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THE ROLE you play in this game is called your character. You can choose to play pretty much any type of character you like, so long as it fits in with what the other players, including the referee, are doing. Think about the kind of person you'd like to play, and discuss your ideas with the other players and the referee. It may be that the referee will provide specific information to help guide you in character creation.

METHODS OF CHARACTER CREATION

Different people like to create characters in different ways. Although this game does allow characters to be described in relatively complex terms, the goal is to be as close as possible to the way in which characters are described in stories, and, moreover, the way we tend to think about them. Thus the idea is, where possible, to describe only the *distinctive* traits of a character.

If you've seen a number of movies about China, or read some books or comics, or have a strong idea about the kind of person you want to play, then you

can start by just writing a description of the character you'd like to play. Then go through this chapter, and, following your description, design your character as the rules explain. Most of the things you've chosen to write about your character will represent a *bonus*. You just have to decide how greatly each trait varies from the norm, and you can assign a bonus to that trait. The referee may be happy just to accept what you write, but if she is strict in applying the limits described below, you may find you can't make your character *quite* as powerful as you had imagined. You should at least be able to get close, though. There's a *Design Checklist* provided in the appendix for you to photocopy, and which gives you something to refer to to make sure you've got everything.

There are several other ways to create a character for yourself. The easiest way is to take one of the Water Margin characters or sample character types listed in the *Extras* chapter. If you're not entirely satisfied with it, you'll have to go through and change the details to suit yourself. If you do change details you should be careful to check the relevant section in this chapter. Then, choose a name and flesh out the background to make the character truly yours. Alternatively, have a look at the *Simple Character*



Wang Jin and his mother escape from the Capital after Gao Qiu is installed as commander of the Imperial Guard

Simple Character Creation

The idea of this method of character creation is to get started as quickly as possible.

- ◇ Choose a character type from the Extras chapter.
- ◇ Decide on the character's name and appearance.
- ◇ Start playing the game!
- ◇ Any time you need to perform an action in the game, or refer to characteristics, decide on the spot or use those of the character type. In either case, note down the bonus.
- ◇ At the end of the game session, if the referee is not taking the 'Anything Goes' approach, go through the procedure listed in the design checklist. You will have some abilities already written down: you'll have to pay for them.
- ◇ If you can't afford to buy abilities you have already used in the game session, then pay for a lower value and acquire bad joss equal to the number of points you'd have to pay for the value you used.

That's it!

Creation box on this page. This suggests a way of developing a character while you play the game. That way you don't have to spend hours pondering over them before the game, but can 'make it up as you go along'.

LIMITATIONS

Although you can choose most details about your character, you aren't *entirely* free in your choice. The level of freedom depends on the method determined by the referee for character creation. The method that provides the most freedom is called the 'Anything Goes' method. Here the player or the referee simply write down the bonuses that describe a character best.

Those who are worried about play balance, however, will use points to 'buy' the abilities and distinctive features of characters. The number of points you have available will depend on the power level decided by the referee, so be sure you know what power level the game is before you start. An 'average' game has a power level of 3. In fact, it's best if you make your character while the referee is around, just to make sure you're doing things right.

The points with which you will buy abilities for your character come in two types: natural gifts and experience. Natural gifts are fixed, while experience depends on the character's age. Older characters thus have a better chance of being skilful. Unfortunately,

however, older characters don't learn so well, and are usually not quite as fit as their younger counterparts. As Confucius said: 'What you win on the swings, you lose on the roundabouts.'

When you have finished creating your character, start noting things down on your character sheet. There's a sample character sheet at the end of the chapter which gives an idea of what to write where. Most important, though, is that you have things written in the most convenient way for you.

*What begins with a dragon's head
often ends with a snake's tail*

FIRST CHOICES

Is your character a hero, destined for great things, facing blood-chilling dangers every day, and shrugging off hardships that would fell an ox? Or is he an ordinary person, trying to make the best of things in a dangerous world? It's up to you.

Most players will probably want to be heroes. And why not? Heroes are capable of extraordinary feats, and usually live an exceptional life, full of danger and excitement. On the other hand, ordinary people can have adventures too, and they face the challenge of rising above their limitations.

What's more, Song society doesn't much care for exceptional people. They tend to live apart from others, as they're rarely welcome in town. Their lives can be pretty tough—if you're a famous martial artist you will have to face challenges all the time from opponents keen to take your reputation. And you're *expected* to do exceptional things.

Normal people, on the other hand, have the security of being a part of society. They'll usually have a steady job and a supporting family. If they have to face adventure, it's more of a challenge, and no one's going to blame them if they fail.

It's quite acceptable to mix types of characters. There is no reason why everyone has to play a hero. Players will have to accept the difference in power of their characters as a fact of life, while making the most of their normal characters' benefits. In this case it is very important that the referee remembers to apply the advantages normal characters receive when in towns.

HEROIC CHARACTERS

Heroes have several advantages over normal people. They are tougher, more energetic, and can have exceptional talents. On the other hand they don't

have the social advantages of normal people. As they are not part of society they only have a limited number of occupations available to them, and may not possess a position bonus.

Heroic characters include outlaw leaders, wandering martial artists, hermits and sorcerers, questers after immortality, and seekers of justice. Heroes are believed to be the reborn souls of spirits of Heaven and the Otherworld.

NORMAL CHARACTERS

Ordinary people are fragile human beings. If you hit them with a sword, they'll probably die. They have to be pretty careful when they get into fights. However, they can have jobs, and earn good money if they're lucky. They can also rely on the help of their family, colleagues and neighbours. And, in certain circumstances, they can become heroes. Normal characters hold down regular jobs, ranging from shopkeepers to clerks to the more dangerous soldier, or the more prestigious magistrate.

AGE

In China, age is more important than you think. There's no such thing as equality, and the usual way in which you decide whether you're 'above' or 'below' someone is by age. Of course, older people have more experience, but they don't usually learn so well as the young.

You can choose the age of your character as you wish. However, rules for children have not been included in this book, so if you want to play a character younger than 15, the referee will have to work something out specially.

You might also be surprised to learn that your character is considered to be aged 1 at birth! Also it is not necessary to make a note of the character's birthday. The Chinese custom is that everybody ages a year at the New Year. Thus it is possible for a 'two-year-old' to have been born only 1 day!

In this game age affects the amount of experience your character has. It also limits his **energy** and **body**. And during the game it will affect the character's chances of improving his abilities.

Example

We'll generate a character as we go along just to show how things work. We'll decide what he's called later.

First of all, we decide to make him a hero. Our next decision is his age. We choose to make him 24 years old. He was thus born in 1087, or the second year of the Original Boon period of the Emperor Zhe Zong. His astrological sign is a Boar.

BIRTH YEAR TABLE

Year	Emperor/Reign Name	Sign	
1056	Ren Zhong		
	Divine Help 1	Yang Fire Dragon	丙辰
1058	Divine Help 3	Yang Earth Horse	戊午
1059	Divine Help 4	Yin Earth Sheep	己未
1060	Divine Help 5	Yang Metal Monkey	庚申
1061	Divine Help 6	Yin Metal Rooster	辛酉
1062	Divine Help 7	Yang Water Dog	壬戌
1063	Divine Help 8	Yin Water Boar	癸亥
1064	Ying Zong		
	Governed Calm 1	Yang Wood Rat	甲子
1065	Governed Calm 2	Yin Wood Ox	乙丑
1066	Governed Calm 3	Yang Fire Tiger	丙寅
1067	Governed Calm 4	Yin Fire Rabbit	丁卯
1068	Shen Zong		
	Bright Peace 1	Yang Earth Dragon	戊辰
1069	Bright Peace 2	Yin Earth Snake	己巳
1070	Bright Peace 3	Yang Metal Horse	庚午
1071	Bright Peace 4	Yin Metal Sheep	辛未
1072	Bright Peace 5	Yang Water Monkey	壬申
1073	Bright Peace 6	Yin Water Rooster	癸酉
1074	Bright Peace 7	Yang Wood Dog	甲戌
1075	Bright Peace 8	Yin Wood Boar	乙亥
1076	Bright Peace 9	Yang Fire Rat	丙子
1077	Bright Peace 10	Yin Fire Ox	丁丑
1078	Original Plenty 1	Yang Earth Tiger	戊寅
1079	Original Plenty 2	Yin Earth Rabbit	己卯
1080	Original Plenty 3	Yang Metal Dragon	庚辰
1081	Original Plenty 4	Yin Metal Snake	辛巳
1082	Original Plenty 5	Yang Water Horse	壬午
1083	Original Plenty 6	Yin Water Sheep	癸未
1084	Original Plenty 7	Yang Wood Monkey	甲申
1085	Original Plenty 8	Yin Wood Rooster	乙酉
1086	Zhe Zong		
	Original Boon 1	Yang Fire Dog	丙戌
1087	Original Boon 2	Yin Fire Boar	丁亥
1088	Original Boon 3	Yang Earth Rat	戊子
1089	Original Boon 4	Yin Earth Ox	己丑
1090	Original Boon 5	Yang Metal Tiger	庚寅
1091	Original Boon 6	Yin Metal Rabbit	辛卯
1092	Original Boon 7	Yang Water Dragon	壬辰
1093	Original Boon 8	Yin Water Snake	癸巳
1094	God's Welcome 1	Yang Wood Horse	甲午
1095	God's Welcome 2	Yin Wood Sheep	乙未
1096	God's Welcome 3	Yang Fire Monkey	丙申
1097	God's Welcome 4	Yin Fire Rooster	丁酉
1098	Original Symbol 1	Yang Earth Dog	戊戌
1099	Original Symbol 2	Yin Earth Boar	己亥

Just to balance things, young starting characters are allowed to have unknown aptitudes. In other words, they can start the game with abilities about which they are not yet aware.

Choosing your character's age also decides which year he was born in, and therefore what his birth sign is. If you assume the game starts in 1105CE, that is,

3783 years since the start of the Chinese calendar, all you have to do is subtract the character's age from 1106 to find out which year he was born.

The birth sign may be used to give some idea of the character's personality: brief descriptions of each of the animal signs are provided in the *Beliefs* chapter. Astrologers don't set much store by these, however, preferring to work out horoscopes according to the 'Four Pillars'—the hour, day, month and year of birth. You are therefore free to completely ignore the personality assigned to your character's birth sign if it is inconvenient.

More details of Emperors and their reign years are provided in the *Culture* section of the *Beliefs* chapter. Reign names are the usual means of counting years.

CAPABILITIES

Natural gifts and experience points are used to 'buy' abilities for your character. The number of points you have is decided in one of three ways: the referee decides which you use. The first way is that you have as many points as are necessary to describe the character you want. This is the 'anything goes' method. In the second way, all the player characters receive the same number of points. This is the 'fair' method. However, life is rarely fair. Referees who prefer to reflect this in their game can ask players to roll dice instead. This is the 'unfair' method.

The truth, of course, is not as simple as this. Even if characters receive the same number of points they may end up with different levels of ability. Some players just have to have the toughest character, and will put a lot of effort into designing their character so that it can fight really effectively. Other players will make more effort to create a well-rounded person.

ANYTHING GOES METHOD

Many people won't want to bother with keeping track of points and 'balancing' characters. This is especially true in groups with inexperienced players. In the 'Anything Goes' method, players simply describe their characters, and then either decide their own bonuses, or give the description to the referee, who will write down bonuses as appropriate. There's no need to keep track of points.

This method will also suit gaming groups with a high degree of mutual trust, who don't want to be bothered with a lot of counting of points and book-keeping.

Example: Points

The referee says we're using the fair method, and the game has a power level of 3. Our character has 16 points of natural gifts, and 24 points of experience.

FAIR METHOD

Normal characters always receive 10 points of natural gifts. Heroes receive 10 plus twice the power level of the game. These points may be spent on **energy**, **body**, aptitudes, **position** and stipend.

Characters receive experience of 15 points plus 1 point for every complete 3 years of age over 15. Heroes receive additional experience equal to twice the power level of the game. Experience may be spent on **energy**, **body**, skills, earnings, favours, **position**, **motivation** and **respect**.

UNFAIR METHOD

Roll two dice and add 4 (plus twice the power level of the game if your character is heroic). This is the number of points you may spend on your character's natural gifts.

