

Spirit Conscript



Lore Documentation, Ed. 1.1

F.A.Q

"Hello Conscript! I hope your first night in the Dark Capital has been comfortable thus far?"

"...Dear me. Well, I suppose a bout of insomnia is a sure thing in an unfamiliar place. I can't blame you."

"I have just the thing. Perhaps a few hours of prattling over some tea will put your head to rest... And maybe, if we answer all your curiosities and questions, this City will feel less like an alien world and more like home."

"Oh, where to start? You're really spoiling me, you know. This skeleton only gets to talk about histories so often."

"So! What would you like to know?"



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The City Between

Who made the City Between?

“Well, that’s certainly a *start*... The world, time, and the City exist on something less like a straight line of cause-and-effect and more like a great, spanning wheel. Six spokes of space, four spokes of time. The realms of reincarnation and the Yugas, you see. Everything in them—Youdu included—is a permanent fixture in the wheel of Samsara, from beginning to end, in an eternal cycle neither created nor destroyed.”

“So, I suppose to answer your question, *nobody* made the City. It’s always been here. Just as there has always been life and death, there has always been a place between them. As for its purpose, its designer or their goals, we can only speculate.”

“Did a god or group of gods make it?”

“If there *is* some sort of divine arbiter out there, they’ve certainly done a fine job hiding themselves. The City Between is no closer to finding a definitive answer than Mortal World is.”

“Why doesn’t Aura exist in Mortal World, but is seemingly everywhere in Youdu?”

“To be brief, it *does* exist in Mortal World! In a very different form, and for very different ends, but it’s there. I’m certain you’re familiar with their religions, their worshipful ceremonies, their (admittedly primitive) martial arts, their meditations... you get the picture. For the most part, the only *useful* applications of Aura they’ve developed are a smattering of energy redirection practices considered pseudoscientific by modern people.”

“Why doesn’t most modern technology exist in Youdu, but is seemingly everywhere in Mortal World?”

“Every civilization has to decide where its greatest minds will direct their efforts, Conscript... The City Between chose the ultimate goal of immortality, presuming that, once obtained, anything would be within their grasps. Technological stagnation has followed that single-mindedness.”

“This City is not *wholly* populated by luddites, of course. There’s a sizable market for many of the conveniences and amenities of the modern age. Electric lighting, radio, public transit, and many other marvels from Mortal World are common! Granted, only *legally purchased and Yudi-approved* articles can be brought in, hence the Smuggling industry...”

“It’s even considered quite culturally *sikh* to dress in Mortal World clothing, ride a Mortal World bus through Limbo, and design new construction projects in the style of Mortal World cities. Some of the more traditionalist elements of society balk at these tasteless, sterile aesthetics—myself included—but they’re the norm in certain regions like the Bureaucratic Quarter.”

“How large is the City Between?”

“Quite large! If I recall, its eastern coast to its west is around three-hundred and seventy kilometers, and its northern coast to its southern edge is roughly two-hundred. Granted, the City *proper* doesn’t extend from coast to coast... Most of that spanning size consists of villages, farms, forests, and other natural features. Even so, the City itself is larger than any comparable metropolis in Mortal World, and by no small margin either.”



“What is a Spirit, and where do they come from?”

“If you want the short answer, you’re speaking to one.”

“The long answer is a little less concise. A Spirit is a representative emblem of significance to the mortal soul. Most Spirits are formed from the gibberish of the human psyche, but some are a bit more coherent. A person who dies with unfinished business, for example, might have felt such despair and vengefulness that a Spirit forms to finish the job. A group of disciples dedicating their lives to a certain idol might manifest the very being they worship. A collective dread of divine punishment, plague or disaster might bear those exact fears in the form of a Spirit. Such things are very rare, and in most cases Spirits are formed as randomly as thoughts and dreams.”

“Once a Spirit is formed, it is eternal and persists until the end of the Wheel. A Spirit’s *body* is still subject to impermanence and death, just as any mortal creature is. Since Spirits are not tied to the cycle of Karma, they do not burn away their negative Karma in hell or reap their positive Karma in heaven when they die. They must gather Aura from continued significance to mortals and regestate in the Spirit Womb, one of six realms of reincarnation. A Spirit which ceases to have significance to mortals may have to regestate in the Spirit Womb for thousands or even *millions* of years.”



“Spirits cannot create Aura on their own, and must rely on Aura from mortal souls, frequently gathered from worship. However, elder Spirits’ immense knowledge of Release Techniques and their centuries of experience make them far, far more efficient in its usage than any mortal could dream of becoming.”

“...*Not to toot my own whistle, of course...*”

“*Are King Yama and Emperor Yudi Spirits?*”

“Spirits of a sort. They are the representative emblems of *duality*, the disparity of opposites, a significance which *precedes significance itself*. They are therefore among the most powerful Spirits in the cosmos. A pattern of the Yuga Cycle demands that creation begin with an immense war between them, always resulting in a stalemate.”

“*What is a Chimera, and where do they come from?*”

“*The product of irresponsible alchemists...* Really, we should’ve never taught you mortals how to use it. It’s only ever caused problems for us.”

“A certain Technique of the Transfiguration discipline allows alchemists to make crude agglomerations of flesh, melding the feather of a chicken with the jaw of a crocodile, the fruit of a peach tree with the spikes of a cactus, and so on. A simple trick, but *highly* dangerous...”

