

Killings Streets™



S. H. Lee
A Sourcebook for Vampire: The Masquerade
and Kindred of the East



Killing Streets™

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S. H.

PRELUDE: REVENGE

Of course, if you ask me, Shanghai is a complete shit-hole. Always has been, always will be. The best thing that ever happened to the place was the Bishamon, and that's not saying much. The only thing better would be a nuke, or maybe some Genji, but ever since the locals got serious about kicking us *gaki* out, that's not likely.

I was only there in the first place because I had some killing to do. I'd heard that an old pal of mine was operating on the docks. I owed him for putting a bullet in my skull back in '69 and I figured I'd better take care of him before someone else beat me to it.

Trouble was, my old buddy — Kensuke Moritomo — was working for Ueda-san, a heavy-hitter with the Bishamon back home in Japan. Smart guy that I am, I decided to cut a deal with his bosses rather than take my chances with a Bishamon hit squad. Ever since the Chinese turned up the heat back in '98, my fellow Japanese had been running a pretty lean operation in Shanghai. I figured just walking in and offing one of their few remaining mortal bosses might not go down too well. I've seen punks get permanent suntans for a lot less than what I was planning.

I cut the deal with Sakamoto-san, Ueda-san's *major-domo*. It was simple: a life for a life. He wanted one of the local Triad bosses to die; he wanted it to look like a hit by the Shanghai Green Triad. The idea was to stir up trouble between the Chink Kuei-jin, to distract them from finishing off the Bishamon. After that, Kensuke was mine. It sounded like a good deal to me; I've never had anything against killing Chinese.

So there I was, casing a skuzzy old warehouse off Zhonghua Road in the Old Town. I'd spent the last couple of nights checking out the neighborhood; it was all seedy old compound houses and cheap new warehouses. Hadn't these people ever heard of zoning laws?

It was the kind of neighborhood where the merchants bought cheap storage space and relied on suspicious, interfering locals to keep an eye on things for them. There was also a pretty mean *wu*, the Blood Circle, in the area. Nice name. They didn't much like anyone who wasn't Chinese, so I'd kept a low profile.

It was beginning to rain. I'd forgotten my umbrella, so in less than a minute I was soaked and the streets were stinking. In Tokyo, when it rains it smells like hot asphalt. In Shanghai, when it rains it smells like a garbage dump. The rain washed all the uncollected garbage and food scraps and dog turds into the gutters. I decided to avoid stepping in puddles when a brown lump floated past my feet.

I caught the sound of an approaching car. I'd set up shop in a *siheyuan* across the road and two gates down from the warehouse. It was a typical old compound house, four apartments around a small courtyard. The little old lady who lived at the front was one of the party's little old spies. Only the geniuses that run this country would recruit neighborhood busybodies and turn them into state informers. I killed her and the rest of the families in the *siheyuan*, and sat their still-warm bodies up around tables and couches in case the Triad guards had IR gear with them. Can't be too careful these days.

I grabbed a filthy old robe from one of the filthy old corpses and shuffled out to the gate. I'd noticed a mad old geezer standing there, staring out into the street at night, so I figured I'd do the same. Besides, it gave me a chance to get a look at my target. Two cars were pulling up at the warehouse. One was an old-looking black Mercedes; the other was a new-looking red Nissan. Probably hijacked from a Hong Kong ferry. I knew a couple of guys who'd messed with some HK pirates. Turned out they were all still serving with the People's

Liberation Navy and were making the heists because the government — which often bought container-loads of stolen cars from the PLN — couldn't afford to pay their wages.

Two punks got out of the Nissan. One headed for the door of the warehouse; the other pulled the hood of his raincoat up over his head and crossed the road. By the time he'd made it down to my gate, I was pressed back against the wall, out of sight.

I heard the Mercedes' doors open, footsteps, and the door of the warehouse closing. I flipped up and over the wall, landing behind the punk with the raincoat. I cut his throat from ear to ear as I raised my pistol. Three silenced shots and the guard by the door went down. I ditched the pistol and let the body drop, and raced for the door.

Yes, purred my Demon, *kill them all*. I pushed it back down. Now was definitely not the time.

I'll give the bodyguards credit. I came through the door pretty fast, but they opened fire before the splinters finished hitting the ground. I caught something moving fast behind them — my target.

I spun in place, smashed the fingers of the closest guard with my foot and grabbed his piece — a sawed-off shotgun. As he backed up and reached for a pistol, I hit the deck. He went down as shots from his buddies missed me and opened him up like a melon. Tufts of the plants growing in pots on the benches behind him flew straight up into the air; it started raining diced flowers and greenery. I rolled across the floor and grabbed another gunman's wrist, yanked him towards me and jammed the shotgun barrel into his armpit. He screamed like a woman as the blast took off his arm and tore into the side of his head.

The last two guards were backing up and laying down lots of lead, so I charged. A bunch of slugs caught me square in the chest, but all they did was piss me off. The guards had that deer-in-the-headlights look now; I jumped, kicking one square in the forehead and fracturing his skull. Dropping, I caught his partner around the neck and dragged him down with me. I've always liked American wrestling; his neck broke with a nice *crunch* when we hit the concrete floor.

* * *

I should've known I was being set up. It seemed simple enough at the time, and looking back, that's what should've made me nervous. I'd been running around Tokyo for a couple of decades, causing trouble and looking for ways to impress the ancestors. Nobody wants to be a shit-kicker forever.

Then we got word on the street that an important message for the Bishamon was coming from Shanghai through Tokyo. Trouble was, it was being carried by a heimin, so nobody could touch the messenger.

That's what they tell you in the courts. What nobody tells you is that when it comes down to it,

there's no such thing as an untouchable. My *uji* — the Genji — were always on the lookout for ways to mess with the Bishamon. I decided to take a risk and have a private conversation with the heimin. He wasn't hard to find; like a lot of other guys who think they're untouchable, he didn't take many precautions. His mistake.

I caught up with him in a crowded bar in Shinjuku. I recognized him immediately; it was Shinji Ogawa. Shinji was a smart-ass punk from Nagasaki. Maybe that's what fucked him up so much. It was sure as hell the thing that killed him the first time.

The second time? That was me. It was just too damned easy. I put a small bomb in his car (which he never bothered to check), and when he hit the road for Narita airport, it went off. I was first on the scene. The poor dumb sap actually thought I was gonna help him. Fat chance. I needed to extract some information. He didn't want to give it up, so I had to persuade him. Things didn't go too well for him after that.

The message he was carrying didn't seem like it would be much use to me at first. It was all in code — you know, "the rising sun travels north, the blue butterfly alights on the red pole," that sort of crap — but when I asked him who gave him the message, I hit pay dirt. Kensuke Moritomo, my old buddy. I hadn't discovered anything that'd help my *uji*, but revenge would be just as good.

Kensuke, growled the voice of my bad conscience, *how nice it'll be to see you again....*

* * *

"Impressive. But your opponents had little skill. Who are you, little devil, and what do you want?"

My target — Xiao Wei — was standing on the edge of a skylight in the roof, looking down at me. I looked around at the wrecked nursery. It was quiet, except for the rain hitting the concrete floor and drumming on the plants. There was a wet smack as a body slid from a trestle table and hit the ground. An earthy-smelling slurry of blood, rainwater and potting mix covered the floor.

"Xiao Wei, I assume?" After all this effort, I didn't want to kill the wrong person.

"You have come for me." It was a statement, not a question. Good. I hate dealing with amateurs.

"Nothing personal. But I've got to kill you before I can kill someone else." It was true; I didn't really want to kill her. Then again, I didn't not want to kill her. And I definitely wanted to kill Kensuke.

She was a typical turn-of-the-century Chinese. Handsome rather than pretty, of medium height and build, wearing a gray peasant's smock and skirt. She was drenched, of course. I decided to take a closer look. She took a step back from the hole when I jumped up.

"And whose death is so important to you that it requires mine as well?"

"An old friend."

"Clearly a friend no longer. Do you know what you're doing? What your vengeance will cause? Or are you just another running monkey, satisfying your lusts and scratching your balls when they itch but never wondering why?"

Don't talk! Kill her! She's dangerous! Clever demon. I never would have figured that out by myself.

"Madam, let me tell you something. I hate this place. I hate the Chinese and you Kuei-jin only make it worse. If you all went back to the hells you crawled out of tomorrow, we'd all be better for it. So I don't care what you think of me, or mine, or your politics or your history. I care about my revenge."

"I see. *Gaki* fool. Think who benefits the most from my death. Whose hands are clean, and whose purpose does it serve?"

She almost nailed me. I barely saw the bloodlash coming — she must have cut open one of her wrists while we were talking. I caught a movement out of the corner of my eye and hit the deck, but it still gouged the side of my face and took off some hair and part of my left ear.

Against a Kuei-jin, I didn't have time to think. I called forth my demon body and screamed as my flesh twisted and re-shaped. Not a pretty sight, but good for fighting. Lots of spines and claws and big teeth and bony plates. The pain felt pretty good.

More! More! my demon raged. It wanted complete control. I ignored it.

Xiao Wei took a step back. I jumped at her but she was too quick. I fell through the roof and landed on a mound of potting mix. I jumped up but she was on me again with the bloodlash, cutting long and deep into my left arm.

"Idiot! Did you think you could take me? Your stupidity will only bring you oblivion."

It was about then I realized I'd been had. Xiao Wei was going to kill me and an attack by a *gaki* would give the Kuei-jin all the excuse they needed to push us out of Shanghai entirely. I was scared. I was mad at myself for being set up. I was mad at Sakamoto for setting me up. I was madder than hell.

Yesss...

Once I realized that, letting my demon take complete control was easy. And just like when I let it shape my body, I screamed because the pain felt so good. I guess Xiao Wei put up a hell of a fight; by the time I regained control, the warehouse was trashed and one of her arms was hanging out of my mouth. I decided I'd better go before someone made a fuss.

That's when Hashimoto and his boys walked in.

* * *

The negotiations had gone pretty well. Sakamoto was an oily old bastard who'd spent his mortal life

buggering his rich daddy's servants and shorting their pay. Eventually, one of them got fed up and stabbed him to death with a pair of shears.

Now he spent his time making sure problems didn't reach Ueda-san's ears. I wanted to know if there was some favor I could do for his boss that would get him to let me kill Kensuke. As it turned out, there was — and it was even in Shanghai. Convenient, eh?

We met one night in a private room at an expensive, traditional restaurant. I had to get dressed up in traditional gear for it. What a bore. There are reasons we wear jeans and tee-shirts; not needing to take hours to get "properly dressed" is one of them.

"Ogawa-san, so pleasant to see you. It is not often that I have the pleasure of conversation with a vigorous young monkey like yourself."

He was goading me, just to see if I'd blow my stack or put up with it. I was cool.

"Sakamoto-san, you honor me with your generous invitation. I rarely have the opportunity to meet an ancestor as venerable as your esteemed self." I can kiss ass with the best of them.

We kept up the witty banter for about an hour. Finally, we got down to business.

"You say you wish to take the life of an associate, but do not wish to bring down our wrath upon your head."

"You are most wise, honored ancestor. This underling is replaceable to your organization, but irreplaceable for the peace of my tortured soul. Yet I respect and fear your power; if you would but name a suitable price in exchange, I would be glad to pay it."

Okay, so it wasn't poetry. But I was making an effort and I think Sakamoto appreciated it.

"Very well. Were we to consider your offer, we would think about a suitable price for this great gift. We honor all our servants, no matter how insignificant. But we also honor the many paths of enlightenment and the tasks and sacrifices necessary to follow them."

The *gaki* like to write lots of stuff about the meaning of existence and the search for enlightenment and the constant struggle between the Demon and the higher soul. Some of us even write poems about it. But it's mostly crap. The reason we get up to so much mischief is boredom. We invent all the other stuff to rationalize it, but living forever would be pretty dull if it weren't for the other *gaki*. And since we're a paranoid bunch — I don't think any of us cared about our mortal lives nearly as much as we do about our immortal ones — we're not really into holding hands and being friends. So it's a screw-unto-others world we've made. All the other stuff is just an excuse. Still, Sakamoto was a stickler for etiquette and he clearly wanted his ass kissed some more.

Give him what he wants, then we can have what we want.

"Your eminence is wise and gracious."

"Were we to consider your offer further, we would review our situation in far off lands. We would consider the status of our enemies..."

"Surely they must be dogs, for no honorable foe could compete with you." I was starting to feel physically ill.

"Imagine the inconvenience to such a foe were his most senior red pole to be killed by a rival. A fellow Chinese. They are a devious, inferior race. Do you speak Mandarin?"

"Enough to get by."

"But of course, these things are mere speculation. Now, let us talk of more civilized matters."

And so the deal was done. The next night I found an unmarked package in one of my regular message drops. It seemed that, with the *gaki* on the outs, a Kuei-jin named Xia Jin-sun was trying to muscle in on the Shanghai Green Triad's turf; he had one of his best red poles, a woman by the name of Xiao Wei, in Shanghai to set things up. The package also had the address of a warehouse, instructions on how to sneak in to the city, a gun that would be traced back to the Shanghai Green and the name of Ueda's local boss, who'd have Kensuke ready for our little reunion.

All too easy.

All too easy.

* * *

Hashimoto was the local *oyabun*, Ueda's number one hitter in Shanghai. When I saw his face, I knew for sure that I'd been had. But I figured I might as well try to bluff my way out.

"Hey Hashimoto, how's things? Did your boss mention I was coming to town? I'm just about done here so I was wondering, where's Kensuke?"

"You... fool..." he spluttered. I noticed he had men covering all the doors, and the holes in the roof and walls.

"Come on, Hashimoto, quit foolin' around. I'll just take Kensuke and get going. Nice coat, by the way."

"Seize him!"

Run! They'll kill us! I figured I'd given my demon enough exercise for the day, so I shoved it way, way down.

Hashimoto's men moved in. I was hurt and exhausted from the fight, so I figured I had one chance of getting out of this alive.

"Wait! I was sent by your boss with orders to kill this bitch and make it look like another Chink did it. But he didn't tell you, did he? Have you got the fake evidence to plant here? What do you think the locals are gonna do? Start killing each other, or figure out



what happened and finish you guys off? We've all been screwed!"

The muscle grabbed me, but I could tell Hashimoto was listening.

Tell him more!

"Sakamoto set the whole thing up. It was a trade. I've got an old grudge against Kensuke; the deal was, if I killed Xiao Wei, I could have him."

Hashimoto's men were starting to look nervous. Maybe they were worried about disturbing the neighbors.

"Why should I believe you? You're pleading for your life. You might say anything." Good point.

"Why would I lie? Either way, Sakamoto's gonna deny any involvement. But do you think I could have gotten into town under all your noses without his help? He told me exactly how to get in unseen."

"Bring him."

* * *

My big mistake, of course, was trusting Sakamoto. The fact that he'd auction off one of his men wasn't the giveaway; Kensuke was mortal and replaceable. I kept on thinking about what Xiao Wei said before I killed her. Why would Sakamoto want to give the Chinese a reason to make one last push and completely wipe out the *gaki* presence in Shanghai? Would Hashimoto give me a chance to talk or would he send me back to Japan before I could convince him not to? I reviewed my situation.

Fact: Kensuke was still alive, and I was unlikely to get the chance to kill him anytime soon. That really pissed me off.

Fact: Xiao Wei was dead. By all accounts, this would be a major setback to Xia Jin-sun. Still, if we'd all gotten away clean (and we probably had; Hashimoto and his boys were pros), there'd be nobody to blame. If we'd been spotted, lots of people were going to die, most likely starting with me.

Fact: Sakamoto may or may not deny ever having spoken to me, but was unlikely to admit that he'd set the whole thing up. He was probably pissing himself laughing right now.

Fact: I was in deep shit.

Question: How to get out of deep shit?

Answer: Get someone to help me dig.

* * *

"Hey, Hashimoto, what happens if we were made getting away from the scene of the crime?" We were in a freezer room at an old meatpacking plant. Hashimoto had decided to work me over by himself. But, lucky for me, he was smart, and wanted to talk to me first. I decided, since my life was in the balance, to oblige him.

"You die."

"And after that, asshole?" He wound up, and punched me in the face. It hurt.

"After that? We fight the Chinese."

"Come on Hashimoto, Ueda-san doesn't want that. Haven't you been under orders to keep a low profile? Sakamoto told me you'd bring fake evidence to make it look like a Shanghai Green hit but he didn't say shit to you, did he?"

"Your point?"

"My point is that he wanted me — or maybe you — to be fingered for the hit. He didn't tip you off about me. That's not helping you guys keep a low profile; that's provoking another war." Hashimoto was deep in thought. It looked painful.

"Why would he want a war? We've been having talks."

"Peace talks? Who wants peace?"

"Ueda-san."

"What about Sakamoto? Any reason for him to want to fuck things up?"

"No." Bingo. Too quick. He was lying.

Keep going! Tell him more! Sometimes my demon disappoints me; what did it think I was going to do? Suddenly clam up?

"Maybe he thinks a random killing and one last bloodletting in Shanghai would convince the ancestors that Ueda-san's plan had failed and he should be replaced."

"Such a thing would never happen." I could tell Hashimoto was thinking, working the angles, trying to figure a way to save his worthless hide and take care of Sakamoto. He looked at me. I looked at him. He smiled. Suddenly, he started yelling. "Your insolence infuriates me! You insult my elders! By the August Personage, I will burn your body to ash!" He gestured with his head to the can of kerosene he'd brought along for persuasion. "There will be nothing left of you and I will report your death to Sakamoto-san!"

He cut me loose from the chair and doused it with kerosene, then tossed a match onto it. Just for dramatic effect, I screamed. He leaned forward and whispered in my ear.

"If I ever see you again, I'll kill you."

If we ever see you again, you'll be dead before you know we're there.... For once, I could only agree.

We waited until the chair had burnt to ash. Hashimoto worked himself up and stormed out, swearing at his men and shouting about "Genji imbeciles" and "honorless dogs."

I hung around for another hour or so, just to be safe, then I left.

* * *

So now I'm back in Tokyo where I belong. Killing Kensuke wasn't nearly as much fun as I'd hoped. I guess by the time I found him, I knew I had bigger fish to fry. Sakamoto got careless. He decided I was stupid, and that I wouldn't figure out his game.

He was only half right.



待ちの果てに
実の上に

嵐

S. H. K.

INTRODUCTION: ON THE KILLING STREETS

"Kalah jadi abu menang jadi arang"
(The vanquished will be reduced to ashes
and the victor to charcoal.)
—Javanese proverb

Crime is a fundamental part of every society. In Asia, with its tyrants and poverty, criminal activity can reach depths rarely seen in the complacent and wealthy West. Crime itself is merely a symptom, a sign of social decay. Like a cancer, it eats away at the underpinnings of a society and must often be brutally excised. The Kuei-jin are an integral part of Asia's darker paths, their predatory and intrigue-laden existence drawing them to criminal activity like moths to a flame. And the streets, like flames, can be very dangerous, even to one of the Ten Thousand Demons.

As enforcer or crime lord, the streets of Asia are beyond the control of Kuei-jin. The back alleys and dives are like the swirling wind and waves of the typhoon. The safest course is to seek simple survival; riding the waves as best you can, enduring whatever the winds throw in your path. But a courageous soul bends the fury of the storm to her purpose, using it to build power and influence within the mundane world.

Such a path is dangerous; a single misstep and the desperate masses — or the forces that lurk among them — can tear an arrogant Kuei-jin to shreds. Final Death is only a mistake away and vicious, greedy and desperate mortals are as dangerous as any rival *wu* or *shen*.

Yet Kuei-jin must venture onto the streets despite the dangers. They are predators, and predators need to hunt. The richest hunting grounds, despite their dangers, are the streets of the thriving metropolises of Asia, tens of millions of people living in decaying societies driven by lust, selfishness and violence. All in all, a perfect environment for the Hungry Dead. The chi resources created by these urban communities can sustain numerous courts and the corruption of the Sixth Age has not yet touched more than a small portion of this bounty, making it more valuable still. So while not every **Kindred of the East** chronicle is a **Killing Streets** story, focusing

on the bitter hopelessness that is Asia's urban legacy, the streets are the natural environment for all Kuei-jin. Whether you plan to use **Killing Streets** as background color or as the center of your game, this book provides the knowledge you require and a cast of demons with which to fill your streets.

WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

Killing Streets is first and foremost a guide to the urban underbelly of Asia and how the Kuei-jin interact and exist within it. Asia is a big place and the genre of hard-boiled crime fiction is just as large. **Killing Streets** tries to distill both down to their barest essences, providing an overview of the social conditions, criminal habits, crimes and Kuei-jin attitudes necessary for a Storyteller to bring the alleys and gambling houses of an Asian city to life. In that vein, we should note that many of the ideas and crimes presented in this book are far from pleasant; **Killing Streets** steers clear of graphic descriptions of the sex trade, for instance, but readers should be aware that any book dealing with war crimes and slavers is not going to be suitable children's bedtime reading.

This book also is not a straight-up story or a regional sourcebook. No new cities are described or specific chronicles outlined. The numerous characters presented are illustrative only, providing extra material for an already existing chronicle. Nor are particular geographical locations described in full detail, though many are covered. **Killing Streets** is a genre sourcebook and as such presents an overview: the whole picture of the lives of the poor, the addicts, the cops, the gangs and the horrors in the shadows. Details such as which areas, in which cities, are centers for what crime, are the subject of books like **World of Darkness: Hong Kong** and **World of Darkness: Tokyo**. **Killing Streets** provides you with the tools to construct your own underworlds, rather than presenting an underworld for you (a nigh-impossible task, considering the breadth of the Asian experience and distinct lack of publicly available information). This book boosts your own creativity, and Storytellers are encouraged to do their own in-depth research on living hard and dying young in Asia.

WHERE ARE THESE KILLING STREETS?

Okay, so you've heard us say "killing streets" half a dozen times already and might be wondering exactly what we mean by it. Is it the slums? The tourist traps? The opium dens? The brothels? The gangs? The poor? The rich? The corrupt? Ultimately, the killing streets are all these things and none of them. The killing streets are an intellectual conceit; a concept of the Asian urban landscape robbed of almost all hope and preyed upon by monsters. Therefore, the killing streets can be wherever you feel the need to make them,

depending on how far you want the horror to reach and how much you want to contrast the bitterness of life in the gutter with the glitter of life in the fast lane.

KEEPING IT REAL

It's worth making a very important point up front: although **Killing Streets** is about vampires (and a few other beasties), it's critical to keep a large human component to stories in this genre. Gritty, urban stories are all about the human scale, about people with small lives paying in blood and pain for their small victories. It's very difficult to respect that fact if everyone is a centuries-old monster divorced from all human concerns. So you'll notice lots of human characters popping up in latter chapters (involved in vampiric doings, but human nonetheless), and you should follow suit in your own stories.

In terms of the setting, plenty of reasons exist for why the streets are predominantly human, even if they make for fine vampiric hunting grounds. One explanation is that the ancestors rarely want to sully themselves with direct contact with the unclean humans of the urban sprawl. Without the power of the elders, the Kuei-jin aren't able to exclude other *shen* from their hunting grounds or displace the mortals who also feed off the streets. It is ironic that in their remoteness from the world around them the court ancestors have limited their worldly influence in much the same way that the despised Kin-jin limit themselves with their Masquerade. The role of ordinary people is especially potent in Asia, where the enormous mass of population combined with the sheer dynamism of modernization means that there are far too many things going on for any of the *shen* to be able to influence more than a tiny fraction of them. This of course makes the streets a very hard place for those serving the courts — the mandarins and ancestors tend to be unforgiving when other *shen* derail their plans.

Religion also plays a role. Many of the traditional Asian faiths are open to dealings with spiritual beings and thus make for useful Kuei-jin tools. With Islam and Christianity however, such accommodations are much harder. Growing Islamic fundamentalism only makes things worse, with more and more fanatical followers finding their way onto the streets and causing problems for Kuei-jin. As such, fanatics tend to take issue with much of the criminal activity that the Kuei-jin take a hand in, and they work to improve the conditions in the poorer areas that the Ten Thousand Demons use to cover their tracks. Missionaries are becoming a major problem for the Golden Courts, and attempts to lock them out have not met with a great deal of success. Kuei-jin ancestors use Kin-jin incursions among the missionaries as a political bogeyman, a way to belittle their rivals. In fact, few actual Cainites enter Asia this way — but

their money does. Enterprising and wealthy Cainites have funneled money to the missionary movement to cause the Cathayans trouble.

Finally, sometimes the Kuei-jin just don't find it useful to involve themselves directly in some parts of street life. So, while the sex trade is rife with unliving activity, Kuei-jin presence is not as pervasive in the drug trade. The production areas in Burma and Laos are under the authority of the competing *penangallan* and *hengeyokai* of Southeast Asia, while the poppy fields of Afghanistan are controlled by Islamic fanatics who act aggressively at any sign of supernatural presence. Few Cathayans are willing to place themselves in a position where their future wealth or access to feeding grounds is in someone else's hands.

OUTLINE

This book consists of the Prelude, this Introduction, and three Chapters.

The **Prelude** sets the mood for the book and gives you an idea of the kind of stories it'll help you to run. The story of a lone *gaki*'s efforts to avenge his murder and stay out of trouble with the courts, it also shows how easily the unwary may become caught up in the larger plots of their elders.

This **Introduction** outlines the scope, purpose and possible uses of the book and includes some lists of handy references, for real-world information and genre-appropriate films, TV, comics and books.

Chapter One: To Live and Die gives the low-down on crime in the Middle Kingdom. Rather than attempting to cover each region separately, the chapter discusses the broad currents of change (and crime) sweeping the region, with notes on the niches within the system occupied by the Kuei-jin.

Chapter Two: Streets of Blood provides samples of the denizens of the Middle Kingdom's mean streets. Rather than covering every nation or court in the Middle Kingdom, the characters and organizations presented are a representative sample, many of which can be transplanted to other locales with minimal effort.

Chapter Three: Storytelling is structured around the life cycle of a chronicle and includes a step-by-step example of one being built. Not all the choices are ones you might make, nor will they all be relevant to your own game, but they illustrate the kinds of decisions to be made when setting up a chronicle and the results of those decisions.

The **Appendix** is devoted to game mechanics. From earthly manifestations of Hell to using character Backgrounds, it contains systems information to make your games run more smoothly.

SOURCES

It's important to understand that extensive resources are available for the crime genre in Asia besides **Killing Streets**, which can only scratch the surface of the world of hard-boiled urban crime. There are many books, comics, TV shows and movies (both animated and live-action) for a Storyteller to choose from. The list included here is only a sample. The listed titles cover everything from prison tragedies to violent action thrillers and Asian fantasy-ghost stories. When reading or viewing source material, try to keep your mind open for ideas — scenes, characters, plots — that might fit into your game. Don't lift elements directly, or you'll be in trouble if your players are familiar with the source. Instead use them as a basis for your own interpretations, and you'll be drawing on a rich storytelling tradition. A number of non-Asian sources have been included for those who find some of the Hong Kong cinema and Japanese anime a bit too far out for their games. After all, with the Great Leap Outwards some **Killing Streets** games may well be played in California.

Books

The Art of Arrow Cutting (Stephen Deadman, Tor Books) — "A novel of magic-noir suspense." Especially interesting for the way a world behind (or beyond) the mundane is revealed, and the lengths others will go to control it.

The Art of War (Sun Tzu, Shambhala Books) — It can't be emphasized enough. This book is at the center of Chinese thinking on strategy. The mandarins and ancestors have read it. So should you.

Conversations with a Yakuza (Junichi Saga, Kodansha International) — A fascinating memoir, telling the history of a real-life Yakuza member, from the 1930s to the present. Much of the violence is glossed over, but a careful reading reveals much about history of the Yakuza and the realities of daily life among them.

The Cult at the End of the World (Kaplan & Marshall, Arrow Books) — A horrifying account of Aum Supreme Truth, the cult responsible for the Tokyo subway nerve gas attacks in 1997, and a fascinating insight into the spiritual barrenness afflicting many modern Asian nations.

The Dragon Syndicates (Martin Booth, Bantam Books) — A fantastically detailed account of the Triads, tracing their evolution from revolutionary societies to global crime syndicates. A must-read for any player or Storyteller using Triad characters.

Gangland International (James Morton, Warner Books) — An excellent reference on organized crime worldwide, the extent of Yakuza and Triad activity abroad — particularly in Europe — gives any enterprising Storyteller plenty to work with.

Memoirs of a Geisha (Arthur Golden, Vintage Books) — A heavily researched and slightly (in Japan) controversial book, *Memoirs of a Geisha* gives an unusual insight into the disappearing lifestyle of a cultural institution and the ways modernization has changed Japanese society.

The Rape of Nanking (Iris Chang, Penguin Books) — If you've ever wondered just why the ancient enmity between Japan and China (and, for that matter, Japan and the rest of Asia) still smolders, read this book.

Red China Blues and *Jan Wong's China* (Jan Wong, Anchor Books) — Jan Wong is a former revolutionary now living and working as a journalist in Canada. She has a fascinating perspective on daily life in China, and her books are essential reading for any chronicle dealing with the citizens of the Middle Kingdom.

Storms in a Gentleman's Teacup (David Myers, Central Queensland University Press) — A whimsical story about an Australian academic's adventures in Japan, Myers' volume is full of insights into modern Japanese living, from dirty weekends to sumo matches and Shinto shrines.

Streetlife China (Michael Dutton, Cambridge University Press) — Scholarly but deeply insightful, Dutton's collection of essays provides endless insights into the daily life of millions of Chinese and their habits and subcultures.

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind (Shunryu Suzuki, John Weatherhill Inc.) — A collection of informal talks on Zen, this volume is an excellent introduction to Buddhist meditation and practice. Excellent for adding depth to your more enlightened characters.

COMICS

Akira (Katsuhiro Otomo, Dark Horse Comics) — Perhaps a little too post-apocalyptic for direct inspiration, Katsuhiro Otomo's masterpiece nevertheless paints an excellent portrait of bored, delinquent cycle-gangs and the destructive antics they get up to.

Crying Freeman (Kazuo Koike and Ryoichi Ikegami, Viz Communications) — Also available as an anime series and a live-action film, *Crying Freeman* follows the exploits of a professional killer, Freeman Yoh, as he battles Japanese, Chinese and American gangsters, terrorists, mercenaries and corrupt police.

Hellhole (Scott Lobdell and Adam Pollina, Image Comics) — A promising supernatural noir thriller with an unusual narrative style. Highly recommended.

Neon Cyber (Lou Kang, Adrian Tsang and Arnold Tsang, Image Comics) — Similar in feel to *Akira*, *Neon Cyber* features lots of gangs, cops and scientists battling for survival in a dystopian near-future.

Sin City (Frank Miller, Dark Horse Comics) — Miller's ultimate noir story cycle, featuring a cast of hard-bitten crooks, killers and cops. Although not set



in Asia, any of his characters and situations could easily be transplanted onto the killing streets.

FILM/TV

A Better Tomorrow and *A Better Tomorrow II* (directed by John Woo) — Action and revenge from our man Chow Yun-Fat. Highly recommended for a look at the lives of lower-ranking members of any criminal organization.

City on Fire (directed by Ringo Lam) — The film that inspired *Reservoir Dogs*, *City on Fire* is another classic HK action film starring Chow Yun-Fat as the gangster who comes to trust an undercover cop, and who faces a decision between his duty to the police and his loyalty to his friend.

Demon City Shinjuku (anime directed by Yoshiaki Kawajiri) — Set in a modern Tokyo taken over by demons, this anime is a great source of ideas, especially if you wish to add the Yama Kings to the streets of your campaign.

The First Shot (directed by David Lam) — A semi-historical account of the setting-up of Hong Kong's ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption), featuring crooked cops, ruthless gangsters and a brave team of "untouchables." A good look at the mentality behind police and government corruption.

The Godfather, Parts I-III (directed by Francis Ford Coppola) and *Goodfellas* (directed by Martin Scorsese) — The quintessential Western gangster films, these movies are also indispensable for a **Killing Streets** Storyteller (or player). Despite the cultural differences, these films are full of characters and situations that can be used in a game. It also pays to remember that these films are incredibly popular with Japanese, Indian and Southeast Asian criminals who have taken to emulating American criminals as described by Hollywood.

God of Gamblers and *God of Gamblers II* (directed by Jin Wong) — A fanciful and utterly over-the-top look at the world of professional gamblers. Can the God of Gamblers (Chow Yun-Fat) overcome his rivals, including the Devil of Gamblers?

Hard-Boiled and *The Killer* (directed by John Woo) — You simply must see these films if you're going to run a **Killing Streets** game. Classics of the genre, they both star HK legend Chow Yun-Fat and say just about everything that can be said about conflicting loyalties, humanity, the cost of evil and gun fights.

Prison on Fire and *Prison on Fire II* (directed by Ringo Lam) — More Chow Yun-Fat, this time as a gentle and funny — but also extremely dangerous — prison inmate, battling corrupt wardens, an unfair system, child welfare agencies and his fellow inmates. A typically HK mix of comedy and ultra-violence.

Pulp Fiction (directed by Quentin Tarantino) — For a slightly skewed look at how modern gangsters operate, and for an excellent piece of cinema, *Pulp Fiction* is hard to pass up.

Reservoir Dogs (directed by Quentin Tarantino) — If you've seen *City on Fire*, you really don't need to see *Reservoir Dogs*. But you should anyway, for a slightly more modern take on cops, gangsters and divided loyalties.

Shanghai Triad (directed by Yimou Zhang) — Starring the wonderful Gong Li, *Shanghai Triad* is the story of a gangster, seen through the innocent eyes of a young boy. Highly recommended for its inside view of the Triads and the games played by and between the bosses.

Tale of a Scarface (directed by Eiichi Kudo) — An adult and melodramatic story of a newly released Yakuza dealing with the collapse of his traditional Yakuza family under pressure from one of the modern syndicates, while he also struggles with his own desires for a new life. A good study of the day-to-day violence and mundane existence of the Yakuza, although it's not one for those under 18.

A Taste of Killing and Romance (directed by Veronica Chan) — Typically Hong Kong, this story of young, beautiful assassins in love (and the cops trying to catch them) is a little over the top, but it can be used for inspiration when creating assassins and their cover organizations.

• *Wicked City* (anime directed by Yoshiaki Kawajiri) — Terrorists try to disrupt the human-demon treaty that has kept both sides from war.

A FEW OTHER SUGGESTIONS

• **Western "Noir" Fiction:** Western authors like Raymond Chandler, Elmore Leonard and James Ellroy write hardboiled crime fiction, and you should read it. Their characters and stories are readily adaptable to the Middle Kingdom, and the mood is spot on.

• **Travel Guides:** Lonely Planet, Fodor and Michelin travel books (to name a few) are of terrific value when setting up a **Killing Streets** game. Full of local color and regional information, they generally include brief histories of the area they cover, a basic vocabulary section and information on transport, banking, entertainment, crime rates and geography. Your single best reference, especially as they can almost always be found in secondhand bookstores.

LEXICON

The various Asian street cultures have a staggeringly large vocabulary. The following slang terms (as well as more "official" terms for various criminal ranks) are only a small sample. Use these terms to spice up the dialogue of your characters.

CHINESE SLANG AND TRIAD TERMS

cho hai: literally “grass (or straw) sandal”; Triad membership officer/go-between and front man, responsible for Triad dealings with society. Of equal rank with a *hung kwan* or *pak tsz sin*.

da bizi: literally “big nose”; an insulting term for a Caucasian.

dai fei: literally “big wing”; a powerful smuggling boat, with a gray-painted fiberglass hull, powered by four synchronized outboard motors; stripped to the essentials for speed and cargo capacity and running at night with no navigation lights to off-shore rendezvous points, *dai fei* look like massive speedboats and are capable of reaching speeds up to 60 knots while carrying one to three stolen cars or other contraband.

fei jai: Cantonese slang for a spiv or smart alec, a sharply-dressed young man making his way up in the world.

fu shan chu: a *shan chu*’s deputy, authorized to act in his absence.

hei gui: literally “black devil”; an insulting term for a black person.

heung chu: literally “incense master”; Triad official, beneath the *fu shan chu*, who administers rituals, promotions and (where necessary) retribution against Triad members equal in rank with a *sin fung*.

hung kwan: literally “red pole”; a Triad fighting unit commander, in charge of between five and 50 men; equal in rank with a *cho hai* or *pak tsz sin*.

lao wai: literally “old foreigner”; disrespectful.

lung tao: literally “dragon head”; colloquial term for a *shan chu*.

pak tsz sin: literally “white paper fan”; a Triad manager/administrator, responsible for handling money and keeping the books; equal in rank with a *cho hai* or *hung kwan*.

riben guizi: literally “Japanese devil”; disrespectful term for a Japanese.

shan chu: literally “master of the mountain”; head of a Triad society; equivalent to the Yakuza *oyabun*.

sheung fa: literally “double flower”; senior Triad boss, beneath the *heung chu* and *sin fung* but above the *hung kwan*; the *sheung fa* controls an operation or district; equivalent to the Yakuza *chunin*.

sin fung: literally “vanguard”; Triad official, beneath the *fu shan chu*, who administers rituals, promotions and (where necessary) retribution against Triad members; equal in rank with a *heung chu*.

sze kau: literally “49s”; Triad soldier, the rank-and-file criminals making up the bulk of Triad membership; equivalent to the Yakuza *kobun*.

waidi gongren: literally “outside workers”; immigrant laborers.

waigouren: literally “person from outside countries”; neutral term for a non-Chinese.

xie dou: Cantonese for vendetta.

yang guizi: literally “foreign devil”; scornful term for a non-Chinese.

yao fan: literally “those looking for rice”; beggars.

JAPANESE SLANG AND YAKUZA TERMS

aka chochin: red light district

awaseru kao ga nai: literally “extremely ashamed”; having screwed up big time in public.

chunin: Yakuza deputy leader; equivalent to the Triad *sheung fa*.

chusei shin: literally “extremely loyal”; best friends, blood brothers.

damate: shut up!; very popular when used towards annoying subordinates.

dame dayo: literally “you should not have said it then!”; stronger version of *damate*; “shut the fuck up!”

dame oshi: make damn sure!; don’t fuck up on me!

gaijin: foreigner; not necessarily an insult, but not considered polite.

gaijin kusai: literally “stink like a foreigner”; a person who has become too Westernized.

gaki: literally “shorty”; insult referring to the size of a man’s genitalia (this meaning of the word is not very popular with Japanese Kuei-jin — also called *gaki*: though other Kuei-jin find it very amusing).

hansei: don’t get caught; good luck parting among Yakuza.

hara no mushi: literally “a gut feeling”; I don’t like this.

iki gai: literally “glad to be alive”; expression of relief after getting off charges or out of a fight.

jodanyo: literally “just joking”; face-saving slang to get out of a mistaken word or action.

juken jigoke: literally “a trip through hell”; a bad day, an operation gone wrong, a bad relationship.

kaigi: literally “talking too much”; a police informant.

kamatoto: literally “acting a bit too innocent”; overzealous acts or protestations of honesty by a known Yakuza.

kikkake: a poser or “fake tattoo boy”; young man pretending to be Yakuza; a wannabe.

kobun: Yakuza gang leader; equivalent to the Triad *sze kau*.

kono-yaro: screw you!

kosho benjo: literally “public toilet”; someone who can be bought or used by anyone.

kuso: damn!

mizu shoubai: literally "shady business"; any semi-legal transaction, from work-from-home prostitution to probably stolen televisions.

mushi no iki: literally "almost dead"; someone who has offended a powerful Yakuza.

namennayo: don't screw with me!

okagesamade: literally "God's got my back"; being wild and taking big risks.

onaji ana no mujina: literally "partners in crime"; group of drinking buddies (a bit rough).

onobori san: redneck.

oyabun: Yakuza gang leader; equivalent to the triad *shan chu*.

saiko-komon: senior adviser to a Yakuza *oyabun*.

shinjimae: go to hell!

taian: literally "waiting for the lucky day"; hoping for a break.

uchi no kaisha: literally "don't screw with my friends"; a threat to anyone attempting to move in on a Yakuza operation or protected business.

ushiroyubi: outcast.

yariman: slut.

BAHASA (MALAY) SLANG TERMS

anak jalanan: street kid.

bangsat: literally "bug-eyes"; bastard, asshole, motherfucker (all round pejorative).

bapak: literally "foster-father"; gang boss, senior political figure, village elder.

beceng: literally "handgun"; shooter, criminal with a gun.

bego: stupid.

bejat: literally "bad attitude"; young hooligans.

brur: literally "brother"; gang member.

buaya darat: literally "land crocodile"; gigolo, rapist.

clang ci: literally "what's up?"; cool.

djantjuk: screw you!

doku: literally "dirty money"; pejorative.

gali: literally "savage class"; gangster or gang member.

ganjaran: literally "bad person"; bum, gangsters, shiftless person.

gedongan: yuppie; westernized person (in a pejorative sense); a wanker.

gombal: bullshit.

hura hura: literally "living it up"; partying, getting it on, can also refer to fighting, drugs, or whatever.

juragan: literally "big boss man"; local or small-time crime lord or corrupt official.

kemropok: literally "boil up inside"; get fighting angry, a screaming argument.

kerakyapan: literally "wandering round without purpose"; shifty individual, bludger, street scum.

kiko: literally "crazy person"; maniac, not necessarily dangerous or deranged.

lonte: slut.

lumajon: stroke of luck.

mabok: drunk, bum, street scum.

mafa: literally "Mafia"; big gangs with political connections.

mampus iho!: literally "you dead!"; a threat with the implication that an "accident" is coming your way soon, especially a politically arranged one.

nas kleng!: fuck you!

ngewe: literally "bad woman"; a loose woman, also a female criminal.

nongkrong: literally "bum"; people sitting round all day on the streets, especially slum dwellers.

nyeleweng: literally "to be corrupt"; crook, shyster, adulterer, any official who is disliked.

nyusahin: literally "to make troubles"; start a fight or generally cause someone or something pain and grief.

pantat: butt face.

pecun: underage prostitute.

perek: literally "experimental girl"; loose, a woman who goes out with foreigners.

putaw: drugs.

udik: literally "upstream/at the source"; country bumpkin, peasant, redneck.

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S. H. L.

CHAPTER ONE: TO LIVE AND DIE

A good fortune may forebode bad luck, which may in turn disguise a good fortune.

—Chinese proverb

INTRODUCTION

The streets of Asia's great cities are dangerous places where fear and death linger in the shadows. Yet it would be a great disservice to a game of **Kindred of the East** to explain away these shadows with as shallow a mechanism as common street crime or the tattooed thugs of the local crime boss. Whether you're thinking of the Triads, Yakuza or even the Mumbai Mafia, such groups are merely the result of a brutal and uncompromising environment whose causes and effects go much deeper than the illegal trade in flesh and pharmaceuticals. They embody a world whose darkness is intertwined with the very fabric of society — a tangled skein that ties the most ancient traditions and latest modern developments to the best and worst of intentions, producing perverse and exploitative elements that have little regard for Western ideals and even less mercy.

This chapter, therefore, does not simply provide a dry recitation of Asia's more unpleasant side. Instead, it offers you the necessary knowledge, images, and symbols to construct a picture of a potentially alien and chilling society lost on the edges of humanity. Hopefully, this picture should shock your players out of the one-step-removed cynicism created by sanitized news coverage about the everyday horrors of life in the Third World, forcing them to confront not just the inhumanity of being Kuei-jin, but also the inhumanity of societies that are losing themselves. Aside from a moral agenda, this drives home to players of **Kindred of the East** that they aren't portraying Westerners any more and that the ground rules in Asian society are very different from what they're used to.

To provide you with the information necessary to create this complex picture of Asian society, we've included some sections in this chapter that deal with ideas you might not normally associate with horror

gaming. **Kindred of the East**, however, is not your standard horror game. To make a **Killing Streets** campaign work beyond Yak gangsters and Tong hit men, you'll need a basic understanding of the deep flaws and conflicting currents that move within modern Asian society. **Kindred of the East** is a game of subtle evils and moral dilemmas; to truly experience its nuances, you need an equally subtle and refined understanding of Asian life. From the garishly lit streets of Hong Kong to the putrid alleys of Surabaya, **Killing Streets** is about the symbiotic relationship between light and shadow. The information in this chapter allows you to project this into your game.

NOT THE WHOLE STORY

Asia is a big place, and this one chapter can only scratch the surface of criminal activity throughout the region. Therefore, we've structured the chapter around the main forms of social decay and crime as they exist on a region-wide basis. We leave it to you to include what you will in your version of Asia, whether the dusty back streets of Lahore or the glittering skyscrapers of Tokyo.

TELLING STORY FROM REALITY

When describing foreign cultures, it is all too easy to fall into clichés. For most people, this is merely the effect of a steady diet of TV, with its simplistic representation of non-American cultures, along with the need to find a handle on characters whose lives are far from their own personal experience. However, there is a less appealing aspect to this habit. Most stereotypes at heart are racist; they may be funny, they may be common, but they almost always contain demeaning and inaccurate generalizations about an ethnic group.

Considering that roleplaying games deal with character through archetypes, the danger of stereotyping different cultures is particularly strong, especially with **Kindred of the East**, which deals with cultures very different from our own. In **Killing Streets** this problem becomes even worse because in many cases we are dealing with the lowest scum that Asian societies have to offer. If the characters within a game become derogatory clichés, however, it is very difficult to give them any humanity, to make them feel alive to the players or to breathe into them that most necessary of all attributes in a **Kindred of the East** game, empathy. It is hard to create feelings of guilt, horror, inhumanity, redemption and sin when players feel nothing for the characters with whom they interact.

There is no easy way to overcome this problem; only the careful preparation of characters ensures that they are more than two-dimensional. One of the best ways to handle this is to turn the typical view of a character that first comes to mind on its head, so a white slaver may be a suit-wearing European yuppie

rather than the clichéd greasy Arab, or the harsh-faced Chinese military officer may be a paragon of respect for human rights. While this approach cannot, of course, be carried through in every case, just a few characters who break the mold can make players think a bit more and perhaps look beyond their assumptions.

WAYANG KULIT: THE ART OF LIGHT AND SHADOW

At first sight, many of the topics covered in this section may seem overly academic and removed from the "fun" game that you wish to play. Our intention is not to put you through an undergraduate course in Asian studies, but to provide you with light and shadow. As in the traditional Javanese shadow puppet theaters, or *wayang kulit*, the topics below are merely there to illuminate or cover the actions of your players, creating drama, suspense, angst or whatever other emotions you wish to evoke. Think of the information below as your candle and rice paper screen, the materials for you to create a setting as light or dark as you desire.

THE NAIL THAT STICKS UP

Japan is the one nation that many will instantly pick as not adhering to some of the following material. This judgment is both correct and incorrect. The timing is certainly off — Japan went through its major struggles with the issues below in the late 19th and early 20th centuries — but otherwise Japan is almost a classic case of the benefits and problems of modernization in a highly traditional society. The first of two huge exceptions to this rule is Japan's struggle with the forces unleashed by its metamorphosis from one of Asia's most traditional nations to one of its most modernized, which eventually catapulted it into World War Two and led it to the brink of total destruction. The potential dangers of cultural, political and social change cannot be highlighted any more clearly than that.

