

A Soul of Your Own

an Alternate Setting for *Nobilis*

by
Jenna K.
Moran

Copyright © 2009 by Jenna K. Moran
All rights reserved.

All characters in this work are fictitious or heavily fictionalized.
Readers are strictly advised against drawing conclusions
about or regarding persons living or dead based on this material.

this release of this work is dedicated to

you

A Soul of Your Own

Adapting *Nobilis*

In this setting you are not of the *Nobilis*. Instead you are a kung fu hero.

There are still Imperators. There are still Excrucians. You cannot easily sort out one from the other. In this little corner of existence their mode of operation is the same.

They seek to own.

There are seven great gems that float in the sky between worlds. These are the stakes of the physical war. Fleets of demons and monsters swarm about them in constant battle. But in truth it is a sideshow.

What both sides want is to find a single person—somewhere in the world—who they may turn from an endlessly transmigrating soul into a vehicle of their power. Someone who may lose their personhood and become instead an avatar, a Power or shard, a toy to the endless gods.

It's not a final victory.

One person won't decide it. Ten billion won't decide it. They are winning and losing such battles all the time, and they'll keep at it until the last soul is snatched up from the cycle of existence to become an angel or a bane. But it's what *matters*.

They'll shed oceans of blood for a jewel; they have, they do, every now and then a hapless world floats into such an ocean and its people drown. But one person is more vital to them than all the floating jewels and stars.

One appropriately vulnerable person.

Such as you.

Metaphysical Implications for *Nobilis*

This game views the Powers from the outside—regards them as alien creatures that are not really people. This should not be understood as canon for the original setting—it's a viewpoint characteristic to PCs in this particular world, and questionable even here. In fact, in general, you should assume that the metaphysics and morality of this world are different unless established in your campaign world as the same.

Attributes

Characters in **AWOYO** have 19 Attributes available, including Aspect, Realm, and Spirit. They do not have access to Domain. Because 19 Attributes can spread characters a little thin, we'll change the cost to buy up your Attributes.

Character Points

It costs:

- 1 CP *total* for a level 0 Attribute;
- 2 CP *total* for a level 1 Attribute;
- 4 CP *total* for a level 2 Attribute;
- 7 CP *total* for a level 3 Attribute;
- 11 CP *total* for a level 4 Attribute;
- 15 CP *total* for a level 5 Attribute.

Characters do not have MP in an Attribute unless they first buy it to level 0; this gives them 5 MP in that Attribute. Afterwards they may buy MP at a cost of 2 MP/1 CP.

Floating Attributes

Each story, characters choose a single Attribute to raise temporarily to level 3 and another to raise temporarily to level 2. One of these Attributes should relate to the unbearable sorrows and the other to the ultimate kung fu heavens, both described below. These temporarily increased Attributes return to their previous values when the story ends.

Kung Fu

Characters in **AWOYO** each have a kung fu style or magical style with a strong thematic form. It's best to explain Aspect miracles as fitting this style, but its real use is as a limiter for certain very generic abilities available through some Attributes—e.g., the power of Weakness to do anything that is ineffectual, including Aspect miracles and Domain miracle of any Estate. When using such a generic power, players must fit it to the thematics of their kung fu or magic. This should be understood more as "facilitating the conceptualization of this otherwise ridiculously broad power" than as an actual mechanism of balance.

King Evil

There are millions of worlds – worlds of blue-skinned people, worlds of flat people, worlds of animals and insects. There are Hells. There are Heavens.

In every world people suffer.

The fabric of the universe groans with this suffering. The universe-person herself, the Infinite Woman, cries out in agony.

This is the work of **King Evil**.

In his Palace of Illusion he causes the world to suffer. When a mouse whimpers in agony, this is the work of King Evil. When kingdoms fall, King Evil is there.

He is with you right now, making your eyes grow weak, making your body grow old, rotting your teeth, and leading you into false desires.

He is everywhere.

He is a very personal devil. And he is not alone.

The Unbearable Sorrows

These are the unbearable sorrows.

Pain

The lash of Agony Man coils around the world. It has terrible nettle-spines. If you trace it back you'll find a kingdom of terrible demons who run down the lash to trouble the world. This is the work of Agony Man.

Before Agony Man pain didn't really hurt. Think of all the horrible pain you've felt. Think of the anguish of the sick, the broken, the downtrodden, the predators' prey. That's the work of Agony Man. That is the first Unbearable Sorrow.

Sickness

There is an ocean from which all plagues come. It is green and noxious and the vapors that rise from it are terrible. The demon **Plague Woman** stirs the sea and sends forth sickness to make people infirm.

Before Plague Woman no one got sick. Think of all the times you've been sick. Think of all the people who suffer from terrible sickness. That is the work of Plague Woman. That is the second Unbearable Sorrow.

Old Age

There is a hidden moon. You can only see it when the stars are all dark at once – that's not very often! It glows only faintly. This is the moon that makes people age. The demon **White-Hair Man** uses the radiance of the moon to age people on all the worlds.

Before White-Hair Man no one suffered from old age. Think of all the people who age poorly. They can't remember things. Their body is weak. Their heroism is lost. That is the work of White-Hair Man. That is the third Unbearable Sorrow.

Death

Buried in an unspeakably dry desert there is a great blue crystal. **Death Queen** thrust it into the ground and made an army of demons to guard it. That is why people die.

Before Death Queen no one died. Not your family. Not your pets. Not your friends. Not your lovers. Not you. All the death you'll ever know is the work of Death Queen. That is the fourth Unbearable Sorrow.

Distraction

There is a great glittering thing. It is shiny. It is made of all manner of substances, and they spin around one another. This is the citadel of the demon **Distraction Evil**. Distraction Evil draws the mind from its proper course and makes it think of unimportant things.

Before Distraction Evil it was very easy to concentrate. Even in pain the mind was always sharp, like a sword. Because of Distraction Evil it is easy to fall into confusion and moral decay. That is the fifth Unbearable Sorrow.

