

Weapons of the Gods

AN INTRODUCTION FOR THOSE CURIOUS TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE CHINESE MARTIAL ARTS FANTASY RPG

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The way of roleplaying is hard! Ten thousand games praise their own greatness to the skies, yet could even a sage make sense of them all! However, your joss is good today, friend, for you will learn of the strongest of all the wuxia games, Weapons of the Gods! Pay close attention, and soon you will know it well – and then who could say that you are not a literati of the gaming world! Read on!

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Heroes of the Wulin

Weapons of the Gods is a game of wuxia adventure set in a mythic China familiar to anyone who's seen a martial arts movie. Players take on the roles of members of the Wulin – the Martial Arts World! – passionate men and women driven to seek conflict and achieve great deeds! Warrior-scholars whose genius unfailingly concoct peerless plans, cunning Daoist sorcerers, doctors whose kung-fu rivals their medicine, masters of hidden martial arts – who would not wish to make the tales of such heroes?

These are men and women that will be instantly recognisable to you from any wuxia movie or comic, humans who through dedication, hard work, and an endless drive to challenge themselves become mighty heroes! Even the least of them can run across water and protect their bodies with the force of their chi – what greatness will they achieve when they are in your hands?

Shen Zhou – the Land of the Gods

The name of the game itself refers to the unique and legendary divine weapons wielded by these heroes (from the Four-Virtue Sword, stained with the blood of an Emperor, to the Crystal From Heaven,

weapon of the Celestial Goddess herself!), and to the kung-fu comic upon which the game is based. Fans of the comic will find it easy to replicate its style, but those unfamiliar with it will find the game's focus on the character and feel of the setting over specific details renders it just as useful for any story of epic personalities clashing in a mythic China!

This game does not concern itself with the minutiae of who rules which town, or who exports fish where – instead, it concentrates on the rich mythic history of Shen Zhou, from the battles between the Enchanted Demon and the Celestial Goddess to the cruel but principled First Emperor, and the nature of the society and its traditions, from the filial duties of child and parent to the esoteric nature of Daoism. Yet how are events thousands of years in the past relevant to the kung-fu heroes of the day? Every scrap of setting is an explicit plot hook, so that in reading the text, you learn nothing that does not lead to exciting play!

Interesting Times

And how does the game play?

Weapons of the Gods does not mandate a certain style of play, but it provides strong incentive towards a proactive pursuit of the wuxia genre. A hero is never so great as when in conflict with a foe! The more attention a courtier pays to her surroundings, the more weapons she has in her arsenal of intrigue! Great rewards await those who seek out and make use of secret knowledge!





Any who wish to grow powerful must achieve great deeds, either virtuous or corrupt.

Thus the game encourages and rewards players actively engaging with the setting and being as active as possible – usually in the context of an action-packed kung-fu adventure! Heroic martial arts, cunning intrigue and secret knowledge is a harmonious state of play!

Four Pillars of Adventure

Of course, what game does not boast of its characters, and heights of fun as high as the clouds? A wise gamer such as yourself would not dream of judging a game before seeing its techniques! While they are described in detail later, let us highlight the key elements that make Weapons of the Gods the rival of any in the martial arts roleplaying world!

Engaging Combat: Naturally for a wuxia game, combat is a prime focus of Weapons of the Gods, and the conflict system does not disappoint. While not complex, it remains mechanically substantial enough to make battles tactically interesting, and contains a number of touches that evoke the wuxia style. The powerful kung-fu techniques available to all characters are powered by a constantly replenishing resource – chi – creating incentive to actually use kung-fu rather than hoarding resources; however, the mightiest techniques have a cost far exceeding the rate of replenishment.

This leads naturally to fighters using a variety of techniques and saving the most powerful for finishing moves, as you would expect from wuxia. Critical hits are very common, but inflict a variety of effects – such as disarming, entanglement, knockback – rather than doing any extra damage.

ensuring no battle is a simple exchange of actions and wounds.

The River mechanic allows players to store dice for use when they really need them – together, this results in frequent reversals. Characters usually only make one attack, and automatically defend, but they gain two free actions each turn for anything else (including Lightfoot, the marvellous kung-fu possessed by every character that allows feats familiar to anyone who has seen a film with wirework). In short, the combat system encourages interesting and dramatic combats between kung-fu fighters!

Deeds and Virtue: while, as with most games, players receive points to improve their characters with, their advancement is controlled through a system of deeds. Characters must perform a number of deeds recognised as both impressive and virtuous (though the virtues in question may be corrupt ones!) in order to advance in rank. This encourages players to be proactive in seeking out challenges and glory, to always be on the look-out for opportunities for impressive deeds! Retiring characters who do nothing cannot grow in power – instead, characters must pay attention to their virtues and do great things!

The Secret Arts: A unified system handles extraordinary abilities – whether they be tactical genius, medicine, Daoist sorcery or the intrigues of courtiers – through influences on the chi of their targets. Creating and manipulating these conditions is where the secret arts differ – a Predictionist or Genius might divine that a given course of action is auspicious, creating a hyperactivity in any who follow it; a Courtier may use a man's passion for a courtesan to create a balancing weakness; a Doctor might migrate a crippling headache to an illness of the spleen, and a Daoist

curse-master might use a spell to create a hyperactivity and a weakness as a matched pair from nothing. This system encourages players to proactively engage with the setting, looking for the best ways to use these influences, or existing influences to manipulate (a courtier is more likely to care about the tragic love affair between two NPCs if she can progress it along yin-yang lines to a new condition that benefits her!). Of course, there are a number of extraordinary techniques that can be used for short-term effects, so the Secret Arts are by no means useless in the heart of conflict, either!

