally from Nagajor and landed in northern Tianjing only after a series of misadventures. She fled with her last few loyalists around the south end of the mountains to Tianjing, where they could at least expect civilized treatment if they got caught. To Varja's surprise, for the first time in her life, she has been successful. Her bandits made their camp in a small valley that she initially thought was cursed since it was filled with disconcerting echoes and a mist that sometimes coalesced into dripping, oddly configured faces. The valley proved to be an excellent hideout, however, as some magic seems to render its entrance invisible to Tianjing's guards. Better yet, now that she has gotten used to the eerie whispers in the mist, Varja has found that they can be useful in directing her to isolated temples filled with golden treasures and very few guards. Having had a lackluster career up until now, she's grateful enough for the help that she doesn't much care where it comes from, or why.

Cities and Locations

The following is a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Tianjing.

The Graveyard of Kipaku

In 7112 IC, pirates from the floating city of **Zo Piaobo** attacked Tianjing, believing the country was in enough chaos following Lung Wa's fall that they could ransack Zetang without facing much resistance. Together, the Great Fleet looted temples and stole thousands of years' worth of priceless artifacts. Countless holy texts went up in flames; fragile vestments were trampled into the mud. Laughing and drunk, the pirates returned to their ships.

Legend holds that their impiety enraged the gods. Whether or not this is so, it's undisputed that a massive storm spun up suddenly as the pirates sailed back to Zo Piaobo and smashed every ship in the fleet. Only those who'd been too drunk to leave Zetang and get on board survived.

Eventually, ocean currents carried the lost ships' remains, as well as those of others that had sunk in unrelated incidents, to the waters off **Kangshur Island**. Outside Tianjing's sanctifying aura, they accumulated into a vast artificial reef of wood, metal, and angry ghosts. Tianjing mostly ignores the Graveyard of Kipaku because the ghosts can't get past the country's magic to threaten the mainland, but occasionally, it poses an indirect problem. Kangshur Island presents a hazard to multiple neighboring nations, including the aquatic city-states of **Xidao**. The fact that Tianjing can ignore the danger that it created rankles these nations, which have long petitioned that the Graveyard be dealt with.

Zetang

Colorful pennons painted with prayer runes and holy symbols flutter from golden chains threaded between the rooftops of the capital city, waving over the heads of passersby and filling Zetang's streetscapes with a visible reminder of its blessings. Shrines adorn every market square, religious art and sculptures decorate the streets, and every house bears a prayer inscription painted or carved above its door. Incense wafts through the air, and prayer gongs sound at sunrise, along with regular chants and drums from the processions that seem to go by hourly.

International Relations

Tianjing is mainly known as a locus for religious pilgrims. Every major faith has a reason to visit the country, which has accumulated an unrivaled collection of art, artifacts, and scriptures over the centuries. Any worshipper who considers themself truly pious makes an effort to visit their faith's holiest site at least once in a lifetime. Pilgrims from nearly every sect are welcome in Tianjing, except those judged likely to threaten the sacred seals.

Rice, fish, salt, religious art, medicine, and lumber are Tianjing's primary exports. It imports incense, herbs, metal, and a wide variety of foods and spices used in festival dishes. Tianjing takes a neutral position in most international disputes, preferring to stay focused on its internal duties and taking part in larger matters only when it must.



ZETANG

Valash Raj

Nations

Valash Raj
Capital: Rakirat
Government: Feudal Monarchy
Ruler: Valash Raja Kasa Vara



Peoples

Catfolk
Giants
Lizardfolk
Oni
Tripkees
Varanas

Languages

Aklo
Amurrun
Chthonian
Diabolic
Draconic
Iruxi
Tien
Tripkee
Valash

Factions

The Veil

Religions

Cyth-V'Sug
Kaiju Worship
Lamashtu
Mugura and Nrithu
Nalinivati
Phi Deva
Srikalis, Sritaming and Sribaril

Resources

Coffee
Dyes
Gems
Lore
Lumber
Ore
Produce
Spices
Technology
Textiles

THE KAIJU CALLERS

The **Valashmai Jungle** is an impossibly hostile environment that's ruled by **kaiju**, the most powerful and ornery of dragons, the sins of ancient civilizations, fungal monsters, and extraplanar horrors. Outsiders look at it and assume that none could flourish here, that divine intervention would be necessary to found a nation in its reaches. To locals, however, these threats are no more existential than earthquakes, monsoons, or wildfires. Dangerous, yes. Brutal, yes. Fatal, often. But they can be planned for, lived around, and governed in spite of.

The Valash Raj, often called "Valash" or "the Raj," is the largest and most successful state to thrive in these hellish environs. It was founded more than 200 years ago in the thick jungle west of Kawuk's Run, when the Rani of Rakarit declared herself heir to the ancient **Valashai Empire** and began to conquer her way across the Valashmai Jungle. Her conquests, and those of her heirs, expanded the Raj north to the **Grey Gulf** and south to the **Sudisan Peaks**, creating a true empire in the eastern Valashmai Jungle.

The Valash dynasty are lizardfolk, though its nobility and populace include many tripkees and catfolk. Valash is ethnically integrated; catfolk are more common in the north, and tripkees in the south, but it's an accident of demographics rather than an official policy. The nation is relatively decentralized, existing in small, concentrated provinces built around a city or fort, with villages sprawling out around it in all directions, severed from the rest of the Raj by many miles of hostile jungle. As such, provinces have a strong regional identity. Villages and towns have long-standing local traditions and historical identities that have survived the centuries. Many provinces identify far more with their region than the Raj as a whole.

Though outsiders often dismiss the Valash Raja's claim to the Valashai throne as hubris, it isn't entirely unfounded. Many Valashai wards allow jungle natives to pass as if they were Valashai themselves, and its arcanists and adventurers have begun to recreate its ancient sorceries. Though Valash is a long way from the glories and sins of its ancient predecessor, it's determined to reach those storied heights.

GEOGRAPHY

The Valash Raj stretches across the eastern landmass of the Valashmai Jungle, west of **Minata**, and south of **Xa Hoi**. The Sudisan Peaks run across the southern reaches of the kingdom, shielding it from the worst of seasonal typhoons. Ancient elemental horrors, carnivorous plants, and verdant predators inhabit the peaks, rendering them mostly uninhabitable. Vast swathes of less hostile jungle dominate the southern lowlands around the Sudisan Peaks, periodically broken up by hills and coves, and these coves serve as the region's population centers.

North of the Sudisan Peaks, the hills stretch for leagues before slamming into **Kawuk's Run**: an enormous stretch of dinosaur-infested wetlands, swamps, and mangrove forests that stretch straight to the northern coast, though more tropical, pristine jungle covers the border with the rest of Valashmai. Flanking Kawuk's Run are great swathes of inhabitable territory; **Rakarit**, the Raj's capital, lies in a highland west of the Run, while the area to the east is densely populated. Off the Raj's northern coast is the Gray Gulf, marred by choking clouds of gray ash that commonly darken its skies. In the Gulf's center is a squat, flat island known as **Arung** that belches gray ash from ancient Valashai ruins at all hours of the day.





Despite its size, the Raj is best understood as an island kingdom with contiguous, inhabited "islands" of territory linked by vast stretches of land that can't be permanently settled or worked but can be transited regularly and relatively safely. Kaiju migration routes, ancient ruins bursting with horrors, and vast populations of unnaturally aggressive dinosaurs all mean that most of this lush, verdant territory stays unfit for civilization. This geography also serves as the Raj's most potent defense against outside powers—the jungle and terrain will devastate invading armies before they can hope to besiege any of the Raj's great cities.

A DAY IN VALASH

In Valash, the day begins well before sunrise. Hunters pour into towns and rural villages hours before dawn, cooking fires bringing light to the village well before the sun. Long-distance caravans and travelers follow in a trickle, though most won't arrive until mid-morning. In many parts of the country, especially in rich urban areas, dawn heralds morning prayers among various religious minorities. Shortly after sunrise, a local **kaiju caller** (in smaller settlements) or council of kaiju callers (in larger ones) will complete divination rituals to confirm no kaiju are in the area, giving the all-clear to farmers and laborers to begin their work. If a kaiju is spotted, horns, drums, and magical messages warn all for miles in every direction.

Labor continues until noon, then many sleep through the hottest parts of the day or retreat to the safety of walled settlements when dinosaurs are at their most active. Only fools and the very brave risk dinosaur territory by sunlight. Merchants, traders, scholars, and nobles have no such environmental disruptions to their day, so working through the afternoon is a sign of status in much of the country.

Communal prayers herald the resumption of labor in the late afternoon. Clergy offer blessings to their faithful, and kaiju callers perform a second set of checks for various hazards. If dangers were sighted in the morning but are gone after afternoon prayers, laborers will often head out for a reduced workday. In cities, mail, public announcements, and royal proclamations are distributed after these prayers, as they're a common point between most religious practices in Valash.

This nexus of civil and religious activity makes the late afternoon prime socializing time. Manual laborers eat a late, communal lunch with family and friends, trading gossip and discussing the day's events before returning to their final work shift. Sedentary workers enjoy an early dinner at a restaurant, often with coworkers rather than family.

Sunset marks the end of most workdays and the start of others. Most kaiju and dangerous dinosaurs are inactive during the night, making it the preferred time

for those who need to venture far from settled areas. Those on short trips leave as sunset approaches, often hoping to reach their destination before dawn. Those on longer trips leave after sunset proper, when the escort of local hunters and the cover of night ensure their safety for the first, vital hours of travel. Hunters, as well as soldiers tasked with culling monster populations, also work by night, aiming to return home with the day's catch before dawn.

While various prayers and cautionary measures against monster attacks and kaiju migration are performed daily, most settlements live in relatively safe areas where kaiju rarely visit and dinosaur populations are either tame or regularly culled. As such, any sort of incident is far rarer than outsiders often expect.

A YEAR IN VALASH

The year in Valash begins with the end of **Monsoon Season** and the beginning of the **Dry Season**. Grand festivals are held in every city with huge, public feasts funded by the Raja. New Year's feasts are often held to be a signifier of the Raj's health, and poorly funded or organized ones can result in public discontent, protests, and even minor rebellions. Most years, however, the festivities present a joyous occasion, and there's a rush of marriages and proposals throughout the opening weeks of the new year. A first harvest follows these happenings, as fruit grown throughout the monsoon season becomes ripe and foreign traders arrive with better weather.

Inevitably, at least one kaiju changes its migratory patterns, forcing the deployment of the kaiju callers and the evacuation of villages along the new migration path. Often, the kaiju callers can redirect the kaiju onto a less disruptive route, updating their meticulous files and allowing the refugees to return home after some weeks. Occasionally, however, the disruption is permanent, and entire villages must be permanently relocated, upending the lives of hundreds. On particularly disastrous occasions, an entire town might have to move as an area becomes too dangerous for the kaiju callers and army to secure.

The Nine Freedoms is a holiday in the midst of the dry season, celebrating the mythical rebellion against the Valashai and the inheritance of its throne by the newly freed slaves. It consists of two weeks of religious rituals, prayers, and retellings of that ancient, distorted history, followed by three days of public celebration at the end. Particularly religious citizens will fast through the day or put on elaborate, costumed reenactments with illusionists recreating the forms of the massive Valashai in theaters or public squares. Kasa Raja announces the opening of new Valashai ruins at the end of the celebrations, heralding a rush of adventurers, profiteers, and researchers toward the site.

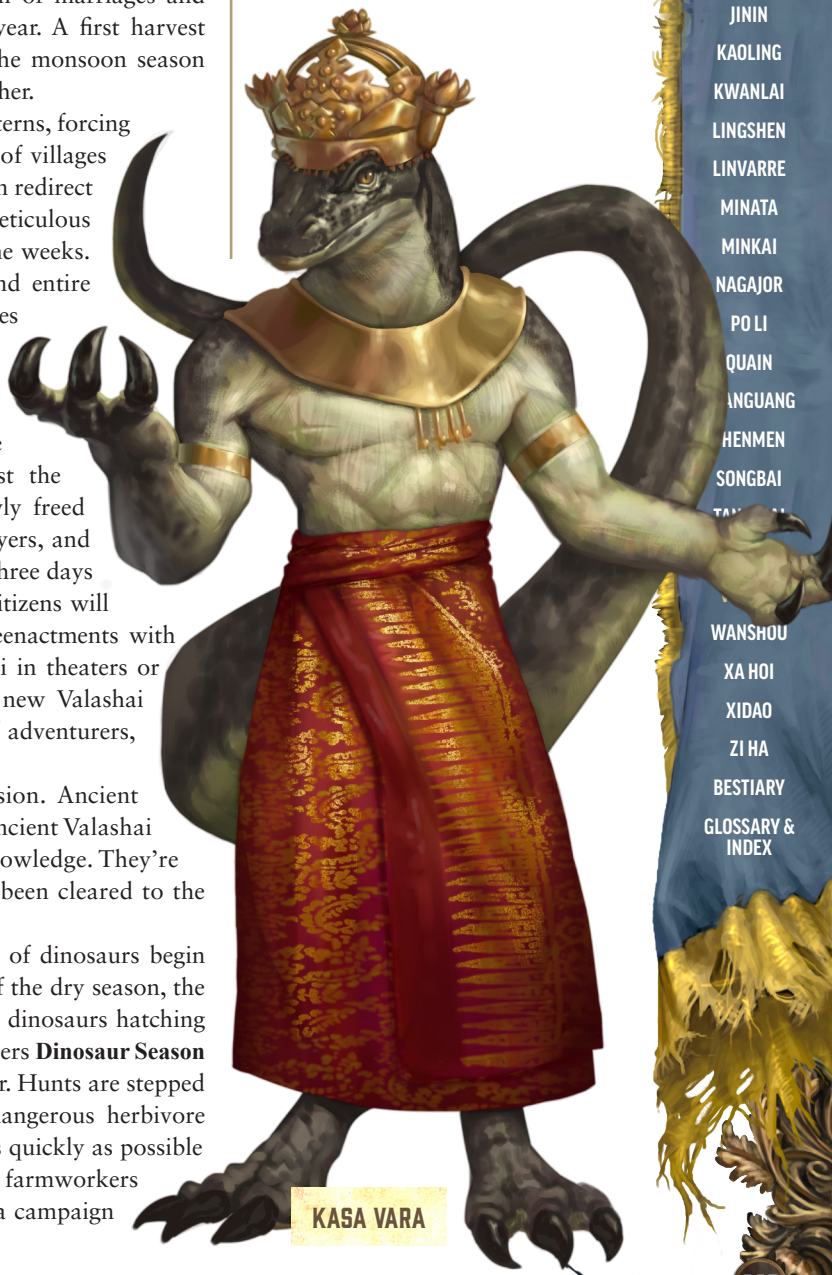
The opening of a new ruin is a momentous occasion. Ancient debris, elaborate wards, or horrific monsters seal most ancient Valashai ruins. However, they also contain untold wealth and knowledge. They're unsealed carefully, and only after previous ruins have been cleared to the Raja's satisfaction.

As the dry season approaches its end, huge numbers of dinosaurs begin to hatch. While this occurrence is technically still part of the dry season, the calamitous effect of hundreds of thousands of ravenous dinosaurs hatching throughout the wilds is severe enough that the Raj considers **Dinosaur Season** its own separate and deeply unpopular season of the year. Hunts are stepped up, and the army is deployed to cull predator and dangerous herbivore populations. Meanwhile, food is harvested and stored as quickly as possible to keep it away from ravenous herbivores and protect farmworkers from various monsters. Dinosaur season also serves as a campaign season for the army to hunt down bandits or rebels.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Much like Tien, the language of the Valash Raj might be more accurately described as a trade tongue, meant to be understandable by its many disparate settlements.

Arung: AH-rung
Kasa Vara: KA-sa VA-ra
Kawuk: KAA-wuuk
Ngarai Jam: nguh-RYE juhm
Raha: RA-huh
Rakarit: ruh-kuh-RIT
Sayo Agar: sa-YOE uh-GAAR
Valash: vuh-LAASH



KASA VARA

The first great rainstorms mark the end of dinosaur hatching and the beginning of the monsoon season. Travel is difficult during the monsoon season, but it's also prime harvesting time at the **Emerald Mile**, provoking a rush of prospectors to the south. Riverboats become more popular during this season, as they're a far more reasonable method of travel than overland hikes through torrential rains.

Inevitably, the monsoon season sees tropical storms and hurricanes hit the mainland. Villages, towns, and cities are flooded and badly damaged, and resources arrive from throughout the empire to help rebuild. Such disruptions see a spike in monster attacks, for the culls and walls that normally keep them at bay no longer hold after contending with a hurricane, so adventurers are often called upon to help the worst-afflicted regions.

The year ends as monsoon season comes to a close, with days and weeks of preparation for the oncoming new-year feasts, and the first great trade caravans of the new year depart in hopes of arriving just in time for the celebrations.

CULTURE

To a timeless or immortal observer, the fact that the Raj styles itself after the Valashai is bizarre. The Valashai were slavers, and the ancestors of the Raj were the enslaved. How could one take that history and make it a point of pride? But thousands of years has passed since the Valashai fell, and its immediate successors, founded and ruled by the Raj's ancestors, took on its name, legacy, and culture even as they abandoned its worst impulses. Many of its cities took decades, even centuries to fall, felled by wars, destroyed knowledge bases, and ever-more-hostile kaiju rather than the simple absence of their former rulers. For many of those successor states, whatever culture survived from long-forgotten homeworlds was functionally indistinguishable from that of the Empire as a whole. To historians, the legacy of the Valashai Empire is one of simple monsters who left a ruined land in their wake, but to the people of that land, the story tells of their highest peak as much as of their worst excesses.

There's a strong sense of inheritance—that the Empire's greatest achievements, greatest works, and greatest sins are both owed to and the responsibility of the Valash Raj. The Valash Raja must fix the Empire's mistakes, restore their works to glory, and create an empire worthy of them. This responsibility is told as much in oral storytelling and cultural expectations as it is in any book of law or justification for the throne's existence.

Valash has a strong oral storytelling tradition. Many legends forgotten by scholars over time have been preserved in folk ballads or local legends in various small, scattered villages. Common themes include the dangers of the world, the might of the kaiju, and the strength of hunters of old. Religious syncretism is very common, with faiths from Nagajor, the old Empire, and lands further west mingling in the jungles to create something unique to the Raj. Many local religions venerate kaiju, either as gods or intermediaries to them, and witches drawing their power from a local kaiju are a common sight in rural areas.



RAHA SULTANA

A lot of rituals revolve around safety—safety from storms, safety from kaiju, safety from dinosaurs, monsters, and the mundane threats of travel. Anyone going on a long trip is expected to seek blessings and good omens before departure, while the arrival of travelers in rural areas is a good omen and communal curiosity. Every wealthy household in town often invites guests to tell their stories and share news from abroad.

Hunters seek blessings before every hunt and are held in the sort of reverence other cultures often offer soldiers, though the steady expansion of the Raj has seen that prominence shared as many famous hunters join the Raja's armies. Skilled hunters often grow wealthy from the sale of monster parts and bounties on dangerous prey. Much of this wealth goes toward armaments, and in addition to magical gear, many prominent hunters have taken to arming themselves and their followers with imported guns and other rare weapons. Gunslingers are still rare in the Valash Raj, but being able to train them has become a sign of status among important hunters and rich nobles.

Traditional clothing is based heavily around sarongs, which are often paired with lightweight shirts or blouses.



Formal clothing, especially for religious rituals, is more varied, often embedding elements from ancient Valashai environmental suits. Textiles are an important part of fashion with styles like batik, ikat, and tapis originating from the region.

Cuisine trends toward spicy food, with an emphasis on fruits and dinosaur meat. Rice is the most common staple, though in parts of the country, people eat sago and other types of plant pith. Hadrosaur or chicken satay is a common meat dish almost everywhere, and various spicy peanut sauces are popular enough that merchants export them throughout Tian Xia.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

The Valash Raj is a federal monarchy, ruled by the **Valash Raja** in **Rakarit**, with local kings, rajas, and sultans allowed to rule their traditional kingdoms so long as they pledge loyalty and pay taxes to the Raj. In return, the Valash Raj is expected to protect them from kaiju and lesser threats. All else, including functions that other Golarian states would consider core to rulership, are secondary.

Key to this protection are the **Royal Kaiju Callers**. The throne's royal kaiju callers are among the most skilled in Golarion, possessing centuries of accumulated lore on various kaiju alongside honed songs, rituals, and procedures with which to appease them. Sightings of a kaiju can see dozens of kaiju callers dispatched across the Raj, tasked with recruiting and requisitioning anything they need to successfully manage the kaiju.

The Callers are more important to Valash than even the army. Without their ability to protect provinces, there would be no great cities, no yearly tributes, no consistent transport or communication, and no kingdom. A raja with no talent at war might have a troubled rule, but there will still be a kingdom when they pass. One who mismanages the Royal Kaiju Callers could see the entire kingdom dissolve back into local states within a year.

As an expansionist power, Valash maintains an army split between the royal army and provincial troops. The Raja himself maintains an elite, permanent force of professional soldiers, while various provincial governors and local lords are expected to maintain order in their lands and raise troops in case of war. More common than warfare, the army monitors kaiju behavior, culls monsters and dinosaurs near inhabited areas, and hunts down rebels and bandits. Provincial lords who wish to avoid the expense of maintaining an army often hire adventurers as cheaper monster hunters.

Maintaining the loyalty of such a far-flung empire of loosely tied rulers is a nightmare. Taxes are ad hoc and tributary, generally based on rough promises made when an individual kingdom was integrated, and annoyed local rulers will simply lie egregiously or claim

that tax caravans were lost in transit. Every member of the ruling elite has a dozen personal favors they would like from the Raja and an equal number of petty threats they're willing to level to try and get their way. To handle it all, the Valash Raja appoints advisors from various kingdoms to their government. Doing so invests subordinate rulers in the process of overseeing their peers, doles out favors to keep key personages happy, and lets the Raja actually delegate some functions of rulership. Some of these advisors are keen-eyed experts with functional ministries and enormous day-to-day influence over governance. Others inhabit positions with salaries but no influence or power, appointed as a favor to keep someone happy rather than to govern. Legally, there's no distinction between the two, which makes for confusing and petty court politics.

Atop an ornate sandalwood throne, bearing the heavy skymetal crown of his ancestors, is **Kasa Vara** (ambitious male lizardfolk monarch), current Valash Raja, Envoy to the Kaiju, King of Kings, Inheritor of the Valashai, Slayer of Beasts, and Shield to His People. Kasa Vara is a male lizardfolk with yellow-black scales, wide eyes, and long, immaculately maintained claws. Where his predecessors, especially his mother, were conquerors determined to grow the Raj as swiftly as possible, Kasa Vara is more concerned with his legacy and legitimacy. He has focused on centralizing and stabilizing the Raj, formalizing relationships built throughout those early conquests, and gaining some measure of international recognition.

This approach has meant a much tighter hand in many provinces. While that hand has provided protection and funds for many villages, it's also considered overbearing by the culturally independent cities and their traditional rulers. Many rulers chafe at Kasa Vara's authority and deliberately handle problems locally, often going out of their way to hide things from the Valash Raja. In response, Kasa Vara often hires adventurers to investigate issues discreetly, giving him an eye on local events his subordinates don't know about, and moves more and more power to his advisors in the capital.

The doughty **Raha Sultana** (hedonistic female tripkee queen) is a middle-aged tripkee and current ruler of **Lahuyasa**. To an outside observer, she appears indolent and luxurious, utterly disinterested in any martial or physical pursuits. This impression is accurate. However, Raha Sultana is also an excellent queen. She's shrewd, generous, and genuinely well-liked by her subjects. She has kept Lahuyasa prosperous and safe throughout her rule and maintained her people's pride and independence as part of the Raj. Under her, merchants and commoners expect the same justice enjoyed by the nobility, and rural farmers consider themselves safe from monster attacks.

Lahuyasa was conquered when Raha Sultana was a child, and she inherited her position as Sultana when her mother died 30 years ago. What she inherited was a city in decline. Once the largest port in the jungle with a monopoly on valuable Minatan trade, it had seen its wealth whittled away by mismanagement and its influence increasingly subsumed by the court at Rakarit. Raha Sultana reforged trade ties with Minata and funded large public works projects in Lahuyasa, helping the city recover some of the prestige and wealth of its lost heyday.

Raha Sultana is an avowed enemy of Kasa Vara's centralizing reforms. She resists every new policy to the utmost of her ability, using her wealth and cleverness to deceive the ministries and obfuscate the power of Lahuyasa. She isn't rebellious, the peace of the Valash Raja's rule has been far too convenient to risk a war, but she's determined to stretch her privileges to their very limits, both for herself and the city she rules.



KAWUK

Cities and Locations

The following is a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Valash Raj.

Emerald Mile

The Emerald Mile can be seen from the horizon, a dazzling, gleaming scar in the side of the **Sudisan Peaks** ringed by long-ruined structures. It's the most visible artifact of the **Elemental Empires** that once ruled Valashmai in prehistory, before even the Valashai arrived. The Emerald Mile itself is a pillar of crystallized flame, stabilized through lost elemental magic, that grows emeralds like fruit. If left alone, the gems disappear in a matter of weeks, becoming incorporated into the area's most monstrous elementals or budding into new monsters altogether. If harvested, however, they're simply gemstones.

Ruins surround the Emerald Mile: farms and containment altars from the Elemental Sovereigns; research stations and planar touchstones from the Valashai Empire; and a variety of villages, mines, and temples from thousands of years of history. All are ruined now, weathered to rubble, looted long ago, and infested with wild, murderous elementals and predatory pterosaurs.

Despite the danger, the local emeralds are immensely valuable. Harvest season brings treasure hunters every year, keen to make their fortune or die trying. While the Raj has officially banned citizens from emerald harvesting due to the high rate of death, those serving as guides have no such restriction. As such, a handful of villages, including the town of **Ngarai Jam**, offer guides, provisions to resupply, and contracts to foreign treasure hunters willing to brave the Mile.

Grey Gulf

Separating the Raj from **Xa Hoi** is the Grey Gulf. The Gulf is an aquatic wasteland, formed of unnaturally still, toxic waters with few fish and still winds. Even the hulls of boats rot with unnatural speed; the life of ships is measured in years instead of decades. Druids and naturalists have tried to treat the waters for centuries, and they've had success only after a fateful visit from the kaiju **Mogaru**.

One hundred and fifty years ago, Mogaru swam to the island of **Arung** in the center of the gulf, ripped open a rocky hillock at its center, and spat flame into an unearthed ruin within. Mogaru's inexplicable, victimless attack lasted for three days and three nights. Even now, the ruin continues to burn, so much smoke bellows from the isle that the sky over much of the gulf remains gray throughout the year, giving the region its name. Since then, purification efforts in the Grey Gulf have yielded results. More fish are now caught every year, and hulls need repair less often and with less expensive reagents. The waters are still hostile, unnatural, and poisoned, but less than it once was.

Unfortunately, these changes have also resulted in a rapid and uncontrolled rise in the monster population. Mosasaurs and ichthyosaurs haunt the deep waters, spinosaurs menace the shore, and even the placid, venerable Kawuk snaps up the occasional cargo ship.

Despite the difficulties, Arung is now settled. It hosts a port, a small bevy of fishing villages, and an outpost supplying expeditions into the isle's burning, slagged Valashai ruins. Expeditions to the ruins are dangerous. Smoke inhalation, malfunctioning machinery, and strange, crystalline monsters pose constant threats, while surviving scouts have reported the remains of some monstrous construct—a dead being with claws the size of palaces and insectoid jewel-eyes that still burn with malign intelligence despite the ruin inflicted upon its body.

Kawuk's Run

Kawuk's Run refers to both the massive wetlands that dominate much of the central Raj and the home of the saurian kaiju **Kawuk**—a massive, piscine creature with the snout of a gharial, the sail and oar-like tail of a spinosaurus, and a long, sinuous body covered in budding growths. These fleshy squirming lumps constantly grow and shed, squirming loose as **Kawuk's Spawn**: juvenile, unnaturally ravenous spinosaurs with a hatred of boats and structures. Kawuk mostly sticks to a known stretch of deep swampland, the primary sign of its passage being a massive sail breaching the water's surface, but occasionally, it ranges north into the Grey Gulf to snack upon cargo ships. Kawuk and its spawn relentlessly attack large boats and buildings they come across but leave small vessels and most mortals alone. As such, life has adjusted around Kawuk, with single-man fishing boats often braving the swamp during its migration to catch the many fish displaced by the kaiju's gargantuan movements.

Kawuk is believed to be natural, a reaction of the land to the great geo-forming of the Jade Hegemon. It ensures there are always predators in the Run, keeping its many animal populations in check, and prevents overt encroachment onto the wetlands by civilization. Kawuk has its own religious cults within the Raj and is often worshipped by bandits, druids, and hunters.

The Run is a massive swampy wetland, hundreds of miles long. Great mangroves rise from waters often 50 or 60 feet deep. Natural groves of fruit as verdant as any orchard tower over the land, and the water is thick with river dolphins, porpoises, and fish of all kinds. The ruins of Jade Hegemon towns and Valashai research stations are scattered across the islands of the Run, but most buildings have been leveled over the centuries by the wrathful Kawuk. Within the Run, villages limit themselves to single-story buildings and small boats, scattered as far as is reasonable to avoid the wrath of Kawuk. Central oversight is rare and difficult, as even the most hardheaded tax collectors avoid its depths, and the army and kaiju callers only enter when they absolutely must. Bandits love the depths of the Run since it's difficult for justice to find them here, and they can

easily live off the land. Many Valash adventurers began their career fighting bandits terrorizing their village when justice was far away.

Rakarit

In a land built around the whims of capricious nature and unstoppable kaiju, Rakarit stands alone. The entire city has been built with construction techniques reverse-engineered from Valashai ruins. Constant kaiju caller rituals and ruinously expensive enchantments repel monsters and weather alike; stupas and minarets tower over the surrounding jungle; and the entire palace appears carved from a single, impossibly massive piece of stone, detailed with grand murals and magical lighting.

The entire city is built upon one of the great vessels that brought the Valashai Empire to Golarion. In its sprawling residential districts, one can see ancient Valashai estates, rebuilt from rubble and converted into grand tenements for laborers. Ancient infrastructure has been aggressively repurposed into modern conveniences, and most of the city enjoys central heating from a starship thruster assembly. The army trains in underground pavilions that once stored thousands of sleeping passengers, and the kaiju callers read new lore into enchanted discs that can repeat every secret ever whispered to them.

Rakarit is also the intellectual center of the Empire. Every secret gleaned, and every artifact torn from the land's many ruins returns to the city for analysis and study. While recreating every secret of the fallen empire remains a far-off dream, Rakarit's colleges turn out a stream of arcanists, inventors, and novel insights whose value must not be underestimated. Many become adventurers, delving into ruins within the Raj or beyond to seek out new enigmas, while others remain content as advisors, court wizards, and armorers for various nobles.

Star Titan's Grave

In a time before writing, a person fell from the sky. The size of a city, and carved of rock and steel, it was no victim of magical mishap or supernatural predation, but a weapon built to kill worlds. On an entire hemisphere, the Fall was recorded as an astrological oddity; the lengthy winters and ash-falls that followed marked it as some fell omen, sparking periodic investigations that universally ended with the conclusion that it fell somewhere in the eastern Valashmai Jungle.

In the jungle itself, however, **Agamazar the Star Titan** and its fell grave are known as hallowed land. On impact, Mogaru found and slayed the kaiju, burning Agamazar's heart from its gargantuan chest in a battle that scoured the jungle of life for miles in every direction. Even its husk spread extraterrestrial toxins and arcane coolant into the ground, poisoning the water in every direction and inflicting an arcane plague upon those who strayed too close.

Agamazar fell so long ago that no one truly knows when it wasn't there. For as long as anyone remembers and for as long as any but the most ancient historical records have shown, the dead Star Titan has lain in the soil, poisoning the land around it. Centuries ago, the **Agamazar Raj** was founded, a petty kingdom devoted in its entirety to containing—and, perhaps one day, destroying—the threat of the Star Titan's Grave. When Rakarit rose to power and began to expand, the Agamazar Raj of the time approached the Valash Raj and offered fealty, but only if the throne helped them perform their mission. The offer was accepted, and the Agamazar Raj was granted exceptions from taxes and military levies so long as it contained the Grave.

Today, walled outposts and small fortresses ring the Star Titan's Grave, all devoted to the sacred duty of protecting people from the slain creature inside. They capture, redirect, and occasionally outright kill those who try to breach quarantine and examine those few allowed to investigate the Star Titan for signs of its arcane plague. Occasionally, an infected interloper will be allowed to leave so that their horrific death due to Agamazar's plague will ward off further attempts.

The current Agamazar Raj is **Sayo Agar** (inquisitive male human warden), a tall, spindly human with reams of understanding on neutralizing the abomination he's meant to guard. He has authorized more expeditions into the Grave than any of his forebears and devised what he believes to be an inoculation against the plague. Sayo is currently looking for brave, trustworthy, and discreet adventurers willing to enter the Grave and learn more about the Star Titan, as his last group all died horrifically during the previous expedition. Recovery of the previous group's corpses for burial and resurrection would be a plus.

International Relations

The Raj maintains strong trade ties and cultural exchange with Minata, especially at the port of Lahuyasa. There's also significant immigration and emigration, especially around monsoon season. Though there have been historical wars between Minata and various coastal states in Valash, relations are currently friendly. Lesser ties exist with Xa Hoi, primarily in the form of trade across the Grey Gulf, and with Nagajor via land routes through the Valashmai Jungle. The border stays peaceful less by diplomatic nicety, and more by the sheer hostility of moving an army from the Raj to either of its terrestrial neighbors.

The Raj shares its most contentious border with the various peoples and states of the western Valashmai Jungle. The Raj views itself as the rightful ruler of all Valashai ruins and ex-Valashai territory, while everyone else strenuously disagrees. Border conflicts, especially over ruins, commonly occur, and groups close to Valash's border tend to be hostile. Those further away, however, view the Raj as a smaller problem than their neighbors.



Valashmai Jungle

Valashmai is the realm of monsters. Hermit dragons, exiled fiends, alien spores, and, most dramatically, a veritable host of titanic kaiju claim the sprawling jungle as their own. More mundane inhabitants live in their shadows: aggressive dinosaurs, mortal-eating plants, predatory wasps, and a variety of minor states, villages, and towns that call the jungle home.

First among this legacy was the **Jade Hegemon** and its fiery munsahir populace. The elementals made the jungle a bastion where they would be safe from myriad oppressors. The water, the trees, and the earth itself were turned to the elementals' purpose. They erected volcano sentries that would drown attackers in lava, self-stocking emerald mines, and innumerable guardians that have since eroded into horrors or swelled into kaiju. Yet, their time passed with the Age of Serpents.