Weakness

There is a city of weakness. It is crystal and it has spires. It is under the shriveled belly of a thin old giant man the size of a mountain. The man is on his hands and knees. He cannot hold himself up but he is too tired to crawl forward and when he lowers himself the spire of the city pricks him and makes him bleed. This is the city of the demon **Thin Woman**. The radiation of that city permeates every world in the cosmos. That is why people are weak.

Before Thin Woman people were strong. They could keep going as long as they had to. They could surmount all the obstacles in their lives. Now they can't. That is the sixth Unbearable Sorrow.

Folly

The face of Folly is a great demon mask. It orbits around the Primal Sun that gives light to all the worlds. Inside the mask lives King Mindless. He gibbers. He drools. He sends forth folly to all the worlds.

Before King Mindless people were wise. When you see someone do something stupid, it's because of King Mindless. And don't think you're immune!

Demons

Sometimes a human who cultivates their spirit, masters kung fu or magic, or sees through the veil of all things will learn to tap the power of these great evils—and also the power of virtue! Such people are known as **heroes** and **evil heroes**.

Once someone learns to tap the power of evil, they're always vulnerable to becoming *part* of that evil. It will try to make them into its tools—

Into **Nobilis** or **Anchors**.

These pitiable creatures, when they take service with the unbearable sorrows and King Evil, are known as demons. You'd think there'd only be a few of them, but there aren't. Or rather, in an infinite universe, there are hardly any of

them—if you spread them out evenly through space they'd be ten million miles apart! At any given time, Earth probably only has twenty or thirty demons on it, and some worlds only have two or three. But if you stacked them up? If you piled them in a heap?

They'd be as numberless as a desert universe's grains of sand.

The Great Tragedies

The work of King Evil has created lesser sorrows. These are the Great Tragedies, also named the Hells.

Youthful Kingdom

Once Youthful Kingdom was a great kingdom on Earth. Then a human there became a Power of Old Age—the demon Savage Child! He grew his forest in the Youthful Kingdom. The people of Youthful Kingdom lived for a shorter and shorter time. Now they are fertile at five years and live for ten. This is one of endless Great Tragedies.

When the power of the demon dominated Youthful Kingdom, it left the Earth. It broke free from the lands around it and soared into the sky between the worlds.

Endless Dying Hell

The people of Endless Dying Hell suffer immeasurably due to the work of the demon Laughing Killer, who is a Power of Death!

Each day the people of Endless Dying Hell wake up. They suffer horrible torments that kill them. Then they wake up again. This is another Great Tragedy.

Once the Endless Dying Hell was just another place on the world of the backward-hand people. Now it floats in the rivers of fire below the world.

Enemies of the Demons

Not everything goes the way the demons want it to.

The Ultimate Kung Fu Master

There is an ultimate Kung Fu Master. He sits in his Endless Lotus Palace and his Vision Eye cuts through all the illusions of the world. In his meditation he sends forth blessings and solace to every world.

The ultimate Kung Fu Master isn't just a Buddha and he isn't just a sifu. He's also the ultimate jade power God and the seething nuclear chaos Azathoth.

If he wins, he'll destroy the world and replace it with something better.

Heroes

And also there are heroes.

They're not in it to help the Ultimate Kung Fu Master. They're not in it to stand against him. How could they? He's too strong! If you're not strong enough to fight somebody and see their style, how can you possibly decide whether their philosophy is right?

So they don't just fight the demons and King Evil.

They protect people from both sides!

Princess Moon Fire was born in the Youthful Kingdom. She saw everyone suffering around her. They could not become civilized and learn to follow the way of enlightenment. This tore her heart and she vowed to put an end to such suffering. She learned infinite kung fu prowess, became immortal, and rose to do battle with the demon Savage Child.

He said, "I can't kill you. I might need you someday!"

And he cast her out of the Youthful Kingdom.

Star-Eye Monk suffered in the Endless Dying Hell. But he resented it too much. He couldn't stand to suffer and die over and over again---he wanted to unlock infinite attainments! Soon he had his "Crystal Insight" that allowed him to

ignore both pain and death. Furious, he challenged Laughing Killer, but Laughing Killer cast him out of the Endless Dying Hell.

"I won't kill you!" said Laughing Killer.

Then he killed Star-Eye Monk, swore at himself in embarrassment, and brought him right back to life!

"That didn't happen," Laughing Killer said.

There are heroes like this everywhere.

The demons don't kill them! Much!

One day, after all, Moon Fire or Star-Eye Monk might become Powers too. They could become celestial avatars. Or they could become just like the demons.

They're powerful. They're awesome. They're too valuable to waste! The demons don't want to kill them.

They're our heroes.

Moon Fire; Star-Eye Monk; and infinite others throughout the cosmos. They're the heroes who might save us all.

Some are far away. Some are on the worlds next door.

Many have come to live on earth, in the mountains of Zu.

The Heavens of Ultimate Kung Fu

These are the Heavens of Ultimate Kung Fu – the source of celestial kung fu styles!

Eternal Pleasure World

The Heaven of Eternal Pleasure is the garden from which delicious tastes, sensual feelings, pleasing colors and sounds, and enticing scents come. It is the ultimate region of sensual ecstasy and it is ruled by **the Queen of All Desiring**.

Before the Queen of All Desiring, the world was bland and tasteless and true. Now it is afflicted with all manner of sensual desires. These echo the endless

bliss of the Great Style which the ultimate Kung Fu master performs. This is the first ultimate Kung Fu Heaven.

Impossible Energy Heaven

The clouds that support this Heaven are beige and they seethe with electric fire. This is the Heaven from which furious devotion comes. This is the Heaven of obsession and love and drive – the ultimate region of ecstatic action. It is ruled by the **Whip-Hand King**.

