

• A CINEMATIC ACTION ROLE-PLAYING GAME •

# HKAT! 2

HONG KONG ACTION THEATRE! 2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION



GUARDIANS OF ORDER, INC. presents a TRI-STAT™ COMPATIBLE ROLE-PLAYING GAME  
produced by MARK C. MACKINNON directed by LUCIEN SOULBAN with art direction by JEFF MACKINTOSH  
starring NICOLE LINDROOS CHRIS PRAMAS JEFF MACKINTOSH LUCIEN SOULBAN  
also featuring ANDREW BAKER GRANT HARRIS RAVEN MIMURA DARREN SPARLING



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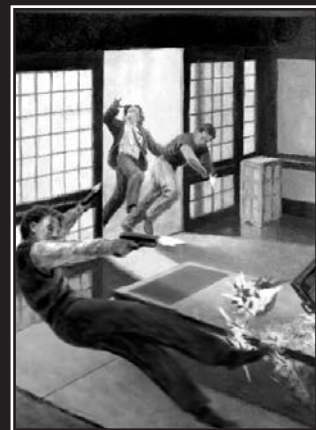
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**COVER STORY:** Yuen bit his lower lip and uttered a curse under his breath. He'd lost count of his ammo, but figured one of his twin Sig Saurs was on empty. Problems? He was also trapped in a room with only a floor table for cover and surrounded on four sides by Japanese sliding panels ... why the hell did he have to come to Tokyo? Fortunately, his opponents couldn't riddle the room with automatic fire without punching through the paper walls and hitting each other. Hyoto's goons would have to rush him if they wanted the briefcase on the table. Yuen flipped his last clip into the air with his left hand, which still held the loaded Sig, while snapping the butt of the Sig in his right hand against his thigh, snagging the magazine release and dropping the empty ammo clip. Yuen then brought the empty gun up, caught the spinning clip in the gun's butt, and then slammed the butt into his thigh, locking the magazine in. Hyoto's goons rushed the two open entrances at that moment; Yuen dove for the ground, both Sigs exploding into action...



My old Kung Fu school was located on St. Catherine's Street in Montreal. Thanks to its second story vantage point and bay windows, it overlooks the city's main thoroughfare and offers a beautiful view outside as well as an embarrassing look inside the school. I say embarrassing because every year, the grand Imperial Cinema hosts the *Fantasia Film Festival* in July and August. *Fantasia* is a chance to see international films for martial arts, horror, fantasy, and sci-fi including the latest Hong Kong action escapades, Italian zombie flicks, and Japanese anime (to name a few). I say embarrassing because any movie starring Jackie Chan, Jet Li, or Michelle Yeoh always draws lines to beat the block. I say embarrassing, because these folks were waiting outside to see the world's premier martial actors, and instead were treated to my bad impressions of Sammo Hung (all the weight, none of the talent). When you're heavy-set and learning hurricane kicks ... well let's just say it ain't pretty. That didn't stop me, though; Kung Fu was in my veins.

Like many fans of Hong Kong *milieu*, I remember those old 1970, badly dubbed chop-socky flicks playing on Saturday afternoon television. Movies like *The Five Deadly Venoms*, *Enter the Dragon*, and *Four Shaolin Masters* were my first experiences with the genre. Later, my Hong Kong influences were few and scattered like most memories of puberty: Jackie Chan in *Cannonball Run I & II* and, later, Carpenter's *Big Trouble in Little China*. Still, I grew older and other hobbies divested me of my time and finances.

Following my introduction to anime, thanks to my friend Jean Carrières at Ianus Publications (now Dream Pod 9), I was in love with these fantastic Asian engines of imagination. "Well," my friends figured "if he likes high-action anime, then let's show him *A Chinese Ghost Story*."

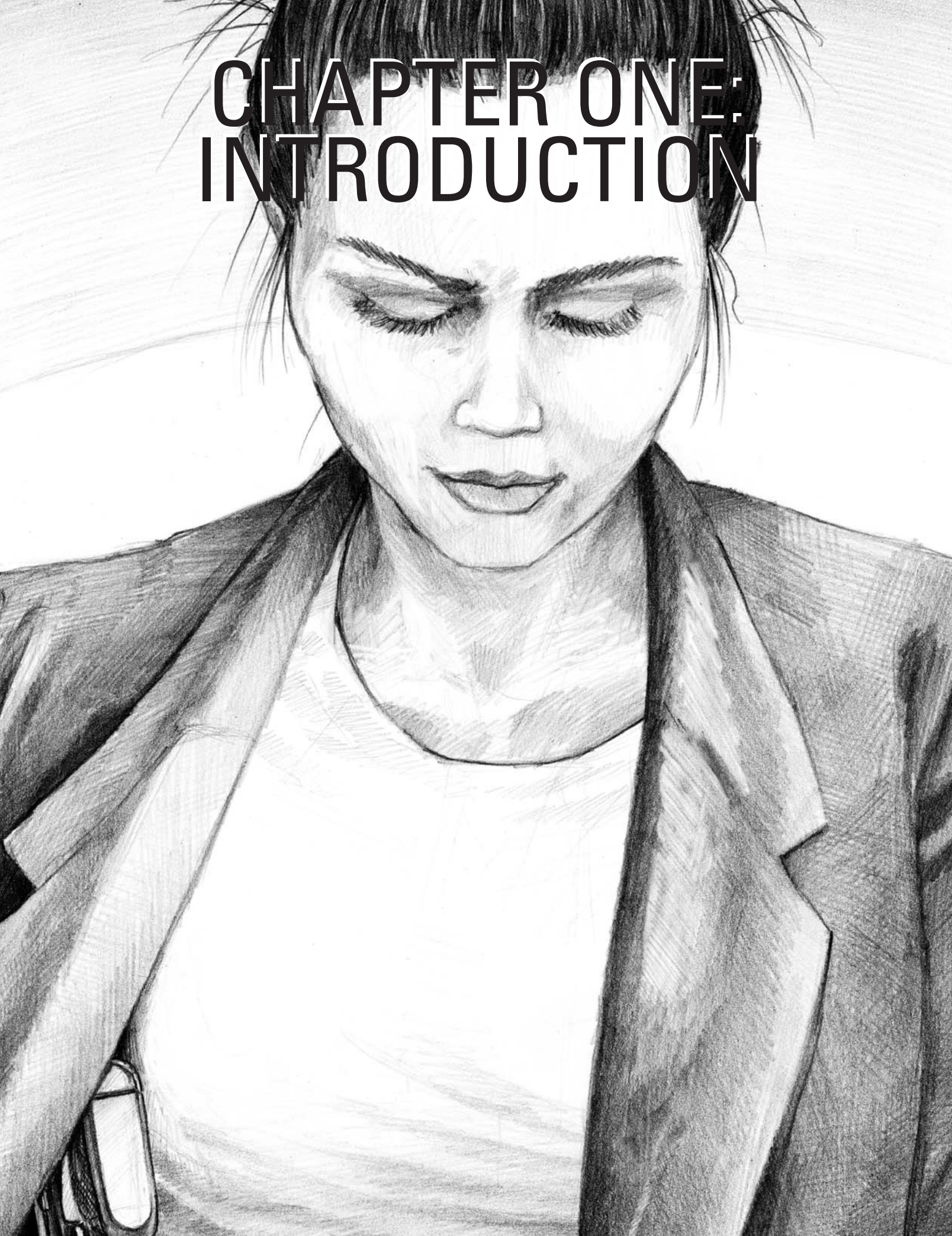
The choreography and action awed me.

It seemed like a floodgate had opened after that. Slowly, Hong Kong films were appearing on the North American radar with greater frequency. Friends like Jean Carrières and Patrick Lapoint were snobs for the offbeat and different, exposing me to a better quality of HK films: Jet Li in *Fist of Legend*, Michelle Yeoh in *Tai Chi Master*, and the double-fisted bill of Chow Yun-fat and John Woo in *Hard Boiled*.

Finally, when *Rumble in the Bronx* premiered to North American audiences, Hong Kong cinema was no longer the privy of a select few. Suddenly, every Tom, Dick, and Blockbuster was renting and selling the classics, and I was no longer hemmed in by limited access. I now had to share my love and was no longer unique for enjoying the offbeat. Still, I was glad, for Hong Kong's talented pool of actors and directors were finally receiving acclaim for their hard work. Little did I realize that my growing appreciation for Hong Kong cinema would also culminate in a job where the offbeat is rewarded, and the fantastic a job requirement.

Lucien Soulban  
June 2001

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION





# LIGHTS, CAMERA, INTRODUCTION

There is a thin line between an ordinary person and a superhero, and that distinction is the action star. While he or she may not possess any powers, his or her sheer ability and skill is far beyond the reach of everyday men and women. Nobody understands this fine line better than Hong Kong films. The honed dexterity and grace of Hong Kong action stars is virtually unparalleled by Western standards; the fusion of Occidental fashion and aesthetics with the Chinese culture is entirely unique, almost magical; and the physical prowess and ability of HK's stuntmen and women is like watching the Olympics of filmmaking.

*Hong Kong Action Theatre!* or *HKAT!* is a role-playing celebration of an art form uniquely Chinese. It possesses a list of alumni with unmatched international notoriety, among them Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Chow Yun-fat, Jet Li, or Michelle Yeoh. It is responsible for a host of Western impostors who try mimicking the frenetic pace of HK cinema without understanding its themes, history, or nuances. Most of all, it is becoming increasingly available to the hungry mainstream markets of the West. More video stores are carrying Hong Kong titles than ever before because they recognize the growing demand. The *Hong Kong Action Theatre! Role-Playing Game* does too, as both a fan of the genre and as a resource for others to enjoy. It draws on the unique precept that the players control actors who fall into a variety of roles much like Jackie Chan in all his films. Audiences watch these movies avidly, not because of the role, but because of the actor.

Hong Kong films are more than the wild stunts, feats of martial prowess, and double-fisted gunplay that aficionados of the genre have come to expect. Classics such as *Painted Faces* and *Farewell My Concubine* are well respected and as true to the Hong Kong milieu as any John Woo or Tsui Hark bulletfest, but there is also little thrill in role-playing melodramas. Therefore, if it appears *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* only embraces the high-octane façade of HK cinema, it is because fans maintain certain expectations from the inherently dynamic, fast-paced nature of most of its films. Conflict is the manna of role-players, and HK cinema offers it in

spades and in attitude. These movies are a wish list of abilities and physical prowess many people wish they possessed. Who wouldn't want Jackie Chan's incomprehensible agility and bravery, or Jet Li's blinding martial speed, or Chow Yun-fat's ultimate cool demeanour, or Michelle Yeoh's prowess in all three aspects? *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* is a partial realization of those wishes, allowing fans to play in an environment where movie logic and FX broaden suspension of disbelief. Where can action heroes brave death with each stunt, defy the dictates of physics like gravity, fight in a complex choreography, and still appear vulnerable? In Hong Kong films of course, where honour, duty, and obligation still serve as strong moral centres in hero and villain alike.

## WHAT IS A ROLE-PLAYING GAME?

Everyone, from child to adult, wishes at one time or another, to be on the big-screen or on a television series. Whether as villain or hero, everyone wonders what it would be like to play the gunslinger squaring off against desperadoes south of the border, or the lead actress facing down the queen alien with nothing but her wits and an armful of heat to win the day. Role-playing games are unscripted movies and television shows where a group of people assumes the roles of heroes and heroines like any actor or actress. They are known as "players," while the parts they play in these adventures are called "actors" or "actor characters." Pivotal to this arrangement is the Game Master, the movie's director who referees the players and establishes plot, mood, and setting for the actors. He or she dictates the course of the movie, creates a framework for the show, and helps the actors interact with their environment; the players, in turn, play their characters in the production, acting and improvising through description and dialogue. When a player wants his or her character to engage in an action, the Game Master acts as referee and helps decide whether or not the actor succeeds at his or her task.

## PLAYING THE PART

Within *Hong Kong Action Theatre!*, everyone plays an actor working in a movie. The movie becomes reality for the duration of the session, allowing players to

interact in a variety of settings and adopt various personas while still allowing for some continuity and growth of character. Each player has something to contribute to the overall story or production, and the GM will call on everyone to accomplish a variety of tasks. A discussion of these parts follows.

### PLAYERS

People who play *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* are known as players. Players control the principal characters in the drama known as actors, while the actors, in turn, adopt different personas called roles, depending on the requirement of each movie. The players decide who their actors are, what they look like, what they do, and how they behave; they fuel the dynamic that drives the game through the actions of the principle character, breathing life into him or her.

Being a player, however, is more than being an actor since there is no script. In a play, the script tells an actor what to say while the director tells the actor what to do. A role-playing game is wholly freeform and improvisational, however. The player must decide what the character does and says. Thus, they are an actor, director, and playwright all rolled into one.

### GAME MASTERS

Game Masters are players of a sort, but with greater responsibilities. The Game Master assumes the role of all the characters that players interact with outside their group. Thus, characters fall into two classifications: player characters (PCs) or those personas controlled by players, and non-player characters (NPCs) or those roles directed by the Game Master. In addition to NPCs, GMs must also create several game parameters including designing movies for the players, and defining the potential roles for the actors to play. It is the GM's job to set the stage and relate that information to the players. That is, he or she must decide upon the movie's overall plot, the nature of the local environs (or film setting), and describe those surroundings to the players in terms of their five senses. While the Game Master establishes the stage in advance, he or she must decide what it looks like, how the people living there act, and the principle and secondary story arcs of the movie. While the players determine the outcome of events and forge the plot

through their characters, the GM must introduce an initial plot hook to start the ball rolling. If, for instance, a GM wants to run a murder mystery-style story, he or she must first determine who died, why, and what roles are best suited for the mystery. Compiling a list of suspects and their motives is also imperative. The GM might decide who the murderer is before beginning play, though that certainly is not necessary.

The Game Master has another important responsibility, and that is serving as referee. In many cases, players may have questions or argue over how a rule works or whether a certain action is possible. It is the GM's job to interpret the rules of the game in a fair and impartial manner to facilitate play. Thus, the Game Master should be familiar with the rules beforehand so that in case of a conflict, he or she can make an informed decision. The GM's ruling is final in all matters.

Being the Game Master is the most demanding and difficult job in the game. It can also be the most rewarding since the GM watches his or her story unfold while helping guide the players. There is no satisfaction like GMing a successful role-playing game.

### CHARACTERS

Most role-playing games use a system of classes or archetypes to quantify characters into nifty categories based on race, skill sets, outlooks, or even interests. Not so here. Characters in *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* fall into two moulds, that of actor and that of role. Either, however, is akin to people in society with varied interests, hobbies, and job descriptions. Nobody introduces themselves as a member of the Big Head Tribe or as a dual class 3rd Level Chemist/5th Level Game Designer. Instead, folks are simply engineers, teachers, doctors, etc. who enjoy hiking, swimming, watching television, collecting stamps, or playing video-games. *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* takes this example to more extreme measures, however, through the division between role and actor.

The actor is often the human face of the player, and the core character around which the player drapes a role. The actor is like everyday people in his or her strengths and weaknesses, though something about him or her sets the actor apart. Perhaps the character somehow epitomizes the mien of cool or suave; perhaps he or she is



a physical prodigy when it comes to fighting or comedy. Regardless, the actor is still “normal” with exception to some skill or shtick that makes him or her a hot commodity on screen.

The role, on the other hand, varies wildly depending on the film. The role is like a costume that actors wear when playing different persona. What’s the difference then between the player controlling an actor playing a role? Using Jackie Chan, as an example, *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* might allow the player to pretend he or she is international superstar Jackie Chan. In the course of a movie, the player does not actually play Jackie, but instead plays Jackie in his role as Wong Fei-hung in *Drunken Master* or as Asian Hawk in *Operation: Condor*. This means that while the roles are different, audiences know to expect certain comedic elements, charm, and insanity-level action from Jackie Chan because of his training as an actor. The same applies to Jet Li, Michelle Yo, Chow Yun-fat, Andy Lau, Anita Mui, Sammo Hung, Yuen Biao, and many others whose martial prowess, beauty, talents, or acting styles are renown.

While the actor is all too human, the role can be as invincible or as vulnerable as that particular movie demands. Perhaps the role is superheroic like that of *The Heroic Hero*, or dark and gritty like *City on Fire*, or magical and over the top like *Chinese Ghost Story*. Historical accuracy and the laws of physics are putty in the hands of the role, which perhaps accounts for this genre’s soaring popularity. The role is often the ultimate in wish fulfilment.

## TRI-STAT COMPATIBLE

For those readers accustomed to the Tri-Stat System normally found in the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* SECOND EDITION role-playing game, *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* uses a slightly modified version of Tri-Stat to accommodate some unique features inherent within the Hong Kong film milieu. Immediately evident is the creation of a dual character concept with the Actor vs. Role distinction (see page 10). This is an important facet of *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* thanks to a new Derived Attribute called Star Power (see page 37), which allows players to bid on roles on behalf of their actors, and encourages high-octane stunts.

Additional tweaks and modifications include scaled point costs for Stats to reflect the difficulty of training, and a freeform martial arts system that is open-ended enough to include a variety of fighting styles. Last, but not least, is a modified conflict resolution system to reflect the often blinding speeds at which Hong Kong action sequences seem to occur.

## LANGUAGE

A few words on sexist language ... readers will not find any here. Throughout the game text are references to “his or her,” “him or her,” “he or she,” etc. There has been an argument for some time that masculine pronouns have become neutered over time and can refer to men or women in an abstract sense. GUARDIANS OF ORDER disagrees with this assumption.

Masculine pronouns such as he, him, and his, are, like it or not, exclusionary terms. They ostracize women. Since both men and women play this game, GUARDIANS OF ORDER does not wish to linguistically discriminate against its audience and will therefore use “he or she” until such time as the English language develops an appropriate neutral pronoun.

GUARDIANS OF ORDER does not discriminate, with one notable exception; when quoting another author, in which case the quote is kept verbatim. If the author uses sexist language, it is an unfortunate but necessary tool to maintaining the integrity and spirit of the author’s original intent. GUARDIANS OF ORDER does not support revisionism, and will therefore maintain the author’s original words.

**DESIGNER’S NOTE:** In the rules section of this book, the numerous martial arts practiced throughout the world are handled very simply. GUARDIANS OF ORDER recognizes and knows that each martial art is different and distinct from the next, but in game terms, they are similar to each other — an attempt to hit a target using *karate* has the same chance of success as one using *akido* or *kung fu*. By using the advanced combat rules (see page 75-77), GMs and players can explore the differences between various martial arts, but in the base game mechanics, they are treated the same.

# CHAPTER TWO: CHARACTER CREATION



**PROD**

**SC**

**DAT**

**CAM**

**DIR**



# 演員對角色 ACTOR VS. ROLE

Character creation in *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* is a special process compared to most other games. Players in *HKAT!* create two personalities for the game. The first is the “actor character,” or simply actor, who stars in movies produced and directed by the Game Master. The second character type is the “role character,” or role, the part played by the actor in the movie itself.

The actor is the base personality, designed with limited access to Attributes, Defects, and Skills. For example, if an actor has a Significant Other in his or her real life, it will have no bearing on his or her role in a movie. The actor is the most important part of character creation since this is the player’s basis for all future roles. If the actor is primarily action-oriented, he or she will probably only play action-oriented parts while more serious roles go to folks with more theatrical ability.

The role is the part the actor plays in the film, be it a police officer, scientist, doctor, martial artist, or something equally as exciting. The actor is probably unskilled in his or her role’s profession, but the scriptwriters will take care of that problem. Thus, before each movie production, players add Attributes, Skills, and Defects specific to the actor’s role in the film. The role personality can take the scientific, medical, or other intellect-based skills required by the actor to fulfil his or her part in the movie.

**DESIGNER’S NOTE:** Some people may not wish to play *HKAT!* using the Actor/Role aspect of the game, instead preferring to play a straight-forward, normal role-playing game of martial arts action. In such a situation, ignore the rules on Role Only, Actor Only, and Open Attributes, Defects, and Skills. Also, the number of Character Points with which players create their characters should be increased since they will not benefit from Role Packages. See page 80 for more details on playing *HKAT!* without using the Role/Actor aspect.

H O N G K O N G A C T I O N T H E A T R E S E C O N D E D I T I O N



## TABLE 2-1: CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

### STEP ONE: GM DISCUSSION

Talk to the GM about the nature of the upcoming game. Discuss when you will play, the game's duration, and the game's intensity level. Is it a series of light action romps, or a dramatic trilogy that explores the darkness of a killer's soul? The GM should inform players what sort of movie or movies he or she intends to produce so they know what type of actors to create. Based on this, the GM should set the budget level of the campaign, which will determine the number of Character Points each player uses to design their characters. See page 12.

### STEP TWO: ACTOR STATS

Use Character Points to give your character Body, Mind, and Soul Stats, making sure each Stat is not lower than 1 nor higher than 10. See page 12.

### STEP THREE: ACTOR ATTRIBUTES

Players can use any remaining Character Points to acquire Attributes, which are rated in Levels from 1 to 6. See page 14.

### STEP FOUR: ACTOR DEFECTS

You may take a maximum of five Defects for your actor. These Defects will provide you with more role-playing opportunities and give you Bonus Points to raise Stats or acquire additional Attributes. See page 28.

### STEP FIVE: ACTOR SKILLS

Your character receives 20 starting Skill Points plus additional points if you assigned the Highly Skilled Attribute (or fewer if you assigned the Unskilled Defect). Use the Skill Points to acquire Skills and specializations relevant to your character outline. Skill Levels range from 1 to 6. See page 31.

### STEP SIX: DERIVED VALUES

After you have modified your character's Stats through Attributes and Defects, you can calculate his or her four derived values — Combat Value (both Attack and Defense), Health Points, Energy Points, and Star Power. See page 36.

### STEP SEVEN: BACKGROUND POINTS

You can earn 1-3 extra Character Points by giving the GM a background history of your actor, an important character story, a review of a past movie, or a character drawing. See page 37.

### STEP EIGHT: ROLE CREATION

Before each movie, after the actor bids for and lands a part, the player must create the "role character." The GM will provide the actor with a set of required Attributes, Skills, and Defects required for the role (see page 38 for more details on Role Creation). The GM may also provide players bonus Character Points and Skill Points to acquire additional Attributes and Skills and increased Stats (as well as buying more Defects to gain more points). The GM must approve all character changes to ensure they fit with the role. These role Attributes, Skills, and Defects are only available to the Actor for the duration of the movie — once filming is completed, the actor moves on to the next production and cannot take any of these additional abilities with him or her.



## 戲判議論 STEP ONE: GM DISCUSSION

You and the other players should discuss the nature of the upcoming game with the GM. Before the players create any actors, the GM should outline such details as campaign duration and expected time commitment. Since HKAT! campaigns are a collection of various movies starring the characters, the genre, story ideas and other game specific details will vary from production to production. The GM, however, should inform the players what the first movie will be like, giving them an idea of what actors to create. As a player, you should listen closely to the GM's descriptions since it will impact directly on your potential actor.

Ask for clarification of any rule modifications the GM plans to use as well as any restrictions on your character. If you have any game preferences involving issues such as combat intensity, maturity level, or drama versus comedy ratio, let the GM know about them. Help the GM create the movie that you all want to produce.

A primary issue that the Game Master should discuss with his or her players is the Character Point total. Character Points are a measure of the relative power and capability of characters. The GM decides how many Character Points are available to each player creating an actor. He or she will usually assign the same number of Character Points to each player's actor while the NPCs receive varying Character Point totals depending on their role in the movie. The number of Character Points assigned by the GM depends on the game's intended level. The GM may run a:

- B-movie campaign (15 points)
- a standard release campaign (20 points)
- a big budget campaign (25 points)
- a blockbuster campaign (30 or more points)

## 演員基礎能力 STEP TWO: ACTOR STATS

Stats (or Statistics) are numerical assignments that reflect your actor's base capabilities. Higher Stat values, for example, indicate an advanced degree of accomplishment or achievement. Three Stats represent your character's abilities: Body, Mind, and Soul.

### BODY STAT

This Stat measures your character's physical aptitudes. This includes overall health, strength, endurance, quickness, rate of healing, manual dexterity, and ability to withstand trauma. A character with a high Body is in good physical shape.

### MIND STAT

The Mind Stat represents a character's mental abilities. High values indicate intelligent, witty, and quick-learning characters.

### SOUL STAT

The Soul Stat represents willpower, determination, and spirit, and can sometimes represent psychic power, empathy, and unity with nature. A high rating in the Soul Stat helps a character focus his or her personal energies or life force to surpass his or her normal limits. It can also power special abilities.

### STAT RATINGS

Each Stat is rated on a scale of 1 to 10. A Stat value of 4 is adult human average. Ratings under 4 indicate decreased competence while numbers over 4 denote increasing superiority (for more details, see **Table 2-2: Stat Value Descriptions**, page 13). Thus, a person of average build, high intelligence, and above average determination might have Body 4, Mind 7, and Soul 5.

Players use Character Points to acquire Stats. You must decide how many to assign to Stats, and then divide these points among the character's Body, Mind, and Soul. Most HKAT! action movie stars have Stats ranging from 4 to 6, depending on their strengths and weaknesses. Their incredible physical abilities are more a reflection of training than innate capacity. Thus, high Stat values are very expensive compared to low values, encouraging players to

create characters who rely on Skills and Attributes rather than Body, Mind, or Soul. The **Table 2-3: Stat Cost** shows the point cost for Body, Mind, or Soul values. At least 1 Character Point must be assigned to each Stat — no character can have a Stat value of zero.

**TABLE 2-2: STAT VALUE DESCRIPTIONS**

**Stat Value Description**

0	Completely and utterly useless.
1	Inept.
2	Significantly below adult human average.
3	Below adult human average.
4	Adult human average.
5	Above adult human average.
6	Significantly above human average.
7	Highly capable.
8	Extremely capable.
9	Best in the land.
10	World-class ability.

**TABLE 2-3: STAT COSTS**

Stat Level	Cost
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	6
6	8
7	10
8	13
9	16
10	20

Players can spend any Character Points not used for Stats to acquire various useful talents and powers called Attributes (page 14). The GM may set an absolute ceiling or floor on the number of Character Points players can allocate to Stats to ensure characters maintain a balance between Stats and Attributes.

**DESIGNER'S NOTE:** In normal Tri-Stat System games (such as *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*), Stats cost 1 Character Point per Level regardless of the Level. In HKAT!, we decided to implement a scaled point cost system to discourage players from building actors with high Stats. Most Hong Kong movie actors' incredible abilities on screen are a combination of film magic and long years of training. The film magic comes across in game elements such as Gun Fu (page 18), Wire Fu (page 23), and Script Rewrites (page 37) while the long years of training are handled through Skills (pages 31 to 36). Thus, the scaled point cost for Stats is to encourage players to create characters with Attributes and Skills rather than high Stats.

Additionally, the point cost between Levels 4 and 5, 7 and 8, and 9 and 10 increases at an accelerated pace. These cost increases are called barriers. It is often easy for a person to maintain him or herself at an average level (Stat of 3 or 4), but to improve oneself to where he or she is now "above average" is challenging and requires effort — it does not come naturally for most people. To mimic this, there is a barrier between Level 4 and 5. Once a person has decided to become better than average (by going to the gym regularly to increase his or her Body, for example) it is relatively easy to increase the Levels following the initial plateau. To improve from Level 7 to 8 and truly stand out requires greater devotion, hence the second barrier. This represents a shift from gym training to a dedicated exercise regimen and strict diet, to increase one's Body, for example. The last barrier comes when one wishes to achieve World-Class Ability, becoming one of the best in the world. These people devote virtually every waking hour to training, and the final point cost barrier represents this extreme devotion.

Additionally, to further encourage players to utilize Skills to differentiate their characters from each other as well as to keep player character capabilities within a manageable range in a high-octane, combat heavy game like HKAT!, some Attributes, such as Combat Mastery, have been removed or altered.



# 演員特徵

## STEP THREE!

### ACTOR ATTRIBUTES

Body, Mind, and Soul represent your character's basic abilities, but his or her acquired or innate talents and aptitudes are known as Attributes. Any Character Points remaining after purchasing Stats are available to acquire Attributes.

There are many different Attributes, each representing a particular talent or special aptitude, and each rated from Level 1-6. Acquiring an Attribute or increasing it in Level requires the expenditure of one or more Character Points depending on its point cost per Level. The Attribute descriptions indicate their relative cost, their game effects and limitations, and the Stat most relevant to the Attributes' use should the player need to make a Stat check dice roll (see page 52).

If one Attribute modifies another to extend beyond Level 6 (such as the Appearance Attribute modifying Art of Distraction), you should discuss the influence and limitations of the new Level with the GM. Characters may take Attributes at higher Levels only with GM permission or when the GM creates NPCs. High Level Attributes, for example, are appropriate for villains who may need exceptional resources to oppose an entire group of characters.

Attribute selection is an important step during character creation. Through Attributes, you define your character's unique capabilities compared to other individuals. Consider carefully the balance between a few high-level Attributes and a large number of low-level Attributes.

If you find yourself needing more Character Points than the Game Master assigned, consider burdening your character with one or more Defects (Step Four: Defects, page 28). Each Defect can provide you with an additional Character Point or two, which you can use to acquire more Attributes or raise your Stats.

Attributes are listed as Actor Only, Role Only, or Open. Only actors may purchase Actor Only Attributes. While the role may benefit from Actor Only Attributes if the actor possesses them, the player may not purchase them for the role. For example: The player cannot purchase the Appearance Attribute for a role — if the actor is not attractive, the role character will likewise not be attractive. Conversely, players may only take Role Only Attributes for their role characters, which vanish as soon as the actor moves on to the next movie. Players may purchase Open Attributes for either the base actor or specifically for a role.

### OPEN AND ACTOR ONLY ATTRIBUTES

The following are only Open and Actor Only Attributes. For Role Only Attributes, see page 42.

**TABLE 2-4: OPEN AND ACTOR ONLY ATTRIBUTES**

Appearance	Actor Only	page 15
Art of Distraction	Open	page 15
Damn Healthy!	Open	page 15
Director's Friend	Actor Only	page 16
Energy Bonus	Open	page 16
Extra Attacks	Open	page 16
Extra Defenses	Open	page 17
Focused Damage	Open	page 18
Gun Fu	Open	page 18
Highly Skilled	Open	page 20
International Appeal	Actor Only	page 20
Scene Stealer	Actor Only	page 20
Signature Move	Actor Only	page 21
Swift Reaction	Open	page 22
Sword Fu	Open	page 22
Theatrical Star	Actor Only	page 23
Wire Fu: Attacks	Open	page 23
Wire Fu: Movement	Open	page 27

## APPEARANCE

**Attribute Type:** Actor Only

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** Body

This Attribute reflects physical comeliness. An Actor lacking in this Attribute is of average appearance. Values of 4, 5, or 6 increase the Art of Distraction Attribute by 1, 2, or 3 Levels respectively, but only when the character is visible to his or her audience. The character's Level of Appearance influences the way potentially interested NPCs initially react to the character. When appropriate, Appearance also gives a -1 bonus per Level on any Seduction Skill (page 47) roll.

**Level 1** The actor is moderately attractive. The role gains a -1 bonus on Seduction Skill Checks.

**Level 2** The actor is quite attractive. The role gains a -2 bonus on Seduction Skill Checks.

**Level 3** The actor is very attractive. The role gains a -3 bonus on Seduction Skill Checks.

**Level 4** The actor is extremely attractive. The role gains a -4 bonus on Seduction Skill Checks. Art of Distraction Attribute increases by 1 Level.

**Level 5** The actor possesses legendary beauty. The role gains a -5 bonus on Seduction Skill Checks. Art of Distraction Attribute increases by 2 Levels.

**Level 6** The actor possesses unparalleled beauty. The role gains a -6 bonus on Seduction Skill Checks. Art of Distraction Attribute increases by 3 Levels.

## ART OF DISTRACTION

**Attribute Type:** Open

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** Body or Soul

Art of Distraction represents a character's ability to capture the crowd's attention through oratorical ability, innate charisma, or even a beautiful or resonant voice. This allows a character to captivate an audience or distract a number of people at a critical moment, provided the character can communicate with the crowd (talking, dancing, television broadcast, etc.).

If the character is trying to distract a potentially hostile group, such as an angry mob or a group of security guards, his or her Level dictates how many people he or she preoccupies. If the character has an audience already prepared to listen, the Level determines the percentage of people who are distracted or moved enough to take action, whether that involves watching the character's next movie or donating money to the character's favourite charity.

Appearance may modify this Attribute, but only if the character is visible to his or her audience (see the Appearance Attribute description). If multiple people with this Attribute work as a team, the total number of people distracted is cumulative. Characters may use the Body Stat when distracting people physically (for example, with sex appeal) or use the Soul Stat when distracting someone through emotion, rhetoric, or force of personality.

**Level 1** The character can distract one person, or deeply influence 5% of the audience.

**Level 2** The character can distract up to two people, or deeply influence 10% of the audience.

**Level 3** The character can distract a small crowd (1-10 people), or deeply influence 20% of the audience.

**Level 4** The character can distract a medium crowd (11-50 people), or deeply influence 50% of the audience.

**Level 5** The character can distract a large crowd (50-200 people), or deeply influence 75% of the audience.

**Level 6** The character can distract a very large crowd (200-1000 people), or deeply influence 95% of the audience.

## DAMN HEALTHY!

**Attribute Type:** Open

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** None

This Attribute increases the character's Health Points, allowing him or her to withstand greater punishment. The Damn Healthy! Attribute, along with the Body Stat, also reflects a character's resistance to sickness, disease, and other physical ailments. See



page 36 of Step Six: Derived Values for more information on Health Points. Note that characters with high Body or Soul Stats may be very healthy even without this Attribute.

- Level 1** The character enjoys an additional 10 Health Points.
- Level 2** The character enjoys an additional 20 Health Points.
- Level 3** The character enjoys an additional 30 Health Points.
- Level 4** The character enjoys an additional 40 Health Points.
- Level 5** The character enjoys an additional 50 Health Points.
- Level 6** The character enjoys an additional 60 Health Points.

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### DIRECTOR'S FRIEND

**Attribute Type:** Actor Only  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** None

The actor is close friends with the movie director and can periodically request one or two minor script changes. This relationship manifests as the re-rolling of undesirable dice results.

- Level 1** The player may re-roll any one dice result each game session.
- Level 2** The player may re-roll any two dice results each game session.
- Level 3** The player may re-roll any three dice results each game session.
- Level 4** The player may re-roll any four dice results each game session.
- Level 5** The player may re-roll any five dice results each game session.
- Level 6** The player may re-roll any six dice results each game session.

---

### ENERGY BONUS

**Attribute Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** None

This Attribute increases the character's Energy Points, granting him or her a greater pool of energy reserves in times of need. See page 36 of Step Six: Derived Values for information on Energy Points and their uses.

- Level 1** The character has 10 additional Energy Points.
- Level 2** The character has 20 additional Energy Points.
- Level 3** The character has 30 additional Energy Points.
- Level 4** The character has 40 additional Energy Points.
- Level 5** The character has 50 additional Energy Points.
- Level 6** The character has 60 additional Energy Points.

---

### EXTRA ATTACKS

**Attribute Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 3 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** None

This Attribute reflects the character's ability to use every combat situation to his or her benefit. Each round, the character may make one or more additional offensive actions provided that the attacks are all similar in nature (for example, all hand-to-hand, all ranged, etc.) In addition, unless two or more opponents are very close together, armed or unarmed hand-to-hand attacks must target the same person. Characters usually carry out these attacks at the same time during the same Initiative (see page 59 of Chapter Three: Game Mechanics). GMs may rule that Walk-on or Speaking Part roles (see page 39) may not possess Extra Actions.

- Level 1** The character gains one extra attack each round.
- Level 2** The character gains two extra attacks each round.
- Level 3** The character gains three extra attacks each round.
- Level 4** The character gains four extra attacks each round.
- Level 5** The character gains five extra attacks each round.
- Level 6** The character gains six extra attacks each round.

## EXTRA DEFENSES

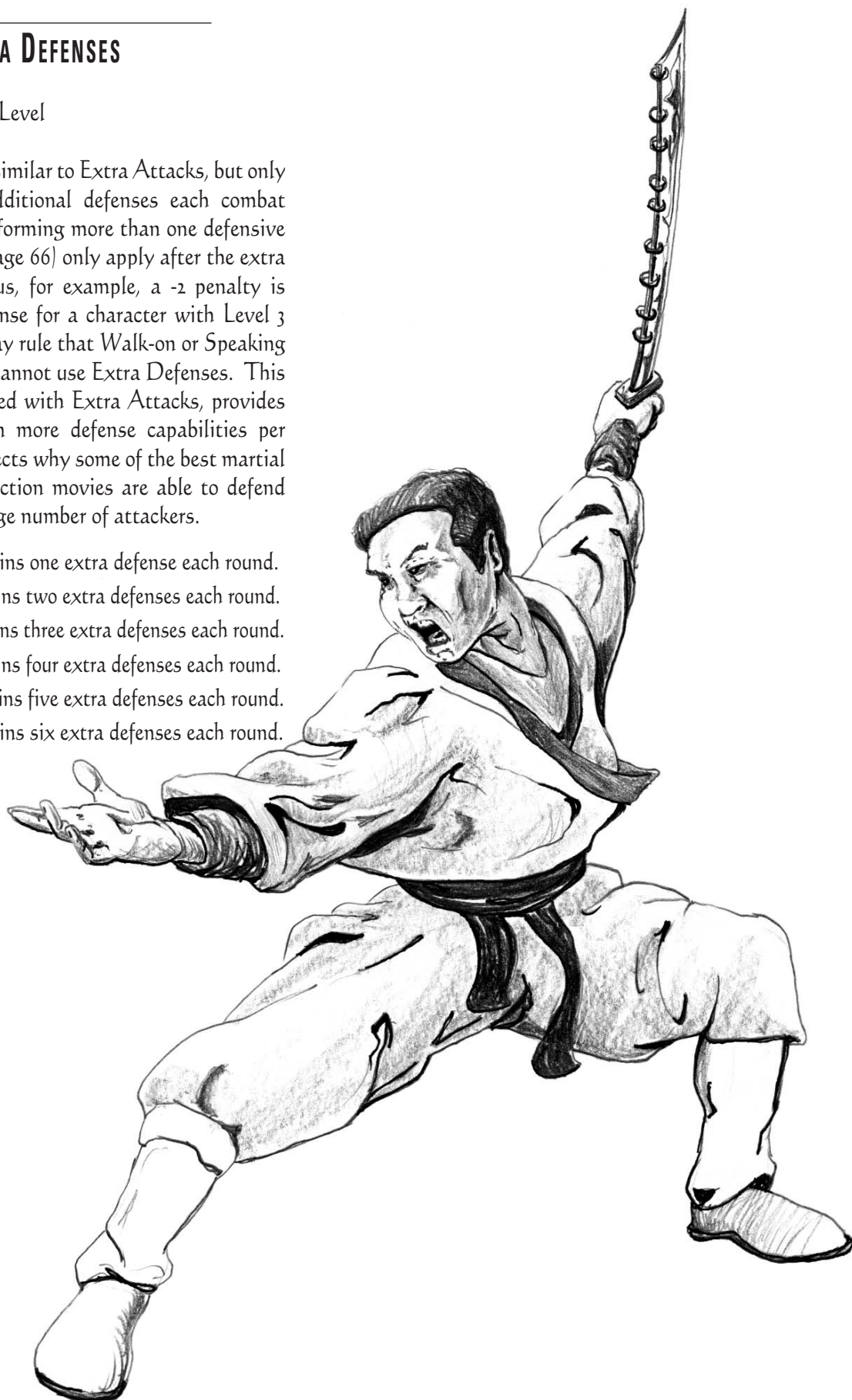
**Attribute Type:** Open

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** None

This Attribute is similar to Extra Attacks, but only grants the character additional defenses each combat round. Penalties for performing more than one defensive action each round (see page 66) only apply after the extra defenses are used. Thus, for example, a -2 penalty is applied to the fifth defense for a character with Level 3 Extra attacks. GMs may rule that Walk-on or Speaking Part roles (see page 40) cannot use Extra Defenses. This Attribute, when combined with Extra Attacks, provides the character with even more defense capabilities per combat round. This reflects why some of the best martial artists in Hong Kong action movies are able to defend themselves against a large number of attackers.

- Level 1** The character gains one extra defense each round.
- Level 2** The character gains two extra defenses each round.
- Level 3** The character gains three extra defenses each round.
- Level 4** The character gains four extra defenses each round.
- Level 5** The character gains five extra defenses each round.
- Level 6** The character gains six extra defenses each round.





## FOCUSED DAMAGE

**Attribute Type:** Open

**Cost:** 3 Points/Level

**Relevant Stat:** None

A character with the Focused Damage Attribute knows precisely how and where to hit any opponent in order to inflict incredible amounts of damage while using one specific weapon type or method of attack (this attack is defined during character creation). For example, it might represent a special talent with a weapon (such as the katana) or knowledge of a particular martial arts technique. For more information on physical combat and damage, see page 69.

**Level 1** Damage delivered by this specific attack increases by 4 points.

**Level 2** Damage delivered by this specific attack increases by 8 points.

**Level 3** Damage delivered by this specific attack increases by 12 points.

**Level 4** Damage delivered by this specific attack increases by 16 points.

**Level 5** Damage delivered by this specific attack increases by 20 points.

**Level 6** Damage delivered by this specific attack increases by 24 points.

## GUN FU

**Attribute Type:** Open

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** Varies

Gun Fu is a special Attribute that allows characters to perform unbelievable feats of cinematic action with their firearms (or other ranged weapons, such as bows or thrown knives, at the GMs discretion). Each Level gives the character one Gun Fu ability, which can also reflect the actor's entourage of specialists, such as special effects co-ordinators and stunt people, who work with him or her on every movie. When an actor takes this Attribute, he or she chooses the Gun Fu abilities when building the role — the exact Gun Fu manoeuvres change

from production to production. In some movies, the producer or director will insist the actor use a variety of Gun Fu manoeuvres to keep the audience excited — it becomes boring if the actor is constantly using the same trick in every gun fight. To mimic this, GMs can limit the use of a Gun Fu ability to once per combat scene.

**Level 1** The character has one Gun Fu ability.

**Level 2** The character has two Gun Fu abilities.

**Level 3** The character has three Gun Fu abilities.

**Level 4** The character has four Gun Fu abilities.

**Level 5** The character has five Gun Fu abilities.

**Level 6** The character has six Gun Fu abilities.

## COOL EXPLOSION

The character can often find and target an explosive object like an oil drum, fuel canister, high-pressure steam pipe, or automobile, and blow it up with a shot. If the character makes a successful Mind Stat check, he or she has found an explosive object, which has been conveniently placed in the scene by the director or script writers, that can be shot with explosive effect. This imparts the Area Affect weapon Attribute (see page 72) upon the weapon for one attack (per successful use of this ability). This counts as two abilities.

## DEADEYE

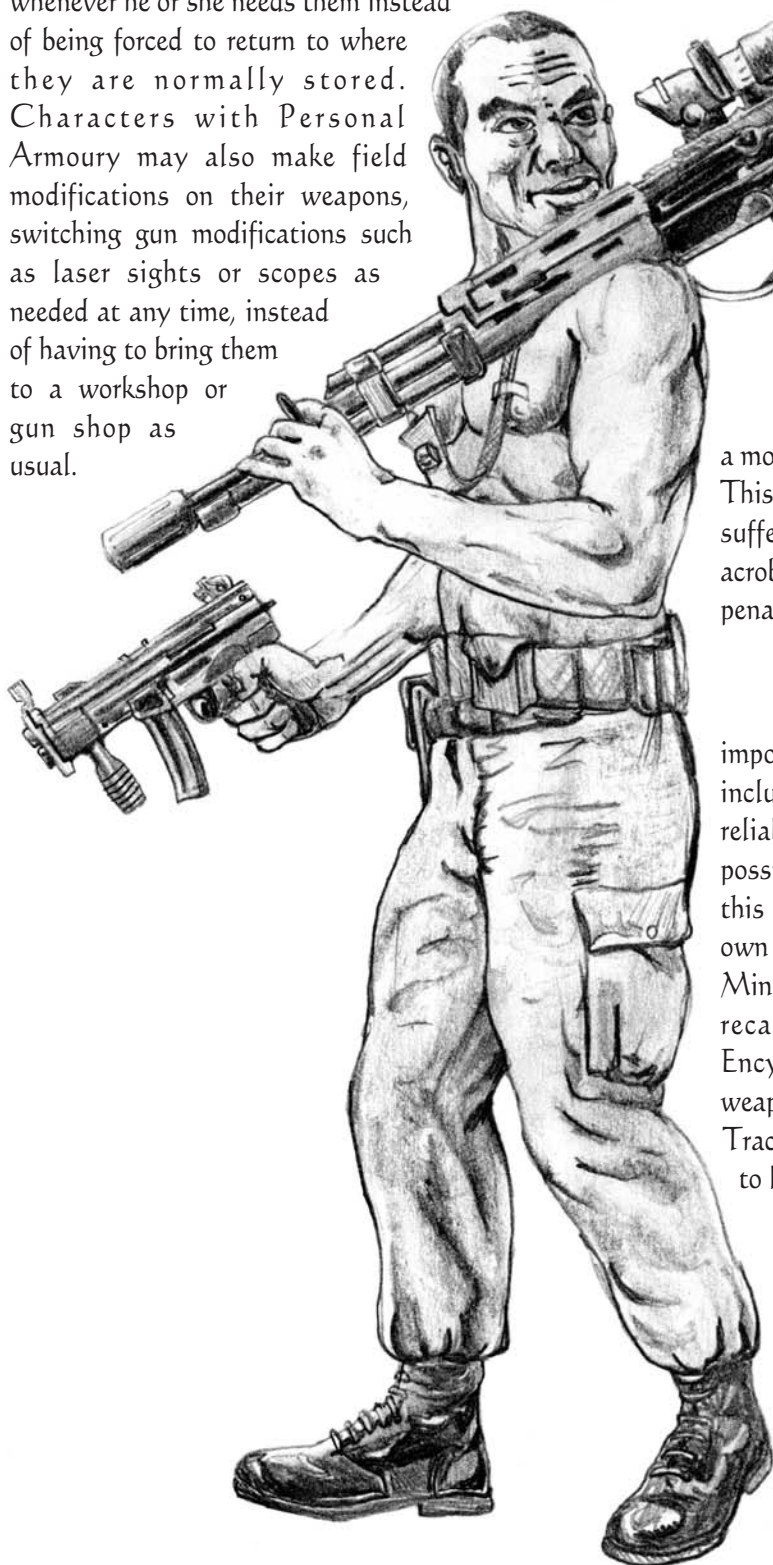
Pertinent dice-roll penalties that characters normally suffer are greatly reduced when firing at pinpoint targets such as partial armour, weak points, and vital spots, or when shooting at longer-than-usual ranges. Snipers and assassins will find this ability useful since it reduces penalties by 3, to a minimum of 0. Thus, attacking a vital spot (+4 penalty) would become +1, while firing at double range (+2 penalty) would be +0.

## ONE BULLET LEFT

The character is seemingly never out of ammunition. Whenever the character rolls a natural 11 or 12 (see page 70), he or she does not run out of ammo, and therefore does not spend his or her next action reloading the weapon. The character may still elect to reload his or her weapon to gain a bonus on his or her next attack (see page 70), however.

**PORTABLE ARMOURY**

The character will always have easy access to any weapon required for a particular task, including illegal weapons and accessories not available to the general public. Remarkably, the character can access them whenever he or she needs them instead of being forced to return to where they are normally stored. Characters with Personal Armoury may also make field modifications on their weapons, switching gun modifications such as laser sights or scopes as needed at any time, instead of having to bring them to a workshop or gun shop as usual.

**QUICK TRIGGER FINGER**

The character can fire a gun incredibly quickly, emptying the clip in record time. The character may fire any firearm as though it was an automatic weapon, thereby doubling its damage. Doing this, however, unloads the gun immediately, forcing the character to reload on the next round or attack with a different weapon. This counts as two abilities.

**STEADY HAND**

This ability allows the character to shoot when on a moving vehicle or otherwise engaged in complex stunts. This greatly reduces the penalties he or she normally suffers for firing from a moving vehicle, performing acrobatics, or otherwise attacking while in motion. Each penalty is reduced by 3 (to a minimum of 0).

**WEAPONS ENCYCLOPEDIA**

The character can recall the vital statistics and important quirks of nearly all ranged weapons. This includes, but is not limited to, its general level of reliability, ammunition capacity, calibre, model year, possible outfitted accessories, etc. Characters without this ability will only know about weapons they actually own or use regularly, and will need to successfully roll a Mind-based Police Science (Ballistics) Skill check to recall important details. In addition, Weapons Encyclopedia also includes knowledge on acquiring weapons, so characters will have a -3 bonus on any Urban Tracking or Business Management Skill checks needed to locate or buy legal or illegal weapons.

**WOO SPECIAL**

The character can fire two guns at once even without the Extra Attacks Attribute. He or she may make both attacks against the same target with a +1 penalty or at two different targets with a +3 dice roll penalty on each attack. This counts as two abilities.



## HIGHLY SKILLED

**Attribute Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Varies

A character with this Attribute is more experienced or better trained than an ordinary person, possessing more Skill Points (see page 31). Players may use Skill Points to acquire individual Skills such as Gun Combat or Driving. Extending this Attribute beyond Level 6 provides 10 additional Skill Points per Level (for example, Level 11 would provide 110 Skill Points). Buying several Levels of the Highly Skilled Attribute is the ideal method for creating a versatile character. This Attribute cannot be combined with the Unskilled Defect (see page 31).

- Level 1** The character gains an additional 10 Skill Points.
- Level 2** The character gains an additional 20 Skill Points.
- Level 3** The character gains an additional 30 Skill Points.
- Level 4** The character gains an additional 40 Skill Points.
- Level 5** The character gains an additional 50 Skill Points.
- Level 6** The character gains an additional 60 Skill Points.

## INTERNATIONAL APPEAL

**Attribute Type:** Actor Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind

The character is well known to audiences outside of Hong Kong. He or she has fans in China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, United States, Australia, etc. Actors with International Appeal gain an increased Star Power reward at the end of a film because the movie reached foreign soil. This additional Star Power may only be used for bidding on future roles or for in-game benefits (see page 37).

