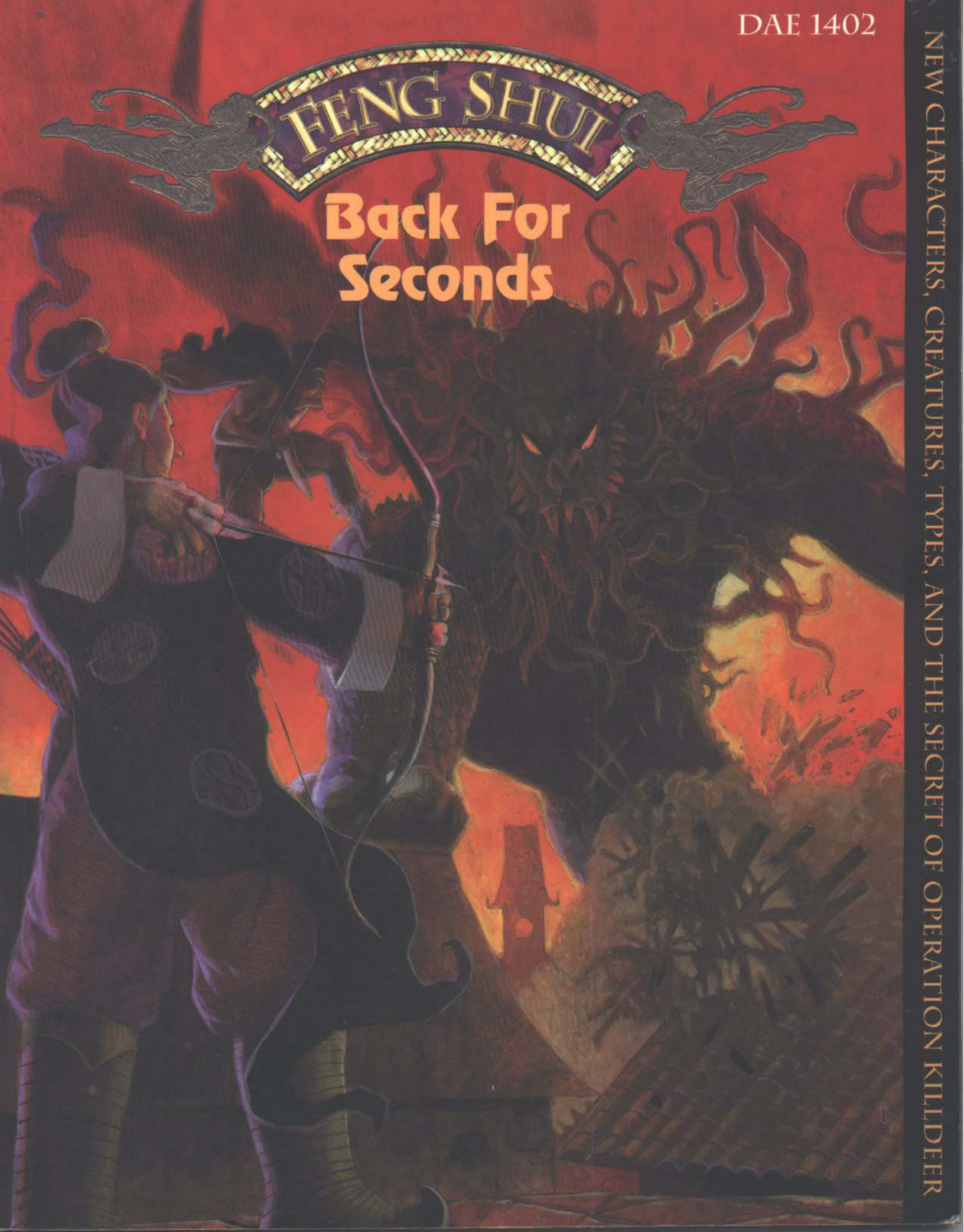


DAE 1402

# FENG SHUI

## Back For Seconds

NEW CHARACTERS, CREATURES, TYPES, AND THE SECRET OF OPERATION KILLDEER



DAEDALUS ENTERTAINMENT, INC. PRESENTS

# BACK FOR SECONDS

ENEMIES & ALLIES IN THE SECRET WAR

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JOHN TYNES

## INTRODUCTION

If you think of your *Feng Shui* campaign as a movie, and yourself as the director, your life is about to get a lot easier: welcome to central casting! This book profiles 37 GMCs, ready to enter your campaign and take on the roles of heroes, villains, or just that creepy guy down the street with the next clue. Plus, you'll find seven feng shui sites described (each of which have special bonuses for those attuned to them) meaning you'll never be at a loss for a cool place to blow up. Many of these GMCs and feng shui sites have been adapted from *Shadowfist* trading cards, meaning that if you're a *Shadowfist* fan, you'll be reading about a lot of familiar folks.

From the Architects of the Flesh, for example, we have the demonic cyborg known as CHAR and the next step in arcanowave-human evolution known as Homo Omega. The Ascended crop up with the trained assassins known as the Stings of the Scorpion and the treacherous Death Shadow. The Lotus provide us with critters such as the Kun Kan and the inimitable Thing With 1,000 Tongues. A gaggle of monks crop up from the Guiding Hand including those of the Orange, Green, and Shaolin varieties. We go ape with Orangotank and Furious George from the Jammers. There are even a handful of ringers with no known (or admitted) affiliation such as the White Ninja and the Mysterious Stranger.

Besides central casting, we're also happy to provide your production with a bunch of great new actors—six, to be precise. The Perpetual Motion Machine, the Williamson Estate, Heads Up Corner and more await your reading pleasure.

*Chapter 3: Dragons* presents six new character types that players can create PCs from. Try a Journalist, Medic, Magic Cop, Thief, Private Investigator, or Gambler on for size! For existing actors looking to extend their range a bit, the same chapter offers new unique schticks for existing types, to use during character creation or to buy with experience points if your characters are already well on their way.

In the back of the book, you'll find our *Appendix: Operation Killdeer*. This presents a short story and source material about the eponymous event that claimed the lives of several innerwalkers, and led into the storyline seen in the *Shadowfist: Netherworld* expansion set. You'll find all the straight dope there, ready to be worked into your campaign however you like.

So, my good director: 37 new GMCs, 7 feng shui sites, 6 new PC types, a grab-bag of new unique schticks, and a major plot-line for your use. What could be of more help in blowing things up?

Oh, of course. A Disintegrator Ray. No sweat—it's on page 6. Just because we care.

# THE ARCHITECTS OF THE FLESH

## ARCANOTECHNICIAN

*Buro Scientist*

The thing with the kitten came up again and again. Really, if I'd known how much trouble that one confounded cat would cause me, I would have been more careful not to get caught.

My teacher was shocked. She looked at me like I was a monster—which I felt was hypocritical. After all, hadn't they told me that learning was good, and that investigating the world around me was a noble and righteous thing? The principal was just angry. My parents didn't understand either. They thought it was "their fault" that I was "cruel." I was neither cruel nor kind—just a disinterested observer of nature's functions. As for the question of fault, that was ludicrous; I did nothing wrong. Yes, the kitten suffered, and yes it died—but its suffering and death were secondary to the knowledge gained through the process.

Forgive me if I seem to be obsessed with this isolated incident, but the kitten episode was important. I was made to feel shame for something that was not shameful. I applied reason to the problem, just as I had applied it to the cat. Reason clearly showed that what I had done was right, not wrong. (Keep in mind that this was back when cats were not scarce.) I chose to identify myself with reason, not with inconstant emotion or the retrograde codes of "traditional ethics." Reason has always been my strong ally.

Case in point: as my schooling progressed, I was rewarded for the exact same experiments that had led to my childhood humiliation. Yes, the frogs and fetal pigs were dead or etherized, but that was simply a function of greater resources. The essence

of the act was identical: blazing a trail of knowledge through a jungle of physical fact.

Other biologists at the university sank into a quagmire of chemical muddling. For me, knowledge of the chemical structure was always secondary. It was a tool for understanding the coherent whole.

The university was educational, but in the end, I was still ignorant of the question that had plagued me since childhood. The kitten had the same number of organs, in largely the same locations, alive and dead. What was the difference? Where did this "life" come from—and where did it go?

At first my research was called "visionary." Then it became "radical." Then "bizarre" and before you know it, out came those old verbal cudgels I'd heard as a child: "Monstrous." "Perverse." "Cruel."

They changed their tune quickly enough when Abominations were needed. Then "cruel" gave way to "ground-breaking" and "innovative" and "patriotic."

I owe the world's change in attitude to one man, one genius whose vision has reshaped science itself. I am speaking, of course, about Dr. Curtis Boatman.

Dr. Boatman finally solved the kitten dilemma for me at the CDCA. There was no one element that was, ultimately, decisive in the division between living and dead; it was all a question of maintaining a balance. This balance (which Dao had labeled the "chi" principle before the final eclipse by her far-brighter protégé) extended beyond the body and into the environment. To prove it to me, Dr. Boatman kept a kitten alive after removing its head and its heart.

Watching that kitten playfully batting around the head that had once rested upon its own tawny shoulders, I knew I had found my calling at last.

## NOTES

Most bullies use their strength to torment people, so they can feel superior to their victims. Arcanotechnicians use their brains to torment the world, so they can feel superior to nature. Since they grew up in a world with collapsing weather patterns, hideous diseases running amok, and propaganda teaching them that food was unhealthy unless it came from a vat, it's not surprising that they see nature as something to struggle with and dominate.

Arcanotech chic demands detachment and impartiality. Enthusiasm, joy and sincerity are shunned in favor of composure, distant amusement, and ironic superiority.

Some Arcanotechnicians genuinely are cold-blooded thinking machines who will calmly obey armed aggressors—until they can get in a good back-stab with a surgical laser. Others will crack when confronted with bullying of a more physical kind: they'll blubber, snivel, beg for mercy and eagerly betray the Buro to preserve their own miserable lives.

Officially, Arcanotechnicians are allowed to own firearms for personal protection (usually a *big no-no* in 2056). Most, however, look down on gun-toting macho types, and refuse to associate themselves with anything so *physical*.

Guess they're not so smart after all...

blend of 21st Century polymers and the husks of demons. I feel a faint burning where each blade touches, but it is nothing against the raging inferno that my mind rides, the flames of eternal death and damnation that guide my actions. With a gentle touch of my immense, clawed hand, the fire in the warrior is extinguished.

Yet my own fire does not dim or even flicker. It cannot be sated by a single death...or by a million deaths.

My orders are to act with extreme prejudice, for the Fire Monarch has betrayed his covenant with my masters. The reasons don't interest me, nor are they needed to make me fight. I would fight even if told I was to slaughter innocents or betray an ally. I would fight even if told it meant my death. The holocaust in my soul will accept no other possibility.

After I have disposed the seasoned warriors and the hopeless martyrs with a fire in their eyes that almost matches the one in my heart, I reach the target.

It is a mosque of delicately-fringed cold fire. It is the most beautiful thing I can remember seeing...even the echoes of my old life are ugly and terrible.

A thing of beauty—destroy it forever.

There is no gentleness in my touch, only rough contempt as I was ordered. What took years to create takes seconds to destroy, as whirling blades and blasting cannons tear the frail structure to wisps, little tongues of flame which are snuffed out in the ever-present mist. Without the presence of this mosque to keep the eternal fog of the Netherworld at bay, the cavern rapidly becomes just another featureless tunnel.

I cannot weep for such destruction, for I no longer have tears. Nor would I have mourned when I committed the act, for it was not I who was in control, but the inferno. Now, however, I mourn the loss of one more thing that is good and noble...and the addition of yet another thing that is base and cruel.

## Arcanotechnician

Body 4, Chi 0 (Mag 5), Mind 5 (Int 7), Ref 5

**Skills:** Arcanowave Device 9, Guns 5, Info/Biology 10, Info/Arcanowave Theory 11, Martial Arts 5

**Weapons:** Punch (5), Kick (6), Evil Looking Piece of Lab Equipment (8), Buro Backup Arm (rarely) (8/1/5+1)

*The Buro Backup Arm is the gun they keep in their storage locker at the Abominable Lab. When they're desperately fleeing the PCs, they'll get to their locker, frantically open it, then turn around triumphantly brandishing this pathetic piece of micro-ordnance.*

**Game Notes:** Most Arcanotechnicians have a rudimentary ability to manipulate Arcanowave tech, but few have AI/O ports and are thus usually unable to use Arcanowave devices. First-hand experience with mutation episodes tends to make people wary.

## CHAR

## BuroMil Cyborg

Dark-skinned warriors glowing with an inner fire that only the most fanatical devotion can generate rush at me...at the *thing* I have become. Their swords glance harmlessly off my advanced composite armor, a

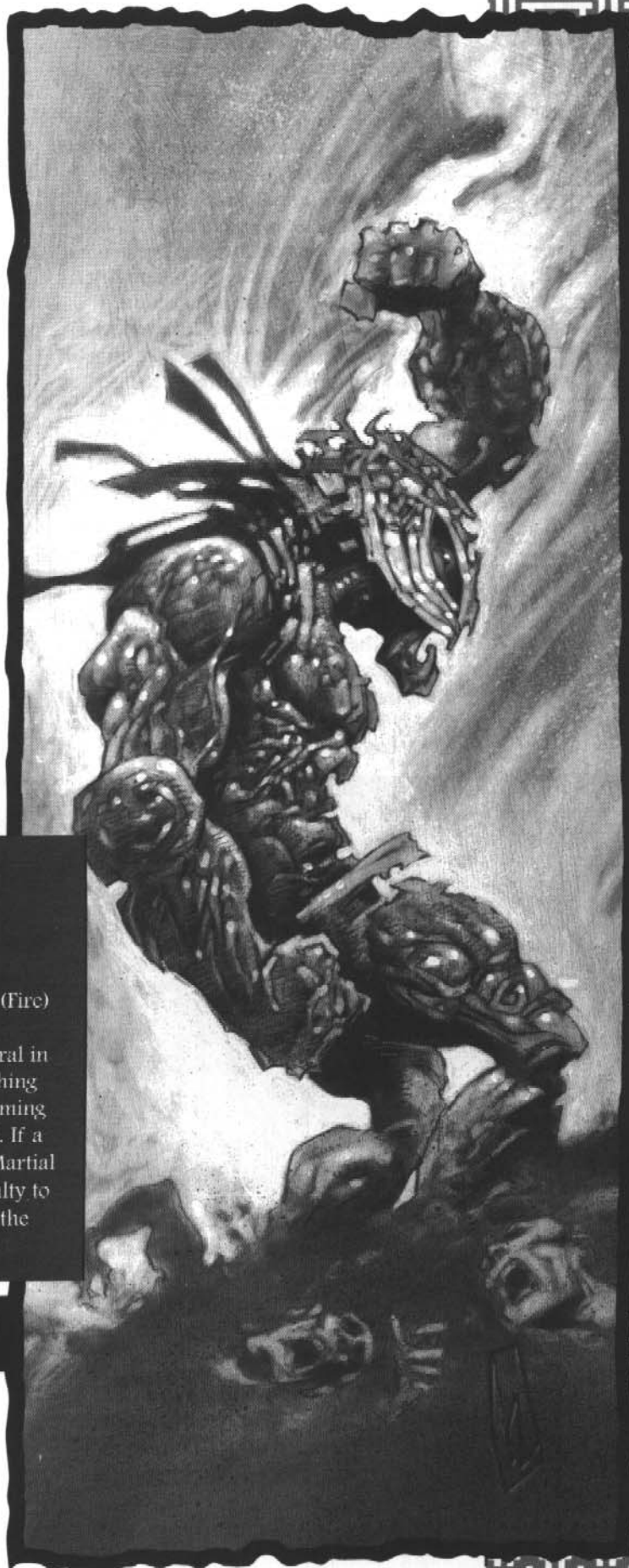
## NOTES

The Buro maintains an experimental arcanowave facility in the Netherworld known as the Biomass Reprocessing Center. Many of the devices and beings constructed there are made of shaped Netherworld matter, and cannot leave. Some can, however, and the CHAR series of battle cyborgs is a terrifying example.

## ARCHITECTS OF THE FLESH

The raw materials used to make each CHAR (Cyborg Humanoid-Arcanowave Revenant) include the usual examples of impressive cybertech, as well as the expected demonic DNA and other infernal components. What is unusual for the Buro, however, is that each CHAR also includes an intelligent, malignant entity: a soul taken from the Underworld, damned there for eternity but released to the Buro in exchange for favors and mass sacrifices. These souls have much of their memory erased by the Buro, leaving almost nothing but a being composed of pure rage and hatred. The bodies of the CHAR cyborgs are encased in a perpetually-flaming shell of demon husks, the flames serving as a constant irritant: the soul is still surrounded by the flames of the Underworld, and is still being punished for its sins.

In combat, each CHAR cyborg is left to its work, well away from the actions of other troops. The cyborgs are well-controlled and will not strike out against Buro forces haphazardly—but each CHAR is so well-armed that simply being in proximity to a combat-active CHAR unit is incredibly dangerous. So, each CHAR is sent off by itself, into areas where nothing is worth preserving. They are malice incarnate, and are driven by an insatiable, demonic need to kill everyone and destroy everything.



### CHAR

Bod 10, Chi 0 (Mag 8), Mnd 3 (Cha 1), Ref 6

**Skills:** Arcanowave Device 13, Creature Powers 13,

Info/Underworld 6, Martial Arts 13

**Arcanowave Schticks:** Juicer, Robot Limb x4

**Creature Power Schticks:** Blast (Fire), Damage Immunity (Fire)

**Unique Schtick**

**Flaming Body:** CHAR is always aflame; the fire is supernatural in origin, and he can consciously will it to do no damage to anything around him—but usually he doesn't bother. In combat, his flaming punches, kicks, etc. have a base Damage rating of Strength +4. If a character attacks CHAR's flaming body with a non-weapons Martial Arts attack, the character has a choice: take a -1 Damage penalty to the attack or suffer 1 wound point of damage which bypasses the character's Toughness.

## DESDEMONA DEATHANGEL

*Abomination*

A P.R. coup for the Buro, Desdemona is in some ways their living emblem. The average consumer loves and admires Bonengel, while viewing the BTM with abject, pants-soiling fear. The mysterious Desdemona is seen on TV

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in only her lovely human form; a few times news shows have had blurry glimpses of her transformed self, but it's common knowledge that no one survives seeing her dark side.

The networks are constantly pushing for a lengthy Desdemona interview, but the CDCA is adamant; the networks have to settle for brief sound bites between missions and cheesecake pinups.

There's a reason for this: Desdemona really is absolutely, purely, blatantly *evil* and cannot hide it. She is incapable of guile (not that she's ever needed it) and would turn from a marketing dream to a political nightmare if she ever started answering questions from the press.

For example, Desdemona eats people. Often. One a week at least; she has to in order to survive. She likes babies best (they leave her less bloated) but the CDCA has kept her on a steady diet of convicts.

Desdemona is primarily a terror weapon. She cannot be trusted to show discretion in any operation, so it's only safe to unleash her in an area where total destruction is desired. Now that the world is pacified, she's largely obsolete in 2056—but handy for the Netherworld and those punitive expeditions to 69.

encounter heavy resistance—cops sent to take down rogue Abominations, for example. When fired, it emits a silent ray which separates any matter it hits into its component elements. The ray looks like a thin, straight flame, with heat distortion above it. A steady shot will poke a hole about five centimeters deep and two centimeters wide—in *anything*. Of course, when it's fired at a living, moving target you're almost guaranteed to not get a steady shot.

The problem with a form of energy that works like a universal solvent should be obvious: what do you keep it in? The Buro gunsmiths haven't quite figured that one out yet, which is why Disintegrator Rays cannot be reloaded. When the last shot has been fired, the weapon simply crumbles into its component elements. Poof! You get a green-black smudge of carbon, copper and zinc all over your hands.

This is annoying, but less annoying than worrying about it falling into the hands of the Jammers, who would love to know how to make matter fall apart. Disintegrator rays also come equipped with a camera mounted on the barrel, so that the boys back at Buro HQ can keep track of who's on the business end of one of these guns. That's not the only insurance policy the Buro has taken out on these puppies, though. The grunts who carry them won't know it, but someone miles away will be able to make them hold their fire—or will be able to discharge or destroy the gun from remote control. On a couple occasions the Buro has deliberately let shipments of a few Disintegrators fall into the hands of dissidents, only to start firing them as soon as they're examined.

#### **Desdemona Deathangel (Monstrous Form)**

Bod 10, Chi 0 (Mag 10), Mnd 5 (Cha 1), Ref 10

(Human Form)

Bod 5, Chi 0 (Mag 10), Mind 5 (Cha 12), Ref 10

**Skills:** Arcanowave Device 19, Creature Powers 16, Guns 16, Martial Arts 16

**Arcanowave Schticks:** Feedback Enhancer, Helix Rethreader, Pulser, Variable Mass Sword (this appears in the sourcebook *Seed of the New Flesh*—if you don't have it, just use the damage rating below.)

**Gun Schticks:** Carnival of Carnage x2

**Creature Schticks:** Flight, Inevitable Comeback x3, Regeneration x3, Transformation

**Weapons:** VM Sword (16), Punch (11), Kick (12), Buro Blue Spear (13/6/30, full autofire, takes out the unnamed on 3 or less)

A Desdemona Deathangel trivia fact: she has no Neural Grepper that enslaves her mind to the Buro. The only thing compelling her to obey is her own desires. The Buro keeps her happy, so she works for them. The CDCA knows she'd desert them in an eye-blink, but they haven't told the BuroMil yet.

## DISINTEGRATOR RAY

### *Buro Arcanoweapon*

This nasty chunk of ordinance is given only to operatives who are expected to

## GAME NOTES

The Disintegrator Ray has a base damage rating of 15, a concealment of 3, and a capacity of 10. As noted earlier, the Ray cannot be reloaded, ever. Lightning Reload (even with three schticks) has no effect with this weapon. The Ray takes out unnamed GMCs on an outcome of 3 or more. Any armor that is hit by a Disintegrator Ray gives its Toughness bonus, but drops in effectiveness by 1 point until it is repaired.

Though it's most likely to be encountered in the hands of Buro GMCs, the Ray is not too bad to let your PCs get a hold of,



## ARCHITECTS OF THE FLESH

because it can only be used a few times and because the Buro can use the remote control/camera to the detriment of the PCs. A Techie could disable the remote control and self-destruct at a difficulty of 15.

If the user gets a botch, all the remaining shots go off at once in random directions. (Oops.) For each shot remaining, start with the character holding the gun. Make a Fortune check, aiming to beat a 5; if the check fails, he got smacked. For the next shot, pick a character that the gun's holder is fighting, and check their Fortune. Continue this alternating between sides until the gun is empty and self-destructs.

### HOMO OMEGA

#### *Buro Cyborg*

He stood seven feet tall, and there was nothing about him that was pleasant or smooth. He was all rough edges, ripped flesh. Even his eyes seemed torn in two in the way they encompassed both you as you were and you as he would have you be: in pieces.

The Tri-D console in the room was on. There were spatters of blood across the viewer, but it still kept playing: "Go, go...Omega!" *Omega Force*—part of the Young Consumers' Action Afternoon—was playing and across the city, kids in gray coveralls huddled before the images unspooling over the satellite. Jubby Joe, Homo Omega's PubOrd cop pal, burst into the Omega HQ Control Room. "Homo Omega! The Jammers are attacking the elementary school! The kids are in trouble!"

Homo Omega extended a razor from his massive hand. He slipped the razor just beneath the flesh of his captive, and then turned it so the dull side was out. With this done, he began to peel the skin from the captive's face. The man in the dirty blue uniform screamed as best he could, but his body was held in a stasis field that nullified most of his motor control. Omega peeled away a three-inch strip of skin and then, with a cruel yank, ripped it free of the rest. Before his captive's eyes, Omega raised the flap of skin up to his face, regarded it briefly, and then popped it in his mouth.

"Come on, Joe! To the SPUD-U bikes!" Omega and Jubby Joe raced down the corridor and leapt onto the flying airbikes used by PubOrd. The bikes revved to life, and the pair

zoomed out of Omega HQ and into the air.

"The Buro thinks you're dead," Omega said, as he chewed the man's flesh. "I wanted you alive, but not for them. For me. And my colleagues." Omega adjusted the stasis field so the man could speak.

As the pulsing tones of the soundtrack played, Omega and Joe arrived at the playground. There, the evil rebel known as Battlechimp Potemkin was about to shoot a small child while other Jammers shot out the windows of parked cars and herded kids into the corners of the fenced-in playground. The Jammer thugs leered horribly at the kids and fingered their weapons.

Omega's captive spat blood. "Just kill me. Just freaking kill me. I'm not going to tell you a damned thing."

From a compartment on his bike, Omega pulled out a Helix Ripper and waxed six Jammers. "You've gone too far, Battlechimp! I am Omega—and I am your end!" The Ripper spat energy, and Battlechimp returned fire.

Omega swallowed. "There's nothing I want to hear. We're waiting for the Vivisectors to arrive, and while we do, I'm just getting you ready." He restored the stasis field to full power, and began to peel the flesh from the man's nose.

"Woop woop! Battlechimp smash Omega! Woop woop!" Potemkin and Omega dodged across the schoolyard, trading shots, while Jubby Joe rounded up the last of the Jammer goons and handed them off to the grinning PubOrd officers who had just arrived.

"We have to get you ready for your new face, after all," Omega said. "Once it's

#### **Homo Omega**

Bod 13, Chi 1, Mnd 15, Ref 8 (Spd 10)

**Skills:** Arcanowave Device 19, Guns 19, Info/BuroMil 18, Intimidation 16, Martial Arts 16

**Arcanowave Schticks:** Feedback Enhancer, Helix Ripper, Pulser  
**Gun Schticks:** Lightning Reload x3

#### **Unique Schtick**

**Arcanomorph Arms:** Homo Omega's arms, from the elbow down, can change into a variety of weapons and equipment on command. He can have up to three different devices/weapons available for each arm at a time (though obviously, only one can be *active* per arm), which are up to the GM. Morphing from one available arm-unit to another takes 6 shots and the process cannot be halted or altered once begun, but of course he can keep one arm active while the other one morphs. Morphing time can not be reduced with a snapshot. Homo Omega is known to have had the following Arcanomorph options available in the past: Buro Crimestopper, Buro Hellharrower, Gripper, Helix Chaingun, Helix Rethreader, Torture Package, Tracer Resin Projector, Wave Suppressor.

## NEW ARCANOMORPH OPTIONS

**Gripper:** The Gripper is a massive three-fingered mechanical hand. It isn't very precise, but it is incredibly strong; when using a Gripper hand, Omega's Strength is 16.

**Helix Chaingun:** A massive version of the Helix Ripper, this weapon requires a Strength of 12 to use and is capable of full autofire. Its Damage rating is 18, its ammo capacity is 60, and it can not be concealed. The Chaingun takes out unnamed characters on an Outcome of 2 or more. To date, only Omega has been equipped with this weapon.

**Torture Package:** This arm option is essentially a torture toolkit. It takes the form of a regular arm and hand (though of course, it's only as 'regular' as the rest of Omega's mutated body) but can manifest a wide variety of torture and interrogation tools. These include many different blades, drug-filled hypodermics, open flames, and just about anything you might name. When using the Torture Package on a captive victim, Omega gets a +4 bonus to his Intimidation skill AV.

on, and once the Vivisectors have done their work, no one will ever know that you were the traitor named Jason X."

"Stay tuned, young consumers! Omega Force will be back after these messages."

## NOTES

The massive abomination known as Homo Omega is one of the Buro's most successful experiments—too successful, in fact. The Omega project was begun to explore the possibilities of human evolution and

enhancement, and Homo Omega was the initial prototype, embodying a wealth of opportunities the Buro saw to improve the human form. Homo Omega is, of course, an incredible combatant. More importantly, however, he is enormously intelligent—substantially more intelligent than humans in general and his Buro masters in particular.

As a result, Homo Omega is nursing some personal ambitions that the Buro knows nothing of. To date, Omega has had no difficulties keeping his agenda a secret. That may change, however, given that Omega



has entered into a clandestine allegiance with the Vivisectors (a group of demonic abominations whose arcanowave knowledge and R&D ability exceeds that of the Buro).

During the crisis depicted in the Shadowfist expansion set *Flashpoint*, the Dragon hero Jason X—formerly a supersoldier bodyguard to Bonengel who defected—sacrificed his life to stall Buro forces and enable his Dragon cohorts to escape. In truth, he didn't die; Homo Omega, credited with killing him, kidnapped him instead. Jason X is due to be operated on by the Vivisectors, as part of the plot they are hatching with Omega.

What is this plot? Time will tell, but for now, Omega won't.

## TACTICAL TEAM

### Buro Cops

Public Order Tactical Officer 34B21, Miguel O'Malley, walked in the front door of his home and took off his hat and coat. He pulled his Buro 9 out of the holster, unloaded it, and secured the gun and the ammo in his safe. Then he stretched and looked around.

Before he knew it, little Eli was on him, throwing his arms around his daddy's legs. "Daddy! You're home! You're home!"

Miguel grinned, and mussed Eli's hair. "Sure am, sport. Home again."

Eli grabbed his dad's big hand and pulled him towards the sofa. "Tell me, daddy! Tell me what happened today! Tell me how you kacked the bad guys!"

Miguel laughed and sat down with Eli on the couch. "Okay, pal. It wasn't a big day or anything, though."

"Did you shoot someone? Huh? Didja?"

"I sure did, Eli. I shot eight people today."

"Did they all die?"

"Six did. The other two, I just wounded."

"That sucks!"

"Oh, I didn't mean to kill them. Wasn't necessary. They'll have plenty of time to heal up in rehab."

"So what happened, huh?"

"Well," Miguel said, leaning back and holding Eli in his arms, "this bunch of Free Sex militants had kidnapped a Buro official—nobody special, really—and were holed up in this abandoned building. They were making demands and stuff. We got a tip on where they were hiding, so me and the team went out there.

"It went like clockwork. We just spread out through the building in the air ducts—they

never knew we were there! When the time came, we all took our positions and moved out. It wasn't more than maybe twenty seconds before we had them all dead to rights, or just dead. I killed four right then."

"Wow!" Eli cried. "Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!"

"Yep, that was how it went," Miguel said, beaming. "Those poor bastards had no chance. But then we had to find out where the hostage was, so I grabbed one of the guys that was still alive and shot him in the knee."

"I bet that hurt! He wasn't going nowhere!"

"That's right. Then I started leaning on him, you know? I shot him in the elbow, kicked him around the room a bit, that sorta thing. And then—"

"Miguel O'Malley! Are you telling little Eli about all that violent stuff?" It was Miriam, Miguel's wife, who had been listening from the next room.

"Sure am, honey!" Miguel replied cheerfully.

"Well for Bonengel's sake, hang on and let me join you!" Miriam hurried in and sat down on the couch next to her two fellas. The happy family beamed at each other, and Miguel continued.

"The guy just wouldn't talk. Finally, I had to gouge out both his eyes..."

## NOTES

Tactical Teams are the rapid-response, heavy-firepower units within Public Order. These guys aren't beat cops—they're hardcore badasses, at least as nameless cop GMCs go. (Abominations would eat them for lunch.)

Most often, Tactical Teams are dispatched in groups of 6–12 individuals. They deal with things like terrorist acts, big crimes, hostage situations, and so forth. They always turn up for big Jammer attacks, but defer to BuroMil forces such as abominations, TacOps, and the like.

Still, if the PCs go for a shoot-'em-up rampage through 2056 London, it'll be Tactical Teams that will land on them with both combat boots. The stats below are for a typical individual.

### Tactical Team Member

Bed 7, Chi 0, Mnd 6, Ref 6

**Skills:** Driving 8, Guns 10, Intrusion 7, Leadership 6, Martial Arts 8, Police 10

**Weapons:** Buro 9 (10/1/17+1), Buro Crimestopper (13/5/7)

## THE ASCENDED

## ADRIENNE HART

*Fledged Martial Artist*

Normally I prefer bubble baths, of course, but I didn't have a G11 to hide under the bubbles and I was really quite tired from hitting the Ebon Cranes' safehouse and just wanted to rinse the blood off and slide under the covers to catch a few hours of sleep and dream of Him, so I hopped in the shower and of course that's when the assault team kicked down the door and came for me. For some people it's telephones. For me it's violent men with shotguns.

