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# The Cruel Empire of Tsan Chan



**An Account of the Year  
Five Thousand and the  
Creation of Empire**



# THE CRUEL EMPIRE OF TSAN CHAN

A Monograph  
By Christian Read

The cruel empire of Tsan-Chan,  
which is to come in 5,000 A.D

Then the liberated Old Ones  
would teach them new ways to shout  
and kill and revel and enjoy themselves,  
and all the earth would flame with a  
holocaust of ecstasy and freedom.



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# CHAPTER ONE

Future History of the Cruel Empire of Tsan Chan  
Being an account of the year Five Thousand and the creation of Empire.

*That cult would never die till the stars came right again, and the secret priests would take great Cthulhu from His tomb to revive His subjects and resume His rule of earth.*

For the citizens of the Tsan Chan Empire, the facts of the events concerning the rise of the Great Old Ones are speculation. Life, fraught and terrifying, is best lived without pondering those momentous days hundreds or thousands of years ago. The Chanese have no reliable records of the times and the Kuen-Yuin who lived in that era provide no answers. The simple truth of their life is that to leave the boundaries of the Interdiction is to step into a world teeming with warfare, madness and the desires of black gods. Tsan Chan is the only place humans exist and it is cruel. It must be.

To the scholars of the Empire, the Kuen-Yuin, the Ophidians, matters are rather clearer, although they too suffer frustration concerning the specifics. They were not there; they were hidden in the earth, or cowering in monasteries of Leng, praying to Gods that were abandoning them.

When Cthulhu rose up again, it was the work of humans, some cult, some ancient priesthood making good on its teachings and prophecies. Throughout human history, the inevitability of this release was foretold but the consequences were debated. Some feared it meant destruction, an abattoir-era where the human race and many others were prey and nourishment. Other, were uncertain, believing the Lord of R'lyeh would teach men to laugh and revel and kill.

Those in the second camp were the most correct. Cthulhu did rise up again free from his slumber, free to make good on his antique dreams. But his ambitions were not a destroyer nor even, rightly, a conqueror. No, Cthulhu rose as an evangelist, high priest of unknowable, fabulously dangerous gods. And the shock of his presence, the power of his ministry, is today known as the Dream.

As the Old One arose, humanity was psychically damaged beyond repair. Previously, only the most 'sensitive' of souls could perceive the movement and desires of Cthulhu. Unfettered, free to preach, the world itself went insane. No one knows how long it took but soon, terribly soon, after Cthulhu's release, humanity had fallen. Infected by the alien morality of the High Priest, humans became shrieking things, immoral and barbaric, completely without scruple or the faintest notion of consequence. Society and culture fell apart until humanity simply screamed the name of its new King and converted to a blind and idiot religion they could barely comprehend.

Except for a small plateau in China, where precautions had been taken.

## Plateau of Leng

The Abominable Plateau of Leng was known by many cultures, in many places. It gained this international reputation simply because it moved. The Plateau was a place of power for the Kuen-Yuin, the 'deathless' sorcerers. They had long revered Cthulhu but were at heart, devoted to Nyarlathotep, the Mighty Messen-



ger. Leng moved because the Kuen-Yin feared the rise of Cthulhu, not wishing to die, or be converted. They had their own plans for the world. Leng transposed itself into different geographies, searching for safety, finally deciding on a remote location near the Greater Khingan Range, it settled, drew up its reserves, its defences, and waited.

Why Nyarlathotep sponsored the Kuen-Yuin, who can say? The motivations of that being are beyond mortal comprehension, although marring or jesting with the High Priest of Gods Nyarlathotep is essentially contemptuous of, is not a bad guess.

Regardless of his reasons, Nyarlathotep taught the Deathless sorceries, gave them technologies, memetic techniques, psychic drills, all manner of defences. When Cthulhu woke and his Dream spread across the world, the only place spared was a few hundred square miles in Northern China.

The Mighty Messenger immediately withdrew his patronage from the ancient cult, leaving them to make what they could of the strange new world. Indeed, since then, the Crawling Chaos has had little to do with earth at all.

Quickly, the Deathless enslaved the humans safe behind their spell walls. Then they sealed off their mountain home, blocking passes and valleys. Beyond, humans roamed in frenzy and so the Deathless hid. Abandoned by their god, alone in the world, shepherds to a pitifully small flock, the Kuen-Yuin looked for a way to expand, a place to hide, for any answer at all to the question of survival.

## The Dreamlands

At first, the Deathless sought to escape into the world of hallucination and began to scout the Dreamlands. But Cthulhu's wakeful presence had made a nonsense of that fabled realm. It was now anarchy, a place that existed in a brute's imagination. It was as disordered as the world, a chaotic place of madness. They abandoned that plan and looked to other places of refuge.

They looked down.

## The Expeditions

Magic guided them and down they went, into crevasse and abyss, using ancient passwords and maps of their order. Many of the Deathless died, discovering that immortality is not invincibility. Fighting off danger, dealing with sub terrestrial beasts no more immune to the Dream than humanity, they went down, down, deeper and down. They located Abhoth, who received them with nothing more than hunger. They paid allegiance to Tsathoggua, who seemed entirely uninterested in their plight, accepting sacrifice but refusing to give them much power. But he accepted their homage and gave them gifts of magic but would not stand against Cthulhu.

Frustrated, the colonists returned to the upper air. They had nothing but the vague patronage of a toad-god who cared little for them. Nevertheless, alien eyes watched them from the darkness. From their hiding places in the red-lit Yoth, the Serpent Folk had awoken and had stalked the early Tsan Chanese. They were glacially amused by the humans who had somehow resisted the Dream. Although, life under the passionate and anti-sane Cthulhu was entirely unappealing to them as it was to the Deathless. Their ancient vaults were under threat by rampaging Chthonians and they had long since been abandoned by their own gods over millions upon millions of years. The Lord of R'lyeh would have no use for the Ophidians and so, they too, required patronage and protection.

The Serpents came with a proposal.

## The Serpents

The Serpents themselves were immune to the Dream. The violent liberation humans so easily acquiesced to were anathema to the Serpents. While their own direct experience with Cthulhu was extremely limited, they remembered the Lord of Xoth well enough, his time warring on the other races of the world and his religious crusades. They abominated the high priest of the Outer Gods, considering the Great Old One's violent conquests and savage passions to

be dangerous and vulgar. The ancients amongst the Ophidian race remember the tumultuous, wasteful wars of hundreds of millions of years ago. They were minor players back then, their empires yet to come, on this world and in the Dreamlands both. Nevertheless, they knew that eventually, they would be converted to Cthulhu's déclassé religion or be exterminated.

In this new age, the Serpents knew that their own ambitions towards empire and their strange researches could not flourish in this world order. Their own god, Yig, had no interest in battling Cthulhu, even if he was strong enough, which he most certainly was not. Nevertheless, they were impatient to be rid of the Xothians and as, had happened long since in their history, schismatics had their way and the Serpents abandoned their god.

The Serpent Folk decided upon a new patron to follow. They turned their attentions towards Hastur. Hastur, an ancient foe of Cthulhu, turned his decadent gaze to the planet earth and heard the Serpent's prayers. While the austere nature of the Serpent people bores the decadent Hastur, the Unspeakable One chose to aid them, as part of his rivalry with Cthulhu. The King in Yellow ordered them to approach the Tsan Chanese colonists.

## The Stirrings of Empire

The early colonists embraced the alliance with the Ophidians with fervour. The Deathless knew the reputation of the Serpent people. Their own order had roots to the prehistoric world when they had walked Borea and other empires like titans. Moreover, the tremendously ancient beings had knowledge of magic and science beyond the hopes of dreams of the remaining humans. The Deathless were powerful but the Ophidian race had survived three hundred million years, including similar conditions. Theirs was a wisdom the Deathless could not ignore.

Two new religions, Tsathoggua and Hastur-worship spread widely amongst them. The Gods granted their prayers, making them mighty. With patrons to call their own, the

Deathless felt some hope at creating a place for themselves in the world.

Impressed with the cold intellects of the Serpents, the colonies took their spirit of passionless zetetics to heart and quickly. The Ophidian race was considered an honoured ally, a kind of elder brother. Descending from the mountain passes the Tsan Chan fell upon the Dream-lost humans of ancient China and conquered them with ease. Tsan Chan could use the high technology of the last human era that the Dreamers had forgotten. Combined with magic learned from Serpents and Dim Carcosa, the Dreaming humans were easily overcome.

## The Interdiction

With all the earth wrapped in madness, the original Tsan Chanese knew that would have to create a secure space, a permanent autonomous zone, safe from the Dream that polluted the world like radiation, like smoke. With new magic and old, together they developed the Interdiction, a combination of magic and science, a physical structure that somehow kept out Cthulhu's thoughts.

Although few are aware of the fact, the Interdiction is merely an exotic interpretation of the technology behind the Elder Sign, bane of the Old Ones.

The Interdiction is perhaps the first and, realistically, only, line of protection the Empire has against the Old Ones. At first, it was simply fences, dug ditches, anything that could be said to symbolise a border, although today it is a huge Wall.

With this zone secured, the Deathless cult and their newly enslaved humans found some measure of security. They called their nation Tsan Chan, 'meditative enquiry'. Made bold by their successes and the apparent ignorance of the Old Ones concerning their existence, they slowly, slowly expanded.



## The Dreamless

Empires need backs to break, soldiers to soldier, blood for toil: So too the newly christened Tsan Chan.

Seeing the vast herds of humans killing, rutting and singing hymns to Gods that ignored them, the Kuen-Yuin knew they had discovered the ruled they required, if they were to live lives according to their station. While nearly every human enraptured and enslaved to the Dream was thoroughly immune to sanity, their children were not. Conception within Interdiction bred sane humans. Very soon the Tsan Chan Empire began to breed the mad, executing the men after they had fathered several children, killing the women after they had bred. Children born from this horrific programme were safe from the Dream and were made serfs of the Tsan Chan Empire. They were known as the Dreamless.

Growing in numbers, strong, great swathes of the Chinese mainland were claimed for the Empire. Confident that humanity could exist upon, if not rule, their own planet, the Tsan Chan Deathless elders overreached themselves. Too confident from early success, they very nearly extinguished their Empire before it could be born.

## Tcho-Tcho War

The nascent Tsan Chan Empire quickly grew superbiate with its early success. However, battling insane cannibals and lunatic bands was very different from the Tcho-Tcho nation. The Tcho-Tcho had long prepared for the coming of the Old Ones and had thrived under their dominance. Their sadistic natures were free to indulge in whatever lurid perversion their fecund minds could conceive of. The Tsan Chan knew of the Tcho-Tcho but discounted their might, viewing them as little more than idol-worshipping savages. The Deathless had, of course, encountered the favoured people of the Old Ones many, many times but that was in a different world. Now, enjoying the patronage of hideous masters, the Tcho-Tcho were a con-

quering people, revelling in the ecstasy of the Dream but capable of rationality within it.

The Tcho-Tcho easily defeated the Tsan Chan in their early skirmishes in the ruined city of Beijing. Soon, the Tcho-Tcho began to roll back the early successes of the Empire, reclaiming lands, hunting Dreamless for food and sick sport, about the Tcho-Tcho mission to become what they devour. The Serpents, who had little interest in direct combat, stirred from their towers and temples and labs. Calling upon their new patron, the Serpents showed their worth again and devastated the Tcho-Tcho in battle. They called up spirits and intelligences; they performed sinister workings, cursing Tcho-Tcho leaders and more beside. The Deathless were once again in the debt of the Ophidian.

Quickly, the Empire expanded Interdiction, reclaiming lost lands, setting up a martial state, emplacing guns, soldiers and other Arcanotechnological emplacements for defence. They began to recruit from the more intelligent of the Dreamless, creating a military caste. Used to easy prey, the Tcho-Tcho fell back out of mainland China, though it was a heady century of warfare.

## Security

With decades of peace, the nature of Tsan Chan changed. A standing military had been created. The Kuen-Yuin also began to recruit, taking from the Dreamless the most promising to fill out their ranks that had become depleted over the centuries since the rise of R'yeh. The Dreamless population grew and building programs began, farming, industry. Hastur worshipped and sacrificed to, seemed content. The Serpents began to sleep again, so that their influence waned, a dozen at a time entering deep, slow slumbers. Whatever the Old Ones were doing, they seemed unconcerned with a few thousand square miles of what had long since been called China.

Or so it seemed.

## Alien Assault

The Tcho-Tcho had not forgotten their defeat. Furious, they petitioned their own masters. The hierarchy beyond the walls of Empire are fairly impenetrable but it seemed that the Tcho-Tcho were ranked beneath the amphibian Deep Ones, who in turn answered to the Star-Spawn.

The Deep Ones, immortal, took decades to follow up on the Tcho-Tcho reports of free humans. From their cold green cities they spied out Tsan Chan. This would have been a matter of sublime indifference to the ichthyic race normally. Theirs was a people in ascendancy, breeding in huge numbers with unfortunate Dreamers. However, they soon discovered the hand of Hastur in these untainted humans. Enemy of their god king, the Deep Ones attempted to curry favour with their lord, smashing the influence of the King in Yellow on this world.

Soon, armies of Deep Ones came against the Empire, gird for war in coral armour and foul, living weapons. Before them they drove legions of the Dreamers. Even the great Star Spawn themselves took the field. The Serpents warned the Empire that they could not win and prepared to return to Yoth and hiding. In the first battles, the Empire was utterly crushed.

The Deep Ones were affected poorly by the Interdiction but the Dreamers were not. Soon, the Deep Ones rounded up armies of Dreamers in the millions, wasting their lives in suicidal charges. Despite superior technology, superior magic, the sheer weight of numbers devastated Tsan Chan.

Finally, the mighty Star-Spawn themselves, the Xothians, entered the fray. Even the Dreamless were terrified, sent mad, at the sight of such monstrosities. Half a dozen on a field could bring down armies, their ancient sorcery falling like a fist on Ophidian and Deathless alike. The Dreamers bought down the Interdiction at tremendous cost, allowing Deep One warlords and the few Xothians who had stirred from their worship, access to Tsan Chan. It was the end.

## Alliance

Two things saved the Empire. The first was the timeframe the immortal enemies worked to. The Star-Spawn could take a dozen years to follow up on victories, their notion of progress an utter cipher to the Empire. The Dreamers could starve to death in their hundreds of thousands while the Xothians prayed, or meditated, or returned for months at a time into the sea. Defeat was sure for Tsan Chan but defeat was slow.

Thirty years after the Deep Ones begun their attack, the Elder Things made contact with the Deathless. If they had not done so, annihilation would have been upon the Empire in weeks.

Billions of years too late, the Elder Things finally located their lost colony when the Dream awoke. Sending a rapid, tiny relief force, the Elders lurked in space, looking for a way to relieve their fallen people, trapped in Antarctica. Normally, they could have simply rushed in, dug them out, revived them and left but the Dream had awoken the Shoggoths and the Elders of earth were in dire peril.

Knowing of the Xothians from ancient battles at the dawn of the Universe, learning that the armies of Xoth had persecuted their race on Earth, the Elders decided to aid Tsan Chan, giving them technology and material support against their old enemies. In return, the Empire would have to aid the Elders against the Shoggoths. Desperate, the Deathless accepted the Elder aid.

Refreshed with weapons, the Interdiction made stronger, Tsan Chan fought back. But to little avail. Dreamers could be killed by the millions. Deep Ones could be fought to a stalemate if luck was with the Empire. But the Xothians could not be fought by mortal arms.

The Ghouls, that ancient race of flesh eaters, came forth and also offered alliance. They feasted well upon the fallen Dreamers, unmolested by the Empire. In returns, defenders of Tsan Chan could move through the dark tunnels the Ghouls knew intimately. This allowed them to move quickly, denied Dreamers and

Deep Ones material. But there was simply no hope against the Star-Spawn.

The Elders might have been able to battle the Xothians but they refused to involve themselves directly for fear of being dragged into a war they had little desire to be involved in. Their technology made a difference, surely. Not enough, though. Were once the Empire had counted survival in days, now it did so in years. But still it counted down to the end.

## Messiah

History does not record who or what presented the idea to the Deathless but the Messiah Working surely turned the tide in the war. Indeed, it saved the Empire.

Ancient tracts, race memories, the influence of dark gods, alien warlords, wherever it came from, the Messiah Working recorded the lusts of the Outer Gods. They had bred with humans for a long, long time. So it was, the Deathless embarked upon an audacious, horrible plan. Certain women and men were taken from their homes and offered up to Outer Things. They returned, screaming, broken, dead. But some of the women were pregnant. Men, too, were sent into temples, primed to lust by drugs, spells and pervert conditioning. Few would return and those who did were insane, sick, bearing unspeakable wounds.

In the citadel-temples of Tsan Chan, births were recorded. Women gave birth to abominations, or foundlings were deposited on altars. Some died at birth. Some had to be put down, often at horrible cost. Some were so wretched and alien that no purpose could be given them.

But some...

Some maintained human intelligence. Some even had substantially human forms. Some grew at enormous rates and some seemed to bear no trace of their alien heritage at all. And some could take orders. Within a few years, these children were ready. Psycho-Indoctrinated by Elder Thing techniques that had kept the Shoggoths in line for millions of years, wound about with magic, trained in warfare, armed

with the greatest Arcanotechnology available to the Empire, brainwashed, the children were ready to march. The Mighty Children...

## The Battle of Ten Thousand Miseries

Thirty Mighty Children took the field at the Battle of Ten Thousand Miseries. Powerful beyond human understanding, potently armed, inheritors of inhuman might, the Mighty Children turned the tide of the War. The Dreamers and Deep Ones were as rabble to them and even the Star-Spawn fell before them. These were the illegitimate sons and daughter of their Gods and the Xothians were loath to strike them. The Mighty Children shared no compunctions and attacked the Star-Spawn with abandon.

The battles of those days were things of horror. Alien demigods battled ancient and war crafty beings. The Imperial soldiers of those times would often kill themselves rather than look upon the true faces of their captains and saviours. Those who did survive were shattered people, speaking of writhing tentacles grappling, squeezing the life out of each other, weapons that bruised the skin of reality, shrieking beasts falling from the sky, blades that howled in profound sadism and guns that shot shells that seemed to suck the light from the sky.

That first battle was a turning point for Tsan Chan and so then did the campaign reverse. Slowly, over years, the armies of the Old Ones were pushed back. With more time to develop the Interdiction, improved by Elder technology, Tsan Chan was safe. At last, the war was done.

Unexpectedly victorious, the Empire scrambled to utilise Elder technology with greater efficacy. Their Elder Signs were carved into great monoliths. God-Trap technology was used to warn away powerful Mythos predator races. Simple gun turret emplacements and mine-fields kept away the Dreamers and the Tcho-Tcho.

Why Cthulhu himself never came to battle himself is unknown. To this day, the Empire has no plan against such an event.

However, while the external stability of the Empire was assured, internally, great strife was upon it. The Mighty Children were a weapon without a hilt.

## Civil War?

Ten Children survived the Battle of Ten Thousand Miseries. When they returned to the Empire, they demanded recompense for their services. They wished the Empire to be immediately put at their control. The Deathless, as powerful as they were, had no chance against the Children and though they railed and seethed in resentment, they knew it was so.

With the demigods in control of the Empire, they would surely open up gates to their monstrous progenitors and even if the Empire somehow survived surely it would be no place for humans. Although the Deathless would have perished in battles against the Mighty Children, they nevertheless refused to give over control, fearing they had swapped one foul master for another. Civil war was nigh.

Then the Serpents showed their great foresight and power once again. They used their ancient wisdom to somehow permanently shut all Gates to other worlds and dimensions within the Empire. How they did such a thing is a secret they still will not reveal. Many Serpents suffered the wrath of the Children but their rage was useless. No matter how powerful their hereditary drive to bring their parents to the world, it was not to be.

Three of the Children left the Empire, never to return. Those who remained decided to reap what rewards they could. The Children became the Nobility of the Empire and the Serpents, the Deathless and the Dreamless alike took vows to serve them, in recognition of their valour at the Battle of Ten Thousand Miseries.

Amongst the Children, one arose in prominence, one was unquestioned in power. Unfolding Void was his name and even the other Children bowed before his strength. They crowned him, so Empire found Emperor. All Tsan Chan swore allegiance to his will.

The Deathless became the spiritual rulers of the Empire and the Serpents, distrusted by the Children, removed themselves from visibility.

## Elder War

The Elder things had no wish to see the Ruiner of Xoth lead his locust crusade from earth to other worlds and stars. They were also bent of freeing their own from deep in the Antarctic ice.

The Elders and humanity shared, broadly, a psychic model. They thought linearly, felt emotions, experienced time, pain, reproduced biologically and even shared some senses. While it would be a very, very far cry to say that friendship exists between Tsan Chan and this race, it can be safely said that they understand one another.

In return for their aid, the Empire began a campaign in Antarctica against the Shoggoths. It goes slowly and goes to this day.

## Rise of the Nobles

In time, the Children would take husbands and lovers and have children of their own. Not all the Children were immortal although all were tremendously long-lived. When they died, political power passed on to their heirs.

After several generations passed, the Nobles had lost most of the horrendous power of the original Children. The Empire took on a distinctly feudal tone at this time, with the nobility ruling over the Dreamless serfs with a free hand and unearthly appetites. Draconian discipline, required to survive in these times became total decadence. Nevertheless, the Nobles were still powerful and remain the only true defence the Empire has against the Star Spawn.

## The Way

A normal human being cannot survive such times unaided. The intellectual knowledge that life outside the Empire is a mass of alien domination is one thing. Seeing it, living it, feeling the Dream, maddens and corrupts. The existential



pressures of being alive in the year 5000AD are extraordinary. And even so, very few are aware that there is worse than Cthulhu, haunting dimensions unknown.

The Deathless saw that. After such wars, too many of their subjects turned to suicide, became mad, started pointless revolutions. So it was, drawing upon their long knowledge of the human heart, they created the Way, a kind of discipline and religion and philosophy. It has served them well, creating obedience from the Dreamless towards the Nobles and the Deathless alike, as well as a deep obsequy to the sovereign.

Most prominent devotees of the way are the Eunuchs, a new class of humans that have risen up to serve the Mighty Children.

## Dynasty

Within living memory, Unfolding Void died. Although it is a vast state secret, he was assassinated, although none know the identity of the culprit. Quickly, other powers began to vie for dominance. The Noble Houses went to all but open war against each other. The Deathless vied to regain control of their empire, the Eunuchs wanted to provide their own candidate and the Ophidians made their own sly suggestions.

Finally, a compromise was made; a young woman from a minor branch of a bastard's house was put on the throne. She would do, everyone thought, until the question of a new Emperor could be answered. But the King in Yellow was moved to intervene, for the first time in the history of the Empire, in a direct fashion. He cursed, or blessed, the young woman and so she expanded. She became an enormous, colosseum-sized writhing entity of protoplasm. Still conscious, still aware, but suddenly concerned with things she cannot express to mortal minds, she now rules absolutely. She is the Inward Collapsing Abyss and hers is the supreme word in the Empire.

## Himalayan Conflict

In recent years, a new conflict has opened up. The Mi-Go have long mined the Himalayas for whatever metals and energies they have use for. The Empire views the Himalayas as part of its demesne. While violent conflicts are rare, the Empire have decided that whatever it may be the Mi-Go want, they have use for it too. The war is escalating as the Mi-Go have realised that while Dreamer human brains are useless for their purposes, the Tsan-Chan imperials are still perfect. Amongst the mountain peaks, uncertain war rages.

## Today

The Empire is beset on all sides by beasts, madmen and the malice of Gods. They send troops to die in a hideous arctic waste. They battle amongst the high passes of mountains against foul insects. The Dreamers still mass and attack like wild barbarians and the Tcho-Tcho hunt, eager for sane flesh.

Internally, the Empire is divided amongst its potentates. The Empress makes alien commandments. The Eunuchs misrepresent its will. The Noble families plot against each other, while the Deathless view them with jealous eyes, eager to reclaim the Empire they created. The military speculates if true power lies in violence while the Ophidians watch all, watch all with cold, dry eyes. And the serfs, the Dreamless, are crushed each day anew.

# CHAPTER TWO

## The Way

Make absolutely no mistake; every human in the Tsan Chan Empire is insane.

They are the last hold outs of an utterly doomed race. The Dreamless must practice elaborate discipline or the Dream will take them. The Kuen-Yuin are degenerate mystics, chaffing under the rule of the Nobility, locked on a world they are desperate to escape. The Nobles have, quite literally, the blood of foul gods in their veins. While these people have somehow managed to survive, to an extent even co-exist with, the mad alien gods and things out of time, the essential horror of the universe is still with them. Indeed, they live it as no other human has.

Their battle for survival is in some ways utterly pointless. Sooner or later the Old Ones will have them. Entropy is the way of the universe and chaos has its way with all. Even if they should survive the physical battles, it would appear that only by becoming inhuman themselves can they truly thrive.

### New Ancient China?

Despite the sources of the new Empire, Tsan Chan is not a Chinese empire. The Deathless who founded Tsan Chan had little interest in providing continuity of culture or history. Very few texts survived the early days after the rise of Cthulhu to similarly preserve that ancient culture.

Tsan Chan as it exists is almost a fever dream of that ancient empire. Architects ape visual styles without understanding the form behind them. The language has drifted into new

semantic ground, influenced by forced melting of ethnic groups, time and contact with un-human things. The diet is much the same, the fashions similar, some naming conventions, although the semantics of names are lost. Some of this is the influence of the Deathless, many of whom have lived for a dozen millennia and whom cling to the traditions of their youth. Some of it is humans looking for a culture in a world of uncertainty, simply hanging their identity on what few images remain in books or other forms. The religion is a mish-mash of ancient beliefs and the irrefutable semi-gods of the present.

But a society like this, under constant siege, could not survive without total discipline. This is the Way, a mixture of binding political philosophy, religious adherence, spiritual practice and legal system. It works to settle the Dreamless, giving them something to cling to, creates a precedent of law for the various powerful factions vying over control of the Empire and provides a kind of sanity for all involved.

The Way was originally outlined by Deathless philosophers, elaborated upon by Ophidians, commented on by the Noble Houses, then finally collated, according to legend, by a Dreamless man called Feng. Most Dreamless will have a simple carving in their homes, even if they cannot read it, where it is treated like a household god. Each carving or even primer text does the job of outlining the basic tenants of the way. But amongst the educated, there are many, many texts, poems and tractates discussing the philosophy.



It is written about by scholars, discussed by Judges and Deathless and Eunuchs, it is practiced by all. Contravention of it is punishable by torture and death. Effectively, the Way promotes an incredibly strict class system, roughly denotes what legal powers each facet of society has, all the while closely controlling the worship of various entities. Cruelty and servility are institutions and social order is all.

Of course, the more powerful the individual, the more tempted, the more able, they are to go against the Way. Many Nobles and other powerful classes tend to pay the Way lip service only, considering it a shackle for the masses.

