

CHAPTER ONE

HAI SHEN GONG

AT A GLANCE

Hai Shen Gong (hai shuhn gohng), literally “the sea spirit temple,” is a colorful place that sits atop a wind-blasted cliff and overlooks the crashing waves of a vast ocean below. It is built in the traditional, gaudy style of Taoist temples throughout the Middle Kingdom. The effigies of five deities and one demon live inside it, the most important of which is the Sea Goddess. Smoke hangs thickly in the temple air, the by-product of countless wax candles and incense sticks, and a fireplace outside fuels a towering light beacon that stands like a sentinel at the cliff’s edge. The beacon itself is a perfect pearl as large as a boulder. It pulsates brightly at night atop its tower to warn ships away from the dangerous cliffs and shallows below.

Unlike other Taoist temples, Hai Shen Gong houses a small population of mendicant nuns who dedicate their lives to the ocean and their goddess.

PLACEMENT

Even though Hai Shen Gong is in a fairly remote location, each year it still draws a number of visitors seeking the Sea Goddess’ wisdom before embarking on their sea adventures. One assumption of this chapter is that the campaign in which the temple is located is an Asian analogue, specifically one similar to mythic China (generically referred to here as “the Middle Kingdom”). However, any setting will work as long as it possesses a number of animistic deities.

To use Hai Shen Gong in a campaign world that is less sino-centric, consider the following:

- If your world has a nation that’s an Asian analogue but the current campaign isn’t set in it, then the temple could have been built by Middle Kingdom immigrants. They were part of a trade mission to a distant country when a

storm blew their ship off course. After landing on this strange shore and settling in, they built Hai Shen Gong to honor the Goddess for delivering them safely.

- The temple can be used “as is” but populated with nuns from local races and cultures. Their form of worship is strange and different when compared to the mainstream faiths in the region, making Hai Shen Gong a cultish offshoot. The temple’s gaudiness and alien trappings emulate the diversity of ocean life.
- You can change the décor of the temple and the names of its inhabitants, but leave everything else more or less intact. The layout is simple enough that Sea Goddess worshippers in any culture could have built the temple.

CHARACTERS

The following NPCs are residents of Hai Shen Gong.

SHI XUAN-LAN

Reluctant Leader

“Next time Old Hu pisses in the incense pot, shoot him.”

Originally born on the plains north of the Middle Kingdom, Shi Xuan-Lan (shih shwen lahn) never expected she would end up at the absolute end of the world worshipping an ancient sea goddess her people never imagined existed. The Butong family, commoners in the service of the ruling Prairie-Lion Clan, reared her, naming her *Kita* (keeta), or “summer meadow.” By the time she could walk she was no stranger to the saddle. As a teenager, she caught and tamed a notorious stallion called Hellwind (both for his blazing speed and his wicked flatulence.) As a young woman, she exhibited the kind of ambition all seven of the khan’s increasingly worthless sons lacked. She had a hunter’s steady hand and precision, a killer’s instinct, a warrior’s battlefield




remorselessness, and a rider's finesse. Kita ruled the plains from Hellwind's back like a queen from on high.

It surprised no one when the khan, impressed by her equestrian skills, asked Kita to join him and his sons on their frequent hunting trips. Despite his sons' obvious filial piety, the khan always believed Kita should be the one to inherit his saddle. Jealousy festered in the boys' hearts, a natural and not unexpected reaction, but protocol forbade them from openly criticizing Kita or their father's admiration of her. While they doubted his judgment, he was still the clan's greatest warrior. They knew that a swift death awaited them should he suspect their disloyalty. So they did what princes have always done: they removed their enemy through manipulation and deceit. During the annual clan gathering, an assassin in their employ stabbed the sleeping khan through the throat with an arrow, snapping off the tip to ensure the old man slowly asphyxiated on his own blood. His murder stunned the clans. But their shock paled in comparison to Kita's, for she had always loved the khan like a second father. The khan's sons blamed the Cloud-Dragon Clan, their own clan's traditional enemy, but to suggest that the Cloud-Dragons had violated the neutral ground of the clan gathering in such a craven manner was tantamount to a declaration of war. The enemy khan swore his innocence vociferously, even going so far as to offer his children as hostages until his clan's name was cleared.

