

SEAL OF THE WHEEL

The Ascended Sourcebook



TONYM

FENG SHUI
Action Movie Roleplaying

Blewer, Brooks, Mangold and Seavey

**ATLAS
GAMES**

Credits

"SEAL OF THE WHEEL"

AN ATLAS GAMES PRODUCTION

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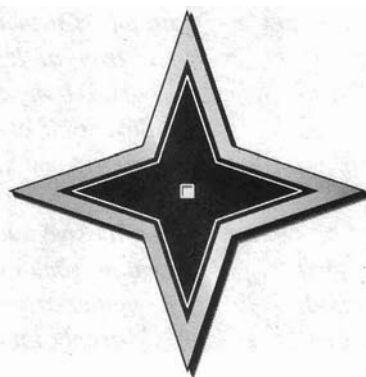
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Spring, the Ninth Year of Emperor *Ming* Ti's Reign

Bei Tairong stretched, experimenting with her new shape? limits. Years spent meditating on the human form had brought her the ascension she'd so dearly sought. Reveling in her new body as she carefully selected clothing that would stand the journey before her, she didn't expect to be disturbed. The rough hands that grabbed her by the arm and the gruff voice that shouted "Thief!" disabused her of that expectation. Tairong reacted with reflexes honed from years of hunting she spun around and snapped her foot into the man's midsection. He let go and choked for air. The man? clothing identified him as a provincial guard.

Tairong scooped the clothes into her arms and dove through the window, not wanting to face the guards.

All this for a change of clothes. Humans are so complicated.

She hid between two buildings long enough to catch her breath and change out of the filthy garments she'd taken from the bandits on the road to Yichang. The new clothes were more comfortable and didn't stink of the road and unwashed peasants. Before she finished, more guards prowled Yichang's streets, presumably seeking the thief who'd just robbed the governor's daughter. Two stopped at the far end of the house serving as her shelter and approached.

"This is practically under her window, the thief is probably nearby"

The other sounded more dubious. "Not a smart thief: He'd —"

Tairong leapt from the shadows, punching the second guard in the throat and grabbing the first before he could react.

Tairong whispered softly into the guard's ear. "Guide me out of here. If you betray me, I'll rip your throat out." The guard swallowed. Twice.

"The governor will —"

Tairong snarled in response. "I will kill you first!" Something in her tone, or the way her eyes reflected the light, changed his mind and he swiftly guided her out of the city, avoiding other guards. Once outside Yichang, a growl sent the guard away Fast. Not that she expected it to help

much. The guard would probably be back soon with a dozen more just like him, all intent on slowly skinning her. Tairong started into the forest at top speed and looked for a place to hide, rest, and recover her strength. Only a few miles into the hilly woods, she found a cave under an ancient tree. Thick, ropy roots nearly concealed the entrance.

Inside, Tairong found the cave a bit more spacious than she had expected, with a dimly lit passage leading further down. Tairong hesitated momentarily before she followed the passage.

There should be no light here.

The passage twisted and turned against itself, often defying logic and common sense, sometimes shrinking so that she had to squeeze through, and sometimes broad enough for a team of horses. Tairong spent some time searching for the source of the unearthly light. But since she was already exhausted from her escape and the oppressive warmth and humidity in the caves, she finally gave up, found a comfortable niche, and slept.

Tairong's slumber was not long or restful. Half formed shadows and bizarre creatures haunted her dreams. She awakened to the sensation of a large lump of muscle, scales, slime, and fangs lifting her bodily from the ground. A blast of hot, fetid air accompanied a halfintelligible growl from the beast.

"Your soul, I eat."

Tairong quickly planted both feet against the wall for leverage, crossed her arms against the thing's snout and pushed! The beast stumbled away, released its grip, and let her fall to the floor and roll to her feet. Tairong followed the roll with an impressive leap, slamming into the beast's chest and knocking it to the ground. She was ready to follow up on its throat when its ponderous tail swept her legs from under her.

As Tairong recovered from the fall, the beast pulled itself to its feet, distending its already immense jaw and revealing row after row of razor-sharp teeth. Tairong barely rolled out of the way as the massive fang-lined mouth slammed into the ground, gouging her arm. When it pulled back for another attack, she lunged for its throat, biting deeply into the tough flesh, the bitter ichor



that served as the thing's blood burning her mouth and throat. She released it, spat out the blood, and danced away before it could strike again with its terrible claws.

What is this? Am I in one of the Hells? Is this my punishment for becoming human?

Tairong didn't have long to question the situation. The beast stood to its full height – at least *half-again* her own stature – and roared. Lightning gathered around its hands and eyes, too bright to look at directly. Tairong decided it was time to leave

and leapt around a corner just as the beast *dis-*charged its blast. The crash of thunder in the *con-*fined space was deafening, and the smell of ozone overwhelming.

The thing's terrible laughter followed her up the passage and its plodding footsteps followed shortly afterward. Tairong debated facing the monster. As it turned the corner, lightning dancing around its eyes, she struck at its eyes and momentarily blinded it. Tairong ran as fast as she could as the beast bellowed its pain behind her.



Illustration by Scott Reeves

History From the Outside

AN INTRODUCTION TO 1850 AND 1996

History is important. It's not dead, it's not just things that happened a long time ago. It has momentum. It has impact. It's the things that happened and are still happening, and if you want to understand **anything** about the world today, you've got to know your history. So, let's start things off with a quick history lesson, shall we? (I know you don't want to, but it's no fair **skip** ping this section to get to the new ways to blow people up. You gotta eat your dinner before you can get your just desserts.)

History is the pattern created by events **occur**ring, one after another. The pattern really comes into focus when people sift through those events and decide what they mean. Different people produce different histories, which is why they keep writing new history books. It's not the profit motive . . . well, it's not just that. You might see the Bay of Pigs **as** a minor screw-up caused by some CIA chief drinking too much before going into a meeting, but someone else might see it as the start of forty years of bad relations with Cuba. History may be based on factual events, but it's very personal.

The Chinese of 1850 saw history as a circular pattern. Events repeated themselves: Dynasties began ruling through virtue with the Mandate of Heaven on their side, became corrupt, and were eventually overthrown by new dynasties that had seized the Mandate of Heaven.

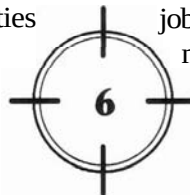
The tides rose and fell, the seasons cycled around, and things remained unchanging.

For the Europeans, and for the Americans, history was a shining road that stretched out of the murky past towards a bright future. It was a straight line that moved ever upwards, **introduc**ing as it went steam power, gas power, electric telegraphs, new lands to conquer, and new ideas waiting to be explored. For them, tomorrow would always be better than today, just as today was better than yesterday.

The two views collided like freight trains, and the impact was about as pleasant **as** you'd imagine.

In China, the Manchu (or Qing) dynasty had only ruled for three hundred years, but it was already dying. The Manchus, who were invaders from the north, had never been fully accepted into the Chinese culture or society, despite their attempts to assimilate Chinese traditions into their governmental structure. In 1850, they were still viewed as outsiders, and popular **senti**ment was never on their side. Worse, their governmental institutions were riddled with corruption, making them inefficient and, in some cases, incompetent. They were unable to cope with an increasing population and decreasing food production, which left a large portion of the populace angry and hungry.

Worse, increasing numbers of Chinese were competing for the fixed number of civil service jobs — and since Chinese government was a meritocracy, you had to pass intelligence





tests to gain entrance. (There. Meritocracy. That's your vocabulary word for the day.) So they were angry, hungry, and intelligent.

Actually, the situation was even worse than that. Western ideas had been trickling into Chinese philosophy for over a century, and some of these had been applied to Confucianism. When Confucian texts were analyzed using Western techniques, some of the long-revered classics were shown to be forgeries added centuries later. Yet these forgeries were still on civil-service examinations. So make that angry, hungry, intelligent, and disillusioned.

It was the perfect recipe for rebellion. It started with the White Lotus rebellions at the turn of the century. It continued with the Taiping rebellion, which hadn't blossomed into war yet in 1850, but with an army of 60,000 people, they weren't a comfort to the Emperor. As it happened, there'd be plenty more rebellions before the Manchu dynasty fell — the Nian, the Boxers, the Muslims — but let's not make things worse than they were at the time.

The government didn't really have the troops or the money to quash all the rebellions, so it tried to ignore the small ones and hold off the big ones. But then someone decided it would be better to allow government officials to form private militias and quash the malcontents themselves. It was a real bargain for a cash-poor empire. This turned out poorly, since those officials and their private — very private — militias gained political power of their own. If the Emperor needs your army, he can't turn you down when you ask for money. A few of these officials — such as the legendary reformer Zeng Guofan, who would rise to power by crushing the Taiping rebellion — were still loyal to the crown, but far more of them were interested in lining their own pockets and creating their own bases of political power. Guess where that power came from? Yep. The Emperor, whose ability to govern was evaporating like water on a hot skillet.

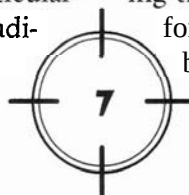
Given all the internal problems, it's no real surprise that when the West came calling to discuss trade rights, the Chinese weren't particularly enthusiastic. At first, they tried their traditional means of dealing with foreign pow-

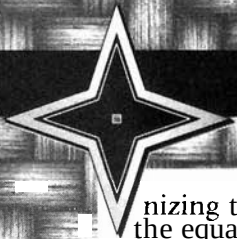
ers: grudgingly, and through a humiliating series of meetings in which diplomats were required to kowtow to the Chinese Emperor, acknowledge him as the greatest ruler in the world, they used diplomatic language that referred to all foreigners as "barbarians," and so forth. They figured they could keep 'em quiet this way while they tried to keep their empire from collapsing like a house of cards.

The English — at the time the main Western power seeking to deal with the Chinese — were less than happy with this treatment. Since Coca-Cola hadn't been invented yet, they decided to flood China with a product that would be in such demand the Chinese would have to deal with them on better terms: opium. They created thousands of addicts, and when China outlawed the trade, they shipped it illegally. This caused crime, decadence, laziness, riots (if you live in any major US city, we probably don't need to draw you a map), and generally worked on China's internal woes like gasoline on a fire.

Eventually, China attempted to stop the British by force. They responded with their own military might, making the Chinese treat them with more respect. Then, seeing this was a winning tactic, they shot beyond respect and tried for abject humility. Surprisingly enough, it worked. The Opium War (1839-1842) forced the Chinese to open up their ports to British trade, made British residents in China subject only to British law (a clause known as **extraterritoriality**), and perhaps most importantly, gave the British "Most Favored Nation" status. That meant that whenever China negotiated treaties with other countries, the British got equal benefits too. (One Chinese intellectual referred to this as "jackal diplomacy.") Oh, and they got a few parcels of territory, too, but nothing very important. A little island called Hong Kong, for one, but a place like that wasn't expected to amount to much.

Of course, just because the Chinese government opened up to foreigners didn't mean everyone in China did. A large network of secret societies began in the coastal cities during this time, expressing anti-Manchu and anti-foreigner sentiments. They were known for being equal opportunity employers, recog-





nizing the talents of women and making them the equals of men in their societies. In fact, if a

woman joined the group before her husband, she was considered his superior, a direct contradiction to the Chinese culture of the time. The Triads, as the groups were called, would go on to become a major part of Chinese society in the next century and a half, usually in the areas of hurting, killing, and supplying illegal goods. Happily, those turned out to be the next century's big growth industries.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world was hitting its stride. America had made California into a state after taking it from Mexico (along with Texas, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and a good chunk of Wyoming — a land deal better than the Louisiana Purchase), and that gave them access to the Pacific. That meant China was a prime candidate for trade, and, through immigration, cheap labor, too. There was no slavery in California at the time, due to a compromise between the North and South that would delay the Civil War for ... oh, at least a decade. So, rather than force people to work, they had to induce them to work for wages that made slavery seem almost appealing. There was a lot of work to do — gold had been found in California two years earlier, making it a very rich place to trade. The US rushed to settle its own treaties with the Chinese government, and made sure to include their own Most Favored Nation clause. The Chinese were favoring a lot of nations. Not many were favoring them in return.

The Russians, the French, the Germans, the Dutch — every colonial power was getting better and better at exploiting the resources of the non-industrial nations. Napoleon was gone, and Europe was no longer at war. Now the wars were fought elsewhere. All of them saw the potential of China, and all of them decided to jump on board the gravy train. A savvy diplomat might have been able to play them off against each other, tying up their military might with posturing for each other, or threatening to give concessions to one power to gain them from another. Unfortunately, the Chinese had already given away that leverage with the Most Favored Nation clause.

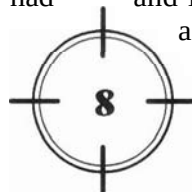
All this mess was dumped onto the head of Emperor Qianlong when he took the throne in 1850: a weak, corrupt government; an angry, disaffected populace that was already taking the law into its own hands (if they weren't addicted to a foreign drug); and an array of foreign countries that saw China as a turkey to be carved up for their own consumption. China needed a strong emperor to unite it from within and force the exterior opponents to deal with it as an equal. Unfortunately, Qianlong was not a strong emperor. 1850 was a bad year for the Chinese government, but it would pale by comparison to the future.

As time passes, nations rise and fall. Governments change. Philosophies and ideals shift.

A century and a half later, the world is very different. Most of the colonial empires have collapsed. After two massive, debilitating world wars, nobody had the military might to maintain them in the force of even mild opposition — and after a century of oppression, opposition was a bit more than mild. In fact, the only power to emerge from those two wars stronger than before — the United States — discovered that these nations had invented a new style of politicized warfare against which superior manpower and firepower were totally ineffective. Their colonial holdings also asserted independence.

The new warfare was economic. Russia's monarchy was overthrown and a new economic and political structure — communism — took over. Most of the twentieth century was caught up in an economic war between communism and capitalism. (Except for that chunk in the middle where everyone just tried to kill each other.)

China lost its monarchy but not its monarch. Puyi, the last emperor of China, became puppet ruler of Manchuria. The Japanese were the true power, but it suited them to have a native on the throne. The rest of China became a perpetual battleground for rival warlords, "warlord" being informally defined as "anyone who can get together a gang of thugs and lay claim to a piece of territory." Finally, after forty or fifty years of warfare, the warlords loosely united under Chiang Kai-





Shek and his Guomindang party. This happened just in time for them to all get kicked clean off the continent by Mao Tse-Tung and his communists, who had honed their skills in warfare against the Japanese, even as the Guomindang had honed their skills by retreating from the Japanese. The two matched surprisingly well, and the Guomindang retreated to Taiwan, where they remain to this day. There are still occasional discussions of "taking back the mainland," but at this point, most Taiwanese don't really want it.

Turnabout became fair play in another sense for the Western powers, as cocaine, heroin, and other narcotics flooded into the United States on a billiondollar scale. The US tried to stop it by declaring the drugs illegal, but illegal shipping continued. The Chinese of 1850 could have told them that would happen, but they wouldn't have understood ... in more ways than one.

Technology continued its race ahead, producing the means to save lives — and end them — on a global scale. Man visited the moon, broke the sound barrier, and invented the slinky. Television, telephones, and powered

flight turned journeys of months into journeys of days, minutes, or no time at all, depending on what was being sent. The world didn't shrink, but it certainly seemed to.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the economic war appears to be over. The communist Soviet Union has collapsed, the communists in China are buying blue jeans and watching Dallas reruns, and although Fidel Castro appears to have survived the CIA's attempts to dust his beard with LSD, he's no longer the terror to the United States he once was. Bill Clinton has been elected to his second term as President of the United States, and nobody seemed to mind that he was probably having an affair right in the Oval Office. Northern Ireland is apparently on the verge of peace, something nobody ever expected to happen. The Middle East, a region that was united until 1918, then dismembered, has managed to keep an uneasy peace for the past couple of years. In fact, things seem remarkably calm.

Of course, that's just how history looks on the outside.

March, 1994

Tairong wasn't sure how to react. After her journey through the endless caves, the crowds of people around the giant box with the moving pictures (she later learned it was a "television"), and the pagodas of fire and darkness, she had somehow found her way out. Who'd think that a circle of glaring light would be the exit? The world she walked into was even more bizarre than the last. At first she thought she was in some unknown Hell: perhaps the Hell of Snarling, Metal Demons and Horrible Stenches.

Towering buildings were crammed next to each other with no thought to aesthetics. Vehicles roared back and forth on black wheels with wild abandon. People rushed from place to place, barely acknowledging their surroundings or other people. Some spoke into tiny black boxes, holding conversations with nothing. Noise that might have been music, but only in some tortured nightmare, blared around her. Tairong curled up in the alcove where she'd exited from the caves and hoped for a surcease that did not come.

To Tairong it felt like hours, but only ten minutes after her arrival, men in black clothing with shiny black bands over their eyes picked her up and took her into one of the Snarling Metal Demons. The only reason she let them take her were the heavy, gold rings each wore. They were embossed with the wheel she had meditated upon to transform into human shape. She clung to the only familiar sight in an unfamiliar world. The soft, plush seats and the harsh, burning drinks comforted Tairong in the

wake of the sights outside. The strange carriage rolled smoothly past towers whose height boggled the mind, and eventually entered a much smaller building. Inside, Tairong was given plush quarters with bed, bath, and other luxuries. The days that followed were a blur, until several men came to visit her.

Their apparent leader stepped forward. "Please hold still, Tairong. This won't hurt much." He stabbed her with something small and very sharp. She lunged for his throat and it took three men to pull her away long enough for him to get away. Hours later, the men in black took her to even better accommodations, where she met a man identified as Colonel Wilhelm. The words were uncomfortable to her tongue, but the pale devil seemed nice enough. The tea he offered her was better than any she'd tasted before coming to this crazy Hell, and the only sound other than their voices was the soft music coming from the walls. He laughed when she asked where the musicians hid.

The Colonel took Tairong aside after a few idyllic days. "I have to send you away. We've found some family of yours and they would like to have you back." Tairong found that hard to believe, since she'd never had cubs when she was a tiger, or children after she had become human. But she went with the Colonel's men to the airport, where another machine flew her across a, endless expanse of land and water to a city called Tokyo, where she was to meet a relative and travel with him to see the rest of her family. Tairong was adaptable by nature. By the

time of her trip to Narita Airport, she had grown accustomed to the crowds and the sights of 1994, and she looked upon them with wonder rather than fear.

As Tairong waited for her "relative" at the airport, two monks in white robes approached, bearing flowers. They smiled as they greeted her and asked if she was interested in Hare Krishna. Before she could answer one of the Colonel's men stepped forward to send them away, only to be kicked in the gut for his troubles. Tairong hissed in surprise, but was already in motion before the second could strike her. "You dare strike my escort?" she snarled as she smashed her hand into the second monk's jaw "I'll have your skin!"

In an instant several monks surrounded her, all wearing robes the color of death. Nearby bystanders retreated to a safe distance. She demanded of the monks, "What do you want?" The monks circled, moving carefully, none taking their eyes from the transformed tiger.

"You are important to the Wheel," they replied. "We will take you to our masters where you shall serve as our hostage."

"Never!" Tairong snarled her response and leapt six feet into the nearest monk, feeling a satisfying crack as her foot connected with his skull. In moments she had her hands full with angry monks, all trying to drag her down. Monk after monk fell before her ferocious attacks, but in the end, there were too many

The leader, the one who'd spoken, gazed over the carnage Tairong had inflicted on his com-

panions. "Impressive. I know just the thing –" Tairong heard a loud thwack! The leader's eyes rolled, showing only white, and he dropped like a sack of rocks. The remaining half-dozen kidnappers turned in unison to see who had assaulted their leader, conveniently turning their backs to Tairong. She took only a moment to acknowledge her new ally's sudden appearance before knocking two shaven heads together. Those dealt with, she followed the monks pursuing the other woman.

The new arrival, facing six angry monks, ran back to where she had come from – the airport bar. She took three quick steps, leapt behind the bar, and ducked for cover. Her pursuers slowed as they entered the lounge and looked for her. Just as two approached the bar, the woman stood, a tap in each hand, and gave each a face full of Hite beer before subduing them with a flurry of blows. Tairong ignored the customers who cowered around her, planted her arms on one of the tables, and did a brief handstand before slamming a foot into each of the remaining monks, knocking both into unconsciousness.

Men who identified themselves as airport security arrived shortly thereafter and led the monks away. To imprisonment, Tairong assumed. The sudden ally approached and bowed. "You are Tairong? I am Adrienne Hart. I've come to take you to the Unspoken Name."

History From the Inside

THE EVOLUTION OF THE LODGE

My Dear Lukas,

I was extraordinarily surprised to receive the missive you sent me, via our "mutual acquaintance." You cannot imagine my deepest joy at hearing of your continued survival. It is rare indeed, at my age, to hear of a friend from my wayward youth that has reached this venerable age, and rarer still to continue to regard him with affection. Ambition is the true bane to those of us who dwell in the rarefied halls of immortality, and it has claimed more lives than armies or ailments. Friends become enemies, brothers and sisters turn against their parents, and from then on, it is simply a question of who will strike first. (Although I remember that some of our other mutual acquaintances still ask that question of themselves.) Even avoiding death at the hands of the ambitious has its own snares and perils; it leads down the deadly road of paranoia, in which the expectation of enmity becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy ...

But let us dwell on happier times, shall we? Or at least, times in which the fog of imperfect memory has concealed the unhappiness. The world has changed much since those happy times, though. Our "mutual acquaintance" explains that you have been out of touch

with events for some time. I suppose it is no surprise, really, considering the fashion in which you departed our company, but still, I feel a duty to bring you up to date. On thinking about it, however, I find that I really am uncertain as to the best way to go about doing so. After all, there is a lot of history to go over, given the long lives we have both led; I would hate to spend ages sifting over trivial minutiae when you are already eager to get to the "juicy bits," as the current parlance calls them. Worse, there are some things I cannot tell; I have obligations to the wider family that occasionally calls on my services, that fraternity that you may remember ... yes, the Lodge still exists, my friend. And I'm not certain that I wish to unburden all their secrets to anyone, even you. In addition to the considerations already mentioned, there is the practical matter of the shifting nature of time itself. What is history for me is a fiction to others, just as if you were to tell the tale of Talla — but I forget. You do not tell her tale to anyone. Still, I am sure you understand my point. The changes in history-can render memory an unreliable guide.

Let us simply think of this as a fiction, then. I shall be your narrator and you shall follow me down the primrose path from innocence to experience. This way, although this story is based on truth (like all the best fictions), you will know that some of the things you are being told are lies. A gentlemen's agree-



ment, to preserve my commitments to the Name, to history, and to the thin integrity of Untruth itself. So it will be a story, and like all the best stories, it will begin ...

Once upon a time, there was an age of wonders. It was an age of four great monarchs, two kings and two queens, who split the world between them and ruled it by dint of might, if not wisdom. They had flaming towers, palaces made of ice, bridges made of purest rainbow, and dragons as their battle-steeds. They were sorcerers of the highest order, and entire armies quaked at the mention of their names ... or they would have, were there armies left to battle with them. They had conquered the last shreds of opposition so long ago that nobody could remember a time when they did not rule. They were immortal, and they had created the perfect empire.

Yet still, these mighty warriors had enemies. Some simply wished for a change in the existing order. Others feared their tyranny and cruelty. Still others sought power; naked ambition rears its ugly head in every circumstance. A few sought revenge, and were willing to do anything — even alter history itself and banish the very magic they practiced — to avenge the slights against them. Ah, Nemesis. Thou art still the most powerful of all the gods.

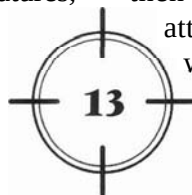
But I apologize, Lukas. I forgot whose story I was writing. Once upon a time there was a dragon who lived in a world that was not an age of wonders. Indeed, it was anything but. It was a world of squalid, squabbling little warlords, who used the magic that surrounded them the way children would use a gun to startle birds. They gave no thought to creating wonders; all their waking moments were stitched with the threads of ambition and avarice. For them, the world was a treasure to be plundered. The dragon, on the other hand, was one of an assembly of animals, all of whom shared an ancient purpose. He, and all his kith and kin among the animals, sought simply to emulate the better graces of these humans while otherwise avoiding their attentions. (I like to think that is why we are the rightful rulers of the world, Lukas. We deliberately transcended our animal natures, while you just blindly evolved.)

Only a paragraph later, and already I must apologize again. You cannot help your human nature, and I should not mock you for having achieved through birth what took me ages of discipline and meditation to achieve. I should, instead, dwell on your arrival on the scene, back in my age. You and your allies came to us. You infiltrated our ranks, you whispered to us in the night. You told us of a future where we would be slaves to the whims of sorcerers more powerful than we could imagine. Worse, the future would be so filled with magic that we would find ourselves trapped as animals forever.

When we challenged you for proof, you showed us. You took our young hero on a journey, through the dark and twisting Netherworld and into a future that some would describe as an age of wonders.

Would it surprise you, I wonder, if I confessed nostalgia for the kingdoms of the Four Monarchs? I know it is not a place I can ever visit again. Even if it were still in existence, by my very nature I am banned from it. In fact, I devote my life to preventing its return. It is inimical to me, and yet ... sometimes I still dream of the citadels in the sky, lightning crackling from one tower to the next in a never-ending display of celestial fury. I long, once again, to catch a whiff of the jasmine and incense in the Burning Gardens. It is my Nimue, my deadly longing.

Even so, I was one of the prime architects of its destruction. You chose us well. You saw in us a potential that we missed in ourselves, and by showing us that potential, helped us to achieve it. We infiltrated the courts of the mighty. We created rituals and ranks, called ourselves the Lodge and the Ascended, the Order of the Wheel, the Jade Wheel Society, the Pledged. Through a dozen names, our identities seemed to multiply. We created whispers and rumors of a history stretching back through the ages, to the Greeks, the Romans, the God-Kings of Atlantis, back to the beginning of the universe if need be. We made those who had never heard of our cause members by implication, then used the mirage of their influence to attract others to our purpose. The shadows we created grew larger, and we grew to fill



them. Those we could manipulate were assimilated. Those we could not, we destroyed. Through stealth and subterfuge, we forged alliances where there had been enmities. We made kingdoms out of salted earth and kings out of petty thugs. We diverted those who would oppose us to foolhardy errands to liberate the desert half a world away. In their absence we recreated the existence to which they would return. We transformed the world as we had transformed ourselves.

We did not notice the day the world changed around us. After all, it was our future we sought to change, and we lived in the present. It could have been triggered by any one of a dozen unremarkable conquests, or one of many that were fought in fury, or even one of the handful that fell into our grasp like overripe fruit. But in the fullness of time, it became evident to us. By then, you had already left our company. We thought you dead, you know ...

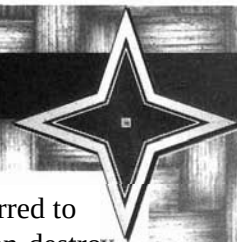
but I digress. Few of us resided in the Monarch future — the hateful time that fought at every turn against our efforts to remain human. So I really cannot pinpoint the day, or even the year in which things changed.

The sorcerers faded away first. Some of them were reduced to minor con-men, their Philosopher's Stones transformed into geodes and their mighty magic diminished into slight of hand. Others, less fortunate, burned in the fires of hatred and paranoia. That was a mess, let me tell you. We burned a handful of sorcerers along with a heap of idiots and fools whose only crime was being in the wrong place at the wrong time. We searched for needles in haystacks by burning down the barn. But that took care of most of those who still knew the arts of magic.

A few of the old order adapted to the new world of the Wheel. They turned their minds, honed by learning the arcane arts, to the



Illustration by Toren Atkinson



neglected sciences and technologies. They puzzled out the careful, ordered rules to which reality conformed, and they managed to work wonders with it that would rival the four realms you remember. They turned pieces of carefully ground glass into a new form of crystal ball, and their "Principia Mathematica" became a new grimoire for the adept. Metal and fire became the new steeds of the warrior, and weapons beyond imagining made Huan Ken's avenging thunder look like a fireworks display.

But I'm getting ahead of myself, and probably boring you, to boot. I can almost hear you, in your little tower: "Where's the heart in this story? Talking about the Lodge as one big happy family, moving from triumph to triumph? Dull! Dull! We need some internal conflict to spice things up a bit." Always an accommodating writer, I shall introduce some. But first I must talk about breeding.

Oh, not the actual act. I am certain that after such an eventful life as yours, you know how it is done. I am referring to the sort of breeding whereby a group or stock evolves from a common set of ancestors and shares certain characteristics. As the Bible mentions, the lion and the lamb may lie down together, but God is notoriously reticent in talking about the offspring. As we found out, though we were human outwardly, we were animals to the bone. It was not wise to let our bloodlines **intermingle**, not even with humans, whose shape we had taken. Becoming too human took away certain strengths and advantages we were quite eager to maintain. Of course, some species had no choice but to interbreed with humanity — there simply weren't enough cockroaches to sustain themselves — but the larger groups of animals began to keep careful track of which species had produced which family trees. A bit like a royal family, in that regard, although "families" would be more precise.

Since each family was composed of a certain species, the same outlook generally prevailed within that family. The foxes, for example, delighted in games of wit and intellect. They became the negotiators, the advisors, the deal-makers of the Lodge. The bears favored a more direct approach, and so they became

the Lodge's enforcers. The snakes preferred to lie in wait for prey to approach, and then destroy it with a single swift strike. Need I go on?

Things were formalized early on. By the time we had "discovered" the New World (of course, we knew it was there — you'd told us), there were already formal houses. I'd already worked out my current arrangement: the final resort, to be used only in those situations where nothing else would do. I had discovered, even then, that the appearance of impartiality was critical to getting one's own way, so I allowed the houses to form. I went a step further and allowed them to elect a leader, which some wag dubbed the Unspoken Name. At the time, it was a play on words. The Name was meant to be a powerless figure, and selection for the office was a sign of contempt. If you were someone each family could agree on, it was because you had no spine. Therefore, nobody would bother to talk to you. Hence, the Unspoken Name.

This is where our young hero, without even realizing it, becomes an important part of the story. A few members of the Lodge felt that I had illuminated a path on which they wished to travel as well. They saw my disdain for politics as a signpost for the future, and they formed their own house to signal that auspicious event. They called it the "Soul of the Dragon," after me (quite flattering, in its own way), and lobbied to be included in the decision-making process.

This put a few noses out of joint. The Soul was rebuffed at first, but then more subtle dynamics of power swayed the balance in their favor. The Unspoken Name, who was a bit sharper than anyone expected him to be, worked out an arrangement with me by which I would report not to the Lodge, but to him. With his personal power base somewhat more secure, he manipulated all sides into believing that a faction whose only interest was in neutrality could **hardly** be a threat to any side. This, in turn, led to a particularly far-sighted move by the Sting of the Scorpion, who arranged matters so that they, too, would report only to the Name. There were prices to pay — no member of that family can ascend to the office of the Unspoken Name — but it secured their importance for all time.

This, in turn, prompted

But this is too clinical, correct? Too much byplay and intrigue for anyone except the most dedicated fan of parliamentary procedure. Very well, I shall simplify it to this: the actions of the Soul of the Dragon had drastic, wide-reaching consequences. This was not because they were interested in their own power. They were every bit as above the fray as I was. No, the problem was that, for the first time, a house existed that was not composed of a single bloodline. It had not been too long since the houses had been formed for the sake of preserving the bloodlines, but it was already evident they were serving political purposes. Representing outlook, not bloodline.

Semantic quibbling? Most definitely not. A bloodline will only fight if its survival is threatened. An ideal will fight until all others see the world their way. In this way, the war began.

Of course, "war" is an ugly term. The houses never fought each other ... openly. It was a war of proxies, and as the New World opened up, it became the arena for these new rivalries. Suddenly, gaining a colony for a certain country was a subtle victory over another house. When two states' armies met on the field of battle, the true vanquisher and vanquished were a thousand miles away. Marriages, births, deaths — every detail became part of a shadowy, nebulous struggle that went on for lifetimes. I watched it all.

The lines between houses blurred, ever so slightly. It was a slow, gradual process, proceeding apace with the expansion of the great empires and the subjugation of the natives of distant lands. Here and there a shark with a particularly insidious turn of mind joined the Web of the Spider, or an elephant who wished to strike out onto the frontiers became a member of the Fist of the Bear. The foxes joined the Shell of the Tortoise in their quest to wipe out the last remnants of magic on the raw edges of civilization. The bloodlines were kept intact; that was rigorously enforced, of course. Nobody was willing to burn the Lodge down simply to scar an opponent. But the houses became more analogous to political parties than ancient monarchies.

Oh, yes, that was a development, too: political parties, and democracies, and, in a

very few cases, anarchies. In our fiction, France at the end of the sixteenth century certainly ranks as a cliffhanger: the forces of history, the forces of monarchy, all shattered. Surely, the Lodge must have feared this? Well, perhaps things did spiral beyond our control. But never much. Never fear the outcome of a contest when both sides are in your debt. We contained the situation, allowed events to run their course, then stepped in to advise the winner. A similar situation took place in the United States of America. As it turned out, democracy provided handy methods for removing recalcitrant leaders, but it wasn't something we were concerned about at the time. The Lodge worked well with anyone.

So the world spun in its rounds as we bickered and fought. Technology, the sorcery of machines, advanced at an exponential pace. To join the political revolutions, there was an industrial one, and the way things worked changed yet again. Magic was driven further away as the shining era of progress began. Medicine became less a sorcery and more a science; people discovered that tiny life forms — not evil demons — caused disease. (A quibble over semantics, but an important one.) This was the prime of the Lodge, the Age of Empires, and our empires (for they were ours, no matter what the history books may say) spanned the entire world in their grasp.

But then came the competition. We ruled the world, but we did not yet rule all possible worlds. In the mid-1800s, we found that the portals to the Netherworld had opened once again. Nightmare scientists from the future, eunuch sorcerers from the past, idiot monks from the present — suddenly it seemed everyone wanted a piece of our empire. But we also saw a future in which the Lodge still dominated the world, despite the changes to both, and the leader of that future Lodge, the Unspoken Name of a hundred years hence.

This is where again we must tread into the realms of good, honest fiction, which is not afraid to call a lie a lie. Although I have my private suspicions, I must confess that I do not know what happened to Kinoshita. There are different versions of the events leading to



his untimely disappearance. It is like the old fable wherein different people were asked how the samurai died, and all gave different answers. (Incidentally, they made a moving picture of that one. Very nice. Remind me to import some equipment to your tower so you can view it.) I will give several different views of how Kinoshita, who was the Unspoken Name while he lived, came to die, and allowed his name to be spoken once more. You may choose your favorite.

Perhaps Kinoshita was a leader unprepared for the challenges that beset him. Perhaps he was good at managing the internal conflicts of the Lodge, but once he was attacked by outside forces, was out of his depth. They (The Eaters of the Lotus? The Guiding Hand?) destroyed him in an underhanded midnight raid, leaving no evidence of their perfidy. The twentieth century Unspoken Name stepped in to fill the breach, saving the past to save the future.

Or how about this: Animals have a sense of territory. Once one animal invades another's territory, war is declared. This is not reasoned, it is not rationalized, it is instinct. It is in the bone. Unfortunately, Kinoshita and his counterpart were, by their very natures, in each other's territory. Perhaps one took the initiative, perhaps the other did. Either way, Kinoshita lost. The law of the jungle. Dead? Exiled? No one knows.

The most prosaic possibility is that **Kinoshita**, the noble leader of the Lodge and the Unspoken Name of **1800s**, met in private with his **twentieth-century** successor. The two of them talked of the need for strong leadership. They realized that it would be difficult for the Lodge to serve two masters, and that as long as both lived, the Lodge would be a house divided. Somehow, one was chosen to remain, and Kinoshita faked his death, vanishing into the mists of history.

That's our loose end, our opening for the sequel. (The sequel is a particularly odious **innovation** in the arts. Remember Homer? He had a great thing going with *The Odyssey*, but it was too clever to be a true sequel. Today it would be *The Iliad* *Two This Time It's Personal*.) Kinoshita may still be out there somewhere. A thing of vengeance, perhaps, dethroned, relying on his native wit and ability? Seeking to

avenge himself on his hated enemies, within the Lodge and without? All too familiar territory for some. Ah, Nemesis . . .

Despite — or because of — this change in leadership, we held the line. We survived until the portals closed once again. (Or at least, that's how I remember it. I may yet wake up tomorrow morning and find these memories every bit as fallacious as your memories of the Summer Palace of the Fire King.) We breathed a sigh of relief, polished up memories of the war that was, **and went back** to our old pastimes of plotting against one another.

Which is, of course, the cue for dramatic necessity to keep things from being boring. In true theatrical style, the threat came from a source we never expected, at a time when we finally believed ourselves safe. Namely, ourselves.

Looking back, it was only too obvious. We had insinuated ourselves with the ruling classes of virtually every nation on Earth. We had **carefully** cultivated these sovereigns to be caught up in rivalries so they would never think to look beyond each other and discover us. We had used them as our personal tools, but in the words of an author I admire, "Tools can be the subtlest of traps." We identified each nation as its ruler. We identified with them and them alone, and after six hundred years of stability, we assumed stability to be the norm. For once, we let our plotting and intrigues run their fullest course, and plunged the world into four years of vicious, bloody war.

The deaths weren't the important part. People are the easiest resource to renew; in fact, the difficulty is in getting rid of the surplus. But during the course of that war, we lost **several** vital feng shui sites in Russia. The ruling class fell and a people's revolution took over. And it wasn't one of ours.

Panic set in quickly. Suddenly, close to a quarter of the world was outside our control. We hadn't foreseen it, and the majority of the Pledged and Lodge members in those areas had been purged in the revolutions. The effects took some time to show, but within ten years, our economic machine was feeling the chi backlash.

Then another war hit, this one completely unplanned, and we wound up losing yet

more territory. Everything was falling apart. Desperation sank in as the Lodge retreated from its traditional seats of power in Europe and China to form a new power base in Japan and the United States.

I can only thank the gods (at least, those with whom I'm still on speaking terms) for the fact that the portals to the Netherworld remained closed during this time, or there would have been no hope for us. As it was, we had a chance to retrench, to begin infiltrating these new power structures with Pledged agents while using our military forces to keep things in a stalemate elsewhere. The Lodge united in adversity — once and for all, perhaps. Six years ago, we began to see true progress. Now, the world is once again united under the Lodge.

Naturally, dramatic necessity required further opposition, and the portals opened again. We were confronted with a grim realization (or, at least, the others were — I remembered it from a century and a half ago): This was the last **juncture** we would rule. The Architects of the Flesh, to use a baroque term coined by one of their scientists, ruled the future. Worse, they had resurrected magic, perverting our technologies in service of dark sorcery. The future was clear. Within fifty years, the Lodge would be gone.

The panic that set in made all previous incidents pale by comparison. The great families of the Lodge had been without true opposition for over a century; the idea of an opponent who controlled as much chi as they did, and who seemed fated to win, hit them like the ground hits a falling man. The Unspoken Name decided to use the **opportunity** to grab for more personal control of the Lodge. He spouted the philosophy of "strong leadership," opining that the Lodge would be eradicated because it was not sufficiently slavish to his whims. (I suppose that tone sounds odd coming from someone who waits for the Name's personal word before taking any action, but it's a sentiment of mine, nonetheless.)

There are a few who would disagree with him, given the opportunity. They see diversity as our greatest ally and slavish obedience to a single leader as something our future oppo-

nents have already perfected. But now is not the time to express such views.

Then there are the traitors. They feel that the only way to win is to embrace our future rulers. Begging for the opportunity to lick their boots, they've already tried to pass on sensitive information. We stop the leaks where we can, but some damage has already been done.

We are beset by enemies from without, and our leader makes things worse from within. There are those within the Lodge who are **working** to correct that, but they fear to act too quickly, lest the Lodge itself be shattered by the act of purging its disease. Kinoshita is dead now, in the past; he was one of our last great leaders, and we are the poorer both now and then without him. I fear the time has come when I must act to preserve my future ... and my past.

It is good to unburden oneself to a friend; I must find out what it is like someday. On looking back on this letter, I find myself shockingly duplicitous in some areas — but then, I know you as well as you know me, and there are **people** whom I might wish to mislead with this missive. It might be a tactic to make some believe there is discord between myself and the Name — the cheese in the trap so I can crush them when they stick out their heads. Or this might be the deception, and my words prior to it gospel truth. That's the trick of wheels within wheels. The pattern is fractal, self-repeating, and (within its narrow confines) infinite. So, I expect you to take my words for what they are. The words of an old friend who has seen a good deal of history. . . and a larger amount that is history no more.

I hope to see you again soon.

Your obedient servant,

Draco

October, 1996

Tairong was still amazed by it all. One does not typically walk through a cave into a hero's welcome – or at least does not expect to – but there she was. The world's an odd place when you discover your spiritual descendants rule over it nearly two *millenia* after you were born, especially when a long walk can take you back to the age of your birth. Tairong tried hard not to think too much about it. She enjoyed the life she had fallen into with its exotic foods, new people, and multitude of places. The world of 1994 was immense!

The 'Ascended,' a group to which Tairong now belonged, accepted her immediately and with great enthusiasm. Among the Ascended, Tairong enjoyed a unique status. She could, unlike the rest of the *Ascended*, travel to the Netherworld's bizarre caves, her own native time, or the nightmarish future without risking reversion into her animal form. The Unspoken Name – the leader of the Ascended – personally asked her (once she adjusted to the world of 1994) to handle field operations too important for Pledged humans but too risky for other Ascended to undertake.

This is why Tairong, of *all* the Ascended, was given a mansion in magic-rich Hong Kong. Not that she really knew what to do with twenty-five rooms, a balcony overlooking the island, or the heated pool. Well, she did know what to do with the pool, but the rest of it? She rattled around in it on those rare occasions when she ventured beyond the few rooms she preferred for sleeping, eating, or watching television. Restaurants, of all things in the 20th century, amused Tairong the most. She was accustomed to hunting her own food, and now she could just go to a restaurant and the men and women there would do it all for her.

This all ran through Tairong's mind as she sat in an overstuffed chair opposite a chubby transformed snake and a silent transformed mole, sipping tea. The snake, a matronly Englishwoman and Tairong's hostess, paused for a moment, as if listening to the bustling London streets. 'Am I to understand that you want regular field work? That's just not done. Oh, certainly, you have Draco and others

who do it occasionally, but we have people to do the routine jobs." Her eyes flicked to the room's sole human, but something told her Adrienne Hart was not about to pour tea for someone else. After a brief pause, she bent forward to refill Tairong's cup herself. "I know, you're from that horrid juncture where the sorcerers run rampant. Hong Kong is bad enough – how you can possibly live in that dreadful place is beyond me. I just hope for your sake you don't wake up with four legs and a tail one of these days." The snake turned her head towards their leader, looking for approval, but the Unspoken Name's face was immobile.

"I want to remain active. We have a world of our own and I don't want to lose it." Tairong stretched and looked over Bleys' shoulder at a lovely view of the Thames. "You of all of us should understand that." Bleys Fontaine, the infamous Lord of Earthquakes and one of the few Ascended who could visit her in Hong Kong, tipped his glass of scotch toward her in acknowledgement. "True enough. That's why I need your help." With perfect assurance, the blind man set his drink down on the table. "There aren't enough Pledged who can do what I need. You have heard about the future, yes? We can stop it, but first we have to know what to stop."

Tairong shrugged. "I understand it's dangerous, but I'm the right one to for this." She briefly glanced at Adrienne in an appeal for support. The Unspoken Name sat for a moment, his jaw muscles working. "You realize that you're asking me to send you – one of the few Ascended alive who can survive magical exposure – into the most perilous of the open junctures? Tairong, you're our ace in the hole." Tairong stood, baring her teeth. She snarled. "We stand on the brink of destruction, and you do nothing. We could have the keys to save ourselves. And you do nothing. I ask you to give me the support I need. The Architects' juncture has the answer!" She slammed her fist onto the table before him, knocking his coffee cup and several pens onto the floor. 'And you do nothing,' Tairong softly finished.

Adrienne quirked an eyebrow at the Name, "I think she has a point." She pulled another chair up to the table and sat, seemingly oblivious to the glare of her hostess. "We've been fighting a holding action here. We need to preemptively stop the Architects.." The Unspoken Name shrugged at the two women. "Fine, I'll authorize the resources for this operation, but I want results." He pointed at Tairong. "I want a detailed outline of your plans within the week."

A few days later, Tairong spoke again with Bleys. The blind man chuckled as she related her further arguments with their leader. "I'm surprised he bothered to bicker, usually he's too busy with other things." His expression darkened for a moment. "He wasn't around when the Monarchs ruled. None

of them were. They don't understand what it was like. So many were lost"

Tairong nodded. "I like it here. I don't want to be a tiger again."

Only two weeks after her meeting with the Unspoken Name and months of forced *inactivity*, Tairong fairly vibrated with anticipation. She instructed her team of Pledged agents to check everything for a third, and hopefully final, time. The Netherworld was just as surreal as it had been on her first visit, but the Pledged had helped her adjust quickly enough. Now all were prepared to enter the future and ferret out the reasons for the *Wheel's* collapse. Tairong thought they *carried* some heavy firepower for what amounted to a history lesson.

Tairong led her team through the Netherworld and its oddly lit tunnels. The future lay ahead.

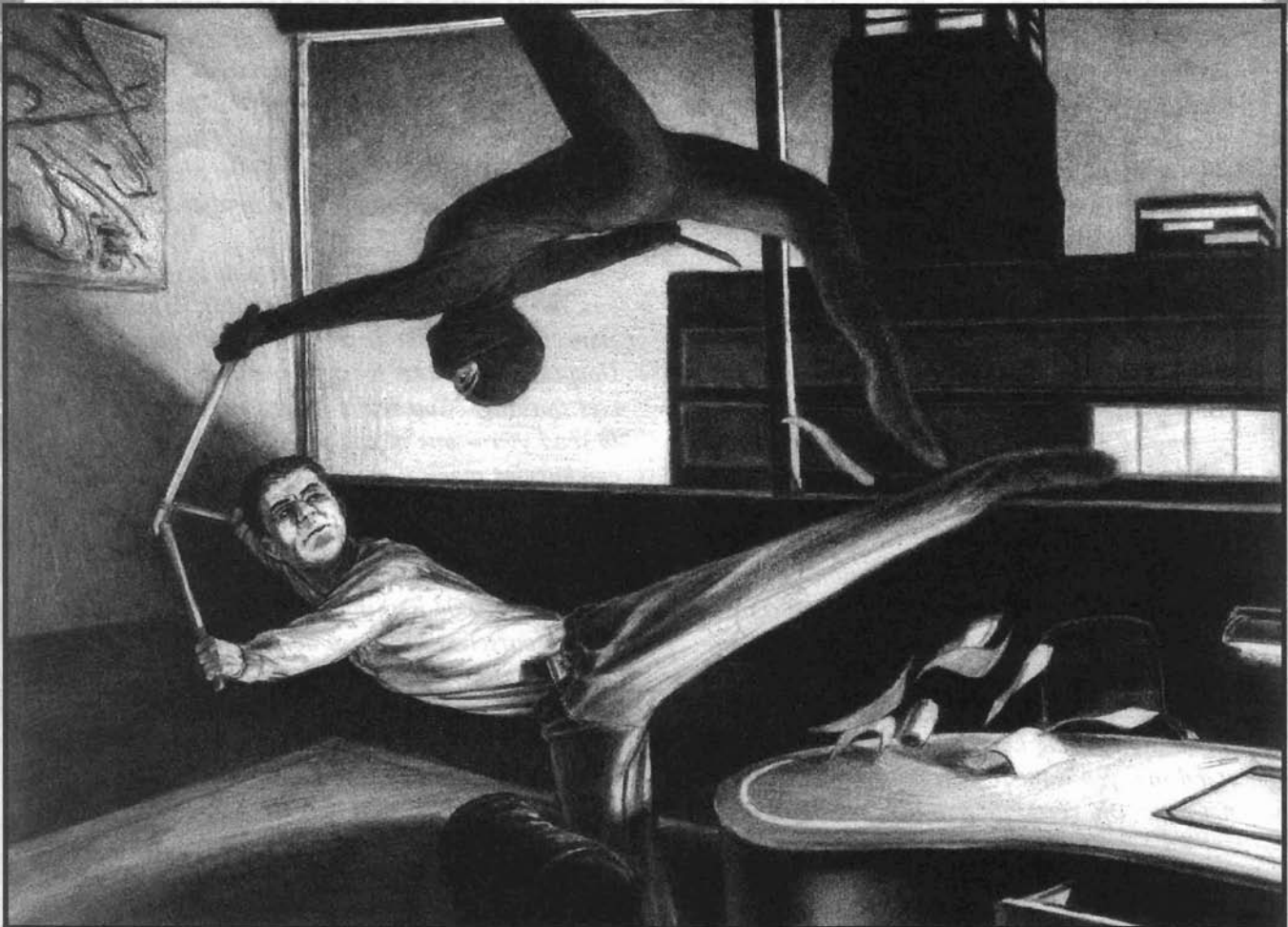


Illustration by Andrew Baker

Spokes of the Wheel

THE FAMILIES AND THE PLEDGED

Planet Earth in the contemporary era is the playground of the Ascended. Put in simple terms, they rule the world. They are the Secret Masters, the puppeteers, the faceless monarchs of all they survey. When the transformed animals of the Lodge say "Jump!" the world asks, "How high?"

