

# The Lacquered Chest

**A ONE ROUND LIVING CITY ADVENTURE**

**BY LAWRENCE RAMIREZ  
AND LAB RAT PLAY TESTING**

*You have been summoned to the Celestial Gateway Emporium to investigate a strange antiquity, a lacquered chest of ancient Kara-Turan design. Will your actions lead you to honor or will you become an affront to the ancestors?*

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This is a standard RPGA Network tournament. A four-hour time block has been set aside for this event. Begin by passing out the player characters; pass them out based on class only, not revealing gender or race. Instruct the players to leave the character sheets face down until you have read the introduction. Then, tell them to study their character sheets, select spells, and notify you when they are ready to begin the adventure.

It is a good idea to ask each player to put a nametag in front of him or her. The tag should have the player's name at the bottom, and the character's name at the top. This makes it easier for the players to keep track of who is playing which character. The actual playing time will be about three hours. Make sure you use the last 20 to 30 minutes of the event time block to have the players capsulize their characters for each other and vote. You should be completely done with the event and all scoring by 15 minutes before the end of the time slot.

The standard RPGA Network voting procedures will be used. Make sure you have finished voting before you collect the players' voting sheets. This way their votes and comments will not influence you. The players are free to use the game rules to learn about equipment, weapons and spells their characters have listed.

A note about the text: Some of the text in this module is written so that you may present it as written to the players, while other text is for your eyes only. Text for the players will be in *bold italics*. It is strongly recommended that you paraphrase the player text, instead of reading it aloud, as some of the text is general and must be adapted to the specific situation or to actions of the player characters.

## Tier Structure

Add the levels of the PCs to determine which tier they are on. For multi-class and dual-class characters, take the highest level and add one for each additional class. Tiered events and foes are marked throughout the text.

Tier 1:	Total levels 4-13
Tier 2:	Total levels 14-25
Tier 3:	Total levels 26-37
Tier 4:	Total levels 38+

## Judge's Synopsis of *The Lacquered Chest*

This story is based about the presence of a mysterious Kara Turan artifact, the Box of Dark Secrets, which has been left in the shop of a local merchant. The PCs are hired to deal with the problems that it has brought about. First, the PCs must help free the trapped spirit of its creator (the sorceress Hsing-niang) now a ghost anchored to the Box.

Second, the PCs must deal various claimants to the Box, which has been stolen from the Imperial court of Shou Lung. There are three parties involved. They are: Magistrate Fong, a spinagon who is looking for the spirit of Hsing-niang (trapped in the Box), Lady Mei-liang, an imperial emissary who has been ordered to retrieve the stolen artifact, and Magistrate T'eng, an assassin sent by rivals to the Emperor of Shou to obtain the Box for use against the imperial court.

This is a thinking person's game. The players should feel busy pursuing all the options available to them and meeting one person after another, trying to ascertain their goals and reliability. Good players should be able to navigate their way through all the dangers with a minimum of combat. Hack and slash players should find the challenges considerable.

Finally, the mood of the story should be hectic and haunting. The PCs should feel as if they are part of an ongoing story, like a good Chinese ghost story. There should be a feeling that the events in this adventure are at the converging point of many previous stories, in which the PCs will have the satisfaction of ending the story line. They will free an innocent spirit from eternal captivity and return a dangerous artifact to its rightful place.

## Introduction

If the table is Tier three or higher, ask each PC from the numbers they need to save vs. petrification, mind effecting spells, and rods with Dex bonus. Then have them EACH roll 1d20, taking note of any roll which does NOT save vs. mind effecting spells. DO NOT inform them of the results of these rolls. The erinye, Machig, has cast her common *charm person* upon them during the course of the scenario. Unless the *charm* is detected and removed immediately before **Encounter 6a**, those PCs who failed even once will be under her influence for this encounter.

Give **Player Handout #1** to the PC male with the highest combined wisdom and charisma, who is also NOT a specialty priest. If only specialty priests or

females are available use the above criteria, with preferences given to specialty priests over females. This PC is the “champion” of Hsing–niang. Take the player aside from the table to read it and do not allow the other players the opportunity to read it.

*The night is black and you stand in a beautiful garden of exotic plants and trees. A pleasant scent catches your attention and you turn to look to the right. A woman, from Kara–Tur, stands there, a whirlwind of a apricot blossoms swirling about her. She is dressed in incredible finery, silk, gold thread embroidery and inset gems, but all this seems as rags and rocks when compared to the unearthly beauty of her face. Never have you seen a woman so perfect and graceful. You can hear your heart pounding.*

*Actually, it isn't your heart pounding, but a large piece of rock crystal, with a human heart beating within it, which suddenly materializes in her hands. A look of pleading comes into her eyes and she tries to tell you something, but her words have no sound. Chains of fire wrap around her arms and legs and pull her away from you. The sky turns into an awful scene of battle, with macabre fiends combating in a landscape of flame and smoke. The garden around you turns to ash and you fall into endless chasm of smoke.*

*In the distance, you hear an desperate female voice yelling, “Break it! Shatter the heart!” You have the sense of an innocent soul in torment.*

*The dream ends and you wake up trembling and drenched in sweat.*

*If the PC who receives this dream chooses to tell about it, he may do so, but do not allow him to read it to the others. After all, it is a dream and is difficult to remember even with a genius intellect. Do this while the PCs are choosing spells, although if the PC who receives the dream is a spellcaster, he may modify his selection based upon the dream.*

*The dry autumn wind rattles at the shutters and the beams creak about you. It's one day before the Feast of the Moon, and the moaning wind and rustling leaves indeed do sound as if the dead are on their way back to visit. With this gloomy thought on your mind, you are startled by a sharp knock upon the door. Again, the knock rings on your door.*

*You open the door with your usual precautions. In the dim afternoon light, a boy stands before you. He is of Kara-Turan blood and about ten years of age. In his left hand, he holds an ironwood staff. In his right hand is a sealed letter, which he holds out to you.*

*“I deliver this from Master Lao of the Celestial Gateway Emporium.” He says with a smile, as you receive the letter.*

*Upon opening the letter, it reads (Player Handout#2):*

*Most brave adventurer,*

*I have heard much of both your prowess in battle and of your benevolent heart. I believe that I am in greatest need of both. Strange events have occurred as of late in my shop, the Celestial Gateway Emporium. I feel that I am in need of adventurers to resolve this situation. Please come to my humble place of business at dusk, six bells after high sun, at 15 Ivory way in the port district. Dinner will be served shortly thereafter. Prepare to stay the night.  
---Master Lao Sung-chien*

If the PCs cannot read, the boy, Wei, will attempt to read it for them. Unfortunately, his grasp of written Common is quite weak. Improvise a broken and nonsensical message, but get the last part clear (i.e.: They are to go to Master Lao's shop on 15 Ivory Way at six bells past high sun.) It is possible that the PCs will have additional questions for Wei. They should quickly find that Wei has little to tell them.

Wei knows the following. Master Lao is his uncle. Their family has been in Ravens Bluff for eight years, although his uncle travels a great deal. Wei knows nothing about the “strange events” other than that his family is distressed about them. Something happened in the shop four nights ago, but Wei doesn't know what. Asides from this, Wei has no information relevant to the adventure.

It is possible that the PCs will do some information gathering before going to Master Lao's. A Local History check at -4 reveals that the Celestial Gateway Emporium deals in rare Kara-Turan antiquities. It is a small shop in the Port district, which has no history of illegal activities or scandals. An Information Gathering check reveals similar information, but also that the shop was broken into four nights ago. Rumor has it that nothing was stolen, although the shop is loaded with valuable antiquities. Moreover, the break in must have been accomplished by a professional, as the Emporium's security is very formidable.

In any case, determine what the PCs are going to do and what they are taking by way of equipment. When they're done making preparations, go to the next section.

## Encounter 1

### The Celestial Gateway Emporium

*Orange and red leaves rustle along the dusty roads as you make your way through the port district. Ivory Way is a narrow path, lined with foreign vendors. At number 15, you see a steep three-story building. A bright red sign declares it to be the Celestial Gateway Emporium. From within the building, you can smell strange herbs and scents.*

*A well-groomed, middle-aged man greets you at the door. His dress is foreign but elegant, obviously of Kara-Turan design. He has a thin mustache and a tiny, pointed beard. His eyebrows raise as he greets you.*

*“Ah, I am most honored that you choose to accept my invitation.” He says with a slight bow. “I am Master Lao. Please enter this humble building. I have a most excellent meal being prepared.”*

*Lao leads you through a shelf-lined room, crammed with foreign objects and artworks. The air is heavy with exotic scents. The next room is filled with crates and large boxes. Lao leads you to an adjacent room*

*Other people are there, most of whom appear to be other adventurers, each seated around a long table. Lao motions you to an ornate, cushioned seat. He sits behind a desk, and pours tea from a pale green pot. As the dark green fluid fills your cup, Lao looks up at you.*

*“So, you have all been called upon to help me with a matter of gravest mystery. If you choose to pursue this matter, you will be working with each other. I think now would be a most appropriate time for introductions.”*

**Lao Sung-chien human oriental male, 4<sup>th</sup> level thief:**  
AL NG; AC 9 (Dex ); MV 12; hp 10; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-3 / 1-2 (knife); SA backstab (x2) not that he would use it; SD nil; S 10; D 15; C 9; I 15; W 13; Ch 14; MR nil; SZ M; ML10.

Allow the PCs to introduce themselves. As they do so, a young Kara-Turan woman, Lao's niece, Nieh, will bring in plates and bowls of exotic cuisine. The food is of exceptional quality, although overly spicy for the average resident of Ravens Bluff. When introductions are finished and the players have enjoyed role-playing their meal, Lao proceeds into business.

*“Ah, now to business. Four days ago, this store was broken into. It was done with perfect silence and*

*skillfulness. The locks were expertly picked and the alarms which I had placed were disarmed. Yet, nothing was stolen. In fact, an object of great antiquity and value was left behind.”*

*“It is a lacquered chest of ancient Shou design. It is no less than eight centuries of age. The enameling and gilding of the chest show that it was constructed for a great noble, perhaps a member of the Imperial family. The interior contains many shelves and drawers. I have not extensively investigated, so I do not know if any of the drawers contain objects.”*

*“Why, you may ask, have I not thoroughly examined this antiquity? After a quick perusal of the exterior and a glance at the interior, I decided to have my honored father use his mystical vision to see if there was an aura of enchantment to this chest. It took much persuading, but my father agreed to the task and settled down for a restful night's sleep. This was three nights ago.”*

*“That very night, the animals of the house, my wife's cat and my sister's dog, became gravely frightened and began howling and shrieking. I went to investigate the shop to see if there was any disturbance. As I approached the storage room, I felt a dread come upon me and a chill run through my heart. Fearful for my life, I took a quick glance into the darkness of the storeroom. Seeing nothing, I quickly fled back to the comfort of the second floor. The cat and dog howled through the night.”*

*“The next day, my father, who was barely capable of obtaining his much needed rest, cast a mystical divination. The magical aura of the chest was most powerful, causing great distress to my aged father. I have been unable to get him to approach the antiquity since, as he claims that it is an object of evil.”*

*“That night, again the animals were greatly distressed. I again went to investigate. With caution, I peered into the storeroom. In the dim, lantern light, I could see that the chest had been opened, its golden handles reflecting my light. I began to approach, but there was movement to my left. I turned to look and found to my dismay that no one was there. A sensation of horror overcame me and, again, I fled back to the second floor.”*

*“Yesterday, I gathered up my courage to investigate the matter with greater perseverance. I began to investigate the interior of the chest when I noticed a small, symbol upon the topmost drawer. I am somewhat familiar with magical glyphs and believe that this symbol was such. With evidence of this magical warding, I choose to cease my investigation.”*

*“At this point, I felt that I should hire professional adventurers to investigate this matter,*

*but I wished to have a better understanding of what was occurring in the night time before handing it over to others. So, I sat down in the storeroom for the night, a hooded lantern beside me.”*

*“The night was horrible, with the wind moaning, leaves rustling, and the beams creaking. My mind was seeing phantoms and devils in every shadow. Finally, I heard the dog upstairs howl as he had for the past two nights. My eyes went to the lacquered chest and my hands went to the lantern. Before I could raise the hood, I saw it. The chest door was open and a dark figure was emerging from within. It had the shape of a woman, but moved with an unnatural grace. I was paralyzed with a most strange mix of fear and fascination. For how long, I do not know. It may have been minutes or hours, but when I regained control of myself, it was gone.”*

*“Terror overwhelmed me, and I ran back to the second floor barring the door behind me. Having determined the source of these strange incidents, I feel no dishonor in hiring adventurers to deal with it.”*

*“This is what I would like you to do. Find out why that lacquered chest has been delivered to me, then lift the curse of this chest from my house. I am capable of paying you each 200 gp for accepting this job, and an additional bonus of 100 gp upon completion. Will you accept this undertaking?”*

Lao has told just about everything he knows. Nevertheless, the PCs will probably have questions, including the following:

What type of creature do you believe this woman to be?  
*“I could not see the woman clearly, due to the darkness, so her exact nature is not known to me.”*

Do you know anything about chests of this type?  
*“Items such as this lacquered chest are common among the nobility as storage space. They often contain small items of personal importance, such as letters, perfume vials, scrolls, or jewelry.”*

Does the chest radiate magic or is there something within it that does?  
*“My honored father was not quite articulate as to the nature or source of the magic. From his reaction, I imagine that the whole chest radiates a mystical aura.”*

May we speak with your father?  
*“My honored father is quite frail and most venerable. At times, he can be somewhat, how do you say,*

*incoherent. Nevertheless, if you wish to speak with him, I shall arrange it.”*

After the PCs have finished questioning, Lao will take them to either the lacquered chest or to his father, if the party has expressed an interest in meeting him.

## **Encounter 1a** **The Devils of Wu Tsien** **(Optional)**

This encounter is purely role-playing. The senile rambling of the venerable Lao are meant for entertainment value alone, although his fear of “devils” has an ironic quality to it. In no way should the venerable Lao be portrayed as useful or as having vital information. He speaks in vague statements and has an unfocused look to his eyes.

Master Lao will ask the PCs to wait as he arranges to bring his venerable father to speak with them. He will not allow the PCs to cast spells upon his father nor will he allow them to take his father anywhere near the lacquered chest. Although his father is far from a sound mind, it is Lao’s filial obligation to carry out his wishes, which include being kept away from the chest. If the PCs treat his father with open disrespect, Lao will politely chastise them, saying that speaking with disrespect to or of an elder is an “affront to Heaven.” If the PC persists, he will ask them to leave the premises, as such dishonorable behavior will not be tolerated in his house.

**The Venerable Lao (sr.) human oriental male, 2<sup>d</sup> level wizard:** AL CG; AC 10; MV 6; hp 3; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (Staff); SA nil; SD nil; S 6; D 6; C 10; I 18; W 4; Ch 8; MR nil; SZ M; ML19 (fearless, the venerable Lao is somewhat mad, and thus immune to fear.) Spells: *Shocking grasp* (d8+2), *Detect evil*.

Master Lao will act as a translator in this encounter, as his father is not proficient in common. When the venerable Lao is brought to the dining room, read the following:

*Master Lao enters the room, accompanied by a frail old man, dressed in a blue silk robe. The old man walks with an unsteady gait; his eyes are unfocused and dark. Lao sits the old man before you.*

*“This is the venerable Lao, my honored father. You may ask him your questions.”*

Are you a spellcaster? or as an opening non sequiter:  
***“The way of wisdom is granted to few. Seek not a word but a path. Heh, heh, heh.” He laughs convulsively.***

Did you *detect magic* upon the lacquered chest?  
***“The mystic forms transcends that which we see with eyes of flesh. The inward eyes see all, even into the depths of immortality! Heh, heh, heh.” He laughs convulsively.***

What did you detect upon the chest?  
***“The Devils of Wu Tsien come seeking the soul. An ill omen hangs about you! Woe to they who fall under the curse of the wood! Heh, heh, heh.” He laughs convulsively.***

Who are the Devils of Wu Tsien or what is the curse? or when the PCs are finished questioning the venerable Lao.  
***“Speak not of evil!!! It will hear and hunt you down! Ahhhhh!” The venerable Lao cries out in terror, looking at the air above you.***

Roll initiative. There is nothing happening here, but the venerable Lao is experiencing a hallucination. Master Lao, after a moment of surprise, will realize this, as it is not too unusual an occurrence with his father. He will attempt to calm down his father and take him back upstairs, asking the PCs to allow his father to rest. He will insist that the PCs refrain from spellcasting or taking any arcane actions, as such may disturb his father, who continues to blather and shriek about devils and curses.

After getting his father to the safety of the upper levels, Lao will return to the PCs. He will be apologetic, saying that his father has long been influenced by the “smoke of dreams,” which has left him somewhat incoherent and prone to peculiar visions. If any detection magics, such as *detect lie* or *ESP*, are used to see if Lao is lying about his father or planning any deceit, they reveal that he is being honest with the PCs and does not intend to hamper their investigation in any way.

If the PCs decide to investigate the chest at this point, go to Encounter 1b. If the PCs are going to do something else (i.e.: sleep, go to the temple of Mystra, walk their camel, etc.,) go to Encounter 2.

## Encounter 1b The Lacquered Chest

Eventually the PCs will begin to investigate the chest, which is kept hidden in the storage room. The chest is made out of wood. It has been finely lacquered to a deep black, which has a reflective quality to it. Their reflections can be seen as dim, ghostly forms within the wood. There are areas of the chest, mainly on the front, which have enameling and gilding. The enameling on the front depicts a fierce battle between ghoulish creatures within a landscape of flame and smoke. The images are highly detailed, but they do not resemble anything in particular, but, rather, generic and fantastical fiends.

The legs of the chest are gilt with gold in a flame motif. This design pattern is continued along the corners, up to the top of the chest, where the flames converge in a triangular peak at the front. Set within the gilded wood are precious and semi-precious materials, including jade, topaz, and mother-of-pearl.

