

Credits

"FOUR BASTARDS"

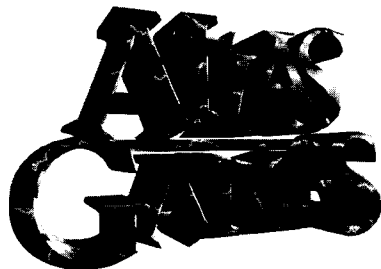
AN **ATLAS GAMES** PRODUCTION OF A **ROBIN D. LAWS** SCENARIO

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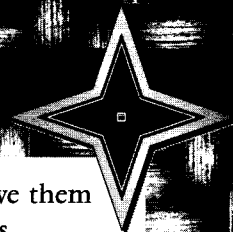
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THE PITCH

Premise: A callous orphanage attack leads our heroes to a gigantic conspiracy that crosses junctures and factions. Behind this sinister plot are four fatherless men, each related to the others by blood.

The Twist: Although the Four Bastards work to betray their respective factions, is there a shadowy figure directing their unknowing hands towards his own ends?

The Climax: Bullets fly, missiles roar, and helicopters explode at the official opening of the Three Gorges Dam, a massive Chinese government project to divert the flow of the hallowed Yiangtze River.

This adventure is for a group of heroes already familiar with the Secret War. It assumes that:

- The PCs are Dragons
- Their headquarters is Hong Kong
- They've made contact with remaining leaders of the Dragon faction
- They know about the Netherworld and the other factions of the Secret War

If they don't live in Hong Kong, but all of the other assumptions pertain, you'll have an easy job adapting this adventure to your series. Just set this teaser scene somewhere else. Every city worth blowing up has orphanages and crime bosses.

The other assumptions are trickier to circumvent. *Four Bastards* is an adventure meant to evoke the epic sweep of the Secret War. Its backstory depends on a grand conspiracy that crosses factional lines. Although you can use the big action set-pieces without the Secret War, you'll likely have to create an entirely new plot line to carry the heroes from one shoot-'em-up to another. That means you're on your own, my friend. Here's hoping you come out alive.

To adjust the adventure to the current capabilities of experienced PCs, subtract their average combat AVs from 15. Round that number up and add it to the combat AVs of all non-

mook characters in this adventure. Leave them as is if your series is still in its early days.

BACKSTORY

Ricky Cho hails from contemporary HK, where he committed an act of excessive psycho-violence forcing the Dragons to cast him out. T'se Chow resides in the 1850 juncture, where he served the Jade Wheel until they cavalierly threatened his family. Long-Nails Chou is a eunuch and former minion of the Lotus. Dr. Siegfried Zhu toils amidst the heat of the CDCA's cooker vats as a developer of the next wave of arcanotechnology. Recently they discovered one another, learning that they have two things in common: They are all illegitimate, and all of them share the same DNA. They were fathered by the same man.

As each is disenchanted in his own way by the Secret War's ceaseless pendulum of bullets and betrayal, they have chosen to form their own four-man conspiracy to take over all of the junctures and end the Secret War. Naturally, they intend the war's conclusion to leave them as history's all-powerful rulers, treading all who dare oppose them beneath their cruel boot-heels. There's only one can of whoop-ass that can stop them—and the PCs hold the pull-tab.

It all started when Kar Fai, the Dragon commando-in-chief, went upside the head of one Ricky Cho, kicking him (figuratively and literally) out of the Dragons for acts of violence above and beyond the call of sanity. The final straw came at a joint the PCs may know: the Bun Festival. Like most Dragons who work modern HK, Ricky crossed paths all too often with its owner, Fast Eddie Lo. Never a well-hinged individual, Ricky hated Fast Eddie from the fat man's first taunt. He despised having to come to the corpulent criminal time and again for favors, in each instance having to endure Fast Eddie's snide comments. Finally he snapped and sprayed the Bun Festival with red-hot lead. A civilian was wounded, and even his Wheel buddies had to allow a police crackdown on Eddie's operation, for appearance's sake. Eddie retaliated against Ricky by blowing the covers of five HK Dragons to the Lotus and Architects. One

of Kar Fai's best operatives was gunned down in a phone booth. The others haven't been able to work in modern Hong Kong since. Kar Fai had to personally apologize to Fast Eddie for Ricky's actions, losing considerable face in the process. No wonder he placed a big black footprint dead center on Ricky's keister.

At loose ends in the Netherworld, a bitterly aggrieved Ricky wandered into the 1850 juncture. He offered his mercenary services to a pirate captain, and soon found himself in the midst of an assault against an ancient island fortress. During the attack, some of the pirates cornered a beautiful young woman, ready to subject her to a fate worse than death. Disgusted, Ricky switched sides and introduced the pirates to the fine 20th-century workmanship of Mr. Heckler and Mr. Koch.

Ricky was shocked when he first clapped eyes on the master of the fortress, T'se Chow. T'se had nearly a decade on him, but was otherwise Ricky's dead ringer. The two men bonded further when Ricky's information on the pirates led T'se to the inescapable conclusion that they'd acted at the behest of his own organization, the Jade Wheel Society. His superiors had merely been testing his ability to defend the important feng shui site he'd been assigned! His new wife could have been raped, his loyal men slain! All for a test! On that day T'se knew his own loyalties had been completely misplaced. The two men cursed

the Secret War and swore revenge on their respective conspiracies. Unfortunately, the Wheel had an informant listening in. They responded to T'se's vituperations by sending an even bigger pirate fleet to force his resignation. The Ascended make their dismissals more permanent than the Dragons', and T'se had to flee for his life. His wife and retainers were killed by cannon-fire. Only T'se and Ricky got away.

T'se and Ricky wandered rootlessly through the junctures, hardening their skills and resolve. One day the Lotus hired them to

assassinate an operative who'd failed an assignment. They tracked their quarry to his laboratory in 69 AD, which just happened to be on the same island T'se had been driven from in a later juncture. When they saw their target, Long-Nails Chou, they knew they couldn't go through with it. If they were twins, he was a triplet. They told him who'd sent them and why, giving Long-Nails reason to also hate his masters. It was clearly destiny that had brought them together. Some force, perhaps the weary earth itself, had made a team of them. The world wanted them to rule her.

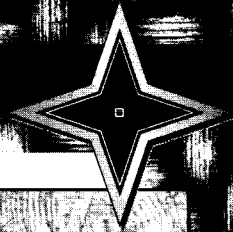
They became surer of this when, in the Netherworld, they found the fourth Bastard. Dr. Siegfried Zhu, still a loyal functionary of the Architects, was stationed at the Biomass Reprocessing Center (*Feng Shui* p. 206) when they spotted him browsing the stalls of the Bazaar.⁶ Seeing their own faces mirrored in him, they kidnapped him and took him to their Netherworld lair. Dr. Zhu came around to their point of view, and agreed to participate in their plan. Although he would never have dreamed of betraying his masters without the intervention of the other Bastards, his meeting with them filled in the missing pieces in the puzzle of his life. He agreed to help them. He even performed a DNA test to prove that Ricky, T'se and he were Long-Nails' descendants. The results established something even more bizarre: All four men had the same father. Their destiny was obvious.

In their excitement at finding one another, none of them stopped to do the math. It is well known that the 69 juncture has only been open for a few years. How could a single man have sired Chou in 21, a then-closed juncture, and also fathered Cho in 1974, T'se in 1818, and Zhu in 2003?

THE BAD GUYS

Ricky Cho is like a player character gone bad. Surely you've had somebody play a character as a hair-trigger psycho who goes hyper-violent when his personal boundaries get the least bit crossed. He doesn't play well with others, and the concept of reasonable force is undreamt-of in his philosophy. Well, Ricky Cho is that guy times two. If you currently have a charac-

⁶ **The Bazaar:** Located midway between most of the major factions' Netherworld installations, the Bazaar is a vast sea of stalls operated by demons, robots, Red Janissaries, legionaries, former cave people, Flux Hoboes, dumpster divers, and other Netherworld outcasts. Because every one who lives there needs to exchange goods to survive, it is as close to neutral ground as the Netherworld offers. Which is to say, everyone is armed to the gills and minor firefights break out as a matter of routine, but few are ever seriously killed. See *Elevator to the Netherworld*, pp. 61-62.



ter like this in your group, you should give him a taste of his own medicine by pairing him up with Ricky in dramatic scenes and the final shoot-out. In the modern era, Ricky favors a Hawaiian shirt and a black ball cap bearing the logo of an eighties heavy metal band.

T'se Chow could be Ricky's wiser uncle. Though still in his early thirties, the death of his wife has turned him implacably grim. He's a cultivated man who's turned to war, a loyal man betrayed by those who claimed they'd protect him. He speaks and acts cautiously, but when he does strike, he does so with no quarter given.

Long-Nails Chou has been maddened by his traffic with demons. He speaks in the squeaky voice of HK-movie eunuchs and moves like a man intravenously injected with espresso. Of the four, he is the most focused on ruling the world and the least passionate about avenging himself against his former masters. The other Bastards are the only people who've ever shown him any

Ricky Cho

Sample Dialogue: "Who exactly do you think you're talking to? Well, lemme tell you, man, it's Ricky Cho you're talking to, man—that's right, in man, Ricky freakin' Cho!"