The second exception is more ephemeral. Japan's rise predated the development of a concept of Asia; terms like East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia date from the fighting against Japan in World War Two. Lacking any vigorous non-Western role model, Japan looked to the West and sought acceptance in the white man's club of 19th-century politics by adopting a Westernized cultural façade. This makes Japan very different from the rest of Asia, which has sought to remain "Asian" while adopting Western economics and science — ironically, often by adopting Japan as a model.

MODERNIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Not long ago at all, the lives of most Asians were little changed from those of their ancestors. It is not so much that history had not affected Asia over the preceding centuries, but rather that historical events had altered the traditional rhythms of life only marginally for the vast majority of the population. Dynasties, wars and disasters came and went without changing the basic structure of life for the agrarian majority. This lack of what the West calls "progress" stemmed from a number of factors like extremely low literacy rates, cultures that tended to revere tradition and ancestry, and most important of all, deliberate policies adopted by colonial and native rulers who reinforced the existing social systems in order to support their own power. The latter was an especially potent factor, keeping many traditional structures alive long after their natural use-by date. This phenomenon played an extremely important role in maintaining the strangely distorted traditionalism that gripped Japan during its modernization after the Meiji restoration in 1868, for example.

History has the force of inevitability on its side, however, and in the aftermath of the World Wars, which first crippled and then destroyed overt Western imperialism, modernization swept into Asia like a tsunami. Blood, chaos and revolution finally broke open Asia's once-secluded societies to the forces that had ravaged Europe for the two preceding centuries. The last remnants of the ancient regimes in Burma, Cambodia, China, Japan, Korea, Laos, Tibet and Vietnam, more than half the nations in Asia, were swept away; new and startling "Western" governments took their place, vowing to bring industry and development to their impoverished and backward peoples. Even in those nations spared the vast changes of utter military defeat or Communist revolution, the departing Europeans handed power to new elites eager to build for themselves the same power that the West possessed.

So irrespective of political persuasion, culture, or history, for the last half century Asia has run a helter-skelter race, trying to catch up with 300 years of history in a single lifetime. In developing their nations, various Asian regimes and governments have been astoundingly successful, though the costs of this success have yet to be fully counted. Some nations changed their minds and tried to turn back to their older and simpler civilizations, but whether they tried this through mass murder (as in Cambodia) or isolation (as in Burma), they have only succeeded in becoming poorer versions of their more forward-looking neighbors.

Any human endeavor brings positives and negatives, and in the modernization and development of Asia there are many of each. These are the light and

shadow that a Storyteller has at her disposal. While an exhaustive understanding of the effects of modernization on the nations of Asia is obviously beyond the scope of *Killing Streets*, the pros and cons listed below give a good indication of the major ripples that flow through the last half-century.

OF THE PAST BUT IN THE PRESENT

One force that worked tirelessly to resist the forces of modernization were elder Kuei-jin, whose localized influence props up many traditional structures for reasons that combine self-interest, ignorance and fear. This is not surprising; the more traditionally minded of the Ten Thousand Demons see themselves living within a structure that was mandated by Heaven. Changes to that structure undermine the Dharmic paths they seek to follow. Many court ancestors and mandarins refuse to accept conquest and domination by the West and the total and irreversible changes that wrack the world around them; instead, they see modernization as a corruption of the mandate of Heaven and so another sign of the imminence of the Sixth Age. Less charitable Running Monkeys charge that such opposition has more to do with protecting the elders' power bases, which modernization has dramatically undermined.

The more society has changed, the more older Kuei-jin have backed away from direct action on the streets, preferring to use Running Monkeys, dhampyrs and trusted families of human retainers as their intermediaries. All these groups are taught or brought up with an understanding of traditional ways and etiquette while also understanding the new and dynamic world outside the courts. This allows the ancestors and mandarins to feel comfortable with them and to go on behaving as if the world hadn't changed, while still having some influence over it. Thus a senior Kuei-jin is unlikely to ever pop up in the alleys and dives of Asia; they remain out of sight behind Scarlet Screens and layer after layer of intrigue and mystery, far removed from the streets that have grown so foreign to them.

MODERN MEDICINE/OVERPOPULATION

The introduction of modern medicine into Asia by Europeans, especially in its effect on child mortality, had far-reaching consequences beyond the purely humanitarian. As fewer children died, the population of Asia boomed, as people culturally ingrained to produce very large families persisted in having many children. It is worth noting that, outside China and India, underpopulation was a defining aspect of much of Asian history; indeed, many kingdoms fought wars secure more people. Even the populations of China

and India were not excessive for nations of such great size and wealth until the modern era.

Between 1850 and 1970, the Asian population exploded, leading to land degradation from overfarming as villagers tried to support more people, greatly increased poverty, a gradual collapse of traditional culture, and dramatically increased urbanization. Yet, in one of history's great ironies, no one was willing to return to the days of letting children die of disease — much better they should live in deprivation. This problem persists throughout Asia, except in those nations that have fully modernized (like Japan, Korea and Singapore), and even these nations will remain seriously overcrowded for many decades to come.

THE GREEN REVOLUTION/RURAL DISRUPTION

Science came to the aid of Asia's burgeoning population in the 1960s, introducing new crop strains, chemical fertilizers and pesticides and modern farming techniques. The changes ended the seemingly yearly ritual of widespread famine somewhere in Asia, except under exceptional circumstances, like war or drought. Since so many people lived in close proximity to the land, such widespread and massive changes to the very heart of rural life could not help but have widespread consequences. The most notable effect was a further speeding up of the move from rural areas to the cities, as progressively fewer people were needed to produce ever-larger crops.

The movement of people exacerbated the cultural changes brought about by the modernization of agriculture. No longer was farming governed by the traditional ebb and flow of village life, but rather by science, a science often barely understood. The need for chemicals and in some cases special seed stock, brought village life into the modern economy, undermining traditional authority in some places and drastically reinforcing it in others, but in all cases overthrowing the long-established patterns of society. Public disorder and strife in many countries followed these tumultuous changes, yet with famine as the alternative, the changes were effectively irreversible.

INDUSTRIALIZATION/EXPLOITATION

Asia's determination to modernize found a powerful ally in international corporations looking for cheap and easy places to put factories. As the initial instability brought about by modernization ebbed, or was repressed by dictatorial regimes, business moved in and industry came to Asia in a major way. It happened first in East Asia, the Japanese economic miracle overflowing into South Korea and Taiwan, while Communism brought mass industrialization to China. In Southeast and South Asia the process was slower but no less far-reaching.



Industrialization brought huge wealth to Asia, providing funds that allowed the almost overnight creation of highway systems, electricity grids, hospital systems and many other infrastructure developments. The benefits of all this growth and construction were untold and the most obvious sign of the new wealth has been the emergence of a vocal, wealthy, well-educated middle class. The middle class reinterpreted their cultures, demanded a voice in politics and generally introduced a new social dynamism into Asia, becoming leading proponents of the rule of law, democracy and human rights.

While a few got rich, many did not, and some got poorer. Hundreds of thousands left rural areas for the already overcrowded cities, looking to build a new life in the industrial economy. But there were never enough

jobs to go around and many found their new homes in the slums and shanties that grew to surround major Asian cities. Even those who have found work in factories are not necessarily better off, with wages as low as fifty cents a day. What's more, the factories are rarely safe and attempts to unionize or otherwise protest the appalling working conditions are met with harsh police action or other government oppression.

Industrialization has not merely exploited Asia's people; the environment has also suffered serious damage from uncontrolled pollution and irresponsible resource development. Even in the richest Asian countries like Japan, environmental protection is not taken as seriously as it should be, and the damage is beginning to drastically affect the health of people living around the worst-affected areas. Attempts at

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES, FADING SPLENDOR AND LITTLE HELLS

The massive growth of cities has been a boon to urban Kuei-jin. The harvesting of Chi has become almost ludicrously easy, and opportunities to garner mundane wealth and influence have burgeoned along with industrialization and centralization. The decline of rural areas, on the other hand, has hit the power bases of non-urban Kuei-jin, like many of the *penangallan* of the Golden Courts, transferring power to the expanding city courts with a speed that defies the normally glacial pace of Kuei-jin politics and provoking numerous shadow wars. Ironically, in the isolated cases where a court exists in a region that stayed close to its traditional roots (for instance, Burma, Laos, Mindanao in the Philippines, or the western provinces of China), the court members have also found themselves seriously weakened, lacking the mortal and Chi resources available to courts in more modernized areas. Many of the rural courts are truly fighting for existence, as other *shen*, especially *hengeyokai* shape-changers, sense their weakness and isolation and continually test their strength.

The courts that are growing fastest are those that have adapted to modernization, like some Genji courts in Japan, the Golden Lion Court in Singapore or the Flame Court in Hong Kong (most especially the Righteous Devils of Kowloon). With their newfound power, such courts are also pushing to undermine more traditional courts, though in the case of the Lion Court very subtly because of the potent powers still available to the *penangallan*. From their offices in glittering steel and glass skyscrapers, the modernized courts look down on the ruins of the past and plan new developments to further secure their power over the masses and the vast Chi resources they represent. They ignore the rural courts' charges that they are suborning the infiltration of the Yama Kings' minions into their modern domains. The majority of urban courts are traditional themselves, but have taken full advantage of the feast of Chi and wealth that fortuitous circumstance has brought to their table.

All the city courts are watchful, however, whether modern or traditional, because the rural courts may yet decide to take matters into their own hands as they did under the cover of Year One in Cambodia and the Cultural Revolution in China. The highly traditionalist rural courts are far from defeated. In fact, they are generally more powerful than their modernist rivals on a one-to-one basis, and in the event of a midnight war, would likely sweep the newer courts away. For the time being, they strike back under the cover of the traditionalist and nationalist movements that are developing spontaneously in human society in response to the pressures of modernization. Ironically, such movements are inventing traditions as much as they are protecting traditional culture, and in their support of such groups the backward-looking elders are ultimately further undermining the society they seek to cosset from history.

The rural courts' charges that the cities are prime grounds for *akuma* and the Yama Kings are not without merit, however. If the Kuei-jin find Asia's modernized cities fertile ground, the Yama Kings find them even more alluring. The misery and despair that makes feeding so easy for the Kuei-jin breeds the necessary conditions for the lords of the Thousand Hells to extend their reach. The growth of their influence is made all the easier by the loss of traditional faith and social structures that helped keep devils away. Indeed, so terrible and horrifying have some places in the Middle Kingdom become that portions of the Yomi World are starting to manifest directly on Earth. The Wall around the spirit realms has weakened to almost nothing as suffering and corruption creates small pieces of Hell on Earth.

environmental activism meet with the same oppression and intimidation as labor activism, and the need for more investment ensures that Asian governments continue to turn a blind eye to environmental vandalism.

LITERACY PROGRAMS/EXTREMIST AGITATION

The growth of an urban society allowed Asian nations to put much more effort into literacy and other educational programs. Education was keenly sought after, both for cultural reasons, which in East Asia placed a high social value on learning, and because education was correctly seen as the first step to building a technological society. The new education was by default highly Western in nature, and with it came an explosion of Western political ideas. Previously, only a limited elite had known of concepts such as Communism, nationalism and socialism; with the expansion of educational opportunity these ideas became widespread. Given the general poverty of their compatriots, the struggle against increasingly dated traditions that conflicted with modernization, and perceived interference by former colonial nations, it is hardly surprising that many of the newly educated population turned to revolutionary ideologies for a solution to the problems gripping their countries. While the desire for revolution has dimmed over time, it has not disappeared entirely. The push for greater democracy and campaigns against political corruption in many Asian countries are a continuing example of political agitation brought about by education and its disruption of local cultures and traditions.

CULTURAL CHANGE/PERVERSION OF TRADITION

What is acceptable to one generation is not always acceptable to later ones. This is as true of Asian nations as of any other. Modernization led to the abandonment of many less appealing traditional practices — some completely, others partially — while a few persisted to become chronic problems.

Traditions that completely faded from society generally did so because of direct government intervention, gradual social change or popular discontent. In China, for instance, the Communists suppressed the ancient practice of female foot binding, which involved the deliberate crippling of women in the name of beauty. In Japan, on the other hand, the ancient caste system slowly lapsed into disuse until it simply faded away. And in India, popular discontent has led to strict laws being put in place to control the traditional use of marijuana.

Absorption into another part of society usually saves traditions that only partially fade away. The samurai culture in Japan survived as the new ethic of the urban classes; similarly, in India the traditions of sadhus and gurus metamorphosed into the New Age

religious movement that grew out of the hippie movement of the 1960s.

Those traditions that refuse to fade away are often the cause of major problems, exacerbating many of the other stresses caused by modernization. The reasons for these traditions' survival are myriad. Perhaps the most famous case is the caste system in India, which despite its inhumanity has survived decades of reforms designed to destroy its influence. In other cases, a particular community or organization supports a tradition because it suits their particular needs.

The Yakuza and the Indonesian army are both good examples of the latter situation. Each organization works hard to maintain the appearance of its historical reputation, thus holding onto a level of popular legitimacy to which their recent actions would otherwise not entitle them. The Yakuza holds itself up as a society of neighborhood defenders instead of organized crime families, while the Indonesian army hides its corrupt and dictatorial nature under the veneer of its pedigree as a revolutionary anti-colonial army. Those in control manage this shadow game through deliberate policies that play on popular ignorance, staged shows of generosity, and on the few people within each organization who still uphold the original ideals. A good example of such behavior was the Yakuza's response to the Kobe earthquake of 1995, when they provided aid days before the Japanese government got organized enough to do anything constructive. At the cost of a little civic-mindedness, the Yakuza greatly reinforced their traditional image and made it that much harder for the police to hinder their criminal operations.

The most dangerous traditions that survive modernization are not true traditions at all, but rather the creation of political or religious extremists who have invented a false history or belief in order to justify their actions or motivate their followers. Such manipulation of history and culture is not limited to modernizing states or to Asia, but it is much easier to accomplish in a nation already wracked by major changes and where the majority of the population find themselves caught halfway between the comfort of ancient certainties and the lure of modern amenities. At such times, the attractions of returning to a putative golden age, of blaming problems on a despised minority group, and of religious extremism are all very real and lend themselves to serious political and social destabilization.

Religious extremism in South and Southeast Asia is perhaps the best example of this deliberate manipulation of societal values. Both regions had a tradition of religious tolerance and syncretism, but with modernization came those who, in their newly educated zeal, desired to bring "true" orthodoxy to their faiths. Such movements, in religions as diverse as Islam and Hinduism, denounced the traditionally

loose forms of worship as moral laxity brought about by Westernization. Such religious movements, by their blatant and deliberate distortions, have had grave effects, often setting back the rights of women and spurring sectarian violence.

REVOLUTIONARIES OF THE ETERNAL NIGHT

The most moribund and oppressive social systems in Asia are the traditional Kuei-jin courts, where ancestors and mandarins enforce total control and insist on the observance of ancient traditions that have little relevance outside the court's closed environment. With younger Kuei-jin excluded and exploited, resentment mixes with stagnation to ferment explosive political intrigues. Unsurprisingly, as soon as the elder Kuei-jin's power bases came under threat by modernization, the first rebellions against their political domination began. Beneath the civil wars and street violence that wracked Asia throughout the 1960s, the first Bamboo Princes and elders were busy fighting their own bitter revolutions. Many new courts were spawned during this time.

Such violence could not be sustained for long. Despite the weakening effects of modernization, the ancestors were too wily to be overthrown by the ambitious but disorganized younger Kuei-jin who opposed them. Ambition is the key word here, for only a few of those who revolted were truly revolutionaries. Behind the idealists were many who simply desired the mandarins' power for themselves, and those desires were the weapon with which the courts broke the revolutionaries' back. Savvy mandarins bought off younger Kuei-jin with more influential roles, or replaced fallen courts with slightly more modernized versions whose new mistresses turned on the idealists to shore up their own power.

The result, despite the idealists' failure to create a truly new Kuei-jin society, was a drastic realignment of power within the courts. No longer could the ancestors and mandarins ignore the Running Monkeys, and as a result they gave more influential roles assigned to younger *wu*. The revolutionaries were not totally defeated, of course. Many went underground within the courts; others turned to the Yama Kings in their despair. Still others drifted into the shadows of Asia's great cities, continuing to work tirelessly at overthrowing the rule of the ancestors. *Heimin* or declared *akuma*, these revolutionary *wu* work to educate other Kuei-jin, seeking allies and agents in the courts while using their greater knowledge of the modern world to build their own Scarlet Screens and human contacts with a view to undermining the courts.

POVERTY AND BACKWARDNESS

Only a few Asian nations have managed to overcome the legacy of overpopulation, illiteracy and stagnation left by Western colonialism and interference. Only in Japan (which had a 100-year head start), in the southern portion of Japan's own former colony Korea, and in Singapore are the poor a minority fed and housed at a reasonable standard. In the rest of Asia, the status of the poor waxes and wanes with the fortunes of their nations, their existence so precarious that a bad harvest, natural disaster or stock market collapse can send them from barely surviving into starvation.

When forced into a capitalistic system, as almost every person in Asia has been in the last fifty years, backward and uneducated people become reliant on outside goods and services that they can only buy with money—money they don't possess and have limited means of acquiring. Modernization makes them poor, and their limited opportunities don't allow them to take much advantage of modernization's benefits to overcome their poverty or backwardness. Trapped in this cycle, whole populations have fallen through the cracks of Asia's economic miracle, the unseen discards of the success stories trumpeted throughout the 1990s.

Such a prevalence of poor and backward citizens has definite social effects, especially in a modernizing economy where suddenly some people have far more than others. The most obvious is the disenfranchisement of the poor, leaving them faceless and unheard, but more disturbing is the way that poverty becomes accepted within society. Asia is by no means the only example of this phenomenon, but in Asia modernization's effects have starkly laid out the contrasts between the modern rich and the backward poor. With acceptance comes disdain and a belief that trying to "solve" the problem of poverty is beyond a nation's capability.

Most damaging of all, acceptance brings a loss of hope. Modernization plays a role in this hopelessness by encouraging people to move to cities in search of paid employment, thus disconnecting them from the traditional culture that gave justification to their hardship, and giving them only unachievable mirages of material prosperity in return. It is in the urban slums of modern Asia that the worst poverty grows.

The physical reality of the poor is a litany of what they don't have: easy access to medical care, clean water, reliable food supplies, decent housing, education, legal services, modern communications and information. The latter is especially important because ignorance makes escaping from their plight much more difficult, and makes them easily preyed upon by the corrupt and criminal. Being exploited and abused is the social reality for the poor; they're powerless in

countries not noted for respecting human rights or due process. Altogether, being poor is harder in Asia. For the great majority it is soul-wrenching, faced as they are with often brutal choices necessary to stave off death or starvation. Only the insatiable human drive to stay alive keeps such people going.

REAPING A BITTER HARVEST

Poverty is a great boon to the Kuei-jin, as it provides them with a nearly inexhaustible supply of Chi. The poor are actually a form of currency among the Hungry Dead; control over a housing complex or slum represents great wealth, a pool of Chi that can be used, traded or "stored" by a *wu* or single vampire as he or she sees fit. That death and pain are all too prevalent in the slums, shanties and working-class tenements of Asia's cities just makes harvesting this Chi all the easier. Chi is far more important to a Kuei-jin than such mundane wealth as money, drugs, real estate or even political power. The use of such baubles, to greater and lesser degrees depending on the Kuei-jin involved, is to secure control over Chi resources.

While the Kuei-jin's feeding is not restricted to the poor, their sheer number, their powerlessness, their short and brutal lives and official disinterest in their wellbeing makes poor people the easiest prey. Only the grossest abuses stand out among the everyday horrors of the slums and back streets. Some Kuei-jin do make a positive contribution by preventing any other, human or *shen*, from preying on their resource, but ultimately, humans are cattle — well-treated cattle, but cattle nonetheless. This of course raises problems for some Running Monkeys and dhampyrs who still feel a connection to their humanity. How human are you when your actions, or at least the orders of those above you, are predicated on human beings being nothing more than chattels?

The poor are also attractive to the Kuei-jin for another reason. Because of their traditionalism, the poor are more open to superstition and thus more likely to be easily intimidated or appropriately respectful of a Kuei-jin, a positive attitude as far as the mandarins are concerned. Some elders therefore can be found inhabiting moldering temples and apparently rotting tenements in the oldest and poorest areas of town, surrounded by respectful masses. This physical presence dampens some of the Running Monkeys' exuberance, especially when dealing with humans who act respectfully and follow traditions. Doing harm to a person "respectful of heaven" does not endear a youngster to his elders, some of whom can develop almost human attachments to those people who still fit neatly within their ancient and outmoded views. By concentrating in the poorer quarters, however, many elders also isolate them-

selves from the new seats of power, further undermining their influence and awareness of the true state of the city around them.

The Kuei-jin are not the only ones who look to prey on society's most vulnerable. Other *shen*, as well as more human monsters, vie for the privilege, but conflicts are less prevalent than might be expected. When a court ancestor asks a Running Monkey to infiltrate a smuggling gang in Kowloon or a prostitution racket in Chowringhee, is the ancestor really interested in controlling a few boats or brothels? It is exceedingly unlikely that the elders' interests are so base. Perhaps the real aim is to cement control of a block of tenements or undermine a rival's control of a missionary school for street children. To humans, however, such organizations are merely about money. Often, therefore, the Kuei-jin and human criminals can coexist, sometimes with the human criminals not even realizing who or what they are dealing with. So long as they retain control over the local Chi resources, the mandarins tend not to care about what else goes on around them. This situation makes the Kuei-jin excellent allies for a clever human criminal, leaving him or her with the money while the demon takes advantage of the Chi provided through the illicit activities. Unfortunately for the human involved, demonic allies tend to have demonic enemies, which can make life very hard for a criminal who just wants to make a dishonest living.

Running Monkeys are less removed from modern society than their elders and tend to pursue agendas set by their old mortal ties. It is not unusual for a disciple to spawn a gang war, vigilante campaign, race riot or outbreak of religious violence, sometimes deliberately, often accidentally. Because the Running Monkeys' interest in mortal affairs soon fades, however, their effect on the streets is like a typhoon, damaging and massively powerful but short-lived. Other *shen* are another matter altogether. The Shih demon hunters and hengeyokai beast-people are especially prone to close ties to poor humans, either protectively like the Shih or exploitatively like the Kumo were-spiders. These beings usually recognize the Kuei-jin for what they are and object to their activities. To resist or pre-empt such attacks, the Kuei-jin turn to their mortal pawns — and so the fighting begins, with the poor in the middle and unlikely to benefit regardless of who wins.

POLITICS AND THE STATE

Asia has little or no tradition of democracy or the rule of law, though almost all Asian nations had extensive experience with despotic and bureaucratic governments. Western colonialists either displaced the traditional, absolute rulers with foreign domination or imposed their will by bullying the traditional elites into submission. The resulting colonial or

near-colonial states used the great advances of the 19th century (modern administration, communications and transport) to build efficient governments devoted to denying the local populace a say and to keeping them firmly in their place. The methods employed by the West were of a sort that would have been labeled barbarous if they had been employed in the "civilized" environs of Europe. Assassinations, exile without trial, genocide, massacre and starvation, all of the worst abuses of police states like Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, were first tried in Asia by the colonial powers.

The nationalists who replaced the colonialists following the Second World War were almost all members of tiny classes of local intellectuals, with only their limited experience of Western politics to guide them in ruling their new countries. In every case, the Asian nation followed a nearly identical pattern. Democracy replaced colonialism, but soon reverted to corruption and anarchy. Despotism then replaced democracy, justifying itself through whatever ideology was convenient: Communism, economic development, nationalism, even the protection of democracy. Eventually democracy replaced despotism, as the rising middle class built by modernization demanded a say and had the economic muscle to enforce it.

Not all countries traveled down this road at the same rate. Japan, for instance, had reached the last stage, relative democracy, before most other Asian nations were free of the West. Only in the last decade has Japan had company, as Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand evolved into true, though often very shaky, democracies. The period between the fall and rise of democracy has had the most profound effects on Asia, however. Even in nations that are now purportedly democratic, the institutions of oppression remain powerful and omnipresent, hovering just out of sight but never out of mind.

The issues go beyond merely having the right to vote. Rights that are taken for granted in the West — such as freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, the right to legal counsel, the right to remain silent and the right to a fair trial — exist in name only, if at all, in most Asian countries outside of Japan. The problems go deeper still in many nations, where police and military brutality (even death squads) create a climate of fear. Even in more progressive nations like Malaysia and Singapore, attempting to combat the ruling party's hold on power or corrupt practices can lead to indefinite imprisonment without trial or deliberate financial ruination.

Nor is keeping your head down and trying not to be noticed much protection in tyrannical societies. The first thing to note about Asia is the level of political corruption. From Japan down, political sys-

tems are crippled by officials' lack of public accountability; the main difference is how much they bother trying to hide the graft. This impinges on every aspect of life, as criminals with official protection run rampant and even access to the most basic government service relies on paying a bribe to a local bureaucrat. It also means that funds for hospitals or humanitarian aid for the victims of war or natural disaster often go astray long before the starving and needy see the money. Those who resist complying with corrupt demands run the same risks as those who pursue democracy or human rights — often even greater because governments can disclaim responsibility for "criminal" activity.

BEYOND THE PETTY CONCERNS OF MORTAL MEN

With most governments and their agencies in Asia crippled by endemic incompetence or corruption, Kuei-jin face little official opposition and outside of Singapore and some parts of Japan and Korea. Therefore, they have little need for anything resembling the Kin-jin Masquerade. The often-brutal Asian police forces and armies also make useful tools for securing ownership over areas with valuable concentrations of Chi, but in this sense the Kuei-jin use government forces in the same way they would an organized crime group rather than specifically to enhance their official powers. This similarity isn't surprising; for the most part on the streets of Asia, "official" just means a gangster with a uniform.

Controlling such forces is an easier task for the ancestors and mandarins, since the established chain of command allows them to take control without having to understand the nature of the streets. Court elders often warn younger Kuei-jin against interfering with official organizations because they wish to protect their own domains and also because they fear losing one of their few remaining tools on the streets to the growing power of the Running Monkeys. The mandarins' influence may also have something to do with why so many Asian police forces seem to hold ideas at odds with the reality of the society around them, harking back to social models long since destroyed by modernization.

This is especially true of Singapore, China and Japan, where the forces of law and order are trying to enforce social strictures far removed from the needs of the streets. The police and army are essentially acting as foot soldiers in a war against change. In this war, ambitious and despotic human politicians who seek to reinforce their own rule by denying modernization and the fearful Kuei-jin elders who seek the same thing within their courts, are natural (if coincidental) allies. It is often hard to tell which is more brutal in their methods, or where human intrigues end and demonic ones begin.

The pervasive corruption within Asian institutions means, however, that influence over official forces often means less than it might, a drawback the court elders try hard to ignore or overcome. The irony of a Kuei-jin elder backing anti-corruption purges is not lost on the more aware Running Monkeys. Such a step is logical for elders to pursue, however, for there is little use in dominating the police commissioner if his officers pervert his orders and are more answerable to the local crime boss than to him. A similar limitation is the lack of regard that Asians, especially the poor, have for officialdom. Respect often exists only for the threat of violence that police and soldiers represent and is shown only when the authorities are in sight. Mandarins, like Asia's human despots, tend to take offence at people's defiance of their authority, however remotely imposed.

Where the Kuei-jin do not exert much influence over officialdom, matters are even more vexing. In areas where mortals are passively or openly rebelling against the tyrannical rule of the local elite, sudden violence can destroy a scheme years in the making or can easily cost a Kuei-jin her existence. Even in less openly violent places, corruption often makes it nearly impossible to predict a given official's decisions. What's allowed today may be reason for arrest tomorrow. Merely upsetting the wrong person, even a powerful mortal, can get someone blacklisted and made a target for terror troops or prosecutors. Backing the wrong side can make a Kuei-jin or her Scarlet Screen the target of death squads or terrorist bombings. Chaos, corruption and violence are all two-edged swords, offering opportunity on the one hand and pain on the other. On the streets, only a careful Kuei-jin avoids getting hurt.

TRADITION AND RELIGION

Asians remain very attached to their cultural traditions, especially religion, even if some "traditions" are now unpracticed or bear little resemblance to their ancestors' beliefs. In a time of constant change, tradition and religion offer seemingly stable foundations for lives and communities otherwise in turmoil. The streets of Asia have always maintained a close connection to these traditions, the flip side of their poverty. Thus, the streets embody a confusing and exotic *mélange* of the Western and the traditional, often exacerbating the worst and burying the best traits of both.

This mix of traditions updated for the modern age is impossible to escape even for the casual observer. It ranges from the merely idiosyncratic, like the electric candles now common in family shrines in Chinese households, to the incongruous, like a combination of elephants and modern limousines in an Indian wedding procession. More dangerous and intractable problems lurk out of sight, however. An exact list of such

issues would be a book in itself, but such problematic traditions can be summarized as involving race, class, sex, power, and religion.

EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE

The manipulation of tradition has always been the Kuei-jin's most subtle method of influence, though modernization is slowly eroding its effectiveness as the pace and nature of change leads more and more Asians to adopt a fundamentally global and Western focus. For the present, however, a gift to the right crime lord or politician, a sincere apology to an affronted local police chief, the threat of some very bad *feng shui* or an advantageous arranged marriage between two powerful families can give a Kuei-jin what he or she wants without resorting to any obvious action. In day-to-day affairs and in twilight wars, such actions are common. Indeed, before modernization such actions were all a court needed to maintain its tethers in the mortal world. With the dawning of the Sixth Age and the failure of mortals to respect the mandate of Heaven, the results of such traditional methods are becoming increasingly unpredictable and gradually falling into disuse on the ever more violent and disrespectful streets.

RACISM

The capacity to hate one another based on the most fallacious concepts is, unfortunately, a human failing common to all cultures. Asia is no exception. If anything, the multitude of ethnic groups and the legacy of colonial divide-and-conquer politics (continued by some Asian tyrants today) make the problems of racism even more intractable in this region. As is the case in many places where racism is prevalent, the real differences are more cultural or religious than "ethnic", and few tangible reasons exist for the hatred. Popular feeling against the Japanese and Chinese, the two most widely disliked ethnic groups in Asia, can nevertheless be traced to definite historical and social antagonisms.

In Southeast Asia, the Chinese fill an invidious role in the public psyche. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese settled in the region over the centuries, imported by local rulers and then by colonial authorities to create a merchant class without strong local roots and therefore reliant on the protection of whoever was in power at the time. Believing in the superiority of their own culture, encouraged by the local rulers not to integrate and put off by religious differences in many cases, Chinese migrants became a relatively wealthy, educated and isolated community. In many regions, locals rarely saw a Westerner during colonialism, but they all saw the resident Chinese agents of the colonial regime.

Unsurprisingly, then, local people came to resent the Chinese for their wealth, their influence



and their difference. They have sometimes been called the “Jews of Asia” because of the popular hatred they face and the risk of violence against them whenever law and order break down. In any period of turmoil, marauding locals invariably loot, burn, murder and rape in the Chinese quarter, their rampages often leading to hundreds or even thousands of deaths. The last noticeable outbreak occurred during the overthrow of the Indonesian President Suharto in 1997. Thousands of Chinese families were burned out of their homes across Indonesia, investigations estimated that as many as ten thousand women were raped, and millions of dollars’ worth of goods were stolen or destroyed.

Other, less widespread, hatreds are boiling over in Asia as well. Indonesia, for instance, has over a hundred and eighty ethnic groups, many with a long tradition of mutual antipathy. While more localized than anti-Chinese feelings, the results are just as bloody when the Achenese and Bataks fight, or the Ambonese attack settlers from Java. Elsewhere, it is Filipinos against Malays, Malays against Thais, Cambodians against Vietnamese, Tamils against Singhalese, Bengalis against Rajputs, Cantonese against Hakka, Manchurians against Mongols, Japanese against Koreans, and the list goes on. The litany of violence, discrimination and baseless preconceptions harbored on the streets of Asia stains a gutter somewhere with blood everyday.

THE MOST EXCELLENT DEMON

Among themselves, most Kuei-jin do not hold to the prejudices of their mortal lives. Being one of the Ten Thousand Demons overrides most everything else. Exceptions exist, of course, especially among the Running Monkeys who have not yet fully adapted to their changed circumstances. This is not to say that certain *wu* and even entire courts do not hold to a particular racial superiority complex. Indeed, the rivalries between Chinese and Japanese courts, as well as the disdain both hold for the Golden Courts, have an obvious racial element to them. However, few courts go to the extent of accepting disciples only from particular mortal communities, though such discrimination is quite common among *wu*. Much like mortals, Kuei-jin rarely display their racism openly, preferring to frame their arguments in terms of morality and upholding the rule of Heaven.

While Kuei-jin may leave behind much of their bigotry with the Second Breath, the world around them doesn’t change. A Kuei-jin from a minority background still faces a great many problems, from physical violence to more subtle social discrimination. Nor can she seek to operate solely within her former community—she is at the beck and call of the court mandarins who, given their limited interaction with the streets, may well not understand the

problems she faces. Then again, assigning a Korean disciple to duties within the Japanese suburbs in Hino or a Chinese jina to the Malay slums of Bandar Aceh could very well be a deliberate punishment or a pointed lesson in humility.

CLASS

Every society has its divisions, artificial rules that say one person is more important, worthy and respectable than another. Family, profession and wealth are all key elements in how modern societies judge social standing, but less modernized societies often have less flexible concepts that determine a person's place in life. On the streets of Asia, the old concepts are dying out, but slowly, and those who benefit from traditional divisions are working hard to ensure that their superiority remains accepted.

The most obvious and traditional class division is that of nobility, where a few families are held up for their long history and the honor and influence of their ancestors. Both Japan and Thailand are constitutional monarchies with well-regarded royal families, while elsewhere in Asia innumerable rajas, sultans and chieftains remain influential even after losing their direct political power. Some are impoverished, some wealthy, but many nevertheless retain immense influence among the least modern segments of society. Some use their influence for good, such as the Thai King's programs to get the hill tribes to stop cultivating opium, and some for ill, such as the Sultan of Aceh's involvement with various extremist Muslim groups.

The most extreme traditional representation of class is a caste system, where a person's role in society is predetermined by birth. The Indian caste system, which condemns thousands to a life of poverty as untouchables, is the most well-known, but similar (although less harshly enforced) systems exist in many cultures, including Japan, Thailand, Burma and some parts of Indonesia. In a caste system, social position is purely determined by blood and often backed by stringent social and religious sanctions to prevent people stepping out of line. In India, for instance, even after a hundred years of reforms to improve the lot of the untouchables (also known as Dalits), this lowest caste still suffers from discrimination in employment and education, an appallingly low standard of living and outright attacks by members of higher castes trying to keep them from "rising above themselves." Elsewhere, the effects are less dire, but on the streets many people know that their birth alone dictates how high they can rise.

THE MOST WORTHY DEMON

Taking the Second Breath certainly raises a Kuei-jin above her roots, but not wholly without effort. Any newly returned Kuei-jin must learn the language

and etiquette of her new society, and the learning curve is sharper for those hailing from humble roots. The process of *ré* — the education of a new vampire — was always important in this regard, with a *hin* being taught the appropriate modes of behavior. With modernization, *ré* has taken on new importance, as in some cases new *hin* cannot even speak a proper language. Failure at this instruction ensures that a Kuei-jin never achieves the rank of disciple, and those who learn half-heartedly win themselves enemies among the staunchly conservative elders. While many Running Monkeys resent this treatment, decrying the old forms of rank, respect and honor as outmoded and weighed against them, a new disciple must adapt to gain acceptance. Indeed, having survived this period as *hin* is an indication that a Kuei-jin has gone some way to doing just that.

Mortals, unaware of the demons who move among them, have less regard for the mystical promotion that comes with the Second Breath. A vampire with an obvious lower class background (say a Korean in Japan) is looked down on in death just as he was in life. Of course many Running Monkeys make an issue of taking such mortals severely to task for such arrogance, and eventually clever Kuei-jin gain enough resources and influence that such petty concerns drift into insignificance. Scarlet Screens are useful in this regard. Through a pawn of the appropriate class, especially one supposedly removed from the streets like the scion of a noble family or a priest, a Kuei-jin can gain influence on mortal affairs that the Kuei-jin's own background would ordinarily preclude. Getting caught manipulating events in such a manner, however, is likely to bring extreme social sanction within the mortal community.

SEX

In the West, women still struggle for true equality with men. In Asia, especially outside the Westernized and educated middle classes, women's situation is downright dire. Local cultures are rife with elements that are highly oppressive, dismissive and exploitative of women. From the widespread tradition of selling daughters to specific traditions like the outlawed Indian practice of *sati*, where widows are burnt to death on their husbands' funeral pyres, the lot of women on the streets of Asia is discernibly worse than it is for men.

The source of many of an Asian woman's burdens is the widespread practice of dowries. When a daughter is married, her family must provide a suitable gift to the groom's family, with whom the bride then goes to live. For the poor, this is a double blow. Not only must they give away some of what limited wealth they have, they also lose a set of hands, a dutiful child who will not be around to support her parents in their dotage. Sons, not unnaturally, are much prized

because they reverse this equation. Hence, female children are unwelcome in many Asian cultures. Even today, a woman, who has too many daughters or no sons, is frequently in danger of her life in these societies. Nor is it unknown for female children to be killed at birth by unimpressed relatives.

For those women who survive to adulthood, parents have always had the option of selling them rather than marrying them off. In the past, women were sold into traditional industries like weaving or as servants and concubines. With modernization, however, an even less savory fate awaits them. The development of a Western-style sex industry — most notably in Thailand and the Philippines, but also in Indonesia, India and China — provides often unwilling employment for increasing numbers of poor women. Women sold into sex slavery live in appalling conditions, raped daily and almost certain to die of neglect or AIDS. A new twist to this horror story is the export of such women to Western countries to work in the sex industry there, leaving them even more alone and isolated than before.

THE MOST EQUAL DEMONS

Female Kuei-jin find that after the Second Breath, all the limitations on them, at least within immortal society, drop away. A demon is a demon; gender matters little, especially when a female Kuei-jin has equal power to inflict hideous retribution for any slights against her. To the extent that sex discrimination exists among the Ten Thousand Demons, it works the other way around, with female Kuei-jin regarded by some elders as more dangerous than males. The example of the *penangallan* of the Golden Courts surely helps foster this image. Whether female Kuei-jin actually have a natural affinity for Flesh Shintai and other disciplines, or whether the rise of matriarchal courts in Southeast Asia is simply a reaction against the highly oppressive patriarchal systems of the region's mortal world, is impossible to determine. It is true, however, that female Kuei-jin hold their own in the courts. Only a foolish disciple treats a female demon poorly, for few female Kuei-jin ever forget the oppression and abuse they suffered as mortals. In fact, many of the women who take the Second Breath died in ways attributable to their oppression by a patriarchal society, and rose from Hell through sheer rage at the injustice of it all. With such shared memories, it is not unheard of for all the female Kuei-jin of a court to turn on a disciple who shows them disrespect.

In the mortal world, of course, the burden of backward mortal views on the place of women is still a female Kuei-jin's to bear. A young woman alone on the streets is seen as an open invitation to human predators, and while mortal attackers may not pose a real threat to a Kuei-jin, dealing with them can quickly

wear thin. In some regions, especially the most backward or those in the grip of religious fundamentalism, women live under severe restrictions. For instance, in devoutly Islamic areas women generally may not walk around in public without a male escort, nor may they own property or receive an education. Female Kuei-jin might therefore find it necessary to disguise themselves as males when operating on the streets of Pakistan or in rural areas of Malaysia or Sumatra.

Being female does have its mortal benefits, however. Not only do women have access to information that might never reach male ears, but their "lesser" gender also makes it much easier for them to play the power behind the throne in criminal organizations or corporations. They act the part of the wife or mistress and fade into the background as far as mortal males are concerned. In many misogynist cultures, women also keep up a powerful clandestine social network, garnering much information and attaining a great deal of influence via husbands, lovers and sons. If female Kuei-jin can access this network and manipulate it to their advantage, they can use it as a powerful and subtle tool to advance their own interests. On the streets, the local women usually see most of what happens because they operate the market stalls, sweep the streets and run their daily errands. While they generally keep what they learn to themselves, unwilling to interfere in the business of men, a female Kuei-jin merely by dint of her sex can elicit help and information that would otherwise be inaccessible. Many of the most successful information-gathering Scarlet Screens are built on this model of female cooperation.

POWER

Many traditions exist to reinforce the social structure of a community, ensuring the continuing power and influence of particular groups. Cultural change always risks upsetting the status quo, and those groups whose power is at risk fight tooth and nail to ensure that their privileged positions remain unchallenged. Perhaps the most widespread and damaging cultural tradition of this nature is nepotism, or looking after family and friends before all else. While certainly not unknown in the West, nepotism has always been most highly thought of and practiced in traditional Asian cultures. The effects of nepotism within a modern, capitalistic and bureaucratic system are extreme, however, with places in schools and universities, government contracts and even menial government jobs, becoming commodities with which to prop up a given family's power and influence. The effects move beyond mere corruption because they extend to every level of society. On the streets, some families control certain trades, or an extended family uses its wide influence to ensure the success of its members at others' expense.

A more esoteric tradition is that of tyrannical rule. Many Asian cultures historically laud strong, authoritarian rulers. Whether the Chinese tradition of the Confucian mandarin or the Indonesian Bapak or father figure, many people unquestioningly accept political or military leaders who act autocratically or who demand privileges not normally granted within a democratic system. In exchange, such leaders are expected to bring stability and prosperity — something that is not necessarily a sure bet, since modern economics and dictatorial rule often conflict. On the streets, however, a widespread belief remains that strongmen are a necessary evil. Their rule is generally accepted, except by the self-interested middle class and those radicals inculcated with the ideas of the democratic West.

THE MOST HONORABLE DEMON

To the ancestors and mandarins of the Kuei-jin, the traditional trappings of power are not just the familiar and proper way to conduct affairs; they are also an easy avenue to influence and power. Few mortals could compete with the experience and connections of an unliving mandarin in pre-modern Asia. By their immortal nature alone, many Kuei-jin developed ties to noble and other influential families, using the nepotistic network of their various mortal pawns to keep an eye on many diverse aspects of society. The Kuei-jin also had a unique ability to use the traditional trappings of power, like the importance of age in China, spiritual prowess in Java or caste status in India. By virtue of their immortal natures and the powers granted to them by the Second Breath, Kuei-jin could awe rulers and ruled alike into accepting that they had a special role under Heaven. Indeed, many Kuei-jin believed this was the case, taking their influence and position over mortals for granted.

Conquest by the West, colonialism and modernization have severely undermined the mandarins' political power, however. More than the influence of the Kin-jin and other *shen*, the changed nature of politics has hurt them, as they were unable or unwilling to adapt to the new systems of power. Democracies, even the dubious and corrupt democracies of Asia, are especially confusing, with many older Kuei-jin incredulous that anyone would allow common people to have a say in the rule of nations. Overnight the changes induced by modernization reduced carefully cultivated families of noble pawns to irrelevance. Many ancestors have been playing political catch-up for the last century.

The traditional courts have therefore been strong supporters of anyone seeking to overturn the new forms of government and return to the old ways. The elders' support of various corrupt and supposedly traditional dictators hasn't been enough, however, to return them to their previous positions of influence.

The present turmoil within the courts primarily stems from the elders' inability to dominate the younger Kuei-jin on the streets of the new Asia, where real power lies. In the gleaming office towers and garish girlie bars, the Bamboo Princes feel the rhythms of the streets and play them naturally. The elders, unwilling or unable to understand the streets, get their information and implement their policies secondhand, always seeming a step behind until matters enter the courts, where the elders' mastery of the forms of court politics allow them to dominate the immortal night (for now).

This balance of power is a crucial point in running a game of **Killing Streets**. No matter how much the Running Moneys own the streets, the elders still dominate the courts. Their personal power, their Dharmic enlightenment, and most especially their control over the forms of political discourse, guarantee it. By inculcating all new Kuei-jin in traditional political culture, the courts are ensuring that all Kuei-jin understand the methods by which true political legitimacy is demonstrated. A Running Monkey may believe that settling a political dispute via a calligraphy or haiku competition is rank stupidity, but when powerful elders insist on honoring such methods, they are followed. At court, a disciple's ability to manipulate dozens of Triad *hung kwan* (gang leaders) doesn't count for very much. Also, disciples or jina sometimes welcome such mild and refined methods of political discourse because they realize that in an all-out midnight war, a mandarin could rip them limb from limb. Modern-minded Kuei-jin have a long way to go before their mortal power grows great enough to challenge the hidden might of the elders, no matter how much they can cheat them on the streets in the meantime.

RELIGION

The savior of some and the doom of others, religion is an inescapable fact in Asia. No empty churches and dying faiths here; instead, people turn to God, mysticism, priests and holy men with alacrity, accepting the role that faith, fate, magic and the spirits play in everyday life. Even among the Western-educated middle classes, faith remains strong. Disconnected from their traditional lot, the new rich turn to the religions of their fathers for something to give their lives certainty and purpose. Nor is Asia lacking in great religious traditions. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, hundreds of animist sects, and combinations of all of the above, pervade the continent.

The purpose of this section is not to give a rundown on various religious beliefs, which you can find in the **Kindred of the East Companion**, but rather to examine how faith impacts day-to-day life. In that regard, the exact beliefs are far less important than the way a religion supports (or undermines) the traditional structure of society. An inherently social



animal, religion has always been used to justify those in power. With the aping of Western political forms as part of modernization, however, Asian religions suddenly lost their strong connection to the state. In many cases they became loose cannons, attracting those disenchanted with change.

Beyond ritualistic symbolism and activities, extremism is the most obvious and influential religious expression in Asia today. The great majority of Asians, even those poor souls on the streets, look to their faith only to guide their prayers, show them the appropriate rites and taboos and channel their hope for a better life after death. To a notable minority, however, faith becomes an excuse to violently seek reward here on Earth. There are many facets of such fanaticism, from the hard-right and militant Shinto organizations in Japan that seek to return the Emperor to his status as God-King, to the Muslim radicals of Southeast Asia and their struggles to carve Islamic states out of the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, to the Sinhalese Buddhist extremists in Sri Lanka who advocate the genocide of the Hindu Tamil minority, to the corresponding Tamil Hindu extremists fighting for a separate Tamil state.

The poor are the most susceptible to the blandishments of religious extremists. Desperately poor people have little to lose and often rely on religious organizations for education and for help in times of need. Even for those not directly involved, extremism is hard to avoid. Few wish to see what little they have destroyed by those seeking to punish the insufficiently faithful, after all. Religious minorities at risk of mob violence are all the more likely to respond with extremism of their own.