Before the Whip-Hand King learned his kung fu the world was relaxed and calm. It was dreary. Now it is afflicted with all manner of obsessions and grand passions. These echo the absolute devotion of practice that only the Great Style can command. This is the second ultimate Kung Fu Heaven.

Endlessly New Heaven

This Heaven is on the back of a celestial dragon that writhes through the sky between the infinite worlds. This is the Heaven of constant change and constant surprise by new joys, new pleasures, and new wonders. It is the ultimate region of ecstatic change and its ruler is the **Dancing Woman**.

Before the Dancing Woman began to emulate the ultimate Kung Fu Master, the world changed slowly and carefully. There were no surprises! Now the world is afflicted with all manner of unexpected and confusing circumstances. These echo the endless creative impulse of the Great Style of the ultimate Kung Fu Master. This is the third ultimate Kung Fu Heaven.

Great Wheel Heaven

This Heaven is a great turning wheel larger even than Infinite Woman. It is full of all manner of experience and life. This is the wheel of reincarnation that drives people onwards to new lives. **Yama Emperor** and his ten disciples the **Yama Kings** labor constantly to spin this wheel. Those who have achieved perfection-in-themselves rise to this Heaven and help the Yama Kings spin this wheel!

Before the Yama Emperor built the Great Wheel, you couldn't have any life you needed. You had to live pretty much the same life every time.

Before the Yama Emperor built the Great Wheel, life lived in very specific places. Now it's everywhere! On land, in the sea, in space, even in the sky between the worlds. This is the echo of the endless progenitive force of the Great Style of the ultimate Kung Fu Master. This is the fourth ultimate Kung Fu Heaven.

Dreaming Sun Heaven

People in this Heaven don't have much but they don't mind because they can look upwards towards the dreaming sun. That sun is the Endless Lotus Palace, bathing them ceaselessly in the radiation of the ultimate enlightenment! This is the Heaven of banishing preconceptions and looking upon the truth. It is the ultimate region of ecstatic contemplation and its ruler is the **Enlightenment-Vision Meditation Master**. He uses many great lenses and antennas to beam images of the Endless Lotus Palace to people all over the cosmos.

Before the Enlightenment-Vision Meditation Master, hardly anyone knew what enlightenment was like. To find out, they had to fight the ultimate Kung Fu Master in person! Now people everywhere can meditate on the Great Style of the ultimate Kung Fu Master. This is the fifth ultimate Kung Fu Heaven.

Infinite Interlocking Hands Heaven

This Heaven is created by the joy of its inhabitants. Each of them buoys up everyone else with their radiance of goodness. They dance and sing and play and use special jewels in their foreheads to radiate compassion energy to anyone who might need it. Everyone here is blissful because they can feel everybody else's joy and love and use it to power machinery. It is the ultimate region of ecstatic oneness and its ruler is **Oneness Woman**.

Before the ultimate Kung Fu Master bound the people of the Infinite Interlocking Hands Heaven together to form Oneness Woman, people weren't affected directly by other people's emotions. Now people feel other people's sorrows and joys---they're like knives and flowers! This is the sixth ultimate Kung Fu Heaven.

Infinite Mercy Crystal Heaven

This Heaven is a giant red crystal that flies through the air between the worlds pulled by a thousand birds and dragons. Wherever it goes it sends forth misty

red vapors of mercy that relieve suffering all through the cosmos. This is the Heaven of solace, surcease, and release. Its ruler is **Mercy Princess**.

Before Mercy Princess, people never got reprieves. They always suffered exactly what they should. Now her mercy shields people from their folly. This is the seventh ultimate Kung Fu Heaven.

The Blessed Kingdoms

The Great Style of the ultimate Kung Fu Master has also created lesser glories.

Colorful River Kingdom

This river is full of beauty. Many wise kings ruled the river region. Then a king came who rejected the Great Style. He chased out all the sages and took their goods to give to the people. He banned kung fu practice. When the Ultimate Kung Fu Master raised the river into the sky to become a blessed kingdom, he punished the king by transforming him into the demon Wisdom Hater.

Independent Existence Enlightenment World

Once the Independent Existence Enlightenment World was a kingdom on Earth. Then the great sifu All-Embracing Prince achieved the independence existence enlightenment. He saw that people are not truly separate from one another—that everyone is part of a single universal principle. In an instant, everything in the Independent Existence Enlightenment World conceived itself part of a single whole. The snow of the mountains, the rock of the mountains, and even the living things and people became one entity. It rose into the sky between the worlds as one of the blessed kingdoms, where all things live in harmony.

The evil hero Small-Cut Man is an evil hero who came from this world. He rejected the Independent Existence Enlightenment. He refused to be part of everyone else. He achieved the Isolation Power and became a terrible monster who hurts others without caring. Some people say he's a Power of Folly, but most people think he's just an evil hero—someone like Small-Cut Man wouldn't serve anybody!

Perfectly Confucian World

The people of this kingdom practiced such perfect Confucianism that everyone became humane. They were too good for the world and so their kingdom tore off into the sky to become a blessed kingdom. The legalist scholar Han Feizi was kicked out to become the Legalist demon.

Transience of the Self Enlightenment World

This enlightenment world existed in the land of the blue people. Then the great sifu Intermittent Spark achieved the transience of the self enlightenment. He saw that no aspect of dualistic existence endures forever.

In an instant, the things of the Transience of the Self Enlightenment World vanished. A pyre of the void rose from the land and began to burn in the sky between the worlds. This is one of the blessed kingdoms.

The pyre of the void is empty only to the consciousness. Things still exist there but because the mind cannot conceive of them as existing in themselves the mind cannot perceive them.

Evil Changeless Hero comes from this world. She rejected the Transience of the Self Enlightenment. She insisted that she would exist, unchanging and immortal. Now she is a statue of gold and jade who flies from world to world causing all manner of trouble, stasis, and decay.

Unfolding Flower-Hand Kingdom

This kingdom has many beautiful flowers. They sway in imitation of the Great Style of the ultimate Kung Fu Master. The air is full of the scent of jasmine and people are content.