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

Skills: Martial Arts 12, Guns 16, Driving 13, Fix-It 10, Intimidation 15, Intrusion 12, Sabotage 14, Info/Metal Bands of the Eighties 12
Gun Skills: Fast Draw x3, Hair Trigger Neck Hours x3, Lightning Reload x3

Weapons: punch (8), kick (9), Browning BDM (10/2/15+1), Beretta Model 21 Bobcat (8/1/8+1, in ankle holster), Mossberg Special Purpose (13/5/9)

love, and he'll defend them with rodent-like ferocity.

Dr. Siegfried Zhu has always been the sort to go along with the crowd and pursue whatever sort of success society defines. In the 2030s, that meant becoming an arcanowave genius. Lately,

Dave White 2000



T'se Chow

Sample Dialogue: "I speak without bravado. Stand aside, or die."
Attributes: Bod 7, Chi 2 (Fu 10), Mnd 6, Ref 9
Skills: Martial Arts 16, Leadership 12, Medicine 10, Info/Chinese Classics 12
Fu Schticks: Flow Restoration, Corners of the Mouth, Healing Chi, Point Blockage, Claw of the Tiger, Tiger Stance
Weapons: punch (8), kick (9), cutlass (11), umbrella (8), Claw of the Tiger (10)

Long-Nails Chou

Sample Dialogue: "Hee hee hee! Your pusillanimous friends can't help you now! Hee hee hee!"
Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 2 (Mag 9), Mnd 7, Ref 6
Skills: Sorcery 16, Deceit 12, Intimidation 12, Medicine 13
Sorcery Schticks: Blast, Domination, Fertility, Movement
Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), dagger (6)

Dr. Siegfried Zhu

Sample Dialogue: "In my PDA here, I keep a complete database of anyone who's ever crossed me. You'd better hope you aren't on it."
Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 0 (Bar 5), Mnd 8, Ref 6
Skills: Guns 12, Arcanowave Novice 12, Fix-It 15, Medicine 10, Info/Biochemistry 10, Info/Mathematics 10, Info/Physics 10
Arcanowave Schticks: Eject, Snap Polish, Spirit Shield Generator
Weapons: Baro Blade of Truth (10/3/30)

though, he's become depressed, realizing that scientific know-how only takes you so far. To advance to the Buro, one needs political instincts, which Zhu lacks in spades. Long-Nails' plan to take over the world seems just the cure

for that. He'll show all of those office-politicking brown-nosers at the Biomass Reprocessing Center who's who. Maybe he'll let them lick his boots. If they're lucky. The weasels.

THEIR SINISTER PLAN

When Ricky and T'se found him, Long-Nails had already been studying a possible short-cut to world domination. His completed rituals permit four men of the same bloodline to take over the world by burning, in quick succession, feng shui sites corresponding to the five elements: air, earth, fire, wood, and (the most potent of all) water. Each site must be the purest or mightiest expression of that element possible.

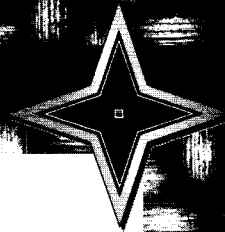
The ritual requires each conspirator to spill the blood of an enemy before going on to destroy the first site. This explains Ricky's attack on Fast Eddie at the orphanage. At about the same time as the orphanage attack (by Inner-walker reckoning), T'se Chow blows up the clipper ship on which his Jade Wheel superior sails, Long-Nails tortures a captured rival eunuch, and Dr. Zhu places a letter-spike on the office chair of his manager. Afterwards they'll rendezvous near the first site on their list.

The sites they've chosen to burn are summarized in the insert below.

Their plan reaches ultimate fruition at the final site, China's dam to end all dams. By channeling the power gained from the other four sites, they'll permanently make their mark on the dam as it is officially opened. They'll own time, junctures, the Netherworld, the whole shebang. That is, unless a certain intrepid band of

Feng Shui Sites Chosen by the Four Bastards

Element	Name of Site	Location	Juncture
Air	Warrior's Crank	Caucasus Mountains, Republic of Bohoristan	Contemporary
Earth	Multiplication Petroglyphs	Northern Ontario, Canada	1850
Fire	Wah-Umar Oil Fields	South Africa	Contemporary
Wood	Longmundo Site DS4S	South China Coast	1950
Water	Three Gorges Dam	Hubei Province, China	Contemporary



rag-tag heroes can figure out their sinister plan and blow the Three Gorges to high holy hell in a budget-busting final cinematic climax.

Cinematic License Alert

Although the Three Gorges Dam is a real project, it isn't set for completion until 2009. The Chinese government deliberated for nearly forty years before Jiang Zemin finally gave it the go-ahead in 1993. It's supposed to provide energy equivalent to twelve coal-burning stations and control the region's disastrous flooding. Critics fear that the flooding required to create the reservoir will displace one or two million people and permanently destroy countless heritage sites. The reservoir may also act as a disease vector for pollution. And then there's always the chance that it will crack open.

Well, that's reality for you. Of course, in the world of *Feng Shui*, there's more than a chance it will crack open.

ORPHANAGE AFTERMATH

EXT. ORPHANAGE. DAY.

Fire trucks and cop cars are everywhere. Paramedics tend to injured children. Firemen with extinguishers put out several small blazes. A nurse tries to gather together the weeping orphans. Cops draw chalk outlines around dead mooks. Fast Eddie's personal physician puts his arm in a sling. Eddie looks over at the PLAYER CHARACTERS.

FAST EDDIE

So was that intended for me — or for you?

The orphanage attack is a device to get the story rolling. An investigative phase follows, which should steer the Secret Warriors to the first of the five feng shui sites, Warrior's Crook in the Caucasus Mountains. To get there, the PCs need to uncover two essential facts:

- Ricky Cho was involved.
- Ricky Cho has some big plan, in which a trip to the Caucasus is next on the agenda.

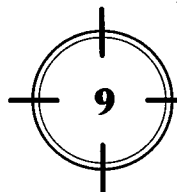
As always, focus on conveying these two points, rather than on having the PCs discover the clues in the exact ways detailed below. If an investigative avenue is entertaining and halfway sensible, it should gradually yield the needed info.

THE CLUES RICKY LEFT BEHIND

- If asked who might want him dead, Fast Eddie replies:

Ha! A list of people who want me dead? That'll take all day and half the night! Why, even one of your own guys, that Ricky Cho bastard, has sworn to see me in my grave. Maybe you should check your own backyard before you go poking your nose into Triad business.

- One of the local TV stations videotaped the shootout. They happened to capture the moment at which Fast Eddie's arm got perforated. A close study of the tape shows that the attacker was separate from the guys in the van. He was *behind* the platform, not in front of it.
- Video enhancement of the assailant (Fix-It vs. Difficulty 8 to do it yourself, or Police/Investigative vs. Difficulty 8 to know a forensic video expert willing to help) shows that he wore a Hawaiian shirt and a black ball cap with the Iron Maiden logo on it. His face is obscured by sunglasses and the blur of movement.
- Shown the video amplification, Fast Eddie positively IDs him as Ricky Cho.
- At the first mention of Ricky Cho's name, any PC who is close to Kar Fai (or another Dragon luminary) can make a Police, Investigation, or Int check (Difficulty 5). If



successful, he knows Ricky's name, his psycho attitude, his typical attire and weaponry, and the story behind his ejection from the Dragons.

- Hey, why not just ask Kar Fai? (Or the Prof, or whoever.) Kar Fai knows all of the info directly above, and also knows the other members of Ricky's team. The only member of that team currently available is Michael Yu, a Karate Cop working for the SDU.⁷
- Fast Eddie may also be able to describe Michael Yu as an SDU officer who managed, for a while, to keep a rein on Ricky.
- Michael Yu can be contacted through the SDU office. His attitude to Ricky is contradictory. If the PCs seem to think of him as a hero gone wrong, Michael condemns him as a dangerous nut job. If they slag him, Michael gets hot under the collar and says:

Sure he was crazy — crazy enough to risk his ass to save my life!

⁷SDU: HK's equivalent of the SWAT team. Focus of countless mediocre movies, many of which model themselves after *An Officer and a Gentleman*, following a recruit's progress from boot camp to deadly action in the field.

- Play this up for as much testosterone-fueled friction as you can, without having the interrogating PC unholster on Michael at SDU headquarters. After sufficient posturing, Michael gives them not only the address to Ricky's last known apartment, but his spare key.

- If the PCs enter Ricky's supposed apartment without double-checking, it's time for some HK-movie comedy stylings. The apartment has long since been rented out to a feisty old granny, who employs a heavy skillet in her attempt to bean the "rapist perverts" entering her place. (If you want to be completely true to the breezy insensitivity of such scenes, you can have her look disappointed when it becomes clear that the PCs have no intention of pervertedly raping her.)
- A talk with the landlord reveals that he's confiscated Ricky's stuff for non-payment of rent. (Hey, why pay the rent when you're about to rule the world?) To get him to voluntarily turn over the stuff for inspection, try Intimidation (Difficulty 10), Police (Difficulty 8, reflecting the trickiness of getting a real warrant for an unofficial case), Charisma (Difficulty 8), or Seduction (Difficulty 8, provided character is an attractive woman). Otherwise, Intrusion (Difficulty 8) gets you into the storage locker and past the padlock.
- Police or Investigation (Difficulty 8) nets Ricky's secret plan. It's hidden in a CD case for a Beethoven symphony—clearly out of place among his collection of vintage hair-metal. (The player doesn't have to figure this out; the check is sufficient.) The plan appears in the insert on this page. Feel free to photocopy this page, cut it out, and hand it over to the player whose character finds it.
- To know where Baharistan is, pit Info/Geography, Info/Current Events, or Intelligence vs. Difficulty 6. Or just consult the handy-dandy world atlas Ricky has conveniently left among his abandoned possessions. He's circled Baharistan in red. It's in Russia's Caucasus Mountains.

