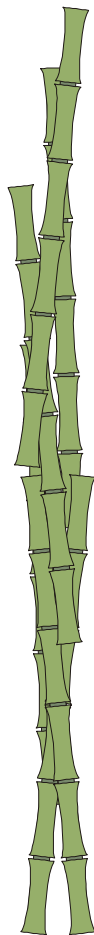


Oriental Adventures - Shattered Empire Campaign

General

300 years ago, the Celestial Emperor, the last ruler in a line demi-gods was killed by an assassin who was in league with unspeakable horrors from another dimension. Fortunately he was killed by one of his followers just before he was able to complete the rituals to suck the real world into the shadow realm. The mighty Empire, however, shattered into various factions ruled by warlords. Today, most of the land is overgrown by jungle. The wilds are home to many weird creatures (often mutated by the influence of the shadow plane). Only a few humans survived and have built new cities. These cities are ruled by the descendants of the warlords, most of which have acquired mystical powers over the generations. These rulers are accepted because they provide stability in a dangerous wilderness. The North is largely unified under the iron rule of foreign horse nomads who have kept the local bureaucracy largely intact.



The Golden Empire

The Golden Empire was run by the Celestial Emperor, who was the direct descendant of the Eternal Judge (a mystical hero of the past). He was killed by his treacherous general Kang-Li. This general planned to take the throne, however, he was killed by one of his lieutenants, a deed which plunged the Empire into chaos.

The Celestial Emperor was supported by a huge class of bureaucrats who were not noble and who were moved to different positions every two years to keep them from getting too much power. The old noble families concentrated on luxury or military careers.

The social structure of the Empire was rather static - indeed the teachings of Master Fu (which are considered divine) demand strict obedience towards the head of the family and the Emperor. The Emperor held the highest rank, followed by ancient nobility. Next came the bureaucrats, then the wealthy merchants, and finally the peasants and workers.

Non-Humans in the Empire

special case where non-humans. Korobokuru (a race related to dwarves) were seen as an inferior breed and considered "untouchable". Only the most demeaning jobs were given to them (such as butcher, undertaker and everything else having to do with dirt, death, and blood (other than combat)). Spirit Folk on the other hand mostly hold high ranks, yet they were feared by the common man (as well as held in awe). Nobles always saw them as inferior, since they usually claim to be descendants to some mighty godlike hero as opposed to some lowly river spirit.

Ratlings and shapechangers only live in the wilds, often working as mercenaries. Highly disciplined hobgoblin tribes mounted on raptor lizards live in the northern wastelands and raid

occasionally. While the people of the Empire see them as little better than animals, the horse nomads regard them as equals.

Real spirits live everywhere in the Empire and they have to be appeased by little gifts and respect, since they are powerful. Most of them are neither good nor evil, but very touchy. Evil creatures can only be found in places that are closely linked to the Shadow Plane or in the realms beyond. These creatures are usually terrible to behold, defying the laws of our dimension.

Religion

Religion did not play such a significant role in society as it does today, in a time of war and destitute. However, all religions practised today originated during the time of the Golden Empire and many of the trends described here are even more prevalent now.

While spirit worship was the religion of the common man, the rulers followed the code of master Fu. Thus, lower castes made heavy use of prayer beads, repetitive chants, and "prayer wheels", while the nobles and bureaucrats had a very agnostic outlook made possible only by the power they held.

The code of Master Fu focuses on moral teachings. Some of its core concepts are:

1. Obedience to the Emperor, the head of the family, and the bureaucrats in that order.
2. Honesty, discipline, self-restraint and hard work according to the station one is born into.
3. Acquisition of knowledge. "Only the wise man can be a good man!" is a coming saying of the followers of Fu.

The goals of the folk religion are different, even though many people follow both systems to at least a certain degree. The folk religion teaches the duality of things, there is a Yin and a

Yang aspect in each thing, except spirits (pure yin) and undead (pure yang). Manipulating these energies through, spells, charms, or breath techniques can lead to eternal life and good health, two of the major goals in life.

Every place has a resonance of yin and yang and only the balance of both is healthy to humans. Thus graves, houses, and fields are only set up in places that have been checked by geomancers.

Commoners held (and hold) these Adepts in high regard (who can cast only divination and healing magic) but saw any other mage as terrible monster. Shamans and other divine spell-casters were also accepted as long as they followed the tenets of the folk religion.