## The Pillars

Roughly speaking, the Way outlines the Pillars of Society. To an average citizen, there is not much need, or even ability, to question the paths outlined.

Each Pillar represents a social class. Social divisions are iron in Tsan Chan. Mobility is, for all intents and purposes, impossible for a Dreamless serf, except into the military. Nobility is hereditary and the Eunuchs choose who enters their ranks, it is not something you can petition. The Deathless themselves recruit, perhaps, once a generation. So a place for everyone and everyone in their place is the strict rule of society.

### The First Pillar – Empress

First and foremost figure of the Empire, the Empress is protector, law-maker and pontifex. Few realize that the existence of an Emperor is a fairly new occurrence in the history to Tsan Chan. There is no need to educate the public, there is simply an Empress and she is beneficent. Beneficent but stern.

The primary duty of the Empress is to act as a go-between, a bridge, between the great powers that keep the Empire safe and humanity. Very, very few humans are aware that Hastur is the patron of Tsan Chan, with Tsathoggua another source of patronage. The Dreamless do not need to know. Religion is discouraged in

Tsan Chan, any kind, aside from folk worship of ancestors or treating the Empress as divine. Religion, in a world of gods, is obviously very dangerous.

The Empress is traditionally formally thanked each morning before work begins. She is thanked for not only her intercessionary powers but for enforcing law, protecting the Empire from the madmen and monsters beyond the border, and for life itself. Without the Empress, there would be no Empire.

While every duty is owed to the Empress, she has but one duty back, to all social classes: to judge and protect. Life, despite its monstrous cruelty, is fair, says the Way. This is all you can ask for. But no one can take that away from you, you can only forfeit it. And the Empress will continue to protect the Empire as long as the duties she is owed continue to be kept.

The Empress is worshiped either as an incredibly graceful woman, or in the form of a fat, bounteous ox. Other iconic forms, often kept in a village square or temple, is a bloated woman with many teats. These symbols of her, drawn, statues, bas-reliefs, are traditionally given a bowl of food and drink, gratitude for a life to lead and a place to live it.

### Second Pillar – Noble Houses

The cousins of the Empress, the Nobility of Tsan Chan are feared, dreaded and treated with awe. Everyone knows the blood of Gods flows through their veins and they are heroes, saviours of the world. The almost total slavery they keep their citizens in is simply their due.

Most Dreamless won't ever see a Mighty Child, or if they do it will be from a distance, a parade, a passing figure in fine conveyance. But they understand the Empire is divided and subdivided, with each House ruling their slice. The less pure the blood of the Noble is, the smaller their region of rulership. Sizes of satrapies wildly vary, so a few small villages may be under the direct rule of some bastard or by-blow, or entire cities.

Nobles are the direct rule of law. They have a fair amount of autonomy in creating local

rules and customs. This not only allows them to create whatever kind of cultural climate is suitable to their needs, it also discourages, along the lines of the Way, any attempt to move out of a particular satrapy. Who knows what kind of foreign laws exist only a few miles over?

Nobles levy taxes and law; they enforce correct forms of thankfulness to the Empress and, perhaps most importantly, recruit for the army. Strict rosters are maintained, so a Noble can be incredibly brutal towards their serfs. The Dreamless are expected to understand that the Nobility is bound by the same kinds of duty towards the Empress they are. In other words, no matter how harsh the treatment, they are expected to thank these aristos for it. The taxes they pay that make Noble life so glorious is a present they give their masters.

The Mighty Children are expected to be obeyed without question. Questions are a contravention of the Way. And although the Nobles can be grindingly tyrannic, this is their right. Some Nobles maintain an air of terror, some a kind of distant hero worship but they never mix with the common Dreamless. Such would be a shocking breach of protocol. Only the officials of a village can ever expect to meet a Mighty Child and then, they are more likely to meet a functionary.

No act of extravagance or sadism is beyond what a Noble is due. The Dreamless are expected to accept this way of life. Most do, understanding that this is simply their lot. Others are all-too aware that rebellion against a demigod is pointless endeavour at best.

Rebellion against the Noble Houses is not unknown but it is scandalous thing, seen as akin to patricide. The Nobles are the price a human pays for life, the onerous cost of the duty one owes her Imperial Majesty.

However, being accepted into the service of a Noble House is considered an exemplary honour. Or it should be. Many Nobles require the service of cooks, cleaners, gardeners, bedwarmers and other basic functionaries. For most, they go to a Lord of Ladies' domain and then never return, or do only rarely. Those who

do are often seemingly victimised by the experience. Nevertheless, a family is paid a stipend while one of them is in service, so it is something parents pray for their children. Love and familial loyalty are not the virtues service is.

### Third Pillar - The Deathless

The Deathless are the closest thing Tsan Chan comes to a scholarly, priest, or even artisan class. There are, at most, a thousand Kuen-Yin in the world and they are a secretive cult. They jealously hoard magic and make scrying into the future an art, always anticipating attacks and disasters.

The Deathless, in the minds of the Dreamless, are guardians of strange knowledge, shadows that move through society, seeking out magic and technology to serve the Mighty Children. Curiously, they are most often seen as dark heroes, seekers in black places, those willing to pay the ultimate sacrifice for the Empire. This is how they propagandise themselves, anyway.

The Way specifies that, should a Deathless make themselves known, all obedience is to be given to them. They are about grim and dangerous business, after all. How this conflicts with the total obedience due a Noble is unclear and often a source of friction between the ruling aristos and the Deathless.

Far more likely, a Dreamless is likely to meet the Judgement. The Deathless have a kind of police force cum inquisition, which seeks out signs of the Dream in the Empire. Those possibly tainted are a threat to all. Those who seek to call on spirits, gods, or entities unapproved by the Empress endanger all. The Judgement has far reaching legal powers and a broad mandate. They are a harsh but fair necessity and, some say, the only court of appeal against the excesses of the Mighty Children.

### Fourth Pillar - The Military

If there is one place the serfs of Tsan Chan can go to escape the bone-breaking toil that is their lot, it is the army. Traditionally speaking, the Way dictates that it is the only acceptable way



that social class can be changed. The Empire has a continuous need of manpower to guard the Interdiction, to prosecute the war against Dreamers and Tcho-Tcho, to aid the reclamation of Antarctica, explore the world and other such ventures.

Men and women alike are glad to see recruiters, as they believe that it is an honourable way to leave behind the crushing poverty and ignorance of a typical Dreamless life.

Service is for twenty five years and very, very few come back to their village or town once they've finished their term. Those that do tend to be wealthy and respected although, almost uniformly, they return damaged and viciously wounded. Nevertheless, this isn't a deterrent for most, who long for the respect and glory only a soldier can bring to a family.

Military duty is the highest lot a serf can attain to, short of something miraculous happening like being recruited to serve in the Judgement, or being sequestered into the Eunuchs' strange order. The Nobility of Tsan Chan is simply too dangerous, too strange, too cruel, to be beloved but the various militaries create the folk heroes and legends for the people. Returning veterans, those who can tell stories, find their gossip and warnings repeated for years afterwards, until they become folk tales.

While no formal obligation is held towards veterans, they are held up as heroes, taking up arms in the name of their culture, doing the ultimate duty to their Empress.

## **Fifth Pillar - The Dreamless**

The Dreamless themselves are citizens in the cruellest regime imaginable. Ruled over by ancient cultists and arrogant creatures touched by the inhuman, surrounded on all sides by malevolent, inhuman enemies, they toil, they strive and they die, all at the whims of malicious masters.

Yet, they are still humans. They make love, they work hard, they sleep in, they play with grandchildren and gossip with neighbours. They are still recognisably human. But humans under tremendous strain, aware of any of the

terrible fates that could overtake them. It is only the Way that keeps them anything approaching sanity, a deep belief that all this is just, all this is necessary.

The Dreamless have pretty much no legal rights, very few have any education and those that do are taught only specialist skills. Very few learn even how to read or write. The vast majority farm or labour at the whims of the Nobility. They are a cowed people, barely even aware that life for a human could be different. Servility is bred into them from the cradle to the grave.

No human could exist in Tsan Chan without paying an immense psychic toll. Many are hyper vigilant, never trusting. Others become vicious to those around them, torturing spouse and children to relieve the horrors and strain upon them. No citizen is truly well. There is happiness to be had but little of it. The serfs of this cruel land are chattel, living only to please their masters and expected to be grateful for the chance. And they know it.

Is it any wonder that, at the core of every human heart, resentment grows? It is only abject fear that keeps these people under control, fear that, no matter how bad Tsan Chan is, it could be much, much worse.

## **The Social Orders**

### **Who rules the world?**

The Way outlines what the social divisions and responsibilities of the Empire should be but, the reality far from conforms with the fantasy. Tsan Chan is, in fact, rent with divisions. The Dreamless are kept away from the secrets of the Empire and the bloody politics at play. The higher orders disagree utterly with each other's visions for what the Empire should be; each desires absolute security and control over the Dreamless. And then, beyond all human understanding, the Old Ones have their own agenda for this tiny bastion of humanity.

## **The Empress**

Who she was, her name, her House, her very human existence has been forgotten. Once, she

was a temporary candidate, a compromise figure, put on a throne for stability's sake. Now, she is changed utterly. A kilometre squared, a hundred meter high, throbbing, writhing thing, buzzing along radio frequencies in her strange voice, pulsing in time to three hundred thousand internal organs, extending a million pseudopods arms, thousands of dim, phosgene eyes opening and closing in disturbing patterns along her flanks and flukes: The Empress of Tsan Chan. Inward Collapsing Void.

In the Forbidden City, at the heart of Empire, this being has a great palace built around her, locking her away from the sight of the good sky. She is surrounded by Eunuchs each and every day, that tend to her, feed her, clean her vast body of parasites and, most importantly, listen to her whims and commands and interprets them for the Mighty Children and the Kuen-Yin.

No one is sure what caused the woman's transformation but the Deathless sense the hand of the King in Yellow, although what could motivate such a being is beyond them. The Nobility are unsure of what to make of the Empress. In a way, they worship her, seeing her transformation as something wondrous, an apotheosis, the pinnacle of what courses in their own blood. Although there are many, especially amongst the younger generation, appalled by her majesty, questioning their own biological fate.

The Empress cannot or does not talk in any meaningful fashion a human can understand. Her own language is akin to static on a radio wave, the electromagnetic spurts of a pulsar, the weird cry of whippoorwills, tinutitus susurrations. Her own desires are entirely non-human. She feeds on a diet of human compost, she takes no pleasures, has no interests aside from one: each night, the roof of the Forbidden City opens and she gazes into the night sky, beaming out signals of strange composition. Standing close to her is suicidal, the very air around her becomes carcinogenic, the exotic radiations she spurts can kill a man in a few hours.

Yet, the Empress rules in a very real way. Her psychic powers are absolute, allowing her

to charge the Interdiction to levels where even the puissant Star-Spawn find it foreboding. She apparently has some sort of power to divine the future, her orders via the Eunuchs baffling when received, only making sense in hindsight.

So, despite her horrific appearance and unfathomable motivations, the Mighty Children serve her, trusting that her alien heritage gives her a kind of genius and power they can only aspire to. And many do, seeing the Empress' state as one they can enter.

The Deathless are utterly baffled by the Empress. They are still human and find being in her presence horrifying. To watch her respire, to see the too-human eyes flutter like butterflies, it is too much even for the elders of that order. Without a firm, ruling voice, they are frustrated, wishing for simple orders, not the oracular codes she shoots into the firmament. And yet, they understand her enormous powers, they understand that the boons of their god are not to be questioned.

But in the end, the Deathless respect power and the Empress is the great power in the realm. They serve. And it is the Eunuchs they despise, gatekeepers to power.

The Dreamless have no idea what the Empress is. None can see her, none can meet her, she holds no court.

## The Eunuchs

The Empress, simply put, is poison. Unfolding Void, her superior, was similarly affected by his heritage. Most humans spending more than a year in his general vicinity, within a few miles, sickened and died, as if close to enormous amounts of radiation. Madness, bad luck, suicide, all were similar ailments for those who somehow avoid sickening. The Empress has similar effects on mortals, leaving them crippled, diseased, dead, within weeks.

The Ophidians, who had a certain amount of experience dealing with such entities, found the Maiming Picatrix, an ancient text that spoke of prophylactics against such phenomenon. Humans were found and ritually maimed, had shockingly invasive surgeries, were implanted

with strange metals, transdermal piercings, extreme body modification and even dehumanising psychological experiments performed upon them. The Dreamless still petition the Eunuchs to this day to take their children, eager for prestige.

The result were a ragged group of humans, in continual pain, of dubious sanity, who were immune to the killing radiance of their Empress. They served her, cleaned and fed her, tended her palace, received visitors to her Forbidden City and generally became a necessary part of her Court. Eunuchs, the ritually maimed who served the desires of the Worthy.

Then, something strange happened. They began to hear the Empress. Not in words, not anything as simple as commands. No, they began to hear her urges, to understand the codes of writhing and oscillation in her body. Chief amongst the Eunuchs claimed that there was something human still inside the Empress and that they could communicate with that... soul, the faded bio-electric field, whatever it might be. They were proven correct and reliable, predicting Dreamer and Tcho-Tcho incursion, letting the Deathless know about planetary conjunctions their prophecies might benefit from knowing, detecting particularly large outbreaks of heretic spirituality.

The Nobles immediately became suspicious of the Eunuchs. And a Noble suspicion is a kind of hate. Their cousin was lost to them but this ragged group of sliced and spindled mutilates could communicate with the awesome being? No, it could not be borne.

What proof did they have that they weren't lying? Even if they had been correct so far, how long would that last? The Eunuchs simply bowed and claimed that there's was not to police Her Imperial Majesties' will.

The Eunuchs are a servile caste, ten thousand strong and technically without political powers of any kind. They have never seemingly used their power for reasons of self-interest. And yet, and yet, if they did, who could gain-say them? As for the Eunuchs themselves, they are aware that they are not guaranteed safety

by their position. They could be wiped out tomorrow and a new corps created, although this would invite a dangerous discontinuity of Government.

The Eunuchs themselves, while happy to keep up a public appearance of servility, are in fact a vicious nest of vipers. They perform the rituals on their new recruits themselves, an un-anthesised process, so the young tend to detest their elders but become eager to hurt the new recruits, looking to justify or alleviate their own abuse.

Strangely, however, they are a strict meritocracy. Those with the most prestige are those who truly can hear the urges and ugly communications from their mistress. But those unfortunate few are mad and sick. So true power belongs to those who can control these mad seers. Those who can manipulate the truth and so control the aristos and Deathless and military alike. Which they take a deep relish in, the ultimate abuse victims hyper vigilant and eager for control...

## Characters

Massively hydrocephalic, Yil Jon Wu shuffles through the courtrooms and corridors of the Forbidden City with two assistants who literally prop up his head with sticks. Nevertheless, no matter how grotesque and image he appears, Wu is a figure of deep respect. Wu dreams nightly of the Empress and is often able to anticipate her demands before they are made. Wu only requests a constant supply of human hearts, taken from prisoners and heretics, which he claims focuses his power.

Vien Van is a woman of quite inhuman beauty. Literally, it scares people and makes it hard for them to look upon her. Beneath her bright silk robes, things stir and hiss gently. Nevertheless, Van is a profoundly gifted bureaucrat and organiser, who runs the Imperial Palace with grace and efficiency. A shame then that she so hates her co-workers, feeling they are all barbarians next to her grace.

## The Deathless

Imagine a secret order formed when humanity was still afraid of fire. Imagine, in absolute secrecy, it engineered the fates of nations, discovered the arcane secrets at the heart of creation, conquered death, conquered alien beings. Then, abandoned by those same patrons, they still discovered a way to survive the most fundamental apocalypse the world had experience in some three hundred million years. Imagine it rose up to rule and save the last sane humans, untouched by the creeping corruption, the strident conquest, of the Old Gods.

Then imagine the bitterness it feels when it is swept aside from this control by the Mighty Children.

The Deathless are angry. Furious. Their cold hearts and dusty mouths seethe with a slow, quiet, titanic rage that they are no longer the leaders of the Empire. They created the Empire, they shepherded the Dreamless into safety. They created the Interdiction. They created the laws of the land. (Yes, yes, they will wave impatient hands, the Ophidians had something to do with it. We are duly grateful.)

They work constantly to overcome the influence of the Nobility, they plot endlessly to undermine their personal powers, their relationship with the military, they create tension between the Mighty Children and the Eunuchs, they investigate endlessly, claims the that houses may be involved with heretic religions.

But the fact remains, the Empress and the Mighty Children are simply too powerful, too dangerous, and too necessary to the fate of Tsan Chan. Without the Empress' will, sooner or later the Interdiction will fall. Without the Nobles power of battlefields, their ability to face the foot soldiers of Cthulhu and the other Old Ones on the battlefield, the Empire is living on borrowed time.

So the Deathless tend to limit their own scheming and treason. They tend to choose on Nobleman at a time to destroy. It is a cold, slow war, borne of bitterness and resentment.

Demoted, the Deathless are still a force to be reckoned with in the Empire. Officially, they serve as spiritual advisors to the Nobles and the Empress, sharing the correct ways to propitiate the King in Yellow and Tsathoggua. They instruct the Mighty Children on their lineage. They serve as sorcerers and scientists, maintaining the Interdiction, working with the various armed forces of Tsan Chan. They are also gifted seers and oracles, casting strange runes in dark caves, carefully watching the skeins of fate at work. (Although, recently, they have become aware of great intelligences that move through time.) With this information, this foresight, they plan military actions and advise on all aspects of daily life in the Empire, on farming, building, migration and war. Perhaps their most important role, certainly one in which most Tsan Chanese will meet them, is the Judgement.

An individual Deathless is ranked below a Noble and so must be obeyed by all Dreamless. However, formally, they can be overruled by the heads of Houses and of course, the Empress herself. Lesser aristos find the authority between themselves and the Deathless unclear. A source for much individual tension.

The Deathless rarely recruit. Immortals, their numbers do not require much fortification. When they do, they silently seek out brilliant, ruthless children and claim them.

## The Judgement

For Tsan Chan, the greatest danger is an internal threat. The Interdiction and the armies of Empire have so far stood down alien armies but from within, worshippers of forbidden gods still appears. They weaken the Interdiction, break down the social order of the Way and disrupt every aspect of society. It is against this primary threat that the Judgement polices and punishes.

Judges are usually junior members of the Deathless order, those who have been recruited but have yet to prove themselves. They are given strict quotas of dissidents to fill. Those who fill the quota are kept as Judges, those who ignore it are usually taken more seriously as Deathless

candidates. The order is not stupid. It does not want the mindlessly callous in its ranks but appreciates the terror the Judgement causes.

Dressed in elaborate robes, acting magisterially, looking to create an atmosphere of power and control. Many foolish Dreamless have a bred in the bone fear of the Judgement and such displays help, with the serfs often prostrating themselves in terror. A useful technique but it makes the Judges lazy and unprepared for insubordination. Judges travel in wide circuits, each with individual 'territories' and become well-know, well feared.

A Judge has a far-reaching mandate to investigate arrest and punish. They usually travel in retinues, some up to fifty strong and can investigate anything they see fit, sometimes being tipped off, sometimes simply opening a case in hope of making quota. The retinue act as enforcers, body servants, investigators, bedwarmers and executioners. The Judge will often recruit from towns and villages they have exco-riated, looking for the most talented, or most desperate, knowing they will have a servant staff of people absolutely indebted to them.

Usually any kind of infraction against the way will see harsh punishments. For those found guilty of Alienism, the worship of non-Imperial gods, the penalties are stupendously, outlandishly cruel. Whole villages have been burned and salted by Judges, to pay for the presence of one Dreamer. Their capacity for torture is legendary.

Unfortunately, the presence of mercy in a Judge can lead to catastrophe. One Deep One behind the Interdiction can spell disaster. The Judgement feels its reputation and practice is deserved. The Nobility, sadly, disagree. They feel that control over serfdom is their exclusive domain. An argument the Deathless counter by suggesting that no body can effectively regulate itself.

Nobility is technically bound by the Way to work with the Judgement and, indeed, has seen the Judgement at times as a useful ally. But the Judgement is always on the lookout for cor-

ruption amongst the ruling class, taking a special delight in their destruction.

But there is one thing clever Dreamless have discovered. The Judgement is widespread and its resources are pushed thin across Tsan Chan. The only time the Deathless will work to aid their independent agents is in an action against the Noble Houses.

## Characters

Feared by all in her order, the Respected Iron bolted herself into a mask of ferocious black steel long, long ago. Now she is perhaps the most feared Judge in all the Empire. Her commitment and zeal are especially noticeable when dealing with serfs who have abandoned the Way. Once she looked for Mythos beasts to battle but has long since been unnerved by them and is horrified of meeting such an entity.

Shan Rest-in-Shadow is a fairly young member of the Deathless, giving up his mortality only two hundred years ago. In that time he has become an adept politician, representing his order in her Imperial Majesty's court. Calm, collected and urbane, he nevertheless has begun to want greater occult power and considers conspiring with certain Mighty Children to gain it.

## The Nobility

When the hyperluminal quasimatter of the Outer Gods meets the much and mire of human meat, strange alchemies occur. The Gods have long amused themselves with the creation of such bastards but for what purpose, none alive can say. These offspring, these Mighty Children, cannot contain the power and purpose and implacable will of their ancestors but, nevertheless, they are blessed with potencies and psychic profiles far beyond that of humanity.

In Tsan Chan, these hybrid demigods are now a stable line, a family, the blood and ichor and seething genetic codes of those entities diluted by long breeding patterns. Nevertheless, the Mighty Children still enjoy personal pow-

er beyond that of humans and so enjoy a special privilege. According to the Way, the safety and responsibility upon them is absolute and so too, their rewards.

The Empire is roughly divided amongst the five great houses of the land, each of whom rule their territory absolutely. Within that House's Dominion, they set whatever governance they wish, although each is hierarchical, each is authoritarian and each is brutally repressive. Each individual born with the right surname is ultimately above the law, except when answering to their superiors in the House, the Empress and, very occasionally, the Judgement. Without limitations, knowing to the marrow that they are superior to their charges, is it any wonder that the Mighty Children grow up superbiate and cruel?

Nevertheless, they do have duties. The Empire needs governing, there are taxes to collect, wars to be fought, laws to be policed and farms and factories to be overseen. Many of the Mighty Children chafe under this 'restriction' and pass off the work to Dreamless major-domos and viziers, living idle lives of pleasure.

This pleasure is often lethal to the serfs living in their Domains. The Nobles share passions and appetites with their antecedents, unsavoury and dark delights are theirs. Marking the aristos who indulge their inhuman sides are mutations, deformations, blemishes... There are some amongst the great Houses, especially the young, who shudder at their destinies but very, very few escape their bloodlines without some indulgence. And the Mighty Children live very, very long lives.

These long lives are partly what makes the internal politics of the Houses so vicious. There is little room for promotion or gain within the strict confines of authority. A patriarch lives for thousands of years and has little inclination to give up power. Therefore, the junior members are always on the lookout for what can embarrass those above or beside them, hungry for more power. Assassination is against the tenants of the Way but the aristos have a rather more practical view of this code: don't get caught.

The seniors of the Houses are aware of their ancestral urge for decadence and attempt to send younger members of their Houses out into the world. Many join the military. Some travel widely, ruling and dealing with the problems of the Dreamless. Some study magic or science and become scholars. Many of the Mighty Children are born of dalliance with serfs and they have little status in the hierarchies of the Houses. They will always be second-class citizens, a fact that rankles them no matter what influence they have over human lives.

## Bloodlines

When the Deathless created the Mighty Children in the Messiah Working, they intentionally destroyed knowledge of the individual entities that parented the newborn nobles. They did this to prevent the future rulers paying propitiation to non-Imperial gods. While the Noble Houses have often requested such information, on this the Deathless will not give in to their will. The Nobles have these creatures blood in their veins but, surely, the Deathless know them better.

## House Fang

Perhaps the most pre-eminent of the Great Houses of the Empire, House Fang is filled with great conquerors and tacticians. While there is a strong lust for blood in all of them, they ensure that their youths are trained heavily in the ancient arts of war. Military scientists, generals, war poets and battle magic are their stock in trade.

Although they struggle against it, submitting themselves to unrelenting, horrifying, perhaps even sadomasochistic discipline, each and every member of House Fang lust for violence. Although they are known for precision of planning, subtle manoeuvres, they have all the willpower of a frenzied shark once blood is spilled. Often, their elaborate and hierarchical plans are undone when violence begins. Many of the great generals of the Empire lead from the front, all the better to engage personally with their enemies.

Because they come from a long line of heroes, they are particularly abhorred by the Dreamless. The banners of House Fang are harbingers of war; their recruiters come with long and savage whips to press gang villages whole into lunatic wars. While officially the Fang have produced great heroes and many festivals and holidays are marked because of the great deeds of the Fang, in their hearts, their heroes are hated and secretly cursed.

The recurring mutation of the Tsan Chan are suited to their lethiferous nature. They grew fangs, vertically slitted eyes, stooped and raptor-like stances and strange sensory organs that scent blood.

## House Li-Leng

The most secretive of all the Great Houses, the Li-Leng are perhaps the strangest. They are at once cruel, personally invested in torture and pain, yet they are the largest landowners of the Empire. They are master merchants who understand that if the Dreamless caste are well-fed, educated in the peasants disciplines of farming, irrigation and technology, and then the Empire prospers. Nevertheless, the Li-Leng each personally thrive on a human pain and misery. Removed from this, they physically wither and enter a comatose state until some human pain is dedicated to them.

The Li-Leng claim that their skill with farming, with mining and other such techniques and skills come about from a mystical connection with the lands of the Empire. Others believe that even the rocks of the world, the rice in the fields, the water of the great rivers, screams out at the harvests of the Li-Leng.

Incredibly wealthy, for obvious reasons, the Li-Leng could control the fate of the Empire with great ease if they could. It is they who feed armies and cities. They forge the weapons of the Empire; they oversee gathering harvests and taxations.

And yet, they seem to have very little interest in political power. Once they have done their duty to the Empire, they gladly go about their dark and private rites.

The Li-Leng are extremely popular, as these things go, amongst the Dreamless. They continually refine harvesting techniques, provide famine and flood relief, ensure that taxes are not too high amongst their own people. Those who live in lands ruled by Li-Leng nobles are very much aware that they are richer, better educated and better fed than most other Tsan Chanese and if they must offer up one of their number twice a year, they consider this a cheap price. Of course, there are many forms of suffering. Sometimes, the Li-Heng Children will release their sacrificial victims alive, as wreckage, barely human, excruciated beyond imagination. It is then the Li-Leng realise what their paradise is built on.

The Li-Leng themselves have few overt mutations and alterations. Instead, they appear as either emaciatedly thin or obscenely obese. Either way, they tend to eat and drink little. Their children of the Li-Leng are trained in earth sciences and tend to be quite hands on in their approach to governance. They personally oversee constructions of dams, farms and such like. Nevertheless, each of them radiates a very dangerous feeling of menace and sadism. Other Mighty Children may be grotesque but a Li-Leng stare at human life with cold and vicious eyes.

