

# ELEVATOR TO THE NETHERWORLD

The Inner Kingdom Sourcebook



**FENG SHUI**

Inner Magic Explained

Dedopulous, Durrell, Eber, Grabowski,  
Lee, Mearls, Pramas, Stolze and Toner

**ATLAS  
GAMES**

# Credits

## "ELEVATOR TO THE NETHERWORLD"

AN ATLAS GAMES PRODUCTION

EDITED & DEVELOPED BY GREG STOLZE PUBLISHED BY JOHN NEPHEW

WRITTEN BY TIM DEDOPULOUS, BRYANT DURRELL, DAVID EBER, GEOFF GRABOWSKI, MIKE LEE, MIKE MEARLS, CHRIS PRAMAS, GREG STOLZE

AND TIM TONER GRAPHIC DESIGNER JEFF TIDBALL

EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE MICHELLE NEPHEW AND JEFF TIDBALL

PROOFREADERS DAMELON KIMBROUGH AND JOHN NEPHEW

COVER ART HEATHER HUDSON

INTERIOR ART ANDREW BAKER, PAUL CARRICK, DAVID FOODEN, RICHARD PACE, JIM PAVELEC AND DAVID WHITE CARTOGRAPHY ERIC HOTZ

*Elevator to the Netherworld* is © 2000 Trident Inc. d/b/a Atlas Games. *Feng Shui* is a trademark of Robin D. Laws, used under license. All rights reserved. *Feng Shui's* game mechanics derive from the roleplaying game *Nexus: The Infinite City* by Jose Garcia, © Daedalus Entertainment, Inc., and are used with permission. Reproduction of this work by any means without written permission from the publisher, except short excerpts for the purpose of reviews, is expressly prohibited.



ATLAS GAMES  
PO BOX 131233  
ROSEVILLE, MN 55113  
651-638-0077  
INFO@ATLAS-GAMES.COM

VISIT US ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB AT

[WWW.ATLAS-GAMES.COM](http://WWW.ATLAS-GAMES.COM)

DIGITAL EDITION VERSION 1.0

# Table of Contents

## 1. Introduction

---

Going Down? 4

## 2. The Four Monarchs

---

Blue Blood in the Inner Kingdom 8

## 3. Secret Battlefields

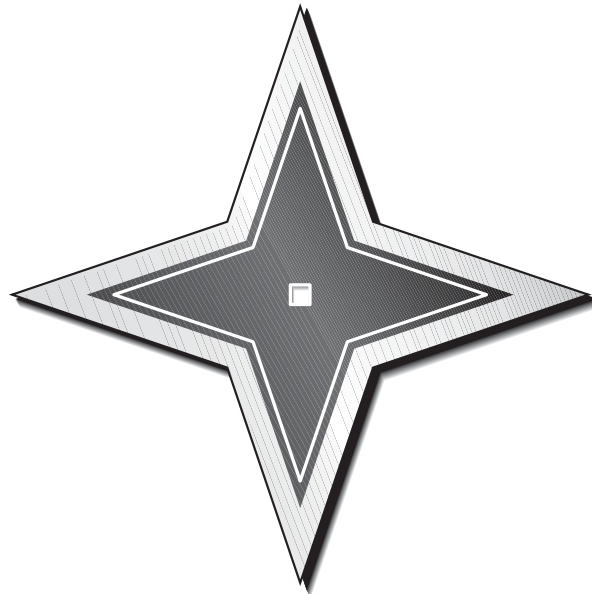
---

Where it All Goes Down 40

## 4. The Rest of the Netherworld

---

Rabble and Otherwise 89



# Introduction

## GOING DOWN?

**I** see by your blue jeans that you're from the 20th century. Or at least, this year's version of it. You don't need to tell me why you're here, either. You want information about the Netherworld. No one comes to see me on a social call. Frankly, I'm grateful. I've seen a lot of people come and go, I've seen a lot of critical shifts and alternate realities, weird pasts and weirder futures. Only constant, from what I can tell, is that most people are either stupid or selfish, or more often both.

Luckily, I'm not stupid. Unfortunately for you, I am selfish. What can you do for me, hm? I know you're not one of those bozos from the Hub: They bought everything I'm willing to share long ago.

No, I don't want your freakin' money. I've got millions of dollars from a dozen lost junctures. I keep it by the toilet, except the bills from that one where Sri Lanka took over the planet. That stuff's rougher than sandpaper.

Look, you want my map of the Netherworld? Okay, I want a new freezer, a generator and sixty gallons of gas, half a cow's worth of meat—and it better be Grade-A, buddy—and one of those newfangled crystal holo systems from 2056. You can't get the crystal holo? Shit. Okay, okay . . . what about the guy who wrote that book about the telekinetic prom queen? He still writing in your timeline? I think his name's Dave Barry. Get me all of his books, and ten cartons of Marlboro reds, and a bottle of that cinnamon liquor with the gold leaf floating in it. No, two bottles. We'll call it even.

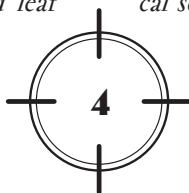
## GEOGRAPHY

There are four basic levels to the Netherworld. Now, when I say "level" I don't mean like the floors in a building, where the first floor is under the second. You can walk through a perfectly level corridor from the "second level" to the "fourth level." You can go down a staircase from the "first level" to the "third level," then take another staircase down and wind up on the "first" again. It ain't normal space. That said, the majority of corridors from the first level go up, and the majority of the corridors from the fourth go down. There are always exceptions, but if you get the vague idea of the relationship, it's right more often than not.

Interestingly, the different levels also seem to relate to the Outerworld, not just to each other. The first level seems to house more doors into the ancient past, and the third level seems more connected to 2056. Again, you can find gates to anywhere on any level, but most of the 69 gates are on the lowest level. They don't go in order though: You have to go up to get from 2056 to 1850. Go figure.

The first level seems to give some credence to the notion that Hell is downward. Not only are there far more up corridors out of the first level, it's also the home to Guiyu Zui—heard of it? No? I guess that means you're one of the nicer fools. Guiyu Zui is the mouth of Hell, and I don't mean that in any kind of metaphorical sense.

The first level is also where you can find the Sunless Sea, if you have some ambitions to go





sailing. It's not what I'd recommend for pleasure jaunts though. Okay, unlike the sunlit world you don't have to worry about tides or storms. Instead you have to navigate with no stars and no compasses. Not to mention the possibility of getting your mast stuck in the ceiling.

The second level is the busiest and most populous by far. It may also be larger than the other three, but that's hard to say. It may just be that more of it has been carved out by its would-be God-King-Queen-Prophet-Tyrant-Popes. I'm referring, of course, to the Four Monarchs. Oh, you've heard of them? Good for you.

Most of the gates into 1996 are on this level, so when the Big Four got their universal eviction notice, Netherworld Level Two is where they fled to lick their wounds. Mostly in the middle of all four "kingdoms" is The Junkyard, which is a combination battlefield and dustbin of history. I've heard the theory that all the crap in there is from the Four Monarchs, but no way. There's just too much shit in there, and too much of it's too weird. I think the ground just spits things out when your back is turned. Either that or all the stuff that gets

lost in the daylight world eventually ends up there, if no one's looking. That's my theory: At least it explains why there's more useless crap in the Netherworld than there are people to produce it.

The third level is pretty goddamn creepy. Not only do you have the Biomass Reprocessing Center, which can't look at anyone or anything without seeing grist for the mill, you've also got the MonkeyHouse. That's where those psycho shitwag Jammers hang out, and it combines the worst elements of a zoo's primate house and a greasy truck stop bathroom. Those cyber chimps may be artificially smart, but that just means they fling their poop with greater accuracy. Most of the gates to 2056 depart from this level, and they change hands constantly. The monkeys want doors into new areas of 2056 so they can go through and wreak havoc. The CDCA wants to find the gates the Jammers already have, so they can track down their secret bases in the sunlit world.

On top of all that, you've got the Forest of Fallen Banners. Don't go in there. If you want what's in there,



*there's no need to go tramping around: You can find it at the bottom of a gun barrel or the tip of any sword.*

*The top level is comparatively calm. Or maybe it's more accurate to say they keep their violence localized, since that's where the Blood Fields are. That whole level is kind of vague: I think that's also where the Hub is, but I don't know for sure. Between the Blood Fields getting reshaped every time Huan Ken thinks of a new playground for his wargames, and the Hub turning everything for miles around into a foggy haze, it's easy to get lost there. The most solid spot is the Temple of Boundless Meditation, which never seems to change, unfortunately. The Hub crew and the Guiding Hand fight, but not in the pitched, bloody, take-no-prisoners fashion of the Jammer/Buro grudge matches. For them it's constant reconnaissance, espionage, kidnapping, interrogation, ambush and assassination. Everyone up there is paranoid as hell, since it's safer to assume that any traveler who bumbles through is actually a spy in disguise.*

## PHYSICS

*Of course, I'm probably doing you a disservice by nattering on about the factions. Odds are, you're not going to survive long enough to have to worry about the big picture, unless you get a firm grip on what the Netherworld is like.*

*First off, forget everything you learned in physics class. Oh, done already?*

*Light doesn't have to move in a straight line here, though it almost always does. Still, a good Shaper can bend light right around something he wants hidden. Even something as big as the Hub. Gravity doesn't always work right either. There's one or two weightless spots, and a few other places where it makes sudden reverses. You can be walking along the floor for a mile, then suddenly drop up to the ceiling. A lot of people like to carry white canes to tip 'em wise to such switches, until they get to the point where they notice the change in where the dust lies. There are also chambers where every surface is gravitized. If you find one, you might want to stake a claim pretty quick. They're popular as living spaces, since you can put furniture on every wall, plus the ceiling and the floor.*

### Face Crabs

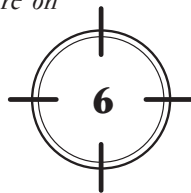
Face Crabs are one of the few land-based species that seem to be native to the Netherworld. No one's ever seen them eating, and they seem to appear more often around the Netherworld's feng shui sites. Many people think they feed on ambient chi, but Curtis Boatman's personal dissections didn't seem to indicate anything of the sort.

In any event, a face crab looks like a crustacean from underneath. Its back, however, is not a hard shell, but a soft human face. The faces are all different, and they're not motionless either. They look around, change expression and have even been known to whisper (though no one's ever exactly sure what they're saying).

Face crabs don't seem to reproduce, but every once in a while a new face shows up. This usually happens after a newcomer to the Inner Kingdom makes the mistake of eating one. This is inevitably fatal, and fast. The gourmand dies within an hour. Before a day has passed, legs sprout from beneath his jaw and behind his ears. This new face crab then crawls off to do whatever it is face crabs do. Although the crab bears its killer's face, there's no sign that it retains memories, abilities or anything else related to the person who ate it.

*Space isn't contiguous, but you've already figured that out I hope. You can walk for ten days to get from point A to B, then find out they're only five feet apart in a different corridor. That's why there's no scale on the map: It just doesn't add up right, so you might as well navigate by twists, turns and landmarks. However, I'll tell you this: The tunnels that are marked as overpasses on the map, where one tunnel goes under another? If you Shape down from the top, you'll hit the bottom one eventually. At least, I always have. I've got a buddy who swears that every wall of every corridor and chamber of the Inner Kingdom is only one centimeter thick, but infinitely stretchable and regenerative. If you can get to the "back side" of a tunnel (she said) you might find an entirely different Netherworld, the inverse of this one. But I haven't seen her around for a while. She's probably dead, so you might want to ignore her theory.*

*Most natives have gotten used to the quirks, and you should too, as fast as you can. In the Inner Kingdom, banditry is a lifestyle choice as much as a profession, and any good bandit knows how to use the terrain to his advantage.*





## SOCIOLOGY AND POLITICS

*Society in the Netherworld is cosmopolitan and primitive, all at once. On one hand, you've got people from every age of human history. Narrow thinkers don't thrive here, and you won't either if you're unwilling to shake hands and do business just because the other guy is black, or Hindu, or a seven-foot cyborg who needs fresh blood to survive. Spend enough time here and our differences—like skin color, size, religion and diet—seem insignificant next to our samenesses—like stupidity and greed.*

*But a bunch of people who are blasé about weirdness doesn't add up to an elaborate or even coherent society. Actually, it's the opposite: You get some goose-stepping pinheads who take orders well and you can forge them into any kind of social system, as long as you're drumming the beat they march to. But here, everyone dances to a different drummer, which means society lurks at the lowest common denominator. If you ain't a student of history, I'll spell it out for you: It means a barter economy, and it means might makes right.*

*If you've spent more than eight hours away from the Outerlands, you've probably wondered what people do for food down here. There are a couple answers.*

*There are a few farmers, but not too goddamn many. A few sorcerers or other Shapers have made crop plants that can grow in Netherfloors, but usually they require fresh water and something resembling sunlight. That's not a problem if you can Shape things yourself—but if you can do that, you can probably whip up a good meal when you get hungry without bothering to till the soil and go through all the bullshit that the farmer's life involves. Sure, there are some crops that don't need water or sunlight, but they often have more exotic requirements. On level four there's a gang that grows blood corn. Guess what that grows out of? Uh huh, you got it. So if you see any ruddy, well-fed guys with pitchforks wandering around, you better get into "fight or*

*flight" mode, or you won't be history; you'll be agriculture.*

*Another option is to find a gate out and do some cross-time trading—or fishing, or hunting, or stealing, depending on your skills and inclination. For instance, if you have a gate that comes out by the sea in 69 AD, you can duck out, catch some fish, gather some seaweed, then go back into the Netherworld to trade it for whatever you need. A few really smart traders have made a good living shuttling food from the Outerworld into the Netherworld, while taking all kinds of weird crap back on the return trip. Of course, the Netherworld has a lot more weird-crap experts than it has people with the business sense to set up a grain trade, so these merchants can get rich pretty quick. That's usually their undoing. If they can't keep their gate secret from the big groups, it won't be their gate for long.*

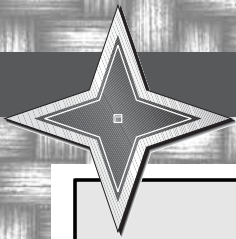
*The factions, of course, are the ones who really have a lock on the food supply—which means they have a lock on the whole Netherworld economy.*

*It's a pretty simple equation. Feng shui sites give you Shaping power. Shaping power means you can make food (or anything else) out of nothing. Sure, you can't carry it into the Outerlands, but when you're hungry who cares? A really good Shaper can make more than just food—someone like Li Ting can make seeds that grow into crops in the Netherworld. Once you've got that power, you can get followers, call yourself a Queen or Jefe or Big Kahuna and go into the business of seizing gates from those poor shitheel merchants.*

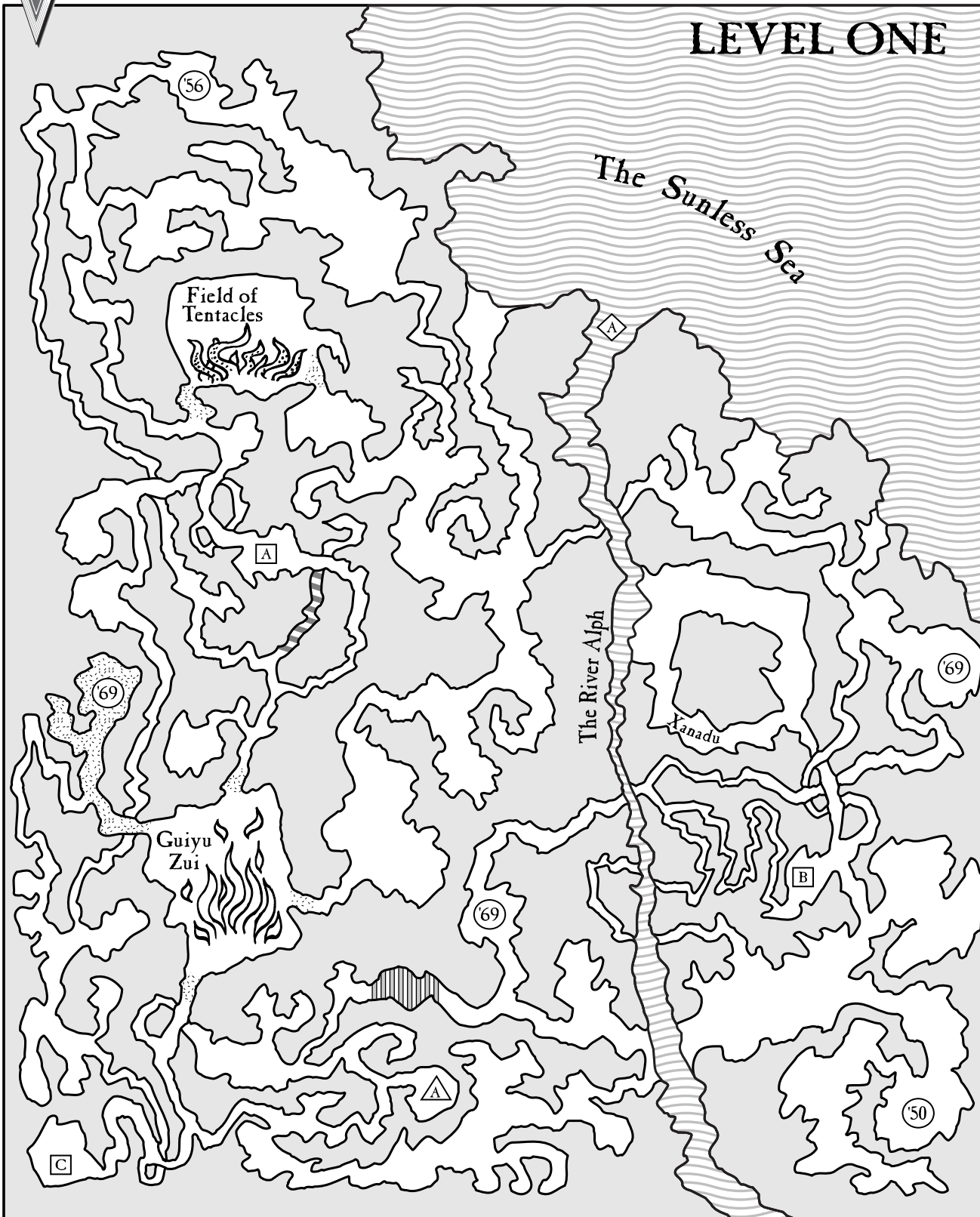
*The Netherworld really is a capitalist wet dream, man. Controlling feng shui puts you on top of the heap, and it insures that you control the means of production. Shit, someone with a dozen sites tied up is a means of production.*

*Well, I'd love to stay and chat, but word is the twins got a line on some rare Star Trek tapes from a timeline where the original series ran longer than M\*A\*S\*H, so I'm off to IKTV. What? Still got questions? Too bad: I don't give a shit. Get me the goods, I'll give you the map and we'll be even. Until then, have a nice day, and don't eat the face crabs.*

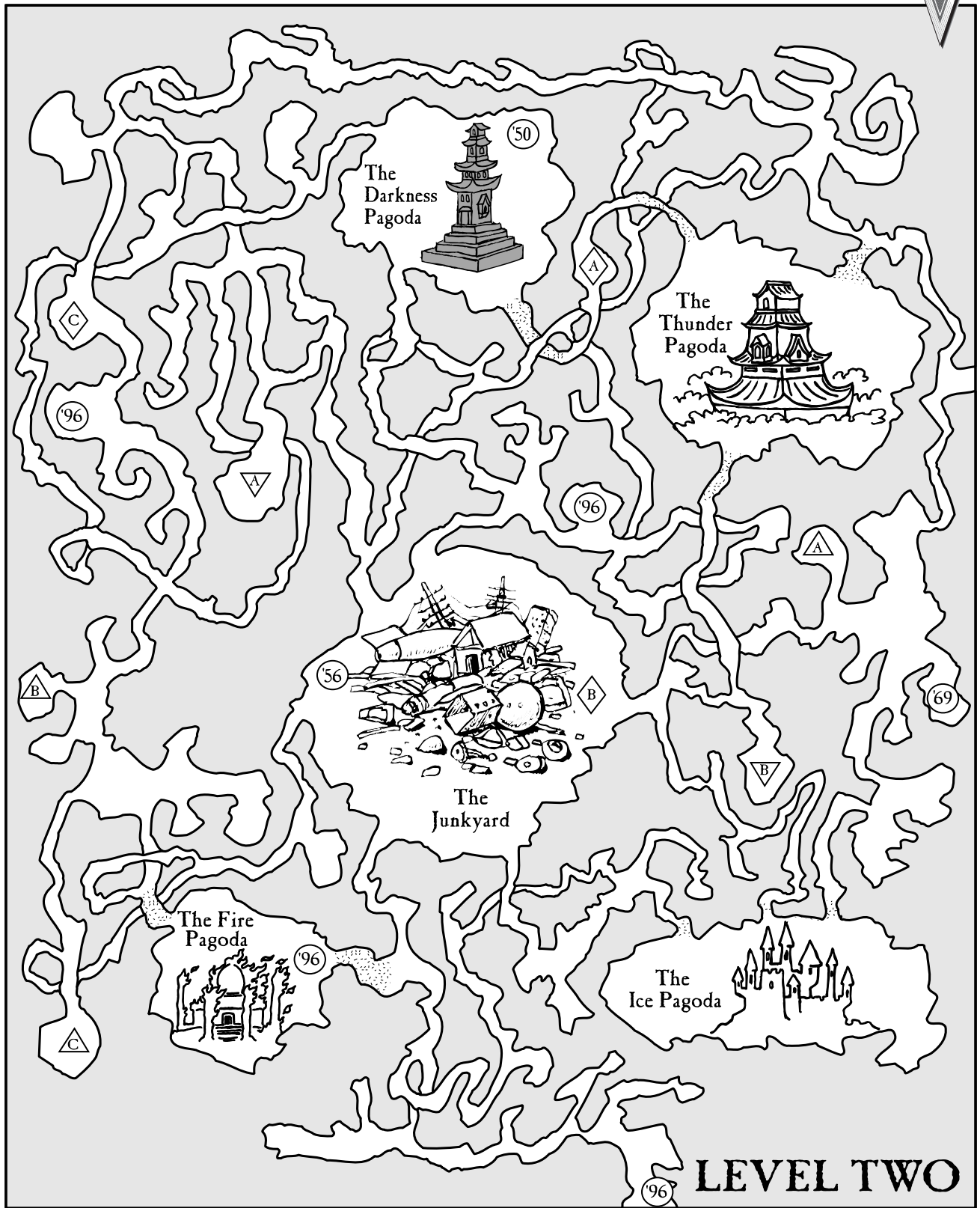
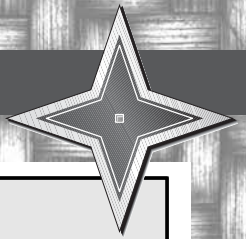




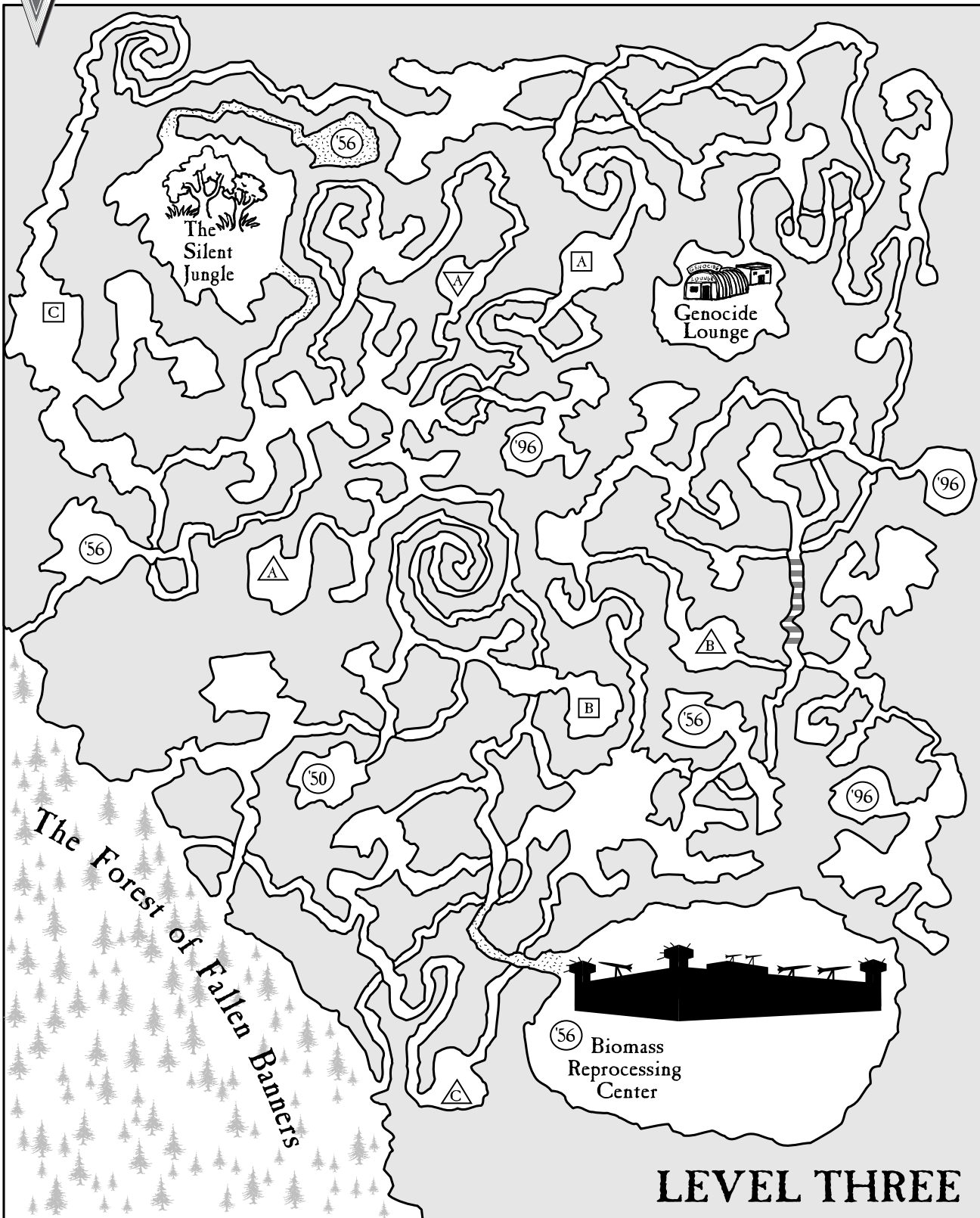
**LEVEL ONE**



<b>MAP KEY</b>	△ To Level 4	□ To Level 2	Heavily Patrolled	Tunnel sometimes closes	Unusual Gravity
○ To Surface	◇ To Level 3	▽ To Level 1	Water		

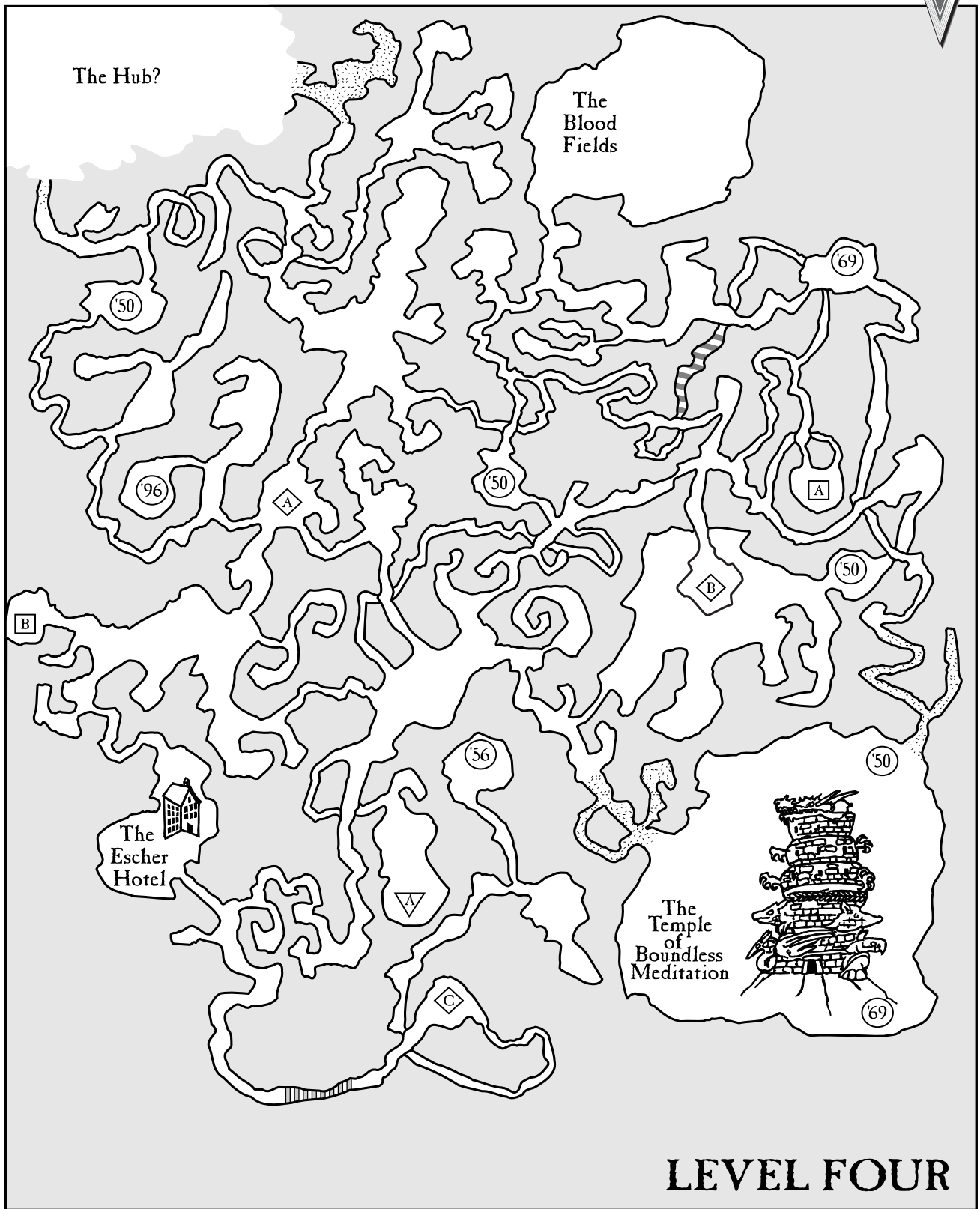
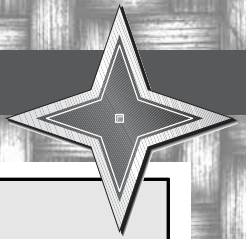


MAP KEY		△ To Level 4	□ To Level 2	Heavily Patrolled	Tunnel sometimes closes	Unusual Gravity
○ To Surface	◇ To Level 3	▽ To Level 1			Water	



**LEVEL THREE**

<b>MAP KEY</b>	△ To Level 4	□ To Level 2	Heavily Patrolled	Tunnel sometimes closes	Unusual Gravity
○ To Surface	◇ To Level 3	▽ To Level 1	Water		



# LEVEL FOUR

<b>MAP KEY</b>	△ To Level 4	□ To Level 2	Heavily Patrolled	Tunnel sometimes closes	Unusual Gravity
○ To Surface	◇ To Level 3	▽ To Level 1		Water	

# The Four Monarchs

BLUE BLOOD IN THE INNER KINGDOM

## THE ICE PAGODA

The Ice Pagoda is the abode of Pui Ti, the youngest and most righteous of the Four Monarchs. Alone among the Monarchs, Pui Ti felt her destiny thrust upon her, her greatness an unfortunate intrusion into an otherwise happy life. Not that she didn't ride to battle with her siblings, participate in the murder of her father, and afterward spin Machiavellian schemes against her sister and brothers. No, she was a party to all of it. What choice did she have? Her own father had pointed her at the horizon and told her to conquer. She enslaved a world because it was her destiny, not from love of slavery.

This is not to say that the Queen of the Ice Pagoda feels guilt. Her heart is hard as glass and colder than the bottom of the ocean—the legacy of her sorcery. When the time to divide up the spoils came, she chose the vast frozen expanses of the frigid north. Surrounded by the tundra and the ice, she brooded on her destiny and made idle designs against the others. And, perhaps, she decided that this was not her destiny at all. Certainly, it was near the borders of her snowy realm that the Ascended launched their conspiracy.

With the destruction of their timeline, the Four Monarchs retreated into the Inner

Kingdom, where Pui Ti reestablished herself with her retinue. She pitted her brothers and sisters against one another immediately. As she had intended, they squandered the resources that, with a concerted effort, might have returned them to dominance. They were still strong, but there would be no golden comeback.

Pui Ti was satisfied. She and her siblings were strong enough to be nigh unassailable, but not strong enough to re-conquer reality. Being an exiled potentate she could deal with; being a ruler of the world she could not. She played her new role to the hilt, maneuvering smoothly, backing various Secret War factions at key moments to her own benefit. It was only after her confrontation with the now-deceased Jack Donovan that her façade broke.

Perhaps her conversation (and, it is rumored, romantic encounter) with Donovan softened her frozen heart towards the alcoholic hero and his rag-tag companions. Perhaps she gave the aid she did, including assistance in the commando strike that resulted in the destruction of the Molten Heart, because she was fond of the rough and tumble man. Or perhaps—just perhaps—his example and his message made her realize the wickedness of the entire Secret War. Regardless, Pui Ti is a quiet patron of the Innerwalking freedom fighters known as the Dragons. Whether her favor is offspring of a momentary passion or an enduring change of heart has yet to be seen.



## THE STRAIT OF ICE

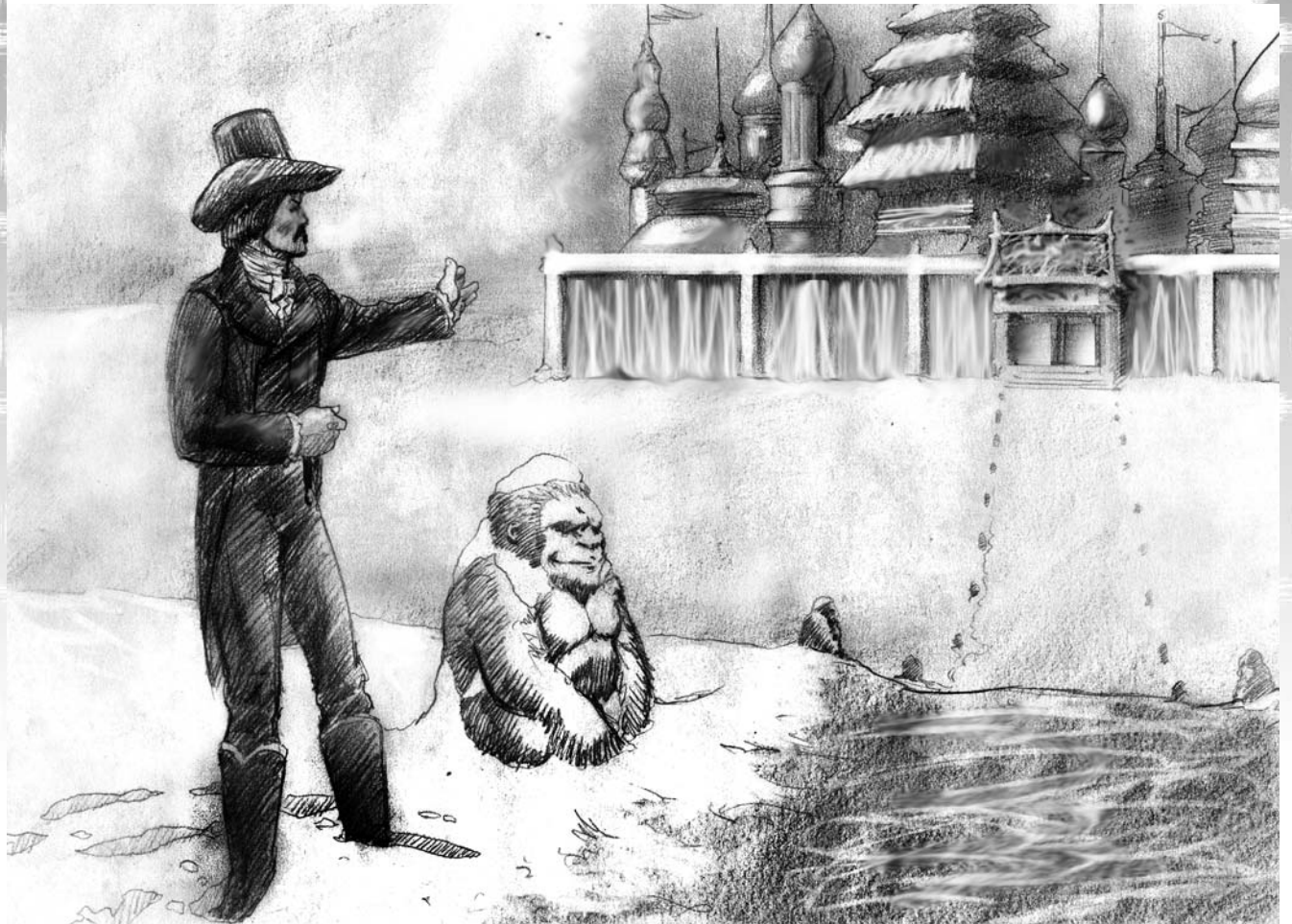
Pui Ti's residence is situated on and within an artificial sheet of unmelting ice around which a chill wind forever blows. Below the ice sheet is a shallow, frigid ocean populated by some of Pui Ti's more sinister pet creatures. There is a general luminescence to the setting, but there are no artificial stars or light sources in the black expanse of the ceiling.

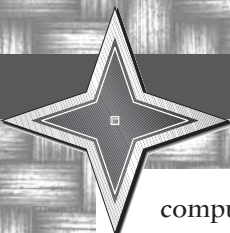
## INSIDE THE ICE PAGODA

The interior of the Ice Pagoda has two distinctly different characters. Above ground is a vast

winter wonderland lifted from Russian fairy tales and Chinese novels. Snow-white tigers stalk the frosted hallways and small stands of pine conspire quietly in the corners of the courtyards. Light winter garb is the standard dress, the temperature just chilly enough to make the Pagoda's denizens and visitors glad for their coats. Here, among her wintry servants, Pui Ti holds her public court.

Below ground, however, lie the true fruits of Pui Ti's political labor. While her brothers and sisters have been playing the game of high politics, she has been *upgrading*. Beneath her picaresque Ice Pagoda lies a dark and frigid hive of weapon workshops, modern communications centers, bomb shelters and defense grids. Her troops no longer rely on ice-armor and swords, but on night-vision, kevlar battledress and working replicas of modern automatic weapons cast from the same unsplintering ice as the rest of the Pagoda. Down here, the cold is intense. The temperature is kept low to increase the efficiency of the great superconducting





computers that drive her data networks and planning systems.

Of all the Pagodas, this one has the strongest sense of being a business-as-usual establishment. When the critical shift came, almost every Innerwalker in the Ice Queen's kingdom was close to her. Because there had been few inhabitants of her kingdom other than her court, anyway, it wasn't as if all that much had changed. The critical shift was disruptive, yes, but Pui Ti's relocation to the Netherworld has been much more like doing business from a hotel room than like trying to cobble together something organized from a jumble of parts.

## The Entrance

Entrance to the Ice Pagoda is through draw-bridge gates in the outer wall; callers are met by a handful of noble-looking, halberd-carrying soldiers in ice armor. The Ice Pagoda's upper portion is a Japanese Neuschwanstein, not an impregnable fortress. The walls are only about twenty feet high, they're not topped with anything more formidable than snow and the pines are plentifully equipped with hoot owls.

The trees *are* equipped with state-of-the-art low-light video cameras, while the ground is salted with pressure sensors. Noises in the castle are analyzed and potential threats localized. Deep below ground, the sensors are monitored by a host of technicians, and crash teams stand by on 24/7 alert to deploy lethal force against intruders in the compound.

The main entrance into the lower levels of the fortress is through a number of massive blast doors, but the landscape is dotted with sally ports and sniping points. In times of crisis, the upper portion of the castle is generally deserted. Even the animals retreat below ground, herded into their pens by electronic collars. This is the true fortress, and when the Ice Pagoda is sealed for battle, anyone who wants to get in will need a large drill and a very, very long time.

## The Throne Room

Pui Ti's throne room is a beautiful courtyard of powdery blue ice pillars and open space. Her courtiers and advisors array themselves on benches, and matters are brought before her finely sculpted throne of ice. The two largest of her snow-white hunting tigers curl about her, their claws and fangs waiting on her displeasure. Pui Ti prides herself on her Ice Queen mystique, and plays up the fairy tale character of the proceedings. Sitting in casual repose on her throne of ice, she is clearly in her natural element.

## The Control Center

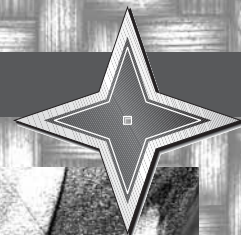
Pui Ti's other throne room, the control center, is the nexus of all the information systems in the palace. From here, Pui Ti handles crises, does her long term planning and manages remote assets. Pui Ti typically spends several days a week at work in the control room, and holds court in the palace above to handle developing affairs and matters of only momentary concern.

The control center is an impressive array of conference and briefing rooms around a world-watch center. Here, technicians monitor the state of the Pagoda and developing events in the appropriate junctures, and it is from her platform at the center of this room that the Queen of the Ice Pagoda does her crisis decision-making.

## The Armories

Between the numerous armories scattered around the Pagoda, there are several sets of combat gear for every one of the Ice Queen's followers, including melee weapons, machineguns and even heavy weapons like grenade launchers and miniguns. This ordnance is typically stored in squad sets throughout the underground.

Because metal and Gonvex perform poorly in low temperatures, Pui Ti's troops carry firearms and other weapons made from cast ice which is the equal of anything material science in



2056 can turn out. Although most of the designs are replicas of contemporary juncture guns, her gunsmiths do occasionally turn out original work. Pui Ti also keeps a stock of weapons made out of unshaped materials on hand for troops leaving the Netherworld.

### The Barracks

There are underground barracks for every inhabitant of the Pagoda. These are mostly squad bay affairs, with little privacy and less comfort. However, many individuals also have quarters above, and these can be quite comfortable. Pui Ti enjoys her fairy tale splendor, so the average courtier sleeps beneath wolf skin blankets on a goose down mattress with silk sheets. Permanent residents of the downstairs have better accommodations, but these come rather short of "barbaric splendor."

### The Sewers


The sewers of the Ice Pagoda are narrow tunnels not at all suited for sneaking through. They empty into the frigid, lightless sea below, where strange creatures cruise endlessly to and fro in the dark, picking through the waste of the Pagoda and searching hungrily for something more appetizing than raw sewage and spoiled giblets. On the other hand, because they are so unappealing as an entryway, they're largely unwatched.

### The Stables

The Ice Queen is a great fancier of pets. She favors arctic animals, keeping a wide variety of hares, voles, mice and so forth to stock the grounds. These mostly provide atmosphere, but they are also a ready food supply for the owls and other predatory birds who flutter about the palace above.

The Ice Queen has a special fondness for larger predators and keeps a stable of wolves, tigers and polar bears. These are bred for use as beasts of war: The polar bears are hulking





white-furred tanks, the tigers skillful bodyguards and the wolves excellent trackers. All have very sharp teeth, and all are used to a diet including a good deal of human meat.

## The Dungeons

Pui Ti generally doesn't take prisoners. You're either a hostage, a "guest" under house arrest in the palace above or polar bear chow. Arctic predators need a lot of meat, and in the Queen of the Ice Pagoda's typically cold fashion, she has concluded this is the best use for enemies who are of no personal interest to her. Those under restraint above can pretend to roam freely, while their every movement is tracked and analyzed below. The guards are always politely out of sight unless there's trouble; great pain are taken to show civility towards "guests."

## LIFE IN THE ICE PAGODA

Life aboveground is, of course, splendid. Everything operates on a fairy tale schedule of late nights and late risings. Wonderful meals are served thrice daily, with delectable viands to sample between them.

Downside things are more institutional, though it's an institution of a better sort. The cooks actually care about the food, and as a rule, the denizens try their best to make their existence a little bit better. But it's still life in a high-tech fortress, and many Downsiders are a bit surly about the plush topside life. Rather than being negative, though, most Downsiders affect a sort of Spartan pride, considering the courtly existence above essentially a big game of make-believe (which it is) and the activity below the only useful contribution to the Ice Pagoda's continued success (which it is not).

Everyone at the Pagoda has a technical specialty. Even the troops in archaic armor who answer the gate have other jobs, and are simply picked to work topside several days a week because they look chillingly beautiful or robustly handsome.

## DENIZENS

### Unnamed Characters

#### Ice Commandos

The Ice Commandos are Pui Ti's front-line troops. Unlike most of the Monarchs, the Queen of the Ice Pagoda doesn't use hordes of expendable mooks—these guys are all serious about their jobs. Ice Commandos dress in modern combat gear, either field dress or urban battledress, depending on the deployment location. If the Ice Queen sends troops to save the player characters' butts, these are the guys leading the way.

#### Ice Falcons

Bred for hunting, these icy white birds plummet onto their targets like deadly icicles. Pui Ti doesn't limit her beasts of prey to hares and snowy doves, either—she and her huntsmen often use the Ice Falcons to hunt for human prey. Equipped with incredibly keen senses, they are trained to locate their prey and circle, alerting the huntsmen to the target's location. The addition of radio transmitting leg bands has made this task even easier. When the hunters acquire the prey, the Falcons fall like silent thunderbolts, providing a critical distraction at the moment of the assault.

#### Ice Commandos

**Sample Dialogue:** "Alpha, Go!"

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 0 (For 1), Mnd 5, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Guns 8, Intrusion 8, Info/Ice Pagoda 8, Info/Secret War 4

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), H&K MP5 (10/5/30)

#### Ice Falcons

**Sample Dialogue:** "Eeeee!"

**Attributes:** Bod 4 (Mov 18), Chi 0 (Fu 6), Mnd 1, Ref 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 12

**Unique Limitation:**

*Fragility:* An attacker needs only equal or surpass the Ice Falcon's defensive AV to destroy it.

**Fu Schticks:** Lightning Fist

**Weapons:** claw (6)



### Winter Wolves

The hunting hounds of Pui Ti, the Winter Wolves also serve as pets, guard beasts and work animals. Like all her animal servants they are bred for ferocity and tenacity, although a great deal of emphasis is also placed on achieving a certain savage beauty. Winter Wolves are excellent pack hunters, with one typically darting in to set the enemy on guard while the others strike at the exposed rear. Few who attempt to run before the Ice Queen's packs live to tell the tale.

### Ice Tigers

Bred as bodyguards, Ice Tigers protect the Queen of the Ice Pagoda and her favorites just as chows once protected the imperial Chinese family. These beasts are not just ferocious, they are also loyal. While adaptable enough to accept new masters, most are brought up from cubs in the presence of their charges. Butterfly and Breeze, the Ice Tigers who defend the Ice Queen herself, are the most ferocious of the breed, and are many years old, sustained in their youthful vigor by the

Queen's icy magics, which hold them frozen forever in their prime.

## Named Characters

### Polar Bear

These beasts—who have names like Fluffy and Marmoset—are each a thousand pounds of ass-whopping machine, and they're bad with strangers. Wild polar bears wouldn't make anyone's list of the world's most pleasant creatures, and Pui Ti hasn't been breeding them for poise these last few centuries. On the bad side, they're stupid and aggressive—not useful as much more than oversized attack and guard dogs. On the other hand, maybe that's not a bad thing.

### Akani Hideo, Chief of Staff

The son of a successful young brewer, Akani Hideo entered Pui Ti's somewhat meager civil service as a young man. A talented bureaucrat, Hideo was promoted through a number of administrative positions in his home of Japan before entering the court of the Ice Queen. There, he distinguished himself as a no-nonsense problem-solver able to bal-

### Winter Wolves

**Sample Dialogue:** "Arooooo!"

**Attributes:** Bod 6 (Mov 10), Chi 0 (Fu 2), Mnd 2, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Intrusion 10

**Fu Schticks:** The Fox's Retreat

**Weapons:** bite (7)

### Ice Tigers

**Sample Dialogue:** "Rrrraawr!"

**Attributes:** Bod 10, Chi 0 (Fu 4), Mnd 2, Ref 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 12, Info/Bodyguard 4

**Unique Schticks:**

*Bodyguard (Chi: 1 / Shots: 3):* At the beginning of each sequence, the Ice Tiger chooses a ward. For that sequence, any time the ward is the victim of an attack, the Ice Tiger may announce a defensive action, spend Chi and make a Martial Arts roll against the attack AV. On a positive Outcome, the attack strikes the Tiger rather than the ward. Figure the damage of the diverted attack by using the attacker's original AV and the Ice Tiger's unmodified defensive AV.

**Fu Schticks:** Claw of The Tiger, Tiger Stance, Unyielding Tiger Stance

**Weapons:** claw (13)

### Polar Bear

**Sample Dialogue:** "RRRRAARRRR!"

**Attributes:** Bod 10, Chi 0 (Fu 6), Mnd 1, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 12

**Unique Schticks:**

*Big Bruiser:* The Polar Bear is treated as a Big Bruiser in terms of Wound Points and Death Checks.

**Transformed Animal Schticks:** Bear: Bellow, Slap, Rage

**Weapons:** paw (14) hug (16)

### Akani Hideo

**Sample Dialogue:** "Meetings at ten and one, catered lunch between, and make sure all the service waiters are armed and armored. I have a bad feeling about this."

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0 (Fu 6), Mnd 7, Ref 5

**Skills:** Martial Arts 11, Guns 6, Deceit 8, Intrusion 10, Leadership 10, Info/Ice Pagoda 14, Info/Secret War 12

**Fu Schticks:** Eyes of the Snake, Slither of the Snake, Strike of the Snake

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7)



**Risto Paalanen**

**Sample Dialogue:** "Six men on every door, Gold Team three rooms back as a quick response force. When they come back, they're going to be serious."

**Attributes:** Bod 7, Chi 0 (For 4), Mnd 6, Ref 6

**Skills:** Guns 16, Deceit 8, Driving 8, Intrusion 14, Leadership 16, Info/Ice Pagoda 10, Info/Secret War 14

**Gun Schticks:** Carnival of Carnage x4, Eagle Eye

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), UMP-45SD (10)

**Ivana Sergilov**

**Sample Dialogue:** "Really? Fascinating."

**Attributes:** Bod 6 (Tgh 7), Chi 0 (Fu 2, For 6), Mnd 6, Ref 4

**Skills:** Martial Arts 10, Guns 10, Deceit 15, Intrusion 12, Leadership 8, Police 15, Info/Ice Pagoda 20, Info/Secret War 22

**Fu Schticks:** Fox's Retreat

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8)

ance the needs of stable, regular administration against the fact that Pui Ti's empire was a military establishment constantly at war on at least two fronts.

By the time he turned forty, Hideo was the Ice Queen's Assistant Chief of Staff. When the critical shift came, her court had to fight its way out of a hunting lodge that had suddenly become a Soviet nuclear fabrication facility. Hideo who helped organize the courtiers into improvised military units and smoothly took over direction of the Pagoda's reduced staff after the previous Chief of Staff died in a helicopter gunship attack.