Long-Nails says, first spill the blood of your enemy. Then begin to burn Feng Shui sites.

First: Warrior's Crook, Baharistan. Air.

Second: Petroglyphs. Earth.

Then, Fire, Wood.

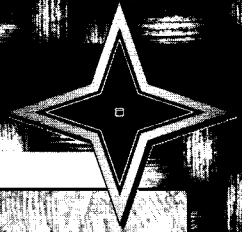
Finally: Water.

Then: The Four Bastards rule the world!

The note found in Ricky Cho's CD case.

BATTLE IN BAHARISTAN

From news reports, average people (like the PCs) know the following about the thinly-disguised breakaway Republic of Baharistan. Its



Islamic mountain men fight an on-and-off guerilla war against the Russian Federation. Using tactics favored by mountain peoples since the dawning of civilization, they've established *de facto* independence. The loss of control over Baharistan shames Russians still reeling from their lost status as a true superpower. Attempts to regain control are politically popular, provided that the Russian forces seem to be winning. Although the Russians use brutal tactics no Western country would ever condone, the impression you get from news reports is that the Baharis are Muslim fanatics, like the Iranians, and that the West will be in trouble if the Baharis expand their foothold to neighboring Islamic regions of the former Soviet Union.

EXT. AIRPORT TARMAC. DAY.

In heroic slow motion, the PLAYER CHARACTERS stride across the tarmac of an isolated airport in Baharistan. It's cold, so the slo-mo captures plumes of white breath escaping from their mouths as they lope towards the camera. Behind them rise the snow-capped peaks of the Caucasus mountains.

Like any self-respecting action movie, this adventure skips the details of flight arrangements. Who cares exactly how the PCs got their tickets? If a player objects, your hand should menacingly shoot out towards a piece of scrap paper, as if to ball it up into a prop grenade...

Beside the PLAYER CHARACTERS walks a lanky, horse-faced man wearing a camouflage jacket and about a week's worth of beard stubble. He smiles, revealing a mouth missing a couple of teeth, as he easily carries the vast majority of the group's gear. This is SHAMIL.

Tell the PC with the highest Intrusion (or, if no one has Intrusion, Deceit) AV that this is Shamil, an associate-of-an-acquaintance-of-a-friend-of-a-contact who you've been advised to hire as your point man in Baharistan. Shamil has been recommended to you as a man with the right shady connections to get your ordnance past both Russian and Bahari officials.

Shamil

Sample Dialogue: "This problem is so minor it is hardly a problem at all, trust me."

Attributes: Bod 5 (Str 9), Chi 0 (For 5), Mnd 5, Ref 5 (Spd 7)

Skills: Martial Arts 8, Guns 7, Deceit 12, Driving 8, Gambling 10, Flexibility 7, Intrusion 7

Weapons: punch (10), kick (11), knife (11), American Derringer Mini-Gun (11/1/4)

SHAMIL

Hey, what I tell you? I get weapons past all inspection, no problem A-OK!

A truck full of rebel soldiers, wearing camo but no particular uniforms, drives up. Each soldier insolently wields an AK-47.

Uh-oh.

Unless interrupted by a PC (remember, everyone in the world of *Feng Shui* speaks Cantonese), Shamil negotiates with the soldier in charge, whose name is Dzokhar. Dzokhar says that his superior insists on meeting with the foreigners. Dzokhar is calm but firm. Shamil assures the PCs that this is just a minor problem and that they should cooperate. All can be worked out if they speak to his superior.

FIGHTING THE AIRPORT GUARDS

If the PCs decide to shoot it out or make a run for it, the Bahari soldiers are no match for them. But after downing Dzokhar and his troops, they have nowhere to run but the inhospitable wilds of the Caucasus. Shamil takes no part in any fighting against his fellow Bahari; he may be a shady character but he has no reason to burn his bridges with the local powers. Nor does he flee into the woods with the PCs. So if our heroes start a gratuitous fight with the airport guards, they lose the aid of the guy who knows the terrain and situation. Have them wander through wintry mountains, suffering frostbite, eating pitiful meals of voles

Dzokhar

Sample Dialogue: "You come with us and there be no trouble."

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

Skills: Martial Arts 10, Guns 12

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), AK-47 (13/5/30), Rambo knife (6)

Unnamed Bahari Soldiers

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

Skills: Martial Arts 8, Guns 10

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), AK-47 (13/5/30), Rambo knife (6)

and lichen, until they finally stumble upon the feng shui site they were supposed to protect. They find it already destroyed. Allow them to pick up the clue that takes them to the next site.

INTO THE MOUNTAINS

If the PCs agree to accompany the soldiers, they ride in the truck.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD. DAY.

A gray sky overhangs the mountains. Desolate stands of pines form an honor guard as the truck winds its way up the road. The landscape is both harsh and majestic.

The Bahari aren't much for military discipline, and are happy to share smokes with the PCs (especially if the PCs are supplying them). As faithful Muslims, they politely turn down any proffered booze if any of the PCs are the sorts to carry whiskey flasks. If offended, the Bahari remain tight-lipped and look annoyed but make no obviously hostile moves. These seasoned guerrillas know that it's dangerous to be baited into a scrap, and that one should fight only on one's own terms. If relations between the Baharis and PCs seem strained, Shamil steps in.

SHAMIL

These good people at heart, with whom you should have no quarrel.

From either Dzokhar or Shamil, the PCs can learn the following during the drive:

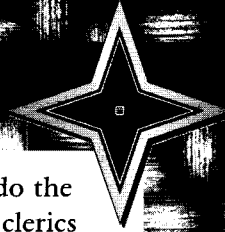
- The struggle is indeed an old one. One of Tolstoy's earliest short stories dealt with Russian soldiers kept captive by Bahari insurgents. (Shamil will have to supply this tidbit, as Dzokhar is unacquainted with Tolstoy.)
- The Bahari remained defiant even during the most repressive days of Stalin, who in retaliation exiled virtually the entire nation to Siberia. A whole generation of Baharis was born and raised in Stalinist internment camps. The generation who grew up despising Russians as cruel oppressors is now in command, and waging a war of independence.
- To the Bahari, the difference between the old Communist Russia and the new democratic one is non-existent.
- The Bahari President is not the real leader. The real leader is that great champion of the people, Yudsuk Kambiev. He is a mighty warrior and a generous chieftain.

Finally the truck arrives at a walled encampment covered by a huge white tent, obviously intended to thwart aerial reconnaissance. A small satellite dish is visible, having been attached to a nearby pine tree. Guards wave the truck through. It travels to the doorstep of a large, ugly, pre-fab building made of corrugated metal. The soldiers get out and usher the PCs inside.

THE VELVET WOLF

INT. KAMBIEV'S COMMAND CENTER. DAY.

The interior of the building contrasts wildly with the exterior. It's a lushly furnished room, with luxurious oriental-style rugs on the floors and colorful ceramic tiles emblazoned with Arabic script on the walls. On a raised platform at one end of the big room are five chairs. Sitting in the center (and largest) chair is a tall, thin man with black hair, penetrating eyes, and a graying goatee. He wears a fine black overcoat over his dark Armani suit and carries a silver-tipped cane. To either side of him are grizzled old Bahari men, each wearing



improbably high ceremonial fur hats. Sitting behind these three are two men who don't look Bahari. The first is a ruddy-skinned, burly guy with a big blond beard. The other is slim, olive-skinned, and sharp-featured. Both wear camouflage gear.

The man in the middle is the shadowy Bahari power-behind-the-throne, Yudsuk Kambiev. Before he became a mobster, terrorist, or revolutionary leader, he was a student of literature. His soft-spoken manner is almost professorial. Unlike a lot of men of his type, he's secure enough in his power that he doesn't need to project an air of menace. He even makes self-deprecating jokes at his own expense. Believing himself to be utterly righteous in defending his people, he speaks with complete frankness about his mission and methods. But he won't do so until first ascertaining who the strangers with the bag full of guns might be.

The old men to either side of him are Ilyas and Ortsu, tribal clerics who recall the deeds of great Bahari warriors and guard their relics. They teach young warriors the zikr dance, which harnesses the chi power of their feng shui sites. They see Kambiev as the heir to a hallowed tradition of enemy-smashing Bahari champions.

The bearded man is Wulfgar Wulfgarsson, a Thunder Knight of Nordic extraction. He's a hearty, back-slapping, smiting machine sent by the Thunder King to advise his Bahari friends in the Secret War. His smaller companion is Khalid Laroui, a cynical Fire Assassin expert in covert operations and international subterfuge. Both suspect that the PCs are Secret Warriors, and want to know which side they're on.

Kambiev allows Ilyas and Ortsu to begin the questioning. They ask such not-entirely-germane questions as:

- Do you acknowledge Allah as the only god?
- What are your lineages? Do you come from a line of great heroes?
- Do you think to come here and steal the secret of the zikr dance from us?

Kambiev doesn't expect useful information to come of this, but does gauge the

PCs' demeanor. The two Innerwalkers do the same. When the exchange with the old clerics uses up its entertainment value, Kambiev begins asking questions like:

- Who are you?
- Who sent you?
- What is your purpose here?
- Are you Russian agents?
- You are from the West, so you must think us barbarians and savages, no?

Assuming that they haven't presented themselves as blatantly hostile to the Bahari Republic, the final question offers Kambiev the opening to tell them his story.

