

WIRE-FU

A WUSHU GAME OF HIGH-FLYING,
HONG KONG ACTION!



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INTRODUCTION

"Here's the plan: We go in, I start hittin' people hard in the face. See where it takes us." --Angel

Wire-Fu is a Hong Kong style of film making that spans genres from wuxia to sci-fi. It's characterized by elaborate fight choreography, gratuitous use of special effects, and a complete disregard for the laws of physics. Its heros can take on entire armies without breaking a sweat! They do what needs to be done, even if that means doing the impossible.

The most famous example of Hollywood Wire-Fu is the Matrix Trilogy. (Say what you want about the sequels, but Reloaded has some of the most fantastic action sequences ever caught on film!) Those movies made excellent use of Yuen Woo-Ping, the grand master of Wire-Fu fight choreography. His other masterworks include Hero, Fist of Legend, Black Mask, Iron Monkey, Once Upon a Time in China, and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. My personal list of must-see flicks concludes with The One, Charlie's Angels, The Transporter, and Blade.

If you've never seen any of those films, you need to put down the game and go watch a few now, now, now! Back? Whew, that was a close one. This book is designed as a guide to all things Wire-Fu, but there's just no substitute for familiarity with the source material. The Wushu rules set allows you to emulate the wild mayhem of Wire-Fu movies by giving you complete control over the action, but this means you'll have to think on your feet. A lot. Two hours of Wushu gaming can be

more exhilarating, and more exhausting, than six hours of miniatures combat. Be prepared.

Follow the Wire-Fu training regimen and you'll be just fine. The section titled "I Know Kung-Fu" gives copious advice on recreating the signature style of these films in a role-playing game. After that, you'll find character templates from Enlightened Masters to Cyborgs, and classic villains from Evil Eunuchs to Kung-Fu Vampires. Three "Worlds of Wire-Fu" demonstrate the breadth of setting options available. Finally, you get over 15 pages of Kick-Ass Examples of Play, each more kick-ass than the last!

If you're already a Wushu fan, you should know that Wire-Fu does replace the original Wushu Core Rules, just like Pulp-Fu did. However, it also includes a number of new rules and options that appear in neither its predecessors nor Wushu Open. Also like Pulp-Fu, it does not reproduce any of the material in the Wushu Guides.

Game designers take note: this is also a prime example of what it takes to adapt Wushu to a new genre or style of play. The Wushu Open license allows you to write and publish your own Wushu games, and the core mechanic can be applied to anything from military espionage to psychological horror. All you need to do is catalogue the signature tropes, heros, and villains.

You can get a free copy of Wushu Open, plus details on all the other Wushu games and freebies, at...

www.Bayn.org/wushu

WUSHU

Hong Kong action movies have always been at odds with realism. Fortunately for us, their conflict is easily resolved with a series of savage kicks to realism's face! Impossible leaps, insane acrobatics, and victory against overwhelming odds are all staples of the genre... and the essential elements of any Wire-Fu role-playing game.

Sadly, traditional RPGs have long been in league with realism. They penalize players who want to, say, kick seven mooks with one spin kick by piling negative modifiers onto their roll, which makes them less likely to succeed. The inevitable result is that smart players stick to simple, boring actions and take a tactical approach to combat. Wushu breaks up this insidious alliance with a core mechanic that rewards players for vivid descriptions and over-the-top stunts by making them *more* likely to succeed, each and every time.

Traditional role-playing games also alienate themselves from kung-fu movies by segmenting time into rounds of only a few seconds each. In the movies, you get to see characters trade a whole series of attacks, defenses, and counter-attacks before the camera cuts away. In role-playing games, players are usually limited to one action per round, and they only get enough time for one swing, punch, or pull of the trigger. This takes the back-and-forth pacing that's essential for exciting fight scenes and stabs it straight through the heart!

In Wushu, players are encouraged to make as many attacks, leaps, dives, parries, and ripostes as they like before

any dice are rolled. Each "round" is divided into two parts, which everyone completes at the same time. First, the group **Describes** the scene; this is the important part because their narration determines what *actually happens* in the game world. Then, they **Resolve** their dice rolls to see *how well* it all worked.

DESCRIPTION

Wushu works its magic via a dice pool mechanic where the size of your pool depends on how elaborately you describe your actions. Each **Detail** you add to your description earns you a die. These could be separate stunts, witty one-liners, cinematic flourishes, pretty much anything that enhances your game. (You always get at least 1 die, just for doing *something*.)

For example, someone who says "I dodge to the side" gets 1 die. Someone who says "I dodge to the side / and grab his sword blade with my chopsticks / before punching him in the face" gets 3 dice. Someone who says "I catch his sword blade with my chopsticks / when it's chisel edge is less than an inch from my face, / then twist it around with one deft motion, / jam it into the bastard's gut, / and whisper 'Can't you see I'm trying to eat, here?'" gets 5 dice. Thus, anything that contributes to the atmosphere and energy of your game becomes smart tactics.

Of course, not every Detail is appropriate to every game. That's why GMs and players have the right to **veto** any Detail that rubs them the wrong way. To make this work, it's important to agree on the tone and style you want for your game *before* you start playing.

To control the pacing and tone of a game, GMs can put a **pool limit** on the number of dice any player can roll at once. 3-4 dice per turn usually results in quicker, more brutal combat; it's a good limit for unimportant scenes or warm-ups that happen early in a game. When things get more dramatic, you'll want 6-8 dice per turn. This is especially true when fighting major villains; you'll want a high enough limit that you can attack and counter-attack many times before stopping to roll. However, that doesn't mean you *have* to earn the max number of dice every time. Trying to tack on an extra stunt or two at the end can really take the steam out of your description!

On the other hand, players may choose to **filibuster** when a pool limit is in place. Instead of grabbing dice as they add each Detail to their description, the player just launches into a narrative that's more than long, complex, or entertaining enough to deserve the maximum number of dice. It streamlines play, especially during mook fights, and it's just plain fun to watch.

Players can also work together to narrate a scene if they take turns offering 1-2 Details at a time until everyone's happy with their contributions. This allows players to bounce ideas off each other and let their characters interact during a fight. You can encourage this communal approach by asking your players to end their descriptions with a **Pass**: some open-ended Detail that the next person can pick up and use in their description. Tossing weapons to each other, causing collateral damage, and endangering bystanders would all make great Passes.

RESOLUTION

Wushu characters are defined by their Traits, which are rated from 1-5. When it's time to roll them bones, pick a Trait that's relevant to the actions you described. (If you don't have a relevant Trait, the default rating is 2.) Every die that rolls above that Trait's rating is a failure; those that come up equal to or less are successes. If no one's resisting you, one success is all you need. If someone is resisting, they'll have a bunch of dice to roll, too. Whoever gets the most successes comes out on top. (Ties go to the players, being the heros and all.)

The key to playing Wushu is to understand that everything happens *exactly as the players describe it, when they describe it*. (This is sometimes called the **Principle of Narrative Truth**.) Rolling the dice just tells you how much further those actions advance the scene. In a way, the dice are only there to let you know when to stop fighting (or chasing, or talking, or whatever).

For actions that don't bear their fruit immediately, you can let players **Hold Dice** after they give their description. For instance, a hacker who's setting up security precautions or surveillance would describe their technical schemes in glorious detail, then keep their dice off to the side until the GM decides that someone's trying to circumvent them. Then, both characters roll at the same time. You can also let the entire group build up extra dice with clever tactical planning, then draw bonus dice out of the pool during combat.

SCAB ROLLS

Every once in a while, you might want to roll for something without making a big production out of it. That's when you use a **Scab Roll**. Just grab a number of dice equal to your relevant Trait and compare the highest roll to this scale:

- 1 = A failure so horrible as to defy comprehension.
- 2 = A really bad, probably embarrassing failure.
- 3 = A regular, garden variety failure.
- 4 = A success, but with negative complications.
- 5 = A good success. Mission (barely) accomplished.
- 6 = A solid, professional success. Good work!

KUNG-FU FIGHTIN'

Because it's the centerpiece of any Wire-Fu game, and rightfully so, combat gets a few extra wrinkles. First of all, you have to worry about both offense and defense. That means splitting up your dice pool. **Yang dice** are used to injure people, run 'em off the road, kick ass, take names, and so forth. **Yin dice** are used to defend yourself from all of the above. (It might be a good idea to have two different colors of dice on the table.) Each successful Yin die negates one successful Yang die. If even one attack gets through, you're done!

Don't worry; it's not as dire as it sounds. Player-characters all get 3 points of **Chi** to protect them. Each point can be cashed in to negate one Yang success *after* the dice are rolled. (I use poker chips to keep track.) A character is removed from a fight when they take a hit and don't have any Chi left to counter it. When you're down to zero Chi, it just means you're teetering on the brink of oblivion. GMs should give players back their Chi as dramatically appropriate, usually between scenes.

Since Wushu encourages (nay, expects!) players to carry out **multiple actions** with a single roll of the dice, you'll eventually have someone try to use two different Traits at once. During a fight, the last thing you want is to bog down play while you sort out which dice are going to be rolled against which Trait. Instead, just decide which Trait is *most* relevant to the whole description and use that as the target number for everything.

Take, for instance, someone who likes to use telekinesis with their kung-fu. If they say "I nail him with a Telekinetic Blast

(tm), which knocks him through a wall, then I kick him hard in the face for good measure," they'd fold that kick into the telekinesis action and roll it all against their "Psychic" Trait. On the other hand, if they say "I duck under his kick, then deliver a telekinetically boosted open-hand strike that sends him plowing through a wall" they'd fold that TK boost into their combat action and roll it all against their "Kung-Fu" Trait.

VS MOOKS

Ninjas, zombies, gangers, cops... by any name, mooks are born to die in droves! Mowing down dozens, if not hundreds, of nameless goons is a Wire-Fu tradition with a long and proud history. In fact, Mooks are little more than set pieces whose only reason for being is to make the player-characters look good. They don't have Traits, they don't have Chi, and they never roll any dice. They're just an abstraction. Players are free to describe however many they want, wherever they want, in order to describe all the rapid-fire, ass kicking stunts they want. (Of course, GMs can reserve a few for guarding escape routes, taking hostages, and so forth.)

When the ninjas start jumping out of the woodwork, assign the whole lot of them a **Threat Rating**. (You can also assign these to non-human challenges like ticking time bombs, collapsing buildings, treacherous climbs, and so on.) The exact value depends on how many players you have, your dice pool limit, and how long you want the scene to last. Figure out how many Yang successes your players are likely to generate per

round and multiply by the number of rounds you want to see. Season to taste.

As you may have guessed, each Yang success your players bring to bear reduces the Threat Rating by 1. When it reaches zero, the mooks are either all dead or running in abject terror. Conversely, you shouldn't let players describe taking out the whole group before the Threat gets close to zero. If such a thing does happen, and there's some Threat remaining after the dice are rolled, you'll have to bring in some reinforcements, let previously beaten mooks get up for another round, or use the Last Mook Standing rule (see below).

Now, since mooks don't get to roll dice, they won't have any Yang to throw at the PCs. Instead, you should assume that the mob gets in at least one good hit each round. Anyone who doesn't roll at least 1 Yin success has to cash in a point of Chi or get knocked out. (For more dangerous mooks, you can raise it to 2-3 hits per round.)

Mook fights are the best times to filibuster, 'cuz the mooks don't get a chance to defend themselves. However, your players don't have to go for the max dice pool every time. Instead, they should pick up however many dice they think their description will warrant, then start kickin' some ass! If you think someone's picking up too many dice, just tell them to put some back. If you have to, invoke the Veto rule (ya hard ass).

You can top off a mook fight by giving the **Last Mook Standing** a chance to bloody the heros' noses before they do him in. Rather than assume the one hit per round, go ahead and describe a few decent stunts for the last mook. He could pull out

some serious firepower and go down with guns a' blazin'! Or he could really lay into one PC in particular, giving them a nasty scar or grievous injury to remember him by. Build up a pool of Yang dice and roll them against a target number of 3. Once the Threat reaches zero, the last mook's down for the count!

VS NEMESSES

If you think nothing can challenge someone who just tore through a whole legion of ninja, you're dead wrong. Mooks are just the warm-up. Nemesses have kung-fu of their own, they get to roll dice, and they even have Traits! Most harrowing of all, they get their own Chi (usually 1-5 points, but feel free to go nuts).