Roll four dice and add 1 point for every complete 3 years of age over 15. Heroes add twice the power level of the game to this number. You may also add one experience point if you only rolled 8 points of natural gifts, two points if you only rolled 7 points of natural gifts, and three points if you only rolled 6 points of natural gifts.

However, you must subtract 1 experience point if you rolled 14 points of natural gifts, 2 points if you rolled 15 points of natural gifts, and 3 points if you rolled 16 points of natural gifts. The result is the number of experience points available to your character.

*As the eagle's cry echoes in the mountains
so a man's name continues after his death*

NAME

Your character will probably have more than one name. Everyone has a *family name*. However, there aren't that many family names to go around, so you'll often find most of a whole village with the same family name! Because of this, all but the poorest also have a *given name*.

The gentry also have a habit of showing off their genealogy with a *generational name*. This is a sort of 'middle name' shared by all the members of the same generation of a family. If the generational names of a family are taken from the words of a poem everyone knows, these names are a neat way of being able to work out whether that distant relative is your senior or junior.

In addition to these standard names, most people, especially heroes, will acquire one or more *nicknames*.

There are two main types: the first is the nickname parents give their children before their official naming ceremony at the age of ten. Most people are reluctant to reveal this nickname to people outside their family, they're too embarrassed! The other kind of nickname is that given by friends or colleagues. This may be complimentary, or it may not. Some characters, especially heroes, acquire a number of nicknames. Thus Wu Song is known as the Tiger Slayer and the Pilgrim.

Those who are initiated into a Buddhist or Taoist religious institution will take a new name to replace their family, given and generational names. Those who acquire fame in the literary world, may have a *nom de plume*, and a stylised name may also be bestowed by the Emperor on those who serve him well.

The order for names is *family name* first, then *generational name* then *given name*. In the case of Buddhist religious names, characters will usually be addressed by the religious name only, as the 'family name' of all Buddhists is Shi.

FAMILY NAMES

Choose the name of your character's family from the list provided. You may also like to copy the way the name is written in Chinese. You'll notice that many names are pronounced the same but written differently.

The first list consists of common names: 70% of people have one of these names. The names from the other list are more unusual. In particular, two-*hanzi* family names, such as Gongsun, or Shangguan are quite distinctive.

Unless you become a Buddhist monk, your family name is your most important name for life. It signifies the 'clan' you belong to. Since the extended family is the Chinese ideal, many groups of families sharing the same name will band together for mutual support, education, defence and the like. In general, someone is more likely to help you if you share the same family name.

Note also that married women *retain* their original family name, even though in all other respects they become members of their husband's family.

COMMON NAMES

The numbers by the names in the first list show their frequency. Those names marked '1' are the ten most common names, those marked '2' the next most common, and so on.

蔡	Cai (3)	曹	Cao (3)	陳	Chen (1)
程	Cheng (3)	崔	Cui (3)	鄧	Deng (2)
杜	Du (4)	馮	Feng (4)	高	Gao (2)
郭	Guo (2)	韓	Han (3)	何	He (3)
胡	Hu (2)	黃	Huang (1)	李	Li (1)

角色角色角色角色角色角色角色角色角色角色角色角色角色角色角色角色角色

梁	Liang (3)	林	Lin (2)	劉	Liu (1)
盧	Lu (4)	陸	Lu (4)	羅	Luo (3)
馬	Ma (2)	潘	Pan (4)	彭	Peng (4)
錢	Qian (4)	沈	Shen (3)	宋	Song (3)
孫	Sun (2)	唐	Tang (4)	汪	Wang (4)
王	Wang (1)	吳	Wu (1)	蕭	Xiao (2)
謝	Xie (3)	徐	Xü (2)	許	Xü (3)
楊	Yang (1)	袁	Yuan (4)	張	Zhang (1)
趙	Zhao (1)	鄭	Zheng (2)	周	Zhou (1)
朱	Zhu (2)				

OTHER NAMES

艾	Ai	安	An	傲	Ao
白	Bai	班	Ban	包	Bao
寶	Bao	保	Bao	鮑	Bao
貝	Bei	畢	Bi	柏	Bian
卞	Bian	卜	Bu	岑	Cen
柴	Chai	昌	Chang	常	Chang
車	Che	成	Cheng	池	Chi
遲	Chi	仇	Chou	儲	Chu
楚	Chu	淳	Chun	戴	Dai
刀	Dao	狄	Di	丁	Ding
董	Dong	東	Dongguo	端	Duan
段	Duan	樊	Fan	范	Fan
方	Fang	房	Fang	斐	Fei
費	Fei	封	Feng	豐	Feng
風	Feng	鳳	Feng	伏	Fu
福	Fu	符	Fu	傅	Fu
蓋	Gai	干	Gan	甘	Gan
戈	Ge	葛	Ge	耿	Geng
龔	Gong	宮	Gong	公	Gongsun
勾	Gou	苟	Gou	辜	Gu
古	Gu	谷	Gu	顧	Gu
官	Guan	關	Guan	歸	Gui
桂	Gui	過	Guo	哈	Ha
海	Hai	杭	Hang	郝	Hao
禾	He	和	He	賀	He
赫	He	衡	Heng	洪	Hong
侯	Hou	扈	Hu	花	Hua
華	Hua	霍	Huo	姬	Ji
稽	Ji	吉	Ji	紀	Ji
季	Ji	計	Ji	賈	Jia
翦	Jian	簡	Jian	姜	Jiang
江	Jiang	蔣	Jiang	焦	Jiao
金	Jin	晉	Jin	荊	Jing
居	Ju	具	Ju	康	Kang
柯	Ke	空	Kong	孔	Kong
匡	Kuang	況	Kuang	賴	Lai
藍	Lan	郎	Lang	朗	Lang
勞	Lao	樂	Le	雷	Lei
冷	Leng	理	Li	利	Li
勵	Li	廉	Lian	連	Lian
練	Lian	良	Liang	寥	Liao
蘭	Lin	凌	Ling	柳	Liu
隆	Long	龍	Long	樓	Lou
婁	Lou	魯	Lu	路	Lu
呂	Lü	倫	Lun	駱	Luo
洛	Luo	麻	Ma	麥	Mai

滿	Man	毛	Mao	茅	Mao
梅	Mei	孟	Meng	米	Mi
苗	Miao	繆	Miao	閔	Min
明	Ming	莫	Mo	牟	Mou
穆	Mu	慕	Murong	那	Na
能	Neng	倪	Ni	粘	Nian
年	Nian	聶	Nie	牛	Niu
鈕	Niu	農	Nong	區	Ou
歐	Ou	歐	Ouyang	裴	Pei
皮	Pi	朴	Piao	平	Ping
蒲	Pu	溥	Pu	浦	Pu
戚	Qi	齊	Qi	祁	Qi
強	Qiang	喬	Qiao	秦	Qin
丘	Qiu	邱	Qiu	裘	Qiu
屈	Qu	瞿	Qu	全	Quan
權	Quan	冉	Ran	饒	Rao
任	Ren	榮	Rong	容	Rong
阮	Ruan	瑞	Rui	薩	Sa
賽	Sai	沙	Sha	單	Shan
商	Shang	上官	Shangguan	單	Shanyu
邵	Shao	申	Shen	神	Shen
盛	Sheng	施	Shi	石	Shi
時	Shi	史	Shi	壽	Shou
舒	Shu	水	Shui	斯	Si
司空	Sikong	司	Sima	司徒	Situ
臺	Tai	談	Tan	譚	Tan
湯	Tang	澹	Tantai	陶	Tao
滕	Teng	田	Tian	仝	Tong
童	Tong	同	Tong	僮	Tong
屠	Tu	萬	Wan	危	Wei
韋	Wei	衛	Wei	蔚	Wei
魏	Wei	溫	Wen	文	Wen
聞	Wen	翁	Weng	巫	Wu
武	Wu	伍	Wu	奚	Xi
席	Xi	習	Xi	夏	Xia
夏侯	Xiahou	鮮	Xian	項	Xiang
向	Xiang	解	Xie	西	Ximen
辛	Xin	幸	Xing	熊	Xiong
宣	Xuan	軒	Xuanyuan	薛	Xue
荀	Xun	嚴	Yan	言	Yan
閻	Yan	顏	Yan	晏	Yan
彥	Yan	燕	Yan	陽	Yang
姚	Yao	葉	Ye	蟻	Yi
易	Yi	殷	Yin	銀	Yin
尹	Yin	應	Ying	英	Ying
游	You	尤	You	於	Yu
于	Yu	餘	Yu	俞	Yu
魚	Yu	虞	Yu	禹	Yu
郁	Yu	尉	Yuchi	喻	Yu
元	Yuan	尉	Yuchi	岳	Yue
樂	Yuezheng	雲	Yun	藏	Zang
曾	Zeng	查	Zha	湛	Zhan
章	Zhang	招	Zhao	甄	Zhen
鐘	Zhong	諸	Zhu	竺	Zhu
祝	Zhu	莊	Zhuang	諸	Zhuguo
卓	Zhuo	宗	Zong	鄒	Zou
祖	Zu	左	Zuo	左	Zuoqiu

OTHER NAMES

To have a generational name, you have to be a member of the gentry (see the section on background). However, both generational and given names can be chosen from the following list. Chinese writing is not provided, as the number of possible ideograms is truly huge, and it would take up a whole chapter! The family name is the most important name from the point of view of society.

The very poorest people may not even receive a given name. Instead they'll be numbered within the family (Li the Third, and so on) and be distinguished with nicknames if necessary. In China, to have a lot of names is a luxury! The list below gives most of the available names in Chinese. Those mainly suitable for women are marked (女), those mainly suitable for men (男).

A	Ai (女)	An (男)	Ang (男)
Ba	Bai	Ban (男)	Bang (男)
Bao	Bei	Ben (男)	Beng
Bi	Bian	Biao	Bie
Bin	Bing	Bo	Bu
Ca	Cai	Can	Cang (男)
Cao (男)	Ce (男)	Ceng	Chan (女)
Chang	Chao	Chen	Cheng
Chi (男)	Chong	Chu	Chuan
Chun	Chuo	Ci (女)	Cong
Cui	Da	Dai	Dan
Dao	De	Deng	Di
Dian	Die	Ding	Dong
Du	Duan	Dun (男)	Duo
E (女)	En	Er	Fa (男)
Fan	Fang	Fei	Fen
Feng	Fo	Fu	Gan
Gang (男)	Gao	Ge	Gen
Geng	Gong	Gu	Guan
Guang	Gui	Guo	Hai
Han	Hao	He	Heng
Hong	Hou (男)	Hu	Hua
Huai	Huan	Huang	Hui
Ji	Jia	Jian	Jiao
Jie	Jin	Jing	Jiong
Jiu	Ju	Juan	Jue(女)
Jun	Kai	Kang	Ke
Ken	Kong	Kuan (男)	Kui
Kun	Lai	Lan	Lang
Lao (男)	Le	Lei	Li
Lian	Liang	Liao	Lie (男)
Lin	Ling	Liu	Long (男)
Lu	Lü	Luan	Lun
Luo	Ma	Mai	Man
Mang	Mao	Mei (女)	Meng
Mi	Mian	Miao	Min
Ming	Mo	Mu	Na
Nai	Nan	Neng	Ni (女)
Nian	Ning	Nong	Nuan

Pa (女)	Pan (男)	Pang (男)	Pei
Peng	Pi (女)	Pian (女)	Pin
Ping	Pu	Qi	Qian
Qiang (男)	Qiao	Qin	Qing
Qiong (女)	Qiu	Qu	Quan
Que	Qun	Ran	Ren
Rong	Rou	Ru	Rui
Run	Ruo	Sai	Se (女)
Sen	Sha (女)	Shan	Shang
Shao	Shen	Sheng	Shi
Shou	Shu	Shui	Shun
Shuo	Si	Song	Su
Sui	Tai	Tan	Tang
Tao	Te	Teng (男)	Ti
Tian	Tie (男)	Ting	Tong
Tu	Tuan	Tuo	Wan
Wang	Wei	Wen	Wo
Wu	Xi	Xia	Xian
Xiang	Xiao	Xie	Xin
Xing	Xiong (男)	Xiu	Xu
Xuan	Xue	Xun	Ya
Yan	Yang	Yao	Ye
Yi	Yin	Ying	Yong
You	Yu	Yuan	Yue
Yun	Zai	Zan	Ze
Zeng	Zhan	Zhang (男)	Zhao
Zhe	Zhen	Zheng	Zhi
Zhong	Zhou	Zhu	Zhuan
Zhuag	Zhuo	Zi	Zong
Zu	Zuo		

The religious names taken by those who become initiated into a religious sect usually have a religious significance. Names are only taken by characters that are fully initiated, so lay priests will not have to do this. Since the names have meaning, it is best if you choose ones such as Sagely Wisdom, Deep Piety, Clear Vision or Pure Soul.