So Dead-Guy-To-Be #1 pulls the curtain aside and I spray him in the face with scalding hot water, he screams and staggers back on cue and I rip the shower curtain off and toss it at guy #2 and kick him back into the bedroom, giving me time to wet two towels and wrap one around me and use the other to snap the eye out of #3 as he comes in. About this time #4 and #5 remember they've got guns and decide they're more scared of me than they're fond of their pals, so they open up, hosing the bathroom down with lead but I'm already through the trapdoor leading into the overhead. You have to love the elegant old hotels—the ceiling access is always in the bathroom.

Now, you can't really blame them. The hot water has given off so much steam that the bathroom and most of the bedroom is opaque, and the roar of their guns in close quarters and the screams of their friends has ruined their hearing, so by the time they gather the courage to stick their heads through the trapdoor to

look for what's left of me I've crawled next door, down into *that* bathroom, out *that* bedroom window—grabbing the remote clicker off the nightstand—and onto the ledge and as I come in my own window I turn my room's TV on and they all look towards the sudden unexpected light and sound as I roll across a bed I just know I'm *not* going to get to sleep in tonight and they snap their necks toward me just about the time they realize that A) I'm not lying in pieces in my bathroom, and B) they're completely screwed and dead in moments.

These guys being what passes for professionals these days, #6 is standing outside in the hallway with a grenade launcher as mop-up, but I throw my towel at him and he dives to one side, giving me time to get to the hallway myself and then it's too close for him to use the weapon, and I break it and then him. External weapons are just no good, you get used to having them and then you start seeing every situation in terms of how you can use your weapon and then a

**Adrienne Hart**

**Attributes:** Bod 7, Chi 0 (Fu 8), Mnd 6 (Wil 10), Ref 8 (Agl 10)

**Skills:** Deceit 12, Driving 14, Guns 14, Leadership 14, Martial Arts 18, Sabotage 12

**Unique Schticks**

**Against All Odds:** Adrienne gets +3 to Leadership in situations where the cause is doomed or where things look so hopeless that survival is nearly unimaginable.

**I Yam What I Yam:** She can use her Martial Arts AV instead of her Will to resist any kind of magic, creature power or arcanotech that would change her in a way other than merely inflicting damage; for example, she couldn't use this ability against Abysmal Spines, although she can still dodge.

situation comes along, like here, in which the weapon can't be used, and you're still thinking in terms of weapons when you shouldn't be. Which is by way of explaining A) why I prefer to use what's lying around as a weapon or, better yet, myself, and B) why I prefer baths.

I have maybe a minute until the heat shows up so I question the survivors. It appears the Ebon Cranes didn't take my hint earlier tonight and decided to escalate instead of bending to the Wheel. Really bad judgement on their part, meaning A) another sleepless night for me, and B) they'll all be dead by morning. Is it any wonder that I always get kicked out of the best hotels?

## NOTES

Adrienne Hart's greatest strength is also her greatest weakness. She's human, so she can go where her Ascended masters dare not, such as Hong Kong, the Netherworld, and the junctures where magic still flows thick as blood and honey. But she's human, so her love for the leader of the Ascended, the Unspoken Name, is doomed—he's a member of the elite Lodge and she's merely Pledged. Their love is forbidden, and could destroy them both. He loves her too much to have her killed as a threat to him, and she despises him for his weakness and adores him for his willingness to tempt fate.

Her other great strength is her steel will, forged in a terrifying childhood in the roughest streets of China where she grew up fast and hard. She refuses to rely on anything outside herself, and her absolute sense of self gives her a strong wall of defense against sorcery and other corrupting arts. On occasion she'll use a gun snatched from the enemy, but when it is empty she discards it without a second thought. Her attitude towards opponents is much the same.

Adrienne Hart died in the disaster known as Operation Killdeer (see Appendix A); her stats are provided here for GM's running pre-Killdeer campaigns, or who want to ignore the Killdeer storyline.

## CHURCH OFFICIAL

### *Pledged Operative*

Archbishop Hsiao-Wen sat in the dark in the private room in the parish hall and watched the videotape the local priest had prepared for him.

It was indeed disturbing.

In the center of the main room of a dimly-lit house, a nebulous, evil-looking face appeared and then faded. In the next instant, a lamp came hurtling across the room, looming in the camera lens for an instant before passing beyond view to impact with a loud smack what was reportedly the camera man's head. The lens swept down to a close-up of the floor, and then the screen filled with snow.

The archbishop clicked the power off with the remote control and rested the lower half of his face on his fist, deep in thought.

He told himself it was pious obedience and not fear that compelled him, as he turned to the phone next to the couch to make the call.

\*\*\*

His holiness archbishop Hsiao-Wen was just a bishop when he was summoned to Rome in response to a special calling. He feared he was going to be relocated or perhaps given some extra administrative duty; he was in no way prepared for the startling revelation he was to receive.

Steered through the many offices of the Vatican, he was ultimately received by no less a personage than the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. The Cardinal gave him a revised history of certain of the Church's dealings, one so fantastic that had any lesser vicar told it to him he would have dismissed the man as mad.

"The Inquisition was a time of deplorable excess, it is true," said the Cardinal. "But at heart it really was a struggle against supernaturally-powered agents of Satan. Demons are real and present, and quite spectacular. Yes, even today.

"The problem was with the secular governments. They chastised political enemies when they should have stuck to monsters and sorcerers as we bade them. That was a horrible thing. Today, the Church deals with a secret, secular body known as the Lodge to carry out the original, pure intentions of the Inquisition. The Lodge has a pervasive influence in all world governments, and therefore can insure that our investigations into the occult proceed unhindered."

Some days later, after the Cardinal had offered various forms of incontrovertible evidence to support his claims, the bishop Wen-Hsiao remarked, "Why should these things not be generally known? It would

bring so many into the faith to know that there are verifiable signs of the supernatural power of Satan at work in the world.”

“Father,” replied the Cardinal, “you came into the Church under your own free will without such proofs. It is not for us to deny others opportunity to exercise their faith. And as our Lord said in his parable as it is written in the Gospel of Luke, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will remain skeptics even if someone should rise from the grave.’ Now, I must warn you that the knowledge I have entrusted to you is not without its price. For what you know, you are now considered Pledged to the Lodge; there is no way around this. It is indeed a high honor and will further your success in your calling, but you must obey the provisions of a special credo that I will explain to you.”

“And if I do not?”

“The consequences would be, I’m afraid, dire. St. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, stated, ‘Every person must submit to the supreme authorities. There is no authority but by act of God; and the existing authorities are instituted by Him.’ He wrote this foremost in regard to the Roman Empire, which was a harsh reality of his time, given to torturing its enemies to death. Let us say that the Lodge is in some ways a harsh reality of our own time. But don’t look so glum, Father; you will serve the Lodge only so far as its purposes serve ours. All else is in God’s hands.”

#### NOTES

The Lodge has successfully infiltrated the major religions of the world, just as it has the major governments. Church Official Hsaio-Wen is a typical example of the Pledged members working within the Roman Catholic Church. In dealing with the Church, the Lodge emphasizes the nature and activity of supernatural creatures, while keeping hidden the nature of the Secret War, the Netherworld, and the like. The Lodge’s purpose in infiltrating the Church is simply to gain an ally against the forces of magic in the world, and to make occasional use of the power of the Church for the Lodge’s political or financial ends.

## DEATH SHADOW

### *Pledged Operative*

I know people who can walk into a room full of hardened killers and walk out the other side covered with blood head to toe—none of it their own. I’m not that good. I can handle the typical mook or hired sword one at a time, but I have something better than the finely-honed ability to kill a dozen men with an 8-shot clip...and that’s a vivid imagination in a world where even the mighty are gullible beyond any reasonable expectation.

Okay, so in a world where mad scientists send cybernetic monster hunters back in time two thousand years to kidnap demons to be turned into terrifying war machines used to fight foreign wars to justify their research budget for monkeys, can you blame someone if they accept that I’m the shadow of Ming I’s lost arm, given human form and voice by her sister and archenemy, the Queen of the Ice Pagoda, and that I’m now freely available for hire by anyone who can afford my steep price? Anyone who’s fought in the Secret War for very long at all would accept that story without a second thought, hook and line. And they have.

The Truth is simply this: in a world where anything can happen, it is better to be smart than strong, because if you rely on strength then when someone stronger comes along you’ll lose. But if you rely on smarts, then when someone smarter comes along they’re so used to seeing wheels within wheels within wheels that they never think to check your references—they just sweep you up in their own plots and counter-plots and counter-counter-plots.

The deal was simple. The Ascended needed an operative in the Netherworld, where magic was so strong that they could not enter. So they allowed me to attune myself to a number of their Feng Shui sites. Not the biggies, of course, but plenty of small ones. It was wonderful. When the chi flows through you, everything goes your way. So even though I don’t know 47 ways to kill a squad of marines with the sort of things you find lying around your home, I developed a reputation far in excess of my own modest abilities. And even after giving up those attunements I could still

#### Church Official

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 0 (For 1), Mnd 5, Ref 5

Skills: Info/Bible 8, Info/European History 7, Info/Latin 6

dream of them, and that gives me shaping power in the Netherworld, which is where I spend most of my time these days pretending to be an enigmatic mercenary for hire to the highest bidder, but in actuality am a loyal servant of the Ascended's interests, even though I'm not pledged and never will be.

And if people choose to think of me as the shadowy arm of some greater power, they're not so wrong after all, now, are they?

### NOTES

Death Shadow is not a combat machine. She relies on her impressive reputation, quick thinking, and a silver tongue to get herself out of trouble. She plays the role of hardened mercenary and takes jobs from anybody for anything, but her deepest secret is that she works for the Ascended and will shade outcomes in their favor if she can get away with it. If outmatched, she'll slip away into the shadows and return another time.

**Fashion Tip:** Death Shadow prefers dark clothing to enhance her mysterious air. She never, ever wears white.

### DRACO

#### *Lodge Enforcer*

Draco is Bespoke Death. Elegant, expensive, and of uncompromising quality.

The Ascended mostly desire to live their lives in peace, free of magic and conflict, and the Lodge is their tool to implement that desire. Sometimes, unfortunately, Lodge members get too ambitious and decide to rearrange things to suit themselves. Most often a warning or a gentle nudge will set things right, but in a few cases things escalate out of control and even elite assassins are no longer enough

#### Death Shadow

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 10, Mnd 8, Ref 7

**Skills:** Deceit 15, Gambling 12, Info/Netherworld 12, Intimidation 10, Intrusion 12, Martial Arts 13, Shaping 15

**Fu Schticks:** Hands without Shadow, Friend of Darkness, Dark's Soft Whisper, Blade of Darkness (manifests as a razor-edged fan instead of a knife), Gathering the Darkness, Strike from Darkness, Shelter of Darkness

**Weapons:** Nunchaku (damage 6)



to bring things back into balance. That's when the Unspoken Name picks up a special phone and calls Draco, who can usually be found on his private yacht or one of his private islands. Draco immediately flies to meet with the Name and spends an hour, no more, being briefed on the unfortunate situation, at the end of which he burns the briefing file. He then goes to the source of the problem, seeks it out, and within 72 hours the matter is stylishly resolved to the complete satisfaction of the Unspoken Name, at which time Draco returns to his yacht or island.

Often his mere presence will resolve a situation, since those high enough to contemplate serious betrayal of the Lodge are aware of his reputation. Other times his arrival will provoke over-reaction, which he will then follow back to the source.

Draco is a transformed Dragon, and in addition to his complete mastery of the martial arts and his own nature he possesses all the powers of all the transformed animals, and all the fu powers found in the Path of the Sharpened Scales. He is brilliant, absolutely loyal, dignified, and ruthless to an extent no human will ever fathom. He is attuned to several of the Ascended's major Feng Shui sites, and he understands completely that if the Ascended lose control of the world, magic might return and he would have to go back to being a Dragon again, losing the joys of being the most dangerous human alive. Even worse would be if enough magic came back to return him to Dragon form, but not enough to sustain a full-blooded Dragon. In that case, the unthinkable would happen—the death of Draco.

really gets to enjoy himself, whereas Draco can have anything he wants in the world, and does. All he has to worry about is answering the phone now and then, and killing a few people who need killing.

It's probably best not to use Draco in the direct view of the PCs. At most they should see the after-effects of his presence, like ripples in a pond that's been hit by a stone. He's pretty much the last resort of the Unspoken Name, who has vast resources to unleash on problems before having to think about calling on Draco.

In the 98% of his time that he's not working, Draco lives a life of perfect (but not decadent) luxury. His clothing comes from the best tailors in London, who also clothe the royal family. His 300 foot yacht is custom-built to his exacting specifications. He is one of the *really rich*, the people who don't show up in magazine rankings of the rich because they don't like attention and can afford to mask their wealth. He never gambles, he cares very little for parties and idle chatter, but he does like to have beautiful women and interesting conversationalists around. He has a passion for politeness and respect, and appreciates style and elegance even in his opponents. Just because you're going to torture someone to death for their poor judgment is no excuse for rudeness.

Draco's origin is a mystery. Tatsuya Yanai theorizes that Draco was originally from a very early juncture but came forward through the Netherworld, and then went into a now-closed juncture in the 13th century where he assisted in the overthrow of the Four Monarchs. He might have returned to the Netherworld afterwards, or he might not have—he's definitely spent at least the last few decades living in linear time, but if rumors are true he may well have been around for many times that amount. If he stayed in linear time after the overthrow of the Four Monarchs, then he's been kicking around for more than six hundred years of linear time. How? Draco isn't telling.

### Draco

**Attributes:** Bod 11, Chi 11 (For 5), Mnd 10, Ref 12

**Skills:** Deceit 15, Driving 15, Guns 16, Info/Art 16, Info/History 16, Info/Lodge 16, Info/Fashion 12, Intimidation 18, Intrusion 16, Leadership 17, Martial Arts 22 (yes, 22)!

**Transformed Animal Schticks:** All

**Fu Schticks:** Bite of the Dragon, Breath of the Dragon, Claw of the Dragon (and any others you care to add)

**Weapons:** Smith & Wesson Sigma (10/1/14+1)

Draco is not interested in power for power's sake. His view is that the Unspoken Name can have anything he wants in the world, but also has to worry about keeping everything together—a thousand and one worries—and so never

### PHILLIPE BENOIT

*Pledged Assassin*

Phillipe's first strong memory is that of his new puppy drowning. He had thought



himself and the puppy inseparable, but the pup had fallen into the river, and now it was dead and there was nothing he or his mother could do about it. Dead was dead. The idea fascinated little Phillipe, and as he grew up he read the great philosophers, trying to understand why this one thing was different. Everything else in life could be fixed. But once you were dead, you stayed dead. Therefore death was the most important thing in life, and if you could understand death, understanding life would come naturally.

As soon as he could, Phillipe joined the French Paratroopers, with whom he served in Algeria and other African hell-holes. First as a sniper, where his steely calm and uncanny aim served him well, then as part of the Special Operations Commandos, striking at enemy leaders before situations escalated to the level where conventional forces would be needed.

## Philippe Benoit

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 0, Mnd 8, Ref 7

**Skills:** Deceit 12, Driving 14, Fix-It 12, Sabotage 14, Guns 16, Info/Philosophy 12, Intrusion 16, Martial Arts 13

**Gun Shticks:** Eagle Eye, Fast Draw x 2 (base initiative of 9), Hair Trigger Neck Hairs

**Weapons:** Browning BDM (10/2/15+1)

After mustering out he discovered that the army had severely undervalued his skill at creating death, and that there were private parties willing to pay handsomely for what came easily to him. Short jobs at high pay allowed him time to study the great philosophers and work out his own theories. He doesn't know about the Secret War or the true nature of the Lodge, but he is aware that he works for some great shadowy organization—and he doesn't care.

When not on a job, he lives alone except for extremely-discreet servants on the tiny island of Anatom, the furthest southeast of the Vanuatu chain in the Coral Sea. Sometimes he invites special guests for very special hunts, and sometimes those guests bring their own prey. The terrain is volcanic and mountainous, with narrow coastal plains. Typhoons are common from January to April, and there are occasional earthquakes. It is accessible by boat during good weather, and there are airstrips on the populated islands in the Vanuatuan chain a few hundred kilometers away.

Benoit is fascinated by death, and sees himself more as an experimental philosopher than an assassin. While others may write about death and its nature, he's in the field practicing it. The only thing he enjoys more than a well-done hit is a well-reasoned argument, and given half a chance he will talk his victims to death rather than shoot them.

While he's quite dangerous with his hands or a gun, he now prefers to kill with his mind, by manipulating his opponents "into choosing non-survivable strategies" while he observes from a discreet distance.

## SOUL OF THE SHARK

### *Lodge Mastermind*

I remember the first time that I met her like it was yesterday. I'll never forget it. At first I thought she was just another westerner, another suit, which was reason enough to dislike her, but that wasn't the only reason. There was something else about her that made her different from all of the other suits in Hong Kong acting like they were some kind of royalty.

In her case, it was like she was out hunting. You could feel her eyes on you from behind those dark-tinted glasses, watching your every move and just waiting for you to show some sign of weakness. It wasn't like the predatory gaze you would expect from a tiger—it was cold and calculating, as cold as her alabaster skin and pale hair. This was obviously not a woman to be trifled with. Whispers in the office said that she was one of the building's elusive owners. This meant that she was closely involved with the Ascended, so I watched her comings and goings carefully. She seemed to take no more notice of me than any of the many other workers in that place.

My infiltration into the ranks of the Ascended had gone far, further than I had dared to hope. I was already working in one of their strongholds in the modern world that they believe they control. The offices were typical of the decadent times, decorated in fine materials in a vain effort to make the place seem like a palace instead of the prison that it was. I did not allow these things to distract me from my work of learning all that I could about the plans of these creatures for the Perfect Master.

One night, I made my way to Kowloon to report to my superior what I had seen and heard in the Ascended stronghold. In the market I thought I saw a familiar hint of pale skin and hair standing out against the crowd, but then it was gone. I stopped at an eating counter and watched in the glass. I saw her enter the place, dressed much as she was in the office in a sharp suit of gray material that looked slightly out-of-date. She made her way to the counter right next to me.

I was surprised when she spoke directly to me. The chill in her voice was like ice brushing across my skin, but I controlled myself as I had been taught to and did not show any outward sign of concern.

"What is good here?" she asked. I recommended the noodles, but she smiled and ordered the fish instead. "I prefer meat," she said as if anything else were beneath her. Barbarian.

When her food came, she ate calmly without saying another word. Her silent presence nearby began to disturb me. I fought to keep myself calm and serene, reciting the words of the Perfect Master over and over in my head. She made no other attempt at conversation, but I could feel her attention on me the entire time. I ate as slowly as I could, stalling for time.

Her departure came as a great relief, but I knew that I had been discovered and that my mission was in danger. I would need to report this to my superior and we would have to seek another way. I still could not understand how I had been found out.

I made my way out through the back of the noodle shop and glanced down either end of the alley. Just as I emerged from the doorway a powerful grip slammed me against the wall like an iron vice. I struggled but my efforts were feeble as an infant's. I could feel her clenched hand choking off my air and my vision began to swim. Her voice came again, soft and cold as a frozen current.

"You have much to learn, little fish. We can smell strangers in our domain just like the scent of blood in the water." I must have blacked out after that. When I awoke, I made my way to one of our Netherworld gates and back to report.

I was removed from my assignment with the Ascended. I still do not know why she allowed me to live, but I am always aware of the feeling of being watched, even in the tranquillity of my home village, and I remember with a suppressed shudder that they can smell fear.



## NOTES

Transformed sharks are descended from the most brutal and effective predator known to man, and it shows. They follow the dictates of their nature, making them brutally-efficient hunters and killers without pity or mercy, ideal operatives for the Secret War. The sharks have developed a certain style and finesse to counter the brutal nature of their animal side. They have cultivated the human qualities of cunning and charm to better allow them to lull their prey into a sense of safety before the savage attack comes.

Sharks are more aware than most transformed animals of the dangers of reverting to their ancestral forms. Not only will they become mindless animals, but a shark will slowly die if it transforms back on dry land. This makes the sharks even more fanatical and dangerous when fighting magically-capable opponents.

## MAKO

Mako is one of the operatives of the Lodge, a capable assassin and an efficient killer who carries out the will of the Ascended. She is the archetypal "ice princess" with pale skin and hair and a cold manner towards others. She conceals her eyes behind silvery mirrorshades, giving her stare a disturbing quality. Some find her cold beauty attractive and Mako is more than willing to use that to her advantage, drawing her victims into a web of seduction and danger. She carries out her duties without emotion or sentiment, showing passion only when she kills. She lives for the hunt and is always on the move, having no desire to be idle for long.

### Mako

**Attributes:** Bod 7, Str 10 (Tgh 9), Chi 6, Mnd 5, Ref 9

**Skills:** Guns 11, Intimidation 11, Leadership 9, Martial Arts 16, Seduction 10

**Transformed Animal Schticks:** Blood in the Water, Cold Gaze, Iron Jaws, Razor Bite

**Weapons:** Mako can acquire whatever equipment she requires for her work from the Ascended and has considerable leeway from local authorities along with various fake identification. She uses weapons when needed but prefers to deliver the killing blow with her bare hands.

## TRANSFORMED ANIMAL PACKAGE: SHARK

**Attribute Modifiers:** Strength +3, Toughness +2, Reflexes +2

**Blood in the Water**    Chi Cost: 4                      Shot Cost: 1

If your opponent is wounded, make a Chi check against their Body. If successful, you can add up to X to your Martial Arts value for your next attack on that wounded opponent, where X is the number of wound points your opponent has or your outcome from the Chi check, whichever is lower. You get +2 to your Chi check for this power if you personally wounded the target character. This schtick can not be used with unwounded opponents.

**Cold Gaze**                      Chi Cost: 4                      Shot Cost: 3

You can stare down a single opponent, inspiring irrational fear. Make a Chi check against your opponent's Willpower. The Outcome is the number of shots they hesitate because they fear to act against you.

**Iron Jaws**                      Chi Cost: 5                      Shot Cost: 3

Make a Martial Arts check to grapple an opponent and get them in a hold. If successful, you inflict damage equal to your Strength and your opponent suffers Impairment equal to your Outcome. Maintaining this hold is a continuous action. Your victim may break out of the hold by making a successful Martial Arts check against you with your Martial Arts skill as the Difficulty.

**Razor Bite**                      Chi Cost: X                      Shot Cost: 3

Make a barehanded Martial Arts attack; if successful, add X (any amount of Chi you want to spend) to the Damage rating for your attack.

## STING OF THE SCORPION

*Lodge Assassin*

Frank Edwards lay back in bed, the smoke from his cigarette trailing up to swirl around in the ceiling fan. The orange light of the neon fast food sign across the street illuminated his worn face, as well as the sleeping form of the woman who lay in bed next to him.

*One more day*, Frank thought. One more day until he reached Las Vegas and safety. One more day until he was free of the bonds of the Pledged.

The small Arizona town where Frank had stopped seemed an ideal place to spend the night. Out in the middle of the desert, miles from any other town, Frank's driving stamina had given out just as the town had come into view.

The Laughing Man had told him to speak to no one without need, and to keep as low a profile as possible. Despite this advice, Frank had not spent the night alone. The bar had seemed so inviting and safe somehow, with its pool tables, pinball machines, and fluorescent lighting. No Lodge members here, surely, just tired locals drowning their thirst after a hard day's work.

Then she had walked in. The rest was a bit of a blur, a jumble of images, smells, and sensations. He turned his head and looked at the sleeping form of the dark-haired beauty. He reached out and stroked her gently rising and falling shoulder. That was when he noticed the tattoo. A scorpion, a red scorpion on her left shoulder.

"No!" Frank shouted, scrambling desperately out of the bed. He launched himself toward his clothes piled on a chair and the .357 hidden among them.

He never had a chance. She was on him like lightning, landing on his back with surprising force for such a slight woman. He felt her hand touch his neck and back in several places, and pain blossomed like spring flowers from her touch. Frank's entire body went limp as agony engulfed him.

"I had hoped you would go with more dignity, Mr. Edwards," the woman whispered, yanking his head back by its hair. "No one escapes the Lodge."

## NOTES

Though most of the time the Ascended are content to work through their Pledged minions when there is dirty work to be done, there are times when the transformed animals prefer to take a more direct hand in activities. When such a need arises, the Unspoken Name calls upon the Stings of the Scorpion, his elite corp of assassins, adept in the "removal" of offending individuals from the path of the Ascended's plans. The Stings owe their allegiance directly to the Unspoken Name, and are his alone to command.

The Stings of the Scorpion are no hulking bruisers, however. The ranks of the Pledged provide more than enough raw muscle for the Lodge's activities. The Stings are masters of subtlety, expert at getting close to their victims and "removing" them with a minimum of fuss and mess. All are transformed animals of Scorpion ancestry, and almost all are extremely beautiful, whether male or female.

All Stings are rigorously trained in psychology, driving, seduction, and intrusion skills, and of course, how to kill quickly and quietly. This, combined with their inherited animal powers, makes them formidable opponents.

**Sting of the Scorpion**

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 5, Mnd 5 (Cha 8), Ref 10

**Skills:** Deceit 15, Driving 12, Guns 12, Info: Assassins 10, Intrusion 15, Martial Arts 13, Seduction 14

**Transformed Animal Schticks:** Dance, Sting, Surprise, Scuttle

**Weapons:** Just about any weapon necessary. The Lodge has access to whatever is necessary for the Sting of the Scorpion to accomplish his or her mission.

In addition to straight network, the Stings of the Scorpion sometimes infiltrate the factions opposing the Ascended, there to lay in wait until the Unspoken Name gives them the signal to strike. While acting as a part of a group they have infiltrated, Stings will seem completely loyal to that group, even killing Pledged agents and other Lodge members if needed to maintain their cover. The Unspoken Name's orders are the Sting's first, last, and only consideration.

In keeping with their animal heritage, Stings prefer to strike with surprise on their side. They are at a disadvantage in a stand up fight, and are definite subscribers to the axiom that "he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day."

BACK FOR SECONDS

# THE DRAGONS

## NEW UNIQUE SCHTICKS

Okay, Dragons! Itching to customize those *Feng Shui* types just a little bit more? Here are some new unique schticks we came up with for the existing types. Each schtick explains how you can swap it for the existing unique schtick for the given type, or how to add it if the type didn't have a unique schtick already. Note that these are only kosher to use when creating a new character; if you want to jury-rig your existing *Feng Shui* character with the appropriate new unique schtick from this list, you'll have to get your GM's approval.

### EVERYDAY HERO

**This'll Do:** Any attack made with an improvised weapon gets a +1 AV bonus. Typical improvised weapons include pool cues, barbells, frozen chicken dinners, weathervanes, beer bottles, and so forth. The same improvised weapon should not be used constantly or carried around from scene to scene; it should be weapon of opportunity rather than habit.

This schtick is granted automatically to starting Everyday Heroes; existing Everyday Hero PCs should gain this schtick at no cost and can begin using it immediately.

### MASKED AVENGER

**Derring-Do:** You receive a +3 AV bonus for Martial Arts checks involving heroic movement: leaping, daredevil stunts, swinging from ropes or chandeliers, etc. This is not intended for stunts with attacks or for dodging; Derring-Do is only good for showy maneuvers to get you from one place to another. You cannot apply the AV to Martial Arts checks to harm someone or to dodge an attack.

To get this schtick during character creation, take 7 skill bonuses instead of 8. To add this

schtick to your already-existing Masked Avenger, spend 10 experience points.

### MAVERICK COP

**Nose for Crime:** You get +2 to Perception checks for spotting criminal activity. If you immediately try to bust the crooks, you can add the Outcome of your successful check to the AV of your first attack or dodge. If you have Hair-Trigger Neck Hairs, its bonuses can be combined with those of Nose for Crime.

To get this schtick during character creation, take 3 skill bonuses instead of 4. To add this schtick to your already-existing Maverick Cop, spend 12 experience points.

### NINJA

**Extra-Sneaky:** When making Intrusion rolls to avoid being seen, you get +2 to your AV and can make use of cover that other people can't. If your GM is applying Difficulty modifiers to Intrusion checks due to poor cover, bright lighting, and so forth, your GM should adjust the Difficulty down by 2 for Ninjas with Extra-Sneaky. Note that this only applies to not being detected—it doesn't help when using Intrusion to pick locks, crack safes, defeat security systems, etc.

To get this schtick during character creation, take 5 skill bonuses instead of 6. To add this schtick to your already-existing Ninja, spend 12 experience points.

## NEW TYPES

On the following pages are six new types for your *Feng Shui* characters. These six were originally slated to appear in the rulebook, but we had to cut them at the last minute. All of you would-be Journalists, Private Investigators, Gamblers, and so forth, rejoice: your type has come

## GAMBLER

*"The odds of my having that card are 145,987 to one. But then again, I am feeling lucky today. And you know that things go my way when I feel lucky. So do you want me to look at your card, or do you just want to give me the money now?"*

In any time period, the Gambler is a constant. You're a devil-may-care hang-glider on the winds of fate, one who turns natural luck and a flair for getting yourself out of scrapes and into a profitable career. You've learned to handle yourself in a fight—not all losers are good sports, after all. But mostly you rely on your drop-dead smile and your airtight instincts to keep yourself out of trouble. With these two weapons at your disposal, you've carved out a life of luxury for yourself—no pleasure is too flashy or shallow for your tastes. After all, what's the fun of winning all the time if you can't flaunt it? You came from humble beginnings and made your fortune using only your brains and your need for victory. The latest clothes, the shiniest gadgets: these are things you've dreamed of since childhood. But the real prize is the sheer joy of beating the odds, of triumphing over your opponents when logic decrees that you should be down for the count. And although you count many criminals among your opponents, you've never slipped over the line from shadiness to outright criminality. But now a melodramatic hook has pulled you into the secret war, a situation where all of the odds you've memorized are turned upside down. Still, you face this new adventure with a grin and your characteristic self-confidence. You know it won't take you long to figure the angles.

**Juncture:** any

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0 (For = 7), Mnd 6 (Cha 7), Ref 5

*Add 3 points to one primary attribute, 2 points to a second primary attribute, and 1 point to a third. Add 2 to one secondary attribute; it may not exceed 11.*

**Skills:** Gambling +8 (=15)  
Guns +8 (=13)  
Martial Arts +2 [Max 11]  
Seduction +6 (=13)

*Add 6 Skill Bonuses.*

**Schticks:** 1 gun schtick

**Weapons:** 1 weapon from appropriate juncture

**Unique Schtick:** You're an expert at calculating odds. You can make a Fortune check with a Difficulty of 4 at any time; if you succeed, the GM must tell you the Difficulty of an upcoming check. You must be able to observe the situation you're figuring the odds for.

**Quick Schtick Pick:** *gun schtick:*  
Fast Draw  
*weapons:*  
(69) sling  
(1850) ball and cap pistol  
(contemporary) Beretta Model 21  
Bobcat  
(2056) Buro Backup Arm

**Wealth Level:** rich



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**JOURNALIST**

*“Yeah, yeah, I know I’m past deadline, but see, there’s this demon chewin’ on my leg and you know, somethin’ like that tends to interfere with the old prose stylings, if you know what I mean. [BLAMI] Never mind, got the sucker. But look, there’s this matter of my expense account...”*

You’re a journalist, possibly even a well-known one, but you are not exactly a beacon for professional standards and objectivity. In fact, you have a reputation for becoming the story instead of just reporting it. Maybe it’s your passionate nature. Or your insatiable appetite for adventure. Or maybe your predilection for knocking it back in the press gallery bar. You just always find yourself getting into impossible situations, ones where the role of observer just won’t do. Why, that time back in Afghanistan when the strange creatures poured out of the mountain pass down into the mujaheddin camp you were staying at: there was nothing to do but to pick up an AK-47 and start blasting at the things, was there? And that time in Stockholm: you couldn’t let them get away with that hostage just because you’re a reporter, could you? And that story about you chasing ex-President Carter with a nine iron has been totally blown out of proportion over the years. Chances are that you’re not a newspaper reporter working a daily beat. You used to be, but after being fired from your tenth or twelfth major paper, you realized that the regular grind was not for you. Instead, you write magazine articles or even books about your exploits. Maybe you even disguise your weirder adventures as fiction, changing the names and turning them into pulp, horror or sci-fi paperbacks. Even so, you’re in a constant battle with your editors, a fight waged via telephone, fax and e-mail: when you sniff another adventure full of fear and loathing, you’re not going to let a measly thing like a deadline stand in your way.

