

ANGELS OF TANGUT

A game by Jack Aidley

Designer's Forward

As will become apparent as you read through this; I didn't find time to finish this properly – I could give you reasons why; but ultimately that's just excuses. In particular the details about GMing and specifying Challenges need considerable work and I haven't had a chance to do any play testing or balancing. There's been no editing or proof reading; only a quick spell check so I apologise in advance for the mistakes you will find. However, I think the ideas already in place should give you enough of a picture to see what I was aiming for.

I also want to thank Jonathan Walton for his excellent sheet and his help in providing images and fonts used in it. I'm only sorry I didn't really get time to put them to good use.

Troupe, Players and the GM

To play a full game of Angels of Tangut you'll need a few friends who wish to play and are happy to commit to playing it across a number of sessions. You'll typically need four to six people, who will be collectively referred to as a *Troupe*. The first time you get together, you'll spend your time creating a world to play in and creating characters to play in that world. Every time you get together after that, you'll take turns taking on a special role called the *GM*, everyone who's not GMing will be referred to as a player. As GM, you'll have a special position of responsibility and authority, creating and balancing a situation into which the other players will take their characters. When being a player, you'll take sole charge of an Angel of Tangut and your choices will shape both the character you are creating through play and the eventual outcome of your imaginary world. These choices will centre on certain symmetries such as pleasure and pain or love and hate.

An Angel?

The Angels of Tangut are not necessarily like the Angels you know and love. Whether they are God's creations and servants even they do not know; they merely follow where they know they must go. Angels normally appear as beautiful women or toned and handsome men (any Angel can appear as either; they have no sex of their own) but they can also appear in Angelic form – four winged and rimmed with a nimbus of light. They are dominated by two aspects: Earth; their ability to perform as mortals, albeit mortals with unnaturally superlative abilities and Sky; their ability to fly and perform great magic. All Angelic magic seems to be a Glamour of sort – an Angel wishing to smite a foe might leap far into the air, snatch the sun from the sky and hurl it at them killing them in a fiery inferno yet when the spell as passed, only their foe would be harmed – the grass around unsinged, even their clothes intact.

Locale

The first thing to do, upon beginning your first session is to get together as a Troupe and create the *Locale* – that is, the area in which the game will take place and the challenges you will face.

1. Contour

First draw a large (covering most of the paper) square or rectangle on a piece of paper using a thick black pen (ideally) – this is the *Surround*. Then, starting with person with the longest hair, and moving sequentially through the members of your Troupe begin drawing contours on the map. Each contour must either be a closed loop, or start *and* end on the edges of the Surround. These contours should be drawn lightly in pencil (or gray pen) and may *not* intersect with or touch any other contour (but contours can be drawn within or surrounding existing contours; in fact it works better if they do). Each person should add at least three contours to the map, but after each person has anyone may call “Enough” when it is their turn to add a contour instead of adding another contour. Everyone else gets one more chance to add a contour but then the Contour stage is finished.

2. Relief

Next comes *Relief*. This is where the Contours you have already drawn get re-interpreted to give shape to the landscape. Starting the next person on from the one that started Contour, each player draws a line between two adjacent Contours (i.e. a line that does not intersect with a third contour) with an arrow on one end or the other. These arrows indicated increasing altitude of the land. The Contours indicate lines of equal altitude. Proceed through the members in the same order as before placing Relief lines as you go, each pair of Contours can only have one Relief Line drawn between them. Continue doing this until every pair of Contours that can have a Relief Line drawn between them has a Relief Line drawn between them.

You now have the lie of the land but what is a landscape without interesting things to fill it?

3. Locations

The third stage is *Location*. This is where you site interesting places; these places will acquire interesting problems and challenges later – for now, they’ll just be empty placeholders. Location placement works in a similar fashion as Contour, starting with the next person round (from the one that started Relief) each person must place at least three Locations but after that, anyone may call “Enough” and bring the process to a close just as before. Locations can be placed anywhere on the map and can be any of the five following things: a Village (draw an empty circle in black pen), a Town (draw a filled circle in black pen), a Shrine (an ‘x’ shape with a circle round in, drawn in red pen), a Ruin (draw a diamond in red pen) or, finally, a symbol from the Tangut (drawn in black or red). Only one Tangut may be placed, and it has special in-game effects – but you do not have to place one.

