



**FENG SHUI**  
Action Movie Roleplaying

# FRIENDS OF THE DRAGON

A GUIDE TO PLAYER  
CHARACTER GROUPS



The main illustration depicts a scene from a martial arts film. In the center, a man with a high topknot and a purple robe holds a long sword. To his left, a man with glasses and a black turtleneck looks on. To the right, a young man in an orange robe is in a dynamic pose. The background shows a crowd of people in traditional Chinese clothing.

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# Credits

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# Table of Contents

<u>Chapter 1</u>	4
<b>Team Up</b>	
<u>Chapter 2</u>	20
<b>Cop Show</b>	
<u>Chapter 3</u>	32
<b>Crime Show</b>	
<u>Chapter 4</u>	41
<b>Espionage Show</b>	
<u>Chapter 5</u>	50
<b>Action Family</b>	
<u>Chapter 6</u>	60
<b>Sentai Show</b>	
<u>Appendix A</u>	69
<b>PC-Owned Mooks</b>	
<u>Appendix B</u>	71
<b>Group Character Sheet</b>	

## INTRODUCTION

# Team Up

*"Sometimes we are five. Sometimes we are one."  
- Gatchaman*

Diversity is a source of strength, but it is often unity that wins the day. The different skills and abilities each character brings to the table are vital to their survival in a roleplaying game, so long as those differences don't pull the characters apart. Characters are normally defined by the ways they're different from one another, but they can also be defined by the things that hold them together as a group.

Sure, plenty of action movies are about lone renegades, solitary anti-heroes, or loose collections of smart-asses who come and go as they please. *Feng Shui*, despite our best wishes, isn't an action movie, though. It's the action movie roleplaying game, and roleplaying games typically involve collections of heroic characters larger than most action movies can afford. To help give everyone an important role to play in the game, we present the **character group**. It's like an ensemble cast or a team. Each member may be good, but together they're better.

Besides, you've already played the motley assortment of wacky action heroes, right? It's time to try out something else.

Enter, *Friends of the Dragon*.

## Character Groups

While diverse and memorable characters are essential in every action movie and *Feng Shui* adventure, it's the relationships between the characters that creates the most exciting moments. A character group puts the focus of the game on how the characters work together, rather than just on how they work.

The Secret War can force eclectic collections of unusual individuals to work together, but as a war of ideals it also drives like-minded warriors together. Many GMs find it challenging to bring all of the player characters together, especially after the happenstance excuse has been worn out. How is it that the widowed sorcerer, the abomination, and the ex-cop all wind up in the same place at the same time, let alone choose to work with one another? Why should this be the sole duty of the GM? Why not turn this task over to the players? Let them think about the experiences and relationships that bind them together. Let them design and build relationships right off the bat, from the ground up, and other clichés.





## What's a Character Group?

Simply put, a character group is a shared character concept, an umbrella of similarities under which individual characters gather to define themselves, share experience points, and enjoy exclusive schticks. All this new stuff just gets added to the character stats you're used to, so it's easy to do. This means grouped characters are more powerful than individual characters, on average. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In *Feng Shui*, the genre conventions of fantasy and futurism are brought to the game by the characters. If no one plays a sorcerer, there's a good chance the game will deal less with magic and more with kung-fu or guns. If everyone plays a cop, the game naturally takes on a theme and begins to look like a television program with an ensemble cast. A themed *Feng Shui* series is called a **show**, and all character groups can be said to fall under a particular kind of show.

In this book, you'll find five kinds of shows, each with a few group types. Shows and groups in general are explained throughout this chapter.

## Shows

The Secret War is a tapestry—a battle that crosses time and bridges worlds. From an individual perspective, this diversity allows you to replicate your favorite character from almost any action movie—but the action of the game itself may have little in common with the source you have drawn from. Sure, you might have a Spy fighting alongside a Big Bruiser and Old Master—but what if you want an entire series centered around espionage, where all of the characters are part of a highly trained team? Such a group shouldn't simply be wandering the streets of Hong Kong, it should be engaging in top-secret missions, using high-tech equipment to battle rival governments or conspiracies in addition to the powers of the Secret War.

### Using All This

Can you play a themed game like a show without using character groups? Sure. Shows don't change the rules at all, they just provide some vocabulary to define the territory you want your game to explore.

Character groups reward players for cooperating and empower character unity. If you want to play a themed game that's about corruption, disloyalty, back-stabbing, and uneasy alliances—like *The Shield*—go ahead. Good luck with that. You may find that the implied boundaries and intuitive concepts of a themed series make it possible to run more complex games. Think of it as sacrificing breadth for depth. This may sound high-falutin', but some of the great operatic action movies have been meditations on theme.

The bottom line is this: the tools in this book are yours now. Use them however you want, so long as everyone has a good time.

Grouping all the PCs together under a single concept—like Cops or Spies—naturally focuses your series, makes it *about* something specific. That means the series can be categorized. In this case, that categorization is a good thing. To make a character group work, everyone has to have a shared idea about the nature and the goals of the whole group and, by extension, the whole series. This is what shows do. A show tells the players what the style of series is going to be like and suggests what sorts of characters and stunts are appropriate or out of place. It also tells the GM what the players want to get out of the series, whether it's stories stemming from the shared history of the characters or giant marauding monsters every week.

In this way, either the players or the GM can decide what kind of show to play, though it's best when everyone agrees. The GM might tell you to create characters for a cop show; the players might get together and make a group of soldiers. Either way, the desired style of the series has been clearly communicated.

It's easy to think of a show as a limiting factor, like a fenced-in yard where you're allowed to play. Instead, think of shows as toolkits. Each one contains several specialized tools and—though you're restricted to a few select tools—there's an awful lot you can do with any assortment of tools.

Instead of your usual eclectic series, try a few episodes of an atmospheric espionage show, a dramatic cop show, or even a sentai show dealing with a colorful team of science ninjas. Playing through an episode of a show can be an interesting diversion from standard play. It can also be an excellent way to develop character backstory, expanding on melodramatic hooks or introducing new villains who will play an important role in your ongoing adventures.

## The Elements of a Show

This book looks at five different kinds of shows, each focused on a genre and style of play slightly different from the traditional *Feng Shui* patchwork adventure. Perhaps you'll find one that especially fits your interests and style of play. Each kind of show is described using the following format:

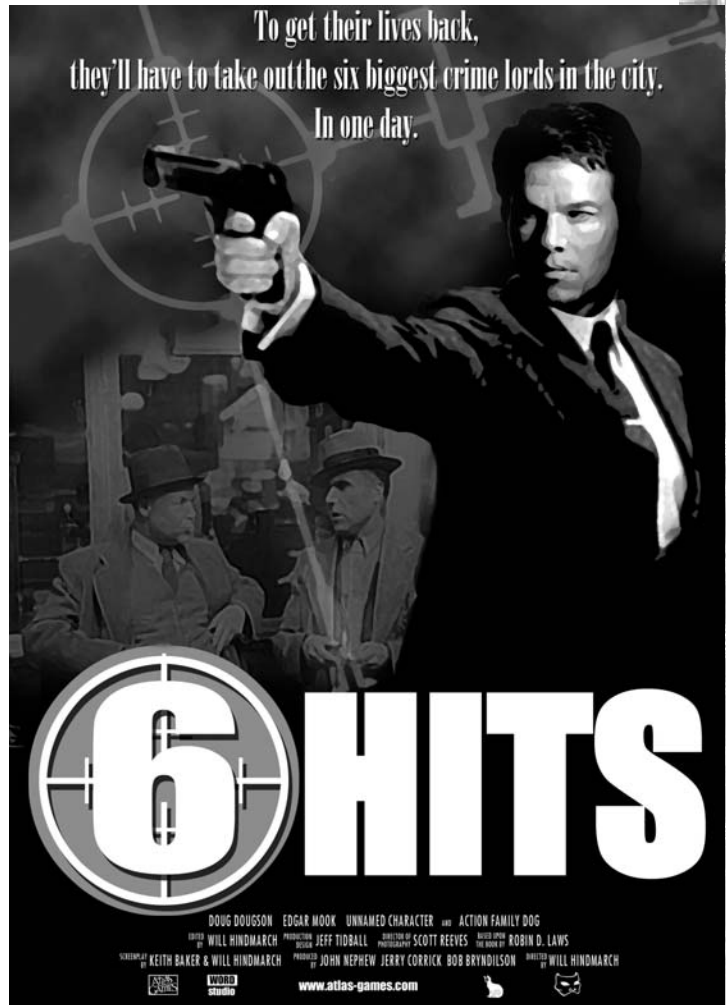
### The Pitch

What's the show about? This is a brief overview of the role the characters will play and the sort of action that's likely to unfold. Each category of show has lots of possible series that can be created within it.

### Setting the Stage

This is a more detailed analysis of the genre. What are the dominant themes? What is the overall tone of the world, and how does it differ from the standard *Feng Shui* setting? What should you take into account as you create characters and groups?

The basic overview is followed by a look at show format. Detectives and SWAT teams are both cops, but there's a big difference between a SWAT series and a mystery-driven detective drama. Each format examines different subcategories within a particular show. This includes the effects of setting the show in different junctures and a discus-



sion of the character types that are especially well-suited to the show.

### Props

Some shows require special rules or material, like special equipment. This provides extras the GM needs to run a particular show. Of course, there's nothing stopping the GM from importing these ideas into other shows or her regular series. If you want to play a Science Ninja in a standard series, plead your case!

### Scripting

This provides the GM with more detailed information about creating a show, taking a closer look at the tone of a particular show and the types of action and adventure seen in a typical episode.







## The Secret War

The final element in a show description is the Secret War itself. Most shows are not built around the Secret War, but are as easy to insert into the time war as any character. In a cop show, you're more likely to be fighting triads than Jammers, but perhaps you want to fight the hold the Ascended have on the precinct. Perhaps your cops are Buro agents.

This section looks at ways that the power players and stand-out action of the Secret War can be woven into the storyline of a show, providing a more traditional *Feng Shui* experience on top of the more focused storyline. One advantage to group characters is that they all start off on about the same foot, so it's easy to slowly introduce them to the Secret War together.

## Character Groups

Shows are general, character groups are specific. This book contains five categories of groups—the show types. Within each category are several specific groups, called **group types**. These are like character types, though a group type is broader than a character type. Each group type allows for lots of different character types within it. Besides that, each group type is like a different show in the same way that *Homicide: Life on the Street* and *TJ Hooker* are different, specific cops shows.

### Is A Group A Kind of Show?

Yes, it can be. A show is any kind of thematically focused *Feng Shui* series, so if all of the PCs in your group are cops, then you're probably playing a cop show, whether you meant to or not. A character group could participate in a series of adventures with no thematic through-line, though, so just because you're playing a group doesn't mean you're playing in a themed series. You can play in either, you can play in neither, or you can play in both.

Remember, a show only has an effect on the rules if the GM limits the character types you can play in order to uphold the theme of the show. Groups can have lots of rules effects.

## Anatomy of a Group Type

Every character group has a group type. The group type provides some character information and inspiration, gives you schticks to pick from, and asks you to personalize the group by filling in some blanks.

Every group type explored in this book uses the following format. Some of this information is especially important for GMs, but none of it is off-limits for players. Here's what you'll find in each entry.

### Name

Your character has a name—why not your group? Choosing a name is an excellent way to define the core nature of your group. Are you a formal alliance, a secret society, or just a bunch of regular guys who hang out at the Fifth Street Noodle House? Action Force October has an entirely different feel than the East Avenue Warriors, and a name may be a springboard for all sorts of ideas. And if your group doesn't have a name, that in itself suggests something about them.

Even if the group doesn't use this name for themselves, you may want to as players. *The A-Team* wasn't an official title, and no one in *The Usual Suspects* ever called themselves that.

### The Pitch

Each group type has a premise, a central idea that gives it its character. This gets summarized as the Pitch, which says what kind of Show the group creates and what makes it unique. *The X-Files* was a Cop Show with monsters, while *The A-Team* was a Soldier Show where no one's a soldier anymore, for example.

### Juncture

Group types may require the characters to come from a particular juncture. Any player who comes up with a good character concept can get around this criterion with GM approval, though.





## Friends of the Dragon

### Backstory

Every character in *Feng Shui* has a melodramatic hook, which defines her personal motives and gives the GM ammunition for adventures about the character. This puts the focus on individual characters, though, and in a group game, all of the characters should get equal billing—which means that the group itself is the main character. Developing the backstory of the group can help the GM create stories that meaningfully involve all of the characters, and may provide you with

further inspiration for the history of your own character. It also gives the characters something to talk about.

The purpose of a group backstory is to explain how your characters know each other, what binds them together, and what's happened to or between them before the first adventure. It can justify the schticks you pick and provide hooks for future stories. Check out the example backstories below.

### Backstory Examples

Backstory is like motive. Your characters have reasons for working as a team, and those reasons come out of your collective backstory. While there are presumably as many different backstories as there are stories, a popular few come up in action movies a lot, so you should look at those for ideas. Some of these resemble melodramatic hooks, and that's no accident. Use the group's backstory to inspire each character's melodramatic hook and the characters will be very closely knit. Shared experiences do that, especially in the action-packed world of weirdness where *Feng Shui* characters live.

#### Anachronisms

*"My world, my family, everything that I cared about — it has been destroyed forever by this cursed war. All I ask is that you fight at my side to keep this from ever happening again."*

Do your characters come from different junctures? If the game is set in the Contemporary juncture and the characters are from other time periods, they may have joined together to find a place in this alien time. Alternatively, you might be from a version of the modern day destroyed in a critical shift. Your group could be part of a larger alliance of displaced people, or you may be the only outsiders you know. You may not even like each other—but you hate the thought of being alone in the strange world. Since this implies that you have all visited the Netherworld at least once, you are already prepared to join the Secret War; you simply need a reason to pick a side or try to carve out a place for yourselves.

#### Location

*"Nobody messes with Mercy Street, mister!"*

The anachronism backstory is based on the idea that none of the characters has a home. This is the reverse: home is what brings you together. Your characters may come from completely different backgrounds and even different junctures, but you all happen to live, eat, or work at the same place—love of this location is what brings you together. Perhaps your apartment building or your favorite restaurant is built on a feng shui site, and monks, mooks, and mechanical monkeys are suddenly coming out of the woodwork to claim it or destroy it. You and your friends came together to protect your home; the battles that follow may draw you into the Secret War.

#### Martial Arts School

*"We bear the honor of the Flapping Turtle school on our backs, and we cannot let it fall."*

If all of the characters possesses Fu schticks—or at least decent Martial Arts AVs—you could decide that you are all part of the same school of martial arts. Perhaps your dojo is well known and respected, and you are called upon to represent the school in various competitions. (Who knows, such competitions could even be held in the Netherworld or other junctures!) A darker option would be to say that you are the last students of a school that has been hunted across the junctures, that an enemy dojo seeks to wipe your secrets from time itself. Can you find a way to overcome your enemies and preserve your ancient knowledge? This concept brings together a variety of character types: The Old Master sensei, the promising student Martial Artist, the hopeful Scrappy Kid, and the Karate Cop who turned his back on the school to focus on the modern world and now blames himself for the downfall of the school. Working together, you must find a way to avenge your fallen comrades. After that, the Secret War awaits.





## Schticks

Character types give you schticks to pick from, and so do group types. Character groups get access to a special kind of schtick, too: the **group schtick**. Group schticks are shared by everyone in the team and represent special training, resources, or other nifty advantages stemming from experience and aptitude.

Group schticks are a big deal, so they get their section later on in this chapter.

## Wealth Level

Some group types provide the characters with a wealth level, like character types do. Group wealth levels override character wealth levels, so that even poor character types have access to rich resources when they join a rich group.

Cops, for example, are always working stiffs. If you use the Killer type to create a police sniper for a cop show, that sniper's still going to make a cop's salary.

### Patron

*"I imagine you're all wondering why I've called you here..."*

Characters brought together by a mutual acquaintance may have nothing in common with one another. Their motives may not overlap, but their skills may be useful to someone with motive (and money) enough for the lot of them. Maybe they've been hired by an eccentric billionaire who has devoted his fortune to fighting the Secret War, or brought together by an old teacher who has helped them all in different ways. The players don't have to share the patron's beliefs, they just have to all enjoy the benefits of working for him, or fear the risk of refusing him. Keyser Soze, anyone?

The GM can exploit a patron in a number of different ways: can the patron be trusted? What happens when a beloved patron vanishes, or is killed? The hold that a patron provides may deteriorate over time if there's no trust between the characters, though. What if the patron ends up providing a motive for the characters to work together by betraying them and becoming the big villain of the show? To get revenge, they'll have to work together.

### Profession

*"Hopping vampires, huh? That'll be \$250 a day plus expenses. Two days up front."*

Perhaps you don't fight out of the goodness of your heart. Perhaps it's what you do for a living. The group could run its own business, working as private investigators, mercenaries, freelance journalists, or even supernatural exterminators. Alternatively, you could choose to work for a higher power. Instead of having a lone Maverick Cop, your group might be part of the Police Department. Instead of a single Spy, the group could be a top-secret government agency. This option may have the most serious impact on the tone and atmosphere of the game—a cop show has a very different feel from a spy show. Many of the group types in this book use this as a default backstory, but you don't have to.

One benefit of the professional group is that they don't have to agree philosophically. All kinds of great dialogue scenes and character relationships can stem from co-workers with differing personal goals. How many reasons are there, anyway, why someone might become a cop or a hitman?

### Vendetta

*"I don't care who you are. As long as you're fighting the Lodge, you're OK in my book."*

Friendship is one force that can bind a group together. Hatred is another. Perhaps the characters don't know each other. But they are united by their feud against the Ascended or the local crimelord (or their former patron, remember?). Individually, the characters don't have the power to fight their foe, and they will likely be picked off and destroyed. Working together is their only chance to succeed—and to survive.

This sort of backstory is best for short series or if it leads to another motive later on. Otherwise, once that crimelord is dead, the characters may drift apart.



# How To Make A Character Group

It's easy. When creating characters at the start of the game, everyone sits down with a copy of the group sheet included at the end of this book and agrees on the group type to be created, like a spy cell, a family of kung-fu fighters, or a bunch of cops. The whole point of the series the GM has designed might be to create a group around a specific idea, like a band of criminals working in Hong Kong's occult antiquities trade, so you may be given a kind of show to create character for.

Once you know what the group's like, start sharing character concepts—even concepts you personally don't want to play. Someone else might love an idea of yours better than their own. From all the concepts that get hollared out, everyone picks one for themselves. In some cases, it's all right for the same concept to get used more than once. A police squad can have two rookie cops, no problem.

When everyone has a character concept, pick character types for those concepts and make characters as usual. Remember that your group type may give you extra schticks to choose from beyond what's listed for your character type.

Character concepts might be exactly the same as a character type (e.g., the Maverick Cop) or you may have to find a type that fits the concept. Those rookie cops share the same concept, but one might be a Maverick Cop and the other a Karate Cop, for example.

While everyone's doing this, talk aloud about the relationships that could exist between the characters. Those rookie cops might be academy rivals, and the Magic Cop might be their old instructor. The group's sorcerers-in-hiding could be siblings. Think of relationships that can provoke or fuel dia-

## So You're Making a Character Group

To get the most out of your character group, get all of your players together and make all the group's characters at once. Sit everyone down and follow these steps, which are explained in more detail at left. There's really no reason you can't mess around with the order of these steps or turn your current cast of characters into a character group, though you might miss out on some of the advantages of group schticks that way.

1. Pick a group type and personalize it.
2. Brainstorm a bunch of character concepts.
3. Select a character type for each concept.
4. Customize each character, using the options from both the character type and the group type.
5. Pick group schticks and fill out the rest of the group sheet.

logue between characters, but not necessarily start fights between them. The conversations of the Misters in *Reservoir Dogs* are great fun, for example, but it's probably best for your game if all the PCs don't murder each other in the end.

Once you're all set, everyone should introduce their character. Keep in mind that character groups have some amount of shared backstory, so be sure to let everyone in on some of the secrets their characters should have learned about yours by now. Once all that has been done, make sure you've filled out everything on the character group sheet.

## Creating A Cast

By starting with the group and deciding what kinds of characters you think would be entertaining or important to have in your show, you're identifying the meaningful roles before the show's actual characters are created. This helps everyone make characters that are sure to be important to the group, whether that importance comes from social dynamics or operational structure or game mechanics. In effect, you're starting at the middle and working your way out.

This also leads to distinctive characters. Everyone wants their character to be special, and that's just easier to do when you know the basic hook behind everyone else's character. Rather than basing your character's unique traits off all the weird possibilities in the game, you can base them off of the other characters in the group. This way you'll know that your character is special without being so strange as to be alienated by everyone else.





## So You've Already Got Characters

If you've already got a bunch of characters working together in an ongoing *Feng Shui* game, it's not too late to turn them into a character group, so long as your GM is in on it. At this point, you already know the relationships between each character and everyone has their schticks, so all you're really doing is formalizing their organization and getting them some new abilities.

Characters shouldn't get the mechanical benefits of group-hood without the operational requirements, though. Don't miss the chance to play that scene where everyone volunteers their skills to help the team, gathers in a circle, and puts their hands in the middle. Each member should pledge their loyalty with some characteristic bit of dialogue that makes everyone else say, "That is *so* [character name]."

Likewise, there should be some explanation in the game as to why everyone's coming together now. Have they become closer through some triumphant victory or monumental loss?

## Villainous Groups

Bad guys can form groups, too. In fact, they probably should. Villainous groups are not only better matches for PCs, they almost always come with detailed motivations. Why are these villains working together? How did they meet? What do they have in common?

Bad guy groups might be army platoons, street gangs, religious sects, terrorist cells, or crooked police units. The total number of group members shouldn't reach outside the single digits, though. Not only do groups become too large to properly synergize after that, but they may become just too tough for the PCs to deal with. That's no fun. Think of the group as the elite core of the bad guys' organization. Every old mook on the payroll shouldn't be considered part of the group. There's no reason you can't have unnamed characters form into groups, though. Some sync schticks (read on) can really put the hurt into an encounter with coordinated unnamed GMCs and give the PCs a thrilling surprise.

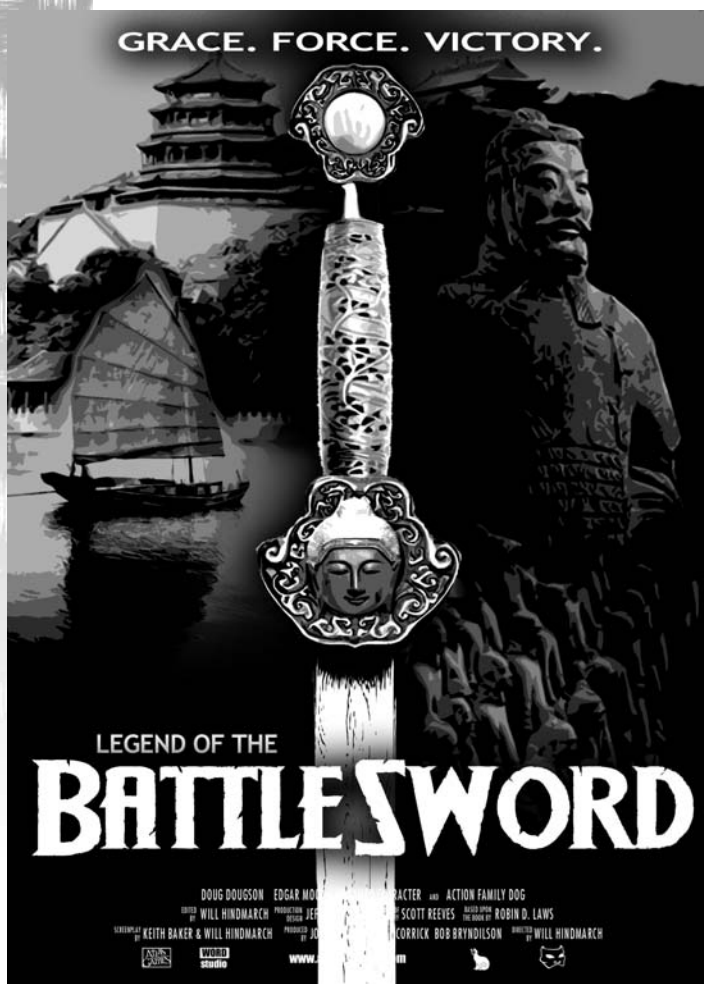
## I'll Talk You Through It

Here's an example of teamwork that pops up in action movies and how you can use model it in your *Feng Shui* game without a lot of new rules. You know that suspense scene where one character tells another one how to defuse a bomb over the phone? (*Executive Decision's* got a good one of these.) Here's some simple rules to use for that scene, when it comes up.

One character is the advisor and the other is the worker. The advisor has the skill and the worker has the opportunity. The advisor conveys the necessary know-how to the worker, who just has to carry it out. If the worker is totally untrained, then he gets an AV penalty by default, determined by the GM. That can be gotten around by taking a few shots to describe the situation to the advisor, if there's time; each shot spent this way reduces the untrained penalty by one. Only a number of shots equal to or less than the worker's Perception can be spent this way. This involves the worker describing "shiny, hooky things" and the advisor prattling off their technical names, for example.

