tian shang
all above heaven

Five
Emperors
Press

act I - the awakening

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Tian Shang: All Above Heaven

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Special Thanks
David wishes to dedicate this game to: Norman Gan, please watch after us from the godrealm brother.

Víctor would like to thank: To my Kids Iván and Nicolás, hope someday you open this book, found a small reminder of your father and smile. To my mother who teach me to achieve the impossible, see the invisible and break the unbreakable

Joerg would like to thank: This has been an interesting journey so far, and i want to thank the most important people. First of all my parents (although they probably will never see this) for being supportive and kind to me, always. My brother for just being there and being awesome.
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Joel would like to thank: My wife; I love you Otter. The team, especially David for giving me the chance to be part of something amazing. All our fantastic playtesters (Especially Mikel, whose web show Confessions of an Improv GM was so instrumental to the design of this game). Stephen Lea Sheppard and Neall Raemonn Price for helping me through a tough time. Brendan Davis for his limitless support and encouragement. Justin Alexander and Alexander Macris for their mind-blowing insights into game design; I wouldn't be in this hobby without their influence. And finally, all of the wonderful people who penned the Weapons of the Gods and Legends of the Wulin roleplaying games: we are forever in your debt.

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(Victor Andrade, Joerg Bours, David Ramirez, Joel T. Clark)

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Tian Shang: All Above Heaven

The following is a partial manuscript from the incomplete works of Zhéxiān; a vanished Deva scholar. An adventurer, poet, and drunkard, he was exiled to the furthest reaches of space for speaking against Imperial excesses and studying forbidden knowledge.

One of Zhéxiān's most bizarre philosophies was the belief that the minds of people from the ancient past or from altogether different universes sometimes traveled across time and space to take possession of some of the heroes of this era. It is believed by academics of esoterica that he wrote this introduction for them.

Welcome oh dear reader, to a cosmos of adventure, wonder, and unspeakable horror:

The Galaxy Above Heaven! A universe of heroes and tyrants, where demigods tread among the stars and intrepid mortals can join or defy them… If they dare!

Fueled by the sacred power within all beings, mortal, machine and beast alike shatter their limits for enlightenment and absolute power. In search of self-realization or domain over the galaxy. Their battles rage across the stars; moons splinter and planets crack beneath their mighty weapons and fists. Their deeds echo across eternity, the new gods and demons feared in legend.

Let us now learn the history of All that is Above Heaven.

The Most Ancient Past

In the universe of All Above Heaven, the myths and magic of legend are real. Prana, the blood of the soul – the inner power of the gods themselves – flows into all life forms through mystical nodes called Chakra. In ancient times, intrepid mortals forged their bodies and souls into harmony and achieved near-infinite power. These rare beings became legends. Some ascended to the heights of divinity, becoming gods; others succumbed to the depths of wickedness, becoming demons. In the misty past, a mighty band of such masters united. These mythical lords were the first to soar across the stars with their blend of science and magic. They were called the Kaufu.

The Kaufu seeded ten thousand worlds. They manipulated life through their understanding of Prana, genetics, and technology. They adapted life forms for scorching heat, freezing cold, ephemeral clouds and crushing ocean depths.

They warped lesser beings to suit their whims; they crafted workers and warriors, slaves and overlords. They created weird artefacts and engineered baffling life-forms, obscuring their ultimate aims; their true goals are lost to history

One day, they vanished; their fate as mysterious as their purpose. Some believe they evolved into a higher state of true godhood. Some that they degenerated into demons or beasts. Perhaps they merely departed from the galaxy to explore the unknown beyond. They left behind only their relics, the ruins of their glorious civilization, and a power vacuum that tore galactic civilization apart.

The Age of Warring Worlds

The disappearance of the Kaufu heralded an era of chaos, darkness, and mad spiritual science. The myriad worlds left in their wake thirsted for galactic supremacy.

Worlds drowned in oceans of blood. Gods died, their stars extinguished for all eternity. For ten thousand years, the galaxy burned with the ravages of unending war.

Although few legends survive from that dark and war-torn time, one is too great to ever be forgotten: It tells of an engineered slave who rose against the god-emperors of the universe. The king of all uplifted animals, the scourge of planets, devil-god who single handedly brought the galaxy to its knees:

The Monkey King.

His cosmic rebellion was stopped only by the intervention of the genetically and spiritually supreme being, the Maitreya.

In the wake of the ape-king's defeat, the hyper-evolved Deva clan unified the galaxy. Their mastery over Prana, combined with their highly advanced and ordered civilization, brought world after world to heel. Thus, the Glorious Zong Xingxi Empire was born.

Rise of the Zong Xingxi Empire

The glorious, undying Zong Xingxi Empire
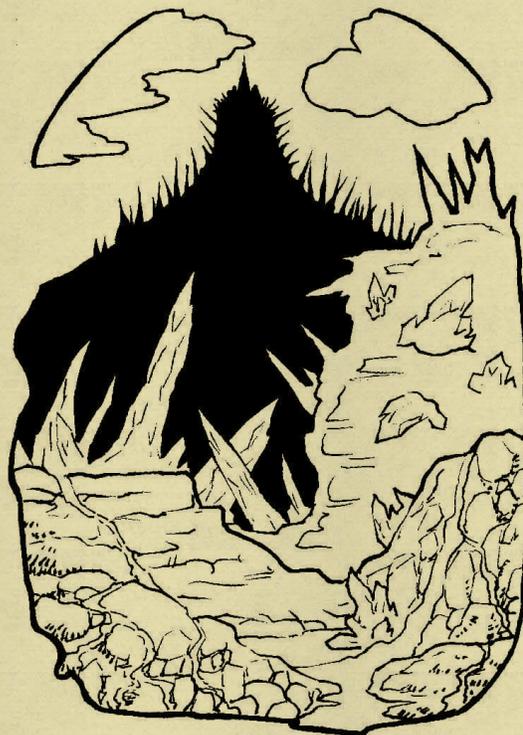
has ruled the Galaxy Above Heaven for ten thousand years. May their reign be everlasting.

Within the core worlds their domain is absolute, but their control loosens among the outer reaches. Vassal and independent worlds become more common as one travels outward from the core, and in the lawless rim even openly rebellious worlds may dare to exist.

The Zong Xingxi divide the galaxy into five sectors, reckoned by Imperial Galactic North:

• Azure Dragon in the Eastern sector
• Vermillion Bird to the South
• Western White Tiger
• Northern Black Tortoise
• And ruling them all, the Central Golden Dragon

Within this golden center the Emprex, Cosmic Axis and Living Embodiment of Galactic Order Itself, is contained on the Celestial Vinaya. The Emprex is the most ancient and powerful among the Deva and widely considered the most Supremely Perfect Being in all existence.

The inner worlds of the empire are Heaven; a techno-celestial paradise where life is a beautiful dream.

But there is always a shadow in Heaven, and nightmares lie in wait, hidden behind its dreams.

The Castes
By Imperial decree, the sentient beings of the galaxy are classified by caste according to their genetic architecture and control over Prana. It is an inflexible system but not an immutable one: it is possible, if unlikely, for those on the lower rungs to rise to the higher echelons. They can achieve spiritual attunement, and thereby greater raw power, through genetic manipulation, bodily augmentation, or by following the ancient paths of effort and self-perfection.

The opposite is also true: it is possible to fall from grace and tumble down the celestial hierarchy. Gross violation of Imperial law is sometimes punished by tearing apart a criminal's very DNA and warping their Chakra through unspeakable arts, reducing them to a mewling shade of their former self. Sometimes accident or perversion leads one hurtling down the demonic hierarchy, rather than the divine. Some insane masters subject themselves to terrifying training, ripping themselves apart to achieve impossible power.
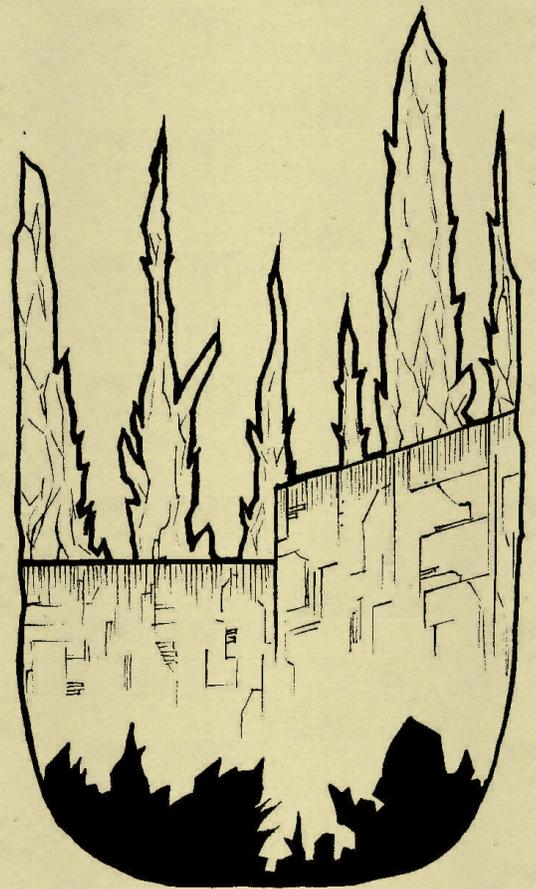
Deva
The most divine Deva stand at the pinnacle of the cosmic hierarchy. Once merely mortal, they transcended their simple existence by mastering the secrets of Prana. It was they who civilized the war-ravaged Galaxy Above Heaven, and it is they who rule it.

Asura
Champions of the Deva, the Asura occupy the second highest rank in their divine hierarchy. Genetically engineered super

soldiers, the Asura are the elite warriors, generals and honor guard of the Deva. It was they who conquered and unified the galaxy for their masters, and it is they who fight to this day at the forefront of every cosmic war. To the endless chagrin of their lords, the Asura hold personal honor and skill in combat as the most essential things in the universe… even above loyalty to their masters.

Ningen

The humble commoners of the Galaxy Under Heaven are the unmodified masses of sentient, commonly (but not always) humanoid beings that populate its thousand-thousand worlds. They are the Ningen, an ancient term meaning "Mortal". The Imperial Natural Histories say that all sapient beings descend or were created from a single Ningen species from a long, lost Prime Planet and that they were seeded across the cosmos by the Kaufu. They were modified to survive in countless different environments and serve different purposes from one species, eventually evolving into their myriad modern forms.

The most common is the familiar bilateral humanoid, but exotic specimens include aquatic beings, hirsute snowmen, even scale-fleshed lava people. All are considered Ningen. Their bodies, chakra and other characteristics suited to their unique homeworlds.

Uplifted Animals

Originally created to serve as slaves, expendable workers, and cannon fodder in the Age of the Warring Worlds, Uplifted Animals are lower life-forms grown sentient and humanoid by Prana-powered gene manipulation. In the current era, they are free folk, but generally unrecognized as true citizens. This means they are not subject to imperial law… But also, not protected by it.

Preta

Preta, often called hungry ghosts, subsist in the dregs of society. Preta are not born; they are manufactured from criminals by one of the harshest punishments inflicted by Imperial Law. Their very DNA and Prana are ripped apart, leaving but the pulp of what once was a person.

This whimpering protoplasm is pressed into a wretched being with only traces of its original identity. Preta are consumed by an overwhelming addiction, usually related to their crimes. Their revolting existence serves as a dire warning to those who would trespass against Imperial Law.

Rakshasa

The barbaric Rakshasa inhabit the lawless rim of the galaxy. They are savages who, by punishment or choice, have their DNA and Prana stripped bare while retaining their identities. Ruling the harshest planets, they have mastered the forbidden art of stealing skills and powers from their vanquished foes. Grotesque monsters, ultimate survivors, genetic pirates, noble savages… The Rakshasa are all these things and more.

Other Denizens

The castes are the classifications of sentient beings mandated by Imperial Law, but more, stranger things inhabit the Galaxy Above Heaven. There are monsters, robots, cyborgs, Sentient Objects, AI ghosts, and even weirder beings that defy easy explanation. Even the primal darkness that gnaws the edge of the galaxy shows signs of sentience, though prudent scholars avoid examining that cosmic horror for too long.

The Vajra Lotus

There is a legend that a mortal being once shattered the boundaries of caste: the Maitreya. Considered the pinnacle of genetic and spiritual evolution, the Maitreya attained cosmic oneness in an event known as the Nirvana Singularity.

Followers of the Maitreya preach that this absolute liberation of physical existence is the ultimate goal of all living things. There

are several branches of this philosophy, each pursuing their existential goal in different ways.

One branch is the Vajra Lotus. They quest throughout the galaxy searching for spiritual relics left behind by their holy sage. Using these treasured technologies, they have labored to recreate the Maitreya and his disciples through genetic manipulations and cloning.

These efforts have borne fruit: the Tulku. These clones of the Maitreya's closest and most powerful disciples, are created, sustained and reincarnated as the immortal leadership of the Lotus.

The gene crafting employed by the Vajra Lotus is more subtle and elegant than that used by the empire. It cultivates the natural flow of Prana and the balance of Chakra, as opposed to the forceful, mechanical manipulations of Imperial methods.

Monks of the Lotus generally reject the trappings of modern civilization and seek to live harmonious and straightforward lives. They mix their genetic science with meditation, martial arts, and the cultivation of humble, austere societies.

Though they are but a small cult, their influence is rapidly expanding across all strata of society in the cosmos. Could the rumors of a perfect clone of the Maitreya be true?

Your Journey Begins…

Distant from the lofty central worlds, we find the White Tiger Sector; known colloquially as the western reaches. Away from the glorious light of the Zong Xingxi empire, this lawless sector is drenched in a darkness and chaos not seen since ancient days. It is packed with savage and untamed worlds; some lush and vibrant, some filled with buried secrets or ancient dreams, all bursting with the possibilities of freedom, glory… and death.

In this savage and bloody sector, new legend begins: Yours

Media Recommendations And Inspirations

Asura's Wrath
Capcom
This video game is probably the closest thing you can find to the pure aesthetic of Tian Shang: A seamless mix between advanced tech and Buddhist imagery, insane planet busting power levels and the dark story of a demi-god seeking revenge and redemption.

Enslaved: Odyssey To The West
Namco
Another great video game with a similar style and theme, this is a retelling of Journey to the West as a space adventure. It has Monkey as a badass fugitive forced to protect Trip a resourceful girl with a lot of gadgets.

The Monkey King
Katsuya Terada / Dark Horse Comics
This savage and erotic retelling of Journey to the West was a great influence in this adventure. The Monkey King in this two-volume graphic novel has been described as a sort of Conan, slaying and laying across a disturbing world full of gruesome demons and monsters. It is like Buddhist inspired Heavy Metal!!