- Level 1** The character gains a +1 Star Power reward at the end of the movie.
- Level 2** The character gains a +2 Star Power reward at the end of the movie.
- Level 3** The character gains a +3 Star Power reward at the end of the movie.
- Level 4** The character gains a +4 Star Power reward at the end of the movie.
- Level 5** The character gains a +5 Star Power reward at the end of the movie.
- Level 6** The character gains a +6 Star Power reward at the end of the movie.

## SCENE STEALER

**Attribute Type:** Actor Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Soul

The character has a reputation for stealing other actors' spotlights and involving him or herself in scenes intended for other people. Actors with this Attribute gain a Character Point bonus to acquire Role Attributes in addition to those provided by the GM. This mimics the character's constant attempts to showoff, but it does come at a cost. The actor quickly earns a reputation for being difficult to work with, so his or her bids for a role are reduced by one for every two Attribute Levels.

- Level 1** The character gains +2 Character Points for purchasing Role Attributes. All bids that an actor makes for a role decrease by one.
- Level 2** The character gains +4 Character Points for purchasing Role Attributes. All bids that an actor makes for a role decrease by one.
- Level 3** The character gains +6 Character Points for purchasing Role Attributes. All bids that an actor makes for a role decrease by two.
- Level 4** The character gains +8 Character Points for purchasing Role Attributes. All bids that an actor makes for a role decrease by two.
- Level 5** The character gains +10 Character Points for purchasing Role Attributes. All bids that an actor makes for a role decrease by three.
- Level 6** The character gains +12 Character Points for purchasing Role Attributes. All bids that an actor makes for a role decrease by three.

## SIGNATURE MOVE

**Attribute Type:** Actor Only

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** Varies

Signature Moves are actions that the actor performs in every film. It is an identifying move or style that audiences often anticipate and recognize immediately. An actor may take one Signature Move per Level. The Signature Moves listed below are common examples, but players may work with the GM to create new ones. Signature Moves may be assigned by the GM for a Role Package if the movie is a sequel and the role appeared in previous installment.

**Level 1** The character may select one Signature Move.

**Level 2** The character may select two Signature Moves.

**Level 3** The character may select three Signature Moves.

**Level 4** The character may select four Signature Moves.

**Level 5** The character may select five Signature Moves.

**Level 6** The character may select six Signature Moves.

## AFFECTATION

The actor maintains a certain style, physical action, or characteristic throughout most films. These are mannerisms like chewing on a matchstick, wearing a black trenchcoat or sunglasses, etc. Once per game session, if the character can work the Affectation into the production, he or she gains a -2 bonus on the first dice roll following the use of that characteristic (though the roll must occur in the same scene).

## BAD DUBBING

Hong Kong films are typically translated in a hurry. This often makes for some confusing subtitles or dubbing, with roles frequently saying one thing in English and another in Cantonese (or Mandarin). The role can sometimes benefit from this, however. Once per film, he or she may re-roll one dice result involving social interaction because the translator misinterpreted the character's true intent or dialogue.

## BLOOD RAGE

Once per film, the role can turn a physical wound into a devastating counter-attack. An example of this technique occurs when Bruce Lee tastes his own blood before going ballistic. The round after an opponent strikes the actor, the actor enters a blood rage — all of his or her anger is directed against the opponent in the next strike, with a -2 bonus dice roll modifier to hit. The attack automatically does double damage.

## CANTOPOP STAR

The actor is a Cantonese pop singer as well as a movie star, using one career to launch the other. He or she begins the game with an additional five Star Power. Once per film, the actor can also announce that one of his or her current songs will underscore a particular scene — often a montage sequence or a bittersweet romantic scene. The audience sighs in appreciation and remembers to buy the CD after the movie; in return the actor gains a reward of one Star Power point. Alternatively, GMs may allow the player to select a CD to represent his or her actor's scene music (it should be an appropriately Cantonese Pop CD or something similar). The player may then, at any point during the game, play a song from the CD to act as the background music for the scene. If the GM deems that the music enhanced the scene in question, he or she may award the actor with one Star Power. If, however, the GM feels that the music hindered the scene, possibly breaking the mood, he or she may penalize the actor one Star Point.

## GRACEFUL

The actor moves with a grace that is beautiful to watch, moving with an astonishing fluidity. Once per game session, the role's lithe movements can allow him or her to act first in combat, regardless of the character's Initiative.

## HEROIC COMEBACK

Several heroic roles make a comeback to beat the villain after they are almost beaten to death themselves. If the role is badly hurt in a battle (lost at least half his or her Health Points), the character may make a Heroic Comeback. The role may either regain half his or her normal Health Point total or earn a -1 bonus for all attack rolls to hit the main villain for the remainder of the film. The character may only use this once per film.



### SACRIFICIAL BUDDY

All of the actor's films feature a close friend who eventually dies. The role must establish a relationship with this buddy by playing at least one scene with the character. If that character is then killed (and he or she usually is), the role gains a -1 bonus for all attack rolls to hit the villain who murdered the Sacrificial Buddy. This lasts the duration of the film.

### SCREEN IDOL

The actor is a big screen heartthrob. Once per game session, he or she may re-roll any failed Seduction Skill checks or any rolls involving social interactions with anyone attracted to him or her.

### THEME MUSIC

The actor has certain music that plays at appropriate times during his or her movies such as Bruce Lee's "Ta-Daal" or the Chinese song "Under the General's Orders" which appears in Wong Fei-hung pictures. The player must select a song that is his or her actor's theme music, but it must be appropriately Hong Kong in style (GMs have final say on what is and is not acceptable). Once per film (not game session), the player can play his or her chosen theme song. If the GM deems it appropriate to the scene, the role gains a -1 bonus to all rolls made in the same scene. If the GM feels that the song is inappropriate to the scene (for example, a love song played during a fight scene with a hated foe), the role gains a +1 dice roll penalty to all rolls made during the scene. Thus, most action-oriented actors will take active music for their theme songs while romance-oriented stars will take love songs as their theme music. This counts as two Signature Moves.

### TYPECAST

Typecast actors always seem to play a certain type of role, whether the character is always a Triad (Chinese organized crime) hit man or a brash young kung fu student. The player must determine the role type when taking this Signature Move. Whenever the character's typecast role becomes available, the actor gains an additional five Star Power to bid on that role.

### SWIFT REACTION

**Attribute Type:** Open

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** None

The character has incredibly fast reflexes and reacts in the blink of an eye. The character gains a +2 bonus per Level to his or her initiative.

**Level 1** The character gains a +2 Initiative bonus.

**Level 2** The character gains a +4 Initiative bonus.

**Level 3** The character gains a +6 Initiative bonus.

**Level 4** The character gains a +8 Initiative bonus.

**Level 5** The character gains a +10 Initiative bonus.

**Level 6** The character gains a +12 Initiative bonus.

### SWORD FU

**Attribute Type:** Open

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** Combat Value

Sword Fu is a special Attribute that allows characters to perform unbelievable feats of cinematic action with their swords (or other melee weapons, such as staves, axes, etc.). Each Level gives the character one Sword Fu ability. Actors may purchase this Attribute to represent their team of specialists (SFX co-ordinator, trainer, stunt people, etc.) who work with them on every movie. When the actor purchases this Attribute, he or she chooses his or her Sword Fu abilities while building the role — the exact Sword Fu manoeuvres can change from movie to movie. In some movies, the producer or director will insist that the actor use a variety of Sword Fu manoeuvres to keep the audience excited — it becomes boring if the character uses the same trick in every fight. To mimic this, GMs may wish to limit the use of a Sword Fu ability to once per combat scene.

**Level 1** The character has one Sword Fu ability.

**Level 2** The character has two Sword Fu abilities.

**Level 3** The character has three Sword Fu abilities.

**Level 4** The character has four Sword Fu abilities.

**Level 5** The character has five Sword Fu abilities.

**Level 6** The character has six Sword Fu abilities.

**AMBIDEXTROUS**

The character can wield two weapons at once (even without the Extra Attacks Attribute), but the weapons must both be for one-handed use (a character cannot wield a two-handed axe one-handed). The two attacks may be made at the same target with a +1 penalty or at two different targets with a +3 dice roll penalty on each attack. This counts as two abilities.

**BLIND FIGHTING**

The character can attack or defend while visually impaired (blind, poor light conditions, etc.) without penalty.

**BOOMERANG WEAPON**

The character can use his or her melee weapon at short range by throwing it in a precision strike. The weapon always returns to the character's hands at the end of the round (Initiative zero). If the weapon is in mid-flight and the character is attacked before the end of the round, he or she cannot use the thrown weapon in his or her defense.

**JUDGE OPPONENT**

The character can judge his or her opponent's approximate Combat Value and weapon Skill Level from the foe's attitude and posture even without actually seeing him or her fight.

**PRECISE STROKE**

When attempting a precise attack, such as against partial armour, weak points, or vital spots, the dice-roll penalties that the character suffers are greatly reduced. Each penalty is reduced by 3, to a minimum of 0. Thus, attacking a vital spot (+4 penalty) becomes +1.

**SILKEN ROBES**

The character can hide virtually any melee weapon on his or her person so long as he or she is wearing something that can conceal the weapons (a long robe, a trench coat, or even long hair). The character's weapon is only noticeable if someone physically searches him or her, and even then such a search suffers a +3 penalty.

**THEATRICAL STAR**

**Attribute Type:** Actor Only

**Cost:** 2 Points/Level

**Relevant Stat:** Soul

The actor has dedicated great time and effort into developing his or her acting ability. He or she has worked hard to be more than just a Hong Kong action movie star and this effort has not gone unnoticed. The actor's bid for a role increases by an amount equal to his or her Level.

**Level 1** The actor's Star Power bid for a role is increased by one.

**Level 2** The actor's Star Power bid for a role is increased by two.

**Level 3** The actor's Star Power bid for a role is increased by three.

**Level 4** The actor's Star Power bid for a role is increased by four.

**Level 5** The actor's Star Power bid for a role is increased by five.

**Level 6** The actor's Star Power bid for a role is increased by six.

**WIRE FU: ATTACKS**

**Attribute Type:** Open

**Cost:** 4 Points/Level

**Relevant Stat:** Combat Value

This special ability derives its name from the use of wires in combination with incredible feats of Kung Fu and armed martial arts. While seen in numerous Hong Kong action movies, Wire Fu is best known and most obvious in *wuxia* films where effects specialists combine martial arts and magic to create amazing, dynamic fight scenes. In most Hong Kong action flicks, Wire Fu: Attacks simply deal more damage, but in some movies, like *wuxia* films, Wire Fu: Attacks allows characters to perform special actions like combating multiple opponents or throwing magical bolts of lightning. Wire Fu: Attacks is a combination of wire-assisted martial arts and special effects.

An actor may take this Attribute to reflect an entourage of specialists (SFX co-ordinators, stunt people, trainer, etc.) who work with him or her on every movie. When an actor purchases this Attribute, he or she selects his or her Wire Fu attacks when building the role (the exact Wire Fu: Attacks manoeuvres that will be used can change from movie to movie).

Each Level in Wire Fu grants the character 4 bonus points of damage. Additionally, players can take special Wire Fu Abilities that add extra “tricks” to their attacks in return for reducing the damage bonus of the attack by one Level (4 points) for each Ability. Conversely, players can also take Wire Fu Disabilities that limit the effectiveness of the manoeuvre but increase the delivered damage by one Level (4 points). If the damage falls to Level 0, the Wire Fu: Attack simple inflicts the character’s Combat Value as damage. If reduced below Level 0, the character must select some Disabilities to raise it to at least a Level 0 effect.

Players may take secondary Wire Fu: Attacks moves at a reduced Character Point cost. Any additional Wire Fu: Attacks purchased at the same Level cost 2 Character Points per move. Subsequent Wire Fu: Attacks at any Level below the first one cost 1 Character Point per manoeuvre. Thus, a player who purchases a Level 3 Wire Fu attack, costing 12 points, may select another Level 3 Wire Fu attack for 2 points or a Level 1 or 2 attack at 1 point each.

Level	Damage
1	Combat Value + 4
2	Combat Value + 8
3	Combat Value + 12
4	Combat Value + 16
5	Combat Value + 20
6	Combat Value + 24

**EXAMPLE:** *Chris is creating a wuxia character and wishes to have some Wire Fu moves. The first one is a mystical lightning bolt attack, “The Energy of the Ancients.” He spends 16 points to purchase a Level 4 Wire Fu attack. With a Combat Value of 5, his attack delivers 21 (5 + 16) points of damage. Right now, however, it is a straightforward attack — to turn it into*

*“The Energy of the Ancients,” he must take a few Abilities and Disabilities. Chris decides that the attack is very accurate and assigns Be Like Water once and Precise Strike once, giving him a -1 bonus to hit while penalizing the target with +1 penalty to defend against the attack. Also, to indicate that the attack strikes a large area with the energy blast, Chris takes the Pyrotechnics Ability. Lastly, Chris also wants the blast to strike at a distance, and thus he assigns a Unique Ability, which allows him to deliver this attack at up to 50 metres away. The GM feels it is too similar to Superhuman Lunge but lacks the necessity of having to close into Melee range with the target. The GM, therefore, decides that the Unique Ability will only have a range of 25 metres. Chris understands the GM’s decision and writes the information down on his character sheet. With these four Abilities, Chris has reduced the damage of the Wire Fu manoeuvre by four Levels. Since, it now only delivers Level 0 damage, Chris will need to assign a few Disabilities to increase the damage to make this attack effective. As a lightning bolt attack, it makes sense that the attack would drain Energy from Chris’s character, so he selects the Enthusiastic Performance Disability twice — the Wire Fu manoeuvre will drain 20 Energy Points per attack (5 x 4 Levels). He also decides that his character can only use this special attack once per movie so he selects Producer’s Limitation, which counts as two Disabilities. He decides that is sufficient. The four Disabilities increase the Wire Fu’s damage back to Level 4. With his first Wire Fu move out of the way, Chris moves on to create the additional ones: A Level 4 attack (2 Character Points) and one Level 2 attack (1 Character Point).*

#### WIRE FU ABILITIES AND DISABILITIES

The GM may disallow any combination of Abilities and/or Disabilities that seems inappropriate. Furthermore, some films may prohibit the use of some Wire Fu effects (GM’s discretion) if they are contrary to the film genre, and thus most Wire Fu abilities are purchased as Role Attributes rather than Character Attributes. When an Ability or Disability refers to the damage of an attack, only the 4 points/Level damage is considered. The actor’s Combat Value is not considered.



**ADVANCED COMBAT NOTE**

When using Wire Fu: Attacks with the Advanced Combat rules (see page 75), all bonuses and penalties are in addition to those incurred with the various advanced manoeuvres. For example, a character has a Wire Fu: Attack manoeuvre called "The Abominable Palm of Fu-Lueng" with the Precise Strike Ability purchased three times (providing a -6 Attack Roll bonus). He can deliver this attack using a High Light Punch, thus gaining an additional -1 to hit from the attack type for a total Attack Roll bonus of -7.

**WIRE FU ABILITIES****BE LIKE WATER**

The character moves with near-superhuman fluidity, slipping past blocks to strike at his or her opponent with a flurry of punches faster than the audience can count. The target defends against this evasive attack at a +1 penalty. The player may purchase this Ability up to three times, providing up to a +3 penalty on the target's defense rolls.

**BLINDING FLARE**

A bright, explosive light accompanies the attack. If the target is hit, the defending character might be blinded. The defender (and anyone else looking at the actor when the attack occurred) must roll a Body Stat check at a +1 penalty for every 4 points of damage that the attack inflicts. If a target character rolls greater than his or her Body Stat, he or she is blinded for a number of rounds equal to the Margin of Failure. Players may also assign Blinding Flare to attack hearing, resulting in an explosive boom which might cause deafness.

**BURNING**

This attack inflicts a lingering wound that continues to damage the target even after the initial strike (like a constant flame or poison). The target suffers an additional 1/10 of the base damage (round up) for five rounds or until the effect is somehow neutralized (GM's discretion; it depends on the type of attack, and may require several rounds before it stops delivering damage). Armour does not protect against the extra burning damage in subsequent rounds.

**FISTS OF FURY**

The character can attack opponents rapidly with multiple strikes (even without the Extra Attacks Attribute). He or she makes three attacks against the same target with a +1 penalty or at different targets with a +3 dice roll penalty on each strike.

**FOOT OF THE DRAGON**

Characters with this Ability can leap high into the air and plunge back down, smashing into the ground and creating a linear shock wave. The quake "fault" is only large enough to affect one person unless combined with the Pyrotechnics Ability. The victim will fall into the crevasse if he or she fails a Body Stat check (though the Acrobatics Skill will provide a bonus). The fissure is approximately one metre deep for the first 4 points of damage, and doubles for every additional 4 points after that. Thus, a strike delivering 8 points of damage would create a fissure two metres deep, while 16 points of damage would create a crevice eight metres deep. This is only usable on a solid surface (earth, sand, cement, asphalt, etc.).

**NERVE STRIKE**

This attack often instantly incapacitates a foe even though it inflicts no physical damage. When hit by a Nerve Strike attack, the victim must make a Body Stat roll to avoid being completely incapacitated. He or she makes the roll with a +1 penalty per 4 points of damage that the attack delivers. For example, an attack that normally inflicts 16 points of damage, would force the target to make a Body Stat roll with a +4 ( $16 \div 4 = 4$ ). The effects wear off in several minutes, or until someone delivers a counter-nerve strike (using a Nerve Strike attack to offset the initial effects). If the latter applies, the target may make a new Body Stat Check with the counter-nerve strike's penalty applied as a bonus to the roll.

**PRECISE STRIKE**

The attack is unusually accurate, allowing for a -2 bonus to Attack rolls. The player may purchase this Ability two or three times for a -4 or -6 bonus.

**PYROTECHNICS**

This attack is akin to an explosion, a rapid spin-kick, spinning back-fist, etc. that affects everyone in the immediate area. All affected characters may make a Defense roll, but it is not enough to escape completely. Unless the character can somehow escape the area of effect quickly, he or she still takes half damage from the attack (round down). Characters who shield themselves with solid objects or terrain may avoid damage normally (GM's discretion) on a successful Defense roll. The GM will decide whether an object or person is within the area of effect, and may assume the area radius is equivalent to one-third the attack's damage in meters. The player may buy Pyrotechnics multiple times, each time doubling the area radius.

**RAPID STRIKE**

The attack occurs faster than the eye can follow, giving the character a +8 bonus to Initiative when using the attack. The player may purchase this Ability multiple times, each time increasing the characters initiative by an additional +8.

**SUPERHUMAN LUNGE**

This Ability allows a character to leap into the air and deliver devastating attacks at long ranges while he or she rapidly flies through the air towards the target. Superhuman Lunge allows the character to deliver hand to hand attacks at a range of 50 metres (though after the attack, the combatants are now in Melee range). Players can assign it to their characters multiple times, each time doubling the range.

**TRACKING CAMERA**

The character with this Ability can leap into the air, and track and follow his or her target. The character receives a -2 bonus to his or her Attack roll. If the attack misses or the target successfully defends, the character may continue to float on wires and try again in the next combat round (only one additional attempt may be made — if the second attempt fails, the character falls to the ground). While in the air, the attacker can only be attacked by ranged weapons.



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**UNIQUE ABILITY**

The Wire Fu attack has an unspecified Ability that is not listed here, and is subject to GM approval.

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**WIRE FU DISABILITIES**

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**ENTHUSIASTIC PERFORMANCE**

The attack draws upon the character's personal energy reservoirs, draining 5 Energy Points with each attack. This Disability is available only twice, and it uses 5 Energy Points per Level of the Wire Fu attack.

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**OUT OF FOCUS**

The attack is not very accurate, and imposes a +2 penalty to all Attack rolls. This Disability is available two or three times for a +4 or +6 penalty respectively.

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**PRODUCER'S LIMITATION**

The character can only use the Wire Fu attack once per film. Once this happens, the movie's producer might insist that the actor use other moves to ensure the audience is entertained with a variety of attacks, or it might break the budget to perform the complex stunt twice. Producer's Limitation counts as two Disabilities.

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**SLOW MOTION**

When the character launches this Wire Fu attack, he or she hangs in the air dramatically before finally striking the target. The actor launches the attack in one round and potentially strikes the target the following round on the same initiative (i.e.: if a character rolls an initiative of 7 and launches a Slow Motion attack, it will strike the target in the following round on initiative 7). Consequently, someone can stop the attack in mid-flight. Anyone with an unused offensive action may attack the slowed character up until the time the attack is resolved. To stop the Slow Motion strike, a successful hit must deliver damage to the attacking character. If not stopped, the attack finally strikes the target (assuming a successful attack roll) in the following round. Players can take Slow Motion more than once to reflect an attack that takes even longer to reach the target. Each additional application of Slow Motion means the character hangs in the air for one additional round where characters may attempt to intercept or otherwise stop the attack. Characters launching a Slow Motion attack may make

Defense Combat rolls in an attempt to avoid attacks launched at them, but at a +2 dice roll penalty. The character cannot, however, launch any other attacks of any kind until the Slow Motion attack is finally resolved.

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**TELEGRAPHED PUNCH**

This Disability represents a slow and obvious attack. The target defends against this evasive attack at a -1 bonus. Players can purchase this up to three times, providing their adversaries up to a -3 bonus on defense rolls.

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**UNIQUE DISABILITY**

The attack has some other unspecified limitation, which is subject to GM approval.

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**WILD FIGHTER**

The character's attack forces him or her to leap into the air and create a whirlwind of debris that affects anyone or anything directly behind the attacker within 1-2 metres, friend or foe. The damage of the debris is normally one-third the damage of the actual attack. If purchased twice, this Disability affects everyone in a 1-2 metre radius around the character equal to one-third the damage of the attack.

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**WIRE FU: MOVEMENT**

**Attribute Type:** Open

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** Combat Value

This form of Wire Fu gives the character superhuman movement. The visual effects are achieved in much the same way that Wire Fu: Attacks are accomplished, but there is no attack associated with the action — the character is simply moving from one place to the next. For each Level in this Attribute, the character may take one Wire Fu: Movement type.

As with Wire Fu: Attack, an actor may take this Attribute to reflect that he or she has a team of effects specialists who work with him or her on every movie. When the actor takes this Attribute, he or she selects the movement types when building a role — the exact Wire Fu: Movement types he or she uses can change from movie to movie.



**Level 1** The character has one Wire Fu: Movement type.

**Level 2** The character has two Wire Fu: Movement types.

**Level 3** The character has three Wire Fu: Movement types.

**Level 4** The character has four Wire Fu: Movement types.

**Level 5** The character has five Wire Fu: Movement types.

**Level 6** The character has six Wire Fu: Movement types.

### CAT'S BALANCE

The character can balance on virtually anything with ease, from a thin wall to a telephone wire to the tip of an opponent's sword. The character gains a -4 bonus to any rolls testing his or her balance.

### CAT'S REFLEXES

The character always lands on his or her feet. Additionally, he or she takes half damage from all falls.

### FEATHER FOOT

The character is virtually weightless in his or her movements and can walk across sand or snow without leaving a trace or even walk across objects that could not normally support his or her weight. The character is so light that he or she could stand upon the outstretched branch of a willow tree while it only bends slightly under his or her weight. The player can treat his or her character's weight as 1% of his or her actual value when determining whether or not an object can support him or her.

### SPEED OF THE COBRA

The character moves twice the speed of an average person (see page 59). The player may assign this movement type more than once, increasing the character's running speed by an additional x2 multiplier each time.

### SPIDER-CLIMBING

The character can effortlessly scale walls and ceilings.

### TIGER'S POUNCE/GRASSHOPPER'S LEAP

The character can leap 5 times further than an average person can (see page 59). The player may assign this movement type more than once, increasing the character's leaping distance by an additional x5 multiplier each time.

### WATER-WALKING

The character can move across water with ease, as if it was solid land.

## STEP FOUR: ACTOR DEFECTS

Defects are small disadvantages that afflict your character as part of the hardships of day-to-day life. Defects only impede your character to a limited extent and are not intended to totally negate his or her many abilities. By taking a Character Defect you can gain one or two Bonus Points (BP) to use when acquiring Stats or Character Attributes. After you have selected your character's Defects, return to the previous steps to use your Bonus Points.

It is recommended you assign no more than five Defects to your character. In most cases two to four Defects are appropriate.

You may take Defects when creating the character initially, in which case he or she will suffer from the Defect in every film. Alternatively, you may take Defects for each individual role. The GM must approve any Defect bought specifically for a role.

As with Attributes, Defects are divided into Actor Only, Role Only and Open Defects.

**TABLE 2-5: OPEN & ACTOR ONLY DEFECTS**

Awkward	Open	page 29
Inept Combat	Open	page 29
Marked	Open	page 29
Not So Fast	Open	page 29
Not So Strong	Open	page 29
Not So Tough	Open	page 29
Owned by the Triads	Open	page 30
Phobia	Open	page 30
Physically Unappealing	Open	page 30
Pigeonholed	Actor Only	page 30
Prima Donna	Actor Only	page 30
Unique Defect	Open	page 30
Unknown Actor	Actor Only	page 31
Unskilled	Open	page 31
Young	Open	page 31

## AWKWARD

**Defect Type:** Open

The character is clumsy. He or she trips over things, fouls up the simplest physical tasks, and behaves like a klutz in general. This Defect has the nasty tendency of hindering characters at crucial moments: in times of stress, when he or she requires great concentration, and sometimes even in combat. Awkward characters often lack self-confidence because they are afraid of messing up yet again. This Defect is well suited for comedy, but can be a huge hindrance during combat and other key situations of the film.

- 1 BP** The character is generally prone to accidents.
- 2 BP** The character is particularly prone to accidents. The character's Defense Combat Value decreases by 1.

## INEPT COMBAT

**Defect Type:** Open

Characters with this Defect are poor fighters. For whatever reason, the character simply is not as good as he or she should be in combat. Thus, the character suffers a Combat Value penalty.

- 2 BP** Reduce character's Attack Combat Value by 1.
- 4 BP** Reduce character's Attack Combat Value by 2.

## MARKED

**Defect Type:** Open

A character is Marked if his or her body hosts a permanent and distinguishing design that he or she may have difficulty concealing. The design may be a family symbol, an identifying birthmark, a permanent scar, or a unique tattoo. This Defect does not apply if the mark is ordinary (such as freckles or a common tattoo).

- 1 BP** The character can easily conceal the mark because it is small or in an inconspicuous location.
- 2 BP** The character has some difficulty concealing the mark because it is large or in an obvious location.

## NOT SO FAST

**Defect Type:** Open

The character is slower or less agile than his or her Body Stat otherwise suggests. Although Combat Value and Health Points are not affected, the character's Body Stat suffers in any situation where agility or speed is the determining factor. Additionally, the character suffers a penalty on initiative rolls.

- 1 BP** The character receives a +2 penalty on Stat or Skill checks where agility or speed is important. The character's initiative decreases by 2.
- 2 BP** The character receives a +4 penalty to Stat or Skill checks where agility or speed is important. The character's initiative decreases by 4.

## NOT SO STRONG

**Defect Type:** Open

The character is smaller or weaker than his or her Body Stat would otherwise suggest. Although Combat Value and Health Points are not affected, the character's Body Stat suffers in any situation involving carrying heavy loads, wrestling, or other feats of sheer strength.

- 1 BP** The character receives a +2 penalty when making Body Stat rolls in situations where physical strength is paramount. He or she inflicts -1 damage point when making any attack that relies on muscular strength.
- 2 BP** The character receives a +4 penalty when Body Stat rolls in situations where physical strength is paramount. He or she inflicts -2 damage points when making any attack that relies on muscular strength.

## NOT SO TOUGH

**Defect Type:** Open

The character is not as durable as he or she might otherwise be.

- 1 BP** The character's Health Points are decreased by 10 points.
- 2 BP** The character's Health Points are decreased by 20 points.

## OWNED BY THE TRIADS

**Defect Type:** Open

Free will has little meaning for a character with this Defect. He or she answers to a particular Triad figure, and dire consequences await he or she who does otherwise. This is usually a Role Defect, but a character could take it at character creation, in which case the Triads may restrict what roles the actor can take in films. If this is the case, the Triad will prohibit the character from accepting roles that portray their organization in bad light. When the player takes this Defect, it only affects either actor or role character. If the actor has Owned by the Triads, it does not mean that the role has Owned by the Triads.

- 1 BP The Triad has some control over the role and usually requires the role to assist the Triad when called upon. Alternatively, the Triads have partial control over the actor, reducing his or her Star Power bid by half on any role that makes the Triads look bad.
- 2 BP The Triad has total control over the role and he or she must follow the Triad's orders or suffer severe consequences. Alternatively, the Triads have total control over the actor; he or she may not bid on roles that portray Triads in a negative light.

## PHOBIA

**Defect Type:** Open

A powerful, but irrational fear plagues the character, which may interfere with his or her ability to act. Avoiding situations that might trigger the phobia could take high priority in the character's life.

- 1 BP The phobia is minor or encountered infrequently.
- 2 BP The phobia is major or encountered often.

## PHYSICALLY UNAPPEALING

**Defect Type:** Open

The character is unsavoury. He or she is not necessarily ugly, but there is something about his or her appearance that puts others off, thereby hampering social interactions. Unlike Appearance, which cannot be improved, special effects and make-up can make an actor Physically Unappealing for a role.

- 1 BP The character is mildly unappealing.
- 2 BP The character is very unappealing.

## PIGEONHOLED

**Defect Type:** Actor Only

The actor is well known for one specific type of role (to be determined when this Defect is assigned) and has trouble getting different roles.

- 1 BP The character must spend an additional five Star Power to bid on any role other than the one in which he or she is pigeonholed.
- 2 BP The character must spend an additional ten Star Power to bid on any role other than the one in which he or she is pigeonholed.

## PRIMA DONNA

**Defect Type:** Actor Only

This actor is overly demanding on the set, and is therefore the scourge of directors and producers alike. He or she has trouble finding work since no one wants to hire him or her.

- 1 BP The actor must bid an extra two Star Power above the normal amount for any film role. This means he or she must outbid another character by at least two points in the bidding war.
- 2 BP The actor must bid an extra two Star Power for any role. Additionally, the character must pay double to earn Script Rewrites (see page 37), because the crew is already sick of his or her tantrums. Thus, a Minor Rewrite costs two Star Power points, while a Major Rewrite costs the character 10 Star Power points.

## UNIQUE CHARACTER DEFECT

**Defect Type:** Open

This covers any possible Defect not mentioned in the rules. The player should discuss the boundaries of this Defect with the GM.

- 1 BP The Defect occurs rarely or has a small effect on the character.
- 2 BP The Defect occurs often or has a large effect on the character.



## UNKNOWN ACTOR

**Defect Type:** Actor Only

The character is virtually unknown in the world of big screen productions. The character's bids for roles are reduced due to his or her anonymity.

- 1 BP** The actor must bid an extra two Star Power above the normal amount for any film role.
- 2 BP** The actor must bid an extra four Star Power for any role.

## UNSKILLED

**Defect Type:** Open

The character is not as skilled as other characters might be and consequently has fewer points with which to buy Skills. Players cannot combine this Defect with the Highly Skilled Attribute.

- 1 BP** The character has 10 fewer starting Skill Points.
- 2 BP** The character has 20 fewer starting Skill Points (normally none).

## YOUNG

**Defect Type:** Open

The character is a young adult or child. He or she suffers all of the problems associated with being underage including dealing with parents, not being able to enter clubs, etc. Additionally, the character is limited to the types of roles available for bidding. For example, a 15-year old will have great difficulty landing the part of the wise, old martial arts master. As an additional, optional rule, the character must bid an additional number of Star Power in order to land the role of a character over the age of 18, equal to half the difference between the actor's age and the role's age, rounding up. For example, a 15 year old actor attempting to land the part of a 20 year old role must bid an additional 3 Star Power ( $(20-15) \div 2 = 2.5$ ; round up to 3).

- 1 BP** The character is a teenager, aged between 14 and 17.
- 2 BP** The character is a younger teenager or child, age 13 or less (at this Level, this Defect is Actor Only).

# STEP FIVE: ACTOR SKILLS

Your character's Skills represent his or her extensive training and experience in a particular field and are acquired with Skill Points, not Character Points.

A starting character receives 20 Skill Points plus an additional 10 Skill Points for each Level of the Highly Skilled Attribute (page 20) that he or she possesses. A character with the Unskilled Defect (page 31) has 10 or 20 fewer Skill Points. Non-player characters created by the GM may have any number of Skill Points but it usually depends on their importance to the movie. The following chart provides a guideline for the number of Skill Points NPCs should have based on their relevance.

**TABLE 2-6: NPC SKILL POINTS**

Importance	Skill Points
Walk-On	5-10
Speaking Part	10-20
Supporting Character	20-40
Lead Role	40-80

The different Skills vary between Levels 1 through 6. Increasing the value of a Skill by one Level requires one or more Skill Points depending on the Skill. The higher the Skill Level, the better your character and the broader his or her knowledge base within that field.

## SKILLS AND SPECIALITIES

Most Skills possess a number of associated specialities, which describe the different ways a character can use that Skill. For example, Gun Combat breaks down into Autofire, Pistol, and Rifle. When you assign a Skill to your character, choose one of the listed specialities or create a new speciality with GM approval. Your character will be significantly better in the chosen specialization than he or she is in the other aspects of the Skill. A specialization usually appears in parentheses after the Skill "Gun Combat Level 3 (Pistol)," for example.

**TABLE 2-7: SKILL LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS**

Skill Level	Descriptions
<b>Skill Level 1</b>	<b>Trained.</b> The character has had some training and practice within the Skill.
<b>Skill Level 2</b>	<b>Well-Trained.</b> The character has had moderate training and practice within the Skill.
<b>Skill Level 3</b>	<b>Expert.</b> The character has had significant training and practice within the Skill.
<b>Skill Level 4</b>	<b>Veteran.</b> The character has had extensive training and practice within the Skill.
<b>Skill Level 5</b>	<b>Master.</b> The character has had exhaustive training and practice within the Skill.
<b>Skill Level 6</b>	<b>Grand Master.</b> The character has unparalleled ability and knowledge within the Skill.

Instead of improving a Skill by one Level, it is possible to take an extra specialization. Each extra specialization only costs one Skill Point regardless of the point cost of the Skill. If your character has Skill Points to spare, however, you may find it advantageous to add an extra Skill Level rather than take several extra specializations.

## SKILL COSTS

In *HKAT!* the point cost of a Skill is based on its utility in the game and not on the difficulty of learning the Skill. Thus, action or combat-oriented Skills are fairly costly at 3-6 Skill Points per Level, while other Skills only require 1-2 Skill Points per Level.

## USING SKILLS

Each Skill has its own description, indicating game effects and the Stat most relevant should a player need to make a Skill check dice roll. Game mechanics for using Skills in play are described under Skill checks (page 55), but there is no need to worry about them while designing a character. Simply choose those Skills that most closely fit your concept.

Skills are not necessary for routine tasks that an average person can accomplish. The Triad bodyguard driving a car as a chauffeur does not need to make a Driving Skill roll to accomplish this. On the other hand, if he or she wants to outpace pursuers while driving against oncoming traffic, the GM should require a roll. A player does not need to assign his character's Skill Points to a particular Skill to justify a familiarity within the field. Even a Level 1 Skill assignment reflects a significant amount of training and will demonstrate that your character is quite knowledgeable or capable in the chosen area. If a character only has limited capabilities with any Skill, he or she should not possess any Levels in it. For example, anyone can throw a punch or fire a gun without any training. A character that can shoot a gun does not automatically need the Gun Combat Skill. A character who is a "natural" or "prodigy" in a particular field may have a high Skill Level after only a small amount of formal training.

While some Skills seem out of place in *HKAT!*, such as Artisan or Business Management, numerous characters in most Hong Kong action movies have training in various areas other than just fighting. Even characters who grow up in a temple learning martial arts their whole lives usually have artistic talents and other abilities covered through Skills.

Skills are divided into Open and Role Only Skills.

## ACROBATICS

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 3 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Body  
**Specializations:** Balance, Flexibility, Jumps, Tumbling

This is the ability to perform gymnastic feats like jumping, tumbling, flips, and other fantastic actions. It is very helpful when attempting Stunts (see page 67).

## ARCHERY

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 4 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Attack Combat Value  
**Specializations:** Bow, Crossbow

The ability to accurately use a bow or crossbow. The Skill's Level acts as a modifier to the character's Attack Combat Value rolls when using this Skill.

### TABLE 2-8: OPEN SKILLS

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### BOATING

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Varies  
**Specializations:** Hovercraft, Large Ships, Small Boats  
 This Skill involves the operation and maintenance of watercraft.

### CLIMBING

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 3 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Body  
**Specializations:** Environment Specific (such as ice climbing, building climbing, etc.), Free Climbing, Rappelling  
 The ability to climb sheer surfaces with or without ropes. The character knows how to find handholds and how to scale surfaces with little risk of falling.

### DRIVING

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Body  
**Specializations:** Car, Motorcycle, Truck, Transport Trailer

While players can assume their characters know how to drive a car without this Skill, characters with Driving are better at it, and they have a better chance of successfully navigating obstacles and such during a chase.

### GUN COMBAT

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 5 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Attack Combat Value  
**Specializations:** Autofire, Pistol, Rifle

This is the ability to accurately shoot a hand-held firearm and to maintain it properly. Autofire applies to unleashing bursts of fully automatic fire from any gun, whether it is a small submachine gun, a big assault rifle, or a heavy machine gun. Pistol applies to firing single shots from a handgun. Rifle covers firing single shots from guns with a shoulder stock, including rifles and shotguns. The Skill's Level acts as a modifier to the character's Attack Combat Value rolls when using this Skill.

### HEAVY WEAPONS

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 4 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Attack Combat Value  
**Specializations:** Artillery (indirect fire weapons such as Howitzers), Gunnery (heavy machine guns, tank guns and other vehicle-mounted direct-fire weapons), Launchers (rocket and missile launchers)

The ability to accurately fire vehicle-mounted or tripod-mounted weapons such as a tank cannon or heavy machinegun and perform routine maintenance. The Skill's Level acts as a modifier to the character's Attack Combat Value rolls when using this Skill.



## INTIMIDATION

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Body, Mind, or Soul  
**Specializations:** Business, Political, Street

The ability to convincingly project a “tough guy” image. A successful roll means someone witnessing your performance believes your threats or intimidation techniques. How they react after that depends on how tough they are themselves in relation to the kind of threat you present — they may respond with respect, fear, hatred, or amusement. The GM should modify any rolls based on the credibility of the threat the character presents compared to the position of the person threatened.

## KUNG FU: ATTACKS

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 5 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Attack Combat Value  
**Specializations:** Strikes, Holds, Throws, Wrestling

The term “Kung Fu” represents various martial arts forms (Karate, Jujitsu, Judo, Tae Kwon Do, Kung Fu, etc.). While the player may decide which martial art his or character practices or even if the character knows more than one form, the Kung Fu Skill denotes his or her ability to fight in hand-to-hand combat. This Skill represents the martial artist’s ability to hit his or her opponent — this Skill’s Level acts as a modifier to the character’s Attack Combat Value rolls when using Kung Fu: Attacks.

## KUNG FU: DEFENSE

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 4 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Defense Combat Value  
**Specializations:** Strikes, Holds, Throws, Wrestling

The term “Kung Fu” represents various martial arts forms (Karate, Jujitsu, Judo, Tae Kwon Do, Kung Fu, etc.). While the player may decide which martial art his or character practices or even if the character knows more than one form, the Kung Fu Skill denotes his or her ability to engage in hand-to-hand combat. This Skill represents the martial artist’s ability to avoid being hit by his or her opponent — this Skill’s Level acts as a modifier to the character’s Defense Combat Value rolls when using Kung Fu: Defense.

## LINGUISTICS

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind  
**Specializations:** A Specific Language, Code, Sign Language, Braille

This Skill reflects a character’s ability to understand language and language theory. In addition, for each Level in this Skill, the character can speak and read one additional language other than his or her native tongue.

## MELEE ATTACK

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 5 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Attack Combat Value  
**Specializations:** Axe, Baton/Club, Knife, Improvised Weapons (chairs, lamps, ladders, etc.), Polearms (spears, naginata, etc.), Sword, Whips/Chains

The ability to attack effectively with a hand-to-hand weapon. This Skill’s Level acts as a modifier to the character’s Attack Combat Value rolls when using Melee Attack.

## MELEE DEFENSE

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 4 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Defense Combat Value  
**Specializations:** Axe, Baton/Club, Knife, Improvised Weapons (chairs, lamps, ladders, etc.), Polearms (spears, naginata, etc.), Sword, Whips/Chains

The ability to defend oneself using a melee weapon. By purchasing different levels of the Melee Attack and Defense Skills, a player can simulate the character’s personal style. A conservative fighter, for example, would have high levels of Melee Defense, while an aggressive attacker would specialize in Melee Attack. This Skill’s Level acts as a modifier to the character’s Defense Combat Value rolls when using Melee Defense.

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## PERFORMING ARTS

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Soul  
**Specializations:** Comedy, Dance, Drama, Public Speaking, Singing, Tea Ceremony

This is the character's ability to perform before a crowd. It can be as a musician, actor, dancer, etc. The character can, with the GM's approval, use his or her skill in Performing Arts to temporarily increase his or her Art of Distraction Skill by one. Additionally, actors with this Skill may win ties when bidding for a role (see page 38).

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## PILOTING

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Varies  
**Specializations:** Heavy Airplane, Helicopter, Jet Fighter, Light Airplane, Lighter-Than-Air Craft

The character can operate aircraft such as small planes or helicopters.

---

## RANGED DEFENSE

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 3 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Defense Combat Value  
**Specializations:** Personal (on foot), Air Vehicle, Ground Vehicle, Water Vehicle

The ability to avoid ranged attacks. This Defense Combat Skill does not enable a character to actually dodge bullets. Rather, it is a combination of situational awareness and tactical movement as well as knowing when to keep moving (to present a more difficult target) and when to drop for cover.

---

## RIDING

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Varies  
**Specializations:** By species (Horse, Camel, etc.).

This is the knowledge of caring for a riding beast, how to saddle, mount, and dismount the animal, encourage it to perform difficult or dangerous manoeuvres safely and without balking, and how to best pace it for long rides.

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## SLEIGHT OF HAND

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Body  
**Specializations:** Card Sharking, Lock Picking, Pick Pocketing, Stage Magic

This Skill allows the character to palm objects, conceal them, and generally make the hand quicker than eye. It is a useful Skill for thieves as well as gamblers who wish to stack the deck.

---

## STEALTH

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 4 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Body  
**Specializations:** Camouflage, Concealment, Silent Movement

The ability to disguise objects or people so that they blend into their surroundings. This also includes the ability to conceal small objects on one's person and the ability to move silently.

---

## SPORTS

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Body (sometimes Mind or Soul)  
**Specializations:** Baseball, Basketball, Football, Soccer, Hockey, etc.

This entails knowing how to play well with others in a team-sporting event using specialized rules.

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## SWIMMING

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Body  
**Specializations:** Competition, Deep-Sea Diving, Free Diving, Scuba, Snorkelling

The character is skilled at swimming or diving. The GM may assume that any character in a modern setting can swim even without this Skill. A swimmer usually moves at speeds equal to his or her Body in kilometres per hour.

## THROWN WEAPONS

**Skill Type:** Open  
**Cost:** 4 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Attack Combat Value  
**Specializations:** Blades, Grenade, Rocks

This Skill represents accurately throwing weapons or objects to hit a target. The Skill's Level acts as a modifier to the character's Attack Combat Value rolls when using this Skill.

## STEP SIX: 轉值 DERIVED VALUES

Calculate the character's Derived Values. These numbers are based directly on the Body, Mind, and Soul Stats and thus there are no choices on point distribution.

### COMBAT VALUE

This value governs all facets of physical conflict including your character's abilities in attacking, defending, and delivering damage. A higher Combat Value reflects fighting spirit and an increased knowledge of all physical combat forms: armed, unarmed, martial arts and ranged weapons. There are two separate components of the Combat Value: Attack and Defense. Character Attributes and Defects may modify either component separately, but unless otherwise noted, the term Combat Value refers to both Attack and Defense.

Characters can only achieve increased ability in combat through harmony of the Complete Self. Lack of self-unity through weakness of any facet of the character restricts his or her ability in combat. Consequently, the Body, Mind, and Soul are all of equal importance to the combat master: Body Stat for a forceful attack and defense, Mind Stat for quick wit, knowledge of combat techniques and anticipation of an opponent's actions, and Soul Stat for the winning spirit and good fortune.

To calculate the base Attack Combat Value, add together all the Stat Values and divide by three, rounding down  $([Body + Mind + Soul] \div 3)$ .

The Defense Combat Value is two less than the Attack Combat Value (Attack Combat Value - 2).

### HEALTH POINTS

This Derived Value dictates the amount of physical damage your character's body can sustain before it ceases to function (for example, your character dies). Players should subtract damage points delivered in combat from their characters' current Health Point total. If the total ever falls below zero, the opponent delivered a fatal blow. The base number of Health Points is equal to the sum of the Body Stat and Soul Stat multiplied by 5  $([Body + Soul] \times 5)$ . Attributes like Damn Healthy! (page 15), and the Not So Tough (page 29) Defect, and the Role Health Points bonus/penalty (see page 40) may further modify Health Points

### ENERGY POINTS

This Derived Value represents the personal reserves and fortitude your character has at his or her disposal when carrying out difficult tasks. He or she can use Energy Points to increase Stats or Health Points temporarily. This advantage usually lasts for a few minutes — the duration of an important task. The player can raise any Stat by 1 point for every 10 Energy Points drained from his or her character's total. The character can also use the new Stat Value towards Stat check dice rolls, though this does not affect his or her character's Combat Value. Characters can also increase the damage inflicted by one point per 5 Energy Points expended. Health Points also increase at a rate of 1 point for every 5 Energy Points sacrificed, which may keep a character who has fallen below 0 Health Points alive long enough to receive medical attention. If your character's Energy Point total is ever reduced to 0, he or she falls unconscious from exhaustion.

To calculate your character's Energy Point total, add together the Mind Stat and Soul Stat and multiply by 5  $([Mind + Soul] \times 5)$ . The Energy Bonus Attribute (page 16) and the Role Energy Points bonus/penalty (see page 40) may further modify Energy Points.



## STAR POWER

Star Power is a measure of your character's fame and audience-demand quotient. Characters use it in their attempts to land specific movie roles. Additionally, actors use it in attempts to influence the movie to go their way — the more important the character is to the success or failure of the movie, the more likely the director will make changes to keep him or her happy. Star Power fluctuates over the course of several movies; the character's past successes increase his or her stock with movie producers while failures will decrease a filmmaker's desire to use the character in his or her next film.

The player calculates the character's starting Star Power by adding his or her three Stats together: Body, Mind and Soul (**Body + Mind + Soul**).

An actor can spend Star Power to change elements of a film in the role's favour. This simulates the character's pull with the studio to achieve his or her ends. There are several ways the player can accomplish this. Each is detailed below.

### RE-ROLL THE DICE

By spending a single point of Star Power, the character can opt to re-roll any dice roll. The player can use this ability on the character's own dice rolls, but can not change someone else's roll. The player must accept the result of the new dice roll (unless he or she decides to expend more Star Power to re-roll again).

### MINOR SCRIPT REWRITE

By spending one point of Star Power, the character can make a minor change to the script, which allows for a slight alteration in the movie's environment that works in his or her favour. These are minor changes like finding a weapon conveniently located under a table or a sudden burst of inspiration (a GM hint).

### MAJOR SCRIPT REWRITE

This allows for a flagrant change in the story, often with a very flimsy explanation. It costs five Star Power to do so, and examples include: the revelation that a dead

character is actually in a coma or the revelation that a secondary villain is really an undercover cop (or vice versa). GMs must approve all Major Script Rewrites; the expenditure of the Star Power does not necessarily guarantee that the director is willing to change his or her movie. If the GM/director does not approve the script rewrite, the actor still spends the five Star Power. This reflects the actor calling in favours, throwing a tantrum, and other attempts to change the script, but the director ignoring such obvious tactics and sticking to his or her guns. Additionally, this prevents players from constantly throwing Major Script Rewrites at the GM without a good explanation — the danger of losing Star Power without any benefit ensures that Major Script Rewrites occur rarely.

### GRANT A BONUS

By spending one Star Power before rolling the dice, a character receives a -1 bonus to the dice roll for any one action. This simulates the script making things easier for a big star. Actor's may spend more than one Star Power on an action, gaining an increased bonus (for example, spending three Star Power earns the role a -3 dice roll bonus).

## 背景故事 STEP SEVEN: BACKGROUND POINTS

Now that you have completed the numerical component of your character (Stats, Attributes, Defects, Skills, and Derived Values), you should concentrate on fine-tuning his or her personality, while still leaving room for the character to grow in the future. One effective method to better visualize your creation is to provide detail through a background history, a character story, or a character drawing. As an incentive, the GM will award you 1-3 Background Points for each contribution that you complete, which are then distributed among the Character Attributes. If any of your character's Stats are changed after using the Background Points, you must recalculate the three Derived Values.

# 編創造 STEP EIGHT: ROLE CREATION

Since HKAT! simulates Hong Kong action movies, the characters are actually actors working on a given film. Thus, a role character is distinct from an actor character. The role is a film part or persona that the actor plays. Roles are described in general terms based on what the character's part in the story is. They might include "The Triad Assassin," "The Burned Out Cop," or "The Shaolin Master." The GM creates each role for the upcoming film, and includes a brief description of the role's identity, his or her principle motivations, available Attributes and Skills, and the role's Importance Level. It is recommended GMs only create one or two Lead Roles for a movie. Additionally, GMs should not create Walk-on Roles for players since the other characters will so completely overshadowed them, the Walk-on cannot accomplish much in the film. Game Masters should reserve Walk-on Roles for Non-player characters (NPCs), keeping Speaking Parts and Supporting Characters for available roles.

There is a minimum Star Power required to play a film role. This is the minimum amount of Star Power an actor must spend to land the role, and it reflects its importance to the movie and the degree of difficulty to play that part. Thus, actors with more Star Power (who are therefore bigger celebrities with higher face recognition and name draw) can command better parts in a movie. All roles must have a Star Power Requirement of at least one and can go as high as 15 or higher.

## BIDDING ON ROLES

When the GM has created the roles, he or she informs the players of the available parts, their Importance Level, and how much Star Power they must spend for the Game Master to consider them. The players then choose the role they want their actors to play. In the case where two or more players want the same role, a bidding war ensues. The bidding starts at the minimum Star Power for the role and increases based on competing actors' bids. Each player secretly informs the GM how much Star Power he or she is willing to spend to get the

part and the director contracts the role to the person who spends the most. If the bidding is still tied, it goes for another round until one of the actors earns the role.