“*Chimeras*—the technical term for such agglomerations—are universally compatible, and can interbreed with nearly any living thing to produce even more mingling of species. Enough alchemical experiments with such methods, and you’re *bound* to create something that runs rampant through the wilds of Youdu. The most dangerous and powerful Chimeras survive and spread, and the cycle of reproduction can’t be stopped once it’s started.”

“All of this might be tolerable if you mortals hadn’t had the impudence to mix *human flesh* with that of the Chimeras, creating cruel and often *sentient* hybrids. If it weren’t for the Beast Hunters and their tireless efforts, the City Between would be completely overrun. They grow in ever-expanding hives, finding new evolutionary routes to escape population control by any means necessary... Beast Hunters certainly have their work cut out for them.”



“What even is Aura?”

“The energy of the soul. To be more clear, the energy that permits experiential consciousness. Souls created energy by... Well, if I knew I’d be brewing up buckets of the stuff in my backyard...”

“How do Release Techniques work? Why do they create the effects they do?”

“By controlling the flow of Aura across the physical body, an Aura User converts energy from the innate crucible of their soul into tangible changes in the physical world.”

“The exact pattern of shaping varies Technique-by-Technique. The thing which *links* all Techniques is the *purpose*, the *meaning* behind that shaping process, which becomes ritualistic in nature through time and practice. The clearer the ritual used to

enact it, the more effective the Technique, even if that ritual is merely how the Aura moves and dissipates in the user's body."

"It's why for seemingly arbitrary reasons *certain actions can make Techniques stronger*. Saying its name gives its activation a clear starting-gun of distinction. Making a hand sign or pose can become habitually associated with the Technique and become a ritual gesture. Saying its Ritual Phrase—describing its function out loud—puts its meaning into the cosmos in the most literal sense imaginable."

"How many people are there in Youdu?"

"Tens of millions. The last census was conducted... oh, I don't know, *four hundred years ago*, and that put this great City at twenty-one million inhabitants. It could be much greater or lesser than that, for all I know. We've had plenty of population booms, mass-cullings, famines and epidemics since then. Knowing that sort of thing is a luxury reserved for *functional governments...*"

"Aura Users as a population are quite rare. Only one in a few hundred has the aptitude for Release Techniques, and most people won't even have a *twentieth* of the Aura you do in their soul's pool of energy."

"Why are the factions of Youdu divided by blood?"

"The most important reason is that *Affinities are passed down by family*. Strong Affinities mean greater influence, wealth, and eventual dominance over the City. *Techniques* aren't passed by blood, on the other hand. While in theory anyone could learn a clan's most secret Techniques, it's usually only the members of that clan who are born with strong enough Affinities to actually *use them*."



“In fact, I may very well have let you in on a few of those *secret Techniques*... Just don’t let that slip, eh?”

“Affinities are not necessarily *pure genetics*, of course. Think of them more like *talent*. A person can train, practice, and achieve higher feats in a discipline, but there will always be the matter of their *inborn aptitude*... something that might *always hinder them* in the race to mastery. So too with Affinities. It’s very possible to go beyond your genetic aptitude in Affinities, but you will always be at a disadvantage if you lack inherited gifts. It’s the unfortunate nature of luck that some are born the way they are. *Pitiable to be a mortal, isn’t it?*”



“Why don’t the *Aura Users of Youdu* use their abilities to, for instance, take over the Earth, or otherwise meddle in Mortal affairs?”

“Aura as an energy is more thoroughly and thickly suffused in the City Between than in any other place in the cosmos. Functionally, this means that the capacity to recover and regenerate Aura is *severely crippled* in Mortal World, making any would-be ventures of conquest ill-advised even in your Bronze Age, much less now. For all intents and purposes, Aura regenerates at minimal efficiency outside of Youdu. Outside of an Aura Burst, people with weak recovery actually *lose* Aura to the atmosphere of Mortal World very slowly if they stay for too long.”

Populations, Groups, History and Culture

“Where did the Yokai come from?”

“Roughly four millennia ago, Spirits were permitted to walk freely among mortals, and we lived as gods among them. *Better days, if you ask me...* It has long since been outlawed to reveal our existence, but in such times we ruled over your kind with greater power than you can imagine...”

“A select few mortals were chosen as our favored vessels, and were ritually made our avatars while our true bodies regestated. Blinded by the unexpected strength of—shall we say, *certain appetites?*—that come with your mortal physiology, many of us begot children, creating the Yokai.”

“...*What?* Did *I* get up to any of that *nonsense?* Of course *not!* Of course... well... *technically* I suppose...”

“Oh don’t give me that look. *Please.*”

“How were the Demon Clans formed once Yokai existed?”

“A few Spirits among us were more prolific than others. If the legends are to be believed, Vuseba managed to produce over a *hundred* offspring before her avatar’s body gave out. That small army came to be called the Blue Demon Clan. The Raja Danaav sired the Red Demon Clan, and Yakshanek sired the Pale Demon Clan, though the latter has not had a suitable avatar in thousands of years.”



“Being who she is, Vuseba immediately waged a bloody eugenic war against the offspring of other Spirits so that her spawn could dominate all of Mortal World. In large part she succeeded. Only a few rare bloodlines of Yokai persist outside direct descendants of the three Demon Clans.”