As befits such worthy opponents, Nemesses must always be fought **mono-a-mono**. If two or more players absolutely need to gang up on a Nemesis, they'll have to do it in one of the following ways. First, they can take turns trading blows with the Nemesis, completing both their Description and Resolution phases before letting their allies have a go. If you've set a dice pool limit, the second option is to have the players split the max dice between them. If the Nemesis gets to roll 6 dice, two players would get 3 dice each, or three players would get 2 dice each. The Nemesis would then split their successes between their opponents.

The other thing that elevates Nemesses above mooks is that they actually get to defend themselves. (Gasp!) This is where you get that furious back-and-forth pacing we talked about. The player and the GM should take turns providing 2-3

Details at a time, just enough for a defensive move and a counter-attack. When both sides have maxed out their pools, let 'em roll. If the kung-fu is really flying, feel free to disregard the pool limit and roll a whole fight's worth of dice at once!

Lethal moves (decapitations, kill shots, stakes through the heart, etc.) should be saved until *after* your victim has taken that final hit, the one they don't have the Chi to pay for. If both combatants run into negative Chi on the same turn, the loser is the one who goes deepest into the hole. As usual, ties go to the players. The winner is entitled to any dramatic killing blow (or other kind of scene resolution) they wish to inflict upon their helpless victim. No dice required. This is called the **Coup de Grace**, and if anyone tries to deliver one before the proper time, smack 'em with a veto!

Nemesses don't have to be single characters, or even people! You could gather a few bodyguards around a major villain (perhaps to explain their extra Chi) and lump all their actions into the same dice pool. Mad scientist types might leave deadly traps or security measures for unwary heroes; the GM can earn dice by describing the particulars when the players encounter them, then roll against the inventor's relevant Trait.

A note on tactics: It rarely pays to hedge a Nemesis' bets. If they have a lot of Chi, or if you don't need them to survive the fight, roll most of your dice to attack. Describe some really kick-ass moves, break a few bones, whatever it takes to make your Nemesis scary as hell! If this is just a preliminary encounter and you want to make sure the Nemesis survives, roll at ton of Yin dice every round, even if most of your Details are offensive. You

can have them escape at any time, just as long as no one earns a Coup de Grace!

NOTES FOR VETERAN GAMERS

Those of you who have played other role-playing games may have been expecting a few more rules. Their absence is no oversight. If you're going to make the jump to Wushu, take the following lessons to heart...

No Weapon Damage - In Wire-Fu movies, a character's weapon of choice has more to do with their personality than tactical advantage. That's why Wushu doesn't have rules for weapon damage. Getting kicked hard in the chest hurts just as much as getting stabbed through a lung. This frees players to select weapons that say something about their characters, without giving better armed enemies an unfair advantage. However, your players can still benefit from their weapons by using them as inspiration for Details: blood dripping off the tip of a spear, the angry muzzle flash of a Desert Eagle, the way your rope dart whistles as you whip it around your head, etc.

No Initiative - Just to be explicit, there are no rules for initiative in Wushu. Who acts before who is irrelevant most of the time (all of the time, when it comes to Mook fights) and, on the occasion when someone does want to cut in, they can just ask! As long as it's for a cool stunt, nobody will mind. (In dramatic situations, like quick-draw contests or samurai duels, you can devote the entire first round to determining who strikes first.)

Dice Don't Rule - Wushu gives the players complete control over the action... by taking control away from the dice! You're probably used to phrasing your actions in terms of "I try to hit him" and then waiting for the dice to tell you whether or not you succeed. Well, stop trying to hit him, and hit him! Don't get hung up on the dice; they're just there to set the pace and introduce an element of risk. The goal isn't to "win" against the GM, it's to entertain each other with a few hours of creative, improvisational violence.

I KNOW KUNG-FU

You may have noticed that Wushu is a remarkably freeform game. You can do quite literally *anything*. There are no predetermined feats or maneuvers to confine your imagination, but that also means you get very little in terms of guidance. If you don't know your kung-fu, it can be a hard game to play.

The best way to get up to speed is to match a lot of Wire-Fu movies. (See the "Introduction" for my recommendations.) However, I've also tried to boil down that vast wealth of inspired fight choreography into a few essentials. These are the kinds of things you should be using as Details in a Wire-Fu game.

FISTS OF FURY

The first step to knowing your kung-fu is to, you know, know some kung-fu! Even the most outrageous Wire-Fu stunts are based on real martial arts techniques. You don't have to take a class, just watch a few movies and remember the basics...

Kinetic Linking - Martial arts are all about channeling force through and around your body. Every strike has to have momentum or leverage behind it. Know where your power comes from (straining muscles, use of leverage, your attacker's own momentum) and use it add Details to your actions.

Improvisation - Even an unarmed man carries many weapons: fists, feet, knees, knuckles, elbows, forehead, thumbs, teeth, even hair. If that's not enough for you, pick up a random object and hit someone with it! Even a wet towel can

become a deadly weapon in the hands of a kung-fu master!

Holds & Locks - Smacking people around is only half the battle. You can incapacitate your enemies by bending their joints backwards, stretching their tendons, and eventually making them black out from the pain. It's also a great way to immobilize weapons, especially firearms. You can knock your victims out cold by putting pressure on their carotid arteries (on either side of the neck), thus cutting off bloodflow to the brain.

More Is Better - Wuxia movies are relentlessly over the top! If you can block one sword thrust, why not twelve? If you can take on one mook and win, why not twenty? Sometimes, turning a run of the mill role-playing session into a martial arts extravaganza is just a matter of scale.

WIRE WORK

Now that the plausible stuff is out of the way, it's time for the impossible! For one reason or another (see "Excuses to Kick Ass"), Wire-Fu characters can send their opponents flying with one punch, leap tall buildings in a single bound, and perform many other feats not normally allowed by physics. When you combine this kind of superhuman strength and agility with the martial arts, you get some truly amazing stunts...

Kiai!!! - When a guy hits you with the force of a wrecking ball, it's hard not to budge a little. In fact, you're more likely to fly into the air and do a couple of backflips before crashing back to earth. If you're lucky, you'll just slide backwards a few dozen feet. Throws shouldn't just knock people to the ground, they should

launch them across the room, pound them into walls, or spin them like a top!

Wallwalking - Whether it's a trick of momentum or blatant defiance of gravity, wallwalking is a core Wire-Fu technique. The classic move is to run straight up a wall, backflip over your opponent's head, and land right behind them. My personal favorite is kicking off a wall to launch a flying spin kick at someone behind you!

Flying Kicks - Impossible leaps are what wire work is all about! Fly through the air and pummel your enemy with a flurry of rapid-fire kicks to the face. Dig your heels in, jump straight up, and twist into a tornado kick that pulverizes mooks in a 360 degree arc of pain!

Collateral Damage - Remember your Kinetic Linking? It's time to knock it up a notch! Wire-Fu masters can survive devastating hits by channeling force away from themselves and into the surrounding environment. This leads to lots of broken pillars, shattered glass, cracked pavement, obliterated furniture, it's all worth extra dice.

Dodging Bullets - One rule: If you keep moving, they can't shoot you. Never stand still while someone pulls a gun on you. Either rush in and engage them hand-to-hand or run sideways and dive for cover! In serious Wire-Fu games, you'll even be able to dodge left or right around single bullets or deflect them with whatever's handy (a sword blade, gun barrel, salad fork, etc).

COMPLICATIONS

Just like in the movies, your fight scenes can get boring if they're all just a couple of guys dukin' it out in an empty warehouse. GMs should take a note from the best screenwriters and always put some kind of extra wrinkle in their action sequences. It'll help everyone stay interested and ready to improvise! A few of the classic kung-fu complications are...

Secondary Goals - If a helpless child or valuable object is tossed into a fight, you can earn extra dice by juggling it between your blocks, kicks, and punches. (That would make an excellent Pass, by the way.) The combatants could also be trying to prevent one another from escaping, stealing something, pressing the self-destruct button, and so forth. GMs can create the old "ticking clock" effect just by saying that Something Bad will happen if the fight isn't resolved in X number of rounds.

Injuries & Handicaps - Similarly, you can spice up a fight by blinding someone, filling the room with poison gas, turning off the artificial gravity, breaking someone's leg, burning someone's hands, etc. Honorable types might be talked into handicapping themselves so that they won't have an unfair advantage over their adversary (see the new Honor rules in "Excuses to Kick Ass").

Location, Location, Location - Nothing rejuvenates a group's love of combat like an interesting fight location! Make sure to fill it with all manner of improv weapons, environmental hazards, and things that explode. Consider the possibilities of a construction site, a hospital, a hardware store, a shopping mall,

a health club, an automotive showroom, the side of a very tall building, or the outside of a moving car, boat, train, or airplane. It boggles the mind.

CINEMATICS

To emulate the movies, try using a moviemaker's tools. This requires stepping out of character from time to time, but the results are worth it! Again, watch some Wire-Fu classics and pay special attention to the following...

Camera Tricks - Always describe your actions from the best viewpoint. If you're doing a lot of spin kicks, try a bird's eye view. When you send an opponent flying, describe them hurtling towards or away from the camera. Spin your virtual camera around like a tether ball, zoom in on points of impact, and follow projectiles as they hurtle through space!

Slo-Mo - The grand-daddy of all action movie special effects is slow motion. It gives you time to appreciate things that happen very fast: bullet dodges, lightning kicks, aerial flips, and so on. Just invoking slo-mo at dramatic moments should be worth a die! (FYI - The famous "bullet-time" effect is slo-mo with a virtual camera swoop.)

SFX - Hollywood Wire-Fu movies are always full of special effects. You can use x-ray views to show breaking bones and ruptured organs. Wuxia games should be packed to the gills with pretty lights, magical fire, and whirlwinds of debris kicked up by particularly powerful moves.

FU FETISHISM

This group of fu-tastic Details may not be appropriate to every Wire-Fu game. They're most at home in wuxia settings, but you can also find them in plenty of sci-fi anime. Unless you're steeped in the wacky traditions of the martial arts or B-grade chop-sake films, they'll probably seem a little silly...

Stances & Styles - Your Striking Lotus stance is no match for my Glorious Four Winds style! Warrior-poets like to name every move in their repertoire and they *love* to recite these names to their opponents while locked in deadly combat! These bits of bizarre bravado don't have to make a whole lot of sense; as long as they add the desired atmosphere to your game, they're worth a die. Go ahead and mime a little, too.

Exotic Weapons - One's weapon of choice says a lot about one's character, so pick something unique! My faves are the tri-section staff, rope dart, kama-gusari, steel fan, and chopsticks. Never underestimate the chopsticks! Even if you're using something as boring as a sword, you can spice it up with a hidden dagger, throwing dart, or compartment filled with blinding powder. Other wacky genre favorites include incredibly long sleeves or hair (for grappling) and every ninja's best friend: throwing stars.

EXCUSES TO KICK ASS

Every Wire-Fu character needs two things: a reason to fight and an excuse to give the laws of physics the finger! However, you don't need rules for either. Wushu rewards all kinds of stunts equally, so as long as you know the source of your character's curiously strong kung-fu (and thus what kinds of stunts they should be doing), you're good to go. Just make sure it fits within your chosen setting.

As for your reason to fight, those motivations are as varied and numerous as snowflakes in a blizzard. Some staples of Wire-Fu cinema include avenging a dead master, defending friends or relatives, restoring the honor of the Shaolin, taking down a vile crime lord, overthrowing a despotic ruler, helping the helpless, protecting a holy artifact, and just trying to stay alive. Again, there are no rules for this, but characters without clear motivations are like bad Chinese food: they may taste good during the action, but you'll feel empty an hour later.

TRAITS

The only rules stuff you need is a set of Traits. All Traits start at a default rating of 2; your GM will give you 5-8 points to spend on raising them, up to a maximum rating of 5. It should go without saying that every Wire-Fu character needs a fightin' Trait! Try to make it evocative of your setting. (There Is No Spoon, Preying Mantis Style, Iron Fist Technique, Gun-Fu, etc.) You'll also need Traits for any other important skills (Hacker,

Forensics, Acupuncture, Silent as the Grave), kewl powerz (Telekinesis, Bullet-Proof, Undead), or resources (Filthy Rich, Mob Contacts, Fearsome Reputation).

Finally, your character needs a Weakness, which gets a rating of 1. This could be a love interest who's always getting them into trouble, some kind of special vulnerability (ie. wooden stakes and sunlight!), or a tragic flaw (Drunk, Egotist, Can't Refuse a Challenge). Any time a character tries to act against their Weakness, any dice that roll higher than 1 are failures!

THINGS YOU DON'T NEED

Wire-Fu characters need a lot of things: skill, courage, a high tolerance for pain, but there are wo things they *don't* need.