Next, the advisor explains the work, granting a bonus to the check equal to his bonuses in the skill or his Intelligence, whichever is lower. This bonus then gets applied to the worker's check, using whatever attribute is appropriate for the skill. If the advisor can see what the worker is doing, then the advisor can shout "No! Wait!" after seeing the first die roll and give the worker a second chance to roll the dice. (Because it's dramatic.)

If this doesn't work, then grab the cat, Rog.





### Flashbacks

What secrets are hidden in your past?

So you're a Killer. For the last year you've fought the good fight against the Ascended, but before that you worked for them. How many people did you kill? How many were innocent? What finally caused you to snap and switch to the side of the angels?

You're a Monster-Hunter. How many creatures did you send to the labs of the Architects? How many Abominations were you responsible for? Did you ever see the horrors those creatures committed in your home time? Have you ever encountered one of the Abominations you personally captured, maybe in the modern day, and had to face the consequences of your former life?

You're a Ghost. What happened in your life that has kept you from passing into death? Who did you fight for? Who did you love? What great tragedy did you leave unfinished?

In *Feng Shui* these ideas are summed up in your character's melodramatic hooks. Your past colors the present, as you seek redemption or revenge. Normally, this is the only way your history comes into play. But what if you had the chance to step back in time—to relive a character's early career?

A flashback is a one-shot adventure that jumps back into the life of a character before she became a secret warrior. What drove the cop to become a Maverick? Why did the Spy leave his agency? What horrors did the Ex-Special Forces character and the Medic see when they were serving together? What about the Abomination's time in the service of the Architects? In this adventure, one of the players gets to play his normal character—although all experience and other benefits gained during the series should be set aside—while the rest of the players get to play new characters created by the GM: the people your friend used to work with. This gives you a chance to play totally against type. Can you help the Ascended lay claim to a heavily guarded feng shui site? Can you capture monsters in the service of the Architects or brutally suppress the idealistic rebels fighting against the tyranny of the Buro?

A flashback serves two purposes. The first is to expand the history of one or more characters. Walking in your old shoes gives you the opportunity to really experience your past. Searching for redemption is considerably more meaningful once you've seen your sins firsthand.

In addition to shedding light on the past, a flashback can provide the fuel for the future of a series—introducing characters or themes that will appear in later adventures. For example, your character is an Ex-Special Forces soldier from the future. After participating in massacres and other atrocities, you fled to the past to fight the plans of the Architects before they took hold of the world.

The GM is planning to launch a major story arc related to the Architects and he wants to tie it into your past, so he starts off with a flashback. You play your younger self, while the other players take on the roles of the soldiers you worked with: cruel and deadly sociopaths, each with their own quirks and talents. In the adventure, you are all working to capture a previously unknown form of demon which the Architects plan to use to create a superior form of abomination. It's an exciting enough mission, and it gives the other players a chance to assume the roles of some very bad people—a twist from the usual *Feng Shui* formula.

Next time you play, the game is set back in your regular time period, starring your regular characters. But in the middle of the action, one of your old teammates shows up! A terrible disaster has occurred in the future: demons you captured in the past (years ago for your character, last adventure for you) have broken free of their control mechanisms and used their corruptive powers to seize control of the Architects. The horrors they're creating in the future are worse than anything Boatman planned for. At this point, all of the players know who this soldier is, and what these demons are. Do you trust him? Are you willing to work with him again? Can you solve the disaster you helped set in motion years ago?

A flashback can be a lot of work for a GM, requiring her to create new characters for most of the players in addition to developing a complete stand-alone adventure. However, an entertaining change of pace and the chance for players to experience the world from a completely different viewpoint can be well worth the effort. And, ideally, the GM can use the characters she created for the past as GMCs in the future!

Of course, GMs could make the job easier by having everyone who needs a new character for the flashback episode make a character group centered on the character history of this week's star. In the above example, everyone would make characters who could fit into the Buro's monster-hunting squads. Now the players are designing interesting future villains and allies for the GM!

If nothing else, a flashback lets you take the group character rules out for a spin without having to start a whole new series. Lots of character types could have been part of some group—no matter how mundane—before they became the independent and self-motivated heroes of the Secret War. The Maverick Cop and the Magic Cop may have been ordinary cops back in the day, for example, while the Ninja or the Killer may have once been simple thugs for a local crime syndicate. What if the current series' Scrappy Kid is the sole survivor of a once-great Action Family? The story of their final, fatal adventure could hold the clues to some threat in the current series.





## Concept vs. Type

With some imagination and the cooperation of the GM any character type can fit into just about any group. Although every character type has an associated concept, you don't need a new type for every new concept you've got. Instead, stretch the boundaries of each type to fit your character concept. You do it every time to customize a type by spending skill bonuses and raising attributes. The way you explain those changes to yourself ("My killer's an Oxford graduate, so I'm raising her Mind attribute.") is the same way you explain them to the other players.

Swapping out skills is another fair trick, so long as you've got a reason and GM approval. In some cases, the character type (e.g. Masked Avenger) or group type (e.g. Detectives) description even mentions it. When swapping skills, aim for changes that complement other characters or fill holes in the group. If you swap Martial Arts for Guns on, say, the Old Master, all you're doing is edging in on the Killer's turf; that ruins the fun for whoever's playing the Killer. Be considerate.

Although some character types have "cop" right in the name, it doesn't mean other characters can't wear the badge. The Big Bruiser is a great example, since he's got a bunch of skill bonuses ready to go into Police, but you've got lots of options. With the weirdness of the Secret War underneath everything, you could even imagine ways for Sorcerers and Ninja to join the force. After that, explaining Techies in the military and Transformed Animals in the CIA is downright easy.

One of your guiding principles, however, should be honesty. A Killer as a police sniper is great, provided that the character is as much cop as killer. Don't play a Ninja in a military series just to make jokes when you *could* be like Snake-eyes; let the ninja concept fall even with your military concept or let it fall into your character history. If you're going to tweak the types, then commit to it and don't waste the opportunity.

Each of the shows has some examples of how character types can be imported. These are examples, not rules. Go forth and blaze the trail.

## PCs On Different Teams

Lots of action movies hinge on the opposites who come together to fight a greater evil and save the day. There's no reason why those opposites can't be two teams of PCs. The trick to making it work in an RPG is convincing the players that their characters can trust each other; players need to be given an actor's motivation and an audience's desire to suspend disbelief—at the same time. Frankly, players, it's best to focus on the suspension of disbelief over the motivation. In a game session, it's more important to have a fast-moving, fun story that everyone gets to enjoy than it is to throw water on the action in the name of realism. Consider this time honored dialogue:

*COP: I still don't trust you.*

*CROOK: I don't like this either, but what choice do we have?*

That exchange turns up in so many movies because the number one reason why anyone ends up in a movie theater (or at a game table) is to have a good time. So let's just get on with it, right? There's plenty of time for you to wink or joke about the lack of trust (or believability) along the way. Hell, it's a perfectly good tool for building some terrific banter, but do you really want to shut down the whole game with that monkeywrench?

Of course, you could also have PCs on different teams on the same side of the conflict. Police officers partner up, for example, so you could always the PCs be two groups of two partners each. This even raises the interesting possibility of mismatching the PCs with each other for an episode, just to see how that works out. Say it's a departmental mandate or something and get on with the fun.

## Welcoming to the Fold

It's possible for people to join a group already in operation. Maybe a character needs to be replaced due to death or player absence, maybe someone new starts playing with you, whatever. Don't punish a new player by denying them all of the group's schticks. Instead, play out an episode or two where the new guy learns the ropes, makes a few mistakes, and doesn't get access to the group schticks. Then, when he's proven that he's up to it, let him use the group schticks like anyone else. Yes, this means that brand-new characters who've just shown up are over-powered compared to starting characters. Don't worry about it. This keeps the game moving at the pace you got used to and makes the most possible people happy.

Also, when adding characters to a group, try to avoid The Scrappy Effect. Don't ruin perfectly good party dynamics with obnoxious new know-it-alls. Don't try to one-up the old-timers. Instead, look at how the *Lethal Weapon* movies add someone new each time out. It's about story and rapport. Make the new character important in some way and the hard part's done. Like making a new group, identify the open position and fill it.

## Group Schticks

**Group schticks** are what make groups better than individuals. One or more are granted to the group when it's created, and more can be purchased as the series progresses. Proper group schticks are possessed by the group as a whole and enjoyed by all member characters. These usually grant the group some beneficial resource or abilities stemming from their experience and cooperation or bestowed by the larger forces of which the group is a part.

Related to the group schtick is the synergistic schtick (or, if you prefer, synchronal schtick), also called a **sync schtick**, for short. Sync schticks aren't purchased by groups, but group types grant characters access to them. Sync schticks empower actions that multiple characters take together and benefit, in most cases, only those characters who have the schtick. The more characters in a group who possess sync schticks, the greater or more flexible the benefits.

Group schticks cannot be purchased by individual characters. If the GM is game, there's no real reason why sync schticks couldn't be used in a game without a group, though.

## Group Schtick List

Here are the group schticks. Many of these depend on the characters having access to the trappings of the group, though; uniforms, headquarters, etc. That's the risk with group schticks: get separated from each other or from the purview of the group and these schticks might not be usable. Likewise, characters may have to give up group schticks for a while to free themselves from restrictions and head out on their own. These are for the GM to call; they're classic television gimmicks but shouldn't be abused.

A few specialized schticks also appear in the show sections, so watch for those.

## A Friend of the Dragon

A close-knit group with shared friends and a wide circle of contacts uses this schtick to illustrate the kindness of a friend's friends. Think of that scene where a sidekick shows up at the hero's friend's shop at night, in the rain, and convinces the friend to open up and help out because their mutual friend is counting on them.

This schtick lets any character in the group use the AV of any other character in the group for Knowledge or Contacts checks. These tests take more time than usual, unless it's the end of the second act and the hero needs to be rescued tonight. Either way, it takes however long the GM says it does.

With one schtick in A Friend of the Dragon, these checks are made at -3 AV; each additional schtick reduces this penalty by one. A group can't have more than three schticks in A Friend of the Dragon. Other penalties may apply, though, especially if any of the characters in question are not especially friendly.

## Authority

If the job, the uniform, or the badge grants you some power over ordinary folks, you get this schtick. Authority supplies a Leadership AV to everyone in the group, provided they carry the badge or wear the uniform. The more schticks the group has in Authority, the more fearsome or respected the authority exuded. One schtick in Authority grants a Leadership AV of 9, like a beat cop; two schticks gets an AV of 11, for detectives and the like. Every subsequent schtick in Authority raises the Leadership AV by 2. No currently operating group has more than five schticks in Authority.

You lose this Leadership AV against subjects who don't see the badge or uniform, or who don't care. Jurisdiction is the limit of Authority; even soldiers find that they have no Authority when operating in hostile territory.

If your personal Leadership score is higher than that bestowed by Authority, then you enjoy a +2 bonus to your Action Value, no matter how many schticks the group has in Leadership. People just respect you more than the badge.





## Back-Up

Police and military are frequently just one part of a larger force. Sometimes even crime syndicates operate this way. When things get really bad, such groups can call for Back-Up.

The more schticks the group has in Back-Up, the better it's loved by the force and, so, the more reinforcements they send. The quality of these reinforcements depends on the group's Authority or Dominion. See the show types for specific examples.

With one schtick in Back-Up, a couple of squad cars or sedans full of suits show up with pistols. With two schticks, some cars and a van come, armed with shotguns and submacs. With three schticks, armor and artillery arrives, like grenade launchers and SWAT teams. No group can have more than three schticks of Back-Up.

Back-Up always consists of unnamed characters who work for the PCs' bosses, not for the PCs. Named GMCs may arrive, too, at the GM's discretion, but they shouldn't displace the PCs for top billing.

## The Big Guns

Only the world's most powerful agencies can call in The Big Guns. Groups without Authority (like spies) may still have access to The Big Guns, though. The Big Guns are the large-scale, deus ex machina-style attacks that desperate characters use to escape certain death... or give a mighty finger to the bad guy.

The Big Guns allows for a single attack to be made by some far-removed force of monumental power, like an air strike or an orbital laser, once per adventure. The GM decides when the schtick is available again. The Big Guns affects a whole fight scene (except those who know it's coming) and eliminates all unnamed characters. The more schticks the group has in The Big Guns, the more damage the massive attack does. One schtick: 20 damage; two schticks: 30 damage; three schticks: 40 damage. Three schticks is the limit.

## Collective Fortune

Some groups are just lucky. This schtick grants the whole group a collective pool of Fortune Dice to

draw from. That pool begins with a Fortune rating of 4; any character may spend a Fortune Die from the collective pool, reducing the pool's total for that session. These Fortune Dice operate just like a character's personal Fortune Dice.

A group's Collective Fortune rating is raised by spending experience points equal to twice the new rating, just like raising a character's secondary attribute. (See "Group Experience," below.)

## Dominion

Good guys get Authority, bad guys get Dominion (also called Territory, Turf, or Rep). Dominion grants a group an Intimidation Action Value based on their association with a larger, renowned criminal organization like the Yakuza or the Russian Mob. The more schticks a group has in Dominion, the farther their reach and more fearsome their reputation. One schtick is on about the level of a street gang, while two schticks represents a city-wide outfit; three schticks reaches across the States, and four schticks is global. With five schticks, the organization is feared throughout all time.

Unlike Authority, this schtick requires characters to make mention (but not necessarily name) the outfit they belong to or their boss. Some organizations make use of uniform colors and badges, just like Authority.

Otherwise, see the Authority schtick and replace "Leadership" with "Intimidation."

## Don't You Die On Me

Groups with bonds stronger than the pull of death take this schtick. If any character in the group collapses, dying, with a death check Outcome of -13 to -1, a teammate may sit by his side, hold his hand, and talk him through the pain. So long as the attending character does nothing but pay attention to her dying friend, the wounded character clings to life for one time increment longer than his Outcome would indicate (e.g., from 30 minutes to 1 hour). If the attending character leaves, the time until death immediately reverts to that indicated by the death check, minus however much time has elapsed since the death check was failed. So if an attend-

ing character leaves at the wrong time, a critically wounded PC may die.

With two schticks in *Don't You Die On Me* (the maximum possible), attending characters may volunteer to take any damage intended for the dying character by throwing themselves on the body.

### Headquarters

Most groups have a home location where they come together to work and coordinate, but not all have a Headquarters (HQ). This schtick grants the group some special space where they can focus on work. An HQ may be shared with others, like a Homicide Division shares a police station with others, or it might be a dedicated, private location like a mob office below an illegal card room.

All Info checks and all knowledge checks made at Headquarters enjoy a +3 AV bonus; this represents the character going through files, pictures, or old videocassettes and doing other research. Typically, this is done off-screen or in a **research montage**. It's common for someone (say, a teammate) to show up just as research is completed so the researcher can say "Come here! Take a look at *this*!"

A Headquarters isn't secret—though its location may not be common knowledge—and may or may not be secure, at the GM's discretion (see *The Terminator*). The best Headquarters are located on feng shui sites. A Headquarters that's destroyed is automatically rebuilt between adventures unless this schtick is swapped out for something else.

### Johnny! No!

Nothing motivates a group like the spirit of retribution. A group with this schtick gets to react with uncommon speed to the potential death of a teammate. When one member of the group fails a death check, the next team member in the initiative order may act on the very next shot, regardless of what her next shot *should* be. Whatever action she takes suffers an AV penalty equal to the number of shots she's moved up in the order. If she'd normally get to act on the next shot, then she may ignore any snapshot penalty during that shot.

If a character fails a death check at the end of a sequence, this schtick isn't much help. It's one

of those slow-motion moments where the villain does something awful and the group can't get there in time.

### Lead The Way

Sometimes it's necessary for the group to follow the tactics of just one member, such as trying to sneak a Big Bruiser into a secure compound with the Thief. With this schtick, skills like Intrusion, Deceit, and Police can be used with one other character in attendance without penalty, even if that tag-along character's presence should complicate the attempt. ("Ignore him, he's just my sister's kid. Now, you were saying about the Black Tongue's secret lair...") Each additional schtick the group has in this ability allows another character to tag-along on a single skill check. The character who Leads The Way makes his skill check as usual and both characters use the resulting AV. If the check fails, it is always the fault of the tag-along character.

### Library

Group with access to excellent records, a storehouse of knowledge, or an advanced computer system have this schtick. A Library can be a pile of scrolls from an old temple, a stack of computer disks, a room full of three-ring binders, or whatever. Every schtick in Library grants 5 skill bonuses to spend on Info skills kept in the Library. Any character may access the Library, add her own Intelligence score to the bonuses in a given subject and make a skill check. This takes however long the GM says it does, but usually at least a couple of hours.

A Headquarters with a Library is nice, indeed.

### Like A Well-Oiled Machine

A lot of teamwork is timing. With one schtick in *Like A Well-Oiled Machine*, the whole group may elect to use one character's Speed as the Initiative for the everyone. With two schticks, they get to use one character's Speed +1, and with three schticks (the maximum), they get to use one character's Speed plus a standard initiative die roll.





## Mooks

Groups may need guards to protect their secret lairs or to follow them around and gawk. With this schtick, the group gets its very own mooks. Use them to determine an enemy's capabilities (by giving him targets to demonstrate on), have them keep enemy mooks busy while you focus on the named enemies, or leave them at your base to alert you to attacks.

Mook GMCs from this schtick are generally less powerful than Back-Up GMCs, but they're yours to command. The more schticks you have in Mooks, the more and better your cadre of unnamed characters. When they get killed, the group gets refunded one quarter the experience points spent on them in the first place.

Assigning names to Mooks doesn't make them named characters, but with enough time and characterization on behalf of the players, it's the GM's right to upgrade a Mook to named-character status. Once that happens, your total number of Mooks drops by one and you no longer get experience points refunded if the named character dies.

No PC group can have more than three schticks in Mooks. See Appendix A for a selection of Mook types. GMCs don't need this schtick to have unnamed goons, remember.

## Secret Code

When groups of friends talk, the mess of in-jokes, references, and innuendo can be virtually impenetrable by outside sources. With this schtick, the group may communicate in plain sight, even during a fight, without any onlooker understanding what's being communicated. The group may use any combination of gestures, codewords, handshakes, chicken scratch, rolls of the eyes, or anything else they like. A number of words equal to the "speaker's" Charisma may be transmitted; a number equal to the "receiver's" Perception are understood (GM decides which words).

Once an onlooker realizes that coded signals are being sent (after at least three or four messages have been sent between any group members in their presence), she may attempt to intercept signals using her own Perception.

## Secret Lair

A Secret Lair is the group's refuge from the world. No one knows its location, and that is its number one defense. The more schticks the group has in Secret Lair, the harder the lair is to find. One schtick amounts to a series of secret rooms beneath the garage; two schticks provides a completely hidden or disguised facility, perhaps in an abandoned warehouse or hangar; three schticks gets the group a remote arctic base, elaborate subterranean cave system, or obscure tropical island. Each schtick also grants a +1 AV bonus to Intrusion checks made to secure the Secret Lair.

Secret Lair and Headquarters can be combined into a single location by getting schticks in both. If the Secret Lair is large enough, you can even park The Van there.

All Secret Lairs have one thing in common: GMCs cannot know about the place unless a PC shares the secret with an outsider. The GM may not have GMCs show up there unless the PCs open themselves up to the risk. The GM gets to decide what GMCs do with the knowledge they have (looking in your direction, Alfred).

## Unity of Minds

Unity of Minds is for groups who show up unwanted to sleep on your couch, as well as for groups who open up and share their feelings when locked in a cell together. Whenever the group is together, they may add +1 AV bonus per person to any checks using Mind-based secondary attributes. Thus, the group is more charming, more perceptive, or more willful together than any of them is alone. Each schtick in Unity of Minds gets the group a bonus to another Mind-based secondary attribute. The attributes may be selected in any order but, once selected, may not be changed. When using this bonus, one check is rolled for the whole group.

## The Van

Teams on the move still need a place to regroup, rest, and coordinate. Therefore: The Van. All checks made to heal a teammate or repair group equipment enjoy a +1 AV in The Van. Any episode that concludes with the group getting in The Van

and driving away earns the group (not the PCs) an additional experience point.

The Van, while it has a gas tank, can't be blown up by any random stunt. It must be bombed, crushed, dropped from a great height, or sunk. The GM has the final say on what is enough to destroy The Van, but it shouldn't be anything that takes less than a full sequence to set up (and possibly avert).

### Sync Schtick List

Sync schticks get purchased by individual characters for the benefit of the whole group. Some of these augment the abilities of any character while some work in tandem with other schticks to create unique effects. A few even count as gun, fu, or sorcery schticks and can be picked when a character is created.

Some of the show descriptions present other sync schticks, so watch for those.

#### Back To Back

Together, back-to-back, you're harder to kill. If you have this schtick, you get a +1 bonus to Toughness for each character with this schtick who fights alongside you. This bonus is based on the total number of schticks working together, so if three characters with Back To Back fight together in a corner, they each get +3 Toughness.

Everyone must remain together (but not literally back-to-back) for this to work. Movement is allowed, so long as everyone moves on the same shot and no one's movement requires a stunt the others are unable to perform (such as Flight). Eligible characters may join or leave the bunch, if they like, which raises or lowers the bonus to Toughness instantly.

#### Combined Sorcery

Two or more characters who all have this schtick can combine their sorcery schticks together as if they were a single sorcerer. All participating characters must begin or finish the spell on the same shot, but not necessarily both. The process of combining schticks for special effects is exactly the

same as that in the *Feng Shui* rulebook, except the GM assigns a Difficulty to each sorcerer based on her part in the larger spell. Likewise, the GM decides what happens if part or all of a Combined Sorcery spell fails or—worse yet—suffers backlash.

#### Friendly Weapon

Two martial artists with a schtick in Friendly Weapon can work together as a single, more powerful combatant. First, you two must synchronize your actions so you both act on the same shot. Then, like Jet Li and Aaliyah in *Romeo Must Die*, you move together, lifting, swinging, and jumping around like a single, many-armed thing. With a variety of stylistic moves and techniques, this lets you use a combination of Martial Arts and Strength to maximize the Outcome and damage of your combined attack. Essentially, you're sacrificing both ordinary attacks for one better attack.

#### Guiding Firefight

This schtick is good for other people. By making a one-shot action yourself, you can reduce the shot cost of another character's action by one. During that shot, you shout "behind you!" or "look out!" provided that you can clearly see the situation your friend is in. With the maximum two schticks in Guiding Firefight, you can take a two-shot action to reduce your friend's shot cost by two. This schtick may be picked as a gun schtick.

#### Pass The Chi

You and your friends are so in tune that you can draw on each other's power in times of need. Two characters with this schtick can pass points—one at a time—in a Chi-based attribute from one to another with a one-shot action taken by either the source or the destination character. One schtick allows you to transfer points to or from a single attribute. Additional schticks let you transfer points to or from additional attributes. Points cannot be changed from one attribute type to another; Fortune cannot change into Magic, for example.





## Group Experience

So where do group schticks come from? You buy them with group experience. Think of the group itself as an extra player who gets experience from the game just like everyone else. Each session, the group receives experience points equal to the average reward given to the characters in the group. Characters can also give their own experience points to the group, as a gift. Just announce that you're doing so, and subtract unspent experience points from your total to add an equal amount to the group's total.

Any use of the group pool must be unanimously approved by all players. In addition, the GM must approve any sort of resource acquisition. Characters can always learn new combat techniques by practicing together, but it's not always so easy to acquire an army of mooks. The idea is this: benefits that come from within the group are up to the players, like any other schtick, while

benefits that come from the outside get overseen by the GM, who may just decide that he doesn't want to spend time worrying about the PCs' Secret Lair in the Netherworld or a small army of unnamed groupies.

## Buying Group Schticks

New group schticks cost  $(8 + X)$  experience points each, where  $X$  = the number of group schticks the group will have after gaining the new one.

New sync schticks cost  $(8 + X)$  experience points each, where  $X$  = the number of sync or gun schticks you'll have after gaining the new one.

## Home Bases

Certain schticks like Headquarters, Secret Lair, and The Van create a home turf for the group that allows them to come together and prepare for action. Any group with one of these schticks also gets a break when performing training montages there, so long as the teacher and the student are both group members. Training montages at home bases cost 1 experience point less for every schtick the group possess in that specific base.

It's worth noting here that a group could have multiple Secret Lairs or Headquarters. These cannot be added together when determining the training discount. One base per customer per visit, please.





## CHAPTER 2

# Cop Shows

*"You've gone too far this time, Griggs! I'm getting my ass chewed out by everybody from the Mayor on down! You're done here, off the case! Too close to this thing anyway," Captain Gleason hollared so loud, pencils shook on his desk. Out in the office, frightened city employees shut their office doors.*

*"You're making a big mistake, Captain," said Griggs.*

*"The hell I am. You'll be lucky if you have a job when this thing blows over."*

*Griggs slammed his badge down on the desk. "Then I'm taking my vacation days. If you won't pursue this, I will. With the people I know I can count on. Murdock, Lance, Brauer. Expect a lot of vacation requests, Captain."*

*"Fine!" Gleason yelled. "Then I'll be happy to take your gun, too, detective!"*

*Griggs shook his head on his way to the door. "Sorry, Captain. That's mine. I'm gonna need it."*

## The Pitch

Crime is a disease. You're the cure.