Grant Morrison's 18 days and Ramayan 3392 ad
Deepak Chopra & Shekhar Kapur / Graphic India.
These two comic series reimagine the two great Indian classics: The Mahabharata and The Ramayana as Sci-Fi/Mythic epics with genetically engineered demons and demigods using high tech weapons and fighting worlds shattering battles. Both series are a great inspiration for the visuals and concepts of the Tian Shang Universe.

Orion
Masamune Shirow / Dark Horse Comics
Shirow, the master of cyberpunk, brings us to a hyper-advance cosmic empire where science and technology work according to the basics of Shinto and Buddhism. We have Yingerions and Yangerions, and Susano Orbatos the goggle wearing god of storms ducking it out with a human girl hopped up with some heavy magitech, there is even a summoning of Son Wukong.

Battle Angel Alita and Battle Angel Alita: First Order
Yukito Kishiro / Kodansha Comics
This is a masterpiece of cyberpunk manga full of transhuman themes, philosophy, existentialism and insane high-powered cybernetic martial arts battles. The later series even takes the story into a ruthless galaxy filled with post-humans, a great inspiration for Tian Shang.

The Incal and The Jodoverse
Alejandro Jodorowsky, Moebius, Many Other Artists / Humanoids
Strange genius, writer, director and psycho-magician Alejandro Jodorowsky, alongside some of the best artists of all times created a cosmic realm, full of weird science, elite meta-warriors, oppressive techno-religions. A mix of action, sci-fi, and philosophy over a vast series of graphic novels starting with iconic Incal has been a great inspiration for our own mad universe in Tian Shang.

Saint Legend
Andy Seto / Comics One
A Hong Kong Manhua, by Asian superstar Andy Seto and published by the now-defunct Comics One, reimagines the Eight Immortals of Chinese lore into techno-super martial artist superheroes in modern day Hong Kong. This mix of futurism and mythology is right our cosmic alley.

Dragonball Super
Akira Toriyama / Shueisha - Toei Animation
What can I say about the Dragonball Saga? The whole series (yes, even GT) has been a great inspiration for Tian Shang. But I point out the latest series because it deals with the hierarchy of the multiverse, it has immensely powerful and yet vain and self-centered gods interacting with mortals, that surprisingly can surpass and challenge them through training and heart. This is very much in line with the cosmos we created.

Guardians Of The Galaxy And Thor Ragnarok
Marvel Movies
Of all of the films from the MCU, the Guardians series and Thor's latest installment present a fun, cosmic, over the top universe full of crazy characters and adventures. Add a coating of Chinese myth and anime action scenes and those stories could be light-hearted Tian Shang campaigns. A group made by a quirky demigod, a berserker, a mortal with divine blood and an uplifted animal and

plant would fit right in the Galaxy Above Heaven.

Jodorowsky's Dune

We finalize this list by coming back to the great madman Jodo. This is the story of one of the greatest, or at least the craziest movies never made. He mixes his own philosophical beliefs, with insane sci-fi concepts, and working alongside some of the most talented people that ever lived, creating a majestic cosmos, that is beautiful and yet terrifying. We may never see this cosmos in movies, but just as with most of our modern Sci-fi canon, our game, Tian Shang is its descendant.

Introduction

Welcome to a grand adventure! In this first leg, you, the Game Master (or GM) will guide one of the Player Characters (or PCs) from the Vajra Lotus's temple-fortress across the universe to Five Elements Mountain, up its sheer face and to the peak, where they will awaken the slumbering Monkey King. In so doing, you will learn and teach how to play this game.

This module is written for 2 players (not counting you, the Game Master).

Before you begin:

First, it is a good idea to read through the adventure part of this module, and additionally, pick through the rules reference section. This way you'll have confidence in your knowledge of the game, which will pay off when you run it.

You'll want to have a copy of these rules for the GM to reference during play.

You'll need a place to play. A nice table in your home, with some snacks and refreshments, is traditional.

You need ten-sided dice, called D10s. About ten per player (yourself included!) should suffice.

It is highly recommended that you have both pencils and note paper. Note cards will also come in handy.

Each player should have a character sheet printed out in advance for their character. You can find the two protagonist's sheets at the end of this book (p.38) and the Sentry's Sheet on (p.20)

It would also be helpful to have something you can use as tokens (pennies, glass beads, poker chips, etc.).
Finally, and most importantly, you'll need your friends! Roleplaying games are a social activity by nature. So, grab some friends, some dice and some snacks… and get gaming!

Even though only you and Tripitaka's player will be playing initially, its best to have all your players there as well, so that they can learn along with you, offer suggestions, and participate.

NOTE: the default assumption of the characters Tripitaka and Sun Wukong is that they are male, and the masculine pronoun is used. There's no reason whatsoever that this needs to be the case;

Gaming over the 'net
In the amazing and technologically connected world in which we live, it is extremely likely that you may choose to run this game over the internet for distant friends. That's great! The above advice should be taken as suggestions, rather than requirements (except for having friends, of course: that one is a necessity!). As long as you have some way of simulation or approximating any of the elements listed above, you shouldn't have any worries.

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they're both genetic experiments spawned from forbidden science. They can be either gender, no gender, both genders; whatever your player wants, that's what they are.

This is true of any player-character in the fantastic Galaxy Above Heaven.

The Climb
Give your first player the Tripitaka character sheet handout.
Read the following aloud (or approximate it with your own description: make it cool!):

The Vajra Lotus has given you your task: reclaim the lost Nirvana Template from its resting place in the forbidden western sector.
They send you first to Five Elements Peak: the prison of the terrifying Monkey King. Sealed there by your predecessor, his mind has been reprogrammed to obey anyone with the DNA of the Maitreya: the very DNA from which you were cloned. You will need his power to succeed in your quest.

In your last moment with them. You hear the hum of their ancient voices, see their sagging, leathery flesh and dark eyes twinkling like oil fires. The starlight of a thousand candles flickers behind them, then stretches out, bleeding into eternity as their sorcery catapults you through the void.

The teleportation mantra vibrates in your bones, transporting you across the galaxy. Your holy brothers fade like a dream; another world swells to replace them. A world of yellow clouds and black earth. The hum recedes, and you find yourself before a titanic heap of acid-eaten stone that pierces the poisonous sky.

Your journey begins.
Explain to the player that the first Scene is called a Montage. It is "zoomed-out", describing their journey up the mountainside.

To climb the mountain, the player must take an Action.

Actions allow a character to do things. Some actions are simple or easy enough to be accomplished by simply declaring you do them (walking across a room, opening a door, etc.) but in the case of climbing a mountain or similarly demanding activities, additional effort is necessary.

Any time a player wants their character to do something difficult, use the following procedure.

Taking Action: The Effort Pool
Characters in this game are extremely capable. They hone their minds, souls and bodies into focused harmony. To demonstrate their hyper-competence, they have a trait called Effort, which is drawn from their Effort Pool. This is a pool of dice ten-sided that is rolled and forms a resource which players use to accomplish things.

We're looking for the what now-?

Reclaiming the Nirvana Template is Tripitaka's ultimate goal. Although for him it's a religious artifact of enormous significance, you have no idea what it is or what it does.

Don't feel bad… Neither does the Vajra Lotus.

The thing was lost eons ago, before recorded history; it's a set of supposedly divine principles that chronicles the Maitreya's ascension to true cosmic enlightenment. The Lotus believe it will guide them on their epoch-long quest to recreate the Nirvana Singularity.

Are they right? Well… Without spoiling the surprise, we will tell you that they're mostly right. Although they, like poor Tripitaka here, have bitten off a bit more than they can chew.

Because of their fantastic capabilities, the Effort Pool will sometimes allow characters to accomplish incredible feats, or take multiple Actions in the blink of an eye.
This is how to form the Effort Pool:
1. Have the player pick up one 10-sided die (D10) for each point of their **Effort**. For Tripitaka, this will be 4 dice.

2. Have them roll the dice. Each one will have a number between 0-9 on its face-up side: this is called its **Facing.** A higher number is stronger. Read both 10 or 0 as 0, the lowest Facing.

3. Arrange the dice in order of smallest to largest Facing on the character sheet as indicated, then group dice with the same Facing into Sets, one above the other, as shown:
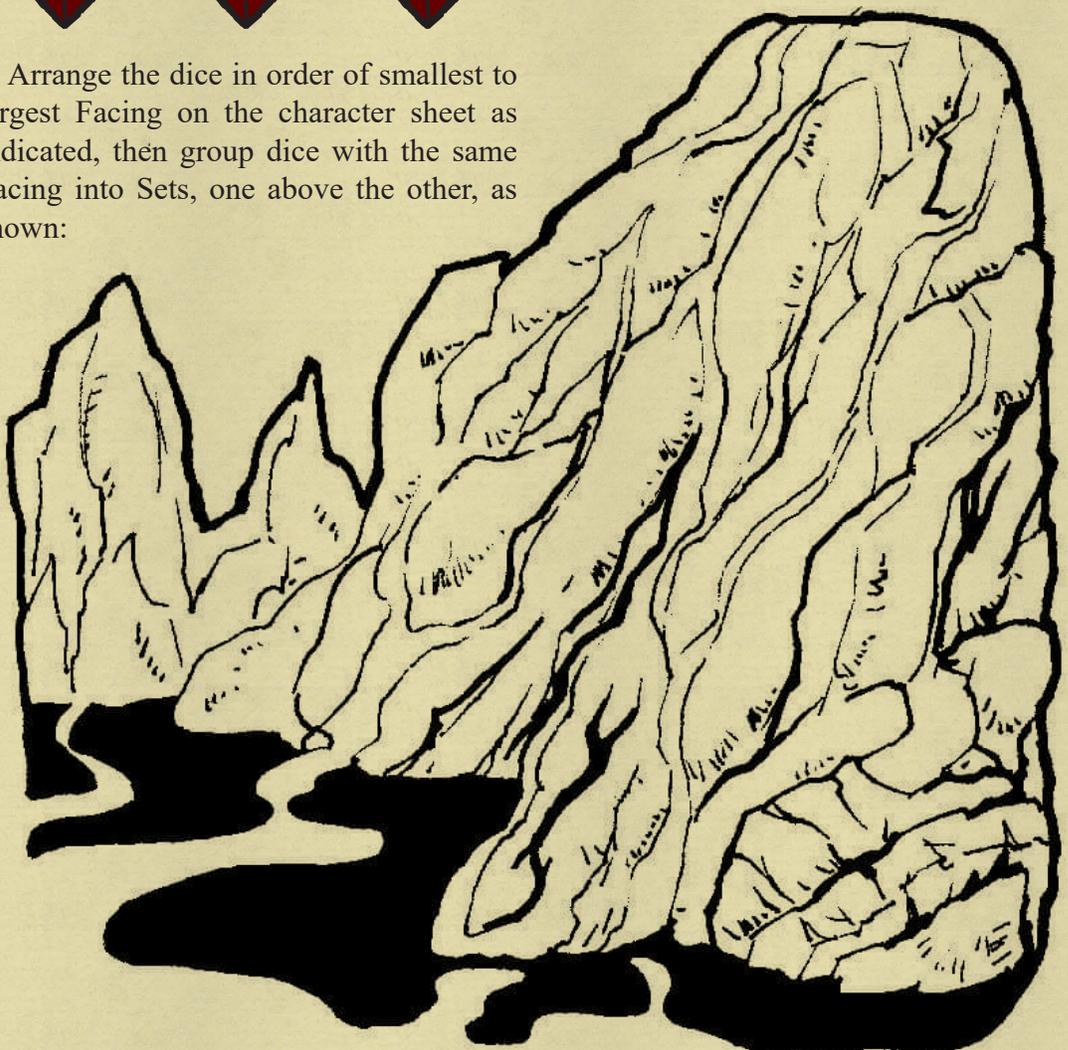
Reading the dice:
Dice are grouped into **Sets** that share the same Facing. Sets are given a Rank which describes how potent an action they may grant.
Think of the number of dice, or **Rank**, as the "tens" and the Facing of the dice as the "ones". For example, one die with a Facing of 2 is read as 12. A Set of two dice with Facing 3 is read as 23.

The number of dice in a Set determines its Rank. A Set of two dice, each with Facing 4, is a Rank 2 Set with a Facing of 4, or a total of 24.

Take careful note that a Facing of either 10 or 0 is read as 0. For example, a Set of 3 dice with a Facing of 0 is 30.

This part of the game can be tricky to grasp, the first time you encounter it. Once it "clicks" though, you'll find yourself forming sets like a pro.

Skills

Characters have 7 Skills which govern their raw, natural talents. Every character may use each of these Skills. Most of the time when characters take actions, they will be using these Skills to accomplish their tasks. They are as follows:

• Power: Raw physical strength.
• Agility: Balance and speed.
• Endurance: Stamina and resistance to pain, injury and sickness.
• Intellect: Genius, quick-thinking, and cleverness.
• Senses: Observation and attentiveness with the 5 senses.
• Heart: Empathy, passion, and charm.
• Spirit: Self-awareness, enlightenment, and discipline.

In this case, Endurance is tested.

Selecting Sets to Perform Actions

To take an action, a character uses Sets from their Effort Pool. This is done as follows:

1. Decide what kind of Action your character is going to take. In this example, we're scaling a mountain.
2. Choose a Set from among the dice you rolled to perform the Action.
3. Remove the dice from your Effort Pool.
4. Declare the Rank and type of action
5. The other Effort dice you rolled will stick around to allow you to do other actions. At the end of your turn, discard any remaining unused Effort dice.
6. When the player chooses a Set for their climbing action, find its Rank in the Effect Chart to determine how well they climb. The full Effect Charts are presented later (p.35), but for now this truncated version will suffice:

Endurance Effect Chart:

• Rank 1, 10-19. Mediocre: Withstand hours of strenuous physical activity. Tripitaka ascends to the summit, but he's exhausted.

• Rank 2, 20-29. Sufficient: Withstand days of strenuous physical activity. Tripitaka ascends to the summit, mildly weary from his exertion.

• Rank 3, 30+. Superlative: Endure horrendous physical punishment for days. Tripitaka climbs almost effortlessly to the summit, getting the jump on any foes he encounters.

After determining how well Tripitaka climbs up, begin the Summit scene.

The Summit

In this Scene, Tripitaka is attacked by a machine made from immortal brass and copper, guarding the resting place of the Monkey King.

This scene begins differently depending on Tripitaka's level of success in climbing the mountain.

If he rolled 19 or less, he's ambushed!
Read the following out loud:
Sweat drips into your eyes as you heave yourself up the rocks. Over the rush of blood in your ears, you hear a mechanical whine and the clatter of falling stones. Lightning flashes in the venom-green sky. Barreling towards you is a nightmare of brass and glowing runes: A mechanical Sentry left by the ancients. Before you can get your footing, it strikes!