Any PC with the appraising NWP will immediately realize that the value of this chest is easily over 100,000 gp. The craftsmanship of the chest is impeccable, obviously the work of a master. No writing or legible symbol can be found on the exterior. If a thief checks for traps on the chest doors, there are none.

Magical divinations reveal the following. *Detect magic* reveals an enchantment of overwhelming intensity and of a variety of schools, including enchantment, alteration, conjuration, necromancy, abjuration, and divination. *Know alignment* indicates that the chest radiates a aura of lawful neutrality. *Find traps* reveals that there is a magical trap upon the chest but the actions which trigger the trap are undetectable. Nothing is revealed with the following spells: *identify*, *detect undead*, *detect evil/good*, and *detect invisibility*.

*Legend lore* will place a cryptic message within the mind of the caster. Remember that the use of this spell requires a permanent magic item, scroll or potion as a material component. The message will say:

***“More beautiful than apricot blossoms was sweet Hsing–niang. Now the heron cries in vain, for the Beauteous hides in shade, away from the warlords of pain. Hsing–niang has left, but here she remains. Sorrow and woe upon they who respect not the dead.”***

Bards may use their ability to identify the general purpose and function of the lacquered chest. If successful, they will know that this is the Box of Dark Secrets, created by Hsing–niang, a sorceress of ancient

Shou. It is an item of legendary magic, primarily of the conjuration school. It is not an evil object, but probably has severe curse on it. Supposedly, the Box of Dark Secrets is kept at the imperial palace of Shou.

Finally, when the PCs open the chest, (see **Judge's Aid #1**) they will see that it is divided into three parts. The top third is recessed and has a bright silver mirror set into the wood at the back, between two empty candle sconces. The middle third has long horizontal drawers, underneath a slanted flat surface, which may be a writing desk, judging by its height. The bottom third has nine small square drawers. The silk interior of each of the doors has a beautiful ink drawing, each depicting a misty landscape with jagged mountains rising above streams and twisting trees.

Upon the top-most drawer is a strange rune, set within the lacquered surface, which any mage or rogue can immediately identify as a magical glyph, although not one with which they are familiar. It is not possible to disarm the glyph by a thief's find/remove trap ability nor by magical means, such as *erase* or *dispel magic*. Of course, it doesn't seem as though the glyph is active or in effect. In fact, the rune can be read by the use of *comprehend languages*. It is simply a woman's name, Hsing-niang.

Allow the PCs to begin a preliminary search of the chest, referencing to Judge's Aid #1 to determine what the PCs find in each drawer. After a few drawers have been investigated, or if the PCs decide to hold off on the investigation until the next day, go to Encounter 2.

## Encounter 2 Magistrate Fong

*A loud knock at the shop door interrupts your investigation. Master Lao looks at you with concern in his eyes. He is obviously disturbed by this late, night visitor.*

*"Will one of you be so kind as to accompany me to greet our unexpected visitor?"*

*Accompanying Lao, you return to the front room. The pounding at the door continues. Lao cautiously opens the door, revealing tall men, dressed in thick, voluminous cloaks over foreign armor and wearing jade masks. There are six of them and they each hold long, curved glaives.*

*"I demand to speak with the owner of this residence!" commands a voice from in front of the armored men.*

*Looking down, you see a small Kara-Turan man. He is about four feet tall, with large puffy eyes and a thin, white beard. He is dressed in dark silk finery*

*and carries an ornate, wood staff. His mouth is set in a perpetual frown and he has an agitated manner.*

*"I am Master Lao, owner of this residence. I am most sorry that I did not catch your name, good sir." Lao says with hesitation.*

*"I am Magistrate Fong Pu-ts'ai, of the Imperial court. I come for the lacquered chest." The little man pounds his staff upon the ground. "I bring you monetary compensation for any troubles you may have experienced from its presence."*

*Two of the warriors step forth and display a coffer, it is filled with gold coins and jewelry.*

*"This is equal to ten thousand gold coins. Now, bring me the chest!" Magistrate Fong says with authority.*

**Magistrate Fong, Baatezu, Spinagon:** I very (12); AL LE; AC 4; MV 6 fl 18c; HD 3+3; hp 27; THAC0 17; #AT 1, by weapon; Dmg 1d6 (staff); SA spell use, fling spines 2/rd 1d4+flame; SD Immune to poison, normal and magical fire. Half damage from cold and gas. Full damage from acid, electricity, and silver and normal weapons.; MR 15%; SZ S; ML 10 (average).

Innate abilities: *affect normal fires, change self, command, produce flame, scare, stinking cloud* once per round.

Fong is a messenger and errand boy of the court of General Tsa. Although relatively weak he enjoys the protection of a competent bodyguard. Fong has a very high opinion of himself.

**Bodyguards, disguised skeletons (6):** I non-; AL N; AC 5 (lamalar); MV 9; HD 2; hp 14; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA nil; SD 1/2 damage from type P and S weapons, immune to cold and mind effecting spells (*charm, hold, sleep* etc.) SW can be turned, holy water 2-8 hp / vial.; MR nil; SZ M; ML NA.

These are the animated skeletons of an unlucky group of Flind servitors that displeased the court of Tsa. They continue to serve the general in death, taking commands from Fong.

Tier 2+ also add:

**Barbaz, Disguised Baatezu (1):** I low (7); AL LE; AC 3; MV 15; HD 6+6; hp 40; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg 2d6; SA spell use, wounding, battle frenzy.; SD Immune to poison, normal and magical fire. Half damage from cold and gas. Full damage from acid, electricity, and silver and magical weapons.; MR 30%; SZ M; ML 12 (steady).

Innate abilities: *advanced illusion, animate dead, charm person, infravision, know alignment, suggestion, teleport w/o error, affect normal fires, command, fear (by touch) produce flame.*

The barbazu assigned to guard Fong has been instructed to keep his distance and remain unseen unless Fong's life is in immediate danger.

Master Lao is very uncertain of this situation. He does not trust Fong and, unless the PCs encourage him to sell the chest, he isn't interested in selling it. Of course, he will look to the PCs for advice. The PCs may have questions for Fong, to which he will respond in an antagonistic and mocking way, saying things similar to the following:

First question:

***“Silence, you foreign devil! How dare you question an emissary of the Imperial court itself!”***

Second question:

***“You prattle like the unwashed barbarian which you are. I ignore your simple-minded words. Bring me the chest!”***

Third question:

***“My patience grows short! Bring me the chest or you shall live to rue your stupidity!”***

Fourth question or whenever the PCs decide that they will not give him the chest:

***“I will give you but one day to consider this, Master Lao. Listen not to the ape-like words of these ignorant savages. You deal with matters far beyond your comprehension. The Imperial court has little patience with fools.”***

If the PCs initiate hostile actions towards him or attempt to touch him, Fong will back away and promptly leave, threatening them as he goes. His guards will follow behind him, disappearing into the night. Neither he nor his guards will engage in combat. If forced into combat, Fong will attempt to escape without revealing his or his guard's nature. At Tier 1, Fong will *scare* the PCs then run off with his guards. At Tier 2 and above, Fong will have his barbazu guards *teleport without error* away with him, as his skeletal guards flee or, if caught, fight.

If the PCs choose to follow him, Fong will make his way to a run down three story apartment building on Mainstay Street, in the port district. Both he and his guards will enter the apartment in the top floor. The guards will close and shutter all the windows, but nobody will put on a light source. If the PCs are capable of spying upon them, they'll notice that the guards are standing at the doorway and next to the windows, apparently ready for combat. If the PCs use *clairaudience* or the rogue hear noise ability, they will

hear nothing, as the conversation being held is through telepathy. If they can observe such, they will see the following:

***Magistrate Fong goes into the main bedchamber, where a beautiful Kara-Turan woman is sitting at a desk, reading a scroll. She has a scrawny white dog on her lap. She turns and smiles at Fong, apparently waiting for a report. Fong humbly bows to her, keeping his eyes on the dog. Fong and the lady are look intently at each other for a few moments. Fong then bows, as the lady rolls up her scroll. She pats the dog gently upon the head as she places him upon the bed. She smiles, then disappears into thin air.***

The lady, Machig, has teleported away to bring their master, Lord Tsa, to acquire the Box of Dark Secrets. Fong will go to his room and meditate for the entire night and the following day. The dog, Xi Hua-wa, will stroll about the apartment, looking about. Remember, the dog has *detect invisibility* and *know alignment* as innate abilities, which are always active. Additionally, it can innately cast *detect magic* at will, at 11th level of casting. If Xi Hua-wa discovers the PCs spying, it will inform Fong of such via telepathy.

If the spying characters are vulnerable to attack, with VERY good chances of killing them, Xi Hua-wa will *gate* in six barbazu to deal with the nuisance. If the chances that the PC will escape are decent, Xi Hua-wa will not tip his hand, since the PCs aren't really learning anything of importance.

If the PCs decide to attack, Xi Hua-wa will instruct Fong to escape in any way that he can. He will then hide and use his *advanced illusion* ability to create an image of Fong casting spells. He will use his telepathy to coordinate the barbazu attack, rotating them out of combat to try to *gate* in additional barbazu or abishai. Finally, Xi Hua-wa will attempt to create *wall of ice* in tactically sound locations, providing coverage or limiting weapon frontage or dividing the PCs into smaller, easier to handle groups. Remember, the dog has a genius (18) intelligence.

## **Encounter 3 More Beautiful than Apricot Blossoms**

As the night progresses, the PCs will probably try searching the chest further. Refer to Judge's Aid #1 to determine what they discover. At ten bells past

highsun, a chill comes upon the room. Read the following:

*A deep silence comes upon the room and a shiver runs up your spine. From upstairs comes the forlorn howl of a dog, followed by a cat's shriek. The shutters begin pounding against the windows, as if the night wind was trying to force its way in.*

*A fluttering wind glides across your face; a trace of apricot lingers in the air. A softly glowing woman stands before the lacquered chest, with rustling blossoms swirling in the air about her. Her beauty is unearthly, but a sense of loss hangs about her and fills her eyes with sorrow. Moreover, her dainty feet do not touch the ground and the chest is vaguely visible through her body.*

The PCs within the room must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation at -5, with only wisdom and magic bonuses applied. Failure results in the PC being paralyzed with a mix of fascination at her beauty and horror at her spectral nature for five rounds. The PCs are allowed a save every five rounds until they successfully save, at which time they will be further unaffected by Hsing-niang's appearance.

Remember, although Hsing-niang is a ghost, she does not have the accelerate aging ability. She has no life draining capabilities, as she has NO connection to the negative material plane. Moreover, she is not evil, so she will not detect as such, even in her undead state.

Hsing-niang will fly towards the PC who received Player's Handout #1. She will hover in front of him, looking into his eyes and bowing gracefully. Everyone who clearly views her will be awed by her incredible appearance, which outshines any worldly beauty.

As she floats before the PC, she will hold her hands out in a gesture of peace. She will then turn to the other PCs and bow to them, continuing to make gestures of peace. If not attacked or interrupted, she will begin casting a spell. She is casting a *sending* spell, which will take her one turn to finish casting. If she is attacked or disrupted while in the process of casting, the spell is ruined. If the PCs ask, or upon a successful spellcraft check, they can see that her "material" components are two spectral cylinders, each with one open end, connected by a short piece of fine wire or twine.

If she is allowed to successfully cast her *sending*, the PC will hear the following message:

*"Question mirror. Left candle, light, snuff. Right, light. Left, light. Nine questions. How help? How enter? What danger? How finish? Why trapped? Sleep before entering."*

Her message has three bits of information in it. First, she is giving instructions on using the divining mirror within the chest. Second, she is hinting at questions which the PCs should ask, of which there are only nine. Finally, she is instructing them to sleep, so that she may talk with them via a *dream* spell.

If the PCs choose to attack her, she will spend two rounds making gestures of peace and submission, doing nothing to defend herself. If the PCs still attempt to attack her, Hsing-niang will attempt to flee into the lacquered chest, closing it behind her, or sink ethereally and invisibly into the ground. If the PCs are able to prevent her from escaping and continue to attack, she'll defend herself with deadly force, beginning with her ninth level spell and working her way down.

If the PCs interrupt her *sending* but cease attacking upon discerning her peaceful intentions, Hsing-niang will be disappointed, but will try to communicate by physical gestures. She will beckon the PCs to the chest and point at the mirror. She will then point at the left candle sconce, point upwards (indicating that they should light the candle,) then down (indicating that they should snuff it.) She will then point to the right sconce then upwards. Finally, she will point again at the left sconce, then point upwards.

To further the point, she will point at a lit candle and point upwards. She will gesture for the PCs to blow it out, then point downwards. If the PCs just don't understand her, she will indicate for them to go to sleep and attempt to talk with them via the *dream* spell.

If the PCs go to sleep, she will hover over her champion and appear to fall asleep. As per the spell rules, Hsing-niang is in a trance. While in this state, she is totally defenseless. Any attacks upon her, which are capable of harming a ghost, automatically succeed. Remember, attacking a helpless, trusting opponent, even an undead one, is not a good act. PC priests, rangers or paladins violating their alignment will lose all spells and special abilities until they receive an *atonement* spell, which costs 50,000 gp, half of which must be paid in magic items.

Give Player's Handout#3 to the PC who receives the dream. Like the first dream, take the player aside and allow them to read it. They may not show the handout to the other players, but may relate it to them as far as they can remember. If the PC can't remember something important, allow them an I check to recall that bit of information, but don't just give it to them.

*You are standing before the lacquered chest, Hsing-niang standing beside you. A series of the little storage drawers open and close three times each. The order seems to be the drawer with the caged cricket, the phoenix hairpin, the box of cinnabar, the fan with plum blossom designs, and, finally, the green celedon flask. Hsing-niang turns to you to speak, her voice barely audible, "Dry wind blows to nowhere, formless and without a path." Then a black tunnel appears before you. Hsing-niang enters.*

*You came to a stairway divided in three parts, left, central and right. Before the steps are two statues of dogs. Hsing-niang puts her hand into the mouth of the left statue then proceeds up the central stairway. At the top is a gorgeous courtyard, tiled in marble of different colors, black, white, green and orange. Hsing-niang steps only upon the orange tiles as she makes her way across.*

*Finally, you make your way to a vast fortress, with only a small doorway. Entering it, you go through a long tunnel which ends in an iron door with a dial set in the middle and a lever to the right. The image of a monkey appears in the air and she raises the lever up. An image of a rooster then appears and she pushes the lever all the way down. Finally, an image of a snake appears and she returns the lever to the central position.*

*You enter a huge room with particles of ash raining down from the ceiling above. In the middle of the room is a white circle of a 20' radius. Hsing-niang stands in the circle and speaks, "Lonely heron waits in shade, weeping for the past." The room around you fades away, replaced by a vast, featureless plain, with the sole feature of a jade platform, on which can be seen a hemisphere formed of the wind.*

*Hsing-niang ascends the platform and recites, "Sorrow is the parting. Sorrow is the loss. Sorrow comes for every man, like the fallen leaves tossed." The hemisphere explodes in all directions, leaving behind a pedestal with the shadow of a heart within it. Hsing-niang points at the crystal and it shatters.*

*You shake your head and are again in Master Lao's shop. The ghost of Hsing-niang hovers gracefully above you. Seeing that you have recovered your consciousness, she bows and disappears.*

## Encounter 3a Magic Mirror

If the PCs follow Hsing-niang's instruction, they will invoke the chest power to *contact other plane*. If they

perform the activation routine correctly, they will contact the ethereal and Hsing-niang, who will intercept the contact, will answer nine questions with brief answers. Her image will appear in the mirror as the PC who performed the routine asks the questions.

REMEMBER, the PCs only have NINE (9) questions that they can ask. If they ask the suggested questions, they will receive the following answers:

How can we help you?

*"My spirit is trapped within a crystal. You must enter the chest to destroy it."*

How do we enter the chest?

*"Open and close three times each to enter the chest: cricket, phoenix, cinnabar, plum, celedon. Dry wind blows to nowhere, formless and without a path."*

What are the dangers which we will face within the chest?

*"Three traps of mechanical nature, the spirits of ash and a tomb formed of the wind itself stand between you and my soul."*

How do we finish this task?

*"Shatter the crystal. This will return you. Perform the Rite of the Dead, so that my spirit may travel to the lands beyond in peace."*

Why are you trapped?

*"I sought to hide my soul from the Evil Ones. I created the Box to protect me, but I was trapped through an accident."*

Other possible questions include:

Who are you?

*"I am Hsing-niang, the tiger of Li, mistress of names obscure, creator of the Box of Dark Secrets."*

Are you a ghost?

*"My spirit is without rest, trapped in a spell of my own weaving."*

How did you become a ghost?

*"The shadow of my heart is trapped within the chest. A magic, which obliterated my entire body, struck me down, but my spirit was bound to the crystal within."*

Why did you place your soul in a crystal?

*"My soul was offered unto evil, for a cause not my own. I sought to hide it within the protections of the Box."*

Who are the Evil Ones?

*“The court of Warlord Tsa seek the power of my soul. My vile master sold it to obtain evil powers. They have been seeking me for centuries, but my prison is also my shelter.”*

Do you know Magistrate Fong?

*“The magistrates within the empire of Shou are without end. I know not the man of whom you speak.”*

How did the chest come to be in this shop?

*“It was stole from the summer palace of Shou. It made its way across the world, until ‘Ali Faddim brought it here.”*

Who is ‘Ali Faddim?

*“Faddim is a merchant of the southern lands. He suffered the curse of the chest and brought it here to be rid of it.”*

What is the curse of the lacquered chest?

*“Only one of Imperial blood may possess it. Others suffer grave misfortune if they hope to own it or use its power.”*

Can the curse be lifted?

*“The curse will not lift until the chest is given unto one of Imperial blood.”*

Why can’t you talk to us?