Secret Warriors fight to protect the timeline and the chi of the world, but who deals with the crimelords, triads, and killers—human and otherwise—that threaten the innocent citizenry every day? Murder and mystery lurks in every shadow and the human tragedies a cop sees everyday can be just as horrifying as the schemes of the Lotus or the Architects. Someone has to protect the innocent from harm.

You.

## Setting the Stage

While cop shows come in a variety of flavors, there is one constant: you are a duly appointed agent of the law, the right hand of justice and society's shield against crime. From a moral standpoint, this is good—you are one of the few honest-to-goodness heroes of society. But it comes with a lot of baggage. As a law enforcer, you are expected to obey the laws yourself. You need to get warrants before the big bust, and you're expected to take the bad guys alive if you can. You may be fur-





ther handicapped by department mandates or issues of jurisdiction. Your chief may order you not to go after the triad boss who killed your sister or some fancy government agency may show up and seize control of your investigation. Of course, this is *Feng Shui*, so you're going to go after that triad boss no matter what the chief has to say about it. If you do end up disobeying orders, you may find yourself going against your own people. If you take things too far—killing people you could just as easily have brought in to face justice—you may end up off the force or brought in by your fellow officers.

As you develop a cop show, there are a number of questions that need answering. This is something players and GMs should work on together to ensure that the show entertains everyone who's going to take part in it. Don't worry, this won't ruin the suspense later on.

The first question is one of overall tone. Is the series going to be light-hearted, with wise-cracking Keystone-style cops bumbling their way through adventures, or will the series take a hard look at the real darkness that the police have to deal with every day—the brutal tragedy of life on the streets? Are the villains despicable creatures with no redeeming features or are they people pushed to crime by poverty and misfortune? When it comes down to it, do you expect victories to make everything right or is the series set in a world where there are few happy endings? It's also possible to mix these tones, like the action buddy comedies do (*Rush Hour*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Lethal Weapon*, etc.), with operatic tragedies and exaggerated moments of comedic relief both hung on very realistic relationships like family and friends.

Next, you should consider the themes you want to explore on the show. There are a number of concepts often tackled in this genre; consider which of these you want to play a role in your series.

**Duty.** As an officer of the law, you have obligations: to the people of the city, to your department, to your partners, and to the law itself. There are times when your duty will force you to make tough decisions. What do you do when you discover that your childhood friend has been running drugs for the triads? When the crimelord kills your wife and the law mandates that you bring him in alive, will you do your duty or obey your thirst for revenge? In a show that focuses on duty, you're asked these questions on a regular basis. In a less realistic

## Cops of the Lotus

If you think about it, 69 AD is a terrific era for a cop show: the procedure is simpler, the authority of the Imperial police is absolute, and there's little to no technical jargon to know. The show becomes all about identifying bad guys and keeping the peace in a world of demons and magic. Sounds exciting. If you want moral ambiguity, there's even the question of how much good Imperial officers can do with the Lotus operating above you.



## Friends of the Dragon

show you can go wild without worrying about the consequences of such things and just use notions of duty as the basis for scathing dialogue to be shouted before the big fight.

**Loyalty.** This theme is related to duty, and the clash between the two is a classic. Cops are expected to look out for one another. In particular, you need to look out for your partner or partners, who are as close as any family member. In *Feng Shui*, your partner is likely to be another player character, and bad things are always trying to happen to the PCs. Thus stories about loyalty can really impact everyone in the group. When loyalty clashes with duty, when push comes to shove, do you obey the law or do you remain true to your brothers and sisters in blue?

**Corruption.** In some shows, the police are as clean as a whistle. There's never any question of trouble within the department; you're the good guys, the crooks are the bad guys, plain and simple. In a darker, grittier series, corruption may be a serious concern. Can you find out who's dirty on the force? If the answer is "the people in charge," what are you going to do about it? What if you get an offer you can't refuse? Little Timmy needs an operation, and all you have to do is turn your back on the rest of the team at a critical moment... will you do it, or will you trust that fate (or chi) will provide you with another answer to your problems? Stories of corruption are often about the gap between righteousness and reason. The Secret War only makes this harder on cops. How do you prove that you're doing the wrong thing for the right reason when the reason's a secret?

Finally, you should consider the roles that your characters will play. The format of the show (see the end of this section) will affect your choice of type and skills. Character type aside, here are a few classic roles that can be found throughout the genre. Each of these could be shaped to fit a variety of character types.

**The Rookie.** You're fresh out of the academy and you don't know what the streets are like. You've never actually shot a man. You're naïve, and the other characters are going to have to show you how things really work. You're enthusiastic and eager to prove yourself, which may cause you to make rash, rookie mistakes. Ask yourself why you became a cop to begin with: is it something you believe in, or were you somehow pressured into it? If you're just out of the Academy, you could even be a Scrappy Kid.

**The Straight Arrow.** You do everything by the book. When you have to choose between duty and loyalty, duty will win every time. You're an expert at quoting regs, and you strictly (even blindly) believe in the system. However, other cops may not appreciate your stiff, hard-nosed attitude; it's possible you've ratted out other cops in the past. You're an idealist and extremely good at what you do. You're probably the highest-ranking member of the group; the rookie hasn't had time, the old man isn't interested, and the dirty cop and the hothead can't hold onto a promotion. In a crooked, dirty precinct, what if this makes you the maverick?

**The Dirty Cop.** You're the flip side of the straight arrow. You're willing to do whatever it takes to get results. While you aren't actually on the take—you are a hero, after all—you have a lot of connections in the underworld. You're perfectly happy to turn a blind eye to what you consider trivial crimes if it helps you bring down the real bad guys, and you're friends with a wide range of prostitutes, fences, gangsters, and the like. You may not be the darling boy of the department, but you get things done. A Magic Cop could've learned sorcery through illegal channels.

**The Old Man.** The members of your family have been police officers for generations. You've been in the department longer than anyone else, but you've never pursued a promotion; your place is on the streets. You're





## Corruption and Characters

A lot of great movies deal with corrupt cops who eventually come to blows with the good cops around them. If any of the PCs in your series are corrupt, this can be hard to do... unless you run a short, controlled series where this is just the point. Imagine a game where the big fight is between the PCs! This works best with fewer players—just two or three—but is even better if this fight leads one of the PCs to reform. Then they all head off to the Victory Motel and kill whatever genuine bad guys remain.

Don't force this on anyone, though. A fight between player characters can turn into bad feelings between players, and no one wants that. If you're concerned about how to get very different cops to work together, watch *L.A. Confidential* again.

the bridge between the straight arrow and the dirty cop. You know the city like the back of your hand, and you're willing to bend a few rules when you have to, but you prefer to do things the way they've always been done. Within the group, you should have the highest Police skill; you were wearing a badge when the other group members were wearing diapers, and don't let them forget it!

**The Hothead.** Like the dirty cop, you're concerned with getting things done. If you can work within the regs, great, but when it's time to take down the punks, you're not going to let some paper-pusher tell you what to do. You're not as likely to associate with criminals—no matter how minor their crimes—and you've got a stronger foundation in violence than the dirty cop. Why bother making friends with creeps when a gun or a fist will let you get all the information you need? The Maverick Cop is obviously made with the hothead in mind, but Ex-Special Forces works just as well.

## Props

Teamwork is important to the police; a SWAT team needs the same level of precision and coordination as an elite military unit, and any police characters in *Feng Shui* should expect to raid a house or apart-

ment one day. Here's some of the crunchy game stuff you'll need for a cop show.

### Unnamed Uniform Cop

**Sample Dialogue:** "Freeze!"

**Attributes:** Body 6, Chi 0, Mind 4, Reflexes 6

**Skills:** Guns 8, Martial Arts 7, Police 6

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), Glock 17 (10/1/17+1), nightstick (9)

### Unnamed Plainclothes Cop

**Sample Dialogue:** "Don't do it, man!"

**Attributes:** Body 5, Chi 0, Mind 6, Reflex 6

**Skills:** Guns 8, Martial Arts 7, Police 8

**Weapons:** punch (6), kick (6), Glock 17 (10/1/17+1)

### Unnamed SWAT Guy

**Sample Dialogue:** "Move and you're dead, asshole!"

**Attributes:** Body 7, Chi 0, Mind 4, Reflexes 7

**Skills:** Guns 10, Martial Arts 7, Police 6

**Weapons:** punch (8), kick (9), MP5 police (11/3/30), knife (9)

## Schticks

These schticks can be used in any series, but are especially appropriate in a cop show.

### Cuff-Fu

Even if you're not normally much a martial artist, you're like Jackie Chan when it comes to handcuffs. You can use your Police skill in place of Martial Arts to incapacitate a named or unnamed character by handcuffing him to something or putting him in some seemingly-impossible contortion. This doesn't make your handcuffs more difficult to escape from than any other, but even a demon can be slowed down by them if you're good.

This is a type-related schtick; any character with the Police skill can purchase this schtick for 9 experience points. The Karate Cop is welcome to swap out one her unique schticks for this one.

## This Is A Raid

This sync schtick is for cops who love to rush in for one swift strike. Every cop who has this schtick adds one to the Initiative result of each other raiding cop with this schtick. So four cops with this schtick on a single raid each get +4 to Initiative for just the sequence in which the raid starts.

## Equipment

A lot of cop equipment is pretty ordinary, but here's two things you may need on the job.

### Handcuffs

Tricky to get out of and tough to break, handcuffs are the industry standard for cops in the action movies. Eventually they get replaced by plastic zip-ties, which can't be picked and are just as tough to break.

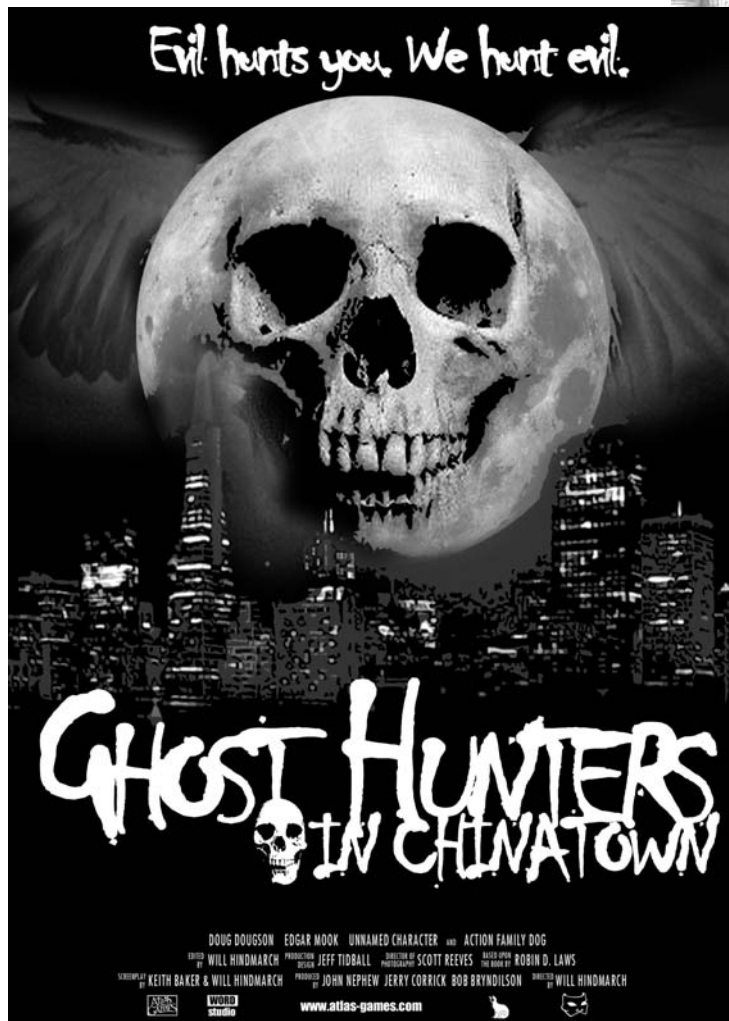
Picking handcuffs requires an Intrusion check (Difficulty 8 or 10 if you can't see the lock), breaking them calls for Strength (Difficulty 10). Sawing through or breaking the chain requires time or a Fix-It check (Difficulty 7).

### Portable Ram

This is that big metal tool cops use to break down doors. It grants a +2 Strength AV, or +4 if two people wield it together. Unfortunately, it takes up valuable gun space in your hand, so don't be caught holding it in a firefight.

## Scripting

So, you're getting ready to run a cop show. Bear these things in mind. First, that police are generally reactive—they respond after crimes have occurred. They don't hunt down potential criminals (well, except in 2056) and they don't go on expeditions to seize or protect feng shui sites. The police wait for people to break the law, and then



they do what they can to restore order and protect the innocent from harm. With that said, you can start things off with a bang and have the characters stumble onto a crime in progress. Chase scenes are a classic part of cop shows, so why not start the adventure with one already in progress and worry about "why" later? Skip the part where the cops look into things and start with the good stuff.

The next thing to consider is the weight of protocol and hierarchy. Cops need to follow the laws, and the world of law is full of politics. How will this come into play over the course of the adventure? Is the commissioner breathing down their necks? Will the villain be able to hide behind a wall of red tape? These sorts of complex matters should just be obstacles for cop characters to ricochet off of, barriers that guide them in other





directions. A growling commissioner gives players advice on where to go even while he tells characters to back off. A villain behind red tape gets to be seen without having to be fought right away. These are tools at the GM's disposal; use them to create and direct the energy and action of the game, not to hinder them.

Of course this is *Feng Shui*, not *CSI: Hong Kong*. Action is the heart of the game. Unraveling mysteries can add a new level to the game, but it can be hard to find the right balance of ass-kicking and investigation. The law may prevent the characters from tackling the villain the first time they meet her; sooner or later the characters should have their chance to face the villain in righteous battle. This is what makes action movies like a ballet: gun battles and kung-fu are how conflicts are depicted and resolved. The important moments in an action movie—whether it's an announcement of love or the solving of a mystery—happen during or because of an action sequence. Don't think of an adventure's action sequences and plot twists as different things. With this in mind, any sort of story can be told using the language of the action film. Here are a few adventure concepts to consider.

## The Mystery

This is the classic detective story. Over the space of three days, three geneticists turn up dead, their corpses horribly mutilated. A priceless jewel is stolen from a locked vault, but the security cameras and motion detectors show no signs of intrusion. A deadly drug is spreading through the slums, but no one knows the source. Something bad has happened, and now it's your job to find out what and why and bring the criminals to justice.

An action mystery is like a pursuit, and the quarry should leave a good trail. The Police and Detective skills are the primary weapons in your arsenal, allowing you to recreate the crime and to identify valuable clues. Journalism can help find witnesses or useful contacts in the underworld. Intimidation, Seduction, or Leadership can loosen the tongue of reluctant informants and witnesses. Other skills help based on the nature of the crime;

Intrusion provides clues about a burglary, while Sabotage reveals information about arsons and bombings. Information is the prize at the end of a mystery, so any skill is potentially useful. Ultimately you'll have to solve the mystery by making sense out of the larger puzzle.

Once the mystery's been beaten, you need to capture or eliminate the perpetrator. This can vary dramatically based on the nature of the crime: there's a big difference between tracking and capturing a lone murderer and bringing down a drug-trafficking triad. Regardless of the build-up, though, no one goes quietly in an action-mystery.

Be careful of leaving characters stranded in this kind of story. Remember, every clue should potentially lead to another action scene, which should yield clues of its own.

## Exposing the Truth

This style of adventure also begins with a crime—but this time, you know who's behind it. You've linked the crime to the local triad overlord, real estate tycoon, or corrupt politician. There's only one problem: you have no proof, and your target is too influential for you to touch. You need to find a way to expose the villain, and in grand style; there can be no question of his guilt when you bring him down. In this style of adventure, you aren't trying to solve a mystery, you're trying to lure the villain into the open.

This sort of adventure puts cops on the offensive. You might need to sneak into the villain's mansion to plant a bug and retrieve critical evidence, or kidnap one of his associates and browbeat her into turning on her former boss. In such cases Intimidation, Journalism, or Seduction may prove to be more important than Police or Detective skill!

## The Sting

Undercover work is another classic police story. In an undercover adventure, you also know the nature of the villains you're dealing with. You may be in disguise to catch a criminal in the act, or you may be chasing a small fish upstream to the

real power player. Either way, it's a dangerous game, surrounding yourself with enemies and nothing but wits as your shield. Deceit and Seduction can be vital to your survival, and Intimidation might be necessary to fit in. The value of other skills depends on the nature of your mission. Intrusion gets you inside a boss's safe, while Driving gets you inside a road-bandit's heart (*The Fast and the Furious*).

The critical element of a sting adventure is timing: even if you have the firepower to kill the crimelord and his mooks ten times over, you probably need him alive and to accomplish your goals—only then can you see your nemesis behind bars. This suggests a great action sequence: imagine undercover cops fighting alongside their enemies, trying not to let anyone on either side get killed and trying to keep collateral damage to a minimum. That's a challenge in *Feng Shui*.

Here's another challenge. What to do if the criminals ask you to participate in some vile act? What do you do if you are ordered to murder an innocent? Refusing the command will jeopardize your mission and possibly your life, but if you go along with it you become a murderer. Can you find a way to walk the moral tightrope until the job is done and the smackdown begins? This might require you to take out criminal thugs in a glorious fight, without letting the truth about it blow your cover!

### Street Justice

Most common with SWAT and POWERS teams (later in this section), this is the straight-up action adventure. You know who the bad guys are, and you don't need to solve any sort of mystery; just settle things fast and for good. Of course, there could be any number of additional challenges. Bystanders are a classic complication: one of the villains is rigged with explosives, and if he dies or pulls the trigger he's taking innocent citizens with him. Can you find a way to immobilize him without risking innocent lives? Perhaps one of the criminals is the son of an important dignitary, and you have to make certain to take him alive—

while he intends to go down fighting. Again, the requirements of the job create interesting challenges, rather than just straight-jacketing the players. These sorts of situations are a new kind of test for those kung-fu maniacs used to blowing up everything around them.

## The Secret War

The police are already fighting a war, so it's not hard to pull a group of cops into the Secret War. A serial killer could be a Lotus sorcerer collecting souls for his dark magics. A new drug on the streets could be part of an Architect scheme to conquer their past. A rash of mysterious explosions could lead to the Jammers.

If the local government is aware of the Secret War—or at least some aspects of it—a Paranormal and Otherworldly Events Response Squad could be a government-funded team of secret warriors, fighting incursions into the Contemporary juncture. Of course, as an arm of the government, elite police units are easily manipulated by the Ascended. You may come to realize that your POWERS or SWAT team is serving the interests of the Lodge, not the public good. But being bound by the law, you'll find that it is difficult to deal with the masterminds of the Ascended; it's a classic question of duty. Finding out who's pulling the strings may put both your job and your life in jeopardy, and if you decide to move against the Lodge you may have to set your badge aside for good.

The mysteriousness of the Time War makes it easy to incorporate in cop shows, because mysteries need solving. That the police are a reactive force makes it possible for the weirdest elements of the War to be hinted at through strange evidence without giving away too much too soon. If nothing else, the bodies the Secret War leaves behind are sure to attract police attention.



# Detectives

**The Pitch:** Find the truth, avenge the dead, and make the world safe for ordinary citizens.

**Juncture:** Any.

**Backstory:** Profession. The work brought you all together. The reasons why are different for each of you, but the work is what really matters to you.

**Schticks:** Detective groups automatically begin play with Authority (x2), Back-Up, Headquarters, and Crime Lab. Detectives operate out of a station house, owned by the city. Other cops come if detectives call for Back-Up, but only if the detectives are much-loved (or the GM says so) do helicopters and SWAT teams arrive. Outside of their jurisdiction, these schticks do nothing.

**Wealth:** Working stiff. The brass wants cheap peace, and detectives are on notoriously tight budgets.

**Special:** All characters must assign at least one skill bonus to the Police skill. After that, your promotion to detective can be rationalized any way you like: luck, social connections, or accident.

## Unique Schtick

**Crime Lab:** Detective characters can send evidence to the crime lab at Headquarters, which always finds out the minimum amount of information necessary to proceed with your investigation, but never fails. If you want it done interestingly, do it yourself. If you just want it done, send it to the lab. If Headquarters is destroyed, so is the crime lab.

*Harmon studied the grisly scene. He pointed at the blood-spattered wall. "Look here. Chen had time to fire three shots before the killer reached him. Perfect grouping, chest level. But it looks like the blood is all Chen's."*

*Jeni frowned. "I don't get it. Chen was a ranked marksman—if he had time to get off three shots, how could he have missed?"*

*"I don't think he did. Look at the position of the body. I think the killer came out of the wall. Chen fires three shots directly forward—and they all pass through to strike the wall. The killer reaches Chen, and from the looks of it, breaks his neck with a single blow."*

*"So what you're saying is..."*

*Harmon nodded. "Our killer's already dead."*

## What About the Detective Skill?

The *Feng Shui* rulebook tell us that the Police skill is what makes you a real police officer. The Detective skill is the stand-in skill for cop-like characters not employed by the force. In a cop show, PCs may find the Detective skill quaint or pathetic.

## Detective Drama

This is the standard cop show—the model for most movies and television shows that focus on police action. An ensemble cast of detectives and officers put their skills to the test dealing with a wide range of criminal scum. Usually, your group will have a departmental focus (Vice, Homicide, Organized Crime) which helps to establish the format for the show. If you're working Homicide, most adventures will start with a murder; if you work Organized Crime, you deal with longer, more involved pursuit and stakeout operations. Whatever your focus, a Detective adventure usually involves a lot of legwork and you may spend more time investigating crime and getting to the bottom of things than you do beating up the bad guys. Sometimes you may already know who the bad guy is, but even then the challenge is gathering

## Groups

The concepts presented above can apply to all cop shows, but when it comes time to actually create characters, you'll want to take a closer look at the group you'll be a part of. A SWAT team requires an entirely different attitude and skill set than a group of detectives, for examples. Here are a few formats to explore.

enough evidence to bring him down; you can't charge in with Both Guns Blazing until you've got a case that will stand up in court or the approval of the commissioner.

### Ensemble Boundaries

Not everyone has to be in the same literal job to be in the same group. They just have to work together. So long as the characters continue to appear in adventures together, they can be in a group together. It's about casting and chemistry more than realism.

### Juncture

Wherever there are laws, there are law enforcers. As a result, police can be found in all four junctures, and it is possible to set a cop show in any time period. Sure, you know the laws in the modern day, but in 69 AD and 2056 you won't have legal jargon getting in the way of your show.

In 69, mysteries are likely connected to ghosts, demons, and sorcerers, and as a result this juncture is generally best suited to the Paranormal and Otherworldly Event Response Squad format described below. However, you could certainly end up investigating assassination or intrigue at court, tracking ninjas and renegade sorcerers. If you want to work directly for the Lotus, check out the Secret Police in the Espionage section.

In 1850 there is a great deal of corruption within the government, so many police divisions will be on the take. This can be a good environment to explore the theme of corruption: can a few honest police officers clean up the town? Can you get rid of the opium dens, chase off the foreign dogs and expose the duplicity of the governor? European spies, corrupt Shaolin monks, and innerwalkers can all threaten and mystify here.

In 2056 the cops aren't much better than criminals themselves. This juncture is better suited to the Secret Police or SWAT Team formats than Detective stories; the cops are generally going to be focusing their energy on locating and eliminating dissidents and Jammers, not solving crimes. If you do want to set a cop show in 2056, you could try to play the roles of honest cops in a bad place.

Can you make a difference working within the system? Can you find a way to bring true criminals to justice (such as it is) while helping the innocent to escape the clutches of the Buro? Or do you really believe in the ways of the Buro?

### Casting

Obviously, the Maverick Cop and Karate Cop are solid types for this style of show. The Karate Cop makes an excellent lead detective, acting as the heart of the group and using her unique schtick to convince strangers to work with the group.

A number of other types are well-suited to the detective role, provided that you're willing to devote a few of your skill bonuses to the Police skill. Spy and Journalist are two good examples. The Spy's ability to get villains to reveal information can be invaluable in an investigation, and the Journalist's network of connections can represent a web of informants built up over years of undercover work. The Private Investigator's deduction schtick can also prove useful; just remove "private" from her name, replace Detective with Police, and you've got a great cop there.

Of course, detectives are only a small part of a police squad; you'll need support from other officers. A Medic can conduct forensic investigations. Big Bruisers and Everyman Heroes make good beat cops—regular guys to back up the big brains. A Killer or Ex-Special Forces character can be a SWAT officer who serves with the squad between his tactical assignments or has been booted out of his old job for, say, brutality.

Supernatural, futuristic, and fu characters don't really fit with a contemporary cop show, though unique groups possible only in *Feng Shui* might change that. What if it's long been secretly true that the San Francisco police department keeps a Sorcerer on the payroll?

Of course, if the show is set in a different juncture—where bizarre abilities are common knowledge—Detective groups may organize totally differently. Netherworld investigators may specialize in knowledge of different junctures, for example.



# S.W.A.T.

**The Pitch:** There's a war against crime in this city, and you're the Special Forces.

**Juncture:** Contemporary. The Buro uses military might in place of a paramilitary police force.

**Backstory:** Profession. SWAT teams are an uncommonly tight bunch—trained together to work together like a precision instrument.

**Schticks:** A SWAT team begins play with Authority, Headquarters, and The Van. SWAT doesn't call for back-up; they *are* the reinforcements.