**Juncture:** 1850, contemporary

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0 (For = 5), Mnd 6, Ref 5

*Divide 5 points between primary attributes.*

**Skills:** Detective + 3 (9) [Max 13]  
 Guns +8 (=13)  
 Info/Intoxicants +5 (11)  
 Info/World Politics +3 (9)  
 Info/your choice +3 (9)  
 Journalism +5 (11)  
 Martial Arts +6 (=11)

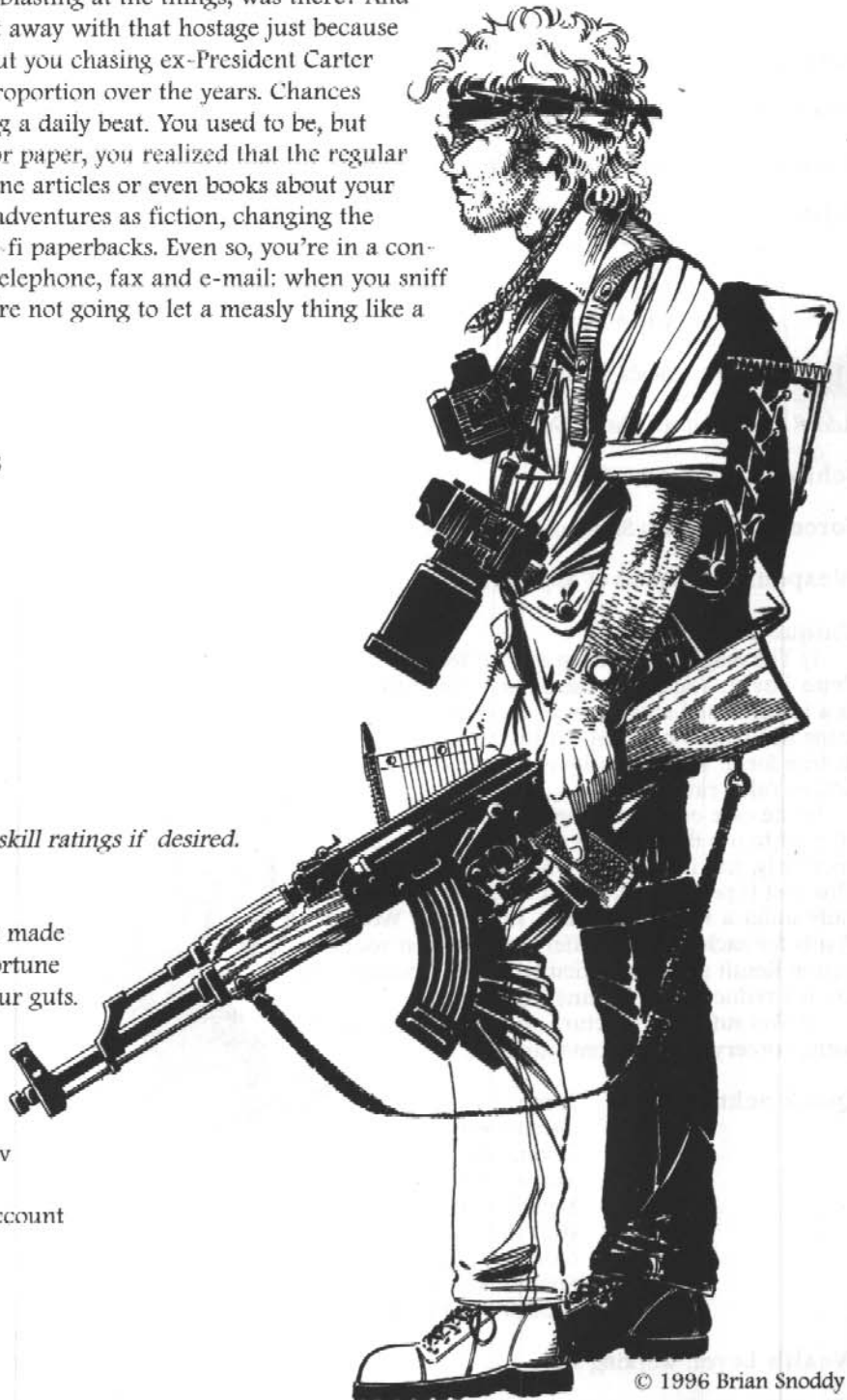
*Add 4 Skill Bonuses. Swap Guns and Martial Arts skill ratings if desired.*

**Unique Schtick:** When you encounter a contact made through your Journalism skill, you may spend a Fortune point to guarantee that the contact doesn’t hate your guts.

**Weapons:** 1 gun

**Quick Schtick Pick:** (1850) pistol  
 (contemporary) Makarov

**Wealth Level:** working stiff, but your expense account abuse allows you to operate as if you’re rich



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## MAGIC COP

*"There are some things that man was meant not to know. It's my job to hunt down those things and kill them."*

Even in junctures where magic is rare and difficult to perform, there are still supernatural occurrences. Many large police jurisdictions secretly maintain small units of officers trained in the mystic arts. These cops are able to take on the occasional renegade sorcerer or shaman who might pop up, and can dispatch demons and ghosts without freaking out. You are one of these cops. You're probably a loner; the system is set up so you have little contact with regular law enforcement officials. Other officers think you're nuts, if they know who you are at all. Alternately, you might be a crusading priest or exorcist who fights supernatural forces in the name of your religion. Depending on the religion, you might act as part of a formal church hierarchy, taking orders from your clerical superiors. Or, in the case of religions without an organized structure, you might be a self-appointed crusader against magical forces. Whether you are police officer or clerical crusader, whether you take orders or follow your own private mission, you have built up tough mental defenses against the creatures of the night. To normal folks, you come off as grim or aloof. You might think of yourself as a holy warrior, implacably gunning down anything that smacks of the occult. Or maybe you wish you could build a bridge between the world of the supernatural and the world of everyday humanity. Magic cops are often drawn into the secret war as they hunt down agents of the Lotus or Architects, discovering that there is much of the unseen world that even they know nothing about.

**Juncture:** any

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi=2 (Mag=8), Mnd 5, Ref 5

*Add 6 to primary attributes, spending no more than 3 points on any one attribute.*

**Skills:** Guns +7 (=12)  
Info/Occult +7 (12)\*  
Police +3 (8)\*  
Sorcery +5 (=13)  
Martial Arts +7 (=12)

\* For crusading priests, replace with Info / [Their Specific Religion] +6 (11)

*Add 8 Skill Bonuses. Swap Guns and Sorcery if desired.*

**Schticks:** 2 gun schticks

**Sorcery Abilities:** Summoning, plus your choice of Divination, Fertility, or Heal

**Weapons:** 2 weapons of appropriate juncture

**Unique Schticks:**

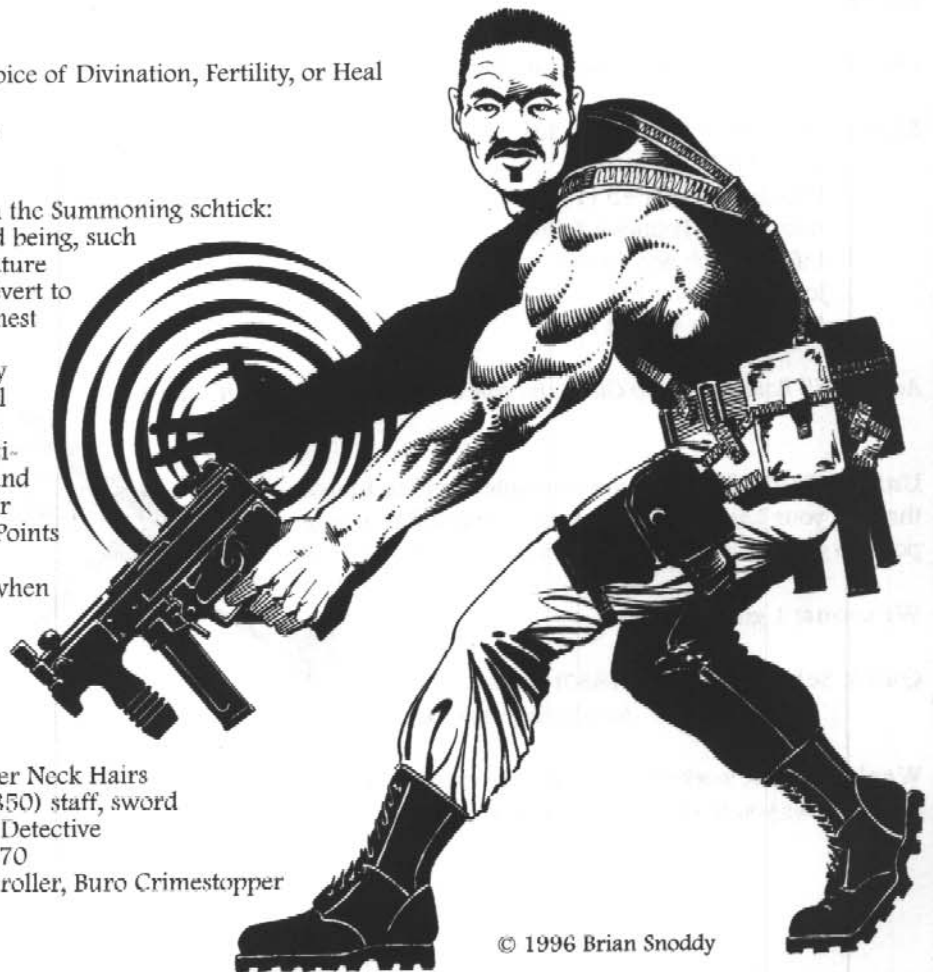
1) The magic cop gets an extra effect within the Summoning schtick:  
**True Form:** You can cause a magically-altered being, such as a transformed animal or a supernatural creature using the Transformation Creature Power, to revert to its true form. The Difficulty is the subject's highest Action Value rating.

In the case of transformed animals, you may attempt to use this spell on any given individual once only, and it costs you a Magic point to try. This cost is permanent. If you fail, you automatically suffer a serious Backlash, suffering 5 Wound Points for each point of difference between your Action Result and the Difficulty. These Wound Points are not reduced by Toughness or Armor.

2) You suffer no juncture penalties, if any, when using Sorcery in your home juncture.

**Quick Schtick Pick:** *sorcery:*  
Summoning,  
Divination  
*gun schticks:*  
Eagle Eye, Hair-Trigger Neck Hairs  
(69) staff, sword (1850) staff, sword  
(contemporary) Colt Detective  
Special, Remington 870  
(2056) Buro Beat Patroller, Buro Crimestopper

**Wealth Level:** working stiff



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## MEDIC

*"I don't see plugging a maniac like you as a violation of the Hippocratic Oath at all. Basically, I look on it as preventative medicine."*

You are a trained medical practitioner used to life in a combat zone. Maybe you've spent some time as an army doctor. Maybe you've been a trauma team member in an inner-city combat zone. Or maybe you've done a stint as an aid worker, helping the afflicted in trouble spots around the world. The one thing you've learned is that people willing to maim and kill their fellow human beings are like microbes—they're everywhere. You used to be a pacifist, until one day you started thinking of the world's killers and criminals as a disease that needed to be wiped out. That's when you added a 9mm autopistol—or a sword, or your fists—to your standard list of medical equipment. You realized that taking out a murderous drug dealer early in his career would save the lives of many innocents. You've been used to holding the power of life and death in your hands, and your program of pre-emptive euthanasia came surprisingly easy to you. But still, you were troubled. Something feels wrong about what you've been doing. It's not guilt exactly—more a sense that you need to change things on a broader scale. You're ripe to discover the secret war, and how the battle for feng shui sites can bring about a better world. You're ready to tend to fallen comrades—and to fell a few of the enemy along the way.

**Juncture:** any

**Attributes:** Bod 4, Chi 0, Mnd 7, Ref 4

Add 6 points to primary attributes, devoting no more than 3 points to a single attribute. Add 5 points, divided as you wish, among secondary attributes (if you're taking *Fu schticks*, bumping up the *Chi* or *Kung Fu* attribute is a good idea). No secondary attribute may exceed 10.

**Skills:** Detective +3 (10) [Max 12]  
 Driving +2 (6) [Max 12]  
 Guns +9 (=13) or Martial Arts +9 (=13)  
 Info/your choice +4 (11)  
 Info/your choice +2 (9)  
 Medicine +8 (=15)

Add 4 Skill Bonuses.

**Schticks:** 2 gun or fu schticks

**Weapons:** 1 weapon of appropriate juncture

**Quick Schtick Pick:** *gun schticks:*  
 Lightning Reload,

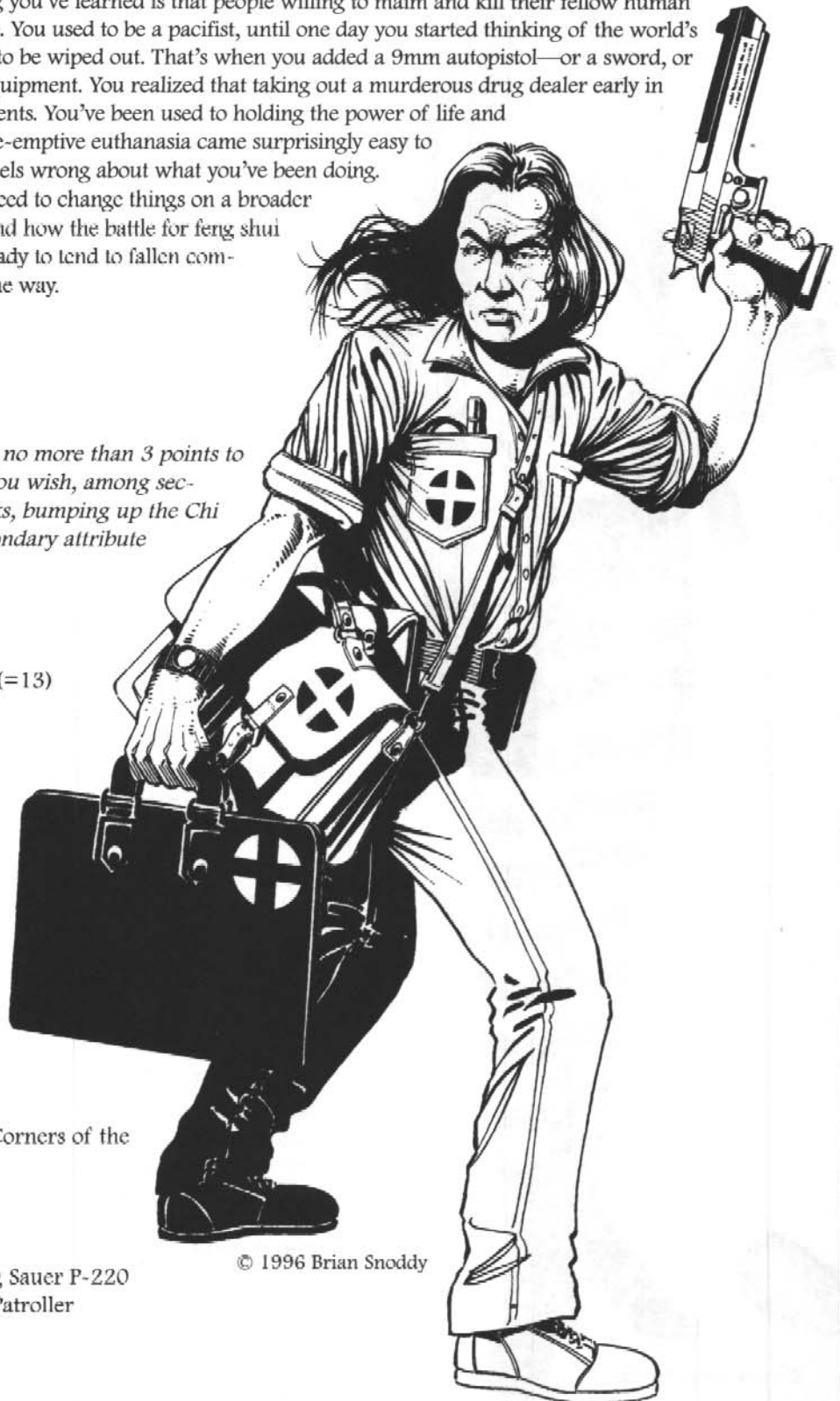
Signature Weapon

*fu schticks:*  
 Flow Restoration, Corners of the

Mouth

*weapon:*  
 (69) katana  
 (1850) musket  
 (contemporary) Sig Sauer P-220  
 (2056) Buro Beat Patroller

**Wealth Level:** rich



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## PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

*"All my life, I've been waiting for someone dressed like you to waltz into this office and give me a spiel like that. Not that I believe it for a second, but it's still cool to see your daydreams realized."*

You are an experienced investigator with contacts throughout society: from well-heeled clients who can afford to hire you, to the enforcers of the law you must occasionally skirt, to the seediest elements of the underworld. You most often work for lawyers, digging up information for use in court cases. When one corporation sues another one, you find yourself poring over corporate ledgers and sifting for obscure references in old business publications. You've worked for insurance companies, keeping plaintiffs under surveillance to see if they're as injured as they claim to be. And then of course there are divorce cases: you've seen more marriages unravel than the most dedicated of soap opera fans. Sometimes you are hired by the defense in criminal cases to look for other possible suspects and otherwise find evidence that pokes holes in the prosecution's pet theories. Although you may have gotten into your line of work because you fell in love with the *film noir* world of Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade, you've spent more time hunched over a microfiche machine in a library than you have slugging it out with gangsters and crooked cops. Maybe that's why, when you sniff out the first clues that point you to the existence of the Secret War, you're ready to chuck the real-life world of the private detective in favor of the fantastic adventure you've always dreamed of.

**Juncture:** any

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0 (For 2), Mnd 5, Ref 5

*Add 3 to one primary attribute. Add 2 to a different primary attribute. Add 1 to a third primary attribute. Add 2 to one secondary attribute.*

**Skills:** Detective +10 (=15)  
Guns +5 (10) [Max 13]  
Info/Business +3 (8)  
Info/Civil Law +3 (8)  
Martial Arts +3 (8) [Max 13]  
Intrusion +3 (8) [Max 11]

*Add 8 Skill Bonuses.*

**Weapons:** 1 weapon of appropriate juncture

**Unique Schtick:** You are an expert at applying logic to real-world situations. When you and the other PCs are speculating as to the best course of action, or as to the motivations of a given character, you can spend a Fortune point to have the GM tell straight out you whether your speculation is correct or incorrect.

**Quick Schtick Pick:** (69) staff  
(1850) cap and ball pistol  
(contemporary) Walther P-5 compact  
(2056) Buro 9A

**Wealth Level:** working stiff



## THIEF

*“You know, I was thinking of myself as retired. But then the head of that museum came on TV and said that their defenses were foolproof, that no one could get to the Guildenstern Diamond. And then I got all tempted.”*

You are a master thief. Although you make your living taking things from their legal owners, you don't do so primarily for the money. Sure, you live in luxury from the proceeds of your past misdeeds. But it's the challenge that keeps your senses keen and your ambitions sharp. As long as there have been valuables, there have been security experts who have claimed to be able to keep thieves away from them. You have made a career out of proving them wrong. You operate through careful research, by assembling every available scrap of information about your target. When you go in, you have every angle planned out to the millisecond. You also plan for something to go wrong. That's when the adrenaline kicks in, when you have to think fast and get it right the first time. When the alarms are screaming and the footfalls of heavily-armed guards are rushing your way, when the distance to your getaway vehicle seems to be impossible to cross in the moments you have left to you—that's the moment you live for. The money is just gravy. Still, there's a thought nagging at the back of your skull that maybe all of this thrill-seeking is just a little bit meaningless—maybe even adolescent. After all, you already have more dough than you'll ever need. And maybe it was a bad thing to blow away all of those guards; after all, they were just working stiffs doing their jobs. Maybe “they shouldn't have got in my way” isn't just a great excuse after all. You don't feel bad about the pretty objects you've taken from rich guys, but that trail of blood is starting to haunt you at night. Lately you've been thinking about leaving a positive mark on the world. Robbing from the rich and giving to the poor, or something like that. Is there a way to use your skills for the greater good, you wonder?

**Juncture:** any

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0 (For 3), Mnd 5, Ref 5

*Add 3 points to one primary attribute, 2 points to a second, and 1 point to a third. Add 2 points to one secondary attribute.*

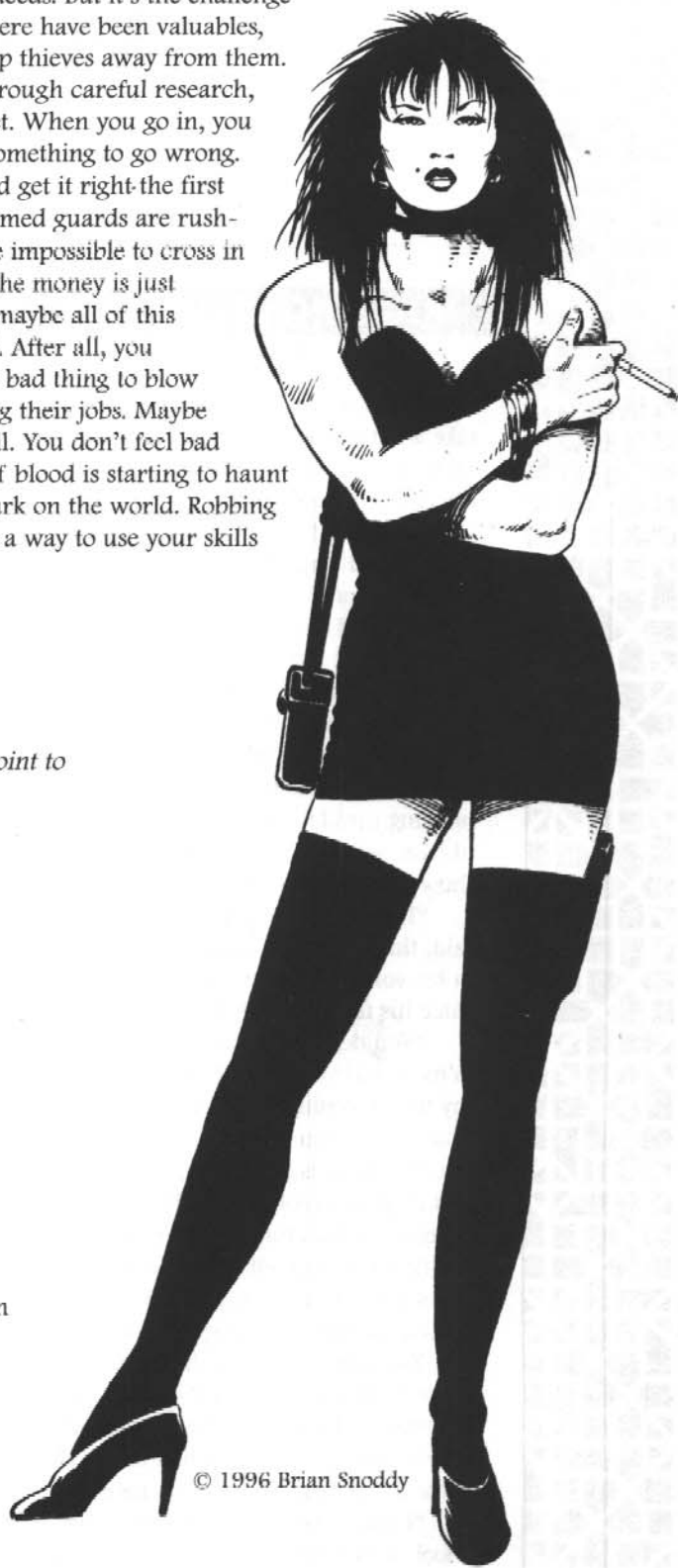
**Skills:** Deceit +4 (9) [Max 13]  
 Detective +2 (7) [Max 13]  
 Guns +6 (11) [Max 13]  
 Info/Arts and Antiques +6 (11)  
 Info/Gems and Jewels +6 (11)  
 Intrusion +11 (=16)  
 Martial Arts +5 (10) [Max 12]

*Add 8 Skill Bonuses.*

**Weapons:** 1 gun

**Quick Schtick Pick:** (69) bow  
 (1850) rifle  
 (contemporary) Bernadelli combat shotgun  
 (2056) Buro Blue Flag

**Wealth Level:** rich



# THE EATERS OF THE LOTUS

## BIG BROTHER TSIENT

### *Demon Hood*

"You don't scare me, Tsien. You can just take what you want to know and shove it up your—" a blow upside the head cut off the rest of the comment.

Adjusting his tie slightly, Big Brother Tsien paced up and down the stained concrete floor of the old warehouse shaking his head and clucking his tongue.

"Doesn't Kar Fai teach you people anything? Hasn't he ever told you to *stay the hell out of my way?*" Lee's head was ringing from the blow and he tasted blood in his mouth. It was hard to swallow while hanging upside-down from a cargo hook like Lee was, but he was determined not to show fear in front of a thug like Tsien.

"I'm not telling you anything," Lee said, this time with a little less conviction in his voice. Tsien grinned, a curious act since his face was still flushed with anger.

"You don't gotta tell me a damn thing. What could you possibly say that I'd waste my time listening to? I'll tell you what: jack. That's what you know that's worth knowing. But there is something you can tell the rest of your droolcup buddies in the 'Friends of the Dragon.' We're gonna have a little show and tell now, and then you're outta here. And when you leave, it'll be with a message. A real special one."

Tsien turned and walked a few paces away from Lee, his hands clasped behind his back and was silent for a moment before he spoke again. When he did, his voice had a distant, lecturing tone to it.

"I used to be like you and your pals. I was a fool, always bouncing all over town on the

hustle. I thought I knew everything, thought I was a big man. I did jobs for some of the biggest guys in the city. I paid my dues, wasted plenty of suckers. I went up the ranks, major career ladder. Not bad for a Kowloon punk."

What the hell is going on here? Lee wondered. Is he going to tell me his whole life story? He bit back a comment and let Tsien ramble. Maybe he could buy some time and learn something in the process.

"Then I got to the top and realized I was in real trouble, because now there were punks like me clawing their way up, looking to kick me out a window. I needed power, quick. Lucky for me, I got it."

*Yeah, you became a better crook, Lee thought.*

"Demons," Tsien said, spinning around to face Lee. "We've all got demons in us. I bet Kar Fai tells you to resist 'em, right? Demons are bad, temptation is bad, yadda yadda yadda." The sneer in his voice made Lee want to wipe up the floor with Tsien's face, but he forced himself to be calm and kept looking for a way out of the chains that held his ankles to the cargo hook.

"That's crap. Demons are strong—even Kar Fai knows that—but if you don't resist your demons, they make you stronger. They give you the power you need to make suckers pay, and pay hard."

"You should write a book, Tsien. 'How To Nurture Your Inner Demon-Child.' It'd be a best seller." To himself, Lee thought *Let me out of this and I'll wound your inner child for you, pal.*

Tsien's eyes seemed to burn with a bright fire from within as he smiled and revealed rows of sharp teeth that made Lee's sweat turn cold and his heart skip a beat.

“You and your buddies are suckers, in my book. Suckers cross me and they pay. And this is why.” There was a cracking sound that Lee felt in his own bones as Tsien’s features began to shift. His skin darkened, becoming a mottled purple hide covered with warts and scales. He grew and stretched until he towered over Lee’s feet and his hands became large and blunt, capable of holding—or crushing—a man’s head in either one of them. The hideously-transformed gang lord looked down on the bloody face of the man hanging from the warehouse ceiling with an evil leer and a blast of breath that could melt steel. When he spoke it was in a deep voice that sounded like he was gargling gravel.

“I hope you can take dictation, sucker, but don’t worry: this is a message you won’t forget.”

Lee did his best not to scream.

## NOTES

Big Brother Tsien is a Triad boss from Kowloon who hit the big time. He’s now a powerful underling of the Eaters of the Lotus and works to carry out their plans in the modern juncture...while making a little on the side for himself. He sees himself as a big wheel in the Lotus’ plans for the world and intends to make himself a king when they take over the time stream.

Lotus magic has released Tsien’s “inner demon” and allows him to transform into a demonic form. This form is built like a brick wall, incredibly strong and resistant to harm. Tsien greatly enjoys his power and likes flashy displays of strength and intimidation against his enemies. He keeps his abilities and his ties to the Lotus a secret, but it is common knowledge among the innerwalkers who are his enemies.

Overall, Tsien is a small fish trying to be a very big fish. He chafes under the rule of

his sorcerous masters, but also fears their power and carries out their orders. He’s likely to take out his frustrations on his underlings and enemies to make himself feel bigger.

## JUEDING SHELUN

*Eunuch Sorcerer*

*I am Jueding Shelun, Pedal of the Lotus and second to Gao Zhang. My genius shaped our expansion since the earliest days, bringing us to this present grandeur. The power of my sorcery rivals all but Gao himself. No one can match the intricacy of my plans.*

*It is a shame that so few grant me the respect I have rightfully earned. Soon they will learn the price for their arrogance. After today, everyone will tremble at the name of Jueding Shelun!*

A thin sorcerer with a long white beard and immaculate silk robes, Jueding Shelun carefully cultivated the appearance of power. He was a megalomaniac and unabashed egotist—constantly bragging about his achievements and his goals.

Jueding saw himself as an invaluable asset to the Lotus, one of their rightful leaders. In truth, he merely stood near the center of power. Oh, his sorcerous abilities were impressive, and Gao honestly valued his opinion. But he was a minor player among Lotus greats.

Still, Jueding remained confident. He believed that one day Gao would recognize his achievements. But as the years passed, his bitterness and impatience festered. Driven by desperation, he decided to seize respect and power. He would act decisively—and rashly.

It began when Jueding learned of a powerful feng shui site in the 1850 juncture. The Red Lantern Tavern, he was told, was the lynchpin to conquering all time.

Once it fell, other sites would soon follow. Lotus influence would expand, and Jueding could hand it all to Gao Zhang as a present.

Still, this mission required a special approach. Gathering a host of toadying lackeys, Jueding cast a spell that cracked a doorway directly to the underworld. He and his minions found themselves surrounded by flames. The air was a thick fog of dead souls, milling about lost and in pain. Continual screams formed an

### Big Brother Tsien

Bod 13, Chi 0 (Mag 9), Mnd 6, Ref 8

**Skills:** Creature Powers 13, Deceit 8, Guns 14, Info/Gangland Politics 12, Intimidation 11 (14 as demon), Leadership 11, Martial Arts 14

**Gun Schticks:** Lightning Reload x3

**Creature Schticks:** Conditional Escalation (+1 Bod, when hit by an opponent using a Fu power), Immune to Blast schticks (except for cold/ice), Inevitable Comeback, Rancid Breath, Transformation (human to demon)

**Weapons:** Desert Eagle .50 Magnum (12/3/9+1), Mossberg Special Purpose (13/5/9)

almost rhythmic backdrop—augmented by the dull squeal of metal grinding against metal.

They walked through the burning plains for six days. Packs of demonic hounds circled them, picking off anyone who wandered too far from the group. Herded forwards by walls of flame and cracking whips, they soon reached the palace of the Thing with 1,000 Tongues.

The palace was a six-thousand-foot monument of broken glass and iron, rising from a pool of boiling blood. Bear-sized guardsmen led Jueding and his company into the throne room, where they bowed before the Thing.

The bargain was simple. The Thing with 1,000 Tongues gave Jueding the crystals of materialization, allowing him to summon it. In return, Jueding handed over all the souls traveling with him, also promising the Thing any souls that it killed during the attack.

The screams of the lackeys ripped through the air as the thing's tentacle-like tongues dragged them toward his massive mouth. Jueding Shelun bowed again, and allowed the guards to escort him out of the palace. As the doors shut behind him, he found himself alone in 69 China.

His laughter rippled through the stone garden. Nothing could stop him now.

Nothing, that is, except the Dragons.

Their intervention caused a slight wrinkle in the fabric of Jueding's plans, and then it all went to pieces. When the Dragons killed the Thing with 1,000 Tongues, its body collapsed on top of the sorcerer. During his last seconds, Jueding Shelun watched his life's ambitions crumble. He raged at the Dragons, blaming them for his failure. Then there was nothing.

Slowly, the blackness of death gave way to gray, featureless mists. After wandering for an eternity, Jueding found himself back at the palace of glass and iron. The Thing with 1,000 Tongues stood before him. Its mouth stretched into a ragged smile. Its voice rang out, echoing through the vast hall. "I killed you during the attack. Your soul is mine."

