

DRAGON LINES

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INTRODUCTION

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FEW CHARACTER archetypes capture the imagination quite like Martial Artists. They are people who can, through a mixture of talent, skill and single-minded dedication, push their bodies to the very limits of human capability. In movies, books and video games, Martial Artists can do even more; their skills allow them to entirely transcend human limitations, to see and perform past what the laws of physics say is possible.

It is easy to see the draw to such a figure. Unbound as they are to the facets of real life that can make it tedious, Martial Artists often come to represent what we wish we could do, if only we had the time, inclination, and the right teachers. They are also often heroes of the people; the regular folk who till the fields and plant crops so that the wealthy and intellectual can do what they do. Martial Artists can also serve as a nearly supernatural force, sent to Earth to enact Heaven's will. They plumb secrets, perform daring feats of skill and bravery, and, in many ways, serve as the Eastern counterpart to the Western idea of the comic book superhero.

In Dragon Lines, your group of role-playing

participants will take the roles of such beings. You will portray people (and, sometimes, non-human people) who can draw on ambient magical energy called Chi and use it to fuel astounding, mystical martial arts styles that can only work in high-energy environments. You'll study under great masters to unlock your hidden potential, and learn secrets about yourself, the Earth, and the Heavens above and below. Will you use your power to curry favour of the Jade Emperor, ruler of All that Is, or perhaps to lay to rest hungry ghosts and dreaded hopping vampires? Or will you defeat decadent Lords and corrupting Foreign Devils to keep the regular folk, the small and weak, from exploitation and degradation?

Generations from now, will you be remembered fondly, as a monster, or even remembered at all?

The rest of the Dragon Lines text is broken down into chapters. These deal with specific details of the game and its setting. If you are going to play the game, consider looking at Chapters 2, Characters, and 3, Martial Arts, to get an overview of what facets of your character will be most at play.

CHARACTERS

Circumstances of Birth

1. Reincarnation: You are supposed to be the reincarnated spirit of a beloved spiritual leader and teacher. Whether you really are or not is a matter of conjecture. Choose a Philosophy from Chapter 6; people who have at least 10 Allegiance points in that philosophy will recognize you for who you are. This may not be a good thing, depending on their other Allegiance scores.

2. Ill-Omened Birth: You were born at a particularly inauspicious time. Whether you believe it or not, others who know of your birth think you bring bad luck, or distrust you unless you can prove your worth. You may opt to have this be real; if it is, you may gain a single minor Chi Augmentation. In compensation, once per game, your Game Master may declare any single roll at the table (not always your own) as a spectacularly disastrous fumble.

3. Born out of Wedlock: For whatever reason, your parents were not married at the time of your birth. This is considered bad form in almost all parts of the Empire, and anyone who knows this about you will place some of the stigma on you, to varying degrees of influence.

4. Blessed: When you were born, spirits gathered and gave you a blessing. This rare gift gives you access to the Spirit Boon Chi power, and you may always take a set of spirits as contacts, even if your profession does not normally provide contact with them.

5. Runt: You are the youngest child of a large family. You have many siblings to call on for aid, and who may

do the same with you. However, this may also be a drawback, as siblings often compete against each other for attention.

6. Problematic Birth: Your birth was hard on you and your mother. You both nearly died, and it is possible that your mother actually did. If this has happened, it is also possible that your father resents you for taking her from him. Alternatively, your mother's close call or death may have made you very close with one or both of your parents as a result.

7. Beloved: You are one of the lucky few whose parents really love them. They will do anything for you, even give their lives if that would save yours.

8. Unknown: You may have just appeared one day, as if by magic. Even if you have an entirely mundane birth, no one knows who your parents really are. How and when the fallout from this manifests is a matter of discussion between you and your Game Master.

9. Stillborn: When you were born, everyone thought you had died during the delivery, only to discover the truth later, perhaps much later. Some may see you as a miracle child, while others assume you are some sort of undead monster masquerading as a normal member of your race and species.

10. Foundling: For whatever reason, your parents left you out in the woods to die. Luckily, you were discovered by someone and raised as their own child. Your foster parents may be normal people, spirits, or even wild animals. How this affects your view of human society is up to you and your Game Master.



Naming Conventions

Characters in Dragon Lines have names that come in one of two usual formats. Traditionalists tend to have a three-part name, typically their family name, followed by a two-word phrase that is supposed to indicate something about the nature of the character. For example, for someone named Huang Tai-Wei, their name means "The Huang Family member known as Great Power." Sometimes the person's given name is used ironically, or as an in-joke amongst the family.

