

GURPS[®]

CHINA

Magic and Adventure in the Empire of the Dragon

By Thomas M. Kane



STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Written by Thomas Kane
Edited by Chris McCubbin and Steve Jackson
Cover by Carl Anderson
Illustrated by Topper Helmers



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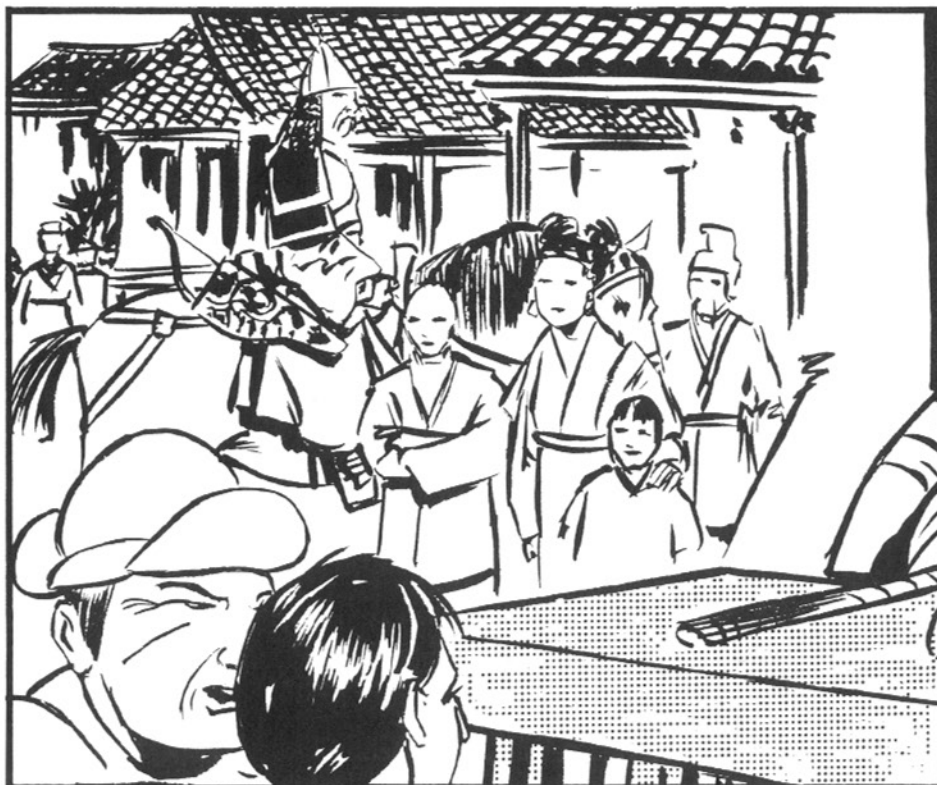
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About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

Roleplayer. This bimonthly newsletter includes new rules, new races, beasts, information on upcoming releases, scenario ideas and more. Ask your game retailer, or write for subscription information.

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BBS. For those of you who have computers, SJ Games operates a BBS with discussion areas for several games, including *GURPS*. Much of the playtest feedback for new products comes from the BBS. It's up 24 hours a day at 512-447-4449, at 300, 1200 or 2400 baud. Give us a call!

Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set*, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to a page in the *Basic Set* — e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *Basic Set*, Third Edition. Any reference that begins with an M refers to *GURPS Magic*.

About the Author

Tom Kane lives in the Maine woods, and at least one visitor who carried on a shouted conversation with him turned out to be talking with the bear. Needless to say, this environment provides plenty of inspiration for roleplaying adventures. Tom is also an active strategy gamer. He has published numerous magazine articles and gaming products in both genres, notably *Tales of the Loremasters* (volumes I and II), two complete adventure collections from I.C.E. As President of the University of Maine at Farmington Table Gaming Club, Tom invites all readers to its bi-annual UMF-CON convention.

Tom speaks a little Putonghua (Common Speech, or Mandarin) and recently discovered that the Chinese pronounce his name "Tangmu Kaien."