He was part of the generation deported *en masse* to internal exile in Siberia. In the seventies, when he was a student, he decided to destroy his hated Communist oppressors. He saw that they were nothing more than a bunch of gangsters, and that the only way to defeat them was to become the biggest gangster of them all. So he went to Moscow with a few stout companions and engaged the leaders of the Russian Mafia, one by one, in single combat. He did this for Baharistan. When the time was right he was strong enough and had the weapons to bring about the freedom of his people. They call him the Velvet Wolf, a name he finds funny.

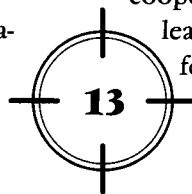
KAMBIEV

(laughs modestly)

Do I look like a wolf to you?

Should the PCs explain that they are here to protect a site called Warrior's Crook, the ears of all five listeners visibly perk up. No one here has heard of Ricky Cho or anyone named Long-Nails. They don't know what petroglyphs might be, and can shed no further light on Ricky's cryptic note to himself.

Unless given reason to think the PCs should immediately be put to death (in which case they must escape to the inhospitable, mountainous forests and protect Warrior's Crook without the cooperation of its guardians), Kambiev decides to learn more about them and invites them to a feast.



Yudsuk Kambiev

Sample Dialogue: "Everything I have done, I have done for my people."

Attributes: Bod 10, Chi 0 (For 8), Mnd 8, Ref 7

Skills: Martial Arts 14, Guns 17, Deceit 12, Driving 10, Gambling 10, Intimidation 13, Intrusion 10, Leadership 18, Sabotage 12, Info/Russian Literature 10

Gun Skills: Both Guns Blazing x2, Carnival of Carnage x3, Hair Trigger Neck Hairs x4

Weapons: punch (11), kick (12), cane (13), Makarov (18/2/8 +1), AK-47 (13/5/30)

Ilyas and Ortsu

Sample Dialogue: "With his mighty spear, our hero Norhka pierced the foe four times. He made this out into the zikr dance, so that all could follow his mighty path."

Attributes: Bod 4, Chi 10, Mnd 5, Ref 7

Skills: Martial Arts 16, Leadership 12, Info/Bahari Lore 28, Info/Cooking 12 (Ilyas only), Info/Rug Making 12 (Ortsu only)

Fu Skills: Prodigious Leap, Flying Windmill Kick, Abundant Leap, Gathering of the Clouds, Awesome Downpour, Zikr Dance

Weapons: punch (5), kick (6), spear (8)

Wulfgar Wulfgarsson

Sample Dialogue: "Until thou hast been smited by me, thou has not been smited."

Attributes: Bod 11 (Egg 13), Chi 0 (For 2), Mnd 5, Ref 7

Skills: Martial Arts 14, Guns 12, Gambling 13, Intimidation 12, Info/Medieval Drinking Songs 10

Star Skills: Ich Bin Ein Bruiser (Golden Comeback p. 64)

Weapons: punch (12), kick (13), really big freakin' magic sword (17), Winchester Model 1300 Marine shotgun (13/5/8)

Khalid Laroui

Sample Dialogue: "Without scourging flame, would the food on our tables be half as succulent?"

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 9 (For 6), Mnd 8, Ref 8

Skills: Martial Arts 14, Guns 12, Deceit 16, Detective 12, Driving 9, Intrusion 15, Sabotage 13, Seduction 12, Info/Geopolitics 12

Fu Skills: Fire Strike, Fire Stance, Fire Fist

Gun Skills: Eagle Eye

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), Makarov (10/2/8 +1)

THE FEAST

EXT. BAHARI ENCAMPMENT. NIGHT.

Bahari men, women, and children, all of whom look unmistakably rugged, gather around a huge fire. They seem oblivious to the winter night's cold. Several sheep and a goat turn over the fire on a spit the size of a car axle. ILYAS, still wearing his gigantic furry hat, carefully bastes one of the animals. From a coal-heated samovar, DZOKKHAR offers the PCs tea which is lip-burningly hot, throat-constrictingly sweet, and teeth-rattlingly strong.

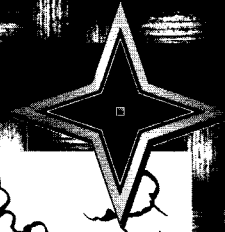
The PCs are still under observation. Wulfgar approaches the biggest-looking one for a chat. Khalid seeks out the one who did most of the talking during the interrogation. Both want to learn enough about the PCs to see if they can be trusted. They want the PCs to first reveal their own knowledge of the Secret War. After sufficient back-and-forth, they cop to being followers of their respective Monarchs.

Wulfgar talks in the same pseudo-Shakespearean dialect you find in old *Thor* comics. If impressed by the PCs and told that they're Dragons, Wulfgar becomes friendly. He admires the Dragons. If prompted, he reveals the following info:

- The Russians are run by the Ascended.
- The Baharis' battle prowess comes from their control of Warrior's Crook, an especially potent feng shui site.
- They have a special rite, the zikr dance, which allows even their lowliest warrior to partake in the site's power.
- The Kings of the Fire and Thunder Pagodas each help the Bahari rebels for their own reasons. The Thunder King respects their courage and medieval way of seeing things.

If the PCs identify themselves as Dragons, Khalid acts like the benevolent fellow they want him to be. He likes Dragons because their idealism makes them easy to manipulate. Khalid reveals the following:

* The Bahari doubtless know these schticks by their own highly exotic names.



- The Russians are propped up by the Ascended. They siphon money from the Russian economy and are hip-deep in its convergence of big business and organized crime.
- The Bahari have always been a thorn in their side, and have been able to resist them because they control Warrior's Crook.
- Kambiev aims to create an empire of Islamic republics in Russia's heartland. (The Fire King supports the Bahari because they are Islamic militants, and have a greater chance of spreading Islamic power than any other nation. Khalid will only say so directly to characters he knows to be friends of the Fire Pagoda.)
- Baharistan is the most cost-effective corridor for a pipeline from Russia's oil fields to the Black Sea. Kambiev's pipeline company trades on the London Stock Exchange.
- Kambiev's tactics are as commendably ruthless as his goals are lofty. He knows that to beat a merciless foe one must confront him with a savagery greater than his own.

If favorably impressed, the advisers report back to Kambiev, who decides to trust them. He promises to take them to Warrior's Crook tomorrow afternoon. But in the morning, they'll accompany him on a pheasant shoot.

THE PHEASANT SHOOT

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE. DAY.

The PCs have accompanied KAMBIEV to a high ridge near a mountain pass. DZOKHAR and some of his men have come along. They haul a long, thin wooden box up the treacherous trail.

KAMBIEV

I have little helper in the Russian camp.

The men open up the long box and hand Kambiev the launcher for a surface-to-air missile.



KAMBIEV (cont.)

If he is correct, a pheasant should be heading this way . . .

(checking his top-of-the-line Rolex)

. . . right about . . . now!

A Russian helicopter flies through the pass. Kambiev shoots it down. Before it explodes in a ball of flame, the pilot ejects. His parachute opens and he drifts down towards a snowy landing.

Perhaps you'd care to assist Dzokhar in retrieving this pheasant . . . ?

Kambiev has given the PCs the opportunity to earn his trust by helping to corral the prisoner. Fu guys with Prodigious or Abundant Leap enjoy a big advantage here. Make other characters do some stunt checks reflecting the difficulty of the terrain. There's always the chance of slipping on ice hidden under the snow, or even triggering an avalanche.

The Russian pilot also has a tough time with the terrain. He's so afraid of capture that he'll shoot at pursuers, and even try to kill himself if they get too close. Give the PCs ample chance to stop him from committing suicide. It might lead to an interesting conflict if they promise him he'll be treated in a civilized fashion. Neither side in this nasty war customarily concerns itself with questions of fair conduct.

The pilot's name is Dmitri Stepashkin. He's hurt, terrified of the Baharis, and reluctant to seem disloyal to his oath as an army officer. The more the PCs play to these concerns, the easier it should be to glean the following info:

- A new officer has suddenly been appointed to take charge of an upcoming raid against the Bahari.
- This Colonel Choketsiniev must be from Mongolia or Tadjikistan or something, because he looks Chinese.
- Choketsiniev argued with the local base's regular officers. He has some new strategy in mind. Stepashkin's mission had something to do with scouting for Choketsiniev's plans.
- Choketsiniev ordered that Russian bombers be armed with some top-

secret weapon. The planes' bomb bay chutes had to be jury-rigged to accommodate it.

- (If shown a picture of Ricky) No, that's not Choketsiniev, but it could be his younger brother.

(What's really happening? Passing himself off as a still-loyal Wheel man, T'se Chow has bullied his way into temporary command in the Russian army. He knows he has only a couple of days at most before the Ascended find him out. During this time he plans to order an attack on Warrior's Crook.)

WARRIOR'S CROOK

EXT. MOUNTAIN TOP. DAY.

KAMBIEV and ILYAS stand beside the shivering PCs as they look up at Warrior's Crook, a strange crescent-shaped mountain peak. The air is pierced by a high-pitched whistling noise which seems to surround every listener.

ILYAS

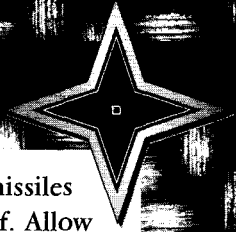
This is where our sacred hero, Norkha, first felt the call of Allah in his heart and learned of the zikr dance. The wind you hear is Norkha's righteousness. Without it, we would be lost.