“Of course, Mortal World is presently ruled by humans, so she did not succeed *entirely*.”

“By some miraculous gift of providence or persistence, humans managed to drive Yokai into hiding, with the largest bulk of their numbers fleeing to the City Between. A few stayed in Mortal World and became legendary demons of human folklore.”

“What has happened among them since that time?”

“Most of the straggling Yokai have gone extinct in Mortal World, and by the laws of Youdu they are not permitted to return there unless they can adequately conceal themselves.”

“In more recent generations, the Blue Demon Clan has become synonymous with the Hellion Mob, infamous for their cunning and perfidy. They’re a bunch of gutless, genocidal sacks of... well, I won’t interject *my opinions*...”

“In any case, they continue willfully in the mission of their progenitor, and aim to crush other Yokai Clans into extinction. Whether through slavery or slaughter, it matters little.”

“The Red Demon Clan—perhaps in spite of their rival—are much more adherent to codes



of honor and fair dealing. In general they favor the Six-Finger, being the only criminal organization with a scope great enough to challenge the Hellion Mob.”

“The Pale Demon Clan is unquestionably the weaker of the three. Finding a suitable avatar for Yakshanek would rebalance the pecking order of Youdu and the Exorcists are already powerless in the face of the Trigram as is, so much of their resources are dedicated to opposing any attempt by the Pale Demons to return to their former glory.”

“How are their relations with the other bloodlines of Youdu?”

“Well, history doesn’t lie... Every time the Blue Demon Clan has allied itself in some temporary arrangement with the human dynasties, it’s ended in disaster for all parties involved. They simply *cannot be trusted...Yes, yes, personal bias acknowledged... Moving on.*”

“The Hair Tribe and the Red Demon Clan seem to like each other, I suppose, in a *brothers-in-bloodshed* sort of sense. Their cultural values seem to line up quite nicely: physical strength, suspicion towards sorcerers and scholars, a masculine patriarch at the head of their familial hierarchy... Both are inextricably entwined with the Beast Hunter’s trade, too. They get along best when alcohol’s involved, so I hear.”

“Something quite similar seems to interlink the Blue Demon Clan and the Scale Tribe. Ambition, ruthlessness, and a willingness to obtain victory by any means knits them close together. In whatever backstabbing, conniving ‘partnerships’ occur between them, there seems to be a mutual understanding that betrayal is inevitable and even *in good sport.*”

“Morally bankrupt sociopaths, the whole lot of them...”

“Now, the *real* problem with making the Yokai get along is their penchant for kidnapping human males. Men are the scarcer gender in the City Between, and when

you're in a eugenic tug-of-war like the Yokai are, the obvious solution is to simply *steal more of them*. At least, that's how the Demon Clans see it. You can imagine it doesn't make the Human Dynasties very keen on alliances, especially with how carefully they've had to curate their bloodlines to pass down powerful Aura Affinities. Most of the power and influence of the Demon Clans come from their sheer numbers, and they seem willing to sacrifice any goodwill on the part of humans to stay the majority demographic in Youdu."

"There have been a number of proposed solutions. It's neither my place nor my preference to articulate them. Suffice to say, they've had... *mixed results*."

"Where did the Shapeshifters come from?"

"There have been many side effects to the millenia-spanning search for immortality. One is the Shapeshifters."

"You see, the alchemists of antiquity discovered it was possible to split one's soul between their native human body and an animal—A Familiar, more precisely. It's a remarkably similar process to the preparation of avatars for the Spirits, and ended in a similar result: the creation of a novel race of mortals."

"Many sorcerers who lost their physical bodies to age or death would return inside their Familiars, and using certain Techniques were able to shift back into a semi-humanoid form."

"There was actually an amusing interim about two millennia ago in which these sorcerers were entrapped in the bodies of cats, foxes, serpents and peacocks, desperately flipping through the pages of their manuscripts for a way to return to human bodies."



"Good times... We Spirits enjoyed quite the chuckle at your expense."

"Some of the instincts and features of their new animal nature seem to have stuck, and the shapeshifting sorcerers eventually acclimated to their new bodies, to community and eventually culture among one another. The rest is history."

"How were the Animal Tribes formed once the Shapeshifters existed?"

"Blood, guerilla warfare and conquest spanning a century of tried and failed armistices. Powerful animalistic instincts tend to make the Shapeshifters pack-oriented and suspicious of others. The Shell Tribe was all but destroyed in the conflict, and only a few surviving vestiges of the family remain. After the war, none of the Shapeshifters are on mutually good terms with one another. There is simply too much blood between them, like an incarcerating wall withholding all hopes of peace."

"Those that live permanently in the City proper are usually quite estranged, desperate, or far from home, and they are much more instinctually comfortable in the wild. Their natural affinity for the wilds and their strong instincts for the hunt have led them to settle in the nomadic territories of the Tribelands. "

"What has happened among them since that time?"

"The Hair Tribe have become incredible martial fighters, Beast Hunters and guerilla tacticians, abandoning their original identity as sorcerers due to tribalist superstitions. It is greatly frowned upon to practice any sort of alchemical or mystical disciplines beyond healings and the removal of curses in their circles. They've even gone as far as to actively crusade against these practices at certain points in recent memory."