NICKNAMES

You don't have to choose a nickname. However, it's a good idea to have one: a nickname is much easier to remember! The nickname given by your character's parents is usually only used by them or other senior members of your family. It's likely to be a graphic description of what your character was like as a baby, hence something most heroes will want to forget about. Examples would include Windy, Little Dribbler, Big Ears, Howler etc.

The nickname acquired in later life, however, is intimately connected with the character's reputation. It may reflect some famous deed of the character (Tiger Slayer), or some flattering metaphor describing the character's abilities (Striking Hawk). For more examples, check out the nicknames of the heroes of Liangshan Po, which are all listed on the *Extras* chapter. As you will see, nicknames involving creatures

are common, and they vary from the poetic to the downright prosaic.

MODES OF ADDRESS

The familiarity of modern Western nations is rarely to be found in Song Dynasty China. To hail someone by their given name is extraordinarily rude. A title (Mr or Mrs will suffice in the absence of anything more specific) plus family name is the usual mode of address. Family and friends will use family titles (see the *Games* chapter for more details). The lower classes, and outlaws, might use nicknames. But the given name is almost never used.

This may help reduce the difficulty of coping with the unfamiliarity of names. Keep the sheer quantity of Chinese names down by using nicknames as much as possible. Player characters should address each other using such formulations as ‘Brother Wang’, ‘Master Zhao’ or ‘Uncle Gongsun’.



Example: Names

We choose the name Yang Ming. This means that our character probably isn't from the lower classes, as he's blessed with a given name.

We give him the nickname Sleepy Dragon, based on the ideas about his personality we are starting to form. That's him in the picture above, by the way.

If a man has long hair it is because his

mind is content; if he has long

fingernails it is because he is idle

PHYSICAL QUALITIES

When you imagine a character, probably the first details you imagine are physical. Are they a man or a woman? How tall is he? Does he have any distinctive features which set him apart from others? These are all details you can choose according to the character you want to play. But you should be aware that physical qualities are often the outward reflection of the inner person. If you choose to make your character fat, you can't make him fantastically agile. If you make him thin and short, it's unlikely he'll be very strong.

Some qualities, like **energy** and **body**, you don't get to choose—you have to pay for them. Sorry about that. Still, if you're really keen to have a character with a high **energy** score, that's something for you to work on while you play, isn't it? There are ways of improving a character's **energy** during the game.

Body and **size** can also be changed slightly (by crash-dieting or overeating, for example), but gender is a no-go, I'm afraid, for all but the most adept sorcerers.

GENDER

There are undeniable physical differences between men and women. However, this game provides no special rules to divide the sexes. Women may be shorter than men *on average*, but you still have a free choice to make a female character as tall as you like.

Song society is distinctly sexist, as the *Society* chapter will make clear. There is even a taboo on social contact between men and women. However, there are plenty of female heroes who don't let society get in their way. Also, the invidious custom of foot binding hasn't yet become widespread, so women characters won't suffer that foul disadvantage.

While normal female characters will suffer social disadvantages, female heroes can expect to be treated entirely according to their merits.

SIZE

There's no need to decide on an exact height and weight for your character, but it's useful to have a general idea. You should therefore describe the character's height in words. You can also describe his build.

When you have decided this you will need to

assign a **size** score. Big, tall characters will have positive bonuses, while short, light characters will have negative bonuses. The value you select will have an effect on the rules. Put simply, a large person is easier to hit than a small person. On the other hand, you have to damage a large person more to make him fall over.

Large people are more likely to be strong. There shouldn't be a difference of more than two in these scores. So a character with a **size** score of -1 can't have a STRENGTH of +2 (you'll have to flip forward to the abilities section to find out what a STRENGTH score of +2 means). **Size** scores can also be used for animals and monsters, and even for inanimate objects! Snakes are dangerous for this reason—although a single hit with a sword will kill one, their size and speed make them difficult to hit.

A **size** score of 0 is average for both men and women. The minimum **size**, which corresponds to a very light, short person, is -2. The maximum **size**, denoting a veritable giant, is +2. You don't need to spend any natural gifts or experience to have a **size** bonus.

ENERGY

Energy is a very important quality (so important it's written in **boldface**). It is the spiritual manifestation of what in Chinese is known as 氣 *qi*. *Qi* is the energy of the universe, the quality that keeps things moving and changing. It's possessed by all higher living things in the form of *hun* souls, and it forms patterns in the earth which the *kanyu* geomancers (also known as *feng shui* experts) can follow.

Characters need **energy** in order to perform actions. It acts as a limit on the total ability bonuses a character can apply to any given task. A character must use **energy** to use bonuses—the **energy** score is the number of points of ability bonus he can use at a time (for example, in one combat round).

Characters may temporarily lose **energy** from shock, injury, fatigue or disease. If a character's **energy** is reduced to less than 0 he is exhausted and unable to perform any actions. He will also fall over.

A normal person starts the game with 7 points of **energy**. A hero has 7 plus the power level of the game. However, older people will lose points: for each complete ten years of age your character is older than 31 (so if he is 41-50 he loses 1, 51-60 he loses 2 and so on).

You can buy additional points of **energy** with your natural gifts, your experience, or both. However **energy** points are expensive. The first one you buy costs 2 points, the second 4 points, the third 6 and so on.

Alternatively you can choose to have 1 point of **energy** less than normal. In this case you get 2 spare points of natural gifts to spend as you like.

BODY

This score represents *qi* manifested in physical form by the character's *po* souls. It is the capacity of the character to sustain physical injury and keep going. When it reaches 0 the *po* souls can no longer sustain life.

A normal person starts the game with 7 points of **body**, while a hero has 7 plus the power level of the game. However, older people will lose points: for each complete ten years of age your character is older than 31 (so if he's 41-50 he loses 1, 51-60 he loses 2 and so on).

To this basic value you should also add the character's **size**, and value for STRENGTH, whether aptitude or skill (including negative values!).

You can also buy additional points of **body** with your natural gifts, your experience, or both. However as with **energy**, **body** points are expensive. The first one you buy costs 2 points, the second 4 points, the third 6 and so on. Or you can choose to have 1 point of **body** less than normal. In this case you get 2 spare points of natural gifts to spend as you like.



Shi Jin, having been taught by Wang Jin, leads his villagers in repelling the bandits.

Example: Physical

Yang Ming is male, and average size. We decide that he has a light build, about 5'7" tall, and we make him right handed. Being a hero in a power level 3 game, he has 10 points each of **energy** and **body** (the basic 7 plus 3 for the power level). We decide that's sufficient.

He is slightly taller than average, and for some reason has developed a slight stoop. On the other hand his sense of fun gives him an infectious grin.

APPEARANCE

How does your character look—pale or dark, attractive or ugly? The people of Song China almost all have black hair, which is why they are known as 'the black-haired race', and most have brown eyes, so that part's easy. But what about the rest? To bring your character to life you should be able to describe at least two traits which set him apart from others. There's no need to make every character a grotesque with a squint, a birthmark above his right eye and a cauliflower ear. However, if the other players and the referee are going to be able to visualise your character, they should have some kind of a simple handle which they can use.

It is possible, of course, to make your character's traits the fact that he is unremarkable. This could be of particular use to a spy or a thief (and would require a negative bonus in PRESENCE—see later). However, even in such a case you should try to find *something* distinctive, if only so that his corpse can be identified when dragged from the river!

HAND

You can choose to make your character right-handed without having to spend any points. However left-handed characters don't suffer such a big disadvantage when they use their right hand as right-handed characters do when they try to use their left. For this reason, to be left-handed you will have to buy +1 in AMBIDEXTERITY (see the later section on buying ability bonuses). Also, like most cultures, the black-haired race is superstitious about left-handed people, who will normally



be distrusted if they make this characteristic at all obvious.

If you want to make your character fully ambidextrous you have to buy an ability bonus of +2 in AMBIDEXTERITY.

OTHER DETAILS

Any other physical details about your character you are more or less free to choose. Note, however, that if you choose to make him unusually perceptive, or strong, or the like, you will have to pay with natural gifts or experience points.

Habits and traits add life to your character. Some gestures you can act out yourself while playing the character (such as a habit of rubbing the side of the nose while talking to people). Others you should describe, though it's quite acceptable to allow these additional details to develop during play.

Just as jade is worthless before it's polished; so a man is worthless before he's educated

ABILITIES

There are two main kinds of abilities—aptitudes and skills. Aptitudes are innate. A character may be born with an ear for music, an affinity for animals, a gift for languages and so on. Aptitudes may be negative. Some people just can't play a musical instrument well, no matter how much they practice (your humble author, for example). Once a character's aptitudes are decided, they are fixed. Skills, on the other hand, are acquired by training or education. You can improve these during the game.

A score of 0 in an aptitude or skill represents an *average* level. This means, in the case of aptitudes, no special talent; in the case of skills, no specific ability.

A *bonus* in an aptitude or skill reflects ability different to the average. A positive bonus indicates a strength, while a negative bonus indicates a weakness. A negative bonus in a skill represents an acquired deficiency, through injury or the like (or just bad upbringing!).

You can have both aptitude and skill bonuses in the same ability. In this case you add the bonuses together to find out how good you are. Although most of your abilities have to be 'bought' using experience or natural gifts, your character will also receive some bonuses because of provenance. These are added *after* you have bought the abilities you want.

TYPES OF ABILITY

Abilities are divided into aptitudes and skills, which are bought separately, using natural gifts and experience, respectively. Abilities can be further divided into basic and specific. Basic abilities represent very general levels of ability, while specific abilities represent much narrower fields. Specific abilities are easier to learn, but can't be used in as many different situations.

Abilities can also be divided according to function: whether physical, mental, spiritual or knowledge. A character can't have an aptitude for knowledge, for the obvious reason that he doesn't *have* any knowledge when he is born. Instead, he can have the mental aptitude of DILIGENCE, which indicates his ability to study.

ABILITY LEVELS

In general abilities are rated from +1 to +5, although it is theoretically possible to have even higher values, especially by combining attributes with skills. The level of ability can be understood roughly as follows:

Bonus	Meaning
0	Average/no special ability
+1	Familiarity
+2	Competence
+3	High achievement
+4	Expertise
+5	Mastery

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

To give some idea of how bonuses influence the chance of success, let's take an easy task: cooking rice. Its ease is 10, and the referee rules that it is such a fundamental skill that a bonus is not necessary, although the skill of CRAFT (*Cooking*) will add to the chance of success.

An unskilled character has a 92% chance of cooking the rice successfully. A bonus of +1 takes that up to 97% (in practice, this would be considered an automatic success, and the dice needn't even be rolled).

Let's look at a more difficult task, swimming in a stormy sea. The basic ease is 5, which means that a character with no bonus has only 8% chance of staying afloat—as you'd expect of someone who can't swim! The average swimmer (+1 bonus) would have a 41% chance of making some headway, while a master swimmer such as the *Water Margin's* Zhang Shun (bonus +5) has a confident 92% chance of success.

One more important point you should note is that bonuses in different abilities may be added together to improve the chances of success of a task. Of course, all the abilities have to be relevant to the task attempted. The character's **energy** score also represents an upper

limit on the total value of bonuses that can be added to a single task. More details about abilities and their meaning are given in the *Action* chapter.

CHOOSING APTITUDES

Natural abilities are called aptitudes. You buy aptitudes with your character's *Natural Gifts* (see the earlier section).