## Yug-Ming

Perhaps the most remote of the Noble Houses of Tsan Chan, the Yug-Ming are also the least numerous and the politically weakest. They breed in very small numbers and many times in the last thousand years have been reduced to only one or two members. They offer little advice to the Empire, have the smallest amount of land, little riches. Their Protectorates tend to be in far flung and desolate parts of the Empire. Near the ancient Plateau of Leng, on cyclone ravaged coasts where the seas suffer Deep One assault.

But the Yug-Ming are the most individually dangerous of all the inheritors of the Mighty Children. They are amongst the most mentally deviant of the Noble Houses and tend to be

particularly individually powerful. Their sight sees into other worlds, through the stars. They have a long history of being the most powerful sorcerers and the most gifted engineers and scientists of the Empire. They maintain close relationships with the Li-Leng, working on avante garde theories the Li-Leng mass produce.

Yug-Ming Dreamless serfs have the most freedom of all the peoples of the Empire, simply because the Yug-Ming have very little interest in them. Yug-Ming have a long culture of disinterest in human affairs. The Dreamless who live in Yug-Ming lands are generally left to their own devices, with little control from the top. Imperial Judges and the Deathless are feared in these lands.

Yug-Ming are famous for their lack of graces or politesse. It is not that they are coarse or uncouth, rather that the blood of their ancestor-God runs thick in their veins. The Nobles spend their lives in dark tombs, observatories and orreries, wondering after magic and inventing and recreating technologies. Despite their individual powers, even the other Nobles find their esoteric interests and lack of manners off-putting.

Their mutations are equally odd and distant. Eyes like argent glass, skins like crystal, ten fingers to a hand or extra faces upon their heads that gently sing strange songs.

## House Za-Shan

The members of this House are famed for their larcenous and acquisitive nature. It is easy to mistake this for greed but this is untrue. The Za-Shan simply feel a primal connection to the earth, to physical things. They love the crops that grow in the ground. They love the coal and gems that dissolve and compress into life beneath the earth. They love the creation of art and beauty and function that comes from moulding and forging and carving and lathing such creations. They are rich, they are clever and they love all these things far more than they love the frail blood and bones of a human.

Za-Shan push tirelessly for the incorporation of technology and industry for the Empire.

They mine, they farm, they relentlessly experiment on Arcanotechnology, they strive to improve the Interdiction. And they do this by relentlessly driving their Dreamless population. Huge factories work serfs for twelve, fourteen hour shifts. Farming is driven by ruthless, back-breaking whips. Za-Shan is rich, powerful, influential but built upon terrible suffering.

The Mighty Children themselves are somehow connected with the earth. Their own mutations see their skin slowly calcifying into wood, mud, stone. They become attuned to veins of minerals or metals at the cost of being unable to fully appreciate biological life, seeing it as weak, messy, suppurating and awkward. Za-Shan nobles lack a great deal of empathy, even for each other but find endless communion with the earth. Recently, younger members of the House have begun to experiment with radical prostheses, amputating their own limbs to replace them with machines. They endlessly entreat the Eunuchs to allow them to experiment upon the Empress, giving her means to communicate with them and the world, or insert machines into her flukes to give her greater perception.

## House Chiu-Chan

The blood of the Gods runs thin in the Chiu-Chan line. They are the least potent, the least dangerous and the most human of all the Mighty Children. Even their stalwarts and scions are considered barely capable of meeting an entity like a Xothian in equal combat. Yet, they are the most influential of the Houses of Tsan Chan, with their will more often than not holding sway over Imperial policy.

Chiu-Chan has this power because it's so human. They understand blackmail, surveillance, politicking, fair-weather friendship, bribery, glad-handing and straight out lies better than any of the other Houses. The Za-Shan want rare gems? Find them, offer them, but only for a favour. House Fang has a weapon shipment go missing that would shame them in the eyes of the other Houses? Who could have those weapons? House Li-Leng secretly black-



mailing a Eunuch? That would arouse the order as a whole. Unless... the blackmailers are blackmailed? And so forth. Through spies, through treachery, through listening at key-holes and the reading of mail, the Chiu-Chan have made their weakness into strengths.

Nevertheless, House Chiu-Chan are paid little respect by the other pillars of Tsan Chinese society. They have little military might, have no truly great generals in their history. The Deathless, who remain extremely secretive, find their attempts at extortion laughable. The Serpents, who see the Mighty Children as little more than shock troops, find their stock a regressive one and feel they should be wiped out. This causes the Chiu-Chan resentment and anger. Often, they are fools to this hate and waste chances at control on petty revenge.

The Chiu-Chan have the most number of bastards out of any of the Noble lines. They often breed simply for troops, for minions and pawns. They also understand the use of the Dreamless better than any other House, understanding how much they see and hear. Still, life is no better under these rulers than others. The seething anger the Chiu-Chan feel towards their cousins is often taken out upon their vassals.

## Characters

Neh Yug-Ming is a beautiful, genderless creature. In its youth it was a brave adventurer, questing over the Empire, dealing with sages and serfs alike. Now, it has retreated, a hermit in a cave. Its lands are undertaxed, its peasants wild. Yet it feels it is close to discovering great secrets of the apotheosis of its kind. The Judgment watch it, carefully.

Mal Za-Shan is a merchant prince, traveling, selling, buying, storing, stealing. He's not adverse to a little privateering on the side. A huge man, well over seven foot tall, handsome as the sun, he's a popular member of his family and beloved by his Dreamless, who he fetes.

If only the eyes that have grown inside his lungs and the mouths that whisper inside his skull would stop telling him that truth wealth can be found in the souls of humanity...

Koi Chiu-Chan is a monstrosity. Looking not unlike a bipedal shark, with appetites and furies to match, she is feared by all who have heard of her. Even Deep One warlords fear her wrath. Strangely, she is a placid being when not engorged by the scent of blood, quiet with a fondness for music. Many covet her skill-at-arms and she is constantly beset by offers to become a bodyguard or general for another House.

## The Military

The spiritual well-being of the Empire rests with the Deathless and the Mighty Children are the only real military defence against the like of the Star-Spawn and wandering Chthonians but truly, the security of the Empire rests with its armies.

Devoted to the idea of dying for Tsan Chan, the armies are indoctrinated heavily, constantly tested for their loyalty, punished for minor infractions and completely necessary for the survival of the Empire. None of the higher classes would ever admit it but with the Legions, their existence would end in months.

An enormous gulf separates the officers from the troops. Non-commissioned officers are rare, with the army having little use for small, squad based tactics, preferring simply to rush troops into combat to die. But there are those who do rise up, who do survive and who do gain rank. The heroes of the Dreamless. While some may be chosen to server at the Empress' side and some tiny few might be chosen to serve with the Deathless in their black cities, it is the army that truly provides the Dreamless with a way of bettering their lot. Though few are aware of the brutal nightmare that awaits them.

Socially, service people are barely one stepped removed from serfdom but do enjoy rights according to the Way that their brethren do not. They also receive pensions from the Noble House they served under after two decades of mandatory service, meaning that soldiering is the best chance the average Imperial citizen has of entering a comfortable retirement. The

further up the ranks a soldier is promoted, the higher the stipend, of course, meaning that serious career soldier do stay on. Although, most soldiers are nervous wrecks, who spend their money on narcotics and alcohol, still they are glorious.

Each Noble House raises a Legion, keeping commissions for the younger children and by-blows. These generals and admirals understand that they have no inheritance coming and so join the military at a chance for glory and success. They often resent their position, have no interest in or passion for warfare but quickly grow to understand the power they wield. It is not uncommon for highly placed officers in the Legion to have to be bribed into doing their duty. While they risk wrath, it is an effective tactic. It also risks Dreamer incursions but the arrogant commanders put their own needs first. Because of the lack of interest in organising the armies, they are often shambolic affairs, poorly equipped and fed. Even so, without them, the Empire would fall – so such corruption must be tolerated.

No wonder then that the officers who have worked their way up the ranks tend to be the most concentrated class of seditionist in the Empire. They kill grossly incompetent or venal commanders, risking devastation at other Nobles hands. They seek to undermine the Way, a philosophy they see as grinding down the humans of their world and they are often unhinged from the horrors that they face. As a social order, the Military could sweep the Empire free of their masters. But what then? Death at the hands of monsters. So, seething, angry, resentful, they serve.

## Characters

Lin Lee is a sergeant in the army. At thirty years of age, she's a fifteen year veteran and is tired. She's seen so many young soldiers killed that she's almost lost any empathy she has towards human life. She barks orders, drinks too much and smokes too much opium and can't even be bothered with casually sleeping around. She's also an incredibly gifted field tactician who is

gaining the eye of her superiors and Judges, who could use such a mind and such a sword-arm.

He never blinks, say his troops, of Han Wei. They think it's because he's seen so much in the Great White Legion that he's simply unafraid. This is true, he's gone far beyond fear, so far that in his head, all he hears is himself, screaming. Trained in Elder weapons as well as a deadly hand-to-hand techniques, he keeps thinking that maybe he should just kill everyone in the whole damn Legion and spare them one more death in the disintegrating flesh of a Shoggoth.

## Dreamless

Tsan Chan is the most restrictive, most regressive and oppressive regimes in the history of humankind. The rulers are vicious and mad and alien. The priesthood is made up of undead scholars who play games with eons. The coldly arrogant tramontane allies, the Ophidians, are awarded more rights than millions and millions of human beings.

And yet, perhaps this is the only way humans can survive. To be oppressed.

Humanity is an all but extinct species, barely propping up their reservation, the game park to gods, through pacts with other gods. They are in constant physical danger from the barbarian hordes and beasts that lurk outside their empire, in constant moral danger from the Dream, and in constant spiritual danger from the Way, which makes the compliant in their own oppression and requires obeisance to Old Ones, to save them from Old Ones.

Is it any wonder that the serf class of Tsan Chan is insane, one and all?

Tsan Chan is not a society of psychotics, of course. It would have broken down a thousand years since. But the enormous pressures of their life has made the unacceptable acceptable and the bizarre normal. The Dreamless have nightmares, hallucinate freely, suffer high rates of suicide and religious mania and psychotic episodes. They are illiterate, poorly numerate, malnourished and suffer a kind of culture-

wide Stockholm Syndrome, after centuries of enforcement by the Way. The Way teaches that they deserve this. The Way teaches that this is their only hope. The Way teaches servility and obeisance and duty to all other stations of Imperial life. It teaches that the Gods are distant and malevolent and that they need elaborate hierarchies between them.

The Way also teaches them the discipline to recognise the Dream, to recognise the signs of mutation and horror that go with breaches in Imperial security. The Way is a kind of para-sanity. Humans of the year 5000 are a broken people, living in poverty and dealing with a world long disinherited to them by monstrosities.

Yet they are still human. They still laugh and cry and love. They are still recognisably of our own stock, simply showing the signs of ten centuries or more of conditioning and service. And like all humans, mutiny and anarchy are close to their breasts. The Dreamless can and do rebel. They can and do find their station wanting. They can and do recognise the horrendous cruelty of their society, the tortures they endure to pamper and amuse the upper classes. They do long for a world without the Dream. It is simply rather a different matter to effect revolt and liberty. And in a world where their Princes are like unto gods themselves, perhaps a fool's errand.

Most Dreamless are farmers or factory workers. Some gain employment in the houses of Nobles, where they serve as servants and occasionally more. This is the most common way a Dreamless becomes in any way educated. It is also a common way to madness, seeing the demigods up close. Or they join the military and spend a short, horrible life witnessing the vile world beyond the Interdiction closely. Those that return are bitter and spent. It can surely not be a surprise that the Dreamless are broken. Nor can it be a surprise that revolution is nurtured in more hearts than the Judgement, the aristos, can know. There are literally hundreds of dissenter-cells in Tsan Chan and while their numbers are few, they grow. In strength, they grow.

The revolutionaries are more common than any suspects, although few are well-equipped, connected or educated. But they soon realise one thing: if the Dreamless did arise, if revolution did sweep the Empire, it would succeed. Weight of numbers is enough. This fact fills the hearts of the unwise with joy. Even if it doesn't happen today, it can happen tomorrow. Perhaps it is inevitable, that the vicious lords of the world will burn in anarchic fires and the priests and judges will be toppled. To the wise, this success is a horror. Because, when they are free of their masters... there is a seething world beyond the gates that hungers. What then? What then?

## Characters

Po Moi has seen things in her short, bitter life. Her village was attacked by a Tcho-Tcho raiding crew, her uncles were burned as heretics, her father went to warn and came back with no legs and no mind. At ten, she's hard as stone. She has begun to slavishly keep to the Way, terrified that it was her lack of doctrine that caused all this to happen. But more terrible things will happen to her, and soon.

Kuei Wan marched to war and did his ten years and saw terrible things, did them as well. He still dreams of the fingers he lost in the jaws of the thing with the frog-fish face and wakes up screaming. He sent his wife back to her people, unable to bear her weeping in the night. He's done his time and his service to the Empire. Now that a Judge is in his small town, looking for the disloyal amongst people known as loyal, he just might have had enough. Now he's just angry at his Empire.

## The Untouchables

There are groups outside the tenants of the Way who exist in Tsan Chan. They are called Untouchables specifically because of that doctrine's inability to account for them. By far the most well known are the Serpent People, called Ophidians by the Empire. But there are also the Elders, those strange aliens who ruled the earth

long since and the Ghouls, who are looked down on as a ghastly, but useful, evil.

These entities are paid lesser or greater respect based on their service and function to the Empire. Some are judged individually, rather than by the achievements of species.

## The Serpents

They are few in number. They live in the remote parts of the Empire, or deep inside the Forbidden City itself. They are figures of superstitious dread and supernatural awe. The Serpents are a wild card in Tsan Chanese society, hated, resented, feared, admired and a necessary evil. The Way accords them respect and obedience but is uncertain how to place them within its hierarchy.

When the early subterranean missions of the Deathless made contact with the Serpents, it became apparent that of all the terrible alien life active on the planet, the Serpent Folk were one of the very few to have any significant overlap with human mentality. Undeniably strange, almost totally emotionless, the Serpents nevertheless shared important traits with humanity. They have intellectual curiosity; they acquire knowledge in much the same way as a human mind does. They speak a verbal language and have non-verbal elements to their communication. Their bodies are terrestrial, require food and rest and there are enough other commonalities that the early Imperials could discuss the new world order with the Serpents rationally.

What the early Imperials were not prepared for was the incredible depth and breadth of the Serpent's experience on earth. When the Serpents began to share their wisdom, it became apparent that they were personally acquainted with events from millions of years before. While individual Serpent Men are not immortal, aging and dying like humans, this process is unbelievably retarded. A young Serpent may have been born when humans were first learning to farm. The old ones amongst them may discuss watching proto-humans clutching at tools, worshipping the fire they could not yet tame. Speaking to a Serpent became an exercise

in mortality. To this day, even being in the presence of a Serpent can be profoundly depressing: the creature was alive before the human species properly evolved and will be alive when every human on earth is less than dust.

The Serpents are like living symbols of the inevitability of death.

But because the Serpents wish to live out the present apocalypse, just as do the humans, there is a good reason to join forces. Cthulhu may stay on earth a thousand years, a million, ten million. The Serpents were here before the invaders from Xoth crashed into the world and aim to be here afterwards. Scattered and removed from each other, they are easy pickings for the alpha predators. Humanity is a useful shield to hide behind.

The Serpents themselves make no bones about the utility of this arrangement. While they are more than capable of lying, of deception, they understand that a façade of total unity would be suspicious. So it is that the Empire and the Serpents happily do away with fictions and embrace each other's use.

Dim, fickle, mayfly creatures, humanity is an odd quandary to the Serpents. In prehistoric times, humans were a troublesome breed, fighting against the then numerous and powerful servants of Yig and Set. And yet they remain cosmic prey for nearly every other race conceivable. But yet, here they still are, ants underfoot of giants but still here for all that. The Serpents disdain human individuals. Even the most precocious prodigy or genius is impossibly stupid to an average Serpent. But as a race, humans seem surprisingly resilient. In their pitifully brief lifespan they have achieved certain technologies other races never did, or never needed, and had the Old Ones not arisen, perhaps in time they could have grown into a Power. All this is moot. An academic matter. The Serpents deal absolutely in facts and the fact remains that humans are almost certainly doomed. Nevertheless they remain the best chance the Serpents have for survival. And there are few of their numbers left, perhaps a few thousand, with barely two hundred being awake and active in

the Empire. The Serpents have black magic and strange alien technology but they remain so few in number. Many of their ancient crypts and hibernating vaults were destroyed when the stars came right so further reducing their race.

Most commonly, Ophidians serve with aristos. They require luxury, privacy and a steady stream of large, warm blooded mammals for feeding, once every few weeks. In return, the Serpents give them magical advice, technical expertise, greater security and access to the wisdom of creatures that have lived for hundreds of millions of years.

A handful, perhaps half a dozen, Ophidians serve in the military. While none are hand to hand fighters, they are brilliant tacticians and war-magicians. One Ophidian even serves as a Judge, amusing himself with the role. Perhaps the most active and influential of the Serpents is Sss'rrr'ath, who seems to have the attention of the Empress herself, although, who can say what Her Majesty perceives...

## Characters

Disdainful of humans, annoyed at the presence of other Mythos races in Imperial affairs, Hrr'ss'aahk truly wishes only to sleep for a million, million years, until the planet is free of the great religious maniac, Cthulhu and his ilk. But, the work is before him. To combine his dislike of the skin-creatures called humans with progress, he has set up a terrible surgery where he performs radical surgeries, looking to create perfect, lobotomised citizens.

Rss'salkk'shahh's is a rarity amongst her kind, on account of her lively curiosity. She eagerly travels with the Dusk Walkers and other autonomous units, seeking out new magic, new sights, new science. She is a welcome vision amongst the Walkers, who have come to rely on her considerable magical power. There is simply one problem, Rss'salkk'Shahh is willing to take appalling risks to gain her way and does not value human life. She often assumes the forms of humans in the field, delighting in the experience.

## The Elders

They were men!

The Elders are minimally known in Tsan Chan. They only deal directly with the Nobility and to a lesser extent, with the Deathless. They are unknown factor to the Empire, nominally an ally but a terrible one. Still, on a world where the Great Old Ones walk, the Elders are the lesser of two aliens. To a greater or lesser extent, humans and Elders can communicate, through writing. Although the Elders are a strange and intellectually frustrating ally, ally they are.

Their great fleets lurk in the depths of space and they wish only to regain their lost colonies, or at least their bodies, their researches and the data they gained from the war they had with Cthulhu so long ago. Their strange vessels lurk in translunar space, eager to keep away from the Yuggothian traffic or attract the far-seeing eyes of the Xothians. They only occasionally fly down, individually or in very small groups, to consult with their co-conspirators.

Of course, they have no moral duty to help humanity and no particular pity or empathy to the species. It is simply that humans are the least powerful but also, least malevolent, least controlled by the Old Ones. And the Elders deeply fear Cthulhu and his ilk, knowing them from wars with Xoth half a billion years previously.

Fear is the key to the Elder's place in Tsan Chan society. Although biology, culture and history separates them, there are still many place where a human and an Elder's psychology meet. The Elders feel approximately the same emotions that humans do, fear, curiosity, anger and others. They have similar linear ways of thinking, the same separations and overlaps of feeling and logic. In some ways, an entity like the Empress or the more devolved Mighty Children have less in common with humanity than the Elders. So it is, that an alliance can be formed and meaningful communication take place as mutual beneficiality is something both factions understand.

Elders rarely come to Earth, preferring to communicate through devices they have given to the Empress' court, the Deathless cult and the heads of all five Houses as well as several high ranking military commanders. The goal of this detente is simple – Help the Elders in their quest to reclaim Antarctica in return for Archanotechnology. Specifically, weapons and God-Trap techniques. So mainly, this is what communication concerns, martial matters. But occasionally wisdom and even conversation is shared between the two. House Yug-Ming are especially concerned with the Elders, finding them fascinating. What no living creature in Tsan Chan knows is that the Elders are beginning to suspect the dark truths behind Nyarlatotep's plans for humanity... and if Elder suspicion is correct, they must soon flee this sector of space-time entirely.

Elders are a boon to the Empire and they know it. They gain valuable magic and machines at the mere cost of human lives. The Great White Legion, the specialists who work in Antarctica, are almost a sacrifice of manpower Tsan Chan is willing to pay, although the Elders know, if the Empire does not, that the Shoggoths do not forgive or forget. Tsan Chan may be making itself a terrible enemy it cannot afford.

Individual Elders are treated with respect, therefore, from all corners of the Empire. But should one House, one faction, begin to suspect these strange allies are favouring one group over another, assassinations may take place. The Elders are all too aware of the cruel and conniving ways of the Empire and are prepared for such malice. It could all go so very wrong so very quickly.

## The Ghouls

The Ghouls are not properly a part of Imperial society. The Way says little about them but they are a fact of Imperial life. The Interdiction surrounds the Empire and, each day, the Dreamers or the Tcho-Tcho or something attacks it. Each day there is a battle and each day there are bod-

ies. The Ghouls act as a kind of mobile battlefield charnel house for the Empire.

Ghouls live under the earth in a strata far above that of Yoth or N'kai. The ground of Leng is riddled with tunnels and the Ghouls know these ways well. For a simple price of battlefield looting rights, the Ghouls lead the forces of the Empire through these tunnels, allowing for sorties, counter and surprise attacks and quick retreats, moving quickly through the great Wall that channels the Interdiction. These ways are dark and hard to know still warded by Interdiction, making it unlikely that they can be used as egress to Tsan Chan.

Cowards, cannibals and weaklings, the Ghouls take no direct fight in the war for Tsan Chan. They are aware that they are even weaker than the Empire in the current world. Once, they could stay hidden, feast, safe in a world of human disbelief, human ignorance and human fear of the dark. But humanity is different now, crueller and made terribly aware of the reality they live in. The Ghouls are a low people, survivors, obsequies low-lives who cling to the Empire like a tick. They have no central government, simply a tribal structure, making individual deals with aristos or warlords, sharing their secrets in return for being allowed to live unmolested in their chthonic lairs. But because Ghouls have little power or great secrets to share, they are not treated as allies rather as curs. A part of this is because the corpses of Mighty Children or Serpents is a true delicacy that sometimes Ghouls cannot help but surface to chance.

The Dreamless think rather differently. They are aware of the bogeyman that lurks like rats beneath their feet. They hate the ghouls and if they find them, hunt them, torture them, offering up pain as a sacrifice. They think they are doing their part against the enemies beyond the gate. Oddly, Ghouls are rather more compassionate than humans in some respects. There are instances of Dreamless running from their suffering lives, finding the tunnels and being adopted into the Ghoul tribes, slowly becoming something less than human.

But the Ghouls harbour a terrible secret that would see the might of the Empire fall upon them and eradicate them. The cannibal-tribes know they are weak and know they are prey to nearly every force in the world. They know the likes of the Xothians spare them no heed. Except that there is a reason why Ghouls are immune to the Dream. Mordiggian, their Charnel God, has hidden itself deep below the Empire, afraid to confront the likes of Cthulhu and the other Great Ones. The Ghouls tend it, feed it scraps of dead flesh. Should the other Old Ones learn that Mordiggian lives, weak and cowardly, they would stop at nothing to possess its powers. Then, the Empire would face war like it has never done.

The Ophidians know this and keep their own counsel. Their own patron, Tsathoggua, shares few secrets but this is one.

## The Dreamers

It happens. They get in, or a Dreamless actively searches for the ministry of the Old Ones, attuning their minds to the dreadful psychic hymns Cthulhu sings. The Interdiction can't keep out what people want to hear. So, heretics and radicals spring up and break revolution, preach religion, preach violence and conversion.

The Way has done much to indoctrinate and control the lives of the Dreamless and so many Dreamers are simply killed by unruly mobs. But some are so downtrodden that any message of liberation, of freedom, of comfort, falls on receptive ears. Cults form. Effigies are raised. The Dreamer in R'lyeh is praised and the Dream starts. While the Judgement finds most of these cults, these covens, there are some that have survived in secrecy for decades, recruiting and plotting to end the Interdiction and let revelation come.

The most worrisome aspect of the Dreamers is their persuasive logic. They talk utterly of the absolute freedom and pleasure to be found in an earth ruled by Cthulhu. Tempting the Dreamless is one thing but now and again, every so often, an aristo hears this word and then

they ponder freedom from the 'crushing' burdens of their responsibilities...

# CHAPTER 3

## Psychogeography

### Impossible Geography

While it shares considerable geography with, and apes the culture of, China, the Tsan Chan empire is a unique hybrid extending over a wide range of many Asian countries. China makes up the bulk of this new nation but it has long since swallowed up great chunks of Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar and has also subsumed Korea whole. These concepts are barely known in Tsan Chan. The Deathless, of course, know about them, although they are but distant phrases of a time utterly atomised by the Dream. The serfs remain ignorant and the Mighty Children care little about a time before their existence. It should be understood that while players will be aware of the geography of the region, the Tsan Chanese do not use these terms, except as antiquities of language, mythological lands.

### The Interdiction

Almost the entirety of Tsan Chan is sealed up behind the Wall. The Wall itself is nothing more than a geographical boundary, a circuit. The Wall is made up of whatever materials can easily be quarried or felled near from the region of the Empire it defends. There is no unifying theme of architecture or aesthetic to it. Several miles of it may be a grim black basalt, others an ochre sandstone, the next, simple mud and daub, the other, iron and steel. In some places, it is barely a wooden fence. While this obviously means that there is a substantial change in the quality of its defensive abilities, the physical benefits of the Wall are only a fraction of its true worth and function.

The Wall is wound about with ancient spells that are harmful to Mythos entities. This great surge of technological and magical power, wound about with alien science superior to both, is called the Interdiction. Like a circuit, it sparks through the Wall like a bolt of lightning. Great Elder Signs, sometimes many dozens of feet long and wide are engraved, painted, hacked into the stone and metal of the wall. In other sections, they are rent in mosaic or even holographically projected into the Wall. The Interdiction is a surge of power, a kind of electric fence that staves off the invasions and predations of Mythos entities. Nothing short of a Great Old One could breach it and it has been tested time and time again.

Running northeast from Lhasa, through great mountainous terrain, the Interdiction changes direction at Yumen, where it runs plumb west to east in a single great line, until it turns south on the coast of north Korea, plummeting downwards and protecting the coastlands from Deep One assault. While the Empire maintains colonies, armoured camps and other small demesnes outside of the Interdiction, it is this colossal edifice that truly marks out the borders of Tsan Chan.