"The Scale Tribe, conversely, hold powerful sorceric practices in their oral histories, some hidden even to the likes of the *Majushin*. They take immense pride in their craft,



and often use it to further their ambitions in secret. Collection of a vast array of Techniques for the sake of the tribe is considered an honored goal.”

“The Feather Tribe has become increasingly isolationist, sectarian and religiously fanatical in recent decades, providing some of the best Exorcists to the City along with

some of its most abominable cult practices. Some theorize that a certain native fruiting body has caused a kind of mass-hysteria in their territory, but since they are more than happy to cannibalize or sacrifice outsiders, very few expeditions have sought to confirm this rumor.”

“It would be remiss of me to not mention that these assessments apply to the *traditional tribalist sects* of the Shapeshifters. Many are everyday citizens of the inner City Between regard the ambitions and practices of their tribe as the product of an excessively isolated, naturalist society.”

“How are their relations with the other bloodlines of Youdu?”

“Well, the Shapeshifters don’t like *each other*, but they can seemingly put aside their differences at the drop of a hat to ally with other races in Youdu. The Hair Tribe has quite good relations with the Red Demon Clan, and the Scale Tribe can seem to find at least some common ground with the Blue Demon Clan in the midst of frequent conflict.”

“As for *humans*, The Hair Tribe seems to find the most trouble with the Majushin and Senguru sects. The Majushin they regard as witches, and they frequently accuse the Senguru of aiding and abetting dark Spirits for personal gain. To the Hair Tribe’s

credit, *neither are inaccurate assessments*. They've attempted numerous raids on the Majushin's famous Turtle Islands without success, and tribal fervor and moral outrage fuel further attacks periodically."

"The isolation of the Feather Tribe prevents them from having any relations outside of violent skirmishes with the other Tribes. Occasionally, researchers from the Institute will attempt to study their practices and come back bloody or dead, so *I suppose they aren't on good terms with Youdu's academics....*"

"...The *Shell Tribe*? Oh goodness, I'm not the one to ask. Some histories are too obscure even *for me*. Very few members of the Shell Tribe remain, and the handful that do are very, very secretive. It's a rabbit hole of endless speculation to parse their goals, their cultural practices, or even how many are alive in the modern era. If they ever have a dramatic resurgence of population, perhaps we'll get a good read on their ambitions and practices. For now, they are among the most mysterious groups in Youdu."



"Where did the human sects come from?"

"Since all the mortal races of Youdu descend from humans, and Aura from mortal souls is a precondition for the birth of Spirits, there is *no historical account of their origins as a species.*"

"That doesn't stop them from theorizing, of course."

“The Majushin for their part believe that humans are merely Spirits from the previous cycle of the great Wheel, and that each Spirit is tumultuously reshaped into a human at the end of time. This is in large part motivated by their ultimate pursuit of immortality, and their legendary alchemy which allowed a few of them to *become Spirits*. It’s pure propaganda, but until it can be disproven it supports their claim of absolute superiority over all other bloodlines.”

“Funny, how eager you humans are to become immortal... I’d much rather be subject to reincarnation than painstakingly form a new body in the Spirit Womb. It’s no *cakewalk*, I’ll tell you that much... But the grass is always greener, I suppose.”



“The Senguru’s theories are more down-to-earth: a mortal is a virtuous conglomeration of matter, given an animate soul merely by the universe experiencing itself. Nothing more, nothing less. The cycle of Karma is self-inflicted, and the illusion that we’re any more or less than animals is a result of solipsistic isolation in a single body, which can be easily overcome with a little effort and know-how.”

“Notably, almost all Conduction Techniques originate from their headstrong goal to unify themselves with physical matter and energy. Ask any Senguru master, and they’ll tell you that getting better at such Techniques is merely a matter of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘controlling’. Some Senguru elders are said to *consciously experience* the matter and energy they manipulate.”

“A lot of pseudo-spiritual mumbo-jumbo, if you ask me.”

"The Ninokata family traditionally holds that humans—*women first and foremost*—are an inevitability of the infinite passage of time. Until a conscious observer comes into being, everything is in relativistic chaos. The world only begins to have meaning when that chaos amalgamates by pure chance into humans."

"Finally the Jiahao..."

"The Jiahao *really* don't care."

"Any fruitless theorizing is pointless and distracting, so why bother? They could be training and cultivating instead of wasting time twiddling thumbs over unanswerable questions. They're here, they have tangible goals, and they cannot neglect them to philosophize over nothing."



"There's something amusingly poetic about that level of acceptance, I think."

“How were the human dynasties formed once the humans existed?”

“They formed rather quickly once a few of Mortal World’s alchemists discovered how to enter Youdu. To reach their *current form*, where each dynasty has its own specialized Affinity through selective breeding, the Fourfold Path had to be established. Knowledge and proliferation of Release Techniques followed shortly thereafter.

“What is the Fourfold Path?”

“The four methods of escaping impermanence, followed by the four human dynasties and corresponding to the four Aura Affinities. In what might seem a twist of fate, it is *impossible to create a novel Release Technique except by attempting to evade impermanence*. As far as my knowledge goes, *all other attempts have failed*.”

“The *Core Affinity* for all its mystifying strength is merely a result of cultivation to achieve an invincible body. The *Alchemy Affinity* has sought an invincible soul. The *Phase* and *Flow Affinities* instead seek to disperse themselves across creation, through time and space or through matter and energy respectively.”