Buying aptitudes is fairly simple, but needs to be explained slowly. If you want +1 in an aptitude, you will have to pay one point of natural gifts. If you want +2 in an aptitude, you first have to buy +1 (costing one point), then +2 (costing 2 points) so the total cost is 3. For +3, you have to buy +1 (1 points), +2 (2 points) *and* +3 (3 points) so the total cost is 6. Expensive, huh?

Just when you thought you'd got it, it gets even more expensive. The prices above cover specific aptitudes. Basic aptitudes cost more. Triple, in fact. But you get a lot for your points, so consider it, eh?

You'll notice you can't buy too many aptitudes. Right. These are pretty special. Even a +1 aptitude means quite a lot. +3 is quite exceptional.

Characters can also have negative bonuses in aptitudes. Players are encouraged to be honest in declaring these during the game, but given human nature, the referee should try to make a note of characters' disadvantages, and apply them. Negative bonus aptitudes may be freely chosen. You can also earn up to 3 points' worth of positive bonuses in aptitudes by choosing negative bonuses: simply add up what you would have paid for the negative bonus if it was positive, and divide by three. The result is the amount of 'extra' points you can spend. The maximum you can earn in this way is 3, so you could, for example, assign values of -1 to nine specific aptitudes in exchange for a +1 bonus in STRENGTH. Or you could have three specific aptitudes at -2 in exchange for a +2 bonus in FIGHTING.

UNKNOWN APTITUDES

Sometimes you don't know your own abilities. To reflect this, you can buy 'unknown' aptitudes. You buy these exactly the same way as normal aptitudes, except that you don't have to say what they are! Just pay your points, and note down 'unknown aptitude', and the bonus, on your character sheet. During the game, when your character attempts an action for which he have no bonus, and which he has not attempted before, you can make the unknown aptitude one relevant to that action, and adjust your character sheet accordingly.

There are restrictions on the unknown aptitudes you can select, however. You can only select specific aptitudes, not basic ones. The amount of unknown aptitudes you can assign depends on your character's

age. The table below shows the number of points you can spend on unknown aptitudes.

Age	Number of Points
<21	4
21-24	3
25-27	2
28-29	1

BASIC APTITUDES

The following are the basic aptitudes, grouped according to function. They cost three times as much as specific abilities—a total of 3 for +1, 9 for +2 and 18 for +3. For more detailed descriptions of their uses, have a look at the *Action* chapter.

PHYSICAL

CO-ORDINATION, ENDURANCE, GRACE, HEALTH, STRENGTH

MENTAL

DILIGENCE, INTUITION, PERCEPTION, REASONING, WIT

SPIRITUAL

ART, EMPATHY, MAGIC, PRESENCE, WILL

SPECIFIC APTITUDES

Specific abilities cost one point of natural gifts for +1, a total of 3 points for +2, 6 points for +3 and so on. Further details of the specific aptitudes are provided in the *Action* chapter.

Example: Aptitudes

What is the Sleepy Dragon naturally good at? And what are his weaknesses? He's sharp, a natural gambler, but not too good at concentrating.

	bonus	cost
CO-ORDINATION	+1	3
WIT	+1	3
FIGHTING	+2	3
LEAPING	+1	1
GAMBLING	+1	1
DECEPTION	+1	1
DILIGENCE	-1	-1
MEDITATION	-2	-1

This leaves us 6 points. Being age 24, we can spend up to 3 points on unknown aptitudes. We decide to have two, at +1 each. The remaining 4 points of natural gifts we hold on to for now, as they might be useful later on. We can come back and buy more aptitudes later if we want to.

PHYSICAL

ACROBATICS, AMBIDEXTERITY, CLIMBING, DANCING, DRINKING, FIGHTING, LEAPING, MISSILES, NIGHT VISION, PILLOW ARTS, ROWING, RUNNING, SHIPCRAFT, SINGING, SNEAKING, SOLDIERY, SPORTS*, SWIMMING, THIEVERY

MENTAL

ADMINISTRATION, AGRICULTURE, ALCHEMY, COMMERCE, COMPOSITION, CRAFTS*, EVALUATION, FISHING, GAMBLING, LANGUAGES*, MEDICINE, NAVIGATION, RHETORIC, STRATEGY, TRACKING, TRAPPING

SPIRITUAL

ACTING, ANIMALS, CHANTING, DECEPTION, DISGUISE, DIVINATION, ELEMENTALISM, ILLUSION, INTIMIDATION, INTRIGUE, MEDITATION, MUSIC, OCCULTISM, PUPPETRY, STORYTELLING

*These aptitudes may be applied to *any* Sport, Craft, or Language in which the character has a skill bonus.

CHOOSING SKILLS

Choosing skills for your character is done in pretty much the same way as choosing aptitudes. The price works the same way, it's just that you use experience rather than natural gifts. So +1 in a specific skill will cost 1 point, +2 will cost 3 and so on. +1 in a basic skill will cost 3 points, +2 will cost 9 and so on. Don't forget that even though you add the two together to find your total ability, skills are bought *separately* from aptitudes. So you could spend 3 points of natural gifts to get +2 in an aptitude, and 6 points of experience to get +3 in the same skill, for a total bonus of +5. Cheaper than the 15 experience you'd have to spend to get that +5 if it was all skill, eh?

One more difference in buying skills is that, while aptitudes are just what nature provided, you had to learn skills somehow. So you should be able to explain how your character gained his bonuses. Usually this will be fairly easy, but you'll need a lot of imagination and persuasion to convince the referee that your riverboat cut-throat is actually an expert surgeon!

What's more, for any specific skill bonus of +3 or more you will almost certainly have acquired the skill from a teacher. If you can't come up with a convincing explanation of how you managed to learn the skill on your own, you will have to make a note of the teacher as a patron (see the section on *Patrons*).

Negative skill bonuses can be acquired as a result of background or physical injury. Dedicated role-players may choose to start the game with disadvantaged characters if they wish, assigning negative skill bonuses as desired. They won't get any extra experience points by doing so, but it might add an extra element of interest.

BASIC SKILLS

The following basic skills can be acquired with points of experience: 3 points for +1, a total of 9 points for +2 and so on. These all correspond to aptitudes (though not all aptitudes can be learned as skills). In the game you should just add the bonuses together to discover your total ability. However, as it makes a difference in learning new skills, you should be sure to know how much of your bonus is aptitude and how much is skill. You will notice that AMBIDEXTERITY, though a specific aptitude, is a basic skill.

AMBIDEXTERITY, CO-ORDINATION, ENDURANCE, GRACE, GRIT, HEALTH, PERCEPTION, REASONING, STRENGTH

SPECIFIC SKILLS

The following lists divide specific skills according to function. As with basic skills you can just add them to the attribute of the same name to find your total ability. They cost one experience point for +1, a total of 3 points for +2, a total of 6 points for +3 and so on.

PHYSICAL

ACROBATICS, CLIMBING, DANCING, DRINKING, FAST DRAW, LEAPING, MARTIAL ARTS*, MISSILES*, PILLOW ARTS, RIDING, ROWING, RUNNING, SHIPCRAFT, SINGING, SNEAKING, SOLDIERY, SPORTS*, SURGERY, SWIMMING, THIEVERY

MENTAL

ADMINISTRATION, AGRICULTURE, ALCHEMY, ANIMAL TREATMENT, CHESS, COMMERCE, COMPOSITION**, CRAFTS*, EVALUATION, FISHING, FORGERY**, GAMBLING, MEDICINE, NAVIGATION, RHETORIC, STRATEGY, TRACKING, TRAPPING

Example: Skills

What has Yang Ming learned in his 23 years of life? 24 points of experience give us quite a lot of choice.

	<i>bonus</i>	<i>cost</i>
GRACE	+1	3
STRENGTH	+1	3
CLIMBING	+1	1
FAST DRAW	+1	1
LEAPING	+2	3
MARTIAL ART 1	+3	6
MARTIAL ART 2	+2	3
EVALUATION	+1	1
INTIMIDATION	+1	1

Leaving 2 points spare. Also note that his STRENGTH increases Yang's **body** score to 11.

SPIRITUAL

ACTING, CALLIGRAPHY**, CHANTING, DECEPTION, DISGUISE, DIVINATION, ELEMENTALISM, ILLUSION, INTIMIDATION, INTRIGUE, MEDITATION, MUSIC, OCCULTISM, PAINTING, PUPPETRY, STORYTELLING

KNOWLEDGE

ANIMAL LORE, ASTROLOGY, CEREMONY, CHINESE, CLASSICS**, DIALECTS*, FIRST AID, FOLK LORE, FOREIGN LANGUAGES*, GOODS LORE, HISTORY**, LAW, LEARNING**, LITERACY, MANNERS, PLANT LORE, ROUTES LORE, RUMOURS, SPELLS*, TALISMANS, TASTE, THEOLOGY, WILDERNESS LORE

*You must buy a separate bonus for each specific martial skill, sport, dialect, craft, spell or foreign language.

**Requires a LITERACY bonus: +1 for CLASSICS, HISTORY and LEARNING, +2 for COMPOSITION, FORGERY and CALLIGRAPHY.

No true Chinese prevaricates

about his origins

BACKGROUND

Decent Chinese society is traditionally divided into four main classes: the artisans, farmers, officials and merchants. In general the classes represent rank in society: the officials are at the top, followed by the farmers, the artisans and then the merchants.

However, there are more people in society than just these four, so we have to expand a little. So, in descending order of importance:

The Imperial Family

Officials } gentry
 Farmers }
 Artisans } commoners
 Merchants }
 Lower classes

There are also certain people who occupy a special position in society, or who are for some reason outside of it. For example, the large corps of eunuchs who attend to the needs of the Emperor, insulating him from contact with 'ordinary' people, could not be said to be highly regarded, though their proximity to the Emperor lends them a very high level of status in practical terms. Similarly Buddhist and Taoist clergy have some special privileges (which might place them above Artisans) but in other respects are mistrusted. Outsiders include barbarians from other lands,

outlaws, and those who, for whatever reason, place themselves outside civilised society. Such people cannot really be ranked in the above table, precisely because they are outside of society. While a barbarian might be regarded as the lowest of the low, in practical terms he will have a higher status than a slave, who occupies the lowest rank of the lower classes.

The simple table presented needs further detail, which you'll find in the chapter on *Society*. For now, all you need to know is that you should choose one of the listed classes for your character's family. Once you've chosen it, it's pretty much fixed: China is a rigid society, and families don't have much social mobility, though this doesn't stop a host of wealthy merchants doing their best to buy their children into the gentry—successfully in many cases. Traditionally it is also impossible for individuals to alter their class, except by drastic measures such as becoming a Eunuch or a priest

Of course, the reality of social relationships is more complex than just social ranks. Merchants find that wealth often makes up for a low position in society. A master craftsman commands more respect than a lowly farmer.

Class is more important for normal characters than for heroes, but it's still worth knowing. Also, although you have a free choice of social class, there can be disadvantages in shooting too high. If you choose to make your character a member of the gentry, for example, you'd be wise to spend some natural gifts on **wealth**. Otherwise you'll be in the unenviable position of being a *poor* member of the upper classes!

PROYENANCE

Where is your character from? You may like to leave this up to the referee, as it may be convenient for all the characters to come from the same town. Or you may have some strong preference: for example, you may want to be a citizen of the teeming metropolis that is the Capital.

The first thing to note about your character's provenance is whether it is country, town or court (in other words the high-ranking bureaucrats, generals, scholars and aristocrats of the Imperial Palace). This has an effect on wealth, and also on the bonus abilities he will receive.

However, the social class of the character limits your choice. You can only choose a provenance if it is listed below.

	<i>Possible Provenances</i>
Imperial Family	Court
Official	Court, Town
Farmer	Country
Artisan	Country, Town
Merchant	Town
Lower Class	Country, Town

You can then add to your skills the following additional bonuses (these are added to existing bonuses). The 'Country' provenance may seem like a bargain, but don't forget that any **wealth** bonus you have is worth less, and you are quite likely to be treated as a yokel in urban surroundings!