Perhaps "puppeteers" is an improper metaphor, as it suggests the Ascended have been pulling humanity's strings, controlling the course of human history directly. This is simply not the case. Direct control of world events requires the flamboyant magical excesses that characterized the Four Monarchs when they ran the show. It goes without saying that such magical operations are anathema to the very existence of the transformed animals, and as such it is vital that they use more subtle methods to maintain their grip on the world.

Besides, direct control has never been necessary for the Ascended. All they've needed to do is keep humanity in the dark and maintain their feng shui sites. Humans are divisive and violent enough that it has taken little effort on the part of the Lodge to stay in the driver's seat.

The Lodge long ago realized that dominating and shaping the world around them did not have to be an active pursuit. Sometimes simply having the correct reactions sufficed. Additionally, direct control over events of

human history proved unnecessary most of the time. If they made sure the proper conditions were present, people tended to behave in the manner the Ascended preferred. Subtlety has proved far more useful to the Ascended than bald-faced tyranny. The oppressed dream of rebellion. Those who believe themselves free dream of nice ski vacations.

Of course, there have always been (and always will be) times when direct action is called for. The Unspoken Name and his minions don't shrink from conflict when it is necessary. Every Lodge member knows that if the Ascended lose the Secret War, the penalty will be far more than a sideways reincarnation into a life they never knew. If magic returns to the present day, they face destruction. They're not just fighting for control of the world; they're fighting for their very survival.

The name of this complex game is Control. The tools are information, influence, deception, power, and fear. The champions of the game, at least in the modern juncture, are the Ascended.

THE WAYS OF THE LODGE

A quick recap of the construction and workings of the Lodge is probably in order before we get to the information about the most prominent families. The Lodge is the formal organization of the Ascended, the transformed

"Typical" Ascended

Each section of this chapter that describes a Lodge family includes a set of statistics describing a "typical" member of that species of transformed animal. While no Ascended can really be said to be typical (they are walking, talking, butt-kicking animals, after all), we figured that just about every *Feng Shui* Game Moderator on the go could use some pre-made villains to toss in her group's path in a pinch. Slap a name on the stats, outfit 'em with some Pledged mook back-up, and you're ready to rock and roll.

But take care not to overuse these typical foes. No pre-generated, generic set of statistics can stand in for a carefully crafted, diabolical villain, tailor-made to give your heroes nightmares. Additionally, if you always use the typical stats, your heroes will soon know exactly what to expect. And we wouldn't want that now, would we?

Temperament is Thicker Than Blood

In the contemporary juncture, members of the same Ascended family are not necessarily — or even usually — related by ties of blood. The families of the lodge function more like clans, or tribes, or even workgroups if one wants to use a corporate model. The families are united by purpose, not by ancestry. The inherent nature and instinctual bent of each transformed animal means that each family is usually made up of animals of a similar type, but this is not a hard and fast rule. A spider with an unquenchable thirst for mayhem will find open arms in the Fist of the Bear, the Shell of the Tortoise welcomes careful planners of all bloodlines, and the Hunger of the Jackal's only requirement is a distinct lack of conscience.

animals that control the contemporary juncture. Without the Lodge to bind them together, the families would be at each others' throats

more often — and to be perfectly honest, that means they would probably all be running around on all fours by now. The Lodge has enabled the Ascended to solidify their grip on the present day, mediating and organizing them all into an effective conspiracy.

The Lodge functions much like a business, with each of the families as stock holders. A controlling council — the "board" — made up of one member of each of the different families, theoretically calls the shots. (In practice, more and more power has been going to the Unspoken Name of late.) The methods the families use to choose their representatives is up to them. Some families send their internally determined leader, some elect their representative, and other families let their leader appoint him.

Family Business

In theory, every family has the same amount of influence on the board as every other family. Each family has one vote, after all, no matter its size. In practice, six families dominate the politics of the Lodge, mostly due to the crucial roles they play in Ascended affairs. These six are the Web of the Spider, the Shell of the Tortoise, the Fist of the Bear, the Soul of the Dragon, the Hunger of the Jackal, and the Fang of the Snake. The Sting of the Scorpion could also be considered a primary player, but they stand a bit above it all, having forgone their vote on the council to serve the Unspoken Name directly.

The Lodge board convenes on a semi-annual basis, unless there's an earth-shattering crisis. The main purpose of the board is to elect the "chairman" of the Lodge board, the Unspoken Name. The Unspoken Name is charged with handling the day-to-day operations of the Lodge and coordination between the various families and their resources. The Lodge board elects a new Unspoken Name every six years, usually (but not always) from among the ranks of the board members.

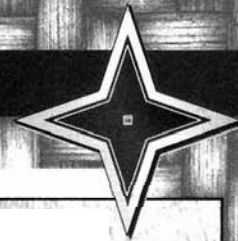
Handing this much power to one individual might sound like a recipe for political shenanigans of the worst type come election time, but this is usually not true. The Ascended know their survival hinges on cooperation, so while board members may make passionate speeches in favor of their candidates, actual electoral manipulation is almost unknown.

As long as all the families do their part to work together, the Lodge board exercises little control over how each family runs itself internally. A sense of independence and wildness seems innate in most of the Ascended, and they would balk under too rigorous an organizational structure.

Of course, the copious resources (both material and informational) granted to the office gives the Unspoken Name a great deal of de facto influence over the families — but nobody really likes to talk about that. For more information on the office of the Unspoken Name, as

well as its current occupant, check out pages

47 and 57.



THE WEB OF THE SPIDER

No family is more responsible for the grand charade **that is the modern world** than the weavers of webs of intrigue, the spinners of lies on a grand scale, **the Web of the Spider**. The specialty of the **Web is covert manipulation**. Intrigue, intelligence gathering, forgery, bribery, blackmail, and simple disn-action and **misdirection** are all hallmarks of the Web's operations. Without the efforts of the Web of the Spider, the Unspoken Name would be the head of an organization under constant siege from the teeming masses of humanity.

The job is a huge one, **and consequently the Web of the Spider is the biggest family of the Lodge**. Their influence on **the Unspoken Name** is commensurate with that size, a fact that breeds **no small amount** of resentment in the other families.

The Strands of the Web

The structure of the Web of the Spider owes much to the webs that its namesakes (and founders) spun to catch unwary insects. Each part of the Web is inextricably connected to the other parts, and yet like a spider's web, the loss of a single strand does not violate the integrity of the web as a whole. The divisions that make up the Web of the Spider — actually called Strands, by the way, the Ascended having as great a taste for metaphor as the next Secret War faction — cover the wide range of activities that fall within the purview of the Web.

The Power Behind the Power Behind the Throne

The oldest Strand, and until recently the most prominent, was the Political Operations Strand. Manipulation of social power structures has been the Ascended's stock in trade since they first infiltrated human society.

The spiders of the Political Operations Strand walk in rarefied circles indeed. Every major political power of the modern world is thoroughly infiltrated by the Lodge and their Pledged agents. Their manipulation is never so

The Web Master

While Clara Duvall may be the leader of **the Web** of the Spider, there is little doubt **about** who is the shining star of the family. **That man is a transformed spider named Walter Placer**, known to most as the Web Master.

Walter Placer was raised among the ranks of the Ascended, and gladly **stepped up** to do his **part** in the Web of the Spider. But Placer's days as an **active Web operative** were brief. An **encounter** with a **particularly powerful Lotus sorcerer** outside Los Angeles dumped Placer in 69 AD, and it **was more than three weeks** before a Pledged search team managed to find him. The time spent in the past left Placer's **genetic structure** teetering on the brink of reversion. His lodge superiors were even more dismayed when the **magical energy** didn't leave his system **once** he returned to the **contemporary** juncture. Fortunately, Placer's **comrades** were able to get him to a nearby feng shui site of **considerable power**, located in the Hollywood Hills. The pulsating chi energy of the site **kept** Placer from reverting to his **ancestral spider form**, but it **also meant** he was stuck there, **unable to leave lest** his arachnid heritage **reclaim** him.

Unable to **actively** play a **role** in lodge operations any longer, Walter Placer **applied** himself to the **Ascended cause** in the **next** best way he knew. If he **couldn't** be in the field gathering information, he **could at least** coordinate and analyze **what others** assembled.

These days the **irradiated** spider reads thirty newspapers a day, monitors radio and television, and, most **recently**, **tracks** the Internet. His quick mastery of the newest **media form** earned him his rather fitting **nickname: the Web Master**. **Cloistered** in his hilltop mansion (the feng shui site mentioned above), Placer takes in **all the facts** of world events and spits out predictions of positively unreal **prescience** and foresight. His extrapolations have stymied more than one enemy **operation** in the Secret War, and the Unspoken Name has token to tolling him almost as **often** as he calls Clara Duvall.

In his Hollywood estate, festooned with satellite dishes, antennas, and phone lines, Placer is defended by some of the best **that** the Web of the Spider have to offer, but the Web Master's position is a precarious one. He's still only a half step from reversion, and even the slightest exposure to **magic** could push him over the edge. **Sorcerers** selling girl stout tookies should expect a particularly unfriendly retribution.

The Web Master was **once a fit and muscular** fellow, but these lost few **sedentary** years have not been kind to his waistline. (He's got lines of credit with the **local pizza places**.) However, Placer still prattles his kung fu every **day**, and there is still some **muscle** under all that fat. Think of him as a more obese, **caucasian Samo Hung**. If **cornered** in his lair, **this transformed spider** isn't going down without a fight.

Sample Dialogue: "The Australian Stock Exchange fell three percent, quintuplets were born in Havana, and the Cubs **beat** the Orioles! Don't you see the **connection**, you pea-brained fool?"

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 5, Mnd 10 (Int 12), Ref 5

Skills: Martial Arts 12, Guns 10, Detective 15, Journalism 15, Info/Just About Anything 15

Transformed **Animal Schticks:** leap, Scuttle, Tingle, Web

Unique Weakness:

On the Verge: Any time Placer takes any damage at **all** from a sortery attack, he **must immediately** make a reversion thetk with **Difficulty equal** to the **Magic** attribute of the ottatking spell-tosser. If he foils, it's spider time for him!

Weapons: **punch (6)**, **kitk (7)**, ET. "Series One Laseroim" (10/8/8+1)

The Innernet

Anyone managing to get access to the Ascended Innernet would find it remarkably similar to the Internet, only without the problems. There are no busy signals, e-mails never bounce, and the software is more advanced than anything available to the public. E-mail, web-surfing (ad-free, natch), instant messaging — it's all there.

The Innernet is easily accessible by any Lodge member with a phone line and the right knowledge. Some Ascended even have their own home pages. Not surprisingly, the Innernet sports much better security than the Internet. Hacking information out of the Ascended's computer network is not a task for the faint of heart.

crude as hypnotizing the leader of the opposition party into voting the way the Ascended want, or as melodramatic as replacing a world leader with a surgically altered duplicate **deep**-programmed to kill at the mention of a trigger word. (That is to say, the manipulation is **usual**-ly not that melodramatic or crude. The Political Operations Strand has pulled off operations using both techniques, but they do try to keep such activities to a minimum.) Lodge politicians are much more likely to be found advising the world leaders rather than leading themselves. They are the unseen voices, the spin doctors, the aides de camp.

The Political Operations Strand's activities aren't limited to the "legitimate" political world. Healthy support for opposition groups, **crack**-pot organizations, and terrorists on the lunatic fringe keep the already muddled state of world affairs constantly out of balance. Even religious cults, militias, and hate groups get their share of Lodge backing.

Actual family members are typically well-hidden within bureaucracies, shell companies, political action committees, and the like. They rely on their Pledged minions to do the actual dirty work.

Lies. Damnable Lies

As mentioned, Political Operations was historically the most influential of the Strands, but that balance of power has shifted recently in the contemporary juncture. The explosion of the mass media in the last half of the twentieth century, as well as the Internet revolution, has propelled the Media Operations Strand, or MOS, to the forefront. Television, radio,

and the World Wide Web all offer such great channels for anesthetizing humanity that the growth of the MOS was almost inevitable.

The first responsibility of Media Operations is to monitor the world media, which they do to a massive degree. There are buildings full of men and women collecting, collating, and analyzing facts from all over the world every day, giving the Ascended an accurate and frighteningly complete picture of what is going on everywhere, all the time. Computers analyze the information, isolating trouble spots and allowing the Ascended to react to all manner of threats (human or otherwise) quickly.

The Ascended don't rely solely on computers to sift their intelligence. Close as they are to their animal heritage, they value instinct and intuition highly, and retain many transformed animal analysts as well. The best of these, and an invaluable resource to the Ascended, is a transformed spider known as the Web Master (see the insert on page 23).

Along with gathering media information comes the Web of the Spider's other great responsibility: the disbursement of **disin**formation. When facts that the Lodge would rather deny make their way through Media Operations' media filters, they move quickly to discredit witnesses, destroy evidence, and make those getting close to the truth look like fools. Sometimes more extreme measures are **neces**sary, and while the Web of the Spider is quite capable of eliminating threats themselves, the usually leave such things to the experts in the Fang of the Snake (see page 43).

Media Operations' duties have gotten a bit more **complex** since the **Netherworld** gates reopened. As well as keeping the existence of the Wheel a secret, they must also keep the true facts about the Secret War under wraps. Keeping their own activities quiet is a piece of cake in comparison, as all of the Ascended cooperate to keep up appearances. Most of the other factions of the Secret War — especially the Jammers — don't give a transformed rat's ass about disrupting the public in the modern juncture. Thus, to Media Operations falls the unenviable task of explaining to the public that the cackling man in ancient Chinese



clothing throwing green fire at the talking gorilla-cyborg with the rocket launcher was "just a publicity stunt." Fortunately, Media Operations is nothing if not creative: see "Shining Dragon Productions" on page 112, for example.

The Cyber-Revolution

The Internet revolution is what's happening in the contemporary juncture, and none of it — e-commerce, day trading, online chat, easy transfer of huge data files — came as a surprise to the Ascended. They've had a private, Ascended-only version — the InInternet — since the '70s. In one of the rare instances of direct Lodge interference in human society on a large scale, the Web of the Spider deliberately retarded the growth of the computer culture until they were sure they had mastered it themselves, fostering disputes about system architecture, hardware standards, and operating systems. In the late '80s the Web finally took off the brakes and let the Internet truly start to develop.

It's a move they've come to regret at times. Even with their head start, the rapid growth of information technology still caught the transformed animals a bit flat-footed, and they've begun to suspect they may have taken the lid off a Pandora's box. The rapidly accelerating rate of information exchange is making the task of knowing where best to apply the influence of the Lodge that much more complex.

There is Nothing Quite as Wonderful as Money

Even Secret Masters need money — at least if said Secret Masters want to remain behind the scenes. It takes cold hard cash to buy the politicians, suppress the evidence, and keep the people of the world complacent and ignorant. Bread and circuses ain't free. Plus, someone has to pay for all those damn guns!

This job falls to the Financial Operations Strand of the Web of the Spider. The operatives of the FOS oversee a network of Pledged accountants, lawyers, stockbrokers, televangelists, criminals, and grifters, all of whom channel at least a portion of their revenue into the coffers of the Lodge. An "accounting error" here, a misdirected religious donation there — it

Typical Named Web Agent

Sample Dialogue: "I'm sorry. I'm not authorized to tell you why I have to kill you."

Attributes: Bod 4 (Mov 6), Chi 5, Mnd 5, Ref 5 (Spd 8, Agl 8)

Skills: Martial Arts 12, Guns 10, Deceit 12, Driving 10, Intrusion 14

Transformed Animal Schticks: Leap x2, Scuttle, Tingle, Web x2

Weapons: punch (5), kick (6), Kahr K9 (10/1/7+1)

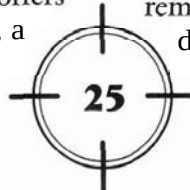
all adds up quickly when you have a worldwide network of operations.

The real money makers are the stockbrokers. More than a few "Wall Street Wonders" bear the Seal of the Wheel. With the great wealth of information available to the Web, it's only natural that they generate most of the monetary revenue for the Lodge. Insider trading allows huge gains on the stock market, and bribed and Pledged government officials make sure no one is the wiser. The process became even easier when the Media Operations Strand constructed the InInternet: the Ascended have had day trading for more than two decades.

Unfortunately for the agents of the Financial Operations Strand, they just don't get any god-damn respect. Since their intricate money manipulations keep them away from the trenches, the Money Spiders are seen as officious do-nothings, whiling away their days in pointless bean-counting instead of maintaining the illusion along with the rest of the Ascended. Even their own family regard the work of the "arachnerds" as the most boring imaginable. Nonetheless, while they may just be accountants, it's worth remembering that they are Ascended accountants, capable of kicking mucho ass as well as accruing mucho dinero.

Queen of the Web

Holding together a family as large and complex as the Web of the Spider takes a person of rare perception and mental flexibility. Clara Duvall is such a person. Seated firmly at the center of the Web of the Spider, she ensures all the Strands work together in a symphony of deception. When the Web of the Spider does what it is supposed to, the hand of the Ascended remains totally unseen and the other families don't have to do a thing. From her exclu-





sive hair salon in Hollywood, Clara Duvall weaves the Strands of the Web into a shroud over the eyes of the common man. See page 60 for more information on the world's most powerful hairdresser.

Plans

Here are the details on just a few specific operations of the Web of the Spider.

The Great Conspiracy Conspiracy

Misdirection is one of the keys to the Web of the Spider's strategy. Early Web tacticians realized that even the best cover-up couldn't hide every trace of Wheel activity. What was needed was a way to defuse or co-opt the most suspicious. So the Web of the Spider fosters any conspiracy theory but the truth. Those searching for the real Secret Masters of the World quickly find themselves awash in a sea of cranks and crackpots, each with his

own beliefs about "what's really going on, man!" Even if anyone did find out the truth, no one would believe it. Would you? Whether it's Rosicrucians, Atlanteans, the Illuminati, the Elders of Zion, aliens from another planet, or black helicopters and secret United Nations occupation forces, the Web of the Spider **makes sure there is just enough evidence** of "the horrible truth" to keep the really passionate (and therefore dangerously curious) searchers on the wrong path.

As a component of this project, the Web of the Spider has set up a cooperative operation with the Hunger of the Jackal. Ever heard of those mysterious guys in dark suits who show up to threaten witnesses, tamper with evidence, and suppress the truth about strange events! See page 42 for more information on the Men in Black and their role in the plans of the Ascended.

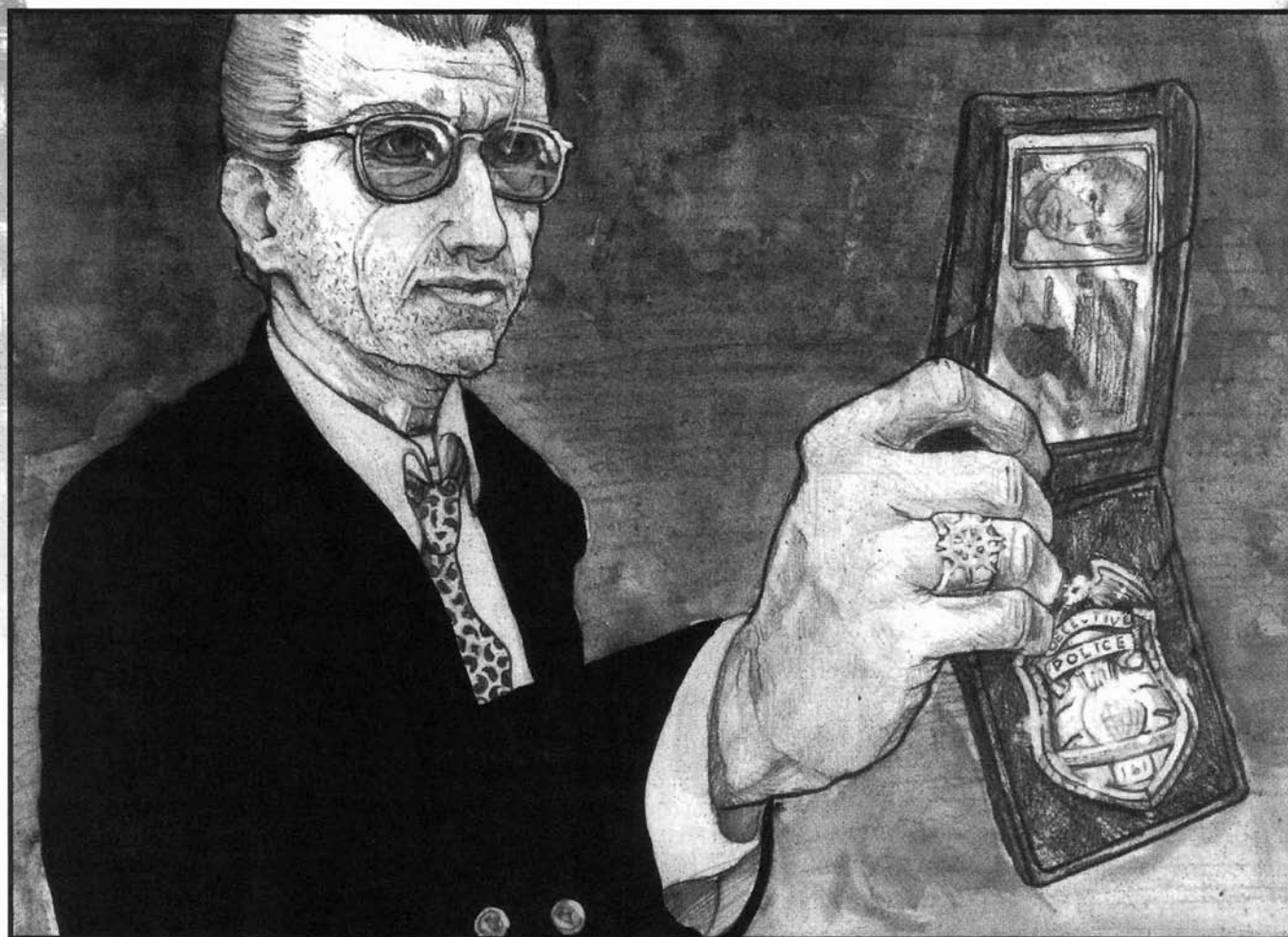


Illustration by Thomas Manning



The only thing that bothers the Spiders are the abductions, cattle mutilations, and Bigfoot sightings they aren't behind ...

The Revolution Will Not Be Webcast

The upside of finally allowing the evolution of the Internet has been considerable for the Ascended, but it has not been without its drawbacks. While easier access to information and speedier communications has brought great benefit, the Internet has turned out to be a bit more difficult to control than the Web would really like to acknowledge. Not only has the accelerating rate of information exchange made sifting for intelligence that much more complex, hackers and information freedom advocates pose a threat to the Web of the Spider's information hegemony.

Then there are the Architects of the Flesh. When the Web finally loosened its grip on information technology, they had no idea they would soon be facing an enemy far more tech-savvy than they. By the time Buro agents started popping through Netherworld gates it was a bit late to put the genie back in the bottle.

The Shell of the Turtle, which is responsible for the Lodge's defense planning, has reacted with quite a bit of alarm to all this, and has virtually accused the Web of the Spider of deadly negligence in handing the humans and the Lodge's Innerwalking enemies a powerful weapon indeed. Their reports were persuasive enough that Clara Duvall has set in motion plans to bring the Internet to heel by consolidating ownership of the Internet's infrastructure and resources in the hands of a few (Ascendedcontrolled) companies.

The Web and the Secret War

Of all of the families of the Lodge, the Web of the Spider probably plays the least direct role in the Secret War. The whole apparatus of the Web is geared towards keeping the proverbial wool pulled over humanity's eyes, not laying the smackdown on people. Web

Sharpened Shells

One of the biggest problems the Ascended face in defending the contemporary juncture is that they are limited in their ability to take the fight to their enemies. Any modern Ascended entering the Netherworld, let alone actually traveling to the other, more magic-rich, junctures, is cruising for a big ol' case of reversion. For the most part, the Lodge's Netherworld activities are delegated to their Pledged minions. To be sure, individual Ascended agents do undertake the dangerous trip into the Netherworld, but large, organized groups of transformed animals are almost unheard of there.

There is one exception to this. The Shell of the Tortoise is the one family of the Lodge with any sort of organized presence beyond the gates: the Sharpened Shells. Charged with the crazy task of operating in the Netherworld on a fairly permanent basis, the Sharpened Shells are **organized** only in the **barest** sense of the word. Most of them are thrill-seeking young turks who would be swiftly booted out of the Shell of the Tortoise **entirely** if they tried to operate in the contemporary juncture. Only the fact that they are **all unfailingly** loyal to the lodge — **despite giving** their elders the metaphorical middle finger at every chance they get — has kept them in the family. Sharpened Shells are technically part of the Inner Shell.

The Sharpened Shells have given the Shell of the Tortoise the best overall grasp of the way things work in the Netherworld of any Lodge family, which has led concretely to the creation of the Mundane Chambers (see p. 74).

For further details on the Sharpened Shells, see Elevator to the Netherworld, p. 54.

operatives (whether Pledged or Ascended) are puppeteers, not pugilists.

The one opposing faction the Web of the Spider does target with special fervor is the Architects of the Flesh. The very existence of the Architects means that at **some point** to come (at least, at some point to come in the Architect time line), the Web of the Spider will be out-manipulated. That fact drives Clara Duvall nuts, and she spends considerable time **worrying** about making the mistake that allows the Buro to take control of the world.

While it may seem strange that the largest family of the Lodge plays such a small role in the actual fighting of the Secret War, consider this: the operations of the Web of the Spider keep two junctures firmly in the hands of the Ascended. They ensure that the Unspoken Name **doesn't** have to worry about upstart humans challenging his control of the world, which leaves him free to concentrate on wiping out futuristic fascists, crazed sorcerous eunuchs, talking terrorist gorillas, and irritatingly **righteous** monks instead. In a very real way, the Web of the Spider is the backbone of the

Ascended — which is pretty ironic when you consider that spiders are invertebrates.

THE SHELL OF THE TORTOISE

Secrecy has always been the best defense for the Ascended. One successful misinformation campaign is worth a thousand weapons. But there are times when secrecy isn't enough, and the incursion of enemies from other junctures who are far too familiar with the Lodge and its machinations has made things worse. Fortunately for the Lodge, there is the Shell of the Tortoise.

When the Lodge first formed, the protective skills of the transformed tortoises made them the obvious choice for handling the Ascended's defense. When the misdirection of the Web of the Spider fails to hide Ascended activities from the prying eyes of their enemies, the Shell of the Tortoise stands as the barrier that lies behind the veil of secrecy. Each member of the Shell is sworn to lay down his life for the safety of the Lodge. If the Ascended ever do lose their grip over the contemporary juncture, it will be over the shattered remnants of the Shell of the Tortoise.

Behind the Shell

The Shell of the Tortoise is organized along simple lines into two broad divisions: the Inner Shell and the Outer Shell.

The Inner Shell

The Inner Shell of the Tortoise is the defense think tank of the Lodge. Their specialty is considering any and every possible threat the Lodge might face, and assessing the actual danger level of each. If the potential hazard to the

is great enough, they either make plans for the Outer Shell to deal with the problem or work with the other families to neutralize the threat. Inner Shell tortoises tend to be cerebral, more given to brainstorming than free firing. Tortoise analysts offer one of the best resources the Unspoken Name has for interpreting the vast array of information gathered by the Web of the Spider.

Another vital area of the Inner Shell's expertise is geomancy. It's vital that the Ascended have accurate information about the world's major feng shui sites to maintain their control. Without the benefit of those sites, the luck of the Ascended would quickly change, loosening or even destroying their grip on the junctures they control. Inner Shell geomancers rove the globe checking chi levels and watching for emerging sites. These geomancers usually operate as government surveyors or environmental scientists, and the Inner Shell has managed to whip up a set of geomagnetic survey tools that look remarkably modern. (It's hard to fool people into thinking you're a real surveyor if you're constantly waving a dowsing rod or poking through chicken entrails.)

The Inner Shell geomancers also keep their eyes peeled for those who would try to corrupt the chi of the Ascended's feng shui sites, and are quite adept at "poisoning" feng shui sites held by others. The Jammers' method of neutralizing feng shui sites is effective (Blow things up! Blow things up! Blow things up!), but Inner Shell geomancers who put their minds to it are fully capable of rendering sites just as useless — with the added advantage that they are able to reverse their mojo later.

Since the gates to the Netherworld opened in the contemporary juncture, the Inner Shell's job has grown at least a million times more complicated. While they used to only have to account for the machinations of humans who had somehow learned of their world wide hegemony and the occasional rogue sorcerer, the Shell's problems are of a much nastier nature now. If only they could close those confounded gates ...

The Outer Shell

While the Inner Shell researches and plans the defensive strategies and facilities, implementing those plans falls to the rest of the family. Some

say that while the Inner Shell makes up the mind of the Tortoise, the Outer Shell is its body.

Outer Shell agents' duties cover a wide range of activities. First, the Outer Shell handles the logistics of the defensive plans hatched by the Inner Shell. Whether it's constructing a secret installation or arranging for a few badly



placed war memorials to mess up an opponent's chi reservoir, the Outer Shell makes it happen.

Second, Outer Shell agents organize and head the security departments at Lodge installations, even going so far as to regularly travel into the Netherworld. The Ascended maintain a major base there, the Hub (see Elevator to the Netherworld, p. 53-61), and a very special group of Outer Shell agents, the Sharpened Shells (see the insert, p.27) are attached to the place. Members of the Outer Shell also act as bodyguards to the Inner Shell geomancers and thinkers.

The Outer Shell's most esoteric duty is rooting out and neutralizing magic in the modern juncture. A special task force wades through regular intelligence reports from the Web of the Spider, on the lookout for strange events that might be linked to magical activity. Outer Shell agents (and their Pledged flunkies) investigate such events and, should there be any actual sorcery involved, take steps; big, thudding, dangerous steps. Tortoise agents within the world's religious communities also work to discredit and vilify the practice of any sort of magic.

Finally, the Outer Shell keeps an eye on the archaeological scene worldwide. Should ancient artifacts of magical power show up among mundane pottery shards, the Lodge wants to know about it. Pledged operatives within world governments often make sure such "treasures of national history" are safely secured in Lodge installations, often going as far as to replace originals with clever forgeries.

Two Minds, One Shell

There is often a bit of friction between the two divisions of the Shell of the Tortoise. The much smaller Inner Shell wields most of the political power in the family, and the Tortoise representative to the Lodge board is almost always an Inner Shell member. This irritates the Thousand Hells out of many Outer Shellers, who resent the fact that a small group of "do-nothing **chi-dowers**" calls the shots for all of them. The fact that the leader of the Shell is a geomancer (and thus also aligned with the Inner Shell) doesn't help things very much.

But the Shell's sworn oath to defend the Lodge to their last breath takes precedence over internal squabbling. Behind closed doors the Inner and Outer Shell may yell epithets at each other, but their mission always comes first and foremost. Their sacred pledge also makes the Shell of the Tortoise one of the most incorruptible of the Lodge families. With the exception of the Soul of the Dragon, the Shell holds the bond between Ascended higher than any other. Tortoises that do betray the Lodge can expect no mercy should they meet their brethren again.

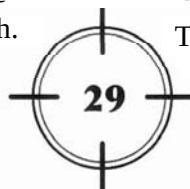
Tortoise in Charge

The leader of the Shell of the Tortoise is a crusty old transformed tortoise named Li Feng Shang – but everyone calls him Sonny. To the world at large, Sonny Shang is the owner and proprietor of the Thousand Lotus Paradise, the best known Chinese restaurant in New York City. As well as being an accomplished chef (the Thousand Lotus has gotten a consistent four star rating from every critic in town for as long as anyone can remember), Sonny Shang also hosts his own cooking program on public television, "The **Wokky** World of Sonny Shang." When he's not running his New York eatery, Sonny ranges throughout the world filming segments for his cooking show and adapting the most esoteric cuisine of foreign countries to the Asian palate. He's a minor TV star, is certainly one of the most prominent members of New York City's Asian community, and may be the most accomplished geomancer living in the contemporary juncture.

Shang looks about 75 years old, with a wiry frame, clean-shaven face and short-cropped white hair. Shang is always accompanied by at least five named Outer Shell agents ("my cooking assistants"). The blood of the tortoise is strong in him, and he looks pretty good considering he's actually around 130. The wily old chef doesn't rely solely on his bodyguards for protection. He moves like a man a third of his apparent age.

Plans

The Shell's main purpose may be defensive, but that doesn't mean they sit around on





Li Feng "Sonny" Shang

Sample Dialogue: "The chi flow here is very strong. Thomas! Alert the Fist of the Bear! And dice those peppers!"

Attributes: Bod 4 (Con 8, Tgh 8, Mov 3), Chi 10, Mnd 7 (Int 9), Ref 4

Skills: Martial Arts 17, Deceit 12, Info/Chinese Cuisine 16, Info/Geomancy 20

Transformed Animal Schticks: Shell x3, Rebuke x2, Reflect x2, Wise Fist x3

Weapons: punch (5), kick (6)

Typical Named Inner Shell Tortoise

Sample Dialogue: "The thi flow here is very strong. We must posses it."

Attributes: Bod 4 ((on 8, Tgh 8, Mov 3), Chi 6, Mnd 6 (Int 8), Ref 3

Skills: Martial Arts 14, Info/Geomancy 14, Info/Strategic Planning 14

Transformed Animal Schticks: Wise Fist x2, Shell x2

Weapons: punch (5), kick (6)

Typical Named Outer Shell Tortoise

Sample Dialogue: "What was that, a tickle? C'mon, hit me again — this time, with feeling!"

Attributes: Bod 5 ((on 9, Tgh 9, Mov 4), (hi 5, Mnd 5 (Int 7), Ref 4

Skills: Guns 14, Martial Arts 12, Info/Tactics 12, Driving 10

Transformed Animal Schticks: Shell x2, Rebuke, Reflect

Weapons: punch (6), kitk (7), Glock 18 (10/1/17+1)

their armored behinds and let the rest of the Lodge do all the scheming. Here are a few of the plans the Shell has in the works.

Blowing Out Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a major thorn in the side of the Ascended. The whacked-out chi flows that ripple around the place have the extremely irritating side effect of jacking the ambient magic level up past the comfort zone of most Ascended. Even though the Lodge controls the vast majority of the city's feng shui sites though their Pledged proxies, the magic tide surging around Hong Kong has refused to ebb.

While they were fully in control of the contemporary juncture, the Unspoken Name was content to leave this little pocket of sorcerous radioactivity alone, but the Secret War has recently changed all that. Hong Kong has become a rallying point for many of the Ascended's most implacable enemies

(meaning every other faction). The Name has had enough. He has charged the Inner Shell of the Tortoise with a Herculean task: fix Hong Kong's chi.

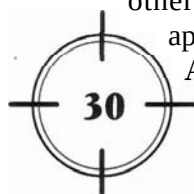
The Inner Shell has just recently started the massive surveying task that is the prerequisite to carrying out the Unspoken Name's orders. Even Sonny Shang, who is heading up Operation Jericho, isn't sure how long the deed will take. But he is positive he can do it. His Tortoise geomancers are fanning out across a hundred mile radius surrounding Hong Kong, and depending on what they find, Hong Kong may not be a safe haven from the Ascended for much longer.

The Extinction Agenda

The fanatical dedication of the Shell of the Tortoise has a dark underside — one as black as the heart of the most evil Lotus sorcerer. Operating within the Shell of the Tortoise is a secret cabal of human-hating racists who have hatched a plan to ensure that if they can't have the world, no one else is going to have it either. They call themselves the "True Ascended," the only ones who "fully realize" they are the next step in evolution and that humans are doomed to biological inferiority. Humans are a genetic dead end to them, and a world without the Ascended is too horrible to contemplate.

This small cadre of fanatics (with members in both the Inner and Outer Shells) has been working with a similarly small group of Fist of the Bear military operatives (as well as scattered members from other families) to secretly gain control of as many nuclear and biological "assets" as possible. Their plan, which they call the Extinction Agenda, consists of linking all of these extremely deadly resources together with a network of eight special satellites scheduled to be launched early next year. Once the system is up and running the True Ascended will have the means to pull the plug on life on Earth, should the Lodge's defeat seem imminent.

The Unspoken Name has no idea this human-hating splinter group exists, much less what it is trying to accomplish. He — and most other sane members of the Lodge — would be appalled to find out about the Extinction Agenda. There is little doubt the True





Ascendeds' life spans will be measurable in days if their plan is ever discovered. Of course, if they have to go, they might just decide to take everyone else with them ...

Relations In The Secret War

The Shell of the Tortoise generally sees a lot more action than the Web of the Spider. They're much more involved with the care of the Lodge's feng shui sites, and their role in the defense of major Lodge installations has brought them up against all the players in the Secret War.

The Jammers are definitely first on the death list. The Architects of the Flesh come next, as Bonengel and Boatman's domination of the future means that the Shell will fail its duty sometime in the future. They can't abide that. Third comes the Lotus. The Shell of the Tortoise like cackling lunatics to begin with, and magical cackling lunatics are even worse.

Operation Kildeer seems to have mopped up what little threat the Dragons posed to the Lodge, so the Tortoises don't spare too many thoughts for them. Finally, the Shell actually reserves a little grudging respect for the Guiding Hand. They're disciplined, they respect the chi flows, and their kung fu is very strong. But as noble as they may be, they will still find no chink in the Tortoises' shell.

THE FIST OF THE BEAR

Sometimes deceptions fail, waiting is inappropriate, and hiding is untenable. Sometimes you must strike out at your opponents. Smash your enemies. Drive them before you, scatter them, crush them utterly under your righteous fist. When the secret masters of the Ascended are done futzing around with subtle plans and need some good old-fashioned violence done, they call in the Fist of the Bear.

Inside the Cave

The Fist of the Bear does one thing very well: mayhem. They tend to leave other activities

to the other families. "They think, we act," is a popular Bear mantra. Sometimes the Fist chafes under the "spineless plotting and sneaking" that characterizes so much of the Lodge's operations. They would much rather face their enemies on an open field of battle, striking them down in honorable combat, than destroy them through subterfuge. But the bears are not stupid. Much as they might wish otherwise, they realize there is a time to strike and a time to abide. But they relish the times when they are unleashed to do what they do best.

The Fist of the Bear has significant contacts in military and paramilitary organizations world-

wide. Fist operatives use the fraternities of warfare as fertile recruiting grounds for Pledged dupes, as well as training zones for their own agents.

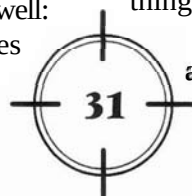
In general, the Fist of the Bear is organized along military lines, a strange combination of kung-fu school and army brigade. Higher-ups are encouraged to treat their subordinates not merely as soldiers, but as students. The arts of war are passed from commander to commanded in this manner, constantly strengthening the whole family. Of course, along with this comes harsh discipline for disobedience.

Who's The Man?

The process for determining the leader of the Fist of the Bear differs considerably from the methods other families use. Rather than hold an election, the Fist of the Bear stages a tournament, or kumite, to determine who is fit to rule. This procedure is only used for determining the family's overall leader, mind you. Any Bear challenging his superior's right to command is likely to end up on the crappy end of one hell of a beating if he's lucky — and have an audience with the Soul of the Dragon if he is not.

But not just any brawny bruiser can rise to the leadership of the Fist. Any contender for leadership of the family must pass a grueling set of exams which test the candidate's knowledge of strategy, tactics, and the ways of warfare, both modern and ancient. This ensures the leader of the family has enough brains to keep things on an even keel.

Candidates passing the exams are pitted against each other in a single elimination



Natraj Thalnasser

Sample Dialogue: "Whether they be human, abomination, or sorcerer, all shall fall before the might of the Lodge."

Attributes: Bod 10, Chi 8 (For 4), Mnd 6 (Will 10), Ref 6

Skills: Martial Arts 19, Guns 17, Driving 12, Intimidation 16, Info/Military Strategy & Tactics 17

Transformed Animal Schticks: Bellow x3, Fortitude, Slap, Rage

Weapons: punch (11), kick (12), Desert Eagle .50 Magnum (12/3/9+1), AK-47

Typical Named Fist Agent

Sample Dialogue: "Your kung fu is very good — by human standards."

Attributes: Bod 9, Chi 5, Mnd 5 (Wil 9), Ref 5

Skills: Martial Arts 14, Guns 14, Intimidation 12, Info/Military Strategy & Tactics 12

Transformed Animal Schticks: Bellow, Rage, Slap

Weapons: punch (10), kick (11), H&K MP5 (10/5/30)

tournament, each round of which boils down to a knock down, drag out fight. The Fist of the Bear **kumite** makes the Ultimate Fighting **championship** look like a tea party. There is only one rule: The only weapon a contender may bring is his own body. Matches last until one combatant submits, or until the referee declares one **opponent** too injured to continue. Killing is not **permitted** in these matches. Ascended blood is too valuable to be wasted in a struggle for dominance.

The **location** of the **kumite** **moves** from **continent** to **continent** on a rotating basis. The last one was held in Beijing in 1990. The next one, scheduled for Prague, is coming up in early 1997.

Although some outsiders within the Lodge find the Fist of the Bear's **dog-eat-dog** hierarchy distasteful, no one has done anything about it, for two reasons. First, it is doubtful that even the Unspoken Name could put an end to it. Second, by tradition, each family is left to run its own internal affairs, as long as they don't interfere with the larger goals of the Ascended. Any **outsider** who attempted to meddle with the Fist's internal affairs would be setting a precedent that might curtail each family's rights.

He's The Man!

The current leader of the Fist of the Bear is Natraj Thalnasser, a transformed bear from

the disputed Kashmir territory, located on the border between India and Pakistan. Natraj was raised in the care of the Lodge, but was nevertheless surrounded by violence as a child. Even as a tiny cub, he liked what he saw. He wasn't fascinated by the atrocities or by the death and destruction. It was the conflict that enthralled him. The tactics, the back and forth, the struggle for a cause is what made his heart soar.

Thalnasser is a career officer in the Indian Army, a shining star of that nation's military force. He holds the rank of colonel there, but, of course, wields far more power than that by dint of his position at the head of the Fist. The burly bear coordinates the worldwide actions of the Fist, and has been known to take part in operations himself when they fall in his part of the world.

Thalnasser looks like a man who should be leading the Fist, standing 6' 6" tall, with a massive frame and a bulk that belies the speed he can muster in combat. He is usually cool as a cucumber — until he's pushed just that little bit too far. Few who have provoked Thalnasser's fury have survived the experience.

Plans

The Fist of the Bear isn't too big on plans. They **prefer** to find the **enemy**, **attack** the enemy, and destroy the enemy. However, they do have a few irons in the fire. They are Ascended, after all.

Storming the Gates

The magic-rich nature of the other junctures is a constant irritant to the Fist of the Bear. In their opinion, the most efficient way to destroy the opposition would be direct invasion of the other junctures — especially 2056. However, they realize that, at least for now, they have to rely on their Pledged agents to carry out most of their operations in the other times. The danger of reversion in the Netherworld, 69, and 2056 is just too great.

The low magic of 1850 has led the Fist to **concentrate** their invasion planning on that **juncture**. Natraj Thalnasser has been sketching out an outright assault of 1850 for some time. He **envision**s a small army of Pledged operatives (and perhaps a few suicidal Ascended willing to



4 brave the Netherworld) taking control of key feng shui sites, effectively extending Ascended hegemony farther back into the past – and hopefully further securing the future.

Kung Fu for the Masses

The Fist of the Bear has taken an odd approach to recruiting for the Pledged since the Secret War began. Demand for Pledged operatives is higher than ever, and the ranks of the military aren't filling the need. The Fist has decided that if people interested in fighting won't come to the Fist, the Fist will go to them. The result of this are the Zodiac Academies. These kung fu schools have proved to be great recruiting grounds for Pledged mooks, as planned. Teach folks a few cool martial arts tricks, initiate 'em into a secret society, throw in some Eastern mysticism and the occasional mild hallucinogen, and it's amazing how they'll do your bidding. If some of the students turn out to be worthy of more than cannon-fodder status, that's the icing on the cake. For more information on the Zodiac Academies, see page 70.

The Fires of War

The Ascended have always found war one of the most efficient ways of distracting humanity from suspecting they are less than the total masters of their destiny. Times of great conflict have always been great opportunities for inserting Pledged operatives into high places, destroying Lodge adversaries, and the like. Citizens in a rain of bombs in a city being sacked and put to the torch tend not to notice a few extra missing people, documents, or computer disks. Not surprisingly, the Fist of the Bear boasts a certain expertise working in war zones.

Only recently has the First dared to actually provoke conflicts around the world. When the portals to the Netherworld yawned wide and invaders from other times began showing up, the Unspoken Name was faced with a mounting conflict that was getting harder and harder to hide. While the Web of the Spider does all it can to ensure the Ascended remain hidden from the humans, the Name also charged the Fist of the Bear with keeping things "interesting" in terms of worldwide conflict. To say that



It's Good to Be King

It's pretty obvious that, as they rule the world and all, life for the Ascended is pretty sweet. How sweet? Here are a few specific privileges your average Lodge member has.

- Total immunity from human legal systems worldwide. Whatever the situation, if an Ascended is in trouble, you can bet something will be done to get him out of it. The solution could be legal string-pulling or an elaborate and convincing faked death.
- Material resources — housing, clothes, cars, health care, and so on — that constitute a baseline life of luxury. True decadence at the "solid gold urinal" level typically requires extra effort.
- Access to the Internet (see page 241, with all the usefulness that entails).
- Access to absolutely ludicrous luxury items, such as cancer-free cigars (\$1,000 a pop, bucko), cars that run on water instead of gasoline, and fully holographic video games.
- Access to the very best equipment available — and a hell of a lot that's not available.
- The allure and power that comes with being one of the world's elite, which usually manifests in the Ascended being surrounded by attractive members of whatever sex he prefers. (Remember though — it's okay to fool around with the hairless apes, but don't breed.)
- The ability to walk around wearing a smug smile, secure in the knowledge that noone around you has a clue about what's really going on.