“Curious, isn’t it? As if some fundamental force of the cosmos were favoring the goal of enlightenment! It is among the most perplexing truths I have ever come to know, and a humbling reminder that there are secrets even we Spirits cannot approach.”

“What has happened among them since that time?”

“The Majushin became the dominant human bloodline by actually *succeeding* in escaping impermanence.”

“Two members of their family in the past four-hundred years have succeeded in becoming a Spirit through a secret Technique theorized and attempted for over a

millenia. Rather than worship Spirits, the Majushin have redirected their whole family's efforts and reverence to these sovereign attainers, accelerating the development of their gestating bodies in the Spirit Womb. They hope these ancestors will bear true immortality and godlike power when they reemerge."

"...Their names? I believe The Majushin actually consider their mortal names *blasphemy*. Their names as Spirits are *Sattva Panfaetha* and *Sugemajo*, worshiped as dualistic ancestor-Spirits of treasured knowledge and hidden secrets respectively. The Majushin have made great efforts to spread the cultic worship of these ancestors in Youdu, sowing the seeds of conflict with the Exorcists and the Senguru."

"If either *Sattva Panfaetha* or *Sugemajo* were to obtain an avatar, the worship of the Majushin could accelerate their influence to heights even greater than the Trigram. Like the Pale Demon Clan, the Exorcists must ruthlessly stamp out their ambitions without creating just cause for all-out war."

"On a more *political* note, the Ninokata have become the only real, tangible threat to the increasingly concentrated wealth and power of Youdu's most influential castes. They hold to a policy called "Self-Forfeiture by Corruption," in which they assert their infrangible right to kill an unjust leader."



“That policy—which they adhere to assiduously—is the only substantive influence the people of Youdu have over their leaders, however vicious. The authorities really can’t challenge an entire clan of invisible, untouchable assassins, much less find them. There is little the power-that-be can do but bargain and challenge the Ninokata’s bluff. Their image has dramatically shifted from cold, cruel assassins to defenders of the people in the face of despotic slavery to Spirits and the negligence of Yama and Yudi’s Ministries.”

“Any sentiment of rebellion is something the upper crust would very much like silenced and declawed. The Ninokata are almost exclusively female, and their last legitimate male has a bounty on his head like no other. His death would likely mean their extinction in the next hundred years. That is, unless desperation forces their clan to change its policies towards bloodline purity.”

“The Senguru’s role as spiritual and ethical authority has largely declined over the centuries. How? I suppose a gradual relaxation in moral and religious code, occurring over decades so slowly and subtly that only we Spirits could see the writing on the wall. And why would we speak up? Exorcism from the Senguru is one of the greatest threats to our eminence over the City.”

“They’ve become cloistered. Less concerned with Youdu, with power, with *anything*... More *secretive*, more *quiet*... Many believe this is a sign that the Senguru are on the cusp of transcending impermanence, just as the Majushin did. I can only speculate on their progress, but they have more



promise than the Ninokata and the Jiahao at present.”

“The *Jiahao*.... They’re growing more and more paranoid, taking up the mantle of moral bulwark in the decline of the Senguru.”

“And rightly so! This City needs a kick in the pants. The Jiahao greatly appeal to the revolutionary spirit of Youdu’s poor against the status quo. Unlike the Ninokata, however, the Jiahao aren’t attached to such controversial policies as the Self-Forfeiture by Corruption. They attract less anarchist sentiment, and are seen as traditionalists rather than cold-blooded killers. They enjoy far more allegiance from the greater whole of Youdu, and even the favor of some unorthodox political powers—something the Ninokata could not possibly obtain.”

“What can you tell me about the Undead?”

“They have a little less intrigue and history than their brother races, given that they are merely mortals who have found ways to attach parts of their soul to their body and enter Youdu upon death. A shockingly trivial process! They are more of a collective of mutual benefactors than a family, and most of them aren’t related by blood. They own the Fortune’s Sepulchre Casino in the Devil Moon, most of Youdu’s banks, and a smattering of other lucrative ventures, which over the eons their careful investments have supported. Among trifles between the other races, they usually just side with whoever will be the most profitable to support.”

“All this obsession with profiteering comes from their desire to provide wealth to future Undead in Youdu, so that they will lead a more comfortable life before their next reincarnation whisks them away. To them, that is a very meaningful task.”



"How is Youdu governed?"

"Not well, I'll tell you that much Conscript..."



"Yama and Yudi each have a gaggle of magistrates to their name, representing the interests of different sectors of the populace. They are chosen by the celestial princes and expelled just as easily. Yama's side consists of Ten Magistrates of Hell, and Yudi's side consists of Seven Golden Sages, also referred to as Magistrates of Heaven."

"That might seem a bit unbalanced, and it is, but it's of little real consequence. Youdu's labyrinthian policies essentially require unanimity from these seventeen bureaucrats just to put up a *stop sign*, for crying out loud."

"That layer of red tape is fit for preventing another War of Creation. Not so expedient at preventing criminal activity and a rule of the rich..."

General Questions from /cyoag/ and /mcyoag/

"What can you tell me about the Institute?"

"Something of an unusual place, that college. It enjoys a large, sprawling campus in the Feudal Spirit Chateaus, suspended in thin air with winding stairwells and hanging gardens of ivy wavering ominous in the fog..."