Other casters were either followers of Fu (in the case of arcane magic - fu was a master of all magical schools) or belonged to one of the three orders. All orders were founded by the prophet Teacher O-Om but later split over theological disputes. They are the yellow, red and black order.

O-Om taught that life is pain and that lack of desire would cause a stop of the cycle of reincarnation. The yellow order started to lead a secluded life as a consequence. They denied their flesh and developed vast mental powers - psionics, in fact. Today, they still try to stay away from others and only come out of their temples, if forced to defend the faithful. The yellow temples do not respect the spirits. These are only seen as higher form of reincarnation and not divine beings.

This was the reason for the red order to be formed. The reds revere all kinds of spirits and feel that these will help them to defeat their passions. Many influences of the folk religion can be found here and many shamans and adepts join these temples. Mastery over the body is still considered a prime goal and thus there are many monks, sohei psychic warriors, and psions with focus on



psychometabolism among their ranks. Skills are indicated by the patterns woven into the seam of the robes. The red sect is again divided into various sub-sects which have developed various styles of martial arts and have different names, such as "The Red Hoods", "The Red Eyebrows", or "Blood-red Fists of the Mountain Spirit".

The black order was formed by the Emperor himself, when he joined the new religion after a dream in which he was crushed by a golden statue of O-Om. In this belief system, O-Om is seen as the god from which the Emperor descended (who in turn was a reincarnation of the Eternal Judge). Today the black order operates underground, using assassins, poison, and blackmail to re-establish the Empire. They share many beliefs of the red order, only do they see the Emperor as a master of all spirits. One of their major quests is to find the reincarnation of their master. Many monasteries are also involved in politics through secret societies that overlap with the monasteries membership. Secret battles are not uncommon since the interests of different communities are sometimes somewhat diametrical.

Some sinister cults exist that worship the entities that live beyond the Shadow Plane. These vile creatures are averse to order and physical existence and would love to destroy the dimension of humanity. These cults are very secretive but openly co-operate with creatures from the Shadow Plane.



The Northern Empire

The North is ruled by a noble class of barbarian horse warriors with the help of a local bureaucracy. The rulers leave the natives largely alone other than for tax reasons and to punish those who would liberate their lands. The rulers have a strict martial tradition, even though the younger generation has become soft and has adopted the local life style. The teachings of O-Om are rare here, but master Fu is highly revered among the bureaucrats.

Ancestor Feats: Unicorn Clan

Races: korobokuru, hobgoblins, nezumi

Prestige Classes: Battle Maiden, Bear Warrior, Kishi Charger

Historical Parallel: China under the Mongols.

Palace of the Jade Emperor



This domain is ruled by a powerful mage who achieved eternal life by transplanting his soul into a jade golem. The palace is a literal fortress and the ruler's will is enforced by terracotta warriors.

The Jade Emperor presents himself as the legitimate heir to the Celestial Throne and all his official deeds mimic those of the late Emperor. However much of it is a farce - the bureaucrats are

powerless pawns and the law changes at the whim of the ruler. The populace lives in fear of the terracotta golems and public hangings are common.

One law that never changes is the tight control of magic - only the loyal followers of the Jade Emperor may wield spells. The local religion is based on the claimed divinity of the Jade Emperor, all other beliefs are forbidden.

Ancestor Feats: Crabe Clan

Races: human, korobokuru

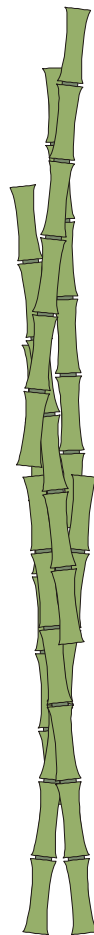
Prestige Classes: Ninja Spy, Shadow Scout, Assassin, Witch Hunter

Historical Parallel: Culture is Chinese which many secret societies and a draconian police.

Tower of the Blade Master

This mercenary city constantly fends off evil spirits that try to invade it. Originally, it was a centre of learning. During the civil war however, it was sacked at least three times and its sages fled to the gigantic natural cave labyrinths which run under the city. The city finally found peace, when the blade master and his army of monks decided to take over the city as a base for their future operations. The master definitely has spirit blood, as can be easily seen by his enormous size (large) and incredibly long arms (reach 15 ft.). He is feared by the populace but respected by the upper class despite his bad manners, for bringing stability into town. Most sages now live in underground complexes which are guarded by the blade master's army of spirits and spirit folk for a fee. The less frequented tunnels are home to nezumi, a race of ratlike creatures that is seen as a pest by most.

