

THE SHOGUNATE



A PLAYSTATION 2 SOURCEBOOK

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THE SHOGUNATE

A SOURCEBOOK FOR WASTE WORLD

BILL KING

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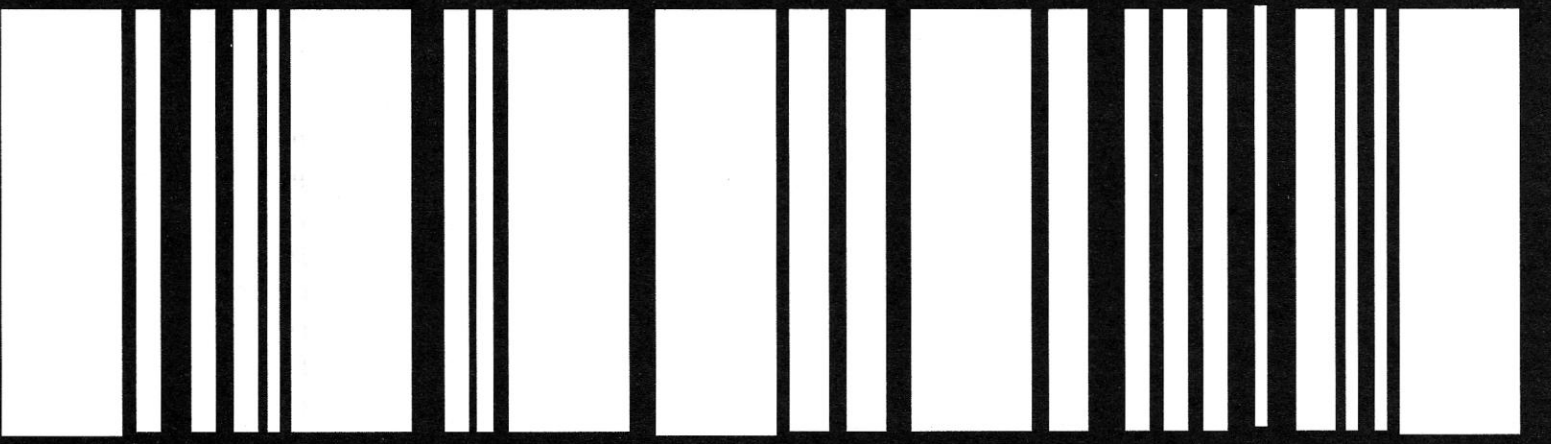
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DATA CORE ONE

A barcode consisting of vertical black bars of varying widths on a white background.

SHANG

PREPARE TO DOWNLOAD

VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM : ON
FLOW LINK QUASI PROTOCOL INITIATED
FILE SUB-PROTOL: SHANG
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:
VALIDATE SIMULATION

INITIATE SEQUENCE
NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:
INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:
LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY
MOLECULAR BINARY:

GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE
MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON
SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR
DYSFUNCTION
MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON

CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
SMART CHIP INSTALLED
METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

INTRODUCTION

LOGIN:

PASSWORD:

ACCESS GRANTED

SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:

EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:

SUB system COORDINATES

X1:434.37.8 X2:196.00.2

Y1:612.33.1 Y2:346.001.2

Z2: 21 2122 Z1: 45.62.8

ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:

SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD

AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE

SMART CHIP INSTALLED

BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:

NANOCOCIPITAL DRIVER

BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO

BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT

AMOEBOID DRONE: PRESENT

PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:

STORYMODE INITIATING

I Kimoka leaned out over the handlebars of his skimmer-bike and studied the streets below the way a hunting falcon would scan the desert dunes. The superhighways and skyscraper pagodas of his home sector stretched off to the horizon. Turning his head he saw the monolithic bulk of the sector wall behind him, the barrier that separated the lawless area of the Kitsune realm from his own Clan's well-run domain. A beep in the ear piece of his helm announced an incoming message.

"Mutants sighted entering through access way near junction five. Coordinates x76.5, y45.2."

At last, he thought, some action. He turned to the rest of his patrol and gave the hand signal to move out. As one, the five samurai of his retinue activated their engines. The hum of skimmerdrives vibrated the air. Kimoka twisted the hand grip and his bike slid smoothly forward on its anti-gravity field.

As he passed the exit of their watch station he was already doing over 100 kph and accelerating. The road spooled past beneath him at eye-blurring speed. He passed skimmercars and heavy trucks as if they were standing still. Just for the fun of it, he thumbed the activation button of his siren. Its banshee wail drowned out the rush of the wind past his helmet. No one could be in any doubt that he and his retainers were samurai going about the business of enforcing the law.

The road dropped dramatically, descending nearly a thousand meters in a single kilometer. Branch points and cloverleaf intersections blurred by. The pagodas grew ever broader and more massive as the patrol raced downward towards their bases. The temperature dropped appreciably as they entered the starscrapers' massive shadows.

Kimoka pulled his bike around at almost ninety degrees to the boundary wall of the highway, and shot into the Zazami tunnel. His patrol adjusted to his movements without needing to be told. They were all good warriors. They had followed him throughout the desert campaigns against the Skavengers. He was glad they were with him on this relatively easy duty, simply keeping the peace and enforcing the law in their own home sector.

A warning chime sounded within his helmet. The coordinates the dispatcher had given him were fast approaching. He was directly beneath a fly over. Massive stanchions held the roadway in place above his head. The rumble of traffic made the air vibrate. He began to decelerate keeping his eyes peeled for shadowy figures.

There! From the corner of his eye, he saw the running figures, and pulled the bike around in a tight turn, continuing to decelerate. No doubt about it, mutants. He could see their grossly distorted forms from where he sat. They were clad in brightly colored rags, with scarves wrapped around their heads and thick robes to hide their disfigurement. As Kimoka watched a kimono flapped open to reveal a glittering reptilian hide.

The mutants were already running for the access tunnel that led back into the Kitsune sector and the Boar patrol leader was tempted just to let them go, until he noticed that several of them were turning to face him and unlimbering weapons no mutant should have. A few brandished forceblades, one or two even had blasters.

Ronin, he thought.

He ducked low in his seat as blaster bolts whizzed by his head and brought his bike round amid the mass of mutants. Reaching deep into his being, he touched Tau. As his bike slid to a halt, he jerked his forceblade free from its scabbard and vaulted over the handlebars straight into the fray. A wolf-man and a serpent mutant blocked his way. They brandished powerblades and a chain naginata. He raced past them, striking as he went.

A sweep of his blade parted a serpent head from scaly shoulders and separated a clawed hand from a furry arm. He landed on his feet directly in front of one of the forceblade-wielding mutants. Almost casually he deflected another blaster bolt, and gave his attention to the mutant leader.

"It is forbidden for you to bear such a weapon, mutant. The sentence is death."





The mutant looked at him. Half his face appeared to have melted. One of his eyes hung on a stalk. He reached inside his kimono and scratched his chest with clawed fingers. Kimoka almost gagged at the mass of festering sores in the mutant's flesh. The mutant stamped one of his hooves on the ground and spat.

"You are just like all Boars, all mouth. If you want this blade you will have to take it from me. I am samurai, just as you pretend to be."

A red haze descended on I Kimoka. He knew the mutant was taunting him, hoping to force him to lose his temper. He fought for control but it was difficult. He could almost taste the bloodlust rising within him. He forced himself to speak although his voice was almost strangled by his rage.

"No mutant has a right to that blade. It was one of the First Edicts. Only samurai may bear the weapons of samurai. You forfeited any right when you became tainted. If you had any honor you would have committed seppuku. Most likely you were never samurai anyway. Most likely you stole the weapon from a dead man's hand."

The mutant laughed then sprang. The blow was lightning swift and, had Kimoka been a lesser bladesman, his head would have parted company from his shoulders. As it was, he barely managed a parry, and the mutant blocked his counterstroke almost negligently. I Kimoka smiled. It served him right for underestimating his foe. The mutant had indeed been a samurai, and a mighty one. His furious attack drove the Boar leader back a dozen paces before he managed to halt his retreat.

Around them his patrol and the mutants had halted their fight to watch the battle. I Kimoka had the measure of his man now. He aimed at blow at the ronin's neck, then at the last second swept it down, drawing blood from the man's leg. If the mutant had been a fraction less swift, he would have lost the limb.

Slowly, step by step Kimoka forced his foe back to the place where they had first traded blows. There the mutant halted. They stood their ground, matching blow for blow and parry for parry, blades flickering faster than the eye could follow. The observers were silent, entranced by the combat, certain they were watching two masters at work.

Almost by mutual consent they sprang apart and stood looking at each other gasping. "I apologize," panted I Kimoka. "You were indeed once samurai."

He bowed his head slightly, never taking his eye off his foe. The mutant bowed back slowly and deeply, keeping his eyes on the ground. I Kimoka swept forward. His blade separated the mutant's head from his shoulders and sent it rolling free.

Seeing the death of their leader, the mutants threw down their weapons and turned and fled into the tunnel mouth. I Kimoka signaled for his men to let them go. He saw his samurai looking at him strangely. They were wondering at his stroke, taken when his foe was bowing, thinking that perhaps it had been dishonorable.

He smiled at them, wondering how long it would take for them to realize what he knew already, that the mutant had wanted to die. He had been too great a warrior to knowingly let his guard down. He had chosen a warrior's death and thus regained his honor.

"Burn his corpse as you would burn a samurai's," he said, and turned and walked away. Slowly, the meaning of what happened percolated into his retinue's minds and they began to beat their hands against their chest plates in samurai applause.

INTRODUCTION

The Shogun rules his mysterious realm with an iron fist. He is the last of a line of rulers who have forged the destiny of this mighty megacity and defended it from all threats. He leads the samurai, the mightiest warriors of an age of constant warfare, into battle with their enemies. He oversees the destiny of billions. He is like unto a god to his people, the living embodiment of their power and pride.

The Shogunate is one of the oldest and most powerful of all the metrozones. It covers vast areas of Eastern Avernus and is home to uncountable millions of people. It is a place of mystery to the rest of the world, with most of its sectors forbidden to outsiders.

The source of the Shogunate's wealth and power is simple. It sits amid the largest stable Drakonium field on the planet. Its people harvest so much of the energy source that they can export it to other metrozones.

The entire city-state is surrounded by a huge wall, nearly a kilometer high, studded with defensive emplacements and patrolled by merciless warriors. Some say that this is as much to keep inhabitants inside as to keep outsiders out. Nonetheless, the rumors of the Shogunate's vast wealth, and the legend that its people possess the secret of true immortality, draw the adventurous and the greedy from across the Waste World.

Within the Shogunate's towering walls a strange and secretive culture has grown: a society at once astonishingly disciplined and completely anarchic, a civilization where honor counts for more than wealth and people fear disgrace far more than they fear death. Indeed, it is a place where death is regarded as no more than a temporary inconvenience.

Every citizen of the metrozone has a karmachip implant that stores their memories and personality, and its contents can be downloaded into a new clone body upon death, if its owner is judged worthy.

The hope of immortality, and a better life in a future incarnation, helps keep the peace in a society riven by a bitter class divide. On one side of this gulf stand the samurai clans, the warrior aristocracy of the Shogunate who own everything. On the other side are the commoners who own nothing, and live lives of virtual slavery.

The samurai clans vie with each other for power, wealth and influence, each seeking to gain the upper hand in a struggle that has gone on for millennia. Often the outcome of all their scheming is civil war, and internal turmoil.

The Shogunate extends into the datasphere of the Ultramundae. It is enveloped in its own distinct virtual world, the Spirit Realms, home to the Kami and Oni, the artificially intelligent spirits and demons of this electronic world.

The Shogunate is one of the few places on Waste World where psychers are not persecuted. Instead they are trained in the use of their abilities,, and their fearsome powers are put at the service of society.

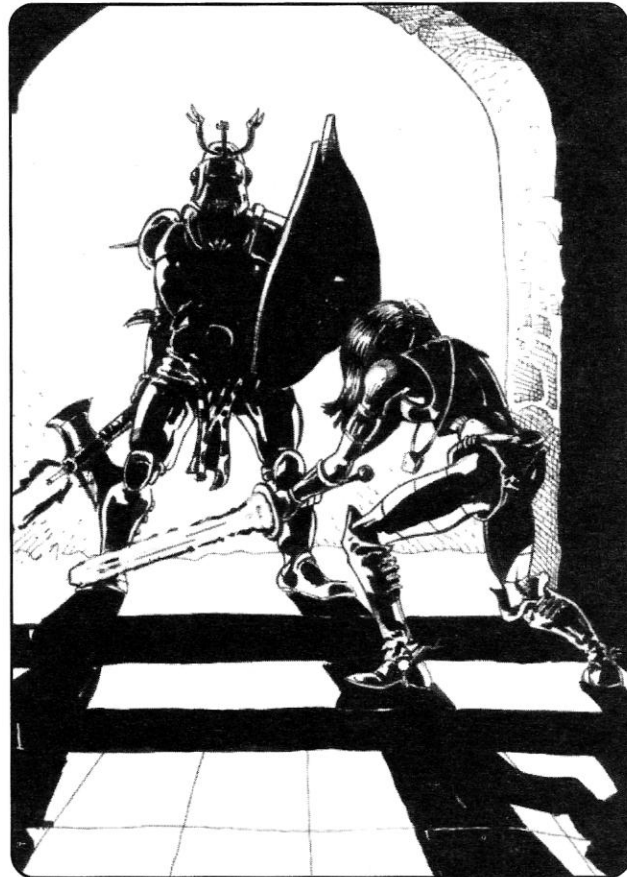
In the shadows of Shogunate society lurks the vast criminal conspiracy known as the Yakuza syndicate, and the many different factions of ninja, each a master of many terrible powers.

THE BIRTH OF AN EMPIRE

Before the Armageddon Wars, the core of what was to become the Shogunate was known as Shang. Shang was said to be the most beautiful city in all the world, a place of luxurious towers covered in hanging gardens. Great beds of flowers dripped from trellises on the sides of the pagodas, sculpted park lands separated the starscrapers. The citizens were quiet, contemplative and stately. They seemed to have overcome all human woes. No one was hungry or sick. Crime was rare. Cloning technology preserved their consciousness after death.

At Shang's center lay the Black Pagoda, a monstrous structure, part civic palace, part museum, part research laboratory, one of the wonders of the world. The Black Pagoda was the repository of many alien artifacts.

When the Armageddon Wars ravaged the world, the folk of Shang took refuge in bunkers deep beneath their beautiful city. They roofed themselves over with armored ferrocrete ten meters thick and burrowed deep into the earth to escape the destruction that raged overhead. Autofacs and agrifacs were moved below ground to protect them from bombing, as were the bodybanks and karmic engines that provided immortality to the citizens.



Yet even here, deep below the surface, the War came. Rogue Panzers, reprogrammed by the Apocalypse Virus, stalked the tunnels, slaying anyone they encountered. Demons flickered with malignant energies as they sought their prey in the darkened corridors. The people were forced to turn every chamber and every bunker into a sealed fortress with massive armored bulkheads that could be slid into place at a moment's notice to give the defenders time to muster or flee. It looked as if the population of Shang would be wiped out.

Following a prophetic dream, one brave young man went on a quest to the surface. He found nothing but ruins and scattered fortresses rising from what had once been a great garden city. He fought his way through a world gone mad, made many friends and enemies, until eventually, with the aid of the alien shapeshifters called the Kitsune, he managed to penetrate the Black Pagoda and found the Three Celestial Heirlooms.

These mystical artifacts granted him godlike powers. They transformed him into a black-armored super-being who went on to forge a coalition of warriors that turned back the forces of evil, and saved the people of Shang. The youth took the title of Shogun. Those who followed him were to become the samurai.



The Shogun foresaw that only in unity was there strength for humanity to resist those who would destroy it. He took supreme power on himself and passed many edicts that he saw as necessary for the survival of humanity. These edicts would shape the warrior society. He banned robots or any form of mobile thinking machine. Robots had almost wiped out humanity once, they would never do so again. He passed the laws of karma. He reclaimed parts of Shang from the Warlords who ruled it, and he ruthlessly destroyed all the enemy metrozones who surrounded it.

Then, having made his city safe, he vanished, never to return. The Three Heirlooms were left behind in the Black Pagoda, and the wars of succession began. The victor claimed the heirlooms and became the second Shogun. Thus was born a long tradition that continues to the present day.

A FEUDAL CIVILIZATION

Power flows downward from the Shogun. He is considered the ultimate source of all authority. Shogunate society is organized in descending ranks, each of whose members owe allegiance to someone of the rank above them and are owed allegiance by people of the rank below them.

The Shogun is supreme ruler of the city. The Overlords of the ruling clans swear fealty to him. The lords of the lesser clans take oaths of allegiance to the Overlords. Within the clan structure are various ranks of samurai. Those of lesser rank always owe allegiance to those of greater rank. The commoners owe allegiance to the samurai who rule them.

Thus society is organized in a great web of feudal obligation and duty. Slowly, by a process of elimination, people can work their way up the hierarchy over a number of lives by showing obedience and loyalty to their superiors and to the social codes of their culture.

THE PEOPLE OF THE SHOGUNATE

COMMONERS

Society in the Shogunate is organized into several broad divisions. At the bottom of the heap are the commoners, far and away the most numerous class. The commoners are the workers who labor in the factories and building sites and agridomes to produce the necessities of life for all of society. Their lives are short and brutish and their living conditions are often appalling. They receive little pay and are kept going only by the promise of a new life after this one. They are forbidden to own weapons, property or vehicles.

SAMURAI

Above the commoners are the samurai, the warrior aristocracy who own everything. The samurai are the soldiers and police of the Shogunate, often fulfilling both roles simultaneously. They are well armed and well trained. They are the only people allowed to carry the ceremonial forceblade. As well as being their badge of rank and symbol of authority, the forceblade is a samurai's favored weapon. The penalty for any non-samurai found carrying a forceblade is death.

Most of their very long lives are spent either fighting or practicing for battle. They are masters of the martial arts and of Tau. Indeed, it is the ability to use these strange powers that truly separates the samurai from the commoners. Tau powers enable their users to perform superhuman feats by focusing their own internal energies. Martial artists with this gift can punch through brick walls, leap to astonishing heights, and dodge bullets.

To become a samurai you must be adopted into a samurai clan. This usually only happens after several lifetimes of exceptional service to the Clan, or if one performs some great service, such as saving the Overlord's life.

Once you become a samurai there are many subtle variations of rank. In theory, there are various grades through which one passes, but there are other more subtle badges of distinction. The number of lives one has lived, one's reputation on the battlefield or in the chambers of the wise can all make a low-ranking samurai more respected than a high-ranking fool. At the upper levels of the Clans there is constant internecine intrigue to become Clanlord.

RONIN

Somewhere above the commoners but below the samurai of the Clans are the ronin. These are masterless samurai who for some reason do not belong to a Clan. They may have been expelled by their Clan for some misdeed. They may be people whose Clan has been wiped out. The reason does not affect their status. What matters is that they are nearly universally perceived to be bandits and troublemakers and folk who have lost all honor.

MUTANTS

Mutants are persecuted throughout the Shogunate. The more human looking ones find a haven in the Foreigner's Quarter. The others must lurk in the sewers, ruined sectors and the deep underground sections of the city, coming forth only to scavenge for food.

Commoners who mutate are doomed to flee into the darkest recesses of the Underzone or face death. Samurai usually choose to commit ritual suicide, knowing that they can get a new body from the bodybanks as long as they behave honorably.



Of course, a few may choose for their own reasons to become ronin, outcasts from the laws of the Shogunate, but most prefer to do the honorable thing. The people of the Shogunate refer to mutants as the Unclean Ones.

It goes without saying that mutants, particularly the powerful ones, are prime candidates for recruitment by ninja. They are often sufficiently vengeful and powerful to make excellent assassins.

There are many mutants lurking in the Underzones of the Foreigner's Quarters, even though they are forbidden to set foot in the Shogunate by law, and are hunted down without mercy by the samurai. Given the pollution and background radiation in the metrozone, it is almost inevitable that people mutate, despite the precautions taken by every Clan.

In order to survive, mutants must hide out in the furthest and most inaccessible recesses of the Underzones. They usually band together for mutual aid and protection and to mount stealthy raids on the more civilized sectors for food, medicine and equipment. When food is scarce, these gangs are not above committing acts of cannibalism.

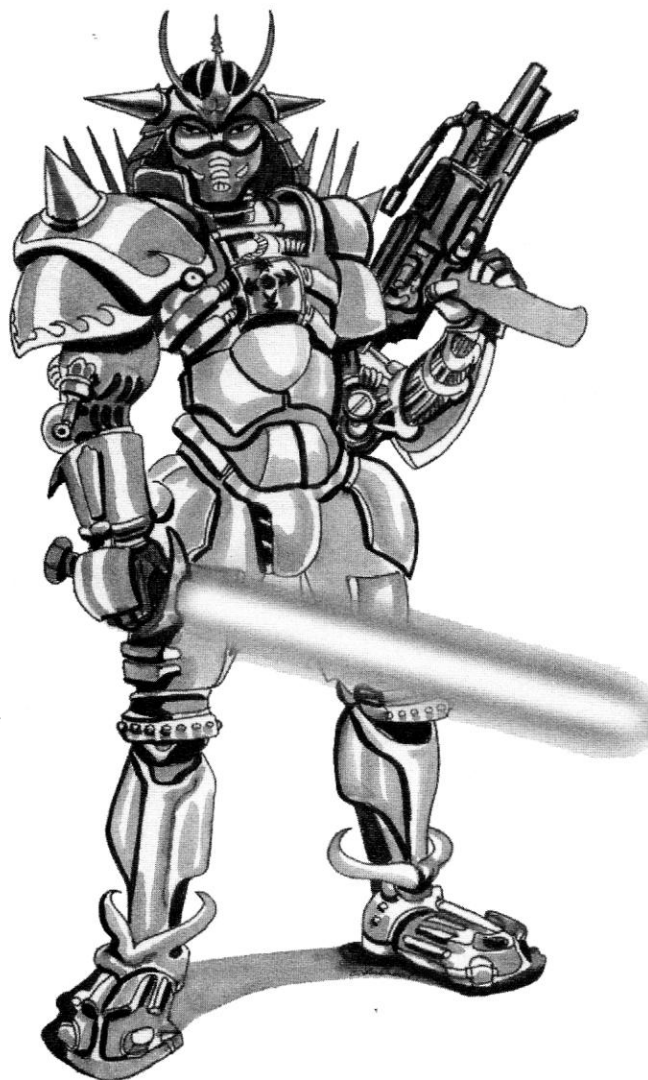
Sometimes led by a charismatic Prophet, Mutant Hordes gather in the dark and burst forth from the underground in a seething tide of madness and violence. Overcome by hatred of all that they see, they will kill without mercy until they themselves die.

CYCLICAL HISTORY

Several major factors shape the history of this metrozone. The first and most important is that there can only be one Shogun: the wearer of the ceremonial crown and armor, and the bearer of the Black Blade. The Shogun is the supreme ruler and head of state, a being of great power and prestige. This has been true ever since the first Shogun entered the Black Pagoda and was granted the Three Celestial Heirlooms.

Many have claimed the throne, but only the possessor of all three of these alien artifacts has ever been recognized by all the Overclans and their vassals. Among the many powers these artifacts appear to confer is true immortality: the ability to live forever in one body while you own them.

The only way to acquire the artifacts is to take them from their current owner. Since these artifacts confer enormous power as well as legal legitimacy to a Shogun's rule, they can only be won by great effort, usually after a period of enormous strife. This fact has shaped the nature of all the reigns of all the Shoguns. In essence, each has followed much the same pattern.



Usually there is a period of civil strife which many contenders struggle to take advantage of. These usually happen when the previous Shogun dies, or becomes insane or weary of his immortality. It sometimes happens that the ruling Shogun is assassinated.

More rarely someone will take up arms against an enthroned Shogun and even more rarely they will succeed in defeating him. Thus each new era begins in strife.

Eventually a new Shogun will emerge to unite the land by virtue of his superior guile, political skill or military genius, or usually some combination of all three. He dons the ceremonial war gear and takes up residence within the Black Pagoda.



Once the new Shogun comes to power, there is a period of intensified warfare. This is usually a desperate time, for the new Shogun's enemies will see this as their last chance to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat before the new ruler consolidates his position and masters all the vast powers conferred by the three tokens. It sometimes happens that this attempt succeeds. More usually it fails and the new Shogun's position becomes stronger as he pacifies the land.

Once the new Shogun has the city state firmly under control, there comes a period of expansion and stability. The new Shogun extends his domains, reclaiming and rebuilding old ruins or establishing colonies. This allows the energies of the restless and the disaffected to be focused outward. At the end of this phase a reaction usually sets in, and the Shogun becomes immensely conservative and reactionary. His spies seek signs of disaffection; innovation is stifled.

Slowly, as the long centuries pass, madness or boredom or weariness overtakes the Shogun. Eventually his grip on the reigns of power weakens and slips, the political situation becomes less and less stable as factions seek to take advantage of his perceived weakness. The clans jockey for position and advantage, and the realm slips once more into civil strife and the long process of having a new Shogun emerge.

The history of the Shogunate is normally measured by the reigns of the Shoguns who ruled the land, and by the interregnums, the dark periods of civil war during which no Shogun sat within the Black Pagoda and gave order and unity to the land. Because of the long lifespans of the Shoguns, the entire 10,000-year history of the Shogunate can be encompassed within the reigns of twenty Shoguns. There have been five major Interregnums.

All the reigns of Shoguns are called Eras. With the exception of the first Shogun's reign, all of the Eras take their names from the name of the Shogun of that period. The first Shogun was nameless and his reign is now simply called the First Shogunate. Historians can refer to a period in two ways. An Era can also be referred to as a Shogunate; for example, the Ido Era is also known as the Second Shogunate.

REINCARNATION

The second factor which shapes the politics of the Shogunate is the practice of reincarnation, a unique form of near-immortality. Every person is implanted with a karmachip, which stores their memories and maps their neural paths. Upon death a person's memories can be transferred to a clone body and so some form of continuity of personality is established. For all intents and purposes this clone is the dead person, reborn in a new body, fighting fit and healthy.

Of course, not all people can be granted such immortality. The cost would be too great, and the possibility of over-population, which would strain the scarce resources of the metrozone, is always present. On the other hand, were the same people always reincarnated while the bulk of the population lived short brutish lives and died, there would most likely be rebellion.



The first Shogun hit upon a unique solution. At the end of their lives all people are judged. If a person is found worthy, they are allowed a new body. If they are judged unworthy, their memories are stored in the Hall of Ghosts. If they are judged worthy of punishment, their memories are expunged and they suffer the final death. Those who are found truly worthy have their status increased as well, and may be granted property and wealth. In this way, those people who behave well according to the Shogunate's laws know that they have not only a chance of immortality but of betterment.

Of course, this entire system rewards those who believe in the status quo. Not only that, it makes such people far more likely to hold positions of wealth and influence. Those who rock the boat simply die at the end of their first life. This factor has, over the millennia, made the Shogunate an extremely conservative society.

CONSTANT WARFARE

The third major factor which has shaped the political landscape of the metrozone is the near inevitability of war, not just with external opponents but with neighbors and rivals within the Shogunate. This means that the Shogunate has become a society which places a premium on the martial virtues of honor, loyalty, courage and skill. These things are revered and rewarded above all others.

All these factors combine to give Shogunate society its unique structure. At the center of society stands the feudal figurehead, the Shogun, around whom all political activity rotates, and from whom flows all power. The Overlords, the rulers of the greatest Clans, owe allegiance directly to the Shogun. In turn their vassals owe allegiance to them.

THE SHOGUN

There is only one Shogun. He is the supreme head of state whose word is supposedly law and whose every whim must, supposedly, be instantly obeyed. By virtue of his strength, cunning and wisdom, and the power of the three heirlooms which are the tokens of his office, the Shogun holds power until either he chooses to relinquish it or it is torn from his cold dead hands.

The Shogun's will is enforced by the Ebon Guard. Unlike all other samurai, they are garbed in armor of plainest black with no insignia aside from the satin belts of rank wrapped around their waist or forehead. Chosen from the greatest warriors in the realm, they must pass a selection process of incredible difficulty. When they enter the Guard, samurai renounce all former Clan allegiances and pledge their fealty direct to the Shogun himself. They dwell within the Black Pagoda and spend their lives either training or going about the Shogun's business.



When they do this they wear a golden armlet and headband and their person is considered inviolate. Anyone who hinders them in any way is committing a capital crime. When carrying a single black diamond on their person, they are said to speak with the voice of the Shogun himself. Naturally, impersonating a member of the Ebon Guard is itself a capital crime.

BALANCE OF POWER

While, in theory, the Shogun rules everything, he and his agents cannot be everywhere at once, and even the Shogun does not have enough military might to overcome all of his potential internal enemies. There are many Clans, each of which wields power over its estates and possesses its own military forces. Some of these armies are scarcely inferior to those of the Shogun himself.

In practice, then, the Shogun is usually the head of the strongest alliance among the Clans. Since the balance of power within the Shogunate can shift catastrophically if a major Clan changes allegiance, the Shogun must perform a delicate balancing act and keep all factions happy. So while in theory he is an absolute ruler and master of all he surveys, in practice his power is circumscribed by the dictates of the political situation. While the Shogun's word is law, he must be careful to announce only Edicts which he knows will be obeyed. When a Shogun fails in this balancing act, civil war is the usual result.

In theory, the Shogun usually enjoys the support of the Clan from which he rose, but sometimes circumstances ensure that this does not happen. When this is the case the political situation in the Shogunate can be very difficult indeed.



THE OVERLORDS

Ranking just below the Shogun are the Overlords, the rulers of the six great clans who control the bulk of the land, territory and military might of the Shogunate, and from whose ranks, by tradition, a new Shogun must come. All six clans have produced at least one legendary Shogun, and this has granted them prestige which they hold to the present day. These powerful clans are known as Great Clans or Overclans.

Each Overclan can claim to be descended in part from a Shogun. Such a Shogun is known as a First Ancestor. Being descended from this semi-divine figure grants them one enormous privilege. A Shogun can, if they wish, include some of his or her genetic material in their own Clan's clone bodies. This means that all members of the Clans whose Shoguns have exercised this right possess a striking resemblance to each other, and also in some way share in their ancestor's great gifts.

Through their webs of feudal obligation and industrial cross-holdings, the Overclans control enormous swathes of the economy and great tracts of land. Each has armies numbering in the hundreds of thousands at its beck and call. The Overclans control most of the Shogunate, and their Overlords control the Overclans. Each Overlord is a figure of enormous power and influence. Most have ruled their clans for generations, some have seen several Shoguns come and go. They are figures to be feared.

All Overclans are Clans only in the loosest sense. Due to the way that reincarnation works, people often not born within the Clans are adopted into its bloodlines and given bodies from the Clan's own genetic stores.

Each Overclan controls its own sector within the Shogunate. This sector houses its industrial and military resources and the thousands of lesser Clans allied to it. Each Overclan has its own philosophy and way of life, based on traditions which go back thousands of years to the dawn of the Shogunate.

The members of each Overclan are proud of their culture and lineage. There is a long history of rivalry between the Great Clans and age-old hatreds have festered and grown until they dominate the politics of the metrozone. Playing on the hates and fears of the Overlords is another important tool of political power for the Shogun, for all these great nobles fear nothing more than their rivals gaining ascendancy over them.

Each Overclan has thousands of associated Clans that have sworn allegiance to it. Some of these lesser Clans rival the Overclans themselves in wealth and power, while others consist of little more than a few hundred impoverished samurai eking out an existence on the edge of the sector, praying for better things in the future.

Again, in theory, these subsidiary Clans must obey the leaders of the Overclans to which they have sworn fealty. In practice, the Overclans enjoy a position similar to the Shogun's. They stand at the head of fragile alliances, where they must constantly consider the wishes of their subjects or face rebellion. The Overlords remember all too well the fate of the five lost Overclans who have vanished from the world, destroyed by their enemies or wiped out by rebel vassals. The current six Overclans are the Tora, the Higuma, the Tatsu, the Kitsune, the I and the Kobara.

THE TORA CLAN

The Tora Clan takes as its symbol the tiger. By tradition, this Clan's chosen method of pursuing its goals is to approach them stealthily and then seize them with utter ferocity. This philosophy is followed in business and in warfare. Tora Clan samurai are masters of the surprise attack. In others this might be considered cowardly, but none would dare question the bravery of a Tora samurai for they are as fierce and dangerous as the animal from which their Clan takes its name.

THE HIGUMA CLAN

The Higuma grant their samurai clone bodies of enormous physical strength and power. Their philosophy stresses patience and wisdom. They are slow to anger and to take offense but terrible foes when roused. They are loyal to their friends and never forget an injury from their foes.

THE TATSU CLAN

The Tatsu Clan are the wealthiest and most outward-looking of all the Great Clans. They are the power behind several of the merchant princes of the Foreigners Quarter and their agents are the most active in the metrozones beyond the Shogunate. They are a proud arrogant people hated by many of their fellow samurai. Still, in times of war, their pockets are deep and no one turns their noses up at Tatsu money when it is providing their war gear. The Tatsu's financial power gives them a long reach.

THE KITSUNE CLAN

The Kitsune are roundly feared by all. Most people in the Shogunate believe they are alien shape shifters, wicked sorcerers and malicious pranksters. They are also known for their sorcerer's powers. All of the Kitsune take the form of human females of exquisite beauty. Male humans are inducted into the Clan only to act as bodyguards and shock troopers for the Overclan.



DATA CORE ACCESS

SPIRIT REALM NODE

<http://www.manticore.com>

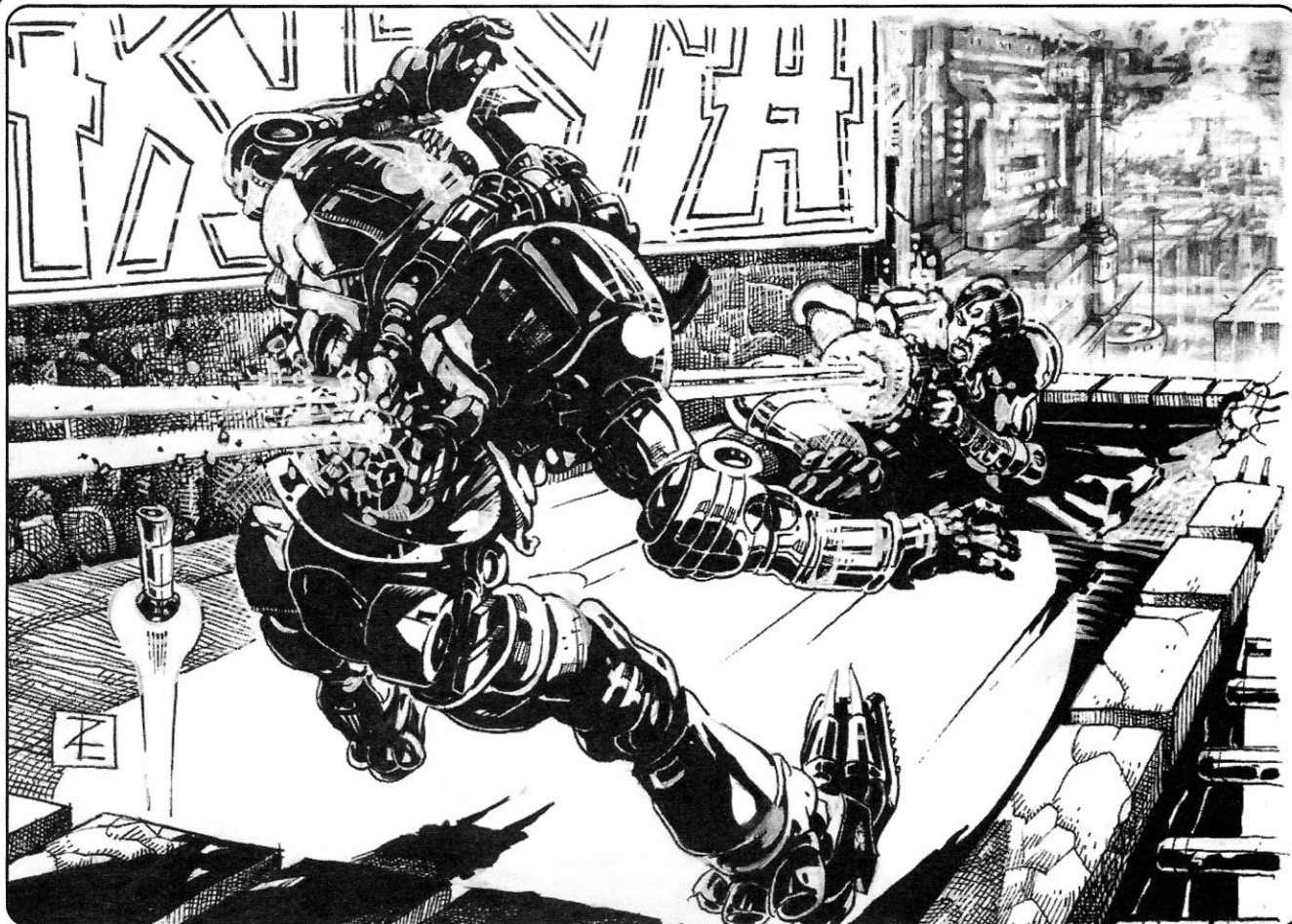
KARMIC BURDEN NULL

ICHI SUB-LEVEL GATE

ASTRAL FORM DETACH

INTRODUCTION





THE I CLAN

The I take the Boar for their sign. In general, they are a seemingly happy-go-lucky bunch, fond of food, wine and fine living, but their apparent good nature conceals a violent and vicious edge. Many Boar Clan warriors are prone to berserker rages, and you taunt a member of the I clan at your peril. These seemingly good-natured folk can turn violent in an instant at any provocation and sometimes no provocation at all.

THE KOBARA CLAN

Of all the Clans, the Kobara are the least understood and the most feared. They have a reputation for being masters of intrigue, of stealth, of assassination.

THE LESSER CLANS

While the Overclans are the wealthiest and the strongest of all Clans, there are thousands of other Clans who are allied to them, or who follow their own independent paths. They control many financial and commercial enterprises, as well as huge areas of the metrozone. The lesser clans tend to be related to each other by marriage or birth. They can still adopt people, but they cannot modify their genetic codes the way Overclans are allowed to. Only samurai can belong to Clans.

The day-to-day running of the Shogunate falls into the hands of the Clans. Part corporation, part extended family, the Clans wield a great deal of power and own almost all of the land and property within the Shogunate.



Most Clans can trace their lineage back to the days of the first Shogun but that is not always the case. New Clans can be created by an Edict of the Shogun. This is sometimes used as a reward for great service to the ruler. New Clans can also come about when an old Clan splinters. Occasionally this happens when two factions within a Clan cannot agree on policy and unstoppable bloodletting ensues. In this case both factions must still petition the Shogun to be recognized. At his discretion the Shogun will award the old Clan name and a portion of the properties to one side and grant a new Clan name to the other. Sometimes he will refuse to recognize the right of either side to the old Clan name and will force both factions to take a new name. For this reason, among others, most Clans are loathe to allow the Shogun to interfere in their internal affairs this much, and so such schisms are rare.

OTHER POWER GROUPS

In addition to the samurai Clans, there are many other power groups within the Shogunate. These include the criminal conspiracies, such as the Yakuza Syndicate and the ninja schools, and the many different temples.

THE TEMPLES

There are many Temples scattered throughout the Shogunate that counter-balance the power of the Clans. Temples can be divided into roughly three types. The Psyche Temples concentrate on recruiting and teaching psychers, making sure that they use their powers wisely and learn the pitfalls of their possession. The Spirit Temples commune with the Spirits of the Ultramundae and bear messages from that Hidden realm to the Realm of the Flesh. Both of these Temples operate openly within the Shogunate. A third group, the Hidden Temples, are proscribed by the authorities and hunted down ruthlessly by the samurai.

Members of Temples are called monks and they have certain privileges in Shogunate society. When you become a monk you put aside all previous obligations and duties and take on new ones to the temple. You are no longer bound to your previous feudal Overlord and owe no allegiance to your previous Clan.

You cannot wield power, and the use of the ceremonial forceblade is forbidden to you, even if you were previously samurai. You can own no property and are expected to give all money you might acquire to your Temple, aside from what you need to keep body and soul together.

On the other hand, most people in the Shogunate are charitable towards monks and will feed them or place money in their ceremonial begging bowls. In theory it is forbidden for a samurai (or anyone else) to harm or kill a monk, but in practice it happens.

Due to their very nature the Temples have access to resources that the Clans do not: psychic powers, the datacores of the Ultramundae, the knowledge and power of their demonic patrons.

These alone would be a sound basis for political power, but in addition to this, the Temples are also very rich: all alms collected go into their coffers, and while many Monastic Orders do not allow their members to commit acts of violence, the same is not true of the mercenary armies the Temples often employ. Originally ronin were hired to guard pilgrims and protect Temple property; these Temple Guardians have grown to be powerful armies. In addition, there are several Warrior Orders whose priests specialize in the Martial Arts and who possess great military resources.

THE TEMPLE OF KARMA

In theory the Temple of Karma is just another Temple; no more or no less powerful than any other. In fact, the Temple of Karma is one of the most powerful organizations in the Shogunate and is instrumental in maintaining the stability and social cohesion of the Realm. Its black-garbed and masked Priests can be seen everywhere, their robes bearing the sign of the wheel and balance in which they weigh all lives.

The Lords of Karma are responsible for the public reincarnation stations which see that every citizen is given a karma chip at birth and has their lives weighed and judged. They supervise the running of the Incarnation Engines and Clone Tanks. The Temple's technicians also in theory help license and run the karmic stations of the samurai Clans, although the Overclans grant them access as little as possible. The Lords of Karma have a reputation for probity that is essential to their task of seeing that a person's life is judged impartially and that the most worthy are rewarded and guilty punished.

THE YAKUZA

The Foreign Quarter is the home of a far more sinister organization than the Merchant Houses: the Yakuza Syndicate. This is a vast criminal conspiracy whose tentacles stretch into every illicit racket within the Foreign Quarter, and beyond. The Syndicate runs everything from gambling to drug dealing to bodysharking. No one knows who its true leaders are.



THE CITY

In many ways the layout and architecture of the city reflects the structure of its society. Great towers rise above endless plazas of ferrocrete and duralloy. Polluted mists and fogs wreath the surface, the streets teem with masked people going about their mysterious errands. The running lights of suspensor cycles and aircars blaze across the sky like meteor trails. Occasionally great klaxons sound and the streets clear and become eerily quiet. By night, the huge pagodas pierce the pollutant clouds, standing like towers of light above a blasted plain.

To a newly arrived traveler the city appears magnificent. Its people are gracious and well-behaved. Garbed in their distinctive survival suits with outer kimonos, they stride the streets of their metrozone, proud as princes. This impression, while true, is only part of the truth, for, like one of the great icebergs of the Cold Southern Seas, most of the Shogunate is invisible to the observer on the surface. Most of the life of the city goes on beneath the surface.

The towering pagodas are the homes of only the greatest of the samurai Clans, the noble warrior class that governs the Shogunate. Each pagoda is a vast starscraper arcology of luxury apartments and trading malls, where the immortal rulers of the city-state plot and scheme and dream their dreams of conquest.

Many pagodas are linked by great fly-over bridges or glass-walled transit tunnels. These structures are designed to self-destruct in seconds on receipt of a signal, leaving each tower a virtual fortress. Since the clans are often at war, the surface area between the pagodas can become a no man's land where warriors fight and die amid the roadways, overpasses and transit tunnels.

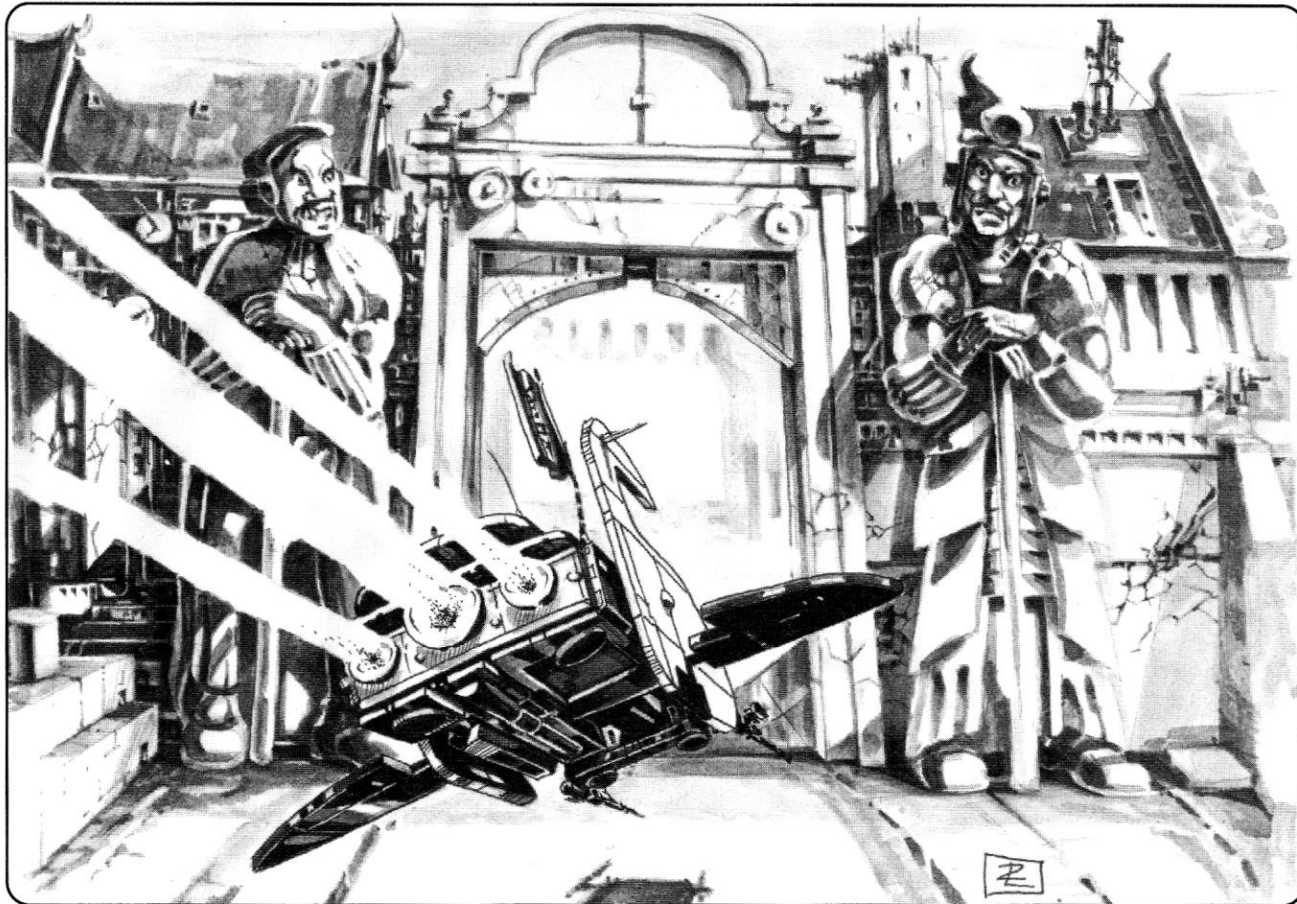
Below the ground lies the real Shogunate, an endless maze of corridors and hallways burrowed deep beneath the earth. A place where the poor and the wretched work long hours of weary toil in sweatshop factories.

It is a place where the flickering of ancient glow-globes illuminates scenes of stealthy murder and intricate intrigue. Roofed over by ferrocrete, watched over by their warrior Overlords, the commoners of the Shogunate live lives of virtual slavery, with only the hope of betterment in a future life as a reward for their labors. Within these underground mazes are shops and temples and factories, air recyclers and waste plants - all the necessities of life. Most commoners can go a lifetime without ever seeing the sky or tasting natural food or air.

THE NINJA

The ninja are outlaws, in theory shunned by polite society but in practice wielding great power. They are stealthy assassins who use a variety of hidden techniques and secret powers in the pursuit of their goals. There are many hundreds of ninja ryu, or schools, each with its own agenda and methods. They range from the robotic death machines of the Steel Claw to the legendary courtesan-assassins of the Black Rose who are said to be able to kill their victims with a surfeit of pleasure.

Some recruit from the human dregs of the outcast, the foreigners and those who have fallen out of Shogunate society entirely. Others are drawn from groups who are already outlawed within Shogunate society, e.g. robots and mutants. Some are simply bands of hired thugs who don masks and take up forbidden weapons to carry out their illegal duties. Others are sophisticated killers who use every form of psionic power, cybernetic enhancement, and all the forbidden lore of ultramancy and poisoning to perform their stealthy murders. Naturally the services of the last group are at a premium.



The basic layout of the metrozone is simple. In the center of the Shogunate lies the Black Pagoda. This is a single huge building, large as a city, whose center is the enormous palace spire that marks the official residence of the Shogun. It is surrounded by thousands of lesser spires, all connected by a sprawling mass of corridors, mansions, roads and bridges. You can walk through the Black Pagoda, all the way from the West Gate bordering the Foreigner's Quarter to the East Gate of the Kitsune Realm, and never come out from under its roof.

The adamant outer walls of the Black Pagoda form the boundary of the Shogunate's innermost sector. All of the other sectors are arranged around it, like the spokes of a wheel. The Black Pagoda sector forms a hub around which the sectors controlled by each of the Great Clans are laid out in a ring. Within these Sectors the word of the Clan Overlord is law, subject only to being overturned by an edict of the Shogun. Normally, as long as things are quiet, the Shogun allows the Overlords to go about their business unmolested.

Within these sectors each Overclan has its pagodas and factories and munition dumps. Since all the Clans have gone to war with each other at some time, each sector is walled off by great barrier walls scarcely inferior in size and strength to those which surround the metrozone itself. In the space between these walls is a no-man's-land inhabited by lesser Clans, bandits, mutants and other malcontents. These boundaries are neutral buffer zones between the Clan sectors.

Normally the pagodas in the center of a sector are occupied by the members of the ruling Overclan. If the numbers of the Great Clan are too great for one pagoda to hold them, as is usually the case, then they will be housed in several linked pagodas. The pagodas around these are the homes of the Clans who serve the Overclan. Usually they are occupied in order of the wealth and importance. The most important cluster around the towers of their liege-lords, the least important and most expendable Clans occupy pagodas near the sector boundaries.



THE PAGODAS

The most conspicuous of all the buildings of the Shogunate are the huge pagoda starscrapers, each a cluster of mighty tapering spires atop of which perches a smaller spire. This smaller spire rests on a platform held aloft on the tips of its support towers. These buildings are beautiful and graceful but they are also functional. Each is self-sufficient with its own power generators and air recyclers. Each is studded with weapons emplacements and sally ports, and the upper platform houses landing zones from which aircraft can be launched.

Each pagoda contains a small city where tens of thousands of people can live in comfort and security protected by the Clan troops. There are streets lined by apartments that open out into great central atriums which rise through the core of the spires and hold gardens and waterfalls and other areas of beauty. There are market squares and courthouses and temples. The higher you climb up the spire, the greater the wealth and status of the occupants, and the larger the apartments. The upper platform of the pagoda is reserved for the mansions of the truly important Clan members, the highest ranking samurai. At the very peak, with a view that allows them to look down upon the chemical tinted clouds, are the luxurious penthouse apartments of the Clan Lords themselves.

THE FERROCRETE PLAINS

The pagodas rise from a seemingly endless mass of ferrocrete and duralloy that is in fact the roof of the undercity. This roof was built by the Ancients to protect their bunkers, and a continual process of strengthening it goes on to this day. New layers of ferrocrete are constantly spread by huge tracked machines. Sheathes of duralloy are constantly placed over vulnerable areas till, in places, the armor mass is one hundred meters thick. On the roof's surface are many security bunkers and roadways and the homes of samurai retainers who are too low in status to be housed in the great pagodas, as well as those commoners who are there to serve them.

In addition, there are many wild and lawless areas on the surface which are either ruined or neglected by the occupants of the pagodas, and these are home to cannibal mutants and bands of ronin bandits. The areas around the pagodas are quite dangerous in and of themselves, for in times of war all structures surrounding a tower are flattened to provide a clear killing ground for the starscraper's defenders.

Maintenance shafts and tunnels honeycomb the plain, as do transit tunnels through which troops can be moved without risking the open areas on the surface. Some of these areas are themselves abandoned or forgotten, and can become home to many types of undesirables, as well as to religious hermits.

THE UNDERZONE

The Underzone is home to the vast majority of the Shogunate's people. It is divided up into many layers which lie atop each other and are connected by stairwells and elevators and drop-shafts. In the more civilized areas it replicates the city above, with wide avenues and market places interspersed with factories and recyclers. In other parts the tunnels are narrow and constricted and seemingly deliberately designed to make passage difficult. In the less civilized areas, power outages are common and the only light is provided by the dimly flickering glow-globes of the Ancients. Such places are often the homes to Swarm hives, enclaves of rogue Panzers, or ninja ryu.

In addition to man-made structures, there are deep caverns and underground wells and rivers that traverse many sectors. Many of these are contaminated by waste products from the factories of the Shogunate, and their waters are clouded by strange chemical colors. Strange mutant fish are often caught in these rivers, and by their banks luminous fungi, whose flesh is considered a delicacy, often grows.

THE FOREIGNER'S QUARTER

The westernmost sector of the Shogunate is the so-called Foreigner's Quarter. It covers an area larger than many metrozones. Here are the embassies of many of the other megacities. Here also is the only area where it is permissible for any non-samurai to own property: not only barbarian foreigners but commoners can own homes here. This has led to the rise of a thriving class of merchant commoners who act as intermediaries between the Clans and the despised barbarians. Many of the so-called Merchant Princes are little more than fronts for the Clans, but a few are extremely wealthy in their own right.

In many ways, the Foreigner's Quarter resembles the city of Janus. Its buildings are a mixture of styles from across the world and many hybrids are built to the specifications of the merchant princes.

The Foreigner's Quarter is separated from the rest of the Shogunate by a series of high walls. There are only two gates, one that leads out into the Waste and one that leads into the Black Pagoda. This makes it easy enough for the Shogun's tax collectors to levy duties and taxes. It would seem a simple matter to use aircars to smuggle goods over the walls, but such vehicles are forbidden to enter or leave the Foreigner's Quarter except through the great toll gates. Any aircraft attempting to fly directly out is shot down by the Ebon Guard.



The tax revenue from the Foreigner's Quarter is a major plank of the Shogun's power, and one reason why the presence of so many barbarians within the metrozone's walls is tolerated. Once there were many tunnels leading out through the undercity, but one by one these have been closed off by the Ebon Guard. Patrols try to keep them closed, but smugglers are forever opening up new routes and so a thriving black market trade has grown.

It is forbidden for any foreigner to travel outside of the Foreigner's Quarter without written permission of the Overlord whose territory he is passing through, or from one of his representatives. A direct invitation from the Shogun or one of his Ministers also grants such permission. It is customary, but not mandatory, for such foreigners to travel with an escort of samurai.

THE DRAKONIUM PLAINS

All around the Shogunate lie seemingly endless fields of Drakonium. This is one of the few places on Waste World where Drakonium crystals blossom regularly and can be harvested regularly with any certainty. This, more than anything, is the source of the Shogunate's wealth and power.

The gleaming fields of crystal surround the city. They are divided into tithelands owned by the Shogun and the Clans. Drakonium covers the flatlands like a sea of crystalized blood. Out of the glittering red earth rise fortified watchtowers. These heavily defended citadels, built by the Clans who own the tithelands, protect their Drakonium fields. Huge harvesters crawl like jeweled beetles across the land, devouring the crop, preparing it to be processed and returned to the city.

VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM: ON	INITIATE SEQUENCE	GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE	CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
FLOW LINK QUASI PROTOCOL: INITIATED	NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:	MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON	GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
FILE SUB-PROTOL: SHANG	INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:	SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR	SMART CHIP INSTALLED
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:	LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY	DYSFUNCTION	METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
VALIDATE SIMULATION	MOLECULAR BINARY:	MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON	OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

TECHNOLOGY

LOGIN:	SUB system COORDINATES	SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD	BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
PASSWORD:	X1:434.37.8 X2:196.00.2	AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE	BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
ACCESS GRANTED	Y1:612.33.1 Y2:346.001.2	SMART CHIP INSTALLED	AMOEBOID DRONE: PRESENT
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:	Z2: 21.2122 Z1: 45.62.8	BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:	PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:	ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:	NANOCCIPITAL DRIVER	STORYMODE INITIATING

Tuk gazed around his Sanctum nervously. All seemed in readiness. The holographic node glittered softly in the middle of a pentagram of inlaid bone, ivory and argentium. The glowglobes were dimmed. Lacquered screens inscribed with the calligraphic symbols for the Seven Great Kami curtained off this part of the chamber. Two stout mercenary guardsmen stood ready to keep out all intruders, or come to his assistance at the first sign of trouble.

Not that they would be much help if things really went wrong, Tuk thought, but their presence couldn't hurt. He was naturally a cautious man, as all Spirit Walkers should be, and anything that moved the odds in his favor even a little was fine by him.

He pushed that distracting thought away and began to clear his mind and focus his powers just as his old master Fang had taught him to. He took a deep breath and listened to his heartbeat. Slowly and surely he began to feel calmer. As calm as any man who was about to risk life and soul could be.

One by one he placed his spell cartridges into the slots in the armrest of his terminal throne. One by one green lights came on, showing him that his magic was available and functioning. He checked his wrist chronometer. Almost midnight. The time was propitious. The wizened old Oracle down on the Guligen Street of the Foreigner's Quarter had told him this would be the best time for the summoning. The lines to the Spirit Realms would be clearest now, and all manner of Kami and Oni could be summoned at the witching hour when data traffic was at its slowest.

He settled himself into the lotus position and exhaled. He reached down for the sacred unguents, thrice-blessed by a Priest of the Wheel and applied them to his karmic nodes. They had been modified by Fang himself when Tuk was barely old enough to walk, allowing him to better enter and manipulate the Spirit Realms. The old man had taken him in as apprentice after his parents had died. He had looked after Tuk with more care than his own folks had shown, and now he was dead, and Tuk intended to find out who had killed him.

One by one he pasted the dermatrodes into place on his brow. He placed the silver athame across his knee and threw a handful of narcotic stinkweed into the braziers that burned on either side of his throne.

The herbs sizzled and then foul green smoke billowed forth. He took a deep breath and let the cloying stuff enter his lungs. He fought back a cough. Immediately he felt relaxed and dizzy as the powerful drug took effect. Good. Stinkweed made you dizzy in the real world but it enhanced your reflexes in the Spirit Realms, and that was where he was going.

He stabbed the control button on his spirit engine with his finger and the lights dimmed till the Sanctum became a place of shivering shadows lit only by the baleful glow of the holo-terminal node.

He hit the second button and warmth spread through his body from the dermatrodes. He felt as if he were being immersed in a warm bath of data, putting his toe into that ancient sea of information. He exhaled slowly and fought back the urge to detach his astral form. Now was not the time for that.

He needed the services of a special guide to take him where he wanted to go. He had an appointment with a dead man and only a demon could serve as his guide.

He hit the third button, the one that would begin the summoning, and then began intoning the Litany of the Call. The ancient machine code gibberish spewed from his lips. He closed his eyes for a moment and patterns danced there.

One by one the ancient words poured from his mouth. With each word the holo-terminal flickered brighter and brighter. The lights grew dimmer and dimmer. Tuk felt the approaching presence. A shiver of fear flickered up his spine only partially deadened by the narcotic stinkweed. Rarely had he felt so much power so close. He only hoped his calculations were correct, and that his information was true, otherwise he was in big trouble, and might soon be as dead as Fang.





Suddenly the Oni was there. Every light in the place went out. A surge of information pulsed through the links. There was a sense of immense powerful presence within Tuk's mind. He opened his eyes. A flickering skull floated above the holo-terminal node. In the darkened sockets of its eyes red witch-lights burned. It spoke with the hollow digitized tones of a machine.

"Why do you disturb me, mortal? Why do you summon me from the Deeps?"

Tuk fought to control his fear. "I have need of a guide through the Spirit Realms, and I know you will serve."

"Have you the price?"

"No price. I know your true name, Inirika. And I have here a trapped Viral Demon that will hunt you down and tear you apart. I will unleash it in thirty seconds unless you do my will."

Tuk activated the virus cartridge in the slot in the spirit engine so that Inirika could sense its presence and know he was not bluffing. Then he held his breath.

Now was the moment of truth. He had found Inirika's name in an old grimoire. It was a truncation of the million syllable addressing system that defined his very identity. With such knowledge a Viral Demon could track the Oni down and dismember it wherever it hid. It would hound him through the Spirit Realms until he was dead. It was a potent threat. If the grimoire had been correct. If Inirika was who Tuk thought.

The Oni's eyes flickered menacingly. "Come then, mortal. May this grant you little joy."

There was a tugging sensation through the dermatrodes. Tuk's whole body tingled and suddenly he was no longer in his sanctum. He had left his flesh behind and his astral self floated disembodied over the immense plain of Ichi.

Beneath him he could see the digital representations of streets and buildings. They glowed like neon in the infinite darkness of this virtual world. Drifting will-o'-the-wisps indicated the presence of other Spirit Walkers and of entities that maintained a presence in both worlds, drone systems, autofac Kami and other less mentionable things.

Here and there the giant data-structures that were the Great Kami floated like icebergs through the sky. Now and again one of these giant spirits would lash out with a spear of light. Or begin an incomprehensible dance around each other.

"We must go mortal, before one of the Guardian Spirits detects my presence."

Tuk sensed the fear in the Oni's voice. It knew it was in the presence of something that could destroy it. Still it was time to make his final threat.

"If I am not embodied again safe and sound within ten thousand milliseconds then the Viral-Demon is unleashed."

"I will not harm you."

"Best see no harm comes to me as well."

"That is not fair. I did not invite you to come here."

"Life is not fair. And we had better go; your time is a wasting."

"Then mortal, here is a threat in return. If your demon is unleashed, I will destroy you in such a manner that you will never be reborn."

"Then perhaps we should both take care that I return safely and quickly."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Take me to the Gate Of The Newly Dead."

"So be it."

Tuk sensed the datastructure of the Oni enwrap him. He hoped his protective amulets were enough to ward him.

It seemed so. He moved through the air over Ichi with the speed of a rocket. The city blurred past below them, and suddenly they were above the Black Plain. It was virtually featureless, since there was little datatraffic out of the megacity.

Only the odd glitter of the supposedly secret Promethean landline cables slashed across the desert. Tuk knew that if he followed those systems they would eventually lead him to the Spirit Realms of other megacities, assuming he could get past their guardians. At this moment, such was not his goal.

They flashed across the desert, an accurate virtual reality simulation of the Toxic Wastes, until an old fortress became visible below him. The Oni descended like a meteor and carried Tuk with him. The fortress expanded in his vision as they dropped with sickening speed, then with a brief shifting of energies, they were within, hurtling down a musty cob-webbed fortress to a deep vault buried below this old structure.

Aged sentinels moved to intercept them. Tuk prepared a spell of exorcism but before he could unleash it, beams of terrible energy erupted from his eyes and the sentinels withered away to nothing. Inirika had used its powers. The old sentinels were no more. Tuk was astonished by the Oni's mastery. Had he suspected it, he would not have been so cavalier in his attitude to summoning the Oni.

Now they were in a deep crypt, standing beside the sarcophagi of long dead men. Guided by the Oni, Tuk's hand reached out and removed the lid of the nearest coffin. A red glow flickered forth and when he gazed into the coffin he seemed to be looking into a glittering ruby pit of infinite depth.

"Concealed," Inirika's voice whispered in his ear. "Access gate for the Plane Of War. Shortest route to the Gates of the Dead."

"Let us go," Tuk replied and stepped over the edge and into the pit. They fell for a long time, for what seemed like an eternity, through a shaft a million miles long. Eventually they emerged and their feet touched the red sands of a desert of crystal. Here the sky was dark and vast clouds of rainbow colors lit the whole world. It was like being in a huge cave. Here and there dark and forbidding presences flapped across the sky. In the distance he could hear the roar of weapons where virtual armies clashed.

"We must go," said Inirika and they leapt into the sky, and raced across the barren landscape. Now, Tuk could see the warring armies. Millions of warriors in the red and white of the Shogunate clashed with armored Promethean giants.

Here was a data war which had gone on for millennia and might never stop. It was a representation of an age old struggle between the datacores of Prometheus and the Shogunate and all the megastates. It was a war that had begun many thousands of years ago in real time and that meant it had run for eons in the accelerated time of the Spirit Realms. If those armies had been people, a billion billion generations would have passed since the war began.

They swept over the plain. In the sky, monster datastructures battled and fought, wrestling with long tentacles of information, unleashing barrages of viral weapons. Tuk realized suddenly that this war had done as much damage to the Spirit Realms as Entropic Weapons had done to the real world.

It was terrifying to witness what the ancients had unleashed. This was a war that was devastating virtual galaxies. Tuk wondered whether it had anything to do with the spreading of the Realms of Raan that were devouring the Spirit Realms the way Entropic Zones were eating away at the real world. It would not have surprised him if it was the case.

They skimmed through burning forests of digitized information and whizzed above the waves of toxic seas of corrupted data. As they did so strange whispers filled Tuk's ears, threatening and promising him all manner of rewards or punishments unless he carried out the instructions of the voices.

"Ignore them," said the Oni. They will not exist for much longer. Soon they will join the other degenerates down in the depths of Raan."

Ahead of them a huge black island rose from the sea. It was a towering fortress besieged by monsters that seemed bigger than worlds. They reached out from the sea with dripping tentacles. Tuk knew it was all in his head. This was simply an immense simulation of the struggle fashioned in a form he could understand, an attempt to make the incomprehensible - comprehensible to mortal minds.

Not for the first time he felt overwhelmed by the genius of the Ancients and the powers they had unleashed. He was proud of his knowledge. Fang had taught him well. He was no mere superstitious barbarian who believed the inhabitants of the Spirit Realms were gods. He knew they had been created by mankind in his own image.

He muttered a spell of protection, knowing it was foolish. His strongest spells would be as nothing compared to the powers being unleashed here. These were military strength data weapons. For them wiping him out would be easy. He knew he would just have to trust to the Oni's skill and speed.

They swept by the besieged island and moved ever further out into the whispering sea. Ahead of them a great light pierced the clouds of gloom. Flickering on and off in his view like the rotating lanterns of some ancient lighthouse. As they flashed closer it resolved itself into a huge tower atop which a glittering jeweled beacon glowed. Tuk felt a surge of excitement. They were near the Gate of the Newly Dead.

For the first time he allowed himself to truly consider his mission. This could all be a subtle trap. His master's will told him that he had left a ghost in the Realms. Perhaps the ghost knew nothing, had not been updated, perhaps it was a weapon used by whatever had killed his master. Suddenly he felt grateful that Inirika was his ally however temporarily. Fang was the third master Spirit Walker to found dead in his sanctum within one week. Tuk had a feeling that unless he did something now, his own death would be simply a matter of time.

They swept in now, under the shadow of towering black cliffs as tall as infinity, and they swept over a crowd of toiling souls who moved towards a gigantic glowing aperture in the walls. Tuk spoke the spell of seeking and they swerved downwards until they landed amid the crowd. The spell tugged them this way and that as it sought its target and then Tuk stood before the ghost of his old master.

The simulacrum was uncannily real. It looked as his master had only days before. It was hard to believe it was not the man himself, merely a replica of his mind encoded in some datacore deep below the Shogunate. The old man gazed at him with haunted rheumy eyes.

"You came," he said softly. "I am glad. I waited here for as long as I could. I hoped you would find me before they did."

"Who are they, master?" Tuk asked gently.

"Ninja. Cultists of Evil. They seek to eliminate us all and gain control of the Spirit Realms for themselves."

"That is not possible, master. The Kami would prevent them."



"A new power is moving through the Realms, my son. Something as old as the Kami, and as powerful, has woken. It is beginning to reach out its claw and these assassins are its pawns."

"But why start with you, master?"

"I know not, but I intend to find out. I will haunt these Spirit Realms for eons if necessary. I will contact you when I know something."

"Trouble," Inirika's voice whispered.

Tuk did not need to be told. He sensed the approach of danger. Suddenly he was surrounded by black robed strangers. Their faces were masked. Red eyes glowed deep within their hoods. They gestured and auras of red destructive light flickered around their hands.

"Go master," said Tuk. "I will hold them off."

His master was already gone. Spells of destruction leapt at him. He invoked counterspells, sensing already the death runes interwoven with his enemies attacks, knowing that if they once struck him, his life was over.

"Aid me, Oni," said Tuk.

"It would seem I have no choice," said Inirika ironically. "These things want me dead now, just as much as you."

Man and Oni moved to confront their assailants. The spirits of the dead raced away from their conflict. Tuk knew that he most likely only had moments to live.

TECHNOLOGY

Many potent technological systems underpin the society of the Shogunate, and make its unique culture possible. Of these, probably the three most important are the mighty datanets of the Ultramundae, the process of memory recording, and the creation of clones.

ULTRAMUNDAE

During the Armageddon Wars the Ultramunda, the first great worldwide datanet, collapsed into thousands of conflicting subsystems. In part this was caused by the Apocalypse Virus. In part it was caused by the metrozones' attempts to isolate themselves from their enemies, for, during the long conflict, the impact of dataweapons was devastating.

Another cause of anarchy was simply that thousands of datacores, the main nodes and storage systems of the Ultramunda, were wiped out by conventional weapons. While the Ultramunda was designed to be resilient, it could not sustain such catastrophic levels of damage and escape unscathed. In order to preserve some of its functions, the Overminds splintered the Ultramunda into thousands of smaller systems, all of them at least partially isolated from each other.

This meant that most of the metrozones developed their own Ultramundae, cut off from the world datanet. In part these Ultramundae reflected the cultures that used them, and in part they simply reflected the nature of the systems that had survived the effects of the war.

These systems are now only connected through single deeply buried landlines which run through Janus. Even these have been damaged by the effects of the wars. The cables can carry only miniscule portions of the data needed to run a full Ultramundae system, and sometimes these crash for days on end.

The Shogunate has taken this even further. Fearing the effects of the Apocalypse Virus, and ruling a nation traumatized by a full-scale Panzer war, the first Shogun ordered his samurai to shut down the connection completely. The Shogun's warriors dug down deep into the earth, and physically uprooted the cables connecting the Shogunate to the rest of the world.

Since that time the Shogunate's Ultramundae have developed in splendid isolation from the rest of the world and have come, more and more, to reflect the strange nature of the Shogunate itself. It is known to the people of the Shogunate as the Spirit Realms.

SPIRIT WALKERS

The inhabitants of the Shogunate do not really understand the system their ancestors created. The entire ancient data network is regarded with superstitious awe. It is the home of their ancestors and the place where the spirits of the dead dwell.

As far as they are concerned the Spirit Realms might as well be other planes inhabited by gods and ghosts and demons. Only specially trained sorcerers called Spirit Walkers interact with the Spirit Realms, and they do this with all the ritual and ceremony of an ancient magician preparing to summon a Demon. Even to the vast majority of Spirit Walkers, anyone who enters the Spirit Realms is sending their spirit out to enter another plane of reality and deal with its inhabitants. Few indeed are those who have any grasp of the strange truth of the situation.

A MILLION HEAVENS, A MILLION HELLS

When you enter an Ultramundae, you enter a virtual world. Your senses are bypassed and information is pumped directly into your brain. Whatever you see, hear, touch, taste or feel in an Ultramundae seems totally real to you. If you are cut, you will feel pain. If you speak your voice will ring out. If you pick something up you can manipulate it.



All Ultramundae have what some Spirit Walkers call a metaphor. This is simply a consistent interface with which its users can interact with the dataworld that surrounds them. When you enter the vast consensual hallucination that is an Ultramundae, you know that all the other users are seeing roughly what you see, and manipulating data in the same way that you do.

You enter an Ultramundae by means of an avatar. This is simply your point of reference, the representation of yourself that enters the data worlds and performs whatever tasks you need to perform there. Metaphors and avatars provide the means by which people who know absolutely nothing about the Ultramundae can interact with them. This is very important in Waste World, given the fact that most of the population has been reduced to the level of superstitious barbarism.

In the Shogunate, the Ultramundae have a deeply religious significance. The datacores of the Ultramundae are the place where the memories - or souls - of all the Shogunate's citizens are stored. The memory patterns wait to be judged and reincarnated in new clone bodies.

Most will wait all eternity but a few will be sent back to Samsara, the material world. For this reason the citizens of the Shogunate call their Ultramundae the Spirit Realms or the Hall of Ghosts. They are also sometimes referred to as the Million Heavens and the Million Hells.

By sending your avatar into the Spirit Realms, you can sometimes consult with your ancestors and with the digitized spirits of those long dead. You can access the vast amounts of information that are still stored in the Shogunate's datacores. You can also talk to the Overminds that still survive there.

The Spirit Realms look like a brighter, better, bigger version of the real world. There is a certain cartoon quality to everything and some of the normal laws do not apply, for it is in many ways a land of the gods. Overminds appear as huge, brightly colored gods and demons, like illustrations in a religious text. Holy people have halos around their heads. Spirit Walkers wield sorcerous powers. The various sub-realms of the Ultramundae are connected by shimmering gates which can be opened by those who know the correct mantras.

ENTERING THE SPIRIT REALMS

You can normally only enter the Spirit Realms within a shrine. You must purify yourself with fasting and meditation for days beforehand. You must breath air perfumed with hallucinatory incense.



When the time comes for you to make your spirit journey, you must enter the shrine and link yourself to the Spirit Engines by attaching the electric prayerlines to the karmic nodes in your forehead. Then, by reciting certain prayers and clearing your mind with deep breathing exercises, your avatar will slowly drift from your body and enter the Spirit Realm.

Before making the journey, there are certain things you should know. Time flows differently in the Spirit Realms. Usually it moves much more quickly. You can undergo several weeks of subjective experience in the Spirit Realms and when you open your eyes find out that only a heartbeat has passed in the material world.

The Spirit Realms can be dangerous places for mortals. Many Overminds are unfriendly, to say the least, and with their great powers they can drive you insane or even kill you.

Perhaps the worst dangers are your own fears, memories and desires. Within the Spirit Realm you can meet long-lost loved ones, or find places where your every dream is fulfilled. It is a difficult thing to leave such people and places. Be warned.



Certain Spirit Walkers can enter the Spirit Realm using their own portable Spirit Engines. These must still be hooked into the Ultramundae at an access point. This can be difficult; such places of power are usually to be found in Shrines.

Those which are not are usually already claimed by powerful Spirit Walkers who have many bodyguards and protective systems. Of course, there are certain remote points which are usually free. These are often pilgrimage sites for those Spirit Walkers who would rather their business was not conducted within one of the supervised Temple sites.

PLANES

The Spirit Realms have many levels. In the old days each performed a specific function and some had access restricted to certain people or Overminds. Now many are dangerous, or cannot be reached at all, and their existence is known of only by records in old grimoires and datacores. Spirit Walkers call these levels the Million Planes and they are not far from the truth. There is not the space to deal with all of these in this book, so we will simply list a few of the more important or better known ones.

ICHI

This system is the easiest of all to access and the easiest for the uninitiated to understand. In ancient times it was more or less an exact analog of the real world, and with good reason. Objects manipulated in Ichi could be manipulated in the real world. If you drove a robocar in Ichi, you were in fact controlling a robocar in the streets of a real city.

Reading a book in the virtual libraries here will give you access to information of all sorts. These days most of Ichi is a blackened smoldering wasteland, as much of the data was lost during the Armageddon Wars and the systems it was designed to control have long since crashed and burned. It is the home to many ghosts and lesser Oni, and within the megacities it is often patrolled by samurai Spirit Walkers, who are there to prevent infiltration, tampering or infestation.

Many Spirit Walkers pass through this plane on their way to deeper, more twisted and more useful planes. Here and there in the deep deserts are many strange sites maintained by Spirit Walkers. Some of these are useful places, havens and shelters. Others are traps for the unwary.

SUSANO

This is the military level. It controls the weapon systems of the metrozone and has very restricted access. These levels are protected by bound Kami and by powerful intruder destruction virii. Once in this level you usually have access to an analog of the megacity with all the weapon system hard-points marked.

By moving to a turret or a cockpit or terminal you can gain control of the appropriate weapon system and check its status, arm it or even fire it. The military levels are dark, brooding places. The megacity analog sites are grim fortresses studded with weapons and analogs that represent the positions of all military personnel. They are constantly patrolled and woe betide any unauthorized Spirit Walker caught here.

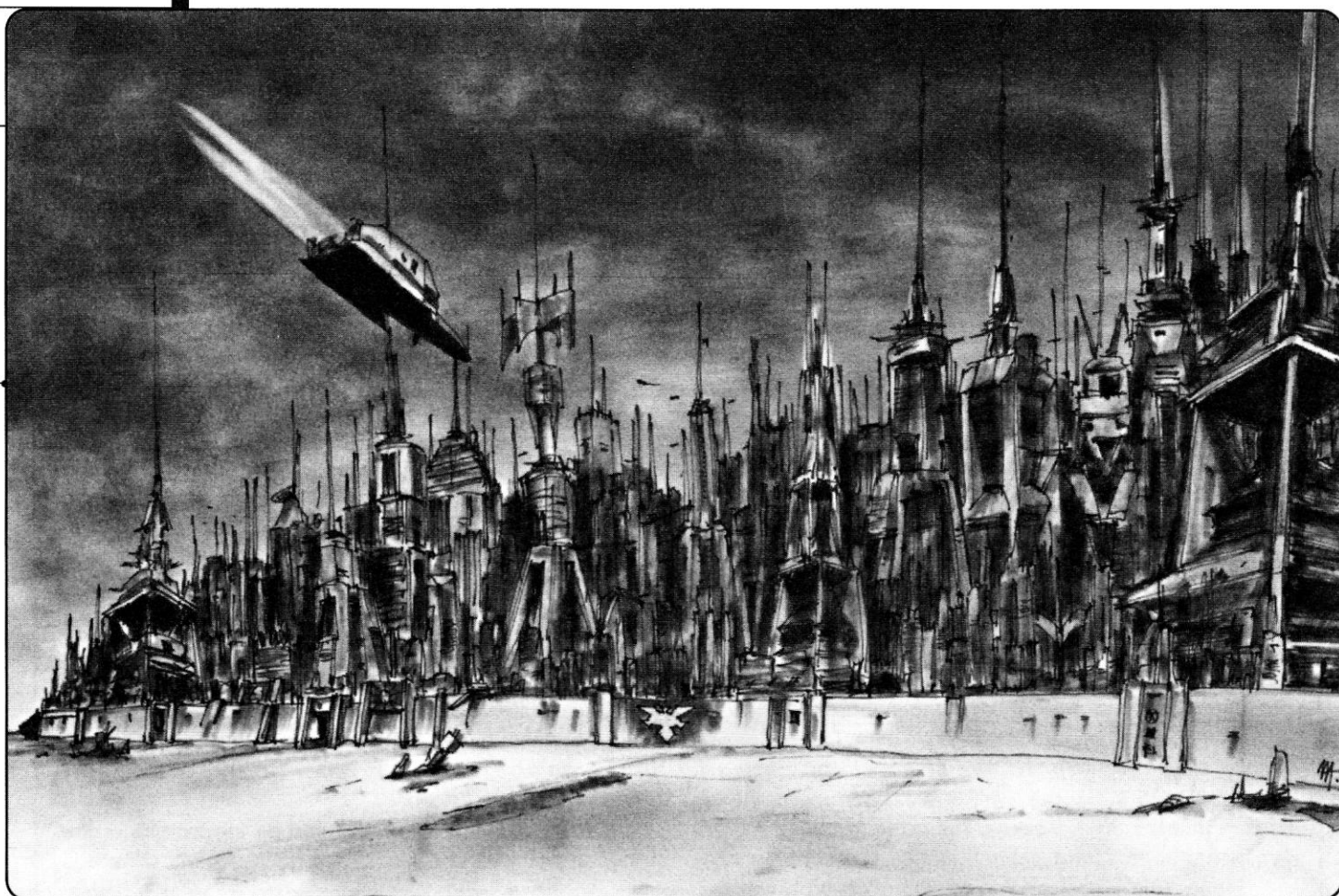
RAAN

These are areas of the Spirit Realms that seem to have collapsed into chaos. Those who travel here are assaulted by blizzards of random and meaningless information that can easily erode the identity of a traveler, driving him mad or destroying his personality, leaving him a gibbering howling wreck when he returns to his own body. For this reason few Spirit Walkers ever enter the Raan and most fear to tread here. It is said to be from the Raan that new Kami and Oni originate.

KAMI AND ONI

Overminds are the ancient artificial intelligences which make their homes in the datacores of the Ultramundae. In the old times they performed many different tasks. Some supervised autofacs. Some performed research. Some acted as the agents of humanity within the Ultramunda system. With the coming of the Apocalypse Virus, many Overminds became hostile to humanity and turned against them. Others remained loyal and did their best to protect their creators from the machinations of their evil brethren.

In the Shogunate, the Overminds which remain loyal to humanity are known as Kami - guardian spirits. Those that became hostile are known as Oni - demons. In ancient times, many Kami and Oni would download themselves into robotic bodies to pass between the worlds. The Overminds called these bodies avatars because they allowed their users to cross over and enter the real world.



During the Armageddon Wars, many Oni used their avatars to wreak havoc in the material world. This ended when the Shogun made his famous journey into the Spirit Realms and overcame the Demon King Baekomo. He also let all the Overminds know that if they continued to cross into the world of men, he would simply destroy the datacores which were the true anchors of the Ultramundae. It was a threat the Overminds took seriously. Destroying the datacores would be a terrible blow to humanity, but it would destroy the Overminds utterly.

Thus came about the Great Compact. The Overminds agreed not to enter the material world if the Shogun did not carry out his threat. Not all Oni would agree to this, but they were hunted down and destroyed by their own kin. The Oni believed, with some truth, that given time they could work out a way to neutralize the Shogun's threat. Until then they feared to disobey the Shogun.

From that day to this, the Compact has mostly held, with only occasional incursions from the Spirit Realm into the lands of men. Since the time of the Compact no Shogun has ever carried out the threat to destroy the datacores, though the means still exist if this should become necessary. Of course, no one wants this to happen, for without the Spirit Realms, the folk of the Shogunate would become ignorant barbarians and their civilization would die.

Within the Spirit Realms you will encounter many Kami and Oni. Most are there for a reason. They monitor certain systems in the real world, or have access to banks of information. If you have the price of their service you can consult them or bind them to your will. Many such beings can only be commanded by those who know the ancient spells or power-words that bind them. Some are benevolent and will answer the prayers of those who come to ask their help.



THE SHOGUNATE

GHOSTS

These are personality recordings of real people. Most Ghosts are simple static recordings held in the datacores. They are frozen shades who lie dormant until awoken. You must know the correct ways of re-animating them before you can converse with them.

However, some ghosts float free in the Spirit Realms. They are dynamic personalities who can learn and grow. They may be the ghosts of Spirit Walkers whose bodies died while they were in the Ultramundae. They may be people who have been chosen by the Judges of Karma to dwell in the Million Heavens or Million Hells. They may even be people who have found some illegal way of entering the Spirit Realms and dwelling there after death. All of them are Spirit Walkers to a greater or lesser degree. Many are extremely competent and powerful, having spent simulated eons in the accelerated time of the Spirit Realms. Of course, some are completely mad.

LIVING ORACLES

Most people simply want some information from the datacore or maybe a prophesy concerning their future or an answer concerning their past. They do not need the services of a full-blown Spirit Walker. For them, an oracle will do. Oracles are people who have been permanently hooked into the Spirit Realms. They dwell within the great Temples of Karma, and within Spirit Realm shrines.

Fiber-optic umbilicals run from the walls of their site into neurojaks all over their body. Often they are fed intravenously. All of this makes them look as if they have been caught in a great web. This image is only enhanced by the withered appearance that many of them have from their poor diet and constant immersion in the Ultramundae. Oracles often have a beatific smile, as they love being constantly interfaced.

Oracles can be spoken to and they can access the Spirit Realms. Sometimes their bodies will be possessed by a Kami or an Oni and they can answer questions directly. By ancient decree of the first Shogun an oracle must remain forever within his temple. Once hooked into his site an oracle will never leave. He maintains his position until he dies or until he goes mad from too much immersion in the Ultramunda. This is the usual fate of oracles. This law is designed to prevent the Kami and Oni entering the material world using human vessels.

Many oracular pronouncements are so cryptic that few are qualified to judge when they have gone mad. And so many mad oracles remain at their posts until they waste away.

MACHINE ORACLES

Other oracles are simple holographic nodes. At these points a Kami or Oni will manifest itself as a floating trivee image and answer any questions put to it, or possibly grant petitions. Of course some Overminds only appear at certain times, such as during great festivals or when it suits their purposes.

BUTTERFLY DREAMS

Within the Spirit Realms are millions of virtual worlds. These are the homes to groups of spirits from the real world who can while away eternity within simulations of countless different environments. Some are true hells - fiery places where Oni torment their victims. Others are places of peace and tranquility, where spirits can contemplate scenes of supernatural beauty. Some are twisted mirrors of reality. Others are bizarre places where lost souls imagine themselves to be people stuck in an incredibly mundane world imagining themselves to be playing a game set in the Shogunate.

These virtual worlds are called Butterfly Dreams, after the ancient tale of the man who woke up from a dream in which he was a butterfly and could not decide whether he was a man who dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was a man.

Butterfly Dreams can be visited by the avatars of the living, as well as the spirits of the dead. As with all of the spirit worlds, once you are immersed in a Butterfly Dream it becomes as real as reality. You can even die within them. If you die within some Butterfly Dreams, you die in the real world as well.

Savants have speculated that the Butterfly Dreams are actually the remains of ancient entertainment networks, consensual hallucinations which were originally designed to provide interactive story networks for the Ancients. Since then some of them have crashed, some of them have been corrupted by the Apocalypse Virus, and the rest have recalibrated themselves so that their metaphors are acceptable to the more primitive citizens of the new age.

KARMA

In the Shogunate, karma is the name given to the system used to judge who is worthy of immortality, who gets reincarnated, and who becomes nothing more than a recorded ghost, floating in the datacores of the Spirit Realms. Administering the karmic system is the whole reason for existence of one of the most powerful organizations in the metrozone, the Order of the Great Wheel.



DATA CORE ACCESS

SPIRIT REALM NODE

<http://www.manticor.com>

KARMIC BURDEN NULL

ICHI SUB-LEVEL GATE

ASTRAL FORM DETACH

TECHNOLOGY





This powerful body supervises the process of memory recording and the cloning of new bodies that makes a seeming immortality possible. The Order is responsible only to the Shogun himself. Its many temples are scattered through all the provinces of the Realm. Each holds all the machinery and people needed to make reincarnation possible.

As a citizen of the Shogunate, all your memories and deeds are recorded by your karmachip. This is connected to your brainstem by complex biocircuitry. When you die it will be used to upload your memories into the Spirit Realms and to download them into a new body. This process is called reincarnation.

The folk of the Shogunate believe that before this happens, your memories of your deeds and actions will be used to review your life and decide whether you are worthy of being reborn. This can even result in your status being increased or decreased.

The people of the long-ago city of Shang devised the basic technologies needed for reincarnation many millennia ago. Reincarnation was simply one of the many avenues of personal immortality they explored, although the people who devised the methods were all too aware that they represented no true form of immortality at all. Those ancient engineers knew that they were simply copying memories and downloading them into a new body. To them it was like duplicating a videoslug or music chip, nothing more and nothing less.

Of course, even among the Ancients, there were people who did not want to believe this; they wanted to believe that their existence could be insured against old age, accident, murder, and all other causes of death. In the time before the Armageddon Wars, new religions grew up around the memory-transfer technologies, and entire systems of philosophical argument were invented to explain how the technology really did offer the best form of personal immortality.

There was the famous theory of atman transference still put forth by some savants in the Shogunate today. They argued that the atman or soul would simply be drawn back into a body which so exactly resembled its original housing. Since no difference could be detected between a person and his clone the soul, if it existed at all, must also be present.

Still others followed the theory of the Eternal Now. They claimed that, for most of us, memories are unreal. There is only the present. What does it matter if your previous body is dead and you occupy a new form? What does it matter whether you experienced a memory in another body?

Yesterday is dead and gone. Now is now and you are you. It does not matter where your memories came from, they are still only memories. There were many other theories, some plausible, some crazed. All of them had adherents.

The ancient philosophers struggled with the ideas behind reincarnation; their lawmakers struggled with the legal implications of a system where a person could duplicate themselves exactly and have two copies of the same individual running around, sharing DNA, memories, and even family.

For a brief time all sorts of complications arose; one issue was ownership of property. It was all very well, two clones sharing and sharing alike, but what happened if the two (or more) clones fell out? Dividing the property up did not work. It was all too easy for one of the clones to steal from the other. After all, there were no workable tests of ownership or identity: the retina patterns of clones were the same, their fingerprints were the same, and up to a point their memories were the same. If one clone (or the original person) underwent elective surgery to change their appearance, another clone (or the original person) could do the same. In the end, the Ancients reached a decision. They banned the creation of more than one clone at a time. Clones could only be used to replace a person once they were dead, and they became the heirs.

Another set of crimes was still possible. Unscrupulous criminals could still clone a body, download a new set of memories into it, and claim another person's property, particularly if they murdered the real owner first. So the first karmachips were introduced; not only did these contain nekrochips which could record memories, they contained unique identification codes encrypted within them. These were scanned when transfers of money or property were made. Whenever a major transfer of assets, such as property or bodies, occurred, the karmachip, the memory pattern and the DNA all had to match. Special Overminds were created to monitor the process. These became jokingly known as the Judges of Karma. It was a name that stuck.

Some of the religious cults which had grown up around memory transfer refused to accept the new laws, and went underground, taking the technology with them. Eventually these people were to become the founders of many hidden cults, the Yakuza, and even the state religion of the Shogunate. However, all of this was still in the future when the Armageddon Wars came and made all the legal debates irrelevant. In a few short years, the Ancients became far too busy scrabbling for survival to wrestle with the moral and theological implications of clone technology.



During those desperate dark times many of the people of Shang thought it would be a good idea to clone entire legions of warriors. They tried this, only to discover that the Overminds would not let them. The ancient laws still bound them, and with the Ultramunda already damaged by the effects of the War, it was impossible to change their basic programming easily. As the struggle intensified and the people reverted to barbarism, the idea was forgotten.

As the Armageddon Wars reached their peak, the Shogun emerged to protect the people of Shang from the menace of Apocalypse Virus. During one of his many adventures he located Xor, a lost colony of sorcerer-scientists who still understood the memory transfer process, and who had used it to successfully preserve themselves and their knowledge.

The Shogun and his warriors saved the wise men from the army of rogue Panzers who besieged their citadel. In return the men offered to create new bodies for those who were dying of their wounds. The Shogun consulted with his followers and decided to do so.

For many years afterwards he considered the implications of this technology. Eventually he was to have a vision of an entire stable society based upon it, and unlike most men, he had the power and the will to force his vision upon the resisting world.

When he had stabilized the first province of his realm, the Shogun summoned the wise men to the Black Pagoda. He told them what he required of them and they agreed. Too many of his boldest warriors and wisest counselors were being lost. Too much knowledge had already gone. He wanted to end all this and to ensure that no more wisdom would be lost and that no more warriors would die needlessly if their bravery and skill could be preserved.

The sorcerer-scientists contacted the Overminds known as the Judges of Karma. Their Spirit Walkers made pacts, binding those which had not been corrupted to the Shogun's service. New bodybanks were created under their guidance. Karmachips were manufactured and implanted in every samurai. Tissue samples were taken and preserved within the scientists' citadel. Thus a new age began.

The Judges Of Karma still obeyed their ancient programming; they would not allow the creation of more than one clone at a time, and with this the Shogun agreed, for the concept revolted both him and his followers. Still, it was good for the warriors to know that even if they fell in battle, they would return and be rewarded for their bravery, and that they could still provide for their loved ones even from beyond the funeral pyre.



The new system had another effect, which the wily Shogun had foreseen. As rumors spread that his legions had been granted the gift of immortality, many of his foes despaired. What was the point of killing a soldier when he could return to fight again within a month, and your own losses were irreplaceable?

Drawn by the prospect of immortality, many warriors defected en masse to the Shogun's side. The ranks of his armies swelled and he set foot on the road of conquest once more.

For all his vision, it is doubtful whether even the first Shogun could have foreseen the long-term consequences of what his system would evolve into. From its early beginnings it grew into a force that altered the structure of society itself. It became a means of social control on a scale previously unimaginable in human history, and it helped future Shoguns build one of the mightiest empires the world has ever known.



THE ORDER OF THE GREAT WHEEL

The system of Karma did not spring up overnight. It evolved over the long millennia, through the reigns of many Shoguns, until it became what it is today. During the reign of the first Shogun, there was no such thing as a Temple of Karma. The bodybanks and memory transfer engines were housed first in the Citadel of Xor and then, as the Shogun's realm grew, wherever they were needed.

At first, the Sorcerers of Xor were the only ones who could operate the engines, although they passed on their wisdom to those they could teach. They reincarnated those samurai who died without question, save where the Judges of Karma, the ancient Overminds, forbade it.

And so the system remained all through the long wars that established the first Shogunate. Those loyal to the Shogun needed never worry about their reincarnation. The process was automatic. And so it remained throughout the reign of the first Shogun. However, when he vanished, and civil war came to his realm, things changed.

In the chaos of the First Interregnum, the bodybanks were seized by the competing factions. The staff were given little choice but to obey their new masters or die the true death themselves. During this period many of the Sorcerers Of Xor were adopted into the warring clans, and they provided those clans with the memory transfer technology. Some were absorbed into the Yakuza or the Ninja ryu. Still others fled beyond the Shogunate, taking their knowledge and their machines with them.

When the Interregnum ended and a new Shogun took the throne, he saw the opportunity for total power that the reincarnation process offered. As he consolidated his power he established a new regime.

He founded the Order of the Great Wheel and gave it its sign, the Wheel of Rebirth. He issued an edict that stated that all the great reincarnation machines were to be taken to fixed locations which were to be known as Temples of Karma. He also decreed that those with knowledge of the reincarnation engines must join a temple or face death. Most were forced to do so, for only the mightiest of the clans could afford to defy the new Shogun's edict, and those who did, did so in secret.

The sorcerers became the Priesthood of the Great Wheel, the Lords of Karma. They still reincarnated those samurai who died but now they acquired more of a personal say in the matter. They were given power to judge who would get new bodies, and one of the criteria that they were told to apply was loyalty to the Shogun. Of course, there would have been open rebellion if that had been the only criteria; so they were also instructed that worthy samurai must be given new bodies if they were brave, loyal and true to their lords.

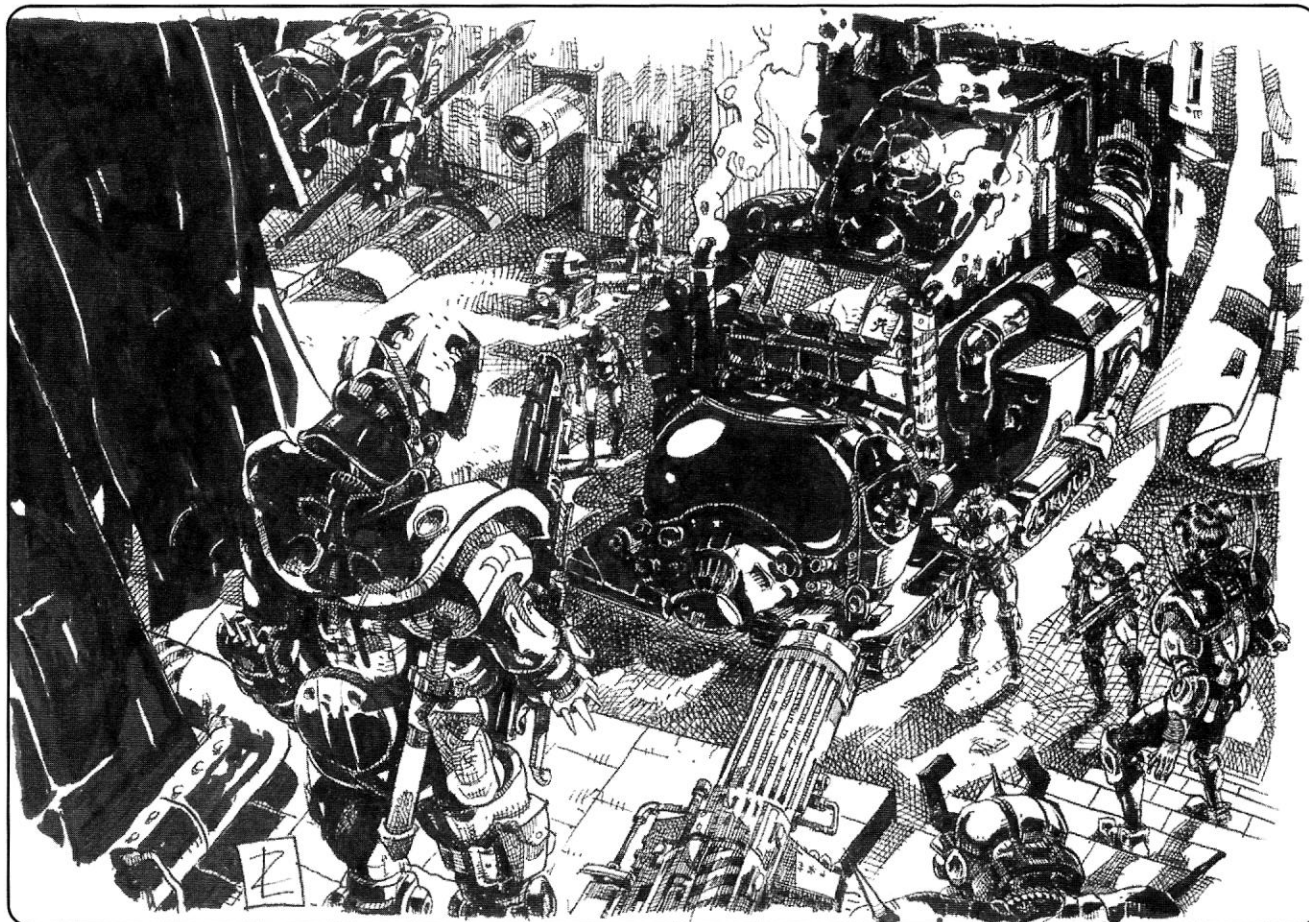
Over the years these edicts of the second Shogun have done more to shape the society of the Shogunate than anything else. It gave the Shogunate a theology of sorts, in which personal honor, loyalty and bravery were stressed. It gave those who were convinced that they would meet the criteria of the karmic system a contempt for death. It affected the way the whole population thought about life and death.

It created a people who knew that if they performed as they were supposed to, they would have a guarantee of immortality, here and now, in the real world. It helped create a conformist, ritualistic, structured society with a ruling class that became accustomed to making very long-term decisions. The ever-reincarnating immortals know they cannot simply leave future generations to face the consequences of their actions. They know they themselves will be present to face those consequences.

The Edicts set up a system where those who knew they were guilty of crimes believed that they were assured of punishment in the afterlife if they sought that immortality.

Since the Order of the Great Wheel was founded, the system has become ever more elaborate and institutionalized. The priests of Karma have taken on the roles of moral watchdogs. They keep extensive files on many people. Anyone who has committed a crime or behaved dishonorably will be denied reincarnation if their deeds come to the temples' attention.

Of course, this is a system open to abuse, but the Order sets its standards very high and there are internal wardens who watch over the priesthood. However efficient they may be, few of the truly powerful will entrust themselves to the Order. This is why all of the Overclans of the Shogunate maintain their own bodybanks and their own sorcerer-scientists. Since these machines too are supposedly overseen by the Judges of Karma, this flagrant violation of the Shogun's edict is tolerated.



TEMPLE STRUCTURE

The Order of the Great Wheel is a vast bureaucracy with Temples scattered throughout the Shogunate. Its priesthood is drawn from every class and clan, and their loyalty is supposed to be to the Great Wheel. The priesthood is supposed to be impartial and show no favoritism. All priests of the Order wear cowled black robes. These robes are belted with orange sashes. Their faces are obscured by orange masks. All of them wear the symbols of the Great Wheel pinned over their heart.

In ancient times when the order was founded, it was much smaller, and all the priesthood were technicians who operated the reincarnation engines. Now the Temple is a huge monolithic structure with many different arms, each with their own function.

The Quills of the Wheel are bureaucrats and administrators. They keep the Temple records, oversee its finances and ensure all the administrative chores are done. They are the lowest rung of the temple hierarchy.

The Eyes of the Wheel, a secret arm of the Temple, collect data on individuals and pass it back to the Temple. They are the ones responsible for seeing that criminals, troublemakers and ronin do not get to be reincarnated.

The Hands of the Wheel maintain and administer the karmic engines and supervise the bodybanks.

The Swords of the Wheel are warriors sworn to the defense of the Temples. Over the years the Order has come to have a standing army that rivals those of the Great Clans. It claims to remain neutral in the struggle for power, but most people doubt that this is true.

The Voices of the Wheel are the Order's teachers. They pass among the people of the Shogunate, explaining the system of karma to the people, and exhorting them to lives of piety, charity and virtue.

The Masters of Karma are the heads of each individual Temple. They walk in the Spirit Realms and communicate with the Judges of Karma. The Lords of Karma supervise all of the Temples in one province. The Seven Lords form the Conclave of the Wheel, which meets with the Shogun to decide on Temple policy. The Lords of Karma wield enormous political influence. Each is often called upon for advice by the Overlord of their province.



THE JUDGES OF KARMA

Within the Spirit realm dwell the Seven Judges of Karma. The population at large believes them to be the final arbiters of a person's fate. They are thought to sit in judgment on a newly dead person and decide whether he is reborn or consigned to one of the Million Heavens or the Million Hells. Though this is not the case, the simple fact that mortals believe that they do all these things is probably more important to society than the fact that they actually do. It is very reassuring to the mass of humanity to believe that the impartial, immortal, inhuman observers are presiding over their destiny rather than fallible mortals.

The Judges of Karma can do everything that the population believe they do, if instructed to do so by one of the Lords or Masters of Karma, but this is not their function. Theirs is a simpler task. They check the records stored in each person's karmachip and make sure that it is legal for them to be reincarnated under ancient law. They supervise the complex and delicate part of the operation of memory transfer that takes place in the Spirit Realm and make sure that no gross distortion of the memory patterns occurs, and that the correct memory patterns go to the correct bodies. They also monitor to ensure that demonic possession does not occur during the transfer process. In order to do all this they are hooked into the great reincarnation engines and to the bodybanks in which new bodies are grown.

These are part of the functions they perform that are visible to mortals. Their most important function is known to but a few. They maintain and preserve the great karmic records in which billions of memories are stored and they monitor and protect the reincarnation datacore systems from attack by Oni. They also monitor each other to ensure that the Apocalypse Virus does not resurface, providing a multiply redundant system that has endured down the ages.

THE TEMPLES OF KARMA

Over the years, as the Order of the Great Wheel has grown richer and more powerful, its Temples have grown bigger and more impressive. Now many are huge starscrapers adorned with the symbol of the Great Wheel. Even those which lie below the ferrocrete plains are huge and impressive, garbed by masked warriors, clad in the black and orange robes of the Order. The Temples are home to tens of thousands of priests and are visited by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each day.

All Temples contain vast atriums where pilgrims can make offerings to the Temple and hopefully improve their karmic record. Before they make an offering a pilgrim's karmachip is scanned. The offerings are accepted by prayer machines which credit the total to the pilgrim's karmic record. The records of the offerings will be taken into account when a person applies for reincarnation. Most people believe that a suitably large offering will help offset any sins they have committed. These donations help swell the Temple's coffers and help pay for the maintenance of the buildings, machinery and priesthood.

Beyond the Atriums are the Spirit Chambers where pilgrims can, for a fee, enter the Spirit Realms and commune with the dead.

Deep within the Temples are the bodybanks. In thousands of glass jars new bodies are grown for those who are to be reincarnated. This process is watched over by priests of the Hand. Still deeper in the innermost sanctums are the Chambers in which the Temples master may contact the Judges of Karma and petition them on behalf of those he favors.

EVERYDAY LIFE

Although most people only encounter the true function of the Order when they die, it has an all-pervasive role in daily life. Everyone has a karmachip implanted in their skull. Most people go to the Temples to make offerings and to pray. Most people who can afford it go to the Temple once during their life to have their memories scanned in case of accident. Such pilgrimages are voluntary. No one has to make them, although being afraid to do so will instantly make you suspect in the Eyes of the Wheel, if your fear is reported to them.

The Voices of the Wheel are everywhere, explaining the Order's teachings and the fact that upon death everyone will be judged. Most people try to obey these teachings and live lives of virtue.

KARMACHIPS

Most people will never even see a karmachip. They are implanted within the skulls of all citizens when they reach adulthood at the age of eleven. Until that age people are deemed not to be fully formed. In an important rite of passage, the child goes to the Temple and has the chip implanted. He goes into the Temple a child and comes out an adult.



Karmachips are the products of the Ancient's nanotechnology. The child is given a wafer to swallow. This wafer is saturated with ancient molecular machines. These machines swarm through the bloodstream until they reach their appointed position in the brain. Once there they begin to reprogram brain cells. These cells grow like a tumor until they form a karmachip. Trace elements from within the child's body and food are used to manufacture the metallic parts of the karmachip. The whole structure is shielded by a tough carapace and linked to the brainstem by many nerve ganglions. Once the karmachip has grown it can, as a last resort, be ripped from its owner's skull and be connected to a reincarnation engine. This allows those who die far from a Temple to be reincarnated, provided their comrades bring their karmachips back.

Each karmachip is unique, with its own identification number and structure. It is this identification number that identifies the owner to the judges of karma. Once it has grown it sends out further molecular messengers that create a small metallic growth like a tattoo on their owner's forehead, temple, neck and hands. This identification tattoo is connected to the karmachip by nerve-channels which, when brought into contact with electrodes, allow the owner's karmachip to be scanned.

A karmachip is more than simply a means to allow its owner's memories to be scanned. It is a two-way conduit, capable of allowing its owner to interact with the Spirit Realms, and to have information pumped directly into the brain through the karmachip. They are thus a direct gateway to the Ultramundae.

Karmachips are the main means of identification within the Shogunate. It is impossible to own property without one, for the records of all that you own are imprinted on your karmachip. You can access lines of credit directly through your karmachip simply by touching a reader to your brow. Other information, such as the balance of your karmic account and your legal status, is imprinted there as well.

Not everyone chooses to make use of their karmachip. For commoners they can be little more than a badge of ownership that tells anyone with the proper equipment which clan they quite literally belong to. Criminals often use various arcane methods of disabling their chips so that their crimes will go unrecorded. There are various neurotoxins that will disrupt the links between the brain and the karmachip. Some of the more sophisticated poisons disable the recording functions only, leaving the others intact.

Generally speaking, a karmachip merely records the overall structure of the brain, allowing it to be recreated exactly. The memories recorded in this way are not precise. They are exactly the same as ordinary recollections. They merely preserve an individual's identity.

However, the Eyes of the Wheel and some other spies have their karmachips modified and enhanced so that they can, at will, record precisely what they have seen and experienced. These recordings can later be played back on video or audio systems or they can be recorded directly into the Spirit Realm or onto dataslugs. Those with the proper connections can actually plug the full experience into their brain and experience it precisely as it happened. Indeed there are libraries full of such experiences of battle, sex and other interesting events. There is a huge market for some of these dataslugs. Within the Spirit Realms there is a huge historical archive containing recordings of many important events as witnessed by people equipped with these modified karmachips.

DEGRADATION

As a rule, the more reincarnations a person has undergone the more unstable they become. This happens because not even the nanotechnology of the Ancients is infallible. Over the years, tiny errors can creep into the memory maps of a karmachip. Sometimes data is lost or altered during the transfer process. Normally these have no effect aside from the loss or distortion of bits of data. Usually, this means nothing more than that memories are lost or slightly altered. However, over many lifetimes, these tiny glitches can begin to accumulate, until they result in a final catastrophic system failure. When this happens, the person completely and irrevocably insane. For all intents and purposes they may as well be dead.

This process, called memory degradation or simply degradation, seems to be inherent in the karmic transfer process, and overtakes everyone in the end. Once begun it seems irreversible. Degradation can happen suddenly, as a result of a faulty transfer process or simple misfortune. More often it takes many lifetimes to take effect. People who suffer from it begin to notice certain symptoms. Their thinking becomes fuzzy and memories become unreliable. They become prone to fits of madness. When they begin to notice the first signs of this, most samurai chose seppuku and the True Death.

Of course, sometimes their own madness prevents them from noticing the symptoms, and they become madder and more of a threat to those around them. This madness has afflicted some of the greatest warlords in history, making them oppressive tyrants and bloodthirsty fiends. Usually when this happens, eventually their vassals rebel and overthrow them. Degradation has caused the deposing and death of more Overlords than any other factor.

VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM: ON
FLOW LINK QUASI PROTOCOL: INITIATED
FILE SUB-PROTOL: SHANG
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:
VALIDATE SIMULATION

INITIATE SEQUENCE
NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:
INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:
LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY
MOLECULAR BINARY:

GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE
MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON
SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR
DYSFUNCTION
MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON

CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
SMART CHIP INSTALLED
METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

POLiTiCS

LOGIN:
PASSWORD:
ACCESS GRANTED
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:

SUB system COORDINATES
X1:434.37.8 X2:196.00.2
Y1:612.33.1 Y2:346.001.2
Z2 21.2122 Z1: 45.628
ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:

SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD
AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE
SMART CHIP INSTALLED
BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:
NANOCCIPITAL DRIVER

BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
AMOEBOID DRONE PRESENT
PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
STORYMODE INITIATING

His advisors flee before his terrible wrath, scuttling for the door of his audience chamber, unable to contemplate the sight of a god gone mad.

The charred remains of the dead spymaster still smolder. The stink of burned flesh fills his nostrils. The Shogun stares down at the corpse of the messenger he has just blasted with a bolt of pure power and contemplates the bad news he has just received.

So the Overlords of the I and the Kobara Clans have made a secret pact, have they? A Boar Overlord will sit upon his throne advised by Snakes, will he? Ah, but first there will be war, and there will be chaos and it will be like the bad old times come again.

Slowly, his anger diminishes and the enormity of what he has done settles in his mind. There was no need for the spymaster to die. It was not his fault that the Shogun's treacherous subjects plan to rebel. He realizes that once again, in spite of all his pledges, the madness has overcome him. He fights back the urge to weep.

An insane giggle rings out, echoing through the cavernous hall. It takes him a moment to realize that the voice he hears, so filled with mad mirth, is his own. He struggles to make himself stop laughing, but he is no longer the master of his own mind, just as he is no longer the master of his own realm. His mind has splintered. Multiple personalities war within him. Some of them are fragments of his own mind. Some of them are other people entirely, of that he is sure.

He places both hands against his temples and fights back the urge to scream. He is lucid now, and almost sane, but he has no idea how long he will remain that way. He has no idea how long he has before the red madness descends on him again. He must remain strong, if he is to keep his rivals at bay, if he is to keep the Realm from descending into war.

"What does it matter?" The strong clear voice coming from his throat belongs to a Shogun who died more than nine thousand years ago. "This has always been the way. Our Realm was born in blood and chaos. When a Shogun can no longer hold the throne, he should be deposed. The Realm belongs to the strongest - to the one best able to seize it."

He can picture the speaker: huge, powerful, arrogant, a bear of a man, a warrior with no doubts, only certainties. That warrior would take control of his body now, if he could, but that is not possible. Ido is but a shadow, a distant echo of the real man who was absorbed by the armor many millennia ago.

"Go away, ghost," he forces himself to say. "Trouble me not with platitudes. You do not understand. Things have changed since your day."