INTRODUCTION

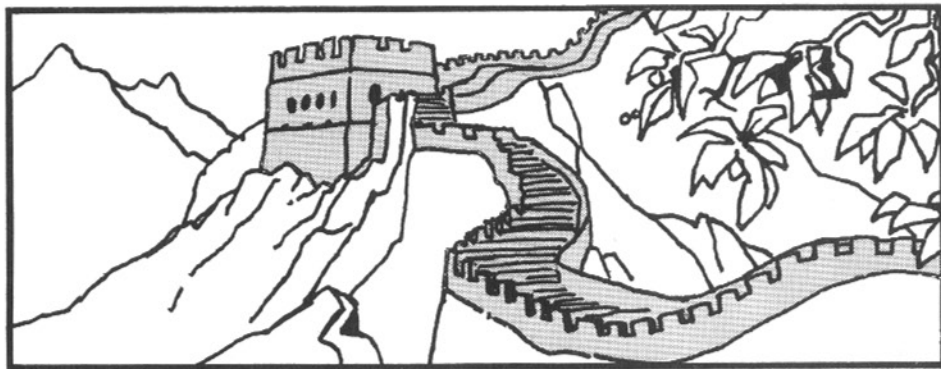
With one quarter of the world's people and 5,000 years of history, few settings contain as many opportunities for adventure as China. Those who want uncomplicated excitement will love *GURPS China*; adventuring for hire was an everyday job in China's Warring States (not that that made it any safer). Gamers who prefer mystery and subtle plotting will also be enthralled, because the politics of China's court easily surpassed the Caesars, Byzantines or Borgias in intrigue.

The typical Chinese campaign is an Eastern fantasy game, set in ancient times or the Middle Ages. China's magic, monsters, journeys and lavish Imperial courts provide an excellent setting for that. The Middle Kingdom also shatters some clichés; a Chinese warrior is more likely to kowtow before a dragon than slay it.

However, this book does not limit readers to any one milieu. It covers Chinese history from the Ice Age to the present. Victorian daredevils, modern spies and researchers of Things Man Was Not Meant To Know are also chief candidates for Chinese scenarios. The White Lotus Lodge certainly has connections with the Illuminati, and Chinese supers are sure to model their powers on Oriental legends. Perhaps there will never be an Oriental *Car Wars*, but the years after the disintegration of the Three Kingdoms (400-580 AD) certainly resemble a prehistoric Autoduel America. Like *GURPS* itself, China can accommodate any sort of campaign.

A project of this scope always generates coincidences. I finished the rough draft of this manuscript in the middle of Gorbachev's Summer 1989 visit to China. That visit paled, of course, next to the protest in Tianamen Square. As this book shows, the demonstrations and massacres there are neither new nor particularly vast by Chinese standards. They have direct roots in the Cultural Revolution. They have spiritual roots in the student protests against eunuch corruption under the Han Dynasty, 2,000 years ago. Campaigns are born from this sort of excitement. However, these events remind one that real adventures usually involve real blood and real tragedy. The Chinese sometimes say, "May you live in interesting times." They mean that as a curse.