He goes on to say that the PCs are clearly mighty warriors, and that their hearts are in the right place even if they happen to be infidels. He asks if they might help defend Warrior's Crook. After what the pilot said, they must assume that the site is the Russians' target.

When the attack comes, you can either arrange things so that the PCs are present but Kambiev and the kick-ass named GMCs aren't, or allow each player to control both her own PC and one of the GMCs

THE FIGHT

The fight begins when about half of the Bahari guards on duty turn out to be traitors, pledged to the Wheel. On signal, they pull out grenades and begin to lob them at



Warrior's Crook. Mooks keep appearing for as long as you need to keep the fight interesting.

- About half-way through the fight, more mooks, in Russian uniform, show up driving snowmobiles mounted with massive military-grade machine guns (16/6/200). Use the same stats for Russian soldiers as for Bahari fighters (see p. 12).
- If any character is having too easy a time dispatching mooks, have a bunch around him announce their names. Bump up their combat AVs to 11. Sample names: Sasha, Irgun, Piotr, Mikhael, Giorgiu, Jan, Paul, Ringo.
- Snowmobiles can crash into pine trees or flip over and burst into flame.
- Others drop from helicopters on parachutes. They throw grenades as they drop, to create a safe landing perimeter.
- Artillery shells blast their way into the encampment, forcing PCs to waste actions dodging them. Failure means taking explosion damage.
- There are steep drops on either side of the trail up to the Crook. Snowmobiles can go zooming over them.
- Dodging characters can fall over ledges and hang by their fingertips until rescued. PCs can race against mooks to get to their ledge-hanging comrades. If a mook gets there first, he gloats and starts to tread on the victim's fingers, one by one.
- A character sees a figure, his features covered by his cold-weather gear, climbing up the back face of Warrior's Crook. However, all efforts to get near him are hampered by incredibly fortuitous artillery fire. Sorcerers and other magical fliers are hampered by powerful waves of hostile chi, which buffet them around like paper airplanes in a hurricane. (That's what happens when you can take advantage of the Ascended's chi power. It's T'se Chow on those rappels, and it's his lucky day.)
- When you finally run out of credible ways to keep the PCs away from the rappelling figure, Russian bombers roar overhead. Friend and foe alike run for cover as the mountainside shakes under the impact of massive bombs.

- Another Russian plane fires smart missiles which rocket towards the crook itself. Allow flying characters to divert all but one of them. Getting hit by a missile should hurt.
- The missile that hits doesn't explode. (If no PCs fly, it's okay for multiple missiles to hit.) Instead, it secretes a sticky purple foam which covers the crook. It fills the formation's flute-like rock fissures, blocking the winds that usually make the sound of Norkha's righteousness. T'se Chow sticks around only long enough to perform the necessary ritual, and then grabs the ladder of a passing helicopter. Allow PCs to chase it. Try to make T'se's escape seem something other than foreordained.
- When the foam hits the feng shui site, any remaining mooks flee. The Bahari pursue them—especially the traitors in their midst—but just can't seem to sustain the energy to keep up the chase, or the accuracy to nail them as they escape.

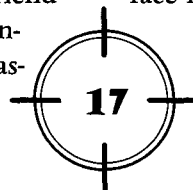
AFTERMATH

Inspection of the goop on the mountain shows that it reeks more of Architects than Ascended. It smells like rotting meat and is shot through with pieces of bone and chitin. When touched, a small demonic head appears and tries to bite off the offending finger. The snapping head then devolves back into the goop. The still-smoking fuselage of the smart missile has the following stenciled on it:

FSSC Prototype
Not To Leave BMRC Lab 11

It also has a serial number including an obvious date. This was made three weeks ago. The year is 2056.

One of the Bahari alerts Kambiev (or the highest-ranking Bahari survivor) that they've found another body. It dropped from one of the planes, strapped to a dummy missile. Kambiev's face flushes with emotion as he sees who it is.



Rewrites

If the PCs treated the Baharis as enemies, you'll need to wing it to see that they witness the final battle and come across these clues. Maybe they get captured partway through by Kambiev, and realize they've been fighting the wrong guy. Or maybe you'll just have to make it up as you go along.

Hey, Man, How Come This Section is So Long?

- Action movies tend to have lots of plot at the beginning, but less and less as they go along. Just like this adventure.
- These characters and situations can return later in adventures of your creation.
- The Baharis give the Four Bastards' plan an emotional as well as an abstract resonance. We see the people harmed by their actions.

If you want the rest of the adventure to be as heavy with character and incident as the Bahari sequence, don't let me stop you from fleshing out later sections.

KAMBIEV

Jusa! Jusa!⁹

(turns to PCs)

He was like brother to me! In Moscow, in gang wars, together we stood shoulder to shoulder!

He goes on to explain that Jusa was his spy inside the Russian army. His eyes welling with tears, he pries open the soles of Jusa's rubber boot with a knife.

This is where he always hid contraband.

Sure enough, there's information inside: a digital image of T'se Chow, output out on a laser printer. The resolution's not too good, but the PCs can see that he resembles, without actually being, Ricky Cho. On its back, in handwriting Kambiev identifies as Jusa's, is the notation:

"Can there really be four of him?"

⁹ Pronounced YOO-sah.

Also under the boot heel is a print-out of a scanned map. It is a historical map of the northern part of Ontario. (You do know that's a Canadian province right? Don't make me come over there and get all nationalistic on you.) The legend on the map dates it to circa 1850. The original owner of the map has circled a spot outside the settlement of Michipicoten, and written the word "Earth" next to it, followed by several exclamation marks. The writing is in a hand other than Jusa's.

As the PCs get ready to leave, Ilyas asks, with choking voice, to come with them. He must find the man who has stolen the Winds of Norkha, and get them back. Otherwise, the Bahari insurgency is doomed, and the next generation will also live as slaves. If they accept, you might want to allow a player to take control of his actions during fights.

SHATTERED PETROGLYPHS

INT. NETHERWORLD: THE JUNKYARD. NIGHT.
THE PROF pores over a set of maps.

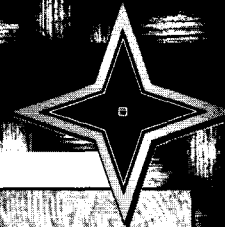
PROF

Netherworld portals in Northern Ontario, circa 1850? Gosh-willikers, folks, I'm afraid those are rarer than good acting on *Babylon 5*.

The Dragons know no fast route to 1850s Michipicoten. The PCs will have to go to the Bazaar and dicker with an information broker to find a way there. You can take your time over this, playing out negotiations with a series of shady Netherworld types, or you can elide over it, telling the players that it took several days of haggling to locate the right portal.

THE MISSILE CLUE

During their stay in the Netherworld, the PCs might also investigate the insignia they found on the missile shrapnel. Any PC Cyborg, Monster Hunter, or Abomination



(or contact with Architect connections) knows that BMRC stands for Biomass Reprocessing Center, the primary Architect installation in the Netherworld. If the PCs have a contact within the Architects, or go to the trouble to find someone who knows someone who *et cetera et cetera*, they, after suitable effort, learn the following. Later tidbits should be harder to discover than earlier ones.

- One of the scientists assigned to BMRC's Lab 11 disappeared a couple of weeks ago. No one knows where he went. The Buro is very interested to know his current whereabouts, so they can, ahem . . . debrief him. Yeah, that's it. Debrief him.
- His name was Dr. Siegfried Zhu. He was a solid researcher, but didn't wield much clout in Reprocessing Center office politics.
- He looked like this. [Contact provides a photo of Zhu, showing the family resemblance to Cho and Chow.]
- "FSSC" stands for Feng Shui Suppression Compound. It's an experimental substance that prevents a burned Feng Shui site from regenerating its chi naturally. Only a few naturally-occurring sites can regenerate, so the material is of only moderate interest to the Buro.
- Somebody saw Zhu talking excitedly at the Bazaar a while ago. This happened maybe a couple of months back. He was talking to two guys who might have been his relatives or something. One wore a Hawaiian shirt and a ball cap. The other wore specs and dressed like an 1850s Mandarin. The witness can positively ID Ricky and T'se from the PCs' photos.

GETTING TO MICHIPICOTEN

The trip to Michipicoten entails a certain amount of hardship.

Wendigo

Sample Dialogue: "URRRHH!"

Attributes: Bod 19, Chi 0 (Mag 6), Mnd 2, Ref 7

Skills: Martial Arts 11, Creature Powers 11

Creature Skills: Conditional Escalation (to Body, triggered when hit by gunfire), Death Resistance, Rancid Breath, Regeneration

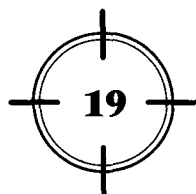
Weapons: punch (14), bite (15)

Wendigo

Cannibal monsters called Wendigo guard the portal. They used to be human, outcasts from the local Algonquin tribe who resorted to cannibalism to survive, and were transformed when they set up permanent quarters in the cave where the portal lies. Prolonged exposure to the weird wavelengths emanating from the Netherworld made them monsters. The Wendigo look like hair-covered men with animalistic features and great ivory tusks. They ambush Innerwalkers and eat them, leaving their gear in a pile in the corner, unused. They're still suffering bruises and singed fur from two recent fights, one against the Four Bastards and the second against a group of armed Irishmen. They can still dimly understand human speech, and might be able to pantomime out the encounter if successfully interrogated after a fight. Treat them as named characters, one per PC.¹⁰

Things That Could Happen During the Fight

- A Wendigo attempts to clout a PC with a gnawed femur.
- Another tosses a human skull at someone's head.
- The cavern is full of large rocks, which hurt even more than chucked skulls.
- Stalactites might be snapped from the cavern ceiling and used as spears or swords.
- A slippery slope leads a character down into the bowels of the cave, where he might become stuck.