If he rolled 20-29, he meets the foe face-to-face.
Read the following out loud:
Pulling yourself confidently up the mountainside. You find a shelf offering a vantage and survey your surroundings. A quadrupedal Sentry machine crawls down the rocks like a massive bronze spider. Its glowing red eye swivels towards you. You drop into a deep stance and brace for battle!

If he rolled a miraculous 30+, he gets the jump on his enemy!
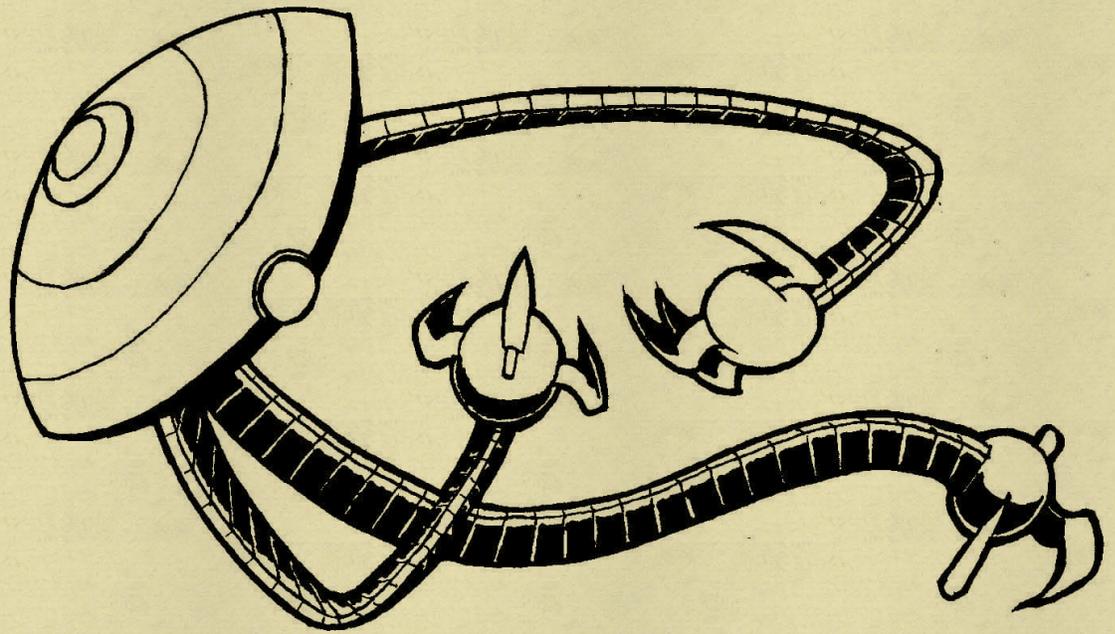
Read the following out loud:
You sprint nimbly up the slippery black stone. A sudden movement alerts you to another presence. Taking caution, you crouch under the shade of a rocky overhang. You hear the whine of decaying machinery as the thing clatters overhead. Its flat, bronze head leans above you, scanning with a single glowing eye. It's a Sentry machine, creaking under the weight of eons. It will find you if you don't act quickly, but just for this bare second, you've caught it by surprise.

Start of the round:
Each round of combat is an intense and exciting affair! In addition to using Skills, characters Attack, Defend, and maneuver to Vanquish their foes. Each round consists of the individual turns of each combatant. Play proceeds in the following order:

1. Round Begins
2. Imbalance Decision
3. Roll Effort
4. Initiative Bid
5. Turns
6. (Locked)
7. End of Round

Let's examine each of these steps in turn. To begin, explain to the player that this is an Action Scene, where time is slowed down to demonstrate the details of the Action: in this case, fighting!

Also, if they're feeling nervous about battling a big scary robot, reassure them that this scene won't end the game if they get beaten. Tell them that, any time their character may die, you will provide them ample warning.

Place the Sentry character sheet (p.20) on the table. Then, begin the fight!
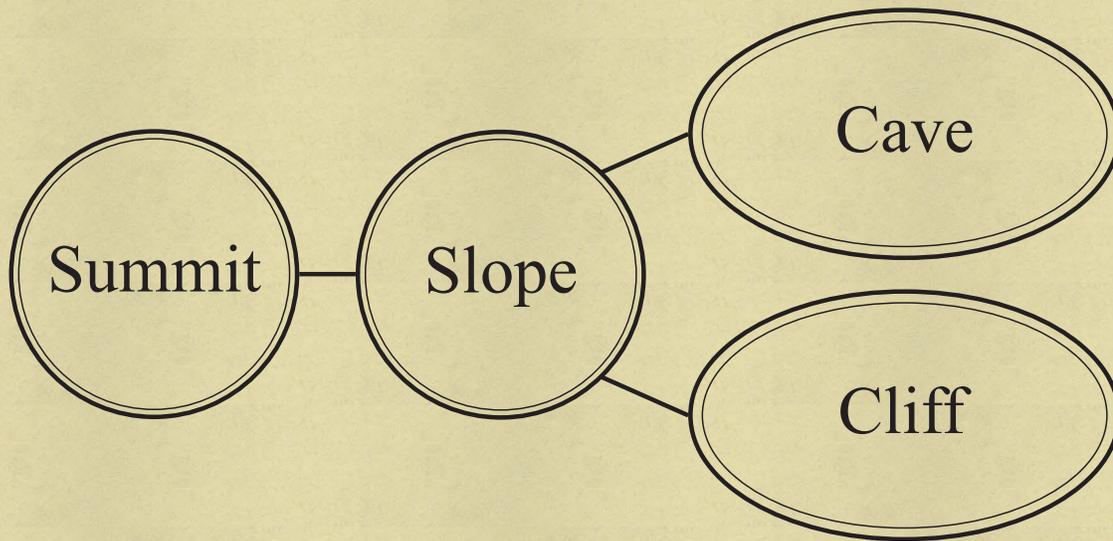
Round 1
1. Round Begins
Combat only begins when one of the characters present begins to use violence. In this case, the rampaging Sentry is trying to kill Tripitaka. It continues its assault until disabled or destroyed. Unfortunately, it can't be reasoned with!

2. Imbalance Decision
Before rolling Effort, combatants must decide on how they are dealing with any lingering injuries. These are called Imbalances and are explained in more detail a little later (p.16).

For now, the only wounded character is the Sentry. As the GM, you will choose between:

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  ┌────────┐   ┌───────┐        ╭───────────╮
  │ Summit │───│ Slope │────────│   Cave    │
  └────────┘   └───────┘        ╰───────────╯
                      │
                      │         ╭───────────╮
                      └─────────│   Cliff   │
                                ╰───────────╯
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The Mechanical Penalty, which reduces its Effort Pool by 1 this round, or

The Dramatic Penalty, which will cause one of its four limbs or its eye to malfunction this round and be unusable.
If you are demonstrating this game in person, then this can be represented by writing the Mechanical Penalty on one side of an index or note card, and the Dramatic Penalty on the reverse side. Flip the card to the chosen side, so that everyone can see how it is dealing with its decaying circuitry.

It is important to note that, although the choice between Dramatic and Mechanical Penalty lasts this entire round, you will make this decision at the start of every round of combat. Next turn you may change your mind and select the opposite Penalty. Do this at the start of every round, for every Imbalance on a character.

After the Penalty is chosen, proceed to the next step.

3. Roll Effort
Both Tripitaka and the Sentry roll their Effort and line up their dice for the turn. The Sentry may be rolling 1 less, if the mechanical penalty is chosen.

4. Initiative Bid
During Action Scenes, there is a fierce competition to act before your foe. By attacking first, a combatant can set the pace of battle, granting them an enormous advantage.

Characters may bid Sets against one another to determine turn order. Although bidding is not a requirement, going before your foe gives you a sizable edge over them.

First, any characters controlled by the GM (called Non-Player Characters or NPCs) bid, then player characters (PCs) bid. If this demonstration is in person, an orderly way of bidding is to proceed in a clockwise fashion, but any order you like is fine so long as everyone gets a turn.

To bid, choose any Set you like from your Effort (or don't bid, at your option). Higher-Ranked Sets go first, with Facings of same-Ranked Sets breaking ties. If characters still tie (i.e. both characters have the same Set), both players roll a D10 to break it, with the highest roller going first. Re-roll any ties until a pecking order is established.

Once everyone places their bid, another round of bidding can take place if anyone wishes to submit a higher bid. This continues until everyone submits their final bid.

This final bid determines the turn order, with the highest bids going first, and play proceeding in order down to the lowest bid. This is called the Initiative order. This order is recorded by the GM every round.

The Sentry always bids its lowest-rank, highest-Facing Set. For Example, if it rolls 1,2,2,5, it will bid the 5, making its total 15. If it rolls 3,3,6,6, it will bid the set of 6's, for a total of 26.

Caught by Surprise: If either combatant has caught the other unprepared as described above, then their Initiative is considered 1 Rank higher this round (for example, a bid of 13 would be upgraded to a 23)

5. Turns

Taking Actions (Attacks, Defenses, Skills, Movement):

Characters may attempt any action that they wish. This could be an Attack, Defense, Skill, or Movement.

We have previously explained how to perform Skills. Launching Attacks and Defending is covered next. Before explaining the mechanical side of these Actions however, it is important that we take a moment to emphasize the importance of describing your Actions.

Players should always describe their character's Actions in the context of the shared mind-space of the game. For example, if Tripitaka wished to Damage the Sentry, his player might describe a kick or punch attack aimed at its damaged eye component.

Players should avoid simplistic or overtly mechanical descriptions. Although technically sufficient to say: "I attack", this is dull! Encourage them to describe how they do so (keeping in mind that their characters are hyper-capable Kung-Fu demigods!)

The level of detail in your descriptions will vary with your tastes as players. Generally, brevity is preferred, with high-impact verbs and nouns used to briefly but vividly describe Actions. This will help the other players visualize the Action, "showing" the fight rather than simply "telling" about it.
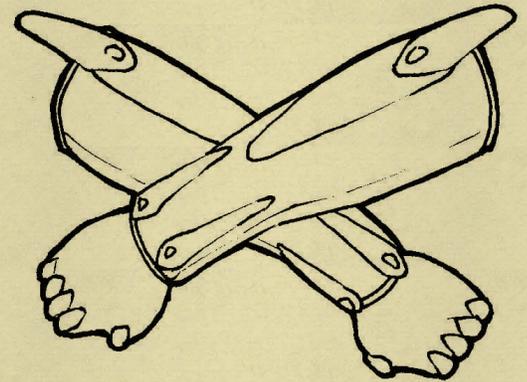
Here's an example attack description you might use for the Sentry: "The sentry raises its heavy brass claw and brings it crashing down with stone-shattering force!"

The Battlefield:

Battles take place on Battlefields. This describes a physical space of up to 110 yards, or 100 meters. The terrain and objects on the battlefield are called its Elements. The area is roughly defined by its terrain; when that terrain noticeably changes, a new Battlefield is entered.

To create a Battlefield, describe it to the player and note any Elements. This creates a shared "mind-space" between you and the player, which can be interacted with by their characters.

It is helpful to draw the Battlefields with a "box and stick" model, to highlight their relationship to the players.

The Battlefield in this conflict is a steady stone slope, terminating in a rocky summit. Elements include a bare, sandy circle with a crystal control terminal surrounded by stone pylons 15' or 4.5 meters tall, loose gravel scattered on the ground, and a brittle limestone shelf supporting a heavy burden of rocks at the peak. Adjacent Battlefields are the sheer cliffside that Tripitaka just scaled, and a nearby cavern that extends a few hundred feet into the stone; entering either places Tripitaka in a dangerous position (either clinging to sheer rock or cornered in a cave!).

If Tripitaka goes first:

Explain to the player that they may describe any action that a highly-trained, agile and physically impressive monk could reasonably attempt. Caution them, however, that this is a confrontation with a dangerous enemy, and they should be thinking tactically to gain the upper hand.

Specifically, they may move within the battlefield, describing themselves as performing any reasonable acrobatics necessary. They may launch one or more attacks, using the rules described shortly. Alternatively, or in addition, they may use their Skills to interact with the Elements of the Battlefield. For example, they could use their Power Skill to try to tip one of the stone Pylons to smash the Sentry. Reference the Effect Charts, (p.35) and use your good judgement to determine the outcome of such actions.

The last two actions require the use of Effort dice (as will be shortly explained). The Sentry defends against every Attack that it can with its highest Ranked Set.

If it finds itself on the Defense, it prioritizes its survival over Attacking.

If the Sentry goes first:

It Attacks with its highest Ranked Set. It Attacks only once and leaves any remaining dice for Defense. If it is without dice after bidding for Initiative and Attacking, then it is Defenseless until next round.

Attacking and Defending:

The Attacker chooses a Set to attack with, just like using a Skill. The bigger the Set, and the higher the Facing, the more powerful the Attack.

Defending is done in the same manner, choosing a Set to oppose the Attacker's Set.

The Sentry defends as described above.

Reaching into the Tactical Infinity

You might be faced with a tough question: What happens if the player tries something and there aren't any rules for it?

I'll tell you what happens: something magical. Something fantastic! Something unique to role-playing games.

The player can reach out, into your descriptions, and into the shared mind-space that has been established as the universe of the game, and they can do something.

What if they want to start a landslide? Or climb on top of the Sentry? Or throw gravel in its eye?

They can.

Reaching into the tactical infinity of the in-game universe is not only possible, it is encouraged! Players who are interacting with this universe are truly engaged in the art of roleplay!

Of course, the rub is you've got to model this somehow, which can be tricky. Thankfully, the system of this game is very flexible if you follow a few guidelines:

Making any significant changes happen generally requires a roll, and

Beings get a chance to defend themselves from harm, and finally,

Not everything requires a roll. If you and the player agree that a thing can be done, then don't worry about rolling for it!

To determine the Damage caused by a strike, subtract the Defending Set from the Attacking Set. Any remaining number is Damage, explained next. For example, if Tripitaka attacked with a Set of 23, and the Sentry Defended with a mere 14, then the attack would deal 9 Damage (23-14=9).

Reaching into the Tactical Infinity (cont.)

Attacking and Defending are the basic interactions of this game (it is an action game, after all!). You can get a lot of mileage out of this, for example: If Tripitaka wants to climb on top of the Sentry, this could be modeled as a hold attack (p. 27). Rather than doing Damage, it places him outside of the Sentry's attack radius on its vulnerable back.

Or perhaps he wishes to toss gravel in its eye: it could be temporarily blinded, rather than damaged, possibly allowing Tripitaka a chance to escape! This could be modeled with the rules for stealth (p. 39).

Don't forget about some other weapons in your arsenal, such as the environmental changes made possible by the Strength Effect Chart. Tripitaka could target the stone shelf Element with a strike: causing enough damage creates a Landslide! The rules for shaping the environment with attacks are detailed on (p. 36).

In every case, make certain to describe and agree on the in-game effect before the roll, then stand by your word if they succeed.