**Wealth Level:** Working stiff. Individual SWAT members work for the work, not for the pay.

**Special:** All SWAT characters need at least one skill bonus in the Police skill.

## Unique Schtick

**Special Equipment:** SWAT teams get armed like a military force, with SMGs, grenade launchers (for tear gas), APCs, sniper rifles, and body armor. A SWAT team gets access to all that sort of stuff by default. If it gets damaged, it might be difficult to replace until the next adventure (GM's call). SWAT teams, though, only get equipment that can be used in carefully controlled applications, to keep collateral damage and fatalities to a minimum. No explosives, no rockets, no machine guns.

## SWAT Team

If you'd like to be an agent of the law but you'd rather kick ass than dust for fingerprints, the SWAT team is the career opportunity you've been looking for.

SWAT stands for Special Weapons and Tactics. SWAT teams are brought in to handle high-risk incidents: hostage situations, assaults on barricaded positions, apprehension of dangerous suspects, high-risk search warrants, protection of endangered dignitaries, and similar tasks that are considered beyond the skills of standard patrol officers. SWAT officers are the elite butt-kicking force of the police department; where a Detective scenario will usually involve mystery and investigation, SWAT stories focus on action. Usually, you'll know who the bad guys are right from the start—but the odds will often be against you.

### Juncture

The juncture notes for Detective group largely apply here as well. However, the SWAT show is an excellent match for the 2056 juncture, provided that you don't mind being one of the bad guys.

### SWAT Gear

Here's some of the equipment SWAT teams can expect to be routinely granted:

**Tear Gas:** Either thrown or fired, tear gas grenades spray out a big cloud of smoke that incapacitates anyone and anything that fails a Constitution check (Difficulty 10). Subjects cough, cry, and wheeze for the rest of the sequence if they fail. The gas persists for up to two sequences without wind to disperse it.

**Rappel Line:** SWAT teams love to rappel. A rappel line lets you Move down a vertical surface or swing around in the air.

**Body Armor:** The standard SWAT body armor is a heavy vest (+2 Toughness, -2 Agility) and a helmet (take it off after ten or twenty minutes of screen time, you'll be fine). It's better than that stuff cops wear under their coats.

**Rubber Bullets:** The damage done by rubber bullets (12) heals after a few minutes, so no one gets killed. A nice rubber bullet stunt could be lethal, though.

**SWAT Shield:** That big metal shield the SWAT guys use grants up to 75% cover when you move, 90% if you don't.

Taking down a Jammer safehouse could be quite a challenge—so load up your Godhammer and get ready for action!

### Casting

A SWAT team doesn't need the brains and subtlety of a group of detectives. You'll want at least one character with a good rating in the Police skill to make sure you know your procedures, but firepower and finesse are the names of the game. Maverick Cops, Ex-Special Forces, and Killers are all good choices, while a Big Bruiser could be the go-to guy when things get up close and personal. A Medic is another solid choice, both to keep your team alive and to patch up those criminals you just have to take home alive. The Techie's all right, but his schtick undermines the sense of planning that goes into a SWAT operation. A Thief is actually a fine choice for the team's tech guy—such a character might be a police officer trained in stealth techniques, or a master criminal who's been given a chance to work off her sentence by helping the police. Intrusion and counter-intrusion is more important than Fix-It for SWAT.

While they don't fit well in other junctures, in a 2056 SWAT Show, Abominations are almost required—after all, it takes an Abomination with a Robot Limb to use a Buro Hellharrower. A Cyborg could take the place of the Abomination as a shock trooper, and a Monster Hunter can make a good officer. If you do play a Monster Hunter as a cop, consider dropping Info/Ancient China for Info/Counter-terrorism.

## Paranormal and Otherworldly Event Response Squad

*Supercop* meets *The X-Files*. Your department handles the crimes that defy logical explanations. You don't deal with simple druglords and thieves. Instead, you're brought in to handle hungry

ghosts, murderous demons, and haunted tenements.

A POWERS show can be based on the Detective model or the SWAT model. Your squad may investigate odd and eclectic cases that the other departments don't even believe in, mixing action with investigation. Each adventure you deal with a new and bizarre threat that needs to be explored, understood, and, finally, pummeled into the next century.

On the other hand, your squad could be dedicated for fighting a known, powerful supernatural threat that is beyond the capabilities of most officers: a conspiracy of vampires, a powerful gang of demons, or the Eaters of the Lotus.

### Juncture

Of all the formats presented here, the Paranormal and Otherworldly Event Response Squad is the most flexible in terms of juncture. It's about perspective: what's otherworldly in 1850?

In 69, demons, monsters, and rogue sorcerers are a constant threat, and you're trained to track down and eliminate these beasts. The question is how you interact with the Eaters of the Lotus. If you answer directly to the Emperor, then your organization is a threat to the Lotus; as a result, the eunuchs may try to sabotage your organization or send you into ambushes. If you're working for the Lotus—knowingly or not—you get sent out to defeat rival sorcerers or supernatural creatures that have gotten out of control.

In 2056, a POWERS team is a variation of the traditional Monster Hunter team. The Squad is responsible for homeland security, and as a result your team will generally be used to uncover and eliminate innerwalkers and other threats from the Netherworld and the past. Modern-day dissidents will be dealt with by SWAT teams and the Secret Police; your job is to counter secret warriors and their unknown powers.

In 1850 and the Contemporary juncture, things will depend on the nature of your enemy. Generally, there are few supernatural crimes in these junctures, so you may be seen as kooks.



# P.O.W.E.R.S.

**Name:** Paranormal and Otherworldly Event Response Squad (POWERS).

**The Pitch:** Uphold municipal and natural law. Protect civilians. Save the city.

**Juncture:** Any, but especially Contemporary and 2056. Whenever things from other junctures raise hell in your own, it's up to you to put hell down.

**Backstory:** Profession or Vendetta. It takes special dedication (or lunacy) to join POWERS. You've got to be more than a cop: you've got to be a believer.

**Schticks:** POWERS groups get Authority (x2), Weird Arsenal, and Headquarters or Library. No one else on the force wants to come and back them up, though. POWERS has the Authority of any detective, even though their probable cause might seem pretty improbable.

**Special:** POWERS officers need at least one skill bonus in the Police skill.

## Unique Schtick

**Weird Arsenal:** This schtick supplies the group with the weird stuff they need to battle the paranormal.

Each schtick the group possess in Weird Arsenal grants them a device which penetrates, circumvents, ignores, or counteracts one Creature schtick or Sorcery schtick. This gear operates for one fight or until the GM says it does (usually whichever is longer). Additional schticks grant additional items, with the same or different powers. The group can pick their devices at any point in the session. Next session they get to pick new ones. Alternatively, the group can design a generally impairing device (a dart, a grenade, etc.) that lowers a target's Sorcery or Creature Powers AV by 3 per hit for the rest of the fight.

However, if there is a known threat, you may be an elite force—humanity's last hope against the monsters.

## Casting

POWERS can support the full range of character types. The Magic Cop is an obvious choice, and a group could easily have two or more Magic Cops with different Sorcery abilities. A Supernatural Creature, Ghost, or Sorcerer could be recruited to help the police maintain order in the magical world, but more than one this becomes a monster show. Beyond this, cast the show as if it were a SWAT team or Detective drama, based on the juncture and the level of action you expect to encounter.

## Examples of Gear

A POWERS officer has access to special equipment designed to deal with the supernatural. The exact source of this equipment will vary based on the show. If POWERS is fighting a recognized and acknowledged foe, the equipment is provided by the government. If most cops think POWERS officers are lunatics, gear is developed in-house by an eccentric inventor. Here are some samples.

**Corporealizer:** This grenade erupts in a thirty-foot sphere of light. Anything caught in this radius loses the use of the Insubstantial power for the rest of the fight.

**Ghost Bullets:** These bullets are completely silent, pass through solid objects, and only damage (8) creatures with Damage Immunity. One schtick gets you fifteen rounds.

**Antimorph Light:** This large flashlight-looking thing prevents shape-changing. So long as the light from this beam is on the target monster, it cannot change forms.

**Null-Scry Emitter:** Stay within ten yards of this little hemispherical device to make yourself immune to all Divination magic for one day.

**Chi Stability Pill:** Take this pill with saltwater to protect yourself from all Fertility magic for one fight.

# Crime Shows

*The floor was a mess of scattered bodies and spent brass. The warehouse was dark and quiet enough that Wu's panicked breathing echoed off the metal ceiling. Blood was everywhere. Silvio moved with grace through the bodies. He was used to this sort of thing.*

*"You did good," he said and took Wu's face in his hands. In one hand, Silvio still held his gun, so Wu's cheek hurt from the heat of it. "You did good."*

*Wu's hands were shaking. "I don't feel good."*

*"But you are. You did right. These were bad guys. Not because they would've killed us—but know for sure that they meant to. They're bad because they were gonna take from us what we built. What you helped us build, Wu. They were gonna ruin the lives we made for ourselves, and our families. You wouldn't let them hurt your family, right?" Wu shook his head and Silvio let go. "You done good. Good work today."*

## The Pitch

Tradition. Loyalty. Success. These things are more important than laws. You and your people do things your own way. You know a freedom greater than law-abiding citizens will ever know. Beneath the city, behind the faces and fronts most people see, your people have built another city, where things are run how you say they're run, and no bureaucrat gets his cut.

You're outside the law, where a person's word matters, and what he does determines who he is. Where the real power is found.

## The Set Up

Plenty of terrific action movies are about criminals, both honorable and otherwise. Character types like the Killer and the Ninja are clearly out-laws. Yet *Feng Shui* is supposed to be about heroism. So how do you play those classic Chow Yun Fat roles if you've got to work for the good guys all the time?

The truth is, you don't have to be the good guys, you just have to not be the worst guys. In the violent and sometimes dark world of action movies, it's more important to be the main characters than it is to be the heroes. There are





plenty of heinous villains in the world that no one will ever take down within the bounds of the law. So what if you do it for the wrong reasons... at least it's done. Besides, the heroic journey is about becoming a hero—not starting out as one.

Criminal PCs don't have to be bad people. On the moral spectrum of action movies, lots of crimes labeled as felonies in the real world don't even register on the cinematic scale of villainy: forgers, fences, burglars, gamblers, con men, the list goes on. These characters may not be law-abiding, but they're often the stars. Who roots for the cops in a heist movie, anyway? Good-guy criminals just need to mean well—and being a charming underdog doesn't hurt. If you're a criminal underdog in a futuristic, tyrannical, and inhumane police state, then you probably are a hero, Neo. Maybe you

**FIVE  
TOTAL STRANGERS.  
FIVE  
DIFFERENT MOTIVES.  
ONE  
VITAL MISSION.**



## YAKUZA GUNS

DOUG DOUGLASS EDGAR MOOK UNNAMED CHARACTER AND ACTION FAMILY DOG  
WRITTEN BY WILL HINDMARCH PRODUCTION DESIGNER JEFF TIDBALL DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY SCOTT REEVES EDITOR ROBIN D. LAWS  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS KEITH BAKER & WILL HINDMARCH PRODUCED BY JOHN HEPHEW JERRY CORRICK BOB BRYNDLSON WRITTEN BY WILL HINDMARCH  
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just don't know it yet.

The great thing about the crime genre is that it spans all junctures with ease. There've always been criminals, and they've always been exciting. In 69 AD, you can tap into the visuals of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon's* romanticized view of Chinese banditry for an anti-Imperial series. In the China of 1850, just about everyone's a criminal in someone's eyes; how about a bunch of underground revolutionaries stealing antiquities from British buyers and using them to restore the feng shui of ancient temples? In the modern day, San

Francisco's a terrific place to set hard-boiled, multi-ethnic crime sagas; how about a young-vs.-old struggle to end the era of cruel, illegal immigration from China? How about a bunch of Triad gangs joining together to fight summoned demons in Chinatown? In 2056, all sorts of free-thinkers are seen as criminals, especially revolutionaries; it's not just for Jammer anymore. Still, criminals of the future don't have to be politically motivated. Robbing the Buro could be the ultimate caper adventure.

Of course, it's legal to play genuinely bad people in an RPG. The trouble is that groups of bad people tends to turn on themselves, especially in the movies. How do you play a bunch of super-cool, stylish gangsters without killing each other like reservoir dogs? First, characters shouldn't be so bad that no one wants to hang out with them; even Léon has friends. Second, suspend disbelief to keep the group together. Make concessions as a roleplayer for the sake of everyone else. You can't

### A Different Kind of Bad

Action movies about criminal anti-heroes still require their stars to follow particular rules of conduct to keep them separated from the villains. Sometimes those rules are very few and hard to make out, but they're always there. This theory applies to your Feng Shui series, too.

The most fundamental rule of all is this one: whatever a protagonist does must be called for. Villains do things beyond what's acceptable and break laws of custom as much as laws of the state. Players who do the same thing are just annoying. Running around capping anyone you like is fine in *Vice City*, but here it doesn't play. Even if your character isn't worried about the consequences of his actions, you should be. The experience you'll have battling any schmuck on the street is less rewarding than helping to bring the thrill of a rollicking action tale to life.

Worse than that, it's boring.



### Character Tone vs. Series Tone

It is possible to bring hard-ass characters and light, funny characters together in a single series. (Brick Top, meet Turkish.) Again, the trick is for players to cooperate even when their characters don't, exactly. Respect the tenor of the overall series (if there is one). Don't try to make fools out of characters who are being portrayed as serious dangers, especially if the character belongs to another player.

In a movie, the action seems to have an attitude above that of the characters. In an RPG, that tone is created by players working together to maintain the atmosphere. When everyone trusts each other not to ruin the game, then everyone gets greater freedom to do what they want in any given scene, knowing that it's not going to bring down the whole show. Then, for example, Avi can shoot at the dog for laughs without the GM feeling like the game's about a nasty dog-killer. The player knows he's not gonna kill the dog, and the GM understands that it's funny if he tries.

Or, of course, that pikey mutt might just appear in the GM's notes as *The Invincible Dog*. Either way's fine.

play your masterpiece character if the game implodes.

The solution to the problem of character attitudes is the same as that of tone for the series. Everyone must understand the limits of the show. It's as easy as the GM saying, first thing: "Shooting babies and selling drugs is not acceptable behavior on this show." Limits like this keep everyone playing on the same field.

That said, a crime show can bring together all sorts of disparate characters. Bosses or master-

minds bring characters in because they have valuable skills the group needs. Therefore, the roles available for players to fill line up with the skills the group needs to succeed. So don't hog all the skills! Understand that your character needs to complement the other characters—not demonstrate how he's better than they are.

Here are some ideas for character roles based on signature skills.

**The Driver:** You're the getaway man. If it's got an engine, it purrs for you. You move stolen goods, outrun black-and-whites, cross international borders, tail marks, and sneak laundry trucks full of thieves into elaborate compounds. You know guys who can get you cars, parts, pieces, and specs. You've got a guy who can disguise vehicles. Think of Jason Statham in *The Italian Job* (not in *The Transporter*, where he's a skill-hog.)

**The Grifter:** You're the people-person, the one who does the lying, the convincing, and the finagling. You charm receptionists, fool functionaries, flatter guards, and break hearts. You know people who can get you uniforms, fake IDs, and addresses. Deceit and Seduction are your skills of choice. (Statham was the charmer, too, in *The Italian Job*; presumably no one else wanted the best Seduction AV.)

### Fascinating Hows

Part of the fascination with the criminal life is that anyone can fall into it. Police, soldiers, and other action movie types have interesting reasons why they have the jobs they do, but how they got their jobs is usually pretty straightforward (they went to boot camp, etc.). Crime show characters get to invent clever, funny, or tragic stories explaining how they came to be fugitives, hustlers, or robbers. If a single story explains how all the PCs became criminals, then you have another thread tying them all together.

Are they all heirs to some illegal business? Were they all orphaned by the same villain and feel the law won't supply real justice? Did they grow up in the same neighborhood and get drawn in together? Do they all owe money to the same person?

If everyone shares the same "first crime" story, why not flashback to it sometime? If everyone's stories are different, be sure everyone gets a chance to tell theirs in a moving monologue between action sequences.

### Fascinating Whys

A single, important goal waiting at the end of the game (a fortune in gold, revenge, respect) creates reasons for criminals to work together and provides a landmark that could define the whole series. This also raises another question you can use to define your character: why? In heist movies, characters aren't defined by what they want but why they want it. There should be as many different reasons for wanting the Torio gang eliminated (or whatever) as there are characters in your group.

Each one of these reasons presents a potential melodramatic hook and, therefore, adventure for the series. Each character could then get to star in a special episode rooted in her history that explains why she's participating in this wicked and awesome job and brings the group closer to success. Over time, each character gets explored and revealed, until there's nothing left to do but the job itself. Afterwards, every player tells a little "ever after" story that appears over a freeze-frame of their character just before the end credits.





**The Hacker:** You're the one with the tools and the know-how. You get the rappel lines, the motion sensors, the signal jammers, and the software. Often, you're also the guy in The Van (sorry about that). You'll need either a high Fix-It or Intrusion AV (or both). The crew in *Sneakers* seems to be mostly fixers.

**The Mastermind:** In the movies, the mastermind is the one with the plan. In an RPG, the players should work together to come up with a plan. So the mastermind becomes the coordinator, the morale-booster, and the liason to the outside world. The Gambler's unique schtick makes for a good mastermind. Exhibit A: George Clooney's Ocean in *Ocean's Eleven*.

**The Insider:** Anyone with a lot of specialized knowledge about the job itself is valuable. A high Gambling AV is essential when trying to knock over a casino. The Police skill reveals a lot about the opposition. Journalism reveals dirty secrets and weaknesses that make everything easier.

## Props

The tools of the crime trade aren't standardized. Few criminals use signature items outside of guns. Specialized equipment doesn't usually grant bonuses or magical effects to skill checks. In fact, specialized equipment might be a mandatory requirement of a skill check. The GM might tell you, for example, that you can't even attempt an Intrusion check on the bank vault without a decoder.

All the same, here are a few tools for your crime show.

## Schticks

Specialized techniques in the criminal world get passed within organizations. Only rarely do such things travel from one mob to another. Therefore,

it may be possible for criminals in the know to identify your allegiance to a particular outfit by the way you do things. Here are a few schticks that—while usable by any character—tell informed criminals something about you.

### Kiss of Death

Contrary to popular belief, many different ethnic mobs have their own cultural variations on the famous Kiss of Death. This schtick encompasses all of them. To use it, you must kiss your subject in a clear, decisive manner. A peck on each cheek, a gentle smooch on the forehead, or a regal farewell kiss on the hand will do, provided there's a bit of ceremony and a lot of pathos involved.

Afterwards, you get a +2 AV on any checks you make to kill that person until he is dead, your are dead, or you plant the Kiss of Death on someone else. To purchase this schtick, spend 10 experience points.

### This Bullet's Meant For You

You could use a magical object to simulate those great movie bullets with someone's name on them (e.g., *The Replacement Killers*), or you could just do this: Any character may put Fortune Dice into a "named" bullet. Until that bullet gets fired, those Fortune Dice can't be used and don't get replenished. When that bullet is fired all those Fortune Dice automatically get rolled, too. This isn't much different than just spending those dice, but it shows how serious you are and tells the other players "that guy is *mine*."

### Mob Hit

In this case, "mob" means "a lot of guys," but the insinuation is fine. This schtick covers those scenes when a bunch of guys get together with submachine guns and ventilate some house or car with an enemy inside. This schtick is bad-ass, too, so watch out. For every character (named or not) in the hit squad who posses this schtick, the Guns AV of the group goes up by one. The hit squad then makes a single attack as a group, using the best Guns AV of all participants, plus the bonus from this schtick. This attack can only be made outside of combat, typically with the benefit of surprise. It's also used for drive-by shootings, though it's then limited to the number of guys that fit in the car.

Among the genuinely organized crime families of the world, this is a popular schtick. It's a gun schtick, by the way.

## Back-Up Thugs

In *Feng Shui*, even small gangs and mobs have enough members for at least one schtick in Back-Up. Unlike cops, though, there's no clear hierarchy of nameless muscle to easily pair with the schticks in Back-Up. For the most part, this doesn't really matter. Just make sure that the different scales of goons *look* different: street clothes give way to fancy designer stuff, gray suits make way for black suits, pistols get one-upped by shotguns, etc.

Also, it's customary for the highest-powered Back-Up characters to be freelance professional killers; if they're good enough, only one or two is necessary to count as Back-Up. GMs are allowed to send in named GMCs as Back-Up, if they want to. (Bucho calls in all three levels of Back-Up in *Desperado*; the third tier is Navajas, the knife dude.) For every schtick the group has beyond the first in Dominion, add one to the AV of a Back-Up mook's Guns or Martial Arts skill.

### Unnamed Street Thug

Sample Dialogue: "There he is! Get him!"

Attributes: Body 6, Chi 0, Mind 4, Reflexes 6

Skills: Guns 7, Martial Arts 7

Weapons: punch (7), kick (8), knife (8), pistol (10/2/13+1)

### Unnamed Elite Thug

Sample Dialogue: "Yes sir. We'll get him."

Attributes: Body 7, Chi 0, Mind 4, Reflexes 7

Skills: Guns 9, Martial Arts 9

Weapons: punch (8), kick (9), SMG (11/3/30) or shotgun (13/5/8)

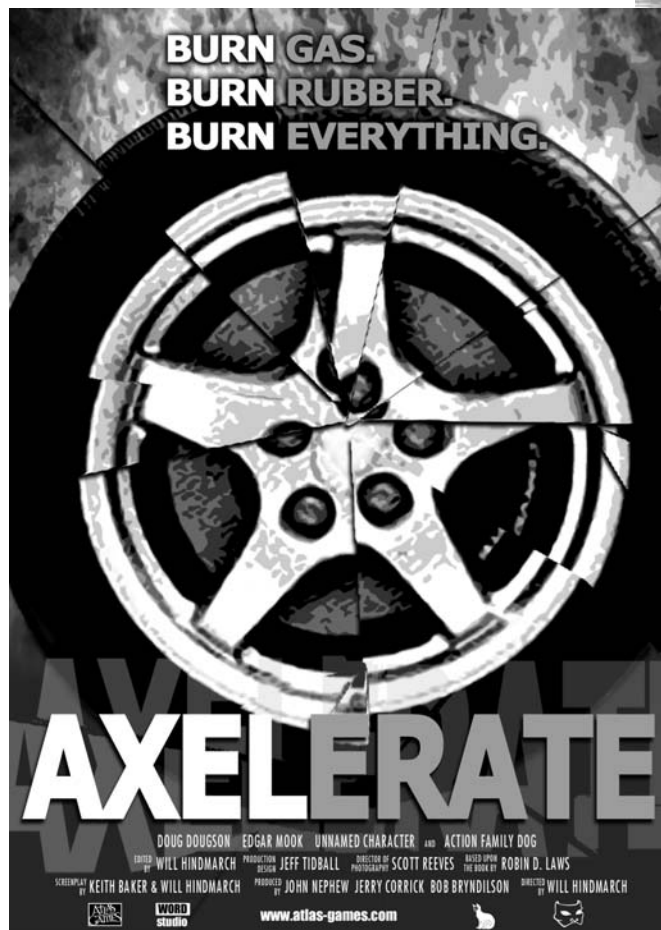
### Unnamed Lethal Killer

Sample Dialogue: "No problem."

Attributes: Body 8, Chi 2, Mind 5, Reflexes 8

Skills: Guns 10, Martial Arts 10, Sabotage 8

Weapons: punch (9), kick (10), AK-47 (13\*/5/30), explosives (25)



## Scripting

On the one hand, crime shows are some of the easiest to design adventures for: the PCs should have their own motives and enough freedom to pursue. All the GM needs to do is create opponents and assign them conflicting motivations. On the other hand, all that freedom can leave a group without direction. In crime shows, it's best for the GM to make the goal or target of an episode very clear, and then let the PCs pursue it in their own fashion. Generally speaking, though, the better-backed a group is, the more structured the jobs they get.

Here are few staple crime adventures to try on your show.





## The Heist

Heist adventures are best suited to loose groups of characters. They reward ingenuity and planning on the part of the players. It's not fun to just play through a heist scenario totally planned out by the GM. Also, if the PCs are pulling off a great caper at the command of a larger organization, then there's got to be something good in it for them.

A heist adventure centers on the location to be robbed; everything else orbits around it. That's where the focus and the momentum of the story goes. Putting a deadline on a heist is popular in the movies, but not necessary. Make sure the PCs have enough time to plan and prepare, but not enough time to pick nits or get bored.

Some great places for a heist: museums, ships at sea, bank vaults, airport hangars, computer server rooms, hotel penthouses, municipal file archives, humungous mansions, casinos.

## The Power Play

The characters are lower-echelon operators in a larger organization that rewards power and position more than protocol. Their job is to take control of east coast operations by getting rid of their boss, taking his place, and getting everyone else to fall into line. If it works, they'll be serious power players in the city—maybe even the country. The trick is doing it and living to keep the job.

Like a heist adventure, a power play requires tact. More than that, it requires the careful positioning of other characters, negotiations with GMCs, and the earning and granting of favors. The great thing about this is that the characters get to talk in character a lot, set up elaborate plans and deals, and interact with a wide assortment of interesting GMCs. The problem is that the GM has to keep track of a lot, set up elaborate plans, and create a wide assortment of interesting GMCs.