*“My voice will not travel the void from the land of spirits to the physical world.”*

If the activation routine was performed correctly, the answers will be correct and without any chance of going insane. If the routine was performed incorrectly, refer to **Judge’s Aid #1**. Hsing–niang will appear next to the PC who performed the ritual and nod her agreement or disagreement, as to the veracity of answers from other sources. The other sources will be even more brief than Hsing–niang’s. Moreover, the chance for insanity is as listed in the spell description.

## Encounter 4 In the Midst of Multiplicity

The day of the Feast of the Moon will be filled with activity. Two more strangers, Lady Mei–liang and Magistrate T’eng, will claim to have rights to the Box of Secrets. Additionally, the PCs may wish to find the merchant, ‘Ali Faddim al–Muluki, to discover why he

left the chest at Master Lao’s shop. Finally, there is an encounter with a Kelemvorite priest just in case vital information regarding the chest has been missed and to help the PCs perform the Rite of the Dead for Hsing–niang’s soul.

These encounters are important for establishing the following. First, the Box belongs to people of Imperial lineage. Second, it is NOT safe for others to utilize the box. Finally, the PCs should get the impression that Master Lao may be of Imperial lineage.

If the tournament is taking too much time, try to keep these encounters short, but get these three ideas across to the players. For time keeping, remember that dawn is at six bells past midnight and dusk is at six bells past highsun. Moreover, today is the Feast of the Moon, a holy day for many temples, especially of Kelemvor. Set up a mood appropriate for such a day, such as the selling of “bread for the dead” at bakeries, funeral bells being sounded in commemoration for the departed, and Kelemvorites preaching the faith. In short, the Feast should be a backdrop to help provide a mood to the story.

## Encounter 4a Lady Mei–liang

In the morning, Lao will check up on the PCs and ask about their discoveries. Upon hearing that a restless spirit is under his roof, he will become very distressed. He will begin preparations to move his family to an inn until the PCs can solve the situation, especially as the dead have great powers on the night of the Feast of the Moon. While he is preparing to leave and the PCs are being served breakfast or finishing up their prayers and spell memorization, around eight bells, somebody knocks gently upon the door.

*Standing before the door is a Kara–Turan woman, dressed in silk finery. Although no longer a young woman, she is nevertheless graceful and quite attractive. Beside her stand a guard of six armored soldiers, each wielding a curved glaive. She gives you a slight bow and a friendly smile.*

*“I am Lady Mei–liang, humble emissary of the court of Shou. Might I speak with the proprietor of this most esteemed of shops?” She gives another slight bow.*

*“I am Master Lao, owner of this shop, my lady. How may I help you?” Lao replies.*

*“It would, perhaps, be most prudent to discuss such matters within the confines of this most*

*handsome of buildings, good Lao.” Mei-liang looks about, up and down the street.*

Lao will defer to the judgment of the PCs. Of course, he feels bad over this breach of etiquette, but there is a powerful, cursed artifact in the back room of his shop, and he would rather not have strangers near it. If the PCs decide to let Mei-liang in he will perform the duties dictated to him as a proper host, bringing refreshments and offering food. If the PCs decide to speak with her outside, he will apologize for the inconvenience.

In any case, Mei-liang will be proud and blunt. She will freely answer any question which the PCs may ask her, which may include the following:

What do you want?

*“I come for the Box of Dark Secrets. It is a lacquered chest of ancient Shou design. It was stolen from the summer palace of the Imperial court and I have been ordered to retrieve it.”*

How did you know that the chest was here?

*“I have followed a trail of thieves, smugglers, murders and fools for over two years. The last one, a fool by the name of ‘Ali Faddim, brought it here. He was most helpful in giving directions, so I treated him with mercy.”*

Where can we find ‘Ali Faddim?

*“He is recuperating on his ship, the Maiden of Muluk. He is simply a fool who thought that they could benefit from the powers of the Box, but, like all of commoner’s blood, the curse came upon him.”*

What is so special about the chest?

*“The Box of Dark Secrets is a much prized treasure of the Imperial family. It has many magical properties, but, if used by any but those of Imperial blood, it will have a most detrimental effect.”*

Who is Hsing-niang?

*“The Lady Hsing-niang was a Wu Jen of great ability. It was she who created the Box of Dark Secrets. No one knows precisely what ever came of her, but that she vanished one day, never to be seen of again. There are legends which tell that her spirit occasionally returns to the Box to see how her creation has fared.”*

Who is Magistrate Fong?

*“Like pebbles upon the shore are the magistrates of the Imperial court. I have not heard of this Fong. Did you ask him to display his writ of office? If you see*

*this individual latter, tell him to report to Lady Mei-liang at the Seven Tiger Inn.”*

(If the PCs then ask to see her writ, she will promptly display it. It is authentic and impressive-looking, but the PCs probably have no way of verifying it. She will not let low charisma PCs handle the writ, especially if it looks like they may be interested in memorizing the document for illicit purposes.)

Are you going to give us any compensation for the chest?

*“The chest has been stolen. You possess an item which is not rightfully yours. If you are cooperative, I will notify the Imperial court that you have been so. I leave it to the wisdom of my superiors to decide if your actions are worthy of reward.”*

Can we discuss this later?

*“I would like to conclude this matter as swiftly as possible, but, if you need time to think on the matter, you have until tomorrow morning. I will return then, and I shall insist that you give me the chest. If, in the meanwhile, you wish to speak with me, I can be reached at the Seven Tiger Inn. Remember, it is not wise to defy the Way of the Imperial Court. May wisdom guide your actions.”*

Remember, she will be insistent that the chest be given to her so that it may be returned to where it truly belongs. She will be patient, but, if the PCs treat her with consistent disrespect, she will leave with a warning against defying the “Way of the Imperial Court.”

Mei-liang will enter an ornate carriage and leave. If the PCs chose to follow her, they will discover that she is staying at the Seven Tiger Inn, at the outskirts of town. If they follow and proceed to spy upon her, she goes about the business of writing letters, reading some ornate scrolls, eating lunch and dinner, washing and grooming, and meditating.

If the PCs are discovered spying upon her, which is very likely if they spend too much time spying upon her, she will be furious. If she can apprehend the PCs, she will do so. If not, she will report the incident to the Watch.

In the case that the PC’s identity cannot be confirmed, nothing comes of her complaints, but, if the PC is identified, after the scenario that PC will be arrested for attempted rape, assault or murder and conspiracy if such can be alleged. Remember that Mei-liang is an emissary of the IMPERIAL COURT!! Kara-Tur is far away, but Ravens Bluff can’t have

adventurers running about causing international incidents.

The PCs will get off with a mere slap on the hand, which includes three months of community service (i.e.: cannot accept pay for any adventures undertaken in the next three months) and a fine of 1000 gp in magic items (i.e.: a potion or a minor one charge magic item.)

If the PCs decide to talk with her later and go to visit her at the Seven Tiger Inn, she will meet with them. Mei-liang will be a good hostess, providing the best food and drink which the Inn has to offer. Refer to Judge's Aid #2 for additional information which Mei-liang may know. During the discussion, she will emphasize her claim that the Box of Secrets belongs only to those of Imperial lineage.

## Encounter 4b

### 'Ali Faddim al-Muluki (OPTIONAL)

If the PCs have received Hsing-niang's clue to look for the merchant, 'Ali Faddim, or the ship, *Maiden of Muluk*, they will find that the ship is in port, although it is scheduled to leave tomorrow, on the morning tide. It is owned by a rich, Zakharan merchant, by the name of 'Ali Faddim. The ship arrived with very little trade goods, apparently they left their last port with little time for loading cargo.

This information can be learned through the usual sources, including the information gathering NWP or connections with the Harbor Patrol or Silent Network. If the PCs don't have these skills, a simple trip to the Harbormaster will suffice, as will any intelligent plan. As long as the players make some effort to find the ship, the PCs will locate it with little difficulty.

**'Ali Faddim, human Zakharan male, 8<sup>th</sup> level thief (merchant rogue):** AL LN; AC 6 (Leather & Dex); MV 12; hp 45; THAC0 17 (13 from behind); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 / 1d8+1 (cutlass); SA backstab (x3); SD nil; S 10; D 16; C 14; I 13; W 8; Ch 15; MR NA; SZ M; ML 12 (steady). Ali Faddim can no longer use his thieving skills for wrong-doing as he is under a curse.

Upon arriving at the *Maiden of Muluk*, a fine caravel, the PCs will notice that it is being loaded with cargo, primarily goods common to the city. If the PCs ask for 'Ali Faddim, they will be directed to a stout, Zakharan man, dressed in rich, but conservative clothes. He has a thick bandage wrapped around his

head, especially covering his left ear. The merchant is inspecting the goods and overseeing the loading process.

When the PCs catch his attention, he will greet them formally and ask of their business. If the PCs mention the lacquered chest, read the following:

*'Ali's eyes go wide at your mention of the chest. He quickly looks about and puts his index finger to his lips, in a gesture of silence. He gives you a nod and beckons to the boarding plank.*

*"This is a matter best discussed in privacy." He says as he motions you to board the ship.*

*As you board, he gives instructions to the crew and first-mate in a melodious foreign language. He then leads you to a well-appointed cabin, aft the main desk. He takes a thickly, cushion seat and gestures for you to take your places at similarly cushioned seats.*

*"Now," he strokes his well-groom beard. "What may I do for you?"*

The PCs will have questions for him, which 'Ali will answer with complete honesty. His experience with the Box of Dark Secrets has caused him to repent his unethical ways (i.e.: his alignment has been shifted to LN and is compulsively honest.) Finally, he wishes to have nothing more to do with the lacquered chest and will on no account go back to expose himself to its power again. He will answer the following questions as follows:

Did you break into the Celestial Gateway Emporium and leave the lacquered chest behind?

*"I did not, personally, break into the shop nor did I leave the chest behind, but such actions were undertaken on my behalf. The chest, of which you speak, was in my possession for a matter of months. It had, shall we say, a most disagreeable effect on me."*

What were the effects which the chest had upon you?

*"May the Loregiver be praised that its evil curse has been lifted from my body and soul. Look at my face or my hands. You see human flesh, darkened by the sun. A ten-day ago, you would have seen ash, held together by mystical forces, in the semblance of human flesh. I'd rather suffer the death of a thousand fleas, than the incinerating curse of the Box!"*

How did you acquire the chest?

*"A curse upon the day on which I came across that most vile of boxes. I was in Hilm, the city of intrigue,*

arranging a rare shipment of Qudran steel to a group of discontents from Kadar. As I was wrapping up the fine negotiations, I was contacted by a man from the distant land of Kara-Tur. His name was familiar to me, although not as a man of ethics.

"I went to speak with him that evening, at the inn where he was staying, a dark place of evil repute. He greeted me, shrouded in dark robes and coverings. Even his hands were covered by thick gloves. His voice was weak and hissing, and his breath rasped and wheezed loudly between words. I knew then that evil was afoot.

"Fool that I was, I heeded not the leanings of my heart. I stayed to hear what he had to offer, despite my uneasiness. He unveiled the lacquered chest and asked for a mere 20,000 dinars for it. I was in disbelief. It was obviously an ancient treasure, with a material value nearly worth that price alone. Finally, it was obviously an object of enchantment. Greed clouded reason, and I bought it.

"I needed to raise the funds immediately. So I contacted the Kadari rebels and wrapped up the deal for whatever they could offer in dinars at the moment, which was considerably less than what I had been hoping for. I rushed to the rendezvous point at a deserted Hilmiyun warehouse. My contact was there with the lacquered chest, ready to be taken away.

"We made the transaction and I had my men begin packing up the chest. My contact started to gibber to himself and began twitching uncontrollably. I went to ask him if he needed any assistance, but he struck my hand aside and threw back his hood. His flesh was ash, as were his eyes, hair and teeth. He screamed, 'You shall never take my Box! It's mine! Mine!'" With that he launched himself at me with gloved hands ready to throttle. I, of course, drew my cutlass and cut him down.

"Upon impact, he burst into a cloud of ash and collapsed to the ground. Even his bones were comprised of ash. It is a sight which I shall carry unto my dying day. May the Loregiver grant me strength!"

What have you learned about the chest?

"It is the Box of Dark Secrets, created by the sorceress Hsing-niang many centuries ago. It has many diverse powers. It can create an aura of terror about it. It can call forth a wall of flame to encircle it, by tapping the ruby in the center of the flaming crown three times. The left scroll leads to a magnificent palace, where spectral servants will wait upon you. The right scroll leads to a pagoda, where waits a black pegasus who will serve as your mount for the day.

"The mirror contacts entities from other worlds and allows you to ask questions of them. Moreover, the mirror works as a scrying device. The writing desk will translate any text. The robe drawers clean and repair any item placed within them. Finally, the storage boxes keep items within perfectly preserved.

"Remember, each use comes with a price. For every power invoked, you shall be transformed slightly into ash. Additionally, it has an insidious quality which effects your way of thinking. Once I had no qualms with smuggling goods or cheating the foolish, but now I have an irresistible urge to be a helpful and honest member of society, regardless of the profit or expense involved. Alas, there is no Fate but the Fate which we are given."

Why did you bring it to the Celestial Gateway Emporium?

"My research indicated that if I would be rid of the Box, I would have to return it to its rightful owner, in short, a person of Imperial lineage. I dreaded the long journey to Shou, and the possible retribution which the Imperial court might have inflicted upon me, if they deemed me to be responsible for its theft.

"I utilized magical divinations which would lead me to the nearest and safest place where I could take the chest to such a person. These magics led me here. I do not know precisely to whom I took the Box, but I know that the curse has been lifted from me, so it must now be in possession of one for whom it was meant. Fate has spoken, I will not argue."

What do you know of Hsing-niang?

"Hsing-niang was a powerful sorceress of ancient Shou, a student of the evil Wu Jen, Deng-li. Her powers grew considerable and she was considered the pre-eminent mage of her time. She disappeared a few years after creating the Box of Dark Secrets. Some say that she occasionally reappears to look upon her finest creation."

Who is Lady Mei-liang?

"I had the, uh, honor of meeting Lady Mei-liang yesterday evening. I told her everything I knew about the chest and its present location. She was impressed by my cooperative behavior, so she gave me the justice of the Shou court, tempered with great mercy, as buying goods stolen from the Imperial court is usually punished by death. She removed my left ear with a single stroke of her blade, so quickly that she had sheathed her sword before I even knew that I had been struck. May the Loregiver be praised that I still live!"

Will you come back with us to show us the powers of the Box?

***“I will not leave this dock for any reason but death. If I approach the Box, or even think I am approaching the Box, my willpower will snap. It is the finest of all treasures. It is an artifact of such splendor and power that only a madman would wish to not possess it! Leave me be. I cannot resist its pull for long. Tomorrow, I will be at sea, never to see Faerun again for fear that the Box will still be here. Blessed be the Loregiver for granting me strength to endure this trial.”***

‘Ali will be emotional drained by relating his experiences with the Box, but if the PCs chose to force him back to the chest, he will put up as much of a fight as he can, calling upon crew members to come to his aid.

**The Crew, human Zakharan male, 1<sup>st</sup> level thieves (12):** AL N; AC 10 (none); MV 12; hp 6; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 / 1-3 (clubs / improvised weapons); SA nil; SD nil; MR nil; SZ M; ML 13

He really would rather die than go back to the lacquered chest. Remember, forcing somebody to do something against their will is not a good action, especially if that person views the action as inimical to their existence.

If the PCs do drag ‘Ali back to the lacquered chest, he will begin gibbering and his flesh will instantly become ashen. If allowed to approach the chest unhindered, he will activate the *wall of fire*, cast at 18th level, at a 5’ radius. The PCs will not have a clear line of sight at this point, so they cannot target ‘Ali with spells. They will hear him babbling insanely in Midani, then he goes silent. The PCs better think fast or the Celestial Gateway Emporium will burn to the ground.

The *wall of fire* is 20’ high and sends forth waves of heat away from the chest. During the first round, the ceiling will catch on fire and all combustibles within 10’ of the wall ignite. The second round ignites the floor boards and the ceiling blaze spreads. Items ignite at 20’. In round three, the whole storeroom catches on fire and, unless the PCs have some magical means of extinguishing the blaze, the shop is consumed by the fire. The *wall of fire* will end in eighteen round, upon a successful *dispel magic* or if a PC taps the sapphire in the flaming crown three times. Running through the *wall of fire* inflicts 2d6+18 hp damage upon the PC so doing, with no save, but requiring the PCs to save for each item carried.

‘Ali has disappeared into the left scroll and is relaxing in the palace. He will not be found by the PCs by any means, magical or physical, as the chest foils divinations into the scroll and the palace is much too big for the PCs to search thoroughly. Later, if the PCs continue with their exploration of the chest, he may take action, as the story dictates.

If the PCs force him into the presence of the Box, but keep him tightly guarded, he will violently attempt to get to the chest, ranting and raving the whole time in Midani. He will be of no help whatsoever, as he has gone completely insane with his obsession with the chest. As soon as the PCs lower their guard, he’ll attempt to take the actions described above. Roll for initiative to see who acts first. If ‘Ali wins, the *wall of fire* is activated. His speed factor is 3.

## Encounter 4c Magistrate T’eng

This encounter takes place in the afternoon, preferably shortly after the PCs have returned from talking with ‘Ali Faddim. Master Lao has already moved his family out of the building and is readying to close up shop early. After all, it is a solemn holy day. He is interested in hearing what the PCs have to report and will become quite to hear that the lacquered chest turns people to ash. Almost as disturbing is any accusation that he may be of Imperial blood.

If asked, he will relate his family history as far back as he knows, which is only a mere five generations. He is unaware of his heritage and is dubious of being of Imperial lineage. If the PCs think of it, they can ask him to activate one of the Box’s powers. If his nails go ashen, he’s not of the lineage. If he can utilize it without detriment, he is obviously of the lineage. Lao will be quite distraught over having to touch the chest, let alone work its magic, but will do so if pressed, trembling all the way.