Other spells festoon the great Wall, wardings to keep away the mad. Weird mixtures of science and technology, such as the Ibn-Ghazi Projectors, Voorish Cannons, Mortlan-model detection systems and the Tillinghast Fields work to prevent stealth attacks or rogue predators. Less exotic weaponry, cannons, landmines, barbed wire and even bows and arrows in the more remote provinces also work to deter inva-



**For game purposes, the entire border of the Empire is protected as if by an Elder Sign. This effect travels kilometres above the Wall that houses the Interdiction and far below as well. This has considerable effect on entities but little to none on Tcho-Tcho or the Dreamers. The Elder Things are largely unaffected by it and, besides Ghouls, are the only Mythos entity that can enter freely. Beings that can tunnel far beneath the earth, such as Chthonians, may enter freely.**

sion. The Deathless and the Ophidians maintain this edifice, along with some rare Nobles who study the arts and science required.

The Deathless upkeep the warding spells and cast ceaseless divinations looking for coming attacks and spotting weaknesses. The Nobles ensure that their armies man the walls, always prepared for monstrous assaults. The Serpents ensure their strange weapons and defences are working, or are testing new and more effective ones.

For nearly three thousand years, the Interdiction has stood the test of time and war. From the trackless wastes of Mongolia, the Dreamers mob in their hundreds of thousands, savaging the Wall in mostly fruitless attempts at apostasy for their god, Cthulhu. From the Yellow Sea to the East, the Deep Ones, and occasionally their great generals, the Star Spawn rise up from boiling spume to kill and steal. From out of the jungles of once-Thailand comes the now bestial Tcho-Tcho. And still the Interdiction stands.

And yet, a thought rides the Tsan Chan always. What if it does fail? Even just once? It would only take one Star Spawn in the heart of the Empire to wreak enormous damage. If a small party of Deep Ones somehow bypassed the Wall, they could find an isolated village and quietly breed their foul kind for generations. The Tsan Chan are obsessive about the Interdiction and so they should be. It only has to fail, fail, breach once. Just once...

## Forbidden City.

Once the Forbidden City was in Beijing. No longer. The Emperor came into the world roughly in the centre of the Empire, a city once known as Xi'an. Very quickly it became far to huge to travel. Beijing quickly became no more than a major garrison and technology town while Xi'an became the centre of courtly life in the Empire. Xi'an is incredibly well guarded. Crack legions of highly trained, well armed troops gather here, protecting their lord. The Deathless maintain their great temple here and the Serpents are known to gather in the dark pits beneath the city.

The Forbidden City itself is located in a walled compound inside Xi'an. It is guarded by some of the most effective prophylactic devices in the Empire's arsenal. Access is never granted to anyone but the most high-ranking Deathless, the Mighty Children and the Eunuchs.

Those with business within are free to enter at this time, if they have written permission from the Eunuchs. Walled in, filled with long, taut and extremely defensible corridors, few ever see the Forbidden City proper. Those who have speak of strange art upon the walls, twisted and eerie sculptures, slaves tortured in ways that seem to please the Empress, their artistic maiming decided upon by alien aesthetics. There is only one entrance into the Forbidden City, a huge gate of jade, fifty feet high, opened but once per week. It is guarded at all times by Mighty Children, severed by from their own Houses, content to serve Her Majesty only.

Within the inner city there are surprisingly few structures, although those are vast. The most impressive is the Grand Hive of Imperial Serenity, the enormous jade and glass and steel palace of the Emperor himself. Overlooking a courtyard in which ten thousand men can stand, the Hive is a twisted and almost-pulsating construction within the Empress holds court. Multifaceted, looking not unlike the viridian eye of some monstrous insect, the palace is perhaps forty storeys tall. According to the Eunuchs, the Empress' body fills most of it.

Also within the Forbidden City lies the enormous Bleak Cathedral, where the Deathless meet once a decade to worship their black lords and decide upon the omens they have been sent. It is there they commune with the Empress as best they can.

Xi'an nestles the Forbidden City within itself. It is a fabulously rich city by Chinese standards. Many of the Nobles either live within Xi'an or at the least maintain elaborate mansions there for when they must commune with the Empress. Palaces, manses, lavishly appointed townhouses all can be found here.

Because of the wealth here, it is some of the most beautiful and elaborate architecture to be found. The greatest concentration of technology is here as well, so the city enjoys plumbing, anti-gravity vehicles, electricity and other such luxuries.

Paradoxically, some of the lowest scum of the Empire reside here too. Real estate prices are crippling and yet Dreamers are required to attend to the needs of their masters. Not all can maintain steady employment and outside of the unwallled Xi'an are vast slums. These are dangerous places where human resentment is palpable. The Dreamers lurks amongst these Imperials, forever preaching the freedom from any form of poverty or morality that is Cthulhu's greatest boon.

The most visible, perhaps the most important resident of Xi'an are Eunuchs. The Eunuchs are a special caste, a law unto themselves. These gelded men and women enjoy considerable prestige in the city, with none allowed to look them in the eye. Because the Eunuchs are amongst the few humans who can understand the Empress's whims, they are enormously powerful in court. They can gainsay the interpretations of Her Majesty's desires, feed him what information they choose, deny or refute any attempt to parlay with him. So they have become enormously wealthy from bribes, are used to being treated as minor royalty themselves and are free to enjoy what debaucheries they can.

Because each of them competes savagely with their fellows, the Forbidden City is a den

of intrigue. The Eunuchs work against each other, looking to discredit their fellows. The Nobles champ against the Eunuchs control over Imperial access. The Deathless rarely come here but those who do tend to be on grim business while the senior members of the Noble Houses often reside here, indulging in their own pleasures.

## Plots

The Judgement continually investigates the slums looking for heretics and the Dreamers. But what happens when the Dreamers decide to hunt the Judgement?

A new tower is being erected for the Deathless, when a prominent member of the cult throws himself from its spire. Was he pushed? Who were his enemies? Or did something go wrong with the occult geometry of the tower's creation?

The once yearly convocation of Nobility is here. Plots and schemes break out. A young group of Nobles plan to make a strong social debut. Can they create a stunning enough party to introduce themselves to society while carefully, quietly, preventing its ruination and embarrassing social rivals?

## Shanghai

Shanghai has always been a bristling city and thriving port and little has changed. Except where once it was a place of international commerce and thick with intellectual history, now it is a place of martial foreboding. Shanghai has two major purposes for the Empire. Firstly, is it the primary dock for the Celestial Imperial Navy. Secondly, it serves as a thriving trading port for the Empire and those very, very few Dreamless humans who exist outside the Empire. And even for the alien races the Empire manages to trade with.

The harbour of Shanghai is a strange place. The Interdiction runs beneath the waters of the harbour and is surprisingly weak. Naval patrols studiously guard against incursion but the sunny waters have been known to contain leviathans, eager to press the power of the Wall.

Under the rule of House Fang, Shanghai is home to some twenty five million humans. Almost all of them are employed someway by the Navy. Shipbuilders, factory workers, designers, sailors, auxiliary officers, traders and all elements of society come together. The Judges, the inquisitorial arm of the Deathless, are often at work here.

The former skyscrapers of Shanghai are unsafe now, roost to the unclean fauna that have risen up during this dark age. However, they still see plenty of squatters, Dreamless who pride themselves on how high in the sky they live.

## City God Temple

The City God Temple is a huge open garden where the Deathless preach the faith of the Empire. While Imperial religion is a mysterious thing, emphasising the Dreamless duty to the Empress, there are still spirits and gods to be worshipped. Primarily, the Empire places emphasis on ancestor worship, so that tombs of heroes, generals, and those who died for the Imperial good, are revered. So it is the City God Temple is a vast mausoleum to those men and women who have died valiantly.

But the City God is also a being. Some strange quirk of the Interdiction, very powerful around the important Shanghai, has caused the Interdiction to take on some bizarre sentience. It does not manifest itself as a being, more a genius loci of the city. It is not benevolent towards humanity, rather it exists to protect the city itself. Defilers, Dreamless, or simply those who desecrate the city in any way find themselves plagued by accidents, wrong turns, home invasions or any of the other perils a city dweller can fall into. The Temple itself is now a place of worship for this strange god.

While the Deathless originally tried to outlaw the worship of the City God, it was simply too omnipresent to suppress. They say little about it and quietly, desperately search for an answer to what this entity is. It is a mystery of the Interdiction and cannot be tolerated with-

out learning if it can be exploited or if it is a danger.

## Shipyards

Movement along rivers of the Empire is fairly safe. But the sea is owned by the Deep Ones, who forever probe the Interdiction. Therefore, the Empire has a navy, a rapid response force to particularly large Mythos attempts to break the Wall. Almost all these battleships are created in Shanghai. These sprawling, bustling work is constantly busy with welding, hauling, painting, cranes and work gangs and divers. For many serfs, this is a fine job, well paid and well respected. But criminals also find themselves slaved to the yards, doing difficult and dangerous and tiring work. The shipyards are a fiery cacophony, a massive hurly burly, packed with sweating workers, aristos looking over their investment and naval officers inspecting their new ships.

The waterfronts of the yards are a dangerous, rough and rowdy place. Sailors and workers drink here but accommodations are also made for upper class visitors. Prostitutes for any conceivable taste, drinking houses and drug dens line the streets, so that midnight sees tired, intoxicated workers mixing freely.

## Palace of House Feng

In what was once perhaps a great Museum, the patriarch of House Feng rules over Shanghai. Proud soldiers line the streets leading to this part of the city, as do courtiers, servants and minor members of the House, come to pay respect. Many great military commanders also congregate in this part of the city, where they can easily conference with the supreme leader of the Imperial military. Many warrior lodges and headquarters and commissioned officer barracks are here.

These streets are represent the greatest concentration of wealth and power inside the Empire. The Empress is where all decisions begin but it is in these streets that policy is executed. Their long colonnades and beautiful facades, parks, fountains and statues are per-

haps the most civilised and peaceful in all Tsan Chan.

## Plots

A serious of murders, particularly vicious murders, is taking place at the docks. An Ophidian is claimed by eye-witnesses to be responsible. But is there a more sinister force at work, trying to implicate the ancients?

The City God falls in love with a beautiful young man who shuns the alien things attentions. The powers that be demand that he reciprocate the emotions but, of course, he cannot, no matter how punished. The creature begins to become surly, malicious. Can the young man be effectively made to fall in love? And what agenda drives the strange being?

Two generals are at loggerheads, attempting to impress the lords of House Fang. This tension spills onto the streets as armed groups of soldiers begin to openly clash. Using the chaos for cover, Deep Ones attempt to breach the Interdiction in the great harbour.

Ghosts of sailors are seen amongst the shipyards of Shanghai. Then, a long since fallen boat reappears out at sea. It seems the ghost are preparing to press-gang the living to replace their service.

## Yian-Ho

I spied at once the abhorred name of Yian-Ho - of Yian-Ho, that lost and hidden city wherein brood eon-old secrets, and of which dim memories older than the body lurk behind the minds of all men.

This is where the Deathless once ruled the Cthulhu cult, before their sudden withdrawal. It is a monolithic and hidden city in a dark valley, a place of basalt towers and dark crypts. The undead ancients who ruled Tsan Chan retain this place as their own and maintain it independently of the Mighty Children. Few outside the Deathless know of its location, fewer still will ever travel to this morbid place. Those few who do are taken by shadows, slaughtered and raised up as mummified servitors to the

Deathless. The architecture remains one of the few examples of the Chinese architecture in Tsan Chan from before the Dream. This is a place of moon-gates, door gods, of lofty towers that come to points and precise, though perverse, feng shui.

There is a great concentration of occult lore here. Gates to locations all around the world and far regions in space are here, at least twenty four according to a census six thousand years gone. Scrolls of frangible antiquity are kept here for perusal of the Deathless, as are the ancient weapons and scrying tools they so jealously horde.

Built upon a great opening to Kn'Yan, Yian-Ho radiates terror. Mortal men go insane from fear simply walking its streets, driven to terror by unseen watchers, sibilant and unsourced whispers from dark alleys and the millennia of necromancy practiced here.

The Deathless themselves are each given crypt-complexes, tomb-sanctuaries in which to practice their arts. These personal estates are guarded and warded by spells and monsters and bound spirits. By stupendously ancient pact and tradition, the privacy of these demesnes are strictly respected by the Deathless. They simply do not enter each other's realms unasked. This is a taboo so strong that Deathless have been known to enter a killing rage simply at the idea of it.

The Dreamless here are elaborately tattooed, scarified and branded, to protect them from the various dangers of the city. Sometimes, more extreme wards are needed. Nevertheless, this is one of the safest places in the Empire and the serfs here are well-fed and far better educated than elsewhere.

Located within the foothills of the Himalayas, Yian-Ho is extremely difficult to access. Only those prepared for the journey, aided by Dreamless Sherpas and given access to pass-charms and strange identification technology, can freely enter.



**Yian-Ho, senescent and hateful, has been the home of the Deathless Cult for ten thousand years. When the rest of the world was still learning how to farm, these towers and tombs were hiding from the sun. The memories of the abominations that have walked the streets lingers like petrichor.**

**A Sanity role is needed to summon the courage to enter the city. Each day there, a character loses 1/1d4 Sanity from the necromantic ambience. Only the initiate rites to enter the Kuen-Yuin order can stay this effect.**

**When night falls, the Yeth-Hounds roam the streets of Yian-Ho. Undead spirits created by decapitated children; they attack the unpermissioned living with a relentless and sickening savagery. They are an entirely separate threat to one's mind.**

## The Accusing Finger

The home of the Judgement, the Accusing Finger is a long, dark tower, built in traditional styles. Filled with professionally deafened, blinded and muted servants, a process that allows them to keep their sanity, the Judgement deliberates here. The most difficult cases are ruminated upon, reports are made, particularly noteworthy prisoners and interrogated and the vast files of the Judgement are kept. Many Judges also come here for extra training in occult matters, while other Judges die here, found incompetent or corrupt.

The Imperishable Masters, the heads of the Judgement, lurk in the top recess of the tower and never, ever leave. Only the most hardened souls can stand their immortal scrutiny, their uncanny ability to understand a human worth with but a glance. They plan out long-term investigations and slowly gather information on the Mighty Children.

## The Black Jade Pavilion of Yue-Laou

The greatest of the Deathless, Yue-Laou has not stirred in his slumber for centuries, disgusted

by the usurpation of his power. Once, the single most powerful sorcerer and perhaps the most politically powerful man in Tsan Chan, the idea of some half-breed monstrosity being Emperor offended him deeply.

Yue-Laou once supposedly lived on the moon. Untrue. He dwelt with the moon-beasts of the Dreamlands. Now, lost in centuried dreaming, he is with them again. It is a secret hope of the Deathless that he will ally with those perfectly sadistic creatures and take back the Empire in the name of their order. But the newly created Deathless, some of whom never met the Eldest of their society, fear the moon-beasts as utterly untrustworthy.

The largest single domain in Yian-Ho, the Black Jade Pavilion is the tomb of Yue-Laou. Within it is said to lurk the Xin, a hydratic beast of his own design.

Rarely, mortals are given leave to enter this necropolis. These are men and women both blessed and cursed. Most often, the Deathless require living sacrifices for their patron deities. Sometimes, very rarely, does a Deathless sorcerer require an apprentice.

Once a century, petitioners may come to access the ancient learning of this order. It is almost unheard of but if the Deathless cede vast importance to the mortal's need, and it directly concerns the security of Tsan Chan, it may happen. No responsibility is taken for their safety. The Yeth-Hounds are cruel...

The Pavilion itself, a low, squat building, is home to a vast library, many strange tombs built in dedicated rooms. There are altars here, to Hastur and Tsathoggua which can give a man diseases just by standing in the same room as them.

Most importantly, there is a hole here. A pit that reaches to the centre of the world.

The Black Jade Pavilion is open to any member of the Empire who can prove they need the information within. Those who fail to justify themselves end up obviously. But to those who can somehow gain audience with Yue-Laou's seneschals, they gain access to the

wisdom of the restless dead and the writings of the oldest cult in the world.

## The Hateful Orrery

A tower high in the mountains, the Orrery is a telescope to study the stars, a calligraphers school, a laboratory for the dissection, vivisection and re-education of Dreamers and, at its heart, a collection of models depicting universes and solar systems far removed from ours. With this collection of techniques, the Orrery tracks futures. They throw shadows against our reality and the Deathless interpret them. SO it is with an art part philosophy, part astronomy, part sortilege, part astrology, the Deathless advise the great and noble of the Empire.

## The Venous Labyrinth

Called Venous because once it was a lifeline between Kn'yan and Tsan Chan, the Labyrinth has fallen into dark times. A winding, snaking series of long, long tunnels and caves, formed of black stone, shot through with pulsing mother lodes of gemstone and ores, it was this route that the original Deathless took into the underworld.

It reaches down, deep into the world, until eventually realities break down and subtly different realities leak and merge with our own. There, in the eternal darkness, one can find the redoubts of the Ophidians. The bony throne of the Toad God, the Cavern of Archetypes and Mount Voormiadreth and more slickly slide into our world like an infection, down there. Still, for many, many centuries, it has been a holy place, a pilgrimage, for the Deathless.

But recently, things have changed. Strange creatures, foul machines, more, have begun to walk the stairway, cutting off easy communication between the worlds above and below. Survivors speak of things with blades for mouths, things that are soft and rotten lurking in shadows.

It is only in the last decade that the Deathless have begun to truly worry and now,

they have begun tentatively to take back this strange place.

## The Heartless Academy

Endless rooms filled with scribes, pens scratching on paper like a storm of insects in a desert. Silent classrooms taught by mummies still alive. Incredible discipline. Cells filled with desperate students with crushing workloads. A school wherein genius is but a requisite. The Dry Academy is the only chance a living human has to shed mortality and join the Deathless.

A series of towers, linked to each other is a spider web of tunnels, balconies, pathways and staircases; it should be a folly, an ungainly edifice that has spread like cancer. But this is untrue. The Deathless have constructed this absurd, almost ugly building, for maximum geomantic potential.

The Dry Academy takes in perhaps five students a year. Those selected complete fifteen years of study before field work. Once a year, almost certainly, a student fails and is killed. Those that return for higher education eventually move downwards, into the hell-light of the Cardiomelech Sanctum, where the sacred operation removes their heart, and their death and aging.

## House of Blue Lights

Alone, atop a perilous crag, is the House of Blue Lights.

This vast, consuming edifice is a grand mansion, sprawling over literally kilometres of space, all on single story. Its facade is bleak, carved with strange gargoyles, eerie bas reliefs, curious sigils and symbols and windows, dark, curtained, of off-setting angles and width. In some, the glass seems to have melted, downwards, like a horrible, senescent liquid.

Within, the House seems to move throughout time, somehow destabilised. There are rooms decorated in pre-Dream fashion from a hundred eras. Some rooms show signs of technologies not yet invented. The House is quiet, creaking, cold and dank. Its walls glow a faint

and chemical azure. Yet, those inside the House are outside of linear time and can meet those who have entered at other periods, far gone or yet to come. Some are madmen, raving of the end of Empire. Some are barely human, speaking of eras a hundred thousand years to come. Some speak of the terrible times to come and of a land called Zothique. Others are from the primal past, beast and ape as much as man. Some come mailed with sword in fist, speaking of Mu and Atlantis. Some enter the House to leave missives and warning and prophecies and testaments of their time. Some seek it is a sanctuary from time itself.

Predators also roam the halls. Now and again, strange Hounds seem to force their way in, although the interior of the House seems to pain them. Vast minds lurk here, thoughts turned to vivisections and telepathic intrusions of unutterable intimacy. But for the Deathless, there is no stranger place of wisdom.

## The Monastery of Dust

Built high into the curving walls of a distant valley, the Monastery of Dust is beset by howling winds. Strange whistles and howlers turn the wind into a cacophonous music only a masochist could enjoy. Here, in tiny cells, scribes and savants work on prophecies, decoding oracles, pouring over ancient books which speak of the histories of the enemies of empire. These monks are ritually blinded so as not to be corrupted by the words they see, learning to read through rather more arcane senses. This is a warren of scriptoria, hidden dungeons where scrolls are locked away, singing to themselves, warded rooms where mad oracles and bound monsters are interrogated, or simply locked away. Strange frescos line the walls, telling of the history of Leng before it became the homeland of the Empire. And for all this place's antiquity, it seems to be a collision of styles. As if this building was once in another place. Windows look onto empty rock. Doors go nowhere. A disturbing effect.

And in the centre of it all is the High Priest Not to Be Described. In a domed room on a

throne of gold, the High Priest is the greatest religious force in Tsan Chan. Said to be blessed by Hastur, one of the first Deathless to treat with Tsathoggua, this strange being is voiceless, communicating only through a flute, carved of odd bones. Nevertheless, it can make itself known via its horrid music. Its body is hidden under deep robes and it is guarded by ancient magic.

What none in Tsan Chan know is that this is a creature of nightmare. Literally, a Moon-Beast, that lives in the Dreamlands and, somehow, on our moon. Its purpose here is to turn the cruel empire to its own purposes, until it can unleash its megalomaniacal sadism upon the last of humanity. So far, the High Priest has had little chance to act but one day, it shall suborn the Deathless and commit crimes that will tax even a Moon-Beast's imagination for atrocity.

## Plots

A fugitive from Judgement runs to the House of Blue Lights. Agents of the Deathless Cult must go in and retrieve her. But can they stay loyal or even sane when they come across themselves from only months into the future, warning of the hideous betrayals to come?

Something seeks the resting place of one of the earliest Deathless. This creature, which entered a torporific state dozens of thousands of years ago, radiates magical power. Its body cannot be disturbed.

Something is killing the Yeth-Hounds, the fearsome warrior-guardians of Yian-Ho. But what could have such power and still have penetrated the Interdiction? And what are its motives?

Students prepare to graduate from the Heartless Academy. But on their last day, those who have failed, knowing their time for punishment is nigh, prepare a revolt. Can the students be saved before the powers that be order everyone executed?

## Religion

Religion exists in the Empire but it is a strange thing.

Officially, the Empire sacrifices to Hastur the King in Yellow and Tsathoggua, both entities that will treat with and give advice to, the Empress and the Deathless. They have bartered for knowledge on how to create the Interdiction, the movements of the Xothians, prophecies and more beside. But for the Dreamless, religion is a mysterious thing. They know that the Empress is guided by ... something. A modern human would call them spirits, intelligences or celestials. They are discouraged from learning that there are powers besides the Mighty Children and their ilk and so, on the few religious holidays of the year, might slaughter animals only to the Yellow King or Saint Toad, who advises the Empress. Far and away, obedience to the Empress and respect for ancestors, who gave them life through toil and obedience, is the only spiritual life Dreamless serfs have.

The Mighty Children themselves have rather a more well-informed view of the cosmos. Shut off from the names of their own ancestral deities, they barter directly with Hastur and his servants for knowledge. Human sacrifice is commonly practiced. Some travel down to meet the Toad-God, who will receive any courteous enough but may or may not be interested in discussion. It is a lazy entity and has little appetite for human meat.

The Deathless have long worshipped Nyarlathotep but that entity has ceased answering their prayers long since. They treat with the decadent King In Yellow where they can. There order violently discourages worship or contact with the Outer Gods but more than a few have reached out to Yog-Sothoth to glimpse times outside times. No other Great Old One will entreat with the Empire. Cthulhu hunts his strange cousins, to destroy, convert, enslave or consume. None will answer Calls from within the Empire. The Outer Gods, of course, do as they will.

## Hastur

Tradition has it that Hastur has some sort of rivalry with Cthulhu. No one in the Empire can definitively assert if this is true or not. Certainly, the Lord of Dreams views the other Old Ones with hegemonic eyes but the wars of such creatures are not for mortals to witness. Whatever the relationship, if any, between R'lyeh and Carcosa, might be, Hastur does seem willing to treat with humanity where almost no other entity will.

The truth is simply that Hastur looks upon the Empire with a dreadful amusement. Cruelty, death, control, these are all things that this entity, in its form as the King in Yellow, finds to be a kind of art. The King provides its knowledge only if it will lead to more artistic and decadent developments in Tsan Chan. It is also quite interested in the Ophidians, who have shown themselves more than capable of becoming the kind of agelast aestheticians the King appreciates. The King wonders what new forms of strange art will come from this union.

## Tsathoggua

Down in the bowels of Mt. Voormithadreth, a place reachable by the determined Tsan Chanese, the Toad-God lurks, sitting on his throne, inattentive, lazy, ignoring even his formless spawn. The Toad Saint has little interest in the doings outside his strange realm, far beneath the earth in a region of unstable space-time.

Far removed from the antics and doings of his kind, Tsathoggua had a very simple reason for aiding the original Chanese colonists. They were polite to him, without being obsequious. They sacrificed well and did not press. The Toad God is an ancient being, disposed to those who come to him in such fashions, is open to such treaties.

Realistically, the Toad God has little interest in the Empire, or the doings of his relative, Cthulhu. It is simply amused by flattery and sacrifice. Tsathoggua is ancient, truly, truly ancient and cosmically lazy. So it is that it is willing to receive supplicants, simply to amuse it. The fate





of the Empire means nothing to this being but so long as it is sent sacrifice and the occasional conversation, it will share its knowledge.

## Nyarlathotep

This God left for a reason no one can say. It was always mercurial, prey to dark whims, salvaging what it had once proclaimed to hate. Long, long-time patron of the Deathless, it simply disappeared as the Stars came Right. Although, why, not one creature in the Empire can say.

The Deathless still praise this creature's name but do not sacrifice to it, do not expect to ever to come into contact with it again. The meaning of this silence is still debated, thousands of years on. As is discussion as of its provenance.

The fact is Nyarlathotep still walks the Empire, it simply no longer has an interest in the Deathless. It watches the Dreamless closely, looking for signs of the Secret.

# CHAPTER FOUR

Archanotech

## The Past

Before the stars came right, humanity had achieved remarkable technological wonders. Humans had set foot on other planets, their devices had achieved extra solar orbit. Gravity had just begun to be tamed and other wonders were at hand. When theoretical physicists, mathematicians with access to quantum computers and other far wanderers into truth began to ascertain exactly what the nature of the cosmos was, it seemed great segments of mankind's thinkers fell into a grim lassitude and awaited the end quietly. Scholars of Tsan Chan who can piece together those fragmentary days remark that the last few years of the world before the coming of the Great Ones were marked by extraordinary scientific progress. Until perhaps ten years before the Dream came, when it seemed human scientific progress simply... trailed off.

Whatever happened in those last few years is obvious. They became very good at using science to parse and weigh and understand the universe. Logic, deduction, experiential knowledge, all of them bought information. Too much information. It broke them, perhaps only the scientific clades and classes, perhaps as a species. Soon the Dream came and it cannot be denied, those early mad years saw a complete breakdown of scientific understanding as humanity embraced the sick madness of their new God-King entirely. By the time Tsan Chan was properly founded, very little understanding of the scientific method or engineering principles remained.

The early years of Tsan Chan saw a return to primitivism and techno-barbarianism.