Next came the **Valashai**, from whom the jungle takes its name. The Valashai were an ancestry of giant reptilians three times the height of a human who arrived from the stars and spread their empire across the jungle, wrestling the ecology into submission to erect grand halls and experimentation chambers. Like many empires, theirs was brutal, built on the backs of innumerable slaves, and racked by rebellion and discontent. With Earthfall, it became too much—reformers, freed slaves, and unleashed monstrosities alike turned their blades upon the throne. The Valashai became no more. Their titanic ruins are sprawled across the jungle, filled with ancient machinery and bioengineered horrors, while the catfolk, tripkees, and lizardfolk who call the Valashmai home all descend from the Empire's subjects.

To an outsider, the modern Valashmai Jungle appears an untamed, wild frontier, foreign to civilization since the Valashai Empire fell. Some even imagine its people as foreign to it as they are, a land of perpetual outsiders. They write of a primal subcontinent to rival any druid's most ambitious dream. This misconception elides an important fact: nothing in the Valashmai is natural. The **kaiju** are the clearest symptom. More kaiju call the Valashmai home than anywhere else on Golarion. Ancient empires of the jungle created some of these creatures, but more have been drawn to the region since Earthfall for reasons unknown. They regenerate the land, keeping it vibrant and replenishing its population of dinosaurs, monsters, and bizarre flora through their migrations. Under their violent stewardship, the jungle remains a place that no mortal can lay claim to. The things that rule the Valashmai are ancient and terrible, forged in stark violation of nature's laws. That people survive here at all attests to mortal ingenuity.

Chenlun Mountains

Rising from the **Embaral Ocean** and stretching through the central jungle, the smoke-belching **Chenlun Mountains** dominate the jungle skyline. Some peaks hold ancient

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Kaiju induced isolation and the influence of the Valashai Empire means that the languages of the Valashmai Jungle share almost no common roots with other Tien tongues.

Akaran: ah-kah-RAAN
Bodhjeva: BOED-jai-va
Dargur: DAR-gur
Kashang: ka-SHENG
Kutaban: ku-ta-BAAN
Otar: OH-tur
Sujana Mahad: SUU-jah-nah maa-HAD

elemental palaces and giant fortresses, abandoned in a bygone age and repurposed by new inhabitants. Others hold volcanic craters, pushed into ignition by long gone magics and still oozing lava into the lowlands. Once, the Jade Hegemon had its center of power in these mountains, from which munsahir governed the entirety of lowlands and where the richest cities sat in its depths. Now, a dozen petty kingdoms, ruled by powerful oni, call the Chenlun Mountains home. Ancient ruins have become fortresses and walled townships—malfunctioning elemental artifacts repurposed into weapons of war and the eldritch lore of slumbering elementals sequestered away as trump cards for bandit kings. From these makeshift fortresses, oni and giants raid the lowlands, taking food, wealth, and captives from their victims.

GOROYASA

Off the jungle's southwestern coast lies the massive, desolate island of **Goroyasa**. A fungal blight covers its vast surface, blanketing it with thick spores that twist both the mind and body of all they infect. Occasionally, lightning strikes cause great firestorms, igniting swaths of fungal spores in blazes visible from the mainland—revealing ruins left by a civilization of giants. The island's only inhabitants are the spore hosts of Goroyasa, legions of infected creatures who sacrifice unlucky adventurers and travelers to the Demon Lord **Cyth-V'Sug**.

The history of Goroyasa is a mystery. Sages who have flown above the island claim that the fungus originates from a crater at its center, likely an experiment gone wrong. Others have differing theories: that a meteor brought the spores to the ancient kingdom; that grand magics severed Goroyasa from the mainland; that the Valashai Empire or the Jade Hegemon unleashed the spores to defeat a rival; or that beneath the fungus is an ancient twin to the Worldwound, sealed with spores to prevent demonic invasion. Attempts to draw answers from the Demon Lord Cyth-V'Sug himself have failed, and even his greatest servants know nothing of the island.

Despite the risks, powerful adventurers still sail to Goroyasa. The fungus has preserved its victims immaculately, and the island's ruined cities are filled with grand arcane treasures and lore lost to time. Unfortunately, most such adventurers end up as new hosts to the spores, or sacrifices at the hands of its servants.



KASHANG

At the eastern foot of the **Riyak Mountains**, silhouetted against their glowering peaks, is the ruined Valashmaian city of **Kashang**. The still-gleaming stone stupas of ancient temples loom large over city walls, windows aglow with the coursing power of ancient wards. Kashang was once a temple city where the saurian Valashai and their myriad subjects alike made pilgrimages and prayed to a vast assortment of interstellar gods. In an empire built upon subjugation and supremacy, Kashang was a city where all became insignificant before the gods, equal under their dictates. Prayers and praises, heard on midnight winds even today, echoed through the city at all hours, and Valashai abolitionists exalted it as an image of what the Empire could be.

When the empire fell, Kashang was spared much of the initial chaos, for none were willing to defile the city. Dwindling resources were dedicated to summoning eternal protectors for the city's many temples, feeding the remaining priests, and protecting what pilgrims dared brave the dangerous jungle. When the last farms collapsed and the city could no longer be fed, even the most devout abandoned the city. Yet, their protections remained.

Today, Kashang is silent. Even the most predatory monsters of the jungle and the most feared bandits and adventurers give the place a wide berth out of fear



of its still-wandering guardians. Each temple contains a treasure trove of knowledge: the lost rites of forgotten faiths, the favor of interstellar gods, and untapped wells of eldritch divine power—wonders lost to time, for none have found a way past their terrible guardians.

But Kashang won't be allowed to lie untouched. Many in Valashmai and the Raj wish to access the city's secrets, and a wealth of patrons look for foolish, powerful adventurers willing to brave the city. Tribes and towns search for long-forgotten cultural ties, relic traders seek unimagined wealth, the Valash Raja desires the legitimacy of ruling Kashang, and foreigners pursue the vanished Valashai.

KUTABAN

Near the jungle's northern border, along the great river that marks the Nagajor-Valashmai border, lies the free city of **Kutaban**. The river hums with life as riverboats and cargo rafts traverse the languid waters at all hours of the day. The city is low with no buildings taller than two stories, instead sprawling along the southern riverbank in a nest of markets, houses, and walled estates. The rib cage of a long-dead kaiju surrounds the entire city, the cadaver's presence warding other kaiju away from the area.

For most travelers, the ferry to Kutaban is their first experience of the Valashmai Jungle. The river port trades extensively with **Nagajor** and **Xa Hoi**, making it an excellent base camp for adventurers aiming to delve into the jungle. It's easy to find adventurer's lodges, where merchants have supplies, guides have advice or offer their services, and successful adventurers share tales of their travels just as new ones hope for treasure and glory.

Many of those new adventurers will never return from their first expedition, and even experienced crews occasionally disappear, trackless, in the jungle. Rescue parties are rare; if someone disappears in the Valashmai Jungle, they're assumed dead.

Just as Kutaban is the gateway to the jungle for outsiders, it's the gateway out of the jungle for locals. Young Valashmaian adventurers get their first taste of the outside world here, meeting strange people, resupplying, and joining one of the trader caravans headed north. In this city, opportunity and customs unite people who would normally war and compete deeper in the jungle. As such, Kutaban is a getaway for star-crossed lovers and exiles as much as it is for adventurers, for the city offers a heady combination of safety, acceptance, and steady work.

Trade drives Kutaban's economy and politics. Here, spices, treasures, and magic items from the peninsula are loaded onto northbound trade caravans, while imported industrial goods, silk, and other luxuries head into the peninsula. This wealth empowers the merchant lords of Kutaban, who leverage their riches into political pull, grand estates, foreign mercenaries, and local armies to secure their power.

Contracts, maps to unplundered ruins, and financial acumen make and break dynasties among the cutthroat merchant lords, but **Sujana Mahad**, the crocodilian sovereign of Kutaban, keeps their feuding in check. Occasionally, the lords will unite against an outside threat. Generally, this threat is an attempt by a foreign power to put Kutaban under their control, but occasionally, another town along the northern border will try to supplant its place as the premier trade city of the Valashmai, only to be thrown back into line by the merchant lords.

SWAMP OF THE DARK BROOD

In the southern reaches of the jungle, towering trees give way to sucking mud, pools of acid, and twisted scrub. A host of lizardfolk factions populate the swamp: the **Black Tongue Biters**, the **Blood Stingers**, the **Red Brood**, the **Thickscales**, and others. These lizardfolk, ranging from bandits to mercenaries to townships, war over the swamp's resources. Alliances are fluid and temporary, battles are fierce, and the politics rivals the danger of any urban court.

Except, of course, on the yearly night of the **Brood Hunt**. No lizardfolk dare fight each other then, for the swamp comes alive. Lone travelers and guards disappear, their screams echoing across the swamps. Towns leave livestock outside the gates and mercenaries encamp in makeshift forts, all hoping the night doesn't come for them.

For in the depths of the swamp, where lizardfolk dare not tread, live the zecuis of the **Dark Brood**. Subjects of the Valashai Empire in a forgotten age, these parasitic beings once won their freedom in an insurgent war that raged for decades, leaving ruined fortresses across the swamps and burying corpses and treasure throughout their expanse. Those who have survived the zecuis tell the tale of **Bodhjeva**, an immortal brood mother and her sorcerous sisters, who led generation after generation against the Valashai until they were free and who'll one day lead them against the rest of Golarion.

Increasingly, the swamp's lizardfolk band together against this threat, extracting a blood price for the yearly terrors. But what might once have been imagined as a small nest of monsters is ever more clearly a hive—thousands of zecuis, hungering for flesh and unified in purpose. The lizardfolk know they'll need help to fight back, or else be devoured alive when the zecuis finally strike.



SUJANA MAHAD

IMPORTANT FIGURES

Verdant **Akaran** is a kaiju guardian of an ancient, dilapidated temple east of Kashang. Its form is a 200-meter tangle of living vines and lotus mouths, guided by great sensory bulbs dotted along its bulk. It constantly patrols the jungle around the temple, suppressing magic in spellcasters, items, and the land itself as it passes. It secretes a deadly toxin, harmless to the jungle's plants but swiftly lethal to mortals and animal life, and it's known to spray this secretion against anyone who dares to fly in its territory.

Legends tell that Akaran was animated when its temple was first sacked. The temple's god, furious at the sacrilege, animated the jungle itself to punish the perpetrators and protect its sanctum in perpetuity. Ever since, Akaran has patrolled the region, viciously attacking would-be interlopers but allowing pilgrims to pass unharmed.

In a time long forgotten, **Bodhjeva** (voracious female zecui queen) and her brood defeated the Valashai, winning their freedom in a brutal insurgency. She was their first leader, forging that fragile coalition of escaped slaves into the Dark Brood. Cohesive, thriving, and vengeful. Then, at the peak of her power, she disappeared to sleep the sleep of ages. Two centuries ago, a zecui returned from the swamp's depths. She took control of the Dark Brood, devoured all who challenged her, and claimed to be Bodhjeva returned, come to build the Brood's strength and unleash them upon a

hostile Golarion. Whatever the truth, none but Bodhjeva herself knows, for the new zecui was more powerful than any other in the brood, covered in ancient scars and secretive beyond reason. Bodhjeva expanded the Dark Brood, breaking what agreements they had with the surrounding lizardfolk. She lays more and larger broods than any of her predecessors and takes captives to match.

Bodhjeva is unstable, and periodically, her demands grow strange and capricious, with those who fail her immediately and messily devoured. Regularly, she migrates to the mile-long, mud-carved hive at the center of zecui territory and slumbers for months or years, killing any who dare wake her or awakening only to attack surrounding lizardfolk populations and eat her fill of sapient flesh. Now she spends more time asleep than awake, and even the zecui wonder if perhaps the Dark Brood would be better off without her.

Among the bandit kings of the Chenlun Mountains, **Otar Sultan** (evenhanded male fire giant monarch) stands apart. This fire giant, beard dimming with age, dark skin weathered by sun and lava, carries himself with a nobility and standing that the caldera oni pillagers who consider themselves his peers lack. His is no glorified bandit camp, but a kingdom—modest yet fair, and offering protection to its citizens for their service instead of extracting wealth and labor by brutal raids. Otar Sultan has withstood many oni challengers who would take his throne, for the giants, munsahir, and other humanoids in his lands willingly rise up to defend him.

It wasn't always so. Once, when Otar Sultan was Otar Twelve-Fingered, he was a bandit like any other, though learning and pretension set him apart. Like his counterparts, he subjugated the munsahir and mortals within his domain and raided freely and with abandon. Such was his life until a catfolk priestess arrived at his castle. Unguarded and unarmed, she asked only to speak with Otar and preach her faith. More impressed with her bravery than interested, Otar accepted and, after several weeks of heated discussion, resolved to change his life and let the priestess leave, weighed down with treasures. Otar Twelve-Fingered declared himself Otar Sultan, freed every slave in his territory, and bid all who wouldn't obey his new laws to leave.

Atop Kutaban, in an estate carved into the vertebra of the long-dead kaiju, lives **Sujana Mahad** (uncouth nonbinary lizardfolk ranger), an iruxi with especially crocodilian features—thick, olive green scales, a ridged back, and an oar-like tail. They wear a black silk baju koko over a matching sarong devoid of patterns, and the only true decoration they wear is a massive, pure gold headpiece. When Sujana Mahad first took power, they had ancient treasures worth many times their crown's value melted down and reforged.

Sujana Mahad is the sovereign of Kutaban, the single most powerful mortal within a hundred miles of the border with Nagajor. They began their career as a humble guide for foreign treasure hunters, then leveraged their knowledge into becoming first a treasure hunter, then a merchant, then a merchant lord. Twenty years ago, Sujana Mahad took power from the previous merchant lord after a political scandal in which several brontosaurus stampeded through the inner markets. Since then, Sujana has proved one of Kutaban's more able leaders. They've cracked down on many of the more serious threats that had built up against the city, organizing culls of many dinosaur populations, replenishing the ranks of the city's kaiju callers, and hiring adventurers to suppress a growing hive of maddened elementals along an important trade route. However, Sujana's loyalties are strictly to the people of the Valashmai Jungle, so disreputable guides and unscrupulous merchants who shortchange adventurers or lead them to their deaths don't face the consequences formerly meted under more foreign-facing rulers.



OTAR SULTAN



Wanshou

Nations

WANSHOU
Capital: Numijaan
Government: Monstrous Autocracy
Ruler: Zhanagorr



Peoples

Athamarus
Boggards
Cecaelias
Fleshwarps
Humans
Merfolk
Tripkees
Undead

Languages

Thalassic
Tien

Religions

Hei Feng
Lamashtu
Lady Nanbyo
Lao Shu Po

Resources

Gems
Mercenaries
Produce
Seafood
Ships

THE FLOOD

Along the western edge of **Xidao** is a vast stretch of mire and floodplains known as Wanshou. A crushing tempest ruined the land over a century ago, though its lush and vibrant surface does much to hide any permanent damage from that time. Explorers to this realm are quick to make note of dangers that stretch across this domain. Predatory hunters stalk within expanses of tall grass and curled orchids. Lily fields choke the space between waterlogged trees whose stubborn roots twist through the mire in a delicate search for earth and balance. It's often impossible to tell where the grass ends and where deep pockets of floodland begin, and traders and locals alike share stories of sudden, violent disappearances within the lush wetlands.

But Wanshou wasn't always this way. At one time, this land was the beating heart of Tian Xia's food supply. From its plentiful farmlands and richly productive paddy fields, the Imperial Lung Wa war machine was kept well fed by the backbreaking sacrifice of Wanshou's farming communities. Keen on maintaining dominance over the region, the empire installed officers loyal to Lung Wa across the province. Tensions within the nation grew under the watchful eye of Lung Wa loyalists, and with every new year of Lung Wa's expansion, demand on Wanshou's farming communities increased. When revolution struck Lung Wa, the province of Wanshou descended into chaos. An empire in ruin suddenly abandoned the heavily armed military outposts, and the long-abused farming citizenry quickly rose up to oust their former oppressors.

For all its violence and upheaval, few traces of old Lung Wa or the rebellion remain in Wanshou today. Much of this time was lost during a year of catastrophic flooding that fundamentally altered the shape of the land. This period, known as the **Season of Torrent**, swept away everything in its path and cast the survivors into poverty. Homeless, battered by war, and starving for salvation, the people of Wanshou called out for a savior. What answered was a being of ancient, unfathomable power.

Today, the people of Wanshou have wonderfully adapted to living in a world dominated by water. Some would say their spirit, tenacity, and ingenuity have kept their nation whole. This culture rapidly adapts to new traditions, guided by a generation of elders desperate to bury a past spent in servitude and suffering. It's also a nation ruled by **Zhanagorr**—the elder kraken who manipulates Wanshou through a subtle campaign of fear, paranoia, and the promise of a glorious future for its battered people.

GEOGRAPHY

To traverse the reconstructed nation of Wanshou is to witness the progress of Zhanagorr's goal to conquer land and sea, where an expanding flow of water buries both natural and artificial elements of Wanshou's history. The vast majority of the former province's population consists of farming communities, isolated between miles of untamed marshland. Each of these communities settle on terraced farmland, taking advantage of natural waterways that provide considerable defensive sight lines to every town or village within the nation. Along these terraces, grains (such as rice or wheat) grow with minimal maintenance in narrow plots of land, supplying every community with plenty of space for harvests while also providing a protective barrier against the encroaching swamp.

Most of these communities have been settled over only three generations, and their fortifications make for easily identifiable landmarks in Wanshou's wilderness. While the distance between communities can vary greatly, each is connected via a network of dry, elevated paths that require occasional maintenance from the elements. Locals, traders, and soldiers frequent these roadways, but more adventurous individuals have been known to explore the wilderness in between using a range of other methods.

Any kind of travel across Wanshou's delta is slow. Though there's technically a wet and a dry season, the water levels might also rise and fall depending on proximity to the coast. Small skiffs are ideal for moving along a floodplain, but a wide variety of vegetation can make even simple navigation into an impossible task. Uneven ground,



ZHANAGHORR



low-hanging branches from twisted trees, stretches of tall grass, and carpets of lilies can severely impede maneuvering through these waters. Travelers who seek to cross by foot can find themselves waist deep in water at any given time. Portions of the land's numerous floodplains have eroded enough to create channels of deep water, and there's little way to differentiate a safe path from a submerged one.

Equally a part of Wanshou's geography are the elements of the past, submerged for centuries just below the surface. Though many are structurally intact, the weight and fortifications of these buildings have sunk them deep within the earth. Buildings submerged within the mud are exquisitely preserved, though they seem wrecked at a glance. These lost structures can be found across Wanshou's wilderness, often with their inhabitants still trapped within. Collapsed towers and ruined foundations mark the location of former crossroads, which can be useful markers that aid explorers hunting for Wanshou's ancient treasures.

Any who make their intention to pillage the past clear will find the locals unwilling to aid them. These wild reaches of the land are reminders of a failure that should never be repeated. What the water took, the Divine Savior might keep.

A DAY IN WANSHOU

Those who call Wanshou home spend each day finding balance with their surroundings, from the most affluent of nobles to the most humble of crafters. In some ways, these practices are spiritual and emotional, meant to remind the people of how far they've developed their great nation. In reality, the rites observed on a daily basis help protect Wanshou's citizens from the supernatural wrath of their forgotten ancestors.

The daily routine starts early in the morning with a drawing of water and a small meal. Barring only a handful of exceptions, towns and villages are built on terraced land, which at a distance gives even the smallest of settlements a very regal appearance. Natural wells at the height of the community feed water down into each home through deep, winding canals. Villagers spend mornings drawing this water for daily tasks, and they take great care not to soil or contaminate the water's source. This immediate source of fresh water is considered to be a sacred gift from their patron: an entity referred to as the Divine Savior, who most iconically takes the form of winding, curling tendrils rising up from the depths in a gesture of sheltering embrace. Though the water can be used for cooking, washing or cleaning objects within the stream would dirty the supply of water flowing to one's neighbor, which might catch the ire of any spirits protectively watching over their homes.

Farming life is slow, and field work takes the collective effort of several families working in tandem. By midday, most families have gathered together for a shared meal before returning to their duties. Homes in farming

communities tend to be larger, often housing several generations of a family under one roof, which is a point of pride for Wanshou's citizens. The families consider themselves self-sufficient, though in reality, it's far from the truth. With suitable farmland in short supply, hunters and fishers provide their families with meat that would ordinarily be supplemented by grazing livestock. Those who aren't responsible for hunting assist with the harvest of grain, which continues to be Wanshou's largest export.

This constant need to forage during harvest has created a unique food culture that varies in each community. Available ingredients determine meals, but most dishes find a way to feature peppers and root vegetables. Local citrus adds an extra bit of flavor and further builds upon culinary variety. If a traveler were to sample the same dish in every community across the province, they would never find the same taste twice.

Urban life is similarly steeped in hunting and gathering—though of a very different nature. Food and water are much easier to secure for anyone with even a small amount of coin. With little wildlife to fear, gossip and rumors spread through the city like wildfire each morning as merchants, nobles, guards, and servants all work to protect themselves from Wanshou's greatest predator: jealous rivals. In the heart of Numijaan, it's wiser to fear what's within the walls of the city than to worry about what lurks beyond.

The same traditions intended to honor the deceased in rural communities exist in urban environments, though on a much grander scale. Residents who lack a communal stream bring their offerings to the sea at least once a day, though there's even a measure of forgiveness given, provided an individual took care to make smaller offerings throughout their day. Businesses will set aside tips that are passed along to cover the maintenance of local cemeteries. Fishers release some of their catch to appease grandparents who might have passed along the trade. Each small gesture holds tremendous meaning, and urban locals deeply believe that their ancestors will be understanding so long as their offerings are gifted from the heart.

A YEAR IN WANSHOU

Harvesting crops remains a priority for most of Wanshou's citizenry, who spend a tremendous amount of focus on keeping pathways between each community clear of obstruction and danger. While farmers will tend to crop rotations over the course of the year, the **Mireguard** make their way across the province. Tasked with repairing, rebuilding, and maintaining roadways, the Mireguard visit most communities at least twice a year. The arrival of helpful outsiders is always a cause for celebration. Though there's no official name for such an occasion, communities will throw a feast to help bolster the morale of the soldiers and laborers who work tirelessly to keep Wanshou's network of roads clear of any danger.

Many towns and villages across Wanshou hold celebrations not recognized by other communities—typically festivities surrounding a more local event like the construction of a community hall, the commemoration of an important hunt, or a period of hardship that the community overcame. On rare occasions, the festivities will focus on the accomplishments of a beloved local hero. However, these deeds are still focused on how one notable soul helped bolster the endurance of their community.

One such occasion is the impromptu series of feasts throughout settlements near the **Natsubori Caverns** during periods of heavy flooding. Amphibious miners normally accustomed to exploring the underwater cave networks will instead celebrate the arrival of the storm, not wanting to risk getting pummeled by newly formed rapids coursing through their mines. Within homes reinforced against the heavy squalls, friends and family swap stories to delight and entertain each other throughout the terrible weather. Storms of this nature can rage on for several days, quickly turning a fun gathering into a marathon of entertainment.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Wanshou's position in central Tian Xia has led to a diverse range of linguistic influences from different cultures that reflect these varied origins. This diversity has also led to a strong accent that reflects aspects of disparate Tian languages, which other Tian peoples tend to find unusual.

Wanshou: when-shoo
Dìshàng: dee-shan
Hitasu: hee-tah-soo
Karagatan: kah-rah-gah-tahn
Natsubori: not-soo-boar-ee
Bong Chin-Hae: bohng chin-hai
Ma Yú: mah oo-oo
Naoki Tanaka: nah-oh-kee tah-nah-kah
Mìmì Qiáng: mee-mee shee-ang



The **Feast of the Forgotten** (or the Unlucky Feast) runs for seven days at the start of the seventh month of the lunar calendar. It was originally celebrated throughout the nation as a time to honor the sacrifice made by heroes of the Lung Wa rebellion. Over time, and with careful manipulation from Zhanagorr, the holiday has instead shifted to focus on preserving the memory of all who wouldn't live to see Wanshou's prosperous future—with heavy implications that the best is still to come. Music and dance are prevalent throughout the Unlucky Feast, but what truly defines the week-long celebration are its meals. All across Wanshou, families make visits to other villages, cooking meals for relative strangers in gestures of goodwill. Citizens set aside traditional dishes for more experimental flavors. In Numijaan, a mass buffet is set across the city, where dishes can be placed and sampled at any time of day. Open grills and iron hot plates are laid out for anyone to cook with. Small competitions arise among some families and businesses, but rarely are these rivalries taken too seriously. Ancestral offerings and prayers are plentiful during this period, and it's common to see spirits manifest to take part in the jubilation.



MIMÌ QIÁNG

A mid-autumn festival marks the last shared holiday of the year, celebrating the closure of another successful harvest. Farming communities typically honor this occasion with a period of rest lasting two to three days, while merchants and traders will halt nonessential business to allow a brief respite before new work begins.

These celebrations help to enrich the lives of people who live through exceptionally difficult conditions. Most, if not all, of those who live outside of Numijaan will experience the unexplained disappearance of someone close to them. Heavy storms will threaten crops and put stress on maintenance crews, all while pressing Wanshou's deadly wildlife closer to settlements. Few citizens will endure a year without some sort of loss—and those who avoid it are likely the political elite who live in paranoia, fearing betrayal from all those around them.

CULTURE

Locals say that no matter how short one's stay in Wanshou, one is bound to see the dead. Spirits watch at a distance, barely visible through fog as passing travelers make camp for the evening. Zombies and ghouls claw themselves from the muck that suffocated their lungs during the Season of Torrent, punishing grave robbers who would steal from their sunken homes. Revenants made of stitched shadow scream in agony across open floodplains, eternally struggling to comprehend the past from the present.

Wanshou's citizenry has a familiarity and reverence of spirits shared by few other cultures. Above and beyond honoring the memory of their ancestors, they pay regular tributes to spirits collectively known as the **Drowned**. Though the Drowned is a term that can encompass all manner of spirits or undead, it specifically applies to those who passed during the Season of Torrent. Their spirits, tortured and eternally bound to the land, require regular offerings to keep their souls in a state of peace.

Residents make weekly offerings of rice, meat, and alcohol using the canals of clean water that flow from home to home. During holidays and festivals, these offerings exponentially increase, allowing spirits to partake in the festivities in equal measure. Each family builds upon the contributions of the family before them to create a communal offering. By maintaining a flow of clean water in their homes, communities keep the fate of their drowned ancestors close to their hearts—but that doesn't mean that these gestures of respect appease all spirits. There are still those who bear tremendous hate for the living.

Vanishings frequently happen all across Wanshou. Some say it's the nature of this land, which beckons all to become lost within its twisting waters and dense vegetation. Children are kept far from running water and are taught at a young age to respect the channels that run through their homes.



Those who soil the stream or disrespect the offerings placed within it, intentionally or otherwise, go missing overnight, dragged into the channel to drown by the spectral hands of their inconsolable, unnamed ancestors.

Equally quick to disappear are any who vocally oppose Wanshou's leadership. Political critics have been found dead in their homes with their bodies twisted in fear and anguish. Others are drowned or later discovered swaying from the branches of wraith-haunted awakened trees roaming the swamps. The discreet nature of these murders has led many to believe that the spirits themselves have aligned with Zhanagorr's will, lending further credence to the kraken's position as a savior.

Competition to win Zhanagorr's favor is fierce throughout every social level, and it's most felt within the capital of **Numijaan**. Jealousy and a desire for the Divine Savior's favor have given rise to a political culture of subterfuge. Most fear being spied upon by their social or economic rivals. More often than not, their fears are warranted. Years of this paranoia have created a boom in superstitions rooted in local legends from historical events. Mirrors are barred from being placed in most rooms out of fear that a reflection would kill and replace anyone who got too close. Rainstorms are equally reviled and revered. No meeting is held on the fourth of any month, and the fourth month of the year is considered to be a time of "peace" in politics, as it's very likely any plans made will backfire during this unlucky period. Nobles commonly fear gifts since many powerful curses have been delivered through seemingly innocent tithes. Instead, the unique but dangerous profession of **Gift Receiver** acts as both a social barrier and spiritual "poison taster," risking their lives in place of their host who would receive a parcel intended to twist, mutilate, or maim.

Such ill intent runs so deeply through Numijaan's upper class that many bloodlines have been poisoned by foul animosity. Physical ailments of an unusual nature are common. Over the generations, children within the province have been born with a wide range of abnormalities, including extra eyes, second rows of sharpened teeth, or tendril-like suckers across their forearms. Other mutations are more subtle. There are nobles who can see only at night, can't breathe unless submerged in water, or have an insatiable appetite for raw flesh. Where these mutations would be alarming in other cultures, here they're coveted as blessings of the Divine Savior's favor—feeding into the endless cycle of jealousy, betrayal, and competitive malice.

GOVERNMENT AND IMPORTANT FACES

Though it appeared as a hero in Wanshou's darkest hour, the kraken **Zhanagorr** actually caused its near destruction. Less than a handful of individuals alive today are aware that the Season of Torrent was summoned by Zhanagorr, who arrived at the apex of the disaster to "save" the battered and defeated people of Wanshou. In the centuries since



HADALPEA



BONG CHIN-HAE



MA YÚ



NAOKI TANAKA

Zhanagorr's intervention, the kraken's control and influence over the people has become almost absolute.

Zhanagorr makes minimal effort to hide its true form, but most of Wanshou's population sees their leader not as a terrifying monstrosity but as the Divine Savior—an entity that's less mortal and closer to something godlike in power. Outsiders might judge Wanshou's citizens as naive, but the reality is far more complex. The great kraken manipulates everything through the use of various agents. Zhanagorr is capable of organizing suitable village locations, roadways, shipping lanes, mining operations, military expansion, and more. Repair efforts performed across the nation by the Mireguard are done entirely through Zhanagorr's guidance, framing the kraken's intentions for the land as altruistic. Generations have experienced nothing but prosperity under the kraken's rule, leaving little incentive to look elsewhere for leadership.

Knowing full well that a political alliance of any kind could begin to unravel the seat of power that Zhanagorr has precariously created for itself, the great kraken heavily plays favorites with the ruling class within Numijaan. Wanshou's citizens desperately vie for the attention of their savior. Ruling lords within Numijaan form a triumvirate that reports directly to Zhanagorr. These three lords are the only ones blessed with the authority to speak directly with the kraken, and in turn, they're tasked with enacting its will throughout the land. This position is highly coveted, and many lords and houses have occupied this station over the years. Few pass on the title willingly, and those who perish while holding the title rarely die of natural causes.

High society both above and below the tide is fixated on power. It's common knowledge that any who can bring valuable artifacts, information, or wealth to Wanshou in the name of the Divine Savior are granted its blessing. The great kraken is well-known for giving small fortunes to those who earn its favor, and political rivals stop at nothing to prove their devotion and loyalty to their nation while downplaying the efforts of their colleagues and subordinates.

Bong Chin-Hae (principled male human warrior) serves as **High Captain of the Mireguard**. A man in his early forties, Chin-Hae has earned a reputation as being an advocate for the people. Unimpressed with the growing corruption and favoritism spreading throughout Numijaan, Chin-Hae has taken it upon himself to make Wanshou's communities, and their roads, safe and well provided for. Many corrupt officials have met their end at the tip of his spear—though he's unaware that evidence he receives of their wrongdoing is often unknowingly delivered by agents of the Divine Savior.

Ma Yú (methodical male human trader) of the Shimmering Estate is the elder of a once-great merchant house. Yú is cunning, patient, and deeply distrustful of Zhanagorr's machinations. After surviving a failed assassination attempt, Yú has since fixated on revenge against Numijaan's noble circles. Immediately relocating his family and most trusted retainers to a gathering of custom-built trade ships, he now organizes the distribution of overseas spices from the network of gilded barges that act as his family's floating home. Ma Yú's open disapproval of Wanshou's leadership is barely tolerated, as his trade connections continue to provide bustling growth to the city.

Mìmì Qiáng (scheming nonbinary human aristocrat), Lady of Dìshàng, is the arrogant ruler of Numijaan's Dìshàng District. Through a combination of luck, bribery, and the careful gathering of exploitative secrets, the Qiáng family has remained in the Divine Savior's favor for two generations. It's a rare blessing for any noble house to rule so long without being undermined, and Mìmì will do anything to ensure the security of their family's position.

Naoki Tanaka (fanatical male human zealot) is the Overseer of the Hitasu District. While the other nobles of Numijaan struggle for power, Tanaka has turned his attention toward a single goal: complete devotion to the Divine Savior. This single-minded worship has made many within the city uneasy, as Tanaka and his loyalists consider themselves above the subtle politics that have governed the city since its rebirth.

Hadalpea, Currentkeeper of Karagatan, (uncanny ancient female merfolk broker) has proven herself to be a shrewd politician. Hadalpea has been instrumental in helping restore Wanshou's reputation to the local oceanic community, building trade opportunities while gathering herself a retinue of fiercely loyal retainers. Rumors circulate throughout Karagatan suggest Hadalpea's longevity is the result of being personally chosen by the Divine Savior. Naturally, those rumors are fueled and funded by Hadalpea's wealth, taken from rival merchant vessels "unlucky" enough to encounter pirates on the open sea.

Cities and Locations

The following is a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Wanshou.

Numijaan

After receiving acknowledgment as the Divine Savior of Wanshou, Zhanagorr used its great strength and magic to restore the city of Numijaan. Now split into three major districts, modern Numijaan is intended to represent the balance and harmony between land and sea that's coveted by the kraken. At a distance, the city looks open and poorly defended. Though there are docks and shipping lanes, the fortified flood barriers that once protected Numijaan from coastal storms hundreds of years ago no longer exist. Instead, the city walls defensively encircle its outermost district before sinking beneath the waves to leave its interior entirely open to Xidao's waters. This view reminds Numijaan's citizens to treat the sea as a blessing, along with being a testament to the Divine Savior's strength.

The **Dìshàng District** is home to many of Wanshou's original populace, including merchants, traders, and the families of laborers. Buildings in this district are tall and often feature hanging plant life reminiscent of the region's distant mountain ecosystem. Much consideration was given to Numijaan's shared population of aquatic denizens. Most of its businesses feature sub-basements that are partly flooded, taking advantage of a secondary sewer system that filters clean water throughout each establishment.

Falling gently from the coastline into the sea is the **Hitasu District**, which acts as a transitional district between Numijaan's citizens above and below the tide. Aquatic and semi-aquatic ancestries mingle in trade, subtly inconveniencing each other by doing business in buildings that have been partly consumed by the coast. Submerged beneath the waves is the **Karagatan District**, which has been built up from the ruins of Numijaan that couldn't be salvaged from its original destruction. Merfolk, cecaelias, and athamarus make up the bulk of the population here—but it isn't uncommon to find awakened undersea creatures mingling as messengers or, in some cases, guards.

Tidecaller Temple

At the heart of the Hitasu District is a chapel devoted to Zhanagorr, helmed by a growing movement of religious zealots calling themselves the **Tidecallers**. Though respected as followers of the Divine Savior, their unity and zealotry have created a sense of unease within the city. Rarely do they squabble over finances or resources, instead focusing single-mindedly on what they can do to promote the goals of the great kraken that rules them. The Tidecallers are the result of generations of manipulation and propaganda—and perhaps a glimpse into the future of Numijaan's populace, if left unchecked.