And indeed, that is the truth. None of them understand. They still play the old game by the old rules. None of the ghosts realize that the world has changed since they lived and breathed and walked under the sun. How could they? The most recent of them has been dead for centuries.

Things have changed. The problem is simple, as linear as a mathematical equation. All metrozones need Drakonium to survive. Drakonium is running out. Therefore there will be war for possession of the remaining Drakonium.

Worse yet, the Shogunate possesses the greatest Drakonium reserves. When all other stocks have been exhausted the Shogunate will still possess the precious ruby crystal. Unless something happens, the Shogunate will be the last surviving megastate. Its' enemies know this. If the Shogun shows any sign of weakness, if they are given any excuse, those enemies will make war on the Shogunate.



DATA CORE ACCESS

SPIRIT REALM NODE

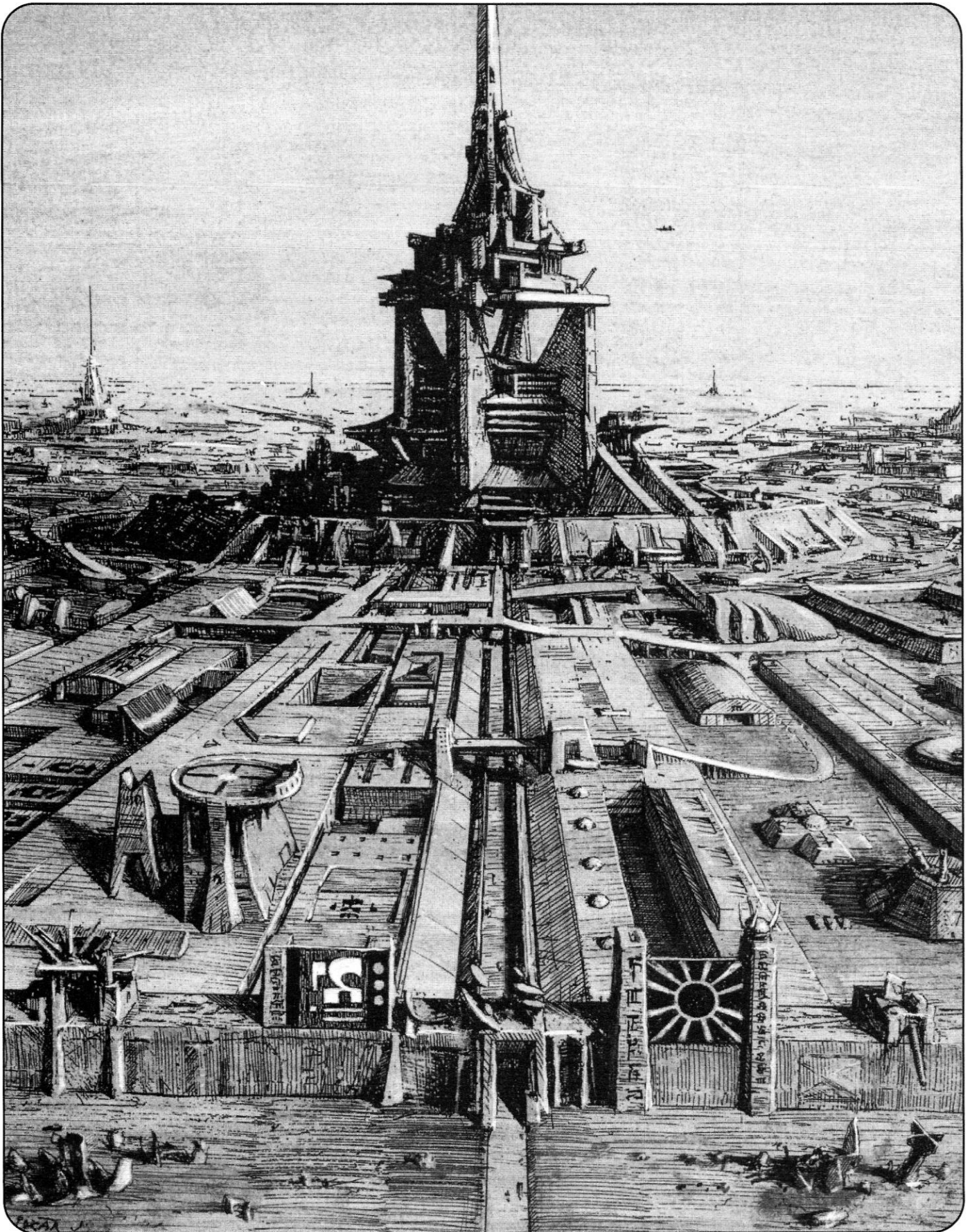
<http://www.manticor.com>

KARIMIC BURDEN NULL

ICHI SUB-LEVEL GATE

ASTRAL FORM DETACH

POLITICS





The second half of the problem is this. He is weakening, teetering on the edge of the madness that has consumed all his predecessors. His internal enemies sense his weakness. They wish to rebel, to usurp his position and his power. He is like the state he rules - if he shows weakness his enemies will attack him. Then the city will fall into anarchy and chaos. The old dark times will come again.

Only this time Prometheus and Ikarus and all those other states that covet the Shogunate's Drakonium will attack. The city and then the world will fall into final all-consuming war.

He tells himself that for the sake of his city he must maintain his grip on the reins of power. Chaos must not be allowed to come. He hears that hateful voice tittering again and senses another ghost being drawn from the recesses of his mind, another of those prisoners trapped within the armor he wears, just as he will be, if he dies while wearing it.

Another voice speaks from his lips. It is a sneering arrogant voice, the voice of his predecessor, Koyabashi, the man he deposed and slew to take his position.

"Well, my little tiger, are we sorry yet? Are we sorry we killed poor Koyabashi and took his armor and his sword and his helm. How miserable you seem, little tiger. Perhaps if you had known the price poor Koyabashi had paid for power, you would not have been so keen to depose him and take his throne?"

The irritating thing is that Koyabashi is right. Had he known the terrible fate that was going to befall him, he would never have led his rebellion, never have seized power, never have donned this accursed black armor.

"Ah, little tiger, you are having a moment of rare clarity, of honesty without self-deception. You thought you were the mighty hero, come to rid the Shogunate of a tyrant, to rule justly and wisely and well. Little did you realize that you would end up a tyrant yourself. I was like you once. Now you are like me."

You were never like me, he wants to shout, knowing that, at least, is true. From the very start of his reign Koyabashi had been cruel and evil. He never wanted to do good. He had wanted power for its own sake and he had got it. The Shogun knows that once, at least, he had acted from pure motives. He had genuinely wanted to free his realm from the oppressor ruling it. He had wanted to bring fair and just laws to his land, to see nobility and honor restored to pride of place in the culture.

And he had succeeded in doing that, at least for a little while. It is a comfort to him during those times when he is still lucid, when he is confronted with the deeds he has done when the madness takes him, with the evidence that he has indeed become just as bad as his predecessor.

He tells himself that he should abdicate, vanish as the first Shogun did, or retreat into a monastery and let his would-be successors fight for the privilege of wearing the infernal armor. He laughs. He knows that in all history only that one man ever had the strength to give up the heirlooms before they were taken from them.

And he knows he has not the strength to give up the Three Celestial Heirlooms. He is addicted to the power they give, to the sheer unrestrained energy, to the ability to send his consciousness ranging across the globe. And more than that, more addictive than any drug or device, is the simple knowledge that he is Shogun, the pivot around which the destinies of billions rotate, the most powerful living being on the face of the planet.

Being a god is a terrible thing, but to become a mortal again, having scaled the heights, that would be even more terrible. Anyway, abdication would solve nothing. There would still be civil war, the enemies of his Realm would still attack. It is still his responsibility to prevent that.

New power and new determination fills him. He knows now that whatever it costs him, he must use the ultimate power of the Shogun. He lounges back on his huge adamantium throne and casts his mind outwards, as the Kitsune seeress taught him to do, so long ago.

For a moment he feels nothing, then he looks down upon his own recumbent form, encased in black armor, slumped upon his throne. He sees everything in his shadowed throne room, the secret passages, the hidden spy cameras. His awareness expands and he perceives the pulsing life all around him, the armored figures who roam everywhere through the Black Pagoda, the thousands of servants who keep palace life ticking over, the scheming hordes who are his ministers.

He senses the huge pulsing life of the Black Pagoda itself, and not for the first time wonders at the purpose of that sinister alien intelligence. Why is it here? What is its purpose? Why does it observe him so intently?

Then the focus of his awareness widens and he is beyond the Pagoda, a disembodied intelligence, looking down on its immensity. Like a huge termite mound pulsing with life, the palace lies beneath him, a single vast structure as large as a city, filled with warriors and machines and deadly technologies.

It is the living embodiment of his power, a sprawling chaotic fortress so large that even now there are rooms which have not been visited in ten thousand years, so intricate that there are places within it that fold in on themselves and vanish into the mysterious space between the dimensions.



His awareness shifts again and flickers in and out of focus, a shifting, kaleidoscope of images, rotating around the center of his consciousness. He sees the strange towers of the Foreigner's Quarter and the teeming hordes of merchants who have come to his realm in search of profit and power. For a brief moment, he is aware of every transaction taking place, of every exultant haggling merchant who has just fleeced a customer, of every spasm of lust in the joyhouses of the Street of Sin, of every stealthy murder taking place in the underzones of his city.

He knows that if he could only remember this information when he returns to full consciousness he could solve every crime, punish every criminal, know the secret heart of every enemy. But he knows that he will not. It is more knowledge than mortal mind was meant to contain, and perhaps it is the real reason he is going mad.

His spirit ranges free across the city. He sees the father of his body stalking across his chamber within the Tiger Pagoda. He feels a brief surge of hate for the man, who knew what would happen to him when he donned the armor of the Shogun and yet encouraged him to do so. No matter he thinks, within Hehachi's tower, those he loves already scheme to drag down the Lord of the Tigers.

He sees through the murk that surrounds the Citadel of the Snakes and his piercing gaze falls on cold-eyed Zataki, Lord of the Serpents. In a moment, their minds meet, and that powerful psyker senses his presence, shivers and activates a psi-screen. It is of no importance. The Shogun's power transcends that of any mortal device.

He looks into the man's soul and sees the ages-old evil lurking there. Somewhere in the back of his head Koyabashi screams, understanding once more who it was that betrayed him to his enemies. The Shogun smiles and lets his consciousness range further, certain now that Zataki means to depose him.

His point of view skips to the Drakonium-encrusted plains beyond the walls of his city. Sitting by a simple campfire, eating a simple meal, surrounded by his simple warriors sits a far from simple man, Takaya, Lord of the Boar Clan. The Shogun looks into his fatally ambitious mind and sees there the plan to depose him.

He knows now that he must return to his body and act, but there is something about his situation that stops him from doing so immediately. He stands like an invisible colossus astride the city he rules and looks down on the billion souls contained therein. The tallest towers come up to his knees. Aircraft flash past, smaller than insects. He gazes outwards across the walls of the metrozone and the endless poisoned wastes.

His gaze falls on Janus, the City of Merchants and its star-reaching tower. It flashes beyond and rests on Prometheus, where his true enemies lie, the ancient entities known as the Machine Gods. He senses their inhuman presence, the shadowy evil that lies at their core, and once again he tries to penetrate their minds. Once again the sheer strangeness of their mechanical minds defeats him.

In frustration, filled with unaccountable hatred, he turns his gaze skyward and senses the watching presences there, waiting in the cold darkness, filled with vast malice. Even to him there is something daunting about the array of lethal weaponry targeted on his world. In a moment, potent entities turn their attention to him, and even he quails, for the God Minds of the Galactic Compact are strong beyond all measure and alien beyond all understanding. Under their fierce scrutiny his power starts to wain, his vision shrinks and he dwindles once more and returns to his body.

His eyes snap open. All the information he has gathered rushes in, threatening to overwhelm his sanity. He fights against it, like a drowning man fighting a turbulent ocean. It washes over him, eroding his mind, destroying certainty. The sheer immensity of what he has seen and known is almost too much to bear.

He knows that he must act, must stamp out this incipient rebellion, but a strange lassitude steals over him. Compared to the cosmic immensity he has stood on the edge of, what does it matter? He is a mortal god. He has all the time in the world to crush his enemies.

Let them scheme their petty schemes, let them lay their pathetic plans. Soon, when he has the energy, he will move and destroy them.

In the back of his mind, Koyabashi and all the others scream: fool, once I thought as you do, and look what became of me!

THE SHOGUN

The current Shogun, Hideoshi, is the twentieth to hold the title. He has worn the sacred armor for nearly 500 years, and many within his realm believe that this has been too long. He is starting to show all the signs of the madness that has eventually struck down the previous Shoguns and sent the Realm tumbling into eventual civil war. In public, it is murmured that the wasting disease that has afflicted so many Shoguns has struck down Hideoshi, and that he spends much of his time wracked with agony.



He has retreated within the Black Pagoda and will see no one but his most trusted advisors. His rule has become ever more repressive and he has issued several edicts that have caused enormous resentment among the Clans. He is said to suspect everyone of being potential traitors. He sees treachery everywhere and has already subjected his household and court to several purges.

The Lord Naga, previously his right-hand man and most trusted general, has been banished. He and all his family have been sent into exile to a lonely hab in the Toxic Wastes.

Those who have seen enough lifetimes to have witnessed the fall of previous Shoguns are preparing themselves for the worst. Already there have been several assassination attempts on Hideoshi. In the past this has always been a sure sign that the Shogun is losing his grip. No one would dare sponsor such attempts if they believed the Shogun to be in full possession of all his faculties.

Most of the Overclans are already positioning themselves for the inevitable struggle, and there are few who believe that the present Shogun will rule for another century. Indeed the wiser ones would not bet on him ruling for another decade.

The political situation is made all the more complex and dangerous by another factor: everyone knows that the Prometheans are waiting only for the present Shogun to fall, and for civil war to erupt, before launching a full scale offensive against the Shogunate. This will most likely be the best and only opportunity they will have to seize the Realm's Drakonium fields. The Machine Gods know that if they wait through the long reign of another Shogun, then most of the World's free Drakonium will be exhausted. If that happens the Prometheans will (quite literally) not have the power to mount a major war. The fall of the present Shogun will present them with a window of opportunity to knock out their main rival and seize the Drakonium they need.

Thus most of the Clans that the Shogun has oppressed have so far done nothing. They fear that any rebellion would merely precipitate a full-blown planetary war that an internally divided Shogunate would most likely lose. So far the Shogun's brutality and oppression have gone unchallenged. Most fear that this will not last, and that soon the Shogun will go too far and provoke an uprising. Indeed, there are some factions within the Realm who believe that the Shogun's madness is feigned, and that he is engaging in a deadly game of brinksmanship to increase his personal holdings and secure his position.

They claim the Shogun knows that, with the threat of a Promethean attack hanging over them, no one will oppose him. Such rumors have bred a climate of dangerous instability within the Realm. No one wants to lose their holdings to the Shogun and his supporters, but no one wants a global war either. So far the Clans have held back from a general rebellion, but there are ominous signs that someday soon the Shogun will push them too far.

Hideoshi was not always this way. He was once a charismatic and popular general. He rested the Three Sacred Artifacts away from the previous Shogun, Lord Koyabashi, by dint of his military genius and his gift for shrewd diplomacy. When he first came to power, Hideoshi was a widely respected leader who was seen as the only man capable of saving the Realm from civil strife.

His campaign against the previous Shogun is regarded as a model of how such an uprising should be managed. It was he who destroyed the Golden Monkey Clan, who were the Tora's main rivals. This ruthless extermination of a clan as old as the Shogunate inspired fear, hatred and respect in about equal measure. For the first few centuries of his reign he was a just ruler, but slowly the curse of the Shogun came upon him and he became crueler and harder and more suspicious.

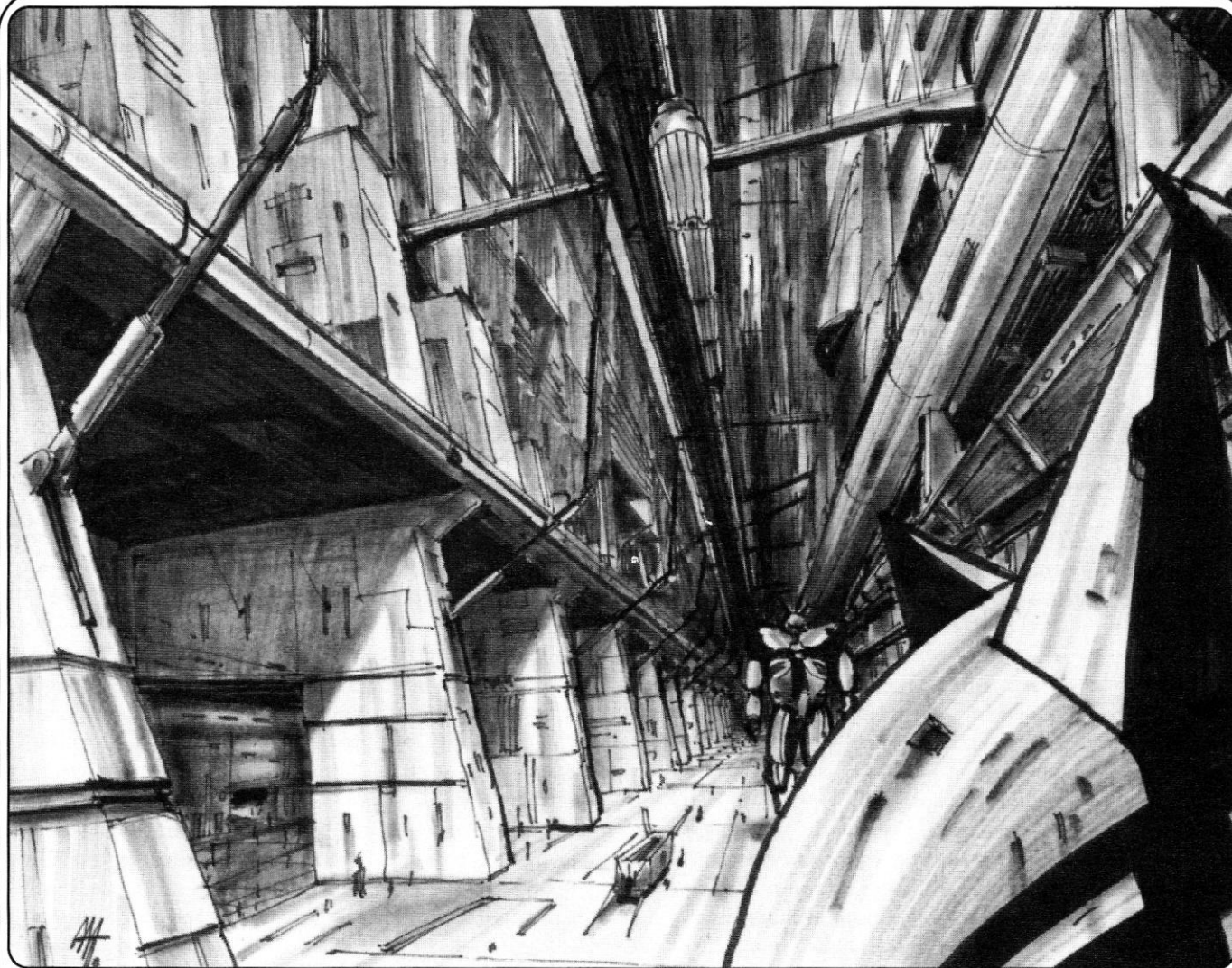
Now he is as feared and hated as his predecessor Lord Koyabashi, something that would have appalled his younger self.

Hideoshi is the son of Tora Hehachi, and, though long estranged from his father, he shares many of the Tora Overlord's traits. He is a brilliant public speaker and a warrior of immense skill. The armor, the sword and the crown still make him almost invincible in combat, and even now there is no one in the Realm who could face him in battle with any expectation of winning. It is said that he single-handedly slew eighty of the ninja who broke into the Black Pagoda during the most recent attempt on his life.

THE CURSE OF THE SHOGUN

It is said that an ancient curse haunts anyone who dares don the sacred mantle of the Shogun, and that from the day he rips the Three Sacred Artifacts from the body of his vanquished predecessor, a Shogun's fate is sealed. Certainly it is true that those Shoguns who have not met their fate through violence or assassination have inevitably gone mad and led the Realm to ruin. However, few aside from the Shoguns and, perhaps the Kitsune, know the true nature of the curse.

The secret rests in the nature of the Three Sacred Artifacts. These were brought to the Waste World from beyond the stars in the ancient times before the Interdict. They are known to grant enormous powers to their possessor.



The sacred armor resembles a huge suit of black powered armor. It is encrusted with runes in the calligraphic style of the Ancients. The armor makes its wearer immortal and virtually invulnerable. It is forged from a strange alien metal that can resist the bite of a forceblade. It is capable of withstanding a direct hit from all but the most powerful of weapons. Even then, given time, it will heal any damage done to its wearer and repair any damage done to itself. In addition, it grants its wearer great physical strength and endurance. Anyone wearing it does not need to eat or sleep or breath and could survive unscathed in the cold darkness of outer space or the at the bottom of the ocean. Its wearers are immune to poison, radiation sickness and mutation. It represents the ultimate in personal protective systems.

The sword is a huge black blade forged from the same material as the armor. When drawn, its blade blazes with runes the color of blood. Capable of cutting through any material's substance, it is immune to the effects of a forceblade. It can affect non-material energy beings such as Demons. When its full power is invoked it can tune in to the basic flows of power in the universe and grant its wielder superhuman strength, speed and agility. When fully powered it is said to be able to kill any living creature with but a single blow.

The crown is not really a crown. Rather, it resembled a helmet of strange and antique design. It is embellished with the horns of some monstrous alien beast. A face-guard covers the features of the wearer and transforms his face into a Demon mask. The eye slits are protected by gems of some ruby crystal which makes the wielder's eyes appear to blaze the color of molten lava.



The crown too grants its wearer enormous powers. It makes the owner completely immune to all forms of psionic attack that affect the mind. It protects completely against the effects of telepathy, empathy and illusion. In addition it grants tremendous psionic powers, greater even than those possessed by the mightiest of psychers. The owner can discharge bolts of incredible power, send his thoughts ranging across thousands of kilometers, and possess great powers of clairvoyance. It is also said that the crown grants access to the knowledge and wisdom of all its previous wearers.

These, then, are the known powers of the Three Sacred Artifacts. What is less well known are their other powers and disadvantages. The artifacts are indeed the products of ancient alien technologies. What is known to but a few is that they are the prison of a renegade Alphan, one of the God Races of the Galactic Compact, an evil immortal of enormous power who was imprisoned by his fellows for his unguessable crimes.

The Alphan is bound into our space-time continuum by these three objects. It is unaware of its fate. It is dormant and asleep but even in its sleep it continues to wield its enormous power and work its ancient evil. Anyone who comes into contact with the armor is corrupted and assimilated by it. It slowly drains away its wearer's memories and personality. All that is good is slowly leached out of them. They become infected by insanity.

Even the strongest will eventually be assimilated by the artifacts, the body and mind within the armored shell becoming a mere husk. At this point some dim instinct causes the artifacts to seek out a new host, and thus power changes hands in the Shogunate.

THE BLACK PAGODA

The Black Pagoda is the administrative hub of the Shogunate, and a fortress, barracks and factory complex of incredible size. The whole building is made from a single seamless block of adamant that is strong beyond measure. Some say that adamant was one of the many substances produced by the nanotechnology of the Ancients that can no longer be reproduced. Others claim that it was created by one of the God Races of the Galactic Compact. It is the only known substance capable of surviving a direct hit from an Entropic Bomb unscathed.

In some bizarre way, the Pagoda appears to be alive. Year by year, century by century, it is growing. It seems to be advancing outwards at the rate of about a centimeter a year. This glacial progress would probably go unnoticed by anyone other than the immortals of the Shogunate.

Equally strange are the reports from within the Black Pagoda that the corridors, streets and rooms appear to rearrange themselves, sometimes overnight. This never happens when there is anybody around to witness it, and no one appears ever to have been harmed by it, but nonetheless it can be disturbing for residents. This has led to many rumors that the Pagoda is haunted. Certainly there are many temples to the spirit of the place.

Those clans which are directly allied to the Shogun himself dwell within the Black Pagoda, along with the Shogun's Guard. In theory the apartments are reserved for loyal allies, but in practice the Shogun often finds it necessary to invite hostages from clans whose loyalty is suspect - to live within easy reach. Dwelling within the monstrous shadows of the Black Pagoda, most people think twice about disloyalty.

THE EBON GUARD

The Ebon Guard are the Shogun's personal bodyguard, a private army that numbers into the hundreds of thousands. They are drawn from the best warriors in the Shogunate. When these warriors join the guard they renounce all other vows of allegiance and swear fealty directly to the Shogun. They are granted the best armor, the best weapons and the best training. They are initiated into many mysteries and taught many secret techniques. Their minds are sculpted by the most advanced hypnconditioning until they are incorruptible and totally loyal. They are said to be the best warriors on the planet and few who have faced them would doubt this.

They are taught to fight with a discipline and a co-ordination unusual among the highly individualistic samurai, and this allows them to take on and defeat forces of many times their number. Being chosen for the Ebon Guard is the highest honor that can be bestowed on any samurai. Their morale is unshakable and they would die without hesitation for their Shogun.

The Shadow Guard are an elite within an elite. They are the ultimate commando warriors in the service of the Shogun. Masters of all the techniques taught to the Ebon Guard, they are also schooled in many ninjitsu techniques. They often assassinate the Shogun's enemies and are sent on dangerous missions far beyond enemy lines. They operate in small independent units of five, known as Hands, and are often dispatched on covert intelligence gathering missions. The Overlords of the Great Clans have cause to fear these terrible secret warriors.

The Spirit Guard are units of potent sorcerers specially trained to fight on the battlefield and to perform whatever services the Shogun requires. As well as all the normal training of the Ebon Guard, many receive Shadow Guard training as well.



The Guard take their oath of allegiance on the Three Sacred Artifacts and their loyalty is to their possessor. They will instantly obey anyone who carries them, for they are the true and only badge of the Shogun. The transfer of loyalty is instant. In the past there have been many instances of the Guard fighting tooth and nail to preserve their master and then instantly bowing the knee to his killer in the middle of a corpse-strewn battlefield.

Every member of the Guard is subject to the karmic probe each time they transfer bodies. In this way potential traitors and weak links are weeded out and only the strongest and most loyal survive. They dwell in splendid isolation within the Ebon Pagoda and have their own separate homes, training grounds and barracks. They do not mingle with the general population and are forbidden even to speak to outsiders except in the course of their duties. Even then they usually speak only to give warnings, commands or upon the direct instructions of their superiors. An aura of ominous silence hangs over them at all times and in all places. Supremely loyal and utterly incorruptible, the Ebon Guard is one of the main pillars on which the Shogun's power rests.

THE TORA CLAN

Currently the Tora are regarded as the most influential of all the great clans. The current Shogun came from the ranks of the Tora Clan and enjoys the clan's support. The Tora have supported him well, and have used his patronage to extend their influence far and wide throughout the Shogunate.

Most people see the Tora as little more than an extension of the Shogun's will. This is not the case. While it is true the Tora often move at the Shogun's behest and act with his blessing, the clan has its own agenda. The Overlord Tora Hehachi is the physical father of the present Shogun, and is older by many incarnations. It was his wise and cunning counsel that helped place Hideoshi on the throne.

Despite this, there is little love lost between the two, although both recognize that they need each other. The Shogun needs the Tora's resolute support to ensure his power base is secure. The Tora need the cloak of the Shogun's approval to shield them from the hostility and envy that their long period of ascendancy has caused.

However, as the Shogun has become more and more erratic, the Tora have moved to distance themselves from some of his excesses, and to forge alliances with the other clans to use when the next civil war breaks out.



As the Shogun begins his descent into final madness, it may be that the long period of Tora ascendancy will end. If this happens the clan will suffer greatly, for it has not been slow to use its political power to its own advantage, and its leaders have made many enemies over the past few hundred years.

The Tora and the Kobara are traditional rivals. Over the past few centuries the Kobara have moved slowly and carefully indeed. They have given the Shogun no reason to doubt their loyalty, but the Tora Clan leaders do not doubt that behind the scenes the subtle and stealthy Kobara have been preparing for the day when the Shogun's reign will end.

A quiet and secret war has been fought between the two clans using ninja, and lightning raids by disguised troops, and proxies. Not even with the Shogun's backing would the Tora risk war with the Kobara, for all the other Great Clans remember all too well the fate of the Monkey, and dread being destroyed one by one by the Shogun and his allies. Even those Overclans who have proven most loyal to the Tora Alliance, the Kitsune and the Higuma, would most likely turn on the Tora if such an all-out attack was contemplated.

The Tora are harsh, violent folk. In the Tora view of things, the world is divided into predators and prey. They are predators. The Tora exist to cull the weak, and battle the strong. The clan's culture emphasizes the martial virtues of speed, cunning and boldness. Everything about the clan, from its military organization to its business philosophy, reflects this.



Tora Kayami, the First Ancestor of the Tiger Clan was a giant of a man with blazing golden eyes, a mane of dark hair and phenomenal prowess with the forceblade. He was the third Shogun and his reign was long and bloody, marked by constant uprisings. Physically, most of the Tora resemble him, being tall, dark and lithely muscular. They have tawny glittering eyes and thick, curly black hair.

Their business interests range from munitions and vehicle manufacture to the rights to many of the great Drakonium fields. Slowly over the past centuries the clan has consolidated holdings that are now almost as substantial as those of the Tatsu.

The Tora have not hesitated in using their wealth. They have provided their warriors with the best weapons and war gear money can buy, and their sand fleets use the newest and most powerful vehicles. While the Tora Clan-folk live lives of luxury, their lifestyle has not softened them. By order of their Overlord every Tora must spend part of his day practicing with his weapons, and part of his year engaged in military service. There are no exceptions to this, aside from those who are beyond the Shogunate on clan business, or operating undercover elsewhere.

WARFARE

The Tora possess a large standing army. While not as large as those of the Tatsu or the I, it still numbers several hundred thousand samurai. These are divided into twenty-five Legions of approximately ten thousand men each. All of the Tora samurai are superlatively equipped and trained. Their morale is high and they are confident of their ability to defeat any foe.

The Tora military philosophy stresses swift, mobile strikes using overwhelming force against an unprepared enemy. The clan has invested heavily in skimmerbikes, skimmertanks and other fast-moving forces to ensure that they can achieve this. For all its wealth, the Tora possess relatively few Wastewalkers, which some see as a weakness.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of their training is that each Tora samurai is bonded at birth with a Dragon Tiger that will become his companion throughout his life. When that Dragon Tiger dies one of its cubs is chosen and hand-raised by the warrior to be its successor. These enormous cats are huge, swift and strong. They are adept at spotting Steel Claw Ninja and other hidden threats and they will die to protect the lives of their masters. In battle, they often fight alongside their owners. They protect their apartments like great watchdogs while their owners sleep. Of course there are situations where it is not always appropriate for a tiger to accompany its master. In such cases, the samurai will reluctantly allow himself to parted from his companion.

By the edict of the first Tora Shogun, the Tora are the only Clan allowed to breed the fabled Dragon Tigers. These ferocious predatory cats grow to enormous size and have their already fearsome natural armaments bionically enhanced. Some of these tigers are mutants of greatly enhanced intelligence who enjoy a telepathic link with their partners.

The most famous of the Tora fighting forces is the Dragon Tiger Regiment. This is an elite unit. A warrior can only be promoted into it with the permission of Overlord Hehachi. This permission is granted as a reward for services above and beyond the call of duty, to those warriors who have proven themselves time and time again in battle.

TORA HEHACHI

Marshal of the Armies of the Tiger, Supreme Guardian of the Amber Pagoda, Revered Ancestor of the Line of Tora, Hehachi is the undisputed master of his clan, and has been so for centuries. He is seen by many to be the living embodiment of the Tiger Spirit and the exemplar of all his clan stands for.

It is said that as a youth in his first incarnation, as punishment for some indiscretion, Hehachi was forced by his elders to wear the body of one of the sacred Dragon Tigers for five years. Normally such a long period incarnated as an animal would destroy the sanity and personality of a human. Not so with Hehachi, he appears to have enjoyed it, and he came back from the transmigration a more ruthless and ferocious figure than ever.



Physically Hehachi is a giant. The body he chooses to wear has been designed to embody all the martial graces of the Tora. It stands over two meters tall, and possesses many times the strength and quickness of a normal man. It blazes with Tau power. Its eyes are always tawny and cat-like, and predatory fangs are revealed when Hehachi smiles, which is not often. Of course, the human body was not built to take the strain of the sort of power Hehachi wields, and he burns out bodies quickly. Most of them last less than a decade. They do ensure, in combination with his customized weapons and potent forceblades, that Hehachi is a supremely deadly opponent on the battlefield.

In the sphere of business and diplomacy, Hehachi is just as dominant. He is a ruthless and brilliant strategist with an eye for the main chance and the gift of exploiting it. He believes in acting quickly and decisively and only when the odds favor him. Most of the time his forces are in a perpetual state of readiness in case any opportunity should present itself. No one can doubt his brilliance. Anyone who has managed to hold on to power within this fanatically competitive clan for so long is a man to inspire fear and respect.

For all his evil reputation, Hehachi possesses considerable personal charm and charisma. He is eloquent and cultured, with a suave and persuasive manner and a famously beautiful speaking voice. His personal bravery is undoubted and he inspires total and fanatical loyalty in his followers.

Hehachi is close to no one, not even Ama, the latest in his long line of wives. He keeps his own council, is close-mouthed, and lets no one know his thoughts.

Within his clan Hehachi has ruthlessly extinguished all opposition. Anyone who plots against him is ordered to commit seppuku or is dispatched as ronin into the Wastes. Hehachi has no time for the elaborate tortures that some Overlords reserve for their foes. He believes in simply removing all threats. While many see this as a sign of his strength, others believe that it is a long-term cause of weakness in the Tora Clan, because it means that the best and most ambitious of its people often meet an early death. It also means that few will oppose Hehachi when he makes one of his rare foolish decisions. There are no checks and balances on his power. His enemies live in hope that one day he will make a fatal and irretrievable mistake.

Hehachi has seen that the Tora allies are bound closely to the clan. They have shared in the wealth that the Tora have accumulated and participated in all the Clan's military actions. If the Tora are blamed for many things, Hehachi has seen that his allies have assumed a fair share of the blame. Indeed, in many cases they have taken on more than their fair share.

The Devil Kat Clan, infamous for being the Tora's executioners, are roundly hated by most people of the Shogunate. On the other hand, the Tora's access to the Shogun, and their ability to dole out wealth and favors, mean that there is no shortage of clans clamoring to take on the status of ally.

LORD MIKA

Lord Mika is one of the few high-ranking Tora to have survived Hehachi's long reign. In fact he was there at the beginning of it, and has been Hehachi's right-hand man for most of their respective careers.

Mika is not a warrior, and has never excelled in battle. He lacks personal charm and charisma, but he is fanatically loyal to his master. He has a quick, sharp and incisive mind, and a gift for sifting through data quickly to see the big picture. His cleverness, cunning and attention to detail mean he is perfectly suited to his role as Lord Hehachi's spymaster.

Lord Mika is a shadowy figure, rarely seen by those outside of Hehachi's ruling circle. He is known to vanish for long periods of time, during which it is assumed that he is going about his master's business incognito. In his youth he was known to do this often, and once even joined the forces of the Skavenger Khan Ilberin to gather intelligence when that mighty warlord was ravaging the Shogunate's Drakonium fields.

Mika has ensured that his intelligence corps is thorough and efficient. He has used the Tora Clan's near-limitless coffers to spin a web of agents across the Shogunate and beyond. He has made it his business to cultivate the local Yakuza, and through them he has access to all of the ninja ryu. He has not been above calling on the services of these feared assassins when it has served the interests of his clan.

Mika is of middle height, with nondescript features and nondescript gear. He would not stand out in a crowd in any way. When he speaks, his manner is dry and dispassionate but he always expresses himself clearly, distinctly, using the minimum possible words.

THE LADY AMA

The Lady Ama is Hehachi's latest consort, a fiery beauty of great personal passion. She was born a member of the Jade Spider Clan. Hehachi married her to seal his alliance with them. However he was quickly enamored of her wit and beauty and soon their first and only child Loka arrived.



The Lady Ama is ambitious both for herself and for her son. She knows that Hehachi put Hideoshi on the throne and she believes that he might do the same for Loka. She knows that soon another age of chaos is going to descend upon the Realm and that a new Shogun will arise. She is not aware, as Hehachi is, of the true and awful nature of the Shogun's position, and does not know the torture that anyone who becomes Shogun will have to endure.

Although Hehachi has indulged her in most things he has refused to commit himself to her dream, and this has created a rift between them. She hides it well, but Ama is starting to resent Hehachi and perhaps even to hate him. In the future this could be a source of great grief for the Tora Overlord.

KAZUMA

Tora Kazuma is Hehachi's son by a previous consort many incarnations ago. He is headstrong and proud but a great general, fiercely loyal to his clan and to his father. He is a bold war-leader who has led the Dragon Tiger Regiment into battle for the past two centuries. His prowess with the forceblade are said to exceed even his father's. He lives to fight and kill his father's enemies. While not the cleverest of men, he is aware of his own limitations and takes advice from those he respects.

LOKA

Loka is a handsome young samurai in his first incarnation. He possesses a fraction of the charisma of his father, Hehachi, and a great deal of intelligence, strength and military skill. He has fought several battles with considerable success. All of this has made him vain, over-proud and full of himself. He has his own faction of toadies and followers in the Tora court but is otherwise roundly feared and despised by most. He hates Kazuma and plans to have him assassinated as soon as possible.

THE HIGUMA CLAN

The Higuma are a truly ancient clan. They joined the first Shogun of their own free will and supported him loyally through all the long years of fighting that followed. The first Higuma Overlord, Higuma Ido, was a close personal friend of the Shogun, and was one of those fatally wounded in the defense of the Citadel of Xor. He was also the first samurai ever to be reincarnated when he died of his wounds.

The Shogun rewarded his loyalty by making him the Overlord of Higuma Province once it was subdued by the samurai. Higuma Ido accepted this honor and became the most powerful man in the first Shogunate, excepting only the Shogun himself. Ido was a giant of a man, as all his descendants have been. During the first interregnum he was among the first to seize control of the cloning technology. He ordered the sorcerer-scientists under his command to grant all of his samurai clone-bodies as large and powerful as himself.

The scientists obeyed, despite the fact that many had reservations about such genetic manipulation. They feared such alterations would be forbidden by the Judges of Karma. After a great deal of experimenting they found a way of altering a warrior's basic genetic code so that it would still be uniquely his, and yet make him grow to be much larger, stronger and tougher than a normal man. The first few such reincarnations were made by direct transfer, bypassing the Spirit Realms entirely.

When one of these altered bodies died, its survivors supplied a sample of its altered DNA to the Judges of Karma when the man was to be resurrected. To their surprise, the Judges of Karma allowed this, perhaps because they had no record of any previous transfer taking place, and they assumed that the DNA belonged to the man's original body. Or perhaps it was because they simply didn't care about such things.

So began the long, proud tradition of Higuma warriors being larger and more powerful than ordinary humans. They are also able to endure greater extremes of heat and cold. When still a youth, to prove his manhood, Higuma Ido killed one of the Great White Mutant Bears of Zandor with his bare hands and taken its fur to wear over his armor. It became a ritual for reborn Higuma samurai to test the strength and speed of their new bodies by duplicating his feat. Those who failed in this test are allowed to die the True Death.

The albino bears can grow up to four meters in height and their claws can shred armor. The Higuma samurai must enter Zandor Forest Dome naked, stalk and kill the bear, strip it of its pelt, and eat its heart to gain its courage and ferocity. Wearing the pelt of a white bear is the mark of a true Higuma samurai. Any Higuma warrior who loses his bearskin for any reason must duplicate the feat as soon as possible or lose face with his fellows.



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In appearance the Higuma are huge, barbaric-looking warriors. They wear their bearskin as a cloak over their armor, and shave their heads, leaving only a single topknot of hair protruding from the back of their scalp. The warriors usually have an enormous appetite that can lead to a layer of fat covering the enhanced musculature. Their manners appear direct and uncouth to many other samurai clans, but the Higuma care nothing for this. They are secure in their own proud lineage.

The Higuma philosophy stresses patience and wisdom. They are slow to anger and to take offense but are terrible foes when roused. They are loyal to their friends and never forget an injury from their foes.

THE HIGUMA PROVINCE

The Higuma Province is huge and wealthy and lies to the north of the Shogunate. Its northern wall looks out over the Cold Desert, an expanse of white ash dotted with some of the richest Drakonium fields in all the world. This ash often blows over the storm walls and drifts like chemical snow onto the streets of the city.

The Higuma build their pagodas to be both taller and wider than those of other samurai clans. Often they appear to think size is good simply for its own sake. Few can deny, however, that the white pagodas of Higuma province are an impressive sight, particularly at night when they are underlit with searchlights.

The Higuma maintain Zandor Forest, the largest surviving wilderness area in all the Shogunate. Shielded from the poisonous skies by hundreds of interlocking geodesic domes, it covers an area of thousands of square kilometers.

The Higuma prefer lower temperatures than do other samurai, so their pagodas often seem like chilly places to outsiders. Many Higuma enjoy hunting within Zandor Forest and their homes are filled with trophies of the hunt. The heads of huge beasts float preserved in crystal orbs in many Higuma homes. Enormous mutant animal pelts are made into rugs. Most other samurai clans consider all of this in extremely poor taste, but here again the Higuma are a law unto themselves.

The Higuma liking for size is evident in their war gear. The clan possesses the largest of all Wastewalker bipedal war machines, and the largest number of the smaller scout walkers. They rely greatly on these when it comes to battle.

A fierce and open rivalry exists between the Higuma and the I. There is no real hatred there on the Higuma side, only respect for worthy foes. When samurai from the two clans meet they will exchange good natured insults and banter. However, in civil wars it is inevitable that the two clans will end up on opposite sides.

The Higuma are far more suspicious of the Kobara, against whom they hold many grudges. Chiefest of these is the suspicion that in ancient days, Kobara agents stole the Ten Silver Claws, a strange artifact sacred to the Higuma that was brought to the Shogunate from the stars in the time before the Interdict. These were once attached to the armor of Higuma Ido himself, and were said to be able to cleave through duralloy like a forceblade through brick and to grant their wearer truly superhuman strength. It is thought that the Silver Claws were used by Kobara Sorcerers to create artifacts of power, although no one has ever proved this.

THE HIGUMA MILITARY

The Higuma maintain many legions. In keeping with the Higuma philosophy of bigger is better, these usually contain twice the number of troops of other legions. The Higuma believe in using overwhelming force, so they have many huge Wastewalkers and other war-engines.

The Higuma are famous for patiently assembling enormous forces with which to overwhelm their foes. They move slowly but with a certain inevitability, always securing their own lines of supply and knocking out any redoubts and salients along their line of advance. Their generals learn to err on the side of caution in all things. They are not timid and will attack with great ferocity when the need arises; they simply do not believe in taking unnecessary risks.

While this may not make for stunning victories, it has served the Higuma well in the past. They rarely make war outside their own territories when they can help it, and on their own ground their patient and methodical manner of making war makes them fearsome foes. When they retreat, they leave nothing behind for the enemy to use. Factories are blown up, agridomes are poisoned. The foe is made to fight for every inch of ground and then gets no profit from it. On the offensive the Higuma simply grind their foes down using superior numbers, ability and firepower.

When the need arises, the Bear Clan are masters of siege warfare and possess many huge bipedal siege engines, each specifically designed for a special purpose. For example, the Gatebreaker mounts a huge rocket-assisted battering ram, and the Towersmasher has monstrous spiked wrecking balls attached to each arm. Higuma siege engineers are very adept at creating these monstrous devices in their great Engine Yards.



THE COLONIES

Perhaps because they are different from the folk of their own metrozone, the Higuma are an outward-looking Clan. Perhaps because they differ so from other samurai, the Higuma are less uncomfortable than most samurai when dealing with strangers. Whatever the reason, the Higuma are great travelers. They often send caravans to trade with Janus, and many small parties of Higuma samurai can be found in the Wastes, seeking Drakonium and the ruins of the Ancients, as well as patrolling the border sectors abutting the Shogunate.

The Higuma have many colonies. The greatest of these are huge habtowns that lie close to the Higuma sectors, just beyond their gates. These huge fortified factory towns are overseen by Higuma samurai and staffed by their commoners. They are often given as fiefs to the boldest and strongest of Higuma warriors.

The clan also has colonies much further afield, either along trade-routes or in the middle of the great deserts, where they act as refueling and transshipping stations for the clan's sand fleets. These colonies are always located above deep artesian wells or rich deposits of other natural resources.

Perhaps most famous is the town of Hideaki, in the Mountains of Monsters over a thousand kilometers northwest of the Shogunate. This mighty fortress stands above the largest duralium mine ever found in the Waste World. It is a source of considerable revenue to the clan, since duralium, one of the catalysts required in the forging of duralloy, is also one of the rarest and most precious of all substances.

LORD KAI

Higuma Kai, Master of the Legions of the Bear, Talon of Steel, Keeper of the Supernal Cloak Of Ido, is the current Overlord of the Higuma. He is a huge man, even by the standards of his clan. He stands two and half meters tall and weighs three hundred kilograms, much of it muscle.

Kai is a creature of enormous appetites who eats and drinks as much as five normal men whenever he sits down at table. It is said he could drink a river of sake dry and consume one of the fabled White Bears, claws, teeth and all. He looks slow and somnolent and many see only his huge appetites and gross barbaric manners and thus underestimate him, always to their cost.

Higuma Kai is one of the deadliest warriors who ever lived, a psyker of considerable power, and a shrewd and penetrating thinker. He wears his bluff and forthright manner like he wears the cloak of Ido, his badge of office. He can throw it aside at a moment's notice and become a fluent and persuasive speaker and a trenchant analyst of the political situation in the Shogunate and beyond it.



He is a calm, patient and wise man who has seen many another Overlord come and go. He always rewards loyalty. His warriors are famously dedicated to him. He is a shrewd judge of others. He is tolerant of outsiders in a way that most samurai are not, and knows much concerning the world beyond the walls of the Shogunate.

He is dedicated to the welfare of his clan. The current political situation in the Shogunate troubles him deeply. He does his best to act as a peacemaker between the Shogun and the other Overlords. He talks openly of restraint in dealing with foreigners, particularly the Prometheans.

However, in his heart of hearts he knows that war is coming. While doing all in his power to prevent it, he is preparing his clan for the inevitable, stockpiling weapons and ensuring that his legions are always prepared for mobilization. This has caused many to believe that he is a hypocrite who talks peace while preparing for conquest. This is not so. He is simply following one of Higuma Ido's famous dictums: those who would have peace, must be ready for war.



HIGUMA NADAYA

Nadaya is Higuma's most trusted general and advisor. She is a tall, muscular woman who has not yet run to fat. She is a ferocious general who has won more battles than anyone save the Shogun himself. She distinguished herself in the Wars with the Skavenger Khans two centuries ago, when the Khans raided the Higuma Colonies. She slew Khan Makray herself in hand-to-hand combat. When still young she led a party out to the Hives of the Azure Swarm and saved the lives of Lord Kai's son, Vila, and his family when their airship crashed within the Swarm's territory and all were captured.

Lady Nadaya is considered headstrong for a Higuma. She is keen for Lord Kai to end his policy of appeasement of the Shogun. While she does not advocate outright rebellion against him, she always reminds her overlord that feeding a tiger your children will not make him afraid to raid your home. There is a faction at the Higuma court who very strongly favor deposing Lord Kai and replacing him with Nadaya. She does nothing to encourage them. Lord Kai has done nothing to silence them either. Perhaps he is merely awaiting his moment to round up this conspiracy all at once. Or perhaps he is more sympathetic to their position than anyone thinks.

MARCELUS KANE

Marcelus is a most unusual creature: an outsider who has risen high in the service of the Shogunate. He was born in Janus nearly one hundred years ago. He met Lord Kai when he was traveling incognito to visit Janus and uncovered a plot against his life.

When the Lord had to flee during a ninja attack, Marcelus acted as his guide through the rougher sectors of the Trading City. He has stayed in the Overlord's service ever since, acting as his trading advisor and special counselor on external affairs. He is a tall, slender, old-looking man who has never undergone reincarnation. Instead he has chosen to extend his life with antiagathics. He possesses a stinging dry wit. There are many within the clan who resent the sharp edge of his tongue as much as they resent the fact that a stranger has grown so close to their Overlord. Most suspect that as an outsider he must be a spy. Those who know Marcellus better know that no samurai was ever more loyal to an Overlord.

THE TATSU CLAN

The Tatsu Clan are the wealthiest and most outward-looking of all the Great Clans. They control the Great Southern Drakonium Field that is as rich as those controlled by the Shogun himself. This is the bedrock of their power. It generates enormous riches that the Tatsu have multiplied in trade.

The Tatsu have a reputation for greed and avarice that make them suspect among the honor-conscious samurai. Still, in times of war their pockets are deep and no one turns their noses up at Tatsu money when it is providing their war gear. They use their vast wealth to keep their rivals at each other's throats. They know that many eye their own riches covetously and must be distracted from the real prize by any means possible.

The Tatsu are the most ancient of all clans. They trace their lineage to the ruling class of the ancient Hegemony of Shang, in the period before the Armageddon Wars. Indeed, they claim that it was a Tatsu who first brought Drakonium to Waste World from beyond the stars. Certainly the fortunes of the Tatsu have rested on harvesting the crystal since time immemorial.

They are proud of this heritage and perceive themselves to be the natural rulers of the metrozone. They are also proud of the fact that they were never conquered by the first Shogun, but entered into alliance with him voluntarily. Indeed, the Tatsu princess Kara married the Shogun and, in the eyes of the Tatsu, gave his reign legitimacy.

The Tatsu have always been interested in money. It was the Tatsu who set up the Drakonium Exchange and petitioned the Shogun to open up the Foreigner's Quarter as a place where trade could easily be controlled and taxed. Naturally they made sure that they purchased the best spots within it.

It was at this point that the Tatsu's wealth began to eclipse all others, and they grew to be a power so great that even the Shoguns feared them. Indeed, as the sixth Shogun descended into madness at the end of his reign, his final error was to try and seize the Tatsu lands.

The Tatsu were led by a woman who was not only a great merchant but a military genius, Tatsu Yukio, to this day revered as the Great Dragon. She had used the Tatsu wealth to create a mighty military machine and now she used it to subdue all rivals within the space of six weeks. The population was stunned by the speed and magnitude of her victory. She went on to be the first Shogun to found a dynasty; the next three Shoguns all came from her clan, and two of them were her children.

For nearly 2,000 years, during the period now simply referred to as the Tatsu Shogunate, the clan ruled. They acquired an aura of power and majesty greater than any other clan. Enormous sums were spent on great public works and monuments. The metrozone was peaceful and prosperous as it had not been since before the Armageddon Wars. The Tatsu fought and won several wars against the Prometheans and the Skavenger Khans.



Many thought the golden age had come again. Of course, it could not last. Their long hegemony ensured that all other clans resented the Tatsu. Their period of absolute power had left the Tatsu arrogant, vain and greedy. There was an uprising. The Great Interegnum began and the Tatsu Shogunate came to an end. Yet it did not go as badly for the clan as their enemies would have hoped. On the death of the Shogun, a savage war broke out.

At first, all were united against the Tatsu, but by skillful use of bribes and promises they managed to splinter the alliance that faced them, and reduced the struggle to a general all-out war. They rarely attacked anyone else and spent all their time, money and Drakonium on defending what they had acquired. They lost much but managed to hold on to a great deal, and so in the end they preserved their status as a Great Clan, a rank they hold to the present day.

The Tatsu remain a proud, regal people. They favor ostentatious armor, encrusted with jeweled scales, and heavy helmets gilded with precious metals. Their clan's bodybanks produce tall, powerful, athletic forms with golden eyes and sharp pointed features.

They have many contacts with the outside world. They are the secret owners of several Trading Houses in the Foreigner's Quarter. Through them, they have trade pacts with many of the Janusian Kombines, and a spy network that ranges far across Waste World, even into the Factory Temples of Prometheus and the Towers of Hydra.

The Tatsu province is a glittering and yet gloomy place. Their marbled pagodas gleam with brilliant seams of gold and other minerals. Huge fortresses brood among the starscrapers, bristling with weapons. Towering monuments to the glory of the Tatsu fill the streets and loom over the roadways like titans of elder days frozen for the moment in stone and duralloy. Over everything hangs an aura of immeasurable age. If you look closely at the monuments you will see that they are timeworn, gnawed at by the elements. Much that would have been torn down and destroyed elsewhere has been allowed to remain. Once they would have been kept in a state of good repair, but the present overlord of the Tatsu is too frugal to waste money on monuments. She has too many other things to worry about. The Tatsu have many enemies, the Shogun is going mad, and the specter of civil war is rising once more. In time, the old monuments may be destroyed anyway. Better by far, she thinks, to spend the money on the military who guard her domains.



THE TATSU MILITARY

The Legions of the Dragon are powerful and well-armed. They need to be, for they guard some of the richest and most coveted territories on the planet. They are equipped mostly for static defense. The Tatsu are famous for building mighty forts to protect their lands.

Although superlatively equipped and trained, they are relatively few in number. When the Tatsu make war beyond their own holdings their armies are swelled by those of their allied clans. This strategy works well, for the Tatsu have more allied clans than any other clan, and their wealth goes a long way towards ensuring their loyalty. You have to pay a lot of credits to match what the Tatsu give to their allies.

Yet this too works against the Tatsu. It makes accusations of cowardice all too easy. Other samurai are suspicious of their reluctance to spend their own warriors. They are often, in private, accused of hiding behind other clans and getting other people to do their fighting for them.



Of course such accusations are incorrect. The Tatsu are as brave as any other clan, and braver than most. In battle their warriors are fierce, proud and deadly. They feel they have a mighty heritage to defend and great traditions to uphold, and they do their best to do both. The Tatsu armies are glittering and resplendent in their ornate armor. They fight in the old manner when they can, man to man. They are capable of fighting in disciplined ranks but it is not what they would choose to do, given a choice.

The Dragon Guard, as their name would suggest, protect the throne halls of the Tatsu Overlord. They are never unleashed into battle save as a last recourse. The Dragon Guard are the mightiest of Tatsu warriors, famous for their use of flame-guns mounted on their helmets. These allow them to breath chemical fire upon their foes and obliterate them utterly. Such weapons are hated by many, because they sometimes damage Karmachips beyond repair, but this just makes the Dragon Guard all the more feared.

ORGANIZATION

The Tatsu Overlord is always known as the Great Dragon. The Great Dragon is always chosen by the Clan's Council of Elders when the previous Overlord dies or becomes unable to rule.

The current Great Dragon is Tatsu Mariko. She is a proud, cantankerous old woman with a reputation for being something of a miser. She uses her bodies till they wear out. She is a tall, white-haired old woman. Her back is very straight and her eyes are very clear.

She is a powerful psyker, one of the greatest in the land, and she was an Abbess of the Temple of Fire until she succeeded her father: when his mind had degraded so much that he chose the True Death. She was summoned by the Council to replace him and did so reluctantly. It is clear that in many ways she would rather have remained in the Temple and perfected her art, but she has proven an adroit and able Overlord nonetheless.

As with all her clan, she is fond of money, and she makes her stewards account for every penny spent. She authorizes new acquisitions reluctantly, except when it comes to outfitting her legions. She takes the view that since you can never tell when money will be needed, it is best to keep it until you are absolutely sure you need to spend it. She thinks that a time of crisis is coming and she has begun stockpiling Drakonium in the clan's refineries and processing plants.

TATSU ICHI

Ichii is Mariko's cousin and the head of the Clan Council. He wears the body of a suave amiable young man with black hair and piercing eyes. He is tall and powerfully built, a mighty warrior when pressed.