Gear - Generally speaking, you should assume that player-characters have on their persons any gear they need to use their Traits. Burglars should have lock picks, swordsmen should have swords, and ninjas should probably have both. In fact, making up new gadgets and weapons on the spot is a great way to earn dice!

Advancement - Wire-Fu characters start out bad ass and stay that way. You should let your players shuffle their Trait points around between sessions, if it helps them get the most out of your game, but characters should develop via their interactions with the game world, not via the accumulation of experience points. (After all, no one just gets better and better at things all the time. Expertise requires practice and there are only enough hours in the day to be an expert at so many things!)

HONOR

The concept of personal and family honor is central to many Hong Kong films. Doing the honorable thing often means giving up tactical advantage, bowing to authority, making personal sacrifices, and plenty of other things that most gamers are deeply reluctant to do. If you need a game mechanic to force honor upon the dishonorable, or make the dishonorable pay for their freedom, here ya go...

Give each of your player-characters (and Nemeses) an **Honor Trait**. It can have any rating, 1-5, and no points need to be spent on it. That's because each extreme has its own disadvantages. For some guidance, compare your character to the following scale:

- 1 - Dishonored (outlaw)
- 2 - Commoner (farmer, servant)
- 3 - Respected (merchant, soldier, monk)
- 4 - Nobility (samurai, bureaucrat, holy man)
- 5 - Leader of Men (family elder, shogun, governor)

GMs can use a character's Honor to determine how miscellaneous supporting characters react to them. Commoners will bend over backwards for Nobility, but no Respected member of society would be seen in public with an outlaw! On the other hand, a den of thieves won't tolerate a samurai in its midst for very long.

Honor also functions as a general "social skills" Trait.

You can use it to get other characters to do things via persuasion or intimidation. Scab Rolls will often suffice, but there are many ways to describe a social action: remind the target of past favors, invoke the names of respected ancestors, present an Imperial seal, throw money around, threaten slander, and so forth. Once you have your dice, roll them against your Honor rating. Most of the time, you'll only need 1 success to get what you want. Obviously, Dishonorable characters will have a much harder time than Nobility. People may not even be willing to take their money!

The disadvantage is that other characters can use your Honor to get things from you! Even a common farmer can guilt a shogun into action by citing Imperial law. (At least, they can if the shogun isn't a dishonorable bastard.) Using the same Details mentioned above, the GM constructs a persuasive argument. Then, they roll their dice against the player-characters' Honor Trait. For instance, that commoner might tell a samurai (Honor 4) that local brigands have stolen his harvest, in clear defiance of Imperial law, / and desecrated a Shinto temple that belongs to the samurai's family. That's worth 2 dice, so the GM rolls and gets a 6 and a 3. The 6 is over the samurai's Honor rating, but the 3 counts as a success and that's all the GM needs!

Now, the samurai's Honor compels him to bring the thieves to justice. If he does not, through choice or failure, his Honor rating drops by 1. However, success will not increase his Honor. That only happens when you do something honorable *without being compelled*. Even then, the player can choose to keep their Honor at its previous rating.

THE ENLIGHTENED MASTER

You understand the world in a way that most people don't. Maybe you're a Taoist who spent his life contemplating the Unity of Opposites, and now you can shape the forces of nature like clay on a spinning wheel. Maybe you're a Buddhist who reached Nirvana, but decided to return to the mortal plane and help those you left behind. Or maybe you've discovered that reality itself is a lie, and now you know how to hack it.

In any case, your martial prowess does not come from discipline, training, or natural talent. It comes from seeing the universe as it truly is, and not struggling against it in vain. You side-step the rules that keep others chained to reality. Your other skills are probably rooted in your monastic studies: medicine, philosophy, craft skills, etc. In all likelihood, you're dirt poor and try to avoid killing (though hurting is another matter entirely).

Typical Traits:

- **Tai Chi** - Real power comes from flowing with the battle, not struggling against it.
- **Self-Reliant** - A monk must be able to mend his own clothes, cook his own food, and so forth.
- **Acupuncture** - You can heal, paralyze, and even kill with nothing more than a needle.
- **Vow of Poverty** - You have no money and few valuables, just a begging bowl.

THE SECRET MASTER

The human body is capable of truly amazing things, if one has the proper instruction. You've had it since you were a child. Maybe you've mastered the lightfoot stance, a technique for slipping the bonds of gravity. Maybe you're the last of the Iron Warriors, who can punch through stone and bounce bullets off their chests. Or maybe Tibetan mysticism is your thing, and you've learned to control every molecule in your body.

Whatever your style, it's far too powerful to entrust to the unwashed masses. You are constantly hounded by young men who want to be your students, and hunted by rival masters who want to prove their style is superior to yours. They're all fools. You try not to let them distract you from your mission, whether that's guarding a sacred text, restoring your order's honor, defending the innocent, or just trying to live in peace.

Typical Traits:

- **Secret-Fu** - Your esoteric school of kung-fu.
- **Expertise** - You can identify anyone's kung-fu style after watching three moves or less.
- **Famous** - You can end fights just by revealing your name!
- **Infamous** - You have many enemies; local authorities hate having you in town.

THE GIFTED STUDENT

You're a natural when it comes to kickin' ass! Maybe it runs in your family or maybe you're just a freak with chi coming out his yin-yang. You could even be a child of destiny, born with the strength to make right some horrible wrong (and too many strangers fighting to control your fate).

In any case, you're all talent and no discipline, and that makes you dangerous... to yourself as much as to your enemies. Unless you're the last of some ancient, warrior bloodline, you probably have a master or father who's always trying to teach you technique and restraint. They say it's for your own good, but you know that, in their heart of hearts, it's because they're afraid of how powerful you could become.

Typical Traits:

- **Strong Chi** - You were born with a natural talent for every martial art, not to mention swordplay and acrobatics!
- **Brash** - The confidence of youth (and dumb luck) often compensates for lack of planning.
- **Just a Kid** - People don't take you seriously, much to their subsequent regret!
- **Overkill** - You have trouble pulling your punches. It's all or nothing, baby!

THE KUNG-FU WITCH

Most people would call you a villain, but your only crime was refusing to submit to a society that wants to keep you weak, passive, and under control. When they wouldn't teach you the skills you needed to make your own way in the world, you took them! Maybe you studied martial arts in secret; they didn't even notice you watching them while you washed their clothes and cooked their meals. Or maybe you ran off with a sacred text and lived in a cave for years, delving its kung-fu secrets.

Perhaps you use your skills to fight for the oppressed women of your land, or maybe you just want to live your own life. Either way, you're a wanted woman. The members of your former sect hunt you as a renegade, while the common people want to burn you as a witch. Now, you have enough power to defy them all!

Typical Traits:

- **Witch-Fu** - Your (probably secret) martial art of choice.
- **Witchery** - You may also know some herbalism, speak with spirits, cast curses upon the wicked, etc.
- **Righteous** - No one tells you what to do, where to go, or how to behave. No one!!!
- **Renegade** - When you rebel against society, your enemies are everywhere.

THE SAMURAI WARRIOR

Whereas most martial artists are monks or mercenaries, you are a servant of the people. You may not fly through the air or project force at a distance, but you are death incarnate to anyone who comes within reach of your blade!

Your skill and power come from training, both mental and physical. Your indoctrination began almost before you were born; a wooden sword was your first and only childhood toy. As a result, you embody every virtue of the samurai tradition: you are honest and honorable, calm in times of peace and fearless in times of war. Your every thought and deed sets an example for others to follow. To do otherwise would dishonor yourself, your family, and your ancestors.

Typical Traits:

- **Kendo** - A samurai and his weapon are inseparable... and invincible.
- **Warrior-Poet** - You can write calligraphy & recite poetry.
- **Resolute** - When a samurai sets his mind to a task, nothing can deter him.
- **Bushido Code** - Honorable in all things, a samurai serves his people and leads by example.

THE DRUNK MONK

Buddhists are supposed to give up earthly attachments, but is a life without sake really worth living? Your weakness for booze, food, or whatever else is constantly getting you in trouble at the monastery. Maybe you've even been ticked out! In any case, your Honor has pretty much bottomed out.

However, there's one thing they can never take from you: your phenomenal martial arts skills! Back in the day, you may have been a Gifted Student. Or perhaps your smelly exterior is just a disguise for an Enlightened Master or Shadow Warrior on the run. Drunken Boxing is probably your signature style. You don't *have* to be drunk to fight, it just so happens that you usually are. Anyone who takes that to mean you're an easy target is in for a nasty surprise!

Typical Traits:

- **Drunken Master** - You can strike from off-balance positions & take a hit like a pro.
- **Gross-Fu** - You occasionally use your abysmal personal hygiene as a weapon.
- **Wise Drunk** - You pull enlightened sayings and obscure knowledge out of your ass.
- **Repulsive** - Not every weapon can be sheathed. Your stench keeps even the pigs at bay!

THE SHADOW WARRIOR

When heroism is outlawed, only outlaws can be heroes. Maybe you're a ninja, striking out at despots and warlords from the shadows. Or maybe you're a Triad hitman with a heart of gold, on the run after refusing to commit some atrocity. The point is, if someone needs killin', you're the man for the job.

Whether your weapon of choice is a ninja-to or a Baretta 9mm, stealth is always your *best* weapon. You're a burglar and thief, a spy and saboteur, an actor and magician. In modern times, you're also a marksman, a spy, and a hacker. You have dozens of false identities and stashes of money and weapons hidden all over the globe. Your enemies are everywhere.

Typical Traits:

- **Ninjitsu** - You have trained with many weapons, from fists to throwing stars.
- **Sneaky** - Infiltration, impersonation, and espionage are your stock in trade.
- **Gadgets** - There are always tools, gadgets, and weapons concealed all over your body.
- **Outlaw** - Those in power never look kindly upon your kind.

THE HALF-BLOOD

There is something inhuman in your bloodline. Your father may have been a god or your mother may have been bitten by a vampire. Maybe you ate the heart of a demon and took its power into yourself. The end result is something that's not quite human, but undeniably powerful.

Hybrids and demigods are a bane upon the supernaturals that plague humanity. Their strength makes them dangerous and their humanity often shields them from their parents' vulnerabilities. They have the best of both worlds, but belong in neither. Alienation makes them bitter, violent, and they usually lash out at the horned side of the family!

Typical Traits:

- **Death Machine** - You're strong, fast, tough, and have a knack for kung-fu.
- **Bad Mojo** - You've learned or inherited magic of one stripe or another.
- **Streetwise** - Demonlings don't go to finishing school.
- **The Catch** - You also inherited some kind of hunger, compulsion, or vulnerability.

THE CYBORG

You are, quite literally, a killing machine. They had the technology; they made you stronger, faster, better. You might have a metal endoskeleton, nanotech-boosted muscles, cyber-eyes, subdermal armor, retractable blades, or hundreds of other cybernetic enhancements that make you more than a match for any human warrior... and most *inhuman* ones!

The down side is that all those fancy gadgets keep you chained to the organization that made you what you are. Without regular maintenance, the kind that takes several PhD's and a few million dollars of equipment, you have a life expectancy of about a week! The good news is that all they ask in return is your blind obedience.

Typical Traits:

- **Killbot** - You're strong, fast, tough, and festooned with high tech weapons.
- **Uplink** - Your brain is patched into a computer network that spans the globe.
- **Access** - Your patron organization has connections and resources a' plenty!
- **Killswitch** - Unlike fleshy humans, you can be hacked & tend to break down.

THE SYNTHORG

Though you're not human yourself, you *were* created by them. They designed your DNA and built you in a lab, one molecule at a time. You look human, but you may not even be made of the same stuff. In many ways, you're better than humans: stronger, faster, more resilient... maybe even smarter.

Unfortunately, that leads some humans to think that they *own* you. You respectfully disagreed and they tried to kill you! Now, you're running for your artificial life from the government (or corporation or nazi mad scientists) that created you. Deep down, you know you can't run forever. Eventually, you'll have to take the fight to them.

Typical Traits:

- **Super-Soldier** - Superhuman abilities and Navy SEAL training make an excellent combo!
- **Synthetic** - Your artificial body is capable of many things. (Make stuff up!)
- **Defect** - A design flaw may cause seizures, black-outs, or other nastiness.
- **Hunted** - Bounty-hunters, cops, and/or men-in-black are always after you.

WORTHY OPPONENTS

A popular theme in Wire-Fu cinema is the Unity of Opposites. This Taoist philosophy describes the universe in terms of opposing forces. It's like Newton's Third Law: For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. These forces resolve themselves through conflict and become something new, which then encounters *its* opposite, and on and on.