If you reward your players for their cleverness and allow them to reach confidently into the tactical infinity, your games will become more enjoyable and engaging for everyone!

Note that a Defender is not required to devote any dice to resist an incoming Attack. This will result in taking serious consequences, however, as they will take the Attack's entire Set in Damage.

Taking Damage:
A character's Health Boxes represent their ability to ablate the damage from attacks or other harm. Note that the Sentry and Tripitaka both have several Health Boxes on their character sheet; they're reasonably tough characters!

When a character takes Damage, mark the leftmost box with the number of Damage taken.

Each Health Level can absorb 9 Damage without further ill effect. However, once it absorbs 10 Damage, it is Filled. Two things then occur.

First, becoming this damaged creates an Imbalance (similar to the Sentry's Imbalance). This is explained in detail in the next section (p.16).

Second, the Health Level is marked with an X. It may no longer absorb any Damage until it is healed. Healing is explained on (p. 31).

Once a health level absorbs 10 Damage, move on to the next level to continue recording. Take note it is possible to fill several Health Levels with Damage from a single powerful Attack. It pays to defend!

Aura:
Tripitaka is student of mystical martial arts: as such, he has an additional measure of protection against damaged. He is surrounded by a magical Aura of luck, latent mystic energy, and cosmic destiny. This is called an Aura.

When he faces damage, he can use this shielding energy to buy off the damage before it is applied to his Health, potentially sparing him from harm.

He has 6 points to buy down damage; after that, it's temporarily exhausted for the remainder of the battle.

Imbalances:

Every time a Health Level absorbs its tenth Damage, the injured character must record or increase an Imbalance.

An Imbalance works exactly like the Sentry's Imbalance, forcing the injured character to decide between a Mechanical or Dramatic Penalty at the start of every round.

Because they are often created mid-round, after dice have been rolled, newly created Imbalances begin by imposing their Dramatic Penalty.

When an Imbalance is increased, it can either increase the severity of an existing Imbalance (increasing the Mechanical Penalty by 1) or create a unique Imbalance, with its own Penalties.

The Attacking character's player determines the details of any Imbalances resulting from their Attacks.

If an Attacker metes out enough Damage and wishes to cause a unique Imbalance, review the example Imbalances (p.33) for some guidance on how to create them.

As you can tell, burdening characters with multiple Imbalances will force them to choose between severely restricting their possible Actions or taking steep mechanical consequences. They may change their mind on how they deal with Imbalances at the start of every round, as previously explained.

Healing:

Health Boxes and Aura recover once Tripitaka spends a scene recuperating. Imbalances stick around, unfortunately; he better be careful!

How Many Actions During your Turn?
During a combatant's turn, they may perform each of these actions:

• Attack or perform a skill once with a single die

• Move around freely within a battlefield, or move to any adjacent one once

• Defend against any injurious effects (including attacks and environmental dangers) unlimited times per turn
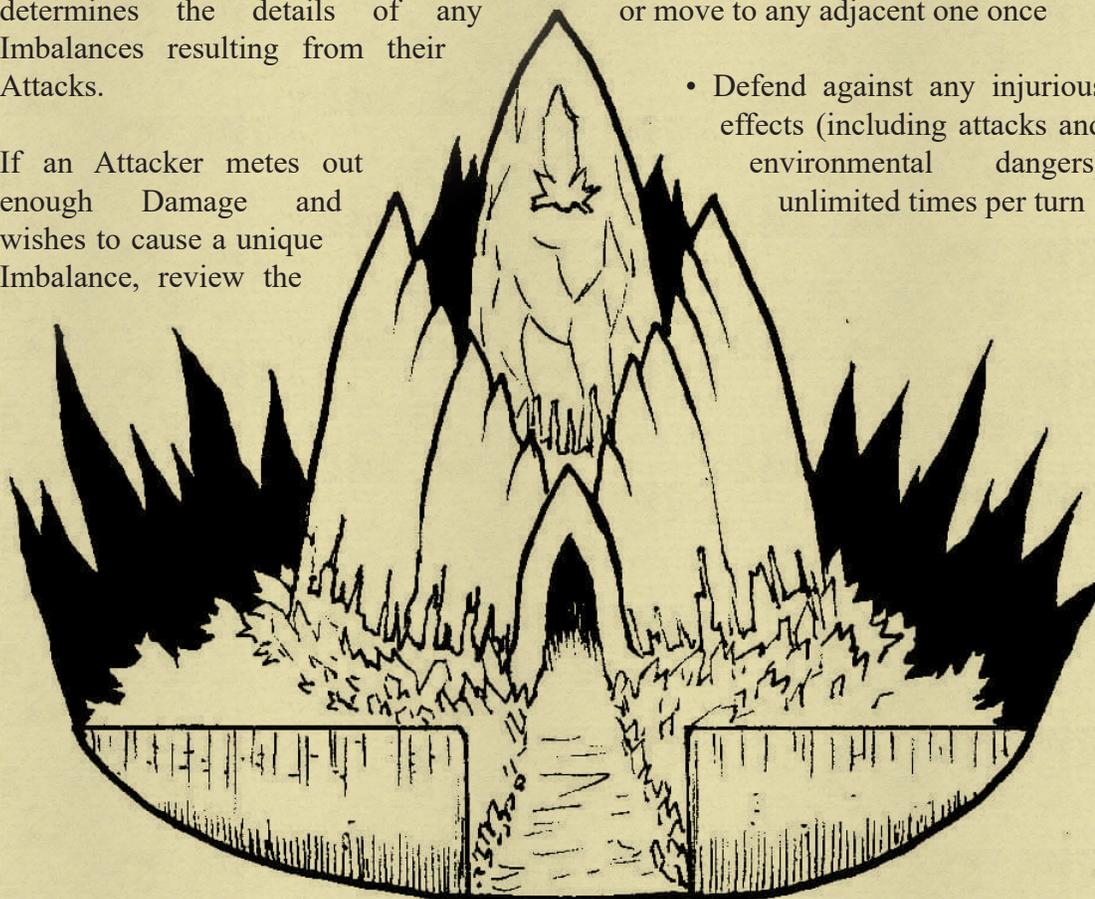
Each of these (aside from moving) requires a Set of at least Rank 1 to perform.

Bonus Actions:
However, if they have a Set of 2 or more matching dice (Rank 2 or above), they may perform any of these actions again with that Set. This is called a Bonus Action.

A character rolling multiple Sets of Rank 2+ may perform multiple bonus Actions. This can include launching multiple Attacks!

6. Recovery (Locked)
This step is covered in round 2!

7. End of Round
After all combatants have taken their turns, they may still have some unused dice remaining in their Effort Pools. At their option, they may "save" some of these dice for use in a future round.

Focus

To do this, move the chosen dice out of the Effort Pool and on to one of the free Focus Slots. Each die requires its own free slot. These are represented on the character sheet as shown below:
These dice remain on the character sheet until they are used, or until the combat concludes. They retain their Facing and are used exactly like dice in the Effort Pool.

The Sentry will always move as many dice as it can into its Focus slots, favoring higher Facings.

Take note that next turn, you will have these Focus dice in addition to the dice rolled in your Effort Pool. They may be used, at your option, until the end of the Scene, when they are discarded.

Discard unused Effort dice:
After you are finished saving any dice in Focus slots, discard all remaining Effort dice in preparation for next round.

What's Next?
If both combatants are still standing, proceed to round 2.

If Tripitaka has been defeated, proceed to the Vanquished! sidebar on (p.21).

If the Sentry is defeated, proceed to the Awakened! Scene, (p.21).

Round 2
This round proceeds just as the previous round. However, there are a few new options that you can access. These options are underlined in the turn order below:

1. Round Begins
2. Imbalance Decision
3. Roll Effort
4. Initiative Bid
5. Turns
6. Recovery
7. End of Round

During step 6, each Chakra recovers Prana equal to it's Recovery Value. This is added to their Pool.

Take a moment to guide the player through each of these new capabilities, directing their attention to the appropriate part of the character sheet as necessary.

Because of these new options, you and the player will be making some additional tactical decisions this round. Your new capabilities are detailed below.

Utilize Techniques and Gupt Kala:
Technique: the mystical fighting arts the characters have mastered. Gupt Kala, or shadow arts, use the same rules but influence souls and hearts, rather than attacking.

They have a few components that describe them:

Name: This is how the Technique is known. Many names are descriptive, giving the foe some idea of the beating that awaits them.

Cost: How much mystical power, called Prana, the Technique requires. This is expanded on below.

Rank/Facing: Describes the Rank and Facing of the Set created by the Technique. These act just like a naturally rolled Set and can be freely paired with other Sets that share their Facing. If the Technique creates a Set of at least rank 2+, it can be used as a bonus Action.

Power: The unique effects or restrictions of the Technique are described here.

Tags: Any general effects or restrictions of the Technique are listed under this entry.

Skill: Techniques may be used to bolster a Skill, rather than perform an attack or defense. This entry describes the skill so boosted

Any of the Techniques listed may be used by Tripitaka's player. A Technique will specify whether it can be used as an Attack, Defense, or other Action with its Tags:

Offensive: Can only be used to attack
Defensive: May only be used to defend
Versatile: Choose between attack or defense

Additional tags you'll encounter are:

Shield: Creates a defense that sticks around, defending against any harmful effects or attacks

Holy: Infused with the high energy of cosmic oneness, these Techniques increase damage dealt to Unholy beings by +10
Sustainable: Can be sustained in a Focus Slot, just like a skill (p.19)

Remember: Techniques may be used as the Skill outlined under the Skill header.

Chakra and Prana:
To use a Technique, the player must pay its cost with Prana. Prana is evolved from Chakra: mystical energy slumbering within the body and spirit.

Chakra have two stats:
A Chakra's **Recovery** determines how much Prana a Chakra recovers at the end of every round.

The Chakra's **Pool** is the maximum amount of Prana that it can contain. Open Chakra begin a scene with full Prana, while Awoken Chakra begin empty.

Chakra may be:
Open: Prana pool begins full and is always accessible. Open Chakra have Recovery 2 and Pool 10

Closed: Cannot be accessed by a character.

Slumbering: Begin each Scene empty but can be opened with a Spirit Action.

Tripitaka has 2 Open Chakra, giving him 2 pools of 10 Prana each to draw from. In addition, because of his Mastery of Spirit, he adds +1 Rank to his Spirit action to open either of two two Slumbering Chakra. He's got quite a wellspring of power!

This is a lot of information to take in, but the bottom line is this: Chakra generate Prana, Prana powers Techniques, Techniques are your magical Kung-Fu powers.

During the second and subsequent combat rounds, make use of the Sentry's Cyclopean Beam power to give it an edge in combat. Encourage Tripitaka's player to use their Techniques to even the odds! This will get them used to using their powers.

Open Chakra:
As previously mentioned, any Slumbering

Chakra may be Opened by using a Spirit Action.

The Set must be Rank 2 or higher
The Rank of the Spirit action become the Chakra's Recovery for the rest of the Scene.

It's Pool becomes Recovery times 5. For Example, if a Rank 2 Set is used, the Chakra's Recovery will be 2, and its Pool will be 10.

The Pool begins empty; at the end of the turn in which it awakens it fills with Prana equal to the Facing of the Set used to open it. Continuing from the last example, if the Facing of the Set used was 7, then the Chakra would fill with 7 Prana at the end of the round. Thereafter, it would recover 2 Prana every round.

Sustain an Action:
If you want to Sustain an Action between turns (such as maintaining a hold on a foe or holding your breath in the vacuum of space) then you may do so by dedicating a Focus slot to it. Simply mark the slot to signal that it is being used and note the Rank and type of action (you'll get some use out of that scrap paper we recommended here!)

As long as the Focus slot remains dedicated, the Action will continue with the same Rank and Facing from round to round.

Only actions that may reasonably last for more than an instant may be sustained. Attacks and Defenses cannot be sustained.

Continuing the fight:
After you have introduced the player to their new options, continue with the second round of the fight!
The Sentry continues its tactics from round 1, summarized below:
• It always bids its lowest-Ranked, highest-Facing Set for Initiative.
• It attacks Once with its remaining highest-Ranked Set.

• It always supplements this Attack with its Cyclopean Beam Technique when it can afford to do so.
• It attacks only once, saving any remaining dice for Defense.
• It stores all the dice it can in its Focus at the end of every round.

Tripitaka's Powers:
Tripitaka's Palm of the Maitreya Technique is especially dangerous; the sentry's processor is corrupted by negative Prana, so it takes an additional 10 Damage when struck with this attack. This attack is also ranged, allowing Tripitaka to Attack from a safe distance if he relocates to an adjacent Battlefield.

His Binding Prayer Strips can end the fight in an interesting way; although they don't physically Damage the sentry, they can make it behave itself. Although it's more likely for it to flee in confusion if confronted with a sufficiently powerful Imbalance, it's your game. If you decide that Tripitaka gets a giant mechanical pet, that's your call. See the Aggravation rules (p.33) for a full breakdown of how this works.

Flee:
A character may use their movement to flee if there is a clear avenue of escape. This allows them to beat a hasty retreat into any adjacent Battlefield.

Keep in mind, if Tripitaka decides to flee from the Sentry without defeating it, it will pursue him!

Ending the Fight:
There are numerous ways this fight can end:

Tripitaka victorious:
Either by force or cunning, Tripitaka has overcome the Sentry and awakens the Monkey King. Run the Awakened! Scene next.

Sentry
Corrupted Ancient Golem

These ancient machines of copper, brass and magic swarm around Five Elements Peak. They guard the resting place of the terrifying Monkey King from all those who would seek to awaken him. Once holy, centuries of neglect have allowed corrupting forces to infest them.

Effort Pool	Focus	Health
4	1	4

Technique: Cyclopean Beam

Cost: 5
Rank: 1
Facing: 1-4

Power: This Technique shoots a beam of red plasma from the Sentry's eye. If the eye is malfunctioning or damaged, it cannot be utilized. Because of its intense heat, it deals +1d10 additional damage.

Tags: Ranged

Corroded Circuitry
(Rank 1 Physical Imbalance)

This Imbalance represents the eons of deterioration of the Sentry's circuits. It can be exacerbated by damage.