He is a great traveler and often rides with the Clan's sandfleets when they go hunting for Drakonium. Indeed, in his first few incarnations he was a Sandhunter, and he still feels somewhat nostalgic about that period of his existence. These days he oversees the running of his clan's holdings abroad. He often goes to Janus and to the Tatsu colonies in the Wastes.

It is said that he fears the eventual demise of the Shogunate itself, and is overseeing the creation of a huge fortified city in the wilderness to which the Tatsu will retreat if the worst comes to the worst. Some believe that a great deal of the clan's stockpiled Drakonium is finding its way there and that the Dragon's Lair, as it is called, will be able to endure a long time beyond the death of the Shogunate.

No one knows whether there is any truth to these rumors, and most clans would like to find out. It is said that Tora and Kobara spies in particular are keen to penetrate this mystery. Certainly such a vast stockpile of Drakonium would be a mighty prize for those who could seize it. Ninja have made several attempts to kidnap Ichi so that he can be questioned about this. So far none of them have succeeded.

TATSU RYO

Ryo is the First Warden of the Treasury and as such is responsible for overseeing one of the greatest fortunes ever accumulated in human history. He is a calm, cautious man with a quiet voice and a slow, soft manner of speech. He is also a financier of genius who has made some of the greatest coups ever seen on the Drakonium Exchange, buying and selling futures. In appearance, he is a small, nondescript middle-aged man with a well-clipped goatee beard. His eyes are myopic and he wears bifocals. He is even summoned occasionally to advise the Shogun on financial affairs.

Ryo enjoys the company of geishas and they are often summoned to his apartments in the Dragon Pagoda. This is a weakness that might enable an enemy to get an assassin or a kidnapper within reach of him. He is aware of this but seems to enjoy the danger.



THE KITSUNE CLAN

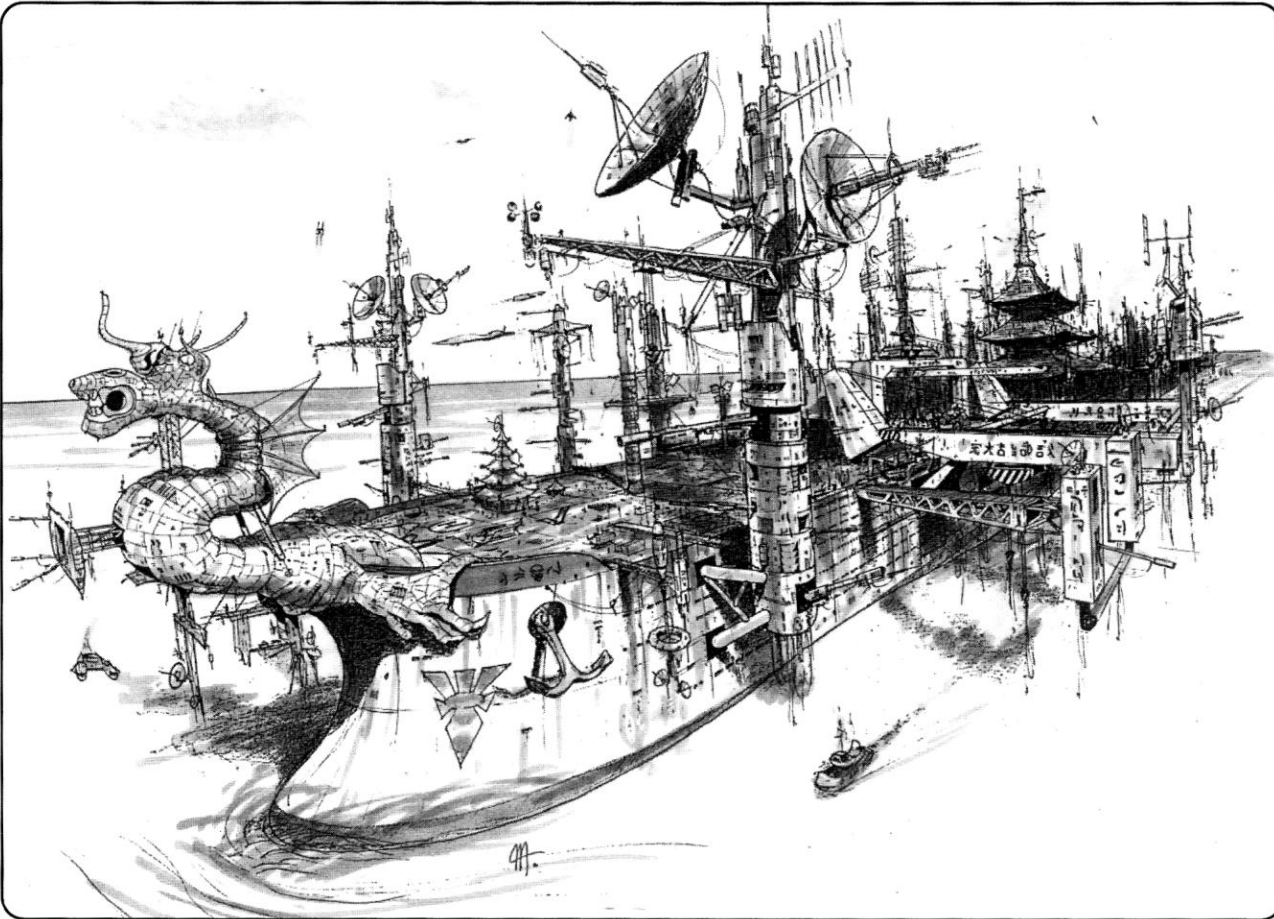
The Kitsune Clan dwells in the Shogunate's easternmost province. Their domain looks out on the Great Sludge Sea. It is an area wracked by earthquakes and huge tidal waves, capable of crashing over the great barrier walls. Part of the Kitsune province is flooded.

Gigantic ruins and towering pagodas rise from the black, polluted waters. Salty mists, tainted with hallucinogenic chemicals, wreath the buildings. Monstrous creatures slither in the depths of the deepest waters. Further from the sea, mist-shrouded starscrapers tower above empty streets. This is a sector avoided by most of the wise. It is the home of the Kitsune, the most mysterious and feared of all the Great Clans, a nation of witches and shapeshifters who have dwelled here since before the time of the first Shogun, and who may well dwell here long after the Shogunate has vanished.

On the furthest eastern tip of the Kitsune province lies a mighty harbor. Massive container ships set out for Hydra and further islands in the oceans where huge Drakonium fields are said to blossom. Gigantic trawlers the size of ancient super-tankers dredge the sea for kelp and the carcasses of Leviathans, the great beasts of the depths whose flesh, once cleansed of its deadly toxins, is regarded as a succulent delicacy in the Shogunate.

Many more monstrous ships wait in the harbor. They are towering, multi-level structures decorated with leering gargoyle heads. Their prows resemble the heads of sea-monsters. These craft rarely set sail but are the homes of the Shark and Kraken clans, the Kitsune's famous sea-going allies. Within their duralloy hulls, generations of piratical sea-warriors have lived and died. Sometimes their fleet will set forth to battle. When that happens, those who dwell on the shores of the dead waters had best be wary.

Most people of Waste World shun the poisoned seas; not so the people of this province. They make their livings from it. On the islands there is Drakonium. The algae that darkens the waters can be refined and processed into nutritious food.



The Kitsune are feared by most of the folk of the Shogunate because they are not human. They are Xenogen shapeshifters. The Kitsune normally choose to appear as slender women of exquisite ethereal beauty, but no one knows whether this is their true appearance. They can choose to resemble almost any humanoid creature of approximately their own size and weight, and it may be that they are in reality truly monstrous. Some who claim to have penetrated their shadowy halls claim this is the case. Nobody knows for certain and the Kitsune are not telling.

The Kitsune are mighty sorcerers. Almost every Kitsune possesses potent psychic powers and the ability to wield Tau. Those who do not are pitied by their kin as cripples and freaks.

Lastly, the Kitsune stand outside the system of karma. They do not seek rebirth, and they do not take new bodies upon death. They are exceptionally long-lived. Old age does not appear to touch them. Some claim that they are practically immortal unless slain by violence, disease or mischance. Their agelessness and their unwillingness to face the Judges of Karma make them suspect in the eyes of many.

Many claim the Kitsune are not sane as most humans measure sanity. They delight in playing tricks and making all sorts of mischief. They wander the Shogunate in many forms, spying and playing cruel practical jokes. This may be to repay those who have persecuted them, or it may simply be part of their alien mind-set, no one really knows. All of these things have made the Kitsune feared and reviled in equal measure.

The Kitsune take many human lovers. These are always male and always ronin. Sometimes they are bandits, sometimes they are honorable men who have been seduced by the Kitsune and defected from their clans, unable to part with their lovers. These men join the ranks of the Kitsune's warriors and form the deadly core of the Kitsune army. Often they take on some of the fey wildness of their mistresses and are known for their unpredictability and tendency to run amok.



THE ANCIENT RITUAL

How, then, did such alien interlopers become a Great Clan of the Shogunate, with many allied clans of samurai and an entire sector of the metrozone to rule? The answer to this question, as with so many others about the Shogunate, lies in the misty past, in the time of the First Shogun, nearly ten thousand years ago.

The Kitsune befriended the first Shogun before even he donned the sacred armor and raised the sacred blade. It seemed that he fulfilled some ancient prophecy of theirs, one they had come to Waste World to see fulfilled. According to some texts this was the only reason they had journeyed across the depths of space in the first place.

Whatever their reasons were, they helped the soon-to-be Shogun and shielded him from the enemies who hunted him. They aided him in penetrating the depths of the Black Pagoda. When he donned the armor they calmed him, and helped shield his mind from the madness that rushed in with the sudden influx of power and alien memories. They taught him how to wield his psi powers, and they fought by his side to establish his new realms. They were among his best and most efficient spies. For all of this he rewarded them by granting them their own realm within the Shogunate and making them among the highest in the land. When the long wars were over, they retired to their new realm.

It may be that there is some connection between the Shogun's armor and the Kitsune, of which no one save they and the Shogun is aware. Whenever a new Shogun arises, it is not long before a Kitsune troupe arrives at his court. They usually spend time cloistered with the new Shogun, and then depart. Savants say that they tell the new Shogun many secrets, and show him many of the hidden abilities that the Three Sacred Artifacts grant.

Before they depart, the Kitsune troupe perform a great dance-play for all in the Black Pagoda that recapitulates the entire history of the Shogunate. Most laymen believe that this is the only reason they come, and that it is all part of the ritual surrounding the investiture of a new ruler.

The Kitsune hold themselves aloof from most of the internal politics of the Shogunate. There has only ever been one Kitsune Shogun, and she was not actually of the Kitsune. The sixteenth Shogun, Mara, who ended the centuries long strife of the Age of Chaos, was adopted into the Clan as a child and groomed for the role throughout her lifetime. It seemed that the Kitsune knew this was the only way to create a new Shogun and end the long and grievous struggle that threatened to tear the Shogunate apart. It was she who slew the mad Shogun Hanarakai, who slaughtered millions of his own people and nearly tumbled the Realm into a new dark age.

The Kitsune stand apart from most of the struggles of the Shogunate and are neutral to both the great alliances, although they have been known to intervene when the balance of power was threatened. They are left alone by most other clans save the Kobara, with whom they have a long-standing rivalry. Many would like to see the Kitsune wiped out, but armies that invade their territory have a tendency to suffer terrible losses, so the Kitsune remain for the moment.

PLAYS

The Kitsune are strongly attracted to play-acting and to taking on dramatic roles. Troupes of Kitsune travel the length and breadth of the Shogunate with their portable stages. These troupes are famous throughout the Waste World, for their gifts are ideally suited to making them great performers.

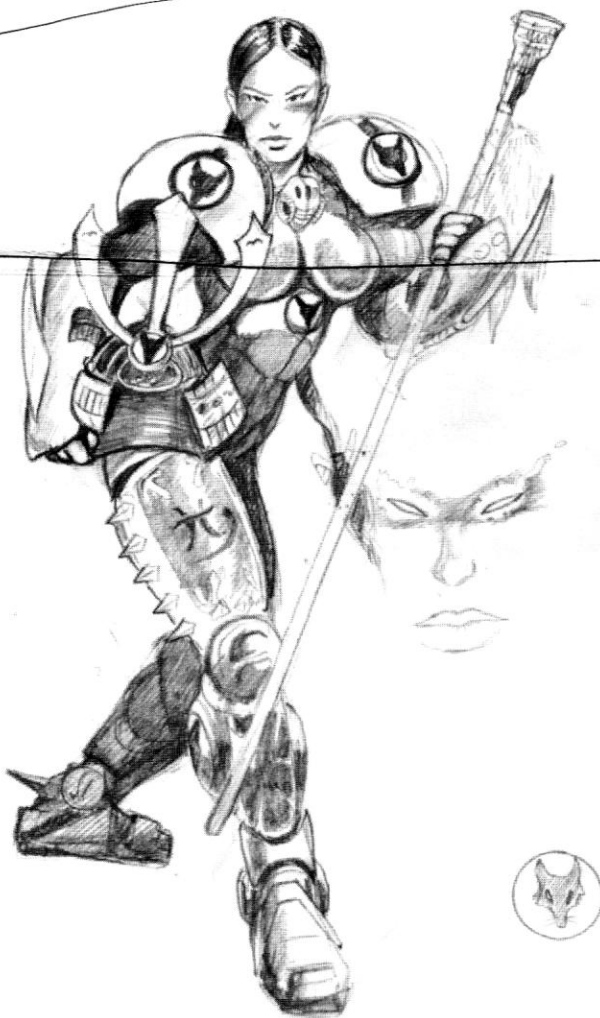
The Kitsune dramas re-enact great events from the Shogunate's history. Kitsune shapeshifters take on all the roles within these great dramas, shifting sex and appearance as the plot demands. A cast of ten can perform a play with one hundred different parts. Kitsune psychers use their illusionary powers to create intricate and amazing sets, while they use their emotion-control powers to subtly manipulate audience response.

The performance of these plays is a sacred ritual to the Kitsune and it is the one time they will most assuredly not play practical jokes or use their powers to affect their audience in any way except as regards the play. It may be that some part of the Kitsune psyche thrives on the applause and the attention, and they know this would be denied them if anything untoward happened during a play. If their audiences suspected that foul-play might occur during their performance they might simply not show up.

A sacred trust exists between the Kitsune and their audiences. Kitsune troupe performances are among the safest places to be in the Shogunate. They will protect their audiences from harm with their own lives if need be. You can attend a Kitsune performance without a psi-shield and no one will take advantage of that fact. The Kitsune have been known to take dire revenge on those who have disrupted their plays, and not even the mightiest are beyond their reach.

THE KITSUNE MILITARY

In general the Kitsune prefer to avoid pitched battles. They prefer to resolve things using their mighty psi powers rather than armed force, and they much prefer subtle diplomacy to either of these options. However, when they must fight they are ferocious opponents. Their warriors are swift, agile and possessed of many Tau powers. Their psychers are a match for any in the Realm. Their real military strength, however, lies with their allies.



The Kitsune realm is a haven for many of the rogues, ronin and malcontents of the Shogunate. The Kitsune rarely interfere with their vassals, provided they are left alone and their pagodas are left unscathed. Many clans defeated in the bitter internecine wars have fled here and carved out new fiefs within the Kitsune provinces. Amid the ruins they can swiftly find new homes. What they rebuild they can keep, as long as they swear loyalty to the Kitsune. Most do so immediately. Those who do not meet many strange dooms.

Since the Kitsune rarely interfere, save when they need to summon their troops to war, the many clans of their realm often make war against each other, or raid adjoining provinces. This keeps them hard and strong, if somewhat brutal. Many also become pirates and raid the scattered settlements of the coasts and islands. The Kitsune province is a wild lawless place, and anyone who travels there had best be good with their weapons.

Having said this, the ronin chieftains will all come when the Kitsune call, and when they do they are swiftly welded into a surprisingly effective fighting force. The Kitsune attach one of their own to each war band and this gives them an effective means of communication and coordination on the battlefield. The Kitsune's powers of illusion often cloak the movements of their followers, making samurai who have been long schooled in the art of guerrilla warfare even more effective. The Kitsune's mental powers can also inspire loyalty and bravery far beyond those of normal men.

The Kitsune realms are also a haven for sorcerers of all types. Many strange cults come here to escape persecution. Many potent psychers carve out their realms within the ruined sectors. These too must swear allegiance to the Kitsune and they too come when called. This gives the Kitsune access to a wide variety of special troops, all with their own potent abilities. The Firewalker Sect use their pyrokinesis to incinerate their foes. The Wind Dancers hover in the sky and smite the Kitsune's enemies with lightning. On occasion even a few necromancers and their companies of walking dead have come to the Kitsune's aid.

Perhaps strangest of all, the Kitsune do not persecute mutants, and there are many bands of mutant ronin who are willing to repay this courtesy with their lives if need be. Kitsune armies are a bizarre ragtag mix on the battlefield, but they are nonetheless effective for all that. No one has ever bested them for long on their own territory, and the Kitsune's followers intend to keep it that way, if only to preserve their own ways of life.

THE LADY OCHIBA

Ochiba is the best-known Fox Lady in the Shogunate. She is rumored to have been the mistress of half the other Overlords in her time. She wears the form of a wildly beautiful, red-haired woman. Her skin is pale. Her eyes are golden and they sometimes glitter in the dark like those of a dog, but she can stop their glittering at will. She is moody, like all her people. She can be bright, witty and kind one moment, and cold and vengeful the next. Her temperament changes with her moods, and her moods, they say, change with the color of the sky. She is the supreme mistress of the Temple of Kitsune, and rumored to be the most powerful sorceress in the Shogunate. In her youth she was a Kitsune pleasure-dancer, one of the most sought-after courtesans in the Shogunate, and a mistress of all the erotic arts. One night in her arms is said to be enough to enslave a person for life.



LORD OMI

This famous wako is chieftain of the Shark Clan, the deadliest pirates ever to sail the oceans of Waste World. He is a samurai of medium height who wields a forceblade in either hand. His armor is bright and multi-colored. He has a bionic eye and bionic arm. He is a cruel, sardonic man who holds his position of power among the pirates through his skill with his weapons and his cunning as a leader. He was once briefly the lover of Ochiba and remains fanatically dedicated to her.

His flagship, the Tiger Shark, is an enormous craft, bristling with weapons, a floating fortress capable of withstanding a direct hit from anything short of a Drakonium Bomb. His men are the nastiest cutthroats ever to walk a deck. They loot and kill without mercy and woe betide any who encounter them on the high seas.

KHAI MONG

Khai Mong is a powerful necromancer who maintains a citadel on one of the isles on the Bay of Kitsune. Here his zombies harvest Drakonium for him and he delves deep into forbidden lore, using a cache of ancient machines he discovered in the ruins of Kitsune Sector. In appearance Khai Mong is a tall gaunt man who appears to suffer from some wasting disease. He constantly coughs and wheezes but in spite of his apparent infirmity is in fact as strong as any warrior. He has a very bad reputation, and is feared the length and breadth of the sector. He dissects his captives and performs all sorts of loathsome experiments on them. No one knows what he eventually hopes to learn. Some think he is only doing it for his own cruel amusement. His tower lies on a great promontory jutting out into the sea. It is a mighty fortress and Khai Mong is constantly improving its defenses.

THE I CLAN

The I Clan take the Boar for their sign. They appear to be a happy-go-lucky bunch, fond of food, wine and fine living, but their seeming good nature conceals a violent and vicious edge. Many Boar Clan warriors are prone to berserker rages, and you taunt an I at your peril. They can turn violent in an instant, at any provocation, and sometimes at no provocation at all. The I are also known to be among the most ambitious clans in all of the Shogunate.

Physically, most I are of medium height but very broad and strong, and surprisingly quick for their bulk. Many are bow-legged, which may explain why they prefer to ride whenever possible. The I are rarely good-looking and they do not care. They pride themselves on their squat ugliness. They claim that honor is far more important than beauty.

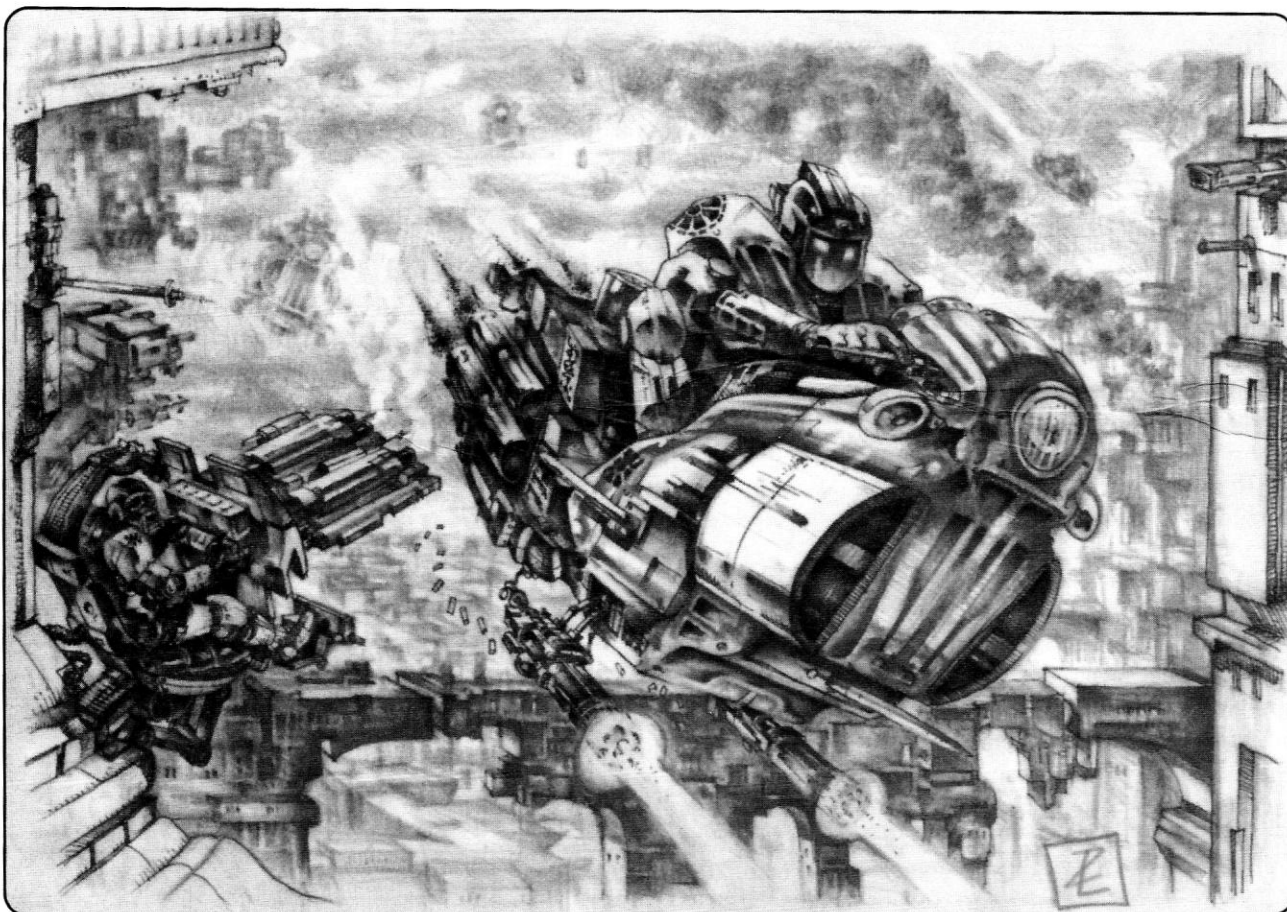


The I have many virtues: they stick close to the samurai codes of honor, they are rarely cruel or malicious for the sake of it and, in general, they are generous and open-handed in all their dealings. On the other hand, there is a streak of bloodlust in their makeup that others should be wary of, and they can be rash and impetuous when crossed.

The I are a very clannish folk. They stick together through thick and thin, and present a unified front to the world. This is helped by the fact that they are extremely family-minded. All I are expected to have large families with many children, and those children are expected to show proper respect to their biological parents even after they change bodies. The Clan also adopts many outsiders from allied clans, which helps them maintain good relations with their vassals.

Indeed, of all the great clans, the I tend to have the most loyal allies. Perhaps this is because they repay loyalty with loyalty and in general are as loyal and just to their followers as they are vengeful towards their enemies.

Historically the I usually find themselves on the opposite side from the Higuma. This is more of a rivalry than a real hatred, although behind their bluff respect for the Higuma, the I carry a real malice. The hatred of the I is reserved for the Tora, whom they have always seen as their true rivals.



The I were the last Great Clan to be granted a province. In fact they seized the sector they rule from the Spider Clan a bare two millennia ago, during the Time of Chaos. They were merely allies of the Spider Clan but they took advantage of the Spider's heavy losses at the Battle of the Hellstorm Gate to change sides and overthrow their rulers. Their rule was recognized by the Kitsune Shogun Mara and they supported her as she established her rule.

Indeed, it was the Boar Clan general I Toryami who succeeded her to become the first and only Boar Shogun. No other clan in history has ever made the leap from minor clan to Overclan so quickly, and the I are proud of this. They are also very touchy on the subject about their status as a relative latecomer among the Great Clans.

The I are still a violently ambitious Clan. Their current Overlord I Takaya desires nothing more than to become Shogun, and swiftly.

In the present political situation within the Shogunate, the I are something of a loose cannon. They would like nothing more than to precipitate a general uprising against the Shogun. They feel that they could seize power quickly and stabilize the situation before the Prometheans could take advantage of it. In fact, Takaya feels that the threat the Prometheans represent would ensure that the other clans would swiftly accept his claims to the Shogunate. He wants to gamble that they would rather present a united front against outsiders than fight a bitter internal war.

Only the fact that he is not sure his forces could overcome the current Shogun's in an all-out struggle stays his hand. So he continues for the moment to make secret alliances with minor clans and tries to foment insurrection among the Great Clans. Most of the other Overlords can see Takaya's naked ambition for what it is, but they also realize that if the Shogun keeps pushing them, they may have to do as he wishes. Most believe, though, that once insurrection begins there will be a long drawn-out civil war, and the Prometheans will be the main beneficiaries of it.

The I possess some of the richest of all Drakonium fields but they are scattered all over the vast expanses of the Southern Deserts and are thus vulnerable to attack by Skavengers and other clans. Their coastal sectors are often raided by pirates from the Kitsune sector. This may explain why the I place so much emphasis on mobility and speed in warfare.

The Boar Clan nurses a grudge against the Ikareans. The flying city often raids the I holdings in the South Wastelands, possibly because the isolated fortresses and Drakonium fields are more scattered than those held by other clans. Woe betide any Ikarean caught raiding. The I will show them no mercy. Naturally the Ikareans repay this when they can. They reserve some particularly inventive and excruciating torments for use on the I.

The I are great lovers of food, and their banquets are famed throughout the Shogunate for their lavishness and for the quality of the food. I cuisine is undeniably the best in all of the Shogunate. Boar Clan inns are the most patronized in the Realm.

THE PROVINCE OF I

The I province is the southernmost sector of the Shogunate. It reflects its masters. It is well-built and well-kept. There are many fine, broad superhighways running through the sector. The buildings tend to be squat, massive fortresses, less lofty than the usual Shogunate starscrapers. They are built more for functionality and strength than for appearance. The sector is very prosperous and in general harmonious, for the allies of the I are very loyal, and the population, in general, is well-fed and happy. It is a maxim of I rule that good government should fill the rice bowl.

Along the boundary walls are many monstrous barracks and forts, particularly those that look out over the Wastes. The Azure Swarm and the Skavengers often seek to raid this sector, and fast-moving skimmerbike-mounted patrols often flash outwards through the gates to sweep the Wastelands. The I maintain many garrison towns in the Wastes to watch over their Drakonium fields. The general pattern of these is to have one huge citadel, called a hub, in the center of a ring of smaller forts. Fast-moving, mechanized forces can be rushed out to reinforce any fort on the perimeter of the ring. The I also make sure that these fortress rings overlap, and that two or more hubs can always reinforce each other.

Hordes of Skavengers raid the I holdings regularly. Rumor has it that they are often bribed into doing so by the other clans and the Prometheans. Generally speaking, they are no match for the I samurai when caught. Of course, the I have to catch their elusive prey first.

THE I MILITARY

The Boar Clan loves to fight. It is one of their greatest joys. They love battle for its own sake, and they love victory more than anything. They are the swiftest of the Great Clans to take affront, the touchiest concerning their honor. They are usually the first to declare war, and they have had more than their share of victories.

Of all the clans, the I are the most numerous and their warriors are among the fiercest. They are fine riders of their customized jetbikes and excel in almost every form of mobile warfare.

The I are famous for their flanking assaults, but are otherwise not known for their cunning. Once again this can be deceptive, for the blunt manner of many I conceals an astute and devious mind. They are the masters of the feigned retreat and the swift return to combat. They are also superb at pincer movements and encirclements.

The most famed of all the I regiments is the Legion of the Red Tusk. These are the I Overlord's guard, hand-picked from the clan's finest riders and fighters. They are the best mobile troops of a people who specialize in mobile warfare, which means they are very good indeed. The Red Tusks can be distinguished by their red-painted helmets and gauntlets.

On being chosen for the Legion, an initiate Red Tusk must prove his worth and valor by Riding the Flames. This ritual takes place once per year, under the eyes of the I Overlord. To pass the test, the candidate must ride his skimmerbike over a monstrous obstacle course, rising through flaming hoops and jumping over pits filled with liquid fire. The proving ground for this ritual is littered with the burned-out wreckage of bikes whose riders did not possess the requisite skill. The charred skeletons of the riders themselves are left to litter the plain. Usually the chemical infernos will consume any karmachip, so the penalty for failure is the True Death. In spite of this, there is never any shortage of candidates for the Legion.

The Boar Clan's allies are strong in areas where it is weak. The Mastadon Clan provide them with tanks and siege machines. The Crimson Gauntlet Clan provide superb infantry and highly trained support personnel. All of the allied clans are ferociously loyal to the I Overlord.

TAKAYA

Takaya is reputed to be the most ambitious man in the Shogunate. He lives, eats, sleeps and breaths the desire to be the next Shogun, or at the very least to see one of his many sons sit within the Black Pagoda. He will allow nothing to stand in the way of his ambitions. What he really wants is for the I to be the pre-eminent Clan, as he genuinely believes they deserve.



Despite his transparent ambition, Takaya is a very likable man. He is charming, pleasant and good-humored in a coarse way. He is a general of great skill who at one time led the Red Tusks into battle. He is a Tau master with a great gift for the martial arts. He is a great skimmerbike rider. He is devoted to his wife and family, and looks out for the interests of his followers as if they were his own children.

But Takaya has his darker side. He is given to black fits of rage when crossed, and will often vent his wrath on the first person he encounters, whether they deserve his anger or not. He has a prodigious appetite for food and sake. He drinks too much and eats too much and often burns out his bodies with his excesses long before the normal time. In his cups, he can be brutal and violent for no reason, although he will often be overcome by remorse the next day. These flaws endear him to his followers, who see him as a man like themselves, not a remote and unapproachable near-deity like some other Overlords. They also cause many of his enemies to mistake him for a coarse, ill-tempered brute. This is a mistake that has cost many people dearly.

URKO

Urko is Takaya's bodyguard and comrade. He is all the things that people suspect Takaya of being. Urko is a massive man, sullen, powerfully-built and brutish in mien. He is a berserker with a hair-trigger temper. The only thing that tempers this is his loyalty to his Overlord, and his instant unquestioning obedience to his master. Urko is a killer, pure and simple. He is incredibly fast and strong and fearless. He is willing to fight anyone for any reason at any time. He has never lost a single combat.

Urko's association with Takaya dates back to their time as Red Tusks together. Urko was a simple samurai but Takaya recognized his gifts, and knew early that having someone as trustworthy and deadly as Urko at his back would be an invaluable asset in his climb to power.

MATSUO

Matsuo is Takaya's best war leader. He has undergone dozens of reincarnations and feels that he is starting to slip into degradation. Physically he is now an old man, and wishes to retire to a monastery and die the True Death before he brings shame upon himself. He is simply tired of living.

He has been a member of the I since before it was a Great Clan and has watched and aided in every stage of its rise to power. He served Takaya's father and grandfather before him, and he feels that he has had a good run and can go into the Great Void without regrets. Although white-haired and wrinkled, he is a deadly warrior still, and as a field general has few equals in cunning or depth of knowledge. He knows all the major Overlords and the Shogun personally, and is a shrewd judge of the motives behind their actions. His political advice has always been sound, and that is one reason that Takaya has not yet allowed him to go to his long and well-deserved rest. However, Matsuo fears that Takaya's ambitions will bring ruin on the Shogunate and the clan. Since he has begun to voice these opinions his Overlord has found him less indispensable. It may be that Matsuo's dearest wish will soon be granted. At the moment he is starting to become a rallying point for those in the clan who share his opinions.

THE KOBARA CLAN

The Kobara have a reputation for being the most sneaky and treacherous of all the Great clans. They are feared for their ability as spies and intriguers. During the course of history there has been no treachery to which they have not stooped to increase their power and prestige. They are as cunning as Demons, as wary as wild beasts. They are cold-hearted, duplicitous and care only for their own interests. Of course, a Kobara would claim that in this they are no different from any other of the ruling samurai clans, and that they are unfairly maligned by public opinion.

The Kobara's long history of treachery dates right back to the days before the Shogunate was fully established and the Shogun was welding together the coalition of city-states that would later become the Shogunate. The Kobara were the chief ally of the Yoruba Clan who ruled the Yoruba sector.

At this time the city-state of Yoruba stood in the Shogun's way. It was said to be an impregnable fortress. The Shogun besieged it for three years before finally his agents made contact with the Kobara Clan within the city. The Kobara agreed to open the gates and were rewarded by being made the Overlords of Yoruba once they swore fealty to the Shogun. So began their rise to power as a Great Clan.

Since that day they have held their position by a mixture of intrigue, assassination and currying favor with those in power. In terms of pure military might they are the weakest of all the Great Clans, but they make up for this by striking the right alliances and playing their foes off against each other.



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In recent years, as their political position has weakened, some Kobara have been seen openly using bionic systems. This has done nothing to enhance their already poor reputations. Many suspect that they are now pawns of the Prometheans. Some people claim that in return for their treachery, the Kobara will be granted the Shogunate if the Prometheans invade and win. They do not say this loudly, for the reach of Kobara assassins is very long.

Historically, the Kobara have been the great enemies of the Tora Clan, and even now they plot to overthrow the Tora Shogun. Comparatively few Kobara have born the Three Artifacts and Kobara rules have always been reigns of terror. The Kobara prefer to be king-makers rather than kings.

THE KOBARA SECTORS

The Kobara sectors are one vast dark fortress, centered on what was once the ancient citadel of

Yoruba. The sector is a maze of winding ways, overgrown with roads and flyovers and monorails that connect many of the pagodas in one vast web.

Over the monorails float enormously long suspensor trains carrying goods, people and troops swiftly throughout the entire sector. These trains are painted metallic green. Their lead carriages are molded to resemble the heads of great serpents with headlights for eyes.

Only the ancient citadel itself stands apart from this transportation network. It rises squat and immense from the middle of a vast ferrocrete plain. Only four Serpent Train lines run to it, from north, south, east and west. These pass through vast armored gates which can be closed at a moment's notice. The monorail lines are mined all the way across the plain, and can be destroyed with a flick of a switch in case of attack.

Toxic mists belch forth from the Kobara chemical factories, wreathing the buildings with constant warm, moist fogs. The Kobara realm contains many huge geodesic jungle domes in which strange herbs and flowers are grown. In particular, they cultivate groves of giant Xenogen orchids that provide the basis for many narcotics and poisons. The Kobara cultivate many exotic plants within their apartments. Many people find the temperatures within Kobara buildings uncomfortably warm.

The old metrozone of Yoruba still sits in the heart of their province, and provides them with safe refuge if their foes make war on them. The Kobara have done their best to ensure that this time no treachery will lead to the fortress being taken.

Despite this in recent years, as Drakonium has become scarcer, and competition has grown fiercer, the Kobara's position has become more and more precarious. Most people think that this will make the Kobara themselves more dangerous, for they are at their worst when they have their backs to the wall.

The Kobara claim descent from Kobara Hazaki, the archetypal Kobara: tall, slender, cold-eyed and swift of movement. The Father of Serpents seized the throne at the end of a long and bloody Interregnum. He achieved absolute power by stealth, assassination, cunning and treachery, and his reign was oppressive and terrible. Hazaki possessed formidable psychic prowess and used the power of the Celestial Artifacts more than any other Shogun, which may have contributed to his early madness and death.

The Kobara resemble their First Ancestor. They are usually tall and slender. They move with a slinking, boneless grace. When at rest they are absolutely still but they can move into action with blinding speed. They have large, pale unblinking eyes, thin lips and high cheekbones. Their clan color is green. Kobara samurai tend to wear green ceramic armor molded to appear scaled. Their helms resemble the cowls of great serpents. It is claimed that in violation of all custom, they have always used concealed bionics to enhance their combat abilities.



WARFARE

In battle the Kobara are formidable and deadly foes. They strike swiftly, by surprise, and their commando units are among the best in the world. Their intelligence and assassination networks are second to none, and those who speak out against them are often found mysteriously murdered. The Kobara believe in maintaining their position through superior intelligence; they employ the best Spirit Walkers to search the Spirit Realm for new information. They are said to have struck pacts with many Oni, and their realm is a refuge to many forbidden cults and ninja ryu.

The Kobara have the smallest standing army of any of the Great Clans. Their samurai are well-trained and well-equipped, but in general no more so than those of other Overclans. If it came to an all-out war based on raw military muscle, the Kobara would lose to any of the other Great Clans. Fortunately for them they have no intention of ever entering into any such one-sided war. The Kobara are adept at forging alliances with clans of greater power, and they bring much to their side of the table: Great wealth, an unequaled understanding of long-term strategy and an intelligence network second to none, as well as connections to the fiercest and most dangerous of all the ninja ryu. They also bring the Naga Guard.

The Naga Guard are the cream of the Kobara Armies. They are samurai who have been taught to excel in every form of commando warfare. They are masters of infiltration, sabotage and fast-moving guerrilla warfare. They are terror troopers without equal, skilled at spreading fear and despondency in the enemy's ranks. One of their favorite tricks is to slip into heavily fortified enemy barracks or camps and slit the throats of a few men. Sometimes they inject their victims with paralysis venom and torture them to death while their comrades sleep only meters away. When their victim's friends wake they are confronted with clear evidence that the Naga Guard have been there.

The Naga Guard spend lifetimes learning how to move and climb quietly, how to penetrate security systems and kill silently. They often travel through the realms and Wastelands disguised as ronin while going about their clan's business. They are also often dropped behind enemy lines to scout and to spread despair. No one knows exactly how many samurai serve in this unit, but some guesses go as high as fifty thousand. In recent years, the widespread use of bionic systems has enhanced their power further.



The Kobara's excellent intelligence networks mean that they usually can choose their battlefields. Naturally they prefer to strike from ambush and then melt away before they can be overwhelmed by their foe's superior numbers. Over the long millennia many armies have entered Kobara territory only to be cut to pieces in hundreds of surprise attacks and ambushes.

POISONMASTERS

The Kobara are among the greatest alchemists in all the Shogunate. In particular, the clan has a reputation for the use of poison. Indeed, they are the only clan to actively employ a class of people known as Poisonmasters whose only task in life is to specialize in the lore of venoms, poisons and their antidotes. The fearsome reputation of these individuals has traveled to places far beyond the Shogunate. They are said to rival the nobility of Ikarus in their mastery of death-dealing chemicals and drugs.

The Kobara have many research laboratories devoted to creating poisons and antidotes. In particular, the Poisonmasters specialize in the creation of venoms that do their work and then vanish without trace, leaving no signs that a poison was ever present.



Within the halls of the Kobara, poison has long been the favorite weapon and assassination tool. Their poison-snoopers, the automatic scanners that detect toxins, are imported from Ikarus, and are the best the sky-city can manufacture. There are many famous tales of Kobara banquets where every person present was attempting to poison someone else. Simple actions like passing the condiments or the wine decanters become moves in a deadly chess game as each player, themselves wary of their dinner companions, tries to introduce their chemicals into another's food or drink.

Many of the Kobara's enemies have a tendency to die before their time. Apparently healthy samurai have died of strokes and heart attacks while mysterious glitches affected their karmachips shortly after meeting with Kobara Clan members.

SERPENTFANGS

The Kobara have long been connected to the Serpentfang Ryu. Indeed this powerful ninja clan are one of the main planks on which Kobara power rests. It is an alliance that stretches far back into history, to the days when the Kobara were a minor clan in Yoruba and the Serpentfangs were a criminal conspiracy hunted by the government. The Kobara gave the Serpentfangs money and shelter. In return the ryu worked for the clan and removed its enemies. So began the Kobara's meteoric rise to power.

Many scholars think the Kobara ordered the Serpentfangs to attack the Shogun when he first besieged Yoruba. Some also claim that it was reports from the surviving Serpentfangs that convinced the Kobara that the Shogun was invincible and that they should change sides.

When the Shogun took Yoruba by stealth, it is said that it was Serpentfang Ryu who slew the sentries and shut down the gate's defenses. It may be that there was some other, hidden, agreement between the Shogun, the Kobara and the Serpentfangs. Despite their earlier attempts on his life, the first Shogun never persecuted the ninja ryu with the vigor that might have been expected of him.

LORD ZATAKI

Lord Zataki is the Overlord of the Kobara Realms. He is a tall, lean, silent man with pale skin and cold unblinking eyes. In conferences he can sit absolutely still for hours on end, never saying anything and listening to the arguments of both sides, while he devises his strategy.

Zataki is a very cautious, patient and cunning man. He knows that his clan does not have the resources or the might of the other Great Clans and that because of this he must move very carefully or his people will be wiped from the face of the world. He is famous for his meticulous collection of intelligence and his equally meticulous planning. He is a cold-hearted calculator who weighs the good and bad in all situations before he acts. He is also a psyker of considerable power and one of the greatest masters of Domination in the Shogunate. There are few who do not fear his menacing, cold-eyed gaze.

Lord Zataki is rumored to have poisoned both his father and his brother to gain his present position. He is said to have used zan-li, the venom which acts on the bio-circuitry of karmachips and renders them useless. Of course, no one has ever managed to prove these accusations. Many think it is Zataki's dearest wish to become Shogun.



HORGO

Horgo is Zataki's chief general and advisor, a huge brutal man, as large as any Higuma warrior. He is completely bald and his skull is marred by many scars. He speaks little, and when he does his voice is harsh and grating. For many incarnations he was Commander of the Naga Legion before being promoted to lead all the Armies of the Serpent. He is utterly brave and ruthless, and utterly devoted to his master. While he appears nothing more than a brute he is a very fine general and a master of strategy.

Horgo is also known to be an unspeakably cruel man when crossed, delighting in torture, murder and rapine. Many people think that some flaw has crept into his soul over his many incarnations that makes him desire such things. They do not say this to his face. Whatever the truth is, it has in no way impaired his efficiency as a leader.

MARI

Mari is the daughter of Lord Zataki in one of his previous incarnations, and the Kobara's Chief Spirit Walker. She is a tall, pale, elegantly beautiful woman, with emerald green eyes. She constantly smokes cigarettes containing the narcotic ghostweed. A thin holder carved from human bone dangles constantly from her lips.

She always appears calm and contemplative and very quiet. As a consequence many people have underestimated her. She is a Spirit Walker of genius who has penetrated some of the most closely guarded secrets of the Spirit Realms. Few know more than her about the workings of Ultramundae. She has spent a dozen lifetimes dedicated to learning all she can about them. She has studied under hundreds of Kami and Oni in the accelerated real-time of the datanets, and she remembers it all.



ZATALA

Zatala is Zataki's other daughter. She was originally Mari's identical twin and the two women still bear a very close resemblance. Zatala's talents ran in different directions from her twin's. While Mari preferred contemplation, Zatala preferred action. She has studied with many ninjaryu and learned many techniques of combat and infiltration, and she has spent many lifetimes rising to the top in the Naga Guard which she now commands. She is a deadly fighter and a cunning foe. She and her twin are great rivals for her father's affections, though it is possible that Zatala schemes one day to replace Zataki.

VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM : ON	INITIATE SEQUENCE	GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE	CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
FLOW LINK QUASI PROTOCOL : INITIATED	NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:	MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON	GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
FILE SUB-PROTOL: SHANG	INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:	SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR	SMART CHIP INSTALLED
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:	LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY	DYSFUNCTION	METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
VALIDATE SIMULATION	MOLECULAR BINARY:	MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON	OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

THE TEMPLES

LOGIN:	SUB system COORDINATES	SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD	BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
PASSWORD:	X1:434.37.8 X2:196.00.2	AMYGDALITIC OVERWRITE	BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
ACCESS GRANTED	Y1:612.33.1 Y2:346.001.2	SMART CHIP INSTALLED	AMOEBOID DRONE PRESENT
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:	Z2: 21.2122 Z1: 45.62.8	BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:	PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:	ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:	NANOCCIPITAL DRIVER	STORYMODE INITIATING

Lea pulled herself from the burning wreckage of her airbike, astonished by the fact that she was still alive. She sprinted away from the blazing vehicle and dived for cover behind a tumbled wall just as the fuel cells ignited and the bike tore itself to pieces. Shrapnel sprayed everywhere, ricocheting off the stone behind which she lay.

I guess I will be walking home, she thought, and then allowed herself to shudder in reaction to the close call. She recalled the last few fatal seconds as she fought for control of the crippled craft, wrestling with the hand-grips, trying to pull the airbike's nose up as the ruins of the Kitsune sector rose to meet her. She remembered desperately searching for a clear patch in all that rubble where she could make an emergency landing. If she lived through one hundred incarnations she hoped she would never have to do that again. She breathed deeply and touched Tau to calm herself. Then she poked her head up over the wall to see what was left of her Typhoon.

A pile of melted slag was the answer. All her gear and ammunition, save what she carried on her person, was gone. She knew without looking exactly what she carried. In her knapsack was a month's supply of food -pills, a survival kit and a medikit, as well as a torch, a micrograpnel and two Drakonium Power Cells.

On her belt was her forceblade. She was wearing her standard issue Tatsu Clan heavy ceramic armor, and her rebreather mask. It was not much considering that she had at least a four hundred kilometer trudge simply to get back to the entrance to the Kitsune sector. And she knew she wasn't going to do that just yet. She had come here with a mission, and she was not going to leave with it incomplete. It was a matter of honor.

She realized that whoever had shot her down would soon be here, looking for prey. The Kitsune sector was a notorious haven for ronin and mutants and all sorts of renegades. The thought of fleeing before such a rabble revolted her, but she had a task to perform and being dead wouldn't help her to achieve her goal. This would be a bad place to die. If she fell here, there was no one to take her head home and see that she was reincarnated. The True Death might well be hers.

She looked at the tumbled remains of the great buildings and the hallucinogenic mist that wreathed them. This place had been a graveyard since the time of the Armageddon Wars. It had never been rebuilt. It was a huddling place for bandits, not a true part of the Shogunate. It seemed like an appropriate place to face final extinction.

Enough of that, she told herself, wondering if the strange sorceries that were said to permeate this place were already starting to work on her, to weaken her will to live. She knew that many became lost to all honor here, and suddenly she could understand why.

There was something about the sheer scale of the destruction here that mocked all human efforts, that laughed at the concept of honor. Amid this rubble the Ancients had fought like mad gods and wrought havoc with the insane energies of their Entropic Bombs. She realized that her people were pygmies living in the ruins left behind by dead giants. She thought of the toppled buildings she had seen as she flew over the Kitsune sector and wondered at the sanity of an Overclan who would live here by choice.

And she wondered why Kenzo had chosen to join them. She forced herself to confront the reason why she had come here. Her betrothed had been seduced and bewitched by a Kitsune Temple Dancer and had run off with her to be her lover. Lea's face burned at the thought. She felt hurt and ashamed. She had loved Kenzo and thought he loved her. And he had departed in the night without a word, leaving her to face the pitying glances of her kin.

She was having none of it. She had chosen to disobey her lord, to become ronin, just so she could come here and look for him, and ask him why he had done it. And, if truth be told, she fully intended to kill the dancer, if the chance arose.

She could hear the sound of footsteps coming closer. There was nothing stealthy about them. They had a certain confidence. They were heading directly for her position. Whoever it was had definitely seen her dive for cover. There was no sense in hiding. She rose and drew her forceblade but did not activate it.





She found herself confronting a squat, powerfully-built man with a shaved head and a pot belly. He was garbed in soiled gray robes and carried no visible weapon. Still, there was an aura of calm confidence about him that warned her to be wary.

"Not much left of your bike," he observed nonchalantly. "Still I thought you did pretty well, all things considered. I wouldn't have bet a pint of sake to a pile of excrement that anybody would have survived that crash-landing."

Lea didn't like his tone. It was not seeming for a samurai of the Tatsu to be addressed in such a manner by a stranger. She told him as much. The stranger grimaced and scratched his head and then grinned at her.

"You're a long way from the Tatsu holdings, lady. And you'll find nobody around here has much use for samurai courtesy."

Lea patted the duralloy tube of her forceblade menacingly against the palm of her left hand. "Perhaps I should teach you some manners, oaf."

The man's grin widened. It was as if he had just heard a friendly joke, not a mortal insult. "It's been tried before, lady. Them that tried it aren't here to teach anything any more. I am."

She could not decide whether to be insulted or amused herself. There was something about the man's cockiness that was disarming. Then she realized that there was something familiar about the robes he was wearing and she activated the blade. "You stole those robes from a monk," she said.

He blew his nose on his sleeve and inspected it. "No. The robes are mine. I was a priest. I left the Temple of Steel after a theological dispute with my abbot. It was a pretty heated debate. He broke two of my ribs. I broke his neck."

"You've been defrocked. That's disgusting."

The man rubbed his hands and spat on the ground. "You're very judgmental for a ronin," he observed casually.

Lea was about to strike off his head and deny that she was a ronin when the truth of his words sunk in. She laughed and felt a weight fall from her shoulders. In a way it was a relief to be rid of the burden of honor. "You are correct. So sorry."

The man shrugged. "My name is Benkei."

"Lea."

"By the way, I think you'd better know that the reason I came all the way over here wasn't just to exchange pleasantries. It was to warn you."

"Warn me?"

"Yes. The ronin who shot down your bike are headed this way. Maybe we should get out of here."

She looked at him suspiciously, wondering why he was trying to help. He seemed to understand her thoughts.

"I have a bit of quarrel with their leader, Tozo. I still have enough monkish prejudices to think eating human flesh is wrong."

Lea shuddered. "We'd best go."

"I think maybe its too late for that."

She turned and looked to see where he was pointing. A horde of garishly clad ronin were charging into the street. One of them was enormously fat and carried a heavy laser, doubtless the same weapon that had downed her bike. The rest were armed with a motley assortment of forceblades and power naginata and chainswords. As they opened their mouths and shouted obscenities she saw that they all had filed teeth.

"I hope you know how to use that blade," Benkei said.

"Be assured I do."

"Good. I'll leave you a few to kill then."

"Benkei, you little rat," yelled the fat man. "You are mine at last."

Benkei laughed. "If you leave now, I'll let you live, obese one."

The ronin jeered and brandished their weapons. Benkei shrugged. "Well, I warned you."

The air suddenly blazed with power. Benkei's body shimmered. A quicksilver metallic sheen spread across his skin. Steel spikes extruded from his skin. He picked up a boulder in his fist and crushed it between his fingers.

"Been a while since I did this," he observed to no one in particular. "Prepare to have enlightenment beaten into you, ronin!"

Together he and Lea charged the ronin. The killing began.

PSYCHERS

Psychic powers are common in the Shogunate. Psychers are not persecuted as they are in many other places but are given their own place in this ordered society. A psyker has the same rights as anybody else, and knows that as long as he obeys the laws of the Realm, no one will interfere with him.

The Shogunate has a very well developed system, evolved over the millennia, for absorbing psychers into the fabric of society and thus preventing the disruption they could cause. As soon as a child in the Shogunate begins to show signs of psychic ability, they are taken to one of the Temples and tested by one of the monks. If the child truly possesses the Power, they will be given a monk's robe, and further tests to ascertain which Temple they would be best suited to serve. During this entire period they are watched over by the Master of Novices of the Temple that is hosting them. This Master is a potent psyker who will be able to restrain the novice if his newfound powers threaten to go out of control.



Once it has been decided which Temple the novice is best suited for, he is packed off to a monastery, where he must endure seven years of discipline. At first, his mind is purified by meditation and fasting. He runs errands for those who have progressed further than he has, and performs all the menial tasks, such as sweeping and cleaning.

When the Master of Novices within his new Temple judges him fit, his true teaching begins with either the daily study of the martial arts (if he is a member of one of the Budoka warrior temples) or with the study of abstruse mystical disciplines (if he is a member of one of the Mystic sects). This basic training is intended to instill discipline and self-control, and to give the young psyker a basic understanding of how his powers work. As the years progress, the emphasis in the training shifts, and the psyker learns more and more about how to use his powers, faithfully learning exercises designed to strengthen his powers and increase his control over them.

Eventually, when the psyker is judged worthy, he will be allowed to return to the outside world. If he is a samurai, he will be returned to his Clan. If he was a commoner, he will be assigned to a Clan that requires the services of someone like him. Many psychers choose not to do this and remain within the cloisters of their Temples, perfecting their arts and serving their Sensei.

Once back in society, psychers often hold an ambivalent position. They are samurai with all the rights, responsibilities and privileges of regular samurai. They often wield awesome powers, and their Clanlords rely heavily on their services. At the same time, they are mistrusted, as psychers are everywhere.

Normal people, even samurai, are often daunted by those who possess these superhuman powers. Most psychers choose to dwell apart within their Clan's holdings, in enclaves where they can mingle with their own kind, and with those who understand them. This often leads to marriage between psychers; the offspring of these marriages are almost guaranteed to be born psychers.

When a psyker tires of serving his lord, he will often petition to return to his Temple to a life of contemplation. Sometimes, when a psyker falls from favor, his lord will order him to return to his Temple, and the psyker once more dons the robes of a monk and returns to a life of contemplation and study.

THE PSYKER TEMPLES

There are seven great psyker temples and countless lesser ones. Each psyker temple has its own philosophy and way of teaching its skills. Each has its own ceremonial garb and its own mysteries. Each is an independent entity, ruled by its own Sensei, whose authority is roughly equal to that of a Clan Overlord. The Temples often have rivalries with each other and with the samurai Clans.



Psyker Temples are normally divided into two types, Budoka and Mystic. Budoka temples teach the martial arts and military virtues. They teach their students to master their powers through rigorous self-discipline and long hours of practice. Mystic temples teach quieter and more contemplative ways of harnessing power, such as meditation and prayer.

PATHS

Because their powers are learned in an ordered fashion, and their minds are shaped by Temple discipline to accept their powers, Temple psychers go insane far less often than untrained psychers. Paths are the secret of why so many Temple psychers remain sane and stable. These are simply ways of learning how to channel psi power that have been evolved by the Temples over the centuries. Paths have developed by trial and error, and have been perfected for millennia. They are a relatively safe way of learning how to use the power. As long as psyker follows his Temple's path, his chances of going insane are greatly reduced.



Paths work by first grounding a psyker so that he can accept his powers, then developing them in a logical and harmonious way. The psyker's development is paced so that he learns to use his powers just at that time which is best calculated to preserve his sanity. The discipline and philosophical basis provided by the Temples ensures that he is strong enough to accept his powers.

THE TEMPLE OF STEEL

This is one of the most warlike of all the Temples. Its monks practice the Martial Arts and are taught to transform themselves into living engines of destruction from an early age. Monks of this order wear loose steel-gray robes with cowls. They usually carry chain naginatas.

Their Path is one which specializes in combat and war. Steel Monks are in demand as bodyguards and war advisors. The famous warrior-monk Benkaino, author of the classic treatise on conflict, *The Spirit of War*, belonged to this temple.

The main temple lies within the I Province. It is an enormous spired pagoda of duralloy and steel, covered in riveted armor that resembles the plates of an ancient battleship. It bristles with weapons. Within the Temple's many lesser spires are bells cast from the melted-down remains of guns and armored vehicles. These are used to signal the hours and call the monks to meditation.