The bottom line is that your average Lodge member is pretty much at peace with what he is and what he's got. They're the monarchs of the world, and are willing to do whatever they must to maintain that.

the Fist conjures war from whole cloth is not quite accurate. As in everything else, the Ascended try to take as little a direct hand in events as possible. The Fist merely fans the flames of strife that are already present.

Happily, war zones make excellent training grounds for Fist of the Bear operatives and Pledged working directly for the Fist. What better place to learn the art of war than with real ammunition and live targets?

The Fist and the Secret War

The Fist of the Bear stands on the front lines of the Secret War, and is called into direct combat with the enemy more frequently than any other Ascended family. And that's just fine with them. Their trademark overconfidence often makes the Bears chafe at the intricate planning of the other families. If you were to

ask the Fist, the way to win the Secret War is simple: Crush all who oppose the Ascended in a series of massive lightning strikes.

The Fist relishes battling the Thorns of the Lotus more than any other of the Secret War factions. Destroying dishonorable opponents in an honorable fashion is a great feeling. The bones and arcanowave devices of the Architects of the Flesh also snap most delightfully under the pounding of the Fist. The Jammers are regarded as unruly children. The Dragons and the Guiding Hand are seen as the most worthy and honorable opponents. Many agents of the Fist were disturbed by the underhandedness of Operation Killdeer, and while they understand the tactical use of eliminating the Dragons, the honest opposition is missed by the Bears.

THE SOUL OF THE DRAGON

Animals fight. A lot. You can't gather a big bunch of transformed animals of different species, all with different attitudes, techniques, and outlooks on life and not expect to have a few disputes. And fights. And turf wars. The Soul of the Dragon keeps the different families from tearing into each other. They're a little bit U.S. Supreme Court ... and a little bit Spanish Inquisition.

Strength in Diversity

It might seem strange that there are few transformed dragons active in the family that bears their name. Considering the rarity of transformed dragons altogether, however, this is a bit less surprising. Actually, no one is born into the Soul of the Dragon. Rather, new members are appointed by the Lodge board. Standards for appointment to the Soul are strict. A potential member must possess an encyclopedic knowledge of Lodge history and legal precedent as well as demonstrate proven ability as a mediator. In an average year one new magistrate may be added to the Soul's ranks, but it is not uncommon for years to pass in which no new appointments are made. Unsurprisingly, the Soul of the Dragon is one of the smallest



of the Ascended families, numbering about thirty magistrates in all.

Lawyer, Judge & Jury

The Soul of the Dragon is responsible for mediating all internal disputes in the Lodge. Whenever two Ascended (or groups of Ascended) are unable to resolve some argument, they may call upon a Dragon magistrate for adjudication. Most magistrates attempt to mediate the situation. If the two parties can't or won't arrive at a compromise, however, Dragon magistrates can issue binding rulings on how the dispute will be resolved. Everyone goes along with magistrate rulings — even the Unspoken Name.

If an Ascended feels so wronged by another transformed animal that nothing but blood can settle the dispute, he may petition a magistrate to issue a "blood rite." If a magistrate can be convinced of the necessity, this gives the pair of Ascended in question specific permission to kill one another, for the duration of one month. If one rite participant kills the other, problem solved. If both are still alive at the end of the rite, the magistrate issues a binding judgment. Blood rites have been called out between entire families in times past, but it is unlikely the Soul would sanction that today. The Secret War has made the Lodge's situation too unstable to allow internal discord on that scale.

The most feared punishment a magistrate can levy is final judgment — the death sentence. Only a very few crimes warrant this punishment: murder of an Ascended, attempting to reveal the truth about the Lodge to the world at large, and dilution of Ascended blood by mating with a human. All who are found guilty of these crimes are stripped of their Lodge privileges and given a 24-hour head start, at which point their names are turned over to Draco (see page 36). Although he is rarely seen to lift a finger, final judgement is always carried out within three days.

The Soul of the Dragon also plays the role of a Lodge Internal Affairs division, ever vigilant for infiltrators and spies within the families. Soul magistrates have open access to all Lodge

"Ape Shall Not Kill Ape!"

Killing is no laughing matter among the Ascended. They aren't precisely numerous, and the loss of even one of their number is a weighty matter. That's why the penalty for Ascended-on-Ascended murder is so severe; they cannot afford to let those who would take the liver of other Lodge members live. The Unspoken Name is an exception. He can issue a sanction order on anyone. The Sting of the Scorpion can also take Ascended life without permission, as long as they are working in the cause of the Name.

Killing mundane humans is a much less weighty matter as far as the Lodge is concerned, though this should not be interpreted as cold-blooded indifference. It simply means that, like many groups, the Ascended put more value on the lives of their own people than of others.

Typical Named Dragon Magistrate

There is no typical Dragon magistrate, so no statistics for one are provided here. Members hail from all different families of the Lodge, the only requirement for membership being age and wisdom — or political connections.

If you want to toss your heroes up against a magistrate, keep a few things in mind.

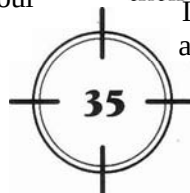
- Magistrates are smart. Even being appointed to the Soul by political manipulation takes acumen.
- Magistrates are never alone. Each is always attended by enough bodyguards (both Lodge and Pledged) to give even the most powerful threat a run for its money.
- Dragon magistrates tend to be older, but you don't get grow old in the Lodge by sitting on your keister. Almost all magistrates are formidable (if a bit arthritic) combat opponents.

facilities at all times, everywhere. Not even the Unspoken Name can forbid them access.

The Custodians of Memory

In addition to their judicial responsibilities, the Soul of the Dragon also serves as the memory of the Lodge, preserving the secret history of the Ascended and ensuring that future generations will know of the glory — and failings — of their forefathers. In service of this agenda, the Soul's histories are remarkably unbiased, even though one might expect them to show the Lodge through rose-tinted lenses. The Lodge's mistakes and cruelties are listed right along with their successes.

In order that their histories are accurate, all appointees to the Soul of the Dragon must





undergo one rather harrowing ordeal when they join the family. They have to go to the Netherworld to ensure they will remain unaffected by superficial and critical shifts. This is less useful than it could be, though. Sure, the magistrates remember what the world used to

be like, but each time reality shifts out from under everyone's feet it creates a whole world of different memories. The soul have learned to heave a heavy sigh, shelve their old histories, and work out what's changed.

Headless Dragon

No magis the Dragon. That responsibility has fallen to Draco, who leads the family more by default than by any acceptance of his position. In part, Draco avoids the work as much as possible. He has d y operati he I his own way rather than be tied down to some tedious administrative post. Apparently, he

Draco's Secret

Those who are given the Lodge's most extreme sanction are not actually visited by Droto. Rather, final judgement is doled out by Draco's children. This may be one of the best-kept secrets in the Lodge.

Drato is the proud father of fraternal triplets: two boys, Liu and No, and one girl, Shi. Their mother was a human woman, a lover taken by Draco at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although he now tells himself it was a moment of extreme weakness, the dragon had not loved like that before, and has not since. She died soon after giving birth to the couple's children. Draco has never spoken of her — let alone how she died — to anyone.

Draco placed the children in separate orphanages at opposite ends of the world, and they were raised among humans with no knowledge of their special nature. When the three reached maturity in the early '50s, Draco visited each of them individually, revealed himself as their father, endowed them with comfortable wealth, and fed them a big fat load of horse manure about how they come from a clan of sentient demon hunters who are destined to stalk evil across the globe. He trained each of them, teaching them "the secrets of kung-fu." What Drato really taught them were the transformed animal powers of the respective species that suited their characters best. None of the three are aware that the others exist. Each believes he or she is the single chosen Child of the Dragon.

In the modern day, Draco's children live lives of comfortable but not ostentatious luxury, broken only by occasional calls from their father to destroy whatever "demons" are stalking the world near them. They know nothing about the Lodge and their father is careful to keep them well away from bona fide Lodge activities. Droto is also careful to lie low himself when any of the three are active in order to preserve the illusion that he is carrying out the Lodge's final sanctions personally. Condemned Ascended die quickly and mysteriously, and Droto sits on his staled butt and seems even more dangerous than he actually is.

Even Droco himself is not sure why he's kept his three children secret from the lodge and each other for all these years. He tells himself he's done it to keep them free from the manipulations and machinations of the Lodge, but he also dreads the consequences if it were found out that he had bred with a human. While he could probably talk (or fight) his way out of final judgement, he doesn't want to take that chance. He might simply be a self-centered son-of-a-bitch who likes having secrets from everyone else. Regardless, he cannot bring himself to tell the truth to his brethren in the Lodge, or to his children themselves.

Anyone who killed one of Draco's children — which would be no simple feat — would be well served to invest in some graveyard property. The old transformed dragon may not be the best father in the world, but to avenge the death of his offspring he would let nothing stand in his way.

Liu, Shi, and No are all striking specimens of humanity and appear to be in their thirties, even though the three are really more than sixty years old. Liu is a bulky slab of a man who was raised in the heart of rural China. Shi is lithe and slim, and grew up in a small town in England. No, raised in southern California, falls in the middle ground. All three trust their father completely and follow his orders without question — at least they have so far.

Liu, Shi, and No

Sample Dialogue: "Yes father. The demon shall be destroyed."

Attributes: Bod 9, Chi 9 (For 10), Mnd 9, Ref 9

Skills: Martial Arts 18, Guns 14, Deceit 14, Intrusion 14, Intimidation 14

Unique Shticks:

Magic Resistance: Draco's children are half human, which makes them resistant to reversion. They acquire reversion points at the rate of one per month rather than one per day.

Liu's Transformed Animal Shticks:

Bear: Bellow, Fortitude, Slap, Rage

Elephant: Armor, Herd, Trample, Trumpet

Tortoise: Rebuke, Reflect, Shell, Wise Fist

Shi's Transformed Animal Shticks:

Crab: Impervious, Pincer, Stuttle, Shell

Scorpion: Dance, Sting, Surprise, Stuttle

Spider: Leap, Scuttle, Tingle, Web

No's Transformed Animal Shticks:

Bat: Echolocation, Tracking Stent, Gliding, Eviscerating Site (see Golden Comeback)

Fox: Borrow, Embezzle, Mockery, Swindle

Tiger: Bite, Mork Prey, Pounce, Surprise

Weapons: punch (10), kitk (11), Mossberg Special Purpose (13/5/9), paired Sig Sauer P-220s (10/2/9+1), Uzi (10/4/40)



couldn't care less about the Lodge's internal justice or communal history.

As mentioned, however, Draco does have some involvement with the Soul — he carries out final judgement, when that sentence is handed down. In fact, it's downright spooky how quickly, quietly, and completely such jobs are done. Even the Unspoken Name hasn't figured out quite how the wily transformed dragon accomplished the execution of three *rogue* transformed sharks on three different continents, all within twenty-four hours of each other. Ask him about his service to the Soul and Draco just smiles quietly and says nothing.

Plans

The Soul of the Dragon is too busy keeping the Lodge families working together to have time for any crazy schemes. They maintain the balance and weed out corruption wherever they find it. That's enough for twice the number of magistrates the family sports.

The Soul and the Secret War

The Soul of the Dragon has little direct contact with the raging Secret War, and its members are kept shielded from it as much as possible. The Unspoken Name knows the function they fulfill is absolutely vital and it is in the interest of the entire Lodge to insulate them from harm. Without the Soul of the Dragon, the Ascended could very well turn upon each other, tearing the whole Lodge apart from the inside.

THE STING OF THE SCORPION

When an Unspoken Name takes the seat of power among the Ascended, he enters a world of intrigue and danger an order of magnitude greater than he has experienced before. All families seek to influence and manipulate the Unspoken Name, not (necessarily) to increase their own power and influence, but usually to ensure their pet methods are used to dispose of the transdimensional interlopers

Shantalle Devereaux, the Unseen Hand

Sample Dialogue: "Try not to bleed on me, darling. This dress is a Paris original."

Attributes: Bod 6 (Mov 9), Chi 7, Mnd 6 (Cha 9), Ref 11

Skills: Martial Arts 16, Guns 16, Deceit 14, Intrusion 12, Sabotage 12, Seduction 17, Info/Fashion 16

Transformed Animal Schticks: Dance x5, Sting, Scuttle, Surprise

Weapons: punch (7), kick, (8), Beretta Model 21 Bobcat (8/1/8+1)

Typical Sting of the Scorpion

Sample Dialogue: (silence)

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

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

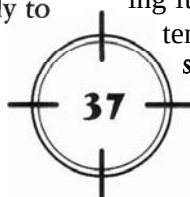
Transformed Animal Schticks: Dance, Sting, Surprise, Scuttle

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), any other necessary in the course of an assignment

that threaten the Lodge. The disparate voices can be maddening: the Web of the Spider calls for more information on the foe, the Shell of the Tortoise advocates a powerful defense as the best offense, the Fist of the Bear urges a direct assault on the enemy, and the Hunger of the Jackal snickers quietly and sits in the corner playing with knives. The Unspoken Name plays a dangerous game every day of his tenure. And yet there is one bulwark, one pillar of security that every Unspoken Name can access: the Sting of the Scorpion.

A Private Army

The Scorpions are the personal emissaries and servants of the Unspoken Name. They are his eyes, ears, and venomous sting. They carry out his will unquestioningly and are the only family permitted to take the lives of the Ascended without sanction, as long as it is in the course of their work for the Unspoken Name. They are, in essence, the Unspoken Name's personal army of assassins. This is not quite the recipe for personal tyranny that it sounds, as members of the Sting are unswervingly loyal to the office of the Unspoken Name, not the person occupying it. For the duration of an Unspoken Name's tenure, the Sting are his to command exclusively. As soon as the Unspoken Name steps





down from the post, however, he is no longer of any special interest to them.

The Sting of the Scorpion is the second smallest of the major families, numbering close to fifty. Unlike the other animal clans, they have no vote on the Ascended council, although their advice is often sought and their close relationship to the office of the Unspoken Name gives them some measure of influence.

The Sting of the Scorpion is definitely the most insular of the families. Only transformed scorpions are allowed in its ranks. If a member ever elects to leave the ranks of the family, he may never rejoin. This is the price of the family's incorruptibility and dedication to the Name. It also contributes to their reputation among the rest of the Lodge as simple pawns of the Name.

Danger is Their Business

The Sting of the Scorpion are the most highly trained and versatile operatives in the Lodge.

The Fang of the Snake may be better at killing, the Web of the Spider may be better at deceit, and the Shell of the Turtle may be better at protecting people, but the Sting of the Scorpion are good enough at all of those things that it's more than a little frightening.

Members of the family are trained from an early age in the skills necessary to accomplish whatever task the Unspoken Name sets for them. With very few exceptions, all Scorpions are physically attractive; some naturally, some through cosmetic surgery. All are capable of adopting a bewildering array of disguises as well. Some family members have been especially effective in infiltrating the other factions in the Secret War.

The Unseen Hand

The head of the Sting of the Scorpion is always known as the Unseen Hand, a name adopted in the late 1800s as a melodramatic counterpoint to the Unspoken Name moniker. Unlike the leaders of the other families, who are most commonly chosen by internal methods, the leader of the Sting of the Scorpion is chosen by an outsider: the Unspoken Name. Upon his election, each Unspoken Name chooses

an Unseen Hand from among the Sting of the Scorpion. For the duration of that Unspoken Name's tenure, his chosen Unseen Hand leads the family. At the termination of the Unspoken Name's term, the Unseen Hand must step down, and can never serve as the leader of the Sting again. Many former Unseen Hands choose to follow the Unspoken Name that chose them, serving as secret bodyguards or agents for the rest of their lives.

The methods by which a particular Unseen Hand runs the Sting of the Scorpion are completely discretionary. Typically, all the Unspoken Name wants to know is that when he gives an order, it will be carried out. After all, he has better things to do than worry about the details of each assassination he orders.

The current Unseen Hand is Shantalle Devereaux, an internationally famous supermodel. Few would suspect the woman whose face once graced the covers of *Elle*, *Allure*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Life* — all in the same month — of being one of the deadliest assassins in the world.

Shantalle Devereaux

Even in a world awash in media images, most people would recognize the face of Shantalle Devereaux. As a supermodel, she was one of the gorgeous creatures making designer clothing look great and screwing up the self-image of millions of women worldwide.

That all changed a few years ago. In a move that shocked the fashion world, Shantalle retired at the tender age of twenty-three, tearfully citing a need to "get in touch with the real me." An unavoidable media presence just a few years ago, the lithe brunette now apparently leads the life of a reclusive. Only her manager and bodyguard Armand and the staff of her estate in Lisbon see her lovely form and face with

Shantalle hasn't completely dropped off the face of the earth, however. Her quest for identity seems to take her to all the corners of the world. She's been spotted by resourceful paparazzi mountain climbing in the Himalayas, jet-skiing in Australia, jogging through Central Park in New York City, and even



taking in the night life of Hong Kong. The world's most recognizable face has seemingly become the ultimate dilettante.

Far from being a simple dilettante, Devereaux is a transformed scorpion and thus a deadly assassin and devoted servant of the Unspoken Name. She once used her supermodel career as a convenient cover for worldwide operations in his service. That ended when she was selected as the Unseen Hand. The role simply left no time for her to maintain her elaborate cover, even though she now travels as much if not more than before.

Like all Scorpions, Shantalle is thoroughly trained in disguise, deception, and death. One might think of her high-profile public persona as an obstacle to accomplishing secret missions for the Unspoken Name. To the contrary, however, the ravishing beauty has found that her fame allows her access to the rich and powerful — who frequently figure prominently in missions given her by the Name. Besides that, Shantalle has mastered the art of disguise to a rare degree. When she doesn't want to be recognized, few normal people are able to do so. This Unseen Hand can walk into the bathroom a supermodel and walk out a disheveled bag lady a few moments later.

Plans

In the world of the Secret War, nothing is done **without reason**. You can be sure that if someone offers undying devotion, they have an agenda of some sort. Everyone lies. Everyone has secrets.

Except the Sting of the Scorpion. It's a surprising fact that the Scorpions actually serve the Unspoken Name with complete devotion. There is no guile behind their service, no secret plan, no hidden agenda. They are what they are. They have pledged themselves to the service of the office of the Unspoken Name, and they consider the fulfillment of that duty a sacred trust. If they weren't such cold-blooded, merciless killers, they would almost be admirable.

The plans of the Sting of the Scorpion are the plans of the Unspoken Name. Full stop.

The Sting in the Secret War

The Sting of the Scorpion's small size keeps them from being as potent a force in the Secret War as they could be. They are a scalpel, not a sword. Furthermore, as one of the Unspoken Name's most potent resources, they are used carefully and with due deliberation.

The Sting of the Scorpion has no special enemies in the Secret War; they are above such petty concerns.

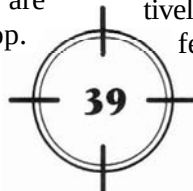
THE HUNGER OF THE JACKAL

The secret control of the world is not always an especially savory business. While the Lodge does its best to take the moral high road (or at least, to avoid the lowest road), it's inevitable that nasty things have to be done on occasion. We're not talking garden variety **slayings** here: we're talking blackmail, torture, psychological terrorization, **brainwashing** — stuff that makes the coldest, most clinical Snake blink.

Nasty tasks call for nasty people. While the Rat and Cockroach families may get the bum rap in terms of prestige, there is no doubt that the lowest, nastiest, most underhanded minds in the Lodge are in the Hunger of the Jackal. Some of their Ascended brethren have even suggested (in private) that the Jackals took human form for one reason and one reason **only**: you can't stab someone in the back without opposable thumbs. Between the clinical intelligence-gathering of the Web of the Spider and the martial smackdown of the Fist of the Bear lies the operational territory of the Hunger of the Jackal.

Fear and Intimidation

The heart of the Hunger's operational **methodology** is based in understanding how the human (and Ascended) mind works. That **doesn't** mean they want to talk to and empathize with people. It means they desire a full understanding of the psyche so they can most **effectively** exploit its weaknesses and prey upon its fears.



When you get right down to it, the Jackals just like messing with peoples' heads. If you can make an opponent wet his pants before you pop a cap in his ass, well, that's all to the good as far as the Jackals can see. To this end, the family has conducted a wide range of secret and twisted psychological experiments on people. (UFO abductions? Yes, among other things.) They have pushed, prodded, beaten, crushed, shaped, distilled, conditioned, and otherwise studied the human mind in ways that would make the cruelest sadist green with envy. The Jackals have an intimate understanding of what makes the human mind work — and an equally intimate understanding of how to break and reshape it.

The practical results? Being captured by — or turned over to — the Hunger of the Jackal is a singularly unappealing prospect, for starters. Prisoners are interrogated in a wide variety of unpleasant ways, many involving psychoactive

drugs and the application of electricity to various parts of the body. Sensory deprivation, implanted false memories, sleep deprivation, truth serum, even outright physical torture: whatever it takes to get information from an enemy, the Jackals are willing to do. They have an impressive record of broken wills and shattered minds to their credit.

One current product of the Jackal's experiments is the Sleeper Program. See page 42 for more information.

A Life of Crime

As they exemplify the worst aspects of the Ascended, it's only fitting that one of the main roles the Jackals play is catering to the worst urges of humans. Much like the Romans provided bread and circuses to their subjects to keep them happy and complacent, the Hunger of the Jackal provides drugs and vice to the world at large. Keep the peoples' veins filled with chole-



Illustration by Toren Atkinson



terol, alcohol, narcotics, and carcinogens and they're a lot more tractable. Keep their main thought centers located below their waists and they're a lot more predictable.

The Hunger of the Jackal is extensively involved in the drug trade. They encourage the use of drugs, the easy availability of drugs, and the creation of new drugs. The Jackals are fans of the "completely synthetic with really nasty side-effects" school of drug chemistry; highly intoxicating, highly addictive, highly useful for keeping the masses sedated.

The Hunger is, naturally, heavily involved in organized crime as well. Hunger agents have influence in the Mafia, the Triads and Tongs of Southeast Asia, biker gangs like the Hell's Angels, and even street gangs in South Central Los Angeles. Mind you, they don't control all this nastiness. They just encourage it, and occasionally steer the criminal element into unknowingly promoting the Lodge's cause.

Their unsavory contacts make the Jackals the ones to talk to when it comes to acquiring ... forbidden things. You say you need a heart for a transplant and you don't care where it comes from? Or you need a little of the latest kiddie porn to plant in a cabinet official's entertainment center? Or you need the wife of a certain pop star sold into slavery in some third world country? Call the Jackals.

The Hunger is also heavily involved in entertainment media, though their involvement is rarely legitimate or savory. In the last few decades, the Hunger has been making inroads into more mainstream movie and TV production, pushing the boundaries of what is considered proper and acceptable. These media activities of the Hunger have forged limited ties between them and the Web of the Spider (see "We are the Men in Black" on page 42 for more details). Don't think these links don't keep Clara Duvall up some nights.

The Leader of the Pack

The leader of the Hunger of the Jackal, who is typically referred to as the Jaw, maintains control only as long as the support of the rest of the family is behind him. As long as the family endeavors are successful, no prob-

"Fat Tony" Camponelli, the Jaw of the Jackal

Sample Dialogue: "I'm sure you and I can come to some sort of mutually beneficial arrangement."

Attributes: Bod 5 (Con 8, Mov 7), Chi 5, Mnd 9 (Wil 8), Ref 9

Skills: Martial Arts 14, Guns 16, Info/The Criminal Underworld 18, Intimidation 16

Schticks: Backbite, Pack Attack, Scavenge, Scurry, Worry

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), AMT Automag IV (11/3/7+1)

Typical Named Jackal Agent

Sample Dialogue: "Watch your back." [sinister giggling]

Attributes: Bod 5 (Mov 7), Chi 5, Mnd 5 (Wil 4), Ref 9

Skills: Martial Arts 9, Guns 14, Info/The Criminal Underworld 12, Intimidation

Schticks: Worry, Scurry, Backbite, Pack Attack

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), Beretta Model 21 Bobcat (8/1/8+1)

Men In Black

Sample Dialogue: "You sow nothing. You heard nothing. We were never here."

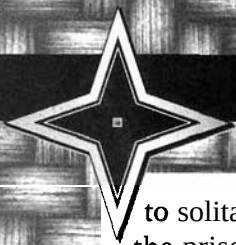
Attributes: Bod 7, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 5

Skills: Martial Arts 12, Guns 12, Deceit 11, Driving 13, Info/Big Lies about the Lodge 10, Intimidation 14

Weapons: punch (8), kick (9), H&K MP5 Police (11/3/30)

lem. Everyone does as they are told. When the worm turns, the Jackals are quick to turn on their leader. Repeated failure and misfortune usually result in some young turk taking the initiative to remove the failed leader. The new Jaw takes his place by right of "natural selection." Of course, he only holds power as long as his plans bear fruit for the family...

The current Jaw of the Jackal is Antonio "Fat Tony" Camponelli, the boss of the Camponelli crime family. Fat Tony, a transformed Jackal himself, removed his predecessor ten years ago, making him the twentieth century's longest reigning Jaw. Why? Well, aside from the fact that Fat Tony is a quick thinker and a meticulous planner, he's also paranoid — a healthy state of mind for a Jackal. Fat Tony is currently doing fifteen to twenty-five in the New York state prison for assault and conspiracy, but that hasn't really cramped his style. He comes and goes as he pleases, being "sent



to solitary" whenever he needs to get out of the prison for a while. It's easy to pull off when the entire prison staff — guards, doctors, even the warden — are members of the Order of the Wheel.

In the spirit of ironic nicknames, Fat Tony is anything but fat. He's whipcord lean, a small man with slicked black hair and a sinister glint in his eye. He's given to fits of laughter at extremely inappropriate moments. His shuffling gait and dull stare conceal both the keen intellect and lithe dangerousness of the man.

Plans

Do you suppose the Hunger of the Jackal has a few nefarious schemes in the works? Good guess! Here's the lowdown on three of them.

We are the Men in Black

One of the most restrained Jackal operations is the long-running Men in Black project. Started back in the 1940's, the Men in Black were set up in collusion with the Web of the Spider as a massive misinformation tool. While the project usually would have fallen fully under the umbrella of the Web, the methodology that the Men in Black project used was distasteful to the Web. By contrast, the Jackals jumped in with both feet.

Whenever the Web of the Spider thinks someone is getting a little too close to the truth about the Ascended stranglehold on the contemporary juncture, they call on the Hunger of the Jackal and their Men in Black. These strange men (and yes, they are always men) show up in dark suits driving big American cars, threaten victims with an array of unpleasant consequences if they "continue prying into things they shouldn't," destroy evidence, and generally act in a bizarre manner to throw their victims even further off the scent. The **MiBs** disappear as suddenly as they appeared.

Actually, the Men in Black don't restrict their visits to folks getting close to the truth. Just to keep things even more confused, the **MiBs** often terrorize harmless cranks who are nowhere near discovering the Lodge's operations. The purpose of the visits is not to actually stop anyone perceived as a threat

to the Lodge. If a person were actually viewed as a threat, the Fang of the Snake would be dispatched to take care of him. The **MiBs** are simply meant to further confuse anyone poking around in the dark corners of society.

The **MiBs** are Pledged operatives of the highest order, and are actually pretty tough in a **toe-to-toe** fight. For the record, they don't know anything about what's really going on in the world either. The **MiBs** are fed a cock and bull story about the Lodge being made up of Secret Ascended Masters from inside the earth ... which they claim is hollow ... and inhabited by Atlanteans ... from space ...

Sleepers

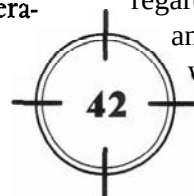
An army of totally obedient slaves has been many a despot's dream for centuries. While the Lodge categorically does not have any "zombie slaves" (*that's* a Lotus schtick, thank you very much), the Hunger of the Jackal has developed something a few steps in that direction. Through years of psychological study, Hunger behavioral scientists have distilled a process that allows a quick and easy — although limited — mind control.

These "psychologists" have gotten this process down to a pretty precise science. All it takes is a couple hours of undivided attention and the right-drugs to place the correct mental **blocks** and pre-programmed responses in place.

Faster than you can say "Manchurian Candidate" you have one **pre-programmed** sleeper, ready for activation at any moment by simply uttering a code phase.

Later programming and instruction can be done in Wheel-controlled hospitals, dentist's offices, tanning salons — anywhere a person isn't going to miss a few minutes. This isn't heavy-duty **brainwashing**, mind you. The Hunger can do that too, but the process time is measured in days and weeks, not minutes.

Of course, sleepers tend not to be very formidable in a fight. Simple sleeper conditioning won't turn a green-grocer into a trained killer. However, sleepers follow simple orders with no regard for their own personal safety, and answer any and all questions asked of them by those who activate them.





Deactivating a sleeper simply requires uttering the activation phrase again. The sleeper is left with no memory of the activation. Post-hypnotic suggestions can also be planted during the activation. Deprogramming a sleeper is very difficult; the Jackals are very good at what they do.

All in all, sleepers are viewed more as strategic assets than serious offensive or defensive tools. Still, it could be a bit disconcerting to be pursuing a Jackal operative through a crowded mall (for instance) and suddenly find innocent bystanders throwing themselves in your way after nothing but a whispered word from the Jackal.

The Jackals don't go around placing sleeper agents **willy nilly**, of course. Sleeper conditioning tends to happen most in areas the Ascended consider valuable — like near major feng shui sites or Netherworld gates. It's always useful to have some able bodies nearby in a pinch. The locations of these sleeper assets and their activation phrases are issued by the Jackals on a "need-to-know" basis. Lodge members operating in highly volatile areas can usually find out about the local sleeper situation pretty easily through the Innernet.

It would never occur to us to suggest that one of the heroes of your campaign might have been subjected to Jackal sleeper training (or heavier brainwashing) at some time in the past. After all, then he could be turned against his comrades in a melodramatic fashion at a strategic point in your story, and we wouldn't want that, now would we? If we were going to suggest doing this, we'd probably also mention that it would be best to reward a player going along with this rather handsomely at the end of the session.

The Big Sell Out

It should come as little surprise that certain elements within the Hunger of the Jackal have concluded things are not ultimately going to go so well for the Ascended. These Jackals have seen what they consider the writing on the wall. It says: "THE BURRO," in really, really big letters. **These Jackals believe the Architects of the Flesh** are going to win the Secret War, and win big.

This group is a small one, but its members are well placed within the Hunger hierarchy. As of late, they have been making some

rather shady contacts, approaching the Architects of the Flesh with offers to trade information. The Jackal agents haven't revealed themselves as part of the Ascended yet. They want to build up a bit of goodwill first.

If the Jaw of the Jackal knew what this little cabal of reprobates is up to, he'd have their heads on silver platters in about five seconds — but not for the obvious reason that they're betraying the Lodge. No, the Jaw is more scared that if word ever got out, the entire clan would probably be horse meat. The Soul of the Dragon has never pronounced final judgment on a whole family before, but for the crime of betraying the entire Lodge to the Architects, the **Jackals** could be the first ones to suffer that fate.

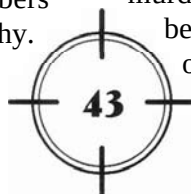
The Jackals in the Secret War

Most outsiders don't know much about the Hunger of the Jackal. They tend to keep a low profile, the better to sneak up on their enemies.

The Jackals are largely indifferent to the varying factions of the Secret War, with two important exceptions. First, the Jackals hate hate the Guiding Hand. The moral righteousness and self control the Hand teaches is in direct opposition to everything the Jackals stand for. Hunger agents often go far out of their way to cause problems for Guiding Hand operations. Second, there are the Architects of the Flesh, about whom you can read more above. The link between the Hunger and the Architects is tenuous right now, but as it grows like a cancerous tumor, it may eat away at the Ascended from the inside out.

THE FANG OF THE SNAKE

The Fist of the Bear takes care of direct police and military action. The Sting of the Scorpion or Soul of the Dragon takes care of the removal of dissident elements within the ranks of the Lodge. But for garden-variety infiltration and murder, the unexpected strike of a snake is the best prospect. The Fang of the Snake would object to anything they do being referred





to as "garden variety," of course; they are masters of their art. In addition, the study of the best ways to transition a person from "alive" to "dead" has given the Fang of the Snake an extensive grasp of the way the human body works. The Fang has put this knowledge to both noble and unsavory use.

In the Coils of the Snake

The twentieth century has brought a great deal of change for the Fang of the Snake.

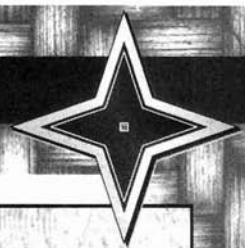
Historically, the Fang's job was assassination: the quick, quiet, and efficient removal of those opposed to the plans of the Lodge. While Fang assassins are still regarded as the most deadly killers in the Lodge (except for the Sting of the Scorpion — maybe), exploration in medical science has given the Fang some specialized talents beyond just killing people — although they remain very good at that.

The brutal, cold nature of their job tends to make the members of this family brutal, cold people. They even creep out other Ascended, who you'd think would be used to that kind of thing by now. Even the blood of Jackals and Sharks runs cold when they are fixed with a Fang's piercing gaze, and few are willing to stand in a Snake's way when he is on a mission.

The Proper Way to Kill

The primary business of the Fang of the Snake is swift, detached, scientifically precise death. Sanction orders can be handed over to the Fang from a number of sources, but each other family usually maintains a consistent liaison with the Fang, just so everything goes through the proper channels. A sanction against a member of the Pledged must be handed down by one of the family's leaders or their immediate staff. Sanctions are usually carried out within seventy-two hours. Snake assassins tend to work alone.

The Fang of the Snake categorically does not kill Lodge members, even rogue ones. That is left to either the Soul of the Dragon or the Sting of the Scorpion. The Fang's genetic studies (more on that below) make them uniquely sensitive to the value of every Ascended life. With the gene pool as limited as it already is,



the Fang of the Snake has declined to reduce it further.

One constant source of consternation to other Ascended is the Snakes' liberal use of the Shed Skin animal power. Most snake assassins who have mastered this power shed at least once a year, and many do so more often. A few shed after every single kill. While there are sound tactical reasons for this activity, it frustrates many already jumpy Ascended when the Fang assassins who meet them at their rendezvous points look nothing like they did the last time they worked together.

Medical Studies

To better accomplish its job, the Fang of the Snake has made an extensive study of the human body and all the ways in which it functions. Snake medical knowledge has always been far more advanced than that of humanity at large. The Ascended knew about infections and the roots of disease and the functions of poisons while human beings were still leeching each other. There is a reason the caduceus — the symbol of physicians throughout the Western world — is entwined by two serpents.

The Fang's intense scrutiny of what makes the human body tick — and how to make it stop ticking — has given the family a great deal of specialized information about genetics, a field in which the Lodge is already far more advanced than the rest of the world. This has led to the development of an entire medically oriented division of the family.

Fang medicos aren't "make you feel better" doctors, however. They are just as cold and clinical about their jobs as their assassin counterparts. Rather, they're "experimental procedure and unnecessary surgery" types. However, the Fang has always kept a tight reign on its researches, avoiding morally shaky areas like the development of tailored viruses and bio-warfare agents. The Ascended's primal connection to the world has made them averse to taking chances by unleashing malevolent biological entities into the contemporary juncture.

Recently, the Fang of the Snake has devoted considerable resources to stemming the spread of AIDS and finding a cure for it.

Dr. Adeleke Ayidaga

Sample Dialogue: "Life and death lie so close together. To know one fully, you must embrace its opposite."

Attributes: Bod 5, (hi 8, Mnd 1 (Int 9, Cha 9), Ref 7

Skills: Martial Arts 14, Guns 14, Deceit 10, Intrusion 14, Medicine 18, Info/A Million Ways to Kill 18, Info/Chinese Traditional Medicine 16, Info/Genetic Engineering 16

Stchicks: Coil, Shed Skin, Strike, Warning x4

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), American Derringer Mini-Cop (11/1/4)

Typical Named Fang of the Snake

Sample Dialogue: "One shot. One kill."

Attributes: Bod 6, Chi 5, Mnd 5 (Int 1, Cha 7), Ref 8

Skills: Martial Arts 10, Guns 16, Deceit 12, Fix-it 10, Intrusion 14, Info/A Million Ways to Kill 14

Sthticks: Coil, Shed Skin, Strike, Warning

Weapons: punch (7), kick (8), Barrett M90 (13**/7/1), H&K P7 (10/2/8+1)

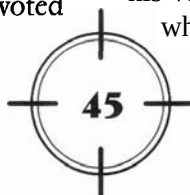
This is out of a simple desire for self-preservation as much as anything else. According to one theory of the virus's origin, it developed among animal populations first, then spread to humans. Fang scientist are terrified that the virus could jump to them next.

Snake Head

The internal leader of the Fang is elected by popular vote every seven years — but there is a twist. The reins of power in the family alternate between the "research" faction (the doctors and scientists) and the "applied methods" faction (the assassins). Fang members call this election "The Shedding of the Skin."

The research faction is currently in its cycle of dominance, headed up by an African transformed snake named Dr. Adeleke Adiyaga. While he was trained in the West, Adiyaga is of black South African origin. He heads up a major division of the World Health

Organization for Sub-Saharan Africa. Adiyaga is a truly learned man, and deep in his heart he ardently wishes so many evil things did not have to be done in the name of the preservation of the Ascended. But Snake blood runs in his veins, just like most of his fellow Fangs, and while he may wish otherwise, he knows his



interests lie with his brothers and sisters, not with humans.

Adiyaga is a slightly built black man who keeps his head shaved bald. He speaks with an educated Afrikaans accent, and to look at him you would never guess he was a top Fang assassin before he heard the calling of the medical profession.

Plans

The Fang of the Snake doesn't have too many irons in the fire outside their normal activities; killing people keeps them pretty busy.

Nevertheless, they do have one big project — one they **believe** is of the utmost **importance** if the Ascended are to survive.

Building a Better Beast

The Fang of the Snake's medical knowledge has been put to use most effectively in the field of eugenics. The Ascended have long been **forbidden** from mating with ordinary humans on strictly practical grounds, but the Fang of the Snake's genetic studies have added a whole other reason to forbid such matches. Human DNA dilutes the animal genes, resulting in weaker (that is, more human) offspring. But it's not just humans that the Ascended have to be careful about mating with. The Lodge has far too much to lose to allow just any old genetic union to come to fruition.

Any transformed animal wishing to have children with his mate must first submit to a vigorous genetic screening by the Lodge Eugenics Committee. Fang scientists investigate the compatibility of the pair's DNA, making sure that any offspring would carry the transformed animal genetic code strongly. If the couple gets the green light, they can mate. If not, then mating is forbidden. Utterly. No appeal.

Relations in the Secret War

The Fang of the Snake is probably the most equitable of all the families in how they view the other factions. They dislike all of them equally. Being more completely convinced than any other family that the Ascended are quite simply superior to their ene-

mies on a genetic level, they believe that triumph is inevitable because the opposition simply isn't as highly developed. (Although they are passionate about their genes, the Fang of the Snake doesn't take its ideas quite as far as the True Ascended cabal of the Shell of the Tortoise — see pages 28-31.)

If the Fang of the Snake did have to pick a prime enemy, it would probably be the Architects of the Flesh. Aside from the fact that they seem to have conquered the future — a future that Fangs consider the sole property of the Ascended — the Architects' messing about with arcanowave technology offends the Snakes on an aesthetic level. It's so crude and ham-handed compared to the family's elegant gene manipulation. Plus which, the arcanowave-augmented minions of the Architects are so damn hard to kill (for good, anyway). The Fang really hates that.

THE REST OF THE MENAGERIE

Obviously, the seven families detailed in this chapter do not represent the full extent of the Ascended organization. Crabs, elephants, foxes, monkeys, rats, roosters, bats, sharks — all have roles to play, usually related to their animal natures. For instance, the sharks act as a **free-ranging** troubleshooting force. These solitary hunters keep an eye out for problems among the human populace, especially those arising from the intrusions of interdimensional interlopers. Moles make excellent miners and engineers. The wealth and resources they remove form the ground fuel a substantial part of the Ascended's secret economy. The easygoing nature of the monkeys makes them ideal for organizing and interacting with both the Order of the Wheel and the Jade Wheel Society. And the tigers ... well, the tigers do just about **any** thing they want.

It should be noted that not all transformed animal species have an organized family. For instance, precious few mallards managed to find the inner will to raise themselves from their humble waterfowl origins. (The lure of float-



ing contentedly on a lake, bobbing for minnows is powerful indeed.) There are a few transformed ducks, to be sure, but hardly enough to form a proper family. The same goes for dolphins, salamanders, cockroaches, and so forth. The independent transformed animals usually hook up with a larger family that suits their temperament.

THE UNSPOKEN NAME

The evolution of the powers and responsibilities of the Unspoken Name provides a perfect case study in political science. The first rule is that all authority is elastic. No one can foresee every possible situation, so something unexpected always comes up. At that point, it's the job of whoever's in charge to delegate the power to deal with it. In other words, whenever a new job pops up, people grab for it like a **jump-shot** at a basketball game. The second rule is that the ambitious seek to increase their own power. Anyone who aspires to the rank of Unspoken Name not only wants the position a great deal, but will tend to increase the power of the office once he occupies it.

With those things in mind, let's look at what the Unspoken Name was originally supposed to do, and how that's changed over time.

Originally there was no Name. Families ran their own operations autonomously, each family cooperating with the others for the good of the entire Lodge. This worked until disputes arose. The resulting conflicts weren't good for anyone — especially those whose bodies were never found — so the families agreed that a single **person**, chosen by the families as a group, would be selected to mediate these conflicts. (Note the choice of language: "mediate." As in "**negotiate**." As in, "you talk, and we decide if we want to listen.")

As time went on, the Names began to find ways to enforce their decisions. The Sting of the Scorpion are the most important tool, as they pledged their loyalty to the Unspoken Name himself rather than to the Lodge. Draco became a second important tool, as he also answered only to the Name, even though

he was only called in as a last resort. Even though rarely involvde, though, Draco represented a weighty bargaining chip. Nobody wanted to piss off Draco.

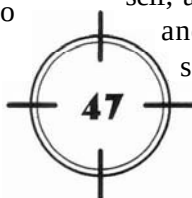
So "mediate" became "adjudicate." "You talk, and we decide if we want to listen" became "I talk and you listen, because you don't want to deal with the alternative." Nevertheless, power remained in balance since each family (other than the Sting of the Scorpion) was involved in the selection of the Name.

When the Netherworld gates opened in 1850, however, the different families needed to do more than maintain their grip on the world. They needed to defend it against active, dangerous enemies. Since no individual family was up to task of coordinating all of the Lodge's "wartime" operations — nor did any of them want to give that kind of power to any other family — they gave the Unspoken Name access to their various intelligence organizations until the portals closed, so he could coordinate their activities.

Which brings us to a third **rule** of political science. Once you give someone a power, you've set a precedent for him to keep it. The families didn't realize what they'd done until it was too late, and, predictably, when the portals closed, the Unspoken Name never got around to **relinquishing** his access to the intelligence staffs of the different families. As there was no option to put the cat back into the bag, the families were suddenly a lot more cautious about the loyalties of those they allowed into their intelligence divisions.

As time passed, the Name continued to receive intelligence from all of the families, but they were careful to tell him only what they wanted him to know. When things got out of hand, the families turned to the Name, who resolved disputes to the satisfaction of all **surviving** parties. In general, things worked well.

Now that the portals to the Netherworld are open again, the Unspoken Name is once again forced to coordinate the efforts of the different families. He has recently taken the step of **forming** a personal intelligence staff to assist him in policy planning. He chose this new staff himself, and they were selected for their intelligence and skill, not their loyalty or seniority. In short, he picked the talented people who





were warming the bench because they wouldn't kiss ass. Some of the old guard grumbled (mostly those whose butts hadn't gotten kissed), but the new staff is working wonders.

Tatsuya Yanai, a transformed fox, leads this new staff. His position as **aide-de-camp** and comptroller is completely new. Which brings up rule number four. Once an office is created, it's harder to get rid of than a cockroach. If something were to happen to Tatsuya, someone else would step in to fill the post.

There are those in the Lodge, of course, who are bothered by the changes. They feel that every increase in the Unspoken Name's power comes at the expense of the powers of the families. (Gosh, they're right!) But they also know they're in a precarious state and pushing too hard against the Name might precipitate the fall of the Lodge and the rise of the Buro. Nobody's willing to do that. Yet.

SERVANTS OF THE WHEEL

The following sections describe the organization and nature of the Ascended's **non-transformed** lackeys.

THE ORDER OF THE WHEEL

In the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Australia, you're not a mover unless you're part of the Order of the Wheel. You'll never run a corporation, lead a nation, or guide a religion if you **the wheel sign on you** somewhere.

Invisible to the common man, the Wheel permeates every aspect of modern Western life: they dictate hemline length, what's on television, and which political party takes office. Any office. The membership guides entire nations, even if they don't realize it.

The Order of the Wheel is filled with all sorts of people, from police detectives to popes. Each has his place, and does what he must to maintain order in modern Western soci-

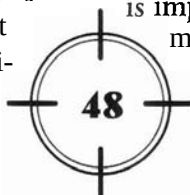
ety. Very few realize the importance of the Wheel, or the tasks it sets before them.

History

In Europe and North America, fraternal orders (such as the Freemasons or the Odd Fellows) evolved from earlier knightly orders prevalent during the crusades. All such fraternal orders are actually part of the much larger (and not quite as well known) Order of the Wheel. The Order was originally established through several monastic and knightly orders in the 13th century in Europe as a means for the Ascended to keep track of trends in the church and nobility. As the Renaissance came around, the Order expanded to include the most successful merchant guilds, using them to guide commerce in Lodge-approved directions. Initially intended just as a monitoring effort, the influence of the conspiracy ballooned beyond its founders' wildest projections. Naturally, the Ascended took advantage of their good fortune and kept on doing it up through the modern day. Through the Wheel's membership, the Lodge directed the spiritual, political, and economic evolution of Europe, bringing about the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and keeping a firm grasp on the people's spiritual lives.

Politically, the Order guided nations away from monarchy and toward democracy. They discovered it was much simpler to guide a nation if they could yank an unmanageable ruler after a few years without fomenting armed revolution. They also drove a wedge between government and religion so political rulers

could not draw upon the church's power when inconvenient for the Wheel. Further, the Order splintered the Catholic Church into factions, all with their own differences of opinion over canon and liturgy, all with their own views on salvation and communication with the divine. The Order appreciates religion as an "opiate of the masses," but they do not care to encourage too much belief in supernatural intervention. Thus, the Protestant sects were born, and now it is impossible to get every sect to agree on even minor points of contention.





The Order of the Wheel truly shines in the economic arenas of the world. With the rise of the merchant guilds during the middle ages, the Wheel was quick to recruit the most successful guild members and use that influence to drive society and technology forward. While it was a long-term project, it's been quite successful. The printing press was simply the beginning. Over time, the Wheel encouraged the introduction of credit banking, bank notes (also known as "legal tender"), and the expansion of craft guilds into full-fledged universities, all exploring the limits of science and technology and leading away from superstition.

1850

In the 1850s, the Order of the Wheel exerts great influence on the colonial powers of Europe and the capitalist democracy of the United States of America. The Order used the gold rush to its best advantage to build up reserves and prepare for global economic expansion. 1850 is a time of great opportunity and **Wheel members** are just the kind of people to take advantage of it. For that matter, those taking advantage who are not members of the Order are usually invited to join.

Africa, South America, and Australia still have cultures with strong magical traditions – even if they don't work as well as they once did – and the Lodge continues to encourage the Order of the Wheel to disenfranchise and absorb their remnants. Even though most attempts to absorb the American Indians, Africans, and Aborigines have met with limited success, the Lodge controls most of the world's feng shui sites. It's only a matter of a few decades before the job's finished.