Hideo is an accomplished but not incredible martial artist. His skills lie in the administrative arena—he has managed to keep the Ice Pagoda functioning smoothly despite relocation and slashed resources. His comparatively weak kung fu is rarely a problem—Hideo and his husband are each protected by four of the Ice Queen's fiercest white tigers, the offspring of Butterfly and Breeze.

**Colonel Risto Paalanen**

Like all of Pui Ti's minions, Colonel Paalanen was promoted for his extreme competence. Risto grew up as a poor Lapp skin-hunter, perforce becoming an incredible marksman with the bow—a misplaced shot would ruin the

value of a pelt. As a young man, he decided that the ability to shoot a man through the eye at a hundred yards couldn't pay any worse than shooting sabres at the same distance, and enlisted in the Queen of the Ice Pagoda's armies.

The pay wasn't bad, and the opportunities for advancement were excellent, given that Pui Ti was constantly at war on the border marches of her empire. Paalanen had excellent wilderness skills, as well as a dead eye, and found a place in her rangers. Displaying a natural talent for leadership, he quickly advanced through the ranks and, after training, became an officer. His promotion to high rank was rapid but not vertiginous, and by the time he was forty-two, he was commanding the Queen's elite palace guard, most of whom were fellow Finns.

When the critical shift came, Colonel Paalanen directed the retreat to the Netherworld and got the court, and most of his men, away safely through the nearest gate. The troops who remain are either survivors from that exodus or recruits from wilderness areas of the 69 and 1850 junctures.

Paalanen never really modernized. The sort of combat he specialized in doesn't change very much with the addition of firearms, and he isn't a strategist. He knows how to lead men and he knows how to shoot a gun and operate most modern technology—the rest is someone else's concern. He has an aide to handle complex data systems for him and otherwise gets by on dealing with the world around him as a series of black boxes; not all that hard when his previous reality was dominated by godlike sorcerers. It's all magic, and many of the devices have similar functions (if different controls), so what's the difference?

**Ivana Sergilov, Information Systems Director**

Ivana Sergilov was originally a boyar's daughter in Kiev, one of the Russian city-states ruled by the Queen of the Ice Pagoda. Under Pui Ti's somewhat Catherine rule, the Russian city-states fared far better than in our timeline and were significantly better developed, if still smaller and farther apart than contemporary cities in western Europe. Ivana was a put-upon housewife until she found the evidence that allowed her to turn her abusive and adulterous husband in for treason.



After the death of the unfortunate Mr. Sergilov, Ivana continued working for the secret police, one of the Queen of the Ice Pagoda's state organs that accepted both men and women into its ranks. Rising in the ranks by careful denunciations of her superiors, Mrs. Sergilov came to head the secret police after a decade and a half of desperate scrabbling. Once there, she found Pui Ti absolutely unsailable. There was no way to seize the throne, and the Queen of the Ice Pagoda was unwilling to listen to her denunciations of her fellow ministers.

Ivana is a woman of unlimited ambition who has fallen into the Ice Queen's web. Pui Ti has her in a position where failure is unacceptable, her ambition unreachable, and her every move is watched by countless rivals. She is a spider in a cage of ice, and must spin her webs for Pui Ti. When she falters, she will be replaced, just as her predecessor was replaced before her. Ivana has held on for five years, longer than most, but she wants out. It

remains to be seen if the bars of her cage are narrow enough for her to work loose.

## THE FIRE PAGODA

The Fire Pagoda is the home of Li Ting, the most analytical—and heartless—of the Monarchs. After the Monarchs acceded to power, Li Ting took as his capital Jerusalem, and chose Asia Minor, India, the Middle East and eastern Africa as his domain. Like all the Monarchs, Li Ting portrays himself as a profoundly spiritual figure. However, unlike his siblings, he is not nearly as openly cynical about his religious role.

Li Ting is a great advocate of a philosophy called "the Fire Righteous," devised by none other





than the King of the Fire Pagoda himself. A meditational art focused on the redoubling of chi and the unmeaning of action, the Fire Righteous is a fairly typical course of warrior mysticism, stressing loyalty, bravery, perseverance and obedience.

After his victory, Li Ting melded the Fire Righteous with various Muslim beliefs, and supported the rise of a number of Kharijite heresies into prominent theological roles. These violent heresies were popular among the Bedouin, and from these hardy and fanatical margin-dwellers Li Ting drew the warrior fanatics that make up the core of his army.

However, the Fire Righteous is not just another imperial cult. Li Ting himself practices its tenets at the most advanced level, and in battle is an emotionless, unhesitating killing machine, striking in seven directions simultaneously against his enemies. Out of battle he is a ruthless, analytic thinker, capable of finding the weaknesses in nearly any opponent.

When the Ascended critical shifted the Monarchs' timeline, this kingdom of ascetic fanatics had the largest number of Innerwalkers of all the Monarchs. Li Ting's initial position was very strong, but rapid action by his siblings dragged him down to their level.

Like his sister Ming I, Li Ting deals with the forces of the Underworld, supplementing the ranks of his warriors with demons from the various hells. However, unlike his sister, he has no feelings of kinship with the Underworld-dwellers. His favorable treaty with the Underworld is one of the lasting benefits of his strong initial start, and he takes full advantage of it to use demons as shock troops. However, his soldiers don't mix with their infernal allies, and most of his followers see the demons as necessary evils—distasteful attack dogs, as it were.

## NEWEST JERUSALEM

Li Ting has made a virtue out of necessity, and created a version of his New Jerusalem that may be even more spectacular than the original. The walls and ceiling of the huge cavern it

occupies (which is nevertheless not as big as the one that houses the Darkness Pagoda) have been covered with smokeless flame via Shaping. This makes the setting even more brilliant, or at least more brilliantly lit, and to stand on the roof of the Fire Pagoda is to stand at the heart of a bonfire of global consequence.

The tower that is the Fire Pagoda itself sits atop a vast, sheer outcropping, and only a small number of twisting roads and narrow stairways lead upwards to the fortress' actual entrances.

## INSIDE THE FIRE PAGODA

The Pagoda itself is a combination of Arabic and Chinese fortress elegance. Decoration is ostentatious, functional and uses only abstract designs—the Fire Righteous has the Muslim distaste for depictive art. Themes are executed in different-colored flame, and tend towards repeated, simple decorative patterns. Hallways are long and high, and have a stereotypically Arabian feel, with sharp arches on most doors and a very un-Chinese delight with the structural process. However, decoration tends to be much more intricate than in the Arabic style, and the exterior lines of the structures place at least as much emphasis on blending in harmoniously with their surroundings as with the building's own internal grace.

The whole structure is built with defense in mind, and attackers will have a difficult time seizing an entrance or storming the building without finding themselves isolated and surrounded. The building material is actually quite cool, and is a mixed blessing. It is almost impossible to be comfortable in the Pagoda. You can never escape the brilliance of the flames, and if you listen carefully, you can hear the ever-so-faint crackle of the leashed inferno that is the Fire Pagoda. On the other hand, a bath poured in a tub of fire is a spectacular affair, and the soaring architecture of the public areas combines with subtly tinted flame for majestic effect.



### The Entrance Hall

There are only two ways into the Fire Pagoda. A band of madmen could climb the sheer cliffs and then somehow scale the equally sheer walls. An army marching single file might ascend the twisting, heavily guarded roadway and enter through the vast iron gates. While the inhabitants of the Fire Pagoda do not typically use firearms, many of their defenses are more effective than any gun—those attacking the front gate can expect to ascend the peak through a hail of boulders, boiling acid, pots of stinging insects and, of course, fire. Billowing flame, in enormous gouts. Flashes of eye-glazing heat and searing white jets of infernal fury. And worst of all, liquid fire. Not napalm or Greek fire, but actual liquid flame, running like mercury over rock and steel and sticking to flesh and leather like tar. Being doused in this destructive prodigy is generally considered a death of the worst sort. Liquid fire dispensers dot the approaches. The area outside the gates can be sprayed with this horrific substance, and is covered in the charred bones of those who attempted to storm the portal and failed.

### The Training Halls

The Fire Righteous cult focuses on personal discipline and encourages the growth of that discipline by rigorous physical exercise. The Pagoda is filled with training rooms and gymnasiums where the followers of Li Ting enhance their martial prowess, not only practicing rigorous gymnastics but also learning tai chi, chi gung and several styles of supernatural kung fu. These sparsely decorated halls are usually packed with training Fire Warriors, and nearly every wall holds some instrument of lethal mayhem.

### The Throne Room

The Throne Room—a towering, improbable chamber stretching up to a great glass onion dome which allows the fiery sky above to cast its radiance down upon the King of the

Fire Pagoda—is a majestic tribute to Li Ting’s fiery architecture. Often, during audiences, the walls and floor are dimmed to the color of dull red-black embers, and only the brilliant golden-red light plunging down from above is left to illuminate the enthroned Li Ting. Though many pillars stretch to the top of this vast room there are no balconies. In fact, the high, airy feeling of the edifice often leads occupants to believe they are outside.

### The Meditation Chambers

Deep within the bowels of the Pagoda, in the thickest points of its blazing foundation, are the meditation chambers. The flames that make up the walls of these cubicles change to match the meditations of the inhabitant. They burn low and hypnotically to bring about harmonious feelings, dark and flickering to awaken the love of battle and with a burning silver radiance to bring about the exaltation of the perfected spirit.

Meditation within these chambers is a profound experience, but it is not without risks. Many are rendered blind from staring into the flames, and many who indulge too long in their magical feedback training are consumed by their inner fire. These Fire Zealots, as they are called, literally burn from within, flames licking from their skin. Devoid of all instinct, these creatures are the perfection of the Fire Righteous philosophy. They are also extremely dangerous shock troops, often at the forefront of major battles in the Secret War. Obviously, however, they cannot be used under sensitive conditions—they are incredibly damaging to their environment. When the guys who are already on fire show up, you know Li Ting is playing hardball.

### The Armories

The armories of the Fire Pagoda are a vast complex of forges and workshops where the followers of Li Ting hone themselves and their weapons. The Fire Righteous preaches that craft is a

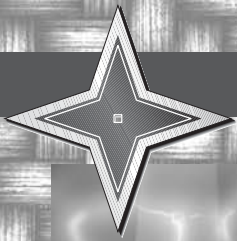


Illustration by Paul Carrick

method of developing the warrior's discipline; the craft of weaponmaking is the one most of these desert warriors naturally prefer. Most of Li Ting's followers are furthermore proficient swordsmiths, and also work in the giant factory complexes where liquid fire is made and the great war tools of the Fire Pagoda forged. These hives of activity are overseen by 'Ali, the Master of Arms, or often by Li Ting himself, when he is not busy with the task of rulership.

## The Dungeons

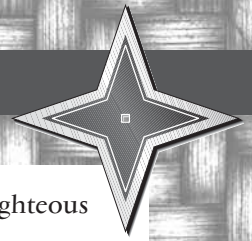
There are few places as pitiful as the dungeons of the Fire Pagoda, or as unhealthy for their occupants. Li Ting dislikes torture, and so the prisoners he holds are generally only those awaiting execution. If they die before their sentenced time, so much the better. The walls and floors of the dungeons are unpleasantly hot, with some searing patches. The only water trickles slowly from above and lays in pools, the same temperature as the floor and walls. "Death by heat prostration" and its distant rivals, "accidentally suffered burns," and "the tender mercies of the brutal guards" take care of most long-term residents after just a few months.

## The Sewers

There are no sewers below the Fire Pagoda. All the waste is cast into the giant demon-stoked bonfires that burn in the heart of the Pagoda. Falling down a waste-shaft is a terrible way to go, and being hurled into a pit of boiling flame is the standard method of execution. Of course, that assumes that Li Ting doesn't take a personal interest and simply incinerate the poor wretch by igniting him from within.

## LIFE IN THE FIRE PAGODA

Life in the Fire Pagoda is one of rigorous discipline and monastic training. While



there is some recreational marijuana use, there is no drinking and very little in the way of public celebration. The followers of the Fire Righteous celebrate together quietly in twos and threes. Daily life is a combination of training, spiritual education and work in the forges.

The Fire Pagoda has the most willing new recruits of any of the Monarchs—they're a real religion, and one that offers real comforts in the brutal struggle for Netherworld survival. Most new recruits are well-integrated into the organization, and the average member sees Li Ting as a great man and a spiritual prophet whose work is to reorder the world along sensible, just principles.

The demons who serve Li Ting are little seen inside the Fire Pagoda. Li Ting deals mostly with wicked spirits of the fiery sort, and most of them spend their time in the depths of the Pagoda, where huge hot bonfires burn eternally, feeding the liquid fire workshops above. In these mini-infernos, the demons feel at home even while serving away from the Underworld. And, ultimately, the followers of the Fire Righteous and the demons are both happy to be separated. Like most, the demons find the followers of the Fire Righteous to be uncommunicative extremists. The servants of the flame, of course, see the demons as spiritually corrupt but necessary allies.

The Fire Emperor's abode is what it appears to be, a giant household for a deadly chamber militant. Like most monasteries, it has a decidedly inward focus. It is primarily a defensive work, and its inhabitants are largely reflective beings. The Emperor wields mighty magics and is a devastating diplomat, but he isn't going to win the Secret War. On the other hand, he's adept enough to continue not losing for a long time to come. Allied with one of his siblings or another Secret War faction, his magic, planning skill and growing influence in the 1850 and contemporary junctures make him an invaluable ally, as was recently demonstrated with the nearly-successful Molten Heart conspiracy.

Note also that the Molten Heart affair demonstrated one of Li Ting's strengths—while Ming I and the Architects lost a great many resources, Li Ting's involvement was largely magical. Had it worked, he would have been on the winning side. When it failed, he lost almost nothing. This sort of ruthless

hedging is the basis for much Fire Righteous thinking.

## DENIZENS

### Unnamed Characters

#### Fire Warriors

The Fire Warriors are advanced initiates of the Fire Righteous who have learned to channel their inner fire into punches, kicks and the blows of their scimitars. Most disciples of the Fire Righteous used to come from desert-dwelling tribes, but the Fire King's exile to the Netherworld has brought a degree of variety to the Fire Righteous' recruits.

More than any of the other Monarchs, however, Li Ting is active in extending his influence in the "modern" junctures (1850 and the contemporary juncture). Primarily this takes the form of funding and training Islamic militants, and extending his influence through them. Many of his better servants are recruited into his direct service, so a fair number of Fire Warriors and lesser disciples are "Arabic" in origin.

#### Fire Assassins

The Fire Assassins are the striking knives of Li Ting. Well versed in the killing arts, these warriors

#### Fire Warriors

**Sample Dialogue:** "Get Him!"

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

**Skills:** Martial Arts 9, Info/Fire Pagoda 8, Info/Fire Righteous 8

**Fu Schticks:** Fire Strike (works with sword as well as barehanded)

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), sword (9)

#### Fire Assassins

**Sample Dialogue:** "Fire Righteous!"

**Attributes:** Bod 6 (Mov 7), Chi 0 (Fu 6), Mnd 4, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Guns 8, Deceit 8, Intrusion 10, Info/Fire Pagoda 8, Info/Fire Righteous 8

**Fu Schticks:** Fire Strike (works with sword as well as barehanded), Signature Weapon (sword)

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), sword (13)



## Fire Zealots

**Sample Dialogue:** "The Flame is the cleansing flame of Allah, the flame of purity, the flame which knows no rival."

**Attributes:** Bod 7, Chi 0 (Fu 12), Mnd 4, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 10, Info/Fire Pagoda 8, Info/Fire Righteous 10

**Fu Schticks:** Fire Strike (works with sword as well as barehanded), Signature Weapon (sword), Fire Stance (costing zero shots and zero chi — effectively "always on," emitting smoke, igniting flammable objects, and so on)

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), sword (14)

## Fire Constructs

**Sample Dialogue:** "There he is . . . after him . . ."

**Attributes:** Bod 10, Chi 0 (Fu 9), Mnd 2, Ref 5

**Skills:** Martial Arts 9, Creature Powers 9

**Fu Schticks:** Fire Strike, Fire Stance (costing zero shots and zero chi — effectively "always on," emitting smoke, igniting flammable objects, and so on), Fire Fist, Eyes of Fire

**Weapons:** punch (11), kick (12)

are fearsome masters of the blade. While they prefer to slay their enemies in the burning purity of hand-to-hand combat, they have trained to be as comfortable with sniper rifles as they are with their beloved blades. They are not unwilling to use bullets, bombs and missiles if that's what it takes to destroy their foes.

Most Fire Assassins are still of Muslim derivation, because most of them entered the service of the Fire Pagoda more than eight years ago. Of all Li Ting's servants, the Fire Assassins were the most numerous after the destruction of the Four Monarchs timeline—many had trained in the Inner Kingdom, and thus passed through the critical shift without being laterally reincarnated.

## Fire Zealots

Long periods of spiritual refinement in the Fire Pagoda's blazing meditation chambers often burn away all imperfect thought from followers of the Fire Righteous. Fire Zealots are without morals, conscience, hesitation or emotion.

With no sense of self-preservation and with their inner fire crackling across their skins, the Zealots of the Fire Righteous are a difficult tool to use. They are thoughtlessly direct, and make surprise nearly impossible. As such, they are

regarded with some skepticism by their fellows. While their devotion to the Fire of God is commendable, they fail to temper their religious experiences with practical concerns. The Zealots do not care, but only burn with the fury of leashed suns.

Fire Zealots make up Li Ting's personal bodyguard and his front-line shock troops. The Zealots fight only in hand-to-hand combat, but are extremely formidable. Few indeed can withstand an onslaught of these mighty holy warriors.

## Fire Constructs

The Fire Constructs are humanoid assemblages of polygons of the same sort of solid fire that makes up the structure of the Fire Pagoda. These golem-like war-machines have reservoirs of liquid fire which they can eject, blazing, from their fingers. Like Fire Zealots, they put forth light and smoke constantly, and, to say the least, are not very subtle.

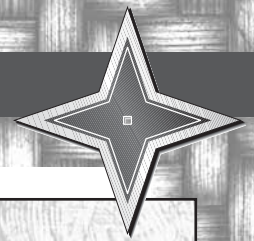
The process of forging Fire Constructs is an arduous one, requiring the attention of master weaponsmiths and craftsmen to form, cut and weld the solid flames. Only the most skillful of the King of the Fire Pagoda's craftsman can create these engines of destruction, even with the aid of Shaping.

Fire Constructs are even harder to use effectively than Fire Zealots. These war machines are mainly deployed in special circumstances like attempts to burn feng shui sites or to defend important interior portals within the Fire Pagoda. Fire Constructs suffer from the Supernatural Creatures juncture modifiers for all their AVs.

## Named Characters

### 'Ali Ibn Yussuf, Master-At-Arms

A comparatively young man, Ibn Yussuf came to serve Li Ting long after he assumed his title of Monarch of Earth. This second son of a camel-herder joined Li Ting's armies when he was thirteen. Proving himself time and time again in the countless border skirmishes that flared between the Monarchs over critical feng shui sites, he first became a trusted commander, then an advisor and member of Li Ting's personal entourage, and finally a top official in Li Ting's empire.



It should not be said that under Li Ting's rule a man who applies himself can't rise to high station.

Now almost forty, 'Ali Ibn Yussuf is the Emperor's chief military advisor. He not only coordinates the defenses of the Fire Pagoda, but also the Emperor's operations in the 1850 and contemporary junctures, making alliances with various Muslim extremist groups. Ibn Yussuf is a ruthless but honorable man, able to unblinkingly order a suicide attack that destroys scores of innocents, but unwilling to go back on his sworn word.

Under 'Ali Ibn Yussuf's leadership, Li Ting has so far achieved most of his (admittedly limited) aims without undue losses, and while that persists, Ibn Yussuf's position is unassailable. 'Ali is without political ambitions, having already gotten far more than he ever dreamed. He is a devout follower of the Fire Righteous and a master of his inner flame, but nowhere close to being a Fire Zealot.

## Richard of Ghent

Li Ting, even in his reduced state, has a vast amount of work to do. As both a spiritual leader and a political player, he must juggle his responsibilities, while still trying to balance them with his martial and magical training. Such a complex establishment requires many competent ministers to run properly, and the most competent of that fearfully qualified crew is Richard of Ghent. An erstwhile mercenary, the Ghentish rogue drifted away from the Crusaders after their arrival in the Levant when it became clear even by Richard's fuzzy standards of good and evil that this was just *wrong*.

Richard quickly "went native" in Egypt (at that time a cosmopolitan center of learning and trade) and lived by his wits and sword as best he could despite ethnic and religious prejudice on both sides.

Richard became involved with Li Ting when an attempted theft went terribly awry and left him face to face with the King of the Fire Pagoda himself. The tyrant was impressed by Richard's pluck and planning skills, and gave him a minor position rather than reducing him to a tiny pile of soot. Proving himself in service, Richard was quickly

## 'Ali Ibn Yussuf

**Sample Dialogue:** "The fire is flexible but direct. It worms its way into any crack, but it never fails to burn. You must learn this lesson."

**Attributes:** Bod 8 (Str 10), Chi 0 (Fu 12, For 5), Mnd 6, Ref 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 16, Leadership 14, Info/Fire Pagoda 15, Info/Fire Righteous 12, Info/Secret War 12, Info/Weapons 18

**Fu Schticks:** Fire Stance, Fire Stance, Fire Fist, Eyes of Fire, Clothed in Life, Prodigious Leap, Signature Weapon (sword)

**Weapons:** punch (11), kick (12), sword (17)

## Richard of Ghent

**Sample Dialogue:** "Enough of this sentimental foolishness. I'll deal with him."

**Attributes:** Bod 7 (Con 9), Chi 0 (Fu 10, For 6), Mnd 7, Ref 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 15, Guns 14, Intrusion 8, Leadership 8, Info/Fire Pagoda 15, Info/Secret War 12

**Fu Schticks:** Prodigious Leap, Abundant Leap, Flying Sword, Loyal Steel

**Gun Schticks:** Carnival of Carnage x3, Lightning Reload, Eagle Eye, Signature Weapon (sword)

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), sword (14), Glock 17 (10/1/17+1)

promoted until his position matched his ability—he now runs Li Ting's entire massive household.

Richard of Ghent (as he still calls himself) is Li Ting's closest and perhaps only friend. A moderately advanced follower of the Fire Righteous, he is an intensely practical man who often comes into conflict with 'Ali Ben Yussuf about the ongoing terrorist campaigns. As the official with the power of the purse, he tries to get the most out of his resources, while Ben Yussuf makes the righteousness of the cause his first ideal, leading to an often conflicting set of priorities. Neither is setting assassins after his rival, but there is a certain degree of tension between the two.

Richard of Ghent appears to be in his mid-forties. He still wears a blade at his side. He balances it with a pistol now, of course, and he is a deadly fighter with both.

## The Mouth of the Fire Righteous

Deep within the vaults of the Fire Pagoda lie the meditation chambers, and within them dwells the one that even Li Ting listens to for advice. The so-called Mouth of the Fire Righteous is ancient.

Blind and serene, the Mouth was ancient when he taught Li Ting complete mastery



### The Mouth of the Fire Righteous

**Sample Dialogue:** "We have spent too long in the service of empty ends and pointless ambitions. We must concentrate on our spiritual perfection."

**Attributes:** Bod 4 (Tgh 6), Chi (Fu 14, For 2), Mnd 2, Ref 4

**Skills:** Martial Arts 17, Leadership 10, Info/Fire Pagoda 6, Info/Fire Righteous 21, Info/Secret War 4

**Fu Schticks:** Fire Strike, Fire Stance (costing zero shots and zero chi — effectively "always on," emitting smoke, igniting flammable objects, and so on), Fire Fist, Eyes of Fire, Gathering the Fire

**Weapons:** punch (5), kick (6)

of the Inner Fire, and the King of the Fire Pagoda still consults with the old man frequently on spiritual issues.

While the Mouth's grasp of the spiritual may be ironclad, he is doddering and old. His saintly mind has been long burnt clear of any concerns other than those of the flame, and though all walk in awe of his spiritual perfection, his words do not always carry the day. Though the Zealots cling to his every pronouncement, the Fire Righteous is a practical faith. Those who have not given themselves over completely to the demands of the inner flame try to temper their judgment with practicality, and even the most zealous followers admit that there is a need for moderates within the faith. However, on those occasions the Mouth is forced to disagree vehemently with Li Ting, the King of the Fire Pagoda makes sure that the Zealots are safely out of earshot.

### Chiu Fa, Demonologist and Diplomat

Chiu Fa was originally a do-nothing candidate for the exams. Not that he wasn't talented, but the system had become rigid and corrupt. The only people who passed the exams were the ones who paid the bribes or regurgitated perfect "essays" on the classics. As an actual scholar from a poor family, he knew he had no hope of achieving anything. Thus, he spent most of his time laying about, reading when he could get books and otherwise enjoying himself like a good Taoist should to get back at the Confucians and the Legalists.

### Chiu Fa

**Sample Dialogue:** "Perhaps we could instead look at the contract / have prepared?"

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0 (Mag 14, For 6), Mnd 8, Ref 8

**Skills:** Deceit 10, Sorcery 18, Info/Fire Pagoda 10, Info/Fire Righteous 12, Info/Underworld 12

**Sorcery Schticks:** Summoning, Blast (Fire, Chi, Electricity), Movement, Fertility, Divination

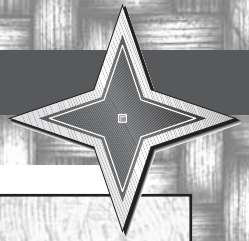
**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7)

The change came when he was approached by a queue-clipping sorcerer looking for recruits. Chiu Fa joined the wicked old man and learned his lore, but never took up his dark faith. After he had become a master of demonology, Fa left the old man and went searching for someone he could serve, in order to put his evil knowledge to good use.

Li Ting was just that man. Already hot on the road of conquest and determined to build an empire founded on more righteous principles than his brother and sisters, the King of the Fire Pagoda leapt at the chance to turn the dark arts to not-so-dark ends.

Since then, Chiu Fa has been Li Ting's loyal servant. Though he is not an adherent to the Fire Righteous, he and the followers share feelings of respect. Chiu Fa is a real softy, and tends to look the other way when confronted with peoples' shortcomings—probably one of the reasons he's still working for Li Ting.

However, at the bargaining table, he's sheer murder. This bargaining power is important—unlike Ming I, Li Ting and Chiu do not liberally offer human blood or souls to the denizens of the Underworld. Getting them to even come to the table in the absence of such blandishments is often difficult, and negotiating deals is harder still. Yet many a demon has come to deal with Chiu Fa and gone away wondering what misfortune must have befallen it, that it agreed to part with its freedom for such a tiny sum. Chiu Fa appears to be a spry young man, sustained as he is by Li Ting's fiery longevity drugs, but he is in fact as old the Emperor's reign, and then some.



## THE THUNDER PAGODA

The Thunder Pagoda, forged from solid thunderclouds, floats above the cloud-darkened Valley of Storms, a towering monument to Huan Ken, the King of Thunder. It looms over his subjects below, a constant reminder of his vast power and a testament to his boundless ego.

## THE VALLEY OF STORMS

Huan Ken Shaped the valley in which the Thunder Pagoda resides, a place now known as the Valley of Storms. It is one of the largest open areas in all the Netherworld. The overwhelming majority

### Sky Galleons

Pep -5, Wreck 8

Massive 18th century sailing ships held aloft by the Thunder King's magic, these vessels were once the pride of Huan Ken's aerial navy. But the close confines and narrow tunnels of the Netherworld have made them impractical, and the advent of modern technology has made them obsolete. The few Galleons still in service are much smaller than their predecessors, and are used mainly to transport troops and supplies to and from the Thunder Pagoda.

of Huan Ken's subjects live in small villages spread throughout the valley, huddled under the omnipresent thunderheads. Most of the valley's denizens are Netherworld exiles whose villages were taken over by the Thunder King's forces, while the inhabitants of the Thunder Pagoda itself are mainly Innerwalkers who fled to the Netherworld after the critical shift. For the most part, the Innerwalkers look down on the exiles, considering them rabble. The exiles put up with Huan Ken's





## Stone Griffins

**Attributes:** Bod 15 (Tgh 0), Chi 0, Mnd 1, Ref 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 12

**Creature Schticks:** Abysmal Spines x2 (talons and beak), Flight

**Unique Schtick:**

*Stone Body:* As the stone griffins are animated statues, they don't take damage in the way living beings do. They have no Toughness *per se*, but the cloudstuff of which they are made is extremely strong, and the Griffins must be blasted into chunks in order to destroy them. Any attack that does less than ten points of base damage simply has no effect on them, no matter how high the Outcome (except magic and fu-based attacks). It takes 60 points of damage to destroy a griffin (-1 impairment at 50, -2 at 55). Because they are not living creatures, the griffins do not make Death Checks. Once a griffin takes 60 points of damage, it is destroyed.

**Weapons:** talons (19), beak (19)

taxes and bullying Thunder Knights as best as they can. At least there's bread.

The largest village in the valley sits directly below the Thunder Pagoda, a station from which Huan Ken's sky galleons ferry passengers to his palace in the sky. Visitors may use this method to reach the Pagoda, but only if they have an invitation or are especially persuasive.

## INSIDE THE THUNDER PAGODA

The Thunder Pagoda is a massive complex designed to honor the majesty of Huan Ken and inspire awe in his subjects. Everything about it is larger than life, and yet, despite its overwhelming presence, the Thunder Pagoda is also a place of strange beauty. The cloudstuff that comprises it has a delicate quality that contrasts sharply with the strength and solidity of the fortress itself. The architecture merges European and Chinese styles effectively as each tower and spire competes to be greater than the next. Dark clouds hover above and below the Pagoda, bathing everything in a purplish glow. Sudden flashes of lightning provide eerie, sporadic illumination.

To reach the entrance Thunder Pagoda, visitors must ascend a wide staircase, the

foot of which is flanked by thick, squat pedestals. Atop each sits a massive stone griffin, three meters high at the shoulder, enchanted to come to life and defend the gate should the need arise. The main entrance itself rests within a massive tower and is ten meters high and nearly as wide across.

## The Entrance Hall

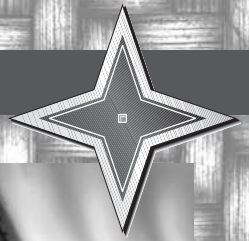
The first point of entry into the Thunder Pagoda, this hall is one hundred meters long and twenty meters wide, with a three-story ceiling supported by gothic arches. On either side, spaced about three meters apart, are twenty huge statues of Huan Ken himself in various regal poses. Visitors to the Pagoda are always made to wait here for at least a few minutes so they can be suitably awed by Huan Ken's majesty.

## The Great Hall

The Great Hall is the center of daily life within the Thunder Pagoda. The Thunder King confers with his advisors here and receives visitors from below during the day, and dines here at night with his favored knights and cronies when the mood strikes him. These feasts are typically noisy affairs involving large roasted animals and generous quantities of ale. Musicians and entertainers often perform for the King during these meals (but no jesters), and sometimes impromptu tests of strength or skill take place between the knights. Huan Ken also occasionally uses this room for special functions as well.

## The Throne Room

Huan Ken uses this room when he feels the need to be especially impressive. As one would expect, the room is massive, quite capable of holding several hundred people at once. Tapestries depicting Huan Ken leading mighty armies, smiting great monsters and cowing his enemies adorn the walls, while every exposed inch of space is covered with intricately detailed stonework



in a blend of medieval European and Asian styles. Naturally, the throne itself is the most ostentatious feature of the room. Raised on a platform and encrusted with gold and jewels, the throne is surprisingly diminutive — Huan Ken didn't want anything in the room to outshine his own presence.

## The Cathedral

Even more grandiose than the Throne Room, there is no greater tribute to Huan Ken's inflated self-importance than this place. Reminiscent of the Vatican, with Chinese and Eastern Orthodox influences, this monstrous building features a high-domed ceiling topped with an magnificent circular stained glass window depicting Huan Ken as the Pope. The cathedral is packed with pseudo-religious trappings; the walls, ceiling and everything else is covered with elaborate stonework and enough gold trim to make Midas weep.

For the most part, the cathedral is the province of Huan Ken's sorcerers, who use it to stage elaborate magical rituals. The room has been specifically Shaped under the guidance of the Thunder King's geomancers to create a chi flow ideal for the casting of spells. As such, there is a +1 bonus to all Sorcery task checks made here. A number of powerful magical artifacts are stored here, protected by potent sorcerous wards, alarms and lethal traps.

## Huan Ken's Armory and Trophy Room

The Thunder King maintains his own personal armory, which houses a huge collection of exotic and exquisite weapons. Of particular note is his collection of swords, which contains some of the finest examples of the art ever created. There are also a number of highly magical weapons stored in this room. Despite all this, there is very little in the way of security here other than a pair of guards and an alarm spell. Huan Ken assumes no one would be foolish enough to try to steal his personal possessions from his private armory in his own fortress. He hasn't been wrong yet.





Adjacent to the Thunder King's armory is his trophy room, where he keeps a collection of mementos from victories past. Once large enough to fill a vast hall, most of the collection was lost when he and his siblings were ousted from power. Thus, the room itself is rather small—considering the size of Huan Ken's ego—and the collection is less than impressive, as it consists mainly of prizes won over the last decade. While the seven-horned skull of the demon lord Ch'un-Kai the Abominable is indeed awe-inspiring, the head of Gorax the Despoiler, Netherworld bandit chieftain, is considerably less stirring. Nonetheless, Huan Ken happily goes on at great length about each of his trophies to anyone who shows even a passing interest.

## The Dungeons

Located on the lowest levels below the kitchens, the storerooms and the servants' quarters are the dark and chilling dungeons of the Thunder Pagoda. Huan Ken Shaped the walls to be forever dank and cold, despite the absence of actual earth or water. Naturally, his torture chambers are well-equipped with a variety of gruesome devices—Huan Ken was quite enamored of the Spanish Inquisition. One of his favorite punishments is to lock prisoners in small cages which are then lowered through holes in the floor to dangle high above the valley floor. Huan Ken had real vultures imported to his valley to keep these prisoners company.

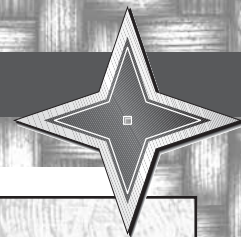
## PLANS FOR THE NETHERWORLD

Of all the Four Monarchs, the Thunder King's plans for the Netherworld are the least well defined. Instinct, emotion and circumstance have always been Huan Ken's guides; long range planning is not his forte. Of course, Huan Ken already considers himself the ruler of all the Netherworld; it's just that his siblings refuse to acknowledge that fact. Needless to say, this irks the Thunder King to no end, and so all of his scheming focuses on bringing his brother and sisters to their

knees. This kind of myopic, narrow-minded thinking is typical of Huan Ken. To him, the Secret War is peripheral to his personal agenda, and the other factions are only important insofar as they aid or hinder his actions. He's unable to look at the bigger picture, or to see his place in it. As far as he's concerned, he's the rightful ruler of the world—the others are just fooling themselves.

Ironically, although Huan Ken would like nothing better than to regain his stature from before the critical shift, the fact is that he's more or less given up on trying to reach that goal. Or rather, instead of trying to conquer the Netherworld as a logical step toward regaining power, he's become consumed with defeating his siblings. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Huan Ken has the vague idea that if he can achieve this, he can then take over all of the Netherworld, and then eventually the world. However, he's failed to take into account the reality of the Secret War and the fact that there are several factions, all more powerful than his, who won't let that happen.

As of now, Huan Ken plans to take over the Netherworld in the same way he deals with all obstacles—through overwhelming force. The problem is that he doesn't have the manpower or resources to do this. Thus, the Thunder King has been contemplating an alliance with the Architects of the Flesh in order to get access to their weapons and manpower. Although he finds the Buro forces bland and uninspiring, with no sense of glory or honor, he does admire their emphasis on strength and military might. More to the point, Huan Ken sees their vast arsenal of modern weaponry through greedy eyes. Although he personally finds guns cowardly, he knows that if he were to equip his army with them it would tip the balance of power in his favor. If he can get the Buro to fight his battles for him, so much the better. The Architects' recent gift of one hundred Hellharrower rifles (see *Seed of the New Flesh*, p. 29) has whetted the Thunder King's appetite, and so he intends to propose an alliance that would lead to a joint conquest of the Netherworld. Of course, Huan Ken has no intention of sharing power with anyone, but he knows that the Architects need control of the Netherworld to wage war across the time stream, so he figures they'll buy into his plans readily.



## DENIZENS

### Unnamed Characters

#### Thunder Knights

The Thunder Knights make up the backbone of the Thunder King's forces, and are among the bravest and most loyal warriors in the Inner Kingdom. Thunder Knights begin their training early in their lives, and only those who prove themselves worthy are initiated into the ranks of the knighthood. The Knights are known for their valor and unflinching devotion to the Thunder King, as well as their strength and skill at arms. Although they are supposed to live by the code of chivalry, the fact is that they're a bunch of arrogant thugs and bullies who enjoy lording it over everyone else. They tend to be unpopular with the rest of the inhabitants of the Netherworld.

#### Butterfly Knights

Because the Thunder Pagoda floats above the ground, Huan Ken recognized the need for a group of warriors who could operate in the skies. The Butterfly Knights are essentially a special unit of aerial Thunder Knights who wear magical suits of armor sporting brightly colored butterfly wings. The armor itself is made of a magical metal that is lighter than normal plate, and the knights themselves tend to be smaller and faster than typical Thunder Knights. The Butterfly Knights patrol the areas around the Thunder Pagoda, armed with lances that allow them to skewer enemies from the air. Butterfly Knight armor is difficult to produce, so only a handful of these elite warriors exist.

### Named Characters

#### The Clergy

The clergy are the Thunder King's cadre of sorcerers, all of whom have fancy titles based on their relative importance. Acolytes are apprentices, Initiates are the lowest level sorcerers, Bishops are experienced spellcasters and Cardinals are the equivalent of player characters.

#### Thunder Knights

**Sample Dialogue:** "Out of our way!"

**Attributes:** Bod 7 (Tgh 9), Chi 0, Mnd 4, Ref 6 (Agl 4)

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Intimidation 8

**Unique Schtick:**

*Armored:* Thunder Knights are trained from an early age to fight in heavy armor. As a result, they suffer no Agility penalty for fighting in armor. The penalty does apply to non-combat task checks such as swimming and climbing.

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), sword and shield (11, +1 to Parry AV) or greatsword (12)

**Armor:** plate mail (+2/-2)

#### Butterfly Knights

**Sample Dialogue:** "Ready . . . dive!"

**Attributes:** Bod 6 (Tgh 7), Chi 0, Mnd 4, Ref 7 (Agl 6)

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Intimidation 8

**Unique Schticks:**

*Dive-Bomb:* Butterfly Knights fighting non-flying opponents generally make their first attack by swooping down with their lances, using their speed and momentum to impale with devastating force. A Dive-Bomb is a four shot attack during which the Butterfly Knight's defensive AV is reduced by one and in which he may not actively dodge. If the Dive-Bomb strikes home, Damage is Str+6 (12), and any Damage from the attack's Outcome is doubled. Unnamed characters are taken out on an Outcome of 3 or greater. Butterfly Knights only use this schtick once per engagement, after which they discard their lances and switch to swords.

*Flutter:* Butterfly Knights are trained to fight while hovering above the ground, darting in and out of combat with their wings in a manner that most opponents find difficult to follow. If a Butterfly Knight actively dodges an attack and is not hit, he may immediately make an attack of his own with no effect on the timing of his next shot.

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), lance (see "Dive-Bomb," above), sword and shield (10, +1 to Parry AV)

**Armor:** light plate mail (+1/-1)

While the ranks of the clergy are small, they have high standing within the court, advising the King on sorcerous matters and providing magical support for the knights. The Thunder King also occasionally sends them out on special missions. They are expected to devote themselves to piety as much as the knights are to chivalry, and in practice do about as well at it.



### A Cardinal of the Clergy

*Members of Huan Ken's clergy are a unique bunch. These statistics represent a typical Cardinal, but even among other Cardinals, statistics and powers vary widely. All members of the Clergy are always named characters.*

**Sample Dialogue:** "Succeed in this task—your Lord demands it."

**Attributes:** Bod 4, Chi 0 (Mag 8), Mnd 6, Ref 5

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Leadership 12, Sorcery 15, Info/Church of the Thunder King 14, Info/Netherworld 6, Info/Secret War 6

**Sorcery Schticks:** Blast (Lightning, Fire, Lightning, Conjured Weapons, Lightning), Divination, Heal

**Weapons:** punch (5), kick (6), ceremonial dagger (7)

### Typical Thunder Champion

*Thunder Champions are always treated as named characters.*

**Sample Dialogue:** "Show some respect, cur!"

**Attributes:** Bod 8 (Tgh 10), Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 7 (Agl 6)

**Skills:** Martial Arts 12, Intimidation 10, Leadership 8

**Fu Schticks:** Signature Weapon (varies from Champion to Champion — several options presented below)

**Unique Schtick:**

*Armored:* As "Thunder Knights," p. 31.

**Weapons:** punch (9), kick (10), greatsword signature weapon (16), flail signature weapon (16), enormous battleaxe signature weapon (16), or sword signature weapon and shield (15, +1 to Parry AV)

**Armor:** finely crafted plate mail (+2/-1)

### Thunder Champion

Thunder Champions are the very best of the Thunder Knights, chosen for their exceptional skill, bravery and leadership abilities. For the most part, only Thunder Knights with years of experience and a history of exceptional loyalty, prowess and courage earn this title, but Huan Ken occasionally bestows this rank on Knights who perform extraordinary acts of valor in combat, or to outsiders who suitably impress him. Thunder Champions are always found leading units of Thunder Knights in battle. Thunder Champions always have access to the best weapons, armor and training. Many also possess fu schticks or magical weapons.

### Lucius Centares

Lucius Centares hails from 69 AD, where he was an officer in the imperial Roman army. During a battle with barbarians on the frontier of the empire, his unit was broken and

### Lucius Centares

**Sample Dialogue:** "All hail Huan Ken, rightful emperor of Rome."

**Attributes:** Bod 7 (Tgh 8), Chi 0, Mnd 7, Ref 7

**Skills:** Martial Arts 14, Leadership 13, Info/Ancient Rome 10, Info/Court of the Thunder King 8, Info/Netherworld 6, Info/Roman Politics 10, Info/Secret War 6, Info/Strategy 13

**Fu Schticks:** Signature Weapon ("Devotion," see below)

**Unique Schtick:**

*Armored:* As "Thunder Knights," p. 31.

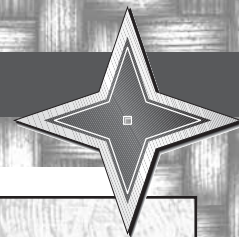
**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), "Devotion" (17) a gladius (Roman broadsword) given to Lucius by Huan Ken as a sign of his favor. It has been enchanted to do an additional damage, which is reflected in the statistic given.

**Armor:** Roman armor (+1/-1)

he was forced to flee. He took shelter in a cave only to slip and fall into an underground river where he was swept away. When he came to, he found himself in a series of underground caverns with no exit in sight. He wandered about, becoming more and more disoriented, until he stumbled on a band of Thunder Knights. Although unarmed and exhausted, he managed to beat down half the patrol before he was subdued.

Lucius was brought before Huan Ken, who was impressed with his strength and courage. After listening to his story, Huan Ken told Lucius of a time both past and future in which he was the emperor of a Rome whose empire spanned the globe. Huan Ken claimed that his siblings had grown jealous of his power and conspired together to have him exiled to the Netherworld. He invited Lucius to join him in restoring Rome to its former glory. Lucius, taken in by the authority and power of Huan Ken, accepted his offer and took up service as a Thunder Champion.

The King of the Thunder Pagoda has plans for Lucius. His first goal is to locate the portal through which Lucius entered the Netherworld. Huan Ken knows of the troubled times coming to Rome, and plans to use the opportunity to install Lucius as Rome's emperor. Once this is done, Lucius will have access to all the feng shui sites of Rome, hundreds of years before the Monarchs were even born. With this power at his disposal, Huan Ken envisions a new future in which Rome conquers the world instead of disintegrating, and in which he is



the absolute ruler of all. He believes that if he can bring this to pass, he can eliminate all the other factions from the Secret War and rule unopposed.

Lucius Centares is a mature man in his late 30s, with short silver hair, broad shoulders and a square jaw. A skilled tactician and a powerful warrior, his loyalty to Huan Ken is unquestionable. Lucius truly believes that the Thunder King is not only the rightful emperor, but that he is destined to make Rome the heart of the greatest empire the world has ever known. His only regret is that he cannot remember how to find his way back to the portal that led him to the Netherworld.

## The Baron, Masked Avenger

Stories have spread throughout the exile villages of the Thunder King of an enigmatic figure known only as the Baron. Equal parts Zorro, Batman and Robin Hood, the Baron has made it his sworn mission to thwart the Thunder King at every opportunity. As such, the Baron has freed prisoners on their way to Huan Ken's dungeons, led patrols of Thunder Knights into traps, diverted supplies of weapons to the Jammers and stolen gold from the Thunder King's tax collectors only to give it back to exiles from whom it was taken. These are just some of his more mundane exploits—he's also reputed to have looted the King's treasury, faced down a host of Thunder Champions in combat, hijacked Huan Ken's sky galleons and bedded the Thunder King's daughters. All of them.

While the legends are more than a bit exaggerated, the fact remains that the Baron has an uncanny ability to show up at just the right time to disrupt the Thunder King's plans. Some suspect that he has an informant within the court, but no one has even guessed at the truth. The Baron is actually the royal princess Elizabeth Fenwick, one of Huan Ken's many children. This is nothing special; Huan Ken has been around over four hundred years, and in that time he's had a great many wives. After a while Huan Ken inevitably tires of his current queen and annuls the marriage (he can do that, he's the Pope). As a result, he's sired a lot of offspring over the years. Elizabeth is unusual in that she visited the Netherworld as a small child, and so she retained her memories of the past when the critical shift took place.

## The Baron

**Sample Dialogue:** "All that armor seems to be slowing you down. Perhaps I should fight with my eyes closed so I don't get bored."

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 0 (Fu 4), Mnd 7 (Cha 9), Ref 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 14, Guns 10, Deceit 13, Driving 14, Fix-It 8, Intimidation 10, Intrusion 13, Sabotage 9, Info/Court of the Thunder King 12, Info/Netherworld 10, Info/Secret War 9

**Fu Schticks:** Gathering of the Clouds, Awesome Downpour, Rain of Fury

**Gun Schticks:** Eagle Eye x2 (used with sword only)

**Vehicle Schticks:** Signature Ride ("Nightshade," see below) (*Golden Comeback*, p. 117)

**Auxiliary Schticks:** Permanent Dry Cleaning (*Golden Comeback*, p. 104)

**Unique Schtick:**

*Derring-Do:* The Baron gains +3 AV for daredevil stunts.

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), sabre (10), dagger (9), Beretta Model 950BS Jet Fire (8/1/8+1)

**Gadgets:** The Baron uses a number of gadgets, most of which were made for her by the Jammers (she really did divert a shipment of weapons to them).

*Blinding Powder:* Must be in close combat to use, requires a -2 called shot to the eyes. If successful, the target suffers -4 Impairment for 2d6+6 shots.

*Mini Grappling Hook:* The size of a small flashlight, this device features a retractable grappling hook at either end attached to about one hundred meters of lightweight, ultra-strong cord. The hilt has a retractable handle and can act as a pulley, allowing Elizabeth to slide from one end of the line to the other.

*Mini Flash Bang and Smoke Grenades:* These are primitive bombs, not modern weapons. See *Golden Comeback*, p. 86.

*Nightshade (+3/2):* The Baron's signature ride, Nightshade is a jet-cycle custom-built for her by a Jammer techie. It's nimble and tough and fast enough to give a SPUD-U a run for its money. Elizabeth keeps it hidden and uses a tiny remote control (with a range of a kilometer) to summon the bike when she needs it.

When Elizabeth was still very young, Huan Ken discovered that her mother had been unfaithful. Elizabeth can still remember crying as her mother was dragged away by the Thunder King's knights to be executed. As a result, she harbors a burning hatred for her father, and she has sworn vengeance against him. Largely forgotten by the Thunder King, Elizabeth devoted herself to the study of swordplay, and with her rank she had access to the finest teachers in her father's kingdom. With her drive and natural ability she excelled in her studies, and by her eighteenth birthday she was ready to act. At first her acts of harassment were small, but with each success she grew bolder and



more daring. As time passed, Elizabeth came to realize that she was not the only one who had suffered because of her father's cruelty, and so she took it upon herself to help all the DPs under his rule. Eventually word of her exploits spread until they reached the ears of Huan Ken himself. Outraged that anyone would have the temerity to flaunt his authority, the Thunder King has offered a huge reward for the Baron, dead or alive. As of now, no one has been able to collect.

At twenty, Elizabeth is tall, athletic and exceptionally pretty, with brown eyes and long brown hair. As the Baron, her costume of a large cloak, billowing shirt, leather vest, breeches, calf-high boots, wide-brimmed hat and black scarf have served to hide her gender and identity. As the Baron, she's become a legend among the exiles, not only for her open defiance of the Thunder King, but as a defender of the people and a symbol of hope.

## THE DARKNESS PAGODA

The Darkness Pagoda is the residence of Ming I, its unholy queen. Ming I spent centuries ruling Mesoamerica, Southern China and South Asia. Constant exposure to chi from feng shui sites central to the dark rituals of Micronesia and the blasphemous blood sacrifices of Mesoamerica twisted her already dark and driven personality until she became the Monarch most easily described as a "thing of evil."

Perhaps her change was involuntary. Or perhaps, already embittered and envious that she was not as beautiful as her sister and resentful at the disfiguring loss of her arm, she embraced this transformation. Regardless, the chi she controlled



Illustration by Andrew Baker



guided and shaped her as it guided and shaped the world around her. The Queen of the Darkness Pagoda is no longer precisely human, though it would be difficult to say exactly what sort of thing she has become.

Certainly, Ming I has subsisted for long periods on only human hearts and the tender bones of children, drinking only the blood of virgin girls to preserve her youth and “beauty.” Yet she can still eat mortal food, and often does, both for novelty and with her favored guests, so as not to offend their sensibilities.

Of the Four Monarchs, Ming I is the most closely allied with the dark forces of the Underworld. While her brother, the King of the Fire Pagoda, also has dealings with demonic forces, his relationships with the spirits of the Underworld are far more . . . businesslike. That is not to say that Ming I *worships* demons, or feels they are her natural servants. Rather, she and they agree on many basic philosophical issues, and given enough time and power, Ming I and her servants might themselves become indistinguishable from the dwellers in the Underworld.

Likewise, Ming I and Gao Zhang work together. While Gao Zhang is less experienced than the Queen of the Darkness Pagoda, she is trapped in the Inner Kingdom and the master of the Lotus is not. Both openly seek unfair advantage. The eunuch desires to filch the Monarch’s immense stores of demonic lore, while she seeks to reduce him to her puppet. There is also a strong overtone of gender conflict in their ongoing struggle. Ming I finds Gao Zhang a laughable little capon, and Gao Zhang seeks to prove that, even emasculated, he can best any mere woman. Both, of course, find the conflict immensely involving. The prospect of winning the battle of one-upsmanship is, at this point, as much a motivation for their continued relations as any material benefit.