Provenance Bonuses

Court	INTRIGUE +1, MANNERS +1, TASTE +2
Town	COMMERCE +1, RUMOURS +1, TASTE +1
Country	MARTIAL ARTS +1, ANIMAL LORE +1, PLANT LORE +1, WILDERNESS LORE +1, MANNERS -1

Maps and lists of towns are provided in the *China* chapter from which you can choose (or even roll the dice for) your home town or district. There's quite a strong feeling of loyalty among most heroes, and finding someone who comes from the same town as you is usually cause for celebration. Characters from the country should still note down the name of the nearest town, as it represents the name of the country region which it administrates.

The character's home district will also determine the dialect and sub-dialect he can speak. Although conversations in the game are generally assumed to be in 'ordinary' Chinese, dialects may become important to the story if, for example two locals are discussing something, and a character overhearing misunderstands what they are saying.

All births are registered by the Ward Chief of the local ward, who must forward information on births and deaths to the registrar of the district. This, along with unique sub-dialects, means that it is relatively easy to determine whether a person is native to a district, or an outsider. Travelling outside one's native district is not encouraged, and those without a good excuse may be detained by the authorities and given a stern warning. Good excuses include visiting a relative or going on a pilgrimage, though perhaps the most common is claiming to be a merchant. This is one more reason why merchants are often treated with suspicion by the authorities.

FAMILY

The importance of the family in Chinese society cannot be over stressed. Of all the loyalties a character possesses, loyalty to family is expected to be the highest. And the family is regarded as the model of Chinese society. A family's father is 'Emperor' and must be shown respect. Children must obey their older siblings. In principle, children are expected to follow the calling of their father. Rebellion is harshly punished: a son who strikes his father commits a crime for which the penalty is execution. Even raising a hand against an older sibling is punishable by two and a half years of forced labour.

You should make a few notes about the members of your character's family. Are his father and mother still alive? What about his grandparents? What brothers and sisters does he have? What do they do? Anything you *don't* write about your character's family is fair game for the referee to create and use in the game. You may make other notes about your character's attitude towards other family members, and their attitude towards your character.

Also consider whether your character is married. Marriage age is quite young (as young as 13 or 14 for women and 16 for men). If he is married, you should describe his spouse in as much detail as you can, and consider whether he has any children. However you don't decide on abilities: that's up to the referee. See also the sections below on Patrons and Dependants.



Singing girl

WEALTH

There are two kinds of wealth with which your character can start the game. The first is a *stipend*; in other words wealth derived from the family. The second is *earnings*, or wealth acquired by personal effort. For the purposes of determining whether your character is eligible for an occupation, you can just add the two bonuses together, much like adding an aptitude to a skill. The result is referred to as your character's **wealth**.

When buying **wealth**, for both stipend and earnings, you should bear in mind the appropriateness

of what you decide. It's rather unlikely that the child of a pedlar will have much in the way of a stipend, for example (though if you can come up with an interesting explanation, so much the better). The cost for both earnings and stipend is the same as a specific ability bonus; in other words 1 for the first point, 2 for the second and so on. Once he has an occupation, you may find that your character's earnings from that occupation increase his **wealth** still further. For each occupation, the earnings derived from **position** are listed in the descriptions. This may be added to any other bonuses for **wealth**.

The *Society* chapter explains how to use **wealth** bonuses in the game. **Wealth** bonuses run from +1 to +10, though as with **position**, +10 is the exclusive preserve of the richest person in the Empire—in this case the Emperor, with a staggering monthly income of 70,000 strings of cash! The actual wealth represented by each successive point of bonus increases exponentially.

As the bonus represents *surplus* cash, you should understand that any bonus indicates that the character is quite well off. The overwhelming majority of China's population earn only enough to feed and clothe themselves (barely, in many cases), and this is reflected in the usual 0 earnings bonus.

One more important point to remember is that the cost of living is much higher in the city. Thus, a **wealth** bonus possessed by a character from the country is worth less if that character starts to live in a town. Conversely, city dwellers moving to the country will find themselves more affluent. This is explained in more detail in the *Society* chapter.

POSITION

A normal character's **position** in his occupation (see the next section) is expressed as a bonus. For most members of that occupation it will be 0, and this is what your character will be unless you choose differently. If you adopt a new occupation during the game, you may well enter at a lower **position** (-1 is normal). **Position** is usually rated between +1 and +10, though +10 is *extremely* rare—as a general rule it indicates the one highest person in that occupation in the whole of China! If you want your character to start the game with a higher **position** you can buy it with your natural gifts or experience. If you want your character to start at a lower **position** you may do so, but you don't gain any points.

Position is very cheap to buy: it costs one point of natural gifts or experience per point of bonus. However you can only use natural gifts in a case where his father could conceivably assist him in acquiring such a **position** (if his father follows the same occupation, for example).

Position reflects the character's formal social prestige, at least within their profession, and is not

available to heroic characters, who are outside society. It also partly determines a character's monthly net income. This, as well as what a given **position** represents for certain occupations, is explained in greater detail in the *Society* chapter.

OCCUPATION

To a great extent your character's occupation will determine his position in society, his income, what clothes he is expected to wear, and the way in which he behaves. It will also provide the opportunity to learn certain skills.

Occupations are associated with certain social classes. The list of occupations gives the social classes a character may belong to if he follows that occupation. Sometimes, joining an occupation will alter class (as with Eunuch or Priest). A character may join an occupation of a lower class, but he can't join an occupation of a higher class.

Occupations themselves also carry certain status in society. This is reflected in the bonus, ranging from 0 to +5, listed by the name of each occupation. This will have an effect on attempts to influence people, in certain circumstances, and is explained further in the *Society* chapter. There is no need to note this value on your character sheet.

Of course, there are other restrictions on choosing certain occupations. For example, you can't be an Aristocrat unless you're pretty wealthy. You can't be a Magician unless you can do magic (well, you can *try* I suppose...). You can't be a Eunuch unless you've had your... yes, well, the less said about *that* the better.

These restrictions are given in *italics* immediately

Example: Background

We know that Yang isn't from the lower classes, so we decide to place him in the Gentry. His father is an official of some kind, so we know he comes from the town. This means we can add bonuses of +1 to COMMERCE, RUMOURS and TASTE. We place his birth in the town of Dongping, coincidentally one of the closest prefectures to the outlaw stronghold of Liangshan Po.

The Yang family is a prolific clan. Its large estate houses four generations, including Yang Ming's paternal grandparents, two sets of uncles and aunts and sundry children. One notable omission is his father. Being an official, Yang senior cannot work in his home town. He is the magistrate of Nang County, four hundred miles to the south, where he lives with his wife Xuanyuan Ai and Ming's younger sister E.

Such a family is clearly rather wealthy. Three of those 4 spare natural gifts disappear to provide our lucky Dragon with a +2 stipend.

after the name of each occupation. At the end of the description of the occupation, a list of *bonus skills* is provided. These are skills which are easier to learn for a character following that occupation. They come with the territory, as it were. They're explained a little more in the *Action* chapter.

Occupations will usually provide characters with basic necessities. They may also provide surplus income, represented as earnings. After bonus skills, a value for earnings may be noted, usually based on position. This may be added to any bonus the character has acquired using experience.

Characters may, of course, try to pretend to be another occupation (especially if they are criminals). This is perfectly permissible, but not as easy as you might think: you have to have the right clothing, and speak the right way. The further the professed occupation is from your true occupation (such as a criminal trying to pass himself off as a Eunuch) the more difficult it's going to be to get away with.

More details about occupations can be found in the *Society* chapter. The most important thing to remember is that occupations are simply ways of describing characters, establishing their connection with the society in which they live, not arbitrary rules in which to shoehorn them.

ARISTOCRAT

+5

Imperial Family or Official *Wealth +3 or more*
Members of extremely high ranking families can enjoy the varied life of an aristocrat. Although many employ their influence to acquire official position, or manage a large estate, some become 'hangers-on' to the Imperial Court. This requires a chameleon-like ability to adapt to the latest trends and intrigues, but has the advantage of providing plenty of opportunity to 'network' as a means of securing a prestigious appointment, by-passing the usual channels. This occupation also includes relatives of the Imperial Family. Aristocrats can draw large salaries from the state if they play their cards right.

Bonus skills: INTRIGUE, MANNERS, TASTE

BARBARIAN

0

Outsider

Characters from countries outside China are normally merchants, spies or explorers. Barbarian occupations are more or less the same as Chinese ones, but confer no social advantages on the barbarian.

Although there are sizeable populations of foreigners in some cities, especially ports, in most of China they are regarded with considerable suspicion.

BEGGAR

0

Lower Class

Begging is well established, with beggars even having their own organisations to co-ordinate their operations. Methods of begging vary, but many



Aristocrat



Bodyguard



Constable

pretend to be mendicant monks. Most beggars survive through a store of knowledge about localities and personalities, as well as through their abilities to engage peoples' sympathy.

Bonus skills: DECEPTION, DISGUISE, RUMOURS

BOATMAN +1

Lower Class

There are many inland waterways (both rivers and canals) used for trade and travel purposes. Boatmen make their livings fishing, or ferrying people or wares across rivers or along rivers or canals to their destinations. Although most are competent and honest boat handlers, some will not be averse to the occasional bout of smuggling, kidnapping or out and out banditry. In some parts of the country, especially the south, there are whole communities living on boats on rivers, some of whom rarely touch dry land.

Bonus skills: FISHING, ROWING, SHIPCRAFT, SWIMMING

Earnings: +1 for **position** 7 or greater

BODYGUARD +1

Lower Class

Wealthy patrons requiring protection will employ bodyguards to provide it. Such patrons may be merchants, foreigners, officials, or even successful craftsmen or farmers. This isn't a very respectable profession, but it usually provides the bodyguard with some clout, and the opportunity to hone his martial skills.

Bonus skills: EVALUATION, INTIMIDATION, MARTIAL ARTS

Earnings: bonus of **position**/3

CLERK +2

Gentry, Merchant, Lower Class literacy +1 or more

This occupation covers a vast range of administrative roles. The Imperial Bureaucracy requires a huge supply of clerks and scribes to maintain the paperwork. Some of these are professionals, while others are drafted from literate members of the local community. Many of these clerks have a reputation for corruption. Merchants, too, often require clerks to keep track of the bureaucratic necessities of their trade.

Bonus skills: ADMINISTRATION, CALLIGRAPHY, LITERACY

Earnings: +1 for **position** 5 or greater

CONSTABLE +2

Gentry, Lower Class

Employees of the judicial tribunal, which stands at the centre of every Chinese town, constables are responsible for the 'dirty jobs' involved in judicial work. They have to search for and bring in suspects, then beat them and even torture them if the magistrate requires it.

Bonus skills: EVALUATION, INTIMIDATION, RUMOURS

Earnings: +1 for **position** 5 or greater

COUNTRYMAN +1

Lower Class

Ordinary people who scrape a living in the wilds. This includes woodcutters, grass gatherers, charcoal burners and the like. There are very few opportunities for countrymen to acquire money or power.

Bonus skills: ANIMAL LORE, PLANT LORE, WILDERNESS LORE

COURIER **+3**
Gentry, Commoner
 Communication is essential to the efficient working of the empire, and official couriers are charged with the task of carrying messages between officials. They have the right to stay at inns at no cost (in fact, inns are set up especially for couriers). Wealthy merchants and aristocrats may also employ couriers for their personal service.

Bonus skills: RIDING, ROUTES LORE, RUNNING
 Earnings: +1 for **position** 5 or greater

CRAFTSMAN **+2**
Artisan
 Crafts are listed in the *Action* chapter. Craftsmen form quite specialised guilds, which act as price setters, labour exchanges and general middlemen. Apprentices receive no pay, learning the craft from a master (see Patrons). Cooks and chefs are considered to be craftsmen.

Bonus skills: COMMERCE, CRAFT, GOODS LORE
 Earnings: bonus of **position**/5

CRIMINAL **0**
Lower Class
 Despite its harsh laws, China has its fair share of criminals. Many peasants, driven off the land by the greed and corruption of the bureaucracy, turn to illegal pursuits. Criminals tend to associate in guilds, but most have to pretend that they belong to a different occupation. You have to be pretty rich to pass yourself off as a mandarin or the like, and have a smattering of appropriate skills.