Players cannot bid more Star Power than they have available. If an actor runs out of Star Power, that is the maximum amount he or she can bid on the role. If the bidding results in a tie where neither actor is willing to bid more Star Power for the part, the actor with the highest Star Power earns the role. For example, Jimmy has 12 Star Power and Janine has 14. Both bid 8 Star Power for the movie's lead role, but neither is willing to bid more — they want to keep a few Star Power to use during the film. Since Janine is a larger star (has more Star Power), the studio decides to hire her for the part. In case of an unbreakable tie where both actors are willing to bid the same amount, but neither will spend more (or they have both bid all of their Star Power) the actor with the highest Level in the Performing Arts Skill wins. If there is still a tie at this point, the players roll a die. Whoever rolls higher wins the part. Characters who lose a bidding war have not spent their Star Power on the part and may use those points to land another part in the movie.

Star Power spent to land a role is gone and cannot be used during the film. Thus, a character that expends all of his or her Star Power to earn a part will have none left while performing — until he or she gains additional Star Power by performing Stunts (see page 67). Additionally, players may wish to bid more Star Power for a role in anticipation of a larger reward at the end of the adventure (see page 48 for Star Power Awards). This represents the character using his or her influence to draw increased media attention to the movie and his or her part within the film. The drawback, however, is that the actor's focus on promoting the movie means he or she has less influence over the direction of the movie, represented by the character having fewer Star Power to use for Script Rewrites, rerolls, etc.

## ROLE TYPES

There are four main types of roles, outlined below:

### WALK-ON

The character makes a brief appearance in the movie and has no lines at all. Reserved for non-player characters.



#### SPEAKING PART

The character makes a brief appearance in the movie and speaks one or two lines. Reserved for non-player characters.

#### SUPPORTING CHARACTER

The character appears throughout the movie and plays an important part in the resolution of the movie's plot, but is not the focus of the movie.

#### LEAD ROLE

The character is the focus of the movie's plot — without him or her, there wouldn't be a story.

## BUYING ROLE ATTRIBUTES AND SKILLS

Once the Game Master assigns the roles, the actors gain a Role Package of Attributes, Skills, and Defects that their character needs for the movie. The GM creates these Role Packages, but the actor may gain bonus Character or Skill points (extra points that the GM did

not use to create the Role Package). The actor may spend these bonus points to improve the role even further. If players use any bonus Character Points to increase their Stats for the role, be sure to recalculate their Derived Values (excluding Star Power).

If the Role Package grants an actor an Attribute or Skill that he or she already possesses, merely add the Levels together to determine the role's Level in the Attribute or Skill. For example, if an actor has Kung Fu: Attacks at Level 2 and a Role Package grants the character Kung Fu: Attacks at Level 1, the character's Skill Level in Kung Fu: Attacks for the movie would be 3 (2+1).

Note: This can increase a character's Level in an Attribute or Skill above 6 in some cases, though GMs may limit this at their discretion.

The following chart outlines the number of points players should use to create the Role Packages for a movie, based upon the movie's budget and the role's Importance Level. A recommended Star Power cost is also provided, though it is merely a guideline — certain roles will cost more or less depending on the movie.

Any Abilities or Defects gained for the role are only for the movie in question and disappear once filming is completed. When the actor moves on to his or her next part, he or she undertakes an entirely new role and Role Package (unless it is a sequel, of course ...).

## IMPROVING ROLES

Actors may increase their role's Attributes by converting Star Power into Character Points. The cost for doing so is one Star Power for one additional Character Point. The actor, in this instance, uses some of his or her influence within the film industry to increase the budget for the movie to ensure his or her role is capable of supporting impressive scenes. These spent Star Power are lost entirely and not regained at the end of the film.



**TABLE 2-9: ROLE PACKAGES**

Movie's Budget	Role's Importance Level	Bonus Points	Suggested Star Power Cost
<b>B-movie</b>	Walk-On	zero Character Points zero Skill Points	1
	Speaking Part	zero Character Points zero Skill Points	2
	Supporting Character	5 Character Points 5 Skill Points	3
	Lead Role	5 Character Points 10 Skill Points	4
<b>Standard Release</b>	Walk-On	zero Character Points 5 Skill Points	1
	Speaking Part	5 Character Points 10 Skill Points	3
	Supporting Character	10 Character Points 15 Skill Points	5
	Lead Role	15 Character Points 20 Skill Points	7
<b>Big Budget Movie</b>	Walk-On	zero Character Points 10 Skill Points	1
	Speaking Part	10 Character Points 20 Skill Points	4
	Supporting Character	20 Character Points 30 Skill Points	7
	Lead Role	30 Character Points 40 Skill Points	10
<b>Blockbuster Movie</b>	Walk-On	5 Character Points 20 Skill Points	1
	Speaking Part	10 Character Points 40 Skill Points	5
	Supporting Character	20 Character Points 60 Skill Points	9
	Lead Role	40 Character Points 80 Skill Points	13

### ROLE HEALTH AND ENERGY

In addition to the Bonus Character and Skill Points the character earns for the role, he or she also earns a modifier to his or her Health Points and Energy Points, commensurate with his or her Importance Level to the story. These modifiers reflect an important character's longevity to reach the dramatic conclusion of the story while showing how minor characters meet their end early on.

**TABLE 2-10: ROLE HEALTH/ENERGY POINTS MODIFIER**

Importance	Health & Energy Points Modifier
Walk-On	-20 (or less)
Speaking Part	No Modifier
Supporting Character	+10
Lead Role	+20

## ROLE ATTRIBUTES

The following Role Only Attributes are available for movie parts.

### FOCUSED

**Attribute Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Soul

Characters who are Focused have achieved greater balance with the universe. Once per session, the character can meditate by making a Soul Stat check. If successful, the character can replenish 5 Energy Points per Level. Use of this ability requires at least 10 minutes of uninterrupted concentration.

- Level 1** The character can replenish 5 Energy Points.
- Level 2** The character can replenish 10 Energy Points.
- Level 3** The character can replenish 15 Energy Points.
- Level 4** The character can replenish 20 Energy Points.
- Level 5** The character can replenish 25 Energy Points.
- Level 6** The character can replenish 30 Energy Points.

### MEDITATION

**Attribute Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Soul

The character knows how to relax and bring him or herself back into holistic wellness. Once per session, the character can meditate by making a Soul Stat check. If successful, the character heals 5 Health Points per Level. Use of this ability requires at least 10 minutes of uninterrupted meditation.

- Level 1** The character can heal 5 Health Points.
- Level 2** The character can heal 10 Health Points.
- Level 3** The character can heal 15 Health Points.
- Level 4** The character can heal 20 Health Points.
- Level 5** The character can heal 25 Health Points.
- Level 6** The character can heal 30 Health Points.

## POSEDOWN

**Attribute Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Soul

The Posedown is a special attack designed to unnerve opponents. A character with this Attribute spends an action to perform a ritualized kata, flex his or her muscles, or just generally appear bad to the bone. If the character makes a Soul Stat check, the target suffers a penalty equal to the attacker's Level in Posedown for all attacks directed against the character for the next three rounds. Players can combine this Attribute with Art of Distraction to affect several opponents at once, but he or she cannot use it against opponents of greater Importance Levels than the posing character. Use of this ability requires one full uninterrupted action (the character cannot do anything else requiring a dice roll, including Defensive Combat rolls).

- Level 1** If the character makes a successful Soul Stat check, targets suffer a +1 dice roll penalty for all attacks directed against the character.
- Level 2** If the character makes a successful Soul Stat check, targets suffer a +2 dice roll penalty for all attacks directed against the character.
- Level 3** If the character makes a successful Soul Stat check, targets suffer a +3 dice roll penalty for all attacks directed against the character.
- Level 4** If the character makes a successful Soul Stat check, targets suffer a +4 dice roll penalty for all attacks directed against the character.
- Level 5** If the character makes a successful Soul Stat check, targets suffer a +5 dice roll penalty for all attacks directed against the character.
- Level 6** If the character makes a successful Soul Stat check, targets suffer a +6 dice roll penalty for all attacks directed against the character.

## WEALTH

**Attribute Type:** Role Only

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** None

The role is financially stable, more so than the average person. This allows him or her to easily acquire commercially available goods, and bribe or hire people. The character probably possesses non-liquid assets (like houses or real estate) commensurate with his or her wealth.

**Level 1** The role is well off. In a modern-day setting, he or she may have liquid assets totalling about \$100,000 US.

**Level 2** The role is wealthy. In a modern day setting, he or she may have liquid assets totalling about \$500,000 US.

**Level 3** The role is rich. In a modern day setting, he or she may have liquid assets totalling a few million dollars US.

**Level 4** The role is very rich. In a modern day setting, he or she may have liquid assets totalling several million dollars US.

**Level 5** The role is extremely rich. In a modern day setting, he or she may have liquid assets in the hundreds of millions of dollars US.

**Level 6** The role is fantastically rich. In a modern day setting, he or she may have liquid assets worth billions of dollars US.

### TABLE 2-11: OPEN & ROLE ONLY ATTRIBUTES

Art of Distraction	Open	page 15
Damn Healthy!	Open	page 15
Energy Bonus	Open	page 16
Extra Attacks	Open	page 16
Extra Defenses	Open	page 17
Focused	Role Only	page 41
Focused Damage	Open	page 18
Gun Fu	Open	page 18
Highly Skilled	Open	page 29
Meditation	Role Only	page 41
Posedown	Role Only	page 41
Signature Move (if a sequel)	Open	page 21
Swift Reaction	Open	page 22
Sword Fu	Open	page 22
Wealth	Role Only	page 42
Wire Fu: Attacks	Open	page 22
Wire Fu: Movement	Open	page 27

## ROLE DEFECTS

The following are Role Only Defects that actors may take for their movie part.

### TABLE 2-12: OPEN & ROLE ONLY DEFECTS

Awkward	Open	page 29
Easily Distracted	Role Only	page 42
Ill Fortune	Role Only	page 43
Inept Combat	Open	page 29
Marked	Open	page 29
Moral Code	Role Only	page 43
Not So Fast	Open	page 29
Not So Strong	Open	page 29
Not So Tough	Open	page 29
Owned by the Triads	Open	page 30
Phobia	Open	page 30
Physically Unappealing	Open	page 30
Recurring Nightmares	Role Only	page 43
Servitude/Obligation	Role Only	page 43
Sensory Impairment	Role Only	page 43
Shy	Role Only	page 44
Significant Other	Role Only	page 44
Skeleton in the Closet	Role Only	page 44
Unique Defect	Open	page 30
Unskilled	Open	page 31
Young	Open	page 31
Wanted	Role Only	page 44

## EASILY DISTRACTED

**Defect Type:** Role Only

Roles with Easily Distracted find themselves inexorably drawn to trivial things that distract them from their current course of action. These triggers (which players must chose when taking this Defect) cause the character to pay exclusive attention to them while they are present, and include such things as food, famous people, hobbies, gossip, or cute members of either sex. Until the trigger is removed, the character cannot do what he or she should be doing. Many characters possess a variety of triggers but do not have this Defect because their sense of judgement moderates their interests.

**1 BP** One specific trigger or a broad number of infrequent triggers distract the role.

**2 BP** Numerous triggers or a specific and frequent trigger distracts the role.



## ILL FORTUNE

**Defect Type:** Role Only

The role has somehow offended a higher power and is now dogged with bad luck. The bad luck can take any form from a penalty to certain dice rolls, to the character never having the correct change. GMs and players should work out the exact effects of Ill Fortune.

- 1 BP The role suffers from a small disadvantage.
- 2 BP The role suffers from a major disadvantage.

## MORAL CODE

**Defect Type:** Role Only

The role has limitations on whom he or she attacks based on moral reservations, emotional attachments, orders, or other restrictions. A Triad Assassin, for instance, might follow a code of sparing innocents. He or she can only overcome these restrictions in the most exceptional circumstances, but his or her actions always carry harsh penalties such as unbearable guilt or punishment by superiors.

- 1 BP The restriction applies to very few people or the role has only moderate reservations.
- 2 BP The restriction applies to a large group of people or the restriction involves very strong reservations.

## RECURRING NIGHTMARES

**Defect Type:** Role Only

When the Recurring Nightmare Defect haunts a character, he or she has trouble sleeping at night and functions at less than optimum performance during the day. The nightmare can be a memory of a tragic event or traumatic experience, or it might be something else such as a prophetic vision or warning. The nightmare may not occur every night but it will haunt the character on a regular basis. Additionally, the nightmares do not necessarily portray the exact same events repeatedly, but the visions should be related to one another in some way. The details concerning the nightmares' content and why they occur is the responsibility of the GM and the player to create.

- 1 BP The nightmares occur infrequently and have a small effect on the role's lifestyle.
- 2 BP The nightmares occur frequently and have a large effect on the role's lifestyle.

## SERVITUDE/OBLIGATION

**Defect Type:** Role Only

The role is obligated to another person, a code of conduct, an ideal, an organization, etc. This is more than a simple debt, and breaking this obligation may have serious repercussions. If the responsibility is to a code, the character may suffer from guilt, regret, etc. If it is to a person or organization, the character may be in great trouble depending on the nature of the service.

- 1 BP Fulfilling the obligation is a small part of the role's life, allowing him or her to demonstrate a large amount of free will.
- 2 BP Fulfilling the obligation is a large part of the role's life, allowing him or her to only exhibit a small portion of free will.

## SENSORY IMPAIRMENT

**Defect Type:** Role Only

One or more of the role's senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell) are either diminished or lost. An example of a diminished sense is being near-sighted or hard of hearing; the GM should take the impairment into consideration when deciding what the character can perceive, and may apply a +3 penalty on rolls to notice things with that sense. Lost senses include blindness or deafness. Any diminishment or loss is based on the character's status after benefiting from any technological aids such as eyeglasses or hearing aids in the setting. For example, if a character is deaf without a hearing aid but hard of hearing with one, or he or she has Sensory Impairment (diminished hearing, 1 BP). In a setting where a hearing aid was unavailable or it will not correct a character's particular impairment, he or she would suffer Sensory Impairment (deaf, 2 BP) instead. A character can take Sensory Impairment multiple times to affect one or more primary senses, or a larger group of secondary senses.

- 1 BP The role has a diminished primary sense (such as short-sightedness or being hard of hearing), or has lost a secondary sense (such as taste or smell).
- 2 BP The role has completely lost a primary sense (like sight or hearing), or has two diminished primary senses.

## SHY

**Defect Type:** Role Only

The role has difficulty communicating with people he or she finds attractive. He or she is easily embarrassed, and will often flee from a potentially romantic encounter.

- 1 BP The role is shy during potentially romantic encounters, incurring a +1 penalty on rolls for social interaction.
- 2 BP The role is shy during almost any encounter with an attractive person, incurring a +2 penalty on rolls for social interaction.

## SIGNIFICANT OTHER (S.O.)

**Defect Type:** Role Only

The role has someone in his or her life for whom he or she goes to any lengths to protect. This can be a relative, spouse, steady date, or extremely close friend. The role will do anything, including betray friends, co-workers, or employers to protect the S.O. When coupled with Sacrificial Buddy (page 22), this Defect can be very powerful indeed.

- 1 BP The S.O. is rarely in grave danger or is only of Walk-on or Speaking Part Importance.
- 2 BP The S.O. is frequently in grave danger or is of Supporting Character or Lead Importance.

## SKELETON IN THE CLOSET

**Defect Type:** Role Only

A character with this Defect has a dark secret that if exposed, will create problems. For roles, this can be any sort of plot complication. GMs and players should work together to determine the sort of Skeleton, the effects of its exposure, and how someone might uncover the Skeleton.

- 1 BP The Skeleton is very difficult to uncover, the consequences of discovery are not too severe, or it only impacts the character's reputation slightly.
- 2 BP The Skeleton is easy to discover, and/or the consequences of uncovering it are dire, and/or it impacts the character's reputation greatly.

## WANTED

**Defect Type:** Role Only

Authorities are hunting the role. The police may have falsely accused the character or he or she might have committed the crimes in question; regardless, the police will arrest the character if they catch him or her. Wanted can also mean that a less savoury organization like a Triad is searching for the character.

- 1 BP The role is not actively hunted or the reward for his or her capture is small.
- 2 BP The role is actively being hunted or the reward for finding him or her is great.

## ROLE SKILLS

The following are Role Only Skills

### ARTISAN

**Skill Type:** Role Only

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** Average of Body and Soul

**Specializations:** Armourer, Carpentry, Metalworking, Woodworking

This Skill represents a character's ability to work with a variety of materials to repair or produce useful or aesthetically pleasing objects that are not electronic or mechanical in nature.

### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**Skill Type:** Role Only

**Cost:** 1 Point/Level

**Relevant Stat:** Mind

**Specializations:** Accounting, Banking, Fraud, Marketing, Securities, Small Business

The character understands the operation and successful management of a business, legal or otherwise. This Skill enables the character to make the business more profitable as well as investigate a business to see if it is operating legally. If characters run their own businesses, the GM can assume they are profitable if they make a successful Skill check every month. If not, they may be losing money and need to accept a special assignment to pay the bills or risk bankruptcy.

TABLE 2-13: OPEN &amp; ROLE ONLY SKILLS

Acrobatics	Open	page 32
Archery	Open	page 32
Artisan	Role Only	page 44
Boating	Open	page 33
Business Management	Role Only	page 44
Climbing	Open	page 33
Computers	Role Only	page 45
Cooking	Role Only	page 45
Cultural Arts	Role Only	page 45
Demolitions	Role Only	page 45
Disguise	Role Only	page 46
Driving	Open	page 33
Forgery	Role Only	page 46
Gambling	Role Only	page 46
Gun Combat	Open	page 33
Heavy Weapons	Open	page 33
Interrogation	Role Only	page 46
Intimidation	Open	page 34
Kung Fu: Attacks	Open	page 34
Kung Fu: Defense	Open	page 34
Law	Role Only	page 46
Linguistics	Open	page 34
Lock-Picking	Role Only	page 46
Mechanic	Role Only	page 46
Medical	Role Only	page 46
Melee Attack	Open	page 34
Melee Defense	Open	page 34
Performing Arts	Open	page 35
Piloting	Open	page 35
Police Sciences	Role Only	page 47
Ranged Defense	Open	page 35
Riding	Open	page 35
Science	Role Only	page 47
Seduction	Role Only	page 47
Sleight of Hand	Open	page 35
Stealth	Open	page 35
Sports	Open	page 35
Swimming	Open	page 35
Thrown Weapons	Open	page 36
Urban Tracking	Role Only	page 47
Visual Arts	Role Only	page 47
Way of the Taoist	Role Only	page 47
Wilderness Survival	Role Only	page 47
Wilderness Tracking	Role Only	page 47
Writing	Role Only	page 48

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## COMPUTERS

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind  
**Specializations:** Databases, Intrusion/Security, Networks, Programming

A character with this skill can program and troubleshoot computers. He or she can use this Skill to hack into other computers or a database to retrieve information.

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## COOKING

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind or Soul  
**Specializations:** Ethnic, Exotic, Fast Food, Gourmet, Home

The ability to prepare tasty, visually appealing meals and find the best ingredients when shopping. Many Hong Kong films raise Cooking to the level of kung fu, whereby the character can defeat an opponent by making a faster stir fry. Great cooking films include *God of Cookery*, *The Chinese Feast*, and *Eat Drink Man Woman*.

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## CULTURAL ARTS

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind  
**Specializations:** Art Appraisal, Archaeology, History, Literature, Urban Legends

This is the knowledge concerning aspects of human culture.

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## DEMOLITIONS

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Varies  
**Specializations:** Artificial Structures, Bomb Disposal, Natural Structures, Safe Cracking, Underwater

The ability to set explosive charges without hurting oneself in the process or inflicting undesired collateral damage. Characters can also use it to deactivate explosives set by someone else.



### DISGUISE

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Varies  
**Specializations:** Costume, Make-up, Prosthetics  
 The ability to change one's personal appearance in an attempt to deceive others.

### FORGERY

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Varies  
**Specializations:** Electronic Documents, Handwriting, Paper Documents  
 This is the ability to falsify documents and counterfeit money. It is Mind-based when employing electronic means to create the forgeries, and Body-based when doctoring documents by hand.

### GAMBLING

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Soul  
**Specializations:** Cards, Dice, Mah Jong, Billiards, Horse Racing  
 The character is good at gambling. He or she can use this skill to make money, solve disputes, or slip out of tricky situations. In some Hong Kong films (for instance, *God of Gamblers*), the gambling Skill is elevated to the same importance as kung fu.

### INTERROGATION

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind  
**Specializations:** Drugs, Physical, Psychological  
 This is the ability to force information out of people. The character is skilled at making targets talk, even when they do not want to.

### LAW

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind  
**Specializations:** Civil, Criminal, Customs, International, Political  
 The character has knowledge of the law, how it works, how to enforce it, and on occasion, how to most effectively bend the rules. This is an excellent Skill for cops and criminals alike. After all, it helps to understand your opposition. All specializations, except International, are specific to one country or region only (for example, "Hong Kong Criminal Law").

### LOCK-PICKING

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Average of Body and Mind  
**Specializations:** Electronic, Mechanical, Safe Cracking  
 The character knows how to open locked doors without a key. He or she can also use this Skill on conventional locks or on safes.

### MECHANIC

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind  
**Specializations:** Aeronautical, Armourer, Automotive, Gunsmith, Traps  
 The character can repair machines and understands how they work.

### MEDICAL

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind  
**Specializations:** Acupuncture, Dentistry, Diagnosis, Emergency Response, Homeopathy, Pathology, Pharmacy, Surgery, Veterinary  
 This Skill reflects knowledge of how to heal the human body. A general practitioner would specialize in Diagnosis, while most police officers or paramedics specialize in Emergency Response. Successful use of this Skill doubles the rate at which a wounded character heals (see page 70)

## POLICE SCIENCES

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind  
**Specializations:** Ballistics, Criminology, Forensics

This is the science behind detective work. Criminology focuses on the study of criminal behaviour and strategies while forensics covers evidence gathering (including hair-and-fibre samples, fingerprint and DNA-based identification techniques, etc.).

## SCIENCE

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind  
**Specializations:** Biology, Chemistry, Physics

This entails knowledge of the various branches of physical sciences. The character understands and has been educated in the applications of the different hard sciences.

## SEDUCTION

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Soul  
**Specializations:** Male, Female

The ability to seduce someone for the purposes of lovemaking. Characters usually employ this Skill to turn an enemy into an ally or to acquire information, though they can use it for the express purpose of luring someone to bed with someone (though this is usually off screen in Hong Kong films, or quickly faded out).

## URBAN TRACKING

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind  
**Specializations:** Academic, Corporate, Residential, Underworld

Urban Tracking is the ability to "shadow" someone (or follow a vehicle using another vehicle) through an industrialized, populated area, or find certain people in a particular sub-culture or environment by asking the right questions.

## VISUAL ARTS

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Varies (often the average of all three Stats)  
**Specializations:** Animation, Drawing, Painting, Photography, Video, etc.

The ability to produce a work of fine or commercial art in a particular visual field.

## WAY OF THE TAOIST

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind  
**Specializations:** Creatures, Items, Places

This Skill implies knowledge of the occult including supernatural creatures, their strengths and weaknesses, and mystical items. It grants the character no direct power in the occult, only an understanding of it.

## WILDERNESS SURVIVAL

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind (sometimes Body)  
**Specializations:** Arctic, Aquatic, Desert, Forest, Jungle, Mountain

The ability to locate food and shelter in the outdoors, to avoid natural hazards, and to identify wild plants and animals.

## WILDERNESS TRACKING

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 2 Points/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Mind (sometimes Soul)  
**Specializations:** Arctic, Aquatic, Desert, Forest, Jungle, Mountain

The ability to successfully trail or track someone or something while outdoors in a rural or wilderness setting.

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## WRITING

**Skill Type:** Role Only  
**Cost:** 1 Point/Level  
**Relevant Stat:** Average of Mind and Soul  
**Specializations:** Academic, Fiction, Journalistic, Poetic, Technical

Knowing how to communicate ideas or emotions in a written work.

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## ROLE DEATH

The great thing about playing an actor is that the character cannot really die. If the role is killed in the movie, it was simply that role that died because the script called for it. The actor will return next week in another movie and in a different part. Thus, death is not final in HKAT! In fact, a heroic death can be more memorable than surviving, possibly earning the actor a Star Power reward (GM discretion).

## CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

The following deals with awarding and using Star Power following a film's completion.

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## STAR POWER AWARDS

At the end of the movie, actors earn a Star Power reward based on their performance. This is in addition to any Star Power gained during the movie from performing Stunts (see page 67), and is based on the actor's achievements in the film. The GM determines the reward or, optionally, the other players may vote for their favourites character through secret ballots. In this case the GM asks the players to rate each of the others in the movie, on a scale from one to four (four being the best). He or she then determines each actor's rating in the film by averaging the results (usually rounding down). This simulates a wide group of film critics publishing reviews about the movie. GMs should feel free to ignore this method if the ratings provided by players do not accurately reflect a player's depiction of a role.

Each level of Star Power award is detailed below:

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### WEAK PERFORMANCE (1)

The actor offered a very poor performance in the role and it actually hurt his or her career. He or she is mocked in the reviews, and that makes the studios more cautious about working with that actor. The character receives a reward of half (rounded down) of his or her Star Power bid for the role.

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### ACCEPTABLE PERFORMANCE (2)

The actor performed sufficiently, doing the part as expected. It will not hurt his or her career, but neither will it make casting directors sit up and take notice. The character earns his or her entire Star Power bid back.

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### GOOD PERFORMANCE (3)

A 3-Star performance forces people to take notice of the actor. He or she played the role very well, and helped make the movie a success. The actor increases his or her stock with the studio as a bankable star and earns a reward equal to one and half (rounded down) times his or her Star Power bid for the role.

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### STELLAR PERFORMANCE (4)

The actor gave a riveting performance in the movie and was one of the key reasons for its success at the box office. Everyone from fans to reviewers to producers and directors are raving about the character's performance in the role. A sequel is already being written. The actor receives an award of twice his or her Star Power bid for the role. Stellar performances should be exceptionally rare.

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## SPENDING STAR POWER AFTER A FILM

Characters can spend their Star Power to improve their Actor's Stats, Attributes, or Skills, or buy off Defects (with GM approval). This is called Character Advancement. The cost for each improvement is listed below.



## IMPROVING STATS

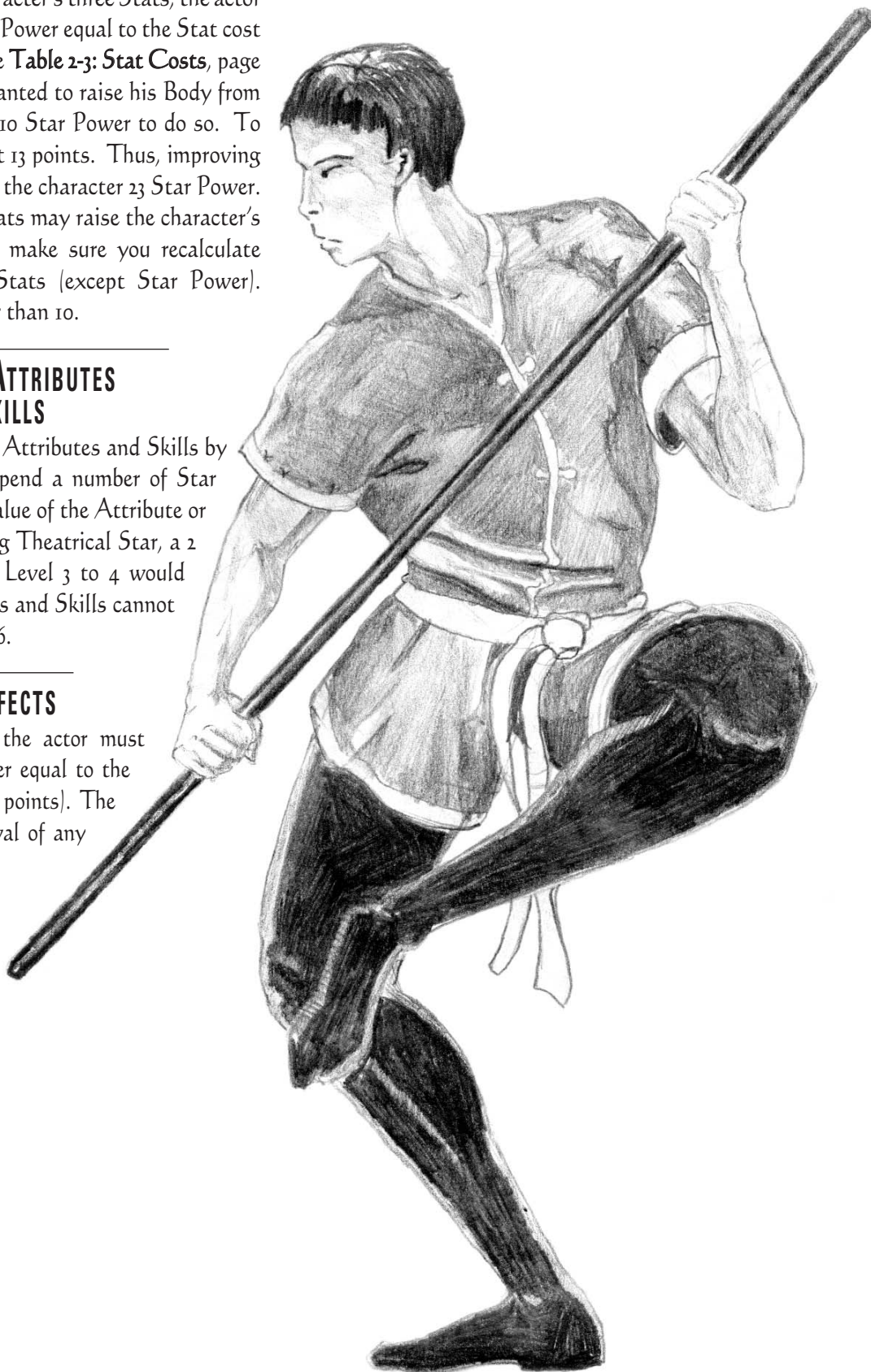
To raise any of the character's three Stats, the actor must spend a number of Star Power equal to the Stat cost he or she wishes to attain (see **Table 2-3: Stat Costs**, page 13). Thus a character who wanted to raise his Body from 6 to 7, would have to spend 10 Star Power to do so. To raise it from 7 to 8 would cost 13 points. Thus, improving a Stat from 6 to 8 would cost the character 23 Star Power. Keep in mind that raising Stats may raise the character's Derived Values as well, so make sure you recalculate those values after raising Stats (except Star Power). Stats cannot be raised higher than 10.

## IMPROVING ATTRIBUTES AND SKILLS

To improve the actor's Attributes and Skills by one Level, he or she must spend a number of Star Power equal to Cost/Level value of the Attribute or Skill. For example, increasing Theatrical Star, a 2 Points/Level Attribute from Level 3 to 4 would cost 2 Star Points. Attributes and Skills cannot usually go higher than Level 6.

## BUYING OFF DEFECTS

To remove a Defect, the actor must spend a number of Star Power equal to the value of the Defect (one or two points). The GM must approve the removal of any Defects.





# CHAPTER THREE: GAME MECHANICS





The construction of *HKAT!*'s system produces a fast, fluid, and cinematic conflict-resolution game mechanic. At its heart, it captures the speed and dynamic feel of the fight scenes enacted by everyone's favourite Hong Kong movie stars. At the same time, however, it provides players with a level of detail and strategy so they feel they are in the action: Do I kick or block? Will my opponent throw a punch at my head or leg-sweep me? Game Masters must apply this additional level of detail to inject drama into the game, and not degrade the cinematic action by complicating it. *GUARDIANS OF ORDER* has thus created two layers to the *HKAT!* system. The first is a quick and simple mechanic that exemplifies the dynamics of Hong Kong action movies. The second, optional, layer provides players with the framework to add detail to their characters' actions. This option is for GMs and players who may not wish to concern themselves with the difference between a kick and a punch, while not inhibiting those who care about it deeply. The second layer adds an extra dimension to the game, which will inherently slow the game mechanics of combat a bit. *GUARDIANS OF ORDER* has made real effort, however, to ensure this slowdown is as minimal as possible, thus expediting the promise of a fast, fluid, and cinematic conflict resolution system.

## 戲統基則入門 SYSTEM BASICS

In a role-playing game, most character or NPC-derived actions do not require any particular rules. A player simply says his or her character walks across a room, picks up an object, drives a vehicle, or talks to someone, etc., and if the GM agrees that it is possible, this simply happens. Personal interaction between characters or NPCs normally consists of the players and GM talking "in character" and describing what their characters are doing. In the GM's case, he or she describes what the characters are seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting.

In the course of a movie, circumstances may arise where specific rules are helpful to determine what happens. This is usually the case when the outcome of an action or event is uncertain and the result is important to the story. If a character needs to fix a broken reactor

pump to prevent a nuclear meltdown, can he or she do it in time? If a character's car drives off a cliff, can he or she jump clear in time, and if not, how badly will the crash injure the character? If two people fight, who wins?

Stats, Attributes, Skills, and Derived Values of the characters involved help resolve these dramatic questions. In many cases, dice rolls can add additional hazard and drama to the action. The dice rolls represent elements beyond the direct control of the character involved or the uncertainty that results when opposing characters interact. In some situations, the GM may elect to determine the results by simple fiat, without rolling dice. The GM may do so if he or she thinks a particular outcome is certain or is dramatically necessary to the game.

One situation the rules cover in greater detail is combat. The rules for combat are extensive, giving players a greater sense that they are in control of their characters' every step. If they lose, they will know the GM has not arbitrarily killed or injured their characters. The GM can also follow a similar procedure with any other actions that impact a character's fate: treat routine activities in passing and delve into more detail whenever an action impacts the player character physically or emotionally.

## 時間 THE PASSAGE OF TIME

"In game" passage of time in a role-playing game is fluid, just as in a movie. In some situations, like a conversation between two characters, the movement of game time normally matches real world time. More often, the amount of time that passes depends on the characters' activities as set by the players' actions and dictated by theory of "movie time" — things happen as soon as dramatically appropriate. To climb a high mountain takes about three long shots and a close-up; becoming a trained officer is as quick as one montage away. The GM can telescope time until something interesting happens: "Two weeks pass while you go about your jobs and engage in routine training. Then the Emperor summons you for a special mission..." Finally, in very dramatic situations such as combat, the GM may keep very precise track of time, using individual "combat rounds" (see Combat,



page 57). GMs may also go back in time as well to employ flashback scenes. A flashback scene is a useful tool to establish the background for a story without simply recounting the information in dry lecture fashion — allow the player to play out the event. Also, flashback scenes help reinforce the cinematic style of *HKAT!*

## 行動 TAKING ACTION

Every character is capable of performing or attempting a nearly endless list of actions. These can be mundane activities (talking, breathing, thinking), skilled activities (forging a sword, hacking into a computer, moving silently, climbing the side of a building), or combat activities (fighting, dodging, shooting). The Combat section covers Combat action in greater detail and thus is not discussed here. Additionally, players can assume that characters can carry out routine skilled activities successfully on a regular basis unless specified otherwise by the GM. For example, the GM can assume that characters with the Gun Combat Skill routinely keep their weapons clean, safely stored, and properly maintained.

Every GM has a preferred method for having players describe their characters' actions. Usually this involves the GM moving from player to player asking, "What is your character doing?" Experienced GMs try to give each person equal role-playing time so that everyone is an important facet of the story (switching between characters as necessary). Conversely, players are responsible for relating their character's intended actions to the GM. In return, the GM will describe the results of those action or will request a Stat or Skill check dice roll to determine the outcome.

### DICE AND DICE ROLLS

*HKAT!* uses two six-sided dice to handle all game mechanic-related dice rolls. Adding the two numbers shown on each die generates values between 2 and 12. The distribution of values almost follows a standard or bell curve, with the middle value of 7 generated most frequently (six times out of 36 possibilities or 1/6th of the time).

On singular occasions, one six-sided die is rolled to generate numbers from one to six. Single die rolls are only used for Initiative checks.

There are three major types of dice rolls a GM or player may use during game play, all using two six-sided dice: a Stat check dice roll, a Skill check dice roll, and an Attack/Defense combat dice roll. When a player announces his or her character's intended actions, the GM must decide if a dice roll is necessary. Should a roll be required, the GM will choose which of the above types of dice roll is most appropriate.

In most cases, a player rolls dice to determine the success of an action his or her character performs, while the GM rolls the dice to determine the results of NPC actions when they impact the characters. In situations where NPCs are only involved with other NPCs, the GM should simply decide what happens rather than rolling dice.

In some circumstances, the GM may roll the dice to determine the results of a character's action instead of having a player roll, keeping the actual dice roll — and the reason for rolling — secret. This is normally done when the player rolling would give away an event that should remain unknown to the character. If, for example, there is something hidden that the character may or may not notice, the GM can secretly roll dice to see if the character spots it. If the GM allowed the player to roll the dice, he or she would know that a clue existed even if the character did not succeed in noticing it.

### STAT CHECKS

The GM uses a Stat check when the innate ability is more important than any learned expertise or combat capability. During a Stat check, the GM decides which Stat (Body, Mind, or Soul) is most relevant to the action in question. If two or three Stats are closely related to the action, the GM should calculate an average Stat Value instead, rounding up to the closest whole number. For actions that fall under an Attribute, the relevant Stat is usually given in the Attribute description (see page 14).

A successful Stat check involves the player rolling less than or equal to the character's Stat Value or Stat Value average on two dice. The Stat check is



unsuccessful if the dice roll generates a value greater than the target number. The greater the difference between the target number and the dice roll, the greater the degree of success or failure (see **Table 3-1: Degrees of Success**, page 55).

The GM may modify the dice roll should the character's action be particularly easy or difficult (see **Table 3-2: Dice Roll Modifications**, page 55) or if the character has Attributes or Defects that might modify the chance of success. More difficult actions gain a positive modifier to the dice roll since the goal is to roll under the Stat Value or Stat Value average, while an easier action receives a negative modifier. A positive modifier that makes a check harder is called a penalty; a negative modifier that makes a check easier is a bonus. Thus, a "+1 penalty" means the die roll is increased by one, making it harder to roll equal to or less than a Stat Value; a "-1 bonus" has the opposite effect.

Regardless the actual target number, an unmodified or "natural" roll of 2 always succeeds (considered at least a "marginal success") while an unmodified roll of 12 always fails (considered a "marginal failure" at the very least). After all, sometimes even the most talented characters fail in their tasks, and sometimes even the most inept characters succeed. Additionally, when a player rolls a natural 2, his or her character gains 5 additional Energy Points (up to his or her maximum), indicating the character is fired up by his or her great success.

If two or more characters work directly or indirectly against each other (such as two people pulling on a contested object), each character must make a Stat check dice roll. The character with the greatest degree of success (or least degree of failure) has the advantage over the other.

**DESIGNER'S NOTE:** Some people believe that a minus (-) modifier bonus and a plus (+) modifier penalty is counter-intuitive for a game system. While we understand this may pose a problem for some players, there is a rationale for this design approach. In Tri-Stat, we wanted to create a system where high Stats are good (an innately intuitive approach) and success is measured by rolling under one's Stat. Some suggest it would be easier for the modifier to apply towards the Stat (increasing the Stat for bonuses and decreasing the Stat for penalties), thus making the system more intuitive. This, however, creates the illusion that a character has suddenly become stronger or faster or smarter than he or she really is for a given task. For this reason, we feel that the modifier must apply to the dice roll and not the Stat. To circumvent this illusion of a character's Stats increasing or decreasing for different tasks, we adopted the minus (-) dice roll bonus and plus (+) dice roll penalty.

For example, a gymnast's Body Stat, a reflection of her overall health, strength, endurance, quickness, rate of healing, manual dexterity, and ability to withstand trauma might be higher than average since she is athletic and active. Thus, she might have a Body Stat of 5. When she attempts a gymnastic manoeuvre, something in which she has extensive training and skill (Acrobatics Skill at Level 2, for example), her ability to accomplish this task is easier than it would be for someone with a Body Stat of 5. She gains a -2 dice roll bonus on her Body-based Acrobatics roll (due to her Skill Level), making the attempt easier. Her Body does not increase by 2 (which would likewise make the attempt easier) because her overall health, strength, endurance, quickness, rate of healing, manual dexterity, and ability to withstand trauma have not increased. She is as healthy, strong, fast, dextrous, and tough as she normally is, but her training has made the attempted action simpler.

Obviously, the result of the two ways to modify Stat checks produce the same value: -2 to the roll or +2 to the Stat generates the same probability of success. If you have difficulty grasping negative bonuses to dice rolls, you can certainly treat them as positive bonuses to Stats. The choice is yours.



**TABLE 3-1: DEGREES OF SUCCESS**

Margin of Failure of 8+	Overwhelming Failure
Margin of Failure of 6 to 7	Extreme Failure
Margin of Failure of 4 to 5	Major Failure
Margin of Failure of 2 to 3	Minor Failure
Margin of Failure of 1	Marginal Failure
Margin of Success of 0 to 1	Marginal Success
Margin of Success of 2 to 3	Minor Success
Margin of Success of 4 to 5	Major Success
Margin of Success of 6 to 7	Extreme Success
Margin of Success of 8+	Overwhelming Success

**TABLE 3-2: DICE ROLL MODIFICATIONS**

Dice Roll Modifier	Action Difficulty
-4	Trivial. Why roll dice?
-3	Nearly Trivial
-2	Extremely Easy
-1	Easy
0	Average Difficulty
+1	Slightly Difficult
+2	Difficult
+3	Quite Difficult
+4	Extremely Difficult
+5	Outrageously Difficult
+6	Practically Impossible

## SKILL CHECKS

A Skill check is similar to a Stat check, except it is used when the GM decides the task is better governed by the combination of a particular Stat and a given Skill. Refer to the list of Skills in Character Creation (page 32) to see which Skills govern which tasks. If an action required general intellectual ability (for example, remembering the name of a person the character had met), the player would make a Mind Stat check. Knowing where to locate the Triad hitman would also require a Mind Stat check, but the GM may decide that the Urban Tracking Skill (and more specifically, the Underworld specialization) governs this. In Tri-Stat™

**TABLE 3-3: SKILL LEVEL EFFECTS**

- Skill Level 1** A character receives a -1 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -2 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.
- Skill Level 2** A character receives a -2 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -3 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.
- Skill Level 3** A character receives a -3 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -4 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.
- Skill Level 4** A character receives a -4 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -5 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.
- Skill Level 5** A character receives a -5 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -6 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.
- Skill Level 6** A character receives a -6 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -7 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.

terminology, the rules would call this a "Mind-Based Urban Tracking (Underworld) Skill check." If a description of a task involves averaging two or three Stats, they are all listed, such as a "Body/Mind-Based Medical (Surgery) Skill check."

The GM is responsible for deciding which Stat, Skill, and specialization is relevant to a given task, using the Stat and Skill descriptions given in Character

Creation. Since this can vary depending on the situation, the GM should listen to players' reasoning why a particular Skill or specialization might apply. The final decision always belongs to the GM, however, and players should respect this.

As with a Stat check, the GM will assign difficulty modifiers for the task as described on **Table 3-2: Dice Roll Modifications** (page 55). Landing a crippled airliner, for example, on an icy runway at midnight during a blizzard might be a +5 penalty. Landing the same crippled jet during daylight in fair weather might not incur a dice roll penalty. A Skill check is performed exactly like a Stat check with the difference that the character's Skill also acts as a modifier. The character's Skill modifiers are cumulative with all other modifiers for difficulty.

If the character undertaking the Skill check does not possess the relevant or necessary Skill, the GM should not apply additional penalties to the die roll if the task is within the means of an average person. If it is something that requires increased knowledge of some sort, however, the GM may further increase the difficulty modifier. The GM may decide that certain tasks (such as brain surgery, or the translation of ancient hieroglyphics) automatically fail when performed by characters lacking the required Skill.

If the character possesses the appropriate Skill to perform a task, he or she receives a bonus to the Skill check dice roll. This bonus is equivalent to the character's Skill Level if the task does not fall under his or her specialization or one more than the character's Skill Level if his or her specialization does apply. The modifiers provided by each particular Skill Level are summarized in **Table 3-3: Skill Level Effects** (page 55).

## 龍爭虎鬥 COMBAT DICE ROLLS

The combat dice roll resolves any type of physical combat including armed, unarmed, martial arts, and ranged weapons attacks. The combat dice roll is very similar to a Skill check except the target number is now the character's Attack Combat Value (for attack combat rolls) or Defense Combat Value (for defense combat rolls) rather than a Stat. A successful combat action involves the player or GM rolling less than or equal to his or her character's Attack Combat Value or Defense Combat Value on two dice. The attack or defense is unsuccessful if the dice roll (after any modifiers) is greater the target number.

A character can attack or defend with a weapon (or unarmed) even if he or she does not possess the relevant attack combat Skill. Consequently, attacking or defending characters lacking the appropriate Skill do not suffer a dice roll penalty; a character without the appropriate combat Skill simply does not receive a dice roll bonus.

Skills adjust the dice roll, but other Attributes may also provide modifiers as well. The GM also has the option of changing the dice roll should the attack or defense be particularly easy or difficult (see **Table 3-2: Dice Roll Modification**, page 55). Remember that an easy attack or defense gains a negative modifier to the dice roll since the goal is to roll under the Attack or Defense Combat Value. Regardless of the actual target number, an unmodified roll of 2 always succeeds and a roll of 12 always fails. Additionally, a natural dice roll of 2 ("snake eyes") is a critical success and cannot be negated by an opponent's defense (the defender does not even have the opportunity to make a defense roll).

### USING ATTRIBUTES

If an Attribute does not specifically require a Stat or Skill check or a Combat Dice Roll, GMs can assume they function automatically in most situations, though the Game Masters may decide that a Stat or Skill roll is necessary in unusual circumstances. For example, a character with the Appearance Attribute always looks good, but the GM might require a Soul Stat check were he or she attempting to attract someone's attention.

Certain Attributes occasionally require Stat checks (or sometimes Skill checks) to properly use the Attribute. Other Attributes provide favourable modifiers to Stat checks or Skill checks. If an Attribute interacts with Stat or Skill checks, this is noted in the Attribute's description in Character Creation.

## 何時 **WHEN** TO ROLL DICE

It is important the GM realize that not all actions require Stat checks, Skill checks, or Combat dice rolls. Obviously, mundane activities such as running or driving down the street, reading a book, or eating noodles should never need dice rolls unless there are exceptional circumstances surrounding the character's actions. The following is a list of suggestions when players should and should not roll dice. If a dice roll is unnecessary, the character should automatically succeed in the action.

### ROLL DICE WHEN...

- The unpredictability of dice adds to the excitement of the game.
- The action is foreign to the character.
- The character has rarely been competent in that action previously.
- The character is distracted or cannot concentrate.
- Another character or NPC is working directly against the character.

- It is purely a matter of luck (requiring a Soul Stat check).
- The action is not of trivial difficulty.
- Outside forces influence the actions.
- The player or GM wants to roll the dice.

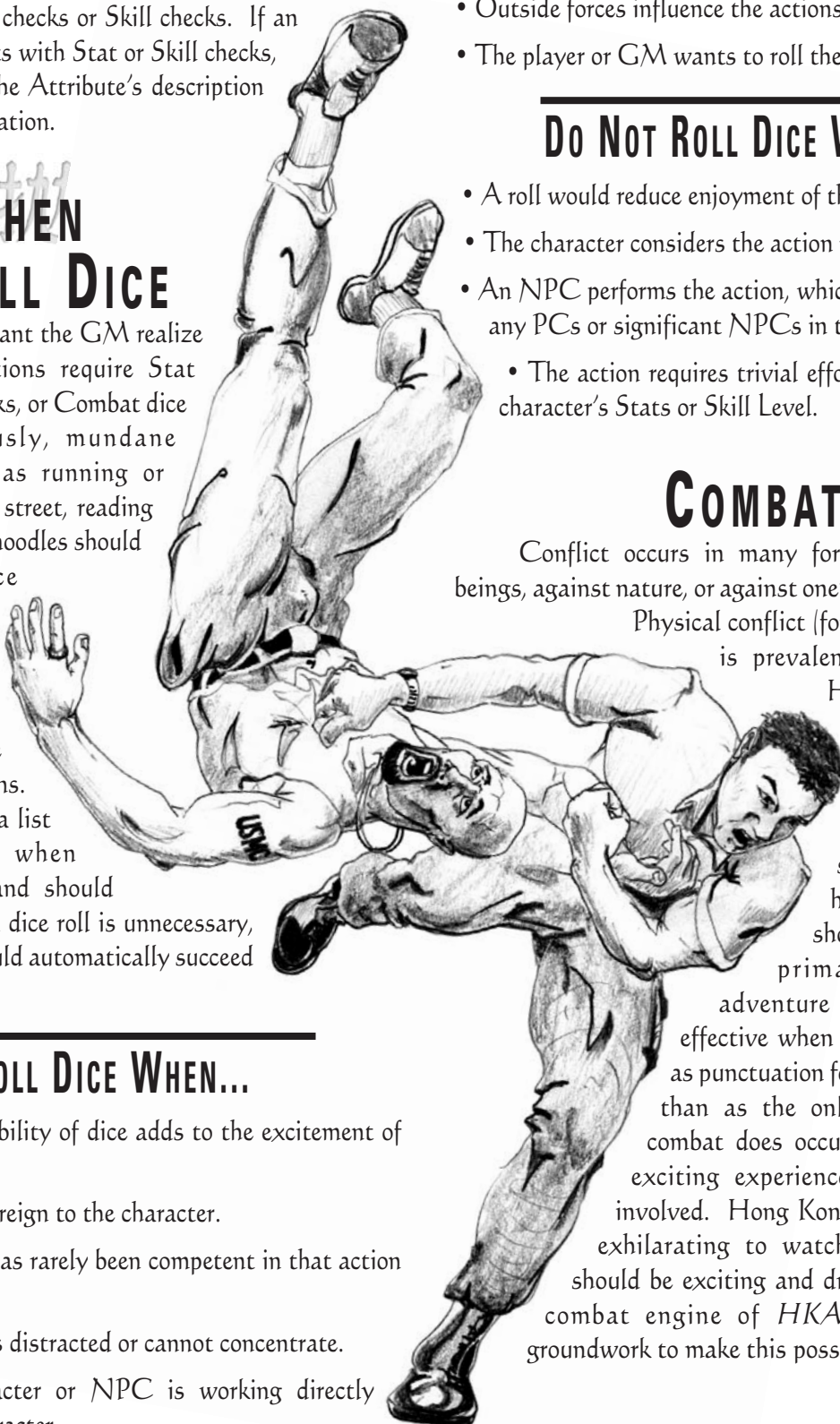
### DO NOT ROLL DICE WHEN...