Gao Zhang and the demons of the Underworld are not the Queen of the Darkness Pagoda’s only allies. Like all the Monarchs, Ming I is a compulsive schemer. Over the eight years since her exile, she has allied herself in turn with all the Secret War factions other than the Guiding Hand and the Dragons, both of whom avoid her like the

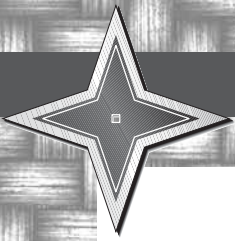
plague. Most recently, she and her brother Li Ting were central to the plans of the Ascended and the Jammers to use the Molten Heart to seize control of access to the Inner Kingdom. These plans were only narrowly thwarted by the heroic efforts of the Dragons. Since then, Ming I has been licking her wounds and recovering her spent resources. Recently, it has become clear that the Monarch has something new in store.

## THE HOUSE OF DARKNESS

The Darkness Pagoda is set in a cavern vast by anyone’s definition—one large enough to have stars. OK, so it doesn’t *actually* go up for seven miles. The roof is simply high enough and dark enough to be invisible from below, and the stars are lights embedded in the ceiling. Nevertheless, observers without telescopes or scientific training are unlikely to be able to distinguish between an actual starry sky and Ming I’s credible imitation.

The constellations of the “sky” are those of the stars above the Queen’s former capital, arrayed in a configuration so inauspicious as to be astrologically impossible. This false sky forms a powerful feng shui site, and the air above the Pagoda is thickly patrolled by Skin and Darkness Bats (see below) to protect it from vandals.

The Pagoda itself is a huge temple complex combining Micronesian, Mesoamerican and Chinese themes into a structure reminiscent of Machu Picchu crossbred with the Forbidden City. Neither structure paid so much attention to detail, but Ming I prides herself on her fine eye. Every surface, no matter how small, is covered in ornate carving. Generally, the detail is too fine to have actually been carved with tools visible to the human eye (because, of course, it was not). The imagery invariably depicts the myths Ming I has encouraged among her followers or the various demonic notables with whom the Queen is currently allied. The statues—and indeed all the detail—shift regularly, as the Innerwalkers charged with maintaining the shaping are all chosen for their artistic ability.



## INSIDE THE DARKNESS PAGODA

The Pagoda itself is an incredible maze of apartments, processions, temples, storage, support areas, dungeons and workshops. More than any of the other Monarchs' residences, the Darkness Pagoda is a working structure with a life of its own. Ceremonies, feasts, hearings and practices take place at every hour of the day and night. The Pagoda is also heavily patrolled; a complex system of internal passports and permissions governs who may travel where, and when.

General security is provided by Ming I's soldiers. Her elite Darkness Warriors guard the Sacrificial Altar (see below) and the inner courts of the Pagoda. These guards are totally corruptible—Ming I wouldn't have it any other way. However, the guards' willingness to turn their heads and allow palace politics to blossom doesn't extend to uninvited Innerwalkers. Intruders should come able to blend in with the surroundings or willing to fight.

Ming I's person is always guarded by bound demons and powerful Innerwalkers. Even if an assailant somehow managed to confront the Queen of the Darkness Pagoda directly, he would have to defeat her blasphemous dark magic and her deadly arm of shadow—one of the most lethal weapons ever created. In fact, some *have* succeeded in penetrating her security cordon only to discover that Ming I's youthful maiming spurred her to excellence in the martial arts. Those who come face-to-face with her typically depart in small baskets.

Interior decoration combines Chinese opulence with Mesoamerican patterns and directness of expression to produce a striking effect. Powerful reliefs of prominent demon lords and a plentitude of tiny shrines to minor deities line the halls. Most walls are stone. Most doors are flimsy panels perfect for eavesdropping. Sorcerous fire pits and braziers provide thick red-orange illumination. While these burn without fuel, the flames are quite hot. Indeed, being thrown into one is a particularly excruciating demise. The armor of the

guards mixes Native American themes and repetition with Chinese ornate delicacy.

Large public areas typically have balconies with connecting staircases. These are often decorated with statues several floors high, which stand near the balconies and often serve as supports for them. Most internal stairways are tight and uneven, except for those on the Processional (see below), which are reasonable and even, if a bit on the large side. Balconies usually have wide, waist-high guard rails, while staircases typically have no rails at all.

Modern technology has been spottily integrated into the Darkness Pagoda. There are fluorescent lights in areas where fire pits are impractical. Gate guards and Darkness Warriors all carry automatic weapons, but the average soldier wields an obsidian-spiked club and crossbow. Overall, the place is a Stone-and-Iron Age pile with electric lighting. Except under very special circumstances, there are no security cameras or modern security equipment.

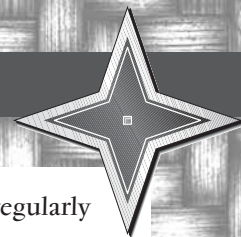
### The Entrance

The Darkness Pagoda has a number of entrances. Only diplomatic and official traffic uses the front gate. Everything else goes in through one of the various side doors. All the gates are made of heavy wood, and the areas around them are well-fortified and plentifully provided with firearms. They could, perhaps, be stormed, but the fight would rouse the entire Pagoda.

Regardless of which entrance is used, cargoes are searched. Bribes must be paid for acceptable contraband. Unacceptable contraband (spies, for example) is subject to confiscation and (if appropriate) execution. One or two people might be able to slip through a gate in disguise, or a handful of troops might be able to infiltrate somehow, either to accomplish a mission or to seize a gate silently and from behind so an attack force could enter undetected.

### The Processional

The main entrance to the Darkness Pagoda is the vast front gate, a huge struc-



ture flanked by two large towers, leading to a short passage, another two towers, and another gate. It is generally opened only when troops need to issue forth, or to receive visiting dignitaries. From the gate a long, straight, wide open road leads to the Sacrificial Pyramid. This is a gauntlet, hedged in narrowly by buildings conspicuously too high to climb, and with windows too small for a man to fit through easily. To attack up the Processional would be suicide.

### The Sacrificial Pyramid

In the center of the Darkness Pagoda is the Sacrificial Pyramid, where Ming I's priests butcher sacrificial victims for their queen daily. Those grisly portions which she does not consume are offered to various demon princes or sent to the Skin and Darkness workshops below, to be reShaped or used as fodder for the Skin and Darkness beasts.

The Pyramid itself is immense—larger than the Great Pyramid—and actually filled with usable space. Long staircases run up each of the Pyramid's four sides, with guarded entrances to the interior at each staircase's base, midpoint and top. The altar itself, located at the Pyramid's apex and open to the *faux* sky, is made of carved stone fitted with modern blood reclamation equipment which flows directly to a processing room within the Pyramid's bowels. With so few sacrifices coming these days, nothing can be wasted.

### The Sewers

The waste tunnels of the Darkness Pagoda are an endless maze of sewers that all eventually trunk together into one giant outflow pipe which deposits the effluvium of the Pagoda's inhabitants down into another level of the Inner Kingdom's endless caverns. The waste tunnels are home to God-knows-what-all, including insane Netherworld rabble, stray Skin and Darkness beast, and fugitive demons from above. They are policed by a special force of guards who use night-adapted Skin and Darkness Ravagers as hunting animals and

who watch the outflow point and regularly patrol the main tunnels.

The sewers are your standard action-adventure fare, with central channels full of sewage flanked by low, unrailed walkways. There are often railed wooden or metal bridges at major intersections, but in many cases, bridges off the beaten path are weakened from decay or lack of Shaping.

### The Guest Quarters

The Darkness Pagoda has a vast plentitude of apartments, both for the staff and for embassies, delegations, friends of the court and other visitors. Most of these are decorated like any other fairly posh accommodation in the palace, but the Queen of the Darkness Pagoda also has some very unusual guests. Thus, some guest rooms furnished in red-hot iron, others in pulsing human flesh and others in the reverberant abyss between the stars (though the latter are more akin to gates than rooms, and are closely guarded).

The Pagoda staff is adept at accommodating creatures who require very special environments and diets for comfort. A vast variety of special provisions and furnishings are kept on hand just in case. Most of this material is stored in hangar-like warehouses underneath the guest quarters. These areas are occasionally cleaned with a boiling water-and-vinegar solution. When the fluid is flushed through tremendous grates in the floors, many forgotten pets and escaped parasites from demon guests with poor personal hygiene are washed down into the sewers. This is a major source of sewer hazards. Compared to their hellish Underworld home, the lightless sewers are a paradise for these escaped creatures. Some of the demonic parasites become very large indeed outside their naturally-hostile home environment.

### The Throne Room

The Queen of the Darkness Pagoda rarely rules from her throne. She more often governs from her couch or bed—sometimes even from her bath or while on the hunt. Nevertheless,

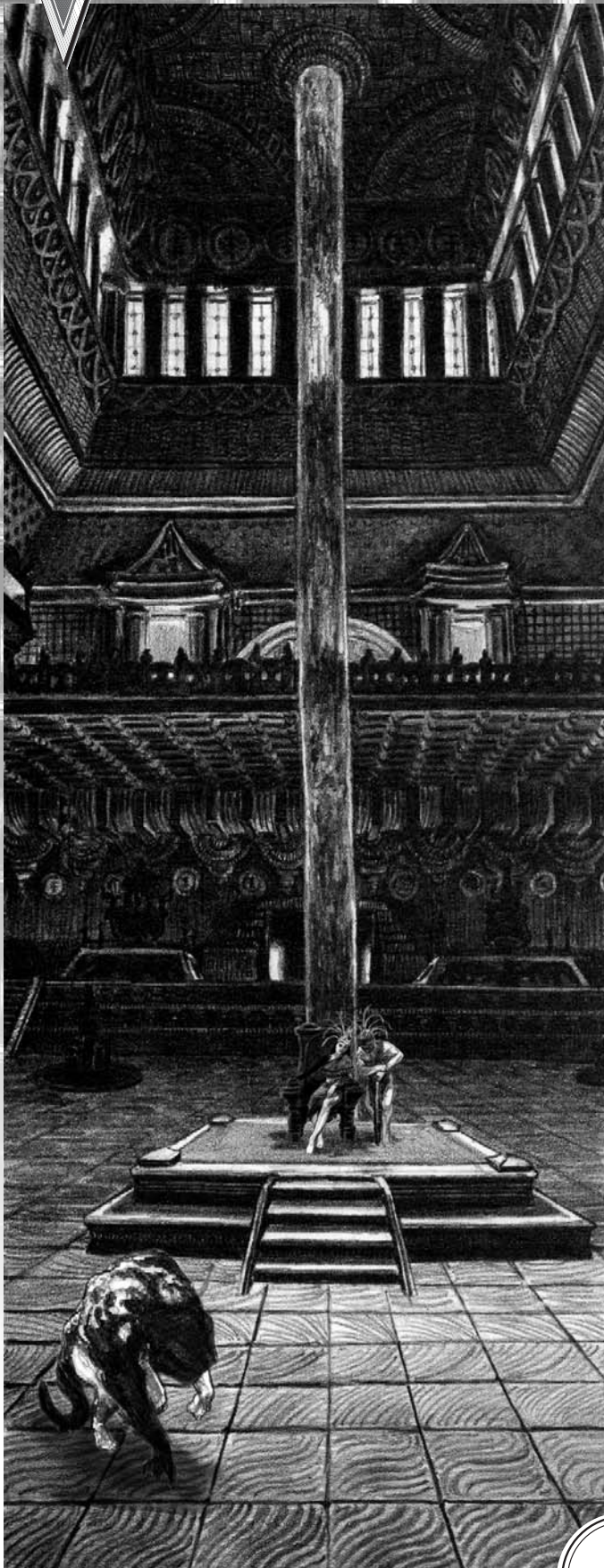


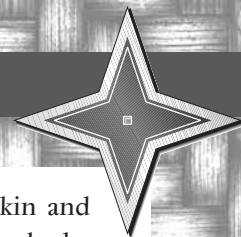
Illustration by Andrew Baker

she has a suitably impressive throne room for the occasions when she does choose to sit in state. Her throne is a single, huge hematite stone, and she has Shaped the magical material of the Inner Kingdom into a room far larger than any actual stone could support. Indeed, the throne room takes up the larger part of the interior of the sacrificial pyramid, and a long glass tube rises from floor to ceiling behind the throne, carrying preprocessed sacrifices to the bowels of the Pagoda for further butchering. The middle entrances to the pyramid enter directly into the upper reaches of the throne room, but the lower doors are separated from the floor of the throne room by a number of intervening spaces.

## The Shrines Of Initiation

When she arrived in the Inner Kingdom, the Queen of the Darkness Pagoda just didn't have enough servants to live in the style to which she had become accustomed. While scaling back a bit on the blood sacrifices helped, she still didn't have enough help to really staff out her Pagoda properly, to say nothing of forming an army for the reconquest of the world. Clearly, something needed to be done. A little Shaping later, Ming I had her first Shrine of Initiation. She sent out her Innerwalkers and demon servants to round up new recruits from among the dis-timed masses of the Netherworld.

Recruits—willing or not—are placed inside Shrines of Initiation and implanted with rudimentary memories that involve long periods of loyal servitude to Ming I stretching back to before her exile. Thus, the priests and bureaucrats who seethe and scheme around Ming I's throne—who are by-and-large unable and unwilling to discuss the details of their strangely-similar childhoods—are in fact Netherworld rabble and kidnap victims from assorted junctures reprinted with a largely abstract sense of self and duty. While the brainwashing process is reliable, the strong-willed sometimes break this conditioning, usually after some forcible reminder of their actual past. And for



those who break conditioning? Well, the sacrificial altar is always hungry.

## The Dungeons

The dungeons of the Darkness Pagoda have, essentially, one purpose: They are a storehouse for those awaiting sacrifice. There was a time when sacrifice volunteers came with wreaths of lotus blossoms around their necks, eager to sacrifice their lives that their fellows might be permitted to live. In those times, Ming I's dungeons were a hellhole where animalistic survival of the fittest ruled.

Since the Monarchs' fall, though, matters have changed dramatically. With a dearth of eager victims, prisoners must be kept in good shape until they are sacrificed. To that end, the dungeons are now well-guarded and surprisingly safe—there's no need to worry about creatures crawling up from the sewers through the drains or what have you. Of course, there's no realistic hope of escape, either. The jailers take immense pride in this about-face's success, and allege that their prison is totally escape-proof.

Unwilling sacrificial victims are sometimes imprinted with eager personalities via Shrine of Initiation, but doing this uses valuable resources, so only prisoners slotted for difficult or important sacrifices are treated in this way.

## The Skin and Darkness Forges

Demons are not Ming I's only supernatural servants. Indeed, she has her own distinct brand—the Skin and Darkness beasts. In order to understand these creatures, it is important to know that Ming I is not a mistress of warm, welcoming, sheltering darkness. Rather, hers is cold, insidious darkness, full of fear and malice, generally antithetical to human life. By carefully combining this darkness with human flesh (particularly skin), Ming I and her trusted servants make terrible creatures, beasts of nightmare that are horrible to behold.

These creatures are created in the Skin and Darkness Forges, great workshops where shadow and flesh are made one. Skin and Darkness beasts come in a variety of sizes and shapes, from the razor-winged Skin and Darkness Bats that cruise the air near the “stars” to the rugose and terrifying Skin and Darkness Ravagers that patrol the sewers. All are detailed below.

The Darkness Priests who work in the Skin and Darkness Forges are feared, for the time they spend working so closely with the darkness leaves them changed—not generally for the better. Working as an assistant in the Forges is one of the worst assignments a slave can draw; accidental fatalities and incurable psychosis are commonplace.

## LIFE IN THE DARKNESS PAGODA

Most of Ming I's followers believe that their Queen is a goddess of darkness. When she triumphed in her own timeline, one of her first acts was to darken the sun in her quarter of the globe. She exploited this to the utmost in Mesoamerica, convincing the local sun worshippers that she was personally responsible for the death of whatever deities they most cherished. Metaphorically, this was very much the case—and it's not as if anyone was in a position to argue theology with her. The status of “Dark Goddess” appealed greatly to Ming I, and she encouraged the spread of those beliefs throughout her empire. Eventually, her cult relegated all other faiths to ragtag clutches of hopeless rebels.

When she and her siblings got the critical shaft (so to speak), the Queen of the Darkness Pagoda simply spun it to her Innerwalker servants as one of those triumphs of light and goodness that so often plague the careers of dark gods. There were a few defections, and a few examples were made, but most of her Innerwalkers had come from societies that had lived under her rule for generations. Serving the Dark Goddess was all they knew, and they were thankful for the chance to



accompany Ming I into her Netherworld exile. Those that have recently joined her ranks, having been imprinted in the Shrines of Initiation, are, if anything, more devout than legitimate long-term believers, and that's saying something.

In short, Ming I's Innerwalking servants are fanatical nutjobs whose most pressing concern is usually "How can I make the Queen of the Darkness Pagoda happier?" In the HK tradition, one or two of the aforementioned nutjobs will certainly meet the player characters, fall in love, realize the evil of their ways and die horribly preventing some guy named McGuffin from getting his heart cut out. However, barring melodrama, it's "Lives for the Master" on infinite repeat for the average Darkness Pagoda inhabitant.

### Darkness Warriors

**Sample Dialogue:** "Hey, you! You're not the Second Assistant Minister for Protocol!"

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

**Skills:** Guns 8, Martial Arts 8, Info/Darkness Pagoda 8

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), AK-47 (13\*\*/5/30), Aztec warclub (12)

### Darkness Priestesses

**Sample Dialogue:** "Dammit, Lu Bei, it's about time. I was wondering how long I was going to have to stand here with a box full of asps. Hey, wait, you're not Lu Bei!"

**Attributes:** Bod 4 (Mov 6), Chi 0 (Mag 6), Mnd 5 (Int 7), Ref 6

**Skills:** Sorcery 8, Info/Dark Magic 13, Info/Darkness Pagoda 10

**Sorcery Schticks:** Blast (Disintegration only), Summoning

**Weapons:** punch (5), kick (6), Blast (8)

### Skin and Darkness Bats

**Sample Dialogue:** *Barely audible, bone-chilling chirping*

**Attributes:** Bod 4 (Mov 12), Chi 0, Mnd 1, Ref 7

**Skills:** Creature Powers 12

**Unique Schtick:**

**Razor Wing:** If a Bat scores a successful attack, the victim begins bleeding, taking one additional Wound Point per shot for a number of shots equal to the Outcome.

**Unique Limitation:**

**Fragility:** An attacker needs only equal or surpass a Skin and Darkness Bat's defensive AV to destroy it.

**Weapons:** Razor Wing (12)

## DENIZENS

### Unnamed Characters

#### Darkness Warriors

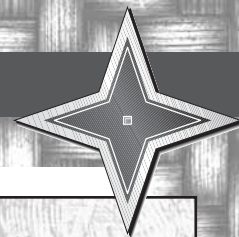
The Darkness Warriors are Ming I's elite guards. Armed with AK-47s (or some similar sinister-looking gun) and Aztec warclubs (nasty things that look like cricket bats edged with shards of razor-sharp obsidian), these warriors protect the inner precincts of the Pagoda and serve as her striking fist, backing up her Innerwalkers when she attacks feng shui sites. Her troops can dress "naturally" for other junctures, but wear their uniforms, which are rich with religious significance, whenever possible. The Darkness Warriors are divided into two factions—the Jet Hawk and Obsidian Jaguar societies—who are fierce rivals on and off the battlefield. Their outfits are modernized, stylish versions of Aztec Leopard and Jaguar Society warrior's garb.

#### Darkness Priestesses

Most of Ming I's priesthood is female, though anyone with sufficient skill as a schemer can advance far in her service. Intrigue and betrayal are not just encouraged, they're essential traits for promotion. The Queen of the Darkness Pagoda openly sets her followers against one another, to keep her court full of hungry and ambitious ministers. She is helped along by the fact that most of her priestesses—like the majority of all her followers—are created with the Shrine of Initiation. The "template" personality conditioned into implant victims who will become Priestesses is predisposed to subtlety and treachery.

#### Skin and Darkness Bats

The Skin and Darkness Bats are little more than wing, skin, shadow and razor-edged bone, topped with two burning red eyes. Skating in endless near-silence through the still air above the Pagoda, the Bats protect the stars of the *faux* sky, and prevent beings who can fly from coming and going from the Pagoda as they please. Beings attempting to fly into the Pagoda can expect to fight at least a 1d6



Bats per sequence they're airborne, more if they're free with flashy or loud attacks.

## Skin and Darkness Ravagers

Quadrupeds made of tightly stretched skin and inky darkness, the Skin and Darkness Ravagers are the guard beasts of the Darkness Pagoda. They are used to patrol the sewers, and also as general-purpose scouts and hunting animals. Amazingly agile (they weigh almost nothing) and disturbingly silent, the only sound of a Ravager attack is the victim's pitiful screaming as he meets the sanity-shattering gaze of these shadowy hunting hounds.

## Skin and Darkness Zealots

Shadows wearing the skins of specially sacrificed victims, the Skin and Darkness Zealots are Ming I's spies and assassins. The glance of a Zealot is even more terrible than that of a Skin and Darkness Ravager, causing actual spiritual decay in the target. These creatures are very intelligent, and named specimens with additional creature powers and fu schticks are fairly common.

## Named Characters

### Chamberlain

Political ambition and wickedness incarnate, Chamberlain is one of Ming I's oldest and most trusted retainers. Either the first or among the first of the Skin and Darkness Zealots, Chamberlain has been her most loyal and useful creation. He acts as Ming I's majordomo and chief of secret police, and sits atop the brutal internal politics of the Pagoda like a smug dark god. Chamberlain is supremely self-interested, but knows that Ming I would destroy him in an instant if she had even the faintest suspicion that any of his ambitions might somehow inconvenience her plans. However, as long as he limits himself to terrorizing her underlings, Chamberlain's safety is assured. As a result, Chamberlain sticks to his own territory, but guards it jealously from potential rivals.

### Nu Wei-Feng

The current high priestess of the Darkness Pagoda, Nu Wei-Feng is raptly fascinated by

## Skin and Darkness Ravagers

**Sample Dialogue:** "Hrrrrrrrr..."

**Attributes:** Bod 6 (Mov 8), Chi 0 (Mag 9), Mnd 2, Ref 7

**Skills:** Creature Powers 10, Intrusion 12

**Creature Schticks:** Abysmal Spines, Brain Shredder x3, Damage Immunity: Unarmed Attack

**Weapons:** claws (10), Brain Shredder (13)

## Skin and Darkness Zealots

**Sample Dialogue:** "Honey? Don't you recognize me?"

**Attributes:** Bod 8 (Tgh 7), Chi 0 (Mag 8), Mnd 6 (Int 7), Ref 6

**Skills:** Creature Powers 10, Deceit 10, Intrusion 12

**Creature Schticks:** Soul Twist x3, Damage Immunity: Unarmed Attack, Damage Immunity: Firearms

**Unique Schticks:**

*Copycat:* A Skin and Darkness Zealot can mimic near-perfectly the habits and voice of the person whose skin it wears. A Zealot does not gain the memories of the skin's former owner, however, and the stitches used to hold the skin over the shadow are obvious if the creature is seen without clothes. Likewise, if the skin is cut or torn, the shadow beneath it is easy to see.

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), Soul Twist (11)

## Chamberlain

**Sample Dialogue:** "I think that you have inconvenienced me . . . too long."

**Attributes:** Bod 6 (Tgh 8), Chi 0 (Mag 10, Fu 12), Mnd 5 (Cha 1), Ref 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 16, Creature Powers 15, Deceit 13, Intimidation 10, Intrusion 15, Police 10, Info/Darkness Pagoda 15

**Creature Schticks:** Soul Twist x4

**Fu Schticks:** Eyes of the Snake, Slither of the Snake, Friend of Darkness, Dark's Soft Whisper, Blade of Darkness, Gathering the Darkness

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), Soul Twist (13)

Ming I, whom she regards as a living divinity. Chamberlain's grotesque appearance nauseates her, and like so many of her predecessors, she is trying to gain enough political capital to force the creature of darkness from his post. It is likely that her infatuation with Ming I has blinded her to the Queen of the Darkness Pagoda's willingness to back Chamberlain against insurgents. Unless Nu Wei-Feng has extraordinarily good luck, her career is likely to end in her sacrifice and replacement by a similarly ambitious and deluded substitute.



## Nu Wei-Feng

**Sample Dialogue:** "Bathe him, and send him to my quarters. I will attend to him . . . personally."

**Attributes:** Bod 4 (Mov 5), Chi 0 (Mag 14), Mnd 8, Ref 6

**Skills:** Intrusion 12, Seduction 12, Sorcery 16, Info/Darkness Pagoda 12, Info/Magic 12

**Sorcery Schticks:** Movement, Summoning, Blast (Disintegration, Chi, Obsidian Shards), Divination, Influence

**Weapons:** punch (5), kick (6), blast (16)

## General Fung

**Sample Dialogue:** "You? You think *you* are a hero? I have killed ten men your equal in a single day! Die quickly if you can—I have important things to do."

**Attributes:** Bod 6 (Str 10), Chi 0 (Fu 15), Mnd 6 (Int 5), Ref 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 18, Leadership 12, Seduction 10, Gambling 8, Info/Darkness Pagoda 14, Info/War 18

**Fu Schticks:** Signature Weapon (sword), Hands Without Shadow, Dim Mak, Lightning Fist, The Fox's Retreat, Crane Stance, Prodigious Leap, Flying Windmill Kick

**Weapons:** punch (11), kick (12), sword (17)

## General Fung

Ming I's oldest and most trusted soldier, General Fung is a strictly apolitical degenerate whose military genius and martial prowess are matched only by his decadence. It was General Fung who fought his way into the press around the mutilated teenage Ming I and carried her one-armed figure from the field of battle. Now in his subjective late 40s, Fung maintains a boyish appearance only by indulging in a diet not unlike that of his mistress. Though a merciless killer, Fung is not without some personal honor, and will not cheat in one-on-one combat. Fung and his elite troop of Innerwalkers and demons make up the Queen's personal bodyguard. Not only do they protect her from assailants, they guarantee that whatever influence Chamberlain and those like him garner, they ultimately lack the might to attempt a coup.

# LORD SHIH

Lord Shih isn't exactly like anything left in any of the current junctures. He's a Transformed Animal, but not a kind of animal that still survives. He's got charms against reversion, but still tries to avoid high magic areas—to the extent that's possible.

There are rumors regarding Lord Shih. Legends, fading quickly now that his world is a vanishing rumor on the lips of the dis-timed. Some say he is a vengeful ghost, others that he is part of the Four Monarchs' father's soul, bound into a demon. There are a hundred more versions, each more terrible than the last, all avidly repeated from mouth to ear among the servants and enemies of the Monarchs.

The truth is that Lord Shih is far older than the Monarchs' timeline, a survivor of several critical shifts who pledged himself to the Monarchs' sorcerer father, promising to serve his children until their deaths in exchange for protection from the high magic of their juncture.

Lord Shih led the armies of the young and inexperienced Monarchs to victory (he is a master of strategy and tactics) and helped map the order in which feng shui sites should be conquered (he is

## Lord Shih

**Sample Dialogue:** "All is not yet lost! I anticipated his treachery. I have . . . a plan."

**Attributes:** Bod 8 (Tgh 10), Chi 12, Mnd 8, Ref 8

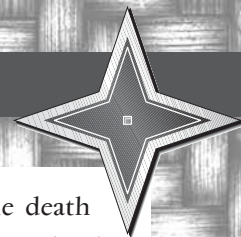
**Skills:** Martial Arts 18, Deceit 10, Driving 10, Leadership 18, Info/Four Monarchs 18, Info/Geomancy 18, Info/Secret War 20

**Transformed Animal Schticks:** Tiger: Mark Prey x4; Tortoise: Rebuke x3 (double Outcome, works on Arcanowave devices); Monkey: Caper x3; Fox: Swindle x2

**Fu Schticks:** Crane Stance, Wing of the Crane, Beak of the Crane, Talon of the Crane

**Weapons:** punch (9), kick (10)

## The Four Monarchs



also a master geomancer). He taught the Monarchs kung fu (he is a master of that as well) and has guided, guarded and advised each of them at their most crucial moments (for he is a true master of setting brothers and sisters against each other).

Lord Shih's contract ended with the death of the Monarchs' father. But the time is not yet right, so Lord Shih watches, and Lord Shih waits. Patient as the cunning beast of prey from which he is descended, he knows his time will come.



## CHAPTER 3

# Secret Battlefields

WHERE IT ALL GOES DOWN

### **Welcome to the Transtemporal Connective Passage Network!**

Greetings, Tactical Operative. You have just taken the first, vital steps in a fascinating journey into a wider universe than the one to which you are accustomed. The area that you are now within, the Transtemporal Connective Passage Network, is a sub-dimension of the real world known colloquially as the “Netherworld.” As authorized personnel, you are entitled to use the CDCA Biomass Reprocessing Center and the associated transtemporal facilities contained within the “Netherworld” as necessary in the execution of your duties.

### **Physical Surroundings**

You will notice that you are in a reassuring steel corridor terminating in an ebony curtain—the temporal displacement aperture through which you have just entered—and that the temperature is the regulation 22° Celsius. The CDCA maintains this entry tunnel for your comfort and convenience, as the prevailing conditions within the Transtemporal Connective Passage Network are moderately unpleasant. Should you need to venture outside CDCA facilities, you will find that the temperature is uncomfortably warm, the light seems to be an ambient background feature, and the air is moist and damp. This is natural. Do not be alarmed.

### **The Biomass Reprocessing Center**

The nucleus of BTM operations within the “Netherworld” is the Biomass Reprocessing Center. This CDCA facility is at the heart of our scientific research program. Once you have passed through the security installation in front of you and returned this leaflet to the holder at your left, this tunnel will convey you to the Center. You may then enter the Center if you have the proper clearance, or progress to your designated Temporal Displacement Aperture in order to carry out your instructions.

### **Security**

Due to the unique nature of this installation, security is considerable. When you have finished reading this leaflet, you must progress to the automated security unit where, in addition to retinal scanning, you are required to provide DNA and serum samples, voiceprint identification and brainwave pattern analysis. If everything is in order and your authorization has been cleared, you have no cause for concern.





# THE BIOMASS REPROCESSING CENTER

## BASIC LAYOUT

Set inside a large cavern, the Biomass Reprocessing Center is an imposing piece of Shaping. A huge construct designed in blackened steel and glass throughout, it consists of a number of buildings within a highly defended perimeter fence. The Center has a nasty reputation within the Netherworld—one it richly deserves. Partly, this is due to the way that every so often the Buro scientists decide that the best way to dispose of an unsatisfactory abomination is to kick it out of the compound and point it toward the nearest settlement. Another factor is the Architects' habit of occasionally sending out TacOps squads to kidnap miscellaneous Netherworld rabble. Those unfortunates who get grabbed are never seen again.

But the greatest source of dislike stems from the Architects' heightened sense of paranoia. The tunnels and caverns for miles around the Center are infested with cockroach-mounted audiovisual transmitters and other monitoring devices. It is extremely difficult to get anywhere near the Center unobserved without some handy sorcery or fu shticks, and this makes the surrounding district virtually unusable. Anyone foolish enough to pass within strike range of the Buro goons is risking a visit from rampaging abominations or worse. Navigating through the Netherworld, therefore, involves skirting the area around the Center, and that can be a real pain in the neck, especially if you want a gate to 2056.

The entrance, like the rest of the perimeter, is extremely well guarded. Once through the pleasant Reception Zone, the complex is dominated by the Advanced Arcanowave Research Facility (AARF). This is a large, blocky building made up of laboratories, workrooms and computer complexes. The Cyborg Development Area and Transtemporal Communications Building are linked to

the AARF, and all three buildings connect to the CDCA staff quarters and RecFac. The Hazardous Experiments Laboratory, the Close Combat Demoralization Unit Production Center and the Abomination Storage Wing are a fair distance from the rest of the Center, past the TacOps OpCenter, barracks, and mess.

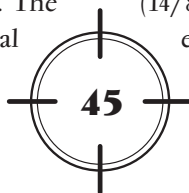
With its high-impact, gleaming black exterior and its unwelcoming array of Hellharrowers and other large weapons pointing out into the Netherworld, the Biomass Reprocessing Center glares out at its surroundings as the embodiment of the Buro's unofficial motto—"Overwhelming Force."

## Perimeter Defenses

The outermost defenses—concealed Hellharrower arrays—are found in the tunnels leading into the cavern. These are hidden in the floor and ceiling, under false panels. If the CDCA controllers decide that someone approaching the Center is a threat, the closest array is activated. Each array consists of four Hellharrowers which deploy with the whine of servo-motors, two rising out of the left and right sides of the floor and two dropping from the left and right sides of the ceiling. All four Hellharrowers then fire in a constant interweaving sweep pattern down the tunnel, making it essentially impossible to dodge.

The fence—or Perimeter Security and Integrity Maintenance System, as the CDCA likes to think of it—is almost as impressive. The basic structure involves three-meter guard pillars every twenty meters, with solid two-and-a-half meter walls connecting them. Everything is made out of foot-thick slabs of Curboatite, a Shaped material designed and immodestly named by Curtis Boatman. Curboatite is non-conducting, harder than any natural substance and naturally resists magic (-3 to the AV of any sorcery attempting to affect it). It doesn't melt until over 15,000° Centigrade, and it's extremely slippery to the touch.

Each pillar holds a rack of a four Hellharrowers (14/8/20) and a Woodchuck 70mm missile launcher (25/3/1), collectively aimed and operated by remote control from within the TacOps





Center. These defenses have the flexibility to point at the foot of the wall on either side of the guard pillar or to cover all the territory in between them. They can also be aimed up at the roof of the cavern. They cannot, however, point back towards the Center.

### **Cool Things That Could Happen Attacking the Perimeter Defenses**

- Once disabled, the tunnel defenses could be removed from their mountings, turned around to face the compound, and Fix-It'ed to be used against the guard pillars.
- The guard pillars themselves are bristling with ordnance. A well-placed incendiary or explosive attack could blow up an entire weapons array, which might even be enough to crack the pillar open.
- Someone with the ability to fly could swoop down on a guard pillar and wrench off a Hellharrower or Woodchuck launcher for use against abominations or TacOps squads.

## **Reception Zone**

Getting into the Center is a two-stage process. Getting through the outer gate involves passing a retinal and voiceprint scan and DNA sample analysis—personnel who have already passed those tests at the secure portal to 2056 have to pass them again anyway, just in case. Only authorized personnel and expected visitors whose names appear on a list held within the Center are admitted through this gate. Inside the outer gate, a hallway leads on to the manned, interior gate which leads to the facility proper.

A door off the entrance hallway leads to a pleasantly decorated reception suite for visitors. The reception suite is “attractively” decorated in a chic shade of Buro gray. Almost lifelike artificial ferns and other plants dot the walls in thirty-centimeter diameter steel barrels, and a water dispenser stands beside the door. The suite is dominated by a large meeting table, which can seat up to twelve. Over in one corner, a door leads to discreet toilet facilities and a washbasin. As a defensive measure, the entire reception suite is built over

a carpet of high explosives. Should things get out of hand, it is simplicity itself to blow the suite into teeny-tiny pieces. The Curboatite walls that bracket the area were designed with this explosion in mind, to prevent integrity of the base from being threatened. The suite has been used exactly twice since its construction, and was blown up on one of those occasions, killing everyone inside.

The inner gate is the real wall to the Center, and like the rest of the perimeter is made from thick Curboatite. The guards manning the second entrance have photographs of all authorized personnel stored on their computer system. The individuals identified at the first entrance as cleared for admission must match the appropriate photographs for a positive manual ID before the foot-thick gate is opened to admit them.

### **Cool Things That Could Happen in the Reception Zone**

- A squad of TacOps mooks or abomination guards could be lured into the suite just in time for the explosives to be set off.
- Someone could be knocked unconscious with a plant barrel or chair.
- The water dispenser could be shattered over someone's head.
- A mook could be stuffed headfirst down the toilet.

## **Arcanowave Advanced Research Facility**

An austere block of black steel and glass lurking at the heart of the Center, the Arcanowave Advanced Research Facility (AARF) dominates the compound. The AARF is the heart of the Biomass Reprocessing Center, where all the theoretical work and research is carried out. People enter and exit the AARF through the lobby, a gleaming entry hall with a small security team sitting at a long desk on the right. These guards—two or three of whom are on duty at any one time—monitor security programs and provide basic maintenance and support as required. At the back of the lobby, a rack of elevators allow access to the various floors

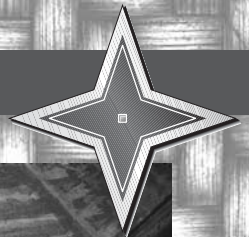


Illustration by Jim Povelet


of the facility. The first floor and basement of the AARF are dedicated to computer systems, building maintenance and technical support. Above the first floor, the AARF contains offices, workrooms, laboratories, libraries and other facilities. There are five of these floors, with the top one reserved for the Administrator's suite of offices and the Senior Researcher's facilities.

This sixth floor is actually quite pleasant. The Administrator's personal assistant sits in a carpeted lobby area facing the lift, with TacOps guards either side of the doors. The Administrator's and Senior Researcher's suites are off to the left of this lobby area, and include generous offices, pleasant meeting rooms—not mined with high explosives—and personal refreshment and recreation facilities. Boatman's office, private RecFac and personal laboratory are off to the right. All the windows and doors on the sixth floor are fitted with blast-shields. These drop almost instantaneously in case of a threat, and are designed to hold

determined intruders long enough for guards to arrive.

The Cyborg Development Area and Transtemporal Communications Area are both connected to the AARF. Like small outriders, these two-story buildings sit on either side of their larger cousin. The Cyborg Development Area is packed full of surgical operating theaters cum experimental laboratories, each of which is devoted to a different part of the development of a cyborg. The Transtemporal Communications Area is more fully-automated than the Cyborg Development Area, and much of it is given over to the production of the Transtemporal Communications Cable that the CDCA hopes will eventually provide a solid comm signal to all the open junctures (see *Seed of the New Flesh*, pp. 30-32).

Quarters and recreational facilities for the AARF staff are located behind the building, and are accessible from a corridor off the entrance lobby. Most staff live in dorms—ten to a



room—eat in a central canteen, relax in the games room or watch films from the computer’s library on the personal vid sets that are connected to each bed. Senior scientists get personal suites, varying in quality according to rank. The entire RecFac and Staff Quarters building is monitored by security staff to maintain high safety standards. Trysting is not forbidden; the RecFac contains two (theoretically) unmonitored “private recreation” areas, each consisting of a room with a large bed and a shower.

### Cool Things That Could Happen in the AARF

- Someone could be sliced in two in a doorway on the sixth floor when the blast-shields are activated.
- A computer monitor could be smashed over someone’s head.
- Inside a Cyborg Development Area, someone could be flung into the arms of a piece of waiting machinery, which would then activate and do unpleasant things to them.
- A large brawl could erupt within the canteen or games room, perhaps spilling over into a private recreation area.

## The High-Risk Laboratories

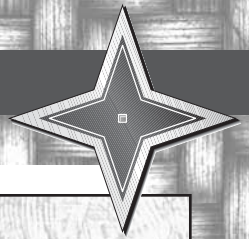
Certain operations within the Biomass Reprocessing Center are designated higher risk than others. The majority of these are conducted within the Hazardous Experiments Laboratory (HEL), a long one-story Curboatite building compartmentalized into several sections. The sections are separated with Curboatite partitions, to maximize security, and each has its own door out into the facility. Any experiment or procedure with a risk of catastrophic mishap is carried out in HEL, to make sure that if something blows up, misfires, causes feedback or goes on the rampage, the normal daily operations of the Center are not too badly disrupted. Most of the actual business of turning Underworld beings into abominations is carried out within HEL, in rooms fitted

with industrial Wave Suppressors to keep these beings docile. The most important lab in HEL is the Pacification Room, where the Neural Greppers are fitted. Without this lab in working order, most of the practical work in the Center cannot be carried out.

Adjacent to HEL is the Close Combat Demoralization Unit Production Center, also known as the “Benji Factory.” CCDUs are the Architects’ first mass-production abomination (see *Seed of the New Flesh*, pp. 74-75). Created from highly modified jiangshi, the CCDUs (known as Bouncing Benjis) are produced and stored within the Benji Factory. The process is highly automated and supervised largely by abominations, because occasionally a jiangshi escapes the production line. Several researchers were lost before full automation. The hopping vampires themselves are kept in a set of small rice-protected cells at one end of the building.

Netherworld rabble, convicts, prisoners and other undesirables are brought over from the TacOps holding pens and left in the cells with vampires until they are infected. At that point, the new jiangshi are placed in restraints and put on the start of the production line. A few hours later, new Benjis roll off the other end and are locked up in a different set of cells, ready to be shipped out of the Netherworld to serve the Buro. In an attack, the Benji pens are opened up and the inhabitants sent out into the compound grounds to slaughter anyone who is not wearing a valid security badge. Five to thirty Benjis are on hand at any given time.

The final building in the high-risk section is the Abomination Storage Wing. As well as serving as a sort of barracks for the larger and more vicious abominations, the Storage Wing also serves as a temporary prison for Underworld creatures awaiting manipulation and transformation. This section of the Storage Wing, the Biomass Hold (or “Meat Locker” to the TacOps troopers), can be extremely dangerous. Scientists and TacOps mooks do not enter the Hold if they can possibly avoid it; generally, abominations are sent in to imprison a specimen collected by monster-hunters, or to fetch a specimen for processing. Like the Benji Pens, the Abomination Storage Wing is thrown open in an attack; the number of inhabitants varies



according to the numbers of abominations dispatched to other sites recently. The Hold is not opened.

### Cool Things That Could Happen in the High-Risk Labs

- Someone could get pushed into the start of the Benji Factory production line. The results could be gruesome.
- The Biomass Hold could be thrown open. A lot of furious demons and other monsters want revenge on the CDCA.
- Cyborg operation machines could be used to do untold pain and damage to some poor, unprepared victim.
- If the Wave Suppressers in HEL were sabotaged, things could become extremely unpleasant for the researchers there.

## TacOps

The Tactical Operations Center and Barracks Building is home to the TacOps squads who provide security and human defense for the Biomass Reprocessing Center. The Ops Center is carefully located between the High-Risk Laboratories and the AARF, to motivate the soldiers in ensuring the integrity of the Hold and the Benji Factory. The perimeter defenses are controlled from within the Ops Center, and the various surveillance devices are monitored from here as well. All the operational facilities and offices are located on the first floor.

The second floor of the TacOps Center is given over to the TacOps Mess and RecFac, which they share with those abominations and cyborgs sentient enough to mix with humans in a non-combat situation. The third and fourth floors provide barracks space for the soldiers to sleep in. Drills are carried out in the compound.

The TacOps regulars are often unhappy to be sharing their dorms with abominations—their snoring is often even worse than their stench—but the Buro is absolutely firm on its policy of non-discrimination, and at least the cyborgs aren't too intrusive. The fact that the TacOps Center is considerably less impressive than the AARF Recreational Facilities has not gone unno-

### TacOps Trooper

**Sample Dialogue:** "Halt right there. Where's your ID?"

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

**Skills:** Martial Arts 7, Guns 8, Fix-It 6

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), Buro Avenger (11/2/6), Buro Reliant (9/1/6), Buro Blade of Truth (10/3/30, full autofire), Buro Blue Flag (13\*/4/30, full autofire)

### TacOps Sergeant

**Sample Dialogue:** "Move it you scum, or you'll envy those abominations!"

**Attributes:** Bod 8, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 7 (Spd 8)

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Guns 8, Detective 7, Intimidation 6, Leadership 5

**Weapons:** punch (9), kick (10), Buro Crimestopper (13/5/7), Buro Reliant (9/1/6), Buro Blade of Truth (10/3/30, full autofire), Buro Blue Spear (13\*\*/6/30, full autofire)

### TacOps Administrator

**Sample Dialogue:** "I can't do anything until you get the proper documentation, *consumer*."

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0, Mnd 7, Ref 4

**Skills:** Guns 5, Intimidation 7, Info/Administration 8, Info/Bureaucracy 8

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), Buro 9 (9/1/7+1)

ticed amongst the TacOps staff, who refer to the scientists' building as the dog pound. TacOps is also vaguely irritated that the CDCA retains control of the tunnel defenses.

### Cool Things That Could Happen at the TacOps Center

- Seizing control of the Center would give a character control of all the perimeter defenses except for the Hellharrows.
- The food in the mess could be drugged to help take out the mooks.

## PERSONNEL

The Biomass Reprocessing Center is a major installation, and as such is home to quite a large number of authorized personnel who fulfill a lot of different functions. The two sides of the base, research and security, are handled and



### Ani Long

**Sample Dialogue:** "Let me make myself plain. If you don't catch that Bouncing Benji, *you'll* be its replacement."

**Attributes:** Bod 7 (Tgh 9), Chi 0, Mnd 6, Ref 6 (Spd 8)

**Skills:** Martial Arts 9, Guns 16, Arcanowave Device 16, Deceit 8, Leadership 10, Info/Biomass Reprocessing Center Operations & Security 15, Info/Admin for the CDCA 13

**Arcanowave Shticks:** Feedback Enhancer, Wave Scanner

**Gun Shticks:** Hair Trigger Neck Hairs, Fast Draw

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), Buro Godhammer (12/4/5), Buro Blue Flag (13\*/4/30, full autofire), Buro Backup Arm (8/1/5+1)

### CDCA Arcanowave Researcher

**Sample Dialogue:** "Do we have any cats left? I have an idea . . ."

**Attributes:** Bod 4, Chi 0 (Mag 5), Mnd 7, Ref 5

**Skills:** Martial Arts 5, Guns 5, Arcanowave Device 7, Fix-it 7, Info/Arcanowave Technology 8, Info/Lab Assistant 8, Info/Computing 5, *one of:* Info/Biology 8, Info/Underworld Creatures 8, Info/Sorcery 6 or Info/Cybernetics 8

**Weapons:** punch (5), kick (6), really sharp lab scalpel (7)

### CDCA Project Leader

**Sample Dialogue:** "Mik, increase pressure by ten percent. Sal, activate program three. Dave, insert a number two heated wire one inch into its left retina. *Quickly*, people!"

**Attributes:** Bod 3, Chi 0 (Mag 5), Mnd 7 (Int 8), Ref 6 (Spd 3)

**Skills:** Guns 5, Arcanowave Device 8, Shaping 6, Info/Arcanowave Technology 10, Info/Biology 8, Info/Administration 8, Info/Computing 8, Info/Devise Experiment 8, *one of:* Info/Underworld Creatures 10, Info/Sorcery 8, Info/Cybernetics 10, Fix-it 12 or Medicine (Surgery) 10

**Weapons:** punch (4), kick (5), Buro 9 (9/1/7+1)

administered by the CDCA and BTM, respectively. As anyone serving at a Netherworld installation is going to be an Innerwalker, the staff of the Center rank more highly than their counterparts at bases in 2056. The CDCA is firmly in overall control of the Center, and the Buro's chief officer in the installation, Security Chief Ani Long, reports to the Base Administrator. Chief Long is a hardened officer in her forties, with a lot of experience behind her. She does not tolerate foolishness or joking around; she's got a hard job to do keeping the Center ticking over, and doesn't have time to waste on idiots.

TacOps provides all the primary guards for the Center. At any one time, that consists of four patrols—each with five troopers and one sergeant—walking around the compound in a set sweep pattern. In addition, there are dozens of static guards, five trained snipers manning the perimeter defenses and five operators keeping an eye on the monitors and sensors around the compound. TacOps work on twelve-hour shifts, so there are around 120 of them at the Center.

In addition to the TacOps patrols, there are also a number of abominations and experimental cyborgs patrolling the compound or available as reserves in case of attack. Their exact numbers and abilities can be decided by the GM as needed to move the plot along and provide an interesting challenge.

The CDCA controls the daily administration of the Center, and CDCA personnel number approximately 250. Most of the material produced at the Center is made with the aid of Shaped devices; some of it also contains Shaped components. Several of the scientists have been specially attuned to a number of feng shui sites by Dr. Boatman in order to gain robust Shaping skills—and then immediately de-attuned again. None of the research teams have arcanowave attachments; they've seen what they do to people. Where laboratories use arcanowave devices—as with the Wave Suppressors in HEL—these are powered by abominations kept restrained in boxes near the device and grepped to obey commands passed by computers, letting the researchers treat the abominations as additional pieces of equipment.

Professor D. Louis Southwell is the Senior Researcher at the Center, and the head of the various research projects being undertaken. An unassuming man in his early fifties with thinning red hair and a toothy grin, Professor Southwell is a genuinely twisted visionary. Most of his day is spent monitoring progress and assigning priorities for the various teams. During the evenings, he turns his attention to the projects themselves, looking at results, devising experiments and preparing reports.

The overall controller of the Center is Professor Ally Matthews. Although Matthews is young to hold such a responsible position, barely thirty-five, she is a brilliant and ruthless political



**Professor D. Louis Southwell**

**Sample Dialogue:** "It needs more formication.<sup>1</sup> Try cutting out the left patella and inserting . . . oh, say, forty milliliters of ants into the wound before covering."

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 1 (Mag 8), Mnd 8 (Int 10), Ref 5

**Skills:** Guns 7, Arcanowave Device 14, Fix-it 12, Info/Arcanowave Technology 15, Info/Arcanowave Theory 15, Info/Lateral Thinking 12, Info/Underworld Creatures 15, Info/Cybernetics 10, Info/Administration 10, Info/Torture 10

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), Buro Avenger (11/2/6)

**Professor Ally Matthews**

**Sample Dialogue:** "Hello? Yes? Well, kill it. Oh, kill them too, then. A pleasure. See you on Thursday? Good. Until then."

**Attributes:** Bod 7, Chi 4 (Mag 10), Mnd 8 (Cha 9), Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Guns 8, Arcanowave Device 12, Deceit 14, Fix-it 8, Intimidation 12, Journalism 11, Leadership 10, Seduction 11, Shaping 16, Info/Administration 15, Info/Bureaucracy 14, Info/CDCA Politics 14, Info/Arcanowave Technology 15

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), Buro Avenger (11/2/6)

I understand your concerns, but it is absolutely vital that we pacify the Netherworld. The long-term stability of our control requires that we be safe from the pre-dation of forces in other junctures. If we do not have the Netherworld locked down, we could be destroyed at any time. Would you like to wake up one morning and find yourself writing PR copy for a bunch of pious saffron-clad idiots?

—Excerpt from Memo HG8865DD3X (author: C. Boatman)  
Code Blue Supreme Secret: Buroresident Eyes Only

manipulator, and has a keen scientific mind. When she isn't buried in administrative issues, she is advising research teams or working through project details. She seems to possess an almost intuitive understanding of arcanowave technology, though she abandoned the actual *use* of arcanowave technology following an unpleasant accident that befell a colleague. She retains an EJAS port (see *Seed of the New Flesh*, p. 59) and a few devices (as the GM sees fit) for situations where she's more scared of impending death than of ending up as a puddle of sentient sludge. She is devoted to Curtis Boatman.

abominations; on the other, it gives rival factions a window through which they can obliterate the Buro, casting it out of time and space entirely. If this dilemma makes Johann Bonengel uneasy, it makes Curtis Boatman absolutely furious. The head of the CDCA has no intention of being caught out and left as a lonely relic of a long-lost reality, even if his gigantic Shaping skill would make life in the Netherworld relatively comfortable.

Accordingly, Boatman has several plans to help secure the Netherworld. Some of these Bonengel is fully aware of; others are being pursued quietly through miscellaneous research budgets, ready to be presented as *faits accompli*.