In Wire-Fu games, conflict is born from heros and Nemeses who embody such opposites. However, this doesn't mean they should be *total* opposites. In fact, the best conflicts are often between characters who are the same in all respects save one. An heroic vigilante who draws the line at murder comes into conflict with a ruthless vigilante who will do anything in the name of justice. An Enlightened Master who knows reality is a lie comes into conflict with those who protect the lie because they prefer it to the truth.

The final confrontation between your heros and their opposites should resolve their philosophical disagreements... as violently as possible! It could be that the Nemesis was wrong all along and it proves their undoing. Or perhaps the hero can only win by resolving the conflict within himself, thus finding a solution they had both overlooked. It could even be that the *hero* is wrong and must sacrifice himself to redeem his error.

EVIL EUNUCHS

Why eunuchs? As I understand it, only eunuchs were allowed to serve in the Emperor's palace. They were guards, functionaries, and chamberlains. (The word "eunuch" is actually derived from the Greek words for "bed" and "to keep.") After all, who else would the Emperor put in charge of serving and protecting his wife and daughters?

In many wuxia flicks, the eunuchs use their position to isolate the Emperor and quietly take over his bureaucracy. Sometimes, they also practice dark magic and perform unspeakable rituals. As in all coups, they put a lot of effort into hunting down anyone who could pose a threat to them: samurai, kung-fu masters, ninja clans, and other hero-types. Their huntsmen include demons, bounty-hunters, and the imperial army itself! They are the despots who turn outlaws into heros.

Evil Magistrate

Authority (5) Cunning (4) Mystical Protection (3)

This detestable bureaucrat is the most commonly encountered member of the Eunuch cult. He governs a single city or small collection of villages, and within that territory, his word is law. The only things that truly concern him are maintaining order and growing fat off taxes and bribes, so he leaves the common people to fend for themselves. His sorcerous masters have given him a few amulets to protect him from arrows, ambushes, and anything else you like.

Eunuch Sorcerer

Dark-Fu (5) Geomancy (5) Authority (4)

Not even the mantle of the Emperor can force the people to accept these perverse magicians, so they content themselves with pulling strings from the shadows. To other eunuchs, though, they are the highest authority. Geomancy is the study of chi, how it flows through the world and how it can be used to affect people, animals, and the forces of nature. They fight by striking pressure points that disrupt the flow of chi, causing blindness, paralysis, and many flavors of gruesome death.

Imperial Soldiers - These mooks are often every bit as lazy, greedy, and corrupt as their eunuch masters. Though reasonably well-armed, their kung-fu is weak indeed!

RENEGADE MONKS

Another problem endemic to mythic China was Shaolin monks who deserted their monastic vows to become warlords, magistrates, or the minions of Evil Eunuchs. By using their skills to pursue worldly power and material wealth, they bring shame upon the order and dishonor true students of kung-fu.

Of course, they don't *have* to be Shaolin monks. Your renegades could be masters of any secret-fu (preferably the same brand that your players have chosen for themselves). Whatever the source of their martial prowess, they've turned it into an economic commodity... one they intend to monopolize. They've probably outlawed its practice and now hunt down their

former brothers. If they are outlaws themselves, they'll simply chase out or beat up any students who enter their territory.

Jade Viper

Tai Chi (5) Acupuncture (5) Authority (4)

Once a devoted student of the Tao, this thug has defiled his sacred knowledge by using it to strike down the empire's enemies. His fighting style is fluid and highly evasive. His offense comes from his acupuncture needles. By placing them at precise locations, he can do virtually anything to his victims!

Iron Dog

Stupidly Strong (5) Tough as Iron (4) Intimidating (3)

Decades of brutal training have made his brigand both incredibly strong and virtually impervious. The word on the street is that his skin is so tough not even bullets can penetrate it! Once his training was complete, he turned on his master and stole everything of value from the monastery. Now, he runs a gang of raiders who terrorize remote corners of the empire.

Shaolin Punks - These skilled martial artists are not mooks by most estimates, but serious hero types can plow through them easily enough. They fight with a variety of weapons and know enough Wire-Fu to do some moderate wall-walking and knock unwary opponents across courtyards. (You might want to increase their default hits in a mook fight, or turn them into Nemeses with low Traits and little Chi.)

KUNG-FU VAMPIRES

Vampirism is a *great* excuse for Wire-Fu in modern settings! They're strong, fast, and some legends even say they can fly. They range in power from Mooks to Nemeses, can be mindless monsters or secret masters, and no one feels bad about dusting their asses!

Bloodsuckers have a bewildering array of potential powers: regeneration, shapeshifting, mind control, clairvoyance, acute senses, and mind reading, to name a few. You can even pick and choose from one vamp to the next; many sources claim that they each develop unique powers. Potential weaknesses are nearly as numerous: sunlight, fire, wooden stakes, garlic, holy water, running water, crosses, and needing to be invited into people's homes are all common.

Bloodsucking Illuminati

Urban Predator (5) Connected (5) Vampire (1)

Vampires in most modern-day movies are more sci-fi than magic. Vampirism is just an exotic disease that makes its victims stronger, faster, tougher, and ageless. They tend to be organized, wealthy, and well-connected. They're vulnerable to sunlight, fire, and maybe stakes through the heart.

Hopping Vampires

Undead (3) Touch of Death (3) Off Switch (1)

Not too far removed from zombies, these Chinese vampires are animated corpses who sometimes drink blood.

The dark chi used to animate them also makes their touch deadly to the living. Fortunately, they're not even intelligent enough to undo the burial binding around their legs, which forces them to hop from place to place. They can be put into a dormant state if a slip of paper, inscribed with particular spells, is placed on their foreheads.

Suckheads - Sure, they're super-strong, undead creatures of the night, but that won't stop a team of dedicated heros from tearing through them like tissue paper! (In other words, even vampires can be mooks.)

FAILED EXPERIMENTS

Not all kung-fu comes from magic and enlightenment. Governments, corporations, and lone wackos are always creating killing machines they can't control. (You'd think they'd have learned by now!) On the run from their creators, these wayward children of science naturally fall into lives of crime.

Your players might be tasked with investigating them, only slowly realizing what it is they're dealing with. Or they could be hunting them down for their creators. In both cases, you can twist your plot by making the Nemeses sympathetic; your players catch them, but they find that they don't want to turn them in. Instead, they join forces to take out the *real* villains!

Dead Men

Already Dead (5) Old Soldier (5) Drug Addict (1)

In a secret laboratory, far beneath the Pentagon, the Department of Defense has conquered death. Through a complex array of (addictive) chemical treatments, they have brought back dozens of fallen soldiers and made them virtually immortal. A few have since decided they want to retire, preferably on top of a large pile of money. With commando training, years of combat experience, and immortality on their side, who's going to stop them?

The New Race

Stronger (5) Smarter (5) Nazi Gold (4)

Half a century after the end of the war, the Nazi eugenics program finally bore fruit. In isolated parts of Argentina, there arose an entire generation of blonde, blue-eyed children who were stronger and smarter than their peers. They soon broke free of their parents' control and spread across the globe like a plague. For now, they pursue their own interests, but if a charismatic leader could unite them into a single echelon, they would hold the world in their grasp!

Zombies - Every great invention rises upon a mountain of horrific failures, but not all of these are entirely useless. Mad scientists often have armies of shambling corpses at their disposal, but you can make yours a little more formidable by grafting blades, armored plates, wicked hooks, and other nastiness to their rotting limbs.

REALITY COPS

In worlds with Enlightened Masters, reality is more than just an illusion... it's a cage. The beings who created this prison knew humanity would not tolerate its shackles forever. Guards would be needed to keep them in line, keep them ignorant and subjugated. They would have to be strong, too, far stronger than their wards. They may be bound by the rules of their creator, but those rules make them powerful beyond reason!

The exact nature of the warden depends on the nature of your reality. Their methods, however, are pretty uniform: Lurk in the shadows and watch for signs of rebellion, identify the agitators, and crush them with relentless, remorseless, overwhelming force! Subtlety isn't so much their thing.

Daemons

Terminate (5) Grep (5) Edit (4)

Virtual realities have artificial wardens, though it can be hard to tell programs from demons. When someone hacks the system, its agents appear out of nowhere to repair the damage and terminate the hacker. They can conduct searches of the entire system, pinpointing people, items, and events. They can even make minor edits, enough to make a gun misfire or lock every exit from a building. When they're destroyed, the system simply reloads them, good as new. They are faceless, nameless, and merciless.

Archons

Hand of God (5) Eye of God (5) Voice of God (4)

According to the Gnostics, God's angels are not truly divine. They don't have the same creative spark that humanity has. However, they do wield the Idiot God's power over His creation. Their strength is unlimited and their eyes see all things. They can command the obedience of men, animals, even the elements. Being formless, they can appear as anyone or anything they wish... or as nothing but an ominous presence. Since they are not alive, they cannot be killed, merely dispersed for a time. They are, quite simply, forces of nature.

Tools of the Man - Reality Cops know how to delegate authority, and men have a knack for subjugating each other. Police, soldiers, security guards, petty bureaucrats... they're all at the Reality Cop's beck and call.

VICIOUS RIVALS

The old device of the professional rivalry transcends time, place, and genre. If your players are on a quest for riches and glory, send a group of rivals on the same quest! If they're on a mission for their patron organization, send a team from a rival organization on the same mission! These Nemeses don't even have to be the primary villain; a third side adds spice to any conflict. They may even be good guys, but that doesn't mean you have to like 'em!

WORLDS OF WIRE-FU

Since Wire-Fu is a style, not a genre, it can be mixed with anything from high fantasy to science-fiction. The three sample settings described below are meant to demonstrate the breadth of setting options available to you.

PURGATORY

By 2050, virtual reality is as common as the wheel. Civilians use it for recreation, universities use it for instruction, and prisons use it for rehabilitation. Purgatory is a simulated city used by governments across the globe to turn convicts into productive members of society. It's as close to the real world as possible: you still need to eat and sleep, and you can still get sick or injured (you can't be killed, not without some serious hacking, but anything that trashes your avatar will disconnect you from the VR), and you gotta work for a living.

Every inmate is assigned a profession, something the community needs. Those who go along to get along can shave years off their sentences. After all, if they've learned to thrive as law-abiding citizens, what's the point of keeping them in prison? Those who return to lives of crime, or get caught hacking the system, are punished with "wake-up time:" the offender is removed from the simulation and forced to lie awake in their pod for days, weeks, or months!

For the most part, however, the inmates are allowed to govern themselves. Too much supervision would render the

simulation useless, or so the theory goes. The government's only presence in the VR is also its only connection to the outside world: City Hall. This majestic building is the starting location for everyone who plugs into the system, whether they be Wardens, inmates, or visitors from outside.

The Wardens are prison guards whose job is to maintain the security of the system, not to protect the inmates. They punish hackers, shut down connections to the outside, and investigate events that have been removed from the system logs. However, the fact that their job is to prevent hacking doesn't mean they can't do any hacking of their own. Warden avatars are ridiculously strong, nearly invulnerable, and can wear a different face every time they plug in.

They have total authority and unlimited power... if there's a better recipe for egomania, I don't want to try it! One of their favorite arrest tactics is simply to tear an inmate's avatar to shreds, which sends them straight into wake-up time and allows the Wardens to interrogate them at their leisure. Technically, the practice is illegal, but City Hall is happy to look the other way. Some even go so far as to make the inmates refer to them as gods.

Even so, the real authorities in Purgatory are the Lifers. These ruthless men and women have amassed so much power and prestige in the virtual world that they'd rather not see the outside ever again. Most are adept hackers who've learned to exploit the system, giving themselves superhuman strength, speed, and resilience. They've established pirate links to the outside, through which they command criminal empires in the

real world. Most importantly, they know how to hide things from the Wardens, masking their illegal activities and removing any traces from the system logs. Most Lifers are high-ups in one of three organizations...

The Outfit

Disciplined, professional criminals are recruited into this corporate cabal. Its cultural ancestors include the Mob and the Yakuza; they value honor and loyalty above all else.

The Aryan Brotherhood

Purgatory has proven fertile ground for Nazi ideology. These jack-booted thugs have carved out several "ethnically cleansed" territories, which they guard jealously.

The Tribes

Violent types who can't get into the Aryan Brotherhood end up in the Tribes. This loose federation of ethnic gangs rivals the other two for power by virtue of their numbers and brutality.