Right before Lao makes his test or, if the PCs don’t think of it, before he leaves for the day, there is another knock on the door. Read the following:

***Standing at the doorway is a richly attired Kara-Turan man, gray and wrinkled with age but with a dignified, distinguished manner to him. He is accompanied by six lightly armored guards, each wielding curved, glaive-like polearms. He gives you a discreet bow.***

***“Greetings, good people. I am Magistrate T’eng, an emissary of the Imperial court of Shou. Is the proprietor of this shop present?”***

*“I am Master Lao, owner of this shop. How may I help you, sir?”*

*“Ah, it is my delight to meet with you.” T’eng says with another bow. “I am looking for a lacquered chest. I have heard that it can be found here. If this is true, I would like to acquire it.” He beckons to his guards, one of whom steps forward and opens a small ornate bronze coffer; it is filled with precious gems.*

The gems are a mix of amethysts, garnets, jade, pearls and very impressive imitations of the above. There is a sufficient amount of the real things to pass any but the most thorough of appraising tests, which will be made at -10, due to the quality of the fakes and the situation modifiers. The real value of the coffers contents is 8,000 gp, but it appears to be worth over ten times that amount (i.e.: 100,000 gp!!!!)

If the PCs ask for an Imperial writ, he will display it, with great etiquette and professionalism. He will not allow low charisma characters to handle or get too close to the writ. Although there should be no way in which the PCs can determine such, the writ is an excellent forgery.

Again, Lao will defer to the judgment of the PCs. At this point, he is willing to throw the chest away, so long as he and his family are safe from the curse. Of course, he wants to know that the curse has been lifted first. Moreover, Lao wants the chest to go back to the proper person, and he doesn’t know which of the three possibilities, Magistrate Fong, Lady Mei-liang or Magistrate T’eng, to choose. Finally, being a good man, Lao wishes to help the spirit of Hsing-niang reach the next world.

In any case, T’eng wishes to see the lacquered chest. If the PCs do not oblige him, he will take it with grace. If the PCs have any questions for him, T’eng will freely answer. Possible questions may include:

Why do you want the chest?

*“I have been sent forth to retrieve the Box of Dark Secrets. I am to return it to the Imperial court when I have retrieved it. To obtain this goal, I have been given this coffer of gems and these six warriors. Of course, these warriors are meant only as bodyguards for me.”*

How did you know the chest was here?

*“The Imperial court has many wu jen and shukenja that have been searching for it by mythical means. Their divinations led me here.”*

Do you know anything about the special properties of the chest?

*“I have heard that the Box of Dark Secrets is an item of great power, but this does not concern me. I only know that it is my duty to retrieve it.”*

Who is Hsing-niang?

*“Hsing-niang was the sorceress who created the Box. She lived long ago and disappeared without a trace. I don’t know the particulars of her legend.”*

Who is Magistrate Fong?

*“I know of a magistrate by the name of Fong in the Yu’ I province. I have never met the man, but I hear that he is a just person. He made an important ruling on the legal particulars of wool carding four years ago. I know nothing more of the man. Textiles are not my field of jurisdiction.”*

Who is Lady Mei-liang?

*“Lady Mei-liang is a vocal proponent of the Imperial court, as all good people should be. She is, perhaps, a little too zealous in pursuing the Imperial wish, a tendency which occasionally alienates people. Nevertheless, she is an intelligent, brave and forceful woman. The Emperor is lucky to have such a person in his service. Although, adventuring and intrigue isn’t the life I’d choose for my daughter.”*

Would you like to see Lady Mei-liang?

*“I would most definitely like to see the good Lady Mei-liang, but, first, I would like to attire myself in clothes more suitable for visiting so esteemed a person.”*

Where are you staying in town?

*“I am a most frugal man and believe that the Imperial court ought not to pay for extravagant traveling expenses. I am staying at a tasteful place, the Jerboa Suites. It is conveniently situated near a major trade road on the outskirts of the merchant district. It serves my purposes.”*

If the PCs suggest that they test Master Lao’s lineage with T’eng as a witness, he will agree to do so. Lao, of course, will still be hesitant to mess with the chest, but, with an Imperial magistrate looking on, he hasn’t much of a choice. T’eng will suggest that one obviously not of Imperial blood (i.e.: one of the PC) should try activating the same power as Lao for comparison. When it is proven that Lao is indeed of Imperial lineage, T’eng will be impressed. Read the following:

*“So, it appears that you do indeed have a legitimate claim to the Imperial family. I must*

*consider this. Nevertheless, this Box does belong in Shou and not in these dangerous western lands. I would recommend that you allow me to return it to the Imperial court, and allow the Emperor to decide the situation of the chest. If you wish to possess it, you can write a letter stating your claim. It may be that the Emperor will return it to you when he has decided.*

*“In any case, I will let you spend this evening to decide. I will be at the Jerboa suites, if you have need to speak with me this evening. I will send a message to Lady Mei-liang, requesting an audience with her. I will tell her of your discovery. Have a pleasant evening.”*

*T’eng bows to each of you and leaves. His men follow behind him.*

If the PCs follow T’eng, they will discover that he indeed is staying at the Jerboa suites. He has his men shutter and guard each of the doors. He stays in his suite through the entire night, meditating with only a single, dim candle illuminating his chamber. His men adequately secure the area to prevent any non-magical spying attempt. PCs using magical scrying, such as *clairvoyance* or the mirror in the chest, will find that T’eng cannot be scryed upon (i.e.: he has *non-detection* cast.) He does send a letter to Lady Mei-liang, requesting an audience for the following afternoon.

If he discovers that the PCs are spying upon him, he will simply pretend to ignore them. He will communicate with his guards through a subtle form of sign language, informing them of the whereabouts of the spies. Two guards will then discreetly slip out (i.e.: successfully do the hide in shadows thing) and attempt to quietly assassinate the spying PCs. The guards, wearing no armor, will sneak up on the PCs, one at a time, if possible, and throw poison darts at them.

If the counter-espionage attempt goes awry, T’eng will feign surprise and indignation, in the case that the PCs accuse him of being behind it. In fact, he will act indignant over the mere fact that he was being spied upon. If the PCs continue to be a trouble, T’eng will call for the Watch.

## Encounter 4d

### Remember the Dead

This encounter occurs right at six bells past highsun. Its purpose is to provide last minute answers in the case that the PCs have not acquired all the information which they will need to have a chance of successfully

completing the scenario. Moreover, it provides them with a person to conduct the Rite of the Dead, which will set Hsing-niang’s spirit free.

Brother Graves is a cleric of Kelemvor. As tonight is the Feast of the Moon, he has the Kelemvorite ability to cast *speak with dead* and actually carry on a conversation with the spirit for as long as he desires, without the presence of any mortal remains. Unfortunately, he only has a limited time to spend with the PCs before he must return to the temple of Kelemvor to take part in the Daeum ceremony, on this most holy of days.

In short, he must be at the temple by seven bells. He needs a half-hour to get there. The casting time for *speak with dead* is one turn. Therefore, the amount of time he can actually spend talking with either the PCs or Hsing-niang is only twenty minutes. He will not allow himself to be late for the ceremony, as he is lawful neutral and this is a “solemn high holy day.”

**Brother Graves, human male, P5 of Kelemvor:** AL LN; AC 5 (chain); MV 9; hp 44; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (footman’s mace); SA spell use; SD nil; S 10; D 8; C 16; I 14; W 16; Ch 7; MR NA; SZ M; ML 16.

Spells: 1st level – *bless* (x5). 2nd level – *slow poison, hold person, aid, silence 15’rd, chant*. Special powers – *speak with dead* (x2)

In any case, read the following when Brother Graves comes knocking at the door:

*The bells toll six after highsun and night has begun to descend upon the city. The restless wind whispers around the shop and leaves rustle, caught in the shutters. Almost immediately after the bells go silent, a loud knocking sounds at the door.*

Ask the PC what they are going to do.

*Upon opening the door, a tall, gaunt man stands before you. He wears the gray robe and cowl of the Kelemvorite faith. Indeed, a symbol of the Lord of the Dead rests upon his chest. He looks at you with deep, dark eyes. His flesh is pale and has a waxen quality to it.*

*“May the Feast of the Moon remind you of the obligations which the living owe unto the dead. Would you like to offer mere coin, which will serve you no purpose in the eternal world to come, for a blessing on the soul of a loved one? Or, perhaps, you would be interested in purchasing a prayer book, with hymns and sermons on the inevitability of our passing from this transient realm and the myriad*

*fates we can look forward to beyond. They're only 100 gold."*

*He holds forth an alms bowl. A ghoulish smile plays across his gaunt face.*

The prayer books are quite nice, although the numerous reminders of the transience of mortal life may become a bit too much for one reading. For a gold piece, Graves will write a PC's name on a list of faithful, who will be mentioned in tonight's evening prayer, the Daeum of the Feast of the Moon.

Since helping the dead find peace is part of the duties of a Kelemvorite, Brother Graves will not ask for money to perform the task of speaking with Hsing-niang's spirit, but, if the PCs wish to contribute money, he will dutifully take it and wish them the blessings of Kelemvor. In game terms, if a PC contributes money to Brother Graves, regardless of the amount, that one PC will be blessed with a +1 to all saving throws throughout the night.

DO NOT tell them that they feel blessed or everyone at the table will start shelling out the gold. Just remember this blessing. When the situation comes about that the blessed PC fails a save, ask how much they failed by and, if they failed by one, tell them that they JUST made it. If they ask why, come up with a bogus reason, such as "The table gave you 10% coverage," or "You felt that the spell wasn't properly cast." Don't ruin the mystery by saying, "Kelemvor gives you a +1 to all saves tonight."

Finally, if the PCs ask about customs of burial in ancient Shou, Graves, being an enthusiast on the topic, will be able to give them the proper instructions on the basics of the Rites of the Dead. In fact, he will look about the shop and indicate which gongs should be rung at what time, which bowl should be filled with water and when it should be poured, and other such intricacies of the Rite. Assume that any PC with spellcraft or religion can remember the instructions.

When all is said and done, Brother Graves will wish the PCs good luck and run off to the temple of Kelemvor.

## Encounter 5 Shadow of the Heart

This section involves the attempt to free Hsing-niang's spirit from the mystical bonds of the Box of Dark Secrets. It is divided into four parts. Firstly, the PCs must open and close the designated drawers three times each in the proper order.

Next the PCs must recite the first part of Hsing-niang's poem to enter the portal. They will come across three mechanical traps, which they should know how to disarm or avoid through the *dream* spell. When they come to the main chamber, they will be attacked by a small contingent of ash creatures. Upon defeating these, the PCs will have to recite the second part of the poem, or they'll be attacked by more ash creatures.

Then, upon reciting the poem, the PCs are transported to another place, where a jade stairway ascends to a platform. At the top of the platform is a howling sphere of wind. When the third part of the poem is recited, the spell is disrupted. The space around the PCs melts away and they reappear in the storeroom, standing before the chest.

Finally, at night, the spirit of Hsing-niang appears before the PCs and asks to be sent away by a Rite of the Dead. She can instruct the PCs as to how it is done, if they have not learned by other means. If they finish going through the trials of the chest during the day, they will feel Hsing-niang's spirit lingering about until night, when she reveals herself as above. Once they have finished the Rite, she is freed of her undead status and ascends to the outer planes.

## Encounter 5a Cricket, phoenix, cinnabar, plum and celedon

This encounter deals with the opening of the portal into the realm of Dark Secrets. The things which the PCs must do are as follows:

1) The PCs must open the specified storage drawers. First, they must open and close the drawer with the caged cricket three times. Next they must do the same with the drawer with the phoenix hairpin. This process must be repeated with the drawer with the box of cinnabar, then the fan with plum blossom designs, and, finally, the green celedon flask.

2) The ritual detailed above will cause the mirror to disappear, revealing a tiny hole behind it. An inscription is above the opening. At this point, the PCs should recite the first part of Hsing-niang's poem, "Dry wind blows to nowhere, formless and without a path." This results in the following:

*Upon uttering the words of Hsing-niang, the wind pounds against the shutters and phantom leaves whirl about you. The tiny hole begins to grow and*

*continues growing until it becomes a dark tunnel, leading off into some extradimensional space.*

## Encounter 5b

### Lonely Heron Waits in Shade, Weeping for the Past

The PCs should now enter the tunnel, which extends forward for a seemingly endless expanse. The PCs will feel as though they are walking for miles, although they will not be tired from the walk. They will come to a section guarded by traps. A *find traps* spell or a thief's find/remove traps ability will let them detect the traps without penalty. A thief will be unable to remove the traps, but, if the ability check is passed, the means of deactivating or avoiding them will be discerned.

Additionally, magic doesn't completely work here. In particular, magical forms of movement, such as *fly*, *jump*, *teleport*, or *blink*, simply do not work. The PCs will immediately know that this is the case upon completing the spell.

*Finally, you come to a grand marble stairway, divided in three parts, left, center and right. Before the stairs are two pedestals with strange dog-like stone sculptures upon them. The creatures have wide open mouths with sharp teeth and fierce eyes.*

The PCs must reach into the mouth of the left dog and flip a switch. This deactivates the center stairway. The traps on the left and right stairways are NOT deactivated. If they PCs don't do this correctly, the following occurs.

**Left stairway:** The stairs ascend for fifty feet. The last ten feet are trapped to activate a series of scythes, which swing out from the wall inflicting 2d8 per tier to everyone on the left stair. If somebody has a *stoneskin* spell active, each d8 removes one from the total amount of attacks blocked by the spell. This stairway can be deactivated by reaching in to the right dog's mouth and flipping the switch.

**Right stairway:** The stairs ascend for fifty feet. The middle ten feet are trapped to trigger a volley of darts to rain down upon everyone on the right stairway. Each PC receives 3d4 per tier. If somebody has a *stoneskin* spell active, each d4 removes one from the total amount of attacks blocked by the spell. This stairway can be deactivated by reaching in to the right

dog's mouth and flipping the switch, followed by the same process with the left dog.

**Central stairway:** The stairs ascend for fifty feet. The ten foot section after 30' have been ascended is trapped to trigger jets of boiling acid to spray up from the steps, soaking everyone on the central stairway. Each PC receives 1d6 per tier for two rounds. *Stoneskin* spells provide no protection from this. This stairway can be deactivated as detailed above.

If the left dog's trigger is deactivated, followed by the right dog's, the teeth clamp down inflicting 1d8 hp damage per round on the unfortunate PC who flipped the switch. Opening the mouth requires a successful bend bars roll by someone other than the PC in jeopardy. If the PC losses over half of their regular hp total, then their arm has been severed, requiring a something along the lines of a *regeneration* spell to reattach it.

*Once past the stairway you come to a grand courtyard, over 300 yards in length paved in a swirling pattern of colored marble. The tiles are of black, orange, white and green. Each marble tile is a 2' x 2' square. Across the courtyard is a vast fortress of dark gray granite. It looms hundreds of feet above you, yet there is not a single window upon its facade. In fact there is only a single doorway into the fortress at the base, directly across the courtyard.*

If the PCs stay on the orange tiles, they'll be fine. It is very easy to stay on the orange tiles, not even requiring a D check. If someone steps on the other tiles, the following occurs.

**Black tile:** 45 lbs of pressure breaks through the thin marble surface, dropping the PC into a pit, where, five feet below, a black pudding waits for them (see statistics below.) Remember that puddings are capable of climbing walls, so, once the PC has been removed from the pit, they are not yet out of danger.

**Black Pudding (1):** I non-; AL N; AC 6; MV 6; HD 10; hp 40; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 3d8; SA destroy armor and weapons SD immune to acid, cold, and poison. *Lightning bolt* and melee attacks divides the pudding into 2 puddings of equal size. MR nil; SZ M; ML NA. The pudding is hungry.

**White tile:** 45 lbs of pressure breaks through the thin marble surface, dropping the PC into a pit, where, five feet below, a white pudding waits for them (see statistics below.) Remember that puddings are capable

of climbing walls, so, once the PC has been removed from the pit, they are not yet out of danger.

**White Pudding (1):** I non-; AL N; AC 8; MV 9; HD 9; hp 36; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 7d4; SA destroy animal and vegetable mater. SD immune to acid, cold, and poison. *Lightning bolt* and melee attacks divides the pudding into 2 puddings of equal size. MR nil; SZ M; ML NA. The pudding is hungry.

**Green tile:** 45 lbs of pressure breaks through the thin marble surface, dropping the PC into a pit, where, five feet below, a green slime waits for them (see statistics below.) Remember that green slimes are not capable of climbing walls, so, once the PC has been removed from the pit, they will no longer suffer attacks, but will need to deal quickly with the infestation.

**Green Slime (1):** I non-; AL N; AC 9; MV 0; HD 2; hp 10; THAC0 NA; #AT 0; Dmg nil; SA creatures touched by the green slime will be transformed into green slime themselves in 1d4+1 rounds SD effected only by fire, cold, or *cure disease*. MR nil; SZ M; ML NA.

PCs that fall into the green slime are in for a horrible surprise, metal equipment immersed with them must save vs. acid or be destroyed unless the slime is removed within 3 rounds.

Combating the puddings in the courtyard is a dangerous proposition. First, puddings are capable of spreading out their mass, so they have no chance of breaking the tiles. Second, every round of combat requires a D check by all involved in melee, unless they have the tightrope walking proficiency, in which case, they automatically succeed in the check. Failure results in the PC stepping on another tile. Roll a d4, with 1= black, 2= white, 3= green, and 4= orange.

If the PCs run away, they easily outdistance the puddings.

Once past the courtyard the PCs come to a large structure with no windows and only one door. The building is made of gray granite and is completely magic resistant, allowing no entry through any magical means, including teleportation and ethereal penetration, as per a *forbiddance* spell. Of course, the door is unlocked.

If the PCs so chose they may attempt to climb the structure. Doing so is extremely difficult and dangerous. The wall surface is very smooth, so nonthief characters must be mountaineers and have

appropriate tools to climb it. The rate of climbing is 1/4 the PC's movement rate in feet per round (i.e.: movement of 12= 3 ft a round.) There are no handholds nor is the wall sloped inward. For every turn of climbing, the PCs must make another climbing check, as per PHB chapter 14: Time and Movement. Regardless of the distance climbed, the PCs will NEVER reach the top, which always seems to be hundreds of feet above them.