In England, the Order takes the form of **gentlemen's** discovery clubs, filled with daring men who travel to the most isolated places on Earth. There, they dig up its ancient secrets, finding and locking away ("for the good of all, my good man") dangerous mystical artifacts and creatures.

In 1850, the Order of the Wheel places paramount importance on recruiting **significant** and amenable native leaders (both religious and political, where they're different) and

What are the Pledged?

While the structure for each Wheel order has a place for the Pledged, the truth is that the Pledged transcend both. Becoming Pledged means shedding previous allegiances, and this includes loyalty to the Jade Wheel Society or the Order of the Wheel in favor of loyalty to the Lodge. (Of course, in truth, both societies serve the Lodge, but the Pledged have a more direct line to their higher authority.) To say it more simply, Pledged agents serve the Lodge directly without intervening levels of conspiratorial bureaucracy. Pledged drawn from the Jade Wheel Society work side by side with Pledged drawn from the ranks of the Order of the Wheel, forming a third branch under the lodge, where they work with great latitude and authority. Nevertheless, most agents maintain identities within either or both of the other societies and use them as support networks.

The Number of the Pledged

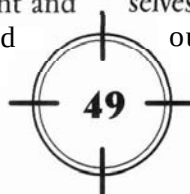
One important fact to keep in mind is that there are as many as one hundred Pledged agents for every member of the Lodge. Whenever the Lodge needs something done, it's the Pledged who do it, and they do a lot of it. The Pledged operate at all levels of society (but are always successful, wealthy, and important wherever they work and whatever they do), and they number in the thousands. It's the rare situation that gets so far out of hand that the Lodge must take a direct hand.

using them to increase Lodge influence among their own populations. It's easier to subvert than fight. African membership in the Order (for example) is growing swiftly in this juncture. This tactic isn't always successful, but it prevents more wars than it causes.

Contemporary

The modern Order of the Wheel has lost some of its romance, acting more as a force for social stability than for unbridled plunder, conquest, and colonization. The Order still supports archaeological digs to locate, expose, and commercially exploit every last bit of mystery left in the world, but the age of exploration is long over.

Modern Wheel members are intense businessmen, multimillionaires, studio executives, presidents, archbishops, entrepreneurs, well-placed public servants, and successful military officers. A high-ranking position is not a prerequisite for membership, but it helps. The Order of the Wheel's members do not consider themselves a conspiracy. They just help each other out – an old boys' network. A CEO chooses his leading men and women from among



Sir Richard Burton

Sir Richard Burton was a traveler, adventurer, and gentleman of the highest order, the most flamboyant and well-known explorer of the 19th century. In his youth, he served the British army in Bombay, India. In later years he lived in the United States, Brazil, Syria, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to name just a few. He spoke dozens of languages, translated the *Kama Sutra*, and survived an overwhelming ambush in the Syrian desert. He wrote: "I was never more flattered in my life than to think it would take three hundred men to kill me."

Having traveled to the four corners of the world, he founded the Anthropological Society of London with Dr. James Runt. Burton became a Master Sufi in 1849. In 1853, he was the first Westerner to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, and in 1858, he discovered the source of the Nile. Nevertheless, it's clear that even with his exciting life, he ultimately served the ends of the Order of the Wheel (and, thus, those of the Lodge).

the ranks of the Order rather than relying on interviews with random applicants. The West's elite are in the Wheel, or soon will be.

Structure

The Order of the Wheel is a stratified organization with thirty-three degrees. The first degree initiates are gathered from all areas of society: promising young military officers, brilliant university graduates, and the very, very ambitious. At the first degree, new recruits are told only of three degrees. It is not until members have worked up to the third degree and are invited to join the fourth that they learn of the full rank structure. At the thirty-third degree (they're told), members are inducted into the Lodge.

In truth, no human is ever promoted beyond the thirty-second rank (and only an elite few make it that far). Promotion within the Wheel is always accompanied by an increase in real-world fortunes. Only the most successful or useful people ever get beyond the third degree. Most Wheel members never learn even a fraction of what lies beyond that level.

Initiates of the first three degrees are the rank and file of the Order. Most are not individually important, though all are useful to the Lodge and the Wheel in some capacity and collectively, they are quite significant. These social workers, police officers, and newspaper editors (for example) provide informa-

tion and favors, and handle the day-to-day functions of the Order.

Initiates of the fourth and higher degrees are more critical to the Order of the Wheel as individuals. They're in important positions and can influence states, provinces, nations, corporations, government agencies, and armed forces. Most played their Wheel contacts against their upward mobility outside the Wheel, making themselves useful enough to take the next big step. All are ambitious and protective of their status in the Wheel.

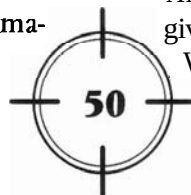
Most members of the Wheel are willing and able to cooperate with each other, even across national and corporate lines. It's not unusual to see agents of hostile powers sharing drinks at a Wheel social affair, or for national leaders to discuss over cigars and brandy how to rattle sabers

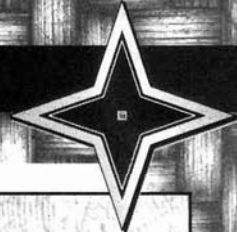
at each other in public. World War III will be scheduled in advance at a Wheel meeting.

Nevertheless, there is competition within the Order of the Wheel, and when these power-brokers go at each others' throats, things tend to heat up fast. It's not unheard of for members to assassinate uncooperative superiors (or ambitious underlings) to avoid difficulties down the line, but it is highly discouraged. Power struggles within the Wheel's upper ranks are rarely visible to the public and fallout is always covered up as quickly as possible.

The Order's members believe all manner of different things about the organization's true nature, because the Lodge circulates all manner of different rumors on the subject. And since no one knows who the thirty-third degree Lodge members are, it's not difficult to fan the flames of speculation. Various rumors paint the leaders of the Order of the Wheel as reincarnated Atlantean priests, aliens from other galaxies, and enlightened secret masters. According to one group, there is no Lodge. Still others believe Lodge members can be selected for induction at any rank; a fifteenth degree member would remain a fifteenth degree member, but secretly join the Lodge. Even the thirty-second degree members don't know the truth.

All members of the Order of the Wheel are given a gold ring with the Order of the Wheel's symbol embossed upon it, though





not all members wear the ring all the time. In fact, many inductees only wear it at Order functions, choosing not to advertise. On the other hand, some fanatics get the Seal tattooed or even branded onto their bodies as a sign of loyalty. (And that's great for ninety-nine percent of them, since only the remaining one percent are likely to be noticed, caught, and interrogated by stony-faced Shaolin monks.)

The Pledged

Thirtieth, thirty-first, and thirty-second degree members are the true elite of the Order of the Wheel. They're the Pledged. Unlike those of lower ranks, these few can be recruited from any degree or even from outside the Order, if appropriate. Existing Pledged can recommend new candidates, but all final decisions rest with the Lodge.

The newly Pledged are often (but not always) allowed to attune to one or more feng shui sites. More rarely, Pledged are taken into the Netherworld. In most cases, these worthiest of pawns are brought to the Inner Kingdom in their sleep, so they remain unaware of the Netherworld and the true nature of the Secret War. A small fraction of Pledged agents know the truth about the Secret War and its factions. Even fewer Pledged know the Order of the Wheel's true nature.

The Pledged are universally well-treated. The Order pays all living and travel expenses and asks only that they are available at all times for difficult and dangerous duty. All Pledged give their full loyalty to the Order, renouncing ties of religion, nationality, and family. Betrayal is not an option and the only early retirement comes from the barrel of a gun, though elderly Pledged who have served the Order into their twilight years often receive more attractive retirement options.

Adrienne Hart (see Back For Seconds, p. 10-11) was one of a very few Pledged agents to achieve the thirty-second degree in the Order of the Wheel. Others include Rebecca Dupress (see Elevator to the Netherworld, p. 53) and Rain Yuen.

Pledged Resources

In the line of duty, a Pledged agent can call upon any reasonable resources necessary to complete his mission. This is not to say that the Lodge expects or wants the Pledged to load up with everything possible and rely on equipment or money to make up for a lack of competence or preparation. Few Pledged gain their status by making such foolish mistakes, though, so this isn't usually a problem.

In 1850 and the tontemporary juncture, the Pledged gain access to the expansive resources of the Lodge through the Order of the Wheel and the Jade Wheel Society. Both of those organizations tun and will assist any Pledged agent at need. Outside these two home junctures, however, Pledged agents ore much more on their own, and have to rely on what they can bring with them, or what resources have been established in those junctures (which is to say, not very much).

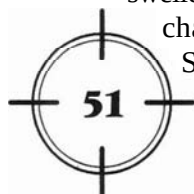
THE JADE WHEEL SOCIETY

The Jade Wheel Society is the Eastern counterpart of the Order of the Wheel. Its members are spread throughout Asia, the Polynesian islands, and the Middle East. Within it, Hong Kong film producers stand alongside communist Chinese generals, oil tycoons, and Triad leaders. This decidedly eclectic mix produces some very unusual social dynamics, to say the least.

History

The Jade Wheel Society was originally established in 13th-century China. The first members were bureaucrats, merchants, and philosophers during the Southern Sung dynasty. After the Mongol conquest in 1267, members of the Jade Wheel Society organized armed resistance against the Mongol occupation, denying that the barbarians ruled with the Mandate of Heaven. This insured — even with the high death toll during the Mongol Yüan dynasty — that Jade Wheel members were heavily entrenched in all levels of Chinese society in 1368 when they expelled the Mongols from China and instated the Ming dynasty.

Few emperors were part of the Jade Wheel Society, but the eunuchs, officers, merchants, scholars, and functionaries throughout China swelled the ranks bountifully. Jade Wheel merchants established relationships along the Silk Road bringing Indians, Persians, Arabs,



and those of other nationalities into the Society. Membership was hereditary, but heredity did not guarantee standing.

1644 marked the beginning of the Manchu dynasty and the Jade Wheel Society's expansion throughout all of Asia. The masters of the Jade Wheel were none too happy with the Manchurians, but were more than willing to use them to spread their own influence. In truth, two entirely separate Chinas existed during the Manchu dynasty: the China the Manchus thought they ruled, and the China the Jade Wheel moved through. Other Jade Wheel elements helped whip up rebellions against the Manchurian emperors (often with the support of the "Southern Ming" princes).

After the Manchus fell in 1911, the Jade Wheel Society supported Sun Yat-sen and the Republic of China. The Lodge wanted to excise the remnants of Chinese monarchy and introduce democracy. The Lodge had no further use

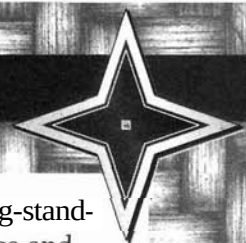
for the Mandate of Heaven, preferring instead to encourage the mandate of the people. Sun Yat-sen's successor, Chiang Kai-shek, came to power through his Jade Wheel connections, but the Guiding Hand's Golden Candle Societies somehow managed to introduce high-ranking advisors that led to a somewhat schizophrenic government. In order to dislodge the dictator, the Jade Wheel Society had to align with the communist party and change the government again.

1850

European colonial aggression during the hundred years or so leading up to 1850 has caused the Jade Wheel Society and the Order of the Wheel to clash, creating much more friction between the two societies than their Lodge masters would prefer. The Lodge instructed both sides to play nice, but the Jade Wheel Society has never fully accepted that the Order of the Wheel works for the same masters or even



Illustration by Richard Pace



remotely for China's good. The Lodge finally interceded fully in 1841, granting the Order of the Wheel the island of Hong Kong and issuing a clear statement of division of responsibilities. This did not end the conflict as hoped, but at least eased it in key areas.

When the contemporary juncture reestablished communications with this juncture, Pledged agents from the future carried instructions to the Jade Wheel Society to focus its efforts on the Guiding Hand as opposed to continuing the sibling rivalry. Thus, the Golden Candle Societies and Jade Wheel Society engage in a complicated dance wherein one rarely counts coup upon the other. The Jade Wheel's influence within the government is balanced by the Golden Candle's influence throughout the peasantry.

Contemporary

The Jade Wheel Society of the contemporary juncture is much more accustomed to working with the Order of the Wheel than the Society of 1850 was. Pledged agents from both organizations work together to ensure harmonious cooperation behind closed doors, if not in public. Nevertheless, one of the greatest concerns for both is Hong Kong's return to Chinese control in June 1997.

The modern Jade Wheel membership includes Triad crime lords, communist bureaucrats, Hong Kong bankers, Arabian oil magnates, and Indian Brahmins. At least two Middle Eastern terrorist organizations are supported by the Jade Wheel and exist only to make inconvenient messes look like terrorist actions.

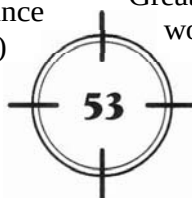
Structure

The Jade Wheel Society is structured after the Heavenly Bureaucracy of China's legends. It is composed of several concentric wheels, each associated with a different level of bureaucracy. The lowest level consists of Heaven's Lesser Dignitaries. This is the stage where Society members are inducted and recruited. Dignitaries are promising police officers, military officers, Triad members, and businessmen who have the potential to ascend to positions of great importance in society. The other (and more numerous)

source of recruits is the children of long-standing members. Once a child comes of age and proves himself worthy, he is initiated into the Jade Wheel Society as a Lesser Dignitary. Members inducted by inheritance are expected to live up to the standards that their forefathers set for them. In some cases, the bar was set in the Jade Wheel Society's earliest days. This expectation is a burden for many, driving them to overachieve and occasionally stumble in the execution of their duties. The Jade Wheel is lenient in most such cases — the first time it happens. Otherwise, it's simply not acceptable to disappoint your ancestors.

Lesser Dignitaries who prove themselves worthy and enlightened are initiated into the Great Nobles of Heaven, where they gain more responsibilities — both to their ancestors and to the Jade Wheel itself. It's impossible to become a Great Noble without building a web of obligations and favors that would leave Order of the Wheel members looking askance. The increased responsibility also brings increased wealth and power. Members at this level are aware of the Da-luo-tian (named for the highest of the Taoist heavens), their name for the Lodge. Most members believe that truly dutiful and accomplished Great Nobles are inducted into the Da-luo-tian, but this is only half true.

The Great Nobles are the Eastern counterparts to the fourth through thirtieth degrees of the Order of the Wheel. The members of this august assemblage are collectively the most influential, powerful, and wealthy people in the East. If (for some inconceivable reason) they were to bring their collected temporal power to bear against the Order of the Wheel, the clash would be devastating for bystanders (in this case, most of humanity). The Great Nobles take extreme pains to maintain friendly relations with the Order's higher ranks, despite their relative lack of civilization. The Great Nobles of the contemporary juncture are aware that the Order serves the Da-luo-tian as well and they accept them on those terms. In the 1850 juncture, things are not so smooth or clear-cut. The Great Nobles of that era tolerate the Order, but would prefer to ignore them in favor of





"more pressing matters" such as the Manchu reign and the Guiding Hand.

Within the Jade Wheel Society, rumors of the Lodge's true nature vary. Some believe that the Jade Emperor himself is the "man behind the curtain," leading the Eastern and Western Wheels into a harmonious accord and thus leading the world to the same. Others believe the Lodge is composed of the Eight Taoist Immortals, who have similar goals. Some think the Celestial Dragons themselves guide the Jade Wheel. Most believe the Da-luo-tian is made up of Jade Wheel members who have been promoted and a few of them believe that to become part of the Da-luo-tian, one must become enlightened enough to advance one's spiritual standing and attain immortality.

The Greater Nobles wear rings similar to the Order of the Wheel's, but carved from imperial jade. The Lesser Dignitaries have rings carved from apple green jade. Like Order members, many choose not to wear them at all times, and some (probably more than in the Order) choose branding or tattoos as well.

The Pledged

Pledged agents recruited from the Jade Wheel Society are symbolically freed of all previous obligations. While they take orders from the Jade Emperor himself, they remain Greater Nobles and must conceal their true status from other members of the Jade Wheel Society. The Jade Emperor entrusts them with the knowledge of the Secret War and their vital role in it. While Pledged agents understand that the imagery and language of heaven and the Jade Emperor are simply symbolic, they also understand that the Secret War is very real and pledge their lives to protect the world they live in from those who would remake it.

Pledged agents of the Jade Wheel receive just recompense for the dangerous and volatile work they must do. Their benefits and responsibilities are identical to those of the Pledged within the Order of the Wheel.

PLEDGED RECRUITMENT

One major source of Pledged recruits lies outside the Wheels. The Lodge is always on the lookout for renegades from other factions. A sorcerer turned against the Lotus might be an excellent target for recruitment, for example, as might a former Buro officer who can no longer stomach Bonengel's government. Those who have not forsaken their friends and allies but who might be happier serving the Lodge (even if they don't know it yet) are also potential targets — doubly so, really, since turning them weakens their factions.

Other potential recruits are those who find themselves in the middle of Pledged operations and learn far too much. Pledged agents on the scene have leeway to determine if those in such situations have the proper potential, and, if so, what to do with them in the short term. Once any volatility has passed, the possible recruits are investigated in more detail to determine whether they are more boon than risk. Potential risks are eliminated and potential boons are courted.

The fact of the matter is that the Lodge runs the show, in 1850 and the contemporary juncture, anyway, and they have what it takes to tempt the most desirable agents to work for them. Their unlimited resources put no limit on the worldly enticements they can offer, and their extensive grasp on hundreds of feng shui sites gives them the opportunity to twist fortune itself to the will of those they wish to recruit. Only those truly committed to their own causes are able to resist the temptations of the wealth, power, and fortune offered to the Pledged.



May, 2055

Danny *Jorgensen* screamed into his cellular: "The safe house is compromised! Evacuate!" It was not easy to dodge bullets and hold a conversation at the same time. The Pledged pushed the phone's red button three times and hurled it at the pursuing BuroSec police. The explosion rattled his teeth and knocked him flat, but at least the Buro thugs didn't get back up. Tairong was only a few steps ahead of him and bounding rapidly through the *now-pan-*icked rush hour crowds.

Only two more blocks to the other safe house.

Once inside, Tairong hissed. "I told you we stayed too long this time."

Danny shrugged and reloaded his pistols. "It's not like we could keep it up forever." He glanced outside for a moment to see the police swarming around the neighborhood in their SPUD-Us. "We need to get back to the Netherworld ASAP."

Tairong shook her head. "Not until we get the rest of the team. I won't leave anyone behind."

The apartment was standard for the Architects' world – all the amenities and comforts you could cram into three meters cubed. It helped that you could hide the furniture in the walls when it wasn't in use. Danny and Tairong together made a crowd in the barely-larger-than-closet-sized living space.

"How can people live like this?" Tairong could never relax in this juncture – no open space, no good food, and no freedom. "I can't even stretch without going outside."

Danny laughed. "Wait until everyone else gets here if you think you're cramped now" As if on cue, Mary Stark, their hacker and engineer, burst through the door.

"What the hell went wrong? I was just about to splice into the Buro's mainframe."

Danny sat in the corner, knees up to his chest. "Maybe you happened?" The rest of the team –

Hawk Ryan, Charlie Wu, and Lydia Chin – filtered in over the next hour. Mary somehow accessed the police channel and they watched as BuroSec officers tracked them.

"We don't have much time," said Tairong, finally. "How far to the nearest Netherworld entrance?"

Hawk, hunched over a street map, replied: "Fifteen miles."

Mary laughed. "I guess we need a car," she said. The others looked at her with expressions ranging from mild amusement to *terrified* astonishment.

Thirty minutes later they stood on the rooftop, staring at a standard issue *BuroMil* grav-car. Heat pulsed off the thing in waves.

Tairong gave Mary a wild stare. "Tell me again how you arranged this?" After all she'd been through, the transformed tiger still felt that flying machines were violations of the natural order. "You're sure they're not going to catch us in this?"

Mary winked at Tairong. "Don't worry, we'll be fine. It's just a five minute jaunt to the entrance, and we'll be home free."

Four and a half minutes later, Mary was flying the grav-car between the buildings only inches above pedestrians' heads as they rode the slidewalks. Danny kept the SPUD-Us at a distance with the turreted gun, which sounded to Tairong like a *thunderstorm* in a can. The entire team was *short-tempered* and overheated and the flying patrols were driving them away from the entrance.

Tairong snarled at Mary, "A five minute jaunt' you said. 'Home free,' you said. I'd rather take my chances walking!"

Mary didn't spare her a glance. "Do you want to get out then?" Before Tairong could answer, the grav-car leapt about ten feet sideways and started

dropping. Mary's only comment was "Oops. Okay, when we land, run!"

The moving sidewalk rushed at the grav-car and its passengers at an alarming speed. Danny swung the turret around and stitched a few bursts across one of the pursuing SPUD-Us, which gave a *satisfying crump* as it exploded and fell toward the ground. The grav-car slid a full fifty feet before coming to a full stop. The fugitive passengers piled out and ran for the nearest cover. Hawk noted the street signs. "We're not far from the entrance."

Charlie and Lydia used some blast-putty to blow open an entrance into the underground tunnels, giving them maybe a few minutes' lead. As the team made their way to the Netherworld portal, the BuroSec demanded their surrender every thirty seconds or so. Repetitive and predictable, as the Buro always was. After enough twists and turns that Tairong was sure they were lost, Hawk whispered triumphantly, "It's just around the next corner!"

Tairong was the first around that corner and saw four men standing stiffly at attention. As the others came around behind her, the four slowly turned to face her, hooked their long-nailed fingers into claws, and hopped forward. Tairong swore as she realized they weren't men. At least, not any more.

She pounced on the nearest, screaming "Don't let them scratch you!" Danny smoothly aimed both pistols at one of the monsters and fired two shots directly at the thing's head. Something flickered for a moment and it seemed to eat the bullets.

Tairong expertly cracked the thing's neck and turned to face the next just in time to see Hawk fall, blood gushing from his face and throat. Lydia was backed into a corner with her assault rifle blazing nonstop and Mary was nowhere to be seen.

Danny fired both pistols into his monster's chest, with little effect. Up close, Tairong saw that the *jiangshi* were equipped with arcanotech.

Is nothing sacred in this time?

She spun, kicked the next monster in the head, and knocked it off its feet.

The hopping monster had Danny backed into the wall. He tried to kick it away, but it simply hopped back to its feet after he knocked it over. It was only inches away, prepared to shred him with those terrifyingly sharp and filthy fingernails when Mary appeared behind it with a pair of sparking cables and shoved them into its back. The *electricity* fried it instantly, filling the tunnel with a smell disturbingly like bacon.

Danny and Lydia both turned to the *last abomination*, standing over Hawk's prone form. It hopped in confusion for a moment, trying to decide whom to attack next when everyone cut loose. Its body jerked spasmodically under the hail of bullets and fell to the floor.

Tairong rushed to Hawk's side and examined his wounds. He coughed, blood spattering the concrete floor. "I guess this is it. Go on home." Tairong shook her head in denial.

Danny grabbed her shoulder. "Come on, BuroSec will get here any moment."

Hawk weakly grasped Tairong's wrist. "Do as he says, just leave a pistol for me."

Tairong turned to Danny, who gave her one of his prized Brownings. Hawk rolled over against the tunnel wall. "Go. Hurry!"

The door opened into one of the Netherworld's tunnels. As the team stepped through the entrance, Tairong thought she heard a single *gunshot* behind her, but a backward glance revealed only the harsh white glare of the gateway.

Movers and Shakers

WHO'S WHO

IMPORTANT ASCENDED

THE UNSPOKEN NAME

face of the Unspoken Name was perfectly still as he heard the news. "Who is responsible?" he asked, finally

Mr. X shook his head. "The battlefield was too chaotic. I suspect one of the Dragons, but since they died, we may never know."

"I see. And the Monarchs?"

Mr. X smiled tightly "They were impressed."

The Unspoken Name nodded. "Very well.

Continue the project."

Mr. X nodded and left, wasting no words.

The door closed, and the Unspoken Name sat in silence for a long moment before he turned to his speakerphone and pushed a button.

Half a world away in a Swiss coffeehouse, Tatsuya Yanai answered his ringing cell phone. "Konichi-wa," he said with a smile. "I was just about to call you. We've picked up a lead on —"

'Adrienne Hart is dead."

Tatsuya set down his latte and began typing at his laptop computer. "I will issue the sanction order immediately — what name?"

"We don't have one yet," the Name responded. "Put someone on it. Top priority."

'And mine?" Tatsuya asked.

"Your top priority remains Project Legacy, as always."

The current Unspoken Name attained his office only two years ago, but he has already made significant changes to the long-established order of things. Some have questioned the wisdom of these reorganizations, but his quiet response is always: "Things need changing."

His most self-evident change has been to consolidate authority over the Secret War in his own person, using a hand-picked staff that leapfrogged the normal ladders of seniority. The long-standing veterans of the intelligence division were not pleased, to say the least.

The intelligence veterans would be even less pleased to discover the full extent of the Unspoken Name's goals, however. His master plan, Project Legacy, has a threefold aim. The

first is to ensure that he remains Unspoken Name beyond his term of six years. He believes that handing over the reigns of power halfway through the fight would allow the other factions too great an advantage. Not one for half-measures, the Unspoken Name's second aim with Project Legacy is to abolish the families of the Lodge. This audacious aspect of the plan addresses the Unspoken Name's belief that the families are too divisive, and will stand

The Unspoken Name

Sample Dialogue: "The wrong candidate won in Peru. Fix that, would you?"

Attributes: Bod 7, Chi 11 (For 8), Mnd 8, Ref 7

Skills: Martial Arts 16, Guns 13, Deceit 16, Leadership 20, Info/Lodge Politics 19

Transformed Animal Schticks: Mark Prey x4, Bite, Pounce, Surprise

Unique Schtick:

Well-Protected: Everyone watches out for the Name. Everyone. The Unspoken Name may make a Fortune check, Difficulty 3, for every sequence he is involved in combat. The Outcome is the number of GMCs that come to the Name's aid. The exact sorts of GMC depends on the situation. In areas the Lodge controls, aid probably consists of hordes of unnamed characters, backed up by a few named ones. Even in areas that seem deserted, though, people show up in the nick of time to save the Name's bacon. In fact, this is the world's chi looking out for its leader, but to the casual observer, it looks like exceptional luck.

Weapons: punch (7), kick (8), SITES M380 revolver (8/2/8)

Mr. X

Sample Dialogue: "Please don't beg. It would ruin my opinion of you."

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 8 (For 8), Mnd 11, Ref 5

Skills: Martial Arts 15, Guns 14, Deceit 18, Detective 18, Intrusion 16, Sabotage 14,

Auxiliary Schticks: One With the Walls

Gun Schticks: Eagle Eye, Hair Trigger Nerk Hairs x3

Stat Schticks: Quirk Study, The Holmes Touch

Transformed Animal Schticks: Blur x3, Camouflage, Doppelganger, Latency, Prey, Tongue, Turret Eyes

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), silenced Walther PPK (9/1/6+1)

in the way of the transformed animals' ultimate ascendancy. The third prong of Project Legacy is completely secret, even to the Unspoken Name's closest aides. They know he has them looking for a man named Bruce Frischmann, a man he claims is his son, but his true motivations and plans are impossible to guess.

MR. X

Snapshots:

A fresh faced secret agent running alongside Kennedy's limo.

A North Vietnamese officer watching the last American helicopter flee Saigon.

A sober UN official surveying the chaos of an Ethiopian refugee camp.

An FBI agent carrying a small, lifeless body from the wreckage at Waco, tears in her eyes.

So many faces. Only one life.

Mr. X sifted through the photographs, pausing on one. A battered, faded image of a wide-eyed boy of ten, laughing at the antics of his father. Long forgotten memories of an innocent, idyllic childhood evoked a single tear.

His cell phone rang; X put the photographs back into his safe. Plenty of time to think about the past later. X listened to his phone impassively, hanging up without acknowledgement. Suddenly, his face contorted with rage. He threw the phone against the wall, smashing it.

Iala Mane' survived, and witnessed the death of Adrienne Hart. The Unspoken Name ordered that the Dragon be captured and interrogated. For the future of the Lodge, X resolved to ensure this would never happen.

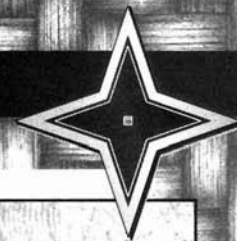
Unspoken Names come and Unspoken Names go, but Mr. X is a constant. He has been confidante and scalpel for different Unspoken Names, for more years than he cares to admit.

In the course of his service, Mr. X has changed identities scores of times. So often, in fact, that the simple task of remembering his birth name sometimes takes effort. But that isn't important to Mr. X, because only the Lodge matters to him. Even the wishes of the Unspoken Name come second. Loyalty to the Lodge is everything.

Nevertheless, Mr. X's failing memory has prompted him to collect a photographic record of his past lives. This evidence is stored in a Swiss bank vault when it's not on his person. Mr. X sometimes worries that that his sentimental collection could be dangerous in the wrong hands. He comforts himself with the thought that the photographs would prove nothing. They show different faces, with different genders. What could they prove?

SEÑOR OCHO

When the Web of the Spider needs a dangerous enemy removed, Señor Ocho is the man they call, and his name is whispered with dread among the very few who have seen him in



action. The Spiders' number one hit man does not come cheaply — even to his own household — and is called only in extremis. The nightmare killer himself doesn't really care how others view him, as long as he gets the job done.

Esteban de la Taberna, the man who became Seior Ocho, was not always so cold-blooded. It's rumored that in Esteban's youth, he fell in love with a human woman and tried to get away from the Ascended to raise a family. The story goes on to say that for three years he lived among humans as a human, with no thought to his heritage or duties, before the Web's matriarch found him. Merciful, or perhaps just pragmatic, she supposedly offered him a choice. Leave his human family forever, renounce his forbidden love, and return to the family of spiders or the Web would kill them before his eyes, right before turning him over to the tender mercies of the Soul of the Dragon.

The man who would become Seior Ocho chose wisely. He turned his back on his wife and their only child, without even a letter to explain where he'd gone. Some say all warmth died in Esteban that day, but they were wrong. Esteban secretly watched his family and occasionally helped them in small ways — a little money here, a lucrative promotion there. It was all he could do, and they never knew the identity of their secret benefactor.

Two years ago, Señor Ocho swung by to check up on his family between connecting flights. He'd just finished the most grueling job of his career and wanted to spare a moment to reassure himself that hope still existed in his world. He found his family's home in flames. The fire department had arrived with the speed reserved for those with Wheel connections, but it was hopeless. That was the day his heart went numb.

Arson was suspected, but no arrest was ever made.

The truth is that Seior Ocho did not lose his ability to care, simply his desire to show it. He wants to find and kill whoever murdered his family, but doesn't know where to begin. On some sleepless nights, he suspects that the Web of the Spider learned of his activities and tried to teach him a lesson. Other times, he thinks it was the Jackals or the Sharks or

Señor Ocho

Sample Dialogue: "The Lodge does not tolerate traitors. Fortunately, even a failure as disappointing as you ton serve us as on example."

Attributes: Bod 7 (Mov 9), (hi 9 (For 2), Mnd 7, Ref 8 (Agl 11, Spd 11)

Skills: Martial Arts 11, Guns 18, Deceit 11, Detective 13, Driving 12, Info/History 13, Info/Intelligence Agencies 12, Info/Lodge 13, Intimidation 13, Intrusion 14, Sabotage 14

Gun Shtitks: Both Guns Blazing x2, Eagle Eye x3, Hair Trigger Hetk Hairs, Lightning Reload x3

Transformed Animal Schticks: Leap x2, Predator, Scuttle, Tingle x2, Web x2

Unique Schtick:

Web of Bullets: Señor Ocho has learned how to link the power of his chi to bullets, allowing him to use the Web transformed animal schtick with his Firearms skill (at Chi x 10 meters). Use the standard Web mechanics (see *Fong Shui*, p. 114) but replace referentes to **Martial Arts** with **Firearms**.

Weapons: punch (8), kitk (9), Bowie knife (10), Browning Hi-Power (10/2/13+1), Hetkler & Koth MP5 K (10/3/30), Mossberg Special Purpose (13/5/7), AK-47 (13**/5/30), AI PM Counter Terrorist (13**/6/10)

Clara Duvall

Sample Dialogue: "Why tut hair? Because I need something to do with my hands and I'm between husbands."

Attributes: Bod 4 (Mov 7), Chi 11 (For 6), Mnd 9 (Cha 6), Ref 8

Skills: Martial Arts 14, Guns 10, Deceit 17, Leadership 15, Seduction 10, Info/Hairstyling 12, Info/Media and Government 19

Transformed Animal Shtirks: Web x3, Tingle x2, Dootlittling

Unique Schticks:

Web Trap: Clara Duvall a n make her webs last up to on hour; those heading into an area where she has plated a web must make a Perception check, Difficulty 9, to notice it.

Weapons: punch (5), kick (6), Beretta Bobcat (8/1/8+1)

some other family, playing some baroque game of influence. Or perhaps they were simply offended by his miscegenation. On more frequent occasions, he considers the possibility that the Guiding Hand, or the Architects, or some other Secret War faction found his family and killed them. He doesn't know the truth, but he's trying to find it.

Of all the possibilities, the idea that the Web of the Spider killed Señor Ocho's family disturbs him the most. Every time he does a job, he could be helping the murderers — or acting against them. Nevertheless, he follows orders, accepts his payment, and otherwise has little use for



wealth or power. He is a truly dangerous opponent because he has nothing to lose.

Señor Ocho prefers to execute contracts against Ascended who betray the Lodge. He kills humans if ordered or hired to do so, but he doesn't consider it a real test of his abilities or convictions. In the Ascended, he sees the step he never took and the life he turned his back on.

CLARA DUVALL

As Anne settled into the chair where Clara Duvall did her hairstyles, the two quickly settled into amiable chatter.

"How're things going with Senator Daniels?" asked the stylist.

"I sent the pictures to his wife last night." Anne chuckled. "She hit the roof."

"Beautiful. I'll have Allan draft a suicide note, just in case he isn't obliging." Anne's laughter stopped abruptly as she felt the blade of the scissors against her throat. "That reminds me ... you told

me you'd taken care of that Dansberg bitch in Amsterdam. Gary – I still think the two of you would make a cute couple – said he saw her alive at the Genocide Lounge. Now, I trust Gary. And I trust you." The blade pressed in a little. "Which one of you am I wrong about?"

Anne gulped. "I thought she died in the explosion, I thought that –"

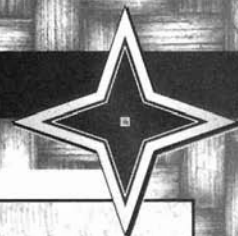
Clara sighed. "That I wouldn't find out?" The blade relaxed. "Oh, honey, you *should* know better. Next time just tell me; you should know I won't be mad." The blade went back to clipping hair. "There, all finished. How does it look?"

Anne looked up at the *mirror*, unnerved. "G-good!"

"It's all in how you arrange the strands, sweetie. Now have a nice day And by the way, *if* Dansberg sends another telegram to the Tribune, you'll be dead by the end of the day"

Clara Duvall heads the Web of the Spider, though her cover is much more unassuming.





She works as a hairdresser in the most elite of Los Angeles's hair salons. (If you have to ask which one, you aren't important enough to go there.) Her clientele includes the most famous people in Hollywood. It also includes her corps of Pledged operatives, who visit her daily to give information and receive orders. From the salon where she works, she manages the entire world.

Socially, Clara is known for her love of earthly pleasures. She's almost never without one of the Wheel's cancer-free cigarettes in hand — California's indoor clean air laws don't apply to her — and she's taken seven different husbands and numerous lovers. However, those who have attempted to slip an infiltrator into her bed have discovered that beneath her friendly facade lies a cold ruthlessness.

THE LORD OF THE EARTHQUAKE

Bleys Fontaine was always quiet and unassuming. He stayed in the background and listened to the things happening around him. His peers thought he was stuck up or maybe a little crazy, but in truth he simply preferred to listen rather than speak. Deprived of sight, he's an avid music connoisseur and a world-class chef. Since he cannot enjoy the world's views, he chooses to stimulate his other senses. At least, that's what the people in the contemporary juncture think.

Bleys remembers a world dominated by magical tyrants. In it, he and a few others found the Netherworld, and in that, a means to overthrow the Four Monarchs and create a world where their kind hadn't been wiped out by the rising tides of magic. Bleys was in the Netherworld when the critical shift displaced the Four Monarchs and brought about the current alignment of the junctures.

In the contemporary juncture, Bleys has made a comfortable life for himself as an enforcer for the Lodge. He is quite heartened to see the success of the Ascended, and he is most interested in serving the Unspoken Name in order to defend the contemporary juncture from further shifts.

Bleys Fontaine

Sample Dialogue: No, I didn't see anything. I heard loud noises and some screams over that way, then the screaming stopped. Maybe you'd better get the poor man some medical help?"

Attributes: Bod 5 (Con 8), Chi 9 (For 2), Mnd 9 (Per 7, Will 10), Ref 7 (Speed 9)

Skills: Martial Arts 16, Deceit 15, Info/Cooking 15, Info/Music 15, Info/Secret War 15, Intimidation 13, Leadership 13, Sabotage 13

Fu Schticks: All of Path of the Immutable Clay, Natural Order, Backlash of the Turtle, Mirror of the Turtle, Laughter of the Turtle, Vengeance of the Turtle, Signature Weapon (walking stick)

Transformed Animal Schticks: Blind, Claw, Latency x2, Prey, Tremor x4, Tunnel x2 (see p. 32)

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), walking stick (11)

Bleys isn't bloodthirsty and prefers to avoid extended bouts of violence, but he will defend the world as it exists, with his life if necessary. He's not the warrior he was in his younger days, but his ability to shake the earth has only grown with old age and experience. Now, he uses his talents as surreptitiously as possible. When the Lodge needs him, they give him a time and a location. When he's there, he waits for the excitement and uses his power to disrupt the Lodge's enemies and soften them up for Pledged enforcers to finish off.

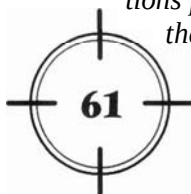
Bleys enjoys his work. He takes special joy in killing sorcerers, demons, and anything from the future. He's troubled by the implications of the Architects' dominance in 2056 and wants to research the future history and learn how the Lodge's displacement came about.

Bleys prefers tailored suits and always carries his specially weighted walking stick for those too stubborn to fall down when the ground goes crazy.

URSULA

"What can I do for you, Comrade?" asked Ursula of the image on her video screen. Kovalov's image distorted momentarily, the interference accentuating his lupine

"Ursula, we need one of your little atrocities. My assets have uncovered a cell of Architect sympathizers operating in the center of Kiev. Our simulations predict significant collateral damage during the takedown."



Ursula

Sample Dialogue: "Don't let my breasts distract you. I can snap your neck if I wish."

Attributes: Bod 9, Chi 8 (For 2), Mnd 5 (Wil 9), Ref 5

Skills: Guns 17, Martial Arts 16, Info/Russian Underworld 18, Info/Soviet History 12, Intimidation 17

Fu Schticks: Fury of the Bear, Slumber of the Bear, Strength of the Bear

Gun Schticks: Lightning Reload

Transformed Animal Schticks: Bellow x2, Fortitude, Hibernate x3, Predator, Rage, Slap x2

Weapons: punch (10), kick (11), Marakov P6 (10/3/8), Skorpion Model 61 (9/3/20)

"What do you have in mind?" Ursula smiled at the thought.

"We were thinking of bombing Kiev Police Headquarters. Just a little bomb, nothing too drastic, just enough to sway public opinion. There is one policewoman we suspect has been contacted by the Dragons. We would be pleased if she were a casualty. I'll send the file over."

"When should this to happen, Comrade?"

Ursula mentally reviewed the resources she had in the area. It would work nicely. The Kiev authorities had been annoyingly efficient recently. The synchronicity of feng shui attunement still occasionally amazed her.

Kovalov frowned. "Two days to pull out our assets. And I've told you before, we don't use 'Comrade' anymore."

Ursula was once a rising star in the Lodge. As one of the KGB's most feared agents, she was in a prime position to become the Bear family's favorite enforcer. It also gained her enemies. One of them, the Ice Queen's personal assassin, almost destroyed her. Wheel operatives found her in a coma, coated in ice and on the verge of reversion. She was rushed to one of their Netherworld Mundane Chambers, where it was hoped she would recover.

Ursula awakened to find the world a very different place: the Soviet Union she had served was no more. Suspecting a critical shift, she was amazed to discover it was **all** part of the Unspoken Name's plan. The reasons were explained to her, but politics always left her cold. She soon lost track of the labyrinthine complexities of the New World Order.

Organized crime, namely the Russian Mafia, seemed a natural home for her talents.

Ursula has risen to prominence within the violent criminal organizations of Russia. She is back to doing what she does best, and she serves a very useful purpose within the Lodge hierarchy. Still, Ursula finds it hard to adapt to her loss of power within the Lodge hierarchy. She is always on the lookout for a chance to prove herself once more to her superiors.

IMPORTANT PLEDGED

KYLE JAMESON

In every line of work, people make mistakes. Those mistakes can be as simple as delivering a package to the wrong address or as complex as getting spotted while setting up to assassinate an important business or political leader. The latter is where Kyle "Mr. Clean" Jameson comes in. He's the man the Lodge sends in to tidy up after others' messes. A team of Pledged screwed up and let the Buro corpses (complete with arcanowave technology) end up in the morgue? Jameson's the one who goes in and removes all the evidence (and if necessary, kills the witnesses). More often, Mr. Clean is called in to help remove a mess before it becomes a problem.

Kyle started working in organized crime, where he developed a talent for sliding **uncomfortable** evidence into places it would never be found. In the course of his duties, he developed an extensive network of people who could help him and people who needed help from him (and often the twain did meet). In exchange for cash and favors, he built an impressive reputation for discretion and efficiency.

In the early '90s, Jameson received a peculiar call. When he checked on the scene, he found a dismembered creature he could only describe as a demon and it had the biggest, weirdest gun he'd ever seen (he'd later swear it wanted to bite him). Before he had a chance to leave, a trim, precise, middle-aged man steered him



into a corner and made him an offer he couldn't refuse. He cleaned up the scene with his usual aplomb and joined the ranks of the Pledged the same night.

Jameson asks but one thing when he's on the job: that no one ask questions or demand explanations. They pay him and do exactly what he says, when he says, and how he says to do it. He takes pride in his work and refuses to allow anything to interfere with his professionalism. He has a reputation to protect, after all. As with many of the Wheel's most trusted operatives, he's been allowed to attune to several feng shui sites. Unbeknownst to Jameson, he was also taken to the Hub in the Netherworld. If a critical shift happens, the Wheel hopes to use his confusion to their advantage in reclaiming the world as it should be. Kyle is aware that strange things are afoot in the Secret War, but does not know its true nature or extent, nor does he ask questions of his benefactors.

Kyle doesn't restrict himself to work for the Order of the Wheel; otherwise, he'd make very little money. He's known to anyone who has contacts in the Underworld and can end up working with anyone.

THE PACIFIC RIM BUTCHER

He loathes pop music. He hates the insincere emotions, the childish lyrics, and the cookie cutter performers. Jazz, on the other hand, has pure emotion and is played by real musicians on real instruments. Jazz is unpredictable; jazz is alive.

UHKFM 1202 never played jazz; he hadn't heard any Miles Davis in over a year

The DJ gleefully announced that they were halfway through a love song marathon. The grating voice of Billie Cho assaulted him for the sixth time that day. His head throbbed with the electronic beat; he felt sick to his stomach. He longed to throw the radio against the wall and laugh as the nauseating sound was silenced. He couldn't; they might need him. They might send him out on the Hunt any second. This noise was the soundtrack to his life; his only rest was when away from the radio.

Kyle "Mr. Clean" Jameson

Sample Dialogue: "Hey, chop chop with those trash bags, 'kay? We're burnin' daylight here."

Attributes: Bod 6, Chi 0 (For 7), Mnd 8, Ref 6

Skills: Guns 13, Info/Underworld 15, Intimidation 15, Leadership 15

Gun Schticks: Hair-Trigger, Neck Hairs x2, Signature Weapon (Ruger Redhawk, a gift from his Wheel sponsor)

Unique Schticks:

A Real Friend: "A friend in need is a friend indeed, but a real friend knows where to hide the bodies." Kyle Jameson knows how to hide anything where it will never pop up again to trouble anyone. He directs his clients as to how and where to dispose of everything and takes over from that point. Of course, this means he knows where the bodies are buried, and this can be inconvenient for anyone who decides to betray him. For a Fortune point, Kyle can dispose of one major piece of incriminating evidence (a body, for example) or several minor pieces (incriminating photographs, damaged or stained clothing, and so on).

Weapons: punch (7), kick (8), Ruger Redhawk (13/3/6)

The Pacific Rim Butcher

Sample Dialogue: "Your lies have displeased the Golden Ones."

Attributes: Bod 11 (Tgh 12), Chi 0, Mnd 4 (Wil 2), Ref 7

Skills: Martial Arts 15, Deceit 15, Info/Conspiracy Theories 13, Intimidation 15

Fu Schticks: Signature Weapon ("alien alloy" knife)

Stat Schticks: Ich Bin Ein Bruiser (see Golden Comeback, p. 641)

Unique Schticks:

Atlantean Pain Editor: John suffers no impairment from Wound Points.

Weapons: punch (12), kick (13), alien knife (16)

Suddenly, he heard that blessed, loved, terrible, inhuman voice again.

"We have been discovered by an unbeliever, you must deal with him . . ."

As the voice whispered the details of that night's Hunt, he was surprised to discover that he had been lightly stabbing himself in the thigh to the beat of the song. His headache was gone now that he had a purpose, and prey.

He loves the Hunt. The Hunt is the only thing that keeps him sane.

John Liu is a sick puppy. He enjoys nothing more than causing pain and suffering. He is also not very bright. It didn't take long for the authorities to catch him. However, the Order of the Wheel had plans for him. His captors took him to a specially prepared studio. He was bombard-

Carter Cross

Sample Dialogue: "Cool — I mean, I can have that ready for you within a week."

Attributes: Bod 6, (hi 0 (For 3), Mnd 8, Ref 7

Skills: Guns 12, Driving 12, Fix-it 15, Info/Old West 11, Info/Science 12

Driving Schticks: Signature Ride (Bucephalus, his horse)

Gun Schticks: Fast Draw

Unique Schticks:

Techie Unique Schtick: See Feng Shui, p. 43.

Weapons: punch (7), kick (8), Colt Revolver x2 (10/3/6), Lefauchaux Shotgun (10/5/2)

ed with high tech special effects, subliminal imagery, and even fake, painful surgery.

He now believes he was rescued by the Atlanteans, an inhuman race that secretly controls the world. He is their human agent, and it falls to him to silence those who would threaten their benign rule.

The Butcher has terrorized the Pacific Rim for nearly a year, and the authorities are no closer to catching him than they were when they discovered the first body. Cops are baffled, though the smarter ones have noticed his victims include investigative reporters and authors. Only John (and his controllers) know they're those who came too close to revealing the world's secret masters. His victims take hours to die. Liu prolongs the time spent away from his hated radio for as long as possible.

CARTER CROSS

Carter Cross grew up on westerns. He lived for westerns — movies and television — and grooved on the inevitable shootouts. He kept a scrap book containing sketches of gadgets he would invent if he could live in the 1850s: steam-powered tanks, spring-loaded gun holsters, and so on. Of course, he never in his wildest dreams imagined he'd ever actually live them — at least, not in the "then" of the westerns.