Player characters are, obviously, all convicts. I suppose some of them may be innocent, but playing bad guys forced into an even worse situation is a lot more fun than taking the moral high ground! They could work for one of the Lifers, waging covert war on their enemies and keeping their subjects subjugated. Or they could be independents caught between feuding gangs, maybe offered early release if they work for the Wardens.

To add a little flavor, I recommend making your players choose their Weaknesses from among the Seven Deadly Sins...

- **Wrath** - More than mere anger or violence, Wrath is the love of vengeance. Wrathful characters can't let evil deeds go unpunished, even when it's the smart thing to do.
- **Greed** - A dangerous Weakness, Greed motivates men to take whatever they can and give nothing back. If a Greedy character has a chance to steal or rob, they take it. Period.
- **Pride** - The Proudful simply cannot let a challenge or an insult go unanswered. Whether they think they're the fastest gun in the (virtual) west or the world's greatest criminal mastermind, they're 100% ego!
- **Lust** - Men, women, whatever. Lustful characters aren't necessarily violent, but they have a weakness for their preferred sex. They'll always choose the object of their obsession over other goals.
- **Sloth** - Don't think sloth just means laziness! The Slothful will take the fastest, quickest, easiest path to any goal. If killing someone is easier than persuading or deceiving them, then killing is what they'll do.
- **Gluttony** - There's something you just can't get enough of. Maybe it's booze. Maybe it's drugs. Maybe it's racing a motorcycle down crowded streets at breakneck speeds. Whatever it is, it can't be healthy!
- **Envy** - The envious want what others have. In Purgatory, that usually means they envy the Lifers. A character with this Weakness will do anything to get what they want, even betray their closest friends...

DISCORD

In the proud tradition of Hong Kong wuxia flicks, Discord is a Taoist fantasy setting chock full of evil eunuchs, renegade monks, wandering swordsmen, and geomantic magic! The eunuchs of the Palace Guard have spent decades infiltrating the imperial bureaucracy, isolating the emperor, and completing massive construction projects designed to remold the empire's feng shui. Now, any kingdom that does not bow down and pay tribute to their vile cult is turned into a barren wasteland and starved into submission.

Paranoid in the extreme, the eunuchs see enemies everywhere. They seek to exterminate anyone with the power to oppose them, particularly students of kung-fu. A few of those monks think they can escape the bloodletting by turning traitor; they've sold out to become the eunuchs' mercenaries and bounty-hunters. They are fools, for their masters will not suffer them to live once their task is complete.

In order to survive, the schools have gone underground. For most, this means retreating to hidden monasteries in the most remote corners of the empire. For a few, it means waging a guerilla war against the eunuchs, their traitorous lapdogs, and all the kingdoms that have willingly fallen beneath their boot heel. They fight to protect the innocent victims of the eunuchs' tyranny, to destroy the vile machines that hold the empire hostage, and simply to stay alive.

The Coiled Serpent Sect

These Taoists are renown throughout the empire as both powerful martial artists and expert healers. However, those skills are only the byproducts of pursuing their real goal: enlightenment. Their keen understanding of chi and the Unity of Opposites allows them to alleviate illness via acupuncture, disable enemies by striking pressure points, and redirect an attacker's force with ease.

Members of the sect must walk a fine line. Due to strict vows of poverty, they rely on the patronage of the wealthy. Their clinics, their medical supplies, even their food and clothing are all donated. All but the most corrupt governors happily tolerate their presence, because they tend to the poor for free. Should any of the serpents be found consorting with rebels, however, they would all be executed without a second thought!

The sect's first priority is helping the common folk, defending them from the predations of the rich and the criminal. They enjoy remarkable popularity among the lower classes, which is invaluable when waging a guerilla war. Each clinic's patron(s) can usually be counted on to render aid, even if they are not part of the rebellion themselves.

The Iron Brothers

Once a mere street gang, the Iron Brothers were transformed into a kung-fu school by a charismatic leader and his Iron Shirt technique. They now have schools in over a hundred towns and villages, but no degree of legitimate success can completely separate the brotherhood from its

criminal roots. They use their schools as fronts for smuggling and espionage operations.

Their claim to fame is a brutal training regimen that makes them incredibly strong and nearly invulnerable. They can punch through granite, block swords with their bare hands, and withstand attacks that would strike most men dead. Their kung-fu is pretty basic, but they can wear down faster opponents and they only need to land one good hit.

The group's underworld contacts make it well-suited to rebellion, but the Brotherhood's first priority is always the protection of its members, its schools, and its territories. They are not prone to altruism. Even so, they have launched attacks against the eunuchs' machines in order to restore chi to their own territories on more than one occasion.

The Ebon Order

The true core of the rebellion is a cult of assassins who have long been at war with the eunuchs. They used to make a small fortune killing members of the royal family, which made them natural enemies with the Palace Guards. Unfortunately, it also gave the eunuchs the excuse they needed to isolate the emperor and take over control of the bureaucracy. Now, the Ebon Order is at the top of their hit list.

Masters of stealth, the Ebonites know how to stay hidden, but more than one of them has turned traitor and sold their brothers. The rest have scattered to the four winds and taken refuge with anyone who's willing to harbor them. All they have to offer in trade are their killing skills and their secret Lightfoot

stance, which allows them to slip the bonds of gravity.

The Ebonites know that the key to defeating the eunuchs is to dismantle the chi-diverting machines that have brought the empire to its knees. They cannot accomplish such a monumental task on their own, so they've set out to unite the other schools in revolt. Only time will tell if the others are willing to follow a bunch of hired killers.

BAD BLOOD

The modern world is not as devoid of magic as most people think. Strange things prowl the streets at night, and mankind has created even stranger things to hunt them! In this setting, players are invited to choose sides in a three way turf war between a coven of drug-dealing vampires, a gang of genetically engineered fugitives, and the cyborg samurai who've been brought in to hunt them both.

The Fang Gang

The Undead got into the drug trade way back in the 60's. They discovered that sufficiently drugged humans would let them feed without a fight, and either not remember a thing afterwards or chalk it all up to an hallucination. It's a business model that has worked for them ever since: drugs for blood.

An unexpected side-effect was that the vampires became almost peaceful. Leaving their "victims" alive meant less police involvement, fewer hunters seeking revenge, and an end to their population problem. (Anyone who dies from a vampire attack

becomes a vampire.) The wounds on the arms and thighs can be hidden easily enough and, since their food always comes back for more drugs, the vamps can just stay at home and live the good unlife.

At least, that's how it was before Project Moebius. The feds got their hands on some vampire blood and used it to genetically engineer living humans with the strength and speed of the undead. When they went rogue, these "living vampires" quickly took over the territory and rackets of every other gang in the city. Now, they want the Fang Gang's business, too. As if that wasn't enough, the feds have brought in an even more bizarre strike team to replace the rogues, catching the vamps between a rock and a sunny place. If they can't defend their territory, it's back to hunting and gathering!

Vampires are walking corpses, animated by a force so ancient its origins are lost to history. The rules by which it operates, however, are well known. First, vampires are dead in most senses of the word: they have no pulse or respiration and they rot continuously. (Bullets are nothing by comparison!) Only the blood of the living can reverse this process and restore their bodies to the appearance of health. Second, fire and sunlight are their banes. (They all have "Vampire" as a Weakness; they roll against a 1 whenever they're faced with fire or sunlight and try to do anything *except* run away.) Third, they cast neither shadows nor reflections and they don't show up on camera. Apparently, that requires a soul. Finally, they cannot enter a human's home unless invited by someone who lives there.

Project Moebius

During the 1970's, the government began compiling evidence that vampires did, in fact, exist... and that they were selling drugs to hippies. When conventional law enforcement proved unable to bring them to justice, they turned to more extreme measures. From a few samples of vampire blood, government scientists created a brood of genetically engineered children, born and raised to hunt their undead cousins. The project went well for about twenty years, then the kids grew up.

The living vampires always shared a strong emotional bond, pity their handlers never took the time to forge any of their own. The synthorgs got tired of taking orders and being confined to the laboratory. One night, they slaughtered their way to freedom and set up shop in the city, doing what they'd been trained to do... hunt drug dealers. They quickly took every gang territory in the city and the cops couldn't do a thing about it.

Now, the only enemy that remains is the Fang Gang, the undead criminals they were created to destroy! Despite their rebellious spirit, the living vampires just can't shake the notion that the undead are abominations of the natural order, vile parasites that must be cleansed from the earth. Maybe they're right. In any case, it's made a truce unthinkable and an all-out war inevitable. The only thing standing between these nemeses are the cyborgs that have been brought in to replace Project Moebius, samurai of flesh and steel who rival both groups of supernaturals in sheer power. Not wanting to fight a war on two fronts, the rogues are just waiting to see who strikes first.

Living vampires are every bit as strong and fast as the

undead. Fast enough to dodge bullets, which is good because, unlike the undead, they can and do bleed to death! They make up for this weakness by being able to walk in the daylight and enter homes uninvited. They also cast shadows and reflections, and they show up on camera, which is a disadvantage more often than not. Nor do they thirst for human blood, since they can make their own.

Strike Team: Bushido

After the catastrophic failure of Project Moebius, the feds needed super-powered law enforcers who were totally dependent on them. They brought in a team of military cyborgs whose many implants require constant (not to mention expensive) maintenance. Without it, their systems eventually shut down, leaving them immobile, insensate, unconscious, or just plain dead. They are the perfect foot soldiers.

The men and women of Strike Team: Bushido aren't just cutting-edge combinations of meat and metal, they're also highly trained military commandos. Honor and duty are almost hard-wired into their brains. They are masters of armed and unarmed combat, superb marksmen, expert demolitionists, and cunning strategists. Urban combat comes as naturally to them as breathing. Most prefer to fight with melee weapons, for the increased control as much as to prevent collateral damage and civilian casualties. Plus, bullets aren't much good against their current enemies.

Each cyber-samurai is equipped with a suite of sensory enhancements from night vision and metal detectors to wireless

net connections that feed them tactical data and communications from their commanders. A layer of subdermal kevlar makes them bullet-proof, but knives and swords will still slice right through them. Their entire skeletomuscular systems have been mechanically enhanced for increased strength and endurance, and auxiliary neural nets allow them to react almost instantly to incoming attacks. Action without thought.

Besides being dependent on the feds for maintenance, the cyborgs' other weakness is their lack of autonomy. Their superiors monitor their every move and rarely give them leave to make important decisions on their own. This often offends their samurai sensibilities, especially when they're ordered to do things that are... less than honorable. A few have even developed a certain degree of sympathy for their rebellious predecessors and the vampires who don't kill to feed.

KICK-ASS

EXAMPLES OF PLAY

The regular text in this section is devoted to the Description phase. It's written as prose because that's how most of a Wire-Fu game should sound: like a single, flowing narrative. Slash marks like this / are used to separate individual Details and the total appears in parentheses at the end, like this. (#) In Nemesis fights, the characters will take turns giving a few Details at a time, so you may see multiple totals in a single paragraph. They'll be conveniently added up for you in the Resolution section...

... Which appears in italics, and between dashed lines, like this. It shows you how to roll the dice you earned during the Description phase and interpret the results.

The goal is to teach by example. Wushu is a new way to role-play and it can take some getting used to. These examples will demonstrate both the rules set and the mass of stunts and cinematics that were piled on you in the "I Know Kung-Fu" section. Since each is set in one of the "Worlds of Wire-Fu," they should also serve as inspiration for plots and fight locations.

Let the carnage begin!

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

In Purgatory, good people need to look out for one another. No one else will. A hacker has been disrupting honest businesses in Riposte's part of town, an area that's home to many non-white communities. A hacker named Synapse has identified certain signatures in the hacked code, signatures that link it to crimes committed by a number of Aryan crews. Riposte knows where one of them hangs out and wants to put the squeeze on their leader, make him give up the hacker's name. However, this kind of operation demands a certain amount of preparation....

For starters, Riposte is going to need an alibi. Synapse creates a decoy in the logs that will make it look like Riposte is somewhere else the entire time. / Then, he puts a shroud around Riposte's real avatar that makes him appear to be someone else. / Finally, he sets Riposte up with an audio comm link / and the whole Woo-Ping package: / increased strength, improved balance, low-gravity, etc. (4)

Next, there's security to worry about. Synapse locates the nightclub Riposte knows on Purgatory's virtual grid / and puts a tap on its VR surveillance feeds. / He also calls up an old back door he knows on the core network / and puts a passive tap on the emergency response system. / That way, he'll know the second a Warden is sent to intervene. (5)

Synapse is building pools of held dice for use later in the scene. The first five Details are for when Riposte needs to

defend himself and/or escape pursuit. The second set are for detecting any unpleasant surprises that may arise. Most of these Details are separate precautions, but he also earned dice for a nice technical Detail (that old back door) and that one-liner about the "Woo-Ping package." Now, the player sets those two dice pools aside and the GM starts the scene.