A single tongue snaked toward him. Thinking fast, Jueding challenged the Thing's ownership, insisting that they bring the matter before the Underworld Court. The tongue stopped its advance, and eight

### Jueding Shelun

*These stats give Jueding's abilities prior to his death. Items in brackets are only available after his death, when he is a ghost.*

Bod 5 [Tgh 8], Chi 2 (Mag 9), Mnd 5/Int 8), Ref 7 (Spd 8)

**Skills:** [Creature Powers 16], Deceit 12, Info/Underworld 12, Info/Demons 12, Intimidation 11, Sorcery 18

**Magic Schticks:** Blast (fire, lightning, acid, chi, conjured weapons, transmutation), Influence, Movement, Summoning, Weather

**Creature Schticks:** [Flying], [Insubstantial], [Blood Drain (AV gain)]

### Unique Schtick

**Dramatic Touch:** Jueding Shelun despises subtlety. He announces his presence with a flash of sorcerous fire and a thunderous roar. As such, he has honed drama to an art form and can easily distract his opponents. Whenever he successfully performs a stunt, he can designate one opponent who loses a number of shots from the current sequence equal to half of Jueding's outcome.

In exchange for this ability, Jueding must always act in a dramatic and obvious manner. This includes gloating over defeated victims and prisoners, giving them a chance to escape.

cloaked figures appeared around them.

Jueding's knowledge of demonic laws allowed him to find a small but important loophole. He argued that the Thing's earthly body was already dead when its fall crushed Jueding, meaning that the Thing was not truly his killer. The Court agreed, granting a Stay of Devourment.

This left Jueding free—but still dead and in a rapidly-worsening mood. He vowed to avenge himself on those who thwarted him. Returning to Earth as an angry Ghost, he began a crusade against the Dragons wherever he could find them.

Jueding Shelun does not know about the Ascended's role in the Red Lantern Temple disaster. If he did, his rage would surely turn on them as well.

## KUN KAN

### Earth Demon

We stood on top of the hill, looking down into the field of mud and rock. Once it was a DataTel Inc. construction site—now only a few pieced-together shanties remained. Twisted brown plants clung to the last vestiges of life. Nothing else grew: no animals, no insects. Death hung in the air, in the stink of oil and bitter chemicals.

I had traced the sorcerer here, which only confirmed my fears. Sane people avoided places like this. The toxic crud they've been dumping would probably eat right through my sneakers. Well, hell. I could always buy a new pair.

## EATERS OF THE LOTUS

Pulling out my Browning Hi-Power, I checked the clip. Full, just like I left it. I slammed the magazine home and nodded to Wang. We started down.

The field was quiet, except for our irregular, squishing footsteps. I began to worry. Perhaps the sorcerer had slipped past us. Perhaps this was another red herring. Then, as we reached the edge of the first shanty, a squeaky chant filled the air. It echoed around us, not seeming to come from any one spot. Soon the ground began to shake.

Three bulky shapes rose out of the muck. They appeared almost human, with bodies formed from tangled roots, mud and loose rocks. Angry green veins of thick ooze pulsed along their arms and legs. With a low growl, they shambled toward us.

Without thinking, I lifted my Browning and shot at the first. My bullet tore a fist-sized hole in its shoulder—but it did not flinch. I could see the wound closing as he approached. Two more steps, and the hole vanished completely.

Wang's gun echoed my own. His shots were rapid and wild as he tried to stave them

off, but the few bullets that found their targets did little to slow the beasts. Desperate, I raised my aim and emptied my magazine into the closest's head. They *can* die. Its body fell apart into clods of loose dirt.

Ejecting the spent magazine, I reached for another, but Wang's muffled scream drew my attention. Turning, I watched one of the creatures tackle him and drag him down. It was like the beast dove into water. The soil slipped around the two, then covered them completely. Wang was gone.

The remaining creature growled and started toward me.

My fingers closed around a fresh mag.

### NOTES

The Kun Kan are humanoid Earth demons. Like most demons, they feed off negative chi. However, the Kun Kan prefer that theirs be siphoned directly from the pain of the Earth. Toxic waste dumps, abandoned battlefields, and city slums are some of their favorite feeding grounds. The Kun Kan are strongest in these areas.



**Kun Kan**

Bod 8, Chi 5, Mnd 4, Ref 5

**Skills:** Creature Power 15, Martial Arts 11**Unique Schticks**

**Implant Suggestion:** This is a variation on the Domination ability; it allows more subtle control over a person's behavior. The Kun Kan cannot force the target to take actions against their will. Some part of the target must agree with the suggestion—the Kun Kan simply strengthen that part. They use this ability on industry leaders, building contractors, and politicians, encouraging them to destroy more of the Earth. To use this schtick, make a Creature Power check with the target's highest AV as the difficulty. The implanted suggestion lasts a number of weeks equal to the outcome.

**Meld with Earth:** Similar to Insubstantial, this allows the Kun Kan to move freely through rock, stone and dirt. Note that this only works on natural earth. The Kun Kan cannot meld with asphalt, concrete or processed metals.

**Negative Feed:** The Kun Kan gain a bonus to all AVs in areas where the Earth was damaged or abused. The exact bonus depends on the damage done and is up to the GM, but is generally +2.

**Regenerates:** 2 points per sequence, 5 when melding.

**Game Notes:** In combat, the Kun Kan are fond of stunts based on their Meld with Earth ability. One of their most vicious attacks is to grab someone and try to drag them underground. If the attack is a killing blow, they successfully drag down the still-living victim.

Other successful attacks only partially submerge the target. Depending on the stunt's outcome, the results could range from merely having one foot trapped, to being pinned from the neck down. As the Kun Kan continue to attack, the victims may find themselves pulled under an inch at a time.

Any named characters pulled completely underground must make a Death Check every sequence until rescued. Unnamed characters automatically die.

The Kun Kan will also grab handfuls of dirt and gravel, throwing them like big, rock-hard snowballs; the Kun Kan throw them at a -2 AV penalty. The typical earthball has a base damage of 8. For larger earthballs, increase both the damage and the penalty.

and their news had been anything but pleasant. Those infernal meddlers from the future called the Jammers had once again destroyed a feng shui site that the Lotus had been on the verge of possessing. Six months of careful subterfuge rent asunder by those destruction-happy fools!

"So the Battlechimp and his cronies have once again interfered with my plans for future days...this will not do at all," Gao Zhang said suddenly, his pacing coming to an end. "The time has come to teach this monkey and his pathetic rabble a lesson!

"I will unleash...Tanbi Guiawu!" he almost screeched. "The demon shall teach them proper respect for the Eaters of the Lotus, and for the mighty Gao Zhang!" The sorcerer began to laugh in his hideous, high-pitched fashion.

The two eunuchs stood utterly silent as their master whirled on his heel, and pointed his long-nailed hand at them, and intoned the words they wanted to hear the least.

"But first...there is the matter of your failure." His lips twisted into a cruel smile.

Gao Zhang's piercing laughter floated out into the cool evening, and the two eunuchs knew that this night was their last.

**NOTES**

Tanbi Guiawu...the name strikes fear into even the most hardened Lotus warrior, and the most adept Lotus sorcerer. Those secret warriors who know of the demon fear him as well. He is an ancient being from the lowest pits of the Underworld, a devourer of souls, a

**TANBI GUIAWU***Giant Demon*

Gao Zhang paced his chamber restlessly, his voluminous indigo robes swirling about him. His brow was knitted in intense thought, and he was muttering quietly. The two sweating eunuchs that stood nearby looked at each other nervously in the flickering light of the nearby braziers. Gao Zhang had usually indulged in "killing the messenger" when it came to those who brought him unpleasant news,

**Tanbi Guaiwu**

*The stats below are for Tanbi Guaiwu in the 2056 juncture; those in brackets are for the 1850 and modern junctures. In the Netherworld, stats for Tanbi Guaiwu are a bit of a moot point. The demon is so strong that he passes out of the realm of game mechanics and into the realm of being a plot device. Following the old adage "give it stats, and your players will kill it," no statistics are listed for Tanbi's Netherworld manifestation. Think of all those army guys who tried to stop Godzilla by shooting at him, and you begin to get the idea. Don't even mention Tanbi's 69 A.D. stats.*

Bod 20 [16], Chi 6 [4], Mnd 2 [2], Ref 6 [4]

**Skills:** Creature Powers 10, Intimidate 12, Martial Arts 8

**Creature Schticks:** Abysmal Spines, Damage Immunity (normal bullets, hand-to-hand weapons (exception: clubs), unarmed attacks), Inevitable Comeback, Stinger



wrecker of havoc on the most titanic scale. The demon asks and gives no quarter. The Lotus unleashes Tanbi Guaiwu on those that it wishes to utterly destroy. Only Gao Zhang himself can control the elemental destruction that is Tanbi Guaiwu, and bend his will to the Lotus.

As long as a football field and a half in the Netherworld, the demon resembles nothing so much as an unholy combination of crab and praying mantis. Possessing five pairs of huge legs, four massive arms, and a pair of vestigial wings, Tanbi Guaiwu is made for destruction and mayhem on a grand scale. A shiny black carapace encases the demon's entire body, with emerald green markings at the juncture of the beast's chitinous plates. Tanbi Guaiwu dwells in the lowest basement of the Lotus's Netherworld fortress, kept asleep by powerful magic.

With such a mighty ally on their side, one might wonder why the Lotus haven't completely dominated the Netherworld. The answer comes down to a couple of factors, the first one being that the demon is only marginally "on their side." Gao Zhang's control over Tanbi Guaiwu is tentative at best. The demon is remarkably single-minded. The only activities it can maintain any focus on are destroying everything it sees and devouring anything that lives. In the few times that the demon was unleashed in the Netherworld, the effort of controlling him left Gao Zhang exhausted for weeks afterward. Gao Zhang can ill-afford to show any weakness to his followers, and avoids using the demon in the Netherworld as a result.

Another peculiarity of Tanbi Guaiwu's powers are that they seem to directly correspond to the magical "background count" of wherever he is summoned. In the Netherworld, the demon is at his full strength and size, but his abilities are diminished in the other junctures. He is also easier to control there. In the 2056 juncture, the Buro's magical activities allow Tanbi Guaiwu to manifest at the size of a locomotive engine. In the 1850 and contemporary junctures, the demon clocks in at elephant size. He is still an impressive opponent even at these diminished

sizes, however. Gao Zhang has never brought Tanbi Guaiwu to his home juncture in AD 69, fearing that even he, Gao Zhang, would not be able to stop the beast if it broke free in that magic-rich time.

## THE THING WITH 1,000 TONGUES

### *Disgusting Demon*

The Thing with 1,000 Tongues sat in its palace of twisted iron and glass shards. The dark ride back to the underworld was unpleasant. Death often is. But the still-fresh taste of souls washed away the memory of Iala Mané's foot—the pain as it crashed through the Thing's brain pan. Smiling an unpleasant grin, it laughed. There would always be another fool who thought he could negotiate with the Lords of the Underworld. Meanwhile, Iala could

### **The Thing With 1,000 Tongues**

Bod 10 (Tgh 20 |10|), Chi 0, Mnd 8, Ref 6

**Skills:** Creature Power 18, Martial Arts 22

**Creature Schticks:** Damage Immunity (normal bullets), 20 Tentacles (its tongues)

### **Unique Schticks**

**Unbelievable Bulk:** Due to its large size, the Thing's Toughness rating is 20. However, if characters make stunts against particularly vulnerable regions (eyes, back of the head, belly button, etc.), the Thing's Toughness is only 10.

**Acidic Blood:** A spurt of the Thing's acidic blood automatically attacks anyone who wounds the Thing in close combat. This is a free attack, costing no shots. The Blood has an AV of 12 and a Base Damage of 8. Somehow it knows to aim for eyes and other vulnerable areas. All blood attacks are stunts.

**Game Notes:** In open terrain, the Thing's favorite attack is to stomp (damage 25) or punch (damage 18). In more closed quarters, it begins picking up and throwing its opponents, while snapping up an occasional victim with its tongues. The thing will chew and swallow anyone it can drag into its mouth (shot cost 3, damage 10). Unnamed characters die instantly. Named characters continue to take 5 wound points per sequence. They can act, but all AVs are -4 and all shot costs are doubled.

Unless pursuing its own plots, the Thing with 1,000 Tongues never fights up to its ability. The Thing's personal agenda often includes dying at a key moment—thus destroying its "master's" plans. Other times, it feigns weakness and hunger. If fed a soul by those who summoned it, it will boost its apparent abilities slightly (actually, just using more of its real abilities), thereby encouraging the sorcerers to feed it even more souls.

Finally, while the Thing may love the flavor of sorcerous souls, it cannot resist the flavor of heroes. Ironically, the Thing has little interest in eating sorcerous heroes. Like mixing chocolate cake and steak, they may taste wonderfully separate, but few people want them in the same bite.

provide a measure of distraction.

The Thing with 1,000 Tongues cast his gaze back through the wall between worlds, focusing on a figure. He lay in a hospital. Gauze bandages were wrapped around his head, covering both eyes.

"Good," the Thing said. "Rest up. I want you fit before the games begin."

## NOTES

Six stories tall with feet the size of automobiles, the Thing with 1,000 Tongues is a monstrous killing machine. A stomp with a foot or a swipe from a meaty hand is more than enough to crumple most opposition. Lashing tongues can grab the unwary, pulling them into its mouth. And if anyone gets close enough to damage the beast, its green acidic blood returns blow for blow.

Given all that, many people overlook the Thing's true power: its devious mind. It was no accident that Jueding Shelun's forces died outside the Red Lantern Tavern. The Thing wanted the sorcerer's soul. True, the sorcerer escaped through a small loophole. But there are loopholes, and then there are loopholes.

The Stay of Devourment and Infernal Restraining Orders that prevented the Thing from claiming Jueding's soul will not protect the man for long. The Thing's plans have already begun to lure the sorcerer back. Any time he spends as a free ghost will only heighten his flavor—like a fruit ripening to perfection.

For the Thing, existence is a game and death merely a pause in the action. Sure, it cannot climb out of the Underworld without mortal help—but it controls many lesser spirits who can. Eating, manipulation, and vengeance: these distractions help the centuries pass.

WALKER OF THE  
PURPLE TWILIGHT

*Eunuch Sorcerer*

Liu Tsou began life quite unassumingly. He was the sixth son born to a pair of poor farmers. He did not have the advantage of size, like his brother Two Horse. Nor was he clever like his sister Mi Tieh. He seemed condemned to be a forgettable member of an unimportant family.

However, as the snow melted in his sixteenth year, he suddenly came down with a wasting sickness. For three weeks he lay helpless in bed. His skin turned a deathlike pallor. His once-black hair faded to a light gray.

A continual stream of healers visited his house, but none could find a source for the illness. They offered their prayers, but no one expected Liu Tsou to live.

Then, on the twenty-fifth day of the fever, Liu woke up—though his eyes remained clouded. Speaking in a voice much deeper than his own, he told his father that a late frost was coming, and the family should wait an extra week before planting their fields. At first his father dismissed the idea, but the strangeness of the situation gnawed at him. In the end, he took his son's advice.

When the frost came, it damaged most of the region's new sprouts. Only the Liu family fields remained unharmed.

Since that day, Liu Tsou has acted as a medium to the spirits. He earned fame throughout his province predicting fortunes and appeasing angry ancestors. Soon, people began calling him a Walker of the Purple Twilight—the name given to those who walk with spirits. He seemed almost trapped between worlds, as if he could not focus clearly on either.

Eventually, word of his abilities reached Hei Chih, the Provincial Magistrate. Hei Chih wanted to invade a neighboring province and hoped to gain spiritual approval. He summoned the young medium to his court, asking to have his fortune read.

But when the Walker of the Purple Twilight arrived, he took one look at Hei Chih and saw darkness eating at the magistrate's bowels. "You are dead." He said with the voice of the spirits. "You have used your seat to rape the land, to rob from your people. Heaven has cursed you. You will not live to see the next summer."

Burned by the words, Hei Chih struck back at the youth. He accused him of trifling with demons, of causing the curse he spoke of. He claimed that misfortune followed in Walker's wake, and that only those who paid his spiritual blackmail were spared. Hei Chih ordered the guards to drag the Walker to the palace walls. There they would disembowel him, cut off his head and hang it from the wall as a warning to others.

## NOTES

Walkers of the Purple Twilight are people, often peasants, who miraculously gain insight into the world of spirits; they also have strange powers that allow them to communicate with the dead and see the fate of the living. For obvious reasons, the Lotus prize such people, and actively seek them out to recruit them into the Lotus. Non-Lotus sorcerers in rural China might also look for young Walkers, to help them stay clear of Gao Zhang's minions.

## WHITE DISCIPLE

*Eunuch Sorcerer*

Grumbling under his breath, Luis began to ascend the 30-foot demon statue in front of him. He was deep underground, somewhere, in a huge cavern that formed a natural amphitheatre. The place was a feng shui site, which was why Kar Fai had sent him and the rest here. It turned out that the site's chi was focused into a giant crystal,

But the guards never reached the wall. Two Lotus sorcerers had infiltrated Hei Chih's court. They recognized this Walker's ability, and moved to rescue him. Under their careful training, he learned to control the spirits, not merely to act as their pawn. He learned how to traffic with demons.

### Liu Tsou

Bod 7, Chi 0 (Mag 8), Mnd 7 (Int 9), Ref 7

**Skills:** Info/Imperial Bureaucracy 11, Info/Lotus 13, Info/Spirits 13, Sorcery 13

**Magic Schticks:** Blast (Disease, Fire, Conjure Weapons), Divination, Summoning

### Unique Schticks

**Spirit Link:** The Walker of the Purple Twilight has an innate sense for spirits. He can feel them moving around—even those invisible to normal sight. This sense gives him +2 to his Sorcery AV for all Summoning and Divination checks.

**Walking the Lines:** The Walker can detect the invisible bonds between people and things. Formed by familial relationship, marriage, feng shui attunement, and destiny, these connections allow him to channel spells. After performing a four-hour ritual to activate the link, he can cast one Blast spell on an object or person in some way bound to the target instead of the target itself. This spell will cross any distance to reach the target, even across junctures.



called the eye of the demon. Now Luis knew why. The crystal was set in the face of a giant statue depicting a hideous creature. Luis particularly disliked all the tongues spilling out of the thing's mouth. In fact, he didn't like anything about this place at all. It was being used by the Eaters of the Lotus as a temple, and so they had adorned the cave with carvings of leering demons and grinning skulls. Luis tried not to look down as he neared the top of the statue. He was right above the sacrificial pit. Had it been filled with blood and bones, he could have handled it, but the fact that it contained nothing but inky, swirling darkness gave him the creeps. Finally, Luis reached the head of the statue and looked at the eye. It was a head-sized chunk of dimly-glowing crystal. "Not bad," thought Luis, forgetting his fear for a moment. This thing would have set him up for a few months back in the old days. That's why he was here, because he could steal anything. Hell, compared to some of his capers, this one had been a snap.

"Intruders! Intruders!" A deep, unearthly voice echoed throughout the cavern as Luis touched the crystal. A horde of swarming figures spilled out from either end of the temple. The majority of them were purple-clad cultists, screaming oaths and swinging swords and axes around wildly. A smaller number of them were the sorcerous eunuchs, their cheeks sunken and their eyes ghostly and white. Kyle, the ex-Green Beret, opened fire as soon as they came into view, emptying his Rugers in both directions without missing a single target. Danny Lau met their charge with one of his own. Leaping into the air, he landed in the middle of the cultists and launched into a rapid-fire series of kung fu strikes. Mack, on the other hand, simply stood and waited for them to come to him. Built like a bear, he grabbed the first one that reached him and threw him back into the others, then pitched the next one, screaming, into the bottomless pit.

Luis looked down on the scene with dismay, the eye already in his pack. Suddenly, the rock next to his head exploded in a flash of white light, nearly causing him to lose his grip. When he looked again, he saw energy crackling around the hands of the sorcerers. One of them pointed at Danny and lightning jumped from the eunuch's hand, just barely missing the martial artist. Another one pointed at Kyle,

but this time the energy flared wrongly in his hand. The eunuch screamed as the electricity consumed him. Mack was not so lucky. The blast caught him full on in the chest, causing him to stagger dangerously close to the edge of the pit.

Another eunuch pointed his hand up to where Luis was perched, then another and another. Luis knew that it was going to be a bad day.

## NOTES

The white disciples are the lowest level of sorcerers within the Eaters of the Lotus. Ambitious and hungry, many men have flocked to serve Gao Zhang since his rise to power. Those who truly seek power, however, prove their devotion to him by allowing themselves to be castrated. Gao Zhang rewards these individuals by inducting them into the Eaters of the Lotus and teaching them the secrets of necromancy. However, this is not always the boon that the aspirants believe it to be. The study of sorcery is not for the weak-willed or foolish, and the competition is intense. Many of these so-called sorcerers destroy themselves, unable to control their own power. Others still are fed to demons, or used in sacrificial rituals when they prove incompetent, or make the mistake of angering their instructors. Only the most talented, clever, and treacherous ever make it to Gao Zhang's inner circle. Still, despite the dangers, there is never a shortage of supplicants—for such are the rewards of power.

Most white disciples, as they are called, are given the task of guarding temples and other important feng shui sites. Others are assigned to assist more-experienced sorcerers in their operations throughout the other junctures, while the most-favored serve Gao Zhang directly in the emperor's palace. The first spell these eunuchs learn is the lightning blast. This serves both as a weapon and as a means of intimidation. The fact that many of them destroy themselves while attempting to use it is of no great concern. It weeds out the failures, and there are always ready replacements.

**White Disciple**

Bod 5, Chi 0 (Mag 5), Mind 6, Ref 5

**Skills:** Info/Eaters of the Lotus 7, Sorcery 7

**Sorcery Schticks:** Blast (Lightning only, base damage 7)

## BACK FOR SECONDS

# THE GUIDING HAND

## GREEN MONK

*Martial Artist*

The Laughing Man and I had been watching the Happy Times Laundromat for about a week before we made our move. There had been just a few too many Hand members in suits picking up their laundry lately for our taste. The Hand was up to something, and it was time to find out what.

We both stepped out of the battered green sedan and walked quickly around the corner to the rear of the building. The lock on the back door was a piece of cake to pick, and soon the Laughing Man and I were standing in the darkened rear of the cavernous laundry facility. The amorphous shape of hampers full of clothing loomed in the half-light around us, and the chemical smell of the detergents filled our nostrils.

I gestured to the Laughing Man, and we both began to move carefully across the room. We were about halfway there when the lights blazed to life, briefly blinding us.

"So, we have visitors," a voice said. "How unfortunate...for them."

As my sight returned, I saw the voice came from an elderly gentleman dressed in an immaculately-tailored grey suit, flanked by five extremely large, bald mooks in dark green suits of a similar cut.

"I don't suppose you'd believe we're just here to pick up our laundry?" the Laughing Man said with his usual smile.

"Your attempt at humor is pathetic," said the old man. "My sons...kill them."

The five bruisers moved toward us. As the Laughing Man drew his matching chrome-plated Desert Eagles and began producing the hail of lead that was his specialty, I leaped through the air with a deafening "Kiiiiii-Yahhhh!" I landed between two of the mooks and unleashed my patented Double Mountain punch into both of the hulking brutes, the same punch I've used to knock holes in concrete walls.

The green-suited pair looked down at me and smiled like nothing had hap-

### Green Monk

*The stats below are for unnamed Green Monks, excluding any Fu schticks. Named Green Monks use the stats in brackets, and also gain the Fu schticks and unique schtick listed.*

Bod 8 (Tgh 9 [12]), Chi 0 [7], Mnd 5 [5], Ref 6 [6] (Spd 4 [5])

**Skills:** Martial Arts 9 [14]

**Fu Schticks:** Inner Strength, Clothed in Life, Natural Order, Backlash of the Turtle, Mirror of the Turtle, Laughter of the Turtle, Vengeance of the Turtle. *Only named Green Monks have these.*

### Unique Schtick

#### Immobility of the Turtle

**Chi Cost: 2 Shot Cost: 1**

On a successful Martial Arts task check, the Green Monk can channel his Chi energy down into the surface he stands upon, rooting himself to the spot. This makes the Green Monk effectively unmovable until either the end of the sequence, or until he is killed. Immobility of the Turtle may be used as a defensive action. *Only named Green Monks have this Fu schtick.*

**Weapons:** Any hand-to-hand/martial arts weapons.

**Game Notes:** Perfect Master Quan Lo trains his Green Monks to be the ultimate manifestation of the Green principle of resistance. This training has made even the unnamed Green Monks tougher than the average mook. To reflect this, unnamed Green Monks go down on an attack with an Outcome of 6 or more (4 or more in the case of attacks that take out unnamed characters on a 3 or more).

pend. I smiled back—and prepared to get my ass kicked.

## NOTES

Resistance is the guiding principle of the Green Monks of the Guiding Hand. Those who are chosen by Quan Lo to follow the Green path are rigorously trained in the way of the Turtle. “The Turtle knows who he is. The Turtle’s shell knows what it is. He resists impure influences. Perseverance furthers.”

To achieve the ideals of the Turtle, Green Monks engage in an intense training path that inures them to pain and gives them a stamina and a constitution far higher than normal individuals. Not only can Green Monks survive injuries that would drop normal men, but they can do so with no outward sign that they were injured at all.

Those Green Monks who have a strong spiritual nature are trained in the higher mysteries of the Path of the Storm Turtle. These men are truly formidable opponents, able to resist hideous damage that would kill most people outright.

The Green Monk’s main weakness is that they often emulate the Turtle a little too closely. This makes them a bit slower to react to the world around them.

## “MONKEY” CHANG

*Transformed Martial Artist*

“Stand still, damn you!” the Mongolian yelled as Chang swerved to the side. Despite the fact that the man was drunk enough to be seeing several images of the humble monk standing in front of him without the help of Chang’s knowledge of chi, the young monk had no intention of complying with the request and taking the chance of being flattened.

In fact, Chang had been drinking a considerable amount himself, but his consumption of alcohol only seemed to improve his ability as his random swaying and bending took him out of the way of the Mongolian’s swinging fists and thrown bottles. The man was a mercenary and a known killer. Chang knew that he shouldn’t have insulted him, but he simply couldn’t resist, the man’s drunken rage being so comical. Too much drink had a tendency to let a little too much of Chang’s true nature show through.

So far, the only target of the highland thug’s anger that was suffering was the

furniture and decor of the small roadside inn where Chang has stopped in for some rest and refreshment. The innkeeper and most of the other customers were hidden behind tables and chairs in the establishment. Some of them shouted to stop the fighting, others shouted encouragement to either side while the rest kept quiet and hoped not to bring any of the violence their way. Chang considered the wisdom of silently avoiding violence as he bent over and picked up a coin from the floor, narrowly avoiding another of the drunk’s hammer-like punches.

*Avoiding violence may be true to the Way, he thought, but it’s much less fun.*

Just then one of the Mongolian’s hands grabbed the front of Chang’s yellow robe as the other massive fist drew back to aim a punch at his head. The drunk smiled, showing a mouthful of yellowed and blackened teeth.

“Now you die,” he said, and swung. Chang’s hair disappeared into the folds of the yellow fabric and he slid nearly out of his shirt. The drunk’s blow struck the stone entryway of the inn with bone-crunching force and everyone watching winced visibly at the sound. The man slid to his knees, clutching his hand in pain. *How can it swim upstream against all of that booze?* the monk wondered.

A light touch on his shoulder made Chang turn around suddenly. He hadn’t felt anyone approach. His reflexive move to one side was neatly intercepted by the woman who stood behind him. She looked at Chang with a hard edge to her dark eyes and dragged him bodily out of the inn. Although she appeared Chinese, she was tall enough to be a westerner and obviously had muscles under her loose clothing. Outside the inn she glanced around before speaking to make sure they were not observed.

“It is a dangerous game you play here, little brother,” she said. Chang smiled drunkenly back at her.

“Dangerous games are the most fun.” The woman shook her head and snorted in disgust.

“See that you do not expose any of us when the Hand discovers who and what you are, little monkey.” She gave Chang a shove that sent him stumbling away as she stalked off into the crowded street and vanished.

*Bears, Chang thought, have no sense of humor.*

## NOTES

Chang is a man playing a very dangerous game, indeed. The trouble is, Chang is not really a man at all, but a transformed monkey living in the 1850 juncture. Originally unaware of the secret war, Chang thought to have some fun and tweak the noses of the Perfect Master of the Guiding Hand. He joined one of their monasteries and learned the art of the Yellow Principle. His teachers considered him a brilliant student who mastered the art of monkey kung fu with amazing speed (big surprise). Chang rose high enough in the society that he learned of the Netherworld and travel to other places and times.

Chang has also learned about his fellow transformed animals in the Ascended. He is most curious about these distant relatives (perhaps even descendants) and is working to learn more about them, hampered by his desire to avoid travel through the netherworld. A handful of Ascended know what Chang is, but to date he has convinced them that he's infiltrating the Hand on behalf of the Lodge; in truth, he's only out for himself, and to have a good time. He is beginning to worry that his little prank has gone too far for him to gracefully back out and he may look to fully defect to the Ascended if he gets the chance. It might be possible to persuade him to join another faction (such as the Dragons) if it looks like it will save his hide and be fun at the same time. But for now, he's doing his best for the Guiding Hand.

**"Monkey" Chang**

Bod 5, Chi 6 (For 8, Mag 0), Mnd 6 (Chr 10), Ref 8

**Skills:** Deceit 10, Infiltration 11, Martial Arts 14, Sabotage 10

**Transformed Animal Schticks:** Caper, Diversion, Throw

**Fu Schticks:** Clothed in Life, Drunken Fist, Drunken Stance

**Weapons:** Chang generally does not carry weapons, but has been known to use improvised weapons from time to time in the form of pots, umbrellas, etc. He often has small items that he has picked up in one place or another and has been known to get lucky enough (through the expenditure of a Fortune point) to have something useful for the situation at hand.

**OLD MASTER**

*Kung Fu Master*

Six rows of students sat rigid in the austere practice hall, legs crossed, hands steepled



before their breasts. They were having trouble with their meditations: there was a disturbance in the chi flow of the monastery, and their instructor was late. At last the side door opened, letting in a direct view of morning sun, and the master entered.

He was dripping wet and wore only his loin cloth. Much to the shock of the students, it seemed also that his breathing was slightly labored and that his face was flushed.

He went to the near wall and selected a bow and quiver and a stout, curved staff from the many weapons hanging there, and then brought these weapons to the head of the gathering, placing them before him on the ground as he sat.

The master raised his arms above his head to guide the group in the communal inhalation. At the end of bringing his hands down in the slow exhalation, unexpectedly he paused and spoke. "Chin, take the bow to the lily pond and shoot two carp." Unquestioning, the student called upon got up and came forward. The quiver bore just two arrows, a fact that registered on the young man's face in a slight coloring of anxiety as he plucked it up with the bow.

As he rushed out the door, the other students' gaze followed him, though they dared not turn their heads. There was a shade of that same anxiety on their faces as well, for it was well known that Chin was hopeless with the bow, more a danger to himself than the fish, and needed two or three full quivers to have so much as an even chance.

The master guided the group in taking a few more deep breaths, and then called on Wai to go cook the morning rice. As Wai left, the students' faces all assumed a look of blank horror. Wai simply could not cook. Their fond anticipation for breaking fast was turned to dread consideration of chalky, stomach-churning glop.

After perhaps a minute more of breathing exercise, the master sighed, and said, "Li, go help your brother with the rice."

This was too much. Li and Wai were extremely quarrelsome and competed jealously for the master's favor. Li would justly but imprudently insult Wai's cooking ability, which would not help the rice, and the brawl that was sure to ensue would get them sentenced to excessive privation for two weeks.

About fifteen minutes after Li left the hall, Quan, a student in the third row, got to his feet, eliciting a low gasp from the others. "Master," he said, "I must protest!

Chin is as likely to shoot his foot as a carp, and Li and Wai will ruin the rice and kill each other in the process."

The master's eyes narrowed, swallowing light. "This outburst is impertinent, Quan," he said. "Even though you bear his name, you are not yet the Perfect Master. I will explain, but you should be ashamed for wasting the time of your brothers."

There was a faint creak from the roof overhead, and a fine trickle of sawdust sifted down into the chamber. Several students glanced up, but as the master remained unperturbed, they returned their attention to him. Quan did not seem to notice; his gaze was fixed, smoldering, on the old man. The master calmly leaned forward and picked up the staff; then with a snap of his arm, he tossed it end over end at Quan, who sidestepped and plucked it expertly from the air.