"Has an extra Wendigo for those if he's along for the ride."

WINTER WEATHER

It's just as cold here as it was in Baharistan. The snow is even deeper. Have fun punishing PCs not accustomed to traveling on foot through the meter-deep snowdrifts that blanket the region's dense timberland.

MISSIONARIES

Although Ontario has long since become a bastion of English-speaking Protestantism, the hinterlands still harbor a number of Catholic missions staffed by Quebecois priests. The PCs run into a couple of them, Father Montagnais and Father Richard (REE-shard). They offer the PCs any healing they require, post-Wendigo, and provide the following info:

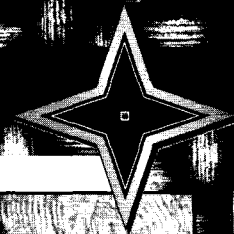
- The area here is still pretty inaccessible. It's inhabited by Indians, fur traders, and a few hopeful prospectors. Most trade and travel is done during the summer, by water. A nearby river joins two Great Lakes, Huron and Superior.
- The local Indians, the Algonquins, are peaceful, though many are still heathens. Still, the Fathers are doing their best to eradicate their abominable practices.
- Several dozen Irishmen have come into the area over the last few months. They're probably up to no good.
- If shown the map:

FATHER MONTAGNAIS

Nothing of interest there, my son. Just a large rock with a bunch of heathen Indian scratchings on it.



Illustration by David White



FENIANS

Waiting for the PCs as they approach the spot on the map are a group of pissed-off Irish-Americans, with a few Irish-Canadians thrown in for good measure. They're Fenians, rebels who hope to force Britain to withdraw from Ireland by attacking targets in Canada.¹¹ Historians refer to this sort of thing as a Doomed Plan. Anyhow, they're pissed off because a bunch of Chinamen who promised them guns have scampered off without delivering the goods. Said Chinamen were, of course, the Four Bastards. Now feeling both desperate and swindled, they're ready to unload their rifles in the direction of anyone who seems weird or foreign. The PCs doubtless fit the bill. The Fenians are still camping in the ruins of the destroyed feng shui site. They ambush the PCs from a rocky outcrop on one side of the trail that leads to it.

Things That Could Happen During the Fight

- Musket-firing Fenians barrel down towards the PCs in a huge sled.
- They roll big snow-covered boulders at the PCs.
- Some fire from high up in the pine trees.
- Some throw dynamite.¹²
- They've hidden bear traps under the snow. PCs who fail secret Perception checks (Difficulty 5) may get caught. If bear-trapped, take 20 Damage. Also, check Toughness (Difficulty 7), or suffer 1 point of Impairment until healed.
- When things are going badly for the Fenians, their leader, "Bare Knuckles" O'Halloran, calls a halt to the fight in order that he and a PC might "Fight like men, god damn it." He picks the PC who has exhibited the greatest Martial Arts prowess in the fight so far.

Conversation with the Fenians can only occur after the ambush (or the one-on-one vs. "Bare Knuckles"). "Bare Knuckles" (or, if he's toast, another Fenian) accuses them of being in league with the "accursed Chinaman, god

"Bare Knuckles" O'Halloran

Sample Dialogue: "Until Ireland is free, we punch the Empire in its Canadian kidney, god damn it."

Attributes: Bod 11 (Ego 12), Chi 0 (For 2), Mnd 5, Ref 9

Skills: Martial Arts 15, Guns 9, Intimidation 14, Leadership 15, Sabotage 13

Star Schiffke: Ich Bin Ein Big Bruiser (Golden Comeback, p. 64)

Weapons: punch (12), kick (13)

Darcy Patrick

Sample Dialogue: "I'll not stop 'till O'Halloran stops."

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 0 (For 2), Mnd 5, Ref 9

Skills: Martial Arts 10, Guns 16, Deceit 10, Sabotage 13

Gun Schiffke: Eagle Eye x2, Lightning Reload x3, Signature Weapon

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), "Old Betsy" — musket (11/5/1)

Unnamed Fenians

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

Skills: Martial Arts 8, Guns 13

Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), butt of musket (8), bayonet (9), musket (8/11/3)

damn it." The PCs can then convince them that they share a mutual foe. They then learn:

- A sinister-looking Chinaman with great long fingernails met with them down in Boston, offering them serious munitions in exchange for armed help in dislodging an Indian band from its far northern holy site.
- If shown images of Ricky, T'se, or Siegfried:

None of them's the one hood-winked us, but they were there, too, god damn it.

- The Fenians endured hideous conditions on their trek north, dutifully slew the requisite Indians, and watched the Chinaman explode the natives' rocky holy place with a wave of his

¹¹ In the real world, the Fenians didn't get started for another seven years or so. Historical accuracy? Ha! We dance on its grave!

¹² **Dynamite:** Not invented in the real world until 1866. See previous note. Re: historical accuracy, dancing on the grave of

Rewrites

If the PCs just smoke the Fenians without searching them, they find the journal among their effects. If things go astray, come up with some other quasi-credible way for the PCs to come across the diary. T'se might have dropped it while fighting off Wendigos. Maybe he left it in the possession of the missionaries, to demonstrate that he is still a good man despite the violence he's been driven to.

hand. They saw him perform some weird ceremony. Then he left with his fellows, and said the weapons would be waiting for them in a nearby cave. Instead of weapons, they found the Wendigo.

In exchange for weapons, rations, or whiskey (in that order), the Fenians offer to escort the PCs to the scene. There they see a rock face that's been blown to smithereens. An appropriate Info check (Difficulty 5) finds, on one of the chunks of rock, a marking that looks like the Chinese character for Earth.

One of the Fenians then steps up and admits that he "inspected" the packs of one of the Chinamen — the one with the spectacles. (That is, T'se Chow.) He produces Chow's diary, which he can't read because it's in Chinese.¹³ Bidding starts at twice the price the PCs just paid for escort to the site. The journal reveals the following:

- T'se's story: His faithful service to the Wheel, their callous attack on his refuge, his meeting with Ricky, the death of his wife, his meeting with the other two Bastards, their discovery that they share the same father — everything you find under the "Backstory" heading, but from T'se's point of view.
- The sinister plan, including the locations for the next three attacks, and the order in which they'll occur. The PCs have only hours to get to the next site, the Nahr 'Umar Oil Fields, before the attack.

It's not because
everyone speaks
Chinese doesn't mean
everybody reads it.

NAHR 'UMAR OIL FIELDS

INT. NETHERWORLD.

The PCs stand in a disused, unshaped Netherworld passageway, studying a map. They look up dubiously at a manhole cover directly above their heads. The strongest PC reaches up and hauls it down. It opens up into a vertical tunnel. A PC gets a boost up into it. It is lined with metal rungs, and he climbs up to a second manhole, which he removes.

EXT. OIL FIELDS. DAY.

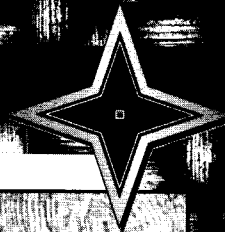
And finds himself in the middle of a firestorm. Literally.

When the PCs arrive, the battle for the site is already in progress. The Bastards have lit the field's oil on fire. Dozens of refinery stacks belch withering flame. The air is full of blinding, choking, pitch-black smoke. A wild assortment of minions wander the site, looking for intruders to kill and/or eat. They're made up of disaffected grunts from various factions. Each has been brought to serve the Bastards by the forces of inexorable fate. Their numbers include Buro cops, Chinese soldiers and police officers, 19th century British officers, and a profusion of Netherworld rabble.

The monks spot the PCs, call an alert, and swarm to attack. Every so often you should promote one to named status, pumping his main combat AV by 3.

Things That Could Happen During the Fight

- A gust of air blows smoke onto a PC. Check Constitution vs. Difficulty 9, or face X shots of inaction, where X is the difference between Difficulty and Outcome. If X is greater than 4, take 5 Damage (not reduced by Toughness).
- Someone gets dropped into a blazing refinery stack. Ow!
- Iraqi army helicopters whirl in to investigate. In doing so, they violate the UN No-Fly Zone. US jets scramble and shoot them



Unnamed Abominations

Attributes: Bod 9, Chi 0, Mnd 4, Ref 5
 Skills: Martial Arts 8, Guns 8, Arcanowave Devices 8, Creature Powers 8
 Arcanowave Schlicker Feedback Enhancer, Agony Grenades
 Creature Powers: Blast, Flight
 Weapons: punch (10), kick (11), Boro Blue Spear (13"/4/30)

Unnamed Demons

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 0, Mnd 4, Ref 10
 Skills: Martial Arts 8, Creature Powers 8
 Creature Powers: Blast, Flight, Tentacles x3 (Each tentacle must be taken out on Outcome of 5 or more before demon itself goes down.)
 Weapons: claws (8), teeth (8)

Unnamed Pledged, Neitherworld Rabble, Boro Cops, Friends of the Dragon, Chinese Soldiers

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 0, Mnd 5, Ref 5
 Skills: Martial Arts 8, Guns 8
 Weapons: punch (6), kick (7), MP5 (10/5/30)

down. Consequence: A burning helicopter comes crashing to earth right where the fight happens to be.