The Prince of Perfect Attainment recognized that his kingdom was too beautiful for the Earth. He ripped it out into the sky between the worlds and separated out its evil into a hateful gem. This gem became the Sapphire Elephant Demon.

The Sky Between the Worlds

All the worlds float in an infinite sky. It's full of currents of all colors and scents. There are creatures that live there like giant birds that eat passing souls and dragons. Some places even have schools of fish. These fish might be as small as goldfish or as large as galaxies—you have to be close to them to find out!

The Dark Spirit

One of the sources of demonic power is a pool of hideous darkness in the sky between the worlds. It's a special power because it's chemical—most of the ordinary evil power is radiation!

Evil Kingdoms

Evil Kingdoms are fiery kingdoms that generate evil radiation. A few are Hells, but most are practically uninhabited. The elements there are too inured to evil radiation and only wake up as people if demons use a super-concentrated dose! It's bad luck to be born in an evil kingdom—the demons there have hardly anybody else to pick on, so they'll either hurt you or try to recruit you!

The Form Kingdom

The form kingdom is a kingdom of powerful fire, water, earth, and air. The demons draw on it for power. Sometimes heroes do the same.

The Middle Kingdoms

The mortal worlds float in the middle planar section of the universe. They are very ordinary worlds. When a kingdom becomes too extraordinary it rips away and floats upwards or downwards through the air between the worlds!

The Sensation Kingdom

The sensation kingdom is a great stewing pot of awareness that the demons stir. They use it to disseminate awareness through all the worlds to keep people from forgetting their evil and returning to being piles of elements.

The Spiritual Attainment Kingdom

This is a transcendent enlightenment kingdom. It lives inside everybody. It has many crystal tiers. Ascending them is difficult but can bring you power.

Its lord is a bird-like lion-like creature with seven limbs.

The Wheel of Existence

Where You Came From

Here is how it all begins.

Long ago the ultimate Kung Fu Master fought King Evil all through the form and sensation kingdoms. The collateral damage of this fight sent fire, earth, metal, water, and wood flying everywhere in the cosmos. Eventually it aggregated to form the mundane kingdoms (like the planet on which we live.)

King Evil made the first demons out of nettles and broken glass.

"Go find good piles of elements," he said. "And shoot them with evil radiation!"

The demons obliged.

A long time passed—days? Weeks? Maybe even countless billions of years!

Then some demons found a pile of some elements laying around. They shot it with their evil radiation. This created false perceptions – specifically, the ability to think untrue things about the world. Suddenly instead of just a pile of elements you were a person – fire, earth, and wood formed your first body; metal and water formed your perceptions and sensations; and the false ideas gave you something to think about!

Welcome to the World!

There are many worlds where demons can bring people to life. Which one were you from?

Hell Kingdoms

Nobody ever wants a new life in a Hell Kingdom. They're just not pleasant!

In a Hell Kingdom the attending demon makes all kinds of suffering for the people in that world. Even if it's your very first life and you haven't done anything wrong yet, they won't go easy on you – they're just too selfish to think that way!

(Of course, there are exceptions. Some Hell Kingdoms have many demons. Some Hell Kingdoms don't have any demons. And some demons have some civilized code that keeps them from punishing people who they don't think deserve it.)

Where are the Hell Kingdoms?

Most of the Hell Kingdoms float around in the sky between the worlds. Some of them are held aloft by great puffs of fire. Some are on the backs of terrible scaled monsters with tentacles and claws. Some just fall through ever-thicker ether. For the most part, they're "below" the Endless Lotus Palace, with the worst Hells naturally congregating around the Dark Spirit. Sometimes there are also Hells around brighter spirits.

Being Born

People in Hell Kingdoms wear their Thought Bodies. These are bodies that look like the way you think:

- Pretty if you are compassionate;
- Ugly if you are evil;
- Serpentine if you think really twisty thoughts;
- Bestial if you have strong, primal reactions;
- Human if you have a very strong sense of being human;
- Black or white if you think simple, clean thoughts; and
- Multicolored if you think really complex thoughts.

Most people don't think like ex-fetuses all the time, so people in Hell Kingdoms don't need a mother's birth. Instead they just pop into being in the Hell.

Life

It's always tragic to live in Hell!

The demons don't necessarily want you to suffer. That's not what makes them demons. What makes them demons is that they'll cling to serving evil even *when* that makes you suffer. Also, they hate the Great Style of the ultimate Kung Fu Master and will go out of their way to keep you from contemplating its glory.

Most of the time while you're in Hell you'll suffer pain, sickness, weakness, and distraction. Even when things are okay, like when they let you gamble, fight your enemies, or have chilly sex on the rocky ground, it's a sad shadow of how good things are on Earth.

Death or Transcendence

Eventually your time in a Hell Kingdom runs out. Everybody in a Hell Kingdom has the option to leave at any time, but it's not like the option to drink tea or wear pink – it's more like the option to stop your own heart or learn astrophysics. If your first life is in a Hell Kingdom, the big thing you need to learn is that there is more to existence! Once you understand about the sky between the worlds it's pretty easy to get there. If you're in the Hell Kingdom because the Yama Kings sent you there, then maybe there's something else you have to do, like letting go of an old bad habit from another life.

In any case, once you've figured out how to leave and trained yourself to do it properly, you'll fly out to the sky between the worlds. Whoosh! The great wheel heaven slams into you and knocks you to another life. All the Yama Kings wave as you fly by. If this is only your first life, you'll be pretty confused by this; later on, you get used to it!

If you're very lucky in Hell, you won't leave the normal way. Instead you'll get so mad at the demons that you'll see through the illusions of the world and become a hero. You'll *awaken your martial arts*. Usually you'll then go and fight the evil Power or Powers that rule that Hell, but they'll only kick you out and laugh at you. You can't fight a Power right after awakening your martial arts! That's like a floppy-eared puppy taking on a boar.