- A roll would reduce enjoyment of the game.
- The character considers the action routine.
- An NPC performs the action, which has no impact on any PCs or significant NPCs in the game.
- The action requires trivial effort compared to the character's Stats or Skill Level.

## COMBAT

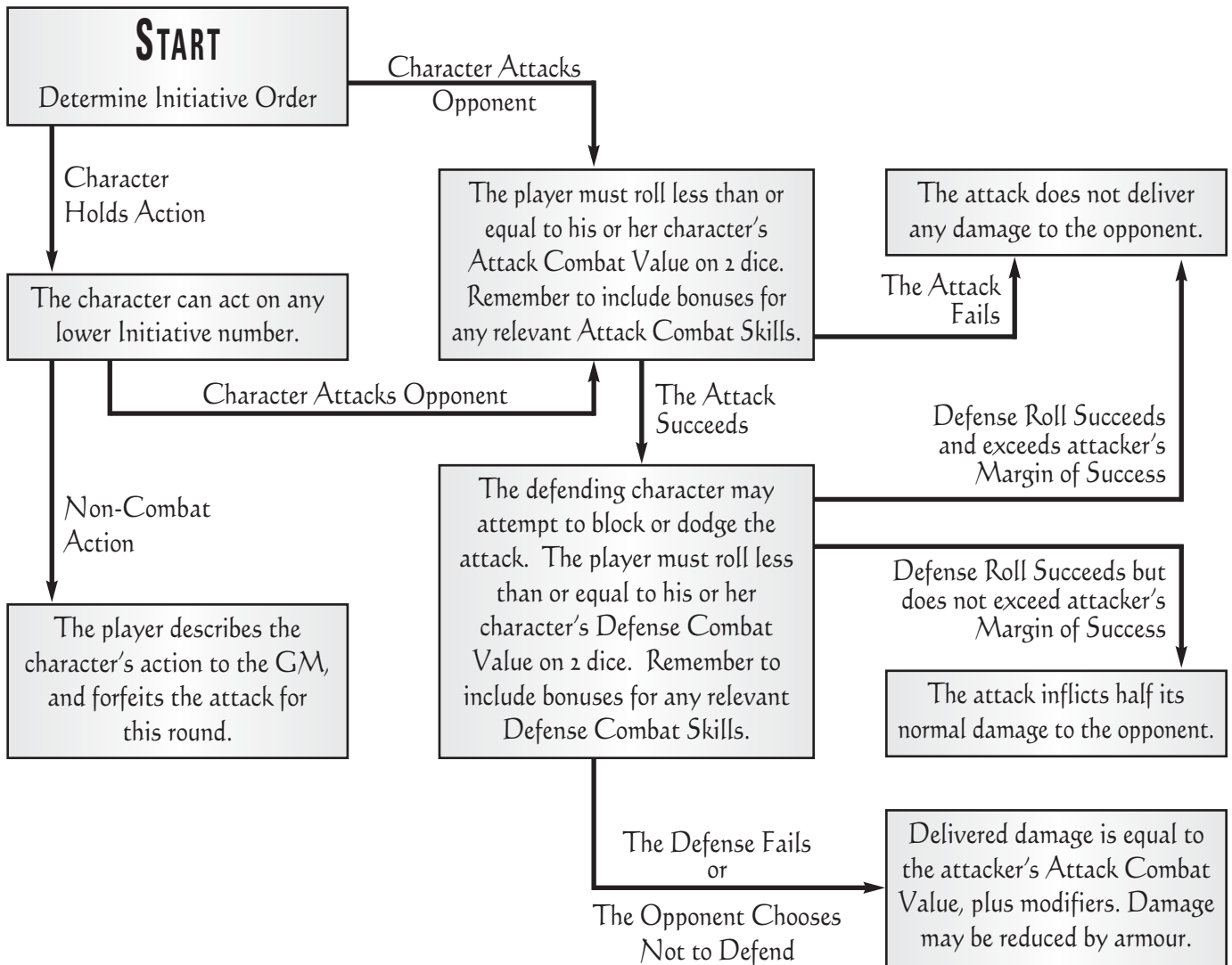
Conflict occurs in many forms: against other beings, against nature, or against one's own weaknesses.

Physical conflict (for example, combat) is prevalent in virtually all Hong Kong action movies and plays an integral part in *HKAT!* Integral is not the same as frequent, however. Combat should never be the primary focus of an adventure since it is most effective when used dramatically, as punctuation for the movie, rather than as the only device. When combat does occur, it should be an exciting experience for the players involved. Hong Kong action combat is exhilarating to watch, and playing it should be exciting and dramatic. The base combat engine of *HKAT!* provides the groundwork to make this possible.





# 香港動作戲台對打流程圖



## COMBAT ROUNDS

When characters attack (or are about to attack) an adversary, combat begins. *HKAT!* simplifies the chaotic experience of combat by breaking it down into increments of time called rounds. Each round is just long enough for the average person to make a single attack, or complete a brief action such as readying a weapon (or diving madly for cover, etc.).

Each combat round covers a short, but fluid, one to ten seconds of time from the characters' perspectives

(depending on their actions and the circumstances). The time scale is not usually relevant, though, if necessary, assume 15 rounds to a minute. Should the characters not resolve combat at the end of the first round, the GM can carry the action into the subsequent rounds.

Each round consists of two parts: Initiative and Character Action. Character Action breaks down further into other activities, with each character involved receiving a chance to act or react. The Combat Flowchart on page 58 summarizes the round's events.

## INITIATIVE

Initiative determines who acts first in a fight and is checked at the beginning of each round. Each player involved in the fracas rolls one die and adds the result to his or her character's Attack Combat Value. The GM does the same for any NPCs engaged in the conflict. The GM may also grant bonuses or penalties if he or she believes the situations calls for it.

The character with the highest total has "gained initiative" and acts first, followed by others in descending order. Should two or more characters or NPCs have the same Initiative, their actions are simultaneous. This means both characters attack and deliver damage at the same time; if one character drops below zero Health Points or Energy Points as a result, he or she still attacks before dying or falling unconscious.

A character may delay his or her action until any time later in the round to see what the other characters intend to do. If all his or her opponents also delay their actions waiting for something to happen, the round ends in a cinematic stand-off and a new one begins.

## CHARACTER ACTION

Characters act in the sequence determined by the Initiative roll. When it is time for a character to act, he or she may take a maximum of one offensive or one non-combat action unless the character has the Extra Attacks Attribute, page 16. In addition, a character can perform one or more defensive actions at other times during the round in a reflexive response to another character's attack.

Some activities do not count as attack or non-combat actions. A character can perform all of the following activities in addition to an attack or non-combat action:

- Move a short distance or manoeuvre a vehicle he or she is already operating.
- Speak, shout, or scream anything that fits within the span of 1-10 seconds.
- Perform Defensive Actions in response to any attacks against him or her. Note that if the character performs more than one Defensive Action in a round, subsequent

Defensive Actions after the first in the same round suffer penalties (or later, if he or she has the Extra Defenses Attribute, page 17).

## MOVEMENT IN COMBAT

The GM decides whether or not he or she wishes to keep detailed track of movement, ranges, and distances. In most close-in combat situations, GMs should not worry about exact speeds and distances — a general idea of the overall situation is sufficient. Alternatively, GMs can measure ranges in a more abstract fashion: "you're behind him and in melee range" or "you can reach her in three rounds, if you hurry." The GM should judge how quickly range shifts from relative speeds to dramatic necessity. For example, in a race between two opponents with equal speeds, the GM can allow the character who keeps winning initiative to increase the gap gradually between him or her and the other runner. A good way to resolve long distance chases is for the GM to establish a certain number of combat rounds between the starting point and the goal. It then becomes a simple matter of staying alive for that long.

If the GM wishes to keep precise track of movement and distances, assume an average human adult can run approximately five metres per round times his or her Body Stat (one metre times Body Stat if swimming or crawling). This guideline assumes about three to five seconds per round, but the GM can modify exact speeds when dramatically appropriate.

## JUMPING

GMs can allow characters to jump as far as seems dramatically appropriate for the movie. If distance is important, a person can generally jump two metres forward, or one up or back, with range doubled on a short running start. A successful Body Stat check allows a fast moving character (or vehicle) with a running start to jump, in metres, one-quarter of his or her current speed in kilometres per hour — an average character can reach 5 kph times his or her Body. A failed Stat check means the character falls short. A wheeled or tracked vehicle or a boat can only jump if it has a ramp. Thus, a vehicle driving at 100 kph can jump 25 metres.



## FALLING

A character who falls a great distance will suffer damage depending on the height he or she plummeted. He or she may also make an Acrobatics Skill check with success halving the damage they sustain to indicate a proper break fall.

**TABLE 3-4: FALLING**

Falling Distance	Damage Delivered
3 to 5 meters	20
5 metres to 10 metres	30
10 metres to 30 metres	40
30 metres to 60 metres	50
60 metres to 150 metres	60
150 metres to 500 metres	70
500 metres (or greater)	80

## OFFENSIVE ACTIONS

When a character acts during combat, as determined by Initiative, he or she may perform an Offensive Action like attacking. Attacks are normally against a single target, though some weapons or attack Abilities may allow the character to engage multiple targets simultaneously.

Before rolling the dice, the player should clearly describe the method of attack, the weapon his or her character uses (if any), and the target. If the character is trying something unusual (such as a called shot or attacking with two weapons), he or she should specify this beforehand.

To successfully attack an opponent, the player (or GM for an NPC) must roll less than or equal to his or her character's Attack Combat Value on two dice as





described under Combat Dice Rolls on page 56. Remember to include all relevant Attribute, Skill, Defect, Weapon Ability/Disability, and difficulty modifiers (refer to **Table 3-5: Attack Roll Modifiers**, page 65).

If the attack roll succeeds, the character is on target and will hit unless the opponent can defend against the attack. Refer to Defense Rolls, page 66, for more information. If the target fails the Defense Roll or does not defend at all, he or she suffers the effects of the blow. This is normally damage and/or any other special effects associated with the attack. To reflect some of the brutally successful attacks demonstrated in Hong Kong action movies, a natural dice roll of 2 ("snake eyes") is a critical success and cannot be negated by an opponent's defense (except when rolled by a Walk-on character; see page 67).

If an attack roll fails, the character has missed. The attacker's action is over, and the attack has no effect, though a miss with a ranged weapon may cause collateral damage if the shot strikes somewhere else instead (this is up to the GM). A natural roll of 12 ("box cars") will always miss and may result in an exceptional failure, such as hitting an innocent bystander or a weapon malfunctioning. Furthermore, a roll of 11 or 12 indicates that a gun has run out of ammunition (see 70).

## MELEE VS. RANGED ATTACKS

Some attacks are useful at a distance, while others are limited to close, hand-to-hand fighting. For simplicity, ranges are grouped into the four categories listed below. It is up to the GM to decide whether he or she wishes to keep a detailed track of ranges and distances, or abstract them.

### MELEE

The attack is only usable against adjacent opponents within touching distance (usually one to five metres). This is the range for swords, unarmed combat, etc.

### SHORT

The attack has an effective range out to about 50 metres. Most pistols, shotguns, grenades, submachine guns, and hurled weapons, such as a thrown rock or throwing knife, are short-ranged.

### MEDIUM

The attack has an effective range out to about 500 metres. Most bows, crossbows, rifles, and machine guns are medium-ranged. This is the default range for weapons if none other is listed.

### LONG

The attack is effective out to considerable ranges: about 5 km (or more if specifically noted). A surface-to-air missile, an anti-tank rocket, or a tank's main gun are examples of this.

## SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Game Masters can use the following special attack situations as optional rules for combat.

### EXTRA AIM

A character making a ranged attack may deliberately take extra time to aim. If a character aims a ranged weapon for an entire round and does not move or Defend during that period, he or she receives a -1 Attack roll bonus, or -2 if he or she is using a scope. If an aiming character chooses to make a Defense roll before he or she can fire, the character loses the benefit of Extra Aim.

### ATTACKS WITH TWO WEAPONS

A character with a one-handed weapon in each hand may use both at once against the same target or attack two different targets (even if he or she does not have Extra Attacks) but at a severe penalty to both rolls. A two-weapon attack incurs a +4 dice roll penalty if all attacks are aimed at the same target or a +6 penalty if aimed at different targets. If a character has Extra Attacks, he or she can only use this option with one attack and not every attack.

### CALLED SHOTS

An attacking character may opt to suffer an unfavourable difficulty modifier to hit in exchange for a Called Shot that provides some special advantage. For example, a called shot may ignore armour (by attacking a small, unarmoured spot) or strike a vital point, inflicting greater-than-normal damage results. Players must specify a Called Shot before rolling the dice.

### CALLED SHOT — DISARMING

A character may attempt to shoot or knock a weapon out of another person's hand. If using a firearm, this requires an attack at a +4 penalty. If the attack hits and the opponent fails his or her Defense roll, the character knocks away the weapon (probably damaging it). If using a melee weapon or unarmed attack to disarm, the character only suffers a +2, but the target may make a Body Stat check to retain control of the weapon. If the Body Stat check succeeds, the weapon's user suffers a +2 dice roll penalty on his or her next action with that weapon (since it is off balance), but he or she retains control of it.

### CALLED SHOT TO VITAL SPOT

A character attacking a living being can specify he or she is aiming for a vital spot (heart, brain, spine, etc.) rather than simply shooting at the centre of mass as is usual. He or she suffers a +4 Attack roll penalty, but, if successful, the attack inflicts double damage.

### CALLED SHOT TO PARTIAL ARMOUR

Some armour may provide partial protection like a flak vest only protecting a person's torso. An attack aimed at a thin or unarmoured area suffers a +2 Attack roll penalty.

### STRIKING TO WOUND

A character using a hand-held weapon or attacking in unarmed combat can elect to reduce his or her delivered damage below the normal damage value to a minimum of 1 point (known as striking to wound). He or she may not attempt this with weapons possessing the Area Effect, Autofire, or Spreading Ability.

### STRIKING TO INCAPACITATE

A character attacking in hand-to-hand combat or with a blunt melee weapon may attempt to knock an opponent unconscious. The target of a successful attack must make a Body Stat Check with a penalty of +1 per 5 points of damage that attack would normally deliver (round down). If the target succeeds on this Body Check, he or she maintains consciousness and takes an amount of damage equal to the penalty on the Body Stat Check. If the target fails this roll, however, he or she falls unconscious and similarly takes an amount of damage equal to the penalty on the Body Stat Check.

### FIRING WEAPONS WHILE MOVING

Characters who are inside a vehicle or otherwise moving faster than a brisk walk fire their weapons at penalty. Firing weapons when moving quickly (running speed) incurs a +1 penalty while moving faster than that (usually in a vehicle) earns a +2 Attack roll penalty. Game Masters should impose a +4 penalty for characters also piloting the vehicle while firing.

### IMPORTANCE MODIFIERS

Unimportant film characters are often very easy to hit since they serve little to no purpose for the plot and are often there just to make the Lead Actor look good. Thus, when a character is attacking a Walk-on character, he or she gains a -2 bonus to his or her attack roll. When attacking a Speaking Part character, the attacker gains a -1 bonus to the attack roll.

### RANGE MODIFIERS

The distances given for weapon ranges (see *Melee vs. Ranged Attacks*, page 61) is the effective reach of a weapon. Many may be fired out to twice that range at +2 penalty or five times the distance at +4, though the GM may decide that some weapons cannot exceed their listed ranges.

### TOTAL ATTACK

A character can take this option in conjunction with an attack. It means he or she focuses completely on an offensive action with no thought given to defense. The character may opt to forfeit one defense action to perform a Total Attack, gaining a -2 bonus to his or her attack roll. Only one defense may be forfeited per attack.

### WRESTLING AND GRAB ATTACKS

Instead of striking to inflict damage in unarmed combat, a character can attempt to grab someone and pin him or her. This is a wrestling attack, and a character must have at least one empty hand free.

Game Masters resolve a wrestling attempt like a normal Attack with the applicable Kung Fu: Attack (Wrestling) Skill. If the attack hits and the target's



Defense (if any) fails, then the attacker successfully grabbed his or her opponent. The target of a wrestling attack defends by making a Defense Combat Value dice roll. The Kung Fu: Defense (Wrestling) Skill is applicable. If the attacker uses both hands to grapple, the defender suffers a +1 penalty if he or she only has one hand free and a +2 penalty if neither hand is free. "Free" means not holding weapons or other objects, or not incapacitated somehow. Reduce the penalty by 1 if the attacker is only grappling with one hand.

The attacker can hold a grabbed character relatively stationary. The target suffers a +2 penalty on all Attack and Defense rolls when performing other unarmed attacks or defenses (including grabbing, biting,

kneeing, etc.) or +4 when attempting to perform other tasks requiring freedom of movement like using hand-held weapons to attack. Exception: if the grabbed character is much stronger or more agile than the opponent is, his or her penalty is halved, and the character can still move freely. The GM may consider a character much stronger if his or her Body Stat is at least four levels higher. For this purpose, each Level of Not So Strong counts as a -2 to Body. Thus, a small child (Body 2) could not stop a strong man (Body 6) from grabbing him or her. It is, of course, possible for

one character to grab an opponent who then grabs the character in return (this is what often happens when wrestling).





If the defender makes a successful Defense roll but does not exceed the attacker's Margin of Success (see page 55), then he or she is partially grappled. A partially grappled foe may attack normally, without penalty, but must break free to move away from the attacker. Additionally, unless he or she breaks the partial hold, the attacker gains a -2 bonus on subsequent attempts to grapple the character. To break free of a partial grapple requires one action. The defender makes a Body Stat Check to break free of a partial hold only if the attacker is much stronger (see above). If an attacker has a partial hold on an opponent, he or she must establish a full hold by making another grappling attempt (with the -2 bonus) to strangle, throw, or pin (see below) the target.

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#### DISARMING VIA WRESTLING

A character can try grabbing an opponent's weapon instead of the opponent's body. He or she makes the attack at a +2 Attack roll penalty, and the opponent earns a -1 bonus to the Defense roll if holding onto the weapon with both hands. A successful attack might dislodge the weapon, but the defender may make a Body Stat check to maintain his or her grip. If the defender fails, he or she drops the item; if successful, the defender is at a +2 penalty to use the weapon until the end of his or her next action.

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### WRESTLING MANOEUVRES

Once a character grabs an opponent, he or she can attempt a Strangle or Throw special manoeuvre as his or her next attack (see below).

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#### STRANGLING

Instead of attacking normally, a character who (on a previous attack) successfully grabbed his or her opponent can choke, crush, or strangle that foe. This attack automatically hits and inflicts damage equal to the character's Combat Value.

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#### THROWS

Instead of attacking normally, a character who has already grabbed an opponent and is standing can hurl the foe to the ground. This move normally breaks the grip on the target unless the attacker succeeds in a Body Stat

Check roll with a +2 penalty (which must be made whether the throw is successful or not). A character must make an Attack roll at a -2 bonus, modified by the Kung Fu: Attack (Throws) Skill. If successful, the opponent receives a Defense roll using the Kung Fu: Defense (Throws) Skill. A throw delivers damage equal to the Attack Combat Value plus 5 additional points of damage. If the defender fails his or her Defense roll, the attacker may throw the character out a window or off a ledge, and the GM can assign extra damage based on the situation. If the attacker throws the opponent at another enemy, the target must make a Defense roll or suffer equal damage as well.

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#### FIGHTING FROM THE GROUND

Fighters thrown to the ground or who are otherwise forced to fight from a prone position must spend one action regaining their footing. GMs may permit a character to regain their footing without expending an action as part of a Stunt (see page 67). Additionally, so long as the character is on the ground, he or she defends and makes all attacks at a +2 penalty. If the prone target is also held, see Wrestling and Grabbing (page 62).

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#### PINNING

A character who has grabbed someone may attempt to improve his or her hold during the next attack by completely immobilizing the opponent in a pin. Game Masters may treat this manoeuvre the same as the first grab attack. If the attack succeeds and the opponent fails to defend, then the foe is pinned, usually under the weight of the attacker's body. Attackers may not attempt a pin if the opponent is much stronger (see Grab Attack for definition of much stronger). Once a character pins an opponent, the target suffers a +3 penalty on rolls when attempting to escape. A pinned character cannot attack or defend.

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#### ESCAPING

A grabbed character who is not pinned (see above) may attempt to struggle free. On the character's turn to act, he or she can attempt to escape instead of attacking. Both characters roll a Body Stat check with modifiers for the Kung Fu: Attack (Wrestling) Skill. The character

with the highest degree of success (or least degree of failure) wins. If the grabbed character wins, he or she escapes, and may also attack or take another action. If the grabbed character ties the roll, he or she escapes, but forfeits his or her attack in the current round. If the grabbed character loses, he or she is immobilized and unable to attack or take any other form of physical action during that round (including a Defense). Additionally, if a grabbed character chooses to attack the person who grabbed him or her and does damage (after accounting for armour) equal to or greater than his or her foe's Body Stat, he or she escapes the grab.

**BITING**

Since biting does not require the use of hands, it is a useful tactic when a character has either grabbed or been grabbed by an opponent. Game Masters should treat this as a normal attack that inflicts only one half of the Attack Combat Value in damage (round down).

**ATTACK ROLL MODIFIERS**

The GM may impose any appropriate modifiers when the players make an attack roll. An attack action normally assumes characters are engaged in active combat — dodging enemy attacks, making quick strikes when the opportunity arises, moving about, etc. The GM should not apply any penalties for this sort of normal combat-related activity. If circumstances are such that a character's aim or concentration seems likely impeded (such as shooting someone whom the character cannot clearly see or attacking a foe while hanging upside down), the GM may assign various penalties to the attack roll. Likewise, in stress-free situations (such as whacking a dummy or immobile victim, or target range shooting with nothing riding on the outcome), the GM can apply favourable bonuses or assume automatic success. Additionally, characters of low importance to the movie (Speaking Part or lesser) are often easier to hit, providing characters with a bonus to hit.

A number of possible penalties or bonuses are described on **Table 3-5, Attack Roll Modifiers**. The GM may adjust or ignore these modifiers if he or she prefers.

**TABLE 3-5: ATTACK ROLL MODIFIERS**

Attack Situation	Modifier
<b>Target beyond Melee range, and:</b>	
Concealed by trees or brush	+1
Concealed by darkness, fog, or smoke	+2
Taking cover	+1 to +3
<b>Attacker is:</b>	
Making a Total Attack	-1
Taking an action to aim	-1, or -2 with scope
Running	+1
Firing personal weapons from a moving vehicle	+2 to +4
Firing personal weapons while swimming or performing acrobatics	+2
In an awkward position (on the ground, etc.)	+2
<b>Called Shots:</b>	
Targeting a partially armoured point:	+2
Targeting a vital spot	+4
<b>Range Modifiers:</b>	
Attacking at up to twice range:	+2
Attacking at up to five times range:	+4
<b>Target is a:</b>	
Walk-on character	-2
Speaking Part	-1

**NON-COMBAT ACTIONS**

Rather than taking an offensive action during any combat round, a character may use a non-combat action on his or her Initiative. Such actions include untying a rescued captive, running, changing weapons, climbing into or out of a vehicle, writing a note, changing clothes, etc. Players may also use non-combat actions to safely withdraw from armed or unarmed combat, provided the opposition does not attack at a later Initiative number in the same round. Note that speaking a few words during combat, running about while attacking, or making a dramatic speech does not constitute an action.

A non-combat action may succeed automatically, or the GM require a Stat Check, Attribute Check, or Skill Check to determine whether it succeeds. Some non-combat actions may require several rounds to perform at the GM's option.

## DEFENSIVE ACTIONS

If a character is the target of a successful attack, he or she may attempt to defend against it by blocking, dodging, or running away. Defensive actions are not dependent on Initiative order but resolved immediately after the attack.

Each character can attempt a defense only once against a particular attack (including grapples). A character may defend against more than one attack in a round, but with an appropriate penalty to each Defense after the first (unless the character has the Extra Defenses Attribute; the penalty then applies to each defense after the final bonus defense, see page 17). Should the opponent not defend (perhaps in anticipation of a more powerful attack still to come), he or she cannot change that decision later in the round. When defending against multiple attacks in a single round, each defense after the first incurs a cumulative penalty of +2 to each dice roll: +2 for the second defense, +4 for the third, +6 for the fourth, etc. This means that even the greatest martial artist may be overwhelmed if badly outnumbered.

The degree by which someone avoids an attack depends on the character's Margin of Success on his or her Defense Combat roll compared with the attacker's margin of success on his or her Attack Combat roll. To completely defend against an attack, the player must score a Margin of Success equal to or greater than the attacker's Margin of Success on his or her attack roll. Remember to include all relevant Attribute, Skill, Defect, and difficulty modifiers. If successful, the defender blocks, dodges, or otherwise negates the attack, and suffers no damage.

If the defender makes a successful Defense Combat roll but scores a Margin of Success less than the attacker's Margin of Success, then the defender partially avoids the attack and only suffers half damage (rounding down). This reflects the character successfully blocking a punch, but still taking some damage after the attacker's fist hits his or her arm, or someone who dives through a window to avoid being shot, etc. If the defender fails his or her Defense Combat roll completely, then he or she does not avoid the attack and suffers full damage.

When a character opts to defend against a ranged attack, the relevant Skill is Ranged Defense. For a hand-to-hand or other melee-ranged attack, the relevant Skill is either Kung Fu: Defense (if the character is dodging or blocking the attack with his or her body), or Melee Defense (if the character is using a weapon to parry).

If a vehicle is the target of an attack, its driver or pilot makes the Defense rolls. If a vehicle is unable to manoeuvre (trapped in a confined space, for example) the GM may rule that it cannot defend at all. Likewise, a vehicle cannot normally defend against attacks made by a character who is riding in or on it.

A Defense Combat roll of a natural 12 (double sixes) is an automatic failure, regardless of the modifiers. In this case, the character automatically suffers full damage from the attack. GMs may also decide that a natural roll of 12 results in double damage.

## INDEFENSIBLE ATTACKS

A character may not attempt a Defense Roll if he or she is unaware of the attack, unable to move, or is struck with a Critical Hit (see page 67).

**TABLE 3-6: DEFENSE ROLL MARGIN OF FAILURE**

Defense Roll Margin of Success	Result
Defense Roll is a Failure	Full damage from attack
Defense Roll is Successful but less than attacker's Margin of Success	Half damage from attack
Defense Roll is Successful and equal to or greater than attacker's Margin of Success	No damage from the attack



**TABLE 3-7: DEFENSE ROLL MODIFIERS**

Defense Situation	Defense Roll Modifier
Defending against multiple attacks:	+2 per attack after the first
<b>Defender's Status</b>	
Attempting a Total Defense	-2
Attacked from behind	+2
In awkward position (on the ground, etc.)	+2
<b>Defender is a:</b>	
Walk-On	No Defense Roll Allowed
Speaking Part	No Modifier
Supporting Character	-2
Lead	-4

### TOTAL DEFENSE

A character can opt not to take any offensive or non-combat actions in a round. Instead of attacking or engaging in something else, he or she concentrates completely on defending him or herself. A character performing a Total Defense may still move normally, but may not attack or take non-combat actions. Essentially the character is dodging and weaving, parrying frantically, ducking and hiding. The character receives a -2 bonus to all Defense rolls. This lasts until the character acts again next round. Total Defense is a good tactic for anyone retreating, or someone buying time until his or her allies arrive.

### ROLE IMPORTANCE AND DEFENSE

Directors often ensure that their movie stars only suffer damage when dramatically appropriate. Thus, important Roles gain a bonus to their Defense Combat dice roll. Conversely, Walk-on parts are cannon fodder for the main characters to trounce, and frankly, directors would prefer seeing them off the set as soon as possible. Thus, Walk-on Roles cannot defend against a successful attack at all — they always suffer full damage from successful attacks.

### CRITICAL HITS

In the event of a natural attack dice roll of 2 (double ones), the attacker automatically hits, preventing the target from making a defense roll at all. The target also receives full damage from the attack. Walk-on parts cannot deliver critical hits — a roll of double ones is merely a normal hit, which the target may defend against.

### 特技 STUNTS

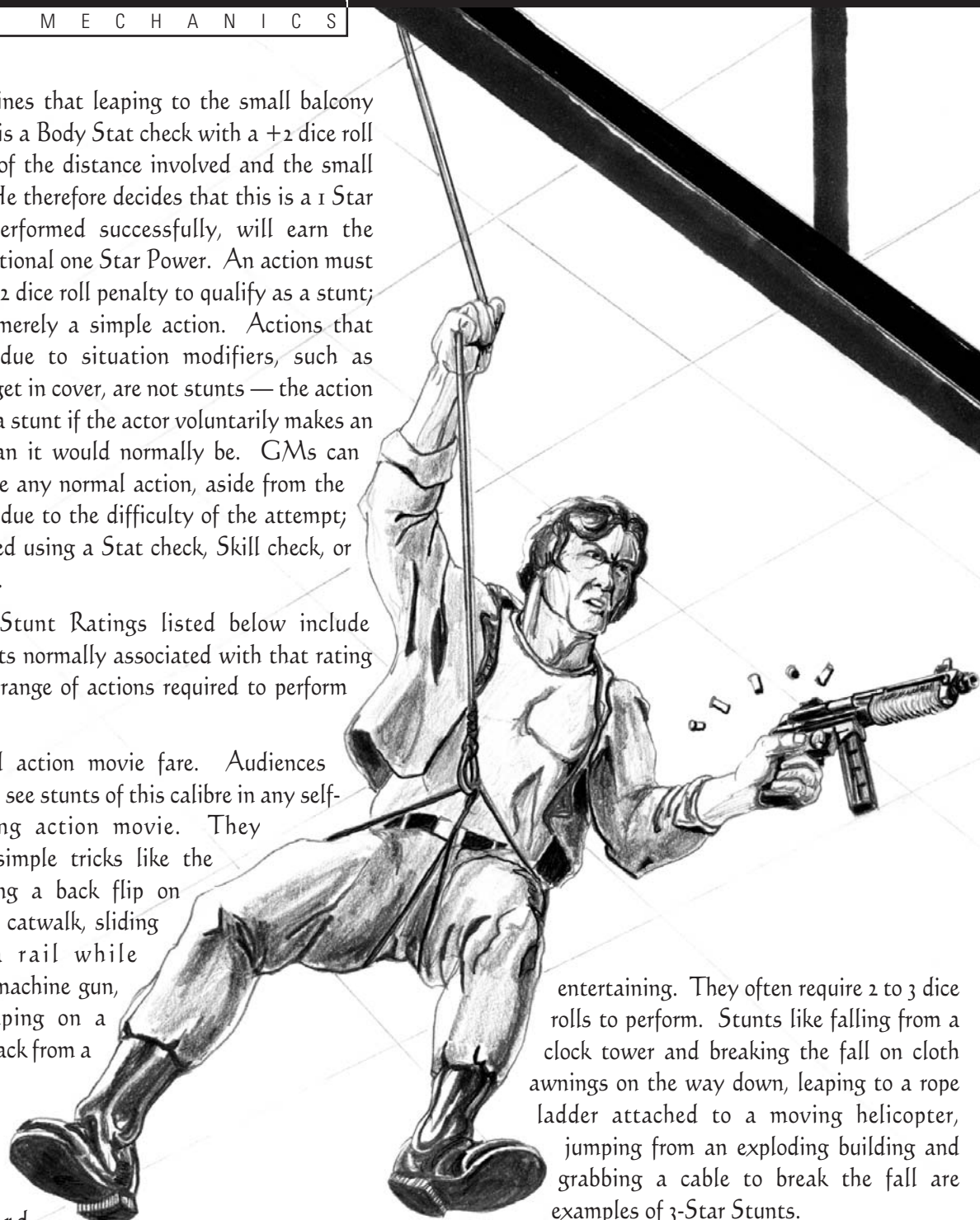
While combat is often the core of most Hong Kong action movies, stunts provide films with an additional layer of excitement and adrenaline. Stunts are role-attempted actions that are simply over-the-top, like leaping from a rooftop onto a small balcony of the building across the street. These actions bring audiences out of their seats with cheers and cries of appreciation. To encourage these dangerous and high-octane feats of daring, *HKAT!* provides a Star reward for dangerous or complex stunts.

Stunts fall into four categories, each coinciding with the 4-Star rating system used by some movie critics. A stunt ranks according to its difficulty, game effect, and its visual-appeal if it actually appeared in a film. The more impressive a stunt the more difficult to perform, but the greater the reward for its successful completion. In most cases, the stunt's rating equals half the dice roll penalty that the GM applies to the action. For example,

the GM determines that leaping to the small balcony across the street is a Body Stat check with a +2 dice roll penalty because of the distance involved and the small balcony space. He therefore decides that this is a 1 Star Stunt and, if performed successfully, will earn the character an additional one Star Power. An action must have at least a +2 dice roll penalty to qualify as a stunt; otherwise, it is merely a simple action. Actions that incur penalties due to situation modifiers, such as shooting at a target in cover, are not stunts — the action only qualifies as a stunt if the actor voluntarily makes an action harder than it would normally be. GMs can handle stunts like any normal action, aside from the imposed penalty due to the difficulty of the attempt; they are performed using a Stat check, Skill check, or Combat dice roll.

The four Stunt Ratings listed below include examples of stunts normally associated with that rating and a suggested range of actions required to perform them.

- 1 Star** Standard action movie fare. Audiences expect to see stunts of this calibre in any self-respecting action movie. They include simple tricks like the performing a back flip on a narrow catwalk, sliding down a rail while firing a machine gun, and jumping on a horse's back from a balcony.
- 2 Stars** These stunts are also standard action film shticks, but they are slightly more complicated and more enjoyable to watch. Examples include scenes like tumbling from a tree but using branches to slow descent, leaping from one moving vehicle to another, and turning a motorcycle on its side to slide under a truck.
- 3 Stars** A 3-Star Stunt takes the audience's breath away. They are difficult to perform and are visually



entertaining. They often require 2 to 3 dice rolls to perform. Stunts like falling from a clock tower and breaking the fall on cloth awnings on the way down, leaping to a rope ladder attached to a moving helicopter, jumping from an exploding building and grabbing a cable to break the fall are examples of 3-Star Stunts.

- 4 Stars** These stunts are the rarest of all, leaving the audience to wonder how the actor accomplished them. They are beyond dangerous, and only the most insane actors attempt them. Examples include piloting a helicopter down a train tunnel, jumping a motorcycle onto a moving train, or running down the full length of a skyscraper, without a safety line.

The chart below lists the modifier to the stunt's dice roll and the Star Power award for successfully pulling them off.

**TABLE 3-8: STUNT LEVELS AND MODIFIERS**

Stunt Rating	Modifier	Star Power Reward
1 Star	+2	1
2 Stars	+4	2
3 Stars	+6	3
4 Stars	+8	4

## 傷害 DAMAGE

Characters suffer damage through combat, accidents, or other hazards. Damage ratings are in points, which the target character subtracts from his or her Health Point total if the attack successfully penetrates armour.

### DELIVERING DAMAGE

The damage delivered to the target reflects the character's understanding of advanced combat techniques as well as the power of his or her weapons. When inflicting injury, the damage value's reliance on the attacker's Attack Combat Value reflects the balance between Body Stat (force of the blow and manual dexterity), Mind Stat (knowledge of a body's vulnerable areas) and Soul Stat (determination and luck).

The attack form also dictates the damage delivered. For most attacks, the base damage equals the aggressor's Attack Combat Value.

#### UNARMED COMBAT

The attack delivers the character's Combat Value in damage.

#### HAND-HELD WEAPONS

Damage is equal to the character's Combat Value plus the weapon's damage value. If the weapon has Abilities or Disabilities, refer to the relevant section (pages 72-74) for their effects. See page 71 for damages delivered by various hand-held weapons.

Damage may also result from a non-combat action such as crashing a speedboat into land or falling off a tree. The GM should assign a total damage value from 1 (very slight wound) to 50 (a major and extremely painful injury) depending on the situation. Naturally, some non-combat actions may result in an NPC's death, but these events should only kill a character in exceptional circumstances.

### ARMOUR AND DAMAGE

If a character has armour (page 74), this reduces the delivered damage from each successful attack by an amount equal to its armour rating. The character suffers any damage not negated by armour, subtracted from his or her current Health Point total. See Effects of Damage (below) for the result.

### EFFECTS OF DAMAGE TO A CHARACTER

Loss of Health Points can cause a character to pass out or die. Should a character or NPC's Health Points ever drop below zero, he or she suffered a mortal wound and will die within an appropriately dramatic length of time unless immediate medical attention is available.

The GM may instead decide to render the character unconscious only if the delivered damage does not reduce his or her Health Points below -20. A character reduced to -20 or fewer Health Points is normally dead, though the GM may allow the character to linger long enough to say a few dying words or perform some other final action.

### CHARACTER IMPORTANCE AND DAMAGE

In most situations, Walk-on character are knocked out after one or two punches since they have reduced Health Points and they cannot make Defense Combat Rolls. GMs may, if they wish, decide that Walk-ons are always defeated after one punch, regardless of the damage delivered — the single requirement of beating a Walk-on is a successful hit. Conversely, Main Villain characters might gain a level of protection from physical harm to ensure the climactic fight scene at the end of the movie lasts a dramatically-appropriate length. While it is improbable that a Main Villain would fall in one or two combat rounds, it is possible (players are ingenious). If



this occurs, GMs may fudge some numbers to ensure the movie climax is truly climactic. Perhaps the Main Villain magically succeeds in his or her Defense Combat roll or actually has more Health Points than the numbers on the page indicate. Essentially, do not allow dice rolls to end your movie too early.

## 恢復 RECOVERY

A character who suffers lost Health Points due to damage may heal naturally. Similarly, lost Energy Points return over time.

### RECOVERING HEALTH POINTS

Health Points regenerate at a rate equal to the character's Body Stat for each hour (or day, for more "realistic" movies) of rest. For example, a character with a Body Stat of 5 rejuvenates 5 Health Points every hour while resting. The healing rate doubles if the character is in the care of someone with Medical Skill but halved if he or she does not spend time resting. Alternately, the GM can rule that the role heals fulls between scenes, or conversely that he or she has no chance to heal, depending on the movie's time frame. Sometimes, in film, the right treatment seems to heal a character completely — a rough field dressing by an unskilled supporting character of the opposite sex can work wonders, particularly if accompanied by a first kiss.

### RECOVERING ENERGY POINTS

The average of the Mind and Soul Stat (rounded up) equals the number of Energy Points the character recovers every hour (or day, for more "realistic" movies) whether the character rests or not. A character with a 7 Mind Stat and a 3 Soul Stat, for example, regains 5 Energy Points every hour ( $7+3=10$ ;  $10\div 2=5$ ). GMs may also rule that characters regain Energy Points when dramatically appropriate for the movie.

## 武器和裝備 WEAPONRY AND EQUIPMENT

In Hong Kong films, just about everything is a potential weapon in the right hands. The following sections detail the basics so Game Masters can react on the fly when necessary.

### GUNS AND AMMO

Hong Kong action movies are notorious for long, drawn out gunfights where characters rarely, if ever, reload their firearms. *HKAT!* reflects this near-limitless reserve of ammunition with this rule: A role does not need to reload his or her gun unless the player rolls a natural 11 or 12 on a gun-based Combat Value dice roll. Conversely, a player may opt for his or her role to voluntarily spend an action reloading a gun. This dramatic moment (usually filmed in slow motion) provides the role with a -2 bonus on his or her next gun-based Combat Value dice roll or a +10 damage bonus on his or her next gun-based attack. If the character voluntarily reloads his or her gun and rolls a natural 11 or 12 on his or her next gun-based attack roll, the weapon does not run out of ammunition (it was just reloaded) though the attack likely misses the target.

### PERSONAL WEAPONS

Combat turns deadly quickly when characters use weapons to increase the severity of damage inflicted against opponents. In *HKAT!*, weapons receive a Damage value ranging from 1 (least damaging) on up. In combat, the Damage value, coupled with the attacker's Attack Combat Value, determines the total punishment delivered by a successful hit (see previous section on inflicting damage). Should the weapon's effect remain outside a character's direct influence (a bomb on a timer for example), the damage equals the weapon's Damage value only — the Game Master should not factor in the character's Combat Value.

**Table 3-9: Personal Weapons** lists the Damage values and other characteristics of common weapons. If a weapon is not listed, the GM should assign a Damage Value based on one that is similar in form and function.

Some weapons possess Abilities and Disabilities to reflect their unique capabilities. Full descriptions of

**TABLE 3-9: PERSONAL WEAPONS**

Weapon	Damage	Abilities	Disabilities	Skill
<b>MELEE WEAPONS</b>				
Axe	8	none	Inaccurate Melee	Melee (Axe)
Bo, Staff or Pipe	4*	none	Melee	Melee (Polearm)
Brass Knuckles	2	Concealable	Melee	Kung Fu: Attacks (Strikes)
Broadsword	10	none	Melee	Melee (Sword)
Chair, Ladder, etc.	4*	none	Melee	Melee (Club)
Club, Baseball Bat	4	none	Melee	Melee (Club)
Knife or Dagger	3	Concealable	Melee	Melee (Knife)
Long Sword	10*	none	Melee	Melee (Sword)
Naginata (bladed staff)	10*	none	Melee	Melee (Polearm)
Nunchuku or Chain	4	Flexible	Melee	Melee (Whips/Chains)
Short Sword	6	Concealable	Melee	Melee (Sword)
Spear	8	none	Melee	Melee (Polearm)
Whip, Rope, or Belt	1	Concealable Flexible	Low Penetration Melee	Melee (Whips)
<b>BOWS</b>				
Crossbow	10	none	Slow, Static	Archery (Crossbow)
Long Bow	8	none	none	Archery (Bow)
<b>GUNS</b>				
Assault Rifle	14	Spreading	Limited Shots (6)	Gun Combat (Autofire)
Light Pistol	6	Concealable	Low Penetration Short Range	Gun Combat (Pistol)
Heavy Pistol	10	Concealable	Short Range	Gun Combat (Pistol)
Hunting Rifle	12	none	none	Gun Combat (Rifle)
Machine Pistol	8	Concealable Spreading	Inaccurate Limited Shots (6) Short Range	Gun Combat (Autofire)
Medium Pistol	8	Concealable	Short Range	Gun Combat (Pistol)
Shotgun	16**	Spreading	Limited Shots (6) Low Penetration Short Range	Gun Combat (Rifle)
Sniper Rifle	18	Accurate	Limited Shots (6)	Gun Combat (Rifle)
Submachine Gun	10	Spreading	Limited Shots (6) Short Range	Gun Combat (Autofire)
<b>HEAVY WEAPONS</b>				
Machine Gun	20	Spreading	Static	Heavy Weapons (Machine Gun)
Rocket Launcher	40	Area-Effect Penetrating	Inaccurate Limited Shots (1) Slow Static	Heavy Weapons (Launcher)
<b>THROWN WEAPONS</b>				
Grenade	20	Area Effect Concealable	Limited Shots (1) Short Range	Thrown Weapons (Grenades)
Thrown Knife	3	Concealable	Limited Shots (1) Short Range	Thrown Weapons (Blades)

these modifiers are on pages 72-74. Note that special or magical weapons might cause additional damage or possess unique abilities beyond those listed here.

### TABLE 3-9 NOTES

“**Damage**” is how much punishment the weapon inflicts. The character adds his or her Attack Combat Value to this number to determine total attack damage.

“**Abilities**” or “**Disabilities**” are any special capabilities or limitations the weapon possesses. See below for details. Unless noted otherwise, a weapon has Medium range.

“**Skill**” is the Skill and specialization that provides a bonus when firing the weapon.

#### NOTES:

- \* requires two hands to wield properly; delivers +4 damage when wielded two-handed.
- \*\* Some shotguns are “double barrelled” and can fire both barrels at once. If so, double the damage delivered. Double Barrelled shotguns have the Limited Shots (2) Disability.

## WEAPON ABILITIES

The following Abilities pertain to weapons and certain advantages they may possess. A shotgun, for example, affects an area, while knives are small enough to hide.

### ACCURATE

The weapon is unusually accurate, giving a -1 bonus to Attack rolls.

### AREA EFFECT

This is an attack, like an explosive blast, that affects not only the direct target, but also anyone in the immediate area. All affected characters can employ a Defense roll (diving for cover, swerving out of the way), but it is still not enough to escape completely. Unless the character can rapidly escape the area of effect (such as jumping off the exploding roof), he or she still takes half damage from the attack (round down). Characters who shield themselves behind very solid objects or terrain may

avoid damage completely (GM’s discretion) on a successful Defense roll. This represents the character ducking or moving behind cover. The GM decides whether an object or person is within the area of effect, and may assume the area radius, in metres, is equivalent to one-third the weapon’s damage.

### CONCEALABLE

A Concealable weapon is small enough for characters to use with one hand or hide it under clothing. Most pistol-sized or knife-sized weapons fall into this category. Spotting a concealed weapon requires a successful Mind Stat check at a +4 penalty to see the weapon or a Mind Stat check without a modifier if patting the character down.

### FLEXIBLE

This ability represents long, flexible, or extendible attacks like a whip or weighted rope. The target defends at a +1 penalty. Alternatively, the weapon can be used to make a grappling or disarming attack (see page 62).

### PENETRATING

Against an attack with this ability, armour only stops half the damage points (round down).

### SPREADING

This attack Ability spreads to cover an expanding area like a spray of projectiles or shot pellets. The defender receives a +1 penalty to his or her Defense roll. Multiple adjacent targets in the attack path may also receive damage if they are lined up or in a dense formation, up to a maximum of one extra target for every 10 points of weapon damage.

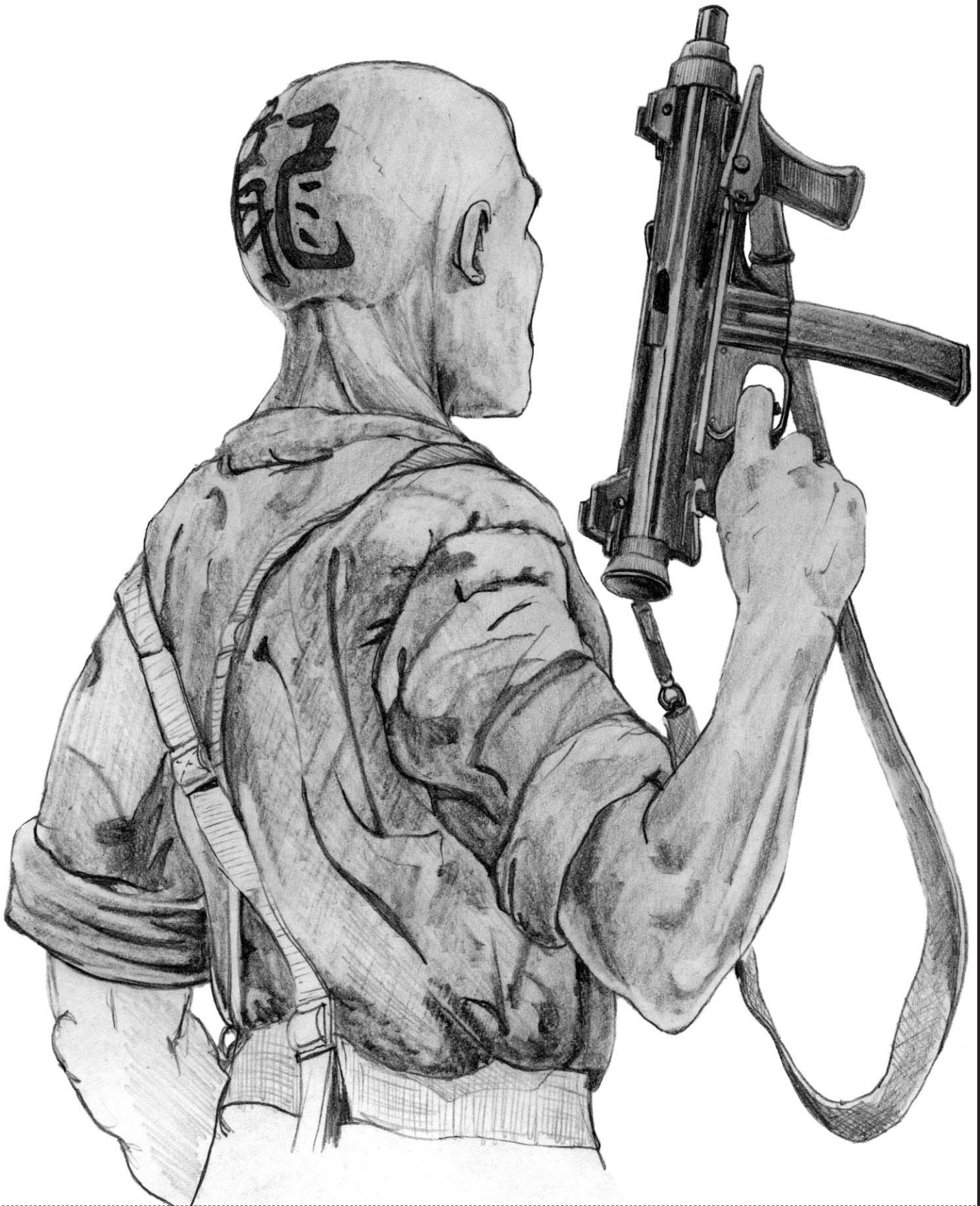
## WEAPON DISABILITIES

Some, none, or many of these Disabilities may apply to a Weapon Attack. The GM may disallow any combination that seems inappropriate.

### INACCURATE

The weapon is not as accurate as normal ones, and imposes a +1 penalty to all Attack rolls.





### LIMITED SHOTS

A character may only use this weapon for a few combat rounds, after which the weapon runs out of ammunition. The number in brackets indicates how many rounds the character can fire before the weapon depletes its ammunition.

### LOW PENETRATION

The weapon has an inferior ability to penetrate armour relative to its damage. Examples include shotgun blasts, or hollow-point bullets. Armour stops twice the usual damage.

### MELEE

This weapon is only usable against adjacent opponents and requires physical contact.

### SHORT RANGE

This weapon is only effective at close range (out to about 50 metres).

### SLOW

The attacker must use one combat action to load and aim the weapon before each attack. Someone with the Extra Attacks Attribute (see page 16) can use one of his or her extra actions to prepare the attack rather than wasting the entire round.