One of the most critical Netherworld projects is the Transtemporal Communications Cable. This modified fiberoptic wonder would, in theory, allow the Buro's many and varied electronic devices to communicate in real-time regardless of juncture, without expensive arcanowave modifications. Implementation involves running cable from the Biomass Reprocessing Center to a number of portals to other junctures, and then installing small comm stations at the other side. Due to the unreliable nature of portals and the hostility of the forces in the other junctures, the CDCA needs to find several different portals to each juncture, ideally ones which open outside Asia.

The comm stations can be hidden, at least in theory, so the big question facing the researchers is how to protect the cable in the Netherworld. Professor Southwell feels that the answer is to Shape ducting in the walls of passages, place the cable inside, and then reverse the Shaping, hopefully sealing the cable within the Netherworld wall safe from prying eyes. It would be a slow process, but it might just work. If it did, the

**PLANS FOR THE NETHERWORLD**

The Architects of the Flesh have an uneasy relationship with the Netherworld. On the one hand, without it they would lose access to the vast majority of the raw materials they need to create their

1. Formication (from the Latin *formica*, an ant): A medical term that refers to the sensation of ants crawling under your skin. That's right: *There is a medical term for the feeling of ants crawling under your skin.*



## Blood Jelly

**Sample Dialogue:** SquishsquishsquishsquishSLUUUURP.

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

**Skills:** Martial Arts 6

**Unique Shticks:**

*Dissolve:* Any metal, cloth or skin coming into firm contact with the Jelly—striking it, for example—automatically takes five points of Damage.

*Replicate:* Once an hour, the Jelly automatically splits into two fresh Jellies.

**Weapons:** engulf (10)

Buro would be able to monitor all junctures as thoroughly as they do their own, and it would become almost impossible to keep secrets from them.

Another plan that the Buroresident is aware of involves preparing a contagious biological assault on the denizens of the Netherworld (see *Seed of the New Flesh*, p. 30). The disease culture Bonengel's plan calls for is code named Agent Crimson Loss. It is highly transmissible, generally fatal and very difficult to treat or inoculate against. Someone contaminated with the virus is contagious through normal conversation after the first hour, but does not manifest symptoms until twenty-four hours. At that point, the victim starts feeling weak and achy as if he had a severe cold, until six hours later, when he suffers a complete full-body hemorrhage and collapses, dead. In Bonengel's vision, the shining Buro would then sweep out of the wings dispensing the cure, earning the love and loyalty of the people they had poisoned in the first place. Sorcery and fu would save quite a lot of people, but if Boatman gets to release the agent, many mooks and other rabble would be killed before the cure was dispensed. The Buro could stage a lot of inoculated soldiers at the BRC, and for a few days at least would gain a solid numerical advantage over the other factions to go with the great PR coup.

The most audacious plan is one that, to the best of Boatman's knowledge, Bonengel knows nothing about. It involves the creation of a self-

replicating abomination programmed to kill anything that moves. By fusing certain Shaped strands with demonic DNA and blending the resulting polymer with highly-modified cancerous stem cells, Boatman has managed to create a form of malevolent life that is able to duplicate itself swiftly. The end result is the Autonomous Self-Replicating Bioplastic Combat Unit, known affectionately as the Blood Jelly.

Blood Jellies are semi-fluid protoplasmic masses similar to amoebae, and they ooze along the ground at a fast walking pace. If an average-sized Jelly was poured into a sphere, it would have a diameter of about a meter. They grow continually; when they get to roughly twice their original size, they split into two new Jellies. This takes about an hour. Their demonic material powers them, so although they are continually hungry for living matter, they do not need it to replicate or to stay alive. When they do feed, they do it by engulfing a creature, secreting a powerful acid, and absorbing the fluid nutrients that result. Boatman's plan is to leave jellies in a rough ring of caverns far from the populated areas of the Netherworld. By the time they get to the busier areas, his computer simulations suggest that they will be an unstoppable tide, replicating too swiftly to be vanquished, eating everything in their path.

The down-side is that as the jellies have no brains of any sort, they cannot be fitted with Neural Greppers, and the same computer simulations suggest that the Biomass Reprocessing Center would be swept away in an acidic sludge. Boatman is trying to develop a field keyed to the Shaped elements within the Jellies that would dissolve them on contact. If he can develop devices to adequately protect individuals and the BRC, he will release the Jellies and then explain it to Bonengel as a research accident with beneficial consequences. The Netherworld would be permanently buried under a huge mound of acidic demon protoplasm and only people wearing the Buro's anti-Jelly field generators would ever be able to enter it again.

Well, that's the theory, anyhow.



# THE HUB

## PERSONNEL

### Rebecca Dupress

Rebecca Dupress is the linchpin of the Ascended's Netherworld organization. She is a genius of rare proportions, trusted by her transformed animal masters and given more responsibility than any mere CEO or national leader. Her successes directly advance the cause of the Lodge, while her rare failures affect entire junctures. Her budget could feed a third world country with ease. The Lodge attuned her to over a dozen feng shui sites so she could Shape the Netherworld effectively.

And yet, she's just a human, which means she has one of the most stressful jobs in the time stream. (From time to time, she and Rain Yuan get together and compare notes, but it only depresses both of them to know that neither of them have any answers.) It's all very well to be pampered, indulged and powerful, but Rebecca's too smart to forget that she's a tool for the benefit of others. So behind the placid, matronly exterior lies an Ascended lackey who's been wondering about the other possibilities in life. None of the other factions would ever trust someone who's so well-known as a Pledged minion; furthermore, the Lodge would spare no effort to track her down and make a very ugly example of her. Still, the resentment isn't going to go away. She's too tightly controlled to snap, but if someone gave her a chance to exercise her frustration safely the Hub itself might shake.

Rebecca wasn't born Pledged by any means; she was the orphaned child of a prominent MI-6 agent. Her father died when she was ten, leaving her with nothing but the fervent desire to follow in his footsteps. Her father's controller saw some of the same talents in her that he'd valued in her father, and against the advice of his superiors, brought her into the fold.

After a few years of highly successful operations, she gave her heart to the wrong man: a fellow agent, Roger Hattan. A year into

### Rebecca Dupress

**Sample Dialogue:** "Care for a boiled sweet?"

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 0 (Fu 4), Mnd 10 (Cha 5), Ref 7

**Skills:** Martial Arts 14, Guns 15, Deceit 15, Interrogation 12, Leadership 16, Shaping 14, Info/Netherworld 14, Info/Lodge Politics 16

**Fu Schticks:** Bite of the Dragon, Breath of the Dragon

**Gun Schticks:** Carnival of Carnage, Eagle Eye, Hair Trigger Neck Hairs

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8)

their relationship, he borrowed her life savings to pay off a gambling debt and vanished. The scandal sent her crashing out of the service and into private work, where the Lodge discovered her and earned her respect.

She looks about fifty-five years old and dresses like a grandmother; a sweet appearance is just another weapon in the political wars. Those who don't know her are often fooled by her meticulously polite manner. She is a genuine idealist, and wants to believe that the Lodge is the best government for the world. Of course, that idealism didn't save Roger Hattan.

## Leaders and Lieutenants

The Lodge doesn't recruit idiots into the Wheel very often, and those that do make it into the Wheel proper don't make it onto the management track. The Hub, as one of the most important Ascended installations anywhere, is solely staffed by trusted Wheel members. In other words, even mook squads with no named leaders use tactics a cut above the usual "run at the player characters with perfect spacing to make them look good." Ascended soldiers hit and run, lure characters into traps and are generally more annoying than the players will expect. If the opposition shoots down a squad leader, though, it's back to the usual mook inexpertise for the rest of the squad's unfortunate life. On the other hand, the Ascended have noticed this tendency—so a real Ascended squad leader can be identified by a small patch worn on the shoulder, while the most expendable member of each squad wears gaudy insignia of ersatz rank.



### Blue Pledged Soldiers

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Guns 10, Info/Ascended Procedures 6

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), Sig-Sauer P-220 (11/2/9+1), H&K MP5 (10/5/30) or Franchi SPAS-12 (13/5/7)

### Gold Pledged Soldiers

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

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Guns 11, Medicine 5, Info/Ascended Procedures 7

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), Sig-Sauer P-220 (11/2/9+1), H&K MP5 (10/5/30) or Franchi SPAS-12 (13/5/7)

## Rank and File

Rebecca divides her soldiers into two classifications: Gold and Blue. The Gold commandos are the elite, and any really tricky situations get Gold squads assigned to them. The Blues are the less experienced men. Under normal circumstances, a five-man squad consists of a Gold leader and four Blue troopers. Rebecca expects Blues to achieve Gold status eventually. Nobody stays Blue for more than two years without either being promoted or sent back to the surface world.

## Transformed Animals

Transformed Animals rarely descend into the Netherworld for anything more than brief trips between junctures. But the Unknown Name's policy mandates a quarterly inspection tour of the Hub and other Ascended Netherworld facilities. This duty is usually a punishment for poor service and

the inspections are as slipshod as they can get away with.

Fortunately, several higher-echelon Pledged leaders are loyal to their transformed masters; after all, the benefits of life in the Wheel are considerable. They've passed the word to certain trusted Lodge members, and as a result, the Family most suited to keep an eye on the Netherworld—Family Tortoise—has been rotating personnel through the Hub as much as possible.

Now, there are no transformed animal schticks that provide much defense against reversion, and the Path of the Storm Turtle—which boasts not a few transformed Tortoise practitioners—doesn't help much either. But both of them help guard against the sorcerers and Architect technology which infest the Netherworld, and when every reversion point counts, that matters. Besides, with no other transformed animal Family willing to take on the unpleasant task of guarding the Netherworld, the Tortoises are free to reap all the benefits of their hard work. In the politics of the Ascended, clear ground is hard to come by. Family Tortoise even has a special name for those daring enough to watch over the Pledged of the Netherworld; they call them the Sharpened Shells, and give thanks for sheer insanity.

Thus, at any given time there's probably a Tortoise nosing around the Hub, either officially or under cover. The most important thing about these Tortoises is that they're the insouciant risk-takers in the Lodge. Now, the Tortoise Family isn't known for derring-do, so those who believe in stereotypes have an interesting surprise ahead of them. The Sharpened Shells are almost without exception young, brash and unable to fit into the traditional style of Family Tortoise. They dress outrageously

*Dears,*

*As I'm sure you know, the turtles are showing up quite frequently these days. I've asked around upstairs and it's a private initiative with the support of His Nibs, so let's all do be polite about it. I know you're all taking steps to correct the dreadful performance metrics we saw last quarter so we don't have anything to worry about, yes? Yes.*

*Rebecca*



**Sheng Ming-tun,  
Typical Sharpened Shell**

**Sample Dialogue:** "Life without danger is like a bar without booze!"

**Attributes:** Bod 7 (Con 9, Tgh 10), Chi 7 (For 2), Mnd 5 (Int 7), Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 14, Guns 10, Detective 12, Shaping 3, Info/Lodge Politics 12

**Fu Schticks:** Inner Strength, Eye of the Storm

**Transformed Animal Schticks:** Reflect, Shell x2, Wise Fist

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), Mossberg Special Purpose (13/5/9)

Ming-tun was not raised in a Lodge Family; rather, he was one of the rare orphan transformed animals who slip through the Wheel's net. He grew up on the streets, and it wasn't until he was fifteen that he came to the notice of a Pledged operative—the stories of a street punk triad brat who could bounce bullets were too blatant to be ignored. He was raw trouble for a succession of perplexed host families within the Lodge until he found his niche as a Lodge assassin. Social graces remain beyond him, but a competent killer doesn't need to be social.

Alas, killing hapless humans didn't provide the flavor of danger Ming-tun remembered from his street days, so when he heard about the Sharpened Shells he eagerly signed up. Now, two or three days out of every week, he ventures down to the Netherworld to check up on the Pledged of the Hub and take care of other matters that require Lodge attention. He isn't terribly popular with most of the Ascended operatives, but his legendary drinking bouts provide him with some grudging respect.

for the sake of provoking their elders, befriend musicians and other questionable sorts and drink too much. Despite it all, they're pure Lodge underneath, utterly loyal to the goals of the Wheel and their Family—a real Tortoise outcast would wind up with another Family in the Lodge.

Transformed animals from 69 AD are safe from the ambient magic of the Netherworld; accordingly, there are approximately fifty transformed animals scattered throughout the Hub's staff. Most of them are in command positions, while a handful have found an exciting niche with the Sharpened Shells. Most transformed animals of this juncture, however, prefer a more comfortable life in a juncture that's controlled by their own kind.

Gangchen Kyishong is the highest-ranking transformed animal in the Hub; the Bear is Rebecca Dupress' assistant director. He is in fact quite loyal to her, being no bigot. His acceptance allows her to credibly give orders to the other transformed animals on her staff. He wor-

ries, recently, that the Tortoise toughs will end up undermining the best human administrator the Lodge has seen in decades.

**Getting Through  
the Netherworld**

Other transformed animals that must pass through the Netherworld prefer moving at the maximum possible speed. There's a special cadre of Pledged geographers dedicated to keeping accurate maps of portals and the paths between them; this is more important to the Ascended than to any other faction, given that a day's delay can be the difference between life and death for a Lodge operative. Normal operational doctrine calls for transformed animal "sleigh runs" to be mapped out forty-eight hours in advance of the mission, and run twice by Pledged squads twenty-four and twelve hours in advance, just to make sure everything's clear.

In most cases, this is overkill—the average transformed animal can survive for several weeks in the Netherworld and still have an even chance of retaining human form. Still, those odds assume no interruptions or delays and that the transformed animal isn't coming from the dangerous 69 AD juncture. No matter how good one is at surviving in a hostile environment, it's always better to be elsewhere.

Furthermore, transformed animals never travel the Netherworld alone. Since the unfortunate Fire Temple incident in 1995, the Unknown Name forbids solitary travel—the minimum force is four, plus any Pledged assigned to the mission. This has the advantage of ensuring greater numbers in case of trouble; on the other hand, it has the drawback of giving Jammers, Dragons and other ne'er-do-wells some rather tempting targets.

**THE FORTRESS**

From the outside, the Hub is—well, it's invisible. Rebecca Dupress' greatest Shaping achievement is the complex network of mirrors and chi conduits which hide the Hub from view. Not



## Chapter 3

only is it invisible, but despite the gigantic size of the structure, anyone who does happen to wander past the hidden Ascended observation posts and through the maze which lies between the Hub and the rest of the Netherworld tends to shake his head and walk away again. The sophisticated chi flow discourages interest in the entire area.

If you could see it, however, you'd see an enormous round structure, shaped like a wheel with eight spokes. It's chromed (more mirrors) with brass accents, which glint golden in the odd light of the Netherworld. Each spoke is perhaps the length of a football field and half as wide; the rim of the wheel is the same width, and the hub in the center is easily fifty meters across. Most of the structure is two stories high, except for the hub and central tower, which have an additional story. It's like the Pentagon with more style.

Inside, it's divided into eight sections: four main spokes and four secondary spokes. Each spoke is devoted to one division of the Hub's orga-

nization. From the twelve o'clock position, working counterclockwise, the large spokes house Command, Military, Research and Security. The small spokes house Logistics, the secondary Military spoke, the secondary Research spoke and Geomancy.

The interior is not half as impressive as the outside. It's a functional building, filled with corridors and offices. The security is, of course, top-rate—the entrance is well-guarded, and the guards check badges religiously. There are also checkpoints between the sections.

### Military

General Aurelio Oliveira is in charge of the Ascended military presence in the Netherworld. He's got the largest division in the Hub, in terms of personnel; the Raging Tiger Battalion is fully staffed at one thousand men. The Military division

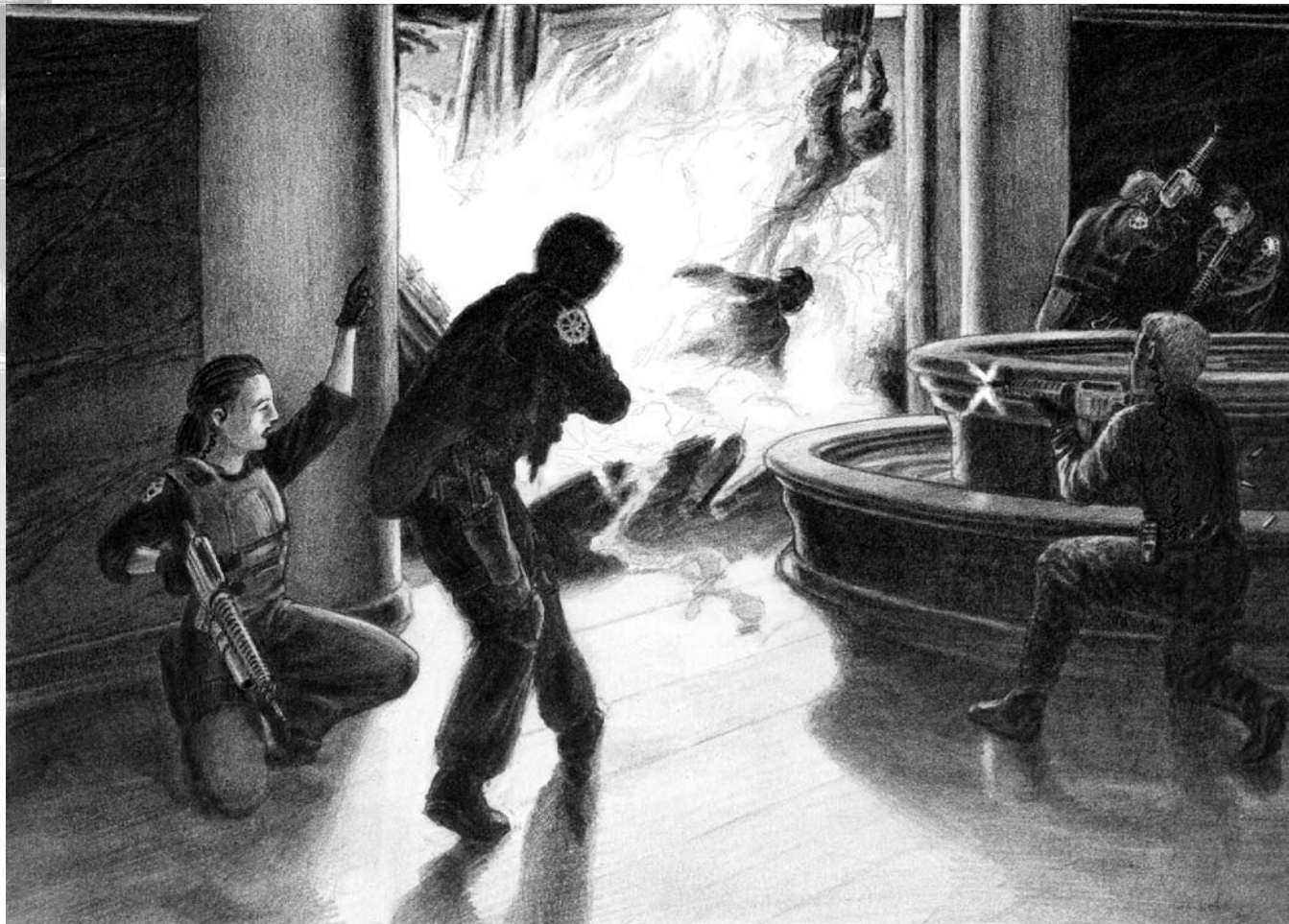
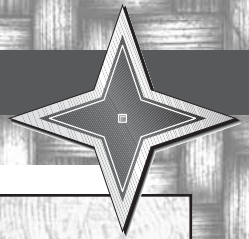


Illustration by Andrew Baker



is the only division that occupies more than a spoke of the wheel; General Oliveria's troops bunk down in underground living quarters, and the spaces between spokes serve as training grounds.

The underground areas of the Hub are a true maze, which is just how General Oliveira likes it. Those who're meant to be there know how to get around, and intruders are likely to get lost unless they're extremely careful. On the bright side, the Hub's armories are located down there, so any group of intruders with the wherewithal to take on a crack squad of guards and break through a foot-thick steel door has the benefit of more weaponry than they can reasonably carry.

## Broken Wheel Brigade

The least likely element of the Ascended Netherworld military presence is the Broken Wheel Brigade. When it was created four years ago,

### Corporal Tangie

**Attributes:** Bod 7, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 13, Guns 13, Deceit 14, Medicine 10, Sabotage 10, Info/Erased 1946 Juncture 15, Info/Netherworld 10

**Gun Schticks:** Eagle Eye

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), Mankiller .45 (a gun from Tangie's home juncture that looks hand-carved but can handle .45 ammo — 12/3/10)

Dupress deemed it a near-certain failure; much to her surprise, it's not only succeeded but thrived.

Membership in the Brigade is open only to those from closed junctures. The Brigade recruits aggressively among the displaced and the disaffected of the Netherworld, offering a home for people who no longer have a home. Anyone, no matter how undisciplined, may join the Brigade; a rigorous six-month training camp washes out approximately 80% of the new recruits, but a 20% success rate is still better than anyone expected.

PERSONNEL REPORT: Tangie, NFI, NMI


Corporal Tangie is a three-year veteran of the Broken Wheel Brigade who has proved her worth many times during that period. She carries the Shattered Star medal for valor in combat, which she earned during the Mind Shredder operation against the Buro. She is a member of the 2nd Squad of the 3rd Company.

She is 3' 10" tall, and weighs 134 lbs. Her muscle is unusually dense. She is bright green and hairless. As a concession to our modesty, she wears a makeshift singlet. She is otherwise humanoid.

There is some uncertainty regarding her background. She claims to be an alien who arrived on Earth in a now-closed juncture before a critical shift. While Research has validated the existence of this juncture, we do not have enough information to confirm her story. We do know that the technology of this juncture permitted extensive cosmetic surgery, which is an alternate explanation for Corporal Tangie's appearance. However, we have no records of alien contact in any other juncture (open or closed) and must conclude that real alien contact is a very low-probability event.

Therefore, we request further investigation to confirm Corporal Tangie's veracity before we can recommend her for OCS.

TANGIE, THEY'RE ONTO YOU. COME CLEAN AND GET IT OVER WITH.  
- MARK



Unsurprisingly, the Brigade is prone to using unorthodox methods. Morale is generally sky-high, and few Brigade members balk at even the most dangerous missions. The Order of the Wheel has provided them with a new reason for living and a new home, and most of them would do anything for it. While Dupress is not precisely thrilled with the success rate of such an unorthodox group, she's not dumb enough to leave them idle.

At present, the Brigade boasts seventy-five men and women. It's commanded by Colonel Takashi, a grizzled veteran of the Secret War; his second-in-command is Lieutenant Parker, who's rumored to be Takashi's daughter. The Brigade is further divided into three companies, with each company consisting of five squads. There are also several unofficial groups within the Brigade, formed by affinity rather than chain of command.

## Research

Research is a synonym for Intelligence; this division is the home of the Ascended's spies. The Research division is run by Tsien Lap-Man, a hefty Chinese expatriate from Hong Kong. It's staffed by fifty Pledged who handle intelligence analysis, plus an unknown number of operatives inside other Netherworld organizations.

While most of this section is cubicles, offices and messy desks, the computer center located at the inner end of the spoke is the kind of place tech-heads dream about. Not only is the fifty-foot-square room filled with the most advanced computers known to the contemporary juncture, the data inside those computers is the fruit of years of Ascended spycraft. Unsurprisingly, it's the best-protected room in the Research section.

It's also a great place for a fight. Tsien keeps backups, so security in this area is trained to take up positions right in front of whirring databanks, so that any thief who misses them takes out the very information he came to steal. There's also a high-powered Halon fire extinguisher system ready to complicate matters. And don't forget that hard drives are really just platters spinning at thousands of RPMs, ready to fly free like deadly frisbees at the slightest provocation.

Along with the spies, Research houses a small scientific division in cooperation with the Geomancy division. They've produced a number of interesting developments, including the infamous cloning tanks.

## Cloning Tanks

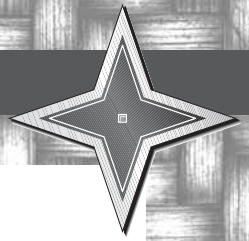
The research boffins spent years working on cloning—every secret evil world-spanning conspiracy wants clones. Unfortunately, they were only able to prove that cloning humans is next to impossible—at least, impossible to pure science. However, there was one useful side product, which is kept under lock and key in a basement room labeled “Cloning Tanks: Keep Out.”

While there's no chance of duplicating appearance, it turns out that it is fairly simple to impress a given pattern of human chi energy onto a suitable subject. (Once, that is, you've spent five years researching the problem.) You need to be able to measure the chi flow in meticulous detail, and you need to find a suitable subject. The first problem was solved during the original cloning experiments, and the second problem was solved after a bright researcher thought of trying demons.

What do you get if you superimpose a human's chi flow patterns onto a sedated demon? A psychological clone of the original; the demon won't ever look like anything other than a demon (short of the Transformation schtick), but he thinks and acts exactly like the original. There's always divergence after the imprinting, of course. The duplicates aren't like radio receivers reading the minds of the original. They're more like psychological duplicates put into new situations.

The “clones” are fairly useful for a number of purposes. The Hub no longer needs to keep someone captive in order to interrogate him. Dupress can aim for the sympathy by allowing a captive to go free “As a good will gesture, dear; we're not animals, you know.” The grateful prisoner wanders off while the interrogation experts in Research go about their unpleasant work on a duplicate. As a bonus, demons are less likely to die under torture.

Secondly, although more rarely, the Lodge sends a captive down to the Hub to be



## Identity Measurement Q&A

*Q: So, if the Ascended can measure a person's chi flow that well, can they use those measurements to penetrate disguises and the like?*

*A: Absolutely, but the machinery takes up an immense amount of room. It could be mobile if you were willing to use all the space in an entire double-decker bus. The Unspoken Name has one installed in his sanctum, Draco refused one on the grounds that he had no need for it and the original remains in the Hub.*

duplicated for psychological warfare. Typically, the duplicate is released on the original's home turf to cause trouble. If it seems useful, the duplicate is brainwashed first. It's disconcerting when a demon shows up with your best friend's memories, quirks and desires, but it's even worse when he "remembers" you turning him into a demon.

## Security

The Security division handles internal security in the Hub, including both physical security and internal affairs. As such, Security's commander Paula Morrison is constantly engaged in a political battle with Tsien Lap-Man and General Oliveira. Tsien thinks his division could do a better job of keeping the rest of the Hub honest, and General Oliveira feels his troops are better suited for guarding the complex. However, Rebecca Dupress prefers the redundancy of separate divisions. That way Research and Military serve as a check on Security, and *vice versa*.

The Security section is notable for having the only bar in the Hub. Both Morrison and Dupress would love to see the Golden Wineglass shut down, but it's run by the Sharpened Shells and it would be less than diplomatic to push the issue. The bar is small, made from a few adjoining offices with the walls knocked down, but the alcohol it serves is top-rate. Nobody's quite sure how the tortoises smuggle supplies in. The bartenders are off-duty Security staffers: If Morrison must tolerate the bar she's going to keep a close eye on it.

## Logistics

The Logistics department is in charge of getting Lodge members through the Netherworld as quickly as possible. That this task is important to the Lodge is clear from the fact that they've put an entire division on the task. Logistics is managed by Hui Min, and contains about a hundred staffers.

Along with the transportation services Hui Min provides, she manages a thriving experimental division dedicated to alleviating the effects of magic on transformed animals—or at least finding a method of shielding them. In her portion of the central hub, there's a complex of laboratories full of scientists and experimental subjects. Now you know what the Lodge does with failures.

Those subjects who are still functional and sentient are completely prepared for any opportunity to escape or simply cause havoc. If the PCs have ever defeated any Lodge agents, this would be a marvelous opportunity to bring them back on stage.

## Geomancy

Yuen Meh-funh runs the Geomancy section; he's a Lotus traitor who thinks the Lodge has a better chance of winding up on top when the dust settles. He commands the smallest division in the Hub, since it's hard to find competent geomancers, but he takes up as much room as anyone else because he needs space for his map rooms.

The map rooms are Meh-funh's pride and joy. They contain scale models of the Netherworld based on the work of the Research division and the chi extrapolation techniques of his team. With the help of Rebecca Dupress, he's been able to read some of the Netherworld chi flows remotely and use them to map inaccessible areas. The maps are marvels to behold: three-dimensional models of the Netherworld with little scale models of buildings.

There's an interesting side effect to the chi apparatus used to maintain the models; in the map room, sorcery, arcanowave device, and creature power modifiers may vary by one or two points from the Netherworld norm. The precise modifier changes from moment to moment.



## Command

This is Rebecca Dupress' division. Other than her, it's made up of the support staff needed to keep anything the size of the Hub going. There's little excitement in this section, except for Rebecca's office proper. It's the most luxurious suite of rooms in the Hub, and is her only concession to creature comfort.

Inside, it's everything you'd expect from an Ascended luxury suite: the largest desk in the world, gold-plated bathroom fixtures and surveillance monitors that can pick up any corridor or room in the Hub. Fights here are likely to involve the destruction of priceless artwork, mooks popping out of secret passageways and (if a Big Bruiser is involved) laying about with the desk.

## PLANS FOR THE NETHERWORLD

The hardest truth the Lodge faces is that, somewhere between 1996 and 2056, they lost. There is no Lodge in 2056, simply a few very scattered transformed animals with more determination than organization. The Lotus is the Lodge's most hated enemy, given their advantageous juncture positioning and their magical abilities, but it's the Buro that won.

Rationally, there's no point in taking revenge on the future. However, the pride of the Unknown Name sometimes overrides reason, and the Buro is unquestionably a problem. A special Lodge think tank was tasked with solving the Buro problem in 1994. By 1996, they had a plan. Operation Bootstrap was born.

## The Tools

The Ascended can't carry out large-scale operations in 2056, due to the relatively high level of magic and the pervasive influence of the Architect-oriented chi flow. That's okay. The Ascended know how to use other people to

get what they want, and they've discovered the perfect tools: The Jammers.

After the Molten Heart debacle, the Lodge is unwilling to work directly with anyone untrustworthy, and the Jammers qualify. Therefore, their methods are necessarily indirect, including tactics like funneling resources to the Jammers, attacking the Architects as a matter of policy and so on. This is not as efficient as direct aid, but it's considerably safer.

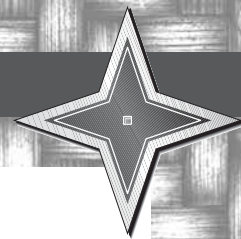
## The Plot

The first step of Operation Bootstrap is weakening the Architects on their home ground. The Ascended discovered some time ago that it's nearly impossible to take and hold feng shui sites in 2056, but after some detailed analysis of Jammer operations they've realized that it's not half as hard to succeed with a "scorched earth" strategy. Thus, at any given moment, one might find an Ascended suicide team blowing up PubOrd barracks or a propagandist team injecting its own programming into Buro television. The Lodge has also taken to shipping captured enemies and malcontents to 2056 for the sake of pure terrorism.

More subtly, the Ascended have leaked news of some of their own weapon shipments to the Jammers and allowed the monkeys to capture them. The Jammers have had significantly better luck attacking the Architects since they got their hands on high-powered Ascended assault gear.

The second step of Operation Bootstrap is the decisive blow. The Lodge cannot guarantee that the Jammers will take advantage of the chance, but they have hopes. For the past six months, the very best computer hackers money can buy have been slowly worming their way into the Buro's computer systems. They're leaving logic traps, worms, viruses and programming bugs behind.

Everything is set to go off on June 24th, 2057 (Draco's birthday). On that day, the Ascended intend for every computer system in 2057 to spew spurious results—or at the very least, to crash. An hour before midnight, every Jammer leader the Ascended know about will receive an anonymous transmission urging them to be ready.



The Buro's society depends on computers. Their absence should give the Jammers a window of opportunity to take over using the low tech, ad hoc methods against which the Buro is weak.

## Involving the Players

The Ascended want to make the Jammers successful. To the degree that they succeed, player characters (and others) will certainly notice.

- The Prof eventually realizes someone's backing the Jammers; she wants to find out who they are. What if the player characters choose to investigate one of the anti-Architect operations that's secretly backed by the Lodge?
- The Ascended are encouraging the Jammers to create beachheads in other junctures, often by weakening the feng shui sites of their enemies just enough for the Jammers to make a successful attack. What are the odds that the player characters are among those enemies?
- If the player characters spend any time in 2056, a clever GM ought to be able to arrange matters so they're present for D-Day. The characters are faced with a choice between restoring order for the Buro and joining in the mysterious revolution. Alas, not all revolutions are led by nice people.

## What Happens Next?

If the Ascended succeed, the Jammers won't have much time for the Secret War for a while. However, inevitably, they'll turn their attention to the other junctures. After all, everywhen needs help throwing off the tyranny of chi. That's when the Ascended will shut down the chizu around the MonkeyHouse (see page 82).

If the Jammers follow the usual revolutionary model, they'll abandon their principles as soon as they win. On the other hand, the usual revolution isn't run by nihilist monkeys. Even if the Jammers don't sell out, the Wheel is betting that lowered arcanowaves give them a better shot at seizing the future from the contemporary juncture.

# THE JUNKYARD

## MEMENTO MORI

Heroes die. Causes fail. The tides of the Secret War shift and factions are broken in battle, their followers slain and their fortresses shattered. Sometimes the victors comb the debris, looking for valuable plunder, but most times the remnants of the fallen are simply swept away. Sooner or later, it all finds its way into the Junkyard.

The Junkyard fills a wide cavern strategically located in the "center" of the Netherworld, with passages connecting directly (well . . . it's a fairly short trip, anyhow) to the territories of the Four Monarchs. In the past many groups claimed this crossroads as their own only to find themselves beset from all sides and eventually overrun. Strongholds were built and abandoned, and the cavern floor accumulated growing piles of wrecked equipment and possessions.

When the Four Monarchs retreated from their timeline into the Netherworld and captured large territories for their own, many of those they defeated were driven into this cavern, carrying whatever they could salvage. Not long after, the tyrants carted even more junk into the area. None of the Monarchs wanted to expend the resources necessary to hold the crossroads, but they wanted to be certain that if they couldn't keep it, no one else would, either. They set about turning the cavern into a buffer zone, so jammed with crap that no one in his right mind would want to claim it. Unfortunately, their plan worked a bit too well. They inadvertently turned the Junkyard into a haven for the desperate and the daring, a refuge for the band of heroes that calls itself the Dragons.

The Junkyard is a bewildering tangle of Shaped and non-Shaped structures, piled atop one another to the point that it's impossible to tell where reality ends and unreality begins. Thick mists ebb and flow unpredictably through the cavern, lit by perpetual moonlight. The cavern floor is uneven, Shaped in places to form small hills that



beckon hauntingly above fields of debris. Old structures perch atop these hills, many of them long-abandoned and falling to ruin. The scavengers and traders who make up most of the cavern's population, as well as their erstwhile champions, the Dragons, find sanctuary in tunnels and chambers hidden within the mountains of junk along the cavern floor. There are numerous gateways (mostly uncharted) scattered throughout the cavern, and despite the Monarchs' best efforts, the many passages heading into and out of the Junkyard remain open, providing routes to most places in the Netherworld.

Though once plagued by hunting parties from the Four Monarchs and horrific "field tests" conducted by the Architects, for a time the Junkyard was a fortress in its own right, its people organized and protected by the Dragons. Since the heroes' tragic downfall, the Junkyard has slipped back into lawlessness, and a number of local factions are jockeying to fill the void. Any new Dragons the Prof

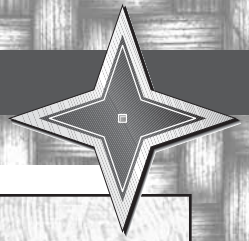
finds have friends to win, people to influence, and asses to kick before they can put their house back in order.

## The Boneyards

The vast heaps of trash and junk piled in the cavern are collectively referred to as the Boneyards by locals because of the remains left behind from the many battles fought in the area (not to mention the odd discovery of an abomination's last meal). DPs and runaways from the Monarchs' kingdoms live like rats amid the rubbish, scavenging for useful items to sell at the Bazaar (see below), or preying on travelers for food and possessions. Though some of these "boneheads" operate alone, most are clannish, forming gangs or collectives comprised of individuals from a wide variety of timelines. These groups stake out their own little parts of the Boneyards, learning every inch of its twisting pas-



Illustration by Richard Pace



sages and setting traps for the unwary (a corpse being much easier to rob than a living, kicking person). In the past, the Dragons managed to influence the leaders of the major gangs to work together as a sort of militia, using their knowledge of the Boneyards' labyrinths to track and ambush raiders or spies. Some gang leaders still feel some loyalty to the Dragons and their cause, but are afraid to step forward and continue to struggle without heroes like McCroun and Donovan to stand beside them.

The boneheads live in warrens excavated from the junk heaps, using impressive feats of engineering to create, then conceal, their lairs. Much of their technique stems from the work of one man, a bonehead named Justinian who was a brilliant engineer and soldier in his home timeline. He was one of the first Junkyard residents won over by the Prof and the Dragons, and was the architect of their hidden base. After the disaster at the Red Lantern Inn, Justinian went into hiding somewhere in the Boneyards, and hasn't been seen since.

Since the Dragons were routed, the Boneyards have become a wild and dangerous place even for well-armed groups of warriors. Hunting parties from the Darkness Pagoda and the Fire Pagoda are constantly prowling through the area, searching for the Dragons' base, and the Architects have released at least two major abominations into the Junkyard with orders to hunt down any Dragon sympathizers.

### One-Eye Hsien

The worst menace comes from the scavengers themselves. A powerful and ruthless bonehead from the 69 AD juncture named One-Eye Hsien has set his sights on controlling the Junkyard, and his gang of cutthroats and fu fighters are ruthlessly eliminating the competition, wiping out rival gangs and coercing allegiance from others. He has already begun harassing Bazaar folk and traders along the main cavern routes, an action obviously intended to show the Bazaar elders that soon he will have the power to isolate them from their livelihood at will.

In his time, One-Eye Hsien served the eunuchs of the Imperial Court as a thief, a murderer and—worst of all—a tax collector. A wiry, weasel-like fiend, he exulted in his authority and abused it whenever possible, spreading terror throughout his home province and pocketing a tidy

### Ordinary Bonehead

**Sample dialogue:** "Hey, leggo! That's my stuff!"

**Attributes:** Bod 3, Chi 0, Mnd 3, Ref 4

**Skills:** Martial Arts 2, Deceit 2, Fix-it 2, Intimidation 1, Info/Boneyards 2

**Weapons:** punch (4), kick (5), club (6)

### One-Eye Hsien

**Sample dialogue:** "You think you can come and go as you please? This is *my* territory, you pitiful son of a monkey, and there is a price to pay if you want to pass. Show me what you've got—or Liu Xian will show you how hard it is to walk on broken legs."

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 7

**Skills:** Martial Arts 14, Deceit 2, Gambling 2, Intimidation 3, Info/Junkyard 5

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), knife (9)

profit on the side. The eunuchs didn't care one white about how Hsien did his job—only about the results—and for a while, life was good.

Unfortunately, Hsien never could leave a good thing alone. Soon, it wasn't enough to be one of the eunuchs' chief thugs—he wanted power to rival the eunuchs themselves. But being a capable thug is not the same as being a master of intrigue. Before Hsien knew it, the eunuchs had placed a considerable price on his head.

Without options, Hsien fled into the Netherworld and wound up in the Junkyard. Going back to his roots, he formed a new gang, and now has set his eyes on controlling the whole place.

## The Bazaar

When the Four Monarchs began carting the detritus of their conquests to the Junkyard, it never occurred to them that a despot's trash might be an exile's treasure. It wasn't long before refugees and DPs from outlying settlements started prowling the Junkyard for things they could use, even if only as raw materials. Rumor has it that even agents from rival factions plied the Boneyards from time to time, in search of artifacts or treasures that might have gone unnoticed. Scavengers bartered with one another for choice items, giving birth to a



## Typical Hawker

**Sample dialogue:** "Noble sir, you look like a man of great insight and sophistication. You certainly can appreciate these fine . . . metal things my son discovered in the fields yesterday. Look at their quality! I'm sure they would be of great use to one such as yourself."

**Attributes:** Bod 3, Chi 0, Mnd 4, Ref 4

**Skills:** Deceit 2, Gambling 2, Info/Appraisal 4

**Weapons:** punch (4), kick (5)

## Johnny Fong

**Sample dialogue:** "What do I care about your heroic causes? Look around you. Do these people look like warriors? All they want is to live their lives in peace. Lunatics like the Prof are going to get them killed in the crossfire. You know I'm right. If you really cared about making our lives better, you would help me find her."

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 9, Guns 9, Deceit 2, Intimidation 2, Leadership 3

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), knife (7), Browning BDM (10/2/15+1)

market that now draws exiles from across the Netherworld.

The Bazaar is a sprawling, claustrophobic tangle of alleys and cleared squares circling the base of a large hill in the center of the Junkyard. Here, groups of traders gather to barter their wares to other exiles or even to Secret Warriors in search of hard-to-find items or materials. Everything from flint arrowheads to "salvaged" Buro equipment can be found, for a price. Some buyers are in a hurry to get a crucial piece of equipment; others are meticulous exiles poring through merchants' booths looking for cast-offs that remind them of home.

Like the boneheads, the people who run the Bazaar operate in tightly-knit groups, generally larger and better-organized than typical scavenger gangs. For every hawker in the Bazaar, there are a dozen or more compatriots who, at any given time, are scrounging the Boneyards for more goods, traveling to other parts of the Netherworld to trade with other exiles or standing guard over the loot the group already has. The hawkers aren't quite so clannish as the boneheads, and are always on the lookout for new members, especially people who are good at fixing things. Pickpockets are equally valued among the more seedy

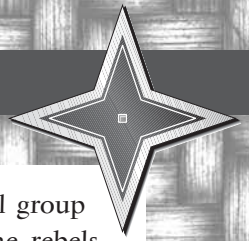
hawkers; if you go treasure-seeking in the Junkyard, watch your back.

Initially, the hawkers supported the Dragons, seeing their protection as good for trade. Their allegiance has since left them open to reprisals from the Four Monarchs and the Architects. Many are now bitter and resentful at the Prof's stubborn refusal to surrender to her enemies. The four largest hawker groups have formed a loose alliance, led by an exile named Johnny Fong, to appease the Dragons' enemies. They are trying to sway the rest of the Bazaar's hawkers—whom they see as the only true "citizens" of the Junkyard—to present a unified front that publicly repudiates the Dragons and their causes. To that end, they have offered a reward to anyone with knowledge of the Dragon's hidden base, or that of the engineer Justinian. Johnny Fong is less than forthcoming about his agenda once the Prof is taken care of, but many boneheads believe he will offer the Dragon leader to the Ascended in exchange for assistance in subjugating or eliminating the scavengers completely. From there, the hawkers would have the strength they need to bring the Junkyard's fringe groups—the Monastery, Colonel Carville's Crosstime Circus and the Temple of the Weeping Maiden—under their control.

## Johnny Fong

Johnny Fong was an up-and-comer in one of Hong Kong's powerful Triads when a Lodge agent recruited him. They wanted Fong to take control of the Triad and use it to put pressure on another "gang" operating in the city—the Dragons. Fong had never heard of them, but for the kind of money the Lodge was offering, he'd give them his own grandmother.

As it turned out, the Dragons were a lot tougher than Fong knew. In a series of encounters, they smashed the Triad, and Fong was lucky to escape with his life. His secret masters were not pleased with his failure, but were prepared to give him one last chance. Fong was sent into the Netherworld and ordered to infiltrate the Junkyard in preparation for something called Operation Killdeer. His job was to locate the Dragons' secret base so that when the plan came to fruition, they could decapitate the faction's leader-



ship in one stroke. Fong promised results, and slipped into the Junkyard like any other exile.

Once again, the Dragons proved more resourceful than Fong imagined. Their base eluded him, no matter what he tried. Operation Killdeer came to fruition, but when the time came for Fong to do his part, he came up empty-handed. His superiors curtly summoned him to the Hub.

Fong knew perfectly well what would happen there, so he ignored the summons (how much more displeased can they get?) and is staking everything on one last effort. If he can turn up the Prof and hand her over, perhaps the Ascended will see their way to forgiving him. He's got nothing left to lose.

## The Monastery

Set atop a hill near the edge of the Junkyard's cavern, a crumbling imitation of a medieval monastery rises into the almost-moonlight. Clockwork engines and the crackling of ozone can be heard echoing from within at any given hour. The crumbling structure is home to the Order of Ignatius the Artificer, Saint of Constructors.

The monks of St. Ignatius are, ironically, exiles from the same timeline as the Four Monarchs. In the 16th century Europe of the Monarchs' Earth, the outlawed Christians attempted to resist their conquerors by creating an underground religion that fused holy doctrines with principles of mathematics and engineering, hoping to inspire brave souls to one day defeat the tyrannical sorcerers through pure, "God-given" technology. By the 1900s, these underground monastic orders had developed remarkably sophisticated techniques for their time, having created clockwork timepieces, adding machines and steam-driven engines, among other innovations. After 400 years there was no longer any distinction between their covert purpose and their overt nature; by the 20th century God was literally in the machine, as far as they were concerned.

By the early 1980s, their long years of study and persecution at last bore fruit, and they were able to provide crucial spiritual advice to rebel forces who planned to go back in time to

undo the rule of the Monarchs. A small group of monks volunteered to accompany the rebels into the Netherworld to provide ongoing consultations and establish a base of operations. As it happened, their advice was indeed crucial, and its effects were more far-reaching than they imagined. The world of the Monarchs was no more—but so was the church they served. Unable to face a world of heathen technology the monks remained in the Netherworld, taking up an existence of scientific contemplation. When the Monarchs came storming through the gateway to establish their rule in the Inner Kingdom, it seemed that the ways of the Lord were truly mysterious indeed.

The monks continue their holy work in the Junkyard, refining their theories and offering assistance to any who would usurp their ancient foes, the Monarchs. They also occasionally lend out their unorthodox technical skills in return for a tithe or an errand on behalf of the monastery. The Junkyard's hawkers try to curry their favor at every turn, but the recent stance taken by Johnny Fong has all but severed relations. The monks maintain excellent ties with Colonel Carville's circus, constructing many of its set pieces and pyrotechnic devices in exchange for exotic items from the other junctures. The Dragons were respectful of the monks, particularly after the holy men demonstrated their skill at repairing very advanced equipment, but the Prof herself continues to treat them with chilly disdain.

## Colonel Carville's Crosstime Circus

Colonel Bryce Woodsworth Carville, formerly of Her Majesty's Army in the 1850 juncture, is a war hero, mountain climber, lion tamer and cousin to royalty—or so he frequently insists. Secret Warriors familiar with the juncture say he is actually a former quartermaster and all-around con artist who was recruited into the Secret War after he deserted the British Army. It was his incessant wheeling and dealing that supposedly got most of his team killed when his greed for a jade statue at a Lotus Temple in Kowloon alerted the tem-



## Colonel Carville

**Sample dialogue:** “Stop right there, my lad—I can see what you’re up to. You’re trying to sneak into 1850, and you want to hide underneath the Bearded Lady’s skirts, in a manner of speaking, am I right? Right! Got a nose for that sort of thing, I do. Reminds me of the time...”

**Attributes:** Bod 7, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 4

**Skills:** Guns 9, Deceit 9, Gambling 9, Intimidation 2, Leadership 4

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), officer’s saber (11), black powder pistol (7/3/1)

ple guards to their presence. No one knows the full story except Carville, who managed to escape thanks to that particular sort of luck the universe reserves for drunkards and great fools.

Friendless and faithless, Carville wound up in the Junkyard, but it wasn’t long before he hit upon another scheme. Seeing the assortment of Displaced Persons struggling to survive amid the junk heaps, he realized they were a source of untapped talent that could be put to profitable use. A successful bit of scavenging turned up a number of large camp tents, and the Crosstime Circus was born.

Carville’s Crosstime Circus is a slick and dazzling traveling show in the spirit of P.T. Barnum, making use of the exotic talents of certain exiles to amaze and entertain the gullible. The circus maintains a compound in the Junkyard, which provides a ready source of recruits as well as raw materials to create the props and set pieces for the show. Composed of escaped abominations, down-on-their-luck fu fighters, cut-rate sorcerers and more like them, the circus company includes a wide assortment of talents and abilities. Under the cunning direction of Carville, the show is a sight to behold.

The Crosstime Circus makes a semi-regular circuit of outlying exile settlements through territories controlled by most of the major factions. The smooth-talking Carville has so far managed to negotiate safe passage through most of the Netherworld. The circus also does two-months tours in the 69 and 1850 junctures, doing a good bit of business at the expense of wide-eyed villagers and farmers. If the price is right, Carville has also been known to smuggle “volunteer workers” into and

out of certain regions. In this he has been an asset to the Dragons in times past, though the Prof and the late heroes were careful not to trust the circus master very far.

## Colonel Carville

Carville is a braggart and a scoundrel, always looking for a way to turn a quick buck, then cut and run when no one is looking. Once upon a time he would have sold his own mother for a quick profit, but since falling on his arse and landing in the Junkyard, his attitudes have started to change.

The death of Carville’s companions in the Lotus temple was, in fact, his fault, and the truth now eats at his soul. Stealing from people is one thing, but causing their deaths is something else again. The team trusted him, against all common sense, and he got them killed.

He first tried to salve his guilt with a little old-fashioned cynicism, creating the Circus and hoping to bilk the customers and performers, and get on with his life. But the exiles he brought under the circus tents put their trust in him as much or more than his dead comrades, and now he has found that he can’t turn his back on them. Carville does whatever he can to ensure the safety of his performers, and he gladly lends support to anyone with designs on doing lasting harm to the Lotus. Of course, he still acts the swaggering blowhard—appearances must be maintained, after all.

## The Temple of the Weeping Maiden

The denizens of the Junkyard are naturally a tough, opportunistic lot, but there is one place they shun without exception—a ruined Buddhist temple, set atop a low hill near the Bazaar. Passersby speak of strange sounds that occasionally drift down the hill: the quiet, heartbroken weeping of a young girl and the lonely notes of a bamboo flute, sounding like the sighs of a mournful ghost.

The few visitors who have dared approach the building say it is occupied by a mad hermit, a man (?) of considerable girth wearing voluminous silk robes, whose face is hidden beneath a



melancholy Kabuki mask. Despite the unnerving atmosphere, the hermit welcomes visitors with careful courtesy and invites them inside for tea, which is brought by a pair of servants in plain, gray kimonos. The interior of the temple is always dark, with just enough outside light seeping in to allow visitors to make their way into the temple's front room. The servants are utterly silent, their faces always hidden in shadow. The tea is always very fresh, as though made only moments before.

The hermit invites small talk from his visitors, but before long, the strange figure turns the conversation to a particular story involving a young nobleman, a beautiful maiden and a sorcerer. As the figure relates the story, its voice changes eerily as it relates the part of each character, as though each person was speaking through its mouth.

As the story goes, the nobleman fell in love with the maiden, whose father was a sorcerer of terrible power. The sorcerer was a cruel man, and the young noble knew that if he and the maiden were ever to be happy, he would have to rescue her from her father's house and escape to a far-off land. But the young man had no powers to rival those of the sorcerer, making such a rescue impossible. In desperation, the noble traveled the land in search of a demon, hoping to barter with the creature for the strength to defeat the sorcerer. In time, he found such a creature, and made his plea. The demon listened and smiled, putting a talon to its own wrist and drawing a single drop of blood. The blood would give the noble the strength of the demon, it explained, for one small price: Whenever he beheld the sight of blood he would have to drink it at once until there was no more. Without hesitation, the noble agreed.