Middle Kingdoms

Sometimes you'll get born in a middle kingdom instead. These are very boring kingdoms like Earth or the land of the blue people. Being born into a middle kingdom isn't very exciting but you won't yawn too much about it because when you're born from a womb in a middle kingdom you tend to totally forget your previous lives until either you awaken your martial arts or die. If you're born as an animal you might not even wonder what those other lives were like!

Being born into a middle kingdom is ideal for personal growth. There's enough happiness to keep people sane and enough suffering to keep them interested in a better life. Everyone born in a middle kingdom has a decent chance of becoming a hero and unlocking the power of the Attributes. They even have a

decent chance of achieving the supreme celestial enlightenment and successfully challenging King Evil or the ultimate Kung Fu Master! One or two groups of heroes manage this every 500,000,000,000,000 years, but nobody can remember what happens to them afterwards.

Where are the Middle Kingdoms?

The middle kingdoms float in the sky between the worlds. They're called the middle kingdoms because they're not very close to any of the big important features of the sky – they're well away from the influence of the demons or the celestial Powers. The middle kingdoms lack elegance and tend to be very large – they aren't culled by demons or pruned by the celestial powers to anything like the same degree.

Being Born

You'll find a suitable fetus in somebody's womb. Then you'll curl up inside it—just like a Russian doll! The mother's body releases enzymes that give you powerful Chi and help you forget your previous lives. They also make you a part of your mother and father's families. She'll link her soul to yours to help you survive the dangerous infancy when you will not know kung fu, and sometimes she will play music to her tummy, after which you will kick.

Life

Then it's time to live!

You could have almost any kind of life in a middle kingdom. For example, you might be a skilled mechanic and spy who repairs automobiles while having gunfights with rival agents. You might build nude statues of 18th-century aristocrats out of papier-mâché. You could die in a gutter as an undernourished gamine with lung cancer, or you could become a professional chef—or even a brown cat! The options are essentially limitless.

Death or Transcendence

One day you will be walking around a corner and Death will be there.

Sometimes it'll be Death Queen. Sometimes it'll be one of her demons. It could even be a hero who has mastered Death Queen's power.

It will open its black wings.

Suddenly you will remember. "Hey!" you say. "There was this pile of elements—"

But it's already too late for talking. Just remembering that much has shot you away from the middle kingdom like a rock from a mass driver. Whoosh! Whoosh! Wham! You try to slow down and catch your breath. Wham! Wham! Whoosh! That's when the wheel of karma hits you and you fly end over end into your next life.

The Yama Kings wave!

One of them's singing! Maybe they even throw you a letter!

You barely have enough time to read it or disentangle yourself from whatever bits of your body you took with you; and then you land.

Hungry Ghost Kingdoms

Hungry ghost worlds are nowhere near as bad as the Hell Kingdoms but they are distinctly unpleasant.

Each hungry ghost world is in the shadow of a single ultimate Kung Fu Heaven. The people there have to live without the blessings of that Heaven!

Where are the Hungry Ghost Worlds?

The hungry ghost worlds are states of being. Each and every hungry ghost world touches everywhere in the cosmos. For example, there's not just an Earth — there's also a set of hungry ghost Earths (pleasureless ghost Earth, enervated ghost Earth, etcetera.) That's why there are always hungry ghosts around but only heroes can see them.

Hungry ghosts can travel the sky between the worlds but they can't leave their hungry ghost world. They can fly to Earth or even to a Blessed Kingdom but it doesn't really help them. They can live in a Hell but for the most part the demons don't go into the hungry ghost worlds to hurt them.

Being Born

King Evil makes special litany boxes and scatters them through the cosmos. These boxes contain the description of the sins that can make someone a hungry ghost and the name that they must wear as such. For example, the litany box of the Forsaker of Innocents sits high in the mountains of Earth.

When a hungry ghost is born, the box begins to rattle. Then it shakes. Then it opens! The hungry ghost falls out. This is the beginning of their tormented life.

Life

Hungry ghosts live in the shadow of an ultimate kung fu Heaven. They cannot let go of their horrible craving for that Heaven, but they won't let themselves practice properly – they shy away from the celestial styles when they see them! Their life is defined by that suffering.

Pleasureless Ghosts

The pleasureless ghost world is in the shadow of the Eternal Pleasure World.

The hungry ghosts who live in this world can't experience sensual pleasure properly. They long for it constantly but it's like catching a snowflake on your tongue: the instant they taste it, it's already gone. They're always hungry. They're always thirsty. They're always too hot or too cold. They're always too damp or too dry!

A compassionate hero leaves out rice grains for the pleasureless ghosts, so that sometimes they'll be a little less hungry.

Enervated Ghosts

The enervated ghost world is in the shadow of the Impossible Energy Heaven.

The hungry ghosts who live in this world don't have any vitality. Some of them lay about in place. Some of them shuffle endlessly through their existence. Some even live apparently whole lives. But whatever they're doing, they don't like it, they don't have the energy to do it well, and they don't even have the mental resources to *stop*.

A compassionate hero speaks loudly when declaring their purpose, in case any enervated ghosts might hear and be inspired – for just a moment – to act.

Stillness Ghosts

The stillness ghost world is in the shadow of the Endlessly New Heaven.

The hungry ghosts who live in this world never change. They want to change, but they don't – at least, not until they're finally ready to move on to their next life. They just keep repeating the same mistakes.

A compassionate hero focuses their mind on the true doctrine, shedding light like a lamp through the cosmos to help stillness ghosts understand their mistakes.

Empty Ghost World

The empty ghost world is in the shadow of the Great Wheel Heaven.

There are no hungry ghosts there. There is just a single litany box, in a lotus, in an entirely empty world.

Confused Ghosts

The confused ghost world is in the shadow of the Dreaming Sun Heaven.