"It was initially established to find the answers to the City's greatest questions: what was here before the City, and what can we learn through them? You've already become familiar with the notion that time is not a line, but a circle that repeats itself. The City's unique position in relation to the wheel of time allows the remnants of previous Kalpas to remain as ruins. Dig down deep enough into Youdu's soil, and you will find evidence of a City built upon a City built upon a City... seemingly *indefinitely*. The Institute was established to study these former Cities and compile what histories we can, in the distant hope of finding a way to save the City from the cycle's inevitable end."

"In the process of doing so, they've discovered no shortage of Techniques. Their scholarship is tireless, and their work is deep and seemingly infinite."

"What are succubi and incubi?"

"Libidinous little gremlins who have adapted to a manner of gathering Aura *less tasteful* than Spirits such as myself. Their primary strategy relies on devouring the Aura of humans through... *physical means, shall we say*. Since you mortals are seemingly *incapable of controlling yourselves* when it comes to prurient activity, it provides an easy way to leech Aura that particular Spirits are all too happy to exploit."

"There's a troubling conundrum as far as sorting out how succubi and incubi fit into Youdu's four primary races. Yokai, technically speaking, are the offspring of a Spirit with a reproductively compatible body and a mortal, or the race consisting of such

descendants. Succubi and Incubi are *slightly* more nuanced than that categorization allows.”

“Succubi are Spirits whose vessels are fit to carry offspring. Rather than actually carry the offspring of those mortals they victimize—a *taxing and gorey process, I’m sure you know, which would not benefit their own proliferation*—they simply use these reproductive systems as a way to create vessels for other Succubi, pulling them out of the Spirit Womb and creating new bodies for them to inhabit through your *primitive and unhygienic congresses*. A Succubus’s body is designed to bear the vessel of another Succubus, put succinctly. Their unions with mortals only produce more Succubi, hence why they are more populous.”



“Incubi are sex Spirits who do not have such faculties. The offspring they produce with mortals are born as Yokai, and though these children inherit much of the famous good looks and proclivities of their sires, they are only Succubi or Incubi in the *derogatory and cultural sense*. Not Spirits proper. They tend to proliferate with less *infectiousness* than Succubi, but are still more successful at gathering Aura than most Spirits... *Whatever works, I suppose.*”

“What is the Fairy Star? How does it work? Can it really stop the end of the Yuga Cycle? What happens if the Yuga Cycle concludes?”

“Shall I be terse? It’s a mere legend, as far as I’m concerned. ‘*Wish upon a star*’ and all that... I’ve seen too many bright young Conscripts such as yourself waste their tragically short mortal lives searching for it in vain, so I don’t want to get your hopes too high...”

"...But as a purely theoretical matter, I have my speculations."

"We may presume that it is an artifact created by former Cities in former Yuga Cycles—the very same ones The Institute studies. Our present study of Alchemy, advanced as it may be, is simply not ripe enough to create such an object. I make this assumption because, based on the nature of the Fairy Star, it would seem to be a *highly unnatural object*, one which would not be produced by the normal course of a Yuga Cycle or as a mere construct of the world itself. After all, if such an object *were to be a natural part of the world*, it would follow that the Yuga Cycle would have been escaped by now!"

"One other theory posits that if the Yuga Cycle is itself infinite—infinite cycles before and after the present one, I mean—then the Fairy Star was created as a sort of pyritic point about the human condition: that even if the Fairy Star *could* end the Cycle, the inherent impurity of the human heart, their fixation with material wealth, power and petty attachments, would ensure that it *never will* end the Cycle, as proven by the fact that the infinite Cycle is yet unbroken."

"That's a pessimist's view, at least."

"What happens when the Yuga Cycle ends? Oh dear me, that's a question for...well I don't know anyone who's lived *that* long. What we *do* know is that seemingly everywhere but the City Between forgets everything from previous Cycles, and based on anthropological records from the Institute, even the scant remnants in the City are almost totally atomized in some yet undisclosed cataclysmic event."

"As for its criteria for a 'pure' wish? I can't really say for sure, but I hypothesize it would be *gravely, gravely strict*... and its inner workings likely *incomprehensible* to Spirits and mortals alike. It would *have* to be, in order to circumvent the untold multitudes who would surely try to attain an impure wish through trickery, proxies, or other unsavory means."

"What can you tell me about Yama, Yudi, The Trigram, and Yakshanek? How powerful are they?"

"I can speak on some more than others..."

"Yama and Yudi are Spirits, as I've mentioned, but of a kind which no other Spirit is. They are freed from the great dependance we Spirits have on mortals by their supreme nature as embodiments of the dualistic cosmos. In a certain sense, the world itself and its ever-churning dualistic turmoil is a ritual of worship to them.



"...That's a vague and shallow way of putting it, but it's what will likely make the most sense to a mere mortal. The very nature of the cosmos is aligned around these two beings, and so they are freed from the necessity of mortal worship. Such ceremonies are still greatly empowering to them, but the whims of mortals are no limitation on their strength."

"The Trigram, in relative terms, are head-and-shoulders below Yama and Yudi as far as sheer power and knowledge are concerned. *Their* strategy

relies on creating an expanding population of Yokai progeny that continually provide them a glut of Aura throughout the centuries. This is why Vuseba is so determined to have her progeny dominate the population of Youdu, and why the Raja Danaav's spawn are so opposed to their proliferation."