- Someone with unearthly strength tosses the manhole cover like a frisbee.

When you think the fight has gone on long enough, the PCs reach the spot where the Bastards performed their special site-burning ritual. Now they're climbing into a helicopter to speed away. Their potent chi helps them escape; the clouds of smoke reduce visibility for flying characters to zero. No chance of shooting them down from the ground, either.

Next stop, the future, and an island intimately familiar to two out of the Four Bastards.

Dave White 2000

Illustration by David White

CONTAINMENT SITE DS4S

Containment Site DS4S is the Buro designation for the island Long-Nails occupied in 69, and T'se Chow guarded in 1850. Its chi is potent because a grove of perfect bamboo trees sits at its exact center. Not even the anti-life procedures of the Architects have managed to dampen its power. So of course they guard it tightly.

This time the PCs have to hunt for the closest Netherworld portal to Bamboo Island. Make them call in favors, visit weird Netherworld byways, and dicker with cunning rabble. They should make at least one successful Investigation, Intimidation, Detective, Police, or other check per PC before they locate the portal they seek. This is your chance to create some bizarre characters and have fun interacting with the PCs.

ZOMER McZOMER

During the course of these inquiries, they're approached by a sometime Jammer named Zomer McZomer. Zomer has a caved-skull only partly bolstered by an aluminum plate. He seems crazy, but claims that the Battlechimp Potemkin is about to pull something big. He's used weird tech to hook in some patsies who are going to help him rule the world, or destroy it, or increase the flow of monkey chow to the Netherworld, or something.

ENTER, STAGE WET

INT. NETHERWORLD.

The PCs stand in a corridor lined with archaic-looking sculptures of fish, dolphins, squid, and other sea creatures. The design is either ancient Greek or some kind of alien. The corridor terminates in a solid wall of water.

The PCs don their scuba gear and prepare to head on in.

Yes, the portal closest to the island is in the middle of the ocean's waters. The PCs

Freaking Huge Shark

Attributes: Bod 15, Chi 0, Mad 0, Ref 10

Skills: Martial Arts 19

Creature Skills: Conditional Escalation (to Ref, upon taking 10)

Wound Points: Death Resistance x3

Weapons: jaws (20)

walk into the wall of water and find themselves about five hundred fathoms below the surface. Oh, and barrelling right towards them is a freaking huge shark. Characters unaccustomed to fighting underwater face 2 points of Impairment. Spy characters are automatically assumed to be scuba-combat experts.

THE SHIP

When the PCs break the surface, they find themselves close to a Buro patrol frigate. The crewmen on the deck look more like the 57 varieties of mook serving the Bastards than a usual Buro complement. The PCs are noticed immediately and put in a spotlight. Ricky appears on the deck and gives them the chance to surrender.

RICKY

C'mon, join the party! After the proper loyalty test, you can join us. Help us rule the world! Meet chicks!

The PCs can try to escape if they want. Only mooks chase them, in Buro-styled personal watercraft. Or they can learn the villain's sinister plot by allowing themselves to be captured. One thing they can't do, no matter how much they might think they want to, is raise a hand to harm any of the Bastards unless the Four start a fight. They've accumulated so much Chi that even the PCs feel a powerful compulsion to join them. Our heroes automatically succeed in resisting the compulsion — unless a player has failed to show up for tonight's session. His character gets sucked in utterly, and looks forward to helping the Bastards destroy the next sites. He snaps out of it when the player shows up at a subsequent session. It's bad form to get the character offed.



Of course, if a player *wants* his PC to voluntarily join, either as a subversive element or because he's becoming an anti-hero, you should allow it. Handling this is up to you; you'll know the particular PC better than I.

The PCs are stripped of their weapons and confined to quarters. However, they are often called upon to dine with the Bastards, who put pressure on them to join their cause. These exchanges allow you to personalize the villains, making them seem real to the players. They tell their stories from their own points of view. They fill in any exposition the players haven't yet heard.

If confronted with the rumor passed along by Zomer McZomer, no Bastard gives it any credence. Zomer had no evidence of anything. The four of them have had not one iota of contact with the Battlechimp or any other Jammer.

The patrol cruiser draws closer to the island. T'se Chow in particular becomes bitterly moved

as he sees it draw closer. The PCs, having read his journal, should know that the tears he sheds are for his murdered wife.

The four gather together and begin to perform a ritual — not on the island, but from the deck of a boat. This all becomes clear when Zhu produces a sleek black laptop connected to the ship's communications tower. He punches in a few buttons and, within moments, orbital lasers reduce the island to smoking rubble. The PCs, still flummoxed by the superior Bastard chi, can only stand by as the Bastards burn the penultimate site on their road to world supremacy.

The Bastards then order their mooks to toss the PCs overboard. Ricky argues with the others and throws the PCs their oxygen tanks, so they have at least a shot at survival.

The boat speeds away. Buro jets and copters appear within moments to investigate the demise of their site. Wise PCs will boot it back for that underwater portal.



THE BIGGEST DAM BATTLE OF THEM ALL

EXT. THREE GORGES DAM. DAY.

A row of Chinese officials, each stuffed into an emphatically unstylish blue business suit, makes slow and awkward progress to the middle of the concrete walkway atop the dam. The camera pulls out and then pulls down to show that the walkway is the top of a dam so massive that it makes the famous Hoover Dam look malnourished. The camera wavers for a moment, as if having spotted something. It slowly, weavily, zooms in to reveal the PLAYER CHARACTERS, anxiously waiting for the big fight to begin.

STAGES OF THE BATTLE

The final set-piece battle unfolds in the following stages:

1. Initial attack by the Bastards.
2. Ascended-controlled security forces launch counter-assault, are beaten back.
3. Lotus forces appear and attack, are also beaten back.
4. Ditto for the Architects.
5. The Bastards triumph and mutate into cyborg gorillas. Reality starts to melt down.
6. Only the PCs can save the day.

THE FINAL REVELATION

Oh, didn't I mention the mutating cyborg gorillas part before? Jeez, I was sure I had. Must have slipped my mind.

Okay, here's what's really up. The Four Bastards are just pawns in a plot by the

Battlechimp Potemkin to strip the world of its chi. The Bastards are really only members of the same ancestral line, not brothers. The Chimp used the Trans-Temporal Hose Job, a device created by one of his techies, to select four individuals, one from each juncture, with the highest possible degree of genetic similarity to one another. The TTHJ then emitted trans-temporal waves which altered their genetic structures. The immediate effect of the alteration was to create a false reading on a DNA test, making them seem like brothers. The DNA of their "father" matches the Battlechimp.¹⁴ In a way, he retroactively made himself their father.

The TTHJ also generated a number of UESIs¹⁵ to set the inexorable log of vengeance a-rolling down the hill. It made Ricky Cho snap in Fast Eddie's presence. It motivated T'se's Wheel masters to launch an attack against his island for no good reason whatsoever. A UESI even catalyzed the brain chemistry that transformed a formerly meek lab jockey like Siegfried Zhu into an embittered powermonger hungry for revenge. Likewise, another neurotransmitter infarction inspired Long-Nails to hatch the entire ritual behind their chi grab.

Jammer operatives are stationed in the crowd of onlookers gathered for the ceremony. When they see that the Bastards are just about ready to complete the ritual and attune to the site, they push the button on the one-of-a-kind prototype TTHJ, destroying it and activating the latent Battlechimp DNA, causing the Four Bastards to go ape.¹⁶ Thus the attunement counts as a win for the Jammers and all-around chaos, not for the Bastards. Instead of allowing them to rule the world, it begins to drain the world of chi.

And only the PCs can save the day.

I did say that part already, right?

¹⁴ As we all know, Battlechimps share a 97% genetic similarity with humans. Siegfried Zhu never thought to test the DNA to look for the other 3%.

¹⁵ UESI: Unsettling Event of Surprising Irrationality.

¹⁶ The original draft contained a reference to "dam dirty apes," but that would be going too far.



MANAGING THE BIG FIGHT

The PCs can get involved at any time. The later they wait, the fresher they'll be for the final fight against the Transmuted Bastardchimps. Early joiners, once they realize that a zillion factions are chiming in, may withdraw for a while to let the sides wear each other down.

The golden rule here is not to bother to roll out combats between GMCs. Sure, roll dice once in a while and peer at the results as if they matter. But really the rules only come into play when PC battles GMC.

Deploy mooks and innocent-bystanders-in-need-of-immediate-rescue as needed to keep the Bastards up and functional until the big revelation. As a last resort, upgrade some mooks to named status and pump their AVs so that they're 3 less than those of the PCs with whom they're trading blows.

Use the stats on p. 23 for unnamed characters on both sides of the fracas.

Phase One:

Bastard Attack

Suddenly, explosions wrack the walkway. Chinese officials go flying everywhere. Some are lifted into the air and plunge dozens of stories to ignominious death at the bottom of the gorge. Others flee along the walkway, running in both directions. Swarms of Secret Warriors appear on both sides of the gorge, making their way through the dense green vegetation to run towards the dam. It's the Bastards' usual assortment of motley minions. The PCs even recognize some of the modern-dress combatants as members of the Friends of the Dragon support society. Ricky has no doubt duped them into helping him!

With no one to oppose them but fleeing officials, the Secret Warriors easily take the dam.

Phase Two:

Ascended Counterattack

As soon as all of the surviving Party members clear the walkway, security forces stationed on both sides of the gorge open fire against the Secret Warriors occupying it. The forces on the dam return fire. Then other Secret Warriors emerge from the dense foliage and swarm towards the still-loyal Chinese soldiers. They include both abominations and multi-tentacled demons. They too seem to be fighting at the Four Bastards' behest.