Lore: Of course, who could keep player from reading every word of a rulebook? Yet then how can an atmosphere of treasuring secret knowledge be maintained? Weapons of the Gods presents the entirety of its rich setting in a format called Loresheets; the player knows everything they have read, but the character only knows it if they have purchased the appropriate Loresheet (of course, those containing common knowledge are free). Knowing such secret wisdom is most valuable, for each Loresheet contains further plot hooks in which to entangle oneself or one's enemies, the chance to gain treasures, join societies, learn secret techniques, or discover a powerful ancestry! This encourages players to quest after and value secret knowledge, and make dramatic use of it once they have it! Essentially, the setting material is a menu of adventure, from which the player may order as he pleases!

So, now we know that Weapons of the Gods is a game of epic wuxia adventure, that engages with dramatic combat, flexible and intriguing secret arts, and knowledge with real mechanical and narrative value! Yet how do the mechanics achieve these ends? How exactly is this incentive towards exciting wuxia play created? Read on!

Overview



Skill Rolls (page 9 of the MRB)

The core mechanic of the game is the skill roll. This is a roll using a number of dice determined by your character's rating in a skill to attempt to beat a difficulty, which is usually set by the game's referee/gamemaster – the Wulin Sage!

Kai Bei, a skilled young martial artist, wishes to impress the beautiful Yee Nan by striking a plum tree so that its blossoms fall to the ground in the shape of the character for "Beauty". The Wulin Sage determines this roll will use the Finesse skill, and that the difficulty is Moderate – that is, Kai needs to roll a 20.

When rolling, you're looking for sets of like-numbered dice. You choose a set to generate a result from, with the tens digit of the result being determined by the number of dice in the set, and the units digit being determined by the number showing on the dice. You can choose a set of one die, so you can't roll less than 10 (by rolling one zero, of course)!

Kai rolls 6 dice for the Finesse skill, displaying marvellous ability! He rolls 1, 3, 4, 4, 8, 9. His best set is two 4s, for a result of 24. This beats the difficulty of 20, so Kai has performed the feat and impressed the beautiful Yee! He could also have chosen to use the die showing 9, for a total of 19 (one 9), but that would have been a failure.

Often you will have bonuses or penalties to your skill roll, which are added to or subtracted from the result after you roll. Usually you only count the highest bonus and the greatest penalty, ignoring lesser ones.

If you beat the difficulty by more than 10, you have achieved a **Critical Success**, which in some cases (like Kung Fu) has a

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specific effect, and in others may mean the Sage gives you some extra benefits. Failing by more than 10 might be a **Critical Failure** - if it seems appropriate, the Sage will offer you some sort of bribe to experience a shocking failure!

Midnight Bei considers Yee to be a sister, despite being from differing clans, and is convinced her cousin Kai is no good for her! She sees his plum blossom trick and resolves to outdo him, seizing her magnificent heirloom flute and attempting to play a haunting tune to impress her "sister." The Sage rules this is at difficulty 20. Kai won't brook this, however, and attempts to throw Midnight off her game by hissing insults at her. Midnight's flute is an amazing instrument, and adds +15 to her roll, whereas the Sage rules Kai's insults are particularly choice, and levy a -10 penalty, so Midnight adds +5 total to her roll. If Midnight chose an appropriate song, or a bee was buzzing near her nose as she attempted to play, we'd ignore any bonuses or penalties from it unless they were higher than those already affecting her. She rolls her 5 dice for Perform, getting 3, 5, 8, 8, 8 - an amazing 38, +5 for a total of 43! This is a critical success, as it's more than 10 over the difficulty of 20, so the Sage declares Kai's blossoms are blown away by the music! Yee is most impressed.

What happens if you roll more than one set? On a basic skill roll, not much, but read on!

Conflict and the River (Page 9)

Characters in conflict are able to store dice from skill rolls to use later in the same scene. This store of dice is called the **River**. River is only useable in a scene where a character is in direct conflict (though not necessarily violent conflict) with one or more other characters - for instance, Kai above couldn't use the River to woo Yee when trying by himself, but with Midnight competing for her attention, he absolutely can! Dice from can only be taken into the River (**floating** the dice)

from sets of two or more

- it's OK to

take only a

a single die, but it has to come from a set of at least two, and it must be a skill roll. You can take any dice out of your river (flowing them) and add them to a roll after your roll (plus you can do it on any roll!). Usually this means making an existing set in the roll even bigger - truly we can only reach our greatest heights when striving against an opponent!

There is a specific order of actions for the River on any roll. You can skip steps, but not go backwards. First is washing, or discarding all dice in the River. Second is floating dice into the River. Third is flowing dice out of the River. That just means you can't boost a skill roll with your River dice and still end up with a full River!

The number of slots for dice in a character's River is determined by their Rank (see below) - starting characters have two slots in their River.

Yee sets the young heroes against each other directly, throwing a great armful of plum blossoms into the air with a single red ribbon mixed amongst them. The first of the pair to seize the ribbon will earn her company for tea! The Sage decides this is a Finesse skill roll at difficulty 30, but that an opposed Initiative skill roll must be made to see who gets the first attempt!