"There is a Trigram in two senses: one in the sense of *worshippers*, and one in the sense of *rulers*. The *Solar Trigram Cult* recognizes a Trigram consisting of Vuseba, the Raja

Danaav and Yakshanek, with the goal being to empower the ancestral Spirits of the Yokai. The *City at large* recognizes a Trigram of the three most powerful living Spirits, excluding Yakshanek in favor of Dokurokuro the Living Grave....”

“*Who is Dokurokuro, you ask? A Spirit of undeath who has fallen out of fashion as far as worship is concerned. He is still among the most powerful Spirits in the City, I assure you... but is undoubtedly weaker than Vuseba and the Raja Danaav.*”

“Where Vuseba and the Raja Dannav’s strategy relied upon a progeny of worshippers, Dokurokuro had a more *unorthodox approach...* hard to pass by the River Vaitarani each day and not see those innumerable souls as an *opportunity, mmm?*”

“He plucked thousands of these passing souls from the clutches of death, placed them into new bodies and received worship as his compensation. Not a bad strategy, until other Spirits saw the same gold rush that he did and began to slowly siphon away from his supply of worshippers like leeches. He succeeded at hoarding souls for a time, but not forever...”

“He’s reclusive these days. Scarce are his public appearances, and his lack of worship from the Solar Trigram was the nail in his proverbial coffin. But he is still very much alive, and on those rare occasions he shows himself he is a force to be reckoned with...”

“*But who knows when that will be...?*”

“*What are the terms of my Conscription?*”

“To be determined. Frankly, I’ve chosen to resurrect you largely for personal gain. I’m compensated for your labor in proportion to your skills and abilities—hence why we’ve spent so long fine tuning that body of yours. I don’t have any obligations once you’re in your Conscriptor’s employment. You can feel free to run for the hills for all I care! I do hope we’ll stay good friends though, I scarcely get much excitement these

days...You Conscripts provide some much-needed stories of adventure to entertain me."

"Tomorrow morning, I'll give you what I'd call a crash-course in the Techniques and skills you'll need to fulfill the duties of your employer. A little magically enhanced learning here, a few masterfully-crafted Waidan pills there, and you'll be fit as a fiddle. Don't expect to learn new tricks as quickly as I'm teaching you, dear Conscript; I'm expending no shortage of my own precious time and resources to accelerate your development, at great cost to my personal powers... *permanent cost, I should add, which I am uniquely suited to provide...*"



"What is the Aura Burst?"

"A highly rare event scarcely seen in a given millenia, much less a mortal lifetime. Aura, outside of mortal souls, is nearly impossible to spontaneously generate. *Trust me, if there were an easy way, we Spirits would have found it by now...* but the Aura Burst is a seemingly random exception to that rule. It is a release of Aura into the atmosphere from what appear to be terrestrial sources in the mantle of Youdu, seeping out of the dank depths of this City's forgotten eons. Our fair Institute has evidently not dug deep enough to answer precisely what its source is, but an Aura Burst seemingly builds for centuries before any evidence of its impending arrival appears."

"In the days of the Aura Burst, you might *double* what powers I can provide through your whole tutelage..."

"Makes me wonder why I even bother, honestly..."

“Are the Dynasties of Youdu who haven’t yet escaped impermanence failures? Can someone who has escaped impermanence create new Techniques, since pursuing it is a requirement?”

“By no means! In due time, one might imagine that *each* of the four Dynasties might achieve their own means of impermanence escape. As you have likely observed, they are all very, very close. None of their efforts are futile, though one had to be the first.”

“In theory, there are as many means to avoid impermanence as the human mind can conjure, even exceeding the Fourfold Path... There are perhaps still undiscovered methods beyond the Universal Sovereign to attain an invincible soul too! That is to say, I doubt that anyone lacks the capacity to produce novel Techniques, even having escaped impermanence themselves.”

“What is the currency of the City Between?”



“Coins and small, flat ingots of metal called Plates, usually with about four times the metal by volume of their corresponding coin. Coins are usually used for small transactions, where Plates are designed to naturally stack like (*incredibly heavy*) decks of cards for large transactions. Their value is provided and backed by the Lunar Temple. A single coin can be returned to the Temple for the penance of a small wrongdoing—a white lie, staring a little too long at a

pretty girl, denying help to someone in need, that sort of thing. Plates can remit guilt for faults a little more severe, but there are limits. Some evils would be unethical to forgive through simple monetary contribution (murders of malice, extortion, or

serious theft, for example) and instead demand long and painful penances and numerous good deeds to be fully cleansed."

"We can't have the City's wealthy getting away with *everything*, now can we?"

"Among other questions: Do you miss having flesh? Have you always been undead? What is your favorite color? Are you biased towards the Undead? Have you ever considered putting something in your eye sockets? Isn't exposing your bare skeleton sort of like nudity?"

"I like you, Conscript. To answer all of these, in order..."

"I have only had flesh in old, long-forgotten bodies... *It's really not all that.*"

"I am a Spirit, not an Undead."

"Red is quite pretty."

"I am unbiased, though they once liked me more than they do now."

"I... hadn't *thought of it*, though I suppose it could be a good chuckle to stick some googly eyes inside of them."

"I'll dress how I like in my manor, and you can avert your gaze if you're feeling prudish."

"Who are the leaders of each Faction in Youdu?"