The hungry ghosts of this world can't let go of their preconceptions—even if they have evidence against them! They're always wrong, and their wrong ideas don't let them find happiness. Each of them uses their false ideas to make the confused ghost world into a weird kind of personal hell. Until they give in to the power of the Enlightenment-Vision Meditation Master, there's only one way for them to see the truth—one-on-one battle with the Ultimate Kung Fu Master or King Evil! Some scrabble endlessly outside the walls of the Endless Lotus Palace or the Palace of Illusion, which to them are as great blocks of solid jade. Others search with a kind of helpless resolve for a way to find happiness in the broken world as they *know* it must be—often even also knowing that they can't succeed.

Not even a compassionate hero can help the confused ghosts; they must allow the radiation of the Dreaming Sun Heaven into their heart or remain forever lost.

Solitary Ghosts

The solitary ghost world is in the shadow of the Infinite Interlocking Hands Heaven.

The hungry ghosts of this world never see anybody else. They never hear anybody else. They can't ever talk to anybody else.

They arrive a little bit after everyone else leaves.

They leave a little bit before anybody else arrives.

They can't leave messages for each other. They can't leave messages at all. When they write on paper, the paper shrivels up and burns away. If they telephone somebody the line breaks down and all they hear is beep-beep-beep.

A compassionate hero burns little fires at the shrines for the solitary ghosts. When they come on such a shrine they can hug the leftover heat of the ashes and pretend the compassionate hero knew their name.

Clockwork Ghosts

The clockwork ghost world is in the shadow of the Infinite Mercy Crystal Heaven.

The ghosts of this world deserve everything that happens to them. Everything happens to them that they deserve. They have clockwork bodies that are caught in the gears of the world and the spinning cloud-clockwork of the sky. They may watch the inexorable unfolding of their karma.

Demons can't make new people in this world. That would be crazy. You'd come awake for the first time ever and you'd realize, "I am about to get everything my past actions have earned me—nothing more or less!" Then your clockwork body would explode to the eight directions of the world and everything in the clockwork ghost world would get tangled up and grind to a halt—until spang! Spang! Spang! Karmic springs would burst and everything would become disorganized. It would be just like when you divide by zero in the Matrix or try to play Nomic in your sleep.

That's not what newborns deserve, so it does not happen!

Death or Transcendence

Eventually a hungry ghost gives in. They let the power of the relevant Heaven take over their soul. It sears through them. The pleasure of the Queen of All Desiring wracks them, or the energy of the Whip-Hand King. They are consumed by the compassion radiation of Oneness Woman or the scripture of the Enlightenment-Vision Meditation Master. The part of their self that bound them to the hungry ghost world dissolves. They fly out into the sky between the worlds. Whoosh! Wham! The great wheel heaven slams into them. The Yama Kings scrub their memories of who they were. Then they send them on to live another life!

Sometimes a hungry ghost becomes a hero or evil hero instead. They master the power of the Heaven. Instead of allowing it to take part of their soul, they take its power and make it their own! These are very dangerous hungry ghosts; however, if they are reached by good heroes before they commit themselves to evil they may be trained in the martial arts and learn to love the world.

Blessed Kingdoms

If you are quite fortunate you will be born in a blessed kingdom. Suffused with the power of the Ultimate Kung Fu Master's celestial disciples, these realms are beautiful and good!

Where are the Blessed Kingdoms?

The blessed kingdoms float in the sky between worlds. They tend to cluster around marvelous things, such as the seven great gems or the Heavens of Ultimate Kung Fu. Often they are comparatively small, kingdoms floating in the sky instead of planets.

Being Born

People in the blessed kingdoms wear their thought bodies. They aren't usually "born"—they just pop up under cabbages and the like!

Life

Life in the blessed kingdom is full of good things. These are not, however, always *human* good things—it often seems as if the power of Heaven fights against that evil radiation that lets you exist as a person at all.

So people in the blessed kingdoms are usually happy and blissful—but sometimes they get angry at how hard it is to remain mistaken in all the important ways people are confused, misled, and mistaken. Such people transcend the ordinary forms of the blessed kingdoms. They achieve a terrifying enlightenment and become evil heroes or even, possibly, demons.

Death

Even sweet things have to fade. You may get to spend centuries or millennia in a blessed kingdom each time you visit one, but one day you start to feel—bleached.

Like the power of the Ultimate Kung Fu Heavens is making you thinner, smaller before it, less.

When that happens suit-wearing agents of the Yama Kings will show up. They'll say, "That's not how a blessed kingdom is supposed to be; so I'm afraid you're going to have to come with us."

It's hard to let go of a blessed kingdom even when it's hurting you. But they know a secret word that makes it easier.

They whisper it to you.

Later, unless you become a hero *right that moment* and overcome the grip of Karma on you, you'll never remember what it was.

But they'll whisper a word, and you'll smile, and you'll let go, and you'll fly with them out to the sky between worlds.

And you'll hang there in the light, looking at all the things and places and how bright and good they are, and you'll realize how much you love them—

The agents of the Yama Emperor, the Yama Kings or the Yama Kings' Anchors, who came for you that day.

And you'll tell them that. Won't you? Did you? You said *something*, but you'll never remember, later, what you said just then.

And WHAM!

WHAM!

WHOOSH!

The wheel catches you up. It whirls you around. It spins you off to land in your new life on some other world.

Maybe it's a different blessed kingdom.

Maybe it's a middle kingdom.

Maybe it's a litany box or a Hell, in which case you are quite within your rights to look back over your shoulder at the Yama Kings' agents like a cat that is being dragged away from a treat. But it's a new world! A new experience! A new opportunity!

Hurrah! And welcome to your new life.

Becoming a Hero

You would have lived a thousand lives like this, probably. Ten thousand. Ten thousand thousand. You would have been the mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter, husband, wife, enemy, and friend—at some point—of practically everyone you'll ever meet. You would have gotten to know the Yama Kings so well you throw letters back and forth as the wheel hits.

And then something changes.

