

Chapter I Introduction

The story of the Stone Monkey

A new day dawns and high upon a mountain heaven observes a strange sight. From a stone egg a fully formed Monkey is born. Observers report this auspicious event to Jade Emperor, the ruler of the Western Heaven.

The stone monkey is bold and energetic and goes on to lead the other monkeys to the Land of Water Curtain Mountain. By being the first to leap the high waterfall and see what is at the top, he becomes their King.

Life in the Land of Water Curtain Mountain is idyllic, but after decades of bliss the Monkey king became restless.

"What is it our Lord?" his old monkey advisers asked.

"I am ruler of all that I see, but one day I will be dead and forgotten" the Monkey King anxiously replies.

"We have heard that certain Taoist Sages who live in the lands of men know the secret of immortality" one of the wise monkeys replies.

"Excellent then I shall find such a Sage, who will be sure to teach me. I will need not fear death and you will not need fear the loss of your beloved King my little monkeys!" exclaims the Monkey King.

Greatly excited the stone monkey prepares immediately for the journey and after saying goodbye leaves his subjects for the lands of men.

If you wish gentle reader to learn what became of the restless Monkey King, his quest for immortality and the trouble that it got it him into please read on.

The Journey to the West

This is a storytelling game that draws its inspiration from the 16th Century Chinese book "Journey to the West" by Wu Ch'eng-en. "Monkey" is the name of the English translation. It takes place in a vivid and colourful version of China, featuring immortals and locations from popular Chinese Mythology, to weave a tale that is fantastical, satirical and spiritual.

The book tells the story of the exploits of the immortal Monkey King. Born from a stone egg, he rises to become king of all the monkeys. Worried that he will not live for ever he learns the secrets of immortality from the Taoist Sage, Patriarch Subobki. Then he sets his mind to rising though ranks of heavenly immortals in the Western Taoist Heaven. He runs amok when his ego cannot be satisfied by all the honour that is accorded to him. Great Buddha in the Eastern Buddhist Heaven hears that there is trouble in the Western Heaven and pops over to see what is happening. Seeing the troublesome Monkey, he traps him under a mountain, saying that one day a passer by will release him and provide him with the means to re-enter heaven.

The second part of the story sees Monkey released by the Buddhist Priest Tripitaka. In service to the priest he accompanies him from China to India to recover sacred scrolls missing from the Chinese canon of Buddhist writings. Two other fallen Immortals, the Demon Sandy and ex-guard Pigsy accompany them also seeking redemption by serving Tripitaka. After many adventures they regain the scrolls and Monkey who has been judged to have redeemed himself enters the Buddhist heaven.

In this game the players play Immortals who like Monkey, Sandy and Pigsy, have fallen out of favour with the heavenly authorities and seek to regain their place in Heaven.

What you need to play

A group of two to six players. One player takes on the role of Narrator, who describes the games setting and plays all the supporting immortals, while the other players play the immortals who take centre stage in the story. While the game can work as a very intimate and intense 'one on one' game (one immortal run by a player with a Narrator) the game works best with a group of three to six immortals.

Pencils/pens and paper. For writing out the player immortals, drawing rough maps and making notes during the game.

A deck of cards. Each player and the Narrator has a deck of cards. Players and narrators draw cards from the deck to resolve the action, such as fights and lively debates, during the adventure.

An adventure. Which can either be prewritten, such as the ones in the back of this book, or created by the Narrator. Guidance on how to create adventures is given in the Narrator's section of the book.

Some time. A game of Monkey typically takes between three and four hours.

Imagination. Since the game does not have a physical board all the action takes place in the imagination of the players and takes the form of a two way conversation between the players and the narrator. The players describe their immortals actions and the narrator describes the reaction of the non player immortals or environment.

Earth, heaven's mirror.

The game takes place in a mythological version of ancient China. In this imaginary version of China, mortals swarm in the great cities of the Tang dynasty (7th To 10th century AD). The earthly emperor has his heavenly counterpart who he is directly responsible to. The Jade Emperor who sits in the Western Heaven has his own court a celestial bureaucracy of Immortals who are responsible for the smooth running of the cosmos. Great Buddha sits in the Eastern Heaven and with the aid of the other Buddhas offers the virtuous man release from the eternal cycle of rebirth for those prepared to follow the way.

Restless and disobedient Immortals.