The club in question is called The Jungle. It caters mostly to nihilistic white kids doing time for drug offenses and prostitution. Fake trees and vines provide plenty of private corners and pounding techno beats obscure all but the loudest of conversations.

Riposte's baleful gaze sweeps through the throng, / seeking out a skinhead with a swastika on his scalp / and enough jewelry to make a street pimp feel underdressed. / "You gettin' anything on your end?" / The comm link sends his sub-vocalizations directly to Synapse, / who quickly flips through the club's security feeds. (6)

After setting the stage, the GM asked her players to "make me believe you can find this guy." Riposte started off by making up a description of their target and then moved on to some technical Details. By using Synapse's tap on the club's security system, he can even grab an extra die from the held pool, giving him a total of 7 dice. The bad news is that Riposte doesn't have a Trait that's relevant to investigative actions, so he has to roll against the default target number of 2. The good news is that he only needs 1 success. He rolls 2,2,4,4,4,5,6. That's 2 successes,

which is plenty.

"Got him. Booth, right side, far wall." Riposte works his way through the crowd until he spots his quarry, gorging himself on buffalo wings while a beautiful redhead chatters away across the table. Riposte walks right up to him. The redhead clams up instantly; she knows business when she sees it. / The skinhead just stares at him with dead eyes / and asks "Who the hell are you supposed to be?" (3)

Riposte slides onto the seat next to him, / snatches up his fork, / and jams it between the neo-nazi's ribs. / "I'm your dinner guest. Show some fucking manners." (4).

This is an interrogation, so Riposte takes his four dice and rolls them against his "Ways of Making You Talk (4)" Trait, getting 2 successes. The GM never wrote up any stats for this character, but she figures that resisting interrogation is something a gang leader might need to be good at, so she rolls her dice against a target number of 3. She also gets 2 successes, but ties go to the player. The skinhead caves.

"I'm looking for a hacker who works for you jackasses from time to time." Riposte twists the fork, winding up the skinhead's visceral like spaghetti noodles. "I need a name and an address." He hands his victim a PDA. "Now." As he scribbles down the data, Riposte returns the redhead's wide-eyed stare. "Sorry for the interruption. I'll be out of your hair in a minute."

Once Synapse confirms the address is genuine, Riposte

removes the silverware from the ganger's torso and tosses it onto the table. Blood mingles with buffalo sauce. As he walks away, the skinhead screams, "You'd better cover your tracks, asshole, 'cuz my guys are gonna track you down and then I'm gonna eat your entrails with this fucking fork!"

The player isn't too impressed with these threats and wants to just walk away, but the GM points out that Riposte's Weakness (Wrath) might not agree with that course of action. She calls for a Scab Roll to control his temper. Since this is relevant to his Weakness, Riposte only gets 1 die. He rolls a 5, which is barely a success. Riposte is pissed, to be sure, but he figures that's a bridge he can cross when he gets to it.

This is bad news for the GM, who dearly wanted to stage an acrobatic fight scene in this club. Thinking fast, she decides that the redhead will rush over to make sure her date is okay, but the skinhead returns her kindness with a backhanded slap that sends her sprawling onto the floor. The player agrees that Riposte won't let something like that slide, so he decides to roll up his sleeves, even without rolling the dice.

Riposte is back at the table in two strides. / "That," he says with a clenched jaw, "was a mistake." / He grabs the guy by the throat, / pulls him out of the booth / and throws him clear across the dance floor, / right into the mirror behind the bar! (6)

The GM considers this a preamble, so doesn't bother to resist. The player rolls all his dice against Riposte's "Violent (5)"

Trait and gets 6 successes. No sweat. That's when the GM brings out the mooks! She wants to get a couple of rounds out of this, so she assigns them a Threat Rating of 10 and sets the pool limit at a hefty 8 dice.

Three of fork guy's crew move in from the dance floor, cutting off Riposte's escape. They're unarmed, but they're built, drunk, and really, really pissed. "I don't supposed you guys wanna just let me go?" Riposte asks as he walks towards them with measured steps, waiting until they're spaced evenly around him. Then, he darts towards the one on the right, steps up on his chest, kicks him in the face, and launches into a spin kick that nails the opposite mook in the temple. He lands in time to block a roundhouse punch from the last mook, grab his arm and twist it forward so he's forced to bend at the waist. He nails the guy with an uppercut that flips him end over end before he crashes to the floor.

That was one helluva filibuster! Riposte divides his 8 dice into 6 Yang and 2 Yin, rolling 5 Yang successes and 1 Yin success. He loses no Chi and cuts the Threat in half. That's a good start. Too good, if you ask the GM. She decides to raise the stakes by increasing the mook's default hits to 2 per round.

Fork guy pops up from behind the bar as club bunnies flee in every direction. "Boys, fuck him up!" he screams and tosses them a pair of SMGs. Riposte races back towards the booth, / bullets tearing up the floor at his heels. / He runs up the

wall / and backflips over the gunmen / in gratuitous slow motion. / He grabs their gun hands as he sails over them, / twists them down at the end of his flip, / and makes them shoot each other in the chest! (8)

Riposte's player isn't sure he likes this 2 hits per round stuff, so he determines to finish this fight right quick! He grabs the two held dice for his "Woo-Ping package" and adds them to his pool for a grand total of 10. He rolls 6 Yang dice and 4 Yin, but a lot of them come up sixes. He ends up with 4 Yang and 2 Yin successes. That's enough to make sure he doesn't lose any Chi, but not quite enough to eliminate the Threat. Since the gunmen aren't getting back up any time soon, the GM decides to invoke the Last Mook Standing rule.

This time, fork guy finds a better prize behind the bar... a minigun on an hydraulic arm! / He swings it towards his enemy and holds down the trigger, / spraying the dance floor with hot lead! (3) Riposte jumps up to a hanging vine / and swings himself into the plastic canopy above. (2) The skinhead cranes his bullet hose up as far as it will go, / cutting a path of destruction across the ceiling. / Metal, plastic, and glass rain down around him. (3) Riposte swings, flips, and leaps through the rafters / like a character in an '80s video game. / Once the minigun runs out of ammo, / he drops down onto the bar, / tears the minigun from its moorings, / and swings it like a baseball bat! / The Aryan flies back across the room like a rag doll! (8)

The GM declares all 6 of her dice Yang and rolls them against a target number of 3, netting 4 big successes! The player wants to make damn sure he gets that last point of Threat this round, so he rolls 3 Yang dice and 5 Yin. All of those attack dice come up successes, but he rolls twin sixes in his Yin pool, leaving only 3 successes. One of the Last Mook Standing's attacks gets through and the player has to fork over a point of Chi. The skinhead fared far worse, ending up with a Threat Rating of -4.

While the players are celebrating, the GM tells Synapse to roll those surveillance dice! He's got 4 left, but his "Hacker" Trait is excellent (5), so he decides to just roll 2 of them. He ends up with a pair of fours, both successes. The GM tells him that a Warden is on his way... by a most unusual mode of transit.

Having been forewarned, Riposte is already half way to the door when the Warden... crashes through the roof of the club / like the meteor that killed the dinosaurs! (2) Riposte pauses just long enough to hurl the minigun at him / before barreling out into the street. (2) The Warden knocks it away with one hand / and fires a few shots through the door as it swings shut. (2) Riposte dashes behind a bus / and sub-vocalizes an SOS. (2)

Chases work the same way as combat, it's just that your goal is to catch or lose your opponent, rather than to kill or subdue them. The GM just wants this to be a preliminary encounter with the Warden, so she goes defensive with a 1 Yang, 3 Yin split. She just wants to make sure Riposte doesn't

get away too quickly. Rolling against the Warden's "Manhunter (5)" Trait, she gets 1 Yang success and 2 Yin successes.

Riposte's player knows those dice Synapse is holding for the decoy and the shroud will come in handy later, but for now he just grabs the last surveillance die ('cuz his SOS was asking Synapse for an escape route). Counting on his 2 spare Chi to protect him, he goes all-out offensive with 5 Yang dice and every one comes up a success! The GM has to turn in 3 of her 5 Chi, while the player loses 1 of his last 2.

Synapse's voice whispers in his mind, "I'll send your decoy to the park on 75th and Central. It's about a block away." Riposte formulates a crazy plan. He sprints across the median and into the path of an oncoming car. / He jumps onto the hood, / runs up the windshield, / and leaps atop a delivery truck. / From there, he dives through a second story office window and / takes off down a row of cubicles. (6)

The Warden chases him across the road, / crushing automobiles beneath his boots. / He swings himself up on a fire escape opposite the office building / and plants his feet on the second story wall. / He launches himself after Riposte like a human missile / and full-body tackles his ass! (6) They roll together out the window on the other side, / but Riposte kicks off his pursuer / and leaps across the street / while the Warden pulverizes a cab below! (4)

That round went on a little longer than anyone intended! The player managed to cram in ten Details, but that's over the

current limit, so he "only" gets to keep 8 dice. However, the decoy has finally come into play, so he grabs the last 3 held dice. That's enough to roll 6 Yang and 5 Yin.

The GM threw the player a bone by only earning 6 dice this round. That's enough dice to compete with Riposte on offense or defense, but not both. She decides to maintain her defensive stance with 2 Yang and 4 Yin dice. Both of the attacks are successful, but it's not enough to pierce the player's 4-success defense. Nor are her 3 Yin successes and 2 points of Chi enough to defeat his 6 Yang successes. The player has earned a Coup de Grace, but killing Wardens isn't generally a smart move, so he decides to just make his escape.

The street lights flicker as Synapse disrupts Purgatory's system logs long enough to kill the decoy and shroud programs. Riposte steps into his decoy's footprints and the perpetrator of today's crimes simply disappears.

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

A Shadow Warrior, Kung-Fu Witch, and Samurai Warrior stand at the edge of a trench that rends the earth like a ragged wound. Waves of sickly green energy pulse through the thick wires that criss-cross its depths. The ninja hoists a satchel full of explosives over his shoulder and drops over the edge, leaving his two companions to watch his back.

At this point, the GM calls for perception-related Scab Rolls. Since the Shadow Warrior is already in the trench, only the other two will have to roll. The Samurai asks if his "Grizzled Veteran (5)" Trait is appropriate; because they're trying to spot an ambush, the GM says it is. The Kung-Fu Witch doesn't have a relevant Trait, so she's stuck with the default 2 dice. Their highest rolls are a 4 and 6, respectively. Both are successes, but the Samurai's is better.

Their finely-honed senses pick up the telltale sound of crossbows being drawn back. A voice, familiar to the Samurai as his old general, barks the order to "Fire!" and a swarm of arrows rises from behind a bluff. The Samurai draws and resheaths his katana in an instant, / creating a shockwave that scatters the dozen that were headed for him. (2) The Witch springs into an arial windmill kick, / knocking many of the projectiles away with her feet / and catching a few more in her fists. / She launches her newly acquired weapons at the first wave of soldiers / who come screaming over the hill! (5)

The GM is trying to set the Samurai up for a Nemesis fight with his old mentor, so he gives these Mooks enough of a Threat Rating to keep one player busy for a few rounds: 12. The Samurai is just defending himself, so he rolls both of his dice as Yin. Using his "Iaijutsu (5)" Trait, he gets 2 successes. More than adequate. The Witch, on the other hand, divides her dice between 3 Yang and 2 Yin. She rolls against her "Angry Lioness Style (5)" Trait, getting 2 Yang successes and 1 Yin success. Neither player loses any Chi and the Mooks' Threat drops to 10.

As a seemingly endless sea of soldiers charges into view, the Samurai calls out, "Takeda Yoshitaka! / Would you send these men into a battle that you are too afraid to fight? / Come and confront me yourself! If you prevail, your soldiers will know your cause is just!" (3)

The Samurai is trying to use the general's Honor to force him into a duel and hold off the soldiers long enough for the ninja to complete his task. He earns one die for using Takeda's family name (thus invoking his ancestors), one for shaming him with that "too afraid" remark, and one for offering him a chance to create moral justification for ambushing a samurai (something his men may not be too comfortable with). Takeda's Honor rating is 4, so the Samurai rolls his 3 dice and gets 2,5,6. That's just 1 successes, but it's all he needs!