Chotilema's Boudoir

Legend says that **Chotilema** was a great and powerful witch who bargained with locals for supplies in exchange for her gifts. Granting small measures of wealth, vitality, and weather-related blessings, Chotilema would often ask for seemingly innocuous things in the form of payment while leaving her patrons unaware of the one-sided pacts they'd formed. Harvesting souls from the innocent to fuel her dark magic, Chotilema has used her curses to siphon life from the land and menace any who would stand in the way of her sinister experiments.

Today, this network of caves rests at the bottom of a flooded gorge, now fed water by channels left over from the storm's path. Some say her body has been disturbed, and her spirit now plagues the land with abominations ripped from the imagination of her twisted soul. Each year, more foul creatures seem to boil out from Chotilema's Boudoir, leaving the local peasantry in split opinions. Those who feel abandoned by the Divine Savior have searched for outside help to curb the spread of these plagued monstrosities. Village elders and loyalists to the Divine Savior heavily petition Numijaan for aid, unaware that an expansion of Zhanagorr's influence would only spread the wetlands in Chotilema's creations' favor.

Natsubori Caverns

With the vast majority of Wanshou's wealth lost during the flood, one of the first major goals imparted by Zhanagorr was to reestablish wealth for his newfound people. Thus began a unique mining operation that would herald in a new age of prosperity for a people keen on putting the brutal failures of the past behind them. Digging began across the coast in search of a suitable mine, and after several years of exploratory mining, a natural underground cavern was discovered to be rich with sapphires. Today, the Natsubori Caverns are still being expanded as mining continues to uncover riches deep underground.

International Relations

Wanshou's reputation, and general trust of outsiders, has suffered considerably since the Season of Torrent. Wanshou's citizens hold a grudge against neighboring provinces that presumably sentenced their ancestors to drown. Conversely, those who have watched Wanshou from afar know that something is terribly wrong. Though Wanshou boasts a healthy trade economy with neighboring coastal nations, most are wary of speaking with Zhanagorr's more fanatical devotees. Over time, these sentiments have turned Wanshou into an isolationist nation—but the fewer influences the kraken needs to contend with, the better.

Xa Hoi

Nations

XA HOI
Capital: Ngōn Hoa
Government: Draconic Monarchy
Ruler: Emperor Pham Duc Quan



Peoples

Dragons
Humans
Kobolds
Lizardfolk
Merfolk
Nagaji

Languages

Draconic
Nagaji
Tang
Tien

Religions

Abadar
General Susumu
Irori
Jin Li
Kofusachi
Lady Nanbyo
Nalinivati
Shizuru
Srikalis, Sritaming, and Sribaril

Resources

Coffee
Dyes
Gems
Livestock
Lumber
Magic Items
Medicine
Ore
Produce
Ships
Spices
Technology/ Clockwork

EMPIRE OF THE DRAGON

Around it, empires rise. Around it, empires fall. For six millennia Xã Hōi—the true Dragon's Kingdom—has stood, like a stone polished by the river current. It's the only "Dragon Empire" able to claim beyond hyperbole an imperial dragon to its seat of power.

The region that would become Xã Hōi, also spelled Xa Hoi, was little more than a collection of warring provincial kingdoms before its establishment. Under threat of collective ruin, they banded together to petition the sovereign dragon **Pham Toan Nguyen**, promising a hoard of loyalty and power for her aid—a treasure of empire. Xa Hoi swore fealty to the sovereign dragons, and the sovereign dragons swore fealty in return. The nation has stood united under the dragon's seal since. Presently, Emperor **Pham Duc Quan**, thirteenth of his line, has exercised authority over the delta's valleys and mountains for 201 years. The protection, majesty, and stability the dragon's dynasty has been able to offer Xa Hoi has earned Pham Duc Quan and his predecessors the zealous affection of its citizens.

Such security throughout the centuries has allowed Xa Hoi to support both itself and its neighbors. Through the last days of Lung Wa, Emperor Quan made great efforts to extend assistance to the Successor States, even to Xa Hoi's detriment, and assured that these directives were in Xa Hoi's best interest for the long run—by non-draconic perspectives. That generosity, fair trade, and a healthily respected border over the generations has given Xa Hoi strong and tempered bonds with their neighboring states. Xa Hoi has yet to bear arms in more than minor border skirmishes with any other state of Tian Xia to this point. It isn't without foes, however. Long has the throne sworn the mechanical abominations of the **Clicking Caverns**, devastating **kaiju** of the **Valashmai Jungle**, and anarchistic pirates of **Minata**'s waters to be enemies of the state. From within, a growing revolutionary front threatens the balance of Xa Hoi's status quo. Even the river's smoothest stone can break if struck in the right spot at the wrong time.

GEOGRAPHY

Stark, black mountains jut up from lush, silken jungle valleys, decorated by innumerable rivers weaving through like jewel-studded chains, all making for the largest river delta in all of Tian Xia. Mastery over the rivers is the only reasonable way the peoples of Xa Hoi could survive since trekking through the marshes and over the mountains proves a dangerous proposition between the terrain and the wildlife. The rivers are a winding, branching, merging, even looping maze of waterways that cut through and below the valleys, bushlands, and mountains. One will find most Xa Hoians settled along and above the water, traveling down it.

Waters seeking the path of least resistance will often detour down through the shafts of the Clicking Caverns from their sinkholes and meet the lava flows below. Water or lava, all rivers lead to the coast and feed into the oceans. Xa Hoi doesn't nearly have the longest stretch of coast, but its people will argue it one of the most beautiful of the continent. Countless estuary coves studded with sheer-faced islands break the waves, making for peaceful waters along the black-sand beaches. Mountains run through the country and even out into the coast, jutting up from the water and making for small, narrow, towering islands that become more concentrated further inland. Without these water-bound mountains, the devastation of storms along the coast would've wiped out Xa Hoi millennia ago.

The mountains of the coastal islands trail inland disparately but become more concentrated further west until they connect with the **Chunlun Range**. In the east, the sheer black peaks stab up from the ground, the scaffolding and zip lines of trees and vines leading up to a jungle canopy that covers the stone like a peach fuzz. Further west, the peaks become more tightly clustered. Mountain bases begin to widen out and conjoin, making for less sheer but just as intimidating slopes. Deep through



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the mountains and under the valleys run caves like termite tunnels in old rotting wood, ever threatening to collapse or burst with the stuff of nightmares. Some are natural due to erosion, tectonic shifts, and giant burrowing animals; others are artificially dug in by the insurrectionists of the **Darklands** carving the Clicking Caverns. The tangled network runs in all axes under the entire breadth of Xa Hoi and its neighbor of **Nagajor**—soon **Tang Mai** and the **Valash Raj** as well, Xa Hoian strategists warn. Some of the tunnels closer to the surface have been reclaimed by the government, and operating bases have been set up in some semblance of another border below.

A DAY IN XA HOI

Xa Hoi's days don't start until just before dusk and end at dawn. Dodging the day's oppressive heat and humidity and finding it safer to be awake in numbers against the dangers in the dark has driven Xa Hoians to a nocturnal timetable for longer than living memory. The comfort of cooler air and matching sleep schedules with the most dangerous predators are all supplemented by a strong coffee culture.

Countryfolk tend to start their days well into the dark. Strong investment in bioluminescent flora and fauna cultivation over millennia has allowed for traveling along major cross-country roads in the dark of night, and the tending of fields, ranches, and shops as easy as in daylight. Much of the produce from Xa Hoi will often have that special glow, marking it specialty fare throughout the rest of Tian Xia, but a simple salad for locals. "Monster" farmers, as they're affectionately jabbed, find their work much easier and productive in the dim of night, treating what were once thought unnatural beasts the same as any other beef or pork stock—though due to a monster's potential for sapience, such ranches are highly regulated to avoid morally questionable stock. Sunrise typically marks the dinner hour and end of the day; pastorals take in the cool mornings before retiring to bed.

City dwellers strive for an early start. Catching the late afternoon and sunset, cities accept messengers and enchanted communiques from throughout Xa Hoi at the overlap of their respective start and end of the work day. As the city does business more often with visitors and outside organizations, the metropolitan workdays are short and heavily front-loaded, with the witching hour onward dedicated to simpler, locally focused tasks and personal time. Cities are heavily invested in bioluminescence like their pastoral counterparts but are more dominantly supported by magical lanterns, as they have better infrastructure for arcane maintenance. Save for those burning out the wick working late or carousing, few city folk see the sunrise.

Abnormal hours and abundant access to high-quality reserves from the mountains have precipitated an indispensable coffee culture in Xa Hoi. Theirs is an especially strong brew, slightly sweetened with a touch of

cream cutting the bitterness and blooming the floral notes. The coffee crop is of such high quality that it's one of Xa Hoi's leading luxury exports—so important that the economy slid to the verge of collapse three generations ago after a virus caused a mass crop die-off, not only crashing trade but Xa Hoians' acuity and morale in its absence. At midnight, most people will take a short break in their day, only 30 minutes or so, to enjoy a coffee and pipe of medicinal herbs, an opportunity to take in the evening and have a playful bicker with one another. Retirees often extend this ritual well into the day.

Otherwise, Xa Hoians tend to keep to two hardy meals a night in the early and late twilight. Traditionally, communities will host a family meal each evening in the public areas of the village or city, where all are welcome to contribute and partake. This allows everyone to gather, share gossip, and show off their cooking, accompanied by all the music, poetry, dance, plays, exhibitions, and the like as folks are willing to offer to their neighbors. Rest assured, these meals don't deter restaurant or private home meal patronage, as few will attend every family meal.

Restaurants and food stalls in Xa Hoi are so specific that orders are simply, "I'll have two, please!" Even large celebratory banquets are often catered by dozens of restaurateurs working in tandem.

A YEAR IN XA HOI

There's hardly a time of year, save for an unexpected catastrophe, where food is in short supply for Xa Hoi. In the old days, Xa Hoians ate very seasonally, primarily river life, jungle fowl, and local produce. Today's menus would seem a luxury in comparison with ranched cattle and fresh produce from afar regardless of the season. Snowless, high-wind winters in the valleys bookend the beginning and end of the year. Spring brings high tides, typhoons, and cyclones that persist all the way through summer. Heavy rains carry through fall as the primary harvest season begins. The heavy precipitation throughout the year, combined with the high average temperatures, makes for a very humid climate. This weather is quite unwelcoming to outsiders and a defense against them on many occasions, but it provides the perfect conditions for the nation's lush jungles and marshes.

Taxes are collected quarterly with the changing of the seasons. Court officials rotate provinces every other month on an offset schedule. One group remains to welcome the next and expects to leave the following month. Officials won't expect to be stationed in the same province for another three years at least.

Each summer, 12 crews—each dedicated to a Xa Hoian monarch from the past—race from the most eastern river basin to the westernmost estuary. Crews compete all year long to vie for the **Dragon Boat Festival** championship and its prize, a favor from the sitting emperor. Teams push themselves to their physical limits, rowing for days at a time with as few breaks as they can stomach. They carefully plot their course, not only optimizing routes for distance, current direction, and hazards, but also organizing a chain of support along projected routes (and backup routes, if they're smart) to provide them with food, drink, and equipment. In the past, they would've stopped to forage along the way, but after some clever teams started the practice of outside support, it became the new standard. Some crews broker sponsorship from patrons in exchange for advertising on the uniforms and boats, or even offering the prize from the Emperor. Settlements set up festivities alongside the river for the boats speeding past, making for a rolling celebration across the country. The largest of the celebrations takes place at the beginning, sending off

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

The prevalence of Draconic in Xa Hoi has spread loan words and vocal sounds into all of the nation's other languages.

ng: like the end of "thing" from the back of the throat.

Xã Hōi: SAH hoy

Hoi: hoy

Fort Hung: fohrt wh-ng

Ngo Thanh Nhien: ngoh TAN-h NEE-nh

Ngōn Hoa: ng-ON hwah

Pham Toan Nguyen: fahm ton ng-win

Pham Duc Quan: fahm dook kone

Pham Lê Ngōc: fahm lay ng-ock

Lam Anh Đào: lahm an dow



CLICKING CAVERNS

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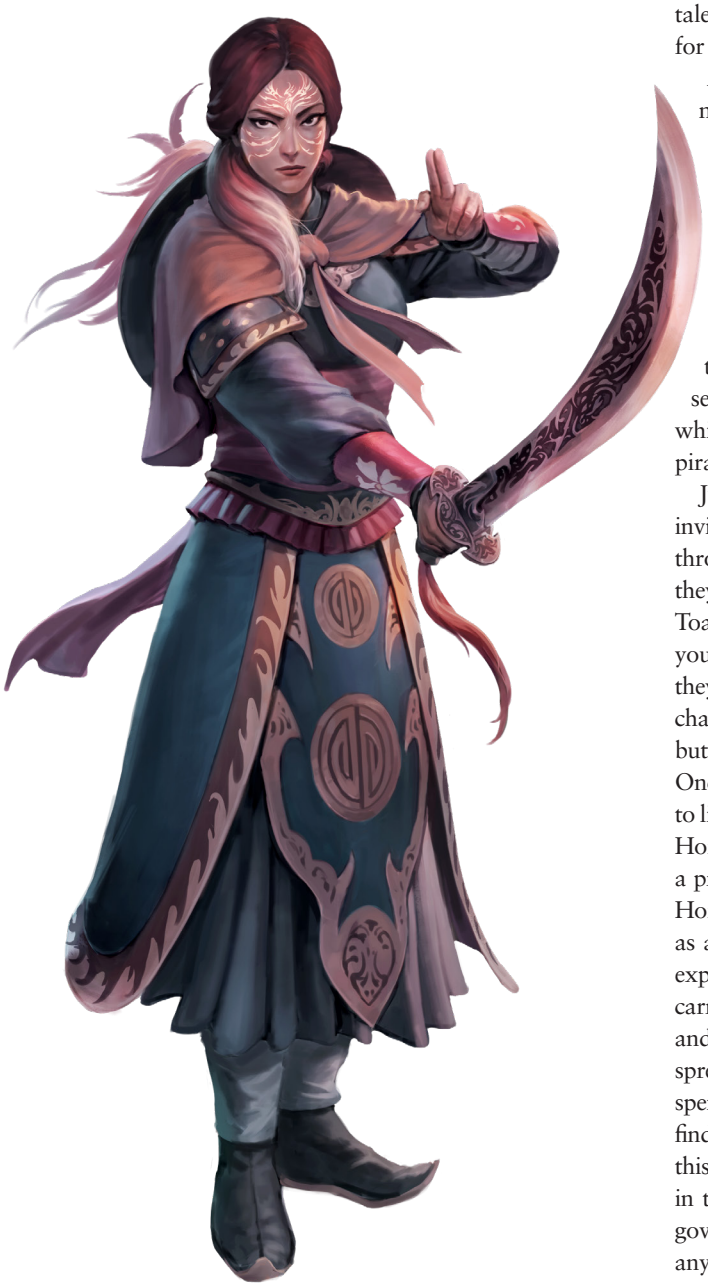
teams with well-wishes and, at the finish line, congratulating all the teams that survive, each met by the sitting sovereign.

A two-day wake occurs in the last days of winter, dedicated to the lost battles and soldiers of Xa Hoi, called the **Festival of the Loss**. On the first day, no fires are to be lit, no blades drawn, none will speak, and adults fast. Silence rules the day, save for the chime of funeral bells. The people of Xa Hoi meditate on the fickleness of fate and take the opportunity to remember that mortal pleasures or good fortune shouldn't be taken for granted. On the second day is a celebration of bonfires, food, and song, punctuated by the chimes of the funeral bells remembering the dead for their better selves beyond their military service. It reminds all that a loss isn't the end, just another day before any other where the living must carry on.

During rotating seasons each year, Xa Hoi sends an open invitation across all of Tian Xia to participate in **War Games** testing the strength of Xa Hoi. These games consist of military exercises carried out on land and sea, with games of more clandestine services held in the capital. The games serve as a point of pride to show nation's strength to its neighbors, a preventative measure to—hopefully—deter any actions against Xa Hoi's interests by showing its capabilities, a promotion showing the resources it has available as an ally, and a means of exposing any weak points in Xa Hoi's operational capabilities to be addressed in the year between War Games.



CULTURE

As if blessed by the sovereigns, dragon-blooded sorcerers claim their magics are more potent and their draconic traits more prominent in Xa Hoi. Among Tian-Dan, Tian-Tang, nagaji, and all others of the Xa Hoian population, these sorcerers are held in high regard, serving as government officiants, augers, and protectors. A child born with such talents is considered a tremendous boon and is destined for greatness in service to Xa Hoi.

As the citizenry is impressed with a strong sense of national duty and long-honored martial tradition, voluntary military service is held as a high mark on an individual's reputation. None are turned away; there's always a place and purpose to suit any ability and skill. Service is so ubiquitous among Xa Hoians that societal pressure nearly undercuts the volunteer aspect. Those who don't serve are often met with disdain and ostracized. Dragon's blood runs through the hearts of Xa Hoians, and any appearance of selfish self-interest or betraying the oaths every citizen takes while undead abominations, devastating kaiju, and roving pirates threatens the country is unfathomable.

Just as they begin their adolescence, Xa Hoians are invited to a ritual endorsing them as citizens. In this ritual, through incense smoke and consciousness-heightening teas, they're recognized by the first Xa Hoian empress, Pham Toan Nguyen. After each swearing fealty to the other, the young citizen is allowed one question of the empress. After, they're to never share the question nor the answer. Some challenge this blatant indoctrination at such a young age, but none doubt that it's the long-dead sovereign they meet. Once recognized as citizens, the young are traditionally sent to live with extended family in various disparate parts of Xa Hoi. A new branch of family receives them every few years, a practice established to strengthen the bonds between Xa Hoi's tribes early in their imperial alliance, now promoted as an opportunity to expose children to a deep wealth of experience at a young age. This itinerancy is expected to carry through to adulthood as many join military service and then continue to travel throughout the nation, spreading Xa Hoi's roots as wide as they are deep. Few spend any more than five years in any given area, the itch to find the next thing difficult to resist. Some detractors point this inclination out as another tool of instilling nationalism in the young, stymieing local organized opposition to the government through encouraging citizens not to settle in any one place too long as adults.



Swimming and learning to navigate the rivers with cutters is an invaluable skill for moving around the nation. If unable to take to the water, Xa Hoians are in danger from the rivers and of never traveling far outside the comfort of their family home. The community often constructs cutters together and gifts them to its members as they reach adulthood; many are made with such care and honed generational expertise that they'll last a lifetime. It's said only once the keel of a cutter cracks should a Xa Hoian begin to consider settling down. Xa Hoians are such strong masters of the current that they can sail their cutters down the lava tubes that run through the Clicking Caverns below—provided their boat and their skin can hold up to it. Despite this command of the Clicking Caverns' courses, the digging of water wells is largely taboo among the people. For centuries, sinkholes have appeared and overflowed with haunted clockworks, terrorizing Xa Hoi, and few wish to tempt fate by digging deep holes of their own.

From the coast to the mountains, Xa Hoian fashion's form and function have been tailored to the climate. Tight tunics and short cuffed pants are traditional labor attire that wick away sweat, with slung sashes of decorative fabric serving as versatile carrying belts and bags for sundry and tools. Long, billowing robes with pocketed pants deep enough to hide a short spear maintain a buffer of cool air against the warm humidity of Xa Hoian nights. Headscarves or turbans are a great point of pride, wrapped into intricate weaves and drapes. Color is especially important to Xa Hoians because of their primarily nocturnal lifestyle. The bright, iridescent pastel pinks, greens, blues, and golds help them to stand out in the darkness, catching the light of their bioluminescent plants and magic lamps.

Rather than jewelry, Xa Hoians accessorize with tattoos and scarification. More hard-skinned and scaled individuals opt for engraving or have entire scales pigmented to make a unique mosaic design. The ornamentation is especially prolific among the rich, achieving a dignified look in Xa Hoian fashion. Court officials and career military service members have a long, strict tradition of face tattoos. The current trends are philosophical proverbs and mythical animals enchanted to move or glow. Markings resembling dragons are strongly frowned upon, but many will skirt this and get images of dragon's scales, have subdermal horn implants, and split their tongues if not possessed of such characteristics by blood.

The people of Xa Hoi practice all forms of art, but the humidity favors some forms more than others. Many famous watercolor paintings, parchment manuscripts, and soft textile art pieces have been lost, crumbling in the hands of their inheritors. Embossed hide canvas, statuary, relief engraving, and lacquer panel paintings are just as beautiful as their counterparts, but such works are more prominent in Xa Hoi's collections and stand taller in the minds of many due to their more persistent nature. Xa Hoian art pieces adorn the lavishly constructed temples and shrines dedicated to **General Susumu**, **Jin Li**, **Kofusachi**, **Lady**

Nanbyo, **Nalinivati**, **Shizuru**, and **the Dewangayaw**, and the memorials to Xa Hoian sovereigns that are prolific throughout the nation. These latter monuments aren't religious sites; the people don't view the sovereign dragons as gods, though their names are often spoken with more reverence than those of the gods. The practices honoring the sovereign dragons are just as devout, but it's a distinction Xa Hoians quickly and passionately point out.

With the torrential rain seasons, fresh water is mostly a nonissue, but problems with storage and a serious drought generations ago have instigated a research boom into desalinization facilities along the coast and atmospheric converters to harness the humidity inland.

GOVERNMENT

In the crucible of Xa Hoi, dragons rule. The official language of the nation's government is Draconic, and all official proceedings and documentation adhere to such, though colloquially Draconic, Tien, Nagaji, and Tang are all popularly spoken. The written law of Xa Hoi, by Empress Nguyen's, design, is curt and vague. In the opinion of Emperor Quan and each of his predecessors, such imprecision allows for more nuanced policy that could be adjusted as needed, rather than relying on millennia of precedent and tradition. In this age, Emperor **Pham Duc Quan** (page 247) sits as the current head of Xa Hoi's draconic monarchy. He lives to serve his nation, just as his 12 predecessors did, so much so that he knows the names of every living Xa Hoian citizen.



With the emperor's trust, court officials have the authority to facilitate matters under their jurisdiction by their best judgment of fairness. As supernatural as sovereign dragons might be, Emperor Quan can't rule alone. Cloisters of advisors, bureaucrats, diplomats, lobbyists, generals, admirals, spymasters, master spies, treasurers, guild chairs, tax collectors, and then some make up the court's officials. Each official bearing the dragon's seal, down to the smallest, most remote villages' headman and marshal, is selected by the Emperor himself. Their merits aren't always clear, but the sovereign's judgment isn't for his subjects to question.

Court propaganda says the Emperor can't die, and as such, no emperor has; each emperor abdicated, and Pham Duc Quan is the latest to take up the position in a peaceful transition. The ceremony takes place behind closed doors, only attended by the closest two advisors of the sitting sovereign. This secrecy, along with the fact that no Xa Hoian has seen the draconic form of a sitting sovereign in living memory and that the successors are completely unknown until their coronation, has made way for countless conspiracy theories.

Pham Lê Ngọc (exuberant male sovereign dragon general) is Pham Duc Quan's eldest sibling and Supreme Commander, holding the highest rank under the emperor himself. He's known for a joy for life that can seem excessive but that he proclaims to be an enlightened pursuit, though such has never interfered with his responsibilities or capacity as commander of the Xa Hoian host. He's currently on a quest to visit every single bar and food purveyor in Xa Hoi—when not on tour, of course.

Former Premier and personal confidant to Emperor Quan, **Ngo Thanh Nhien** (stern male human advisor) is the acting head of the **People's Reformation Order (PRO)**. The PRO is a political party advocating for restructuring Xa Hoi's government to a republic ministry with the imperial dragons as ceremonial heads of state advising the ministries, as opposed to directing them. This long, simmering sentiment was brought to a head with Nhien's apostasy, the prominent figure joining and lending legitimacy to the cause. Their main argument is that the sovereign dragons, as good and benevolent leaders as they are, take too long a view in their actions, trading today for tomorrow. Elves, dwarves, and gnomes, with life expectancies in the hundreds of years, are dismissive, but humans, orcs, ysoki, and others with shorter life spans who have lived under singular policies spanning generations have more sympathy toward the criticism.

Odisssssi is a famous dancing troupe from Nagajor playfully named for their specialty, renowned all across Xa Hoi, Nagajor, Tang Mai, and the larger Minata islands. Having performed for every seated emperor

since Xa Hoi's unification and for the leaders of many other nations for generations, they're an exhibition never to be missed. Their dance is said to make it seem as if the world is spinning and swaying, inebriating the audience without serving a single sip. No venue or event is too small for the Odisssssi, who dance for the love of the art—and possibly to work as spies for foreign powers, though no evidence to support such claims has ever been found.

Lam Anh Đào (ascetic female human mystic) is a monk who's allegedly immortal since achieving enlightenment millennia ago. She claims she visited heaven, only to find it a den of conceited egos, wanton excess, and fickle temperaments viewing mortals as little more than pets to provoke against one another. Since then, she has led a growing following that openly speaks against religion and the state that supports it. The group has carried out a number of attacks that are always claimed as the acts of radical individuals unsanctioned by Lam Anh Đào or her lieutenants.

CITIES AND LOCATIONS

The following are a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Xa Hoi.

Ngōn Hoa

Shadowing the confluence of two great rivers, Xa Hoi's capital city is a testament to architecture and engineering, with the illusion of simply floating above the waters given by stilts and suspended bridges. Buildings are narrow, deep, tall, and tightly packed in clusters networked by canals, bridges, and zip lines such that residents of Ngōn Hoa might claim they've lived entire lifetimes never setting foot to soil if they make the effort. Locals will even walk barefoot their whole lives, holding it as a mark of pride, and snicker at the soiled footwear of visitors.

Fort Hung

As if looking into a concave mirror, a city of artificial stalactites is carved into the ceiling of a reclaimed Clicking Caverns channel. Its architecture matches Xa Hoian style but with bizarre inconsistencies drafted from the twisted misremembering of the undead. Now layered with new architecture atop, the sprawl had been repurposed as the nation's forward operating base in their underground war, though the line of battle has since moved. Presently, primarily merchants and opportunists occupy Fort Hung, offering services to adventuring types.

Ship's Right

Ship's Right is a recent development in response to an imperial commission for the construction of a larger ocean fleet to challenge privateers along the coast and archipelago, as opposed to the more river-oriented sloops traditional in Xa Hoi. A dozen mountain islands were conjoined with bridges and scaffolding in an ambitious engineering project, converting them into one of the single largest shipyards in all of Tian Xia.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Nagajor and Xa Hoi have a strong bond through their united war efforts in the Clicking Caverns. Tang Mai has long been a friend, with many Xa Hoian dragon-blooded sorcerers studying in Tang Mai and many scholars being invited to Ngōn Hoa to investigate the increased potency of dragon-blooded sorcery in Xa Hoi. Xa Hoi and the Valash Raj have a mutual respect for one another, but they disagree on how to address the kaiju issue—a topic Xa Hoian officials aren't shy to bring up when the monsters cross the border and wreak havoc. Xa Hoi and Minata are usually copacetic. The Xa Hoian navy frequently crosses Minatan waters chasing pirates, and Xa Hoi's officials urge Minata to take a stronger stance against such raiders. Generous trade agreements with Tian Xia's Successor States supplement these relationships, keeping most of the continent on favorable terms with Xa Hoi.



PHAM LÊ NGỌC



NGO THANH NHIEN



LAM ANH ĐÀO

Xidao and the Oceans of Tian Xia

Nations

Xidao
Capital: Yashabaru
Government: Grand Council
Ruler: High Matriarch Urakadussi



Peoples

Adaros
Athamarus
Cecaelias
Dragons
Faydhaan
Ghosts
Grindylows
Krakens
Lutings
Merfolk
Spirits

Languages

Thalassic
Tien

Religions

- Abadar
- Daikitsu
- General Susumu
- Hei Feng
- Jin Li
- Nalinivati
- Qi Zhong
- Shelyn
- Srikalis, Sritaming, and Sribaril

Resources

- Alcohol
- Gems/ Jewelry
- Seafood
- Ships

THE WORLD BELOW THE WAVES

Under the tempestuous waters of the **Xidao Gulf** lie the largest aquatic settlements in all of Tian Xia: the alliance of Xidao. A league of over 50 distinct city-states joined together under a common banner, the aquatic confederation of Xidao in many ways defies classification. From colorful coral domes to ancient draconic palaces, the states of Xidao are as diverse as their populace. Yet the scenic waters of the gulf belie greater threats just beneath the surface, threats that have kept Xidao united for millennia, locked in a never-ending war.

Early Xidao society venerated sea dragons as their protectors and guardians, and the Age of Dragons saw a number of elaborate temples and opulent palaces built in their honor, most of which still stand today. It was also during the Age of Dragons that the developing underwater nations began war with one another. Ultimately, the sea dragons were said to have stepped in as mediators, encouraging the various underwater nations to live in peace and harmony—or, barring that, at least an uneasy truce.

Earthfall led to the expansion of Xidao, as well as the widening of the **Aya-Maru Trench** that ran through its territories. Once a minor valley avoided by superstitious locals but otherwise ignored, the trench grew to become a gaping wound that would cleave the gulf's floor in two. The dormant evils that lurked in Aya-Maru's deepest reaches were awakened, unleashing a plague of undead upon Xidao's denizens. Uniting against their common enemy, the various states organized themselves into a loose military alliance to strike back at their foe, pushing the army of unliving monstrosities back into the dark depths of Aya-Maru. Whatever lay at the bottom of the trench remained unpacified: from then on, the forces of evil contained in Aya-Maru would return year after year to wage war on the gulf's various settlements. As time passed, the undead army grew stronger and stronger, their ranks bolstered by the spirits of Xidao's restless dead. Ultimately, the confederation of Xidao would be officially founded, the various city-states of the gulf joining together in hopes of finding a solution, once and for all, to the threat of Aya-Maru. To this day, what lies at the bottom of Aya-Maru is cloaked in mystery. Numerous theories have been posited over the years, from enormous krakens to wrathful sea-liches, but the truth remains unknown. Though numerous scouts were sent to explore the trench floor over the centuries, none have ever returned—at least, while still alive.

Today, Xidao enjoys a flourishing economy powered by sea trade across the Xidao Gulf. This trade has made friendly allies of the nearby nations of **Kwanlai** and **Minkai**. Xidao likewise shares Kwanlai's healthy distrust of **Wanshou**. After all, many have speculated that the simultaneous emergence of the nation's kraken ruler and the widening of Aya-Maru are no coincidence.

GEOGRAPHY

The Xidao Gulf is as changeable as the winds, undergoing dramatic transformations throughout the year. During the warmer months, kelp forests sprout from the nutrient-rich depths, green fronds growing at astonishing speeds to reach up toward the calm, sunny shallows. These forests, along with Xidao's many coral reefs, provide a rich habitat for the gulf's vibrant ecosystems. On balmy, windless days, the water of the gulf can be clear enough for passing sailors to spot reefs and forests from the surface—along, of course, with the sprawling settlements and grand coral monuments that mark Xidao's largest cities.

The trench of Aya-Maru runs north-south along the center of the Xidao Gulf, loosely splitting Xidao territory into eastern and western halves. On the east side of the gulf lies **Yashabaru**, the official capital of Xidao, as well as **Uruuknus**, a historic city-state founded among the ruins of an ancient dragon palace. On the west side of the gulf lies **Pobashabla**, Xidao's "western capital" and the seat of its military. The depths of Aya-Maru are the deepest points in



HIGH COMMANDER SAWTOOTH

TIAN XIA WORLD GUIDE
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HISTORY
THE IMPERIAL DRAGONS
FACTIONS
RELIGION
BACHUAN
CHU YE
DARKLANDS
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HONGAL
HWANGGOT
JININ
KAOLING
KWANLAI
LINGSHEN
LINVARRE
MINATA
MINKAI
NAGAJOR
PO LI
QUAIN
SHANGUANG
SHENMEN
SONGBAI
TANG MAI
TIANJING
VALASH
WANSHOU
XA HOI
XIDAO
ZI HA
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the gulf, and the shallower regions of the trench are rumored to harbor vast sinkholes which lead to a labyrinthine network of underground caverns; such caverns often play home to outlaws and criminals who seek to escape from the authorities, if they can survive the undead onslaught at their gates. The waters surrounding Aya-Maru are a chilling dead-zone, a stark contrast to the vibrancy of the rest of the gulf. From skeletal whales to ghostly sharks, undead sea creatures prowl the waters around the sinister trench, seeking out hapless prey.

The waters of the Xidao Gulf are also irrevocably marked by the **Tempest**, an inhospitable zone of constant storms that migrates across the sea, seemingly at random. In the eye of the storm lies the **Azure Serpent**, an ancient sea dragon whose unending grief over her son's untimely death fuels the fierce maelstrom. Furthermore, travel through the Xidao Gulf has been made significantly more difficult in recent years due to a draconic insurgence. A small but powerful group of sea dragons have banded together to demand tribute and worship, creating thick areas of whirlpools and typhoons across crucial trade routes. The only way to quell these storms is through gaining the dragons' favor. Scattered throughout the gulf are a multitude of dragon towers, constructions of stone and mother-of-pearl where sailors can make offerings to sea dragons in the hopes of being granted a temporary reprieve from the gulf's unpredictable storms.

Yet despite these dangers, the gulf is frequented by traders and adventurers alike. Many hope to strike it rich by uncovering treasures from the elusive **wai-gaa**, dangerous and fragile "floating islands" that appear suddenly from the depths. Wai-gaa vanish as quickly as they appear, collapsing in on themselves in a few minutes with enough force to suck even the strongest of swimmers down toward the ocean floor. These ephemeral islands bear buried sediments and forgotten treasures up from the seafloor to the surface of the water—along with the bones of the dead, who rarely take kindly to being disturbed.

A DAY IN XIDAO

The numerous city-states of Xidao each have their own daily routines, in large part influenced by the depth at which their city has been built.

The cities of **Eastern Xidao** reside mostly in shallow, clear waters, where the light of the sun easily makes it through the sea to illuminate the intricate coral monuments and huge stone structures below the waves. As such, the trade-dependent states of Eastern Xidao follow a diurnal schedule comparable to those of most surface-dwellers. Workers wake up to the rising sun, craftspeople rushing to set up their booths at dawn, and by the time the sun is fully risen, colorful outdoor markets bustle with activity as merchants hawk their handmade wares. The cities of Eastern Xidao are known for their intricate beadwork

jewelry and remarkable mother-of-pearl inlays, with stalls full of beautiful artisan goods. The busiest centers of Xidao's underwater marketplaces are the raucous public auction houses, where locals bid frantically over items imported from surface nations: popular goods include ceramics, steel tools, and root vegetables. Throughout the day, couriers can be seen rushing to and from the local trade spires, hurrying to meet tight delivery deadlines and intercept passing merchant ships; many of them ride swift but docile aquatic mounts, from huge manta rays to giant eels.