"You think you were ill-used yesterday when I hit you with that stick for slouching. I would not have you bear me a grudge. Strike me. No, do not hesitate! Strike me now or you will not eat for two days."

Quan rushed forward. At that moment, there was a terrific cracking noise overhead, and a figure in dark blue robes came bursting through the roof. Catlike, he landed on his feet facing the master, who remained unmoved, and raised an immense curved sword over him. Just as he was about to cleave the master in twain, Quan clocked him dead from behind with the staff.

Wide-eyed, Quan dropped the staff on the prostrate Lotus assassin and bowed to his teacher. The other students were in various stages of gaining their feet, but the master waved them back down.

"You too may be seated, Quan." The master addressed the students: "Now I will explain. I realized this morning that we were under attack by the Eaters of the Lotus. The first clue was that there was an extra tussock in the lily pond, which I noted when I opened the window to my chamber. The second clue came to my attention in the bath when Cho's shower did not work: though Quan is impudent, he is not neglectful, and would not shirk his morning duty of raking leaves from the gutters that feed the cisterns on the roof. Finally, I heard high-pitched cackling from the kitchen pantry when I passed it from the showers.

"I saw in these tokens an opportunity to teach. Chin I sent to the lily pond because he must learn how to shoot. His problem is



that he concentrates too hard, and does not listen to the natural wisdom of his body; when the abysmal horror rises from the water to claim him, he will defend himself unthinking and shoot straight and true, finally grasping the Tiger Principle.

“Wai and Li are the most effective fighters of you all...that is, when they are fighting each other. After arguing for a time over the rice, they will be more than prepared to deal with the Lotus priests slinking out to attack them from the pantry. Furthermore—”

At that moment, Chin, Li, and Wai came rushing breathless into the hall. The master held up his hand, stopping them just as they opened their mouths to speak. “Chin,” he said, “you have come to tell me that you slew an abysmal horror in the lily pond.” Chin nodded, wide-eyed with surprise. “And, Li and Wai, you have come to tell me you have defeated a pair of Lotus priests who ambushed you from the pantry.” Li and Wai nodded and bowed. “Did you leave the rice cooking on the stove?”

Li and Wai faced each other with open mouths and then ran out the door together.

“As I was saying,” said the master, “*Furthermore*, Li and Wai must learn to leave the lid on the rice longer, which in their distraction by the priests they will have done.

“Quan, for your impertinent question, I sentence you to clean the remains of a tentacled demon from the third cistern on the roof of the bathhouse. I dispatched it just before I arrived, but soiled my robes with its blood, and could spare no time to change. Alas, I too am not the Perfect Master. Yet many ends are achieved by my art: defense, education...and breakfast.

“Students, morning meditation is ended; let us all repair to the dining hall to enjoy a meal of perfect rice!”

### NOTES

The Old Masters of the Guiding Hand have a vital role: they are the teachers who instruct younger Hand members in the Six Principles of the Perfect Master, Quan Lo. While the most evident result of their teaching is in the martial arts prowess of their students, the Old Masters also instruct their pupils in Chinese history, art, culture, and other topics. The Hand’s goal for its students is not just to make them a powerful fighting force, but to make them die-hard warriors



**Old Master**

Bod 4, Chi 10 (For 2), Mnd 8, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 16, Info/Calligraphy 10, Info/Chinese Painting 10, Info/Chinese Poetry 9, Info/Eastern Philosophy 12, Leadership 12

**Fu Schticks:** Willow Step, Flow Restoration, Corners of the Mouth, Healing Chi, Point Blockage

**Unique Schtick**

**Sifu:** An Old Master is adept at improving a comrade's Martial Arts performance through advice and instruction ("be prepared for his claw of the tiger...remember the patient crane defeats the rash tiger!"). This advice can be given during combat, and doing so is a continuous action. The Old Master may instruct multiple characters at once; each character instructed is a separate continuous action. For example, an Old Master who is instructing 3 characters simultaneously is maintaining three continuous actions, so any action the Old Master makes will have its shot cost increased by 3.

The recipient of an Old Master's advice gains a +2 AV bonus to his Martial Arts skill while he is receiving the advice, provided that he dutifully accepts and follows the advice given. Inattentive or obstinate characters receive no bonus. If both the character receiving the advice and the Old Master giving it share a Fu schtick in common then the character gains an additional +1 AV when using that schtick. Once an Old Master ceases giving instruction, the character receiving it loses the granted AV bonus immediately. A character cannot benefit from the advice of more than one Old Master at a time.

At the GMs discretion, Old Master PCs in the campaign may acquire the Sifu schtick during character generation by substituting it for their standard unique schtick. Or they may acquire it as the series progresses by spending 12 experience points. Any player with an Old Master who uses this ability should roleplay these instructions.

for the traditional way of life that is threatened in 1850. The students must be morally superior and intellectually gifted, as well as having the ability to kick ass.

The Old Masters rarely venture out on field operations for the Hand. Their responsibility is to pass on their knowledge to the next generation, so that a continuity of tradition, respect, and excellence is maintained. Still, if their school is attacked or if the danger is simply too great, Old Masters will not hesitate to get out there and show their stuff.

## ONE HUNDRED NAMES

### *Legion of Followers*

The monk led us through the courtyard past the rows of peasants going through

their drills. They used unwieldy rakes and pruning hooks in lieu of lances, yet the Hand had trained them to marvelous coordination even with these crude implements. What was it that fueled the fervor and determination so clearly written on every face there? That, I'd been told, was what we'd been summoned here to find out.

But I was skeptical. I had been to Canton in '42, in the wake of an opium war, and the bloodshed sickened me. Much of the commerce with the foreign traders was evil, but China had been addicted to opium before the British discovered our weakness. There was nothing insidious about them. Was it not better to give ground on trade issues than to kill? The enemy were, after all, men like ourselves, not devils.

Or so I had thought.

We reached the low, stone outbuilding and filed into a hall that was sectioned off into a row of meditation cells. Within each cell was a teenaged boy or girl bound to a cot. Some were drooling and moaning or panting; others keened and wept. Their staring eyes were transfixed, as if by some vision of hell. I did not understand what I saw.

I started forward into the nearest chamber, toward a teenaged girl, but the monk at my side suddenly barred my way with an outstretched arm. "No. You cannot help. You will merely upset her."

"Is this what opium does?" said one of the villagers behind me. I smiled grimly at his simplicity and shook my head—I had seen the tormented despair of opium withdrawal, and this was something wholly different. But it was not to me that the question was addressed.

The monk remained impassive. He said, "Moral corruption is a tree with many branches, all sharing a common root. Come."

At the end of the passage was a heavy wood door; the window set in it was covered over with a sliding panel that bore a small handle. The monk took hold of the handle and uncovered the window, and then motioned for me to look.

A creature, seeming half-man, half-snake, writhed on a board propped against the far wall opposite the door; its wrists were bound over its head to the wood by manacles so tight they bit into its flesh, and it seemed as if, for further measure, its

slender hands had been nailed down. A shaft of daylight from some high window out of sight flowed wetly over it. My gaze went to its face, and its slit-pupilled eyes locked into mine. I became enthralled.

I was aware of strong hands gripping me, but it was not until some moments after they had turned me around that I was able to see my neighbors from the village. Feeling ill, I staggered to a wooden bench along one wall of the hall, helped somewhat ungently by the monk. Then the others were allowed to look, but I think that the monk now took care that each did not detain himself long.

I was still recovering when the monk had replaced the panel to the cell window. The querulous murmuring of my comrades died away as the monk held up his arms, motioning for silence. "Sorcerers sent this thing," he said. "You are fortunate to have seen it: may it cleave to your minds as a living symbol of all the corruption we have set ourselves against."

"What is it?" I asked, cradling my head in my hands. The implication of the thing defied all logic, and my mind had grown numb to block it out. Another, less provocative question suddenly occurred to me: "Why are you torturing it?"

The monk seemed indignant. "We torture nothing. It is being detained, by the only means we have, so that we may harvest its venom—a narcotic, much worse than opium. Like all the blandishments of technology and sorcery, it brings intense pleasure which burns away at the soul, leaving a terrible hunger and misery in its wake. The young people you saw are its victims, far advanced in addiction to its poison. They must be weaned from the venom slowly, or die. When they are cured, we will slay the abomination swiftly and mercifully."

"It's impossible," I said. "No such creature exists."

"So says your science," the monk said to me, "but it is time you knew the folly of your Western education, alderman."

Then he told us of the secret war and the Netherworld. He explained how the Hand had recently occupied a nearby cave with a doorway to those junctures, and how many loathsome things that roamed the area had their

escape cut off when they did. "Such was the plight of this demon," said the monk, "whom we caught entering the cave with his entourage of drugged followers. To what unspeakable end he was leading them, we will not consider.

"The enemy is subtle, pervasive, and deadly, good people. And he has many guises. Whether the guise is that of a smiling foreign trader or a disgusting horror, we must remain equally undeceived. Had those children more honor for the wisdom of their elders, they never would have gathered secretly to drink wine in the forest where the demon lurked. They would have spared themselves mortal danger and much suffering."

Many in the party murmured in assent. I merely breathed deeply and nodded, still fighting my shock.

"You will report for training tomorrow at sunrise, and join the local cell of the Hundred Names," said the monk. There was no question in his tone.

And there was no question that they—we—would come.

## NOTES

The Hand's string of organized cells (some known as Golden Candle Societies or Hundred Names, among other titles) is an important component of the group's efforts. These cells recruit peasants and village leaders across rural China, convincing them of the righteousness of the Hand's cause, and encouraging them to resist the offers of foreigners and the tragic lure of 'progress.'

These cells receive combat training and ideological instruction. The Hand hopes to encourage a popular rebellion

### One Hundred Names

Bod 5, Chi 0 (For 1), Mnd 5 (Wil 7), Ref 5

**Skills:** Info/Farming 8, Martial Arts 6

### Unique Schtick

**Mass Attack:** These trained and dedicated armies of farmers and simple country folk attack with a unity borne out of strict instruction by the Hand's monks and by their devotion to the cause. When a group of One Hundred Names make an attack, they may attack as a single combatant for game purposes. The AV of this check (usually Martial Arts) is increased by the number of One Hundred Names attacking, divided by two. For example: if a force of 18 One Hundred Names attack a single character, they make a single attack with a +9 AV bonus (for an AV of 15).

**Weapons:** Usually polearms or farm implements, Strength +3 damage (8).

among rural Chinese, a rebellion that will throw out the foreigners and restore China's autonomy. Zealous and idealistic, the Hand are willing to convert all of China one village at a time.

Battles fought in 1850s China near rural villages may draw the attention of local Hundred Names members, who will race to the scene and attack any obvious bad guys.

## ORANGE MONK

### *Martial Artist*

Kho Fan strode into the room with the air of a man who owned it. As it happened, he did. The sprawling common room spread out before him, and he looked out from the balcony as a feudal lord did his holdings from the parapets of his castle.

As the gaslights on the walls burned with their flickering yellow light, Chinese men gambled and drank, shouting loudly to each other and themselves as they won and lost fortunes—mostly lost—at Kho Fan's gaming tables. Scantly-clad waitresses picked their way among the tables, dispensing drinks, smiles, and invitations to come upstairs...for the right price.

Occasionally, a man would speak quietly to a bartender and be led to a stairway to the basement where the fruits of the poppy could be enjoyed. At least that was the usual sight that greeted Kho Fan's eyes; today the scene was a bit different.

The stranger was standing on a table near the bar. He was a man of medium build, dressed in the clothing of a peasant with his head completely shaven. Aside from this, his only distinctive feature was the orange sash that encircled his waist. Lying around him were the crumpled forms of Kho Fan's best leg-breakers, eight of his strongest men. The remaining thugs hung back, waiting for Kho Fan's orders.

"Greetings, my friend," shouted Kho Fan to the stranger. He bowed slightly in greeting. "What brings you—"

"First of all, I am not your friend, dog," spat the stranger, turning to look at where Kho Fan stood on the balcony. "Secondly, my purpose here is simple. This establishment is now closed. You will no longer push the filthy ways of the Westerners on our people, or weaken their minds with intoxicants and wasteful games."

Kho Fan gestured to one of his bodyguards standing just behind him. The goon tossed a leather pouch off the balcony onto the table where the stranger stood. It landed with a heavy clinking sound. The stranger picked up the pouch and poured its contents onto the ground without even looking at the money that issued forth. Kho Fan stared, obviously taken aback.

"You cannot bribe the righteous, Kho Fan. The Perfect Master has declared that this building close today, and by my will, it will be so," said the stranger.

"Over my dead body," Kho Fan yelled back.

"If that is what is necessary, then so be it," said the stranger. In the blink of an eye, the stranger sprang in an incredible leap across the room and up onto the balcony where Kho Fan stood. Before either of the crime lord's bodyguards could react, the stranger had grasped Kho Fan by the head and neck.

"May your ancestors forgive you," the stranger said quietly, looking directly into the man's eyes. "The Guiding Hand will not."

SNAP.

## NOTES

Those who follow the Way of the Crane are among the Guiding Hand's most potent martial artists. While not as powerful, resistant, or agile as some of their brothers, the Orange monks possess enough of all of these characteristics to make them formidable opponents.

The Orange way teaches the value of diversity. With this in mind, Orange monks are trained in many different types of conventional martial arts. This allows them to better adapt to the fighting styles of different opponents. They are also trained to divide their attention between many opponents at once, and to actually function more effectively when doing so.

Those with greater spiritual strength and mental fortitude are taught the higher mysteries of the Orange Way. These are shown the Path of the Passive Wings, becoming well-versed in both attack and defense. Such initiates strive to become the ultimate manifestation of Quan Lo's Orange Principle: "The Crane flies across mountains, over streams, through heavens. The elements are diverse, the Crane's wisdom furthers."

## Orange Monk

The stats below are for unnamed Orange Monks, excluding any Fu schticks. Named Orange Monks use the stats in brackets, and also gain the Fu schticks and unique schtick listed.

Bod 8 [8], Chi 2 [6], Mnd 5 [5], Ref 8 [10]

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8 [14]

**Fu Schticks:** Prodigious Leap, Crane Stance, Wing of the Crane, Beak of the Crane, Talon of the Crane, Migration of the Crane. *Only named Orange Monks have these.*

### Unique Schtick

**Orange Principle:** Whenever an orange monk uses a Fu schtick, they gain a +1 AV bonus to their Martial Arts skill the next time they use a *different* Fu schtick during the same sequence. In addition, practitioners of the Orange Principle are adept at combating multiple opponents simultaneously, and they receive a +1 AV bonus to their Martial Arts skill when attacking 3 or more opponents in one action.

At the GMs discretion, beginning PCs may acquire this schtick by foregoing one of their starting Fu schticks and lowering their Chi or Fu (whichever is higher) by 2. Instruction in the ways of the Orange Principle is usually reserved for members of the Hand. PCs who have mastered the Orange Principle must have a plausible reason for how they could have acquired such knowledge. They could be former members of the Guiding Hand who now fight for a different cause, or they could have a sifu (martial arts instructor) who is secretly (or maybe overtly) a member of the Guiding Hand and has taught the PC the Orange Principle for reasons which serve the Perfect Master's plans.

**Weapons:** Just about any martial arts weapon. Diversity is the hallmark of the orange monks.

**Game Notes:** The Orange Monks are by far Quan Lo's most versatile resource, if not the most powerful in terms of raw strength. The Orange Principle of Diversity guides them, and their fighting style reflects this. Orange Monks actually fight *more* effectively against multiple opponents. With this in mind, Orange Monks' favorite tactic is to Prodigiously Leap into the middle of a group of opponents and commence with the butt-kicking.

kets from his arms and shoved him roughly against the wall.

He looked at them, blinking calmly in the morning light. "Yes, my sons?"

One of the brigands held a grim knife to the old man's throat. "We aren't your sons, fool! We know you belong to the Shaolin Temple. It is said that the temple holds great wealth—gold, and pearls, and more besides."

The monk nodded slowly. "It is true that the temple holds great wealth, of a sort. But I know little of such things. I am but a simple monk."

The other brigand, who had a scar running down one side of his face, chuckled. "And what do you do there, old man? Are you a mighty warrior?"

"Oh, no," the monk said. "I am no warrior. That honor is bestowed on greater ones than I."

"So you are a scholar, then?"

"Certainly not," the monk replied. "There are many within the temple who know far more than I do. I do not aspire to such heights."

"Then what are you, then?"

"I do my part. I go to the market, I prepare the food, I keep the kitchen in good order."

"You're the cook! Hah! A mighty Shaolin Cook-Monk! You are filling me full of fear, old man!"

"Enough with this," the other brigand said. "You said there was wealth within the temple. We want it. You will tell us where it is, or you will die."

"Death is inevitable, young man. It comes to all in time."

"There are many ways to die!" he hissed. "We can make you suffer!"

"Suffering is part of life, young man. It is our triumph over suffering that makes us strong."

"You, strong? I doubt it. Let's see how strong you are when I spill your blood upon the dirt, eh?"

"Blood is the river of our body, young man. It nourishes us and when spilled, it nourishes the soil for blood is rich in life."

"You talk too much! Tell us where the Shaolin's treasure is kept, mighty cook, and we shall spare your life!"

The old man looked from one brigand to the other. He sighed. "Very well then. I

## SHAOLIN MONK

### Martial Artist

It was morning, and Li Chen was leaving the market in the small village near the Shaolin Temple. He had two wicker baskets full of produce, and he bent slightly below their weight. Li Chen was an old man, thin and bony, though dressed in trim orange clothes that demonstrated the pride he took in his bearing. It would take him more than an hour to reach the temple, but he preferred to walk rather than taking a wagon.

As he passed through a run-down area of the village, two young bandits walked up alongside him and then, when no one was looking, hustled the old monk into an alley. There they toppled the bas-

shall show you where the treasure of the Shaolin is kept.”

The brigands nodded, smiling.

“I will have to show you this carefully. Here, let me get two stones.” The monk leaned down and picked them up. “Now, pay attention.” The brigands looked forward eagerly.

With a blinding snap of each wrist, the monk hurled a stone, hard, into the face of each brigand. The pair staggered back, and their hands flew up in defense. The monk kicked one of the brigands in the face, then spun around and landed three quick punches to the other. The brigands fell back against the opposite wall, while the monk strode forward quickly but gracefully. He grabbed each of their heads, and popped them simultaneously against the stones. The two men collapsed to the ground, unconscious.

The monk stepped back and shook his head. “The Shaolin Temple is rich in treasure, young fools. And that treasure is located *here*.” He put his fist to his heart and stood staring down at the men.

Then he picked up his baskets, hoisted them onto his shoulders, and continued on his way.

## NOTES

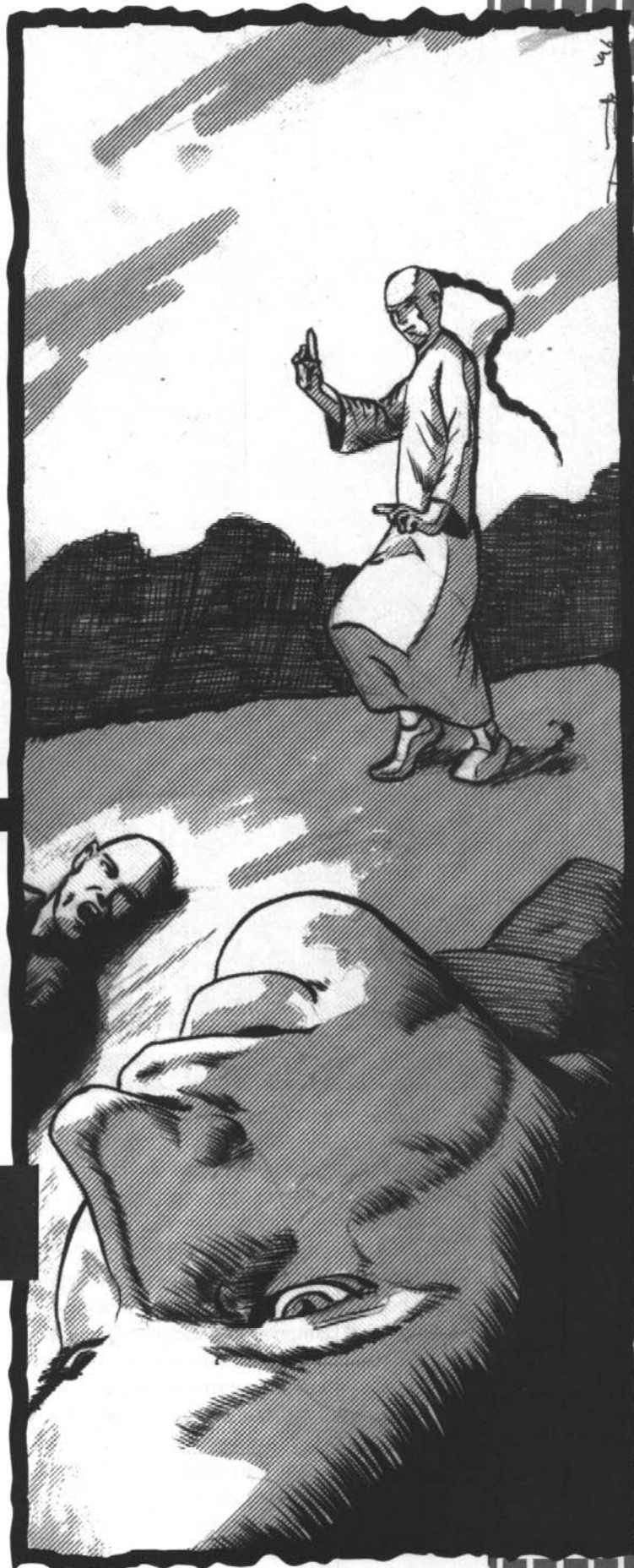
Shaolin Monks are the backbone of the Guiding Hand. They are not as fierce as the warriors, and they are not as learned as the scholars, but what they do, they do well—and most importantly of all, they do it in a way that serves as a lesson to all. They carry themselves with dignity, and find meaning in the most trivial of tasks. They take pride in service, show humility in achievement, and radiate confidence in their approach to life.

## Shaolin Monk

Bod 6, Chi 1 (For 3), Mnd 6, Ref 6

Skills: Info/Geomancy 8, Martial Arts 9

Shaolin Monks rarely go on missions into the field. Most often, they concern themselves with the daily regimen of keeping the temples of the Hand in good order. They seek to make the Hand's temples as peaceful and harmonious as possible, and one of their least-known but most-important duties is to constantly make small adjustments in the position of everything within the temples, to encourage better chi flow.



# THE JAMMERS

## CHROMOSOME SCREAMER

*Escaped Abomination*

Public Order squad alpha-one-three moved quietly through a narrow, dimly-phosphorescent ravine in the Netherworld.

Somewhere in the distance, sporadic gunfire and the occasional scream could be heard. The Buro had just staged one of their periodic raids on the Genocide Lounge and was now, as per standard operating procedure, combing the area for stragglers and fleeing Jammers. The raid had gone more or less as anticipated, and a large number of suspected subversives and terrorists had been killed or captured. No further serious resistance was expected. Nonetheless, the officers of squad alpha-one-three were perhaps a bit nervous. As they had headed away from the main body of the Buro assault force, they had each begun to feel that they were not alone, that something was watching them, perhaps even stalking them. That they were the hunted, and not the hunters.

Suddenly, a dark, massive shape leapt down from the ridge of the ravine into the middle of the squad. Bellowing a deafening roar, it began to toss the Buro cops around like bouncing balls. The thing was massive, with huge furry paws and bony spikes jutting out of its body. The officers panicked, shouting random curses and firing wildly into the darkness (mostly hitting each other) as they were torn apart. The squad leader made a last desperate cry for assistance into his comlink before the thing crushed his head like an eggshell.

As the beast finished mauling the PubOrd droogs, the grating sound of turbines cut through the air overhead. The thing bounded out of the ravine as quickly as it had descended as the sound of machine gun fire rang out. It reached the top of the ridge, then leapt upward onto the hood of the combat aircar, causing it to lurch precipitously. The aircar's shocked crew unloaded with their weapons at point blank range, but the monstrosity barely seemed to notice as the bullets ripped through its skin. It grabbed the pilot of the vehicle and tossed him aside effortlessly with one arm while it mauled a crewman with the other. Letting out one last mighty roar, it jumped up and slammed its feet into the control panel of the aircar. There was a brilliant flash of electricity and fire, and the vehicle spun out of control into the distance, to be lost among the distant sounds of fighting below.

## NOTES

The chromosome screamers represent one of the unmitigated failures of the CDCA to produce inhuman super-soldiers. Their early attempts to turn primates into war machines had failed catastrophically, creating the Battlechimp Potemkin and the other cyberchimps who would later turn against them. Nonetheless, their later successes with the abomination project made them bold and overconfident. This, along with Bonnengel's constant demand for newer and better soldiers, led them to re-examine their earlier work. They surmised that if they could inject the DNA of a demon into the embryo of a gorilla, they could custom

**Chromosome Screamer**

Bod 12, Chi 0, Mnd 3, Ref 9 (Dex 5)

**Skills:** Creature Powers 10, Intimidation 15, Martial Arts 9

**Creature Schticks:** Abysmal Spines x1 (bony spikes)

**Unique Schtick**

**Must Kill Buro:** Chromosome Screamers hate the Architects of the Flesh so much that they actually receive a form of conditional escalation when fighting their troops or attacking their sites. Whenever one of these two conditions is met, the chromosome screamer gains a +2 increase to their Speed AV and inflicts an extra +2 damage on Martial Arts attacks. This lasts as long as the screamer is in combat or is actively engaged in destroying Buro property.

**Weapons:** Spike Punch (base damage 15)

grow new, even more-powerful warriors. Furthermore, obedience to the Buro state could be encoded directly into their brains, thus avoiding their earlier failures with the chimps, while also reducing the tendency toward fits of berserk madness found in the current abominations. Thus, the chromosome screamer project was born.

As usual, the Buro scientists' ability to create living engines of destruction was matched by their inability to control said creations. The chromosome screamers were grown quickly in vats, and they did indeed turn out to be as powerful and fearsome as the scientists had hoped. However, from the very start they were impossible to control. Taken out into the Netherworld to test out on the Jammers, they instead turned on the Buro forces with savage ferocity before fleeing into the tunnels. When Battlechimp Potemkin heard about this, he sought the abominations out. He found them to be pathetic creatures, half-mad with pain and with no understanding of whom or what they were. Because they were half-ape, the Battlechimp was able to sway them to his cause, promising them revenge against those who had treated them so cruelly.

The Chromosome Screamers are massive, frightening creatures. Vaguely gorilla-like in appearance, their features have been twisted by the demonic DNA within them. Jagged, spiky bones sprout all over their arms, back, and head, and they are covered with long, coarse, sooty-black fur. The Battlechimp uses them as front line shock troops, sending them to hammer Buro forces and installations directly, or to delay those same forces when the Jammers are forced to retreat. In this regard they perform excellently, as their hatred of the Buro drives them to new levels of destruc-

tion. However, the Battlechimp has his misgivings about the Screamers as well. The demon within them makes them unpredictable at best, and psychotic at worst. They have a low tolerance for all humans in general, and they can lash out with tremendous savagery for seemingly no reason at all. For the most part, besides fighting the Buro they only want to be left alone. So far, the Battlechimp has accepted this as the best solution for now, but he wonders if the day will come when the chromosome screamers will turn

against him as well.

**DUMP WARRIOR**

*Scavenger/Scrapper*

Jayson hurled himself behind the stack of crates as the hand grenade went off, hopefully right in the middle of the PubOrd squad. He closed his eyes as the shrapnel was embedded in the other side of the crate. Then there was a moment of silence, followed by groans of pain.

Jayson opened his eyes, and started as Freida's bloodshot eyes looked into his. She grinned a lopsided grin at him and returned her attention to the gun-like shape of the device she held in her lap. Her clothes looked like they hadn't been washed in weeks, and Jayson curled his nose at the women's smell.

"Are you still messing with that thing!?" Jayson hissed.

"Yep... and I almost have it this time..." Freida whispered back.

"Oh, yeah, sure... that's what you said the last time! If Furious George hadn't shown up..."

"But he did. Anyway, I've gotten most of the bugs worked out since then."

Jayson craned his neck, listening as the woman continued to work.

"I think you'll finally get a chance to test it," Jayson said, hefting his pilfered Buro Godhammer and shifting to a squatting position. He peered over the edge of the pile of crates, ducking back just in time as a bullet whizzed over his head.

Freida dropped her tools and slapped the panel on the side of the gun-like object closed. She hefted it lovingly, and looked at Jayson with that lopsided grin again.



"Let's do it!" she shouted. Before Jayson could react, she stood up straight and aimed her weapon at the PubOrd squad advancing across the warehouse. She pulled what must have been the trigger and Jayson closed his eyes as a brilliant blue ray lanced out from the "muzzle" of the weapon. Freida played the weapon around the room like a fire hose, and the PubOrd goons went down like a bunch of playing cards, falling to lie twitching on the floor.

"What's the matter boys, can't take a little nervous system damage?" Freida yelled.

Suddenly the weapon in her hands emitted a shower of sparks, and the blue light went out like a candle flame. Freida muttered a curse and, without hesitating, threw the weapon toward the remaining goons.

"What are you doing?" Jayson yelled

"Get the hell down!" shouted Freida

Jayson's last thought as the explosion ripped through the warehouse was how much he hated working with Dump Warriors.

## NOTES

With technology as one of their primary tools, the Jammers are always happy to recruit those with a mechanical or electronic aptitude. The vast industrial dumping grounds of 2056 have proven to be a fertile ground for this sort of recruitment. Many of the scavengers who eke out an existence there have an almost-instinctive grasp of engineering and design, and are able to kit-bash useful implements out of what is only a pile of scrap metal and wire to the uninitiated. The Battlechimp and his agents have scoured the dumps of 2056 for these individuals, most of them living life on the edge, constantly dodging the minions of the ever-present Buro. They are often understandably in sympathy with the Jammers' cause right from the start, and need little persuasion to join up.

The Battlechimp has forged these individuals into the Dump Warriors, the combat technical support arm of the Jammers. Numbering about thirty or so, the Warriors are a colorful band even among the rather diverse membership of the Jammers. Growing up in the trash yards of 2056 has not equipped them with the best of social skills, and most prefer the company of a pile of spare parts to that of other people. The Warriors are all highly loyal to the Battlechimp, seeing him and the other



**Dump Warriors**

Bod 4, Chi 0, Mnd 5 (Int 9), Ref 5

**Skills:** Driving 7, Fix-It 12, Guns 10, Info/Technology 15, Intrusion 11, Sabotage 13

**Unique Schtick**

**Kit Bashing:** Dump Warriors gain a +2 AV to their Fix-It skill when creating or improvising items out of spare parts and scrap. They gain an additional +2 AV when trying to construct a weapon or vehicle using these means. Unfortunately, items constructed by Dump Warriors in this fashion are unreliable: whenever a double six is rolled in a task check involving such equipment, something unintended happens (guns fire sideways, jetpacks reverse direction, etc.). If that double-six roll fails to beat the Difficulty of the check, then the equipment breaks down in the most spectacular, inconvenient and dramatically-appropriate fashion possible.

At the GM's discretion, Kit Bashing can be available to starting PC Techies by reducing their Fix-It AV by 2 during character creation. At the GM's option, a PC could specify a different area of specialty other than weapons and vehicles such as computers & radios, explosives & jet-propelled devices, etc.

**Weapons:** Bobo Splitter (or other kit-bashed weapon; see nearby boxed text), Buro 910

**Game Notes:** Most Dump Warriors carry at least one weapon of their own devising on their person. Typical Warrior gadgets might be electrified swords, EMP grenades, chemical adhesive projectors, or other oddities. A sample kit-bashed weapon, the Bobo Splitter, is described in the nearby boxed text.

Warrior weapons are also subject to backlash rules as with sorcery. Anytime a Warrior fumbles while using their weapon or device, the device will malfunction. The actual effects of this are left up to the GM with the general guideline that the more powerful the device, the more spectacular the malfunction (and resulting malfunction).

The Dump Warriors are unique enough that its recommended that they almost always be named characters.

Jammers as the only people who really understand them.

Left to their own devices, individual Warriors often come up with strange weapons and tools. These devices are frequently of the "chewing gum and baling wire" school of construction, and although they are often highly-effective in combat, they are almost always just about as dangerous to the user as the target. Despite the risks, the Battlechimp allows the Warriors to carry these weapons. If nothing else, a Warrior device often confuses the heck out of an opposing force. If it actually works as designed, so much the better.