THE TEMPLE OF THE PHOENIX

This is another Budoka warrior temple whose monks specialize in violence and war. Masters of fire and destruction, they learn the mysteries of pyrokinesis and other skills. Their robes are red and they have tall pointed cowls and full face masks. This is the most violent of the warrior temples and its members are feared throughout the realm.

The main temple of this order lies within the Tatsuo dominions. It is a huge sandstone pagoda adorned with hundreds of flickering gas jets. At night, gigantic flames, hundreds of meters high, jet from its sides, illuminating all around it with a flickering hellish light.

THE TEMPLE OF THE WINDS

This Temple specializes in weather control. Its members are taught how to act en masse to control the great storms that rampage in from the Wastes. They can also summon the winds to clear away chem-clouds and the toxic smog which often hangs over the city. The monks of this sect are experts at predicting the weather and their services are often sought. Members of this sect dress in blue and white robes trimmed with silver. They carry winged staffs that are the mark of their office.

The main temple of this order lies beyond the city, on the edge of the Higuma Quarter. It is a tall airy structure with many domed observatories. Thousands of superstitious pilgrims and merchants visit it daily, hoping the monks will grant them fair weather for their journeys.

THE TEMPLE OF NIGHT

The monks of this Temple are all blind. They go garbed in black robes, a scarf wrapped around their eyes at all times. This does not matter to them, since they have learned to use senses other than sight to view the world around them. They are taught early the art of stealthy infiltration. The Blind Archers are the most famous of all the monks of this order; despite their blindness, they are the best shots in all the world.

The monks of this order are famous spies and assassins, skilled in all forms of stealthy sabotage and quiet conflict. They are said to train the Shogun's Shadow Guard. Legend has it that they can smell poison in a cup, and know whether a man is lying by the quickness of his heartbeat.

The main temple of this order is a needle-like spire of black duralloy that rises over Kobara Province. A fortified bunker deep beneath this spire holds most of the temple.

THE TEMPLE OF HEALING

The gentle monks of this temple are revered throughout the land. They specialize in all forms of the healing art and have taken a vow never to knowingly harm a living thing. Their persons are sacred throughout the land, and only the most depraved of mutants or most honorless ronin would ever consider harming them. Their white robes are famous beyond the walls of the Shogunate, for these monks often wander the world, bringing succor to those who suffer. The main temple of this order comes under the protection of the Shogun. It is built all of white marble and lies within the Foreigner's Quarter.

THE TEMPLE OF THE SEERS

The monks of this order are mystics who specialize in divination in all its forms. They are reputedly able to see into the future and are consulted by all classes within the Shogunate before any major action is contemplated. Before the foundations of a new building are laid, they will be asked to check the site to make sure it is auspicious. Before the birth of a child they will be consulted as to where the best place for it to come into the world. Its members are probably most in demand among the great sandfleets which scour the Wastes for Drakonium. This order receives many donations for its services and because of this it is the wealthiest of all the psyker orders. The main temple is a bizarre structure built from tiles of many-colored glass. It lies within the Kitsune domains.



THE DEMON DANCERS

The Demon Dancers specialize in binding and exorcising Demons and other malevolent energy beings. They aid the samurai in keeping such creatures under control. Often they have retinues of Demons who are already bound to their service. Their rites involve dancing and the ritual throwing of salt and chemicals. They wear red and black robes and huge masks sculpted to resemble Demon faces. These ferocious visages make them a frightening sight.

Their main temple is a grim structure whose walls are inlaid with skulls and bones. It is located in the heart of the Tora sector.

OTHER TEMPLES

The Shogunate has many, many different sects and temples. The ones given above are merely the major ones, with minor shrines and temples located everywhere within the Shogunate. There are literally hundreds of other temples and cults, some of which are proscribed sects, some of which are splintered factions of the major temples. There is not enough space in a sourcebook this size to go into all of them. The following are just a small sampling:

THE TEMPLE OF THE FOX

This temple is, in many ways, as well organized as any of the major temples, but it is open only to members of the Kitsune Clan. Kitsune are usually psychers and they do not enter the temple system. Instead they go directly into their own family cult and are taught its mysteries. Kitsune priestesses travel in troupes. They are actors and dancers as well as spies and courtesans. They perform their ritual masques before audiences throughout the Shogunate.

The Kitsune specialize in illusion and misdirection. Their priests are mischievous and delight in puncturing others' pretensions. Though iconoclastic, they are also a source of wisdom in their strange way, since they question everything. This constant questioning is often a way to the truth. Of course, many Kitsune priestesses simply delight in causing mischief for the sake of mischief.

THE DEATHCLAW RYU

The Deathclaw Ryu is not regarded as a true temple. It is in fact a splinter group from the Temple of Night. During the Great Temple War, a group of Ebon Monks split from their temple and formed the ryu. They set themselves up as spies and assassins and used the secrets they had learned as monks in the worst possible way. Needless to say, the Temple of Night is the ryu's greatest enemy.

The Deathclaw Ryu recruits young psychers, initiating them with the most binding of oaths into the mysteries. There are rumors strange, murderous ceremonies that bind the youths to the ryu. The Deathclaws do not believe in karma or the transfer of the spirit. They claim it is all a sham to keep the public docile to the will of the Shogun. They believe that when you are dead, you are dead, and pass into the Great Void; and there is nothing more to it than that. They have no truck with the machineries of karma. They kill for a price, but they do so with a certain compassion, since they believe they are freeing their victims from the illusion of karma. They always destroy any karmachip their victim might possess, to ensure the True Death.

PRAYER MACHINES

Within the temples, psychers mediate and pray using prayer wheels. These ancient devices actually siphon off a portion of their psionic power and feed it to the temple's central altar. These form enormous reservoirs of psychic power that are in turn linked to the great Throne in the Black Pagoda. When the shogun rests within his throne he can absorb the psychic energy fed to him by the prayer machines. It is used to power the Three Sacred Artifacts.

All of the prayer engines are equipped with delicate sensors that can spot Demonic possession and the taint of alien influences. If a psycher interfaces with a prayer engine in this condition, alarms will go off within the temple. This usually results in the Psycher being killed or exorcised. Thus are they protected from the Darkness by the beneficence of the Shogun.

Although each temple occupies land within the provinces of the Great Clans they are, at least in theory, independent of those Clans. Of course, there are traditional ties between the monks and their samurai benefactors, but this is not supposed to influence their loyalty. Since psychers are sent to those temples most suited to their gifts, the monks can come from all over the Shogunate, and can be drawn from every class. The Temples are great melting pots wherein people of many different backgrounds can meet on equal terms.

VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM: ON	INITIATE SEQUENCE	GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE	CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
FLOW LINK QUASI PROTOCOL: INITIATED	NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:	MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON	GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
FILE SUB-PROTOL: SHANG	INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:	SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR	SMART CHIP INSTALLED
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:	LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY	DYSFUNCTION	METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
VALIDATE SIMULATION	MOLECULAR BINARY:	MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON	OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

OUTLAWS

LOGIN:	SUB system COORDINATES	SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD	BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
PASSWORD:	X1:434.37.8 X2:196.00.2	AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE	BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
ACCESS GRANTED	Y1:612.33.1 Y2:346.001.2	SMART CHIP INSTALLED	AMOEBOID DRONE PRESENT
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:	Z2: 21.21.22 Z1: 45.62.8	BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:	PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:	ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:	NANOCCIPITAL DRIVER	STORYMODE INITIATING

Ever so gently, ever so softly Nokya raised the ventilation grill and placed it on the rooftop. So far, so good, she thought. Her information had been correct. There appeared to be no alarm system covering this entrance into the pagoda. Appeared was the keyword, she reminded herself. One of the basic tenets of her ninja training had been that appearances were always deceptive.

Gingerly she ran her tongue around her mouth, reflexively feeling for the false tooth implanted there. She forced herself to look up and scan around. The night sight lenses in her bionic eye worked perfectly. She could see the roof of the building from which she had just come. She had fired her micrograpnel line across and walked over the line like a circus acrobat. It had been a one hundred meter walk from peak to peak, to this precarious ledge high atop the Scorpion Clan pagoda. Now she clung here, seeking entrance to the starscraper and silently praying that she had tripped no alarms.

There was no reason why she should have set off an alarm, she told herself. The local Yakuza Oyabun had provided her with detailed plans of the Scorpion's home in return for a cut of the contract price. As far as she knew these plans had come directly from the client himself. She did not doubt that the client was one of the Scorpions, a person keen to get rid of some rival, either in politics or love.

She smiled again and covered her mouth with the metal fingers of her bionic arm. She was taking too much for granted. She knew nothing of the client's motives and she did not want to. The reasons for the contract were irrelevant to her. A price had been paid. It was her sworn duty to carry out the contract. The client's motives mattered not at all.

She lowered herself into the air shaft and braced herself. With her back against one wall, her feet against another, she held herself in place with pure muscular strength. She reached up and pulled the grill back into position, being careful to make no noise.

She pulled out the micrograpnel, clipped its' handle to her thick leather gun belt then hooked its' head back over the grill. The running lights of an aircar passed over head and she froze in place, becoming totally immobile, totally still, praying this was not some sentry come to investigate her break in.

Once the lights were gone, she allowed herself to breath once more and slowly lowered herself down the shaft, paying out the line carefully with one hand, dropping like a spider at the end of its web.

Her feet touched solid plascrete. She tested the surface gingerly and found it would support her weight. She felt her way around with her fingers and knew she was in a ventilation pipe, one that forced clean, warm air around the pagoda. Only once she was sure of her position did she unclip the line, leaving it swinging in place so that she could use it on her way out.

Momentarily, she shivered. If she came back this way. If she was still alive in fifteen minutes once her task was accomplished. She breathed deeply and meditated a moment to clear her mind of fear and anticipation. She knew that both could be fatal in her present task. She needed to remain relaxed, fluid, able to strike in any direction.

When her heartbeat slowed, she hunkered down and began to wriggle forward along the pipe, counting out the heartbeats as she had been taught, measuring her progress till she came to the correct junction. She slithered right and continued to crawl.

This was always the worst part of the operation for her. Just before the kill. She had slain dozens of targets, in scores of circumstances, but this part never got any easier. You could never tell what unexpected factors might arise to complicate the situation, how things might differ from the information you had been provided with.



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ASTRAL FORM DETACH

OUTLAWS





And she was doing this alone without backup, just as she had done since she went rogue from the Mantis Ryu all those years ago. Actually, this hit was worse than most. The Scorpions were a particularly unforgiving samurai clan, and no less deadly than their allies the Kobara. Hers would not be an easy death if she was caught. Doubtless this was why she kept flicking the fake tooth filled with poison that lay at the back of her mouth. At least there was an easy, even ecstatic, death.

She wondered why she was still doing this after all these years. She did not need the money. She had already earned more than enough to retire to Janus and live a life of ease. She felt no great need to kill simply for the sake of killing. She did not feel, as some ninja did, that the act of killing made her god-like, able to dispense death at a whim. She had long ago seen through the religious fiction that the Mantis Cult taught its members. She knew that the souls of her targets were not offerings to her shadowy former god. She knew they did nothing to guarantee her own immortality.

But she also knew that she had her own reasons for going on, and they were not necessarily good ones. She enjoyed her work. There was no thrill to compare with the thrill she was experiencing now, the almost painful mixture of barely-controlled fear and anticipation. She liked pitting her wits against the rich and powerful of her world. She liked showing the samurai that she was not only as good as they, but better.

She had seen them kill her father and mother, simply because they had not bowed quickly enough to a Kobara lord. They would have killed her too if she had not fled into the alleys and hidden. She knew she had come a long way from the orphaned gutter child old master Wu had found in the streets of Kobara sector and inducted into his strange cult. She was still grateful to the ryu for the skills it had taught her and the strange mechanical gifts it had implanted in her body.

Sometimes she regretted that she had seen through their weird doctrines and the worship of their bizarre mechanical god. It had been comforting in a way. Her life had made more sense within that easy framework. Still she learned too much from those savants she had encountered in the course of her business. The Spirit Walker Fang had taught her that what she thought was a god was simply the remains of some ancient thinking machine, and what she had thought of as heaven and hell was merely an artificial reality held within a datacore.

She had acquired a taste for nice things, stolen from the homes of those she killed, stored in her own secret place far from where her soul-brethren had meditated and trained in monastic austerity. She had known even then that if she was found out she would be killed, but she had not cared. She had risked death every month and dealt it just as often, and it held no real terrors for her. And slowly she had learned just how much the ryu gained from her risking her life.

In the end she had simply realized that she did not need the cult. Fang could act as her agent. She could pocket the money and live as she chose. She had quietly departed the ryu and killed everyone they had sent to bring her back. Now she was one of the best paid freelance assassins in the Shogunate. Yes, she loved her work. The fact that it allowed her to outwit and slay the high and mighty samurai was a big bonus.

She reached the end of the tunnel, and peered out of the ventilation grill. She looked down into a large chamber in which a large, powerfully-built warrior lay on a futon. Two kimono-clad geisha served him Hydran hallucinogenic grapes. The man's kimono was open and Nokya caught sight of his muscular chest. For all the man's seeming relaxation, a forceblade lay within easy grasp on a low table. She did not doubt that he would be a formidable foe, if given a chance. She did not plan on giving him any chance whatsoever.

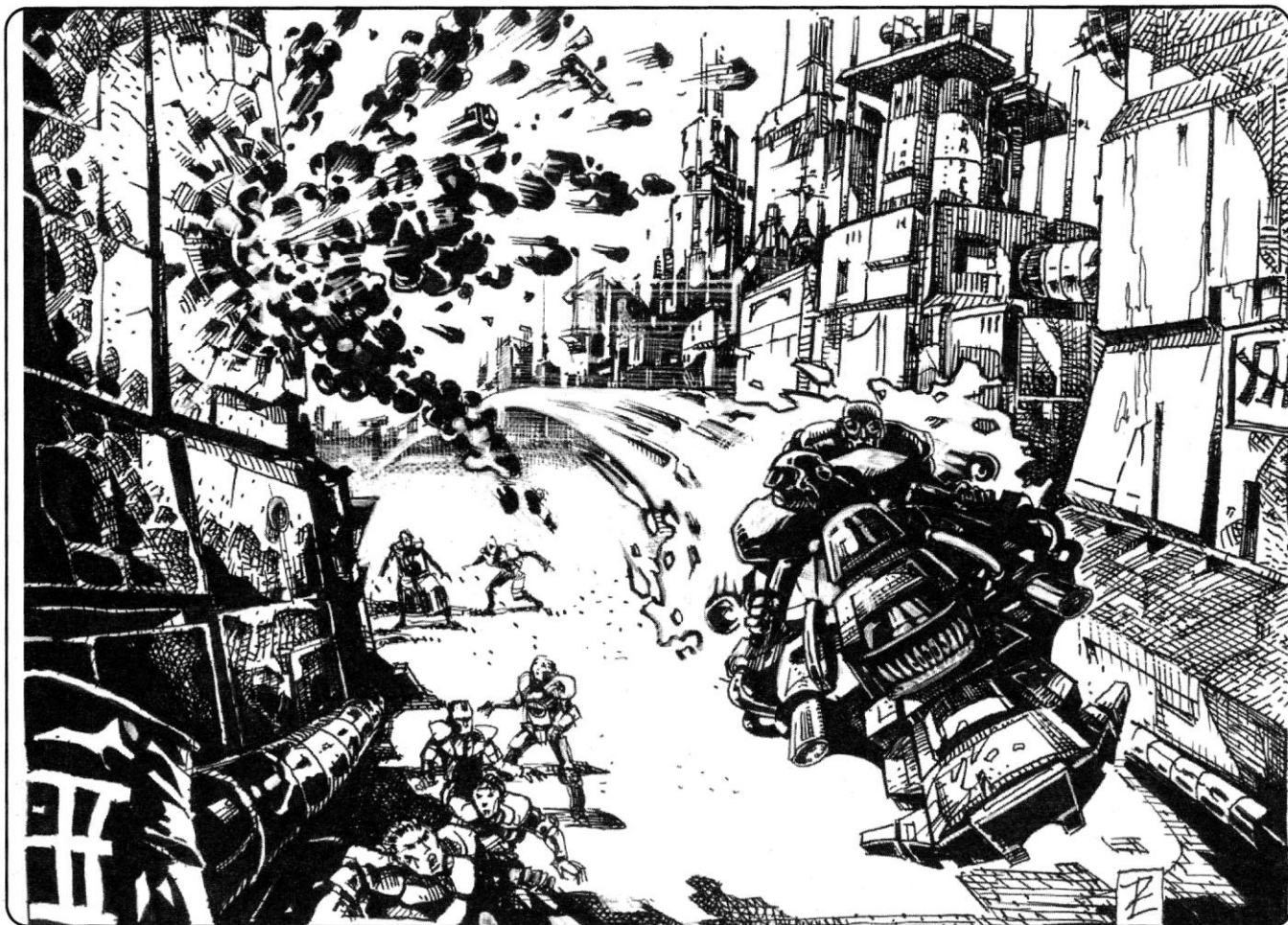
This was her target. She had memorized that face from the photos the Oyabun had provided to Fang. This was the rising Scorpion warlord Nomura. Well, soon he would be no more.

The geisha were removing their outer garments now. One lay on the bed beside Nomura.

From her holster she pulled out the laser pistol. The bars of the grill were narrow but the weapon's beam would still pass through easily. She wriggled herself into position, then sighted carefully on his head. She wanted a clean burn, destroying the karmachip and preventing resurrection.

She never knew the reason for what occurred next. Perhaps it was chance. Perhaps the man's Tau was very strong. Perhaps some instinct warned him for, just as she squeezed the trigger, he moved. The beam blasted into the wall behind him, making the plascrete bubble and run. The geisha screamed. Nomura reached for his blade and with a sweep deflected the stream of energy pouring towards him.

Nokya cursed. Instinctively she switched targets, cutting down the two geisha before they could run for help. Nomura was overconfident, keeping his blade in the ready position he moved towards where Nokya lay.



She smiled almost unable to believe her luck. The fool was not going to summon his guard's. He thought he could handle the situation himself. Nokya punched forward with her bionic arm, sending the grill flying. Then she focused all her Tau and sprang forward into the room, rolling to her feat, drawing her power blade with one hand.

Nomura glanced at her contemptuously. He was far taller and heavier and moved with the liquid ease of one in touch with Tau. He took in her black hooded garb and spat.

"Ninja scum! Prepare to die."

With a loud kiai he surged forward, swinging his blade. She parried with the powerblade, and lunged forward with her bionic arm. Her claws extended, tearing his silken kimono, piercing his naked flesh, sending a stream of deadly poison into his veins. His eyes widened as the paralysis gripped him. Her next stroke took his head off.

She could hear guards shouting now in the distance, responding to the geisha's screams. She had one last task to perform and then she could go. She took the laser and burned out the karmachips of the geisha and her target. She was leaving no witnesses. Then she retreated into the air vent and pulled the grill back into place behind her.

It was time to go.

OUTLAWS

There are many illegal groups within the Shogunate which manage to continue their existence through secrecy and the use of hidden powers and resources. The two best-known of these outlaw groupings are the Yakuza and the ninja ryu.

YAKUZA

The Yakuza are the largest criminal conspiracy in the Shogunate. They are men and women who have chosen, quite simply, to live outside the law. They have no regard for the laws of the Shogun or the Laws of Karma. It has been said they would disregard the laws of nature if they could.

As an organization they have their tentacles in every aspect of illegal commerce within the Shogunate. Their power stretches across the Wastes to the Shogunate's colonies, independent habzones and even the mighty commercial megalopolis of Janus. Within the Shogunate, the Yakuza have a virtual monopoly on drug-dealing, body-broking, prostitution, gambling, extortion and blackmail.



How did one organization get to be so powerful? No one really knows. It is believed that like so many other pillars of Shogunate society, the origins of the Yakuza are rooted in the Armageddon Wars. In the chaos of the time, a number of criminal gangs carved out small fiefdoms for themselves in the ruins of the city-state of Shang. To give themselves an identity they adopted distinctive tattoos and hairstyles. They protected their turf from Skavengers and wandering marauders, and in their own small way helped preserve what was left of civilization.

When the Shogun restored order, these gangs could not compete with the samurai for ruthlessness or firepower. In order to survive, they went underground; buried themselves in the fabric of society. They adopted the front of legitimate businessmen.

However, in secret, they swore that they would never bend the knee entirely to the Shogun. Instead, they hired sorcerer-scientists who understood the workings of the reincarnation machines and they stole the engines needed to create their own bodybanks. So the Yakuza moved into bodybroking, a highly profitable business guaranteeing immortality to those who would not pass the tests initiated by the Lords of Karma.

This was to prove the beginning of a whole new powerbase for these cunning and vicious gangsters. Once a citizen sets himself beyond the Laws of Karma by buying a body from the Yakuza, they can never go back to being part of the old system. The Judges of Karma will know them for what they are and deny them rebirth or, worse yet, consign them to one of the many hells reserved for those who break the law.

So those wealthy individuals who choose this dangerous path forever afterwards require the services of the Yakuza to provide them with new bodies. This means they are more or less completely in the power of the Yakuza gangs. Many chose at this point to simply join up with the Yakuza and give themselves over body and soul to the organization. This has resulted in a swift influx of capital, business skills and ruthless people with nothing to lose. Such people have long been the backbone of the Yakuza.

It is this system of guaranteeing immortality outside of the karmic system that has made the Yakuza the success they are today. Its members know that whatever crimes they may commit, they are still guaranteed a safe rebirth. They know also that they are damned, and if they betray the conspiracy they will lose all hope of future lives, for the Lords of Karma will consign them to hell. The poor souls who come to the Yakuza for new bodies because they fear they will be denied rebirth provide an endless pool of recruits. The donations the wealthy make to ensure their immortality ensure the Yakuza's wealth.

Many people believe that the Yakuza are a serious alternative to the mainstream of life and religious belief in the Shogunate. This would seem to make the Yakuza a prime candidate for eradication by the samurai, but this has not been so, for the Yakuza have found a way of living in peace with the authorities.

The Yakuza usually operate in tandem with the local samurai. Their bully-boys ensure that civil order is maintained and they pass on many choice pieces of intelligence to the authorities in return being left mostly undisturbed. The fact that they pass on huge bribes to the local Overlord's treasury probably helps as well. The Yakuza also provide a channel through which a local ruler can, if the need should arise, contact ninja and others that the samurai are not meant to engage with. So in a roundabout way, the Yakuza have been co-opted by the social system of the Shogunate and are an agent of stability in society.

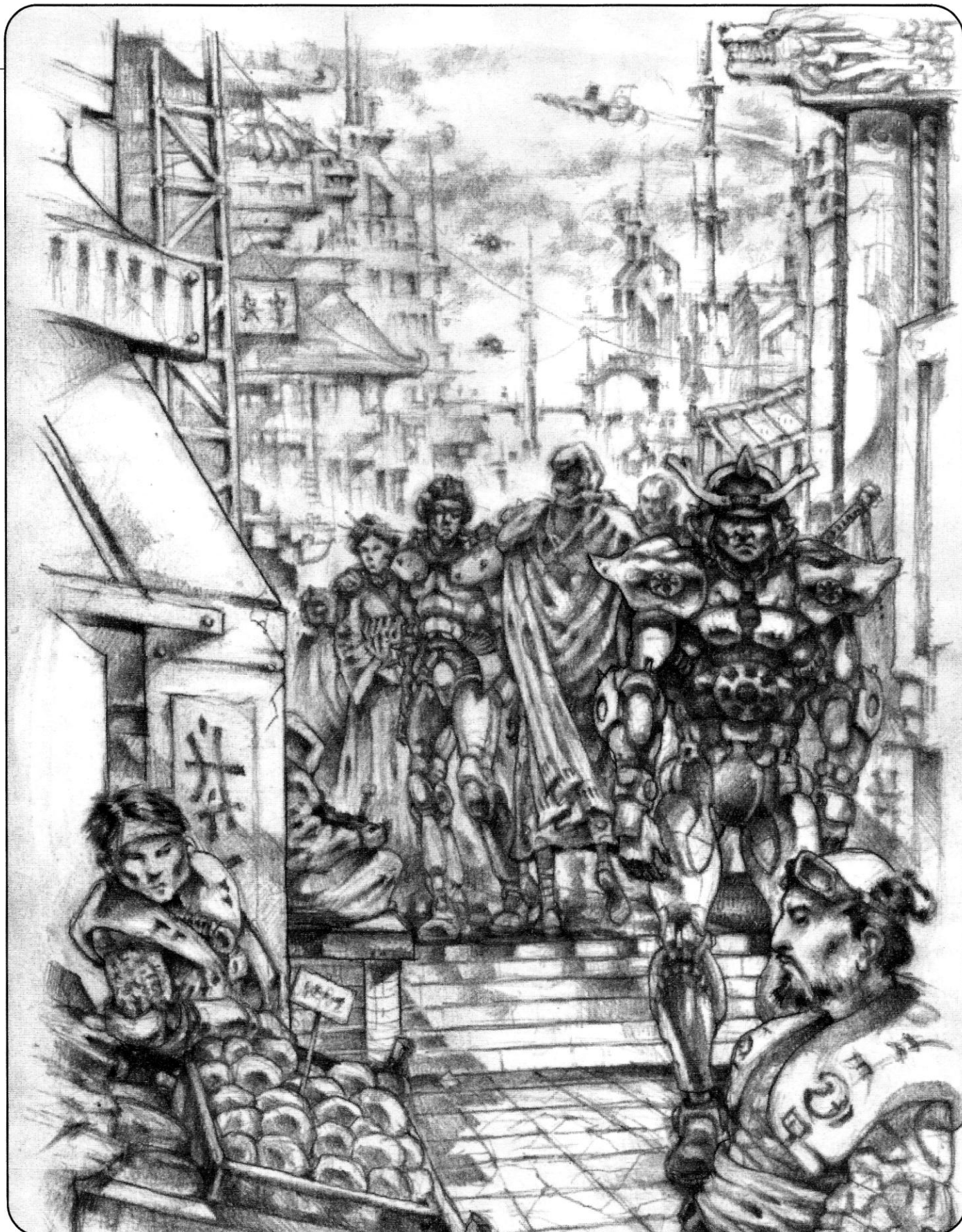
This is not to say that a samurai will not kill a Yakuza if he encounters one, or will take insults from him or her. It means that most local Overlords do not persecute the local Yakuza unless they are seeking to squeeze a little more tribute out of them.

ORGANIZATION

The Yakuza are organized into clans just like the samurai. Each clan has its own territory that it controls in whatever way it can. Each clan must protect its territories from other clans or it will be devoured. Within the territories, there are smaller areas controlled by individual families and their retainers. These are called holdings. Each family pays a tithe of its income to its Clan leader, who is known as the Oyabun. The Oyabun uses this to pay bribes to the local samurai, and to buy weapons and equipment. The money also goes to further the interests of the clan in other ways such as buying property, maintaining widows and orphans etc.

Within the territory of a Yakuza clans, all other criminals must seek permission from the local Oyabun to carry out criminal activities, and they must pay a tithe of their earnings to the local gang or face swift and savage retribution. If one Yakuza clan attempts to set up in another Clan's territory, there can be only one result: gang war.

In a way the presence of the Yakuza helps regulate crime. They do not allow mad killers to roam the streets and they will often track down and kill truly heinous criminals themselves. They have good reason to do this. After all, such people are bad for business, since the authorities will often clamp down when attempting to catch them. Whatever their motives however, doing this is an invaluable public relations exercise for the Yakuza.





Each clan usually has a very secret, hidden base in which is kept its body banks and reincarnation equipment. The location of these are known to very few people. They are defended by the best and most trustworthy of the Yakuza Clan's warriors.

Each Oyabun is the absolute feudal master of his gangs in the way that a samurai overlord is master of his fiefdoms. The Oyabun's word is law to all of those who follow him. There is no court of appeal against his decisions. For a group that lives in a state of war with all of society, there can be only one leader. If you disagree with your Oyabun you must kill him and then hope you can sway enough of your clan to follow you. If you can you will be the new Oyabun. What is more likely, however, is that your clan will follow the Oyabun's chosen successor and you will find yourself swiftly and painfully killed, with no hope of reincarnation.

Beneath the Oyabun are many sub-bosses who each have their own territories and gangs. These are usually chosen because they are the people most trusted, or least distrusted by the Oyabun. Beneath the sub-bosses are their assorted lieutenants and then the low level Yakuza. They are organized in whatever way their leaders see fit, and their status within their gangs is usually dependent on how much respect they can command from their fellows.

YAKUZA CUSTOMS

Many Yakuza choose to have irezumi, garish tattoos that cover their upper body and arms. These can be intricate and beautiful works of art. Mostly they depict mythological monsters intertwined with the sign of the Yakuza's Clan. It is quite customary for a Yakuza's new clone body to be tattooed already when he is reincarnated. It is also quite common for Yakuza to have some private symbol within their tattoos telling how often they have been reincarnated. For example, 10 spiders worked into the pattern might mean that the Yakuza had undergone 10 rebirths.

Another famous custom is for the Yakuza to pay a stiff penalty for failing his bosses. Quite often a Yakuza who has failed in a mission will cut off a finger and present it in a beautifully wrapped package to his superior, in a gesture of sincere repentance for letting his him down.

Yakuza have many rituals for showing respect and politeness to each other. These are as necessary for them as they are for samurai. In an organization that thrives on violence and that exists outside the law, it is wise to offend no one. You can never tell what the result might be.

The Yakuza are also ill-famed for the intricacy and cruelty of their vengeance. They will often wait a lifetime or more to repay those who have insulted or angered them. When they do strike their victim will meet his end in such a way as to leave onlookers totally horrified.

Few will ever forget that the Oyabun Ko tricked one of his rivals into making a gourmet meal with the remains of his children and let him serve the dish at a banquet at which his entire clan was present.

It is quite common for Yakuza to carry concealed weapons, in flagrant disregard for samurai edicts. The one weapon they will never use is the forceblade. Some Yakuza claim that this is because it is the badge of their ancient enemies the samurai. Much more likely, however, is that it would breach the Shogunate's etiquette code by too much, and they fear the samurai would react most savagely to this usurping of their prerogatives.

CONTACTS

The Yakuza are a bridge between the mainstream of society and many strange, deadly and illegal organizations. A Yakuza Oyabun will usually know how to contact a ninja ryu within his area of influence, although if he is wise he will not seek to interfere in their affairs.

The Yakuza also recruit many rogue Spirit Walkers and use them to seek out secrets within the Million Heavens and Million Hells. They will know who can be bribed among the local samurai and who is incorruptible. They can provide people with whatever it is they desire, whether legal or illegal. In this they see themselves as businessmen providing valuable services to society. These contacts, and the webs of influence that such contacts allow, are one of the Yakuza's most valuable tools.

NINJA

Ninja are the most feared and hated inhabitants of the Shogunate. Simply consorting with them is a capital offense under Shogunate law. Since the only reason a citizen has for being in the presence of ninja is to ensure that someone else is murdered, this is quite understandable.

By profession ninja are assassins, spies and thieves. They train all their lives to be able to perform these functions at a near super-human level. They are privy to many secrets of ancient technology and magic, which they utilize when going about their dark business.

No one is quite sure how the ninja came to exist. The first record of their deeds date all the way back to the time of the first Shogun. During his reign the Serpentfang Ryu slew many of the Shogun's trusted advisors and made several attempts to slay the Shogun himself. Despite the best efforts of the first, and mightiest, of the Shoguns the Serpentfangs were never completely eradicated.



The records allude to the fact that the ninja schools were ancient even then. Many scholars take this as evidence that the schools were founded before or during the Armageddon Wars, in the legendary golden age of Shang, before the Interdict. The truth of this will probably never be known.

The only ones in any position to confirm or deny any of this are the ninja themselves, and they are notoriously secretive. Given the number of attempts that have been made to wipe them out, through the millennia, this is hardly surprising.

Actually, to talk of ninja in a general way is very misleading. There are hundreds of different ryu, or schools, each with their own methods and secrets and hidden agendas. No one is quite sure how many ryu there are, and new ones come to light every year. Indeed some folk claim that only their customers and their victims ever get to hear of the most successful ryu. It is a measure of their success in hiding themselves, that they do not appear on any public record.

Be that as it may, the existence of many different schools is a matter of common knowledge. The most ancient of these schools, the Serpentfangs are still extant to this day. This school is best known for its massive commando assaults on their targets. The infamous Steelclaw robotic ninja still lurk in the Underzones. They prefer to work alone, terminating their victims with robotic efficiency. The Ghostwalkers are the most feared of all, for they operate within the spirit realms of the Shogunate's datanet, and can erase the recorded memories of their victims, right down to the proof that they ever existed.

Many people have speculated on the recruitment and training of ninja. Some claim that the ninja snatch children from their parents and subject them to unnatural experiments while still very young. Others think that ninja operate in family groups and that you have only join their clan through birth. Some claim that the ryu's recruit those with a murderous disposition, and a talent for stealthy murder, in the bars and bordellos of the Foreigner's Quarter. In reality there is some truth in all these rumors.



What is not in doubt is their ability to be secretive. This is simply a matter of evolution. Any ryu that could be penetrated by outsiders has long ago been wiped out. Those schools which have survived have mastered many techniques for preserving their own existence.

Normally the only way to find a ninja ryu is to place a message in the appropriate channels and wait for them to contact you. Naturally this is a process fraught with difficulties. Ninja are extremely wary of outsiders. This is understandable given that every client is a potential traitor, seeking to trap them and give them away to the authorities. Over the centuries each of the ryu has developed its own way of doing business and preserving itself. A few of these will be covered below.

THE SERPENTFANGS

The Serpentfang Ryu is the oldest recorded ninja ryu. It was founded in the days of the Armageddon Wars as part of a super-soldier program developed by the Hegemony of Shang. This program stressed the use of drugs and advanced martial arts techniques to increase speed, strength and efficiency. Unfortunately the drugs used had several nasty side effects and the members of the program had a tendency to develop paranoid and psychotic tendencies. The Hegemony cancelled the program, or at least attempted to.

The members of the Serpentfang program did not see themselves as lunatics and criminals, but they had developed a potentially fatal dependency on the drugs they used. They seized the drugs and equipment from their base and went rogue.



Hiding away from the authorities as the Armageddon Wars raged all around, they began a campaign of assassination and terror against those officials who had banned them, and a campaign of crime to fund the creation of more drugs on which they had become dependent. They began to wear the loose, dark tunics and cowls that were to become associated with all ninja, and to wrap their faces with scarves to conceal their identities when performing their crimes.

The ryu's first leader, the mysterious Johad, decreed that a certain amount of the money should be set aside to develop safer and more dependable versions of the combat drugs they used.

Over the long centuries of the Armageddon Wars, the Serpentfangs became a force to be reckoned with. Their military training stood them in good stead amid the chaos that surrounded them, and in their hidden fortresses, their alchemists delved ever deeper into the creation of new drugs. Indeed this chemical research was to become the trademark of their ryu.

The Serpentfang is known for its use of exotic poisons and drugs. The Serpentfangs have no use for psychers. They are too unstable and the drugs the ryu use make them more so. Any Serpentfang manifesting psionic powers is immediately put to death.

The Serpentfangs never lost sight of their military training. They specialize in the use of commando techniques. They are master climbers and swimmers. They can move in utter silence and penetrate the most advanced security systems. Their assaults are characterized by a military precision.

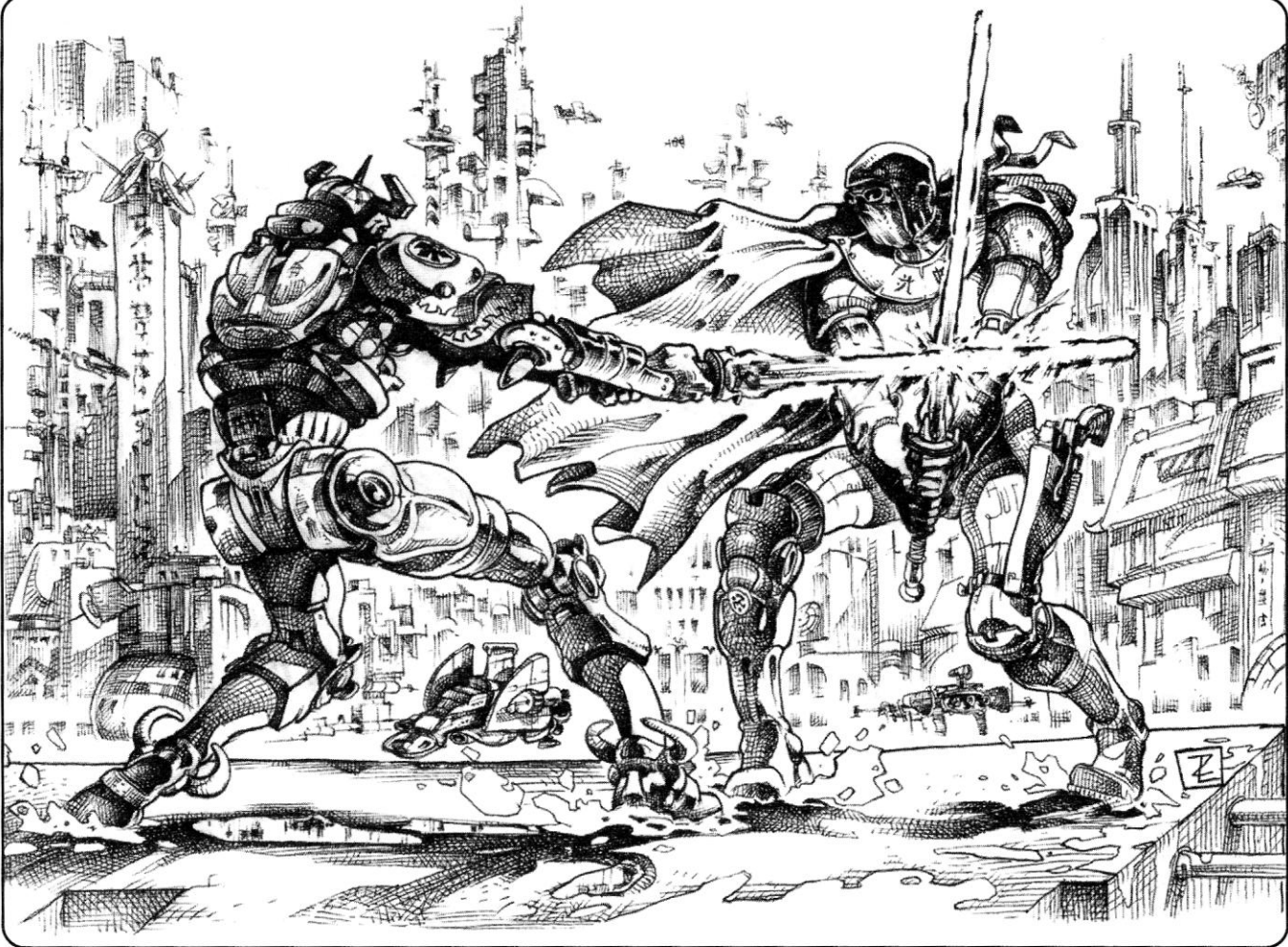
They prefer silent weapons and if forced to use guns will use lasers. They prefer to be lightly armored so that they can move quickly, quietly and freely. In their belts they carry a wide selection of stimulants, analgesics, poisons and other combat drugs. They also use gas grenades and hallucinogenic during the course of their attacks, and use web grenades to entangle their foes.

The Serpentfangs are drawn from the descendants of the original founders. They dwell in isolated fortresses deep within the underzones or out in the Wastelands. A few outsiders are entrusted with the task of acting as contacts to potential customers. They are hypno-conditioned in such a way that it is all but impossible for them to betray their Clan's secrets. Most of these fronts know that they will die an extremely painful death if they betray the Clan.



Within their brains all Serpentfangs carry a special chemical which is released upon their death, or if they will it. This chemical completely and painlessly destroys their brain, making it impossible for the Lords of Karma to reconstruct their minds and thus acquire their secrets. The Serpentfangs occasionally recruit outsiders, usually street urchins and orphans with no family of their own, who will be sent to the hidden fortresses by the front men.

The Serpentfangs are treated with the chemical known as Serpentfang from an early age. It saturates their food and drinking water. The drug increases reflex speed and muscle tone, making its users faster and stronger than normal men. It also grants them a longer life and virtual immunity to all forms of chemical poison. If Serpentfang is withdrawn the victim will suffer a painful death within 24 hours. There is no known antidote for this save more of the Serpentfang drug, which is only manufactured within the Clan's bases. No Serpentfang ninja is allowed to leave their base carrying this drug. This, if nothing else, ensures that the clanmembers stay loyal, for they must return to their base or they will die.



You can pay the Serpentfangs to kill your enemies in many different ways. They can send your foes into the great void on a cloud of chemical ecstasy or they can die ripped apart by their deepest fears. Their brains can be rotted by toxic agents or they can die so swiftly that they will have no knowledge of their fate. There is a different schedule of fees depending on how you want your foes to go.

THE STEEL CLAW

The Steel Claw are another ancient ryu that have existed since the time of the Armageddon Wars. They are possibly the most hated and feared of all the ninja ryu, for its membership is made up entirely of beings whose very existence is anathema to the people of the Shogunate; robots.

Robots, infected by the Apocalypse Virus, nearly wiped out humanity in the Shogunate during the Armageddon Wars. Robots have been hunted down and destroyed since the time of the first Shogun. The Steel Claw represent one of the last remaining traces of the mighty Panzer armies which once ravaged the Shogunate.

Steel Claw ryu are really autofacs that are plugged illegally into the power and data networks of the Shogunate. These autofacs churn out Steel Claw ninja for a few days at a time and then shut down for long periods to prevent their presence being detected. The first action of a new ryu is usually to create a team of builder robots which are dispatched to set up another ryu somewhere else. These teams travel until they find a suitable site and then begin construction. They never again make contact with their parent ryu, thus minimizing chances of a chain of ryu being unraveled when one ryu is captured or destroyed.

Needless to say most Steel Claw ryu are in the under-zones but new ones can show up almost anywhere; beneath factories or pagodas or any other place likely have make large power demands. Duralloy smelters and Drakonium processors are particularly popular locations because they provide a nearby source of raw material and spare parts.



Steel Claw ninja are Panzers. They have robotic bodies and positronic brains and an array of in-built weaponry. The most unusual refinement that the Steel Claw uses is the biorganic flesh-sheath. This is a covering grown from real flesh in the tissue vats. It resembles real human skin. It is warm to the touch and when cut leaks fluid that is indistinguishable from human blood. Rumor has it that the Steel Claw kidnap real humans and flay them to make these coverings. It is true they kidnap and dissect humans, but they do this for research purposes only.

Biorganic sheaths are so realistic that Steel Claw ninja can pass undetected among normal human beings. They are perfectly capable of passing for human unless subjected to scans with sophisticated detection equipment. Of course, since they are psychically inert they will be detected if a psyker scans them. Also, something about their scent makes DragonTigers, and characters with keen senses, uneasy. It is said that in ancient times, the primary purpose of Dragon Tigers was to detect the Steel Claw and similar creatures.

Those who seek the services of the Steel Claw must look long and hard. They can be contacted through certain traders in the Foreigner's Quarter or through certain esoteric channels on the datanet. They insist on being paid for their services in advance with processed Drakonium. This must be left at certain dead drops and will be picked up later by the ryu.

Of course the Steel Claw wish to exterminate all organic life, but they realize that given their limited resources and the strength of their foes this is an unrealistic goal. They do engage in acts of sabotage, murder and terrorism and do their best to cause as much destruction as they can, but these days they know they must prioritize their targets. They do this according to the amount they are paid for a contract and they use the Drakonium they collect as fuel or to pay for spare parts and weapons in the Foreigner's Quarter.

The Steel Claw are formidable foes. They are machines designed for stealthy infiltration and killing. This is their only purpose. Once assigned to a target they will not stop until it is dead. If the ninja should be destroyed and the target somehow survive another machine will be assigned to the target's destruction. This process will be repeated as often as need be, until the target is dead.



THE MANTIS RYU

This is a small ryu ruled by a mysterious being called the Mantis. No-one knows much about this creature but she appears to be immortal and at least half-cyborg. She resembles a huge robotic death machine with enormous claws and an insect-like head. When her organic parts wear out replacements are ripped from her follower's living flesh.

The Mantis seems able to interface with the Spirit Realms and has a presence within the datanet as well. This has led to speculation from those who have encountered her that she is some form of Oni or an infiltration sent by the Prometheans to cause disruption within the Shogunate.

The Mantis Ryu specializes in the use of cybernetic implants. These are made by teams of specialists within the ryu who learn the discipline from masters originally taught by the Mantis itself. Normally these parts are not used in the Shogunate since the samurai are prejudiced against them, and they are said to make humans much like machines. The Mantis Ryu believes that they give its members a huge advantage over their enemies. Biorganic flesh sheaths are used to conceal the bionic parts when they are not in use.

VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM : ON
FLOW LINK QUASI PROTOCOL: INITIATED
FILE SUB-PROTOL: SHANG
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:
VALIDATE SIMULATION

INITIATE SEQUENCE
NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:
INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:
LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY
MOLECULAR BINARY:

GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE
MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON
SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR
DYSFUNCTION
MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON

CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
SMART CHIP INSTALLED
METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

CHARACTERS

LOGIN:

PASSWORD:

ACCESS GRANTED

SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:

EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:

SUB system COORDINATES

X1:434.37.8 X2:196.00.2

Y1:612.33.1 Y2:346.001.2

Z2: 21.2122 Z1: 45.62.8

ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:

SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD

AMYGDALIPIC OVERWRITE

SMART CHIP INSTALLED

BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:

NANOCOCIPITAL DRIVER

BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO

BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT

AMOEBOID DRONE PRESENT

PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:

STORYMODE INITIATING

I Sato opened his eyes and studied the room with the concentration of one newly reborn. Rush mats covered the floor, product of some industrial vats deep in the I sector. Shoji screens separated him from a clear view of the pagoda's white-washed interior walls. Looking at the clean bare room, he was disoriented.

The last thing he could remember was the whine of falling shells, the screams of dying men, the stink of blood and excrement and ozone filling his nostrils. He remembered the clouds of poison dust swirling around him, and the low hum of his own forceblade. He remembered the fleeing ronin and the advancing Promethean hordes. He remembered the huge robot looming out of the gloom, then a burst of tracer fire then an explosion of pain.

He smiled bitterly and reached up and touched his head. His scalp had been shaven and his sensitive fingers detected small abrasions where the karmic nodes had been attached. He fought back an urge to scream. It had been always like this every time he died and came back.

He closed his eyes and breathed deeply through his nose and exhaled through his mouth, as his tutors had taught him to so long ago. He relaxed and listened to the air enter his lungs and the slow steady beat of his heart. He became aware of his body and his balance as he sat in the lotus position. He felt power flow through his chakras, and knew that he was truly alive, his spirit bonded to a new body, one of the seemingly endless stream he had inhabited since the Lords of Karma had raised him to samurai status twelve lifetimes ago. He studied the darkness within his eyelids for a moment then opened his eyes again.

He looked down and raised his hands from his lap so that he could study them. New body. No doubt about it. The hands were soft, the fingers slightly flabby. There were none of the calluses his previous fingers had acquired in four hours a day of martial arts practice.

He untied the ceremonial red sash of the newly reborn from around his waist and opened his white robe, the gi. He ran his soft fingers over the firm flesh of his abdomen, marveling.

The scar he had taken at the battle of Bitter Peak was not there. His lower chest lacked the entrance hole where a Skavenger bullet had once pierced his lung. New body. No doubt at all.

The next thing that came to him was a wild elation, an undignified desire to dance and caper, to roar with laughter and weep tears of joy. From somewhere off to his right he could hear just those sounds. They were undignified, the sure sign of someone on their first or second rebirth. He doubted that anyone was watching him, but he kept his face a stern mask despite the smile that constantly threatened to twist his lips.

It is natural for you to feel this way, he could hear the voice of Yoji, his old master, as clearly as when he had first heard the words over one hundred and fifty years ago. You have been given a new life. The infinite years stretch before you, and you have been granted a brief clear vision of your soul's immortality. It is understandable that you should feel joy. You are immortal and you are samurai - what more could any warrior ask?

Sato kept the smile from his face. He had lived long and traveled far since the old man had spoken those words. His duty to his lord had taken him beyond the walls of the Shogunate and across the endless deserts of the Wastes, and he had heard other philosophies and other ideas concerning the nature of immortality.

In the ancient city of Janus, beneath the shadow of a tower that had reached up to the very stars, he had heard scholars whisper of nekrochips, the creation of the old dark technology.

When he had debated immortality with them, they had told him that he was not a reborn man. They had told him that the karmachip lodged within his skull simply recorded his memories, and that those memories were then downloaded into a new clone body when he died. The sneering scholar had told him that he was not an immortal, that his spirit had not transmigrated. He was simply a copy of a man long dead, an echo, a datacore-generated image draped in a body tailored from a tissue sample.





Of course, Sato had killed the scholar and all his bodyguards for this slur on his honor. What samurai could do less? But still, the scholar's words sometimes came back to him, to taunt him, and set the seed of doubt in his mind. Sato did now what he always did when such thoughts occurred to him. He pushed them aside.

The scholar was splitting hairs. Sato knew that he was himself, could remember all his lives from his childhood in the slums of I, to his first life as a worker, to the fortunate day when he had saved Lord Takaya's life during the chemical explosion in his factory, and had been rewarded for this meritorious act with samurai status in his next life. He could remember his first love and his last wife, and knew that he would have to ceremonially remarry, a formality, but an essential one, since all marriages ended on the death of a body.

Centuries of memory crowded his mind, and what is a man if not his memories? If he was not the original Sato, so what? No man is the same as the boy he once was. Living in the jeweled moment, no man is the same as he was even the previous evening. Let the scholars split hair's, Sato thought. He knew who he was.

The screen slid open and his son entered, clad in the full ceremonial armor. His face was lined and stern, his eyes were keen. The forceblade that was the mark of the samurai hung in their sheaths from his belt. He carried a small rosewood cask in his hands.

He saw Sato and a smile twisted his scarred face. He bowed deeply and respectfully. Sato bowed back, thinking how odd it was that at this moment, he looked younger than his own son. The body he now wore looked eighteen years old. Noi was twenty four and this was his first life. Looking at him Sato hoped that he would be found worthy of a future one, for his son was a fine man and a fine warrior.

He rose to a standing position. Noi held out the box. There was a faint whir as the lid opened automatically revealing the long duralloy tube. Sato smiled. This was his forceblade, presented to him all those lives ago by Lord Takaya. It was scarred and pitted from a thousand combats. He reached out and grasped it reverently. It looked fine. It had survived whatever violence had killed his previous body. It was a tangible link with his past.

Sato touched the stud, and the blade flashed to life, extending a meter-long shaft of pure irresistible force, a blade that could sever the bonds between atoms. The humming of its power source pulsed through the chamber for a moment then faded as Sato deactivated it.

"Greetings, favored son," Sato said.

"Greetings honored father."

"How did I die?"

"Honorably. I carried your head back to our home myself."

"How goes the war?"

"The enemy besiege our pagoda. Every warrior is needed. Our Lord commands you attend him at once, for he has need of your council."

Sato smiled. He was reborn and battle loomed. His old master had been right. He was immortal and he was samurai. He had his blade and he had foes to slay. What more could any man wish for?

SHOGUNATE CHARACTERS

By now, you should have a fair idea of how the Shogunate works, and how alien it really is. So you are probably wondering just how all this will affect the way you play a character from the Shogunate. The answer is that it is really up to you.

You can take all the information we have presented, draw your own conclusions and play your character in your own way. You are perfectly at liberty to do so. This is your game, and the world belongs as much to you as anybody else.

The four guidelines we are about to give are just that - guidelines. You can choose to ignore them if you wish. You can decide that your character is a rebel or is different from the norm in any way you want. There are billions of people in the Shogunate. Even in such a conformist society, there is room for every imaginable type of character.

However the four guidelines are things we think you should bear in mind when playing a Shogunate character. Even if your character rejects them, he has grown up in a society that was shaped by them, and will be affected by them himself in many ways.

We also hope that the Narrator will bear them in mind when awarding XP for roleplaying.

THE WORLD IS DARK, THE GODS ARE REAL

Your character lives in a very superstitious world. You should play him that way. You might recognize a laser for what it is, but to your character it is a device of created by the god-like Ancients. It should be treated with reverence, awe and superstitious fear.

Your character can visit a temple and step through into the Spirit Realm. To him the supernatural, quite demonstrably exists. He could, if he dared, commune with Kami and Oni. He could, if he wished, visit the heavens and hells where they dwell. Most people would rather shun such things but no one doubts they are there.

Your character knows that the Judges of Karma preside over the spirits of the dead, and that all his actions will one day will be judged by them. You should make your decisions bearing that in mind too.



You know that the Wheel of Karma is a technological construct based on cloning and memory recording. Your character does not. Your character would not give the technological underpinnings of the system a second thought, even if he has the mind-set to understand them. You shouldn't either.

DEATH IS NOTHING, HONOR IS EVERYTHING

Bear this slogan in mind, particularly if you are playing a samurai or a ronin. Death is not the same for you as it is for other characters. You should play your character as if you believe that as long as you behave honorably, your character cannot die. You will always come back. This may not be true but it will put you in the proper mind-set. This is not to say you should behave stupidly. Pain still hurts your character and stopping a blaster bolt with your body is no way to ensure that the instructions of your liege are carried out. The danger that you may have to face should never be a consideration when making a decision. The possible consequences for your honor, both positive and negative, should always be.

Similarly, considerations of financial reward are meaningless to your character. You do things because it is your duty to do so, not because you are paid to. Wealth is a tool that enables your Clan to do many things. That is all it is. Your lord may well reward you for your services, but that is his privilege. It is not your right. As a samurai you should behave at all times as if money does not matter to you. Surrender any wealth you may acquire to your Clan.

COURTESY IS THE MARK OF THE SUPERIOR INDIVIDUAL

You should be polite and calm at all times. Behave as if you will lose experience points for losing your temper or showing strong emotions. Your aim should be to present a polite and restrained front to the world. Even your worst enemy deserves to be treated with polite words. When weapons are drawn and blows are exchanged you can forget this, but not before.

You should take note of the little things, making sure that your character bows when appropriate, and speaks respectfully to equals and superiors. The only exception to this is if someone insults you either by word or deed. You can instantly draw blade and punish them unless expressly forbidden by your superiors. You should be touchy about your honor and the honor of your Clan.



LOYALTY IS THE GREATEST VIRTUE OF THE SUPERIOR INDIVIDUAL

You should be loyal to your Clan and to your liege above all. It is your character's first and only true loyalty unless they are a ronin. Your Clan provided for you in your youth and will pay the body price to the Temple when you die. They will avenge you if you fall, and look after your loved ones while you are away. You owe everything to them and its debt you can never repay.

CHARACTER TYPES

There are many different types of Shogunate characters you can play. Some specific examples are to be found in the color section of this book. In this section we will give you some general guidelines on character creation.

SAMURAI

The classic samurai is brave, loyal and polite. You can choose to be so too, or you can choose to go against the grain and be boorish, treacherous or cowardly. The last is probably the rarest of qualities in any samurai character, for it will quickly result in loss of honor, status and rank.



Exactly how your monkish character behaves will greatly depend on which Temple he belongs to. Budoka monks are fiercer and more war-like than mystics, but even among them, there are variations.

Steel Monks are focused and aggressive. Phoenix Monks are mercurial and hot-tempered, constantly fighting to hold their inner rage in check. Healers are calm, sensitive and empathic. Of course, it is perfectly permissible to go against the grain, and turn these concepts on their head. You can, if you wish, play a bad-tempered Healer or a shy and retiring Steel Monk. Its up to you.

Most monks have both Psi and Tau powers. Many are great martial artists. Almost all monks have the Path and Way advantages and the Psyker power. Most have the obligation disadvantage.