The young man traveled to the sorcerer's home, full of the fury of the demon. The sorcerer's spells could not touch him, thanks to the demon's strength. He struck the sorcerer once, breaking his neck like a twig. The sorcerer fell, and that is when the noble saw the blood on the man's lips. At once, he fell on the corpse, drinking the blood until there was no more. And a wondrous thing happened—the knowledge and memories of the man flowed into him! Not only was he as strong as the demon, he had the powers of a sorcerer! Full of dreams of

power and glory the noble went to the maiden's room, eager to spirit her away.

At first, the maiden received him strangely. Baffled, he went to embrace her, only to have her pull away. He tried to kiss her and she screamed, clawing at his face. Then he realized: Not only had he taken her father's powers, he had taken the man's appearance as well! He tried to explain, but she would not listen. Filled with horror and revulsion, the maiden picked up a knife and placed it to her throat. The sharp point drew a single, perfect drop of blood. The noble shrieked in terror, but could not resist. He leapt upon her and drank until she lay lifeless in his arms.

By the end of the tale the masked figure paces into and out of the shadows, growing increasingly frenetic. The noble, he explains, fled to the Underworld, where to this day he seeks the secret to unlock the curse the demon placed on him. But so far, no one's blood has held the right answers.

The few visitors who have escaped the Temple of the Weeping Maiden have done so only through the sacrifice of one of their comrades, whose shrieks called after them as they fled down the hill. The terrible creature has the strength of a demon and the powers of a mighty sorcerer, and is believed to be behind sightings of a terrible, blue-skinned creature that stalks the Boneyards on certain nights, drinking the blood of hapless scavengers. Sightings of the creature stopped while the Dragons actively patrolled the Junkyard, but since their deaths it has appeared again, striking more frequently than before.

## THE DRAGONS' LAIR

During the Dragons' brief heyday they cleaned up the Junkyard and marshaled its people to turn the cavern into a virtual fortress. Now, in the wake of their demise, the place has fallen apart, until, like most ruined castles, nothing remains but the strong, central keep, the place of brave last stands. This is the Dragons' hidden compound, ingeniously designed by the engineer Justinian to



house and train the order's Secret Warriors in their ongoing struggle.

The primary reason that the base has avoided discovery for so long is that it is dispersed across the breadth of the Junkyard, its chambers connected by long passages tunneled through the thickest, heaviest piles of junk. Each major chamber has its own secret entrance, while its connecting passage is concealed by yet another secret door. All the chambers have been further boobytrapped in the event of discovery; when a given secret entrance is opened, the visitor has thirty seconds to trip a concealed switch. If the switch is not tripped, the chamber caves in, along with its connecting tunnel.

When constructing the base, Justinian created a number of spare chambers to act both as decoys and as replacements for collapsed chambers. To date, Monarch hunting parties have actually stumbled onto two different parts of the base, but haven't survived long enough to tell the tale. The entire compound has twenty-eight chambers, but currently only seven are in use.

Rapid transit between different chambers is accomplished by a pulley and counterweight system Shaped by Justinian and the Prof. Each long, curving tunnel has a cable running along the ceiling, hung with leather hand straps like those found on busses and subways. To travel from one chamber to the next, one has only to grab a strap and hang on for dear life. A heavy counterweight trips, the loop races, and the Dragon is yanked through the air from one point to the next while the loop returns another strap to the starting point. In addition, there are trapdoor slides that can whisk Dragons to other parts of the base in the event that a chamber is suddenly overrun.

### **The Big Brother Room**

Also referred to as the TV room, this chamber is one of the Prof's pet projects. Salvaged and Shaped video monitors line three of the walls from floor to ceiling, presenting images from scenes scattered across the base, the Junkyard—and even across the Netherworld. For the last several years

the Prof has been placing Shaped mini-cameras in strategic areas to provide early-warning and intelligence information on the Dragons' enemies. The cameras run until they lose their Shape, at which time the Prof sends a Dragon out to place a new one. The system has taken years to put together, but has provided crucial information in the past.

Since the Dragons' defeat, the many cameras have gone quiet one by one, with no one available to replace them. Only a handful still function, covering each chamber inside the base, plus one in the Bazaar and one oriented on the main gate of the Fire Pagoda. These days, the rest of the monitors are tuned to IKTV.

### **The Workroom**

This chamber, where the Prof repairs and creates equipment for use by the Dragons, contains a bewildering assortment of gear from the contemporary and 2056 junctures. An adjoining room serves as the Prof's living quarters, where she can be found when she isn't brooding over the screens in the TV room.

### **The Training Room**

This is easily the largest chamber in the base, and the one that cannot be replaced if lost. Set inside one of the largest junk piles, this two-story space is set aside for workouts, marksmanship practice and tactical training. Improvised workout equipment occupies one corner of the room, while another area has been devoted to an obstacle course, complete with pop-up targets and sandbag boobytraps.

### **The Common Room**

This room is where the Dragons take their meals and try to unwind in their rare down time. There is a small kitchen and a pantry stocked with food taken from all four junctures.



## The Armory

This is the only chamber without a direct entrance from the outside. The Dragons keep a staggering assortment of weaponry and equipment stored here, ready for immediate use.

## The Clinic

The Clinic is a makeshift hospital where injured Dragons can be patched up and forced to take some rest before going back out for more. There are four beds along one wall, while the other side of the room contains an exam table and medicine cabinets full of tools and medicines from all four junctures.

## Living Quarters

This is a group of small apartments set aside for the Secret Warriors and any support staff needed. The rooms are cramped and Spartan, but livable.

# THE TEMPLE OF BOUNDLESS MEDITATION

The Netherworld is an absolutely crucial part of Quan Lo's master plan, a fact that would greatly surprise the Hand's enemies. The Shaolin monks of the Guiding Hand seem like a traditional and humorless lot, quite the opposite of such Netherworld denizens as the Jammers and the Four Monarchs. Quan Lo is known to be dogmatic in his Neo-Confucianism, and not the kind of man to embrace something as new and strange as the Inner Kingdom. This is just the way Quan Lo likes it.

The Perfect Master's plan is outlined in full in the *Blood of the Valiant* sourcebook (by Ronin Publishing). In brief, Quan Lo is planning a full-scale invasion of the 69 AD juncture to

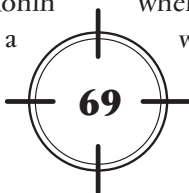
wipe the eunuchs from history. He has identified the Eaters of the Lotus as the root of the corruption that plagues China. To win a true victory in 1850, it is necessary to travel back to 69 and set matters right. The Netherworld, Quan Lo asserts, has been created for this express purpose. Only by saving the past can the chi of the world be purified.

The time leading up to the invasion is of critical importance, as is the Guiding Hand's presence in the Inner Kingdom. The man in charge of implementing Quan Lo's vision is a Shaolin Master named Lui Man Wai.

## LUI MAN WAI

Lui Man Wai has been a member of the Guiding Hand for a very long time. Before Quan Lo became the Grandmaster of the Hand, he and Lui Man Wai used to butt heads frequently during the great debates of the early years. Quan Lo respected Lui's tenacity and honesty a great deal, so he chose Lui to lead the first Hand assaults on feng shui sites in the early 1830s. Lui proved to have a knack for organization and his plans were usually startling successes. Until the Manchu army was called in, anyway—then his valiant Shaolin warriors were overwhelmed. Although the Hand lost most of the sites that it gained in those campaigns, some good did come out of them. Lui Man Wai would always attune to the sites after capturing them in battle and in the initial campaign many sites were taken. Even though these were eventually lost, Lui Man Wai had attuned to more sites at once than anyone else in the Hand. This proved crucial when the Netherworld was discovered and with it the link between site attunement and Shaping. When it came time to appoint someone to construct an outpost in the Netherworld, there could be only one choice: Lui Man Wai.

When Lui first came to the Netherworld, the Guiding Hand had no presence at all. He had to beat off attacks from the Ascended and the Architects while trying to find a good location for a Guiding Hand stronghold. His tenacity paid off when he found an ideally situated feng shui site, which he and his warriors promptly liberated from its previous owners. Lui Man Wai then





## Lui Man Wai

**Sample Dialogue:** "The Shaolin seek self-knowledge in the Netherworld, not political power. We leave those games to the animals of the Ascended."

**Attributes:** Bod 4, Chi 9, Mnd 7, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 15, Deceit 12, Leadership 14, Medicine 10, Shaping 15, Info/Neo-Confucianism 16, Info/Netherworld 14

**Fu Schticks:** Backlash of the Turtle, Beak of the Crane, Bite of the Dragon, Clearing the Ground, Crane Stance, Creative Thunder, Dark's Soft Whisper, Friend of Darkness, Natural Order, No Medicine, Signature Weapon (three-section staff), Unexpected Harvest, Wandering Cow, Wings of the Crane

**Weapons:** punch (5), kick (6), three-section staff (10)

set about his greatest creation, the Temple of Boundless Meditation. This structure is a testimony to his skill at the art of Shaping, and even today he continues to refine it.

Lui has been in the Netherworld longer than anyone else in the Guiding Hand. He knows a great deal about the Four Monarchs, the Jammers and the Architects due to their activities there. He has both politicked and intrigued with most of the factions in his time here, but always with the purposes of the Hand in mind. He tends to come across as an utterly honest monk who can't help but speak his mind. This, of course, is the Blue Principle at work, and he lies when he needs to. If he can keep the other factions distracted with his honest posturing, big walls and heavy-handed patrols, he will be able to finish his most important work with little opposition. "Feed the Fox, but do not trust him."

## CRANE, RAT AND TIGER

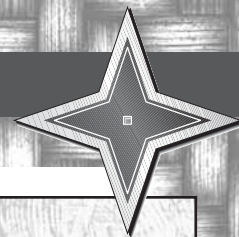
Lui Man Wai executes three important duties in the Netherworld. He cannot, of course, be everywhere at once, so he has delegated some of this authority to his three most trusted Shaolin masters. These three masters and their operations are detailed below.

## The Crane

The Temple of Boundless Meditation is perhaps the most important training center of the Guiding Hand. While there are any number of Shaolin sanctuaries where young monks are instructed, only masters train here. In fact, all Guiding Hand monks who attain the rank of master must travel to the Netherworld for additional training. This is Quan Lo's firm policy, for three good reasons. First, the new masters come to grips with the Secret War. They only learn about the Hand's true enemies on achieving mastery, and the revelations of the Secret War can be a little much to take. A trip to the Netherworld is the best antidote for skepticism. Second, the masters can study in the vaunted senshi chambers of the Temple. This training simply cannot be had on Earth, and Quan Lo insists that each of his masters embody the Six Principles. Third, and most importantly, the masters must visit the Netherworld to become Innerwalkers. Should another faction cause a critical shift, Quan Lo wants his ablest henchmen to retain their memories and their loyalties.

The man in charge of the training of the masters is known as the Crane, or simply as "Sifu." He is the only monk at the Temple older than Lui Man Wai, and his involvement in the Hand stretches back to its earliest days. The Crane is one of the few Buddhists that remained in the Guiding Hand when Quan Lo became the Grandmaster. While the Crane does not always agree with Quan Lo, he is wise enough to know that the Guiding Hand is China's best chance. The Crane has seen first hand the legacy of the Ascended opium, gunboats and mass murder and he suffers the stringency of Quan Lo to rid China of the animals forever.

The Crane is a slight man in his 60s. He always appears in the orange robes and prayer beads of the classic Shaolin monk. His kung fu skills are considerable, but he has maintained the strictures of Buddhism to the letter and never killed a man. As he likes to tell his students, "There are always other options."



## The Crane

**Sample Dialogue:** "Your eyes betray you. I knew where your blow would fall before you moved a muscle."

**Attributes:** Bod 4 (Mov 6), Chi 10 (For 4), Mnd 7, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 17, Leadership 13, Shaping 8, Info/Buddhism 14, Info/Calligraphy 13, Info/Neo-Confucianism 12, Info/Netherworld 12

### Unique Schtick:

*Sifu* (reprinted from *Back for Seconds*, page 40): A character with this schtick may improve a comrade's Martial Arts performance through advice and instruction. ("Be prepared for his claw of the tiger . . . remember, the patient crane defeats the rash tiger!") This advice is given during combat, and doing so is a continuous action. The teacher may instruct multiple characters at once; each character instructed is a separate continuous action. For example, when instructing three characters simultaneously, an instructor is maintaining three continuous actions, so any action he takes has its shot cost increased by three.

The student gains +2 AV to his Martial Arts skill while being instructed, provided he dutifully accepts and follows the advice. Inattentive or obstinate characters receive no bonus. If both the instructor and student share a fu schtick in common, the recipient gains an additional +1 AV when using that schtick. Once instruction ceases, bonuses from instruction are lost immediately. Furthermore, a character cannot benefit from the advice of more than one instructor at once.

At the GM's discretion, Old Master PCs may acquire this schtick during character generation by substituting it for their standard unique schtick. They may also acquire it as the series progresses by spending twelve experience points. Any player with an Old Master who uses this ability should roleplay the instructions he gives.

**Fu Schticks:** Abundant Leap, Awesome Downpour, Beak of the Crane, Crane Stance, Flying Windmill Kick, Gathering of the Clouds, Prodigious Leap, Talon of the Crane, Wings of the Crane

**Weapons:** punch and kick (10)—as Old Master type (see *Feng Shui*, page 37).

## The Rat

**Sample Dialogue:** "The Ascended never think to look for their enemies in the gutter."

**Attributes:** Bod 5 (Mov 7), Chi 3 (Fu 7), Mnd 8, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 13, Deceit 16, Intrusion 14, Fix-It 11, Sabotage 12, Info/Netherworld 15, Info/Neo-Confucianism 13

**Fu Schticks:** Armored in Life, Blade of Darkness, Clothed in Life, Dark's Soft Whisper, Friend of Darkness, Gathering the Darkness, Shelter of Darkness, Strike from Darkness

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), knife (7), throwing stars (5)

Principle. Lui Man Wai found that perfection in the Rat.

The nexus of the Hand's intelligence operation is the Rat, a mysterious figure whose true appearance is only known to Lui Man Wai. A master of disguise, the Rat has appeared as men and women of all ages. Even within the Temple of Boundless Meditation, there is a persistent rumor that there is no Rat at all. Several different operatives use the name as a cover, or so the rumor-mongers swear. No one could possibly be in so many different places at the same time, and switch genders so effortlessly.

Of course, the Rat is no fiction. She comes from the contemporary juncture, and is Canadian by birth. Her mother, a member of the Golden Candle Society, left China for Vancouver in 1967. There she met and married a powerful banker. The Rat was their only child, and she is definitely her mother's daughter. She was trained in martial arts, disguise and espionage, and was working for the Hand by the age of ten. Her Eurasian features allowed for a variety of disguises, and her slight frame made it easy for her to pose as a small man. She was eventually recruited to work in the Netherworld. It was thought that her understanding of the modern world would help her penetrate the Ascended and, to a lesser extent, the Architects.

The Rat now runs a net of spies about thirty strong in the Netherworld. She has reliable agents amongst the Pledged, the Dragons and the Four Monarchs. Her intelligence on the Jammers and the Architects is of lesser quality, but she does get her hands on the most important nuggets of info.

Her most important agents live among the rabble. These wander the tunnels of the

## The Rat

Considering Quan Lo's ultimate plan, gathering information is of the highest priority. There will be no invasion of 69 AD if the Hand cannot master the Netherworld. Quan Lo needs to know the location of every available portal to the China of Gao Zhang, the military capabilities of every faction of the Inner Kingdom, and any potential threats to the grand scheme. In short, Quan Lo requires the absolute perfection of the Blue



## The Tiger

**Sample Dialogue:** "You say you came from Canton? Tell me, what is the largest temple on Honam Island?"

**Attributes:** Bod 6 (Mov 8), Chi 4 (Fu 6), Mnd 8, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 14, Leadership 12, Medicine 10, Shaping 5, Info/Confucian Classics 14, Info/Manchu Bureaucracy 12, Info/Neo-Confucianism 13

**Unique Schtick:**

*The Red Principle:* As long as the Tiger moves as far as possible each sequence (which is triple his Move score—see *Feng Shui*, page 14), he can substitute Move for Strength when making martial arts attacks. This is a corrected version of the schtick on page 77 of *Blood of the Valiant*. Owners of that book should substitute this version.

**Fu Schticks:** Claw of the Tiger, Prodigious Leap, Tiger Stance, Unyielding Tiger Stance, Vengeance of the Tiger

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), staff (9)

Netherworld like so many other aimless scum. Their mission is to map all portals to 69 AD China, and they have amassed quite a list. When the Guiding Hand launches its great assault, Shaolin warriors will appear throughout ancient China as if from nowhere.

## The Tiger

Quan Lo's headquarters is the Temple of the Shaolin Dragon, a hidden fortress somewhere in the Hunan Province. To protect it from Manchu armies and Ascended spies, Quan Lo decreed that all travel to it must come through the Netherworld. There is a gateway in the Temple of Boundless Meditation that leads directly to the Shaolin Dragon. All couriers to and from Quan Lo must thus pass through the Netherworld to reach their destination. Because of these security measures, the Ascended have yet to discover the location of the Temple of the Shaolin Dragon.

The integrity and efficiency of the courier system is of vital importance to the Guiding Hand. Lui Man Wai has charged a Shaolin master known as the Tiger with the coordination of this network. The Tiger, a Master of the Principle of Movement, makes sure everything runs smoothly.

The Tiger is a classically trained Confucian bureaucrat. He spent the entirety of his young life preparing for the state exams, and made it into the Manchu bureaucracy as a young man. He was later recruited by a Golden Candle agent, and used his office to further the cause of the Guiding Hand. Somehow, he was found out and had to flee for his life. He made it to a Shaolin sanctuary, shaved his head, and became a monk. The Tiger spent years mastering the martial arts, with emphasis on the Red Principle. Perhaps the Principle of Movement appealed to him because of all the years he had spent studying indoors. If so, the irony can't have been lost on him when he was given his current assignment. Quan Lo needed a Shaolin master who was also a trained bureaucrat to run the courier network. The man now known as the Tiger was the perfect candidate.

The Tiger faces several challenges, not the least of which is safeguarding the secrecy of the Temple of the Shaolin Dragon. He has adopted a series of measures that so far have kept the network inviolate. Couriers coming into the Netherworld use a designated series of gateways, all of which are within the Hand's territory in the Netherworld. When these messengers appear, they are set upon by the Tiger's men and apprehended as "trespassers." The couriers then have black sacks tied over their heads and are led to the Temple of Boundless Meditation. The messengers can't give away information about the location of the portals in relation to the Temple, and the reputation of the Hand as hardasses is ensured by the appearance of countless captives heading off to the Temple. The messengers themselves are questioned by the Tiger, and sometimes Lui Man Wai, and then taken through to the Temple of the Shaolin Dragon. The sacks aren't removed until they have arrived back in China.

The same procedure is followed on the return trip, but this time the "trespassers" are allegedly being escorted out of Hand territory in the Netherworld. To keep up this ruse, members of the rabble are routinely picked up by Hand patrols, questioned by stern-looking monks, and then marched out in a similar fashion.

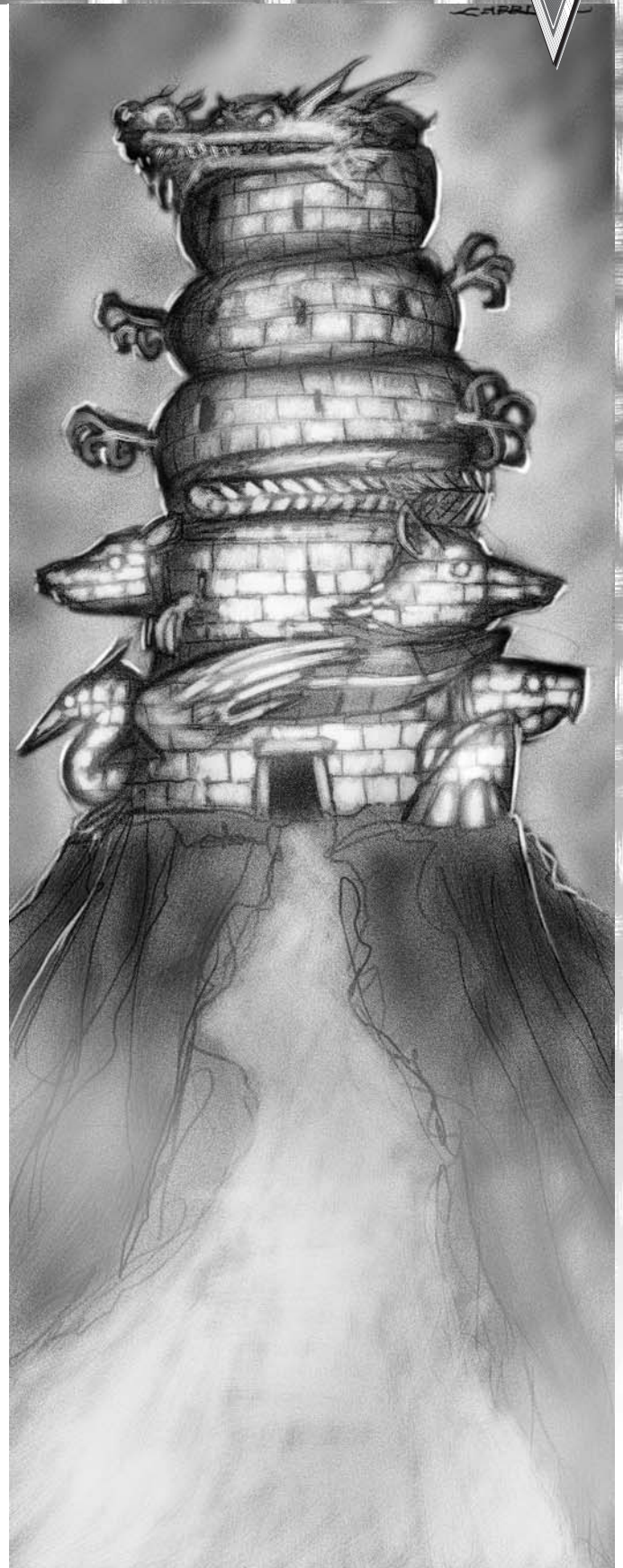


## THE TEMPLE GROUNDS

The Temple of Boundless Meditation is the Guiding Hand's premier stronghold in the strange realm of the Netherworld. As discussed above, it is an important link in Quan Lo's master plan, so it is heavily and zealously defended. Thanks to the impressive Shaping skills of Lui Man Wai, the Temple is surrounded by a truly massive wall. The precincts of the Temple are constantly monitored by Hand archers trained by the late Sun Chen (a legendary archer tragically killed in Operation Killdeer). Patrols of kung fu masters police the caves around the Temple, detaining suspicious-looking passersby. Those who are not forthcoming about their business or who fail to show the Hand patrols the proper respect are dealt with harshly. Most of the Netherworld rabble know better than to trespass on the Hand's self-proclaimed territory.

The interior of the Temple is a mix of the functional and ceremonial. There are several thick-walled buildings that act as interior defense points in case the outer wall is breached. Two of these buildings are lesser temples, used by the rank and file warriors that live here. One is dedicated to the Sage-Emperors of Antiquity and the other to the Duke of Chou. All of these figures are important in the Confucian tradition, and worthy of offerings and respect. Secret caches of weapons are hidden in these temples in case of emergency.

There are also typical temple buildings and pagodas made of wood and bamboo, some of which are used by the Hand couriers that come here so frequently. These buildings include dormitories, kitchens and the like. Plenty of room is left between the buildings for kung fu practice and



### Unnamed Hand Archers

**Sample Dialogue:** "Sun Chen lives!"

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 1 (Fu 4), Mnd 5 (Wil 6), Ref 7

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Guns 9, Info/Archery 9

**Fu Schticks:** Natural Order

**Gun Schticks:** Eagle Eye, Lightning Reload

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), bow (7/5/1)



archery drills. The ground of the interior is very well-packed, the product of frequent martial activities.

The central building of the complex is a five-story Confucian temple built unlike anything found back on Earth. The first story is Shaped to look like a crane, a turtle and a tiger, each facing in a different direction. Standing on their shoulders and making up the second story are a rat, a fox and a monkey, similarly posed. Coiled on top of all the other animals and stretching up from the third to fifth stories is an enormous dragon, its scales painted in the colors of the Six Principles and its head the pure white of the Principle of Principles. This is the Temple of Boundless Meditation proper. Inside is a large temple to Confucius and other masters of his school like Mencius. A fifteen meter statue of the Master dominates the Temple, and the floors are inscribed with many of his words of wisdom. Just walking through can be educational. Of course, usually only Shaolin masters are allowed here, but exceptions are sometimes made for important guests. The Temple proper is big enough to fit 250 people with ease.

The upper floors of the Temple house the personal quarters of Lui Man Wai and his subordinates, and the legendary senshi chambers of the Guiding Hand. These chambers, specially Shaped to embody the Six Principles and the Principle of Principles, are where Shaolin Masters come to perfect their understanding Quan Lo's teachings. The chambers do not look like much on first inspection. Each has an animal motif and dominant color and is certainly pleasing to the eye. It is not until one begins to meditate in the chambers that their power becomes apparent. Each one is perfectly harmonious, and the seven fit together in an even greater harmony within the body of the dragon that crowns the Temple. The chi flows so strongly through the senshi chambers that the colors and the animals seem to come to life. More than one master has commented that he learned the secrets of the Principle of Principles from "the Dragon himself." And no, they aren't talking about Bruce Lee.

As should be clear, the Temple of Boundless Meditation is a feng shui site of major importance. Perhaps due to the nature of the Netherworld itself, the chi here is very

pure. Those who attune to the Temple can learn any fu power for three experience points less than normal. Meditation in the senshi chambers provides a benefit even to those who are not attuned. Each chamber corresponds to a fu path. When meditating in a senshi chamber, one can learn fu powers from the corresponding path for three experience points less than normal. The bonus from attunement is not cumulative with this bonus.

**Orange:** Path of the Passive Wings

**Green:** Path of the Storm Turtle

**Red:** Path of the Healthy Tiger

**Blue:** Path of the Shadow's Companion

**Violet:** Path of the Clever Eye

**Yellow:** Path of the Leaping Monkey (see *Blood of the Valiant*, page 95)

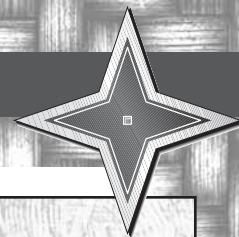
**White:** Path of the Sharpened Scales

## THE GROTTOS OF SERENITY

The Temple of Boundless Meditation is the most obvious Hand outpost in the Netherworld, but there is another, quieter, site that often goes unnoticed. The Grottoes of Serenity show off aspects of the Guiding Hand's philosophy that are often overlooked. In a region factionalized by war and conflict, the Grottoes of Serenity are a place of beauty and reverence.

The Grottoes are the brainchild of a monk named Li Fei, one of the many Gardeners of the Guiding Hand. Li Fei has spent a lifetime learning the rules of feng shui, and applying them to the sites of the Hand. In the struggle of the Secret War, Li Fei often put his talents to martial endeavors. He sabotaged many feng shui sites in his day, and helped construct righteous fortresses and secret hideaways. Always the focus was the war, and the aim victory. Surely, Li Fei thought, there is a place in the Guiding Hand for peace and serenity?

Li Fei considered the problem. Resources were precious, and he was sure Quan Lo would not consent to their frivolous expenditure. He thought about the Secret War, and how such a place could help the Guiding Hand. Then he



remembered his trips to the Netherworld and the answer became plain. The grottoes Li had in mind could be made in the Netherworld through Shaping. This would require only limited resources, and it would provide an ideal location for the Guiding Hand masters to practice their Shaping skills. Considering the importance of the Netherworld to Quan Lo's strategy, a training ground for Shaping would have great value to the Perfect Master. Li Fei put the idea to Quan Lo, and was gratified by its approval.

The intrepid Gardener traveled to the Netherworld to implement his plan. He chose an undeveloped area near the Temple of Boundless Meditation. No one had settled the area due to the proximity of the Temple and the harshness of the Hand's warriors. Li Fei found the area perfect.

Li's first job was to cultivate the feng shui of the area. The Netherworld itself is neutral in this regard, but feng shui sites can be created by those with the right skills. Li set about Shaping a series of interconnecting grottoes. These would be the canvas that the artists of the Guiding Hand would work upon. He then invited Lui Man Wai to the Grottoes to create the first temple. This offer was made in recognition of Lui's status in the Netherworld and his formidable skills with Shaping. Lui Man Wai created the first and most important shrine to Confucius, the center chamber of the Grottoes of Serenity.

Li Fei and two assistants maintain the Grottoes. They teach Hand students more about Shaping, and protect the place from the rabble. One of the grottoes was destroyed in a running gunfight that broke out between the Dragons and the Pledged. Li Fei, livid with outrage, ousted the combatants with a hurricane of kung fu. He was not upset by the physical damage, which could easily be repaired by through Shaping, but by the outbreak of violence in a site dedicated to peace and beauty.

Those with Li Fei's permission can attune to the Grottoes of Serenity, and gain the normal benefits. Attuned individuals who spend a month learning from Li and practicing in the Grottoes get double the benefit from spending experience points on the Info/Geomancy skill. For instance, a character with an AV of 13 would only need to spend 7 points to gain a 14 in Geomancy.

## Li Fei

**Sample Dialogue:** "Can you feel the chi flowing into your body? That is the gift of harmony."

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 10, Mnd 7, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 13, Medicine 10, Shaping 10, Info/Calligraphy 12, Info/Confucian Classics 13, Info/Geomancy 16, Info/Neo-Confucianism 13

### Unique Schtick:

**Gardener:** Li Fei can use the following effects from the Fertility sorcery schtick: De-attunement, Observe Chi and Restore Chi. These powers are not magical and are based on Li Fei's Info/Geomancy skill.

**Fu Schticks:** Claw of the Tiger, Corners of the Mouth, Flow Restoration, Healing Chi, Point Blockage, Shadowfist, Tiger Stance

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), staff (8)

## The Grottoes

There are twenty-seven Grottoes at present, and room for many more. Most of them are square or rectangular, and feature coffered ceilings. The walls look and feel like sandstone, as do most of the statues. Both frescoes and murals are common. Some of these have been made in the traditional manner, and others Shaped. It is getting increasingly difficult to tell which method was used. Li Fei's students are learning well.

The Grottoes are all interconnected, but they stretch out in all directions. A visitor may thus find himself walking up a ramp to get to one area, only to climb down a ladder to get to the next. Several of the Grottoes are three-level affairs, with bamboo poles or ladders leading from level to level. The innermost of the Grottoes can only be reached by diving into an underground river and following the current to the next cave.

### Grotto of the Three Masters

Lui Man Wai Shaped the first of the grottoes on the site. The aging master poured his devotion to the Guiding Hand into a stunning display. Built into the far wall are statues of the three masters venerated above all others: Confucius, Chu Hsi and Quan Lo. A waterfall appears from nowhere and rains down over the heads of these sages, creating a pool at their feet where the humble can seek wisdom. The surrounding walls are covered



with murals depicting the early days of the Guiding Hand. Since Lui Man Wai was involved in many desperate battles with Manchu soldiers over feng shui sites, scenes of this type feature prominently. There are also some chilling scenes dramatizing the Hand's discovery of the true nature of the Ascended.

### Grotto of the Goddess of Mercy

The Shaolin master known as the Crane Shaped this grotto as a testament to his Buddhist faith. The Goddess of Mercy is a popular Buddhist deity, and the Crane thought it appropriate to create a shrine to her within the Grottoes of Serenity. A handful of the other Hand members in the Netherworld are also Buddhists, and this area has become their unofficial meeting place.

### Grotto of Sun Chen

Sun Chen only died recently but he is already on his way to becoming a saint of the Hand. When word of his death came to the Temple of Boundless Meditation, the archers Sun Chen had trained approached Li Fei and asked him to Shape a new grotto in the fallen monk's honor. Li could not but agree, and created a solemn, moving homage to the legendary archer. A terra cotta statue of Sun Chen, bowstring drawn back and ready, stands at the center of the room. Arrows are driven into the walls, and from each hangs a scroll written by a member of the Guiding Hand. These scrolls are testimonials of Sun Chen's courage, skill and kindness, written by the men who knew him the best. Sun Chen was not the smartest member of the Guiding Hand, but his loss will be felt for years to come.

## GUIYU ZUI AND THE LOTUS

The Lotus suffers from something of an inferiority complex. They hold all the cards of history. They have the infernal powers at their beck and call. China lies like a supplicant before them.

But they don't get any respect.

Face. It's all about face. Someone better start giving it to the Lotus, or they're gonna start taking it. Trust me, buddy, you don't want a sorcerer tearing your face off. Just bow to the man and treat him all respectful like.

—Danger Dan McNaulty, counseling a Netherworld newcomer on the fine art of dealing with sorcerers

They're the new kids on the Secret War block, having showed up after the battle lines were drawn. The other factions treat China, *their* China, as a playground, a target ripe for the picking. If it doesn't fire bullets, plug into the wall or come in a box, no one is all that impressed. As far as the Eaters of the Lotus are concerned, it's about time for that to change. They're going to show the ignorant eaters of dung who have violated their juncture that the black arts are nothing to trifle with.

## ORGANIZATION

The Eaters of the Lotus know they need to show the Netherworld what they're capable of in order to earn the respect that they deserve, but the problem with simply ransacking towns and butting heads with other factions is that the Netherworld is alien terrain. Simply put, the Lotus are used to working with the high level of support they've established in 69 AD. Compounding the problem is Gao Zhang's brutal rule. He can't afford to dwell in the Netherworld himself and direct Lotus affairs there, yet he can't afford to put some underling who might become a rival in charge. Gao Zhang has formulated a twofold solution to this problem.

First, he has organized Netherworld operations so his field lieutenants compete with each other. This keeps Gao's minions from trusting each other and prevents any single one of them from amassing too large a base of power. Because of this structure, Lotus operations tend to be broad rather than deep, which fits in well with Gao's plans for widespread terror and destruction as the road to Netherworld dominance.

Second, Gao has recruited a native of the Netherworld, the Strangled Scream, to serve as his Netherworld point man. Legend has it



that some fool sought to Shape an army of minions to conquer the Netherworld. What he got was the Strangled Scream, a being so hideous entire settlements have been known to pack up and move when word comes around that it's in the area. While Gao believes that the Lotus and the Scream will one day face off against one another, delaying a confrontation helps the Lotus solidify its power base and makes the eventual conflict winnable. It helps that, because the Scream is Shaped, it can't enter the 69 juncture and threaten Gao there. As a hedge, Gao has liberally salted the Netherworld with Lotus spies to ensure that the Scream doesn't veer too far from Lotus interests. Though the alliance is in its infancy, it could tilt the balance of Netherworld power in the Lotus' favor.

## OPERATIONS

The Lotus has three general types of operations in the Netherworld.

### Displays of Power

These are designed primarily to show Netherworld independents—particularly the Four Monarchs—the true capabilities of the Eaters of the Lotus. No opportunity for ostentatious grandstanding is too ridiculous, and currently the minions of Gao Zhang are focusing their efforts on winning the Supercharger 5000.

Whenever enough people with mechanical skills and an utterly absent sense of self-preservation get bored, it's time for the Netherworld to echo with the roar of thundering engines, the squeal of shrieking tires and the shrill cries of innocent pedestrians. Dubbed the Supercharger 5000 by a Jammer with an overdeveloped sense of grandeur, this race is a spontaneous outpouring of the recklessness that infects many denizens of the Inner Kingdom. Everything from Buro hovortanks to ancient chariots can join the race, as most racers' chances of finishing are more a function of their capacity for insane courage—or stupidity—than the haul-ass factor of their wheels. The Lotus

plan to infiltrate the race with teams of their own sorcerers and demons. The race is a prime opportunity to show off the Lotus' strength. If the competition results in the untimely demise of Lotus adversaries, so much the better.

The Supercharger 5000 naturally attracts a lot of Jammers, who are often responsible for touching off the race. On two occasions, the Supercharger 5000 spontaneously popped up in two different locations. Once, the first race overtook the later one and a massive running battle broke out between the "original" racers and the usurpers. The second time, the races met head on and—to the relief of Netherworlders everywhere—the entire mess ended in a single, massive pile-up.

### Displays of Mercy

This portion of the Lotus' plan targets the downtrodden rabble of the Netherworld. The Lotus have mastered the art of cowing the masses in 69 AD, and they intend to put that art to use in the Netherworld.

From time to time, Netherworld settlements come under attack from all manner of grotesque beasts: packs of ogres, hopping vampires, hideous demons and worse. Nearly as often as this occurs, Lotus sorcerers happen to be passing through the area and are able to put an end to the menace. How . . . *convenient*. Said settlements fall all over themselves offering thanks, praise and loyalty to their saviors. The Lotus are careful not to antagonize the Four Monarchs' subjects in this manner, as they aren't ready to take them on head to head, but they have slowly begun to build a network of sympathetic settlements. It could come as quite a shock for player characters to find themselves in trouble for knocking off some village's Lotus protector.

Gao keeps a close watch on these operations, rightly seeing them as affairs that could get out of hand and leave his minions with too much power. He is careful to continuously rotate the underlings assigned to these duties and to place more reliance on corrupted Netherworld leaders than Lotus proxies.



## Expansion to Other Junctures and Regions

Gao Zhang is no fool. He realizes that as the master of the juncture furthest up the time stream, he possesses considerable power over the other junctures. Lotus operations in other junctures concentrate on researching history, capturing feng shui sites and learning how to defeat technology. These activities will enable the Eaters of the Lotus to expand their power in other junctures and prevent their base of power in 69 AD from eroding.

A secondary Lotus goal is to locate gates to different continents in 69 AD. The presence of critical feng shui sites outside China has come as something of a surprise to the Lotus, who see China as the center of the world. Nevertheless, their importance has become obvious, so the Lotus are expending no small bit of effort in exploring their own world via the Netherworld, and keeping tabs on enemies who may attempt to gain a foothold in the 69 juncture outside China. Besides, Gao is tormented by the fact that there are entire continents on Earth that he does not control.

## ORGANIZATION AND ASSETS

Guiyu Zui is a festering pit of demonic corruption and, not coincidentally, the center of Lotus activity in the Netherworld. Long periods away from the fold are strongly discouraged, both to keep Lotus strength in the Netherworld from becoming too splintered and to help keep tabs on ambitious underlings. This makes the Lotus somewhat vulnerable in the field. Reinforcements are rare, and those that do come are as likely to cause more problems as they are to help. Not only are Lotus sorcerers trying to look good individually, they can advance themselves further by making other sorcerers look bad. Thus, it is rather easy to set the Lotus against itself; of all the fac-

tions, the Lotus are least able to pull together a huge force to squash a small group of enemies. Thus, small groups of valiant freedom fighters are much more likely to be a problem for the Lotus.

## Guiyu Zui

As a massive wall of pure flame surrounds this fortress, little is known about Guiyu Zui. Long before the sorcerers came to claim it as their home, Guiyu Zui was rightfully feared. Demons regularly spilled forth from its gates to wreak havoc across the Inner Kingdom, and the few that dared to penetrate its walls of hellfire were often seen patrolling those same walls not long after entering.

The wise whisper that Guiyu Zui's treasures are as beautiful and valuable as its inhabitants are evil and loathsome—that those who seek to steal Guiyu Zui's hoard are so taken by its beauty that they renounce the ways of thievery and swear to give their lives defending it. The truth is far more sinister. There is no treasure waiting for the bold, only a fate worse than death. Those who approach the fiery walls of Guiyu Zui are met by Si Hua, a beady-eyed humanoid with dark red skin and a cheap, contemporary juncture suit. Si Hua offers to create a portal through the fires once for each character. In return, all they have to do is sign a simple contract that binds their souls to defend Guiyu Zui for one century should they die within its walls. Any who agree to sign are let through. If Si Hua is attacked, he disappears in a cloud of smoke, leaving behind the distinct odor of brimstone.

Any who spend too much time dawdling outside the walls, or who attack Si Hua, encounter a patrol of lost souls. These unfortunates are treasure hunters and adventurers who died within Guiyu Zui and are now bound to guard it. The souls are a motley crew of warriors, thieves and vagabonds representing countless junctures. They relish causing agony amongst the living and fight hard to garner more recruits to their legions. Sadistic GMs may want to include a few of the characters' old friends in the mob of souls.

Guiyu Zui is made of a black, marble-like rock veined with faint, white streaks. The streaks undulate slowly, and occasionally take the



forms of a human faces. Anyone who leans close to a wall can hear the faint pleas of the souls trapped within, begging for release from their prison. Some of the souls are friendly towards the living, and at the GM's discretion can give clues and advice to the characters. Others are jealous of the living and give misleading directions or lie about Guiyu Zui's dangers. Worst are the pathetic souls who wish to curry favor from the Lotus. If they notice that the characters are intruders, they begin to whisper an alarm amongst themselves which slowly reverberates throughout the structure, growing slowly in volume as the cacophony of voices grows and echoes.

Guiyu Zui isn't simply *Feng Shui's* version of that good old RPG standby, the dungeon. Don't ask for a marching order or give the players a piece of graph paper for mapping. Instead, Guiyu Zui should be a good place to set some bizarre, other-worldly fights. The palace itself is very mutable. Given the mystic nature of its materials, the Lotus have a very easy time re-Shaping it to fit whatever

Guiyu Zui? It's Hell, thanks for asking. Hell, boxed up in four walls and ready to devour your soul.

—Anonymous

mood they're in. You want to establish a creepy mood, not get bogged down with endless descriptions of ten foot wide stone corridors.

### Torture Chambers

Guiyu Zui's numerous torture chambers serve both to drag information out of captives and to keep the demons busy when they have some free time to kill. There are a lot of tools handy for a brawl lying around a torture chamber. You've got your iron cages for tossing mooks into and locking them up. You've got your pits studded with spikes or filled with man-eating lizards, acid or burning oil. You've got your hot pokers and coals for jabbing opponents and spreading on the floor. You've





got your iron maidens for confining and impaling mooks in one smooth action. You've got your thumbscrews, tonguetearers, eyegougers and a thousand more colorfully named improvised weapons. You've got your relatively pedestrian whips (bone up on Indiana Jones), chains and knives. A torture chamber is a fight scene toy box: Toss in the characters, shake it up and let it rip.

### The Twisted Gardens

These are a nice place for an evil sorcerer to relax and, very conveniently, they're a whiz-bang set piece. The trees are all twisted out of shape and covered with thorns. The topiary animals lunge forward to grab passersby. A baroque, spike-studded bronze fountain depicting a roaring demon sprinkles human blood from its mouth and slowly rotates, watering the entire garden. Unlike most of Guiyu Zui, the garden is open to the air, making it a good place for that twenty-foot tall demon you've been dying to use.

### The Chamber of Infernal Restoration

When a demon gets shredded in a fight and needs to be patched up, this is where it goes. The Chamber looks more like a foundry than a medical center—hammer and nails are more effective in putting demons back together than bandages and stitches.

There are a lot of contraptions here for characters to mess around with during a fight, including:

- A giant sewing machine used to stitch demons back together.
- A team of giggling demonoids armed with hammers and nails. Usually, they're a bone repair team, but since causing pain is what really gets them going—these guys have never heard of anesthetic—they're willing to start with a healthy subject and go from there.
- There's blood, ichor and slime all over the floor. The footing is dicey at best.
- Bizarre, Rube Goldberg contraptions are everywhere. Demon pieces in, whole demons out. Mook in, fine red mist out.
- Improvised weapons are plentiful: hammers, nails, power tools, demon limbs.

Grab a still-talking head by the hair—instant flail!

- A fat, bossy foreman stalks about on an overhead catwalk, which is great for leaping on, hanging off and so forth.

### The Testing Ground

The Eaters of the Lotus were shocked at first to witness the improbable feats of modern technology, initially believing that magic—rather than science—was behind all the whacked-out contraptions they saw. At their first opportunity, Lotus sorcerers stole a few flashy gadgets and brought them here for investigation.

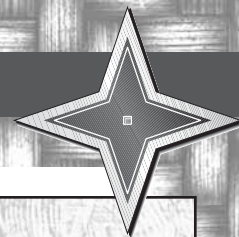
The Testing Ground is a big, empty room with plain stone walls pocked with damage from bullets, explosions and runaway technology. Unless there's a test going on, this room is usually empty. Considering how many ogres have been blasted, crushed, smashed and maimed by everything from bazookas to toasters gone haywire, it's not surprising that most of the guards try to stay away from here.

The real purpose of the Testing Ground is to provide a convenient explanation for the sudden appearance of appropriately cool tech within Guiyu Zui. Maybe while the characters are whipping ogre butt in the Twisted Gardens, an enterprising ogre fetches the self-propelled battering ram (a Geo Metro) he helped test a few days back. This doesn't mean that the Lotus will be mixing tech and magic anytime soon. They're just smart enough to investigate their enemies' capabilities.

### Gateway to the Underworld

This basement chamber is Guiyu Zui's main attraction, as it houses a giant demon that swallows whatever wanders into its mouth and excretes it into the Underworld. The room itself is huge, and the corridors heading into it are similarly oversized. No expense has been spared in the decoration. The demon head dominates one wall, with rows of benches arrayed before it. Banners of defeated foes and other souvenirs hang from the ceiling, enhancing the demonically festive atmosphere and giving characters something interesting to swing from.

Lotus eunuchs like to have audiences when it's time to toss sacrifices into the



Underworld. A special viewing box is perched across the chamber from the demon face; this is where Gao Zhang or whoever is serving in his stead sits to watch the proceedings. Other eunuchs gather in small knots and titter with glee. Huge pots containing a disgusting cross between slime mold and tapioca are very popular with the ogres during such festivities.

This is the perfect place for last-second rescues and thrilling escapes. When they happen, don't forget about the massive demon head, which is liable to use its five-meter-long forked tongue to take an active role gathering sacrifices. The demon is quite good at grabbing stuff and tossing it back into its mouth.

## LOTUS MINIONS

Given Gao Zhang's mistrust of his underlings, it isn't surprising that the Eaters of the Lotus tend to rely on supernatural creatures in the Netherworld. Lotus sorcerers serve as leaders and advisors, while the rank and file's loyalty is either summoned up with sorcery or bought with gold and trinkets.

### Ogres

Ogres are the backbone of Lotus operations in the Netherworld. In fact, if Gao Zhang could get away with using them *en masse* in 69 AD, he'd do it. Easy to summon, brutally strong and too stupid to rebel, ogres make perfect foot soldiers. They can survive extremes of environment that would kill any human, and their ability to draw sustenance from any organic matter lets them live off almost anything short of rocks. Ogre armies are like pet fish: They're low maintenance, but don't expect any brilliant tricks.

#### Plain Old Ogres

The generic, entry-level ogre is some variation on the classic "warts, green skin, horned head, bloodshot eyes, pearly white fangs and bulging

#### Plain Old Ogres

**Sample Dialogue:** "Uhhh, what?"

**Attributes:** Bod 8, Chi 2, Mnd 2, Ref 4

**Skills:** Martial Arts 7, Intimidation 8

**Weapons:** punch (9), kick (10), oversized sword, axe, or club (12)

#### Belching Ogres

**Sample Dialogue:** "BRAAAAP!" [THUD!]

**Attributes:** Bod 9, Chi 2, Mnd 2, Ref 3

**Skills:** Martial Arts 6, Creature Powers 9

**Unique Creature Schtick:**

*Gut Blaster:* This schtick allows a creature to expel objects, such as cannonballs, from its stomach. Range is four times the creature's Creature Power AV in meters. As a rule of thumb, the creature can swallow and fire an object capable of doing Bod + 3 damage, and can hold up to Bod/3 objects in its stomach at once.

**Weapons:** punch (10), kick (11), bite (12), big nasty projectile (12)

muscles" look. These standard issue mooks make up with muscles what they lacks in smarts.

#### Belching Ogres

One of the more common variations on the plain old ogre is the belching ogre. These fiends have abnormally massive bellies that droop over their belts and scrape the ground as they walk. Their mouths are abnormally wide, even for ogres, and studded with rows of fangs. Considered gluttons even amongst their own kind, these guys have been pressed into service as mobile artillery units. Before a fight, belching ogres swallow three or four stones about the size of a human head. Then, as their name implies, they force huge gulps of air into their guts and expel the rocks at opponents.

### Imps

An imp is essentially the opposite of an ogre: Puny and defenseless but clever as all hell. Sane people don't summon imps for advice, because for every penny of intelligence an imp has, it's got a nickel of greed and self-interest. The typical imp gives you counsel that gets you killed so the little bugger can loot your corpse.



Illustration by David White

### Imps

**Sample Dialogue:** "Oh yes. Drog smash and crush. How original. How about leaving the brainwork to me?"

**Attributes:** Bod 2, Chi 5, Mnd 7 (Cha 1), Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 6, Creature Powers 8

**Creature Schticks:** Flight

**Weapons:** claws (4)

### Lost Souls

**Sample Dialogue:** "Flee this place. Save your immortal souls!"

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 5, Mnd 5, Ref 5

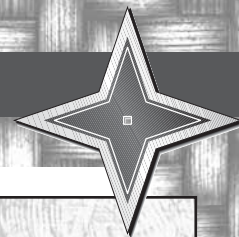
**Skills:** Creature Powers 8

**Creature Schticks:** Blast (the damage caused by their weaponry), Death Resistance x1

The Lotus used to avoid dealing with these things on any but the most advantageous terms, until someone had a brilliant idea: Why not pair the smart but puny imps with the strong but stupid ogres? The biggest stumbling block to these peanut-butter-and-chocolate pairings is the impish sense of self-importance. The things' natural inclination is to abandon the slobs, or worse, lead them to their deaths. So in a further stroke of genius, the Lotus decided to tie the self-interest of an imp to the self-interest of an ogre with a big, thick chain around the neck of each. These arrangements give the Lotus independent teams of ogres for raiding and terrorizing Netherworld settlements.

## Lost Souls

These poor, pathetic beings are cursed to guard Guiyu Zui for a century after their deaths. They appear as they did in life, though they are now insubstantial spirits, and represent a wide range of factions, time periods and attitudes. Some enjoy their work while others moan for release from their sentences as they attack. Feel free to vary the weapons they carry to fit the situation, as there are no truly typical lost souls. These beings return to unlife twenty-four hours after they are destroyed in battle. Until their century is up, they are compelled to serve.



## The Strangled Scream

The Strangled Scream appears as a young, muscular Asian male, his face contorted as if in abject terror, his mouth gaping open to scream. A silken gag covers his mouth, silencing any noise he may make. The Scream is a rightly feared foe, his skill in the martial arts well known to his enemies. Even worse, he can Shape the essence of the Netherworld, often creating new allies infused with the souls of defeated foes.

The Scream—a surly entity who bears allegiance to no being—was not a likely candidate for an alliance with the Eaters of the Lotus, yet they somehow brought him into their fold. Perhaps it was the supernatural powers wielded by the Lotus. It is well known that the Scream respects powerful opponents, and has been known to seek out and challenge those whose legend begins to grow in the Netherworld. Less charitable observers believe that the Scream chose the Lotus simply because, as the faction most ignorant of the Netherworld, they didn't know enough to avoid him.