Western Xidao settlements are considerably deeper underwater, located closer to the sinister threat of Aya-Maru. The trench seems to darken the water around it, with light penetrating the stormy surface waters for only a few hours at midday when the sun is at its peak. As such, Western Xidao cities are much less dependent on the cycle of the sun and can often be mistaken for nocturnal. Western Xidao cities lack the daytime boom of activity seen in Eastern Xidao cities; rather, citizens go about their day when they please, with a more or less equal amount of nocturnal and diurnal businesses. This spectrum of waking hours also serves the various barracks stationed in the western Gulf well, ensuring that guards will be available to patrol Aya-Maru's perimeter around the clock. The military presence in Western Xidao is unavoidable in the cities as well. Armed soldiers can often be seen on the streets, whether on or off duty. Throughout the day, craftsmen toil away at their work, though the majority of items produced in Western Xidao possess a decidedly more practical slant when compared to the artistic, ornamental goods of Eastern Xidao. After all, the barracks of Western Xidao are always in need of new weapons and armor.

Most locals break for a meal twice a day. Active trade with surface-dwelling nations provides Eastern Xidao with a cornucopia of delicacies. Wealthier families tend to eschew meat in favor of the exotic fruits and vegetables grown on land, while less well-off citizens subsist mostly on kelp fruits and seaweed wraps. Seasonings are also in high demand, though the aquatic environment makes powders and sauces useless—instead, cooks imbue their food with flavor by adding small amounts of whole spices and herbs directly into their dishes. While most Eastern Xidao citizens frown upon the consumption of fish, Western Xidao locals have no such qualms. Shellfish is a staple food in Western Xidao, with chefs taking great pride in the freshness of their catches. Scallops, oysters, and giant clams are often eaten raw, served with thin slices of zesty sea mustard.

Finally, as the sun sets and the midnight waters grow cold, most Xidao locals retreat to the comfort of their homes, retiring to their spherical "bubble beds" lined with plush sea sponges. Eastern Xidao cities have relatively little in the way of nightlife, though late-night pubs and casinos can be found in almost every Western Xidao city. There, locals can sip fermented beverages from sealed, waterproof pouches and place bets on the next day's seal races—a popular pastime, albeit one that has bankrupted many.

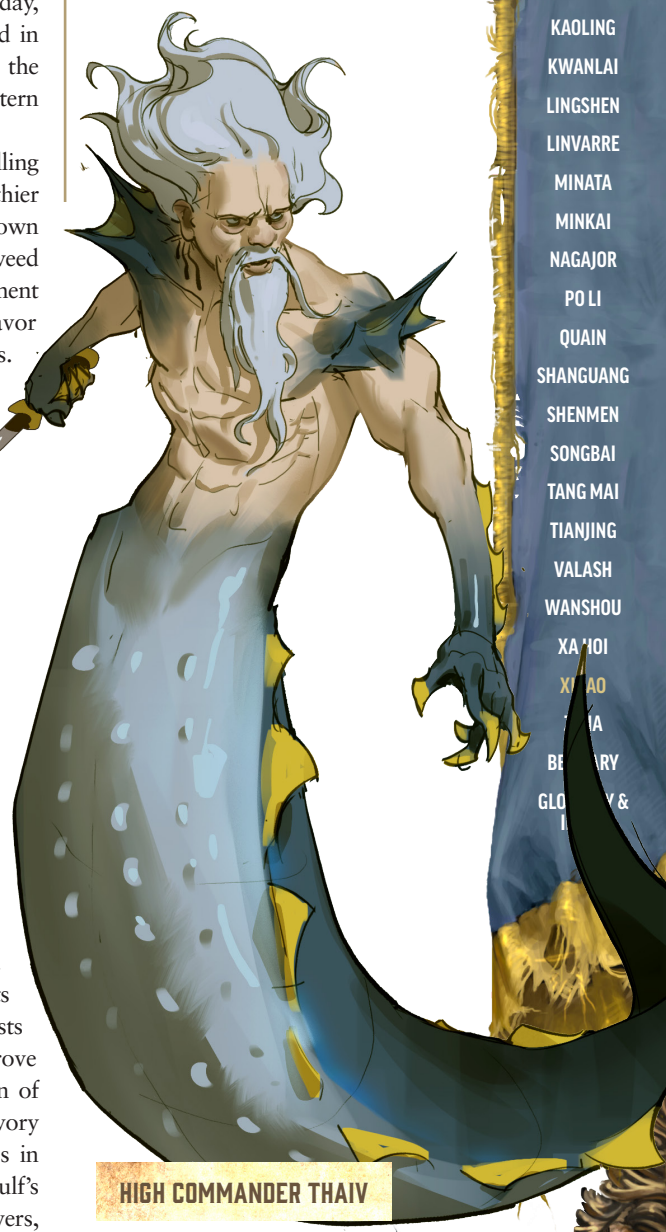
A YEAR IN XIDAO

The denizens of Xidao divide the year into three main seasons, each of which bring with it unique changes to the ecology of the waters of the Xidao Gulf. The late summer and early autumn bring with it the **Season of Storms** and its sudden squalls and heavy rains. These storms wreck havoc on the kelp forests beneath Xidao's waters, sweeping away the thick fronds, but they also prove deadly to would-be travelers looking to cross the Xidao Gulf. The Season of Storms provides a bountiful harvest every year to Mewru's less-than-savory scavengers, who diligently pick through the wrecks of sunken trade ships in hopes of striking it rich. Sailors who insist on making their way across the gulf's waters can purchase temporary protection at Xidao's numerous dragon towers,

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Xidao Thalassic vowels are almost always short, and double vowels are pronounced twice with a slight glottal stop (or guttural "h" sound) between them. R's can be rolled or trilled in certain dialects. Stressed syllables tend to occur near the end of words.

Yashabaru: yah-shah-bah-ROO
Pobashabla: po-bah-SHAH-blah
Mewru: miu-ROO
Uruuknus: ooh-rooh-ook-NOOSE
Aya-Maru: ah-yah mah-ROO
Urakadussi: ooh-rah-kah-doo-SEA
Wai-Gaa: why gah-AH



HIGH COMMANDER THAIV

where offerings of precious metals and magical items can sway a sea dragon to grant a ship safe passage.

Though the surface is balmy and warm, the shallow waters are at their coldest during this season. The combination of stormy and chilly weather sends the trade-dependent cities of Eastern Xidao into a kind of hibernation, with the activity of its normally bustling markets slowing to a crawl. Yet as this season draws the most intruders out from the depths of Aya-Maru, Western Xidao is on highest alert during this time, the atmosphere of its militaristic cities is drawn taut with tension. Simultaneously, many religious festivals take place during this time, and the season is sacred to followers of the storm god, **Hei Feng**.

After the Season of Storms comes the longest season of the year, the **Season of Change**. Spanning the months between late autumn and early spring, the Season of Change is a transitory period between the cold, tempestuous Season of Storms and the warm, languid Season of Tranquility. After the decimation of kelp forests during the Season of Storms, sunlight makes its way into the depths again, spurring on a new wave of kelp growth. Kelp farmers harvest tender kelp sprouts at this time, a local delicacy. This is also prime fishing season. Schools of fish can often be found near the surface, feasting on the first algae blooms of the season. Winds whip across the surface of the sea, dredging up waters from the deep and bringing them back to the shallows. The water temperature can change quickly and unpredictably, spurred on by the strong currents. Buried treasures and forgotten bones are sometimes uncovered by these currents, shifting sediments floating to the surface to form wai-gaa, the short-lived "floating islands" that draw countless curious scholars and adventurers alike. The Season of Change is associated with new life, adventures, fortuitous meetings, and love. Appropriately, the western city-state of Pobashabla hosts an annual **Serpent's Ball** during this season, a courtship festival associated with Nalinivati where those looking for love can mingle and socialize while enjoying free food and plentiful drink.



Late spring marks the arrival of the **Season of Tranquility**, during which the mercurial waters of the Xidao Gulf calm. Kelp forests reach maturity, their thick fronds reaching toward the sky. Despite its relaxed name, it's during the Season of Tranquility that many of Xidao's city-states are at their busiest. The calm waters make it a popular time for merchants from abroad to frequent Xidao's many trade spires. Furthermore, as attacks from Aya-Maru are rarest during this season, Western Xidao's barracks take advantage of the peace to pour vast amounts of resources into the recruitment and training of new soldiers during this time. Many large-scale events are also held during this season, the largest of these being the **Festival of Arts**, a week-long fair hosted by the temples of **Shelyn**. Throughout the week, exhibitions and competitions of all kinds draw huge crowds to the historic city of **Uruuknus**. The festival aims to celebrate fine craftsmanship, skilled performers, and beauty in all of its manifold forms. Diplomatic meetings are also held during this season, the most notable of which is the yearly Convocation of the Grand Council at Xidao's capital, **Yashabaru**.

Culture

Geography and a long history of cooperation has left profound trends in Xidao, even as individual city-states continue to build their own identities.

The East-West Divide

Long divided by the massive trench of Aya-Maru, Western and Eastern Xidao have slowly developed their own unique traditions over time. Travel between the two halves of the gulf, though time-consuming, is not particularly difficult, yet this cultural divide has made migration between Eastern and Western Xidao relatively rare.



Eastern Xidao is an economic powerhouse dominated by merchants, artists, and politicians. The core of Xidao's economy is reliant on the trade centers of Yashabaru and Uruuknus, two of the only cities in the gulf to have major structures above water to facilitate large-scale trade and idea exchange. Yashabaru is also the diplomatic hub of the confederacy and the seat of Xidao's government, where the members of the Grand Council convene yearly to discuss gulf-wide matters. With the high volume of travelers and traders passing through the cities, Eastern Xidao is generally more open to outsiders and relatively diverse in population: athamarus, merfolk, cecaelias, lutings, and even the occasional grindylow are regular sights. Temples to Shelyn, Daikitsu, and Abadar are particularly common on the eastern side of the gulf, with Qi Zhong enjoying a healthy degree of veneration in the scholarly city of Uruuknus, which houses Xidao's main magical academy. Uruuknus also houses the remnants of Xidao's dragon cults, ancient lineages who worship the sea dragons and believe that draconic blood runs in their veins. The settlements of Eastern Xidao have coexisted peacefully with one another for centuries, and Eastern Xidao enjoys a sense of unity and common identity that makes travel between its various city-states relatively smooth.

Western Xidao, on the other hand, is made up of an assortment of city-states that would be at each other's throats in an instant if not for their mutual goal of keeping the evils of Aya-Maru at bay. Most of the western city-states have athamaru majorities, though adaros, cecaelias, and lutings are not uncommon—particularly in Western Xidao's two major cities of **Pobashabla**, Xidao's imposing "western capital" and the seat of its military, and **Mewru**, an outcast state overrun by pirates, rogues, and scavengers. Hei Feng is revered in almost every settlement of Western Xidao, alongside Nalinivati, General Susumu, and deified folk heroes. There are also a few fringe cults that are said to worship the dark powers lurking at the bottom of Aya-Maru, though this rumor has been fiercely denied by Western Xidao officials.

In a stark contrast to Eastern Xidao, the settlements of Western Xidao are openly distrustful of surface-dwellers and outsiders. Despite this, Western Xidao is just as reliant on trade as Eastern Xidao, as most of its underwater settlements lack the capability to forge steel weapons and armor in large quantities. Above-water forges in trade spires do exist, as do crucibles connected to underwater geothermal vents, but both of these are rare. Instead, underwater smiths create copper-plated weapons, tools, and armor, using domesticated electric eels to fuse thin coatings of metal onto carved stone bases. Visitors walking by these smithies may be startled by the occasional flashes and loud zaps that can be seen and heard throughout Western Xidao cities, mistaking them for underwater lightning storms. Mount trainers also enjoy a great deal of prestige in Western Xidao, breeding and taming giant moray eels, sharks, and other aquatic beasts for military use.

The city-states of Eastern and Western Xidao have a relatively rocky relationship. The denizens of Eastern Xidao are sometimes accused of being too "soft," enjoying their comfortable, cushy lives while Western Xidao puts itself on the line to ensure their safety. On the other hand, residents of Eastern Xidao condemn Western Xidao for cooperating with the bandit state of Mewru, enabling crime and harboring known fugitives.

Fashion and the Arts

Surrounded by the flourishing coral reefs of their gulf home, the inhabitants of Xidao are enamored with vivid colors and eye-catching patterns. Woven fabrics are used extensively, most of them created from hardy aquatic plant fibers. Most clothing is loose-fitting, with light, shimmering sleeves billowing out in the water to mimic fins and scales. Tattoos and piercings are both extremely popular among Xidao residents, with tattoo artists and jewelers dedicating their lives to mastering their crafts. Ostentatious jewelry is common among the well-off, from hammered gold bangles to elaborate mother-of-pearl necklaces. Intricate carvings of silver and bone are especially popular among Xidao's soldiers, who collect them as protection charms against the evil magic of Aya-Maru. The truly wealthy wear strings of black pearls. One of Xidao's most valuable exports, black pearls can only be harvested in the waters of the north, dangerously close to Aya-Maru.

Xidao cities are also a hot spot for arts, crafts, and culture. Touring performance troupes enjoy great popularity in Xidao settlements, putting on shows and concerts in the late afternoon after the markets have closed for the day. Xidao's graceful, synchronized dance teams are especially well-known. Performers don silken costumes with long, flowing sleeves and colorful ribbons, both of which leave beautiful trails of color behind them as they spin and dance through the water. Demonstrations of physical prowess also draw sizable crowds—Pobashabla in particular hosts an annual martial arts tournament that attracts skilled warriors from all corners of the aquatic nation.



LUONG PHUNG

Language

Xidao as a whole has its own unified system of writing used to represent most languages spoken within the area. As opposed to the ideographic system of traditional Tien writing, the Xidao writing system is phonetic, designed around the particular idiosyncrasies of underwater life. In the depths of Tian Xia's deepest waters, it can be difficult—or, indeed, unnecessary—for denizens to differentiate between the directions of up, down, left, or right. The script is designed to be able to be read from any direction, lacking a true "upside-down" or "right-side up." Consonants are written in a cursive-like manner, with each "letter" connected to the next in an unbroken line. Vowels are denoted by a system of dashes, dots, and accent marks etched on one side of the consonant-line. While outsiders find the system confusing, Xidao locals swear by it; though most Xidao natives can speak Tien without issue, the ability to read Tien is relatively uncommon, except among the traders, scholars, and diplomats who routinely deal with surface-dwellers. Most Tien documents are transcribed phonetically into Xidao script for this reason, so as to be accessible to the common public. Each of the city states of Xidao has a distinct local dialect. Eastern Xidao dialects are famed for their melodic, sing-song quality, embellished with different pitched purrs at the end of sentences that can change a sentence's tone. Western Xidao is known for the idiosyncratic clicks and whistles used in many of its largest dialects, with origins in soldiers' long-distance communication.

Government and Important Faces

The confederacy of Xidao as a whole is governed by a **Grand Council**, made up of representatives from each of Xidao's individual city-states, usually their

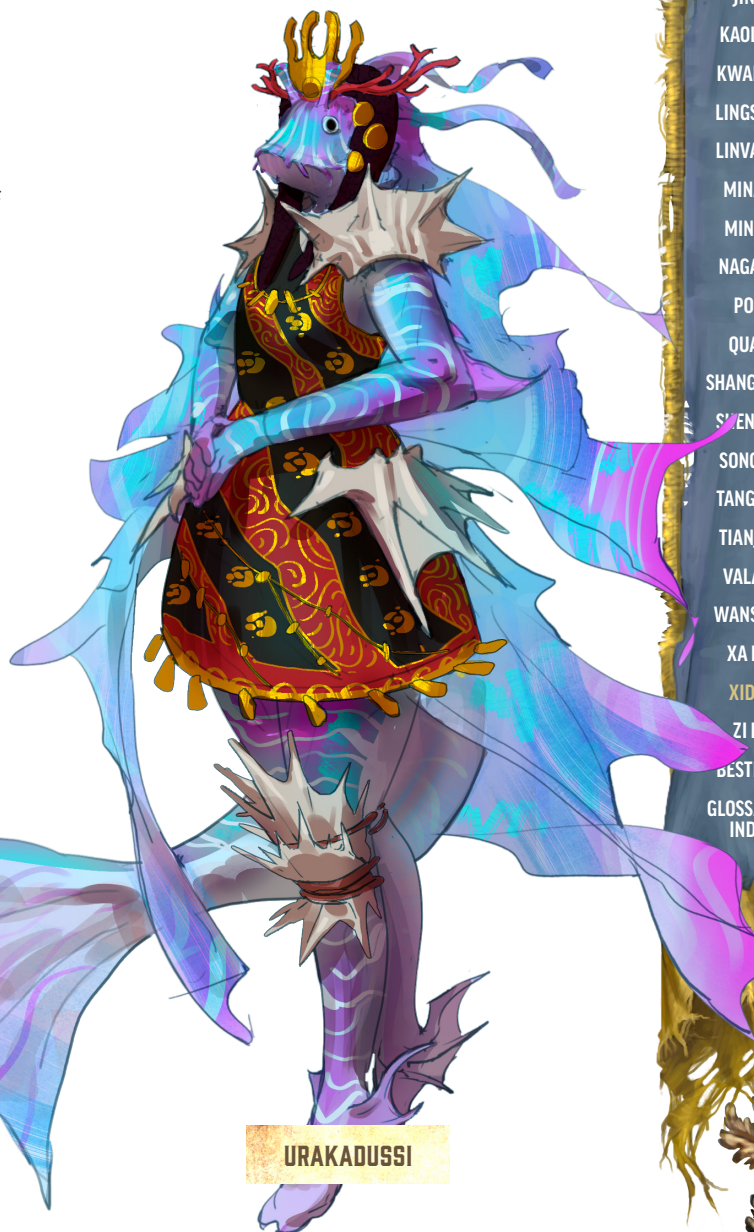
leaders. They have a yearly meeting in Yashabaru, a lofty but celebratory occasion during the Season of Tranquility known as the **Convocation of the Grand Council** (or the Convocation, for short). Most decisions that concern the entirety of Xidao are decided by the Grand Council, though it tries not to interfere with the business of individual city-states unless absolutely necessary, with lower-level and local decisions left to the discretion of the state's leaders. Individual states are governed in a variety of ways, from absolute monarchies to constitutional republics.

A **High Matriarch**, who presides over the Council's proceedings and serves as the primary diplomatic face of Xidao, is elected from the Council's members and serves until a majority vote of no-confidence is passed to replace them. The title of "High Matriarch" has traditionally been used regardless of the gender of the elected official—though historically most of Xidao's leaders have been female, as traditional athamaru settlements were usually governed by a matriarch, the elder of the settlement's reigning clan. As settlements have grown to exceed a single clan and non-athamaru peoples have become increasingly common, this has shifted, though regardless, the status of women in Xidao society remains relatively high. The current leader of the Grand Council is High Matriarch **Urakadussi** (mystic female athamaru oracle), a native of Uruuknus whose family is rumored to have ties to the city's mysterious dragon cults.

The other notable unified "face" of Xidao is its collective army, whose forces hail from all corners of the Xidao Gulf. Its central base is stationed near Pobashabla, where soldiers are trained year-round to take part in the endless defense against Aya-Maru's threats. Some Xidao city-states institute a period of mandatory military service for all citizens, though this is a controversial and highly contested policy. The army is jointly led by two High Commanders; the current leaders of Xidao's military are High Commander **Thaiv** (principled male merfolk marshal) and High Commander **Sawtooth** (inspiring female ocean giant cavalier) who hail from Western and Eastern Xidao, respectively. The fact that neither of Xidao's current High Commanders are athamarus is a sore spot among some traditionalists, but both have striven to prove their skill and loyalty on the battlefield.

Over the course of Xidao's lengthy history, sea dragons have served as impartial arbiters between Xidao's many nations, revered for their power and wisdom. Legends have it that some dragons even took human form and guided the development of early Xidao society, while others were respected or worshipped as nobles and rulers of the sea. Uruuknus, one of Eastern Xidao's largest city-states, was notably established around an ancient dragon palace, a grand structure that now serves as the city's magic academy. After Xidao's many nations united as one to combat the assaults from Aya-Maru, the sea dragons largely retreated from mortal society, content to let the fledgling confederacy develop on its own terms as they turned their attentions to the burgeoning conflict between their own kind and the underworld dragons to the south. Many can still be found across Xidao, though sea dragons today tend to keep to themselves, pursuing their own private agendas.

One lineage of sea dragons, descended from the ancient "royal" line of sea dragons which once ruled over Xidao's residents and aided in the creation of Xidao society, still resides near the ancient capital of Uruuknus and occasionally participates in diplomatic or governmental decisions. Many of the ocean's less scrupulous sea dragons, however, have taken up residence near Mewru. These prideful sea dragons eschew the traditional arrangement of accepting dragon tower offerings in exchange for safe passage. They instead strike deals with pirates and scavengers, sending winds and storms to sink unsuspecting trade ships in exchange for a portion of the spoils and reverent worship of the raiders



URAKADUSSI

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who depend on them. In most of Xidao, however—with the notable exceptions of Mewru and Uruuknus—the worship of sea dragons has waned, with deities like Hei Feng taking their place in city temples across the gulf. This has led to increasing tension between Xidao and its past protectors in recent years, with some sea dragons enraged at the loss of the respect once afforded to them.

The ancient sea dragon Luong Phung, known by most only as the **Azure Serpent** (page 15), is the heart of Xidao's Tempest. Her only child was killed by a Tian sailor—the circumstances around that death have been muddied by rumors and mistellings, but most agree that the death was unintentional, a tragic or foolish accident. Ever since, the Tempest has raged across the gulf, a small but deadly area of whirling winds and unending storms that moves incessantly across the water as Luong Phung roams the sea, unable to move past her all-encompassing grief. Any sailors unfortunate enough to find themselves in her vicinity will likely be ripped apart by storms, her unquenchable sorrow strong enough to whip the winds and lash the seas.

Cities and Locations

The following are a sample of some of the prominent locations that can be found in Xidao.

Yashabaru

The largest of Xidao's city-states, Yashabaru is the confederacy's gleaming capital. With kaleidoscopic dome-shaped buildings and famed coral-and-glass towers that breach the surface of the Xidao Gulf, Yashabaru serves as the captivating face of Xidao, its center of diplomacy and government. Every year, the Convocation of the Grand Council is held in the city, bringing together the leaders of Xidao's numerous city-states to address gulf-wide issues and vote on future policies. To facilitate diplomacy with surface nations, Yashabaru is one of Xidao's only city-states to have above-water structures, from conference halls to guest housing for visiting dignitaries. The city is steeped in an undertone of politics and decorum, an atmosphere that other city-states sometimes criticize as elitist. Temples devoted to Abadar and Daikitsu are common here, owing to the high volume of merchants and craftsmen. Yashabaru is one of the most diverse of Xidao's city-states: athamarus make up around only half of the city's population.

Pobashabla

Often referred to as Xidao's "western capital," the culture of Pobashabla is heavily colored by the city-state's huge military presence. Its proximity to Aya-Maru to the east and Wanshou on the west makes it an important strategic location, and it's in this city that most of Xidao's troops are housed and trained. Most outsiders assume that the city-state is dull and spartan, associating it with the strict and regimented nature of Xidao's military. In reality, the city-state is a flourishing cultural capital in its own right, with a variety of events and traditions that highlight the resilient, good-humored nature of the city's locals. Martial arts competitions and sports tournaments are popular, raucous events that draw large crowds and even larger bets. The annual courtship festival, the Serpent's Ball, attracts singles from across Xidao, all hoping to find their perfect match. Shrines devoted to the worship of Hei Feng are commonplace, along with those to General Susumu and Nalinivati.

To an outside observer, the western city-state may seem like one of Xidao's most orderly settlements, mostly owing to its heavy military presence—but tensions between the local populace and the increasing number of soldiers have been brewing for years. Residents accuse the military of encroaching steadily on the city, demolishing local landmarks and monuments to build new barracks and training facilities. In the shadowed alleys of Pobashabla, directly under the Xidao Army's nose, a separatist faction plots to take their city back from what they see as warmongering occupiers.

Uruuknus

A city-state established amid the remains of a vast draconic palace to the east of Aya-Maru, Uruuknus was once the ancient capital of Xidao, where the then-independent city-states would bring their concerns before the sea dragon court to seek guidance and mediation. To this day, the city retains its air of ancient tradition, home to Xidao's largest research archives and magical academies, whose studies seek to peer above the waves and into the lightless depths.

Most of the city's inhabitants worship the deities Shelyn and Qi Zhong, though Uruuknus is also known for its dragon cults: lineages who claim to have dragon blood in their veins and venerate certain sea dragons as their ancestors. These influential families have made recent controversial pushes toward reviving the state religion of sea dragon worship, aided by the High Matriarch herself. The controversy has only been made worse by the recent insurgency of a number of sea dragons demanding to be reinstated as gods, threatening Xidao's trade-dependent economy with summoned storms should their requests be denied. The dragon cults of Uruuknus have encouraged the confederacy to accept the dragons' demands, having already funded the construction of a number of new dragon temples in their own city.

Mewru

Located in northwestern Xidao, Mewru is sometimes known as the City of Pirates, a disorganized city-state infamous for harboring rogues, fences, and fugitives of all sorts. Taverns and gambling-houses litter the city-state's streets and are prime places for adventurers and mercenaries to find quick employment—so long as they don't mind running afoul of the law. The city-state is mostly tolerated because of their firm choke hold on Xidao's richest pearl-gathering waters. The black pearls exported by the city are prized by artisans and jewelers throughout Tian Xia.

By far the most profitable industry in Mewru is that of scavenging: scavengers sort through shipwrecks new and old, picking through the remains and appropriating any valuable goods as their own. Some have even partnered

with sea dragons, sinking entire trade fleets with magical storms before looting the wreckage. Officially, this behavior has been harshly condemned by Mewru's elected leaders, though action is rarely if ever taken to curb it. In exchange for these toothless policies, many of those very leaders have found their own pockets lined with ill-gotten goods.

Aya-Maru

In the centuries preceding Earthfall, the trench known today as Aya-Maru was a sacred Xidao burial ground. It was said to be a wound in the earth itself, one that led all the way down to the heart of the underworld. Bodies would be taken to the edge of the trench, their burial clothes lined with precious goods and offerings to appease the lords of the dead. There, heavy stones would be used to weigh down the bodies as they drifted down into the darkness of Aya-Maru and toward their eternal rest. For centuries, traversal of its depths was strictly forbidden, as it was believed that the spirits of the dead would follow the living back to the surface should their rest be disturbed. Over the years, evil entities of all sorts found shelter in the dark crevices of the trench's deepest reaches, biding their time and growing ever stronger.

After Earthfall, the disastrous widening of Aya-Maru spelled the beginning of a curse that would plague the city-states of Xidao for generations. To this day, the restless dead spill unceasingly from Aya-Maru's stone maws, raiding nearby settlements and slaughtering the living indiscriminately. Sinkholes of all sizes have also opened up along the sides of the trench, leading deep underground to a maze-like network of tunnels. Some of these tunnels eventually open into blistering hot caves connected to geothermal vents, where criminal organizations and bandit groups have taken up residence, taking advantage of their newfound ability to set up forges and craft deadly and profitable weapons. The deepest of these caves are mostly unexplored, as is the bottom of Aya-Maru itself. Some say that the depths of Aya-Maru are home to elder krakens and other huge, monstrous beasts—which have feasted on Xidao's dead for centuries before developing a taste for the living.

Trade Spires

The waters of the Xidao Gulf are dotted with huge coral towers, known to locals as trade spires. Doubling as ports and lighthouses, trade spires hold both underwater and above-ground levels where traders from Xidao can mingle with foreign traders, sailors, and other passersby. Most of the trading occurs above ground, with some less land-savvy Xidao craftsmen preferring to hire the services of an amphibious broker to peddle their wares. Xidao traders most often seek goods that can be difficult to acquire underwater. Popular goods include steel weapons, tools, or armor; ceramics; glassware; and produce such as fruits and vegetables—particularly tubers and other root vegetables, which are seen as exotic delicacies across the underwater nation.

Dragon Towers

Sailors looking to navigate across the Xidao Gulf during the Season of Storms would do well to leave offerings behind at the various dragon towers scattered throughout its waters. A far cry from the rough-hewn and sea-battered stone of local trade spires, dragon towers are imposing monuments built from smooth, carved marble, shining pillars that extend out from the surface of the water and reach toward the clouds. They mark the territory of a sea dragon and signal to travelers that the local dragon may be amenable to an exchange of goods and services. With a sufficiently valuable offering—and a fair degree of luck, considering the capricious whims of these regal creatures—a sea dragon may agree to calm the waters to ensure a ship's safe passage.

International Relations

Xidao holds a strong enmity toward Wanshou, which is gladly returned in kind. The underwater alliance is far more friendly toward other surface neighbors. Kwanlai is considered an ally, serving as Xidao's primary trade partner and sharing a mutual distrust of Wanshou. While Xidao's ties aren't as strong with Minkai, the two nations have traded amicably for generations.





Oceans of Tian Xia

One hundred years ago, **General Orphyrea Amanandar** set sail from Taldor, planning on finding a new land to rule on the far side of the world, only a few months before Aroden's death threw the Inner Sea region into chaos. Undaunted, she navigated through horrific storms, monster-haunted oceans, and the dangerous waters of the **Valashmai Sea** between the Valashmai region and **Sarusan**—a feat that many naval commanders would be proud of. Yet Orphyrea was only getting started. She sailed up the eastern coast of Tian Xia to find the land entangled in war; the fall of Imperial Lung Wa had left the mainland in chaos as countless successor states and recently freed nations fought for dominance. The general sailed her fleet between **Bachuan** and **Tianjing**, navigated the Sea of Ghosts, and finally made landfall in northern **Shenmen**. Her ships barely seaworthy, Orphyrea led her bedraggled army north along the banks of the **Gan Tzou River**, seizing territories and destroying enemies, until at last she reached the war-torn city of **Kamikobu**.

Tian Xia is surrounded by ocean waters except for its northern border at the feet of the **Wall of Heaven** mountain range. While the people of Tian Xia are aware of the existence of Avistan and other distant lands, the vast expanse of the **Okaiyo Ocean**, the perils of crossing the **Crown of the World**, and the shield of the Wall of Heaven work quite well to keep the Dragon Empires relatively isolated from the rest of Golarion. On Tian Xia's western shores lies the **Embaral Ocean**, with the Okaiyo Ocean to the East. The coast of Tian Xia is also bordered by several seas, including the **Ivory Sea** along its northwestern coast and the **Songil Sea** bordering its northeastern coast. To the south lies the Valashmai Sea, which separates Tian Xia from the much smaller **Sarusan** continent further south. Within Tian Xia, a shallow sea forms the **Xidao Gulf**, separating the peninsula of **Minkai** from mainland Tian Xia. **The Sea of Eels** and **Sea of Ghosts** are virtually landlocked in Tian Xia's interior, with only a series of rivers connecting them to the coast. Surrounding the continent of Tian Xia is a shallow extension of landmass known as the continental shelf. This shelf is only 100 fathoms (600 feet) deep compared to thousands of fathoms in the open ocean. The shelf becomes especially shallow to the southwest, giving rise to the **Minata archipelago** and its thousands of islands.

The oceans and seas surrounding Tian Xia have given the continent a long history of trade and exchange with its neighbors in the East and West, though strong currents along the coast and unpredictable wind conditions often makes transit to and from Tian Xia difficult, while also providing a protective buffer from hostile invaders for most of the year. Twice a year, in the spring and the fall, seasonal winds and currents rush

through the Embaral Ocean and bring life to the marine desert. Many ships—mainly trade vessels—launch their vessels the moment these first winds blow across the sea. In Tian Xia, the wind is called the **Wakening Wave**, and enormous, colorful silk kites are flown to celebrate the wind's return.

Any vessel straying too far into the churning sea of storms not only risks destruction from wind and wave, but also falling victim to a plethora of sea creatures. Sailors report a large population of fanatical adaros who relish the stormy weather. They also claim the sea is full of whirlpools—including one so wide witnesses cannot see its other side. Thus while the waters of the Valashmai Sea are filled with titanic creatures, its seabed is also littered with lost artifacts and treasures.

While the bulk of the Okaiyo Ocean's depths are opaque, they are by no means unpopulated. The ocean bustles with water deities, jaathooms, athamarus, merfolk, and ancestral spirits—a mythical submarine world that reflects the cosmopolitanism of its land populations.

EMBARAL OCEAN

Though it's the second smallest ocean, the Embaral boasts varied climates and a vibrant ecology. Whales are common in its waters, and their great migrations bring fleets of ships trailing behind them for the hunt. Most whaling takes place in northern waters, as the creatures are protected in the equatorial region by an ancient dragon turtle named **Calan** who attacks any whaling ship that enters his warm waters. Independent of the whales, the Embaral Ocean is a marine desert in the midst of living waters, stretching between Casmaron and western Tian Xia. Few fish swim through the region and the winds die down, leaving miles of glassy water pulsing with low swells.

Outside of this marine desert, strong currents move north and south along the shores of the continents. This pattern facilitates trade up and down the coasts of Tian-Xia, but presents difficulties for those wishing to cross the ocean east or west. Twice a year, in spring and autumn, the currents dig into the open ocean, stirring life into the marine desert and kicking up winds that make crossing the ocean through the middle more reliable. The seasonal winds last for several weeks, just long enough for an average trade ship to cross. Any delays can be fatal for a crew. The richest trade guilds can pay for weather-workers to journey with ships crossing the ocean on **Ylimancha's Wing**, but most traders can't afford this luxury. They must instead rely on the competency of the captain and crew, and hope that no unexpected issues stall the journey.

IVORY SEA

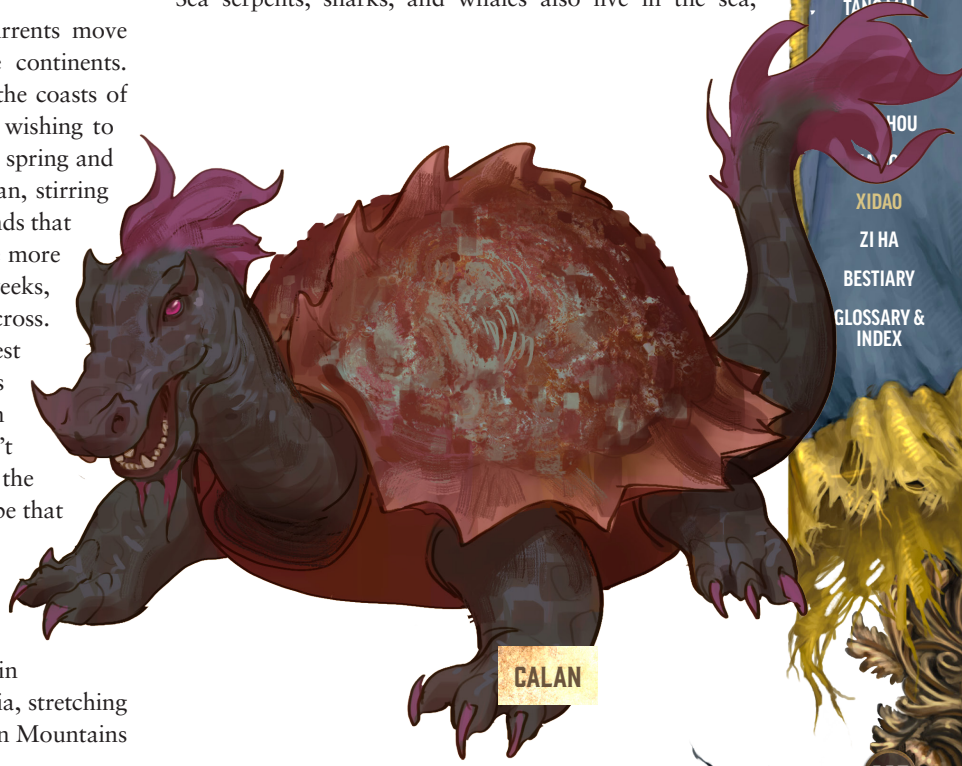
The Ivory Sea connects to the Embaral Ocean in the south and the Shining Sea in the west. The sea borders northwest Tian Xia, stretching below the feet of the northern Wall of Heaven Mountains to the southern shores of the Crown of the World. During much of the year, the Ivory Sea is covered by the **Tashen Yakuta** ice shelf. The sea is home to abundant sea life, including seals, walruses, and numerous species of whales, including the narwhal and beluga, also known as the "ivory whale" for its gleaming white skin. Many of these whales migrate north from the Embaral Ocean during the summer, while blue whales occasionally enter it from the **Shining Sea** to the west.