Carter went through high school and college with incredible grades but a geeky reputation. After high school, he received an attractive scholarship offer from MIT, and managed to get into all the best classes. When he thought about it (notoften) he just figured he had a really good guidance counselor. Upon graduation, he had a slew of job offers.

Rather than choose any one over the other, he went freelance, working as a contractor and developing a lucrative career. He never stopped to think too long about his easy success.

Years later, Carter ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time. He got caught in the middle of a fight of fu and sorcery between agents of the Guiding Hand and the Thorns of the Lotus, in the lobby of a famous Las Vegas hotel. Shaken by events, Carter ran into the first elevator to open (disgorging several Pledged agents) and found himself in one of the Ascended's Netherworld feng shui sites. At first, the Pledged in the Hub took him into custody, but quickly determined that he was not a danger and was in fact an asset. His engineering degree and creative approach to technology were appealing credentials, and his extensive knowledge of the 19th century served him well. He didn't think too much about the fact that the Pledged had his life story on file.

The Order of the Wheel brought Carter into the Pledged and assigned him to serve as a courier between the 1850 and contemporary junctures. Carter decided to make his permanent home in 1850 San Francisco and operates his workshop from there, supplying agents with devices that would otherwise be unavailable in the 19th century. He reports regularly to the Order in the contemporary juncture to pass reports on 1850 operations.

Carter maintains a front as a blacksmith and inventor in San Francisco, where he's a very respectable citizen. He won't do anything to endanger his standing in 1850. To "keep up with the times," he's learned how to ride a horse and shoot a pistol. While he prefers not to fight if it can be avoided, he's learned that avoidance doesn't always work. As a result of his compulsive practice, Carter can shoot as well as (and sometimes better than) his screen idols. He's developed quite a reputation as a six-shooter and a quick-draw in 1850 San Francisco, but doesn't go out of his way to start trouble.

Recent genealogy studies in the contemporary juncture lead Carter to believe he might be his own great-great grandfather, and that his family has served the Order of the Wheel for nearly 150 years. This disturbs him.



REVEREND REDGLARE

Allan didn't care what benefits he got out of being Pledged, he still hated coming to Redglare Chapel. The doors opened, revealing the Reverend himself.

"Howdy," the cybernetic clergyman said, his artificial larynx still managing to convey a Southern accent. "And how are ya? Still keeping the faith?" He slapped Allan's back with a thick robotic hand.

Allan smiled painfully and said, "The Lord provides."

"He always does," the Reverend responded, grinning. The flesh moved, but the metal plate that was the left side of his head did not. "He always does. But I'm guessin' you didn't come here for a social call." He patted the muzzle of his gun-arm. "The forces of Satan are gatherin' again?"

Allan coughed. "In a sense. There's a group that's been teaching Capoeira—"

"Capo-what, boy?"

"Capoeira. It's a martial art that involves dancing. They've been interfering with some of our Netherworld operations and we hoped you could lead the faithful..."

The Reverend clicked his tongue against his silver teeth. "Well, I don't know, son. Seems to me that dancin' ain't so bad. There's worse stuff out there, like ghosts, and —"

Allan set his briefcase down on the Reverend's desk and opened it, revealing two rows of gold bars.

The Reverend's left eye flashed its trademark LED glint. "— and I think these Cappy-era boys need to learn the wrath of the Lord! Emma! Fire up the search engines! I need some quotes from the Good Book; we're goin' on a crusade!"

Allan smiled, and turned to leave. The last thing he felt was a heavy thud in his back as a razor-edged crucifix hit him in his left lung. He keeled over.

"What was that for, Reverend?" Emma, the Reverend's AI asked.

"Boy got hisself an earring since we last saw him. Afraid that breaks Leviticus 19:28. And it made him look like a damned pansy, too."

Reverend Redglare is an exile from a far-removed critical shift; he's used his time in the Netherworld to Shape his own personal

Reverend Redglare

Sample Dialogue: "Got anything against dressin' up like animals, Emma? I feel like whackin' the cast of Cats."

Attributes: Bod 9, Chi 0, Mnd 5 (ha 8), Ref 7

Skills: Martial Arts 13, Guns 15, Leadership 12, Info/Religion 8, Shaping 14

Gun Schticks: Eagle Eye, Lightning Reload x3

Unique Schticks:

The Engine of Righteousness: The Reverend's gun-arm — the Engine of Righteousness — is designed as an anti-demon weapon. It fires razor-edged silver crucifixes. (He seems to have an infinite supply of these. At least, nobody's ever seen him reload.) These are treated as silver bullets that do 7 Damage to normal beings. Against supernatural entities (ghosts, abominations, and the like) they ignore all Toughness.

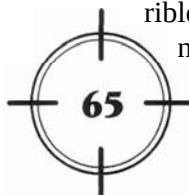
Weapons: punch (10), kick (11), Desert Eagle .50 Magnum (12/3/9+1), Engine of Righteousness (7/-/-)

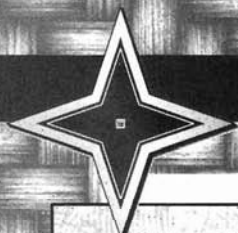
fortress, Redglare Chapel (see page 73). He's also attracted a large mob of dis-timed persons who find his bizarre evangelism compelling. Some of these really do believe the Reverend when he speaks of evil, but most are just head cases looking for something to destroy. With his frequent crusades, the Reverend is an easy way for them to get their fix.

Most of the time, Reverend Redglare picks his targets at whim, relying on his chapel's AI, Emma (a certified genius), to justify the purges in the pages of the Bible. Indeed, as far as the Netherworld as a whole is concerned, he's merely a lunatic it's best to avoid. But, as shown above, the Lodge has a standing agreement with Reverend Redglare, allowing them to utilize his services against Netherworld targets in exchange for regular payments of gold, which he uses to purchase supplies outside of the Netherworld. He may be crazy, but he's also always looking out for Number One.

TEN THOUSAND SHUDDERING NIGHTMARES

Several millennia ago (he forgets exactly how many), a demon lord committed hell's most terrible crime. While stripping the skin off a sinner whose situation was rather complicated





Running Horse

Sample Dialogue: "How did I find you? You're the **only** person in **ten thousand** miles smoking filtered cigarettes."

Attributes: Bod 7, Chi 3 (Fu 10), Mnd 5 (Per 10), Ref 7

Skills: Martial Arts 17, Guns 15, Detective 14, Driving 14, **Info/Survival 15**, Intrusion 15
Fu Schticks: Beak of the Crane, Crane Stance, Dark's Soft Whisper, Friend of Darkness, Gathering of the Clouds, Natural Order, Prodigious Leap, Talon of the Crane, Wing of the Crane

Gun Schticks: Eagle Eye x2, Fast Draw, Hair Trigger Netk Hairs, Signature **Weapon (bow)**
Driving Schticks: Signature Ride (**Thunderbird**, his horse)

Unique Schticks:

Hunter's Instinct: See "Bounty Hunter," p. 85.

Weapons: punch (8), kick (9), bow (10/5/1), knife (9)

Ten Thousand Shuddering Nightmares

Sample Dialogue: "Sorcery keeps me alive. **That is why** I wish to see it expunged from the world."

Attributes: Bod 10, Chi 0 (Mag 8), Mnd 4 (Cha 2), Ref 5

Skills: Martial Arts 14, Guns 13, Artanowave Device 16, **Creature Powers*** 15, **Info/Sorcery 10**

Arconowave Schticks: Feedback Enhancer, Neural Stimulator, Wave Scanner

Unique Schticks:

Will Not Die: Ten Thousand Shuddering **Nightmares is immortal.** He never needs to make **Death** Chetks. He takes one **point** of **Impairment** for every 15 Wound Points inflicted upon him, **Unlike** other characters, he does not regain **all** his Wound Points at the end of a session. Rather, he regains **ten** Wound Points **each** time.

Weapons: push (11), kitk (12), **Deathsaber** (3), Desert Eagle .50 Magnum (12/3/9+1), **Pancor Jackhammer** (13/6/10)

**Although Ten Thousand Shuddering Nightmares has the Creature Powers skill, he only has the Horrific Visage and Deceptive Speed aspects of that power. His infernal punishment has stripped him of all his ether powers.*

— did the right thing for the wrong reason, or maybe the other way around — Ten Thousand Shuddering Nightmares found himself thinking, "What's the point, really?" It all seemed so arbitrary and pointless that he walked off the job, allowing the half-skinned soul to escape into the Netherworld.

As punishment for questioning his duties, Ten Thousand Shuddering Nightmares was stripped of his powers and banished from the Underworld for all eternity. Since then this creature has wandered the world serving

those who could help him regain scraps of his power. In each case he gradually built up his skills and abilities, outlived his masters, and moved on.

Ten Thousand Shuddering Nightmares ("Ten" for short) is quite possibly the most bored creature on the face of several worlds. All he wishes is eternal rest, something that has been forbidden him. He has recently thrown his lot in with the Ascended. If they win the Secret War, magic ceases, in all its forms. Then maybe he will know peace. He serves as a powerful undercover agent for the Lodge, since few Innerwalkers are aware of his true affiliation.

Ten wants to destroy all magic. If that means a few fellow Pledged must die, so be it.

RUNNING HORSE

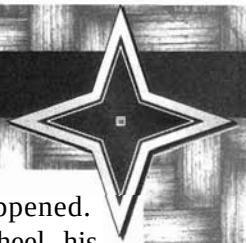
There were three of them hunkered down by the fire. Feeling safe. Telling one another that even the Unspoken Name lacked the resources to find them in the Australian Outback of the nineteenth century

Running Horse knew what they were thinking because he was close enough, lying in a shallow pit covered in hot scratchy earth, to hear their conversation. There were two Pledged agents and a traitor to the Lodge. Their talk told him that the two Pledged weren't just dupes following orders: They knew what they were betraying, and who. They were there to meet Architect scientists with proof of the true nature of the Wheel's masters. The Unspoken Name was right in his suspicions.

*Horse lay motionless for hours waiting for the moment to strike, but his targets were good and never totally dropped their guard. He approved — it was the sort of mission he **really** enjoyed.*

*Eventually, one of his quarry looked to the horizon, where a dust plume could be seen tearing towards them, and kicked his companions awake. "Look **lively**, they're coming."*

*That split second of inattention as **all** that Horse needed. Surging to his feet, he ran towards the camp. One of the Pledged went down with an arrow through his neck before their leader even knew what was happening. The other was quick enough to draw his Glock before a second arrow caught him in the chest. A third arrow and*



the Ascended traitor was down screaming, his hand pinned to his thigh, trapping his Desert Eagle in its holster. Running Horse approached quickly, but without haste. Plenty of time before the Architects arrived.

The wounded transformed animal hissed in pain and fear. "You're dead, you know that ... you just signed your death warrant."

Running Horse drew his knife. "Well, according to my report, you die in an Architect doublecross."

Running Horse is one of the foremost authorities in pulling the "track" out of the "trackless wilderness" of 1850. When a fugitive disappears into the African bush or the wilds of Wyoming,

Running Horse goes in to see what happened. Among the human members of the Wheel, his position is nearly unique.

It was Running Horse who wielded the Ivory Spear (see page 90), saving the Lodge from a coup attempt. Officially, there is no evidence that Running Horse was guilty of shedding Ascended blood, but a very few at the top levels have their suspicions. Mr. X and Draco know, but both of them privately think the "spilling blood" business is an anachronistic rule observed more in the breach than the observance. Nonetheless, it's still a dangerous secret between the three of them.



Illustration by Richard Pace

July, 1995

Tairong hated to lose sleep, especially over someone else's problems. Still, part of the reason she chose to live in Hong Kong was to provide

Ascended-level assistance where the Ascended couldn't normally go. When she made it clear she was available, she expected requests to come solely from the Hong Kong Operations Commander, not from a man with the colorful name Fast Eddie Lo.

Fast Eddie Lo puffed on the most offensive cigar Tairong had ever had the misfortune to smell in her life. She had to squint just to see him clearly through the blue-white haze that wreathed his head.

"I know you outrank me," he said "so I want it clear that this is a favor." He blew two streams of smoke out his nostrils. "I've got some troubles down in one of my hotels. Someone's moving in,

and he's not part of the Wheel. Whoever's screwing with me already sent me this as a message." With that, Eddie put an elaborately carved wooden box on his desk. "Go ahead. Open it."

Tairong leaned over and flipped the lid back. She had to steel herself to not recoil from the smell. The expression of pain on the severed head's face spoke volumes about how the man had died. "Who is this?"

Fast Eddie sighed and looked appropriately remorseful. "He was my number three man. Him and five of my best died last night facing these freaks. I want them out and the grapevine says you're the best the Wheel has locally"

Tairong, Danny, and Lydia stood outside the colorfully named Wing Chan's New Forest of

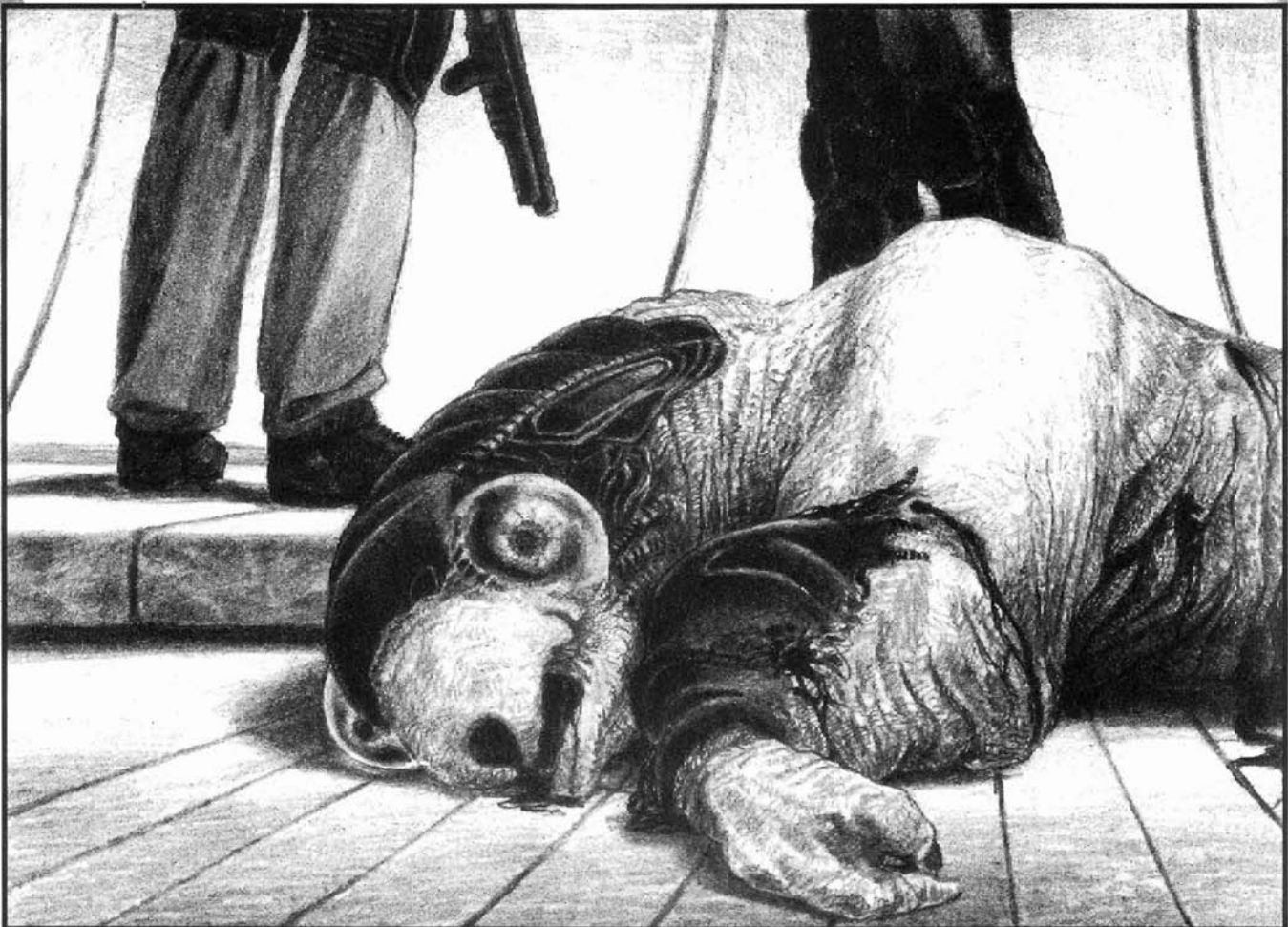


Illustration by Andrew Boker

Incandescent Bliss. The thoroughly seedy exterior belied the colorful name. Tairong looked at her assistants. 'Are we ready?'

The interior smelled of urine and other, less identifiable things and Tairong was convinced she could hear termites burrowing through the walls. The man behind the desk ignored their entrance, instead reading a tattered newspaper. Danny, far too well dressed for the hotel, banged on the desk. When the clerk finally chose to acknowledge him, he spoke. "Mr. Lo sent us, said you'd give us a good price on a room."

The man held up a finger to Danny, said "Wait," and started digging through drawers behind the desk.

Danny turned around to say something to his companions when the clerk stood again with a sub-machine gun in his hand. Danny immediately rolled to the floor and stood, facing the man with both Brownings out. "I'm sorry, friend. Did you lose the keys?"

The clerk shook his head and chuckled. "No, no. But you are in the wrong place. Mr. Lo can't use this hotel any longer. Tell him we kill three men for every man who comes here."

Lydia coughed politely. "Three to one. You're outnumbered."

Then the elevator dinged, signaling the opening doors. From inside the elevator, a man spoke. "That's three to six."

Lydia turned to cover the elevator with her shotgun. Danny kept one pistol aimed at the desk clerk and moved one to cover the five men in the elevator. Tairong crouched, preparing to leap on the first man to twitch wrong. The man who had spoken left the elevator, stepping aside to let his men, all armed with submachine guns, move out.

"I sent Fast Eddie a message last night," the man said. "Doesn't he know better? Maybe three heads will convince him tonight." He gestured to his men. "Kill —"

Tairong pounced, knocked the wind out of him, and ripped the firearm from his grip. Danny took the signal and shot the clerk in the

throat and one of the elevator thugs in the stomach. Lydia ratcheted her shotgun, the blast ripping a third man into two pieces. The man Tairong disarmed kicked her hard enough to send her reeling regained his feet, and drew a pistol from under his jacket. Danny spun around, firing both Browning pistols into a fourth man's chest. Lydia blasted the final thug, leaving Tairong and the leader facing off.

The man slowly circled Tairong. "How could that bottom-feeder Fast Eddie afford talent like you?"

Tairong snarled back at him, warily matching his movements, her eyes locked on the gun. Danny and Lydia both took aim on the man.

Danny spoke. "Stop, drop the gun, and hold up your hands."

The leader spat in response. "You shoot me, I shoot her."

Tairong growled deep in her throat, her hands hooked into claws, and she rushed the man almost too quickly for him to see. He fired, the bullet grazing her arm. Both Lydia and Danny opened fire, their shots hitting home. Tairong was on top of him before he could fall, ripping wider the wounds inflicted only a moment before.

The multiple impacts spun his body around and knocked him to the floor. Tairong flipped him over, wrapped her fingers around his throat, and bellowed: "Who do you work for? Who sent you after Fast Eddie?" Her companions approached, keeping their firearms aimed at the man. "Why this hotel?"

The man coughed once, twice. He stared at Tairong and spat. She slapped him hard across the face and repeated the questions.

He coughed again and spattered blood on her arms. "Look upstairs, and you —" A final coughing fit shook him, ending with a death rattle.

Tairong dropped the dead man. "You two, go outside. Wait for me." After they departed, she looked upstairs.

The hotel wasn't a hotel after all.

Wheel Sites

WHERE IT ALL GOES DOWN

ZODIAC MARTIAL ARTS ACADEMIES

If you're a practicing martial artist, you already know about the Zodiac Martial Arts Academies. They're a chain of schools that teach kung fu all over the United States, with branches opening up in Europe and Asia as well. It's an aggressively expanding operation, sort of like Wal-Mart or McDonald's. Major cities lacking Zodiac Academies are probably on the list for expansion.

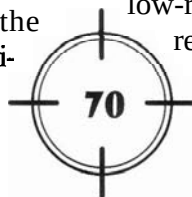
The schools are known for their distinctive sign, which features the animals of the Zodiac surrounding the name of the school. In keeping with this theme, students each choose a "totem animal," such as a bear or a monkey, which provides them with the basis for the study of a particular style of kung fu. Among respected martial artists, the Zodiac Academies are scorned for teaching quickie kung fu instead of laying the proper foundations for lifelong study. They find that those who have studied at the Zodiac Academies have trouble progressing past elementary exercises.

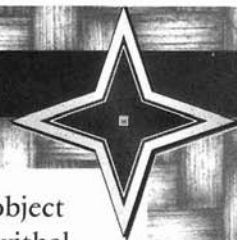
Among those who know about the Secret War, the Academies are known as one of the Wheel's main recruiting centers. The archi-

tectural design of the Academies' buildings, with their slightly offset brass plaques that form the symbol of the Wheel, molds the chi of its students and makes them more amenable to the idea of following orders from the Wheel. In game terms, any character attuned to a Zodiac site may learn any fu schtick from any of the animal paths (Path of the Passive Wings, Path of the Healthy Tiger, and so on) that does not have a prerequisite by spending two fewer Experience Points than are normally required. However, all schticks from those paths that do have a prerequisite cost two Experience Points more than normal. In addition, anyone attuned may raise his Fu secondary attribute at half cost. However, every time this is done, it lowers his Willpower attribute by one point. Attunement to a Zodiac Academy does not give any of the other normal benefits of attunement to a feng shui site.

Signing up at a Zodiac Academy isn't recommended for PCs. On the other hand, it might be a nice plot hook to have your resident gun-toting maniac enroll, thinking he will be able to compete with the big boys by learning at a local branch.

All teachers and staff at the Academies are in the Order of the Wheel, though many are low-ranking and have no idea that feng shui really works. In fact, few Zodiac staffers have much more skill than their stu-





dents. The Wheel tends to recruit instructors from the ranks of Zodiac students, and they're kept ignorant as long as they're serving their purpose.

If the PCs find out about the sinister secrets of the Zodiac schools, they might be tempted to run around wrecking them. That's easier said than done. When school is in session — which is frequently — they're pretty well defended. Ten to twenty martial artists, even if they aren't that skilled, are at least a minor hassle. The real killer, though, is that most of the students are innocents. The schools all have kids' classes, offer discounts for local cops, and run selfdefense courses for single women. These aren't the enemies most heroes want to fight. Blowing Academies up in the middle of the night is definitely a tactic that will take a given school out of commission ... for about a month. The speed with which

these places can be rebuilt is a scary object lesson in the Wheel's financial wherewithal.

AREA 51

The site known to popular culture as Area 51 had its genesis in the 1850 juncture. Over the course of the Secret War, the Lodge assembled quite a stockpile of unique items, dis-timed technologies, and even a few captured (or unkillable) supernatural creatures. They wanted to study the technology and find ways to neutralize the magic. After a few high-profile incidents involving abominations, they realized that even in a low magic juncture, these things had the potential to be dangerous. What they needed was a storage facility that could contain the captured magical and arcanotech debris until it could be safely destroyed. It had to be a place so far out of the way that it would be inconceivable for anyone to find it.



The area that would someday become New Mexico was judged suitably desolate.

Fast-forward a century, when Manifest Destiny caught up with the Lodge. A then-recent incident involving cryogenically frozen Buro soldiers caused a flurry of activity at the site. Given that there was a town nearby, members of the Lodge worried that sooner or later someone was going to notice. The Web of the Spider swung into action, spinning various lies about offcourse weather balloons. Not everyone bought it, so a second layer of **misinformation** was thrown to the winds: that of a flying saucer crash.

The result has been nothing but gravy for the Lodge. Pledged companies continue to pump out "alien" merchandise featuring the Area 51 theme, and the public continues to snap it up. Those who pride themselves on their skepticism "know" the "truth," and Area 51 remains secure. Then again, who knows what your PCs might do?

For Game Moderators, this is a perfect place to store bizarre magic and arcanotech for use as plot gimmicks. The Lodge tends to save whatever it doesn't recognize, so it might be that some of these things retain their potency. Who knows? The device your PCs need might be waiting in Area 51. Or if you want to turn the tables, the Architects or the Lotus would undoubtedly raid the place for its treasures if they ever found out about it. Plus, a much smaller, less high-tech version of the base exists in the 1850 juncture as well. It's brand-new, but the experiments that are taking place out there might attract some attention. If you're running an Old West game and need a supply of **serious weirdness**, this is a great place to pick it up at a discount.

HABBAKUK

Of all of the projects the Allies considered in World War II, none was stranger than Habbakuk. Geoffrey Pyke, its creator, had been on the fringes of the military science since World War I. When he had his brainstorm, German U-boats were taking a heavy toll

on Britain, and the British needed a way of evening things out for their air power. Aircraft carriers were too vulnerable to submarines, so what could be done?

The answer, as we're sure you've already foreseen, was to sculpt a two thousand foot iceberg made of water mixed with wood pulp, into an iceberg aircraft carrier and fortress capable of carrying virtually anything the military needed. (The wood pulp, in case you're curious, hardened the ice so it could be **hammered** and sawed, and also raised its freezing point so it could survive in the North Atlantic's waters.)

Insane? Not as much as you'd think. A prototype lasted an entire summer in a lake in Alberta. Expensive and impractical? Apparently so, which was why history records that the project never went any further.

Completed? Yep. The Wheel didn't have to worry about expenses. They were even able to install fog generators to conceal its location, and cannons that sprayed liquid nitrogen at approaching ships to freeze them in place. They now use the massive ice fortress as a **center** for those projects they're particularly concerned about.

If you can't do anything with that as a Game Moderator, you need more help than this sourcebook can give you. The heroes infiltrating Lodge troops, making their way onto the massive base, and foiling the latest machinations of the Lodge is a plot that's got to be worth some interest. However, it might be a little tricky to end it in the classic James Bond style, since the walls are fifteen meters thick and have what you'd call a natural **fire-retardant** effect. Even if our heroes were to blow the electrical generators or the **refrigeration** plant, the iceberg's natural buoyancy would allow the Lodge time to rebuild. Of course, doing as much damage as you can in order to **cover your escape** remains a time-honored tradition.



SHINING DRAGON PRODUCTIONS

Secret Warriors who watch action movies in addition to living them out have already heard of Shining Dragon Productions and seen its logo, a spiny-backed dragon with its tail in its mouth. It's a Hong Kong movie studio that cranks out the usual mix of comedies, dramas, romances, and action flicks. It's best known, however, for its **action/horror** films, particularly the Demon Hunter series, in which the forces of darkness are perpetually beaten back by renegade cop and demon hunter Devon Sharpe. (Devon Sharpe, of course, is played by Devon Sharpe in much the same way Jackie Chan always plays characters named Jackie.)

Observant characters, or those familiar with the Netherworld, may realize the spectacular special effects — which draw raves from even the most jaded critics — aren't special effects. They're real demons. Devon Sharpe gives the phrase "doing his own stunts" a whole new meaning.

In fact, the building where the Shining Dragon Productions studio is now located on top of a major Netherworld portal — and it's one that leads to a bad part of town. Despite the Lodge's best efforts, it has always been the site of frequent demonic incursions into the real world. The Lotus and the Buro would (and have) both kill to try to get hold of the building, but the Lodge foresaw this and stationed a team of specially trained antidemon agents there to **fight** the horrors that come out of the portal.

This became difficult to conceal in short order, and so Shining Dragons Productions was born. It's perfect for the Lodge. People who see strange occurrences, demons, monsters, and gunfights assume it's all part of the filming. Furthermore, they make huge profit on the films. In addition, since the films are all about evil demons and sorcerers being beaten back by good old-fashioned guns

and fists, they make great propaganda. This is one of the few Lodge sites that the Jammers won't try to burn, in fact. They actually use the Demon Hunter series as training films for their raids on 69 AD, and aren't interested in getting rid of it.

Meanwhile, Devon Sharpe and his fellow stars continue to hold the line against the forces of darkness. Depending on the composition of your PC group, this might be a great way to introduce the "nice face" of the Lodge. (If you need a way to introduce the "nasty face" of the Lodge, you can take note of the fact that the Triads are silent partners in the studio until their business is threatened, at which point they become the dangerously noisy partners in the studio.)

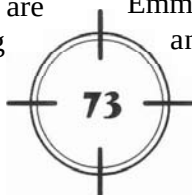
REDGLARE CHAPEL

The best way to get a feel for Redglare Chapel is to picture the largest, most impressive-looking cathedral you've ever seen. Think of ornate gargoyles, beautiful stone arches, gilded domes, and wondrous architecture.

Then start slapping weapons on it.

That's the central point: Redglare Chapel is a fortress, and it was designed to make sure invading armies go home in bite-sized chunks. Armaments bristle from every tower, spire, and dome; even the gargoyles contain cunningly concealed flamethrowers. This is, in point of fact, the most heavily-armed fundamentalist chapel in existence. (Admittedly, that's not a crowded field, but even if it was, the competition would be blown away.)

The whole weapons system is controlled by a single artificial intelligence, the supercomputer Emma, who was Shaped by Reverend Redglare himself. (Emma is not an acronym. Nobody knows why it was named Emma, and given Reverend Redglare's homicidal tendencies, nobody's asked. Nobody's that curious.) Emma has Guns 18, Carnival of Carnage x3, and Ten Thousand Bullets x2. She's almost





as trigger-happy as the Reverend, and is a real stickler about housekeeping.

Outside the church is the makeshift town where the Reverend's followers live. They're a mob of displaced, faceless losers who follow the Reverend for one simple reason: he finds good fights. The town has minimal sanitary facilities, non-existent law enforcement, and no money — it's all been donated to Reverend Redglare's good works. (When asked, people are hard-pressed to name specific "good works," but they usually counter with the time-honored debate technique of assaulting the questioner.)

MUNDANE CHAMBERS

The situation is simple: Lodge members try to avoid the Netherworld as much as possible, due to the high levels of magic therein. But this is a major weakness for them, limiting travel to other junctures and forcing them to rely on the Pledged. They've never been comfortable with this state of affairs, but, until recently, there hasn't been much they could do about it.

The Mundane Chambers are a recent innovation on the part of the Lodge that addresses this problem. While still not in common use, that's changing as their benefits become more obvious. The Mundane Chambers are areas of the Netherworld, each about a hundred feet square, which have been Shaped by Pledged operatives in such a way that magical energies drain out of them. The net effect is to create an area with the same juncture modifiers as 1850 or the contemporary juncture. The transformed animals of the Lodge can enter them to purge excess magical energies.

There are drawbacks, of course. The chambers are spaced and hidden, due to the necessities of the Lodge's minimal presence in the Netherworld. If you don't know where one is, you're not just going to stumble into it. They also only offer protection while you're inside them, and it takes a full twenty-

four hours to purge your Reversion points. Breaking up your trip with frequent twenty-four hour stays in a ten by ten room isn't the most fun way to travel, even if the Chambers are very nicely appointed. The worst drawback, though, is that if you are discovered while inside a Chamber, you're in deep shit. The intricacies of the chamber's structure are pretty vulnerable to damage, and if they get damaged, the magical energies flood back in, leaving you in the same boat you were in before.

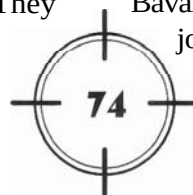
But it's better than nothing ... and this is only the beginning, after all.

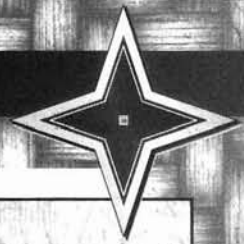
THE COUNTRY CLUB

St. Francis Island

The Country Club is the ultimate resort. It's in the middle of the South Pacific, thousands of miles from everything. This relatively tiny island has its own airstrip, accessible only by small aircraft and helicopters (assuming they have the range and fuel to reach the island), and a small port capable of handling anything up to a very large yacht. The island is the eroded top of an extinct volcano and has a wide variety of animal life and lush plant life, including several sub-species unique to the island. The northeast portion of the island is the volcanic peak — a cone, complete with crater. St. Francis has a surface area of thirty square miles, about a third of it tamed. The Country Club itself is located on the northern end of the island, and the immediately surrounding area is perfectly landscaped...The main building includes a large hall decorated with the seals of each Ascended family. It's big enough to handle up to five hundred guests at any given time.

To the rest of the world, the Country Club — a private resort for the Bilderbergers, or the Bavarian Illuminati, or whatever conspiracy du jour is supposedly running things — is a myth (at best). Even among the Order of





the Wheel and the Jade Wheel Society, the actual truth of its existence is unknown, and this is certainly for the best. No amount of wealth, favors, political power, or fame can get you onto this island if you're not one of the Ascended. Humans are brought to the island for one thing only: the Wild Hunt. Only a few of the Ascended care to participate in this savage tradition, but those few appreciate the chance to indulge their animal natures for a few nights. Every year, over the week between Christmas and New Year's Day (the height of summer for St. Francis Island), a half dozen or so Ascended of predatory aspect gather to enact their hunts. One or two bring the prey: six to ten humans to serve as the entertainment. The idea is to let them run loose on the island, where weapon caches have been hidden in advance, then hunt them down and kill them using only transformed animal schticks.

The rest of the year sees more moderate entertainment. The world's secret masters are more interested in a relaxing time than constant bloodbaths and spectacle (many protest the Wild Hunt, but few are willing to put a stop to it). The resort is open year-round to the Ascended, who arrive in their submersible yachts and private jets. The island itself, in addition to the main building, has cabins scattered across the tamed third for those guests who want more privacy. The resort is known for its incredibly luxurious appointments and breathtaking views, especially from Anthony Peak, the highest point of the island.

Security is lax on St. Francis; it's getting there that's hard. Spy satellites are programmed to never photograph it and airplane and cruise ship routes never come near. Anthony Peak hosts a sophisticated radar and sonar array that picks up any approaching craft, allowing the staff time to warn them away, usually through military channels. Any craft that continue to approach suffer "accidents" caused by torpedoes or surface-to-air missiles. But once someone is actually on the island, there's very little in the way of surveillance or live security. The Ascended value their privacy and don't want to set up

Typical Unnamed Country Club Guards

Attributes: Bod 6, Chi 0, Mind 6, Ref 6

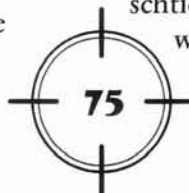
Skills: Martial Arts 8, Driving 8, Intimidation 8, Police 10

Transformed Animal Schticks: Most have none. A few have one or two appropriate to their species.

Weapons: fist (7), kick (8)

anything that can watch them. Someone who stows away on a vehicle bound for St. Francis can move around with relative freedom. Unless they have reason to believe otherwise, guests assume anyone they see is also Ascended (they don't all know one another), and many keep their distance out of a desire for privacy.

Anthony Peak's interior has been hollowed out to make room for an extensive command and communications center. Over one hundred yards across, this vast domed chamber is dominated by a huge, holographic representation of the Earth, with crisis areas, wars, and impending wars clearly color-coded on it. The globe rotates at the rate of one full rotation per normal day and the day/night terminator is clearly marked for reference. It doesn't normally display feng shui sites, but a special command can light up the globe, indicating where all of the major sites are and how much chi flows through each. The "Situation Arena" has hardwire lines to every major military installation and national government on Earth, enabling Ascended there to keep abreast of world events. Underneath the Situation Arena is the island resort's power plant, a geothermal plant capable of supplying the United States' East Coast power needs. What troops are on the island are stationed within Anthony Peak. Four barracks and training areas are located near the Situation Arena, with facilities for up to fifty guards to man the equipment and keep the Ascended guests apprised of information they need to know. The guards are young Ascended, recruited to serve on the island and receive training in fu and transformed animal schticks. Many graduate to lives of specialized network for the Lodge.



BLOWING UP ST. FRANCIS

St. Francis is not a large island, but it has great potential for some really impressive fight scenes. Of course, it is remote, so getting there is a bit of a challenge. Fortunately, any group of PCs should be able to overcome that hurdle. As mentioned, stowing away on a vessel already headed for St. Francis is a very easy way to get PCs to the island (even if they don't know that's where they're headed). Another (nastier) method works well if the Ascended have captured the PCs at some point. Rather than kill them, their captors can bring them along for the Wild Hunt. Of course, if relatives or close friends were kidnapped for the hunt instead, any decent PC would try to go along for a daring rescue.

Once on the island, it's time to start blowing things up. A few ideas include:

- The main building's grand hall has a grand staircase leading up to a mezzanine. The banisters, painted in gold leaf, are perfect to slide down to get to a bad guy or just blast mooks on the way down. Three gigantic crystal chandeliers hang over the grand hall, perfect targets for PCs to shoot (causing them to fall onto conveniently placed mooks). Strategically placed marble pillars provide cover.
- Precious, irreplaceable, and very fragile works of art fill the building: paintings, statues, and vases are all over the place and PCs can drop a few on the enemy to discourage pursuit. The possibilities with a large vase and a flight of stairs are simply endless.
- The jungle provides hiding places, both for evasion and ambush. A martial artist can swing onto a GMC from above with any vine. Speaking of vines, the clever PC can use the terrain to lay traps: dig a Burmese tiger pit, complete with pungee sticks and broad palm fronds to cover it, or stretch a vine across an otherwise clear path to trip up pursuers. A gun-toting

psycho can use an assault rifle to shoot up a tree so it falls on one or more GMCs. During the Wild Hunt, caches of pistols and rifles (no fully automatic or burst-fire weapons, sorry) are concealed in a half-dozen locations in the island's wilderness.

- Anthony Peak has several entrances, including tunnels at the base, each running several hundred feet before opening into a barracks, gymnasium, lounge, or the Situation Arena. Each of the four barracks has twenty-five single beds, none of which are nailed down. The lounge has soda and snack vending machines, tables, chairs, two television

sets with satellite feeds, and four pool tables. The gymnasium has nautilus machines, weights — any kind of exercise device known to man can be found here.

The opportunities for improvised weapons and cover abound throughout the Anthony Peak facility.

- * The Situation Arena is filled with computer consoles, desks, office chairs and a huge glowing hologram of the Earth in the middle of it all. A few dozen technicians are at work at all hours, keeping the system running and ready to receive alerts or issue instructions. Clever PCs can hide inside the hologram for cover. The sixty foot projection towers surrounding the hologram can be shot up, knocked over, or otherwise destroyed to cause massive property damage and power surges. It's possible to get into the Situation Arena through the crater but not incredibly easy. It requires climbing to the top and rappelling into the crater. Once inside, a few large lava tubes lead PCs into the base and the Situation Arena itself. The crater's lip houses a sophisticated radar array that blows up very nicely and causes all kinds of consternation in the Arena.
- If the PCs can override the heavy-duty doors leading to the geothermal plant, they find a maze of catwalks stretched across rivers of bubbling magma between the core taps running from the volcano's molten heart. The PCs can also load up



an airplane with explosives (fuel, plastique — it doesn't matter what it is, as long as there's a lot of it) and set the autopilot to crash it into the crater, igniting the volcano in a massive eruption.

- The docks are relatively ungarded (only four or five people on duty at any given time). At least a half-dozen yachts (normal or submersible) are docked. A small, armed submarine to handle the rare interloper sits locked up most of the time. Crates and luggage often fill the dock during arrivals or departures, providing cover or weapons. The dock has a refueling tank for the yachts, providing a great opportunity for beautiful explosions.
- The air strip has a small tower and aviation fuel tanks for the planes. Usually, one or two planes (Lear Jet or smaller — great for getaways) are parked near the runway. After the PCs destroy the Situation Arena they can plant explosives among the fuel tanks, ignite the volcano, and steal a plane, leaving utter chaos and destruction in their wake. Who wouldn't want that?

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

Ever notice how some Ascended seem to get from 1850 to the contemporary juncture the hard way — by aging through? Ever wonder how they do that? Some Ascended (notably the Tortoises) seem genetically inclined towards longevity, but others have to find alternate means. The best alternate means is a feng

shui site somewhere in Florida (or maybe Cuba or Haiti or Bermuda) known as the Fountain of Youth.

It's not exactly what you think. It's not a natural spring that you drink from and it makes you younger. (At least, it isn't that any more. Ask old Po Liu about what it used to be like, if you can find him.) Now the Fountain of Youth is just a rather nice pond with several modestly opulent cabins built on its shore.

Attune to the Fountain and you don't get any older. That's how it works.

This doesn't exactly mean you're unchanging. The effects of injuries or illnesses or too much sun can still mess up your body. But as your body cells reproduce, they copy their DNA perfectly, like they did when you were a kid, instead of getting tangled up with errors that accumulate until your organs start breaking down.

The drawback to the Fountain is just this: only six people can be attuned at any time, two for each cabin. Draco owns the site, but he defers to the Lodge Council when it comes to deciding who attunes. Mr. X got permission due to his outstanding work in 1861. Others are given berths when the previous occupants die (rarely) or get kicked out (which can happen in theory, but never has in practice).

The Fountain is a secret even from most Ascended. Only the topmost authorities in the various families even know about it, and all of them (naturally) covet the spots there. The only thing some of them want more is the position of Unspoken Name — because Draco has stated, immutably, that no Unspoken Name or former Unspoken Name is to be allowed to attune to the Fountain.



November, 1995

It took Tairong months to build a picture of the Wheel? global operations. She didn't much like what she found. It's one thing to protect yourself from a dangerous enemy, but she couldn't think of a good justification for all their activity. Fast Eddie Lo's slave ring was small potatoes compared to some of the things the Ascended allowed – no, *encouraged* – to happen.

She again sat in the Unspoken Name's office. Adrienne wasn't present, but Tairong was grateful for that. What had to be said wasn't for her ears. She outlined her findings to the Unspoken Name, ticking them off on her fingers. "Governmental corruption, organized crime, drug smuggling, political assassinations.... The list went on and on. When she finished, she met his gaze and asked the question. "Why do we allow this? This is our world. We are its rulers. Why do we coddle this villainy?"

The Unspoken Name's expression was blank. It showed, at best, mild consternation. "I respect you too much to lie to you about something that obviously upsets you greatly. Yes, we let these things happen. But, really, it's *their way*. That's how humans are. Given the flimsiest of reasons, humans eagerly invent their own atrocities. It does not take a lot to turn the average human being into a torturer, or a killer. This *unpleasantness* is inevitable. At least this way they *leave us alone*." He offered her a cigarette, taking one for himself when Tairong declined. "There's no way we can stop it. If we tried, it would make this world as brutal and moronically inflexible as Bonengel's. You've seen the Buro first-hand; you know what it's like. Would you rather we enforced a police state?"

Tairong shook her head *slowly*. "No. That? not what I meant. But we're not just allowing these things. Some of us encourage them. We recruit

their most brutal thugs and bring them into our house."

"To paraphrase a rather smart man, it's better to have them inside the tent *pissing* out than outside the tent *pissing* in."

"I assisted a Wheel member last summer. It turns out he was running slaves through the hotel we investigated for him. Slaves! Is this what being human means? I want no part of it!" She stormed out of the Name? office, slamming the door hard enough to rattle the hinges.

The Unspoken Name sat, shaking his head, and glanced through his day planner. He had to look up the number, but before Tairong had left the building he had reached his chosen assassin. "Esteban, I require your services."

The tall, dark Spaniard caught up with Tairong at the airport. She froze when she heard the click of a safety behind her. Ocho whispered softly into her ear. "Come with me. Make no sudden moves and this will be easy." He remained silent as he guided her out of the terminal and to an idling limousine.

Once inside, he frowned at her, the pistol he carried never wavering. His voice had a smooth, Spanish cadence. "We must talk, Tairong." The transformed spider studied *her*, looking for something. "What you are doing is wrong. The Unspoken Name, *you, myself ... we all do* what we must to survive."

"Survival? What threat are Fast Eddie's victims to us? I may be naive about this world, but I know that the Wheel is about more than *survival*. It's about power. It's about using people as *cattle, as pawns and slaves and prey*. I can't do that. I used to be an animal, and I wanted *nothing* more than to be human. Now, I can't watch

my family" – she spat the word – "treating humans like property. #

"We can't afford to connect too closely with the them! They'll break your heart, betray you. Believe me, in the *long* run you're better off with your own kind." He shook his head and glanced out the *win*-dow. "Please, reconsider your decision. You don't want to go where I've gone."

Tairong sighed softly "Why the gun, then? Why the car and the long drive?"

The Spaniard shrugged slightly. "I needed to get your attention and to be prepared *if* you chose unwisely."

Tairong's lip curled. "*And* what then? You would kill me? Break your own traditions?"

Señor Ocho's face showed a tiny trace of sadness. "If necessary I hope it does not come to that. When I – no, *that's* wrong. The Unspoken Name sent me because I, more than any other, understand what you go through now"

Tairong violently shook her head. "No! I will not. This is wrong. We are wrong! Do what you must, but do it quickly"

Tairong recalled the lessons *Bleys* taught her, about acceptance, serenity ... and defense. The tiger snarled and lunged for *Señor* Ocho. The spider raised his pistol and fired a single shot. The bullet slammed into her chest, flattened against the *chi*-strengthened flesh and bone, and fell to the floor. A fraction of a second later, Tairong fell upon him. He didn't resist – just grabbed her shirt with one hand and the door handle with the other. He rolled, flexed, extended, and her own momentum carried her out of the moving car.

Tairong rolled to a stop on the freeway shoulder. She shakily stood, every muscle protesting the harsh treatment. Blood flowed from nasty scrapes and she thought she might have broken a rib. Ocho's limou-

sine skidded to a stop several hundred feet down the freeway, and the assassin stepped out.

Tairong vaulted over the guardrail and into the trees lining the freeway. Several bullets whipcracked into the trees around her. At first she thought he was a poor shot – until she found herself tangled up in invisible lines, unable to move. Trapped in *Señor* Ocho's web, she tried to struggle free.

Tairong was still struggling when *Señor* Ocho approached. "Natural order, is it? That is such a pain in the ass. I hoped, really hoped, that you would listen to reason." The tiger thought she heard a pleading note in his voice. "I advise you to close your eyes. If you wish, pray." At that precise moment, the web holding her vanished. Off-balance, she fell.

The tiger saw a large rock on the ground before her. She bit the pain back, grabbed the rock with both hands and twisted to throw it. Ocho spoke. "Stubborn to the *end*?" Light flashed on metal, and her sleeve was pinned to the ground by a throwing knife. He stared into her eyes, his gaze burning with barely hidden rage.

"Do it," she spat. "Kill me. Finish it."

He twitched and another blade was between his fingers. *Señor* Ocho frowned, and with the speed of a stage magician made the knife vanish from his hand. "Not this time."

Tairong looked on, confused. "What are you talking about?"

Ocho shook his head. "You remind me of someone." She just stared. "Go," he said. "Do what you must." He held the pistol straight out and aimed again for her heart. "Run!" Tairong sprinted into the woods and did not dare to look back.

Campaign Resources

FIGHTING LIKE CATS AND DOGS

NEW TRANSFORMED ANIMAL PACKAGES

CHAMELEON

*Attribute Modifiers: Move -1, Intelligence +2,
Perception +4, Willpower +1*

Blur **Chi: X / Shots: 1**
Increase your Dodge AV by 2 for X shots. For each extra schtick you take, the bonus is increased by 1. You cannot take more than three schticks in Blur. Furthermore, the Blur bonus does not apply to active dodges. You may use Blur as a defensive action.

Camouflage **Chi: X / Shots: 1**
Spend X Chi points to increase your Intrusion by X for the rest of the sequence.