*Beyond the door is a long hall, 100 yards long. It is unlit, but normal and magical light sources work as usual in illuminating it. The walls are perfectly smooth, as is the floor and ceiling. At the end of the hall is a normal sized door, made of iron and with a dial set in the middle of it. A silver lever is to the right of the dial, which has three positions, up, down, and center. The dial has depictions of animals upon it. There are six of them, including a rat, rooster, horse, monkey, tiger and snake.*

As soon as a PC turns the dial, the entry door will slam shut, incapable of being opened by any means, short of a *wish* or divine intervention. The same holds true for the door with the dial. Moreover, as soon as the door slams shut, the walls slowly begin to close in on the PCs within the hall. This happens regardless of where the PC turns the dial.

In six rounds the PCs will be squashed to death, if they do not open the dial door. The way to open the door is to turn the dial to monkey and raise the lever up, followed by turning the dial to rooster and pushing the lever all the way down. Finally, the dial must be turned to snake and the lever must be returned to the central position.

If the PCs do not know the combination or forget the clues provided in the *dream*, allow thieves one chance per round to open the door with their open locks ability. The door cannot be forced open by brute strength nor opened with a *knock* spell.

*Upon opening the door, you enter a huge chamber with twenty entrances, including the one which you have come through. Particles of ash drift through the air, like gray rain, obscuring your vision. In the middle of the chamber is a white circle of a 20' radius. Across the room are humanoid forms, comprised entirely of ash. They rapidly approach you.*

### **Tier 1 (Levels 4-13):**

**Ash Spirits (5):** I non-; AL N; AC 8; MV9; HD 3; hp 12; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4; SA paralyzation by touch for 2d4 rds; SD immune to cold, fire, and mind

affecting spells (*sleep, charm, hold.*) SW turned as 3 HD undead, Holy water causes 4d4 hp, a *gust of wind* spell causes 1d6 hp per level of the caster to ash spirits, a *windwall* causes 2d6 hp +1/level of the caster, to ash spirits that attempt to cross it.; MR nil; SZ M (5'-6'); ML NA.

The ash creatures are the sorry remnants of those who sought to use the Box of Dark Secrets for personal gain, that were not of imperial blood. They are doomed to jealously guard its inner sanctums against any who would intrude. The ash spirits' physical forms are destroyed when they reach 0 hp's, only to reform in one turn. The ash spirits can only be permanently dispatched by the use of a *dispel evil* or the destruction of the artifact that spawned them.

### **Tier 2 (Levels 14-25):**

**Ash Spirits (5):** I non-; AL N; AC 6; MV9; HD 6; hp 24; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; SA paralyzation by touch for 2d4 rds; SD immune to cold, fire, and mind affecting spells (*sleep, charm, hold.*) SW turned as 6 HD undead, Holy water causes 4d4 hp, a *gust of wind* spell causes 1d6 hp per level of the caster to ash spirits, a *windwall* causes 2d6 hp +1/level of the caster, to ash spirits that attempt to cross it.; MR nil; SZ M (5'-6'); ML NA.

The ash creatures are the sorry remnants of those who sought to use the Box of Dark Secrets for personal gain, that were not of imperial blood. They are doomed to jealously guard its inner sanctums against any who would intrude. The ash spirits' physical forms are destroyed when they reach 0 hp's, only to reform in one turn. The ash spirits can only be permanently dispatched by the use of a *dispel evil* or the destruction of the artifact that spawned them.

### **Tier 3 (Levels 26-37):**

**Ash Spirits (5):** I non-; AL N; AC 4; MV9; HD 9; hp 36; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8; SA paralyzation by touch; SD immune to cold, fire, and mind affecting spells (*sleep, charm, hold.*) SW turned as 9 HD undead, Holy water causes 4d4 hp, a *gust of wind* spell causes 1d6 hp per level of the caster to ash spirits, a *windwall* causes 2d6 hp +1/level of the caster, to ash spirits that attempt to cross it.; MR nil; SZ M (5'-6'); ML NA.

The ash creatures are the sorry remnants of those who sought to use the Box of Dark Secrets for personal gain, that were not of imperial blood. They are doomed to jealously guard its inner sanctums against any who would intrude. The ash spirits' physical forms are destroyed when they reach 0 hp's, only to reform in one turn. The ash spirits can only be permanently

dispatched by the use of a *dispel evil* or the destruction of the artifact that spawned them.

### **Tier 4 (Levels 38+):**

**Ash Spirits (8):** I non-; AL N; AC 2; MV9; HD 12; hp 48; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 2d6; SA paralyzation by touch for 2d4 rds; SD immune to cold, fire, and mind affecting spells (*sleep, charm, hold.*) SW turned as 12 HD undead, Holy water causes 4d4 hp, a *gust of wind* spell causes 1d6 hp per level of the caster to ash spirits, a *windwall* causes 2d6 hp +1/level of the caster, to ash spirits that attempt to cross it.; MR nil; SZ M (5'-6'); ML NA.

The ash creatures are the sorry remnants of those who sought to use the Box of Dark Secrets for personal gain, that were not of imperial blood. They are doomed to jealously guard its inner sanctums against any who would intrude. The ash spirits' physical forms are destroyed when they reach 0 hp's, only to reform in one turn. The ash spirits can only be permanently dispatched by the use of a *dispel evil* or the destruction of the artifact that spawned them.

Roll for initiative. The PCs have to save at the beginning of each round vs. breath weapon or be blinded for the remainder of the round, with all the problems that entails. The ash spirits are unaffected by the ash. The PCs have two turns before additional ash zombies arrive.

Upon defeating the ash zombies, the PCs should stand in the circle and recite the next part of Hsing-niang's poem, "Lonely heron waits in shade, weeping for the past." Upon saying this, the party is mystically transfer to another place (i.e.: go to Encounter 5c.)

If the PCs do not recite the poem, eventually more ash zombies will arrive. An ash zombie will appear at each doorway, except for the one by which the PCs entered. The next group will arrive in yet another turn. In other words, nineteen of these ash creatures appear each turn. Moreover, although they can be turned, the PCs should not know that they are undead.

Upon defeating the ash creatures, the PCs have a turn to recite the poem or the fight begins anew. The Box replenishes its defenders quickly, from the spirits of those who sought to possess it. Eventually, the PCs will have to recite the poem or be overwhelmed by the endless army of ash undead.

## Encounter 5c

### Like Fallen Leaves Tossed

*Upon reciting the poem, the room fades from sight. You appear on a featureless plain which seems to extend on forever in every direction. The sky is gray and empty, although providing a dim light, by which you can see. Before your party is a large, ornate platform, constructed out of jade. On top of the platform is a whirling hemisphere of wind and color. The howls of the wind are as loud as a hurricane, but the air around the platform is perfectly still.*

The swirling hemisphere of wind is the result of a *windtomb* spell. The spell can be brought down if the PCs climb the jade staircase and recite the last part of Hsing–niang’s poem, “Sorrow is the parting. Sorrow is the loss. Sorrow comes for every man, like the fallen leaves tossed.” This poem invokes the greatest power of the Box of Dark Secrets, in that it activates a *wish*, which will bring down the *windtomb*.

Be sure to ask who is going to say the poem. Only one person can deactivate the power of the *windtomb*, as the poem must be clearly enunciated and uninterrupted. When this is determined and accomplished, read the following:

*The colors of the swirling wind become erratic and the hemisphere starts to lose its shape. The wind howls in your ears with deafening volume. Suddenly, the wind explodes in a myriad swirl of light, which swallows up your group. You are knocked to your knees, dazed by the power which you have unleashed. (Name of the PC who recited the poem) lies unmoving and incoherent on the platform. In place of the hemisphere of wind is a pedestal with a large crystal upon it. The shadowy form of a beating heart is visible within it.*

The PCs should shatter the crystal. This will free Hsing–niang’s soul from the Box. Upon shattering the crystal, space melts all about the PCs and they experience a moment of free fall. Then, they are back in the storeroom, standing before the lacquered chest.

The PC who has recited the poem will be stunned for five rounds. Nothing appears to be physically wrong the PC, but their S, D and C attributes will be reduced to 5 for the next three days, due to the stress of activating the *wish*. Additionally, their voice will sound breathy and sibilant for a like period of time.

If the PC do not shatter the crystal, they will be stuck in the Box until they do. Hsing–niang will appear briefly to plead with them to shatter it, but she is

visibly bound by chains of fire and can only speak briefly before she disappears. If the PCs don’t shatter the crystal within an hour or by midnight, whichever is longer, it’s too late for them and for Hsing–niang. The court of Lord Tsa has acquired the Box and it is now in Baator, where the PCs are imprisoned for one year. Hsing–niang is not so lucky.

In the odd situation that they PCs have determined that they can cast a *wish* while standing atop the platform, mind you that there should be NO way that they would know this, the PCs are in for a most unpleasant surprise. An ash creature, (If ‘Ali Faddim is in the Box, then it is he,) will sneak up the other side of the platform unnoticed to the PCs, regardless of any special ability. The ash creature, once a good individual led astray by material greed, recites the poem as the PCs are forming their self–serving requests. The interruption of the poem causes all who were involved to spontaneously combust as per the *conflagration* spell, cast at 18th level (see **Judge’s Aid #3**.) Note that the ash creature is immune to this while there is nothing in existence, not *protection from fire* spells, not a Red Raven outfit, not a ring of fire resistance, not anything which will save the PCs from this gruesome fate (Unless they can survive 36d6 with no save.)

Note that this horrid fate only strikes those PCs who were planning to use the Box for their own personal gain. Hsing–niang appears to ward away the flames from the innocent, but she is unable to save the guilty from the inevitable consequence of their greed. The ash creature finishes reciting the poem and shatters the crystal while the PCs are dealing with the emergency. When everything is settled, the PCs are back in the storeroom before the lacquered chest.

## Encounter 5d

### Rest in Peace

This takes place at nightfall (i.e.: six bell past highsun) or later if the PCs have not already accomplished the task of freeing her.

*Over the lacquered chest is beautiful Hsing–niang. She is bound to it by chains of flame, which she struggles against to no avail. She looks at your group, and moves her hands in a pleading gesture. She moves her hand in a gesture of peace, then begins to cast a spell.*

If the PCs allow her to cast, they will notice that it appears to be yet another *sending* spell. She will again send it to her champion, if he is still around. She says:

***“Perform Rite of Dead. Evil Ones come for my soul! I point objects for ritual. Imitate what I do. Sorry for explosion. Soon get better.”***

The PCs should now perform the rites, which any priest can perform with Hsing–niang’s instruction. If the PCs have learned about the rite before this point, Hsing–niang can spend more time instructing them on the particulars of the ceremony. Remember, Hsing–niang’s soul is in danger of eternal damnation. She isn’t interested in small talk at this point. She will gesture pleadingly and visibly beg for the PCs to free her. If the PCs ignore her desperate request, for whatever reason, they are not acting as befits a good person, so check alignments.

Hopefully, the PCs perform the ceremony and set her free. Upon completion, Hsing–niang begins to glow with a pleasant rosy hue and apricot blossoms swirl around her. She smiles at the PCs and she will give her champion a soft kiss on the cheek and whisper softly in his ear,

***“Tell those who come for the chest that Hsing–niang has left and that they are too late for her soul. The dark ones will not be inclined to fight if they know this. Give it to the one who answers with honor the question, ‘Why do you seek the Box of Dark Secrets?’”***

With this being said, she floats above the PCs and, with a flash of rosy light, she disappears. Apricot blossoms drift to the floor and also disappear.

## **Encounter 6 Wherein All Is Resolved**

The only question left at this point is to decide what is going to happen with the Box of Dark Secrets. They can give it to Magistrate Fong, Lady Mei–liang, or Magistrate T’eng. Keeping the Box is an option as well, but one which will have dire results for the PC who chooses to possess it.

Wise players should be able to get away without a single combat, but other may get stuck fighting in spite of their efforts. In the situation that the PCs do get into combat, they will probably get soundly defeated. If the PCs performed the Rite of the Dead properly, by receiving directions from both Brother Graves and

Hsing–niang, they will receive assistance from Hsing–niang in each situation. Each encounter will be handled differently and is discussed individual under “Hsing–niang’s help.”

## **Encounter 6a The Devils of Wu Tsien?**

At midnight, there is a loud pounding at the door. When the PCs open it, they see the following:

***Opening the door, you see the familiar form of six heavily cloaked warriors, each wearing jade masks. Before them is the diminutive Magistrate Fong. He waves his staff at you menacingly.***

***“You filthy barbarians have had your time to consider! Bring me the chest now or you shall learn that it is most unwise to face the wrath of Fong!”***

If the PCs tell him flat out that the spirit of Hsing–niang has been freed, Fong will be taken aback and at a loss for words. He will look over his shoulder relaying this information to his superiors telepathically, who will instruct him to try to talk the PCs into giving or selling him the chest. If the PCs ask him “Why do you seek the Box of Dark Secrets?”

***“Impudent mortals! If you had more wits than a toad you would not stand between General Tsa and an unfulfilled promise. Tampering with the dark secrets of the box will bring you to a most swift and grizzly end.”***

If the PCs appear ready to fight, roll an encounter reaction. Lord Tsa may give the order to back down and retreat. He was mainly interested in Hsing–niang’s soul and, if he could also get the Box, he would be more than happy to take it, but he isn’t interested in losing valuable baatezu for a cursed, albeit powerful artifact.

Use the charisma of the party’s leader to determine if the baatezu fight. The PCs are considered hostile. Roll 2d10 and add the total. As Lord Tsa is not truly interested in fighting for the Box and the PCs are considered to be defending their home and with a defensive terrain advantage, subtract 5 from the number rolled.

The party leader will have a reaction adjustment based upon Charisma. A high stat will give a bonus to the roll (i.e.: subtract this number from the number rolled,) while a low charisma will give a penalty (i.e.: add this number to the number rolled.) If a low

charisma PC is leading the party, you may want to ask the other PCs if they REALLY want such an unlikable and irritating person representing their group. If they see no problem with it, well, we'll see if they live to regret it.

In any case, this is the formula: Roll 2d10 - 5 (+/-) reaction adjustment (Ch) = ?.

If the modified die roll is 5 or less, Fong will react with "flight." If the modified roll is 8 to 6, Fong is "cautious." If the modified roll is 9 to 12, he is "threatening." A modified roll of 13 and over results in combat with the court of Tsa. Use the following player test for each instance. Note that PCs with a charisma of 15 or higher AUTOMATICALLY succeed.

**Flight:** Fong backs down and bows.

*"So, it appears that you foreign dogs are not as stupid as you appear. I shall leave now. Do what you will with the accursed box." He turns and marches off into the darkness.*

**Cautious:** Fong steps back and shakes his fist.

*"You barbarian pigs may have won this time, but I, Fong Pu-Tsai shall remember this indignity." He turns and marches off into the darkness.*

**Threatening:** Fong stands his ground and strokes his beard most menacingly.

*"Know this, you unwashed savage scum. With a mere blink of my eye, I could obliterate you entirely, but I have no great love for the Box of Dark Secrets. I have more important things to do than waste my time with you filth." He turns and marches off into the darkness.*

**Hostile:** Fong turns and marches away from the door without a word. As he does so, the combat begins. Note that the court of Tsa will only fight the PCs for the amount of rounds by which they failed the reaction check. In other words, if the modified roll is 13, then the baatezu fight for one round. If the modified roll is 20, then they fight for eight rounds.

If the PCs are interested in selling the Box, Fong will negotiate. He can offer up to 50,000 gp in precious gems and two magic weapons of +2 quality, the type to be determined by the PCs. When the price has been established, Machig, who is listening telepathically, will teleport to retrieve the items offered and send an abishai to deliver them to Fong. As soon as the deal is

made, Fong will have his guards teleport away with him and the Box, except at Tier 1, where Machig will have barbazu arrive and teleport them away. The rest of Lord Tsa's court will do likewise.

If the spirit of Hsing-niang is still up for grabs and the PCs will not turn over the chest or, if the PCs just attack Fong, they are in for a BIG fight. The PCs should be outgunned at each tier, with the possible exception of those lucky tables that have access to *holy word*. Even so, the big baatezu will be well out of the 30' radius this spell and will be targeting their nastiest spell at anybody wearing a symbol of Tyr or Oghma.

Remember, Lord Tsa, Xi Hua-wa and Machig will all be well hidden on the roof tops and in the shadows. Moreover, while Fong and his undead servants will draw the PCs out of the shop to melee in the street, the barbazu will break into the shop from the back and sides and will attempt to grab the chest and teleport away with it. As soon as the chest is in their possession, all the rest break off and escape.

An important note to remember is that baatezu can communicate by telepathy and are therefore capable of working with incredible organization. Moreover, the majority of them are highly intelligent or genius. They will use their special abilities to the maximum effect whenever possible. Each tier will have slightly different tactics as dictated by the baatezu ready at the scene. **Remember, the tiers are cumulative.**

### **Tier 1 (Levels 4-13):**

**Magistrate Fong, Baatezu, Spinagon (1):** I very (12); AL LE; AC 4; MV 6 fl 18c; HD 3+3; hp 27; THAC0 17; #AT 1, by weapon; Dmg 1d6 (staff); SA spell use, fling spines 2/rd 1d4+flame; SD Immune to poison, normal and magical fire. Half damage from cold and gas. Full damage from acid, electricity, and silver and normal weapons.; MR 15%; SZ S; ML 10 (average).

Innate abilities: *affect normal fires, change self, command, produce flame, scare, stinking cloud* once per round.

**Bodyguards, disguised skeletons (6):** I non-; AL N; AC 5 (lamalar); MV 9; HD 2; hp 14; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA nil; SD 1/2 damage from type P and S weapons, immune to cold and mind effecting spells (*charm, hold, sleep* etc.) SW can be turned, holy water 2-8 hp / vial.; MR nil; SZ M; ML NA.