All Locations must be placed at least one thumb's width from every other Location. All of the symbols should be "small" – about the size of the circle on the Earth or Sky Diagrams on your character sheet – except for the Tangut symbol which should be about the same size as it appears on your character sheet.

Once all Locations have been placed, they need to be numbered. Just start somewhere on the map and number them off, skipping the Tangut Symbol. Starting at one makes most sense unless you're all Computer Programmers. These numbers are so you can easily refer to locations for the next three stages without cluttering the map up too much. I suggest you also take an index card and write the number on it, so you can track the details about a Location later.

4. Challenges

Next up is *Challenges*. Each person should take a number of poker chips (coins, or other counters will do if you don't have any poker chips) equal to the most locations anyone placed, plus an extra three for luck (so at least six chips). These chips can then be paid in, to buy facts, conflicts and relations for each location. How these chips are spent determines the kind and variety of challenges and conflicts that will be faced in game; but not exactly what they are, how hard they are or how they will pan out. Turns proceed through the players in order, starting with the next one along (you get the idea by now, I'm sure). But this time there's a twist; on your turn you may pay in any number of chips. The round continues cycling through the Troupe members until all chips have been spent. You may play no chips at all on your turn if you like but only if the person before you played at least one chip *and* you played a chip on your last go, (everyone must play a chip on their go). The Tangut Symbol (if there is one) is excluded from this stage.

Example Facts:

- The Village's well had dried up
- The Town has a small church
- Someone has been summoning Demons at the Shrine
- The Ruins are of a ancient Sorcerer's tower

Example Conflicts:

- The Buddhists and the Taoists are locked in struggle for the hearts of the villagers
- The Mayor of the Town wants to encourage trade; the people want to keep strangers out
- The Shrine is to two gods and they are vying for control
- The Ruin is being guarded by a powerful spirit that wants to return to the netherworld

Example Relations:

- The Village elder and the priest are involved in a secret homosexual relationship
- The Town guard are all being bribed by the innkeeper

5. Connections

Don't worry we're almost there. Now we just need to join the locations up. As before, start with the next person round and continue in order. On each person's turn they may draw a line (which needn't be straight, but should either follow contours or an approximately direct route, think the kind of line a road would take) connecting either a Location to another Location or a Location to an existing Connection. This round continues until every Location has at least one connection and the Tangut Symbol is included in the Connections phase. Connections should be drawn in black ink.

A Rose by any other Name would smell as sweet?

6. Naming

Finally, it is time to *Name* each of the Locations. This is left to last so that the names can be chosen after as much as possible is known about the places. Angels of Tangut was created with a Tibetan feel in mind; however, you can adopt a different naming style if you like. This round proceeds in the usual fashion starting with the next person round and proceeding in the usual order. Each player names one location; play continues until all Locations are named. Anyone may challenge a name if they feel it is inappropriate, in this case the name is put to a vote among the Troupe (the challenger wins on a draw) and if the challenger's objection is supported the person who chose the name must pick another.












Again, the Tangut Symbol requires no name.

Character Creation

Next up, is Character Creation. Again, every member of the Troupe will need to do this and you will need to be together as a group when you do so.

1. Glyph

Starting with the person with the shortest hair, each person must choose one of the following *Glyphs*. Draw it in the box where it says 'Glyph'.

	Motion		Trade		Deceit
	Threat		Family		Magic
	Co-operation		Ideas		Faith
	Authority		Protection		

No-one can choose the same Glyph that someone else has already picked.