Suddenly you realize that everything that makes the demons and the celestial beings what they are—heck, everything that makes the *unbearable sorrows* and the *Imperators of the Kung Fu Heavens* what they are—is inside you as well. That you can tap that power. That you can wield it.

And that if you are not careful the Heavens and the Hells will use that power to make you *theirs*.

You awaken your martial arts.

Celestial Beings

King Evil isn't the only one who makes a play for people's souls. The Ultimate Kung Fu Master and the Imperators of the seven Heavens are always trying to recruit heroes like you into the ranks of the *celestial beings*.

Good heroes, evil heroes, in-between heroes—once you learn to tap the power of the Heavens, you're always vulnerable to becoming *part* of those Heavens. An agent of love and justice—but not quite a person any more.

Instead, you're **Nobilis** or an **Anchor**.

The heroes don't know what to make of the celestial beings. Is it good to be a celestial being? Is it bad? It's probably a good thing to be, and the heroes are always working together with the celestial forces—

But to be a person is precious.

Or is it?

Maybe you're just confused. Maybe that's just a bit of evil radiation confusing you. Maybe everything you are is made up of a silly refusal to let go of that radiation and join the great infinite, the ultimate good, the crawling chaos, the supreme cosmic One. Maybe all reality is just a hungry ghost world for the Ultimate Style, and to become a celestial being is the best thing that can happen.

Or maybe it murders you, and replaces you with a brilliant white light.

Attributes

Characters in *A Soul of Your Own* may purchase the following Attributes:

Aspect

Aspect is purchased normally, but many other Attributes make it partially or wholly obsolete.

Chi

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Chi. You may also use this Attribute to perform Aspect miracles, with the following provisos:

- these miracles must be acute, and cannot be sustained;
- they are fueled by Chi, an Earthly magic, and can be blocked by destructions of the same;
- they must match the thematics of your kung fu or magic.

When you think that your character is particularly obsessed, driven, energetic, powerful, or competent, roll 1d6. If you roll your Chi or less, that energy and power might not be your own. You may spend 1 Chi MP to claim it; if you do not, it is a gift of the Whip-Hand King of Impossible Energy Heaven. Make this roll only once per incidence of excessive energy.

Contemplation

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Contemplation. You may also use this Attribute to perform mental and sensory Aspect miracles.

When your character thinks deeply about the world, themselves, a problem, or someone else, and emerges with a new insight, roll 1d6. If the result is your Contemplation or less, that insight may be a profound communication of the kata of the Ultimate Kung Fu Master, filtered by the Enlightenment-Vision Meditation Master and then beamed to you from afar. You may spend 1 Contemplation MP to claim it as your own insight instead.

Death

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Death. Characters with this Attribute are not bound to the wheel; if they die, they remain active,

and can perform Aspect miracles with this Attribute until they either choose to give up their current existence or can afford the major destruction of Death necessary to return themselves to life.

When your character dies, kills a sentient being, or faces what you believe is a shocking or immersive experience of death, roll 1d6. If you roll your Death or less, your character's experience or action may not be their own. You may spend 1 Death MP to claim it; otherwise, Death Queen acts or witnesses through you. If you believe that a great deal of killing may be required, you may perform a *murderous meditation*, sustaining a single state of mind and death-act (whether your own or that of Death Queen) through a number of actions. Until you release this mode you are an avatar either of Death Queen or a breath of murder arising from yourself; thus, sustaining it beyond its initial necessity may be contrary to your purpose as a hero.

Distraction

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Distraction. If you are not paying attention to what you are doing you can also use this to perform Aspect miracles and miracles of other Estates. These must be thematically appropriate to your kung fu or magical style.

When you believe your character is confused, is committing a moral error, or is just now becoming aware of a moral error you did not yourself recognize at the time, roll 1d6. If you roll your Distraction or less, your confusion may stem from the Distraction Evil. You may spend 1 Distraction MP to claim it; otherwise it is the power of Distraction Evil at work in your soul.

Empathy

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Empathy. You may also use this Attribute to perform Aspect miracles to understand other people better, though these are limited as usual by the terrafi sairyd (the divide between souls).

When your character feels another's experience acutely, roll 1d6. If the result is your Empathy or less, that Empathy may be a gift from Oneness Woman. Either spend 1 Empathy MP to claim it or accept that your empathic insight, in this case, rode to you as a signal carried by a beam of compassion energy rather than originating in your soul. If you have this Attribute, you may choose to make a momentary insight into another person's experience persistent, bearing it with you until the scene, session, or story fades.

Folly

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Folly. You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of Aspect or other Estates, as long as doing so is a bad idea. You must also match such miracles to the thematics of your kung fu or your magic.

When you decide your character's recent actions were stupid, you must roll 1d6. If you roll your Folly or less, that stupidity may stem from King Mindless. Either spend 1 Folly MP to claim it, or accept its origin as such.

Karma

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Karma. You may also use this Attribute to perform any miracle that is both poetic justice and suited to the thematics of your style.

Whenever your character learns an important lesson or gains something they genuinely needed, roll 1d6. If the result is your Karma or less, that lesson or gift may come from the karma-fulfilling actions of the Yama Emperor and Yama Kings. If you wish to remain the author of your own fate, freeing yourself from that Karma, spend 1 Karma MP.

Nettle's Bite

You may use this [Attribute+2] to perform miracles that push forward your own destruction—that move you inevitably towards a tragic end that undoes everything you stand for and that you are. These miracles can be miracles of Aspect or of any Estate but they must match the thematics of your kung fu or magic.

There is no roll associated with the nettle's bite; it is ultimately for the player to decide whether such actions are the character's or the power of King Evil.

Old Age

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Old Age.

Characters with this Attribute are Immutable, and with Old Age 3+ become Eternal as well.

Each session you must roll 1d6. If you roll your Old Age or less, spend 3 Old Age MP or the power of White-Hair Man claims a little of your soul.