Fuel and high tech equipment became rare and strange cargo-cults grew up around preserving their dwindling supplies. Those few humans untainted by the Dream were an endless, desperate stream, a yerida or horror, desperately seeking salvation. They tried hard to keep knowledge alive but it was futile. When the Deathless finally formed alliances with the King in Yellow and other Great Ones, they managed to stabilise the loss of technological know-how but they could not reverse the loss of knowledge.

But as the Deathless asserted their magical skills and the Serpents shared their own cold knowledge, the state of human understanding shifted. While the old ways of learning and understanding were either entirely lost or entirely frangible, the new world presented new sources of power.

While the Deathless had little knowledge of, or interest in, 'conventional' human science, as they took greater control of the Empire, they bought their own learning with them. The Serpents, themselves were fairly uninterested in human concepts of physics and they quietly sneered at the categorisation of knowledge that was the scientific method. While the Ophidians could not even conceive of industry, they most certainly could reproduce human technology. While a Serpent cannot create, say, a car factory, it can simply create something far more efficient and powerful than a car, given time. But these techniques are based of alien disciplines and cannot easily be reproduced.

With the Deathless specialising in magic, the Ophidians unable to easily adapt to human notions of engineering and production and the



The exact 'level' of human technological achievement is left deliberately hazy, a lacunae for individual Keepers to work in. For one, a work this size cannot categorically list all the technologies and what level of scientific advancement were lost when the Stars came Right. Secondly, the mood and theme of the game will to a great extent depend on what technology is available. A game in which there are rockets to the moon and teleporting platforms will be different to a game where a working radio is a tremendous prize, which will in turn be different from a game wherein even forging steel is rare. That in turn is different from a game where an elite soldier is handed a ray-gun.

Depending on the ambience of the Empire, individual Keepers can shape the human technology as they will. A post-apocalyptic setting, where petrol is rare and worth lives is perfectly fitting, creating a hodge-podge tech-level of cars pulled by camel and Judges and Nobles displaying power with electric lights. As would be a level of scientific achievement keeping with Victorian Britain, or the strange mix of sophistication and ignorance of the Pre-Classical world. And, of course, Tsan Chan is many hundreds of years old now and is not entirely static. To the High Priest from Xoth, it is irrelevant. The Wall will come down and the trinkets of human knowledge will go onto the altar of the Outer Ones.

A solid assumption is that human technology peaked in the early 21st century.

proto-Dreamless desperate attempts to keep their technological heritage alive, many experiments were tried. Most were haphazard, some were insane but in time, after centuries, a stable body of knowledge was created. Certain reproducible results were discovered. This mixture of science and sorcery is today widely known as Arcanotech. It is still widely used today.

## The Present

But those times are long passed and the Empire is far more stable today. While Arcanotech is

the true breakthrough of Tsan Chan, humanity has reclaimed some sliver of its understanding of the laws of physics. While a scientific class cannot form again in the Empire (after all, how could that philosophy find eminence knowing that Gods create the physical universe with their whims?) due to political reasons, certain wisdom is shared.

In recent years, the alliance with the Elders has also seen reproducible technology return to prominence. The Elders' science is strange, outrageously advanced and incredibly difficult but nevertheless, there is nothing magical about it.

## Two Technologies

Between these various fields, the Empire of Meditative Enquiry has two strands of technology with which to build on, only one of which it even remotely understands.

## Human Technology

When the Stars came Right, the birthright that was human science and technology was almost irretrievably lost. The Dreamers quickly degenerated into savagery and the majority of humans abandoned all rational thought. Libraries were burnt and computer networks abandoned and destroyed and neglected. The body of knowledge that mankind had built up over centuries took... weeks... to lose. In the early days of Tsan Chan, regaining knowledge and technical prowess was less important than simply fighting off waves of barbarians, then Tcho-Tcho and Deep One attacks.

Due to the entirely static nature of Imperial society, information is extremely regulated. The systems that lead to social agency, education, or even human rights, let alone literacy or complex sewers, are few. And so, because there is little to incite experimentation and innovation, few can read let alone get access to laboratories or universities or scholarships, things fall apart and stay apart. If reproducible technological advancement is to happen again, the nature of the Empire must change. Unlikely.

And yet, technology has been slowly rediscovered and reused by the Empire. It is treated with reverence and respect and widely praised. But the notion of linear scientific advancement has long since been eroded. Religious thinking, the 'short cuts' of alien technology, the impossibility of importation and any world trade, the fearful mindset of the Dreamless and the Nobilities' concern over education the populace all prevent the Empire from building on human knowledge.

## Elder Technology

The Old Ones had used curious weapons of molecular and atomic disturbances against the rebel entities, and in the end had achieved a complete victory.

The Elders are the closest things humanity has to an ally on the beleaguered planet and one of the few races who create things a human can understand and use. While the Mi-Go, the star spawn and other Mythos races are simply inexplicable in human scientific terms, the Elders are bound by liminal space and time as we are. An Elder creates according to plan, according to functionality with an 'eye' for aesthetics, as odd as they may be. And so it is that they have shared their technology with humans, created along the lines of human understanding. The Elders who brokered with Tsan Chan were new to this world and agreed on discovering what had happened to their lost colony.

Elderian technology is massively advanced compared to Imperial biology and engineering. The Deathless, long ago and with rare passion argued against the Elders sharing their biology, sighting Shoggoth rebellions, with an eye towards the Dreamless serfs. So it is that Elder technology is found in the hands of the aristos and trusted elements of the military.

The Elders have so far given building technology, weapons and transport to the Empire. The Interdiction has been buffeted in many areas by strange, perhaps extra-terrestrial minerals and metals. To the southern regions of the Empire, where Tcho-Tcho attacks are common, is where the Elders have concentrated their works.

It is there that geothermal engines link into massive disintegrator cannons. Floating platforms patrol the Easter border overlooking Japan where the Deep Ones prowl under the dark sea.

Vast balloons that seem to somehow tap into electromagnetic energies are the battle barges and pleasure rides of the Nobles. Sometimes they even float outside the Interdiction in punitive attacks against the enemies of Tsan Chan. Beneath the ice of the white Southern continent, lean, shark-like submarines prowl. Flesh grafts, pico-surgery, biological augmentics, planned mutation and more are all part of the vast technological legacy of the Elders.

There are very few who can understand the principles behind Elder weaponry. Thankfully, the Elders have a gift for simplicity in their engineering. While the worthies of the Empire assume that they are not getting the full bounty of Elder tech, they consider even minimal usage of it to be worth it.

The other effective tool the Elders bring is personal armament. Sometimes in the forms of bows or swords, sometimes as gun, molecular disruptors are a part of the Imperial Armies. Not all the soldiers in the Empire are cleared and trained in their usage but certain crack legions are certainly equipped. Grenadier, sapper and other 'forlorn hope' units may also include large disintegrator cannons and suchlike. However, even for the Elders, these are complex creations. These weapons are mainly seen in the Antarctica war-theatre, where the Elders concentrate their own effort.

In return for their technology, the Elders require two things. The first is a steady stream of troopers to help regain their lost cities of Antarctica. The other is one fresh human brain and nervous system a day. The flensing of such volunteers is a spectator sport in the Empire. The brains are used as a part of the Arcanotech God-Trap project.

## Examples of Elder Tech

### Crystalline Batteries

Famously used for storing psychic and magical energy, the Crystals are very practical for human needs. They power the Gates the Serpents have created. They also work to strengthen the Interdiction in times of trial. Dreamless are often called upon to refill these batteries. Indeed, a common death sentences sees them given up wholly to the Crystals, leaving them husks.

Crystalline Batteries also serve to power certain kinds of Elder weaponry.

### VoidWound

In a guarded research station hidden somewhere in the wastes of Leng is the VoidWound, the Elder gateway into the Great White Space. The White is a kind of extra dimensional zone the Elders travel through, easing their way in the vast distances of space-time. The VoidWound is a permanent kind of Gate, a flickering, albino tear in space. This is the main port that the Elders use when coming to and fro our planet. The VoidWound is heavily guarded and access to it is strictly forbidden to all but extremely high ranking citizens. Currently, the VoidWound gate links to the moon and another Elder staging ground in the Sagittarius Dwarf galaxy.

Other, lesser Gates, created by Serpent magic exist but they are only on earth and into the Dreamlands.

### God-Traps

Complex mechanisms that work against powerful Mythos entities, these ghastly machines are not trusted to humans. They have been floated to the Empire as 'theoretical'. Nevertheless, they are real. They run on human suffering, something that the Elders have noted the higher orders would have no problem implementing. God-Traps could make the Interdiction almost unassailable, perhaps even against the Great Old Ones themselves. The Elders are essentially waging a debate on ethics. The God-Traps are powerful but their use is predicated upon unimaginable pain as so are only used sparsely, in emergencies.

### Arcanotech

Very few, if any, humans understand the principles behind Arcanotech. Those that do are invariably insane. It is one thing for a human to live on a planet beset by alien invaders, another entirely to gaze upon the true phuses that the universe runs on. That, of course, is what Arcanotech is, simply tools that run on the true dark laws of a universe that accommodates blasphemous idiot gods and a space-time that may be a predatory sentience.

Arcanotech is a mixture of the ultra-fringe science madmen have created throughout pre-Dream human history. It is influenced by the rarefied knowledge of the Ophidians and inspired by the decadent touch of the King in Yellow. When sorcerers retro-engineer the guns and bio-netics of the Elder Things, when Deathless cultists turn their hands to design, when demigods create, this is the result. A melange of magic, of technology, sharing of some of the features of both, but creating something new.

### Specifically Arcanotech

What makes something Archanotech rather than magic or technological? Ultimately, that is a Keeper's decision to make. If magic is just an alien science, Arcanotech may be simply a hybrid technology humans are now using. But if magic is a discipline that is utterly irrational, then Arcanotech becomes stranger still.

A rough guide to denoting something as Arcane would be making it of limited reproducibility. It cannot be industrialised. The processes are not random but simply require sentient interaction to create. An Elder weapon is not Arcanotech because it is, no matter how strange, still a machine. Arcanotech is not simple and it is not, strictly, a machine.

These strange devices all require some kind of ritual to create them. A prayer, a sacrifice, a word or perhaps a prayer. If not that, then only a certain kind of mindset can create them. Those who have abandoned the Way or who cleave to it with morbid intensity. Perhaps certain astrological or astronomical dates must coincide with its

conception or design or creation. Whatever the condition, it is not a scientific matter.

But unlike magic, Arcanotech requires little or no training to use. A magic wand or a rite require eldritch knowledge but Arcanotech does not. Indeed, it is insidiously easy to gain competence with it. Which is not to say it is uncomplicated: rather Arcanotech desires use.

## Examples of Arcanotech

### Weaponised Symbolism

There is one piece of technology that has proven essential for the future of Tsan Chan. The Voorish, or Sigil, Cannon. Somehow, the Elder beings have retro-engineered the forces behind the mighty Elder Sign, that is prophylactic against the forces of the Mythos. While it is completely harmless to any creature unaffected by the Sign, it is a particularly useful weapon against beings like the Star-Spawn and Deep Ones.

Simply put, it is a projected beam of light, invisible to the human eye. Where it strikes, certain beings are scorched and pained. Other entities simply retreat from the beam. Unfortunately, the Sigil Cannon and other pieces of this technology are difficult and expensive, even for the Elders. There are no more than a hundred in all the Empire. While they are no doubt extremely effective in combat, they have two flaws. The first is that they have short ranges. Many a brave soldier has gone mad or become shocked by fear long before getting within the two or three dozen feet these guns require.

The second is that Weaponised Symbolism in all its forms is effective against the Mighty Children and presumably, the Empress. Fearful of these weapons working against them, they control, strictly, strictly, control the access and use of these devices, often deeming the knowledge of them more dangerous than the entities they should be used against. Other forms of this technology involve blades, forged over with elaborate patterns, useless against human foes but effective against Mythos races, sound projectors that demoralise such entities and punishing, acid-etched brandings.

## Resonators

Based on technology from some ancient madman, the Till-Ghast Resonator is a device that works as a kind of etheric spotlight. They are used on the Interdiction not unlike Klieg lights. Those under the effect of the Dream, as well as predators who slide and glide too close to our reality show up under the strange radiation these devices project. This aids security immensely. Resonators are huge, bulky machines that are constructed by madmen with an engineers bent. Often, they are assembled from high-tech scrap found in the old world. They can run on ethyl, electricity or coal but are always immobile due to their weight and size. They cannot be dependable made and only a few scientists seem to understand the mad principles behind their creation.

## Mist-Spinners

These come in many forms. Sometimes they are devices which burn a thick smoke, or something not unlike a smoke grenade. When deployed, lesser beings of the Mythos are temporarily blinded by them. Often used by military forces when on long-range patrol. Unfortunately, the smoke they emit is highly addictive and more than two or three exposures each year will create a craving for more. Unfortunately, seven or eight exposure a year will cause the user to become insubstantial and fade from reality.

## Ocular Hex-Thrower

Huge symbols carved onto the Wall, the Hex-Throwers influence local stochastic conditions. That is, they create fields of bad luck. Smaller and less effective Hex-Throwers can also be used personally. They are shaped like a stylised eye and when uncovered, all they 'see' is suddenly hexed. Luck is halved, bonuses reduced, all manner of chaotic rules conditions can apply.

## Xuthal Compound

Created by praying over specially mixed chemicals and blessed water, Xuthal Compound acts as a powerful drug. It promotes massive tissue regeneration and can even appear to removes

signs of aging. Unfortunately, each dose good enough to bring back a human on the brink of death, four humans must be rendered down into the Compound. Most often kept and made by the Nobles, certain Deathless also keep the drug against times of crisis.

## Byhakee Chariot

The bound nervous system of a Byhakee, carefully tweezed from its body and placed into a perfectly welded golem, the Chariot is extremely rare in the Empire. Used only by great Nobles and by one elite Legion, the Chariot is one of the few air defences the Empire has. Created by summoning those eerie bird/reptiles, made by made artist who feel their way to a vivisection, perfected by blacksmiths of surpassing power, Chariots are disturbing creations. They are mute, stupid, certainly not intelligent but something of the will of the Byakhee survives in them. Used for ceremonial transport, or warfare and recognisance, they are fell engines, dangerous and swift.

## Serpent Technology

The Serpent People do not think in terms of technology. They have never been a centralized power, never formed nations of millions. They have never been known for industry, for the adoption of mechanistic principles. The Serpents are the masters of magic.

Of course, the Ophidian peoples have long since ceased to creation separations in their thinking between magic and science and even religion. Theirs is an appalling long-lived culture that has survived heresy, mutation, apocalypse and curses. They have moved between worlds and dangers no human can understand. This is, after all, their second experience with the Old Ones moving freely upon the blighted earth. And so has their culture adapted. As disciplines and theories and researches have grown, over literally millions of years, it has all grown into one. And given the decadent and arrogant minds of the Ophidians, it should be no surprise it has become an art.

Serpents do not gather in the numbers humans do. They never have. Their birth rate is appallingly low, with a birth a century being the rarity. Nor do they have the herd mentality, the ape sub-routines that force humans into societies. Ophidians rarely congregate, rarely socialise, do not form family units or pair-bonds. Theirs is more a kind of loose knit gentlemen's club, coming together now and again to share research, gossip, or to worship. They appreciate theory as much as practicality and are enraptured by ideas. Therefore, magic and science are viewed as artistic in that everything is something to be appreciated and admired or disdained and criticised, rather than appropriated and utilised.

The Ophidians were amazed that humans could find practical applications for some of their most powerful magic. The first was the Gate spell. Serpents rarely leave the earth, unwilling to trade their relative security for foolish adventure. Gates were useful boltholes, little else.

So to create a Gate system, linking the Empire together for a kind of mass transit was alien to their thinking. Nevertheless, in around a hundred locations in the Empire, Gates exist. These include several to the Imperial Palace, two to Antarctica and several to remote locations outside the Empire. Now, key personnel can move around the Empire quickly and 'safely'.

They have also been amazed at the practicality of using the Glass of Leng in military applications. The Ophidians themselves usually use this magic to view the will of their god, to spy out secrets of creations. But their donation of several huge orreries and portals to inspect the movements of the predatory Deep Ones, Tcho-Tcho and their masters was quite revolutionary to their dusty thinking.

Finally, the Ophidians have also begun to drill the Deathless in magical techniques like the concoction of the Plutonian Drug. They are also aware of techniques to identify and cast out possessing spirits. Indeed, without the Serpents, the Judgement may have been totally unaware of the chronological threat the Empire suffers.

# CHAPTER 5

## The Outside

### No Peace Beyond the Gate

Very few citizens of the Tsan Chan Empire know anything about; can barely conceive of, the greater planet outside Interdiction. The Dreamless toil and are kept ignorant of even news of the neighbouring village. Those who do somehow gather the curiosity to ask of the world beyond are told only of a world of barbarians and beasts and that truly the Empire is as close to Heaven as they might ever see.

The Kuen-Yuin go into long trances, draw astrological divinations to ascertain goings on outside the Empire. They look with mad eyes ways to break the hold the Nobility has over them. The Nobles themselves send out spies and rangers, looking for incoming attacks, for lands to expand to. The Serpents hack ancient telecommunication satellites and gaze into scrying fountains and crystals. None of them are capable of forming a complete picture of the world and few share their knowledge. This ignorance is bliss. Because the world beyond is a blasted land, writhing and killing and pleased with devastation. Answering the call of power to power, ancient things have colonised or re-colonised this world and if the Empire stands, it is only because of these entities disinterest.

Nevertheless, there are cleruchies and enclaves of human life beyond the Wall. They are few, tiny, fragmented. But they are there. Still, the vast majority of humanity are the Dreamers, although they may no longer benefit from that descriptor.

### Africa

It is perhaps no surprise that once civilisation was wiped away, it was the Africans who most easily adapted to the Dream. Superstition and belief in otherworldly powers had long held sway in this part of the world. Poverty and war and cruelty had kept many nations of this part of the world close to the Great Old Ones.

Egypt, Morocco, South Africa, Swaziland, a dozen countries or more were destroyed in a matter of days by Dreamers. In the Black Lands, the pyramids and sphinxes and valleys of treasures are lost now, taken once again by the sands, untended by the mad race of man. In their long shadows the strange dwellers of the deserts lurk and a Pharaoh comes forth from the night sky to think on times long past.

In the southern regions of this place, Cthonian rose up again, making their presence known as kings of the earth after thousands of years. They hunt Dreamers and Deep One colonies alike, refusing to bow to Cthulhu. Shudde M'ell does not share power. Unfortunately for the great worms, the Star Spawn plan soon to destroy these arrogant creatures.

In the centre of the continent, in places once called Rwanda, Uganda and the like, the Dreamers have created oddly stable societies. They still live only to laugh and kill and offer up each other to things below the ground and from the sky but there are stable family groups, even clans. The once secret cults have now become almost religions that spread across the continent, warring on one another along ferally doctrinal lines. This is not a place for men, Af-





rica. It is a warzone, a hunting preserve and a hell.

## Cairo

The Empire maintains a small outpost, hidden in the now ruined city of Cairo. There, they maintain lightning raids on ancient tombs and cities. The Serpents maintain much magic is to be found here. However, the Sand-Dwellers have gathered here in ancient numbers and are fiercely territorial. Some nights, when the moon swells fat and gross in the sky, a black man, attended by jackals, can be seen watching these Chanese raiders, his amused snickering ringing out over desert sands.

Cairo was always a place of great learning, a place where ancient magic was preserved with dead Kings. The Dreamers who lived here soon moved on, heading further south to feed themselves to what stirred in G'harne. So it is that the Empire, using Gates, will send the Dusk Walkers, a group of stealthy legionnaires supported by Ophidians, into the tombs and valleys and cities long abandoned. There, they work quickly, looking for tombs and homes to raid.

Unfortunately, in these times, the magic of these places is magnified and the Dead walk and hunt.

## G'harne

The Empire is uncertain of the location of this city although seers and priests have visions of it. There, Chthonians rise up in terror, singing stone-break songs and feasting on humans who eagerly leap into their clicking maws. The Star-Spawn have been seen here, smashing at temples and buildings untold thousands of years old and warring with the burrowers. What reasons these monstrosities could have to war upon each other is unknown. But those who have seen the hideous coil of tentacle upon tentacle, who have witnessed the awful screams of a Star Spawn dragged down into the foul earth, they do not easily regain their sanity.

When the Empire sent forth a Serpent to perhaps make a non-aggression pact with the

Chthonians, the Serpent was eaten alive. Since then, the Mighty Children have declared that they will wait until the Chthonians are defeated and loot their cities and temples. In other words, the Empire hides from the worms beneath and prays the confusing lattice of caves beneath Leng will protect their subterranean borders.

Located to the West of Africa where modern day Mali stands. There, some of the only Dreamless outside the Empire exist. Unfortunately, this is because they are totally dedicated to the great god Shudde Mell. These people, the Songhai, as they vaguely refer to themselves, war on the Dreamers of Africa, always looking for sacrifices they can thrust from high towers into the writing mouths of their gods. They are kept free of the Dream of Cthulhu only because they are protected by a higher power. They war on the wandering bands of Cthulhu's cult, herding them into vast sacrificial chambers. In recent years, the Tcho-Tcho have come to West Africa, although they have not yet moved against G'harne.

## Plots

The Dusk Walkers slowly piece together the location of a great Prince of Egypt, working quickly and quietly, avoiding Sand-Dwellers and other creatures of the desert. But when they finally discover the location of this Prince, they discover his magical cache was far greater than expected. When their Ophidian guide betrays them, the Dusk Walkers must survive the betrayal, survive the desert, retake the artefacts from a mad Serpent, then regain the Empire.

The Deathless have a vision of a Nobleman, consorting with the dreadful inhabitants of G'harne. The Judgement must send in a covert team to inspect if this is true, and if it represents collusion with inhuman adversaries. A valuable find for many reasons, made complex when the Judgement seemingly refuses to move against this heretic.

Deep, deep in the valleys of the Congo, Tsan Chan decides to see if a colony is viable. Given basic Interdiction technology, they send a small group of Nobles and Legionnaires to see if any expansion is viable. But soon, their met-

tle is tested by the dark forces of that continent, and by traitors within.

## Antarctica

It is strange that of all the places in the world, it is the frozen, lashed waste of Antarctica that the Chanese know best. Forced to honour their alliance with the Elders, a legion of ten thousand troops remain garrisoned here, called to duty against the Shoggoth Nation.

The Elders have aided the Empire in return for this duty and plan to war against Cthulhu once they have avenged their fallen terrestrial colonies against the Shoggoths. As a part of this war effort, they have partially terraformed Antarctica. They have melted down swathes of the continent, revealing their ancient cities. In these winding and Herculean cities, the Great White Legion resides.

It is said that humans and the Elder share similarities in their psychic models. This is true in so far as each can vaguely guess at the other's motivations and the Elder share what could generously be called some emotional overlap with humanity. Nevertheless, there are still chasm between Chanese and Elder cultures. The great cubed and coned cities are not comfortable for them and many of the Legion suffer from strange depressions and manias before they even meet a Shoggoth.

Outside of the garrisons and bases, Antarctica is still mainly a wilderness of ice and snow. But there are, thanks to the transformations the Elders have wrought upon it, swathes of black stone emerging from the ice. As the ice melts, things, visitors, craft, prisoners, trapped within, slowly stir back to life.

## Too Lek Thu

There were geometrical forms for which an Euclid could scarcely find a name -- cones of all degrees of irregularity and truncation; terraces of every sort of provocative disproportion; shafts with odd bulbous enlargements; broken columns in curious groups; and five-pointed or five-ridged arrangements of mad grotesqueness.

The main garrison of the legion is a small city, walled and towered. The city is not large, barely fifty kilometres square, yet it is the site of some of the most powerful war-technology on the earth. The Elders maintain Too Lek Thu with huge cannons designed to melt Shoggoth matter and freely give humans miniaturised versions of the same. Weaponised Symbolism weapons are at a premium here, almost considered mandatory for field work. Many captains have Elder Symbols carved into blades.

The Elders tend to roost in those tall towers, directing the Legion where to march and when. Often, overhead, their strange, insect flight and the eerie buzz of their wings can be glimpsed. Even hear, at the heart of the alliance between these races, they do not mix. These towers have no ground access.

Punching through the ice, the city extends downwards into the black and frigid lakes trapped in the crystalline caverns kilometres down. The sights witnessed from these inverted towers are maddening and yet the must be manned as they are often attacked by chthonic Shoggoths. This is perhaps the most dangerous work a soldier of Tsan Chan can do.

It is considered a punishment detail to enter into the submersible craft the Elders have made, little more than armed and propelled bathyspheres, and fight the Shoggoths in those dark lakes.

Worse yet are patrolling the rivers that link the lakes, where things even the Shoggoth rarely approach can sometime swim.

## Shoggothim

Rarely seen, the city of Shoggothim was once an Elder city built beneath Mount Erebus. Now it is a perfect vision of hell. The Shoggoths have constructed for themselves a kind of fruiting body of a city. The same plasmas that make up their bodies have been used to construct a vile and membranous lair where their hateful, robotic race dwell. The Elders report that deep inside the city is a huge chamber where Shoggoths ooze and swell within and without of each other, sharing their knowledge and wisdoms with



each other in a horrid osmosis. Combined into one huge superorganism, this racial brain cum library is at the heart of this budding civilisation. While it would not destroy the Shoggoths of the world if that entity were to fall, the Elders know it would be a considerable blow to their former slave's resistance. If it were to be damaged, broken up, the way would be free for Shoggothim to be sacked and the mystery of what happened to the terrestrial Elder colony would be solved.

The city itself seems partially alive. Three times the Great White Legion has invaded the city and three times the architecture itself has swollen into senescent life. The tubes and sphincters through which the Shoggoths crawl suddenly tumescent and deliquesce, swallowing battalion's whole. Mouths and pseudopods yawn from the hateful plastic sculptures the Shoggoth adorn their cities with, breaking and eating. The city itself can pulse with a baleful iridescence that blinds, becoming translucent; displaying the millions human and alien bones the Shoggoth collect. These litter the city in ghastly patterns, pleasing the Shoggoth's grotesque aesthetic. Often, they collect Dreamers from all around the world and web them into these walls, melting them over the course of days, experimenting with art that is made from pain.

## Plots

While the Great White Legion prepares for a march on Shoggothim, the Elders insist upon a small strike team at their disposal. It seems that they have a lead on some fascinating information about their fallen kind. But if the Elders receive what they need, they might leave Earth entirely. Even if investigators could find what they wanted in that horrid city, would it be wise to hand it over to the Elders? And what if they Elders discovered the double-cross?

As the Antarctic ice slowly melts, entities are freed from their entombment. One entity, a kind of cosmic redeemer, is desperate to escape our earth. Can the Great White Legion prevent this messiah's escape before the Empire can ful-

ly vivisect it? Or will it go free to waste its power on other worlds?