Others adopt nicknames that are colourful, evocative, or in some way more interesting than a traditional name. Sometimes these nicknames incorporate the family name, along with a personal descriptor. The above character might be known as "Great Huang", or "Sagacious Huang."

Nicknames also often incorporate animal names, as well as numbers. It is not unusual to find someone known as Seven Fighting Eagles, or Flame-Haired Demon.

Character may also have multiple names, for use in different social situations.

Someone may go by an outlandish nickname when with their friends, but use their traditional name when dealing with family or other authorities.

If you are coming to the table with no idea what sort of character you want to play, consider using the Random Background Generator table for ideas. This will not necessarily give you any overt direction to how to make your character, but it may help make it a multi-dimensional person rather than a collection of numbers on a page.

If you have got a concept already, or want to see if one develops, go ahead and start rolling the dice.

RANDOM BACKGROUND GENERATOR

For each of the sections below, roll 1D10 or choose an entry from the list. You may also roll a D10 for each list, all at once, and select the dice you wish to apply to a specific list. Some list entries suggest characteristics, skill or powers. These are only suggestions, not mandates.

ROLLING CHARACTERISTICS

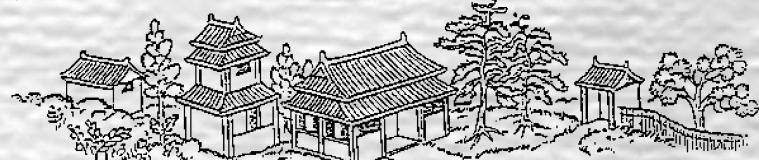
Dragon Lines does not use the Education characteristic, since there is very little formal education for Martial Artists in the Empire. Otherwise, all other characteristics are used. Roll 2D6+6 for each of them, in any order. Once you have done so for each of the characteristics, look at them. If you have not rolled a 16 or higher, you may replace

one of your rolls with a 16. Bear in mind that some Martial Arts styles require a 16 or higher in a specific characteristic. Normally, you would get to trade up to 3 characteristic points around, but in this game, the free 16 replaces that.

STEP TWO: RACE AND CULTURE

Normally, in BRP, Step 2 is where you determine if you are going to use any of the Powers system. Instead, Dragon Lines characters all use powers. Step 2 is to determine whether you want to play as a regular human, or as one of the myriad spirit and half-spirit beings that live in the Empire. Non-human beings gain access to a different power set than pure humans, but gain less power from their initial Martial Art to balance.

If you plan on playing a human character, continue from here. If you wish to play something not entirely human, choose one of the options below. In any case, consider the Culture of your character as well.



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manifest as a lashing tentacle, with which you strike opponents. Aside from the requirement of being near water, this spell is identical to the Blast spell.

Aquatic Transformation. You may turn yourself, or a target, into a large, fresh- or salt-water fish. This is the only form you can take with this spell, but is otherwise identical to the Change spell.

Conjure Water Elemental

Diminishing Strike. A series of strikes to the target's vital centres allows you to temporarily reduce one of his or her characteristics. This is similar to the Diminish spell, save that a successful Punch attack is needed to affect the spell, rather than a POW contest.

Dispel

Impeding Arm-lock Stance. By striking at foes' arms and legs, you are able to hamper their ability to effectively strike you. This works just like the Dull spell.

Elemental Weapon

Elemental Mastery

Enhance DEX

Enhance STR

Enhance CON

Healing Waters. If you have access to liquid water, you can channel it to heal injuries.

Illusion

Detect Water-as per the Perception spell.

Water-Enhanced Strike. If you are able to dip a weapon or appendage into a body of water, you may have the weapon absorb Water Chi, which aids the use of that weapon. This is as per the Sharpen spell, with the additional requirement of being able to make your weapon or appendage wet.

Water-Walking. As per the spell found on page XX of this book.

Wounding Touch. As per the Wound spell, save that this version is a series of pressure point strikes that require a Punch roll in order to take effect.

THE SEVEN ARTS

The Martial Arts traditions known as the Seven Arts are a collection of different styles that are a relatively recent development. Where the Elemental Styles revolve around the use of Chi to augment human capabilities, the styles of the Seven Arts go even further, by changing the fundamental nature of their practitioners. The Seven Arts are often seen not only as fighting styles, but ways of being, or a collection of attitudes about life. They are not something you do, but something you are.

Each of the Seven Arts is based upon a certain characteristic. In order to practice one of the Arts, a character must have at least a 16 in the characteristic upon which the Art is based. Once learned, however, the Art can always be practised, including powers that stem from the Art that, under normal circumstances, have a strict characteristic requirement.