Bonus skills: DECEPTION, GAMBLING, SNEAKING, THIEVERY

DOCTOR **+3**
Artisan, Lower Class
 There are two kinds of doctor: those who are employed by the bureaucracy and those in private practice. The latter ordinarily come from a family practice, or are priests, while the former have to study in the state-run Medical Academy and pass rigorous examinations. This occupation includes physicians, surgeons, pharmacists, vets and those medics specialising in forensic medicine.

Bonus skills: FIRST AID, MEDICINE, PLANT LORE, SURGERY
 Earnings: bonus of **position**/4

ENTERTAINER **+1**
Lower Class
 In general, the profession of entertainer is considered a dishonourable way to make a living, though there's no doubt that entertainers are widely appreciated. Since Chinese dramatic performances involve such a wide array of entertainment, this occupation covers such diverse talents as singers, acrobats and dancers.

Bonus skills: ACROBATICS, ACTING, DANCING, MUSIC, PILLOW ARTS, PUPPETRY, SINGING, STORYTELLING
 Earnings: +1 for **position** 7 or greater

EUNUCH **+2**
any
 Any man may become a eunuch, and although it is possible to achieve considerable power this way, it is not necessarily an occupation to be recommended to player characters. The process of becoming a eunuch is not really suitable for publication, and it has a relatively high fatality rate. Furthermore eunuchs must sever all family ties. On the other hand, once they become Eunuchs they effectively join the Imperial Family, and they are considered to be of this social class.

Bonus skills: CEREMONY, INTRIGUE, MANNERS
 Earnings: bonus of **position**/3

FARMER **+1**
Farmer, Lower Class
 The majority of farmers are tenants on land owned by others. Their life is hard; their rents are high. Others are lucky to own their own land. They, unfortunately, must bear the brunt of the taxes, which rich folk somehow manage to evade paying. The luckiest farmers of all come from wealthy families with official connections. A touch wealthier, however, and they stop having to follow this profession, instead becoming landowners.

Bonus skills: ENDURANCE, AGRICULTURE, ANIMAL LORE, FOLK LORE
 Earnings: bonus of **position**/5

HERMIT **0**
any
 Anyone who secludes himself away from the hustle and bustle of town life can be considered a hermit. For this reason it includes the lone swordsman dedicated to perfecting his art, as well as the more traditional philosopher, searching for the truth through meditation. A hermit becomes an outsider.

Bonus skills: MEDITATION, WILDERNESS LORE

HUNTER **+1**
Lower Class
 A dangerous job, especially in those areas infested by tigers. A hunter may be employed by the authorities to rid an area of a menace, or by traders to obtain precious hides, tusks or internal organs. For those who balk at the man-eaters, there is a thriving trade in game animals, or a meagre living can be scraped by trapping rabbits.

Bonus skills: ANIMAL LORE, FISHING, MISSILES, SNEAKING, TRACKING, TRAPPING, WILDERNESS LORE.
 Earnings: +1 for **position** 7 or greater

INSTRUCTOR **+3**
Gentry, Lower Class
 An instructor teaches the martial arts, whether to soldiers in the army, or as the personal tutor to a rich personage. Such a person will normally have a reputation and may receive challenges from other martial artists.
 Bonus skills: EVALUATION, FIRST AID, MARTIAL ARTS
 Earnings: bonus of **position**/5

LABOURER **0**
Lower Class
 Labourers are manual workers, often employed by craftsmen or farmers, or as servants to the wealthy. They do the heavy work under the supervision of their employer. Sometimes they will stay in a job for some time and eventually change to the employer's occupation (such as an apprentice craftsman). This is not common, though; the bulk of labourers simply turn their hands to whatever pays. Labourer is the most common single career for the average city dweller. This occupation also includes probably the toughest occupation: that of miner.
 Bonus skills: STRENGTH, ENDURANCE

LANDOWNER **+4**
Gentry *Wealth +2 or more*
 When you own a certain amount of land, you find you are sufficiently rich that you no longer need to work it yourself as a farmer. In this case, you become a landowner. Most landowners will have tenants, who may be farmers or craftsmen (depending on whether the land owned is in the country or the town). They may employ a manager to handle day-to-day affairs, but will normally have to exercise at least some supervision.
 Bonus skills: ADMINISTRATION
 Earnings: bonus of **position**/2

MAGICIAN **+2**
any
 The various kinds of sorcerers have a wide variety of abilities at their disposal. Many are practitioners of the philosophy of Taoism, and one of the most common branches of the arts of Chinese sorcery is Alchemy—the quest for immortality. However, Buddhist sorcerers are also encountered, and so are *wu ren*, shaman sorcerers of the folk religion.
 Bonus skills: ALCHEMY, DIVINATION, ELEMENTALISM, ILLUSION, SPELLS, TALISMANS
 Earnings: bonus of **position**/5

MANAGER **+3**
Merchant
 A merchant may be employed by a landowner, or by the state, as a general manager, supervising collection

of rent, upkeep and so on. A merchant who is fortunate enough to run his own business might earn a living selling some commodity, or working as a moneychanger. Shopkeepers tend to be fairly specialised, and they run their enterprises as family businesses, so wives and children are expected to assist. This occupation includes those shopkeepers who own their own shops, as well as those who pay rent to a wealthy landowner, magnate or the government. It also includes those who run estates or factories on behalf of others.

Bonus skills: ADMINISTRATION, COMMERCE, TASTE
 Earnings: bonus of **position**/3

MANDARIN **+5**
Gentry
 A magistrate is the effective ruler of a district (a walled town and the surrounding countryside), and therefore responsible for tens of thousands of citizens. He is in charge of all civilian administrative decisions within the district, and except in a military district or prefecture, outranks the officer in charge of the garrison. He is primarily the dispenser of justice.

The magistrate's immediate assistants occupy the lowest rank of the imperial bureaucracy. If diligent, and given success in the imperial examinations, they may become magistrates. A magistrate who performs his tasks well can hope for promotion up through the hierarchy: whether as a prefect, a circuit intendant, or a functionary of one of the various ministries of the central government. From there the path to the top is rocky, but the rewards are great. A spell in a government ministry may lead to a post as a minister, and there is always the possibility of trying to become a Censor, the feared policers of the bureaucracy. Characters wishing to occupy higher positions as mandarins must either be aristocrats, or pass the Imperial examinations.

Bonus skills: ADMINISTRATION, CEREMONY, LAW, RHETORIC
 Earnings: +1 at position 1, rising to +2 at 3, and +3 at **position** 7 or greater

OUTLAW **0**
any
 This occupation includes a wide range of character types, though of course most are out-and-out bandits. Anyone who is recognised to be outside the law must have this occupation. He becomes an outsider. It is anticipated that many hero characters of this game will end up in this occupation. Despite the bonus skills, it is by no means limited to warriors.

Bonus skills: MARTIAL ARTS, MISSILES, WILDERNESS LORE



Mandarin



Pedlar



Servant

PEDLAR

0

Merchant, Lower Class

The lowest level of merchant, pedlars wander the streets dispensing anything from medicine to snacks to magical charms and paraphernalia. Traditionally, medicine pedlars advertise their wares by putting on a display of martial skills. This is a common profession for down-on-their-luck warriors.

Bonus skills: COMMERCE, DECEPTION, RUMOURS

PRIEST

+2

any

The occupation of priest covers a wide range of people concerned with the various types of religion. These include Buddhist and Taoist monks, geomancers, diviners, astrologers and so on. To be ordained in a monastery, monks require an official document of authorisation. There are, of course, many lay priests who lack such authentication, but who nevertheless cater to the religious needs of the populace. Priests are viewed as lower class but in practice their association with the occult or the hierarchy of the clergy lends them influence.

Bonus skills: ASTROLOGY, CEREMONY, CHANTING (Buddhists only), DIVINATION, ELEMENTALISM (Taoists only), MEDITATION, OCCULTISM, THEOLOGY

Earnings: +1 at **position** 7 or greater

PUGILIST

+1

Lower Class

Martial arts contests are a regular spectacle in Chinese society, and this occupation includes those prize-fighters who make their living by competing in such tournaments. However it is wider than this, including any student of the martial arts, and the monks of the Shaolin monastery.

Bonus skills: EVALUATION, GRIT, MARTIAL ARTS

SAILOR

+2

Lower Class

The Chinese are great traders, and their merchant vessels regularly journey across the South Pacific and Indian Oceans. This occupation covers the whole gamut of ocean-going sailors, from deck hands to ship captains.

Bonus skills: NAVIGATION, ROWING, SHIPCRAFT, SWIMMING

Earnings: bonus of **position**/5

SCHOLAR

+4

Gentry

China has a great tradition of learning. People of all classes aspire to the status of scholars. Those who show particular ability at the classics stand a good chance of passing not only the local examinations but also the Palace ones—the key to a lucrative career in central government. This occupation includes students and teachers, and even the illustrious scholars of the Imperial Academy.

Bonus skills: CLASSICS, COMPOSITION, HISTORY, LEARNING

SERVANT **0**

Lower Class

Servants can be quite highly trained insofar as one needs training in the procedure of serving food or drink and so on. Even bringing a simple message to a master could involve a degree of ceremony and correct behaviour, certainly in the case of an official master. A servant usually works for a wealthy master in return for food and board and a poor salary. Alternatively, he may be a waiter in a tavern or restaurant. Such menials working in the Eastern Capital must be able to remember complex orders perfectly, or they will soon be out of a job.

Bonus skills: MANNERS, RUMOURS

SOLDIER **+1**

Gentry, Lower Class

Not all men enlisted into the army can really be said to be following the occupation of soldier. Many, especially the criminals sentenced to penal servitude in an army labour unit, are little more than labourers. Fighting members of the Imperial and provincial armies are true soldiers, however. It also covers officers and even the military officials who provide one arm of the bureaucracy. In general, this is not a highly regarded occupation. In fact, soldiers are intensely disliked by many people. When they are not involved in military action or duties such as fire fighting in a city, many soldiers supplement their income with mercantile activities.

This occupation may include those countryfolk drafted by the bureaucracy as leaders of local militia, whether temporarily or permanently, and those who have been sentenced to penal servitude and subsequently drafted into the regular army.

Bonus skills: MARTIAL ARTS, SOLDIERY, STRATEGY

Earnings: bonus of **position**/3

SPY **+2**

Lower Class

Spies are of use to a variety of powerful people: officials, generals, merchants and so on. They specialise in the arts of disguise and deception. Like criminals, they will usually disguise their true occupation, and may pose as merchants or couriers. This occupation includes most members of the Imperial Secret Police.

Bonus skills: DISGUISE, PERCEPTION, SNEAKING

Earnings: bonus of **position**/4

TRADER **+1**

Merchant

A trader is a travelling merchant, supplying shops, or other businesses with commodities. The trader specialises in the distribution of goods, and therefore a detailed knowledge of trade routes and market fluctuations are essential to his success. The most

prized commodities are salt and tea—both government monopolies.

Bonus skills: COMMERCE, GOODS LORE, ROUTES LORE

Earnings: bonus of **position**/2

WANDERER **0**

any

A character may become a wanderer at any time, simply by abandoning his present occupation. Acquiring a new occupation after being a wanderer may be difficult, however.

Bonus skills: ROUTES LORE

WASTREL **0**

Gentry, Merchant

Stipend +2 or more

The children of wealthy parents are free to indulge themselves in whatever diversions they choose. Their parents may engage arms instructors to tutor them in the military arts.

Bonus skills: one according to the teacher engaged, plus TASTE

HEROES' OCCUPATIONS

If you choose to play a heroic character, you have one great disadvantage: you have stepped outside normal society. For this reason, heroes may not have a **position** bonus. The character's **respect** bonus is the only measure of status that a hero can use. You *must* choose one of the following occupations: Barbarian, Countryman, Hermit, Hunter, Magician, Outlaw, Pugilist, Priest, Spy, Wanderer or Wastrel. However, this doesn't mean that the hero has followed that occupation all his life. You should feel free to determine the previous history of your character (see the later section), including what occupation he followed until he felt the call of the wild (or was forced into following it).

The referees may allow a character to 'defer' his exile from society. In other words, at the start of the

Example: Occupation

A look at his abilities makes it obvious that Yang is not cut out for a career in the Civil Service. But coming from the family of a magistrate he wouldn't have much trouble being employed as a constable at the local Yamen in Dongping.