Dramatic Penalty:
One of the Sentry's four limbs loses power and goes limp. It must be clumsily dragged. Alternatively, it's single eye shorts out and it cannot see or use its Cyclopean Beam attack.
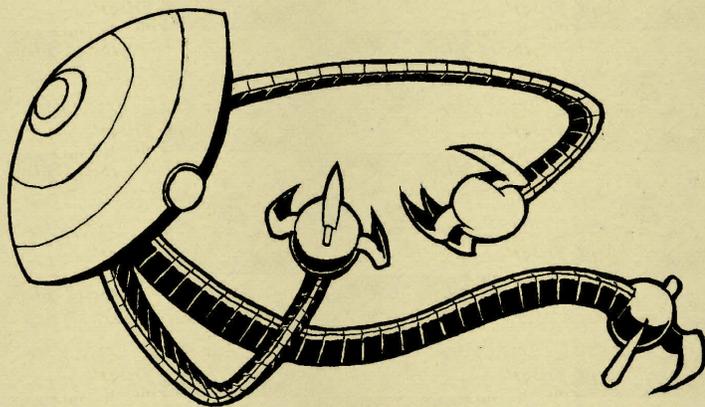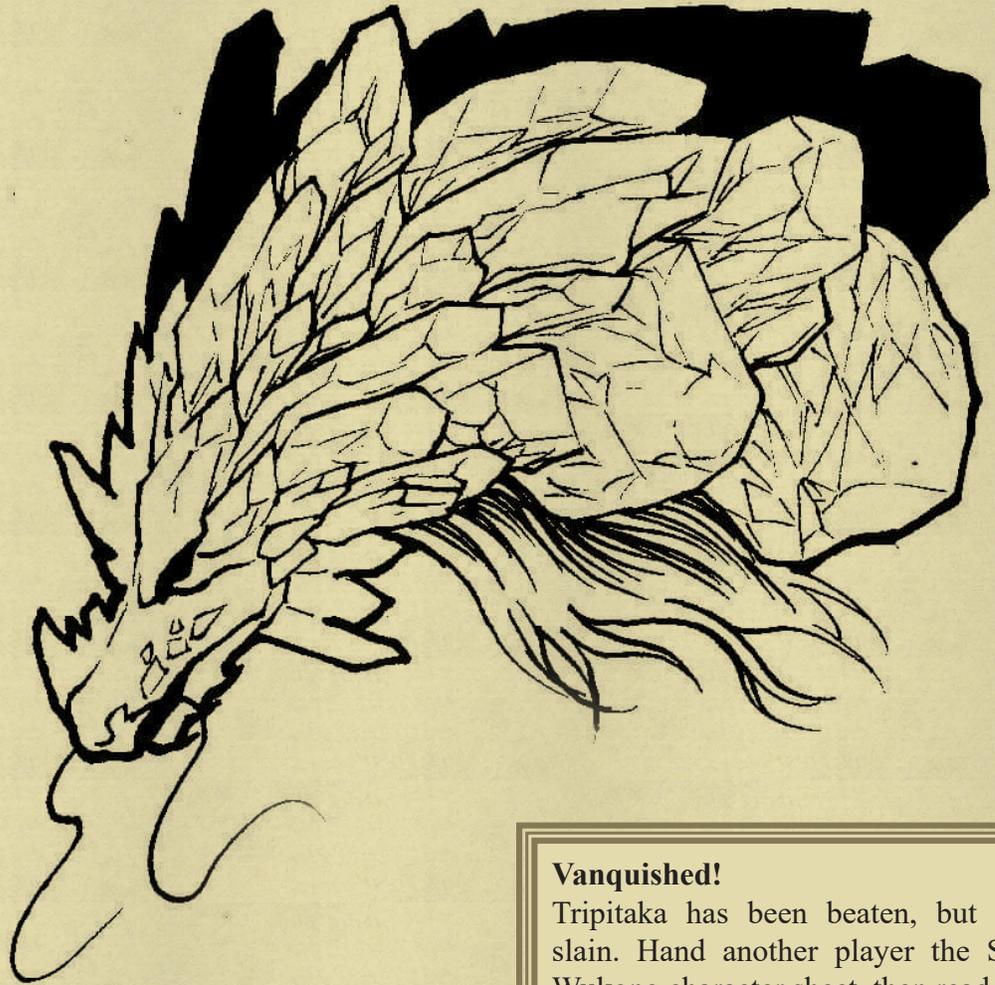
Tripitaka defeated:
The Sentry gets the better of our intrepid monk. Don't fret though: Tripitaka's holy blood awakens the dormant machinery, summoning the Monkey King to his aid. Read the Vanquished! Sidebar next.

Escape:
Although the Sentry fights until it is victorious or destroyed, Tripitaka may find a way to escape. However, he will have to return to awaken the Monkey King. This will allow him a chance to heal, as explained on (p. 31). Ultimately, he must destroy, outmaneuver, or otherwise overcome the Sentry to claim victory.

Awakened!
Within a crystal lotus cryo-chamber, Sun Wukong rests imprisoned by ancient techno-sorcery. When anyone with the DNA of Maitreya touches the crystal control panel (or when his blood spills on the ground nearby), the prison lotus is drawn out from deep within the mountain

Vanquished!
Tripitaka has been beaten, but not slain. Hand another player the Sun Wukong character sheet, then read the following aloud:

"The holy blood of the monk spills onto the stone. Deep within the mountain, ancient alarms whir into cacophonous life. With a deep rumble, the machinery recognizes the blood of the Maitreya and remembers its purpose…"

Now, run the Awakened! Scene with the following changes:

Tripitaka begins the Scene unconscious. He will recover his Health and get back on his feet when Wukong awakens, although he must contend with any Imbalances he has received.

Emphasize to Sun Wukong's player that his crown is commanding him to save the monk's life, on pain of death.

and shatters, releasing him. He begins to thaw and is active within moments. He begins play with the Imbalance Eternity of Ice.

Eternity of Ice
(Rank 2 spiritual Imbalance)
A character suffering from this Imbalance is frozen both physically and spiritually. Their limbs are heavy, their flesh brittle: no speed or grace is possible while so enervated.
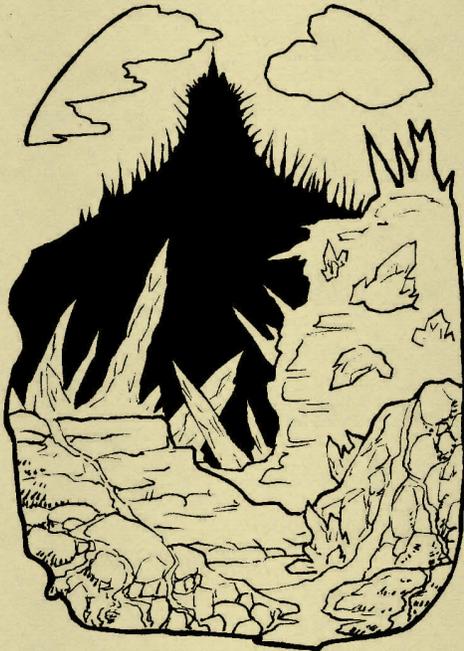
Dramatic Penalty: A player must describe their motions as ponderous, heavy and clumsy. Their breath fumes out in a frosty cloud and their flesh cracks and creaks with the ice of centuries.

Mechanical Penalty: -2 to Effort Pool.
Read the following (approximately) aloud:

"From deep within the mountain you hear the grinding of rusted machinery. An alarm of unfathomable antiquity roars into life. Suddenly the stone erupts, and a massive crystal and steel lotus explodes from the lone sandy patch on the mountainside.

The crystal cracks, and the supine form of a man-sized ape topples out. His fur is matted and frozen; frost rimes his eyes and mouth.

The alarm blares on and on, and from the many dark places of the peak three more sentries emerge, awakened to force the Monkey King back into his eternal prison."

Then, begin the next combat! This one pits the three newly awakened Sentries against Tripitaka and Sun Wukong, still groggy from his centuries of icy slumber.

New Rules for Battle 2

Wukong introduces a few new elements to the player's side of the table, which you should briefly highlight with your players.

First, Wukong has an Imbalance. Before rolling Effort Pools for the start of the battle, make certain to remind Wukong's player that they must choose between acting out his frozen handicap or rolling two fewer dice!

Don't be afraid to utilize the veto power you have over a player's proposed Actions to give the character's centuries of frostbite "teeth"!

Second, Wukong was frozen wielding his legendary weapon, the Ruyi Jingu Bang. It doesn't look like much; just a humble heap of strange metal with blocky patches of technology haphazardly cobbled on. But it has tremendous power.

In the first round, the weapon is too stiff to be used for much more than a heavy club; however, this is still an advantage!

Weapons have a special power that they bestow on characters similar to Technique. A specified number of times per round, the character may harness this advantage free of any Prana cost. In the case of a Heavy weapon like the Ruyi Jingo Bang, it adds +1d10 (one rolled die) Damage to all of Wukong's successful attacks.

After the first round, the weapon fully reactivates, and all of its special features are accessible.

Some of these abilities strongly encourage interaction with the tactical infinity (specifically, the staff's power to extend as far as Wukong can sense opens up a world of creative hijinks).

Others encourage the use of some not-yet introduced rules. Its ability to grow to a massive size is best utilized with a Sustained Power Skill Action (p.36).

(As you'll recall, a Sustained Action is similar to the Skill roll that Tripitaka made earlier to climb the mountainside, with a key difference: it utilizes a Focus Slot to remain "on")

For example, if Wukong grows his staff to, say, the size of an oil drum, he could lift it and use it as a massive weapon if he utilized his Power Skill. He would need to achieve a minimum of Rank 2 to lift it (remembering that Wukong has Power Mastery and adds +1 Rank to his Power Actions for a total of Rank 3).

If he uses his Focus slot to Sustain this action, he can keep swinging this gigantic club every time he attacks: this adds +1d10 to his damage for every Rank required to lift it!

Wukong and Tripitaka may sustain any action that they wish, even retaining the bonus from their Mastery, so long as they have an unused Focus Slot (and so long as you deem it reasonable!) to dedicate to the task. Just remember to mark or place a counter on the Focus slot and note the Rank and type of action sustained.
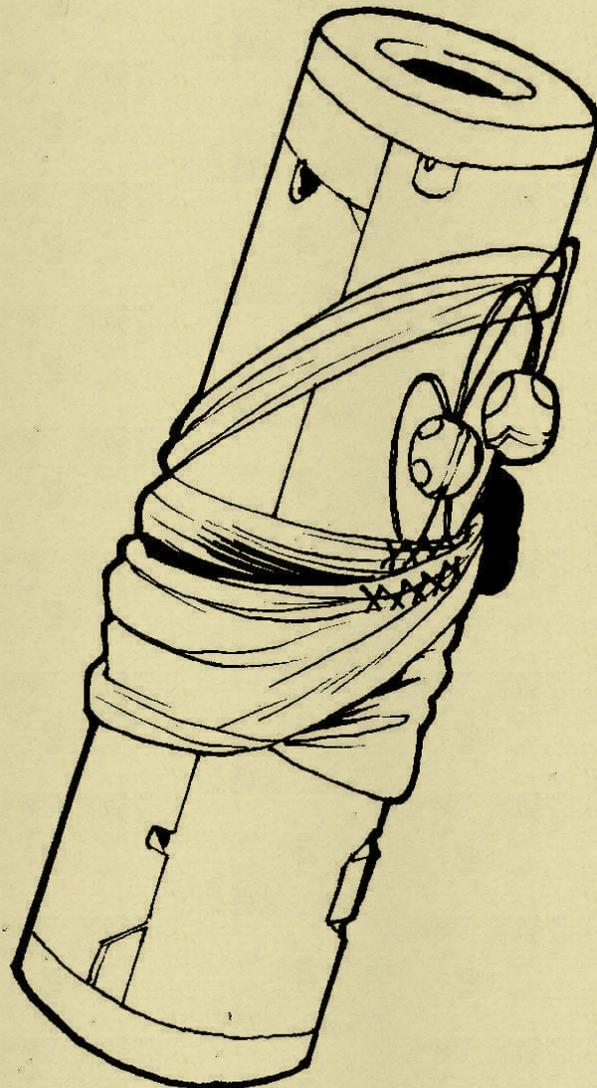
Gamemaster Rules Reference

What this section is for

This section is for GMs to familiarize themselves with the rules, and to reference to answer rules questions during play. It begins with a detailed breakdown of Combat, including the entire process from start to finish. It then covers rules which are introduced in the adventure but not fully describes, like healing, movement, stealth, and Imbalances. Finally, it provides the Effect Charts for the Power, Agility, Endurance and Senses skills.

Combat

Here are some important things to keep in mind about combat:

• Combats happen in "slow motion"; time is slowed to a crawl as players push their characters to their limits.

• Combats have a consequence for inaction. This might be danger (if you don't defend yourself from an attack, you're injured), but might manifest as a lost opportunity (If you don't grab the Five-Heart Manual before your rival, they'll get it and you won't!).

• They proceed in Rounds. Rounds represent just a few heartbeat's worth of time. They are highly structured, proceeding in a very strict order outlined below.

Start of the Round

When any character decides to use violence, this triggers the start of a round of combat. There's no "I attack before they know what's hit them!"; if you try to attack, everybody present gets to join. The process of combat contains all the sneak-attacking and similar strategies; you can't bypass it.

Characters don't have to join the fight; they can be spectators. This could leave them defenseless in the face of an attack if somebody wants to draw them in, however, so it isn't advised!

We'll refer to characters participating in the conflict as combatants. When someone launches an attack at someone else, we'll call them the attacker, and the poor sap getting attacked as the defender.

1. Round Begins

The inciting event which begins battle is any person deciding to use violence to achieve their goals. Insults, threats, posturing, and similar saber-rattling aren't enough: Combat only begins when at least one character crosses that line between threat and violence.

Every character present decides now if they're going to act. If not, skip them in future steps.

Below is the full breakdown of how the steps of a round manifest in combat.

2. Imbalance decision

Next, any combatants with Imbalances have a tough choice to make.

For each Imbalance, they must decide if they'll take its Mechanical Penalty (which will reduce one of Effort Pool, Focus Slots, or available Chakra this turn) or its Dramatic Penalty (Which will limit what their actions can do).

The Imbalance rules are on (p.31): reference those during this step.

3. Roll Effort

Every combatant rolls and organizes their Effort Pool. There is only one roll per round. The dice are a limited and important tactical resource. There are a few notable things to point out here:

• Even ambushed or "unaware" characters get to roll. Why? Because they're badasses and they can react to total surprise with a

nuclear roundhouse kick. Even 1-Effort die wielding schlubs might muster a desperate defense at the last second, so everybody gets to roll

• Combatants might be rolling less dice because of their Imbalances. Aren't you glad we made them decide if that happens before they rolled?

4. Initiative Bid

Starting with the GM and working clockwise, every combatant may submit a bid for Initiative out of their Effort Dice. Players may choose not to bid or replace an old bid with a higher one.

After everybody has bid, they can change their bid to out-bid one another. This starts with the GM and goes clockwise again. This process continues until everybody has submitted their final bids.

When you bid again, you replace your initial bid with your new bid. You must bid higher than your previous bid; you can't submit lower bids. Only your highest and final bid counts; replaced bids are re-added to your Effort pool (you just swap them with your new bid).

Characters who do not bid go last. Multiple characters who don't bid tie in last place.