Kai and Midnight both roll 5 dice for Initiative. Kai rolls 1, 5, 7, 9, 9 - naturally, he uses the two 9s for a total of 29. Midnight rolls 2, 4, 5, 5, 8 - craftily, she takes the 8 for a total of 18, and floats the 5, 5 into her River. Kai had the higher of the two rolls, so he will get to try first!

Kai rolls his 6 dice for Finesse, getting 2, 2, 5, 7, 7, 9. Cursing, as he won't meet the difficulty of 30, he floats the 7, 7 into his River and uses the two 2s for a total of 22 - a failure, but not a critical failure. Midnight rolls only 4 dice for Finesse, getting 0, 3, 3, 5. Normally this would fail too, but she flows her 5, 5 into the roll, meaning she has three 5s - 35, a success! Note that she can't then take the two 3s into her River, as you must float before you flow.

Midnight runs up Kai's back and dives along his arm to seize the ribbon that had just been out of his reach! Yee smiles appreciatively, but Kai cries "Cheat!"

Joss (pp. 11, 13)

Joss is a mechanical representation of luck, good or bad. **Xia Joss** is good luck, and can be spent to roll an additional die on any roll after you've seen the roll. **Corrupt Joss** is bad luck - for your foes! - you can spend it before someone makes a roll to deduct a die. Joss is earned in three main ways. Whenever you use a set of 0s on a skill roll, you earn a point of joss - Xia if you succeed, Corrupt if you fail (on contested rolls, compare your total to the highest total opposing you; for instance, when rolling Initiative in combat, characters on your side don't count!). The Sage can give Joss when she pleases as a reward for good play or Deeds (see below). Each player can also give one point of Joss per session to another player for doing something cool.

Attributes (page 36), Skills & Specialisations (page 37)

How then does one know how many dice to roll for a skill roll? The answer is a combination of skill, specialisation, and perhaps talent. Each skill has a rating from 0 to 5 - you begin with that many dice. You can have specialties in skills - for instance, "Swords" is a valid specialty in Melee - and each relevant specialty adds a die, to a maximum of two dice from specialties. Finally, each skill belongs to one of the five Attributes (Might, Speed, Presence, Genius and Wu-Wei), which is rated from 1 to 5 (or sometimes higher!). These are primarily used to determine your chi (see below), but if the relevant attribute is equal to or higher than the number of dice you get from skill and specialties, you get a bonus die.

Kai has a Fight skill of 4, meaning he starts with 4 dice. He has a specialty in Fight of Palms, meaning he adds another die when making palm strikes, for a total of 5 dice. Finally, his Might, the attribute Fight belongs to, is 5, which is equal to his Fight + Specialty, so he gets one more die for a total of 6.

This is relevant, since having accused Midnight of cheating, he has a fight on his hands! The way of love in the Wulin world is hard!

Combat: Artful/Brutal (pp. 67-68), Initiative (page 69), Actions (page 69)

Midnight rolls through the plum blossoms, rising into a battle-ready posture, her fighting spirit rattling the tree branches! "How dare you! I am no cheat, it is just your skills are so poor that any contest with you looks too easy! Do you have the courage to come here and prove me wrong?"

She holds her heirloom flute at the ready, revealing blades cunningly hidden in its ornamentation. Without a word, Kai charges, relying on fists alone!

There are two types of close combat weapons - Artful, which uses the Melee skill (usually blades and other skillful weapons), and Brutal, which uses the Fight skill (usually clubs and blunt objects, including fists and feet). You may only use Artful kung-fu with Artful weapons, and Brutal kung-fu with Brutal Weapons.

Ranged weapons are their own type with special rules discussed below. There are also mixed types (Artful/Ranged or Artful/Brutal, for instance), which allow you to freely mix kung-fu of the appropriate types.

Midnight's flute is Artful. Kai's fists are Brutal.

At the beginning of each combat round, all participants make an Initiative skill roll. The character with the highest total goes first, and then the next highest,





and so on in descending order. If you have a weapon drawn, you get to add the Speed trait of the weapon to your Initiative skill roll.

We know from earlier that Kai and Midnight both roll 5 dice for Initiative. However, Kai has an advantage – the speed of fists is +15, whereas Midnight’s flute is only +5. Kai rolls 2, 4, 4, 5, 6 and takes the 6 (floating the 4, 4) for a total of 31 (one 6 +15). Midnight rolls 3, 5, 8, 8, 9 and takes the 9 (floating the 8s) for a total of 24 (one 9 +5). Kai is faster to react!

Each character gets one full action and two free actions each turn. Most skill rolls, including attacks, are full actions. Free actions tend to be very easy things, like shouting insults or dramatic flourishes, as well as purely mental tasks of difficulty 18 or less. Sometimes a full action becomes a free action on a critical success (normally you can move 10 yards per round without it counting as any kind of action, but you can make an Athletics skill roll to cover more ground. This is a free action on a critical success).

Kai stamps the earth dramatically, ceasing the vibrations of the branches – a free action. He then tries to cover the 20 yards to Midnight (difficulty 20), and rolls a 33 – a critical! Critical success on covering ground makes it a free action, otherwise Kai would have used up his full action, and not been able to attack. This time, however, Midnight’s luck has run out, and a palm blurs towards her!