Finding the action in this sort of story is easier than you might think. Not only could there be a series of brutal engagements with the boss to be replaced, but the PCs could be sent out to rough up, beat down, or take care of other people's ene-

mies just to make new friends. If the characters really want a lot of action, they'll make it happen.

## Gang War

A new generation of gangsters is moving into the established territory of the old-time ethnic mobs. They can't share the market in protection money, illegal gambling, and gun-running. It's gonna be war, winner take all.

Gang war stories make for great recurring adventures, for backdrops that periodically come into the foreground. The PCs could be part of some small, up-and-coming gang challenging the old, stale crimelords of the neighborhood, or they could be the elite illegal samurai of a thousand year-old tradition defending their masters from harm. The two (or more!) sides might be evenly matched, or the battle might be heroically uneven.

These sorts of adventures are the most action-packed and operatic. Gang wars can span many years and miles, taking characters across the globe. If the PCs are influential, they get to choose their battles and their enemies. If they're not, then the GM gets to tell them where to go and who to fight every week. Either way's good, depending on the group. Gang war stories can be about loyalty, tradition, greed, or anything else that motivated people to fight.

## The Lam

It's like *The Fugitive*, except you're all guilty. Maybe you did something just (but also illegal), or maybe you made a mistake. Maybe you're just a bunch of career criminals who've been on *America's Most Wanted*. Whatever it is, you're running now.

You rob banks or do jobs for local syndicates to keep yourselves in money. You concoct daring schemes to get across international borders and avoid detection. Sometimes, you even help people along the way to make up for your past misdeeds.

PCs on the lam could be running from the police and the mob at the same time. Maybe you're turncoats or rats. Maybe you were sacrificed to the Feds by your bosses, and both sides

want you to bring you in for an interrogation (or an execution).

Characters on the lam might be ultimately searching for exoneration or escape. If they're guilty, then exoneration can only come with a pardon from the government—how do they earn one of those? Escape is only temporary. Adventures on the lam could be set months or weeks apart, separated by periods of relative calm broken by the appearance of mafia hitmen or Interpol agents. Either way, there's action anytime, anywhere.

# The Secret War

A lot of the things secret warriors have to do are against the law. While that may make them criminals in the eyes of the state, it doesn't make any adventure where a law is broken into a crime show. The Secret War does touch even the lowest depths of the criminal underworld, though.

Plenty of criminal organizations (in the movies, anyway) hire themselves out as muscle. Just about any regional criminal outfit could work for the Ascended and not know it. Consider an illegal fight club-like dojo that trains folks to become Thorns of the Lotus in the Contemporary juncture. What about a street gang that turns out to be Jammer novices? What if your band of revolutionary philosophers in 2056 finds out it's being played by both the Jammers and the Buro?

The criminal underworld's knack for operating behind the scenes makes it a great operational theater for factions from other times, but the realities of the time war can be exploited for criminal gain, too. What if the Yakuza sends your crew into the past to obtain rare antiquities for sale? Why couldn't an enemy gang use the Netherworld to run guns or drugs into the country? What about a triad boss who uses a demon to terrorize the local citizens so he can charge protection money?

Unlike a lot of shows, though—where the beliefs of a particular faction polarize the PCs

with or against them—characters in a crime show might work for multiple factions over the course of a series (or at once). If the characters have a reputation for skill and neutrality, they could find themselves working for the Guiding Hand one week and the Lodge the next!

## Group Types

We've covered a lot about what holds criminal groups together already, so let's cut to the chase, here. These groups offer a few different takes on the crime show. Tweak them a bit for even more show styles.

### The Syndicate

Its roots go back to the warlords and hostage-takers of feudal Japan. Its customs and traditions have gone unchanged for centuries. It's feared throughout the Pacific Rim, and it's called the Syndicate.

Not a mob in its own right, the Syndicate is like a consulting firm that works with other organized crime families to perfect and protect themselves. Yes, they have operations selling guns and trafficking in illegal artifacts, but those are territories of expansion taken or gifted from negligent or thankful clients. The Syndicate's primary role is to provide wisdom and violence.

A Syndicate group might be experts at infiltration—modern ninja, or masterful bodyguards—today's yojimbo. They operate in small, plush offices from Tokyo to Seoul to San Francisco and receive jobs from the House, who operates above them. They are allowed to pursue freelance work, but any fluctuations in loyalty lead to exclusion or death. The zen-like wisdom of the Syndicate comes down from above. You are its hands and feet.

### Junctures

The Syndicate started as a rebel clan of samurai in Japan. Its unique structure stems from reorganiza-



# The Syndicate

**Name:** Individual Syndicate offices get colorful, singular names like “Black Blossom” or “Phoenix Nest.”

**The Pitch:** You’re the elite and cosmopolitan ronin-for-hire in the wealthiest criminals circles in the world.

**Juncture:** 1850, 1996, 2056. The Syndicate maintains itself by not underestimating its enemies... in any era.

**Backstory:** Varies. Each cell is different, and may be assembled due to geographical, functional, or philosophical compatibility. Officers are encouraged to look forward, rather than backward.

**Schticks:** Syndicate offices are all granted a Headquarters and a Secret Lair (x1), plus Global Connections.

**Wealth Level:** Rich. All offices get to tap into the larger wealth of the Syndicate, and all members are very well paid.

**Special:** There is no leaving the Syndicate alive.

## Unique Schtick

**Global Connections:** The Syndicate doesn’t maintain any particular territory or turf. It’s above that.

But its very name opens doors and mouths. Syndicate characters gain a +2 AV when using any skill to locate contacts. Syndicate officers are also granted a +2 Intimidation AV.

## Syndicate Secrets

All this talk about loyalty just begs for a series that tempts the PCs to break the rules. Here’s an idea for you: The PCs are personal bodyguards to a Syndicate boss who’s slowly going senile. They’ve got a chance to command a whole arm of the organization by keeping this a secret and claiming to act in his name. Can they keep the other Syndicate bosses from finding out while they create their own criminal empire?

tion following the death of a great warlord. His men, advisors, and concubines maintained operations without him, developing a sort of multilateral business model that has outlasted competitors and would-be conquerors. The Syndicate has survived for centuries because it is cautious and thoughtful; it takes all threats seriously.

The Syndicate operates in 1850, 1996, and 2056. As a group, the type can easily be used to model any rigid criminal organization from 69 AD on. They’re an elite, respected, and byzantine organization useful for all your elegant and sophisticated criminal needs.

## Casting

The Syndicate maintains cells of operatives throughout the world. Sizes vary, and so do func-

tion. Some are tiny, lethal hit squads. Some are larger offices with an assortment of skill sets. A character group could focus on any range of tasks it likes, provided that the group is skilled, disciplined, and loyal.

A Syndicate group depends on style, though. Grace and dignity are important. Maniacs and the indiscreet need not apply. Therefore, Abominations, Cyborgs, Ghosts, and Supernatural Creatures are out. Sorcerers are welcome; the Syndicate’s well aware of magic. Karate Cops are actually good choices, provided you replace their Police skill with something like Sabotage or even Detective. Maverick Cops could make sense (especially as ex-cops), except for the “maverick” part.

The Ninja, the Thief, the Killer, the Big Bruiser, and even the Gambler are excellent choices.

## The Jade Inn Gang

In San Francisco’s Chinatown is a restaurant called the Jade Inn. It’s a handsome, elaborately appointed place full of archaic decorations and delicious smells. The food is great, but the place is really popular for its back-room sales of magic and occult oddities. For years, old man Tsung marveled neighborhood kids on stories of Chinese

# Jade Inn Gang

**The Pitch:** You're the young inheritors of an illegal business that keeps the people of San Francisco safe from evils they don't believe exist.

**Juncture:** Contemporary

**Backstory:** Location. You all started as the neighborhood kids living around the Jade Inn. A sense of tradition and a sense of duty drive you to fight off the other gangs who'd take control of the neighborhood.

**Schticks:** The Jade Inn Gang gets the schticks Headquarters, Secret Lair, and Collective Fortune. The restaurant and the magic shop downstairs are the Headquarters. The store room is the Secret Lair.

**Wealth Level:** Working stiff. If the restaurant or the magic shop go out of business, you'll all be Poor.

**Special:** All but one character must be Chinese-American. The token outsider can be anything.

## Unique Schtick

**Feng Shui Site:** The group is already in possession of a feng shui site: the Jade Inn. In addition to gaining extra experience points from attunement, the site is extremely well-defended against sorcery. The whole place has a -4 Sorcery AV modifier to all those not-attuned to it. This modifier can be diminished or erased by destroying the four magical artifacts that produce the effect, located in the Jade Inn's kitchen, smoking section (illegal in California), foyer, and office.

magic and ghosts. At the same time he was secretly smuggling artifacts into the country from Beijing. With them, he created a swirl of excellent feng shui around the Jade Inn and bolstered it with his magic junk.

This last summer, though, Old Man Tsung was mysteriously killed and now it's up to you to carry on the family business. Can you protect the Jade Inn from the Black Tongue gang of underground sorcerers who want the Inn's chi and the triads who want the real estate? The local police are corrupt, and no one's looking into Tsung's death. If you want to maintain his legacy and avenge his death, you'll have to work outside the law.

## Juncture

Contemporary. Old Man Tsung was a lonely man who just wanted to protect himself and his friends from the evil magic that was being brought into Chinatown by the Black Tongue gang. He imported beneficial magical objects and sold them to local sorcerers in exchange for his own safety. He also donated them to local shops to protect them from bad chi and evil magic. Most of the neighborhood sports some Tsung knick-knack in the window.

Other junctures can easily come into play here, though. Tsung didn't know it, but several of

his suppliers are actually innerwalkers from the past. They routinely sold things at Tsung's to keep themselves in guns and ammo.

## Casting

In this show, it's not what the characters are, it's what they believe. They must all be willing to keep Tsung's open for business. Other than that, they could be anything. A Magic Cop might keep the SFPD from looking too hard at Tsung's place while helping to smuggle goods into town. Any character could work at the restaurant, though a Big Bruiser seems like a nice choice. An Old Master could be Tsung's brother come from China to manage the business. Everyday Heroes might wait tables at the place.

Supernatural creatures who are attuned to Tsung's are an interesting idea. If the Ghost PC someone Tsung knew in life or is she bound to an artifact in the inn? Tsung might have taken in a Transformed Animal to protect him from Chinatown's magic, and left him a share of the business.

Of course, the characters need the skills to fight off the other gangs. Maybe the Ex-Special Forces character is a secret refugee from 69 AD who likes Tsung's 'cause it makes him feel at home?



# Espionage Shows

*"Hurry up, Fox," I whispered. "We've only got two minutes before the motion detectors come back online." Fox ignored me, focusing all of her attention on the locking mechanism.*

*"This is a damn fool idea," Mongoose said as he adjusted the radio jammer. "You know Sylekov as well as I do. What makes you think we can trust him now?"*

*"Look, Goose, I know you're still sore about the Kiev caper, but Sylekov knows better than to cross me again. Besides, he wants to see SKULL brought down just as much as we do. Trust me—I've got a feeling about this."*

*"Got it!" Fox said. She typed in a final code, and the massive vault door slid open. Now we just needed to get in, grab the Janus Files, and get out. There was only one problem: the vault was filled with SKULL commandos, and a dozen guns were leveled in our direction.*

*"Still got a good feeling about this, boss?"*

## The Pitch

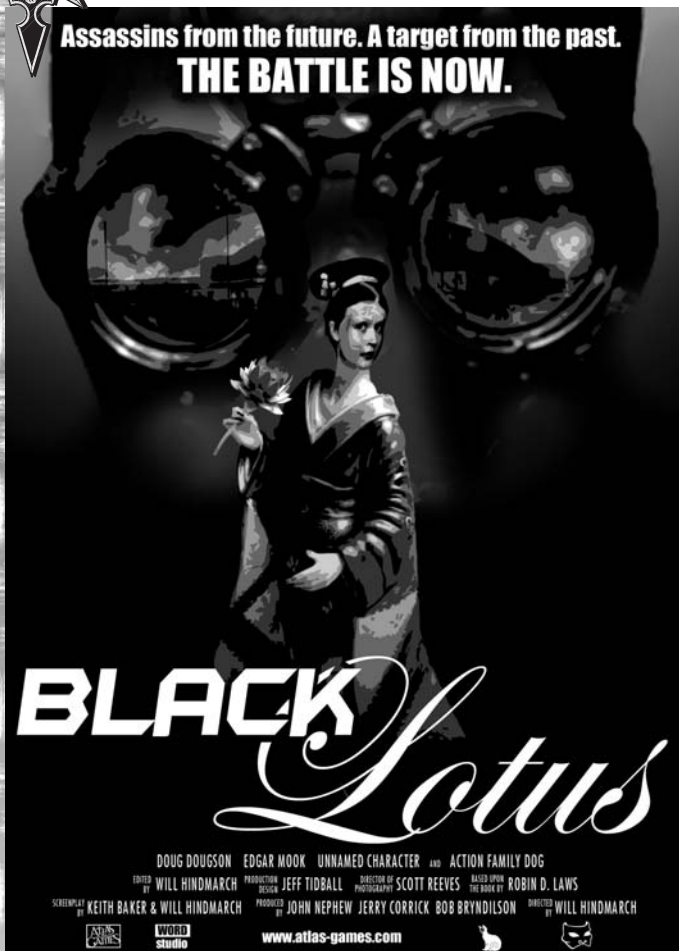
Your mission: enter the fast paced world of international espionage. You'll need to move fast, travel light, and take no prisoners. Trust no one. Remember: the fate of the free world is in your hands. This book will self-destruct in five seconds.

## Setting the Stage

You've watched your fair share of movies. You know that the life of a secret agent is sensational and exciting. The cars and enemy agents are fast

and beautiful. The villainous mastermind has a dastardly plan and a host of horribly disfigured henchmen. The missions take you across the world to exotic locations. A car chase is a good start, but a chase on a hydrofoil through iceberg-clogged water lanes is better. Duel on the wings of a stolen experimental bomber! Engage in a shootout in the nuclear reactor of an underwater base! Battle on the bridge of a space station as the self-destruct mechanism counts down!

Technology itself is a major supporting character in an espionage show. Aside from the fancy gadgets your characters have at their disposal, you'll be dealing with doomsday devices and advanced security systems: the time-locked safe is protected by a grid of lasers and a deadly microwave emitter—you've got exactly one minute to get in and get out before you're flash-fried!



Of course, high technology is only a player if you're in a juncture that has high technology. In 69 or 1850, you probably won't be dealing with a laser defense grid (though you never know!). In 69, technology is replaced by magic; deadly wards and possessed statues take the place of motion detectors and robot guards. In 1850, technology is limited and magic is uncommon, but you still deal with alchemical tricks, deadly poisons, and invisible inks.

Another important theme in an espionage show is deception and uncertainty. Who can you trust? Have you been given all the information you need to know? You may be forced to ally with deadly enemies. You may find that your allies are not as trustworthy as they appeared.

Bearing all of these elements in mind, there are two critical questions that you need to answer when developing an espionage show: Who are you working for and who are your enemies? The

## Skills As Roles

Spy capers and heist movies are a lot alike. One way to claim territory for your spy character is by being the best with a particular skill and basing your whole character on it. Take a look at the character concepts in the Crime Show chapter for some examples.

nature of your parent agency is the most important factor in defining your series. A few options:

**Official Government Agency:** The CIA, NSA, and MI5 are official agencies. Work for them, and first and foremost you'll be looking out for the interests of your own country. However, villainous masterminds may threaten the entire world, in which case you may end up working with agents of other nations.

**Secret Government Agency:** A black ops program that the government won't or can't acknowledge might be so secret that even the President can maintain plausible deniability. Take consolation in the fact that you're defending your country, but you may end up fighting your own people if you aren't careful.

**Mercenary Team:** Spies for hire can work for anyone. This allows you all to come from different backgrounds and use less-than-official tactics. This is a good way to include characters from different junctures, as covert secret-warriors-for-hire may take in a ninja from the past or an abomination from the future for their unique and valuable skills.

## An Explosion in Disguise

Most action movies are decidedly overt. In an espionage show, that just won't do. Sure, you'll still get to blow stuff up, but you'll have to learn to do it away from the public eye. When that's not possible (which could be often), you'll have to escape the scene before news crews or police arrive (there's a chase, there) or you'll have to come up with a cover story. It should always be the players' job to come up with that cover story, too. The GM's job is to describe the subsequent headline or broadcast that explains it to the world in the background of some later scene.

For an example of overt action with covert characters, look at *Ronin*. For an example of spies who don't worry about any of this stuff and stay secret just because, see *True Lies*.





## 005 — 009

Some of the most famous spy movies feature a single, unbelievably stellar secret agent saving the world virtually by himself. Most of these, in fact, feature the same agent. This trick just doesn't work in a roleplaying game. A single star character is no fun if there's three players at the table. Everyone should get equal billing.

The best option for a long-running series is to create a team of characters whose skills work in tandem to save the world. Another option is to have everyone play the big, star spy from their own country. This gag won't play for long, though, unless the players are careful not to step on each other's toes. When everyone's the superspy, who gets to kill the maniacal villain?

You'll just need to get a bunch of villains, then.

Once you've settled on the nature of your organization, look at your enemies. Are you primarily engaged in Cold War-style schemes between nations? Are you an anti-terrorist squad with missions ripped from the headlines or are you dealing with ridiculous masterminds? Do you fight a new villain every week, or are you battling a specific and persistent evil force like KAOS or SPECTRE, complete with a recurring villain you'll come to know and hate? Is your group (or the parent agency) aware of the Secret War? Are your enemies?

## Props

Spies are ultra-skilled, well-equipped, and cool under pressure. That's what sets them apart from other action heroes. Of course, sometimes it's the gadgets, sometimes it's luck, and sometimes it's expertise that makes gets them through their impossible missions. Here are a few tricks to get espionage PCs up to speed.

## Gadgets

Where would spies be without gadgets? From the ninja's smoke bomb to Maxwell Smart's shoe phone, spies need their toys. For the most part, the GM can make up gadgets as required without the need for specific rules. After all, a shoe phone

is just a cell phone that looks like a shoe. You don't need stats for that.

Gadgets—in real life and in the movies—are often miniaturized versions of normal devices: a camera hidden in a pair of glasses, a grappling hook in a watch, a pen with the stopping power of a Smith & Wesson, etc. So one easy gadget is the gun with a really low Concealment rating and just one or two shots. Likewise, tiny explosive devices are always fun.

You can find alternate rules for gadgets in the *Feng Shui* book *Golden Comeback*, too.

## Quick and Easy Gadgets

Of course, you'll want gadgets that do more than just shoot, right? (Right?) So here's a simple way for GMs and players to handle gadgets on the fly.

Assign each gadget a skill or secondary attribute that it mimics or opposes. A grappling hook might supply a Move AV, for example, while knock-out gas opposes Constitution. The difference is that a gadget never rolls dice. It just scores an Action Result equal to its AV, all the time, so it might not be fantastic, but it's sure to be reliable.

The exact AV of any particular gadget is determined either by the GM when gadgets are given out (usually at the beginning of a mission) or by players when the gadget is first revealed using the Secret Gadget schtick. The GM may choose to assign specific gadgets with fixed AVs, or he may assign certain AVs and let the players decide what skills and secondary attributes the gadgets will interact with.

Gadgets, even though they're described using a skill or attribute AV, only do one thing. A fake passport isn't also a fake pilot's license just because they both use the Deceit skill. Strike a balance between common sense and creativity when adjudicating the uses of gadgets.

*For example: The GM knows that the characters all have average Perception scores, so she assigns them two pairs of glasses with microscanners in them (Perception AV 12) to make sure that they don't miss any of the adventure's vital clues. In addition, she assigns them one AV 10 gadget to be based on any skill or attribute of the players' choosing. All the play-*

ers agree that they'd like an electronic lock decoder, and assign the gadget an *Intrusion AV 10*.

Of course, sometimes you do just want a gadget that blows up real good. In that case, use the AV number as the damage dealt. Therefore, a gadget with a *Sabotage AV 12* might just be a small explosive that does 12 damage.

A gadget works for one scene or one fight, unless the GM says otherwise.

## Giving Out Gadgets

Assigning gadgets to the PCs is a fast and easy way to get the action moving. Giving them AV values for them to assign themselves lets you control the power level of their gadgets while giving the players some tactical choices to make. The AV values you give out also give a general sense of how difficult you expect the mission to be. There's no strict guideline for how generous a GM should be with gadgets, though. It's her call.

## Schticks

Here are a few schticks for characters in the spy business.

### Impossible!

You have the ability to survive impossible situations. Spend a Fortune Die to cancel out 10 + Toughness damage from a single source like a bullet or an explosion. Each schtick you buy in Impossible! lets you spend another Fortune Die on the same situation; each die spent this way cancels out another 10 damage. You must describe how you survived (a parachute opens up from under your jacket, you were buried under a mound of protective rubble, the explosion blew you clear back onto the train, etc.).

Spend 12 experience points each time you buy this schtick. Like all schticks, it's subject to GM oversight.

### Secret Gadget

You've got technology so secret even you and the GM don't know what it is before it appears on

## Sample Gadgets

Here are a few examples of some gadgets than be brainstormed on the fly using the Quick and Easy Gadget rules.

**Latex Mask:** A hyper-realistic, form-fitting mask designed from a laser-scan of a real person. Very convincing. (*Deceit AV 13*)

**Disguise Kit:** A collection of face mustaches, contact lenses, make-up, and concealer. (*Deceit AV 10*)

**Digital Playing Card:** This fiber-optic playing card displays any face card of any suit. Change the image by touching the card with the accompanying signal ring. (*Gambling AV 11*)

**Magnetic Jammer:** This palm-sized device freezes all hard disks and most small electronics within a few feet. (*Sabotage AV 10*)

**Shoe Spikes:** With a slight move, your shoes project steel spikes for traction. (*Agility AV 10*)

**Knock-Out Spray:** Like binaca, except it lays you out. Subjects must make a Constitution check (*Difficulty 10*) to resist the effects.

screen. This schtick grants of a gadget with a skill or attribute AV of 10. The gadget is automatically hidden on your person and is assumed to have a Concealment rating of 1. So long as you can reasonably still have something hidden on your person, you still have access to your secret gadget. The GM decides whether or not the gadget's been removed. No one, upon seeing your secret gadget, can identify what it does without a Fix-It check (*Difficulty 12*).

Two schticks in Secret Gadget raises the device's AV to 12. Three schticks raises it to 14. You can't have more than three schticks in Secret Gadget. Spend 10 experience points each time you buy this schtick.

## Scripting

Spies are never at loose ends. In an espionage show, you're always on a mission. The first step of an espionage adventure will almost always be a







mission briefing. Whether the PCs are called into HQ or receive a self-destructing DVD, the characters will be given their objective and the resources at their disposal, and told about any important GMCs they may encounter as allies or enemies. Typically spies receive equipment on a mission by mission basis; personal items and Signature Weapons you always get, but that's it. This way characters rarely have to worry about having the right tools for the job. On the other hand, if you love shotguns and Control doesn't think this is a good mission for shotguns, you're out of luck.

An espionage mission should be a combination of furious action, suspense, and moments of careful planning. Characters are generally provided with detailed information about their objectives and targets. Timing can be critical: an Intrusion check may only shut down security systems for a short while. Deadlines like these are great tools for adding tension: What do the PCs do when they only have two minutes to spare and an innocent bystander gets in their way?

Espionage adventures are usually about finesse more than force. Either the target is too solidly defended for a frontal assault or it is vital that the PCs not be discovered. As a result, when the characters act they must be swift and precise. If the characters encounter a group of guards, it's not just a question of winning the fight; it's a matter of winning the fight before any alarms go off. This may be as simple as a time limit on the action—say, after two sequences someone spots them on the security cameras. Perhaps, instead, there is an alarm button in the fight scene and if any guard reaches the button the alarm is sounded.

Of course, capture is also a time-honored tradition of the spy genre; sometimes the PCs won't be able to keep that guard from reaching the button. If this is the case, don't be afraid to hit the characters with the narrative stick. It can be hard to threaten experienced *Feng Shui* characters with the dangers of overwhelming force, so just make it a fact of the mission: if the alarm goes off, the PCs are captured. (Cut to: Prison Cell.)

Once captured, it's time for the confrontation with the evil mastermind (including gloating and

## About Failure

If you really think it's important, you can cut experience point rewards for failed missions. In *Feng Shui*, it's not recommended. So long as a failed mission was entertaining and exciting, the players should be rewarded. Failure is its own punishment.

the opportunity for the Spy's unique schtick to be used), followed by the challenge of a jailbreak.

All that said, the PCs first need a mission to go on. Here are a few of the classics:

**Sabotage:** Go somewhere and break something.

Destroy the madman's death ray. Feed false data to the enemy's supercomputer. Blow up the bioweapons facility. This could easily be combined with another mission; you may need to steal a formula and then blow up the lab to cover your tracks.

**Assassination:** Sabotage a person in a permanent way. A surgical strike that eliminates a mastermind or a scientist may be the best or only way to incapacitate an enemy organization. A major question is how much collateral damage is acceptable. It may be important that you don't harm your target's associates or damage the environment (much); perhaps your employers want the General's second-in-command to take over after his death. Kill both of them and you fail the mission.