ENDURANCE OF THE MOUNTAINS STYLE (STR+CON)

Considered to be an offshoot of the Earth Dragon Style, Endurance of the Mountains was developed in the same monasteries in the Obido Mountains, as a response to the other Seven Arts Styles. Where Earth Dragon Style is mostly about using Chi to temporarily change the practitioner, Endurance of the Mountains works to make practitioners as permanent and enduring as the mountainside in which they live. Practitioners are frequently adherents to the Path of Enlightenment, hoping, perhaps foolishly, to achieve an eternal existence. In order to learn the Endurance of the Mountain Style, a character must have a Constitution score of at least 16.

Style Attacks: Punch, Grapple, One Weapon skill.

Style Skills: Climb, Insight, Sense, Meditation.

Techniques: **The Mountain Stands** (+10% to Parry, if you take damage, it cannot produce Knockback, even from techniques designed to do so).

Juggernaut Charge (+10% to hit if you can move a few feet before you attack. Automatically causes Knockback.).

The Mountain's Embrace (+10% to Grapple check, Disarming).

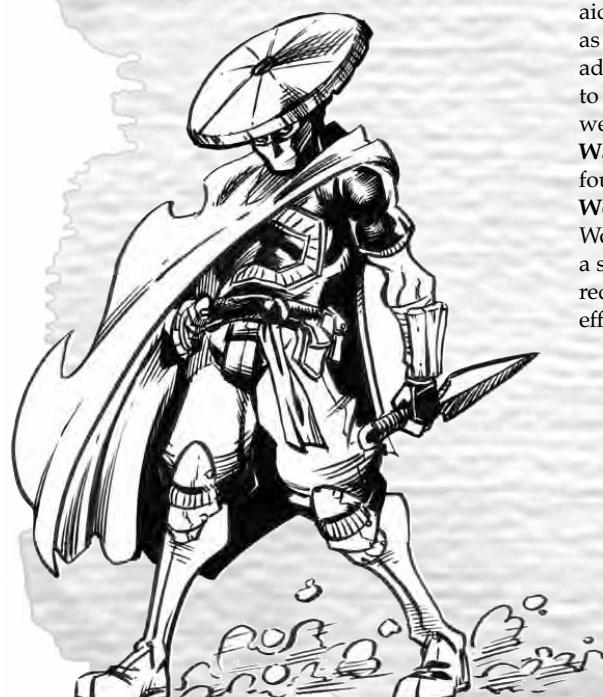
Practitioners gain access to the Chi Augmentations, and may select from the following list:

Hardy (Often taken multiple times to counter various damage types)

Increased Characteristics: Strength and Constitution

Keen Sense: Touch

Metabolic Improvement





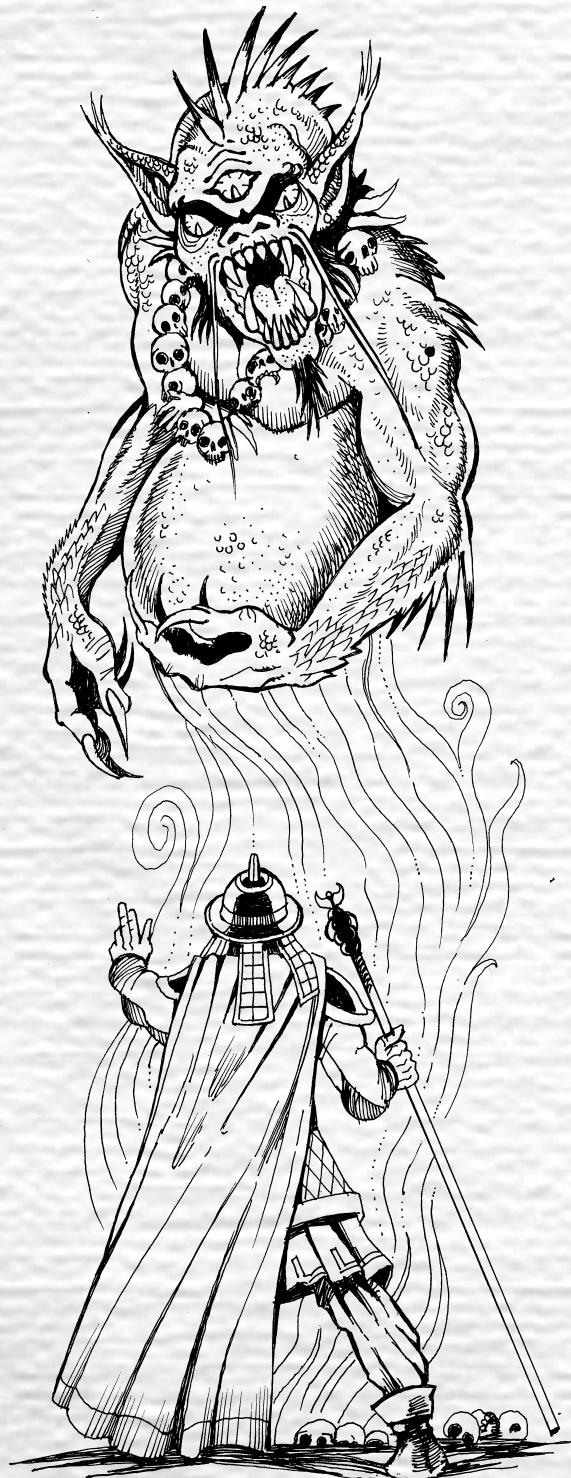
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contest. If you succeed, you may make the spirit leave the premises immediately. If you fail, the spirit remains, and mocks you. You may try again next round.