Combat: Attack & Defense (page 70), Result Dice & Hurting People (page 71)

An attack is a skill roll, with the Strike trait of your weapon added as a bonus to your roll. When attacked, you may automatically oppose the attack with an appropriate skill – usually your weapon skill or Dodge, also adding your weapon’s strike as a bonus if appropriate.

Kai rolls his Fight skill, getting 0, 1, 3, 4, 4, 7. The strike of palms/fists is only +0, but he still has those 4s in his River, which he flows, getting a total of 44! Midnight automatically opposes with her Melee skill – and her flute has a strike of +10! She rolls 3, 4, 6, 7, 7 for a total of 37. Kai wins by 7 and strikes her!

Damage is determined by a concept known as result dice. For each five points or fraction thereof by which you beat the difficulty, you get one result die. In the case of damage, you roll these dice, adding the weapon’s damage trait as a bonus, and subtracting the value of the target’s Armor as a penalty. The result is subtracted from the target’s health.

Health is determined by the total of your attributes – usually 15 for starting characters. Each time you take your full health in damage, you gain a penalty, usually a small penalty to all actions and a larger one to actions involving mobility (noted on your character sheet – take a look!), and lose your breath in a color of chi (see below). If you take more than five times your health in damage, you die.

Kai succeeded by 7, which is one full unit of 5, plus a fraction, and hence 2 result dice. His damage modifier for fists is –5, and Midnight wears medium Armor, giving an additional penalty of –5. He rolls his two dice, getting 2, 8 – his best result is 18, or 8 after penalties. This is less than Midnight’s health of 15, so she doesn’t take penalties – yet. First blood to Kai!

Combat: Chi Aura (page 71) and Jade Healing (page 73)

Armor isn’t your only defense against damage – members of the Wulin can also oppose damage with their **chi aura**. This is a pool of dice that refreshes each turn, and can be spent by rolling as opposition against damage. You can roll as many dice as you wish up to your total chi aura against a single attack, but those dice are spent until they refresh at the end of the turn.

Like River, chi aura is tied to rank. Starting characters have chi aura 2. Chi aura can also be spent to add dice to skill rolls based on your Archetype (see below).

On Midnight's turn, she naturally attacks Kai with all her fury! Kai's defense isn't successful (normally blocking a weapon bare-handed damages you, so he used Dodge, which has no strike bonus), and with her flute's damage modifier of +5, Midnight inflicts 16 damage on him! However, he spends and rolls a die from his chi aura to oppose this damage, getting a total of 13. 16 - 13 is 3, so Kai only takes 3 points of damage!

He laughs in Midnight's face - "You have squandered your victory, for now Lady Yee will see my skills are as high as the clouds, while you crawl on your belly with the worms!"

As a free action, you can spend Jade chi (see below) to heal damage, at one point per point of chi spent. This isn't very efficient, but might get you over the threshold to take a lower penalty, and is always useful if you weren't using the chi for anything else!

As one of her free actions, Midnight spends 3 jade chi, healing 3 points of damage. She still has 5 points of damage remaining, so Kai is still winning!

As you can see, noble reader, Wulin fighters are quite hardy! Battles between rivals are serious affairs; while kung-fu techniques increase the power of attacks, they also improve defenses, so a good duel can take some time. Make sure to read on, however, for later we'll explain how Wulin fighters smash lowly minions by the handful!

Combat: Chi, Chi Modifiers, and Kung Fu (page 229)

Each of the attributes corresponds to a color of chi: Might to **Jade**, Speed to **Crimson**, Presence to **Gold**, Genius to **White** and Wu Wei to **Silver**. Each character has a number of points of chi in each color equal to their rating in the

corresponding attribute.

Kai has Might 5, Speed 4, Presence 2, Genius 2, Wu Wei 2. Hence, he has 5 Jade, 4 Crimson, 2 Gold, 2 White and 2 Silver chi.

At the end of each turn, a character regains one point of each color of chi if they are beneath their maximum.

Midnight spent all but one of her jade chi - 3 points - last turn. She regains one, leaving her with two points of jade chi. She's full in all the other colors, so she doesn't gain any extra in them.

Chi is most commonly spent on kung-fu. Each kung fu style has a color; in order to use techniques of that style, that color of chi must be spent (the exception is Lightfoot, the style used by all characters, which allows any colored chi to be used). Characters buy techniques in the style in increasing order of power and cost - the level one technique of a style costs one point of chi to use, level two costs two points of chi to use, the third level three points, and so on. Some very high level techniques may cost more than their level.

You can use a technique once per round, but may use as many techniques in a round as you can pay for. You can freely combine relevant techniques on a single action, but you only count the best bonus or penalty from the combination!

Each style also has a rarity (Common, Uncommon or Rare), reflecting the difficulty of finding a teacher, and the style's power, default Critical results (see below) and a type - Artful, Brutal, Ranged or a mix. Some styles may only be used with specific weapons.

"How sad!" muses Yee, idly playing with fallen plum blossoms. "I thought the Bei Clan were famous for their kung-fu, and yet my two good friends brawl with such little skill!"