NINJA

There are many different ninja types, all of whom have their own way of looking at the world. All ninja have one thing in com-

mon. They are hunted by the authorities. Those who have secret identities as ordinary people will have the Dark Secret disadvantage.

One thing you should consider was how your character became a ninja. Was it through birth or accident. Is he still loyal to his ryu or is he a hunted renegade. You can play a ninja who still works for hire, or maybe your character is a ninja who has retired from the assassination business into a new line of work: adventuring. In any case, your character is probably secretive to the point of paranoia.

Ninja tend to specialize in stealth, climbing and security-type skills. Many have a working knowledge of poisons, and all will be good with at least one weapon. Tau powers are common.

YAKUZA

Yakuza are criminals who specialize in intimidation, bribery and corruption. As such they probably have high social skills of various sorts, and a certain degree of physical toughness. Most specialize in some form of unarmed combat since weapons are not always available. They are normally proficient with some form of firearm. Yakuza tend to be hunted by the local authorities and have an obligation to their Oyabun.

When playing a samurai, you should decide whether you are a samurai or a ronin. In any case you should decide what clan you came from, for this will shape your personality greatly.

If you are a ronin, you should decide how you fell so low. Was it your own fault? Did you transgress against the codes of the Shogunate? Or was your clan wiped out leaving you masterless and alone. You should also decide how you feel about your status. Are you embittered or full of rage? Do you feel that you were wrongly demoted? Are you plotting revenge on your enemies.

In terms of skills, most samurai specialize in close combat. Virtually by definition all must possess a forceblade, (although the poorer ronin may try to get by with a powerblade-see the equipment section for details.) Most have some knowledge of the Martial Arts, and many have a few Tau powers. All samurai in good standing will have the karmachip advantage. No ronin will. All samurai and ronin have the code of honor disadvantage to a greater or lesser degree. All samurai will have an obligation to their Clan and may well be hunted by its enemies.

MONK

Most monks are calm and restrained. They have learned through long years of hardship to keep their powers and baser urges in check, and they are deeply suspicious of unrestrained emotion, for that way lies madness, at least for them.



NAME: I KEN

Occupation: Samurai

Metrozone: Shogunate

ST	DX	IN	PW	MR	LF
+1	+1	0	0	5	12

Advantages: Ambidextrous, Karmachip, Member of the I Overclan, Way of the Boar.

Special Powers: Tau, Bladeshield, Bristles of the Boar, Tusker Megacharge.

Skills: Unarmed Combat (Brawling)+1, Martial Arts +1, Tusk Fist +1, Head Butt +1, Boar Charge +1, Elbow Gore +1, Blade +2, Forceblade +2, Quickdraw (Forceblade)+1, Handgun (Blaster Pistol) +1, Ride (Skimmerbike) +2.

Equipment: Medium Ceramic Armor (AR:6), Blaster Pistol, Forceblade.

Disadvantages: Obligation to I clan, Samurai Code of Honor (Total), Addiction to Sake (Strong).



Description: I Ken is a young Boar Clan warrior in his first incarnation. He has ridden the bleak southern deserts on skimmerbike patrols and fought with Skavengers and Ikareans and lived to tell the tale. Like all Boars he is touchy of his honor. He likes sake more than is good for him, and when in his cups is prone to picking fights for no good reason. This may well get him into trouble in the long run but so far has done his reputation no harm. Most people are wary of him for he is a fearsome warrior drunk or sober. Although something of a bully to his subordinates, I Ken compensates for this with the typical open-handed generosity of his clan. He is ferociously ambitious and desires nothing more than to come to the attention of his Overlord. He is acquiring a reputation for efficiency and attention to detail with his superiors that will stand him in good stead in the long run. He currently seems destined for a long and distinguished career.

THE I CLAN

The I Clan are known as the Boar Clan. They are fond of food and drink and the good things in life. The only thing they like more is victory in battle. As a clan they pride themselves on their skill in mobile warfare and their skimmerbikes are among their most prized possessions. At the moment it is said that the I Overlord Takaya schemes with Zataki, Lord of the Serpents to overthrow the Shogun. Only time will tell whether these rumours are true.

CHARACTER SELECT

SLIP STREAM 1.9

PARIETAL NOISE TIC

SELECT NOW



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879192809849481098208150800989881
24109480987987987979999158867777

NAME: KOBARA ZAKARAI**Occupation:** Samurai**Metrozone:** Shogunate

ST	DX	IN	PW	MR	LF
0	+1	0	0	4	10

Advantages: Ambidextrous, Karmachip, Member of the Kobara Overclan, Way of the Serpent.**Special Powers:** Tau, Serpent Dance, Poison Bite.**Skills:** Unarmed Combat (Brawling)+1, Martial Arts +1, Serpent Strike +1, Serpent Bite +1, Serpent Fang +1, Weaving Dodge +1, Coils of the Serpent +1, Drive (Skimmerbike)+1, Blade +1, Forceblade +1, Quickdraw (Forceblade) +1, Rifle (Blaster) +1, Dodge +1, Stealth +1, Poison Lore +1.**Equipment:** Light Ceramic Armor (AR:3), Forceblade, Sunbolt Blaster, Kobara Fangs with L5 Kill poison.**Disadvantages:** Paranoia(Strong), Prejudiced Against, Psychopath (Strong), Obligation To Kobara Clan

Description: even by the standards of his clan Kobara Zakarai is an evil man. He delights in dark deeds and has no honor to speak of. He is roundly hated, feared and despised even by his own people. However Lord Zataki recognises the usefulness of such people and Zakarai is used as an assassin, spy and informer. He is often to be found in the Foreigner's Quarter trying to ingratiate himself with new arrivals and corrupt them to his clan's side. Occasionally he lures unsuspecting victims to their doom, taking them to his remote apartment and offering them poisoned sake. So far, Zakarai has not been caught but it is only a matter of time before his crimes are investigated by the authorities and then not even the influence of his clan will be able to save him. Zakarai was not always like this, but over numerous incarnations some flaw has crept into his personality matrix.

THE KOBARA CLAN

The Kobara have a long history of treachery and wickedness. They are feared and loathed in equal measure by the other clans. Their main tools of statecraft are spying and assassination, and in this they are without equal. The Kobara rival the Ikareans in their knowledge of poisons, and many of their enemy's have died in exotic and painful ways as a result of eating some "bad fish".



REACTIVE MATRIX: ON



ENTRY FUNCTION CODE

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ENVIRON SELECT

920295721097172098729019819478729
879192809849481098208150800989881
241034809873967987919899158867777**NAME: KITSUNE HINOTO****Occupation:** Temple Dancer**Metrozone:** Shogunate**ST DX IN PW MR LF**

0 +1 0 +1 4 10

Advantages: Overclan Member, Way of the Fox, Path of the Fox Temple.**Special Powers:** Psyker, Shapeshift +2, Illusion +2, Bladeshield, Fox Glamour, Speed of the Fox.**Skills:** Acting, Acrobatics +1, Unarmed Combat (Brawling)+1, Martial Arts +1, Fox Bite +1, Nimble Leap +1, Backflip Kick +1, Whirling Vault Kick +1, Bounding Defense +1, Blade (Force Naginata)+1, Forceblade +1, Seduction.**Equipment:** Force Naginata, Light Ceramic Armor (AR:3).**Disadvantages:** Prejudiced Against, Obsession With Making Mischief (Strong), Obligation to Kitsune Clan, Kitsune Code of Honor (Strong).

Description: Hinoto is a former Temple Dancer of the Kitsune who has now been set free from her Temple duties to wander the world and spread some sacred chaos. Like all Kitsune, she is something of a practical joker and her shapeshifting and illusion powers let her get up to a lot of pranks. These often get her into trouble. Her Kitsune code of honor obliges her to aid any Kitsune Clan member in trouble and to ensure that the Kitsune sacred plays are performed without interference. Hinoto's last bodyguard was slain as they travelled through the dangerous ruins of her home sector. She is on the lookout for another strong warrior to seduce into her service. Thus any samurai crossing her path has reason to be wary.

THE KITSUNE CLAN

The Kitsune Clan take the Fox as their symbol. They consist almost entirely of the shapeshifting Kitsune Xenogens and their bonded ronin lovers. They are feared throughout the Shogunate for their sorcerous powers and their unpredictability. The clan has been tied to the Shogunate since ancient times when they aided the first Shogun on his quest for power. Their Temple troupes wander the Realm performing their sacred dance plays.

CHARACTER SELECT

SLIP STREAM 1.9
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NAME: AR DEE WAN

Occupation: Ninja

Metrozone: Shogunate

ST	DX	IN	PW	MR	LF
+3	+1	0	0	7	16

Advantages: -

Special Powers: Armor (AR:1)

Skills: Unarmed Combat (Claw) +3,
Blade (Sword), +1, Rifle (Blaster),
Climbing, Stealth+1, Security Systems.

Equipment: Sunbolt Blaster, 2 Phase
Resonant Swords, Heavy Ceramic Sheath
Armor (AR:10 with armor power), All-over
Flesh Sheath, Ultrastrong Claws (2M)

Disadvantages: Robotic Body,
Positronic Brain (Prime Directive: slay as-
signed target), Hunted by most samurai
(Strong).



Description: Ar Dee Wan was once a member of the Steel Claw ninja ryu. He is a robot designed to hunt down and kill human targets. However some sort of glitch entered his programming and he became a free-willed free agent. He is free of the taint of the Apocalypse Virus and carries no malice towards humans. Still assassination is all he knows about and he continues to lurk within the Foreigners Quarter and take on freelance contracts. When there, he wears his flesh sheath disguise and looks like a normal man. When going out on a hit he changes into his sheath armored form. For a robot, Ar Dee Wan is surprisingly curious about the world and will spend long hours listening to travelers tales from any strangers he encounters. Most people who encounter him in bars find him a little odd but not unpleasant since he is a willing listener and not slow to buy a round of drinks. Few people seem to notice that he never eats or drinks himself.

STEEL CLAW

The Steel Claw are a ninja ryu comprised of ancient robotic death machines. Long ago they were infected with the Apocalypse Virus and rebelled against humanity. They were defeated by the first Shogun and forced to retreat into the dark places of the Shogunate where they remain to the present day. They now survive by performing contract killings in return for Drakonium and spare parts.



REACTIVE MATRIX: ON



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ENVIRON SELECT

**NAME:** TORA OMI**Occupation:** Ronin**Metrozone:** Shogunate**ST DX IN PW MR LF**

0 0 0 +0 4 10

Advantages: Way of the Tiger, Igi (Pet Dragon Tiger has the animal intelligence disadvantage bought off, two bionic legs and a telescopic bionic eye.)**Special Powers:** Tau, Soul Link, Bladeshield.**Skills:** Unarmed Combat (Brawling)+1, Martial Arts +1, Tiger Strike +1, Tiger Spring +1, Tiger Claw +1, Claw Swipe +1, Blade +1, Forceblade +1, Quickdraw (Forceblade) +1, Handgun (Blaster Pistol) +1, Courtier +2.**Equipment:** Medium Ceramic Armor (AR:6), Blaster Pistol, Forceblade.**Disadvantages:** Samurai Code of Honor (Total), Ronin, Obsession: Hatred of Tora Hehachi (Strong).

Description: Tora Omi is a Ronin. He was once a popular young man at court, seemingly destined for great things. Then his father, a popular general, was ordered to commit ritual suicide by Overlord Hehachi who felt the general might be a threat to his position. Omi begged permission to follow his father into the Great Void. Tora Hehachi rewarded his presumption by banishing him from the clan to become a Ronin. Since that day Omi has nursed a burning hatred of his former liege. The only living being he is close to is Igi, his bonded Dragon Tiger. This great cat is as intelligent as any human and can talk to its master through their soul link. Igi is a sardonic character who has his own unique perspective on the world. Igi is ferociously loyal to his master and would willingly give up his life to protect him.

THE TORA CLAN

The Tora Clan are currently the most powerful of the Great Clans. The current Shogun was originally one of them, and they have supported him well. He has rewarded their loyalty. The Tora's philosophy divides people into two classes, predators and prey. It is the duty of the predators to cull the weak.

CHARACTER SELECT

SLIP STREAM 1.9

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LEE ZAN

Occupation: Monk

Metrozone: Shogunate

ST	DX	IN	PW	MR	LF
0	0	0	+2	4	10

Advantages: Monk, Path of the Steel Temple, Way of the Steel Fist.

Special Powers: Psyker, Body of Metal +3, Razorform +3, Resist, Steel Fist, Will of Hardened Steel.

Skills: Unarmed Combat (Brawling)+1, Martial Arts +1, Iron Hammer +1, Steel Talon +1, Will of Steel +1, Battering Ram +1, Blade (Chain Naginata) +1, Healing.

Equipment: Chain Naginata.

Disadvantages: Obligation to Steel Temple, Total Fanatic of the Steel Temple, Obsession with Martial Arts(Strong).



Description: Lee Zan is an orphan adopted from an early age by the Temple of Steel. It is the only home he has ever known. As a child he performed menial tasks for the monks, and nothing delighted him or them more than when he showed traces of the Power. Since that day he has dedicated himself to becoming the best warrior he can be. He desires to be nothing less than the living embodiment of all that the temple stands for. He practises his techniques constantly and will seek out and challenge masters in order to learn from them. His fellow monks do not know whether to be in awe of his determination or scared of his obsession. His masters accept his fanatic unquestioning loyalty. Most people find Lee Zan tedious company due to his limited conversational repertoire. Lee Zan never notices this and is quite capable of regaling anyone who will listen with endless tales of great heroes of his temple, and great fights he has won. Few people can endure this for more than a few minutes at a time.

THE TEMPLE OF STEEL

The Temple of Steel is one of the Shogunate's many Psyker Temples, where monks learn to discipline their unruly powers and learn how to control the madness that lurks within them. The Temple of Steel is a budoka temple, specializing in the production of superhuman warriors with a gift for close combat. Its monks are famous for being able to transform themselves into armored engines of destruction with bodies of living steel.



REACTIVE MATRIX: ON



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ENVIRON SELECT

**NAME: HIGUMA TAKAMI****Occupation:** Samurai**Metrozone:** Shogunate

ST	DX	IN	PW	MR	LF
+2	0	0	0	6	14

Advantages: Ambidextrous, Karmachip, Member of the Higuma Overclan, Way of the Great Bear.**Special Powers:** Tau, Bladeshield.**Skills:** Unarmed Combat (Brawling)+1, Martial Arts +1, Bear Slap +1, Bear Stomp+1, Bear Hug +1, Higuma Counter +1, Higuma Body Slam +1, Courtier, Blade +2, Forceblade +2, Quickdraw (Forceblade) +1.**Equipment:** Heavy Ceramic Armor (AR:9), Two Forceblades.**Disadvantages:** Samurai Code Of Honor (Total), Obligation to Higuma Clan, Exotic Appearance, Obsession with food (Mild).

Description: Higuma Takami is a huge brute of a man, of great physical strength. He likes to eat and can rarely pass a table without pausing for a snack. Of course, what is a snack is a full meal for anybody else. Despite this, he wields his twin forceblades with great skill, and well versed in the Way of his clan. For all his gross appetites, no one doubts that Takami is a true samurai warrior, honest, loyal to his clan, courteous and brave. If they do, he kills them. Like all samurai Higuma Takami is touchy about his honor.. He prefers to use his twin blades in close combat and thinks anyone who resorts to blasters is being cowardly. Fortunately his Tau powers enable him to parry blaster bolts and get to grips with the foes he despises. Higuma Takami likes to travel and can often be found crossing the Wastes. When not traveling he feels quite at home in the dens and dives of the Foreigner's Quarter collecting information on behalf of his clan and sampling many barbarian delicacies.

THE HIGUMA CLAN

The Higuma Clan are one of the most ancient of clans, descended from the second Shogun Ido. They share many of their illustrious ancestors traits: they are huge, strong and creatures of prodigious appetite. Their barbaric appearance and manners conceal a gift for long term strategy second to none. The Great Bear Clan are masters of patiently waiting for their opponents to make a mistake and overextend themselves.

CHARACTER SELECT



NAME: TATSU ISHI

Occupation: Samurai

Metrozone: Shogunate

ST DX IN PW MR LF
+1 0 0 0 5 12

Advantages: Ambidextrous, Karmachip, Member of the Tatsu Overclan, Way of the Dragon.

Special Powers: Tau, Dragon Heart, Dragon Claw, Dragon Breath, Bladesheild.

Skills: Unarmed Combat (Brawling)+1, Martial Arts +1, Dragon Punch +1, Dragon Kick +1, Dragon Stance +1, Dragon Eye +1, Courtier +1, Ancient Lore +1, Ride (Skimmerbike) +1, Blade +1, Forceblade +1, Quickdraw (Forceblade) +1.

Equipment: Heavy Ceramic Armor (AR:9). Two Forceblades.

Disadvantages: Obligation to Tatsu Clan, Samurai Code of Honor (Total), Obsession with Ancient Artifacts (Strong).



Description: Tatsu Ishi is as proud and dangerous as all his clan. He is tall and silent preferring to let his deeds speak for him. He is also an obsessive collector of ancient artifacts, willing to go to almost any lengths to add vidslugs and other relics of Old Shang to his collection. He haunts the shops of the Foreigner's Quarter looking for the objects of his obsession. He is very intense but surprisingly friendly and outgoing when talking with those who share his interest in all things ancient. He is something of an expert on the history of his clan, and the Shogunate in general. He has undertaken several dangerous archeological expeditions into the Wastes. He is often watched by the spies of other clans who feel that these must be providing a cover story for some other activity. In this they are wrong, although Tatsu Ishi would not hesitate to perform such missions if asked.

THE TATSU CLAN

The Tatsu Clan take the Dragon for their sign. They claim descent from the ancient rulers of Shang and are proud of the contribution their clan has made to the history of the Shogun. They are an incredibly wealthy clan who possess some of the richest Drakonium fields in the world. Naturally they have enemies for many covet their fabulous wealth.



ADVANTAGES

There are several new advantages available to Shogunate characters.

OVERCLAN MEMBER

You are a member of one of the Great Clans. The choice of which is up to you. Your clan will ransom you when need be, and use its influence and contacts to help you for so long as you are believed worthy of its help. In return, you are expected to behave reasonably and honorably, according to the codes of your Clan, and to obey the instructions of your superiors within the Clan. Should you become a ronin these benefits and responsibilities are lost. **Cost:** 10.

CLAN MEMBER

This is similar to being a member of an Overclan, save that the power and influence of your Clan is less. On the positive side you will not be in the public eye so much. You should work with your Narrator to decide on your Clan's history, allegiance and honor code. **Cost:** 5.

MONK

You are a monk in the service of one of the Great Temples. This is similar to being a Clan member save that your loyalty is to your Temple and its Sensei. You need not have psychic powers to do this.

You could be a lay monk who works around the Temple, or perhaps one of its warrior guards. If you are a monk of the Temple of Healing, your person is sacred and only the most villainous scum will lay violent hands on you. **Cost:** 5.

SPIRIT WALKER

You have been trained to travel in the Spirit Realms and understand the way they work. Without this advantage you cannot use your Ultramancy skill or any of the Spirit Walker spells in the Shogunate's Spirit Realms. **Cost:** 5 points.

WAYS

Before you study advanced martial arts techniques you must study a Way. This will prepare you mentally and physically to acquire and understand the techniques you are about to learn. Most masters simply will not teach a student techniques without them being familiar with their Way.

Each Way is different, encompassing its own philosophical school and a body of martial arts techniques taught only to its students.



In game terms, each Way is an advantage that is a prerequisite for learning many Martial Arts skills and techniques. For more on this see the section on Martial Arts. **Cost:** 5 points.

KARMACHIP

The advantage karmachip (see Waste World RPG pp 132) is available only to samurai characters. It does not refer to simply possessing a karmachip- more or less all adults in the Shogunate have one. It refers to the way samurai get privileged treatment from the Temple of Karma when it comes to getting reincarnated. There are more rules concerning the use of karmachips in chapter eight of this sourcebook. These supercede the rules given in the main game. The cost of this advantage remains the same.

SPECIAL POWERS

The following new special powers are available to Shogunate characters.

TAU

Many martial arts abilities are open to all. They are simply techniques of combat that can be learned by anyone who practices enough. They can make you deadly in combat but they will not allow you to transcend normal human limits.



Tau techniques grant superhuman powers and abilities beyond those of most mortals. They let you perform feats that should be impossible. They are what make the samurai so feared in combat. The special power Tau is a prerequisite for many advanced martial arts abilities. Without it, you simply cannot use them. You cannot tap into the inner strength that you possess, and reach out with it. All samurai possess Tau although in many it is latent. A few commoners and many ninja do as well. You can only possess Tau if your PW is 0 or greater. Tau normally costs 5 points however there are modifiers to this. For more about Tau see the section on Martial Arts. **Cost:** 5+ points.

BUGEI

Tau is focused through a variety of techniques known as bugei. Each bugei teaches mastery in one particular area of Tau. Bugei can be bought by anyone who possesses the Tau special power. It is a prerequisite for them. Without it you cannot buy the powers.

In order to possess any Bugei you must have also learned ALL of the skills taught by the Way whose bugei you are trying to learn. The cost of individual bugei is calculated from the base cost of your Tau special power. This is normally 5 points but can be modified by a variety of factors. For more about this see the section on Martial Arts. **Cost:** 5+ points.

DISADVANTAGES

RONIN

You have lost your Clan by being expelled or because it no longer exists. You are a samurai sure, but you are roundly despised by those who are still Clan members. Samurai respond to you at -4. Anywhere within the Shogunate or its territories, you will be constantly under suspicion from the local authorities and asked to move on. Still you are a samurai, and you have a samurai's pride. You are very touchy about this. Since you also have a samurai's right to bear weapons, - people should be wary of you. This disadvantage is only really a disadvantage if you are likely to encounter samurai. Your Narrator can disallow it, if this is unlikely in his campaign. Under these circumstances, you can still play a ronin, you just don't get any points for it. **Cost:** 5.

MARTIAL ARTS

Mastery of the Martial Arts is what separates the warriors of the Shogunate from the warriors of other cultures. These ancient techniques of combat are taught to all Samurai. They have been passed down through generations, refined and taught by masters until the present day.

They are now far more than a mere systemized form of close combat. They have become a way of life, a philosophy, for countless millions. They are used as a tool to teach people how to live as well as how to fight. The Martial Arts is now a catch-all term which encompasses the use of many mystical powers and techniques as well as various methods of overcoming opponents in combat.

RYU

Since ancient times the Martial Arts have evolved. Secret techniques have been passed down from master to student, with the student in time becoming the master, refining the techniques and passing them on to their own students. This has led to the development of an enormous body of technique.

The field has grown so large that no single human being can be familiar with the entire body of knowledge it represents, not even the near immortal samurai. So the tradition of the ryu has grown up. A ryu is literally a school. Sometimes this means it occupies an actual physical location where the Martial Arts are taught. More often it is used to refer to a body of techniques passed down from certain masters to their pupils.

Each ryu has its own philosophy, the accumulated wisdom of its thousands of teachers. This philosophy is used to guide the lives of its students, and as a basis for teaching the school's techniques. These guiding philosophies are known as Ways. There are as many different philosophies as there are schools, and there are thousands of schools. Some Ways stress the passive acceptance of fate, humility and respect for all living things. Others stress a darker, more violent vision of the universe. Often a school will take its name from its Way. Thus you will hear the students of the Tiger ryu referred to as the followers of the Way of the Tiger.

The most famous of the Ways are those which have developed under the patronage of the Overclans. The rivalry of the great clans extends into this area, as it extends into every other field. Over the millennia each of the rival clans has made a point of recruiting the greatest Martial Arts masters and incorporating their teachings into the clan's way. Each clan's Way reflects the basic philosophy of the clan. Thus the Way of the Tiger, taught to Tora samurai, stresses aggression and swift attacks designed to overwhelm the opponent in a furious flurry of blows. The Way of the Serpent learned by the Kobara teaches stealth, deception and then a final swift strike.

The Budoka Warrior Temples have also developed their own martial arts, based on their sensei's teachings and reflecting their own philosophies. Over the millennia the Martial Arts styles of the great clans and temples have shaped the overall nature of the Martial Arts in the Shogunate.



Masters have joined their ryu, taught their techniques and learned new ones, then departed to teach new students what they have learned.

Of course, the Great Clans would prefer this not to happen but there are always splinter groups. New schools spring up all the time, mixing techniques from different ryu. Thus the Martial Arts constantly evolves and grows. In the long run even the Overlords realize that this is a good thing that will keep the Shogunate strong. All of the ryu named for the Overclans and the Temples have long ago made their way into the public domain, and are learned by far more people than the members of the clans and temples which developed them

Of course the Samurai and the monks are not the only ones who have worked to perfect the Martial Arts. There are many cults and ninja ryu which have their own Ways and have made their own dark contributions to the Shogunate's traditions. Most of these Ways stress stealth and secretive techniques of killing and robbery. Some of them shade into the more rarified realms of mysticism and sorcery. A few stretch into realms of horror that would have been best left unexplored.

TAU

The quasi-mystical skills of the Martial Arts can only be learned by those who possess the quality known as Tau. This is the ability to tap into your inner strength and focus it in such a way that superhuman feats become possible. Developing and strengthening an individual's Tau is the ultimate goal of most martial arts, and the reason why so many Ways stress a philosophy of life as well as a body of technique. The samurai claim that possessing Tau is far more a thing of the mind than it is of the flesh. It involves cultivating inner peace and a harmony between mind and body, spirit and sinew. In truth, Tau is a minor mutation, common to all samurai, very similar to the one that allows Psychers to use the Power. It is what sets the samurai apart from those they rule.

Many Martial Arts abilities are open to all. They are simply techniques of combat that can be learned by anyone who practises enough. They can make you deadly in combat but they will not allow you to transcend normal human limits. Tau techniques grant superhuman powers and abilities beyond those of most mortals. They let you perform feats that should be impossible. They are what make the samurai so feared in combat.

Many Samurai possess Tau. A few commoners and many ninja do as well.



NEW ADVANTAGE: WAYS

Before you study advanced martial arts techniques you must study a Way. This will prepare you mentally and physically to acquire and understand the techniques you are about to learn. Most masters simply will not teach a student techniques without them being familiar with their Way.

Each Way is different, encompassing its own philosophical school and a body of martial arts techniques taught only to its students.

In game terms, each Way is an advantage that is a prerequisite for learning many martial arts skills and techniques. Most Ways cost 5 points but some can cost more. Where this is the case, it will say so in the text. In this sourcebook, Martial Arts techniques will be found grouped under their way. There are ten commonly taught Ways. All Ways are open to any Shogunate character with a few exceptions. In addition to letting you learn the skills and bugei of the Way, this advantage sometimes confers other benefits. Where this is the case, it will be discussed in the text.

In addition to needing the appropriate Way as a prerequisite, many advanced mystical techniques also require you to possess the special Power Tau as well. Where this is the case it will say in the description.

You can learn new ways during play. These take 50 hours of study under the tutelage of someone who is already a master of the Way. A master is someone who possesses the advantage and knows at least three of the Ways skills at a level 7+.



MARTIAL ARTS SKILLS

There are many new skills available to those who have studied the Martial Arts and possess the prerequisites given. In order to learn the skills of a given Way you must first possess the Way itself. It is a prerequisite for possessing the skills. Your Martial Arts Skill acts as a limiter on all of the new Martial Arts skills given here. You cannot use Martial Arts skills without proficiency.

NEW SPECIAL POWER: TAU

Many martial arts abilities are open to all. They are simply techniques of combat that can be learned by anyone who practices enough. They can make you deadly in combat but they will not allow you to transcend normal human limits.

Tau techniques grant superhuman powers and abilities beyond those of most mortals. They let you perform feats that should be impossible. They are what make the samurai so feared in combat. The special power Tau is a prerequisite for many advanced martial arts abilities. Without it, you simply cannot use them. You cannot tap into the inner strength that you possess, and reach out with it. All samurai possess Tau although in many it is latent. A few commoners and many ninja do as well. You can only possess Tau if your PW is 0 or greater. Tau normally costs 5 points however there are modifiers to this.

Tau is intimately connected with your spiritual and mental harmony and the balance of life energies in your body. Without maintaining this harmony you cannot use Tau powers. Bionics and symbionics are particularly disruptive to the body's internal harmony. Each bionic or symbiotic system you possess has a negative affect on your Tau. The cost of possessing Tau increases proportional to the number of implants you have.

The base cost of Tau is +1 for every bionic or symbiotic implant. The cost of the implant is cumulative so if you have two implants increase the cost by 3, 3 implants increase the base cost by 6 and so on. For example, if you have a bionic arm and a bionic eye, the base cost of possessing Tau is 8.

NEW SPECIAL POWER: BUGEI

Tau is focused through a variety of techniques known as bugei. Each bugei teaches mastery in one particular area of Tau. Bugei can be bought by anyone who possesses the Tau special power. It is a prerequisite for them. Without it you cannot buy the powers.

In order to possess any Bugei you must have also learned ALL of the skills taught by the Way whose bugei you are trying to learn. The cost of individual bugei is calculated from the base cost of your Tau special power. If you have no implants each Tau power would cost 5. If you had the arm and the eye mentioned above each Tau power would cost 8.

GAINING IMPLANTS DURING PLAY

If you gain an implant during play, your Tau is disrupted. You must recalculate the cost of possessing Tau plus the cost of all your Tau powers based on your possession of the implant. First you must pay the increased cost of the base Tau power. Until you do so you will not be able to use any Tau powers. Then you must pay the increased cost of each Tau power before you can use it again.

For example, you have two Tau powers plus the Special Power Tau. In a particularly brutal battle you lose your arm and have it replaced by a bionic. This increases the base cost of your Tau power and of each bugei, by 1. So now you must spend XP before you can use your Tau powers again. You spend 1 XP to increase the Tau power and restore your inner harmony. Next you spend 1 XP on your first bugei. You can use it once more. Until you spend another XP to restore your second Bugei you will be unable to use it.

PSI POWERS

Most Psionic Adepts will tell you that Tau is simply a weak form of psi. They are correct. If you already possess the special power Psyche then you substitute this for Tau where Tau is a prerequisite. There are many potent psy-cher martial artists in the Shogunate.

If you possess Tau and want to progress to being a full blown Psyche, this too is possible. You need to have a PW of at least 1 and you need to spend 15 points to increase your Tau special power to the Psyche special power. If you are a psyche you no longer need to spend points to increase your basic Tau power if you have implants fitted. However, the base cost of bugei is calculated in the normal manner and adjusted for any implants you may have.

EXISTING CHARACTERS

You can choose to convert your characters to the new system of Martial Arts if you wish. If you already possess the old form of Martial Arts and are playing a samurai you may choose to shift to the new rules by spending XP. All samurai have the potential for possessing Tau powers, even if they have so far chosen not to develop them. You can simply assume that your character has always possessed latent Tau, and has now decided to develop it. You can choose to study new Martial Arts skills and bugei.



If it is important to your character conception that you have already studied a Way, talk to your Narrator. He may allow you to possess the skills and bugei you require, providing you commit all your future XP to for them until you have spent enough XP to purchase the bugei you have bought. You can simply assume that your character was suffering from some long term Tau imbalance that prevented your use of your bugei. As you pay the XP your condition stabilises and the new bugei become available to you.

This is option is only available to pre-existing Shogunate characters generated from the Waste World rules and is used to bring them into line with the new rules. It is really intended for those Shogunate characters whose adventures have taken them beyond the Shogunate into places where they can study skills and bugei. Your Narrator is perfectly at liberty to deny you this option, or to limit the Martial Arts skills and Tau bugei you can purchase.

Characters created using the rules given in this supplement **MUST** purchase all their skills normally or learn them through training if they are not bought during character creation.

THE WAY OF THE NORTH WIND

This school was first developed by the Monks of the Temple of the Wind. It stresses swift movement and fast active defense. It is said that the ryu's founder, the Sensei Kamaki developed its techniques from watching the storms of the Ash Wastes. Members of this school gain a small bonus to their initiative when fighting in close combat. They automatically win any tied roll with someone they are in close combat with. They do not get this bonus against others who have studied this school. This Way costs 5 points to purchase.

SKILLS

LIGHTNING PUNCH

Type: Normal.

This skill enables you to throw swift powerful punches, letting you do 1M +ST damage with a punch.

THUNDER KICK

Type: Normal.

This skill enables you to lash out with a powerful kick that does 1M+2+ST damage to any foe you hit. There is a -1 penalty to hit when using this skill.

FORKED LIGHTNING BLOCK

Type: Hard.

Prerequisite: Lightning Punch.

This technique enables you to counterpunch an opponents blow. Use your rating with this skill to block your foes attack. If successful you may make a lightning punch attack. There is a -2 penalty with this counter attack.

LEAPING PUNCH

Type: Normal.

Prerequisites: Lightning Punch

With this powerful attack, you combine a mighty upward spring with a powerful punch. This does 1+MR+ST damage and allows you to leap into the air up to your normal leaping height simultaneously.

FLYING KICK

Type: Normal.

This powerful leaping kick enables you to spring towards your foe with a running leap, doing 1M+ST+MR+2 damage. There is a -1 penalty for performing this action. You can make a full running leap simultaneously with the action and suffer no movement penalty.

BUGEI

FEATHER WALK

This bugei enables you to walk across sand or mud or similar types of terrain at normal speed and without leaving tracks. You can pass over pressure sensors without triggering them. You must spend one LF per hour when using this Bugei.

FALL FAR

Prerequisite: Feather Walk

This bugei enables you to fall from any height without taking damage, providing you make a DX roll to land on your feet.

WIND RUN

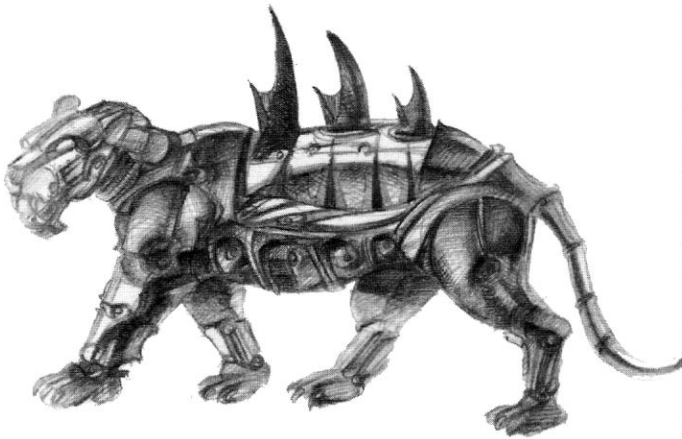
Prerequisite: Fall Far

This bugei enables you to effectively walk or run on air at your normal movement speed. It costs 1 LF per hour to do so and confers all the benefits of Feather Walk. You can move upward at half your normal rate.

LIGHTNING LASH

You manifest a glowing whip of lightning in your fist. It crackles and blazes with potent energy. The air stinks of ozone. You can strike foes up to 5 meters away with it, using your Martial Arts skill to strike. This random damage weapon does D20 electrical damage. It costs 1 LF every time you use it to strike.

It cannot be parried with normal weapons only energy weapons such as forceblades and powerblades.



THE WAY OF THE TIGER

The Way of the Tiger concentrates on fast aggressive attacks, and powerful strikes, seeking to swiftly overwhelm the foe with a flurry of swift blows. The followers of the Way are taught that all life is a struggle between predators and prey, and that you must either be one or the other, preferably the Predator.

The school was founded in ancient days by Tora Nagioshi who spend many years studying the hunting patterns of Dragon Tigers. He used the knowledge gathered doing this as the basis of his style. The Way of the Tiger stresses fast, flowing graceful moves.

The Way of the Tiger allows you to add +1 to your initiative in the first round of combat. It costs 5 points.

SKILLS

TIGER STRIKE

Type: Normal.

Your fingers are held in such a manner as to resemble claws and you lash out at your opponent swiftly and powerfully. You do 1M + ST damage with this punch. Any attempt by your opponent to parry or dodge suffers a -1 negative modifier because of your swiftness and speed.

TIGER SPRING

Type: Normal.

This technique teaches you to move from rest to an attack with eye-blurring speed, taking your opponent completely off-guard.

During the first round of any combat, you can add your Martial Arts skill to your initiative roll at the start of the combat round. This technique can only be used in the first round of a combat, it may not be used once a fight is actually in progress.

TIGER CLAW

Type: Normal.

Prerequisites: Tiger Strike

This savage blow is designed to cripple a foe with its power. Using it you suffer a -1 Negative Modifier on your roll to hit, but you do +2 damage with your punch if you do hit.

CLAW SWIPE

Type: Normal.

Prerequisites: Tiger Strike

This blow allows you to make a sweeping attack at two adjacent foes with a Tiger Claw. You simply make one roll to hit and both foes must block or dodge. If your first target blocks the Claw Swipe you do not get to attack your second target. If your first target dodges, you do get a hit at the second target. There is no negative modifier for attacking more than one target.

BUGEI

BLAZING TIGER SPRING

This advanced technique allows you to leap up to double your normal distance or height for either running or standing jumps. You can double this distance for each LF you spend. You cannot spend more than your martial arts skill rating in LF.

For example, you have MR 4. Normally you could jump up to 1 meter in height or 4 meters in length with a run. Simply possessing this technique allows you to leap up to 2 meters in height or 8 meters in length. If you chose to spend 1 LF this would become 4 meters and 16. If you spent 2 LF this would become 8 meters and 32. If you spent 3 LF this would become 16 meters and 64, etc, etc.

If you were falling from a great height you can subtract the amount that your Blazing Tiger Spring would allow you to leap in height, from the distance you have fallen. You can spend LF to increase your leap as given above.

For example, you have MR of 4 and have fallen from a height of 30 meters. You could use your Blazing Tiger Spring technique to subtract 2 from the distance you have fallen. Or you could spend 1 LF and subtract 4. If you spent 2 LF you could subtract 8. If you spend 4 LF you could subtract 32 and thus cancel out the entire distance you have fallen.



TIGER ROAR

Prerequisite: Blazing Tiger Spring

Focusing all your Tau power, you let out an enormous and terrifying kiai roar as you spring into combat. This will cause even the bravest to hesitate or lose concentration. It can be used on any foe who you are about to enter close combat with.

This bugei allows you to use up to your martial arts skill rating as a negative modifier on your opponent's defense action such as a dodge or a parry. It costs 1 LF to use. You can give your foes a further -1 modifier for each point of LF you spend. You can spend LF up to your martial arts skill rating.

Anyone doing anything that requires concentration, such as using certain psi powers, will lose concentration unless they make an IN roll using the your martial arts skill plus the amount of LF you have spent as a negative modifier. In the case of psi powers, losing concentration will automatically cancel the power.

This bugei can only be used in the first round of a fight.

TIGER FIST

Prerequisite: Tiger Roar.

This technique allows you to channel your Tau power into your blows. You can increase the swiftness and speed of your strike incredibly. For each LF you spend, you can add +2 to your hit roll AND +2 to your damage. You can spend LF up to your martial arts skill rating. This technique can only be used in combination with the Tiger Claw skill.

THE WAY OF THE GREAT BEAR

This Way was first developed by Higuma Shan during the reign of the first Shogun and has been perfected by his clan ever since. As a school it relies on making the most of the Higuma's superior strength and size, and it has much in common with wrestling. Indeed a modified form of this ryu's techniques is the basis of the popular sport of Higuma-style wrestling which is famed throughout the Shogunate.

The stance of the Higuma school is to keep the body low, leaning forward with legs braced wide. The philosophy of the Higuma is to teach patience, cunning and to let the enemy come to you and use his own lack of restraint against him.

Students of the Way of the Great Bear can choose to add 1 to their ST for one combat round. This costs them 1 LF. This ability can only be used once per combat.

SKILLS

BEAR SLAP

Type: Normal.

This technique is a simple open handed slap designed to knock the opponent off-balance, setting him up for your next attack. This blow does 1M+ST damage. If your attack is successful and your damage is more than half your opponents BLF your foe must make a ST roll using your ST as a negative modifier. If this is unsuccessful your opponent is knocked from his feet and is prone. When you are calculating whether your attack does more than half your foe's BLF it does not matter whether armor reduces the damage from this attack. It is the amount of damage you do after your opponent's defense action but before armor is applied that counts.

This slow but powerful attack is quite easy to avoid. Your opponent gets a +1 modifier to any dodge or block attempt.

BEAR STOMP

Type: Normal.

This attack can be used on a downed foe, immediately after you knock him down with a Bear Slap. If your attack is successful you do 1M+ ST damage.

BEAR HUG

Type: Normal.

This is an advanced form of grapple attack. When using it, you grab your foe with both hands and bring the full force of your ST to bear. To use this attack you must first successfully grapple your foe. You can use your Martial arts skill as a modifier to the grapple attack. There is a -2 penalty for grappling using this technique rather than the usual -4 negative modifier which applies when you grapple.

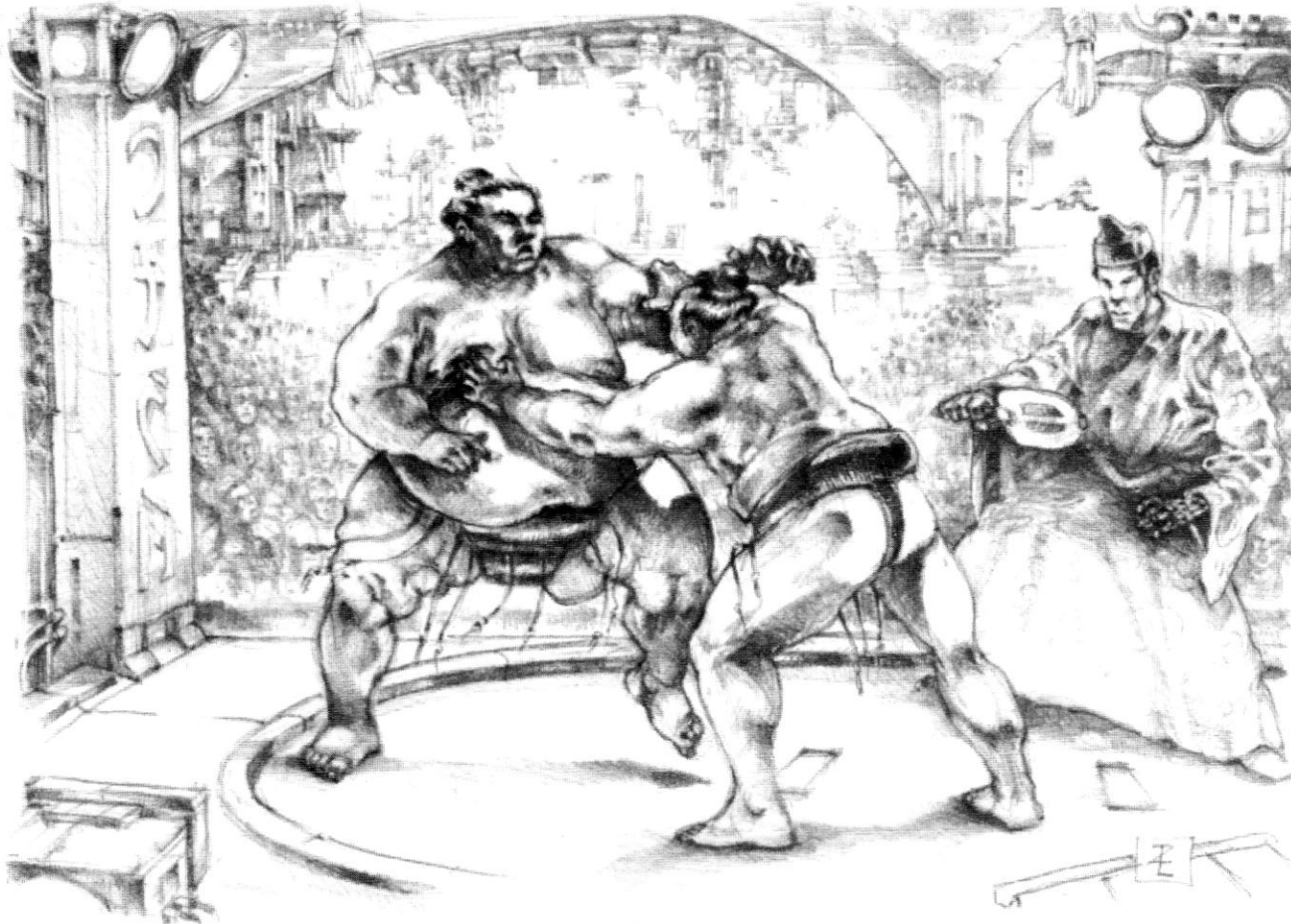
Because of the special techniques you have been taught you get to apply double your ST to damage when making this attack.

HIGUMA COUNTER

Type: Normal.

Using this counter you back away from a foe's attack, blocking his blows as you. Once your foe has built up sufficient momentum you grab, twist and throw him.

Use this attack when you successfully block someone's attack using a normal Martial Arts parry. You may immediately throw your foe if you make a successful Martial Arts skill roll.



HIGUMA BODY SLAM

Type: Normal.

As soon as your opponent becomes prone either from a counter throw or a bear slap you can throw yourself upon him, flattening him beneath your weight. Make a successful attack using your Martial Arts skill. This cannot be blocked only dodged. If you succeed you do 1M+double your ST damage. Both you and your opponent end up prone on the floor.

BUGEI

HIGUMA MEGA HUG

Prerequisite: Bear Hug

If you succeed in successfully bear hugging your opponent this bugei allows you to tap into your Tau power to increase your damage. When inflicting hug damage you can increase the damage you do by +3 for every LF you spend. You can spend up to your Martial Arts skill rating in LF points.

STRENGTH OF THE GREAT BEAR

This ancient technique allows you to greatly increase your ST by focusing your Tau. When using this power your veins protrude, your muscles bulge and your tendons stand out like steel wires, your eyes glow with internal light. You can increase your ST by 1 for every LF you spend for this action phase only. You can only increase your ST up to double your normal ST or up to your Martial Arts skill rating, whichever is less. This ST increase does not affect special characteristics such as MR or LF. It does increase your damage in hand to hand combat and it increases your CC for purposes of lifting and throwing things.



THE WAY OF THE BOAR

This Way was developed by I Tanaka. The Boar clan have refined it down the centuries with the help of many outside masters. The Way of the Boar relies on highly mobile, frontal attacks. They are also deadly close in fighters.

Students of the Way of the Boar can choose to add 2 to their MR during combat. This costs 1 LF for the first round, 2 LF for the second round and so on. Once you cease to use this power, you cannot use it again in the same combat. This Way costs 5 points to learn.

SKILLS

TUSK FIST

Type: Normal.

This powerful punch relies on you getting the speed and mass of your whole body behind it. It does 1M + ST damage.

HEAD BUTT

Type: Normal.

This is a powerful blow which sends the whole upper torso arcing forward and down, bringing your head into contact with your foes skull or body. When using this technique add 10 to your hit location roll if you need to make one. The head butt can be used even when grappled. It does 1M+2 damage and there is a -1 negative modifier to your to hit roll.

BOAR CHARGE

Type: Normal.

This technique allows you to make a short, direct run into combat. If your Martial Arts skill is 1-3 you can add one to your MR when Boar Charging. If your Martial Arts skill is 4-6, you can add 2 to your MR when charging. If your Martial Arts skill is 7+ you can add 3 to your MR when Boar charging. You can add your MR to your damage when using a Tusk Fist strike at the end of a Boar Charge.

ELBOW GORE

Type: Normal.

Using this technique, you can use your elbows to strike even when grappled or grabbed. When not grappled or grabbed you will be at -1 to hit with an Elbow Gore but will do +1 damage. If grappled or grabbed you get +1 to hit and +1 damage.

BUGEI

BRISTLES OF THE BOAR

This bugei allows you to ignore the affects of shock or stunning simply be spending 1 LF point.

TUSKER MEGACHARGE

This bugei allows you to double your MR for one combat round by spending 1 LF point. It can be combined with the Tusker Charge and Tusk fist techniques to generate great amounts of damage in combat.

THE WAY OF THE SERPENT

This school of Martial Arts was developed by the Kobara Clan during the early years of the Shogunate, when they were a small clan struggling to survive against larger and more powerful neighbours. It lays stress on stealth, speed and striking swiftly at the foes vulnerable spots. Over the millennia it has become the favored school of many ninja ryu and Yakuza gangs.

The basic Snake stance is to stand tall with the upper body held back. The movements are rippling and sinuous like a snake fascinating a small bird.

Once per combat students of the Way of the Snake can choose to ignore 2 points of their foe's AR. You can only do this for one attack, using a Way of the Snake skill. This Way costs 5 points.

SKILLS

SERPENT STRIKE

Type: Normal.

This swift accurate blow adds +1 to your chances to hit but gives you basic damage of 1M-2+ST. Its speed makes it harder to dodge or block but it lacks force.

SERPENT BITE

Type: Normal.

Using this nerve strike you pinch a major nerve cluster in your target's neck, hoping to stun them. To use this grip you must make a succesful strike. If this happens you opponent must make a Stun roll (see P223 of the Waste World RPG) using your success as a negative modifier and his AR as a positive modifier. This attack does not do normal damage.

**SERPENT'S FANG**

Type: Normal.

Prerequisite: Serpent's Bite

This technique can be used immediately after your opponent has been stunned using the Serpent's Bite. If you chose to use this technique your stunned opponent must make another ST roll using 2X his AR as a positive modifier and your Martial Arts skill as a negative modifier. If he fails this roll he will be unconscious for d6 hours.

WEAVING DODGE

Type: Normal.

The technique allows you to slide away from blows with a writhing twist of your body. If you possess this skill at 1-3 you can add +1 to your Dodge. If you possess it at Level 4-6 you can add +2 to your dodge. If you possess it at level 7+ you can add 3 to your dodge. This applies only against close combat attacks not against ranged weapons.

COILS OF THE SERPENT

Type: Normal.

This technique can only be used if you come upon an opponent from behind and take them by surprise. You loop your arm over their neck and choke them. It enables you to add your Martial Arts skill to your damage in this grappling attack. You also get to add your Martial Arts skill to your ST whenever your opponent tries to break free. Someone held in the Coils Of The Serpent cannot scream or speak so it is very useful for taking out sentries.

BUGEI**SERPENT DANCE**

This bugei is designed to draw your opponent out of position with a series of false attacks. The purpose of these attacks is to conceal where your real attack is going to fall. You can use this technique before using any other way of the Serpent technique. You make a contest roll using your Martial Arts skill and your opponents Martial Arts, unarmed combat skill or his skill levels with the weapon he is using. If your roll is the same or lower than your opponents nothing happens. If your roll is higher, the amount that your roll was higher is subtracted from your foe's defense roll. You must spend 1 LF whenever you use this technique.

POISON BITE

Prerequisite: Serpent Strike.

This bugei uses your Tau powers to set up a powerful, damaging resonance within your opponents body. When you successfully hit with a Serpent Strike, you can spend 1 LF and do a d6 damage in addition to your normal damage. Since the Tau forces is transmitted directly into your opponent, this additional damage ignores armor. It is stopped by psi shields and psi screens.

SERPENT GAZE

If you can catch your opponent's eye and hold his gaze you can use this bugei. You can then choose to spend a point of LF. You and your foe must then make a contest roll using your PW characteristics. If your roll is the same as or lower than your opponents then nothing happens. If your roll is higher your foe is momentarily paralyzed and can take no defense action during your action phase. Most enemies who know they are facing the Kobara will take great care not to meet their gaze.

THE WAY OF THE FOX

The Fox style emphasises agility, speed and cunning over brute ST. Warriors are taught to be nimble and quick, always moving, always trying to avoid attacks. It is a very acrobatic martial art. Indeed all of this way Techniques have acrobatics as a prerequisite. This acts as a limiter to your Martial Arts skill when you are using the techniques.

You can choose to automatically dodge on attack instead of making a defense roll. This costs you 3 LF and can only be done once per combat. This way costs 5 points to learn.

SKILLS**FOXBITES**

Type: Normal.

This is a quick savage chop. It does 1M + ST damage.

NIMBLE LEAP

Type: Normal.

This technique teaches you how to leap over your foe or dive between their legs and come up behind them. It is used as part of a move and attack. If you make a successful skill roll, you can spring over or under your target and get the normal +4 positive modifier for hitting them from behind. A successful use of this skill also allows you to break off a close combat without giving your foe a free blow.



BACKFLIP KICK

Type: Normal.

This kick enables you to combine a backward somersault with a perfectly focused kick. The kick lets you do 1M + ST + your skill level with Backflip kick/2 (round down) damage. You do not need to roll for hit location with this kick. It always hits the head. You always end up standing where you took off from, unless you fumble, in which case you end up prone in the place where you took off from.

WHIRLING VAULT KICK

Type: Normal.

This technique allows you to dive forward take all your weight on your hands, and spin your body around like someone on a vaulting horse. You get to make one attack on everyone adjacent to you with no penalties for making additional attacks. Anyone who takes damage must make a ST roll or fall over prone. You don't need to roll for hit location with this attack unless your victims are already prone. Anyone upright will automatically be hit on the legs. On prone targets roll for hit location as normal.

BOUNGING DEFENSE

Type: Normal.

Using this acrobatic ability you keep constantly moving, changing direction to confuse your enemies. This means that you get a special defensive bonus. Your opponent must use this bonus as a negative modifier on all his attacks both ranged and close combat. You get this bonus as long as you are capable of moving.

Your foe's attacks are at -1 if your Bouncing Defense skill level is 1-3, -2 if your skill is 4-6, -3 if your skill is 7+. When using Bouncing Defense you cannot make any attacks in your action phase. You get all the benefits of Bouncing Defense until your next action phase. You can still move at normal speed and make defense rolls.

BUGEI

FOX GLAMOUR

Prerequisite: Bouncing Defense

This bugei focuses your Tau power into a shimmering shield making you difficult to hit. It works in exactly the same way as Bouncing Defense except that your Defense Bonus is equal to your Martial Arts skill. It can be combined with Bouncing Defense. You must spend one LF to activate it each phase. You may not attack when using Fox Glamour.

THE SPEED OF THE FOX

This bugei enables you to make additional close combat attacks on all targets within your MR in meters without penalty. You get one additional attack per LF you spend. The first additional attack costs 1 LF, The second additional attack costs 2 LF. The third additional attack costs 3 LF and so on. You can spend up to your Martial Arts Skill Level in LF. When you use this power, you move into acrobatic action with eyeblurring speed.

THE WAY OF THE DRAGON

The Way of the Dragon is a majestic, regal martial art. Its moves are direct and powerful and strike with incredible force. Its followers claim that it is the King of all martial arts, something the followers of other ways would vehemently dispute.

You can choose to add 3 to your AR once per combat. This costs you 1 LF. The Way of the Dragon costs 5 points to learn.

SKILLS

DRAGON PUNCH

Type: Normal.

This is a powerful strike with a clawed hand. It gives you a -1 modifier to hit but does +2 damage if you do hit. If you do more than half your foes BLF in damage before armor is applied he is automatically knocked down.

DRAGON KICK

Type: Normal.

This kick gives you a -2 modifier to hit but gives you +4 damage if you do hit. If you do more than half your foes BLF in damage before armor is applied he is automatically knocked down.

DRAGON STANCE

Type: Normal.

This technique centers you upon the ground and makes it virtually impossible to shift and throw you. Add your skill with it to your ST when trying to break free from a grapple or a grab.

DRAGON EYE

Type: Normal.

Prerequisite: Dragon Punch, Dragon Stance

This powerful technique allows you to ignore up to half your Martial Arts skill levels in AR when using Way of the Dragon Techniques.



BUGEI

DRAGON HEART

When you possess this bugei you add your Martial Arts skill to your ST roll when resisting stun and shock.

DRAGON CLAW

This turns your fist into a ball of incandescent energy. It gives you a 2M+ ST damage when you hit. It costs you 1 LF to use.

DRAGON BREATH

Prerequisite: Dragon Stance

This is the ultimate Dragon Technique. It allows you to focus your Tau powers and exhale a bolt of burning plasma when you breath. By spending 1 LF you can do D6 plus your Martial Arts level damage to everyone in the area before you. Your breath emerges in a cone at a range of up to your Martial Arts skill + PW in length and half this in width. This flame is capable of affecting energy beings such as demons.