**Theft:** Steal the plans. Obtain the sample of Duranium-188. Get the real *Mona Lisa*. It can be hard enough to steal an object from a madman's island fortress, but things can always be more challenging. Perhaps you have to steal a nuclear isotope from the middle of an auction house filled with international criminals—while the auction is underway! Often, you'll need to find some way to prevent the theft from ever being discovered—switching the formula for a fake or burning down the lab, for example.

**Extraction:** Move a person from one place to another. This covers rescue missions, kidnap-

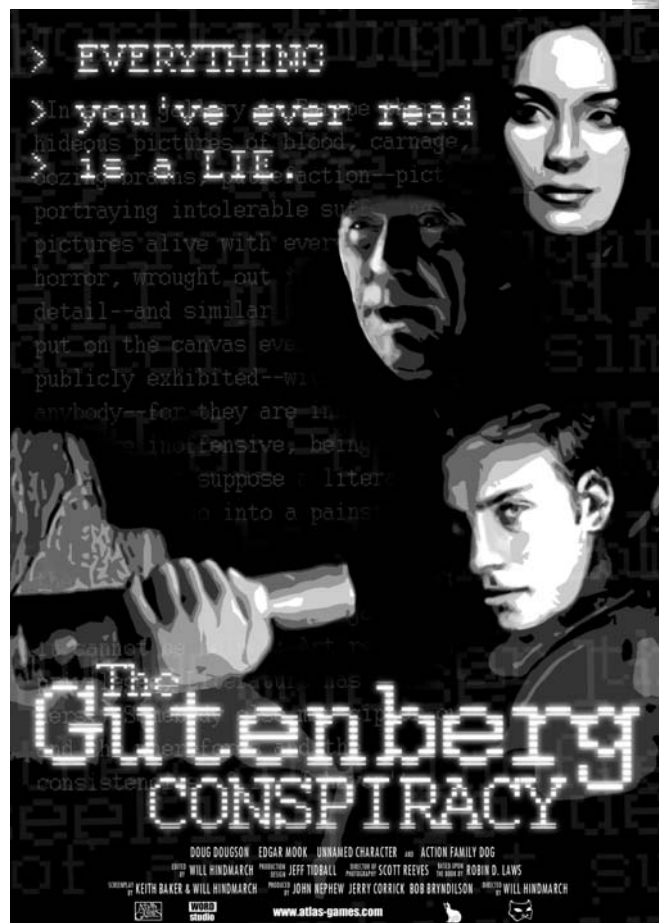
ping, and bringing fugitives to justice. As always, the difference between this and a military operation is subtlety: you need to act with absolute precision, leaving no clues in your wake. The extraction of an unwilling target can be an especially challenging mission. Subduing a named character might not be as hard as getting his unconscious body out of the country!

**Impersonation:** Disguise and deception are a common espionage theme. In order to obtain important information or to accomplish any of the missions listed above, you may be sent undercover. Perhaps you'll pose as a triad crimelord in order to smoke out a bioweapons dealer, or take the place of an assassinated cult lieutenant to get close to his crazed leader. Unlike long-term police work, as an undercover spy you'll probably be taking on new roles every week; this presents lots of opportunity for roleplaying, as you effectively get to play a different character each session.

## The Secret War

An espionage show is a good fit for the Secret War, what with all the secrecy. As members of the NIA (Netherworld Intelligence Agency), you could be tasked to sabotage the operations of other innerwalkers, explore other junctures, or find ways to acquire and protect feng shui sites for your agency. But do you trust your employers or are they simply trying to become the next Buro?

Even if you don't use the Netherworld or travel between junctures, the existing power players can make interesting patrons or enemies. In the Contemporary juncture, you work for MI5, but as time goes by, you begin to realize that your entire agency is being manipulated by a massive conspiracy—a sinister cabal known as the Ascended. How long will you work for a conspiracy of shadowy overlords?



The Secret War affords you unusual locales for spy games, too. Missions may not take you to exotic places, but exotic times. Sabotage might involve subtly ruining the feng shui of a choice site or throwing the monkeywrench into an important sorcerous ritual.

## Groups

The Espionage format is fairly straightforward. Here we give you a classic group and a team built just for the Secret War.

### Mission: Unstoppable

This is the classic espionage show. Each adventure your team of spies gets a new mission. If you choose to accept it, you'll end up stealing secret



# Mission: Unstoppable

**Name:** None, officially.

**The Pitch:** You are the world's top secret operatives, brought together to save the world from terrors it can never be allowed to know.

**Juncture:** Any.

**Backstory:** Profession. Making the world a better place is important to you, and this is the job where you get to have the greatest impact on the greatest number of lives.

**Schticks:** Mission: Unstoppable teams get their briefings in the field from secure transmissions and dead drops. They get the schticks The Van, Lead the Way, and Secret Code for free.

**Wealth Level:** Working stiff. The government doesn't pay all that well.

**Special:** Officially, you don't exist. You can never purchase Authority, Back-Up, or Headquarters. You've left your family and your old life behind, which is great fodder for a melodramatic hook.

## Unique Schtick

**Mission Equipment:** Your group is always issued at least some special equipment to help you succeed. Every adventure, the group receives at least a total of AV 30 in gadgets. This could be three AV 10 gadgets, two AV 15 gadgets, or any other combination totalling AV 30. The GM may assign these gadgets or the players may be allowed to request specific equipment. This equipment, once assigned, cannot be replaced or altered. Make do with what you were given.

plans, destroying doomsday devices, or tracking down enemy agents scheming to assassinate the Prince of Rongovia.

## Juncture

Most spy films are set in the Contemporary juncture, and there are advantages to following suit. Playing in the Contemporary era lets you make use of modern technology, providing you with quick transportation across the world, exciting car chases, technological terrorism, and plots that play off current political events. When folks think of a spy adventure, they usually think of a modern spy adventure.

Espionage has been around a long time, though. In 69, your group may be part of a secret order of investigators attached to the Imperial court, or you may be an independent ninja order that sells your services to anyone with enough money. An immediate question is how you interact with the Eaters of the Lotus. As the last remnants of the Imperial Secret Service, you may be trying to expose the vile sorcerers for what they truly are. Or, you could work on behalf of the Lotus, searching out feng shui sites and matching wits with the strange invaders from the future. The question here is whether you are aware of the

evil nature of your masters, or whether you believe that you're serving the greater good.

In 1850, your group could be European agents trying to counter the various resistance groups that are threatening international interests in the region. Or you could be agents of the Imperial Court, continuing the battle against the foreign devils in the shadows. Can you make the foreigners pay for the humiliations inflicted upon proud China?

Finally, in 2056, there are two options. You could choose to work for the Buro itself. Of course, in 2056, this is less like being spies and more like being secret police. Elsewhere in the future, you could be spies working for the resistance, who infiltrate Buro operations and sabotage Architect facilities. It's a dangerous game, but it gives you the chance to make a difference in your world.

## Casting

When you are building the cast for Mission: Unstoppable, versatility is vital. More than other shows, a team of spies needs to be able to handle any challenge that comes its way. Combat expertise is a must, of course, but the group also needs good scores in Deceit, Driving, Fix-It, Intrusion, Sabotage, and Seduction. Journalism isn't necessary, but it's helpful—this is an information game

and Journalism represents a network of contacts. As for Gambling, well, that depends if you're planning to blow some cash at Monte Carlo during the mission. Detective or Police can be useful, but usually your agency will provide you with the basic facts you need to get to where you're going—not that you couldn't run a spy show with cop show elements.

It should come as no surprise that the Spy is a good choice for any espionage group. However, it's not absolutely necessary. You could cover the same bases by having both a Thief and a Gambler, although the Spy's unique schtick is certainly useful.

A Techie is another great character to have on the team. Someone needs to keep the group in gadgets, and if you every have to defuse a nuclear bomb or other form of devious death trap, it's good to have a Fix-It master on hand! Again, there are dozens of different approaches you can take to the character. Perhaps you're a teenage prodigy recruited into the agency without ever experiencing life (happens all the time in Hollywood) or a brilliant scientist who would rather be working in a lab than wasting your talents in the field. Do you work with fancy tools and lace your speech with technical jargon, or are you a seat-of-the-pants engineer who puts things together with paperclips and chewing gum?

In the combat department, an Ex-Special Forces character is an excellent choice, possessing Driving and Sabotage in addition to his impressive combat skills. A Killer could easily be employed by the government as part of (or all of) a wet team. In general, Big Bruisers are better-suited to the villains in an espionage game, but with the right use of skill bonuses, a Bruiser can fill a solid backbone role.

Whatever type you settle on, take a moment to think about your role as a combat expert. Are you a cold, emotionless assassin who gives everyone else the creeps? A former soldier who will never leave a man behind, regardless of the mission profile? Do you relish your kills, or do you pray that you can make it through a mission without having to pull the trigger?

The use of kung-fu and magic depends on juncture. Ninjas, Martial Artists, Sorcerers, and

Old Masters are very appropriate in the past, but not so much in the Contemporary juncture; for modern Fu, the Ex-Special Forces character is the best match. A Transformed Animal can be an intriguing choice; are you working against the Ascended, or are you a spy monitoring the group's activities on behalf of the Lodge? Everyman Heroes and Scrappy Kids generally don't make much sense as employees of a government organization. Spies are highly trained individuals who participate morally gray actions. They need to be team players. People who wear their pajamas to work need not apply.

### Nether Agents

Unknown to most innerwalkers and secret warriors, there is a super-secret collection of agents dedicated to preventing critical shifts: the Nameless House. They operate with strict neutrality from a secret base in the Netherworld where they maintain carefully anonymity.

Inside that base—which is staffed mainly by exiles—the House keeps a vast and detailed archive of data on closed junctures, critical shifts, and changes to the timeline. Besides that, they've got an excellent record of known Netherworld portals and feng shui sites throughout time and space. They have access to moments in time no other group or faction even knows to exist, and they guard it all with their lives to keep the Secret War from breaking its promise and going public.

House missions involve intelligence gathering in hostile times and the recovery of materials outside their rightful place. House operatives (called Nether Agents) recover computers from 1850, nukes from 69 AD, and evil totems from 2056. Sometimes this means getting past motion detectors in a Chinese castle or cracking a futuristic vault in an ancient Buddhist temple.

### Juncture

Nether Agents visit every juncture, including a few that exist outside the scope of the Secret War. Any time period the GM wishes to explore can be visit-



# Nether Agents

**Name:** Nameless House cells are designated with mythological terms and numbers, like “Pegasus 33.”

**The Pitch:** Travel through time is a power too great for ordinary people, so extraordinary people like you must protect time and space from the villains of history.

**Juncture:** All.

**Backstory:** Any. Characters may join the Nameless House because they deeply believe in the philosophy of righteous intervention or because they’ve been distimed and need the work.

**Schticks:** The Nameless House is a vast and well-equipped place. Nether Agents get the Headquarters, Library (x3), and Secret Lair (x3) schticks.

**Wealth Level:** Rich. The Nameless House is not above selling harmless artifacts to collectors and museums for millions. Since all Nether Agents live at the Nameless House, they get to bask in this wealth, too.

## Unique Schtick

**House Benefits:** The Nameless House prepares agents for travel in two ways: Every PC gets a temporal umbilical and every operative gets access to the House’s costume division. The costume division makes great, authentic disguises. Treat the Nameless House as having a Deceit AV 18 when granting disguises to operatives headed for the field.

ed for a few days through one of the House’s limited portals. To prevent operatives from being stranded in closed junctures (though it does happen), they’re each given **temporal umbilicals**, to protect them from a dangerous shift in time.

While Nether Agents do bring modern gadgets into other junctures, they are forbidden to leave them there. Mission equipment, therefore, often consists of gadgets made from archaic materials, like a potent knock-out gas stored in a clay jar. (Some old ninja tricks may have been developed centuries later by the House.) Nether Agents wear period garb when on assignment unless they have a mission plan that only involves interaction with secret warriors. The House isn’t concerned with weird stories that will have a minimal impact on temporal development; they’re worried about nukes going off in Han China.

## Casting

Anything can be fit into a Nether Agent group, from Cyborgs to Ghosts (and don’t Ghosts make great spies?). The characters in your particular operational cell will have a big impact on the missions they’re given—a Cyborg simply won’t be allowed to walk around Shanghai in 1850. For the

## Temporal Umbilical

People mistake temporal umbilicals as high-tech devices when, in fact, they’re magic talismans made out of steel and silicon. A temporal umbilical is attached with a strong adhesive either to the small of the back or over the belly-button. It looks like a black poker chip with tiny blinking lights on it. To use it, don’t touch it and don’t get it stolen; they function automatically.

Temporal umbilicals feed constant data to and from the agent in the field. The Nameless House communicates directly with agents through them and all operatives in a single group can communicate over space-time so long as the umbilical is attached and a Netherworld portal is still open to the juncture. Finally, temporal umbilicals divine the location of Netherworld portals within a few hundred feet.

In an emergency, the Nameless House activates a return signal, which magically transports any temporal umbilicals back through Netherworld portals. The transport is instantaneous, so Nether Agents are yanked immediately out of junctures just before they close. This burns out and destroys the umbilical.

Agents can also activate the emergency escape feature on the temporal umbilical to immediately travel through the nearest portal. If this portal isn’t the one the agent was thinking of, then she might end up lost in the Netherworld or on a one-way path to some other time. Hitting the switch is a one-shot action. Transport is instantaneous.

most part, though, as long as the characters can pass for human, the House’s costume division will handle the rest.

# Action Family Shows

*I rolled between the legs of the musclebound guard; he wasn't expecting any resistance from a kid. He started to turn around, but I was already on my feet—then my sliding thunder kick sent him tumbling to the ground.*

*"Very nice, Johnny," my father said. "But remember to keep your spine straight. You're letting your energy dissipate." Always the critic. I opened my mouth for a snappy retort, then saw the sword rising behind my father's head.*

*"Dad! Behind you!" I screamed, dashed forward—but it was over before I could reach him. As the katana came down towards my father, he caught the blade between his palms. He spun to the left, somehow using the sword as a lever, and flipped his armored attacker right over. He went flying through the air, crashed against the wall, and slid limply down the wall with a metal scraping sound.*

*"Well," said Dad. "Do me a favor and don't tell your mother how close that was. You know how she worries."*

## The Pitch

The family that slays together stays together. Bonded by blood, years of friendship, or love, you fight together as a family to stop crime and corruption. The work is important, but family's what it's all about.

Curse you meddling Scrappy Kids!

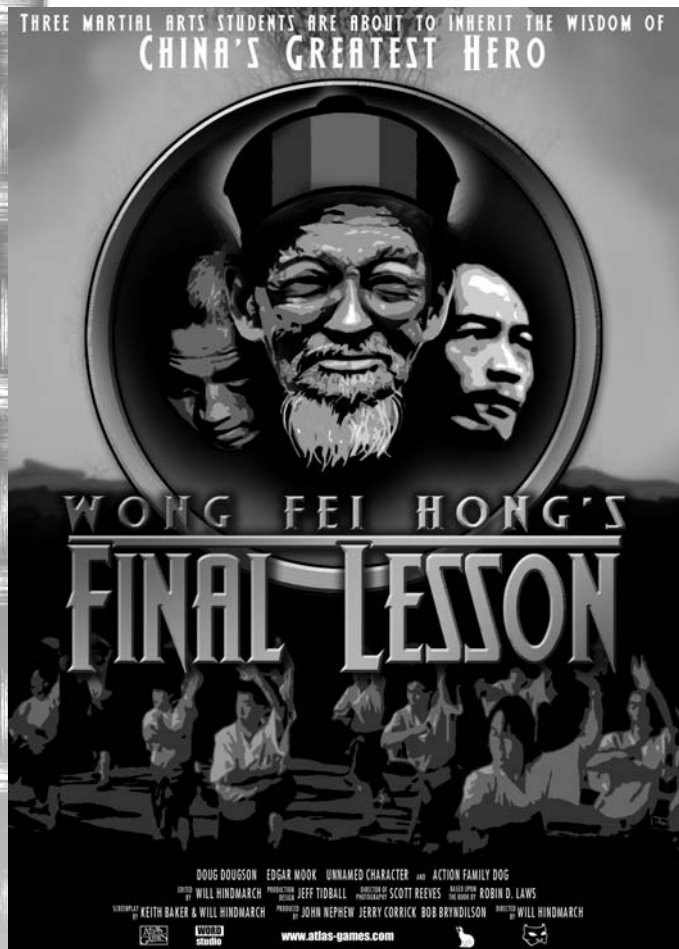
## Setting the Stage

Many *Feng Shui* groups are brought together by random chance. Even in the other shows sug-

gested in this book, your characters may just happen to work as a group, having been thrown together by some larger force. An action family has a much deeper bond: love. You are bound by a genuine feeling of belonging, a sense of family, and nothing can break that tie. As a family, you make the world a better place. Your connection gives your strength; no one knows you better than your family and, when times are tough, they'll never let you down.

One of the recurring themes of an action family show is the exploration of the relationships between the characters—father and son, husband and wife, brother and sister. Does sibling rivalry play a role? Are the parents pleased with their children? What strains do a life of action put on a marriage? You're all fighting for a common goal, but that doesn't mean that all members of the





group approve of your methods. Maybe the family patriarch is an Old Master and you, the eldest son, refused to follow the family tradition of martial arts and became a Maverick Cop. After a long separation, you have set aside your differences to fight for the common good. But your grandfather's disappointment in your choices will be a continuing theme: he criticizes your reliance on guns and refusal to respect the wisdom of your ancestors.

An action family doesn't need a blood connection, though. The important thing is that all of the characters share a bond no one else can match. Your character may have been adopted into an action family and another may be a family friend. Perhaps two characters served together in a war and saved each other's lives more times than they can count. You may not be brothers in blood, but you are as close as any brother could be. Consider *Scooby Doo* (yes, we're referencing

## Action Family Squabbles

In reality, relatives fall out of touch or let problems become rifts in the family all the time. A dramatic action family show deals with inter-character conflicts a lot, because there's an escape hatch anyone can use to keep the pressure of dramatic conflict from exploding the series. It's exemplified by this kind of dialogue:

**ACTION FAMILY CHARACTER:** "I don't like what he did. I can't excuse it, but I can't turn my back on him either. He's my brother."

Strife in an action family is good drama, but it's only entertaining in a roleplaying game if everyone enjoys the banter. Don't paralyze the action of the story to argue about cleaning the kitchen and don't create conflicts between characters whose players aren't interested.

If people are interested, though, these inter-character conflicts can serve the GM in the same way as a melodramatic hook. Creating unresolved relationships gives the GM ways to make adventures important to individual characters and gets you precious screen time. You don't have to resolve these conflicts in any given episode, but don't avoid resolving them, either. It's very satisfying to get that sense of character development. Besides, your show isn't likely to stay on the air for years, so get it while the getting's good.

*Scooby Doo* again): no one's related to that dog, but he's a part of the family. Of course, in *Feng Shui* the Mystery Machine would be loaded with guns and Shaggy would be a drunken master!

Anyway, there are roles to be played other than just brother and sister. Here are a few of the reliable ideas to play with:

**The Head:** You are the voice of experience, the one everyone looks to when they need direction. Whatever your skill set is, this should reflect on the entire family. If you're an Old Master, then martial arts are a family tradition. If you're a Techie, then the family fortune comes from your many patents. Your job should be something that takes the family to exotic locations every week. Leadership is an important skill for you to have; when other members of the family squabble, it may fall to you to settle their disputes. Needless to say, you could just as easily be a matriarch as a patriarch.



### The Space Between Characters

When you set up an action family show, the most important step is to establish the relationships between the characters. Are they related? How? Are there rivalries or unresolved issues between any of the group members?

Where each character's role relative to the job may be key in another show, in an action family it's the characters' roles in relation to each other that's important. In this way, every character has the potential for a unique relationship with every other character. These relationships can be any combination of linear (grandmother, mother, daughter) or circular (a circle of friends) networks. That is, all the characters may be connected to one another or they may form a sort of chain where one PC is the sole link between the group and another PC. To be a real action family, though, those satellite characters can't be so distant or rebellious as to drift away. It's your job to keep a character in the group, not everyone else's.

Here's an example of an action family network:

*The Old Master is the father of two sons: the Karate Cop (the good son) and the Magic Cop (the bad son). The Magic Cop is married to a Sorcerer, who gets along fine with the Old Master (because it's respectful) but not the Karate Cop (who thinks she's a bad influence). The Karate Cop has a daughter (a Scrappy Kid) from a failed marriage; she and the Old Master are terrific friends, but she's not crazy about her dad right now. The Scrappy Kid's dog is an Animal Companion.*

*When a new player joins the group, she decides to play the Old Master's dead wife, a Ghost, and develops a new relationship with each character.*

**The Loony Uncle:** Age does not always bring wisdom. In your case, it's taken it away. If you're an Old Master, the emphasis is on "old;" if you're a Techie, your friends at the Institute always said you were mad. Perhaps you've always been a little crazy, or perhaps you were a great hero who's faded in his twilight years. The family needs your skills, but they know you're a few donuts short of a dozen and always worry about you. But they love you dearly and will stand by you whatever may come, even if they speak to you in patronizing tones and tend to shush you in important conversations.

**Something to Prove:** You love your parents dearly, and your burning ambition is to earn their respect. You may be measuring your skills against another sibling, against the head

of the family, or against some long-dead ancestor. In the case of sibling rivalry, it may be that you are both following the same path—Path of the Healthy Tiger, for example—and you want to prove that you have superior understanding of the discipline. Otherwise, you may want to prove the path you've chosen is the better one.

**The Bad Son:** You've always been a rebel.

Whatever the head of the family has done, you've done differently. You've rejoined the family because you believe in the cause, and you love most members of the group. But while you won't endanger the group, you're always trying to prove that father doesn't know best. You'll have to decide what caused this bad blood; perhaps you blame the patriarch for the death of another family member, or simply feel that you never got the attention that you needed as a child. The question now is if you can work through your differences as you fight alongside one another.

**The Voice of Reason:** In a family of martial artists or gun-toting vigilantes, you're the quiet one. You have always tried to help the others work through their fiery tempers, and you're always looking for a way to find the smartest or smoothest solution to every problem. You could be a Medic, a Journalist, or a Magic Cop who has focused on Heal and Fertility. The fight against evil is important to you, but it's just as important to hold your family together and make certain that the battles don't tear you apart.

**The Ancestor:** Long ago, a member of the family participated in a horrible atrocity, bringing great shame and a dark curse on the family line. You are that ancestor. You've been forced to wander the world as a Ghost, and until you are reborn your family will always suffer misfortune. Recently you had a vision and learned that your chance for redemption is finally at hand. You don't know what you must do, but you know that your living





descendants are involved, so you have emerged from the shadows to fight alongside them. It's up to you if you want to play up the tragedy of your past or if this is an opportunity for a lot of "in my day we didn't have any of this fancy (fill in the blank)" jokes.

**The Kid:** Whether you're the youngest child of the patriarch, a grandchild, or a ward that has been taken in by the family, you're the heart and soul of the group. It's your job to break the rules, to get in as much trouble as possible, and to be as cute as the Dickens in the process. For an entertaining twist, you could come from a future juncture (what do you mean, they don't have Gameboys in 1850?).

## Props

Action families may not be any better equipped than an ordinary family. The union of the group's individual abilities is what makes the team really powerful.

## Schticks

An action family show can make use of just about any schticks. Here are a couple that are especially well-suited to this sort of show, though.

### Animal Companion

Action Families often possess spunky pets: the trusty dog who pulls the Scrappy Kid from the burning building or the adorable monkey who's always stealing things and getting into trouble. This schtick can be taken by the whole group (action family dog) or by an individual character. The animal companion is controlled by the players, though the GM can take the reigns for story purposes. The owner(s) of the Animal Companion can communicate freely with it.

Anyone who's dealt with a trained police dog knows animals can learn Martial Arts just as people can. While limited in their ability to communi-

### Creating Animal Companions

Keep the stats brief. While it might seem like some animals have all sorts of nifty powers, an Animal Companion should have just one or two defining features that make it stand out. Statistically, it doesn't need to match the PCs. In fact, it should probably trail behind them a bit.

Animal companions provide some great attribute or secondary attribute AVs, but shouldn't need schticks or other special powers. Still, those listed here have unique schticks to serve as a guide.

### Action Family Dog

**Attributes:** Body 5 (Move 8), Chi 0, Mind 3 (Perception 9), Reflexes 6

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

**Weapons:** bite (7)

**Unique Schtick:** Dogs have an excellent sense of smell and use their Creature Powers skill to sniff out danger.

### Monkey Companion

**Attributes:** Body 3 (Move 5), Chi 0 (Fortune 2), Mind 3 (Perception 6), Reflexes 7

**Skills:** Deceit 7, Intrusion 10, Martial Arts 7

**Weapons:** bite (4), thrown junk (4) (use Martial Arts)

### Constrictor Snake Companion

**Attributes:** Body 5 (Move 3, Constitution 7), Chi 0, Mind 2 (Perception 6), Reflexes 5

**Skills:** Intimidation 7, Martial Arts 7

**Weapons:** bite (6), constriction (9)

**Unique Schtick:** Once a constrictor has made a successful Martial Arts attack, it damages its foe on subsequent rounds without any additional checks. Each round, the Action Result of the attack increases by 1. To escape, enemies must beat the Action Result with a Martial Arts check.