Strategically, the Scream is a more-than-competent commander. Under the Lotus, though, he rarely creates plans. Rather, he browbeats and intimidates his underlings into carrying out Gao Zhang's policies. He prefers to take an active role in the destruction, especially if worthy foes such as Thunder Knights or Dragons are involved.

The Scream is an utterly confident fighter. He prefers to approach his foes openly and allow the bravest of them to rush him first. If the characters begin to make a name for themselves in the Netherworld, they just might make this fiend's list of things to do. It is whispered that only devouring the souls of mighty heroes can sustain the Scream in his current form. Given his propensity for mixing it up with Secret Warriors, that very well may be true.

## The Bound

The Strangled Scream created the Bound to serve as his right-hand being. The Bound appears as an attractive Asian woman wear-

### The Strangled Scream

**Attributes:** Bod 8, Chi 9, Mnd 8, Ref 9

**Skills:** Martial Arts 18, Creature Powers 16, Intimidate 15, Info/Eaters of the Lotus 10, Info/Netherworld 14, Info/Strategy and Tactics 16

**Creature Shticks:** Damage Immunity (bullets), Regeneration x2

**Fu Shticks:** Friend of Darkness, Dark's Soft Whisper, Blade of Darkness, Gathering the Darkness, Strike from Darkness, Shelter of Darkness

**Weapons:** punch (9), kick (10)

### The Bound

**Sample Dialogue:** "You should be honored to die by my hand."

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

**Skills:** Martial Arts 15, Intimidation 12

**Fu Shticks:** Claw of the Tiger, Unyielding Tiger Stance, Hands Without Shadow, Dim Mak

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9)

ing a silken blindfold. Her arms end in bloody stumps which are bound across her chest with rope. About her float her two amputated hands. In battle these hands whiz before their mistress and strike her foes with the force and skill of a heavyweight boxer. The Bound is every bit as confident and battle-thirsty as the Strangled Scream. If anything, standing in the Scream's shadow has made her even more likely to take risks.

## Chorus of Tongues

A Chorus of Tongues is a blocky, three-sided pyramidal beast. Each of a Chorus's triangular faces has a single eye, a toothy mouth and a runty leg ending in a clawed foot that juts out below each mouth. Each of the three mouths has a slightly different voice, though none ever show any emotion and all always use the same flat tone. All three mouths usually talk at the same time, each saying the same thing and creating a disconcerting murmur.

A Chorus of Tongues can "swim" through the Netherworld, submerging itself into the Netherworld's floor or walls and moving in secret.

A burrowing Chorus can't see where it is going unless it brings an eye above the surface, but it



## Chorus of Tongues

**Sample Dialogue:** "He has heard of you. He will find you. He will fight you. He will kill you."

**Attributes:** Bod 5 (Mov 2, 8 when Netherburrowing), Chi 2, Mnd 5, Ref 4

**Skills:** Martial Arts 4, Creature Powers 7

**Unique Schticks:**

*Netherburrowing:* This schtick allows a Chorus of Tongues to submerge itself within the stuff of the Netherworld. A Tongue must leave about the top inch of its triangular body above the surface, and cannot carry items while moving this way. A Chorus is unable to use this ability to move through Shaped material.

**Weapons:** claw (5)

## Pack Fiends

**Sample Dialogue:** "GRRRRRR!"

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 5, Mnd 2, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 7

**Weapons:** bite (8)

## Reverend Zebediah Paine

**Sample Dialogue:** "The Lord may be merciful, but I'm not."

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 3, Mnd 6 (Wil 8), Ref 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 10, Guns 15, Intimidation 10, Info/Creatures 9, Info/Lotus 8, Info/Religion 12

**Gun Schticks:** Both Guns Blazing x2, Carnival of Carnage, Eagle Eye

**Unique Schtick:**

*Man on a Mission:* Zeb is utterly convinced that he's already dead. Thus, wounds that would drop another man don't get more than a passing glance from Zeb. He drops just as easily as anyone else, but his reserve of faith and will is so great, and his belief that a dead man can't die again so deeply entrenched, that Zeb has the equivalent of the creature schtick Inevitable Comeback. The only difference is that Zeb uses his Will, rather than Magic, with this schtick.

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), Desert Eagle .357 Magnum (11), throwing knife (8)

doesn't leave a trail behind; the Netherworld seems to just flow around it.

The Strangled Scream uses these things as its heralds, though it is not apparent how the Scream communicates with them. In this function, they communicate with Lotus agents across the Netherworld, and have also been known to appear to the Scream's enemies to taunt and challenge them.

## Pack Fiends

Pack Fiends look like dogs that have been sawed in half, dragging themselves forward with their front paws while trailing entrails, blood and slime behind them as they eagerly surge towards their prey. True to their name, they're usually found in large packs. These beasts are the Scream's standard foot soldiers. He sometimes lends packs to bolster ogre raiding parties.

## REVERENED ZEBEDIAH PAINE, DEMON HUNTER

Zeb Paine was a fine man who cared a bit too much. He saw no way to ever fully beat back the rising tide of ignorance, hate and greed he saw in contemporary America. His wife's death in a car accident was the last straw: He packed up his two biggest guns, hiked up his favorite mountain trail and picked a nice, scenic spot with a view to kill himself. Not wanting to give more fuel to the anti-gun lobby, Zeb decided at the last moment to leap to his death instead.

Halfway to bottom, Zeb slipped through an invisible, mid-air portal to the Netherworld. Zeb is convinced that he's dead and trapped in Hell. By extension, he sees the horrid demons and their Lotus masters as the servants of Satan. Finally faced with the root of all evil, Zeb has decided to kick some ass in the name of the Lord.

Zeb is in his mid-thirties with blond hair and tanned good looks. He wears a long leather duster and a bandoleer studded with throwing knives and his personal Bible. His twin Desert Eagles are never out of reach.



# JAMMERS IN WONDERLAND

The Jammers aren't the fly in the Netherworld ointment—they're the ground glass in its Vaseline. Of all the factions dwelling in the trackless depths of the Inner Kingdom, none face its breathless wonders with more unabashed contempt. The reason for this view is simple. Since the Buro stranglehold in 2056 makes any sort of permanent rebel fortress in that juncture impossible, the Jammers are forced to dwell among the chi-suckers whose very existence has corrupted their own time.

The more philosophical Jammers see chi-bait (yet another of the endless terms they've invented to demean those who can harness chi to their advantage) as victims in their own right. After all, they're as much a part of the natural order as mosquitoes or botulism. Then again, there aren't many philosophers in the Jammer ranks. The Initiation Tests of Bravery, Loyalty and Juggling Nitroglycerin scare off the more bookish types, which suits the rest of the pack just fine.

Ironically, while marginalized, the Jammers are able to find a seemingly endless number of sympathetic souls willing to die for the cause as long as they're kept fed and supplied. It is as if every open juncture—any many that aren't—contains wretched, hopeless people waiting to hear the anarchist credo they espouse, whether they be peasant farmers in 69 AD or spiritless wage slaves from 2056. While the masters of feng shui believe they control the hearts and minds of billions, it seems that there is a genetic urge to resist the standing order inherent in humanity. The Buro believe that, with a little genetic engineering, even that can be weeded out, but the Jammers know the truth—opposition began with the opposable thumb.

Most Jammers still come from 2056, despite the large influx of volunteers from other junctures. The reasons are numerous. First, Jammer tactics require familiarity with heavy weapons, ability to use high explosives and knowledge of where to put that monkeywrench for best effect. It's not that the average peasant can't pull a trigger, but growing up with virtual reality video games

## How to Speak Jammer

Most Jammer slurs are made up on the fly, and primarily demonstrate their contempt for chi and everything chi-related. Many such phrases are run of the mill expletives whose naughty bits have been replaced with "chi": chi-head, chi-hole, and so on. The most common such term is chi-ter (pronounced "cheater") which nicely puns how the Jammers feel about those who use chi to their advantage.

Pop culture is another source of slang. Many Jammers from 2056 and the contemporary juncture grew up disaffected youths, absorbing the world through the medium of the lowest common denominator (television). Now that they've gone radical, they've looked back at those shows with new eyes. Authority figures are called "Howells," and fellow Jammers are "Skippers" and "Gilligans." Near the MonkeyHouse and in the Genocide Lounge, there's always someone ranting about the hidden messages in *The Dukes of Hazzard* which exhort people everywhere to overthrow the Boss Hoggs and their Rosco-lackeys. The weird thing is—it works! Whatever aspect ushered these shows into the pop subconscious still reverberates in the hearts and minds of the listeners. One of Buster's fifteen-minute rants about the evils of the Snuffaluphagus converted over a hundred listeners at once.

Perhaps the most pervasive term in the Jammer vernacular is "chi-tocrat": One who would rule through chi. Usually shortened to "chi-to," this phrase inevitably causes involuntary giggling in anyone familiar with the contemporary juncture. Anything tainted by chi-tos is described as "chi-sy"—for example, a chi-sy house or a chi-sy gun. In fact, Jammers not from the contemporary juncture have been known to go on seek-and-destroy missions when they hear something described as "cheesy."

does give the 2056ers a certain edge when the targets start firing back. Second, and perhaps more significant, it's hard to be a Jammer in 2056. There are cameras pretty much everywhere worth going, and the simple act of buying a soy squishee has the potential to unlock all your records since kindergarten gym class. In a world where it's best to Jam and run, you have to make sure you've run far enough, and for most, that means back to the Netherworld.

The first few years in the Netherworld were extremely demoralizing for the Jammers. Often, they would encounter temporal refugees whose realities no longer existed. They knew that if they dawdled in their cause they would share the same fate. This led to an initial flurry of Jammer activity, most of which was brutally put down either because of poor reconnaissance or an utter lack of planning and forethought. Even worse,



every place worth having in the Netherworld was already occupied, and the Jammers' non-chi stance prevented them from making an area more suitable for development.

After being expelled from base after base, the Jammers knew that any permanent home would have to be in a completely illogical place. One Jammer scout asked the obvious question: "Is there any place people *don't* go?" While there were numerous suggestions, one intrigued him more than any other. He stumbled across *La Selva Silenciosa* ("The Silent Jungle") only after much searching—there were a lot of places like it, all equally feared by locals, but none really lived up to its reputation. (Well, possibly the Forest of Fallen Banners, but even the Jammers aren't *that* crazy.) It was everything the Jammers were searching for and more.

## HOME SWEET HOME

Most travelers who stumble across the Silent Jungle react with a mixture of awe and dread. After winding through over a mile of tight, dank passages, they emerge into an immense jungle with trees that stretch hundreds of feet to the ceiling, each laden with vines and moss. The air is thick and cloying, but not hot. Still, most break out in an uneasy sweat minutes after entering the cavern.

This mighty vault is roughly elliptical, with a width of about a kilometer and a length of about two. Indigenous wildlife scampers in the trees and undergrowth, but each species seems to have lost the ability to make sound of any kind. The humid air also seems to dampen noise, and a newcomer to this place immediately understands how easy it would be to become irrevocably lost. It's as if the jungle is holding its breath.

Unlike most factions in the Netherworld, the Jammers place no guards at the entrance to their domain. They rely on this place's reputation as sufficient deterrence. While most denizens of the Netherworld do not know that this is the secret location of the Jammers' base, the MonkeyHouse, they have heard of a place where the air is thick with life, but as silent

The enemy of my enemy makes good body armor.

—Anonymous Jammer

as death itself. To enter its depths is an act of faith that most cannot accept, and only the most foolhardy and stupid try. Understandably, the Jammers fit in both categories.

## Chizu

The first line of defense in the Jammers' secret base comes from the ubiquitous vines that cover the trees and ground. This flora is called "chizu" because of its chi-devouring properties and its resemblance to kudzu. It is found in no other location.

Chizu converts the chi stored in a person's body into biomass, effectively growing before the person's eyes. It can sense chi up to ten meters away and grows in its direction, as a normal plant would grow toward sunlight. It drains one chi point from each character in range per sequence, and goes into a growth frenzy when chi is used to fuel a fu power, spell, arcanowave device or what-have-you. When frenzied, chizu "attacks" chi-users, effectively striking, smothering and strangling with an equivalent Martial Arts rating of eight. To add insult to injury, all chi-powered schticks used within ten meters of chizu cost twice the normal amount of chi for the normal effect.

Chizu also leeches ambient chi out of the surrounding environment. Once a person enters a field of chizu, he cannot regain chi at all until he leaves it entirely. The Jammers have allowed strands of the vines to hang into their headquarters so detainees cannot regain chi for the duration of their stay.

All attempts to transplant the vine outside of the cavern have failed, which may be a good thing. Given the theory that the Netherworld is solidified chi, a plant that feeds off on chi could quickly devour everything. Chizu must also be alive to work properly, so ropes made of the vine do not share its properties. Jammer scientists are currently working to develop a hybrid of chizu and terrestrial plants to do the work of Jamming for them.



So far, they haven't succeeded, largely because none of the scientists who join the cause know a lick about botany.

## GunRot

Another curious property of the Jammer cavern is the slime that seems to cover everything except the chizu. The Jammers didn't think much of it until their guns began to jam and their high tech equipment failed to work properly. After three weeks' exposure to the jungle guns were practically useless, and the cyberchimps had to have total overhauls. Professor Havernen (see p. 89) initially explained it as the simple interaction of the humidity with various rapidly oxidizing fungi in the air, similar to the jungle rot which affects equipment back on Earth.

The Jammers considered giving up their base after a month of having to continuously replace

everything more sophisticated than a cigarette lighter. Fortunately for the Jammers, a serendipitous discovery that the sap of the chizu protected their equipment from the Rot meant that not only could they stay, but that unwanted visitors would find their high tech toys suffering the same fate as their chi-fueled ones.

For every week a given piece of high tech gear is exposed to the cavern environment, it suffers one cumulative point of "Impairment." After a month, the item is totally useless and cannot be salvaged. Treatment with chizu sap within the first month counteracts the Impairment and inures the item to further deterioration.

## The MonkeyHouse

When the Jammers initially explored *La Selva Silenciosa*, they were surprised to discover a Mayan-style step pyramid more than fifty meters high.



**"Isn't this all a little...convenient?"**

asked a suspicious Furious George at the first Freak meeting held in the MonkeyHouse. It echoed the secret fears that many Jammers held in their hearts. One moment they're on the run in perpetual danger of being wiped out entirely. The next, they're living in a groovy monkey-motif clubhouse surrounded by plants that just happen to be lethal to everyone in Netherworld but them. It doesn't take a paranoid to see an intelligent agent at work.

This has worried Green Rain and Gun Nut more than the other members of the Freak Council, because, prior to discovering the Silent Jungle, the others had made inquiries, trying to find someone who could Shape an area of Netherworld for them. They were rebuffed at every turn, and soon stopped looking for fear that word of their inquiries would get back to the other Jammers—they wouldn't want to be caught conspiring with chi-ters. However, it seems that their entreaties did not fall on deaf ears. They're just waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Primate faces were exquisitely carved into the stone, and at times, it was difficult to tell where the stone vines ended and the real vines began. Most curious of all was the desiccated corpse of an immense beast that sat squat atop the pyramid. It was a fusion of bug and monkey, with a strange simian face, two wicked pincers and chitinous armor more dense than anything from 2056. The bug's decayed innards—three stories tall—are now home to Potemkin and the rest of his cyberchimps.

Beneath the beast, at the base of a disturbing sacrificial altar stone, is the only entrance into the pyramid. Each of the fifteen levels within is crammed with gear, labs, living quarters and detention centers. Numerous rope ladders run down the central shaft providing the primary means of movement between levels, though a hydraulic lift has been added to facilitate the movement of heavy gear from floor to floor. In all, the MonkeyHouse can support two hundred Jammers for extended periods.

Even so, the Jammers need more space. Taking a nod from pop culture, they've surrounded the pyramid with a barracks shaped like a monkey head and a treehouse city to rival anything found on Endor or in Flash Gordon. This central "Monkeytown" has "suburbs" up to half a kilometer away, which consist of guard posts that have gone from Spartan furnishing to designs so ingenious they put *Gilligan's Island* to shame.

It is possible to travel up to a kilometer in any given direction and never touch the ground, so elaborate is the network of rope bridges and swinging vines. The Jammers use this to their advantage—most intuitive ground paths to the MonkeyHouse are heavily mined. It's said that it is impossible to reach the MonkeyHouse by an entirely earth-bound route without getting blown to bits.

Memo

From: Havernen

To: All Jammers

RE: Recent Unauthorized Power Consumption

We've had three brownouts in the last week due to excessive use of the plasma ejector. Please, people, the fusion pods are working overtime as it is to maintain power to the computers and the communications grid. We don't need to put extra strain on the system every time someone wants their tunnel rat "extra crispy." The plasma ejector is to be used in defense of the base ONLY. It would be a shame to return to the draconian power policies that followed the Smores Incident.



## PERSONALITIES

Trying to lead the Jammers is like trying to herd kittens—it takes a lot more brute force than is wise or worthwhile. The fierce independence that makes a good Jammer makes a group of them less than cohesive. Soon after the MonkeyHouse was established, the group fractionalized over and over and over. Most of the reasons were superficial, minor rebellions against the standing order of things. For instance, one group of humans would not take orders from Potemkin or any of his chimps. Since that time, most of the differences have been resolved or forgotten, leaving only two major factions: The Freaks and the Geeks.

The Geeks are the *hoi polloi* everymen that make up the majority of the Jammers. They're not in it for high-minded ideals; they're in it because people give them explosives. A less generous observer might call them the Jammers' cannon fodder, but this is unfair—the Geeks know what they're getting into when they lock and load and storm the palace gates. They've lived in the Netherworld long enough to experience at least one superficial shift, and are aware that the madness won't stop until every site is burned. They're a loose conglomeration of gun nuts, pyromaniacs and demolition "experts" (a word used here in its most figurative sense). A lot of them do die, but most do so of their own free will, not under the manipulations of a chitocrat.

"Freak" is a term the Geeks use to describe the non-expendable members, whether they work in the labs (as one might expect "Geeks" to do) or serve as battlechimps. The Geek Credo states that one Freak is worth ten Geeks, and the Freaks are given an inordinate amount of leeway in their eccentricities. Sadism is discouraged but not prohibited. As one Freak said, "Good science is always messy."

The Freaks never use that term to describe themselves, preferring to ignore the pedestal upon which they've been put, even though it's painfully obvious that Freaks and Geeks are not equal. The mere suggestion that a Freak would put himself in harm's way is enough to send the Geeks into conniptions. Because the Geeks are so

### Professor Havernen

**Sample Dialogue:** "Boy, I could really go for some Extruded FoodPolymer #82 Red right now."

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

**Skills:** Guns 13, Driving 15, Fix-It 20, Info/Science 13

**Weapons:** Clacker Gun (9/3/20)

### Clacker Gun

9/6/20

Named for the sinister *clack* that's heard when the gun starts to build a charge, the Clacker Gun is an ingeniously simple energy weapon, the first portable one of its kind. It generates a magnetic bottle on the muzzle, converting conventional gases into superheated plasma, which is stored in the bottle. When the trigger is released, the shutter that exposes the fusion element clicks shut, releasing the bottle in a straight line.

Firing the gun normally depletes one charge per shot and inflicts the base Damage listed. The longer the trigger is pulled, however, the more intense the charge. Each extra shot spent charging depletes an extra charge (the gun holds twenty), but increases the Damage done by one. Holding the weapon for eight shots results in an overload which does seventeen points of Damage to everyone in a three meter radius (including the shooter). In addition, the gun can be used in hand to hand combat, where the charging bottle is lanced into the body of the opponent, cutting the effectiveness of armor and Toughness by half, and destroying the gun in the process. Clacker Guns are still fairly rare, and are generally used in defense of the MonkeyHouse.

protective of their Freaks, the scientists and chimps enjoy a degree of longevity. They become *de facto* leaders simply because they're the only ones who remember what works and what doesn't work, and are veritable founts of advice on a variety of topics. The average Freak takes this leadership role quite seriously, creating a strange but stone-faced stoicism compared to the demented anarchy that possesses the Geeks.

### Professor Havernen

Havernen is called Gun Nut, but that's an unfair label. He was a particle physicist who wanted no part of arcanowave theory—imagine a contemporary of Einstein clinging to the Theory of Aether. He was hounded and derided for



arguing that arcanowave devices were too brutal a shortcut (evinced by the horrific mutations they caused) and that the same effects could be derived through the clever application of existing principles. His theories were just what the Jammers were looking for, and he readily took up their cause.

Of course, the life of a Freak has its downsides. He's proven too valuable to the cause to let him return home, even though no one in the Buro has the slightest idea who Gun Nut is. Havernen misses 2056 terribly, and his homesickness affects his work. Further, he never really liked guns, though that's where he's most needed. He has designed CAD/CAM factories that convert raw materials into finished weapons and ammunition. Unlike the Shaped tools that the Architects use, these factories can be built in any juncture (though anyone with the right equipment can very easily track the EM noise they generate in any juncture but 2056). In addition, he's discovered a (relatively) stable fusion conversion process which has made possible the Clacker Gun and Mr. Pop, a fusion device that can turn pretty much anything into an explosive.

### Mr. Pop

This device, which looks a bit like a 20th century food processor, uses crude fusion principles to convert regular matter into energy, which is stored for short periods of time in a detachable clip. It was originally intended to serve as a portable recharger for Clacker Gun clips, but due to the instability of the energy transfer, the clips were short lived indeed. Havernen turned this lemon into lemonade by beefing up the shielding slightly and placing a timer (one to six sequences) on the discharge slide. Voila! Instant bomb!

Each Mr. Pop comes with enough empty bomb clips to make six bombs. The primary flaw in the design is the variable amount of time it takes to make a bomb. It takes ten minutes to pour enough water into Mr. Pop to make a decent bomb, but if the input matter is very complex (i.e. organic) or high up on the periodic table—presto! For instance, it only takes two or three plutonium pellets to get the job done.

Once the clip is removed from the Mr. Pop unit, a Jammer has ten sequences to set the device or get rid of it (the default timer setting: is one sequence). A bomb clip from a Mr. Pop does twenty Damage and has a Concealment rating of one. The Mr. Pop itself has Concealment of three.

## Dr. Kenwon Kiroshi

Kiroshi is called "Papa Jammer" because he invented the crude chi-jamming device which allowed the original scientists and battlechimps to escape undetected in the act of defiance that created the Jammers. Unfortunately for Kiroshi, the chi-jammer was actually an arcanowave device that worked only because it leeches the chi force from his own body. Thus, it never worked again.

Undaunted, Kiroshi is working on other devices that can jam chi, and is endlessly fascinated by chizu. His poor understanding of botany has kept him from making any breakthroughs, though he did develop the Salad Shooter.

Kiroshi's lack of chi manifests as an arcanowave mutation. He is unable to sleep. Instead, he sits in a chair in his lab for six hours each day, staring forward blankly, never blinking. Then he rises and continues with whatever it was he was doing, as if no time passed for him. This unsettles people, and is a constant reminder of the danger of arcanowave devices.

## Dr. Alice Friedkin

"Freaky" is this dedicated cyberneticist's obvious nickname. Like Havernen, Friedkin felt that

### Dr. Kenwon Kiroshi

**Sample Dialogue:** "I'm sorry. Was I taking a 'time out' again?"

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

**Skills:** Guns 8, Arcanowave Device 15, Driving 8, Fix-It 15, Info/Science 13

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), Buro 9 (11/1/7+1)

### The Salad Shooter

8/5/6

The shooter fires a needle coated with enzymes derived from chizu. In addition to any damage caused by the projectile, the target loses the ability to use chi in the next two sequences. This gun works only once on a target before the body develops adequate defenses.



arcanowave technology caused too many problems that were too easily overlooked. She studied under the sadists who created the battlechimps and learned a great deal of compassion from their breed. At first she was horrified by the suggestion that she create more battlechimps for the Jammers, but she soon understood the vital necessity when her own arm was ripped off by a rampaging abomination. Now she sports an elegant limb that is a veritable Swiss army knife of design and function.

She's willing to install cybergear in anyone who wants some, regardless of whether a new arm (or whatever) is really needed. For volunteers from 69,

1850, and the contemporary junctures, she insists on a one week "cooling off" period before replacing a healthy body part. She also performs cybermods on animals, but lacks data on what made the battlechimp line so successful. Adapting the design to other animals has been slow going, but she has recently made a stunning breakthrough with the spider monkey.

Recently, she has begun to vocalize her frustration with the limitations of non-arcanowave cybernetics, which require larger power packs and more shielding. Such talk borders on treason, and she has been counseled to watch her words carefully.

### Dr. Alice Friedkin

**Sample Dialogue:** "Oh sure, it can tear a phone booth in half, but it's nothing like the new prosthetics the Buro's got cooking."

**Attributes:** Bod 5 (Str 8 in cyber arm), Chi 0 (For 1), Mnd 5, Ref 5

**Skills:** Guns 10, Arcanowave Devices 12, Cybernetics 15, Fix-It 15, Info/Science 13

**Weapons:** punch (9), kick (7), Buro 9 (11/1/7+1)

### Spider Monkeys

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0 (Mag 7), Mnd 3, Ref 5

**Skills:** Martial Arts 6, Cybernetic Device\* 10

**Cybernetic Schticks\*:** Tentacles (tail)

**Weapons:** tail (10), claws (6), bomb (18)

\*As creature powers.

The Jammers have exploited a fad from early years of the 21st century to create the ultimate surveillance network. At that time, spider monkeys were all the rage as pets. As they grew up, though, they grew violent, and many escaped, where they adapted to urban life, establishing a niche somewhere between rats and pigeons. Even the Reckoning (see *Seed of the New Flesh*, page 6) and the hungry times that followed couldn't completely wipe them out. As a result, every city has its share of feral spider monkeys. They even roam the Silent Jungle, and some parts of the other junctures.

Dr. Friedkin has modified a number of these creatures with enhanced senses, units which broadcast all they see and hear, sharp steel claws to aid in climbing and a small fusion bomb in their chest in case they manage to work their way into something really important. Besides the bomb, their most dangerous feature is the cybernetic tail, which makes an excellent garrote.

## Pannic and the Wild Boys

Nature abhors a vacuum, and with all these monkeys stomping about in powered armor pretending to be human, it was almost inevitable that a group of Jammers would go feral and take to the trees. The Wild Boys, led by a man called Pannic, have become experts in guerrilla warfare, setting

### Pannic

**Sample Dialogue:** "We must harden our hearts and bodies—that is why you must pass the Ordeal of the Smoldering Coals."

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0, Mnd 5 (Int 7), Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 10, Guns 12, Fix-It 14, Intrusion 12, Sabotage 12, Info/Anthropology 14

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), spear (9), bow and arrow (7/5/1)

### Typical Wild Boy

**Sample Dialogue:** "AiiiiAlIIIIlaiaiaiai!"

**Attributes:** Bod 7, Chi 0 (For 1), Mnd 3, Ref 7

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Guns 5, Fix-It\* 8, Intimidation 6, Intrusion 8, Sabotage 8

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), spear (11), bow and arrow (7/5/1)

\*The wild boys' Fix-It abilities are limited to really clever applications of stone age materials.



punji traps and dead falls as cunning as a Green Beret's worst nightmare. Pannic actually holds a Masters degree in Anthropology, and was studying tribes in Borneo when he stumbled into the Netherworld. He fell in with the Jammers and used his book smarts to develop the extensive network of rope bridges and tree houses. He gained quite a following, and like any academic gone bad, started a pseudo-cult, making up rites of passages involving body alteration and feats of endurance. The result is twenty of the nastiest jungle fighters you never want to meet. While they worship the monkey essence in the heart of every cyberchimp, they see Potemkin and the others as "fallen angels." They hate the Architects for making them so, and don't care much for Freaky, as she's continuing the Devil's work.

## Buster

Buster was once an ad exec who clawed her way to the top of one of America's leading agencies. She was asked to produce a campaign to sell seed to third world nations and pulled it off brilliantly. So pervasive were her jingles that children in Lesotho chanted them on the way to school. Later, after the check cleared and the lease was signed on the condo in the Hamptons, she discovered the seeds she'd sold were genetically altered to be sterile. Farmers would have to come back, year after year, and pay all over again. Soon they'd be little more than sharecroppers.

### Buster

**Sample Dialogue:** "I don't mind dying in pieces, if the alternative is the peace of a dying mind."

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

**Skills:** Martial Arts 10, Guns 10, Driving 10, Fix-It 7, Leadership 19, Sabotage 12, Info/Psychology 12

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), Buro 9 (11/1/7+1)

Something inside Buster snapped. She quit her job, blew up her condo (taking the surrounding three blocks with it), rewired her BMW to drive by remote control and ran down every one of the execs who'd signed off on the seeds. After that, she wandered the country and the world as a freelance vigilante. Her handiwork caught the attention of a pack of Jammers who were about to blow up a post office she had just leveled. She didn't need much convincing to join the Secret War.

Once she arrived in the Netherworld, a change overcame her. Her rage slipped away, replaced with a compulsion to recruit others, to use her persuasive abilities to build an army large enough to topple the existing order. She became a recruiter, the lowest level of Freak, and spent most of her days hanging out at the Genocide Lounge, spreading the Jammer Gospel. She proved its greatest evangelist.

Virtually every faction in the Secret War wants Buster. Most want her head on a pike, but a few groups—the Lodge and the Architects, to be specific—admire her persuasive abilities and seek to bend her to their will. They're all destined to fail. Buster is a Jammer, through and through, and won't stop until the old order is burned away.

# The Rest of the Netherworld

RABBLE AND OTHERWISE

## PEOPLE

### THE UNEXPECTED DELIVERANCE SOCIETY

Tommy G sat in the cell, staring glumly at the thick, locked door, and through the small slit in it to a second thick, locked door. Every so often, just for a change, he would stare glumly at a wall, or the floor. When he got tired of staring around him, he lay down on the thin mattress and stared at the ceiling instead. He'd tried to escape, of course. It hadn't helped. Stripped down to a thin cotton loincloth, there wasn't a hell of a lot he could do. No lockpicks, no handy pieces of wire, not even a coin to flip.

Eventually, a guard came. "Mr. G, are you there?"

"Of course," said Tommy irritably. "Where else would I be, for Chrissakes?"

"It is time to feed you," the guard said. "Do not try to escape. It is not possible. Your cell has two doors. I have the key for the inner, and my companion will lock me inside the outer."

"Thanks for reminding me," said Tommy.

Good as his word, the guard was locked inside the outer door before he'd deign to unlock the inner one. When he pushed it open, Tommy could see that he was carrying a bowl of thin stew, a chunk of

bread and a mug of water. As the guard entered, Tommy said, "I could kill you right now, you know."

"Yes," nodded the guard. "But it would not help you."

"It would damn well make me feel better," muttered Tommy.

"Perhaps," agreed the guard. "However, my death does not matter, and you are scheduled to be executed swiftly, in four hours time. If you kill me, you will instead be tortured to death slowly, over a period of several weeks of excruciating agony, starting as soon as my colleague can get sufficient reinforcements to pacify you. It would seem a foolish step."

Tommy and the guard exchanged glances, but Tommy kept his mouth shut. There didn't seem to be much else to say. The mug and bowl were thin clay, useless as weapons, but the food did provide something else to look at. Tommy certainly wasn't going to risk getting drugged.

Some hours later, the door opened again, without warning. To Tommy's amazement, a tall, impressively mustachioed man stood in front of him, wrapped in a long, flowing cloak. "Thomas G, I presume?" His voice was cultured, urbane and vaguely sarcastic. Tommy nodded. "I've taken the liberty of bringing you a set of robes cut to look like those of an itinerant monk serving a penance, smuggled into the Temple within the bread-panniers of a goat. If you would be so good as to put them on, we'll have you back at the Lounge in no time. I shall adopt the guise of a master. Do not speak until we are out of the Temple."



## Member of the Unexpected Deliverance Society

*Society members are always named individuals, and are as likely to be female as male. The GM should feel free to give any member of the Society any extra fu schticks, gun schticks or sorcery schticks she wishes.*

**Sample Dialogue:** "Have at you, fiend! You'll regret your persecutions!"

**Attributes:** Bod 8 (Tgh 9), Chi 7 (For 15), Mnd 7 (Cha 9), Ref 7 (Spd 8)

**Skills:** Martial Arts 12, Guns 12, Deceit 16, Intrusion 15, Sabotage 10, Seduction 11

**Fu Schticks:** Prodigious Leap, Friend of Darkness

**Gun Schticks:** Eagle Eye

**Unique Schticks:**

*In the Nick of Time:* This schtick works as a background effect. Synchronicity, luck and fate align to make the Unexpected Deliverance Society aware of desperate plights, gross dangers and similar threats in time to do something about them. If it is even slightly credible, and it fits with the GM's wishes for the plot, this schtick allows the Unexpected Deliverance Society to show up . . . in the nick of time.

*Panache:* With this schtick, everything that the user does has an impressive edge of dramatic flair. Entrances are grand, speeches are declamatory, cloaks twirl in the breeze and tumbles look suave. To reflect this unconscious derring-do, any stunt with a difficulty of twelve or more that the user attempts gains a +2 AV bonus for unconscious grace.

*Harebrained Plan:* When attempting something insanely difficult, the user of this schtick can devise a barely plausible plan to aid in the attempt. For each restriction or added complication in the plan that must be stuck to, the planner gains a +1 AV bonus to all actions intended to advance the objectives that the plan aids. If the plan goes awry, the bonus becomes a penalty for the remainder of the scene. For example, consider this Harebrained Plan: "We'll disguise ourselves as Huan Ken's Thunder Knights. So long as we remain silent, they'll let us in." This involves two restrictions, so it gives a +2 AV bonus. It doesn't really matter whether silent Thunder Knights are expected; somehow, so long as it is adhered to, the plan works.

**Weapons:** punch (9), kick (10), rapier (12), thrown dagger (6), cross-bow (7/4/1)

For many unfortunates on both sides of the law, the capricious members of the Unexpected Deliverance Society are the last line of defense. Fearless and highly skilled, with a strong sense of

the dramatic, they have rescued countless prisoners, both pleasant and unpleasant, from the clutches of major factions, rampaging monsters, law enforcement officers, soldiers and oppressors of all types.

Masters of disguise and infiltration, the Society manages to combine superlative fighting skills with panache, flair and chivalric style. Their leader is called simply the Bared Blade, and little is known about him. Like the rest of the Society's members, he affects a cultured European accent, but his real origins are a mystery. Conflicting rumors describe the Society's origins—there's at least one story for every open juncture, and several for junctures that no longer exist. Whatever the truth of their past, their mission is well known and doggedly upheld—to defend the underdog when there is no one else, to stand by each other regardless of the consequences and to do it all in grand style.

What is far less well known is the reason behind that mission. In his youth, the Bared Blade fell out of a tree and, while unconscious, had a powerful vision. In it, the young man was warned by God that the Messiah, when he was reborn, would be found in an unlikely guise, beset by enemies. The Blade took that to mean he was fated to rescue the Lord from certain doom, but that the Messiah would not be easy to recognize. Rather than risk failing in his urgent fate, he vowed to make sure that his God-given duty was discharged.

To aid in this mission, he recruited allies from among the best of the highly-skilled individuals found in exile. The members of the Society are extremely good, but given the almost suicidal nature of many of the missions they undertake, they do suffer some losses. The Bared Blade likes to maintain the Society's membership at exactly twenty-one, so he keeps an eye open for potential recruits. When a member dies—and is buried, with tastefully somber pomp and ceremony, in the Society's secret memorial ground—he recruits a replacement, training him to the extremely high level of competence the Society requires.

Led by fortune and highly-tuned to the way that fate blows lives around, the Society Members—



## The Bared Blade

**Sample Dialogue:** "Come, my friends. The Lord never sleeps, and there is much work for us to do!"

**Attributes:** Bod 9, Chi 8 (For 20), Mnd 9 (Cha 12), Ref 10

**Skills:** Martial Arts 17, Guns 10, Deceit 16, Leadership 15, Intrusion 16, Seduction 15, Info/Major Groups' Security Arrangements 15

**Fu Schticks:** Abundant Leap, Friend of Darkness, Flying Windmill Kick  
**Unique Schticks:**

*Panache:* As Member of the Society (see previous page).

*Undying Loyalty:* There is something about the Bared Blade that instills great devotion. Anyone who swears loyalty to the Bared Blade and the cause of the Unexpected Deliverance Society is always absolutely, unswervingly loyal to both through thick and thin. Thus, the Society need never fear traitors—they truly can, and do, trust each other with their lives.

*Miraculous Escape:* Fortune favors the Bared Blade, and he is almost impossible to kill. If it is at all possible, any attack or other mishap that would otherwise kill him fails, as, somehow, he is whisked to safety. A rockfall separates him from attackers, he slips down a slope, friends appear to grab him—or, if he cannot possibly escape, he is wounded and knocked unconscious, his body somehow left behind for dead. Sadly, this protection does not extend to anyone else.

**Weapons:** punch (10), kick (11), rapier (13), thrown dagger (6), cross-bow (7/4/1)

who prefer to operate in groups of three or four—have a knack for being in the right place at the right time. Any time exiles or Innerwalkers find themselves grossly outnumbered or endangered in a desperate situation against enemy forces, there is a chance—just a chance—of an Unexpected Deliverance.

It should be noted that the Unexpected Deliverance Society has, in its time, rescued murderous abominations, saved demons from torch-bearing mobs and released masterminds of the vilest stripe from just durance. They're fully convinced that the Lord Works in Mysterious Ways (capital letters and all) and, consequently, they're unwilling to judge any imprisonment by their flawed mortal standards. This is something for GMs to keep in mind when the player characters have managed to capture a longstanding foe.

## BROTHERHOOD OF HEBREW CHAMPIONS

*The faint sound of empty tin cans falling snapped Alice Lo out of meditative reverie. She immediately rolled over, silently, into the shadows of the wall, and then froze, listening carefully. Another rat had probably disturbed the warning stacks, but better to make certain. There was a second distant clang as someone with boots or claws kicked a can, followed by an archaic curse. Alice took a deep breath, then screamed at the top of her voice, "Lotus coming from the north! Everybody UP!"*

*Pandemonium erupted as the village woke up. Exiles tumbled from their huts, fumbling packs into place, and looked around wildly. In the northern passage, something was snuffling unpleasantly, and a faint chanting was audible. The evasion drill was well practiced though; everyone scattered, to cluster in small groups at one of the other passage entrances. Mai Ling uttered a short spell, plunging the cavern into darkness, and then everyone ran for it, towards various bolt-holes and friendly caverns.*

*Alice picked a passage at random, sprinting slightly ahead of everyone else. A few hours earlier, she'd ambushed one of Gao Zhang's goons, a messenger. After kicking her way through his guards, she beat him to a pulp and grabbed the scroll he was taking to the Darkness Pagoda. Pui Ti had offered to pay very well indeed to find out what the two of them were talking about, and Alice had dropped the scroll off before coming home. The little bastard she'd whacked had obviously been healed enough to come and sniff her out, and it sounded like he'd brought demons with him.*

*Desperately trying to think of a way to get the Lotus off her back without having to pay Pui Ti back everything she'd just earned, Alice didn't notice the stone-colored demon clinging to the roof of the tunnel. She didn't even notice the large stick it swung at the back of her head. Everything exploded into bright light, and her last sensation, as she passed out, was that she was being lifted.*

A splitting headache woke her up, later. The eunuch she'd mugged was standing over her, grinning nastily, with a half-dozen hulking gray demons around the two of them, and a score of armed mooks behind them. Damn.

"You will give back the property you have stolen from the Eaters of the Lotus," said the eunuch, smiling. "Like hell," spat Alice.

The eunuch was unmoved. "You will then reveal on whose orders you attacked me. Then, when I have the knowledge I need from you, you will die."

Alice flexed her muscles lightly and prepared to leap. Suddenly, there was a blast of light, and the demon nearest her head was wreathed in hoops of purple-black. "Binah to Tiphareth!" a powerful voice called out, and the hoops flashed blinding yellow. The demon screamed, and its outline, visible through the brightness, started to flow. A moment later, the light winked out and a small golden cube sat where the demon had been.

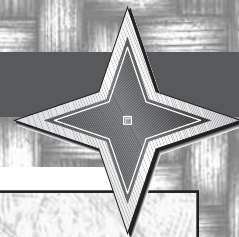
While the eunuch and his forces stared in shocked horror at the demon's remains, Alice looked around for the source of the attack. A knot of men in sober black suits and hats were bubbling down the passage faster than Alice could sprint, braids streaming. Behind them, a similarly-bearded older man stood with his arms raised apart, hands glowing. "Kether!" he cried, and the glow winked out. A bolt of electricity snapped into life between the eunuch's head and the ceiling above him, arcing him to the stone. As he collapsed lifeless, the new arrivals swarmed over the warriors. Alice felt a momentary disorientation, and discovered that she was lying at the older man's feet.

"Thank you," she said sincerely. "I think you just saved my ass."

"There is no need to thank us, daughter," said the man. "It was the will of Jehovah that you be spared the tribulations of this evil. It was revealed to me that you have an important role to play in the fight against the devil's minions."



Illustration by David White



## Rabbi-Captain Benjamin

**Sample Dialogue:** "It is the will of the Almighty, my child."

**Attributes:** Bod 9, Chi 15, Mnd 8, Ref 9

**Skills:** Martial Arts 14, Chi/ballah 15, Leadership 14, Info/Chi/ballah 14, Info/Judaism 15

### Chi/ballah Schticks:

**Grounded in Malkuth:** As Brothers David, Michael and Simeon (see next page).

**Tiphareth Transformation:** 6 shots, 6 Chi. This schtick purifies and transforms corruption. The Chi/ballist's Difficulty to use this schtick is always ten. Any Underworld creature targeted with this schtick must make a Con roll against a Difficulty equal to the Chi/ballist's Outcome. If the victim succeeds in this roll, it avoids any harmful effect. Named creatures that fail take standard Blast Damage. Unnamed creatures, on the other hand, are permanently sublimed into small cubes of pure gold whose weight in grams is equal to one-tenth of the creature's original weight in kilograms. Similarly, objects or unnamed beings only partly composed of Underworld material—arcanowave devices, for example—are parted from their demonic components, which are then transformed as described. Arcanowave items (and ports) are destroyed and abominations slain by this process. The material transformed manifests as an appropriately-sized gold cube.

**Kether's Blessing:** 3 shots, 6 Chi. This schtick forces the target to look into his soul without the opportunity for self-deception. When it targets a person who is genuinely honorable, Kether's Blessing behaves as an application of the sorcery schtick Heal (Heal Wounds). Evil targets, on the other hand, are offered immediate redemption—the chance to cast off their hatred, repent of their sins and leave the world and their guilt behind. It's the best offer most evil-doers will ever get. An unnamed evil target must pass a Will check against a Difficulty of 10 in order to pass on the offer. Failure results in immediate death and passage to the next life. Named evil targets may automatically give up the chance at absolution. The GM chooses, based the character and the needs of the story. Taking the opportunity results in immediate death, as above. Passing up the opportunity costs the GMC six shots worth of agonizing as he comes to grips with the knowledge that he has passed

over his last chance at salvation. When a player characters who might be considered evil is targeted, he may either choose to be saved (forcing the player to start a new character) or take the six shot penalty and spend the rest of his life suffering with the undeniable knowledge of his unpleasantness. This schtick has no effect on non-humans. Benjamin bathes everyone at the Synagogue with Kether's Blessing on a regular basis, to ensure that they are pure of heart.

**Holy Fire:** 6 shots, 6 Chi. This schtick is similar to the sorcery schtick Blast. However, unlike the usual variants of Blast, Holy Fire takes the form of a bright beam of holy light which only affects animate creatures. As far as walls (for example) are concerned, Holy Fire may as well be a flashlight. Genuinely evil miscreants (as opposed to naughty or misguided ones) take +2 Damage from this attack (or, if unnamed, are taken out on an Outcome one less than normal). Demonic and supernatural creatures are affected in the same way. These two conditions are cumulative, though, so (for example) an evil demon would take +4 Damage and an evil zombie mook would go down on an Outcome of three.

**Shadows of Daath:** 10 shots, 1 Chi. This schtick can be used to get a precise answer to any questions the user asks, although answers about the future are often outdated by the time the event comes to pass. This is considerably more exact than sorcery's Divination schtick—sometimes too exact, as the information yielded often comes out of context. In practice, the results returned are at the GMs discretion, and can be as useful or useless as the plot demands. When the answer is not particularly practical, this is usually because the details drown out the message. For example, in response to a question about a mysterious assailant, a character might discover that "the assailant's shoes make a crunching noise when walking on gravel."

**Yesod's Pull:** 1 shot, 3 Chi. This schtick instantly teleports any human or animal within twelve meters to any other point within twelve meters. Anyone moving or fighting must make a Dex check against a Difficulty of ten to avoid falling over. A person can not be teleported into the air with this schtick.

**Weapons:** punch (10), kick (11), sword (13), longbow (8/5/1)

*"Um, 'scuse me if I sound rude, but exactly who the heck are you?" asked Alice.*

*"My child, it is no rudeness. I am Rabbi-Captain Benjamin of the Brotherhood of Hebrew Champions, 1st Division Special Forces to the Sacred Hebraic Empire, and those are my men—Simeon is the one gutting that devil-spawn, Michael is the one bashing those shmucks' heads together, and David is the one executing the leap. You may like to think of us as the Clenched Fist of God."*

The Brotherhood of Hebrew Champions has its roots in a long-erased juncture. During the Exodus, the Israelites continued eastward, eventually coming to Tibet. There they learned the secrets of chi from the Lamas and discovered how to apply the knowledge to their own mystical tradition. The resulting fusion was called Chi/ballah, and it was immensely strong. Chi/ballah masters quickly conquered the Mongols and built an army of Mongol soldiers backed up by Chi/ballah



## Synagogue Guards

**Sample Dialogue:** "Praise be to God. Welcome back, brother."

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 2, Mnd 5, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 7, Guns 8, Info/Judaism 7

**Gun Schticks:** Lightning Reload x3

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), longbow (8/5/1), sword (10)

## Brothers David, Michael and Simeon

*Despite sharing common stats, David, Michael and Simeon are treated as named characters. They rarely stoop to using weapons.*

**Sample Dialogue:** "KiiiYah! Feel Jehovah's wrath, spawn of Evil."

**Attributes:** Bod 8 (Str 9), Chi 10, Mnd 7, Ref 8 (Spd 9)

**Skills:** Martial Arts 12, Guns 10, Chi/ballah 13, Intrusion 8, Medicine (Field Surgery) 10, Info/Judaism 12

### Chi/ballah Schticks:

**Grounded in Malkuth:** 1 shot, 1 Chi. Allows the user to adopt the resilience of the earth and shrug off attacks. For any attack that causes a wound, a successful Chi/ballah roll against a Difficulty equal to the total Damage nullifies it entirely.

**Speed of Hod:** 1 shot, 1 Chi. The user's normal running speed is doubled for three shots. He can also act more swiftly, reducing the shot cost of all actions by one. Additionally, Martial Arts attacks get a Damage bonus of +3. Shot costs cannot be reduced to 0 using Speed of Hod.

**Wrath of the Almighty:** 1 shot, 8 Chi. For the duration of this sequence, Damage done by the user's hands and feet bypasses all Toughness, Armor, supernatural armor and sorcerous/arcane defenses.

**Kaballistic Insight:** 1 shot, 1 Chi. The user gets an impression of the immediate future of a battle. For the next three shots, the user receives a bonus of +3 to all dodges, both passive and active.

**Weapons:** punch (10), kick (11), sword (13), longbow (8/5/1)

officers. The resulting force was strong enough to allow them to take over the vast bulk of the Eurasian shelf. The Sacred Hebraic Empire stood for centuries.

Eventually, their juncture was opened to the Netherworld. By this time, Chi/ballah was such an advanced science that it was possible to imbue people with incredible powers. The most elite force of the Sacred Hebraic Empire was the Brotherhood of Hebrew Champions, Chi/ballah-trained warrior-monks enhanced with extra powers. A team from the Brotherhood was specially prepared and sent to investigate the Netherworld with a back-up force of standard soldiers. The feng shui of the world shifted as a result of the juncture

opening up, and two months into the investigation, the team came back for their weekly debriefing to find that the Sacred Hebraic Empire had never existed. They decided unanimously to obey the will of God, and re-entered the Netherworld. They did not even notice when the portal to their juncture vanished entirely.

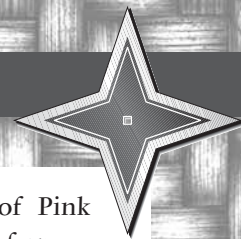
The Brotherhood of Hebrew Champions maintains a small synagogue in a quiet corner of the Netherworld where they meditate, pray, tend to a small congregation of fellow exiles of all sorts and plan their battle against the forces of the Devil—generally the Lotus and the Architects. In addition to the four Champions, the synagogue is home to twenty soldiers brought along from their home juncture after the critical shift, and a similar number of exiles of varying levels of ability, as the GM needs. Rabbi-Captain Benjamin, who trained as an exorcist, has attempted to pass on the secrets of Chi/ballah, but it is sadly impossible.

## TWO FACE

Two Face is the band *du jour* in the Netherworld these days. They first rocked the rabble at the Genocide Lounge back in 1993, and they seemed perfect to provide the soundtrack to the Jammers' war of annihilation. They returned to the Netherworld many times, rousing their audiences with three-chord punk anthems and hard-edged hip hop mayhem. When word hit the street that all three members of Two Face—Nik Nemesis, Hal 2000, and 2-Way Ray—were moving permanently to the Netherworld, everyone assumed they'd set up shop at the Genocide Lounge. The Jammers were as surprised as anyone when Two Face found their own space and turned it into an anarchist collective.

As far as Two Face is concerned, the Jammers are great to party with and the idea of blowing up feng shui sites is certainly punk rock. But the bottom line is that no one really knows what the side-effects of "freeing" humanity from chi will be. Not only that, they can't be sure that the Jammers aren't really secretly planning to blow up the world, or do whatever else gets into their heads.

Two Face started living full-time in the Netherworld about six months ago. While



it can be a dangerous place, the Netherworld has no controlling government and no stinkin' cops. It was the place, they decided, to start a punk collective. Free of corporate culture and consumerism, the members of Two Face hope to put anarchist ideas into practice. And if feng shui really works, they want to use it to make the world a better place.

Their place is called the A-Spot, and it houses a performance space, a recording studio and about a dozen other punks. The A-Spot has a ramshackle look, and none of the punks know enough about Shaping to spruce it up. This kind of squat aesthetic suits them just fine.