Many religious extremists, despite their moralistic façade, also engage in criminal activities to fund the good fight — selling drugs or guns, or running protection or kidnapping rackets, are hardly unheard of. A good example of such behavior is the Islamic extremists of South Asia, who from their bases in Afghanistan and northern Pakistan have become major producers of hashish and heroin. Despite their claims that the drugs are for sale only to decadent Westerners, problems with drug abuse are starting to seriously afflict the extremists' own societies. The extremist elements then blame these problems on lax moral behavior and use them as an excuse for a further crackdown on those who resist their fundamentalist rule.

Not all those who turn to religion seek out violent solutions; many simply use their faith to hide from the encroaching changes that are redefining how they live. Various called traditionalists, orthodox or iconoclasts, they call for a return to old forms of morality and strict interpretations of social standards. Their appeals almost always run counter to the true needs of society, but are influential and touch upon strong and deeply felt cultural beliefs.

Religious activism also has its positive side, of course. Many Catholic priests died or were imprisoned fighting the Marcos regime in the Philippines and the Indonesians in East Timor, for example. Likewise, Islamic intellectuals and Buddhist priests are often at the forefront of movements resisting dictators and domineering crime lords. From drug rehabilitation programs to education and health, faith in Asia is also a harbinger of hope on the dark streets.

THE MOST PIOUS DEMON

The Kuei-jin excel at manipulating religion, especially the elders with their long experience in playing on human superstition and their intimate knowledge of the hidden world. A temple or cult makes an excellent way to secure a hold on rich Chi resources, as well as garnering significant other benefits in terms of manpower and mortal wealth. Given that the Kuei-jin are an accepted part of Asian spirituality, imported religions like Islam and Christianity aside, it isn't all that hard to con mortals into believing that the Ten Thousand Demons are legitimate interpreters of the mandate of Heaven, the family ancestors, or any other spiritual authority chosen to suit the Kuei-jin's purpose at the time. That eastern religious cults have proven popular in the West has also not gone unnoticed; a number of the cults that are expanding their operations in Europe and the American West Coast are actually Scarlet Screens for various courts. These cults are subtle fallbacks should the bold endeavor of the Great Leap Outward fail.

Religion remains one of the few media through which the mandarins can affect the streets directly and in a way they fully understand. That many Running Monkeys are removed from their traditional religions and exhibit little understanding of just how useful congregations of the faithful can be is an extra benefit. The insidious influence of Kuei-jin has pushed some religious groups into trades that they might otherwise have avoided, as well as perverting once harmless spiritual organizations into dangerous cults deeply involved in immoral activities. Such perversions must be hidden carefully, however. Careless elders have discovered that mortal officialdom is becoming more aware of such groups, and crackdowns are making truly criminal activity by religious groups more difficult.

Religious faith has other drawbacks for the Ten Thousand Demons, especially when there are Shih demon hunters around to enforce Heaven's balance. Even normal mortals concerned about their churches can be a problem, though elders are adept at redirecting such individuals towards the less subtle activities of the Running Monkeys. The non-Asian religions, Islam and Christianity, are more of

a problem because their faithful do not accept the "legitimacy" of the Kuei-jin's role under Heaven. A Shinto priest or Hindu Brahmin may uncover a Kuei-jin but choose to do nothing about her, so long as her actions stay within the acceptable boundaries of the Ten Thousand Demons' place in the heavenly hierarchy. On occasion, the mortal followers of some Asian faiths and individual Kuei-jin or *wu* even make open alliances.

CRIME AND COLLAPSE

With all the problems besetting Asia — the chaos and confusion, the doubts and fears — it is little wonder that the streets are awash with crime. From petty and inconsequential pickpockets and burglars to dangerous and cruel white slavers and war criminals, every kind of ne'er-do-well can be found in Asia, and the spilt blood and human suffering runs deep. Some struggle against the tide of crime and violence, but good intentions alone cannot prevail against the rising human storm created by modernization, poverty, politics, and misplaced traditions.

NO RESPECT, NO MORALS, NO CONTROL

Few Kuei-jin indulge in crime for crime's sake and fewer still are solely interested in the mortal wealth such activity brings. Nor do most take the time to run a family of beggars or a pickpocket gang directly or even remotely — the return is simply not worth the effort. Kuei-jin prefer to deal with crime only when it brings them power over their rivals or plentiful Chi. This is one reason for the emphasis on the sex trade, which keeps large numbers of expendable young victims pouring into the cities of Asia. Yet to older, more refined Kuei-jin, the notion of dealing with criminals, who have always been of the lowest classes and social standing, is intolerable. They prefer to leave direct involvement with these commonest of mortals to Running Monkeys, dhampyrs or disposable human lackeys.

Criminality also brings its fair share of practical problems to the Kuei-jin. First off is surveillance by mortal authorities, a potentially serious problem if certain activities come to the attention of the wrong people. Dabbling in crime brings the constant threat of arrest or of being wanted by the police. A Kuei-jin having to do time would find himself in serious difficulty. Another potential drawback is the inherent danger and treachery of the criminal underworld. It almost goes without saying that criminals are not to be trusted; therefore, the only safe way to use them is to ensure that your goals match theirs. When you happen to be one of the living dead, such a similarity of purpose is unlikely, at least in an obvious sense. Mortal criminals want money, Kuei-jin want power and Chi; making these two separate goals meet is not always easy. Subtlety is the key. A

Kuei-jin can ultimately make criminals do anything she wants as long as the criminals don't associate what they're doing with anything other than criminality. For example, a Kuei-jin who needs constant victims is better off dressing up her feeding as reprisal attacks against rival criminals or rebellious locals than simply demanding that people be brought to her. While the end result is the same, the first method brings the Kuei-jin respect in the criminal community; the second only raises questions about exactly what is going on. The brutality of Asian criminals means that even the most devil-ridden Kuei-jin can find a hole to hide in if necessary, but by the same token even the Kuei-jin must take care to fit in. Otherwise, the mortal criminals will see them as a threat and remove them.

Subtlety brings its own problems, however. If your associates don't realize you're one of the Hungry Dead, then you're as likely as any human crime boss to be betrayed and overthrown by jealous underlings or greedy rivals. The problem of untrustworthy allies and subordinates is becoming more and more of a problem as social order breaks down on the streets. Lack of respect, mindless violence and drug addiction are all part of a live-fast-and-die-young nihilism that makes a Kuei-jin crime lord's job rather nerve-racking. Naturally, a Kuei-jin is more likely to survive an assassination attempt and tear her enemies limb from limb in revenge, but the problem still exists, especially if court rivals are manipulating the assassins in question.

A few displays of a Kuei-jin's power can work wonders, making superstitious underlings fearful of crossing the boss. Of course, such actions raise the risk that rumors of what the Kuei-jin really is might reach the ears of a local Shih. Once upon a time, the role of crime lord was easier; the penchant for rituals and spiritualism by organized Asian criminal groups presented an excellent method of hiding the true source of a Kuei-jin's power. With modernization and the skepticism that has accompanied it even in moderately traditional crime groups a display of power now tends to raise eyebrows. More traditionally minded groups are also hard for a Running Monkey to infiltrate; their historical roots and maintenance of the ancient traditions of address and respect make such groups favored Scarlet Screens for those elders who deign to deal with criminals. As a result, ancestors and mandarins tend to dominate traditionally minded organized crime groups, while Running Monkeys favor those groups that have left the ancient mumbo-jumbo behind. As the modern gangs are proving more effective on the streets, the Running Monkeys are undermining the elders without even trying, leaving the old guard irate at another weakening of traditional society.

THE SEX TRADE

Concubinage and indentured servitude have been a part of most cultures at one time or other, and in many Asian states have only been illegal within living memory. Among the poor, the concept of selling children is neither alien nor necessarily the horror that it may appear. Large numbers of children, especially female children, could be a terrible burden for a village if harvests were bad or any number of other minor disasters struck. In service to a wealthy or noble family, a child was assured of food, perhaps even an education, and was certainly more likely to lead a comfortable life than in the poor village they came from. Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese history is rife with scholars, generals and ministers of humble background who came through such servitude to power and prominence.

Modernization and Western-style lusts turned this traditional practice into a living hell for tens of thousands of women and increasing numbers of boys and young men as well. Western-style brothels came to Asia with colonialism and soon acquired poor peasant girls as indentured servants. Their numbers were never great; the trade was mostly limited to the major port cities where there was substantial passing traffic. The Vietnam War, however, brought a huge number of rich, young American soldiers to the region; with their need for rest and recreation in the Philippines and Thailand came the birth of the Asian sex trade.

By the end of the war, the Philippines and Thailand had become so notorious for their sex industries that perverts from all over the world traveled there for thrills. The big dollars of sex tourism kept the bars and brothels open; so lucrative was it that the sex trade expanded into other countries. Wealth and the development of a middle class brought the sex trade — albeit for local perverts — to India, Indonesia and China. In countries like Malaysia, Korea, Singapore and Japan, where religion or wealth precluded a readily available source of poor women, criminal syndicates began to import girls from Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia to fill the local clubs and brothels. Eventually this international trade extended to Europe and the United States as well.

Poverty, greed, disease and deviancy mean that the sex trade now goes beyond village girls having to work as strippers and prostitutes. Desperation is always followed by exploitation, much as night follows day, and many pimps have abandoned any pretense of paying the workers. Sex workers become sex slaves, and as property their living conditions become worse, their treatment more callous and their social status even lower. To add horror to misery, the traditional scourges of VD and syphilis have been joined by AIDS, which has devastated the sex trade and infected tens of thousands of sex workers. The trade's

abused workers lack the power to demand that condoms be used; instead, the infected are thrown out onto the streets by their criminal bosses and replaced by “fresh meat”. If they are lucky, they die in understaffed and poorly equipped hospitals.

Where there are no rules, when people are reduced to chattel, there are no limits to which some people will not descend. So long as they have the money, perverts from all around the world can come to Asia to pursue the basest, vilest and most twisted of their imaginings. Pedophilia, torture, snuff, forced transvestism and bestiality, the most bizarre and inhuman desires of the warped and amoral, find a home in the back alleys of Calcutta, Jakarta, Manila and Bangkok. The truly sick hide behind the forced gaiety and fluorescent glitz of the open sex trade — open only in that its most prevalent abuses, like rape and drug addiction, are acknowledged sins and almost innocent compared to the horrors in the back rooms.

THE TORN LOTUS

Kuei-jin love the sex trade, and their interest has helped it spread around Asia. Every court sees the usefulness of a business that uses mortals like chattel and has myriad ways of disposing of the bodies. In many ways, the brothels and strip joints, with their quiet and desperate back rooms where all sorts of debaucheries go on, are the closest thing Cathayans have to Kin-jin Elysium. To cause problems for the sex trade is to be barred from easy feeding in its brothels and bars. The courts therefore tend to assign oversight of the trade to a senior mandarin. While young Kuei-jin may actually manipulate the trade via their various Scarlet Screens, the court elders insist that nothing disrupt the peaceful exploitation of the sex workers and their customers for Chi. This makes the sex trade one of the few industries on the streets where the Kuei-jin fight to maintain near-complete domination, ensuring that even those brothels or snuff houses that they don't directly operate allow them the access they desire and don't do anything to bring mortal authorities down on their heads.

Not all brothels are equal, of course. A centuries-old mandarin is just as unlikely to enter a garish strip club in Mong Kok as a brash young Running Monkey is to frequent an ancestral Geisha House in Kanzai. Nevertheless, every Kuei-jin is likely to find somewhere suitable to sate his hunger and carnal desires. The ranks of sex workers also make an excellent place to recruit servants and slaves — after all, no one misses them, and some even welcome the chance to get out. Even the twisted world of service to the Ten Thousand Demons is often less heinous than the sex trade. The move of the trade into Europe and North America has also provided an excellent avenue for Kuei-jin influence to enter those regions. The Kin-jin themselves encourage the sex trade for the same rea-

sons, not yet realizing that by doing so they are opening their doors to some of their enemies.

Of course, other *shen* understand why the Kuei-jin are so involved in the sex trade and support many of the reforms designed to crack down on it. Nothing is more likely to annoy a Cathayan than having his easy feeding grounds removed by police vice squads or rezoning of the local red light district. While the Kuei-jin rarely balk at fighting with other *shen*, the growth of a middle class and religious fundamentalism are also undermining the sex trade. These social changes often drive the trade underground, where the vampiric benefits are not so great and the guarantee of easy Chi not so certain. The degeneracy of the sex trade also attracts *akuma*, who manipulate matters to sink customers and Kuei-jin alike into ever greater debauchery.

Given the deaths and abuse suffered by sex workers, a growing number of women trapped within the industry in life are taking the Second Breath, especially in Southeast Asia. Fueled by anger at their mortal abuse and disgusted at the way the urban courts exploit the sex trade, these women gravitate toward rural courts. The *penangallan* gain large numbers of recruits in this fashion. *Wu* made up entirely of former sex slaves are becoming the shock troops and spies of choice in the battles around Southeast Asia's thriving cities. The problems caused by such fanatics are coming to light only slowly, though many of the more urban Golden Courts fear that their rural rivals are building an army of whores and strippers to sweep them into the sea.

THE DRUG TRADE

Various drugs have been used in Asia for centuries, from marijuana in some Hindu religious ceremonies to the opium smoked by peoples as different as Thai hill tribes and imperial Chinese mandarins. Only when the British needed a product to trade for Chinese tea did drug addiction become a widespread problem and the drug trade a major source of revenue and conflict, however. Opium remained an overwhelmingly Chinese problem until the Communist take over in 1949. The Chinese Communists' brutal policy of repression soon all but eradicated drugs as a major scourge in China, but the trade and those who made money from it managed to survive offshore.

The Vietnam War brought widespread drug activity back to Asia, with heroin introduced to disconsolate American soldiers by criminals in Vietnam and Thailand eager to find a new batch of addicts to replace those they had lost in China. Returning soldiers took the taste for heroin back to America and introduced it into the counter-culture of the 1960s, and a new drug trade was born that brought seemingly inexhaustible riches to those who controlled access to the opium poppies from which heroin was derived.

Naturally, fierce fighting over who controlled the Golden Triangle — an area of land encompassing northern Thailand, Laos and Burma — started almost immediately, fuelled by drug money, CIA guns and the inability of any of the countries involved to successfully suppress the heroin trade.

Eventually, however, Southeast Asia fought back. Despite the billions brought in by heroin, the vast corruption the drug trade spawned and the violent resistance of the drug lords, regional governments slowly managed to shut the Golden Triangle down. Heroin was undermining the very existence of many Southeast Asian nations; their governments responded with death sentences for anyone caught smuggling, compulsory and brutal detoxification for addicts, and (in Thailand) the intervention of the powerful and influential king. Nowadays, while opium is still grown in the Golden Triangle, the heroin trade is mostly gone from Thailand and no longer poses an extreme threat to national stability.

The drug trade itself did not die out, however; it merely moved its operations to more hospitable countries, those whose governments were too corrupt or ineffective to stop the drug lords. In Burma, Laos and Afghanistan, drugs remain big business. The drug lords often possess armies large enough to fight pitched battles with government troops, a situation that harks back to the worst days of the Golden Triangle. From their hidden bases, these barons of the trade suborn government officials, fund wars and push their product into other Asian countries. Creating markets near at hand is their way of ensuring their continued prosperity, despite how little money the Asian markets bring compared to the United States or Europe.

In recent years, cheap drugs have flooded into Asia, targeting the desperate poor as the latest growth market. As the ranks of the poor, dispossessed and hopeless swell, the problem grows. Increased addiction leads to increased levels of petty crime and fear, as well as greater opportunities for criminals to dominate and corrupt the cities and communities they prey on. Most of Asia is on this slow road downward, a path already well trodden by Hong Kong and Japan, a vicious cycle that leads to dissolution and despair among the thousands of addicts who end up on the streets looking for their next hit.

FRAGRANCE OF THE ROTTING POPPY

Given their overwhelming concern with Chi, the Kuei-jin have no particular interest in the drug trade. Indeed, many elders within the Quincunx courts actively dislike the drug industry. They remember China's humiliation at the hands of the British during the Opium Wars, and have worked to oppose the drug lords within their own spheres of influence. Modern mortal authorities are also incensed by the drug trade because it chips away at their power and control. Few

Cathayans see any point in attracting official scrutiny, and so keep their drug connections at arm's length. That doing so accommodates many elders' innate prejudices is a happy coincidence. Ironically, these same elders supported the efforts of various Triads from the late 19th century onwards to sell opium and later heroin in Europe and North America. This trade represented an open attack on the West that has had positive effects in the immortal night — much of the Great Leap Outward built on inroads made by the Triads.

SMUGGLING AND PIRACY

With its hundreds of islands and tens of thousands of kilometers of coastline, Asia has a rich maritime history, especially of fishing and trading. Since ancient times, governments have taxed traders, and so every civilization developed some form of smuggling. In Asia, traditional maritime smuggling grew enormously after Western colonization. The Western nations wanted to make money from their colonies and so taxed anything and everything they could, often at punishingly high levels. Asian sailors and traders went about avoiding such taxes with characteristic ingenuity. Independence did not end smuggling, but increased it in reaction to the tight control imposed over national economies by various socialist and Communist regimes.

Modernization and the development of Western-style capitalist economies hurt the smugglers, but not much. Guerrilla wars led to the rise of gun running as a major industry, likewise drug smuggling and the smuggling of luxury goods for the new middle class. Stolen cars, liquor and perfumes keep smuggling a big business in Asia. Modernization has also given the smugglers access to the latest technology, like cigarette boats, global positioning systems (GPS), and radar and satellite communications, keeping them well ahead of the poorly equipped local militaries.

Piracy is smuggling's less accepted counterpart, ranging from major operations where entire container ships go missing in the South China Sea, to attacks of opportunity by poor fishermen against yachts and small ships in the Straits of Malacca. Some pirates, mostly small-time operators who fear reprisals by survivors or the local government, are chillingly violent. They often rape female victims before killing and dismembering them along with the men. The more professional operators rarely kill the crews of the cargo ships they capture. To do so might make successful piracy harder in future, as the crews rarely resist — after all, they own neither the ships nor the cargo. Still, the risk of violence on the high seas has become great enough that individual ships are warned not to stray from the main shipping lanes and to maintain close radio contact with mari-

time authorities. The major shipping lines routinely hire security guards for their vessels.

WAX OF SECRET WATERS

The Kuei-jin make extensive use of smugglers, whose activities often provide the only way to move mystical artifacts and other possessions, like pet *chih-mei* or bakemono, to which mortal authorities take exception. Using smugglers is a delicate business, however, because the smugglers and pirates of Asia have always been the domain of the Same-Bito weresharks. To treat these savage *shen's* followers with anything but the greatest respect is to invite savage retaliation. In some regions, particularly southern China and Bangkok, alliances of convenience have arisen, with the courts in those regions providing protection to land-based elements of Same-Bito piratical enterprises in return for Same-Bito agreement to move large quantities of human cargo for the sex trade. These arrangements provide something for everyone, though the elders are careful to leave dealing with the unpredictable Same-Bito to disciples of no particular importance.

The movement of artifacts is a highly important function for which the Kuei-jin rely on smugglers, as modern mortal governments frown on items of cultural importance leaving their national borders. Any *wu* asked by a mandarin to take a gift to a court in another country, or even to acquire a certain little something for her, must deal with smugglers. Modern airports, with automated and impersonal security, offer few avenues for a Kuei-jin to use her disciplines to sneak even the smallest packages past customs. An even more dubious use for smugglers is the ransacking of ancient jungle temples, deposits of jade and even stands of cedar and teak trees. Apart from the valuable materials gained, the damage done undermines the rural courts, especially those of the *penangallan* — a fact not lost on the urban Golden Courts that encourage smugglers of illegal artifacts, lumber and precious stones.

PEOPLE SMUGGLING

Asia has undergone several major population displacements since the end of colonialism, each with its own subtle effects. Under the duress of modernization and poverty, many Asians find it an easy step from the tradition of indentured servitude to hiring out as foreign workers far from home. Whether in the oil fields of the Middle East or the prosperous homes of Singapore, Hong Kong and Europe, hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis, Indians, Filipinos and Indonesians have left home over the years to earn money to send back to their families. While many are horribly exploited (especially young women working as maids), the money is good and for the most part their families see significant benefit from the sacrifices made by

those who work abroad. Indeed, income from foreign workers is the Philippines' third largest source of export income.

In the decades following the fall of South Vietnam and the collapse of Cambodia into bloody chaos, millions of people, many ethnic Chinese, took to boats and fled re-education and genocide. This first great wave of refugees saw hundreds of thousands living in barely sanitary camps throughout Asia and thousands more resettled in the West. Groups promptly developed to prey on these desperate political refugees, from the pirates of the South China Sea who pillaged their overloaded boats, to the smugglers who turned a quick profit by moving people for money.

By the 1990s, times had changed and the flow of refugees dwindled. But with poverty remaining endemic in many Asian countries and the lure of the West's great wealth becoming stronger, a new form of refugee came to replace those fleeing political repression — the economic refugee, often better known as an illegal migrant. From all parts of Asia, poor people seeking a shortcut to a better life set their sights on America, Europe and Australia. Soon the smugglers who had preyed on political refugees came to recognize the desires of these desperate people as a gold mine..

For your money or your life, the people smugglers (sometimes called snake-heads) will take you from China or Iraq to America or Australia. Of course, first you need to survive the hardships and neglect imposed by the smugglers and then avoid detection and repatriation by the local customs and Coast Guard. Smugglers charge extortionate fees for the trip, as much as \$25,000 dollars for a one way ticket to America; families work for years to send just one member abroad, hoping that in the promised land of freedom and wealth this favored son will make good and benefit them all. For those who can't afford such extravagance, the smugglers have another offer: a one-way ticket and then a job where the smuggled person can work off the cost of her trip (at daily compounded interest and slave labor rates, if she gets paid at all). All too many women find out the hard way that the smugglers are turning a little extra profit by selling them into the sex trade; their dreams of freedom shrivel into the dank, abusive nightmare of enslavement in a foreign brothel.

Before they get to the brothels or sweatshops, illegal migrants must survive the journey. Some travel by sea, two dozen or more to a shipping container for weeks at a time, with little food or water. Others are carried in trucks through the heart of a Siberian winter or a burning Kazhak summer. Many suffer casual beatings and abuse at the hands of the very people they paid to smuggle them. All are just as likely to die on their journey as they are to be caught at their destination. Indeed, the few horror stories

that find their way onto the nightly news represent only a small percentage of those migrants who don't make it. Whole ships sink, taking dozens to the bottom; entire families starve to death as their containers sit unattended in a customs yard; groups of human goods suffocate in dark, cramped trucks, clawing at the locked doors with their last breath.

PATH OF THORNS AND TATTERED BLOSSOMS

With their focus on maintaining control of Chi, the Kuei-jin generally do not favor assisting people leaving Asia for any reason. This is especially true of those in the slums and refugee camps who are such easy prey. Yet the poor are so numerous and the people smugglers can take so few that only the truly domineering Cathayan bothers resisting their activities in her hunting grounds. As people smuggling makes use of Asia's existing smuggling network, the courts are also loath to create problems with criminal organizations that they otherwise use extensively.

In the last few years, Chinese Kuei-jin have also used existing people-smuggling networks to help further their invasion of the West Coast of the Americas. The Great Leap Outward has brought of Cathayans to the West, a migration the established networks made simple. In fact, those jina who protected the smuggling networks now reap immense profits as troop carriers in the great shadow war.

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS STRIFE

A step above crime, but not quite war, civil disorder simmers just beneath the surface of many Asian countries, roaring to life at times of crisis. People like to have a reason to tear up the town, and religion and ethnicity usually provide enough justification to pillage, murder and burn out the neighbors. Though such hatreds normally arise of their own accord, criminal and political groups have grown adept at exploiting them, whether for the raw profit of looting or to undermine political opponents and provide a convenient excuse for a military crackdown.

Whether Muslim versus Hindu, Christian versus Muslim, Chinese versus Malay, or any other of a dozen or more combinations, the results are the same: bloody riots, inhuman atrocities, burnt homes and businesses, chanting mobs and a gripping fear that pervades minority communities like a disease. Most people don't take this sort of abuse lying down, of course, and invariably self-protection groups and secret societies spring up to defend the helpless or just to add to the bloodshed. Such groups tend to be self-sustaining, often turning to crime in times of peace. The most famous example is the White Lotus Society, the forerunner of the Triads.

Such murderous tension and fear makes for nervous people, so that even innocent fires can lead to violence. Mob violence is one of the few things that

can empty the streets, as even the most hardened criminal will think twice before taking on a furious mass out for slaughter. In past times, places of worship or traditional leaders could have called a halt to the violence or at least provided refuge, but no more. The forces of modernization, which have added so much to the underlying resentment and turmoil in so many communities, have also undermined the structures that once kept antagonistic feelings in check. So when the fires start and the mob howls, far too few try to prevent the streets running red.

TIMES OF BLOOD AND FIRE

When riots erupt, Kuei-jin can play out their rage without restraint and feed as they will. Such times are both electrifying and terrifying. The risk of Final Death is much greater when all normal controls and limitations fail, and mobs have an unfortunate propensity to play with fire. Kuei-jin sometimes deliberately start the violence, however, manipulating the simmering tensions to start a riot that will cover some audacious attack. Such actions tend to occur when two courts are at war or a court is in chaos, since the ancestors generally frown on actions with the potential to extinguish even the most potent vampire.

Given the level of tension in some communities split by racial or political differences, the Kuei-jin sometimes have to work hard to prevent their mere presence from starting riots. A bloody body found at the wrong time or an ill-timed attack on a rival can easily bring the mob onto the streets. Of course, explaining to a mandarin why you couldn't carry out his orders is sometimes more dangerous than risking blood in the gutters. In more religious and traditional communities, the Kuei-jin themselves can become the target of the mobs. In India, Indonesia and Malaysia, more than one *shen* or Shih has manipulated the faith of fundamentalist Muslims into a burning fury about the devils living in their midst.

Whether they are targets, motivators or merely observers, Kuei-jin are quick to take advantage of the chaos. Powerful mandarins have been known to simply disappear during such mortal violence, leaving their enemies in a good position and without blood on their hands. Even ancestors have failed to last through a time of blood and fire, which can last weeks if the mortals become especially riotous. The paranoia that goes with this danger often motivates further violence — everyone believes that if they don't strike, their enemies will. The opportunity is also too much for some Kuei-jin to resist. Rioting allows them to avenge slights too small to justify a twilight war, or made by a vampire too powerful to openly oppose. Particularly annoying *wu* and Running Monkeys with powerful patrons are popular targets, something of which all young Kuei-jin are painfully aware. Many vampires hide during the



fighting, hoping to pick up whatever pieces they can of their Scarlet Screens after it all calms down.

CORRUPTION

What's right and what's wrong when you're a civil servant, policeman or soldier and you don't earn enough to feed your family? Is it wrong to take crisp US dollars from a respectable businessman as payment for not investigating too closely the age of the girls in the club he runs if the money feeds your family for another month? Is it wrong to demand money from those who come to you to request government services if the government is insisting on paying you in rice? Is it wrong to look the other way at the opium being smuggled through the local port if the man in charge is your boss? These are not abstract questions — these are the moral dilemmas of Asia's streets, the questions that mean the difference between starving as an honest man and being a tarnished survivor.

In some exceptional cases, corruption reaches grotesque scales, with generals and politicians becoming billionaires. The most obvious cases are China's Communist Party bosses and two former presidents in other countries: Marcos in the Philippines and Suharto in Indonesia. Every dollar these leaders take is money that the average person doesn't see, and in a poor country a billion US dollars is wealth so unimaginable that heaven itself seems more real. The elite may have their

glittering clubs surrounded by barbed-wire fences, solid gold plumbing in the bathroom, rooms full of shoes and clothes, and villas in the south of France, but among the millions of Asia they represent a tiny light of wealth against a dark sea of poverty only deepened by their corruption. Under such rulers the whole system of government and business becomes compromised; every deal needs a kickback, every job requires you to know the right person, and every law becomes negotiable.

On the streets, therefore, the difference between criminal and official is often dubious at best. In fact, groups defined as criminal are often nothing more than the enemies of the ruling regime, whether a Chinese meditation society banned because it espouses self-reliance outside state control or a union in Indonesia arguing for better pay and greater rights for workers at a huge multinational sporting goods company. Not all supposed criminals want your money, just as not all "servants of the people" want what's best for you. As a result, most people seek to avoid dealing with the government at all if they can. Instead, they build informal networks that they can rely on or they make deals with local strongmen to protect them the way that the police should. Thus organized crime, secret societies, powerful political parties and the wealthy become the dominant forces on the streets, interceding with a corrupt state for their various paying constituents.

BAKSHEESH FOR EVERYONE

Many Kuei-jin have massive monetary wealth, as well as access to resources unavailable to mortals, and are therefore in a unique position to buy whatever they want from corrupt government officials. Even honest officials are not immune to persuasion by some Kuei-jin Disciplines; more ordinary blackmail is another avenue at which a clever Cathayan can easily excel. While Running Monkeys and Bamboo Princes twist and maneuver on the streets, taking their control of local councilors and policemen for granted, their elders play a more subtle game. Why bribe a policeman when you can manipulate a police chief or security minister? If a Bamboo Prince is causing you problems, merely arrange for some of her most loyal retainers to be transferred or for the locale of her haven to suddenly be rezoned for urban renewal. In the Byzantine world of high-level corruption, the ancestors have the Bamboo Princes checkmated, and they regularly remind their inferiors of that fact through bureaucratic face slaps that are meant to keep Running Monkeys in their place.

While some younger Kuei-jin subtly support activists trying to thwart official corruption, others accept the elders' role and make use of it to cover up indiscretions when necessary. As part of the game, some elders deliberately try to force such occasions to put disciples in their debt. Doing this helps keep the Running Monkeys honest because they don't want to give the ancestors and mandarins any help that they don't have to. Of course, corrupt officials are hardly trustworthy, but few Kuei-jin deal with them directly, anyway. Instead, they use Scarlet Screens (like corporations or secret societies) to make their interests seem part of day-to-day corruption. This tactic also makes the Bamboo Princes' job harder, forcing them to determine which of a corrupt official's decisions are directed by an elder and which by the official's purse.

TATTOOED DEVILS

For all Asia's diversity, organized crime throughout the region is almost entirely split between three groups; local governments and revolutionary organizations, Triads controlled by ethnic Chinese, and the Japanese Yakuza, though the latter is less influential than the former. This is not to say that all crime is run by corrupt officials and Triads — indeed, at the basic level of the street gang, crime is always localized — but who those gangs report to is another matter altogether.

Many apparently local crime groups are actually offshoots of the Triads, in structure if not in lineage. The ethnic Malay criminals of Indonesia called the *Gali* ("savage class") are a prime example. Like the Triads, they use tattoos and complex mystical rites as a sign of membership; often, the only difference is

the translation of Chinese rank names into Javanese or Balinese. These similarities can be traced to the strong influence of Chinese immigrants on urban life in Southeast Asia, as well as the money and firepower with which the Triads have expanded their influence. So even when not specifically dealing with Triads, you often might as well be when you consider the similarities.

This sameness benefits a Storyteller. By taking the information presented below about the Triads and the Yakuza and simply altering the names and places, a Storyteller can come up with a Malaysian or Korean gang without having to become an expert on local communities. This overview is not entirely accurate, and we encourage a Storyteller interested in setting a game permanently in Southeast Asia to do further research; however, additional materials are not common and often consist of highly academic criminology texts. For most games, an atlas, a dictionary of Malay or Thai names, and the ideas presented in this chapter are all you need to create a convincing non-Chinese or Japanese gang.

OF RAJAS AND BABUS

The one region is Asia where the Triads have not had serious influence is the Indian subcontinent. Here, the local ethnic criminal groups and a relatively effective police and court system have kept crime in local hands. Forms of crime in India, like many of that nation's institutions, are highly Westernized, but divided by caste, ethnicity, and religion. Thus you have the Bombay Mafia, Arab and Muslim; the Madras Mafia, Tamil and Hindu; the Calcutta Mafia, Bengali and Hindu; and so on. The heads of these crime organizations are called "dons" after the American Mafia and for the most part exhibit exactly the same traits and structures, but with communalism adding to the violence and hatred.

THE TRIADS

In every significant Chinese community worldwide, there is at least one Triad living off the people through protection rackets, graft, gambling, prostitution and drugs, as well as more legitimate control of the labor markets and service industries. In this, the Triads are not very much different from any other ethnic organized crime group, one reason why they have managed to make deals so easily with the Mafia in the United States. The big difference is historical and cultural. Just as the Mafia represents southern Italian culture through the prism of criminality, so do the Triads represent Cantonese culture, although tied to even more specific historical events.

TRIAD HISTORY

The Communist take over of Hong Kong in 1997, which had been the Triad capital since 1949, prompted many Triads to move overseas and brought them to the close attention of the West for the first time, but the Triads go back centuries. Their historical roots lie within that most popular of Chinese political groups, the secret society. The Triads sprang from the secret societies founded to resist the Mongols in the 10th and 11th centuries. One society, the White Lotus, became a major power behind the Ming dynasty and pervasive throughout Ming society.

When the Manchus overthrew the last corrupt and incompetent Ming emperor in the 17th century, the White Lotus started a resistance movement. This new movement became known as the Triad Society. Three is a mystical number in Chinese numerology, representing Heaven, Earth and man, and thus was an expression of existence as a whole. The Triad Society never managed to overthrow the Manchus, but it did survive, growing ever more powerful, fractured and widespread. The various modern Triad societies' strong mystical tradition goes back, at least according to legend, to the destruction of the Shao Lin Temple in the mid-18th century. Oppressed by the Manchus as a threat to the security of their dynasty, the surviving Shao Lin Monks supposedly joined the original Triad Society, bringing with them their mystical and spiritual beliefs. The veracity of this story is uncertain, but whatever the truth, the legend itself lent a great deal of spiritual and political credibility to the Triad Society. With its increased power, the Society expanded from southern China, becoming well-established in Peking by the mid-19th century and spawning sub-groups in almost every overseas Chinese community.

Time took its toll on the Triad Society, however. Though its political emphasis remained, many sub-groups had turned to crime to fund their operations. Prostitution, gambling, opium dealing and extortion were favorite money-makers. At the same time, many sub-groups had developed into what amounted to neighborhood organizations, protecting the locals from corrupt officials and providing local men with a place to drink and smoke — a mix of neighborhood watch and the Masonic Lodge. They gained great power by becoming closely intertwined with everyday life, so much so that during China's Taiping Rebellion in the mid-19th century, they could field armies and conquer cities. Around this same time, it became common to refer to the myriad sub-groups of the Triad Society as "the Triads."

Despite their growing criminal focus, the Triads remained committed to the overthrow of the Manchus and various sub-groups continued their involvement in anti-Manchu movements. These included the Boxer Rebellion and the Republican movement that even-

tually overthrew the Manchu dynasty in 1912. Triad influence in recent Chinese history cannot be overestimated. Sun Yat Sen, the father of modern China and first president of the Chinese Republic, was a member of a number of Triads, including one exclusively based in Chicago and Honolulu, the Kwok On Wui Society. However, the Triads he belonged to had remained purely political.

The Triads became increasingly powerful and influential under the Chinese Republic, especially once the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) established its dictatorial rule. Without a foreign oppressor to resist and as corruption pervaded the Kuomintang, the majority of Triads became organized crime syndicates dedicated to supporting the nationalist officials who allowed them to pursue their drug dealing, gun running, extortion, white slaving, prostitution, gambling and moneylending uninhibited. Not all Triads turned to crime, not even the vast majority, but enough did to taint the Triad name forever as referring to criminal syndicates rather than social organizations.

Given the close ties between the corrupt Triads and the nationalists, it is not surprising that the Communists made membership in a Triad a treasonous offense when they took over China in 1949. They even suppressed the peaceful and social Triads, afraid they would become a focus for resistance. This repression effectively ended the non-criminal tradition of the Triad Society, except within a few overseas communities. The criminal Triads didn't die so easily, however, but fled to Taiwan, Macao and Hong Kong. There, they mixed with the local Triads in a turbulent and violent marriage that kept them occupied for almost a decade. With China's vast cities denied them, the newly arrived Triads turned their former activities to other cities, especially those elsewhere in Asia and on the West Coast of the USA.

The biggest boon for the Triads was CIA support for various Kuomintang military officers who had retreated into Laos, Thailand and Burma to escape the Communists. The CIA supplied these officers with large quantities of arms so that they could pursue the fight against Communism. Many of these officers were not merely corrupt but also active members of Triads, and they soon turned their forces toward controlling the production of opium within the Golden Triangle. CIA weapons gave the Triads control over heroin production for the first time and allowed them to expand it enormously. By the mid-1960s, the Triads had completely recovered from their losses when they were driven out of China, controlling the heroin trade and using the vast sums it brought them to take a major interest in virtually every major criminal activity in Asia.

Today, the Triads retain this dominant position; even the reintegration of Hong Kong into China has not fazed them. Most Triads, including

the big ones like the 14K Society, Shui Fong, Wo Shing Wo, Wo On Lok and Sun Yee Ong, already had their major operations offshore. Many prominent Triad members emigrated to Canada, America, Australia and the United Kingdom, but the most effective survival technique was improving contacts with corrupt Communist officials.

STRUCTURE OF A TRIAD LODGE

A strict hierarchy governs Triads, with members swearing complex oaths of loyalty and secrecy. A Triad is headed by a *shan chu*, who is assisted by a *fu shan chu*. The *heung chu* and *sin fung* oversee the Triad's mystical ceremonies and ensure the loyalty of members, as well as being responsible for disciplining anyone who gets out of line. Beneath these central officials are various departments or branches, each of which covers a specific activity or geographic area. Headed by a *chu chi* and a *fu chu chi*, these departments can be involved with criminal or communal activities to ensure the Triad's support in its local area. Many of the traditional posts within a Triad, especially the spiritual and ceremonial ones, are slowly losing favor as the societies modernize and discard the more mystical rituals.

Below the leadership are four ranks. *Hung kwan* are the Triad's heavy hitters and street thugs, and many of these are also *chu chi* running street crime. *Pak tsz sin* are the business and money men, these days running the money-laundering and drug labs; they report directly to the *heung chu*. *Cho hai* act as organizers and as the Triad leaders' eyes and ears on the streets, ensuring that everyone is doing as they should and paying the Triads what they ought to. At the very bottom, the *sze kau* are the foot soldiers of the Triad; they do as they're told and carry out any number of crimes, from drug smuggling to armed robbery.

Joining a Triad requires a generous donation to its coffers and sponsorship by an existing member. The process can be time-consuming and requires a potential member to prove his loyalty to the Triad time and time again, committing crimes as demanded with the slightest slip meaning death. These joining rituals are some of the few not simplified with modernization. Indeed, many have become more complicated through computerized background checks and other modern additions aimed at weeding out undercover police. Once deemed ready to take the final step, the new recruit is taught one of the many secret handshakes that his Triad uses to identify its members and is ordered to turn up at a secret Triad lodge for initiation—or perhaps to be killed. Until the last moment, the initiate can't be sure which fate will be his.

Traditionally, Triads have a lodge, a building where they meet and perform their ceremonies. With the development of modern criminal investigation procedures, however, lodges have made it too easy for

the police to track the Triad's members. Every Triad still maintains a central ceremonial space, which they move every six months or so—usually a neutral site like an empty warehouse or apartment. Some of the biggest Triads still maintain lodges that are veritable palaces; these facilities tend to be used by the senior level in a Triad, which has no direct connection to criminal activity and which has returned to its former function as a semi-secret social order.

As the Triad Society fragmented into the diverse Triads of today, so the expansion since the Second World War has seen those Triads grow large enough to become more like syndicates of related crime gangs than single entities. The 14K Society in Hong Kong is the largest Triad in existence, with an estimated 33,000 members. Without a structure rivaling a major corporation, no organization so large could be centrally run. Like their secret-society ancestor, the Triads manage by letting each lodge go about its work independently. Whenever a gang boss gets big enough, she may split off from her existing lodge and set herself up in a separate territory. In return, the new lodge pays tribute to the lodge above it, forming a chain of obligation that extends all the way to the one lodge that represents the entire Triad. Failure to pay leads to war, which once saw the rebel lodge or lodges either exterminated or able to form a new Triad of their own. Establishing a new Triad is relatively unusual today, but fighting wars to absorb a lodge above your own is not. The more senior you are, the more lucrative operations you can run, and you also benefit from the constant flow of money from tributary lodges below you.

With this flexible structure, the Triads are perhaps the most responsive and aggressive of organized criminals. Low-level lodges especially are always seeking to push the boundaries of their control. It is also common for powerful Triad officers to head off on their own, perhaps with the blessing of their elders, to found completely new lodges in virgin territory, either by starting new operations or allying with an existing local crime gang. This unrestrained growth can lead to major gang wars and clashes with police, but it also fueled the huge inroads the Triads have made in North America and Europe, as young Chinese gangsters emigrate to seek their fortunes away from the powerful lodges that control most of Asia.

TRIAD RITUALS

Triad ceremonies are long and complex, some lasting up to eight hours, and involve numerous rituals and oaths drawn from a whole range of sources. While the basis of Triad mysticism comes from Buddhism and Taoism, elements from Christianity, Islam, and increasingly Hollywood and Hong Kong cinema are also thrown into the mix. Traditionally, a Triad performed a raft of rituals for nearly every major

decision, from alliances to the imprisonment of prominent members. The modern world has left little space for this extreme devotion to ritual, both through lack of interest among younger members and the fact that such ceremonies are a beacon to police investigators. Most Triad rituals are slowly declining, at least among the actively criminal Triads.

Each Triad has its own rituals, hidden with the same dedication as all Triad secrets. The rituals are the one connecting element between junior and senior lodges (tribute payments aside), and as such are taken seriously even though the rituals themselves are falling into everyday disuse. The rituals most likely to be practiced in full are those in the initiation ceremony. Modernization has not changed the importance of binding a new member to the secrecy of the lodge, nor the intimidation value of acts like biting the heads off live chickens and writing documents in blood.

KUEI-JIN AND THE TRIADS

Obvious similarities exist between the Triads and the courts of the Quincunx, with their secret rites, hierarchical rankings and layer upon layer of deception and tradition. This similarity rests on a shared background in the murky and conspiratorial world of traditional Chinese court politics. The long involvement of Kuei-jin in the Triads, all the way back to the White Lotus Society, has helped strengthen the similarities and helps to explain why the Triads have held so strongly to their traditions in the face of massive social change. The Triads are the ultimate insider's weapon among the Kuei-jin — no Running Monkey can compete with elders who have probably been involved with a Triad or two for centuries.

While they often maintain some links to less senior lodges, for the most part the ancestors and mandarins don't bother with such riffs. It is much easier to control a senior Triad lodge whose money is tribute and thus predictable, and simply have the lower lodges take care of whatever legwork a mandarin needs done as a favor to their betters. Many Running Monkeys have not yet worked out the subtleties of this tactic; they mistakenly believe that by taking the junior lodges they are robbing the elders of their tools. Because of the beliefs of their mortal allies, Running Monkeys who control lesser lodges cannot refuse service to the senior lodges; to do so would mean losing face before the lower-level Triad members and invite retribution from other junior lodges seeking to gain face. In the end, the Bamboo Princes frequently find that their operations still work for the elders despite their best intentions.

On the streets, however, the Bamboo Princes are disquieting the elders. Their knowledge of the modern world allows them to undermine the traditional Triads where it counts most, in the alleys and gutters

of Asia's big cities. They tend to take a straightforward approach to weakening the traditional Triads. First, locate a scam being run by your target, preferably something nasty like child prostitution or white slavery. Then give the story to the press and help beat up the target via public opinion. As the police crack down, move against the target's commercial assets with lawyers and accountants. Finally, let your own red poles loose on what few members escape the police raids. Though ambitious humans first devised this tactic, it has proved very successful for many a Bamboo Prince, with Triad and Kuei-jin elders alike underestimating how much their sway over senior public officials would bend under public pressure. If all else fails, brutal frontal assaults are always an option — a bloody one, however, because no Triad has ever been loath to fight it out.

YAKUZA

Though far more insular and smaller in number than the Triads, the Japanese Yakuza is almost as powerful, mainly because of the wealth and power it has accumulated in Japan. Wherever Japan's ever-expanding corporate empire has gone in Asia, the Yakuza has followed — not bad for an organization which for most of its three centuries of existence was nothing more than a collection of criminal guilds representing gamblers and small-time traders. In fact, the term "Yakuza" comes from the Japanese version of blackjack, called *oicho-kabu*. In the game, the worst hand includes an eight (*ya*), a nine (*ku*) and a three (*sa*). An accurate translation of Yakuza is therefore often said to be "useless hand", or more simply, "no good."

YAKUZA HISTORY

The history of the Yakuza dates back to the mid-18th century, to two specific groups within the strict social constraints of the Tokugawa Shogunate: the Bakuto (itinerant gamblers) and the Tekiya (street peddlers). Both groups came from the same social class, the landless poor, and were regarded as delinquents and misfits. Each group was divided along geographic lines, with gangs running the gambling or markets within a specific area and avoiding any conflicts that might have brought the Tokugawa authorities down on them.

Eventually, as the authority of the Tokugawa Shogunate decayed, the various gangs started forming organizations, using the formal Japanese noble family structure (*gumi*) as a model, probably because the *gumi* was the dominant political structure under the Shogunate. These gangs became quite powerful, controlling entire districts and dictating terms to the weakening Tokugawa officials, local nobles and merchants. In an early sign of their political acumen, some of the most powerful Yakuza bosses sided with

the Meiji Restoration and were richly rewarded for their efforts, taking the Yakuza into the mainstream of Japanese society.

The Yakuza modernized along with Japan, taking control of construction labor, the rickshaw industry and the docks, though gambling always remained central to its identity and profitability. Modernization's Western-style police force and the relative honesty of the Meiji regime forced the Yakuza's illegal activities further underground, however. This led to setting up legitimate businesses to hide illegal activity on the one hand and paying off the local police on the other. Yakuza involvement in politics, which began during the turmoil of the Meiji Restoration, continued. The Yakuza brought officials under control with bribery and blackmail, initially to protect their illegal activities from official interference — but their interest soon took another turn.

The Yakuza became closely intertwined with the rise of Japanese ultra-nationalism, creating inseparable links between organized crime and politics. These ties helped the ultra-nationalists take control of Japan and ultimately plunge it into the Second World War. The reason for the evolution of such political-criminal groups as the notorious Genyosha (Dark Ocean Society), which staged the murder of the Queen of Korea to create a pretext for Japanese occupation of the peninsula in 1895, was the leftist threat to Yakuza power. By trying to eliminate corruption from the labor markets and public life in general, as well as promoting resistance among the urban poor to Yakuza depredations, the leftists were marked as enemies. Yakuza bosses found the right-wing political parties happy to pay for their services. Another reason for the coming together of the Yakuza and ultra-nationalists was the fact that both recruited from the same pool of unemployed young toughs.