Each player controls an 'immortal'. This is their alter-ego in the story which the Narrator describes to them.

In Chinese myth Immortality is not only granted to the gods. They may be awakened intelligent Animal Spirits, whose animal nature gets them into all sorts of mischief and yet gives them abilities beyond that of any mortal. They may be immortals who serve in the Celestial Bureaucracy. Or they may be Ascended masters, Kung fu experts and Taoist sages who have trained hard in the mystic arts and attained immortality. They may even be demons seeking to change their evil nature.

An immortal has a number of numerical scores, attached to short descriptive words for quick reference. Each score measures how powerful or skilful an immortal is in a particular area.

Each immortal has **Skills** which represent areas of expertise. For example the skill Cat Kung Fu will cover not only the fighting skills of this martial art, but also skills of perception, stealth and balance.

Attitudes describe the personality or physical traits a immortal possesses. These are strong and noticeable to anyone meeting the immortal. If skills tell you what an immortal can do, attitudes tell you how they do it. Attitudes give either a bonus when used to perform actions.

Because the immortals are immortals they have **Magical Powers**. These may stem from magical items that they have acquired, magical spells that they know, or abilities gained through Kung-fu practice.

Virtue measures the standing of the immortal in the eyes of Heaven. Evil demons have a Virtue of 0 while saintly Priests have a Virtue of 6. The player immortals are Immortals who have fallen out of favour with the heavens, and have a starting Virtue of 3. Through right action they seek to increase their virtue to 6 and be readmitted into one of the heavens. Players set the goals which gain them virtue and thereby steer their immortal's story.

Fortune measures a pool of good fortune that the immortal can draw upon. It can create long term effects, such as improving immortal scores, or temporal effects, such as giving a bonus when performing Actions. Once spent Fortune is lost. It can be gained through harmonious or virtuous behaviour and lost through disruptive or non-virtuous behaviour. Unlike Virtue, increases in Fortune is awarded by the Narrator.

The Narrator

One of the players needs to be the Narrator. The narrator is responsible for describing the surroundings and the situations that the player immortals find themselves. The narrator also describes the actions and plays the part of any other immortals and mortals, called non player characters (or npcs), that the player immortals encounter. This may range from an elderly woman who works the ferry that the immortals are using to cross the mighty river that bars their way, or the angry Dragon King of the Western sea that they have just offended by their impolite behaviour.

Narrators need to know the rules and guidelines in the players' section, for they are the person that the players look to to clear up any misunderstanding or disputes about the rules.

While the role of narrator is pivotal, the Narrator's section provides lots of help and tips on how to smoothly and effortlessly run the game. It also gives an overview of the many interesting locations and immortals that populate the world of Monkey.

The Game System

Most actions that the player immortals do can be resolved using common sense; there isn't any need to use the rules in this book. Simply by taking it through between players the action will be resolved.

When the outcome of an immortal's action is uncertain the Narrator may ask for an Action.

Each player has a deck of playing cards. The deck is used when the Narrator calls for an Action. Aces are high. Jokers are wild cards, which when drawn, mean automatic and resounding success.

The Narrator can call for one of two types of Action:

A **Simple Action** is called when a Narrator wishes to quickly resolve a conflict in the story such as climbing a mountain or checking to see if they can hear the rustling of the ghostly breeze behind them. The player draws a number of cards equal to the skill he is using. He gains an additional card for using an appropriate Attitude, e.g. Very Determined or Very Agile. The opposing immortal or force, in this case the Mountain, draws a number of cards equal to the skill or resistance they are using, with a bonus card for appropriate Attitudes or environmental conditions, e.g. the Mountain pulls an extra card because it's been raining heavily. The two players add the total of their cards, the victor being the person who beats his opponent's total.

A **Dramatic Action** is resolved in exactly the same way by pulling cards. However, Dramatic Actions are called when a Narrator wishes to focus the game session on an important and lengthy scene in the game's story, such as a long tough fight against a River Dragon. The action is not resolved in one draw of the cards. Each lost draw, reduces the players hand by

the number of cards dependant on the how much greater the winner's draw was. The eventual winner is the one with cards remaining in their hand.

For more detail about the Action system see Chapter 2.

Now that you have a introduction to this game, yet are anxious to start, please be patient gentle reader and read the next chapter, where you will learn how to create you own immortal.