### **Tier 2 (Levels 14-25):**

**Barbazu, Disguised Baatezu (1):** I low (7); AL LE; AC 3; MV 15; HD 6+6; hp 40; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg 2d6; SA spell use, wounding, battle frenzy.; SD Immune to poison, normal and magical fire. Half

damage from cold and gas. Full damage from acid, electricity, and silver and magical weapons.; MR 30%; SZ M; ML 12 (steady).

Innate abilities: *advanced illusion, animate dead, charm person, infravision, know alignment, suggestion, teleport w/o error, affect normal fires, command, fear (by touch) produce flame.*

### **Tier 3 (Levels 26-37):**

**Machig, Disguised Erinyes (1):** I high (14); AL LE; AC 2; MV 12, fl 21c; HD 6+6; hp 50; THACO 13; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+4 (dagger / str); SA spell use, rope of entanglement.; SD Immune to poison, normal and magical fire. Half damage from cold and gas. Full damage from acid, electricity, and silver and magical weapons.; MR 30%; SZ M; ML 12 (steady).

Innate abilities: *advanced illusion, animate dead, charm person (by gaze, save at 1/2 level), detect invisibility, invisibility, locate object, polymorph self, infravision, know alignment, suggestion, teleport w/o error, fear (aura), produce flame.*

Machig carries the *rope of entanglement* usual to Erinyes, it can be used to entangle up to 8 man-sized opponents WITH NO SAVE OR TO HIT ROLL. The rope is AC -2 and has 22 hp and can only be cut by attack with edged weapons or magic. Strength alone is NOT enough to break the rope. The rope is a manifestation of diabolic power and will vanish if Machig is slain or banished.

### **Tier 4 (Levels 38+):**

**Xi Hua - wa, Disguised Gelugon (1):** I genius (18); AL LE; AC -3; MV 15; HD 11; hp 88; THACO 9; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3+4 (bite in Chihuahua form); SA spell use, Fear 10'; SD Regenerate 2hp/ rd. Immune to poison, normal and magical fire. Half damage from cold and gas. Full damage from acid, electricity, and silver (half damage) and +2 magical weapons.; MR 50%; SZ T (polymorphed); ML 16 (champion).

Innate abilities: *wall of ice (yep, 3-30 no save, each round), advanced illusion, animate dead, charm person, infravision, know alignment, suggestion, teleport w/o error, detect invisibility, detect magic, fly, polymorph self.*

**Hsing-niang's Help:** After half of the PCs have been defeated, read the following:

*A golden blaze of light appears above the roofs across the street. At the center of this radiance is a woman upon a golden crane. It is Hsing-niang, but even more beautiful than before. With a wave of her hand, a bolt of lightning streaks down the street,*

*striking a large man in black, Kara Turan armor. It then flashes back up the street, hitting a white dog on a rooftop down the street. It then arcs over the building and you hear a woman scream out in pain. It again arcs over the building and obliterates Fong's soldiers then arcs into Fong, who leaps with pain upon the impact.*

*After a few more arcs, there is another brilliant flash of light. The street is silent. Fong and the other appear to be gone.*

Hsing-niang has cast a *limited wish*, allowing her to modify the results of a *chain lightning*. She didn't kill a single member of Tsa's court, but they had no desire to fight her now that she's regained her real abilities as an immortal (26th level wu-jen.) After that warning shot, Lord Tsa ordered the others to retreat. They all used their *teleport without error* ability to leave the scene.

## **Encounter 6b Never Threaten a Lady's Honor**

The PCs have apparently survived the encounter with the court of Lord Tsa. Master Lao return in the morning, bringing breakfast pastries with him for the PCs. He will inquire as to their night and will be most pleased that Hsing-niang's spirit has been freed. Nevertheless, he is still uncomfortable about having a powerful artifact in his residence. Lao will suggest that they give it to either Lady Mei-liang or Magistrate T'eng. After a bit of discussion, a gentle knock sounds at the door. It is Mei-liang and her entourage.

*Upon opening the door, you are faced with Lady Mei-liang. She gives you a respectful bow. Her mouth is set in a friendly smile, but her eyes show hard determination.*

*"I have come for the Box of Dark Secrets. It is a matter of honor that I return this chest back to the Imperial court. I was ordered to retrieve it and I shall do so, or die trying. As for payment, I will be meeting a Magistrate T'eng in the afternoon. If he has an Imperial order which dictates such, I will see to it that you receive your payment. Please, bring me the chest."*

If the PCs ask her "Why do you seek the Box of Dark Secrets?"

*"I am honor bound by the order of the Emperor to find and retrieve the box."*

Giving her the chest is the lawful thing to do. Master Lao agrees that such is proper, especially as she will be meeting with T'eng later in the day. It would be nice to receive a reward, but it is better simply to be rid of the Box and its curse. If Lao's Imperial heritage is pointed out, Mei-liang will be surprised, but such a discovery does not change her orders. She will speak on Lao's behalf in the Imperial court, if he desires the Box as his own, but she can't promise him that it will be returned. Of course, Lao doesn't want the Box, so he doesn't care what the Emperor does with it.

If the PCs give Mei-liang the chest, she will be thankful and relieved that she didn't have to hurt anyone. If they do not give her the chest, she will insist on fighting honorably for it. If the PCs have already given the chest away, she will ask for the treasure which they have received in the transaction as compensation, or she will insist on fighting for it. If the Box has been taken from them by the court of Tsa, she will leave immediately, without another word.

If the PCs point out that dueling is illegal in Ravens Bluff, she will point out that she has diplomatic immunity and, if they will not resolve this matter honorably, she will have each of them arrested for possessing or selling stolen goods. Lao will give in at this point, unless the PCs have some very convincing reasons why he shouldn't.

Mei-liang's threat is not in vain. If the PCs either do not give her the chest or do not face her in a duel, the Watch will arrive and arrest everybody, confiscating the Box. The PCs will be let off with a slap on the hand, costing them three months of community service (i.e.: they cannot take pay for any adventures undertaken in the next three months) and a fine of 1000 gp in magic items (i.e.: a potion or a minor one charge magic item.) The Box will be given to Lady Mei-liang, when she proves her case.

If the PCs chose to fight her, she will ask them to chose a champion. They are allowed to prepare their champion for combat with whatever spells or items they wish. She will consider too much of this somewhat dishonorable, but will not stop them. She will activate her psionic abilities at the appropriate times for maximum PSP effectiveness.

**Lady Mei-liang, human oriental female, 20<sup>th</sup> level fighter/ 22d level psionist:** AL LG; AC 0 (-10); MV 12 (48); hp 173 (200); THAC0 -6 (-11); #AT 5/2 (20/1 if using special attack); Dmg 2d8+5 (2d8+15 +4d4); SA psionics and kinsai abilities; SD automatically makes her first fifteen (15) saves, thereafter saves vs. anything on a one (1), psionics and kinsai abilities;

MR nil; S 17 (23), D 20 (25), C 18 (24), I 18, W 21, Ch 16; SZ M (5'); ML 20.

When the combat is about to begin, read the following, UNLESS a PC is using a weapon of speed.

*Lady Mei-liang stands before you, holding her long thin sword before you. Her eyes narrow in concentration and you feel a strange fluttering in the air around you. She holds her blade to the side and asks:*

*"Do you submit?"*

*You notice something at your feet. It appears to be a severed left ear. It appears to be your ear!*

If a PC has a weapon of speed, allow them to roll to hit. Unless they roll a natural 20 or have a THAC0 of -2 or better, they can not hit her. Mei-liang will be surprised by their sudden attack. Read the following:

*Mei-liang appears startled by your sudden attack. She looks at your weapon and smiles.*

*"Ah! For a moment I thought you were a real warrior, but you're merely a monkey with a magic sword."*

*Her eyes narrow in concentration and you feel a strange fluttering in the air around you. She holds her blade to the side and asks:*

*"Do you submit?"*

*You notice something at your feet. It appears to be a severed left ear. It appears to be your ear!*

If the PC decides to fight roll the damage for her whirlwind attack, including the pain ability and the knockdown. She will not cause critical hits on the first round. If the PCs submits, she will reach out to touch him. This negates all the damage which she had inflicted, except for the severed ear.

Finally, she will not kill her opponent, but will remove their left ear as a sign of triumph. If, by some miracle, she is defeated, it will have to be by killing her, as she will stop at nothing less and is capable of fighting up to -10 hp.

Remember, don't hold back. She is meant to win this combat with little difficulty. She is on the ethical high ground and there is really no reason why the PCs should want to keep the Box. It isn't theirs. Refer to **Judge's Aid #2** for all of Mei-laing's abilities.

**Hsing-niang's Help:** If the PCs are about to be massacred by Lady Mei-liang, read the following:

With a loud cry, Mei-liang leaps towards you, her sword whistling as she nears you. Suddenly, things

stop, frozen in time. The dazzling blade is right at your throat. Hsing–niang, radiant and more beautiful than ever, stands behind Mei–liang. She touches her shoulder and they both disappear.

Time resumes and you are alone. As you gather your wits and bind your, Hsing–niang and Mei–liang reappear, her sword again sheathed.

***“Give her the Box. She will return it to where it belongs.” Hsing–niang then disappears with a flash of light.***

Hsing–niang has taken Mei–liang aside and informed her of the help which the PCs have given her, a member of the imperial family, albeit a dead one. She ordered Mei–liang to let the PCs live in spite of any offenses they may have inflicted upon her honor. Mei–liang, as a subordinate to any of the imperial family, has to obey this. However, if the PCs decide to defy Hsing–niang’s direct command to give her the Box, Mei–liang will use her most deadly attacks against the party. She is completely healed.

## Encounter 6c Ninjas Show No Mercy

Just before highsun, Magistrate T’eng comes to visit the shop.

***Another knock sounds at the doorway, and, upon opening it, you are greeted by Magistrate T’eng. He is again accompanied by his armed guards. T’eng gives you a courteous bow.***

***“I have come to inquire about the Box. Is it still in your possession?”***

If the PCs ask him “Why do you seek the Box of Dark Secrets?”

***“Such is the will of my superiors. It is not my place to question their orders.”***

If the lacquered chest is still in their possession, T’eng will again offer the chest of gems in exchange for the Box. If the PCs decline, he will be most sorry and attack. T’eng gets the surprise attack due to a successful pick pocket check, which enables him to arm himself unnoticed, and, therefore, he also gets the backstab bonuses. His soldiers attack after the surprise attack round. Note that T’eng gets one round in which only he may act, while the following round everybody who successfully passes their surprise roll may act. In

other words, it is possible that T’eng will get two full rounds of activity before he is opposed by the PCs.

If the PCs no longer have the Box, he will be interested in hearing who has the box. If the court of Tsa has acquired the lacquered chest, he will attack the PCs as above. He is covering his tracks, in case any enemies are on his trail. Moreover, if he is aware that Lao is of the Imperial bloodline, he will attempt to kill him as well.

**Magistrate T’eng, human oriental male 7<sup>th</sup> level fighter/9<sup>th</sup> level thief/11<sup>th</sup> level wizard:** AL LE; AC - 2 (*shield*; D, *prot. good*); MV 12, fl 18(B); hp 88; THAC0 9 or 7 (thrown); #AT 3 or 4 (ROF); Dmg 1d4+6 (sai+1 in each hand, specialization, S); SA backstab x 4, spells; SD spells; MR nil; S 17 or 18(51), D 18, C 18, I 17, W 10, Ch 13 or 18; SZ M (5’6”); ML 18.

If the PCs have given the chest to Lady Mei–liang, he will express happiness at their wisdom. He will not fight the PCs, as he will need to be ready for a most difficult combat with Mei–liang. Of course, she wipes up the floor with him and his assassins.

**Hsing–niang’s Help:** If the ninjas have dropped three PCs, Hsing–niang will appear and save them. Read the following:

***A flash of light fills the room, momentarily blinding you. At the center of the radiance is Hsing–niang. She waves at the assassins and they disappear. She turns to you.***

***“Take the Box to Mei–liang. More assassins will come for it if you keep it.” Upon say this, she disappears.***

Hsing–niang has used a *wish* to mimic the effects of a *dimension door* upon the remaining assassins, dropping them 840 yards away, into the sea. The assassins will easily survive this, but they will be hesitant to immediately attack the PCs again. If the PC give the chest to Mei–liang, the assassins wait until she is on her way back to Kara Tur to attack. She easily defeats them.

If the PCs ignore Hsing–niang, the assassins attack again at the most inconvenient time. Hopefully, while a PC is alone, they will throw a bunch of poison weapons at the unfortunate victim. They will go about attacking the PCs one at a time, until they can get to the chest. REMEMBER, while the assassins are stalking the PCs, the Box is bringing about changes in alignment to its possessor and may be manifesting minor malevolent powers. Moreover, if Mei–liang is

still around, she'll be quite violent in her encounters with the PCs.

If the scenario ends with the situation unresolved with the ninjas, they'll instigate a mass attack, triggering the chest's defensive powers, causing everyone who wishes to possess the chest to be affected by *conflagration*. This should end the stalemate.

## Resolution

### Dry Wind Blows to Nowhere

At this point the fate of Hsing-niang and the lacquered chest should have been decided. Any PC who had been corrupted by utilizing its powers will return to normal in a few days. The PC who suffered the backlash of the *windtomb* will eventually regain their normal dexterity and strength, but the release of such energy resulted in a weakening of their overall constitution, (i.e.: C lowered by one point permanently.) Another result of the backlash is that the PC is able to focus residual wind magics innately. If the PCs would rather have a C point than these magical abilities, the spirit of Hsing-niang will return to the Box and utilize it to return their health to them. If the Box has been given to Lord Tsa, she will NOT be able to do this.

The PCs will receive payment as arranged by Master Lao, that being 300 gp each. If the PC negotiated with Fong and did not give up the treasure to Mei-liang, an additional 30,000 gp and two fine magical weapons, Lao keeps 20,000 gp to get in contact with the Imperial court. If the court of Tsa just took the Box, they get no further treasure.

If the PCs give the Box to Mei-liang, the Imperial court gives them a reward for their actions, that being the cricket cage, the box of cinnabar, the plum blossom fan, the phoenix hairpin, and the celedon flask, each of which are magical.

If the PCs negotiate with T'eng, he will give them the coffer of gems, which amounts to 8,000 gp. There are sixty gems of exquisite quality worth 100 gp each, although anything but the most detailed of inspections indicates that they are worth around 500 gp each. The price difference comes from minute flaws in the cut or stone quality and clarity. There are 200 gems of 10 gp each, although only a detailed inspection reveals that these are forgeries and they actually appear to be worth around 500 gp each. If they combat T'eng they will get the coffer as above and a *sai +1*.

If the PCs chose to keep the Box of Dark Secrets, ask what they are doing with it. If they take it to a temple, on the way there, everybody involved will

spontaneously combust, as per the *conflagration* spell. It will then teleport itself away.

If they take it to the Mage's Guild or Ministry of the Art, within a few days they hear of a horrid accident with caused numerous people to spontaneously combust. The cause is unknown and there are no survivors. If looked for, the chest is nowhere to be found. If the story behind the chest is told, then the mages will insist that it be sent back to the Imperial court, where permission to investigate the Box may be obtained.

If a PC decides that they should undertake the investigation on their own, and keeps the chest at their own private residence, the chest quickly subverts their weak and foolish mind. Within the day, the PC is dead, a pile of ash on the floor of their residence, with no chance of being *raised*, *resurrected*, *reincarnated*, or *wished* back into existence. It will take a special favor from the deities who look over the Imperial court to bring back such a fool. To be fair, point out before they commit to possessing the Box all the dangers associated with owning an artifact. If the PC is still so reckless, so be it.

If everything turns out OK, the PCs gain 1 Fame point in merchant class. If the fight with the court of Tsa burns down the port, the PCs gain 1 Infamy point in general. Knights and squires gain one chivalry point if they free Hsing-niang from her imprisonment AND return the Box to its rightful owners (i.e.: give the chest to Mei-liang.)

## The End

### Experience Point Summary

Experience is calculated as follows for Living City events.

1. Sum the experience listed below for objectives.
2. Assign discretionary role-playing experience (0-500 points). These should reward accurate character portrayal throughout the adventure, not just how well the PC interacted socially.
3. Finally, multiply the total by the tier according to this chart:

Levels 6-13	Tier 1
Levels 14-25	Tier 2
Levels 26-37	Tier 3
Levels 38-56	Tier 4
Levels 57+	Tier 5

PCs should get the experience points of the tier for which they qualify, regardless of which tier is actually played. For example, if you have a Tier 3 group and you have to bump the combats by one tier to challenge them, they still get the experience points for a Tier 3 group, not for a Tier 4 group.

Questioning Lao	50 xp
Examining the Box	50 xp
Wittily bantering with Fong	50 xp
Acting peaceably with Hsing–niang	50 xp
Questioning Mei–liang	50 xp
Questioning ‘Ali Faddim	50 xp
Questioning T’eng	50 xp
Questioning Graves	50 xp
Avoiding the traps and wards of the Box	50 xp
Defeating the ash spirits	100 xp
Freeing Hsing–niang	100 xp
Avoiding combat	50 xp
Giving the Box to Mei–liang	100 xp
Total Experience for Objectives	800 xp
Role-playing Experience	0-500 xp
<b>Total Possible Experience</b>	<b>1300 xp</b>
Tier 2:	2600 xp
Tier 3:	3900 xp
Tier 4:	5200 xp

## Treasure Summary

If it’s not on this list, the PCs cannot keep it. This is a house rule which overrides what they may actually acquire in the scenario.

### Encounter 1: Celestial Gateway Emporium

- 300 gp each from Lao

### Encounter 5c: Like Fallen Leaves Tossed

*Gen Con 1999 only:* Only to the PC who recited the poem-

- Spirit of Wind Mastery: A wind spirit (formerly bound to imprison Hsing-Niang) has taken up residency about the PC. The spirit may use one of the following spell-like abilities per day: *whispering wind*, *levitate*, or *wind wall*. These abilities are at a casting level of 12.