Characters that tie roll 1d10 for their action order, re-rolling ties until a winner emerges.

Once the bidding is complete, all bid dice are spent. Going before a foe is a considerable advantage but must be carefully weighed against the cost of out-bidding them.

Once the Initiative Order is established, players take their turns in that order this round.

If the combat continues into future rounds, then new bids will determine the order in which players act in those rounds.

Changing Initiative: Character can voluntarily lower their Initiative to any number lower than their total. This can be done at the end of any player's turn, before any other turn begins.

5. Turns

Characters then act in the order established in the initiative bid.

During their turn, a character may take all the following actions:

• A single diceless Rank 0 action: This is commonly used to move (allowing movement between adjacent Battlefields, or some tactical movement within the same Battlefield, like taking cover or clambering up a ladder) or to do something critical but simple, like grab an important item or pull a lever.

• A single action, including attack, with 1 Effort die: This can be used as a weak attack, but might be used for some strategic purpose, such as operating a simple mechanism with Intellect or climbing a steep incline with Agility

• As many Defenses as they wish with 1 or more Effort: Characters may defend as many times as they wish with only 1 die.

• Any number of Bonus actions they wish, including attack, with a set of at least Rank 2. These actions are only possible with sets of 2 or more matching dice but are otherwise not limited. Characters that can produce a lot of Rank 2+ Sets enjoy a flurry of actions!

Diceless Rank 0 actions include:
• Moving with Agility: They can move up to an adjacent Battlefield. See Tactical Movement (p.30)

• Leveraging Power to move or lift things: They can move up to 50 lbs./25 kilos

• Any other action covered by Rank-0 in the Skill Effect Charts

Attacks, Defense and Damage
Here's how to launch an attack, defend yourself when somebody attacks you, and what happens if an attack gets through and causes damage.

Attacking
The attacker selects a Set to attack with. They can bolster this Set with Techniques which have the Offensive or Versatile keywords. Additionally, Weapons can modify attacks.

Defending
The defender now chooses how they defend. They can let the attack slam into them if they like, but that's usually a terrible idea given any other option.

Generally, they will wish to select a Set of their own to defend against the attack. They can bolster this Set with Techniques which bear the Defensive or Versatile keywords. Keeping in mind, a single die may be used to defend against attacks an unlimited number of times per round.

Damage
Subtract the defender's total Defense (Rank and Facing) from the attacker's total Attack.

A 0 or lower result is a successful defense. The attack has been rendered harmless by the defense

A Positive result is a successful attack and damages the defender.

Whatever positive result remains is taken by the defender as Damage. They must reduce it to 0 by "buying it down" with either Aura or Health. If they are unable or unwilling to do so, they are Vanquished See the full Aura and Health (p.30) and Imbalances rules (p.31).

6. Recovery
Characters recover their magical energy, Prana, in this step.

Every Chakra has a Recovery: this is how many Prana it generates for its Pool. The Pool is the total reservoir of mystical power it offers a character.

Open Chakra have a Recovery of 2 and a Pool of 10. They begin each scene filled with Prana.

Newly-Awakened Chakra don't add any Prana from their Recovery in the round they Awaken. Instead, they add Prana equal to the Facing of the set used to Awaken them. Their Pool is determined by the Rank of the Spirit action that awoke them; see the Awakening Slumbering Chakra section (p.30).

It's much easier to spend Prana than to recover it. Characters must shepherd their mystical power carefully, or else they may find themselves tapped out of magical power when they need it the most.

7. End of Round
The round closes out. This is when any round-long effects expire.

This is also when combatants can end the combat if they so choose. If, at the end of a round, no character present continues to try using violence, then combat ends.

Even one remaining violent character can drag everybody into another round of combat. But, if a mutual peace is decided, this is when the fighting ends.

Sneak Attacks, Holds, Throws

Here are some additional things which can happen during combat.

Sneak Attacks

Senses can be used to hide and launch sneak attacks.

Attacking from complete surprise increases your initiative bid by 1 Rank.

Any attack launched from stealth has a powerful advantage: Defenders cannot use most Techniques to bolster their defense against it. They must rely on defenses from their Effort pool alone.

Techniques that bolster Senses can be used to defend against surprise attacks. Other prized defenses can defend against them as well; these will describe their defensive capabilities.

A hidden character will reveal themselves by attacking or performing any conspicuous or noisy action. Using a Subtle weapon does not forfeit the benefit of Stealth: these weapons are prized by assassins!

Once revealed, the character is revealed to everyone in the Scene and must take a Senses action again to regain the benefits of being hidden.

Holds

Rather than dealing damage, a successful attack may be used to Grab a foe. If the attack overcomes the foe's defense, record it's original, unreduced Rank: this determines the difficulty to break the hold. Unlike normal attacks, Holds may be Sustained.

A held character's movement is dictated by the holding character. Generally, they are held still or thrown (p.27). They can instead be dragged along as the grappling character moves. It's also possible to hold a foe's head under water to drown them, among other creative strategies.

Breaking a Hold: The held character must overcome the Rank of the Hold to escape (this is a Power action, so Mastery may apply)

An attack against either character in a hold that exceeds the hold value may break it and send both characters sprawling, at the attacker's discretion. This means that a character can smash a friend out of an enemy's hands, like hitting a baseball from a tee. Their friend would have to contend with the damage from the strike, however!

If multiple characters grab one another, then only use the highest result rolled for the sustained action. Characters that voluntarily entered the hold may do so at any time, while those who were drug in against their will must break the action as usual.

Throwing

When you attack a foe, you may use a Power action to hurl them into nearby scenery (or launch them to the horizon).

After you declare your attack but before they declare a defense, use a Power action to "empower" the attack. This adds kinetic force to the final strike, but does not otherwise change the attack's result nor its damage.

If the foe manages to successfully defend against the empowered attack, the extra kinetic force is wasted. If they are struck, however, it launches them! Furthermore, Grabbed foes may be subject to throwing without defense.

If the thrown foe is "aimed" towards a target within the same Battlefield, then:

They are thrown violently in a direction of your choosing!

Any impacted structure takes damage as though the empowering Power action were used to break them. This can result in the defender smashing through several weaker objects before colliding with a structure sufficiently tough to halt their momentum!

If aimed and thrown for distance (or if no structure is sufficient to halt their progress), the unfortunate defender hurtles toward the horizon, traveling a distance equal to an equivalent Agility action to move!

When the defender impacts a structure of sufficient resilience to halt their flight,

or when they reach the terminus the their movement, hey take 1d10 damage per Rank of the Power action you used to throw them. This is taken in addition to the damage from the empowered attack!

Tactical Movement
Tactical movement happens when you're measuring every second of your movement; maybe you're being chased, maybe you're fighting for your life, maybe the building you're in is collapsing. In any case, you've got to book it!

Here's the process for tactical movement:
• The GM describes your immediate surroundings, including any foes, obstacles, hazards, or other notable elements you see.

• They then describe neighboring Battlefields you can perceive.

• You describe how you're hiding in, running through, climbing, breaking, or otherwise strategically dealing with your surroundings.

• The GM describes the outcome of your efforts.

Because tactical movement generally happens in combat, the speed of the movement is more likely to be measure in terms of Agility actions.

Characters using Agility to move tactically bob and weave through the obstacles of battle with grace and panache. They use acrobatics, parkour, sprinting, and other gymnastic movement to overcome obstacles and distance.

The Rank of their action determines the grace, speed and distance of their movement:

0-Normal human movement and agility. Characters can jump half their height vertically or twice their height horizontally without significant effort. You move fast and far enough to maneuver within or across a single Battlefield during your turn, but not both.

1: Superior human athletics. With significant effort, characters can leap their height vertically or four times their height horizontally. This allows them to bound over significant obstacles. You're fast enough to move through a Battlefield and within a second during your turn.

2: Olympian effort. Exceptional characters can leap twice their height vertically or six times their height horizontally. This is enough to scale buildings in a few bounds. You can move through two Battlefields and maneuver within a third with this incredible speed.

3: Beyond-human athletics. Characters achieving this rank can leap several stories in a bound. This allows them to cleanly traverse most obstacles at a whim. You can move through three Battlefields and maneuver within the fourth with this speed.

4: Superhuman movement. This rank leaps tall buildings in a single bound. Two Battlefields can be cleared with a leap of this power. You can move through five Battlefields and maneuver within the sixth with this speed.

5: Titanic stride. This speed allows a character to streak across seven Battlefields in a single instant.

6+: Journeys of an eyeblink: Characters moving at these velocities completely depart measurement in Battlefields and begin to circumvent entire countries with their movement. They sprint through long journeys in the beat of a butterfly's wing. Such legendary speed is beyond the scope of this module.

The places moved through are called Battlefields. They're described in terms of their Terrain and Elements: Terrain is what

the ground (or equivalent medium moved through) is like, while elements are things present in the area.

Terrain can affect what movements are easy or even possible. You can't really run underwater, and you can't swim up a concrete staircase. In effect, players must describe their movement in terms of the Field's terrain. Sometimes this is just flavorful, but it's often tactically important; to give one example, it's not so difficult to run with a broken arm, but swimming is next to impossible.

Elements also open up (or limit) strategic possibilities. A massive dead tree would require circumvention (limiting the strategic option to flee) but would make an awesome sledgehammer for a super-strong character (opening up an intimidating weapon option)!

In both cases, the Tactical Infinity leads the gameplay: this is a place where sound, consistent judgement from the GM is vital.

GMs, use the Effect Charts (p.35-39), environmental destruction rules (p.36) and other elements of the mechanics that allow you to make game-elements from your descriptions. This turns an interesting description from you into a tactical landscape for the players, creating a rich and satisfying blend of imagination and gameplay.

Note the hyper-detail at play in tactical movement: players must consider everything in terms of how it affects their movement. This is useful for combat and chase scenes, but as mentioned before is a great way to represent any tense situation. For example, carefully sneaking through an area loaded with foes or monsters would use these rules, even though the character's pace is much more measured than usual.

Weapons

When using a weapon, characters gain a bonus to a single attack representing the unique edge it grants them. These advantages enhance actions, similar to Techniques. However, except for Unarmed strikes, they may not create Bonus actions. The advantage offered by a weapon can be accessed freely once per round. Additionally, it can be used to enhance additional actions if Prana is spent at the listed Cost.

The advantages and the types of weapons which grant them are listed below.

Balanced: Such as swords; these perfectly honed killing instruments are the kings of weapons, coveted and feared by warriors. Offense (may only boost attack) Rank +1. Cost 6

Reflexive: Sai, Staff, and shield are used primarily for defense, rather than attack. Defense (may only boost defense) Rank +1. Cost 4

Flexible: Chains and other entangling weapons, like nets; used to grab and entrap foes. Grab (may only boost grab) Rank +1. Cost 5

Reach: Spears and similar strategic weapons, used by skilled combatants to control the flow of battle. Initiative +1d10; evoked once for free, but may be evoked again for cost. Cost 3

Heavy: Hammers and other massive, blunt objects used to crush bones and pulverize the foe; they are exceedingly easy to use, able to rely on both size and momentum. +1d10 Damage, adds to every attack at no cost. Cost 0

Ranged: Such as guns or bows, used to strike at a distance. Attack adjacent Battlefield/ any visible target. Cost 0/6

Subtle: Throwing Needles and other quiet, easily concealed and innocuous weaponry;

they are nearly harmless on their own, but often coated in deadly poison. Remain hidden when attacking. Max damage 1, but may be coated in poison. Cost 0

Unarmed: Strikes with fists, feet, elbows, even the forehead; the most fundamental weapons, able to attack freely and often in a flurry of blows. May Attack with a set of Rank 1 twice per turn. Cost 4

Improvised: A suitable substitute for the improvised weapon must be used (such as a parasol for a spear). It gains the abilities of the mimicked weapon but costs either 1 Effort Die (of any Facing) or 3 Prana every time it is used.

Awakening Slumbering Chakra

Although the full rules for Chakra are beyond the scope of this book, using Chakra in combat is so strategically critical that we detail it here.

Characters can Awaken their Slumbering Chakra on their turn. This require a Spirit Action of Rank 2 or higher.

The Rank of the Spirit Action used to Awaken them becomes their temporary Recovery for the rest of the combat. Their Pool becomes their Recovery times 5 (So a Recovery of 2 creates a Pool of 10, a Recovery of 3 becomes a Pool of 15, etc.)

Chakra Awaken empty, but during the Recovery step, they fill with Prana equal to the Facing of the set used to Awaken them. For example, if you Awakened your Chakra with a total of 26, they would have a Recovery of 2, a Pool of 10, and fill with 6 Prana during the Recovery step.

Aura and Health

Aura is possessed by characters of Degree 1 or higher. It is a mystic barrier of protective Prana that surrounds these powerful warrior, warping destiny in their favor and warding off harm. As they grow more powerful, their Aura increases in strength as well. Truly epic masters are nearly invincible.

Defenders may reduce incoming damage with their Aura. For every point of Aura they spend, Damage is reduced by 1.

Aura doesn't replenish until characters are able to rest and recuperate from battle. This makes it a resource which must be used frugally.

Characters also have Health Boxes representing their luck, vitality and general ability to shrug off injury. As they become more powerful, their bodies are battened on Prana, and so they get additional Health Boxes.

Each Health box contains 10 Health. Health can be spent to reduce incoming damage in exactly the same way as Aura.

However, whenever a Health Box is depleted of Health, the defender becomes injured; this either creates a Rank 1 Physical Imbalance or increases an existing one by 1 Rank.

The attacker chooses the specifics of the Imbalance, using the Imbalance guidelines. (p.33)

Being Vanquished and Death

The standard outcome of losing all your Health is being beaten messily unconscious, to recover at some later time: we call this being Vanquished. Characters might not be satisfied with this outcome; sometimes, they're out for blood.

Death is a big deal: It has its own special mechanic., the dreaded Death Token.

Characters don't die in most circumstances where they're injured or beaten. However, when the Death Token is present in a scene, all bets are off. Every danger becomes more dangerous, every risk riskier.

To introduce the Death Token, one of the following conditions must be met:

The GM must, at the beginning of a round, declare that Death is a possibility for the characters.

One of the Players must declare, on vanquishing an adversary, that they are killing them. This specifically includes vanquishing characters normally, then slaying them later while they're still helpless and unconscious.

At any point, a player proposes an action that the GM specifies will kill them (just put that token up there to show them how serious you are!).

In this way, only through GM warning or player bloodthirst can characters risk permanent death.

If Death is introduced, then it remains an outcome until the combat ends. While the Death Token persists, any character that Vanquishes another may kill them.

Healing

Characters tend to get battered during fights. Fortunately, because their Health represent the minor Damage, near misses, luck and endurance of a character, they recover quickly.

When a wounded character spends a scene resting and recuperating, they completely heal all Damage to their health levels.