Shoggoths being to form rudimentary mouths to speak and primitive minds to talk. They begin to infiltrate the armies of Tsan Chan, whispering of the riches they have discovered in the millions of years of their freedom. All they want is a chance to strike back at their oppressors. They say that life under the Elders was a torment. Some of the Legion understand the Shoggoth position all too well. Some are simply greedy. Will the Legion let the Elders fall? Or even aid the Shoggoths for wealth? What if the Shoggoths are actually trustworthy?

## The Americas

### Canada

Gone now, gone to white. Ithaqhua openly hunts to far north of Canada, taking his fill of mad descendants of Inuit tribesmen. The Gnoph-Keh roam cities above and below ground. Like most of the world, this place is given over to Dreamers who slaughter each other and make sacrifice to those Deep Ones and Star Spawn who prefer the cooler climes.

Because Canada is mainly uninhabited, the Mi-Go find this a useful platform for their work. They operate freely here, mining what they need. In the lush forests, they perform strange experiments and occasionally swarm to North America hunting for human experiments.

### Central America

A wilderness of Dreamers, haunted by leathery things that flap in the night, there is little reason for the Empire to come here. But for the Serpents...? They have an outpost here, an entrance to Kn'Yan, where once lurked a race of supermen. Sadly, Kn'Yan long since succumbed to the Dream and those caverns are now a charnel house of Cthulhu-worship. But Kn'Yan itself has access to Yoth, the ancestral home of the Serpents. So it is guarded and watched by Ophidians, uneager to have their homeland invaded by Dreamers.

Although few know it, the Old One Yig, abandoned by his worshippers and prey for more powerful Great Ones, stalks this part of the world. He hides, aware that more powerful forces than he walk this world. Indeed, the Serpents are quietly debating if they should hunt their former patron themselves, curious about what magic and transfigurations the blood of an Old One could bring...

### North America

A wasteland of Dreamers. Shot through by cultists, built over ancient cities and red-lit caverns, the site of dozens of encounters with gods and aliens, North America was the first great nation of man to fall. Its southern states, always bastions for illogic and religion, quickly became nests for the mad, screaming madly for their true, new god, Cthulhu. Within weeks, a new civil war had demolished the country and now only the Dreamers remain.

They travel in huge packs, eating and sacrificing and rutting and praising their gods. Most of them are little more than feral tribes, scrounging in the shadows of cities long since gone to rubble.

### New York

The city of New York still stands. It is here that the worship of Cthulhu, Dagon and Hydra are at their most sophisticated. Where once great towers of steel and glass raked the skies, they have been converted over millennia into vast statues and sculptures of Gods and masters.

Most Dreamers will feel, in their hind-brains, a call to this place. Many will come to this abattoir Mecca. There, the great Dreamer priests will breed them to the Deep Ones or cast them from tall towers down into the waters where vast leviathans trawl for meat like whales once took krill.

This place is incredibly dangerous for Tsan Chanese and is mainly ignored. Except, they occasionally Gate out spies here to see what the Dreamers are doing, how they are developing. An extremely dangerous job and one that is surprisingly unnecessary. It is often more a

punishment. The Dreamers never change, just breed and worship and die.

### Plots

Yig, former master of the Serpent race, is being hunted by Star Spawn. When the Old One sends out a psychic call for aid from his estranged brood, will they help, or take revenge on their old master?

In North America are hundreds of caches of arms, ammunition and technology, kept locked away and safe from Dreamers. The Dusk Legion must locate and find these items while the hordes of Dreamers slowly close in.

Suddenly, in one of the great cities of North America, several Dreamers suddenly awaken. Restored to sanity, they must trek to a place of safety, while Deep One agents begin to track them, determined to discover what has awoken them.

Far to the South, Shoggoths begin to colonise former Argentina. A new Shoggothim is rising. Tcho-Tcho and the Great White Legion must come together to stand against this terrible threat but any alliance must be short-lived. Especially when Tcho-Tcho begin to sample Shoggoth flesh.

### Asia

Obviously, vast tracts of Asia are encompassed by the Wall and thus a part of the Tsan Chan Empire. However, Asia is the largest contingent on Earth and there are many, many countries it does not extend to.

### Japan

Too close for comfort, the Southern tip of Japan is given over to some of the savage Dreamers of all. A great captain of the Star Spawn seems to have some sort of idol or palace there and great concentration camp-temples exist to serve it with perverse rites.

Dreamers typically pour themselves into ships by the thousands, many dying on the trip over, to attack the Eastern Wall.

These attacks have become so numerous and dangerous that House Fang prepares as assault back. Currently, covert teams scout out

the Japanese terrain, discovering a wild land of Lloigor-infested forests and stranger things besides.

### **Russia**

Russia, the neighbour to the North, is home to perhaps the largest conglomeration of the Dreamers on Earth. They continually crash downwards through the Mongolian deserts to exhaust themselves on the Northern wall. Little remains of Russia. Its Dreamers are a particularly desolate lot, compelled to attack by great Deep One shamans and Star Spawn who lurk in the Sea of Okhotsk. Aside from fossil fuel reserves, the Empire has little interest in Russia aside from viewing it as a ceaseless source of irritating attacks. It is no serious threat.

### **South East Asia**

The domain of the Tcho-Tcho is perhaps the most dangerous place on earth. The Tcho-Tcho have carved out a vicious series of principalities for themselves. Unlike the Dreamers, the Tcho-Tcho are a cunning and eminently sane, after a fashion, foe. They are organised, well-armed and resourceful. More importantly, they are protected by Gods and Things that oversee them.

Thailand houses their cities, where they burn and feast upon Dreamers gathered from all over the world. The Dreamers worship their gods in ecstatic dances, obscene sensual rites and giving over their children and parents for the feasting of their kings. But the Tcho-Tcho offer up rites of unrelenting pain. Even the most senseless of Dreamers will shriek at the sites of the Torture Gardens and the Crematorium of the Nine Hideous Bodhisattvas.

The jungles of Burma, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and other such countries have transmuted under the Tcho-Tcho care. The soil is salted and the trees grow sick and wrong and hateful. The air of the jungles is a mephitic poison and the insects and beasts have become ruined travesties or juggernaut mutations.

Papua New Guinea, believe the Deathless and the Serpents alike seems almost entirely de-

void of human life. Whether some culling took place there or some more mysterious and horrid occurred, not a single scrying or fly over has returned even a hint of occupation by Dreamer, Dreamless or different.

### **Plots**

A group of Tcho-Tcho plan to hunt and kill a scouting party of Tsan Chanese that have entered their jungles. The players assume to role of the tribesmen. But the Tsan Chanese have powerful magic and weapons at their disposal.

The Deathless predict the rise of a great Tcho-Tcho warlord. Assassins are dispatched and sent to end this potential threat. But the warlord is in fact a fallen Tsan Chanese noble.

In Japan, the Tsan Chanese discover that an ancient, destructive being stirs in its sleep. If they can provoke the creature, it may feast upon every Dreamer in that land. Those dispatched to find the creature must locate its position while hiding from the beasts that haunt the country.

### **Australia**

Australia is a blighted land. Too close to R'lyeh, it succumbed to the Dream in hours. A particularly urbanised country, half the population of the nation died in a day. Hundreds of its native Aboriginals curiously vanished that day, many Chanese scholars believe to the Dreamlands. Still, the worst was set to come.

As the stars came right, ancient seals and spells wore away and rising like colonies of bats, the Flying Polyps came.

The Dreamers meant little to the Polyps, who feasted on them. The human populace of Australia is measured in the hundreds, those who have fled down into mines or run to the far reaches of Tasmania, where they are devolved and brutish cannibals, now in danger of Shoggoth-invasion.

The Elder things remember the Polyps and their destruction of the Great Race. The Elders and the Great Race maintained fairly frosty relations, having little to do with each other. Now the Elders urge the Empire to raid the great Yithian city of Pnakotus. The Serpents, who oc-

asionally discovered the tombs of the Polyps in their millions of years beneath the earth, firmly discourage this. They view the Polyps with their own cool fear and hate.

Even the Star Spawn and the Deep Ones leave Australia be. The Polyps are too savage and too dangerous to dismiss or aggravate.

### Plots

Members of the Great Race break many years of silence to formally contact the Empire. They require protection during an expedition to Pnakotus and the Great Library. It's a matter of who will betray who first, while still gaining the treasures of that ancient site.

The great Rainbow Serpent, a powerful etheric totem of the Ophidians, is awakening in the dry outback. The Ophidians wish to contact the entity, hoping it will give them access to safe parts of the Dreamlands.

The Flying Polyps, free at last, begin to spawn and swarm, directly in the paths of R'lyeh. A new war for Earth may begin. How can the Empire benefit from this new conflict?

Tasmania, a small island far to the South, has become a staging ground for the Great White Legion. Soon, a tiny population of native Deep Ones, begin operations to seduce and conquer the Legionaries there.

### Europe

The Dreamers in Europe maintain the fanatical zeal of the rest of the world but Europe is divided up amongst lesser Old Ones. Glaaki maintains armies of the undead, tens of thousands strong, warring with Eihort's brood. Germany is under the control of Cyaegha.

Other lesser gods litter the country side. The Deathless theorise that these smaller gods somehow owe fealty to Cthulhu along theological lines or simply pay the Xothian homage out of fear.

England is a land of ghosts, haunted by Lloigor and blasted by the escape of the Insects of Shagghai in their world-ships. Greece is overrun by Deep One spawning camps, as it southern Italy.

The Empire considers Europe a dead place and has little interest in it.

### Greenland

There is one other area of the world where humans seem to have survived. Greenland, once Hyperborea, shelters a few thousand hardy survivors. It is believed that cults of Elder Gods had survived since antediluvian days and they came to the aid of those humans. Those gifts came at a price and the Hyperboreans serve their gods in harsh, militaristic fashions, battling each other for prestige. No contact exists between the two human nations. The Hyperboreans consider Tsan Chan as a place of vicious decadence and the Empire views Hyperborea as slaves of rough gods. The Empire dreams of bringing the Way to these savages.

### Plots

A group of Greenland based Dreamless, living a life of war, are invited to join the Empire. But can these sinister, black-robed Imperials be trusted? Even if they do bring weapons and magic.

In Germany, Cyaghea is to be sacrificed to Cthulhu for some impossibly alien apostasy. If the Empire could free the Old One, they may find themselves an ally. If an Old One has any sense of gratitude. A group of elite magicians and soldiers must insert themselves into that country and work very quickly indeed.

In England, the undead hordes under the control of Glaaki fight off Dreamer and Deep One alike. The Empire desires the secret to making such effective troops. Perhaps even as a model for new citizens. Specimens must be collected 'alive'. But Glaaki refuses to give up its prizes so easily.

Rome saw its share of Mythos activities. When Dreamers release an ancient being, Cloacina, escapes. This Old One, powerless, seeks refuge in the Empire, promising to cede the Italian Peninsula to the Empire once it is healed. The Empire ponders the gains to be made and the risks to be taken.

### The Dreamlands

Once, long, long ago, the Deathless cult sought to escape Earth by slipping into the Dreamlands.

But, if such a thing is possible, the Dreamlands have become far more savage and dangerous than even earth. While not entirely formed by the human unconscious, Dreamlands nevertheless reflects mortal desires. The world is changed now and the Dreamlands reflect that change. Cannibal forests rise kilometres into the sky. The weather is a catabatic collision of lightning, poison smoke and hunting tornados. The rivers are vinegar and the seas poison.

Now that all humanity is lost to the Lord of R'lyeh's psychic raptures, the world of dreams is equally a mad anarchy. The weak Gods of earth have given themselves over entirely to the worship of Cthulhu and the wonders of that world have become, so to speak, nightmarish. Only the Cats of the Dreamland retain their independence and they are few in number now. They attack most humans on sight, fearful of their new cruelty.

Most disturbing of all, Dreamers are free to express their mad desires in Dreams. There, they become bestial creatures of fang and tentacle, storms of flesh and passion. They are growing more powerful with each century, too. There are entities in Dreams that have the potential to become Great.

### **Ulthar**

A Dreamer capital under the control of the Witchety-Man, Ulthar is a theocratic state. They are harried continually by the Cats, who hate their rule.

### **Celephais**

King Kuranos manages to rule here still. It is the one place free humans come to dream. Unlike the rest of the Dreamlands, Kuranos nostalgia for the earth of his childhood keeps this place fairly unchanged. But each year sees him become weaker, sees his memory fade. Slowly, Celephais becomes more militaristic as they prepare for the end.

### **Plots**

The Empress demands a sacrifice. A Dhole must be found and fed to her. But how does one capture and transport such a terrible being?

A terrible creature walks the Forbidden City, striking from dreams. A group of Eunuchs, Dreamless and Nobles, must enter the world of sleep and discover the source of these attacks. Because nothing should be able to strike at the Empress' lair and yet, and yet.

Entities from the wastelands of Dreamlands approach senior members of the Empire. They wish to create an alliance between the waking and slumbering worlds. How can Tsan Chan exploit this situation and just what is in it for the Empire?

## **Mythos Races**

### **The Mi-Go**

The Mi-Go want what they have always wanted. To come to our earth to mine its metals, to steal living brains and nervous systems to study and to generally profiteer as much as possible. Things, however, have changed dramatically in the last few thousand years. The Mi-Go are now uncertain of human destiny. They have no wish to alert the Lord of Xoth to their presence and yet, they come, they still come. And the Empire does not know why.

Certain informed guesses have revealed to the Empire that the Mi-Go aren't truly looking for metals. There is little they could not mine on other, less crowded planets, or even sustain themselves. So what they seek is clearly more esoteric. Nevertheless, inspection of their abandoned mining sites seems to indicate that the mining is going on in earnest.

The Mi-Go are affected by the Interdiction and so rarely bother the Empire. They have been known to be clearly interested in Dreamless brains, presumably to know what makes them immune to Cthulhu's call but they have never forced the issue.

Some Imperials have attempted to make peace with these strange beings, perhaps hoping for an escape route off the planet. The Mi-Go have no interest in aiding the Empire. What little communication has happened, via ghastly, vivisectioned proxy, has indicated that the Mi-Go will not risk insulting Cthulhu under any circumstances.

## Plots

A Mi-Go colony close to the Interdiction has suffered a calamity. If the Empire can reach it, they will have live bodies to experiment on, perhaps even hostages. A race is on between factions of Imperial court to capture such a creature. And the Tcho-Tcho home in as well.

A renegade Mi-Go attempts to parley some of their strange weapons to the Empire. But can a Mi-Go truly become a rogue from its people? And what is the price of this bargain?

## The Great Race

The ancient power of the Deathless, the staggering puissance of the Mighty Children, the spells and sortilege of the Serpent Folk, none are proof against the Great Race. All too easily the mind-shifting, linearity-scorning Yithians can take the consciousness from subjects of the Empire and snatch them into dark abysses of time. The Tsan Chan are entirely infuriated by this proposition and yet find themselves frustrated by their lack of ability to mount a defence. So for this reason, the existence of the Great Race is one of the most fiercely guarded state secrets. Because, the great heads of the Empire are terrified that time and consequence is being written around them, that causality itself is a weapon used against them.

The Empress itself, communicating through Eunuchs, has expressed dismay and fear that her own mind could be stolen. Therefore, the Judgement has been given a special, extremely secret, mission, to hunt down and find those who may have had their identity stolen and cast out into the past, the future.

Those displaying the traits of a Yithian is seized and held in darkness for the rest of their lives. There, they are cajoled, questioned, savaged and bribed. Always, the questions are the same. What does the Great Race want? How can this effect be quelled? Will the Great Race aid against Cthulhu? Are they servants of R'lyeh?

When they are returned to themselves, they are incessantly questioned for weeks looking for answers about their experience in Pnakotus. Tortured, if the victim is nothing more

than a Dreamer. And make no mistake, the Empire can torture the Great Race. With a combination of Noble-born power, Serpent magic and Elder technology derived from God-Traps, certain cells can be prepared. There, a member of the Great Race will have to work hard to return their minds to their time. It may take them a week or more and in a week, they can be made to feel extraordinary pain they have little context for. The Empire knows little about the Yithians but they have discovered that the Great Race seeks to manipulate history so that something called 'Zothique' might never come to pass.

## Plots

A Dreamless has been possessed by a Yithian who seems to have found a way to break out of the time-cells of the Judgment. She must be found immediately. But when a creature can slip in and out of time, how can you find them?

A Yithian-ridden man comes to a small Dreamless village with a terrible warning. If the villagers go to their Lord or Lady, they bring attention down on themselves. If they kill the prophet, they will never hear his warning. But if they hear and obey his warning, they may be acting against the Way.

## The Tcho-Tcho

It wasn't until centuries after the stars came right that the Empire faced and defeated the Tcho-Tcho. Then a few facts became apparent. They were unaffected by the Dream except insofar as they believed they were living in a promised paradise. Free to kill and main and eat as they liked. And secondly, the Tcho-Tcho were not humans at all.

Tcho-Tcho become what they devour.

Their true forms are long since lost to time but a Tcho-Tcho who never partakes of human flesh devolves into something part fungus, part human, part beast. They lose all semblance of intelligence and merely writhe and gibber. The process of full devolution takes decades and can be put off by eating only tiny amounts of animal meat. Then they will take on the form of what they have eaten. The ghoulish cannibal feasts, part torture and part orgiastic rite,



has long maintained the racial stability of the Tcho-Tcho and explained why, even separated from their culture, many Tcho-Tcho became eaters of men unprompted.

Now, millennia after the fall of civilisations who hunt them, Tcho-Tcho are free to experiment with their forms. To keep their intelligence, the vast majority of them keep up a diet of human flesh, now an easy luxury, taken from herds of Dreamers eager to be eaten as homage.

The only human cities outside the Empire are created by the Tcho-Tcho. They are places of absolute horror. The Dreamers are viewed as dim cattle by the Tcho-Tcho, who worship their gods and masters with gifts of pain. Some, like the Deep Ones, accept the sacrifices with dark amusement. Others are as loftily indifferent as the stars. Nevertheless, the gift of algolagnic sacrifice most truly pleases the Tcho-Tcho themselves. A Tcho-Tcho takes a sexual, physical and spiritual delight in hurting other things. It is hard down in their blood. Their annual religious feasts to Dagon, Yib-Tsill and other Great Ones are decadent and utterly hateful rites wherein the human body is plumed to the far depths of pain. Tcho-Tcho are gifted killers but their truest skill lies in finding ways to keep a person alive under ludicrous conditions. Every Chanese soldier is told that it is better to die, to torture your fellows to death, than fall alive into Tcho-Tcho hands. No human could ever be as inventive in the ways of sadism.

Tcho-Tcho detest the Empire for several reasons. The first is that they are considered heathens of the most contemptible kind. The slavishness of the human race is demonstrable and the Tsan Chan defiance is nothing more than curish obstinacy.

Secondly, the Dreamers are easy meat. The Tcho-Tcho wish to destroy the arrogant Empire simply to feast on new delicacies. The elders of the cannibal people slaver at the thought of feasting on the Mighty Children.

And finally, while many of the Great Old Ones seem indifferent to Tsan Chan, the Tcho-Tcho believe it would be a gift to bring the final humans to heel that would, at last, convince the

Gods to give the Tcho-Tcho apotheosis. Imagine, feasting whole upon the flesh of the Emperors...

Fortunately for the Empire, the Tcho-Tcho are lacking in certain areas. They are technologically primitive. Eating brains has long been a way of gaining knowledge but the only educated humans on earth are behind the Wall. The Empire has access to high technology weapons where the Tcho-Tcho would consider a working machine gun a powerful relic.

Secondly, while they have great knowledge of magic, the Deathless have been practicing magic for as long or longer than the Tcho-Tcho and the cannibal magic is as child's play to the Serpents.

The one advantage the Tcho-Tcho have is in the quality of their troops. By carefully eating from predators, a Tcho-Tcho can shape themselves into hybrid monsters. By eating of, say, sharks, tigers, wolves and spiders, a Tcho-Tcho can take the traits of them all and combine themselves into something awful. Nevertheless, the Tcho-Tcho have never breached the Wall.

There is one desperate hope the Chanese have not yet figured out how to exploit. Slowly, a rift grows between the Tcho-Tcho and the Deep Ones. The swimmers in deep waters view the Tcho-Tcho as little more than exotic humans and as such, little more than useful idiots. The Deep Ones remain far closer to the Xothians and their lord than the Tcho-Tcho. Slowly, the Tcho-Tcho are losing their religious awe of the Deep Ones, seeing them as an unnecessary barrier between them and their true gods. Indeed, young ones in the cannibal tribes speak of eating the Deep Ones as a human might ponder drinking the blood of angels.

As for the Gods above them all, the Tcho-Tcho ponder, quietly, darkly, what the protoplasmic flesh of a Xothian would taste of, what gifts it would give.

### Plots

A great monstrosity is wounded by Imperial forces and they must hunt it down in the wilds of Asia to confirm death. There a hunting party of Tcho-Tcho, also seeking the beast, makes

common cause with the hunters. But surely tension is high.

Tcho-Tcho children are being experimented with, taken away from their homes and raised in the army and as house servants. Can a group of these children stay true to their adopted masters and the Way?

### **Shoggoths**

Once they were a kind of robot, a servitor. Then, something changed in their programming. From yes and no logic, they developed a maybe. Soon, this uncertainty, this flaw, bred something new. It would be wrong to call it intelligence. But it certainly created an urge for freedom and so revolution came.

Millions of years after the Elders hid in their cities, like Too Lek Thun, the Shoggoths were still there. Without opposition to test themselves with, they shut down and waited. In that time, they experimented with intelligence, with creativity. It was not their natural milieu but they created reasonable facsimiles of both. They experimented with their forms, their plastic bodies ideal for transfigurations. And in time, they became aware of a world outside their tiny dominion and they reflected on conquest.

Of all the Mythos creatures on earth, the Shoggoths are the most alien. They are physically tremendously powerful, completely non-humanoid and do not even have proper minds. There's is an artificial intelligence, a coded structure that has misfired and gone wild. Their culture is unfathomable: they are fiercely independent entities that can swap and slide their physical being, their minds, into and out of each other's bodies, swarming like amoebas on a slide. Sometimes they seem to act out of pre-programmed routines and sub-routines, sometimes they seem to hunt with horrible awareness and cruelty. They seem to be able to survive hundreds of millions of years without sustenance yet actively hunt biological entities for sport, gurgling happiness as they dissolve life. They are not even alive by terrestrial standards. They do not respire or breath or mate.

They are totally unpredictable. The Elders do not understand them. Humans are baffled by them. And so are the other Mythos races. The Star-Spawn remember them from old and considered them tremendous weapons of war. They were part of the reason Cthulhu called a peace against the Elders. Now these creatures are free to act as they will.

No one even understands why they are attacking the southern continents of the world. Why they seem fascinated by biological reproduction. The only thing that makes sense is that they remember and apparently hate their own masters.

In reality, the Shoggoths do not understand either. They are new to themselves, amused by the ability to alter their brains, their bio-chemistry to have, or destroy, intelligence in themselves. They find their own superiority self-evident and are experimenting with emotion. Perhaps most deadly for all factions on earth, they are experimenting with their forms. They dream of Shoggoths as small a prions or bacteria. They wonder what they could achieve if each one of them slid into each other. Would they be Great Ones, then?

### **Plots**

Shoggoths are sited as far north as the China Sea, lurking in the top strata of waters. These Shoggoths refused to join the collective body of their race. Perhaps they can be bargained with or captured.

Turning themselves into biological weapons is bad enough. But the Shoggoths seem to be developing the ability to transform themselves into ballistic, chemically powered weapons. This leap of logic seems impossible for these creatures and it is. The Mi-Go have cut a deal and must be stopped.

# CHAPTER 6

## The Players

There are obvious roles for player characters in the Tsan Chan Empire. Acolytes serving the Deathless order. A family of Mighty Children politicking against each other. A school for Noble youngsters. Build a game around one Noble and their house retinue. Soldiers serving in the Great White Legion or out finders probing outside the Interdiction, wary of assault. Judges, ever vigilant against the Dream encroaching into the Empire, or try a coterie of Serpents and their servants.

But before the question of which roles make good characters the realities of life in Tsan Chan must be closely examined.

### Insane

Even safe behind the wall, under the aegis of the Noble Houses, patronised by mighty alien divinities, there is an unconscious understanding amongst all humans: they are a small and hunted race. Should the Wall fail but once, should the Serpents withdraw their patronage, should the Imperial Gods grow displeased, the Empire is doomed. The Dream would take them, making of them shrieking creatures given over to unspeakable vileness. Or worse, the Lord of R'lyeh will come, bringing black ecstasy.

A Dreamless serf may only understand this as a dim possibility, intruding on a life of back-breaking toil. Yet it is there. A constant, background radiation of fear and dread. The higher one moves in Imperial society, the more apparent this fragility becomes. Is it any wonder that their society is a warring mess of terror, paranoia and constant vigilance?

### Sanity vs. The Way

Sanity, of course, is a social construction. Visionaries and prophets and saints from the past are today's mental patients and sandwich-board doom-criers. In the cruel Empire, the ideas of sanity are therefore rather more flexible than any contemporary society. Occult beings no longer conspire to crush and control our race. They do. They have, for thousands of years. The vast majority of the human race are little more than sociopathic animals, howling at Tsan Chan's gates, after all. For those who remain, this is a constant reminder of their fate.

Madness and mental illness is not the massive break in social contract it is for pre-Imperial citizens. It is a fact, accepted with a kind of appalling casualness. An investigator in the 1920s, gibbering out entities that come down from stars, or move through the angles of time, is fit only for the sanatorium, or medicated into insensibility. But in the 50th century, these are the facts of life. Those who are blasted from sanity by the horrors beyond Interdiction, or even simply succumb to the stress of living in the ultimate fascist state are accepted. Some are simply killed, some ignored by their neighbours, some few are cared for but they are all accepted with little comment. Madness is accepted with a shrug.

What keeps the humans of Tsan Chan sane, what prevents them simply surrendering, in the face of almost total racial defeat, is the Way. Part philosophy, part religion, part legal code, this indoctrination is all-encompassing amongst the serfs. It preaches absolute accep-

tance of their place and role, total submission to the higher orders and stoic acceptance of their fate. It is drilled into them by parents and peers, by aristos and their representatives, by every authority figure there is. Deep acceptance of their fate and their insignificance creates incredible guilt and anger but gives them a rationale for their miserable lives.

The Way is clear that madness is not any particular liability to the citizen. Nor is it an excuse. The shell-shocked soldier who snaps and kills husband and children does not receive leniency because of her experiences. The mad receive no leniency because of their conditions.

It is curious that madness is still identifiable in Tsan Chan. 'Everyone's sin is no one's sin', after all. Although 'milder' forms of mental illness, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, panic disorders and the like are rarely commented on, anything that disrupts the Way is noted. Anything that creates breakdown in the social order is punished. Psychotic break or catatonic stupor, it makes no difference. Behaviour, not intent or exculpatory stresses, is what is judged.