The 1920s and 1930s were boom years for the Yakuza, as their political allies protected and encouraged them. During this period, many of the major Yakuza *gumi* still known today, like the Yamaguchi-gumi, were established and became entrenched in both the black-market economy and legitimate business. As Japan's overseas empire expanded, so did that of the Yakuza. They moved into Japan's new colonies and set up operations among migrant Japanese communities in North and South America. The first Yakuza crimes in the United States, discovered as early as 1930, involved drug running, but this burgeoning problem was snuffed out along with many other Yakuza activities by the start of World War Two.

Though perfectly willing to use them, the Japanese ultra-nationalist leaders despised the Yakuza for manifold reasons, from class to race, caste and ideology. Once the Second World War catapulted the ultra-nationalists into total control, the Yakuza

suddenly found that their erstwhile allies didn't need them. In fact, the nationalists turned on them—many Yakuza members ended up in jail or conscripted to fight in the Emperor's armies. The war also finished the Yakuza's original American envoys, as internment and then illegal deportation back to Japan ended their influence. These setbacks, however, did not significantly damage the underlying strength of the Yakuza as a whole. The organization thrived on the black market and came out of the war leaner and more focused than ever.

After the war, the Yakuza gained a powerful sponsor in the CIA, which ordered senior *oyabun* (Yakuza chiefs) released from jail to use their influence to combat the pro-Communist union movement. This action helped the Yakuza regain their former political and corporate influence, which they retain to this day despite half-hearted crackdowns in 1964 and 1995. Contacts with foreign groups, especially the Corsican Mafia and the Triads who shared the Yakuza's CIA patronage, led to involvement in the international drug trade and the burgeoning sex trade, with the Yakuza becoming influential in the Philippines in the same way the Triads were in Thailand.

In the new democratic and corporate environment, two new groups became prominent within the Yakuza, the *gurentai* (street thug) and the *sokaiya* (corporate racketeer). The former had always been around, but the need for increased manpower meant that many common street criminals whom the Yakuza once would have shunned now became recruits. The *sokaiya* represented an entirely new form of criminal, created by the huge Japanese multinationals (called *zaibatsu*) that had no desire to respond to their shareholders. The *sokaiya* specialized in insulating the *zaibatsu* from their shareholders and later became leeches within the economic system, extorting money from the whole range of big business.

The wealth and opportunities of the 1960s outstripped the ability of the traditional Yakuza *gumi* structure to handle the diversity and size required in the new environment. As a result, syndicates of *gumi* formed, often through violent gang wars that did much to finally end the traditional relationship between locals and their neighborhood Yakuza clan. No more immune than anyone else to the huge impact of American culture on Japan, many Yakuza members adopted the Hollywood depiction of gangsters, with their dark suits, sunglasses and big cars. The Yakuza could flaunt their status despite rising public resentment only because of the overwhelming corruption of Japanese politics.

Modernization has slowly eaten away at Yakuza traditions, as increased violence and drug dealing combined with a failure to maintain their local roots eventually forced action against them. The deep economic recession of the 1990s limited the Yakuza's ability to

simply buy its way out of any situation, while Yakuza involvement in international crime, especially in Hawaii, put significant pressure on overseas operations. It remains to be seen how long the Yakuza's traditional structures can hold together; when they finally crumble, what remains will be purely criminal corporate entities more akin to a Western corporation than a Japanese family. Such organizations are likely to be even more influential (and even more dangerous) than before.

YAKUZA ORGANIZATION

At the top of any Yakuza *gumi* is an *oyabun* (father), who doles out advice, protection and help. Below him are the *kobun* (children), who offer loyalty and services to their father in return for his protection. The Yakuza's expansion has complicated this traditional structure, so much so that along with the other effects of modernization, the *gumi* is losing the fanatical loyalty it once enjoyed among many of the *kobun*. Though *kobun* loyalty in general remains strong, it is increasingly rare for a Yakuza member to voluntarily lay down his life for his *oyabun* or perform other similarly selfless acts.

Beneath the *oyabun* is his chief adviser known as the *saiko-komon*, who runs an organization of lawyers, accountants, secretaries and financial advisers. A *saiko-komon* will often have his own gangs within the *gumi*, doing the hustling he needs to maintain the family's business interests. Next is the *waka-gashira*, second only to the *oyabun* in respect within the *gumi*. This official acts as his enforcer and day-to-day manager on the streets.

In an interesting facet of the *gumi* structure, an *oyabun* can also be a *kobun*, owing loyalty to another *oyabun*. In this way a *gumi* can grow into an extended family. Such *kobun* are known as *kyodai* (brothers). Out of respect for their more powerful influence, they report to a different lieutenant, the *shatei-gashira*. This structure can repeat itself many times over and has many extensions and revisions, thus allowing extended families like the Yamaguchi-gumi to have over 10,000 members.

Not all Yakuza have combined into super-*gumi*; some have instead formed alliances or federations. Powerful groups like the Nippon Kokusui-kai, Sumiyoshi-rengo and Inagawa-kai have a flatter structure, with fewer sub-families, and they decide matters with more consensus. Allied *gumi* tend to be notably more modern in their outlooks and have done better in various gang wars since the 1960s. In general, the allied *gumi* tend to have internal structures not unlike a *zaibatsu*, with a controlling board and various departments. In an amusing take on a modern Japanese tradition, Yakuza often carry business cards with their *gumi* emblem, name and rank. As police pressure on them grows, it remains to be seen if this practice will continue.



The *gumi* structure works so well mainly because it recruits from the losers within Japan's highly structured and unforgiving society. Among this collection of high school dropouts and misfits are also many representatives of Japan's long-despised Korean and Chinese minorities, as well descendants of the *burakumin*, Japan's former untouchable class. One of the largest areas for recruits is the *boso-zoku* (biker) gangs, made up of adolescent thugs much given to mindless violence and petty crime. To these people, the *gumi* becomes a new home, a place where they get respect and somewhere to belong.

In fact, the Yakuza has served as an important social safety valve by accepting those rejected by the mainstream. This role is lessening as Japanese social rigidity loosens. The degree to which Japanese society has already changed, especially the loss of the tradition of respecting and obeying the elderly and the general disregard in which the old ways are held, is having a significant negative effect on the Yakuza. In past years the Yakuza all paid at least lip service to *giri-ninjo*, the idea of obligation and compassion. This tenet held that not only did the *kobun* owe the *oyabun*, but the *gumi* also owed the local neighborhood. While strict neighborhood ties largely faded decades ago, nowadays young gangsters are showing scant regard for *giri-ninjo* when it interferes with turning a quick buck. Tradition-minded *oyabun* find this increasingly vexing, and there may yet be a bloody reckoning.

YAKUZA RITUALS

Rituals in the Yakuza are neither particularly ornate nor spiritual, a feature of their prosaic and down-to-earth background. The most important ritual among the Yakuza is *sakazuki*, the adoption of a new member within the *gumi*. This ceremony involves a simple exchange of sake cups to symbolize the blood connection, with Shinto offerings and the choice of an auspicious day rounding out the requirements. Nowadays the sake is often the only part of the ceremony still invoked, often followed by a feast or binge at a karaoke bar.

The most recognized Yakuza ritual is *yubitsume*, the amputation of part of a finger as apology for a misdeed. A close second is the ritual welcoming of a

gumi member out of jail — *demukai*, a snub to authorities that shows that the released inmate has not reformed at all. Yet despite the public perception of these two rituals as essential to the Yakuza, both are on the way out. One major federation of *gumi*, the Inagawa-kai, has already banned *demukai*, mainly because it gives the police too many chances to positively identify *gumi* members. Inagawa-kai has also tried to ban *yubitsume* for much the same reason.

KUEI-JIN AND THE YAKUZA

Kuei-jin involvement in the Yakuza is less widespread than with the Triads. The *gumi* are a more limited tool than the larger Triads, and connections to them are only open to *gaki* (Japanese Kuei-jin). The modernist Genji courts have little time for the traditionalist Yakuza *gumi*, instead preferring to invest their time in the modern Yakuza federations. The traditionalist Bishamon, however, despite rumors to the contrary, officially refuse to have anything to do with the Yakuza. The Yakuza are definitely lower class, and worse still (from a Bishamon perspective), often have Korean or Chinese backgrounds. This has left the traditional Yakuza, who are likewise despised for their low-class roots by most Japanese *hengeyokai*, open to interference from outside Japan. Both the Green Courts and the Quincunx have used their ethnic ties to develop very delicate connections. These links are so sensitive that only the most trusted members of the courts involved have the slightest inkling that something is going on.

For the Genji courts, the modern Yakuza are an all-purpose tool. Their widespread influence is a one-stop shop for directing almost every facet of Japanese society, from government and business to the local markets and noodle shops. The recent government crackdowns, however, have cost the Yakuza some of its usefulness and also some of the protection and influence granted to it by the Genji courts. What the Quincunx and Green Courts hope to gain is more difficult to say, though ties to the mortal Japanese government, ready-made smuggling routes into Japan and access to more wealth than even their local corporations could provide them are possible answers. For now, the foreign Kuei-jin bide their time, apparently happy to have a back door to Japan for their use whenever they need it.



S. H. K.

CHAPTER TWO: STREETS OF BLOOD

*When on surrounded ground, plot. When on
deadly ground, fight.*

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

In this chapter you'll find an assortment of Kuei-jin, dhampyrs and mortals. Presented by geographical region, most can be transplanted to any location with only minor changes. Along the way, we also provide you with a variety of source material on street-level goings-on across the Middle Kingdom. The profiles of some of the mortal and more-than-mortal characters in this chapter use rules from **World of Darkness: Demon Hunter X** and **Half-Damned: Dhampyr**.

CANTON, CHINA

Guangdong Province and its capital city, Guangzhou, are both traditionally referred to as "Canton" by Westerners. The Cantonese are regarded by most Chinese (including themselves) as different from the rest of the People's Republic. The trifling matter of their dialect (Cantonese) aside, Guangdong Province was settled by a number of minorities, most of whom came from the north (fleeing the invaders of their homelands). Most

Chinese immigrants hail from Guangdong, and the city and province have been centers of international trade since the late 1600s. Secret societies and revolutions have always found ready homes in Guangdong, which gave birth to the Taiping Rebellion in the mid-19th century and the Alliance for Chinese Revolution in 20th. The latter would become the Kuomintang (KMT) nationalist party.

Proximity to Macao and Hong Kong has enormously benefited Guangdong; most goods "made in Hong Kong" are made there. A commercial powerhouse, the province tops most of the measures of economic growth in China. Even today, Guangzhou is a boomtown, with workers flooding into the city from the province's rural areas and contributing to the urban sprawl. Never an attractive city, Guangzhou has few parks, much less any coherent environmental policy. The Pearl River Delta, the city's waterway and harbor, is an ecological disaster area.

A tourist destination for "Hongkies," especially on weekends and for traditional festivals, Guangzhou is facing a growing crime problem. Unemployed workers turn to crime to support themselves and prey on the visitors. Guangdong is also the traditional home of the Triads; their roots in the region can be traced back over 2,000 years to the local trade and social guilds. The rise in petty crime actually poses a problem for the Triads—there are simply too many small-time operators to keep track of them all. In response, the Triads are concentrating on major crimes (bank heists, illegal gambling operations and fraud), leaving the street-level operators largely to their own devices. Most Triads still sponsor at least one gang, however, just to keep an ear to the ground and to maintain a presence on the streets. These responsibilities are usually entrusted to junior members, who are expected to prove their worth by keeping the gangs well-connected and out of trouble with the law.

The only exceptions to this "hands-off" policy are smuggling and the drug trade. Guangdong was the original entry point for opium into China (in the mid-1700s). The struggle between the Co Hong, the sole merchant's guild appointed by imperial decree to trade with foreigners, and the British eventually led to the Opium Wars. The ancestors who remember what that struggle cost them are not about to give up the hard-earned fruits of their labors.

CANTON BY NIGHT

The current Ancestor of Guangzhou is Lee Chun-yi, a Resplendent Crane who may or may not be the Lee Chun-yi chronicled in the reign of Emperor Hwei Tsung in the opening decades of the 12th century. A firm believer in orderly progress towards a more perfect society, Chun-yi is the *shan chu* of the dominant Triad in Canton—the Co Hong. This organization is the same Co Hong that received the initial license to trade with foreigners in 1757.

Chun-yi places great faith in his fellow Kuei-jin. The city is rife with corruption and there is plenty for all. Chun-yi's Scarlet Screens are concentrated in the civil bureaucracy, which gives him far-reaching influence. Approximately 60 vampires reside in the city of 6,500,000 souls, with perhaps another 20 or 30 scattered throughout the province; as long as affairs are conducted appropriately, Chun-yi is satisfied. Of course, he has an extensive information-gathering network and a number of servants who understand technology quite well.

The only real cloud on Canton's horizon is the current instability in Hong Kong. Guangdong has enjoyed cordial relations with the tiny city-state for many decades, and the conflict between the Righteous Devils of Kowloon and the Victorious Whirlwind has placed the Wan Kuei of Guangdong in a difficult position. So far, Chun-yi has managed to

avoid making any firm commitments, but as soon as one side gains the upper hand, he will have to act, most likely to give victory to the opposing faction and thereby ensure their gratitude and loyalty. Ultimately, he would like to see the Flame Court officially moved to Guangdong and placed under his authority. Decisively resolving the situation in Hong Kong would greatly strengthen his claim to such authority.

See *Kindred of the East*, pp. 155-159 and 166-173, and *Kindred of the East Companion*, pp. 17-23, for more information on China. *World of Darkness: Hong Kong and Nights of Prophecy*, pp. 52-65, cover Hong Kong.

THE TAIPING

Hong Xiuquang, leader of the Taiping Rebellion, was an ambitious young man who three times failed the exams to enter the civil service, but eventually succeeded in finding God. Protestant missionaries had been active in the Guangdong area for some time; after reading some of their tracts, Xiuquang had a dream in which he claimed God and Jesus ("Yasoo") revealed to him that he was also a Son of God. The Chinese translation of the Bible featured the character for Xiuquang's surname (which means flood) in a number of places. Xiuquang realized that, like the flood in the Old Testament, it was his duty to rid China of the Qing Dynasty and its backward, heretical traditions (like Confucianism, which imposed the rigorous exams), and to establish the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace.

He gathered some 20,000 followers and conquered Hunan, Hubei, Anhui and Nanjing, which became the Taiping capital in 1853. The Taiping ruled for 11 years, only to be suppressed after Xiuquang's death in 1864. In Nanjing, none of Xiuquang's 100,000 followers surrendered. They all preferred suicide.

CHEN CHUNRONG, THE INSCRUTABLE MISTRESS OF THE WICKED HEART

Background: The wife a Taiping government official (see sidebar), Chen Chunrong was as dedicated to the cause as the most fanatical soldier. As the eldest daughter of a well-to-do family, Chunrong's intellect and ambition were doomed to frustration in traditional China; the Taiping's antipathy to the status quo suited her perfectly. She prayed nightly to Yasoo that her three children would live to see the establishment of the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace. When the Taiping were finally suppressed by imperial troops, Chunrong could not bear to see her dream die. Commending her soul to Yasoo, she murdered her children and husband while they slept,



barricaded herself inside their house and set fire to the floor.

As she suffered for her crimes in the Hell of Being Skinned Alive, Chunrong came to realize the error of her ways. She had been wrong to reject traditional Chinese values. Wrong to try to wipe out evil. Wrong to murder her family and damn herself to an eternity of suffering.

Her determination to atone for her foolishness grew until she was able to escape from Hell. Her time as a *chih-mei* was unusually short; as soon as she regained her composure, she presented herself to Lee Chun-yi, the Ancestor of Guangzhou. Impressed with her determination and her respect for traditional values, Chun-yi gave her a position within the Co Hong, his Triad.

Chunrong is a loyal servant. She seeks enlightenment, tries to exemplify the values she now holds dear, and is eager to prove her worth to her superiors. A staunch traditionalist, she delights in the corruption and destruction of zealots and fanatics, and has a particular hatred of Westerners and their religion. Her Scarlet Screens include a number of brothels, opium dens and an illegal fighting ring.

Image: Chunrong normally dresses in humble, traditional clothes. When modern dress is required, she wears conservative suits in dark gray. Her manner is severe but her demeanor lightens considerably when she is planning or discussing a scheme to spread misery and wickedness.

Roleplaying Hints: You wish to atone for the crimes and foolishness of your mortal life. You have no particular interest in mortals, but you do have a particular hatred of the West and its decadent culture; you value your culture and traditions above all else.

Haven: Chunrong has a secure vault in the basements of each of her brothels. Converted from bondage dungeons, the vaults all contain several interesting pieces of furniture and a somewhat disturbing atmosphere.

Secrets: Chunrong is well versed in the activities of the Co Hong and is especially well informed when it comes to their vice operations.

Influence: Chunrong is making steady progress along her Dharmic path but has yet to really prove herself to her elders, and so her influence among the unliving is limited. Among the living, she wields a subtle influence over her more powerful patrons, but needs to handle any overt attempts at manipulation discreetly.

Nature: Autocrat

P'o Nature: The Barbarian

Demeanor: Judge

Balance: Balanced

Direction: Center

Dharma: Way of the Resplendent Crane 4

Second Breath: 1864

Apparent Age: mid-40s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Acting 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Empathy 3, Leadership 2, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Crafts 2, Etiquette 3, Melee 2, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Academics 3, Bureaucracy 3, Finances 2, Law 2, Linguistics 4, Occult 3

Disciplines: Cultivation 2, Chi'iu Muh 2, Demon Shintai 3, Ghost-Flame Shintai 2, Tapestry 1, Yin Prana 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 4, Herd 3, Jade Talisman 2, Resources 3, Retainers 4

Virtues: Yin 5, Yang 4, Hun 5, P'o 5

Willpower: 8

TANG FUGUI, THE CUNNING MONKEY

Background: Fugui was an unfortunate opium trader during the struggles with the British. Ruined during the Opium Wars, he sold his children and then wagered — and lost — his wife. Cut off by his Triad associates for being too well-known to the authorities, he was eventually killed stealing silverware from the residence of a British diplomat.

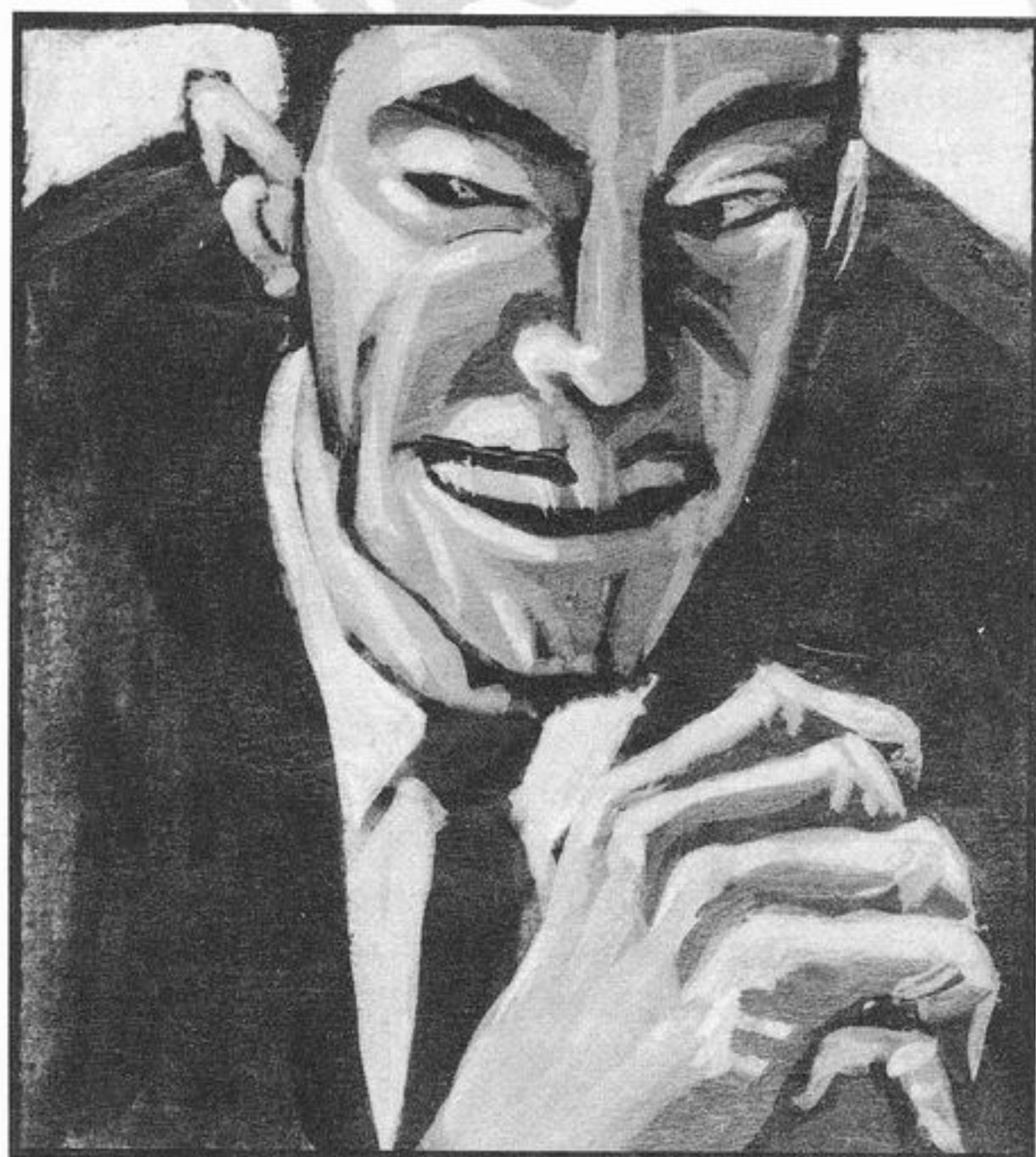
After death, Fugui wasn't surprised to find himself in the Hell of Those Who Sell Their Children. He stayed there for a long time, considering his fate and reflecting on his failings. Eventually he realized he had erred in depending on others and on fate to assist him when he should have assisted himself. His resolve and determination grew steadily until he was able to escape from Hell and draw the Second Breath.

By the time Fugui returned to the Middle Kingdom, China was in its first throes of reform and modernization. He joined the Kuei-jin court, expecting to be treated as a respected equal, but had to choke down his rage when he realized he must kowtow to the ancestor, Lee Chun-yi. A jina named Chen Chunrong offered to take him under her wing. She set him to work as an enforcer, courier and odd-job-man. The work suited him well, as it granted him considerable independence and kept him away from the courts.

Fugui did not become a *zhu wangzi* — a Bamboo Prince — until the 1970s. When he first read Burakumin's manifesto in 1969, he felt as if a great weight had been lifted from him. At last, some Kuei-jin were ready to stand against the eunuch and the mandarins. Fugui is now the Bamboo Princes' chief source of information in Guangdong. He hides his political sympathies in plain sight; everyone knows his lack of proper respect for authority, and in a simple double-blind, he trusts that no one would believe him fool enough to actually take arms against the system under which he chafes. So far, his gamble has paid off.

Image: Fugui is short and wiry, with a lopsided grin and a manic gleam in his eyes. His shaved head and normally disheveled appearance contribute to the slightly disreputable image he projects to the court.

Roleplaying Hints: You've got them all fooled. Just goes to show what idiots they are. You have nothing personally against most of the Kuei-jin you know, except that they unthinkingly support the same system of tyranny that condemned most of them to death in the first place. You're content to let the Cantonese court keep on underestimating you. Their mistake will only make your eventual victory sweeter.



2

Haven: Fugui cares little for material comforts and makes his haven in an unassuming house overlooking the Pearl River delta. His chamber is heavily fortified.

Secrets: As an information-gatherer, Fugui knows a great deal about all the supernatural comings and goings in Canton. His knowledge of mortal criminal activities is mostly limited to what Chen Chunrong tells him.

Influence: Fugui has little real influence in Canton; he's regarded as a modestly cunning leg-breaker, not without potential, but not yet disciplined enough to be taken seriously. Within the ranks of the Bamboo Princes, he commands significant respect.

Nature: Visionary

P'o Nature: The Legalist

Demeanor: Bravo

Balance: Balanced

Direction: South

Dharma: Path of a Thousand Whispers 3

Second Breath: 1915

Apparent Age: early 30s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 4

Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette 1, Firearms 4, Melee 3, Torture 3

Knowledges: Bureaucracy 1, Computer 2, Investigation 2

Disciplines: Black Wind 3, Demon Shintai 2, Flesh Shintai 2, Obligation 1

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Contacts 4, Resources 2

Virtues: Yin 4, Yang 4, Hun 5, P'o 4

Willpower: 8

ZHAO XIANXI, PAWN OF THE DEAD

Background: Not all corrupt cops start out that way. Some come from good homes and want to serve the public. They're loyal and brave and dedicated. They study hard, excel at their training and end up doing important undercover work combating drugs, gambling and prostitution.

Zhao Xianxi was all those things, until the day a police bust went wrong and he was shot in the hip while working undercover. Fragments of bone and bullet perforated his abdomen and the surgeons couldn't get them all out. Officially, he's now working a desk and taking prescription painkillers. Unofficially, he spilled his guts to his former Triad friends in exchange for a supply of opium sufficient to dull the constant pain.

The gang he was investigating is one of Chen Chunrong's Scarlet Screens, and the vampire was as delighted to have a source of information inside the police drug squad as she was concerned that the



authorities had infiltrated her operation. She has instructed her men to pump Xianyi for information for as long as possible. Unknown to Chunrong, however, the entire drug squad is in fact a Scarlet Screen for Ancestor Lee Chun-yi, who found it disappointingly easy to place a man inside her operation. The ancestor has made to garner all the information necessary to compromise Chunrong's operations should the need arise.

In the meantime, Xianyi sinks deeper into despair. His wife knows something is wrong but has not yet discovered his drug problem, nor have any of his fellow officers. Were he to be found out, Xianyi would likely kill himself out of shame. He can see no way out of his current predicament.

Image: Once the picture of clean-cut, athletic good health, Xianyi now walks with a limp and is constantly in agony. He is developing a stoop because standing up straight hurts so much. He tries to keep his appearance tidy, but as his predicament worsens, he cares less and less for such trivialities as his appearance.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a desperate man. You hate constantly betraying your fellow officers, but neither can you stand the agonizing pain you're forced to live with because of a departmental blunder. You crave redemption, even if it costs your life.

Haven: Xianyi lives with his wife and two children in a comfortable apartment on the outskirts of Guangzhou. He's very much aware that the Triad knows the address.

Secrets: Xianyi has access to vast quantities of information about Canton's criminal underworld. He has no idea of the existence of the Kuei-jin, though like all cops he's seen his fair share of weird shit.

Influence: Were Xianyi to come clean to his superiors, they would most likely dispose of him. Were he to come clean to an honorable or independent source of help, he has enough information to destroy several criminal operations.

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanor: Curmudgeon

Age: 33

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Talents: Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Empathy 4, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Drive 3, Firearms 3, Performance 4, Security 3, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Computer 1, Investigation 4, Law 2, Medicine 1

Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Resources 2

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 2, Courage 2

Humanity: 5

Willpower: 4

SHANGHAI, CHINA

The war in Shanghai is all but over, with the Chinese Wan Kuei triumphant over the Japanese *gaki*. That doesn't mean that things are quiet in this major port city; far from it. Now that the Chinese have re-established control, the race is on to fill the vacuum left by the Japanese. A vicious turf war has erupted, which, if unchecked, could well leave the city open to re-infiltration by the *gaki*, who still have a few agents in place. These *gaki* have learned to walk very, very quietly through the night, but have also maintained a steady flow of information to their *uji* back in Japan.

ZHANG FUWEN, THE CULTURED DEVIL OF A THOUSAND CRIMES

Background: Zhang was an ambitious peasant who spent his early years caught in a tumultuous cycle of famine, poverty, flood and uncertainty. His keen mind craved order, and so he studied long and hard to pass the exams that would give him entry to the civil bureaucracy. He failed. Bitterly disillusioned, he joined his local Triad and rose through the ranks quickly, bolstered by an effective combination of ruthlessness and organizational skills.

Despite his outward propriety, Fuwen was a man of complete moral indifference. He cared neither for virtue nor vice, only for order and predictability. Realizing the vast profits to be made, he quickly turned to importing drugs, weapons, slaves and other contraband. A generous master who took care of those loyal to him, he soon became the dominant smuggler in Shanghai. He died peacefully in his sleep in 1897.



Upon his death, Fuwen was most surprised to find himself in the urban hell called the Wicked City. He rose swiftly in the administration of the Yama King Mikaboshi, displaying a flair for politics and manipulation, only to fail the special exams to enter Mikaboshi's entourage. After that, Fuwen's control snapped and he wandered in a daze through the maze-like city. Eventually he discerned a pattern in the seeming chaos of the slums, and simply walked out of Hell.

He lost little time in re-establishing ties with his old smuggling operation, but couldn't quite settle in to the routines of his old life. Something in him missed the order and regimentation of the hell he had escaped. Fuwen then experienced a satori. His path was clear.

It didn't take him long to find Mikaboshi's representatives. Fuwen's clarity of purpose impressed the Yama King; after gratefully submitting to several months of torture as punishment for his escape, Fuwen gave his soul gladly, even lovingly, to the only master who held out any hope of creating a world that made sense. He felt no shame in his abasement before his new master, only pride and fulfillment.

Since becoming *akuma*, Fuwen has made it his mission to increase the reach of the Wicked City. He does not engage in unsophisticated acts of terror, nor does he delight in the corruption of other Kuei-jin. His mission is to support the government, to increase the regimentation of daily life and to destroy the sparks of individuality that give humans such joy. He has thrown his efforts into taking control of as much of the city as possible and often personally directs his Scarlet Screens to ensure that their orders are carried out to his satisfaction.

To his fellow Kuei-jin, Fuwen is a reliable Resplendent Crane and a jina of the Flesh Court. During the long struggle against the *gaki*, he rose to prominence because of his superior ability to organize and direct Scarlet Screens. He has remained in the Flesh Ancestor's favor for over two decades, an accomplishment few others of his rank can match. Fuwen's stature has only risen with the recent victory over the Japanese vampires. Every mandarin who wishes to gain a foothold on new territory must take Fuwen's street contacts and agents into account. Fuwen has graciously allowed many of the competing factions to use his resources, thereby placing powerful Kuei-jin in his debt.

Image: Fuwen appears as a slightly built man of advanced years. His posture and carriage, like his martial arts, are textbook-perfect. He dresses in a simple, well-cut, black Chinese-style suit and eschews jewelry or other adornment.

Roleplaying Hints: Order must be brought forth from chaos. Concepts such as "good" and "evil" are simple-minded expressions of an individual's prejudices dressed up as moral absolutes. You admire Mikaboshi and hope to serve him forever.

Haven: Fuwen has several vaults concealed in warehouses and ships. They are all simply and identically appointed. He has no shrine to Mikaboshi or other obvious trapping of his infernal servitude. He serves through acts, not rituals.

Secrets: Fuwen is an *akuma*. He has been gathering intelligence on all his fellow Kuei-jin and is one of the dominant Triad bosses in Shanghai. Mikaboshi is pleased with his efforts and often requires Fuwen to assist his other agents; Fuwen is therefore well acquainted with his master's plots and schemes in the Shanghai area.

Influence: Widely respected as a leader of the struggle against the *gaki*, Fuwen wields considerable influence in the Flesh Court, based in Shanghai. He has the ancestor's ear on matters of law and crime, but this has brought him jealous rivals. He is also a highly-valued servant of Mikaboshi.

Nature: Deviant

P'o Nature: The Slave

Demeanor: Traditionalist

Balance: Balanced

Direction: Center

Dharma: *Akuma* of Mikaboshi (believed to be a Resplendent Crane jina)

Second Breath: 1905

Apparent Age: mid-60s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Talents: Dodge 4, Empathy 3, Expression 3, Intimidation 5, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 5, Torture 5

Skills: Crafts (calligraphy) 4, Etiquette 5, Martial Arts 4

Knowledges: Law 4, Linguistics 5, Medicine 2, Occult 3, Rituals 3, Science 3

Disciplines: Cultivation 1, Ghost-Flame Shintai 5, Internalize 2, Yang Prana 3, Yin Prana 3

Investments: The Mask of Yomi, The Ebon Fountain

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Contacts 5, Herd 3, Influence 4, Resources 5

Virtues: Yin 5, Yang 5, Hun 5, P'o 5

Willpower: 9

LU YUEXIU (ELEGANCE LU)

Background: Lu Yuexiu is a dhampyr, the daughter of Zhang Fuwen. Yuexiu's mother was a simple fisherwoman who raised her until Fuwen sent emissaries to collect his daughter. Neither Yuexiu's mother nor her two young brothers survived the collection, which occurred almost 50 years ago. It did not take Elegance long to forsake her humanity and she is as certain of her superiority as she is terrified of her father.

Fuwen sent her to Europe for an education. Upon her return, she filled several junior positions to test her mettle before being given charge of a number of a minor Scarlet Screens (including local police, martial arts clubs and business chambers) with which to harass the *gaki* in Shanghai.

Once the *gaki* were all but vanquished, Fuwen placed Yuexiu in command of another Scarlet Screen — a band of pirates operating in the South China Sea. Yuexiu, an educated and intelligent woman, was horrified. She hates the crude and uneducated band she commands, but nevertheless discharges



her responsibility with the efficiency expected of her. She has realized, however, that her father regards her as nothing more than a tool to be used as he sees fit. She is planning to escape his service, perhaps by faking her death and heading to Singapore, where she has learned rogue dhampyrs can find a safe haven.

Image: Not particularly pretty, Yuexiu is nevertheless in excellent physical condition; when in action, she dresses in expensive athletic and combat gear. On-shore, she is the picture of a successful entrepreneur, dressing and living lavishly.

Roleplaying Hints: You have nothing but contempt for all mortals, and you are jealous and fearful of the Kuei-jin. Once utterly loyal to your father, you now plot your escape and long for your freedom. On-shore, you love flaunting your wealth — further proof of your superiority.

Haven: Yuexiu has a penthouse apartment overlooking Shanghai's harbor.

Secrets: Yuexiu knows everything there is to know about her father's smuggling operation. She neither knows nor cares to know much about his other activities — if her father doesn't want her to know, she's not interested.

Influence: Yuexiu has considerable influence among her father's servants and Scarlet Screens; her underlings regard her as a tough but fair boss. Were she to need a few favors (guards to look the other way, messages or small items delivered) she would have little trouble finding a discreet and capable ally to assist her.

Nature: Conformist

P'o Nature: The Barbarian

Demeanor: Competitor

Age: 56

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Talents: Athletics 2, Dodge 3, Intimidation 4, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 2 (boat), Firearms 4, Martial Arts 3, Meditation 3, Melee 3

Knowledges: Linguistics 3, Medicine 2, Occult 2

Special Abilities: Passive Joss, Active Joss, Joss Binding

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Face 3, Influence 2, Resources 4

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 3, Courage 4, P'o 1

Humanity: 5

Willpower: 7

YING BAOCAL

Background: Always fascinated by power, by the ways in which the weak (like himself) could impose their will on the strong (everyone else), Ying Baocai became a master manipulator from an early age. By the time he entered high school, he was taking bets on the horse races. By the time he left, he was running the books for the local racecourse. Such talents assured his initiation into the Triad.

His boss is Lu Yuexiu, for whom he takes care of her smuggling concern's on-shore operations. The job is a big responsibility for one so young, but Yuexiu had a good feeling about Baocai, who seized his chance with both hands and hasn't looked back since.

Baocai negotiates deals, takes orders and looks after the maintenance of the ships, paying the sailors (whom he secretly fears) and keeping the books. Keenly aware of how quickly his fortunes could change, he has been skimming small amounts off the operation since he started. The cash is hidden away in a number of accounts, safe-deposit boxes and buried caches around Shanghai.

Baocai has heard many stories and seen a few odd things that have made him suspicious of his Triad masters. He's aware that things are not quite as they seem, and is currently debating whether it's wise to dig any deeper regarding Yuexiu and whoever pulls her strings.

Image: Slightly built, with a lean and hungry face, Baocai dresses in expensive smart-casual clothes befitting his cover occupation as the manager of a successful import-export firm.

Roleplaying Hints: Should you or shouldn't you? You just know there's something funny about your boss. You know you shouldn't pry, but knowledge is

power. And you never know when a little blackmail might come in handy.

Haven: Baocai lives in a trendy apartment in Shanghai.

Secrets: Baocai knows all the financial and criminal details of the smuggling operation and is well-informed about other illegal activities in Shanghai. He suspects that the mystical and ritual trappings of the Triad are more than just trappings, but has no hard evidence.

Influence: Baocai is a middle-ranking Triad member, and his superiors listen to his advice, but do not necessarily heed it. He has a number of friendly contacts in the local police with whom he regularly exchanges gifts, but all of these are known by Yuexiu, who still has agents on the force.

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Director

Age: 26

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Talents: Dodge 2, Intimidation 3, Leadership 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Drive 3, Etiquette 2, Firearms 3, Security 3, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Bureaucracy 3, Computer 3, Finance 4, Investigation 1, Law 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 2, Influence 2, Mentor 2, Resources 4

Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 3, Courage 2

Humanity: 4

Willpower: 6

JAPAN

Japan is a nation at war with itself, a collision of ancient tradition and cutting-edge technology. Nowhere are the contrasts between old and new so sharp as they are between the nation's two leading *uji*, the ultra-traditional Bishamon and the ultra-modern Genji. Since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the closing days of World War Two, the land has been dying, the flow of Chi poisoned by the two atomic bombs. Both *uji* have been doing all they can to counter the effects of this cataclysm, so far without success.

The *gaki* had pinned many hopes on holding Shanghai, believing that access to its untainted Chi would give them the reserves they needed to purify their land. Their recent setbacks in the city have been a major disappointment and many young *gaki* are agitating to retake the city. But a more pressing conflict is brewing. Many Bishamon wish to expel all the foreigners who steal the island's precious Chi,



while many Genji are forging alliances with foreigners to help regain the ground they have lost since the war. Tensions are running high, and many ancestors fear another bloodletting is inevitable. Of course, such fatalism only makes such a conflict more likely.

See **Kindred of the East**, pp. 159-161 and 173-175, and **Kindred of the East Companion**, pp. 23-27, for more information on Japan. **World of Darkness: Tokyo** also has plentiful information, both on the capital and the nation as a whole.

SUZUKI MICHIKO

Background: Women in Japan aren't supposed to be like Michiko. Loud, abrupt, ill-mannered and tough, she loved karate and kendo and followed her father onto the police force, graduating second in her class at the academy. On the streets, she worked twice as hard as her male colleagues and her arrest statistics showed that she was doing her job. But her arrests rarely resulted in convictions and she often had to pull out of a bust because backup failed to arrive in time.

Then she started investigating some grisly, Yakuza-related killings, and her world turned upside-down. Instead of the sullen lack of co-operation she was used to receiving, her colleagues became actively obstructive. Her family was threatened and her partner hospitalized, but she refused to stop working the case. Eventually, her captain suspended her on charges of psychological instability, and it all became clear. Her entire department was being manipulated. She set about trying to discover by whom, but her investigations bore bitter fruit. Her home was firebombed and her family killed.

That very night an agent of the Japanese government contacted her. In a meeting he explicitly told her never happened, the dark-suited man showed her evidence that monsters out of legend — the *gaki* —

were behind her woes. He offered her the chance to fight back as part of an organization that also did not exist officially: Strike Force Zero. She has been battling the Japanese people's true enemies ever since.

Michiko was appointed second-in-command of her Strike Team and has brought it a healthy dose of street smarts. She leads the hunt every night, scouring the streets for the unliving predators. Though it still goes against her grain, she now often lets mortal criminals go, hoping that they will lead her to their demonic bosses. She still hasn't found the *gaki* that controlled her old police department, but she's sworn to take revenge, even if it takes a lifetime to achieve.

Image: Michiko is an attractive woman in her late twenties. Slightly taller than average, her build is muscular and her manner abrupt and businesslike. She wears expensive pants suits of the latest cut and fabric, and a number of tasteful and very expensive pieces of jewelry.

Roleplaying Hints: You're a cop. You've always been a cop and you'll always be a cop. It's just that now, you have a different jurisdiction. The *gaki* are criminal scum and you'll bring them in just like all the other murderers you've caught. And if you have to have yourself cut open to be able to fight the demons out there, then that's a price worth paying. You hope.

Haven: Michiko has an expensive apartment in the heart of Tokyo.

Secrets: Michiko's team has brought down a few *gaki* and some other strange monstrosities since she joined up. She has consumed SF0's databases on the supernatural and has begun piecing together a disturbingly accurate picture of the supernatural entities that operate behind and within Japan's criminal organizations.

Influence: As a member of Strike Force Zero, Michiko has considerable pull in the civilian world. Within SF0 itself she is regarded as a promising recruit who'll either burn herself out (and end up dead) or learn to temper her passions with prudence (and end up dead, but with a few more kills to her credit).

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Curmudgeon

Age: 33

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

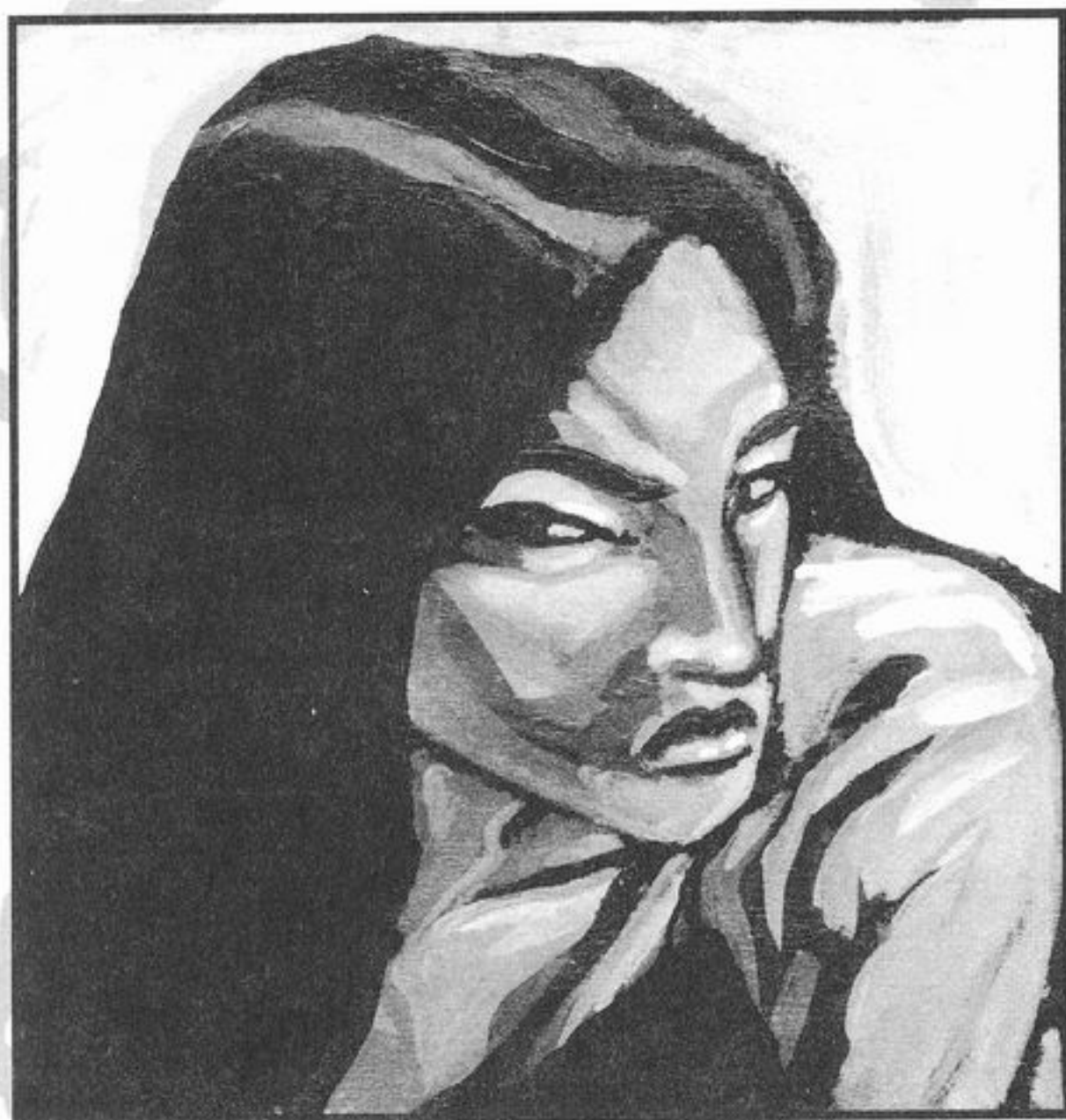
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Athletics 2, Dodge 3, Intimidation 4, Streetwise 3

Skills: Drive 3, Firearms 4, Martial Arts 3, Melee 3, Security 2, Stealth 3

Knowledges: Computer 1, Investigation 2, Law 1, Medicine 2

Special Abilities: Emotion Suppressor, Psi-Band Radio, Sheath



Backgrounds: Backers 3, Resources 3, Contacts 3
Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 3 (Yin Chi),
 Courage 5 (Yang Chi)
Willpower: 8

SFO ON THE STREETS

Strike Force Zero, as portrayed in *World of Darkness: Demon Hunter X*, may make a rough fit into a *Killing Streets* chronicle. The human-scale focus of a gritty, urban drama can clash with the cybernetic monster hunting hi-jinks of SF0. Storytellers can resolve these disparate styles in several ways, the simplest of which is not to use SF0 in a *Killing Streets* context. If you want to combine the two, however, keep the following points in mind.

In an urban drama, remember that things happen on an individual, human scale. Your stories concern a few crooks and cops, not a massive division of the Japanese secret service. As such, you can easily involve one or two SF0 agents in a *Killing Streets* story without bringing all the strike force's super-technology to bear. One or two enhancements won't be very jarring as long as you don't make them the center of the entire story — just like your Kuei-jin's Disciplines shouldn't be the center of their characters. In fact, the idea of a lone SF0 agent cut off from the resources of the Zaibatsu makes for a classic tale of a lone cop.

(Those of you who keep track of the evolving *World of Darkness* meta-plot also know that the current state of affairs in *Mage: The Ascension* is not terribly conducive to the use of super-technology. The nature of reality now makes some of the Technocracy's wilder toys much less reliable, including some of the most impressive tools used by SF0 agents. This means that most strike teams are using more subtle tools these days anyway, which makes them more useful in a *Killing Streets* context.)

JIMBO MATCHAN

Background: Matchan was a punk from an early age. He rarely saw his father, his mother doted on him, and he was thoroughly sick of it all by the time he was ten. School bored him, but motorcycles didn't. He got into petty crime to scrape together the money to buy his first bike, and joined a bike gang to be with others who understood him.