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*Kai does not hesitate. Brilliant green light bursts from his eyes and hands, turning the blossoms about him to green stone, as he drives his palm forward with the power of the Bei Fist Skill! Bei Fist is an Uncommon Brutal (Palms Only) Jade style. Having won initiative, Kai activates **Living Weapon** – the first technique in the style – it turns his palms from strike +0/damage –5 weapons to strike +5/damage +10 for the round! As the first technique, this costs him 1 Jade chi. He ends up with a total of 46 on his attack – Midnight is in trouble!*

Many kung-fu techniques add a bonus or penalty based on what's called the chi modifier. This is a number derived from the relevant attribute – so, your Crimson chi modifier is based on your Speed. Every 3 points or fraction thereof in an attribute contributes +5 to your chi modifier – so Might 3 gives a jade modifier of +5, Presence 5 gives a gold modifier of +10 etc.

*“Buffoon! You shame the Bei Fist with your clumsy fingers. Are you trying to humiliate our family in front of Sister Yee?” Midnight soars backwards into the branches of a plum tree, blossoms swirling around her like stormclouds covering the moon. Midnight activates two techniques at once. The first, **High as the Clouds**, the fourth technique of Lightfoot, costs her 4 chi, but gives her +15 to dodge and a great deal of movement. The second, **Moon Covered By Clouds**, is the second technique of Cloud Mastery, a Jade style, costing her 2 jade chi, and reducing Kai's strike by her Jade chi modifier. Midnight has a Might of 4, so her modifier is +10. With Kai's roll reduced to 36, and with +15 to her Dodge, Midnight easily escapes – though at a hefty cost in chi!*

Ranged Attacks and Critical Effects

Ranged type weapons and kung-fu use the Ranged skill to attack. Artful and Brutal defenses suffer a -10 penalty against ranged attacks, and any defense with the Ranged skill suffers a -15 penalty. On top of that, weapon strike doesn't count against ranged attacks, so

usually the best option is Dodge! As a result, while ranged attacks usually aren't very powerful, they **are** quite difficult to defend against.

*From her perch in the tree, Midnight raises her flute to her lips, and sends a burst of sound that stains the very air gold towards Kai's ears: Midnight is using the Music of War style, specifically the first technique, **Single Note of Pain**. This technique allows ranged attacks to be made with a musical instrument! This has no strike bonus (the Sage rules the flute's amazing sound quality doesn't count for attacks!), but Midnight still has those 8s in her river, and flows them, ending up with a total of 48. Kai won't gain any advantage by blocking with **Living Weapon**, so he chooses to use the Dodge skill, activating a lesser Lightfoot technique to get a small bonus – no luck: Kai only gets a total of 36. Midnight has hit by 12 – a Critical!*

Critical successes in combat (beating the difficulty – usually the defense of your opponent – by 10 or more) inflict one of a specific list of **combat effects** – sometimes dictated by the weapon, but usually a choice of two or more based on the kung-fu being used. Combat effects include disarming, knockdown, embarrassment, and a host of other inconveniences, but never directly do more damage.

*Midnight has two choices for her critical – **Disorient**, which prevents Kai from using his chi aura against this attack, or **Stun**. Knowing she needs to force Kai to surrender quickly before he brings out the more powerful techniques of the Bei Fist Skill, she chooses **Disorient**, resulting in a lot of damage!*

Archetypes (page 29) and Regaining Chi (Errata)

Each starting character is a member of one of three main **Archetypes** of Wulin fighter – the **Warrior**, **Courtier** and **Scholar** archetypes. These are not particularly restrictive (certainly Scholars can be terrifying martial artists, Warriors canny manipulators, and Courtiers brimming

with secret knowledge), but they do show the challenge that the character most desires to face, and gives access to some special abilities.

Warriors may start the game with an Uncommon kung-fu style, giving them a great leg-up on building a powerful repertoire! They may spend their Chi Aura to add dice to Dodge skill rolls.

Courtiers may start the game with Secret Arts, and often use the Secret Arts of Intrigue, the pre-eminent means of manipulating the emotions and relationships of those around them! They may spend their Chi Aura to add dice to Confidence skill rolls.

Scholars may start the game with Secret Arts, and they often use Daoist Sorcery, esoteric skills that allow powerful blessings and curses! They may spend their Chi Aura to add dice to Awareness skill rolls.

Kai Bei is clearly a warrior, for otherwise he would not have learned the Bei Fist skill so early in his career in the Wulin! Midnight Bei is a Courtier – her Lightfoot, Cloud Mastery and Music of War are impressive, but they're still just Common kung-fu. She's perhaps a little more focused on combat than your average Courtier, but that's natural coming from the martial Bei Clan – and, of course, probably why Yee is manipulating her so easily.

Every Wulin fighter can push themselves to regain chi in times of stress, and each Archetype uses a different skill to do so. Warriors use Hardiness, Courtiers Confidence, and Scholars Medicine. Regaining chi is a full action rolled at difficulty 18. Each result die gives a point of chi; all chi regained is for the same color (chosen before rolling), and cannot take you over your maximum.

Midnight is still in her plum tree, but despite her success, she's getting worried. The fight is beginning to escalate, which is bad for her – she can't avoid the power of the Bei Fist forever!

*To make matters worse, she's run out of Jade chi, which she needs to fuel her Cloud Mastery. Not willing to face the **Rainbow Stunning Strike** she knows Kai is holding in reserve, Midnight braces herself in the tree and uses her Confidence to bolster herself.*

*"You've learned the clan's mightiest art, Kai, but it'll only make you look like a fool, since you'll never hit me!" Midnight wins initiative and makes her Confidence roll, and gets a lucky 32, for three result dice, and thus regains three points of Jade chi! She'll be able to maintain **Moon Covered By Clouds** for a few turns yet!*

Yee smiles contentedly as the young Bei clan members brawl for her attention, but suddenly her eyes narrow as a richly robed figure appears in the pagoda overlooking the plum tree orchard, armed and disreputable figures running through the trees at his command! Unrighteous Thesis, that wickedly corrupt scholar and his Devil Cloud gang had arrived!