Due to the supernatural hunger of the spirit, the PC suffers the reduction of his Constitution by 1 point. To be free of the spirit, the PC must receive a *dismissal*, *dispel evil*, *abjure*, or similar magic that will remove extra-planar creatures. In

this event, the lost Constitution point will return in two days’ time.

The spirit cannot act if the PC is within a *protection from evil/good* or *protection from evil/good 10’ radius*, or a *zone of forbiddance*.

Note that these powers are spell-like attributes of the spirit, not innate abilities of the PC, though the spirit will use them as benefits the PC about whom it resides. The spirit stays with the PC for one year unless the PC gets rid of it sooner (it leaves on 8/8/2000). If the spirit is not dispelled or sent away within one week of its attaching itself to the PC, the lost Constitution point may not be regained at all except by a *wish* spell.

The spirit cannot be traded, given away or sold.

### Encounter 6a: The Devils of Wu Tsien?

If the PCs trade with Fong they will receive the following:

- 30,000 gp total in precious gems
- Two *melee weapons +2*: This item was received as the result of a trade with Magistrate Fong, involving stolen property from the Imperial court. Emblazoned on the weapon in fine Kara-Turan calligraphy is the passage, "The bearer of this weapon is without honor."

Note: Any melee weapon normally available to LC characters is acceptable, although Oriental weapons are also available. However, specialization is not available in oriental weapons.

### Encounter 6b: Never Threaten a Kinsai's Honor

Giving Lady Mei-liang the Lacquered Chest

Imperial gifts:

- Lucky Cricket with Cage: The bearer of the cricket may be alerted by its sudden and loud chirping when danger is near. This insect's presence grants a +1 bonus to the surprise roll. Additionally, the creature seems to bring good luck when gambling is involved. PCs with the gaming NWP make their checks at +1 when money is on the line.
- Box of Cinnabar: This box contains a rare and mysterious ingredient of the "Elixer Vitale." The steady consumption of the contents bestow upon the owner a +3 to saving throws vs attacks which cause aging. The box magically renews its contents each week.
- Fan with Plum Blossom Design: This delicate folding silk fan is enchanted to act as a *gunsen (iron fan) +2*. Damage is 1d3/1d2, type B, size S, weight nil, speed 2. In the hands of a wielder proficient with gunsen, the +2 bonus can be used

to adjust either the attack rolls or AC of the wielder. It requires its own weapon proficiency, and since there is no one here to teach the PCs the proper uses, it takes two proficiency slots spent on it to gain the AC adjusting ability.

- Phoenix Hairpin: An elegant jade and cloisonné hairpin with phoenix feather motif raises a female PC's reaction adjustment in situations involving personal allure as if her Charisma were increased by 1 point. It does not actually raise Charisma, or affect other Charisma-related checks. The object's value for craftsmanship alone is 6000 gp.
- Celedon-glazed Flask: This non-magical, pale green porcelain flask is extremely magic resistant. Magical liquids stored within it are not subject to the effects of dispelling. The flask saves as ceramic with a +5 bonus. It can hold one potion at a time.

Fighting with Lady Mei-liang:

- Missing Left Ear: The bearer of this certificate was defeated in an honorable duel with Lady Mei-liang. This mark causes the PC to suffer a -1 reaction adjustment in polite society settings. However, the gruesome wound is unsightly enough to allow a bonus of +1 reaction among barbaric or orc-like creatures.

### **Encounter 6c: Ninjas**

Negotiating with T'eng:

- 8000 gp total in flawed gems and exceptional forgeries

Fighting with T'eng:

- *Sai +1*: Damage 1d4/1d2, type B, size S, weight 2lbs, speed 2. If the PC is parrying for the round with the sai, it provides the benefit of an additional +1 to AC adjustments.

## Player's Handout #1

### **Dream of the Lacquered Chest**

The night is black and you stand in a beautiful garden of exotic plants and trees. A pleasant scent catches your attention and you turn to look to the right. A woman, from Kara-Tur, stands there, a whirlwind of apricot blossoms swirling about her. She is dressed in incredible finery, silk, gold thread embroidery and inset gems, but all this seems as rags and rocks when compared to the unearthly beauty of her face. Never have you seen a woman so perfect and graceful. You can hear your heart pounding.

Actually, it isn't your heart pounding, but a large piece of rock crystal, with a human heart beating within it, which suddenly materializes in her hands. A look of pleading comes into her eyes and she tries to tell you something, but her words have no sound. Chains of fire wrap around her arms and legs and pull her away from you. The sky turns into an awful scene of battle, with macabre fiends combating in a landscape of flame and smoke. The garden around you turns to ash and you fall into an endless chasm of smoke.

In the distance, you hear a desperate female voice yelling, "Break it! Shatter the heart!" You have the sense of an innocent soul in torment.

The dream ends and you wake up trembling and drenched in sweat.

**Player's Handout #2**

**A Letter from Master Lao**

*Most brave adventurer,*

*I have heard much of both your prowess in battle and of your benevolent heart. I believe that I am in greatest need of both. Strange events have occurred as of late in my shop, the Celestial Gateway Emporium. I feel that I am in need of adventurers to resolve this situation. Please come to my humble place of business at dusk, six bells after high sun, at 15 Ivory way in the port district. Dinner will be served shortly thereafter. Prepare to stay the night.*

*---Master Lao Sung-chien*

## Hsing-niang's Dream Message

*You are standing before the lacquered chest, Hsing-niang standing beside you. A series of the little storage drawers open and close three times each. The order seems to be the drawer with the caged cricket, the phoenix hairpin, the box of cinnabar, the fan with plum blossom designs, and, finally, the green celedon flask. Hsing-niang turns to you to speak, her voice barely audible, "Dry wind blows to nowhere, formless and without a path." Then a black tunnel appears before you. Hsing-niang enters.*

*You came to a stairway divided in three parts, left, central and right. Before the steps are two statues of dogs. Hsing-niang puts her hand into the mouth of the left statue then proceeds up the central stairway. At the top is a gorgeous courtyard, tiled in marble of different colors, black, white, green and orange. Hsing-niang steps only upon the orange tiles as she makes her way across.*

*Finally, you make your way to a vast fortress, with only a small doorway. Entering it, you go through a long tunnel which ends in an iron door with a dial set in the middle and a lever to the right. The image of a monkey appears in the air and she raises the lever up. An image of a rooster then appears and she pushes the lever all the way down. Finally, an image of a snake appears and she returns the lever to the central position.*

*You enter a huge room with particles of ash raining down from the ceiling above. In the middle of the room is a white circle of a 20' radius. Hsing-niang stands in the circle and speaks, "Lonely heron waits in shade, weeping for the past." The room around you fades away, replaced by a vast, featureless plain, with the sole feature of a jade platform, on which can be seen a hemisphere formed of the wind.*

*Hsing-niang ascends the platform and recites, "Sorrow is the parting. Sorrow is the loss. Sorrow comes for every man, like the fallen leaves tossed." The hemisphere explodes in all directions, leaving behind a pedestal with the shadow of a heart within it. Hsing-niang points at the crystal and it shatters.*

*You shake your head and are again in Master Lao's shop. The ghost of Hsing-niang hovers gracefully above you. Seeing that you have recovered your consciousness, she bows and disappears.*

# Judge's Aid #1: The Box of Dark Secrets

The lacquered chest was created over eight centuries ago by the sorceress, Hsing–niang. Its purpose is two–fold. First, it is meant to protect the spirit of Hsing–niang from the infernal court of Lord Tsa. Second, it is meant to be an item of power for the Imperial court of Shou Lung. It was given to the Emperor himself as a present from Hsing–niang.

The powers of the chest are numerous. The obvious abilities are as follows:

## Exterior

- enameled scene: *cause fear* in a 50' rad., 5/day.
- golden flames: *wall of fire*, 1/day.

## Interior

- left scroll: *Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion*, 1/day.
- right scroll: *phantom steed*, 1/day.
- writing desk: *comprehend languages*, upon any text placed on the desk.
- 5 horizontal drawers: *mend* and *cantrip* (clean), 1/day each.
- 9 small drawers: as a jar of preservation.
- **Magic Mirror:**
- *contact other plane*, 1/week.
- *magic mirror*, 1/week.

If the activation ritual is messed up, roll a d10 to determine the random plane contacted. 1=elemental, 2=inner plane, 3=astral, 4=O.P./Int 19, 5=O.P./Int 20, 6=O.P./Int 21, 7=O.P./Int 22, 8=O.P./Int 23, 9=O.P./Int 24, 10=O.P./Int 25.

Additionally, roll another d10 to determine alignment contacted. 1=LG, 2=LN, 3=LE, 4=NG, 5=N, 6=NE, 7=CG, 8=CN, 9=CE 10= roll again. For every shift of ethos and morals chances of knowledge and veracity are reduced by 5% and chance of insanity is increased by 5%. (EX: LG caster contacts CE outer planar entity of 25 Int. The base chance of insanity is 85%, while the chances of knowledge and veracity and 78% and 70% respectively.

## Storage drawers

In addition to acting as jars of preservation, they currently hold special objects. Removing an item counts as activating a power, while merely opening the drawers causes ash to appear on the hands. The items return to the chest in two turns after being removed. They are as follows:

- Upper left: beautiful phoenix motif hairpin.
- Upper center: finely carved wooden figurine of a crouched tiger.
- Upper right: bamboo cage with a cricket.
- Middle left: wooden box with a strange mineral/herb-like "cinnabar."
- Middle center: fox pelt purse.
- Middle right: shallow bowl made of mother–of–pearl.
- Lower left: paper fan with plum motif.
- Lower center: Bamboo writing brush.
- Lower right: pale green celadon glazed porcelain flask.

## Minor malevolent powers

Every activation of a special ability causes the PC doing so, unless it is Hsing–niang's champion, to be turned into ash, bit by bit. Body parts turned to ash are still functional. There is no save. The progression is as follows:

- 1) Finger nails turn to ash.
- 2) Teeth turn to ash.
- 3) Hair turns to ash.
- 4) Hands turn to ash.
- 5) Feet turn to ash.
- 6) Legs turn to ash.
- 7) Arms turn to ash.
- 8) Face turns to ash.
- 9) Head and neck turn to ash.
- 10) Skin turns to ash.
- 11) The PC collapses into a pile of ash and his or her spirit is absorbed into the Box. Only special intervention on behalf of a Kara Turan deity may restore the PC to life.

## Corrupting Effect

The Box will gradually change the user's alignment to LN. Every three activations requires a save vs. spells or the PCs alignment is permanently shifted to LN. A *wish* can restore the original alignment.

Moreover, the Box will attempt to mentally influence those who claim it for their own after a few days. The Box's ego is 85. It wishes to be returned to one of Imperial lineage.

Finally, the Box will defend itself against attempts to destroy it. It is capable of casting any spell of 9th level or less to do so. It has 100% magic resistance. As a creation under the power of the Kara Turan Celestial Bureaucracy, the Box scoffs at the powers of any barbarian deity, especially Mystra.

It can only be destroyed if buried under one hundred tons of apricot blossoms and struck by a blade of a kinsai grandmaster, while a heron recites Shou poetry from the time of the Box's creation.

Returning the Box to one of imperial lineage removes all the effects of the minor malevolent powers, but not the corrupting effect.

## Judge's Aid #2: NPC Appendix

### Hsing-Niang, human female spirit, 18<sup>th</sup> level

**Wizard:** AL LN; AC -5; MV 12, fl 18; hp 81; THAC0 3; #AT 1; Dmg special; SA spells and innate abilities; SD +4 magical weapon needed to hit, spells, innate abilities, Immunity to mind-affecting and biological spells, poison, paralysis, and cold; MR 75%; S N/A, D N/A, C N/A, I 21, W 17, Ch 20; SZ M (5'6"); ML 16.

Spells: 1st level - *burning hands, color spray, magic missile, shocking grasp, spook*. 2nd level - *Melf's acid arrow, scare, stinking cloud, Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter, web*. 3rd level - *dispel magic, flame arrow, lightning bolt, Melf's minute meteors, slow*. 4<sup>th</sup> level - *enervation, fire shield (chill), fumble, ice storm, phantasmal killer*. 5th level - *chaos, cloudkill, cone of cold, dream, sending*. 6th level - *chain lightning, death fog, death spell*. 7th level - *limited wish* (mimicking monster summoning V, summoning three five-headed cryohydras), *power word* (stun), *prismatic spray*. 8th level - *maze, prismatic wall*. 9th level - *conflagration*;

### Ghostly Innate Abilities (5th Magnitude)

1) Immortality: As a 5th magnitude ghost, Hsing-niang cannot be killed by conventional means. If her spiritual form is destroyed, she will be back, as good as new, within a few hours with all her spells re-memorized.

2) Insubstantiality: Hsing-niang is an incorporeal being. As such, she can travel through solid objects and ignore the physical laws of the universe, such as gravity. As a result of her insubstantial form, she has a natural AC of -5 and can only be struck by weapons of +4 enchantment or greater. If attacked on the ethereal, her AC becomes 0 and she can be hit by weapons of +2 or greater.

3) Invisibility: Hsing-niang can become invisible at will by retreating into the border ethereal. She can be easily seen by the use of certain magics, such as *detect invisible*, but non-magical or physical attempts to find her, such as scattering flour in the air, *glitterdust*, or a high-level PC's attempt to see invisible creatures, fail to reveal her. She is on a different plane.

4) Rejuvenation: Hsing-niang can instantly heal herself of all damage by absorbing the ethereal essence around her. Doing so leaves her drained and helpless for a turn afterward. Therefore, she will move to a safe location before utilizing this ability.

5) Cause Fear: Hsing-niang can instantly radiate an aura of terror at will, which last as long as she wishes. Anyone looking at her must make a save vs.

paralyzation at -4. Failure results in the person running away in terror for four rounds.

6) Entrance: The unearthly beauty of Hsing-niang, as well as the hypnotic effect of the swirling apricot blossoms causes a peculiar mixture of fear and fascination. This power is always active. Hsing-niang is incapable of turning it off. Anyone viewing her must make a save vs. paralyzation at -5 or stand entranced for five rounds. Victims are allowed a save to break free every five rounds.

7) Perform telekinesis: Hsing-niang is capable of influencing physical object by merely exerting her will over them. An object being influenced by this power becomes surrounded by a flickering pale blue light. She can cause a sustained manipulative force, capable of affecting 90 lbs., or she can unleash a single concessive force, capable of hurling an object of 450 lbs. up to 180' away. Damage caused by hurled object is 18 hp, no save.

**Special Weakness:** Casting *disintegrate* upon Hsing-niang automatically returns her to the Box, unable to return for a day. This is a special allergen, acquired by her transformation to a ghost, against which she receives no save or magic resistance.

### Background

Hsing-niang lived over 800 years ago. As a young girl, she was given to a powerful, albeit evil, sorcerer, Deng-li, as a servant. Sensing her mystical potential, Deng-li taught her the secrets of magic. Of course, this was not done to benefit her, but rather to create a useful servant and bargaining chip. Eventually, in order to gain the secrets of immortality, he made a deal with the baatezu lord, Tsa. Part of this deal was the soul of Hsing-niang.

Eventually, Hsing-niang grew in power and split from her evil master. Her talent and skill brought her great power and prestige, so much that she eventually married into the Imperial family of Shou Lung. With such wealth and influence at her disposal, Hsing-niang quickly became one of the most powerful mages in the empire.

Magical divinations eventually revealed to her that she had been sold to the dark court of Lord Tsa. Terrified by this discovery, she created the Box of Dark Secrets, which was meant to protect her soul from death and discover. She cast a *lifeproof* spell upon herself and put the crystal, which contained her life force, into one of the secret spaces of the Box. The

power of the Box would keep it safe from detection and destruction.

Hsing-niang was now immortal, for all intents and purposes. She could suffer any damage and, although her body would appear grievously wounded, she would not die. Unfortunately, she eventually got disintegrated in a mystical confrontation and her body was obliterated. Hsing-niang was not killed, as her life force was safe in the Box, but she was left as a spectral entity. In short, she became a ghost, trapped by the spell which granted her immortality.

Hsing-niang is anchored to the Box and has difficulty leaving it. In this scenario, she is granted greater freedom than usual because of the mystic forces which are aligned during the Feast of the Moon. She is unable to speak to or affect things on the prime material, unless spells are used to bridge the planes.

As long as she is within the prison of the Box, the court of Tsa cannot obtain her soul, without first gaining possession of the Box. Once she is freed, the Box is no longer protecting her and she will need to be sent away with the Rite of the Dead before the court of Tsa comes to claim their prize.

### **The Court of Lord Tsa**

**Magistrate Fong, Baatezu, Spinagon (1):** I very (12); AL LE; AC 4; MV 6 fl 18c; HD 3+3; hp 27; THAC0 17; #AT 1, by weapon; Dmg 1d6 (staff); SA spell use, fling spines 2/rd 1d4+flame; SD Immune to poison, normal and magical fire. Half damage from cold and gas. Full damage from acid, electricity, and silver and normal weapons.; MR 15%; SZ S; ML 10 (average).

Innate abilities: *affect normal fires, change self, command, produce flame, scare, stinking cloud* once per round. Fong is a messenger and errand boy of the court of General Tsa. Although relatively weak he enjoys the protection of a competent bodyguard. Fong has a very high opinion of himself.

**Bodyguards, disguised skeletons (6):** I non-; AL N; AC 5 (lamalar); MV 9; HD 2; hp 14; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA nil; SD 1/2 damage from type P and S weapons, immune to cold and mind effecting spells (*charm, hold, sleep* etc.) SW can be turned, holy water 2-8 hp / vial.; MR nil; SZ M; ML NA.

These are the animated skeletons of an unlucky group of Flind servitors that displeased the court of Tsa. They continue to serve the general in death, taking commands from Fong.