All in all, he was a typical bike-riding delinquent youth. Inevitably, one night he pushed his luck too far and wiped out during a high-speed run through the Ginza. He woke up from his coma just long enough to see the distraught looks on his parents' faces. Then he went to Hell. But not even the Wicked City could

hold him for long. He was too quick, too street-smart. He ran from the servitors, took the Second Breath, and has been running ever since.

Before long, his wild plans for eternity came to an abrupt end. He found the Bishamon incredibly hide-bound and stuffy, the Genji almost as bad. Fortunately, he found a third way — that of the heimin. It sounded good to Matchan. He's been at the game less than two decades but is already building a solid reputation as a fast and reliable go-between. His cocky attitude initially put some ancestors off (he calls it "redlining" them), but if there's one thing the elders respect, it's results, and nobody has ever had reason to complain about Matchan's work.

Between jobs, Matchan hangs out in biker bars and other seedy, low-rent locales, playing the mysterious tough guy who knows that no mortal punk can hope to take him. He's come dangerously close to losing control of himself in a couple of brawls, so now he plays it a little cooler.

Image: Matchan is a gangly young man apparently in his mid-twenties. He dresses in biker's leathers or designer suits, depending on the occasion. He has nothing but disdain for the elaborate ritual dress some *uji* ceremonies require and rarely forgoes an opportunity to jibe loyal court disciples on such matters.

Roleplaying Hints: You love the freedom of being heimin. You're aware that you walk a dangerous path, but that knowledge just heightens the joy of the open road. Keep your eyes open and never stop moving, that's your philosophy.

Haven: Matchan has a number of havens across Japan, mostly specially fortified apartments and basements in working-class areas.



Secrets: None. Matchan forgets everything he might overhear. Immediately. No one could pay him enough (in money, favors or other exchange) to remember.

Influence: As a heimin, Matchan officially has no influence. As a practical matter, he knows members of the criminal underclass across Japan and is generally well-liked. His fellow heimin respect his speed and dedication, if not his attitude.

Nature: Competitor

P'o Nature: The Barbarian

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Balance: Yang

Direction: West

Dharma: Dance of the Thrashing Dragon 3

Second Breath: 1977

Apparent Age: early 20s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Expression 3, Streetwise 5

Skills: Drive 5, Etiquette 3, Firearms 3, Melee 2, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Finance 1, Linguistics 2, Rituals 3

Disciplines: Black Wind 2, Blood Shintai 1, Equilibrium 2, Internalize 1

Backgrounds: Horoscope 3, Jade Talisman 3, Resources 3

Virtues: Yin 3, Yang 5, Hun 3, P'o 4

Willpower: 7

MOMOSE KAORI

Background: All her life, Kaori wanted to do things her own way. She was a tomboy and the terror of her neighborhood, and her parents despaired of her ever finding a husband. Little did they know that marriage had never figured into their daughter's plans.

Kaori ran away from home as soon as she finished high school. She moved to Tokyo to find her fortune, but instead it found her. Working as a barmaid while studying at Tokyo University, she was dumping some trash in the alley behind the bar when she stumbled across two *gaki* fighting. She was terrified, rooted to the spot as she watched the monsters clash. Eventually, one fell, and the survivor turned its maddened gaze upon Kaori. Its triumph was short-lived, however, as a third figure flashed down from a neighboring roof and quickly dispatched the weakened creature. Recovering her wits, Kaori grabbed a broken board as the new combatant turned slowly to face her. To her surprise, it was a woman. Wordlessly, she ran from the alley and was soon lost in the crowd.

Kaori started researching immediately. Piecing together what information she could from newspapers, books on mythology and crime reports, she realized that



she had seen two demons battling each other. The woman, she suspected, was one of the lone demon-hunters she read about.

Proof of the supernatural came as a profound shock. Kaori realized that human free will was an illusion if these monstrous creatures were pulling the strings from behind the scenes. She deduced from her mythology books that to be embraced by the Hell Kings, one must first prove one's wickedness. Then a servant will be sent to test one's resolve before one is taken to Hell and reborn.

With demons swimming through the sea of humanity like sharks, Kaori realized that the only way to prosper was to become one herself. She reasoned that she first needs to become wicked enough to earn passage to Hell. Next, she needs to be strong and clever enough to impress a Hell King. Finally, she needs to be well-versed in the necessary traditions to enter the society of devils. As a first step on the path toward becoming a demon, she has turned to petty crime and the seduction and corruption of her university teachers and fellow students. By night she prowls the streets, looking for the unliving.

One of these days, she'll wake up in one of the Hells. Then the fun will really begin.

Image: A striking young woman, Kaori has a strange gleam in her eyes and an otherworldly distraction in her manner. Needless to say, this demeanor drives some men (and some women) mad with desire.

Roleplaying Hints: You are either completely insane or close enough that the distinction makes no difference. The ultimate *gaki* wannabe, you cultivate an air of mystery and exoticism that can't entirely hide the desperate need that drives you.

Haven: Kaori lives in a basement apartment in a run-down building. Predictably, she sleeps late and avoids the sun.

Secrets: For a woman pursuing such a hopeless, bizarre dream, Kaori has managed to uncover some truths among her collection of pop superstition and half-baked mysticism. She understands that the *gaki* feed on the Chi of their victims, that there are several species of supernatural creatures living alongside humankind and that a group of mortals exists who hunt demons using Shinto magic and martial arts.

Influence: None. Kaori has only escaped death because a number of the city's *gaki* find her efforts endlessly amusing and are protecting her from harm.

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Deviant

Age: 19

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Acting 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Drive 2, Performance 2, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Computer 2, Investigation 2, Occult 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 1, Resources 1

Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 2, Courage 5

Humanity: 3

Willpower: 8

KOREA

Korea's history is the story of one wave of conquerors after another. A small country with a long coastline, surrounded by such powerful and often belligerent neighbors as China, Russia and Japan, Korea has been a crossroads for invading armies for centuries. Nevertheless, the Koreans have held onto their own cultural identity. The country's turbulent history has left it with a strong xenophobic streak, however, despite modernization and development into a significant economic power.

The division of Korea into two nations brought competition between North and South, but both have become economic heavy weights in their own right. The movement towards reunification has gained strength in recent years and led to a unified Olympic team, but at the turn of the century progress remains mostly symbolic.

KOREA BY NIGHT

The Kuei-jin of Korea quickly learned to adapt to the regular changes in their nation's fortune; they are entirely pragmatic and have little time for pomp and ceremony. The division of the nation has had little effect on the Green Courts beyond making it somewhat more difficult to travel the length of the country. The Kuei-jin take the long view and have little inter-

est in particular government regimes, preferring to work from a distance and allow the mortals' enthusiasm for bizarre experiments (like capitalism and Communism) to exhaust itself. Korean Kuei-jin are mostly concerned with expanding their already vast holdings of jade, which they craft into talismans. In recent years, local sources have dried up, and tensions with the *shen* have mounted as rapacious Kuei-jin raid their dragon nests.

Both Koreas are relatively peaceful and lack the rough-and-tumble criminal underclass of other nations. The Kuei-jin who operate on the streets generally concentrate on smuggling and gambling. The Parallel Path is a major source of income for Korean Kuei-jin and those who operate it are reluctant to accept payment in anything other than jade, which is growing scarce. The other pressing problem is the brewing conflict with the *shen*; the Tengu raven-folk have begun to recruit their fiercer brothers to help protect the dragon nests. Some of the shape shifters have begun entering the cities to hunt the Kuei-jin, believing that the element of surprise will grant them significant advantages.

See *Kindred of the East*, pp. 161-163 and 175-177, and *Kindred of the East Companion*, pp. 27-29, for more information on Korea.

KIM DAE-SAM, THE SUBTLE MASTER OF A THOUSAND DEATHS

Background: Kim Dae-sam always loved playing with his toys, pulling them apart to see what made them work. A quiet child who never lost his temper, he suffered at the hands of local bullies until the bicycle of Lee Pak-il, his chief tormentor, fell apart one day as Pak-il was riding down a steep hill. Dae-sam visited his "friend" at his sickbed, and said he'd discovered what had happened to Pak-il's bike. He handed Pak-il a collection of bolts and reminded him to take better care of his things, or else another accident was sure to happen. The bullies left Dae-sam alone after that.

When the Korean War erupted, Dae-sam was drafted into the North Korean Army. He expected to serve as a mechanic, but his drill sergeant picked him immediately as a young man with the implacable demeanor and icy professionalism to be a superlative killer. Dae-sam soon grew tired of the army's methods, however. It was easy enough to desert, and he found a ready market for his skills. Dae-sam specialized in hits that looked like accidents — mechanical failures leading to fatal car wrecks, accidental electrocutions, gas leaks and the like — and he soon became highly sought after.

The sages say one's destiny is inescapable. Perhaps that is why Dae-sam was himself assassinated. A previous employer who wanted him out of the way set him up, and his outrage was so great that not even the



Hell of Being Cut to Pieces could hold him for long. His rage burned cold and he soon made his escape. The assassin who killed him swiftly met her death in a spectacular collision between her car and an out-of-control petrol tanker. The businessman who hired her, however, was trapped for five agonizing hours in the tangled wreckage of a derailed train before dying in the wake of a mysterious power outage at the hospital where surgeons were trying desperately to save his life.

Dae-sam intends to one day control the Green Courts, but he is patient and methodical. He has studied his condition and the operations of the Courts, the better to control and manipulate them. He has little interest in Scarlet Screens, gathering jade, transporting Kuei-jin and Kin-jin along the Parallel Path, necromancy or any of the other activities prevalent in the Green Courts as ends in themselves. They are simply tools to be used. He sees the infiltration of Korea's cities by the *shen* as the perfect opportunity to test his understanding and to increase his importance within the courts.

Image: Kim Dae-sam is a handsome man, appearing to be somewhere between his late twenties and late thirties. His build is athletic rather than bulky and he moves with quiet assurance. He speaks little and has no use for social niceties.

Roleplaying Hints: It amuses you to kill with ordinary objects, allowing your victims to kill themselves with their carelessness. You are a professional, however, and if need be can finish off a hit with gunplay or hand-to-hand combat. You intend to eventually control the Green Courts, and all your activities are directed, no matter how tangentially, to that goal.

Haven: Dae-sam never sleeps in the same place two nights running. He has caches of equipment around the world, and small apartments in most major Asian cities.

Secrets: Dae-sam knows a great deal about the habits of the Kuei-jin, Kin-jin and *shen*. He has a passing knowledge of the Parallel Path and court politics but is still concentrating on learning how best to operate on the streets.

Influence: Despite his avowed disinterest in politics, Kim Dae-sam wields considerable influence among the Kuei-jin of the Green Courts, who admire his dedication. Although several of the Green Ancestors rely on the Thousand Whisper assassin Shadow Puppet (see **Dharma Book: Thousand Whispers** for more details), many mandarins have come to use Kim's services instead. He is also being looked to for leadership in the nascent struggle against the *shen*.

Nature: Loner

P'o Nature: The Fool

Demeanor: Curmudgeon

Balance: Yin

Direction: West

Dharma: Song of the Shadow 4

Second Breath: 1959

Apparent Age: late 30s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Dodge 4, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 3

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 5, Martial Arts 4, Melee 4, Stealth 5, Survival 3

Knowledges: Enigmas 2, Investigation 3, Occult 2

Disciplines: Yin Prana 3, Bone Shintai 4, Internalize 1

Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Horoscope 2, Resources 5

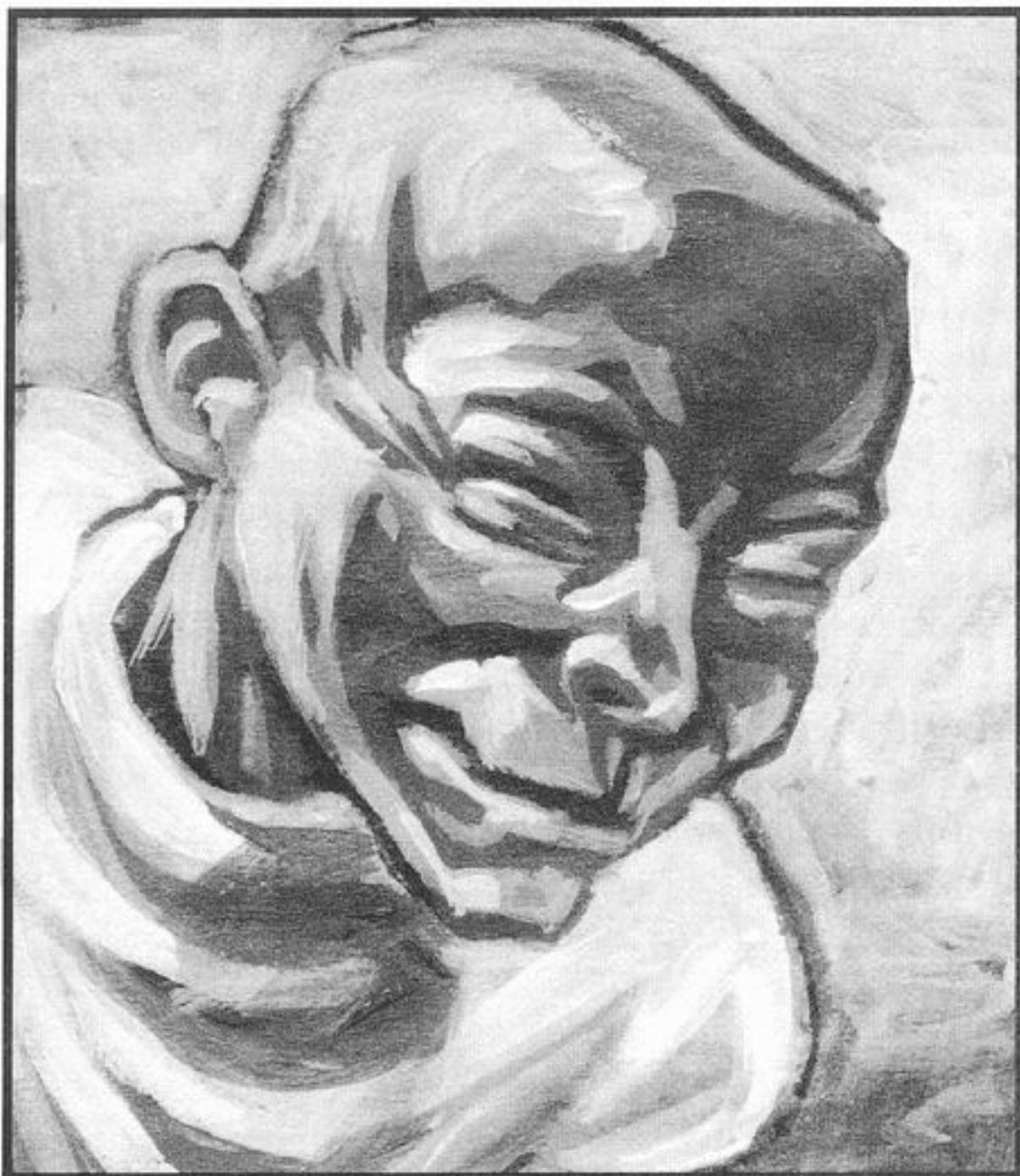
Virtues: Yin 5, Yang 3, Hun 6, P'o 4

Willpower: 9

CHO CHONG-KYU, THE VANISHING DEMON OF CHEMULPO

Background: Chong-kyu was always a likeable fellow, and smart too. So smart, in fact, that he didn't think the rules of his world applied to him. Smart enough to see the potential for personal power and profit by providing forbidden goods and services to enlightened and sophisticated individuals.

As a procurer, Chong-kyu excelled. When the Tong-haks, an anti-foreigner society, rebelled for 3 months in 1894, both Chinese and Japanese troops entered the county. The Japanese took the city of Chemulpo (modern-day Inchon), and all-out war soon followed. In its wake, Chong-kyu amassed considerable wealth dealing in luxuries and other illegal goods. It was easy money, but he hadn't figured on getting in



the way of a smuggling operation run by the same unliving ancestor for over a century. Chong-kyu's death was remarkably painless and quick, unlike his time in the Hell of Being Skinned Alive. Overcome by fear, Chong-kyu nevertheless struggled against his fate. Eventually, his terror of remaining in Hell forever overcame his fear of the consequences of escape. By carefully observing the movements of Tou Mu's servitors and his fellow sufferers, he smuggled himself out of Hell.

When he entered the Green Courts, he recognized the ancestor of Chemulpo as the one who had ordered his death. The ancestor made good use of Chong-kyu's talents, ordering him to supervise the day-to-day operations of the Chemulpo end of the Parallel Path. Chong-kyu accepted this new responsibility and immediately set to work, drawing up registers of safe houses, noting dangerous areas and keeping detailed records of who was on the path, for how long, and what they paid. By the time the Korean War broke out in 1950, Chong-kyu effectively controlled the path's southern reaches.

Five decades later, Chong-kyu remains on top of his game. He has a number of Scarlet Screens, mostly in Seoul and Incheon, including two smuggling operations, several small hotels and a taxi company. His specialty is moving things from one place to another without anyone noticing, and he's very good at what he does, often making arrangements and interviewing clients personally. Despite his success, Chong-kyu longs for a satori to tell him how to proceed in his unlife. His cowardice served its purpose in freeing him from Hell, but he's too scared to try being brave.

Image: Chong-kyu is a wizened old Korean with a bald pate and a small potbelly sticking out from his otherwise skinny frame. He dresses in traditional garb and acts the part of the absent-minded old man.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a professional procurer and smuggler, but you wonder if that's really why the August Personage of Jade has seen fit to send you back to the Middle Kingdom. You think you should probably take revenge on the ancestor who had you killed, but you're sure you couldn't succeed. Does that make you a coward?

Haven: Chong-kyu has a number of fortified vaults in his warehouses and boarding houses throughout Korea. His office is in a rundown boat-shed in Incheon.

Secrets: Chong-kyu has kept detailed records of the movements of many of the Kuei-jin in South Korea for the last 20 years. This resource alone makes him privy to many secrets. Were he to set his mind to it, he could easily discover who was meeting whom, and why.

Influence: Chong-kyu is far more influential than he realizes. Under his management, the Parallel Path has made more profit and assisted more travelers than ever before. His other smuggling activities have brought many Kuei-jin items they could not otherwise have obtained. He is well liked, if not personally, then at least for his professional skill.

Nature: Conformist

P'o Nature: The Bandit

Demeanor: Director

Balance: Balanced

Direction: East

Dharma: Way of the Resplendent Crane 4

Second Breath: 1895

Apparent Age: late 60s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 2

Talents: Brawl 2, Dodge 4, Empathy 3, Expression 3, Streetwise 5, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Etiquette 4, Firearms 3, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Computer 2, Finance 4, Investigation 3, Law 3, Linguistics 2, Politics 2

Disciplines: Chi'iu Muh 2, Demon Shintai 3, Equilibrium 2, Yin Prana 1

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Contacts 5, Influence 3, Resources 4

Virtues: Yin 4, Yang 4, Hun 3, P'o 3

Willpower: 6

THE GOLDEN COURTS (SOUTHEAST ASIA)

The *penangallan* are the undisputed mistresses of their domains throughout Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia. Throughout the 20th century, they have made use of the superstitious, uneducated rural poor to control the jungles, fight each other and keep rival Kuei-jin trapped in the cities. But their understanding of modern society is poor and they are reluctant to come to terms with the fact that traditional ways of life in rural areas cannot compete with the lure of employment and opportunity in the rapidly expanding urban economies. Now they face the despoliation of their jungles and the looting of their temples, and it is uncertain how much longer they can continue their lifestyle.

The *penangallan* have not been idle in defense of their realms, however. The jungle queens' reputation for savagery is well earned, their methods brutal and direct. Across Southeast Asia, they have taken advantage of rural revolutionaries and hill tribes, including the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Pol Pot's campaign in that nation was an attempt to return to "year zero," a cultural holocaust on an unimaginable scale. Though not responsible for the slaughter, the jungle queens encouraged and took advantage of it to further their own feuds and keep the rest of the world out of their domains. Yet even this drastic tactic hasn't worked. Pol Pot's death and international pressure on the Khmer Rouge have curbed their worst excesses, until even the hard-liners have begun to realize that they must adapt or perish.

Current events are rapidly moving beyond the jungle queens' control. The rural populations over whom they claim sovereignty are desperately poor, and the destruction of so much physical and intellectual infrastructure in senseless wars has left countries like Laos and Cambodia ill-equipped to take advantage of the economic opportunities from which their more fortunate neighbors have benefited. Virtue and hard work do not feed families. Stolen artifacts and pieces of ancient temples, however, do. The famous Khmer temples that dot the jungles of Laos, Cambodia and Thailand represent a source of fabulous wealth to the local inhabitants. They care little for the fact that they are dismantling their past; survival is their first priority. Compounding the problem is the entry of organized gangs and the military into the illegal market, and the fact that even a modest piece — say, the head of a statue, or a few square feet of a frieze — brings in enough money to feed a family for over a year.

At first, the jungle queens were not too concerned. They abandoned Angkor Wat and retreated, trusting the dense jungle to keep their temples and

lairs hidden. But in recent years, conservationists (and looters) have been bringing technology to bear, and sophisticated radar systems have located a number of previously unknown temples.

The situation on the ground is once again very dangerous. Every strike at a party of looters simply causes the next party to bring in more guards and heavier weaponry. Urban Kuei-jin use Scarlet Screens in the military, smugglers and police to keep the archaeological treasure flowing; the *penangallan*, for their part, have realized that they must put aside their own differences if they are to survive. This truce among the jungle queens remains fragile, as some have used it to take advantage of their more trusting (and forward-looking) rivals, but the *penangallan* have nonetheless begun efforts to influence conservationists and international scholars. The irony of this move is mostly lost on them, but some astute *penangallan* suspect that involving the international community might, in the long run, be far more harmful to their cause than simply allowing the traditional bloodbaths in the jungle to continue.

SCARLET SCREENS

The current conflict is being fought almost entirely by proxy, as Scarlet Screens are maneuvered against each other. The *penangallan* have been more reluctant to lead attacks since realizing (to the surprise of their more traditional members) that military encampments, especially those commanded by the occasional dhampyr or accompanied by a Shih, can be extraordinarily lethal.

Most of the urban Kuei-jin involved in the struggle operate out of cities in Thailand, including Bangkok, Khorat and Ubon Ratchathani (near the border with Laos). Many of these are males who feel marginalized by the jungle queens, but urban women are also involved. These urban Scarlet Screens receive stolen treasures from the Cambodian and Laotian militaries as well as numerous private expeditions, and arrange for them to be shipped to the bazaars in Bangkok where wealthy Westerners await.

The *penangallan* have long relied on local peasants, but have recently begun calling on the numerous rogue Khmer Rouge units still at large in Cambodia, which have staged several pitched battles with RCAF (Royal Cambodian Armed Forces) units "protecting" (i.e. looting) sacred sites. The queens have also established some Scarlet Screens among the Thai police (to control smuggling), the RCAF (to stop the looting) and even among conservation organizations (to bring international pressure to bear). These have met with limited success so far, and the jungle queens have not fully considered the long-term implications, but it is unlikely that they will be able to turn the tide without more influence in the mortal world.

See *Kindred of the East*, pp. 163-165 and 177-180, and *Kindred of the East Companion*, pp. 29-31, for more information on the Golden Courts.

THANOM CHARUSATHIEM, THE AUSPICIOUS GAMBLER

Background: Wealth or danger — Thanom never could decide which he liked best. An ambitious hustler and con man on the streets of Bangkok, he often walked right into dangerous situations and bluffed his way through. It was inevitable that one day he'd bite off more than he could chew. He'd heard that the jungles were dangerous, so on a bet he headed out into the verdant green hills, confident that he would survive for three days and then head back to Bangkok to claim his prize.

He didn't last a single night. Captured by villagers and taken to their *penangallan*, he was tortured and sacrificed in a bloody ritual. So great was his rage at losing his bet that he didn't stay long in the Hell of Contemplation of the Self. He didn't have eternity to waste. His arrival as a *chih-mei* marked the beginning of a brief rampage among the poor inhabitants of Bangkok, but Thanom was quickly taken in hand and taught how to behave.

Hungry for revenge, Thanom worked to expand the education and urbanization of Thai society. He knew the *penangallan* were virtually impregnable in their jungle homes, but he also realized that the conflict between their primitive ways and modern economics would eventually prove their undoing. When peasants began looting Khmer temples across the border in Cambodia, Thanom saw an opportunity. He quickly sponsored a number of smuggling

operations, which delighted him with the wealth they transported out of the jungles and the impotent rage he knew the queens would be feeling.

When the *penangallan* began to strike back, Thanom armed his men. He has even offered his services as a guide (who insists on sleeping alone during the day and travelling only at night) on several expeditions. He has yet to face a *penangallan* in direct combat, but he's hoping he won't have to wait much longer.

Image: Thanom is a Thai of unprepossessing appearance. In Bangkok, he wears Western clothing and presents himself as a successful businessman; in the jungles, he masquerades as a slightly eccentric guide and wears little besides a loincloth, a cotton shirt, sandals and his gun-belt.

Roleplaying Hints: You used to have only two passions in life — money and danger. Now that you've returned from Hell, you have a third: revenge. You are obsessed with finding the *penangallan* who ended your life.

Haven: Thanom makes his lair in a warehouse operated by one of his Scarlet Screen smuggling operations.

Secrets: After privately sponsoring a number of high-tech jungle explorations, Thanom knows the location of several as-yet unexplored temples. He hasn't decided how he'll use this information, but somehow he will make sure it inflicts the greatest misery possible on the jungle queens.

Influence: Thanom is extending his influence into the political sphere, sponsoring efforts to reclaim the jungle and build factories, housing and modern villages. As the utility of striking at the *penangallan* through temple-looting becomes more apparent, Thanom's influence among the Kuei-jin of Bangkok (and Thailand) increases.

Nature: Thrill-Seeker

P'o Nature: The Legalist

Demeanor: Gallant

Balance: Yang

Direction: East

Dharma: Howl of the Devil-Tiger 4

Second Breath: 1972

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

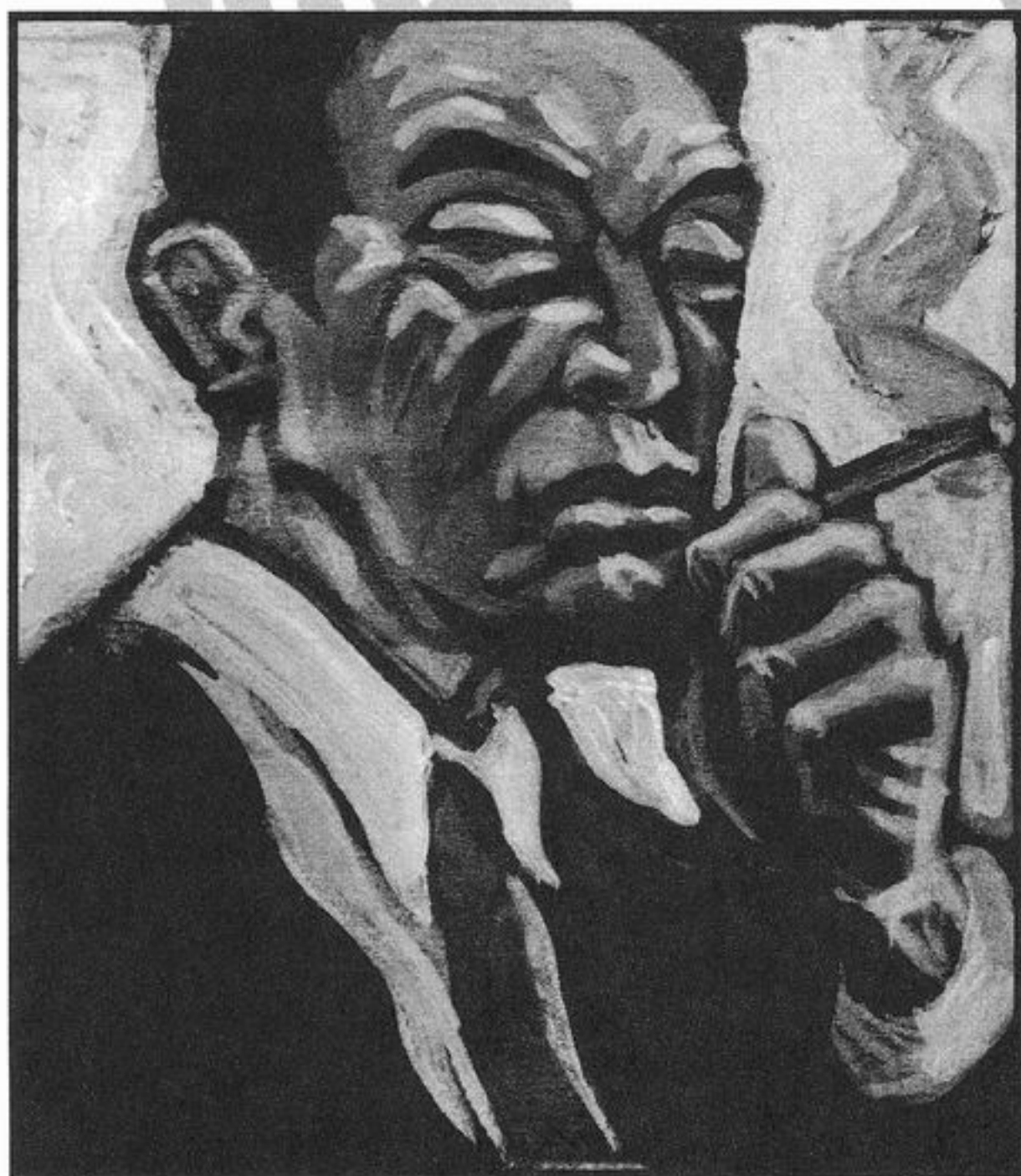
Talents: Alertness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 4, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Etiquette 2, Firearms 3, Survival 2, Torture 3

Knowledges: Finance 3, Law 2, Politics 3

Disciplines: Yang Prana 2, Demon Shintai 4

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 4, Horoscope 3, Influence 4



Virtues: Yin 1, Yang 3, Hun 3, P'o 2

Willpower: 7

PHIBUL PRAMAJ

Background: All Phibul's life, he had to struggle to get by. Fever struck him down in his teens, and his health never recovered. Frailty forced him to give up his ambition to become a *muay thai* kick boxer, but as it turns out, he found something better: money. Driven onto the streets to make a living, Phibul discovered a knack for cutting a deal, haggling a good price, and keeping his customers coming back.

He soon realized that the big money lay in moving drugs, but he quailed at the severe penalties and high risk. Fortunately, Heaven took mercy on his plight. Thanom Charusathiem, an eccentric entrepreneur, wanted someone to run some stalls selling antique statuary. Phibul jumped at the chance. When he realized that he was actually selling priceless artifacts looted from the Khmer temples, he hesitated. But he also recognized that the items weren't literally priceless; they were just very expensive. And his commission made quite a sum.

Phibul has dealt with competitors, occasional raids by the police and the odd assassination attempt with his customary good grace and ready smile. His money has bought him a small mansion, a beautiful wife and two sons. He doesn't think very much about the morality of his actions or his increasing ruthlessness; to do so would be to question the blessings of Heaven.

The secret of his success, he feels, is his habit of working at least one day a week at one of his marketplace stalls. He likes to think it keeps his skills sharp. It also allows him to watch other dealers in action, so he knows who he needs to recruit and who he needs to eliminate.



Image: Phibul is a sickly-looking but perpetually cheerful man in his mid-thirties. He dresses in expensive Western-style clothes when conducting business with his partners, but wears old jeans and shirts on those days when he decides to conduct business at one of his stalls.

Roleplaying Hints: Business is good. You have solid connections with the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) and the Thai police, and a number of procurers who make large purchases for overseas clients. You have no interest in preserving important archaeological sites; that sounds suspiciously like something a wealthy Westerner would think of.

Haven: Phibul owns a small mansion in one of Bangkok's better neighborhoods, with servants and a permanent security staff.

Secrets: Phibul has an intricate knowledge of the workings of the black market and extensive contacts with overseas smugglers and dealers in antiquities. He does not suspect anything supernatural about his business, however.

Influence: Phibul is a valued servant of Thanom Charusathiem, who always listens to his suggestions. He has some influence in the business community as a wealthy trader, but no political connections to speak of.

Nature: Competitor

Demeanor: Survivor

Age: 33

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Athletics 2, Dodge 2, Expression 2, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 3, Martial Arts 2, Firearms 4, Security 3

Knowledges: Computer 1, Finance 3, Law 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Influence 1, Resources 3

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 3, Courage 3

Humanity: 4

Willpower: 7

KUKRIT SONGKHAM

Background: The life of a policeman in Thailand is tough. But Kukrit's father was a policeman, and his father before him, so he felt that not to follow in their footsteps would dishonor them. He thinks of his job as akin to that of a garbage collector; you can never stop people from producing trash, but if you stop collecting it, it'll overflow and choke the streets.

Kukrit had a successful career fighting the drug trade in Bangkok, but eventually became too well known to the syndicates operating in the city, and so he requested a transfer. He was sent to Aranya Prathet,



just across the border from Cambodia, to help in the fight against smugglers.

The naked greed of the smugglers appalled him. How could people destroy the temples and tombs of their ancestors? Kukrit has never really understood the motives of the criminals he fights, and the idea that some are forced into crime as a way of protecting and caring for their families would not make sense to him.

Kukrit currently commands a police patrol that seizes smugglers and busts their warehouses. The violence his men regularly meet with has surprised him, and he is trying (so far without success) to organize multinational, cross-border operations to stop the smugglers at the source.

Unknown to Kukrit, his entire department is a Scarlet Screen for a local *penangallan*. He, his superiors and his men are being manipulated to put pressure on the governments of Thailand and Cambodia to end the illegal artifact trade. These moves are meeting with some success in Thailand, but not in Cambodia. Kukrit's commanding officer recently suggested an unauthorized expedition to track some smugglers to their sources. As more and more treasure flows out of the jungles to enrich the crime bosses, and as the violence escalates, Kukrit finds this idea increasingly attractive.

Image: Kukrit is a fit and athletic-looking Thai, of medium height but quite muscular. He is an enthusiastic *muay thai* kick boxer and looks exactly like what he is — a police hard man, with no sympathy whatsoever for criminals.

Roleplaying Hints: Criminals are scum. They don't respect their ancestors, their fellow man or their

society. It's your job to do everything you can to stop them. You aren't reckless, but you're confident in your abilities (and those of your men) and you never back away from your word.

Haven: Kukrit lives in a modest apartment in Aranya Prathet with his wife and daughter.

Secrets: An expert on the trade in illegal antiquities, Kukrit is as yet unaware of the presence of supernatural creatures in the jungles and cities of Asia. He has extensive knowledge of their mortal operations and of the drug trade in Bangkok.

Influence: Kukrit is highly respected by his neighbors and his fellow police, and feared by criminals.

Nature: Conformist

Demeanor: Perfectionist

Age: 30

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Intimidation 4, Leadership 3, Streetwise 2

Skills: Drive 3, Firearms 4, Martial Arts 3, Melee 3, Security 2, Survival 2

Knowledges: Bureaucracy 2, Computer 1, Investigation 2, Law 1, Medicine 1

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Equipment 1, Influence 2, Resources 2

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 3, Courage 5

Humanity: 6

Willpower: 6

SINGAPORE

Singapore is, in many ways, the model modern nation-state. The tiny island is prosperous and peaceful, with one of the lowest crime rates in the industrialized world. Criticizing the government is not allowed, chewing gum is illegal and littering carries heavy penalties. Singaporeans have traded liberty for prosperity and so far, it's been worth it. There are no slums, no run-down ghettos or seedy neighborhoods. The police keep a tight lid on the criminal element and the market for vice of any sort is small.

Of course, if you lift a rock, you'll find bugs and worms scurrying for cover. Singapore in the Middle Kingdom certainly has its dark side — but its denizens live in corporate boardrooms, penthouses and mansions, not in nightclubs and brothels.

The Lion Court Emperors keep a tight rein on the city, fearing the *penangallan*, resenting the Kin-jin who chose to remain in the city after 1965 (when the British handed the island back to Malaysia), and preying on each other. They have also instituted a policy of welcoming dhampyrs to the city. Over the last 20 years, Singapore has developed the highest

concentration of the half-damned children of Kuei-jin. The Emperors hope to use them as weapons against the *penangallan*, but the dhampyrs themselves are starting to organize.

Crime and vice are expensive, sophisticated affairs in Singapore. The risks are enormous, and so prices are incredibly high. Workers gamble and drink, but the drug trade is mostly restricted to wealthy corporate employees. No direct shipping links exist between Indonesia and Singapore, and with Malaysia only a stone's throw away, smugglers have little interest in the island. Those who brave the law, however, make a huge profit from bringing in drugs, slaves and videos.

See *Kindred of the East*, pp. 165 and 179, *Kindred of the East Companion*, pp. 31-32, and *Half-Damned: Dhampyr*, pp. 64-65, for more information on Singapore.

TRIPLE HARMONY INSURANCE UNDERWRITERS



Triple Harmony Insurance Underwriters is a multinational underwriting firm with extensive operations throughout Southeast Asia. Specializing in high-risk technology start-ups, Triple Harmony has been the savior of more than one failed entrepreneur.

Triple Harmony has offices in the capital cities and major regional centers of all the Tiger economies and weathered the economic crisis of the late 1990s with its reputation intact. Many analysts have wondered how this privately-owned company managed to pay out all the claims it did. Those who wondered too publicly about the company's connections with organized crime were quick to acknowledge the company's probity (after a visit from its representatives), or to vanish (after a visit from its representatives).

Triple Harmony is, of course, a Scarlet Screen. It is run by the Bamboo Princes, who find the access given to insurance assessors and risk management specialists a handy source of information. Funded by a shrewd business plan and the proceeds from a number of illegal operations (principally corrupt deal-brokering between governments and contractors), Triple Harmony is a name you can trust.

Local hotshots run the organization on a franchise basis, but all books are audited twice a year by a team from the organization's headquarters in

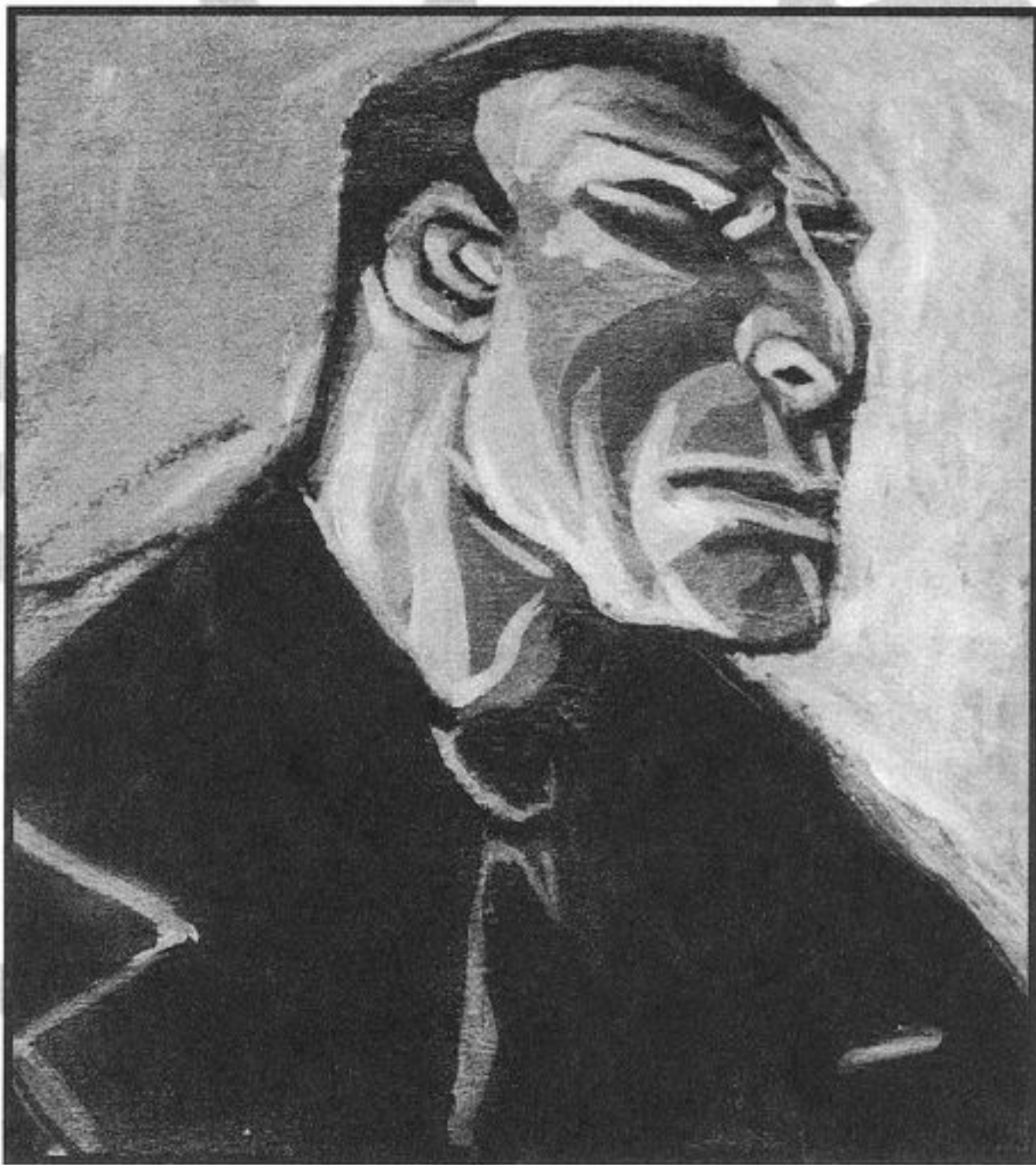
Singapore. Periodically, a management inspection team will do the rounds, just to keep everyone on their toes. This team normally consists of Shi Guanlong and Yan Shijian.

SHI GUANLONG, THE VIRTUOUS DRAGON

Background: Shi Guanlong is one of the many dhampyrs in Singapore. The son of Tang Yulin, a Bamboo Prince hacker and financial whiz, Guanlong is only 43 years old but has learned much. Yulin raised her son alone, wasting no time in educating him on the dangers faced by the Middle Kingdom as the Age turns. Infected with his mother's sense of urgency, Guanlong works as a bodyguard and travelling companion for Yan Shijian. This allows him to travel throughout Asia on business and to serve as a courier and troubleshooter for the Bamboo Princes.

Guanlong has little trouble with his life, but was poorly socialized by his mother; he fits the stereotype of the silent bodyguard quite well. He has met other dhampyrs on his travels but finds little in common with them. He has no time for personal plots against hated Kuei-jin or inferior mortals. He focuses on a greater goal and is unconcerned with recruiting more dhampyrs to the Princes' cause; he leaves such matters to others.

Maya Surita, a dhampyr advisor to Chan Jianglu (one of Singapore's Golden Lion Emperors), has her eye on Guanlong and would like to recruit him into her plan to forestall the coming of the Sixth Age. Given the similarity between her goals and those of the Bamboo Princes, she feels her chances of success are excellent, provided she can overcome Guanlong's loyalty to his mother. (See *Half-Damned: Dhampyr*, p. 65, for more information on Maya Surita.)



Guanlong is quite fond of Shijian, the mortal he protects, and has risked his life for him a number of times. Shijian is Triple Harmony's best analyst and information-gatherer, but Tang Yulin is concerned that her son's selfless dedication may lead him to carelessly throw his life away defending a useful but easily replaced mortal. She's not quite sure how to deal with the situation, but she's considering having Shijian killed as a reminder that even the most skilled mortal is of no real consequence.

Image: Guanlong is an imposing man who appears to be in his late twenties. He typically dresses in expensive black suits, with a colored shirt and matching tie. When not on bodyguard duty, he favors casual clothes that allow him full freedom of movement; he is always armed.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a loyal soldier. Your mother raised you to serve the cause of the Bamboo Princes, which is to prevent the world from being stuck in the Sixth Age. You don't hesitate to put yourself in danger; you're not suicidal, but you realize that your value comes from selfless service.

Haven: Guanlong lives a nomadic life, in whatever apartment or other accommodation Triple Harmony provides.

Secrets: As one of Triple Harmony's trouble-shooters, Guanlong has access to incredibly sensitive business and financial information about many companies in Southeast Asia. He also knows many of the Bamboo Princes' mortal and half-damned operatives, but few of the Princes themselves.

Influence: Among the Bamboo Princes, Guanlong is regarded as a valuable servant, not an equal. Among his fellow dhampyrs, he is highly respected and could exert considerable influence if he chose to.

Nature: Conformist

P'o Nature: The Demon

Demeanor: Director

Age: 43

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 3

Skills: Drive 3, Etiquette 1, Firearms 4, Melee 3, Security 4, Stealth 3

Knowledges: Computer 3, Finance 2, Face 1, Investigation 2, Law 2, Linguistics 3, Politics 1

Special Abilities: Passive Joss, Iron Mountain 1

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Mentor 3, Resources 4

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 4, Courage 3, P'o 1

Humanity: 7

Willpower: 8

YAN SHIJIAN

Background: Shijian is from a wealthy, upper-middle class Hong Kong family. He studied at the London School of Economics and was quickly snapped up by Triple Harmony, who offered him a lucrative pay package, the opportunity for travel and the chance to use his skills in both financial analysis and strategic investment.

Shijian excels at his job and enjoys it immensely. Recently, however, he has grown disturbed at how violent Asia has become. At first, he thought it was a general phenomenon, but some quick research led him to realize that much of the violence he saw centered around Triple Harmony assessors as they traveled through the region. Perplexed, he began some investigations of his own, and his findings have startled him. He is convinced that the owners of the firm are criminals or terrorists using Triple Harmony as a front to gather information about their targets and generate legitimate revenue.

Consequently, Shijian lives in a state of quiet terror. He and his bodyguard Shi Guanlong were once good friends, but now Shijian wonders if Guanlong is on the lookout for signs of disloyalty. Shijian recently bought a black-market pistol and has also begun making extra copies of the information he records when inspecting clients. Along with information about Triple Harmony itself, he has made multiple copies of these files, with instructions to his solicitors in Singapore to make the information public upon his death. So far, his activities and suspicions have remained hidden, but his paranoia is increasing, and the risks he takes along with it.