Minions (page 345)

Of course, not everyone who picks up a sword is a member of the Martial Arts world! The vast majority of fighters encountered are thugs or soldiers in service to more significant characters, and as you'd expect from the genre, while they can pose a challenge, members of the Wulin can face these **minions** in large numbers and dispatch them like flies!

Minions always act in groups, usually under a specific leader. They come in three classes – the weakest are Mobs; the next most powerful, Gangs; and the strongest of minions – Faction fighters. They have a **Rating**, which is the number of dice they roll on attacks, and derived from the number of minions fighting together in a scene under a single leader (see table in the core rulebook; usually no more than 5). Finally, they have a **Base Value**, the amount added to their attacks and defenses, which is equal to





the number of minions attacking a single character, plus their leader's Presence for Gangs and Factions.

Minions always divide themselves equally amongst all targets where possible. They act on their leader's initiative, and roll their leader's Tactics skill for defense. Minions don't have health; instead, one minion is dispatched for each result die on an attack against their group. Having minions killed doesn't reduce their Rating, but does reduce their Base Value.

Mobs attack once per round per target, and can only form sets of one die. They can only bring 15 fighters to bear on a single person.

Gangs attack twice per round per target, and can form sets with two dice. They can bring 20 fighters to bear on a single person.

Factions attack three times per round per target, and can form sets with three dice. They can bring 25 fighters to bear on a single person.

*"Six Devils City is alive with talk that the Bei Clan is entertaining a reclusive and beautiful poet – do you have any idea how much the Jin Emperor would pay to add such a girl as an ornament to his court? My most humble apologies, noble Bei... but the Devil Cloud gang **must** have that beauty!" Unrighteous Thesis indulges himself in one of the trappings of villainy - stroking his silky beard with a confident smile!*

"You brought only twenty of your Devil Clouds to fight two of Bei Clan's warriors? What, are you tired of having so many mouths to feed?" Kai's defiance is perfect for a brash young hero! Yee finds it most promising.

"It is true," reflects Unrighteous Thesis to his gang, "Not all of you will survive against the Bei Fist, but of course the survivors will have a correspondingly larger share of the spoils!" The greedy Devil Clouds need

no further encouragement.

Disregarding Yee, the gang divides into two groups of ten, one to attack Kai and one to attack Midnight. As a Gang of 20, their Rating is 5, and they add their leader's Presence – 4 in the case of Unrighteous Thesis – to their Base Value. This gives both groups a Base Value of 14 – 10 fighters + 4 Presence. Unrighteous Thesis win initiative; desiring to test his followers, he does not assist them, and chooses not to act, but they act on his initiative. The group attacking Kai take their first attack, rolling their Rating of 5, and getting 2, 2, 2, 6, 9. Normally this would be a 32, but Gangs can only use sets of two dice, so this is a 22, plus their Base Value of 14, for 36. Kai's brashness doesn't pay off here – his defense roll is only 24, so he is hit for three dice damage! Luckily, Gangs don't add their Base Value to damage, and thus after they roll 19 damage, and his Chi Aura die turns up 14, he takes only 5 damage. Still, after the damage done to him earlier by Midnight, he's in trouble, even though he defends their next attack!

*Kai's held back enough! His pride as a warrior won't let him take beatings like that from his courtier cousin and the lackeys of a scholar! He leaps into the air in a blaze of red and green chi, descending like a comet amidst a blur of hands rending like steel claws, staining the swirling plum blossoms with the blood of his foes! He activates **Living Weapon** again, as well as **Flesh-Rending Talons** from the Eagle Claw style; despite his wound penalties, this powerful kung fu and a good roll give him a total of 55! Unrighteous Thesis is no slouch with Tactics, however, and shouts orders: His skill is rolled for the defense of his minions – he gets a result of 30, plus the minions' Base Value of 14, giving a total of 44. They scatter out of the angry Bei's path, so only three result dice go to Kai: Normally this would dispatch three minions, but **Flesh Rending Talons** gives two bonus damage dice – in this situation, that means two more minions down. Five minions fly into crumpled bleeding heaps from Kai's rending claw-like fingers, in the blink of an eye!*

As you can see, the game encourages fights between members of the Wulin to be substantial duels and engagements, but those against minions to be rampages!

Weapons of the Gods (page 358) and Secondary Attacks

No matter how great the power of their kung-fu, every fighter wants a weapon that matches their heroic spirit. In Shen Zhou, these are the Weapons of the Gods, legendary weapons from the very pinnacle of human craftsmanship (Class III) to the weapons forged by the Gods themselves (Class I). Every one of these weapons is unique, and besides their impressive stats, each has one or more unique powers, from the useful to the literally earth-shattering!

Yee sighs; the battle is going poorly for her Bei clan friends. Kai has showed great strength, but was sorely wounded earlier by Midnight's Music of War. Midnight is defending well, but her offense isn't as strong as Kai's, and she has only dispatched two foes. If Unrighteous Thesis chooses to intervene, it could be a disaster.