The locals belong to all major religions, even though spirit worship is encouraged by the blade master. There are a few cults that worship the unspeakable entities, hoping to gain enough power to defeat the blade master.



Ancestor Feats: Phoenix Clan
Races: human, spirit folk, nezumi, korobokuru.
Prestige Classes: Blade Dancer, Ninja Spy, Assassin, Shape Shifter, Ember Mage (Boem), Graven One (Boem)
Historical Parallel: generic Chinese

Temple of the Monkey General

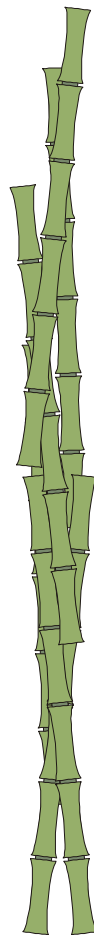
The temple was originally the holy city of a subjugated country. The local god is called the Monkey General and he was adopted into the Imperial pantheon. The Hyn (humans from Hynd) came as pilgrims once a year to the city, which was otherwise only populated by monkeys, a few vanaras, and the priesthood. During the Fall, 90% of the Hyn people died, leaving the temple as a poorly maintained ruin. Answering the prayer for help by his priests, the Monkey General gave his monkeys intelligence and now these creatures run the temple city (or rather, its ruins). A few human priests still live here and while they are treated with respect, they do not wield any power. The vanaras form a merchant class that is despised yet needed.

Life in the city is hard for all non-priestly humans. The apes treat them as slaves, using them to harvest fruit and repair the city. New humans are captured during the raids against the other cities a fact that has caused hatred towards these creatures.

Regional Feats: Lion Clan
Races: vanara, human, ape, monkey
Prestige Classes: Singh Rager, Void Disciple
Historical Parallel: Indian culture meets Planet of the Apes

The Castle of the Red-Gloved Daimyo

About 100 years after the end of the civil war, the Bamboo City (which largely consists of living bamboo magically woven into buildings) was attacked by the forces of the blade master. In his plight the ruling prince begged for the help of the red-gloved Daimyo, the



powerful ruler of an offshore pirate island. The daimyo answered his call and with her armies of samurai, she defeated the attackers. However, the prince realised to his horror that he was now the puppet of the foreign ruler, whom he was forced to marry.

The samurai, while bound to a complex code of honour, are still pirates. Despite their discipline they are a harsh occupational force, since they do not see non-samurai as sentient beings but rather as cattle. Only a few can be considered good and are sought by the common folk to help them against their evil brothers.

Due to its state as a military colony, the bamboo city has not prospered. However, there is a small trade colony that houses people from far lands, all of which are truly alien, such as the illithids from the underwater Domed City (who ply the trade lanes in their biological squid ships) and yuan-ti sailors from the Isles of the Serpent.

While the locals are followers of Fu or O-Om, the pirates are one of the few

societies that openly follows the unspeakable entities. Their patron is the Wheel of Law, a kraken-like creature with human heads at the tips of its tentacles that rewards its followers for following its constantly changing edicts, which are mostly harmless (such as wearing a red scarf, abstaining from alcohol for a week) but also involve random human sacrifice and other detestable acts. Since the pirates are mostly lawful and quite sane, they are not mindless cultists of this chaotic entity but rather see it as a business partner who provides powers in exchange for payment.

Ancestor Feats: Dragon

Races: human, illithid, yuan-ti, lizard folk, spirit folk (bamboo, bone).

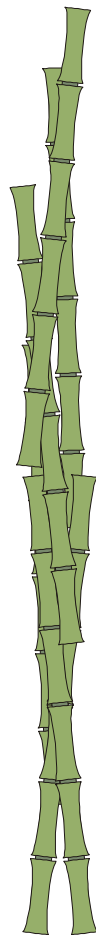
Prestige Classes: Weapon Master, Eunuch Warlock, Iaijutsu Master, Blackguard (a.k.a Dark Samurai, must be LE)

Historical Parallel: a Japanese warrior culture with tendencies to fanaticism and suicide attacks. There is a definite fascist streak but there are good sides as well. A few "Lovecraftian Dreamland" creatures live here as traders.