Things That Could Happen in This Phase

- Secret warriors fighting on the gorge are thrown down into the river.
- Loyalist soldiers flee in terror from the freaks and demons.
- A crowd of on-lookers panics; a little child is about to be trampled, and one of the PCs must save him!
- A Chinese officer orders soldiers to open fire on news crews. The Ascended don't want footage of this fracas getting out.

When this starts to get boring:

The security forces are taking it in the chops! Dozens of soldiers are down! Some groups have ringed themselves around important officials, as human shields. Others hide under trucks or behind buildings. Many more others just lie where they have fallen, unconscious and bleeding. Their leaders order a ceasefire. An unmarked, black helicopter appears and hovers over the dam. The FOUR BASTARDS quickly disembark from it, climbing down a ladder. More mooks appear, to ferry heavy-looking boxes onto the walkway.

More helicopters, these ones bearing the insignia of the Chinese army, rise up over the crest of the gorge like apocalyptic valkyries.

But they do nothing about the warriors on the dam. Instead, they land near the officials, who rush inside. The army heli-

copters speed away. The Ascended have abandoned the field.

The Bastards' mooks begin pulling strange ritual implements out of the boxes. The attunement is about to begin.

If the PCs have been merely spectating at this point, you might want to let them rush in where they have previously feared to tread, before starting the next phase.

Phase Three: The Lotus Arrive

Suddenly the air rattles and shakes. An ear-piercing clap of thunder rumbles all around. Lightning smashes down from a black cloud that wasn't there before.¹⁷ Out of the lightning bolt pours a corps of eunuch sorcerers!¹⁸ They fly towards the dam, magically blasting away as they go.

Things That Could Happen in This Phase:

- *Blast effects:* Sorcerers create fists which reach onto the dam, grab rival mooks, and hurl them to their deaths below. Electricity fries abomination circuitry. Guns explode, wounding their operators. The railing comes to life and boa-constricts its way around the chest cavities of several defenders.
- Sorcerers assume PCs are in league with Bastards and let 'er rip, attacking with blasts.
 - Eunuchs suffer backlash effects. Some explode in midair. Others spiral down into the gorge.
 - The Bastards' helicopter operator takes a run at a passel of sorcerers, slicing a few flying eunuchs with his rotor blade, before himself being zapped. The helicopter barrels towards a set of bleachers, behind which many innocent bystanders cower.

Unnamed Eunuch Sorcerers

Attributes: Bod 5, Chi 0 (Mag 8), Mnd 5, Ref 5
Skills: Sorcery 10
Sorcery Subskills: Blast, Domination, Flight, Movement
Weapons: punch (6), kick (7)

Unnamed Hopping Vampires

Attributes: Bod 12, Chi 0 (Mag 8), Mnd 2, Ref 2
Skills: Creature Powers 8
Creature Subskills: Corruption, Damage Immunity: Bullets, Blast (except for the ever-popular flesh-melting blast)
Weapons: claws (1)

- A few determined Ascended officers rally and join the fray, only to be smacked down by both sides. (This stops if the PCs can communicate to the eunuchs that the Ascended also oppose the Bastards.)

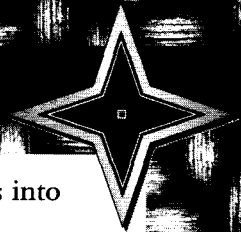
When things again start to flag and it's time to move on: Sorcerers take control of demons and abominations, who swarm towards the bridge to attack their former masters. They tear into the dam defenders for a while. Long-Nails works a mighty spell which grows the demons and abomos to twice their normal size. They fly at the eunuchs, tearing them to bits. They drop the corpses onto the bridge where Long-Nails performs a second working which brings them back to life as hopping vampires. More thralls for the Bastards!

Phase Four: Architects of the Flesh

With the eunuchs converted to their use, the Four Bastards again begin to set up their ritual implements. Demons roam the walkway, devouring the slain and spitting them out as additional hopping vampires.

Again, you might want to wait until the PCs make a move before:

Just imagine how many human sacrifices it took to open this temporary dimensional portal just where they needed it. In a subsequent episode you should take note of the fact that the Bastards seriously depleted their supernatural resources during the three-hour battle, and have had to temporarily pull back as a result. If this sounds before-hand like a how you know it's a magic man!



Incredibly powerful laser beams zap down from the upper atmosphere. They hit portions of the dam. It begins to crack. Then futuristic attack helicopters appear, disgorging dozens of missiles. In mid-flight, the missiles transform into abominations. The Architects have joined the fray!

Use above statistics for unnamed abominations, but add 1 to the Outcome needed to down them.¹⁹

Things That Could Happen in This Phase

- Some missile-ized abominations fail to deploy. They hit the dam with a thud. Blood oozes out of them before they fall. More cracks appear in the dam.
- PCs must shield bystanders from orbital laser strikes, or simply dodge the suckers themselves.
- Long-Nails dominates abominations into attacking PCs or bystanders.
- An abomination rips the head off a hopping vampire, sending it hurtling through the air. It hurtles towards a PC. If the PC doesn't dodge, the still-robust jiangshi noggin clomps its teeth into him. Damage from disembodied tossed vampiric head bite: 10 per sequence until dislodged. To dislodge, check Strength (Difficulty 5). Damage accrues at the top of each sequence.
- Assorted disembodied hopping vampire limbs writhe and wriggle across the walkway, impeding the progress of PCs who try to navigate it.
- Abominations on each side charge into each other headlong, colliding in mid-air and exploding in a shower of foul ichor.
- If Ilyas is present, he gets through to the Bastards.

¹⁹ That is, the Outcome is usually 8, but is 5 for damage weapons and 4 for damage weapons.



He fights valiantly but is outmatched. Ricky Cho dispatches him with a point-blank chest shot. As he goes down, the PCs hear the old sound of the wind whipping through Warrior's Crook ringing mournfully in their ears.

When your ability to keep the excitement going—and the PCs away from the Bastards—flags, go to the final bit.

Phase Five:

Gorilla Meltdown

The war of attrition seems about over. A few twitching body parts still flop around on the walkway, but the various mooks are down for the count. Now it's just you and the Four Bastards. The bad news: They've just completed their ritual.

All characters with Fu or Mag ratings greater than zero fall to their knees for a moment, as if the wind has been knocked out of them. Leaping characters fall suddenly to the ground. Flying ones abruptly plummet: Check the relevant AV (Difficulty 9) to come out of the tailspin without thundering in.

Everything you can see—the dam, the gorge, the sky, your own bodies—seem to warp and twist, like reality itself has become a funhouse

mirror. The effect seems centered on the Four Bastards, who've fallen to their knees. They're changing—getting bigger . . . hairier! They're sprouting metal limbs and onboard weaponry! They've become cyborg gorillas! And the world-warping effect is getting worse, as if all of existence is about to swirl down the porcelain bowl!

Notes on the Final Smackdown

- Add 3 to each Bastard's Bod. Give 'em flight powers (rockets in their legs) and onboard machine guns (Damage 14, no need for reload, use best combat AV to activate).
- If the PCs are having too easy a time of it, the Bastards unconsciously develop the ability to warp the very fabric of space itself. They distort PCs' bodies. They cause flailing arms to sprout from the dam itself. They create rips in the space continuum and shove PCs through them, causing reality incompatibility damage.
- The best way to end the world-threatening chi-drain effect is to kill the Bastards. When one of them dies, a popping sound reverberates through nearby ears. Each time, the world seems 25% less warpy.
- If Ilyas is lying there in his pool of blood, he tries to get the attention of the PC with whom he had the closest relationship. With his dying breath, as blood dribbles out of his mouth, he removes from his sheepskin coat a carved wooden staff.



ILYAS

Use this — (sputter) — my brave one. Touch it to him. Recapture the energy of Warrior's Crook — I beg you — *urk!*

The PC must defeat T'se and touch the staff to him as he loses consciousness.

- The mighty chi of the angered Yiangtze River interacts badly with the chaotic chi of the ape-ified Bastards. If any of them fall in the river, a mighty explosion occurs. Result: one atomized Bastard. (It's a bummer if T'se goes this way, forever dispersing the chi of Warrior's Crook. Do what you can to give PCs a chance to avert this.)
- If Bastards die in other ways, they revert to human form. They intuitively realize what has happened to them. In a dying monologue, a Bastard fingers the Battlechimp, recognizes his own as role as dupe in a plot to siphon the world's chi, and expires, leaving room for a sequel of your own devising.

big explanation of all that went on. Or it might be a Jammer defector or even a Buro contact who's discovered the Battlechimp's plan and arrived just too late to help stop it.

When the Jammers find out that the Battlechimp's efforts did something really nasty to reality, some of them begin to question his whole objective of destroying the world's chi. You might want to play this up in a future adventure. Perhaps the PCs help rescue Jammer defectors, or find themselves in the middle of a Jammer civil war. This would naturally entail a great many explosions.

For their part, the Chinese government announces that the Three Gorges Dam project will not go on-line until some "minor engineering defects" are cleared up. In fact, they leave the thing inoperative forever, guarding it heavily lest some other enemy do them the dirty by destroying it. They later come to regret investing so much of their chi in one mega-project.

But that's a story for another day.

DENOUEMENTS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

Someone shows up to provide whatever exposition is still missing. It could be Kar Fai or another Dragon GMC, passing along the Prof's