Four days later, the khan's wife discovered the arrow tip while preparing his body for cremation. She turned it over to the clan elders, who recognized the haft etchings as Kita's. They sent for her, but she was out riding, seeking solace in isolation. Because she had not taken her hunting gear with her, the messenger returned with her quiver instead. Inside, the elders found the matching arrow — damning evidence, indeed — then delivered the tragic news to the khan's sons. By the time Kita returned, she found an angry mob gathered outside her tent, thirsty for her blood. The khan's eldest son had them convinced she wanted leadership over the clan, that she assumed the old man's love for her was a clear indication she would inherit it upon his demise.

It became suddenly clear to Kita, as people whom she had once considered friends and family turned on her, that the boys had been setting her up for this moment for years. Rather than die for a crime she didn't commit, she spurred Hellwind around and fled. There would be time enough for justice later. The new khan sent his siblings after her, com-


SHI XUAN-LAN
15th-Level Human Ranger/1st-Level Cleric

CR 16; Medium humanoid; HD 15d8+15 + 1d8+1; hp 80; Init +6 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (+6 Dex), touch 16, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +15; Grp +16; Atk +18 melee (1d4+4/crit 19–20/x2 plus 1 Con, +3 *dagger of wounding*), or +19 ranged (1d6+5/crit x3 plus 1d6 fire damage, +4 *composite shortbow of flaming*); Full Atk +18/+13/+8 melee (1d4+4/crit 19–20/x2 plus 1 Con, +3 *dagger of wounding*), or +19/+14/+9 or +13/+13/+8/+8/+1/+1/+17 ranged (1d6+5/crit x3 plus 1d6 fire damage, +4 *composite shortbow of flaming*); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Combat Style, Combat Style Mastery, Improved Combat Style, Turn Undead, Spells; SQ Animal Companion, Aura, Camouflage, Evasion, Favored Enemy, Spells, Spontaneous Casting, Swift Tracker, Wild Empathy, Woodland Stride; AL CG; SV Fort +12, Ref +17, Will +13; Str 12, Dex 22, Con 12, Int 15, Wis 18, Cha 16

Skills: Craft (leatherworking) +12, Heal +10, Hide +18, Jump +10, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +10, Knowledge (geography) +10, Knowledge (religion) +6, Listen +16, Move Silently +16, Ride +28, Search +20, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +7, Spot +10, Swim +16 (+20 vs. nonlethal damage), Use Rope +12, Survival +20 (+22 when underground, +22 to avoid getting lost and hazards, +22 when following tracks)

Feats: Endurance, Improved Precise Shot, Leadership, Lightning Reflexes, Manyshot, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Rapid Shot, Ride-By Attack, Skill Focus (Ride), Spirited Charge, Track

Languages: Aquan, Common, Prairie-Lion Clan dialect

Human Traits (Ex): Humans get 1 extra feat and 4 extra skill points at 1st level.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Shi Xuan-Lan is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, and with all types of armor and shields (except tower shields).

Favored Enemy (Ex): Shi Xuan-Lan gains a bonus to her Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, and Survival skill checks and a damage bonus in combat against the fol-

lowing creature types: Animals +8, Giants +2, Monstrous Humanoids +4.

Track: As a bonus feat, a ranger is able to find tracks or follow them for 1 mile at half speed with a successful Survival check based on conditions.

Wild Empathy (Ex): A ranger can improve the attitude of an animal, or magical beast with an Intelligence score of 1 or 2, within 30 feet with a Charisma check. The typical domestic animal has a starting attitude of indifferent, while wild animals are usually unfriendly.

Combat Style (Ex): This ranger chose the archery Combat Style and so is treated as having the Rapid Shot feat, which gives one extra attack per round with a ranged weapon.

Endurance: At 3rd level, as a bonus feat a ranger gains a +4 bonus to Swim checks vs. nonlethal damage, to Constitution checks to continue running, to avoid nonlethal damage from a forced march, starvation, or thirst, to hold your breath, to Fortitude saves to avoid nonlethal damage from hot or cold environments, and to resist damage from suffocation. Also, the ranger can sleep in light or medium armor without becoming fatigued.

Animal Companion (Ex): This ranger had a light horse animal companion named Hellwind. Hellwind died plummeting from the cliffs of Hai Shen Gong, and Shi Xuan-Lan has not been able to bring herself to replace him.