As well as participating in standard Jammer raids, the Dump Warriors are charged with maintaining the devices and equipment of the Jammers in the best possible condition. Experienced Warriors are sometimes placed in charge of sabotage missions involving complex machinery or devices; their natural skills enable them to break things more effectively as well as building them.

(The group is colloquially known as "Warriors." Those who call them "Dumpers" usually get a fist in the mouth.)

**Bobo Splitter (13/3/8):** At first glance this appears to be a toy, consisting of two guns made of neon green see-through plastic which have been welded together and loaded with small rubber balls. Few take this weapon seriously at first, but it's an extraordinarily lethal and unpredictable weapon. The two guns are rigged to fire a pair of rubber balls in tandem; as soon as the balls leave the Bobo Splitter's twin chambers they separate, but remain connected by a super-thin and ultra-lethal monofilament wire that runs between them. This wire is capable of cutting an armored PubOrd officer in half, body armor and all (hence its name).

Unfortunately, after a Bobo Splitter has been fired it doesn't stop at its original target—the balls bounce off walls, ceilings, helmets, bodies, etc. retaining most of their momentum and continuing to be a lethal threat to everyone in the area. In each shot after a Bobo Splitter has been fired, all characters in the area must make a Fortune Check. The character with the lowest *negative* Outcome is hit by the Bobo Splitter for the usual damage. (If no one gets a negative Outcome, no one is hit.) If unnamed characters are in the area, make a single check for all of them, subtracting the total number of unnamed characters from their collective AV of 0. If that check results in the lowest negative Outcome among all characters present, then one unnamed character gets split into two halves. The balls usually continue for up to two sequences but this can last as long or as briefly as the GM desires. The effect of multiple Bobo Splitter rounds being fired into the same area isn't cumulative; multiple rounds tend to get in each other's way, severing each other's monofilaments or getting tangled up.

If the Bobo Splitter user fumbles the initial attack roll, the weapon's spring-loaded firing and loading mechanisms malfunction and release all of the remaining ammo in a continuous stream. These don't hit their intended target—instead, all characters in the area must make Fortune checks immediately to see if they are hit by a stray Bobo Splitter round; the weapon's user suffers a -3 AV penalty on this first check (but not on subsequent checks).

## FURIOUS GEORGE

*Flying Monkey*

"Accessing record of suspect identified as 'Furious George,'" said the air-squadcar's computer.

"Aw, you stupid damn kid!" the veteran PubOrd officer yelled at the rookie beside him. "Why'd you call that up? I told you that flying monkey's Furious George! Who the hell assigned you to me, anyway?"

The computer cut in: "Suspect identified as public enemy number one. Hold. Accessing. Subject identified as public enemy number two. Hold. Accessing. Subject identified as public enemy number one."

"Something's screwy with the database, I guess," said the rookie.

"Nothing's wrong with the database, you idiot. This is all-out gorilla warfare! Potemkin's blowin' stuff up on the other side of town. The computer updates capital crimes in progress, and that's changing their status on the fly. Potemkin and George are competing for the heavyweight belt!"

The squadcar was some ten meters above the street, navigating the artificial canyon between glass-walled mega-arcologies under construction. Far up ahead, silhouetted against the sky, was the tiny, puppetlike mass of a great ape, dangling beneath the whirring rotor of his 'copter pack. The ape cyborg's multigun arm ratcheted and spit fire, ripping into a convoy of CDCA shock troop vans, and then something oblong detached itself from between his legs and plopped earthward like a fantastically large turd. It wasn't a turd. Furious George banked to one side and did a one-eighty, coming back toward the squadcar as the explosion of an incendiary concussion bomb bloomed on his heels.

Vertical tsunamis of glass on both sides of the street rushed ahead of the shockwave, chasing Furious George as he came on.

"Hold on!" the vet shouted.

George buzzed overhead, trailing his multigun arm but opening up on the car with a .50-caliber Peacekeeper auto from his good paw. The sound was like a jackhammer. The policemen slapped the releases on their harnesses and then ducked under the dash. When they looked up, they were confronted by a huge smiley face of slugs embedded in the bullet-proof glass of the windshield. Then the smiley bobbed in



an insane nod that shook the squadcar as they met the roaring shockwave.

The policemen slid under the console and hugged their seats like tots with separation anxiety. The computer spoke above the din: "Extensive felony records on suspect. Would you like a detailed account?"

"Um... yes!" shouted the rookie.

"No!" screamed the vet, just as the car banked with a screech off the exposed metal skeleton of one of the buildings.

"Input error," said the computer.

"Cancel the rap sheet!" yelled the vet.

"Input error. Furious George. Rebel cyborg, intrinsically armed and highly dangerous. Stock species: pan troglodytes. Height: one point three three meters. Weight: fifty-three kilograms. Enhanced mental and physical abilities; dynamo-pack cybernetic adjunct under subject's neural control, accepts a variety of attachments including helicopter blade permitting flight; prosthetic multigun arm. High-ranking member of terrorist organization known as the Jammers. Accomplices include public enemy number two, Jammer leader Battlechimp Potemkin, another pan troglodytes cyborg. Aliases include "Furious," "George," "Monkey Business," and "The Whupmeister."

"Felony History..."

"Shut that damn thing off!" shouted the vet, as he crawled back up into his seat just after the rookie had retaken his own.

"... thousand two hundred thirty-one counts of homicide, approximately fifty-five—hold. Approximately Twenty-five hundred counts of abominicide..."

"It won't shut up! We're gonna have to reboot," said the rookie, reaching for a switch on the console.

The vet turned to look just as the switch was thrown. "Not that one!"

With a deep sigh, the car's jets wound down, bringing the car swiftly but gently to the blackened and rubble-strewn pavement.

"Stupid damn incompetent little —!"

The vet reached over assertively to correct the error and then looked up in surprise as the rookie detained his hand and brought the butt of a service pistol crashing into his temple, knocking him cold.

"... prurient grafitti on public-service bulletins, wideband broadcast of character slurs against esteemed chief executive Johann Bonengel..."

"End rap sheet," said the rookie, and the computer obediently complied.

Out of the silence that followed, a faint, low background hum resolved itself into the chop of an approaching 'copter rotor. The Jammer infiltrator in the PubOrd uniform reached over and opened up the radio to the police band. From the nearly hysterical tone of reports coming in, it seemed that dozens of units were converging fast.

A few seconds later, a squat brown form alighted on the road ahead, leaning on the metal bulk of his cybernetic arm, the wash of his rotors pattering debris over the car. The rotors swiftly locked to a halt, and then, answering to some mental command from George, folded themselves down along their telescoping shaft, which then retracted into the pack on the ape's back as he ran to the driver's side of the car.

"Let's go, George!" the infiltrator yelled from inside. "Half the Buro's gonna be here soon!"

The simian opened the car door and hauled the unconscious cop out with one hand, dumping him on the pavement. As he climbed in to take the controls, George flashed his accomplice a toothy grin bracketed by vampirelike canines. "Yuh done good, kid!"

"Thanks, George, always a pleasure. Now let's get back to that Netherworld portal before they get onto us."

As they lifted off, George sniffed the air and glared suspiciously at the Jammer. "No blood in here. Don't tell me you didn't finish that carcass off."

"George buddy, when you gonna learn? You bump off all the dumb ones and work gets that much harder." The young man cued the radio. "Attention all units, this is Buro unit TST1345 returning to base with critically-wounded partner. Suspect last seen flying into blasted building on the corner of 76th and Freedom way..."

## NOTES

The Jammer known as Furious George is perhaps one of the most formidable of the cyborg-simian beings in the organization. George has a copter pack that lets him fly, and his prosthetic multigun arm can tear stuff up real good. George is one of Battlechimp Potemkin's best buddies and cohorts. George isn't a genius (though he's not an idiot, either), but on the battlefield, this is one tough monkey.

## Furious George

Bod 11, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 7

**Skills:** Guns 15, Intimidation 12, Sabotage 13

**Gun Schticks:** Carnival of Carnage x2, Fast Draw x2, Signature Weapon (Chaingun)

### Unique Schtick

**Flying Monkey:** Furious George's copter pack can propel him at great speeds. His top speed is 140 mph but it takes him a full three sequences of accelerating along a reasonably straight path to attain that speed. At this speed Furious George receives a +2 bonus to his Dodge AV, which is why the Bobos have such a hard time nailing him. When flying in combat or from a cold start, Furious George's Move score with the copter pack is 18.

**Weapons:** Multigun (16/—/1,000) This is Furious George's signature weapon, a massive automatic multigun grafted permanently onto his arm. The multigun's ammo is effectively unlimited—it's fed by a backpack containing over 1,000 rounds. The multigun's damage rating is 16 and it takes unnamed characters out on an outcome of 3 or more. The multigun is capable of full autofire and Furious George can fire bursts of up to 12 rounds without suffering AV penalties.

additional combustion systems within the tank here and here." The lecturer indicated the appropriate areas on the schematic.

"Yup! That's right!" shouted the chimp. "Don't get him pissed!" The med students turned around to glare at the chimp, and the lecturer tapped her pointer impatiently on one palm. The chimp seemed to think he'd been ceded the floor. "I was riding up top with him when we stopped at a store in the '96 juncture. Some fat jerk in a cadillac had his car running in the handicapped spot. Well, maybe he was just pulling over to get out and run away like the rest of the screamin' civvies, but he shouldn't have been in the handicapped spot. Know what I mean?"

"Anyway, Orango may be one badass piece of hardware, but let's

## ORANGO TANK

### Ground-Assault Monkey

The Jammer medical symposium on cybernetic implants was held in a misty Netherworld amphitheatre, and was attended by a total of three serious med students and one precocious young chimp who had nothing better to do than distract them. The med students were huddled near the lecturer on the lowest of the concentric tiers of rock that served as the seats of the amphitheatre. The chimp sat half a dozen tiers up, as if to point out the absurd emptiness of the space chosen for the lecture.

"Could ya speak up, Doc? Those of us in the back row are havin' a hard time hearing you!"

The slight, Hispanic woman giving the lecture was obviously doing her best to ignore the distraction. But there were signs that her frustration was building. Dark sweatstains spread from under the armpits of her frock, and an unruly lock of hair fell over her brow, sagging close to impinging on one eye. Once more, she jabbed her pointer at the schematics on the board—a series of line drawings of a cyborg tank.

"The Orango Tank cyborg's endocrine system is contiguous with the control systems of its mechanical parts. Adrenalin flow above the the baseline value puts weapons on automatic standby and engages



face it, he's basically a cripple in a souped-up wheelchair; he doesn't care much for insensitive jerks parking in his spot, even if they're just pulling in there to get out of his way. Well, I could hear the spare engines cut in, which meant his adrenalin was pumpin' big time, and there was that beep that tells you that the targeting system's up. I was at Orango's shoulder and looked over to see the red-light crosshairs flashing on the lens of his helmet visor. 'Oh, shit,' I says. 'C'mon, big guy, at least let me get behind-' But no. Orango gives the fat man just enough time to get clear before he cuts loose with the cannons. You see, he's not exactly what you'd call reasonable when he gets his temper up. As a matter of fact, you can't tell him a damn thing."

"Thank you, *Tommy*," said the lecturer between gritted teeth.

"You should have seen that caddy blow! I figure the gas tank in it was kinda low so there was a lot of fumes built up, 'cause Great Momma Gibbon but that sucker blew. Flipped up in the air like a cat hit with a cattle prod—not that I'd know, of course, not having anything against your cat, Doc," he added a bit too hastily. "I rolled behind the turret just in time. Almost rolled right off Orango's back."

"That will be all, *Tommy*!" shouted the lecturer.

"Um, yes ma'am."

The lecturer turned back to the board with her pointer upraised, but then paused, slowly lowering the stick back down. She spun around. "When did this occur?" she demanded.

"'bout a half hour ago," the chimp said with a slight quaver in his voice.

"How did you gain access to the '96 juncture?"

"I told him it was a bad idea, Doc. But there ain't any of those candy bars with the coconut inside in the stockpile, and you know how the big guy gets when his blood sugar is low."

"How did you access the juncture?" the lecturer repeated sternly.

"Well, um, we sorta borrowed that Gatemaker contraption from the lab and strapped it to the front of the tank."

"You two made an unsanctioned raid on the twentieth century juncture with our most valuable piece of

hardware...to get candy bars?"

"Not a raid, Doc. After the big guy cleared the parking space, Orango pulled in and hung out while I went and snagged a couple of boxes in the store. The checkout people had all cleared, along with everyone else, it seemed, but I left a handful of counterfeit '96 money by the till on the way out. It's not even like we were stealing."

The lecturer was livid. "You've risked the exposure of our whole operation to the Ascended! What were you thinking, you little son of a retarded siamang!"

"That's hard, Doc! You of all people should know what they say: What do you get a two-ton cyborg tank with five megatons of conventional blast capability on-board?"

"What?"

"Goddamn coconut-filled candy bars when he wants 'em, Doc! You're damn straight!"

## NOTES

Orango Tank stands beside Furious George in the kicks-major-butt-for-the-Jammers category. Half orangutan and half tank, Orango zips around on high-speed treads while a variety of internal weapons systems grafted onto his body take out the trash. As noted earlier, Orango is a sucker for coconut-filled candy bars, and isn't the most responsible of Jammers (who are generally pretty irresponsible anyway). Still, when he shows up to a fight he's there to chew gum and kill Bobos—and he's always outta gum.

### Orango Tank

Bod 16, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 6

**Skills:** Driving 15, Guns 14, Intimidation 12, Martial Arts 12

### Unique Schtick

**Half-Tank:** Being half-tank has its advantages. Aside from being superhumanly tough, Orango Tank can also move at speeds of up to 70 mph. In combat, where he accelerates from a standstill and has to make frequent turns, his Move is effectively 15. Unfortunately, being half-tank also has its disadvantages: Orango Tank's size and bulk makes Dodging difficult, so his Dodge AV is only 13.

**Weapons:** 20 mm autocannons (17"/—/3,000), Flamethrower (14"/—/30) (° Takes out unnamed characters on an outcome of 2 or more; ° Takes out unnamed characters on an outcome of 3 or more and targets hit by this weapon suffer an additional 11 pts of damage per shot for the next 8 shots.)

## BACK FOR SECONDS

## NEUTRALS

## DAPPER ZHAN

*Abysmal Deceiver*

Johnny Lo knew that he was a dead man. He knew it even as he ran from the goons that pursued him. It didn't really matter how far or how fast he ran because sooner or later Fast Eddie Lo would catch up with him. There was no way out. Then the alley Johnny ducked into turned out to be a dead end. *Whoa, bad choice of words*, he thought. There had to be a door around here somewhere, some way out.

Fast Eddie's bully boys rounded the corner with big smiles on their faces. They knew they had him trapped and they were going to have some fun. It was one of the few fringe benefits of being a professional legbreaker, and they obviously wanted to get the most out of it. Johnny backed away as far as he could until he felt the rough brick wall against his back.

"You shouldn'ta run, Johnny," one of them said as they came closer. "And you shouldn'ta taken Eddie's money."

"I can pay it all back, I just need more time," Johnny said, "please, just a little more time."

"Time?" came a voice from behind the two goons. "Is that all?" The bruisers started to turn around and suddenly froze in their tracks, standing like statues. The figure at the end of the alleyway shook his head and walked calmly towards Johnny, past the thugs.

"Get lost, boys, this is a private conversation," he said, and the thugs turned and walked away without another word. Johnny almost didn't notice them leaving,

he was so caught up in the appearance of the stranger who had saved him.

The guy was like nothing he had ever seen before outside of a movie theater. He was tall and thin, dressed in a tuxedo and tails, which was not *that* unusual for Kowloon. It was the pale purplish skin, hairless and smooth, the pair of horns on his head, and the broad grin filled with shark-like teeth that made the guy really strange. One thing was certain, whatever he was he wasn't...

"Human? No of course I'm not." The stranger's sudden comment almost made Johnny jump right over the wall. "But I can help you, Johnny Lo." *How'd he know my name?* Johnny thought.

"Look, mister, I appreciate your help, but..." The stranger waved a long-fingered hand and Johnny thought he counted six fingers on it.

"It's Zhan. My friends call me Dapper Zhan and I know that we're going to be friends, Johnny. Sending away those muscleboys was nothing, my friend. I can give you some *real* help. I can get you out of the trouble you're in, out of the mess that your life has turned into. How about that?"

Get out of trouble with Fast Eddie? Get out of hock and maybe out of Kowloon? "Who do I have to kill?" he replied. That made Zhan's smile widen until it looked like his face would split in two. The rows of sharp teeth sent a chill down Johnny's spine.

"Nobody, that's the beauty of it. You agree to let me help you and I promise that no one will ever bother you again. Have we got a deal?" The whole thing was totally

round-the-bend crazy. Maybe that's why Johnny decided what he did. *What the hell*, he thought and took Zhan's thin hand in his own, feeling the cool press of his fingers against his flesh.

"Deal." Zhan smiled his shark-toothed smile again. When Johnny took his hand away he noticed a faint symbol visible against his palm.

"Congratulations, Johnny, and welcome to the club."

## NOTES

The demon called Dapper Zhan is an Abysmal Deceiver from the netherworld who knows how to make a deal. He appears to people in need and offers them his help in exchange for an undisclosed favor at some future time. As part of the deal, he marks those who owe him with a sign on the palm that can be seen by sorcerers with the Divination schtick as well as by the person with the sign. This sign allows Zhan to mentally communicate with and dominate his pawns over any distance in the same juncture.

Often, the "payments" that Dapper Zhan demands of those he has aided are small, seemingly-harmless things. Other times they are far more serious. The most common service is to allow Zhan to "borrow" their identities for a short while, using his transformation schtick to assume their form. This allows him to get close to other victims as well as items he might be interested in.

**Dapper Zhan**

Bod 6, Chi 0 (Mag 8, For 10), Mnd 6 (Chr 9), Ref 7

**Skills:** Creature Powers 18, Deceit 16, Info/Netherworld 12, Intimidation 10, Intrusion 15, Martial Arts 12, Shaping 8

**Creature Schticks:** Damage Immunity (Normal Bullets), Domination x3, Poison Fangs, Regeneration, Transformation

The demon's exact goals are unknown. He appears to be collecting a complex network of debts and has an interest in acquiring rare items that have magical potential or properties. These are funneled back to his lair in the netherworld. Zhan doesn't appear to be working for any particular faction in the Secret War; he has his own agenda, which may one day conflict with that of other innerwalkers.

## THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

*Netherworld Outcast*

"I friggin' hate the Netherworld," Zebediah said, looking around at the faintly-luminescent walls of the small cave.

"Relax," his companion said, leaning considerably more calmly against the nearby wall. "It won't be for much longer."

"He'd better show up."

Jenna raised a hand to tell Zeb to chill. "He will," she said. "If he's anything, he's honorable enough to keep his word." Zeb settled back on his haunches and watched the strange shadows flicker in the greenish light of the tunnels.

"I hate this place," he repeated, more to himself than anyone in particular. He took another look around the tunnels and still didn't see any sign of life around apart from the two of them. "What do you know about this guy, anyway?"

Jenna cocked her head and her eyes took on a faraway look for a moment. "Not much, really. I know that he said he would help out again if I needed it and that he's good to have around in a fight."

"Who's he work for?"

Jenna shook her head. "Nobody that I know of. He likes his solitude."

"And I plan to keep it that way," said a voice from the far side of the cavern. Zebediah reached immediately for the shiny chrome automatic holstered at his belt but Jenna stopped him before he could draw on the stranger. Zeb slowly took his hand away from the butt of the gun and glared at the shadowy figure moving into the light.

"Not a good idea to sneak up on people like that," he told the stranger.

"Apologies," he replied. His voice held a mocking tone. "Force of habit here in the Inner Kingdom. Good to see you again Jenna, I got your message. What is it that you want?"

Zeb tried to make out what he could about the guy. He was tall and kind of gawky, like a scarecrow. Most of him was covered by the strange kind of cloak that he wore. It seemed to shift and shimmer in the light of the cave in such a way that his outlines appeared blurred or distorted in some way. His face was long and pale,



framed by long black hair that fell in straight lines cutting across the planes of his features. His mouth had a slightly cruel twist to it.

"The Triumvirate has been gathering forces for a strike against a site in our time," Jenna said. "The Jammers think they're going to eliminate another feng shui site from the picture, but either the Ascended or the Monarchs are going to end up controlling it in the end. We need your help to protect it."

"Why should I want to help with that?" the stranger asked.

"Because when we last met you told me that you wanted to protect this place," she took in the whole of the cave and tunnels with a sweep of her hand. "If the Triumvirate succeeds in their plan, the portals in the netherworld will be sealed." The figure looked the both of them over carefully before replying.

"I came here because I wanted nothing more than peace and the opportunity to learn the inner workings of magic and the netherworld. Now I find myself continually drawn into the conflicts of factions like yours. What does it matter to me who wins your eternal war, so long as I am left alone to do my work?"

Zeb was getting tired of this guy's attitude and spoke up. "You don't think that anyone else is going to just let you play around in their back yard, do you? Sooner or later, somebody is going to decide you're a threat to them. Maybe not today or tomorrow, but eventually the Monarchs or the Ascended or the Lotus or any of the others will decide that you're too powerful to be left to your own business. They won't trust you to stay out of their way, and they'll come after you to either join them or die." His voice rose in urgency. "We're offering you a chance to make a difference, to put a stop to some of this mess!" Jenna laid a hand on his shoulder and Zeb trailed off.

"Do what you want," Zeb said. He glanced back at Jenna, then at the stranger, "I'll wait outside." Jenna watched him go then turned back towards the stranger.

"Father, please," she said, "enough of this hiding. We need your help. The Triumvirate's tech-

nomagic is too powerful for us to stop it alone." The stranger's eyes became bright and distant as he looked at Jenna's face.

"You're so like your mother," he said, "so passionate and sure of your cause. That is what killed her in the end." Jenna's jaw hardened as tears coursed down her cheeks.

"At least she knew what it was like to be alive." She turned and started to walk out of the chamber until a voice stopped her.

"No, Jenna, wait. Please, don't go. I can't lose you like I lost her."

"Then come with us, father, *help* us. Use some of that magic that you have studied and value so highly for something other than your endless experiments." The stranger looked for a long moment into the face of his daughter and saw the courage of the woman she had become. It shamed him to see such bravery from a child who thought her own father a coward. He drew his cloak around him and nodded.

"I will come."

## NOTES

The Mysterious Stranger is, needless to say, an enigmatic individual. He's been skulking around the Netherworld for years, perhaps decades—no one is really sure. His magical powers are known to be great but his reputation is small, at best. He stays out of the Secret War as much as he can, and therefore is unknown to the major players. The Stranger chooses his fights carefully, and does his best to preserve his anonymity. If he turns up in a campaign, it'll usually be with some very specific and short-tem goal

### **The Mysterious Stranger**

Bod 5, Chi 9 (Mag 11), Mnd 7, Ref 7

**Skills:** Info/Netherworld 12, Intimidation 11, Intrusion 10, Shaping 10, Sorcery 15

**Sorcery Schticks:** Fertilit, Heal, Influence,, Summoning, Weather (fog only)

### **Unique Schticks**

**Iridescent Cloak:** The Stranger's cloak has a shifting, chameleon quality to it that gives him +2 to his Intrusion value for not being spotted as well as increasing his Dodge AV by 2 if surrounding light is dim (as it almost always is in the Netherworld).

**Weapons:** The Stranger isn't known for carrying weapons of any kind, though he often carries odd magical or technological items that he's picked up while wandering around the netherworld.

in mind; should be make friends among the PCs, he may or may not be willing to help them in the future. It just depends on what they ask of him, and how important the task—and the PCs—are to the man known only as the Stranger.

## NINE CUTS

### *Mercenary Assassin*

Word on the street was that Big Brother Lau was having a domestic dispute with his bookmaker. Something about 5% off the top and a Cayman island bank account. Sort of thing that makes an honest accountant think about retiring—'course Lau's accountant was anything but honest and Lau's .357 magnum retirement package wasn't too attractive. So he tries to cut a deal with the Hong Kong police. Who? The accountant, of course. Nope, never did learn his name, that's for the boys downtown to worry about. I just baby-sit 'em.

So the HKPD suits, they got this gold mine of real hot info on their hands, and they know Big Brother Lau's boys are going to try to whack him. That's where I come

in. I make people disappear so that the wrong people can't find them. Anyway, the cops come to me, all worried that Lau's going to send his pet hitman after this poor slob. They want me to do some tricks and make this guy vanish for a while.

Usually I hide people from the cops, but I figure what the hell, the brownie points might be worth it. Money's good and maybe I can even open up a whole new market. Maybe their money clouded my judgment—should've known that hiding people *from* the cops and hiding people *for* the cops are two different things. Cops play by the rules, after all; the rest of us don't.

So, long story short and all that crap. Me and my people sit on this accountant slob for a couple days before we figure out we've been made. Our usual place is down in the warehouse district—of course I can tell you, its cover was blown, so it don't matter where it was. It's useless now. So anyway, we start noticing a couple of the same people hanging around outside. No one special, some old man selling stuff on the corner, couple punks eating at a noodle wagon, but the same people, pretty consis-



tently too. Suspicious, but nothing too threatening, just figure it's time to move our package, but we've done that before. No sweat, all part of our job.

Then I see this bald guy, just walking by, and he's got this hard look in his eyes. He's just walking, nothing special, but my skin goes all clammy-like just looking at him. I know he can't see me in the shadows where I'm hiding, but I also feel like he's looking right at me, too. He had this calculating look in his eyes, like a butcher, trying to figure out what cut's going to get him the best price for the least work. I watch him, just walking by, and I know he knows I've seen him and that he just doesn't care.

What did he look like? Doesn't really matter, does it? If you ever meet him, you'll know or you'll be dead. Big guy, bald, light brown skin, maybe African, maybe Arab, I dunno. Whatever he was, he wasn't from around here—stuck out like a fox in the henhouse. So I got spooked and called the boys together, figuring our cover just got blown, and it was time to leave pronto. I tell them to get their stuff 'cuz we're moving. When the boys had the cars ready I went to get our accountant buddy.

He's in the office, standing there in a dark corner. He doesn't say a word. There's a little noise behind him, and I realize we ain't alone. That bastard with the cold eyes from the street is here.

He's standing in the shadows right behind the accountant. I'm about to warn the poor schmuck when I notice the handle of a little paring-knife sticking out of his car. The accountant's dead of course, and this guy's letting the corpse slide down to the floor, gentle-like, I guess so that my boys out in the cars don't hear nothing. He's just staring at me as he's doing this, and I know that little noise I heard was for my benefit. If he wanted to, he could have whacked the accountant and been gone before I even knew something was wrong. It's like the guy wants me to watch him kill my client, like he's getting off on the fact that he's one up on me, sick bastard. I go for my gun, figuring a couple of 9mm rounds ought to put me back in the lead right quick.

But before my nine even clears the holster, this guy's on me. Quicker than I thought possible, he's got a blade the size of my forearm against my throat, and his hand

over my mouth. He doesn't even try to stop me pulling my piece—both of us knew I wasn't going to be quick enough to get it out—but then I get a grin from him. He takes his hand off my face and puts a finger up to his lips, I notice he's got this tattoo of a Yen symbol on his hand, real classy, but I'm in no mood to argue aesthetics with him. With two feet of surgical steel against my larynx, I don't say nothing. The guy says two words and disappears back into the shadows, while I boogie out the door.

What'd he say? "Nine Cuts," like it's his name or something.

Oh, you know him, officer? Too bad. If I never see that stone-cold freak again it'll be too soon.

### Nine Cuts

Bod 8, Chi 0 (For 4, Fu 8), Mnd 5, Ref 8

**Skills:** Guns 12, Intimidate 8, Intrusion 9, Martial Arts 15

**Fu Schticks:** Dark's Soft Whisper, Dim Mak, Friend of Darkness, Hands Without Shadow

**Gun Schticks:** Fast Draw x3, Hair Trigger Neck Hairs x2

**Weapons:** Throwing Knives, Combat Daggers, Beretta 92 Centurion (10/2/15+1)

## STEVEN CHEN

### Charmed Cartoonist

The children of Hong Kong are all familiar with the works of Jade Studio and its sole proprietor and creator Steven Chen. Chen is the writer and artist of such comic books as *Jade Warrior*, *Crying Assassin* and *The Bronze Dragon*, all well-known and popular for their depiction of fast and furious martial arts action. Steven Chen is also on the brink of becoming an unknowing participant in the Secret War that rages in Hong Kong.

Chen writes and draws his books from his own private studio in Hong Kong, incorporated under the name Jade Studio. The studio is located on the top floor of a building that Chen owns. The first two floors make up his apartment and the third is given over to his studio and private office. Part of the studio also serves as a workout area and gym where Chen practices a daily regimen of the kung fu he learned as a child on the mainland.

Unknown to Steven Chen, his studio and apartment have become the focus of chi energies that have benefitted his con-

stant daily work in martial arts, meditation, and the creation of his comic book stories, energy that has played no small part in his success in both his chosen career and his kung fu hobby. Jade Studio is a minor feng shui site that Chen himself is attuned to. Also unknown to the artist, his publisher—Wuxing Press—is under the control of the Ascended. The Lodge Masters have discovered the true nature of the studio's feng shui site and are initiating plans to take full control of it and perhaps also bring Steven Chen into the fold as a member of the Pledged.

The Guiding Hand also has an interest in Chen and his comic books. Although a decadent art form, they espouse the values that the Hand upholds: purity of mind, body and spirit and a reconnection with the power of chi in proper balance. The fact that the villains in all of Jade Studio's comic books are technological horrors or evil magicians doesn't hurt the Hand's opinion of them, either. Guiding Hand agents have begun to feel out the site and explore the possibility of recruiting Steven Chen to their side with promises of more-advanced kung fu teachings to build on Chen's already-capable level of skill.

Chen would also be of great interest to the Dragons, but thus far they are not aware of the Jade Studio site or of Chen's increasing prowess in the martial arts, since he rarely displays it outside of the privacy of his practice room and some friendly sparring matches.

Chen could very easily be an old friend of any PC who was brought up on the mainland or who lived in Hong Kong for any length of time. Perhaps Chen and another character were both kung fu students together. If Chen starts having troubles related to his studio and career, he might turn to that character for advice, especially if his friend is known to have experience with some "weird stuff."

book stories has come as something of a surprise, and in many ways he is still the humble country lad from the Chinese mainland who came to Hong Kong seeking his fortune years ago. He hasn't allowed his success to change him and he still lives rather simply, keeping up his regular workouts and kung fu practice while working on new ideas for his comics. He likes the possibility of adapting some of his stories into films, and is talking with a Hong Kong film studio (which is secretly backed by Fast Eddie Lo) about the possibility.

Chen is an honest, simple man of decent values. If he were to discover the truth about the Secret War, he would feel compelled to take action somehow. He would likely side with a faction like the Dragons that is fighting for the underdog, but it is not impossible that the Guiding Hand or even the Ascended (in some innocuous guise) could sway him over to their side.

If he does become a participant in the Secret War (for any of the factions) Steve Chen will certainly have unlimited material to keep his comic books going for a very, very long time to come.

#### Steven Chen

Bod 6, Chi 3 (Fu 7), Mnd 5 (Cha 6), Ref 6

**Skills:** Artist 10, Info/Comic Books 9, Martial Arts 12

#### Unique Schtick

**Wall of Fanboys** Shot Cost: 1

**Chi Cost:** 1 in Hong Kong, 3 elsewhere

Using his innate chi, Chen can get help from his huge collection of young fans in Hong Kong and elsewhere. If Chen uses Wall of Fans, a bunch of young people who adore his work recognize him in trouble and rush to his aid. This ability only works in places where there are large numbers of people who might be familiar with Chen's work (basically only large Asian cities in the modern juncture, and especially Hong Kong). The fans will try and protect Chen from his opponents and might deter some mooks and other attackers. Note that the collection of fans will only dissuade those villains noble enough not to mow down a bunch of helpless kids. In some cases, this ability could turn into a detriment if Chen ends up having to protect his helpless fans. The gamemaster should adjust the effectiveness of the schtick based on the demands of the story.