The Monastery of the Purple Ascetic

The purple ascetic is an immortal monk-psionist who ran a monastery up in the mountains until the day the civil war broke out. Following a vision from a spirit, this believer of the red order philosophy, decided to take over the town of the red towers, a site holy to his temple.

The locals were happy to be



protected by monks and sohei, many of whom had psionic powers. Many joined the order as lay members and today the city is a huge monastery with only 10% of the people non-members. It is a city of constant chants, gongs, and meditation. City life is slow and peaceful, rash movement and loud noises are frowned upon, even during combat training.

There is a dark side as well, however. Not everybody is happy to be a devout follower of monastic discipline. Some merchants resent the new rule and have started a ninja organisation which has the purpose of disrupting the rule of the monks.

Since the city has maintained many of its riches it is a prime target of raiders from the other city states and the Northern Empire.

Ancestor Feats: Crab, Scorpion (pick one)

Races: human, spirit folk

Prestige Classes: Metamind, Soulknife, Slayer, Shadow Dancer, Henshin Mystic, Shintao, Assassin, Ninja Spy, Yakuza, Monk, Tattooed Monk

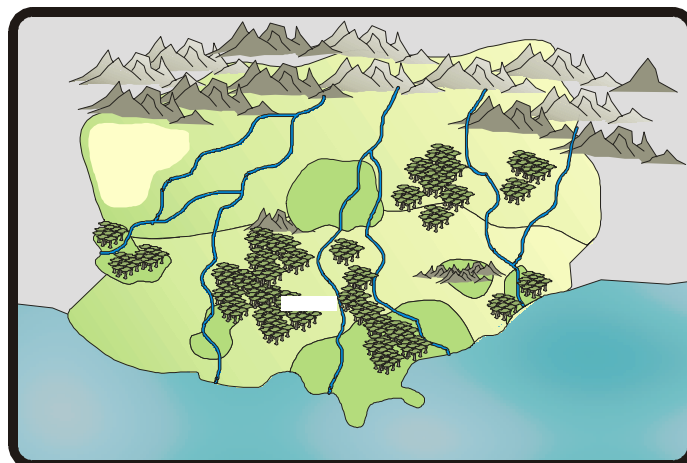
Historical Parallel: Himalayan monasteries

Cosmology

The prime dimension is an endless land that contains many small islands of civilisation, which only have occasional contact, It is infinite as far as anybody

can tell and home to many non-human races which live far from the Empire and its neighbours.

There are many small dimensional pockets, which lead to crate- to house-sized



spaces that are the home of spirits. these places usually look like caves, huts or other shelters. They are tied to the location that the spirit guards (e.g. a tree, waterfall, or house) and can be accessed by those who know the proper key word.

There are five different types of spirits; Heavenly (Air) Spirits (*Tianxian*), earth spirits (*Dixian*), human-related spirits (*Renxian*), immortal spirits (*Shenxian*), and demonic spirits (*Guixian* or *oni* in the tongue of the southern pirates).

Parallel to this world exists the *Shadow Plane*, a realm that seems to be an evil, twisted caricature of the real world. While everything non-sentient that exists in the real world is present here as well, it is twisted in some way, to be ugly and evil. There are no colours here, only shades of grey and the sun appears as a pale spot in a cloudy sky. Intelligent creatures that currently occupy a position in the real world are seen as semi-transparent on the plane of shadows. They usually cannot be attacked from the Shadow Plane.

This version of the shadow plane combines the effects of the plane of shadows and the ethereal plane of the standard cosmology. There is no astral plane and astral spells will use the shadow plane for their effects.

The shadow plane "seeps" into the real world in some places, usually the sites of terrible acts. Here the creatures from the shadow plane can enter the real world without being summoned.

The shadow plane is also the route to an unspeakable outer realm (the Far Realm from the Manual of the Planes), a place of chaos and utterly alien creatures. These beings can enter the shadow plane but not the real world and rely on agents which they recruit there. The entities, sometimes called the Elder Gods, are utterly evil.

Creatures

All kinds of spirits live in this world, many are elementals of various types. The Shadow Plane and areas where it leaks into the real world are home to shadow creatures of all kinds. Spirits are often neither evil nor good, instead encompassing traits of both. Many have very human weaknesses and their often ridiculous appearance belies their powers.

The shadow creatures however are never good. There are some who are not utterly evil, loving to steal and spoil things. The closer the ties to the Realms Beyond, however, the viler these beings become. The latter dimension spawns many oozes, aberrations, and other bizarre outsiders.

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