2. Fearful Symmetries

You must now pick a set of five Symmetries for your character. Pick carefully, for the symmetries you choose will dictate the kind of stories your character will tell, and the kind of lasting impressions you can leave on the land. The Symmetries listed here should be considered an example set, if you get unanimous agreement from the rest of your Troupe you may pick others. Whatever you choose it always consists of a Hard/Easy pair, listed in that order. You may not reverse the order of any of the symmetries.

Actuality	/	Appearance	Generosity	/	Greed	Mercy	/	Justice
Compassion	/	Honour	Honesty	/	Lies	Peace	/	Violence
Courage	/	Fear	Hope	/	Resignation	Pleasure	/	Pain
Forgiveness	/	Revenge	Love	/	Hate	Principles	/	Pragmatics
Friends	/	Family	Love	/	Lust	Wisdom	/	Strength

It will work better if no two members of your Troupe share the same *set* of Symmetries, although you will probably share several of your Symmetries with other people. Write the Symmetries you have chosen in the 'Fearful Symmetries' box on your character sheet.

And you're done. Angels have no names, although you may acquire words by which you are mentioned.

Game Structure

Angels of Tangut is, as I have said, played over a number of sessions. It works like this, after the creation session, one of the Troupe Members will take on the role of GM (vote, nominate, roll dice, mud wrestle, whatever works best for you). Whoever is GMing will pick a Location; you must pick one of the Locations with fewest Challenges that has not yet been resolved. Locations with no Challenges are ignored, and the Tangut Symbol is never chosen. It's best to do this at the *end* of the session before so they can get some to plot, plan and prepare. That person will then GM until all the Challenges in that Locations have been dealt with. Then the role of GM will pass on to someone else. You don't have to rotate in a set order, but *everyone* must GM, no-one can GM two consecutive Locations and you should aim to have everyone GM as equal a number of games as possible by the end.




In general, targeting a Location a session is a good guideline, but don't worry if it runs over or under that.

The Location chosen defines what challenges will be faced, and where play will take place. If a player leaves the Location then they take no further part in the game until they decide to return; play cannot be moved to a different Location.

The Dreaded Tangut-a-Go-Go

Whenever you enter a new Location, you must face the Dreaded Tangut-a-Go-Go. This will determine which of the Tangut symbols you will have access to during play at his location. You will want to place some kind of mark or marker to indicate which Tangut you currently have. It works like this, roll a dice, you can move your marker that number (no more or less) in either direction; if moving that far would take you off the line of symbols, you can't move that way. If you're in the centre and roll a 6, re-roll. Before you first roll you can place your marker on any symbol you choose.

The Symbols of the Tangut

Dzamtang		Hope redeems you To spread the news is to multiply it With a stout heart, a mouse can lift an elephant
Kandze		To set fire to the wood, you need the help of the wind A problem shared is a problem halved The pen is mightier than the sword
Gyantse		The wish is father to the thought Only a certain amount of flowers and jewels are beautiful Let sleeping dogs lie

Nagchu	爨	Excellent people are honoured wherever they go Do not cast diamonds to pigs Actions speak louder than words
Batang	儼	Bird and shadow are linked Fools seldom differ The moon grows darker as it gets nearer to the sun
Tsetang	龜	A nibbling rabbit can also die of overfeeding Many hands make light work Honesty is the best policy
Pelyul	蕤	A lie is like a jump from a high roof Do not underestimate the quiet man Faith conquers all
Litang	弔	By pride one causes virtue to decline The Fig has many seeds The heart is heard in every organ
Xiangcheng	頁	Cold hearts can find warm words No man is an island The unfortunate would be bitten by toothless dogs
Tongren	隘	Goodness speaks in a whisper, evil shouts It is hard work to be the mother of many pigs My enemy's liver is the sheath of my sword
Daochen	藪	Luck that lasts is always suspect Dreams do not build houses The clouds do not ask permission from the trees

Playing the Game

The Rule of Law

Wherever possible Angels of Tangut tries to provide clear rules that can resolve conflicts clearly and unambiguously. However, it is possible there will be disputes over such things. Usually the GM will simply rule on what happens; however, any of the players may challenge the GMs ruling in which case the point is put to a simple vote among the Troupe; with the GM winning draws.