— Thomas N. Kane

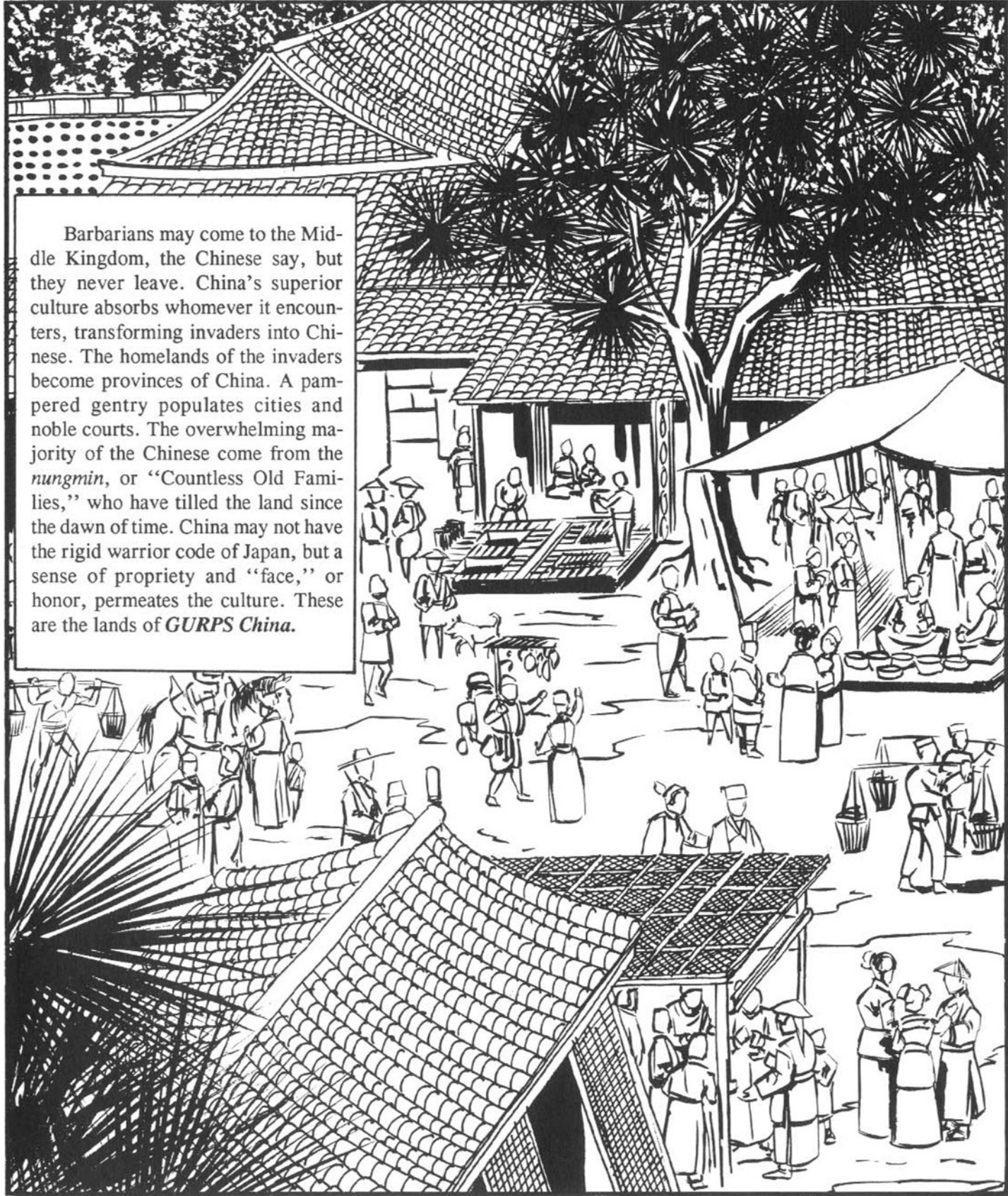


Spelling

Arguments swirl eternally around the correct spellings of Chinese words in the Latin alphabet. *GURPS China* uses a simplified version of the Wade-Giles system. This should aid readers who wish to do their own research, since most reference books on ancient China use this method. Wade-Giles also provides an Oriental ambience. However, since China has officially switched to the Pinyin system, the Glossary provides a guide to conversions.

LIFE IN CHINA 1

Barbarians may come to the Middle Kingdom, the Chinese say, but they never leave. China's superior culture absorbs whomever it encounters, transforming invaders into Chinese. The homelands of the invaders become provinces of China. A pampered gentry populates cities and noble courts. The overwhelming majority of the Chinese come from the *nungmin*, or "Countless Old Families," who have tilled the land since the dawn of time. China may not have the rigid warrior code of Japan, but a sense of propriety and "face," or honor, permeates the culture. These are the lands of *GURPS China*.