OKAIYO OCEAN

The Okaiyo Ocean connects the western coast of Arcadia with the eastern shores of Tian Xia. The majority of the Okaiyo Ocean is temperate water full of strong currents and stronger winds. While the seas are calm and few storms threaten these waters, the central expanse of the Okaiyo can be dangerous to travel. The winds are unpredictable and require an experienced and alert crew to harness properly and safely. Many a ship has been caught in a strong crosswind and demasted, leaving the ship hobbled or even dead in the water. There are also pockets of the ocean where the winds cease altogether, stranding ships in doldrums that can last days or weeks. Mercantile companies and wealthy nobles sponsor exploration fleets to sail the Okaiyo Ocean and chart its mysterious waters. One company, the **Red Kite Trading House**, offers a yearly purse to anyone who brings in a detailed report and map of trade channels to Arcadia.

SONGIL SEA

Many different types of fish inhabit the Songil Sea, swimming in fat schools up and down the coast. Fishermen have no lack of work on the peaceful waters, reeling in nets full of cod, pollock, salmon, and sablefish. Sea serpents, sharks, and whales also live in the sea,



CALAN

feasting on the rich reserves of fish, and are quick to guard their territory from land-dwellers. Grindylows, however, are the plague of the Songil Sea. These ferocious, sadistic creatures gorge themselves on the plentiful fish of the region, but even when their bellies are full, their thirst for mayhem remains. In general, the grindylows prefer to attack during inclement weather, using storms or fog to hide their presence. On the Songil Sea, storms are few and far between, and so the grindylows have learned to strike quickly when the lightest rain falls or thinnest haze of mist rises. Citizens of port towns on the edge of the Songil Sea refer to breaking storms as "grindylow weather."

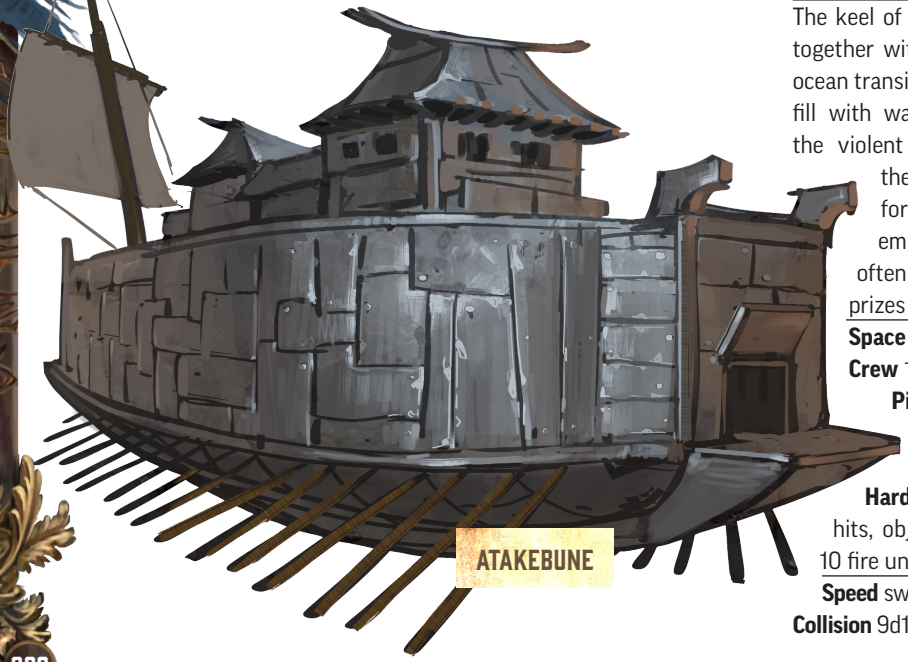
XIDAO GULF

This shallow sea known as the Xidao Gulf separates Minkai from mainland Tian Xia. It's frequented by superstitious fishermen and merchants, ever careful to pay homage to the creatures beneath. The shallow shores of the sea are home to a variety of sea life: crabs, lobsters and other sea creatures abound here and act as a draw to fishers. Xidao's pearls are famed throughout Minkai for their beauty, and divers often find black pearls of great value here.

Those who would travel upon or take resources from the Xidao Gulf are well advised to pay for the privilege, however, by placing an offering in one of the countless "trade spires" scattered atop reefs and atolls throughout. These stone obelisks feature numerous small shelves onto which offerings of ceramics, glass, gold, metal tools and weapons, and vegetables like tubers can be placed.

VALASHMAI SEA

Easily the most dangerous body of water in all Golarion, the Valashmai Sea is wracked with persistent storms and fantastic creatures. Its waters threaten the lives of any sailor who dares venture far from the coastline of southern Tian Xia. People crossing this violent sea must hug the southern coastline of Tian Xia if they hope to pass from the Okaiyo Ocean into the Embaral or Obari. Captains who have made the trip across the Valashmai Sea and back again have reported an azure heart to the sea, a stretch of water so intensely blue it seems painted. The waters here constantly churn, fed through some unseen source. Ships must skirt the azure expanse lest they attract the attention of the creatures who live in its waters. Seafarers who wish to venture into the Valashmai Sea or through to the lost lands of Sarusan must hire Valashmai pilots to do so successfully.


ATAKEBUNE

TIAN XIA SHIPS

ATAKEBUNE VEHICLE 11

HUGE

Price 4,000 gp

The structure of these gargantuan vessels is fully covered by iron. These vessels are akin to floating fortresses rather than true warships, and are typically used in coastal actions and for river blockades. They use oars for propulsion, as their full iron cladding, as well as their bulk, impedes propulsion via sails.

Many of these vessels are beautifully gilded with red and gold inlays across their iron cladding. This added weight only further contributes to their suspect stability.

Space 75 feet long, 30 feet wide, 30 feet high

Crew 1 pilot, 80 rowers; **Passengers** 60

Piloting Check Sailing Lore (DC 27), Diplomacy (DC 29), or Intimidation (DC 29)

AC 26; **Fort** +21

Hardness 20, **HP** 150 (BT 75); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Speed swim 30 feet (rowed)

Collision 8d10 (DC 27)

Sluggish This vehicle must move twice its length for each 90-degree turn it makes.

BAOCHUAN VEHICLE 13

GARGANTUAN

Price 8,000 gp

The keel of these vessels consists of wooden beams bound together with iron hoops to provide added stability during ocean transits. In stormy weather, holes in the prow partially fill with water when the ship pitches forward, lessening the violent turbulence caused by waves. Renowned for their seaworthiness, Baochuan were often chosen for transporting valuable treasure or important emissaries during stormy seasons. As such, they're often referred to as "treasure ships" and highly sought prizes by pirates.

Space 300 feet long, 50 feet wide, 40 feet high

Crew 1 pilot, 200 crew; **Passengers** 400

Piloting Check Sailing Lore (DC 31) or Nature (DC 33)

AC 29; **Fort** +23

Hardness 10, **HP** 250 (BT 125); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage; **Weaknesses** 10 fire until broken

Speed swim 30 feet (wind)

Collision 9d10 (DC 22)

DJONG — VEHICLE 15

GARGANTUAN

Price 17,000 gp

Djongs are immense multi-decked outriggers used by the Tian-Sing for transit within the Minata archipelago. Similar in design to the smaller karakoa, djongs have an open hull design that makes them very fast and exceptionally stable, capable of carrying hundreds of rowers on their decks, as well as a large woven triangular sail on a mast. The broad platforms on the djongs made them excellent for ferrying cargo, and their size and stability enabled them to host hundreds of warriors and their gear for transport. During peacetime, djongs are often used to host major celebrations and important weddings, with dignitaries bringing large entourages on their own djongs and then rafting up with other celebrants to form a floating village.

The size of the djongs is limited by the availability of the large timber required to form each of its twin hulls. Many of the giant trees suitable to build djongs have been harvested, making the surviving djongs even more valuable, with their overall length becoming a metric of status for their owners.

Space 250 feet long, 100 feet wide, 50 feet high

Crew 1 pilot, 400 rowers; **Passengers** 100

Piloting Check Sailing Lore (DC 34), Diplomacy (DC 36), or Intimidation (DC 36)

AC 32; **Fort** +26

Hardness 15, **HP** 280 (BT 140); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage; **Weaknesses** 15 fire until broken

Speed swim 50 feet (rowed, wind)

Collision 9d12 (DC 34)

Sluggish This vehicle must move twice its length for each 90-degree turn it makes.

GEOBUKSEON — VEHICLE 12

HUGE

Price 6,000 gp

These squat vessels are built with a protective shell-like covering on their deck rather than the open main deck design of most sailing vessels. The fully covered deck protects the vessel's 80 rowers and complement of 50 soldiers from arrows and incendiary weapons. In addition, this armored deck is covered with iron spikes to discourage enemies from attempting to board.

On the bow of the vessel is mounted a dragon head which can emit sulfur smoke to effectively hide its movement in close combat. Below the dragon head is mounted a large anchor with a wooden crest shaped like a face, and these can be used to ram into enemy ships.

Space 110 feet long, 35 feet wide, 40 feet high

Crew 1 pilot, 80 rowers; **Passengers** 50

Piloting Check Sailing Lore (DC 30), Diplomacy (DC 32), or Intimidation (DC 32)

AC 23; **Fort** +18

Hardness 20, **HP** 180 (BT 90); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Speed swim 30 feet (rowed, wind)

Collision 8d10 (DC 30)

Smoking Breath When the geobukseon Stops, it's concealed by the smoke for 1 round or until it next moves. The geobukseon can't use this concealment to Hide or Sneak.

Turtleback Spikes The roof of a geobukseon is difficult terrain and hazardous terrain. A creature that moves on the roof takes 1d6 piercing damage for every square of that area it moves into. Falling prone on the geobukseon's roof deals 5d6 piercing damage.

KARAKOA — VEHICLE 5

LARGE

Price 450 gp

Karakoa are large twin-hulled outriggers used by the Tian-Sing for transit within the massive Minata archipelago. Fast and sturdy, karakoa are distinct from other Tian vessels in that they're equipped with platforms for transporting warriors and fighting at sea. During peacetime, they're also used as trading ships, able to carry goods and passengers. While capable of crossing oceans, their open hull design may perform poorly during rough seas as breaking whitecaps could swamp the craft.

Space 80 feet long, 40 feet wide, 30 feet high

Crew 1 pilot, 20 rowers; **Passengers** 20

Piloting Check Sailing Lore (DC 20) or Athletics (DC 22)

AC 17; **Fort** +12

Hardness 10, **HP** 70 (BT 35); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage; **Weaknesses** 10 fire until broken

Speed swim 40 feet (rowed, wind)

Collision 5d8 (DC 20)



GEOBUKSEON



Zi Ha

Nations

ZI HA
Capital: Sangpo-Jong
Government: Joint Secular and Religious Rulership
Rulers: Tian Zenwyn and Gyalto Tulku



Peoples

Giants
Hobgoblins
Humans
Samsarans
Xulgaths

Languages

Hongali
Jotun
Samsaran
Tien

Religions

Pharasma
Phi Deva
Qi Zhong
Shelyn
Shizuru
Tsukiyo
Yamatsumi

Resources

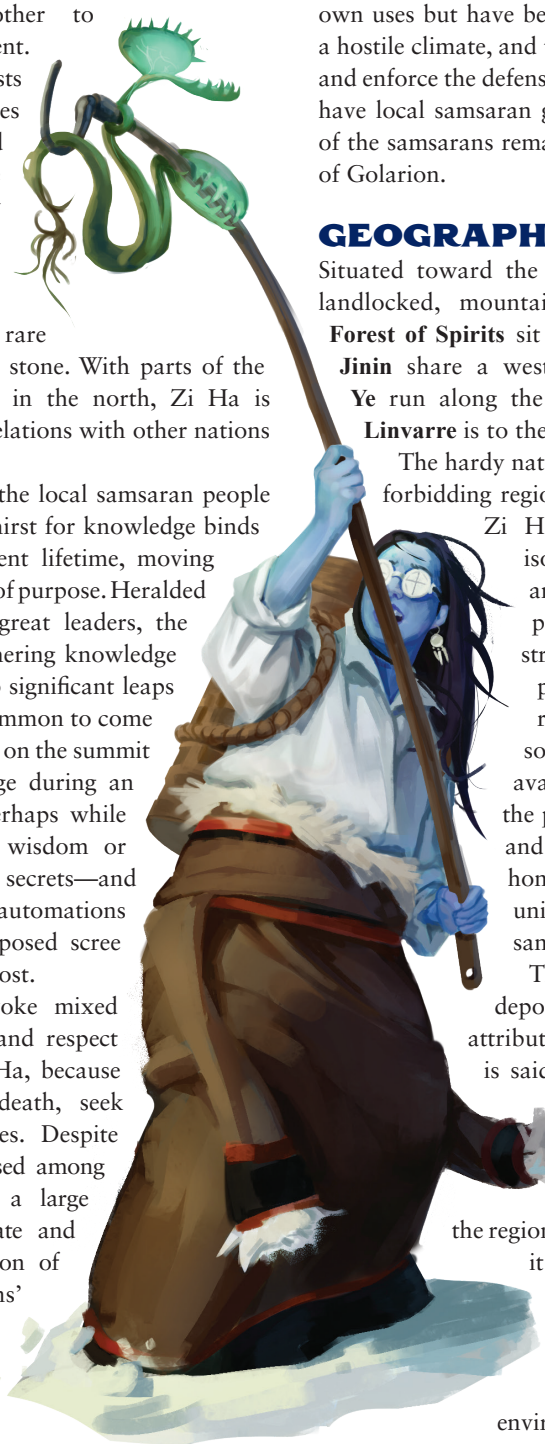
Alcohol/ Drugs
Books/ Lore
Gems
Livestock
Medicine
Stone
Technology/ Automatons

SACRED LAND OF REINCARNATION

Knowledge is mightier than the sword, so to infinity we shall seek it. This is in our blood.

—Karakorai, great Samsaran alchemist

The formidable mountain nation of Zi Ha, the traditional homeland of the reincarnated **samsarans**, also harbors vast, bleak stretches of metamorphic jade that shields its inhabitants from ill-intended visitors. The small fortified villages of diverse Tians, formed from mountaineering expeditions, herders, miners, or adventurers, have developed strong customs of internal trade and hospitality with one another to survive the hostile environment. Communal foraging outposts and reliably dispersed tea houses ensure the frost-hardened society of Zi Ha sees ample activity, as members of every village gather to spearhead a roc hunt, herd imugi, fortify against encroaching ogres, or mine for **Tsukiyo jade**, a rare manifestation of the precious stone. With parts of the nation relatively inaccessible in the north, Zi Ha is pushed to maintain positive relations with other nations within and outside Tian Xia.



To the residents of Zi Ha, the local samsaran people hold legendary status: their thirst for knowledge binds their soul beyond their current lifetime, moving forward a never-ending wheel of purpose. Heralded as innovators, oracles, and great leaders, the samsarans' proclivity for gathering knowledge has allowed Zi Ha to develop significant leaps in technology. It's not be uncommon to come across an intimate Tian village on the summit of a forsaken mountain range during an expedition or pilgrimage—perhaps while seeking out a sky dragon's wisdom or an underworld's dragon's secrets—and encounter giant nocturnal automations that can maneuver steep, exposed scree and are fortified against the frost.

The samsaran people invoke mixed feelings of fear, inspiration, and respect by various neighbors of Zi Ha, because of their abilities to defy death, seek knowledge, and heal diseases. Despite many samsarans living dispersed among the continent of Tian Xia, a large percentage of them reincarnate and reside in the foreboding nation of Zi Ha. Tales of the samsarans' origins describe humans from the legendary, lost village of **Jariha** in northern Zi Ha, struck by a new and undocumented disease that spread quickly and had lethal outcomes. This small group of humans searched far and wide to discover a cure and happened upon a pure wellspring, **Lake Manamovar**. Drinking from this spring not only rejuvenated the humans, but changed their souls to become eternal. Upon their deaths, they reincarnated into the current form of the samsarans: translucent blue-skinned humanoids who remember fragments of their past lives and who are focused on the overarching goal of enlightenment, however many lifetimes it takes.

Mercenaries and treasure hunters have tried to steal the magical healing properties of samsaran blood for their own uses but have been waylaid by powerful illusions, a hostile climate, and the scavenging beasts that confuse and enforce the defensive retreat of Zi Ha. Unless parties have local samsaran guides, the traditional sanctuaries of the samsarans remain protected secrets from the rest of Golarion.

GEOGRAPHY

Situated toward the north of Tian Xia, Zi Ha is a landlocked, mountainous region. **Hongal** and the **Forest of Spirits** sit to its north, while **Kaoling** and **Jinin** share a western border. **Wanshou** and **Chu Ye** run along the nation's eastern borders, while **Linvarre** is to the south.

The hardy nation of Zi Ha is separated into two forbidding regions: north and south. In northern Zi Ha, the terrain is daunting and isolated, as the mountains are bleak and unforgiving, with serpentine peaks sharper than glass. Vast stretches of desolate, frigid rock are populated by ferocious beasts and reptilians who have thrived in the solitude afforded by blizzards and avalanches. The samsarans live below the permafrost line on the mountains, and the **Tsering Springs**, their ancestral home, is mostly inaccessible to those uninvited or lacking an appropriate samsaran guide.

The mountain stone is filled with deposits of jade, which the samsarans attribute to **Tsukiyo**, their patron god. It is said when Tsukiyo was slain by his jealous brother, it was Shizuru's tears and Tsukiyo's blood that mingled to form the first jade, much of it falling onto the region of Zi Ha. Upon Tsukiyo's rebirth, it became a symbol that guides the reincarnated samsarans in their quest for enlightenment. When light reflects off the mountains, the snow and surrounding environment appear entirely jade green



and shines so bright it can cause those without proper goggles to suffer snow blindness.

Every year on the new moon of the month of the Sky Dragon, underworld dragon hatchlings emerge and stir beneath the tectonic plates of Zi Ha. The fortified mountain range shifts in violent clashes, forcing the chilling peaks to spiral even higher. This intimidating event attracts the bravest and most daring mountaineers and adventurers from Zi Ha—and across Tian Xia—to be among the first to summit these new awe-inspiring peaks.

The tallest mountain in Zi Ha is **Mount Tsukiyo**, one of the highest peaks in Tian Xia. Many seek it out on a yearly pilgrimage along the Kelsang mountain range called the **Tsukiyo Trek**. This long and arduous journey lasts from the new moon of the Underworld Dragon to the full moon of the Underworld Dragon. Some may undertake the trip to seek out a sky dragon's counsel while others challenge themselves to race to its very peak during the Earth Touches the Sky Festival.

In southern Zi Ha, the mountainous region is populated with natural heating from geysers and craters, allowing many Tians to live in fortified villages and hunt for ice worms, forage for carnivorous plants and fungi, and herd woolly yaks, sheep, and cows. The capital of this nation, **Sangpo-Jong**, is located at its southernmost point and surrounds a giant boiling geyser, the **Yoten Crater**, providing unlimited heat to the city. Around 70% of the population is located in the south and gathered around Sangpo-Jong, the entertainment center of **Lekshey** and the learning city of **Rangdol**.

A NIGHT IN ZI HA

"Zi Ha is overlit in the day and comes alive during the dark."

—Choyang Dralha, famous Samsaran artificer

Many visitors to the mountain kingdom are unprepared for the long nights. In the northern region of Zi Ha, population centers are built away from the sun and experience an almost-constant 24 hours of complete darkness. Even in southern Zi Ha, the land is completely dark for 3 full moon cycles of the year. Following a lunar and constellation calendar, each new phase of the moon marks another night passing in Zi Ha. Most of the population divide their nights into quarters, approximately 4 hours each, with the remaining time reserved for sleep. Zi Ha comes alive at night, and there is a cultural embrace of the darkness. Prominent samsaran technology gravitates towards heightening the natural senses—sound, smell, sight, touch and taste—and are a brilliant example of the relationship the population of Zi Ha has with the dark.

At the start of any given week, most of the populace sleeps for a couple of hours, considered the "first sleep," then participates in guild work. Afterwards, they may engage in another quarter of rest, considered their "second sleep." Towards the middle and end of the week the populace spends a significant amount of their leisure time with friends and family. Enclaves within Zi Ha only contribute four quarters at the start of the week—approximately 16 hours—to any sort of work or labor in the guilds. Travelers unfamiliar with this Zi Ha tradition may have trouble finding specific services if they do not arrive earlier in the week.

Most of the population devotes a quarter of their evening in meditation and quiet self-reflection. The rest of the night is loud, raucous, and cheerful, especially in the northern region, as the population participates in monthly celebrations filled with special Zi Ha mung bean cakes, roasted woolly goat meat, and delicacies imported from other nations. Valuing leisure and family time over work, Zi Ha is both a festive and reflective nation.

The night is an ominous and sacred time. During their quarter nights of mediation, many residents engage in bloodletting rituals with ceremonial jade blades, honoring their ancestors and fore-samsarans. Zi Ha mung bean cakes and goat meat offerings are presented to the imperial dragons of Tian Xia and the moon god Tsukiyo, with people asking them to guide them on their journeys or for the health and happiness of their friends, family, and the nation of Zi Ha.

Many interesting plant and animal adaptations have sprouted and thrived in Zi Ha, with plants and fungi developing carnivorous, toxic, and luminescent properties and animals becoming hardy and woolly. Communal foraging and hunting expeditions between fortified settlements through the Foragers Guild, Herders Guild, and Hunters Guild ensure safe harvesting of the carnivorous plants, woolly yaks, ice worms, and bioluminescent fungi, as well as transferring these ingredients to the Chefs Guild to prepare and distribute to the populace of Zi Ha.

In the southern regions, the populace loves to eat imported delicacies from different nations across Tian Xia, and there is a strong culture of gathering together for meals and cooking. Some smells may be unfamiliar to travelers, as the natural Zi Ha carnivorous plants give off strong wafts of digested meat. Culinary chefs in Zi Ha have been able to distill the poison from these hardy, frost-resistant carnivorous plants that grow along Zi Ha's mountains, creating edible, flavorful dishes and hallucinogenic alcohol.

A YEAR IN ZI HA

"There is only one season in Zi Ha—frigid temperatures and falling snow."

—Suklha Yama, former leader of the samsaran people

Time in the region is celebrated and marked by the different phases of the moon, with Zi Ha adhering to the Tian Xia Zodiac based on the constellations. For example, if a new trading deal is set for the "eighth moon cycle of the Forest Dragon, half moon," and it's currently "seventh moon cycle of the Ogre, full moon," the new business deal will start within 14 nights, as each moon cycle takes 28 nights for the moon to

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Only the samsaran peoples converse with each other in Samsaran; otherwise Tien proliferates Zi Ha. Dialects of Tien have emerged over time, separated into northern and southern variants in Zi Ha. A minority of the population in Zi Ha also speak Hongali.

Zi Ha: ZI- ha
Rangdol: RANG-doll
Tsering Springs: SEAR-ing Springs
Lekshey: LEKS-hay
Kelsang: kel-SANG
Manamovar: MANA-mo-var
Tsomo Road: TSO-MO road
Gyalto Tulku: GEE-alto TOOL-ku
Gyalten Tashi: GEE-al-ten TA-shi
Karakorai: KARA-ko-rai
Tian Zenwyn: TI-an ZEN-wyn
Choyang Dralha: cho-YANG DRA-la
Suklha Yama: SOOK-la YAH-ma
Tsering Rafflesiaceae: SEAR-ing RAF-fuhlease-see-ace-see-ah



be reborn from a new moon to a full moon. Every full moon in Zi Ha is a celebration of another cycle, with loud, raucous feasts. Common foods include special cakes in the form of crescent moons and zodiac symbols, imported lush fruits, and hot soups of egg and woolly yak. It's considered lucky to start anything new on the phase of a new moon and to complete a task on the night of a full moon. Travelers would do well to time their visits to coincide with a monthly full moon party in Zi Ha or one of the most prominent regional holidays.

The southern region experiences reliable sunlight for only four complete moon cycles out of the year, balanced between 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness. Because the Kelsang mountain range of Zi Ha consists of a natural serpentine ore and glassy formations, the reflected sunlight is deep green and considerably magnified—more than thirty seconds of exposure can cause blindness and third degree burns. Many of the southern cities have created underground settlements to reside in for these four months, escaping the dangerous reflected brightness.



A floral phenomenon occurs only during these four months—all the carnivorous plants and bioluminescent fungi that thrive in the darkness shrivel up and die, while a full blooming of the rare parasitic plant, tsering rafflesiaceae, takes place. This large red flower grows using photosynthesis and by parasitizing the roots of the dying carnivorous plants in Zi Ha, taking on the smell of decaying, rotten meat as a result. Despite these unusual features, tsering rafflesiaceae is prized among the humans and samsarans in Zi Ha for its edible and widespread medicinal properties, and it's harvested towards the end of the full moon of the Blossom constellation. At the start of the new moon, Dog constellation, the plants and fungi that thrived in the darkness start to rise up again, until the next Sovereign moon cycle.

During the first moon cycle—the Underworld Dragon—starting with the new moon and lasting to the full moon, the Kelsang mountain range in the northern region shifts drastically due to underworld dragon hatchlings emerging from their nests, forcing the frozen, sharp peaks to spiral even higher. This exciting seismic event attracts brave mountaineers from across Tian Xia and Zi Ha to be the first individual of the new year to summit the new heights of Mount Tsukiyo. The Northern region of Zi Ha pays tribute and offers feasts to the underworld and sky dragons during their **When Earth Touches the Sky Festival**, with many cheering on the mountaineers from the base of the mountain, playing games, and singing hearty songs about daring adventures and awe-inspiring dragons.

Between the new moon of the sixth moon cycle, the Sovereign Dragon, to the full moon of the ninth moon cycle, the Blossom, Zi Ha celebrates the **Tsering Rafflesiaceae Festival**. The population in the southern region retreats into underground cities during this time, avoiding the blazing reflections and heat from the light reflecting off mountain range. For these four moon cycles, the population does not participate in strenuous work and focuses on leisure activities, festive merriment, spending time with family, or learning new skills. Arts, science, and technology usually flourish during this time, with an abundance of new creations developed. Members of the Foragers Guild spend a couple of nights towards the full moon of the Blossom to harvest the tsering rafflesiaceae while they wait for the regular carnivorous plants and bioluminescent fungi to flourish again in the darkness.

The eleventh moon cycle—the new moon of the Sky Dragon to the full moon of the Sky Dragon—sees an annual sacred pilgrimage known as the **Tsukiyo Trek**. International visitors and internal residents alike can spend a full moon phase (28 nights) climbing a spiraling, wrought out path along the precipices of the Kelsang mountain range towards the base of Mount Tsukiyo. Those who dare to endure this arduous and dangerous



journey can bring offerings of Zi Ha mung bean cakes and mountain goat meat to Tsukiyo, the moon god, and the sky dragon, **Shei Long**. They're often rewarded with a fulfillment of their requests, deep spiritual reflection, and breathtaking scenery. It's recommended for travelers to hire a Kelsang warrior guide, as the path moves through unlit, treacherous regions filled with wild beasts and monsters.

CULTURE

As a mountainous region composed of jade ore and glass, Zi Ha leans heavily on mining for jade and precious gems. Other industries include medicinal herbs, livestock, and mountaineering tourism. Most humans and samsarans in Zi Ha spend a very short amount of their week gathering the resources they need to survive and have large amounts of time dedicated to leisure activities—meeting under the moon and stars while telling stories, dancing, singing, and playing games. Working hours are reduced in order to share critical tasks that do exist. The population within Zi Ha have access to a varied and nutritious diet and have very little economic scarcity. Due to communal living, high levels of productivity, public ownership of technology, and positive trading relations outside Zi Ha and between fortified enclaves within Zi Ha, the nation currently enjoys an age of leisure and abundance. As a result, the people in Zi Ha have a high quality of life and long life expectancies.

The population is provided with various guilds for an additional sense of belonging and purpose, but these do not replace their families. Students within Zi Ha enter schools of learning based on their early and emerging talents and interests, joining diverse guilds across Zi Ha. Many of the prominent and popular guilds are located in the southern region, with several concentrated within Sangpo-Jong, the capital city. Within the northern region, the harsh climate and dangerous wild beasts have attracted significant outposts of the Healers and Warriors Guilds.

The people of Zi Ha have separate clothing for outdoor and indoor use, work and fashion. Outdoor clothing is more practical, wool and fur with heavy layers. Indoors clothes are more stylish, with long, colorful robes representing the beautiful mountainous landscapes, fauna, and flora of Zi Ha. Makeup is rarely worn, except in theatrical performances to transform the individual into another being. Raucous laughter is encouraged while indoors, and whispered conversation is preferred outdoors.

Zi Ha commonly venerates many deities and dragons, especially the underworld dragons and sky dragon of Mount Tsukiyo, Shei Long. Many samsarans revere Tsukiyo, the prince of the moon and their patron god, but the general population in Zi Ha pays tribute to many popular gods, including Shizuru, Yamatsumi, Pharasma, Qi Zhong, and Shelyn. Within Zi Ha, there's a strong

relationship with both death and life, influenced largely by the samsarans. Death isn't seen as an ending, but rather, the beginning of another phase of an individual's life. Gathering insight and reflection of one's life purpose is regarded with the utmost importance.

Special ceremonies are held for the departed, with a large feast commemorating the person's life within their enclaves. Death is considered only the beginning of an individual's journey toward enlightenment. For the samsarans, death is the beginning of another cycle of rebirth. There are special ceremonies to honor the rebirth of a samsaran, and another which is held when a samsaran has their first flashback to a previous life, usually at a very young age.

Government and Important Faces

Zi Ha was formerly ruled by a secular autocracy appointed by the ruling theocrats, but reforms occurred with greater samsaran and centralized input into government decision making. Tian Zenwyn, the leader of the samsarans, jointly leads the nation with Gyalto Tulku, who was appointed by the Oracular Advisory Council of Sangpo-Jong. Each possess veto authority to accept or reject proposed policies and laws, with stalemates resolved by popular vote. Both authorities are attentive to samsaran and human interests within Zi Ha, ensuring that the government upholds the values of peace, protection, and prosperity for the nation. They are currently in a stalemate, however, as Gyalto Tulku desires to see Zi Ha and the samsaran people less isolated and more renowned within Tian Xia, showcasing samsaran talents and blood-healing properties for wider use, while Tian Zenwyn wants to consolidate power for a samsaran autocracy within the nation.



TIAN ZENWYN

Tian Zenwyn (thoughtful nonbinary samsaran child sage) is a bright young ruler with an attentive ear to their people. Despite being just 12 years old, Tian Zenwyn has powerful yet fragmented flashbacks of their previous lives of leading Zi Ha and has reclaimed the lost ring that grants them their birthright of leadership. Tian Zenwyn seeks to preserve and improve the well-being and livelihoods of the samsarans, ensuring the government of Zi Ha provides appropriate protections against those that would hunt and harm them. They wish to build secure checkpoints throughout the nation to ward against thieves and intruders. Fearful of Gyalto Tulku's recent policies to completely open up the northern region of Zi Ha to increased trade, tourism, and industry, Tian Zenwyn plots to consolidate power and create a samsaran autocracy with a planned coup.

Gyalto Tulku (steadfast female human bureaucrat) is the elected leader of the humans of Zi Ha by the Oracular Advisory Council. She seeks to increase the prosperity and well-being of the population within a nation plunged into frigid darkness and danger. Often compared to a workhorse, Gyalto Tulku tirelessly aims to establish positive domestic relations between enclaves, has helped set up the industry guilds in Sangpo-Jong, New Oppara, and Ayanjinbo to prosper and thrive, and maintains beneficial international relations with other nations within Tian Xia. Working alongside Tian Zenwyn, she balances the needs of the samsarans with those of the general Tian population. She currently seeks to increase the diffusion of samsaran technology and magic into the mainstream population of Zi Ha. Recently, the Oracular Council has confided in Gyalto of a potential change in leadership happening soon, with the upcoming solar eclipse being the time to act to secure her place.

Cities and Locations

Most of the general Tian population choose to reside within the south of Zi Ha, marked by various artisanal guilds in Sangpo-Jong, Ayanjinbo, and New Oppara. Most samsarans choose to reside within the remote and mountainous region of the north, along with the taiga giants and brutal enclaves of reptilians.

Tsering Springs

Various enclaves claim this settlement to have been built upon the mythic pure wellspring, **Lake Manamovar.** Now dried up, the lake transformed the humans from

the village of Jariha to become eternal, life-bound samsarans. The entrance to the samsarans' oasis is concealed behind a roaring waterfall in the Kelsang mountain range, fortified by strong illusion magic to dissuade and confuse unwanted intruders. With a samsaran guide, a peek behind the illusionary curtain reveals sanctuaries devoted to disciplined scholarship and spiritual enlightenment, alchemical factories that lend themselves to scientific discoveries, and rich fields filled with toxic, carnivorous plants to produce antidotes, healing salves, and defensive weapons.

Mount Tsukiyo

This notable snow-capped spire, one of the highest in the Dragon Empires, is Mount Tsukiyo. Due to its lack of life sustaining air, the mountain's Death Zone is rumored to be the gateway between this life and the next. Brave adventurers endeavor to be the first to summit Mount Tsukiyo each year, earning fame, fortune, and sponsorship from the Warriors Guild.

Labyrinth of the Two Hells

This expansive series of caves are home to two brutal enclaves of reptilians who claim otherworldly and fiendish ancestry. These opposing xulgaths—children of the cold hell and children of the hot hell—have been in perpetual warfare for centuries. This location has been fearfully avoided within Zi Ha and not much more about it is known.