### STATIC

The character cannot use this weapon while moving either because it requires precise aim or because of the weapon's heavy weight. The character cannot even make Defense rolls on the round he or she uses a Static attack; if he or she has already made a Defense roll, the character cannot attack with a Static weapon until the following round.

## BODY ARMOUR

Where there are guns, swords, or anything remotely deadly, there is always armour, whether it is made from ancient metals or from modern plastic-fibres. Many guns have damage values that exceed armour ratings. In such a situations, the additional damage is not a reflection of the bullet piercing through the armour. Instead, the armour often stops the bullet from penetrating the target but fails to stop all of the kinetic energy of the bullet, resulting in impact damage being delivered to the target (potentially resulting in a serious bruise or even broken bones in extreme cases).

### MODERN ARMOUR

#### LEATHER JACKET

A basic jacket of tough leather, which can easily pass as ordinary clothing and stops 1 point of damage.

#### BULLET PROOF VEST

A modern lightweight ballistic-fibre "flak jacket." Characters can hide it under clothing and it stops 4 points of damage. It is cumbersome, however, and penalizes the wearer with a +1 penalty on all Body-related dice rolls.

#### TACTICAL BODY ARMOUR

A modern, heavily-reinforced outfit made of modern ballistic materials with a rigid vest and an open-faced helmet. It stops 10 points of damage. Due to its bulk, however, all combat or Body-based dice rolls suffer a +2 penalty.

#### GAS MASK

A modern gas mask protects against gases and similar attacks, but imposes a +2 penalty on all dice rolls for actions requiring peripheral vision. It requires one action to put on or remove a gas mask.

### ANCIENT ARMOUR

#### LIGHT MAIL

A light shirt of fine metal links that can be hidden under a normal jacket and stops 2 points of damage. Due to the armour's weight, the character suffers a +1 penalty on all Body-based dice rolls.

### PARTIAL METAL ARMOUR

A mail hauberk or cuirass, open helmet, and arm or leg protection. It stops 7 points of damage. Due to the armour's weight, the character suffers a +2 penalty on all Body-related dice rolls.

### FULL METAL ARMOUR

A complete head-to-foot suit of metal armour, similar to those worn by ancient warriors in battle. It stops 10 points of damage. Due to the armour's bulk, the character makes all combat or Body-based dice rolls at a +3 penalty and all Attack and Defense Combat rolls at a +1 penalty.

## 高級戰鬥 ADVANCED COMBAT RULES

The following rules are provided to create a combat system that reflects the fighting styles of Hong Kong action movies. If GMs feel they hinder their *HKAT!* game, they can ignore these suggestions. Adding these game rules, however, provides players with an additional level of detail to describe their roles' attacks.

### A PUNCH VS. A KICK

In the basic system, a punch is identical to a kick — both deliver the character's Combat Value in damage. In reality, however, a punch and a kick are two different things. Additionally, there are varying types of punches and kicks, each one with its own advantages and weaknesses. In the advanced system, all strike attacks fall into one of seven base categories. When an attacker decides to strike (Grapples and Throws are in the basic system, page 62) his or her opponent in unarmed combat, he or she chooses one of the following attack types:

#### LIGHT PUNCH

This attack type describes all light and fast punches, elbow strikes, and other hand/arm-based blows. These attacks deliver little damage, but are incredibly quick, accurate and allow the attacker to move back into a defensive stance quickly to avoid a counter-attack. They include rabbit punches, back fists, ridge hands, and jabs.

### MEDIUM PUNCH

Medium Punches are the most common attacks in most martial arts styles. They include a broad range of hand/arm strikes, shoulder blows, and other upper-torso attacks. These are solid, basic strikes that provide the fighter with few advantages, but likewise have few weaknesses.

### HARD PUNCH

Hard Punches are where the fighter throws all of his or her weight behind the blow, such as spinning back fists, roundhouse punches, haymakers, and the like. These attacks are slower than the average punch and often leave the attacker off-balance, but they deliver incredible damage.

### LIGHT KICK

As with a Light Punch, Light Kicks are fast, snap attacks made with the attacker's foot or knee, enabling him or her to strike quickly and return to a defensive posture. Since a person's legs are stronger than his or her arms, kicks inherently deliver more damage, but at detriment to their speed (thus they are slower than punches). They include front-snap kicks, front sidekicks, or any other kick where the attacker generates little momentum between him or her and the target.

### MEDIUM KICK

Medium Kicks are foot or knee strikes that deliver an excellent amount of damage. These attacks, however, are relatively slow and leave the attacker exposed to a counter-attack. They include strikes where the attacker can throw his or her hips behind the blow more forcibly, like crescent and roundhouse kicks.

### HARD KICK

When an attacker launches a Hard Kick, he or she puts all his or her weight behind the foot- or knee-based strike. These attacks often leave him or her very open to a counterstrike since most of these devastating kicks involve the attacker spinning his or her body to add momentum to the blow. They include spinning back-kick, spinning crescent, skipping sidekick, or even a skipping, spinning roundhouse.



## AERIAL KICK

These wonderfully visual attacks deliver incredible damage (on film since no self-respecting martial artist kicks to a person's head in a fight) but are very difficult to land and needlessly expose the attacker to a potentially brutal counterstrike. Since the attacker leaps into the air to literally throw all of his or her weight behind the kick, he or she can only make minor modifications to the attack, making it difficult to hit. Additionally, because the attacker is now in the air and unable to move freely, the opponent can now better predict where to throw his or her next strike, leaving the airborne attacker vulnerable. Lastly, Aerial Kicks are only Torso or High attacks (see below).

**TABLE 3-10: ATTACK TYPES AND MODIFIERS**

Attack	Damage	Initiative	Hit	Defense
Light Punch	-4	+2	-1	-1
Medium Punch	-	-	-	-
Hard Punch	+3	-1	+1	+1
Light Kick	-2	+1	-	-1
Medium Kick	+2	-1	-	+1
Hard Kick	+5	-2	+1	+2
Aerial Kick	+9	-3	+3	+3

**"Damage"** is a modifier that applies to the attack's base damage (Combat Value).

**"Initiative"** applies to the attacker's Initiative (see page 59) to determine when he or she launches the attack during the turn.

**"Hit"** modifies the attacker's Attack Combat Value dice roll when he or she attempts this strike-type.

**"Defense"** modifier applies to the character's Defense Combat Value dice roll to defend against the next attack directed against him or her.

## HIGH, TORSO OR LOW

The basic game assumes an attacker is trying to strike the target in the torso, the centre of the opponent's mass. In Hong Kong action movies, however, attackers regularly throw kicks at an opponent's head followed by leg sweeps. Defenders are constantly guessing where the

next attack will land to defend that area of the body. To mimic this strategic dance, after the attacker selects his or her attack type, both parties choose High, Torso, or Low for their attack or defense, as appropriate to their role as adversary or defender. The defender then modifies his or her Defense Combat Value dice roll depending on either combatant's choice (see **Table 3-11: Defense Location Modifiers** for the exact number).

## LOW ATTACKS

Low attacks are any strikes or sweeps directed at the opponent's legs or feet. Due to the smaller target area, these attacks are harder to land and therefore incur a +1 dice roll penalty to hit. When they are successful and deliver damage, however, they can potentially knock the opponent to the ground. If hit by a Low attack, the defender must make a successful Body Stat check (he or she cannot use Acrobatics) or fall to the ground. The defender rolls at a penalty equal to +1 per point of damage over 5 that the attack delivers. Thus, a Low attack that dishes out 8 points of damage will force the defender to make a Body Stat check at a +3 (8 points of damage - 5 = 3) dice roll penalty to avoid falling to the ground. See page 64 for rules on Fighting from the Ground. Additionally, fighters who find themselves on the ground can only make Low attacks until they regain their footing.

## TORSO ATTACKS

Torso attacks are against the opponent's centre mass — their chest and abdomen. Since the torso has the most surface space, the attacks suffer no penalty to strike but likewise enjoy no particular advantages. All normal rules apply to Torso attacks.

## HIGH ATTACKS

High attacks are those against an opponent's shoulders and head. Since the target area is smaller, the attacks suffer a +2 dice roll penalty. Because the head is such a sensitive target, however, the attacker has the potential to deliver devastating damage. If he or she rolls a natural 2 (a critical hit), the attack dishes out double damage and, as with all critical hits, the target cannot defend against it.

**TABLE 3-11: DEFENSE LOCATION MODIFIERS**

Attack	Defense Modifier		
	Low	Torso	High
Low	-2	+1	+3
Torso	+1	-2	+1
High	+3	+1	-2

*EXAMPLE: Tom attacks Kim's character. Tom decides he wants to inflict some serious damage and selects a High Hard Punch. Kim, however, believes Tom wants to knock her character to the ground so she selects a Low block. The two reveal their selections simultaneously. Kim groans when she realizes her choice means she suffers a +3 penalty on her Defense Roll if Tom's character succeeds with his attack. After resolving that action, Kim attacks back and selects a Medium Kick this round and decides to attack Low, hoping to knock Tom's character to the ground. Tom, knowing how Kim's character likes to fight, guesses her intent and defends Low. Kim groans again when she realizes that Tom now has a -2 bonus on his Defense roll if her attack succeeds. The fight is not going well for Kim right now....*

## ADVANCED COMBAT AND WIRE FU

When using advanced combat manoeuvres with Wire Fu, combine all bonuses and penalties from Abilities, Disabilities and the attack type to determine the final Attack Combat dice roll modifier. See page 25 for full details.

## ADVANCED COMBAT AND INITIATIVE

When using the advanced combat rules, players must select their attacks at the beginning of the turn so they can apply the Initiative modifier to their Initiative roll. Thus, for example, three characters are in a fight. Tom rolls an initiative of 7, Sally rolls a 9 and Kim rolls a 6. Tom decides his character will attempt a High Hard Kick and thus his initiative for the turn is a (7-2) 5. Sally decides to hit hard with a Torso Hard Punch so her initiative for the turn is (9-1) 8. Kim wants to land a shot

in case the other characters knock her out before she acts, so she goes with a Torso Light Punch and acts on initiative (6+2) 8. Therefore, using the advanced combat rules, the initiative rolls are Sally and Kim, both with 8, and Tom with 5.

## ADVANCED COMBAT AND MULTIPLE ACTIONS

There are two ways a GM can handle Initiative in advanced combat with multiple attacks. In the first method, the character acts on the worst Initiative of his or her chosen attacks. A character with three attacks, for example, chooses to launch a High Light Punch (+2 initiative modifier), a Torso Medium Punch (no initiative modifier), and a Low Hard Kick (-2 initiative modifier — the worst of the three). He rolls an initiative of 9. Thus, his attacks would occur on initiative 7 based on the penalty from the Low Hard Kick. This assumes that all attacks occur at roughly the same moment. Additionally, it allows a character to perform a Hard attack followed by a Light attack.

Alternatively, if GMs prefer, each attack could occur at the applicable initiative. Thus, in the above example, the character would deliver his High Light Punch on initiative 11, the Torso Medium Punch on initiative 9, and the Low Hard Kick on initiative 7. This method assumes the attacks occur at different points in time rather than simultaneously, but does not permit a Hard-Light combination (since light attacks always come before harder attacks in Initiative).

In both cases, the character also suffers from the worst Defense modifier on his or her next defense combat roll. In the above example, the character would suffer a +2 penalty on his next Defense Combat Roll thanks to the Low Hard Kick.

The GM should inform players which method he or she will use since both choices affect game-play.



# CHAPTER FOUR: GAME MASTER'S SECTION





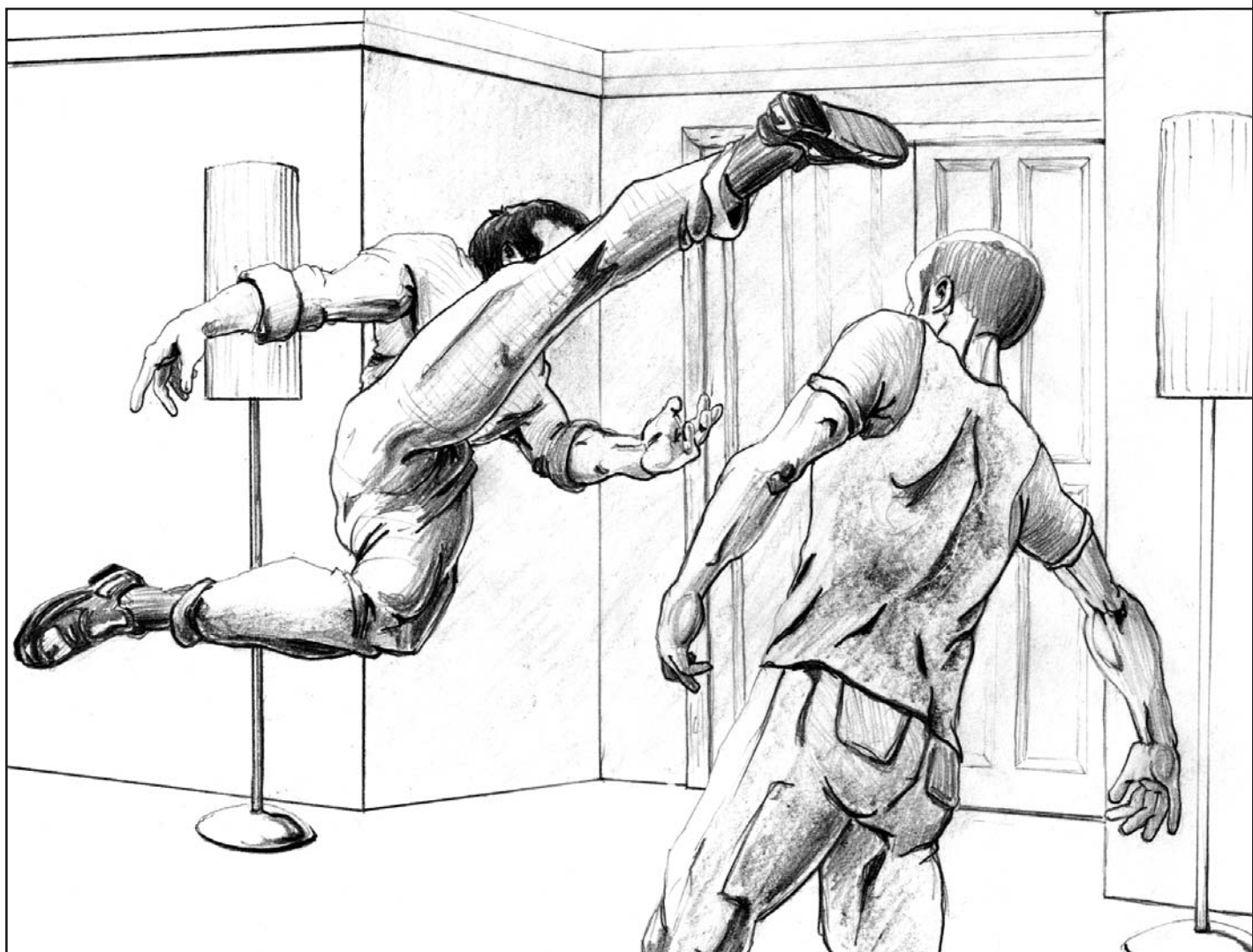
## SHOWTIME

So the actors are prepped, the locations picked out, and the pyrotechnics crew ready with explosives and fire extinguishers. All that is left now is to create the script. Hong Kong directors are infamous for shooting on the fly and creating a story along the way. *Hard Boiled* started when John Woo heard about the impending destruction of a restaurant and obtained permission to use it in the movie's gun happy opener. He later built the plot around Chow Yun-fat as Jazz musician Tequila looking to avenge his partner's death.

This is not always the case, though. Hong Kong movies are part spur-of-the-moment inspiration that often leaves Western audiences dumbfounded by 180-degree plot twists, part artistic genius looking for new ways to break the mould, and part creative insanity that sends

actors, actresses, and stunt doubles careening into life-threatening situations. Regardless, Hong Kong directors can frame shots and capture a moment's frenetic intensity like no other. Is it any surprise, then, that these men and women earned international respectability and notoriety in one deft swoop? Is it any wonder they are the premier visionaries of tomorrow's action trends? Even Western pioneers like Quentin Tarantino acknowledge Hong Kong cinema's influence on their own work.

These are important lessons well suited to Game Mastering since the GM must establish setting, mood, and often script changes to keep the characters on their toes and the players entertained. Chapter Four therefore discusses *Game Mastering Hong Kong Action Theatre!* with an eye on making productions a unique experience, entertaining players while challenging their characters, and finally, just having fun.



## TELEVISION VS. CINEMA VS. SEQUEL FRANCHISES

*Hong Kong Action Theatre!* is unique because it is deliberately episodic, but there are other methods of gameplay available. *Guardians Of Order* realizes not everyone enjoys playing the same way. The nature of *Hong Kong Action Theatre!*, however, allows it to accommodate a variety of styles, each with their own strengths and benefits. The Game Master should pick whichever suggestions best suit his or her campaign.

### MOVIES

Movies are the ultimate one-shots. They rely on a single concept to propel the plot, and often proceed at breakneck speed to resolve the story before the audience loses interest. The nature of movies is also such that they cover a wide gamut of styles, time periods, moods, themes, and even motifs. Players might enjoy a wuxia-style epic focusing on the Eight Immortals in one session, and find themselves in a "Big Timer" flick about the life of a Triad leader in the next. Movie-style games allow GMs to run productions with constant variety and an unending selection of ideas not hampered by a series construct (like a continuous setting, or fixed time period, or established level of reality).

Movies also appeal to players who want instant gratification or quick results; this game-style imparts an immediate sense of success since movies are almost miniature derivatives, and players often resolve them within a few sessions. Additionally, death is rarely a factor; the role may die, but the actor lives on to star in another film. In fact, sometimes death can improve the actor's standing with audiences, thereby increasing his or her Star Power reward at the end of the movie. A good death scene can move the audience as easily as it can send them into hysterics.

### TELEVISION

Television-style productions are games where the players play ongoing characters within an established setting framework and timeframe; it relies on the more traditional role-playing experience. This variant allows Game Masters to create a fixed world with multiple potential story arcs and an epic number of characters. It

enables GMs to develop a solid world background over time and expand upon it with each story line rather than abandoning potentially good ideas or world concepts when the episode ends.

Beyond the logistics of this style, the single greatest benefit is to the player's advantage. Ongoing series allows players to explore their characters fully while establishing familial bonds with other characters sharing their experience. The Game Master can expose the characters to a variety of situations, allow them to evolve and learn at a pace not dictated by the length of the movie. There is a definite sense of progression on everyone's parts, and a sense of history.

The stakes in television series are also often greater and potentially more realistic because the threat of death is now a factor. Unlike movies where a character's role death is not permanent because the actor remains unaffected, death in television implies the role and actor are no longer a part of the show. The role died because the scriptwriters, producers, or director decided they do not want the actor involved in the series anymore, or because the actor simply retired. In either case, he or she is probably never returning, leaving the player to create a new actor/role.

When creating a character for a television series, where the GM and players do not wish to have the actor star in different movies, the distinction between actor and role are ignored. GMs should therefore assign players a number of Character Points equal to what he or she would assign to both the actor and to the role package. For example, instead of granting players 20 Character Points to create their actors and roughly an additional 10 Character Points for each actor's role package, the GM would simply assign 30 Character Points to each player to create their character. Further, GMs should ignore the distinction between actor, role and open Attributes, Skills, and Defects — the character is created with access to all abilities and disabilities.

### STAR POWER IN TELEVISION SERIES

Most aspects of Star Power remain untouched in the television format, be it script rewrites, bonuses to dice rolls, etc. The only significant change is to the bidding process, but Game Masters can still use that system almost as presented. At the end of a story arc, players

may bid against each other to see an element of their character's background featured prominently in the next session. This does not mean the character role is the central and only focus of the session, merely that an aspect of his or her history comes into play. The Game Master decides the event in question, whether the character's Significant Other lands in trouble, or a Nemesis makes an untimely appearance.

In this situation, there are no minimum or maximum bids. The player who wagers highest wins; if only one person bids, then he or she becomes a featured element in the next episode with as little as one Star Power.

### SEQUEL FRANCHISES

This last style of production is the best of worlds, television and cinema alike. Sequel franchises are movies that garnered enough success to spawn several sequels, copycats, and possibly even new genres as *Encounters of the Spooky Kind* did with horror/comedy/martial arts. Moderate successes (or movies with in-demand actors) might generate one or two additional movie chapters like *Drunken Master I & II*, *The Legend of Fong Sai Yuk I & II*, *A Better Tomorrow I, II, & III* and the *Swordsman I, II & III*. Some movies are huge successes, spawning four or more sequels including *God of Gamblers I through IV*, *Once Upon a Time in China I through VI*, and Jackie Chan's *Police Story* franchise including *Supercop & Project S* with Michelle Yeoh. The pioneer series, however, remains the Wong Fei-hung dynasty. While several movies starred Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and Zhao Wen-zhou in the role of this highly popular folk hero, the definitive actor for Wong Fei-hung is Kwan Tak-hing who portrayed the martial arts master in 98 sequels to *The True Story of Wong Fei-hung*.

Hong Kong, infamous for its one-week production cycle, can churn out sequels for highly popular movies within the same year. This accounts for Kwan Tak-hing's epic 99 movie-run in under 21 years. This is also a perfect set-up for Game Masters running miniseries-style campaigns around the same characters and setting. Players can develop their characters much like a television series, and explore themes not normally accessible in single movies, while the GM can experiment with different styles and campaign premises through the

various franchises without disrupting the group's dynamics often. Additionally, while each sequel offers the players the benefit of shared history from previous installments, the focus of each film is tighter than a television show since it is still a movie at heart. The film must have a set of circumstances that the players resolve by the feature's end, although the antagonists may be recurring NPC roles.

The other advantage with franchises is that the Star Power mechanic works the same as in television series over the span of sequels, but when the series ends and the GM is ready to launch a new multi-part epic, the players bid for new roles as per normal.

### PRE-PRODUCTION: BUILDING THE SET

Before the filming ever begins, the cast and crew must finalize a script, decide on locations, choreograph stunts and fight scenes, design costuming, work out the lighting, prepare the inevitable explosives, find or build the right props, etc. Creating a production is much the same as writing a script. While the Game Master is free of such painstaking obligations, his or her production requires its own set of considerations. These basic elements are intrinsic to well-rounded stories, and the Game Master may benefit from these techniques by applying them where appropriate. Certainly, no two GMs will run their productions exactly the same way, whether one prefers a free-form style game, or another details every potential step. The suggestions listed below are merely that, suggestions. Game Masters can either ignore the ones they dislike, or even experiment by applying a new technique with each film to emulate a different director or direction. Using themes, for example, might make the difference between a generic action film and art house masterpiece. Not defining the villain may turn the film into a mystery with the Game Master using in-game events to determine the best potential antagonist in the end. Each production bears its own styles and preferences, but the core of *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* lies in a willingness to experiment and have fun. No event can truly ruin a campaign since the players maintain a higher level of suspension of disbelief, and the story-arcs are often self-contained.



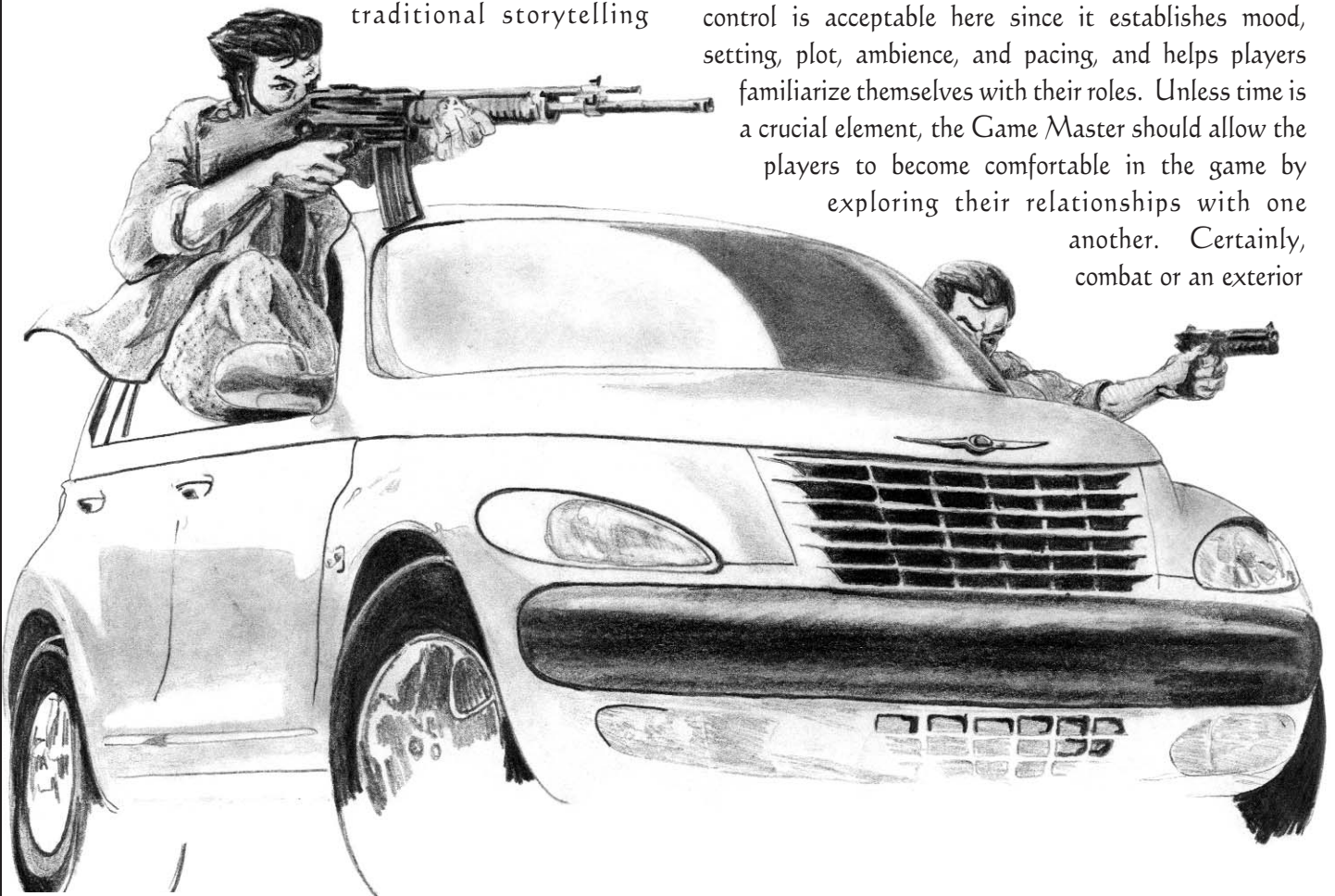
## SCRIPTING

Outlining the script often means creating a story arc with a definitive beginning, middle, and end. In movie scriptwriting, this archetype breaks down further with the first major plot twist occurring 20 minutes into the movie or by page 30 in the script. Twenty minutes before the movie ends, the protagonists go from victim to victor when they arrive at a solution to their dilemma and implement their plan. Unfortunately, while audiences can set their watches by this in Western films, Hong Kong cinema rarely follows such conventions. Instead, they rely on pseudo endings and potential resolutions followed by additional plot twists or cause-and-effect situations. In fact, by Western perceptions, HK directors seemingly buck audiences like a wild bronco, throwing them left when the script turns right. The truth is, Hong Kong uses different pacing conventions, which in turn follow traditions established through their myths and legends. These ancient tales inspired Peking Opera, which in turn influenced Hong Kong cinema. Thus, traditional storytelling

techniques and gestures, conventions and styles carry across to the silver screen, turning these films into theatrical productions of sorts. Regardless, Game Masters should rely on what makes them comfortable, be it Western style filmmaking, Hong Kong tradition, or a fusion of whatever works.

Returning to the principles of beginning, middle, and end, the Game Master should consider a framework of scenes, and establish which points can potentially diverge or jump to a new situation. This does not entail forcing the character roles into following scripted actions. Instead, Game Masters should always leave room for the characters to act of their own accord, and be ready to deal with the consequences of their actions. Writers often claim that their characters take lives of their own and do not follow the script's intended direction; players are living examples of this free will, while Game Masters should be those writers willing to follow their characters' lead.

The story's beginning relies on shepherding the actors through the formative point of the film. Some control is acceptable here since it establishes mood, setting, plot, ambience, and pacing, and helps players familiarize themselves with their roles. Unless time is a crucial element, the Game Master should allow the players to become comfortable in the game by exploring their relationships with one another. Certainly, combat or an exterior



threat often galvanizes a group, but the Game Master cannot rely on this technique throughout each film without boring the audience/players. Knowing this, the GM should vary the film's beginning, altering tempo one movie, and using cut-scenes to tell a story the next. The GM can start the adventure using the classic *in media res* (in the middle of the story like *Heroic Trio* that opens with the rash of baby kidnappings). The actors may begin with a flashback establishing their relation to one another, or simply start in the dark without benefiting from cut-scenes. It is up to the GM, as long as the players know what to do or what is expected of them.

The "middle" is a vague and ubiquitous term that signifies specific scenes, battles, or revelations that players must encounter to reach the end. There can be as few as one or as many as ten middle scenes, though the GM should strive for three to five. Even this is dangerous, however, for players will inevitably and rightfully feel like the Game Master is steering the group where he or she wants to go rather than following the players' leads. While this is a valid concern, Game Masters should also remember that they are responsible for everyone having fun (and that includes overcoming adversity). What is a GM to do? Again, the key is experimenting, and there are multiple techniques to solving this conundrum.

The first technique is often the simplest. The character roles start at point "A," while their goal, be it a waiting spouse, a villain, the package drop-off point, freedom, etc., is point "E." The Game Master therefore knows the roles must hit points "B," "C," & "D" to reach their goal, and plans for whatever awaits them. Jet Li's *The Bodyguard from Beijing* follows this formula with Jet's character protecting Christy Cheung who witnessed a murder. His role's primary agenda is straightforward: guard Cheung's character until he no longer needs to protect her. Thus, the action comes to him, and the players are incumbent on the GM to ascertain "what's next." The danger in this is when players anticipate the next step and manage to circumvent it. This is not disastrous, and might in fact allow the GM to explore unintended aspects of the movie. It is all about rolling with the punches.

The second technique is more complicated, allowing characters some freedom with direction through branching paths. For example, scene "A" splits into scene "B" and "C." These scenes diverge further into "D" or "E," "F" or "G" respectively. The closer one arrives at the end, or "Z" for example, the more paths merge. Scenes "T" or "U" both lead to scene "X" while "V" or "W" hit "Y." Obviously "X" or "Y" lead to "Z," the finale.

In this instance, the Game Master should realize players might bypass some scenes because of the branching process, but this provides a framework for players to explore the movie's environment. Additionally, the Game Master should always ensure that each scene contains enough information to lead players to two different locations. This way, if they miss one clue, they have not hit a dead-end. Instead, they can go elsewhere where another two or three clues wait, and progress from there. This also helps the Game Master redirect wayward groups who become lost over the course of the game.

Last, but not least, is the third technique better known as free-range gaming. In this case, a Game Master sets up the world with enough detailed information that the character roles can go virtually anywhere and do anything. The roles start at point "A," but the only other certainty is point "Z" where the objective lies. Anything in the middle is up for grabs, but the GM is comfortable enough to let the players explore. The main difficulties with this technique is 1) It requires either extensive planning to detail the world, or an excellent sense of improvisation, and 2) The Game Master must know when to reorient the players back towards their proverbial Mecca without relying on *deus ex machina*. Otherwise, the characters may wander aimlessly, creating an understandably frustrating scenario, or grow tired of the Game Master's rescue attempts.

## UNDERSTANDING GENRE & THEME

Every story has a genre or style/category. Genres include romance, tragedy, comedy, science fiction, suspense, etc. Most times, Game Masters run their games, vaguely aware of the story's genre elements, but more often, their stories are simply vehicle for ideas without the exploration of specific conventions. Horror,



for example, might be about scaring people, but the genre's conventions or "themes" go deeper than that. Horror is about the loss of personal control over a situation, the exploration of the monster within each person, or humanity's primal fears of the unknown.

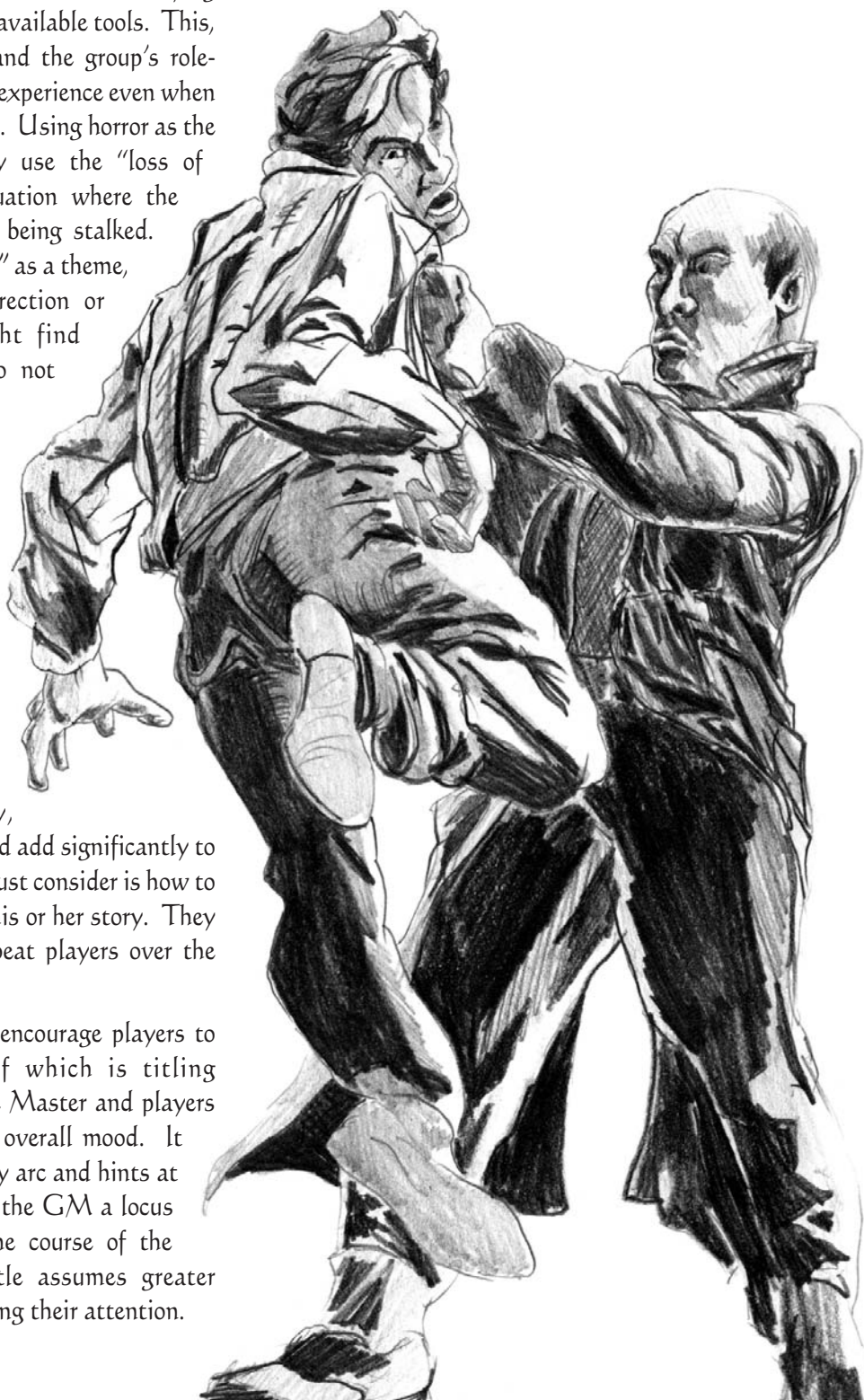
Understanding a film's genre and its underlying themes increases a Game Master's available tools. This, in turn, allows him or her to expand the group's role-playing horizons by diversifying the experience even when relying on the same genre repeatedly. Using horror as the archetype example, the GM may use the "loss of control" theme to role-play a situation where the characters are isolated, alone, and being stalked. Playing on humanity's "primal fears" as a theme, however, changes the movie's direction or mood. Suddenly the roles might find themselves facing horrors they do not understand or cannot see.

Thus, understanding genre means understanding the available themes. A romance, for instance, offers thematic elements like a willingness to sacrifice everything for love, or having absolute faith in someone. Science-fiction entails exploring the impact of technology on humanity or engaging in social commentary taken to the extreme.

As mentioned previously, themes create memorable stories, and add significantly to the drama. The first thing a GM must consider is how to approach the thematic elements of his or her story. They should never be heavy-handed or beat players over the head. Subtlety is the key.

There are several devices to encourage players to think thematically, the first of which is titling productions. This offers the Game Master and players focus by encapsulating the game's overall mood. It communicates the intent of the story arc and hints at the underlying themes. This gives the GM a locus with which to work, and, over the course of the characters' investigations, the title assumes greater meaning for the players while focusing their attention.

Another technique is to use a specimen character whose function it is to embody the theme of the production. This works best if the NPC is not ever-present, however, since players are astute enough to know when someone is hitting them over the head with a motif.





It is also possible for this NPC to change over the course of the movie/series. That is, the theme character is actually a different character at different points during the production. The first few stories may involve Theme Character A, but when the focus of the story changes, perhaps Theme Character B now best embodies the production's motif.

Player characters are also useful vehicles for themes. Once a production is underway, it is likely a character will embody the game's motif (or its antithesis) inadvertently. The Game Master should encourage this kind of behaviour when it happens by focusing on the player character for that scene or session.

### GIVE VILLAINS THE BEST LINES

Every good story needs an opposing villain, but is the antagonist someone who exemplifies evil, or is he or she merely the protagonist's moral, social, or political opposite? Pardon the oxymoron, but every good villain needs strong motivations and strength of purpose. Evil is not a necessary qualifier for rivalry; instead the person who provides the greatest obstacles to the story's protagonist becomes the foe by merit of his or her opinion, and by the audience's perception ... good and bad have nothing to do with the equation.

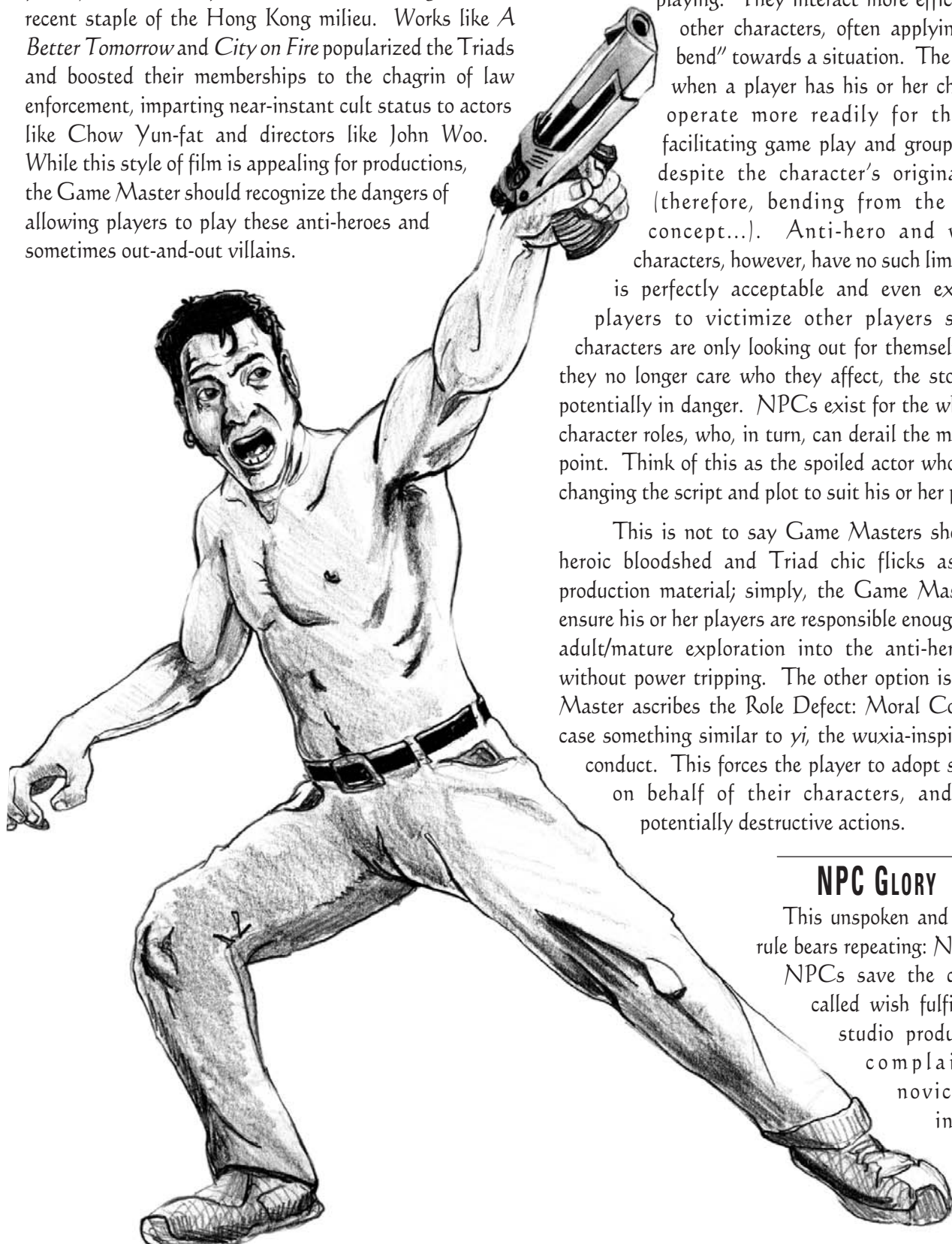
An antagonist who simply shoots puppies in the kneecaps makes for a weak and uninteresting adversary because there is nothing more to him or her other than violence. Someone who serves as the villain because he or she seeks revenge for the death of a daughter (for instance) is suddenly more chilling for audiences who might empathize with the antagonist's actions. This obviously does not preclude GMs from using miscreants who commit evil for its own sake, but their motivations are infinitely more important than their actions. If the GM understands what drives these individuals, he or she can further explore the depths of their depravity.

Remember this list when designing the bad-guy/gal:

- 1) Give the villains the best lines; love your characters. These writing aphorisms pertain to treating the character's foe as a fully developed and singular persona. Villains need motivations, for it is not the actions that make characters hate antagonists, but rather their reasoning and implementation of agendas. Develop them as thoroughly as players build their characters.
- 2) Nobody sees themselves as the antagonist. Everyone has motive for his or her actions, and they are always justifiable in his or her eyes. In fact, the adversary probably sees him or herself as the hero of a different calibre.
- 3) The most interesting villains are those people who can force the character roles to examine or confront their own morality; perhaps someone in a position of superiority like a mentor or religious figure, or even a trusted confidante. This is a case of defeating opponents through wits instead of brawn.
- 4) Game Masters should not be afraid to give their villains sympathetic traits. These force the character roles to question their perceptions while empathizing with the adversary; had circumstances been different, the roles might have been in the same situation.
- 5) Trademark your antagonists (no, not literally). Trademark means using distinguishing characteristics to make the antagonist unique from every other villain out there. In *My Father the Hero*, one minor antagonist is a butch, suit-wearing woman. In *Swordsman II*, the gender-bending Brigitte Lin plays Asia the Invincible, a man who sacrificed his gender for power. In *Gorgeous*, Jackie Chan's business adversary is his best friend (who wishes Jackie no ill will), while his martial opponent is a competitor who fights fair and lives for the thrill of competition. In either case, it is a refreshing departure from the crime magnates and evil eunuchs killing for the sake of quick stereotypes.

## PLAYER VILLAINS VS. PLAYER ANTI-HEROES

Heroic bloodshed and gangster films, which portray Triads in a positive or honourable light, are a recent staple of the Hong Kong milieu. Works like *A Better Tomorrow* and *City on Fire* popularized the Triads and boosted their memberships to the chagrin of law enforcement, imparting near-instant cult status to actors like Chow Yun-fat and directors like John Woo. While this style of film is appealing for productions, the Game Master should recognize the dangers of allowing players to play these anti-heroes and sometimes out-and-out villains.



The principle danger is one of control. When players adopt the roles of good or just characters, they generally police their own actions for the sake of role-playing. They interact more efficiently with other characters, often applying the "5% bend" towards a situation. The 5% bend is when a player has his or her character cooperate more readily for the sake of facilitating game play and group dynamics, despite the character's original concept (therefore, bending from the character concept...). Anti-hero and villainous characters, however, have no such limitations. It is perfectly acceptable and even expected for players to victimize other players since their characters are only looking out for themselves. Once they no longer care who they affect, the story itself is potentially in danger. NPCs exist for the whims of the character roles, who, in turn, can derail the movie at any point. Think of this as the spoiled actor who insists on changing the script and plot to suit his or her purposes.

This is not to say Game Masters should ignore heroic bloodshed and Triad chic flicks as potential production material; simply, the Game Master should ensure his or her players are responsible enough to handle adult/mature exploration into the anti-hero mindset without power tripping. The other option is the Game Master ascribes the Role Defect: Moral Code, in this case something similar to *yi*, the wuxia-inspired code of conduct. This forces the player to adopt some ethics on behalf of their characters, and prohibits potentially destructive actions.

### NPC GLORY

This unspoken and oft-ignored rule bears repeating: Never let the NPCs save the day. It is called wish fulfilment, and studio producers often complain about novice writers interjecting

themselves into a series universe by developing a hero who saves the regular cast from misfortune (thus earning their undying admiration). Unfortunately, GMs commit this *faux pas* as well, becoming the centre of attention through their NPCs. The Game Master is so enthralled with a personal character concept he or she would love to play, he or she turns the role into a pseudo-character designed to impress the players with the role's (and thus GM's) prowess. This is simply ego stroking at expense of the game, and a large step to making the players superfluous.

This is especially dangerous in films where the players have invested personal time and effort to seeing the adventure through. Allowing NPCs to grab the brass ring is as unsatisfying as the characters going to avenge the death of their *sifu* or master, but discovering their master already returned from the grave to avenge himself! What was the point of that exercise? To rob the players of their glory? If the Game Master is so desperate to participate in the game, perhaps he or she would benefit from allowing a guest GM to run a game while he or she played the occasional production. Always remember, the players' characters are the stars of the movie, not the NPCs.

## MOVIE MAGIC

Now that the game is underway, here are additional techniques to make *HKAT!* an entirely unique experience. These methods are not required, but given this system's episodic and experimental nature, they help break the monotony of standard campaigns with fun suggestions.

### HAVE AN AUDIENCE

One useful technique is treating the players as the audience. While they still act as the story's characters, the GM allows the players to glimpse cut-scenes that may not involve them. They could witness a murder without seeing the killer's face, notice an important clue fall between the cracks, watch a suspicious rendezvous between NPCs, etc. It adds that sense of enjoying a television show or movie. The major difficulty with this technique, however, is ensuring the characters do not act on knowledge that they do not possess yet.

## ACTOR SHOWCASES

A potential substitute to using *Star Power* is to showcase one actor's abilities as the principle character of a movie and alternate to another actor for the next movie. This means everybody in the game has a chance to play hero every three to six movies depending on the size of the player group. Therefore, one movie might work on the actor's strength as a stuntman, while the next covers someone else's ability to act, or their sex appeal, etc. This technique relies on the notion that the best way to craft good stories is to know your players. If the GM understands them well, he or she can design episodes around the players' aspirations and fears, and even tailor plots to disturb and thrill them. This should draw them deeper into the story. This is not to say that the GM need offend his or her players. In fact, he or she should not — that would be going too far and breaking some basic principles of trust.

This technique can really pull players in, and once the Game Master has them, he or she will find that the players are all too eager to help craft the story. They want to see it grow because they are entranced by the engaging story. GMs should be careful, however, for the line between fun and going too far is sometimes a thin one.

## SUBPLOTS

While subplots are important for movies, series, and sequel franchises, they work most effectively for ongoing continuous productions (like television series). A subplot is a smaller scenario tangentially related to the main one, and crucial for several reasons. First, they keep the game from becoming dull. Stories that proceed from point to point with nothing in between lack substance. Subplots spice up the action and backdrop, allowing the Game Master to focus attention away from the main plot. For a television series, having two or three subplots open at any time keeps the action interesting and fresh.

Secondly, subplots allow the Game Master to shift the focus between characters. A character may not be important to the main plot currently, but if he or she is part of an engaging subplot, the player feels involved and important to the production.



Thirdly, subplots allow the GM to control the dissemination of critical information. If the entirety of the action revolves around the main story, the Game Master will have to surrender key secrets much faster. Subplots, however, allow the GM to cut back and forth between several different stories, and not reveal vital clues as quickly.

This technique enables the Game Master to dole out information to different characters. There is nothing quite like offering separate key pieces of a puzzle to several characters who have no reason to interact immediately. The GM then has a situation where everyone knows a little, but if they managed to share information, the whole ordeal would suddenly become much clearer. By handing out separate bits of information, the Game Master decreases the likelihood that this will happen immediately, and prevents one character from monopolizing the clues.

Finally, major plots often start as subplots. They begin as little events behind the scenes, and grow until they become the focus of a story. This is in the Game Master's favour since it is usually a player who serves as the subplot's catalyst, through his or her actions. Anything that uses player characters to drive the plot is good for the game.

One potential pitfall of employing subplots that GMs should know, however, is that there is a tendency to focus on one character, and thus the character's player while he or she explores the subplot. This results in other players sitting around idly, waiting for the game to reinvolve their characters. GMs should always minimize the amount of time that players remain uninvolved with the game — players can become disinterested in the story and the game in general if they feel they are not participating regularly. Thus, GMs must achieve a careful balance between allowing each player to explore his or her character's subplots while interacting with other players.

### CLIFFHANGERS

Cliffhangers are a technique pioneered by radio serials, 1950s action series, and contemporary season finales. When used properly, they can make a fine dramatic tool, and are particularly effective in

emulating a television-series style production. At the end of each session, the Game Master simply leaves the players hanging either in some precarious situation or on the cusp of a major revelation. GMs are likely to hear cries of protest initially, but if he or she uses this technique properly, it will leave the players hungry for the next session.

Taking this idea a step further, Game Masters can employ the "season finale" technique by building a large story arc to climax, then ending it on a cliffhanger. The GM can then take a few weeks off, running Special Events in the interim (see page 92) and use this time to collect his or her thoughts on how to proceed next. This should really build the players' interests. GMs must tread carefully, however, for if they wait too long between one session and the next, the players' might forget past game events, and their enthusiasm will wane.