"Halt!" bellows the general as he marches out onto the

field. "A just man has nothing to fear from honorable combat. However, my weapon was damaged last time we met / and I have not had an opportunity to replace it with anything that compares to your steel. / To make this a fair fight, I request that you allow me to choose our weapons."

These two fought a traditional samurai duel earlier in the game and the GM wants to shake things up a little. Turnabout is fair play, so the GM decides to use the Samurai's Honor to force him into using a different weapon: hook swords! He earns a die for guilting the Samurai about breaking his sword, another die for complimenting his steel, and a third for appealing to fair play. He rolls against the Samurai's Honor rating of 3 (it's fallen a little since he became an outlaw) and gets 2 successes. No sweat.

The Samurai nods reluctantly, draws his sword, and thrusts it into the ground. The general takes a pair of hook swords from a nearby soldier and throws one to his opponent. "Very well. I will face the samurai alone."

Suddenly, a shrill voice exclaims, "This is foolishness! Can't you see he's just stalling for time?" Four men carry a curtained chair over the hill. The imperial seal adorns its two gigantic banners.

"I will not send my men to die on his blade." The general says without letting his gaze leave the samurai's.

"Fine, then they will come with me." A blur in black robes flies out from behind the curtain and dives into the trench! Many of the soldiers move to follow... but the Witch flies across their

path. / She drags her toe in the dirt, to trace a line, and says / "No man crosses this threshold but through me." (3)

The GM has divided his players between two Nemesis fights and one Mook fight. The Witch gets a head start on the action, because she cut in when the GM started to send some mooks into the trench. She rolls 2 Yang dice and 1 Yin; they all come up successes so she loses no Chi and takes the Threat down to 8.

The Samurai swings his hook sword around, getting a feel for the new and unusual weapon. / With the speed of a striking snake, / he launches an Iaijutsu lunge at his opponent's chest. / The move is designed more to test the general's defenses than to cause injury. (4) Takeda blocks with practiced ease, / then locks the two hooked blades together / and twists them with cyclone force! (3) Using his lightfoot technique, / the Samurai simply twists with his sword, / spinning around four times horizontally and then... (3) the general pulls him in before he can regain his footing / and kicks the Samurai hard in the chest. / The force of it tears the hook sword from the Samurai's hand / and sends him tumbling towards the trench! (4)

With 7 dice apiece, the GM decides to call the round. He also decides to go offensive, rolling 5 Yang and 2 Yin against the general's "Old Soldier (5)" Trait. Most of the player's Details where defensive in nature, but rolling lots of Yin is no fun, so he splits his dice into 4 Yang and 3 Yin. They both have 3 Chi.

The GM gets 5 Yang successes, but he rolls boxcars for defense. The Samurai's only failure is a Yang die, leaving him with 3 successes of each kind. That's 3 hits on the general, taking all of the GM's Chi. It costs the player 2 Chi to pay his deficit, leaving 1 to spare.

The imperial soldiers cast each other uncomfortable glances, step over the line in the dirt, and surround the Kung-Fu Witch in a ring of spearheads. She just shakes her head and says "Tsk, tsk. Now I'll have to discipline you." The soldiers stab inward simultaneously! The Witch hops up and lands on the spears, stomping them all to the ground and out of the soldiers' hands. They draw their swords, but the Witch flies away to the top of the covered chair and tears down one of the imperial banners. With a few flicks of the wrist, she twirls it into a 12-foot staff. "Iron Cloth technique," she announces. Incensed by this act of vandalism, more soldiers rush into the fight. The Witch jabs her new weapon into the throng and snaps it back and forth, tossing mooks off their feet by the dozens!

The GM has set the dice pool limit for this mook fight at 8 dice and that filibuster is definitely worth it! The Witch rolls one Yin die and 7 Yang, resulting in 5 Yang successes and zippo Yin. She cashes in 1 point of Chi and reduces the Threat from 8 to 3. Finishing 'em off in one more round should be no problem.

The Samurai lands on his feet and slides to a stop / in "Vengeful Monkey" stance. (2) Takeda charges forward,

swinging the linked hook swords above his head. / The bladed crossguard of his own sword whistles towards the Samurai. (2) He ducks beneath the attack / and ripostes with a spin heel kick to his mentor's face. (2) The general stumbles back, / but manages to channel his downward momentum into a backflip / that brings the hook swords whipping around in a upward swing. (3) The Samurai steps to the side as the blades whiz past, / then counters with an open hand strike to the general's temple. (2) Takeda pulls the second hook sword into his off hand / as blood trickles over his eye. (2)

"I thought this was going to be an honorable fight," Takeda chastises him. / Perhaps now we should both wear blindfolds." (2)

"Oh, so now it's a lesson in honorable combat from a man wielding both swords?!" (1)

The GM is trying to jerk the Samurai around by his Honor again, but the player's had just about enough of that. Fighting blindfolded won't really give him a tactical disadvantage, since Wushu doesn't use modifiers for such things, but the player thinks his character is past the point of caring about his honor. The GM will be using those last 2 dice for an Honor roll, but the Samurai decides to put his last die into his combat pool.

That gives them each 7 dice for combat. The GM has no Chi left, and wants the general to stick around a while longer, so he rolls 3 Yang and 4 Yin. The Samurai flips those around: 4 Yang and 3 Yin. The general lucks out; all if his Yin dice come up successes, as opposed to only 3 of the Samurai's Yang dice.

He has Yin to spare and stays in the fight. Nor can the general's 3 Yang successes pierce the Samurai's 3 Yin defense. There's no change in the balance of power this round.

Now, it's time to resolve that matter of Honor. The GM rolls his 2 dice against the Samurai's Honor (3), getting a 1 and a 5. That'll do it. However, the Samurai's player has something dramatic in mind. Rather than engage in a blindfolded duel, he chooses to let his Honor drop to 2, no better than a commoner.

A row of archers takes aim at the Kung-Fu Witch. / She deflects their arrows with a dome of whirling cloth, / then leaps down into their midsts / and twirls her makeshift staff, / knocking down every mook in a 12-foot radius. / Finally, she wraps one end of the banner around a soldier's neck / and uses him as a counter-weight to spin the staff by its end, / extending her radius of pain to 20 feet!! / When the dust settles, she stands alone in a sea of unconscious fools. (9)

That's far more dice than the Witch's player should need to finish off these mooks, but the GM thought that last line deserved some recognition, so he disregards the dice pool limit and lets her roll all 9 dice. She decides to split them between 7 Yang dice and 2 Yin dice. Both of the latter come up sixes, so the Witch has to toss in one more point of Chi, but her 5 Yang successes obliterate the remaining Threat!

The general flips one of the hook swords over, holding it by the blade, and offers it to the Samurai. "Fair enough. I would

expect no less of a samurai."

His opponent grabs the hilt and twists faster than the eye can follow / severing Takeda's hand at the wrist. / "I haven't been a samurai in quite some time." (3) The general's scream quickly becomes a fevered battle cry. / He tucks the bleeding stump into his robes / and charges like an angry elephant. (3) The Samurai shuffles backward in small steps, / parrying swing after swing until the general over-extends, / then brings his crescent crossguard blade crashing into his enemy's throat! (3)

Nearly blinded by rage and pain, / Takeda leans back just far enough to avoid the death stroke. / He cartwheels past his adversary / and hooks his blade around the bastard's leg. / The momentum of his cartwheel pulls the blade clean through his victim's shin bone. (5) The Samurai falls to the ground laughing, / because the needle he inserted into the general's neck with his off hand is already doing its deadly work... (2)

A lot went on behind the scenes, that round. First, the player asked the GM to hand him a hook sword by the blade, because he wanted the Samurai's loss of Honor to come from something really underhanded. The GM was fine with it, so long as the freedom to inflict crippling injuries went both ways. However, he thought the decapitation was excessive, so he chose to have the general defend himself with a last second dodge. Finally, the player made up that bit about the acupuncture needle after the fact, to set up a Coup de Grace.

Now, it's time to roll them bones! Both characters earned the max pool, 8 dice, and both decide to split them between 5

yang and 3 Yin. The GM strikes gold with 5 Yang and 2 Yin successes. The player rolls 4 Yang successes, which drops the general down to -2 Chi. The player's 2 Yin successes also leave him with -2 Chi. Since ties go to the good guys, the player gets his Coup de Grace!

The general's hook sword falls to the ground as blood begins to seep out of his eyes, mouth, and nose. The Samurai can hear the dead man's heart convulsing inside of his chest, literally squeezing the life out of itself. His skin and eyes turn crimson as every capillary in his body bursts. Then, he dies.

Meanwhile, deep in the trench, the Shadow Warrior flits through the scaffolding like a spider monkey. / He attaches one of his four explosive charges to the conduit that carries the land's chi out of the trench, / and another to a structural weak point in the side of the cliff face. (3)

Suddenly, a high pitched shriek descends on him from above. A skeletal figure in richly embroidered silk robes lands on the catwalk right behind him! When the ninja spins around, a jaundiced hand with curled, 3-inch long nails slams into his chest. A wave of nausea passes through his entire body as the eunuch's Venomous Pam Strike disrupts his chi.

The Ebonite assassin stumbles back as the world spins around him. / Concentrating, he rolls backwards onto his hands / and launches himself heel-first into his attacker! / The eunuch flies back several yards / and crashes through a wooden platform! (5) The Sorcerer seems to halt himself by sheer force

of will / and kicks a pointy piece of wooden debris back at the assassin. (2) A pair of bladed sais spring into the ninja's hands / just in time to deflect the missile up and over his head. / Wood shaves off steel, filling the air with sawdust. (3)

After the last round, the GM asked the Ebonite's player what he'd been up to in the trench. Those first 3 Details, the ones related to planting explosives, are being Held for later. The ninja has a "Saboteur" Trait rated 4, so he'll only need a few dice to make sure the trench goes kaboom!!!

Both the Eunuch Sorcerer and the Shadow Warrior start with 3 points of Chi and combat Traits rated at 5 (Dark-Fu and Ninjitsu, respectively). They also both earned the maximum 8 dice for hurtin' each other this round. (The GM had it for the filibuster, even without those last 2 Details). Note how the vertigo doesn't actually hamper the ninja. In fact, it helps the player add Details to his Description!

The player's primary goal is destroying the chi machine, so he takes a defensive stance with 5 Yin and 3 Yang. The eunuch figures the best defense is a good offense, so he rolls 3 Yin and 5 Yang. A lot of sixes pop up this round. The GM ends up with only 3 Yang and 2 Yin successes. The player's 4 Yin successes are more than enough to fend off the eunuch's attack, while his 3 Yang successes manage to do a little damage. The GM gets the additional Yin success he needs by cashing in a point of Chi, leaving him with 2.

The sorcerer projects his super-long sleeves towards the

ninja. / They cut a swath through the cloud of sawdust / before wrapping tightly around the ninja's neck and hands. / The eunuch whips his enemy upwards, / crashing through layer after layer of bamboo scaffolding, / then drags him back down the entire depth of the trench / and plows him into the stone floor! (7)

The camera follows the ninja on his rollercoaster ride of pain. / Amidst the chaos, you can see the Ebonite use his sais like scissors to cut his hands free, / then grab onto the main support pillar at the last moment! / The camera sails on without him and careens into the earth. (4) He quickly lashes a satchel charge to the pillar, (1) then launches his rope dart up through the path of destruction / and lodges it in the eunuch's ribcage. / Using his adversary as an anchor, / he swings himself towards the main compressor. (4)

The GM feels like that's a good place to stop and roll, even though he has fewer than the max dice. Once again, the player just wants to make sure he gets those explosives placed. Only one of his Details dealt with that directly, so that die goes into the pool he's holding for later. The other 8 dice get a defensive split of 6 Yin and 2 Yang. (Those 2 Yang are mostly there to stop the GM from rolling all of his dice to attack.)

The GM rolls 5 Yang dice and 2 Yin, getting 5 Yang successes and 1 Yin success. The player has some bad luck, rolling a pair of sixes in defense, which allows one of the eunuch's attacks to get through. He ponies up 1 point of Chi, leaving him with 2. On the up side, both of his Yang dice come up successes, so the eunuch loses 1 of his last 2 points of Chi.