Possessing spirits will leave the body they had inhabited behind. Ghosts tend to disorporate when banished, sinking into the general Chi flow of the environment. Other spirits try to leave if they are able to do so, and will cease hostilities if they had been compelled to attack.

Using a spirit's True Name grants a +30% bonus to the POW vs. POW Resistance attempt.



BEGUILING GAZE

This power costs 3 Chi to use. When activated, your APP counts as being 6 points higher. You may make a APP versus INT Resistance roll. If you succeed, the target feels as though you are good friends, and he will go out of his way to aid and assist you, perhaps even offering to serve you. You may have a number of beguiled companions not superior to one third of your APP at any given time.

Effected creatures may make an Idea roll each day in order to overcome this power.

BIPED/QUADRUPED

As per the Mutation of the same name.

BOUND SPIRIT

At some point in your character's past, a spirit was bound to you. Now, it serves you to the best of its ability. Work with your Game Master to determine the nature and powers of your spiritual companion. This power is only for spirits bound in the flesh. For spirits in binding objects, choose the Artefact power instead.

Note that, if you have bound this spirit yourself, you may select this power the next time your Martial Arts training allows you to do so. Once selected in this manner, the POW spent to bind the spirit is returned to you. You may only have a number of spirits bound to you or in your service equal to your APP.

If taken as an adverse Augmentation, the spirit that is bound to you is not helpful. In fact, it goes out of its way to make your life miserable. It might be the shade of a man you killed when you were 12, the spirit of an ancestor who is concerned that you are not living up to your potential (and verbally berates you about it), or even a demon who follows you around and tries to eat your friends.

If taken as a Minor adverse Augmentation, this is relatively benign, but still irritating. You can buy it off eventually by spending a Power slot when you have access to one. If taken as a Major Augmentation, the spirit cannot be gotten rid of in any way short of an exacting and arduous quest, and the spirit bound to you will actively try to stop you from completing it.