Unfortunately Yang is a hero. We know that he will lose his position as a constable. The referee decides to allow Yang to be a Sergeant (position +3) without spending any points, because he'll lose that position very soon. Yang's exile is deferred, but the player agrees that circumstances will soon conspire to switch Yang's occupation to Outlaw.

game he can follow any normal occupation. The circumstances in which he leaves that occupation will form one of the events of the game.

For example, an Arms Instructor to the Imperial Guards (occupation: instructor) is framed by a corrupt official who covets the man's wife. As a result of this he becomes an outlaw, and so his life as a hero begins...

In cases where a character's exile is deferred, the player should agree to a deadline by which the character must leave his occupation. Once the deadline is reached the referee is at liberty to have him framed...

PATRONS

In a society such as China, where the idea of equality is almost entirely unknown, patrons are of crucial importance. If you want to get anywhere, a patron is essential. You should make a note of your character's patrons on his character sheet.

There are two basic kinds of patrons: active and inactive. An active patron is one with whom the character currently has a relationship of some kind. An inactive patron is someone who is no longer in regular contact with the character.

The principal patrons for all characters are their parents. If the character still lives with his parents (which is normal for most characters until they marry, and in many cases even after) then the parents will be active patrons. If the parents are dead, or the character lives apart from their family, then the parents will be inactive patrons. Characters are expected to make offerings to their ancestors at the family altar, and if the character's parents are dead, this is of particular importance.

Other patrons arise because of occupation or learning. Any teacher of a character automatically becomes his patron. As a general rule, if a character has a specific skill of +2 or more, he will have been taught, and that teacher will be a patron. You may choose whether the patron is active or inactive.

A character in an occupation will normally have a patron: his superior in that occupation. A manager working for a rich trader will regard the trader as his patron. Soldiers in the army regard their superior officer as a patron. A married woman regards her husband as a patron. Players may describe their character's patrons in as much detail as they like but, since they are the referee's characters, the referee has final say, and may change the players' descriptions.

Patrons are useful in that they provide a resource that can be drawn on. On the other hand, a character is expected to obey his patrons if he wishes to maintain **respect** (and retain his patron). Thus patrons can be something of a burden at times.

Patrons also affect a character's **respect** bonus, because when a patron gains or loses face, this has an

effect on the character. The reverse is also true: a patron may gain or lose respect from the actions of a dependent. Thus patrons will disapprove of actions by a character which might cause them to lose face. This is explained further in the *Society* chapter.

Characters often owe their patrons *favours* (see below). By owing favours to patrons you can gain extra experience to spend on your character's abilities. The exception to this is that you can't get experience from the 3 favours you owe to your parents.

DEPENDANTS

Of course you don't only have patrons. You may acquire dependants to whom *you* are a patron. Firstly there are family dependants. A married man regards his wife (or wives and concubines if he's very rich) as dependants. He must support them, but in return he can expect their loyalty and obedience. The same is true for children.

Secondly, there are servants. A character who comes from the gentry or higher, and any character with a **wealth** bonus, will almost certainly have one or more servants, maids or retainers. Of course, a portion of the character's **wealth** bonus will have to be set aside to provide the living expenses for these dependants. The referee should determine the details of a character's family retainers.

Dependants may also be acquired through an occupation. An officer in the army regards all his men as dependants. A magistrate's dependants are the staff of the tribunal (though some might argue that everyone in his district is his dependant in a sense!).

As with patrons, dependants are usually played by the referee. Players may describe these dependants, but the referee has final say. Dependants owe their patrons favours, but subject to the approval of the referee, you don't have to pay experience for this. As with patrons, the actions of a character's dependants may have an effect on the character's face.

FAYOURS

Obligation is important to the people of Song China. They must keep careful track of who owes them favours, and who they owe favours to. The network of favours becomes very important in using influence. This is explained further in the *Society* chapter. When you create a character you might like to think about the favours he owes or is owed. All characters owe their parents three favours (whether those parents are dead or alive!). Only two of these favours may be 'repaid', and the approved way of doing so is by producing heirs. Failure to observe filial piety by attempting to repay them can result in the acquisition of *bad joss*, a store of points which the referee keeps track of, and which may have nasty consequences for

the character (it is explained further in the *Games* chapter).

Up to three points of experience can be gained by owing favours. Each favour owed gains one point of experience, irrespective of the social standing of the person to whom the debt is owed. These favours may include the character's Patrons (see above), but you can't get points of experience from the three favours you owe to your parents!

You may also be owed favours. Any dependants your character has, which are agreed by the referee, will owe you favours.

It is also possible to be owed favours by other people. These cost experience according to the social standing of the person *relative to the player character*.

<i>Position of Person</i>	<i>Experience</i>
Lower than, or the same as character	1
Higher than the character	2
Much higher than the character	3

The referee will have to interpret these relative levels. Obviously it will always be necessary to think up some details about the person with whom the character has a relationship: at the very least a name. The referee is at liberty to use that person in the course of a game.

Example: Contacts

Yang's first Patron is his father. He also owes a lot to Prefect Hua, who has just completed his term in Dongping, and who has now moved to a position in the central government in Bianliang. His martial arts teacher, Master Hung, is another (inactive) Patron. As long as Yang remains a constable, he has a squad of lower-ranking constables as his dependants. He also shares some responsibility for the children of his extended family, though these are not direct dependants.

His life up to now has been busy, if uneventful. During his teens he was on the move every four years or so as his father's official post was changed. As an adult, he obtained his position as a constable through his family. To gain promotion to sergeant, however, he persuaded Prefect Hua, to whom he now owes a favour. This provides him with an additional point of experience, which he immediately sink into a favour owed by Gu, a kind-hearted petty crook in Dongping. Yang deliberately allowed Gu to escape arrest a year ago, earning a flogging for his pains.

*No great virtue may be brought
to perfection without politeness*

PERSONAL QUALITIES

Although most aspects of the personality of a character are left to players to bring to life through their performances, certain areas are made easier to understand and administer by the use of rules. None of these rules restrict a player's freedom to play the character she wants, but they do go some way to encouraging players to make their characters real Chinese heroes, and not just Joe Average Westerner in a strange costume. They also provide players with relatively concrete possible goals for their characters.

MOTIVATION

A character's drives are an essential element in describing who he is. Most areas of personality don't require rules, just the ability to imagine that you are a different person. Motivation, however, has an effect on a character's chances of improvement, so some rules are necessary.

Each player may select a principal motivation for her character. The motivation should usually be one appropriate to the character's class and occupation. Possible motivations are given below, but players may choose to come up with others. Remember that the character's motivation should be something that inspires him to better himself.

Players acquire points of motivation in the game by 'claiming' them at appropriate moments, as explained in the chapter on *Action*. There is a penalty, however. When you claim motivation for your character you also acquire points of *bad joss* (this is explained in the *Beliefs* chapter).

Characters ordinarily start the game with 0 **motivation** unless the player chooses to make some motivation rolls (see the *Action* chapter). You can make up to five motivation rolls, but be warned: you will also acquire bad joss!

You may also select a secondary motivation for your character if you like. You can claim points freely for both motivations if you do so.

Motivation may be used to assist in character improvement and, optionally, may be spent by players to gain one-off bonuses to important rolls. It has some other effects on the game (especially for religious characters), and referees may like to take account of the characters' current motivations in adjudicating the game. However, **motivation** is not presented as a restriction on player freedom. In the end, the

psychology of the character is the player's to decide.

You are free to abandon a motivation at any time, and may also switch to a new one. Any points acquired are lost (but bad joss which was acquired because of that motivation is not lost).

A player character does not *have* to have a motivation.

AMBITION 志

The character desires advancement above all other things, though the method will vary according to circumstances. A character with this motivation will usually be socially competitive and probably try to acquire position.

CHIVALRY 侠

Martial virtue in China is not necessarily the same as we would recognise in the West. Chivalry prizes generosity, honesty, bravery, and to a large extent, chastity. A martial hero should be quick to leap to the aid of the underdog, or to revenge an injustice, and extreme violence is acceptable in such circumstances.

DESIRE 欲

A character with this motivation is driven by the pleasures of the flesh, whether they be food, members of the opposite (or same) sex, or whatever. A curiosity



The chivalrous sergeants Flying Tiger and Beautiful Whiskers help Shi Jin escape the sheriff.

of this motivation is that, as with greed, satisfaction of the desire rarely seems to diminish the motivation.

ENLIGHTENMENT 悟

The character must be a practising Buddhist to select this motivation. Buddhist enlightenment requires a character to transcend the cares of the world. It is usually acquired through meditation and ascetic practices. Ultimately a character following this motivation may become a *Lohan*, a form of Buddhist Sublime.

FACE 臉

A character with this motivation is driven to protect his prestige, and avoid ridicule by others. While most people consider it important to be treated properly, with appropriate respect, this motivation suggests a level of passion in excess of the normal.

FAME 譽

The character wants his name to be known far and wide. This is a common motivation of heroes and villains alike. Characters desiring fame will often attempt to improve their **respect** score, and maybe even go to the lengths of hiring storytellers to spread stories about them.

FILIAL PIETY 孝

Actually the highest moral duty a person can have, filial piety is the dedication of a child towards the well-being of their parents. It is considered the natural response to the 'debt that can never be repaid' (the gift of life).

GREED 貪

The character desires wealth above all else. This is an appropriate motivation for merchants, but it is usually looked down upon, and therefore characters from other social classes may suffer from making this motivation too obvious.

HAPPINESS 愉

A popular motivation though not, it has to be said, necessarily the strongest. The character simply wishes to lead a happy life, and, if a virtuous person, probably feels that other people should also be happy.

IMMORTALITY 仙

The character must be a practising Taoist to select this motivation. There are various levels of immortality for which a Taoist may strive, from simple longevity in this world, to becoming a Sublime, and even dwelling in the Otherworld. This game does not deal with attaining Immortality.

JUSTICE 義

A basic belief in justice in China usually accords with the ideas expressed in the Law Code. There is no

sense of ‘equality’ involved. Justice means that everyone should be treated correctly according to his station in society. In some circumstances the Law Code may be perverted by corrupt individuals. A character motivated by justice will find this the greatest crime.

LOYALTY 忠

For this to be an overriding motivation, an object of the loyalty should be specified. The object of loyalty should not be too far removed from the character (it’s pointless a peasant choosing loyalty to the Emperor as a motivation, for example) and should ideally be an immediate superior.

MERCY 憐

Almost entirely limited to Buddhists, as it particularly stems from the doctrine associated with Guan Yin. The Chinese concept of mercy involves showing compassion to all living things, irrespective of their social status.

PERFECTION 熟

An obsessive desire to achieve a high level of ability in a certain area may be possessed by scholars and warriors alike. The disadvantage with this motivation is that points may only be added to the chance of improvement in the particular area with which the character is obsessed.

PURITY 潔

Usually limited to monks, priests and hermits, the motivation of purity involves a rejection of contaminating influences from the everyday world. Depending on the precise religious beliefs of the character, this may include lusts and desires, non-vegetarianism and violence.

REVENGE 讐

The character is determined to avenge some specific past action. This motivation goes far beyond Justice, and may indeed apply in cases that could not be called just. The player should specify the object of the revenge. Usually, obtaining the revenge sought will force the character to find a new motivation. Ordinarily, however, characters find it hard to adjust

Example: Motivation

Yang is a prime candidate to become one of the brotherhood of heroes. Who knows, he may even be one of the reborn souls of the Water Margin heroes. He follows the Chinese ideal of chivalry above all else.

We already know that he allowed a petty criminal, Gu, to escape. In his work as a constable he has tended to prize fair play above the letter of the law.

to a new motivation after having followed this one!

VIRTUE 仁

Mainly possessed by ardent followers of Confucianism, as this concept is fundamental to its teachings. Virtue relates to interpersonal relations. It is usually understood to refer to a sensitive awareness of the situation of other people. However, it differs from the Taoist and Buddhist ideals in that it stresses dealing with people correctly, and maintaining harmony and order in society.

RESPECT

You can’t get very far in Chinese society without respect. The higher you climb, the more important it is that your reputation is flawless. **Respect** is more than this, however. It is a character’s informal prestige: who he is.