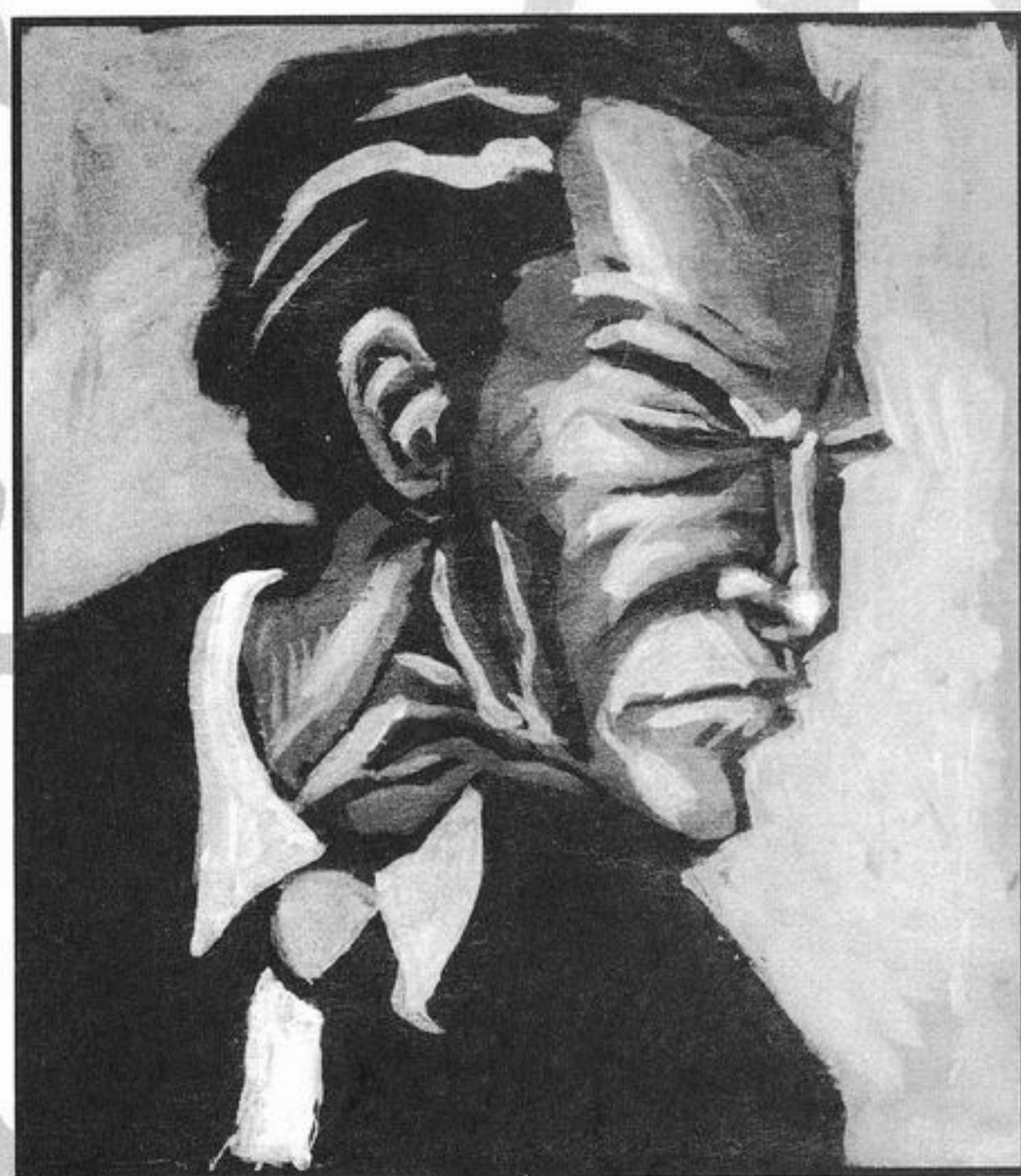


Image: Yan Shijian is entering middle age and is beginning to develop both a stoop and a paunch. Despite the travel involved, his job is almost completely sedentary and his well-cut clothes and careful grooming can't hide his declining health.

Roleplaying Hints: You're scared. Really scared. You're certain that Triple Harmony is a front company for some kind of dangerous, illegal business and you know too much for them to just let you go. You fear for your life and you're becoming increasingly paranoid. Even your friends might secretly be watching you. You can't decide whether telling your wife would protect or endanger her.

Haven: When not on the road, Shijian lives in a comfortable apartment in Singapore with his wife and 6-year-old son.

Secrets: Shijian probably knows more about the business dealings of Triple Harmony's clients than anyone else in the company. He is aware that many businesses are concealing transactions and deals of questionable legality and could get the financial and other data to back up any such claims he cared to make.

Influence: If he were to produce his stash of secret information on Triple Harmony, Shijian could bring the company down and expose its unliving controllers to some unwelcome danger.

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Traditionalist

Age: 34

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 2

Talents: Alertness 1, Empathy 2, Expression 2

Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette 2

Knowledges: Bureaucracy 4, Computer 2, Finance 3, Investigation 2, Law 1, Politics 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 2, Resources 3

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 3, Courage 2

Humanity: 8

Willpower: 5

INDIA

India is a vast nation, home to approximately one-sixth of the world's population. From the poverty-stricken beggars who live in garbage dumps to the freshly-minted millionaires heading software and motion picture companies and the world-class scientists produced by its universities, India is a nation on a collision course with destiny.

The influence of the British is reflected in many aspects of Indian life, from the nation's fanatical love of cricket to its civil bureaucracy. But not even the British could alter the basic character of Indian

society, with its rigid caste system and animosity between Hindu and Muslim.

Indeed, India is something of a crossroads, a hybrid mix of East and West. Nowhere is this more apparent than in its supernatural population. Both Kuei-jin and Kin-jin call India home and the two factions have maintained a cautious co-existence for centuries. The frenzied self-destruction suffered by many local Ravnos Kin-jin in 1999 (during the so-called "Week of Nightmares") upset this delicate balance, as did the massive influx of foreign *shen* — *chi'n ta*, *hengeyokai*, Kuei-jin and Kin-jin alike. Many arrangements that had existed for decades or centuries have collapsed. Times are tense in India, and foreigners are advised to tread carefully.

See *Kindred of the East Companion*, pp. 32-33, for more information on India.

"BOLLYWOOD"

The first moving pictures in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) were shown in 1896. The locals enthusiastically took to the new form of entertainment and by the 1920s a strong film industry had been established. With the introduction of the "talkies," local studios assured their success with the commercially astute decision to film in Hindi while the rest of the industry fragmented into linguistic pockets. By the mid-1930s film production was rivaling textiles as the city's largest source of employment.

When India became an independent nation in 1947, Prime Minister Nehru introduced a number of socialist reforms, which caused massive growth in the "parallel economy." This in turn made huge sums of illegal funds available for investment and caused the collapse of the studio system.

The Indian film industry today is driven by independent producers with their own sources of funding. Of course, much of this money derives from the "Mumbai Mafia," which uses film production to launder funds.

Several Kuei-jin have created Scarlet Screens in the Mumbai film industry. Chief among them is Rajiv Pooviah, with his very own (secret) production facilities. Also prominent are Rani Chawla, still a Running Monkey, who backed the production of several art-house films that have made a strong impression on the international scene, and Amir Ratnam, a Bamboo Prince who has made a number of thinly veiled anti-establishment propaganda films.

THE BEGGAR KING OF CALCUTTA

Background: The Beggar King has lived in so many bodies that he has forgotten his original name and is no longer even certain that he shouldn't call himself the Beggar Queen. Born into abject poverty in the slums of Calcutta over 300 years ago, the peasant who would become the Beggar King lived a short life of hopeless misery.

Put to death for speaking against the caste system, the Beggar King's soul awoke in Lanka. Overcome by rage, he took the Second Breath and re-entered the Middle Kingdom, determined to end the suffering of his fellow untouchables.

To his distress, however, his corpse had been thrown into the Ganges and consumed by crocodiles and he found himself in a strange new body. Even stranger, his soul was only weakly attached to this new physical shell. He would later learn to call himself a Yulan-jin, a body jumper. He adapted quickly enough and passed through the *chih-mei* stage to become a follower of the Flame of the Rising Phoenix Dharma. Although considered heresy in Chinese courts, this Dharma is very common among India's Hungry Dead. Despite his body-jumping, the king is dedicated to continuing his life as one of the poor and so always returns to that status.

The Beggar King soon realized that, given the precarious nature of his physical existence, to ensure his survival he would need to create some kind of structure that did not rely on his presence to be effective. He soon became the master of all the beggars, pickpockets, thieves and spies among the untouchables and created a myth that the mantle of the Beggar King passes, at a time of need, to one worthy of it, who then defends the beggars from those who would oppress them.

The Beggar King has had no success as yet in combating India's caste system, but he is a formidable presence in Calcutta. He has the ears of the leaders of the poor communities, and they are an excellent source of information. If you need to know something, a beggar or street urchin has probably seen or heard of

it. And if a beggar or street urchin has seen it, the Beggar King will know about it sooner or later.

Image: As a Yulan-jin who is constantly putting himself in danger, the Beggar King's appearance can vary widely, and he rarely has the same body for more than a decade before it gets killed. The Beggar King always dresses in the rags of the most desperate of beggars and is rarely anything but filthy.

Roleplaying Hints: You are somewhat schizophrenic and a little paranoid, but truly believe the dispossessed to be your subjects. You struggle endlessly against the caste system that consigns you and your followers to the bottom of society. You are not always fully lucid, but your purpose is always clear.

Haven: The Beggar King has no permanent havens, but is generally welcomed wherever he goes among the poor.

Secrets: If it happens on the streets of Calcutta, the Beggar King knows about it sooner or later. He has no interest in the politics of the Kuei-jin, except insofar as they affect his subjects.

Influence: Given the vast numbers of Indians living in the slums of Calcutta, and the influence he wields among them, the Beggar King is easily able to generate a riot or demonstration should he feel the need. He could easily spark an uprising and wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice many lives for his cause, but he feels the time is not yet right.

Nature: Caregiver

P'o Nature: The Demon

Demeanor: Architect

Balance: Yang

Direction: East

Dharma: Flame of the Rising Phoenix 3

Second Breath: 1693

Apparent Age: Varies (presently, late 50s)

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Empathy 2, Intimidation 5, Leadership 5, Streetwise 5, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Stealth 5, Survival 5

Knowledges: Medicine 4, Occult 5, Rituals 5

Disciplines: Black Wind 3, Flesh Shintai 4, Obligation 3, Yang Prana 5

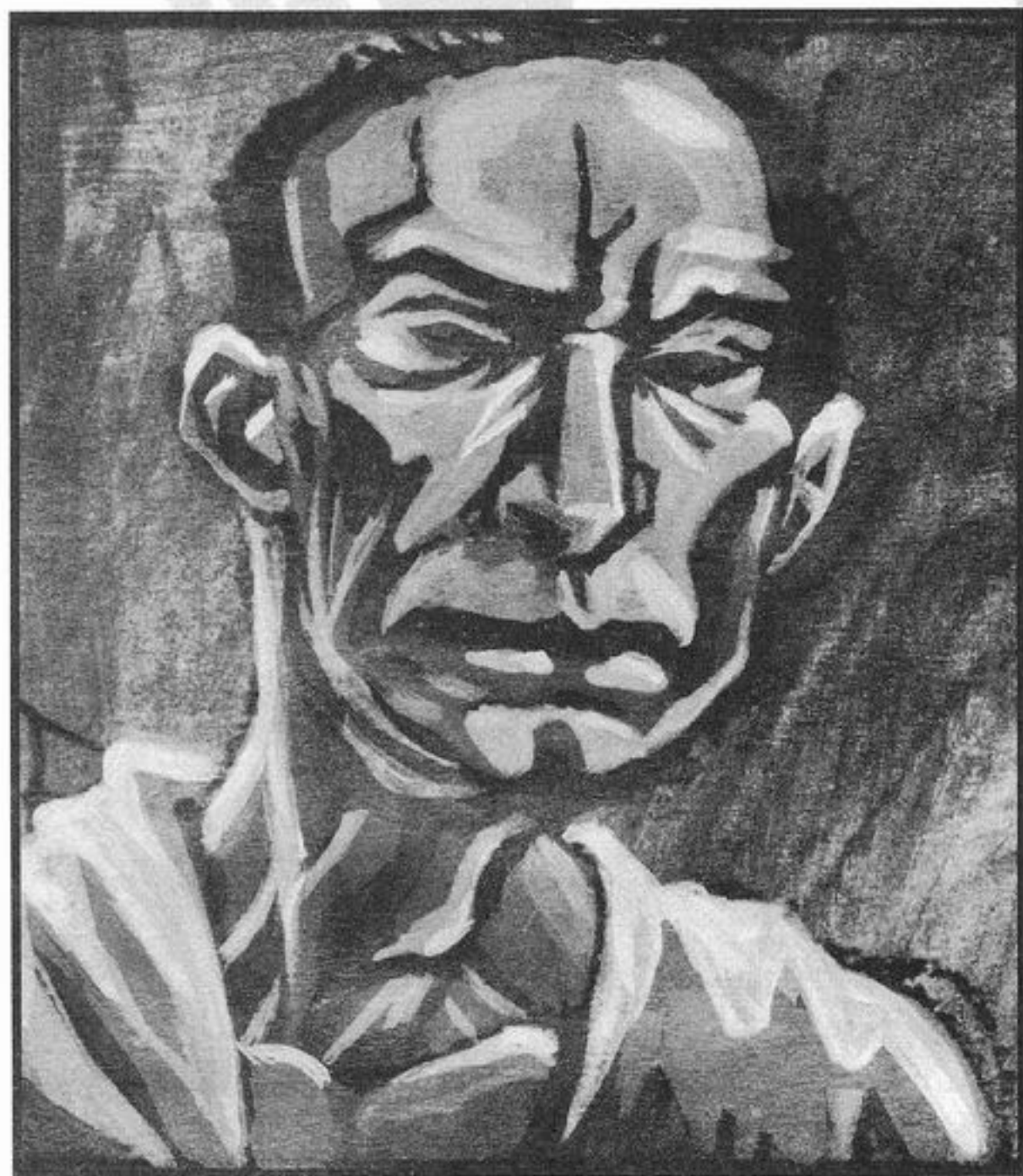
Backgrounds: Allies 5, Fame 2, Herd 5

Virtues: Yin 4, Yang 6, Hun 5, P'o 5

Willpower: 8

INDIRA

Background: Indira is perhaps the most fearsome demon hunter in India. Trained by her grandmother, herself once a formidable hunter, Indira has been hunting rogue Kuei-jin and Kin-jin throughout India for the last six years. She supports herself with freelance





photography and theft from her victims (who are often quite wealthy).

She was in Calcutta, on the trail of a Ravnos Kin-jin she suspected of murdering an entire village of farmers, when the Week of Nightmares struck. Suddenly, maddened Kin-jin were on the rampage and it was all she could do to put them down as quickly as possible; there was simply no time to worry about protecting the innocent.

Horried by what she had seen, Indira decided to stay in Calcutta for a while, disguised as a beggar, to see if she could discover anything about the madness that struck. She has heard stories about a being called the Beggar King, stories that indicate an elder Kuei-jin who may know what happened during the Week of Nightmares. Once she is done in Calcutta (and she's not too sure when that might be; if her search remains fruitless for too much longer, she'll move on), she intends to head to Mumbai; she's heard rumors about decadent Kuei-jin using the movie studios as a source of nourishment and influence.

Image: Underneath the layer of dirt and grime, Indira is an attractive woman in her late twenties. Only her battle-scarred and hardened body betrays her calling. When not in disguise, she prefers traditional clothes in bright colors; when on a hunt, she favors dark-colored military-style dress.

Roleplaying Hints: Try to maintain a sense of humor about what you do. You have nothing against the *shen* in general, only those who overstep their bounds. These, you regard as little more than rabid animals to be put down. You're not certain that you enjoy your calling, but you don't think you're fit for an office job.

Haven: Whatever city she travels to, Indira lives in a rented apartment in a working-class area.

Secrets: Indira knows a great deal about the comings and goings of Kuei-jin within India, but little else.

Influence: Minimal. She is an outsider (and a threat) to the Kuei-jin, whose most likely reaction to her presence is to fight or flee. She has no influence in the mortal world.

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Survivor

Age: 23

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Dodge 5, Intimidation 2, Streetwise 3

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 3, Martial Arts 4, Melee 5, Security 2, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Linguistics 1, Medicine 2, Occult 4

Special Abilities: Qiao of the Feng 3, Qiao of the I Shen 2, Qiao of the Meng 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Favors 1, Mentor 2, Resources 2,

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 4, Courage 5

Humanity: 6

Willpower: 9

RAJIV POOVIAH, THE DEMON OF A THOUSAND NIGHTMARES

Background: Rajiv Pooviah was a pimp, though no one called him that in polite society. As an attendant for a high-caste government official in the Raj, his duties included finding suitable young ladies to serve as maids, cleaners and secretaries for his employer, his employer's guests, visiting dignitaries and so on.

What did it matter if their tastes were a little eccentric? Such sophisticated individuals were beyond base pleasures like sex. They generally preferred the thrill of the hunt. Few things proved more invigorating than pursuing a young maid across one's estate. The visitors from England went so far as to venture that it was more bracing than fox hunting. One fateful night, however, Rajiv was caught sampling the wares. There was, of course, only one suitable punishment. That very evening, Rajiv discovered that the hunt was not so much invigorating as terrifying, not bracing but fatal.

Even as death sent Rajiv's soul screaming to Lanka, the Demon City of the *Rakshas*, Rajiv was gathering his strength for revenge. After being hunted through the ruins of this once-potent hell for a decade or so, he had had enough. Recognizing the illusory nature of all reality, he re-entered the Middle



Kingdom. With a new invention, the camera, he ruined the lives and reputations of those who had so casually discarded him.

Fascinated by pictures and (in time) movies, Rajiv came to Mumbai just as it was becoming one of the great film-making cities of the world. As well as his interests in legitimate film companies, Rajiv controls a number of production houses that specialize in films appealing to more refined sensibilities. He is deeply offended by phrases such as "snuff film" and "kiddie porn." His films are art, each and every one.

Image: Rajiv is a darkly handsome Indian apparently in his early to mid-fifties. He dresses in the most expensive designer labels and lives a life of luxury and excess. The thing most people remember about Rajiv is his eyes. Bottomless pits of contempt for humanity, their stare has been known to terrify the most ruthless businessmen and the most hardened killers.

Roleplaying Hints: You are utter scum. Monstrously corrupt, you hide your evil behind the face of a handsome, successful, eccentric film-maker, known only to a very few of the most well-placed insiders in Mumbai, and to your special clients. You're very well connected, with Scarlet Screens in prostitution, drugs, slavery and the trade in human body parts.

Haven: Rajiv has a mansion on the outskirts of Mumbai, and a holiday house in Calcutta. Both have heavily fortified vaults.

Secrets: It's surprising just who comes to Mumbai for a special screening. Rajiv has entertained numerous influential guests, mortal and otherwise, who trust his discretion completely. Were he to reveal the secret requirements of his clients, he would not live long, but their reputations and possibly their lives would likewise be forfeit.

Influence: Rajiv is not terribly popular among his fellow Kuei-jin, who find him less than enlightened. Nevertheless, his hospitality, discretion and "open-mindedness" have made him many friends. He also has considerable pull in the film industry, local government and criminal syndicates in Mumbai.

Nature: Deviant

P'o Nature: The Slave

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Balance: Yang

Direction: South

Dharma: Dance of the Thrashing Dragon 4

Second Breath: 1896

Apparent Age: mid-50s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 3, Empathy 4, Expression 4, Intimidation 4, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Etiquette 4, Performance 2, Security 4, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Finance 2, Occult 4, Rituals 3

Disciplines: Black Wind 3, Demon Shintai 3, Flesh Shintai 2, Yang Prana 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Horoscope 2, Resources 4

Virtues: Yin 3, Yang 6, Hun 4, P'o 5

Willpower: 7

CALIFORNIA AND THE GREAT LEAP OUTWARDS

The Green Courts of Korea have not remained inactive while the Quincunx occupied itself with the Great Leap Outwards. As always, however, the Green Courts have their own agenda, and it has little in common with that of their Chinese neighbors. The Green Ancestors were concerned that the Parallel Path would lose some of its utility if America became safe territory.

Following the establishment of the New Promise Mandarinate, the Green Courts' fears have been realized. A flow of Kuei-jin to California has begun, which some see as a more desirable place to disappear than Korea. The Green Courts have countered by contrasting the safety of the Parallel Path, based on its long history, with the dangers of America, based on that nation's proximity to so many relatively unknown factions and powers. They have also begun sending discreet teams of Kuei-jin to America, with instructions to destroy the tenuous peace agreements and return the Mandarinate to a state of war.

See *Shadow War*, pp. 83-95, and *Nights of Prophecy*, pp. 52-60, for more information on the Great Leap Outwards.

THE GREEN TIGERS

The Green Tigers have been together as a *wu* for over fifty years. Led by Roh Ju-yung, they were the first Korean *wu* to move to America. Each member made his or her own way to Los Angeles and set up his own havens, Scarlet Screens and contacts with both Kuei-jin and Kin-jin before meeting formally for the first time in this strange land. They have established a smuggling pipeline to Korea, become the hidden patrons of several local merchant organizations and martial arts schools, and engaged in covert operations to disrupt the New Promise Mandarinate.

Their position, nevertheless, is precarious. They are trying to play the Asians against the Americans, and skilled manipulators are operating on all sides. The Green Tigers enjoyed their greatest success in preventing a *wu* from Beijing's Blood Court— The Five-Fold Devil Club — from establishing Los Angeles International Airport as its domain, which would have virtually guaranteed the Chinese a safe means of bringing reinforcements into the country.

The members of the *wu* are:

- **Roh Ju-yung (Resplendent Crane):** Ju-yung has created a sphere of influence for himself among the artisans and political leaders of the Korean community (see main text).

- **Kim Jisun (Devil-Tiger):** Jisun has taken control of a number of influential police and judges. She concentrates her efforts on using the law to harass members of the Mandarinate and undermine their trust in each other.

- **Ahn Doo-hwan (Song of the Shadow):** A patron of the arts and a formidable sorcerer, Doo-hwan has established himself behind the local Korean Cultural Association. He seeks to strengthen the political influence of the Korean community, as a tool to bring pressure to bear on the Mandarinate.

- **Yi Jung-ah (Thousand Whispers):** Jung-ah has infiltrated the local gambling and prostitution rackets, using her considerable powers of persuasion and seduction. She is building up an independent power base and disputing the locals' control.

- **Cho Chae-kyu (Thrashing Dragon):** A master of Taekwondo, Chae-kyu has set up Scarlet Screens in several local martial arts schools and street gangs. He uses their muscle to disrupt the Kin-jin's street-level operations, hoping that the Kin-jin will mistake his pawns for tools of the Chinese.

ROH JU-YUNG, THE JADE BLACKSMITH

Background: In his mortal days, Roh Ju-yung was the son of a blacksmith. He learned the family trade and eventually inherited the forge. When the Manchus invaded in 1637, they ordered him to make blades for them. He refused, and as punishment the Chinese killed his family before his eyes. He returned to the



forge and began making the lowest-quality blades he could manage. Eventually, the Chinese realized what he was doing and crucified him.

Ju-yung had always been a quiet, peaceful man. But when he awoke in Hell, his P'o screamed loud and long, and has been screaming ever since. It did not take him long to escape, and ever since drawing the Second Breath he has fought to keep Korea in Korean hands. When the Green Courts began their policy of neutrality and set up the Parallel Path, Ju-yung enthusiastically supported it. He acted as a guide and a guard and was happy to be doing what he could to ensure his homeland's security and independence.

With the Great Leap Outward, Ju-yung saw a new danger. If the Quincunx could establish a solid stronghold in America, it would quickly grow even more powerful. He requested leave of the Green Courts to lead his *wu* on an expedition to the Americas, to observe the situation and protect the ancestors' interests. His petition was granted, and he led the Green Tigers *wu* to the foreign land. They quickly established themselves among the Korean population of Los Angeles, and have concentrated on establishing smuggling routes between America and Korea. They tried to maintain an appearance of neutrality in the struggles between the Kin-jin and the Kuei-jin invaders while disrupting the plans of both sides as much as possible. Now that the two warring sides have established a rough peace, Ju-yung is doing all he can to destroy it.

Image: Ju-yung is a heavily-built Korean who dresses simply in modern, working-class clothes. He keeps his emotions and opinions largely to himself, but will brook no argument or interference with his plans.

Roleplaying Hints: You hate the Chinese and the Japanese. You are supremely indifferent to the Americans who surround you, but you acknowledge that they make useful dupes. Your purpose in America is to disrupt the plans of the Quincunx, a task you handle with relish.

Haven: Ju-yung has a subterranean chamber in the forge of a traditional Korean blacksmith who turns out expensive, hand-forged swords and other artifacts for collectors.

Secrets: Ju-yung is well-informed on the plans of the Kuei-jin in America, but knows little about the activities of the Kin-jin. His knowledge of events in Korea is considerable but several years out of date.

Influence: Ju-yung is trying to position the Green Tigers as a group of outcasts fleeing prosecution in the "old world" of Asia; among Anarchs opposed to the Quincunx, their reputation (and influence) is growing.

Nature: Martyr

P'o Nature: The Bandit

Demeanor: Visionary

Balance: Balanced

Direction: Center

Dharma: Way of the Resplendent Crane 6

Second Breath: 1649

Apparent Age: mid-40s

Physical: Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 6

Talents: Brawl 5, Dodge 4, Intimidation 5, Leadership 5

Skills: Craft (blacksmith) 5, Etiquette 4, Melee 5, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Linguistics 3, Occult 3

Disciplines: Demon Shintai 4, Internalize 5, Iron Mountain 2, Jade Shintai 3, Yin Prana 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Horoscope 3, Resources 3

Virtues: Yin 5, Yang 5, Hun 6, P'o 7

Willpower: 9

CHO CHAE-KYU

Background: All his life, Chae-kyu had to fight to get by. Smaller than most of the other children in the village, he took lessons with a local master at his parents' urging. Soon enough, he was able to defend himself more than adequately, and as he entered his teens, all he wanted to do was fight. He became a regular on Seoul's underground fight circuit and recorded a creditable but not exceptional career. But fighting is a young man's game, and it makes men old very quickly. A recurring knee injury ended Chae-kyu's fighting days, leaving him with nothing.

Crime seemed the obvious option, so he started work as an enforcer. He was pretty good, but one day

he picked a fight with the wrong man and ended up tied on a set of railway tracks. Chae-kyu refused to take his messy death lying down. As soon as he returned from the Hell of Being Cut to Pieces, he demonstrated to his killers a fair approximation of the tortures he had suffered there.

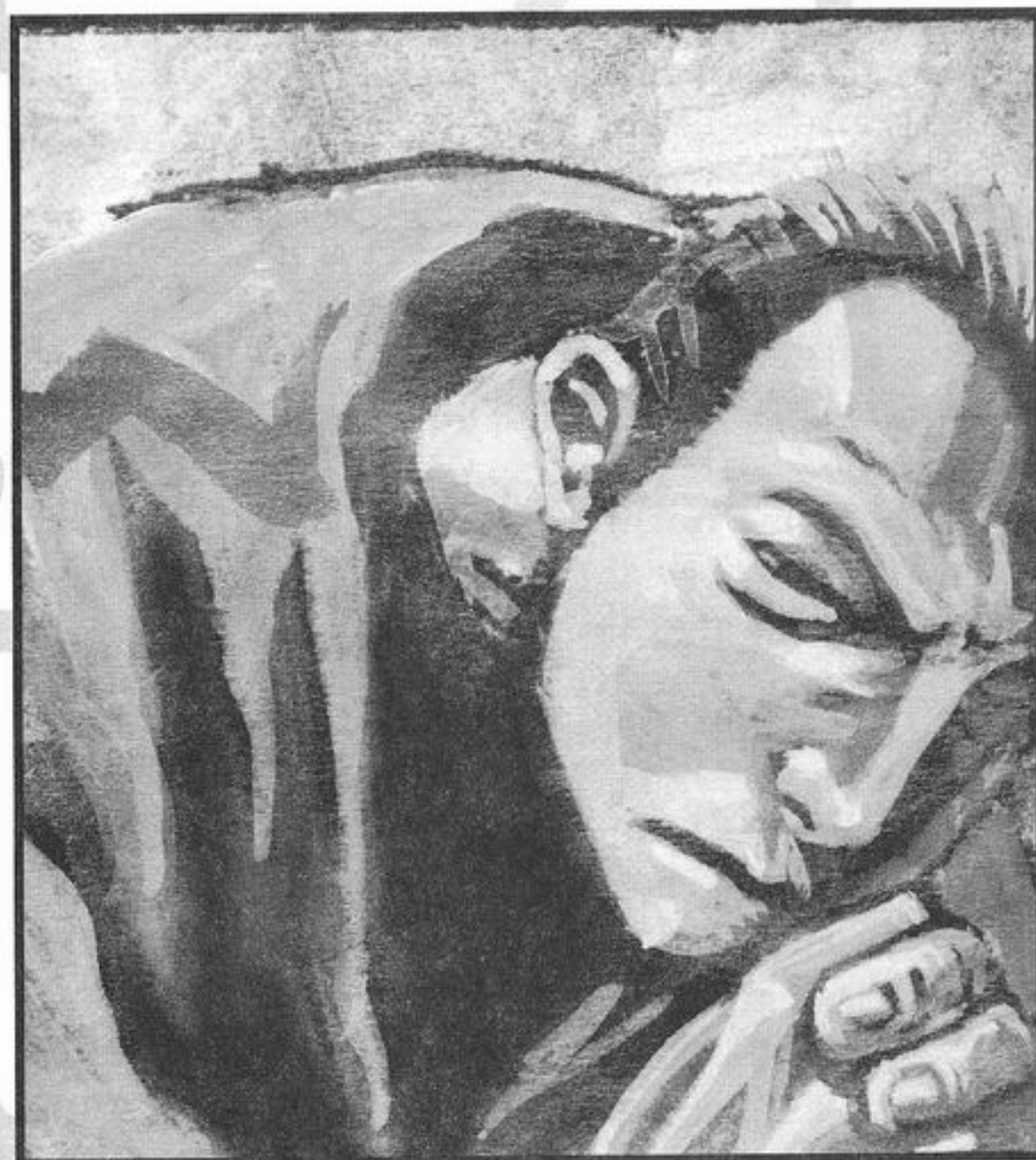
Having avenged his demise, Chae-kyu was content to fight and brawl, until he came to the notice of an elder Kuei-jin by the name of Roh Ju-yung. Ju-yung helped instill a sense of nationalism in Chae-kyu, and also taught him how to use his martial arts as a way of focusing his soul. Chae-kyu took up tae kwon do and has become a deadly exponent of it.

Recently, the Green Tigers moved to Los Angeles to see if they could do anything to disrupt the Quincunx's plans. Chae-kyu has no interest in the politics of the situation, only in doing everything possible to hurt the Chinese. He has become influential in the Korean martial arts community of greater Los Angeles, and recently formed a syndicate to bring select students into the illegal fighting circuit.

Image: Chae-kyu looks like a brawler, with a chunky frame, spiky hair and permanent scowl. He dresses in the clothes of a street tough (jeans, combat boots, leather jacket), but his demeanor changes when he is practicing tae kwon do or actually in combat; only then does he seem to be at peace.

Roleplaying Hints: Your whole life, you've been fighting opponents bigger than you, and you love it. You like to know the odds before you get into a confrontation, so if you choose to start something, you never back down.

Haven: Chae-kyu has made his haven in the basement of a house owned by Richard Kim, a loyal tae kwon do instructor who knows his new master's plans.



Secrets: With a growing cadre of dedicated youth at his command, Chae-kyu is well informed about the activities of local gangs and criminals; as the organizer of an illegal fighting syndicate, he is also well connected to the organized crime groups who control the circuit.

Influence: Chae-kyu is gaining considerable influence among the “moms and pops” of LA’s Korean community. He teaches their children to respect (and defend) themselves and is a model of propriety, even if his hours are a little eccentric. He has yet to gain significant influence on the fight circuit.

Nature: Monster

P’o Nature: The Slave

Demeanor: Trickster

Balance: Yang

Direction: South

Dharma: Dance of the Thrashing Dragon 5

Second Breath: 1965

Apparent Age: mid-20s

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Dodge 5, Empathy 2, Intimidation 4

Skills: Etiquette 2, Martial Arts 5, Melee 5, Stealth 3, Torture 1

Knowledges: Linguistics 3, Occult 2, Politics 3

Disciplines: Equilibrium 1, Black Wind 2, Demon Shintai 1, Bone Shintai 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Herd 2, Jade Talisman 3

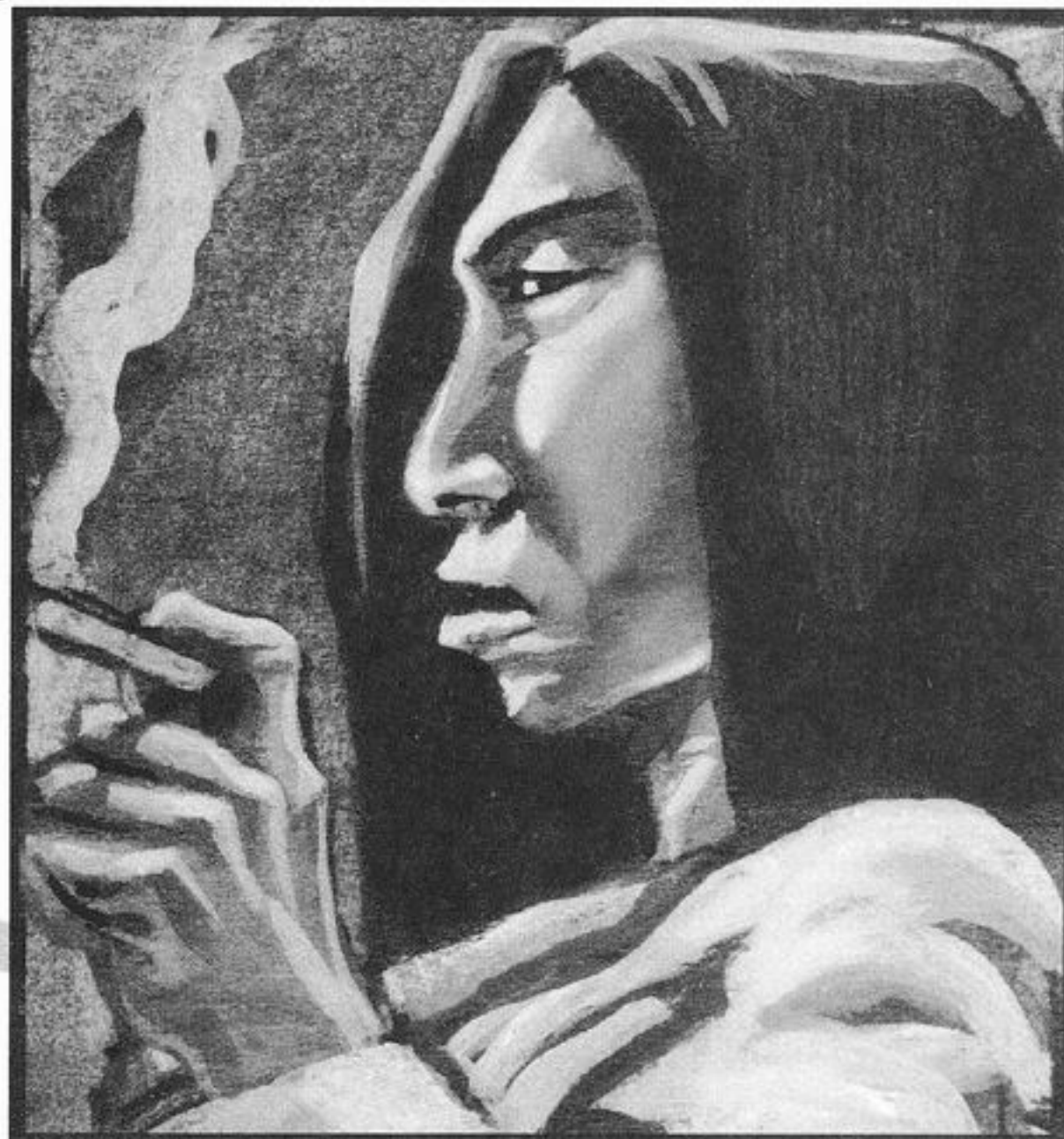
Virtues: Yin 2, Yang 5, Hun 5, P’o 4

Willpower: 8

LEE YOUNG-IL (MAGGIE LEE)

Background: Maggie Lee grew up as a typical American teenager. Her parents run a successful Korean restaurant, and she used to hate being Korean. All she wanted was to have blonde hair, blue eyes, fair skin. Instead, she had black hair, brown eyes and sallow skin. She didn’t care about thousands of years of cultural history or the pride she could have taken in her ancestors’ achievements. She could see that America was better. Why should a cruel accident of birth deny her what she wanted more than anything else in the world?

Maggie kept running away from home and getting into fights at school. Her teachers said she was a problem student and suggested special education. She somehow made it through school in spite of her difficulties, but after graduation she started hanging around with the local toughs and ended up being arrested on minor drug possession charges. Her family was horrified. Fortunately, a wise ancestor named Kim Jisun arrived from Seoul, and she took their wayward



daughter in hand. The turn-around in Maggie’s behavior has been remarkable. Jisun gave Maggie (or Young-il, as she prefers to call herself now) a job (with unspecified duties, but her grateful parents weren’t about to ask questions) and a place to live. Maggie visits her parents every week and seems to have become the model daughter.

In reality, Jisun is a member of the Green Tigers *wu*, and Young-il is one of her recruits. Her strong will had to be broken (by a comparatively trivial display of power), but she has been a smart, loyal servant ever since. She now heads a gang of tough, street-smart girls and young women who engage in small-scale racketeering, drug dealing and protection scams. Jisun is thinking of trading Young-il to Cho Chae-kyu for another, comparable servant; the girl is excellent breeding stock, and Chae-kyu has been musing about the value of a dhampyr servant for some time now.

Image: Young-il is a pretty Korean girl in the bloom of early womanhood. Her eyes, however, have a hint of madness in them. She dresses in the most expensive street fashions and loves playing her good girl/bad girl routine.

Roleplaying Hints: This is great! You’re getting paid to hang out, steal stuff, occasionally seduce a feeb or two and tell lies to your parents. Jisun is scary, and you’re not sure you believe the supernatural shit she told you, but why question a good thing? Anyway, seeing her use those icky powers once was more than enough... it’s probably best not to think about it too much.

Haven: Young-il lives in a well-appointed apartment near her parents’ house. (They’d spit if they saw all the cool stuff she’s got now.)

Secrets: Young-il keeps her ear to the ground, and tells Jisun quite a bit about local gang politics and criminal activities.

Influence: Young-il has become an influential member of the Korean gang community, though much of that respect comes from the veil of threat that surrounds her patron.

Nature: Child

Demeanor: Rebel

Age: 19

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Athletics 1, Expression 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 2, Performance 3

Knowledges: Computer 1, Occult 1

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Mentor 3, Resources 3

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 2, Courage 3

Humanity: 5

Willpower: 5

HELL ON EARTH

The Yomi World may be far removed from nightly life on the streets, but it is making progress. The everyday suffering of the poor and the hopeless calls Hell to Earth, slowly creating corrupted blights called broken mirrors. These areas are borderlands between the material and the infernal, places where the battle against the Sixth Age has already been lost.

THE WICKED CITY

Mikaboshi, Yama King of the Wicked City, is pleased with his progress and has every reason to be. Every frustrated corporate worker, every transaction on the stock exchange, every hostile takeover, urban development and new factory adds to his domain. As the Middle Kingdom is urbanized and corporatized, so too does the Wicked City grow. It is growing so fast and so strong, in fact, that in certain places and at certain times, parts of the Wicked City manifest on Earth.

It happens slowly. An area, whether a corporate precinct, a slum on the outskirts of a major industrial area or an entire major industrial region, becomes more and more like the Wicked City. The regulations squeeze tighter. The bosses are a little crueler, the workers a little more desperate. As the atmosphere of despair and frustration becomes stronger, the barrier between hell on Earth and genuine Hell weakens. And if the flow of Chi is wrong, the misery unbearable, the suffering unimaginable, the Wicked City itself comes to town.

It might only be a single office, cubicle or tenement building, but the place affected becomes part of

Mikaboshi's realm. In effect, it exists in both the Middle Kingdom and the Wicked City. Spirits and torment flow from one side to another. Devils come to town and humans end up stuck in Hell itself.

Tales of people vanishing into the bowels of the city, workers committing suicide at their desks, going berserk and sending viruses or pornography over computer networks, managers having breakdowns in board meetings, corporate consultants advising companies to make massive staff cuts, finance departments engaging in ruthless takeovers — in a truly wicked feedback loop, all these and more have resulted from mergers between the Middle Kingdom and the Wicked City, and helped create the link in the first place.

The courts of the Hungry Dead only took notice of this phenomenon in the late 1990s, and to say it causes them grave concern is a major understatement. Some Kuei-jin have taken it as a sign that the Sixth Age is already upon the Middle Kingdom, others as further proof that modern ways (particularly technology, bureaucracy and lack of respect for traditions) are inherently corrupt. "Outbreaks" of this overlap between the Middle Kingdom and the Wicked City have been recorded in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Jakarta and Mumbai, but many fear these are just the beginning of a major intrusion of the Yomi World into the Middle Kingdom.

The overlap phenomenon has also fuelled increased efforts against the Bamboo Princes, who are seen as dupes of Mikaboshi. The more reasonable Kuei-jin grudgingly admit that they are unwitting dupes, but this simply adds ignorance to their litany of crimes and further raises sentiment against them. Calls have already come for the declaration of all Bamboo Princes as *akuma*. So far, moderate heads have prevailed, but if these manifestations continue, the tide of opinion is likely to take a more extreme turn.

See the **Appendix**, p. 104, for rules and further information on this phenomenon. See **Kindred of the East**, pp. 30 and 185, and **The Thousand Hells**, pp. 36-37 and 51-53, for more information on Mikaboshi and the Wicked City.

CORPORATE CONSULTING

CORPORATE CONSULTING

Corporate Consulting (CC) is a major corporate training company headquartered in Shinjuku, Tokyo. It specializes in advising companies on how to merge, acquire, divest, restructure, downsize and streamline their operations. Companies typically engage consultants from CC when they are looking to cut costs

and improve their share price. A team of two to five analysts spends anywhere from a week to several months at the client company with *carte blanche* to talk to staff, view sensitive records and plans and take part in regular company meetings.

Typically, the CC reps hold an on-site meeting with senior management to present their preliminary analysis of the company, then return to their own offices where they draw up a plan of action. When the plan is ready, it is double-checked and presented to the client. Any amendments are made following a final audit, and then the real work begins. CC brings in consultants and expert accountants, lawyers, trainers, project managers, motivational speakers, labor relations experts and other staff as needed to effect their changes. Most companies report improved performance and a healthy benefit to the bottom line.

Most companies don't report that they've been taken to the cleaners by one of Mikaboshi's best operators. CC is a Scarlet Screen for Ryuichi Hachimoto, an *akuma* who gave his soul to the lord of the Wicked City over a century ago. Bored with his success in corrupting individuals, Ryuichi saw a chance to act on a much larger scale in the rise of corporate culture in Japan after World War II. He founded Corporate Consulting as a manpower recruiting firm and still has subsidiaries specializing in these areas.

CC's techniques are very effective. Their real goal, of course, is to create low morale among workers (which is subtly blamed on poor management), distrust among management (which is subtly blamed on senior management) and outright fear among senior management (which is blamed on greedy shareholders or boards of directors). Of course, the mass firings that often follow CC's involvement with a company are just another happy side effect. Companies are generally encouraged to outsource any physical production to underdeveloped countries with cheap labor, boosting unemployment in the home country and contributing to the misery of oppressed sweatshop workers in the Third World.

CC is legally owned by the Toda family, who are proud to have three generations involved in the business. A thriving operation, CC has absorbed a number of competing firms and is growing at a steady pace. Ryuichi's next concern is to expand the company's holdings in construction and education in Japan. He's keen to start really building the nation's future, and to help educate its youth.

RYUICHI HACHIMOTO

Background: The businessman who calls himself Ryuichi Hachimoto was born almost two centuries ago in Shimonoseki. The son of a wealthy merchant, Ryuichi took the family business firmly in hand and



after running it for a few years, became extremely wealthy. Feeling that he had done all he could in the trading game, he turned to politics. Not being samurai, he could not actually govern, but he realized that he didn't need to have his hands directly on the levers of power to exert influence. He became a master at loaning funds to samurai, then calling in favors in exchange for forgiving debts. Soon, he was the most influential man in the city, but he made one small oversight: he forgot that samurai were proud and hot-tempered. One evening, as he made his way home from an evening with a geisha, he was set upon by the retainers of a local samurai offended by his success. The thugs beat him to death.

Awakening in the Hell of No Money, Ryuichi immediately set about turning the situation to his advantage. He realized that he would not be able to survive the punishments of the hell with his mind intact for more than a few decades, so he began planning his escape. Gathering a group of desperates around him, he used them as cannon fodder and distractions as he traded, wheeled and dealt towards his goal. Eventually, he and the last surviving soul made it to the threshold of the Middle Kingdom. Shoving his companion back down the road to Hell, Ryuichi dove through the gates and heard them slam shut behind him. He never looked back.

Ryuichi quickly threw in his lot with the modernist Genji *uji*, as the Bishamon were clearly far too hidebound and obsessed with outmoded ideas about honor and hierarchy. He became interested in industry and his Scarlet Screens made great sums of money, but he was not satisfied. The only real measure of success was domination over others, and he felt constrained by the rules of war imposed by the courts.

His contempt grew, until eventually he realized that only Mikaboshi understood the direction of the Great Wheel's turning. Offering himself to the Lord of the Wicked City was just another move intended to ensure his own eventual triumph.

His latest venture, CC, has given him the opportunity to spread the influence of the Wicked City across Japan, and he is considering opening branches in the USA and Singapore. Ultimately, Ryuichi wishes to become a Yama King himself. Mikaboshi is aware of this and has decided to hold Ryuichi where he can keep a close eye on him.

Image: Ryuichi is a well-dressed, carefully groomed businessman. He favors handmade, understated suits of the highest quality fabric and most flattering cut for his generous frame. His manners are impeccable and his knowledge of corporate etiquette extensive. Somehow, he always seems to know just what to say to put people at their ease.

Roleplaying Hints: There's no other way to put it — you're a snake. You happily lie, cheat, steal, murder, corrupt and manipulate to get what you want, with a firm handshake and a winning smile. Most of your victims can't even see you coming, but even when they do, they're usually so hypnotized by your charm and apparently deep-seated sense of ethics that they can only watch helplessly as you bend them to your purposes.

Haven: Ryuichi lives in an expensive penthouse apartment in Tokyo. He also has emergency bolt-holes in Shinjuku, the Ginza and the Narita Airport complex.

Secrets: Ryuichi knows much about his fellow Genji, but only feigns interest in his *uji*'s affairs. In recent decades he has focused his mind on the intricacies of large corporations and their financial dealings. In this area, his knowledge is unsurpassed. He is aware of the existence of a high-tech police unit (Strike Force Zero) but has so far been unsuccessful in his efforts to gain any concrete information about it.