**Barbazu, Disguised Baatezu (1):** I low (7); AL LE; AC 3; MV 15; HD 6+6; hp 40; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg 2d6; SA spell use, wounding, battle frenzy.; SD

Immune to poison, normal and magical fire. Half damage from cold and gas. Full damage from acid, electricity, and silver and magical weapons.; MR 30%; SZ M; ML 12 (steady).

Innate abilities: *advanced illusion, animate dead, charm person, infravision, know alignment, suggestion, teleport w/o error, affect normal fires, command, fear (by touch) produce flame.*

The barbazu assigned to guard Fong has been instructed to keep his distance and remain unseen unless Fong's life is in immediate danger.

**Machig, Disguised Erinyes (1):** I high (14); AL LE; AC 2; MV 12, fl 21c; HD 6+6; hp 50; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+4 (dagger / str); SA spell use, rope of entanglement.; SD Immune to poison, normal and magical fire. Half damage from cold and gas. Full damage from acid, electricity, and silver and magical weapons.; MR 30%; SZ M; ML 12 (steady).

Innate abilities: *advanced illusion, animate dead, charm person (by gaze, save at 1/2 level), detect invisibility, invisibility, locate object, polymorph self, infravision, know alignment, suggestion, teleport w/o error, fear (aura), produce flame.*

Machig carries the *rope of entanglement* usual to Erinyes, it can be used to entangle up to 8 man-sized opponents WITH NO SAVE OR TO HIT ROLL. The rope is AC -2 and has 22 hp and can only be cut by attack with edged weapons or magic. Strength alone is NOT enough to break the rope. The rope is a manifestation of diabolic power and will vanish if Machig is slain or banished.

**Xi Hua - wa, Disguised Gelugon (1):** I genius (18); AL LE; AC -3; MV 15; HD 11; hp 88; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3+4 (bite in Chihuahua form); SA spell use, Fear 10'; SD Regenerate 2hp/ rd. Immune to poison, normal and magical fire. Half damage from cold and gas. Full damage from acid, electricity, and silver (half damage) and +2 magical weapons.; MR 50%; SZ T (polymorphed); ML 16 (champion).

Innate abilities: *wall of ice ( 3-30 dam. no save, each round), advanced illusion, animate dead, charm person, infravision, know alignment, suggestion, teleport w/o error, detect invisibility, detect magic, fly, polymorph self.*

Captain in the infernal army of Lord Tsa, Xi Hua - wa is a vicious little opponent who delights in raining terror on his foes while in the disguise of a harmless little doggy. This has led those who have survived encounters with him to refer to him as the 'meanest dog to ever walk the realms.'

**Lord Tsa, General of the Burning Hells, Disguised Pit Fiend (1):** I super-genius (19); AL LE; AC -5; MV 15 fl 24c; HD 16; hp 128; THAC0 2; #AT 2; Dmg 1d10+10 (two handed sword w S and aura of woe); SA spell use, Fear 20' save at -3; SD Regenerate 2hp/ rd. Immune to poison, normal and magical fire. Half damage from cold and gas. Full damage from acid, electricity, and silver (half damage) and +3 magical weapons.; MR 50%; SZ M (polymorphed); ML 20.

Innate abilities: *advanced illusion, animate dead, charm person, infravision, know alignment, suggestion, teleport w/o error, detect invisibility, detect magic, polymorph self, Fireball (10d6), hold person, improved invisibility, produce flame, pyrotechnics, wall of fire (2d6+16), and (once per day) symbol of pain.*

The name of Lord Tsa alone is enough to set those from the nation of Shou trembling. He is an exceptional Pit Fiend who never forgets a slight by mortals...

### Visitors from Afar

**'Ali Faddim, human Zakharan male, 8<sup>th</sup> level thief (merchant rogue):** AL LN; AC 6 (Leather & Dex); MV 12; hp 45; THAC0 17 (13 from behind); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 / 1d8+1 (cutlass); SA backstab (x3); SD nil; S 10; D 16; C 14; I 13; W 8; Ch 15; MR NA; SZ M; ML 12 (steady).

'Ali Faddim can no longer use his thieving skills for wrong-doing as he is under a curse.

**Lady Mei-liang, human oriental female, 20<sup>th</sup> level fighter/ 22d level psionicist:** AL LG; AC 0 (-10); MV 12 (48); hp 173 (200); THAC0 -6 (-11); #AT 5/2 (20/1 if using special attack); Dmg 2d8+5 (2d8+15 +4d4); SA psionics and kinsai abilities; SD automatically makes her first fifteen (15) saves, thereafter saves vs. anything on a one (1), psionics and kinsai abilities; MR nil; S 17 (23), D 20 (25), C 18 (24), I 18, W 21, Ch 16; SZ M (5'); ML 20.

NOTE: The statistics in parenthesis are used whenever she is ready for a combat or suspects even the slightest possibility of danger. The unmodified stats are only to be used if she is confronted completely by surprise.

"Kinsai" kit abilities (20th level: Grandmistress of the Glittering Way)

1) **Whirlwind attack:** Once per day, kinsai may focus their body's chi energy for one round of martial arts supermastery, which allows them to make one attack per level within one round (i.e.: Mei-liang makes 20 attacks on the first round of combat.) These

attacks all occur during the kinsai's first attack of initiative, by-passing the usual rules regarding multiple attacks.

2) **The Vajra stroke:** Every successful attack, even if it causes no damage (i.e.: upon those guarded by *stoneskin*,) causes the unfortunate recipient to save vs. breath weapon at -5 or fall prone and stunned for 1d4 rounds. Only kinsai of bladed weapons and 15th level or over can perform this powerful attack.

3) **Speed of the Mantis:** Kinsai improve initiative by one per two levels. This is cumulative with other factors which improve initiative, such as the liajitsu NWP, two-hand style specialization and the clairsentient devotion, *combat mind*. (Note: Mei-liang has an initiative modifier of -13 and her Dragon Sword has a speed factor of 3, which means that even if she rolls a 10, she still goes on initiative zero, before anybody except for those with weapons of speed.)

4) **Decapitation and limb severing:** Whenever a kinsai over 15th level strikes a foe on a roll of 16 or better, they may opt to inflict a critical wound. Roll a d10 to determine what has been struck. 1-2= right leg. 3-4= left leg. 5= abdomen. 6-7= torso. 8= right arm. 9= left arm. 10= head. Recipients are allowed a save vs. death at -20 to avoid this gruesome fate. Anybody receiving a critical wound is OUT of combat. The overwhelming pain prevents them from doing ANYTHING, but howling in pain, passing out, or dying. (NOTE: this attack is optional. Mei-liang will only use it if her foes prove themselves to be entirely without honor.)

5) **Way of the Tiger:** Mei-liang may quadruple her movement at will for twenty (20) rounds, four times a day. She is able to traverse any surface when utilizing this power, including vertical inclines or vast amounts of liquid. Moreover, she can leap as per the *jump* spell once a round, while this power is active.

6) **Secrets of chi points:** A kinsai become extremely familiar with pressure points and the routes by which the body's life energy travel. Any successful touch, disregarding armor or magical wards, such as *stoneskin*, allows the kinsai to disrupt the recipient's nervous system. This causes 1d4 hp damage, NO save, per five levels of the kinsai (i.e.: Mei-liang inflicts 4d4 hp upon a successful touch.) This damage is in addition to any other damage inflicted by the touch. There is NO save. NOTE: a kinsai may opt to delay damage for a few segments after the attacks were made. They may delay the reaction up to fifteen seconds after the damage was dealt and can negate it upon a single touch, which counts as a free action.

7) **Inner Eye of Wisdom:** A kinsai is completely aware of the true location of their opponent. A kinsai is

allowed a save vs. spells, with a +1/4 levels, to negate modifiers which impede or prevent the kinsai from striking their foe. (i.e.: cloaks of displacement, *mirror image*, *fog cloud*, and *darkness* have no effect upon the kinsai's ability to strike their foe if a save is made.)

8) **Dance of Swirling Steel:** A kinsai is capable of performing a full parry maneuver IN ADDITION to a round's worth of action, including the use of special abilities. The full parry maneuver is similar to that in the PHB, but, instead of improving the defender's AC, it inflicts a penalty to the attacker's die roll. (Note: Mei-liang's AC is -10 AND opponents attack her with a -11 penalty to the roll.)

### Psionic Abilities

As a 22nd level psionicist, Mei-liang has a vast arsenal of powers at her immediate disposal. Here is a tiny list of things that she is capable of doing, as well as their results. REMEMBER, Mei-liang has twenty (20) automatic successes and 35 re-roll opportunities.

Finally, through her adventuring, Mei-liang has acquired favors and enlightening tips on performing her psionic arts from many great masters and extraplanar beings. This is why she has more Psionic Strength Points than a pack of mind flayers (PSP=600.) The Dragon Sword stores an additional 200 PSP, which she can draw upon at anytime. For purposes of this game, assume that she never runs out of PSP.

NOTE: the use of these may already be factored into Mei-liang's statistics. This is indicated by a (\*) after the description. Activating a power requires that a d20 be rolled, equal or less than the power score.

- 1) *Combat Mind:* Improves initiative and AC by 1. \*
- 2) *Detonate:* Blows up non-living things within 10', no save. Power Score=21.
- 3) *Disintegrate:* Save vs. death magic. Power Score=17.
- 4) *Adrenaline Control:* S, D and C increase by six point each. \*
- 5) *Biofeedback:* AC improved by 3 and damage from physical attack are reduced by 2 hp. \*
- 6) *Flesh Armor:* AC improved by 8. \*
- 7) *Banishment:* Sends an individual to a pocket dimension until psionicist chooses to free them, NO SAVE. Power Score=17.
- 8) *Teleport:* No chance of materializing in an object. Power Score=18.
- 9) *Ego whip:* -5 at saves, to hit, proficiency check and the target cannot cast spells higher than third level, for 1d4 rounds. NO SAVE. Power Score=18.

10) *Id Insinuation:* target can do nothing for 1d4 rounds, NO SAVE. Power Score=17.

11) *Ultrablast:* everyone in a 50' radius must save vs. paralyzation or pass out for 2d6 turns.

### Powergaming special abilities:

As with most LC characters, Mei-liang has acquired quite a few "certs" in the form of special favors. These are innate abilities which has been granted to her by deities or creatures of similar power. They may each be utilized as a FREE ACTION, in addition to the things she can do in a regular melee round.

A few examples are listed below, but she has ANY power that the judge can imagine, REGARDLESS OF THE ABSURDITY. Remember, there are PCs out there that have played in every LC event ever written, including premier events with certs of true powergaming mastery. Imagine Mei-liang as the recipient of all the certs of fifty such PCs. Note that Mei-liang will only use these abilities if sorely pressed by the PCs.

- 1) Gift of the Wrathful Deities: Projects an aura of death in a 50' radius of Mei-liang. She automatically suffers 49 hp damage, but everybody within the area of effect suffers 98 hp damage. NO SAVE. This is an innate psionic power so it will not be disrupted by *dispel magic*. This is a one shot ability.
- 2) Automatic Saves. Fifteen times.
- 3) Opponents automatically fail their saves. Ten times. Note: this can be combined to gruesome effect with her *disintegrate* ability.
- 4) *Haste*, no aging. Cast at 18th level and affecting only Mei-liang, usable 1/day.
- 5) Special Time Power: Mei-liang can opt to change anything which occurred the previous round, simply by willing it. This is a one-shot ability.
- 6) Additional whirlwind attack: Four extra times.
- 7) Automatic Healing: Mei-liang instantly returns to maximum hit points if she ever falls beneath 30 hp. This is usable only three times.
- 8) Automatic *free action*: this ability works whenever Mei-liang wishes. It can be activated instantly as a free action. Usable three times per adventure.
- 9) Automatic power score: usable 20 times.

### Background

Lady Mei-liang is a noble of the Shou court. She has been ordered by the Emperor himself to retrieve the Box of Dark Secrets, at all costs. She has been on the trail of the chest for over a year, dispensing justice and fighting with numerous criminal groups, that have

been involved with the stolen chest. Her patience is without end as she relentlessly hunts down the stolen artifact.

Her primary goal in life is to obtain and preserve honor. Success is intertwined with honor. She has NEVER failed in a mission before and has no intention of letting magic rich barbarians stop her now. She doesn't want to hurt anyone, but, if they stand between her and her honor, they will not be standing for long.

Mei-liang is proud, haughty and confident in her abilities. She is not only a noble of the Imperial court, but the Grandmistress of the Glittering Way. To defy her is to defy the very "Will of Heaven Itself!" Such affronts will be met with harsh discipline.

**Magistrate T'eng, human oriental male 7<sup>th</sup> level fighter/9<sup>th</sup> level thief/11<sup>th</sup> level wizard:** AL LE; AC - 2 (*shield*; D, *prot. good*); MV 12, fl 18(B); hp 88; THAC0 9 or 7 (thrown); #AT 3 or 4 (ROF); Dmg 1d4+6 (sai+1 in each hand, specialization, S); SA backstab x 4, spells; SD spells; MR nil; S 17 or 18(51), D 18, C 18, I 17, W 10, Ch 13 or 18; SZ M (5'6"); ML 18.

Spells: 1st level - *friends* (raises Ch to 18), *message* (to coordinate with underlings), *protection from good*, *shield*. 2nd level - *deppockets* (stores over forty sai for throwing), *misdirection*, *protection from paralysis*, *strength* (raises S to 18/51). 3rd level - *delude*, *fly*, *nondetection*, *protection from normal missiles*. 4<sup>th</sup> level - *enchanted weapon* (placed upon off-hand sai), *polymorph self* (makes him look like a middle aged man of average height and build), *stoneskin* (9 attacks). 5th level *seeming* (placed upon underlings to make them look inconspicuous), *sending* (for reporting back to superiors), *teleport* (in case of an emergency. Note: it has not been precast);

### **Background**

Magistrate T'eng is a master assassin sent to obtain the Box of Dark Secrets. His superior is a rebel cousin of the Emperor, currently in hiding in the country of Koryo. As a person of Imperial lineage, the rebel is capable of utilizing the awesome powers of the chest. T'eng has been told to return with the Box or never return.

T'eng is crafty and brilliant. He is a smooth diplomat and a convincing actor. He is always ready to play up to any weakness or opportunity to advance his goal. He will subtly attempt to sow doubt into the minds of the PCs towards Mei-liang. He will always be amiable, although he thoroughly dislikes female adventurers and uneducated barbarians.

He has followed the trail left by Mei-liang, albeit at a safe and unnoticeable distance. He will claim that magical divinations have led him to the chest, as the PCs will have doubts about his story if he claims to have found it the same way as did Mei-liang.

## Judge's Aid #3: Unusual Spells

The following spells are taken from the *Arabian Adventures* sourcebook. They are here in an abbreviated form listing only the aspects applicable to this scenario.

### *Lifeproof* (Necromantic)

This powerful incantation enables the caster to safely remove an intangible but vital part of the recipient's life. The caster places that part- called the *Shadow of the Heart*- in a closed glass container or a crystal. Once inside, the "shadow" becomes clearly visible as a translucent image of the recipient's heart.

As long as the Shadow of the Heart remains safely within the container, the recipient's body can endure any amount of physical damage. When reduced to 0 or fewer hit points, the character doesn't fall unconscious or die; he just keeps on going. Destroying the container kills the recipient.

### *Conflagration* (Necromantic, Evocation)

This gruesome spell sets a living creature on fire, incinerating its hair, and clothing, and at least the top layers of flesh. The target suffers 2d6 points of damage each round, with no saving throw allowed. Individuals within 10' of the target are allowed a save vs. spells. Failure means that they, too, lose 2d6 hit points; success means the damage is halved.

All items carried by the target must make a saving throw vs. magical fire at -2 or be destroyed. These flames are so intense that they set ablaze all other flammable items within 10' of the target, and melt soft metals, if such items fail a save vs. magical fire. This spell creates an "extremely hot flame" as far as devices such as a ring of fire resistance are concerned.

The living target of the *conflagration* can move and fight normally as long as he lives, and those within 10' are subject to fire damage. He cannot cast spells, but can still use spell-like innates.

Death brings no relief. When all his hit points are lost, the target's corpse falls under control of the caster. The wizard can animate his now-dead target by mental command, but cannot perform other spells in addition to commanding this movement.

*Conflagration* is difficult to thwart. Spraying the target with water or sand only creates a billowing cloud of steam or hot dust within 20' of the target, causing 1d6 points of additional damage to those within the cloud. Complete immersion in a large amount of water, or burial beneath the sand, reduces damage to 1 hp per round for both the target and those within 10'. A well

or reflecting pool does not contain enough water, but a small lake does. A successful *dispel magic* also put out the fire.

(Note: *Conflagration* is not thwarted by spells and devices, such as *protection from fire* or rings of fire resistance, as these keep an external flame source from inflicting damage upon the person so protected. This spell does not cause exposure to an external flame source, but, rather, causes the target's body to burst into flame. Those within 10' of the target have all the usual protection as the flames are merely being exposed to them and not emanating from their flesh!)

### *Windtomb* (Abjuration)

The casting of this spell creates a virtually impenetrable wall of wind around a person, place or object. The windy barrier encircles the item and arcs over the top, preventing all entry. It can extend itself into a sphere, thwarting all attempts to dig under the barrier and gain entrance from below. Even if all the material around it is removed, the *windtomb* remains firmly in place.

If creatures try to breach the wall from without, they're picked up, battered for a round, then tossed outside the area of effect, suffering 4d10 points of damage. Even creatures in *gaseous form* or a similar state are battered and tossed if they attempt to breach the tomb.

Creatures who are partially or wholly shifted into another dimension can escape damage when attempting to cross through the tomb. They still don't succeed, however. This applies to creatures out of phase, as well as those in the astral or ethereal plane.

The *windtomb* scatters magic. Attempts to *teleport* or *dimension door* into or out of the tomb fail miserably; the individual attempting the act is randomly shunted to another location on the same side of the tomb. Similarly, other spells (including *dispel magic*) are bounce off in random directions. Only the power of a full *wish* or similar spell can bring down the walls of a *windtomb*.