

## WHAT IS SHENMO?

The term shenmo is a somewhat literal translation of the Chinese phrase “gods and demons fiction”, a literary subgenre of fantasy that revolves around deities, monsters, and other supernatural entities in Chinese mythology. Journey to the West is the most well known example of the genre in literature, the story of a human pilgrim who recruits three demons to serve as his disciples and bodyguards while he embarks on a long, perilous journey faced with numerous supernatural threats, all in the service of retrieving sacred Buddhist texts for his homeland of China.

Shenmo fiction is heavily textured by the theologies of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Gods, concepts, and principles from all three coexist in shenmo stories, and the meeting of related or even competing concepts is often the focus and heart of a story. Both mortal and immortal characters alike are often heavily allegorical, but an element of grounded humanity is emblematic of the best stories in the genre. Many shenmo characters outlive the popularity of their own stories; even those entirely unfamiliar with the genre likely know of Sun Wukong the Monkey King, a timeless character who continues to be adapted, implemented, and used as inspiration for hundreds of years after his invention.

Shenmo stories and characters rely on a concept similar to animism, the idea that animals, plants, and even inanimate objects and natural phenomenon can have a soul. The supernatural can appear in the most mundane of times and places, and part of the fantasy of Shenmo is that even the most quiet of happenings and typical of peoples are worthy of the

attention of the gods. When anything or anyone can be the subject of a story, the kinds and amount of stories is limitless.

## WHAT ARE JINGSHEN?

Jingshen, are supernatural beings, typically animals or nature spirits, that through various means or circumstances have acquired a demihuman form. Some were once mundane before they awoke to a rare mental acuity due to the practice of druidism or other forms of spellcraft, others are souls, either divine or mortal, that have reincarnated into a supernatural form.

Any creature, and sometimes even objects, can become a jingshen, ranging from the smallest spider to the largest elephant, from the tallest tree to the largest boulder. All jingshen share a few fundamental traits regardless of their origins; they either grow or shrink to human size, and they typically cannot return to their original form, assuming they do not possess magic powerful enough to forcibly revert. Jingshen can be quite diverse, even among those with similar origins; one fish spirit might take more liberally from the human form, perhaps appearing similar to a fish only in that they possess finlike ears or a skin of scales, while another might appear more conservative, appearing almost like a fish with human limbs!

All jingshen belong to one of five clans, each corresponding to one of the five chinese elements. These are the Huo, the Fire Clan, the Shui, the Water Clan, the Mu, the Wood Clan, the Tu, the Earth Clan, and the Jin, the Metal Clan. Members of a clan are not necessarily blood related to one another, they are merely alike in their abilities. Each clan has certain traits and members more typical to it. However, each Jingshen is unique, and can belong to any clan.

## WHAT ARE YAOGUAI?

Closely related to jingshen are the yaoguai; spirits that use their supernatural powers to prey on humans or serve their own selfish interests. Yaoguai can be born as a mundane creature of great malevolence, exiled immortals with a desire for vengeance, or from creatures or objects cursed by dark magics. The term yaoguai is a pejorative one wielded by gods and humans both; in truth, nothing physically discerns a jingshen from a yaoguai. The title is therefore one of reputation; a jingshen who falls from grace or commits a grievous sin may be branded a yaoguai, while a yaoguai who cultivates their conduct or justifies their redemption may be bestowed the title of jingshen. Since yaoguai and jingshen are physically alike, both use the same abilities and traits when building a character.

## JINGSHEN ABILITIES AND TRAITS

- **Ability Score Improvements:** You increase one ability score by 2, and another by 1.
- **Age:** As supernatural beings, age is something of a peculiar topic. A jingshen can be born of two jingshen parents, and those who are typically matures at the same rate as a human and live slightly longer, approximately 120 years. First generation Jingshen, those that occur supernaturally typically had a life or existence before their transformation, and afterwards, their new form is as old as jingshen as they were in their previous one. An adult animal would transform into an adult jingshen, while a young one would become a child. In rare cases, typically involving plants or objects, a jingshen may