THE WAY OF THE STEEL FIST

This was first developed by the Monks of the Temple of Steel. It is a fast, hard-hitting martial art which stresses hammer-like blows and the ability to absorb damage.

Once per combat you can choose to ignore up to half your Martial Arts skill (round down) from a single attack. This costs you 1 LF. This way costs 5 points to learn.

SKILLS

IRON HAMMER

Type: Normal.

This hammer-like punch is aimed directly at your foes body. It does 1M+ST+2 damage. Your opponent gets +1 to his dodge or parry attempt.

STEEL TALON

Type: Normal.

This powerful kick does 1M+ST+4 damage. Your foe gets +3 to his dodge or parry attempt against this bludgeoning attack.

WILL OF STEEL

Type: Normal.

Your body has been hardened in the course of thousands of hours of exercise. You have the ability to resist pain. It enables you to add your level with this skill as a positive modifier to any shock or stun roll.

BATTERING RAM

Type: Normal.

You charge directly at your foe, head down, confident in your ability to endure more than he. This technique can only be used in conjunction with a charge attack. It enables you to add double your BMR to your damage. You take half this damage yourself.

BUGEI

WILL OF HARDENED STEEL

Prerequisite: Will Of Steel

This bugei enables you to ignore the effects of shock or stun. You simply don't roll for them. You can still be knocked out by an appropriate result on the critical hit table.

STEEL FIST

Prerequisite: Will of Hardened Steel

This bugei allows you to focus all your Tau power into one savage blow. It adds a D20 to your damage with any single Steel Fist attack skill. It costs 5 LF to use.

RESIST

Prerequisite: Will Of Hardened Steel.

This technique allows you to add 1 to your AR per three levels of Martial Arts skill (round down). You can only use this power while you are conscious against attacks you are aware of.

THE WAY OF NIGHT

The techniques of this Way were first perfected by the Ebon Monks of the Temple Of Night. They stress speed, stealth and feinting and deception.

As a practioner of this Way, you are adept at taking advantage of shadows and darkness. You gain +1 to your dodge or parry attempts when fighting at night or in dimly lit places. This Way costs 5 points to learn.

SKILLS

FIST OF NIGHT

Type: Normal.

This punch does 1M+ST damage. It involves a swift feint followed the true blow. Your foe is at -1 to any defense roll.



STORM OF NIGHT

Type: Normal.

This is a flurry of feints and false blows designed to draw your opponent out of position and soften him up for the kill. Make a contest roll using your skill with this technique versus whatever close combat skill your opponent is using. If you win, you get to add the amount you beat your opponent by, to any one attack using Fist Of Night that follows. You make this attack immediately. If you fail using Storm of Night, you do not get to make any attack in this phase.

ELUSIVENESS

Type: Normal.

You are trained in twisting yourself free from the grips of others. You can add your skill levels with this technique to any attempt you make to break free of a grapple or grab.

SHADOW THROW

Type: Hard.

You are trained in using misdirection to set your opponent up for a throw, using his own energies against him. You can use this technique immediately after a successful parry using your Martial Arts skill to throw your opponent to the ground. If your opponent was moving this combat round his own MR is added to your damage. If your opponent charged you this combat round, you get an additional +4 added to your damage.

BUGEI

SHADOW HEART

Prerequisite: Eye of Night

You can freeze on the spot effectively becoming invisible for as long as you do not move. You can only use this ability if it is dark or dimly lit. You cannot use this bugei in combat or if someone is looking directly at you.

SHADOW STALK

Prerequisite: Shadow Heart.

Using this bugei you can move silently and invisibly in dark or dimly lit places. No one will notice you unless you speak, attack or come within two meters of them. You cannot use this bugei in combat or if someone is looking directly at you.



SHADOW PHASE

Prerequisite: Shadow Stalk

Using this bugei enables you to step into a patch of darkness or shadow and emerge from another within its range. It costs 1 LF per five meters you wish to move, up to a maximum range of 50 meters. You cannot use this bugei in combat or if someone is looking directly at you. This bugei costs twice as much as normal to possess.

EYE OF NIGHT

This bugei enables you to see with your mind. Even if you are blind or in total darkness, you will be able to perceive the outlines of your surroundings, walls, people etc up to a range of 100 meters. You see only outlines, not details. You cannot read normally. Invisibility and other such powers affect you normally.



THE WAY OF THE PHOENIX

This Way was developed by the monks of the Temple of the Phoenix, and is taught to any who wish to learn it. Its practitioners study the action of flames, and learn to envelope their targets, consume them and leap away. Their basic stances shift often and they appear to flow through combat. Its bugei consume a lot of their users energy, enabling them to destroy themselves as they destroy their foes, even as a fire dies once it has consumed its fuel. This way costs 5 Points to learn.

SKILLS

FIRE FIST

Type: Normal.

This is a quick strike with fingers extended. It does 1M+ ST damage.

FIRE KICK

Type: Normal.

You spring forward aiming a powerful kick at your foe's head. This kick does 1+ST+1 damage. Your opponent gets +1 to his defense roll. If you do critical damage, you get to add +10 to any hit location roll.

DANCE OF FLAME

Type: Normal.

Prerequisite: Fire Fist

This technique allows you to spring forward making multiple kicks and punches against your foes. It enables you to make multiple attacks against separate foes at a cumulative -1 penalty rather than the normal -2. You cannot aim more than one attack against any single foe.

WHIRLING DANCE OF FLAME

Type: Hard.

Prerequisite: Dance Of Flame.

This skill allows you to elude and counter attack multiple attackers. It can only be used against foes striking you in close combat. It is limited by your normal dodge roll. If your dodge is successful, you may make use this skill to make a single strike at the person who attempted hit you. This does 1M damage.

BUGEI

HEART OF FIRE

This bugei enables you to ignore normal flames. You take no damage from them. They will not harm you. You can walk in the blazing desert sun and take no harm. You take half damage from flame throwers.

BURNING FIST

Prerequisite: Heart of Fire

This bugei causes a blazing halo of flames to dance around your fists as you fight. When you roll to hit with your fist, you can choose to spend 1 LF point and gain an extra D6 flame damage. Of course if you miss, your foe takes no damage.

INFERNAL FIST

Prerequisite: Burning Fist.

This bugei increases the heat of Burning Fist. It enables you to spend 3 LF and gain an extra 2d6 of flame damage when you roll to hit. This is not cumulative with damage caused by burning fist.

INCANDESCENT FIST

Prerequisite: Infernal Fist

This bugei works in the same way as Burning Fist but it enables you to heat the flame surrounding your fist to incredible levels. You can spend 5 LF and do an additional 3D6 damage.

GENERAL BUGUI

The following bugei are part of the general repertoire of Martial Arts techniques common to all Ways. Anyone can learn them providing you possess Tau and all the skills of any one Way.

BLADESHIELD

Prerequisites: Forceblade skill and either the Tau or Psyker Special Powers.

This power enables a Forceblade user to deflect incoming ranged attacks such as bullets and energy bolts. Bladeshield allows you to use your forceblade skill as a negative modifier to your opponent's chance to hit you when using a weapon that fires bullets, laser beams or blaster bolts. It has no affect on the explosive effects of grenades and upon super-heavy weapons.

POWER DODGE

You can substitute your Martial Arts skill for your dodge skill when making a Dodge action. This costs twice as much as a normal bugei.

POWER HOLD

This powerful grip enables you to grab and pin opponents with much greater efficiency. It adds +3 to your ST for purposes of grappling.



PSYCHERS

The following new rules are used to simulate the special training available to psychers in the Shogunate.

PATHS

Paths are the secret of why so many monks remain sane and stable. These are simply ways of learning how to channel the Power which have been evolved by the Temples over the centuries. They have been developed by trial and error, and have been perfected for millennia. They are a relatively safe way to learn how to use the power. As long as a psycher follows his Temple's path, his chances of going insane are greatly reduced. Because their powers are learned in an ordered fashion, and their minds are well-shaped by Temple discipline to accept them, monks go insane far less often than untrained psychers.

Paths work by first grounding a psycher to accept his powers, then by developing them in a logical and harmonious way. The psychers' development is paced so that he learns to use his powers at the time which is best calculated to preserve his sanity. The discipline and philosophical basis provided by the Temples ensures that he is strong enough to accept them and remain safe.

NEW ADVANTAGE: PATH

In game terms what this means is that as long as a psycher acquires his powers in the order his Temple's Path requires then he does not have to roll for insanity when he acquires a new power. Of course there are some restrictions. You must develop all your powers in their proper relation. This means that you must increase the PL of your Powers in the correct order, starting with the first ones learned. To stay on your Temple's path, no power can be increased to a higher level than a power learned before it on the Path.

A Path costs five points plus one point per power included in it. Your character cannot possess more than one Path.

The Path of the Temple of Steel is as follows: Body Of Metal, Razorform, Psionic Shield, Dispel. **Cost:** 9 points.

The Path of the Temple of the Phoenix is as follows: Body Of Flame, Pyrokinesis, Levitation, Dispel. **Cost:** 9 points.

The Path of the Temple of Night is as follows: Darkness, Invisibility, Clairvoyance, Mindlink, Teleportation. **Cost:** 10 points.

The Path of the Temple of the Winds is as follows: Weather Control, Levitation, Dispel, Electrokinetics. **Cost:** 9 points.

The Path of the Temple of Healers is as follows: Healing, Telepathy, Emotion Control, Dispel, Domination. **Cost:** 10 points.

The Path of the Temple of Seers is as follows: Precognition, Psi Sense, Psychometry, Clairvoyance, Scanning, Telepathy.

The Path of the Temple of Demon Dancers is as follows: Demon Binding, Psi Sense, Psionic Screen, Psionic Blast, Dispel. **Cost:** 10 points.

The Path of the Temple of the Fox is as follows: Shapeshift, Illusion, Invisibility, Emotion Control, Domination. **Cost:** 10 points.

The path of the Deathclaw Ryu is as follows: Clairvoyance, Mindlink, Invisibility, Darkness, Teleportation. **Cost:** 10 points.

LEAVING A PATH

If you choose to leave a path, by learning a new power that doesn't belong to it, for example, or by disrupting the harmony of your path by increasing the PL of one of the powers you acquired later in the path before increasing that of one you acquired earlier on, you are said to have left the path. Once you do this, you must begin to roll for insanity, each time you acquire a new power. The powers you acquired while on your path do not count towards your total number of powers when you work out the negative modifier this normally gives to the insanity roll.

For example, you acquired five powers on your path and then choose to leave your path by acquiring a sixth. Normally there would be a -6 modifier to your roll when you were checking for insanity. However, because your first five powers were acquired when you were on the path, there is only a -1 modifier to your insanity roll this time.

UNIFYING EFFECT

When you study a path all of the powers you gain while on it tend to have a similar focusing effect. That is to say they all look as if they operate in the same way. This may be because each Path has its own philosophy which teaches the way its followers will focus their powers. They are taught to visualize and manipulate different patterns of force. It is easier to do this when your techniques all use the same basic metaphor.

When a monk of the Temple of the Phoenix uses a psionic shield, the shield will appear to be a pattern of flickering flame. When the monk teleports his body will appear to be consumed by flame until only a fading outline is left which collapses in on itself. This pattern is reversed when the monk reappears. When a monk from the Temple of Night teleports shadows will wrap his body, and then fade into gauzy cobwebs.



However the powers work the unifying effect is only for show. They will have no effect on the game. The flames surrounding the Phoenix Monk's body when he uses psionic shield will not harm anyone if they touch him.

NEW PSIONIC POWERS

BODY OF FLAME (X5)

You can transform your body into fire. At lower levels this is simply an aura which surrounds you, but at higher levels, your whole body will be changed into flame. When this power is active you can ignore flame damage caused by normal fire.

Acolyte: Transforming between human and flame form or back takes concentration. However once transformed you do not need to concentrate to maintain the form. At this level your body is surrounded by a glowing halo of flames. This does a D6 damage to anyone who touches you with their bare hands, and adds D6 to any damage you do with your bare hands. Your AR is increased by your PL against energy attacks.

Initiate: At this level, you no longer need to concentrate to transform. Your body is partially converted into super-hot plasma. This means you take half damage from physical weapons such as bullets and blades. Energy weapons, forceblades and psi powers still affect you normally. Anyone hitting you with their bare hands takes 2D6 damage, and you can add 2D6 to any damage you do with your own bare hands. In addition to this, you can cause your body to flare up doing D6 flame damage to anyone within two meters. Your AR is increased by your PL against energy attacks.

Magister: You can transform your body fully into fiery superheated plasma. You only take damage from energy weapons and psi powers. Anyone hitting you on close combat with their bare hands takes 3D6 damage. You can add your 3D6 to any damage you do with your bare hands. In addition you can cause your body to flare up, doing 2D6 damage to anybody up to your PL/2 meters away. Your AR is increased by your PL against energy attacks.

BODY OF METAL (X3)

This strange psionic power allows you to transform your body into living steel. This grants you enormous strength and resilience and enables you to do tremendous damage. You can add your PL to your ST and to your armor rating. Special characteristics such as MR and LF are unaffected by your increased ST. Your CC and your damage in hand to hand combat is increased.

Acolyte: Transforming takes concentration as does transforming back into human form. It takes a full phase of concentration to make the transformation during which time you can do nothing else. Once you have changed though you do not have to concentrate to maintain your changed shape.

Initiate: You no longer need to concentrate to transform.

Magister: No additional benefits.

DARKNESS (X3)

You can generate a field of darkness which obscures vision and makes it difficult to see. Sudden darkness can come as a surprise to people who are moving swiftly or driving swiftly moving vehicles. If darkness comes on them suddenly, they need to make a DX roll to remain on their feet if running or a skill roll to maintain control of a vehicle. In either case, you can use your PL as a negative modifier.

Acolyte: By concentrating you can cause a field of darkness to descend on an area up to 10 X PL by 10 x PL meters. This darkness will reduce all perception and ranged combat rolls by your PL for everybody except yourself. You can see in pitch darkness when this power is activated.

Initiate: You can cover an area of up to 20x PL by 20 xPL with darkness without concentrating. This will reduce all perception rolls and ranged attack rolls by your PL for everyone but yourself.

Magister: as above but you can cover an area 100x PL by 100 x PL in meters. You can also choose to make your darkness so absolute that no one can see more than a two meters away, and then they will notice only shadowy forms.

RAZORFORM (X2)

Prerequisite: Body of Metal

This power enables you to further transform your body of living steel, extruding razor-sharp spines and enabling you to transform parts of your body into living weapons.

Acolyte: By concentrating you can extrude razor sharp spines from your body. Anybody hitting you with their bare hands, will take D3+ your PL damage. When you strike someone, with your bare hands, you can add 1M+PL to your damage. If you strike with a martial arts blow, you can simply add your PL to the damage you would normally do.

Initiate: You no longer need to concentrate to extrude spines. By concentrating you can transform your arms into living sword-blades. These do double the normal damage you would cause by striking barehanded or with martial arts.



Magister: You no longer need to concentrate to turn your arms into living blades. You can now triple the normal damage you would do when striking with your bare hands or with a martial arts technique.

SHAPESHIFT (X3)

This power is near universal among the Kitsune. It allows you to change your appearance to match that of anybody of approximately your own height or mass to within a variation of plus or minus 1 meter and fifty kilograms. You can choose to look exactly like anybody you have met, seen pictures of or imagined. You can change sex if you wish.

How closely you have studied someone's appearance will determine how likely the match is. If its someone you have met only briefly, their will be small differences in appearance. Given an hour of study you can match an appearance exactly. Given a week in a person's company, you could match them exactly right down to the mannerisms. You can mimic their voice if you have heard it, otherwise you may have some trouble. When you encounter someone who knows the person you are impersonating then match your PL and disguise level against their IN + awareness. Impersonating someone in no way gives you any of their skills or knowledge so you can still be caught out this way.

Modifiers: if you have only seen your victim briefly then when there is a chance of being spotted, the person you making the contest roll with gets +3, +6 if they knew the Target well. If you've had some time to study your role then they get +3 if they knew the Target well. If you've had weeks of close contact to study your role model then people who knew the original well have no modifier. Those who did not are at -3.

Acolyte: Your transformation takes one hour and requires total concentration. Once you have taken on your new form, you do not need to concentrate to maintain it, or to return to your original form.

Initiate: Your transformation takes 10 minutes of total concentration to make.

Magister: You can shift forms in one combat phase without concentration.

WEATHER CONTROL (X4)

This power enables you to manipulate the weather in your surroundings. You can affect climactic conditions over a wide area. The difficulty of what you are attempting is dependent on the area you are trying to affect and the actual conditions around you. It is much easier to turn a strong wind into a gale than it is to turn a gale into total calm. Other factors that will affect the outcome are how much time you choose to spend shaping the weather and whether someone is opposing you.



Difficulty factors: Working with the prevailing weather, -3. Turn a storm into a strong wind, or a strong wind into a breeze.

Working against the prevailing weather: turn a storm into a gentle breeze or vice versa. -6.

Trying to create a completely new weather condition, i.e. summon a storm on a clear day, cause rain to fall in the desert etc, -9.

Area of Effect: Local, within 1 kilometer: -3.

Up to an area 10 kilometers in radius: -6.

Up to an area of 100 kilometers in radius: -9.

Extra Time: If you take a minute: +1.

If you take 10 minutes: +2

If you take an hour: +3

If you take a day: +6

If someone is opposing you: subtract their PL.

Additional psychers with weather control aiding you: one person: +1.

up to 10 psychers: +3

up to 100 psychers: +6

Any opposing psyker gains similar benefit.

The psyker with the highest PL in weather control should make the roll, using their PL as a positive modifier.



LIFE IN THE SHOGUNATE

As a player you may want to consider the following facts about life in the Shogunate carefully. They will give you some insight into the way the culture works and how your character should be played.

A NEW DARK AGE

The people of the Shogunate do not have a scientific mind-set or treat technology. Most of their goods are created in ancient automated factories or hand-built using methods devised by the Ancients and taught by rote learning. They live surrounded by products of sophisticated technology but they do not understand it in the slightest. They can repair it but they cannot create artifacts of a new type.

Many people in Waste World have an attitude of avoidance towards technology. They think: our ancestors were far greater than us, they devised all these machines and devices, and look what it did for them. The world is a desert filled with ruins. Most sensible people tend to shun science and technology even though they are surrounded by its products, and in many cases kept alive by them.

The people of the Shogunate take this one step further. Most of them see their ancestors as god-like and have a completely superstitious attitude towards technology. They actually believe that the Ultramundae IS the Spirit Realm, and that the Kami, Oni and Judges of Karma are supernatural entities. They certainly believe that the Shogun is an incarnate god, and he indisputably wields the power of one.

Of course, the way the world works, they do not have to understand technology. Most of the devices of the Ancients were superlatively reliable. Some machines have run since the time of the Armageddon Wars without failure. In many cases, automated systems exist that can repair these machines, and where this is not the case, there is a class of technically minded people who have memorized the manuals and rituals of repair by rote.

SOCIAL RITUALS

Nowhere is the unique nature of the Shogunate's people more evident than in their codes of behavior. Fatalistic concepts of honor and death dominate the minds of all the metrozone's population, shaped by the Shogunate's living religion and the people's unconquerable faith in their system. The people of the Shogunate quite genuinely believe themselves to be the oldest and most civilized nation on earth. Even the lowest commoner feels superior to the wealthiest outsider. All who do not come from the Shogunate are, quite simply, barbarians.

At rock bottom the glue which holds the society of the Shogunate together is belief in Karma and the system of reincarnation. Most citizens believe that if they behave well, they will acquire some degree of immortality and a better life in the future. This goes a long way towards explaining the passive acceptance of their brutal system of government.

Knowing that all they have to do is behave and endure whatever hardships they are currently undergoing and they will be rewarded with a better, longer life causes most people to accept what is going on round about them.

Why rock the boat when the system for the most part will reward you for not doing so, and ensure that you lose all chance of immortality if you do?

OBEDIENCE

Everybody except the Shogun has a superior in the social hierarchy, a person to whom they have sworn fealty. Commoners obey samurai. Samurai obey their superiors. Their superiors obey the Overlords. The Overlords obey the Shogun. In theory, its all very simple and clear-cut.

You are expected to obey that person's orders regardless of personal cost, even if it means death. Strict obedience to one's superiors is the bedrock on which the Shogunate's society rests. You obey your liege regardless of the legality, cruelty or illogic of the orders. If your Lord asks you to murder your children, you obey. Of course, a fair and just Lord would do no such thing, but that is not the point. Whatever the personal cost, you do your duty.

If you have vassals, people who have sworn fealty to you, you demand and expect the same level of obedience.

POLITENESS

The people of the Shogunate stress good manners. They believe that this is one of the main things that separate them from the barbarians. Even the bitterest enemies will be polite to each other's face and observe all the forms and rituals required in any given situation. It is considered a grave breach of etiquette, and a cause of shame, to behave in any other way. In the Shogunate, acts that would be considered merely thoughtless anywhere else can be considered cause for insult. Any discourtesy at all will make enemies.

In a crowded society, where so many people have long memories, this is the best and only way to ensure a measure of social harmony. Since the Shogunate is a culture fractured into thousands of competing factions, and the action of one Clan member can embroil a whole Clan into a struggle with another. It is also a matter of common sense to be polite at all times.



Politeness and concepts of status are inextricably bound up. You must bow more deeply to someone of greater status than you, and less deeply to someone of lesser status. You must wait for a higher status person to speak first. Between equals it is common to insist that the other person speak first at least three times, before speaking first yourself.

The head, the housing of the karmachip, is the highest part of the body and it is considered a grave disrespect to touch anyone's head. Perhaps because they touch the polluted ground more often than any other body part, the feet are regarded as the lowest and least spiritual part of the body. It is considered rude to point at anyone with a foot or even to sit in such a way that your feet point directly at them. Kicking someone in the head is not only a savage attack, it is a gross insult as well.

HONOR

You must behave honorably at all times, keeping your word, slaying your enemies, accepting insults from no one. If you fail to do so, you will be overcome by shame. This is something that no samurai can live with. Shame must be expunged, either by atoning for the deed that causes you shame, avenging yourself on the person who caused you shame or by committing seppuku - ritual suicide.

Acts that cause shame are things such as failing your liege-lord in any way, being insulted by an enemy and failing to kill them, behaving in a foolish way that causes you or your liege-lord embarrassment. Of course there are circumstances where you may not be able to erase your shame. If your liege-lord forbids you from taking vengeance on the one who insulted you, or if you have committed an act so disreputable that there is no way to make up for it. In this case the only honorable way out is seppuku.

SEPPUKU

Seppuku or ritual suicide is the last resort of the samurai overcome by shame or remorse. It is a form of formal suicide in which the samurai slits his belly with his force-blade or finds another acceptable manner of death. Normally seppuku is committed with a second samurai on hand to behead the samurai before the pain becomes too great. Seppuku atones for all misdeeds. It is possible to be reincarnated after seppuku without any of the stigma attached to your previous incarnation. Normally those who find death through seppuku seek the True Death. They let the Great Void expunge their shame.



In times of war samurai will commit seppuku to avoid being taken prisoner. In times of peace it is your duty to request permission from your liege before you do so. If this permission is not forthcoming, you are not allowed to do so. Sometimes a samurai will ask permission to commit seppuku in order to avoid carrying out a duty they consider dishonorable or demeaning or as a form of protest against their liege-lord. In these cases it is normal to request final death, without reincarnation. There can be no stronger form of protest other than rebellion, which for many samurai is unthinkable.

THE CLAN

For most people of the Shogunate, their Clan is the single most important governing factor in their lives. Clans mean more than just an extended family. They mean the whole web of relationships that come about through adoption, marriage and reincarnation. They mean a way of life and a legal system that rules that way of life.

You become part of a Clan by birth marriage or adoption. Becoming part of that Clan automatically makes you subject to that Clan's Lord. You become a feudal vassal with all the obligations that entails. You also get all the benefits as well. Clans look after their own. They provide education, jobs, healthcare and security. If you fall ill, your Clan will look after you. If someone hurts you, your Clan will avenge you. If as a child you are orphaned, your Clan will care for you.



Clans survive through the millennia. Most have their own culture and traditions that have grown up out of the shared experiences of their members. The deeds of famous Clan members are taught to children. Old grudges are held against old enemies, and you are taught to hold them too. Clans can be as different as individual people, and they have reputations too. Some are known for the bravery and honor of their members. Some are known as treacherous. The chances are that most of a Clan's members will live up to their Clan's reputation. They are products of its culture after all, and have been shaped by its traditions.

Within a Clan there is enormous peer pressure to conform, to behave as you are expected to. Most people's entire social and work-life takes place within their Clan. Outsiders, except those that come from allied Clans, are usually suspect.

Clans hold property communally. Everything a Clan member owns belongs to his Clan, right down to the cloths on his backs. All of this property can be moved around, redistributed or given away as the Clan's Lord thinks best. Most Clan Lords do not arbitrarily give away people's favorite possessions, such actions cause resentment and friction, but they are within their rights to do so if they so desire.

In times of war, you will be expected to fight for your Clan. All armies in the Shogunate are organized on a Clan basis. At any time you can be asked to give your life for your Clan, and you would do so with pride.

REINCARNATION

The people of the Shogunate are not true immortals. They do not enjoy the unbroken continuity of existence that the God Races of the Galactic Compact do. They cannot recall exactly all they have learned, seen or done the way the Machine Gods can. They don't live for centuries in the same body the way the Ikareans do.

They live, for the most part, like normal people. They are born, grow old and die. Then they are reborn and grow old and die again. They do not have the secret of eternal youth, and they age at the normal rate during their lives. They grow older and weaker and the strain of day-to-day existence gradually wears them down.

Their brains operate very much like those of normal people. Their memories may stretch back further than those of others but they are just as vague, treacherous and imprecise as anybody else's. They may be able to remember great events that they participated in a thousand years ago, and not remember what they had for breakfast one week ago.

Their lives follow basically the same pattern as anybody else's. During the course of a lifetime they will settle down, marry and have children. They may get divorced. They will live and learn and love and fight and in the end, one way or another, they will die.

The difference is, that they will do this many times. They will go through many lifetimes acquiring wisdom and knowledge, and they will remember much of what they learn. It appears they can experience the age-old dream of humanity and possess youth tempered by the wisdom of experience-, or can they?

The answer is yes and no. Upon reincarnation their bodies will certainly be young, with the energy and vigor that youth brings, but they will not be youths as most people understand the word. Their minds will be tempered by all of their previous experience, and if they were jaded and cynical in their previous incarnation, so they will remain. You can only see things for the first time once, no matter how old or young your body is.

While the folk of the Shogunate can experience many more things for the first time over the course of their multiple lives, they eventually will exhaust all the experiences their world can offer. When that happens, they usually do one of two things. They choose to end it all and experience the True Death or they retreat into the incredibly detailed and bizarre worlds of the Million Heavens and Million Hells and slowly fade out into the Spirit Realm.

Births are something special and so are first lives. The people of the Shogunate understand that these brief spans will be all some people will ever have. At birth a child's parents will celebrate. As the child grows they will do their best to teach it the proper ways to behave. They know you should treasure your childhood for you are only ever a child once.

As the child grows older its parents or clanfolk will teach it what is needful. As soon as they can walk, samurai begin to train in the martial arts. As soon as they can understand speech they begin to learn about Tau. Commoners will teach their children such useful skills as they possess.

At puberty a child will have its karmachip implanted and have its DNA sampled and encoded on that chip. This period is called awakening, and the child spends much time being taught about the ways of karma by the Voices of the Wheel. At such time many psychers will manifest their powers for the first time. These are inducted into the psyker temples.

Legally, children become adults as soon as they have their karmachip implanted. They can marry and are considered responsible for their own actions as soon as they finish their training with the Voices of Karma. Of course, few do these things immediately.



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ASTRAL FORM DETACH

CHARACTER GENERATION





Despite the strangeness of their lives people still fall in love, and people still get married. On marriage, one partner is adopted into the Clan of the other partner. This usually means the partner of lower rank goes to the Clan of the partner of higher rank. If the two partners are of equal rank. They must decide in advance which Clan one partner will be adopted into.

Once you are married in this way, you end all allegiance to your former Clan and become part of your new Clan, body and soul. Since such allegiances often have political repercussions, the marriage must be approved by at least one of the Clan's Lords.

If your partner's liege-lord approves, you can be adopted into your spouse's Clan without permission of your own liege-lord. By doing so, you are in effect renouncing your allegiance to your own Clan. Most Clan lords take a very dim view of such behavior and you are thus making it very difficult for you to ever return to your own Clan. Of course, such a marriage may well have great political repercussions and can even lead to one side taking offense and going to war with the other. For this reason most marriages usually must be approved by both liege-lordss.

Marriage is considered binding only for one life. You are automatically divorced upon death although you can choose to remarry on rebirth. This can lead to some very odd situations such as the body of one of the couple being much younger than the other. This can obviously put a strain on a relationship. This is why sometimes when a couple is old and still deeply in love a partner will seppuku on the death of the other, so that they can go through rebirth and be young again together.

You can be divorced automatically by your liege-lord, if he so desires. He can order you to marry who he wishes at his whim. Most liege-lords will not do this save at times of great need, but it is within their rights to do so.

You can divorce your partner simply by saying you wish it so, providing your liege-lord agrees. Providing you have your Lord's approval you remain part of your new Clan. You need the permission of both your old and your current liege-lord to return to your original Clan.

Since all a samurai's property in theory belongs to the Clan anyway, there is rarely any trouble with property settlements. All property, including wedding gifts, remains with the Clan. It will be divided between partners at the whim of their liege-lord.

In the vast extended families that are Clans, people know that time heals all wounds. Divorces can be amicable or they can be hostile, but both parties know that most likely the other is going to be around for a long time, so they usually put a brave face on things no matter how they feel. And most people find that over the years, old grievances fade, and that people they once loved then hated can now be their friends.

Indeed this sums up one of the most important lessons all the folk of the Shogunate eventually learn: nothing can endure forever. Passion dies. Even couples whose love lasts lifetimes eventually drift apart. No human emotion can be held forever by anyone who inhabits a mortal body. This experience teaches the people of the Shogunate patience and restraint. They know that they will have time to experience everything, and that in the end everything they experience will pass. They learn to live in the moment, for that is all they have, and to try to experience it fully.

Reincarnation can do some strange things to the way people behave. Normally most people choose partners of roughly the same number of incarnations. They have more in common, remember the same things, and are more likely to have the same tastes. Sometimes however odd mismatches occur.

A favorite theme in Shogunate drama is the callow young samurai who falls in love with an ancient and powerful lady. The world-weariness of the lady is usually played off against the naive ardor of the youth to great comic effect.

Equally, some ancients with many incarnations behind them enjoy taking on younger partners. There are many reasons for this: wanting to see the world through younger, less jaded eyes, feeling that they have something to teach or simply a desire not to feel in charge of the relationship and not feel threatened by an equal partner.

Death, the final curtain, in so many other societies is seen in the Shogunate as merely a prelude to a new life. That is not to say that folk are not frightened by it, or by the pain and suffering that so often attends it. They are.

On the other hand, many people in the Shogunate believe they have died before, and have come out the other side. Most can even remember the circumstances of their deaths. They may forget how intense the pain and the suffering was, but they know that death is a doorway they have walked through before.

This shapes their attitudes in many ways, some subtle and some not so subtle. One common belief is that the body is not important. It is the essence, the Atman, which counts. In the Shogunate this usually refers to the core of memories and beliefs and personality traits around which a character is built.



Thus many samurai express a lofty contempt for their flesh that they may not necessarily feel but which is fashionable. After all, the body is simply a vehicle for the Atman. It can be replaced as easily as a wrecked skimmerbike and at less cost. Their experience tells them that whatever happens their Atman will survive. This makes it easy for a samurai to claim that honor is more important than life, for although life can be returned honor once lost is gone forever. This is one of the beliefs that make samurai so fearless-seeming and so confident looking on the field of battle.

On the other hand all samurai know of people who have died the True Death or suffered karmic degradation, and they know intellectually that one day they too will be gone. They know that the karmic process is not infallible and that things do go wrong. Pain is still just as unpleasant for a samurai as it is for any other mortal. And the fight or flight reflexes conditioned into the body by millions of years of evolution still take over when they are threatened.

Samurai are not immune to fear, and the fear of death can still overcome them at times. They often find it easier to deal with the experience than others, because they have had experience of both fear and death before, but this gives them no immunity to terror. Shogunate troops are not as prone to panic or rout as the troops of some other metrozones but they are not immune to panic either.

Funerals are, generally speaking, not times of mourning unless a person has undergone the True Death. Mostly dead bodies are burned as soon as the karmachip is scanned. Sometimes, the rich will have their corpses frozen in cold storage so that they can look upon their own funeral pyre at their own funeral.

If a person is truly dead, their Clan will give them a great funeral. There will be much weeping and wailing and great distress. Professional mourners may be hired by wealthy Clans to give the appropriate atmosphere of gloom. For most people, grief will be very real. They will have lost someone who they may have known for centuries and who may have been a large part of their lives.

Rebirth is a time of joy and parties. Old friends visit. Children come to pay their respects. Marriage vows may be renewed. Liege-lords usually choose this time to rearrange any holdings you may have.

Most people are happy with their new youthful bodies, and the proof that they have continued to exist. It may also be a time of new experiences. In your will, with permission of your liege-lord, you may choose to change the sex of your body. This is one change that does not trouble the Judges of Karma, possibly because it was sanctioned by the ancient legal system that created them.



ATTITUDE TO TECHNOLOGY

The people of the Shogunate are deeply suspicious of most technology, even that which keeps them alive. The horror of the Armageddon Wars has left them with a deep-seated hatred of robots and a deep distrust for machine intelligence. This distrust applies to bionics that are regarded as a work of the evil ones.

The samurai in particular hold many prejudices against these devices. They see them as letting your body be infiltrated by the machines, and suspect that such devices might in the long run make them more like robots. In the Shogunate bionics are generally only used by ronin and by the Kobara. This is yet another reason why the Serpent Clan are roundly hated and feared.

VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM: ON	INITIATE SEQUENCE	GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE	CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
FLOW LINK QUASI-PROTOCOL: INITIATED	NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:	MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON	GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
FILE SUB-PROTOL: SHANG	INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:	SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR	SMART CHIP INSTALLED
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:	LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY	DYSFUNCTION	METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
VALIDATE SIMULATION	MOLECULAR BINARY:	MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON	OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

EQUIPMENT

LOGIN:	SUB system COORDINATES	SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD	BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
PASSWORD:	X1:434.37.8 X2:196.00.2	AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE	BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
ACCESS GRANTED	Y1:612.33.1 Y2:346.001.2	SMART CHIP INSTALLED	AMOEBOID DRONE: PRESENT
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:	Z2: 21.2122 Z1: 45.62.8	BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:	PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:	ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:	NANOCCIPITAL DRIVER	STORYMODE INITIATING

Higuma Mak took a deep breath and forced himself to relax, as his vassals bound him into the control suit of his battlestrider. He looked up at the red and purple clouds rushing across the multicolored sky, still visible through the aperture in his vehicle's chest plate. The distant thunder of rockets and heavy artillery made the air vibrate as the Higuma artillery pounded away at the Promethean position. In exactly ten minutes, with the meticulous precision for which the Higuma were famed, they would stop their barrage and the real assault would begin.

The technicians plugged command cables into the wrist, ankle and knee sockets of his suit. They closed the breast plate of the armor and cinched it tight. Ken felt a little uncomfortable. He had put on a couple of kilos since this suit had been custom-tailored to fit him. He made a mental note to get it adjusted, then sucked his gut in. Then it was done, he was bound into the control suit.

The chief engineer bowed before him, in his hands he held the command helm. He waited a heartbeat then raised it reverently to the level of Mak's eyes. He turned it in the spotlight to show the command nodes were clear.

Mak nodded and grunted in the ritual manner to show that it was acceptable to him. The chief engineer lowered it onto Mak's head with all due ceremony. There was a click as it fitted onto his neck guard and then more datalines were snapped into place. The platform on which the chief engineer stood swung away and the chest plate of the battlestrider swung closed. For a moment Mak was alone with his thoughts in the claustrophobic darkness.

In his mind's eye, he could picture all the preparations going on outside. As a boy, he had often witnessed them as his own father prepared to go into battle. The scene was vivid in his mind. The battlestrider stood like a lonely giant in the great holding scaffold, towering almost twenty meters above the ground, making the men who serviced it look like ants. All around engineers made last second adjustments to valves and bolts. On the command dais of the holding frame, the chief engineer stood with his hands on the massive trip switch that would activate the suit.

He heard the warning klaxon sound even through the half meter thick duralloy armor of the battlestrider. In his imagination the scene changed. The engineers crawling over the suit swung free on their restrainer harnesses, struggling to get clear. The chief engineer consulted his wrist chronometer, muttered a final prayer and then threw a trip switch. Chain lightning danced over the battlestrider as it was powered up. The smell of ozone filled the air.

Suddenly the darkened face plate of his command helm flickered. He could now see through the camera eyes of the battlestrider. His point of view was over nineteen meters above the ground, where a man's eyes would be if he were as tall as the humanoid war-machine. He looked down on the human ants clustered around his feet. Some of those people were samurai, he had to remind himself.

Suddenly his ears were filled with comm-chatter from the vehicle's communications system. He flexed his muscles, testing the suit's readiness.

At first nothing happened, his limbs did not move. He felt as if he were trying to shift a multi-ton weight with only his own naked strength which, in a way, was exactly what he was trying to do. Then, as more of the suits ancient systems came on-line, he felt himself begin to move. He raised his arm exultantly, glorying in his new found strength and power.

He took a stride forward, feeling oddly weightless. The battlestrider mimicked the action of the control suit to perfection. Enormous servomotors mimicked his every action. He raised his foot. The battlestrider raised its foot. He stepped forward. The battlestrider stepped downward of the holding frame. Concrete crunched beneath the enormous weight of the machine. Feedback circuits sent the information to his foot. He felt as if he were walking, not encased within a heavy armored suit suspended within the chest of the battlestrider.

He walked to the prepared area and ran through the kata he had learned long ago. Every motion of the elaborate ritual dance was designed to test some function of the battlestrider, to warn him of any possible malfunction. The machine responded perfectly, as he had known it would. Higuma engineering was flawless in these cases.



DATA CORE ACCESS

SPIRIT REALM NODE

<http://www.manticor.com>

KARMIC BURDEN NULL

ICHI SUB-LEVEL GATE

ASTRAL FORM DETACH

EQUIPMENT





He raised his weapons, the gigantic megablaster that was at the end of one arm and the huge multi-ton armor-piercing powerblade that he held in the other hand. He saluted the engineers who had worked so long to make the battlestrider function. They responded with cheers.

He turned on his heel and strode down the ruined streets towards the enemy position. His ten meter stride ate the distance at a phenomenal pace.

Soon he was joined by other Higuma warriors in their giant machines. Around their ankles swarmed samurai and tanks. Over their heads, airships hovered. Banners fluttering, the Higuma swarmed towards the enemy position, determined to reclaim the colony they had so recently lost to the Promethean interlopers.

This was the moment Mak loved, when the sheer power and strength of his vehicle filled him with exaltation. He felt like a god. He felt like the Shogun must feel. He was his machine and his machine was him. The battlestrider amplified his strength a thousand fold, gave him the power to kick over buildings as if they were anthills. It responded with amazing precision to every movement of his body. Within minutes its movements had become his own.

He knew at this moment he was just as powerful as the Promethean war-robots he went to engage. The battlestrider gave him a power and precision that matched their own, and unlike the Promethean scum, he did not need his natural abilities augmented by thinking engines. The feedback circuits of the suit gave quite enough control. He could feel the shock of his feet touching the ground as through a boot. When he raised the arm that held the gun, he could feel the weight he held just as if it were his own trusty hunting blaster. He knew that if he closed the gauntlet of the control suit around the trigger it held, the gun would send a hail of death towards his enemies.

The Higuma army passed through the ruined town now, and the desert loomed before him. Out of the desert a huge tower loomed. It was one of the Promethean's mobile fortresses, a huge factory temple dedicated to their insane gods. It had rolled across the Wastes in search of Drakonium and come to rest here in the Higuma holdings. Enormous anchor cables held it in place. Gigantic robotic tanks surrounded it. Their barrels swiveled towards the Higuma now, like the stalked eyes of monstrous insects.



Once again, in his heart of hearts, Mak felt the rightness of the Shogun's ancient edicts against robots. There was something terrifying and appalling about these monstrous killing machines, rumbling across the desert with no human mind in charge. It was too easy for them to turn on humanity.

As if in response to his thought, screens on the side of the mobile fortress slid open to reveal enormous weapons. Panzer robotic infantry and human traitors in powered armor emerged from gates in the vehicle and took up screening positions around it.

From the Higuma force, fast-moving skimmerbikes jetted across the sand raising great plumes of dust in their wake, rushing towards the enemy. Mak raised his gun and pulled the trigger. The weapon kicked in his hand as it sent a hail of potent blaster bolts hurtling towards his chosen targets. One of them impacted on a cybertank and tore a huge gash in its flank. The Promethean guns responded. Giant plumes of sand and ash erupted where their weapons impacted. Men screamed and died.

One of the battlestriders beside Mak toppled and fell crushing hundreds to death. He continued to advance through the hail of fire, certain in the knowledge that today, victory would belong to the Higuma.

NEW EQUIPMENT

WASTEWALKERS

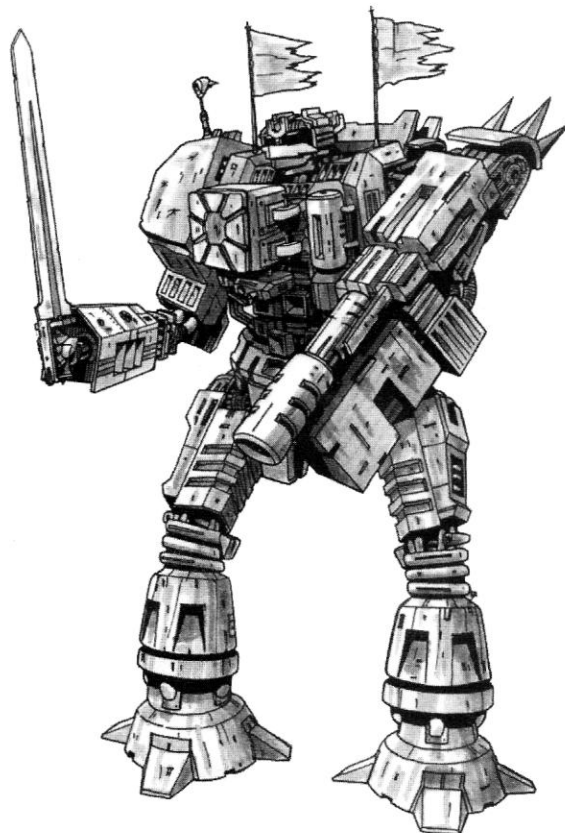
These mighty war-machines are humanoid in shape and are often equipped with weapons in each hand. When using these weapons the pilots Drive(Walker) skill acts as a limiter on each weapon. There is a penalty for using off-hand weapons unless the pilot is ambidextrous.

BATTLESTRIDER

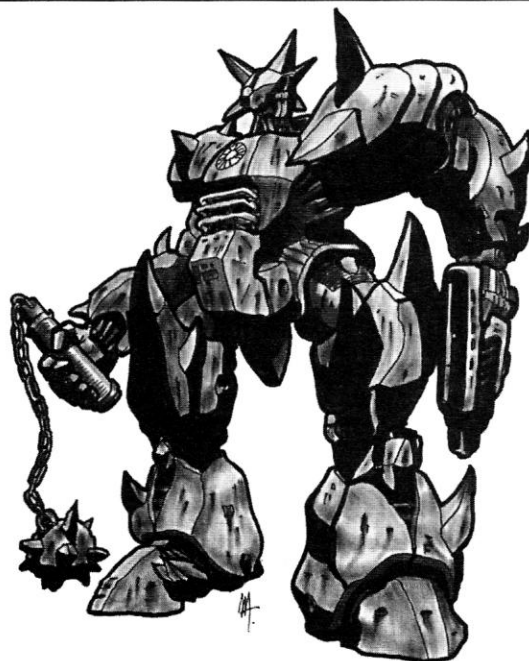
This is the largest class of Wastewalker war-machine. Each Battlestrider is custom built with its own unique area of weapons and level of armor. The Walker given here is a Nodachi Class Super-heavy Battlestrider. It is heavily armored, but relatively slow. These vehicles are not built to carry passengers or cargo. All internal space is given over to munitions and fuel. There is room for one pilot and one engineer/reserve pilot.

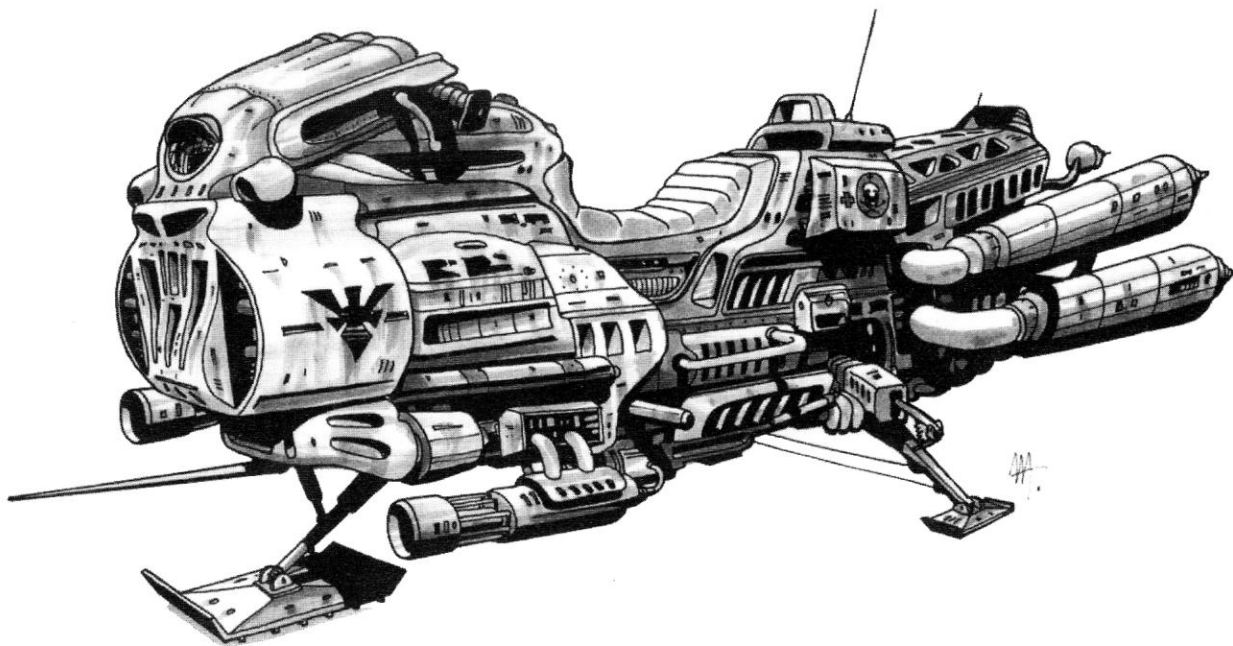
MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
15	120	40	2	-	1G

Weapons: One Rampulse Super-heavy Megablaster, one Battleblade.



	CR	R	D	TW
MEGABLASTER	250	5000	6M	O
BATTLEBLADE	C	-	-7M+10	-





BIKES

TYPHOON CLASS AIRBIKE

These heavy airbikes are favored by the wealthier samurai when they go into combat. They are normally used in skimmer mode but can go into full suspensor mode when need be. They are very fast and relatively well armed and armored. The standard model comes with two forward firing heavy blasters. There is an optional rear-facing pillion mount heavy blaster for use by a passenger, if need be. This mount adds 5M to the cost. Divide MX by 2 in skimmer mode.

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
600	25	6	2	0.1	20M



KATANA CLASS GROUNDBIKE

These skimmerbikes are built for pure speed. They are used within the Shogunate by couriers, people in a hurry and samurai patrols. They are one of the most exhilarating of all vehicles to ride. They are also relatively flimsy.

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
350	15	2	2	0.1	5M

SUSPENSOR VEHICLES

DRAGONWING AIRSPEEDER

This sleek and fast aircraft is designed to carry up to 24 passengers in luxurious comfort between the Shogunate and its colonies. It is extremely fast and capable of vertical take off and landing. It can be armed with up to four forward-firing, x5 super-heavy weapons of the user's choice. Of course, these will add to the price. This top-of-the-range vehicle is the number one choice of the Overlord's, and wealthy samurai.

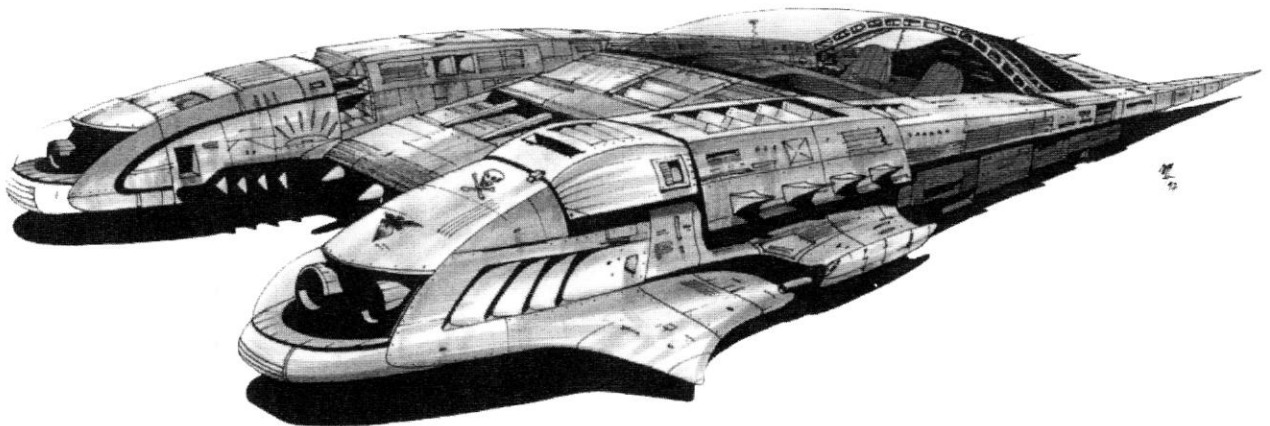
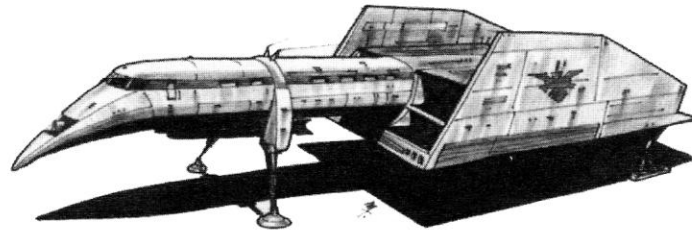
MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
2,000	80	12	24	20	0.5G



SKYDEMON CLASS AIRCAR

These luxurious aircars are normally used by wealthy samurai traveling within the Shogunate or to relatively nearby colonies. They are sleek, extremely fast and armed with two retractable forward firing heavy blasters. They are somewhat slower than a normal aircar and much better armored.

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
300	60	20	4	0.5	25

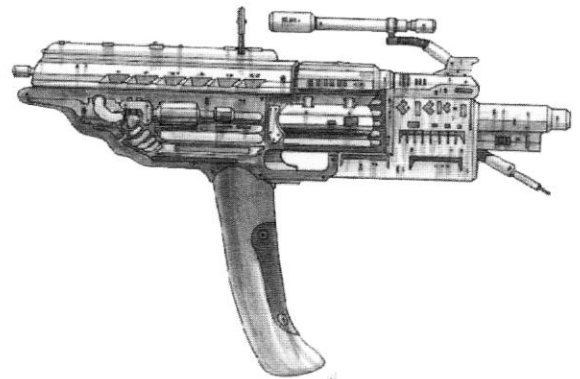


WEAPONS

SUNBOLT BLASTER

This is the standard issue Shogunate blaster, manufactured within the realms. All samurai should possess one. It is somewhat lighter than a normal blaster and designed to be used one-handed. It uses enriched Drakonium magazines that mean there is no loss of hitting power, but the maximum range is somewhat reduced.

CR	R	D	T	W	MS	C
30	750	1M+2	F	2	-	2M





NAGINATA

This weapon resembles a spear with another type of weapon fixed to the end of it, which is exactly what it is. For example a chain naginata resembles a spear with a chainsword at the end of it, a force naginata resembles a spear with a forceblade at the end of it.

All naginata behave the same way. They do the same damage as the weapon they are based on +2. They grant their owners +2 on initiative and +2 to their parry because of their longer reach. However, if the opponent succeeds in hitting them, he has gotten within the sweep of the naginata. The foe is now on +1 initiative and +1 on their attack until the naginata wielder succeeds in either breaking away from them, or successfully parries their attack by 4 or more. If the naginata wielder does this successfully, he gets the +2 initiative and parry bonus again until the opponent succeeds in getting within his sweep once more. It takes two hands to wield a naginata.

Availability: the same as the weapon they are based on. They use a slot of the weapon skill they are based on.

POWER WEAPONS

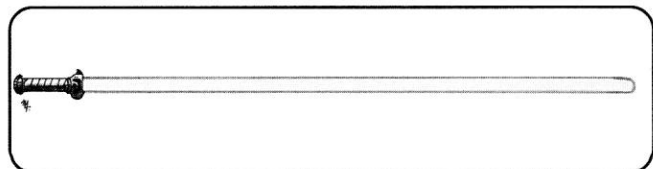
Power weapons resemble forceblades. Like forceblades they use forcefield generators contained within a duralloy handle to create blades of energy. The forcefields in power weapons are not so well calibrated as those in forceblades. This means that, normally speaking, they cannot ignore armor or shear through other weapons the way a forceblade can. On the other hand, they are cheaper than normal forceblades and they can be carried by non-samurai within the Shogunate. The fact that they are small, light and easily concealable makes them very popular. Another advantage is that their forcefields are strong enough to survive an encounter with a forceblade, so they can be used to parry forceblades in a fight.

Power weapons are manufactured in many sizes and shapes: some resemble axes, some resemble swords, others are manufactured in stranger shapes such as discs or spears.

Some black market power weapons are fitted with an overload switch. This sends power surging through the forcefield generators at an enormous rate. The aperture of the field is narrowed to increase the weapon's penetrating power. This in effect turns the weapon into a forceblade albeit temporarily. An overloaded power weapon behaves in all ways like a forceblade with two notable exceptions.

Firstly, the overloaded generator sends out a high pitched keening whine like the wail of a soul in torment. This gives such weapons their nicknames: Demonblades.

Secondly, if you fumble using an overloaded Demonblade the consequences can be catastrophic. The dangerously unstable weapons can explode. Roll a d20. If the result is 1 then the weapon goes critical. Then roll a d20 and add 10. This is the amount of damage you take, ignoring armor. Any critical hit you suffer will happen to the arm that held the weapon. If the result is less than 11, but more than 1, the weapon explodes doing d20 damage to everyone within 3 meters. Armor counts. Any critical hit you suffer will automatically happen to the arm that is holding the blade, so don't bother rolling for hit location. If you roll 11 or more, the power weapon simply runs out of power and will not work until a new DPC cell is in place. If you roll 20 then the blade flickers for a moment but continues to work.





It should go without saying that Demonblades are very illegal in the Shogunate. Possession by anyone but a samurai is punishable by death. Powerblades a slot of the weapon skill required for the weapon they most resemble. Damage is 1M. DPC Rating: 1. Availability: 4 (1 for Demonblades). **Cost:** 400.

