

CHINA: THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

China claims of being the bastion of the Hungry Dead world: the first courts and the source of the most significant philosophical and spiritual writings. China also contains the most potent reservoirs of power and the deepest spiritual connections to Chi in Asia. From this foundation sprang an advanced supernatural society that has never been surpassed among the Hungry Dead.

Given this history and apparent lasting power, one might assume the Hungry Dead of China act as the leaders of Asia's entire supernatural population, holding authority on par with the divine emperors of old.

Hundreds, even thousands of years ago, this was largely true. The Quincunx Courts were masters of the Asian continent—an empire of the Hungry Dead founded on the dominance of a Sinocentric interpretation of the Quincunx Dharmas. Throughout the multiple dynasties, their courtiers held exclusive access to the levels of mortal power. At its zenith, the nighttime bureaucracy of the Quincunx ensured orderly behavior throughout the night world; disruptors and heretics were brought to heel almost as soon as they rose.

During the late 18th and 19th centuries, several sects of the White Lotus Society rose in rebellion against the Qing dynasty. Hidden within those heretical practices were young "Scorpion-eaters" who directed these militant factions to weaken the power of both the Qing and the Quincunx. The Quincunx Courts, much like the Qing dynasty administration, had become complacent and failed to quell the uprising quickly. Even though the rebellion was eventually crushed, the notion of the invincibility of the Quincunx was shattered, contributing to the frequent revolts of the 19th century. During this period, the Scorpion-eater faction grew in alarming numbers.

When the First Opium War began, the accompanying Western Kindred exerted their influence on China, frequently attacking the Quincunx for their own ends. While the Second Breath took time to manifest, the Kindred had no compunction about mass-siring fledglings to use as cannon fodder.

The Quincunx eventually lost control of its hold in Southeast Asia and Korea, followed by the mainland cities themselves. By the time the conflicts of the 1930s concluded, the empire was gone and its glories had turned to ash. The Hungry Dead in China fragmented into a patchwork of warring courts and wu.

Today, the Quincunx Courts have been re-established. While many of these courts are merely shadows of their former selves, the rise of a regional ancestor from the Yuqiang Court has led to a recent strengthening of the Quincunx. Consequently, the Courts have begun considering a campaign against the Western Kindred, seeking revenge for the various humiliations China suffered during the wars of the past.

BEIJING: THE YUQIANG COURT

Beijing is a city of a staggering 20 million people, but it is not the largest city in China; Shanghai claims that distinction. Still, the capital of the People's Republic remains the nerve center for over one billion Chinese citizens and nearly 14,000 vampires. Its influence ripples outward across the entirety of China, due in large part to the stifling national bureaucracy and meticulous pervasiveness of the Communist government.

Like many of China's metropolitan hubs, Beijing is a striking blend of ancient imperial tradition and rapid modernization, featuring 3,000-year-old landmarks alongside a futuristic skyline. Tourists expecting to be overwhelmed by chaos would be surprised to find the city relatively quiet and modern.

The Hungry Dead of the Yuqiang Court are intimately familiar with this new face of Beijing. They move through the streets with what seems like total familiarity, perfectly attuned to the city's pulse. They have maneuvered silently in the night as Beijing grew to its present configuration; over the centuries, the wu of the Yuqiang Court have carved out their own individual and communal niches within the city.

Still, the existence of the Hungry Dead in the shadows of the capital is not without its complications. The regional ancestor, Chang Xuan, sits firmly in the Forbidden City. However, as the Chinese proverb goes, "The mountains are high and the emperor is far away." The Yuqiang administration has had significant trouble exerting its will over the Zhurong Court in the distant Pearl River Delta region.

Rumors also have it that Chang Xuan is considering a second "Great Leap Forward." The first such initiative entrenched several Hungry Dead wu within Chinese communities to protect the Quincunx's interests. Now, several courtiers have asked if this second Great Leap would finally allow them to avenge the humiliations of the past.