Everyday Affairs

Tech Level

Chinese history does not follow the standard sequence of Tech Levels. Therefore, most items include a date of invention instead of a TL rating. From antiquity to about 2,000 BC, all cultures, including China, were at about Tech Level 1. By 300 BC, China qualified for Tech Level 2, but in social organization it was closer to Tech Level 5 (assembly-line production, year-round mass armies, central government, etc.). Even the peasants used more efficient plows and animal harnesses than European farmers. As always, some fields of progress, notably weapons, surged far ahead of others. In the 1500s, China lost some of its superiority. Meanwhile, the West advanced. By the 19th century, one could consider China TL3, with TL5 and TL6 imports. Modern China possesses a space program and nuclear navy, but most of its people are at TL6. Of course, the peasants always lived primitively.



China's culture is what makes the Middle Kingdom unique, and the Chinese worship tradition. Society depends on youths' devotion to elders, siblings' mutual love and subjects' obedience to the State. One indicates respect with a bow. The most extreme bow, or *kowtow*, involves kneeling and touching one's head to the ground. After one bows, one's superior returns the gesture, but does not bend as low. Whether with lessers or greater, one must behave courteously, keep one's temper and avoid drawing attention to anyone else's flaws. One loses great "face" if humiliated in public, and a courteous person strives never to embarrass anyone . . . unintentionally.

Art is as important to the Chinese as manners. The Chinese consider music and dance as essential as air. Clapperless bronze bells and jade chimes are holy, while the music of flutes and drums inspire noble deeds. However, foreign stringed instruments lead to decadence.

Food

China's diet changed as the Middle Kingdom absorbed new peoples. The ancient Chinese based their diet on millet, usually pressed into cakes. Wheat and barley were popular too, and everyone garnished meals with beans, turnips, melons, onions, dumplings, ginger and basil. Meat was expensive, and most people could only afford dried beef. Rich men could afford pork and chicken. When China amalgamated the southern lands, the Chinese discovered seafood and rice. By Han times, the latter engulfed all Chinese cooking and thought. Instead of saying "hello," a Chinese person inquires, "Have you eaten rice today?"

In the Tang dynasty (618-906 AD), bizarre foods became fashionable. These included spinach and pistachio nuts from the West, dill from Indonesia, almonds from Turkestan and an ice cream made of milk, rice and camphor. Eating wild mushrooms became a mark of status. Tea also appeared in the Tang dynasty. Its preparation became almost a religion, and fashionable Chinese practiced a tea ceremony like the one still performed in Japan.

The Chinese have been drinking alcohol throughout their history. They make beers and wines out of millet and rice. The elite enjoy grape wine. Northern exiles and colonists in the southern jungles drink heavily because of the heat and constant worry over malaria. Sojourners in the South like coconut milk and palm toddies.

Dress

China's civilized dress sets it apart from the barbarians. Everyone, from scholars to street urchins, wears the same basic two-piece outfit — a sashed tunic and jacket. Women add dresses and aprons. Everyone wears round straw hats outdoors to ward off sun and rain. The length of the skirt and sleeves depends on how much physical work the wearer expects to do. A peasant or soldier wears loose, unencumbering garments. The necessities of warfare forced the Chinese to adopt the nomads' custom of wearing leather trousers and hard boots. These make both horseback riding and farming much easier. An Imperial Minister's formal robes might trail several feet behind him. Garments like this provide enough loose cloth to conceal almost anything, but cause a -2 penalty to DX rolls. Of course, a nobleman does not hesitate to wear more practical clothes if he needs to.

Ordinary Chinese make their clothes from hemp or softer nettle-fibers. People in cold regions imitate the nomads and wear wool. Not even the lowest peasants go barefoot, although the poor must make shoes of straw. Most people wear clogs or leather boots, while the idle rich have brocade slippers. Rich people can afford clothes of silk and damask, with geometric embroidery. People don consecrated smocks for magical and religious rites. Magistrates wear ritual capes.

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