Imbalances, however, represent severe injuries and are slow to heal. Healing these deeper wounds, such as Wukong's Frozen Imbalance, will have to wait until Act 2!

Imbalances

Damage to the Aura and Health are small potatoes; scratches and near-misses that recover quickly and have no lingering effects. But when you get really hurt, hurt so bad that you're left with a lingering wound, that's something else. That's an Imbalance.

Imbalances are wounds that hurt you so bad that your internal alchemy is altered. The mystical meridians of Prana are very real to the characters of this universe, and significant injury to the body and soul warps them. This twisting of their natural flow of life-energy is an Imbalance.

You might be asking: "Is this a physical or spiritual injury?"

It's both. Injuring the body disrupts the interaction of body and soul. Likewise, injuring the soul manifests physically as illnesses of the flesh.

What qualifies as an Imbalance?

In short, any physical or spiritual injury that has lingering consequences is represented through an Imbalance

Broken leg? Imbalance. Obsessed with something? Imbalance. Cursed by a Kappa to carry water on your head or dehydrate into a mummy? Imbalance (also yikes, tough luck)

Those are some pretty wide parameters. This is intentional, because we want to encourage players and GMs to come up with all variety of horrific consequences.

How do you get an Imbalance?

There are broadly two ways to get an injury so bad it becomes an Imbalance

1.- You spend the last Health from one of your Health boxes, blunting a fatal wound by taking a lesser injury (a Physical Imbalance)

2.- A skilled speaker or sage unbalances the vital flow of your Prana by sparking a powerful passion or mystical illness within you (a Spiritual or Emotional Imbalance)

What does an Imbalance do?

Imbalances limit the capabilities of

characters. However, they offer the player a choice of two ways that this can manifest:

The Mechanical Penalty: The more straightforward of the two penalties, this temporarily removes a player's access to one of their character's advantages. They might be a(n):

Effort Penalty: removes Effort dice prior to a roll
Focus Penalty: Seals a Focus Slot, so that Effort and actions cannot be stored in it (any Effort or actions currently stored are lost)

Closed Chakra: Closes a Chakra so that it's Pool and Recovery become 0

The Dramatic Penalty: The more esoteric of the penalties, this prevents players from describing their actions according to the manifestation of the injury. These can take as many different forms as a sadistic GM can imagine, so a comprehensive list is counterproductive. Some examples are included later (p.33).

When players choose the Dramatic Penalty, the GM is given special veto power over their actions within the scope of the injury. Guidelines for this are suggested in the Imbalance examples (p.33), but ultimately the GM has the final say over whether any proposed action is possible.

Whichever penalty is chosen remains until the player's next turn.

What determines how an Imbalance manifests?
The type of penalty is chosen by the creator of the Imbalance. This is the person landing the injurious blow or twisting their victim's heart or soul.

In the case of damage from the environment or NPCs this is the GM, but players can let their sadistic side show when their characters put the hurt on a foe.

There are boundaries to what Imbalances can do:

• Physical Imbalances created by otherwise mundane wounding must:

• Target a single limb (arm, leg), hampering movement and motor skill

• Harm the sense organs (sight, hearing), blinding or deafening the target
• Injure the head, disorienting and befuddling the mind

• Injure the torso, hurting the breath and bodily integrity

How bad is the penalty?
The Imbalance's Rank determines how steep of a Mechanical Penalty is taken.

Effort Penalties remove 1 die per Rank

Chakra and Focus penalties only seal a Focus/Chakra every two Ranks This means that odd-numbered Ranks (1,3,5) don't increase Focus or Chakra penalties; only even-numbered ones do (2,4,6).

Dramatic penalties are all-or-nothing; they never get worse nor better (until the Imbalance is healed). They start severe, so that characters are tempted to take the Mechanical penalties when they're still minor wounds.

As those penalties worsen, players are incentivized to take the Dramatic penalties, so they have some chance of mitigating their injuries through clever strategy and action descriptions.

How do Imbalances become worse?
Every time a character spends the last Health from a Health box, they either evolve a new Physical Imbalance or worsen an existing one by 1 Rank. The worse you get hurt, the worse your Imbalances get.

Emotional and Spiritual Imbalances, however, are evolved and worsened

differently. You can't take physical damage from a well-placed quip.

...Well, not normally. But you can if properly Aggravated.

Aggravation

Tripitaka's special Binding Prayer Strip attack creates an Imbalance and then worsens it by building Aggravation. This works as follows:

A manipulator (Tripitaka in this case) "attacks" with his Spirit skill, targeting the foe.

They defend with the same skill (Spirit) and only Techniques which boost that skill can be used to bolster their defense.

As with a normal attack, any positive number remaining creates "damage"

However, unlike physical attacks, these manipulations injure the soul, not the body: they can't Vanquish enemies, and foes can't mitigate them with Health.

Instead, the damage manifests as Aggravation

Aggravation is a measure of the disharmony caused in the foe's body by the emotional manipulation or curse. Aggravation builds with successful attacks and worsens an Imbalance.

When a manipulator creates Aggravation, it's "attached" to an Imbalance. This can be:
• An Imbalance of their own creation.
• An already-extant Imbalance.

If they create a new Imbalance, it begins with Aggravation equal to the "damage" dealt (the Spirit "attack" minus defense).

When Aggravation is between 1-9, the Imbalance is too weak to carry any Penalty: it is Rank 0. Such Imbalances are effectively harmless but can be further inflamed.

Once Aggravation equals 10 or higher, The Imbalance's Rank increases by 1. Furthermore, every 10 full Aggravation added increases the Imbalance's severity by another Rank (So at 20 Aggravation it becomes Rank 2, at 30 Rank 3, etc.)

Aggravation remains attached to the Imbalance until the end of the scene: then it reduces to 0.

Example Imbalances

Because the Mechanical representation of these injuries are covered under Mechanical Penalties, this section describes only the strict Dramatic penalties for these wounds. Note that these are not inclusive limitations; GMs still retain flexible veto power when you choose Dramatic penalties.

Injured arm:

An arm is damaged; maybe the bone is broken, maybe a tendon cut. It might even be completely severed. In any event, it's useless. This has the following effects:

• The character cannot use their Power Mastery, if any

• They lose free access to their weapons' benefits. They might still pay its cost to access them
• The arm can't be used for anything; no reaching, grabbing, catching, climbing, etc. If you want to open a door, you've got to use your good arm
• If both arms are injured: Tough luck buddy, both of your arms are too damaged to use! This has the following, even more severe effects:
• The character cannot take Power actions at all
• They also can't use weapons

They can't use either arm for anything, making even really simple object manipulation nearly impossible (you try eating spaghetti with your feet sometime)

Injured leg:
A leg is hurt; broken, sprained, or otherwise injured into uselessness. This has the following effects:

• The character cannot use their Agility Mastery
• The entire Agility chart "shifts up" by 1: Rank 0 actions now require a Rank 1 set, Rank 2 is now 3, etc.
• This means they must roll any time they wish to move at all

• The leg can't be used for anything. It's dead weight, getting drug around behind them.
• If both legs are injured: Both of your legs have been disabled by injuries; looks like you're in a jam! This has the following effects:
• The character cannot take Agility actions at all. Power may be used to drag yourself along, but it doesn't work as well (reduce your result by 2 Ranks and compare it to the Agility chart for movement)
• Defense is penalized by 10; any time you try to defend yourself, reduce your result by 1 Rank

You can't move your legs at all; you're stuck wherever you've landed (unless you pull yourself around or find an alternative method of movement)

Injured Eyes:
Your eyes have been injured, blinding you. This has the following effects:

• You can't see anything! You must rely on your other senses (hearing, touch, orientational awareness, etc.) to interact with and detect things.

Injured Ears:
Your ears have been injured, deafening you! This has the following effects:

• You can't hear! Although humans are primarily sight-based creatures, we still rely on our hearing for most communication and to give us information about things we can't see. You have to get by, lacking the awareness usually provided by your ears

Injured Torso:
Your torso has been injured. Maybe your lung was punctured, maybe your ribs broken; but somebody but the hurt on you bad. This has the following effects:
• You're in such pain that you must use one available arm to clutch your chest or stomach in agony
• Otherwise, double over in pain so that you can't move faster than a clumsy stagger

(unless you use Agility to move faster)
• Shift the Endurance chart up by 1 Rank; your injuries make any kind of endurance more difficult

Injured Head:
You've taken a blow to the head. This is disorienting and painful and has the following effects:

• Shift the Intellect Effect charts up by 1. You're not dumber, just disoriented and confused
• This means even remembering recent events or solving simple logic puzzles requires a Rank 1 Intellect action
• Your disconnection from reality makes using tools (aside form weapons) impossible.

Effect Charts
Thess scales describe the effect that Skills have at different ranks. Consult them when a character performs a Skill Action to determine its impact. Additionally, use them as a benchmark for the relative scale of phenomena both supernatural and mundane.

Characters may naturally achieve any result of Rank 6 or less through a combination of Focused or rolled Effort dice. To achieve Rank 7 effects, a minimum of a Novice-level Technique must empower the underlying Action.Rank 8 requires at least Expert.

The terrifying powers of Rank 9 and 10 may only be achieved with the use of Master and Ultimate Techniques: these dizzying tiers of achievement are beyond the scope of this book.

If a character could naturally achieve a result of Rank 7+ without the aid of Techniques, then the total result is limited to Rank 6. Achieving greater results requires bending the fabric of space and time to achieve the impossible; they need the mystical force of Prana to allow a mortal being to achieve them.

These restrictions do not apply to machinery or natural forces which could reasonably achieve the listed effects.

Power
The skill of raw physical strength. When characters use their muscles to lift, break, shove or otherwise leverage their sinew-studded frame, this is the skill they use.

Use Power when:

• Lifting and throwing heavy objects
• Improvising heavy weapons
• Shoving, pulling, dragging, or otherwise moving weighty loads

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Use Power when:
Lifting and throwing heavy objects
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Shoving, pulling, dragging, or otherwise moving weighty loads

Power Effect Chart
Rank 0 / Mortal: Unrolled Deadlift about 200 lbs./100 kilos, lift an adult human or manhole cover.Punch hard enough to break glass.

Rank 1 / Capable Mortal: Result 10-19 Deadlift about 500 lbs./200 kilos, lift a full drum of oil, or two adult humans Punch hard enough to batter down an oak door.

Rank 2 / Peak Mortal: Result 20-29. Deadlift about 1000 lbs./450 kilos, lift and throw a grand piano, or a cow. Punch hard enough to crack an oak tree in half.

Rank 3 / Enhance : Result 30-39, Deadlift a solid ton/ 1000 kilos, lift a motorcycle, or a polar bear. Punch hard enough to put holes in concrete.

Rank 4 / Superhuman: Result 40-49 Deadlift about 2 tons/2000 kilos, lift and throw an automobile; knock over an elephant with a standing shove. Punch hard enough to shatter a city street and send it's shards splashing into the sewer underneath.

Rank 5 / Titanic: Result 50-59 Deadlift about 23 tons/30,000 kilos, lift a train car. Punch hard enough to warp an I-beam and start a building collapsing.

Rank 6 / Minor God: Result 60-69 Deadlift about 55 tons/50,000 kilos, lift a tank, or a space shuttle. Punch hard enough to stop a locomotive going full-speed and crumple the engine like a used napkin.

Rank 7 / Demigod: Result 70-79 Deadlift about 300 tons/250,000 kilos, lift a barge, or pull a hydroelectric generator out of its moorings. Punch hard enough to reignite a dormant volcano: your fist is natural disaster.

Rank 8 / Major God: Result 80-89 Deadlift about 650 tons/600,000 kilos, lift and hurl a battleship, or push over a building with your bare hands. Punch hard enough to cause a city-leveling earthquake: you fist is a horseman of the apocalypse.

Heavy Weapons
Heavy objects may be lifted and used as crude weapons. Such colossal objects deal 1d10 additional Damage per Rank of Power required to lift them, but only if they successfully strike a foe. The dice are rolled and added to damage from the attack. For example, successfully smashing a foe with a polar bear (Rank 3 to lift) would grant +3d10 Damage!

For objects requiring Rank 5+ to lift, this damage increases by an additional flat +10 per Rank after 4. So a Rank 5 object (like a train car) deals 10+4d10 additional damage when it hit (Ouch!)

Generally, such improvised weapons are smashed on impact or dropped onto the foe at the attack's conclusion. If the Power Action used to wield the weapon is Sustained however, then the object may continue to be used as a massive weapon. Note that the Attack with the weapon must be made with a different action; you cannot use the same action for more than one purpose.

Shaping or Breaking the environment
Power can be used to break, warp, and otherwise re-shape materials into more useful forms. The harder the material, the more strength is required to shape it.

Alternatively, Power can be used to break things. Because sometimes it's just more expedient to kick through a concrete wall. Attacks aimed at the environment use this chart as well.

In either case, when players use Power to reshape or break the environment, consult the following chart to determine how hard of a material they can reshape/destroy:

Environment Destruction Chart
Rank 0 Break Glass: You can destroy windows and other highly destructible terrain features. Damage the most breakable things.

Rank 1-2 Break Wood: Totally shatter windows or put cracks into thick, solid oak with your fists. Break the most breakable things and damage hardier things.

Rank 3-4 Break Concrete: Punch through sturdy wooden walls or put cracks into concrete with your fists. Break sturdy things and damage incredibly sturdy things.

Rank 5-6 Break Metal: Knock down concrete pillars or dent steel with a kick. Destroy incredibly sturdy things or damage fortified things.

Rank 7-8 Break Magical Metal: Punch through a steel bulkhead or warp adamant with the force of your blows.

Destroy fortified things or damage nigh-indestructible things.

For rank 0-4 actions, the amount of material reshaped/broken is up to the size of a person. For every category by which the action exceeds the minimum number, roughly double this amount. For example, a Rank 1-2 action could destroy an entire wall made of glass, while 3-4 could shatter the side of a glass building!

Rank 5+ actions begin to divert from this scale because of the inhuman level of kinetic energy carried by an action of this magnitude. Aiming a Rank 5-6 Power action at a structure's load-bearing points will cause it to begin collapsing, causing a Hazard or a Disaster. Rank 7-8 Power actions aimed at the environment cause Earthquake-scale disasters.

Agility
The skills of balance, nimbleness, and speed. When characters need to move fast or far, when they need to tightrope walk across a power line; when they need to dance through a hail of bullets, they use this skill.

Use Agility when:
• Moving tactically
• Travelling fast
• Balancing or performing gymnastics

Agility Effect Chart
Rank 0 / Mortal: Unrolled Stand on one leg, jog at a moderate pace, dodge a thrown ball.

Rank 1 / Capable Mortal: Result 10-19 Walk a balance beam, run at about 12 mph/20 kph (as fast as a normal human's top running speed), dodge thrown punches.