SHANGHAI: THE GOUMANG COURT

Shanghai is packed to bursting. Holding over 24 million people, it is the most populous urban area in China. Over the years, Shanghai has earned a host of sobriquets—few of them flattering—including the "Monster City." Stereotypical images of Shanghai from the 1920s and '30s romanticize the era: Art Deco buildings, immense wealth, well-dressed men in Western or Tang suits, and beautiful ladies in qipao. Even the brutal gangsters who controlled the backstreets have been stylized by history.

Since the emergence of the foreign concessions, Shanghai has been the playing field for one of the longest open conflicts in the night world. Chinese Hungry Dead and Western vampires wage war against one another, and among themselves, for control of the city. Through "Scarlet Screens" or plain, open violence, the factions pursue age-old vendettas and retaliate against fresh insults.

The chaos peaked in the 1920s and '30s when Scorpion Eater warlords emerged

alongside Sabbat allies, attempting to seize Shanghai and its vast resources for their own ends.

For decades, Shanghai has been coordinated by a secretive wu of Hungry Dead that formed when hostilities first began. These Hungry Dead meet irregularly and in shifting locations to avoid discovery by unfriendly forces. Their identities are known only to themselves and a handful of fiercely loyal underlings. Natives call them the Silent Mandarins; they are the mysterious directors of the war against the Western Kindred. The existence of the Silent Mandarins has sparked vicious battles, as their enemies are convinced that these Mandarins alone hold the city's supernatural society together.

Though decimated, the Goumang Court has survived. A new ancestor has been established, but the court is still in its infancy. Preceptors from the Yuqiang Court have been stationed there to provide guidance until the Goumang can stand on its own. Still, the fight is far from over. Even if open hostilities have lessened, espionage, bribery, suicide missions, and other acts of silent aggression are constantly initiated by hostile Kindred seeking to undermine the new court.

CHONGQING: RUSHOU COURT

Chongqing is a massive, mountainous megacity—a true vertical labyrinth. Unlike the flat sprawl of Beijing or the coastal glitz of Shanghai, Chongqing is built upward and downward. For the Hungry Dead, it is a city of a thousand levels, where a wu might meet in a penthouse on the 60th floor while a rival group lurks in the damp, dark vaults far below.

The Rushou Court stands in stark contrast to the rest of the Quincunx. It encompasses the most extensive, yet least populated, land in China. Vast distances separate the towns and cities, leading to a virtual absence of Western Kindred and mortals throughout its history. Little in the Rushou Court's sphere of influence proved too enticing to the average Western trader of the 19th century. Tea, silk, and porcelain remained the primary foreign interests, and these were produced in much greater quantities elsewhere in the country. Even after 1860, when Christian missionaries received broad permission to travel, Europeans remained rare in Western China.

The Rushou Court is more loosely structured than other Quincunx Courts; the sheer distance between cities provides local wu a certain degree of autonomy. As a result of this isolation, it is not uncommon to find peculiar local wu composed entirely of Thrashing Dragons, or even groups subordinate to a local Yin spirit. While travel along dragon lines used to be the primary way to navigate the Rushou Court, the advent of high-speed railways is rapidly closing those distances.

The one constant in the Rushou Court is the Ancestor and Bone Flower, Ku Zu, who has remained in power since long before this century's span. Her icy grip ensures that the usual politicking of the Quincunx surrounds her ministers and interests, yet Ku Zu herself remains aloof, focusing her attention on the Bone Library. This library is dedicated to preserving the ancient rites and ways of the Quincunx Courts and the Hungry Dead.

Today, the city is a booming industrial giant of over 30 million people. In the neon-lit haze

of the Chongqing streets, Bone Flowers move unseen among the living. However, tension is rising. The rapid expansion of the city has disturbed ancient burial sites in the mountains, and "Stray Devils" (Scorpion Eaters) are reportedly finding new recruits among the disaffected laborers of the sprawling industrial zones.