Influence: Ryuichi's influence over corporate Japan is considerable, as most company directors and managers eagerly read the magazine columns and academic papers produced by CC. He is a darling of the more ruthless Genji but is despised by those whose idea of progress involves changes to Japan's current direction.

Nature: Director

P'o Nature: The Monkey

Demeanor: Autocrat

Balance: Balanced

Direction: East

Dharma: *akuma* of Mikaboshi (believed to be a Shadow Song jina)

Second Breath: 1837

Apparent Age: early 50s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Intimidation 5, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Etiquette 5, Firearms 3, Performance 3

Knowledges: Academics 3, Bureaucracy 3, Computer 1, Investigation 3, Law 1, Occult 3, Politics 4, Rituals 3

Disciplines: Demon Shintai 3, Ghost-Flame Shintai 2, Hellweaving 3, Internalize 2, Yang Prana 3, Yin Prana 3

Investments: The Savage Kiss

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Herd 3, Influence 2, Resources 5

Virtues: Yin 5, Yang 5, Hun 4, P'o 5

Willpower: 9

THE HELL OF BURROWING MAGGOTS

The Yama Kings are aware of the Wicked City's success in breaking through into the Middle Kingdom. All are jealous, but not many are in a position to emulate Mikaboshi's achievement. After all, it's difficult to imagine any way in which the Hell of Boiling Oil or the Hell of Being Skinned Alive could manifest on Earth. The Hell of Burrowing Maggots, however, is not so alien to the Middle Kingdom. Rangda, the Mistress of Pestilence, sees the trash heaps of major Asian cities and the poor who dig through them as a ripe recruiting ground. She also works in deep jungles and toxic spill zones. Everywhere disease grows, so does Rangda's power.

Her servants have not been idle. The slums of Mumbai and Calcutta, the villages of Laos and Cambodia and the depths of the jungles of Southeast Asia have suffered outbreaks of disease the likes of which have not been seen for some time. The bubonic plague is rumored to have returned to India and the maggots that infest the garbage dumps seem to be getting bigger all the time.

Mikaboshi's moves into the urban landscape are much more organized than Rangda's, but hers are more widespread. Almost every Asian city has an inhabited dump where parts of the Hell of Burrowing Maggots seep through.

See **Appendix**, page 104, for more on this process. See also **Kindred of the East**, p. 30, and **The Thousand Hells**, pp. 38-40 and 55-56, for more on Rangda and the Hell of Burrowing Maggots.

JUHI BACHAN

Background: It's hard to make a living as a beggar on the streets of Mumbai. So hard that some get tired of begging, and sell the only thing they own — their bodies. Juhi is one of millions of young

women working as prostitutes, and like most of them, she takes little care of her health.

She was surprised one day when her pimp brought her to a fancy hotel room and told her to do whatever her client wanted. The client didn't introduce himself, simply told her to strip and lie down on the floor. Juhi doesn't really remember what happened next, and she wouldn't believe the truth if someone told her. After all, who would believe that a human being could turn into a giant maggot and still need the services of a prostitute? Nobody. But the nightmares about the giant, pulsating slug with soft skin, a nauseating stench and burning semen keep coming. Every night, Juhi sees herself giving birth to a giant worm, shitting maggots and picking lice from her skin. Every morning she scrubs herself almost raw. Her pimp became so worried about her obsessive cleanliness that he took her to a doctor, but her health was fine — better than it had ever been, in fact.

Neither the pimp, Juhi nor her doctor know that Rangda has made her the carrier of deadly pestilence. Every customer Juhi has had since being visited by Rangda's servitor has died of some awful, highly contagious disease — but working girls see so many clients, and so many of them are just passing through, that no one could possibly make the connection. Juhi is only contagious to those she has intercourse with, and otherwise displays no signs of infection.

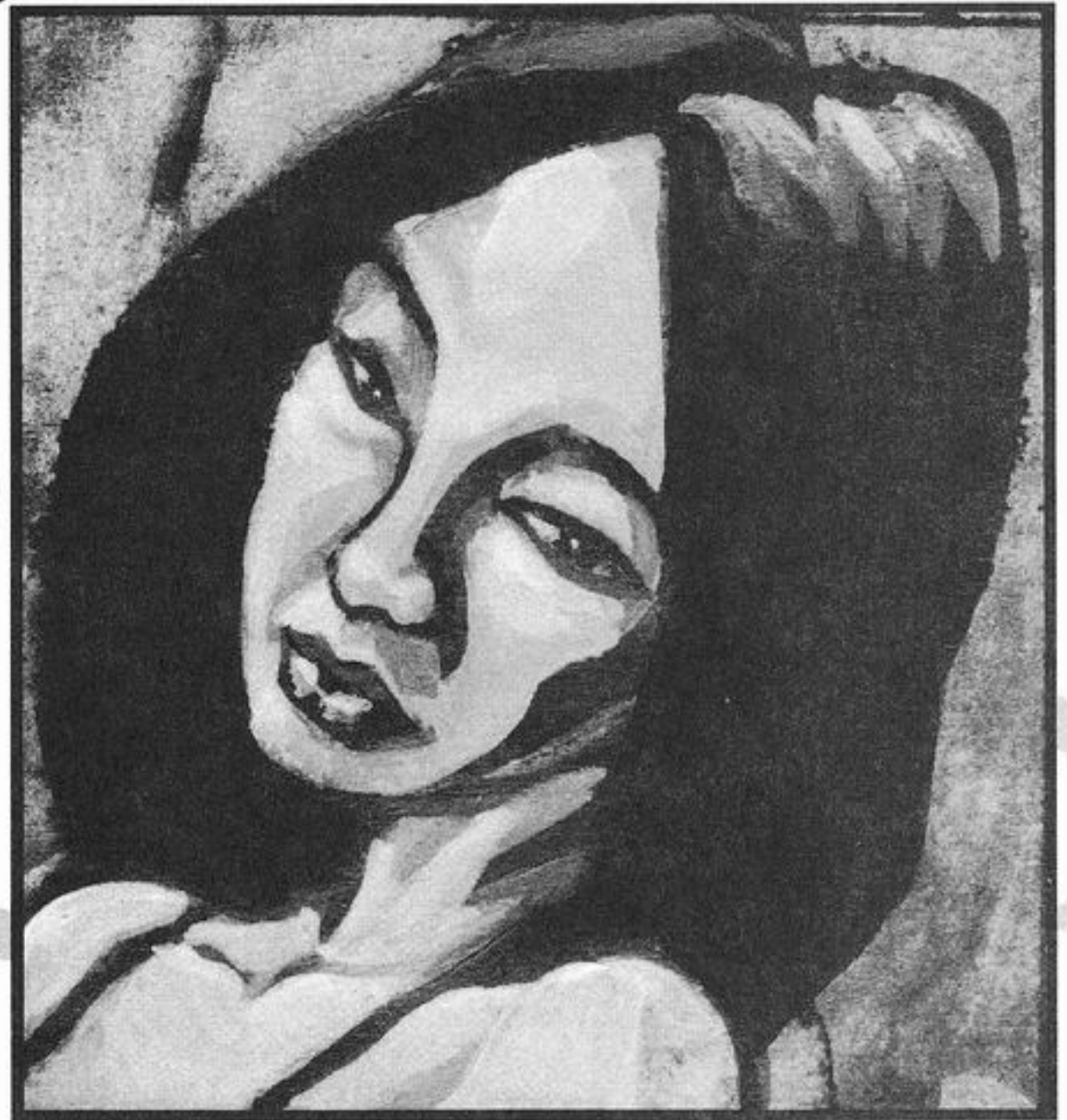
Image: Juhi is a pretty young woman of 16 who appears to be in perfect health, but she's seen enough horror and suffering to last her a lifetime. She dresses in cheap traditional garb that accentuates her figure and has a nervous, flighty manner.

Roleplaying Hints: The nightmares keep coming. Whenever you see grubs or bugs, you get very upset and won't rest until they're killed, their bodies disposed of and any mess or residue cleaned up. Those terrible nightmares couldn't be true. They just couldn't. You're a nice girl, you're just down on your luck. Such monsters wouldn't want someone as ordinary as you... would they?

Haven: Juhi shares a drab apartment with three other working girls. She keeps it spotlessly clean.

Secrets: Juhi knows lots of gossip and is privy to some sensitive information let slip by her wealthier and more influential clients, but has no inkling of the supernatural (beyond her own half-remembered experience).

Influence: It's conceivable that Juhi could blackmail some of her clients, but she knows that would end her career as a prostitute, and most likely her life.



Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Child

Age: 16

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Acting 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Etiquette 1, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Medicine 1

Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Resources 1

Willpower: 6

Powers: A sexual partner of Juhi's, regardless of the form of sex act, runs the risk of contracting a deadly disease. The partner must roll Stamina against a difficulty of 7; five successes are required to avoid becoming infected. Four successes leaves the partner with a life-threatening disease like malaria or dysentery. Any fewer successes leads to a virulent fatal affliction like bubonic plague, cholera or typhoid. Subsequent sex acts require a similar roll, with a cumulative penalty of +1 to the difficulty. Note that different diseases have different incubation times, so the effects may not be immediately apparent. The Hungry Dead are generally immune to this effect, although permanently Yang-unbalanced Kuei-jin should still roll to see if they become carriers.



S.H.

CHAPTER THREE: STORYTELLING

*An athlete may run ten thousand miles to prepare
for one hundred yards.*

— Ray Bradbury, *Zen in the Art of Writing*

THE STORY SO FAR: INTRODUCTION

All the information presented so far is intended to aid you, the Storyteller, in running an urban crime **Kindred of the East** game. But more important than all the information on real-world criminals or fictional vampiric activities is the effort you put into making your game and your stories unique. That's what this chapter is for: to help you put together an unforgettable chronicle, mini-series or one-off game set on the mean streets of the Middle Kingdom.

BLOODSUCKERS

Before getting started on the specifics, it's worth thinking about the setting in broad terms. Vampires and criminals have much in common. Both are outsiders, individuals who operate beyond the bounds of

society. Both congregate in cities, both prey upon humans. This similarity gives a Storyteller the opportunity to show the Hungry Dead at their most extreme, operating in an environment that brings all their worst traits to the fore. There are no wishy-washy characters or situations in a **Killing Streets** chronicle; everyone and everything should be amplified, bold, larger than life. There is little room for the social niceties of the courts, or debates on the finer points of Dharma. The Kuei-jin who inhabit the streets are smart, ruthless and very, very mean.

Use the setting to show your players this seamy side of the Middle Kingdom. Much of Kuei-jin society is highly formalized and most characters will have had at least a few interactions with the courts. **Killing Streets** offers players a different view, focusing squarely on the dirt under the fingernails, the skeletons in the closet and the bloodstains under the carpets of the "civilized" and "enlightened." The

living and the dead alike calculate how to cheat, steal, bribe and kill their way to the top of their chosen heap. To stand out as a monster in such company is a challenge worthy of the most depraved Kuei-jin; to stand against the tide of moral decay and open corruption is equally ambitious.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS: GETTING STARTED

If you like Hong Kong movies, anime, kung fu films, horror or crime stories, cyberpunk comics or supernatural adventures, you already have pretty much all the knowledge you need to get started. *Killing Streets* is about a particular genre of gaming; you could call it "hard-boiled street-level urban drama" but essentially, it's about stories that kick ass. The genre rarely concerns itself with subtle plots and devious political machinations. It's about hard people doing hard things in a hard world. That's not to say that schemes can't be subtle, or that intrigues are totally out of place. Rather, the emphasis is on the human side of the equation. Things happen offstage so their effects can be seen onstage. If a corrupt politician takes bribes to approve a housing development, don't show the deal being done, show the family homes and local neighborhoods being bulldozed. That's the level of action a *Killing Streets* game should aim for.

Delving into the source material is highly recommended. The **Introduction** (p. 13) contains some suggestions, but don't limit yourself to these. Read history books, novels, magazines, travel guides and newspapers; real-world events and people are just as interesting and relevant as fictional ones. Asia is a region undergoing enormous change, and few things give any game more piquancy than a solid grounding in contemporary (or historical) events.

With this in mind, start writing down your preliminary ideas. Keep a notepad or folder with you; that way, if you see something that strikes a chord, or have a flash of inspiration, you can make a note of it. Even if an idea doesn't seem immediately useful, you'll have it on hand later, when it might suddenly fill a gap or suggest a character or start a story all of its own.

Write down anything you can associate with the setting. Snatches of conversation, descriptions of a character, images, sounds, situations, relationships, plots and intrigues, real-world events and people, neat artifacts; whatever comes into your head when you think about the game.

Look over your notes and see if any elements belong together. Perhaps a couple of characters and a location may suggest a scene. Or some dialogue

might link with an image. A newspaper story might combine with some music and a picture. Don't worry too much about originality or avoiding clichés; a large part of the preparation for any chronicle is this continual process of collecting ideas, grouping them together, looking for contrasts and similarities and connections.

Once you've worked on your raw ideas, review them to see if an overall pattern or story or any major characters seem to be taking shape. There are, broadly speaking, two kinds of stories: character driven and plot driven. If you have lots of interesting ideas for characters and situations, you can use them to build strong, character-driven stories. If you have ideas for scenes and broad currents of change and conflict, you can use them to build plot-driven stories. If you have a mix, work on them all; eventually you'll decide which elements have the most potential and concentrate on them. Developing plots and characters is discussed in more detail below (see p. 88-91).

EXAMPLE: FIRST STEPS

Nick has been running a *Kindred of the East* chronicle for a couple of months and he feels it's time for a change of pace. He's been concentrating on the more formal and mysterious aspects of Kuei-jin society, with lots of court intrigue and some exploration of the spirit world. He'd like to shake his game up a little. Armed with a copy of *Killing Streets*, he starts out by jotting down some thoughts on the game he's thinking of running:

- Humans at their lowest ebb. Kuei-jin preying on them.
- Hong Kong: city of bright lights, dark secrets.
- Local street gang trying to defend turf from criminals.
- Decaying, disused port facility.
- Running fight at Kai Tak airport.
- Stern Shih warning PCs off (potential ally/enemy).
- Mandarin with a taste for Ming ceramics.
- Ambitious lieutenant ready to betray his boss.

Already, some ideas for stories are emerging. Ming ceramics are being smuggled in via the old port terminal. Something goes down at Kai Tak involving the lieutenant. The street gang finds a shadowy protector in the lone Shih, who holds a dark secret. All of these will need fleshing out, and some may be changed (or dropped) entirely, but for now, Nick has enough to get started with.

ONE-OFF STORIES AND EXISTING CHRONICLES

If you want to begin a chronicle from scratch, your choices are effectively unlimited. Starting with a one-off story is often a good way to see if you and your players enjoy the feel of the setting. You can use your first story as an introduction to a longer chronicle, or you might decide to set an ongoing chronicle in a different corner of the East, but to make the events of your one-off story part of your chronicle's history.

One-offs have the advantage that the stakes can be a little higher and character death isn't so much of a problem (just make sure you have a number of suitable entry points for replacement characters). You can also create stories with sharper climaxes; if the players fail to thwart their antagonists, they can suffer the dire consequences without worrying about the long-term implications for their characters.

If you're already running a chronicle, you'll need to decide whether to integrate **Killing Streets** into it or to run it as a separate game. Either way, emphasize the differences between the gritty, dirty and personal nature of the streets and the more genteel and esoteric atmosphere of the courts. A separate **Killing Streets** game, running as a break from your regular chronicle (or even concurrently with it), is another possibility. This set-up gives you the opportunity to tell a story from two angles, or to flesh out another corner of your chronicle's setting and history. An awful lot happens on the streets that the authorities (mortal and supernatural) never see, which is why so many individuals flock to them.

SO WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?: THEME AND MOOD

Characters and plot elements are the concrete building blocks of a story or chronicle, but they don't function in a vacuum. To build a strong tale, you need to aim for some sort of effect, to have an idea of what you want the story to say and what kind of atmosphere you want to project.

THEME

In the broadest sense, theme is what your chronicle is about, and it helps give your stories their emotional weight. A good analogy is the way theme music is used in film and television. Just as a movie or TV show's theme music represents its mood, and just as it might be reprised at critical moments in the story, the theme of your chronicle is your motif. It should be reprised when appropriate.

The following themes are especially appropriate for **Killing Streets** games:

HONOR AND DUTY

Much of the source material for **Killing Streets** focuses on conflicts between honor and duty. If I am duty-bound to perform a dishonorable act, what do I do? This can work quite well for a group of Kuei-jin, as their responsibilities to their *wu*, their court and their Dharmas may all pull them in different directions.

Stories with this theme often involve innocents who are in the way of someone's plan. Players might be asked to murder, rob or kidnap innocent people. The key is to present a moral dilemma, to catch players between their sense of right and their sense of honor, and to make them squirm as they try to resolve the conflict.

GREED AND CORRUPTION

Everyone has a price. If you decide to use this theme, make sure your players know that everyone they meet is for sale — or almost everyone. Constant betrayal is no fun, after all, so make sure you include at least one incorruptible character. She doesn't have to be a "good guy"; she just has to be loyal to her masters. An incorruptible character shows it's possible to live a principled life, which throws those who choose not to do so into sharper contrast.

Tempt your players. Perhaps a rival wants some information. Nothing damaging or incriminating — and of course, it'll be worth the character's while. This situation is how many *akuma* target the righteous, but it ties in with the idea of *guanxi*: Everyone wants harmony, and refusing requests, especially if they come with a gift, can be most inharmonious.

THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

All Kuei-jin were mortal once, and mortals can give free rein to their evil impulses without fearing their P'o. It's trite but true to say that no scheme concocted by any immortal has come close to matching the evil perpetrated by a Mao or a Pol Pot. Humans may not be immortal, but they play the game with a ferocity most Kuei-jin would be hard-pressed to match.

Perhaps the characters become unwittingly involved in a complex and brutal scheme being masterminded by a "mere" mortal. Many Kuei-jin have over-inflated opinions of their own wickedness. Reminding them that they don't have a monopoly on evil presents them with opportunities to reflect on how much progress towards enlightenment their souls have actually made.

WHERE THERE'S HOPE, THERE'S LIFE

These stories are about brave individuals fighting the good fight, standing against the tide of evil. It may not be possible to make the streets of the city safe and clean, but a character might have some chance of protecting a neighborhood, school or family. On the

streets, heroism exists side-by-side with terrible character flaws and moral blind spots. Contract killers risking their lives for love; corrupt cops making one last stand for justice; gangsters deciding that the boss's latest scheme is simply too awful to carry out; all of these are heroes, of a sort.

Use the contrasts in this type of story to good effect. Heroes stand as beacons of hope against the darkness and corruption of the world, but the brightest light casts the darkest shadow. All too often, the darkness surrounding a hero on the **Killing Streets** stems from her own weaknesses. Make sure your players get to see both sides of such characters, then force them to decide whether the good being done can excuse or expunge the evil that taints it.

Mood

Try to vary the mood of your chronicle between stories, sessions and even scenes. It can be quite effective to run an occasional scene whose mood contrasts with the overall mood of your story. Doing this will heighten dramatic tension as your players wait for the dominant mood to resume. Allowing a mood to rise gradually will let it infuse and color your whole story. The following are a few suggestions:

FEAR

No one who deals with the criminal underworld lives without fear. The idea here is to discover what your players fear and bring it closer and closer. Use the rules; if a player has to make rolls to avoid wave soul, it emphasizes the helplessness felt by her character. Tailor events to the characters' P'o natures for best effect.

Fear can be a difficult mood to maintain. As in a good horror movie, ease the mood every so often with a light-hearted moment (to let the audience relax), then apply the pressure again twice as hard. If you expose your players to the source of their fear without respite, it'll lose its power to scare them. Break it up a little.

UNCERTAINTY

This is a tricky mood to pull off, but can be very rewarding when done effectively. The key is to keep your players (and their characters) off-balance, never quite certain who their friends and enemies are and what's going to happen next, without pulling the rug out from under them all the time. The trick to this is to make sure the characters in your story have hidden but consistent motives. That way, if and when these folks switch allegiances or go in an unexpected direction, the players will be able to look back and figure out why.

Force the players to rely on their wits and their deductive skills, to get to know the characters in your story well enough to make judgments about their



personalities and motives. Make sure your Storyteller characters are “real” enough to make such judgments possible. You want to keep your players guessing at the real motives of a character, even if they’re sure they’ve got an ally (or enemy) for the time being.

DESPAIR

This mood makes a good choice if your players enjoy angst. It’s time for broken hopes, desperate schemes and people on the edge — slow death by apathy and disappointment on the one hand, quick death by impotent rage and desperation on the other. Characters shouldn’t wear their emotions on their sleeves, however. Despair should leak from them like water dripping from a tap until there’s nothing left. Characters in such a state may not respond to danger, or may risk their lives needlessly in the belief that with no hope, their fate doesn’t matter.

Be aware, though, that despair is like fear — it wears out quickly. Players get sick of hopeless situations that are always ground into their faces. The key is to add some variety and a few glimmers of hope. Give the players something to strive for in the dark.

VITALITY

Not as odd a choice as it sounds; where better to demonstrate the vitality and energy of street life? After all, it’s precisely this energy and vitality that attracts the unliving. When people exist on the knife edge of disaster, they live each day to its fullest, painfully aware that it may be their last.

Hustlers, gamblers, ambitious underlings and other flamboyant operators populate a game evoking this mood. Their vitality should manifest in a constant stream of new schemes, plans to get rich and a steady refusal to simply lie down and take whatever life decides to dish out. Chi isn’t the only form of vitality the Kuei-jin drain from the living.

EXAMPLE: THEME AND MOOD

Nick has decided that the theme of his game will be honor and duty, and he’ll strive to create a mood of fear. He decides that the Shih is a focal character for the theme; some scenes where the players must decide how to deal with her will present them with a choice between fulfilling their duties and acting honorably.

Putting the players in situations that arouse their characters’ P’o natures should bring home the characters’ fears. Events will be violent and death sudden; Nick wants everyone to be afraid that making the wrong move will result in disaster. He’ll ratchet up the pressure as the story progresses, and finally give the players a chance to overcome their fears as part of the finale.

it's How You Play it: STYLES OF PLAY

The style of your game informs many of your other choices, such as theme and mood, appropriate Storyteller characters, the nature of the conflicts and situations encountered and so on. It’s possible to switch styles between or even within stories, but you have to be careful not to confuse or overload the players with jarring style changes. The following styles are particularly well suited to a **Killing Streets** chronicle:

URBAN CRIME

Urban crime stories revolve around street-level cops and criminals. These guys aren’t crime bosses and police superintendents with penthouse apartments, political connections and expensive cars; they’re foot soldiers, leg-breakers, street-corner dealers and beat cops. Many are wretched creatures, barely making a living and spending all their energy searching for that one big score or bust that will set them up for good. For most, that big job never comes. And those few who do get lucky rarely know how to use their good fortune to get themselves off the streets.

Complex schemes are not usually part of the style; a personal dilemma, a bank job gone wrong, a simple case that rapidly becomes a nightmare of inter-departmental squabbling and political interference — this is the stuff of the urban crime story. There’s little honor to be found, only the constant, desperate struggle to survive. This just makes the few decent characters, the rare true friendships, stand out in greater contrast, like a gold ring sitting on top of a trash heap.

There are few differences between cops and criminals at this level, only the side of the law they’re on. Their brutal methods and attitudes are fundamentally the same. Often, only the presence of a badge or a tattoo separates the two sides.

ULTRA-VIOLENCE

We’ve all seen a John Woo film or two in our time. As a style, ultra-violence isn’t just about bunch of thugs shooting or beating the piss out of each other. It’s a form of melodrama; high stakes are reflected in the extremes of violence to which the characters are driven. If it’s not a drug shipment or jewel heist, it’s a hero struggling to assert his sense of honor or self-worth in a situation where he feels he has nothing to lose.

This style can get dull pretty quickly if all that happens is one fight scene after another. If you take a look at some movies in this genre (Woo’s *Hard-Boiled* and *The Killer* are the classics), you’ll see that there are a number of skirmishes, with the intensity steadily rising until the story climaxes. Do the same in your



chronicle — start the fights off small, and ramp up the scale as you build towards your climax.

You'll also notice that between the bouts of violence are moments of intense soul-searching and difficult moral choices. These quiet moments are the counterpoint to the violence and they give the stories their staccato rhythm.

Fights are also used as vehicles for character development. Not only must the protagonist overcome her enemies, she must also overcome her own limitations in order to move closer to her goal. The character must grow — save an innocent to redeem her past callousness, decide to sacrifice money for honor, put her life on the line to protect a friend — in order to be worthy of victory. Try to throw similar moral curve balls at your players.

The fear of death should be strong in an ultra-violent chronicle. Never allow your players to become complacent when facing your villains, or much of your story's drama will be lost. Staging can also enhance your stories. Set a gunfight atop a speeding freight train, a brawl in the bowels of a sinking ferry caught in a typhoon, a free-for-all in a zoo, and so on. Distractions from the simple goal of killing the enemy are another effective dramatic device. Innocent bystanders, environmental hazards, time limits, anything you can think of to constrain the players' freedom forces them to think on their feet and keeps the action fresh.

Creeping Horror

Horror can be difficult to roleplay successfully; to be effective, you need to frighten your players, not just their characters. Horror stories usually rely on dislocation from the familiar to achieve their effect, so take away the characters' usual surroundings and resources and force them to rely on their wits. A routine meeting that suddenly turns bizarre, a pattern of events that seems to be random but is clearly being effected to some purpose, inexplicable shifts in allegiance — all of these undermine the players' sense of security and control over the game. Mood-setting is a vital element in a horror session, and can help get your players in the right frame of mind (see "Theme and Mood in Play," p. 91).

A creeping horror is something — a disease, a demon, a corrupt human, a steady loss of moral direction — that manages to get under a character's skin. It forces the players out of their comfort zone and into encounters they'd prefer to avoid, facing the horror and its effects. Forcing the players to make soul state rolls is one way to demonstrate the (potential) loss of self they face. Shake them up; have the horror work its way closer and closer to the players, attacking the things they hold dear and think are secure. You need to make sure it's not just another monster to be investigated and destroyed, but a menace that threatens the foundations and certainties of the characters' world.

INTROSPECTIVE

These games put the focus squarely on the character. The goal is usually some kind of self-examination, so these kinds of chronicles make an excellent way to roleplay increases in Dharma. The challenges and characters encountered should illustrate or challenge strongly held beliefs and force the players to look at them in a new light.

Introduce characters or situations that cause disagreements between different Dharmas. Force your players to decide on courses of action that won't be palatable to them all. A Resplendent Crane might want to kill a corrupt cop for taking bribes, a Devil-Tiger might think his internal moral debate is instructive, and a Bone Flower might want to torture vital information out of him. The three views cannot be completely reconciled. This gives your players opportunities to argue their points of view, and in so doing, to explore their characters' beliefs and motives, perhaps gaining or offering insights along the way.

INVESTIGATIVE

A classic of the genre, the point of such stories (aside from solving the mystery) is to teach the players something. They might gain a vital clue towards solving or resolving your overall plot, or they might just explore a new corner of your game world. Whatever they gain should be useful to them later on, however.

In a one-shot, solving the mystery is the payoff, but even then your players should come out of the game with some new insights into the Middle Kingdom. For example, you might have the *wu* on the trail of an ancient piece of calligraphy that has been stolen from an ancestor's haven. As the characters follow the clues, they discover that the scroll is reputed to grant immediate enlightenment to any who read and truly understand it. Why then has the ancestor not become enlightened? That's another mystery.... (See page 89 for more on building mysteries.)

EXAMPLE: STYLE

Nick knows exactly what he wants here: ultra-violence. The **Killing Streets** are dark and dangerous, and that's what he wants to show. He plans to present the story as a series of investigative interludes broken up by increasingly dangerous and desperate battles, with hostages and innocents at stake. By forcing even the non-combat-oriented characters to take action, he's going to stress the fact that life on the streets is an ugly struggle for survival. Knowing that all of his players have combat-capable characters helps this decision. If his group contained some pacifists or other non-combatants, he'd go for another style.

THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT

The overall mood of a **Killing Streets** game is gritty and dark and the focus is on the streets; supernatural elements should be kept to a minimum. If your players keep heading off to the spirit worlds, it detracts from the harsh reality of the mortal world. Make sparing use of these realms, and try to present them as something alien, mysterious, and most important of all, dangerous.

Before you send your players to the Yin, Yang or Yomi World, consider how a spirit realm can reflect and enhance the theme and mood of your story. What does the nature of the realm tell the players? What creatures inhabit it? How do they react to outsiders? The spirit world is largely a reflection of the human psyche, which means that for criminals, it is no place of refuge.

PUTTING THE SPIRIT WORLD INTO YOUR GAME

Generally, you should consider bringing the spirit world into play whenever you want to highlight an element of the game in a melodramatic fashion. The spirit world may be subtle, but it is still alien, and this is what should strike your players the most. If you want them to see the misery a Storyteller character causes, show them a child weeping because the villain has just murdered her parents. If you want to show your players why he's a villain, or why he fears the things he does, show them the hell he returned from, or the spirit that haunts him.

Another option is to reverse the "normal" order of things; instead of having players intrude upon the spirit realms during your story, have the spirit realms intrude upon the material world. This allows you to keep the focus squarely on the mundane while still making use of the esoteric. Using a single spiritual element, such as a ghost or a manifestation of the Yomi World (such as the Wicked City; see p. 76) reminds your players that supernatural forces are at work without providing an easy escape from the grimy streets and crumbling buildings.

As always, try to humanize your use of the spirit world. Each spirit the players encounter should be memorable, each hell or realm doubly so. Show, don't tell; if you want to demonstrate the Hell of Burning Sands, don't just describe the howling wind and scorching sand underfoot. Have the players meet an escapee who vividly recounts his suffering, show them corpses being blasted clean, or have them meet pathetic victims willing to do anything to get — or stay — out.

TELL ME A STORY: PLOTS

Once a chronicle is established and the players are familiar with the setting, it can be very rewarding

to run plot-free sessions. In these, the players dictate the action and the Storyteller responds, improvising as she goes. But ultimately, if you want to tell a story that builds to a satisfactory climax, you need to have an idea of where you are going. You need to come up with a plot.

Some Storytellers like to detail their plots extensively, while others prefer little more than a few notes to keep their improvised game moving in the desired direction. Neither approach is superior; the notes that follow may be taken either as a guide to the details you need to map out carefully or those you should keep in mind as you construct the story on the fly. Find the style that suits you best.

STORIES ARE MADE OF PEOPLE

The best way develop a plot is through your Storyteller characters. If you've got an idea for a story, work on the characters involved. If you haven't, work on some characters you think are sufficiently interesting to take center stage. A nice twist is to make a character associated with a player's character central to your story. That gives the *wu* an immediate interest in the story line. Get inside this character's head and think about her needs and desires. What does she want? Can she get it immediately, or does she need a long-term plan? What will she do, what will she sacrifice, to get it? The best way to build stories around characters is to focus on their long-term goals, breaking them up into a series of steps or tasks to be completed. This way, you can build a number of individual stories around the character that have their own logic and purpose.

What kind of characters can be used? There are any number of archetypes to choose from: the megalomaniac crime boss, the crusading cop, the incompetent police superintendent with his eye on city politics, the desperate ex-friend who calls in a favor for help on a dangerous job, the enforcer who can't control her violent urges, the "average Joe" out to avenge a murdered friend or relative. The source material is full of such characters; don't be afraid to steal ideas.

For a more intricate plot, carry out the same process for two (or more) characters. Then compare their plans, looking for points of conflict and overlap, areas where they are in competition with each other. For example, if two mandarins want to acquire the same Ming vase, you've got a story. If each influences a criminal organization, you might have war on the streets, or an uneasy peace as each side tries to avoid starting a war until they're fully prepared. If one has his talons in the police and the other is a criminal, you have a police crackdown on smuggling. If both use police departments or divisions, you've got bureaucratic infighting, internal affairs audits and so on.

Sketch out how the conflict might resolve itself without the players' intervention. This need be no more than a very simple outline, but the more detail you decide to put in, the more raw materials you'll have to work with once the players do get involved.

You now need to look for ways to let your players into your story. If the antagonist's scheme is so flawless that he leaves no clues, loose ends or witnesses behind, you've created a story that your players will never see. So loosen things up. Look for places in the flow of events where a clue might be left behind, a witness might see something or an underling might slip up. It can be very dramatically effective to give one or more of your main Storyteller characters a "fatal flaw," some miscalculation or mistake that seems obvious to an outsider but which the character cannot see because of arrogance, ignorance or a simple miscalculation. Such flaws shouldn't be immediately and fatally obvious, but should be sufficiently exploitable that the players will be able to use them to get closer to their goals.

Stories are most powerful, however, when they touch the players' characters directly. Perhaps the events set in motion by your Storyteller characters result in a *wu*-member's territory being invaded, allies being attacked or enemies revealed. If you can devise some kind of personal hook to draw each player into the story, you won't be able to keep them away if you beat them with a stick. You'll also avoid the tired old cliché of the ancestor sending the *wu* out on another mission, when they should be taking the initiative themselves.

ONION LAYERS

Another way to construct a story is the "onion peel" method. This works especially well for mystery stories (see below), and is based around the idea that resolving the conflict at the heart of a story is like peeling off the layers of an onion, each time getting closer to the center.

Start by deciding what lies at the core of your story, and then construct layers of information that lead your players to it regardless of the order in which they uncover them. The advantage of this method is that you're less likely to create a linear story with only one way for the characters to progress. This is a different matter from the story hinging on one or two key pieces of information to uncover, or characters to meet. The problem with a linear story is that you've already decided how the story unfolds. If your players come up with a different way to piece things together, they'll get stuck and you'll have work on your hands getting things back on track. But if the players can "peel the onion" from any angle and still make headway, then you'll be able to deal with any approach to your story.

EXAMPLE: PLOT

Nick is ready to start pulling his ideas together into a coherent story. He decides to use the “onion peel” method of building his story line, which will be based around the desires of a few major characters.

He likes the idea of the mandarin with a taste for ceramics; he decides that an ambitious lieutenant is organizing a smuggling operation that doubles as the start of the lieutenant’s own power base. This character sets up at the old port facility and starts a distribution operation in the slums of Hong Kong. There, he runs afoul of a local “neighborhood watch” organization, set up to protect the honest merchants from extortion. This group is hard pressed but has been getting some (anonymous) assistance from a local Shih.

The lieutenant wants to crush the local gang, but the Shih keeps intervening. The mandarin decides to fly in a trusted associate to eliminate the lieutenant. The lieutenant gets wind of this and heads to the airport to intercept his new rival. The Shih also gets wind of the plan and decides that the airport would be a good place to take care of the pesky Kuei-jin once and for all.

How can the players peel the onion? Aside from hooks stemming from their characters’ backgrounds (see below), Nick thinks that police and organized crime groups would be concerned with the smuggling operation and a number of busts and battles might ensue. The mandarin, if a patron or enemy of the *wu*, might also be a means for involving some characters, as might the Shih and the local gang. Beyond this, Nick contents himself with detailing the set-piece finale (the fight at the airport) and the resources available to his cast of characters.

Alternatively, if Nick were to take a more linear approach to designing his chronicle, he might lay out his rough chain of events and consider the most likely responses from his players:

- Characters caught in a skirmish between smugglers and street gang; learn about new operation moving in.
- Characters encounter Shih, who tells them not to get involved unless they want to become targets.
- Characters hear about mandarin’s associate coming to Hong Kong.
- Characters attacked by lieutenant’s minions (he fears they are working against him).
- Characters tipped off by the Shih about the imminent arrival of the mandarin’s associate.

Of course, these notes will be fleshed out and adjusted in play, as the story and the characters’ relationships with each other develop, but for a start it provides Nick with a pretty clear idea of the plot and its likely resolution.

A SPECIAL CASE: MYSTERIES

Mysteries are great fun for both the Storyteller and the players, who feel particularly satisfied if they can resolve a story using only (or mostly) their wits. Generally, a mystery benefits from tighter plotting and a more fully detailed back story. The gathering of clues and the collection of information are the keys to solving a mystery, and you need to be confident that you don’t accidentally introduce unwanted inconsistencies or contradictions. This is especially important when you consider that mysteries are often solved by noticing and pursuing inconsistencies in the evidence (“So tell me, how can you say you were at Kai Tak airport last Tuesday when I have five witnesses who saw you in Kowloon?”).

Some Storytellers like to use flow charts as a rough guide to the story, with information A leading to clue B, clue C and character X, each of which leads to a number of further sources of information. This approach can work quite well; just make sure that there are no dead ends, and enough interconnections to give your players freedom of movement around and through the information.

A timeline is especially important; few things spoil a mystery more effectively than a Storyteller who’s confused about the facts. In addition to an overall timeline, it’s quite helpful to prepare a separate, more detailed timeline for each of the major Storyteller characters, so that you have a complete picture of who was doing what to whom at what time and at which place.

When you’re laying your trail of clues, avoid the obvious. People don’t generally go around dropping business cards, crumpled pieces of paper with the time and location of crucial meetings or matchbooks with important phone numbers on them. By the same token, don’t be too obscure, and make sure that you’ve built some redundancy into things. If the players don’t stay around to guard a key witness, who is then defenseless against the assassin sent to kill him, it shouldn’t be the end of the road for their investigations. Perhaps a bystander saw the whole thing, and can give the players the clues they need. Or the witness escapes and must be found before the attackers return to finish the job. If a unique person, thing or place is crucial to moving the story along, make sure the players have more than one way to get to it.

ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF: CHARACTERS

An important part of preparing your chronicle is considering how the players' characters will fit in. It's possible, of course, to design a chronicle without specifically considering how to get players involved. But if you look at the existing characters who are taking part, or think about what kind of new characters would fit in especially well, you can draw your players into your story and ensure that every character can play a useful and satisfying role in it.

The key is to look for character types or specific character details that will fit into your story. When you're building your plot and Storyteller characters, stay alert for the cracks and spaces that allow your players to involve themselves. For example, say one of the main characters in your story is a charismatic Resplendent Crane starting a crackdown on drug runners. Characters with similar goals, connections to the drug trade or a stake in the turf where the Crane operates have a reason to get involved.

PRE-EXISTING CHARACTERS

When you're integrating a *Killing Streets* story into a pre-existing chronicle, you should examine two elements of each character — history and Backgrounds. If at all possible, involve a character's history in the set-up for a game. Referring to a character's past offers several benefits. First, it can draw or propel a character into a story. If a character was active in Shanghai in the 1920s, she will likely be interested in the activities of Shanghai Green Triad members. Second, it gives players great satisfaction to see the effort they've put into a character history rewarded. Doing this should encourage all your players to come up with detailed character histories.

Further, this type of story reinforces the idea that even recently undead characters once had mortal lives. Having a character protect the ancestors of a friend or lover, or meet a childhood friend who's become an old man, can be the basis of a very powerful story or scene. It also gives you the opportunity to include some flashbacks, scenes that tell an episode from the character's past, that contain a lesson or clue for the present.

If all of an existing character's Backgrounds haven't yet been fully defined, it might be possible to integrate them into the set-up of your story. For example, an Ally or Contact might be a member of a gang set to play a critical role; a Mentor might have once trained or been betrayed by an unliving crime boss; and so on.



NEW CHARACTERS

If you're starting your chronicle with brand-new characters, the above considerations apply, but you have more of a free hand. This is especially important if you're planning a single-story chronicle; taking care of some character development or history before play starts helps your players quickly feel at home in your game.

You can also give direction to your players when they're generating their characters. The idea is not to restrict your players' freedom to create characters they want to play, but rather to help them come up with characters who work well together and can involve themselves in the action. Give your players specific suggestions or outlines for characters. If you've decided that one of the characters should have been a cop or a smuggler or a member of a certain family, court or other organization, simply tell your players what you want and let them come up with the details.

Alternatively, provide some general suggestions for types of characters you know will fit in well. Make sure to have more suggestions than players, so that your players can make a genuine choice. The vengeful ex-cop, the over-enthusiastic Devil-Tiger, the Bone Flower who regards her mortal ties with bemused affection — these are examples of the kind of simple outlines you can provide.

EXAMPLE: CHARACTERS

Nick is running his *Killing Streets* story as an interlude in his ongoing chronicle, so he revisits his players' characters to see if he can connect them to his new story. One character has three dots in the Contacts Background, but has only defined two contacts so far. Nick decides that the third is a police officer who works the beat around the street gang's area. Another character has no potentially useful Backgrounds, but she was once a pirate in the South China Sea. Nick figures she might know something about smuggling and decides to give her some extra information on the lieutenant's operations once they come to light. A third character has a Shih Ally, and Nick decides to give her some basic information about the Shih that figures in the story.

PREPARE FOR THE WORST: RUNNING THE GAME

You can do a number of things to help your game sessions run more smoothly. Chief among them is making sure you're adequately prepared to actually run the game.

You might want detailed notes or simply a loose outline of what you have in mind for the session. If you work from notes, make sure they're easily accessible, and that you've covered enough ground to be prepared if your players make all the right connections the first time around and start powering through your story. If you prefer a more improvisational style, make sure you've got a firm handle on the motives, plans and resources of all your Storyteller characters.

You can also make a list of names, so you won't be caught out if you need to create a character on the spot. Have maps handy (or firmly fixed in your mind) so that when players go somewhere, you can describe their surroundings. If you can, use real-world places you're familiar with as models for game locations. And make sure you review your notes from the previous session(s), so you don't forget any details or important events that have an impact on the session to come.

THEME AND MOOD IN PLAY

The best way to communicate your theme and mood in play is to use background elements in-game. If your game's theme is the price of loyalty, set some scenes in a nightclub infamous as the place where an *akuma* betrayed a former friend. Have informers willing to sell out their friends or other allegiances, local street kids turning to crime and so on. You can use such elements to communicate a lot of information to your players. By altering the "background color," you'll warn them that a change is in the air, or that a new influence is at work.

PHYSICAL SETTING

If possible, make the room or area where you play an instrument for mood setting. The most obvious tools are sound and light. Many gamers use a soundtrack, and the right music can really add to a story. Avoid music with lyrics, as they're too distracting. And make sure that you're not forever switching tapes or discs. Compile a tape (or load a CD stacker, if one's available) so that you don't waste game time switching or searching for music.

You can also use lighting to create an atmosphere. Turn the lights out (and the sound off) as the hit squad cuts the power to the nightclub the players are checking out. Shine a flashlight at the players as the security guard comes over to ask them what they're doing. Be sure to raise your voice and startle your players; the streets are neither nice nor polite.

Props are also handy. An old matchbook, a crumpled invoice, a recorded conversation... anything the players can manipulate themselves makes the events of your game more immediate by breaking down the barrier between player and character.

GAME SETTING

Try to use in-game settings that complement your story's mood. If you want to evoke the energy of the streets, make use of bustling marketplaces and frenzied nightclubs. If despair is your flavor, try crumbling, abandoned buildings and deserted factories and train yards. Background events — a mugging, two lovers walking hand-in-hand, a massed crowd surging forward to get into a department store that's having a sale — all communicate to your players something about the world their characters inhabit. Even if you set a scene or two somewhere clean and wholesome for contrast, it can be very effective to include a single element out of place, something to represent the harsh realities of life in the Middle Kingdom. A desperate beggar or an abused servant reminds your players that everyone, no matter how rich or influential, is only a step or two away from the streets.

CHARACTERS

Your Storyteller characters are the primary means by which your players will interact with your story. If your characters are rich and complex enough, they'll convey far more than any amount of Storyteller exposition, mood music, props or other gimmicks. Storyteller games are ultimately personal affairs, so make sure you give your players plenty of interesting people to meet. Wealthy characters play a special role in a **Killing Streets** story; they represent the aspirations of the majority of your other characters, but they should all have shady (or at least mysterious) pasts. Their wealth should make them seem like a different species altogether — at least until their underlying corruption and wickedness is revealed (there are very few benevolent millionaires in the Middle Kingdom).

KEEP NOTES

A useful habit to get into is to make notes as you play. Whenever you get the chance, scribble some notes about what's happening in the current session. At the very least, take a few minutes after the session is done to record the key events and write down anything you'll need to sort out before next session. This will help you avoid embarrassing continuity mistakes. Your notes don't need to be extensive — just a half-dozen or so points will serve perfectly well. Of course, if you prefer to write a detailed chronicle of your story, all the better.

Always check these notes when preparing your next session. As well as helping you remember what happened last time around, they can serve as a useful source of new ideas. You might notice some Storyteller characters who've been turning up a lot, and decide to write them up in more detail. An offhand

comment made by a Contact, Ally, Mentor or other character might serve as a lead into a brand-new story, and so on.

EXAMPLE: PREPARATIONS

Nick is ready to run his first session. He's recorded a tape with some traditional Chinese music on one side and some techno on the other. He plans to play the traditional music for most of the street scenes, to emphasize the honorable nature of the Shih and the gang. The techno will be used for combat and any other action scenes. He's set up his gaming area with a ratty old cloth over the table and a mismatched set of cups and plates for munchies. He'll keep the main lights off, and has a desk lamp set low to the gaming table to allow the players just enough light to read their character sheets and game books. His notes are on hand, as is a pad for him to scribble down notes on important developments during the game.

WHEN LAST WE LEFT OUR HEROES: ADVANCING THE CHRONICLE

Don't be afraid of change. Just as in real life, stories rarely run according to plan. Managing the interplay of characters and action and their effects on a story is one of the chief skills of a good Storyteller, and this is where all the time you spent developing antagonists and secondary characters really pays off. If you have a strong grasp of their aims and abilities and resources, you can adjust their plans in response to events as they unfold. This is a common occurrence on the streets, as the hustlers and wheeler-dealers change strategies to match their dynamic environment.

Two vexing problems deserve some special attention: players who solve your mystery or foil their opponent's plans straight away, and players who get lucky (or smart) and defeat an antagonist in the first minutes of play. Neither problem is insurmountable. If the nefarious plan is uncovered early on, allow your players their victory (after all, they've earned it), but then have them discover that it was only a diversion or a sideshow intended to keep them away from a far more insidious scheme. It's hard to keep secrets on the streets, and if word gets out that Black Ling got wasted trying to lift a shipment of diamonds, it's inevitable that someone else will try their luck at the same heist.

THE STORYTELLER EXPRESS

One of the worst complaints that can be leveled at a Storyteller is that she “railroads” her players. That is, she presents situations where the players’ actions have no real impact on events. For each key scene or encounter you have in mind, you should give some thought to four broad outcomes and consider how each would affect your story:

- The players get all possible information or clues;
- The players get none of the possible information or clues;
- The players get into a fight and are badly beaten;
- The players get into a fight and kill the Storyteller characters or destroy evidence.

These four points don’t cover all the possibilities, but they represent the extremes, and considering several outcomes can help keep you from railroading your players. Your master criminal might have only one brilliant plan, but you should have several.