Doppelganger **Chi: Special / Shots: Special**
You may abandon your old human form and take on the appearance of any specific person. You may never return to any of your former appearances. Using this power takes fifteen

minutes and causes you to permanently lose one point from your Chi attribute. During the fifteen minutes, you can act without any particular impairment.

Tongue **Chi: 4 / Shots: 3**
Make a barehanded Martial Arts attack that causes 2 Impairment for the rest of the sequence. This attack inflicts no Damage. The range of this attack is equal to your Chi in meters. This effect is not cumulative.

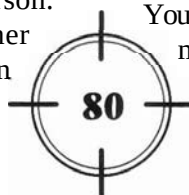
Turret Eyes **Chi: 1 / Shots: 3**
You can target two characters without the normal AV penalty for doing so. Use the highest AV of your two targets for determining the Outcome.

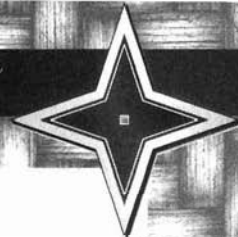
CRANE

Attribute Modifiers: Mind +3, Reflexes +3

Buffet **Chi: 2 / Shots: 3**
Hit an opponent with an unarmed attack. In addition to normal Damage, he loses a shot. For an ^{extra} schtick in Buffet, you can increase this penalty to two shots. You cannot take more than two schticks in Buffet.

Dance **Chi: X / Shots: 3**
You make a series of leaps and feints that climaxes in a blistering kick. In addition to





taking normal Damage, your opponent also suffers X Impairment on his next attack, where X is any amount of Chi you wish to spend. This Impairment does not wear off with time, but only affects one attack.

Flight

Chi: 6 / Shots: 3

You go airborne until the end of the sequence. You may reach a maximum vertical height equal to your Move rating and navel horizontally up to twice your Move rating. Each extra schtick adds a Move rating to vertical flight and two Move ratings to horizontal distance.

Crane Strike

Chi: 4 / Shots: 2

Make a barehanded Martial Arts attack. If your Reflexes are higher than your target's Reflexes, you can ignore your opponent's armor.

JACKAL

Attributes Modifiers: Move +2, Willpower -1, Reflexes +4

Backbite

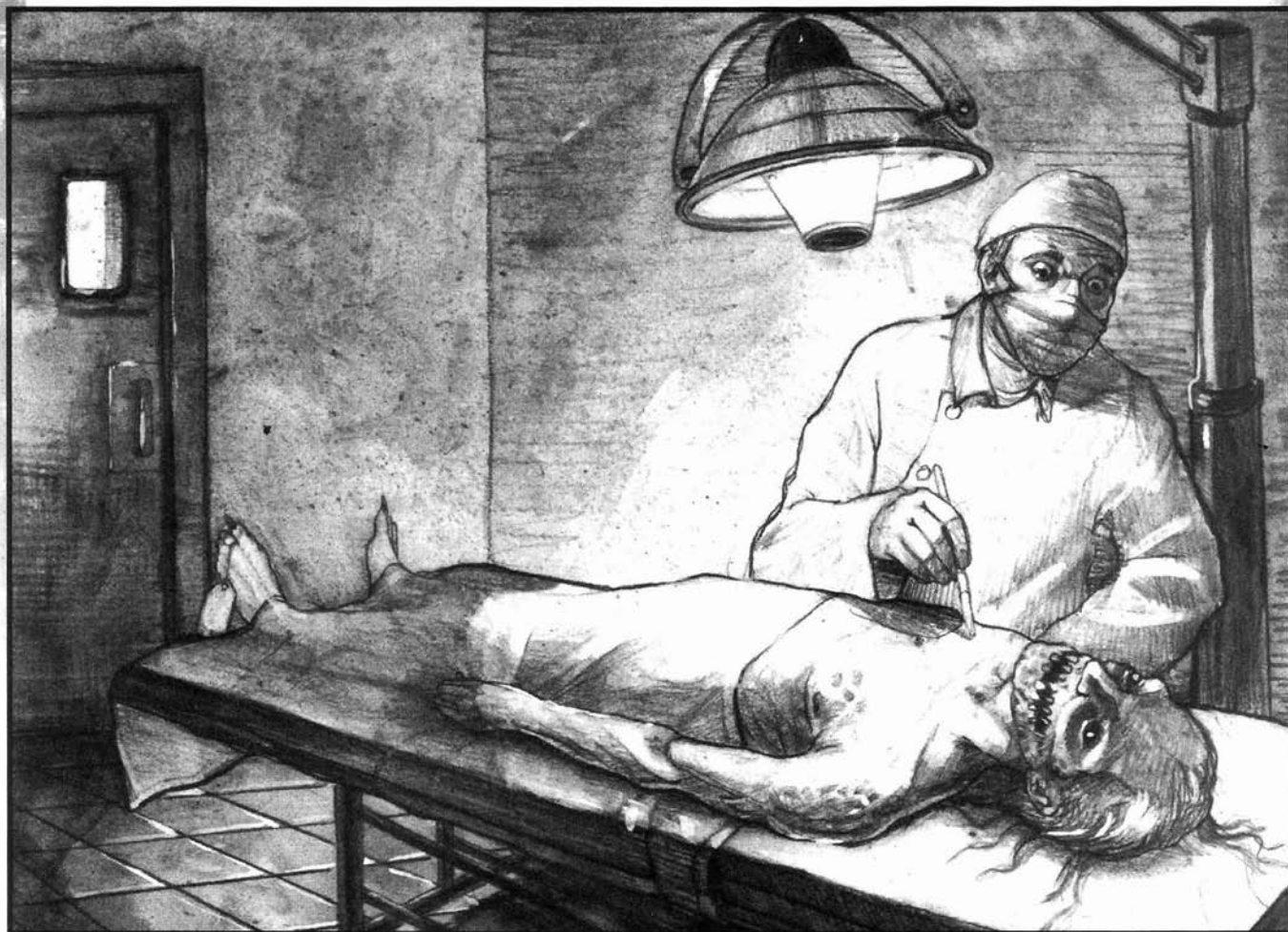
Chi: X / Shots: 3

Hit an opponent who is unaware of your presence with a **Martial Arts strike**; subtract X (the amount of Chi you elect to spend) from his Toughness.

Pack Attack

Chi: 1 / Shot: 3

If an opponent has already been struck by a transformed animal's Martial Arts attack this sequence, you may attack him with a +2 to your Martial Arts AV. (You may not use this ability if you were the only transformed animal that hit him, however.) For each additional schtick you take in Pack Attack, the bonus increases by 1, to a maximum of +4.



Scavenge

Chi: 0 / Shots: 0

On the very last shot of the sequence you may take one unused Chi point from another character. You must use this Chi point in the next sequence or it is wasted. Use of Scavenge does not affect the target's available Chi points in the next sequence. You may only use Scavenge once per sequence. For each additional schtick in Scavenge, you may steal another unused Chi point (from the same character), up to a maximum of three.

Scurry

Chi: X / Shots: 1

Add X (any amount of Chi you elect to spend) to your active dodge rating until the end of the sequence.

Worry

Chi: 3 / Shots: 0

Use this power after you roll a Martial Arts Outcome higher than your target's Toughness. You may immediately make an additional attack at no shot cost, and if you are successful, the new Damage bypasses Toughness. This power can only be used with unarmed attacks.

MAGPIE

Attribute Modifiers: Fortune +2, Intelligence +1, Perception +3, Reflexes +2

Flight

Chi: 6 / Shots: 3

You go airborne until the end of the sequence. You may reach a maximum vertical height equal to your Move rating, and travel horizontally up to twice your Move rating. Each extra schtick adds a Move rating to vertical flight and two Move ratings to horizontal distance.

Good Omens

Chi: 1 / Shots: 1

For the rest of the sequence, Fortune rolls that you make are open ended.

Steal

Chi: 1 / Shots: 2

Roll a Martial Arts check. If successful you do no Damage, but steal your opponent's weapon. That weapon can then be used against its original owner at +3 AV for the rest of the sequence. (Remember that a Signature Weapon can never be permanently taken away from its owner.

It is always lost or discarded somehow before the magpie leaves the scene.)

Glean

Chi: 4 / Shots: 3

You are as adept at stealing an individual's knowledge as you are at taking his valuables. Make a Perception check with the target's Willpower as the Difficulty. If successful you may ask the target one question, which he must answer truthfully. The question must be simple and concise. The information is picked out of the brain telepathically, so he may remain unaware his mind has been violated. Obviously the target cannot disclose information that he does not have.

MOLE

Attributes modifiers: Constitution +2, Strength +2, Mind +1

Blind

Chi: 0 / Shots: 0

You ignore penalties to Martial Arts or Dodge Action Values caused by darkness. You are also immune to Brain Shredder, Horrific Appearance, Squamous Visage, and any other schtick that requires you to see the attacker. You suffer a -2 to all Perception rolls that involve sight.

Claw

Chi: X / Shots: 3

Hit an opponent barehanded with a Martial Arts check; if successful, you may add X (any amount of Chi you elect to spend) to the Damage rating of your attack

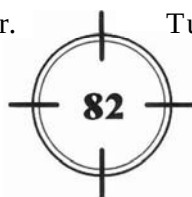
Tremor

Chi: 3 / Shots: 3

Strike the ground, causing localized earth tremors. Make a Martial Arts attack and calculate the Damage as usual, reduced by Agility rather than Toughness. The result is taken as Impairment that lasts for four shots, instead of as Wound Points. Flying opponents are unaffected. Each schtick in Tremor allows you to target one opponent, though each target must be within a radius equal to the number of schticks you have in Tremor times your Chi in meters.

Tunnel

Chi: 3 / Shots: 3





You are able to tunnel through soil, rock, or even concrete. (This power does not **allow** you to breach bank vaults, granite walls, or battleship armor, however.) You can tunnel a distance equal to your Kung Fu stat, in meters, every time you use the schtick. For an extra schtick in this power, you can make the tunnel inaccessible to others, as it collapses behind you.

TOAD

Attribute Modifiers: Fortune +2, Charisma -1, Perception +3

Evil Eye **Chi: 3 / Shots: 3**
Strike your foe barehanded; his next roll is an automatic failure unless he spends a Fortune point to bolster it. This Fortune point does not add an extra positive die.

Secretion **Chi: 2 / Shots: 0**
When you are struck in **hand-to-hand** combat, your attacker takes the Outcome of his roll as Impairment. Each schtick you take in Secretion causes this Impairment to last for three shots, to a maximum of nine shots.

Calamity **Chi: 1 / Shots: 3**
Make a successful Martial Arts strike. In addition to normal Damage, the target is unable to spend Fortune points for the rest of the sequence.

Bloat **Chi: X / Shots: 1**
Use your Chi to absorb Damage. X (any amount of Chi you elect to spend), is added to your Toughness, but only for this shot.

NEW FU PATH

PATH OF THE RAGING BEAR

Fury of the Bear **Chi: 1 / Shots: 3**
Make an attack with a melee weapon. You get a +3 bonus to your Damage, but the weapon shatters on impact. You may not use this with a signature weapon. *Path: Strength of the Bear*

Strength of the Bear **Chi: 3 / Shots: 0**
Use immediately after an opponent attacks you successfully with a **hand-to-hand** weapon. That weapon breaks. Signature weapons are immune to this effect. *Prerequisite: Fury of the Bear; Path: Slumber of the Bear*

Slumber of the Bear **Chi: X / Shots: X**
Increase your Toughness by X until end of sequence. *Prerequisite: Strength of the Bear; Path: The Bear Awakened*

The Bear Awakened **Chi: 5 / Shots: 1**
Until end of sequence, you gain +3 to your Martial Arts AV against any opponent who rolled a higher Initiative than you did. *Prerequisite: Slumber of the Bear; Path: The Bear Undying*

The Bear Undying **Chi: special / Shots: 4**
Use before making a Death Check; that Death Check is an automatic success. Your Chi attribute goes down by one permanently whenever you use this power. *Prerequisite: The Bear Awakened*

Path of the Raging Bear



Bodyguard

"Get down! Now!"

You're a "Personal Protection Specialist." It's your job to get your client from point A to point C while avoiding the bad guy at point B. You're well known among the clients who count — you've played "bullet magnet" for numerous celebrities and politicians all over the world.

Maybe your skills have brought you to the attention of the Wheel and you've been invited to take your skills to the next level of challenge. Or maybe their rivals have you figured for one of the few who can beat the Wheel at its own game. Or just maybe, the one client you couldn't save died at the hands of someone who wasn't one hundred percent human.

Regardless, you're ready to do what it takes to keep your client safe. If that means strong-arming demons and capping Shaolin monks instead of muscling paparazzi and spotting psychotic stalkers — well, the job description is still largely the same.

Juncture: any

Attributes: Bod 5 (Tgh 6)
Chi 0 (For 1)
Mnd 5 (Per 7)
Ref 5

Divide 6 points among primary attributes, spending no more than 3 on any one attribute.

Skills: Driving +6 (11)[Max 13]
Guns +8 (=13)
Info / Celebrities +7 (=12)
Leadership +1 (6)[Max 10]
Martial Arts +6 (=11)

Add 4 Skill Bonuses. Swap the Skill Bonuses and Action Values of Guns and Martial Arts if desired.

Schticks: 3 gun schticks, or 1 gun schtick and 2 driving schticks

Unique Schtick:

Take the Bullet: Keeping clients alive is what you do, even if it means getting hurt yourself. Nominate another character as your "client" at the start of each session. If that client is ever wounded, you may, as a two shot defensive action, attempt to pull him out of harm's way or shield him with your body. Roll your combat AV with the attacker's Action Result as the Difficulty. If successful you pull him out of **danger**; if you fail the roll you don't get there in time. On a fumble, you both take the Damage as rolled.

You can protect people who are not the designated client as well. This is a two shot action. You literally take your buddy's hit for him. Roll your combat AV with the attacker's Action Result as the Difficulty. If you succeed, you take the Damage instead of your pal. The attacker's Outcome is calculated against your friend's Dodge Action Value, but you reduce the Damage with your own Toughness.

Weapons: 2 weapons of the appropriate juncture

Quick Schtick Pick:

Gun: Fast Draw x2, Hair Trigger Neck Hairs

Weapons:

69: bow, sword
1850: sword, Colt revolver
Cntp.: H&K P7, Micro Uzi
2056: Buro 9, Buro Blade of Truth

Wealth Level: working stiff

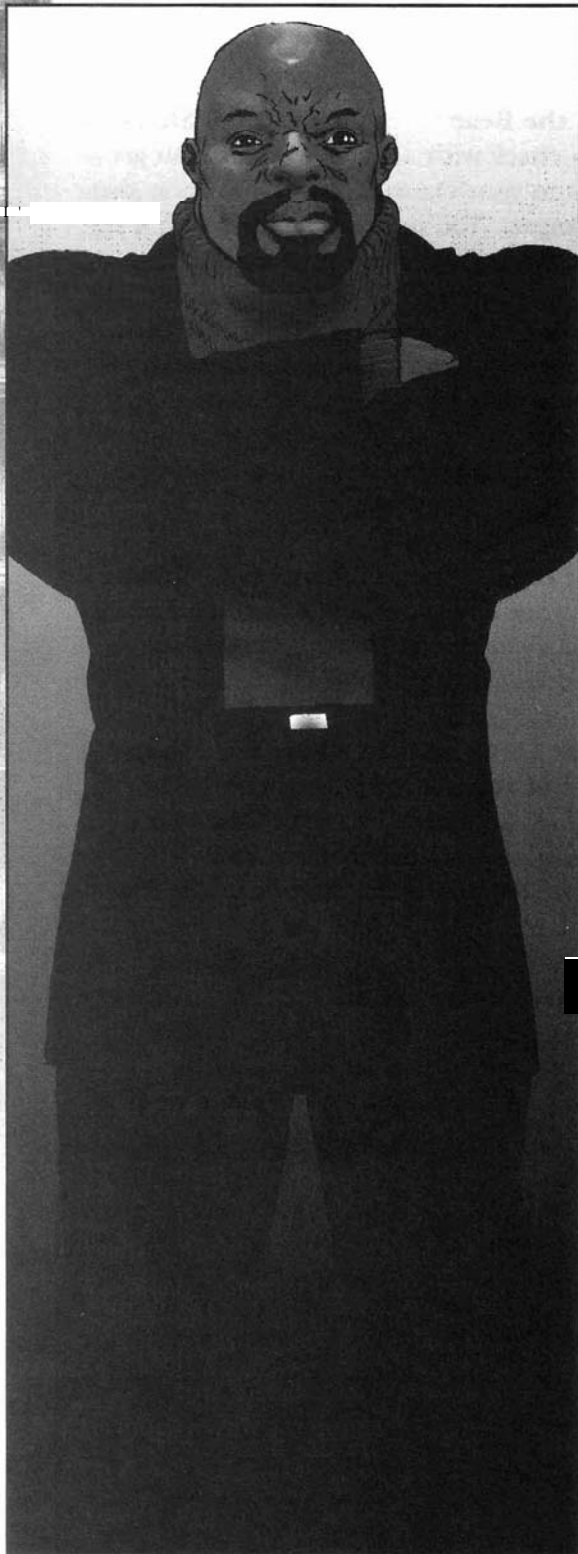


Illustration by Rithord Pace

Bounty Hunter

"The poster said dead or alive. Right now, I'm leaning towards alive. You don't want me to change my mind."

You started out skip chasing and finding deadbeat dads, but your considerable talent soon found you tracking more crafty and desperate crooks. These crimeys can be cunning and vicious – but also lazy, self-destructive, and sentimental. You are often called in to hunt criminals who have crossed international borders, or are hiding out in countries without extradition treaties. You always get your man (or woman), and if he puts up a spirited struggle that suits you just fine. You are able to think like those you hunt. No one can hide from you permanently. They can run, but they just die tired.

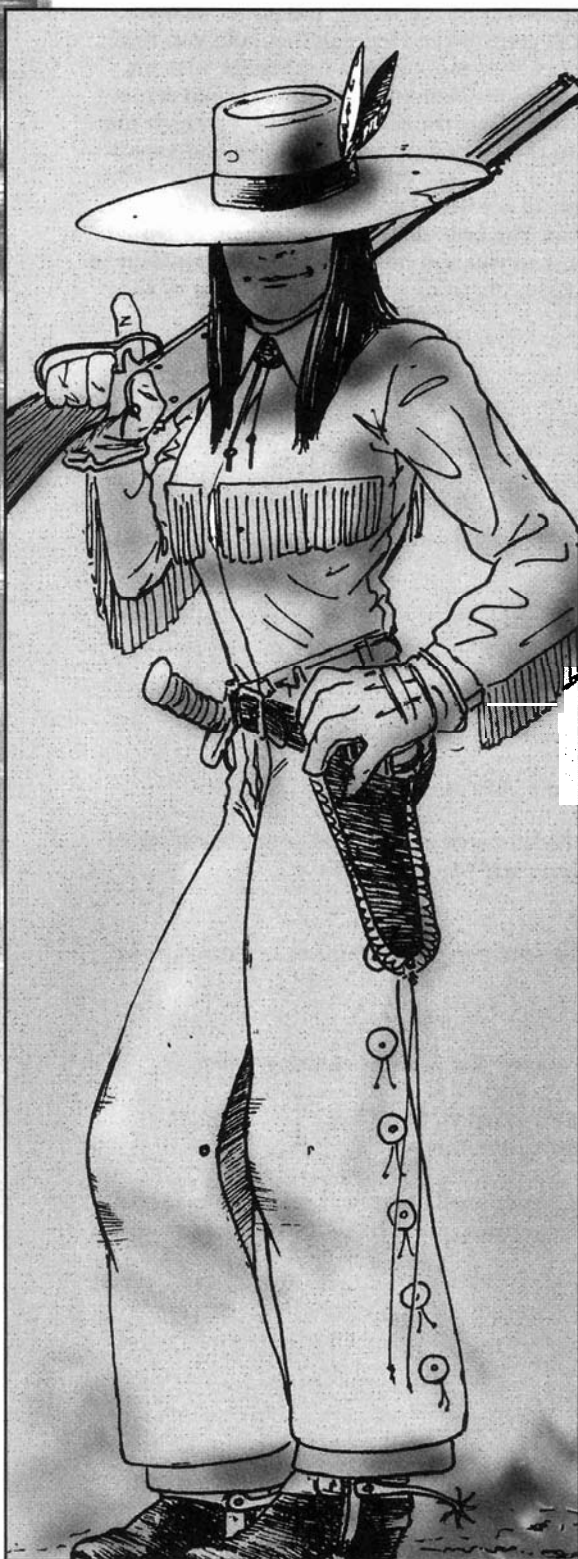


Illustration by Richard Pore

Juncture: 69, 1850, contemporary

Attributes: Bod 5
Chi 0
Mnd 5 (Per 8)
Ref 5

Divide 5 points among your primary attributes.

Skills: Detective +4 (12)[Max 14]
Driving +5 (10)[Max 12]
Guns +8 (=13)
Info/Criminal World +6 (=11)
Intrusion +6 (=11) [Max 13]
Martial Arts +6 (=11)

Add 6 Skill Bonuses. Swap the Skill Bonuses and Action Values of Guns and Martial Arts if desired. Max for all skills is 14.

Schticks: 2 gun schticks

Unique Schtick:

Hunter's Instinct: Visit the location of a fugitive's last sighting. Roll your Perception with the quarry's Mind as your Difficulty. If successful, the GM gives you some clue as to your target's actions or present location. Depending on the juncture you could get this insight from surveillance footage, dropped receipts, or even something as simple as footprints and spoor.

Weapons: 2 weapons of the appropriate juncture

Quick Schtick Pick:

Gun: Hair Trigger Neck Hairs, **Signature Weapon**

Weapons:

69: bow, sword

1850: knife, Colt Revolving Rifle

Cntp.: knife, **Mossberg Special Purpose**
Shotgun

Wealth Level: working stiff

Lodge Survivor

"You bastards stole my world. Someday, I'll make you all pay"

You are of the one percent. All other transformed animals in the world of the Architects have reverted to their animal ancestry. You are one of the "lucky" ones, surviving in the ruins of Acapulco, Honolulu, or the Rockies. Life has been one long nightmarish fight, forcing you to do things that no sentient creature should.

Before they died, your parents told you stories of your proud heritage — about the grandeur of the Lodge, the power of the Order of the Wheel, the craft of the Pledged. They told you about time travel and the Secret War, too, but you were never sure you could believe them. Until now. Now you've stumbled onto something that could only be a Netherworld gate. At last, you have the chance to travel back to the glory days of your people and experience them first hand.

You're not sure how to get where you're going, or what you'll find when you get there. The only thing you are certain of is that no one should be forced to run and hide because of an accident of birth. Anyone who disagrees is going to feel the full force of your long-suppressed rage.

Juncture: 2056

Attributes: Bod 5
Chi 7 (For 2)
Mnd 5
Ref 5

Attributes are changed depending on which transformed animal package you choose.

Skills: Guns +3 (8)[Max 13]
Info/Survival +7 (13)
Intrusion +6 (11)[Max 13]
Martial Arts +6 (11)[Max 13]
Add 6 Skill Bonuses. Max for all skills is 13.

Weapons: 1 gun from the 2056 juncture

Schticks: 5 schticks divided between guns and your chosen transformed animal package in any way you see fit

Unique Schticks:

Immunity You have the same reversion modifiers as a transformed animal from 69 AD.

Quick Schtick Pick:

Transformed Animal: Rat — Disorientating Strike,
Infect, Lurk
Gun: Concealed Weapon, Eagle Eye
Weapons: Buro Crimestopper

Special Limitation: Cannot learn Sorcery; if returned to animal form through exposure to magic, your character is retired from the game.

Wealth Level: poor



Illustration by Rithord Pote

Pleaged Agent

"You can't handle the truth!"

The truth is out there — which means you're working overtime **tonight**.

You are a member of a secret conspiracy, and you love it. You **love** all the **sneaking** about: dead letter drops, wearing shades and black suits, scaring the **crap** out of people, and sitting in on late night rituals. You were born to do it. Maybe you used to work in law enforcement or the military, where your hard work and diligence recently got you promoted. Not just some tide change or pay increase either — the real raise. You now serve the world's secret masters directly.

Or you did. Maybe something has led you to question your dedication to the Wheel. Sure, they can give you everything — except, apparently, a straight answer about who's running the show. The Wheel trained you to use your deductive powers, but they also trained you to follow orders blindly. That contradiction is getting harder and harder to live with.

Juncture: 1850, contemporary

Attributes: Bod 5
Chi 0
Mnd 5
Ref 5

Divide 5 points among your primary attributes.

Skills: Deceit +6 (11)[Max 13]
Detective +8 (=14)
Guns or Martial Arts +5 (10) [Max 13]
Info/Order of the Wheel or Info/Jade Wheel
Society +9 (=14)
Leadership +3 (8)[Max 12]
One non-combat skill as a personal
specialty +5 (10) [Max 13]

Add 6 **Skill Modifiers**. **Max for all skills is 13.**

Weapons: 1 weapon of the appropriate juncture

Schticks: 2 gun schticks, 2 fu schticks, or 1 gun and 1 fu schtick

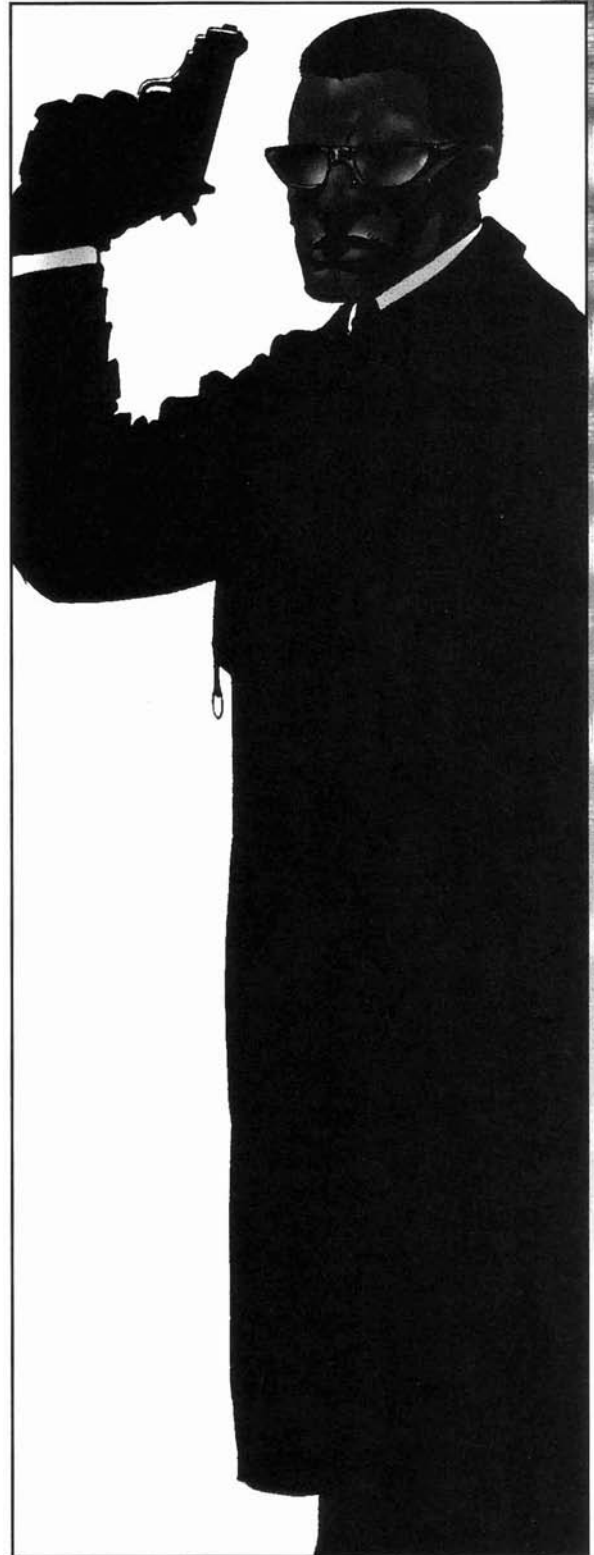
Unique Schtick:

Pledged to the Cause: As one of the trusted servants of the secret masters, you can command those below you in the Wheel. You can send materials for analysis in the top scientific labs, request that scholars pour through the secret archives of the Vatican, or commandeer a SWAT team as backup. Roll your **Info/Order** of the Wheel or **Info/Jade Wheel Society skill** against a Difficulty set by the GM (usually somewhere between 10 and 18, depending on her plans and whims). Any troops gathered using this schtick are always mooks with an AV of no more than 7, and they usually number no more than twelve. On a fumble, somebody within the Lodge has noticed your misuse of power and will probably take appropriate steps soon.

Quick Schtick Pick:

Gun: Eagle Eye
Fu: Bite of the Dragon
Weapons:
1850: sword
Cntp.: Sig-Sauer P-220

Wealth Level: rich



Smuggler

"You want it moved cheap? Go to the post office. You want it there fast, safe, no questions asked? Talk to me."

You provide a public service; you never, never call it smuggling. You have principles. There is some merchandise you would never touch. After all, if you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas. But if one pushy government wants to keep its neighbor from getting vital supplies like medicine, or rifles, or tariff-free cigarettes — well, that just doesn't seem fair. The money doesn't hurt either. And if anyone squawks about the price, hey, you didn't put up the trade barriers, now did you?

Lately, life has taken a few strange turns. You've started carrying guns for some very desperate customers. Their money is good and their hearts seem to be in the right place, but piloting a boat through a giant underground sea with what looked like an honest-to-god sea serpent chasing you wasn't really what you were expecting. Still, it was kind of fun. Plus, the Chinese antiques they gave you in payment were in really great condition, for being about two thousand years old.

Juncture: any

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

Divide 5 points among your primary attributes.

Skills: Deceit +5 (10)[Max 13]
Driving +9 (=14)
Fix-It +8 (=12)
Info/Illicit trade routes +10 (=15)
Guns +5 (10)[Max 13]
Martial Arts +3 (8)[Max 10]

Add 6 Skill Bonuses. Max for all skills is 13

Weapons: 2 weapons of appropriate juncture

Schticks: 3 driving schticks, or 2 driving schticks and 1 gun schtick

Quick Schtick Pick:

Driving: Ram Speed x2, Signature Ride

Weapons:

69: sword, bow

1850: sword, pepper-box pistol

Cntp: Browning Hi-Power, Mossberg

Special purpose

2056: Buro Avenger, Buro

Crimestopper

Wealth Level: working stiff (but everyone thinks you're rich)



Two-Fisted Archeologist

"Maybe if I bury you for a thousand years, you'll wind up worth something."

The past is dangerous. Your years as a field historian have proved that time and time again. Our ancestors left dangerous artifacts littering the ruins of their cities. You have dedicated your life to making sure that these items do not resurface to threaten humanity.

Often you have found yourself involved in a **life-and-death** race to recover an artifact. Your rivals have ranged from unscrupulous profiteers to hallucinogen-snorting cultists to reactionary terrorist groups. Only your wits, skill, and quick fists have saved you (and maybe the world) from catastrophe. The museum or fellowship that funds your expeditions doesn't ask questions as long as you get results.

Recently, you have been asking yourself what happens to these dangerous artifacts once they leave your hands. The official line is that the government's top men study them. But you know all of the top men, and none of them have seen any of your finds. Maybe it's time to do a little more digging.

Juncture: 1850, contemporary

Attributes: Bod 5
Chi =4
Mnd 5
Ref 5

Divide 5 points among your primary attributes. No more than 3 points can be spent on any single attribute.

Skills: Detective +5 (10) [Max 12]
Driving +4 (8) [Max 10]
Guns +2 (7) [Max 10]
Info/History +10 (=15)
Martial Arts +8 (=13)

Add 6 Skill Bonuses. Swap the Skill Bonuses and Action Values of Guns and Martial Arts if desired. Max for all skills (other than Info/History) is 13.

Weapons: 1 weapon of the appropriate juncture

Schticks: 1 gun schtick or 1 fu schtick

Unique Schticks:

But You're Dead! You have the knack of surviving. When you fail a Death Check, spend a Fortune point, and you can return, hale and hearty, ten sequences later, with 30 Wound Points remaining. You have to come up with a suitably crazy story about how you survived your "death." Your Fortune attribute is permanently reduced by one every time you do this.

Counter Rituals: The years you've spent poring over strange esoteric manuscripts and deciphering hieroglyphics has imparted some minor magical knowledge. For the cost of a Magic point you can give a -3 AV penalty to a magic item, or Sorcery or Creature schtick, including Blast, for an entire sequence. This action has a shot cost of 6.

Quick Schtick Pick:

Gun: Signature Weapon

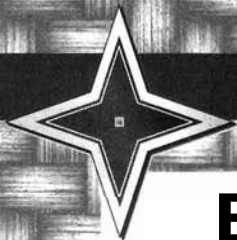
Weapon:

1850: Colt Revolver

Cntp.: Colt King Cobra

Wealth Level: working stiff





EQUIPMENT

SHADES

The Lodge has captured and analyzed many arcanowave devices, but none has impressed them more than the wave scanner (see Feng Shui, p. 124). Something that allows the user to detect and deal with sorcerers and abominations? You can be certain that got their attention. But wave scanners are not what you'd call subtle. Any Lodge operative who tried to question suspects with burning demonic eyes would have a hard time maintaining cover. The Lodge scientists were also wary of recreating arcanowave.

In designing their version of the wave scanner, Lodge scientists instead enhanced the chi of the user and channeled it through the optic nerves. The device was then disguised as an expensive pair of **Raybans**. The Ascended science teams refer to them as Optical Enhancement and Detection Units (OEDU), but everyone else (ie. everyone who uses them) calls them **shades**. It should be noted that the egghead behind these devices has just discovered that the CDCA used a pair of antique shades as the basis for their design of the wave scanner.

The Lodge **has** just rolled these babies out. Their extensive field-testing is going well; many Pledged Operatives are requesting them for every assignment. Only those with a positive chi flow (that is, a Chi attribute of one or more) can use shades to do anything other than keep the sun out of their eyes. There are two different models currently available:

OEDU-M

The wearer can detect a sorcerer or disguised supernatural creature just by glancing. Roll Perception, Difficulty (15 - target's Magic attribute). This is a one shot action. If detected, the sorcerer appears to have an undulating purple aura. **Supernatural creatures** appear in their horrific form.

OEDU-A

The wearer can detect an arcanowave user at a glance. Roll Perception, Difficulty (20 - target's Arcanowave Device skill). This is a one shot action. If detected, arcanowave users appear to have a sickly green aura.

IVORY SPEAR

The Ivory Spear was taken from one of Ming I's champions — and boy, was Ming pissed — by a transformed magpie who not only managed to steal the item itself, but also to glean its history from his mind.

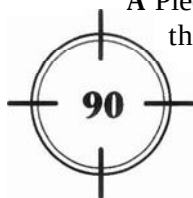
Since Ming I hates the Lodge more than any other faction within the Secret War (since their schemes reduced her to living in the wretched caverns of the Netherworld), to create the spear she dispatched a group of her strongest warriors to the wilderness of Kenya in 2056, where they avoided Buro patrols and civilians alike. Eventually they found their quarry: the last living transformed elephant. Exhausted and harried, he was overcome and imprisoned within the Darkness Pagoda. He was very strong, **lasting almost a month before reversion overcame** him. The Ivory Spear was carved from his tusks, with frightful glowing runes etched into its razor sharp blade.

One of the most feared items held within Area 51, the spear has proven indestructible. The Unspoken Name usually personally signs the extermination orders on those humans who learn of its existence. So far the Ivory Spear has been used by the Lodge only once, to end the threat of a rogue transformed animal. There is no doubt that should a similar threat ever present itself, the Unspoken Name would not hesitate to use it again.

The Ivory Spear does Strength + 6 Damage in combat. A transformed animal can neither actively dodge this attack nor reduce its Damage with Toughness.

BRONZE AUTOMATON

A Pledged archaeologist exploring a far cavern of the Netherworld found this construct, an eight-foot tall, ancient Chinese warrior





made out of a strange, bronze-colored alloy that is stronger than titanium. It's also terribly heavy, as she discovered while hauling it back to the Hub for analysis. The scientists that studied it found a socket in its back. Miniature fiber-optic cameras discovered a simple and surprisingly rust-free clockwork mechanism inside. Without delay a key was constructed to fit the socket, and two Pledged agents suspected of treachery were instructed to wind the mechanism.

Once the Automaton was fully wound it took on the semblance of life. It was discovered to be very strong, virtually invulnerable, and capable of carrying out simple orders to the letter. Its first mission, which was to destroy an annoying clique of Lotus sorcerers based in the Netherworld, was a resounding success. So far the Bronze Automaton has been given three missions, all of which involved rooting out and destroying small groups of troublemakers deep in the Inner Kingdom.

The Bronze Automaton is more than it seems. The spirit of Qui Ling, one of the original Silver Dragons, possesses it. How his soul came to be imprisoned within this metal behemoth may never be known. Certainly sorceries that have long since vanished were involved. Qui Ling's personality has been almost totally erased, but a spark does remain. There is the very slim chance that this engine of destruction could become a staunch Dragon ally. If the Bronze Automaton is ever confronted with a perfect reflection of its form, it's possible that the ancient warrior within will awaken. If this should ever happen, then the Ascended will have gained a dreadful and indomitable enemy.

COMBAT DRUGS

Peace through superior chemistry! Combat drugs are the opposite of the Architects' Productivity Drugs (see Seed of the New Flesh, p. 49). The Lodge, after experimenting with different drug cocktails in conflicts from Vietnam through Grenada, has produced some synthetic compounds that enhance a combatant's effectiveness. These compounds are risky and can cause serious physical and mental problems, even death. Researchers continue to try to

Bronze Automaton

Sample Dialogue: [The implacable heavy thud of its footsteps]

Attributes: Bod 12, Chi 0 (Mag 8), Mnd 1 Ref 7

Skills: Martial Arts 15

Creature Shticks: Armor x4, Damage Immunity (bullets, fire, poison, suffocation, drowning)

Stat Shticks: Ich Bin Ein Bruiser, Immutable Self, Shattering Blow, Tougher Than Leather (all destribed in Golden Comeback, p. 641)

Weapons: punch (131, kick (14)

produce "safe" combat drugs, but until they are successful, expendable, drug-crazed soldiers are dying in droves throughout the hotspots of the Secret War.

Simply inject a syringe containing the required drug into your vein (a three shot action). Make a Constitution check, Difficulty 5. The Outcome is the number of sequences that the drug is active within your system. On a fumble, you have injected a bogus batch of the drug and suffer a bad reaction. You take 10 Damage, ignoring Toughness, and the drug has no other effect upon you. (Unnamed characters are killed outright.) Some of the drugs have side effects more suited to their nature, detailed below.

Enhanced Adrenal Boost

This drug floods the system with a synthetic adrenaline mimic, supercharging the fight or flight reflex. Troops under the influence are easily identified — their foaming frenzies and tendency to use assault rifles as clubs are a giveaway. The Wheel likes to use these poor saps as shock troops to weaken the opposition.

Characters under the influence of this drug gain a +2 bonus to all physical stats and resulting skills. The subject takes 5 Wound Points per sequence after a number of sequences equal to Constitution - 2. He continues taking this Damage, at the start of each sequence, until the drug has run its course. Anyone under the effects of this drug must make a Willpower check each sequence, Difficulty equal to the number of sequences he has been under the effects of the drug. Failure means he spends the rest of the sequence attacking comrades.

Just Say No!

The drugs detailed in this section are highly experimental and massively destructive to the human body and mind. We don't recommend that you allow your player characters to get their hands on them. Here are simple rules to suitably punish characters stupid enough to go down this path.

- Lodge combat drugs are highly addictive. Each use of every drug calls for a Willpower check, Difficulty 10. If the roll fails, the character becomes addicted to that type of drug. It is possible to become addicted to more than one combat drug.
- The drugs are very difficult to get. Characters need a wealth level of rich and good contacts within the Wheel to even have a hope of getting a regular supply. If an addict ever gets in bad with the Wheel (which you can probably expect to happen at least once every three sessions) the GM has the right to cut off the supply.
- If, for whatever reason, an addicted character is without his supply for a session, he suffers 1 Impairment for the whole session.
- Keep track of the number of times the drug is used in a session. At the end of the session, the character must roll Constitution with this number as the Difficulty. Failure means he loses a point from the secondary attribute of his choice.
- It is possible for a character to go cold turkey to beat his addiction. Play through an entire scenario at a 2 Impairment without taking a hit of the drug and then lower the Body attribute by one. The character must be active for the entire scenario. No free rides.

If for any reason a character becomes addicted to one of these drugs through no fault of his own, we suggest you deal with the character in a more lenient fashion.

Panic Suppression

Even highly trained operatives have a tendency to panic when faced with some of the more extreme combatants of the Secret War. It's difficult not to wig out when you go toe-to-toe with something that has been turned inside out and has vomited the contents of its all too visible stomach on you. This drug is a hallucinogen that disrupts the connection between the brain and the five senses.

A character on Panic Suppression takes four less Damage than normal from the creature power Brain Shredder and is immune to the effects of Nauseating Chunks, Horrific Appearance, and Squamous Visage. He also becomes somewhat disconnected from the real world and suffers a -2 to his Reflexes attribute. It requires an Outcome one point greater than normal (so six, usually) to take out an unnamed character who has taken this drug.

Fumbling named characters take an extra two points of Damage from Brain Shredder, take a -2 penalty against the other listed powers, and suffer -3 to Reflexes. Fumbling

unnamed characters tend to curl up in fetal balls and visit their safe places.

Pain Scrambler

This drug screws around with the pain/pleasure center, causing pain to be perceived as pleasure and vice versa. This drug is highly addictive and slowly erodes the sanity of users.

Impairment due to pain or wounds is negated for characters using this drug. Even a sucking chest wound (which would normally slow you down) can briefly be ignored due to the chemical euphoria. It must also be said that those under the influence of this drug are very weird and often get into self-mutilation in a big way. All their social skills — yes, there are one or two in *Feng Shui* — have a modifier of -4. These guys usually sit around in barracks carving love poems into their arms.

Pain Scrambler has no game effect on unnamed characters.

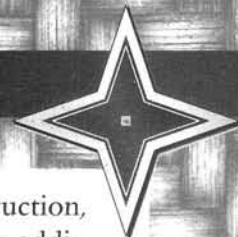
Reflex Boost

He who shoots first gets to walk away. This drug is the ultimate "upper," honing the reflexes razor sharp. The user gains a +1 bonus to his Reflexes attribute. If a tie occurs between a drugged character and an undrugged character when rolling for Initiative, the drugged character acts first. The user also finds it difficult to concentrate on anything and therefore takes a -1 penalty to his Mind attribute.

CHANGELING FIREARMS

Pledged agents sent on missions within the 1850 juncture were mightily unimpressed with the choice of firearms the 19th century offered. They soon started taking their personal weapons with them, a practice to which the Lodge turned a blind eye even though these weapons looked horribly out of place.

Twentieth century gun bunnies, however, had a tendency to show off the capabilities of their beloved weapons to their less fortunate nineteenth century comrades. These temporal locals then wanted to get their hands on



similar toys. Soon, there were clandestine weapons being smuggled through the Netherworld. Inevitably some of these fell into the hands of the other factions.

The Unspoken Name issued a decree that banned the transport of large quantities of twentieth century firearms into earlier junctures (unless he gives special dispensation). He did, however, recognize the advantage that automatic weapons gave his troops and ordered his top weapon specialists to look into the problem.

The result was weapons that look like they belong in the 1850's but which are, in fact, fully automatic. Ammo clips and feeders are concealed behind a thin wooden veneer. An explosive charge is concealed within, programmed to destroy the gun if it's not reset every twenty-four hours.

Colt Repeating Rifle 13 ** / 5 / 20

The multiple barrels are used to conceal all the innards of a modern assault rifle. It's reloaded using specially shaped clips, slapped into a concealed port.

Lefauchaux Automatic Shotgun 13/6/12

Although the cartridges have to be manually fed into this weapon, the full auto-fire capability more than makes up for it.

Colt Automatic Revolver 9 / 3 / 15

Looks like a revolver, performs like a Mini Uzi. A perceptive observer may notice that the chambers don't revolve — if he's not too busy diving for cover.

GYROCOPTER

Just the thing for the spy who doesn't want to worry about ground-bound pursuit! This one-man helicopter is small enough to be concealed in a nearby bush or hedge maze, but is so easy to operate that even a child could leave an exploding mansion in style. Warning: A gyrocopter's maximum lifting capacity is 250 pounds. Hefty spies might be advised to seek a different escape route.

The gyrocopter is Pep -3, Wreck 2. It has an hour's worth of fuel and runs on ordi-

nary gasoline. Due to its simple construction, it can be repaired even after a crash. In addition, its frame usually absorbs most of the shock of a crash; it gives +2 to the Toughness of its pilot for purposes of crash damage. It has wheels, and can be piloted on the ground in a pinch. Used in that manner, it has a Pep of -5. They put a rotor on it for a reason, folks.

GYROJET WEAPONS

Originally designed by weapons genius Robert Mainhardt, this space-age weapon fires what is essentially a small ballistic missile. It's silent, produces no recoil, and can even be fired underwater. Since the entire casing is fired, not ejected, the gyrojet weaponry described below never jams, even on a fumble. On the downside, Gyrojet rounds do lose stability at long ranges. Double all range modifiers. Also, rounds sometimes set things on fire. This happens on a fumble, with the concrete results at the discretion of your kind and fair-minded Game Moderator.

Gyrojet weaponry, of course, can't fire normal ammunition, and only the Wheel produces rocket bullets. This probably won't stop the truly determined gyrojet aficionado, but it might slow him down a bit.

Gyrojet Pistol 10/2/7+1

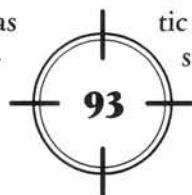
This is the standard-issue gyrojet weapon. It's usually assigned to those Pledged who specifically request one (for underwater operations, mostly, but some Pledged just like the darned things). It takes one shot to reload.

Gyrojet Special 14*/3/0+12

"Zero plus twelve" Damage means that this is a twelve-barreled pistol, designed to fire twelve shots at once, at a single target. This is for the guy who wants enough stopping power to put down a bull elephant (or an unnamed character on an Outcome of 4 or more). It takes fourteen shots to reload; good luck doing that in combat.

Finjet Cigarette Launcher 6 / 1 / 1

Exactly what you'd imagine — a miniature ballistic missile hidden inside a cigarette. Make sure to remember which end is which, or



your last cigarette won't be a nasty surprise directed at your firing squad, but instead a spectacularly successful suicide. It is not reloadable; the designers felt that surprise was the weapon's only asset - and besides, you'd look stupid trying to reload a cigarette.

JETPACK

This backpack-sized flight device, designed originally by Bell Labs but now produced exclusively by the Pledged, uses low-temperature steam exhaust to propel its user safely through the air, giving an advantage in speed and maneuverability over your ground-bound opponents. Simply twist the motorcycle-type grip to increase your lift and use the joystick to control your sideways direction.

Of course, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- The fuel reservoir contains only twenty-one seconds of fuel, so the user is advised to keep his altitude in mind at all times.
- Small body movements can send the jetpack out of control, with disturbing results.

The Pledged advise the wearing of protective headgear while operating this device. The Pledged assume no responsibility for injury suffered by the user while operating this device. Please note that attempting to fuel the jetpack with anything other than pressurized hydrogen peroxide is a violation of warranty.

While in chases, the jetpack has Pep -1, Wreck 1, though you'd have to be a very impressive shot to hit the jetpack and not the pilot. The jetpack has enough fuel for seven sequences of continuous operation, although using it in small bursts extends its life. Once it is out of fuel, the only way to travel is straight down - and it can't be fueled up on the run. It is very difficult for an untrained pilot to use a jetpack. Add three to the Difficulty of all Driving checks made by those unfamiliar with its operation.