### FLASHBACK EPISODES

The most riveting stories are often those with an intricate history. Flashback episodes rely on past events to weave a second narrative, thereby telling two interwoven stories at once. The first sequence is normally the flashback itself, and relates the relevant history that leads up to the second sequence or the actual episode involving the characters. To make this a dynamic process, however, the Game Master has two options available.

The first flashback episode involves more work, but can make for memorable role-playing as well as allowing the players a fresh perspective on the production. In it, the contemporary adventure is actually related to another incident that took place decades ago. It could be a murder with the same strange MO as one years ago, a missing body discovered after thirty years, a 1950s theft where the important artifact has resurfaced in a contemporary auction, a dying cop who wants closure on the one case he could not solve, etc. Regardless of the instance, it is enough to involve the characters. During the investigation, however, just before the characters are about to learn a new morsel of information or a clue, the Game Master flashes back to the initial episode that started everything. Instead of being observers in a narrative, however, the Game Master allows the players to assume the roles of the characters involved in the past.

They can play through the scenario or scene that leads up to the clue that their contemporary selves discovered.

Admittedly, the flashback episode might require some scripting to keep the players from drifting too far from the primary story thread. Additionally, Game Masters should not run a flashback episode if they believe the players will deliberately screw around with the story for their own amusement.

There are two goals with this form of flashback and the Game Master should handle each differently. In the first method, the flashback sequence is for the benefit of the characters. The characters are remembering past events, for example, which are being played out in the flashback scenes. In this case, there needs to be some link between the flashback and the present day games, be it one of the characters, an NPC survivor, or detailed records of the events. Since the flashback provides the characters with information from the past, there needs to be some vehicle for this information to reach the characters.

In the second form, the flashback sequences are for the benefit of the players, not their characters. In this case, it is not important if the characters learn something from the flashback. The GM is trying to provide the players with background for the present day adventure. For example, the characters could be investigating a murder and, just when they are about to discover a clue, the GM might flash them back to a police investigation in the late 1800's with similar circumstances and clues. The GM does this to inform the players that the killer has some link to the past, thus providing insight to the production's setting rather than information about the adventure. The characters do not need this information to solve the crime, but it does help the players understand the GM's production.

When a GM decides to use either flashback technique, he or she should provide the players with enough information regarding who their new characters are and what they should be doing. Without this information, the players may waste a great deal of time blindly wandering around without knowing where their characters are or what is going on.

The second flashback method that Game Masters can use requires far less work, but can be fun nonetheless. In this scenario, the episode begins with the characters already in a difficult situation or encounter. They might be caught in a dead-end alley facing the Emperor's Royal Guard, for example, or they could be standing over a corpse while facing police officers who have their guns drawn. The Game Master allows the characters one action to react, before rewinding the entire episode to the beginning. Play now proceeds towards the event that began the game session. Now the players know that something terrible is in store for them, and that heightens their anticipation.

If the players manage to circumvent the end-situation entirely, the Game Master can always add "but who said that cut scene had anything to do with this episode?"

## CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Character advancement is just as important in *HKAT!* as it is in more traditional role-playing games. In this case, the actor is advancing while he or she trains in real life to better equip him or herself for the next big blockbuster part. In a television series, however, character advancement can be applied straight to the character's role, reflecting character development in the hands of a good writer.

The GM may award all characters one bonus Character Point every three to five role-playing sessions and one bonus Skill Point every couple of sessions. Each player can assign these Character Points to Stats or Attributes immediately or accumulate them for future use.

The point cost for increasing a Statistic, Attribute, or Skill is identical to the cost during character creation. Players can assign advancement points to Statistics, Attributes, or Skills their characters use most often. Alternatively, players can rationalize their decision to the GM should their character acquire a new Attribute or Skill. The GM, however, can veto the idea or require the character to perform certain game activities in order to support the acquisition of a new Attribute. At the GM's option, characters can also use bonus Character Points to

remove Defects that are no longer appropriate to their character concept.

GMs can award points more frequently for faster character advancement or less frequently for slower character advancement. The GM also has the option of rewarding exceptionally talented or active players with an extra advancement point or two.

## CHARACTER DEATH

Characters die. It is a fact of gaming, and it makes for good drama. *Hong Kong Action Theatre!*, however, is unique in that the role dies and not the actor. The player's core concept always remains intact unless he or she decides to retire his or her actor, and create someone new. Otherwise, the role is generally short-term and only lives for the duration of the movie. Thus, player attachment is minimal.

The only time this might be false is when the production is a sequel franchise or television series. In these campaign types, a role's death might upset a player whose actor and role persona were virtually synonymous. In this situation, Game Masters should remember the following advice, and use or ignore it as he or she sees fit.

Killing roles on a simple dice roll is frustrating, but then how does the GM avoid eliminating characters without compromising the tension of potential failure? First, the GM should avoid placing characters in needless danger and luck-of-the-dice death traps. There should always be a chance for failure and dangerous consequences to certain actions, but the GM can avoid doomsday scenarios with some foresight. By forcing an average character role to face a mob of Uzi-toting gangsters with his or her back against the wall, the GM virtually ensures the character's demise. By giving the character forewarning, or by allowing him or her to play a game of cat-and-mouse, however, the GM now offers the player the ability to outthink or outmanoeuvre the opponents

Likewise, bad situations do not have to be insurmountable. If the character drives off a cliff, for example, it is extremely unlikely he or she could survive. The GM can circumvent this by allowing the character a Stat Check to avoid the problem in the first place or,

failing that, use some other contrivance to rescue the character. The car could land on an outcropping, for example, or the character has two turns to escape before the car falls. This is not especially realistic, but that does not matter to high-action *HKAT!* movies.

## GIVE THE PLAYERS FAIR WARNING

Sometimes players do not recognize the potential consequences of their actions. While that may be truer to life, it again makes for unsatisfying play experience. Thus, GMs should offer their players a chance to reconsider monumentally rash choices.

If a player is about to do something the GM knows is dangerously stupid, he or she can stop the game for a moment and ask "are you sure that's what you want to do?" Usually, this is enough to give the player pause to analyze the potential consequences. Sometimes, the GM should also imply the likeliest outcome with, "you realize that X could happen?" where X is a bad result of the action. If the players persist, however, then the GM can proceed with a clear conscious knowing that he or she warned them of a potentially bad decision.

Warning players in advance of danger is also a good technique. If the Game Master knows there are lethal obstacles sure to arise in an evening's session (like a gunfight in freefall), he or she should warn the players in advance. Something as simple as "Warning: tonight's session may be hazardous to your character's health. Not even your stuntmen or women want a part of this, so don't play stupidly." This alerts the players to impending nastiness, and that their characters need to be especially vigilant. If the GM plans to make matters more difficult than usual, the players deserve a warning in advance so they can play to the best of their abilities.

## NOBODY DIES

Nobody dies, but that does not mean everyone is a winner either. This style of campaign is where the Game Master agrees not to kill any character unless the player gives his or her consent. Like any real television or movie production, the audience would be horribly disappointed if the stars of the story died before reaching the end (another way of looking at it is the actors are locked into a three-year contract).



At first this might sound like a blessing, allowing players to act with impunity, but the truth is, it gives the Game Master more power than ever. He or she can now throw anything and everything at the characters without worrying about killing them. Campaigns of this vein are usually more thrilling, because the Game Master is no longer worried about accidentally killing characters; he or she has greater room to manoeuvre. While true that some players might adopt Superman complexes (where they believe themselves immune to everything) and walk into every situation with guns a'blazing, the fact is death should be the last thing to fear. They may find themselves paralyzed like Chow Yun-fat in *Once a Thief*, shell-shocked like Jet Li in *Tai Chi Master*, or tortured by a demon for centuries like Joey Wong in *A Chinese Ghost Story*. There are far worse fates than death in a movie.

That said, there are a number of techniques for circumventing certain death. The first option is the "badly-mangled" routine where the incident thrashes the character to within an inch of his or her life. There is precedence for this in reality where parachutes failed to open but the jumper miraculously survived the earthward plummet, where people survived lightning strikes and even explosions, and where babies emerged unscathed after falling from several stories. These are admittedly freak situations, but movies are supposedly about these very turns in reality and logic.



A second option is the narrowly averting tragedy option where the character manages to avoid the deadly situation entirely. The car plummets off the cliff, but the character leaps out in time to grab the edge; the bullet hits the character, but a gun/whisky flask/bible in his or her jacket takes the brunt of the impact; just before the explosion hits, the character leaps out the window and falls into the ever-convenient pile of waiting trash. Whatever the event, there is always some twist of luck that allows the character to emerge unharmed.

The third option in this scenario is the "I'm Mark's twin brother, Ken." The look-alike switch is always available for players who want to keep their roles after they die, and was used in *A Better Tomorrow I & II* to justify the return of Chow Yun-fat in the sequel (he died in the original). Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood are no better than each other for such contrivances, but given movie audiences have greater ability for suspension of disbelief, this is a viable explanation for popular stars.

### THE UNAVOIDABLE

Sometimes, death is inescapable. There is no way to prevent a character's death, and that is fine. People die, both in real life and in literature, and there is no reason why it cannot and should not happen in a production.

To deal with inevitable death, the GM should not simply kill the character like it was a passing fancy. He or she should give the player a chance to play the scene. In other words, allow the character to go out in style.

If the character dies by falling off a cliff, for example, play up the dramatic tension by describing the character's scramble to hang on to a slippery outcropping. Let the player relate the character's fears, hopes, and final thoughts while he or she falls. If another character is trying to help, allow them a final word while one futilely reaches for the other. If a character is shot, the GM should allow him or her to die in someone's arms after he or she related a final confession or statement.

Give the character's death meaning even if the death was meaningless. By playing out a death scene, the Game Master allows the player to achieve closure with

the character. This also impacts the rest of the cast heavily; everyone is absorbed in the character's death. The finality and injustice of death can create a powerful scene that allows players to explore new facets of their characters, and leave them with an unforgettable role-playing experience. If a character is going to die, the GM might as well benefit from it instead of treating it like a plot wrinkle.

This applies to NPCs as well. The Game Master can grant beloved non-player characters their one final chance to express their feelings; this is especially crushing if they reveal something about themselves that none of the other characters knew (like unrealized love or admiration, a secret, or hidden fear). Villains can likewise spit at the victorious characters with their last breath. Both NPC types can offer some important clue or information just before dying to take the story in a new direction. After all, if a dying character says something cryptic just before expiring, the characters cannot very well ask him or her what was meant.

The bottom line is Game Masters should use death as a tool in productions, not an inevitability. Characters will die — that is unavoidable. GMs can use the threat of death to heighten the tension of the game, however, and the notion of death itself to explore themes of closure, human frailty, the struggle of life, and grief. Death should never be a random production event. Instead, it is a literary vehicle to help the Game Master drive home certain concepts and even game themes.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

As mentioned previously, the Game Master assumes many hats, but the key concern should be having fun. The following suggestions are special events and one-shot recommendations to take games beyond standard role-playing experience. Since *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* is fiction within fiction, many of the events described herein take advantage of that reality. Mostly, though, they are meant as fun events to draw the player group closer together and remind everyone that this is just a game. Here are some ideas beyond the standard gameplay expected from the GM as director.



## AUDITIONS

Every actor knows about that nervous moment when he or she walks into the room with the waiting writer, director, and producer for his or her audition. Script in hand, the actor introduces him or herself, and talks about past roles and experiences in what is supposed to be an icebreaker. The actor then performs a monologue or reads lines from the script. The lucky ones receive a call-back or second audition, while the unlucky actors earn a flat smile and the ever-dreaded "we'll call you."

This special event is for players who want a break from the routine of bidding Star Power to earn their roles. Instead, their actors want filmmakers to treat them like professionals, and decide to go through the audition process. For this, the Game Master should give players forewarning at the end of a movie, telling them the next session requires them to audition for their parts. The Game Master should have the roles ready so players have an idea of who they want to play. Next game session, they must perform a monologue from a movie or play, or read lines from a script they believe is appropriate to the part (this just requires a trip to the library where books and resource material on monologues, and even some scripts, are available). It is not necessary for the players to memorize their lines, just that they perform them.

While the GM may act as judge, he or she can either ask the players to vote for their favourite performances via secret ballot, or invite friends not involved in the production to participate (thus keeping the vote non-partisan). In either case, the point is to have fun and turn the session into a true film-making experience.

## GUEST DIRECTORS

The Game Master can ask his or her players to direct a movie or episode in one of two fashions. In the first method, the Game Master still runs the session, but the player "directing" the episode describes the action and the scene. This introduces an interesting and different perspective to the game and makes the episode unique. Each player brings distinct gifts and ideas to the table; by letting them direct an episode now and again, they can express themselves more fully. Additionally, it allows Game Masters to include those players who might be on

the periphery of the action. An extremely creative group of players might even vie for the opportunity to direct, each one stamping his or her personal vision to the episode, and making *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* uniquely theirs.

The second method is more radical, and involves the player becoming Game Master. Although it is much harder to accomplish, the rewards can be incredible. Game Masters should ask players privately for movie/episode ideas. If the GM likes the concept, he or she can play an NPC while the player runs an episode.

In this circumstance, the Game Master should place any restrictions on the player he or she feels are necessary. Two recommended examples are 1) the story cannot directly involve the GMing player's character, and 2) the episode cannot kill off another player's character. For the former exception, players cannot be expected to effectively run their characters as a protagonist while acting impartially. Few people like it when the GM uses his or her pet NPC as the focus of an adventure so why should that change if a player takes over the role of GM for a session? For the latter exception, when one player is responsible for killing another's character, it establishes animosity, and could upset the group dynamics.

If the GM succeeds at rotating players as guest directors, then he or she is truly a producer (making the decisions on the focus for each session). Unfortunately, there are no hard rules for this technique. As a general guideline, the Game Master should not reveal too much background information to the player-director lest the current story arcs lose their impact. Game Masters should also work with the player-directors to integrate their twists as seamlessly as possible. After that, it is a matter of personal taste and skill as to how Game Masters use guest GMs.

Another option is to invite a person outside the game to direct an episode now and again. If the Game Master has a friend who would like to play, but cannot attend regularly, he or she can fill them in on the details and run the occasional episode. While it may feel like the Game Master is surrendering control of his or her production, it gives the GM a new perspective on the production.



Due to the potential of a difference in the game's atmosphere, GMs should consider introducing guests between two major story arcs. This ensures that the mood and feel of a campaign remains consistent while still imparting a unique perspective on matters every once in a while.

Additionally, an outside player could also make regular guest appearances on the "show." This has the benefit of adding to the group dynamics, giving players new perspectives into the current situation, and treating the episode as a special event.

## MOVIE NIGHT

The ultimate in socializing, the group gathers together and either watches a video at someone's home or goes to the cinema. After seeing the movie (Hong Kong or Western), they try creating their own version of the film, assuming the roles of the lead characters. The GM can alter events to keep the action exciting, but the players will usually throw in enough alternate situations and solutions to change the movie's initial direction. Finally, the players will be able to prove that the star of the movie shouldn't have gone into that alley alone....

While GMs may feel that only action movies are best suited for such activities, he or she should remember that Kevin Costner's *The Bodyguard* inspired Jet Li's *Bodyguard from Beijing*, while *Message in a Bottle* also found homage in Jackie Chan's *Gorgeous*. Whether the Game Master uses elements from the movie, or rips it off entirely is up to him or her. In either case, this establishes a great situation for improvisational role-playing while still providing the GM with a safety net.

## RUINED ENDING

The movie wraps up for post-production and the actors return home for a much-needed break before the next film.

Then the actors receive a call later that week; an accident ruined the last reel and the director is calling everyone back in to reshoot the



ending. Naturally, the actor playing the villain disliked his or her death scene or the facility with which the actors killed him or her, so the actor convinced the scriptwriters to change some parameters from the last shoot. Maybe the villain is suddenly more powerful and threatening, or he or she happens to know the heroes' plans. Regardless, the actors must replay the end conflict with different parameters in place. Conversely, the players may also take a different tact this time around and avoid several pitfalls along the way that hurt their characters.

A variation of this event is re-shooting an alternate ending. The director and producer in this case disagreed with the movie's direction, and each demanded their own ending. The result was an alternate finale where the characters might change the focus of the movie through role-playing, die instead of survive, survive instead of die, etc.

### GUERRILLA FILMING

In this variation, the director is shooting the movie illegally, and is trying not to attract the authorities' attention. If he or she does, the entire production must quickly relocate sets and film elsewhere to avoid arrests and fines, which sometimes results in choppy continuity and seemingly radical shifts in the plot line.

The principal trick behind this event is that whenever a player rolls a natural 12 (boxcars), his or her character fumbled in a big way. Maybe the actor tripped, hurting him or herself; perhaps the stunt backfired or prop malfunctioned, endangering innocent lives; maybe the police simply responded to a complaint from a local citizen and are coming to investigate. Regardless, the actors, crew, and entire set must relocate elsewhere, bringing fights and chase scenes to an abrupt halt, ending dialogues or scenes, etc. How does it appear on film? Why in the form of an unexpected plot twist that the GM and players must now incorporate into the movie of course.

To carry this off successfully, the Game Master must be willing and capable of improvising the session. The so-called "plot twist" can be anything from the arrival of a new character to an abrupt chase scene that conveniently brings the characters to another location. The fun in this is that the Game Master is now subject to unexpected turn-of-events created by the players.

### GOLDEN HORSE AWARDS

Although not a "true" gaming session in the strictest definition of the word, this is a fun event allowing players to recount their favourite moments and roles from the last few movies (the more they participated in the better), and stresses the camaraderie of the gaming experience. This event is called the Golden Horse Awards, and it is Hong Kong's premier gala to recognize excellence in movies and acting. Think of it as the Pacific Rim's version of the Academy Awards.

The session before the Golden Horse Awards, the Game Master announces the special event, and asks the players to prepare a list for their choice in Best Movie (adventure), Best Performance (by the player's actor), Best Fight Choreography (fight sequence), Most Memorable Scene, etc. by drawing on previous adventures. The following session, the players gather for a potluck or informal game where they sit around and talk about their favourite stories or events in a game based on the available categories. Then the session begins with the GM playing reporter on the "red carpet," and interviewing the actors before the show starts. This is to generate excitement about the evening's events.

Following the interviews, the Game Master hosts an auction where the players bid Star Power to win in various categories like Best Performance or Best Movie. The prestige of winning a Golden Horse Award in this case translates as game-mechanic "prizes" for players to use towards their actors. Depending of the Game Masters willingness, prizes might include:

- Ten free Dice Re-Rolls, but no more than twice a session.
- Ten free Minor Script Rewrites, but no more than twice a session.
- Two free Major Script Rewrites, but no more than once a session.
- Starring role in a movie (one tailor-made for that actor's skills and abilities) with no Star Power bid required.
- Ten free Star Power points.
- Ten additional Character Points for their actor's next Role Package.



The Game Master should keep these awards a secret to prevent players from directly underbidding the prize by its equivalent value in Star Power (thereby bottlenecking the bidding process). Conversely to prevent players from overbidding on prizes (e.g. Spending more Star Points than a prize's worth), the Game Master should verify who has the greatest Star Power in the group, then create rewards that potentially exceed the maximum values in Star Power equivalent. For example, if one character has the highest number of Star Power at 11, then the GM can safely offer three Major Script Rewrites (15 Star Power value) as a prize without fear of the player feeling gypped.

The other option for awards is each player writes down three of his or her favourite choices for each category like Best Performance or Best Stunt. The one rule is players can only vote for themselves once in each category, with the other two votes going for someone else's performance or stunt sequence. The GM then tallies the votes together and chooses two or three of the most popular selections of each category. First and second prize receive smaller rewards like one Major Script Rewrite for first prize and three Minor Script Rewrites for second (for example). This prevents players from accumulating too many rewards from multiple wins. The inherent danger with this variant, however, is some players may feel snubbed or cheated for not winning. Then again, after all awards ceremonies, isn't there an actor or two who feels snubbed...





## UNFINISHED SCRIPTS

This is another experiment in improvisational role-playing and Game Mastering. Actors and directors who have undergone any stage training often play different improvisational games designed to increase their skills and proficiency in the performance arts, or to simply help the group bond. This is a valuable lesson for role-players who improvise entire movies based on minimal stimulus from the Game Master. Therefore, these games are methods of honing one's skills as player and GM, and helping improve the group dynamic.

"Unfinished scripts" is one event with multiple variants depending on the skill of the Game Master and his or her group. At its most basic level, the Game Master brings ten pages from an already published script, which is usually enough to introduce the major characters and general plot-line. Scripts are generally available at the library, at a bookstore, or perhaps even on-line. The actors then read the roles the GM ascribed to them, and continue playing the movie where the script leaves off. With practice, the Game Master can then use a script with fewer pages, or even take pages from the middle and begin the new movie from there.

A more advanced option uses the descriptions on the back of a video or DVD sleeve. The GM can take the sleeve from one movie, generate roles (both listed and probable) based on the sleeve's information, and launch the movie after reading the description's opening, and often establishing line. Jet Li's *Fist of Legend* begins "When Chen (Li) discovers that his beloved teacher and mentor has been murdered, he swears to avenge his death!" *City on Fire* starts with "Chow Yun Fat [sic] stars as an undercover cop who infiltrates a gang of violent bandits led by Danny Lee (*The Killer*)."

Adding further difficulty to these events, the GM can rule that any natural roll of 12 (a fumble) automatically changes the direction of the film. For this, the Game Master must have three to five movie sleeve descriptions ready of like genre, though they do not have

to be Hong Kong films. For instance, if the GM decides to base the adventure off the description for Jackie Chan's surprisingly sombre *Crime Story*, other cop movies might include *Hard Boiled*, *The Big Heat*, *Organized Crime and Triad Bureau*, and *Rock 'n Roll Cop*. A period piece involving Fong Sai-yuk can include any number of movies recounting this hero's exploits.

With this variant, a fumble means the Game Master must now introduce a new game element from a randomly drawn movie. In *Crime Story* for example, Jackie Chan suspects his police partner is the criminal mastermind; that suddenly becomes a new plot twist after a fumble. In *Rock n' Roll Cop*, Anthony Wong discovers his ex-girlfriend is involved with gun smugglers. Now suddenly, there is more to the character's roles than initially revealed, as Jackie Chan finds his ex-girlfriend running guns for his partner; the players must factor these changes into their characters while the GM incorporates these new elements into the story.

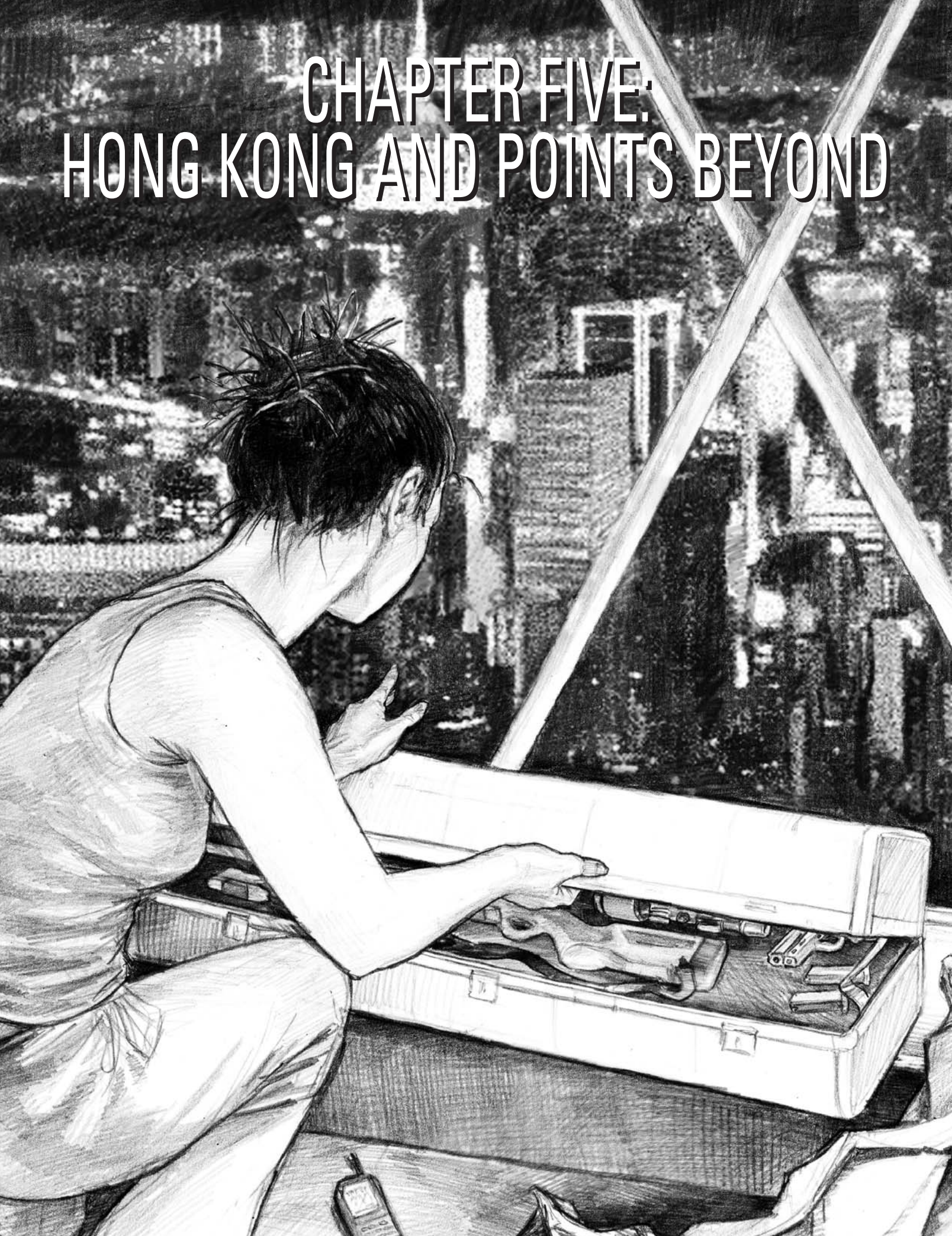
If the Game Master wants to choose from a wide assortment of movies without photocopying boxes each time, there are two options available. He or she can either check the website for online distributors of Asian films and print out the movie descriptions for sale, or purchase a guide like *Hong Kong Babylon*, which contains filmographies for various actors, directors, and producers, along with 300 movie synopses.

## KILL-KILL-KILL-A-THON

The movie's plot is tissue thin, but the roles start the adventure running, and do not stop until they die. The GM gives the Star Power reward to whoever survives the longest, though Game Masters should warn players they cannot increase their own chances by killing or betraying other players. Anyone who does forfeits his or her Star Power prize at the end of this death marathon. This style of game play may generate friction within the group, however, and create an unhealthy level of competition between players who feel slighted. The Game Master should be careful when employing this technique.



# CHAPTER FIVE: HONG KONG AND POINTS BEYOND





# HONG KONG HISTORY

As recently as 1840, Hong Kong was little more than a few hundred agricultural villages with a total population under 7,500. The British called it “a barren rock,” and it was far removed from the high culture present in other parts of China.

## FISHING VILLAGE OR TRADE CENTRE?

The history of Hong Kong and its surrounding areas springs into Westerner thought only towards the end of the sixteenth century, near when European trade and exploration expeditions “discovered” the riches of Asia. Yet there is evidence Neolithic tribes first inhabited the region from about 4000 BC, and survived by hunting, followed next by the seafaring Yue people who fished the rich coastland.

Hong Kong itself may not have existed as the West came to recognize it centuries later, but it played a minor role in trade for generations of leaders. The Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) established active trade relationships with Arabs who journeyed to the area, while during the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD) the first Cantonese settlers arrived to make permanent homes on the rocky land. It was near the end of the Song Dynasty that the child emperor was killed fleeing the Mongols, who had already sacked northern China and were intent on unifying the country under rule of Kublai Khan. The Mongol drive for territory forced many Chinese south into the region, creating a time of lawlessness and unrest — a period of increased pirate activity and many lost lives.

It was during the later years of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD) that European expansion finally brought extended and relatively respectful interactions between China and the West. Portuguese traders and Italian Jesuit missionaries were among the first since Marco Polo to make substantial in-roads with the Chinese leadership and engage in cultural exchanges.

China and Portugal established a secure enough trade relationship by 1557 that Portugal was allowed to establish a trading colony in Macau. Britain lagged behind in its trade relations with China enough that it took until 1685 to establish limited trade. It was during

this time that the Ming Dynasty fell, and, in 1669, people forced from their homes by imperial edict could now venture back into the coastal territory. It still took until 1714 before the British East India Company could build its own trade station in Guangzhou.

## THE OPIUM WAR AND THE BRITISH TAKEOVER

Silk, tea, and other hot commodities from the Orient kept the balance of trade in China’s favour throughout most of the Western world; despite European’s desire to expand their influence, the Chinese resisted. Through a combination of genuine disinterest in Western goods and a rigidly isolationist trade policy, the Chinese maintained the upper hand in European trade dealings — they simply wanted nothing of what the Far West had to offer.

Free-trade proponents from Europe felt that China had established an utterly unfair trade method, called the Canton System. This policy restricted all foreign trade to the port of Canton. Foreign merchants were confined to their factories in the waterfront district of Canton, could not bring their families with them, could not learn the Chinese language, and could only deal with specially-appointed brokers franchised by the Imperial Government. People called these brokers *hong* merchants, and their firms *hongs*. At no time could Europeans deal directly with Chinese retailers. Additionally, foreigners had to pay cash for all of their purchases.

Opium changed all that. It became the weapon with which the West fought back, “balancing” the trade deficit in a most unscrupulous way. Although the conflict is commonly known as the Opium War, the fact is that opium was merely an excuse for a conflict. In spite of an imperial edict, this “foreign mud” continued flowing into China through Western traders and corrupt or complacent Chinese officials at a staggering rate — some tens-of-thousands of chests of the drug each year. Finally, the Emperor dispatched the governor of Hunan province to handle the situation, who, in turn, responded by seizing and publicly destroying over 20,000 chests of foreign-owned opium.



Once Britain, the most powerful naval force in the world at that time, lured China into a conflict, they shook the Middle Kingdom from their position of superiority. Fortunately, the war did not last long. With British lives at stake, parliament was forced to send more troops to China, and a 4000-man expeditionary force arrived from India to demand compensation for the lost opium. The soldiers attacked forts up and down the Pearl River until reaching Canton, while more ships sailed north and blockaded ports along the Chinese coast. Finally, when British ships were within reach of Beijing at the mouth of the Yangtze River, China agreed to negotiate. The result was the Treaty of Nanjing. In addition to securing Hong Kong, the British also won a repayment of cash and the right for British citizens in China to be tried in a British court. It is not an overstatement to say that access to Hong Kong as a trading port was the least important of these concessions at the time.

## THE HEYDAY OF COLONIALISM

Within five years of the British landing in Hong Kong, the population more than tripled. During mainland conflicts, such as the Taiping Rebellion (1859-1865 AD), refugees brought Hong Kong's population up to over 100,000. The Convention of Peking essentially legalized opium, securing the opium traders' profits at detriment to the health of addicts. The bubonic plague and regular outbreaks of malaria still could not diminish the colony's explosive growth; by 1895, Hong Kong had gone from sleepy fishing villages to the world's fourth largest port, helped in no small part by the opening of the Suez canal. With the beginning of the twentieth century drawing near, Hong Kong had acquired new-found importance in the world.

## REVOLUTION, OCCUPATION, AND CIVIL WAR

Civil war and social unrest on the mainland forced Hong Kong to grow even faster by the turbulent year of 1911 when the Manchu dynasty of the Qings came to an end. Over 500,000 lived in the colony at this point. Trade shifted away from opium, but the political climate on the mainland had become more intolerant of the island's excesses. When revolutionary thought finally came to the forefront of the political scene, the mainland turned

against Hong Kong altogether; the resulting Boxer Rebellion ushered in a new level of hatred and resentment against outsiders such as Christian missionaries and European businessmen. In 1926, China boycotted trade with Hong Kong, cutting off not only a lucrative business, but also the colony's main food source. The boycott did not last long, but it did affect the colony's stability.

Hong Kong's growing pains were nothing compared to the crisis following the Japanese occupation of Shanghai in 1937 when a sudden flood of refugees descended upon the colony. During a four-year period the population grew to 1.65 million. Japan's aggressive expansionism was a mounting concern for the colony's administration, but truthfully there was little they could do. During ten years of nervous anticipation, Japan slowly pushed down the Chinese coast until it reached Hong Kong. On December 8th, 1941, the Japanese invaded, inflicting heavy casualties on the defending British forces. The Japanese army overran the border and had effectively taken the entire colony within a few short weeks. On Christmas day, the British surrendered. Six thousand people in the colony had died during the invasion, and another nine thousand were imprisoned. The Japanese interned any British civilians left behind in Stanley Prison on the island.

This was Hong Kong's darkest hour. The occupation continued until the end of World War II, and the surrender of the Japanese to Allied forces in 1945. By that time, the population of the colony had been slashed to a mere 600,000 people.

## POST WAR BOOM

Post-war Hong Kong was just as fraught with turmoil as the years leading up to the end of the war. Following the Japanese surrender, as many as 100,000 residents returned every month. With the communist push on the mainland and the resulting social unrest, the influx of residents and refugees continued unabated.

The birth of Red China created an influx of well-to-do Chinese who brought with them the money and ideas that would shape the colony for the remaining decade. This put Hong Kong in a difficult position. Most of the Chinese refugees were vehemently anti-Communist, but

at the same time, Hong Kong depended on the mainland for its survival. Hong Kongers recognized that a new government hostile to both unabashed capitalism and western influence at its doorstep could spell disaster for the region. Amazingly, the armed forces of the People's Republic of China (PRC) did not roll into Hong Kong, and the colony went about the business of re-establishing itself.

Hong Kong's main problem was, and continues to be, population growth. Between 1945 to 1960, Hong Kong's population soared from 600,000 post-war residents to three million people. Immediately following Japan's withdrawal, people slowly filtered back to Hong Kong from neighbouring Macau and rural China, but the birth of Communist China in 1949 created a deluge of capitalist refugees. To worsen matters, when Beijing sided with North Korea during the Korean War, the UN's subsequent trade embargoes against China cut Hong Kong from its principle customer. It was no longer the Western gateway into the Middle Kingdom. Fortunately, the savvy entrepreneurs who escaped the communists' so-called Cultural Revolution capitalized on Hong Kong's cheap labour force to create inexpensive electronics, watches, and textiles. This success firmly established the colony's economy on a global scale, but at an ugly cost. Working conditions for refugees were downright Dickensian with child labour, 16-hour workdays, poor working conditions, etc. Global watch dogs eventually forced Hong Kong to address and rectify this problem, but by then the colony was an Asian gem.

Hong Kong continued serving as a refugee destination point. During food shortages in 1962, for example, Mainland China opened its borders for 25 days, allowing 70,000 expatriates to cross over to Hong Kong. Later, in 1980, the colony declared that any Mainlander who managed to sneak across Red China's heavily secured border into Hong Kong's rural areas could stay and work. The influx of Chinese refugees was augmented by the arrival of Vietnamese "boat people" fleeing the occupation of their homeland. Between 1975 and 1982, 100,000 Vietnamese arrived in Hong Kong through the island's open door policy. While the colony's government allowed the majority to work until they moved into other countries, 14,000 found permanent homes in HK. Eventually, the influx of Vietnamese Boat People overburdened the immigration quotas for various Asian

countries, forcing Hong Kong to detain 20,000 of its most recent arrivals. Housing them in places like Happy Valley's Lai Tai Estates, these refugee camps were nothing more than thinly disguised prison camps and squatter communities. Eventually, Hong Kong's overtaxed population could only return the refugees to Vietnam, amid outcries from the international community, just before the colony's transfer back to China's control.

## ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS

With the emergence of Communist China and its Cultural Revolution in 1949, Hong Kong found itself in an awkward situation. The first stemmed from its proximity to Mainland China and the recent ideological upheaval that it engendered across Asia. Following the UN's trade embargo against China, Hong Kong lost a valuable avenue of commerce, while still resting near the maw of this stirring dragon. If China ever reared its head and raged against the world, it would consume Hong Kong, its wayward child, first. This fear almost saw fruition in 1967 when 300 Chinese fanatics and sympathizers, inspired by the zealous Red Guard and armed with automatic rifles, penetrated three kilometres into the New Territories. Eventually, Hong Kong's police prevailed and restored order, but it left the colony with an uneasy sense of its own vulnerabilities.

China, however, went back to sleep, leaving Hong Kong untouched until 1976 and Chairman Mao Zedong's death. His successor, Deng Xiaoping, opened China to tourism and foreign investments in 1978 in the hopes of bringing the Middle Kingdom into the 20th Century. The colony's geographic importance once again surged to the fore and Hong Kong returned as the premier Western bridge and waypoint into this untapped, virgin territory. Many of HK's businesses moved their factories to the Mainland where they found cheaper labour, while foreign investors piled into the city and surrounding territories to take advantage of its proximity to China. The efforts capitalizing on China's new policies were primarily attempts to monopolize segments of China's vast consumer base, but they also hid those investors scrambling to make a profit before Hong Kong returned to Chinese control in 1997.



Technically, the handover strictly applied to the New Territories, which constituted 97% of Hong Kong's available lands. Without them, however, Hong Kong was nothing but a withered shadow of its former importance. Additionally, when British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher visited Deng Xiaoping in Beijing, the Chairman made it clear China planned to reclaim all of Hong Kong. He remained entrenched in his decision, and even announced that if Britain and China could not reconcile a decision by 1984, China would make the decision itself. With little recourse, Britain eventually agreed to return Hong Kong, much to the dismay of many locals. China, however, instituted the "One Country, Two Systems" policy where Hong Kong would retain some autonomy as a free port and remain capitalist for a period of 50 years following the handover (Deng called it "Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong"). This included the right of free speech, unrestricted travel, protection of private property, pursuit of religion, the right to assemble, etc.

Hong Kong remained uncertain about the handover, and saw its Stock Market and currency plummet, forcing the government to intercede and stabilize the HK dollar against the US dollar. Matters did not improve following the 1989 Tiananmen Square

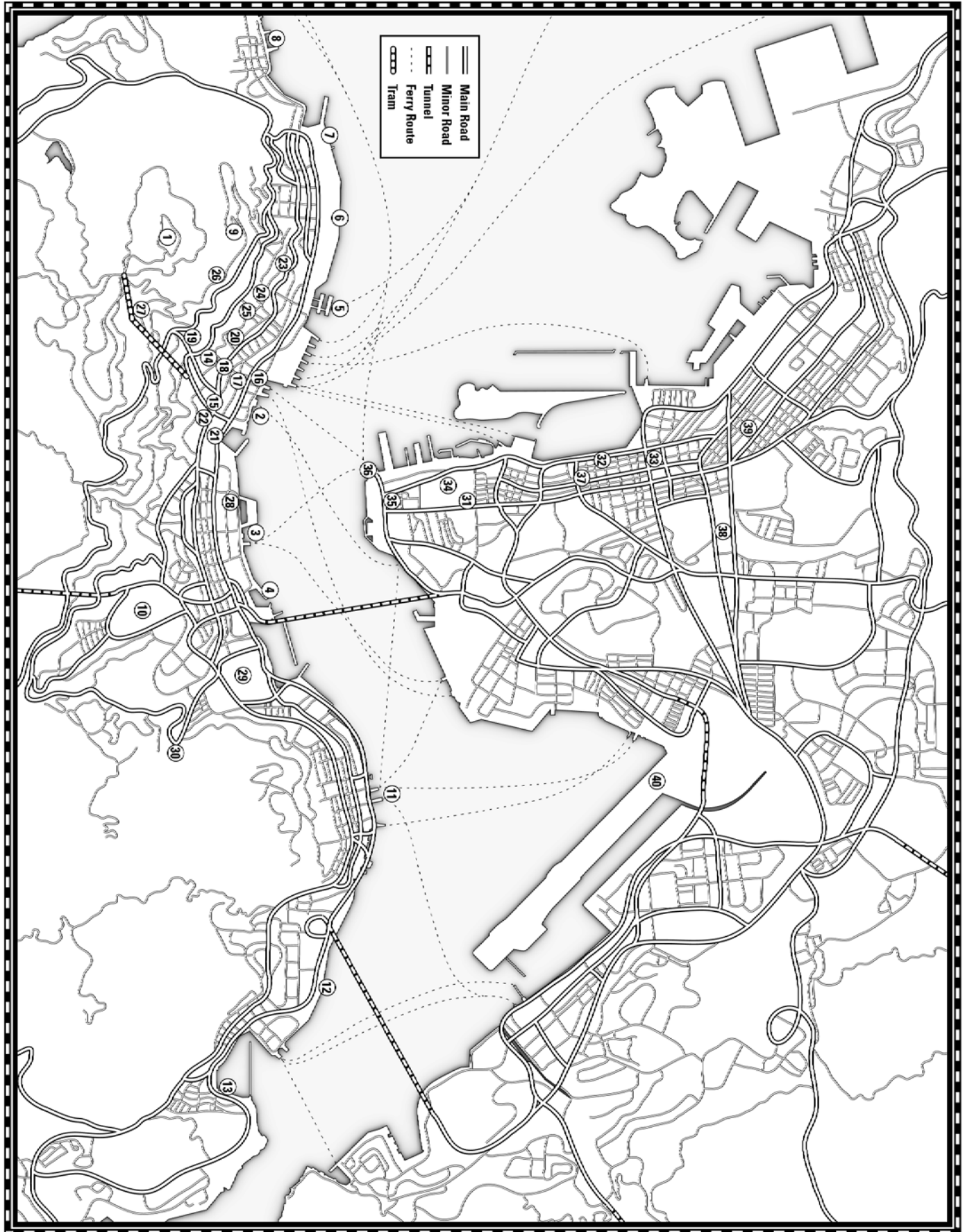
massacre that sparked demonstrations in Hong Kong and sent its Stock Market tumbling 22% in one day. Land prices also suffered, and a record number of skilled locals immigrated to Australia, North America, Singapore, New Zealand, and Britain. The Chinese Government later helped ease tensions by, among other things, investing in the HK \$160 billion Airport and Port Project designed to entice foreign investors back.

Despite the misgivings on both sides, July 1, 1997 came and went in an internationally televised event filled with fireworks and followed by torrential rain that dampened the grand entry of the People's Liberation Army. Soon after, when people realized China was holding true to her promise of keeping Hong Kong in the Special Administrative Region (SAR), many who left throughout the earlier decade returned from abroad, this time with a greater command of the English language and high-grade technical skills. Currently, the ever-present fear of the great red dragon is enough to keep tourism low, and force newspapers to censor themselves (only reporting good news). Couple this general unease with the virtual collapse of South-East Asia's economy in 1998, and Hong Kong is far quieter than it has been the last twenty years. Whether this awkward honeymoon is an indication of things to come, or a brief lull in Hong Kong's normally frenetic pace still remains to be seen.









## LEGEND FOR MAP OF HONG KONG/KOWLOON

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## AN OVERVIEW OF HONG KONG ISLAND

Hong Kong Island is without doubt the epicentre of the Special Administrative Region encompassing Kowloon, the New Territories, the Outlying Islands, and Hong Kong Island itself. It was here in 1841 that Charles Elliot planted the British Flag at Possession Point, and claimed Heung Gong (Cantonese for “Fragrant Harbour”) for the purpose of free trade with China. Today, the city that developed from that colony remains the most influential and important part of Hong Kong (SAR) — a massive complex of glass and steel stretching from the water’s edge to the heights of Victoria Peak.

In its entirety, the island makes up less than 9% of the former colony’s surface area (measuring only about 15 kilometres across by 11 kilometres wide), yet it contains over a third of the population. This figure is even more surprising when one realizes most of these people live on the island’s north face, and much of Hong Kong Island is steep, uninhabited mountains.

The island’s northern slope is one big city facing Kowloon across the harbour. The city’s heart is called the Central District, or sometimes “Victoria” — a name christened by the British who first landed here. Central District is Hong Kong’s main business centre, and most of the colony’s corporate deals transpire here, in Wan Chai, and in Causeway Bay (the two districts immediately east of Central).

Heading west from Central, travellers pass through Sheung Wan, the Western District, and Kennedy Town, collectively and simply known as “Western.” These are three of the city’s older sections where the ultra modern skyscrapers give way to smaller housing tenements, warehouses, food markets, and curio shops. It is where European influence is least felt.

Just south of the Central and Western Districts, the land slopes towards the top of Victoria Peak; about half way up are the Mid-Levels where the winding roads hide many of the city’s stately homes. Victoria Peak itself is only sparsely populated, but offers a fantastic view of Central down below. Only the richest and most powerful residents of the city can afford the colonial-style mansions and walled estates of “The Peak.”



Directly behind the district of Wan Chai is Happy Valley, which received its name in the 1840's from a group of European settlers hoping to avoid the malaria and congestion of the Western district. Today, it is a shopping haven, but also houses the famous Happy Valley Racecourse, where thousands of spectators flock each year to bet on the races.

On the far side of Causeway Bay is the district of North Point, considered one of the city's "Liberated Zones" (a name given to it because of its large Mainland Chinese population). Wan Chai and Western are the city's other two "Liberated Zones." East of here are the districts of Quarry Bay, Shau Kei Wan, and Chai Wan, which are strictly residential areas.

While the island's south side is not as heavily inhabited as the north, it is hardly empty. The town of Aberdeen, also called Heung Gong Tsai, (meaning "Little Hong Kong" in Cantonese) is home to about sixty thousand residents. The Aberdeen Harbour is one of the island's only natural typhoon shelters, making it a valuable landmark, especially for several thousand Tankas and Hoklos tribe members who live here aboard their sampans and junks.

East of Aberdeen is the small peninsula of Ocean Park, which contains the island's amusement park. This "Disneyland," Chinese theme park, aquarium, and waterslide playground all wrapped into one is serviced by the world's largest outdoor escalator as well as a cable car. Continuing east from Ocean Park are more recreational facilities — Deep Water Bay and Repulse Bay — which have some of the most beautiful and most crowded beaches on the island.

The southern tip of Hong Kong is the Stanley Peninsula and the town of Stanley. This is a quiet little community housing the island's maximum-security prison as well as several largely-European residential areas.

## THE CENTRAL DISTRICT

Central District, a tightly woven bed of streets and skyscrapers, is the financial and business centre of the colony. This was the first part of the island colonized by the British in the 1800s. Today, residents still considered it the "capital" of Hong Kong since most of the colony's

government operates alongside the corporate sector. The view of Central from Kowloon or Victoria Peak has become one of the standard establishing shots for countless movies filmed in Hong Kong.

Developers have reclaimed most of the land in Central and pushed the ocean further and further from the original water line over the years. Because of the constant need for space, every building in Central shoots skywards, and there are few old and decrepit buildings in the heart of downtown. In fact, except for one or two heritage buildings used by the government, everything is either shiny and new or just being built. Hong Kong has one of the most rapidly changing, most unique, and most expensive metropolises in the world.

Much of the movie *Chungking Express* takes place in Central. Despite the strength and increasing renown of the Hong Kong film industry, the Hong Kong government has given little more than tacit approval of outdoor filming on the streets. As a result, many directors resort to "guerrilla filming" without permits. In *Extreme Crisis*, for example, the production crew secretly filmed the scene where an explosion throws four parked cars into the air without a permit, on the streets of Central. During the filming of a similarly covert shoot in *Downtown Torpedoes* a stuntman died. The Hong Kong government did not give permission for the productions to use explosives, but the guerrilla filming went on as usual.

## THE WALKWAY

One of the best ways to move around Central is by elevated walkway — a complex web of footbridges connecting most buildings in this part of the town. From 6:00AM to 9:00PM pedestrians can travel the length of Central without ever touching the ground. They pass through office towers and downtown hotels along the way in glass-encased, air-conditioned walkways that shield local executives from the elements. This system of raised sidewalks is a vital part of life in Hong Kong, and moves pedestrians safely and efficiently through Central.

Enterprising peddlers eagerly sell their wares in this area. Many such "retailers" cannot afford a peddler's license and set up shop illegally. Some sell stolen property or pirated canto-pop CDs at phenomenally low prices. At

night, most of downtown's office towers lock their doors and restrict access to the upper footpaths, leaving entire sections deserted until first light. Lovers, members of organized crime, and other industrious individuals with the proper contacts can usually access these areas for all sorts of clandestine meetings and rendezvous.

### CARDBOARD SHANTYTOWN

A glamourless stretch of downtown central is the cardboard shantytown that has emerged between the Star Ferry Terminal and Blake Pier. Here one will find many of the city's poor, homeless, mentally ill, and destitute. Since Hong Kong has little in the way of social assistance — and hardly any mental health care programs — there are few avenues available for these people, and this short stretch of walkway is now their home.

### THE INLAND PARTS OF CENTRAL

Statue Square is among the rare "green" spots in all of Central with its fountain and few benches. The statue in the square's centre is a testament to the power of big business — it was a monument of Queen Victoria once, but now Sir Thomas Jackson, one of the first bankers to manage the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, occupies her place.

The seat of Hong Kong's power is across Des Voeux Road in three massive financial towers to the south. In the middle is the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank Tower — at one time the most expensive building in the world at a cost of one billion US dollars. Built in 1986 and designed by architect Norman Foster, the structure is like a suspension bridge, with no internal support beams. The first 20 floors of the interior are a giant atrium, with escalators rising to open-faced offices that overlook the middle. It is a truly incredible complex and a wonder of modern architecture that cries out to be featured prominently in an action plot.

The Shanghai and Hong Kong Bank Tower fully employs the careful design philosophy of *feng shui*, and was subject to the approval of a *feng shui* master before being built. The two stone lions guarding its entrance are from the bank's previous HQ, and protect the building from bad luck; even the placement of interior elevators followed the illustrious *feng shui* master's instructions.

### FENG SHUI

The China Bank is an excellent example of *feng shui* at work. Practitioners believe it is situated on the head of a sleeping dragon, a very brash move by the Chinese government. If the dragon sleeps peacefully, then the building benefits by collecting its breath, which is a good source of positive *chi*. If the dragon should ever awake, however, bad *feng shui* will undoubtedly befall those who work within. Since the building was completed, China has regained control of Hong Kong, so it appears their gamble has worked thus far. There is an excellent shot of the building in the opening scenes of *God of Cookery*.

