

OA 9 - Uniting the Scrolls

Synopsis

As the PCs bring the scroll(s) (from OA6 and 8) to the Jade Emperor, a jealous general tries to bring them into discredit. They have to use the weapons of intrigue to help General Zhen and his loyal followers, the Blue Hunter and Jade Dragon, to get permission to forge the grand alliance with the other provinces in order to fight against the incursion of the servants of the foul entities. Then, while their allies travel towards the Nezumi Network to meet the representatives of the other warlords, they must travel to the Spires of Tengu to ask the master of wind for his help to eliminate the orc threat. This adventure is for 4 characters of level 6.

Arrival in the City of Butterflies

After the conclusion of the last adventure (or due to some other deed that helped recover one of the magical elemental scrolls), the PCs are invited to the City of Butterflies to an audience with the Jade Emperor.

Upon their arrival, they will be given fine silk robes (500 go worth each), a boot-licking personal servant-slave

named Low Ling (korobokuru commoner level 3), and the aforementioned invitation to the palace.

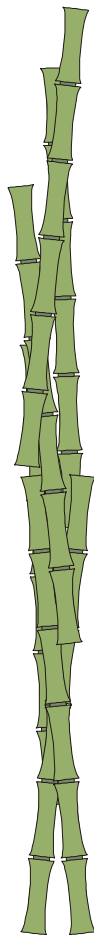
This audience will be very formal with many complex rites, full of jealous courtiers (a good way to introduce the major players here), and elegies for the player characters. They are invited to stay in the Emperor's villa near the spas of the city.

After this impressive reception, the Blue Hunter and Jade Dragon will approach the PCs and tell them about their little problem. However, the meeting is short and whispered, leaving little time for the PCs to ask questions.

The Problem

Clearly, war is imminent both in the North with the wild orc tribes and in the South with the invaders from Yupang. General Zhen, an Imperial minister, is sure that only an alliance between the different provinces can avert the fall of the Jade Emperor.

However, other ministers fear that Zhen's influence might increase if he were to successfully negotiate such a treaty and therefore try to foil him. The Blue Hunter and Jade Dragon kindly ask the PCs to help them gather some information on the other ministers and to ensure with all means (short of violence) that the idea finds the favour of the Jade Emperor due to the approval of his ministers.



On The Edge

Here is a way to have some fun with your players - in every major scene, use a map and miniatures to show where everybody stands. Of course your players will suspect combat and react accordingly. However, if their defensive stance becomes too obvious the other characters in the scene will feel offended, mock them, or react otherwise to their edgy behaviour.

You can further taunt the players by coincidentally putting people in a position where they flank them, letting some unknown person slowly move towards their back etc. Of course all of this has nothing to do with them but they will never be sure.....

Give the players handout 1 which gives an overview over the ministers involved in the decision (their stats are included in the *NPCs of the Shattered Empire* PDF). The reward offered for their deeds is a post in the Emperor's military along with a minor land grant.

Gathering Information

Having little opportunity to speak to their friends again, the players will have to gather information on their own. A good way to do this is to use the gather information skill and give them the handouts. Do not simply roll but also ask how and when they do it, adding a bonus for good ideas, roleplaying etc. Some other skills (bluff, diplomacy) might also get a +2 bonus if used properly. See the sidebar for an example on how to use such skills *in a good way* (but this is just my opinion). Step by step this will provide the players with all the handouts, most likely one at a time. If they are unable to reach the higher DCs give them boni for good roleplaying or clever

Using "Gather Information" in a Good Way

The following is an example on how to make more out of a simple skill roll:

Tok Yo, a rogue, rolls a gather information of 25. This is an excellent roll! Describe to the player how he meets a chambermaid while watching the kitchen complex of the palace. Briefly act out the conversation with her, giving the player some info how to handle her (due to the good roll Yo knows from some other servant that the chamber maid has a sick sister). This talk could lead to the character getting access to the personal diary of somebody where some info on No Qiu can be found....



ideas or let them find out those facts by themselves.

Random Events

These random events provide further complications for the PCs based on the discretion of the DM.

- A courtier falls in love with a PC of the opposite sex. The would-be lover is either old but highly charismatic or young and handsome with a naive streak. This can lead to several complications, as the enamoured fool keeps distracting the PCs all the time. If violence should break out, (s)he will probably die, trying to protect her love interest.
- Invitation: some bureaucrat invites the PCs to a party in their honour, possibly bringing them into contact with some interesting people. Use this, if the PCs progress either too fast for your taste, or if they need some more hints.
- The PCs manage to annoy the witch hunters who are highly valued at the court and have to deal with their antagonistic actions.
- The Red Sash Society is still out to cause chaos and confusion - maybe the PCs stumble upon an assassination attempt to are the target of one?

Possible Strategies

The PCs will have to find a way to convince at least 2 of the other senior ministers to support Zhen's plan. Ideally, all 3 would support him, making approval by the Jade Emperor the most likely. There are many ways to solve this problem (this adventure is about intrigue and anything cool or reasonable should work). There are several 'default' solutions however:

- If No Qiu is convinced that Zhen will **perish during his mission**, or will

make a fool out of himself, he will support his bid to go and forge an alliance of the provinces. He will not necessarily trust the PCs unless he is convinced they are really enemies of Zhen or if he gets the information out of some other source. With his vote, Mian Weng's opposition to the plan can be overcome.

- If **Mian Weng's true nature** is found out, he can be blackmailed into supporting the alliance, even though he will try everything to make the negotiations fail. If the PCs slay him, they can (hopefully) present some evidence to the nature of Mian Weng, before the terracotta warriors hack them to pieces. Their position will be really bad if they hurt any innocents.
- **Fake evidence** can also be used to discredit Weng. However, this has to be carefully arranged, as lie detection spells and other divination available to the witch hunters will be used to find out the truth. Weng will be reluctant to be tested however, so if the PCs are not obviously involved, Weng will rather live with whatever shame is brought upon him than have his true nature discovered.
- **Hua Wen** most likely knows the PCs already (from the underwater adventures in Naga-Noth where he was trapped in shark form). However, even if they helped him, he is unlikely to endanger his political career to help them. **Blackmail** is one option (he cursed Zhen's armour after all) but will make him a powerful enemy of the PCs. Offering him a way to **improve his position** is another option - with the right gift (like the black scroll) or massive concessions (which will not make Zhen happy at all), he can be won over to supporting the alliance.



- **Assassination** is an option that will not be condoned by Zhen and will be tricky, as the PCs have to overcome the guards of the minister they target and will have to ask their conscience, which side they are on.

Conclusion

As soon as the PCs tell Zhen that they have won over the ministers to his cause he will propose his strategy to the Jade Emperor. After the ruler accepts, Zhen travels to the Nezumi Network to meet ministers from all other states save for the Northern Empire. The PCs are asked to travel to the Tengu Spires and get 2000 XP each as an ad hoc reward.