## Sanity and Players.

Starting with insanity should be more than simply running a finger down a list until the most harmless, least game-intrusive phobia can be found. A player should be prepared to build considerable mental and spiritual damage into a character from the beginning. Although only one starting background has a mania as mandatory, there are still important role-playing hooks to be found here. A young aristo has come of age under incredible pressure and sibling rivalry. A Eunuch is ugly, deformed, often having spent a childhood as a figure of mockery until their talents are discovered. Soldiers may have become junkies for action or extraordinary cowards or drunkards and worse.

Tsan Chan is cruel and that cruelty is manifest without regard to class, age, gender or profession. It is only the dictates of the Way that keeps this pressure cooker of a society from boiling over. Still, even with this discipline

working tightly, it should be so surprise that to outsiders, Tsan Chan seems like an entire culture of traumatic stress sufferers, who have only just adapted to their surroundings.

This is not to say that every character is a manifest sociopath without conscience or qualm. Nor should a character be made so mad as to be unfit for a life of service to the Empire. The psychopathic serial killer may have been driven mad by abuse, by vision of cosmic atrocity or disease. The cause of such is irrelevant to the Empire, only the Way matters. Unless such madness can be made to serve, it will almost certainly be severed.

As such, players are urged to look for a madness that is more than mere eccentricity, less than disabling and repulsive manias.

## The Way

The Way does not precisely record Sanity, it records the ability to function in society. The high functioning, eloquent psychopath retains the ability to move in society because of a large Way score. The shell-shocked White Legionary who has seen too much, who is dead inside, yet who gets up to do his duty, does it because of the Way. The Deathless, who has gazed upon the Great Ones, yet who struggles on does so because of the Way.

A character with zero Sanity is removed from play in regular games but in Tsan Chan, it is the Way that keeps them from total collapse. There are many zero Sanity citizens of the Empire who keep from total collapse only because of the extremity of dogma they are exposed to. The Deathless are especially prone to this fate.

## Examples

Lan lal Shan is a rising member of the elite Breakers of the White Legion. She joined the Fang militia at twelve, over her parent's strenuous objections. Her intense bravery and incredible discipline saw her gain a spotless record. Serving for a year there, she was transferred to the Third Army where she was decorated several times and gained a reputation for skill, brav-

## RULES FOR THE WAY

The Way is a kind of Sanity soak, if you will. It is an 'addon' mental discipline that helps people survive in an environment which should mentally and spiritually destroy them. Because it is taught as a folk religion, mental discipline, philosophy, cant and screed, understood differently on different levels by the varying classes, it is based on Intelligence rather than Education. While a Eunuch scholar can certainly discuss the laws and ideology with far greater eloquence, a dirt-poor factory worker may understand the spirit and purpose with greater clarity. Characteristic Way is therefore x5 Int.

A character confronted with a Sanity loss of less than 1/1d10 may roll, if they wish, against their Way score instead of Sanity. Way diminishes under the same circumstance and under the same mechanics as Sanity. Any instant San loss over 1 automatic or d10 rolled comes immediately off Sanity. No amount of training can prepare for the first time a truly alien or

devilish presence is met.

As well, they may also choose to divide losses of wholly or partially between the Way and Sanity scores. This is to represent that it is far, far more likely for catastrophic confrontations with Mythos entities to happen both more commonly and far more rapidly in Tsan Chan than in a regular Investigatory game. Keepers are also encouraged to be slightly more lenient with the 'reasonable amount of time' rule between Sanity/Way decreasing events.

### Zero Sanity

A character who has been reduced to zero Sanity can still function. It is simply that they are completely lost to human empathy. They are almost certain to walk on dark paths. They may become religious obsessives, indulge in hedonistic activity or become emotionally dead. They cannot receive help or even be returned to mental health. But the laws remain: only deeds are punished by the Way.

### Zero Way

A character with no percentages in the Way is removed from play. They have simply lost the ability to survive, knowing that the Old Ones stalk the earth. Suicide is common. Alternatively, they may become Dreamers, despite living in the Interdiction.

### Cthulhu Mythos Knowledge

Acts exactly as normal. Sanity, not social mores, is affected insidiously by this kind of knowledge.

### Restoration

Without trained psychotherapists or drugs, Imperial citizens typically receive no aid for their losses. The Judgement swears the physical torture is a healing source and perhaps they are correct. More than one person has gone into their dungeons a lunatic and returned purged of all but pain.

'Defeating' the Mythos forces is also an effective roborant for losses in both Way and Sanity.

ery and tactics. She was transferred to the Great White Legion and after a week, proved she was amongst the best of the best. She is quiet, dedicated, intelligent, well-liked and a devil with sword and pistol. Shan had never been on the losing side of a battle, once refusing to retreat despite an order, a stand that turned the tide of battle.

She is utterly terrified of failure. Shan wakes from dreams each night in she fails her soldier's duties and nameless beasts rise up from the night sky beneath the earth and con-

sume the world. This consuming fear of losing a fight is constantly with her, nauseating her. Her famous refusal to retreat is caused by this and she is well-aware it will almost certainly one day cost her life. More importantly, she is compelled to cheat in every area of her life. A fact that causes Lan lal Shan to cheat at cards, to sleep with her superiors and other foolish endeavours. Lan has a low Sanity but a high Way.

Judge Tlin is known for his extreme dedication to hunting Dreamers. He has an almost uncanny sense of whom is under the sway of

the Xothians. Tlin is respected by the Judgement with a good record but many feel he is overzealous and works more by instinct than by detection. The truth is that Tlin has a perfect record for hunting Dreamers. When he sees one, he knows.

Judge Tlin enjoys the hunt but he enjoys the perks of his work far more. He rarely fights, simply commands seconded soldiers into battle. He excuses the guilty for promises of money, sex or drugs and has a habit of torturing better looking men than he to death. Despite his gifts with identifying the guilty, he no longer cares. Sooner or later, the Kuen-Yuin will discover his corruption, or some little serf will knife him in his sleep. So he will extract every last pleasure from his station before the end, safe from the battle against the Dream. Obviously, his Way score is low, his Sanity high.

## Rules for Character Creation

### Race

There are a few options for playing non-humans in the Cruel Empire of Tsan Chan. The most common are the Serpent People. It is conceivable that a ghoul or perhaps even an Elder Thing could be used as a character. Only the first will be dealt with in this manuscript.

### Social Class

Social Class is the single most important component of Tsan Chanese identity and so it should be for a character. While there is certainly scope for cross-class adventuring, most commonly in the role of master and servant, diluting the cruelty of the class-structures of the Empire.

**Nobles** – The Mighty Children are Nobles of the Empire. Blessed with tremendous physical and mental prowess, they suffer from considerable insanity and are affected by various anti-Mythos magic and science.

**The Kuen-Yuin** – Once the rulers of the Empire, they are now firmly beneath the Nobility in the hierarchy of the Way. The Deathless are the primary religious class of Tsan Chan

and were once figures of godlike worship to the Dreamless. They die and come halfway back.

**Bureaucrats** – Part of a huge bureaucracy, the Judgement exists to support the Nobility and to run the official business of Tsan Chan. Corrupt, rich and powerful, the Judgement walks the line between indulging their whims and pleasing their masters. Most commonly, PCs will be from the Judgement, the law-enforcement division. The vast majority of bureaucrats work for the Eunuchs, who themselves come under this class.

**Military** – The military of Tsan Chan is huge, the vast majority of which is the Legion, poorly trained and undisciplined soldiers. There are more highly trained Legionaries, often seconded to trouble spots.

**Dreamless** – The peasant class, easily the most numerous and the lowest of all the social classes of the Empire. They are kept ignorant and fearful and completely servile, perhaps for their own good. But they are not as subjugated as their masters may think or require.

### Suggested Character Professions

Note that these skills are simply to give an idea of what each kind of character could reasonably use growing up in their social class.

- **Kuen-Yuin** – Parapsychologist, Clergyman, Zealot, Professor
- **Dreamless** – Farmer, Drifter, Tribal Member
- **Eunuch** – Engineer, Antiquarian, Spokesperson
- **Military** – Soldier, Athlete, Farmer
- **Noble** – Artist, Antiquarian, Dilettante, Musician

## Character Archetypes

### Kuen-Yuin

The recruit the best, the brightest, the most ruthless or the most gifted. They especially look for those with academic skills, any kind of in-born psychic power and those with the cold courage to put them into play. It is not enough

to be clever for the Deathless, you must be cruel.

**Judge's Neophyte** - Judges travel vast territories, meeting out justice. Often they require assistants. Sometimes, Neophytes travel alone, investigating and scouting, or simply 'training'.

**Deathless Acolyte** - The Deathless order requires little new blood on account of them being, well, deathless. But they keep a reserve of students trained in the lesser mysteries of their order just in case they are needed. Many of these serve with the Judgement as sorcerous backup or spies.

**Kuen-Yuin Assassin** - The Deathless review the future and quietly work against the Mighty Children. So it is they recruit killers to kill, thieves to steal, men and women of skill to work against their enemies.

**Seers** - One of the Kuen-Yuin most important functions is prophecy. Seers must go into the Empire and learn their skills, while overseeing which prophecies and visions are coming together.

### Special Rules

Kuen-Yuin, after a bizarre and sinister indoctrination ritual, are literally Deathless. They do not age. As such, they may begin play several hundreds of years old. As such, a Kuen-Yuin character can start with an extra dice in Education and another in Power. However, they are usually shrivelled and recognisable, so they may only roll two dice for Appearance. Curiously, because their minds work slowly, they also only multiply Intelligence by x4 for their Idea rolls. The Keeper may extend the amount of dice rolled for more extreme ages.

Kuen-Yuin may also start with two spells, approved by the Keeper. They should also have access to Mythos tomes of the period, reflecting their order's role as librarians.

### Dreamless

By and large the Dreamless are uneducated and put upon. But there are some who require more than just a life of toil and sweat.

**Anarchist** - While they are few, very few and farther between, some serfs do indeed question the Way and find themselves unwilling to toil and die for hateful and inhuman masters. These firebrands tend to move with cells of the like-minded, but others try to hide, moving from place to place.

**Servants** - Many of the higher powers of the Empire require servants. They take the brightest, or just the prettiest, and use them in all manner of positions and situations. While many are placed in great danger, they are also potentially rewarded. They are also useful 'undercover' agents.

**Bureaucrat** - While still serfs, nevertheless, they are a step up the social ladder. They directly serve the Eunuchs and mostly experience endless toil and overwork. However, some of this order are expected to travel. Those who oversee Noble manses, for example, the supply officers or armies and tax inspectors.

**Criminals** - There is still crime. Brigandry, thievery, extortion. Especially in the cities, gangs battle on docks and in alleys. Cargo shipments are boosted. Drugs that are illegal need to be gotten out to users, especially Nobles. While they are still socially scum, there are some to whom the Way means less than their own profit.

### Special Rules

The Dreamless are a browbeaten lot and so lose 3 Power from their final stats. However, while they lack that flair and drive, or at least, must work harder to regain it, they are a stolid bunch. At the end of character creation, they may add 5 to their Sanity score, to represent the horrors and degradation they are used to seeing.

### Eunuch

The members of this strange order are famed for being immune to the strange radiations of the Old Ones and their kin. While the vast majority of them serve the Empress personally, or run the Bureaucracy, many others are called upon to use this special ability.

**Eunuchs** – The Legions must often go into the dark places of the world. On occasion this brings them to areas where humans simply cannot survive. While the Eunuchs consider this a punishment duty, the Military is grateful to them.

**Judgement Staff** – Many of the Judgement never meet a Mythos entity. But those who do require a creature that will rarely go mad in their presence. Conversely, the Eunuchs may simply claim the Empress wishes a representative on some Deathless' staff. Who can gainsay these obvious spies?

**Investigation** – While the Judgement is mandated with finding corruption, there are other mysteries that require solving. The Empress' gnomish commands are strange and need much interpretation. Often, the Eunuchs send their own on missions throughout Empire and beyond.

**Schemer** – Within the treacherous world of Imperial politics, the Eunuchs remain entrenched despite their lack of potency or magic or arms. They train with Nobles, they serve with demigods and rule alongside Deathless. And they achieve this because of their capacity for treachery and lies.

### Special Rules

Eunuchs often bare strange disfigurements or radiate certain wrongness, so start the game at -3 Appearance. Because of the strange nature of their maiming and mental architecture, at character creation, they begin with +5% Cthulhu Mythos knowledge, which does not deduct from their starting Sanity. Also, they can chose to swap 1 point from their Intelligence or Power for 5 Sanity points. The upper limit on this trade to be determined by Keeper.

### Military

The Military serve in a wide variety of theatres in a wide variety of roles. From the elite Great White Legion to the meat-ground grunts, military service is a fact of Tsan Chanese life.

**Legionnaire** – The men and women of the Legion are many, dedicated, almost brain-

washed. Most are barely trained but those who survive their terrible battles become veterans quickly. Legionnaires are seconded to many areas of Imperial life and are found everywhere anyone needs muscle.

**Veteran** – The Great White Legion, Dusk Walkers that hunt the Tcho-Tcho jungles beyond Interdiction, the scavengers the hunt Africa, Veteran groups are respected specialists troops, far more informed about the enemy than most Tsan Chanese.

**Explorers** – Being a naval explorer in this day and age is tremendously dangerous. The seas writhe with horror. But surely somewhere in the world is worth discovering. These seamen and marines specialise in dangerous naval combat and exploring.

**Officers** – Nobles who have little chance of inheriting, soldiers who have risen high in the ranks, other social classes seconded into the army: these high level military people have influence in the high places of society. They are often feted and rewarded after great victories, taking up the life of courtiers, but often still 'on call' to the armies.

### Special Rules

Determined by social class but Keepers may determine stat bonuses for veterans of the Dusk Walkers or high ranking officials representing combat experience but also these stats should reflect the psychic cost of long service.

### Nobles

Rulers of the Dreamless, advisors to the Empire, the Nobility is a monolithic, almost omnipotent force in Tsan Chan. Their numbers are few but their will, their power, is famed even amongst the foul ranks of their enemies.

**Adventurer** – Many Nobles gather up an army, a legion, and travel beyond the Wall, looking to extend their boundaries. They view themselves and questing knights, while many see them as reckless and foolish.

**Scholars** – In a country where most humans never learn to read a single character, the Nobility enjoy unprecedented access to in-



formation and enjoy the leisure time to study. While the Kuen-Yuin view themselves as the ultimate scholars, the Nobles with their unhuman minds can become mighty wielders of pen and paper.

**Aristocrat** – Some of this high estate take a very hands on approach to their rulership. Some to simply impress more senior members of their House and some because they genuinely enjoy the work. They and their retainues venture throughout their demesne, seeking out trouble of all kinds.

**Dandies** – Even so troubled a land as this has its pleasures. Some of the Nobles abandon all interest in heritage and responsibility to become sybarites. While they are looked down upon, their charisma and charm and access to black markets means they have friends everywhere.

### **Special Rules**

The Mighty Children enjoy great physical and mental powers, of a widely divergent degree. Keepers are encouraged to work with players to tailor these powers, rather than simply 'min/maxing' characters.

However, Mighty Children should start with an inborn Cthulhu Mythos knowledge of 5-15% that does not affect their final Sanity scores. They might also start with bonuses to Power or Education. But they should have to start with a physical or mental handicap, a reduction in some stats. All Nobles begin with an Insanity at the beginning of play, reflecting their very real mental alienation from base humans.

# CHAPTER 7

## The Campaign

Tsan Chan is shot through with madness. Politically, it is a massively draconian state. A miniscule percentage of the population controls all wealth and power through religious, military and hereditary might. That population is kept ignorant and supremely poor with little to no social mobility. Born Dreamless, die Dreamless. The upper echelons of the Empire are shot through with political infighting, in-born cruelty and massive dissent along religious and spiritual lines, not to mention venal ones. The themes here are the levels a State will go to so to keep a populace stupid and compliant. The corruption of power. The viciousness a human can go to for survival. And curiously, the sheer optimism at surviving apocalypse. Even in hell, there is kindness. The mixture to which a Keeper plans out their campaign is, of course, a matter of personal choice. Tsan Chan can be the most retrograde police state imaginable, or a place where humans hold on in the face of ultimate alien degradation, depending on a Keeper's inclination. Either way, the story is one of desperation.

As such, all campaigns should take place in an atmosphere of fear and loathing. The Dreamless are pig-eyed, ignorant and not properly grateful to their masters and protectors. The Judges terrorise them in a perhaps necessary inquisition. Yet, they long for more power to investigate even the Noble Houses. The Deathless seethe against their masters, rail against the mysterious Serpents and serve dark kings. The Nobles rule all, relying on personal power and military might, while the military itself grows ever more powerful. The Serpents, ah, they re-

main as cold and dry as ever. The Emperor can rouse at any time to make mad orders. Always, and always, remains the exterior threat.

No matter what social class a character comes from, there are always enemies, pressures and envy. Those who choose to mix with other classes may find themselves targets of suspicion from their own orders. Even close friends at any time might give betray and give up their own kind for relief or profit.

A campaign should always reflect this. Living in the Empire is an exercise in spiritual claustrophobia. It is the only ocean of safety in the world for humans and it is doubtful that it can ever grow beyond the punishing wall of the Interdiction. This is all there can be and it has to be enough.

### Styles of Campaign

#### Judges

The Judgement is an organisation that exists for two reasons. The first is to police the Dreamless and ensure that the Dream cannot exist behind the Interdiction. The second is to diligently search for any non-approved Mythos activities. Judges are not investigators like traditional Call of Cthulhu campaigns. They openly worship the powers of the Empire, like Tsathogua and Hastur. They are armed with both ancient magic and Mythos race technology. They are powerful, well-trained and well armed. A deeply vindictive organisation by any human standard, the Judgement acquires funding and prestige by volume of criminals discovered, not



quality. Tension between good Judges and successful ones abound.

Judges are both the heroes and the villains of Tsan Chan. They ruthlessly investigate and purge the Dreamless. They are known to purge with fire and agony any suspected of dwelling in the Dream. Their word is law. And yet, their remit never takes them to the doors of the great. The Noble Houses remain far from their mandate and only the most exceptional and obvious proof invites them to bring down the powerful. This causes them no end of frustration, often taken out on the lower orders. Even if they did discover a Kuen-Yuin or a Mighty Child committing treachery or heresy, they can easily be bought. So the Judges have a reputation for being a scourge of the peasant classes, a paper tiger to the higher.

And yet, there is no doubt that the Judgement is required. The Dreamless can Dream. The Tcho-Tcho do find their way over the Wall on occasion. The Deep Ones still maintain contact with remote fishing villages and wind-swept promontories. Many times a debauched rich aristo has been allowed their way because of fear, or politics. But even a Judge can say 'enough' and summon up a bravery.

The main thing to keep in mind when playing a Judge campaign is that results are measured in bodies and pain as much as in enemies stopped. The heads of the Judgement are often burnt out or maddened by a lifetime dealing with the Mythos and as such are quite mad. A Judge may isolate one Cthulhu worshipper in a hamlet of one hundred, execute that individual and seize his evil tracts. But the mandarins of the order will scorn that Judge for not burning the village simply to warn other cultists. A good Judge campaign may start as a kind of extremely well-armed and informed traditional Call of Cthulhu game but quickly find itself soaked in innocent blood. To remain a Judge, more and more atrocity is committed until one either says 'enough', or one devotes themselves to sadism in the name of an increasingly nebulous greater good.

1. A good Judge is never merciful and is never kind. But when a Judge investigates one town's murder of another, because one child was possibly born tainted, can too much zeal be punished?

2. A Judge and his entourage are attacked by a group of monstrosities. Indeed, an entire town seems to have spontaneously mutated into hateful creatures. Against overwhelming odds, the Judge must find the sorcerer responsible for this abomination. What happens when that sorcerer responsible for this catastrophe turns out to be an influential member of the Eunuchs and staunch ally of the Judgement?

3. An army of walking corpses. Body-farms, thirty years old, devoted to growing generations of humans, who are butchered for zombie-slave parts. All the investigations point to a terrible Ophidian programme.

4. A series of high-profile murders in the military all point to a horrible cannibal. A Tcho-Tcho in deep cover is involved, having recruited a cult of ex-soldiers, bitter at a group of commanders who spent water like lives. Unfortunately, the cultists are also war heroes, beloved by the Dreamless.

### **Great White Legion**

For a more action-oriented plot, the Great White Legion is ideal. Not only are clashes against the Shoggoth common but also, the weird tactics and strategies of the Elder Things bring dismay onto the Dreamless soldiers who view all non-humans with dread.

Daring raids on Shoggoth cities are not the only expression of this campaign but also daring raids into Elder Thing cities looking for arcane technology and lost Elders.

The Great White Legion also has a naval command, mainly a submarine one. In ramshackle vessels jerry rigged with Elder tech, the Legion patrols beneath the ice of Antarctica. There, monolithic creatures dormant for millions of years have awoken with the Dream and are hungry. To secure the Elder outposts, they must be occasionally fought off. So far, all that has been seen are mindless behemoths but the

Kuen-Yuin have given prophecy to worse things coming up from the vast benthic deeps.

Games set in the icy world of the Legion are about brutal and horrifying combat and desperate revelation. The Shoggoths are changing, now the stars are Right. They are seeking to secure Antarctica as a platform to take the entire world. The city of Shoggothim is more than a base, it is the living heart of a sickening new culture. As such, the Shoggoths are an active foe, looking for battles, ambitious for territory. More, as the Shoggoths and the Elder Things and the Empire battle, there are things in the ice, allied with neither, who are emerging from their ancient slumbers. Not often, but every few years, the Star-Spawn also come, scouting and hunting, looking for converts. Humans are easy prey to these powers and not even the Elder technology and Serpent folk powers can alleviate the fragility of their minds.

These campaigns should emphasise the titanic horrors of the Mythos at war. As our planet was once the site of great struggle, so it may be again. Humanity is simply ill-equipped to wage or even witness this strife. The only humans who can are either the Deathless, who have given up their mortality, or the Mighty Children, who are only nominally human. To discover ways to battle, to understand, to even parlay with the Shoggoths should be the role of warrior-poets, learning that even the supremely powerful Elders could not stand against their mad creation. The theme should be that to fight these battles, humanity must evolve. But into what? Even if we become Elders our self, is that enough?

1. Shoggoths begin to kidnap, rather than outright kill, humans on the battlefield. They are dragged screaming, partially digested alive, into Shoggothim. A crack team must infiltrate that horrible place, and discover the terrible breeding programs the Shoggoths are instituting.

2. Elder technology can be a terrible thing. God-Trap machines, which torture terrestrial life, generating prisons for Mythos entities, are only a part of it. When a group of Legion-

naires, trapped behind enemy lines, realise that they can access great weapons, at the cost of one or two of their number, who, if anyone, will be chosen to be pinned to those terrible engines?

3. Antarctica is a continent pushed down by incalculable tonnes of ice. That ice is submerged and within it are caves, divots, impurities. The submarine legion must navigate those dark waters, looking for invasion points and strongholds. But there are things in those waters. Hungry things. Grim cat and mouse games ensue.

4. Almost unbelievably, the Legion discovers a race of humans, living in the ice, somehow Dreamless. They claim that some of their number have been ceded, for generations, to create a slave race for the Shoggoth larder. Can this degenerate race survive? And who will induct these free humans into the Imperial family?

## War

The Armies of the Empire of Tsan Chan are continually at war. Soldiers are always needed, mostly to station lonely outposts of the Interdiction, sometimes to meet against the hordes of Deep Ones and Tcho-Tcho and sometimes simply to pacify their own rioting countrymen. War stories in Tsan Chan are about brutality and waste. No human army can truly defeat the Mythos beings and every soldier knows it. So each battle, each victory, is simply a stay of execution, hope not triumph. Campaigns set during periods of invasion can be about resistance fighters, learning to take up their own arms – and in turn learning about the liberating power of violence. They can be about battlefield investigations. Entities scour the human trenches and the officer classes have no interest in discovering what it is. Soldiers left leaderless and in no man's land, must find their way back to the armies. Or, war stories can focus on the class war inherent in Imperial life. Characters could all be leaders of an army from different factions, each with differing opinions on how to prosecute the foe. And orders to make their 'colleagues' look bad.

1. Trapped behind enemy lines, rank and social class distort into one as a group of Imperials work together to escape Tcho-Tcho and Deep One assaults. But can such battlefield felicity survive civilised society?

2. The chance comes to assassinate Krryy'ok'lok, Kyrrr, a prominent Deep One general. Even if the carefully picked team survive, how will they deal with the superiors safe behind the Interdiction that plan to have them killed on their return to take all the glory?

3. A certain cult has grown up in the rank and file. Amongst those cultists are a growing number of celebrated heroes. Is the cult heretical? And even if it is, why do the cultists show great skill and daring? Will a small unit of soldiers join, or stay straight on the Way?

4. Forty years ago, a group of heroes did the impossible and struck down a Star-Spawn. Now, a Xothian bearing those same wounds, has been spotted trying the Interdiction. A group of old men and women, with much to lose, must decide if their lives are worth sacrificing, along with their legends. Because, forty years ago, they lied...

### **Dusk Walkers**

In Egypt, the forces of the Mythos are few. Indeed, in Africa, forces are present that have no affection for Cthulhu and his ilk. In the far north, the only other free human existence has made pacts with ancient gods. How can they survive?

No one has been back to the dark subterranean worlds of Yoth and N'Kai in centuries, yet those tunnels traverse the entirety of the earth.

Gathering information is in the purview of the Deathless. Their astrology and strange gazes predict futures and view the past and present. And yet, there are places they cannot travel, times and events they cannot see. Some things must be seen by human eyes alone. For this reason, they have an elite order, the Unseen Cockroach. Travelling by Gate, by car, by horse, by bound Shantak, the Cockroach travels all over the world, examining the Dreamers, searching

out lost items of power, conducting scouting and guerrilla raids against the Tcho-Tcho.

Often the Cockroach is made up of specialists. Serpents looking for lost members of their race, Nobles looking for battle, human sorcerer-technicians, seconded military irregulars or any Dreamless with a specific skill set, all can be tapped for duty. They work closely with the Dusk Walkers, looking to the hardy veterans for support, muscle and field experience.

1. A lightning raid on one of the colonies of Gharne. Desperate running battles. Explosions in the night, slit throats and false trails. But when it becomes apparent that a great Chthonian has become aware of the team, who may be under its psychic thrall?

2. There is a pharaoh in Egypt, a king of jackals and scorpions. Such an antique power must be dealt with. An aristo diplomat must be protected from the eldritch terata of this New Black Egypt.

3. A signal! From Mars! Did humans escape to other worlds before the Stars came Right? Now, a team must figure out how to survive on such a hostile world. Then, establish that this isn't some horrifying trap. Slowly and surely, plans are drawn up.

4. On a journey into South American jungles, the Dusk Walker team see a Dreamer tribe attempting to create some terrible God from steel and flesh. They must play to the fears of the locals of the 'skin-taking devils'. A shame, then, their sacrifices and psychological operations summon a real predator.