### FURTHER INLAND

The southern tip of Central ends at the Zoological and Botanical Gardens, another landmark from Hong Kong's past. Central's chief nightspots are in Lan Kwai Fong. Peter Chan's *Twentysomething* is set in Lan Kwai Fong's club scene, and was very controversial following its release because the lifestyle it portrayed was so different from the majority of Hong Kongers' experiences. It is not nearly as shocking to Western sensibilities, however.

### EAST TO ADMIRALTY

Halfway between the Central and Wan Chai district is Admiralty, Hong Kong's second "big business" region. The most distinctive structures in Admiralty are the Lippo Centre, a pair of buildings previously owned by the troubled Australian entrepreneur Alan Bond. The buildings reputedly possess bad *feng shui* because of the sharp, unnatural design of their surfaces. Across Queensway, from the Lippo Centre, are more of Hong Kong's luxury hotels.

## THE WESTERN DISTRICT: SHEUNG WAN AND BEYOND

When the British first colonized Hong Kong Island, they landed here, a malaria-infected region that they quickly abandoned. Today, the Western District is anything but Western. After the British deserted it, the Chinese took over and made it theirs; it has remained such ever since. The further west one travels, the more Chinese the Western District becomes.

### SHEUNG WAN

Sheung Wan is the district closest to Central and officially begins west of Central Market. This is Hong Kong's last refuge for traditional Chinese craft-makers, a region of smoky shops and merchants tucked away among narrow, dingy lanes. Botham Strand is the centre of Hong Kong's snake trade with shops selling snake bladder soup or snake bile wine, which is said to bring vitality to the drinker. Hong Kong's Chinese populace firmly believe in the healing power of the snake.

Queen's Road West is the home of the Han Wen Eatery, a bird restaurant where patrons take a break while walking their birds. It is just this sort of location where John Woo filmed the opening teahouse shootout scene from *Hard Boiled*.

### THE UPPER SHEUNG WAN DISTRICT

From a distance, Mount Victoria's slopes look very steep. Fortunately, Ladder Street is actually a series of steps leading up to Caine Road. Built in the 19th century, the city originally hoped to ease the load on sedan chair bearers. Today it is the only street of its kind left in the colony.

A short way up Ladder Street is Lascar Row, better known in ancient times as "thieves alley." Now, Lascar Row and Ladder Street are oversized flea markets, and still very much a "thieves' market." Also situated in this district is the Man Mo Temple, dedicated to Man (God of Civil Servants and Literature, who represents education), and Mo (God of Martial Arts and War). This is one of Hong Kong's oldest buildings, and was constructed in 1840 before the colony even existed.

### TAI PING SHAN

Further up Ladder Street and to the west is the district of Tai Ping Shan, or "Peaceful Mouton." During the mid-1800's this served as haunt for some Hong Kong's roughest characters — the Triad gangs owned and operated this portion of the colony. This area holds many temples hidden amongst its side streets. The Kuan Yin Temple and Sui Tsing Paak Temple, which are off Tai Ping Shan Street, are typical examples of the district's small, smoky, religious shrines. The more popular Paak Sing or "hundred names" ancestral hall is more prominent, and used to store the bodies of those awaiting burial in China. Normally these types of halls are for a select clan or family, but this one is accessible to anyone, and holds the ancestral tablets of nearly 3000 people.

### VICTORIA PEAK AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

Situated behind and above Central, "The Peak," and surrounding areas are Hong Kong's ritzier neighbourhoods — the higher up one travels, the more expensive are the homes. If a person has a few hundred million Hong Kong dollars at his or her disposal and is looking for a place to call home, then the Peak is the premium choice. If, on the other hand, a person is financially secure but not rolling in dough, then the Mid-Levels or Wan Chai Gap might be more his or her style.

### THE PEAK

Crowning Hong Kong island is the Peak, an area blanketed in a network of scenic paths, quiet gardens, urban streets, and stately mansions. Overlooking downtown Central, the incredible view is among Hong Kong's greatest attractions for all but three months out of the year. That is when damp fogs cover the Peak since it is 5 degrees cooler than sea level.

The Peak Tram, built in 1888, runs from Central to a stop on the Peak 400 metres above sea level. Unfortunately, Hong Kong's entrepreneurs recognize the Peak's popularity, and have also built the Peak Galleria, a mall of expensive stores, restaurants, and art galleries.



## HOME-MADE MOVIES: STORM VELOCITY

Peter Mo, an up-and-coming sculptor, is hosting a gala premier of his work at the Peak Galleria. While the event is closed to the public and despite the threat of a typhoon, the mall is still a madhouse of high society art patrons, rich literati, social climbers, news teams, and police. Nobody seems especially worried about the storm since the designers built the Galleria to withstand 270 km/h winds. Nobody, however, expected a small army of well-armed kidnappers to swoop in either (well, maybe the audience did). Now, with the terrorists holding the assembly hostage for ransom and the storm holding everyone prisoner, the characters (maybe as police, news crews, rich elite, etc.) must find a way to deal with the kidnappers while keeping the body count low. Add to that a typhoon that is exceeding the Galleria's safety limits (Typhoon Wanda in 1962 hit peak gusts of 259 km/h), and explosives hidden throughout the mall, and the characters have their hands full. The final confrontation should occur on the mall's third-story viewing deck that offers a protected vista of Hong Kong down below, and the storm of the century.

## MID-LEVELS

The Mid-Levels are not as expensive as Victoria Peak, but are still a ritzy and high-priced part of town dotted with luxury homes and skyscrapers. Its most notable feature is the series of escalators and electronic walkways that dot the area. They can carry 30,000 people, and cost over HK\$200 million to build. Throughout the day, the escalator changes direction to meet the needs of the greatest human traffic flow — in the morning it goes down, by evening it heads up.

## WAN CHAI

Wan Chai, the district directly east of Central, is the infamous home of Suzy Wong, that loveable hooker with a heart of gold immortalized in Richard Mason's famous novel, and later the film, *The World of Suzy Wong*. Since the '40s, Wan Chai has been Hong Kong's red-light district, although some of its colour has faded. Today, glitzy neon signs and tourists still pack its narrow

streets, but it is certainly not the Wan Chai of old. The entertainment that propelled the district into notoriety is generally overpriced and underexposed. Wan Chai and Causeway Bay are now more popular as shopping venues for electronics and audio/visual goods.

## SEEDY WAN CHAI

Lockhart Road runs from Harcourt Garden at its most western point to Causeway Bay at its east. This is the legendary strip, where thousands of American, Australian and New Zealand soldiers "vacationed" while taking R&R during the Vietnam War. This is where tourists can find much of the island's nightlife and an ample number of bars, restaurants, and streetside food stalls cluttering the street.

## CULTURAL WAN CHAI

With the high price of real-estate in downtown Hong Kong, the city has been trying to clean up Wan Chai, converting it from a seedy brothel-zone to a sophisticated cultural centre with successful results. The Hong Kong Arts Centre on Harbour Road, for example, has a reputation as the island's premier venue for cultural events; next-door the Academy for Performing Arts trains young students in modern and classical music, dance, and acting. Both facilities stand where brothels once existed.

Just east of these cultural icons is one of the most extraordinary buildings in all of Asia — the 78 story Central Plaza. Made of reinforced concrete and measuring 374 metres in height, it is Asia's tallest building and the tallest concrete structure in the world.

## CAUSEWAY BAY

Most people consider Causeway Bay, the eastern end of Hong Kong's "interesting sites," a tourist trap. Originally "Causeway Bay" was just that — a real bay that the Cantonese called Tung Lo Wan. In the 1950s someone decided Hong Kong needed more space, and filled in the bay. For almost 20 years, the area remained sparsely developed, but when planners decided in the early 1970s that the 2-kilometre long Cross Harbour Tunnel would resurface in Causeway Bay, buildings sprouted up like weeds. Today the area is a nice mix of

office towers, residential apartments, and shopping centres. The *Young and Dangerous 3* roller-blade scene was filmed in Causeway Bay. In fact, it has served as the setting for much of the conflict and turf fighting in the *Young and Dangerous* movie series.

### VICTORIA PARK

Victoria Park, among the largest park spaces in Hong Kong, is well known for elderly Tai Chi enthusiasts practising their arts, public concerts and acrobatic shows (thanks to the Urban Services League), the HK International Kart Grand Prix, and the flower festival in the days prior to the Chinese New Year. It is popular with locals and lovers, but has recently run afoul with youth gangs. A three-hundred-year-old Tin Hau Temple (like the many scattered across Hong Kong), once a waterfront temple dedicated to a seafaring Goddess, is located on the park's east side.

### HAPPY VALLEY

Travelling south from Causeway Bay, one soon enters Happy Valley, a district famous for two things: the gaudy Aw Boon Haw Garden and the racecourse.

### OFF TO THE RACES

Happy Valley's chief attraction is the Happy Valley horseracing track, a large open-air oval that caters to thousands of spectators each racing season. Betting on horses is a Hong Kong institution. It is the only legal form of gambling allowed in a place where the people love to wager. Not surprisingly, the Hong Kong Jockey Club pulls a lot of clout. Each season, it brings in an estimated HK\$45 billion, a percentage of which goes to social and charitable organizations — which is why Jockey Club schools and clinics are a common site in the colony. A portion of this money helped develop Kowloon Park in Mong Kok.

### AW BOON HAW OR "TIGER BALM" GARDENS

Despite what some tour guides might say, the Aw Boon Haw Gardens are a garish collection of painted statues, pagodas, animal figures, and colour-stained staircases that tell many awesome and awful Chinese tales. The only interesting part of the collection, the

## HOME-MADE MOVIES: GHOST STALLIONS

Across the street from the Happy Valley tracks is a cemetery with graves dating back to the colony's founding. Also interred in the graveyard are the bodies of the many people who died 80 years ago when a huge blaze tore through the racetracks. Now an evil *fat-si* (or black-magic priest) is summoning spirits from the graveyard to possess racehorses and help him win a fortune. When a Triad gang with a vested interest in the track's prosperity investigates the *fat-si's* run of good luck, however, he kills them and decides to wreak havoc on Happy Valley tracks in retribution. The characters play gamblers, Triad members, good magicians, or even track security when the *fat-si* first starts his winning streak. Over the course of the movie, they must investigate hauntings, possessed horses, and the grisly death of the Triad members. At the movie's climax, however, the black-magic priest summons the dead back from the cemetery to deal with the characters in this *Dawn of the Dead/Encounters of the Spooky Kind* homage.

Haw Par Mansion, is at the front gateway and is closed to the public. This is a surrealist's dream and the perfect backdrop for a present or near-future gunplay and kung fu extravaganza.

The story behind the Aw Boon Haw Gardens is an unusual one. The man who built them, Mr. Aw Boon Haw, was filthy rich, having made a fortune in the 1930s off the production of Tiger Balm, a liniment rub still used to this day by martial artists to soothe sore muscles. One day, he decided to build the most spectacular garden in the world and set about doing so. At the time, he spent millions of dollars on his display, which by today's standards would be tens of millions of dollars. When completed, his empire had crumbled under the financial strain of his creation, but the "Tiger Balm Gardens" were born.

### NOT-SO-HAPPY VALLEY

Tourists venturing all the way up Tai Hang Road to see the Tiger Balm Gardens might also hazard a closer look at Happy Valley's not-so-famous attractions, the hundreds of squatter shacks dotting the nearby hillside.



While Hong Kong does not advertise its existence, these are the homes of refugees awaiting resettlement by the government. Further up the road was another, much larger resettlement camp deceptively named the Lai Tai Estates. Hong Kong's populace ignored the plight of these refugees since the impending handover consumed public attention. In some cases it took more than a decade to settle refugees' cases.

## EVERYTHING EAST OF CAUSEWAY BAY

The east half of the island falls into two main parts: The northern side, which is packed with apartment buildings and people, and the eastern side, with its less-populated, serene and rugged coastline.

### THE CITY DISTRICTS

Beyond Causeway Bay, there is little happening in Hong Kong City. This area of town is mostly residential.

## THE VILLAGE OF SHEK O

The village is not very large, and consists of a small bus station next to the car park, a beach beside a miniature golf course, a bike rental shop, some restaurants, and a marketplace that caters to summer crowds mostly. It seems like a sleepy little village, but what usually escapes a visitor's notice when first arriving are the walled mansions tucked away down the road. This is another of the island's more expensive neighbourhoods, and a number of influential Taipans living here. The Shek O Country Club has excellent food and an 18-hole golf course. One must be a member to use the club or the course, a proposition that costs near a HK\$100,000 just for the privilege of getting on the waiting list!

Alas, for most Hong Kongers, the only reason to visit Shek O is its premium beach and lazy weekday afternoons tanning.





## THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE ISLAND

The south side of Hong Kong Island is more laid back than the congested north face, but still has plenty of people to remind travellers they are still in HK. From June to October, the popular south coast draws the weekend crowds.

### STANLEY VILLAGE

Ranked as one of Hong Kong's top 10 tourist destinations, Stanley features waterfront restaurants, a covered bazaar selling a variety of trinkets, and a beach for relaxing and swimming. Stanley is steeped in Chinese history. During the dirty 1840's, before Hong Kong even existed as a colony, the village already maintained a population of 2000, most of whom were fisherman. Originally called Chek Chau, meaning "robber's lair," the village served as a pirate base.

### THE HONG KONG SEA SCHOOL

One of the island's more interesting institutes, Hong Kong Sea School accepts only underprivileged boys. The children practically become state property, and live on the school's private grounds while educators teach them the skills to join the ranks of Hong Kong's most advanced seamen. Many of these young boys later pursue careers in the military or as merchant marines.

### STANLEY PRISON

Stanley Prison, Hong Kong's maximum-security facility, is where the colony sends its most undesirable criminals — murderers, rapists, and similar ilk. The Japanese also used Stanley Prison as a civilian internment camp during their invasion and occupation of Hong Kong during World War II.

### REPULSE BAY

Repulse Bay was one of Hong Kong's colonial attractions, with its sandy beaches and luxurious hotels; fortunately, it still lives up to that reputation today. In recent years, it has become a smaller version of a rich

### HOME-MADE MOVIES: *CHILD OF MINE*

Five years ago, the Red Tea Society (a Triad group) fell to its rivals, the Pah Lodge. At the time, an undercover cop, Jimmy Kai (the main role), found himself torn between defending Red Tea's *lung tau* (Dragon Head or Triad Leader) whom he'd befriended, or obeying his superiors and "retiring" before the Pah Lodge killed him too. Duty eventually persevered, but Jimmy always blamed himself for the murders of the *lung tau* and his family. Now, the ex-enforcer (known as a Red Pole or *hung kwan* fighter) of the Red Tea Society, Fan Chin, is out of jail, and he knows Jimmy's true identity. Even more, Chin knows the *lung tau* hid his four-year old son before he died. Chin never forgave Jimmy for the betrayal, but he needs his help and resources to find the *lung tau's* son before the Pah Lodge does. Jimmy sees this as a chance to redeem himself and correct a wrong, so he agrees, even though it means defying his superiors and evading Pah Lodge's killers. This race against time features potential characters in Jimmy and Chin, Jimmy's police partner and friend, other ex-members of the Red Tea Society, a nosy reporter, etc. The final fight takes place at the Hong Kong Sea School where the *lung tau* hid his now nine-year old son.

Hong Kong, and now supports a commercial zone and a growing collection of office towers and luxury apartment complexes. Most notable of these structures is a yellow, pink, and purple apartment building with a square hole cut from its midsection. While the building appears almost garish, a feng shui expert recommended the design, hence driving up the property values as well.

### OCEAN PARK

Ocean Park is Hong Kong's answer to Disneyland. Owned and operated by the Hong Kong Jockey Club, the park is separated into two parts: a lowland site and a headland site.

The lowland site contains gardens, parks, a butterfly house, a theatre, a children's zoo/playground, and the Water World fun-park. The headland site, however, is where everyone goes for the "action." First is the Ocean Park proper, with its aquarium, whale shows, and shark display. Then, there is the amusement park

containing the usual roller-coaster rides, fun houses, and skill-testing games. Last up is the Middle Kingdom, a Chinese theme park with pagodas, traditional crafts, statues, martial arts exhibits, and Chinese opera performances. Ocean Park is yet another Hong Kong setting begging to appear in an action movie.

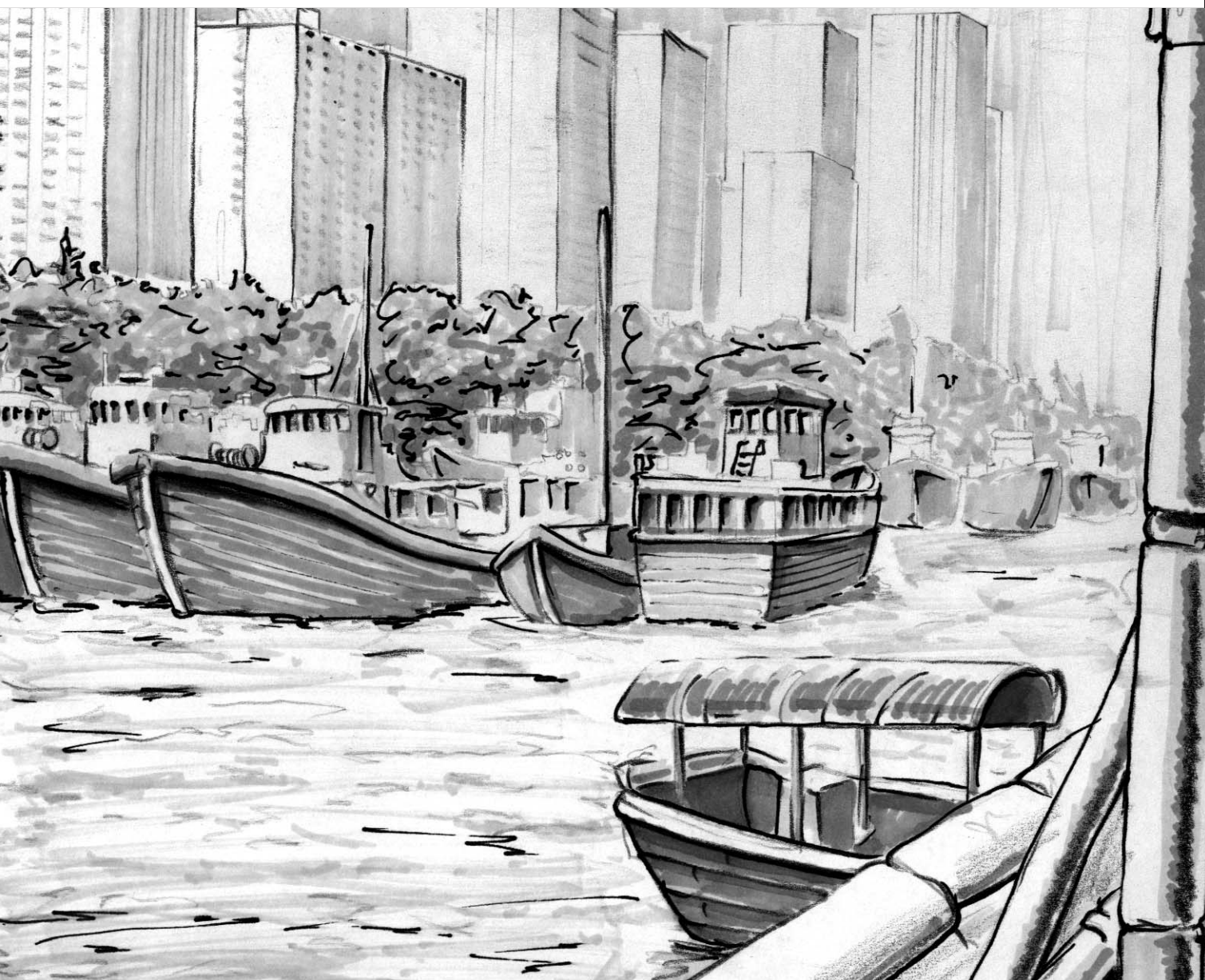
## THE LITTLE HONG KONG CALLED ABERDEEN

Aberdeen is unlike any other spot on the island; it sees a great deal of activity, but by appearances, plays the role of a quiet little town. In fact, for the most part, Aberdeen is just that — quiet and unassuming even though guides still rate it a top tourist draw. Here visitors can find a shabby looking shrine recessed into a

hollow in the ground that serves as the town's Tin Hau Temple. Built in 1851, this is an important religious centre to the townsfolk, especially during the Tin Hau Festival that thoroughly transforms Aberdeen for its duration.

## THE ABERDEEN TYPHOON SHELTER

Most of Hong Kong Island's black-market deals reputedly happen on the waters of Aberdeen Harbour. Since there are literally hundreds of small sampans and junks that call the harbour home, the Hong Kong Police find it impossible keeping an eye on everything. Some key draws for tourists, however, aside from the wharf-side eateries are three palatial-like floating restaurants and the many houseboat restaurants moored off the docks.





## Kowloon

Kowloon is the overlap where China exerts increasing influence over the SAR in cast and appearance. Originally called *Gau-lung* for the “nine dragons” (or the “eight mountain peaks plus one for the Emperor”), the English approximated that into Kowloon. Most of Hong Kong’s luxury hotels are Kowloon-side, and the city has also reclaimed a great deal of land — like Tsim Sha Tsui East district, which was recently a harbour. The best luxury hotels and shopping areas are in Tsim East. Yau Ma Tei and Mong Kok districts are to the north and range from the more traditional to the decidedly seedy. Two movies in the “...On Fire” series, *City on Fire* and *School on Fire* were largely shot in Kowloon.

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### TSIM SHA TSUI

The movie *Tom, Dick and Hairy* opens with an aerial view of Tsim Sha Tsui district. Here, the finest hotels, restaurants, and shops bustle with tourist dollars while existing side by side with some of the most dreary, over-crowded tenements. Director Wong Kar-wai grew up in run-down Tsim Sha Tsui, though the area has reputedly improved — barely if the existence of Chungking Mansions is any indication (see below). The opening scenes of *Chungking Express* were shot here.

Kowloon Park stands along the west of Nathan Road. It contains everything one would expect to see in a park (tennis courts, walking paths), including more unusual fare such as a sculpture garden, a maze of clipped hedges (both excellent backdrops for gunplay) and the Jamia Masjid Mosque. Like many mosques throughout the Middle East and Asia, tourists cannot traipse through at will as they would in the other churches and temples throughout the city. Visiting Muslims can worship here without fear of intrusion, however.

Nathan Road is the heart of the hotel district. Here, and up Salisbury Road, visitors can find hotels ranging from the cheap and sleazy (like the infamous Chungking Mansions) to the magnificent Peninsula Hotel, where the British governor surrendered to the Japanese during WWII. Nathan Road is very busy, very crowded and almost always noisy. *Full Alert*, widely considered to be one of Ringo Lam’s best films, shows a

scene where an explosion showers crowded Nathan Road with fiery wreckage (in another example of guerrilla cinema so prevalent in the 80s and 90s). Some *City on Fire* scenes show men running through market stalls in Kowloon, while other good location shots include Nathan Road, Cheung Lok Street, and Nanking Street. The boastful Golden Mile (in reality much closer to half-a-mile) on Nathan Road is a continuous line of shops and a perfect example of how splendour and squalor coexist here.

The Star Ferry terminal is also situated in Tsim Sha Tsui. Star ferries have been making the crossing from Kowloon to Hong Kong Island’s Central district since 1898, and appear in many movies, including the Hong Kong-flavoured James Bond classic *The Man with the Golden Gun*. The company named all their ferries after stars (such as Northern Star and Twinkling Star), which just begs for a gunfight aboard a ferry named the Shooting Star (one would think).

Tsim Sha Tsui is the home turf of the Sun Yee On Triad (with an estimated 45,000 members in this district alone). There is an active nightlife here, as well as a sizeable underworld population. The movie *9413* takes place largely in Tsim Sha Tsui’s Amoeba Club, while *Lawyer, Lawyer* features scenes in the Hong Kong Club and Number Nine Nathan Road.

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### CHUNGKING MANSIONS

“Mansions” is a misnomer in that there is nothing stately nor majestic in this collection of guesthouses hidden within this monolithic and crumbling high-rise. Infamous among backpackers and Hong Kongers alike, Chungking offers cheap rates on rooms for a good reason ... it epitomizes the term dive right down to the trash-strewn stairwells and faulty lifts that break down regularly.

Five blocks, lettered “A” through “E” and consisting of 17 floors apiece, comprise Chungking Mansions. Scattered throughout these blocks are dozens of “guesthouses” that occupy an entire floor or two, with rooms varying in price and quality. Some guesthouses are nice, with private bathrooms and well-furnished décor, while others have shared bathrooms (or “alcove” bathrooms where the toilet and sink are in the shower cubicle) and dilapidated furnishings replete with creaking floorboards and that “abandoned-for-a-century” look.



Perhaps worse are the fire escapes and stairwells, especially in D-Block. Many residents simply throw their trash out the windows, never concerned that the trash snags and hangs on the many pipes covering the stairwell or on ledges. Since nobody cleans the trash up, it festers in the stairwells and serves as home to a legion-score of large, ugly cockroaches with voracious appetites. Thanks to the building's overtaxed elevators (all two of them, one for A & B Block, and one for C, D, and E Block), using the stairwells is sometimes a necessary evil.

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## TSIM SHA TSUI EAST

Tsim East is all built on reclaimed land, which is still shiny and new after a mere 20 years in existence. Everything here is bigger, flashier, and more extravagant than in Tsim Sha Tsui proper. Visitors can expect modern and shiny new malls, restaurants, nightclubs, theatres, and other luxuries associated with contemporary life.

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## YAU MA TEI

By day, Temple Street is an unassuming thoroughway. Since the 1970s, however, it transforms at dusk into a bustling, crowded night market. There are street doctors, fortune-tellers and singers, old wine shops, market stalls and street barbers. Visitors can also catch street performers acting in scaled-down Chinese opera. Tourists crowd the stalls, looking for bargains or hoping to have Palmists tell their fortunes through palm readings or in the traditional Chinese manner of scrutinizing the shape of (or lines on) a person's face. Vendors try to catch the attention of customers by literally throwing clothing out into the street. *Streets of Fury* has some good scenes using Temple Street fortune tellers.

Kansu and Reclamation Streets are the home of the jade market, where one finds a surfeit of jade merchandise. Jade comes in many shades other than the familiar green — purple, yellow, orange, violet, brown, and white. Inexperienced customers might buy aventurine, bowenite, soapstone, or serpentine as "jade" from unscrupulous vendors eager to take advantage of the foolishly uninformed. Yau Ma Tei is also a good shopping district for electronics and audio/visual items.

Tin Hau Temple on Market St. is among the oldest temples in the city. It is quietly unattended most of the time, except during the Tin Hau festival, when people cram into it and the other 40-some temples dedicated to the fishing goddess around the city.

The Yau Ma Tei Typhoon Shelter is a colourful floating community of sampans and junks, and home to Tanka and Holko fisher families who still follow their traditional lifestyles. There are some 8,000 people who make their homes here, taking refuge on the water from the crush of people living on the surrounding land.

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## THE TANKA EGG PEOPLE

For thousands of year, the Tanka and Holko tribes — the traditional boat people of the region — have been living on the waters around Hong Kong. The majority of these people are from the Tanka tribe, some of whom live out their entire lives on the water without ever touching dry land. The legends concerning their traditions are questionable since there is little documentation concerning them. One popular tale says their land-bound neighbours banished them to the seas because of their ancestor's past crimes. Tanka literally means "Egg People," a name given to them in ancient times because they used eggs to pay their taxes rather than money.

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## MONG KOK

Crowded, crowded, crowded. Infamous as having one of the highest-population densities in the world, Mong Kok is block upon block of government subsidized tenement housing and packed markets; it is also one of the SAR's busiest shopping districts. Mong Kok's single unique draw is the Yuen Po Street Bird Garden. Birds are ideal pets for those crushed into the Mong Kok housing blocks; they do not need much space, they do not need walking, they are easily cared for, and they are both pleasant to look at and pleasant on the ears (if you choose the right one). The Bird Garden caters to the devoted owners of these little pets, showering them with love and attention in the form of hand-crafted, ornate bamboo cages, porcelain water dishes, special blends of bird seed, and treats of live grasshoppers and honeyed water. The cafes in this area are set up with overhead racks to accommodate patrons and their birds, like the set-up for *Hard Boiled's* famous shoot-out.

Mong Kok is an exceedingly popular setting and film location for modern Hong Kong movies. It seems a natural choice for expressing the turmoil and anxiety present in movies like the *Young and Dangerous* series. *As Tears Go By* was set in Mong Kok. Much of *Once Upon a Time in a Triad Society 2* takes place on Dung Wong Street, with the climactic "chopper scene" played out in the lobby of the Newport Cinema on Jordan Road.

Exemplifying the crowded conditions of this region is the Sino Centre, which literally has hundreds of shops, each about the size of a closet. As unbelievable as it seems to those outside of Hong Kong, people actually live in such small spaces. The movie *Cagemen* concerns so-called cage homes, where as many as 100 people live in a 1000 square-foot house that might have two bathrooms and a shared kitchen. Inside, several dozen two and three-level bunk beds, each surrounded by wire, qualify as a person's home. Not surprisingly, in a climate where melodrama, extreme violence, bizarre fantasy, and goof-ball comedy are the choice of the day, Hong Kong theatre patrons looking for escapist entertainment did not receive *Cagemen* enthusiastically. Nonetheless, it does a good job revealing the darker side of Hong Kong's poor and over-crowded neighbourhoods.

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## SHAM SHUI PO

Just north of Mong Kok, Sham Shui Po district accommodates the population spill over from its southern neighbour. There is little to see here but block after block of high-rise housing. One location of note is the Lei Cheng Uk Han Dynasty Burial Vault. Builders discovered the 1,600-year-old burial vault in 1955, during excavations for the huge estate that now surrounds it. Experts believe it was built around 220 AD, but little remains within the cross-shaped, four-barrel chamber besides some pottery and bronze pieces. Still, the site serves as a reminder of the historical connection to the land.

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## LAI CHI KOK

Lai Chi Kok borders the New Territories so closely it is almost part of them. It is also home of the Sung Dynasty Village, a replica town with people in period costume recreating life in a village of that period. This is the perfect location for either inserting a taste of ancient China into a modern day shoot-'em-up or a near

future/fantasy film. This theme park recreates the period (960-1279 AD), right down to authentically costumed "villagers" demonstrating everything from noodle making to calligraphy. A wax museum in this small theme park displays historical characters from each of China's dynasties, and would be another fine location for anachronistic gun fights or martial arts action.

## HOME-MADE MOVIES: THE AUGUST WARS

Millennia ago, the August Emperor Huang-Ti battled and defeated his ancient rival, the demon Ch'i-You. Huang-Ti entrusted the execution to his ally, the Winged Dragon, but when the great serpent beheaded Ch'i-You, the headless body fled and later collapsed far from the Chuo-lu battlefield in Hupei. Huang-Ti's men secretly buried the head and body in two separate tombs, but Ch'i-You's 81 brothers rescued the latter portion. The Winged Dragon, however, spirited the head away and hid it from the brothers for the subsequent centuries.

Four thousand years later, modern times — It is the first day of the seventh moon (normally August), and the Ghost Month is beginning. For two weeks, according to tradition, the gates of Hell open, and all the spirits who were unloved, not offered proper worship, or violently murdered are free to roam the land. At the end of those two weeks, people appease these angry spirits with offers of food at the Yue Lan Festival, and the dead return below. The Sung Dynasty Village was about to host special events commemorating the first night of Ghost Month when a mysterious fog surrounded the area. Nobody who enters leaves, but the characters (in any variety of roles) must save their loved ones and help avert "an impending catastrophe." Inside the fog, Sung Dynasty Village has been converted into an actual ancient town (devoid of modern technology), with spirits possessing the local actors and spectators into believing they belong to this period. The culprits are four surviving brothers of Ch'i-You's 81 kin, who uncovered the demon's iron head in Sung Village, and plan to reunite it with his body. With the gates of hell open, Ch'i-You will return back to life and keep the gates open forever. Fortunately, while the characters may not be ready to stop the four brothers and the demon on their own, the spirits of Huang-Ti and the Winged Dragon return to infuse the characters with their essence in this wuxia action-fest.

## THE NEW 新界 TERRITORIES

The New Territories are surprisingly wild and unpopulated compared to the crush of the cities. This is where one finds most of the region's wildlife (unless the city's dogs and market chickens count as such) and plant-life, as well as green rolling hills and villages.

### THE WESTERN REGIONS OF THE NEW TERRITORIES

#### TUEN MUN

The local reclamation project created a neighbourhood of high-rise housing barely 20 years old. Tuen Mun was the turf in *Young and Dangerous 4* and is very close to various temples and monasteries scattered about. Among these destinations is the Ching Chung Koon Taoist Temple (or the Temple of Pines), which holds room after room of altars covered in burning incense and photos of departed relatives of the people who come here to pray. Of note are the numerous artifacts entrusted to the temple: a 1,000 year old jade seal, Lui Tung's (one of the Eight Immortals) magic demon-slaying sword, and a gourd said to be filled with herbs with which he could heal people. This is a popular shrine and filled with visitors, especially during festivals.

The Miu Fat Buddhist Monastery is also near Tuen Mun. Ornate and almost gaudy, this Buddhist temple is unusual in its decoration. Large carved stone animals, golden dragons, elephants, and a variety of porcelain animals are set all around the front of the building. The central shrine is that of the Three Precious Buddhas, and contains thousands of gold Buddha plaques and ancestor tablets.

Castle Peak is easily accessible from Tuen Mun. This site has long been a holy area, with sacred springs and evocative rock formations, tended to by monks and celebrated by poets.

#### KAM TIN

Kam Tin is one of the last remaining walled villages left in the New Territories. Founded in the 10th century, it eventually became a fortified village belonging to the Tang clan. Kam Tin is a good place to find the renowned and hard-working Hakka women (easily identifiable by their broad, fringed black hats, gold capped teeth, and pajama-like clothes — see Hakka People). They work hard at cultural isolationism, preserving their customs and dialect against the ever-encroaching modern world. Kam Tin means Embroidered Fields, but it is too urbanized for that name anymore. Chow Yun-fat actually speaks the native Hakka dialect, which he used in the movie *Now You See Love ... Now You Don't*.

#### THE HAKKA PEOPLE

Many of Hong Kong's traditional walled villages were built by a tribe known as the Hakka or "guest people," a name given to them in ancient times when they led nomadic lives. Back then, they travelled thousand of miles from Northern China and eventually ended up in Hong Kong. Today, they are a permanent regional fixture, having settled centuries ago to pursue an agricultural existence.

Hakka tribe members are usually easy to spot, and look quite different from their Cantonese neighbours. In Hong Kong's rural areas, most still wear their traditional costumes. Unlike the Cantonese, the Hakka are a matriarchal society, which helps identify them. Hakka women are more actively involved in what others consider "men's work" — heavy manual labour such as working on a construction site or tilling the fields.

Although the Hakka migrated to the Canton region over a millennium ago, they still suffer from some prejudicial treatment at the hands of native Cantonese, who think of them as the "guests" who never leave. In typical Chinese fashion, the Cantonese people seemingly possess very long memories.

#### SHEK KONG

In the early 1980s, Shek Kong had the unpleasant distinction of being the home for several thousand Vietnamese refugees who the Chinese detained in



crowded camps. A huge political problem for the Hong Kong government, the question of what to do with the thousands of "boat people" was a heated topic. The turning point apparently happened after a fire swept through one of the camps, killing 24 refugees. The colony has since returned most of them to Vietnam, while repatriating a few to Hong Kong.

### LAU FAU SHAN

This tiny little fishing village has two points of interest. Most notably, it borders one of the oldest established oyster beds in the area. The locals have been harvesting oysters for centuries, as anyone can guess from the 500 metre-long pile of shells behind the fish market! Sadly, the incredible pollution churned out into the nearby water is poisoning these oyster beds and destroying this traditional way of life. Lau Fau Shan is also across Deep Bay (a misnomer evidenced by the sweeping mudflats left visible at low tides) from Guangdong Province. Back when 1997 seemed far in the future, Deep Bay was the favoured crossing spot for those fleeing China, and Lau Fau Shan a frequent refuge for swimmers who made it across. Much of the surrounding area is swamp and marshland, and the Mai Po Nature Reserve just to the northeast is a habitat for egrets, ibises, and the occasional leopard or mongoose.

## THE CENTRAL REGIONS OF THE NEW TERRITORIES

### SHA TIN

Sha Tin is a huge city in the otherwise rural New Territories that grew from 30,000 to 500,000 in one ten-year period. The Temple of Ten Thousand Buddhas is on a nearby hill, up some 500 steps. Inside the temple are 13,000 nearly identical (but slightly different) gilded clay statues of the Buddha, which were donated by worshippers. A prolific monk, Yuet Kai, who wrote more than 96 books on Buddhism, founded the temple. He is now embalmed and covered in gold-leaf ... on display behind glass for the morbidly curious. To the west of Sha Tin is Tai Mo Shan, or Big Hat Mountain, Hong Kong's tallest mountain measuring 3,230 feet above sea level.

### TAI PO

Situated near the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Tai Po was an important market centre for the region. Pearl divers plied a regular trade in this area, but as much as anywhere else in Hong Kong; unfortunately the city has reclaimed sizeable tracts of land around the harbour in recent years. Tai Po is currently a booming city with a population of over 200,000.

### FANLING

The Tang Chung Ling Ancestral Hall in Fanling is one of the largest and most significant structures of its type in Hong Kong SAR, and was built in 1525 in honour of its founding ancestor, Tang Chung Ling (1302-1387). It is the main ancestral hall of the Lung Yuek Tau lineage.

### SHEUNG CHUI

One of the few New Towns to escape crushing modernization, Sheung Chui is refreshingly traditional. It is an old Hakka enclave, and home to the Hau and Liu clans (as opposed to the ever-present Tang clan in other towns). There are several traditional walled villages in this area, as well as restored ancestral halls. The Hakka-related architecture and the walled city (Hakka Wai) are particularly interesting for those seeking to meet authentic Hakka families. It is good to keep in mind that even though this is a more traditional, rural area, there are still nearly 150,000 people living here and in Fanling!

### IN THE SHADOW OF THE MAINLAND

Daya Bay is a massive nuclear power plant built in Shenzhen, in the Guangdong province, just over the Chinese boarder from Hong Kong (whose proximity to the island might concern Hong Kong's citizens). The plant was a co-operative effort between China and France in the mid-1990s, and though it went active in 1994 it also suffered two serious shutdowns within the first fifteen months of operation. No one wants another Chernobyl disaster — especially in overpopulated Hong Kong. Daya Bay makes an excellent backdrop for post-apocalyptic melodrama.

# CHAPTER SIX: THE HISTORY OF HONG KONG FILM



**Yan Pin    Shin Lang Fing    Yang Chen**

*Featuring*

**Yi Shihi    Ping Hsu    Andrew Lee    Hing Sam Dun    Tsui Han Jacobs**

*Also featuring Feet Too Small to See, Wakefield Trio, Phillip Coben, Darkest of the Wiltside Thickets*

*Jeff Mackintosh, Andrew F Baker, Mark McKinnon, Jennifer Baker, Dimension Films presents a Ten Hats Film*

*Phillip Coben, Darkest of the Wiltside Thickets, Wakefield Trio, Feet Too Small to See, Andrew F Baker, Dimension Films pres*

*Too Small to See, Wakefield Trio, Phillip Coben, Darkest of the Wiltside Thickets, McKinnon, Je*

*Darkest of the Wiltside Thickets, Wakefield Trio, Feet Too Small to See, Andrew F Baker, Dimension Films, Baker, Mark F Baker, Mark McKinnon, Jennifer Baker, Dimension Films presents a Ten Hats Film*

**NOW PLAYING**



## THE NAME GAME

Before beginning a whirlwind tour of Hong Kong movie history, a caveat. Chinese names are, for Westerners, something of a nightmare. Not only is there a difference in the way names are rendered in Cantonese and Mandarin, there are also several competing systems of romanization (primarily the older Wade-Giles system and the official PRC pinyin system). Add to these issues the fact that many Hong Kong film industry personalities have Western stage names, and it becomes nearly impossible to present all names in a standard fashion. Why refer to director Lam Leng-tung when people know him better as Ringo Lam? Then there are the two different actors who go by Tony Leung. Sources can also be contradictory. The book *Asian Cult Cinema* by Thomas Weisser has separate filmographies for Lau Kar-leung and Liu Chia Liang. The problem? Those are simply the Cantonese and Mandarin spellings of the same man's name!

This section tries to be as consistent as possible, generally using Cantonese naming conventions, but this is not always feasible. Some source material only gives Mandarin names, for instance, especially for the early years of HK cinema. This section also tries using names most familiar to Westerners, but with an accompanying apology for any confusion; the name game is an inescapable and unfortunate pitfall of Hong Kong movies.

## 港片起源 THE BEGINNING

Hong Kong cinema has a long history, stretching far beyond the chopsocky flicks of the 70s. To understand what is happening today in HK film, fans have to go back to the beginning.

Film first came to Hong Kong in 1898, when a team of cameramen from the Edison Company arrived to show off Edison's Vitascope. The team shot footage of the HK Regiment, the Sikh Artillery, assorted street scenes, and the HK Government House. Nine years later the

Colony produced its first two short films, *Right a Wrong with Earthenware Dish* and *Stealing the Roasted Duck*. Both stories were adapted from the Peking Opera, a tradition that would continue for decades. Liang Shaobo, a theatre actor and director, directed the two films, which were financed by an American named Benjamin Brodsky. Brodsky had founded a company in Shanghai called Asia Film, and wanted to crack the Mainland market. Several years later he founded Hong Kong's first studio, Chinese American Film. This short-lived studio only produced one project, *Zhuangzi Tests His Wife* (1913), directed by Li Minwei (who also starred as the wife due to the theatre taboo of featuring women on stage). Brodsky took the only print of the film back to America before it could be shown in Hong Kong, much to Li's chagrin. In 1923 Li Minwei teamed up with Liang Shaobo, his brother Li Beihai, and his cousin Li Haishan to found the China Sun Motion Picture Company, the first Chinese-owned film company in HK. Unfortunately, China Sun was forced to move to Guangzhou Province in 1924 after the Hong Kong government rejected their application to rent land for a studio. That year China Sun produced *Rouge*, generally considered HK's first feature film, which opened at the New World Theatre in 1925. Shortly thereafter, a general strike that lasted into 1926 shut Hong Kong down. All film activity in the Colony ground to a halt, forcing China Sun to move yet again, this time to Shanghai.

Li Minwei turned his eye towards documentary film for the next few years. An avid supporter of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, leader of the Chinese Revolution, Li shot footage of Dr. Sun from 1926-1928. Focusing on the Northern Expedition, in which the nationalist forces of the Kuomintang (KMT) attempted to bring warlord-controlled territory under revolutionary rule. Li's work has become the standard photographic reference of this era. He passed on this footage to his descendants, an edited version of which appeared under the title *A Page of History*. Li Minwei also found time to produce fictional movies, the most important of which was the first film adaptation of the *Romance of the West Chamber* (1927). This fantasy martial arts film was a precursor of the modern day Hong Kong action flick, as was 1928's *Burning of Red Lotus Temple*. The latter



project featured palm-powered daggers that shot through walls, and other supernatural powers. Meanwhile, another Hong Kong native was building his own legacy. Luo Mingyou was born in the Colony, but educated in Beijing. After a stint as a theatre manager, he became a film producer, establishing the North China Film Company in 1927. He eventually controlled the film distribution and theatre business in five northern provinces. In 1930, Luo Mingyou gathered together a group of investors to form United Photoplay Service (UPS). Luo merged North China with Li Minwei's China Sun and a third company, the Da Zhonghua Bai He Film Company. UPS's head office was initially in Hong Kong, but moved to Shanghai in 1931.

## THE GOLDEN AGE OF CHINESE FILM

Li Minwei supervised UPS's first films. All three projects, *Spring Dream in the Old Capital* (1930), *Wild Grass* (1930), and *Love and Duty* (1931), involved love in feudal China. They also starred a beautiful young actress named Ruan Lingyu, who became known as "China's Garbo." The films were lost in the chaos of war and revolution, but amazingly a single copy of *Love and Duty* resurfaced at the Chinese Consulate in Uganda in the mid-90s. It was returned to China, restored, and shown for the first time in over 50 years at the 1996 Hong Kong International Film Festival. The success of UPS's first endeavours helped usher in a golden age. From 1930-1937 Shanghai was the centre of Chinese film production. Most Shanghai films used the Mandarin dialect, whereas 95% of Hong Kong's population spoke Cantonese. The KMT made this worse in 1936 by banning Cantonese films on the Mainland.

All was not bleak in Hong Kong, however. Since the British controlled HK, the Colony offered an atmosphere that some filmmakers found preferable to Shanghai. In 1934 Shao Zuiweng moved his Tianyi Studios from Shanghai to Hong Kong. Tianyi specialized in martial arts fantasies, which the government criticized as morally bankrupt. When Shao's first Cantonese talkie proved a smash, an opera film called *White Gold Dragon* (1933), it only made sense to relocate to a major centre of Cantonese speakers.

Tianyi was not alone. Several other companies also moved to HK, most notably Grandview. UPS also maintained its HK branch under Li Beihai. All these companies, and several new ones, ensured a steady stream of Mandarin filmmakers and technicians headed south. They managed to exploit the Cantonese markets of Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and the US Chinatowns, while concurrently making Shanghai-styled Mandarin films for the Mainland.

The advent of the talkie caused a boom in Hong Kong's movie industry. Studios made some 400 films between 1933 and 1941, most of them in Cantonese. While Hong Kong produced films in volume, it was Shanghai that basked in prestige. This situation may have remained static if not for the military machinations of Japan.

## WAR, OCCUPATION, AND CIVIL WAR

Japan had conquered Manchuria in 1931 and set up a puppet state called Manchukuo. It was only a matter of time before Japanese territorial ambition led them south, and in 1937 a full scale Sino-Japanese war broke out. On August 13, 1937 the Japanese army marched into Shanghai. They occupied the entire city save for Western-controlled foreign concessions. Many Shanghai filmmakers fled to Hong Kong, while others retreated to the sympathetic Western concessions. On "Orphan Island," as these places became known, these filmmakers continued practising their craft free of Japanese control. Even this isle of relative peace did not last however, and Japan seized control of the foreign concessions in 1941.

The Sino-Japanese War led to a new type of film, the "national defense" movie. Produced in Wuhan, Chongqing, and Hong Kong, national defense films were patriotic paeans to the Chinese soldiers fighting the Japanese. They showed Japanese atrocities and the heroism of the Chinese resisters. Shanghai expatriates, who already had an established left-wing tradition, made many of these movies. Typical of these filmmakers was Cai Chusheng, the first Chinese director to win an award at an international film festival (Moscow, 1935 for his *Song of the Fisherman*). Cai scripted films like *March of the Partisans* (1938) and directed others like *Orphan Island Paradise* (1939).

Hong Kong filmmakers also contributed to the cause. Grandview made many national defense movies, including *48 Hours* (1937) and *At This Crucial Juncture* (1938). Unfortunately, none of those made by Hong Kong's own filmmakers have survived. In December 1941 the Japanese army occupied Hong Kong, and the heyday of the national defense film was over.

Both Shanghai and Hong Kong had to deal with Japanese occupation. The Japanese, who had already built studios in Manchuria and Peking, created a coalition of all film companies called United China. Those Shanghai moviemakers and actors who had not fled worked for United China during the occupation. After the war, the Chinese people, and especially the Communists (whose control of Shanghai since 1949 made the study of this era almost impossible), treated these artists as collaborators and traitors. Hong Kong's film industry, however, reacted differently. Members either fled to the Mainland or simply refused to make movies. Despite Japanese efforts to bring United China to Hong Kong, they only made one project (*The Attack on Hong Kong*, 1942) in Hong Kong during the nearly four years of occupation. The film's only Chinese star later asserted that the Japanese coerced her into making the film, and flew her to Japan to shoot her scenes. The Japanese were understandably frustrated by this state of affairs, and this may have contributed to their decision to melt down all existing Cantonese films for their silver. A true tragedy, this action erased hundreds of films from history.

A period of uncertainty followed the end of World War II. The Kuomintang and Mao's Communists fought a vicious civil war until 1949. During those years production of Mandarin movies increased after many Shanghai filmmakers fled to Hong Kong. At first they considered their move temporary, but that perception changed after the Communists' ultimate victory. While several left-wing filmmakers, most notably Cai Chusheng (who became the head of the PRC's film ministry) returned to China, it was clear that Hong Kong was becoming the centre of Chinese cinema.

The influx of Shanghai talent lasted from 1946 to 1952, when the PRC closed the border. At first Shanghai expatriates made Mandarin movies targeted at the

Mainland, while local filmmakers made Cantonese flicks for their own market. After Cantonese productions increased, Mandarin film companies slowly operated Cantonese units as well. Many actors worked in both Mandarin and Cantonese cinema. By the early 50s Hong Kong was the new Asian Hollywood.

## CONFLICT AND CAPITALISM

Hong Kong film industry in the 50s and early 60s defined itself by three different conflicts: the studio war of MP and GI vs. Shaw Brothers, the prestige war of Cantonese vs. Mandarin, the actors' war of ling vs. xing.

The Shaw Brothers are familiar to any aficionado of HK film. Their involvement in the industry stretches back to the 1920s, when eldest brother Shao Zuiweng founded Tianyi studios in Shanghai. Second brother Runde managed Tianyi after its move to Hong Kong in 1933. Tianyi was re-named Nanyang, and then Shaw and Sons in 1950. The two younger brothers, Runme and Run Run, lived in Singapore and bought land for theatres and oversaw distribution. In 1957 Run Run returned to Hong Kong and founded the last and most famous Shaw's company, Shaw Brothers. This studio would come to dominate Hong Kong film.

Shaw Brothers main competition was a company called MP and GI. The man behind this studio was Dato Loke Wan-tho, an ethnically Chinese Malaysian businessman educated at Cambridge. Loke worked out of Singapore, where he ran the Cathay Organization. This company bought out a troubled HK studio called Yonghua, and then transformed it into a new studio called Motion Picture and General Investment (MP and GI).

Shaw Brothers and MP and GI competed fiercely on every level. Both studios pursued strategies of vertical integration, controlling production, distribution, and exhibition. They also competed for overseas markets in Singapore, Taiwan, and Malaysia. Their main exports were Mandarin-language films, many of which were musicals. This rivalry continued until 1964, when Loke died in a plane crash. MP and GI was officially renamed Cathay, after its parent organization, but without Loke it foundered and produced its last film in 1970.