Sangpo-Jong

Serving as the reigning capital of Zi Ha's nation, Sangpo-Jong is the meeting place between the two rulers of Zi Ha. Over half of the total population in Zi Ha resides within Sangpo-Jong. The fortified settlement is built around a massive underground geyser, **Yoten Crater**, providing substantial natural heat to the entire city year round.

Sangpo-Jong also serves as the center point for commercial trade across Zi Ha. This concentrated trade attracts students and artisans to the Sangpo-Jong Chefs Guild, Foragers Guild, Harvesters Guild, and Hunters Guild, with all of these guilds experiencing exponential growth in recent years. Students with the gifts of magical foresight and a connection with the sky dragon, Shei Long, have their skills honed at the Oracles Guild in Sangpo-Jong. Members of the Oracles Guild serve as the adjudicators of justice within Zi Ha and the Oracular Advisory Council for Tian Zenwyn and Gyalto Tulku.

Lekshey

Whereas there is a widespread appreciation of merriment, music, and song across Zi Ha, the greatest concentration of musicians, entertainers, and bards reside within the esteemed Bards Guild in Lekshey. The city bursts with street music, musical clubs, and monthly festivals that accompany an entire musical genre.

Rangdol

Rivaling the esteemed samsaran scholarship found in Tsering Springs, the Engineering & Architecture Guild, Mages Guild, and Scholars Guild in Rangdol nurture some of the brightest minds across Zi Ha. Visitors marvel at the public transportation in the form of massive communal automations, the grand public libraries, and an exact mirror of the city's services underground that the population moves to for Zi Ha's months of intense, blazing sunlight.

International Relations

Within Zi Ha, fortified communes and enclaves have positive domestic trading relationships with one another, ensuring collective survival in the harsh climate and conditions. Friendly trading relationships with other nations include Jinin, Hongal, Xa Hoi, the Valashmai Jungle, Songbai, Po Li, Nagajor, and Bachuan.



GYALTO TULKU

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Bestiary Introduction

Across Tian Xia beasts prowl, inspiring worship and curses upon the tongues of those who look upon them. For what some may see as holy, others may see as perverse, and on the matter of beasts, this is especially true. While most creatures in Tian Xia are willing to live and let live, they can nevertheless pose a threat, just like the rest of Golarion's inhabitants. From fertile deserts to limestone towers, from vista mountains to thick rainforests, Tian Xia is home to a never-ending dissimilitude of creatures that have found the perfect place for themselves. The following are just a few.

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HANDCRAFT CREATIONS

Animated handcrafts vary considerably in appearance, reflecting the temperament and tastes of their creators. When describing animated objects from different origins, consider how those origins and traditions are reflected in the final product. Common motifs in Tian animated handcrafts include woven straw, silk embroidery, lacquered wood, or mother-of-pearl inlays. Purely decorative handcrafts might have more outlandish elements, such as live fish in glass tanks or living silk kites that battle each other in the skies above wealthy neighborhoods.

ANIMATED HANDCRAFT

Many types of animated constructs, objects, and handcrafts have existed in Tian Xia. Some, like the terra-cotta soldiers of Lingshen, are well-known. Others are rarer and less commonly encountered. Tian animated handcrafts are built from traditional artisan materials of differing rarity and with varying levels of effort, relying on crafting skill and quality components more than simple spellcasting.

INKDROP

Not all handcrafts are intended for war. The inkdrop is an infiltrator used by spellcasters to learn secrets or alter documents. Embodied in a single fist-sized drop of ink, the inkdrop can glide across a page, changing characters or removing them altogether, with devastating consequences for statecraft.

INKDROP **CREATURE –1**

TINY CONSTRUCT MINDLESS

Perception +6; darkvision

Skills Athletics +2, Stealth +3 (+5 in dim light or darkness)

Str +0, **Dex** –3, **Con** +2, **Int** –5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –5

Perfect Memory An inkdrop remembers the exact pattern of any ink it moves over physically.

AC 7; **Fort** +2, **Ref** +6, **Will** +5

HP 15; **Immunities** critical hits, mental, precision, spirit, unconscious, vitality, void; **Weaknesses** cold 5, fire 5

Blotting While a creature has the inkdrop grabbed or pinned, it can destroy the inkdrop by smudging the inkdrop out with an Interact action.

Speed 10 feet, climb 10 feet

Melee ❖ pseudopod +6, **Damage** 1d4 bludgeoning plus blinding ink

Blinding Ink A creature critically struck by the inkdrop's pseudopod is blinded by the ink until it clears its eyes using an Interact action.

Ink Blot ❖ The inkdrop leaves a pattern it remembers over a square foot of surface. If there's existing non-magical ink on the surface, the inkdrop erases the non-magical ink.

ANIMATED KITE

An animated kite is perfect for spying, allowing observation from a great distance, although many are treated more like pets. The kite itself is a simple handcraft, easily created and destroyed, made of enchanted paper stretched over a fine bamboo frame. More advanced kites can be decorated with a variety of runes that allow the enchanter to see or hear from a distance.

ANIMATED KITE **CREATURE 0**

SMALL CONSTRUCT MINDLESS

Perception +6; darkvision

Skills Acrobatics +7

Str +0, **Dex** +3, **Con** +0, **Int** –5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –5

AC 15 (13 when broken); construct armor; **Fort** +4, **Ref** +9, **Will** +4

HP 15; **Hardness** 1; **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, mental, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, spirit, unconscious, vitality, void

Construct Armor Like normal objects, an animated kite has Hardness. This Hardness reduces any damage it takes by an amount equal to the Hardness. Once an animated kite is reduced to less than half its Hit Points, or immediately upon being damaged by a critical hit, its construct armor breaks and its Armor Class is reduced to 13.

Speed fly 30 ft

Melee frame +7 ❖ (magical, finesse), **Damage** 1d6 bludgeoning

Attach Line ❖ (manipulate) The animated kite gives its line to an adjacent ally with a free hand. The kite remains attached until the creature releases it or the kite



flies more than 60 feet away. A creature between them can also sever the line with a successful Strike against AC 13 that deals any amount of slashing damage.

Sawing Line ◆◆ **Requirements** The animated kite has its line attached to an ally; **Effect** Each creature along the line between the kite and its ally takes 1d6 slashing damage (DC 16 basic Reflex save).

ANIMATED BAMBOO FIGURE

Supple but strong bamboo strips woven into intricate patterns form the base of the animated bamboo figure. These materials are plentiful and easy to come by, though they require great care and patience to prepare, making them ideal guardians for isolated communities. These hollow and pliable handcrafts can stretch or compress, jumping and springing farther than most humanoids.

ANIMATED BAMBOO FIGURE CREATURE 2

MEDIUM CONSTRUCT MINDLESS

Perception +8; darkvision

Skills Acrobatics +10, Athletics +10

Str +4, **Dex** +4, **Con** +3, **Int** –5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –5

AC 18 (16 when broken); construct armor; **Fort** +9, **Ref** +10, **Will** +6

HP 30; **Hardness** 3; **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, mental, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, spirit, unconscious, vitality, void

Construct Armor As animated kite, but reduced to AC 16 when broken.

Speed 30 feet, climb 15 feet

Melee ◆ fist +10 (magical, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 1d8+4 bludgeoning plus Knockdown

Spring Forward ◆◆ The animated bamboo figure jumps up to 30 feet and makes two fist Strikes against different targets. It can use Knockdown following this activity, attempting to Trip each creature struck.

ANIMATED WINE VESSEL

A beautiful wine vessel presents a mark of status among drinkers, to say nothing of an animated one that pours the wine on its own. Although normally harmless servants, these vessels will just as quickly follow instructions to swallow intruders and drown them in strong wine.

ANIMATED WINE VESSEL CREATURE 3

LARGE CONSTRUCT MINDLESS

Perception +9; darkvision

Skills Athletics +17

Str +4, **Dex** +0, **Con** +4, **Int** –5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –5

AC 19 (17 when broken); construct armor; **Fort** +11, **Ref** +7, **Will** +7

HP 45; **Hardness** 4; **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, mental, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, spirit, unconscious, vitality, void

Construct Armor As animated kite, but reduced to AC 17 when broken.

Speed 15 feet

Melee ◆ jaws +11 (magical), **Damage** 2d8+4 bludgeoning plus Grab

Spit Wine ◆◆ (water) The wine vessel opens its mouth and blows a stream of wine in a 15-foot line, dealing 2d8 bludgeoning damage (DC 19 basic Reflex save).

Swallow Whole ◆ (attack) Medium, 2d8+4 bludgeoning plus wine-soaked, Rupture 10

Wine-Soaked When a creature ends its turn Swallowed Whole by the animated wine vessel, it must succeed at a DC 19 Fortitude save or become sickened 1.

CALLIGRAPHIC EMBELLISHMENTS

Calligraphy is a common addition to the animated objects of Tian Xia. Although much of it is decorative, some calligraphy carries enchantments that generally function as weapon runes until the construct is broken.



ANIMATED WINE VESSEL



AOYIN HORNS

The horns of an aoyin are a potent material for crafting magical items that induce a frenzied state or blood loss, much like in tales about the beast's calls. Each horn, of which an aoyin normally has four, can be used as 60 gp worth of materials for items like a *wounding rune*.

AOYIN

An aoyin resembles an ox with a pale body, four horns, and hair as coarse as straw. Although this large, solitary beast bears a slight resemblance to the common draft ox, it's a highly aggressive and territorial carnivore who stalks and devours its prey. An aoyin dwells high in the mountains, rarely being seen by common folk. However, during lean winters, an aoyin might descend from its mountain home in search of food, resulting in gruesome encounters with nearby settlements. It's believed that a single aoyin can decimate the population of an entire village, only to retreat into the nearby mountains once it has satiated its hunger.

An aoyin, even a herd of the creatures, is primarily driven by hunger and other natural urges. Outside of its natural habitat, an aoyin might occasionally be kept by those who revel in bloodlust. Even with magical control, a captive aoyin is more likely to turn on its handlers than obey commands. As an uncontrolled weapon, however, a hungry aoyin poses a terrible threat to most communities.

Tales in certain isolated areas claim that the growling call of an aoyin can drive those unlucky enough to hear it into a frenzy of hunger and violence. Villages will be found consumed by infighting without any sign of an aoyin even entering its borders. Although it's possible a powerful variant of this creature might possess this ability, most of these stories are inspired by the terrible magic available to those who understand the aoyin's secrets and are spread when villages collapse through magic compulsions or mundane infighting.

AOYIN CREATURE 10

RARE LARGE ANIMAL

Perception +19; bloodsense (precise) 60 feet, low-light vision, scent (precise) 30 feet

Skills Athletics +21, Stealth +18, Survival +19 (+21 in mountains)

Str +7, **Dex** +4, **Con** +6, **Int** –4, **Wis** +3, **Cha** –2

Bloodsense An aoyin can detect exposed blood as a precise sense at the listed range, including from creatures taking persistent bleed damage.

AC 29; **Fort** +22, **Ref** +18, **Will** +16

HP 210

Driven by Hunger ↻ **Trigger** The aoyin fails or succeeds at a save against an emotion effect; **Effect** The aoyin's hunger is powerful enough to blot out any other emotion. The aoyin critically succeeds at the save instead. If a creature within 40 feet is taking persistent bleed damage, the aoyin can also Stride up to its Speed in a straight line toward that target as it seeks out the closest source of food.

Speed 40 feet; mountain stride

Melee horn +21 (deadly d12, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 2d12+7 piercing plus 2d6 persistent bleed

Melee hoof +21 (agile, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 2d8+7 bludgeoning

Horn Toss ◆◆ The aoyin Strides and makes a horn Strike. If the Strike hits, the target is flung 20 feet in a direction of the aoyin's choice.

Mountain Stride An aoyin isn't impeded by difficult terrain caused by snow or mountainous terrain, nor does it need to Balance to move over uneven ground created by those conditions.

Trample ◆◆◆ Medium, hoof, DC 29

ASO BERANG

Deep within the woods are grand, giant creatures with tusked maws. Their visages have inspired various tusked demon masks used for great festivals across Tian Xia. These beasts are known as aso berangs, or bear dogs, in the islands of Minata. As their name suggests, they resemble large canines with the bulk of a bear. However, aso berangs aren't simply large and charismatic animals, for many say they're the kings of forest spirits and patrons of guardians. They're often revered as protective entities by those who live outside the woods they guard. These guardians only appear to common folk if the forest they live in is in danger or if they need something. When they do so, aso berangs can appear as large and powerful humans who emanate a regal presence.

Aso berangs have wickedly sharp talons that shed regularly, and they're strong enough to climb trees in pursuit of witches who attempt to escape up them. Very often, aso berangs attack visitors whose hearts they deem impure or those they consider as potential threats to their forest. Unfortunately, receiving this judgment usually takes little more than forgetting to perform the proper rites of respect and reverence.

ENMITY OF WITCHES

The first aso berang and ancestor of all aso berangs, Ganas Buti Rajah, faced the witch armies of Rani Randa, the Queen of Witches and Tanggal. Now, Ganas Buti Rajah's descendants uphold the tradition of stewardship: protecting the forests and cleansing the lands of magic they judge evil.

ASO BERANG — CREATURE 12

RARE LARGE SPIRIT

Perception +23; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 120 feet

Languages Celestial, Petran, Sylvan, Tien

Skills Arcana +21, Athletics +25, Intimidation +23, Nature +25, Occultism +21, Religion +25

Str +7, **Dex** +5, **Con** +5, **Int** +3, **Wis** +7, **Cha** +5

AC 32; **Fort** +25, **Ref** +25, **Will** +27

HP 260; **Resistances** fire 15, void 15

Watch Over Evil ↻ **Trigger** A creature within 30 feet of the aso berang Casts a Spell; **Effect** The aso berang makes a spectral flame Strike against the triggering creature. If the Strike hits a creature with the tanggal trait or is a critical hit, the triggering action is disrupted.

Speed 35 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ❖ tusk +25 (magical, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 3d12+10 piercing plus 2d4 fire

Melee ❖ claw +25 (agile, magical, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 2d4+10 slashing plus 2d4 fire

Ranged ❖ spectral flame +23 (divine, range 60 feet), **Damage** 7d6 fire

Divine Innate Spells DC 32; **5th** *nature's pathway*; **4th** *cleanse affliction*; **2nd** *share life* (at will)

Change Shape ❖ (concentrate, divine, polymorph) The aso berang takes the appearance of any Medium or Small humanoid creature. In this form, the aso berang can't use their tusk Strikes, and their claw Strike becomes a fist Strike that deals bludgeoning damage and loses the reach trait.

Cleanse the Forest ❖❖❖ (divine) The aso berang dashes to attack each nearby enemy so quickly that it's impossible to tell they've moved at all, save for a slight flicker in their outline. The aso berang Strides adjacent to an enemy and attempts a melee Strike. If successful, the aso berang can Stride and attempt to Strike a different enemy. If this second attack is successful, they can Stride and attempt to Strike a third enemy. Once they fail a Strike (or upon succeeding at their third Strike), the aso berang Strides back to the space where they began.

Phantom Flames The aso berang's flames are as much spectral as physical. Whenever an aso berang deals fire damage, they can have that damage be spirit damage instead. The aso berang's flames never burn plants or objects unless the aso berang wishes it.



ECLIPSED LIGHT

Bul-gaes bring with them the distorted light of an eclipse wherever they go. This distorted light favors blue hues and skews the spectrum of visible colors, giving the world an eerie, muted ambience.

BUL-GAE

Bul-gaes are manifestations of the eclipsed sun and moon. They look like large canines, though their coloration and features change as they exercise their powers over heat and cold. Depending on whether they've most recently unleashed their lunar or solar powers, bul-gaes resemble either a crimson hound wreathed in flames or a cerulean, frostbitten fox, respectively.

Legends say that the first bul-gae attempted to steal the sun from the sky. As they bit down on the burning sphere, though, the bul-gae was badly burned. Having failed, they then tried to retrieve the moon, but when they touched the moon, the bul-gae froze solid and fell to the ground. The descendants of that bul-gae forever hone their powers of flame and ice so that they might one day succeed where their ancestor failed.

Tales say that bul-gaes serve as faithful companions to the ancient, shadowy master of the first bul-gae. These stories purport that the shadow master can see through the distorted light of all bul-gaes and use the hounds as a means to watch the universe for unknown purposes.

BUL-GAE CREATURE 14

UNCOMMON MEDIUM BEAST COLD FIRE

Perception +26; greater darkvision, scent (imprecise) 60 feet

Languages Tien

Skills Athletics +28, Intimidation +23, Stealth +23, Survival +25

Str +8, **Dex** +4, **Con** +7, **Int** +5, **Wis** +6, **Cha** +4

AC 33; **Fort** +28, **Ref** +22, **Will** +25

HP 255; **Resistances** cold 15, fire 15

Eclipse Aura (aura, darkness, occult) 100 feet. Light and shadows morph strangely around the bul-gae. Non-magical bright light is reduced to dim light within the aura. When a creature attempts an action within the aura that has the light trait, it must attempt a DC 34 Will save. On a failure, the action is disrupted.



Solar Flare ↷ (fire, occult) **Trigger** The bul-gae takes damage; **Effect** The bul-gae releases a solar flare in a 30-foot emanation. Each creature in the area takes 6d8 fire damage (DC 34 basic Reflex save). On a critical failure, a creature also takes 2d10 persistent fire damage. After using this ability, the bul-gae's flames cool, and they can't use Solar Flare again until after they've used their Lunar Burst ability.

Speed 40 feet

Melee ❖ jaws +27 (agile), **Damage** 2d8+12 piercing plus 2d6 cold or fire and Knockdown

Lunar Burst ❖❖ (cold, occult) The bul-gae releases a blast of otherworldly frost that deals 6d8 cold damage to each creature in a 10-foot emanation (DC 34 basic Reflex save). On a critical failure, a creature also becomes slowed 2 for 1 round. After using this ability, the bul-gae's flames heat up and they can't use Lunar Burst again until after they've used their Solar Flare reaction.

Shadow Leap ❖ (occult, shadow, teleportation) **Requirement** The bul-gae is in dim light or darkness; **Effect** The bul-gae dives into a shadow and reappears from a shadow within 40 feet.

Thermal Mastery The bul-gae has total control over the powers of cold and fire. Each time it attacks with its jaws, it can choose to have the additional damage be either cold damage or fire damage.

GAU CHO RONG

Campfire stories claim gau cho rongs originated as the ghosts of poachers' prey come back for revenge, concocted minions of hags, or cursed beasts that became addicted to the flesh of children who wander where they're told not to. Known by the unsettling nickname of "hollow bears," gau cho rongs are easily mistaken for their good-natured cousin, the sun bear.

Little more than 3 feet tall with long, lolling tongues, they resemble adorable little cubs when glutted but turn into terrors when they begin to hunger and hollow. The hungry gau cho rong's pelt goes slack until it appears little more than brittle bone in a sack of fur, like an old doll shucked of its filling. The hollow bears writhe and whimper, luring sympathetic victims or opportunistic hunters. As these targets approach, other gau cho rongs drop down from the boughs above on the backs and faces of their prey, their loose fur dulling most attacks as they rake victims with their long, hooked claws. Once they've finally eaten their fill, the gau cho rongs revert to their disarmingly endearing state. Thus continues their life of playing, hunting, lazing, slaying, romping, and rending.

GAU CHO RONG — CREATURE 4

UNCOMMON | SMALL | BEAST

Perception +10; darkvision

Skills Athletics +13, Intimidation +11, Stealth +13, Survival +10

Str +5, **Dex** +3, **Con** +0, **Int** –2, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +1

Full Belly When a gau cho rong is full, which requires consuming an entire Medium creature or 6 Bulk of meat, it becomes peaceful and even playful. It has an automatic result of 33 on Deception checks and DCs to pass as a normal sun bear, but it loses its resistances. A gau cho rong remains full for 8 hours.

Subsumed Traits After it finishes digesting a full meal, the gau cho rong will gain a trait from that creature until the next time it's full. Gau cho rongs that gain the animal trait have scent out to 60 feet as an imprecise sense, while those with the amphibious or aquatic trait gain a swim speed of 25 feet. Humanoid hollow bears gain the Reactive Strike reaction. Traits like fire add that damage type to a gau cho rong's resistances. Other traits have effects at the GM's discretion.

AC 20; **Fort** +8, **Ref** +13, **Will** +6

HP 50; **Resistances** bludgeoning 5, slashing 5

Speed 25 feet, climb 15 feet

Melee ❖ jaws +13, **Damage** 2d8+5 piercing

Melee ❖ claw +13 (agile), **Damage** 2d6+5 slashing

Ambush ❖ **Requirements** The gau cho rong is hiding and a creature that hasn't detected it is within 20 feet; **Effect** The gau cho rong Strides toward the creature. Once the creature is in reach, the gau cho rong makes a Strike against it. The target creature is off-guard to this attack.

Devour ❖ **Requirements** The gau cho rong's last action was a successful jaws Strike; **Effect** The target takes 1d6 persistent bleed damage. The gau cho rong gains some knowledge from the creature's blood, learning how to understand and speak all languages that creature knows for 1 minute, which it does in a distorted version of the target's voice. During that time, the gau cho rong also gains a +2 circumstance bonus to Intimidation checks to Demoralize that creature.

SUBSUMED TRAITS

Physical changes from creatures they've devoured are visible in markings on the gau cho rong's loose hide and even in the shape of its bony frame, granting different hollow bears slightly different abilities even among the same group. It's possible that unique, older, or more powerful gau cho rongs might gain permanent abilities from digesting certain creatures.





Passing Judgment

There are no exact criteria or written rules that drive the Great Flood's decisions. It's a matter of aesthetics, opinion, and which head ends up leading the discussion. Generally, however, settlements at odds with their natural surroundings will be treated more harshly.

A Terrible Sense of Humor

A scholar who debated the Great Flood once recorded the following deadpan exchange, serving more as an example of the creature's infamous jokes than providing any actual knowledge.

Scholar: "What lord or power do you answer to?"

The Great Flood: "We don't have a lord."

Scholar: "Then which of your nine faces is your leader?"

The Great Flood: "We don't have a leader."

Scholar: "Then how do you resolve your disputes?"

The Great Flood: "We don't have disputes."

The Great Flood

There are few creatures capable of such ecological destruction while staying as humorous and lighthearted as the Great Flood. The Great Flood towers with their giant serpent body and nine humanoid heads, each one with a different personality, though all serve the same purpose—to vanquish all signs of life that shouldn't be where they are. This creature intends to maintain the balance of the universe, ensuring that nothing takes up more space than necessary. Unfortunately, the judgment of where someone or something should be is only seen and weighed by the 18 eyes of the Great Flood, with little regard to mortal input.

The Great Flood is an immortal, or at least ageless, being who hibernates for 12 years at a stretch. On the thirteenth year, they emerge from the depths of the oceans and begin weighing the state of the world and the environments closest to their resting place: should the first thing they see on dry land be destroyed? Each of the Great Flood's nine heads lends their thoughts and insights to this deliberation, and upon reaching a consensus, they'll either carry on to the next location or they'll drown the land, immersing miles of dry land in salty waters from the ocean. In instances where they perceive the excess life as particularly problematic, they'll even decide to poison the waters with their bitter breath to ensure that nothing survives the judgment they've decreed. The Great Flood, despite its inherently destructive nature, isn't actually bloodthirsty and will often afford an opportunity for poor townsfolk to state their case and beg for the lives of their town to be saved. While the Great Flood has the capacity for mercy and consideration, the godlike creature stands adamant once they've made their decision. One or two of the heads might feel a twinge of guilt and tell a small joke to the townsfolk, relieving themselves of the mental pressure, before murdering an entire village.

The nine personalities of the serpentine creature often run into contention with each other. One is a perfectionist, while another is aloof; one is assertive, while another is playful; one is capricious, while another is suspicious; one is ambitious, while the other is a people pleaser. The last one is quiet and secretive, only ever whispering to the heads closest to them. Though the heads squabble like siblings, they eventually always make a compromise.

Leading Head

During each of the Great Flood's appearances, one head takes the lead once combat begins, chosen by the GM when initiative is rolled. Whichever head is in the lead grants a different action the Great Flood can use during its first turn each round (see Coordinated Actions).

Aloof—The Flood's Command ❖ (divine) The aloof head casts a 5th-rank *command* (Will DC 42).

Ambitious—Claim Position ❖ (divine) The ambitious head declares a divine position above its station. It gains 100 temporary Hit Points for 1 minute. It also gains a weakness 20 to spirit damage and can't Claim Position again for 1 minute.

Assertive—Rush In ❖ The Great Flood Swims, then makes a melee Strike.

Capricious—Changing Thoughts ❖ (concentrate) The capricious head counteracts each mental effect on themself as a 10th-rank effect with a +32 counteract modifier.

People Pleaser—Build Consensus ❖ (concentrate) The heads discuss and audibly agree on a creature to target. Until they Build Consensus again, their Strikes deal an additional 20 precision damage to that creature.

Perfectionist—Find Fault ❖ (auditory, concentrate, emotion, linguistic, mental) The perfectionist head criticizes a creature within their aura. The creature must succeed at a DC 42 Will save or take 9d6 persistent mental damage.

Playful—Bad Jokes ❖ The playful head makes an ill-timed quip about the impermanence of life. They attempt to Demoralize each creature within their aura.

Secretive—Secret Movement ❖ (concentrate, divine, teleportation) The Great Flood is invisible until the end of their turn and teleports to an open space within their aura.

Suspicious—Eighteen Eyes ❖ (concentrate) The Great Flood peers at their surroundings. Until they move, they see through illusions in their aura and the reach of their jaws is increased to 25 feet.

THE GREAT FLOOD CREATURE 20

UNIQUE GARGANTUAN AMPHIBIOUS BEAST

Perception +39; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 120 feet

Languages Draconic, Petran, Thalassic, Tien

Skills Athletics +38, Deception +33, Diplomacy +33, Intimidation +38, Nature +31, Performance +29, Society +33

Str +10, **Dex** +8, **Con** +9, **Int** +7, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +5

AC 44; **Fort** +37, **Ref** +32, **Will** +33

HP 472; **Immunities** disease, poison; **Weaknesses** mental 20; **Resistances** fire 20

Bitter Breath (aura, disease, poison) 90 feet. If a creature ends its turn in the aura, it's exposed to the Great Flood's flood breath disease.

Coordinated Actions The Great Flood's multiple heads allow them to act on two separate initiatives, rolling initiative twice and acting on both results. They can't Delay. At the start of each of their turns, they gain 2 actions (see Multiple Reactions below for reactions). Any ability that would sever one of the Great Flood's heads doesn't cause the Great Flood to die if they still have at least one head, but it does cause them to lose the additional reaction granted by the severed head.

Multiple Reactions The Great Flood gains an extra reaction per round for each of its nine heads, which they can use only to make Reactive Strikes with their jaws. They can't use more than 1 reaction on the same triggering action, even if a creature leaves several squares within the Great Flood's reach, and they gain reactions on only their first turn each round.

Reactive Strike ↻

Speed 40 feet, swim 80 feet

Melee ❖ jaws +40 (reach 15 feet), **Damage** 4d8+20 piercing

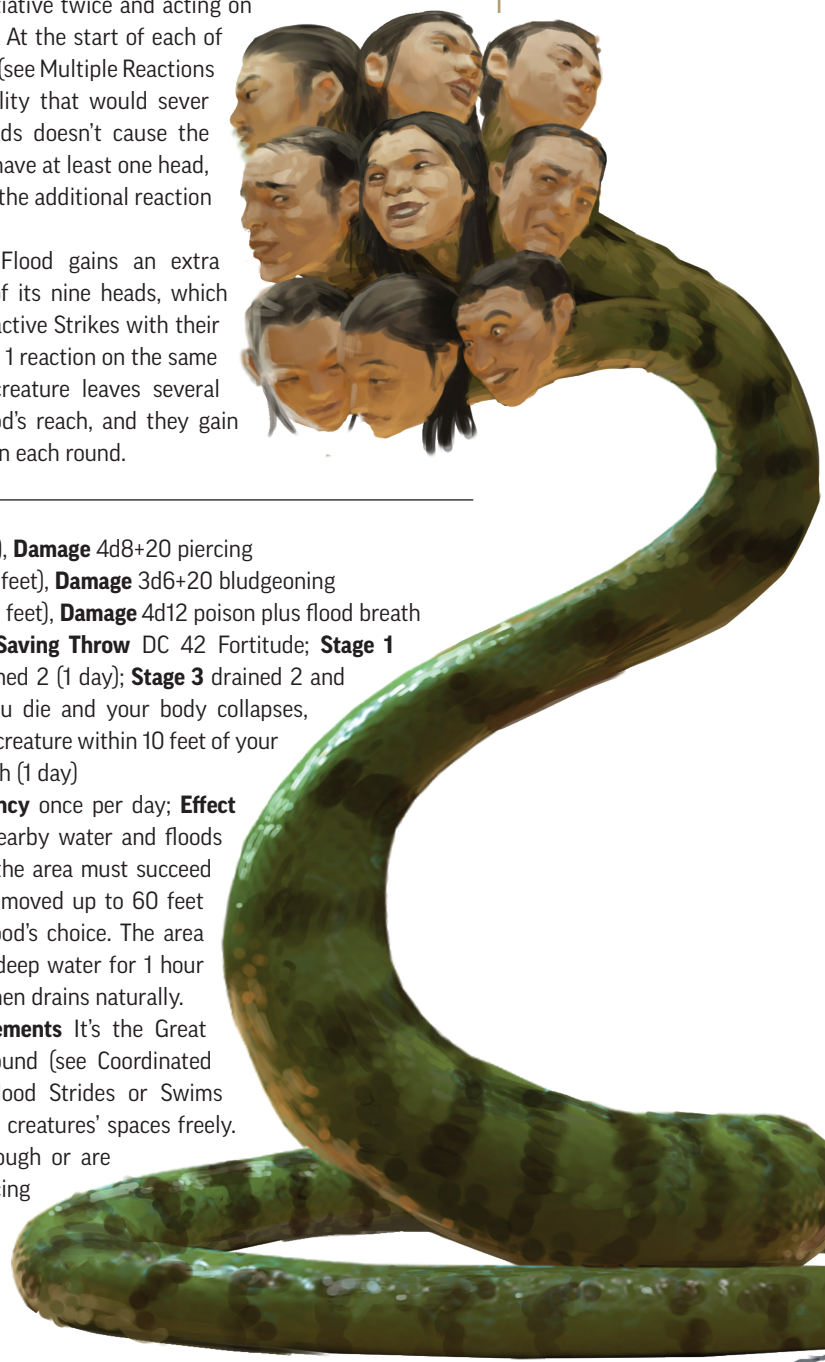
Melee ❖ tail +40 (agile, reach 15 feet), **Damage** 3d6+20 bludgeoning

Ranged ❖ breath +39 (range 180 feet), **Damage** 4d12 poison plus flood breath

Flood Breath (disease, poison) **Saving Throw** DC 42 Fortitude; **Stage 1** drained 1 (1 day); **Stage 2** drained 2 (1 day); **Stage 3** drained 2 and doomed 1 (1 day); **Stage 4** You die and your body collapses, releasing a cloud of toxin. Any creature within 10 feet of your death is exposed to flood breath (1 day)

Great Wave ❖❖ (water) **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** The Great Flood gathers all nearby water and floods a mile burst. Any creature in the area must succeed at a DC 42 Reflex save or be moved up to 60 feet in a direction of the Great Flood's choice. The area remains flooded with 30-foot-deep water for 1 hour or until the Great Flood dies, then drains naturally.

Nine-Jawed Frenzy ❖❖ **Requirements** It's the Great Flood's second turn in the round (see Coordinated Actions); **Effect** The Great Flood Strides or Swims twice, moving through smaller creatures' spaces freely. Each creature they move through or are adjacent to takes 4d8+20 piercing damage (DC 42 basic Reflex save). Creatures that fail the save are also exposed to flood breath.



INFLUENCE THE FLOOD

Convincing the Great Flood to spare an area can be handled with the influence subsystem (*GM Core* 187), treating the heads as individuals to be swayed. Many of the heads will follow each other's leads, although which and how is a good thing to learn with Discover.

EERIE ADORNMENT

All haunted constructs yearn to embellish their frames. They prize unique materials, delicate or skillful constructions, and ornaments. In addition to decorating their current body, they use these materials to build a new body as the haunted construct becomes larger and more powerful.

HAUNTED CLOCKWORK

The constructs of the Clicking Caverns all have similar designs, being made of clockwork. The most unusual feature of them is that they're self-replicating, or perhaps self-reincarnating, since the animation of a haunted construct requires a soul.

HOPPING HEAD

A hopping head is shaped like a humanoid head, sometimes with elaborate facial features, other times with a crude toylike visage. Below the head is a spring-loaded column that allows the hopping head to move itself around.



HOPPING HEAD

HOPPING HEAD — CREATURE 1

TINY | CLOCKWORK | CONSTRUCT

Perception +8; darkvision

Languages Sakvroth, Tien

Skills Athletics +6, Intimidation +6

Str +1, **Dex** +3, **Con** +0, **Int** –1, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +1

AC 14; **Fort** +5, **Ref** +10, **Will** +7

HP 25; **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, unconscious, vitality, void; **Weaknesses** electricity 2, orichalcum 2

Speed 20 feet

Melee ◆ spring +8 (finesse), **Damage** 1d6+1 bludgeoning

Melee ◆ bite +6, **Damage** 1d8+1 bludgeoning

Hopping Strike ◆◆ The hopping head Leaps 15 feet and makes one spring Strike at any point during that movement, dealing an additional 1d6 bludgeoning damage.

THE CATERPILLAR CARRIAGE

The haunted construct known as the caterpillar carriage is composed of armored segments that flow over one another as the carriage inches forward. It has two forelegs that dig grooves into the ground, making way for the many wheels situated along its underside.

CATERPILLAR CARRIAGE — CREATURE 18

UNIQUE | GARGANTUAN | CLOCKWORK | CONSTRUCT

Perception +30; darkvision, tremorsense (imprecise) 100 feet

Languages Sakvroth, Tien

Skills Athletics +35, Diplomacy +30, Intimidation +30

Str +9, **Dex** +3, **Con** +7, **Int** +2, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +4

AC 42; **Fort** +33, **Ref** +29, **Will** +30

HP 380; **Immunities** death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, unconscious, vitality, void; **Weaknesses** electricity 15, orichalcum 15; **Resistances** physical 15 (except adamantine or orichalcum)

Like Clockwork ◇ **Trigger** The caterpillar carriage gains the slowed or stunned condition; **Effect** The carriage is quickened for 1 round.

Speed 40 feet, burrow 40 feet, swim 20 feet

Melee ◆ jaws +35 (reach 15 feet), **Damage** 4d10+17 piercing plus Improved Grab

Melee ◆ wheel +35 (agile), **Damage** 4d8+17 bludgeoning

Constrict ◆ 4d10+4 bludgeoning, DC 40

Rescue ◆ The caterpillar carriage absorbs a willing construct within its reach. That construct doesn't exist separately until the caterpillar carriage releases it as an Interact action or is destroyed.

Rock Tunneler The caterpillar carriage can burrow through solid stone at a Speed of 20 feet. It can leave a tunnel if it desires, and it usually does.