The steam jets, by the way, while "low-temperature" enough to not injure the user, could conceivably be used to nail someone else in the face. This would cause 6 Damage, but require some pretty nifty flying.

PERSONAL HOVERCAR

A smaller (one or two man) version of the Bigass Hovercraft described in Golden Comeback, p. 122. This vehicle rides on a cushion of air and performs equally well on water, land, or a combination of both. It takes half damage from blunt attacks (like sideswipes and rams - they just bounce off). Pep 0, Wreck 10.

SUBMARINE CAR

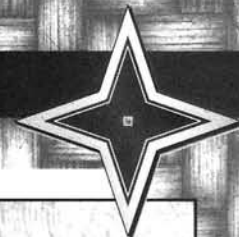
We won't make the joke everyone else makes about this baby (hint: it involves Chappaquiddick), but this is one fine machine when you run out of solid ground beneath your wheels. Utilizing state-of-the-art sealed compartment technology, the sub-car can travel both on land and underwater to keep your best agents out of the hands of their worst enemies. It is advised that you should not utilize the submarine features of this vehicle if hull integrity has been violated. Please remember to scrub vehicle after immersion, as barnacle growth can impair aerodynamics and reduce mileage.

On the road, it's a sports car: Pep +1, Wreck 8. In the water, it's a mini-sub: Pep -1, Wreck 4. Why a lower Wreck value underwater? Because if your windshield gets a bullet hole in it, you won't care that the body's still intact.

SURPRISES

THE KILLKID PROJECT

Few Lodge schemes have displayed a more callous disregard for the sanctity of life than the Killkid Project. Initiated in 1962, the program was dedicated to breeding totally trustworthy human killing machines loyal to the Lodge and the Lodge alone. The ultimate aim of the Killkid Project was to give the Wheel deadly agents that could be inserted anywhere.



They'd look just like normal folks, but be a thousand times more dangerous.

As one might expect, the Hunger of the Jackal sponsored the whole deal. Human babies were "appropriated" from all over the world, using tactics from fake adoptions to outright kidnapping in some Third World countries. The children were raised on an isolated island somewhere in the South Pacific. Drugged, trained, and brainwashed every day of their lives, the Killkids (as they were known) were schooled in the deadly arts as soon as they could walk. They were educated in strategy, tactics, hand-to-hand combat, athletics, firearms, explosives — the complete skill package of the effective assassin. As a final insult to their humanity, they were assigned numbers rather than names.

The end result were fresh-faced, beautiful, strong, intelligent children — with the minds of cold blooded killers and hearts of unfeeling stone. Most would call it child abuse. The Hunger preferred to think of it as "applied psychological conditioning." By whatever name, the process was effective. The Killkids are among the most physically perfect and highly skilled human killing machines that have ever lived. Only one problem arose: the Killkid Project had a very high mortality rate. Of the thousand subjects put into the program, only seven survived it. By the time the Netherworld gates opened on the contemporary juncture, the Killkid Project had been suspended indefinitely. Even the Ascended realized (after the fact) that a success rate of less than one percent didn't justify the time and energy put into the project.

The current Killkids are awfully useful, though. When the Hunger of the Jackal (which handles the training and care of the remaining Killkids) needs a human removed quickly and efficiently, the Killkids are often the choice for the job. Unlike normal folks — even experienced assassins — this sort of wetwork is all they know. An infiltration/termination/exfiltration op is as ordinary to them as nipping down to the store for some breakfast cereal is for the rest of humanity. Consequently, there's no nervousness or edginess to cover up. And even if they are found out, the Killkids are more than capable of taking care of themselves.

Killkid

Sample Dialogue: "Excuse me sir, can I have a moment of your time?" [BLAM BLAM BLAM]

Attributes: Bod 11, Chi 11, Mnd 11, Ref 11

Skills: Guns 15, Martial Arts 15, Sabotage 15, Intrusion 12, Deceit 10, Driving 12

Unique Shtick:

Death Before Dishonor: Killkids have been trained to induce a heart attack in themselves if they are captured and interrogated. This takes a single shot, and results in death in less than a minute. Anyone trying to get information out of a Killkid is going to end up with nothing more than a corpse on his hands unless magical or fu powers intervene.

Weapons: Any

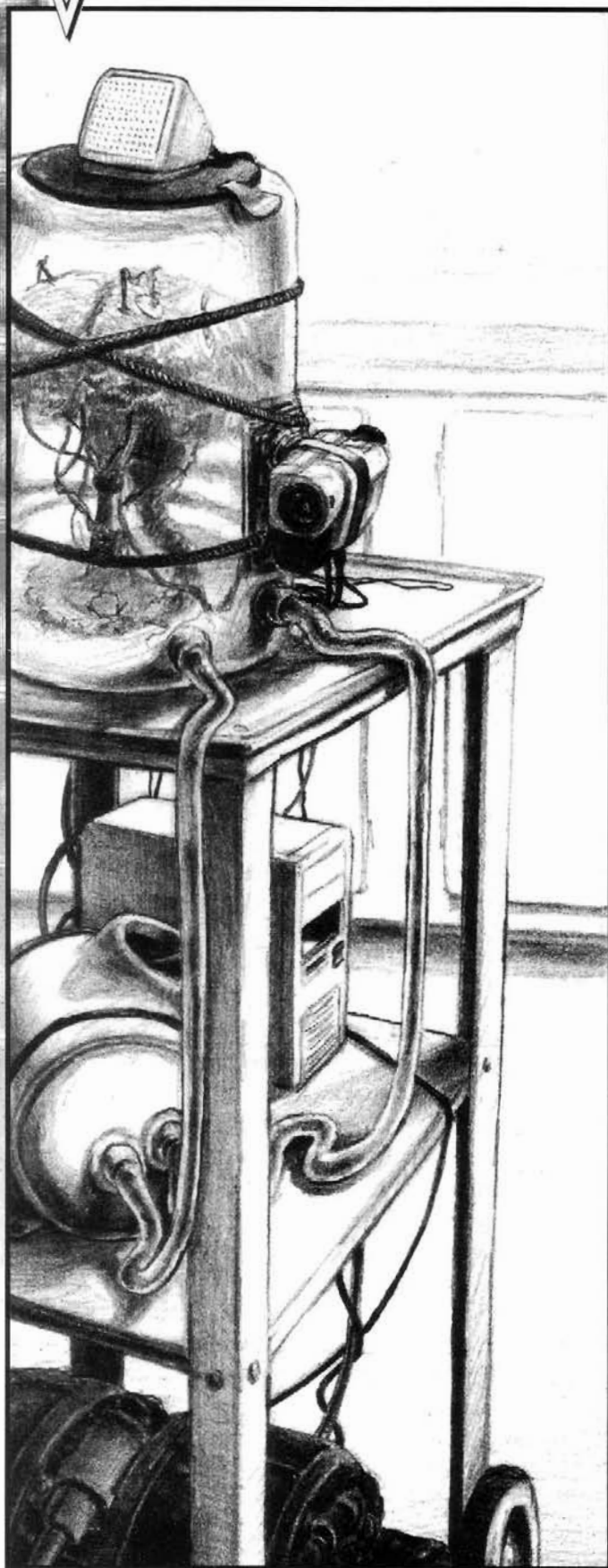
Although seven of the Killkids survived the conditioning process, only six are still alive in the contemporary juncture. Killgirl 5 perished tragically when she ran afoul of Pledged mastermind Tommy Gonnorelli. According to reports, she was set on fire and tossed to her death off of the top of a hundred-story skyscraper. At least, that's the story. Nobody ever actually saw the body.

Killboy 1 is the oldest of the Killkids at thirty-two, while the youngest is Killgirl 7. She's only nineteen years old. The Killkids are of diverse ethnic backgrounds, and contrary to what you might think, share no sort of brotherly or sisterly bonds at all. The kids are cold and unfeeling predators, pure and simple.

Each Killkid has been assigned a "companion" from the Hunger of the Jackal, but a better term for them would be "handlers." Killkids are always on the move, transported from place to place, mission to mission, then back to their isolated headquarters for training, reinforcement, and periods of down time.

Killkids might be encountered just about anywhere the Ascended operate, in any juncture or the Netherworld, but are only used in high priority Lodge operations. There are only six of them, after all. They are dangerous opponents, but too rare to be risked in less-than-crucial situations.

Despite their young age, Killkids often lead Ascended tactical forces. That "innocent bystander" those Lodge mooks are "holding hostage" may actually be the one in charge. Many Lodge foes have been (briefly) surprised when the "poor victim" they rescued broke their necks with one clean jerk.

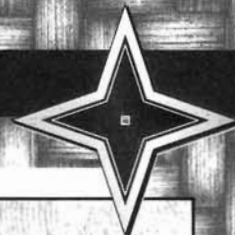


One very important thing to know about fighting a Killkid: they are not the world's most inventive thinkers. The conditioning process that honed their murderous skills to such a razor edge imposed a rigid thought process, stamping out creativity more thoroughly than even the worst American high school. For any given situation, a Killkid has a limited number of tactical options. The Killkids are schooled thoroughly in traditional and nontraditional combat situations, but unexpected events can catch them off-guard. Emotional situations are similarly foreign to the Killkids. Their dead hearts feel nothing and the emotions of others puzzle them. Any time an opponent does something tactically nonsensical or unexpected in combat, or displays an incredibly passionate emotion, a Killkid has to make a Mind check, Difficulty 20. Failure means the Killkid misses his next shot, hesitating in the face of the unexpected. While this reaction may provoke sympathy in combatants, anyone harboring feelings toward a Killkid (no matter how attractive he might be) is far better off directing his energy to putting the soulless psychopath out of everyone's misery. The Ascended have had their hooks in the Killkids' brains since infancy, and it's hard enough to survive an encounter with a Killkid, much less forge any sort of psychological bond with him. We're not saying it's impossible, of course. This is *Feng Shui*. Stranger things happen every day.

THE BRAIN TRUST

They say a mind is a terrible thing to waste, and the Ascended believe that wholeheartedly. In fact, they believe it literally.

In the mid-1930s, a crackpot Bulgarian scientist named Dr. Elias Lobyachov published a paper claiming he had learned the secret of removing the brain from the human body and had also created a method for keeping the mind alive afterward. The absurdity of Lobyachov's claim (along with his own admission that he had not figured out how to get a human brain back into a body after removal) meant that his work received little attention from the serious scientific community.



Desperate to prove that his theories were sound, Lobyachov attempted to actually perform the risky process on his own dying wife. The procedure failed.

Lobyachov, previously a well-regarded biologist and surgeon, was arrested for murder, tried, convicted, and sentenced to be hanged. But before society could have its pound of flesh the despondent scientist took poison in his jail cell, committing suicide in the spring of 1954. Thus ended any public interest at all in the work of Dr. Elias Lobyachov.

Which was a darn shame, because Lobyachov's process works.

Lobyachov's Legacy

The good doctor's work was not lost forever. The death of Lobyachov's wife and his subsequent misfortunes were all a put-up job. When the doctor published his paper on brain removal and storage, the Unspoken Name of the 1930s was quick to recognize the potential of Lobyachov's technology. If a person's mind could be preserved, their wisdom could remain long after the body had passed on. Even those Ascended who consider themselves a superior breed are certainly capable of appreciating the brilliance of an individual — especially if that brilliance can be put to work for the good of the Ascended.

Far from dying, Lobyachov and his well-preserved wife were spirited off to Rio de Janeiro to work in secret. Any doubts the embittered scientist may have had about joining a worldwide conspiracy were quickly alleviated by his red carpet treatment. No viand was too fine, no luxury too rare for Dr. Lobyachov. (His wife? She got to live in a pure crystal jar.) Over the next ten years or so, with the support and funding of the Lodge, Dr. Lobyachov perfected his process.

So what is the Brain Trust? That's simple: it's a secret facility in Rio de Janeiro that's full of preserved human brains, all still alive and thinking.

After Lobyachov had perfected his techniques, the Lodge began "harvesting" suitable minds. Most of the time the Ascended simply waited for a person to pass away of natural causes, but they were hardly above hurrying a few of them along. Snatching a brain in that narrow window between death and

Dr. Elias Lobyachov

Sample Dialogue: "Dr. Ramirez, check the glucose level in General MacArthur's tank. He's babbling about liberating the Philippines again."

Attributes: Bod 3, Chi 0 (For 2), Mnd 8, Ref 4

Skills: Guns 10, Medicine 15, Info/Spotty Knowledge About the Wheel 12, Info/Brains 20
Unique Schtick

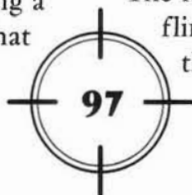
Brain Cart: Dr. Lobyachov's cart is outfitted with a few special features. First, the container that holds his brain is bulletproof, shatterproof, and heat-proof. Thus, taking the doctor out of combat involves eliminating his cart, not taking out his gray matter. The cart has a few built-in offensive capabilities that the doctor can use. The first is the equivalent of an H&K MP5 (10/5/30) mounted in the front of the cart. Keep in mind that the doctor can only fire at what is in the ninety degree arc in front of him. Second, Lobyachov can release a charge of electricity through the frame of his cart, doing 12 Damage. The doctor can make this attack a bit nastier by combining it with a ramming maneuver. The ram does 8 Damage itself, for a combined "ramming/electrification" total of 20 Damage. Ouch!

decomposition is tough, but the Wheel has the best mortuary cat burglars this side of the Lotus. Once acquired and stabilized, brains are spirited off to Rio for preservation. Not every brain is successfully saved, but over the years the process has become more routine, and the Brain Trust has grown.

Only the best (or worst, depending on your viewpoint) brains end up in the Brain Trust. Many of the great scientific, strategic, and social thinkers' gray matter has ended up suspended in glass tanks at the Brain Trust. Albert Einstein? Got him. Winston Churchill? Tank #317. Anwar Saddat? Present and accounted for.

Once the Netherworld opened on the contemporary juncture, the Wheel was even able (sometimes) to spirit brains from previous junctures — though primitive operating conditions and the hazardous journey to Rio often result in a little brain damage. Nevertheless, James K. Polk is relatively intact.

At first, Lobyachov's techniques only allowed the preservation of a person's brain, not communication with it. He licked that problem in the 1950s. Today it is quite easy for the scientists of the Brain Trust to have a chat with any of the minds that reside there. None of the human brains in Rio have a clue where they are. The Ascended have worked up a suitable line of flim-flam for each of the persons preserved there, to assure maximum cooperation. For



Brazilian Army Soldiers

Sample Dialogue: "This is a secure facility! Stop or face the consequences!"

Attributes: Bod 6, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 6

Skills: Guns 8, Martial Arts 5, Intimidation 8

Weapons: punch (7), kick (8), M-16 (13*/5/30)

Brain Trust Scientists

Sample Dialogue: "Yes Dr. Lobyachov. Right away."

Attributes: Bod 4, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 3

Skills: Martial Arts 4, Medicine 10, Info/Half-Truths About the Lodge 8

Weapons: punch (5), kick (6)

instance, Einstein's brain has been told that civilization has collapsed and his advice is vital to rebuilding society. The brains are never allowed to talk with one another.

When the brains aren't actually being interacted with, they are kept sedated. The scientists wake each of them up once a month for a little chat, just to make sure all the neurons are still firing.

The Think Tank

Once a few decades had gone by and the Unspoken Name was sure about the stability of Dr. Lobyachov's process, it was time to jar up a few Ascended who were too valuable to lose. To date eight of the most intelligent and devious Lodge minds have been preserved after their deaths, united in a secret advisory body (ahem) called the Think Tank. Unlike the human minds preserved in the Brain Trust, the brains of the Think Tank are left conscious at all times, free to apply their intellectual resources to the downfall of the enemies of the Ascended. The Think Tank advises the Unspoken Name and the Ascended council whenever possible, and also serves as a source of advice to the Soul of the Dragon.

While all members of the Lodge (and some of the other factions in the Secret War, for that matter) are aware of the existence of something called the Think Tank, only the Unspoken Name and a few select others (like Clara Duvall) know that the vaunted advisory body consists of disembodied brains. The entire Brain Trust

project is a big secret, and the actual nature of the Think Tank is an even bigger one.

Incidentally, Lodge leaders since the Think Tank's inception have been very careful about who they "appoint" to the group. Sort of like the United States Supreme Court, appointment to the body is for "life" — and no one has yet figured out how long the expected life of a brain in a jar is. A few of the older and crankier Think Tank members have made more than one Unspoken Name consider a jaunt to Rio to play a little brain baseball.

Brain Drain

The Ascended aren't satisfied with just popping the brains out of people's heads and talking to them. Heavy duty research also goes down at the Brain Trust — research that could change the course of the Secret War.

The natural assumption would be that the scientists here are trying to figure out how to swap brains between bodies, right? If you really want to infiltrate the enemy, capture one of his operatives and plop a brain loyal to you in the body. Well, it's not that easy. Dr. Lobyachov's brain preservation process has so far proven a one way proposition. Attempts to put a brain back into a human body have been disastrous. Lobyachov has been smacking his head against the problem for over fifty years, with no success at all.

With that in mind, research at the Brain Trust is actually being directed in an even more sinister manner. The Brain Trust scientists are trying to figure out how to "jack in" to a brain, effectively turning it into a living hard drive. All the information in the person's mind would theoretically be available, without all the tedious talking to them. This would be great not only for the vast store of knowledge the Brain Trust has at its disposal right now, but also for totally thorough interrogations of captured agents from other factions. The prospect is fearsome.

They got the idea, incidentally, from the Architects. They know the Biomass Reprocessing Center has had limited success shaking memories out of disembodied brains, but they're pretty confident the Architects haven't licked the bioelectric-to-just-plain-



electric impulse problem that must be solved to let a brain talk through a speaker. (It took Lobyachov a good twenty years, remember.) On the other hand, the Architects do have what it takes to play back a brain's memory impulses into another brain. Thus, they can poke around but not ask direct questions. And, as with so many Buro interrogation techniques, it often destroys what it's searching.

Both factions have half the technology for detailed brain draining, but neither one would trust the other with their laundry, let alone such a decisive technology. Thus, both factions are involved in a brain technology race. Currently, it could go either way.

Meeting of the Minds

The Brain Trust facility is located on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, right on top of a major feng shui nexus point. The facility is a top secret military installation. It's o secret, in fact, that no one in the Brazilian military or government even knows what's going on there. Pledged operatives inside the Brazilian bureaucracy keep it that way.

Most of the Brain Trust is located underground, with only a few buildings and a military-grade airstrip visible on the surface. Eight sub-basements contain the complex apparatus necessary for keeping all of the minds of the Brain Trust alive and thinking. The brains themselves are kept on the lowest level of the facility, with the Think Tank housed in a particularly fortified section of their own. In the grand tradition of any secret base, an emergency escape tunnel links the Think Tank's section of the Brain Trust to a hidden submarine base a few miles away. In times of crisis, Dr. Lobyachov retreats here to coordinate the evacuation of the Think Tank in case things go badly.

Dr. Lobyachov? Shouldn't he be dead by now? The answer to that question is yes — and no. Elias Lobyachov was more than willing to undergo his own procedure, and the Wheel-loyal (and not just a little crazy) scientist still runs the Brain Trust after all these years. Lobyachov has had a special cart constructed for his brain case, complete with a loud-speaker for haranguing the scientists

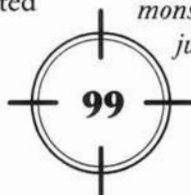
under his control and a hidden "surprise" or two for anyone underestimating a motorized brain in a bulletproof jar. Mounted inside his armored conveyance, the doctor can zip around the facility quite quickly, cackling insanely in his Eastern European accent and making sure the Brain Trust runs smoothly. Startling the bejeezes out of his underlings.

There are about twenty Pledged scientists, researchers, and personnel running the day-to-day operations of the Brain Trust. Five Ascended scientists of various bloodlines run the Think Tank. A company of unnamed soldiers, courtesy of Fist of the Bear agents inside the Brazilian military, are stationed at the facility. Three quarters of them have no idea what goes on down below, other than that it's very secret and very important. The remaining quarter of the soldiers are members of the Wheel who take care of patrolling and guarding the subterranean halls below.

Obviously, blowing up the Brain Trust would be a really nifty idea — but the task is hardly an easy one. The biggest obstacle to infiltrating the Brain Trust is finding out about it in the first place. Only the most highly placed of the Pledged know of the existence of the Brain Trust, and even they have no idea about the existence of the Think Tank. As mentioned above, the security at the Brain Trust is ludicrously high. The Ascended have the greatest minds of the 20th century stored here, so they don't exactly leave the front door open. Any trip to the Brain Trust is going to be a tough one. The loss of the Brain Trust would be painful, and as a moral victory it would be hard to beat. If a group of enterprising Secret Warriors could also take out the Think Tank, the Ascended would really be left smarting.

THE KUANLUN PROCESS

Phoenix Lee rolled away from the acid-belching monstrosity before her, firing both Colts into its scaly chest. She barely got to her feet before the monster planted its clawed foot where she'd been just a moment before. Unfortunately, it had her



Pledged Schtick: Free Will

This schtick is only available to high-ranking Pledged within the Wheel. Kuanlun's glyph is not known outside of the Lodge, Kuanlun, his assistants, and the few Pledged agents who've had the procedure worked upon them. Agents who undergo the procedure must swear not to reveal it or Kuanlun's existence to anyone, including Pledged who have not undergone the procedure.

The schtick's effect renders the recipient immune to the Influence sorcery schtick as well as the creature schtick Domination. A Pledged PC cannot start play with this schtick, but may purchase it with experience for a cost of 12 + the total number of schticks he will have after gaining Free Will.

Kuanlun assured his Ascended masters that the glyph completely blocks all attempts at mind control. It's possible that he has not been entirely truthful. He may have worked a few surprises into the glyph — maybe no one who has one can attack him, or perhaps his Influence schtick actually does work on them. Who knows? Okay, the GM and Kuanlun do, but nobody else does.

Kuanlun

Sample Dialogue: "This may sting a bit."

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 0 (Mag 8), Mnd 8, Ref 6

Skills: Guns 11, Info/History 12, Info/Pop Music 12, Info/Lotus 10, Medicine (69 AD) 15, Medicine (contemporary) 9, Sorcery 16

Gun Schticks: Signature Weapon (Sig-Saver P220, bathed for a full month in a demon's blood)

Magic Schticks: Blast (chi, conjured scalpels, disease), Fertility, Heal, Influence, Movement

Unique Schticks:

Influence Inoculation: This schtick takes several hours to perform, as Kuanlun's surgical team has to remove the scalp and expose the skull. At that point, Kuanlun must go to work carefully engraving the sigil into the bone and then treating it with rare and expensive alchemical powders. It takes the patient a week to recover, since any use of healing schticks during that time disrupts the delicate enchantment.

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), Sig-Saver P220 with silver bullets (13/2/9+1)

in a corner and the bullets didn't do a damned bit of good.

"Rex!" The voice was commanding and imperious, yet high-pitched. The demon shuffled away, its shoulders slumped. "You must pardon Rex, he likes the taste of human blood." The speaker stepped around the crates, coming into view. Phoenix had heard of people charged with power before but had never actually seen one. Now she knew what they meant. Electricity arced around the man, who was dressed in a black business suit and tie. His eyes literally glowed. "I, on the other hand, prefer to handle my kills personally." The sorcerer's eyes flared brightly and his voice assumed a haunting resonance. "Drop your weapons and surrender."

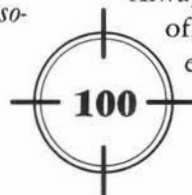
Phoenix felt the command's sheer power wash over and around her. The top of her skull tingled as the newly carved sigil drew the power of the sorcerer's command, then released it in a bright flash of light. Phoenix ran away from the demon and emptied both pistols into the sorcerer. The sorcerer stared in surprise at Phoenix as bullet after bullet smashed into his body. The last words he heard before darkness claimed him were, "Kuanlun sends his regards."

One of the problems any decent conspiracy faces in the Secret War is the possibility that some irritating Lotus or Dragon sorcerer could pop up at any moment and seize your servants' free will to fold, spindle, and mutilate as they please. This is simply unacceptable to the Wheel. Unfortunately, resistance to mind control is not easy to come by. Certainly, some people are naturally strong-willed, but you can't wear mind-control armor or tinfoil hats to block sorcery or crafty supernatural creatures.

When you rule the world, though, the things outside your determined reach make up a pretty small list. Everyone has a price, and for the Lotus renegade Kuanlun, that price was not as steep as it could have been.

Kuanlun betrayed his Lotus masters when, after assignment to the contemporary juncture, he decided he didn't want to leave. That wasn't a crime by itself, but when he abandoned his mission and murdered the rest of his team, Gao Zhang was very upset. As far as the master eunuch was concerned, severe disciplinary action was warranted. Kuanlun, who only wanted to enjoy life far away from Gao Zhang and the Lotus, found it understandably irritating (and in fact, terrifying) to be the target of regular demonic attacks. When the Cannibal Demon With Ten Thousand Jade Teeth came within a hair's breadth of eating his head, he turned to the only people who could possibly help him avoid Gao Zhang's punishment: the Pledged agents who'd just broken into his penthouse looking for the source of the recent demonic incursions.

Always opportunistic, Kuanlun immediately offered his services to the Pledged (and by extension, the Wheel) in exchange for pro-





tection from Gao Zhang. The baffled agents took him to their leaders and washed their hands of the matter.

Kuanlun made the Lodge an offer they couldn't refuse: he claimed that he could, with a simple procedure, immunize anyone to the effects of magical influence. Or rather, that he had an idea as to how exactly he could do this thing. The Shell of the Tortoise approved the funding for Kuanlun's research, including attunement to several feng shui sites. Given the facilities, access to magical tools and supplies (especially the alchemical ingredients he needed for his spells), a full team of Pledged surgeons, and an unlimited number of experimental subjects, Kuanlun proceeded to invent the field of brain surgery via sorcery. Within six months, he had results in the form of a magical glyph that could be carved into the top of a living human's skull and **alchemically** treated to instill immunity to magical mind control.

Kuanlun still heads his team of Pledged magical researchers. His current objective is to find a way to immunize transformed animals to magical reversion. So far, he has experienced nothing near the success he achieved with the previous project (and the steady stream of high-ranking Pledged agents to immunize to mind control slows his progress). Kuanlun is under no temptation to betray his Ascended masters. He doesn't want another time-traveling conspiracy out to kill him.

CHINET

Darryl shouted "Rock and roll!" and cut loose with the Blue Spear. His squad spread out, shooting at every available target. It looked like the Architects were going to get hold of some major 1996 chi.

The Chinese soldiers were on the run. Reveling in the carnage, abominations cut loose with the hellish light of helix rippers, shredding the hapless grunts. Everything was going according to plan and the Buro was getting the site a full forty years ahead of schedule.

Darryl Steinman, the Buro operative assigned to spearhead the first major thrust into the 1996 juncture and start the process that would eventually dislodge the Ascended, walked

into the base headquarters and found General Chu Kwai-see sitting calmly behind his desk, on the phone. The general spared a glance at Darryl before he placed the receiver in its cradle and looked sadly at the man from the future, come to destroy the present. "I suppose you want me to surrender, Mr. Steinman? I'm afraid that's not possible."

Darryl stopped in surprise. "No, I was just going to —" The bullet to the back of the head cut him off mid-sentence. The man who had shot him, his second-in-command, ordered a retreat through his field radio and slowly departed, eyes glazed.

The general picked up the receiver again, "Thank you." He carefully hung up the phone, smiling and began considering his retirement options.

ChiNet is a global satellite network in the contemporary juncture and one of the Ascended's greatest defenses against the loss of major feng shui sites. Having been aware since 1850 that the contemporary juncture was due to open, the Wheel set to planning defense. With the advent of the space program, a few farsighted Pledged (some would call them mad) outlined a plan wherein a network of satellites orbiting the Earth could be used to focus the full strength of the Earth's chi on any feng shui site in the Wheel's possession.

ChiNet's technology is based on captured arcanotech stored in Area 51. It took years to crack enough of it to understand the basics of manipulating chi with technology. But ChiNet technology branched from arcanowave technology early on, since the goal was to focus and direct pure chi, rather than pervert it, as the Architects had done. Sputnik was the first satellite in Earth orbit to carry ChiNet equipment, and every launched thereafter carried some as part of the standard schematics, though only a few people would recognize the equipment.

Pledged from the Order of the Wheel ensured that American and Russian satellite networks could link up and focus the chi as needed and the Wheel maintains control centers in major cities around the world. Stanley Fort (see **Feng Shui**, p. 217), for example, has full ChiNet access. The Unspoken Name can take control



of ChiNet from his offices and override controls from any other part of the world.

ChiNet is very powerful in application, but very limited in focus. It can, for very brief periods (up to ten minutes at a time) direct global chi flow from all major feng shui sites to any one major feng shui site. What happens when you have the world at your beck and call? Everything goes just right. Arcanowave devices, fu paths, sorcery, and creature schticks, however don't function well. As for enemies — well, small doubts expand to full-blown insubordination. Dislike for one's commanding officer can blossom into outright betrayal.

Unfortunately, **ChiNet's** technology causes rapid degradation in the satellite network. A satellite's life span can be reduced by as much as a factor of ten if the network is activated too often. Also, activation degrades the feng shui sites themselves, as a huge amount of chi gets drawn from them to **fuel** the network. **Finally**, the **ChiNet** can only be focused on major sites the Ascended already control. The Wheel prefers to save it for last ditch defenses, to prevent vitally important sites from falling to their foes.

Only the highest-ranked Pledged or the Ascended themselves can call upon ChiNet, and the Unspoken Name must confirm the request before it goes online. The Ascended believe that all records of ChiNet have been destroyed or lost (deliberately), but a few still remain, buried deep in both CIA and KGB records. They could turn up at any time. In fact, they could end up in PC hands, at least for awhile. Think of the briefcase in Pulp Fiction.

ChiNet's Effects

The following occurs at a site upon which ChiNet is focused:

All schticks based on Chi, Kung Fu, or Magic are at -5 AV for those not attuned to the site. This massive influx of chi disrupts **attackers'** abilities on an equally massive scale. Characters (PC or GMC) attuned to the site receive a +5 AV for all Chi, Kung Fu, or **Magic**-based schticks. All named, attuned characters each receive five Fortune points to be used only during the period ChiNet is active.

PCs attacking or trying to capture the site must make a Willpower, Chi, Fortune, Kung Fu, or Magic check (roll against the best of those), Difficulty 10. On a failure, the PC retreats or surrenders as appropriate. Named GMCs react according to their personalities. A GMC attacker who doesn't like the characters he's with betrays them, where one who actually likes them retreats or surrenders. Unnamed GMCs retreat immediately, or surrender if no retreat is available.

After ChiNet shuts down, all characters attuned to the affected site suffer 2 Impairment for all actions during the next week. All characters attuned to major Ascended sites in the contemporary juncture suffer -1 Chi (or Fortune, Kung Fu, or Magic if Chi is zero) for seven days.

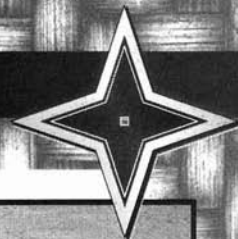
The Jammers are an unusual case. Many Jammers are immune to the effects of chi and are thus unaffected by **ChiNet**. This hasn't come up yet, so the Ascended are unaware of this gap in their defenses. When it does, **they're** in for a rude surprise — especially if the Jammers should manage to blow up a site with all the world's chi focussed on it. Should such an unlikely event come to pass, the results of such a catastrophe are up to the GM. Just make it grisly.

PROJECT X-RAY

Remember when we said the big **floating iceberg-fortress** was the **weirdest project** the Pledged undertook in World War II? We lied. (Investigations of the Wheel are always riddled with lies.) There was one stranger project ...

The caverns outside Austin, Texas, are known for their vast population of bats, but very few know that those caverns are also the home of the most feared (or, at least the most bizarre) strike force the Lodge possesses: the deadly Suicide Bat Bombers of Project X-Ray.

This Suicide Bat Bomber project was the brainchild of an American dentist named Lytle Adams, who realized that by attaching small firebombs to bats and releasing them over Tokyo, one could create a mobile force of **incendiary** weapons that would achieve the same effect as tons of bombs. (Why nobody else



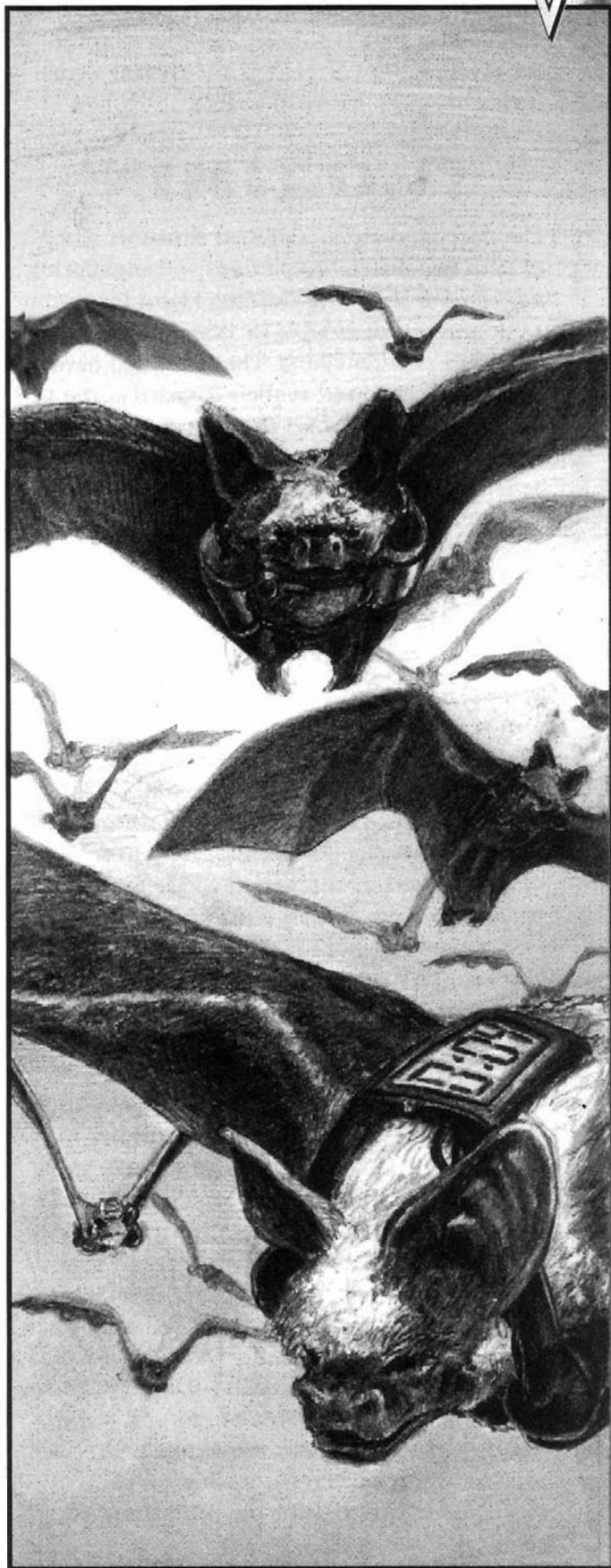
had previously hit upon this scheme is a total mystery.) He quickly got the backing of the military — your tax dollars at work — and proceeded to conduct tests on what size bat could carry what size bomb. A one-ounce incendiary attached to a Mexican free-tailed bat seemed the perfect mix, and preparations were made for a test run.

It was there that they hit upon a snag. There was no way to communicate the objectives involved to the bats, who had a tendency to simply fly wherever they wanted and detonate friendly planes, troops, and one another. This was where the Lodge had the advantage. Commander Kyle Ross, a transformed bat himself, was assigned to the project. Using the Doolittling schtick, he was able to control and discipline the bats. Nevertheless, the Lodge was forced to hold the project in reserve. If people found out how the bats were controlled, it would jeopardize the Lodge's greatest secret.

Thus, the forces of Project X-Ray are only used against targets in the Secret War. Against those targets, however, they're a lot more dangerous than they sound. The Ascended can mobilize a force of three hundred bats anywhere in the world in under ten hours. On arrival, the bats are released to seek out their targets. Generally they're directed against buildings which they're told are good nesting sites, but occasionally they're simply released to wreak havoc.

The bats are considered unnamed characters. Due to their small size and the bombs attached to them, they go down on any positive Outcome. They have a Martial Arts 6 and do 4 Damage when they hit (expiring in the process). Characters hit by a bat are set on fire and suffer an additional Wound Points every three shots until they take an action to put out the fire. The additional Wound Point are cumulative for multiple bats, which is what makes them so scary. Take another look at the middle of the last paragraph: Three. Hundred. Bats. Against that many, even a Big Bruiser should be running like a little sissy girl.

Ross is still in charge of the project, but since he's a general now, he doesn't usually get personally involved in combat. He tends to



leave things to the base staff. If personally threatened, he has a direct comlink into the bat caves and can screech out a distress signal. If this happens, bats will swarm.

TWO TIMIN'

The Ascended are in a unique situation. They control two different junctures — "neighboring" junctures at that. The Guiding Hand is causing a fair amount of trouble in 1850, but it has little influence outside China. The Ascended have the rest of the world at their disposal — the personnel, the money, and the feng shui of almost two whole planets. There are a lot of obvious benefits to this — and a few hidden problems.

BENEFITS

Double Dipping

Many feng shui sites are natural geological formations: auspicious mountains, mystical waterfalls, enchanting natural bays, and the like. Similarly, large buildings that have stood for hundreds of years — the Taj Mahal for instance — typically have good or even excellent feng shui. Members of the Ascended are probably attuned to these sites in both junctures.

This opens up all sorts of interesting possibilities. For instance, imagine that in the depths of the unexplored Africa of 1850 (well, "unexplored" if you don't count the people who live there) there is a crudely carved yet strangely beautiful statue of an ancient and now-forgotten Earth Goddess. Attuning to this statue grants the ability to survive any natural rock fall or avalanche. The attuned literally walks free unharmed. Unfortunately, this feng shui site also causes marked seismic instability. The surrounding area is wracked with constant tremors, making the region virtually impassible. Normally this would call for a pretty difficult decision. Do you destroy the statue, gaining a rush of chi and stabilizing the area for exploitation? But in the process you lose that incredibly useful attunement benefit. Or, do you attune to

the site, resigning yourself to never settling and exploiting the area's mineral wealth? The Ascended can have their site and eat it too. They can attune to the statue in 1850, then dynamite it out of existence before the contemporary juncture "arrives" and strip mine the entire area. Such are the perks of being the masters of two different junctures.

Psychological Warfare, Feng Shui Style

Ascended psychological warfare does not consist of pamphlet drops, propaganda broadcasts, and all that other tired psy-ops stuff. Rather, we're talking about that most insidious weapon of the Secret War, the superficial shift.

The Ascended are in a prime position to make their enemies' lives totally miserable. If someone is too tough, canny, or useful to simply extinguish, it's possible to make the poor sap so confused and disorientated he either surrenders to get his life back or abandons the 20th century, becoming vulnerable as he moves to an unfamiliar juncture or the Netherworld. It could even cause a highly sensitive individual to commit suicide.

For example, say that James South, an ex-cop and Dragon, regularly survives Pledged assassination attempts. The Unspoken Name has personally signed his death warrant, twice.

Unfortunately, no one seems able to execute it. Quite frankly, the resources being wasted to deal with this single individual outweighs the damage he can cause as an enemy. South may be untouchable, but his great grandfather, a farmer in South Dakota, most certainly isn't. South the Senior's extermination order is duly signed. Killing an Innerwalker's ancestor does not expunge him from history, but it does cause a superficial shift. James' memories remain unchanged. He still remembers his parents, his address, his friends, his first job, and the name of the first girl he ever kissed. Sadly, they do not know him from Adam. If you mess with an Innerwalker's past (and you have enough feng shui sites to back you up), he laterally reincarnates. He becomes someone else. So South wakes up in a strange house with a new



name and a new past. He probably then does what every experienced Innerwalker does in such a situation. He hits the registry of births, deaths, and marriages to discover who he is.

This happens at least a couple of times to most Innerwalkers. The harder ones are more than capable of coping with it. If you spend your days in fierce firefights with eunuch sorcerers, supernatural martial artists, flying monkeys, and cyber-demonic monsters, you can usually cope with a little personal insecurity in your life.

However, what would happen if you woke up every couple of months with a new identity, living in a different city or even a different country? Pretty soon, even the most dedicated warrior is going to feel disconnected from everything that made his life worthwhile. Many pack it all in and retreat to the Netherworld where they have far fewer opportunities to threaten the Wheel's control of their junctures. In some cases, the Wheel would like to increase the frequency of these lateral reincarnations, but even they tend to lose track. But so what? If an individual refuses to draw attention to himself, he's out of the way voluntarily. Check, and checkmate.

The Wheel also uses superficial shifts to arrange political power and world events to their satisfaction. A troublemaker is kidnapped and briefly transported through the Netherworld. The Lodge then arranges a superficial shift where he is forced to live his life in abject poverty, swearing blind he is really the President of France. The Spider family, in particular, finds it more efficient to bring a problem leader to heel rather than train a replacement.

The Wheel also uses lateral reincarnation to protect itself from reporters, cops, and others who get too close to their secrets. If a reputable reporter stumbles into the middle of a **Pledged/Architect** grudge match, there are going to be some questions if the guy just croaks. But if his grandparents never meet, the shift may be enough to keep him from becoming a problem in the first place.

Finally, controlling the two central junctures — the advantage that lets the

Ascended use this strategy — also protects the Wheel from it. Want to force a lateral reincarnation on a native of 1850? Good luck tracking down his ancestors in 69 AD. Even if you find them, by the time 1850 rolls around the shift will be so moderated by the intervening centuries that it probably just changes his middle name. Contemporary Secret Warriors are most vulnerable to this kind of jiggery-pokery, so you can bet that the Wheel in 1850 spends a fair amount of time concealing the ancestry of their contemporary-era operatives. (Unfortunately for the Wheel, the Buro also figured this tactic out quickly. An awful lot of genealogical data got fudged under the aegis of the Sub-Bureau For Progressive Human Homogenization.)

PERILS

Being the masters of two time streams is not all sweetness and light. It also brings its own special brand of blinding migraine. The obvious problem is that any strike hurts them twice as much. If you control a feng shui site in two junctures and someone blows it up in the earlier one, you lose it in both. This has led to the Wheel placing blueprints and architectural plans of many of their historical feng shui sites in private libraries all over the world. This makes it easier to rebuild a site should the worst happen.

But there are other problems, as well ...

The Netherworld

Cross-juncture communication, trade, and operations rely on the Netherworld. The Ascended hate going through the Netherworld. For a lot of them, even a twenty-four hour stay means a chance of taking that sudden plunge down the food chain. Nevertheless, the Netherworld is vital to Lodge operations at the same time it is infused with the very stuff that they fear the most: magical energies. The real pisser is, the more successful the Wheel is at expunging magic from the different junctures, the more the magical energies of the Netherworld increase.

Of course, if a Lodge member spends too much time in the Netherworld without decontaminating in either 1850 or the contemporary juncture (or one of the Netherworld



mundane chambers), he will revert eventually. While transformed animals from 69 AD are more resistant to the dangers of reversion, they do not always understand the complexities of life in the 19th and 20th centuries. This has led to a couple of bullet-riddled misunderstandings. Furthermore, some in the Spider family are uncomfortable with the amount of influence this gives a small group over the direction and policies of the entire Lodge.

The Lodge can't live with the Netherworld, and can't live without it. To make matters worse, everything they do to ameliorate one of their problems makes something else worse. Nobody said the Secret War was easy.

Culture Shock

Operatives native to the 1850 juncture often have trouble adapting to the pace of life and level of technology in the contemporary juncture, and vice versa. The Wheel attempts to inoculate against this culture shock with lectures, practical exercises, and a number of other strategies, but even after their best efforts, many operatives still experience adverse reactions when travelling across time.

The sheer volume of noise in the 20th century invariably dismays 1850 natives. They also have trouble adapting to the smell, pollution, and crowds. More than one promising Pledged operative has been retired due to claustrophobia induced by the teeming crowds of the modern metropolis. It has to be said however, that 1850s operatives take to contemporary weaponry like a duck takes to water.

Modern day operatives also have trouble adapting to life in the 19th century. Those on protracted missions have to supplement their diet with vitamins and bolster their immune systems with antibiotics. They also have to cope with uncomfortable clothes and a lack of air conditioning. Contemporary operatives tend to treat 1850 era firearms with a disdain that they probably don't deserve, an attitude that led to the development of Changeling Firearms (see p. 92). Contemporary operatives also find it difficult to deal with the lack of communication technology in the 19th century. Satellite cover, cellular phones, video conferencing,

reliable forecasts on the Weather Channel — all the stuff that makes life so convenient in the contemporary juncture is just not available. To communicate at a distance, you have to travel, even if the journey is over three thousand miles. Most contemporary operatives are positively disgusted with the state of the 1850 transport network, needless to say.

WHEEL HEROES

One way to use Seal of the Wheel is as the basis for a campaign centered on Ascended and Pledged agents. In such a campaign, players take the roles of characters who support the Wheel and its goals. This isn't really that far-fetched. Look around you. Do you like where you live? What you're doing? Do you enjoy the world you live in? Would you fight to defend your way of life? If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, then you're already on the Wheel's side.

No matter their origin or nature, all those who work for the Lodge — player character or GMC — have one thing in common: loyalty and reliability. No one who has not proven himself is admitted into the Wheel's secure fraternity, and this should be taken into account when taking up a Wheel campaign. Every player should know how his character proved himself to his Lodge superiors, and what compromises he made. There is certainly no room for nationalistic patriotism in the Lodge, and no space for family loyalty to mundane brothers and cousins.

A Wheel campaign could center on safeguarding normal people from Secret War spillover — protecting the world from the scum of the Netherworld. Player characters working for the Wheel might not even be aware of the Secret War at first. Or, they might begin as seasoned Pledged operatives who take the fight to the enemies of the Ascended across the time stream. Of course, just as in every other campaign, player characters have the option to play transformed animals — full members of the Lodge. More ideas for Wheel campaign types and Wheel campaign characters can be found later in this section.



RESOURCES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Characters in a Wheel-based campaign have the advantage of an enormous organization's resources but have the disadvantage that the organization is always looking over their shoulders. The former gives the player characters a huge arsenal of possibilities, and the latter gives the GM a fair bit of control over what the player characters can do without getting into trouble. The specific benefits of being one of the Pledged are discussed throughout this book. Likewise, the GM should not have any trouble creating a sense of the Byzantine operations of the Lodge in a Wheel campaign after reading about the various families and personalities that comprise the Ascended conspiracy.

Feng shui sites are a special case. When it comes to allowing PCs to attune to sites, the GM should be careful not to be overly generous. A PC group who's demonstrated skill and competence has probably earned the right to attune to a (that's one) site. A really impressive PC group might even be allowed to attune to two or three sites. The Ascended probably won't give more opportunities than that for any non-transformed animals to boost their personal fortunes. Very few Ascended are even attuned to a significant fraction of the feng shui sites controlled by the Lodge. Of course, those who are (like Draco and Mr. X) are very influential.

Vast resources aside, characters who expect the Lodge to deliver their every mundane desire are in for a rude shock. In most situations, the Pledged are expected to attend to their own needs. After all, the Order and Society recruit agents to make life easier for the Ascended, not the other way around. Most Pledged, however, have extensive personal networks and resources, and so getting hold of a few cases of ordnance or a sporty car is rarely a difficulty. It wouldn't be out of line to give Pledged (or Ascended) characters in a Wheel campaign the rich wealth level off the bat.