**Weapons:** Chen has several standard martial arts weapons in his studio, but doesn't carry them around with him.

#### NOTES

Steven Chen is a likable easygoing man in his late twenties. His success with his comic

#### TIMOTHY SMITTS

*"He's seen more evidence of the truth than most secret warriors, and he still*

*doesn't have a clue. He's less than harmless; of all the fruit loops in Hong Kong, he's the fruit loopiest."*

—Rain Yuen,  
*informally briefing Col. Baynes Wilhelm*

Timothy Smitts (or "Weird Tim") is something of a fixture in the Wanchai district of Hong Kong. He's a tall, scrawny, caucasian with long, greasy and disheveled hair. If you look close enough at his scruffy beard, you can usually tell what his last meal was—that is, if you can't smell it a block away on his breath. Most people don't want to look that close. Weird Tim dresses like he's homeless and showers maybe once a week, if it doesn't rain.

Closer investigation reveals that Tim is a bundle of contradictions. He looks like a bum, but he's actually a landlord with two Master's Degrees from Cornell. His conversation is a mix of well-expressed insight and incoherent babbling about the CIA, quantum mechanics, and the St. Louis Arch.

Here's what happened to Weird Tim. His parents were hippies, and they named him after Timothy Leary. Then, before young Timmy's frightened eyes, they turned into yuppies. All their hippie friends did the same thing.

Tim started to wonder what could possibly cause so many people to completely reverse their values and identity in such a (comparatively) short span of time. It seemed to defy the whole concept of identity. He was terrified that he could wake up one morning and find himself a rude, insensitive asshole instead of a pleasant, easygoing dude.

**Timothy Smitts**

Bod 4, Chi 5, Mnd 7 (Cha 4), Ref 5

Skills: Fix It 9, Info/Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy & Economics 13, Info/Wanchai Landlord 6, Martial Arts 11

Unique Schtick: Whammy (p. 67)

This question of identity plagued him through his first double major in college (psychology/philosophy) through his Master's Degree (sociology) and through his *other* Master's Degree (economics). Nothing made sense, and it really, really bugged him until he met an old Chinese woman named Chow Kun Pat. She told him that if you understood feng shui, everything became clear. The future? A snap to

read, if you just know how chi operates. As an example, she told him "The monkey will rise and fall, but the friends of the monkey shall have great fortune. All things they do shall be watched by the unblinking eye, and this great country will breathe in and out their every notion."

Tim didn't think much of it, until he realized that, a full four months before "Friends" premiered on American television, she had predicted both the course of its plotline and the course of its attendant media frenzy. He immediately decided that the woman was right: chi was the governing power of the universe.

(Ironically, the old woman had actually been predicting the American Republican primary results of 1996.)

You can't get a Master's in Geomancy at Cornell, so Tim moved to Bangkok, then Shanghai, and (after he read about Heads Up Corner [p. xx] in a tabloid), Hong Kong. He was surprised to learn that the shabby tenement on one side of Heads Up Corner was for sale, and he quickly bought it, moved in, and began studying the feng shui of his new home.

His prosperity as a landlord would surprise anyone unfamiliar with chi flow. He's had enough spare time and money to design a computer setup that is supposed to analyze and track the chi of the world's weather patterns, and correlate it with current events. (He's completely on the wrong track; the weather reflects chi, it does not influence it.) He's also been trying to figure out who *really* controls the world's supply of chi; he believes his attunement to Heads Up Corner allows him a clearer view of reality.

Maybe... maybe not. He believes that the world is currently controlled by dictators from the future, who give orders to their lackeys with time-warping tachyon radios and then monitor the repercussions of their decisions. He thinks that their main enemies are a group of Chinese immortals who have used their mastery of chi principles to repeatedly "become their own fathers," using their own sperm cells' DNA to replenish themselves and reverse aging (he can go on about this for hours; the details are pretty disgusting). He is hoping to get in contact with a group of wise and principled confucian monks, guided by extraterrestrial spirits called the Four Monarchs. These monks

(known as the Ascended Lodge) are the only ones who can restore harmony to the world. Needless to say, he's very close to the truth—and yet so very far away.

## WHITE NINJA

*Assassin*

Before Quan Lo was the Perfect Master, he was a Mediocre Boyfriend. I do not wear white because it is the color of death, although it is, or because it makes it more challenging to sneak around in the dark, although it does, or to stand out from the irritating hordes of would-be ninja in black or purple, but because in white reside all six color principles in harmony, and this harmony may be called upon for the purposes of death as easily as life. And no matter what Quan Lo may say now, I broke up with him first.

In my own humble estimation, I am smarter than anyone stronger than myself, stronger than anyone sneakier than myself, and sneakier than anyone smarter than myself. I require no forgiveness from anyone, and I have no regrets or remorse for

what I do or what I am. I will kill for anyone, but I will die for no one. My employers are buying my skills, not my loyalty.

I am interested in the perfection of my art of death, and care not a bit who I work for, as long as they keep faith with me and pay in advance. The chi cares not who controls it, and therefore neither do I. The factions all like to believe that it would be a tremendous calamity if their side were to lose or another to triumph, and none of them realize that their struggle is all part of the cycle of the chi and there is no loss or victory, only struggle. There's no point in explaining this to them—only Quan Lo has ever understood fully that the chi is its own master. But his ambition to reshape everything in his own image has blinded him to the truths he once embraced.

My favorite weapon is the moonlight-forged sword given to me by the ancient master assassin who raised me after my father gave me to him in payment for another's death. Its name is Nine Hundred Souls. The master had no name, since he had given his name to Death in exchange for Her secrets. The master was harsh but



kind in his own terrible way, and when I was fully trained and we were hired to kill my father, he showed his regard for me by allowing me to perform the execution myself. My little sister—Death Shadow—has never forgiven me for our father's death, but then he didn't give her away, now did he? She was always mother's favorite, anyway. I always prefer to kill with the sword when I can, because each death makes it sharper and stronger and more beautiful.

edged weapons that any competent ninja carries. I don't care for blunt weapons; if you're not going to draw blood you should just stay home, master always said.

I can also kill people with my costume sash, or anything handy, or even my bare hands, but it rarely comes to that. I don't use guns. I could use guns, but they lack the personal touch. Assassins who use sniper rifles or bombs or poison are too afraid of death to be really, really good at it. You have to get right up into the face of the person you're killing and look them in the eye, even if for only a split second, so they understand that they're not just dying, that they're being killed. You have to show them you're not afraid of them, so that they know there's no point in coming back as a ghost to haunt you, that you'll just kill that, too. People who use guns a lot are always haunted by their pasts, in my experience.

I don't do guard work. Give me a target, pay me, and go away, that's my style. Hit it fast, hit it hard, hit it smart, and go on to the next job.

The money? The money's just a token of the client's respect. I live a simple life, so what I don't spend on laundry bills and fast cars I burn as ghost money for my father, so that he can buy nice things for himself in the Oil-Soaked Hell of Those Who Sell Their Daughters. I like to think he uses it to bribe the demons (this is a Chinese Hell, of course you can bribe the demons) not to tear his entrails out and make wind chimes of his bones. That way, when I take one of my rare vacations and I'm not earning anything, I can really enjoy myself.

## White Ninja

Bod 6, Chi 5 (Fu 10), Mnd 7, Ref 8 (Spd 12)

**Skills:** Deceit 13, Fix-It 12, Guns 11, Info/Eastern Philosophy 10, Info/Secret Wars 9, Intimidation 14, Intrusion 18, Martial Arts 18, Sabotage 14

**Fu Schticks:** Signature Weapon (Nine Hundred Souls), Willow Step, Walk of a Thousand Steps, Friend of Darkness, Dark's Soft Whisper, Blade of Darkness, Gathering the Darkness, Strike from Darkness, Gathering of the Clouds, Awesome Downpour, Rain of Fury, Torrent of Fury, Prodigious Leap, Abundant Leap, Flying Sword, Loyal Steel, Vertical Charge

*Feel free to give her a new Fu schtick each time the PCs encounter her.*

## Unique Schticks

**Kuji-Kiri:** The White Ninja is the ultimate master of this ancient Ninja art, and many of her Fu powers use Kuji-Kiri. In addition, if her hands are not bound and she has accepted an item of value to kill someone, she may spend 1 point of Chi and 1 shot to reduce that person's AVs by 2 until the end of the sequence.

**Nine Hundred Souls:** She leaves a distinctive wound in victims she kills with her sword. If she wounds someone with the sword and they survive, they will retain a distinctive scar after healing.

**Weapons:** Nine Hundred Souls [13], Shuriken [7]

**Game Notes:** In combat, White Ninja prefers stealthy attacks to head-on confrontations, often using her Gathering the Darkness and Strike from Darkness Fu schticks. If confronted by multiple named characters she'll go on the defensive, using active Dodges and Willow Steps and at the end of the sequence she'll launch a massive attack using Torrent of Fury.

My next favorite weapon is my razor-sharp nails of steel, which twist and turn in the paths of the nine Kuji-Kiri finger magics to protect me from my enemies and to bleed them dry.

Next after that are the nine shuriken I carry, each carefully carved from the bones of demons so that when they're thrown you can hear the shrieks of the damned. They're also useful for pulling out nails and opening soft drinks.

Following that are the usual assortment of knives, chains and assorted bizarre

## YAKUZA ENFORCER

### *Killer Hood*

I was a little behind in my loan payments to Tsien, but I managed to scrape up \$30,000. Only half of what I owed him, but better than nothing, right? Okay, okay, so maybe me and the Death Ring matches weren't seeing eye-to-eye on the betting line, but that's bound to turn around sometime. Ain't no reason for Tsien to come

down on me hard. Everyone has a dry spell, every now and then, right? I was good for it, he knew that.

So I'm waiting in some skin club expecting one of Tsien's normal mooks as bagman, and in comes this guy that looks Korean or something—no, Japanese. He's got this way of walking, big-cat style, that does nothing to conceal the fact that he's packing. I'm used to guys walking like this; what bothers me is that the club's clientele moves out of his way like he's freaking Moses parting the Red Sea.

Looking at this guy a couple seconds too long, I know that time's run out and so has Big Brother Tsien's patience. I start looking for the back way out, but before I even move, the guy is sitting beside me with his arm around my shoulder.

I figure that's it, game over and all that. But my luck changes, sort of, and maybe not for the better. Three guys with these big honking ginzu knives jump out of the crowd intent on making sushi out of the both of us. The Japanese guy seems as surprised as me by this, so the first mook slashes him right down the front of his chest. It's a deep ugly wound, but it doesn't stop my date from snatching the knife right out of the mook's hand and sticking it back between the loser's eyes, all casual-like.

Second guy ignores me too and jumps at the bigger threat, cutting and stabbing like he's showing off for the disco lights. While they're busy dancing I realize who this big guy is. He's the Yakuza hitter, Akira Takahashi. He showed up in Hong Kong awhile back to take out some stool pigeon who thought that putting a few hundred miles, the sea of Japan, and a couple of foreign countries between him and the clan would keep the yaks off him. Akira showed up a couple weeks later and cornered the guy in a club. End of story, right? Wrong. Takahashi slips up a notch and a girl gets hurt, crippled hurt. According to the yak code, Akira has to make atonement to the girl and her family—unfortunately, the girl's related to Tsien in some distant way and the big bro is not one to pass up an opportunity like that. So Takahashi is honor-bound to work for Tsien, who gives him the dirty work. Like roughing up guys what owe Tsien money—like me.

About as quick as I get around to recognizing him, Akira rips off his bloody shirt and whips it around the mook's knife hand, binding him up but good. Then, he does this little twist and I hear bones snap. Second guy goes down screaming, and Akira's got this little smile on his lips, like he's enjoying himself. He looks over at the third guy who is smart enough to have brought a gun. You'd think looking down the barrel of a .357 would unnerve a guy, but Akira just stands up straight, staring at the gunman.

The club's gone silent and everyone's just staring at the two of them, but mostly at the yak. He's got this huge knife wound across his chest that's just got to hurt like hell and the blood's getting everywhere, but that's not what we're all staring at. The guy's body is covered in these tattoos: geishas, samurai, cherry blossoms, and dragons. They seem almost alive, as he walks calmly towards the last mook, who is not doing as well as a man in his position should be. We can all see the gunman's hand shaking as he pulls back the hammer of his hand cannon. Akira doesn't even flinch, he just keeps walking towards the guy, as if he would be disappointed if the goon didn't pull the trigger.

The hammer clicks into place and the goon's finger tightens on the trigger...

*Boom. Boom.*

I shot the mook first. I figured after he finished off the tattooed freak I'd be next. Akira just stares at me, like I sneezed in his corn flakes or something. I tell you, some guys just don't know how to say "thank you." He walks over to me and finishes my drink. Then he says we're even.

I've seen him around since then, even worked with him a couple of times. Wouldn't say we're close or that I'd invite him to a dinner party, but as long as I keep on the good side of him and his clan I'd say I'd trust him. Get on his clan's bad side, you're gonna be seeing those tattoos up close and final.

## NOTES

The enforcer may seem to be nothing more than another petty gunman working for the criminal Yakuza, but this is not the case. The enforcer is the soul of the Yakuza personified. Members of the enforcer's own Yakuza clan begin pleading for mercy at



## Akira Takahashi, Yakuza Enforcer

Bod 7, Chi 5, Mnd 5, Ref 8 (Agl 9)

**Skills:** Deceit 7, Detective 6, Driving 11, Guns 14, Info: Yakuza Politics 8, Intimidation 9, Martial Arts 13

**Gun Schticks:** Carnival of Carnage x2, Hair Trigger Neck Hairs, Lightning Reload

the very sight of his tattooed body, for they know that he is only summoned when there is to be a reckoning. The enforcer has been known to eradicate entire clans of Yakuza in pursuit of his vengeance.

## ZE BOTELHO

### Lodge Outcast

The last assassin clutched his stomach, blood and viscera pouring over his arms, and dropped to the floor of the ransacked conference room. The Unspoken Name, disheveled and flushed, looked from the corpse to Ze Botelho, who stood bronzed and blood-spattered a few feet away.

“You saved my life. Why?”

“I wouldn’t mind seeing you dead, but not like this, at the hands of your inferiors. Our blood grows thin. There is too little of it left to spill without need.”

“But I ordered your death. If you had let them kill me, Kinoshita would have let you go.”

“Then you could let me go now, couldn’t you?”

“I could—but you are a traitor. You let that sorceress live after I ordered her death because you loved her. All sorcerers must die; it is our law. They threaten everything we are. If we relax our guard and let the magic return, we could lose everything. I am grateful that you saved my life, but I cannot revoke my death order. My life cannot mean more to me than my honor, or I deserve neither.”

“You deserve *nothing!* The Lodge is a hollow shell with no passion, a mockery! You have grown fat and lazy and complacent in your power. Once we were predators, proud and strong. Now we are sheep, and the Lodge our shepherd. We must be predators again, or our enemies will feast on our flesh!”

“Very well then. Since you are so intent on strengthening our ranks, you should not mind if I use

you as a whetting stone for the claws of our young, to send them against you to learn what it is to serve the Unturning Wheel. You refuse to respect the Lodge, and so you can not shelter yourself within it any longer. I cast you from the Lodge. Go out into the world

and live or die by your own strength with no one beside you. Every claw will be raised against you. Every fang will be bared at your throat. The Unspoken Name commands, and all shall obey or die, by their Pledge.”

“I will see your precious Lodge of Straw brought down and scattered to the winds of fate, and I will mock you from its ruins, toothless one!”

Botelho stormed out of the room, leaving the Unspoken Name alone with the dead. The leader of the Ascended took out his cell phone and dialed a few numbers. It was time for the hunt to begin.

## NOTES

Cast out from the Lodge by the Unspoken Name, Ze Botelho seeks to strengthen all transformed animals by destroying the Lodge—which in his view has grown corrupt and weak, too inwardly-focused to face the new threats that are emerging after centuries of prosperity and dominance. Expulsion carries a mandatory and swift death sentence, but he knows much of the inner workings of the Lodge and skillfully plays one faction against another so he can slip between the cracks. He’s always a half-step ahead of his pursuers, and if they get too close he finds some convenient target to distract them. He’s not a big enough threat for the Lodge to waste its big guns on, but he’s more than a match for the typical Pledged assassin, and in some cases has even turned those sent against him to his own deadly purposes.

### Ze Botelho

Bod 6, Chi 7 (For 2), Mnd 6, Ref 7

**Skills:** Guns 10, Info/History 8, Info/Lodge 14, Intrusion 11, Martial Arts 14

**Transformed Animal Schticks:** Bite x2, Mark Prey x2, Pounce

**Fu Schticks:** Claw of the Tiger, Tiger Stance, Unyielding Tiger Stance, Vengeance of the Tiger

**Weapons:** Botelho rarely uses weapons, preferring to rely on his chi and fu schticks.

## BACK FOR SECONDS

## FENG SHUI SITES

## ANCIENT TEMPLE

*Feng Shui Site*

There is an ancient vine-covered temple in a shallow mist-filled valley near the borders of China, Laos and Vietnam. In this temple there are two and seventy monks, and guarded by these holy monks is a curiously-carved statue of the King of Monkeys From The Time When Birds Walked Like Men, and these monks would die to protect their king, but they rarely have to because the temple is so well-hidden amid the mountains and mists, and also because the armies of three nations jealously guard the borders, and the armies of four drug lords jealously guard their crops, and it is not a place idly travelled to, it is full of death and treachery and all the poisonous serpents anyone could ever desire. But if you must, you should travel one way or another to the abandoned fort of Dien Bien Phu where two score years in the past French dreams of empire were shattered forever, and then make your way north no less than 150 kilometers along the River of Broken Dreams, past the three armies of men and the four armies of greed, and the army of the night that no man dares whisper of for fear they will hear him speak of them, and on into the fog-shrouded mountains, and if your soul is pure and your heart is good and your kung fu is mighty you may reach the temple that was old when China was young, and learn the secrets of the two and seventy monks. But you will not return.

## NOTES

In addition to using Ancient Temple as a site to be protected or a place to race the bad guys to in order to retrieve the statue or prevent them from getting it, you can also use it in backstories or backgrounds, particularly for characters who might have had reason to be on the China-Vietnam-Laos border. Perhaps their Long Range Patrol was wiped out and they were restored to health by the monks. Move the temple about if it's more convenient to have it elsewhere. Have it wiped out by the heroes' own army, so he bears a heavy burden of guilt perhaps. Perhaps it saved his life or his father's life and now they're calling in the debt. Perhaps he fell in love with a priestess of the temple and now the daughter he never knew he had who has sworn to kill him for betraying her mother has sought him out. You get the idea.

## POWERS

Characters attuned to the Ancient Temple gain all the usual benefits for feng shui site attunement. In addition, they may acquire Fu shticks in the Path of the Leaping Storm at -1 cost.

## AUSPICIOUS TERMITES

*Feng Shui Site*

Just when you think you've seen everything in this crazy friggin' world, something like the termites comes along. I've blown up plenty of feng shui sites, but I never had one come back from the dead before.

We got word of a Bobo project downtime in Africa, some biotechnology research garbonzola. Since the Buro didn't exactly do a lot of research in the plains of twentieth-century Africa, we knew something was up. Battlechimp said he thought they were checking out a new feng shui site, so we got sent to check it out and blow it the heck up.

So off we go, and sure enough there ain't no factory or lab there. Just a bunch of big dirt mounds crawling with termites—not to mention arcanotechs and Bobo droogs. The mounds were giant termite nests; Gomez knew about the feng shui stuff and said that it was the mounds the termites made that turned this place into a feng shui site. Don't know if it just happened that way or someone planned it, but it didn't really matter. The arcanotechs were taking some of the bugs and doing all kinds of tests on the place.

We hit them so fast they never knew what happened. A couple good shots to the mounds sent dirt and bugs flying everywhere. You'd think working with all of that arcanowave stuff, the techies would have strong enough stomachs to handle being covered in bugs but I guess not. Once we took out the Bobos, we blew the site and got out of there.

Then, a couple of months later, we intercept this report on its way uptime to the Buro talking about the Termite site! Seems we didn't blow all of the little buggers up when we waxed the site, so they were friggin' rebuilding it! Now we gotta figure a way to take it out for good, only this time, the Architects are ready for us...

### NOTES

This unusual feng shui site exists on a veldt in central Africa. It is a collection of termite mounds that have been constructed in such a way as to focus and intensify the natural chi of the area to produce good feng shui. The strong chi of the site in turn allows the insect colonies to prosper and remain strong, creating a kind of symbiotic relationship. This relationship extends to the point of the termites having a kind of natural instinct to protect and preserve the site, even allowing them to reconstruct the site correctly if it is damaged or destroyed.

The length of time it takes the termites to reconstruct the site after it is damaged or destroyed depends on the amount and type of damage and how many of the insects survived. Light damage can be repaired in a matter of days, while destruction of the mounds could take weeks or months. However long it takes, as long as some of the termites survive they will always rebuild the site exactly as before, making it very difficult to destroy.

The Auspicious Termites site can be used as the hook for a real off-beat *Feng Shui* adventure set in Africa, complete with safari jeeps, lions, elephants, dangerous poachers, and tribal warriors. The site is unique in its ability to recover from damage of all kinds and eventually rebuild itself to its former chi levels. Geomancers have speculated there might be some kind of special relationship between the features of the land, the termite colonies, and the chi flow of the area that causes the insects to rebuild their mounds in a manner that works to harmonize and strengthen the site's feng shui.

This phenomenon makes the auspicious termites of interest to several factions of the Secret War. Foremost among these is the Architects of the Flesh, who have a strong interest in the relationship between arcanowaves (chi) and biology. The termites from the site might be useful in the Architects' arcanowave research and could be used as the basis for a terrible new arcanowave device. The other factions who become aware of the Architects' plans would certainly want to keep them from getting ahold of the site and taking termite samples away. Of course, it is also possible that the termites have no special properties in and of themselves and might turn out to be worthless away from their home.

The site is also one of concern to the Jammers, whose goal is to destroy feng shui sites. A site that can rebuild itself when destroyed is certainly a threat to their plans. If the factions learn how to use the secrets behind the auspicious termites to make their own feng shui sites self-regenerating, the Jammers' chances of overcoming the sites and eliminating them drop sharply. The Netherworld rebels will certainly be interested in discovering exactly how it is the site works with the local environment in order to regenerate.

At this point, the other factions of the Secret War are not yet aware of the Auspicious Termites site, but they would certainly take an interest in it once word reached them. The Lotus might want to discover if there are any magical applications to the termites and study them for the possibility of developing their own creature-based feng shui sites. The Ascended may also take interest in local legends of insect men from the distant past being involved with the site—perhaps a tribe of Transformed Termites?

### POWERS

Characters attuned to the Auspicious Termites site gain all the usual benefits of attunement. In addition, they have a +3 AV bonus when making Death Checks. Any major disruption to the site breaks all attunements, even if the termites survive and start to re-build.

## CITY SQUARE

### *Feng Shui Site*

The sun shone brightly over the burnt-red tiles of the West Plaza. It was a beautiful, warm summer's day, with just a hint of a breeze cooling the air. Pedestrians strolled past the placidly-bubbling fountain, or took their lunch hour under the shady canopy of one of the many trees. Though it was called the West Plaza, it actually sat nearer to the center of the city. Situated at the border between the corporate and shopping districts, the West Plaza was happily isolated from most of the noise and smog of the city around it. Not quite a park, it was instead a small grassy enclave, opening up to avenues that led into all corners of the city, yet pleasantly isolated from traffic and noise. Bordered by a number of fashionable boutiques and shops, it was a favorite with local workers, shoppers, and students from the university nearby. On warm afternoons such as this one, couples came to sit in the soft grass, old men played chess on the park benches, young musicians played guitar on the fountain's edge, children tossed frisbees to their dogs, and Jilly and Ringo watched from nearby.

"Notice the aesthetics of the square, Ringo" said Jilly, in the tones of one who has dedicated her life to erudite study. "See

how the shapes are carefully chosen carefully to subtly complement each other, naturally suggesting balance without being blatantly symmetrical."

"Indeed Jilly, indeed," replied Ringo in similar lofty tones. "Even the colors of the tiling suggest harmony and peace while avoiding ostentation or blandness."

"Mmmm. And you see how the square itself carefully merges with the surrounding environment?"

"Of course, of course, who could miss the graceful way in which the streets are drawn toward the center, without ever actually intruding on it?"

"Oh yes, the plaza ties directly to all the major arteries of the city. This was no accident. Whoever designed this was a certifiable genius."

"Without a doubt, Jilly, without a doubt. One can almost imagine the lines of energy coalescing here."

"And yet the power is so easily redistributed throughout the city from this point. In effect, the square forms a sort of natural power interchange for all the chi in the surrounding area."

"Not to mention a natural buffer, as well. I imagine that, should any of the sites in this city find their chi disrupted, this square would act naturally to redistribute the damage, thus equalizing the chi flow in the area. Imagine that, Jilly. Does it not truly awe you?"

"Most certainly Ringo, most certainly. It is without a doubt a wonder."

"Mmmm," the two watched silently for a moment from their vantage point, lost in admiration. Then Jilly turned back to Ringo.

"Did you bring the necessary materials, Ringo?"

"Indeed I did, Jilly. Indeed I did," Ringo replied, hoisting his pack. "All the C4 we need."

"Excellent. Well, let's blow this sucker up."

### POWERS

A character attuned to the City Square site receives an additional experience point per session if they are also attuned to another feng shui site in the same city. However, if the character loses her attunement to either feng shui site, she loses 3 experience points that session in addition to not receiving the usual attunement bonus.

## HEADS UP CORNER

*Feng Shui Site*

When the Wanchai district of Hong Kong was being laid out, a nice tidy juncture was planned at an intersection between Gracious Bounty street and Running Feet avenue. Unfortunately, the map that the intersection was planned on was surveyed poorly, and no one noticed until the streets were already being paved towards each other.

The city planners decided to make the best of a botched job and slap a patch of lawn with a statue in the middle of the snarled circle where Gracious Bounty, Running Feet, and Snake Alley intersect. The effect is interesting; a pedestrian will be walking along a dull and squalid avenue, and suddenly come to an intersection that looks almost... fanciful. Right smack in the center is a patch of green, with a big, smiling, aquamarine Buddha.

Lots of people liked to walk by the area; it didn't get the name Heads Up Corner until 1985, when a young girl named Mim So Chang who lived at the intersection noticed that every time she flipped a coin on her front stoop, it came up heads. In fact, any coin flipped in front of that particular building will come up heads. Every single time.

This was certainly weird, but after some initial flap (a team of scientific researchers from England came to examine it but never found anything worthwhile) people stopped paying attention. After all... heads up all the time? In the larger scheme of things—so what?

The building retains the name Heads Up Corner, and is owned by an expatriate American named Timothy Smitts (p. xx). He lives on the top floor and rents out the rest. It's usually full.

## POWERS

The feng shui of Heads Up Corner is not particularly powerful; the Architects measure it at 20 Daos, tops. Any character attuned to Heads Up Corner gets one extra experience point at the end of every session.

However, while the chi flow is not particularly strong, it is weirdly turbulent. It creates strange ripples and eddies in the currents of causality—and it protects its own.

In game terms, attunement to Heads Up Corner gives a character a new schtick called **Whammy**. Once per session, an attuned character can put the whammy on her opponent (traditionally done by 'giving him the hairy eyeball' i.e. looking at him funny). That opponent adds another negative die to his next roll. Furthermore, characters may also spend a Fortune Point up to three times per day to activate a whammy on their enemies.

When your characters do this (or have it done to them) you should describe it as a terrible coincidence. "He lunges in, spittle flying from his jaws and... trips on his own shoelaces! And lands on his own katana! That's got to be terribly embarrassing!"

Almost *nothing* is too improbable to be arranged by the Whammy. It's often especially impressive if some great, cataclysmic event occurs simply to achieve a small result. For example: your PCs are trying to ditch some mooks, and one of the PCs puts the whammy on the pursuers. Right at that moment, a suicidal insurance agent decides to swan dive from his eighth story window. He doesn't hit the mooks, but the resulting crowd and confusion is sufficient for the PCs to escape.

## PERPETUAL MOTION MACHINE

*Netherworld Feng Shui Site*

**September 23, 1904:** Terence Caviston sits dejected in the Cafe Bogomil and watches the evening traffic of Geneva. His spirit is crushed far more thoroughly than the propaganda leaflets that strew the ground around that band of Bolsheviks a few tables over.

This afternoon was the final straw. After six frustrating months trying to find like-minded scholars of energy somewhere outside Britain, he'd decided to go ahead and patent what portions of his etheric counter-vortex rotor system were already complete. But the patent clerk—some upstart with delusions of achieving science—supplemented his rejection of Caviston's work with a tedious lecture about the photo-electric effect, an imagined equivalent of mass and energy, and who knew what else. Apparently all this was supposed to refute Caviston's fundamental premises.

Well, let that clerk try to get his own ideas taken seriously someday...

Suddenly the Bolsheviks' conversation (or rather exchange of speeches and diatribes) forces itself to the front of his consciousness. It is the lean philosophical chap, Ivan Ulyanov, holding forth. "... give the people the means of liberating themselves from the capitalist system of power generation and distribution, and the bourgeois state will tumble of its own leaden weight!"

Caviston gathers a breath. He does not know how much he truly believes of what must be said, but the opportunity must be seized. "Pardon me, Mr. Ulyanov." The whole herd of revolutionaries turns. "My name is Caviston. We met at the Hallesbech library function week before last."

"Oh, yes? Oh, yes, the inventor. What do you want?"

"You seek physical power as well as political, and rightly so. I seek to implement a plan that bring such power to the world. The establishments of Europe have no interest in my work, content to prosper on the miseries of their subjects. But you and your... comrades... seem open to fresh thoughts. With a very modest investment of finances and resources, I believe that I can provide you with the matrix from which a new era of energetic freedom might emerge."

**July 4, 1908:** Caviston is not dead. This is something of a surprise. Nor is he, so nearly as he can ascertain, anywhere at all familiar.

He regained consciousness lying on the floor of a bare cavern, lit by luminescent fungi and some less-obvious source. The air is laden with dust. It is more humid and far warmer than the stretch of Siberian forest outside Tunguska that has been Caviston's home for the last three years. Caviston's laboratory equipment lies strewn about him in some disorder, as though it had been dropped from a height of a few inches.

His last memory before awakening here (wherever here may be) is of a bright light screaming across the sky toward him. There had been a great gout of fire approaching from the southwest. In its center he seemed to see a tormented face, not human in its proportions, screaming something unintelligible. His counter-vortex rotor had spun into ever

more rapid gyrations. Then nothing, then here.

The face, of course, was nothing more than the pattern-making impulse of the human mind leading him astray. But the fireball may well have been the sort of natural etheric vortex he first theorized of years ago. Its interaction with the contrasting turbulence of his own device could readily have taken him across a poly-dimensional fold in space.

Clearly this is not Tunguska, Siberia. Comrade Lenin (who disdains the "Mr. Ulyanov" appropriate to a real gentleman) will be heartily displeased. Three years of research, brought here... wherever here is... in the blink of an eye. Ah, well, the course of true science is often difficult.

First he must find out what this place is. Then he must find out how best to continue his work.

**May 1, 1989:** Li Fan Caviston can see at once that her father is dead. His passing has been peaceful, the Bodhisattvas be praised. Clearly he slipped away from this incarnation in the depths of sleep.

His death is no surprise. For months, his conversations had been filled with reminiscences of the terrestrial lands Li Fan has never seen. For most of a year, Li Fan has done the real work in implementing the next version of her father's chi engine. (To the very last he refused to use the terminology of feng shui, insisting on his ether-oriented usage. She humored him to his face and made better sense in other company.)

The time has come to leave. Her father, driven by his dreams of power, was willing to overlook the hardships and indignities imposed by his new sponsor, Huan Ken, King of the Thunder Pagoda. Now that filial duty no longer binds her, she can seek sponsorship elsewhere.

**Now:** The Caviston Etheric Counter-Vortex Rotor Engine, Mark VI, Version 2, lies gathering dust in a side cavern no faction currently claims. Huan Ken's sages spent two fruitless years poking at it, but even with the help of the notebooks Li Fan left behind, they made no progress. They turned to other pursuits, the eternal struggle of the Four Monarchs led to a tilt in the balance of power, and the whole project was abandoned.

## POWERS

Now chi is flowing again through the engine's cavern, thanks to more recent shifts in the struggle. Caviston never realized or accepted that he had developed a chi concentrator. It can both accelerate the flow of chi and generate some mechanical energy on the side: it really is a perpetual motion machine, but one founded on principles he never mastered. Someone willing to tinker with it (a Techie, say) could get it working in a matter of weeks. Once activated, it will draw enough chi to become a full-fledged, albeit minor, feng shui site, and also release a steady stream of 300 watts at 110 or 220 volts. Developing connectors to link modern devices and Caviston's eccentric output is an evening's work for a good electrical engineer.