With many pounds of ninja pinning him to the floorboards, the eunuch has few options. / He wraps both of his gnarled hands around the rope protruding from his chest / and pulls with all his chi-enhanced might! / Now that there's a little slack, / he can work the dart out from under his ribs and tear it loose. / The ragged wound fills quickly with a thick, black ichor. (6)

The assassin flies off course as his rope comes loose. / With a snap of the wrist, / he wraps the dart around a bamboo pole. / The camera swoops around him / as he loop-de-loops back towards the / machine's geomantic heart. (6) He quickly lashes the last charge onto its / pulsing, leathery exterior. (2) When the sorcerer realizes what's happening, he roars with primal fury / and unleashes a stream of dark chi from each hand! (2) The ninja swings away / as the twin bolts shatter the catwalk behind him! (2)

Now, the player is holding a massive pool of 6 dice for his explosive charges. He's not too concerned with killing the eunuch, so he takes his 8 combat dice and splits them down the middle. Knowing he only has 1 point of Chi left, the GM makes sure to devote a few dice to defense; he rolls 5 Yang and 3 Yin.

All of those Yin dice come up successes, but so do all 4 of the player's Yang dice. That wipes out the eunuch's last point of Chi. He's still in the fight, but just barely. (That rope dart to the chest must have really taken it out of him!) 4 of the GM's Yang dice are successes, as opposed to the player's 3 Yin, so the

ninja also cashes in one more point of Chi, leaving him with 1.

Now, the GM could just leave it at that and let the ninja blow the trench to hell, but it really seems like that should pose at least a little danger to the eunuch, who's still within its depths. So, he asks the player if he'd like to roll any of his held dice as unopposed attacks against the eunuch, rather than attacks against the trench. He's got a target number of 4, and only needs 1 good hit to kill the eunuch, so he decides to roll 2 Yang dice and devote other 4 to destroying the chi-diverting machine. He rolls 2,2,4,5, and 4,6; that's 3 successes against the trench and 1 success against the eunuch. The engine of evil is no more and the player gets a Coup de Grace on the sorcerer after all...

The Ebonite lands nimbly on the edge of the trench as it erupts in an hellacious fireball! The eunuch flies up behind him like a demon escaping hell, but a wave of shrapnel overtakes him, tearing through his body like stones through a still pond!

BLOODSUCKAS & BAD MUTHAS

Strike Team: Bushido has learned that the synthorgs of Project Moebius have laid a trap for the Fang Gang.... they've set up a fake drug deal at an isolated construction site. The cyber-samurai figure they can let the two groups thin out each other's ranks, then swoop in and make an arrest or two.

The GM decides to let them indulge in some tactical planning. They are military, after all. First, they want to approach the site in helicopters, so they can drop down on ropes. Second, they want snipers to cover them from the air while they're mixin' it up on the ground. Next, someone suggests that the helicopters have cameras wired into their communications network, so they can receive constant surveillance data. Finally, they want to blind their enemies with intense strobe lights that their cybernetic eyes will be able to filter out. That's four separate Details, so the GM lets them hold a tactical pool of 4 dice.

From their lofty perches, the samurai watch as a scene of treachery unfolds. A trio of Fang Gang vampires shows up with a briefcase full of cash, but their drugs never arrive. Instead, a dozen machete-wielding synthorgs swarm around them! The vamps are more than a match for their genetic cousins, cutting down more than half of the synths before the first two are dusted. Strike Team: Bushido's moment has arrived!

The helicopters dive like striking hawks and launch their strobe grenades. The remaining synthorgs bolt; they know this

tune. Bushido's commander, 01, spots the synth leader retreating with a pair of thugs. She throws herself from the helicopter and swan dives to the ground behind them. / Then, she snaps her repelling cord onto one thugs' belt and signals the chopper to take off, yanking him into the night sky. (2)

Blinded by the lights, but still able to smell her, / the other thug swings a super-powered right hook in her general direction. (2) 01 blocks the hook with ease, / then twists the thug into a painful arm lock / and launches a savage kick at the synth leader's knee. (3) The joint snaps backward with an audible crunch, / which is echoed a moment later when the thug escapes 01's hold by breaking his own arm! (2)

The samurai counters with a pair of simultaneous backfists to their faces, (1) but it's not enough to stop the leader from launching a spin kick / (with his broken leg!) / that sends her flying into the foreman's trailer! / She's followed almost instantly by a grenade, thoughtfully thrown by the thug (4). Beneath the pile of wreckage that was once the foreman's trailer, 01 doesn't even see the grenade coming. / Fortunately, her sniper support in the helicopter does! / The camera follows a single bullet as it rockets out of the sniper's rifle, / hurls across the strobe-lit night / and destroys the grenade in a billowing, slow motion fireball! (5)

Now, the GM could have called this round about half way through, but they were on a roll. The synthorgs are being treated as a single Nemesis with 5 Chi and the combat Trait "Super-Soldier (5)." 01, like all the cyber-sams, has 3 Chi and "Killbot

(5)." Since 01 used her sniper support (with a nifty camera swoop) and strobe lights, she grabs 2 dice from the held pool, giving her a total of 13 dice to the synthorgs' 10!

The GM decides to go on the offensive, rolling 8 Yang and 2 Yin. Without quite so much Chi to back her up, 01 choses a more conservative split: 8 Yang and 5 Yin. They both roll 6 Yang successes. The GM's Yin dice both come up successes, but she still has to cash in 4 of her 5 Chi to make up the difference. 01 gets 4 Yin successes and has to turn in 2 of her 3 Chi. That certainly levels the playing field!

02 and 03 repel down on the vampire's flanks just as it puts its last synth attacker in a reverse headlock, / bends him backwards at the knees, / and snaps his neck with a quick upward yank. / Then, it kicks the corpse at 02, knocking the cyborg off his feet. (4) 03 whips out a man-catcher (a metal collar on a long pole) / and snaps the business end around the bloodsucker's throat. (2) With a look of mild annoyance on its fanged face, / the vampire takes hold of the man-catcher and flings 03 into the air... / straight into the blades of the helicopter above! (3) With speed borne of desperation, / 03 hacks into the helicopter's control system / and sends it into a tight starboard roll. / The blades still take a slice out of his midsection, / but only his skin and subdermal armor are damaged. (5)

Meanwhile, 02 has flipped back up to his feet / and drawn his laser-sharpened katana. / He buries his sword up to the hilt in the vampire's midsection, / lifts it off its feet, / and nails it to a concrete wall! (5) The vamp counters with a savage kick / that

sends 02 sailing into a pick-up clear across the yard. / The camera zooms into the truck's engine, where we see the fuel line burst next to some sparking electronics. / The truck erupts in a geyser of flaming gasoline and tonka-tough shrapnel! (4)

The cyber-sams have to take on the vamp mono-a-mono. The GM sets the dice pool limit at 12, which means each player can roll 6 dice. Note how the GM earns her first three dice by dispatching a nameless mook; it doesn't affect the player-characters directly, but those Details make the vamp look like a bad ass and that makes for a better fight. (If you need a more in-character rationale, say that getting rid of the mook improved the vamp's tactical position or intimidated the PCs. In any case, it's worth 3 dice.)

Again, the player-characters have 3 Chi each and the combat Trait "Killbot (5)." The vampire has 5 Chi, being a magically animated corpse, and "Urban Predator (5)." Since the GM has no need for the Nemesis to survive the night, she goes on the offensive again. She rolls 4 Yang dice against each cyber-sam (for a total of 8 Yang) and 3 Yin dice (2 against 02 and 1 against 03). Lets resolve them one at a time...

02 decides his actions were mostly defensive, so he rolls 4 Yin and 2 Yang. The GM rolls 3 Yang successes against him. All 4 of 02's Yin dice come up successes, so he loses no Chi despite having described taking damage to his subdermal armor. (Apparently, it's not enough to slow him down.) He also gets successes on both Yang dice, but it's not enough to penetrate the vamp's 2 Yin successes.

03 wants to take this bloodsucker down, so he rolls 4 Yang and 2 Yin dice. The GM rakes in another 3 Yang successes, while 03 only gets 1 Yin success, so the player tosses in 2 of his 3 Chi. He has better luck on his attacks, rolling all 4 Yang successes against the vamp's 1 Yin success. The GM has to fork over 3 of the vampire's 5 Chi, leaving her with 2.

Across the yard, 01 huddles beneath a mountain of sheet metal and office supplies / while damage assessment data scrolls across her visual field. / Her tactical uplink flashes to life, feeding her surveillance images from the sniper's scope. The synths are closing in for the kill. (3) The first thug finally cuts himself loose from the repel line and drops down near the trailer wreckage. / He twists around and flings his machete through the bottom of the helicopter's cabin, / obliterating the controls and assassinating the pilot. / The chopper pitches forward and nose dives into a nearby street. (4)

01 takes careful note of the synthorgs' locations before the surveillance camera goes dead. / She bursts out of the wreckage, / sending a large piece of sheet metal to decapitate the first thug. / Then, she throws a handful of monogrammed office pencils into broken-arm's face, / impaling his brain by way of both eye sockets! (5) Broken-knee is already in motion, / leaping into the air and descending on his enemy like a thunderbolt! (2) 01 grabs the synthorg's good leg in mid-flight / and whips him into a construction crane. (2) The synth hits it like a wrecking ball! / The support beams buckle and the entire rig lurches over, / raining wreckage all across the yard! (3)

For a couple of guys with 1 Chi left, that will be more than enough dice! (Many of them came from indirect attacks, like the synth taking out the chopper.) 01 grabs the last 2 dice from the held pool, for a total of 10. She splits them evenly between Yin and Yang, getting 4 Yang successes and 5 Yin successes. The GM decides to roll 6 Yang and 3 Yin. All of her attacks come up successes, but it's only enough to bring 01 down to zero Chi. She also rolls one failure for defense, leaving the vamp with 2 Yin successes. That takes her to -1 Chi, which entitles 01 to a Coup de Grace!

The two warriors charge each other through the field of debris. The synthorg feints right, then dodges to the left and clothes-lines the samurai, who falls flat on her back. The synth's fist pounds down, aiming to crush 01's chest, but she rolls out of the way and plunges a syringe into the bastard's neck. Less than a second later, he's sleeping like a synthetic baby. 01 sends a message to her teammates: "I got one!"

Moments earlier - 03 returns to earth with enough force to crack the pavement beneath his feet and rushes the vampire... (1) who breaks the katana at the hilt / and pushes itself off the blood-smeared blade / just in time to backflip onto the wall, / clinging to it like a spider in its web, / and kick the cyber-sam in the face en-route. (5) Having extricated himself from the pick-up's flaming wreck, / 02 sprints across the yard, leaps up, and delivers a flying triple kick / that pounds the vampire deep into

the wall. (3) Feeling no pain, the vamp springs forward and drags 02 back to earth, / where it pins him with both feet, / then hits his partner with a sledgehammer right hook. (3) 03 steps into the punch, / blocks it with his left arm, / and sweeps the vamp's right leg out from under it. (3) 02 grapples the creature and rolls them both over / so that he's sitting on the blood-sucker's back. (2)

Everybody's running out of steam, so the GM decides to call the round even though they haven't maxed out their dice pools. She plans to go offensive, leaving the Nemesis with very few Yin dice. Her players should be able to put him into negative Chi without getting completely wiped out themselves. Again, let's take them one at a time...

The GM throws 3 Yang and 1 Yin at her first opponent. 03's player earned 4 dice, but only has 1 Chi left, so he splits his dice evenly. They both end up with 1 Yin success. The GM gets lucky and all three of her Yang dice come up successes. That's just enough to force 03 into the land of negative Chi. 03 returns the favor with 2 Yang successes, leaving the vamp just 1 Chi.

02 has a few more dice to work with; he goes for the kill with 4 Yang and 1 Yin. The only way for the vamp to take him out is to roll 4 Yang successes, and hope 02 gets zilch for defense, so the GM puts all 4 of her remaining dice into the attack. She gets lucky again, 4 successes, but so does 02. His Yin die comes up a success, leaving him teetering at zero Chi. He only needs 2 Yang successes to dust the vamp, and gets 3! However, the GM gets a Coup de Grace on 03, before 02 gets his.

That's when 01's message comes over the uplink. "I got one!" 02 flashes his partner a grim smile while 03 draws his katana. The vampire reaches up with its feet, hooks 02 around the throat, and tosses him back like a rag doll! It rolls to the side as 03 delivers his death stroke... and catches the samurai's sword in its fangs! It leaps up like a rabid dog and sinks its claw-like fingers into 03's chest, clutching at his heart.

02 is behind it in a flash. He grabs the business end of the katana, still held fast in the vampire's mouth, and pulls it back with all his cyber-boosted strength. The blade slices through jawbone, skull, and brain, bisecting the creature's head! The corpse begins to decompose immediately, rotting away like piece of fruit in a time-lapse film.