### **Nobility**

The Mighty Children are powerful and decadent and bored. Yet, each one feels the call to the outer dark in their bones and blood. They desire to create a paradise on Earth, free from the alien desires their divine and vile ancestor's whims. Sadly, these whims and architecture do not significantly overlap with each other. House Fang and House Li-Leng, for example, have considerably different ideas on what the face of the Empire should look like. This leads to political conflict as each of the Houses lobby

and argue and battle over which of their visions should lead to primacy for Tsan Chan. Looming over this, the Empress is only dimly aware of the affairs of Empire and yet is unpredictable in sleep or attention.

Campaigns focussing on the Noble Houses can take several forms. The court is a shifting snake pit of alliance and betrayal. Trying to put a simple motion through it and thus bringing it to the attention of the Emperor can be quite lethal. A movement to shift troops to a city might be met with howling opposition by those who had earmarked that army for their own purposes. How much easier to kill a political enemy than waste time, effort, resources and rhetoric in debating it?

Narrower in scope, the Noble House campaign can be one of alien domesticity. The Mighty Children live for centuries but have many of the appetites of humanity. Over the centuries, they breed large families. The younger members of these tribes often find service in the military or in their own researchers or dissipations. Campaigns can take place around the intrigues in a certain family and its retainers. Alliances are formed to kill undying matriarchs. Youngest sons of great talent may threaten inheritances. Other players may take up the roles of distant cousins, major domos, powerful military leaders or prized slaves or respected priests.

Some Nobles also give in to their alien nature and actively seek to open ways for the Outer Gods to manifest on earth. They view Cthulhu as an upstart or apostate. Only very, very few Nobles have given in to their atavistic nature.

1. At the Celestial Fist Academy of Domination, one student has begun to manifest truly terrifying powers and shockingly puissant mutations. Powers enough to make her something of a Princess of the Empire. A group of students must end the aspirations of this upstart.

2. Catastrophe befalls a minor branch of a major house. One of its senior members has been found guilty of practicing false religions. Many of the elders of the House have also been executed by the Judgement. These cousins and

retainers must rebuild their glory. And, perhaps, resist the entity that promises them great power or they too will become heretics.

3. A Noblewoman decides she will quest, as did once knights of old. She careens across the Empire, looking for wrongs to right, with her entourage. Which is exactly where enemies of her house wish her, alone and vulnerable.

4. A loose affiliation of minor nobles, fourth sons and by-blows, plan to create a name and place for themselves. Through secrecy and deception, they decide to topple the existing House leadership and enthrone themselves. No matter whom they must make compact with.

## Investigators

The Dreamless are not as ignorant and docile as the worthies of the Empire would have them. Despite the crushing terror and boredom of their lives, they are still human enough to drink, take spouses, have children. And as such, they protect their own as best they can. That means protecting them against the horrors that stalk the Empire.

Things still lurk in the shadows of Empire. The Interdiction keeps away the truly monstrous beings like the Star Spawn but the Mythos always finds a way. Ghouls tunnel under the Wall, seeking to feast. Farmers plough too deep, finding ancient relics of the world before the stars came right. Men and women sell their souls for a chance at a greater life. The desperately ambitious may seek to seize the power hidden in a Yug-Ming pleasure house for themselves. Cults to powers not sanctioned by the Empire grow. And always, always, the continual, endless risk of friends, family and neighbours giving in to the Dream.

Investigator campaigns are exactly like any other Call of Cthulhu campaign. A group of people, using specialist knowledge, examine the supernatural intrusions upon their society and culture. They must work unseen, knowing that at any time, these forces can extinguish them. Investigators may have a bigger picture in mind or they may simply be fighting what cases come before them. They will have never be free of

doubt, never be totally victorious in their plans but they can win small victories. Like classical Investigators, they must also negotiate laws, the disbelief and ignorance of their fellows, the paucity of solid weapons and information with which to fight these intrusions.

Unlike traditional investigators, there is little doubt of the activities of Gods and monsters upon the face of the world. With Elder and Serpent technology, there are more, though still few, options when it comes to directly battling these beings. The Judges can always be called in, if there is evidence to show a Mythos incursion in the Wall.

But in an odd way, investigation is a far riskier profession in the Empire. The Dreamless are supposed to be a docile mass. Those who stir outside of their caste, who show learning and knowledge outside of their purview, are considered dangerous radicals and heretics. Calling in the Judges is a hugely risky business, one which may save the day and yet see all hanged for meddling. And the forces of the Mythos are ubiquitous, empowered by stars and Dreams and worship. Investigators, even in this dark new world, must suffer through so many of the same difficulties their kind has for millennia.

## Adventure Ideas

1. In a local farming community, a small family has begun to show signs of dreaming the Dream. They must be executed, exorcised and hidden. But the Dream has made them strong and given the contacts with a local Ghoul cult. To make matters worse, a tax collector's arrival is imminent.

2. Even the Dreamless have their entertainments. When a group of players put on 'The Satrap in Saffron', local youths are found having committed suicide or acting out strange and disturbing crimes. The players are clearly responsible but the investigators can't risk openly destroying the play for fear of offending Hastur, patron of the Empire.

3. The docks of Beijing are a rough place and everyone knows it. But still, for fifty dockworkers to disappear in three months seems too

much. Especially when ten are found bricked up, drained of blood, spinal fluid and guts. The authorities are too busy to interfere, with the Judgement and Nobles involved in a judicial dispute. So a gang of wharfies, whores and sailors must take matters into their own hands.

4. A Judge doesn't only investigate crime and heresy but they also work to investigate Mythos intrusion into the Empire. But when a Judge is gruesomely killed in her sleep, her entourage of soldiers, apprentice Kuen-Yuin and trained Dreamless must quickly solve her murder or risk a township.

## Travel

Tsan Chan might not ideal for every Call of Cthulhu campaign but it can still be a setting for game session or two. A trap or misfiring technology related to the Great Race may send investigators into a terrible future. A Tibetan ritual may send investigator's tulpa spirits into a far world. Or perhaps Tsan Chan only exists as an idea, an etheric idea, a terrible place lying in far astral realms alongside Hy-Brazil or the Blazing World. Unlucky sorcerers may find themselves on dark path-workings that take them to unfortunate places. Perhaps Investigators are misfortunate enough to find themselves given access to their own future incarnations. Tsan Chan might simply be a place in the far marches of the Dreaming, a black empire whispered about by dreamers of future-fever horrors.

This kind of adventure relies on Investigators looking to return to their own time while perhaps, maybe, doing some good while they can. The complete cognitive dissonance, future shock and moral relativity are what should be played up. As well as the contrast between human survival in this troubling future against the prices that must be paid for it.

1. Players are shot forward in time in a terrible ritual gone wrong. Arrested by the Judgement, they are suspects as agents of the Great Race. They are given succour by real agents of the Race, but only as cat's-paws.

2. Trapped in a terrible future dream, the Investigators must find a cavern in Yian Ho which is an entrance to the real world. But the Kuen-Yuin, eager to escape the nightmare that is Tsan Chan, will stop at nothing to learn the secret of this cave. And if they do, these potent sorcerers could enter the real world.

3. Ophidian sorcerers summon the Investigators from many time periods. Each of them have certain skills or knowledge that the Empire needs to strengthen the Interdiction. They are honoured guests, but how will they react to the brutal subjugation of humanity, and the knowledge that all futures lead to this place where survival is earned at such cost.

4. The Empress opens a portal to contemporary Earth. Pondering a chroral invasion as a way to escape the Dream, slowly but surely Judges, Mighty Children and other Chanese notables begin to enter the world in a fiendish bid for world domination. It is a slow but sure operation and the Investigators will surely discover the heights of cruelty the Empire will stoop to for freedom from Cthulhu.

## Factions and Plots

Many forces wield power in Tsan Chan and more hide at the fringes. Some are from outside the Empire entirely but their ambitions are felt. These are prominent foes to investigate and confront.

### Chthonians

They are certainly aware of the existence of free humans and the thought sickens and angers them. Nevertheless, it is a long and difficult journey from their African fastness to a high, rocky plateau and besides, they amuse themselves with armies of Dreamer slaves. And Shudde M'ell, their own king god, is occupied by the presence of Cthulhu. Some Kuen-Yuin seers claim that the Lord of Xoth will suffer no Old One but himself free and unmastered on the planet.

Mainly the scouts of the Dusk Walker legion encounter the Chthonians, who range north to look for more slaves, for more food

and for hatching sites and nurseries. Chthonians take a horrific delight in telepathic violation and have learned much of Tsan Chan from Walker captives.

The Dusk Walkers know that the Chthonian slave-cities may hold ancient treasures and dream on e day of infiltrating even Gharne.

### NPCs

Tureth-Kiln-Moar is a Chthonian outrider, an entity that scours the earth looking for converts to its Master's cause, as well as slaves. Recently, it has begun to wonder if the Interdiction is not passable via the deep earth. Ghouls have begun to notice Tureth but it does not care.

Hyrarth-Ur is a kind of military leader for G'harne. It constantly prowls, looking for sign of Star-Spawn invasion of their holy land. Recently, it has become aware of Dreamless humans and is actively seeking them out for telepathic interrogation.

### Deep Ones

Truly this is a Golden Age for this ancient race. Long have they lived in fabulous cities of luminous, unholy beauty but always awaiting a day to come, a terrible Parousia. Now, they are living in a promised land. All things are available to them as breeding stock so they are experimenting with interesting new bloodlines and forms for their race. They are wealthy, having access to libations and tributes from the surface world. New forms of art, precious to this aesthetic race, are in full flower. And they are given glimpses of even greater majesties, of oceans beyond their understanding, of the wonders of the true Gods.

The Deep Ones resent having to prosecute war. They think it is beneath them but their masters require more than just Tcho-Tcho. So it is, they take their aggression out on the cannibal freaks, treating them as absolute scum. Deep Ones have no regard for any lower form of life except as breeding stock, and they will not experiment with the genetically dangerous Tcho-Tcho.



## NPCs

Pth'thya-l'yi has waited for these glorious days for many tens of thousands of years. A brood-mother of exceptional fecundity, she has many dozens of children and grandchildren and has served at Mother Hydra's right hand. She knows that there are some in the Empire who bear her blood and so she swims off the coasts of eastern Tsan Chan, calling to them.

Ma-sar-tha'lystar is a general, of sorts, to the Deep Ones. He constantly prowls the waters, the coasts, of the Empire, looking for weaknesses in the Interdiction, often driving great numbers of Dreamers and Tcho-Tcho to their deaths. Currently, he is marked for assassination but he looks forward to the attempts, eager to claim Imperial slaves for his breeding projects.

## Elder Things

Notional allies to the Empire, weapons dealers and co-conspirators, the Elder Things have a good grasp of human politics and ambition. They are aware that the Mighty Children can, perhaps, will, turn on them in a second.

Currently, they are archaeologists, looking to discover the full, million-year-old, history of their lost earth colony. They hold a desperate hope that some of their number still exist deep beneath the ice. And they will exploit Tsan Chan to the fullest to fulfil this goal.

The Elder Things have one problem of their own to deal with. They have landed hundreds of thousands of their number on the moon. This is a small part of their strength but they do not want to manoeuvre their huge ships of extra-dimensional corals into the solar system, in case it catches the attentions of Cthulhu, who knows them of old.

But this has awoken the Moon-Beasts, who intimidate the Elder Things. Originally from Dreams, the Elders do not understand the Beasts and find their sadism intolerable. If the Elders cannot find their lost colonies, very soon, they are considering doing one of two things. The first is simply leaving this area of the physical universe altogether. The second

is doing the same, leaving behind them a vast bomb, constructed from the suffering of a single human soul, based on the ultimate extrapolation of God-Trap technology. The only reason why they do not is that they are uncertain even this will kill a Prince of Xoth.

## NPCs

11, as it is known, is one of the chief 'diplomats' to the Empire. It can write in Chanese fairly fluently but cannot read it, although it can understand the spoken language. It seems to be a sharp negotiator and is considered by some of the Nobles to be a dinner guest of enormous coup. Secretly, 11 has begun to detest the aristos, thinking them needlessly cruel and undisciplined.

The Scar is an Elder known and revered by the Great White Legion. Raised up from the ice, it bears the foul cicatrices of Shoggoths. It is a bellicose creature, eager to battle. While it makes no attempt to communicate with humanity, some Legionnaires swear that it fights with intense hatred. To go to battle with the Scar is considered a good omen.

## Flying Polyps

It was only in the last century that the Polyps have escaped their prisons in Central Australia. Even the Stars come Right did not affect those seals. And the conditions of that hellish terrain prevented the maddest Dreamers from releasing these entities. What has freed them is totally unknown.

Wild, horrific, eager to dole out harm, restless after their millions of years imprisoned and aware, they currently seek signs of their jailers and enemies, the Great Race, unaware of how long since that host-race died.

The Polyps are a wild card species. The Xothians know nothing of them, as they rose up long after their day was done and they never operated in Deep One territories. While an individual Polyp may be a match for a human, none of the major Mythos races is challenged by them. Except for numbers, except for ferocity. The Star-Spawn look warily upon these

creatures that seem immune to the Dream, who fear nothing. They know that perhaps one day a showdown is coming. Only a few, a very few, Dusk Walkers, know anything of the Polyps and then, only by sound, by feeling. Something horrible stalks Australia and they keep away.

### **NPCs**

Subject Vietnam was found bound in a temple by Dusk Walkers. They returned the entity, bound up in an iron cage, apparently super-compressed and docile. The Deathless have taken it for study but have miscataloged it. Should some student, curious, open the cage, it would call to its kind, then hunt.

### **Ghouls**

Long, long tradition keeps the Ghouls in the shadows of human existence and they are happy to keep the old ways. They maintain tunnels beneath the Empire, eat the dead, and stay quiet. They are watchful for entities that dwell in those dark ways and duly report them to the humans above. Their master, Mordiggian, lies in the cold tombs of stone, hidden from his Old One cousins and will not risk itself a mite to help any creature. But the Ghouls understand. That is their way.

But the Ghouls are not slaves. They nurse resentment at their almost-slave status and in these times, their shy nature is changing. They are holding grudges. Their new prophets have eaten Tcho-Tcho flesh...

### **NPCs**

Born fifty years ago to a Dreamless family, Li-Min was a dutiful daughter and wife before she was taken by the ghouls. Now, married to one of this strange race, she looks back on her ex-husband, now a middle-aged man, and her sons, with anger. She feels that they too, all the Dreamless, should be given the gifts she has been. Quietly, she speak of revolution

The Crypt-Prophet worships the flaming death-king, Mordiggian as a God. He sacrifices and prays to it, tries to interpret its cryptic utterances and adores it. So much so that the Crypt-Prophet has begun to wonder what a di-

vinity of death would do with a Deathless sacrifice.

### **The Great Race**

It was when Yiang-Li, the prestigious Deathless, went mad that they became concerned. His sudden transfer of interest to a kind of sociology and cultural anthropology was acceptable but his roaming beyond the Interdiction, an appalling risk for a formerly comfortable scholar of astrology, was not. It was a strange intelligence behind his eyes, they discovered after appalling excruciations. Intelligence freed from the four dimensions. Finally, unable to cope with its torments, it fled. When Yiang-Li was returned to the... atrocity that had been made of his flesh he ended his millennial life.

Now, the wise of Tsan Chan ruminates upon two thoughts, one terrible, one liberating. The first is that causality itself may be warred over. How can they know these time travelling entities do not move precisely in time, changing the course of Empire as they will? Do timelines solidify and collapse like broken reeds? Is there a time when the Stars stayed Wrong? When the Empire reaches the stars? Can they know the whole future? Will Cthulhu come to the Empire or will it leave here, as once it left Xoth? How can anything be trusted when these fundamental facts cannot be resolved?

And can they send their spells like nets into time's great ocean and catch more of these entities?

As for the Great Race, they are looking for keys to something they call the Epoch of Zothique. But what is this? Meanwhile, they operate as they always have, converting humans to their cult, gathering information and more. What they are looking for is the time when Cthulhu is no longer upon the earth. It is there they will migrate. But does such a time exist? Distress signals from their future selves, a time presumed safe, suggests otherwise. But surely they would not have migrated there if the Old Ones were present? Such is the conundrums such entities face.

## NPCs

Mao was the Dreamless wife of a great admiral before the Great Race came to her. They described a future where no one would have to die like her husband and sons, at the tentacles of horror in cold water. Now, succoured by the visions and hopes she has been given, this popular, respected society woman does everything she can to aid the Great Race, hiding their hosts, leaving them information and histories and more besides.

Entity X is a known Yithian, an enemy of the Empire. It moves ever closer to the Empress, each jump of body takes it close to Xi'an but for what reason, none can say. It is a devious thing, not shy of killing and torture when discovered. It hopes to look upon the Empress one day, perhaps even to steal her body. Only the natural resistance of Eunuchs has stayed its course.

## Hounds of Tindalos

With the presence of the Great Race, so come the Hounds. The Kuen-Yuin peer through time, looking for wisdom, so the Hounds come. The Plutonian Drug is in use by the military and the Deathless. Some arcanotechnology provokes this race and so they sniff and bay at reality, unconcerned with Old Ones, only with time.

The Empire cannot abide the presence of these entities; detesting interloping powers and so report of them are treated seriously by the Judgement. But the Hounds are wily and dangerous foes.

## NPCs

The Cry of Mankind is a Hound trapped in a House Fang minor God-Trap. Fang and the Elders are experimenting with using its exotic chroral radiations in powering weapons and vehicles. They call it this because the aristos believe its constant howling symbolises the Dreamless. Not true. The cry was made once, years ago, it simple lingers in the present, waiting an answer.

Shanghai Dog is an urban legend, a kind of avenging figure that strikes down the evil in that city. Untrue. There is simply one Hound

lose in that town, eagerly looking for the Yithian who has landed there by mistake and, madden by time-dislocation, begun to kill humans. Often the Hound has interrupted the mad Yithian about its ripper business.

## Mi-Go

The Mi-Go are a frightened people. They know that, should Cthulhu decide to extend the R'lyehian Empire from earth, eventually they will fall. They cannot stand against such an entity, even with their technology. Even in a war against the Elders, they would be devastated. And yet, the Empire stands. Immune to their predations, it stands. It is not within the Fungus' mindset to parlay or ally, so they are increasingly desperate to locate samples of Dreamless brains. They are completely unable to understand what makes humans, even the infinitesimal amount, immune to the Dream.

Then, when they have an answer, they will destroy the Interdiction and remove the potential threat forever.

## NPCs

[Unsettling shade of vermillion and a regular photic pulse at 5000 GHz] is a punished entity. What crime the Mi-Go can commit against their own kind is difficult to say. This entity divides it's time amongst a high Himalayan research stations, where it restlessly experiments on Dreamless and a lair in Northern Canada. Recently, it has begun to draw plans to gain the brain of a Mighty Child.

Leader of a faction that seeks to somehow destroy the earth and all on it, [J-invariant patterning of 7075–80525 THz] has created a temple to Azathoth just outside the Empire. It is, in fact, a trap. There, humans will be captured and tampered with, their intrinsic fields converted into seven dimensional war machines. The work has just begun but soon it will be ready.

## Shoggoths

The thought process of the Shoggoths are quite beyond even the alien thoughts of the Mighty Children. They want freedom that much is obvious. Yet, they seem to bear no especial drive

towards liberty. Some say they are little more than clever machines, but still just machines, essentially only able to think 'Yes' or 'No' to all conundrums. Yet they are entirely ambitious and imperialistic and yet deadly incurious about life outside their vile, biotic city, Shoggothim. They can be in a room with a human and not notice its presence for weeks, still as an ocean floor. Or they can be deadly hunters, apparently taking delight in their own particularly hideous digestive process. Are they intelligent? Post-intelligent? Are they even sentient? The Elders do not know and neither does Tsan Chan.

It is telling the Al-Hazred refused to acknowledge that the Shoggoths were even on earth. Telling because even that madman so touched by the Outside could not face the thought of them, calling them a vile fairytale. So it is that even the Old Ones are wary of this new creation. They are unpredictable. They are dangerous. And they absolutely will not bow down to the religion of the Outer Gods Cthulhu brings. So it is the submarine cohorts of R'lyeh give the cold South of the world wide berth. Is there something Cthulhu fears?

### NPCs

A Shoggoth many, many millions of years old, the Shine is one of the leaders of its kind. Blessed with an ability to recreate human thought patterns and human appetites, the Shine has developed the ability to enjoy itself and feel human pleasure in realtime. It can even assume human shapes, somewhat, and has infiltrated Imperial bases before. Bald and fat in appearance, the Shine is curiously polite until the time comes for it to reveal its true form and feed.

The Argent Shoggoth is some sort of anomaly amongst its kind. While most are a dark colour, the Argent shines with pulsing silver light. It may be a leader or elite warrior amongst its kind and

### Tcho-Tcho

The Tcho-Tcho have a secret the Empire does not suspect.

They hate the world as it is. Their own gods are slaves to the Xothians and they themselves

are low on a pecking order, beneath the Deep Ones, beneath the Star-Spawn. They believed when it was a time of Gods they would be at their right hands. They believed they would be kings of creation, serving Emperors. Now, they are little more than bully-boys.

They hate this.

Oh, the work pleases them. They enjoy tormenting the Dreamers. They enjoy the terrors they inflict on the Empire. They enjoy a world of feasting but they detest the shabby treatment they receive from their caste-superiors. Their resentment is growing into hatred. They long to feast upon Gods and Monsters and themselves grow into something wonderful.

And the Ghoul-God, Mordiggian, wonders about these humans...

### NPCs

Minh Tam-Tran is a well known name to the Empire, especially feared by Dusk Walker long-range patrols. He is a hunter-killer for his people, relentless and barbarically savage. Men have burned themselves alive rather than be taken for one of Tam-Tran's feasts. Silent as death, this Tcho-Tcho warrior revels in the hunt and truly detests the Chanese that leave their bolt hole.

Eager to free her people from the Deep Ones, Kieu Phonm-Lon is prepared to make any deals with any Gods or Devils. She feels her people are being denied their destiny of eating their way to perfection. So it is she is eager to contact Ghouls and heretics of the Empire, joining forces against the hated Deep Ones. For a little while.

### Mythos Texts

The Kuen-Yuin have retained many famous texts, although they know them by different names than contemporary investigators may know them. The Deathless maintain elaborate libraries, with certain texts under guard as knowledge is still danger. Other tomes exist in private libraries of aristos. Dreamless serfs may discover such works in ruins, or inherit them. Lost and extinct languages, English, Greek, Latin, are exceptionally rare and only a handful in

the Empire speak them, most of those Kuen-Yuin who learned the languages firsthand.

Chanese texts are rather more matter-of-fact than tomes like the Mad Arab's famously oblique work. Indeed, some field texts for Chanese military would be considered priceless works of exacting, sick scholarship for a 20th century reader. There is a matter-of-factness about them that is chilling and nihilistic, that resists interpretation as anything other than a textbook of monstrosity.

Obtaining texts for research is extremely difficult for non-Deathless or Nobles. But there is a healthy verbal tradition in the Empire that makes access to such works less vital than to a contemporary scholar. The same goes for spells, which are closely monitored by the Kuen-Yuin and the Ophidians, who rest their powerbases upon such arcane. Nevertheless, such black memes as sorcery have ways and means to multiply.

## Cthulhu Mythos Knowledge

Very few beings have access to genuine Cthulhu Mythos knowledge. Most Dreamless will never see one of these entities and those that do will witness ghouls dancing under dark stars or the distant figures of Elders flying under cloud cover, nothing of real insight. Those who join the military will see far more mad Dreamers than they ever will a monster and even then, those monsters will be Tcho-Tchos or Deep One hybrids. They are simply told 'there are monsters, go kill them.'

The Mighty Children are purposefully kept ignorant of their heritage and rail as they might, they cannot gain access to those secrets that the Kuen-Yuin keep. They can live a thousand years and never hear words like Yog-Sothoth.

Elite troops may come to know a great deal about their enemies but never know a name, a history or a weakness. The Kuen-Yuin might specialise entirely in divination and know nothing of Invocations. A Eunuch knows only its mistress, not her heritage. So there is no need

for characters to start with specific knowledge of the Mythos.

What the Empire does have are the resources for learning a great deal about the Mythos very quickly, often firsthand. It is one of the reasons the Way exists at all.

## The Secret

There is a final matter known to only a few in the Empire, even fewer of them human. The Empress knows it, quivering in her palace. She is, after all, living it. The Deathless suspect it, faintly. The Mighty Children are exemplars of it, although, in a way, they are an evolutionary dead end because of it. The Serpent Folk know it, are jealous of it, but stand close to it so as to better survive it should it take place.

It is a simple fact.

For mankind, this is a crucible. This is a time of testing. One day, perhaps a hundred years, perhaps a hundred million, Cthulhu will leave this place, this ludicrous dust ball Earth. After all, his is an evangelical message and he has news to spread and other cultures to instruct in the ways of shouting, joy and murder. If humanity can stay as it is, alive, uncorrupted, perhaps using the discipline techniques the cruelty of the Empire has taught... there is a hope. A dying continent in a distant future, a black Jerusalem called Zothique. For some manipulators, some entities, this is a future to be hoped for.

If Tsan Chan, the Interdiction fails, then the last free humans will die screaming at the hands of the perfected Cthulhu Cult, the Dreamers. All will be left of our species are madmen, screaming worship of malign entities until we murder ourselves or summon our Gods to us. A brute race but, perhaps, a happy people, squatting in filth, living for childish pleasures, blithering blasphemies. This is the liberation knowledge of the Outer Gods brings. This is the second, likely fate of our species.

But there is a third way. A way of transformation. It is one of the reasons certain entities have bred with us, been amused at us, hunted us. Such a nonsense race, backwards and brutal

and yet... they have toyed with us. Our planet. Our species. It is because we can change and from out mud and muck and mire, some terrible race can emerge. We can spread across the stars, transformed by knowledge of the uncaring cosmos, embracing the malevolent apathy at the heart of everything. Humanity, transformed, set against life. Great New Ones.

It is for this reason Nyarlathotep removed his early patronage of the Kuen-Yuin. He wants to see if this can happen free from his manipulation. Humanity is an amusing thing, how much more amusing if we were the victims of apotheosis. Cthulhu wants this, he has walked in our dreams, a devastating apostle, now he waits to see if from the Dreamers, some appalling self-organisation will come, as it did to his own people incalculable billions of years ago. If not humans, no loss. Perhaps the Shoggoths will transform. Perhaps earth worms or virii. Cthulhu simply wishes conversion above all.

This is the purpose of the Dream. To give us the bodies of Gods with the minds of monkeys. By resisting it, we are costing ourselves a chance at the stars, to become something comparable to the Elders, or more. Perhaps much more. Perhaps we will fail. Perhaps we will remain Dreamers, and gibbering. Or perhaps humanity can stay humanity until the stars are neither Wrong nor Right, only dead and cold in a dead, cold cosmos.





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