BREATHE FIRE

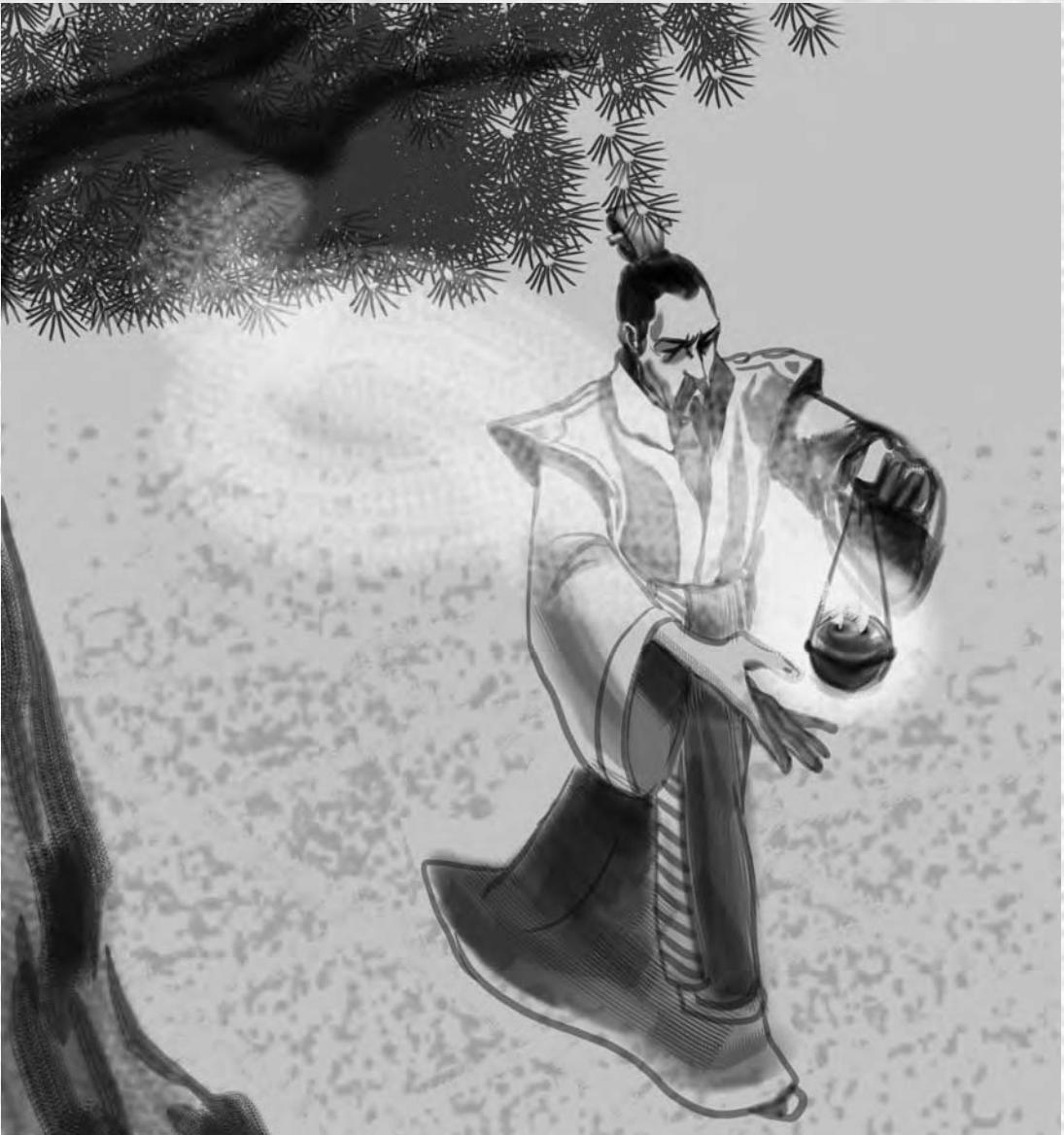
For whatever reason, the character may breathe fire 1D6 (rolled when power is selected) times a day. This attack does 3D6 damage, and may only focus on a single target within one metre. This is magical fire, so it does not harm the user, although it may set other things on fire.

CAMOUFLAGE

As per the Mutation of the same name.

CHI NEXUS

Your character has access to an area suffused with Chi. This may be the location of a particularly strong flow of one type of Chi, or an area in which more than one type of Chi overlap. Work with your



THE FIVE NOBLE PATHS

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In the Dragon Empire, the existence of gods and spirits is an unquestionable fact. People experience manifestations of the divine nearly every day. You may petition an immortal spirit of justice to oversee a trial, or you might have your lunch stolen by glowing green monkey spirits. The Emperor rules with a literal Mandate of Heaven, and temple rites often result in solid, visible manifestations of spirits, come to accept sacrifices. What a modern reader would see as otherworldly is part of the natural order; it is understandable, repeatable, and accepted in every level of society.

Such a culture has little room for religion as we know it. Religion hinges upon the need for faith in something, an external force that may or may not exist, but can still theoretically alter the lives of those who believe. In Dragon Lines, faith and belief are superseded by fact and knowledge.

However, human nature being what it is, few agree on what everything means. The existence of the supernatural, and what humanity's proper relationship to it is, are matters of contention, which, much like in our world, can lead to backstabbing, and open conflict over matters of doctrine.

There are an infinite number of ways to see the

natural order, but in the Dragon Empire, five belief systems hold enough prominence that everyone has heard of them and knows the basic tenants of the systems. Though they deal with gods and spirits, the philosophies are not religions in a strict sense of the word. They do not promote the worship of divine beings. Of course, the members of each path may feel that their way is the proper way, but this is not encoded into the philosophies themselves.

THE FIVE NOBLE PATHS

The schools of thought that are responsible for these conflicts are called The Five Noble Paths, and they make up the core of intellectual life in the Dragon Empire. Of these five, three are a welcome part of society, one is only grudgingly tolerated, and the last is loathed by all good and decent folk. Taken as a unit, the Paths are a matter of discussion, but they are also deeply held beliefs about life and how to live it.