Resolving Conflicts

Conflict Resolution in Angels of Tangut works like this:

1. Declare what you are trying to achieve and approximately how.

You need to be clear about what you are trying to achieve. This needs to be discussed with the GM to maintain a scale for the game. Conflicts such as “persuade Laithang to allows us entry to

the chambers”, “Laithang tells us everything he knows”, “seduce Quixang” or “drive the marauders from the village” are suitable in scale for Angels of Tangut. Conflicts such as “enact a five year plan to bring peace and prosperity to the village” or “overthrow the government” are too large in scale, and should be broken down further while conflicts such as “parry his sword blow”, “introduce ourselves politely” or “get Quixang to dance with me” are usually too small in scale, and you should try and think bigger.

2. The GM tells you how many dice are against you

The GM *can* simply declare you succeed at this point. Otherwise he will tell you how many dice are against you; how the GM knows this is discussed later on in this document

“Say Yes or Roll the Dice” - Vincent Baker

3. Claim anything to make it easier

You always start with five dice. If the conflict relates to the word given for your Glyph, you may claim one extra dice. If the conflict relates to one of phrases on your current Tangut, you may take another two dice. Finally, if it relates to the Tangut Symbol in the Locale, and you are in a Location connected to it, you may take another dice. Thus you will roll between five and nine dice.

4. Roll a bunch of dice

Pick out a number of green (six-sided) dice equal to your dice, and a number of red dice equal to the GMs and roll them. Now match up dice of the same colour with the same number on them into groups. Having large groups on your side is good, on the GM’s not so much.

The dice don't have to be Green and Red, just different colours.

5. Use your resources to change the outcome

If the result doesn’t please you, you can use up your Earth or Sky aspect to affect the result. Using Earth indicates you’ve acted in a mortal manner but with greater prowess, maybe you’ve displayed an unnatural intellect, a great show of strength or an amazing moment of charm; while Sky on the other hand means you’ve used supernatural means. Sky is always showy; maybe fire falls from the sky, maybe you summon an army of wolves to fight for you, maybe the trees start moving.

Either way you cross off one of the circles in your Earth or Sky diagram (as appropriate), starting at the top for Earth and the bottom for Sky. The first circle you cross off gets you one extra dice, the next two, the third three and the fourth (say it with me!) four. You can only cross off one circle at a time and cannot use both Earth and Sky at once. These extra dice are rolled on your side, and added into the existing dice pool. Match them up as before.

6. You announce the result of the dice.

Compare your largest group of dice with the GMs. If you have more dice in the group, you succeed, if you have less, you fail. If the amount of dice in the group, compare the number on the dice, you need the higher number to succeed. If you're still equal, then no outcome is achieved just yet; but you still apply any *Extras* (see the very next paragraph!)

Now, it may be that after that largest group, you've also got a number of smaller groups (as in, at least pairs, singletons don't count). These are called Extras. Ones on your side mean some beneficial side effect occurred, ones on theirs means some penalty occurred. You may, if you wish, cancel out some of their Extras with yours.

Finally, you announce the result of the dice in a manner such "I succeed, with two penalties", or "I fail, with no extras" or "no result, but one bonus and one penalty".

7. The GM narrates how the dice roll translates into a result

If the player succeeds, then the outcome has to include what they were aiming for; if it fails then it needs to describe how and why. Ideally, in a way that moves the game on. Although what happens is narrated by the GM, they should accept input from the players in how they narrate what happens. Bonuses and penalties need to be accounted for. Each bonus or penalty should have an effect narrated for it; these can be tangential to the conflict in question but must relate to either it, or the way in which it was resolved.