Trample ◆◆◆ Huge or smaller, wheel, DC 40

IMUGI

Imugi (ee-moo-ghee) are dragon-like serpents with great mystic potential, including that of ascension into another form. While some imperial dragons are born to their birthright, many that currently roam Tian Xia are ascended imugi—though they would strike down anyone who claimed such.

To become an imperial dragon, imugi must care for a koi egg for a thousand years. The power from the nurtured egg hatching is enough to power a draconic ascension ritual, and whatever power lingers transforms the koi into an imugi to continue the cycle. The kind of imperial dragon that the imugi becomes depends on where it chooses to nurture the koi egg. Imugi strongly prefer long-finned koi, and Tian koi farmers have learned to keep a separate pool of these butterfly koi away from the others they tend, as imugi tend to displace quite a bit of water—and koi—when swooping down to snatch an egg they want.

Though imugi have some power over rain and storms, most aren't powerful enough to exact a true sense of weather control. Many are known for their benevolence, and some villages even rely on imugi's forays out of streams or lakes, bringing rains during the growing season. Imugi have as wide a range of temperaments as the dragons they become, and some are notorious for how their impatience twists into a foul temper or an arrogance that flicks people aside as if they were bugs. While some might consider mean-spirited imugi corrupted and claim they can be purified somehow, imugi simply hold themselves higher than the average creature and see no reason to conceal their true nature from someone they see as beneath them.

IMUGI CREATURE 7

UNCOMMON LARGE AMPHIBIOUS DRAGON WATER

Perception +13; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 60 feet
Languages Draconic, Tien
Skills Acrobatics +15, Athletics +17, Intimidation +15, Stealth +15
Str +6, **Dex** +4, **Con** +4, **Int** +2, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +2
Nesting By coiling around a butterfly koi egg for 1 minute, the imugi designates it as their chosen heir, which grants the imugi the effects of a constant *status* spell on that egg. If the egg is destroyed or otherwise made nonviable, the imugi can choose a new koi egg with this ability after 1 week.

AC 24; **Fort** +12, **Ref** +19, **Will** +14
HP 135; **Immunities** paralyzed, sleep; **Weaknesses** poison 5
Parental Wrath ↻ **Trigger** A creature damages the imugi's chosen koi egg or ends its turn within 40 feet of the egg; **Effect** The imugi Strides or Swims toward the triggering creature. If they end their movement within reach of the creature, they can attempt a melee Strike against it.

Speed 40 feet, swim 60 feet
Melee ❖ jaws +17 (reach 10 feet), **Damage** 2d10+8 piercing
Melee ❖ claws +17 (agile), **Damage** 2d6+8 slashing
Melee ❖ tail +17 (reach 15 feet), **Damage** 2d4+8 bludgeoning plus Grab
Primal Innate Spells DC 25; **4th** *fly*, *water breathing*; **Cantrips (4th)** *detect magic*
Constrict ❖ 2d8+4 bludgeoning, DC 25
Floodwaters ❖❖ (primal, water) Waters rush forth in a 60-foot line, dealing 4d6 bludgeoning damage (DC 25 basic Reflex save). Creatures that fail the save and aren't grabbed by the imugi are pushed 10 feet away.
Storm Veil The imugi twists any nearby precipitation into a swirling veil of sleet and wind. They gain concealment when in any form of mist or rain.

IMPERIAL ASCENSION

The ritual an imugi undergoes to become a true dragon releases a burst of overwhelming magic. Characters exposed to this burst might find their minds filled with lost techniques or abilities that the imugi has encountered over its long life, allowing them to gain access to uncommon or rare character options, suddenly understand formulas to craft items, or immediately retrain along a new path.



PLAYING A JIIDON

While jiidons don't have ancestral rules in this book, a player interested in creating a jiidon character can use the beastkin versatile heritage (*Pathfinder Lost Omens Ancestry Guide* 78) to emulate a jiidon who has obtained a permanent humanoid form. The player should work with the GM to determine who the jiidon is imitating and what complications this might have.



JIIDON

Legends among jiidons explain that many ages ago, when magic was wilder and of less distinct order, a magic-touched rat consumed the discarded fingernails of a human, and the gods granted that rat the ability to shapeshift into a copy of that human. True or not, jiidons are seemingly normal rats who share the blessing from this story. It's unclear where the first jiidon was born because their descendants live among rat and humanoid populations around the world. In their original forms, jiidons are extremely difficult to distinguish from an ordinary rat and often even finds a home leading its non-sapient kin.

After eating the discarded fingernails of a humanoid, however, a jiidon can assume the shape of the clippings' owner, resembling the subject in all of the obvious and superficial ways, with several subtle differences. Their ears are a little larger and sometimes come to a small point. Their teeth continue to grow for their entire lifetimes, so they must regularly chew on stones, bark, and other hard materials to file their teeth down and conceal their true nature. The whiskers that grow from the sides of their faces also require daily trimming.

Jiidons are mostly harmless, but their powers provoke alarm among those who know of them. Mothers scold their children not to clip their nails after nightfall, lest a lurking jiidon seize a sliver that got lost in the dark. Though as cautious as any rat, most jiidons want nothing more than to transform and take a place in humanoid society. In order to reduce suspicion, they've been known to target those who are unpopular among their neighbors. The gratitude they feel when they do replace a humanoid can sometimes be seen in their actions, revealing the fact that the target has been replaced or endearing jiidons to those who didn't appreciate the original's attitude.

Jiidons from large families will often seek a role that grants them access to nail trimmings, such as a cleaner or doctor, and pass the gift of humanoid form through the family.

JIIDON — CREATURE 3

UNCOMMON | TINY | BEAST

Perception +10; darkvision

Languages Sylvan, Tien

Skills Acrobatics +11, Deception +9, Stealth +11

Str +2, **Dex** +4, **Con** +3, **Int** +1, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +2

AC 19; **Fort** +12, **Ref** +13, **Will** +9

HP 40

Scurrying Retreat ↷ **Trigger** The jiidon takes damage from a Strike; **Requirements** They're currently transformed into in a humanoid form; **Effect** The jiidon reverts to their rat form and Climbs or Strides. They can't resume humanoid form for 1 minute.

Speed 30 feet, climb 10 feet

Melee ❖ jaws +11 (finesse), **Damage** 2d6+4 piercing plus sneak attack

Consumed Fragments ❖ (concentrate, polymorph, primal) The jiidon takes on the form of any Medium or Small humanoid creature whose fingernails or similar fragments they've consumed within the last week, gaining the effects of a 3rd-rank *illusory disguise* spell to impersonate the creature for 8 hours; this is a polymorph effect rather than an illusion effect. Once a jiidon has transformed into a creature in this way, they must eat that creature's fingernails again to transform into it again. If a jiidon consumes the nails of a specific humanoid three nights in a row, they can take the form of that humanoid at will but can't use this ability to imitate any other humanoid thereafter.

Sneak Attack The jiidon deals an additional 1d6 precision damage to off-guard creatures.

Tactical Gnaw ❖❖ The jiidon uses their nearly indestructible teeth to chew through even the toughest armor, leaving an opponent vulnerable. The jiidon makes a jaws Strike. On a successful attack, if the target is wearing armor with Hardness 10 or lower, the armor becomes broken. This Strike doesn't further damage armor that's already broken.

KUN

Hungry and resentful, the malevolent kuns are mythological fish monsters that dwell in the remotest, coldest depths of the ocean. These massively powerful creatures could easily rule a subaquatic domain if they cared to, but kuns are also famous for their total self-absorption and complete ambivalence toward other forms of life. Kuns remain as far away from other creatures as they can, subsisting on only their own icy hatred. They can consume and digest prey, but such feedings are incidental or driven more by spite than any physical need. Most kuns remain ignorant and uncaring, keeping themselves in the dark and disregarding any signs of life around them except to occasionally lash out when disturbed.

The kun hunts at the bottom of the cold, dark sea. But if shown the light of the sun, a kun begins to understand that it dwells within a different, bigger world. When flocks of birds or schools of fish cast their dappled shadows upon a kun, they might grow weary of their solitude or become curious about the realm above.

KUN — CREATURE 14

UNCOMMON | GARGANTUAN | AQUATIC | BEAST | COLD | UNHOLY

Perception +27; darkvision, light blindness, wavesense 60 feet
Languages Thalassic (can't speak any language)
Skills Acrobatics +25, Athletics +29, Intimidation +22, Survival +25
Str +8, **Dex** +4, **Con** +7, **Int** +1, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +4

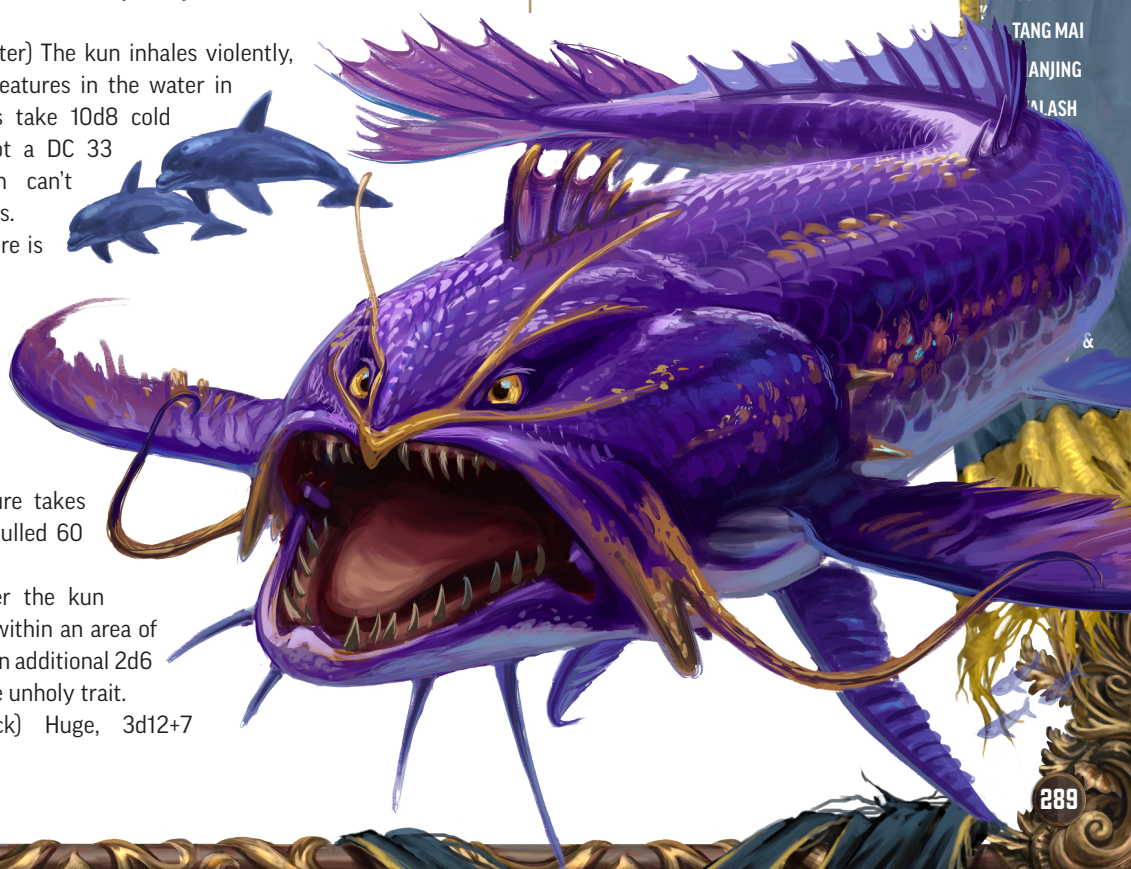
AC 36; **Fort** +29, **Ref** +24, **Will** +23
HP 230; **Weaknesses** holy 10; **Resistances** cold 10
Spite ↷ **Trigger** A creature within reach of the kun's tail uses an action to heal or help anyone else; **Effect** The kun bats the triggering creature away with their tail, making a tail Strike against the creature. On a hit, the action is disrupted and the creature is pushed 10 feet.

Speed swim 40 feet
Melee ❖ jaws +28 (reach 15 feet), **Damage** 3d12+14 piercing plus Grab and heart of darkness
Melee ❖ tail +28 (reach 20 feet, sweep), **Damage** 3d12+14 bludgeoning
Primal Innate Spells DC 32; **7th** *darkness* (at will), *wall of ice;* **5th** *control water* (at will)
Funnel ❖❖ (cold, primal, water) The kun inhales violently, sucking in heat and all creatures in the water in a 60-foot cone. Creatures take 10d8 cold damage and must attempt a DC 33 Fortitude save. The kun can't Funnel again for 1d4 rounds.
- **Critical Success** The creature is unaffected.
- **Success** The creature takes half damage.
- **Failure** The creature takes full damage and is pulled 30 feet toward the kun.
- **Critical Failure** The creature takes double damage and is pulled 60 feet toward the kun.

Heart of Darkness Whenever the kun makes a jaws Strike from within an area of darkness, their jaws deals an additional 2d6 spirit damage and gains the unholy trait.
Swallow Whole ❖ (attack) Huge, 3d12+7 bludgeoning, Rupture 30

CHANGE OF HEART

In extremely rare circumstances and for their own mysterious reasons, a kun might sacrifice some of their power to undergo a permanent, onetime transformation. In a final dramatic act, the kun flings themself up and out of the ocean, allowing the sun to fully wash over them. In the process, the kun transforms from a hateful fish into a noble and curious bird called a peng (page 294).





GRIM BLADES

Minatan folktales have it that a forgotten demigod created the first mananangals by bisecting the torso of a human with a divine knife. The demigod then cut into the human's shoulders and drove a pair of bat wings into their back, birthing the first mananangal. The divine power of the demigod's knife still resonates in every mananangal and makes each of the aberrations susceptible to cuts from similar weapons. Communities dealing with a mananangal's terror train with light blades and other slashing weapons to cut the monsters from the sky.

MANANANGGAL

Mananangals are wicked monsters that live as humanoids during the day but feed upon people at night. To hide their depravities, these beings disguise themselves as everyday people—typically recluses or eccentrics—and use their proximity to a community to pick out their next targets before striking under cover of night. Mananangals use their long, hollow tongues to drain victims' blood from vital organs such as the liver, and the resulting odd drainage marks make it difficult to determine the exact nature of a victim's death. This mystery typically leads to confusion, terror, and mistrust among communities, which most mananangals savor. While they fly, mananangals make a distinctive ticking sound, leading some to refer to the creatures as "tik-tiks," and badly affected communities descend into fearful chaos at the first reports of this telltale noise.

Mananangals share their cannibalistic, body-separating traits with other types of tanggals, such as penanggalans, though a number of characteristics set them apart. For instance, whereas penanggalans relish vinegar and even bathe in the substance, mananangals abhor the merest scent of it.

MANANANGGAL CREATURE 8

MEDIUM ABERRATION TANGGAL

Perception +16; darkvision

Languages Aklo, Common

Skills Acrobatics +18, Deception +16, Religion +13

Str +5, **Dex** +5, **Con** +2, **Int** +1, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +4

Light Blindness

AC 26; **Fort** +14, **Ref** +17, **Will** +19

HP 180; **Weaknesses** slashing 8

Speed 30 feet (or fly 80 feet when body is separated)

Melee ❖ claws +18 (agile, magical), **Damage** 2d8+9 slashing plus Grab

Melee ❖ jaws +18 (magical), **Damage** 2d10+9 piercing

Occult Innate Spells DC 26; **4th** *sleep*; **3rd** *fear*; **2nd** *darkness* (×3); **1st** *enfeeble* (×3); **Cantrips (4th)** *light*

Blood Drain ❖ **Requirements** The mananangal has a creature grabbed; **Effect** The mananangal drives their tongue into the grabbed creature to drink its blood. This deals 4d6 damage, and the mananangal gains temporary Hit Points equal to the damage dealt. A creature whose blood is drained by a mananangal is drained 1 until it receives healing (of any kind or amount).

Separated Body A mananangal typically resembles a living humanoid. They don't appear as an aberration at first glance and receive a +4 status bonus to their Deception DC when Impersonating a humanoid. At any time, but especially at night, a mananangal can, as a 3-action activity with the manipulate trait, rip their upper torso from their bottom half, leaving the lower torso limp and helpless but allowing the upper torso to fly free. A mananangal can separate their body at any time, but they risk further damage if they do so during the day.

The mananangal's upper and lower halves share the same pool of HP. If its lower half is damaged, the mananangal is immediately aware of the attack. Each minute a mananangal remains separated after sunrise and before sunset, it takes 2d6 points of damage until it reattaches its upper and lower torsos or is destroyed, whichever comes first.

NUE

A nue is an ancient creature of enormous size and destructive power. Though sightings are rare, it's described as having the head of a monkey, the body of a tanuki, the limbs of a tiger, and a snake for a tail. The beast's eerie body is matched by its ability to drain the life force of those around it just by howling.

According to certain tales, in ancient times, a nue would freely terrorize kingdoms and inflict nightmares upon it victims. It first appears as an enormous storm cloud before turning a poisonous black color. When angered, a nue can summon lightning to cause massive amounts of collateral damage. Hearing a nue's howl is considered an ill omen.

NUE — CREATURE 11

LARGE BEAST

Perception +21; darkvision

Languages Tien

Skills Acrobatics +20, Athletics +22, Deception +18, Intimidation +18, Occultism +18, Survival +17

Str +7, **Dex** +6, **Con** +4, **Int** +1, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +4

AC 30; **Fort** +21, **Ref** +24, **Will** +18

HP 200; **Immunities** fear; **Resistances** non-magical 10

Viper Tail ↻ **Trigger** A creature within 15 feet of the nue leaves a square during a move action it's using or moves into a square that would cause the nue to become flanked; **Effect** The nue whips around and attempts a tail Strike against the triggering creature. This Strike doesn't count toward the nue's multiple attack penalty, and its multiple attack penalty doesn't apply to this Strike.

Speed 40 feet

Melee ❖ jaws +24 (finesse, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 3d10+7 piercing

Melee ❖ claw +24 (agile, disarm, finesse, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 3d8+7 slashing

Melee ❖ tail +24 (agile, finesse, reach 15 feet), **Damage** 3d4+7 piercing plus 2d4 poison

Cloud Form ❖ (concentrate, polymorph) The nue changes its shape into that of a dark storm cloud. In Cloud Form, the nue is concealed, gains a 60-foot fly Speed, gains a +4 status bonus to its Deception DC to prevent others from seeing through its disguise, and can't make attacks, though it can use its howl abilities. The nue can Dismiss this effect.

Monstrous Howl ❖❖ (auditory, mental, void) The nue lets out an eerie howl that rattles creatures' very souls. Creatures within 60 feet must attempt a DC 27 Will save (DC 29 at night). They're then temporarily immune to Monstrous Howl for 10 minutes.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature takes 2d8 persistent void damage.

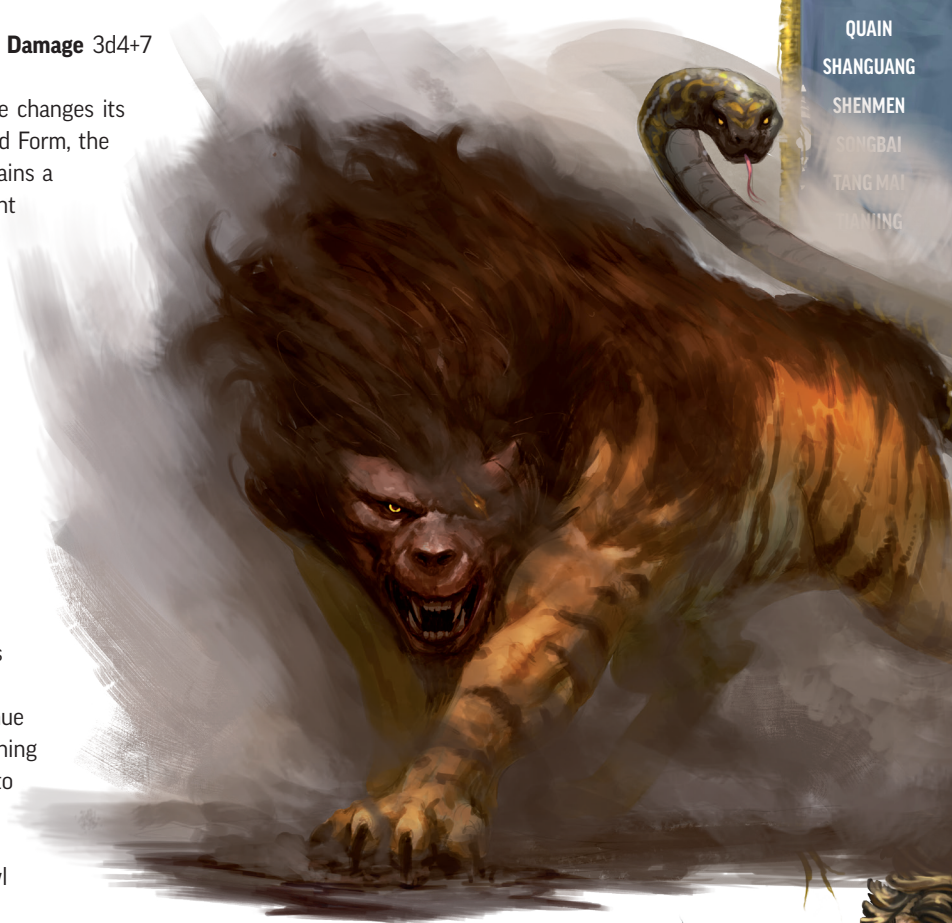
Failure As success, plus the target is drained 1.

Critical Failure As success, plus the target is drained 2 and stunned 1.

Thundering Howl ❖❖ (electricity) **Effect** The nue howls to the sky, calling down a bolt of lightning that strikes the creature closest to the nue, to a maximum range of 60 feet. The bolt deals 12d6 electricity damage (DC 27 basic Reflex save). The nue then can't use Thundering Howl for 1d4 rounds.

CURSE OF THE NUE

Even in death, a nue's spirit can bring disaster to those around it. One way to suppress the curse is to perform burial rites and build a mound over the nue's tomb. Another is to avoid the curse entirely by setting the corpse adrift down a river or burying it far away. The curse itself is said to enact its wrath through possession; some believe this is how a nue is created.





ELEMENTAL BLOSSOMS

Undisturbed forests, forgotten valleys, and medicinal gardens hide plants that carry elemental or magical essences. Hiding among these flowers, mantises grow stronger with the rich environment, preying on the other fabulous creatures living among the blossoms, such as apothecary bees (*Pathfinder Howl of the Wild*).

ANIMAL MASTERS

While many sapient beings like to put themselves above the animal kingdom, the gap can be closer than many realize and catch the arrogant off guard. Tian stories abound with tales of masters learning mystic or martial arts from animals, though many scholars dismiss these creatures as powerful beings simply taking animal form. The five-color mantis is a strong counterargument to the latter claims, as are animals who undergo the transformation into yaoguai. Rarer tales speak of mimic birds who cast spells that they overhear or larvae that cocoon themselves into artifact shells and pupate into living weapons.

ORCHID MANTIS

Few creatures appear as beautiful as the orchid mantises. Their elegant form and coloration resemble flowers, and many people adopt the delicate creatures as short-lived pets. While these mundane insects aren't dangerous to humanoids, they can still bring down prey several times their own size. Unfolding from their flowery pose, orchid mantises lash out with blinding speed, even chasing foraging butterflies with their sharp-toothed arms and powerful bite.

GIANT ORCHID MANTIS

These mantises have grown to an unusual size, which makes their camouflage less effective in most environments. As such, they're usually found in areas where a blossom the size of an adult human could pass as normal, in the lushest rainforests, or in lands where rare medicinal herbs are cultivated. Tame giant orchid mantises can also be found protecting those rich enough to afford such decorative guards.

GIANT ORCHID MANTIS — CREATURE 2

MEDIUM ANIMAL

Perception +6; low-light vision

Skills Acrobatics +8, Athletics +7, Stealth +10

Str +3, **Dex** +4, **Con** +3, **Int** –5, **Wis** +2, **Cha** –4

Floral Camouflage When Hiding, the giant orchid mantis is concealed by any amount of leaves or petals, even if they aren't thick enough to make other creatures concealed.

AC 18; **Fort** +9, **Ref** +10, **Will** +6

HP 30

Speed 40 feet, climb 20 feet, fly 20 feet

Melee mandibles +11 (finesse), **Damage** 1d10+3 piercing

Melee leg +11 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 1d8+3 piercing

Barbed Limbs ❖❖ The giant orchid mantis makes two leg Strikes. If it hits the same creature with both attacks, that creature is grabbed until the end of the mantis's next turn.

Sudden Strike In the first round of combat, creatures that haven't acted are off-guard to the orchid mantis.

ORCHID MANTIS SWARM

Some mantises have unusually strong connections to elemental power. Though they lack the training to cultivate this energy, when orchid mantises gather at a place of abundant food or overflowing natural energy, they can bring trees to bloom in the depths of winter or turn any stretch of ground into a garden. Despite their beauty, gathering in large groups only seems to exacerbate the mantises' tempers. Although the mantises are individually harmless, anyone disturbing the countless false blossoms is likely to be recognized as food, no matter their size.

ORCHID MANTIS SWARM — CREATURE 6

LARGE ANIMAL SWARM

Perception +12; low-light vision

Skills Stealth +16

Str –2, **Dex** +4, **Con** +1, **Int** –5, **Wis** +2, **Cha** –4

Floral Camouflage When Hiding, the orchid mantis swarm is concealed by any amount of leaves or petals, even if they aren't thick enough to make other creatures concealed.

AC 24; **Fort** +13, **Ref** +16, **Will** +12

HP 100; **Immunities** precision, swarm mind; **Weaknesses** area damage 5, splash damage 5; **Resistances** bludgeoning 2, piercing 5, slashing 5

Speed 30 feet, climb 20 feet, fly 20 feet

Biting Blossoms ❖ Each enemy in the swarm's space takes 3d6 piercing damage (DC 24 basic Reflex save). Creatures that fail this save also take 1d4 persistent bleed damage.

Drifting Petals ❖❖ (mental, visual) The swarm Flies. Each creature whose space it moves through must attempt a DC 24 Will save or be transfixed by their blossom-like bodies.

Critical Success No effect.

Success The creature is dazzled for 1 round.

Failure The creature is dazzled and stupefied 1 for 1 round.

Critical Failure The creature is blinded and stupefied 2 for 1 round.

FIVE-COLOR ORCHID MANTIS

Orchid mantises naturally live short lives that don't offer a great deal of time to gather spiritual energy. However, a mantis in a rich enough environment can extend their life span and grow to understand the elements. These creatures become five-color orchid mantises and, despite their violent attitudes, are thought to be especially sacred to Qi Zhong. As such, these dangerous mantises are often avoided or placated while gathering herbs rather than driven off.

FIVE-COLOR ORCHID MANTIS — CREATURE 9

UNCOMMON MEDIUM BEAST

Perception +18; darkvision

Skills Acrobatics +19, Athletics +19, Stealth +21, Survival +18

Str +4, **Dex** +6, **Con** +4, **Int** –3, **Wis** +3, **Cha** –4

Floral Camouflage When Hiding, the five-color orchid mantis is concealed by any amount of leaves or petals, even if they aren't thick enough to make other creatures concealed.

AC 27; **Fort** +19, **Ref** +21, **Will** +16

HP 137

Elemental Expulsion ↻ **Requirements** The mantis has an elemental trait from Color Shift; **Trigger** It's damaged by a weapon Strike; **Effect** Elemental energy pushes back against the blow, giving the attacker a –2 status penalty to attack rolls until the beginning of its next turn. If the weapon contains material that matches the mantis's trait (such as earth for a thrown rock or fire for a lit torch), the mantis gains resistance 10 to all damage from this Strike.

Speed 50 feet, climb 25 feet, fly 25 feet

Melee ❖ mandibles +21 (finesse), **Damage** 3d10+7 piercing

Melee ❖ leg +21 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 3d8+7 piercing

Color Shift ❖ **Frequency** once per round; **Effect** The mantis attunes itself to one of five elements, changing color accordingly (yellow for earth, red for fire, white for metal, black for water, or green for wood). It gains that trait and a +2 status bonus to saving throws against effects with that trait until the beginning of its next turn. If the mantis uses Color Shift on its next turn, it must choose a different color.

Harvesting Limbs ❖❖ The mantis makes two leg attacks. If both attacks hit, the mantis gains 10 temporary Hit Points, and the target must succeed at a DC 27 Fortitude saving throw or become drained 1 (drained 2 on a critical failure). The drained condition ends when the mantis is reduced to 0 Hit Points.

Sudden Strike On the first round of combat, creatures that haven't acted are off-guard to the mantis.

COLORFUL COMPANIONS

Orchid mantises are common choices for familiars, even beyond their natural range. At the GM's discretion, such familiars can take the plant form familiar ability (*Player Core* 213), despite not being plants themselves, to represent and enhance their exceptional camouflage.



CLEAR DIRECTION

Most pengs on Golarion are seen in the skies of southern Tian Xia. Pengs hardly ever roost or even stop to rest, and they're almost always spotted heading in a southerly trajectory. According to pengs themselves, they have no destination: they're headed south, and even they don't know why. Some whimsical pengs claim that they're in pursuit of a dream they once had in a life they lived long before this one.

PENG

A peng is a massive avian beast who flies effortlessly among the highest clouds. Their bright plumage makes it difficult to see their shape against an azure sky, but with patience, an onlooker might notice movement too swift to be a natural cloud.

Beautiful and graceful, a peng arises from the unlikeliest of origins: the cruel kun, a hateful fish monster whose predilection for the crushing depths of the sea matches the peng's own love of the bright, open sky. After a kun sacrifices their power for a noble heart by bathing in the sun's rays, they transform into this majestic bird, which eschews violence unless they must fight to stay free.

A peng doesn't seek danger or thrills; they want only to make their long voyages and fly without disruption. However, they sometimes come into conflict with dragons and other high-flying creatures that would hunt them or block their path. Although it's unclear to mortals what purpose a peng's journeys serve, celestial powers related to air or freedom will sometimes ask their mortal followers to assist a peng in its journey.

A peng's calm and steady nature is so strong that its mere presence can quell storms and still winds. Spotting a peng is undoubtedly a sign of good luck for sailors and mariners—a feeling shared with most others lucky enough to lay eyes on these rare and beautiful creatures. When the sky is clear and blue with gentle weather for an extended period, such fine conditions can be attributed to the presence of an unseen peng.



PENG CREATURE 12

RARE GARGANTUAN AIR BEAST COLD HOLY

Perception +25
Languages Sussuran
Skills Acrobatics +23, Athletics +22, Nature +25
Str +4, **Dex** +6, **Con** +5, **Int** +3, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +7
Heaven's View Clouds don't impair a peng's vision.

AC 32; **Fort** +23, **Ref** +24, **Will** +23
HP 200; **Resistances** cold 10; **Weaknesses** unholy 10
Calm Weather Aura (air, aura, primal) 1 mile. The ambient weather around a peng is always lightly cloudy with a pleasant breeze, and the temperature is pleasantly warm for the season. Another creature that attempts to alter the weather within this aura (such as with a *control weather* ritual or localized effect like *gust of wind*) must succeed at a DC 32 Will save; otherwise, the effect is disrupted. The peng can activate or deactivate this aura as a single action with the concentrate trait.

Speed 10 feet, fly 70 feet; windslice
Melee ❖ beak +24 (reach 10 feet), **Damage** 3d8+10 piercing
Melee ❖ talon +24 (agile), **Damage** 3d6+10 slashing
Primal Innate Spells DC 32; **5th** *howling blizzard*; **3rd** *wall of wind* (at will); **1st** *gust of wind* (at will)
Cloud Cover ❖ (air, primal) The peng exhales a thick cloud and envelops themself in the mist. The peng is concealed until the end of their next turn.
Flap Wings ❖❖ (air, cold, primal) The peng beats their wings to create a mighty burst of frosty air and push away foes. Each creature within 10 feet of the peng takes 4d6 bludgeoning and 4d6 cold damage (DC 32 basic Reflex save). Creatures that fail their save are pushed away 10 feet; creatures that critically fail are pushed away 20 feet and knocked prone.
Windslice Pengs can move in any wind with easy grace. A peng ignores difficult terrain caused by wind and doesn't need to Maneuver in Flight in high winds.

PIXIU

To witness a pixiu (pee-shee-oh) is a blessing indeed—and a sight to behold. This winged, dragon-headed lion has a formidable appearance that belies its youthful exuberance. Legend claims it was this overenthusiastic playfulness that caused the first of their kind to be banished from heaven, cursed to gather wealth and never let it go. Whatever the case, each pixiu has an uncanny ability to sniff out gold, which it loves to eat. Curiously, a pixiu's touch is also able to sunder curses and censure malign spirits, perhaps a remnant of its lost divinity.

Due to its celestial background and ability to exorcise curses, a pixiu is also believed to be a bringer and protector of prosperity, attracting good fortune and fending off evil spirits. Its heavenly origins and love of wealth may be the reason why imperial dragons have cared for them since time immemorial, valuing them as guardians and loyal companions. In particular, underworld dragons employ pixius to expand their hoards, and many sovereign dragons value them as status symbols. In dragon-ruled realms across Tian Xia, the presence of a pixiu within a community is seen as a sign of its draconic patron's approval and goodwill.

Despite the protection of imperial dragons, the lure of wealth is still enough to drive some to attack a pixiu. Although a pixiu will rarely forgive an attacker, it prefers to withdraw peacefully from those it judges as purehearted but desperate. A pixiu's draconic masters, however, aren't always as forgiving.

PIXIU DIMORPHISM

Male and female pixius have notable differences (though, just like natural animals, individuals with the traits of both exist). Males have a golden coat and mane, while females have a blue overcoat. While most pixius have one horn, females with two horns aren't uncommon; curiously, no male pixius with two horns have ever been documented.

PIXIU — CREATURE 8

UNCOMMON LARGE DRAGON

Perception +18; darkvision, goldsense (precise) 120 feet
Languages Draconic
Skills Acrobatics +14, Athletics +18, Religion +16
Str +6, **Dex** +2, **Con** +6, **Int** –2, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +4
Goldsense The pixiu can detect the presence, location, and approximate value of gold within 120 feet.

AC 26; **Fort** +18, **Ref** +14, **Will** +16
HP 165; **Resistances** void 10
Good Fortune ↻ (fortune) **Trigger** The pixiu, or an ally within 30 feet, is about to attempt a saving throw but hasn't rolled yet; **Frequency** once per hour; **Effect** That creature rolls the triggering saving throw twice and takes the better result.
Stored Wealth Pixius can eat gold and gems with no adverse effects. A pixiu's belly can hold any number of gold pieces, usually around 100. Whenever it takes slashing or piercing damage, a number of gold pieces equal to the damage falls from its belly to the ground in its square.