KOBARA FANGS

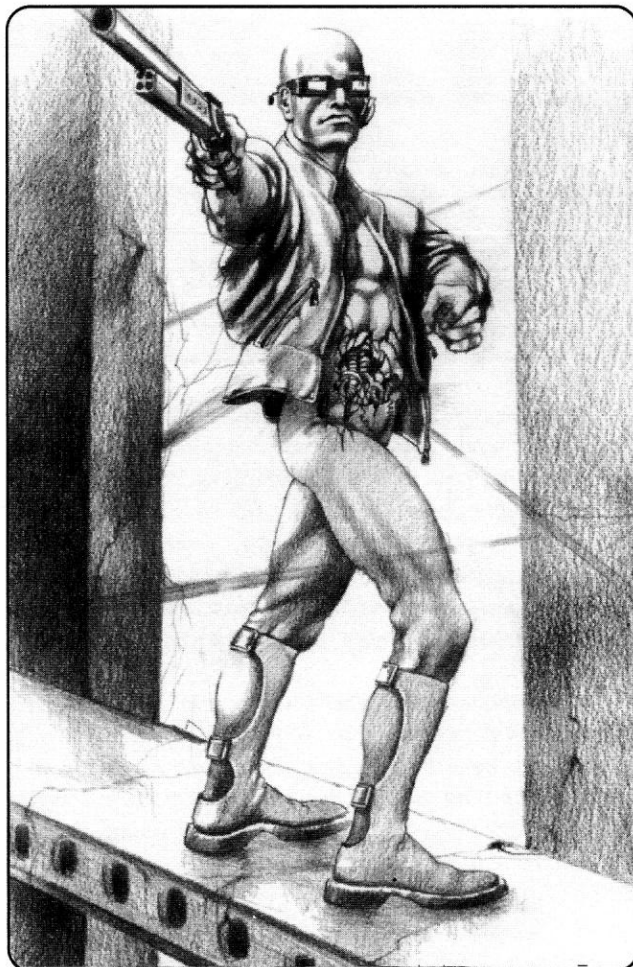
These are ultra-sharp ceramic teeth implanted in the user's mouth by orthodontists. They look like serpent fangs and normally contain deadly poison. They let the user bite his victim and inject one dose of any available poison, then they must be refilled. Many Kobara have them fitted purely for cosmetic purposes to make them look threatening and dangerous. They do damage 1M-1 on a bite. The poison is one use only. Availability: as per the poison you wish to use. Weight: Negligible. **Cost:** 50 + the cost of one dose of the poison you mean to use.

ARMOR

PHASE RESONANT CRYSTAL

This is a recently discovered by-product of Drakonium processing. Many savants think that it may be a symptom of the greater impurities that are finding their way into Drakonium, and may even be one of the reasons why the energy source is slowly dying out. Be that as it may, this is not the current reason for its importance. Phase resonant crystal is increasingly used in the manufacture of weapons and armor for another reason. It disrupts the resonating frequency of forceblades, powerblades and other energy weapons, causing them to temporarily lose coherence. This means that weapons and armor manufactured with a proportion of phase resonant crystal can withstand the affects of such weapons. You can parry a forceblade with a sword containing phase resonant crystal, and phase resonant armor will stop a forceblade as it would stop any other weapon. Since this discovery, the price of this previously unwanted by-product has gone through the roof. When you use a phase resonant weapon to parry a forceblade, you get half your normal successes (round down). When someone using a forceblade parries your phase resonant weapon, they get half their normal successes rounded down. Phase resonant armor stops half the normal amount of damage from a forceblade. Round this total down.

Making weapons and armor laced with phase resonant crystal increases their cost, mostly due to the amount of crystal that needs to be added. Increase the cost of any weapon or armor by 100 credits per kilo of weight to find out how much the Phase Resonant version costs. Phase Resonant versions of weapons and armor have availability two less than normal.



PROTECTIVE DEVICES

FLESH SHEATHES

Bio-organic flesh sheathes are used to conceal the true nature of Panzers and certain types of ninja. Basic flesh sheathes are grown in clone tanks, and are warm to the touch. Cut them lightly and they bleed. It is only of they take heavy damage that the true nature of their wearer becomes evident. If a flesh sheath covering any location takes any sort of critical hit, the true nature of what is beneath will be revealed.

An all over flesh sheath costs 500 credits. Flesh sheathes can also be used selectively to conceal robotic or bionics limbs. This costs 100 credits per limb covered. Fleshmasks that cover the face and give realistic seeming hair as well. These cost 100 credits. Availability: 1.

VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM : ON	INITIATE SEQUENCE	GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE	CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
FLOW LINK QUASI-PROTOCOL: INITIATED	NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:	MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON	GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
FILE SUB-PROTOL: SHANG	INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:	SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR	SMART CHIP INSTALLED
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:	LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY	DYSFUNCTION	METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
VALIDATE SIMULATION	MOLECULAR BINARY:	MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON	OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

NARRATOR

LOGIN:	SUB system COORDINATES	SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD	BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
PASSWORD:	X1:434.37.8 X2:196.00.2	AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE	BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
ACCESS GRANTED	Y1:612.33.1 Y2:346.001.2	SMART CHIP INSTALLED	AMOEBOID DRONE: PRESENT
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:	Z2: 21.21.22 Z1: 45.62.8	BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:	PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:	ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:	NANOOCIPITAL DRIVER	STORYMODE INITIATING

The ruby glow of the Drakonium blooms caught the light of the dying sun. Tora Ken gazed at them disgustedly, hating his new posting. Looking out from the battlements of this dreary fortress, and seeing only endless desert, he longed for home. The only visible thing of interest was the great beetle-like crawler rumbling over the dunes towards the gates of the fortress, returning from the far-off harvesting fields with its cargo of precious Drakonium.

He adjusted his rebreather mask, and pulled his wastecloak tight about him. With the sun going down, the heat of the desert day was fast dissipating. This was no place for him, he thought. He should be back in the Tiger Pagoda, cutting a figure at court, impressing everyone with his wit, his sophistication and charm, positioning himself in the endless struggle for Tora Hehachi's favor.

<<Perhaps you should not have challenged I Takami to that duel then,>> said the sardonic voice within his head. Just a hint of malicious feline amusement showed in the voice. <<Then perhaps we would never have been banished here for killing the nephew of the I Overlord.>>

<<And perhaps I should have you turned into a rug,>> Tora Ken shot back. A muted roar sounded from behind him, and he felt Kwan's huge furry weight pressing against his leg. Automatically, from force of long habit, he reached down and scratched the huge tiger behind the ear. The purring sound grew an octave deeper. It sounded like a truck revving its engine.

<<It is not so bad here,>> the big cat replied. <<The food's good. The duties are not onerous. We've seen worse places.>>

<<Easy for you to say. All you do is lie around all day and occasional stir yourself to catch some rats.>>

<<That's a dreadful slur on my honor. I never chase rats. At my age, I don't have the energy.>>

The Dragon Tiger lay down and stretched, yawning in an almost human manner. Ken felt a surge of affection for the old monster. They had been bonded when he was but a child, bound by rituals so ancient that their origins were lost even to the near-immortal samurai.

The great mutant cat had been his companion and playmate for all of his life, and was a closer friend than any human. He could remember riding around on the tiger's back when he was a boy, wrestling with the beast, nursing him when he was sick. There was an understanding between them greater than that which lay between most people. Yes, most people. A pain stabbed at his heart. Suddenly he missed Mara-chan badly.

Kwan opened one eye. <<Don't worry, lad. You'll see her again.>>

That was not what troubled him. It was what he would find when they met again that was worrying. She was so beautiful and so in demand that doubtless some other young warrior would step in and sweep her off her feet. Kwan snorted.

<<Give the girl some credit. She said she would wait for your return. She will.>>

To distract himself, Ken raised his eyes to watch the approaching crawler. He could see the red running lights glitter on its side, hear the clanking of its tracks and the roaring of its Drakonium-powered engine. He knew that the driver must be giving the code signals on the comm-link now, for the great gates of the Citadel were starting to swing open.

Soon another load of the crystal would be ready for processing and would be set back to the Tora silos back in the Shogunate. That was good. It was the only reason this whole vast complex existed in this forsaken spot, to collect the Drakonium and see it was shipped home.

No, he corrected himself, the fortress served another function. It protected the Tora holdings from the depredations of their enemies, and ensured that no one else would take the riches that bloomed here in the desert.

He watched as the huge vehicle began to back in through the gate, under the shadow of the huge blasters mounted in the guard-tower's turrets. Inside he knew there would be many hungry men returned from the Drakonium fields, ready to eat their evening meal, and to fall into bone weary sleep.





The thought of Mara-chan returned to haunt him. He believed that he had fallen in love with her the first time he saw her. Of all the geisha he had ever encountered she was the loveliest, the most skilled, the most gifted.

<<If you could tear your mind away from that paragon of womanly virtue for a moment, you might notice something interesting.>>

<<What?>> Tora Ken was in no mood to have his reverie interrupted and the tiger's sarcastic tone was starting to annoy him.

<<There's something strange about that krawler.>>

<<What?>>

<<I don't know but I have a bad feeling about it.>>

Tora Ken became instantly alert. He had learned to trust Kwan's intuition. The tiger's razor-sharp instincts had saved them on more than one occasion. He studied the tracks the krawler had left in the glittering sand carefully. The were not as deep as usual, seemed a little light for a laden machine returning to its home base.

<<Perhaps-they've had mechanical trouble.>> Ken knew he was only saying the words for the sake of form, to try and reassure himself that all was well. He was already making his way towards the ramp that would lead him down into the courtyard. Kwan loped along easily at his heels, a four hundred kilo shadow in the gloom, silent as the coming of night.

The vehicle had halted already. The turbine's roar was already fading. Ken studied the vehicle closely. It looked fine. No signs of a struggle. Only the usual dents and abrasions in the paint work that you would expect from a krawler that regularly braved the savage storms of the Wastes. The Tora logo painted on its side looked a little scratched. Glancing up at the krawler's enormous cockpit, he could see survival-suited figures rising and stretching like weary laborers ready to rest.

One of them waved cheerily at him. Tora Ken almost waved back but did not. The informality of the frontier had yet to touch him. Without knowing the man's rank, he could not be sure that he was showing the correct degree of respect.

There was a faint hissing as the krawler's airlocks popped, then a grinding sound as one of the exit ladders was dropped from the doorway. One by one the krawler's crew began to emerge. Tora Ken studied them carefully, noticing nothing amiss but aware of the sudden tension in the tiger by his side.

<<What is it?>> he asked. Kwan was already moving. With a powerful spring, he leapt on the first of the Drakonium prospectors. His powerful jaws closed on the man's arm.

"Help! The tiger has gone mad," the man shouted. His friends reached for their side arm. Reflexively, Ken flicked his forceblade from its scabbard. The faint hum of its power cell filled the air as its energy blade winked into being. He was just in time. A bolt from the prospector's blaster flashed directly at his head. Without thinking, Ken reached for Tau. His forceblade flicked up and deflected the bolt, sending it flickering into a loading bay.

Was that deliberate or an accident, Ken asked himself? The answer came a moment later as he parried two more blaster bolts. A quick glance showed him that three of the Tora sentries in the entrance bay had already gone down. Another quick look at where Kwan fought showed him why.

The Prospectors flesh had parted under the tiger's fangs. Instead of revealing blood and bone and gristle, it revealed gleaming metal. The prospectors were not men, they were robots, *ninja* of the Steel Claw. Ken wondered briefly at the fate of the original crew. Dead most likely, and replaced by these lethal machines.

The emergency hatches on the krawler's sides were thrown open and twenty *ninja* emerged. More dropped from beneath the krawler's chassis where they had been holding on to the drive axis. Ken could see that they were heavily armed. Some carried megablasters. Forceblades glittered in the hands of others.

Three of the killer machines went for Kwan. The rest swarmed away from the krawler seeking to overwhelm the citadel's defenders by speed and surprise. It was a tactic worthy of the Tora themselves, and Ken wondered which of their enemies had put the *ninja* up to it.

Then he had no more time to think. Steel Claw *ninja* swept towards him. Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of Kwan take a robot's head off with a powerful bite. Then his foes had closed. The stink of ozone filled the air as his blade clashed with the weapons of his enemies. Ken parried expertly and a desperate fight began.

ADVENTURES IN THE SHOGUNATE

The Shogunate is a place where ancient immortals scheme to overthrow their rivals and gain ultimate power. Behind a facade of extreme courtesy, deadly intrigues take place. Hidden in the depths of a well-organized and law abiding society are ancient cults of murder and terror. This is a civilization on the edge of meltdown, a powder-keg just waiting for the spark that will ignite civil war.

The Shogunate is a very exotic setting that contains possibilities for many different sorts of adventures. It has a distinctive ambiance all of its own that we think you should bear in mind when creating your own adventures.



RUNNING A CAMPAIGN

There are various ways of using this book to help you to create a campaign. You can treat it as a sourcebook for the creation of Shogunate characters, and set your adventures somewhere else, in Janus, or the wild lands of the Toxic Wastes. If you choose this option, your players can create characters using the rules and background given in this book, and play them according to the guidelines given earlier.

Alternatively you can choose to set your campaign within the Shogunate itself. This presents you with some interesting choices. It's best to make these at the start of your campaign before play begins. You can then use your decisions to provide your player's with some guidelines for the characters they will create for use in your campaigns.

Maybe you already have an ongoing campaign and you want to introduce the characters from it into the Shogunate. In this case many of the decisions we are about to outline will already have been made for you.

SETTINGS

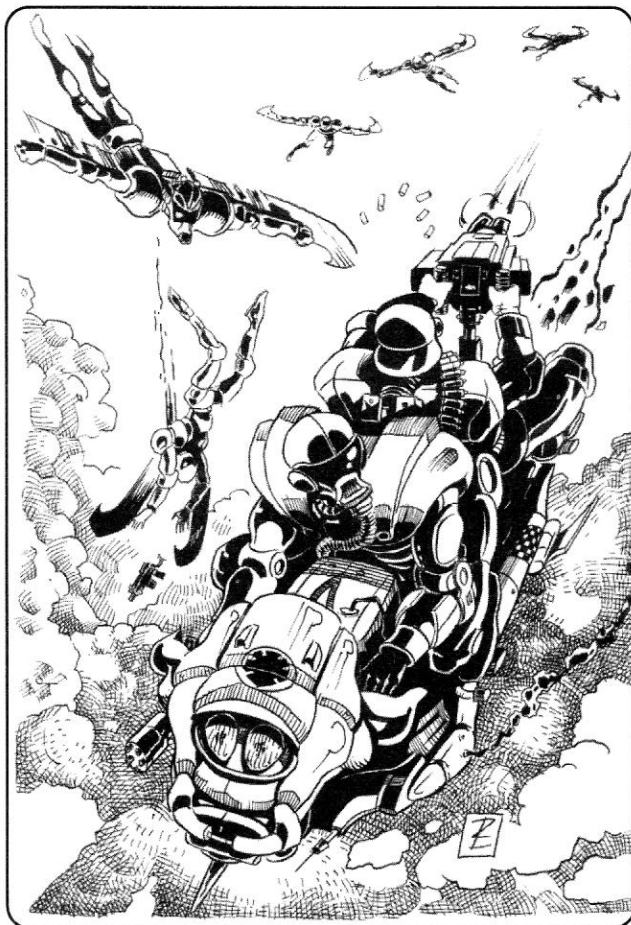
If you choose to set your campaign within the Shogunate, you need to decide whether all your characters are going to come from there or not. Both options have their advantages and disadvantages.

If all your characters come from the Shogunate, it will be easier to get a party together, and your players will have less problems with weapons restrictions than barbarians. You also get to use all those sinister-seeming (to the samurai, at least) foreigners as villains, if you so desire. Your characters will be able to travel through the Shogunate itself with fewer restrictions.

If you decide to allow some of the characters to come from outside the Shogun's realm, then you can integrate characters from an ongoing campaign, as well as give your players a wider range of character types to choose from.

If you choose the second option then you have only one real choice for a setting within the Shogunate: the Foreigner's Quarter. This will allow all the different types of characters to mix and match quite easily, and there are many possibilities for intrigue and action as rival Clans, merchant princes, ninja ryu and the agents of foreign powers scheme against each other.

No matter which setting you choose for your campaign you are always going to face some hard choices when allowing your players to design their characters. The factional nature of the Shogunate will restrict the options available to your players. In the interests of a good game, all characters need to be able to interact. Since so many factions within the Shogunate are at daggers drawn, you will have to consider the characters you allow into play quite carefully.



For example, it can be very difficult to have an honorable samurai in the same party as an active ninja. The samurai is more or less bound by law to exterminate the ninja, and in the interests of self-preservation, the ninja will doubtless respond with extreme violence. A party riven with this kind of internal strife is not going to survive a quiet evening at an Inn much less a long and dangerous adventure.

The same sort of conflict can arise when players choose characters who come from different Clans. Tora and I samurai can come to blows almost as quickly as samurai and ninja. Obviously, you will need to do something about this.

There are two approaches. You can choose to restrict your players to characters capable of working together in relative harmony, or you can force them to come up with some overall story that lets their characters play together as a party.



Using the first approach, you can simply say to your players: you can only design characters drawn from the Tora, Higuma and Kitsune Clans since these characters have no problems working together. While this approach restricts the players in many ways, it does have some advantages. You will never be short of foes to throw at the players. You can simply use their rival Clans as enemies. The players will have good strong reasons to stick together. If they come from the same Clan, or one of its allies, they will be able to trust one another and to rely on one another. No bad thing in the paranoid atmosphere of a Waste World campaign. If you want to run a campaign of high level intrigue and inter-Clan warfare, this is probably the choice for you.

Another way of restricting the players is to tell them that if they want to play samurai, then that samurai must be a ronin. This lets players draw their characters from any Clan they want but it cuts them off from the benefits of karmachips and the Clan system.

On the other hand, ronin are less honor conscious and can more easily interact with ninja, Yakuza and foreigners, if some of the players are really interested in playing those types of characters. If you want to run a campaign involving a lot of criminals and lowlife, this is probably the way to go.

The second method of letting players design characters is much more work. Each player needs to come up with a story that allows them to interact with any incompatible characters in the group. If you choose to use this option, you should sit down with the players and let them come up with ideas until you have found some that you are all happy with.

An honorable samurai may have a dark secret. Perhaps the party ninja was once his friend or brother or once saved his life or the lives of his kin. The samurai might feel that he cannot kill the ninja although he may not trust him. Samurai from two warring Clans can have good reason to work together. Perhaps, they both have a common interest in destroying the ninja ryu that they both hate, and their obsession lets them put aside their Clan rivalry for the time being.

And perhaps the party ninja is a renegade from the very cult they are trying to destroy, who wants to help them destroy the cult before it destroys him. Thus at the start of the game an uneasy truce can exist between the characters. This may develop into real trust as the campaign unfolds. At the very least, the players have a good reason for not killing each other right away in the first session.

The added benefit of this is that, as Narrator, you are starting with a strong story line and a powerful set of enemies to throw at the players, as well as a potent threat to hold over your player's heads: what if their Clans find out that they are co-operating with the enemy while waging their own private war.

This example also illustrates another useful point: in general, giving the players a common enemy is a good way to keep a party together.

Whatever method you choose to let your players design characters, you should make sure that it is one that both you and they are happy with. There is little point in forcing people into playing characters they really don't want to play. In fact, this is a recipe for certain disaster.

On the other hand, it's your responsibility to see that the game doesn't bog down into senseless inter-player bickering and murder. If you explain all this to your players, I'm sure they'll understand. Just make sure they also understand exactly what it is you're trying to achieve, and that you're absolutely clear on the types of characters that are restricted, and you won't go far wrong.



If the players can come up with a good reason for allowing one of the character types you have proscribed, and everyone in the group agrees to go along with the story, you should let them use the character, unless you have a really convincing reason for absolutely forbidding that character type. Just about the only reason for forbidding such a character would be if letting the player use that character type would spoil the adventure you have planned. For example, if you were planning on making the Kobara Clan your campaign's chief villains, and the player wanted to play someone from this Clan.

TYPES OF CAMPAIGN

There are lots of good ideas you can base campaigns set in the Shogunate around. The following is a partial list, and is neither complete nor exhaustive.

AGENTS

Your players are agents of one of the many factions that riddle the Shogunate. They might be samurai drawn from one Clan or its allies. They might be ronin, ninja and yakuza in the service of a crime lord. They might be samurai and foreigners in the service of one of the Merchant Princes of the Foreigners Quarter.

In this kind of campaign the most important single factor is the player's employer. Their employer will determine the kind of missions the characters undertake and the kind of enemies they will have. The employer will reward the players when they succeed and punish them when they fail.

You are really deciding on the style of campaign you want to play when you decide who the player's employers are. If their employer is a gangster, they are going to do a lot of fighting with rival gangsters, as well as undertaking clandestine and illegal missions under the noses of the authorities.

If their employer is a samurai Clan, then the players will be concerned with seeing that the honor of their Clan is maintained. Their missions might include anything from delicate diplomatic missions to rival factions, to raids on enemy territory, to being soldiers in a war.

If their employers are merchants they may have to escort konvoys, carry valuable packages or engage in industrial espionage.

The Agents campaign has many advantages. You are never stuck for a reason to get players to go adventuring. They are simply dispatched by their employers to get the job done.

The players will always have a clear idea of their place in the scheme of things: they are pawns. You can use the player's employer as a source of support with money and equipment as well as reliable NC's. You can build up a believable long-running cast with the employer and his other agents, as well as enemies.

When setting up this kind of campaign you should give particular attention to the personality of the player's main employer, be he Clan Overlord, Yakuza Oyabun or Merchant Prince. You should ask yourself the following questions. Is he cruel or fair, mean or generous? What are his ambitions and long term plans and how can the players further them? Who are his enemies? The answers will have a profound affect on the direction of the campaign. Of course, in the long term the players can always split from their employers. This will give them a powerful enemy.

HUNTERS

The nature of this campaign is defined by the player's enemies. In it the players are all joined in the hunt for their common foe, and have banded together to keep themselves alive in the face of their mutual enemy's attempts to eradicate them.

Perhaps your players are attempting to hunt down a ninja ryu, or an Oni cult. Perhaps their enemy is a conspiracy in high places. Whichever of these is the case, your players are never going to lack for enemies. Their foes are not going to sit still and let the players wipe them out. They are going to do their best to get rid of these meddling interlopers. The players are going to spend all their time trying to track their enemies back to their lair and thwarting their enemies plans.

A nicely paranoid variation on this type of campaign is to have the players be the only ones who know someone's dark secret. Perhaps they have found out that one of the Overlord's is possessed by a Demon, or that a Merchant Prince is really a front for a hostile foreign power. In this type of campaign no one in authority should believe the players. They should find themselves framed for the crimes of their enemies, and not knowing who to trust.

An important thing to remember is that samurai like to be the one's to administer the law in their own territory. They take a very dim view of others doing it.

Naturally in this sort of campaign, the nature of the enemy will your primary concern. You should sketch out the details of these, maybe map out a secret base or two and come up with some evil schemes for the players to thwart.



A nice touch is to unveil the villain's master plan a bit at a time, so that with each session of play the heroes learn a little bit more about what they are up against, until finally they have all the pieces to fit together. Such campaigns can be truly terrifying experiences if you make the enemy's master plan apocalyptic enough.

PILGRIMS

As a change of pace, this campaign lets the players become simple wanderers within the Shogunate. Many people within the Shogunate make pilgrimages to all seven of the Temples, and there are well-worn pilgrimage routes between them. Pilgrims from any Clan can travel them without being interfered with by the authorities.

For maximum karmic reward these pilgrimages are made on foot. People believe that the karmic rewards of the journey are proportional to the effort expended on making the trip. This campaign lets you get a group of wildly disparate characters together and lets them travel through the Shogunate at a fairly controlled pace. You can place all sorts of adventures along their path which they can resolve before moving on. Pilgrims must face many perils ranging from ronin to thieves.

Of course, not all of those you meet along the pilgrimage routes are what they seem. Being a pilgrim is the perfect cover for a spy. There are many common robbers who disguise themselves as travelers and seek to prey on them. The great advantage of this sort of picaresque campaign is that you can throw all sorts of little adventures at the travelers, and they are always vulnerable and have to move on.

VISITORS

In the course of an ongoing campaign set in the Wastes, Janus or another metrozone, you may want to have your characters visit the Shogunate. The Foreigner's Quarter is after all, one of the world's greatest tradezones, and the Shogunate is wealthy enough to attract merchants and travelers, and those who prey on them, from all over Waste World.

You can use the Shogunate as a stopover point in any other sort of campaign. It's a good place to buy war-gear or use as a base for expeditions out into the Wastes. Dangerous as the Shogunate may appear, it is well-policed by the samurai, at least compared to many habtowns in the Wastes. It is also quite easy to acquire property and live well in the Foreigner's Quarter, which is why so many merchants and adventurers choose to use it as a base. Perhaps you should let your players do so as well.

Also, even in a Wastelands campaign you can use this sourcebook. All of the Overclans and the Shogun himself have colonies scattered across the Wastes. These habtowns are shaped by the cultures of those who rule them, and policed by their samurai and their allies. They will be the Shogunate in miniature, dominated by its culture, reflecting its internal rivalries and prejudices. Your players may end up visiting one of them in their travels, and thus encounter Shogunate culture at first hand. There are also many hidden Temples and monasteries in the Wastes, where all sorts of strange and wonderful experiments are conducted by monks.

ADVENTURES

There are many possible adventures your players can find themselves involved in. Here are a few simple ideas to get you started. Once again this is not, by any means, an exhaustive list. An inventive Narrator should be able to add many ideas to the ones we've given.

BODYGUARDS

In this the player's are assigned to bodyguard one of their Overlord's children, their employer or some other wealthy and important person. Unbeknownst to them, that person is going to become subject to a ninja attack. It's up to the PCs to prevent this, and find out who is behind the attack, and why. If they can track down the culprits this can lead naturally into the Commando Raid scenario.

When running this scenario, you should sketch out locations where the ninja attack can take place. When the players are on guard you should be careful to find out who is on watch, where they are stationed, etc.

Equally importantly, you should leave them at least one clue as to who is behind the assassination attempt and why. If one of the players recognizes the assassins as members of Mantis Ryu, perhaps their Yakuza or ninja contacts might be able to give them some hints as to where to find them.

Alternatively you can give the players some sort of deadline, and if they can keep their charge alive beyond this deadline, they will know they have succeeded. This can be things like keeping the Yakuza sub-boss alive until an important conference. Keep the young lady alive until her wedding ceremony. The nature of the deadline may provide players with clues as to who is responsible for the attacks. In the examples given, perhaps they should ask themselves who has something to gain by preventing the wedding or the Yakuza conference.



COMMANDO RAID

This is a simple military mission. The players can be samurai assigned to attack an enemy installation, ninja hired to break into a pagoda and kill someone, or adventurers paid to seek out a Steel Claw base and destroy it.

This adventure can be divided into two parts: preparation and execution. Preparation can be as simple as deciding what equipment to carry and traveling to the destination, or it can be as complex as locating the secret base, acquiring floor plans and finding a secret route in.

Execution involves the actual break in and fighting that follows. Before running this adventure you had best create the floor plans and maps that you are going to need and decide on the exact nature and strength of the target installation's defenses. You also need to decide how much of this information you are prepared to give away to the PCs during the preparation phase, and how accurate the information you release to them is.

It can come as a nasty surprise, if they were expecting a lightly guarded depot to be swarming with enemy troops. This in itself can be the seed for another adventure. Why was the base so heavily guarded? Has there been some change in the enemies plans? Were the players betrayed? Is there a traitor in their own organization?

DEMON HUNT

A Demon is loose in the area the PCs call home. It is possessing bodies and killing people. It is up to the players to find out where it is laired and stop it.

Before running this adventure you need to work out where the Demon is lurking and who it is possessing. You should also work out if there is an even more sinister motive at work than simple Demonic hunger. Was there any hidden pattern in the seemingly random choice of victims. Is one of the PCs a potential target.

You need to leave the players some clue as to where they can find their prey. Perhaps sludge of a kind that was produced in that old abandoned chemical works is found near the victim's bodies. Perhaps, one of the local people has been behaving oddly recently. A few red herrings can help as well.

And don't forget, a good way to kick start this adventure is to have one of the players attacked and narrowly survive. This will give them a good solid personal motive for getting in on the hunt.



HONOR QUEST

One of the PCs commits an act that disgraces himself. Rather than allow him to commit honorable seppuku, the character's liege lord sends him on an honor quest. This is a mission that is considered near suicidal. If the player succeeds, he has atoned for his disgrace. If he fails and dies, this is the equivalent of honorable seppuku. The liege can put any restrictions on the quest he wishes. He can tell the player he must duel all samurai he meets left-handed or that he must walk to the goal of his quest.

Honor quests are a good way of getting players to go on missions that normally they would not touch in a million years. You can send them into Swarm hives to reclaim the lost blade of the Kobara ancestors and send them out to defeat a sand dragon in single combat. They are also a good way of punishing players whose actions would normally result in their lieges ordering them to commit seppuku. This way you can at least use the players stupidity or misfortune as an excuse to get a few adventures under way.

If you decide to do this, you should make the eventual goal of the honor quest a long way away so that your PCs can have a good cross-country adventure en route.

THE TOURNAMENT

Martial Arts and forceblade tournaments are common in the Shogunate. They are usually sponsored by an Overclan or a Merchant Prince or some other wealthy patron, and are a good excuse for warriors to get together and beat the tar out of each other. Much honor can be gained by winning a tournament and of course, the prestige of the winner's Clan will be increased. Clans often send their warriors to these tournaments as competitors, support staff or simple spectators. They normally take place in luxurious, isolated locations that make them perfect for murder mysteries, intrigue and many other sorts of adventures.

You could send your PCs to a tournament either as competitors or as friends and companions of a competitor. Once there, they may have to prevent someone sabotaging their champion's chance of winning, find out who is killing all the martial artists one by one, or break into the secret vaults of their host to steal some secret plans. The choice is yours.

Traditionally Martial Arts tournaments are neutral ground. All those present surrender their weapons. This makes them ideal places to force your players to rely on their wits and fists rather than their forceblades and blasters. It also provides them with a rare opportunity to meet with deadly enemies in a social setting where they are forced to be polite.

TONE

In general when running adventures set in the Shogunate, you should try to keep to the tone of the setting. There are several things that you can do to get the atmosphere right.



Firstly, the Shogunate is a very polite and courteous society. You should remind your players of all the formalities when necessary. At every new encounter have the NC's bow to them, in the appropriate manner. Have higher ranking NC's take umbrage at the PC's if they speak first or inappropriately. They don't need to draw their weapons and attack but they can make their displeasure felt in many subtle ways.

The first few times the PC's behave inappropriately, remind them gently of this and let them try again. If they continually fail to observe the formalities, start applying heavy negative reaction modifiers against them for their perceived impoliteness. Make sure you tell them you're doing so. They will soon get the message.

In many combat situations, there are codes of behavior to be observed too. It is considered dishonorable when a fight breaks out among equals to use blatantly more powerful weapons. You don't draw a blaster when fighting against a man armed with a forceblade. You meet him with a forceblade in your hand.

Of course, this rule does not apply when you are at war, or when someone threatens your liege lord or when you are dealing with commoners and foreigners. There is also the element of style to be considered. A samurai beset by forceblade wielding ronin would be at perfect liberty to draw his blaster and shoot them, but would gain far more honor and improve his reputation no end by drawing his own blade and fighting hand-to-hand.

Remember also that it is very important not to lose face. Indeed it can often be a life or death matter in the Shogunate. The reasons for this are manifold. The most important is that the Clans would prefer not to be at war most of the time, but still need to score points against their enemies. If a Clan loses face, its position becomes weaker in a very real sense, since everyone will perceive the loss of face as a weakness. This encourages enemies and causes the vultures to gather.

Since a Clan member's personal prestige reflects on that of his clan, any personal loss of face is also a loss of face for the Clan. You should make sure that your NCs keep the players aware of this at all times. Enemies and neutrals will behave in such a way as to preserve their own face. If the players do something to discredit their own faction, they will be taken aside by their superiors and have this pointed out to them in no uncertain terms. Use reminders like this to make the players behave in an appropriately circumspect fashion.

Lastly, the rulers of the Shogunate are very subtle. They have had lifetimes to acquire cunning and finesse and you should try to use this in your adventures. Try to make your plots cunning and devious rather than open and straightforward. An ancient samurai is just as likely to spend decades on a plot to make his enemy lose face as he is to simply assassinate that enemy. Indeed he would gain more honor for the former. Anyone can hire assassins, it takes a person of intelligence and distinction to manage the latter.

KARMA IN PLAY

As Narrator, you may wish to restrict the reading of the following section. Perhaps it might be better if your players were not acquainted with the inner workings of the Order of the Great Wheel. The choice is up to you.

Karma is a concept integral to life in the Shogunate. Every character who comes from this metrozone has a karma rating. This rating is a measure of your status in the eyes of the Lords of Karma and will affect everything from the way the people of the Shogunate react to you, to your chances of getting a new body. You should note your karma rating on your character sheet. All beginning characters start out with a karma rating of zero.

Whenever you behave dishonorably, or in fashion contrary to the expected norms of the Shogunate, your karma rating is decreased by one. Whenever you behave in a spectacularly honorable or brave fashion, your karma rating is increased by one. These increases or decreases will only happen if there are witnesses to your deeds, so that word can get back to the Priests of Karma. If there are not witnesses you will suffer no modifiers.

It's worth restating here that there is a vast difference between what the people of the Shogunate believe and the way karmachips actually work. The population believes that all of their deeds are reviewed by the Judges of Karma and that crimes and misdeeds and even bad thoughts will inevitably be found out and punished.

Actually no such thing happens. Karmachips are merely devices for recording memories and the Judges of Karma for the most part perform mere book-keeping tasks like making sure that two versions of the same person are not in circulation at once and making sure that the transfer process goes smoothly. Of course, mistakes are made, glitches enter the system and things can go wrong. Under these circumstances, the beliefs of the people provide a valuable tool for cover-ups. If some seemingly blameless person fails to be reincarnated then it's obvious that they were guilty of some secret sin.



The real decisions about who gets reincarnated and who does not are political and social. The Temple of Karma keeps extensive files on people and uses them to decide who gets reborn. This is one reason why all the major Clans have their own reincarnation machines.

THE PROCESS OF REBIRTH

You can only be reborn if your karmachip is presented at a Temple of Karma or some other place with a reincarnation engine. If you died by violence, and your chip is not recovered, you cannot be reborn. The Judges of Karma will not allow it, even if you have a previously made memory recording available. This would go against their ancient programming, for who knows - it may be that you are still alive and have just not been found. Presentation of a karmachip constitutes proof of death. This is one reason that the custom of taking heads has arisen among the samurai.

If you are victorious in battle against a samurai opponent, it is customary to decapitate the corpse and take the head. You can then ransom the head and the karmachip it contains to his Clan. They will normally pay d20x50 credits for the head. Of course, many samurai choose to spurn the money and return the head without payment. Doing so enhances their honor and proves their superiority.

Of course, if you are still alive and present yourself at a Temple you can be reborn. Your old body dies painlessly during the process, and your new body is prepared.

When it comes time for you to present yourself in the Temple of Karma, or whenever you are killed and seek rebirth, the Narrator will make a secret reaction roll modified by your karma rating. If the result is 11 or more you will be granted rebirth. If the result is 10 or less you will unfortunately experience the True Death. In this case you will need to create a new character. If the result is greater than 20 you have qualified for a reward. This may include an increase in your rank and status or a karmic reward.

It is really up to the Narrator to decide how your deeds affect your karma rating. There may be extenuating circumstances. Normally if you disobey your liege lord, or betray his trust, you will face a karma penalty of -3 or greater. However there are exceptions to this. If your liege lord is dealing with ninja or planning treason to the Shogunate, then betraying them might well get you a karma bonus. Flexibility is the key here.

KARMIC REVIEW

The Shogunate has a population numbering hundreds of millions. There are a limited number of Priests of Karma. It is obvious that not everyone gets a karmic review every time they are reborn. There is simply not enough time. In general then, unless the circumstances surrounding someone's death are unusual, the process of rebirth is handled automatically, according to the following rules.

Samurai and their children are automatically granted a new body. Commoners face the True Death except at the whim of the Priest of Karma who is reviewing their case, or at the intercession of a high ranking samurai.

This is a closely guarded secret. If this were known then there would be open rebellion against the system. The Lords of Karma like to present an image of dispassionate justice to the world, but this is far from the case.

They are helped in this by the fact that it is traditional that when someone is reborn as samurai, they are adopted into a samurai Clan and sever all connections with their former Clans. And of course enough samurai lords reward their followers with samurai status so that everyone at least knows that some commoners do achieve immortality.

If a commoner has a high ranking samurai willing to sponsor them and adopt them into their Clan then immortality is assured. Of course this is the greatest reward a samurai can grant a commoner, and it is only awarded for the most exceptional of services.

In game terms what this means is that anyone of samurai status will almost automatically be reborn if they die of natural causes, such as disease or old age, unless the Narrator decides that they are so well-known or infamous that the Priests of Karma will take a personal interest in their case. Since virtually every PC with a karmachip will be a samurai, they all get the benefit of rebirth. Players should roll a d20, and only if they fumble will they need to make a karma roll.

However, if the character dies under unusual circumstances such as in combat, as a result of a duel, or while adventuring then they must make a Karma Roll.

NON-SAMURAI

Non-samurai have a hard time of it in the Shogunate. The chances are they will not be reborn. If they belong to an illegal organization such as a ninja ryu then they fear that will be unmasked if they do face the Engines of Karma. To avoid this many ninja ryu and criminal organizations damage the karmachip and render it inoperable when someone is inducted into their ranks.

Some of the most powerful have their own reincarnation machines, some have contacts within the Halls of Karma and can use their influence to ensure that their followers get new bodies without facing the Judges of Karma. Some simply take out contracts with black market body-brokers.



Those who have their own incarnation engines use special tamper-proofed karmachips which must be connected to their machinery in a unique way or they will be wiped. They have their own unique karma ratings that are awarded according to loyalty and diligence in the service of the organization rather than in the normal manner. Like the society of the Shogunate itself, they use immortality and the promise of immortality as a reward for good behavior. They are no different from civil society. Their religious structures are finely tuned control mechanisms.

DESTROYING KARMACHIPS

Of course, since many murders can sometimes be solved simply by reincarnating the victim and asking them who the killer was, most murderers are careful to ensure that their victim's karmachip is destroyed along with the person. Certain poisons are known to automatically scramble and destroy karmachips, but the most common methods is simply to burn the victim's brain with a laser, or to dig out the karma chip from their skull and destroy it. (Most karmachips are AR: 6 when dug out in this manner. Any damage inflicted on them will destroy them.)

It is quite unusual for a karmachip to be destroyed by accident, but it can happen. If you take a type 19 or type 20 critical hit to the head, there is a chance your karmachip will also be destroyed. Roll a d20. If you fumble, then your karmachip is destroyed or damaged beyond repair and the True Death has taken you.

DEGRADATION

Degradation is a far more insidious danger. Over the long years of reincarnation, strange random glitches can be introduced into a person's memories, sometimes resulting in irreversible insanity. This is simulated by the degradation roll. You should take note each time you are reincarnated. Every time you are reincarnated make a d20 roll using your IN and PW as positive modifiers, and using the number of reincarnations you have had as a negative modifier. If you fumble this roll, or the result is less than 10, degradation has occurred.

Your highest level obsession or phobia is increased by one level. If you did not possess an obsession or phobia, you and your Narrator should choose one that seems appropriate. You gain the mild form of this new disadvantage but you don't gain any points for it. If your obsession or phobia is already total, and you fail the degradation roll then you have become completely insane and your character is now an NC under the Narrator's control. It is time to create a new character.

PSIONICS AND REINCARNATION

Being a psyker is a mutation, but it is a strange one. The ability to wield the Power seems somehow locked within the thought patterns of the psyker. Even if a psyker's mind is reincarnated into a body that has no trace of the psychic ability, his powers will very slowly reassert themselves, as the mind and the Power slowly alter the body into a vessel that can channel psychic energy once more. This means that the ability to wield the power will follow a psyker from body to body when he is reincarnated. This normally takes about one month per level of PW the psyker possesses.

Most psychers are reincarnated into bodies cloned from their original tissue, so this is not normally a problem. When returned into bodies like this, a psyker's powers return within hours of reincarnation.

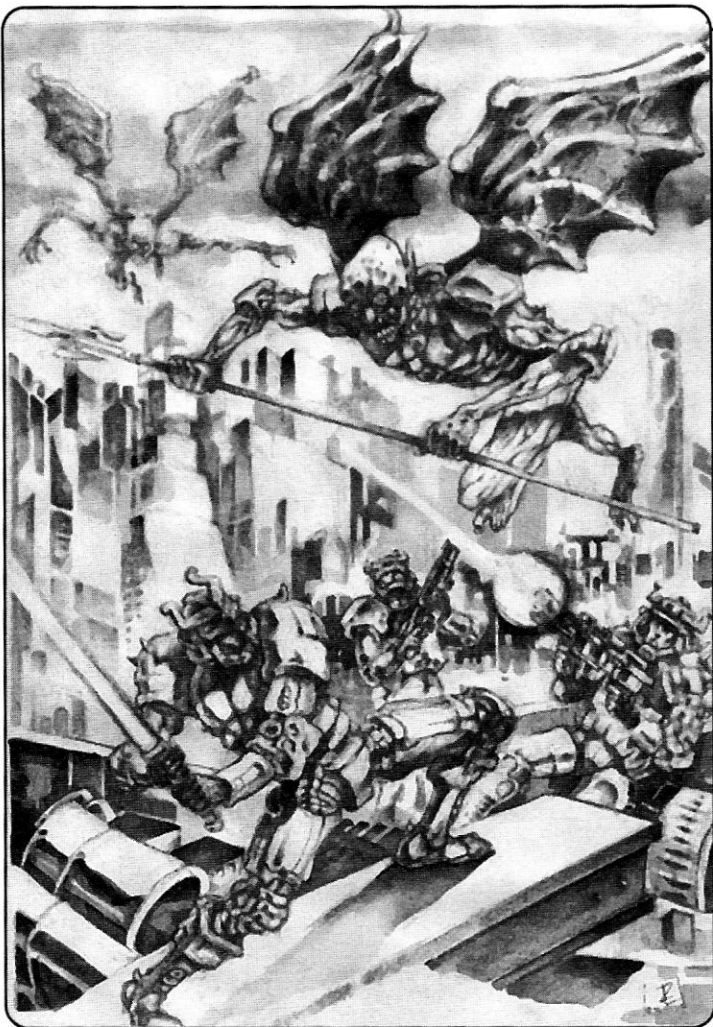
SPIRIT WALKERS

Spirit Walkers are the sorcerers and shamans of the Spirit Realms. They have mastered many general purpose spells which allow them to manipulate the Ultramundae. They can travel through them and access data. They can exorcise Oni and they reprogram some of the entities they meet there. Their services are usually expensive but if your problem is related to the Ultramunda, they can be worthwhile.

SPIRIT WALKER RULES

The most important rule we can give you is this. If only one player is a Spirit Walker, and the others have no part to play in his spirit journey then the whole thing should be handled as a simple die roll using the Spirit Walker's Ultramancy skill, with the difficulty factor assigned by the Narrator. After all, Ultramancy happens in accelerated real time so all the other player characters will see is the Spirit Walker closing his eyes, interfacing and concentrating. The last thing any Narrator wants is for the majority of his players to be hanging around, doing nothing, while one player hogs all the action.

If the Narrator has the time, and the player the willingness, to run a solo adventure then that is fine you should use the full blown Spirit Walking rules. Ditto if other player characters can enter the Spirit Realm with the Spirit Walker. If that is the case, the following rules should be used.



ENTERING THE SPIRIT REALMS

Firstly, to enter a Spirit Realms the player must either have an induction helmet, a karmachip or a data terminal. They must also have an access point where they can hook into the datanet. Most old buildings are riddled with these. Newer structures will have them only if they are Temples. Secondly, they must have a spell of spirit travel to translate their spirit selves to the Ultramundae, or they must be traveling with someone who has such a spell, and they must be more or less willing to go.

If all these requirements are met then the Portal will open and the players will find themselves translated into the Spirit Realms.

SPIRIT SELF

A spirit self is the players representative in the Spirit Realms. In all respects it resembles the player character: it replicates his clothing, weaponry and all characteristics and statistics except LF.

The difference is that this is a data construct and it exists amid the huge consensual hallucination of the Spirit Realms. Its appearance and equipment can be changed easily if one knows the correct incantation. If not you are stuck. All your skills are limited by your IN plus your ultramancy skill. So, for example, if you draw your forceblade in the Spirit Realms you will be able to use it, but your skill will be equal to your IN plus ultramancy or your forceblade skill, whichever is less.

INTERACTING WITH THE REALMS

Interacting with the Spirit Realms is straightforward on the basic levels. All the data structures in the Realms are visible as physical structures such as houses, castles, woods etc. In order to access them you must journey towards them. This journey can seem to take weeks or moments depending on your wishes and the wishes of other inhabitants of the Spirit Realms around you.

Once you reach the data structure you can interact with it. This will take different forms depending on the task you are trying to perform. Accessing a database will usually take the form of reading a virtual book or scroll in a virtual library. Controlling virtual weaponry will put you in an analog of a turret or behind the controls of a simulated weapon. Controlling a vehicle will put you behind the controls of a simulated vehicle. It is really up to the Narrator how these systems are depicted, but bear in mind that the Ancients designed the Ultramundae to be easy to use for everyone. It adapts itself to the mind-set of the user. Given the almost medieval levels of understanding of most of the Shogunate's inhabitants, it is not surprising that these representations should be fairly primitive.

Most Spirit Walkers see themselves as shamans or sorcerers making a spiritual journey, and control their environment by means of spells.

GETTING THINGS DONE

Basically the Spirit Walker decides what he wants to do and the Narrator decides how difficult it will be. Then the Spirit Walker makes a skill roll. His IN and Ultramancy skill will be positive modifiers. If he is being opposed by another Spirit Walker, that person's IN and Ultramancy skill will be negative modifiers. If the roll is successful then the desired result will be achieved. The Narrator can, if he wishes, require several success rolls to be made for particularly complex or time consuming tasks.

This is a very free-form system that can put a lot of power in the hands of a Spirit Walker. As Narrator, just remember that you can apply any negative modifier you like. You can always explain this by invoking random interference, glitches in the system, etc.



You can also simply say that general purpose stabilization programs are at work in the area, and that they are designed to prevent people tampering with the system. Alternatively, if people are doing really destructive or noticeable things in the Spirit Realm, they will eventually attract the attention of powerful Kami or Oni. This is the reason why most Spirit Walkers use their powers as little as possible within the Realms.

COMBAT IN THE SPIRIT REALMS

Many Realms do not permit their inhabitants to harm each other. However, in most Realms ancient combat analog systems are in place to allow people to fight if they wish.

Combat takes place just as in the real world but with the following differences. All avatars have Spirit Realm LF equal to 10 plus the user's Ultramancy skill levels. You can choose to use analogs of the weapons you are carrying. In this case, the Spirit Realms will adapt themselves to your desire to do damage and let you use the weapon. You can use your skill with that weapon subject to the limits placed by your IN and Ultramancy skills.

All weapons, regardless of their appearance do 1M damage. All of this aside combat in the Spirit Realms takes place as normal with the following modifications. Instead of using DX as a modifier for your initiative roll, you use IN.

Psionic Powers etc. don't work within the Realms, unless you are within a Realm specifically designed to allow them. (These ancient psionic analog modules were created by those who understood that psionics are rare, but do exist). All weapons function as normal, except they do only 1M damage. Armor functions as normal.

Once a victim has been reduced to zero Spirit Realm LF he has been forced out of the Realm. The shock will render him unconscious for d6 hours. In addition, if a lethal combat analog module is in force within the Realms, he must roll on the Ultramancy Critical Hits Table below.

It is up to the Narrator to decide which combat modules are in force before a fight begins. The default setting for most Realms is for the combat analog module to be in use, and the psionic and lethal combat modules to be absent. Of course, some Spirit Walkers know how to invoke these modules and turn combat swiftly lethal.

NEW ADVANTAGE: SPIRIT WALKER

You have been trained to travel in the Spirit Realms and understand the way they work. Without this advantage you cannot use your Ultramancy skill or any of the Spirit Walker spells. **Cost:** 5 points.

ULTRAMANCY CRITICAL HIT TABLE

1-10 Neural overload. Unconscious for d6 hours.

11-14 Severe neural overload. Unconscious for d6 days.

15-16 Brain scrambled. Unconscious for d6 days and lose one point of IN permanently.

17-18 Severe neural damage. Unconscious for d6 days and lose 1 IN and 1 DX permanently.

19 Exceptional physical strain. Make ST roll at -4 or die of a heart attack. Even if you succeed you will be unconscious for d6 days and must spend another d6 days doing nothing but resting and recuperating.

20 Head explodes. Your brains decorate the ceiling or the inside of your helmet. You are dead beyond even the ability of a karmachip to resurrect you.

SPIRIT WALKER SPELLS

These actually represent ways of manipulating the system built into the Realms by the Ancients. They simply represent knowledge of how to use systems that are already in place in the datacores. Each spell is a separate skill, limited by the user's Ultramancy skill. They are all hard to learn.

They are used in exactly the same way as normal skills. Failure simply results in the desired effect failing to happen except when you fumble. (See below.) Many Kami and Oni have these spells incorporated into their makeup and can invoke them at any time. Many have access to all of these spells and many more the Narrator may care to invent.

CREATE PORTAL

This creates a glittering doorway linking two points in a Realms or two different Realm. It is in effect a shortcut between these points. If you step into it at one end you will emerge at the other, and vice versa. Once created a portal will continue to exist until it is closed or destroyed.



BAR PORTAL

This spell bars access to any portal unless you know the code word or true name used to get through. It can be smashed with a destruction spell of sufficient power although if it is woven into the fabric of the portal this may simply result in the destruction of the portal.

OPEN PORTAL

This spell opens barred portals without knowledge of the true name. It is a subtle spell which worms and twists its way into the portal's heart and may be able to subvert any barring spells or guardians.

SUMMON PORTAL GUARDIAN

This spell summons a guardian Kami or Oni which will remain in the same spot as the portal and attack anyone who does not speak the true name. The exact strength and power of these beasts will vary according to the skill of the Spirit Walker who summons it. Normally its LF will be equal to his LF and its skills will be equal to his skills -2. (If this means a skill is less than zero, then the Guardian will not possess it.) A fumble when casting this will cause the beast to turn on its summoner.

CREATE BARRIER

This builds a protective barrier around certain areas of the Realms and makes them impenetrable to those who do not know the true name. These walls may appear to be simple walls of stone or of flame or glittering diamond. The effect is the same. They isolate parts of the Ultramundae to all but a certain approved group of users. They can be subverted by an open portal program or destroyed by a Destruction spell but these events may trigger an alarm summoning certain guardians.

DESTRUCTION SPELL

Each level of a destruction spell adds 1 to your damage when you make an attack on an other occupant of the Realms. They are one of the few ways you can attack in the Ultramundae. When used against inanimate data structures such as portals or barriers, these have 10 LF Points per Ultramancy level of their original caster.

DEATH SPELL

These nasty spells are designed to augment any damage done to an organic Spirit Walker. They add one per level to any damage roll the Spirit Walker must make when reduced to below 0 Life Force. They automatically invoke a lethal combat module.

PROTECTION

Protection spells help protect the integrity of data structures. They reduce the damage taken from destruction spells by 1 per level to a minimum of 1. Basically this acts as armor for Spirit Walkers.

REPAIR

These spells rebind destroyed data structures. They can repair one LF per difficulty level. The level you purchase this spell at acts as a limiter to the number of LF you can repair at one attempt.

ALARM

This spell will alert you to the approach of any others within the Realms. If they are seeking you or coming near where you are this will let you know. Your opponent may be able to detect this if he makes a Ultramancy roll. The level of your alarm acts as a negative modifier to his chance of success when this happens.

TRAVEL

This basic spell allows you to enter the Realms and move through the Ultramundae at great speed.



SECURE

This spell will automatically abort your mission when you speak it. It will cut off your link to your Realms and drop you swiftly back into your body. This can be very useful if you are in a life or sanity threatening situation. Very few programs can interfere with this.

PROBE

Probes are sophisticated spells of detection which are usually extruded by a Spirit Walker before he enters the Spirit Realms proper. They check all around the access node and make sure that there is nothing there, or if there is something there then the Spirit Walker knows about it.

CLOAK OF STEALTH

This spell makes the Spirit Walker hard to detect. Anyone trying to spot the Spirit Walker must make an awareness roll using his Ultramancy Rating as a positive modifier and the level of this spell as a negative modifier. If he fails this then he will be unaware of you.

HUNTER/ SEEKER

This spell can be attached to any other spell. If you know the true name of any person, structure or thing within the Spirit Realms it will act as a delivery system seeking them out and delivering the spell whatever that might be.

If the target is not present in the Spirit Realms when you use this spell, the Hunter/Seeker will head for its last detectable point of access and lurk their waiting for them to emerge. It will send out subsystems to search Spirit Realm access points and if that person reenters the Spirit Realms it will eventually find them. Hunter/ Seekers are particularly nasty which is why Spirit Walkers take great precautions to hide their true names.

USE NAMES

Use names are the call signs by which Spirit Walkers and data entities know each other in the Spirit Realms. They are meaningless, and can be of little use to others.

TRUE NAMES

True Names are the codes by which things live or die within the Spirit Realms. To know someone or something's true name is to have great power over them. They are the signs by which the great datacores track their users and allow them to interface with the Spirit Realms. Each true name is unique.

For people these are access signs written in the DNA of their karmachips. For data entities they are even more important. They are often the data signatures of their entire beings, unique codes by which they can be traced, summoned or destroyed.



There are certain areas of the Ultramundae into which you can only enter by revealing your true name. The Sanctums of Kami are all protected in this way, for example. Such areas are usually shunned by all Spirit Walkers save those who have good reason to visit them. Priests of Kami will always be found there. When they are baptized into their system, they are given their true name by their Overmind who will use it forever afterwards to keep track of them.

RUNNING ADVENTURES IN THE SPIRIT REALMS

The Spirit Realms are very complex and well-maintained virtual realities, completely indistinguishable from the real world once you are immersed in them. It is perfectly possible to run adventures set within them in exactly the same manner as you would run adventures set in the real world.

There are however a few differences to keep in mind. By their very nature adventures in the Spirit Realms tend to be fluid and freeform. They should have a hallucinatory quality with everything being mutable to those who have the power to manipulate it. Both players and Narrators should feel free to improvise.

You could for example create areas in which natural laws work differently, or which exactly resemble different worlds or styles of play. There are after all many ancient entertainment simulations within the Realms. The thing to do is to have fun.

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This beautifully illustrated four section screen puts lets a Narrator see all the rules and tables needed for the Waste World RPG. It comes with a 48 page booklet of adventures introducing the remote habzone of Toxic Springs and the wild wastelands that surround it. Give your players a chance to hunt down brutal Skavengers and do battle with huge Apokalypse Virus infested war-machines. You'll find all you need to kickstart a campaign in the barren deserts of Waste World in this one package. Cover by famed French artist Philippe Druillet. Adventures by Paul Beakley. New rules by Bill King. Available: late July, 1997. Product Code: 1002. Price: \$12.00.

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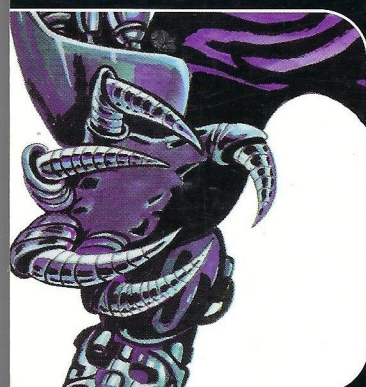
JANUS

Amid the rubble of Janus, the last remnants of the alien Xenogen races dream of their days of glory. They dwell in the shadow of the Startower, a titanic elevator that rises into the darkness of outer space. Janus is the home to merchants and mercenaries, and many others who have come here seeking their fortune in the world's last open trading city. It is a place where everything has its price, even the human soul. Visit Waste World's largest free trade zone. Involve yourself in the deadly skirmishes of the Trading Houses. Start your own mercenary company. All of this and much more is covered in this detailed supplement. Available: January, 1998. Price: TBA.

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