Improved Combat Style (Ex): A ranger who chose the archery Combat Style is treated as having the Manyshot feat, which lets her fire three arrows at a single opponent within 30 feet.

Woodland Stride (Ex): A ranger moves through undergrowth at normal speed without taking damage or impairments.

Swift Tracker (Ex): A ranger moves at normal speed while following tracks with no penalty to the Survival check.

manding them to perform their filial duty and not to come back unless they brought her head with them. They had no choice but to obey. Riding after Kita gol Butongyi, the fact that they had fallen neatly into the trap their brother had laid for them as well as for Kita fed their hatred for her even more.

That was six years ago. Since then, the brothers have pursued Kita south through the entire length of the Middle Kingdom. She quickly learned to hide in isolated country temples. Even though the austere Buddhist temples, with their gentle monks and nuns, made her feel welcome, she grew to love the garish Taoist temples more. They were almost always uninhabited, tended only by the laity who lived nearby. When they discovered her, they usually

assumed she was just another penniless traveler seeking shelter and left her alone. Many times they even let her eat the sacrificial food offerings. These places began to feel like home to Kita, and their gods like her family.

Unfortunately, the inevitable happened and Kita ran out of land. A long wall of cliffs towering over an impossibly vast ocean stopped her dead in her tracks. The brothers continued to nip closely at her heels, though, and after so many years of flight exhaustion threatened to overwhelm her. Yet Kita was filled with a sense of calm fostered by the gentle rhythms of the crashing waves below. Only the unending grass plains of her homeland compared to the majesty and scope of the ocean. It called out to her. Meanwhile, the brothers rode hard to intercept her.

SHI XUAN-LAN, CONTINUED

Evasion (Ex): If a ranger makes a Reflex save against an attack that normally deals half damage on a success, she takes no damage.

Combat Style Mastery (Ex): A ranger who chose the archery Combat Style is treated as having the Improved Precise Shot feat, which lets ranged attacks ignore the AC bonus granted by anything less than total cover and the miss change from anything less than total concealment.

Camouflage (Ex): A ranger can use the Hide skill in any natural terrain, even if it doesn't grant cover or concealment.

Ranger Spells: (3/2/2/1) Shi Xuan-Lan has a caster level of 7th and can prepare spells on the ranger spell list. The DC to resist these spells is 14 + the spell level. She normally has the following spells prepared:

- 1st Level — *alarm, entangle, magic fang*
- 2nd Level — *sleep, snare*
- 3rd Level — *neutralize poison, water walk*
- 4th Level — *summon nature's ally IV*

Aura (Ex): This cleric has a faint Chaotic Good aura.

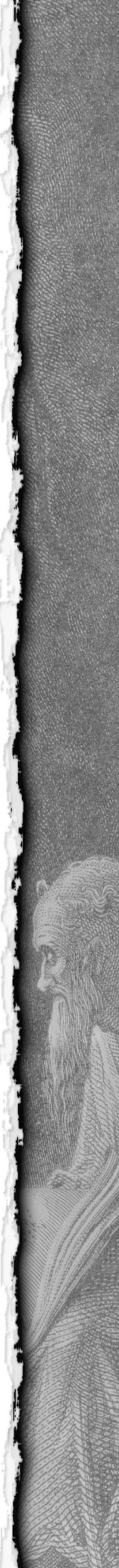
Spontaneous Casting: Shi Xuan-Lan can "lose" a prepared spell in order to cast any *cure* spell of the same level or lower.

Turn Undead (Su): Shi Xuan-Lan can Turn Undead six times per day.

Cleric Spells: (3/2+1) Shi Xuan-Lan worships the Sea Goddess and has chosen the Sea and Travel domains, which allow her to Rebuke or Command aquatic creatures 3 times per day as an evil cleric Rebukes undead and to act normally 1 round per day regardless of magical effects that impede movement as per the spell *freedom of movement*. Survival is also a class skill. She normally has the following spells prepared; domain spells are marked with an asterisk.

- 0 Level — *create water, guidance, light*
- 1st Level — *command, endure elements,* entropic shield*

Possessions: +3 dagger of wounding, +4 composite short-bow of flaming, quiver with 23 arrows, ring of swimming, figurine of wondrous power (bronze griffon), horn of fog, explorer's outfit, jewelry (worth 206 gp), and 731 gp





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