Respect is measured on the same scale as abilities. A respect of 0 indicates that the character has no special reputation. A negative value for respect indicates that the character is actually disdained by people. Positive values show increasing levels of public regard for the character.

In Song China, **respect** often comes from being a part of a hierarchy. Characters will have a score in **respect** according to the following criteria:

+1 respect
is gained by characters with a simple position in a hierarchy: that of a person who has been placed in charge of a small number of subordinates. For example: the manager of a thriving business, a sergeant in a magistrate’s yamen or a military unit, a master craftsman or a small-scale bandit chief.

+2 respect
is gained by being part of a more complicated hierarchy, and having at least two tiers of subordinates. This applies to ‘mid-level’ people, for example, officers in the army, ward chiefs of villages, magistrates, magnates or Abbots of temples.

+3 respect
is gained by those at the top of a substantial hierarchy. This applies to ministers, generals, bandit kings and the Taoist Celestial Master.

This should be added to any **respect** bought with your experience when you create your character. It costs the same as a specific ability: so the first additional point costs 1, the second 2 and so on. You may, if you wish, start the game with negative points of respect. Each negative point of respect provides 1 additional point of experience.

Don’t confuse **respect** with any moral judgement. There is no sense in which a person with high **respect**

is ‘good’ while a person with low **respect** is ‘bad’. It simply shows what others think of your character, and in China that is more important.

Respect will change in the course of the game as a result of your character’s actions, and even as a result of those he is close to (see *Face*, below). It is important in relations with patrons and dependants, as well as in the use of influence. It is especially important for heroes, who may not possess a **position** score, and who therefore often rely on their **respect** scores (and their ages) to determine relative status.

FACE

Although the basic **respect** score of a character is determined by what he *is*, it will change according to what he *does*. This is handled using the mechanic of *face*. The concept of ‘gaining face’ and ‘losing face’ is relatively easy to understand. Whenever your character does anything impressive or shameful, anything that might have an effect on his reputation, it is reflected in an award of *face*.

Players may ‘trade-in’ their characters’ face scores for **respect** bonuses when they acquire enough *face*. In order to acquire a **respect** bonus, you need to have *face* points equal to five times the new bonus. *Face* traded in for a **respect** bonus is lost.

After a while players may start to regard *face* as a form of social currency. This is quite an appropriate way of considering it. While the Chinese are no less fond of wealth than any other culture, money is considered rather vulgar.

Full details of how to gain and lose *face*, and how to convert it into **respect**, are given in the *Society* chapter.

PREVIOUS HISTORY

Much of the character’s previous history should be clear from the preceding sections. You know where he was born and something about his family. You also know what occupations he has followed up to the present, and what patrons, dependants and contacts he has acquired in the course of his life.

Although it’s by no means necessary, writing a

Example: Reputation

Yang’s qualities have stood him in good stead, earning him a reputation for generosity. We spend one of his spare experience points to give him a respect bonus of +1. As long as he remains a sergeant, this is raised to +2 because of his position in a hierarchy. If he becomes an outlaw, he may retain this level of **respect** if he manages to be put in command in some way: becoming a lieutenant to the chief, for example. For a character with Yang Ming’s talents, this should be possible.

brief life history of your character will help you bring him to life in the game, and may give the referee some useful ideas for adventures. You should also note down any events in your character’s life which left a deep impact on him. Examples might include the death of a parent, the first time he had sex or killed someone else, and so on.

Although what you create here may return to ‘haunt’ you during the game, this is one of your biggest chances to make a creative input to the plot of the game.

*Sons receive their father’s fortunes;
daughters share their husbands’ lot*

POSSESSIONS

The possessions with which your character starts the game are mainly determined by his occupation and **wealth**. Other possessions are at the discretion of the referee. Players whose characters have high **wealth** bonuses should negotiate with the referee for land, buildings, shops and other large items of property.

Referees may be lenient in the case of hero characters who will be becoming outlaws. In such cases, the characters may be provided with ‘temporary’ **wealth** bonuses and property. In the *Water Margin*, for example, Shi Jin started as a fairly substantial landowner, and was also the Ward Chief of his local village. After being betrayed by an underling, however, he lost all this—fleeing in the night and burning down his family home.

In this game we don’t fuss around with the accountancy of keeping track of precise amounts of money. Thus any reasonable request by a player for a possession should be accepted. Referees may like to ask a player to make a roll if, in a tight spot, she claims that her character has brought just the widget needed to get him out of trouble.

CLOTHING

All characters automatically gain clothing appropriate to their occupation and **position**. Examples of typical clothing for particular occupations can be found in the illustrations throughout the game. Compared to the longer robes of earlier times, the increased use of horses in the Song Dynasty has made trousers more popular, and for working men they are now the rule, along with simple wide-sleeved overshirts. Scholars still wear long robes.

To a very great extent, you can tell a person’s

position and quality from his clothing. This is especially true as you get higher in society. Mandarins are precisely distinguished according to rank by their clothing.

One very important point is that it is customary for all men, with the exception of Buddhist monks, to wear a hat.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Characters automatically have access to the tools of their trade as defined below. However they won't necessarily own them. In the case of many craftsmen, for example, employees will use tools provided by their masters. Soldiers usually do not own their weapons, which are provided by the army. However characters of increased **position** may own their own tools.

ARISTOCRAT	none
BARBARIAN	according to occupation
BEGGAR	begging bowl, wooden fish
BOATMAN	for position +1 or greater, a boat
BODYGUARD	weapons, see below
CLERK	writing set
CONSTABLE	weapons, see below
COUNTRYMAN	none
COURIER	none
CRAFTSMAN	according to craft
CRIMINAL	according to type of crime
DOCTOR	medical almanac
ENTERTAINER	according to type
EUNUCH	pickled organs
FARMER	farm implements
HERMIT	none
HUNTER	traps, weapons, see below
INSTRUCTOR	weapons, see below
LABOURER	none
LANDOWNER	none
MAGICIAN	magical focus
MANAGER	scales
MANDARIN	none
OUTLAW	weapons, see below
PEDLAR	goods
PRIEST	religious paraphernalia
PUGILIST	none

Example: Possessions

Finally we find out what Yang owns. He is decked out in constable's gear, and is entitled to a weapon: a mace. As the proud possessor of a +2 **wealth** bonus he can opt to have two additional weapons. We decide instead to give him one good sword. So now we know what his martial arts bonuses are in. The +3 is in SWORD, the weapon of a gentleman, and the +2 is in MACE.

SAILOR	none
SCHOLAR	books
SERVANT	none
SOLDIER	weapons & armour, see below
SPY	disguise
TRADER	none
WANDERER	none
WASTREL	none

WEAPONS & ARMOUR

The tools of war are regulated in Song China, so carrying military weapons or wearing armour openly in a town is not advisable for those characters who do not follow an occupation which makes them eligible to do so. Only Bodyguards, Constables, Hunters, Instructors, Outlaws and Soldiers may count weapons as tools of the trade. Of these, only Constables, Soldiers, and those Instructors employed by the government are permitted to openly bear arms within a town. Officials are permitted to bear arms, though few do so, as the military profession is scorned.

In the country the rules are more likely to be interpreted loosely, so more or less anybody can carry weapons, although relatively few people actually do.

Characters following one of the above-mentioned occupations are entitled to a weapon according to the following list. The weapon is considered a tool of the



Lu Da sorts out the bullying butcher, Zheng.

trade, and may be owned by characters with a **position** bonus of 1 or greater.

Bodyguard	Any weapon (but beware of the law!)
Constable	Bow, sword, sabre, mace or staff
Hunter	Axe, mace, spear, bow
Instructor	Any weapon (but beware of the law!)
Outlaw	Any weapon
Soldier	Any weapon (usually sabre, spear or sword)

Such weapons are of average quality. If your character has a **wealth** bonus you may choose either to improve the quality of his weapon (for each point of **wealth** bonus, improve the quality by one step), or to have an additional weapon from the list per point of **wealth** bonus.

Soldiers on battle duty may be issued with armour, and outlaws may also have scavenged it. Militia members are almost never issued with armour, but are permitted to wear light armour on duty. Regular soldiers on combat duty are issued with medium armour. At position +3 this improves to metal armour, while Field Commanders and higher (+5 position) are equipped with full armour. Outlaws only have what they can scavenge: basically light armour if they are lucky, though a **wealth** bonus of +2 or greater enables an outlaw to own medium armour.

Characters from other occupations who want weapons must buy them (exception: any character who wants a knife may have one). As it is against the law to supply military equipment to those ineligible to use it, characters will have to be careful.

ANIMALS

In a society in which dog meat is sometimes eaten, pets are rather uncommon, apart from in the more decadent reaches of the aristocracy. Beasts of burden and horses are a little more common. Farmers with a **wealth** bonus may own a number of oxen equal to their bonus cubed.

Horses, though more widespread than in the past, are still quite rare, as the best ones are bred by the barbarians beyond the borders. A character may have as many horses as his **wealth** bonus, assuming the horses are of poor quality (for example, a donkey). As with weapons, for each additional point of **wealth**, a character may either have an additional horse or improve the quality of a horse by one step: from poor to average to good to fine.

Example: Finishing Off

Wait a minute: we still have one point of experience and one point of natural gifts left unspent. Glancing back over our choices, we decide to pick up an aptitude in INTIMIDATION and a skill in MISSILES: BOW (how could we have forgotten that?).

The completed character sheet, with all the things we've decided written in the appropriate places, is presented on the next page for your amazement and amusement. The numbers on the sheet correspond to those used in the *Design Checklist* which appears in the appendices.

OUTLAWS

OF THE WATER MURKIN

水滸梟雄

Name ①

姓名 楊明 Yang Ming Sleeping Dragon

Social Class ⑨

階級 Gentry, official

Provenance ⑩

本籍 Town Dongping pref.

Family ⑪

家族 Paternal grandparents,

uncles, aunts, various nieces,

nephews & cousins (+ see Notes)

Occupation ⑬

職業 Constable

(at Dongping yamen)*

Position ⑭

職位 +3 Sergeant

Wealth ⑫

財富 +2 stipend

Patrons ⑮

恩人 Father (now Magistrate

of Nang), Prefect Hua (now a

mandarin), martial arts teacher

Dependants

依賴者 squad of constables

Favours ⑯

恩請 1 owed to Prefect Hua

owed 1 by criminal Gu

Age ②

歲 24

Gender ③

性 male

Size ④

身 0

Energy

氣 10

Body ⑤

體 11

Appearance ⑥

貌 slight stoop,

infectious grin

Hand ⑦

手 right

Personal Qualities

Motivation(s) ⑰

動機 Chivalry 0

Respect ⑱

尊敬 +2

Astrological Sign ⑲

干支 Boar

Abilities ⑧

能量	Aptitude	Skill	Total	Skill Type	Experience
	CO-ORDINATION +1		+1	basic phys.	
	WIT +1		+1		
	FIGHTING +2		+2	basic phys.	
	DILIGENCE -1		-1		
	LEAPING +1	LEAPING +2	+3	spec. phys.	
	GAMBLING +1		+1	spec. ment.	
	DECEPTION +1		+1	spec. spirit.	
	MEDITATION -2		-2	spec. spirit.	
	[?] +1		+1	spec.	
	[?] +1		+1	spec.	
	INTIMIDATION +1	INTIMIDATION +1	+2	spec. spirit.	
		GRACE +1	+1	basic phys.	
		STRENGTH +1	+1	basic phys.	
		CLIMBING +1	+1	spec. phys.	
		FAST DRAW +1	+1	spec. phys.	
		SWORD +3	+3	spec. phys.	
		MACE +2	+2	spec. phys.	
		MISSILES: bow +1	+1	spec. phys.	
		EVALUATION +1	+1	spec. ment.	
		COMMERCE +1	+1	spec. ment.	
		RUMOURS +1	+1	spec. know.	
		TASTE +1	+1	spec. know.	

Possessions ⑳

持有 Constable's clothing
Average mace Good sword

Notes

短信 *will lose position and change to Outlaw on becoming a hero.

Younger sister E, mother Xuanyuan Ai, live with father in Yamen at Nang.