Rank 2 / Peak Mortal: Result 20-29 Perform complex gymnastics and tumbling, run at 28 mph/ 45 kph (the fastest recorded human running speed), dodge sword swings.

Rank 3 / Enhanced: Result 30-39 Perform jaw-dropping feats of acrobatics, run at 60 mph/ 100 kph (as fast as a cheetah at a sprint) Dodge a bullet.

Rank 4 / Superhuman: Result 40-49 Walk through a rainstorm without touching a drop of water, run 260 mph/ 400 kph (as fast as a modern sports car at top speed), dodge automatic weapon fire from point-blank range.

Rank 5 / Titanic: Result 50-59 Dance through an inferno without catching fire, run at 750 mph/ 1200 kph (the current land speed record), dodge a falling star in midair.

Rank 6 / Minor God: Result 60-69 Brachiate from clouds, or balance on a surface that cannot support your weight (such as water or a leaf), run fast enough to shatter the sound barrier (exceed Mach-1), dodge a railgun shot.

Rank 7 / Demigod: Result 70-79 Fly by surfing air currents like a wave, traverse a small country in forty heartbeats (exceed Mach-2), dodge a laser canon's blast.

Rank 8 / Major God: Result 80-89 Fly by swimming through the air with perfect 3-dimensional movement, outrun the fastest fighter jet (exceed Mach-3), dodge a bolt of lightning.

Tactical movement
Moving vertically and jumping large distances is part and parcel for the kung-fu heroes in this game. When characters need to push themselves to superhuman levels of mobility, this requires an Agility action. This is covered in the Combat section (p.28)

Endurance
The skill of resilience, staying power, and toughness. When characters need to push their limits, resist harmful phenomena, or survive inimical circumstances, they use this skill.

Use Endurance when:
• Withstanding hardships
• Prolonging strenuous activities
• Enduring deprivation

Endurance Effect Chart
Rank 0 / Mortal: Unrolled Withstand extended exposure to sunlight on a hot day, prolong demanding physical activity for several minutes, endure hunger or thirst for hours.

Rank 1 / Capable Mortal: Result 10-19 Withstand scorching sun or freezing winds, prolong demanding physical activity for hours, endure hunger or thirst for one day.

Rank 2 / Peak Mortal: Result 20-29 Withstand deadly atmospheric heat and cold, prolong strenuous physical activity for days, endure starvation for two weeks and dehydration for four days.

Rank 3 / Enhanced: Result 30-39 Withstand being set on fire or plunged in freezing water, prolong punishing physical exertion for weeks, endure oxygen deprivation for an hour.

Rank 4 / Superhuman: Result 40-49 Survive being baked or frozen, prolong physical activity that would kill a bull for weeks, endure a vacuum or the crushing depths of the ocean.

Rank 5 / Titanic: Result 50-59 Survive within a bonfire or immersed in liquid nitrogen, prolong physical exertion equal to a bulldozer for over a month, endure a caustic chemical or acid bath unscathed.

Rank 6 / Minor God: Result 60-69 Survive wading through molten lava or drifting through the cold vacuum of space, prolong the energy output of a locomotive train for several months, endure any disease no matter how fatal.

Rank 7 / Demigod: Result 70-79 Survive immersion in molten steel, prolong the equivalent energy output of a jet turbine for a year, absorb the kinetic force of a dynamite explosion by shielding the blast with your body.

Rank 8 / Major God: Result 80-89 Survive a nuclear meltdown, prolong the equivalent energy output of a power plant for years, endure an atomic explosion.

Sustaining Actions
All actions sustained during a scene are typically released when that scene ends. Endurance actions are an exception to this: they can remain longer, as exhibited on the Effect Chart.

Additionally, a sustained Endurance action may be "dedicated" to prolonging any other sustained action. This requires one Focus slot for the original action, and one for the prolonging Endurance action.

So if you desperately need to hold that mountain above your head for a week, you'll need at least two Focus Slots.

Senses
The skill of the five senses, situational awareness and physical subtlety. When characters need to get information about their surroundings, move and hide, or notice minute detail, they use this skill. Use Senses when you must:

• Hide or sneak
• Detect anything with the five senses
• Gather details from your environment

Senses Effect Chart
Rank 0 / Mortal: Unrolled Observe any obvious thing with the five senses. Hide in a perfectly concealing spot, like behind a concrete wall or inside a chest

Rank 1 / Capable Mortal: Result 10-19 Notice subtle or hidden details, like the outline of a hidden door or a camouflaged soldier. Hide in a reasonably concealing spot, such as deep shadows or a dense shrub

Rank 2 / Peak Mortal: Result 20-29 Notice well-hidden or extremely subtle details: you could uncover a spy's false identity by observing their body language or smell a poison in cooked food. Hide in a partially concealed spot, such as a dim room with no furniture or sparse vegetation

Rank 3 / Enhanced: Result 30-39 Use a hyper-elevated sense to substitute for another, such as using echolocation to "see" in complete darkness or scent to sense the emotional state of another through their pheromones. Hide without camouflage by unobtrusively occupying your environment, minimizing your shadow, and angling your body to flow with your surroundings

Rank 4 / Superhuman: Result 40-49 Push your senses to mind-boggling levels; see the tiniest flea, or to the limit of the horizon with perfect detail; hear every conversation within a city block with absolute clarity; feel the minute imperfections in soil from hundred-year-old tracks. Hide from the mind's eye; even as the most noticeable detail of your surroundings, the mind refuses to see you unless you draw attention to yourself

Rank 5 / Titanic: Result 50-59 Push past the membrane of senses to the truth that underlies them; see through solid objects with x-ray vision; "see" the layout and all inhabitants of a complex by feeling the vibrations in its wall; determine the exact chemical composition of anything via smell. Hide by walking behind light and thus becoming invisible, save for a feint blur of motion when you move

Rank 6 / Minor God: Result 60-69 Detect details as the most sensitive of scientific instruments; you can focus your eyesight as keenly as a telescope or microscope, flawlessly revealing the mysteries of astral and molecular reality. Hide from mechanical detection; x-rays, radar, sonar, thermal imaging, etc.

Rank 7 / Demigod: Result 70-79 Perceive the rough shape of the fabric of time. In addition to the present, you may perceive any event in the past or near future with the same subatomic scrutiny as the previous rank. Hide from the past, diminishing your importance in memory and historical records so that your identity vanishes from the world's recollection

Rank 8 / Major God: Result 80-89 Perceive the fabric of time and reality in great definition; you can perfectly perceive any place, no matter how concealed, on the same planet as you as though you were observing it directly. You could see through the planet's crust and core to the other side, or backwards in time to witness the past as clearly as the present. Hide from the weft of fate, so that you cannot suffer Zui consequences or be detected by any magic

Stealth

A character may hide with a Senses action. They cannot be observed or attacked until they are detected by another character's Senses action of equal or higher result.

Characters must have appropriate cover to hide, as specified on the Effect Chart. A character may move within cover but may not leave it without losing its protection.

From stealth, characters may launch Sneak Attacks, as described in the combat section (p.26)

Pre-generated Player Characters

These are the characters that star in this introductory adventure. Everything a player needs to play are on these character sheets, including a brief introduction to each character and an overview of their values and motivation.

We advise that you review the rules for Effort Pool, Focus, Chakra, Skill Mastery, Health, and Equipment so that you are ready to answer any questions your players may have about their character.

Sun Wukong - Strong, Uplifted Animal, Degree 1

An immortal experiment from a terrifying age of genetic manipulation. He shook the pillars of galactic civilization and caused unheard-of catastrophe. He led a violent revolution of "enhanced" animals, nearly overthrowing even the Imperial armada until the intervention of the Maitreya, who sealed him into a cryo-chamber that slowed his powers and attempted to reprogram his volcanic mind. Has his reconditioning changed him enough to offer a true chance of redemption? Or will this failed experiment once again bring havoc to the cosmos?

Effort:
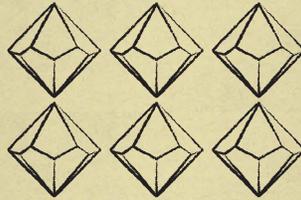
Focus:

Chakra: O S

Masteries: Power

Health: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Aura: ⑤
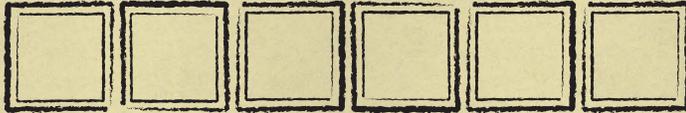
Techniques:

Shines of the Monkey:
Cost: 3 Rank: 1
Facing: Random
Power: Roll a d10 to create the Facing. This Technique counters another character's Skill, attack or defense action. Reduce their action's total by your result. If it becomes 0 or negative, it is cancelled.
Skill: Agility Tags: Versatileii

Fist of the Great Ape
Cost: 3 Rank: 1
Facing: 4-7
Power: If used to break or shape structures, objects or terrain, increase result by 1 Rank
Skill: Power Tags: Offensive

Giant Form
Cost: 15 Rank: -
Facing: -
Power: You transform, growing to the size of a rhinoceros! This grants you +1 rank to both Power and Endurance actions, and may include other actions at the GM's discretion. Damage from your attacks is increased by +10.
Tags: Sustainable.

Immortal Flesh
Cost: - Rank: -
Facing: -

Power: At the end of each combat round, roll a d10, regaining Health points equal to the result.

Item: The Crown of Command
This cruel-looking device takes the form of a set of black metal pylons anchored into your skull. It carries several powers and burdens: It cannot be removed without killing you (Thankfully, it is basically indestructible). You are always aware of Tripitaka's current position and health. If Tripitaka dies, the crown melts down and turns your brain into a radioactive lump of coal. Tripitaka can cause you unendurable pain simply by wishing it so. This immobilizes you and prevents you from taking any action until he deactivates it.

Weapon: Ruyi Jingu Bang
Type: Heavy (can transform into any type)
Powers: Can shift into any type of weapon (Balanced, Reach, Heavy, Subtle, etc.) at the beginning of any round or action. Can be called to its wielder's hand with a thought. Can shrink down to the size of a toothpick. Can extend to potentially limitless length. Cannot be willed to grow larger than the Monkey King can currently lift.
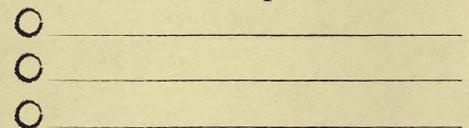
Imbalances Physical:
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
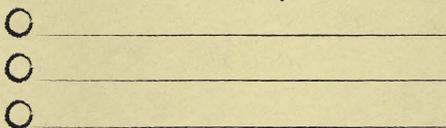
Imbalances Social:
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
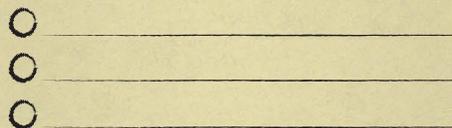
**Imbalances Spiritual:**
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____

Tripitaka - Enlightened, Ningen, Degree 1

A clone-monk programmed with a holy mission: to recover the lost texts that reveal the secrets of ancient Enlightened technology. He has been engineered by the sorcerer-scientists of the Vajra Lotus from remaining strands of the Maitreya's DNA, granting him synthetic holiness. Only time and tribulation will reveal if he can develop his own enlightenment from the artificial template of his soul.
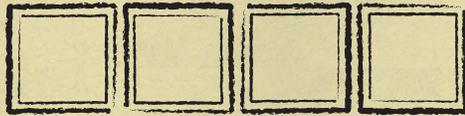
Effort:

Focus:

Chakra: O O S S
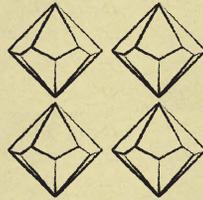
Masteries: Spirit

Health:

Aura: 6

Techniques:

Maitreya's Palm
Cost: 3 Rank: 1
Facings: 5-9
Power: Against Unholy beings, artifacts or architecture, increase Damage dealt by 10.
Skill: Agility.
Tags: Offensive. Holy. Ranged.

Shield of the Lotus
Cost: 2 Rank: 1
Facings: 1-5
Power: Creates a shield which defends against all incoming Attacks and other dangers. If this defense is overcome, the shield bursts and offers no further protection. Lasts until the end of the round.
Skill: Endurance
Tags: Defensive. Shield.

Ohm Mantra
Cost: - Rank: -
Facings: -
Power: This powerful Technique grants an additional Focus slot. This slot may only hold Effort dice with a facing of 6. It may not Sustain Actions or otherwise be utilized outside of this limited function.

Gupt Kala: Binding Prayer Strips
Cost: 5
Rank: 1
Facings: Any
Power: Spirit Attack. Generates Aggravation towards a Spiritual Imbalance. Generates and places a holographic Prayer Seal from Prana which adheres to the target. This Imbalance enforces one of the Six Virtues: Generosity, Discipline, Tolerance, Diligence, Contemplation, and Wisdom. Unholy beings cannot remove the Seal, but any other being can simply peel it off. Until the Seal is removed, the associated Imbalance cannot naturally heal.
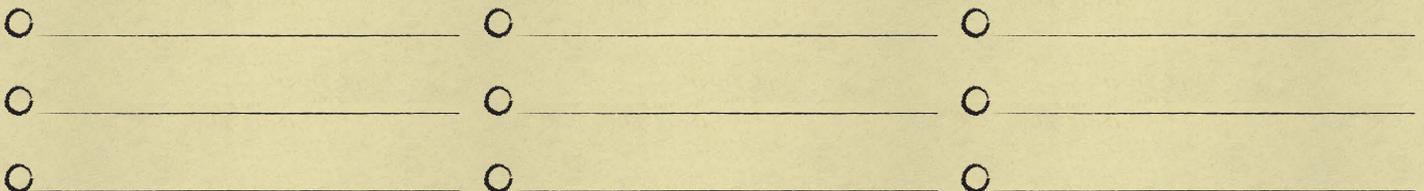Tags: Social. Holy.

Imbalances
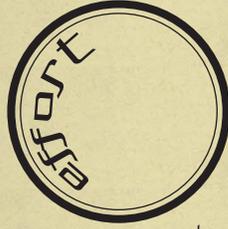
Physical:

Social:

Spiritual:

aura

power

endurance

agility

intellect

senses

heart

spirit

caste

archetype

character

player

focus slots

weapon

armor

health

imbalances

possessions

karma
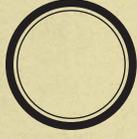
wood
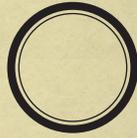
fire

earth

metal

air

water

yin

dharma

effort

pool

tian shang
all above heaven

chakra

heaven/hell
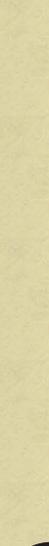
tianshang
all above heaven

Five
Emperors
Press