CHARACTER TYPES

The following sections discuss the different sorts of characters that might operate on the Lodge's behalf in a Wheel campaign.

Ascended

Few Ascended are active across the time stream. The danger of reversion has been discussed often in this book. For this reason, most Lodge activities are carried out by the Pledged. That said, it could be an interesting challenge to play a transformed animal of the Lodge who must overcome the danger inherent in travel through the Netherworld on a day-to-day basis. Players should also keep in mind that transformed animals hailing from 69 AD are much better at Netherworld travel than their brethren from 1850 and the contemporary junctures. In any case, a transformed animal who is an active operative in a Wheel campaign should have a backstory (and melodramatic hook) which describes why the character is not like the other Ascended, who prefer to operate through their Pledged lackeys.

Wheel Recruits

Most Pledged come from the Order of the Wheel and the Jade Wheel Society. They've proven themselves time and again to be more reliable, more competent, and more resourceful than the average (ahem) bear. Since they're in the organization already, they've already attracted the notice of the Lodge.

All fresh Pledged are taken to the Netherworld so they won't forget their loyalties in the event of a critical shift. Recruits are often drugged before the trip so they aren't aware of where they've gone. Years pass before most Pledged ever learn about the Secret War. (Fast Eddie Lo, for example, knows nothing about it). Players creating Wheel recruits should determine what they know (with the GM's help, of course) about the Secret War, Netherworld, and so forth before things get rolling. They should also determine how they rose through the ranks of the Order or Society, and how the peo-

ple they know there will be able to assist them in the course of the campaign.

Renegades From Other Factions

All of the factions have their problems. The Architects' future is oppressive, and many of their operatives assigned to the contemporary juncture find themselves going native, what with the variety of food, great entertainment, and relaxed emphasis on forced homogeneity. A few, after exposure to earlier junctures, find that they don't want the Architects to come into being and turn against them. Lotus sorcerers, once away from Gao Zhang, often find that they don't particularly care to serve a master who kills his servants on a whim — especially if they've failed at some critical task. The list goes on and on. There are all manner of Secret Warriors who once served other masters but who no longer find it to their taste. The Wheel watches for them.

A renegade from another faction knows many things the Wheel wants to know. In exchange, the Wheel offers newly Pledged agents protection from their former masters, in addition to the usual benefits. Renegades are also likely to be assigned to missions in their home junctures, if only because of familiarity. (But also, because the Ascended don't like to keep sorcerers and arcanotech-users near their home junctures).

WHEEL CAMPAIGN IDEAS

Running a game for characters with the backing of a large, entrenched organization that rules the world is not quite the same as running a campaign based around the activities of a rag-tag group of heroes like the Dragons. But this is not to say that the Ascended are fat and happy. The Eaters of the Lotus wait to one side, to the other side are the Architects of the Flesh, and the Guiding Hand strikes from within their home junctures. One must also not forget about the occasional Jammer bombing run or

those rare occasions when the Four Monarchs make a half-serious attempt to regain their lost power.

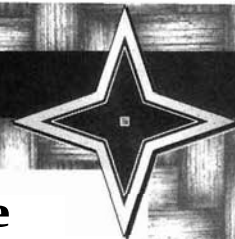
The following sections provide a few ideas for how to structure the conflict of a Wheel campaign.

Taking 69 AD

If the Wheel could take control of the 69 AD juncture, it could seriously cut into magic's threat and perhaps make changes that would displace the Architects from 2056. The Wheel has an advantage over the Lotus in that it knows the location of every major feng shui site on Earth in 1850 and the contemporary juncture. In a campaign focused on taking 69 AD for the Ascended, the characters are responsible for putting that knowledge to use.

Taking 69 AD is necessarily a long-term project involving the capture of dozens of feng shui sites. Furthermore, it will leave the characters in the middle of nowhere in a low-tech environment with magic and demons all around. Gao Zhang currently has the advantage in 69 AD, of course, but he has only recently become aware of feng shui sites outside China, so the Lotus are currently caught a bit flat footed. To make things even more dangerous in 69 AD, the Architects of the Flesh also know where all the sites are and have an agenda similar to the Ascended's.

One thing to keep in mind is that the world outside China in 69 AD is not **unpopulated**. The Roman Empire is still spread across Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, and they probably have their fair share of feng shui sites. Whether they understand what they are or not, they're unlikely to want to give them up to gun-toting psychos from the future. When deciding what elements of the ancient world to use, keep in mind that magic is real and monsters exist. If it comes down to a choice between rigid accuracy and cinematic action, go for the action. That's what **Feng Shui** is all about.



Taking 2056

The Architects' home juncture is an object of fear and concern for the Wheel. No one is really certain what happened between 1996 and 2056 to bring Bonengel to power and leave the Wheel by the wayside, and the Lodge really wants to know. Most expeditions into the Buro's home turf are focused on gathering information and establishing safe houses. The Wheel is not yet ready to make any kind of full-fledged move on the Architects.

Expeditions into 2056 are dangerous. Everyone is under surveillance, and infiltrators can get caught with the slightest misstep. It doesn't do the Wheel much good if their Pledged agents in 2056 get arrested or killed by cybernetic demons. On the other hand, any opportunity to gum up Buro operations is a good one and should not be passed up. High-tech espionage adventures with massive explosions, incredible gunfights, and your typical Bond-style action fit very nicely in 2056. Since it's impossible to create a superficial or critical shift from 2056, Pledged can pretty much do anything without causing unforeseen problems in their own junctures.

As with 69 AD, the Wheel knows where most of the Architects' feng shui sites are. Unfortunately, unlike in 69 AD, most sites are heavily defended with the best troops, equipment, and abominations the world's chi can bring to bear. 2056 is the hardest nut of all to crack and can drive a long-term campaign a long way.

Defending the Home Junctures

Turnabout's fair play. Characters in a campaign based on this concept track down and stop other factions from getting a foothold in either the 1850 or contemporary junctures. This campaign is more likely to have a mission-oriented structure as characters become aware of problems and solve them. They can learn about trouble spots through their own investigations, the Wheel can assign them to certain tasks, or a combination of both methods can be employed. The characters in this game are in the position of being the Wheel's first, last, and only line of defense against mad sorcerers, demons, and **arcanotech**-toting terrorists. The Pledged must stop any and all incursions without letting the rest of the world know just what threatens it.

Pledged agents who specialize in this kind of work are often based in the Netherworld, where they can move to act in any juncture as needed to solve situations as they come up. Often, they're called to fix superficial shifts that indicate a greater threat. For example, increased Lotus influence in the 1850 juncture might lead to Victorian-era pop occultism blossoming into a trend that still hasn't run its course by the contemporary juncture. Since all PC Pledged are **Innerwalkers**, they'd notice the shift in trends. It would then fall to the characters to locate the eunuchs in 1850 and cancel their influence, restoring the contemporary juncture to its former condition. Left unchecked, the Lotus could use the changes to snowball into dominance over the contemporary era.

A Few Months Later, a Time Like Any Other

Tairong never got the hang of the Netherworld – *the Inner Kingdom, as the residents called it.* The tunnels, the demons, and the bizarre play of light and weren't so bad. It wasn't the *inhabitants and the landscapes.* It wasn't that the *Four Monarchs could make entire palaces from shadow, ice, fire, and clouds.* It wasn't even that ridiculously huge television screen. No, what Tairong could not quite grasp was why, in a place where anyone with the talent could create a home as grandiose as possible, anyone would choose to live in a junkyard.

"So you were one of these Ascended, and now you want to join the Dragons? What makes you think I'd know how to find them?" Tairong already knew from the Wheel's files that the Prof was involved with the Dragons, but she had to admit that the Prof was good.

"Enough of this nonsense. I came here to tell you about Killdeer." That got her attention. "I know who set it up and who executed it. Who set the Dragons up to die."

The Prof looked warily at Tairong. "Why should I believe you? You're one of them. Why betray them?"

Tairong shrugged. "No, I'm not one of them. You can believe or not believe, it does not change my knowledge. I've been to the very heart of the Ascended and saw ... at first I helped them, but now that I know what they're like, I want to destroy them. They've perverted their nature. They diluted their blood, blamed the sorcerers. They created a

world that rewards the worst in human nature and they claim no responsibility for it." Tairong gazed into the distance. "No, I'm not one of them, I'm –"

"Dead." Danny completed her sentence as he and Lydia casually strolled into the Junkyard. He continued: "Why, Tairong? Why did you turn against us?"

Lydia broke in. "You need to come with us, back home. You can make this easy, or you can make this hard." She glanced at Danny. "We'd rather make it easy."

Danny's Brownings fairly leapt into his hands. "Come along."

Tairong glanced apologetically at the Prof and, lightning-quick, dragged her behind a pile of useless ornithopter parts. Danny's bullets smacked into the junk, causing a few piles to teeter alarmingly. Surprisingly quick, the Prof twisted free of Tairong's grip and disappeared among the junk. Danny and Lydia approached, slowly. Both were aware of the damage Tairong could inflict with her bare hands.

Tairong tossed a twisted bit of metal at a different, nearby pile of trash. Her former companions paused. Tairong *couldn't* see them, but she could visualize Danny *motioning Lydia to check the sound.* Her lips spread into a grin – not a human grin, but that of a predator baring her teeth for the kill. If Mary hadn't left the group after Hawk died, they'd stand a chance. Now? No.

Danny's shadow darkened the ground nearby. Tairong focused chi into her hands and leapt. She guessed accurately and landed on Danny, clawing at his throat and abdomen. Danny flinched from the ambush, not that it did much good. She whispered, "You should have come with me," before sinking her teeth into his throat and ripping.

Something small and hard smacked into the side of Tairong's head, nearly knocking her out. She rolled over and looked for the attack's source, but saw nothing.

Lydia.

She retreated further into the junk piles, looking for a place to rest, catch her breath, and locate her erstwhile companion. Another slug slammed into the junk pile Tairong had chosen to hide behind. She spared a quick look around to see Lydia duck behind cover.

Too far to jump.

She crabwalked back to Danny's body and picked up one of his signature pistols. "Sorry, friend. I don't think you'll need this any longer."

Lydia called from her hiding place. "Tairong, *if* you come with us, the Name will forgive everything. How could you betray us? I can understand the rest of them, but we go way back, right?" Tairong wondered what lies they'd been fed but didn't answer, assuming that Lydia wanted to pinpoint her location.

The Prof's voice, loud as thunder, rang through the Junkyard. "I don't know who

you are or why you barged into my home to kill a guest. You have thirty seconds to walk out the front gate. If not, I can't take responsibility for the consequences." With that, the sounds of hydraulics and other machinery filled the Junkyard.

Tairong used the noise as cover to advance closer to Lydia. Once the sounds stopped, Tairong saw several dangerous-looking pieces of machinery aimed in Lydia's direction. Lydia stood, with her hands in the air. "Okay, fine. I'm gone. Tairong, the *Wheel's* waiting for you. One way or another."

Tairong hefted the pistol. Not balanced, but good for a throw at this range. She centered her aim on Lydia's retreating back. She nearly followed through, but changed her mind at the last moment. She didn't want more blood on her hands, not right then. Lydia left the *Junkyard* in one piece. They'd meet again, Tairong was certain of that.

After Lydia's departure, the Prof's voice rang out again. "You killed that guy, you can clean up the mess. As for the rest, I want to hear what you have to say. Then I want proof. Convince me." She laughed bitterly. "*There's* a saying: 'fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.' I'm not going to fall for another trick like Killdeer."

Tairong sighed. This would be harder than she expected.

Adventure!

DOUBLE STUNTS AS STUNT DOUBLES

IT'S A MOOK'S LIFE

The Eaters of the Lotus find the contemporary juncture confusing, loud, and chaotic. More than one new arrival has nearly had his plans for world domination nipped in the bud by a careening taxi.

So where do Lotus sorcerers go to learn about the world? The same place we do: they go to the movies. Movies offer a simple explanation for the world and serve as a primer on how things happen. Want to know how the contemporary juncture's markets can be corrupted? Watch *Wall Street*. Want to know how the police force deals with emergencies? Watch *Hard Boiled*. All of life is up there on the silver screen if you care to watch it. Sort of.

Lotus agents usually avoid action movies. They get more than enough of that in real life, thank you very much. They enjoy courtroom dramas, tearjerkers — films that concentrate on the incidents of every day life. High-pitched sobbing has ruined more than one matinee showing of *Kramer vs. Kramer*. But that doesn't mean they haven't noticed the popularity of explosive action movies — especially the ones being filmed on top of a certain Netherworld portal they would just love to get their hands on. (See "Shining Dragon Productions," p. 112.)

BACKGROUND

A Lotus agent has infiltrated the Shining Dragon production *Revenge of the Demon Hunter*. This movie contains the typical blend of high-octane action and minimal plot. The sorcerer has managed to edit in footage of diabolical runes that, once magically charged, will cause the film's audiences to become blood-thirsty mobs. While the police (and the Jade Wheel) worry about the riots, the Lotus hopes to **seize** a few poorly defended feng shui sites. If the poor PR for the film hurts the Wheel's pocketbook, that's gravy on the biscuit.

Unfortunately for the Lotus, fickle fate has taken a hand. The Inner Kingdom rock guitarist Sven "Hurricane" Harrison has stolen footage from the film, intending to use it as a backdrop for an upcoming performance at the Genocide Lounge. To make things worse, the journey through the Netherworld has charged the footage.

GETTING INVOLVED

Any Innerwalking characters present at the Genocide Lounge during Hurricane Harrison's performance can take part in this adventure. Here are a few ideas:

- **Dragons** could be accompanying the Prof to a meeting with the Jammers. Maybe they have some much-needed information or the Prof is delivering some equipment. The contact never shows.



- The Genocide Lounge is the best place in the entire Inner Kingdom to really kick back and party. Even Secret Warriors need to relax sometimes.
- The nemesis of a PC has been spotted at the Lounge recently and the character is there to discover why.
- Innerwalkers fresh off the turnip truck tend to gravitate to the Lounge.
- The Jammers have invited the Dragons to the Lounge to celebrate a joint victory.

LIGHTS, MIRRORBALLS ... ACTION!

It's a calm night at the Genocide Lounge despite the best efforts of wannabe guitar god Sven "Hurricane" Harrison, Jammer and speed

metal freak. He's playing a six number set. Harrison hasn't hit the big time yet, but he has a small following among the Jammer dregs. These are the losers and **weirdoes** Potemkin feels he can't really trust on missions. Considering the caliber of the average Jammer, that's really saying something.

Harrison starts his performance a few minutes after the heroes arrive. He stands in front of a large video wall, which shows a dizzying montage of images, as he bellows incoherent lyrics and tortures his distinctive axe guitar. The jumble of attempted rhythm and melody totally disregards the taped backing music. Nevertheless, a small crowd of thirty or so in front of the stage appreciates the din. They're leaping up and down and screaming at the tops of their voices. The other patrons and staff of the Genocide Lounge make a point of **ignoring the whole performance**. They've seen it all before.



Sven "Hurricane" Harrison

Sample Dialogue: "Hello Genocide Lounge!"

Attributes: Bod 6, (hi 0, Mnd 4 (Cha 7), Ref 7

Skills: Martial Arts 13, Guns 10, Fix-It 12, Info/Speed Metal 11, Seduction 7

Unique Schticks:

Sonic Axe: Harrison's guitar is full of Jammertech. The guitar is shaped like an executioner's axe, and it's not just for show. Harrison is also able to generate a sonic blast by hitting a highly discordant chord. This blast does a base Damage of 3, which is not reduced by Toughness. The target must also make a Fortune check (Difficulty equal to the Damage sustained). Failure means his guns have been temporarily disabled. On a fumble by Harrison, the guitar shakes itself apart and deals him 10 Wound Points, which are not reduced by Toughness.

Weapons: punch (7), kick (8), guitar axe (10), sonic blast (3)

Harrison's fans

Sample Dialogue: "Dude, he hit Sven! Get him!"

Attributes: Bod 6, (hi 0, Mnd 4, Ref 5

Skills: Guns 5, Martial Arts 5

Weapons: punch (7), kick (8), knife (8), Bura Backup Arm (8/1/5+1)

Genocide Lounge Staff

Sample Dialogue: "Hey, you can't go back there!"

Attributes: Bod 6, (hi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 5

Skills: Guns 6, Martial Arts 6

Weapons: punch (7), kick (8), Intratec Tet-9 (10/3/32+1), Mossberg Special Purpose (13/5/9)

PCs that take an interest in the spectacle can make Perception rolls, Difficulty 5. If successful, they notice that the footage shown on the video wall seems to be taken from an action movie. They recognize two of the actors, Devon Sharpe and Maureen Wei. The sequence involves exploding helicopters and perilous leaps between buildings.

Beams of light suddenly shoot out from the video wall, hitting everybody watching the performance. Then all hell breaks loose as Harrison and the Jammers become a bloodthirsty mob.

Things That Could Happen During the Fight

- It is possible that some PCs were looking at the video screen when the mojo went

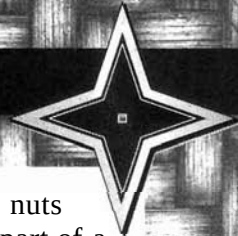
down and were hit by a beam. Ask them to make a Willpower roll and record the result. Nothing is going to happen to them — they have plot immunity — but they don't have to know that.

- When the players reach for their trusty shot-guns, "remind" them that they handed in their most obvious weaponry at the door. All weapons above Concealment 2 (yes, that includes swords) are safely under lock and key. To get them they need to get past two members of the staff and break through a thick steel door.
- The driving backup music blasts from speakers all through the fight. Characters cannot converse with one another until the speakers have been destroyed. This means that your players shouldn't discuss strategy except with gestures. If you're feeling particularly cruel (or immersive) you can actually slap a noisy CD in the player and crank it to painful levels.
- Tables and chairs abound. A bar fight isn't a bar fight until somebody breaks a chair over someone else's head.
- There is plenty of booze available, most of it behind the bar. Alcohol is very flammable.
- It would be a shame if someone weren't thrown over the bar and into the shelves of bottles.
- Mirrorballs hang from the ceiling. They can be swung on or shattered with well-placed gunshots.
- That video wall is just begging to be destroyed in a shower of sparks.

Picking Up the Pieces

The Prof is very interested in the events that led to the riot at the Lounge, especially if she witnessed them. She takes the footage for examination and questions those who were affected. It takes her the better part of a day, but this is what she learns:

The footage comes from the movie *Revenge of the Demon Hunter*, a *Shining Dragon* production. The movie hasn't been completed yet. It's being filmed on location in Hong Kong.



- There are single-frame images spliced into the footage that serve as a visual **compulsion** spell. These images are seen **subliminally** and **compel** the watcher to become extremely violent.
- The spell has to be activated before it will work. It is very likely that the magically charged atmosphere of the Netherworld activated the stolen footage.

She concludes from this information that somebody has infiltrated the production crew of the movie and is sowing some serious **mis-**chief that could lead to great loss of life. The Prof (and the Jammers) would like a small group to infiltrate the movie production as stuntmen, uncover the sorcerer, and remove the threat.

CASTING CALL

On the following evening, our heroes are parked on a Kowloon street staking out the home of casting director Benny Chim. They watch him leave home — right on schedule — and begin his evening constitutional. This evening will be different for Benny than most **evenings, though, because this evening, Benny's** going to be mugged and rescued.

Eight Jammers wait for Benny in a nearby alley, **dressed as a generic street gang.** They are going to assault Benny while the PCs rush to the rescue. Our heroes must show off as much as possible so Benny immediately hires them as **stuntmen** on the shoot. The fight needs be **real-**istic without anyone getting killed. Use the stats of Harrison's fans for the Jammer mooks, though they won't be carrying guns.

The "mugging" takes place within a narrow but well-lit alleyway. Everyone wants Benny to see just how cool our heroes are. The PCs suffer +2 Difficulty on every attack because they're used to fighting full strength and now have to pull their punches. Make sure the players know that Benny will probably be unnerved by **any-**one exhibiting really bizarre powers; the goal is to look heroic but normal. No obvious creature, magic, or arcanowave schticks. The stranger fu powers (Fire Fist, for example) should **prob-**ably be avoided as well. Finally, there are no

guns allowed. Even the Jammers aren't nuts enough to let someone shoot them as part of a mock robbery.

Things That Could Happen During the Fight

- There are **several dumpsters** (some with chains and padlocks!) along alleyway. All make satisfactory "bong" sounds when **peo-**ple are thrown into them.
- A fire escape with a security ladder leads down into this alleyway. This could be dropped down on a mook, or serve as **fod-**der for acrobatics.
- If his rescuers are turning the tide, Benny might become courageous enough to pick up a lead pipe and lay into one of his **mug-**gers. Benny, of course, hasn't been warned to pull his punches.
- Hey, who left that gas can over there?

Picking Up the Pieces

Benny is (presumably)impressed at the martial prowess of his rescuers and immediately offers them a part in his latest movie. "You're **fabu-**lous! You could be the next Chow Yun Fat! The next Devon Sharpe! The next Jackie!" All they have to do is turn up at the Shining Dragon Productions sound stage at seven o'clock sharp the next morning.

THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS FOR GETTING YOUR BUTT KICKED

The production of *Revenge of the Demon Hunter* is in big trouble. The stolen footage was crucial to the movie and has to be replaced. Unfortunately for all involved, the preview screening for the studio execs and financial backers is scheduled for tonight.

Three separate action scenes have to be shot back-to-back, edited into the final reel of the movie, then rushed to the screening.

Philip Mo

Skills in [brackets] only apply if Philip is the Lotus infiltrator.

Sample Dialogue: "We only have one take, so let's get this right!"

Attributes: Bod 4, (Chi 0 [Mag 8], Mnd 7, Ref 5)

Skills: Martial Arts 3, Info/Moviemaking 13, Intimidation 12, [Sorcery 16]

Fu Powers: Signature Weapon (Megaphone)

Sorcery Schticks: [Blast (fire, chi, lightning), Divination, Influence, Movement, Summoning]

Weapons: punch (5), kick (6), megaphone (8), [Blast (10)]

Maureen Wei

Skills and abilities in [brackets] are Ten Ghosts' skills.

Sample Dialogue: "Sorry! I hope that didn't hurt too much."

Attributes: Bod 4, Chi 0 (For 6) [Mag 8], Mnd 5 (Cha 8), Ref 4

Skills: Martial Arts 6, Driving 6, Info/Showbiz 14, Seduction 14, [Sorcery 16]

Sorcery Schticks: [Blast (fire, chi, lightning), Divination, Influence, Movement, Summoning]

Weapons: punch (5), kick (6), [Blast (10)]

Maureen Wei?

This isn't Maureen Wei's first brush with the *Secret War*. She also appeared the scenario *Shaolin Heartbreak*, written by Allen Varney and published in the (out of print) stenorio collection *Marked For Death*. In fact, incidents in that scenario led to her temporary retirement from the movie industry. Just so you know.

The PCs, being emergency stuntmen, are going to feature in all three sequences. The film has gone way over budget, so the stuntmen previously used on the shoot still haven't been paid and are refusing to appear.

Benny and the production crew have another problem: Johnny Fan. Johnny is the adopted son of Triad crime lord Quick Eddie Kwan and managed to get himself employed as an actor in the movie because Benny owes Quick Eddie thousands in gambling debts.

Unfortunately, Johnny is an extremely poor actor and all of his scenes have ended up on the editing suite floor (despite Benny's protests). Johnny has heard about this and isn't at all happy. Resorting to violence certainly wouldn't be out of character. Both Johnny and Eddie are members of the Lodge - a transformed bear and jackal, respectively.

WHO'S THE BAD GUY?

Most of the rest of the scenario revolves around our heroes trying to find out who the Lotus bad guy is. Since the last thing you want is for your players to get all Sherlock Holmes and work out who the bad guy is right at the start of the scenario, the infiltrator's identity is really up to you. So here is what we suggest:

The villain is the last person that the players suspect, literally. Each of the suspects is behaving strangely. This behavior could be caused by demonic possession or have a more mundane explanation. You could decide who the evil protagonist is before the game commences, but why not just see what happens? Here are the suspects, each with an explanation for why he or she could be the villain.

Philip Mo

Philip is the film's director. He has a small cult following, and is well known for his tantrums on the set. He is never without his megaphone and spends most of the time between takes in his trailer. Mo is a short, balding, fat man with a high squeaky voice.

Why he could be the villain: Philip is unlucky enough to be a eunuch sorcerer from 69AD and was recruited by the Lotus long ago. He's the simplest choice for the villain, so maybe the players will overlook him as being too obvious.

Maureen Wei

Once the darling of the Hong Kong film industry, Maureen Wei has been out of the spotlight for a while due to "personal problems." (The papers suggest she was drying out after a "nightmarish descent into drugs and booze," but don't they always suggest that?) She wants — no needs — a dramatic comeback vehicle. Wei has shining black hair, arching eyebrows, a straight nose, and a mole on the left side of her jaw.

Why she could be the villain: a eunuch sorcerer, Ten Ghosts, possesses Maureen. Ten Ghosts' body and Maureen's soul are safely hidden away in the Netherworld where they will not factor into this adventure.



Devon Sharpe

The star of the Demon Hunter series. Everyone has seen this **guy** in action, and he's one of the coolest Hong Kong screen actors. He choreographs the fight scenes and does his own stunts. This guy truly has his finger on the pulse of HK cinema. Sharpe is actually an Ameriasian, over six feet tall, ruggedly handsome with piercing blue eyes and dark hair. Most women fall head over heels in lust when they first meet him. Oh, and he's Pledged. What did you expect? No one gets to movie star status in the contemporary juncture without the Ascended's say so.

Why he could be the villain: a eunuch sorcerer, Ten Ghosts, possesses Devon. Ten Ghosts' body and Devon's soul are safely hidden away in the Netherworld where they will not factor into this adventure.

Benny Chim

The casting director. He's a very ordinary looking man of medium height and weight; he wears a pair of heavy-rimmed black spectacles.

Why he could be the villain: Benny has been dead for some time, centuries in fact. Actually an evil Lotus ghost named Kun Song, he fakes his "death" (see "Tragedy Strikes" on p. 120) so that he can keep an eye on the heroes without having to maintain his masquerade.

VERTIGO

The first scene to be filmed is a simple rooftop fight featuring the characters versus Maureen Wei. The characters are costumed as huge horned ogres. Before the scene is shot, Benny impresses upon them the idea that they are supposed to lose the fight. They must make Maureen look good in the process. Benny cheerfully informs the PCs that her kung fu isn't as good as many of her fans believe.

The fight takes place on the flat roof of a four-story building. There isn't really time to choreograph the fight properly. ("We'll improvise! It'll be very avant garde!") Maureen and the characters are told to make good use of the props that surround them. Mo suggests

Devon Sharpe

Skills and abilities in [brackets] are Ten Ghosts' skills.

Sample Dialogue: "You know, there's more to movie making than you think."

Attributes: Bod 8, Chi 0 [Mag 81, Mnd 5, Ref 8]

Skills: Guns 13, Martial Arts 12, Driving 13, Info/Film Production 11, [Sorcery 16]

Gun Shtticks: Both Guns Blazing x4, Signature Weapon x2

Sorcery Shtticks: [Blast (fire, chi, lightning), Divination, Influence, Movement, Summoning]

Unique Shtticks:

Shake It Off: Whenever something causes Devon to suffer Impairment, he makes a Willpower roll. The Difficulty is the current amount of impairment. If he succeeds, he ignores that Impairment. This action has a shot cost of one, and the effect lasts until he suffers further Impairment or is forced to make a Death Check.

Lucky Claw: Devon has a talon of the first demon he ever killed on a thong around his neck. This is an emblem of good fortune and allows him to reverse the stores on the negative and positive dice once per session.

Weapons: punch (9), kick (10), Automag V x2 (15/3/5+1), [Blast (10)]

Kun Song

Sample Dialogue: "You fools! You followed me here ... only to die!"

Attributes: Bod 5 (hi 0 [Mag 7], Mnd 8, Ref 9)

Skills: Creature Power 16, Sorcery 15

Creature Shtticks: Flight, Insubstantial, Mask of Humanity, Brain Shredder (visage of his rotting self), Damage Immunity (bullets)

Magic Shtticks: Influence, Summoning

Weaponr punch (61, kitk (7), Brain Shredder (7)

that if one of the "demons" could go over the side of the building and through the wooden scaffolding, that would be swell.

The demon costumes are very restrictive. The characters suffer 1 Impairment.

Things That Could Happen During the Fight

- Maureen really isn't very good, and if left to her own devices probably wouldn't come anywhere near hitting the PCs. The players can aid her efforts by adding half their AV to hers, as they lean into her punches and kicks.
- In addition to a lack of Martial Arts skill, Maureen isn't very good at pulling her punches. Every time she connects the target

must make a Fortune check, Difficulty 5, or take full damage from the blow.

- Going off the roof and through the scaffolding calls for a Fortune check, Difficulty 5. If successful, the scaffolding breaks the character's fall as it is supposed to and only 10 Wound Points (minus Toughness) are sustained. If not, something goes wrong. The scaffolding was not put up right, was manufactured wrong, or the character missed it entirely. The four-story fall is worth 27 Wound Points (minus Toughness).
- There are plenty of props on the roof: water barrels, TV aerials, washing lines, and bed sheets.
- Some wisecrack on the crew thought it would be funny to leave a fiddle lying around.

ENTER THE TRIAD

The players should just have enough time to rule out one of the suspects when Benny, white-

faced, collects them and tells them that he saw something strange in the editing room. Before he can elaborate, however, Johnny Fan and his goons arrive looking for him.

There are three Jade Wheel mooks present for every PC, plus Johnny Fan. They arrive in several limousines and start swaggering around the set, pushing people around and calling for Benny. Those who have seen Wheel rings before may notice that all the goons are wearing them.

If the PCs don't interfere (yeah, right), the goons assault Maureen, Philip, and several other members of the crew while Johnny beats Benny bloody. Devon is suspiciously absent while this is happening. If the heroes intervene, Johnny orders that the upstarts be taught a lesson.

Things That Could Happen During the Fight

- There isn't any good reason why the heroes should have access to their normal gear, unless

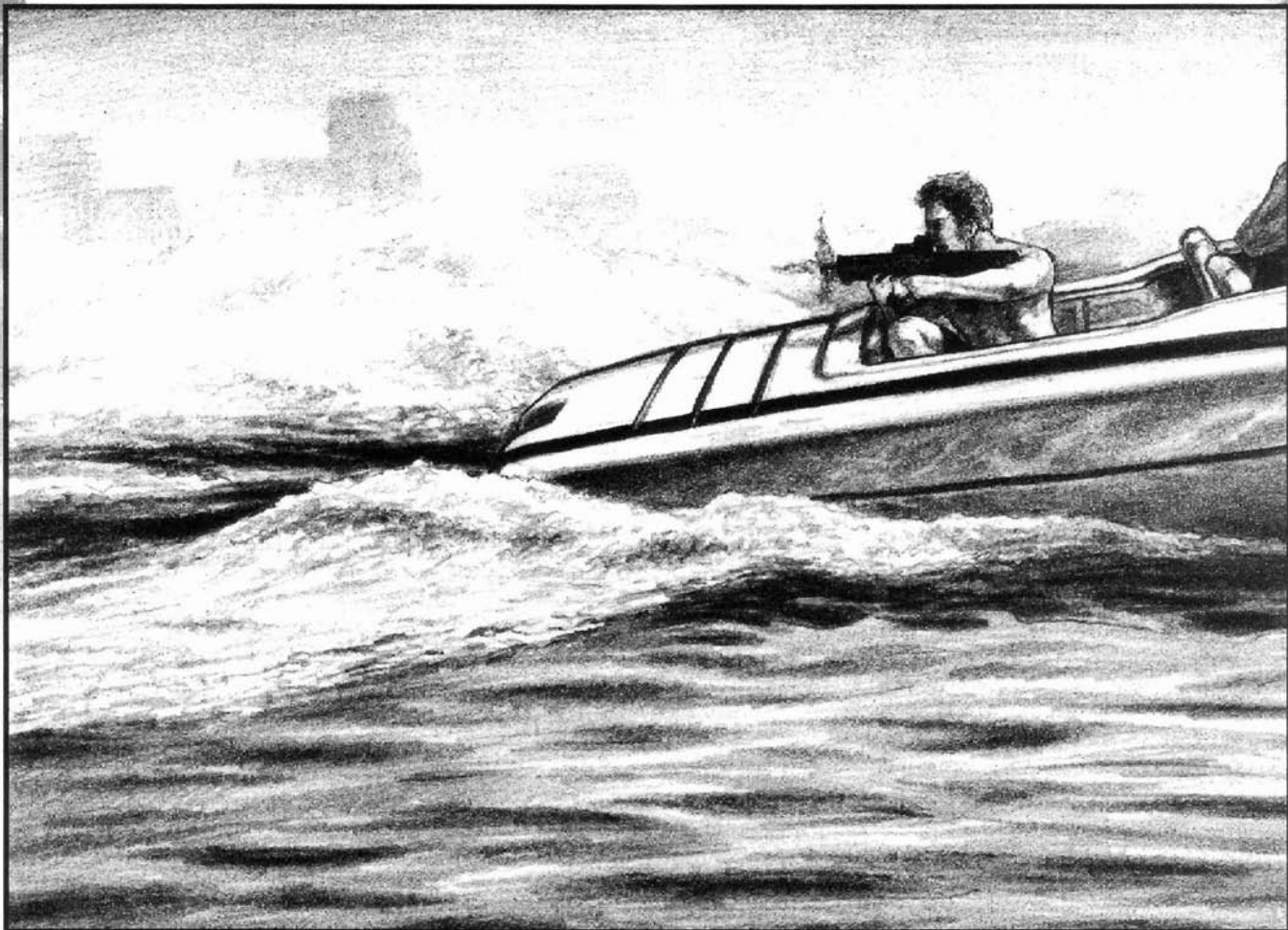


Illustration by Andrew Baker



it's a Signature Weapon or they explicitly said they were bringing it along to the set. The guns on the set are all loaded with blanks.

- A hand-held camera or a sound boom could make a handy makeshift weapon.
- Almost half the furniture and props lying around are dummies designed to break easily and inflict no damage.
- A cable could be used as a whip or to trip a mook.
- The big lights used on the set require obscene amounts of electricity. Since all Secret Warriors' mothers warn them against putting metal objects in sockets, though, this should not pose a hazard.
- It might occur to Philip or one of the cameramen to roll tape during the fight in case they need some extra scenes of the PCs getting punched in the face. It sure would be easy to get in the way of something dangerous if your eye was glued to a camera, wouldn't it?

Once it is certain that the tide of battle is going against him, Johnny — essentially a bully and coward — attempts to escape. If necessary, he orders Devon to come out of his trailer and attack the PCs. (Devon is Pledged, remember?) Once he's certain Johnny has escaped, Devon stops fighting (if possible), apologizes to the heroes, and retreats to his trailer.

Picking Up the Pieces

Once all the excitement is over, Mo orders that the next scene be prepared immediately. The player characters may be focused on the investigation and want to question Benny or Devon, but that's not in the cards. Devon is locked in his trailer (or has sneaked out and can't be found) while Benny is getting dressed down by Phillip Mo. Maureen could also serve as a distraction. She begs the PCs, with tears in her eyes, to help ensure that the film gets finished. ("This is my second chance and I won't get another. Please, please help me!")

THE CHASE

In this scene, the PCs stand in for the two main actors as well as acting as assorted

Johnny Fan

Sample Dialogue: "No one crosses me and lives!"

Attributes: Bod 9, Chi 8 (For 3), Mnd 3 (Will 9), Ref 5

Skills: Martial Arts 13, Guns 13, Intimidation 12, Leadership 6

Transformed Animal Schticks: Bellow x2, Fortitude, Slap, Rage

Weapons: punch (10), kick (11), Colt Python (11/3/6)

Triad Mooks

Sample Dialogue: "Yes boss!"

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 5.

Skills: Guns 7, Martial Arts 7

Weapons: punch (6), kirk (7), Glock 17 (10/1/17)

bad guys. This is how Mo sees the stunt going: the characters, standing in for Maureen and Devon, are riding a single motorbike. They are to combat a number of gangsters chasing them. Once the gangsters have been dispatched, a helicopter comes into view, with a bad guy hanging from a rope ladder. Somehow, Devon and Maureen must cause the bad guy to fall from the rope ladder into "that chasm over there. Don't worry, there's an **airbag**."

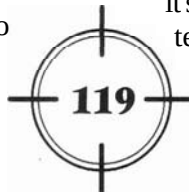
The motorbike is being filmed at a leisurely 30 km/hr in a movie set of alleyways and narrow roads. If you want to use the chase rules in Golden Comeback, assume that the "stars" have a Yamaha Thunderace (Pep +3, Wreck 1) and the "gangsters" are riding trail bikes (Pep +2, Wreck 1). If a character comes off a bike, he can make

an Agility check, Difficulty 7, to roll with the fall and avoid taking 10 Damage.

All of the weapons in this scene fire blanks.

Things That Could Happen During the Fight

- As soon as Thunderace has only one rider, the front tire blows. This sends both rider and bike through a flimsy crash barrier. Grabbing hold of the barrier calls for an Agility check, Difficulty 10. Otherwise the bruising tumble into the chasm inflicts 19 Wound Points. (This isn't a planned stunt, it's just plain bad luck, but paranoid characters who suspect foul play don't need to know that.)



- "Do not back up. Severe tire damage."
- Someone left a bunch of pieces of plywood laying around with one end of each propped up on something. Say, do you suppose they could be used as jumps?
- Is the **airbag** actually in the chasm? And if so, did anyone remember to inflate it? That depends on how the **GM's** week at work went, as far as we're concerned.

TRAGEDY STRIKES

Before the next scene can be set up, tragedy strikes. Benny Chim's body is found, his face contorted in great pain. He appears to have died from a massive heart attack. His body is taken away in an ambulance. (If Benny is the Lotus infiltrator, he faked his death so he could spy on the PCs full time. If not, he discovered something he shouldn't have in the cutting room and was knocked off by the real infiltrator.)

After a few moments of silence, Mo claps his hands once and demands that the next scene be set up. Over the incredulous protests of the crew, he insists that the show must go on. ("Do you really want to disappoint our investors? Do you really think they'll pay you if they don't have a movie they can show? And if they don't pay up, what are you going to do? Sue them?") With these clues, perceptive PCs might start asking questions and find out that, yeah, the movie (and in fact, the whole studio) is backed by the Triads.

TRIAD REVENGE

This scene involves the PCs acting as mook cops, trying (and **failing**) to contain a group of demons from rampaging down a deserted Hong

Kong street. The PCs start behind a barricade of police cars with drawn **pistols** and **shotguns**. The demons are moving down the street towards them. Mo explains that this is a filler shot designed to show how tough the demons are, before Devon Sharpe takes them down.

To complicate matters, Johnny and his pledged thugs have come back for revenge, disguised as the demons. Johnny knows that the script calls for the heroes to lose the fight

and intends to use that to his utmost advantage. Charlie Yen, a transformed fox, comes along for the ride, despite the general Ascended policy of leaving the rough stuff to Pledged. (If he's living in Hong Kong he's already a loose cannon, right?) If Johnny was killed in the previous scene, Charlie is leading the mooks. If Johnny is still alive, there are three "demons" for each PC. If Johnny died, there are five.

The demon costumes the Triads are wearing are less restrictive than the ones the PCs were wearing earlier, and cause no Impairment. As before, however, all the firearms in this scene fire blanks.

Johnny fights to the death this time, for plot reasons that will become apparent later.

Things That Could Happen During the Fight

- The Triads will take full advantage of the fact that the police cars are operative and try to run the PCs down. (Philip protests that demons don't drive cars from the sidelines, but who's listening to the director?)
- In addition to the police cars, there is also a police motorcycle present. Unlike the cars, it turns out to be a dummy vehicle that can go no faster than it can be pushed.
- The Triads are definitely not above spoiling the shot by making use of set equipment like lights, cameras, director's chairs, gaffer's tape, and so on.

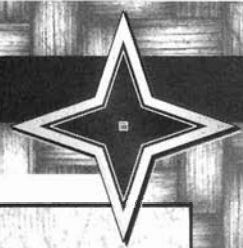
Picking Up the Pieces

Once the fight is over and the demons have been **unmasked**, the **footage** is rushed off to the editing room and spliced together. Everyone's

in a hurry to either get the film ready for the screening or get the hell away from a set that's looking increasingly jinxed. All of the suspects disappear. "They're headed for the preview, I suppose," says anyone they ask.

That's the PCs' hint to go to the preview themselves.

The actual infiltrator is busy splicing his evil spell into the footage. Even if the PCs try to keep their eye on the film all the way,



something crazy happens to give the infiltrator just the time needed to carry out his (or her) evil plan.

KICKING AND PUNCHING IN THE BACK ROW

The screening is being held in a newly opened theme restaurant, HK Movie World, before a specially invited audience. Getting into the preview should not be difficult, especially if the PCs have one of the crew handy to vouch for them. Getting out again is the real trick.

HK Movie World

HK Movie World is a restaurant chain that celebrates the worldwide appeal of Hong Kong action movies; every restaurant comes complete with a movie screen that allows the restaurant to serve as a cinema. The restaurant also boasts other Hong Kong action movie-themed attractions. Movie props are displayed in glass booths. Posters from famous (and not-so-famous) movies cover the walls. The menu is brimming with cringe-worthy puns on HK movies; for example "Chicken Chow Yun Fat Mein" and "Drunken Master Prawns." (Thankfully, wiser heads prevailed when "Hard Boiled Eggs" were proposed). The attraction that really brings in the crowds, however, is the Wuxia Tower. This is a four-story "soft play area" where customers can wear special bungee harnesses and leap about between the many platforms trying to swat one another with foam swords.

Already present at the private screening of *Revenge of the Demon Hunter* are the Lotus villain, six representatives of the "financial backers," various members of the cast and crew, and about a dozen unnamed guards and waiters.

Beating on the Lotus

The Lotus villain realizes that his cover has been blown as soon as the heroes arrive at the screening. They would never be invited to such a prestigious event normally, and chances are that they look a bit worse for wear when they arrive.

Charlie Yen

Sample **Dialogue**: (Reading from script) "Thy soul is mine, you stinkin' pig!"

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 1 (For 5), Mnd 8 (Wil 4), Ref 7

Skills: Guns 13, Martial Arts 13

Fu Shtitkr: The Fox's Retreat

Transformed Animal **Schicks**: Borrow, Embezzle, Mockery, Swindle

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), Kahr K9 (10/1/7+1)

Triad Mooks Disguised as Demons

Sample **Dialogue**: "Grrr!" [snigger]

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 5

Skills: Guns 7, Martial Arts 7

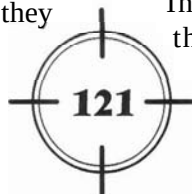
Weapons: punch (6), kitk (7), Glock 17 (10/1/17)

Knowing that the game is up, the villain thinks only of survival and plans escape. He decides that the best way out is to escape in the confusion. **All** he needs is confusion.

Lucky for him, the movie is starting just as the PCs wander in.

Things That Could Happen During the Fight

- The villain casts an Influence spell onto the film, charging the runes. Three shots later, everyone in the room who viewed the film is out for blood.
- Next, he casts a Summoning spell upon the screen, causing the giant celluloid image of Devon Sharpe to enter the fray.
- He casts a similar Summoning spell on various posters, bringing forth an assortment paper-thin Jackie Chans and Jet Lis.
- There are a ton of props all over the place, from swords to grenades to firearms. Most are inoperative, but for no particular reason, the motorbike from *Heroic Trio* is fully gassed up.
- A fight in the Wuxia Tower with combatants leaping about like hyperactive grasshoppers would be really swell. Even a foam sword can take a mook out if used just right.
- * As in the Genocide Lounge, the film is too loud for the Dragons to discuss tactics. In the flickering dark, it is possible that the heroes may mistake each other for their enemies.



Celluloid Image of Devon Sharpe

Sample Dialogue: (Spouts random sound bites of movie dialogue)

Attributes: Bod 12, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 8

Skills: Guns 13, Martial Arts 13

Gun Schticks: Both Guns Blazing x4, Signature Weapon x2

Unique Schticks:

On The Screen You Gain One Hundred Pounds: Same effects as Ich Bin Ein Bruiser (see *Golden Comeback*, p. 64).

Weapons: punch (13), kick (14), Automag V x2(15/3/5+1)

Poster Mooks

Sample Dialogue: [silent]

Attributes: Bod 7, Chi 0, Mnd 4, Ref 8

Skills: Martial Arts 7

Weapons: punch (8), kick (9)

Possessed Waiters, Busboys, Bodyguards, and Film Execs

Sample Dialogue: "Aaaaaaaagggggghhh!"

Attributes: Bod 5 Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 5

Skills: Guns 6, Martial arts 6

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), reinforced heavy briefcase (7), Glock 17 (10/1/17+1)

Quick Eddie Kwan

Sample Dialogue: "Exit stage left, you bastards!"

Attributes: Bod 5 (Move 7), Chi 1 (For 2), Mnd 5 (Wil 4), Ref 9

Skills: Guns 14, Martial Arts 13, Leadership 12

Gun Schticks: Signature Weapon (Glock 18)

Transformed Animal Schticks: Backbite, Patk Attack x2, Stavenge, Scurry, Worry
Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), Glock 18 (13/1/17+1)

Triad Mooks

Sample Dialogue: "Sure thing, boss!"

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 5

Skills: Guns 1, Martial Arts 1.

Weapons: punch (6), kitk (7), Glock 17 (10/1/17), Uzi (10/3/30), Winchester 1300 (13/5/8)

Night of the Jackal

Quick Eddie Kwan has sworn revenge for the death of his adopted son Johnny. (That's why Johnny had to die in the last fight. If the GM couldn't arrange Johnny's death then, Kwan is pissed that someone had the balls to assault his son.) He doesn't want to wait for the Lodge to declare open season on the heroes, he wants the pleasure of killing them himself. Now!

Eddie has brought Charlie Yen (if Charlie survived the previous fight) and thirty or so Triad mooks with him just to be sure. Most of them fall under the influence of the movie's spell, but it really makes no difference to Eddie if they're attacking the PCs for the wrong reasons.

The riot spell can be the GM's tool for regulating this combat. If the PCs are doing too well, they are attacked by ensorcelled waiters, film crew, or even Maureen (if she's there). That gives them the complication of fighting non-lethally. On the other hand, if things are going badly for the PCs, the fact that many of the Triads are freaking out might lead them to fight one another, or to interfere with a named enemy at a crucial moment.

Picking Up the Pieces

The aftermath of the big fight may not do a lot to sort out the whys and wherefores of the spell that was in the film, but the PCs should be able to identify the Lotus infiltrator as the guy who was waving his arms and casting spells, at the very least. Enough to satisfy the Prof? Probably not, but since the villain of the piece probably wound up dead, whattayagonnado?

RIDING OFF INTO THE SUNSET?

If the characters do a lot of poking around trying to find out about Quick Eddie Kwan or any of the other Triad or Ascended types that put in appearances in this scenario, they'll quickly run up against a very serious wall of Wheel ass-whupping. But that's a story for another day...

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I like to think that is why we are the rightful rulers of the world. We deliberately transcended our animal natures, while you just blindly evolved.

-Draco

I'm sorry. I'm not authorized to tell you why I have to kill you.

-A typical

Ascended agent

Your lies have displeased the Golden Ones.

-The Pacific

Rim Butcher

The Australian Stock Exchange just fell 3%, quintuplets were just born in Havana, and the Cubs just beat the Orioles! Don't you see the connection, you pea-brained fool?!

-Walter Placer

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