Pain

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Pain. If you are badly hurting you may also use this Attribute to perform Aspect miracles.

When you believe your character is suffering great pain, you must roll 1d6. If you roll your Pain or less, that pain might not be your own. You may spend 1 Pain MP to claim it; if you do not, it is an emanation belonging to Agony Man. This rule applies once per incidence of pain, normally when it begins, but you may roll any time up until the instant after the pain ends. If you have this Attribute, you may choose to make a given pain linger to prevent staccato pain from intermittent torture draining your MP.

Pleasure

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Pleasure. If you are wracked with sensual desire or floating on its satiation you may also use this Attribute to perform Aspect miracles.

When your character experiences a great ecstasy, you must roll 1d6. If you roll your Pleasure or less, that pleasure might not be your own. You may spend 1 Pleasure MP to claim it; if you do not, it is a gift of the Queen of All Desiring. If you have this Attribute, you may choose to make a given sensual pleasure linger until the end of the scene.

Realm

Realm is purchased normally. It grants power over a Chancel-like entity, an occult temple for martial artists in the Zu mountains or elsewhere.

Respite

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Respite. You may also use it for any miracle that earns you a defensive reprieve, as long as that miracle is also suited to the thematics of your kung fu.

When your character receives a reprieve either from an imminent doom or a just but not necessarily immediate one, roll 1d6. If the result is your Respite or less, the reprieve may not be fate, fortune, your own abilities, or whatever help you received, but the grace of Mercy Princess. You may spend 1 Respite

MP to claim the reprieve as something you wrought yourself or received through comparatively mundane fortune.

Sickness

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Sickness. If you are sick you may exaggerate the effects to miraculous levels (such as blowing enemies away with a sneeze, or having the "chills and immune to fire" sickness) and use this Attribute to perform Aspect miracles.

Characters with this Attribute are immune to the supernatural quality of some sicknesses, but cannot be immune to the mundane vectors of contagion. When the HG believes your character is at mundane risk of sickness, roll 1d6. If you roll your Sickness or less, the power of Plague Woman might reach you. You must spend 1 Sickness MP or manifest at least the superficial elements of this illness. If you have this Attribute you may voluntarily catch something either before the GM makes you roll or after you spend the Sickness MP, creating it out of your own power as an antibody to Plague Woman's work and preventing further infection of this sort until you choose to let the illness in question fade.

Spirit

Spirit is purchased normally.

Transcendence

You may use this [Attribute+2] to perform miracles that push forward your own sanctification—that move you inevitably towards servitude either to the Ultimate Kung Fu Master or King Evil, transforming you into a demonic or sanctified avatar of something inhuman and superhuman. The miracles can be miracles of Aspect or of any Estate, or you can even temporarily substitute this [Attribute+2] for Spirit, as long as this miracle or use fit both Transcendence's purpose and the thematics of your kung fu or magic.

If you have this Attribute, then at the completion of a story or major victory, roll 1d6. If you roll your [Transcendence+2] or less, you must spend 3 Transcendence MPs or become something a little more enlightened than you were.

Unexpected, the

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate "the Unexpected." You may also use this Attribute to perform Aspect miracles and miracles of other Estates, as long as they both match your kung fu or magical thematics and are a surprising (yet reasonable) application of the same.

Whenever your character changes in a way you consider meaningful, roll 1d6. If you roll your "the Unexpected" or less, that change may be a gift of Dancing Woman. You may spend 2 the Unexpected MP to claim it, or accept that change's external source.

Weakness

You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of the Estate Weakness. You may use this Attribute to perform miracles of Aspect or other Estates; these miracles must match the thematics of your kung fu or magic, and they always fail to achieve meaningful results.

When you recognize your character as having failed to achieve some important thing, roll 1d6. If you roll your Weakness or less, that failure may stem from the radiation of Thin Woman. You may spend 1 Weakness MP to claim it; otherwise, it was in fact *not* your character's own failing but that emanation.

Emanations and Consequences

In the above rules, players may frequently save MP by asserting that some experience their character is having derives from one of the great evils or celestial beings in the setting; or, conversely, spend MP to avoid making this assertion.

Naturally to have your weakness, or pleasure, or folly, or pain, or energy come from an external power is a step towards being co-opted by that external force. It's a step away from being a hero and a step towards being a demon or celestial being. But the details have been left unstated in a fashion deliberately imprecise and unanchored in the game's mechanics. Each player is meant to come to their own understanding of and interpretation of this cost; their own sense of how far they can compromise their character by giving over their body, mind, and fate to the influence of external factors. If you're happy saving a few MP by giving over a few areas of your character's life experience to the higher and lower powers, please do so; if you're bothered by the notion, please feel free to refrain.

Example Character: Vitalia

Vitalia is a brash young martial artist and nurse who accidentally threw an outbreak of strep through the hospital window one day. After repeatedly parsing this sequence of events in her head, she became aware of the vapors from Plague Woman's ocean and then of the entire vastly brilliant universe. Soon after heroes of the Zu mountains dragged her off to China to train.

Aspect	0	(1 CP)		
Chi	3	(7 CP)	Floating	
Realm	1	(2 CP)		
Sickness	4	(11 CP)	Weakness	3
Spirit	2	(4 CP)	Contemplation	2

Martial Arts Style: Phoenix Rising Style

Vitalia's Sickness rating of 4 means that she gets sick sometimes and often has to spend Sickness MP to keep Plague Woman from gaining a foothold in her soul. Her Chi rating of 3 means that the Whip-Hand King offers her a great deal of energy through the forms he performs in the Impossible Energy Heaven; sometimes Vitalia will do something energetic and then realize it wasn't her energy at all, but the Whip-Hand King's Chi settling into her soul. For the first story, as she's dragged off to learn meditation and heroism and such, she's also going to wrestle with issues of Weakness and Contemplation.

Her Phoenix Rising Style is a firebird-based style with thematics she expects to develop over the course of play.