If, however, you find that your players are going off-course, give them a nudge. Perhaps they get a message from an exasperated superior, directing them to a witness or informant. Someone might offer information in exchange for protection. A contact might have a new lead for them. Just make sure that when you provide assistance, you make your players pay for it; especially on the streets, there’s no such thing as a free lunch. Maybe the new information is dangerously incomplete. Or their contact has sold them out, or was acting under duress.

NEVER LET THEM SEE YOU SWEAT

When you’re running your sessions, go with the flow. Don’t panic if your players completely miss your carefully constructed plot. Keep your cool and remember that Storytelling is largely a confidence game; if you can convince your players that you’re ready for any eventuality, that your game world has been fleshed out in loving detail, they’ll throw themselves into it with glee. But if you’re stalling, or pushing the characters too hard in a certain direction, you’ll ruin their suspension of disbelief. It’s better to call a break in play or even to end a session early than to do a botched job of on-the-spot invention that breaks continuity.

THE PROBLEM OF PLAYERS

Players can do other things to derail a game, for which you need to be prepared. The most disruptive is spending their entire time in petty conflicts with other players. Less common but more serious is getting their characters killed.

PLAYER-ON-PLAYER CONFLICT

Some groups of players love to make characters who don’t get along; others find that their characters can’t agree on a course of action. If your players are bickering, the only thing you really need to do is make sure they’re having a good time doing it. It’s perfectly appropriate for characters with sharply differing moral codes and strong personalities to clash over tactics, ethics and so on. In fact, you should encourage this. Pointless bickering and nit-picking, however, should be discouraged, especially if it ends up alienating part of the player group.

Remember that your Storyteller characters haven’t stopped working towards their goals. Realizing that their enemies were going about their business unopposed while they spent a session arguing and blocking each other should bring most players back to earth. This outcome is doubly good; it penalizes your players and shows them that if they won’t take decisive action, others will. A single failure on the streets probably won’t have the same dire consequences as failing the Blood Ancestor in front of the court, but word gets around, and a bad reputation can follow a character like a bad smell.

You need to watch the action carefully when characters start pointing guns at each other. Threats of violence are appropriate to the genre, but usually between enemies, not allies. If the players involved want to take things all the way, keep the enjoyment of the other players in mind. A solution that allows the characters to back down without losing face might be best. Have an enemy attack, to give them somewhere more useful to point their guns. Or perhaps the phone rings with an urgent message. If they still refuse to blink, let ‘em kill each other and sit things out until they make new characters. Then make the players wait for an appropriate time to introduce them.

Conflicts over tactics can also be a problem. Few things are more frustrating for a player than seeing a carefully negotiated dialogue or alliance ruined by another player who decides to pick a fight. This situation is definitely part of the genre — the headstrong cop barging in over the negotiator’s objections, the enforcer breaking legs instead of asking questions — but when it occurs between players, it can become a serious obstacle. Start dropping hints, such as gangs that are defeated because of their disunity or Storyteller characters who are unable to help because of conflicts within their organizations. Out-of-game, encourage your players to work together. Ultimately, if a player is determined to be disruptive, you may have little choice but to tell him to change his ways or quit the game. Be polite but firm.

The reverse can also happen, with players unwilling to pull their weight in combat. *Killing Streets* is a violent genre and non-combatants usually don't last long. The first thing to do is to make sure that you've put a good mix of situations into your story, so that all the characters can contribute in plenty of ways. But on the streets, if you can't look after yourself you'll be hunted down as easy prey. "Defenseless" pretty much equals "victim," so pacifist characters should at least have some defensive abilities — or start learning them.

CHARACTER DEATH

Some players just keep getting their characters killed. Sometimes these things happen by accident, in which case you may be tempted to ignore the dice and let a character live. After all, why should an unfavorable die roll hinder your story? It shouldn't, but if you shield your players from the consequences of their actions too often, they may take things less seriously. The best solution is to build trust with your players, so they know you won't put them in no-win situations — but if they start picking fights or putting themselves in needless danger, then sooner or later someone's going to get hurt.

If it really comes down to it, the chief rule to follow is to give each character the opportunity for a melodramatic death scene. *Killing Streets* is based on a genre with a high mortality rate, so you shouldn't be surprised if some of your players' characters end up dead. A death scene is a great opportunity for roleplaying, and if a player is about to lose a favorite character, she should get a chance to go out in style.

EXAMPLE: PLAYER CONFLICT

Two of Nick's players are at loggerheads. One wants to approach the smugglers directly. The other wants a full-blown raid to destroy their operations. Both plans have merit, but the other players are getting annoyed. Nick has foreseen this problem (these two players often disagree on such matters) and he has the Shih scheduled to stage a break-in while they're arguing, so that by the time they arrive, the information they could have stolen has already been retrieved. If they had acted decisively, the Shih might have joined them, or she might not have tried her break-in that night, if ever.

THAT'S ALL, FOLKS!: ENDING THE CHRONICLE

All stories have a beginning, middle and end, but especially in long-running chronicles, there's a risk of the story line petering out. Coming up with a good ending for a story is largely a matter of looking at the desired outcomes for each of the main characters. If you've drawn up an outline of how the story flows without the players' influence, you'll have a good idea of how things could turn out. You might have in mind a big set piece, like an assault on an enemy's base or the rescue of hostages. Or you might be relying on in-game developments to help you come up with a suitable finale.

Whichever approach you choose, make sure you bring your story to a dramatic close. Typically, you'll have one or maybe two scenes set after the climax for tying up loose ends and ensuring that everyone gets their just desserts.

One thing that sets many Asian stories apart from their Western counterparts is that happy endings aren't guaranteed. Even if the heroes escape with their lives (and often they don't), they may be crippled, blinded, imprisoned or even murdered by their own superiors after having defeated their enemies. There are a number of "classic" endings for such stories, including:

THE EPIC BATTLE

Few endings are more satisfying than the guns-blazing-and-fists-flying combat extravaganza. Be sure to make the fight an epic, with lots of extras to be gunned down (see *Vampire: The Masquerade*, p. 217, for notes on how to handle extras) and lots of enemies to battle.

THE FINAL BETRAYAL

Be careful with this one. It's genre-appropriate, but it can lead to some very pissed-off players, especially if they've had no inkling of the upcoming betrayal. If you do decide to have allies turn against the players at the last moment, make sure that the players have an opportunity to defeat them. This ending is perhaps best suited to one-off games, where characters can go down in a blaze of glory.

THE MASTER PLAN

The plan here can either be the players' or their opponents'. If it's the players', they should be reaping the benefits of their careful preparations as they take down their enemies. If it's their enemies', the players should get one last chance to think on their feet and avert disaster. Either way, throw in one or two "wildcard" elements that are beyond anyone's control, such as the police turning up or a third party suddenly taking interest in events; the streets are nothing if not unpredictable.

THE PYRRHIC VICTORY

This can work alone, or as an adjunct to another ending. In this finale, the players achieve victory, but at a terrible cost. The cost might be paid by the players (their characters killed or ruined, crippled or discredited) or by others as a price for the players' triumph (to defeat their enemies, the players doom some innocent parties). As with a betrayal ending, be sure to give your players their victory (or at least a chance at it) before you show them its cost.

EXAMPLE: ENDING

Nick has decided to end his story with a bang. He's running the **Killing Streets** story as an interlude in his already-established chronicle, and he wants to let the players know that the story is over. He goes with the battle at Kai Tak airport, and gets hold of a map and roughs out the sequence of events. He decides that the battle will take place in a wing currently being repaired (a blatant steal from the film *Die Hard 2*, but he figures the players will make the connection and get into the spirit of things). He plans for waves of extras to attack first, then to have the main characters enter the fray. It's hard to predict the flow of combat, but he's decided that the fight should spill out into a hangar and that the final face-off, if possible, should leave the villains standing near some barrels of highly flammable chemicals ripe for a dramatic explosion. He's also prepared some notes on what the villains say during the fight — the soliloquy from the villain as he thinks he's won the day is just as important as the smart quip tossed off by the hero as he snatches his victory from the jaws of defeat.

In the wash-up, Nick evaluates what went well and what didn't, makes note of any contacts who might recur to set up further stories, and makes sure that one or two characters escape to bear a grudge against the players' *wu*.



APPENDIX: ROAD RULES FOR THE DARK METROPOLIS

The face of "evil" is always the face of total need.
— William S. Burroughs, *The Naked Lunch*

A **Killing Streets** chronicle can be run using only the rules found in the **Kindred of the East** rulebook, but for those Storytellers who like to tinker, this Appendix presents some optional systems and additions. It includes rules for dealing with mundane interactions on the streets, followed by a long look at the mixing of the Yomi Realms and corrupt urban

areas. A Storyteller who prefers to run interactions on the streets through roleplaying should ignore the expanded rules for the Streetwise Talent below. Similarly, if you feel your chronicle would be damaged by the idea that the Yomi Realms are emerging in the mortal world, simply ignore the material presented, or adapt it to your needs.

STREET TRAITS

So, how much for the little girl?

In a story or chronicle focussed on the urban underbelly, certain traits gain a whole new importance. Obviously, the Streetwise Trait is critical, but it is hardly the only one. The following section provides an expanded look at Streetwise and many other key traits, complete with optional mechanics and advice. The governing idea behind the discussions below is that on the streets, nothing is free, and that players should earn the benefits they get through their abilities and backgrounds.

STREETWISE (TALENT)

Streetwise represents knowing whom to speak to and having a certain reputation — it isn't an ATM of contacts and illegal merchandise to be accessed at will. Successes mean that a Kuei-jin knows just where to go and who to speak to for the information or goods she wants, or that she is generally aware of day-to-day news and gossip, but all this is just information. Feel free to make a character go down onto the streets to act on her knowledge (unless the activity isn't key to the chronicle and you don't want the distraction). Such gutter-level activity is central to Streetwise and to the whole **Killing Streets** mood — it keeps a character in touch, keeps her persona's reputation up and provides an opportunity to discover information that might otherwise never make its way to the players. Keeping an active presence can be especially important if a character is also acting in ways that jar with her street persona. It can be highly disconcerting for a character masquerading as a down and out smuggler to be asked "That wasn't you I saw in the social pages, was it — you know at the Chinese Ambassador's ball?"

The process of getting to know the streets is not without its pitfalls. After all, as a Kuei-jin learns about them, others learn about her. The Storyteller can ask for Wits + Etiquette rolls as a character gets to know the street scene (and the player saves up experience to buy dots in Streetwise). The character may also need to bribe underworld figures, get in a few fights, or show "credentials" of some description (i.e. as a Yakuza or a cop) that define her interest to the other denizens of the streets. Unknowns are potentially dangerous on the streets, and so despite their natural desire for secrecy, Kuei-jin must have an acceptable persona or they'll be shunned (or worse). Characters who do not go to these efforts shouldn't be allowed to gain dots in Streetwise.

LOSING TOUCH

Players whose characters don't spend at least some time once a month (game time) getting down and dirty in their local neighborhood should find

WHO ARE YOU ON THE STREETS?

If you want to run a full-on, gritty, gangsters-and-street-scum chronicle, think very carefully about making players create complete street personas. It's very important for you to know exactly how the various denizens of the streets regard the characters. What happens if two characters are members of allied Triads that suddenly have a falling out? Are any of the characters connected in mortal eyes to the local councilor who just got arrested for corruption? These details and others like them are all small but important for a **Killing Streets** chronicle.

their difficulties on Streetwise rolls starting to creep up. People on the streets get suspicious when they lose track of what someone has been up to — they start to wonder if they're being scammed. Again, the key thing to remember is that as the characters watch others on the streets, they are also being watched. Kuei-jin are dangerous and powerful, but they are merely one part of the urban social system and by no means an omnipresent one. Another way of representing a loss of street-level contact without playing with numbers is to make the results of successes less useful — a character locates a heroin dealer, but doesn't pick up on the fact that this guy is under police surveillance or just got busted and won't have a large enough quantity of drugs for the character's needs. The streets are a dark place, and a little knowledge is often more dangerous than none at all.

MAKING DEALS

Remember that even on the streets, money can't buy everything. Money can be somewhat of a problem in some chronicles — with their immortal ways and powers, it isn't hard for Kuei-jin to acquire vast wealth, and some players try to translate this into vast amounts of influence or at least easy access to anything they desire. Money (more strictly speaking, the Resources Background) combined with Streetwise can sometimes seem a recipe for disaster as players try to justify pulling automatic shotguns loaded with dragon breath ammunition out of thin air. But things just aren't that simple, and you can play up this aspect as hard as necessary to get unruly players to understand the facts of life. First of all, without a respected street reputation, throwing around large amounts of cash for exotic items is going to attract a lot of attention. The local military commander, crime boss or chief of police (corrupt or not) is going to be very interested in some mysterious person buying an arsenal. Second, the characters are hardly

the only people with money on the streets. Corrupt officials, drug traffickers and any number of other mortals can easily have access to huge sums to counter the Kuei-jin's efforts.

A character may be asked for many other things in return for getting what they desire: perhaps an assassination in exchange for drugs, a smuggling run for some guns, or some drugs for an assassination. Such bartering arrangements are harder for the police to track, especially if they are trying to follow a money trail. A Storyteller should structure the demands to match the personas that the players' characters have adopted on the streets. You don't ask a group of pimps to smuggle drugs by sea, but you might ask them to provide some mules to carry those drugs on an airline flight to San Francisco. A character can even do or provide something for free, storing up a favor to be called in when necessary or to be traded to another person. The latter especially can make life difficult for characters forced to acknowledge favors to an enemy or potential rival.

WHEN IT JUST CAN'T BE DONE

Sometimes, no matter how many contacts you call, how many bars you hit and no matter what you offer, what you want just isn't available. It may be a scarce (or in-demand) commodity, or perhaps the dealers and street scum aren't willing to sell it. The latter might seem strange to our Western concept of crime, but most Asian societies are fairly authoritarian and criminals almost always operate with some degree of semi-official acknowledgement of how far they can go. One of the most common limitations is on guns and drugs. Countries like China, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam execute anyone caught trafficking in either, and in most other Asian countries the penalties are very heavy.

While police corruption might ease some of the danger in relation to drugs, it doesn't help where guns are concerned because of the political importance most Asian governments place on keeping society in line. No matter how corrupt, a policeman will go after you if you start a gunfight in public because he has to keep his job. Similar restrictions are placed on anything else that affects politics, like smuggling out dissidents or providing illegal satellite dishes so people can watch uncensored television broadcasts. Thus, any character who rocks the boat is likely to find that all his Streetwise Talent gets him is a lot of refusals and people telling him to go away, grow up, drop dead or perhaps all three. If a character refuses to take no for an answer, a beating is likely to follow, or perhaps a carefully worded call to the local police, who will happily use their undercover squad to try to sell the character anything she wants.

NEW IN TOWN

Unless a Kuei-jin is a local, it takes some time for her to build up knowledge of the local scene. Depending on the depth of knowledge desired, a Demon will have to spend anywhere from one (for Novice level access) to five weeks (for Master level access) cruising, clubbing and kowtowing full time in order to become accustomed to how things work. If she can't give her full attention to this acclimatization process, the number of nights needed stretches out. Until the character puts in sufficient time getting to know the local ropes, all of her Streetwise difficulties go up by at least 1. There is no roll for getting to know the local scene, it just takes time. If a Kuei-jin is of a different ethnic or religious background than the norm for the city in which they are seeking to ingratiate themselves, a Storyteller should feel free to make the task of acclimatization all the harder and maybe even throw in a little "random" mob violence to ram home the problems minorities face in Asia.

MEN IN THE SHINY GREEN SUITS!

What happens if the players' *wu* doesn't have anyone with Streetwise? In this case, the fun is about to begin because there are many kind souls on the streets who make it their purpose in life to bring people together. Fixers, middlemen, dealers, whatever name you wish to give them, there is an entire class of semi-criminals who, for the right gratuity or favor, put people in touch with whatever or whomever they want. Naturally, this system has its own problems because it gives someone else, often a mortal, potential insight into the *wu*'s activities and puts the characters at risk of getting drawn into the middleman's troubles. Them's the breaks.

All of this is ripe with Storytelling possibilities, of course. An especially effective technique is to have the characters undertake some mundane task for their fixer that suddenly brings them back into the world of the Hungry Dead. If they discover that the little package they're carrying belongs to a powerful mandarin, they may have to balance living and unliving concerns. Masquerading as lowly mortal agents of an equally lowly mortal criminal when faced with the dhampyr majordomo of the Mandarin of Seven Rivers can be nerve-racking indeed.

ETIQUETTE (SKILL)

Even though modernization is slowly overwhelming tradition in Asia, the region's various cultures are still far more formal than in the West. This carries over into the underworld, and criminal organizations place a great deal of importance on tradition. In Asia, formal etiquette is not just for the tea room and reception hall, but for the drug buy as well. There are appropriate ways to address the local Triad boss depending on the situation, for instance, and only the most down and out gang lacks a similar structure of seniority and formal respect. The more traditional the criminal or organization, the more complex such ways are. Failure to show proper respect is unlikely to be fatal, unless the omission is an obvious attempt to belittle or insult a senior gangster or official, but it marks the characters as uncouth and smalltime, which has negative consequences for their reputation on the streets. This option works just like the standard application of this skill, but it is an important one to keep in mind for giving an alien flavor to your *Kindred of the East* chronicle.

- **Touching the Untouchable:** At the lowest end of town, in the shanties and slums, Etiquette is also very important. In many places in Asia, who you deal with is just as important as how you treat people. Is the beggar on the streets over there an untouchable, and therefore beneath your dignity and position to publicly confront? If he is, what is the established way of interacting with him or perhaps finding out who his beggar master is? Is he Malay, a Hakka, or from some isolated backcountry indigenous tribe? Do you even speak a common language, and if not, how do you find a person who can translate? Finally, if you're trying to impress the yokels, a show of fine breeding and superior manners goes a long way toward getting them to treat you with respect, if only because an education shows you're someone important, and if they screw with you the local goon squad might come down on them.

You can use Intelligence (or Perception) + Etiquette rolls to answer these questions in lieu of playing out these dilemmas. The only reason we recommend rolling over roleplaying in this case, as opposed to when using *Streetwise*, is that unless you and your players have a solid general understanding of Asian customs, the players may find it difficult to manage this type of interaction in-character. Nothing can be more frustrating for a player than to keep getting into difficulties for not saying or doing the right things when their character should know what to do because of his background. Using the Etiquette skill is the easiest way around this problem, speeding up play and minimizing player frustration.

If you want to resolve such cultural and social issues through roleplaying, however, there is a way to do so that will keep everyone happy, but will also require a fair amount of extra work on your part. Rather than using Etiquette as a Skill (covering the act of interacting properly), use it as a Knowledge (of proper customs). When characters make a roll, provide them with what they think is the right answer; for instance, it is fine to approach the beggar and give alms, or that he looks like a Karen animist priest who will only talk in allegories. Once they have the information about the right way to approach a social situation, make your players roleplay the interaction normally. Because this method requires the Storyteller to have a great deal of knowledge or do a lot of research, it might be easier to save it for important scenes and otherwise use Etiquette rolls per the main rules.

INVESTIGATION (KNOWLEDGE)

Investigation is a useful Ability in a *Killing Streets* campaign, and is best used as suggested in the main rules. The real adjustments involve attitude, especially if your players are accustomed to using an appearance of mortal authority or the general distaste for public violence to get by in their investigations. In Asia, being "official" is likely to make matters harder, not easier. People simply disappear off the streets if they hear that a local policeman is looking for them. In many areas, the government also has established ways to find out what it wants. You go to the local crime boss and complain to him that someone broke into your office; if she believes it was out of line or that you are a good person to curry favor with, she will take care of the matter. This may mean handing the culprit over to the police, giving them a beating or a warning, or maybe doing nothing and lying to you. Of course, simply bullying the local criminals into giving you the freedom to do whatever you want is also a time-honored approach used by the strong over the weak.

Going over the heads of the local street authorities and thus not giving them face is guaranteed to arouse their opposition and ensure that they'll make your life difficult every step of the way. Nor will they shy away from extreme violence. This may seem at odds with the authoritarian nature of many Asian regimes, but tyrants only care about themselves. As long as violence is not aimed at them and doesn't cost them money, the powers that be really don't care what goes on. They oppose guns that might help arm a revolution, but if the characters' enemies want to hack them apart with machetes, little will stop them once the right bribes are paid, or provided the attack occurs in the right part of town. This reality makes an investigation much

more nerve-wracking and provides strong incentive to go through the local bosses. Better an imperfect result than a gang of pipe-wielding thugs trying to pulp you in the local McDonalds.

LAW (KNOWLEDGE)

Knowledge of the law and the legal system is a useful tool for anyone planning on breaking it or skirting close to that. Given the complexity of jurisprudence today, even criminals who commit a so-called "perfect crime" can find themselves behind bars for some small associated misdemeanor that they didn't realize they were committing. The classic (albeit Western) example of this is Al Capone, who was eventually imprisoned for tax evasion. When players want to know exactly when their characters are crossing the line and how badly they are doing it, Intelligence + Law rolls are appropriate. In most cases, players know the vampires are breaking the law without a roll, but inadvertent breaches can be just as dangerous as calculated crimes.

Naturally, as the Storyteller, you also need to have some knowledge of what the laws actually are, or enforcing them becomes difficult. Luckily, many Asian legal systems owe much to their colonial pasts and mirror Western law quite closely. Therefore, anything you know is illegal in the States is probably illegal in Asia. One difference is that penalties tend to be much heavier and the police more likely to resort to unauthorized methods to get evidence or a confession. Abused characters who want to seek redress for such methods — they *are* illegal after all — are out of luck, except in Japan, and even there the results are hardly as drastic as most plaintiffs would like. The laws that don't tend to correspond to those in the West are the ones dealing with freedom of speech. There is no such freedom for so-called subversives outside of Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. With "subversive" generally defined as whatever the authorities want it to be, it's very easy to end up in prison simply for speaking publicly, or taking part in a demonstration. As a Storyteller, these two legal loopholes are quite useful for keeping unruly players in line and reinforcing the fact that Kuei-jin are outsiders in, not the controllers of, the mortal world.

A Storyteller can handle the effects of mortal laws in game in a number of ways. For those Storytellers who feel particularly strict, just note down when your players break minor laws that they don't think to ask about. At some point appropriate in your chronicle, these indiscretions come back to haunt them. Storytellers more inclined to believe that characters' backgrounds should give them some idea of the legal niceties of their actions can use hidden Wits + Law rolls, if any character has the skill, to cut players some slack without giving away

the fact that they may be doing something they should be careful about.

Finally, for those Storytellers who don't think this sort of thing is for their chronicle, simply don't bother with it or say that the laws are just like those your players are used to. After all, not every chronicle need be mired in mortal attempts to impose order on the chaotic streets. In a more flexible chronicle, you can use Law like an official equivalent of Streetwise. Legal knowledge lets your characters trace who is responsible for what in the Byzantine labyrinth of Asian government. Even once you know who to deal with, you still need to know which forms to fill out, how many times you need to do that, what other information or evidence you need, and a million and one other petty details. Law allows you to resolve all this with a few simple dice rolls. Actually dealing with the bureaucrat or finding the evidence you need is another matter all together. (The optional Bureaucracy Knowledge can also be used for these functions.)

Beyond general application of legal knowledge, there are some special legal situations worth considering in a story set in Asia's urban underbelly:

FAITH AND THE LAW

Religion is often reinforced with legal sanctions in Asia, especially in Muslim countries. For example, it is illegal before the gods and mortal courts to kill a sacred cow in India, or for a woman to be immodestly dressed in Pakistan. The sanctity of mosques, shrines, churches and monasteries tends to be protected all over Asia, likewise the persons of priests and nuns. This is not to say that no one breaks such laws, but even intimidating the local *mufti* in Malaysia or Bangladesh is illegal (something unlikely to occur to Westerners). Almost any religious stricture that the Storyteller can think of probably has official legal sanction somewhere in Asia, and though most such laws are no longer enforced, they're still on the books and can be used if the authorities wish to. A good example of this sort of legal abuse is the enforcement of an old religious law against sodomy against political opponents of the present regime in Malaysia. Such selective charges have the double effect of undermining the opponent's public standing while also being very hard to defend against, especially if the government is fabricating evidence. Many characters like to think that as Kuei-jin they are above petty human superstitions, but failing to be aware of local religious beliefs can create problems far more serious than getting a few dirty looks.

DEATH AND TAXES

Tax evasion is illegal in all countries, but it is also endemic in Asian developing nations. In poor



countries without well-developed banking or financial structures, the government can't catch tax evaders, so it rarely bothers trying — unless the characters are making a nuisance of themselves, in which case an audit could be called and the fun begins. Lawyers and accountants, records and receipts — not the stuff you might think a street-level story is made of, but money is the goal for most mortals and the authorities take a great deal of interest in following it if motivated to do so. Keeping a set of books with all the right figures to show a loss or no assets at all can allow characters to get out of this easily enough; the key is having them available if the tax man comes calling unexpectedly.

TRAVEL

Travel restrictions are something with which Westerners have little experience. Military bases and other important places are out of bounds, but the idea of needing official permission to move to a new house or travel interstate is truly alien for most of us. In the most authoritarian Asian countries, like China, North Korea, Vietnam and Burma, such restrictions are the law. Even in more democratic countries like Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia, the government likes to keep an eye on people when they move around and requires residents to register with local authorities. Such restrictions are an inconvenience for a Kuei-jin, an annoying mortal intervention in their unives, with the potential for revealing all sorts of inconvenient information. Yet the more restrictive the country, the more bureaucratic it becomes, and with the right paperwork you can do anything you want. A Cathayan who wants a trouble-free life, moving as he wishes, needs to be able to present the police and other petty officials with all the necessary passes and permits; to do that, he has to know where and how to get them.

ARTIFACTS AND ARCHEOLOGY

Historical artifacts are a sensitive issue in Asian countries because they lost so many during colonialism, and so the rules governing archeology and the trade in artifacts are very strict. Some Asian countries even have separate government departments with police powers to maintain, protect and track down their national treasures. With their interest in history, mysticism and jade, as well as their belief that they are above the laws of mortal society, Kuei-jin find these bodies more difficult to deal with than the police proper. While the illegal trade in artifacts is extensive, running into trouble is an unnecessary risk if a Cathayan knows what she's doing. Again, everything comes down to the pretty pieces of paper that mortals love so much. Want to transport a gold Buddha from Bangkok to Manila? No problem if you have the right export permit. Need to dig through

the ruins of a temple in Manchuria? Get the permission of a certain official and the mortals may even do the work for you.

ALLIES (BACKGROUND)

Having people you trust willing come to your aid is extremely important on the streets, even for one of the Ten Thousand Demons. Trust is the rarest commodity in this unforgiving environment, and anyone deserving of it is worth their weight in gold. Use the Allies Background as described in the main rules, but remember that in Asia the concept of mutual obligation (*guanxi*) is extremely strong. If an ally does you favors, you owe her favors in return. You cannot interact with anyone on the streets, mortals or otherwise, without becoming enmeshed in ties of honor and obligation. Of course, a character need not honor his obligations, but failure to do so is bound to alienate allies and sully the character's reputation. Gaining new allies and keeping others becomes that much harder.

CONTACTS (BACKGROUND)

Streetwise may let you know who and where to go to for something; contacts are the people with whom you have an ongoing interaction. The Contacts Background, like Allies, follows the basic rules but with a darker, harder edge. There is nothing resembling trust when dealing with contacts; instead, both parties know exactly how much they distrust each other — a fine distinction that makes for good business. Never let the characters (or the players) forget that last word: *business*. Contacts aren't like allies, they're in it for the money or some other appropriate reward. The greater the risk, the less likely a contact is to come through and the greater the reward they want. Contacts have their own agendas, and a few false leads or some deliberate trawling for information from the players is par for the course in such dealings. For those Storytellers who wish to involve the supernatural night closely in their street games, contacts need not be limited to mortals. Kuei-jin can see into the spirit worlds with (relative) ease, and its unusual inhabitants make for interesting contacts who can easily introduce a little unwanted excitement into the characters' unives.

FAME (BACKGROUND)

Standing out in the crowd is not necessarily couth in Asia. While the Fame Background basically works as set out in the main rules, the effects are quite different. Being well-known, for instance, may make violent retribution for an indiscretion more likely, as the greater the exposure of an incident, the greater the likelihood of public loss of face. Nor is a wealthy

and well-known individual going to find that her fame gets her respect. She may get the opposite if slum dwellers think her celebrity came from kowtowing to the regime or exploiting the common man, for example. Among the tradition-minded, a certain amount of decorum and modesty is expected, and those who fail to abide by such rules find themselves objects of derision no matter how famous they are. These takes on Fame aren't affected by the reason for the character's notoriety; whether for a gangster or an actress, society's rules in Asia tend to be less flexible than in the West, and those who don't abide by them often find that society is bigger than they are.

Fame does have its uses in Asia, however. For example, it frequently helps overcome any limitations placed on a character because of her ethnic or religious background. If you're famous, people tend to be more forgiving than they are of normal people. But even in this case, fame is a double-edged sword. Improper acts can quickly turn fame into infamy and multiply the effect of an "unacceptable" background. It is just this sort of stimulus that can lead to mob violence, so a famous character had better watch what she says. Fame should also reduce difficulties when dealing with people whom the Storyteller decides are impressed by the character's reputation, perhaps even getting the character more than he bargained for. Many poor and illiterate Asians treat people as their reputation paints them, even if that reputation for crime-busting and being a friend of the common man is a purely fictional persona created by the cinema. On the streets, nothing comes without a price.

HERD (BACKGROUND)

Easy marks are not hard to come by on Asia's bitter streets, and some Storytellers may wish to increase the number of vessels gained per point if players are interested in building a herd among the poor and desperate. Superstition and poverty make religious organizations and charitable funds two easy Scarlet Screens to establish to hide a Cathayan's hunger. Indeed, in the darkest and most hopeless areas of Asia's big cities, Kuei-jin have little need to hide their feeding at all — terrorizing the population of a shanty into submission and feeding as a Kuei-jin desires is a common choice and the poor have no official recourse. The same goes for those unfortunate accidents (usually involving a *chih-mei*) that leave a tattered corpse. The police probably aren't called and, if the victim doesn't have a family to take care of burial, the body lies where it is left until stray dogs and rats have gnawed it clean.

Herds of poverty-stricken vessels have their drawbacks, however. The poorer the herd, the more likely tainted Chi (from industrial waste or poor health) is to be a problem, in addition to the annoyance of

having to replenish the herd regularly as disease, starvation, and the general violence of the streets takes its toll.

INFLUENCE (BACKGROUND)

Being owed favors by political movers and shakers is even more useful on the Asian streets than in the West. Checks and balances from democratic institutions or human rights laws rarely exist to get in the way of patronage, but this situation also makes Asian politics even more cutthroat. Quite often, "retirement" after losing a political battle means a prison cell at the very least. Corruption charges appear out of the new regime's hat and that's that. Kuei-jin who have influence, therefore, are playing with fire. If any of their powerful mortal connections need a situation taken care of, the Cathayan had better listen up because political defeats can lead to purges where all the loser's associates and allies meet the same unpleasant fate. Even in less dire situations, being on the wrong side of Asian politics means endless harassment and difficulty in getting even the most basic cooperation from government institutions and private businesses, to the point of becoming a pariah in official affairs. Anything that a Storyteller can think of to make life unpleasant wouldn't be too far from the truth.

Using these ideas in a game brings a new level of danger and complexity to a chronicle. For this reason, consider their use carefully before introducing them. Scheming officials and subtle power plays are not quite the level of action a **Killing Streets** game should aim for, but they can still have a place in your chronicle (see **Chapter Three: Storytelling**). You might like to think about limiting the geographic scope of your game to take full advantage of the suggestions above. Whether you set your story in a single vast city like Saigon or a district or small country like Singapore, the more limited range of play and poorer resources available to the government make it less likely that a character's political ties will allow her to run roughshod over a Storyteller's carefully laid plans. Even so, players should be forced to pay a price for this help by becoming involved in the lowest rung of political games, the cat and mouse fighting between political loyalists for supporters and money on the streets.

THROUGH A BROKEN MIRROR, DARKLY

The streets tend to be a prosaic setting, somewhat removed from the mystical and spiritual aspects of **Kindred of the East**. But the dawning of the Sixth Age is changing some of this, literally bring pieces of hell to the urban underworld. In certain areas the



corruption of the natural order has made the Wall semi-permeable, allowing a limited merging of the Yomi and mortal realms. Called "broken mirrors" by the Kuei-jin, these places are full of shattered mortals and spirits, all preyed upon by devils reveling in the corruption around them and the half-mortal state they have acquired, a glimpse of the future under a Demon Emperor.

WHERE AND WHY

Broken mirrors are isolated phenomena for now, and if you want to use the idea of emergent Yomi Realms, you should site them very specifically for your chronicle. The areas need not be physically hidden, but they should be places where hell already seems to be on Earth for many of the inhabitants. Mortal pain should be your guide to placing broken mirrors. Some concrete suggestions appear below.

THE WALL AND PAIN

Broken mirrors form in places that violate the natural order of things, places where the Wall is strong because of a lack of ambient Chi, places devoid of natural life or spiritualism. Such a separation from the spiritual often reflects (and helps promote) a lack of hope among the locals. When misery and pain are continually poured into the void left by the natural world, slowly a rift to the Yomi World opens. The amount of suffering has to be substantial enough to cause an insidious inversion in the role of local spirit guardians. These entities become so totally crushed that their existences are unbearable and they hammer on the Wall from the Mirror Lands, trying to destroy the cause of their pain. The spirits of mortals who die under the horrific conditions of these hells-in-the-making become trapped as well, hammering on the other side of the Wall, trying to gain admittance to the Spirit Realms and some surcease from the torment that has followed them even in death. Even the living mortals must exist in the very essence of suffering: pain without malice, pain without end, a gray amorphous nothingness that kills hope even as it inflicts agony. This requirement means that torment from an identifiable nemesis is rarely enough; the crushing hopelessness of slavery or even of the worst corporate culture is more effective. The mortals concerned must believe that escape is impossible — were their tormentor to vanish, another would just replace him. When all these conditions are met, then the Wall begins to sunder, weakening enough to allow the passage of Chi from the mortal world to the Spirit Realms. This process builds until the faintest traces of Chi from this hellish place reach the Yomi Realms.

A CONVERGENCE OF TAINTED CHI

The tainted Chi of these tortured mortal lands attracts the Yomi Realms. The affected regions' low levels of natural Chi are infected by what can only be described as the spiritual essence of pain, which arises from the constant suffering within these places and bad *feng shui* that causes it to multiply on itself rather than dissipate. The mix produces a taint not unlike the Demon Chi of the Yomi Realms; when this Chi connects to the seething spiritual morass of those realms, it sets up a current. Slowly the movement of Demon Chi from the Yomi Realms to these mortal hellholes grows and the local Mirror Lands are absorbed into the Yomi Realm. Eventually the Wall becomes porous, allowing devils to infect the mortal world directly and sucking the spirits of these places further into Yomi forevermore.

The nature of this suffering-tainted Chi determines what Yomi Realm is attracted. Thankfully, mortals are nowhere near as inventive as devils and very few places in Yomi are like anywhere on Earth. Indeed, so far only the Wicked City has formed any lasting connections with areas of urban blight. The Hell of Burrowing Maggots also has a growing link with centers of disease and pestilence, but it is less secure (see p. 78). Pessimistic Kuei-jin elders predict that as the Sixth Age progresses, more and more hells will expand into the Middle Kingdom until there is no difference between the two and a Demon Emperor reigns over all.

Certainly, other Yama Kings and their *akuma* are working to make up ground lost to Mikaboshi and his Wicked City. So feel free to add more hells to the list if you have a few favorites that you'd like to inflict on the world (and the characters in your chronicle). The only real limitation is that the suffering in the hells should bear some resemblance to the suffering in the chosen mortal location.

A FEW NICE SPOTS IN HELL

Urban blight, corporate banality, rampant egos and greed, amorality, and the hopelessness of those caught in a system without natural purpose are the elements that the Wicked City and a few of worst urban centers in Asia have in common. Few mortal cities are utterly without hope, however, and so stable broken mirrors are rare despite Asia's ever-growing metropolises. In some cases, the affected zone is only an office or a building, but once he has his claws in, Mikaboshi sets about expanding his hold. Legions of corrupted architects, social workers and engineers are spawned and sent out to further the blight as the Yama King seeks to draw more and more of the mortal world into his grasp. Mikaboshi's agents have had the most success in the banking centers of Hong Kong, the Shinjuku district in Tokyo, on Paoan Street in Taipei, and downtown Bangkok.

The stinking foulness of the garbage created by a major metropolis is something that most mortals have little wish to endure. For some, however, driven by poverty, starvation and utter desperation, these places become home. In lean-tos built of detritus, the urban poor eat what other people have thrown out, rotting and fetid. They spend all day digging through the stinking heaps, looking for anything of value that they might be able to sell. In many ways these hopeless souls, afflicted by disease and blighted by starvation, are human maggots burrowing through the waste of a careless and brutal society. Despite Mikaboshi's pride at what his Wicked City has achieved, Rangda has more footholds in the mortal world than he. Almost every major metropolis in South and Southeast Asia has a pit of reeking despair where the Hell of Burrowing Maggots has started to emerge. From Calcutta to Manila and Jakarta to Bangkok, Rangda's minions are infecting the long-ignored dumping zones of Asia.

SYSTEMS AND EFFECTS

Within broken mirrors, the laws of the mortal world still govern, not those of Yomi. However, only a very careful or very foolish Kuei-jin uses mystical powers in these tainted places, for the results of even seemingly innocuous actions can be an eternity of suffering in Yomi proper. There are also many residents who possess strange powers or are possessed by bizarre spirits, beings whose actions are as much influenced by Yomi as by the mortal world. The sections below lay out various systems to simulate such dangers and terrors.

EVERYDAY EFFECTS

There is no discernable physical sign of entering a broken mirror and no special difficulty doing so. Indeed, millions of mortals move into such zones every day to work in mindless jobs or return to the squalor in which they live. More aware of their nature than mortals, however, Kuei-jin may feel a sense of malice in the blighted areas. You can ask players to make Perception + Awareness or Perception + Enigmas rolls to pinpoint the feeling, but all Cathayans feel their P'o stir within them. The first time a character experiences this sensation, the player should make a standard check for Shadow Soul.

There is no normal Chi to be found in broken mirrors, only Demon Chi, or Chi so corrupted by suffering as to be its equivalent. This prevalence of Demon Chi empowers a Kuei-jin's P'o while she is within a broken mirror. The Hun faces a +2 difficulty penalty on all Shadow Nature rolls; once one fails, the P'o remains in control at least until the Kuei-jin leaves the broken mirror. A truly cunning P'o may come to realize this and seek to remain, allowing it to maintain its control over many nights. Demon Chi

can be refreshed as fast as a Cathayan desires, though feeding requires a Shadow Nature roll, the tainted Chi being so rich in Demonic power that consuming it causes the P'o to rise up.

Akuma revel in the corruption of the broken mirrors, and the extra powers they gain through the closeness of the Yomi Realms makes them incredibly dangerous opponents. Clever *akuma* have learned to keep havens within these corrupted areas, strongholds to retreat to if they are threatened or perfect locations from which to ambush unsuspecting enemies. More than one Kuei-jin has met Final Death when an *akuma* they have been hunting suddenly turns the tables on the friendly ground of a broken mirror. The *akuma*'s player gains a -1 difficulty bonus for all powers, -2 if the infernalist serves the Yama King who controls the broken mirror. The *akuma* can also draw as much Demon Chi as he desires if he can absorb Chi via osmosis or breath. This makes an *akuma* very dangerous and you should give your players plenty of warning — or an escape route — before setting them up for a night of devil hunting in a broken mirror.

Broken mirrors have so far not appeared near dragon nests. The reasons for this are not known, though some Kuei-jin speculate that the natural flow of Chi to such sites does not allow for the build-up of taint required to build a bridge to Yomi. Rangda and Mikaboshi would certainly like to be able to expand broken mirrors under their sway to include such powerful sites; the potential for them to corrupt the Chi of entire regions is too tempting a possibility to ignore. In Tokyo, for instance, the fighting between Mikaboshi's minions in Shinjuku and the varied *shen* protecting the large dragon nest under the Imperial Palace in Kanzai has only just started, but it promises to be a brutal and uncompromising war of extermination.

The immoral perversions of Yomi warp mortals who live within these corrupted places. Violence, lust, despair and all the worst human traits multiply, while murders, rapes, robberies and suicides become accepted facts of life in a broken mirror. Debauched revelries, domestic violence, incest, back-stabbing ambition, informing, and pure malice are second nature to many residents; even cannibalism pops up among them. Any concept of human morality or the mandate of Heaven vanishes beneath a swelter of hatred, pain and the pointlessness of existence. The Chi of such mortals is tainted as mentioned above and their corruption makes them highly susceptible to possession by Yomi spirits, though some Kuei-jin claim there is little difference between the mortals living in these little hells and bakemono in any event.

Bakemono within a broken mirror are very dangerous, mainly because they can't be truly killed.

Elsewhere in the mortal world, killing the host that a Yomi spirit has infested also kills the spirit (or at least sends it screaming back to Hell); in a broken mirror, with the powers of Yomi so close, the spirits simply leaps to another target. After a host is destroyed, a successful Willpower roll against a difficulty of 8 will allow the bakemono to take possession of another mortal body. The higher the number of successes, the shorter the time this takes. How long exactly is up to the Storyteller, using the drama of the moment and strength of the characters as the best factors determining whether the bakemono posses the yuppie in the office overlooking the fighting and jumps right back into the fray.

The only solution to this dilemma is to lure the bakemono out of the broken mirror, where the normal rules of the mortal world reassert themselves, or to enter Yomi and destroy the spirit there. Bakemono are numerous in broken mirrors because demonic spirits can move into Yomi relatively easily, and Mikaboshi and Rangda both find many uses for their possessed servants. From policemen to tea ladies, characters will find the demon-haunted in every level of society, sometimes with little purpose other than to further the misery of the inhabitants, even by such small acts of petty cruelty as issuing parking tickets and serving awful tea. Generally, however, bakemono are relatively subtle despite their numbers and powers. The Yama Kings know that time is on their side, and aside from seeking to stop any attempts to repair the Wall in the broken mirrors, they are content to let mortals condemn themselves with only the slightest of help.

DISCIPLINES AND RITES

The unhealthy situation in a broken mirror affects several Kuei-jin abilities, making them difficult or outright dangerous to use. Quite often, Cathayans discover an area's hell-taint after experiencing some of these difficulties.

- **Equilibrium:** Equilibrium focuses on the natural flow of Chi, but within a broken mirror there is no such thing, especially as far as its denizens are concerned. To reflect this, all Equilibrium attempts suffer a +2 difficulty penalty. Also, attempts to actually manipulate the Chi in other beings (per Chi Mastery) always fail. Any attempt to corrupt the Chi flow in a resident of a broken mirror has the reverse effect, healing damage taken by the victim, though the effect wears off in a number of rounds equal to the Equilibrium successes.

- **Tapestry:** Tapestry is the worst-affected discipline. Kuei-jin find themselves unknowingly reaching into Yomi with this power, only to discover that Demon Chi acts very differently than normal Chi. The following effects are unavoidable by any but the most powerful *arhat*. Spirit Call brings forth only malign spirits, who will attack on a fumble. Chi Ward fails, but draws devil-possessed mortals who feel the tremors in the Wall's broken shards. Chi Shaping only brings bad joss, always towards the weaver or his *wu*. Ride the Dragon takes a Kuei-jin straight into the appropriate hell, but not back out (unless the Storyteller is feeling particularly compassionate). Chi Rift does the same and draws in all of the affected Kuei-jin's nearby companions as well.

- **Demon Arts:** The Demon Arts work all too well where Yomi is strong. Consequently, players find all their difficulties reduced by 1, though the Hun's difficulty for the subsequent Shadow Soul roll is raised by 2 (as noted above).

- **Cultivation:** Practitioners of Cultivation often find themselves overpowered by their P'o within a broken mirror. Any attempt to communicate with a P'o, their own or another's, results in the character making a Shadow Nature roll with the standard +2 difficulty penalty to the Hun (as noted above).

- **Rites:** For the most part, Kuei-jin rites (those that aren't purely social in nature) simply do not work in a broken mirrors; the natural order is too perverted. A Cathayan who so desired could create rites specific to these Yomi-infected places; certain *akuma* probably have done so, but such rites would have few results other than the malefic. All but two rites simply fail. Behold the Spirits Doorway always finds a doorway, but it leads straight to the appropriate hell. The Rite of Supplication opens a gateway into the appropriate hell that stays open until the ritualist is dead or a specially created jade plug is used to close it. The plug can be created using pieces of blue and white jade, which are blessed by a Kuei-jin ancestor (or mortal holy man) who knows the appropriate rituals, and then thrown simultaneously into the gate, the blue from the mortal side, the white from the Yomi side. This final requirement means that someone has to volunteer to stay behind and escape from Yomi the hard way.



PUTTING THE MIRROR BACK TOGETHER AGAIN

Inevitably, when characters discover that their least favorite Yama King is moving in next door, they will want to try to evict him. Doing so is not an easy process. In fact, with the slow turning of the Wheel toward the Sixth Age, there is no sure way to repair a broken mirror and restore the proper Chi balance.

That doesn't mean it's impossible, simply that no single method works in all cases. Following are some elements and strategies that can help heal a blighted place. As Storyteller, decide which one (or ones) are necessary for a particular spot. Use the size and duration of the broken mirror as an indication of relative difficulty. Sealing the Wall to Yomi in an area that just became porous may only require defeating a few minor spirits and fostering some positive mortal activity; repairing a blight that has grown for decades could involve a long quest into the bowels of Yomi itself.

Possible strategies include:

- **Mortal Endeavor:** The basic prerequisite for healing a broken mirror is to foster a sense of hope in this hopeless place. Accomplishing this is extremely difficult, not only because a broken mirror is so vile, but because Kuei-jin are not the best candidates for making humans at ease. It requires a subtle touch, influencing truly generous souls to risk themselves in the worst places on Earth.

- **Rituals:** Purification rituals used to be far more common among the Kuei-jin than they are today. Many of the old ways have failed or been sabotaged by *akuma* and other servants of Yomi. Still, some ancestors still know the secrets of purification and might be convinced to help heal a broken mirror.

- **Spiritual Aid:** Nature and life spirits can play an important role in healing Yomi taint, but gaining their aid is rarely easy. The local spirits have already been consumed or harmed by the mirror, so few of their fellows want to risk the same fate. Kuei-jin must strike a bargain with powerful spirits to bring their resources to bear.

- **Defeating Yomi:** Broken mirrors are more than a force of tainted nature, they are the work of various devils from the Yama World. Defeating the creatures who are actively maintaining and furthering the mirror can help heal the land. In the case of small and new mirrors, these may be minor devils; in major areas of taint, the Yama Kings themselves may take a personal interest.

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