### Owl Companion

**Attributes:** Body 3 (Move 8), Chi 0, Mind 2 (Perception 8), Reflexes 8

**Skills:** Martial Arts 10

**Weapons:** beak (5), flying rake (4)

cate with strangers and to use technology, they can often serve as valuable spies: on the streets of a big city, people don't worry about a dog listen-



## "Because I said so."

There's no way Dr. Quest was a PC. He was clearly a GMC used to get the players into interesting scrapes and locations every week. Your group can do the same thing with a noble scientist, quixotic artist, or devoted military parent. This lets the GM enjoy the benefits of a group show—focus, direction, (obedience)—while the players enjoy a lot of character freedom within the show's structure.

Remember, though, that GMCs shouldn't save the day, show up the PCs, or win the adventure for anyone. That's why the players show up, remember: to play Race Bannon.

ing in on their conversation! An Animal Companion can supply comic relief, be an adorable scene partner a heartfelt soliloquy, or go get help.

Animal Companions come in lots of types; this book lists just a few. GMs should create the stats for Animal Companions based on the needs of the players and the show. Animal Companions are always named characters, but shouldn't be the stars of the show. (Down, Scooby.) The player or group with an Animal Companion must spend their own experience points to advance the Companion's skills or attributes.

This schtick costs 12 experience points. For heaven's sake, you don't need more than one Animal Companion.

## Scripting

What makes the an action family show stand out is the relationship within the family. After that, it's about action, like any other *Feng Shui* series. As the GM, you want to provide players with opportunities to explore their character relationships. Consider using old family enemies, evil twins, divorcées, and black sheep as villains. What will the family do when they discover that the triad they've been fighting is actually run by one of their own?

Look at *Alias*. On that show it seems like every spy in the world is the step-brother, uncle, cousin, ex-lover, dog-walker, or childhood chum of a Bristow. It's not just believably done, it's even



## Feng Shui Kidz!

Right now, there's a whole slew of new action movies featuring action kids. Since some of these characters are too young to, you know, get a job, they often form into groups built on friendship. From the famous, already-licensed vampire slayer to Robert Rodriguez's stellar live-action family in the *Spy Kids* trilogy, these pictures are about close-knit groups of heroic young people who deal with the evil of the world and the horrors of adolescence by leaning on each other. These extended families are great models for *Feng Shui* groups.

If your players won't get on board with this idea, try telling them "It's *Dawson's Creek* meets *The Killer*" and see how that goes over.

compelling! This creates a great sense of global continuity within the game universe and makes every character feel like they've got an important link to the world at large.

This touches on another concept useful in any show, but especially fun to use with action family shows: the allied guest-star. This works great if





## The Personal, Writ Large

The personal foibles and differences of the PCs can be focused on without actually making them the subject of an adventure. In fact, it's better if you don't. Create adventures that mirror or reference the group's relationships without tapping directly into them. Maybe the PCs get caught up in hostilities between two foreign generals who are orphaned brothers—just like the PCs are! Tie a childhood baseball game into the rivalry of two PCs and then devise an adventure where the characters must save a baseball stadium overrun by terrorists. Find something personal, then blow up a copy of it big enough to set an adventure in.

you've got an extra player at the table for a week or two, but even with GMCs this is a fun game to play. Invent some relative, friend, or former group member to come and stir up the group dynamic. Maybe it's a seldom-seen uncle (played by Tom Hanks) who comes in to teach the family a lesson about alcoholism. Maybe it's the great-grandmother—the only person in the world who can out-complain Grandpa Wu. Maybe it's Indy's dad.

Whatever guest-star you create, you've got a tool for exploring the party dynamic in new ways. Each player gets to improvise old in-jokes with grandpa or play the shock of finding out Aunt Janice isn't the perfect hero everyone thought. As with all GMCs, this guest star shouldn't steal the show. Make her an excuse for a lot of fun dialogue or an especially touching episode.

Bring the sense of family into the action by setting an action sequence at cousin Eileen's wedding or having uncle Joe's funeral spark off a family adventure. What if villains kidnap the family nanny for ransom? What if the Guiding Hand decides it wants the feng shui site the family estate is on? Make everything an emotional experience for the characters.

## Family Features

Here's a fun experiment: Make all of the characters with some trait in common. Maybe everyone wears glasses (and has a bad Perception score) or maybe everyone's really Tough. The trick is to make the characters alike in a way that'll still keep them different from everyone else in the world. You want them to have something in common without being identical.

# The Secret War

Action Families are well-suited to the standard secret war plotlines. Wandering Rebels are always looking for mysteries and problems to solve. As a wanderer, it's your job to put a stop to the vile schemes of evil cyborgs and eunuch sorcerers, and if clues are left behind, you can follow up and get pulled into the deeper plotline. A Cornerstone family can take things a step farther and become a major player in the war. With your resources and wealth, you can easily purchase land; once you learn of their existence, you can start seizing control of feng shui sites for your own ends. This will bring you into direct conflict with the powerful factions fighting in the war, but hey, they may already consider you to be a threat—prove them right.

## Groups

A family can fit into any number of roles. You could overlay a family drama on top of any of the other shows in this book. Here, then, are a few ideas that take special advantage of the action family show.

## The Wanderers

You're a rootless family. You have given up your home and heritage to wander the world; the other members of your family are the only constants in your life. It's up to you to decide why you chose to become a wanderer. You may be traveling by choice to aid as many people as you can—solving a mystery, defeating a villain, and then moving on in search of new problems to solve. Perhaps your birthright was stolen from you, and someday you hope to take vengeance on the villain who betrayed you. Or it may be that your fight for a

# The Wanderers

**Name:** Pick a name for your family, your band, or The Van.

**Juncture:** Any.

**Backstory:** Location. You all live together. Wherever you are together is home.

**Schticks:** The Wanderers get The Van, Collective Fortune, and Don't You Die On Me to begin with.

**Wealth Level:** Poor. The traveling do-gooder gig never pays very well. The people you help usually supply you with what you'll need to get by.

## Unique Schtick

**Very Special Van:** Your Van, because of its paint job and construction coupled with the good vibes you put out as a group, is a portable feng shui site. So long as The Van stays in your possession and is intact, you all enjoy the benefits of attunement automatically. This Van counts as two schticks in a home base for everything that counts such things.

noble cause has forced you to live on the move. You may be racing to stay one step ahead of Buro police or Lotus assassins, fighting to help the needy as you stay one step ahead of your pursuers. Stop moving and you become an easy target.

## Juncture

As Wanderers, your goal is to protect the innocent from evil and oppression. Innocence and evil can be found in every juncture; it's simply a question of the form they'll take.

In 69, you're battling the eunuchs and other crooked officials of the Imperial court. You may steal from the rich to benefit the poor or work to expose the evil deeds of those in power. In addition to these human foes, the shadows of 69 are filled with all manner of monsters and hungry ghosts; peasants are always praying that heroes will come and rid them of these night terrors. Think of it as *Crouching Pussycat, Scooby Dragon*.

In 1850, you protect the peasants from corrupt officials, arrogant Europeans, and the perils of opium—not to mention cults and secret societies! At times your goals may coincide with those of the Guiding Hand, but in general your independent approach causes the Hand to see you as a threat, and you clash with the monks more often than you work alongside them.

In the Contemporary juncture, you have a variety of options. You could focus on ridding the streets of crime, battling triads and gangs, or you could take more of a mystery approach; instead of

fighting a known evil, you are trying to uncover the dark forces people don't know about. This is the perfect approach if you want to move into a traditional Secret War series: as you travel about, following up on rumors of paranormal events, you find yourself dealing with Lotus demons, Ascended plots, and gates to the Netherworld itself. Put that box of X-files in The Van and go.

The dark future of 2056 is definitely in need of heroes—but it is also one of the most dangerous places for those who refuse to stay put. In 2056, you are a saner alternative to the Jammers. You fight to improve the lives of consumers, staying one step ahead of the death squads. Perhaps you operate a pirate media service (broadcasting from The Van), exposing the horrors of the Architects as you destroy Abomination labs and munitions factories. In time you may discover the Secret War and portals to the past. Will you continue to fight for change in your own time, or will you try to wipe the Buro from history?

## Casting

For the most part, relationships between family members are more important than character types. Almost any human type can fit into this show, provided it can fit into The Van. Obviously, it is difficult to have an Abomination, Supernatural Creature, or Transformed Animal as part of a human family, but that character could be adopted. You may be an Abomination or a flesh-eating ogre, but the other members of the





## Cornerstone Adventures

In a series about a Cornerstone family you want to focus on the fact that the characters are far more famous and influential than is typically the case in *Feng Shui*. They should hob-nob with princes, search for feng shui sites with famous explorers, and deal directly with Quan Lo, the Four Monarchs, and the other movers and shakers of the Secret War. It's best to ramp this up slowly; start with an ambassador asking a favor, move to an exotic expedition, and then deal with an attack by a world-class villain. However you handle it, by the time a few episodes have passed the players should definitely have a sense of the family's importance.

people of the city may admire you, but they also expect you to deal with their problems; if a horde of cyborg demons attacks the city, the first response will be "Why haven't Mr. Adventure's kids stopped this yet?"

One of the most important things about a Cornerstone show is that you and your family are power players. The world knows who you are. Ambassadors, presidents, and princes may come to you for help or advice. The invading forces of the Secret War may rightfully consider you to be a threat and may launch preemptive strikes against you. It can be dangerous to be good at what you do!

family treat you like a brother. You do whatever you can to repay that trust and affection.

If you're up to dealing with vehicles, the characters could even be identified by their Signature Ride. Is everyone a motorcyclist or is The Van a mighty semi-trailer?

## Cornerstones

This format is the opposite of the Wanderers. Rather than being disconnected from society, your family is a cornerstone of the city. You are wealthy, successful, and famous. People look up to you, and you hobnob with the social elite.

However, fame has its price. You may have a penthouse home or a ritzy manor, but that means that your enemies know where to find you. The

## Juncture

Cornerstones can be found in any juncture. The 2056 juncture requires a slight departure from the core idea of the format because in the dark future it is difficult to be both a respected and powerful family and altruistic at the same time. In such a show, you'll be balancing a public façade of loyalty to the Buro with secret and subversive activities. Your public connections provide you with the information you need to fight for justice. But you must tread lightly: if you fall under suspicion, your family could be destroyed.

In 69, the members of your family are trusted advisors of the Emperor. This puts you in direct conflict with the Eaters of the Lotus, who wish to exercise full control over the court. In addition to

# Cornerstones

**Name:** In addition to your family name (which may already be world-famous), pick a name for your world-spanning foundation or respected provincial holdings.

**Juncture:** Any. Royalty qualifies in any era, starting in 1850 the generally wealthy can become Cornerstones.

**Backstory:** Any. You may not agree with any part of the family, but you're in it. You've got access to the money, the position, the power and the responsibility. The spotlight's on you whether you want it or not.

**Schticks:** Cornerstone families enjoy these schticks: Headquarters, Library, and Mooks (x3). In this case, Mooks represents the total number of mooks you can have in the field with you at any one time. If these mooks die, they're automatically replaced. No refunds.

**Wealth Level:** Rich.

## Unique Schtick

**Rich and Famous:** Your Reputation preceeds you. The GMC automatically decides who has and hasn't heard of you wherever you go. As a general rule, though, your contacts checks ignore penalties for location; you just get on the sat-phone and ring up a driver if you need to. This schtick also grants you access to ridiculously expensive equipment like jets and guns. Your Mooks enjoy a benefit from this (see below) and you enjoy an endless supply of them as a result.

any other troubles you may have, you'll have to deal with constant attacks from eunuch sorcerers.

In 1850, your family may be a bastion of traditional values. One of the few wealthy yet honest families, you fight to purge the land of opium and corruption. You must decide if you are opposed to the Europeans, or if you believe that there can be an understanding between the two cultures. On the other hand, you may *be* the Europeans. Perhaps you've brought your money to China to introduce China to British culture. You may mean well, but can you maintain your influential station while standing next to gunship diplomats?

In the Contemporary juncture you're renowned international adventurers. You are familiar with leaders and dignitaries from across the globe, and have consulted with the heads of intelligence agencies and armies. It will be up to you to decide if you are loyal to a particular nation or if you consider yourselves to be citizens of the wider world. Of course, as influential citizens of the world, you'll quickly encounter the Lodge. Secret Ascended stooges could make overtures to you: Join and become masters of feng shui. Refuse and become enemies of the world's great power.

## Cornerstone Mooks

Sample Dialogue: "Whatever you say, sir."

Attributes: Body 7, Chi 2, Mind 6, Reflexes 7

Skills: Driving 11, Guns 11, Intimidation 10, Martial Arts 11

Weapons: punch (8), kick (9), Tec-9 (10/3/32+1), SPAS-12 (13/5/7)

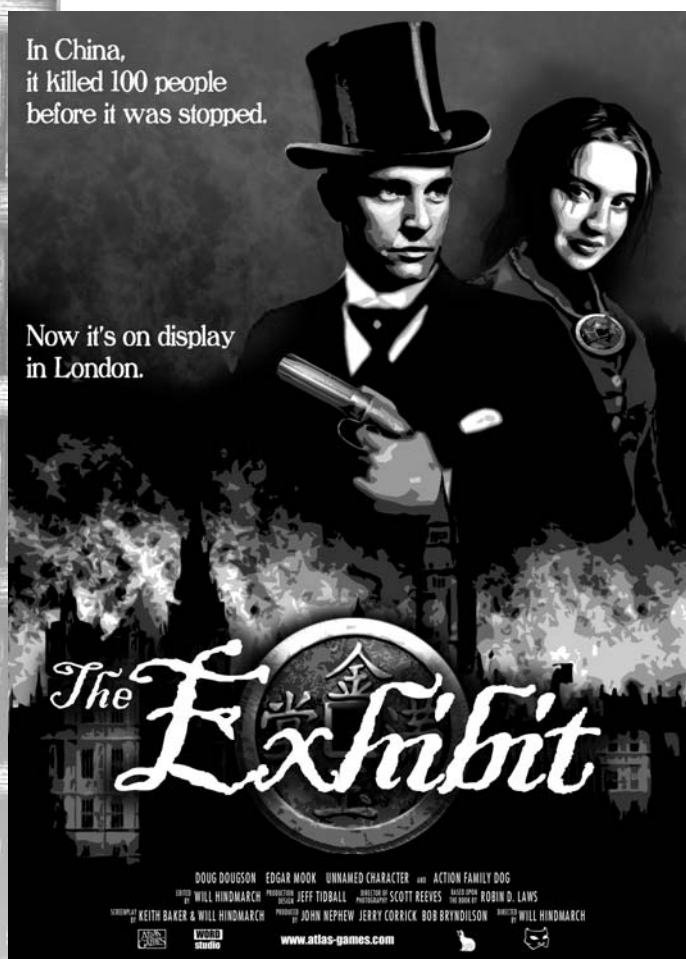
Notes: These guys are more advanced than ordinary mooks. It's an example of GM fiat. Cornerstones get nice mooks.

## Casting

Just like the Wandering Rebels, most any archetype can fit into the Cornerstone Show – it's all a matter of determining the relationships between the characters. Given the wealth of the family, you don't have to work. So if you're a cop, that's a choice you've made to give something back to society. The Killer can be a difficult character to justify, but you may have honed your skills for the good of society; perhaps you make a sport of hunting hitmen and assassinating assassins.

It is important for a Cornerstone family to have a recognized patriarch or matriarch – the central figure the public sees as the face of the family. This does not have to be the oldest member of the





family; it's all a matter of what you are best known for. If it's science, you're looking for a Medic or Techie. If it's diplomacy, you could have a Spy, Gambler, or Journalist. You could even be Ex-Special Forces, a retired mercenary renowned for your heroism and bravery. Any role can work; it's just vital that you think about the background.

## World-Famous In Your Own World

A Cornerstone family might not be famous to everyone in the world but to people in certain circles or subcultures. Perhaps the PCs are celebrities among circus-folk or world-famous crafters of magic like those ladies on *Charmed*. The creation (and participation in) these special societal circles can be a lot of fun. GMs might find it helpful for inspiring GMCs and keeping the theme of the series in focus. PCs can enjoy being regarded as world-class experts and exploring a subculture of magic, technology, time travel or whatever society circle it is that they're moving in. Cornerstone families could have stories, noteworthy ancestors, and melodramatic hooks going back centuries to the very roots of the subculture. That's sure to get the attention of some villainous or needy GMCs.

## Adventure Comes to You

In *Feng Shui*'s chapter on feng shui sites it says that turtling is bad. Does this mean that it's bad to have adventure come to you? Heck, no. The easy answer here is to point out that Cornerstone-style groups have holdings all over the world, so even if they're on the defensive they're traveling all over the globe to exotic locales.

What if a rich action family owns a bunch of feng shui sites but doesn't know it? Maybe the Ascended or some other power has been attuned to them all this time and keeping it (and the Secret War) carefully hidden. Now they get to rush all across the globe on a series of adventures to steal their own sites back and ferret out the conspirators in their own organization. Or they could just attune to them all in an elaborate jet-setting attunement montage. Now the characters have a bunch of experience points, a rush of new powers, and a huge stake in the Secret War. Normally characters slowly explore the Secret War, but in this game they could get dropped right in with ankles on their feet!

Another advantage to the home-based adventure is the sense of ownership players get over a part of the setting. When scenes are set in a place the PCs call home, have the players set the scene instead of you. Now, when a fight breaks out, they won't just be grabbing swords off the wall, they'll be grabbing "my Aunt Esther's sword, which was a gift from the mayor of Tokyo." That's a little more exciting.

Plus, like a melodramatic hook, a home base makes it very easy to get adventures started. GMCs can literally walk in the door, put on a PowerPoint presentation describing the elaborate mission they want the PCs to undertake, and off they go. It's a cheap tool, but a functional and much used. For a recent, shameless example, see *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life*. For a classic, shameless example, see *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

If players complain about this trick, ask them if they want to hunt for an adventure or if they want to *find* adventure.

# Sentai Shows

*"Get them, my minions!" Lord Cyclone shrieked. The cyberogres surged like a relentless wave of steel and mottled flesh.*

*In a blur of brilliant color, the five fighters of BIFROST faced them head on. "Heaven's Hurl'd Hammer!" Crimson cried, scattering three ogres with one mighty blow. Veridian and Goldenrod leapt onto Crimson's shoulders and vaulted forward, springboarding off their mighty captain and deep into the fray. At Crimson's side Indigo drew on the power of Freya's Golden Tears and a storm of glittering golden daggers tore deep into the exposed flesh of the monsters. But for every ogre that fell another rose to fill its place! "You'll never stop me, BIFROST Warriors!" Lord Cyclone shouted. "Hong Kong will fall before my endless army!"*

*The five fighters drew together. "You can't win, Cyclone!" Crimson said. "You cannot stand against the pure light of justice!" The five raised their weapons as one, and a brilliant nimbus of light encompassed them. "BIFROST'S BURNING BLADE!" Their voices rang out together, and their five lights merged in a blinding, deadly rainbow...*

## The Pitch

Earth is threatened by evil. A host of terrible forces descends on the city from throughout time. Cyborg monsters strike from the future, while vile sorcerers conjure demons from the depths of the Underworld. But Earth has a secret weapon in the battle against evil: a team of teenagers in an assortment of brightly colored spandex! With their bizarre weapons and amazing martial arts, these brave warriors will vanquish the forces of darkness and save the world!

Go, Battle Team Menagerie!

## Setting the Stage

The word *sentai* can be translated as "taskforce." Sentai shows have been a Japanese tradition since the mid-seventies: more than twenty-five live-action Japanese sentai series have aired since then. The footage from these shows was used to create the western world's *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* series. Many animated series also follow the sentai tradition: *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman* (aka *Battle of the Planets*) is one of the first series in the genre, while *Go Lion* (aka *Voltron*) is classic sentai.





## Wait, Seriously?

Yes, seriously. We know that Japan isn't in Hong Kong, but everyone who heard about this book said something about how he'd "form the head," so here's the sentai show chapter.

No, the strictest interpretations of those old sentai shows aren't a good match for the sometimes dark, always explosive world of the Secret War. Sentai shows are set in idyllic worlds beset by sometimes laughably evil forces where battles for the world take place downtown between towering monsters. *Feng Shui* is set in a more complex world more like our own where the fight for humanity happens beneath a veneer of normalcy.

There's plenty of fun ideas to be stolen from sentai shows for an ordinary *Feng Shui* game, though. Bryan Singer's recent *X-Men* movies have as much to do with sentai as they do with Hong Kong action (which is to say "more than a little bit"), but clearly fall into neither of those genres. In fact, if you think about it, the *X-Men* movies aren't bad inspiration for another way to handle the Secret War: as a popularly misunderstood culture war waged just off the world's main streets by an assortment of weird characters.

Goes to show you, you don't have to wear the costume to make use of the inspiration you get.

## Super-Deformed Innerwalkers

No, you shouldn't just bring a bunch of sentai-style characters into an existing *Feng Shui* game. Sentai isn't a good match for the tone of the Secret War, but it is a good match for an afternoon of action-packed fun, so it's included here for your amusement. You could even use the elements of the Secret War in your "What If?" sentai show, no problem. If it turns out you like it a lot, then play for as long as you all are entertained.

What sentai *does* do is exemplify the character group concept's outermost limits, so you'll have a wide array of tools to use when building your own groups and shows.

the villains, who will ultimately end up working with the heroes.)

While there is no crime in this classic sentai world, there is a variable amount of violence and sexuality that appears in the show. In *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman* the heroes use lethal weapons; the young female ninja cuts the throats of her enemies with a razor-bladed yo-yo. *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon* includes a pair of lesbian sailor scouts. These elements were toned down when the shows were redesigned for a western audience, but your show won't be broadcast, so do what's right for your audience (that's you and the players, by the way). Do your heroes kill their enemies, or do you simply knock them around and send them running back to the Netherworld?

Once you've settled on tone, you need to develop your group. The first step is to pick a theme, which will be reflected in your skills, abilities, and—most notably—your costumes. A few examples:

**BIFROST:** When these five teenagers found the mysterious runestones, they gained the powers of the ancient Norse gods. Now they battle the ancient monsters of mythology rising once again to threaten the Earth. Watch out for Veridian's Midgard Serpent Strike!

**Battle Team Menagerie:** When the brilliant Dr. Morphogene wove human DNA into the bodies of animals, she created four young warriors—human in form but imbued with the strength of the wild. Under her guidance, Battle Team Menagerie fights the horrific

The basic sentai formula is simple: an evil force is hell-bent on conquering Earth. Only one group can stop these villains: a band of young heroes, ranging in age from mid-teens to early twenties. These warriors are trained in martial arts, possess special weapons, and are often empowered with magical or sci-fi-style abilities. Teamwork is a critical part of these shows; ultimately the heroes have to pool their powers to defeat their enemies.

As you begin to develop your sentai show, the first thing you need to do is to establish the tone. The classic sentai shows take place in worlds with a clear divide between good and evil. Forget about all of the problems in the world. Drug dealers? Corrupt politicians? Wipe them off the slate. The world is for all intents and purposes a paradise. Nations work together and you'll never see a homeless person, a mugger, or a drug addict. All bad things come from the outside—from the alien force of evil that threatens civilization. Conflicts are simple and straightforward, and good and evil are always black and white. (There is a notable exception to this rule: the brooding warrior who has been brainwashed or otherwise controlled by

Abominations of the Emperor of the Future, struggling to preserve the purity of the planet!

**The Sense-Eyes:** These five children were raised in a monastery in the hidden kingdom of Agharta. In addition to mastering the martial arts, each was taught to hone one sense to a razor edge. Today they use their unerring sense of justice to battle the Unseen Order, a hidden cabal of sorcerers determined to break the barriers that separate the world of the living from the Underworld. In times of trouble the Sense-Eyes merge their powers together, forming the mighty and mysterious Sixth Sense!

The next step is to determine the background of your group. Sentai invariably have a strong support network, with access to vehicles, a base, a fancy computer, all the comforts of home. But is this provided by an international alliance, or is your group funded privately by a mysterious philanthropist or alien mentor? Does the world know about their saviors, or do you fight from the shadows, making sure that innocent people never know the horrors that threaten the Earth every day? You also need to determine where your base is located. Do you work out of a flying fortress? A floating island? A simple underground complex hidden deep below Hong Kong? This ties into the question of where you spend most of your time. Do all of your opponents always come to Hong Kong, or are you constantly racing across the world to foil the enemy's next evil plan?

Next, you should decide who you're fighting. Sentai groups traditionally focus on a specific foe, and as heroes you'll be measured by your enemy. Whoever the enemy is, he must have access to an endless horde of monsters and minions, and be driven by a thirst to conquer or destroy the Earth. Alien invaders, demon lords, and cyber-emperors from the future are all excellent choices. While the enemy forces should have a clear leader, the heroes will never face this sinister leader in battle. He will always scheme in the shadows, sending minion after minion to fight on his behalf.

Although it is good to focus the series on a single villain, it's possible to have the enemy

forces evolve over time. For example, a cyber-emperor from the future relies on cyborg troops. At some point he allies with the demon-lord of the Underworld who betrays him and takes over his empire. However, this doesn't help the heroes any—now they have to fight Abominations reflecting the merged power of the two forces.

## Props

From bizarre weapons to synergistic fu techniques, Sentai characters have access to a range of items and abilities that may or may not be available in other shows or series.