Co-operating With Each Other

If two (or more) players want to co-operate on the same Conflict, they certainly can. Simply include any extra dice they get from Glyphs, Tangut and Resources into the total. Both players must agree on the outcome they want. The base of five dice is not multiplied by the number of players involved, so it is only if they have Glyphs, Tangut or Resources that it makes any difference. If both players agree, players can join in and bring extra Resources after the dice have been rolled but in this case their Glyphs and Tangut are ignored. Also the bonus die from the Tangut Symbol on the map is only counted once.

Player Vs. Player

Occasionally two players will want to have a conflict between them resolved through the dice, in this case follow this modified procedure:

1. Agree on what you are both trying to achieve

You both need to be clear on what you are trying to achieve and agree these are fair aims.

2. Both players claim extra dice

As before, you both start with five dice, and can claim extra dice for your Glyph, your Tangut and possibly the Tangut Symbol on the map.

3. Roll the dice

Each player rolls their own dice pool. You must show the other player what you have rolled before stage 4.

4. Use Resources

As before, you can use Sky or Earth to improve your roll.

5. Announce and compare the result

Compare as before; the player with the best result succeeds, the other fails. Bonuses and Penalties apply for the winning player.

6. The GM narrates the result

Exactly as before.

Breaking the Symmetries

And this, gentle reader, is where you really get to change the world. Breaking a Symmetry has a lasting, persistent and non-local effect on the world and on your character. You can either break the Symmetry on the easy side (cross off the one on the hard side) in order to gain a hefty bonus in a conflict, or break it on the hard side (cross off the one on the easy side) and have to succeed in the conflict again, this time with a penalty. Either way your action modifies the surrounding Locations as well as the one you are in and has a lasting effect on you.

You can only break a Symmetry if *both* sides of the symmetry could both be meaningful in the conflict you are engaged in.

Enough waffle. what about the mechanics?

Whichever side you break on, you cross off the other side of the symmetry, and place a mark (a small point, usually) next to the side you broke on – or, if you already have a mark or marks *on the other side* remove these marks; so if you keep breaking on the same side you build up marks but return to a neutral state if you switch sides. You cannot break a symmetry more than once at any given location (which is why you cross them off) but when you move on to the next location you can break it again, so remove the crossing out. The mark, however, remains.

When you break on the easy side, you can declare it either before you roll the dice – or, and only if you are going to fail, you can declare it at the same time you use resources. Breaking on the easy side gets you another three dice, plus one for each mark you have against the hard side of this Symmetry.

When you break on the hard side, you must declare it *after* you have just succeeded on a roll but before it has been resolved. You must then begin again with the conflict (keeping the same desired outcome), this time you take a penalty of one dice (by which I mean, the number of dice you are rolling against increase by one) for every mark against the easy side of this Symmetry. Any resources you spent are lost on the second roll, and you must spend again if you need the extra dice.

The resolution that is described must involve the side of the Symmetry you broke on whether you succeeded or failed but it should play a bigger part if you succeeded, and it's best if the description includes something about how your actions cause it to spread. Then you need to write the word with a '+' next to it in every Location linked to this one (if any of the Locations already have the word, add another '+' and, in this Location, you need to write the word and underline it. This Location now has the side of the Symmetry you chose to break on written into it's very soul and being.

The Symmetry has also affected your character and you should try and reflect that in the way that you play your Angel.

GM Preparation and Location design

Before a game starts you will want to take some time coming up with ideas that use the Challenges described for the Location. You will get a number of dice to spend on the ideas you come up with.

Freeform Conflicts

You can start any conflict you like with four dice. You also get three dice per player to spend at any time as you choose. You may not spend more than three on a given conflict

Dice from Symmetries

If the Location you are in has any '+'s from previously broken Symmetries you may claim an extra dice for each '+' if the player's failure would support that Symmetry.

Dice from Challenges

On any Challenge specified by the players you get extra dice to design up a challenge relating to that challenge. You can get four dice to spend on one conflict, three on two different conflicts or two on three different conflicts. You may also gain dice from the above sources.

When Symmetries are broken on the Hard side

You may, if you wish, spend extra free dice to make the second roll harder.