*Gracefully she pulls back the silk cloth covering her basket of tea accessories, and with practiced skill draws forth a saber of exquisite beauty, shining with an inner crimson light! The weapon is the famous **Filial Ambition**, forged from the heroic ambition of her late youngest brother, its sash dyed with his heart's blood! This Class III Weapon of the Gods has Speed +5, Strike +20, Damage +20, and grants an additional point of Crimson chi each round it is used in ambitious fashion!*

*"Never have I been so insulted – a reclusive poet! While my verses may be sweet indeed, I am Yee Nan, and I will show you why they call me the Sword Nightingale!" Thunder crashes in the skies above as Yee cultivates her fury, and then explodes forth at the gang attacking Kai – so swift is her attack that the blur of her passage seems to be a crimson dragon made of swords! She activates the **Flashing Blade** technique of the Dragon Saber style, adding even more Strike, and easily cuts down the five gangsters.*

It's rare to have more than one attack per turn in *Weapons of the Gods*; indeed, the ability is only granted by some kung-fu styles, and then usually only a single attack, known as a **Secondary Attack**.

These attacks always occur after everyone else has had their turn. Some powerful styles also allow an **area attack**, affecting multiple foes with the same attack, or **replies**, where a successful defense creates a counterattack. This keeps rounds flowing quickly, and prevents single characters from monopolising a combat round.

*Yee's ambitious move – to cut down the Devil Cloud gang in an eyeblink – is not over. Even as the gang attacking Midnight start in shock, a ring of sword-images suddenly surrounds them, glinting crimson as if covered in the blood of their fellows. This can only be Heart Moves the Blade – the unrivalled sword skill of the Nan clan! Yee activates **Brutal: Speed Blade**, the second technique of the style, which not only gives the initiative but also grants a secondary attack, which is what Yee is interested in. She can't use **Flashing Blade** again (each technique can only be used once per round), so she activates **Killing Spree** from Heart-Breaking Blade; together both **Killing Spree** and **Speed Blade** form her **Broken Heart's Killing Ambition Strike**, costing 1 Crimson and 2 Silver Chi. This powerful signature move effortlessly destroys the gangsters – everyone is shocked by Yee's killing might!*

Rank and Deeds (pages 80 and 339)

Each character in the Wulin has a Rank, which indicates their position in the Wulin, as well as setting the size of their River, Chi Aura and maximum attribute score. Green disciples are Rank 5. Starting characters like Kai and Midnight are Rank 4. More experienced and powerful characters will be higher in Rank, from Yee Nan at Rank 3 to the terrifying Earth Lord of Hell Clan at Rank 1!

Rank also acts as a ceiling on the amount of Destiny (similar to experience in other games) that you can spend – for instance, a Rank 4 character can't spend their



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100th point of Destiny until they achieve Rank 3. Indeed, after a certain point, characters can't even earn more destiny without increasing in Rank - once they reach 150 Destiny, for instance, Rank 4 character can't earn any more!

This encourages Wulin fighters to go out and seek great challenges, for Rank can only be increased through earning sufficient Destiny and achieving a number of impressive **Deeds**. These Deeds must be deemed Impressive (by the Sage and/or the group), and must be Virtuous - in line with either one of the five Xia virtues, or their five corrupt opposites. The number of Deeds required to go up in rank varies depending on the pacing of a campaign, but by default it is 10 (either all virtuous or all corrupt), with either two in each of the five relevant virtues, or five in one virtue and five spread amongst the rest.

*Yee's last act - killing thirteen men in an eyeblink - was certainly impressive, the sort of thing that will establish her fame in the North and set people all over the city talking. The Sage is undecided whether it was virtuous (a deed of the Ba virtue or **Force**) or corrupt (the Bao Virtue or **Ferocity**), but Midnight and Kai's players convince her that being in their defense, it counts as virtuous. Yee's player notes on her character sheet that she has another deed of Force - she's getting close to five deeds there, but is a bit thin elsewhere, so she's not yet ready to increase her Rank.*

The Sage thinks Yee's manipulation - pitting Midnight against Kai for her attentions - probably counts as a deed of Individualism, a corrupt virtue, but it's fairly trivial, so it doesn't satisfy the Impressive requirement.

Corrupt deeds don't necessarily mean a character is evil - it's possible to play an anti-hero without too many problems, especially since the

corrupt virtues tend to be differing moral spins on the same actions as their Xia opposites, allowing the anti-hero to work with the party while following their own (un)ethical path. However, too much corruption earns an invitation from the Hell Clan to join - and they don't take "no" lightly!

Note that this system also explains why it's no good to simply hide on a mountain training forever, or retire to raise a family and rule your lands - it's fine to go into seclusion to spend your Destiny on new kung-fu styles, but if you aren't constantly seeking challenge, you won't increase your power!

Extraordinary Techniques (pages 306 and 317)

The true power of Courtiers and Scholars is in the long term - subtle influences, mighty curses, genius plans - the Secret Arts. However, they are far from useless in the heat of the moment, for they have access to Extraordinary Techniques, short-term versions of the sorts of effects Secret Arts can achieve, but each useable with a single full action.



There are two classes of Extraordinary Technique - Intrigue, and Daoist Sorcery. Each technique is bought separately, and has its own destiny cost and rules. All techniques require the use of one or more special methods to invoke - conspicuous compliance to Confucian virtues for Intrigue, or sorcerous techniques such as finger gestures or talismans for Daoism.