"Let's see... Well, Shen-Roh (the current head of the Six-Finger) was a former head of the Red Demon Clan, but that role has since been filled by Jin the Gold-Horned, named for... *well you can imagine*. Though he's a little less intelligent than Shen-Roh was, that also means he's less *conniving*. The Red Demon Clan values his trustworthiness, his determination in the face of odds,



and his ability to crack skulls much more anyway.”



“As for the *Blue Demons* and their *Hellion* scoundrels, both are headed by a pair of young, violent twins... The Clan, by Momo-dono, and the Hellion by Koko-dono. The fact that they’re twins also means their leadership is practically interchangeable, much as the Blue Demons and the Hellion themselves. They both wield gigantic oversized weapons, both talk down to every other race in the City, both are unerringly willing to sacrifice morality to achieve victory at any given time... *to say they’re popular among their clan would be an understatement.*”

“Perhaps their biggest offense to the other clans is how frequently they steal human men for impromptu weddings-of-force to win powerful genes. They’re frequently called succubi in the derogatory sense for *that* heinous crime...”





“The Pale Demon Clan—and to a certain extent the Trigram Cults as well—are headed by Botan-dono, an eccentric demoness driven mad by her fanatical devotion to Yakshanek... It’s truly a frightening thing to see. She’s not well-liked by her clan, unstable as she is. She is the bane of the Exorcists, wielding extreme powers of Alchemy and evading capture at seemingly every turn. Nobody knows whether she’s actually *close to resurrecting Yakshanek*, but I can’t imagine she’s *far from completion*...”

“The Hair Tribe is headed by a beast of a man named Kenji the White Wolf, the father of Futaba—their exiled princess. Intensely paranoid, conspiratorial, and honor driven... the kind of man who lashes out in fury when questioned. The kind of man who temporarily exiles his daughter for her spoiled nature. And his burning, brow-creased hatred is almost *unilaterally* centered on his eternal enemy, the enemy who he wants to see driven into the ground before he sheds this mortal coil: *The Majushin*.”



“If you think you’ve seen hatred, you have *never* seen fury as white-hot as Kenji’s toward the Majushin. They are demons, pillagers of this City, the sowers of this age of

corruption. To him, this City can *never* be free as long as a single Majushin worm still draws breath."

"Nobody appears to be able to reach the innermost sanctums of the Feather Tribe in recent memory, so if they do indeed have a shaman at the head of their Tribe, you can bet he is protected from all visitation by outsiders. Such knowledge is unfortunately beyond my paygrade, Conscript..."

"The Scale are too disjoint and spread across decrepit little hermitages to have any kind of centralizing leadership. Their hierarchy is mostly by age on those rare occasions they gather."

"As for the *humans*..."

"The Majushin shun any notion of centralized leadership outside of their ancestor Spirits, as doing so would detract from their centrality to the family. Various complex rites are used to receive direct transmissions of their will for the Dynasty, allowing Sugemajo and Sattva Panfaetha to lead by proxy through the learned elders of the Sorcerer bloodline."



"The Jiahao's current patriarch is Weimin the Conqueror, and the instigator of the Jiahao's shift toward the moral backbone of the City, supplanting that position from the Senguru. He's also made it a part of the dynasty's priorities to establish good relations with the Hair Tribe and the Red Demon Clan, a trifecta of powerful martials which he believes could finally

bring the Majushin down a peg. He's one of the more strategically-minded leaders in the Jiahao's history, and positioning his clan for future dominance is his ultimate objective. There are rumors that he is even secretly in support of certain revolutionary organizations in the hopes of winning the support of commoners disaffected by the corruption of the City. He's secured a position as 3rd Magistrate of Hell, a seat which he gladly uses to push forward the goals of his own bloodline."



"The Senguru's highest elder is Charuvinda Chandra, a thin, skeletal old ascetic who scarcely speaks or leads at all. He can typically be found completely still in transcendental meditation for days at a time, on a single meditation mat, with neither food nor drink. When he *does* speak, he informs his clan on matters of the utmost importance, which he seemingly knows by intuition alone: the locations of rising Spirit

cults, the machinations of rival factions, the movements of the City's weather months in advance. Rumor has it that he is close to escaping impermanence by Dissolution unto Matter, a state which would rocket the Senguru into equal competition with the Majushin. He is the 1st Magistrate of Heaven, though his sheer inertia as a leader nets the Senguru little benefit in that role."

"The Ninokata's matriarch is an uncharacteristically young woman named Takako. While usually such a position is filled by a greying, conniving old grandmother with ten children, Takako is an unmarried, thirty-something romantic raised in the Dynasty's darkest hour of male shortage. She is a leader more open to new membership than any in the Dynasty's history. Her thirst for a just City, with all of its

corruption carved away, is far greater than her desire to continue her clan's incestuous purity."

"Nothing to do with the fact that she's helplessly fond of young men in secret, of course... I mean really, you should see the magazines she reads... All her sober brooding and edge just makes it more hilarious."

"Her position on many issues makes her hated by both the City's political elite and the traditionalists of her clan, a position which she must walk with tightrope elegance. She isn't particularly concerned with dominance among the other bloodlines of Youdu, though she would not shun alliances against the Majushin if their evils became too grave to stomach. Some might say they already are..."

"I hope that gives you some small notion of the City's politics and interplay."