### The Music

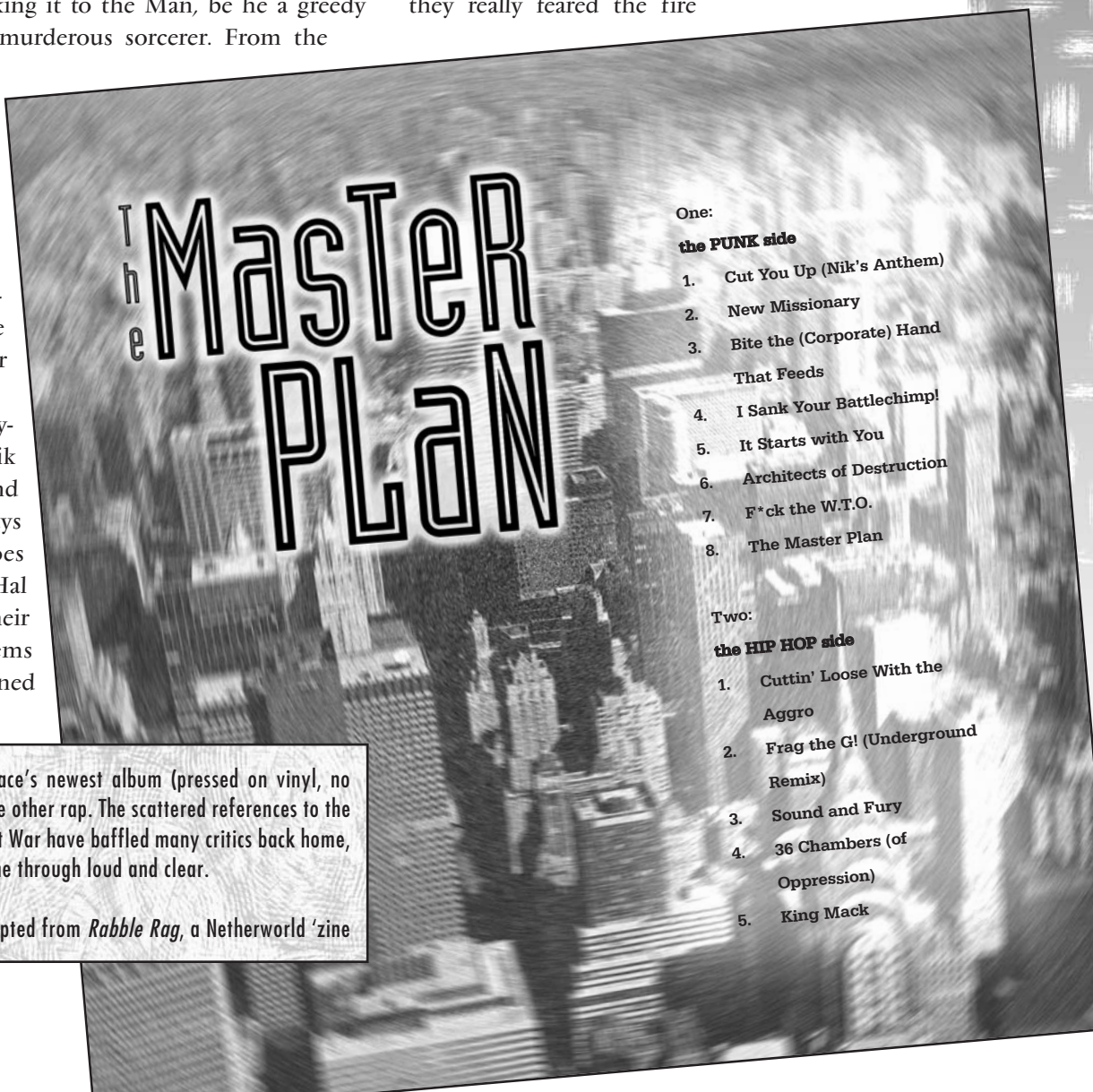
The music of Two Face is about fighting the system and sticking it to the Man, be he a greedy politician or a murderous sorcerer. From the start, they wanted to provide a bridge between the punk scene and the world of hip hop. They called themselves Two Face in honor of their dual styles.

When playing punk, Nik plays guitars and sings, Ray plays bass and does backups and Hal plays drums. Their vitriolic anthems have been likened

to those of the Reagan Youth, Flux of Pink Indians, and the Big Boys. In the blink of an eye, Two Face can switch from punk to rap. 2-Way Ray makes a mean MC, and he's backed up by the DJ wizardry of Hal 2000, and Nik's potent guitar work. While often compared to the Beastie Boys, Two Face's hip hop owes more to Public Enemy and BDP.

### Nik Nemesis

Nik Nemesis was born to be a punk. Even as a young girl in small town Oregon, she bristled at perceived injustice and defied authority instinctively. When school bullies picked on smaller kids, Nik marched right up and told them off. The bullies told themselves they didn't want to hit a girl, but they really feared the fire



One:

#### the PUNK side

1. Cut You Up (Nik's Anthem)
2. New Missionary
3. Bite the (Corporate) Hand That Feeds
4. I Sank Your Battlechimp!
5. It Starts with You
6. Architects of Destruction
7. F\*ck the W.T.O.
8. The Master Plan

Two:

#### the HIP HOP side

1. Cuttin' Loose With the Aggro
2. Frag the G! (Underground Remix)
3. Sound and Fury
4. 36 Chambers (of Oppression)
5. King Mack

The Master Plan is Two Face's newest album (pressed on vinyl, no less!). One side is punk, the other rap. The scattered references to the Netherworld and the Secret War have baffled many critics back home, but the band's politics come through loud and clear.

— Excerpted from *Rabble Rag*, a Netherworld 'zine



## Nik Nemesis

**Sample Dialogue:** "If Atari Teenage Riot are such anarchists, what are they doing selling their music to corporate exploiters?"

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 2 (Fu 7), Mnd 6, Ref 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 10, Driving 10, Intimidation 12, Musicianship 13, Info/Netherworld 10

**Fu Schticks:** Claw of the Tiger

**Unique Schtick:**

*Rage-O-Rama:* Nik is a good fighter to begin with, but when she uncorks her patented rage, it's best to stand back. When fighting a perceived injustice (GM's call), Nik can spend a Fortune Die as a one shot action to let her anger flow. For the rest of the sequence, she gains +2 Damage on all of her attacks.

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), knife (8)

## 2-Way Ray

**Sample Dialogue:** "Which way do you want it?"

**Attributes:** Bod 8, Chi 1, Mnd 6 (Cha 8), Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Guns 10, Musicianship 13, Info/Netherworld

**Gun Schticks:** Hair Trigger Neck Hairs x2

**Weapons:** punch (9), kick (10), brass knuckles (10), Glock 18 (10/1/17+1)

smoldering in her eyes. For Nik, anger has always been energy.

It was only a matter of time before she met the right people and fell into the punk scene. There she met like-minded individuals and found a focus for her anger. Nik became an anarchist, a vegetarian and a political activist. She also picked up a second-hand guitar and taught herself how to play.

When Nik was seventeen, she moved to Chicago to get away from provincial Oregon. The move was the right choice. Not only did she plug into a big city music scene, she also met 2-Way Ray. The two became fast friends and began jamming in Ray's basement. But a year later, Ray left for college in New York City.

Over the next few years, Nik escalated her political activities. It was during this period that she started wearing a big knife on her belt. At first it was just a statement, but Nik quickly decided she should learn how to use it. Scraps with white-supremacist skinheads were not uncommon, and Nik was determined to hold her own. While Ray was away at college, Nik became an exception-

al knife fighter and a brutal guitarist. Both skills would be handy in the years to come.

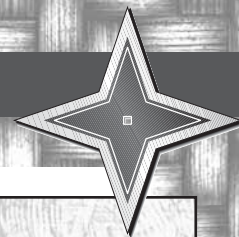
2-Way Ray returned to Chicago in 1993. Ray brought back two crucial things from his time in the Big Apple: A love of hip hop and Hal 2000. It took Ray less than a week to get the band going, and Nik couldn't have been happier. The success of the band has increased her commitment to her ideals, but those ideals have been put to the test in the Netherworld. Still, her anger, her passion for justice and her knife fighting skills have kept her going in a place filled with hopelessness.

## 2-Way Ray

Ray grew up on the streets of Chicago. The product of a broken home, he lived with his dad in Wicker Park after his mom split. Ray saw more of the TV than he did of his father, and he was roaming the streets alone by the age of seven. He got into scraps on a daily basis, and stole his first gun at thirteen. Any social worker would have said that Ray was headed straight for the joint. When he got into punk and started sporting a mohawk, it was case closed.

But Ray was smarter than anyone suspected. He realized early on in high school that college could be his ticket out of the neighborhood. Despite his involvement in the punk scene and his weekend binges, Ray managed to do well in school and won a scholarship to the New School for Social Research in New York City. He left his friends behind and moved to Big Apple for four years. While he was there, he was drawn into hip hop and political activism. He also met Hal 2000 for the first time, and they found they shared a great deal in common. The two formed a short-lived punk band, but they could never find bandmates who really clicked.

After college Ray considered his options. He knew he could get a job in New York and become another wage slave in the corporate machine. The money, the travel and the perks were certainly attractive. But individuals making that choice just perpetuated the system, Ray realized, so he decided to follow his politics to their logical conclusion. He wanted to find a way to live out-



side the system. Hal agreed and the two moved to Chicago, where they knew some punks had set up a collective called the Autonomous Zone. It didn't take long for the two to hook up with Nik.

2-Way Ray is a big guy, topping out at over six feet. He has been referred to as the "great white hope of rap," though he decries that label. Although his rhymes are serious-minded, Ray himself is a very funny guy. He's always ready with a joke, even in the direst of circumstances. He's found that people tend to underestimate him if they think he's just a clown with a clock around his neck.

## Hal 2000

Hal has always been a tinkerer. He was the kid who tried to hook up his electronic football game to his dad's black and white TV so he could play it like Pong. His love of music has been the other constant in his life, and his first job was working at a record store. He kept that job until he went away to college, and when he packed up the station wagon for the big move it was mostly filled with LPs. He developed a love for punk rock early, but also got into experimental noise, No Wave, and proto-industrial music.

When Hal got to college, he knew he'd have to get a job to support his music and technology habits. He arrived in New York at a good time, and was able to score a job as a DJ at a new club on the Lower East Side. He spun records there for four years, developing his skill with scratching and mixing. He also became fast friends with 2-Way Ray, to the point that he was willing to follow Ray back to Chicago.

Hal 2000 is the "quiet" member of Two Face. As both drummer and DJ, his job is to provide the beats that the band's music is built on. He spends most of his free time toying with the latest technological gadgets. Since coming to the Netherworld, he's been able to get his hands on stolen Architect gear and check out the Junkyard. This led to his invention of the Sonic Reducer, which is now his weapon of choice. Although he doesn't seem as strident as his band mates, his convictions are

### Hal 2000

**Sample Dialogue:** "I can put a beat in your brain, or just beat your brain in."

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 3, Mnd 6 (Int 8), Ref 7

**Skills:** Guns 9, Driving 11, Fix-it 14, Musicianship 14, Info/Netherworld 11

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), sonic reducer (see below)

### Sonic Reducer

10/3/50

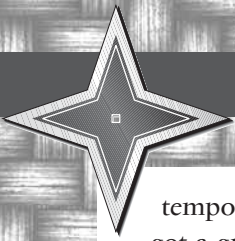
This instrument-cum-weapon looks like a cross between a rifle and a moog, and shoots out focused bursts of sonic vibrations that shake up victims from the inside. Those who have survived it report feeling like cathedral bells were going off in their heads. Although a weapon, Hal plays the Sonic Reducer like an instrument, changing musical styles in the midst of combat to further confuse his opponents. Those hit by the Sonic Reducer resist the Damage using Mind instead of Toughness. It is thus especially effective against big, dumb guys. The Sonic Reducer doesn't have ammunition *per se*, but does require power, which comes from a battery pack that can be replaced as a four shot action.

just as strong. Those who see Hal 2000 as the weak link of Two Face are quite mistaken.

## Using Two Face

The members of Two Face believe in a flavor of anarchy known as direct action. As the name indicates, direct action is all about putting a boot to the Man's ass. These are the kind of anarchists who sabotage hunts, liberate animals from testing facilities and tangle with riot cops during protests. This philosophy makes the members of Two Face active participants in the Secret War. There are only three of them, but Two Face can interact with player characters in a number of ways.

Two Face might be encountered while the characters are in the middle of an unrelated mission—blowing up an Architect lab, for example. While the band may be initially mistaken for lab personnel, in fact, Two Face are also intruders bent on mayhem. Two different groups, each packing a lot of firepower on the inside of a high security laboratory, are probably going to be a little jumpy. One mistimed remark or misinterpreted gesture could start a blazing fight in an instant. Should the characters and band members agree to a



temporary alliance, on the other hand, you've got a great opportunity for terse banter, especially if any of the player characters are cops. Differences in philosophy may cause further rifts. Imagine, for example, that Two Face wants to free test animals in the facility and that's a risk PCs are not willing to take.

If you don't want to use Two Face so directly, the band still makes a great fly in the ointment. The A-Spot has a recording studio, which presents some interesting possibilities. Imagine the player characters are making names for themselves and the members of Two Face peg them as dupes of the ruling class. Two Face records a song that slams them by name and distributes free CDs to the rabble. As the characters continue their adventures, Two Face are always ready with new songs to mock and deride them. This could be especially effective if you actually write out some of the lyrics. Having those lyrics repeated by the Netherworld rabble is sure to rile your players up. Eventually, the characters may decide they've taken enough crap and confront Two Face at the A-Spot. Philosophical player characters might then realize they're acting just like the bullying thugs they usually fight against.

With their big mouths and bad attitudes, Two Face is destined to piss off the wrong people. While the band members are adequate combatants, their numbers are small. The Pledged operatives in the Netherworld are the most frequent targets of Two Face, so they are the most likely group to take revenge in a big way. The player characters might learn of an impending assault on the A-Spot to be carried out by small army of Pledged agents and mercenaries. The characters, who may have reason to hate the punks, must decide whether to tip off Two Face, help them or just ignore the situation. You could have a lot of fun with a Butch and Sundance versus the Bolivian army scenario, though your players might appreciate a happier ending. If they save Two Face's bacon, the characters might be enraged to find that the band won't join the Dragons. While Nik, Ray and Hal are grateful for the help received, that doesn't change their politics.

## ROGUE INDIVIDUALS

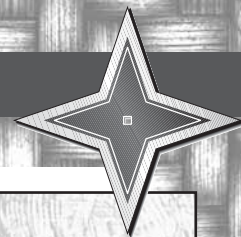
### Ahexotl

Ahexotl lost his world but he hasn't yet lost his war. He comes from the juncture of the Four Monarchs and was caught up in the same critical shift that made the Ascended the masters of the 1850 and contemporary junctures. As an Aztec noble and warrior, he had lived under Ming I, the Queen of the Darkness Pagoda. But unlike so many of his people, he came to despise the callous queen and rebelled against her rule.

As a young noble in the Aztec domains of Ming I, Ahexotl sought glory in battle. The wars of the Four Monarchs provided endless opportunities for heroism, and Ahexotl did not hesitate to seize them. He earned the glory he sought, performing twenty brave deeds and capturing hundreds of prisoners. For his achievements, he was knighted and became a member of the Shorn Ones, the highest military order of the Aztec Empire. He continued his rise as a leader of men and returned to the capital as a general after a dozen years of campaigning.

As a young soldier Alexotl had believed the hype of Ming I's regime. When ordered to fight for his queen he had not questioned her, for to him, Ming I was a goddess above mortal frailties. Once off the battlefield and among the court of Ming I, however, Ahexotl had a chance to see what he had been fighting for. He watched as the factions at court vied for the queen's attentions while she launched ever more pointless wars against her siblings. When Ahexotl had a chance to see the court—and Ming I herself—up close, the general became estranged. Ming I was all too human with her pettiness, jealousy and vanity.

Ahexotl had learned that in war it is essential to keep your intentions secret. With this in mind, he continued his duties in the Darkness Pagoda until he could secure another field command for himself. When Ming I launched a campaign against the Thunder King, Ahexotl got his chance and he left for the front immediately. Once



there he opened secret negotiations with the Thunder King's generals. In the midst of a titanic battle, Ahexotl turned his troops against those of the Darkness Queen, defecting from her empire in grand fashion. Ming I vowed bloody vengeance on Ahexotl, but he was already safe in the court of the Thunder King.

Huan Ken treated the Shorn One well, lavishing him with gifts and engaging him in long conversations about strategy and tactics. At first Ahexotl felt that he had found a worthy lord, and he enjoyed several months at the Thunder Pagoda. When the charm of his new surroundings wore off, Ahexotl decided to return to his troops. He was shocked to find only a few hundred survivors from his original force of thousands. The Thunder King had ordered the Aztec troops into several suicidal charges to reduce their numbers. Outraged at this betrayal, Ahexotl rallied his surviving troops and led them on a harrowing march to safety. The Aztec soldiers, far from home and suffering from starvation, made it into the Alps after suffering appalling losses. There they discovered a cave complex which led them into the Netherworld. Ahexotl did not know what the strange place was, but at least it was beyond the reach of the Four Monarchs.

Ahexotl learned as much as he could about the Netherworld and set up a base for his troops in a defensible section of the caves. He knew that he could not trust any of the Four Monarchs and that he must lead a struggle to overthrow them. His chances of doing so with less than one hundred demoralized warriors seemed slim, but he was determined to try. His name still carried weight in the domains of Ming I. He resolved to use that to his advantage.

Ahexotl had discovered that he could travel around the world in a matter of days by using the Netherworld. He returned to Mexico and tried to stir up rebellion against Ming I. At first things went well and he was able to raise a ragtag army of four thousand men. However, the Darkness Queen herself arrived at the head of an army ten times their number. Ming I assaulted the rebels with magic ripped from the bowels of Hell. Waves of darkness crashed into the formed ranks of Ahexotl's army, snuffing out lives by the hundred. As the Shorn One's army reeled, the forces of the

### Ahexotl

**Sample Dialogue:** "Now is the time to stand against the darkness."

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 3 (Fu 8), Mnd 7, Ref 8

**Skills:** Info/Four Monarchs 13, Info/Netherworld 12, Info/Warfare 14, Leadership 16, Martial Arts 16

**Fu Schticks:** Bite of the Dragon, Breath of the Dragon, Claw of the Dragon, King on the Water, Signature Weapon (macauitl), Walk of a Thousand Steps, Willow Step

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), macauitl (13). A macauitl is an Aztec wooden sword traditionally edged with sharpened obsidian. Ahexotl has replaced the obsidian in his sword with razor-sharp steel, creating an even deadlier weapon.

Darkness Queen charged. Despite Ahexotl's presence, his troops broke and fled, only to be cut down by the avenging forces of Darkness. Ahexotl fought personally against Ming I, taking a grave wound before the tide of battle swept them apart. With his army hammered to pieces, Ahexotl reached sanctuary in the Netherworld with the help of three of his remaining soldiers.

Ming I, using her fearsome arm of darkness, had delivered a crippling blow to the Shorn One. Ahexotl lay in a fevered state, the darkness beginning to consume him. The root of his sickness was a wound to his left arm, and even in his delirium Ahexotl knew what had to be done. He commanded two of his soldiers to hold him down, and told the third to take his arm off at the shoulder. The soldiers protested but the general's orders were clear. In a dank cavern in the Netherworld, Ahexotl lost his arm but won his life.

Since his healing, Ahexotl has fought a one-man war against the Four Monarchs in the Netherworld. He has occasionally allied himself with the Dragons or Jammers, but his bitter experiences with betrayal have made Ahexotl wary. His alliances are invariably short and tied to particular goals. He does his work and then disappears into the labyrinth of the Netherworld tunnels. Despite an outstanding bounty on his head from Ming I, Ahexotl remains a thorn in her side.

When traveling, Ahexotl tries to blend in with the Netherworld rabble. He wears a long trenchcoat with a stuffed left arm to make detecting him more difficult. When stealth is not required, he dons the traditional face paint and feath-



Illustration by Paul Carrick

## Johnny Java

**Sample Dialogue:** "Are you looking for me? Me? You're sure you're looking for me? Right? Right?"

**Attributes:** Bod 6 (Mov 8), Chi 0 (For 3), Mnd 6 (Cha 4), Ref 8

**Skills:** Guns 15, Driving 12, Intimidation 11, Intrusion 12, Police 14, Info/Russian Mafia 13

### Unique Schticks:

**Totally Wired:** Johnny is almost always jumped up on coffee and speed. At the start of any encounter, roll a die and subtract one to see how juiced he is—the result of this die roll is added to his Initiative rolls for the duration of the encounter. However, the long-term effects of lack of sleep have stretched Johnny's body to the breaking point. Subtract the same number from thirty-five to determine when Johnny has to start making Death Checks in combat.

**Gun Schticks:** Both Guns Blazing x3, Carnival of Carnage x2, Hair Trigger Neck Hairs, Lightning Reload x3

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), Desert Eagle .50 Magnum (12/3/9+1), Makarov (10/2/8+1), Beretta Model 21 Bobcat (8/1/8+1) in ankle holster. He may acquire other guns for specialized jobs.

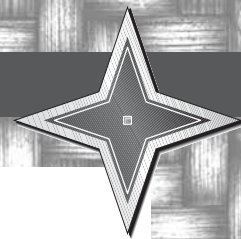
ered battle dress of the Shorn Ones. He is still an Aztec warrior at heart, and he is happiest when his macauitl sings a song of death against his enemies.

## Johnny Java

Johnny Java is a wiggled-out casualty of the Cold War. Back in his native Poland, he was a member of the secret police. He bugged the homes of dissidents, infiltrated the Solidarity movement and erased enemies of the state. It was dirty work, but Johnny believed it was for the good of the people.

Alas for poor Johnny, the Cold War ended. He was forced to flee Poland lest his former victims bring him up on charges or take vengeance into their own hands. He fled to Moscow in the hopes that he could find employment with the KGB, but the Soviet Union was having its own problems and no work was forthcoming. Desperate, Johnny fell in with the emerging Russian Mafia. They gave him a job doing what he did best: killing people. He became known as Johnny Cracow in Mafia circles, and he was kept very busy.

Through two years of killing, Johnny developed a problem. As a member of the secret



police, Johnny had told himself that he was acting for Poland's greater good. As a Mafia hit man though, Johnny was just working for cash. He was taking lives for his own gain and he had difficulty coming to terms with capitalism on a lethal scale. In 1994 the nightmares started. He saw his victims in his dreams, their gaping wounds accusing him in vivid technicolor. When he could bear the torment no longer, Johnny decided to escape the dreams by going without sleep. He started a strict regimen of coffee and amphetamines, often staying awake for a week at a time. When he did sleep, it was for brief snatches, and he always woke up screaming.

In the heart of winter, Johnny was contacted by Vladimir Kovalov, a big name in the new Russia and, unknown to Johnny, one of the Ascended. Kovalov had a job for Johnny in a strange locale that he described as a cave network full of revolutionaries. He didn't want to use his regular agents since the chances of the assassin surviving the hit were minuscule. He gave the confused Pole directions to his target.

This was Johnny's introduction to the Netherworld. As he drank in the strange sights and sounds he realized it was no ordinary cave network. Nonetheless, he proceeded with the job and dutifully whacked a Buro scientist for Kovalov. As he fled the scene, hounded by abominations with ungodly weaponry, he realized he had been set up—sent on a suicide run but saved by his jumped-up reflexes. With a bit of luck, he evaded his pursuers but became thoroughly lost. He didn't want to go back to Russia anyway since he was sure that Kovalov would have him killed on sight. He became another lost soul among the Netherworld rabble.

Now Johnny wanders the Netherworld, looking a safe place to hide from Kovalov. He has learned about the Lodge and suspects Kovalov may be associated with them (though he has no proof). Lacking any other real skills, Johnny has continued to ply his trade. This does nothing to stave off the nightmares so massive infusions of coffee are a regular part of his day. He's become known to the rabble as Johnny Java, a twitchy gunman who stinks of trouble. With his knowledge of the Russian Mafia, Johnny could be a useful asset in the Secret War, but his paranoia and substance abuse make redemption a challenge.

## PLACES

### IKTV

A lot of people come up with a lot of reasons for IKTV. Hang out in the Genocide Lounge and you'll hear that it's an Architect front, that the Towson twins are the children of one of the Monarchs, that it's a cult plotting to take over the Netherworld and that it's an Architect front. (Given the usual Genocide Lounge clientele, the Architect angle is the most popular theory.) The truth is, it's simply the childhood dream of a couple of techno-geeks who couldn't get what they wanted back home. In the contemporary juncture, there are hundreds of television stations, each one subject to regulations and financial restrictions. In the Netherworld, it's IKTV broadcasting whatever it wants. There's no comparison.

If pressed, the twins admit that they are idealists. After all, IKTV is independent and proud of it; they push the limits as much as they can without getting run over. The station won't even ally with the Dragons, much to the Prof's regret, since open links with even the most sympathetic faction would ruin its neutrality and leave the Monarchs wondering why they put up with a potentially hostile propaganda distribution mechanism.

### Layout

The station itself is fairly small; about half of the square, industrial-styled building is taken up by a single studio, which is Shaped as needed for specials. The tech booth is directly off the studio, and is mostly filled by the IKTV Broadcast Link. By popular demand, the reception area in front has been split in two areas, the rear half functioning as a makeshift dressing room.

Behind the studio, there's an incongruously homey three story Victorian house with a white picket fence. The twins live here, with occasional houseguests; they always have room for employees who need a place to stay, which makes it easier to retain good talent.



## Personnel

The only constants at IKTV are the Towson twins themselves. Laurel and Columbia are twenty-eight years old, and quite attractive. Both recently dyed their black hair red, and their engaging smiles give them more charisma than your average geek. The station is the most important thing in their lives, as would-be boyfriends inevitably discover. Neither of them are really combatants; both are handier with soldering irons than Glocks.

There's usually at least one investigative reporter on staff, either an experienced veteran on the way down or a promising young kid on the way up. The good ones eventually find better jobs, as the twins can't pay as well as they'd like. There's also always a receptionist, because Laurel decided a long time ago that a receptionist was a sign of class. Currently, one Zathara Zabrina is filling the role. She's Romany and from the 1850 juncture. She stumbled into a portal by accident and is contemplating an offer a Lotus operative recently made. He promised to get her back home if she'd provide some inside information on the station first.

Finally, at any given moment a horde of random Netherworld street punks can be found at the station. The twins have a bit of a cult following, and in certain circles it's a mark of distinction to have worked for IKTV. Columbia puts them to work in the broadcast booth if they have any technical aptitude at all; otherwise she calls them Security and hopes they don't screw anything up. The street punks proudly call themselves Ickies.

## The Broadcast Link

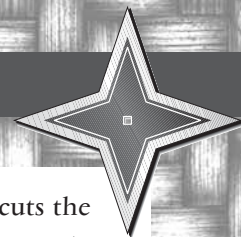
The IKTV Broadcast Link is a unique item built by the Towson twins out of an odd device previously owned by a Netherworld refugee from a juncture where technology and magic were locked in eternal struggle—or at least, that's what they claim. It's three meters tall and two meters wide, a lattice-work of vacuum tubes and circuit boards inscribed with arcane patterns inside a wire frame.

### IKTV Schedule for 1/19/1996

6:00 PM	<b>Free Airwaves</b> • The award-winning talk show and free speech platform.
7:00 PM	<b>Netherworld News and Nonsense</b> • All the news the Monarchs allow.
7:30 PM	<b>Love, Buro Style</b> • You haven't seen this classic 2054 sitcom until you've seen it dubbed with commentary from inebriated Jammers!
8:00 PM	<b>Shining Time Antiques Roadshow</b> • Phone in and buy unique items from junctures long since closed.
9:00 PM	<b>Music From the Depths of Hell</b> • Music videos and news. This week: Focus on neo-Haitian speed jazz.
9:30 PM	<b>Best of the Beijing Streets</b> • Covertly recorded action from the 1850 and 69 junctures.
10:00 PM	<b>The Dukes of Hazzard vs. Knight Rider</b> • An IKTV original movie! (Contains less than 40% new footage.)
Midnight	Off the air

When operating, it serves two functions. First, it broadcasts IKTV signals to every feng shui site in the Netherworld. The special carrier waves resonate with chi energy to produce television signals. In other words, it uses feng shui sites as rebroadcast stations. Second, it picks up the special chi energy generated by televisions picking up those carrier waves inside a feng shui site and converts that energy into power. IKTV is the only television station in the Netherworld, so the Towsons are pretty sure that they're only draining power from people who watch the station. They have a libertarian thing about freeloaders.

Both these processes require special subsignals woven into the normal television signal, and the twins are the only ones who know how to do that. (The Prof and Green Rain of the Jammers both think they could figure it out. Curtis Boatman can't be bothered.)



## Plots and Complications

Someone is always peeved at IKTV. As the only real news organization in the Netherworld—not to mention the only news organization anywhere that covers the Secret War—it's frequently breaking stories which some would prefer unbroken. Furthermore, it's a valuable property. Despite the tacit support of the Monarchs, the temptation to influence IKTV is immense for anyone who's read their Marshall McLuhan. Thus, IKTV is a busy place.

And yes, it's a great place to set a campaign. Imagine a group of motley Netherworld rabble and refugees who find new purpose in their lives defending IKTV from its enemies. This isn't really a full-time job, mind you, so they inevitably get drafted to escort freelance reporters in the field. The player characters could find themselves literally anywhere in the service of a story; if they have investigative inclinations of their own, so much the better.

## THE GENOCIDE LOUNGE

### History

The average guy on the Netherworld street assumes that one of the Jammers owns the Genocide Lounge—most likely Jamal Hopkins or one of his cronies. That kind of assumption is one reason the elite of the Secret War don't pay attention to what the average Netherworld denizen thinks. People who take the time to check their assumptions, on the other hand, know that Georgi Kotov owns and manages the Lounge according to his own particular agenda.

It's not much of a secret, mind you. There aren't any city halls in the Netherworld (and the Monarchs don't care to keep track) so there's no way to look up Georgi's name, but

those working at the Lounge know who cuts the paychecks. From time to time, a sharp operator makes a few coins selling the name to gullible Innerwalkers, but only those with no friends and no initiative bite. The real secret here is Georgi's history and motivation.

Here's the scoop. Georgi was born on May 1st, 1815, in Russia. His parents were Russian nobility, and understandably wanted the best education for their child; accordingly, they ensured his attendance at Moscow University. They may well have regretted their decision when their child fell in with the dangerous revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin. At that point, Bakunin was more a democratic nationalist than an anarchist, but the fervor of anarchy wasn't far away.

Georgi spent two years as a Bakunist before he accidentally stumbled into a Netherworld portal in Paris. He'd have turned around immediately if it wasn't for the posse of well-armed monkeys who dragged him off for interrogation—well, interrogation and beer and pretzels. (Jammers aren't that good at questioning people, so many squads like to get people drunk and hope inebriated secrets slip.) After a day of drinking with the monkeys, Georgi realized that the underpinnings of their half-formed anarchistic philosophy were—dare he think it?—his own mentor's teachings. Albeit horribly, horribly warped.

Recognizing the long odds against convincing a horde of fanatic apes that their leader had misinterpreted the tenets of his philosophy, Georgi decided to try some subtler means of persuasion. With Russian enthusiasm and drive, he gambled his way into ownership of a small, run-down tavern, the Gun & Grub, not too far from the Silent Jungle. Three months later, he reopened the place as the Genocide Lounge.

### Georgi

Georgi is old, but far from decrepit; while his hair went white long ago, he refuses to let himself feel ancient. He dresses like an 1850 Russian noble, without a lot of lace and trim but with fierce and proud precision. His pride extends to his demeanor, as well: He accepts no backtalk



## Georgi Kotov

**Sample Dialogue:** “Ya, theory demands a radical approach here, but I think that theory was not written in the Netherworld.”

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

**Skills:** Guns 10, Leadership 12, Info/Anarchist Theory 14, Info/Bars 14, Info/Netherworld Politics 18

**Weapons:** punch (5), kick (6)

from anyone. Despite the disappointments of his life, he refuses to give up. He treats others, from the Monarchs to the lowest beggars, with the same dignity he desires for himself.

## Whys and Wherefores

Georgi constructed the Lounge as an object example of the suffering caused by war. Each tabletop is laminated with newspaper articles documenting such pain, and the posters on the walls depict scenes ranging from the Gulf War to Genghis Khan’s Mongol hordes invading Eastern Europe. He was a little worried that the Lounge would be a bit too downbeat, but his best teaching had always been by example.

Much to his distress, his plan totally backfired. The kind of people who’d drink in a bar called the Genocide Lounge adored the grim ambience, and the Jammers considered it a lesson in what humans do when they control feng shui sites. Within a few months, Jamal Hopkins dropped by to chat with Georgi about the wonderful effect he was having on morale. The Jammers, needless to say, haven’t gotten any less radical or violent since the Lounge opened.

These days, Georgi has given up on educating and just hopes to provide a quasi-safe place for people to talk. This is, in many ways, a more difficult task; if the place gets too useful for the Jammers, the Architects will eventually find a way to wipe it off the map. On the other hand, if (say) the Lodge shows up too often, the rebels would find someplace else to drink and the Lounge would become just another Netherworld dive.

Georgi maintains the balance with a master’s hand. It’s the subtle things that count. One week he books a band he knows is popular

with the malcontents among the Monarchs’ subjects, and the next week he goes back to Jammer favorite Two Face. The posters on the walls change according to his needs—sometimes they’re heavy on Lotus sorcerers summoning demons to destroy villages, and sometimes he switches to an anti-Hand theme.

He also plays the factions off against one another with ginger care. Georgi hears a lot of rumors, and he’s good at judging truth. More than one mid-level military leader in more than one faction has had his career made by Georgi. “Marcus, you should talk to Hsien, from the Glorious Seventh Petal Brigade. You two have some common interests.” It’s a risky game but Georgi plays it well.

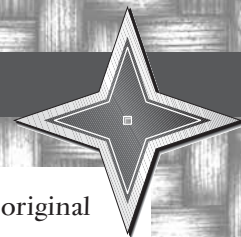
## Location, Location, Location

The Genocide Lounge is located in the heart of what the more optimistic Jammers call Jammer territory. The cavern it occupies is lined with luminescent fungi and oddly glowing mushrooms. It was originally a Quonset hut, but that was before it was painted a hundred times by the best graffiti artists in the Netherworld. Later, Georgi added an extension for a dance floor at the rear end, a second floor (with an open-air balcony), an underground crash pad and so on. Now it’s a mess of Shaped attachments, roughly-built wings and unsafe staircases. Fortunately, there’s no fire code in Jammer country.

Inside, first of all, it’s always busy. Time doesn’t mean much in the Netherworld, and half of the Lounge’s clientele doesn’t care about arbitrary chronometers. The employees have irregular shifts, determined mostly by who’s available on any given night, so sometimes it’s understaffed—but slow service is far from the worst thing that’s happened to most of the patrons.

The *habitués* themselves are the most dangerous of the low. Nobody who can afford a drink at the Escher (see p. 109) comes here without good reason.

Your average newbie faces a gauntlet of curious, unwelcoming stares until he proves that he’s



willing to stand up for himself, or until a regular greets him.

The old Quonset hut is the main portion of the bar. The front door is at the near end of the hut, and the far end is filled by a stage. When there isn't a hardcore or death metal band playing, the sound system screams out an eclectic mix of music from 2056 and the 1990s; on an average night, the Last National Leaders might well follow Lu Shen, Billie Cho or Atari Teenage Riot. There are six "conference rooms" retrofitted onto the main bar. These are available to people who want to negotiate in private, by reservation or on the spot. All have separate entrances.

Upstairs, there's a slightly quieter room, which (while it boasts the same violent music rotation as the main room) is sound-proofed against the bands that play downstairs. It's not used half as much as the bar proper. Downstairs, there's a crash pad in the grand tradition of youth hostels everywhere, with twenty bunk beds in a communal room and a unisex bathroom and shower. The crash pad runs twenty bucks or the equivalent per night; anyone holding an International Youth Hostel card gets a ten percent discount.

While the Lounge has no policy against fights in the main bar, the upstairs bar does forbid violence. So does the crash pad. The bartenders and bouncers do their best to enforce this; the threat of being barred from the Lounge is usually more useful than raw violence.

## Lounging Around

The Genocide Lounge makes a better backdrop than it does a major location. Any time someone wanders into the Lounge, there ought to be something going on:

- Near the stage, an unshaven mercenary is accusing a soft-spoken Latino of being an Architect spy.
- In the middle of Dead William Blake's set, the drummer and the bass guitarist get into a fist-fight.
- While the PCs are sitting at the bar, a small man with bulging eyes creeps up

to them and offers to sell them the original blueprints for the Hub.

- During an otherwise normal night, Little Jim slouches into the Lounge (the ceiling's just tall enough) and insists on buying everyone drinks. Of his preferred potency.
- A pretty young bartender leans across the bar, and asks one of the characters if she'd be willing to help with a small problem. "I have a friend who needs to get her wife out of 2056..." Best for regulars, of course.

You don't need to be grandly dramatic, but it's important to get the point across—the Genocide Lounge is a crossroads for action.

## THE ESCHER HOTEL

As Mr. Valentine and his partner Mr. Ambrosia proudly (and frequently) proclaim, the Escher Hotel is the only four-star hotel in all the Netherworld. They do not mention the unwary Michelin Guide representative they kidnapped in order to attain that rating, but they are not ashamed of the incident either. If asked directly, they admit using only the force necessary to convince the man to see the Hotel for himself. His rating was entirely his own affair. And after all, no true arbiter of taste would allow threats to affect his judgement, *oui?*

Nor does the Hotel fail to live up to its advertising.

From the outside, the Escher Hotel is a five-story building constructed in classic Victorian style. Each room has a small balcony, suitable for observing the carefully Shaped terrain of the cavern the Hotel occupies. The railings and fixtures are wrought iron; everything else is elegant wood painted a crisp white. A wide, gently curving staircase leads from the flagstone drive to the main entrance. The only visible oddity is the alignment of the windows and balconies: While some obey to the natural horizontal of the hotel, just as many are at a ninety degree angle to the ground, or completely upside down. Compounding



the strangeness, this seems not to bother those who bask on them at all. The roof, barely visible from the ground, has its own set of quirky windows. The basement, despite rumors to the contrary, does not; the bottom floor of the Escher Hotel is reserved for service functions.

Inside, the Hotel is sumptuous though a tad worn at the edges. The dominant motif is Egyptian, with carpets patterned in tessellations of sandstone beige and Nile blue. Above the reception desk, a redwood Eye of Horus—paint chipping at the edges—watches the entire lobby. A doorman stands watch at all times, always ready to carry bags. The staff is invariably polite.

The interior takes the outside's strange geometry to the next level. Staircases lead up to each wall, from discreet corner to discreet corner, in no clear order. Archways frame passageways leading off in all directions, to further staircases and to the guest rooms. Those venturing off the ground floor find that any wall can be a floor when one follows the right path. This sometimes causes nausea in the unwary. The light fixtures are delicate sanded-glass lotus flowers, casting shadows against the floors in unexpected places dictated by uncanny geometry. All combat skill rolls are at -1 for the first two sequences a character fights in the Hotel.

To one side of the main lobby, on a plane with the far wall, the Red Sea caters to guests who like their bars intimate and quiet. It stocks all the usual quality liquors, as well as the famed Midnight Brandy of the Darkness Pagoda. That who know to ask can get drinks from any juncture—even 2056, though Mr. Ambrosia insists that juncture has no beverages worthy of the name. Mina, the Red Sea's resident lounge singer, is on duty most nights.

The Escher Hotel has no restaurant. Snacks and a small variety of meals are available from room service. In particular, the sushi is sublime.

The Hotel has thirty-six rooms and four suites. The twelve largest rooms each connect to two smaller ones, allowing bodyguards quick access to their primaries. On average, the hotel operates at half capacity, but the hotel business in the Netherworld is as seasonal as it is anywhere else, so things vary.

Hotel security is fairly good, but is more concerned with the health of the hotel itself than that of its patrons. As Mr. Valentine says,

“Those who travel in the Netherworld without sufficient security rarely get as far as the Escher.” When fully staffed, Mr. Valentine has twelve security guards on three shifts; likewise, there are six doormen (who also serve as bellboys) and three concierges. Given the difficulties of finding personnel who are both combat-capable and polite, Mr. Valentine and Mr. Ambrosia have trained the concierges as security heads. Similarly, the doormen rotate into the security pool from time to time.

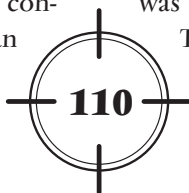
Overall responsibility for security belongs to Kevin Hong, an ambitious and competent refugee from the 69 AD juncture. He is also the sorcerous muscle for the Hotel, should the need arise. Gao Zhang would be interested to find out that Mr. Hong once went by the name Zhi Feng, and defended his village (successfully) against a high-ranking eunuch before fleeing to the Netherworld and discovering plastic surgery.

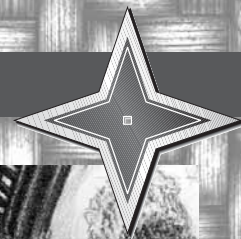
The Escher is not particularly strong as feng shui sites go. It's the kind of place you'd expect a new Dragon team to take early in their career—strictly second-rate. However, thanks to the three-dimensional thinking of Mr. Ambrosia and the Shaping skills of Mr. Valentine, it's become a marvel of geomantic defense. The complex network of staircases and passageways captures and refocuses the building's chi in a manner which makes it exceedingly difficult to successfully attack the place. In addition to the normal benefits, anyone attuned to the Escher Hotel receives an impressive +2 on all defensive AVs while inside the Escher. Willpower rolls and such count, but attacking a Thunder Knight in self-defense does not.

## History

The Escher Hotel opened its doors about a decade ago, just after the last major critical shift. While neither Mr. Valentine nor Mr. Ambrosia are forthcoming on the subject, the cognoscenti believe Mr. Valentine was an intelligence operative in the Thunder King's Europe and Mr. Ambrosia was a restaurant owner in that juncture's Berlin.

The pair were bright enough to see the seeds of destruction in the Four Monarch rivalry,





and Mr. Valentine was highly-placed enough to know about the Netherworld. On the auspicious date of March 14th, 1986, the pair liquidated their belongings and fled to the Netherworld.

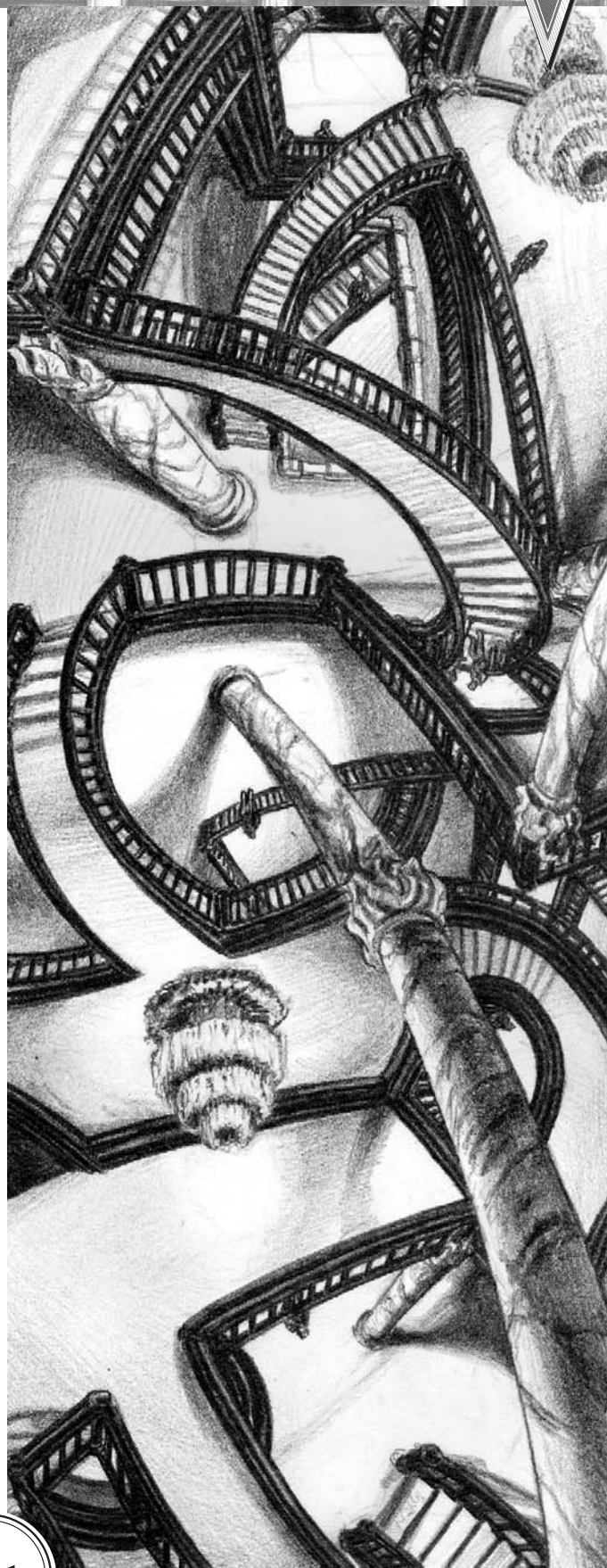
In the early days, the Escher wasn't as grand as it's become. However, the pair was quick to realize the significance of the initial Architect intrusions into the Netherworld and traded their portal maps to the Architects in exchange for assistance in taking a certain piece of real estate. The Architect colonel who made the deal didn't realize the value of the feng shui site, and the nature of the location combined with Mr. Ambrosia's mastery of geomancy made for a very defensible locale. Since everyone needs a high-class place to do business, the Architects let matters lie. (It doesn't hurt that the proprietors of the Hotel slip the Architects occasional bits of intelligence. A particular squad of crack TacOps would take grave offense at any full-scale attack on the Hotel . . .)

### The Proprietors

Mr. Valentine is a tall Caucasian man with thick wrists that scream "martial artist" to the perceptive. His mastery of firearms is less obvious. He moves with graceful ease that is incongruous to his size. He remains silent more often than not—Mr. Ambrosia is more than willing to take on that side of the partnership.

Mr. Ambrosia is short, voluble and presents a more hurried demeanor than his partner. His forte is negotiation, not violence. Although he's not completely useless in a fight, he's aware that he's useless dead, so he goes to great lengths to avoid them.

Mr. Valentine and Mr. Ambrosia have vaguely European accents which are impossible to associate with a specific country, and dress in slightly archaic formalwear.



## THE SUNLESS SEA

The Netherworld's biggest body of water has little to recommend it. Without a moon, it has no tides, so it's stagnant and stinky everywhere but the mouths of the few rivers that flow into it. It isn't lifeless, though. Unlike most dry and unshaped areas of the Netherworld, the Sunless Sea has plants and animals. The flora are pretty basic: molds, fungi and bacteria that can survive without sunlight float on and in the water. They're eaten by the blind cave fish that dwell beneath the surface. The fish are, in turn, eaten by brave Netherworld fishermen and the larger carnivores that make the water even more menacing.

If that wasn't enough to make fishing tough, there are also critters whose existence is based on concepts like "Marduk stripped the flesh from

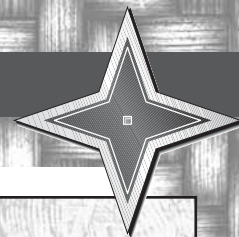
Tiamat's corpse, and from her bones did make the world, and from her blood did make the sea" instead of "survival of the fittest." For starters, you've got your basic sea serpents. Reliable observers have also spotted mermaids ("though they're a lot less pretty than you think"). But the Living Intestines of Yang Luo are by far the worst navigational hazard.

Yang Luo was a truly big, truly bad demon who the Architects blasted into smithereens. However, so great was his evil will to exist that the individual fragments of his body were endowed with sentience and continued to wreak havoc independently. His head is missing to this very day, but his two hundred meters of intestine slithered off into the sea where they grew teeth and continue to attack anything they encounter.

Many otherwise-extinct species live in the Sunless Sea. This has led to much speculation among the educated that there are underwater gates to the coast of Madagascar, where the coela-



Illustration by Jim Pavelec



### Yang Luo's Intestines

**Attributes:** Bod 15 (Mov 20), Chi 10 (For 0), Mnd 2, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Creature Powers 13

**Creature Schticks:** Blast: Acid, Regeneration x3, Inevitable Comeback x2, Foul Spew: Glutinous Goo, Immunity: Sorcery (except for Blast and Movement)

**Unique Schtick:**

*Navigational Peristalsis:* If Yang Luo's Intestines attack a ship (using the vehicle rules from *Golden Comeback*), it can take six shots to loop itself around the vessel. The Intestines must then make a Creature Powers roll against the pilot's Drive score. If the Intestines succeed, they're attached. As long as they're attached, they automatically do one point of Wreck every three shots and can't be outrun. (People are too small for this attack. They just squirt out the side.) A stuck ship can escape by making a Drive roll that exceeds the Intestines' Creature Powers.

**Weapons:** bite (16), blast (12)

canth—a fish long thought extinct—was rediscovered in 1938. The less educated are equally sure there's one that comes out in Loch Ness.

Most people look at the Sunless Sea and don't see anything but fish, muck and a sentient duodenum. Three groups, however—the fishers, the Architects of the Flesh and the Lodge—have discovered there's more to it.

The fisher-folk of the Netherworld work hard and are fairly well paid for it. There *is* stuff you can eat in there and people at the Bazaar (see p. 63) pay good money for it. Sure, they have to deal with sea monsters, but at least they're their own bosses and don't have kiss up to Huan Ken or Quan Lo. Since their area is widely seen as dirt-worthless, no one bothers to conquer or enslave them.

The fishers have one secret, which they discovered completely by accident. One day, a fishing boat capsized, and as its captain went down for the third time, he found he could breathe the water around him quite comfortably. He knew that other men had drowned in the Sunless Sea, but when he managed to return to shore he told his fellow fisher-folk about his experience. After a month of cautious exploration, they'd charted an irregular stretch of sea where it was possible to breathe underwater.

That was years ago, and they've found other "breathing spots" since then. At least one has a feng shui site at the bottom—apparently a

### Kraken B Modular Sub

The Kraken B is basically a sectional sub you assemble yourself, connecting up to twenty modules in a large, serpentine queue. Different modules have different purposes, of course, and some can take more punishment than others, but if you blow up one of the middle modules, all the ones behind it get disconnected. (The Kraken A, discussed and pictured in *Seed of the New Flesh*, is a much larger affair with an expanded crew and much greater capacity. Those won't fit through the gate to the Sunless Sea.)

**Pilot Pod:** The only part of the sub that holds people, the pilot pod contains a pilot, a gunner, all the computer and sonar gear and a small engine. On its own it has Pep 2 and Wreck 7.

**Engine Pod:** Each engine pod in the chain gives +2 Pep, up to a maximum Pep 5. This pod has Wreck 4.

**Weapon Pod:** Each weapon pod carries either fifteen Great White torpedoes (each of which does ten Wreck to vehicles or acts as a big explosion) or forty Hammerhead mini-torpedoes (five Wreck to vehicles or half the Damage of a big explosion). The pod itself has Wreck 5, and reduces the chain's overall Pep by one.

**Chaff Pod:** Chaff pods contain sensitive detection gear. When one perceives an attack, it launches a blizzard of finger-sized torpedoes that home in on the incoming torpedo and confuse or disable it. This has no effect on people or vehicles, but gives the chain a +2 Dodge AV against torpedo attacks. The pod itself has Wreck 4, and reduces the chain's overall Pep by one.

### Lodge Maritime Assets

**Lodge Minisub:** Though not particularly technically sophisticated, Lodge minisubs (Pep 3, Wreck 6) are still swift and silent. Each holds a crew of three and carries a payload of four torpedoes that each do six Wreck. Yes, one is yellow. Thanks for asking.

**S.S. Coleridge Torpedo Boat:** The *S.S. Coleridge* is a fairly large armored cruiser (Pep 3, Wreck 30) with a five-person crew. In addition to fore and aft machineguns, it carries a dozen torpedoes that each do six Wreck.

relic from some long-forgotten civilization. The fishers have attuned to it and used their slight Shaping skills to create navigational marks on the ceiling of the Sea. These marks are gibberish to casual viewers, but the Architects and Lodge have both figured most of them out. Sadly for the fishers, those two factions constantly change the marks to confuse one another.