Speed 30 feet, fly 40 feet
Melee ❖ jaws +20 (magical), **Damage** 2d10+5 piercing plus 1d4 holy and Devour Wealth
Melee ❖ claw +20 (agile, magical), **Damage** 2d6+5 slashing plus 1d4 spirit
Divine Innate Spells DC 26; **4th** *cleanse affliction* (×3)
Devour Wealth ❖ **Requirements** The pixiu's previous action was a successful jaws Strike; **Effect** The pixiu swallows up to 2d12 gold pieces on the target's person and gains temporary Hit Points equal to the amount devoured. These temporary Hit Points last for 1 minute.
Trample ❖❖❖ Medium or smaller, claw, DC 26



DEATH-LONG CAREER

Even after atoning for their sins and regaining their memories, some souls choose to retain their titles as joseung sajas. These experienced reapers hunt ijhyeojin, former joseung sajas who have abandoned their posts. To joseung sajas, an ijhyeojin is no more than just another soul overstaying its welcome in the world of the living.



PSYCHOPOMP, JOSEUNG SAJA

Joseung saja (jo-seung sah-jah) is a name sometimes bestowed on creatures in the afterlife who have committed grave sins in their lifetimes. Known also as reapers, these pale and sunken-eyed creatures are psychopomps—beings who guide the souls of the dead to the Boneyard. No one knows the specific criteria for one to become joseung sajas, but those who are selected have their memories erased and must work as joseung sajas until they've been deemed to have fully atoned for their sins.

Joseung sajas from different eras wander the world, and when a creature nears death, one will appear and await the target's demise as their afterlife guide. When needed, they even alter their target's memories to remove painful emotions that might chain them to the mortal world, easing them into a peaceful death. This duty prevents those who die tragic or violent deaths from becoming bound to the world as ghosts—a mercy, though one often unappreciated by the wards of joseung sajas. If a creature targeted by a joseung saja becomes undead or otherwise cheats death, the reaper must fulfill their duty of granting the creature a true death.

Because joseung sajas linger among mortals in order to perform their duties, they're one of the most commonly seen psychopomps.

JOSEUNG SAJA — CREATURE 14

MEDIUM MONITOR PSYCHOPOMP

Perception +28; darkvision, lifesense 60 feet

Languages Celestial, Chthonian, Diabolic, Requian; *truespeech*

Skills Athletics +25, Boneyard Lore +26, Diplomacy +28, Religion +28, Society +24, Stealth +24

Str +5, **Dex** +4, **Con** +5, **Int** +4, **Wis** +8, **Cha** +8

Items *+2 striking longsword*

AC 35; **Fort** +25, **Ref** +25, **Will** +28

HP 250; **Immunities** death effects, disease; **Resistances** poison 15, void 15

Speed 25 feet

Melee ❖ longsword +29 (versatile P), **Damage** 2d8+8 slashing plus reap souls and spirit touch

Divine Innate Spells DC 34; **5th** *translocate*; **4th** *talking corpse*; **2nd** *invisibility* (at will, self only); **Constant (5th)** *truespeech*

Reap Memory ❖❖ (incapacitation, mental) The joseung saja looks into the eyes of a creature within 30 feet and removes inconvenient or painful memories that are preventing it from moving on to death. The target is aware that the joseung saja attempted to alter its memory and can attempt a Will save to resist. Willing targets receive the effects of a critical failure.

Critical Success The target is unaffected.

Success The target takes 2d10 mental damage and is stupefied 2 for 1 round.

Failure The target takes 4d10 mental damage and is stupefied 2 for 1 week.

Critical Failure The target loses all painful emotions and memories, leaving an indistinct haze. If the target is an ijhyeojin, then all of their memories are reaped and they become a joseung saja.

Reap Souls ↷ (death) **Trigger** The joseung saja brings a target to 0 Hit Points or successfully Strikes a target with the dying condition; **Effect** The target must succeed at a DC 34 Will save or immediately die. A reaped creature can't be return to life or become undead except by a 9th-rank or higher ritual.

Shifting Form ❖ (concentration) The joseung saja is incorporeal until the end of their next turn. While they're incorporeal, they have resistance 10 to all damage (except force, void, and *ghost touch* weapons).

Spirit Touch A joseung saja's Strikes all have the effects of a *ghost touch* property rune and deal an extra 3d6 void damage to living creatures and 3d6 vitality damage to undead.

SAKHIL, IJHYEOJIN

Ijhyeojins (ee-jyuh-jeens) were once joseung sajas, psychopomps who guided the dead to the Boneyard as divine punishment for their sins. Over time, they rejected their roles and became sakhils. Some did this due to a sense of injustice over having to atone for their sins in the afterlife, but all do so partially out of a desperate desire to reclaim their memories—for ijhyeojins are named for the fear they manifest, the fear of being forgotten. They prey on people who are socially isolated by circumstances or those obsessed with their legacy, slowly cutting their victims off from friends, professional contacts, and family. Ijhyeojins particularly enjoy infiltrating medical facilities to prey on patients who fear about being forgotten in their deaths, snatching away crucial memories from them or their visiting loved ones. Hunting in this way also grants the sahkils ideal positioning to lure joseung sajas to their demise.

Ijhyeojins resemble the pale-skinned psychopomps they used to be, except their faces have no distinguishable features, like a skull with a smooth layer of skin pulled over it. Their bodies continue to twist and grow the longer they live.

IJHYEOJIN — CREATURE 14

MEDIUM | FIEND | SAHKIL | UNHOLY

Perception +28; darkvision, lifesense 60 feet

Languages Celestial, Chthonian, Diabolic, Requian; telepathy 100 feet, *truespeech*

Skills Acrobatics +25, Boneyard Lore +28, Deception +28, Intimidation +28, Religion +28, Stealth +25

Str +6, **Dex** +5, **Con** +4, **Int** +4, **Wis** +8, **Cha** +8

Easy to Call An ijhyeojin's level is considered 2 lower for the purpose of being conjured by the *planar binding* ritual (and potentially other rituals, at the GM's discretion), but they're always free to attack or leave instead of negotiate unless the primary caster's check is a critical success.

AC 35; **Fort** +22, **Ref** +25, **Will** +28

HP 310; **Immunities** fear; **Weaknesses** holy 10

Forgotten Presence ↻ **Trigger** The ijhyeojin critically succeeds at a saving throw against a spell; **Effect** The ijhyeojin redirects the triggering spell to a new target other than its caster. If the ijhyeojin is wearing that target's face, the new target takes a –2 circumstance penalty to this saving throw.

Speed 30 feet

Melee ❖ claw +28 (agile), **Damage** 3d8+14 slashing plus swipe countenance

Divine Innate Spells DC 34; **4th** *rewrite memory* (at will); **2nd** *invisibility* (at will, self only); **Constant (5th)** *truespeech*

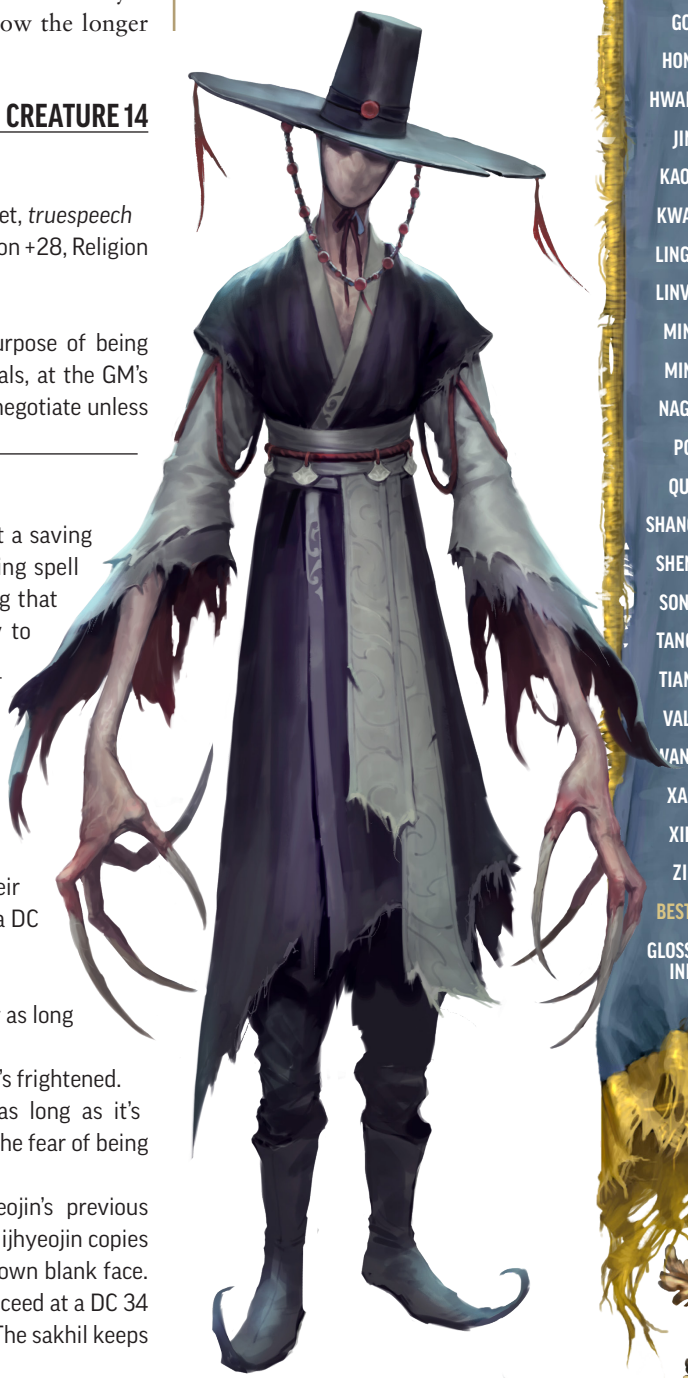
Overwrite Memory ❖❖ (emotion, fear, mental) The ijhyeojin alters the memories of a target within 30 feet, insinuating their faceless visage in the place of others. The target must attempt a DC 34 Will save.

- **Critical Success** The target is unaffected.
- **Success** The target is frightened 1 and treats no one as an ally for as long as it's frightened.
- **Failure** The target is frightened 2 and is confused for as long as it's frightened.
- **Critical Failure** The target is frightened 4 and confused for as long as it's frightened. If the target is a joseung saja, they instead realize the fear of being forgotten and become an ijhyeojin.

Swipe Countenance ❖ (mental, visual) **Requirements** The ijhyeojin's previous action was a successful claw Strike against the target; **Effect** The ijhyeojin copies the countenance of the target, imprinting it perfectly onto their own blank face. While only their face changes, creatures must Seek them and succeed at a DC 34 Will save to distinguish them visually from the original creature. The sakhil keeps the same visage for 24 hours or until they steal another.

FATAL FEUD

Ijhyeojins regard all joseung sajas as brainwashed servants of the Boneyard who need to be "awakened" from their sense of duty through fear. Despite their perception of themselves as liberators, ijhyeojins delight in watching a joseung saja unravel completely as they become consumed and reborn as faceless sakhils by their own fear.



SOUL RESERVOIR

A site with a history of drownings can be the result of a single shui gui curse being passed down through the years, but particularly dangerous sites with repeated natural drownings can develop complex hauntings. In addition to the ghosts struggling to drown the next victim, other undead gather and haunts develop under the dark, still water.



SHUI GUI

When a person drowns in a body of water, there's a chance that their spirit will be trapped and unable to reincarnate. Twisted with anger, spite, and malice, the spirit transforms into a shui gui.

If someone sees a shui gui from shore, they'll often see only the top part of a head with two pinprick reflections of light from its eyes. Lurking under docks and near the water's edge, the shui gui calls out to people or makes disturbances to draw them within reach of the water. Once the unsuspecting victim is close enough, the spirit pulls them underwater, drowns them, and possesses their body in a process known as ti shōn. Once the spirit successfully inhabits the vacant body, they escape their curse and live a new life; however, their victim's spirit remains trapped in the water until, at last, they too drown a hapless passerby, thus continuing a never-ending cycle.

A shui gui is terrified of fire, and those who camp by water or travel by boat are advised to always keep a lantern handy. Charms and amulets can also keep the shui gui at bay, but the spirit is generally weakest after being goaded onto land.

SHUI GUI CREATURE 5

UNCOMMON | MEDIUM | AQUATIC | GHOST | INCORPOREAL | SPIRIT | UNDEAD | WATER

Perception +14; darkvision

Languages Tien

Skills Athletics +13, Deception +13, Diplomacy +11, Ghost Lore +15, Religion +12, Stealth +16

Str +0, **Dex** +5, **Con** +0, **Int** +4, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +4

Water-Bound Curse The shui gui is bound to the body of water in which it died. It's unable to move further than 120 feet from the edge of the water.

AC 21; **Fort** +9, **Ref** +14, **Will** +10

HP 50 (void healing, rejuvenation); **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, precision, unconscious; **Weaknesses** fire 10; **Resistances** all damage 5 (except fire, force, *ghost touch*, spirit, or vitality; double resistance vs. non-magical)

Rejuvenation (divine) When the shui gui is destroyed, it reforms after 2d4 days within the body of water it's bound to, fully healing. It can be permanently destroyed if the body of the shui gui who originally died in the water can be found and laid to rest.

Ti Shōn ↷ (death, divine) **Trigger** A creature grabbed by the shui gui dies of suffocation; **Effect** Ripping the spirit of its drowned victim out of the target's body, the shui gui enters the corpse to take the original owner's place. The shui gui then returns to life at the edge of its body of water as if it had been the target of a successful *resurrect* ritual (*Player Core* 394), except it has the appearance of the target rather than its original body. After a week, the spirit of the drowned creature becomes a shui gui. The new spirit can't be raised from the dead by normal magical means until they've been destroyed as a shui gui.

Speed 10 feet, swim 40 feet

Melee ❖ ghostly hand +14 (agile, finesse, magical), **Damage** 2d6+4 void plus Grab

Drag Under ❖ The shui gui Swims at half Speed, along with any creature it has grabbed.

Drown the Living ❖ **Requirements** The target must be holding its breath and be grabbed by the shui gui; **Effect** The shui gui tightens its grip. The target must succeed at a DC 24 Fortitude save or immediately lose 1d4 actions worth of air (or twice that on a critical failure).

Ghostly Grasp A shui gui can Grapple corporeal creatures despite being incorporeal. The shui gui uses its Athletics check to Grapple as normal but can't use Athletics for other actions that require corporeal contact, like Force Open or Trip.

YEONGNO

Neither human nor beast yet resembling both, yeongno (yeong-no) are creatures that once were denizens of heaven but were cast out, down to the mortal Universe, due to their own greed. Yeongno claim to have once been celestial dragons and wear elongated dragon masks with full-body wraps decorated with scale patterns in honor of this claim—though no one has been able to confirm the veracity of this belief. As they wander, they hold a willow pipe in their mouths, producing a distinct "bibi" sound that often heralds their appearance.

Despite their reputation as monsters who eat people, yeongno are welcomed by the poor and oppressed, who see the creatures as wise and just. Yeongno believe that by eating 100 wealthy individuals who abuse their wealth or who accumulated their wealth by underhanded or exploitative means, they can atone for their own greed, allowing them to ascend back into heaven. A corrupt and greedy individual can escape their fate of being eaten by a yeongno by giving away all of their wealth and agreeing to be transformed into a pig for one year. If the person can endure one year living as a pig in the care of a household they once harmed, the yeongno will spare them.

YEONGNO — CREATURE 7

LARGE CELESTIAL

Perception +17; goldsense (precise) 120 feet
Languages Diabolic, Draconic, Empyrean, Tien; *telepathy* 100 feet
Skills Athletics +17, Diplomacy +15, Religion +15, Society +15, Stealth +13
Str +6, **Dex** +2, **Con** +4, **Int** +2, **Wis** +6, **Cha** +4
Items wooden pipe
Goldsense The yeongno can detect the presence, location, and approximate value of gold within 120 feet.

AC 25; **Fort** +15, **Ref** +13, **Will** +17
HP 120

Speed 25 feet
Melee ❖ jaws +17, **Damage** 3d6+8 piercing plus Grab
Ranged ❖ pipe +13 (divine, sonic, range 60 feet), **Damage** 4d6 sonic
Fortune's Favor ❖❖❖ (curse, divine, incapacitation, polymorph) **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** A target creature within 30 feet must succeed at a DC 25 Will save or gain the effects of *cursed metamorphosis*, being polymorphed into a pig whose girth is determined by the target's wealth. After 24 hours, the target can end this effect using a Dismiss action, at which point the yeongno becomes aware that the effect has ended. A yeongno can use Fortune's Favor only if no targets are currently under its effects.
Money is Pain ❖❖ (divine, mental) **Requirements** The target is carrying at least 100 gp worth of precious metals; **Effect** The yeongno crushes a creature it can see with the weight of their wealth. Apparitions of gold coins approximating the wealth of the target materialize and pummel the target from all sides. The target attempts a DC 25 Will save.
Critical Success The target is unaffected.
Success The target is slowed 1 for 1 round.
Failure The target takes 3d6 persistent mental damage and is slowed 1 as long as the damage continues. The effect immediately ends if they're carrying less than 100 gp worth of precious metals.
Critical Failure As failure, except any flat checks to remove the persistent damage automatically fail.
Swallow Whole ❖ (attack) Medium, 3d6+6 bludgeoning, Rupture 20

GLUTTON'S REDEMPTION

Yeongno eat the corrupt and wealthy as a symbolic means of consuming their own greed. While yeongno aspire to ascend from their current existence, they also actively sabotage other creatures hoping to do the same. They feel particularly threatened by imugi (page 287), whom the yeongno believe would take their spots in heaven.



Glossary & Index

This appendix contains brief explanations and page references for the content presented in this book, including new rules, locations, deities, and organizations. New rules content is marked with an asterisk (*).

Abadar God of cities, law, earth, and wealth. 46, *Pathfinder Lost Omens Gods & Magic* 12–13

Absalom Reckoning The most commonly used calendar in Avistan and Garund, consisting of 52 weeks across 12 months. The current year is 4723 AR.

access Certain uncommon abilities, feats, and other options have an Access entry. Characters who meet the criteria in the entry gain access to that option. *GM Core 23*

adaro Aquatic humanoids that heavily resemble sharks. Generally prefer tropical waters.

aiyawu Traditional silver-chased shrines where the elves of Jinin left gifts for their neighbors.

Alseta God of doors, portals, thresholds, and traditions. Known as the Welcomer. *Gods & Magic* 53

Amanandar Country renamed Linvarre when it gained independence. 131

amurrun See catfolk. 86, *Advanced Player's Guide* 8–11

Ancestor's Day A holiday dedicated to remembrance and celebration of one's forebears. 212

anito Capricious nature spirits that populate the islands of Minata. 139

Arcadia One of Golarion's continents, lying to the east of Tian Xia. *Pathfinder Lost Omens World Guide* 6–7

Aroden God of humanity, innovation, culture, and fulfillment of destiny. Now deceased. *World Guide* 14, 21

Arshea Empyreal lord of freedom, physical beauty, and sexuality. *Gods & Magic* 82

Aspis Consortium A prominent trade organization which spans the Inner Sea region and beyond. Known for unscrupulous practices. *Pathfinder Lost Omens Character Guide* 65

athamaru Amphibious people who resemble fish, commonly found in the Gulf of Xidao.

Avistan One of Golarion's continents. It makes up the northern half of the Inner Sea region. *World Guide* 7

Axis A massive planar city that is known for its adherence to order and home to the monitors known as aeons. *GM Core* 179

Azaersi Hobgoblin leader of the Ironfang Legion and the Avistani nation of Oprak. *Legends* 26

Azlant One of the greatest nations on Golarion before it was destroyed during Earthfall. *World Guide* 8, 62–63

Baekho* God of balance, healing, nature, and seasons. Known as the Lord of the Seasons. 24

Bestiary* 276–299

Blue Faith A Hongali faith focused on the Great Sky Spirit Tenengir, sire to Hongal's great spirits of earth, sea, and wind. 87

Boneyard A plane where the souls of the dead travel in the afterlife. Home to the monitors known as psychopomps. *GM Core* 179

caligni A human-like people who reside in the Darklands. *Monster Core* 48–49

Calistria Elven goddess of lust, revenge, and trickery. Known as the Savored Sting. *Gods & Magic* 16–17

Casmaron One of Golarion's continents. Located to the west of Tian Xia. *World Guide* 7

catfolk Humanoids with feline features and a love of discovery. See amurrun. 86, *Advanced Player's Guide* 8–11

Cayden Cailean The god of bravery, ale, freedom, and wine. *Gods & Magic* 18–19

cecaelia An amphibious people with the upper body of a humanoid and the lower body of a octopus. *Bestiary 3* 45

celestial Creatures who hail from or have a strong connection to the planes of Heaven, Nirvana, and Elysium.

Celestial Court The organized society of Tian Xia's immortals and divinities, ruled over by the goddess Shizuru. 23

Clicking Caverns A series of Darklands tunnels and caverns that surfaces near the border of Nagajor and Xa Hoi. Filled with haunted flesh-eating clockwork machines. 69–70

cultivation The art of improving personal power through meditation and training. Often associated with martial arts or supernatural abilities.

Crown of the World The glacial continent at the very north of Golarion. Connects to Avistan and Tian Xia.

cyclops One eyed giants who possess limited power of foresight. *Monster Core* 70–71

Cyth-V'Sug Demon lord of fungus and parasites. Known as the Blasted Hearth. *Gods & Magic* 76, 124–125

Daikitsu* God of agriculture, craftsmanship, kitsune, and rice. Known as the Lady of Foxes. 25

Darklands The immense area of caverns, vaults, and passages beneath the surface of Golarion. *World Guide* 7–8

dawnsilver A rare metal that resembles silver with a blindingly bright shine. As strong as steel but much lighter.

Dewangayaw A name referring to the triad of deities Srikalis, Sritaming, and Sribaril. 41

Desna Popular goddess of dreams, luck, stars, and travelers. 46, *Gods & Magic* 20–21

dokkaebi An ethnicity of goblin most common in Hwanggot. Known for innate magic abilities and skill at illusions.

Earthfall A cataclysmic event in -2793 IC, in which a rain of meteorites fell upon Golarion and caused massive destruction.

Emperor's Footprint A forested sinkhole in Po Li considered sacred due to its connection to the Eternal Emperor.

Eternal Emperor The emperor of Lung Wa, stated to be reincarnated in each successive ruler of that land. Worshipped by the state religion of Imperial Lung Wa and the theocratic Successor State of Po Li.

faydhaan Diplomatic and charming genies who reside underwater. *Monster Core* 158

First World A plane that overlaps the Universe and is said to be a "rough draft" of existence. It's home to vibrant landscapes and fey. *GM Core* 177

fleshwarp A blanket name for people who have been changed from their original ancestry. *Ancestry Guide* 88–93

Fumeiyoshi* God of envy, graves, infamy, and undead. Known as the Lord of Envy. Tsukiyo's brother. 26

General Susumu* God of fear, glory, warfare, and death. Known as the Black Daimyo. Shizuru's half-brother. 27

geniekin An umbrella term for planar scions descended from beings from the Elemental Planes. *Ancestry Guide* 98–99

Gozreh Dual god of nature, the sea, and weather. Known as the Wind and the Waves. *Gods & Magic* 26–27

Grandmaster One of a thousand master cultivators of Quain who dominate martial arts. 177

Green Faith A faith defined by reverence for the natural world and a dedication to preserving it. *Gods & Magic* 96

grindylow A sharp-toothed amphibious creature with a top half that resembles a goblin and a lower half that resembles an octopus. *Bestiary 2* 138

grogrisant The legendary six-eyed lion of Taldor, which has appeared throughout history. *Monsters of Myth* 30

Hao Jin A powerful Gokan sorceress famous for bearing the power of a phoenix. *Legends* 46–48

Hao Jin Tapestry A demiplane created by Hao Jin to save people and places at risk of destruction. Eventually unraveled and destroyed due to warring factions using it for their own purposes. *Legends* 46–48

haunted clockwork* Flesh-eating, malevolent constructs that are possessed by evil spirits. 286

Heaven A plane that embodies order and compassion and is home to the celestials known as archons. *GM Core* 180

Hei Feng God of the sea, storms, tengu, and sailors. Known as the Duke of Thunder. 28, *Gods & Magic* 63

Hell A cruel plane separated into nine distinct layers and home to the fiends known as devils. *GM Core* 180

hobgoblin An ancestry created by infusing goblins with the power of the *Cantorian Spring*. *Character Guide* 47–51

huli jing See kitsune. *Ancestry Guide* 120–125

Ichimeiyo A system of proper conduct attributed to the goddess Shizuru. 48

Imperial Calendar The most commonly used calendar in Tian Xia, consisting of 52 weeks across 12 months. The current year is 7224 IC.

Imperial Dragons Namesakes of the Dragon Empires and guardians of Tian Xia before humanity arrived. They embody five elemental forces. 14, *Bestiary 3* 74

Inma A kishin oni powerful enough to grant divine abilities to her lackeys. Known as the Empress of the World. 66

Iron Mountain A mountain in the Wall of Heaven that contains gates to Heaven and Hell. Every 12 years, the Celestial Dragon appears at this location to exchange a dragon pearl for a potent sacrifice.

Irori God of history, knowledge, and self-perfection. *Gods & Magic* 30–31

iruxi See lizardfolk. *Character Guide* 47, 56–59

Ivory Accord A historic truce signed between Nagajor and the Yixing Empire in 1503 IC. 161

Jade Hegemon An ancient elemental empire that existed in southern Tian Xia, founded and ruled by munsahir. 233

jaathoom Invisible genies of dreams and nightmares who can transform into owls. Monster Core 157

Jin Li God of challenges, dares, promotions, and self-improvement. Known as the Golden Dragon Carp. 30

jorogumo Shapeshifting beings that can appear as a beautiful woman or a giant spider. Known to devour humanoids or use them as living incubators for eggs. *Bestiary 3* 141

Jotun A language spoken primarily by giants and giantkin.

kaiju Semi-intelligent beasts of enormous size and uncertain origin. Most common in the Valashmai Jungle, but known to reside elsewhere on Golarion.

kaiju caller A respected kaiju expert who's tasked with soothing, placating, or warning others about kaiju.

kami Divine nature spirits that serve as guardians to objects or places. Most common in Minkai and the Forest of Spirits. *Bestiary 3* 142–145

King Huang Shixin Former king of Lingshen, known for his powerful military might and expansionist ambitions. Recently deceased. 123, 128

kirin A majestic antlered beast resembling a scaled horse. Appears only in times of prosperity or during the birth or death of a figure destined for greatness. *Bestiary 3* 148

kitsune Vulpine people known for their ability to change shape. *Ancestry Guide* 120–125

kobolds Small and scaly people who frequently lurk underground or in the lairs of powerful creatures. *Advanced Player's Guide* 12–15

kraken An enormous, squid-like leviathan with a cruel intelligence. *Monster Core* 212

Lady Jinxi* God of daybreak, liminal spaces, twilight, and solitude. Known as the Poet of Dawn and Dusk. 32

Lady Nanbyo* God of earthquakes, plagues, fire and suffering. Known as the Widow of Suffering. 33

Lady of the North Star* God of secrets, remembrance, winter, and immortality. Known as the Mother of Secrets. 34

Lake Manamovar A legendary spring that transformed a group of humans into the first samsarans. 269

Lamashtu God of madness, monsters, and nightmares. 46–47, *Gods & Magic* 32–33

Lao Shu Po* God of night, rats, and thieves. Known as the Old Rat Woman. 35

leshy Living plants animated by primal spirits. *Character Guide* 52–55

lizardfolk A reptilian ancestry known for adaptability and natural prowess. *Character Guide* 47, 56–59

Lung Wa A massive Tian Empire that lasted from 6642 IC to 7106 IC. Known for its far-reaching power and influence, but also its corruption and abuses. 12

Lymnieris Empyreal lord of sex work, rites of passage, and virginity. Known as the Auroral Tower. *Gods & Magic* 128-129

merfolk An amphibious people with humanoid upper bodies and piscine lower bodies. *Monster Core* 231

Mugura and Nrithu* Rival gods of dance and storytelling, lovers and rivals, fame and gratitude. 36

munsahir Fire elementals with a strong resemblance to dwarves. Founders of the Jade Hegemon in the Valashmai Jungle.

Mutabi-qi An ethnic group local to the Shanguang Desert and Wall of Heaven, who live primarily nomadic lives. 185

naga Serpentine beings with magical powers and keen intellects. *Monster Core* 236–237

nagaji Serpentine people created by the goddess Nalinivati. *Pathfinder Lost Omens Impossible Lands* 46–51

Nalinivati* God of snakes, sorcery, fertility, and family. 37

Netherworld A shadowy reflection of the Universe with twisted landscapes cast in perpetual half-light. *GM Core* 178

ogre Large and densely muscled humanoids. *Monster Core* 250–251

onggi An earthenware storage jar typical to Hwanggot. 94

oni Failed kami tempted by despair or hedonism to incarnate into mortal forms. *Monster Core* 252–255

Osirion A nation in northeastern Garund that boasts countless tombs and temples from the time of the empire of Ancient Osirion. *World Guide* 53–54

Outer Rifts An endless winding plane full of dangerous chasms and home to the fiends known as demons and qlippoth. *GM Core* 181

Pathfinder Society A globe-trotting organization dedicated to exploration and the reclamation of lost relics. *Pathfinder Lost Omens Pathfinder Society Guide*

Pharasma God of birth, death, fate and prophecy. Known as the Lady of Graves. 47, *Gods & Magic* 38–39

Phi Deva* God of humans, the defenseless, and the collective good. Known as the Thousand-Souled Chorus. 38

planar scion A blanket term for several versatile heritages representing people descended from a distant planar ancestor or with a strong tie to another plane. *Player Core* 78–81

poppet A small and unsophisticated construct usually used as a helper or a toy. On rare occasions, may gain sapience. *Pathfinder Lost Omens The Grand Bazaar* 60

Qi Zhong* God of elements, cycles, health, and medicine. Known as the Master of Medicine. 39

Qiaos A colloquial term for bi-ethnic Tian-Shu and Tian-Min Songbainese people. 205

qlippoth Horrific and primordial creatures native to the Outer Rifts. *Monster Core* 280–283

Ravithra God of judgment, karma, law, vengeance. Known as the Chalice Bearer. *Impossible Lands* 318

ratfolk A rodent-like ancestry known for a devotion to their communities. *Advanced Player's Guide* 20–23

Rovagug God of destruction, disaster, and wrath. Known as the Rough Beast. *Gods & Magic* 40–41

Ruby Phoenix Tournament A grand martial arts tournament held in Goka every 10 years. The grand prize is a treasure from Hao Jin's vault and is highly coveted.

Sarenrae God of healing, honesty, redemption, and the sun. Known as the Dawnflower. *Gods & Magic* 42–43

samsarans Blue-skinned people native to Zi Ha, who reincarnate upon death and recall pieces of their past lives.

sarangay Powerful carabao-headed warriors who live on the isles of Minata. Known for the magical gems in their foreheads that are said to contain their souls.

seugathi An aberrant and alien creature that lurks in the Darklands with terrible occult powers and a vast intellect. *Pathfinder Adventure Path #164: Hands of the Devil* 82–83

Shelyn God of art, beauty, love, and music. Known as the Lady of Chrysanthemums 47, *Gods & Magic* 44–45

Shinonome The sky dragon herald of the goddess Shizuru.

ships* 266–267

Shizuru God of ancestors, order, the sun, and growth . Known as the Ruler of Heaven. 40, *Gods & Magic* 70

Shory An ancient empire prominent in central Garund around 1 IC and famous for its flying cities. *Pathfinder Lost Omens Mwangi Expanse* 17

Spawn of Rovagug Nigh-invincible monsters spawned from the god Rovagug, known for massive destruction.

sprite Diminutive, whimsical, and exuberant creatures from the First World. *Ancestry Guide* 126–131

Srikalis, Sritaming, and Sribaril* A triad of gods with a focus on raiding, war contracts, treasure, and warriors. 41

Successor States A collection of 16 nations that formed after the fall of Imperial Lung Wa.

Sun Wukong* God of drunkenness, nature, and trickery. Known as the Monkey King. 42

Tagamallaru A catch-all word for an ethnicity of river peoples who live along the Ilushe River of Linvarre. 135, 137

Taldor An empire in decline in southeast Avistan which seeks to reclaim former glory. *World Guide* 128–129

Taljjae An elusive creature that resides in Hwanggot, known most for the masks they wear. *Monsters of Myth* 96–101

tanggal Cannibalistic aberrations that can separate their body into two pieces while hunting.

tanuki A name for both a raccoon-like animal native to Minkai and sapient tanuki who possess shapeshifting powers.

Tapestry People A catch-all term for the many disparate peoples who once resided within the *Hao Jin Tapestry*. 53

Taumata Empire An ancient and magnificent civilization that once spanned across the isles of Minata. 139

tengu Avian people with a strong resemblance to crows. *Advanced Player's Guide* 24–27

Tien A common trade tongue spoken among many people in Tian Xia.

Tian-Dan An ethnic group local to eastern Tian Xia, especially the nation of Xa Hoi. Proudly claim descent from dragons.

Tian-Hwan An ethnic group local to eastern Tian Xia, especially the nation of Hwanggot.

Tian-Min An ethnic group local to northwestern Tian Xia, primarily Minkai and the Forest of Spirits. Known for occasionally having unusual eye colors.

Tian-Shu The most populous of Tian ethnic groups, common to the central nations of Tian Xia. Took the name in honor of the first emperor of Shu.

Tian-Sing A name for a group of diverse ethnicities local to the isles of Minata. Often have wavy black hair and sepia skin tones.

Tian-La An ethnic group local to northern Tian Xia, especially the nation of Hongal. Often nomadic due to their harsh living conditions.

Tian-Tang An ethnic group local to eastern Tian Xia, especially the nation of Tang Mai. Sometimes incorrectly referred to as Tian-Dtang.

Tian-Yae An ethnic group with roots from both the Mutabi-qi and the Shory people of Yjae. 188–189

tripkee Tripkees are a family of frog-like humanoids. *Mwangi Expanse* 118–121

Tsukiyo God of jade, the moon, and spirits. Known as Prince of the Moon. 43, *Gods & Magic* 71

tsukumogami Intelligent, mobile objects formed from the union between a 100-year-old object and a kami. *Bestiary 3* 276–277

Valashai Massive, alien reptilians who landed in the Valashmai Jungle during Tian Xia's prehistory. 233

Varisia A region in northwestern Avistan. Known as a frontier land and home to ancient Thassilonian ruins. *World Guide* 116–117

Vudra A vast peninsula in southeastern Casmaron, home to the Vudrani people.

wayangs Small people native to the Netherworld. Immigrated to Golarion after Earthfall.

xulgaths Reptilian people native to the Darklands. *Monster Core* 352–353

yaksha Divine spirits who emigrated to Golarion from the first world.

yaoguai Beings that usually begin as simple animals, plants, or objects, but have found a means to transcend their original forms through the power of cultivation.

Yaezhing* God of harsh justice, murder, and punishment. 44

Yamatsumi* God of mountains, volcanoes, and winter. 45

ysoki See ratfolk. *Advanced Player's Guide* 20–23

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