## Schticks

Here are a few uniquely sentai schticks for your series:

### Coordinated Attack

In a stunning display of ballet-like choreography, the whole group attacks together—flying through the air at once to land a five-footed kick on a huge enemy, for example. To execute this move, every participating character must have this sync schtick. The group as a whole then makes a single attack using the group's best AV in the selected attack skill. Each additional character participating cancels out two points of the enemy's Toughness for this single attack, so that a team of five characters would ignore 10 points of Toughness!

This sync schtick costs each participant 2 Chi to perform.

### Heroic Declaration

Just before uniting to defeat evil, the whole group pauses, strikes a dramatic ensemble image, and shouts something heroic. Then they kick ass. This is that schtick. If the whole group spends two shots doing nothing, all at once, one character can make a Leadership check against their enemy. If successful, half of this check's Outcome becomes an AV bonus to a Coordinated Attack made later





## Unique Weapons

Sentai groups sometimes get access to unique Signature Weapons from their backers or the alien powers that brought them together. These sorts of weapons aren't just individually special, they're unique in all the world. To get a unique weapon, take two schticks in Signature Weapon. Here are a few unique weapon statistics that you can steal and redress for your own weird weapons:

**Ray-Gun:** This futuristic, alien, or magical device emits a powerful Blast and holds infinite ammo. Maybe you wear it on your arm or chest. Damage is 10+, Concealment is damage -9.

**Area-Blaster:** This sort of thing is designed to hurt multiple people at once and has one schtick in Carnival of Carnage built in.

**Protective Weapon:** These items, usually melee weapons, protect you from some kind of attack type, whether it's Sorcery or Martial Arts or Guns. It raises your Dodge AV by 2 against that type of attack.

**Blessed Weapon:** When you use this weapon, you're luckier. You don't fumble unless you get a negative Action Result with this thing.

in that sequence. If the Coordinated Attack is made too late, you'll have to make another Heroic Declaration. This is a group schtick that costs the character making the Leadership check 3 Chi.

## Equipment

Sentai shows typically have a science fiction flare. Each hero usually has a unique weapon, ranging from traditional blades and bows to ray guns or bizarre weapons like sonic boomerangs or deadly roses. These are Signature Weapons tailor made for your character, so give yours a descriptive name like Lotus Bomb or Seven Snake Sword.

## Scripting

*Feng Shui* is about action and a sentai series should push this to the limit. The show's about furious, superhuman action showcasing the amaz-

ing skills of the characters and their ability to work as a team. Traditional sentai shows go through the following stages:

**1. The Plot Revealed.** Every adventure, the group's evil nemesis will have a new evil scheme that the heroes need to thwart. The group will find out about this threat right away. They may receive a briefing from their commander ("Lord Cyclone is back, and he's sent a Giant Robot Hopping Vampire to destroy Hong Kong!") or they may get attacked right away, with the villain's plan revealed during the attack ("It's no use, BIFROST Warriors! Even if you could defeat my ogres, you'd never get to Phildelphia in time to stop my Liberty Bomb!"). A third possibility is that the players will be given a mission but won't immediately know how the villain is involved ("One hour ago, the Artemis 11 space module crash-landed on Monster Isle. You need to rescue the astronauts and recover the wreckage. Be careful—we still don't know what caused the module to crash.")

**2. Travel Time.** The group often has to travel to confront the threat, whether it's a few miles within Hong Kong or across the world. In any case, this is the time in which the players make plans and prepare for the upcoming battle.

**3. The Initial Encounter.** Traditionally, the characters do not win their first encounter with the major threat. What matters is what they learn during the fight. Does the monster have a weakness? Where is the gate Lord Cyclone is using to bring in his cybertroopers? The characters will have to fight to survive, but sometimes survival is all that can be hoped for. In the end, the characters regroup and reconsider the situation.

**4. Find a Way to Exploit the Weakness.** So, the Space Pig is surrounded by an impenetrable force field... can one character slip through the field and sabotage the field generator from within? Can you destroy the temporal gate, so you only have to deal with Cyclone's existing army? Can the villain be outwitted?

**5. The Big Fight.** Now you revisit the foes from the initial encounter—but this time the odds are even. If you work together, you have a chance to smash the villain once and for all. Depending

on the set-up and the amount of time you have for the adventure, this could be one big fight or a series of small fights. Perhaps you have to overcome a few guards before you encounter Lord Cyclone, or perhaps you defeat the villain right away and he suddenly grows to ten times his normal size, requiring you to use all of your sync schticks to defeat him.

Both the initial encounter and the big fight should include a significant number of mooks, allowing the heroes to strut their stuff. However, the final confrontation in the big fight will usually involve a single powerful foe—someone tough enough to shrug off the individual attacks of the sentai warriors, forcing them to fight as one.

## The Secret War

The basic model of sentai is a great fit for a Secret War game; just change the wardrobes and names, and replace the giant monsters with giant set pieces. Tone down the enthusiasm a touch, muddy up the world that's being fought for, and you've got a perfectly good *Feng Shui* series.

Sentai groups are set apart from other groups by the nature of their union. Action families are based on friendship, police and criminal groups are founded on ideology, but sentai groups are bound together by their powers.

Do all the characters have fu powers or sorcery? Are they all gun prodigies with advanced technology? Do they bring an assortment of powerful abilities to bear against evil? Whatever it is, there's a good chance that a sentai group has some sync schticks.

Sentai-style secret warriors might work for some mysterious third party in the world against all factions in the time war, or they might work for some wealthy Dragon with an eye towards world change. The Nameless House (page 48) could fund and control a special operations group like this. Whoever it is, the group is bound to face

off against the deadliest enemies the Secret War has to offer.

Check out the Science Ninja type at the end of this chapter for a look at how a Science Ninja might appear in *Feng Shui*.

## Groups

For the purposes of a *Feng Shui* game, most sentai groups are statistically alike. The difference is in the details you supply and the adventures they lead. Here you'll find juncture and casting notes for any sentai group, and two group types of different power levels.

### Juncture

Use the Secret War as presented for sentai action in the regular *Feng Shui* universe. Classic-style sentai shows are set in an idealized version of the Contemporary juncture. Aside from the lack of





# Sentai Heroes

**Name:** Sentai groups have great, exciting names that may or may not make a lot of sense.

**The Pitch:** Youth, teamwork, and enthusiasm are Earth's secret weapon against evil. Let's go!

**Juncture:** Any. It costs the same for you to set a series in ancient China as the modern world, so strike out and explore other options.

**Backstory:** Any. Sentai characters may get thrown together by the intervention of some higher power or organization or they may join up due to personal motivations.

**Schticks:** Sentai groups are schticked-out. They get Headquarters, Secret Lair (x3), and Big Guns. Plus, each character gets a sync schtick for joining the group.

**Wealth Level:** Rich.

## Unique Schticks

**Signature Strike:** Before you may any Martial Arts or Sorcery attack you can proclaim a name for that move and gain a +1 AV bonus to your strike. You can keep doing this until one of these strikes does damage, then you can't do it again until the next fight.

**Magic Costume:** Sentai characters wear honest-to-goodness costumes. Rather than make you take the time out to put them on, this schtick lets you transform into your costume as a one-shot action. It's automatic; the costume appears in a flash of light or other visual effect.

crime, poverty, and war, it's the world outside your window. But don't be afraid to break with tradition.

In the 69 juncture, your heroes can fight the demon lords of the Underworld or a vile sorcerer who seeks to literally unleash Hell on Earth. Fighting monsters is the primary pastime of most sentai heroes, and let's face it, where are you going to find more monsters than 69 AD?

In 2056 you can be heroes of the people, pitting your martial arts and pure hearts against the mad Doctor Boatman and his army of abominations! Assuming that you're not going to defeat the entire Buro (at least in one evening), it would be good to have a clear, simple adventure structure that allows you to face threats. For example: You're the guardians of an island sanctuary or idyllic moonbase—some refuge against the tyranny of the Buro. Every episode Boatman and Bonengel try a new scheme to conquer your home. Can you overcome their abominable beasts?

The 1850 juncture is a fairly bleak period for a sentai show...at first glance. Your group could be the champions of China, battling the schemes of the nefarious Europeans who seek to destroy your way of life. Can you defeat the Rail Baron and his Legion of Steam?

## Casting

The Science Ninja type has been specifically designed with sentai in mind, but variety never hurts. Bear in mind, though, that sentai adventures are usually very straightforward and focused on action. A Journalist is not going to have a lot to do. Here are a few tips to bear in mind as you create your team:

The value of particular skills depends on the concept behind your team. Superhero-style sentai characters may be able to survive with Driving, Martial Arts, and Guns alone, since they seldom interact with the normal world. If you don't have a giant robot to work with, you may need to rely on Intrusion and Sabotage to foil the plans of the enemy.

Several archetypal roles appear time and again in sentai series, and each of them is easy to fill with the existing character types.

**The Loner:** Brooding and handsome, the loner is the hothead who's always making rash decisions, but falls into line when the chips are down. The Maverick Cop is an ideal choice, but Ex-Special Forces characters fit nicely.

**The Lady:** Females sometimes get treated as an archetype on sentai shows, but that's a waste





## Friends of the Dragon

of perfectly good possibilities. The lady is likely to rely on speed and acrobatic ability more than strength, so the Ninja and Martial Artist are good choices here.

**The Little Guy:** In live-action sentai, the whole group sometimes has the same body type; animated sentai have a more diverse range. One common character is the little guy, often the younger sibling of one of the other warriors. The Scrappy Kid is a perfect fit.

**The Lunk:** The lunk is the flip side of the little guy: large and powerful, but relatively slow-moving. The lunk is sometimes the emotional center of the team. The Big Bruiser is a logical

### A High-Powered Start

The closer your sentai game is to a regular Secret War series, the fewer powers a group needs to appear like a dedicated do-gooding team. For higher-powered games, give the players a bunch of experience points to spend right after character creation. Go ahead and limit the schticks or maximum AVs that can be purchased with these. Once everyone's done with that, have them describe a back-story montage (like a training montage) that shows everyone working together, how they met, and what life is ordinarily like for them. (It won't be all that ordinary, probably.) From this opening voice-over bit you can lead right into an introductory action sequence already in progress.

type for this role, plus he gets enough skill bonuses to be useful beyond his size.

### Super Sentai!

One other classic feature of those sentai shows is the gigantic super-character the heroes sometimes form by combining all of their might. (The shows where this happens are commonly called "super sentai.") Ready? Here's how to do that using the *Feng Shui* rules:

First, is it right to do this in your *Feng Shui* series? The game rules aren't really built to handle forty-foot multiplayer characters, so these rules are really just a shorthand method to make it easy and possible to try out. The real question is how your series is going to deal with humungous monsters battling the streets. Sort of takes the secret out of the war doesn't it? (The easy answer: Netherworld.) The fact is, you probably shouldn't try these rules in your ordinary series.

Of course, you might anyway, so how are you going to explain it? Is the mega-character some spiritual avatar created by a sorcerous rite and modeled on the PCs? Have they been literally transmogrified into an enormous gestalt of themselves? Maybe this is just one particular group's manifestation of the Big Guns schtick?

However it happens, it's recommended that the PCs be limited to forming a mega-character only once per adventure.

This quick system for character conglomeration makes use of a couple new, core concepts. First, the character with the highest rating in any attribute or skill is called the **Champion** for that trait. Second, mega-characters operate on a different scale than ordinary characters. Mega-characters treat ordinary characters as unnamed characters, even if they're not. Mega-characters treat other mega-characters as named characters, even if they're not. Ordinary characters hit by a mega-character get knocked out of the action on an Outcome of 1 or greater. (Littler enemies might still be hard to hit but they're not hard to hurt.)

Now, to determine the mega-character's game stats, find the group's best AVs in everything. That becomes the mega-character's AV. If two characters are tied, the mega-character gets the tie AV +1 for every character in the tie.

A mega-character gets different benefits, though, based on which character makes up which part of the larger body. A single character can only grant the mega-character one category of schticks (guns, fu, etc.), and only when using the part of the mega-character where the Champion with those schticks is located.

Champions supplying a Guns AV must form a gun-wielding arm if the mega-character is to use guns. Characters with Sorcery AVs can form arms or the head. Characters with Martial Arts AVs make good legs, but can really be anything. Creature Power-based characters make good torsos. Note that a mega-character doesn't need a character for each body part, but that each character needs a body part all to herself. Thus, the mega-characters for especially large groups may need tails, wings, etc.

In combat, the mega-character rolls initiative as a single character, but on each shot a different player gets to decide what to do with his part of the mega-character. Poorly coordinated actions could lead to disastrous results (using up all the Chi for the sequence, for example). Start at one end of the table at the top of the sequence and go around in order on each subsequent shot, or let the players decide what order they'll go in. The challenge of playing a mega-character is coordinating the use of available powers and imagining stunts that use the whole gestalt in the best way over the course of a sequence.

Then there's the ridiculous, large-scale stunts! Pick up a water tower and clobber somebody with it. Pick up a train and swing it like a flail. Throw a gasoline truck like a grenade. Climb up on a building for the mightiest elbow drop New Jersey ever saw. Because the general numerical scale for mega-characters is still on par with the numbers you're used to, determining the AV modifiers and damage ratings for stunts should be as easy as ever. This is mostly an exercise for your imagination.

All this stuff hurts remarkably few people, by the way. In sentai shows, collateral damage and casualties are two totally different things. It'll all be rebuilt next week, so go nuts.



# Street Sentai

**Name:** Street sentai characters may be labelled with some name invented by the mass media or they may have an official operation title.

**The Pitch:** Alone, your abilities would make you an outcast. Together, you may save the world.

**Juncture:** Any, but especially 1996 and 2056, with a backdrop of modern technology and timely societal commentary.

**Backstory:** Any. Anachronism is a good, and so is Location. Were you all caught together in some kind of bizarre chi surge that bestowed your powers on you?

**Schticks:** Street sentai get the Headquarters, Secret Lair (x2), and Big Guns schticks. Big Guns might represent some combined power the PCs have together or some larger surge they can call on like an orbital laser strike or a bolt of chi from Heaven.

**Wealth Level:** Rich. Though you may not be in charge of this money.

## Crossfire

Characters with this sync schtick use controlled and synchronized fire to press enemies into especially lethal kill zones. To set up a Crossfire, two or more characters with this schtick must position themselves on different (but not necessarily opposite) sides of the target. Everyone then makes an attack on the same shot against that target. Add the Outcomes of all attacks together and use that number (and only that number) as the damage dealt to the target.

This isn't a unique schtick. Anyone can take it as a gun schtick or sync schtick.

## Sentai Powers

Although guns, fu, and magic are enough to create some great sentai groups, there's a lot of mileage to be gotten out of the creature schticks. GMs are encouraged to let PCs purchase a creature schtick or two during character creation to cover some outrageous abilities. If your game's set in the world of the Secret War, you've got all the explanations you want for strange powers: they could actually be magic, or the characters might have demon-tainted blood, or they may martial arts prodigies taken from all over the world to study with the masters of a hidden fighting school in the Netherworld.

If your game is set in its own version of Earth, go ahead and call the abilities that come from schticks anything at all: alien powers bestowed by the Northern Lights, some strange birthright that comes up every 100 years, or it could all be in the suit. It's up to you.

While Supernatural Creatures, Cyborgs, Ghosts, Abominations, and Sorcerers don't fit the classic mold of a sentai group, such characters could easily play as redeemed enemy agents or fill out the lunk's spot. You could even have an entire group comprised of nonhuman characters. For example, Battle Team Menagerie is a group of Transformed Animals with no loyalty to the Ascended.

## Street Sentai

The Science Ninja is designed to be usable with either a high-powered, colorful sentai show or as part of a grittier, meaner team that deals with bullets and death. It's meant to serve as a central type that a whole group could use to represent a shared origin with later specialization in different areas.

A darker, more grounded sentai show deals with the rougher emotional issues of working in a world of hideous dangers where one person might not be enough to make a real difference. In short, it works like other group shows. Grim sentai shows could be about Science Ninjas genetically engineered by the Buro for all the wrong reasons but freed to fight their evil fathers; or about a secret cabal of Contemporary assassins who use magic and technology together to cut the heads off the world's most evil organizations. These bloodier, more serious shows riff on the sentai formula to create a new category you haven't seen on television.

# Science Ninja

*"You're right, Zhang. I may not be strong enough to take you... but we are!"*

Since you were young, the path that the world set out for you has been clear. You are meant to help people, protect the Earth, and fight the most terrible evils. The fact is, though, that you couldn't do it alone. You and your allies—your friends—fight together to repel tyranny and villainy throughout the world. Sometimes this just requires courage, cooperation, and confidence in your comrades. Sometimes it requires sacrifice, be it through bloodshed or some small part of your soul. You must do what others can't (or won't) to protect the innocent. Fortunately, you're skilled and dedicated. Plus, you've got access to a well of power many people wouldn't understand. Ordinary citizens fear or admire you for that power; there's no telling if any average person will commend or condemn you. They don't understand. If you felt like you could really find a normal existence—or were sure you wanted one—you might think of giving up the fight and living a simpler life. But you can't leave your friends to face danger alone, can you?

**Juncture:** any

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

*Add 4 points to a primary attribute. Add 4 points to a Chi-based secondary attribute. The max for all attributes is 10.*

**Skills:** Guns +5 (10) [Max 12]  
Martial Arts +5 (10) [Max 14]  
Info/[your choice] +5 (10)

*Add 8 Skill Bonuses to these or any skills. Swap the maximums for Guns and Martial Arts, if you like. Swap out Guns or Martial Arts for the skill needed for your schtick picks, if necessary.*

**Schticks:** Pick one sync schtick plus one line from the following list:

- 3 gun schticks
- 3 fu schticks
- 3 sorcery abilities
- 3 transformed animal schticks
- 3 Creature Powers

**Weapons:** 2 weapons from any juncture

**Quick Schtick Pick:**

*Sync Schtick:* Back to Back

*Gun Schticks:* Signature Weapon: 2 (Unique Weapon), Crossfire

*Weapons:* katana, experimental impulse blaster (ray-gun, 13/4/—)

**Wealth Level:** Rich





# Appendix:

## PC-Owned Mooks

While the unnamed characters PCs get from the Mooks schtick are subject to the commands and orchestrations of the PCs, they are created by the GM as GMCs. Only the GM knows enough about the power levels and atmosphere of the other characters in the game world to make PC-owned goons who can participate in the setting without being either needlessly complicated or irretrievably boring. The PCs' mooks are less an instrument of combat might—they are just unnamed characters, after all—and more an instrument of narrative finesse.

GMs, when creating GMCs for a group with Mooks, should strive to make stats the PCs won't be ashamed to run around with; but these shouldn't be so great that Mooks become the preferred means by which the PCs deal with their enemies. Give the GMCs a stand-out statistic and a fatal weakness or give them modest scores across the board. Base the PCs' thugs on those of their enemies, if appropriate. If the PC-owned mooks are denizens of a mundane world, then they'll naturally be weaker than supernatural or specially equipped minions.

PC-owned Mooks can have be given any equipment which the PCs could reasonably get access to in large numbers. This might be top-of-the-line or specialized equipment, if the GM's willing to give it out. Be generous, but don't go crazy. Base the attributes and skills of PC-owned GMCs on the scores of other mooks you've made for the game, but base their equipment on what the PCs carry. Likewise, let the PCs dress up their mooks however they want. It goes towards character development for the PCs.

The last line of defense against Mooks taking over the game is drama. GMCs from the Mooks schtick shouldn't be important characters in the story; give 'em billing in the block of stunt guys—not with the cast—if you're worried about them taking over.

### PC Mooks Vs. Named GMCs

Generally speaking, sending a squad of unnamed characters up against a named GMC—especially a villain—is going to end in the defeat of the unnamed characters. This is just the same as sending villainous goons up against the PCs; it's done for the enjoyment of the players, the dramatic escalation of combat difficulty, and to drain the PCs' resources (ammo, Magic, etc.) a bit before the final fight. PCs send their goons up against villains either to buy time or to get a good idea of the villain's capabilities in battle. If a bunch of unnamed characters get roasted in a torrent of unholy fire then the PCs have got some valuable intel. Don't assume that those mooks are dead, though, unless they'd really have to be (Outcome 8 or 10+) or it's importantly dramatically for them to be. Mooks die because someone (the GM, the PCs) decides they do; the dice don't tell you.

Groups with Mooks can (and maybe need to!) face tougher opponents—opponents who can defeat a squad of thugs before turning to face the PCs for a fight that's still dramatically satisfying and action-packed.

### PC Mooks Vs. GMC Mooks

One of the big reasons to allow PC-owned mooks into the game is to facilitate those huge clashes between gangs of loyal warriors while heroic leading women and men struggle in graceful combat high above. That is, PC-owned grunts take up the slack that PCs don't want to deal with. When two groups of unnamed characters clash, what happens depends either on who wins the concurrent or subsequent battle between named characters or on what the GM says happens.

As a GM, realize that the Mooks schtick gives players the choice to circumvent or bow out of a fight that they (as players) don't want to start or continue while, at the same time, letting the fight be fought (as characters) by their loyal minions. Maybe they just want to get to the big boss and don't want a plague of bad die rolls in a mook fight to ruin their good time. They're saying (and make sure they know this) that however you decide this fight should play out dramatically is fine with them. You, then, shouldn't use that against them; spite always brings a game session to a crashing halt. Whenever possible, use your narrative gifts to keep such battles meaningful to the characters and the adventure—say, by having it's outcome depend on the victory of the PCs over their nemesis.

If you want to use the dice to determine the back-and-forth of a mook battle in the background, roll a single attack from each side on each sequence: success takes out one or more mooks from the enemy pack (how many depends on the quantity of the mooks; you decide).





# Friends of the Dragon

## Numbers of Mooks

How many mooks do the PCs get with each schtick in Mooks? That's a call for the GM to make. In some games, five mooks is about right; in others, twenty. The PCs should be able to keep up with the bad guys by buying lots of schticks in Mooks, but not overwhelm them. Underdogs make better heroes, remember. Frankly, though, you don't even need to know exactly how many mooks are on the payroll for the PCs any more than you do for the villains. The question is, do the PCs have precious few (one schtick), a respectable but exhaustible lot (two schticks), or many skilled and loyal followers (three schticks).

## Numbers For Mooks

The easiest way to stat up PC-owned mooks is to give them numbers just a bit off from bad guy mooks; plus one here, minus on there, etc. If this doesn't do it for you (or the PCs), then base the AVs of the mooks' combat skills on those of the PCs. Low-quality mooks should be equal in skill to the average group AV -3, second-tier mooks should be AV -2, and top tier mooks should be AV -1. Remember that mooks for average PC groups

don't need skills beyond Guns and Martial Arts. Give them whatever you skills you want, though.

As a rule of thumb, each schtick in Mooks raises the attribute scores of the mooks by one. Their skill ratings then get arbitrarily determined as noted above. Mooks can learn Sorcery or have Creature Powers if the GM wants; just give them Chi scores if they need them.

Mooks may specialize in firearms or melee or any other kind of combat that seems appropriate. If one combat AV goes up, then another should be lowered, but there's no single, correct formula to this; it's another matter of GM fiat. Mooks with specialized AVs get specialized equipment, too, like snazzy guns and grenades.

Below are a few mooks for you to use; these are all low-powered samples. Just raise everything by 1 for each additional schtick the PCs have in Mooks or customize as you see fit.

As a GM, the single best thing you can do when creating PC-owned mooks is to interview the players. Ask them what they want their mooks to look like, sound like, and act like "on screen." Get a description of them as background characters and then cast them as you see fit with all of the schticks, guns, and fu *Feng Shui's* given you.

### Average Mook

**Sample Dialogue:** "Yes sir."

**Attributes:** Bod 6, Chi 0, Mnd 4, Ref 6

**Skills:** Guns 8, Martial Arts 8

**Weapons:** punch (7), kick (8), Glock 17 (10/1/17+1)

### Guns-Specialist Mook

**Sample Dialogue:** "Locked and loaded, sir."

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

**Skills:** Guns 10, Martial Arts 6

**Weapons:** Colt 1911A (10/2/7+1), Mini Uzi (10/3/25)

### Melee-Specialist Mook

**Sample Dialogue:** "None shall pass."

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

**Skills:** Martial Arts 10

**Weapons:** polearm (11), sword (10)

### Fu-Specialist Mook

**Sample Dialogue:** "Taste my knuckle strike!"

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

**Skills:** Martial Arts 8

**Schticks:** Pick any one fu power

### Supernatural Mook

**Sample Dialogue:** [*monstrous snarl*]

**Attributes:** Bod 7, Chi 0, Mnd 3, Ref 6

**Skills:** Creature Powers 8

**Schticks:** Damage Immunity (Bullets) or Blast (Acid)

### Sorcery-Specialist Mook

**Sample Dialogue:** "Magic of the dragon, empower me!"

**Attributes:** Bod 4, Chi 0 (Mag 2), Mnd 6, Ref 5

**Skills:** Sorcery 8

**Schticks:** Blast (Fire)



# Group Sheet

**Group Name:**

**Group Type:**

**The Pitch:**

**Backstory:**

**Juncture:**

**Wealth Level:**

**Character:  
Melodramatic Hook:**

**Sync Schticks:**

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**Character:  
Melodramatic Hook:**

**Sync Schticks:**

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**Group Schticks:**

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**Experience Points:**

**Character:  
Melodramatic Hook:**

**Sync Schticks:**

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**Character:  
Melodramatic Hook:**

**Sync Schticks:**

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