Li Fan may still be roaming the Netherworld. She is about to turn fifty, and might have any reaction the GM thinks interesting to the prospect of strangers completing her father's life work.

## WALL OF A THOUSAND EYES

### *Netherworld Feng Shui Site*

Tsai Lu Suk found the meaning of his life's work in an American comic book. That was in 1985. Since 1975 he'd preyed upon the poor of Kowloon, keeping the eyes of his victims for reasons he'd never fully understood. In the comic book it all became clear. The story was about a serial killer who remembered the eyes of each of his victims and could tell a short story about each one. Lu Suk realized that the eyes are indeed the windows of the soul, and that in his collection of eyes lay the raw material of some new entity drawing on the souls of everyone he'd released from the prison of life.

Two years later he discovered a gateway to the Netherworld in the basement of a Triad-run gambling den, burned to the ground during a battle between the Dragons and Pledged toadies. It immediately seemed like home. He soon moved his eye collection to an unused Netherworld cavern and began studying magic under the tutelage of a Lotus sorcerer amused by his ambition. In time, of

course, he killed his mentor and added those eyes to his collection.

In 1990 he began work on his New Thing. It took careful fertility magic to create a receptive layer of moss throughout his home cavern. He embedded his eyes, one by one, into the moss. He adopted blind children and trained them to do the repetitive labor of tending the eyes with water and vitamin solutions and simple medicinal magic. Each eye grows a rudimentary brain at the end of its severed optical nerve, with some of the basic reflexes of its species. They constantly turn in their mossy sockets to survey the cavern, drawn to light and motion. Reflecting their various origins, they all blink independently (a sight that visitors usually find somehow especially disturbing).

Lu Suk owes no allegiance in the secret war. But he finds it a wonderful source of exotic raw materials. Nestled in among the human eyes are the eyes of demons, hopping vampires, various models of Abominations, and the like.

The cavern Lu Suk chose had no particular feng shui significance when he moved in. The eyes have changed that. They act as mirrors of chi, drawing in and endlessly reflecting positive chi while discharging negative chi through side glances down surrounding corridors. Lu Suk therefore lives in a bubble of good chi surrounded by an irregular zone of just plain bad luck. This has helped maintain his privacy.

### **Tsai Lu Suk**

Bod 4, Chi 3, Mnd 5, Ref 4

**Skills:** Info/Anatomy 15, Martial Arts 15, Sorcery 11  
**Sorcery Schticks:** Fertility, Heal, Influence

### **Children of the Wall**

Bod 4, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 4

**Skills:** Info/Eye Tending 10, Sorcery 8  
**Sorcery Schticks:** Fertility, Heal

If he is killed or otherwise removed, someone will have to take over the duties of maintaining the eyes. The children can teach a new keeper enough to do so—they simply can't do some things themselves, even though they know what must be done. (The children know that this is sort of an odd way to make a living, but Lu Suk is very kind to them and it still beats many Hong Kong orphanages.) If the eyes are not

maintained, they will shrivel and die over the course of a month or two.

### POWERS

Characters attuned to the Wall of a Thousand Eyes receive +3 AV to their perception for the purposes of spotting other characters trying to sneak up on them and/or ambush them.

## THE WILLIAMSON ESTATE

### *Feng Shui Site*

Frederick Williamson first came to the island of Hong Kong in 1835 as a diplomat with the British Foreign Office. Five years and a couple of successful trade speculations later, Williamson retired from the Foreign Office a very wealthy man. He bought some land on Lantau Island, settled down, got married, and began to indulge his first love in life: botany.

To better practice his hobby, Williamson had a huge greenhouse built to contain his beloved plants. Covering almost five acres, Frederick Williamson's Botanical Gardens became a legend in horticultural circles. Those walking among the twisting paths often said they felt as if they went on forever. It was said that in his greenhouse Williamson could get even the most stubborn plants to bloom, almost on demand. The man himself often said even he didn't quite understand why he had such spectacular luck with his plants, but that he was not inclined to investigate the matter too closely. Frederick Williamson's estate was a regular stop on the Hong Kong socialite circuit.

In 1848, inexplicably, everything went wrong for the Williamson family. First there were the bad investments that drained the family money. The two Williamson daughters were taken ill and died of brain fever. Finally, Frederick was killed by a falling pane of glass in his beloved greenhouse. This left only Williamson's wife and their newborn son. They stayed on at the estate, but the family never truly recovered. Soon they were living in only one wing of the house, and the out-buildings were left to rot. The greenhouse remained as it had been when Frederick died, the only memorial the

impoverished family could afford.

The Williamson estate remained in the possession of the family until 1929, when the American stock market ruined what small bit remained of the Williamson family fortune. The house has passed from owner to owner down through the years, universally causing bad luck to those who have chosen to live there. The last owner let the house revert to the Bank of Hong Kong in 1978, and the house has stood vacant ever since, despite the Bank's best efforts to unload it. The Williamson estate has a reputation that has rendered it nearly unsalable, and the run-down nature of the estate makes it unattractive to buyers.

### THE CURSE

Frederick Williamson built his estate, and specifically his greenhouse, directly on top of not only a feng shui site but a small Netherworld gate. Williamson's spectacular success with plants was due to the good feng shui of the estate's location, but he and his family had no inkling of the power of the land or the presence of the gate.

Unfortunately for himself and his family, Frederick made the fatal error of offending a local geomancer possessed of a particularly acrid disposition—and a rare prowess. The geomancer secretly placed stones around the Williamson estate that did more than just cut off the good feng shui of the site. The geomancer actually turned the site into a “feng shui sink,” a place that would sap the chi of any who dwelled there, causing them all kinds of bad fortune. As a side effect, the Netherworld gate was closed as well.

The effects were immediate and obvious. Misfortune befell the Williamsons, and the family was effectively destroyed, but the geomancer's curse lasted long after both the geomancer and the family had gone the way of all flesh. So skillfully and securely did he place the component stones of his curse that they remained undisturbed for over a century.

Only recently has the pall passed from the house. A section of the outlying grounds of the Williamson estate was appropriated by the local government for a road project about 2 years ago. During the road construction, one of the geomancer's stones was inadvertently destroyed, disrupting the feng shui sink. Thus the normal



favorable flow of feng shui was restored and the Netherworld gate reopened. None of the various factions have noticed the re-activation of this particular feng shui site... but it is only a matter of time until someone does.

### STATUS

The Williamson estate as it stands today covers about 100 acres, down from its original size of 150. It lies toward the southern end of Lantau Island, out of sight of the shore. The hilly landscape is very overgrown, with groves of trees scattered around the area. A small stream runs through the estate as well.

Most of the outbuildings are mere shells, with only the brick walls still standing. The main house—a modest Edwardian affair consisting of a central house and an east and west wing—stands mostly intact, although almost all of the windows have been broken out by vandals.

The interior of the house is bare and dusty. Chinese graffiti on the interior walls and the odd empty can of food (left by vagrants) are the only signs that anyone has been there recently. Structurally, the house has maintained its integrity well over the years.

Behind the house lies Frederick Williamson's beloved greenhouse. This glass and wrought-iron structure is actually taller than the main house, rising to about four stories high. As in the main house, many of the glass panes have been broken out of the structure, but perhaps not as many as one might have suspected. The stream that crosses the grounds runs directly through the greenhouse.

In the years since Frederick's death, the vast array of plants within the greenhouse have really gone wild, taking over the inside entirely. Thick vines and bushes jam the interior, and the trunks of trees twist up into the higher reaches of the building. Entering the greenhouse is a rough task, as the entrances are choked with vines and bushes. Once one passes this initial obstacle, strangely, there are still clear, natural paths within. These are twisting, turning trails that lead from the two entrances at either end to the humid interior of the garden. Somewhere amid this morass of plant life

lie the graves of Williamson's two daughters, and of Frederick Williamson himself. A variety of grottoes and secluded alcoves are scattered throughout the building as well.

The gate to the Netherworld opens at seemingly random times during the year, although anyone attuned to the site would soon learn to "feel" when the gate was about to be accessible, and eventually could open it on demand. It is invisible, and located in the center of the greenhouse. Anyone attuned to the site who senses the gate's existence can find it and open it. Other people, having seen it opened by someone else, can then use it on their own from then on.

### NOTES

The Williamson estate offers many plot possibilities for the creative game master. It is that rarest of rarities, a totally-unclaimed feng shui site. This alone could make it the centerpiece of an interesting power struggle. The players could stumble across the estate while on the run from some sort of threat, or find out that one of the factions has leaned of it and is taking steps to possess the estate.

Alternately, something or someone nasty could wander out of the Netherworld gate and terrorize the local populace. A faction could use the house as a staging ground from which to transfer people and supplies from the Inner Kingdom to the modern juncture. Then there are the restless spirits of Frederick Williamson and his two daughters...

### POWERS

In addition to providing the normal benefits of attuning to a feng shui site, the most obvious benefit of occupying the Williamson estate is having access to the Netherworld gate. After a few days of attunement to the estate, the PCs will be able to "feel" when the gate in the greenhouse is about to open. The gate opens pretty much at the GM's discretion, with the caveat that using it too often will strip it of its mystery. With sufficient time and experience, the GM may even allow attuned PC's to have some limited control over the gate.

# THE TRIUMVIRATE

Operation Killdeer occurred in the summer of 1995 (though GMs may set it whenever desired, or ignore it completely) and resulted in the deaths of a number of innerwalkers. Among them were Adrienne Hart, Jueding Shelun, and the Thing With 1,000 Tongues—all of whom are profiled elsewhere in this book.

The following story describes how Operation Killdeer came to a close. Afterwards, you'll find source information on the event, which led to the establishment of the Triumvirate and a threat to the entire world.

## ENDGAME: OPERATION KILLDEER

### NEW YORK, 1995

Adrienne Hart is nervous, and she doesn't like being nervous. She's not used to it. She is a self-molded person. She designed herself from the ground up specifically to avoid feeling nervous, or fearful, or not in control. To avoid feeling weakness of any sort. Her self-creation has been very successful. She rarely thinks of her days in the orphanage, of being a terrified little girl with only one friend in the world. She thinks instead of her present self: an elite assassin, the confidant of the Unspoken Name himself. The blade-sharp right hand of the secret ruler of the world. She thinks instead of how she made herself: the hours, the months, the years of grueling martial arts training. Of the two pledges she made. The first to the Order of the Wheel, the organization that led her to serve the Unspoken Name: absolute loyalty. The second to herself: control, always control. Never let any external state or situation affect you, Adrienne. Everything comes from within. There is nothing that matters to you other than your heart, your soul, and your deadly hands.

But as Adrienne Hart shifts awkwardly in a leather chair in an empty, luxurious

office suite in the MacMillan Building, she tries very hard not to think the thought that has been troubling her dreams. The first pledge is interfering with the second. She has lost control. Her heart belongs to another now.

That other comes into the room. Tall, straight-backed, his features sharp and hard. She jolts up, taking a sudden shock of breath into her mouth and lungs. The other seems as agitated as she is. They are both bound to the same dilemma. They have lost their hearts to one another. This is a love that is more than inconvenient, for the other is the Unspoken Name: the chairman of the Lodge, the conspiracy that has ruled the Earth for centuries. His blood is not entirely human. Nor is that of any of the other members of the Lodge. Adrienne is human, one of the Pledged who serve the Lodge. And love between a Lodge member and one of the Pledged is forbidden. It is a taboo big enough to cause grave problems for both of them. The Unspoken Name would be removed from his post if their desire were discovered. He would likely be killed by the other members of the Lodge; a disastrous blood feud could erupt. She would certainly be killed, her combat prowess not withstanding. It is certain that she could take dozens of

her fellow Pledged with her, but this is not a certitude that pleases her. Her whole life, her whole identity, is service to the Wheel. She cannot bear the thought of betraying it, and curses her own heart for betraying her. She really wants to go out and hit somebody really hard. Again and again, preferably. The Unspoken Name, her impossible lover, opens his mouth to speak. She hopes he is about to give her the opportunity to do just that.

He does not disappoint her. His words do not refer to their passion, but they do not need to: every pause between every word screams it.

“Adrienne, an assignment. Operation Killdeer. This is only a combat assignment if it goes disastrously wrong. It is still quite dangerous. You may refuse.”

Adrienne does not acknowledge this last sentence. She is shamed by it. For a Lodge member to offer a Pledged a choice of turning down even a life-threatening assignment is not a kindness: it is a sign of contemptible weakness in her lover. She wants to spit in his face. She wants to embrace him, and remain in his arms forever.

The Unspoken Name continues: “You are to observe the execution of a stratagem that has been long in preparation. These briefing papers will give you the full details of the operation. In short, we have prepared a trap for a group of our more bothersome adversaries in the Dragon and Lotus camps. We have put certain—excuse the pun—*wheels* in motion that will cause them to fight over the Red Lantern Tavern, Canton, 1850 juncture. Our infiltrators have convinced the leadership of both camps that to allow the other to capture this feng shui site would be to allow the other an overwhelming advantage in the secret war. This is, needless to say, a fabrication. The site is useful, but far from decisive, which is why we’re prepared to lose it. It is bait for a confrontation which will, ideally, cost them both dearly.

“However, we have broader objectives than simply the demise of prominent enemies. Operation Killdeer is, in a sense, an audition. We are displaying our expertise at manipulating the other actors in the secret war, for the benefit of some potential allies. You are to travel to 1850 Canton and ensure that they are properly impressed by our little demonstration. You will meet them at a noodle house down the street from the Red Lantern tavern; precise direc-

tions, as well as the code words to recognize your contacts, are contained in your briefing material.”

“So I just sit back and watch the others fight?”

“If there is insufficient Lotus and Dragon bloodshed, Adrienne, intervene. Our display must be dramatic. If this alliance bears fruit, our supremacy will be cemented once and for all.”

Adrienne stands and leaves the room, skipping the pleasantries. She is acting a role, that of her old business-like self. As she goes, she feels the longing of the Unspoken Name like hot sunlight on her back.

### CANTON, 1850

Sun Chen, legendary archer of the Guiding Hand, sits unhappily on a bench in the Red Lantern Tavern. He is not the man for this job, he thinks. He is a man to operate from a distance, to fell enemies on the open battlefield. He is not a spy, not even a close-up fighter. If something goes wrong, he will be at a disadvantage. Yet it did not even occur to him to question the orders of the Perfect Master, Quan Lo. Quan Lo told him to come here and wait; the tortoise-shell oracle has revealed that great and dangerous events will take place here soon. Sun Chen is completely dedicated to the objectives of the Hand. Therefore, he must be mistaken when he thinks himself a poor choice for this mission. In choosing him to monitor the Tavern, Quan Lo must have considered factors which elude Sun Chen. It is not possible that Quan Lo would make a strategic error. Sun Chen promises himself that he will live up to the Perfect Master’s faith in him.

What Sun Chen does not consider is that even Quan Lo has limited resources to draw from. Quan Lo realizes that Wong Fei Hong or Fong Sai Yuk would be better suited to this task. But they are far to the north, defending crucial feng shui sites from mysterious attackers. Quan Lo hopes that Sun Chen can contain any troubles that break out in Canton. He has seen the tortoise shells, however. The burn marks on the shells are chaotic and full of tormented, impossible lines. He fears that he is sacrificing Sun Chen. But he must know the full import of the omens contained on the surface of the shells. For the greatest weapon of the superior man is knowledge. If Sun

Chen falls, he will not be the last brave warrior to die in the name of the Hand. Quan Lo knows that the road to justice will be slick with the blood of the valiant before the struggle is over.

A hand squeezes Sun Chen's shoulder. Sun Chen starts; he is not a man accustomed to being taken by surprise. He reaches for the dagger at his belt; it is gone. The man who has touched him is already sitting down. He is wearing the garb of a traveling peddler, but it is obvious that he is a foreigner. He is much too tall, his build too broad, to be an underfed peasant. The man places Sun Chen's dagger on the table in front of him.

"Thought you might go for that. Bad idea. Your dossier says you're an arrow man. Didn't want you getting yourself hurt and all. Here, take it back."

Sun Chen gazes into the man's face. He has olive skin, curly black hair, a cleft chin. His face is deep and weathered. The words he has spoken are flat, containing neither friendliness nor malice. He meets Sun Chen's eyes calmly, confidently.

"Thought I'd introduce myself before things get hot. We're here for similar reasons. We have no reason to be friends, but we have no reason to kill each other, either. Least not this time around. We're spectators and should keep it that way. Especially you, Sun Chen. This isn't going to be a job for Arrow Boy."

Sun Chen feels the flesh on the back of his neck burning with anger. The stranger has found his secret anxiety as easily as Sun Chen would find the center of a target; the stranger exploits this weakness casually. Sun Chen can tell that he has a knack for nonchalantly slicing away at a man's pride, a knack that he uses out of habit. The archer separates himself from his rage, disowns it. He remembers the words of Quan Lo: 'The angry warrior does not persevere.' Sun Chen elects to find his own power in this meeting: the power of silence. He will wait for the stranger to reveal himself.

Instead, the stranger stands. "There's lots of people who have a reason to die tomorrow. We're not among them. You're not stupid, so don't get stupid. Don't mess with me and I won't mess with you."

The stranger leaves the tavern. Sun Chen could easily put an arrow at the base of his neck in less time than it would take him to draw a breath. Something tells him he should. But he does not.

## HONG KONG, 1995

Tricia Kwok holds tight to the armrest of Johnny Tso's night-black Maserati as Johnny takes a too-tight curve onto Cotton Tree Drive at his usual reckless speed. Nothing is going to slow Johnny down: he already smells Lotus blood, mingled with the aroma of his own shotgun shells. Johnny has a special hatred for the Lotus: their Poison Thorn goons killed his folks. Only hours ago, he was happily preparing for a trip through the Netherworld to 1850. There'd be Lotus aplenty to take down there: they were making a play for the Red Lantern Tavern in Canton. Then came a call from Fast Eddie Lo himself: Lotus activity down on the docks. One of Fast Eddie's boys had seen what might have been Big Brother Tsien himself, resurfacing after all these months. Before the others could protest, Johnny was changing his plans. Sorcerers in 19th century Canton were one thing, but right in his home town? That hit another priority level for him. Reluctantly, Kar Fai let them split up: he, Zheng Yi Quan, Kwok and Tso would look for Tsien. Donovan, McCroun, Mané, and Zheng's students would continue with the Canton operation.

Tricia feels something gnawing at the pit of her stomach. The timing of this Tsien sighting is too tight to be a coincidence. The others have learned to trust Fast Eddie, but she's never warmed to him. She's seen the police intelligence files on the guy, seen the bodies he's left behind over the years. There's more to Fast Eddie than just the typical triad profile; he had to be as deep into somebody's pocket as the demon-worshipping Tsien was into the Lotus. And Tsien hadn't been spotted for months; something was fishy, and it wasn't just the smell of the docks.

Tricia, Zheng, Kar Fai, and Johnny are at the waterfront. Tricia turns out to be right: no Big Brother Tsien, no Poison Thorns, no sorcerers, no demons. They've been had. Detoured. Tricia resolves to have a one-on-one with Fast Eddie. A heavily armed one-on-one.

## CANTON, 1850

Jueding Shelun pauses to luxuriate in his own brilliance. It was he who had found out about the importance of the Red

Lantern Tavern, having carefully and ruthlessly interrogated countless Canton informants. It was he who presented the plan to Gao Zhang, Center of the Lotus, and fought for its adoption despite the jealous protestations of his fellow sorcerers. It was he who had journeyed to the Underworld, his retainers suffering terrible casualties on the hazardous trek, to secure the cooperation of the much-feared Thing With 1,000 Tongues. It was he who was moments away from striking a decisive blow for the Lotus, from announcing that they had joined the secret war in force. With the Red Lantern in Lotus hands, 1850 will soon fall to Gao Zhang. Like spilled mah jongg tiles, the other junctures will follow. Why? Because Jueding Shelun is a genius. And why is he a genius? Because he does not bother with the foolish subtlety of his foes, used to pursuing their own tails. He will employ sudden, brutal, shocking force.

The signal comes from below. The Thorns of the Lotus are in place. Jueding titters, in his high, unearthly voice, and pulls the crystals of materialization from the folds of his cloak. He throws them down from his rooftop perch to the hardened earth of the street below. The crystals hit with a deafening crash. The sky darkens, and noon becomes night. A portal from the Underworld opens in the street. A vast and obscene creature squirms its way through the gaping hole in the earth. It pulls itself to its full six-story height. The Thing With 1,000 Tongues. It stomps towards the Red Lantern Tavern, the noise of its approach underscored by the hysterical laughter of Jueding Shelun.

Within the Tavern, Sun Chen's eyes widen in shock. He has encountered demons before, but none so enormous as the one now headed towards him. He withdraws his arrows, standing his ground. Around him patrons of the Red Lantern, normally a rough and self-possessed lot, are fleeing in undisguised panic. He will not panic, he tells himself. He will prove himself. In his eagerness to show that he is suited for his mission, Sun Chen overlooks its exact details. As the demon looms above him, he forgets that this is not his fight, that he is merely to observe. Sun Chen looses a rain of arrows into the writhing maw of the demon.

The street now echoes with the sound of blade raining upon blade. The Friends of

the Dragon, Zheng Yi Quan's students, fight with valor even though their master is not present to see them. They face the Vassals of the Lotus, bandits and extortionists unused to serious opposition. The Friends of the Dragon lack experience; the Vassals want for morale. Their struggle is not a whip-sharp ballet of violence, but an ugly and chaotic jostling. Many fall on both sides.

Joining the battle are three of the Dragons' finest: Jack Donovan, wise-cracking L.A. cop. Iala Mané, an unpredictable warrior hardened under Africa's sun. Mad Dog McCroun, a big bruiser with the soul of a poet. Donovan and Mané take on the gigantic demon. Donovan peppers it with handgun fire while Mané gets beneath it and tries to topple its pillar-like legs. McCroun scrambles up onto the rooftop to confront the giggling sorcerer. He directs a hammer-blow of a punch to the sorcerer's face. Jueding Shelun reels back for a moment, and then levitates from the top of the roof. He opens his mouth, and a stream of fire pours from it. McCroun goes up in flames.

Adrienne Hart is watching from the interior of an antique shop. The shop keeper and his customers have already fled. She has observed the scene with a mixture of excitement and detachment. Her fighter's sinews yearn to be out in the fight, but her common sense tells her there is nothing to be gained by participating. Until she sees McCroun.

Now she can see only images of the past. Her and McCroun as children, in the orphanage. They called him Mad Dog even then. But he protected her, was her only friend. She had thought him long dead. But here he was, a secret warrior fighting for the Dragons. And probably dying before her eyes.

It takes only moments for Adrienne to vault herself through the antique shop window, to bounce from the opposite wall, and to leap onto the rooftop. The flaming corpse of Mad Dog McCroun falls past her as she leaps. She kicks the levitating sorcerer in the jaw, breaking it.

The Thing With 1,000 Tongues has seized Sun Chen in its enormous fists, ignoring Donovan and Mané. It breaks Sun Chen's back and tosses him idly into an alleyway.

Sun Chen, his vision dimming with agony, falls at the feet of the mysterious man he met the day before inside the tavern. The stranger shakes his head in mock sympathy.

"Thought you were smarter than that, Arrow Boy."

Despite his apparent calm, the man has a weapon out. Sun Chen knows enough about the secret war to recognize it as an arcanowave device. The stranger serves the Architects.

The gigantic demon turns its attention to Donovan, stomping him into juice with a single crushing stomp of its foot.

Adrienne Hart launches herself at the sorcerer as he blasts her with his breath of fire. She wraps her arms around him, and that's the end of his levitating. The two of them fall to the hard packed dirt of the Canton street. Adrienne twists herself so that Jueding Shelun takes the brunt of the impact. She hears the familiar sound of bones cracking. His and hers both.

Sun Chen dismisses the pain from his body, thinking only of the indifferent humiliation the Architect has visited upon him. Broken back and all, he throws himself to his feet, grabbing the man from behind and locking their bodies together. He cartwheels into the street, using the Architect as a shield, dashing back towards the demon. Sun Chen knows he will die now. He just wants to take the Architect with him.

Jueding Shelun staggers to his feet, as does Adrienne Hart. His jaw is broken. He raises an arm to blast her into dust. Then he sees the cartwheeling men coming towards him. He moves his smoldering hand to roast them instead. The flames envelop Sun Chen and the Architect, whose name happens to be Nirmal Yadav. Both are instantly slain.

Iala Mané has climbed the body of the Thing With 1,000 Tongues as if it is a baobab tree. He kicks into the soft, mushy cranium of the beast, sending foul green spew everywhere. It gets into Mané's eyes, burns him. He finds himself falling, spinning, but cannot control his descent.

Adrienne sees the demon falling towards her. She kicks the sorcerer into its path. Fate gives him a moment to howl in impotent rage before the vast bulk of the slain demon crushes him utterly. She staggers backwards, falling against the shattered wall of the Red Lantern Tavern. Blood is running down from the crown of her head, falling into her eyes. She is as blind as Mané, who is lying motionless but alive in the middle of the street. The last of the Vassals of the Lotus have fled with a few Friends of the Dragon in pursuit.

A man walks up behind the blinded Adrienne Hart and shoots her in the head. She falls, attracting no notice from those on the street.

The man who has just shot her is known as Mr. X. He used to have a normal name, but he has almost forgotten it. No one else knows it, not even his fellow Lodge members. Names are like socks, to be changed frequently. They mean nothing to him. He's used so many names that he sometimes confuses his old identities with the people he has murdered.

He strides contentedly over to his guests, the two people Adrienne Hart was supposed to make a connection with. Mr. X is not sorry about having to kill her. He is never sorry about anything. He is pleased. Pleased that he is able to monitor the Unspoken Names' activities, able to note this unseemly attraction and nip a problem in the bud. Mr. X does not want distractions to ruin the Ascended's new plan. This is why he is here himself, to take out Adrienne Hart and take over her mission.

The mission starts as he greets his guests. They, a man and a woman, are both Chinese, but their costumes mark them as strangers to 1850s Canton. The man wears armor that suggests an odd hybrid of the Ming Dynasty and medieval Islamic style. The woman's garb seems almost Aztec, but her arm of pure darkness attracts far more of Mr. X's attention than her attire.

The woman, with regal detachment, points her chin towards Adrienne's body.

"I thought she was one of yours."

"She became an impediment. Now, I trust our organizational capacity has been appropriately demonstrated."

"Indeed. You even got an unexpected Architect and Hand in the bargain."

Mr. X smiles. "Unexpected?" Actually, they were completely unexpected, but he isn't going to let his new allies know that.

"Now let us speak of the Molten Heart."

The three conspirators do not see Iala Mané, who has crawled within earshot. Mané plays dead, listening carefully, knowing that a new chapter in the secret war is about to begin. Mané promises himself that this new chapter will have a different sort of ending. The kind of ending in which a full accounting is taken for the slain.

## WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

Li Ting (King of the Fire Pagoda) and Ming I (Queen of the Darkness Pagoda) were, as usual, up to no good. The pair had been pooling magical resources for years in the hopes of finding a way to control the portals that led from the Netherworld to the four junctures. Their sorcerers and scholars toiled for several years, and finally found a way to do it. Unfortunately, Fire and Darkness magics were not going to be enough, the two Monarchs needed outside help.

Li Ting had the answer. He and Ming I both agreed that they had little chance of controlling the world again as they once had, and that solidifying their hold on the Netherworld was the wisest move. There they could build a power base and perhaps, eventually, return and conquer the world. But that wasn't going to happen as long as the Secret War was going on—there were too many factions, too many agendas, and the Monarchs wouldn't stand a chance. So, Li Ting suggested that they approach the Lodge of the Ascended, who dared not enter the Netherworld because of its highly-magical nature. If the Ascended were up to the challenge, they'd form an alliance, complete the magical artifact that would let them control the portals, and split their kingdoms: the Ascended could have Earth, and the Monarchs would keep the Netherworld. The other factions would be shut out, and the Ascended would spend years hunting them down and taking them out. Sooner or later, the Ascended would rule the world—and perhaps, one day, the Monarchs could put them in their place.

Ming I and Li Ting approached the Ascended and proposed an alliance. The Ascended were very interested, needless to say, and offered to stage a demonstration to prove their worth. This demonstration was Operation Killdeer: the Ascended showed how effortlessly they could manipulate the other factions into destroying each other. Suitably impressed, the two Monarchs and the Ascended forged their alliance.

Yet they still needed help with the creation of the Molten Heart, the techno-magical artifact that would allow the alliance to control all of the Netherworld portals. The Ascended suggested the Jammers as a third partner, correctly judging that the Jammers would have the knowledge needed to make the Molten Heart a reality. To convince the

Jammers to cooperate, the Ascended orchestrated a subtle game of deception. Through a weeks-long series of furtive contacts, dropped hints, and outright lies, they brought elements of the Jammers into contact with “rogue” sorcerers of the two Monarchs. These sorcerers told their Jammer buddies about the Heart, what it would take to get it working, and (here comes the smooth lie. . .) that it would almost certainly cut off the flow of chi among the junctures when the portals were shut down, dampening the power of feng shui sites on Earth.

Needless to say, this sounded great to the Jammers, who bought the ruse hook, line, and sinker. (Of course, the Molten Heart had no affect on chi flow, and the “rogue sorcerers” were Pledged operatives.) When Li Ting approached Battlechimp Potempkin soon afterwards, the Jammer leader agreed to an alliance with the two Monarchs and the Ascended. Thus was born the Triumvirate.

## THE MOLTEN HEART

With the three-way alliance cemented, the technicians of the Jammers and the sorcerers of the two Monarchs got to work. Months passed as the team sought ways to combine magic and technology in the creation of something new. The shaping powers offered by the Netherworld were invaluable.

Meanwhile, the two Monarchs began to construct a new stronghold in the Netherworld: the Fire and Darkness Pavilion. This was to be the resting place of the Molten Heart, guarded by the fiercest warriors of both Monarchs, Pledged operatives of the Ascended, and a motley assortment of Netherworld mercenaries who'd been led to believe that the Ascended would reward them for helping usher in a new order. It was in the Fire and Darkness Pavilion that the Jammers and the Monarch sorcerers completed their work.

In the end, they succeeded in creating the Molten Heart. This powerful artifact allowed its controllers to open and close Netherworld portals at will, even shutting them all down if desired. It threatened to end the Secret War once and for all, and leave the Ascended as the masters of Earth for all time.

## WHAT WENT WRONG

Obviously, things didn't work out according to plan. What happened? That's up to you and your campaign. In our campaign, a bunch of Dragons (including the valiant heroine Ting Ting) got wind of the plot through Jammer contacts who suspected that they'd been misled. (The Dragons, of course, were hot for post-Killdeer vengeance on the Ascended.) They figured out what was going on and ended up in a massive Netherworld battle that resulted in the destruction of the Molten Heart and the deaths of the Monarch sorcerers working on the project. The Jammers betrayed the Triumvirate and pulled out before everything went up in smoke.

In your campaign, things might have ended differently. Perhaps the Ascended had some ulterior plot of their own, or perhaps the Architects clued in and waxed the deal. Maybe the Molten Heart was not destroyed, but simply disappeared—Lusignan might have it, stuck in his tower someplace, or maybe the Prof is tinkering with it to see how it works. Since your campaign is probably starting post Killdeer, the starting PCs may never have heard of this whole story, meaning you can twist the ending any way you like to set up future

plotlines. And of course, whoever tells them about what happened may put a whole different spin on the truth for their own purposes.

The status quo post-Triumvirate is pretty simple to figure out. The Ascended and the two Monarchs have ended their alliance (since they no longer have anything to gain) but are not enemies. The Jammers trust the Monarchs even less than before, and are actively hated by the Monarchs now where before they were simply a nuisance. The other two Monarchs found out about the plot after the fact, but have kept their opinions to themselves. The Ascended still regard the Jammers as a bunch of easily manipulated fools, while the Jammers have realized how insidious the Ascended really are.

One small part of this storyline has not yet been resolved. During Operation Killdeer, the Ascended operative known only as Mr. X murdered Pledged assassin Adrienne Hart because he knew that she and the Unspoken Name were in love. This killing was not part of his orders; he did it on his own, to protect the Ascended from the chaos that the situation could cause. This will not be the last time that Mr. X goes beyond his orders—he has an agenda of his own that will be revealed in times to come.

## STILL HUNGRY? MORE IS ON THE WAY.



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