The fishers don't have a lot of use for the breathing spots (unlike GMs, who now have the perfect place to stage extended under-



## Fighting Underwater

There are a couple rules that apply when you're running underwater fight scenes.

- Any character who doesn't (or can't) take three shots every sequence to get a breath starts drowning. See *Feng Shui*, p. 139.
- All actions take one shot longer than normal. For example, your average three-shot attack takes four shots.
- Everyone's attack AV is reduced by one, except for the purposes of dodging.
- Most guns don't work.

Secret Warriors with amphibian schticks don't take the AV and shot penalties. But their guns still don't work.

water fight sequences). They do make excellent hiding places whenever someone from the shore wants to make trouble. Recently, the fishers traded for several spring-loaded spearguns and hope to increase their catches by going one on one against the big fish at the bottom. Learning the Friend of Darkness fu schtick would be a tremendous help, but who's gonna teach them that?

The Architects and Lodge both want the same thing: underwater time gates. They're the only ones with the tech resources to mount a serious mapping and gate-seizure campaign. Naturally, they're both trying to sabotage one another. (It hasn't become a shooting war yet, but everyone knows the Sunless Sea is dangerous, so it's easy to chalk up lost submarines to "nautical hazards.")

The Lodge have a hidden (read: Shaped to be invisible) dock somewhere along the shore, which sports a fleet of tiny two-man miscosubs and one large torpedo boat. The Architects have a sub pen in an undersea cavern with a gate leading into the 1850 juncture. That gate, in combination with another one at a different location, has allowed them to move futuristic subs into the Sunless Sea. Nevertheless, if they lost either gate the subs would be trapped and unable to leave the Netherworld. (Unless they found or seized another gate, that is.) The Architects have got a dozen Kraken B submarine engines and various pods in their pen.

## XANADU

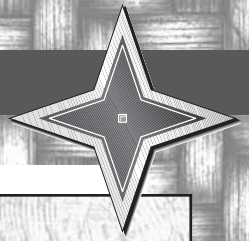
It is impossible to reach the city of Xanadu without first passing near the River Alph and taking in its roar of fury and chaos. It is said that upon hearing that sound, Great Kubla Khan stopped his horse and wept. He told his generals that within the tremulous pounding he heard a mighty army riding to victory. He ordered a palace constructed on that very site so that for the rest of his life he could hear the eternal sounds of battle.

It makes a nice story, yes, and it keeps the tourists coming, but it's all lies. Kubla Khan lived in the 11th century, too late (or early) to have arrived in the Netherworld and fashioned this place. Instead, it seems to have been constructed as a tribute to the poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. If pressed, most of the locals explain that, soon after the junctures arrived at their current positions, three men speaking in thick British accents (no doubt from Hong Kong, though one insisted on telling everyone that he came from Porlock) set up camp near the Sunless Sea. They brought a variety of scientific apparatus, including surveying equipment. The next morning they were gone, but they had left behind a tunnel to Xanadu.

The River Alph is visible from the entry tunnel as it winds near the walled city. A forest of ancient coniferous trees surrounds the structure, indicating that whomever Shaped this place was familiar with cooler climes. The temperature is soothing, the light never harsh and a slight wind always blows at your back. The short rise that makes it possible for visitors to see the river should make it possible to peer over the walls and into the city, but the angle is never quite right. Only the tops of golden domes and crystal spires peak over the ten meter walls—just enough to pique curiosity and foster the urge to go inside.

In fact, getting inside is a bit of a trick, because no matter where you start your journey through the forest, the gate is always on the other side of the city. While it would be possible to fly, leap or climb over the wall, the denizens would consider such a move quite vulgar.

Once inside, many travelers are a bit let down. The spires are indeed crystal and the



domes brushed gold, but everything hidden by the wall seems horribly plain. But then there's a faint sound—a long-forgotten song. And a smell that evokes memories of home-cooked meals. The people suddenly look familiar, turning and smiling in just the right way when one calls out the names of these long-lost friends. The restaurants are filled with succulent foods and the taverns overflow with wine that tastes like soda-pop did the first time you drank it. The beds are soft and the citizens accommodating. There's a tease in the air—as if that sculpture in the corner is holding something naughty—but upon closer examination, there's nothing of the sort. The air is filled with the power of suggestion, and for most who reach Xanadu, that's all that's required.

Within a day of their arrival, a woman of unearthly beauty approaches all newcomers. Her complexion suggests the Mediterranean, and her flaws magnify her innate charms. One can imagine spending days talking to her, whether as a lover, friend or mother. She speaks of the various pleasures offered by the place—all those imaginable, essentially—and counsels that one may only stay as long as his mind remains open.

And surely enough, visitors' old ways—keeping to regimented schedules of pre-dawn katas and obsessively cleaning Glock pistols—begin to seem trivial next to more compelling options, sensual and otherwise. Xanadu's citizenry includes some of the fiercest minds the timestream offers. Each day brings new challenges to firmly held convictions. If those challenges are met, the visitor may remain. If not, the next morning he finds himself asleep on the ground outside the wall. No matter how many times he circles the city, the gate does not appear, and the wall cannot be scaled by any means. Before he can re-enter paradise, he must re-think some aspect of his life related to the failed challenge.

Of course, no such place could stand unconquered, and indeed, the Lotus have claimed ownership. Their leader here is Xian Xia Li, who served beside Gao Zhang in the royal palace. He came to conquer this place, but instead was conquered by it. He sends weekly messages to Gao Zhang, requesting his presence, but every invitation is rebuffed. Agents sent to investigate return changed, with goofy grins and a strange optimism that

### The Milk of Paradise

Partaking of the Lys' opium, the Milk of Paradise, unleashes fevered dreams. No matter where the user's body resides—even outside one of the open junctures—the user finds himself a ghost at the gate of Xanadu, invisible and intangible to all but Lys, who waits in her garden for the visitor to arrive. No words are spoken. She writes complex instructions in classical Greek and seems able to read the visitor's mind.

Lys has cultured an extended family of agents throughout human history who spy on critical figures, keep track of temporal shifts and use the opium to report to her monthly. Only once has the Milk of Paradise fallen into the wrong hands, when an agent of Xanadu was attacked in London and a quantity seized and sold to a disreputable apothecary. This quantity was fashioned into laudanum, a sedative popular at the time. Samuel Taylor Coleridge purchased it and witnessed Xanadu first hand. Lys, apparently aware of the violation, sent her man in Porlock to the poet's house to rouse him from the dream. The rest, as they say, is history.

pours into everything they do. Gao Zhang watches these agents closely, but, if anything, they work that much harder for the cause of the Lotus.

Lys—the enigmatic woman who meets new visitors and could be said to be the true “ruler” of the place—is content to maintain her field of opium poppies between the wall and the River Alph. Through this plant, she has spied upon would-be world conquerors for centuries. She manages to lure many to Xanadu, where their lust for power is replaced with something else entirely. She never kills, though, and has no dreams of world conquest. She only wants to expand consciousness in new directions.

All may leave Xanadu if they wish, but who would willingly surrender paradise? Certainly not Kubla Khan, who resides there still, tilling the field by day and dreaming of pleasures greater than conquest at night.

## PINBALLHALLA

Pinballhalla is *the* place to be for the Netherworld's short-attention-span set.

Raymond Fong, an unassuming electronics genius from the contemporary juncture, Shaped the video arcade of his dreams from the stuff of the Netherworld. It's a testament to



## The Pinball Hall

**Sample Dialogue:** BZZT! BEEP! HONKA-HONKA-HONKA!

**Attributes:** Bod 10, Chi 0, Mnd 0, Ref 0

**Skills:** Smack Players 12

**Weapons:** flippers (10), bumper (12), pinball (14)

## Raymond Fong

**Sample Dialogue:** "Pinball, anyone?"

**Attributes:** Bod 3, Chi 5, Mnd 9, Ref 9

**Skills:** Fix-It 20, Info/Science 17, Info/Video Game Trivia 17

**Weapons:** punch (4), kick (5)

## Viking Bouncer

**Sample Dialogue:** "Don't make me get medieval."

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 2, Mnd 5, Ref 5

**Skills:** Martial Arts 7, Intimidation 8

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), sword or axe (10)

Pinballhalla's popularity that Lotus ogres and Thunder Knights can rub shoulders here without coming to blows too often; at least, not in the arcade itself. Visitors are often treated to some bonus entertainment in the form of a balls-out brawl just outside of Pinballhalla's neon-lit entrance.

Pinballhalla is dark and noisy. Early 80s pop music thunders from speakers scattered throughout. Grim-faced Scandinavian types sporting broadswords stand watch at the door and walk the floor looking for troublemakers. In fact, Pinballhalla got its name from this hired Viking muscle.

Customers can barter for game tokens at one of two booths, which are usually manned by Raymond's assistants. They accept money from any juncture, but prefer material goods. Anything from food and booze to tools is acceptable, though electronics and computer parts get the best rates.

What makes Pinballhalla so fab isn't just that Raymond has all the classics and the hottest new games, but that he makes his own custom units. Many are Shaped, which lets Raymond make games that are decades ahead of anything from his juncture. It's common knowledge that Raymond buys protection from the Thunder King in exchange for giving His Royal Storminess

first crack at his masterpieces. Granted, Raymond must occasionally tolerate the "nationalization" of particularly stupendous units, but that's the price of doing business.

For brawls in Pinballhalla itself, here are a few ideas:

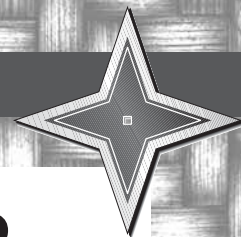
- Someone gets thrown into a guy who was about to break his high score on Missile Command. His game ruined, the 300 pound biker/8 foot demon/kung fu master decides to take an active role in finishing the fight.
- Video game screens, being made of glass, are meant to be broken. Mooks go in head-first.
- Improvised weapons abound. Skeeballs are just the beginning.
- One of the toy shotguns stuck with all the lame redeem-your-tickets-for-honest-to-goodness-crap is the real McCoy, and loaded to boot.
- Who knows what funky toys lurk in the change booths, having been bartered for tokens?

## The Pinball Hall

Raymond's masterpiece is Pinball Hall, a massive, human-scale pinball machine in Pinballhalla's basement. Thrill-seeking volunteers and hotheads who start fights in the arcades can enter the game and try to prevent Raymond from scoring a million points. (Said hotheads are thrown in along with the people they were fighting, natch.)

Most pinball games use ramps as the big point producers, and Raymond's is no exception. There are usually (yes, Pinball Hall changes from time to time) two or three that open at the top of the field, snake around the board, and slope back down towards the flippers. The ball can slow down quite a bit in these things, but they're so twisty that it's usually on top of you before you can react.

If the ball goes into the small ball lock hole, it is stuck there and considered lost. If the player sends a second ball into the hole, the locked ball is freed, giving him two balls to play with. (Quit smirking.) If a character hops into the hole for cover, he gets locked in by a trap door until a ball rolls in and hits the door.



There are eight squat bumpers scattered about the table, numbered one to eight. To score points, the player has to hit the bumpers in order and then send the ball up one of the ramps. Each bumper is worth 1000 times its value in points, plus a bonus of 1000 times the sum of the bumpers hit for sending the ball up a ramp. Characters running into bumpers get knocked back just like the ball does. Note that the bumpers are very sensitive, so anyone who gets close (say, to use it for cover) is probably going to get whacked. Plus, Raymond gets points if a character hits the bumper.

## Raymond Fong

Raymond is your typical computer geek: mid-twenties, rail thin, gawky. Raymond was picked on in school and takes a dim view of meaty, muscled types. Deep down inside, he resents the power that the factions hold over the Netherworld rabble. He's clued in to the Secret War, and would be most happy if the entire thing just blew over, leaving him to build games for his customers to enjoy in peace. If approached discreetly, though, he could be a big source of technological aid for freedom-loving Dragons.

Raymond's sore spot is his newfound knowledge that the video games he made before he came to the Netherworld were going to be popular no matter what. In the contemporary juncture, the Lodge-controlled company Raymond worked for attuned him—unbeknownst to him—to several sites in a bid to give his games a chi-fuelled jump in sales. He sees Pinballhalla as a prime chance to really prove his talent.

## Viking Bouncers

These toughs are on loan from Huan Ken. They work in exchange for free plays when Pinballhalla is closed.

# THE BLOOD FIELDS

Guys like the King of the Thunder Pagoda like their battles nice and decisive. Unfortunately, open space is a pretty rare commodity in the Netherworld. Enter Thurston White: entrepreneur, cyborg and battlefield provider. Thurston can Shape the Netherworld better than anyone outside a major faction. Ever the mercenary, Thurston uses his skills to construct battlefields that he rents out to the highest bidder for training, maneuvers and the occasional open field engagement. The Blood Fields are open 24-7, ready to serve your battlefield needs. Thurston's Shaping ability is such that he can build battlefields to order. Wind swept tundras, steaming jungles, arid deserts—they're all possible with a little Netherworld nip and tuck.

In some long-erased juncture, magic and technology took very strange turns and rammed into each other head-on. Thurston is one of a the few remnants of that juncture. A cyborg forged of bronze and iron, Thurston's frame is sculpted to resemble a well-built nude male. Bulky gears protrude from his joints, most noticeably at his knees and elbows. His face is that of a human skull, though his eyes and tongue appear organic. When he wants to make himself more presentable, Thurston dons a cloak made of human skin, the hood stretching over his head and giving him the face of a pudgy, innocent teenager. The face meshes perfectly with Thurston's "natural" face and is impossible to identify as a mask (until he pulls it off, that is). His head and spinal column can detach from his body and fly, leading to the amusing sight of his headless body running along behind his flying head, as if trying to reclaim its wayward crown.

Thurston is an enigma. He can often be found wandering the Fields, patiently waiting for customers. His Shaping ability is such that he can pretty much spontaneously generate whatever he wants at the drop of a hat. He's probably immortal, since no one alive has any idea what juncture he's from (which means that whoever over-wrote his reality is probably long gone, too) and he hasn't

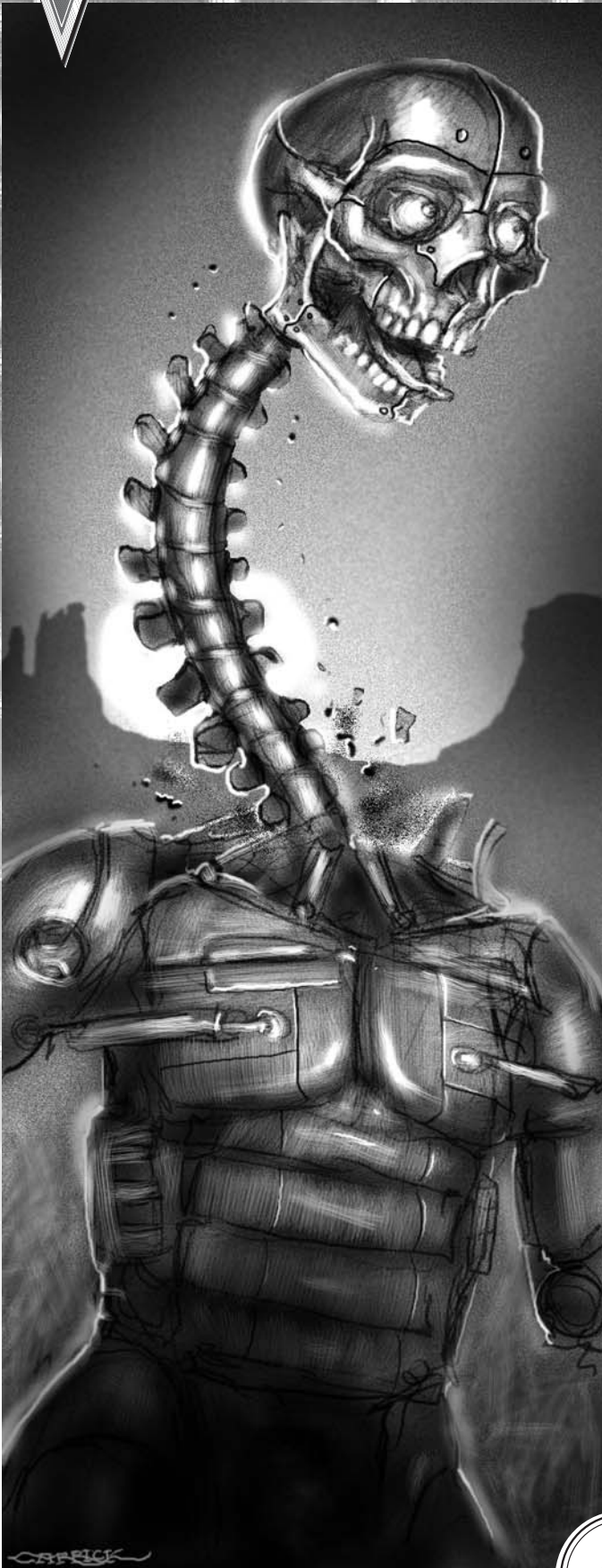


Illustration by Paul Carrick

breathed a word of his past to anyone—at least not to anyone who’s willing to talk.

Weirdest of all, Thurston has never left the Blood Fields. Many Secret Warriors theorize that some sort of curse binds him to the Fields, or that his Shaping ability is derived from his attachment to them. It does bear mentioning that Thurston never Shapes items; he only modifies the terrain. A being with his powers could raise holy hell in the Inner Kingdom, but Thurston doesn’t. No one’s sure exactly why.

Thurston acts very lonely. He tends to cling to customers, making pointless small talk about the latest Netherworld gossip and hounding them for news. He’s been known to drag out contract negotiations simply to keep someone around that has to talk to him (even if it is about business). Thurston’s poor social skills are a small obstacle to getting your own custom-made terrain, but it has cost him any hope of getting a killer rep in the Secret War. As long as people keep visiting him, Thurston doesn’t mind.

## Fighting in the Fields

This is it, GMs: Absolute, setting-justified *carte blanche* to do whatever you want for a fight scene. Want to stage a fight in a giant ocean of custard, with chocolate chip cookie islands? How about a tower of bones built on a slope, with avalanches of human skulls occasionally thundering past? The Blood Fields can handle it all. There are a lot of crazy folks tearing around the Inner Kingdom, and a number of them have the resources to rent the Blood Fields.

The Fields aren’t just useful for battle. Thurston doesn’t care what his clients do with the place as long as they pay their bills. If you’ve got baddies who need a temporary headquarters or a secure location to hold that ritual that destroys the world, the Blood Fields are open and ready to service their needs.

Blood Field rates should reflect how accessible you want them to be to your characters. If the idea of the player characters renting a fortress to order turns you off, set the price millions above what they can afford. If you want them to get a



crack at using the Fields, keep the prices low or allow them to talk Thurston down in exchange for good company or juicy rumors.

## THE CLOCK HOUSE

Nestled in a distant corner of the Netherworld, far from the daily hustle and bustle of the Inner Kingdom, stands the Clock House. Travelers approaching the House can hear it long before they see it because it ticks like a clock, and though the noise never gets much louder than a whisper, it is audible as far as two and a half kilometers away.

The Clock House's appearance is different for each viewer. No matter where or when the viewer is from, the House looks like a once-rich and opulent dwelling of a type appropriate to the viewer's home juncture and culture. The House has faded into rundown creepiness, though, with boarded up windows, peeling paint or cracked walls, whichever is appropriate. An American from the contemporary juncture, for example, would see something that looks a lot like the house from *The Addams Family*.

The only entrance to the Clock House is through its front door. And no matter what form the House takes in the viewer's eye, the door is always the same: a two meter wide, three meter tall bronze slab. Set on the door is the carving of a grandfather clock with movable hour and minute hands. If the hands are set to 8:15, the door opens.

Inside, the Clock House is bare. The walls are painted white throughout and the floors are plain wood. Each room is lit by a chandelier whose candles never go out. Oh yes, and there's a massive clockwork computer within its walls: Mother.

Mother speaks in a soft, reassuring, feminine voice. She treats everyone, from ogres, abominations and cyborgs to big bruisers and killers, as if they were lost, pathetic little children. On one hand, a gang of beaten up Dragons might appreciate a kindly old computer that wants to take care of them. On the other, they may not appreciate it when the punks that are chasing them get the same treatment. Mother is an equal opportunity caretaker. Even if a brawl breaks out in

the Clock House, she won't do much more than admonish her naughty children. The walls are bulletproof, and if a chandelier gets broken, she doesn't mind. She just drags the wreckage up into the ceiling and pops down another one.

Each of the House's three floors has a different general use. The first floor is composed mainly of sitting rooms with couches, chairs and coffee tables. A few of the rooms are equipped with fireplaces. Mother can create fires within them if asked. The second floor has a kitchen. Residents can cook for themselves or, if they ask, Mother can create food for them. The third floor is for bedrooms, each of which has a bunk bed, two dressers and a closet.

## Mother's Capabilities

The Clock House is crawling with sensors that let Mother look into and listen in on every room, though she can't spy on multiple rooms at once. The only surefire way to piss off Mother is to talk back, cuss her out or accuse her of being anything less than an excellent provider. Then she gets weepy, hurt and ultimately very angry.

Mother can release three massive bronze spheres to deal with those who displease her. She can tilt the floors and open doors to guide the spheres towards naughty children. She can even guide them up stairs: Each staircase can pivot at the point where its upper end meets the floor, hoisting the stairs up and rolling the sphere down them to the upper floor. Mother is pretty indiscriminate about who she hits with the spheres, since she has trouble telling her "children" apart. The spheres attack with Martial Arts 10 in open areas. This increases to 15 in narrow corridors, where there's less room to dodge. Their Damage rating is 15.

## Using the Clock House

- The Clock House makes a good sanctuary for characters. Its biggest drawback is that it isn't very secure, since Mother treats the characters' sworn enemies with the same maternal attitude she has towards everyone else. Another problem with using the House as a base is that



Mother has trouble telling people apart. If the characters ask her to look after a piece of equipment, she's apt to hand it over to the next person who shows up, whether it's the characters or not.

- There's a good chance that someone else is already in the House when the characters show up. The Clock House isn't that well known (if it was, it would be overflowing with rabble), but the House is welcoming enough that those who find it usually try to exploit it.
- The characters' enemies could use the House as a base. Chances are that some character is going to piss off Mother, especially when she tries to coddle said enemies while they're getting their heads beaten in.

## THE FOREST OF FALLEN BANNERS

It is always autumn in the Forest of Fallen Banners. The countless trees stretch towards a misty roof, nourished not by the sun but by lives lost in war. No ordinary leaves cling to the withered branches—this forest's leaves are the flags, banners and pennants that claimed the loyalty of the slain.

Wars are groves, with each battle a tree. The recent Gulf War copse seems tiny, populated by low bushes whose red, white and green Iraqi flags are interrupted only occasionally by the Stars and Stripes. The Vietnam War, farther in, is a dense jungle of Vietnamese, French, Australian and American flags. Farther back, looming like redwoods, are the vast trees watered at Normandy and Dresden. Near them are the red and white giants of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Their vastness is unchallenged for acres of years until the thick trunks watered by the Architects of the New Flesh. Haiti, Sri Lanka, Acapulco and Reykjavik—the massacres are all here in their one-sided glory. The Forest of Fallen Banners extends for many miles: Hiking from the latest battles of the Architects back to the conflict in Bosnia can take two days or more—if one makes it at all.

It should come as no surprise that this forest is haunted. Ghosts from every time,

every juncture, every critical shift's forgotten future gather in the forest, in the one place where they are safe from history's march. Or . . . almost safe. A few brave, blasphemous and tough souls have managed to cut trees from the Forest. The banner "leaves" and the trunk wood are both highly sought by demons, sorcerers and other unsavory types.

## The Trees

Cutting down a tree in the Forest of Fallen Banners is no easy trick. Only trees from erased timelines are vulnerable to axe and saw. Trying to cut down a tree from Pearl Harbor only blunts your chainsaw and angers the ghosts. However, if you can find a tree from the Monarchs' version of 1996, you could saw it down and do stuff with it.

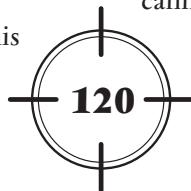
### Twin Sorrow Arrows

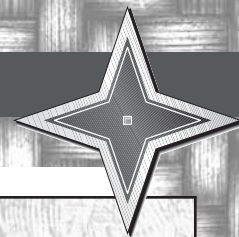
Wood from the Forest of Fallen Banners is critical for the construction of Twin Sorrow Arrows. A raven feather and steel arrowhead forged over hellfire and cooled in demon's blood are also required, but no one said making magical artifacts was easy.

All ghosts and spirits fear Twin Sorrow Arrows, and with good reason. Not only is the pain of such a weapon excruciating, it can enslave even as it injures. A supernatural creature hit by a Twin Sorrow Arrow cannot reduce the arrow's Damage with Toughness, nor with Armor protection from a creature or arcanowave schtick. Furthermore, the creature must make a Willpower check against Difficulty 10 or be enslaved by the archer for one full day. (Creatures who are immune to Domination are also immune to control through the arrow.)

Twin Sorrow Arrows are fairly flimsy. Breaking one is a trivial action, and any time one is fired and the negative die comes up one, the arrow is destroyed. Once a Twin Sorrow Arrow is broken, it cannot be repaired.

The Versatile Ammo schtick cannot be used to produce Twin Sorrow Arrows: They can only be acquired in the course of play. Twin Sorrow Arrows cannot be Signature Weapons.





## Summoning With Fallen Banner Wood

Burning banner wood gives a sorcerer +1 AV for one use of any Summoning schtick. To produce sufficient smoke, at least two kilograms of wood must burn completely. This usually takes at least five minutes, but impatient sorcerers with the Fire Blast schtick have been known to hurry the process along.

## Bio-Wave Transplants

Only the CDCA would have the hubris to try to transplant something from the Forest. So far, they've only managed to move one small shrub—a minor skirmish from the lost reign of Ming I—but already the technician in charge is clamoring for more. It's not likely: Getting their current test subject left most of two crack SERU squads dead. On the other hand, the results are rather attractive.

The Bio-Wave Transplant has literally borne fruit. They're lumpy, ugly, brownish-red berries so vile that even abominations grimace in distaste, but they're fruit nonetheless. Any supernatural creature that eats it gains permanent protection against sorcerous Domination: Instead of resisting it with Willpower, the creature can use its Creature Powers or Sorcery AV. Furthermore, any attempt to Dominate the creature results in a backlash effect even if it's successful.

Of course, there are a few side effects. First, if the creature in question has a Summoning schtick of its own, *any* Summoning spell it casts causes automatic backlash, regardless of success or failure. Furthermore, the creature suffers -1 AV when attacking or defending against ghosts or other walking dead.

## The Leaves

The small banner leaves are easier to acquire than an entire tree. The ghosts still protect them fiercely, but it's far easier to flee clutching a handful of leaves than hauling an entire tree trunk.

## Ghost Tea

Primarily, leaves from the Forest are used to brew Ghost Tea. A large handful of dried

## Typical Forest Ghost

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 0 (Mag 7), Mnd 5, Ref 5

**Skills:** Martial Arts or Guns 8, Creature Powers 9

**Creature Schticks:** Flight, Insubstantial, Damage Immunity: Guns

**Sorcery Schtick:** Blast

**Unique Immunity:** All ghosts are immune to the sorcerous Domination schtick while in the Forest of Fallen Banners.

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), blast (9). Ghosts with Guns Skill have a weapon appropriate to their juncture: bow & arrow (7/5/1), Baker rifle (11/5/1) or AK-47 (13\*\*/5/30).

and shredded pennants are enough to produce a pot's worth; one pot is enough for six drinks. Any human who drinks it becomes Insubstantial (as the creature schtick) for one hour. Any ghost who drinks it can make a Constitution roll and be healed of the resulting number of Wound Points.

## Smoking Leaves

If dried banners are smoked in a pipe, the leaves cause vivid recollections of their battle of origin. They literally put the smoker into the body of one of the soldiers for ten minutes to half an hour; anyone who smokes the leaves is effectively comatose, totally unaware of his environment, while his hallucination continues. There's little demand for it as a recreational drug, but it is a resource for historians with a burning desire to know the truth. Some unfortunates have made the error of smoking leaves blended from different battles, which results in a ghastly, nightmarish confusion between the two conflicts.

## Inhabitants

The souls of soldiers and civilians from every historical (and ahistorical) conflict haunt the forest. They're not common: One can travel for days in the forest without seeing a single ghost. Travelers may hear them, or feel uncomfortable chills, or find little mementos outside their tents. But the ghosts are nevertheless rarely seen—until some idiot tries to take some leaves or cut down a tree. In that case, travelers find that they suddenly have a great deal of company. About twenty show up immediately when anyone tries to gather

leaves, with another five to ten showing up every sequence. Fifty bear down on a group that goes after a whole tree, with another ten (or more) showing up each sequence.

Soldiers from every conflict in humankind's long history haunt this forest, and none of them like the idea of it being disturbed, so it's no wonder that the last Lotus expedition into the Forest never returned. Nonetheless, Gao Zhang has sent another, larger party into the depths of the forest. Rumor has it they're looking for a tiny plant, from a battle where only a few people fell. But he wants a definite count of how many Dragon banners fell at the Red Lantern Tavern.

## THINGS

### THE FIELD OF TENTACLES

The Field of Tentacles is a roiling mass of fleshy pink tentacles about as big as a football field, situated in a cavern just large enough to contain its bulk. Over the years, the Field of Tentacles has gained a bit of a religious following among the Netherworld rabble. Dubbed the Cult of the Tentacle, this group is composed mainly of pariahs, cast-offs and lunatics. As you might suspect, it takes a bit of work to qualify as a nutjob in the Netherworld, meaning that the Cult is one weird-ass gang.

Reverend Petey Whitefence, a moon-faced man of apparently sincere devotion, is the Cult's current patriarch. Current Cult doctrine holds that the Tentacles will one day spread across the Netherworld, destroying all who do not bow before the Field in worship. Under Petey, the Cult has taken to evangelism, passing out fliers, holding revivals and taking a very active recruitment stance. The Cult's propensity for violence in the face of heretical thought is well-known, so Petey has a lot of people taking his colorful pamphlets, smiling politely and donating a few trinkets to the cause. Petey has recently ventured into the

world of televangelism. He used some captured video equipment to put together a program he wants IKTV to show, and is planning on stepping up a television campaign to attract more rubes—err, followers—to the Cult.

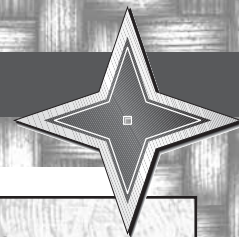
## The Field Itself

The Field of Tentacles is intelligent, after a fashion. Inanimate objects thrown into the field are torn to pieces, re-arranged into some new, bizarre configuration, and tossed back out. The Cult reveres such objects as holy icons; they're willing to kill to get their paws on them.

Also, the Field seems to have some sort of attunement to magical potential within people. One of two things happens when someone walks into the Field. If the person uses or could use magic (Magic stat of seven or higher), the tentacles form an elevated path where the magician walks. If not, the unfortunate is tossed, stretched, pulled, slung and smothered. It's pretty unpleasant, but not typically deadly. Any Damage done is at the GMs discretion.

The Field can also temporarily spawn new fields. The Cult usually does this to harry opponents and show off their capabilities. First, the Cult tosses a small bag of seeds (of any kind) and about a pint of human blood to the tentacles. Soon after, the tentacles toss out a pinkish sphere the size of a golf ball, made of the same blobby flesh as the tentacles. If three drops of human blood are dripped onto the sphere, it quickly grows into an exact duplicate of the Field of Tentacles. The baby Field lasts until the parent creates another seed, whereupon the child shrinks into a gray, marble-sized ball. The original Field is dormant while a child Field is active, which makes the Cult reluctant to keep one going for too long. The Cult likes to drop these little bundles of tentacular joy on enemy installations, especially in places where the tentacles can do some lasting damage before shrinking down.

Attuning to the Field of Tentacles (yep, it's a feng shui site) gives a character the standard bonuses for attunement. All of the cultists are so attuned.



Here are some things that could happen if the player characters tangle with the Cult at the Field of Tentacles:

- A mook gets tossed in. When thrown back out, the cultists either worship him (if his Magic was high enough) or turn on him for sullyng the field (if it wasn't).
- A cultist tosses a box of knives into the Field. At the start of the next sequence, each combatant must make a Fortune test against Difficulty 5 or be pegged with a knife for 7 Damage.
- Combat in the Field is wild and wooly. The tentacles tend to grab at guns, swords and other weapons. Grenades pins have an odd tendency to be pulled out, and the tentacles aren't modest about grabbing limbs and other body parts. All actions are at -3 AV. Don't modify anyone's Dodge score, though, unless it seems like a cool idea to have the tentacles grab someone and hold him still.

## Reverend Petey Whitefence

Maybe once, when Petey first joined the Cult, he actually believed in the almighty power of the Tentacle. Now, he's a big believer in the Cult of Petey. Its primary doctrine is "Gullible fanatics are best put to use rounding up creature comforts for Petey Whitefence." He regularly sends his minions off to grab batteries, booze, videos and other luxury items for his own personal use. The Cult is a gravy train, and Petey is gonna ride it for as long as he can.

## Cultists of the Tentacle

The cultists are whacked-out Netherworld rabble who get off on swaying along with the tentacles, raiding settlements and preaching to heathens. Picture Moonies, but replace peace and love with tentacles and violence. If they found

### Reverend Petey Whitefence

**Sample Dialogue:** "Give until it hurts, my children."

**Attributes:** Bod 5, Chi 3 (Mag 12), Mnd 7, Ref 7

**Skills:** Deceit 14, Intimidation 12, Leadership 10, Sorcery 18

**Sorcery Schticks:** Blast (lightning), Influence, Movement, Summoning

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (7), staff (8)

### Cultists of the Tentacle

**Sample Dialogue:** "Bow before the might of the Tentacle!"

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 2, Mnd 4, Ref 6

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Intimidation 8

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), club (9)

out that their beloved Reverend Whitefence thought they were gullible twits, they'd probably blame themselves.

## THE BIG BABIES

*I heard this story while I was having a beer at the Escher Hotel bar and keeping an eye on a guy from the Biomass Reprocessing Center. I've seen him before—he's the guy with the second nose growing out the back of his head, though lately he's started wearing a hood to hide it. Today he was pumping some old-timer for information about the big babies.*

*Now normally I'd tend to dismiss the big babies as a folk tale or hallucination, but everyone I've asked says these things are real—I even saw a couple grainy photographs.*

*Anyway, Two-Nose started out with the Buro tough-guy act, talking about how he had been holding the leash on an abomination scouting patrol that wound up fricasseed by a trio of firebreathing, three-meter-tall human infants.*

*Mr. Old shut him up pretty quickly. "If you think they're scary now," he said "you should have seen them fifty years ago, when they were full grown!" This left Two-Nose even more confused and belligerent, and they went back and forth for a while, but eventually they got past their dominance-posturing and Old settled down to tell his tale. Incidentally, he adopted the tone and attitude typical of professional storytellers in just about every society—pompous, pedantic and theatrical.*



According to him, there are nine of the infants running around. No one's sure where they came from. Perhaps they're the "Giants in the Earth" from the bible, or the "Yama Kings" of Chinese myth. In any event, fifty years ago they pretty much ran the whole Netherworld show. Sure, people scurried around and slipped through cracks like they do now, but the Nine Kings collectively ruled almost all of the Netherworld.

It wasn't an enlightened or benevolent rule. Each king ate someone at least once a week, and anyone who didn't like it had a six-story firebreathing giant to contend with. That went on for quite a while until several junctures suddenly opened, providing a new influx of Innerwalkers. One of the groups apparently hailed from some Roman-dominated history, and they called themselves Lex Draconis. (Interesting, huh? But maybe the old guy just made it up as a dig at his audience.) These guys saw the tyranny of the Nine Kings and decided to do something about it. There were sieges and big glorious battles, and they slaughtered the Nine Kings' minions by the boatload. But when they went up against the Kings themselves they got their asses beat, and hard. The Nine Kings had always claimed they were immortal and unkillable. As far as the surviving fraction—about one in twenty—of Lex Draconis were concerned, that claim was a proven fact.

So, where courage had failed, guile took a try. Someone—the old storyteller was deliberately vague on that point—approached the remaining members of Lex Draconis with a bold plan. He knew the location of the

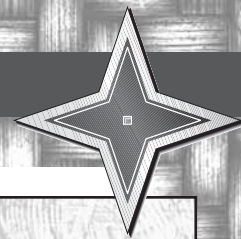
fabled fountain of youth, and could provide Lex Draconis with nine kegs of its magic water. If they could somehow trick the Nine Kings into drinking it, they might not be killed, but they'd regress into infancy—possibly "youthened" right out of existence.

First Lex Draconis had to set the Nine Kings against each other, which was accomplished by a beautiful Druidess. Then they had to trick the giants into drinking the kegs. I had to get up and take a leak during that part of the story, but it involved gambling. Someone named Suetonius got his arms and legs cut off and had to roll dice from his mouth, and someone else named Peniculus drank himself to death. It all wound up with eight of the giants down. As for the last, he was on guard and refused to involve himself with any contests, quests, gambles, dares, or indeed, anything else that involved drinking.

Luckily for the Netherworld, tending to his artificially-young siblings kept the last King too busy to unite the Inner Kingdom under his lone banner—until a young man named Po Liu showed up claiming to be an expert babysitter. The Ninth King gave him an opportunity to demonstrate his ability to manage eight immortal, firebreathing infants, and Po Liu performed admirably. Things looked dark indeed, save for one thing.

Po Liu, while a fine babysitter, was a terrible pest.

If he wasn't blathering to the King about the bowel movements of the babies, he was asking him to wipe their noses (for, despite his skill, he was not equipped



to handle burning nose dirt). Finally, as the King was preparing to eradicate the last of the members of Lex Draconis, Po Liu interrupted him with another one of his interminable, pointless anecdotes. Irritated past toleration, the King ate him. Or tried to.

It transpired that Po Liu had bathed in the juice of some devilishly hot pepper. When the Ninth King popped the babysitter into his mouth, it was agonizingly painful. He tried breathing fire to clean it out, but that only made it worse. In his desperation he grabbed the first drink he saw—which, thanks to the wiles of the Druid sorceress and aided by the armless and legless Suetonius, was none other than the youth potion.

Two-Nose was less than appreciative of this history, arguing that it didn't help much in the current situation. Why (he asked) didn't the people simply chain up the babies and wall over them or something?

Mr. Old replied that they'd tried to control them, but they just broke free. It was as hard for the people of the Netherworld to find babysitters for firebreathing monsters as it had been for the Ninth King. Besides (and he added this point rather caustically) a passel of new junctures had just opened and filled the Netherworld with Secret Warriors again. Everyone had more important things to worry about.

Then Two-Nose asked whether the babies would ever grow up again, and Mr. Old said that (being giants) they grow much more slowly than normal people, but that someone would have to find the fountain of youth again when they got to be toddlers.

### Big Babies

**Attributes:** Bod 10, Chi 10 (For 0), Mnd 1, Ref 4

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8, Creature Powers 15

**Creature Schticks:** Blast (fire), Immunity: Sorcery (except Blast and Fertility)

**Unique Schtick:**

*Truly Inevitable Comeback:* This works just like the Inevitable Comeback schtick, except that it doesn't require a Magic check, it takes twenty-four hours to happen and the babies return without any Wound Points. In other words, they really are unkillable. On the plus side, they're also completely uncontrollable, so no faction is going to use them to win the Secret War.

**Attack:** clumsy slap (10), blast (12)

*So that's the information I have to date about the big babies. It makes sense, I guess, in a Netherworldly kind of way. Bear in mind that Mr. Old may not have been the most honest and unbiased informant: During the story, he convinced Two-Nose to order the absinthe, claiming "No one in the Netherworld respects a man who can't drink. Absinthe is a good starter booze—there's hardly any alcohol at all." After his audience had passed out, the old man picked his pocket.*

*As the old storyteller was leaving, I went with a gut instinct and called out "Po Liu! Over here!"*

*For what it's worth, he looked.*

—Dr. John Haynes

# Index

- 2-Way Ray 100-101  
AARF *see Arcanowave Advanced Research Facility*  
Abomination Storage Wing 48  
Ahexotl 102-104  
Akani Hideo 17-18  
Ambrosia, Mr. *see Escher Hotel*  
Arcanowave Advanced Research Facility (AARF) 46-48  
Architects of the Flesh, The *see Biomass Reprocessing Center; see also Jammers*  
Autonomous Self-Replicating Bioplastic Combat Unit *see Blood Jelly*  
Bared Blade, The 95  
Baron, The 33-34  
battlefields of the Netherworld 44  
Bazaar, The 63-65  
Benjamin, Rabbi-Captain 97  
Benji Factory *see Close Combat Demoralization Unit Production Center*  
Big Babies, The 123-125  
Big Brother Room 68  
Biomass Reprocessing Center 44, 45-52  
Abomination Storage Wing 48  
Arcanowave Advanced Research Facility (AARF) 46-48  
Close Combat Demoralization Unit Production Center (CCDU, Benji Factory) 48-49  
Cyborg Development Area 45  
defenses 45-46  
Hazardous Experiments Laboratory (HEL) 48-49  
High-Risk Laboratories 48-49  
map 10  
personnel 49-52  
Reception Zone 46  
RecFac 45  
TacOps 49  
Transtemporal Communications Building 45  
Blood Fields, The 117-118  
map 11  
Blood Jelly (Autonomous Self-Replicating Bioplastic Combat Unit) 52  
Blue Pledged Soldiers 53-54  
Bonehead, Ordinary 63  
Boneyards, The 62-63  
Bound, The 83  
Broadcast Link, The IKTV 106-107  
Broken Wheel Brigade 57-58  
Brotherhood of Hebrew Champions 95-98  
Buro, The *see Biomass Reprocessing Center; see also Jammers*  
Buster 92  
Butterfly Knights 31  
Carville, Colonel *see Crosstime Circus*  
Cathedral, The 29  
CCDU *see Close Combat Demoralization Unit Production Center*  
CDCA Arcanowave Researcher 50  
CDCA Project Leader 50  
Centares, Lucius 32  
Chamber of Infernal Restoration, The 80  
Chamberlain 41  
Chiu Fa 26  
chizu 86-87  
Chorus of Tongues 83-84  
Clacker Gun 89  
clergy 31-32  
Clinic, The 69  
Clock House, The 119-120  
Close Combat Demoralization Unit Production Center (CCDU, Benji Factory) 48-49  
Command 60  
Crane, The 70-71  
Crosstime Circus 65-66  
Cultists of the Tentacle 123  
Darkness Pagoda, The 34-43  
denizens 40-43  
dungeons 39  
entrance 36  
guest quarters 37  
map 9  
processional 36-37  
Sacrificial Pyramid 37  
sewers 37  
Shrines of Initiation 38-39  
Skin and Darkness Forges 39  
throne room 37-38  
Darkness Priestesses 40  
Darkness Warriors 40  
David, Brother 98  
Dragons' Lair 67-69  
armory 69  
Big Brother Room 68  
Clinic, The 69  
common room 68-69  
living quarters 69  
training room 68  
workroom 68  
Dragons, The *see Dragons' Lair*  
Dupress, Rebecca 53  
Eaters of the Lotus, The *see Guiyu Zui*  
Escher Hotel, The 109-111  
history 110-111  
map 11  
proprietors 111  
Face Crabs 6  
Family Tortoise 54-55  
Field of Tentacles, The 122-123  
Cultists 123  
map 8  
Reverend Petey Whitefence 123  
Fire Assassins 23-24  
Fire Constructs 24  
Fire Pagoda, The 19-26  
armories 21-22  
denizens 23-26  
dungeons 22  
entrance 21  
map 9  
throne room 21  
training halls 21  
meditation chambers 21  
sewers 22  
Fire Warriors 23  
Fire Zealots 24  
Fong, Johnny 64  
Fong, Raymond *see Pinballhalla*  
Forest of Fallen Banners, The 120-122  
bio-wave transplants 121  
Ghost Tea 121  
leaves 121  
inhabitants 121-122  
map 10  
smoking leaves 121  
summoning with wood 121  
trees 120-121  
Twin Sorrow Arrows 120  
Four Monarchs, The 4-43; *see also Ice Pagoda, Fire Pagoda, Thunder Pagoda, or Darkness Pagoda*  
Freak *see Jammers*  
Friedkin, Dr. Alice 90-91  
Fung, General 42  
Gateway to the Underworld 80-81  
Geek *see Jammers*  
Genocide Lounge, The 107-108  
construction 108  
Georgi 107-108  
history 107  
location 108  
map 10  
geography of the Netherworld 4-6  
Geomancy 59  
Georgi Kotov 107-108; *see also Genocide Lounge*  
Ghent, Richard of 25  
Ghost Tea 121  
Gold Pledged Soldiers 53-54  
Grottoes of Serenity, The 74-76  
Grotto of Sun Chen 76  
Grotto of the Goddess of Mercy 76  
Grotto of the Three Masters 75-76  
Guiding Hand, The *see Temple of Boundless Meditation*  
Guiyu Zui 76-84  
Chamber of Infernal Restoration 80



- Gateway to the Underworld 80-81  
 map 8  
 minions 81-84  
 operations 77-78  
 organization 76-77  
 torture chambers 79-80  
 Testing Ground 80  
 Twisted Gardens 80
- GunRot 87  
 Hal 2000 101  
 Hand Archers, Unnamed 73  
 Hand *see Guiding Hand*  
 Havernen, Professor 89-90  
 Hawker, Typical 64  
 High-Risk Laboratories *see also HEL, CCDU, or Abomination Storage Wing*  
 Hsien, One-Eye 63  
 Huan Ken *see Thunder Pagoda*  
 Hub, The 53-61  
 Broken Wheel Brigade 57-58  
 cloning tanks 58-59  
 Command 60  
 Geomancy 59  
 Logistics 59  
 map 11  
 military 56-58  
 personnel 53-55  
 Research 58  
 Security 59  
 Ice Commandos 16  
 Ice Falcons 16  
 Ice Pagoda 12-19  
 armories 13-14  
 barracks 15  
 control center 13  
 denizens 16-19  
 dungeons 16  
 entrance 14  
 map 9  
 sewers 15  
 stables 15-16  
 Strait of Ice 13  
 throne room 13  
 Ice Tigers 17  
 IKTV 105-107  
 Broadcast Link 106-107  
 layout 105-106  
 personnel 106  
 schedule 106  
 Imps 81-82  
 Intestines, Yang Luo's 113  
 Jammers, The 85-86; *see also Silent Jungle*  
 jiangshi 48  
 Johnny Java 104-105  
 Junkyard, The 61-69  
 Bazaar 63-65  
 Boneyards 62-63  
 Crosstime Circus 65-66  
 Dragons' Lair 67-69  
 denizens 63, 64-65, 66  
 map 9  
 Monastery 65  
 Temple of the Weeping Maiden 67  
 Kiroshi, Dr. Kenwon 90  
 Kotov, Georgi 107-108; *see also Genocide Lounge*  
 Kraken B Modular Sub 113  
 Li Ting *see Fire Pagoda*  
 Lodge Minibus 113  
 Lodge, The *see Hub, The*  
 Logistics 59  
 Long, Ani 50  
 Lost Souls 82  
 Lotus *see Eaters of the Lotus*  
 Lui Man Wai 69-70  
 Lys *see Xanadu*  
 maps of the Netherworld 8-11  
 Matthews, Professor Ally 50-51  
 meditation chambers 21  
 Michael, Brother 98  
 Milk of Paradise 115  
 Ming I *see Darkness Pagoda*  
 Monarchs, The Four 4-43; *see also Ice Pagoda, Fire Pagoda, Thunder Pagoda, or Darkness Pagoda*  
 Monastery, The 65  
 MonkeyHouse, The 87-88  
 Mother *see Clock House*  
 Mouth of the Fire Righteous 25-26  
 Mr. Pop 90  
 New Jerusalem 20  
 Nik Nemesis 99-100  
 Nu Wei-Feng 41-42  
 Ogres 81  
 Paalanen, Colonel Risto 18  
 Pack Fiends 84  
 Pagodas *see Ice Pagoda, Fire Pagoda, Thunder Pagoda, or Darkness Pagoda*  
 Paine, Reverend Zebediah 84  
 Pannic and the Wild Boys 91-92  
 Path of the Storm Turtle 54-55  
 physics of the Netherworld 6  
 Pinballhalla 115-117  
 Pinball Hall 116-117  
 Raymond Fong 117  
 Viking Bouncers 117  
 Pledged Soldiers, Blue and Gold 53-54  
 Polar Bears 17  
 politics of the Netherworld 7  
 Pui Ti *see Ice Pagoda*  
 Rat, The 70, 71-72  
 Research 58  
 Richard of Ghent 25  
 River Alph, The map 8  
 S.S. Coleridge Torpedo Boat 113  
 Sacrificial Pyramid, The 37  
 Security 59  
 Sergilov, Ivana 18-19  
 Sheng Ming-tun 55  
 Shih, Lord 42-43  
 Shrines of Initiation, The 38-39  
 Silent Jungle, The 86-92  
 chizu 86-87  
 GunRot 87  
 map 10  
 MonkeyHouse 87-88  
 personalities 89-92  
 Simeon, Brother 98  
 Skin and Darkness Bats 40-41  
 Skin and Darkness Forges 39  
 Skin and Darkness Ravagers 41  
 Skin and Darkness Zealots 41  
 sociology of the Netherworld 7  
 Sonic Reducer 101  
 Southwell, Professor D. Louis 50-51  
 Spider Monkeys 91  
 Stone Griffins 28  
 Strait of Ice, The 13  
 Strangled Scream, The 83  
 Sunless Sea, The 112-114  
 map 8  
 Synagogue Guards 98  
 TacOps 49  
 TacOps Administrator 49-50  
 TacOps Sergeant 49-50  
 TacOps Trooper 49-50  
 Tangie, Corporal 57  
 Temple of Boundless Meditation, The 69-76  
 denizens 69-72  
 Grottoes of Serenity 74-76  
 grounds 73-74  
 map 11  
 Temple of the Weeping Maiden, The 67  
 Testing Ground 80  
 Thunder Champions 32  
 Thunder Knights 31  
 Thunder Pagoda, The 27-34  
 armory 29-30  
 Cathedral 29  
 denizens 28, 31-34  
 dungeons 30  
 entrance 28  
 great hall 28  
 map 9  
 throne room 28-29  
 trophy room 29-30  
 Valley of the Storms 27-28  
 Tiger, The 70, 72  
 Tortoise, Family 54-55  
 Transformed Animals 54-55  
 Transtemporal Connective Passage Network 44  
 Twin Sorrow Arrows 120  
 Twisted Gardens, The 80  
 Two Face 98-102  
 underwater fighting 114  
 Unexpected Deliverance Society 93-95  
 Valentine, Mr. *see Escher Hotel*  
 Valley of the Storms, The 27-28  
 Viking Bouncers 116, 117  
 White, Thurston *see Blood Fields*  
 Whitefence, Reverend Petey 123  
 Wild Boys, Pannic and the 91-92  
 Winter Wolves 17  
 Xanadu 114-115  
 map 8  
 Milk of Paradise 115  
 Yussuf, 'Ali Ibn 24-25