HONG KONG: ZHURONG COURT

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of China. Originally ceded to the British Empire in the 19th century, the city became a vital free port for trade in Eastern wares. In 1997, the lease between Britain and China ended, returning the city to Chinese control. China has granted Hong Kong several special rights, including its renowned free-trade market.

The city of Hong Kong possesses a strong presence of dragon lines that coalesce in and around the urban sprawl, making the use of precise feng shui in architecture more than just a tradition—it is a necessity. This high saturation of magical energies draws the attention of numerous Hungry Dead and Western Kindreds, creating a unique and volatile melting pot.

For centuries, Hong Kong was the territory of the Zhurong Court. However, in the chaos of the First Opium War, the Court splintered into a thousand warring wu across Canton. This internal strife allowed the Kindred to claim domains in Hong Kong with little resistance. Soon, the entire Hong Kong became a Camarilla city.

The remaining Hungry Dead lived in isolated wu, each developing its own way to cope with British rule. One of the more powerful groups was the Righteous Devils of Kowloon, who made a non-aggression pact with tai-pan Pedder for mutual benefit.

When the city changed hands in 1997, the Yuqiang Court reacted by sending a warring wu known as the Victorious Whirlwind to take back Hong Kong and root out foreign influence. Many local Hungry Dead were resentful, viewing the Quincunx's actions as reactionary violence that ignored the local networks already in place. The Righteous Devils became the spokesgroup for these disenfranchised Kuei-jin who hoped to honor their existing agreements and enact the Moon Doctrine. Both sides declared a Shadow War, and by 1999, Hong Kong remained a brutal battlefield between the Victorious Whirlwind and the Righteous Devils.

The two decades since 1999 have witnessed the Zhurong Court finally solidifying its power and the Quincunx crushing the Righteous Devils. However, the Court is far from undisputed. Hong Kong has become a guiding light for the Bamboo Princes, who see in the city a fusion of cultures and progressive ideals they hope to bring to the Quincunx Courts. Together with the anarch factions, they hope to beat the Zhuring Court back to Shenzhen.

In the shadows, while the people of Hong Kong go about their daily business, a secret war continues for control of the Pearl of the East.

TAIWAN

TAIPEI — THE ANARCH ACCORD

Taipei is the capital and largest city of Taiwan. While the mortal world navigates the tensions of the Taiwan Strait, the night world is locked in a supernatural Cold War. The local Hungry Dead have no desire to be absorbed into the Quincunx Courts as part of the Second Great Leap Forward.

In the neon-drenched night of Taipei, a historic alliance has been struck—a deal that would be considered absolute heresy in Beijing: the Taipei Accord. This treaty unites the Western Anarch Movement and the Eastern Bamboo Princes. Both groups share a common enemy in the stifling, age-old hierarchies of their respective Elders. Together, they have turned Taiwan into a bastion of radical reform.

The philosophy of the Bamboo Princes is to bring the society of the Hungry Dead into the 21st century, advocating for an accepted form of Westernization within Asian society. Many of them believe that both Kindred and Hungry Dead deserve equal treatment as peers. The Anarchs, meanwhile, are more than happy to wreak havoc on the old systems; since 2012, there has been a steady influx of Anarch vampires seeking refuge from the Camarilla's reach.

This peace is brokered and maintained by an unlikely figure: Andi Liu, a Malkavian Oracle. Though a Western Kindred by blood, Andi Liu has lived in Taipei for decades, navigating the city's complex heritage. She claims to hear the future in the hum of the city's heartbeat. Both the local Bamboo Prince Ancestor and the resident Barons defer to her visions, as she is often the first to predict the arrival of hostile Quincunx forces or the encroaching influence of the Yama Kings.

As long as the Taipei Accord holds and Andi Liu's prophecies remain accurate, Taipei remains the only place in the Middle Kingdom where a vampire can truly choose their own destiny.