Unrighteous Thesis is stunned at the martial arts skill of his intended kidnap victim, but he's careful not to show it - that would lose him face in front of a pack of warriors!

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Conversely, Yee Nan uses the Secret Art of Intrigue to place a weakness condition on the Devil Clouds, inciting disloyalty and arguments. If the Clouds argue and betray each other, they avoid penalty; if they act harmoniously, they take the penalties. The Sage would really like the Devil Clouds around for later, so she decides they swallow the penalty, effectively cancelling Thesis' grand strategy.

Of course, this is just the beginning! While all Secret Arts have the same end result - chi conditions - there is a vast variety in the methods used in their manipulation!

Even a famous doctor might not be able to cure the common cold causing the Sick condition in your lungs, but he can migrate it to your kidneys, so it won't cause you any problems while you're fighting!

A Predictionist can't really tell the future - how could they, with so many headstrong heroes stomping about and ignoring the will of the gods? But their predictions certainly form powerful conditions that make them far more likely to come about!

A Genius can't trick a girl into loving you, but she can certainly give brilliant advice that will give you a hyperactivity for wooing her!

A Courtier may not be able to fix your broken heart when you ignore the Genius' advice and the girl rejects you, but he can certainly use your Lovesick weakness to create a balancing Anger hyperactivity that helps you fight Hell Clan (and hopefully gain enough fame to win another girl's heart...)

Suffering a run of bad rolls? A Daoist can "discover" that you were under a curse all along, and use that curse to build another that makes an

enemy share your
misfortune!

Deceptively simple, the Secret Arts are at once subtle and powerful in the long term, and though they use the same system of effects, the variety of causes and manipulations gives each Secret Art a distinct character in play (a trivial example of which is Thesis' sorcerous incantations versus Yee's allusions to Confucius).

Lores (page 85)

Congratulations, gentle reader! Your fortitude in keeping up with this text so far is to be admired - and shall be rewarded. We have kept the greatest marvel of this mighty wuxia game for last - the **Loresheets!**

As we explained long ago at the beginning of this text, Loresheets begin as an answer to the problem of the divide between what the character and the player knows - the player can know what she pleases, but the character knows the things on the Loresheets he has purchased (of course most general knowledge has a Destiny cost of zero!). Loresheets can be purchased directly with Destiny, at a discount with months of difficult study, or simply be awarded by the Sage.

However, it goes much further than that. Loresheets are not merely what the character knows, but opportunities to get involved in the drama underlying such knowledge! Each lore supplies priced plot hooks to involve oneself in, whether they be treasures, the machinations of secret societies or the discovery that you have a particularly illustrious ancestor! Some of these secrets allow you to involve others as well, friend or enemy...

The following is a sample lore (by necessity extremely truncated!) and its use in play:

The Han Dynasty



Six Devil City

Destiny Cost: 3

Study Difficulty: Learning (30)

Riding north with his retinue of thousands, Cao Cao brooded, the awful artifact wrapped tightly in silks and balanced upon his lap. The Yellow Turbans had been destroyed and the Han Dynasty saved, yet did not the vultures still circle the throne? Such arrogance from the great generals, but who could stop them? Cao Cao was the only hero in the land, yet here he was, riding into the desert with such inauspicious treasure, away from the capital where he belonged!

The city threw its gates open for him – what choice did it have while he flew the Imperial banner? Or so it seemed... until The Iron Shadow Warlord, himself, magnificent in his sharp bladed- and-mirrored armor and face-concealing-helmet, strode forth alone from the gateway. It was clear that the Warlord did not look with welcome upon the vassals of the Han, and with a single gesture of his gauntleted hand, bade them stop before they entered the gate.

“That curse washed down the Yellow River, Cao Cao. You should have let it continue to the sea, to be lost forever. Do you not know the risk of bringing it here, to the City of Six Devils?”

Cao Cao, deep in thought, raised a peerless eyebrow. “Only six?”

Secrets of Destiny: Six Devil City

The Iron Lotus Pavilion

[Location]

Undisturbed since the Three Kingdoms period, the Iron Lotus Pavilion remains just where the Iron Shadow Warlord, Cao Cao, and their mysterious adversaries left it. Who dares brave its cursed bounds?

1 Discovery: You locate the Iron Lotus Pavilion.

1 Fortune: An ally is chosen to lead their society’s quest for the Pavilion’s treasure.

1 Fortune: An enemy becomes entangled with the mysterious Third Party.

3 History: You have a relevant connection to the Cao family.

5 Secret: You will soon learn the nature of the Six Devils.

5 Entanglement: Entangle your destiny with the Yellow Turban Treasure.

Yee has some spare Destiny, so she buys “Six Devil City” outright. Looking through the various Secrets of Destiny, the Iron Lotus Pavilion catches her eye. Firstly, she spends 2 Destiny to buy both Midnight and Kai as the leader of the Bei clan expedition to the pavilion – obviously they’ll be chosen as joint leaders! Yee wants her young friends to have a chance to achieve great deeds and increase their fame, and also wants a chance to take a back seat on this quest where she can manipulate the pair to her advantage. She’s not too keen on being connected to Cao Cao or entangling herself with the cursed treasure, but learning the potent secret behind the city’s name sounds like the perfect thing to do while her friends take the limelight, so she spends 5 destiny, and knows she will soon discover the secret.

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