With the two largest studios concentrating on Mandarin films, the Cantonese houses had to wage an uphill battle for respectability. Mandarin movies generally had larger budgets, more shooting time, and the inherited prestige of the Shanghai era. Cantonese films, on the other hand, were known as “seven day wonders” because studios shot and edited them in only a week. Despite the efforts of many left-wing filmmakers and studios such as Grandview to make serious Cantonese movies, the stigma remained. On the other hand, Cantonese films outnumber their Mandarin counterparts by a 3:1 ratio, with an average of 150 Cantonese films released each year in the 50s.

Throughout this era, Cantonese films based on Peking Opera proved consistently popular. Quick to make, the stories remained familiar to Chinese the world over, and there was a ready pool of talent in Hong Kong. The studios even subtitled their opera films so patrons could sing along with their favourite stars in the theatre. The opera films proved so successful, in fact, that it created a rift between film actors (xing) and the opera performers (ling). The film actors felt that the opera performers were not only taking work away from them, but also contributing to the amateur reputation of Cantonese cinema.

### MOVIE TOWN

Run Run Shaw oversaw the construction of the largest studio ever built in Asia, the Shaw Brothers Clearwater Bay Studio, sometimes known as Movie Town. Clocking in at a whopping 46 acres, Movie Town not only featured sound stages and film labs, but a complete replica of a Qing Dynasty town (featured in an endless array of kung fu flicks) and a recreation of a Great Wall section. Raymond Chow recalls, “We started out with just two stages, then added two more, then four more that ... we bought a huge hanger and converted that to four sound stages.” By the mid-60s, Movie Town could shoot upwards of ten films at a time, and there were even dormitories to keep actors close to the set. It was a Shaw Brothers world for certain.

## THE BIRTH OF THE MARTIAL ARTS MOVIE

From the perspective of Hong Kong action movies, there was no greater event than the birth of the Wong Fei-hung film dynasty. The real Wong Fei-hung was a famous martial artist and doctor, a paragon of Confucian virtue who defended people from injustice. Wong’s most famous student, a man named Butcher Wing, settled in Hong Kong after Wong Fei-hung’s death in 1924. He passed on Wong’s martial arts to several generations of students, some of whom worked in Peking Opera troupes. In 1949 a group of opera performers and actors got together to make a film about Wong Fei-hung. They formed a new studio called the Yong Yao Film company and shot their first movie, *The True Story of Wong Fei-hung*.

Kwan Tak-hing, the actor who portrayed Wong Fei-hung, explained the importance of the films in an interview before his death. “Everybody knew who the character was, so we had to do a good job! Luckily, we had many of the grand-students of the real Wong Fei-hung working on the films. We were the first Chinese movies to feature real kung fu. Before everything was swordplay and magic!”

*The True Story of Wong Fei-hung* was an enormous success. Kwan Tak-hing lead the ensemble cast in an incredible 99-movie run, making the series the longest running franchise in cinema history. The last film, *Wong Fei-hung Bravely Crushing the Fire Formation*, was released in 1970. The amazing thing about these films is that the cast remained the same for the life of the series. Shek Kin, who played Wong’s nemesis, recalls, “The main problem was finding a new way for me to get defeated every time!”

In addition to introducing real martial arts into Chinese film, the Wong Fei-hung movies fathered the next generation of Cantonese talent, literally. Lau Charn, who portrayed his *sifu* (master) Butcher Wing in the movies, became the patriarch of an entire clan of filmmakers, actors, and martial artists. His sons include Lau Kar-leung, Lau Kar-wing, and adopted son Lau Kar-fai. Yuen Siu-tien fathered twelve children, the most famous of whom is Yuen Woo-ping (who directed two latter day Wong Fei-hung films with Kwan Tak-hing, *The Magnificent Butcher* and *Dreadnaught*). Another



regular actor in the series was Lee Hoi-chuen, whose son Lee Siu-lung would achieve worldwide fame under his English name, Bruce Lee.

## THE TURBULENT 60s

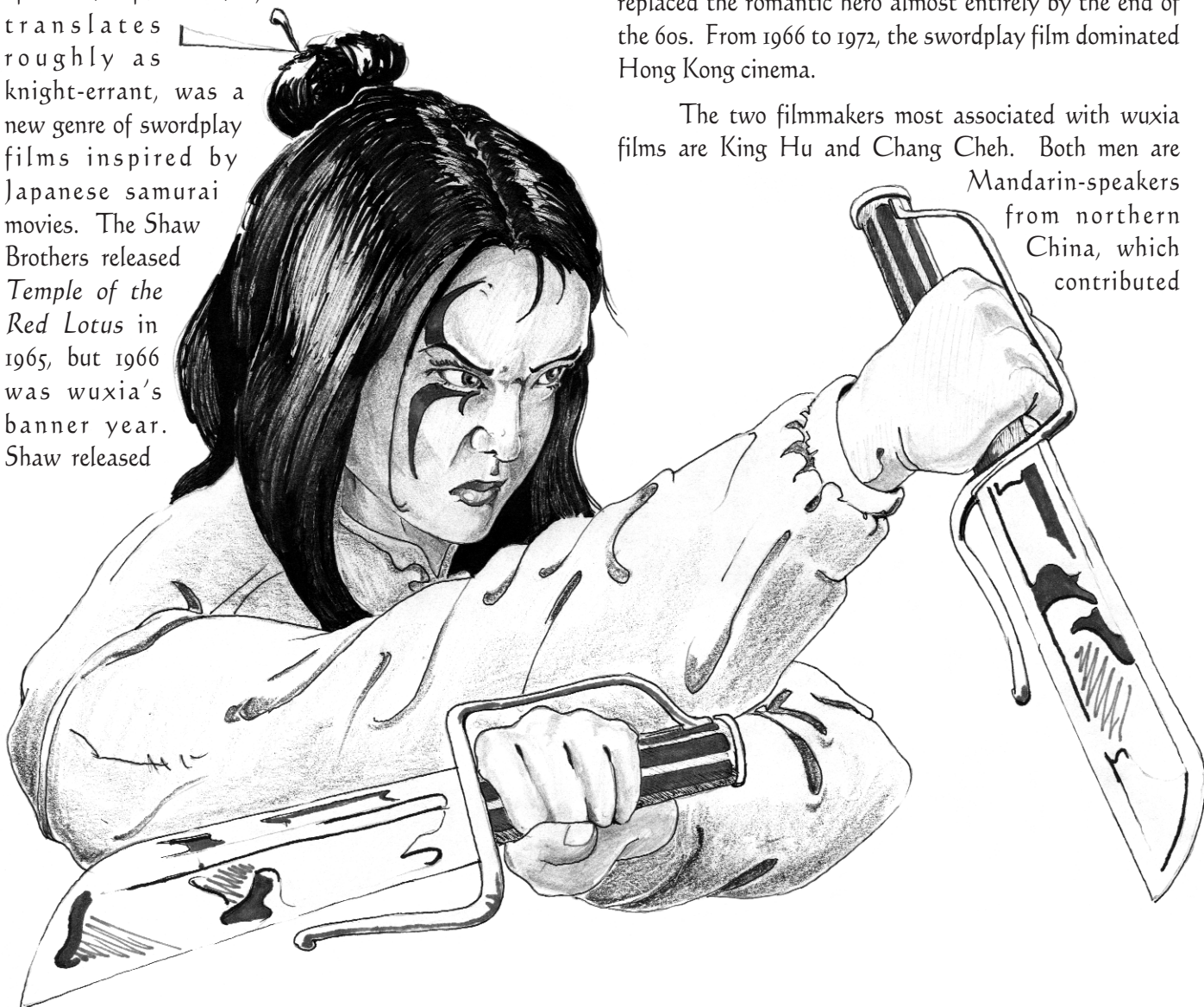
Something very strange happened in the 1960s. Despite the fact that the majority of Hong Kong spoke Cantonese, films in the dialect all but ceased production by 1970. Between 1971 and 1973, only two Cantonese-language films were made in Hong Kong. The reasons behind this change are difficult to ascertain, though the dominance of Mandarin films at the major studios was certainly a factor.

Another contributing factor was no doubt the rise of the wuxia film. Wuxia, which translates roughly as knight-errant, was a new genre of swordplay films inspired by Japanese samurai movies. The Shaw Brothers released *Temple of the Red Lotus* in 1965, but 1966 was wuxia's banner year. Shaw released

King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* and Chang Cheh's *Tiger Boy*, while Great Wall released *The Jade Bow*. The latter film was particularly important for two reasons. First, it introduced a new style of action choreography, courtesy of Lau Kar-leung (son of Lau Charn). Second, it featured swordsmen who could levitate and leap to the top of buildings with ease. These moves became such a feature of wuxia films that the term is sometimes mistakenly translated as "flying people."

The popularity of wuxia heroes is in marked contrast to the romantic leads of earlier Mandarin films. The dominant male of these movies was the somewhat effete scholar figure, popular in China from literature and opera. Whether a product of HK's changing sensibilities, or a simple desire for a change of pace, the wuxia hero replaced the romantic hero almost entirely by the end of the 60s. From 1966 to 1972, the swordplay film dominated Hong Kong cinema.

The two filmmakers most associated with wuxia films are King Hu and Chang Cheh. Both men are Mandarin-speakers from northern China, which contributed



to the conception that wuxia was a Mandarin phenomena. King Hu was the first Hong Kong director to win art house accolades in the West. His films were extremely stylish, and his sword fights were timed like dances. He established evil eunuchs as a wuxia staple and his 1968 film, *A Touch of Zen*, was the first Chinese film to win an award at the Cannes Film Festival. Chang Cheh, on the other hand, stripped his heroes down to a violent core. His films were awash with blood, a far cry from the Confucian restraint of the Wong Fei-hung series. Chang's first great success was the *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967), a movie experts generally credit as beginning the martial arts film craze. In the coming years, Chang Cheh would prove more adaptable than King Hu, whose interest seemed to only lie in Ming Dynasty swordplay films.

## ENTER THE DRAGON

By 1970 wuxia films were in decline. While martial arts movies were still the rage, the genre underwent a critical shift. Swordplay was slowly phased out while kung fu found increasing favour. Some wuxia players were quick to change course. Chang Cheh dove right into directing kung fu flicks, seeing them as an extension of what he had been doing all along. Jimmy Wang Yu, star of *One-Armed Swordsman*, redefined himself in *The Chinese Boxer* (1970), which he directed and starred in. Only one man would take kung fu films and make them an international success, however. His name was Bruce Lee.

Lee was born in San Francisco in 1940. His father, original Wong Fei-hung series actor and Peking Opera performer Lee Hoi-chuen, was on tour in the US when his son was born. Bruce grew up in Hong Kong, and appeared on screen at a young age. He appeared in many Cantonese dramas, such as 1950's *The Kid*. At the age of 18 he returned to America to claim his citizenship. After a stint at the University of Washington in Seattle (where he met his wife Linda), Lee pursued a career in Hollywood. His best known work was as sidekick Kato in a short-lived *Green Hornet* TV show. He also had guest shots on other shows, such as *Blondie*, *Longstreet*, and *Batman*. Despite the help of Hollywood stars like James Coburn and Steve McQueen, and a role in the 1969 film *Marlowe*, Bruce Lee had difficulty cracking the American market. Coburn and other friends suggested

Lee try conquering Hong Kong, as Clint Eastwood had done in Italy.

Shaw Brothers made Bruce an offer, but only at their basic pay rate for a newcomer. In 1970, however, former Shaw Brothers production chief Raymond Chow left the studio after eleven years to found the rival Golden Harvest. It was Chow who successfully negotiated a deal with Lee, thus establishing Golden Harvest as a major player in HK film. Chow later said, "You have no idea of the trouble we ran into when we first started to push our films overseas. The reaction was: 'What! A Chinese film!' Then Bruce Lee changed all that."

Lee's first HK film since the 50s was *The Big Boss* (1971). When Lee signed on, Chow replaced the film's original director with Golden Harvest star Lo Wei. Lee wanted to do his own fight choreography, but Lo Wei would not allow it. No one doubted his martial arts skills, but his screen sense was as yet unproven. Despite tension on the set between Lee and Lo, *The Big Boss* was a huge hit, breaking box office records all over Asia. Actor and director collaborated once again on *Fists of Fury* (1972), although this time Lee took over fight choreography for his scenes. Lightning struck twice, and *Fists of Fury* made even more money than its predecessor, with a half million people seeing it in Singapore alone. Both films broke out internationally, capitalizing on Lee's charisma and the American success of *King Boxer* (a 1970 Lo Lieh film that prefigured Lee's triumphs).

Riding high, Lee founded his own film company, Concord, to produce subsequent movies with Golden Harvest. This type of arrangement was one of the secrets behind Raymond Chow's success. He abandoned the big studio system of Shaw Brothers to work with independent production companies. Directors and even stars could make deals with Golden Harvest, control their own productions, and share in the profits. This freedom helped Chow entice significant talent away from Shaw Brothers (Lo Wei, for instance, directed 17 films for Shaw before leaving for Golden Harvest).

Bruce Lee's first feature through Concord was called *Way of the Dragon* (1972). He directed and starred in this tale of a bumpkin immigrant overcoming all obstacles in Rome. Notable for a coliseum duel with Chuck Norris, *Way of the Dragon* was another huge commercial success.





## CHENG PEI-PEI

Cheng Pei-pei is Hong Kong's original fighting diva. Initially trained as a ballerina, Pei-pei earned her start at Shaw Brothers. She played a classic male scholar in one of her early films, *Lotus Lamp* (1965). Her true destiny, however, was not playing men, but kicking their butts. Director King Hu cast her as Golden Swallow in his seminal wuxia movie *Come Drink With Me* (1966). The knightly, sword-fighting Golden Swallow was such a hit that Cheng Pei-pei became a leading light of the wuxia genre. She starred in two more groundbreaking films by King Hu, *Dragon Inn* (1967) and *A Touch of Zen* (1971). She also worked with wuxia's other leading director, Chang Cheh, in a sequel to *Come Drink With Me* called, appropriately enough, *Golden Swallow* (1968). After starring in yet more swordplay films like *Lady Hermit* (1969), Pei-pei took a break from making films while kung fu superseded wuxia. She returned in a 1975 Lo Wei production entitled *The Heroine*, which bore strong similarities to *Fists of Fury*. The cast included a young Jackie Chan, about whom Cheng said, "I never imagined he'd become such a star!"

Increasingly dissatisfied with the parts offered to her, Cheng Pei-pei retired from cinema and moved to Los Angeles, where she taught ballet and raised a family. She reappeared in Hong Kong films in 1988, when she took the role of a Peking Opera teacher in *Painted Faces*. She also managed to produce and star in her own cable talk show, *Pei-pei's Time*. In 1994, she starred in Yuen Woo-ping's *Wing Chun*. It was only fitting that she play the martial arts instructor of Michelle Yeoh in the film, since Yeoh is the obvious inheritor of Pei-pei's mantle. Her best role since the 1960s, however, was to come in the year 2000. Ang Lee cast her as the villainess in his gorgeous paean to wuxia films past, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Cheng Pei-pei is still the queen after all these years.



Interestingly, it did not make it to America until after Lee's death, and it was retitled *Return of the Dragon* and positioned as a sequel to *Enter the Dragon*.

*Enter the Dragon* (1973) is still the most famous kung fu movie of them all. Lee was working on his next film, *Game of Death*, when American Fred Weintraub offered him the film. *Enter the Dragon* became a Warner Brothers/Concord production, in collaboration with Golden Harvest. Although directed by an American, *Enter the Dragon* boasted a largely Chinese cast and crew. Lee choreographed the fights, and also tried to show off his philosophy of kung fu. He wrote a scene in which he discusses this philosophy with his Shaolin master. After Lee's untimely death, director Robert Clouse edited the scene out, and it was not put back into the film for a good twenty-five years.

*Enter the Dragon* was an enormous international hit. Ironically, it was a box office failure in Hong Kong itself because Chinese audiences felt that the movie wasted too much time on character and plot. Lee did not live long enough to see the release of his most famous film. He died under mysterious circumstances in 1973, allegedly due to hypersensitivity to the painkiller Equagesic. Since his death, there have been many theories concerning the nature of his demise. Some say the Triads killed him, while others say the Lee family curse did him in. Certainly, the death of his son Brandon on the set of *The Crow* did nothing to dampen the speculation.

## HK INTERREGNUM

Bruce Lee's death could not stop the momentum of kung fu films. By 1973 the craze was in full swing. Both Shaw Brothers and Golden Harvest turned out scores of actioners. All films were shot without synchronized sound, and dialogue and sound effects were dubbed in later.

By this point, director Chang Cheh had left wuxia behind and fully embraced kung fu movies. He found two charismatic stars in David Chiang and Ti Lung (see sidebar). He also helped train several filmmakers who would later become famous in their own right (John Woo tops this list). From 1966 to 1975 Lau Kar-leung worked under Chang Cheh as a fight choreographer. Lau brought a realistic style to Chang's movies, and the two collaborated fruitfully until the film *Marco Polo* (1975).

Lau Kar-leung is close mouthed about their dispute, but the upshot was he struck out to direct films on his own.

Lau Kar-leung's switch to director was most fortuitous for the genre. He was not only an amazing director of kung fu epics, but he also helped revive Cantonese-language films. His own martial arts pedigree led him to explore the historical roots of kung fu, in such film as *Executioners of Shaolin* (1976) and *36th Chamber of Shaolin* (1978). The latter film made a star of Lau Kar-fai, who became so identified with the Shaolin monk role that he kept his head shaved for over a decade.

## A NEW KING IN TOWN

Despite the achievements of actors like Ti Lung, Alexander Fu Sheng, and Lau Kar-fai, HK cinema continued its search for a new Bruce Lee. Studios made many attempts to fill the Little Dragon's shoes. First, there was a parade of look-alike, sound-alike knock-offs like Bruce Li, Bruce Liang, Bruce Le, and Tang Lung. Many of these actors appeared in "sequels" to Bruce Lee films, such as *Fist of Fury 2* (1976) and *Fist of Fury 3* (1978).

Lo Wei, director for Bruce Lee's first two films, made a more serious effort. After a thorough search, Lo chose a young stuntman and actor named Jackie Chan. Chan had been trained in a Peking Opera school in Hong Kong, and like most of his classmates, had moved into film after interest in the opera declined. He earned small parts in many films in the early 70s (his moment of glory in *Enter the Dragon* was having his neck snapped by Bruce Lee!) but he never achieved a break-out role. Chan was in Australia, having given up his dreams of movie stardom, when he received a telegram from Willie Chan (no relation) offering him a contract with Lo Wei's production company.

Jackie returned to Hong Kong and made seven films with Lo Wei from 1976 to 1978. Lo's intentions were all too clear from the first of these titles with, *New Fist of Fury* (1976). Chan played it straight and Lo Wei tried to recapture his glory days. The resulting films were box office disasters. By 1978, Lo Wei was more than willing to loan out Jackie Chan to another production company, Seasonal, run by Ng See-yuen. Ng teamed Chan up with director Yuen Woo-ping for two films that would change both his life and the kung fu movie industry: *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master* (both 1978).

## THE SEVEN LITTLE FORTUNES

Hong Kong was home to four Peking Opera schools in the 1960s, and only one taught students on a full-time basis. This school, run by Master Yuen Chan-yuan, was the Peking Opera Research Institute. Parents signed over their children for a variable number of years, during which time they lived, worked, and trained at the school. The longest apprenticeship was a full ten years. Students worked twelve to fifteen hours a day, learning singing, acting, face painting, acrobatics, martial arts, and weapon use. Punishment was severe and Master Yuen struck terror into his young charges.

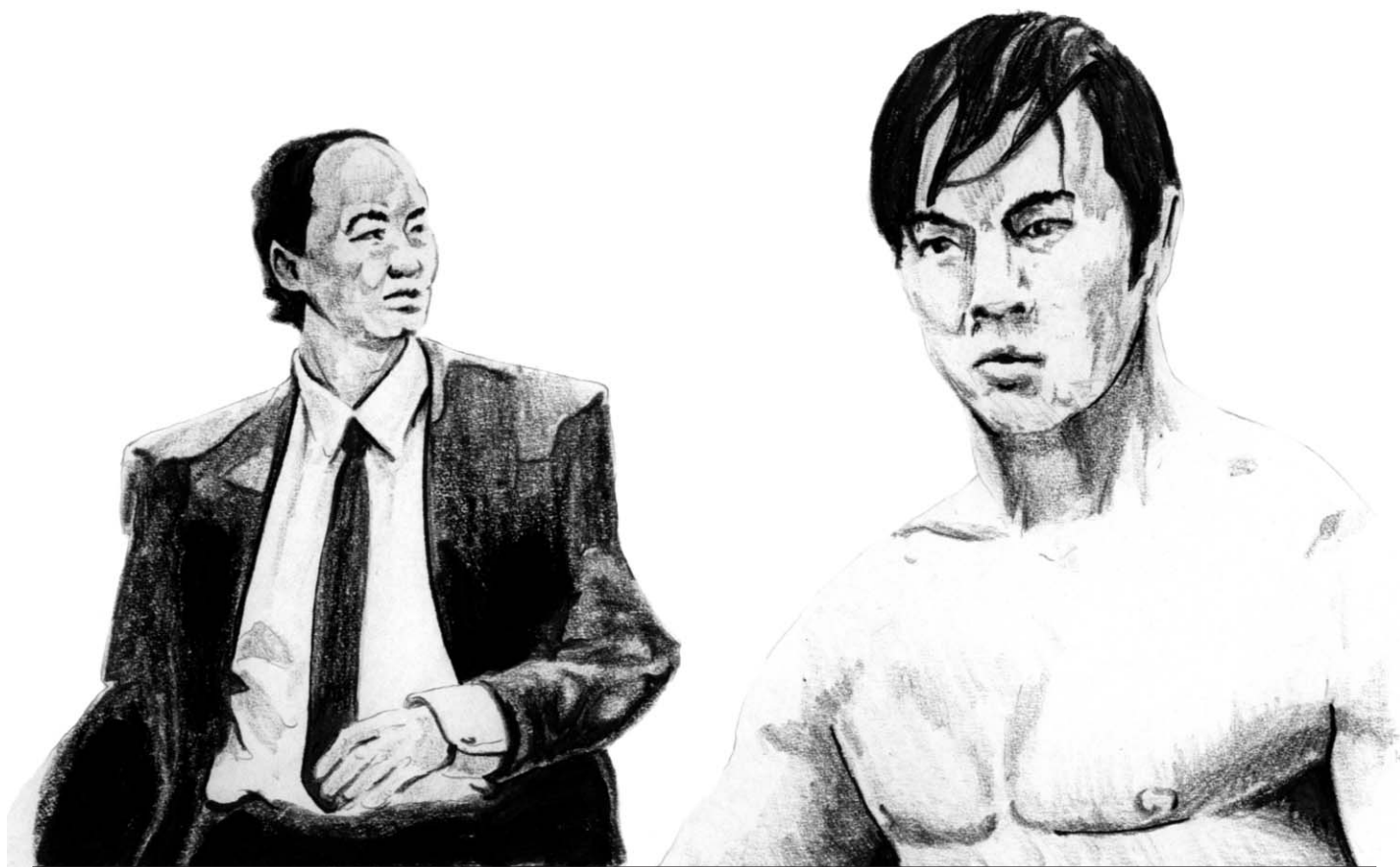
Amongst the school's students were actors and directors who would change the face of Hong Kong cinema. They performed as a troupe called the Seven Little Fortunes, despite the fact there were fourteen members at any given time. Their performances raised money for the school, and Master Yuen also loaned out the children to movie studios for additional cash. Jackie Chan, the school's most famous student, appeared in his first film, *Big and Little Wong Tin-bar* (1962), at age eight. Each student took on the Yuen surname as a tribute to their *sifu*, and many chose to keep it for their professional careers (not every Yuen comes from this school, however; original Wong Fei-hung series actor Yuen Siu-tien fathered twelve children, many of whom went into movies as well).

By the time this generation of students had graduated, Peking Opera was in decline. They found a ready calling for their talents in Hong Kong movies, however. Former Little Fortunes who found fame in films include Sammo Hung (actor, director, fight choreographer), Yuen Biao (actor), Yuen Wah (actor), Yuen Kwei AKA Corey Yuen (director, fight choreographer), Yuen Mo (actor, fight choreographer), Yuen Tak (actor, fight choreographer), and of course Jackie Chan (actor, director, fight choreographer). In 1988 Alex Law directed a film about the Seven Little Fortunes called *Painted Faces*. Sammo Hung gave an award-winning performance as Master Yuen, though Jackie Chan claimed the movie's portrayal of Yuen's methods was not harsh enough!

Chan had realized that he was not earning a reputation trying to act like Bruce Lee. There was no replacing the Little Dragon. According to Chan, he looked at Lee's films and planned his next move. "When Bruce Lee kick high, I kick low. When Bruce Lee punch, he is the superhero; when I punch, ahhh! It hurts!" Chan successfully added comedy to the kung fu film in both *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master*. In the latter flick, he played Wong Fei-hung as a youth so troublesome he is packed off to his uncle to learn discipline and kung fu. Yuen Siu-tien, father of director Yuen Woo-ping, played Fei-hung's master in a role that revived his career. This veteran actor of the original Wong Fei-hung series helped pass the torch on to the next HK superstar.

Both films were smash hits, which allowed Chan to direct himself in his next feature *Fearless Hyena* (1979). By finding his own screen persona and bringing comedy and slapstick to the fore, Jackie Chan redefined the kung fu movie genre and made himself a star. After over ten years of grim-faced bloodshed and heroics, it seemed that Hong Kong was ready, even eager, for this change. For the next several years, comedy would become king. Even stalwarts like Lau Kau-leung found themselves directing light fare like *Lady Is the Boss* (1980) and *My Young Auntie* (1981). Lau was actually forbidden by Shaw Brothers to direct a serious kung fu picture for two years. The early 80s also saw the rise of comedy series like *Aces Go Places* (five films from 1982-1990).

By 1983, it was clear that Shaw Brothers could not continue in its current state. Its old-fashioned studio system was outdated and its best directors were producing flops. When Jackie Chan signed with Golden Harvest in 1980, the writing was on the wall for Shaw Brothers. Run Run Shaw responded with a radical solution. He pulled Shaw Brothers out of film production altogether and went into television. While this was bad news to many Shaw Brothers' regulars, the move was successful in the long term and the Shaw network is still in business today.



## TI LUNG

Ti Lung was born in Guangdong province in 1946. He attended the Eton School in Hong Kong and, after graduation, auditioned for the lead in *Dead End*. While he did not land the part, he did earn a Shaw Brothers contract and a small role. He then worked on Chang Cheh's *Return of the One Armed Swordsman* in 1968, and continued studying Wing Chun and later Thai Kickboxing.

Ti's big break came when Jimmy Wang Yu left Shaw Brothers to make his own movies. Chang Cheh needed to replace Wang Yu and decided that two stars were better than one. Chang teamed up Ti Lung with David Chiang in the film *Vengeance* (aka *The Deadly Duo*, 1971). The pairing was a hit, and Chiang took the HK Best Actor Award for his role. Ti and Chiang went on to make many movies together, including *Duel of Fists*, *New One Armed Swordsman*, *Blood Brothers*, and *Five Shaolin Masters*. In the course of these roles, Ti Lung developed an identifiable persona. His characters seemed to embody the Chinese ideal of honour, and audiences probably saw Ti as an incarnation of traditional virtues.

In the mid-70s Ti Lung tried his hand at directing. He also landed a role in a co-production between British schlock horror masters Hammer and Shaw Brothers. He hoped that the film, called *Shatter*, would bring him international stardom. Like David Chiang's similar attempt, *Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires*, this too failed.

With the heyday of kung fu movies coming to close, Ti's career took a downward turn. He returned triumphantly in 1986, however, in John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow*. His portrayal of the honourable Triad Ho hearkened back to his earlier roles, but now he was in the urban jungle of modern HK. Over the next ten years he starred in such films as *People's Hero*, *Drunken Master 2* (as Jackie Chan's father), *First Shot*, and the *Bare Footed Kid*.

After thirty years in the business, Ti Lung is definitely considered old school. Over the last several years he has been working for the TVB television network. In 1996 he reprised his role from *First Shot* in the series ICAC Investigators. In 1998 he teamed up with another old school martial arts actor, Yuen Biao, in a series called *Righteous Guards*. It is hoped the old master will return to film before too long.



## HORROR AND FX

The first half of the 1980s was a volatile time for Hong Kong cinema. There were some genuinely important firsts in kung fu films. Sammo Hung, one of the Seven Little Fortunes (see sidebar), already possessed an impressive career as an actor and fight choreographer when he directed and starred in *Encounters of the Spooky Kind* (1981). This film popularized a mix of horror and martial arts that was to become a staple of HK movies. The penultimate expression of this type of film was to come three years later with *Mr. Vampire* (1984). Lam Ching-ying, another actor whose career stretched back to the Bruce Lee days (he doubled for the aging Shek Kin in *Enter the Dragon's* fight scenes), finally became a star as a ghostbusting Taoist priest. He would reprise the role of the "one eyebrow priest" repeatedly in the following years, in such films as *Magic Cop* and *Vampire Vs. Vampire* (both 1991), not to mention six official sequels to *Mr. Vampire* and several unofficial ones.

The supernatural elements of horror films called for the increasing use of special FX. The trouble was that Hong Kong boasted virtually no special FX industry. Certainly nothing comparable with what US-based ILM had developed in the wake of *Star Wars*. Enter maverick director and visionary Tsui Hark.

Tsui Hark was born in Canton but raised in Saigon. He came to the United States at age 18 to study film in Texas, and later worked with a documentary moviemaker in New York City. He returned to Hong Kong and was hired directing dramas at TVB, a television network. In 1979 he directed his first feature film, the *Butterfly Murders*. Neither that project nor two subsequent efforts made much of a mark, but he did direct two successful lightweight comedies. This gave him the resources to make the landmark *Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain* (1983) for Golden Harvest.

Hark envisioned *Zu* as an FX-laden spectacle, the likes of which Hong Kong had never seen. He recruited American experts in optical effects and animation to bring his sprawling supernatural epic to life. Yuen Biao, another Little Fortune and the protagonist of *Zu*, remembers what a new experience the film was for everyone. "Many of us had worked on Chinese horror

films before, but usually the monster was a guy in a suit or a giant prop. This was the first time we had nothing to react to, because they were going to superimpose a lot of effects later."

*Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain* was a hit that allowed Tsui Hark to found his own company, Film Workshop. Hong Kong now had its own FX house and a visionary poised to redefine Hong Kong film again.

## THE NEW WAVE

Tsui Hark is perhaps at the vanguard of a group of Hong Kong filmmakers known as the *New Wave*. This group of directors, which includes Ann Hui, Yim Ho, Alex Cheung, and Peter Yung, was not so much united by artistic vision as background. They were the first generation of moviemakers brought up after WWII who, like Hark, had studied film abroad. With 70s cinema focused on kung fu, the future members of the *New Wave* went to work in television instead. So many *New Wave* directors, writers, and cinematographers had worked in television between 1976-78 that critic Law Kar dubbed HK's TV stations the "Shaolin school for filmmakers."

A TV comedian and variety show host named Michael Hui paved the way for the *New Wave*. Hui had made his film debut in 1972 with a movie called *The Warlord*. After making three more films, Hui started his own production company with his two brothers, and signed a deal with Golden Harvest. He went on to produce, write, direct, and star in a series of very successful comedies at a time when kung fu was king. Many saw Michael Hui as the first local star of his generation, and like Jackie Chan he helped revive Cantonese-language films. His brother Samuel was also an important figure. He wrote the songs for the musical segments of Michael's films, many of which became hits in their own right. He helped establish the musical genre of "Canto-pop," which would become intertwined with HK movies in the 80s.

Television in late 70s Hong Kong featured many shows about the police, criminals, and social issues (the Independent Commission Against Corruption even filmed its own propaganda show, *ICAC*). It is thus not surprising that so many early *New Wave* films dealt with

law enforcement and crime. Things took off in 1979, with the release of Alex Cheung's *Cops and Robbers*, Ann Hui's *The Secret*, and Peter Yung's *The System*. A series of crime thrillers followed over the next two years, including Yim Ho's *The Happenings* (1980), Ronny Yu's *The Savior* (1980), and Patrick Tam's *Love Massacre* (1981). Gone were period costumes and kung fu vengeance. Instead, New Wave films addressed the social problems of modern capitalism: youth gangs, organized crime, overcrowded prisons, and the like. The directors also engaged in stylistic experimentation, taking HK film even further from the rigid studio system of previous years.

The New Wave, however, was not an artistic movement per se. While one can certainly call many of its moviemakers auteurs, the New Wave did not try to break away from the rest of Hong Kong film. Commercial success was as important to them as artistic sensibility. Ann Hui's second film, for instance, was a ghost comedy called *The Spooky Bunch* (1980). Tsui Hark went from weird cannibal flicks like *We're Going To Eat You* (1980) to directing comedies for Cinema City. It is mildly amusing that a group of filmmakers known for the social realism of their films had to deal with the reality of their own situations. None of them could afford to make a series of unsuccessful films.





Commercial reality was not just a concern for the New Wave. By 1983 Shaw Brothers was in trouble. Golden Harvest's methods proved more versatile than Shaw's outdated studio system, martial arts comedies and horror films supplanted the traditional kung fu flick, and the New Wave brought fresh voices to HK cinema. It is to Run Run Shaw's credit that he realized a course of action. Rather than die a slow death like predecessor Cathay, Shaw Brothers simply quit filmmaking altogether and moved into television. The shift was a success, and Shaw is a major TV competitor to this day.

## HEROIC BLOODSHED

While the crime thrillers of the early 80s were not strangers to violence, they proved no replacement for the stylish combat of martial arts films. Johnny Mak, another member of the New Wave, directed a seminal work in 1984 called *Long Arm of the Law*. The film is about Mainland Chinese gangsters that pull off high-risk crimes in Hong Kong. Utterly loyal to each other, the gang members all die in a hail of police bullets. Johnny Mak pushed the envelope with *Long Arm of the Law*, and is a virtual John the Baptist of what would later become the Heroic Bloodshed genre. His work was important, paving the way for the one true prophet ... John Woo.

John Woo grew up in an HK slum. His own family was too poor to pay for schooling, but an American family sponsored his education through the Lutheran Church. He became a "fervent Christian" and even considered becoming a minister. His love of the arts and film in particular led him to make experimental films, which he funded through work for the Lutherans. In 1969 he landed a job at Cathay Studios, working his way up from stagehand to assistant director within two years. He went to work for Shaw Brothers in 1971, and learned his craft from martial arts maestro Chang Cheh. Woo began his directing career with kung fu films in 1973. He made a series of journeyman movies in the 70s, the most interesting of which were two films attempting to revive faded genres. *Princess Cheung Ping* (1976) was a straight up Peking Opera film and *Last Hurrah for Chivalry* (1978) was a throwback to Chang Cheh's wuxia pieces. Neither was a success, but *Last Hurrah for Chivalry* showcased themes that would dominate later Woo

masterpieces. In particular Woo featured the code of honor (known as *yi*) that bound the martial knights of wuxia films together.

While audiences know Woo as a leading figure of the New Wave, his filmmaking career predates them by a good six years. When Tsui Hark and Ann Hui broke new ground in the early 80s, Woo was still directing typical studio fare like *From Riches to Rags* (1980) and *Heroes Shed No Tears* (1983). John Woo's stylistic and commercial breakthrough did not come until 1986 when he teamed up with friend Tsui Hark, who was reaping the benefits of *Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain*. Woo directed and Hark produced a film for Cinema City that would change the face of the industry: *A Better Tomorrow*.

*A Better Tomorrow* is based on a 1967 film, *The Story of a Discharged Prisoner*. Woo expanded the tale, and updated it to modern HK. He recruited chopsocky great Ti Lung, ex-television actor Chow Yun-fat, and singing sensation Leslie Cheung to star. Ti and Chow play experienced Triads who live by *yi*. They find that capitalist Hong Kong has little place for men of honour such as themselves, and are betrayed by one of their own. In essence, Woo directed a wuxia film, replacing swords with guns. His major stylistic innovation was making gunfights as exciting as martial arts, a feat even Jackie Chan did not attempt when he launched his *Police Story* series in 1985 (which, though set in the modern day, primarily features Chan's kung). The style and grace of Woo's action scenes were like nothing seen before. The audiences responded to Woo's ballistic ballet and heroic sentiments, and *A Better Tomorrow* brought in HK \$34,651,324.00, making it the top grossing HK film ever.

Woo subsequently used this same winning formula in two other films: *The Killer* (1987) and *Hardboiled* (1992). Even the comedic caper flick *Once a Thief* (1991) featured a climactic gunfight and a story based on friendship and honour.

## TRIAD CHIC

*A Better Tomorrow*, like any successful movie of its calibre, saw a host of imitators. Over the next several years, dozens of gunplay films flooded the market. Woo had tapped into something and Hong





Kong responded. Reportedly, Triad membership swelled after *A Better Tomorrow*, and many critics accused Woo and other filmmakers of glorifying criminals. Another landmark film, Ringo Lam's *City on Fire* (1987), went so far as to show an undercover cop (Chow Yun-fat) learning the true nature of friendship amongst the criminal gang he infiltrated.

With big money rolling into Hong Kong film industry, the real Triads took notice. There had always been some Triad influence previously, but it grew much worse in the go-go 80s. Insiders differentiate the Triads as beneficial societies or thugs. Good Triads provide funding for production companies, use their influence with local bosses to facilitate location shoots on Hong Kong streets, and generally act more like businessmen than gangsters. The bad Triads intimidate actors and directors, issue death threats, and even resort to contract killing in extreme cases. Famous bad Triad incidents include the bashing in of director Wong Jing's teeth, the attempted theft of actor Andy Lau's film *All's Well That Ends Well* (1992), and the throwing of a cat's head into Chow Yun-fat's courtyard (he failed to respond to a Triad-sponsored script). The situation became so bad that Jackie Chan led a march of film industry professionals in a protest march through the streets of HK.

In 1989, Charles and Jimmy Heung established Wins Entertainment Group. Their father was Heung Chin, founder of powerful Triad society, Sun Yee On. Both brothers deny Triad connections, but Canada denied Charles a passport due to his alleged ties to organized crime. Charles actually began as an actor in Taiwanese martial arts films, and still acts occasionally in films he produces. The partnership between his brother and he did not last long, which by all accounts is a good thing. Triad or not, Charles Heung succeeded in making Wins Entertainment Group number two behind Golden Harvest in the 90s. Ironically, Wins is something of a haven for Hong Kong stars who have had trouble with bad Triads.

## A NEW GOLDEN AGE

Critics believe 1986 to 1993 were Chinese cinema's new Golden Age. A second group of New Wave directors, many of whom learned their craft writing or pursuing production work in the early 80s, came to the fore. Second wave directors of importance include Ching Siu-tung, Wong Kar-wai, and Stanley Kwan. Tsui Hark continued to be hugely influential. He produced innovative works like Ching Siu-tung's *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987), and directed films like *Peking Opera Blues* (1989). John Woo directed a series of blood-drenched gunplay films, Jackie Chan became even more popular with his *Police Story* series, and Sammo Hung directed inventive martial arts films like *Pedicab Driver* (1989).

In the early 90s, a new type of gangster picture became popular. Known as the "Big Timer" films, these biopics glorified the exploits of famous Triad leaders. The first was *To Be Number One* (1991), a Golden Harvest movie produced by Johnny Mak (of *Long Arm of the Law* fame). Ray Lui starred as "Limpy" Ho, a notorious drug trafficker and Triad godfather of the early 1970s. The movie mythologizes rather than deconstructs Limpy, making no real attempt to explore his character. *To Be Number One's* gorgeous production design only served to add to the glamour with which audiences viewed such figures. It was one of the top ten grossing films of the year and followed by a string of imitators. Ray Lui and co-star Kent Cheng became regulars of the genre, and the two appeared in another Johnny Mak production, *Lord of the East China Sea*, two years later. On this go-around the "Big Timer" in question was Du Yuesheng, leader of Shanghai's notorious Green Gang in the 20s and 30s. Other films, like the epic *Lee Rock* (1991), told the story of police corruption.

## THE RETURN OF WONG FEI-HUNG

Once again, it was Tsui Hark who kicked off Hong Kong's next cinema craze. Through instinct or careful consideration, Hark realized it was time to return to the roots of HK film: Wong Fei-hung. The Wong Fei-hung series of the 50s and 60s had a special place in the hearts



of Colony citizens. In 1991, Tsui Hark directed and produced *Once Upon a Time in China*, a film that revived the Wong Fei-hung franchise and the period martial arts movie.

Hark chose ex-Chinese wushu champion Jet Li to portray Wong Fei-hung. Li had caught everyone's attention in 1983, when he starred in *Shaolin Temple*, the first martial arts movie filmed in the People's Republic of China. Two sequels later and Jet Li seemed like a flash in the pan. He struggled through the 80s, even moving to California and getting a green card at one point. He shot a film with Hark in America called *The Master* (1990) but it went unreleased until 1992. Still, Hark believed Li was perfect to assume the Wong Fei-hung mantle. Audiences agreed, to the tune of HK \$29,672,278.00.

That quickly, the kung fu movie was back. Hark went on to produce five sequels, culminating in *Once Upon a Time in China and America* (1997), which reunited Jet Li with Tsui Hark in the USA. Hark also oversaw the revival of the swordplay film. His first stab had been in 1990, when he offered King Hu a chance to bring back wuxia with the film *Swordsman* (1990). King Hu left the film in mid-production and the final credits list four other directors on the project. After the success of *Once Upon a Time in China*, Hark produced his second stab at wuxia, this time under the able direction of Ching Siu-tung. *Swordsman 2* (1992), featuring Brigitte Lin as the gender-bending villain Asia the Invincible, succeeded admirably in revitalizing the genre.

In the early 1990s there was virtual flood of martial arts movies that climaxed in 1993. Even Ringo Lam directed a kung fu flick, the superlative *Burning Paradise* (1993). In 1992, Jackie Chan starred in his first period martial arts film in ten years. It is perhaps no coincidence that Chan chose to reprise the role that had made him a star: Wong Fei-hung. Chan's film, *Drunken Master 2*, broke the box office record set by *A Better Tomorrow*, grossing HK \$40,971,484.00.

## GO (TO THE) WEST, YOUNG MAN

Average box office receipts dropped off after 1993, the only positive result of which was lessened Triad involvement in the film industry. There are several reasons for the decline. First, Hong Kong was bracing for the 1997 changing of the guard over to China. The UK had worked out a deal in 1984 with the PRC, and as time ticked away, there was trepidation in HK (especially after the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989). Second, piracy was taking its toll. The VCD, or Video Compact Disc, provided a cheap way to pirate movies. Oftentimes, VCDs of new movies were available on the street within hours of a film's debut, and for less than the price of a ticket. Third, some of Hong Kong's major talent left for the West (some because they feared the hand-over, others simply for prestige).

Directors John Woo, Ringo Lam, Tsui Hark, and Ronnie Yu (whose stylish martial arts film *Bride With White Hair* had wowed audiences in 1993) all made the trip to America. Strangely, directing a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie became something of a prerequisite and Woo, Lam, and Hark all took a turn. John Woo enjoyed the most success, leaving Van Damme behind him to direct such successes as *Broken Arrow* (1996), *Face Off* (1997), and *Mission Impossible 2* (2000). Ronnie Yu has done more offbeat films, like *Warriors of Virtue* (1997) and *Bride of Chucky* (1998), while Hark and Lam returned to Hong Kong to call their own shots. Kung fu film legend Yuen Woo-ping was invited to the US as fight choreographer for *The Matrix* (1999), and added so much style to the film that he is reportedly in demand in Hollywood.

Actors also jumped in on the action. Jackie Chan had tried to conquer America once, in the late 70s, but with limited success following such schlock as *The Cannonball Run* (1981). He finally made a mark with a fairly mediocre movie call *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995, released in the US in 1996). It was successful enough, however, to secure American releases of some of Chan's HK films like *Supercop* (1992) and *First Strike* (1997), and to gain Chan roles in American films like *Rush Hour* (1998) and *Shanghai Noon* (2000). Chow Yun-fat has



similarly done well, with movies like *The Replacement Killers* (1998) and *The Corruptor* (1999). Jet Li has also made the switch, starting with an atypical villainous role in *Lethal Weapon 4* (1998) and moving on to star in *Romeo Must Die* (2000). His older films, like *Black Mask* (1996), were also re-released in the US. Michelle Yeoh, who trained as a ballerina in the UK and thus speaks flawless English, also made the most of *Supercop*. She had the prestige of becoming a Bond girl in *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997), and was shockingly allowed to be more than window dressing.

## THE HAND-OVER AND BEYOND

On July 1, 1997 the United Kingdom officially returned Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China. A \$130 million spectacle made the hand-over quite the event, and Prince Charles himself was on hand to do the honours. Hong Kong ceased being a colony, and instead became a SAR (Special Administrative Region). The PRC appointed a chief executive and a legislative council, and business proceeded more or less as usual. Unfortunately, the Asian economic meltdown hit hard on the heels of the hand-over, hastening the decline of HK cinema. In the early 90s Hong Kong made an average of 200 films per year. This dropped to 100 by 1997 and bottomed out in 1998 at a mere fifty films. With the PRC in and the profits tiny, the Triads had left the film industry by 1998.

Director Cheung Yuen-ting summed up the state of post-hand-over HK film so well that he is worth quoting at length. According to Cheung, "the current Asian economic crisis is affecting the film industry in a profound way. The audience is very careful about the choice of which film to see. That's why they flock to see big Hollywood films which guarantee good value for money. Furthermore, some of the most popular stars have crossed over to Hollywood. Because of the shrinking economic situation, local films are made on shoestring budgets and very tight schedules. That makes it even harder for local films to compete with Hollywood films. Many of the big local film studios have been forced out of

business or forced to reduce their yearly output. However, since there is no major trend now, it is easier for filmmakers like myself to find financing for non-mainstream types of films. Since everybody is at a loss as to what type of films can make money, film bosses are willing to bet on filmmakers who can provide a full script and a reasonable cast."

The future of the Hong Kong film industry remains an open question. While box office numbers are recovering in the wake of 1998, they still are a long way short of HK's golden age. The small production companies are the only ones lean and mean enough to survive, and even Golden Harvest went through terrible times (culminating in the loss of their over 30-year old studio after the SAR refused to renew their land-lease). Still, hope remains. Auteur Wong Kar-wai has achieved art house success in the West with his offbeat films like *Chungking Express* (1994) and *Happy Together* (1997). The 1998 film *The Storm Riders*, a big budget special FX martial arts picture, broke first day box office records and showed there was some life left in HK. Mainland China is also a mass of untapped potential. With HK films finally Chinese enough for the PRC, money from the Mainland may help save the film industry.

A last hope emerged from a most unlikely corner. Taiwanese director Ang Lee, who achieved success in America with such films as *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) and *The Ice Storm* (1997), returned to his roots and directed a wuxia picture. Armed with a big budget (by HK standards) and the indisputable star power of Chow Yun-fat and Michelle Yeoh, Lee crafted the best wuxia film since the heyday of King Hu, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). The film broke out of the art house, and received rave reviews all over North America. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* won four Oscars, including Best Foreign Language Picture, as well as the People's Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival. Perhaps Ang Lee has made the film that will lead Hong Kong into the 21st century. Fans of Hong Kong action cinema can only watch and wait.



## RINGO LAM

*"He's like a mad dog on the set. I couldn't believe it, this guy has no sympathy at all. You don't feel pain, he's not happy."*

— Jasmine Chow

Ringo Lam is the cynic's choice of Hong Kong film directors. While his movies are every bit as violent and sharp as John Woo's, Lam does not share Woo's chivalric ideals of honour and loyalty. For Lam, the world is an ugly place, and he styles himself a "dark-faced god."

Ringo Lam started in television. He trained at TVB, first as an actor and then as a production assistant, from 1973 to 1978. Lam then moved to Canada, and studied film at York University until 1981. He never completed his degree, but still directed his first film by 1982. Karl Maka, the head of Cinema City, brought him in to finish a ghost comedy called *Esprit d'Amour*. He did well enough to land the director's chair for *Aces Go Places 4*, even if comedy was decidedly not his forte. Karl Maka was pleased with Lam, and allowed him to direct a drama of his choosing. The result was *City on Fire*, which won Lam a Best Director Award at the Hong Kong Film Awards and established him as a major talent.

Since then Ringo Lam has produced a body of work second to none in Hong Kong cinema. He has worked repeatedly with Chow Yun-fat, most notably in the riveting *Full Contact*, though many of Lam's later films enjoyed greater popularity in North America than in HK. Lam attributes this to some remarks he made after the Tianamen Square massacre. He received so many death threats that he spent a month in Singapore just to be safe.

Like John Woo, Ringo Lam also directed a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie (*Maximum Risk*). Unlike Woo, he did not stick around after the experience, but returned to HK to make movies his way. Since then, he has directed several excellent movies, including *Full Alert* and the genre-bashing *Victim*. No one can keep Ringo Lam down.

## MOVIE REVIEWS

The following films exemplify Hong Kong cinema's success and account for its international appeal.

### A BETTER TOMORROW (1986)

**DIRECTED BY:** John Woo

**STARRING:** Ti Lung, Chow Yun-fat, Leslie Cheung, Waise Lee, Emily Chu

*A Better Tomorrow* is a landmark film any way you slice it. It established John Woo as an action director par excellence, it created the "heroic bloodshed" genre and touched off a gangster film craze that lasted for years, it was the top grossing HK movie of all time up to that point, and it even started a fashion craze among teenagers who bought up trenchcoats and sunglasses so they could look like Chow Yun-fat's character.

The story focuses on two Triad members, Mark (Chow Yun-fat) and Ho (Ti Lung). Both men are from the old school, where loyalty and honour are paramount. Ho feels increasingly alienated by the anything-for-a-buck atmosphere of the 80s, and he also worries that his Triad connections will prove trouble for his younger brother Kit (Leslie Cheung), a rookie cop. Ho travels abroad for "one last job" and walks into a trap. The police wound and capture him, and gangsters back in HK kill his father in retaliation. Mark finds the man responsible and takes him out in one of the most stylish scenes of bloodshed ever filmed. He is crippled avenging his friend's honour, however, and by the time Ho is out of prison Mark is reduced to working in the parking garage under Triad HQ.

After his stint in the joint, Ho wants to go straight, but he cannot escape his past. Mark has been waiting for Ho's return and expects the two to have a comeback. Kit blames his brother for their father's death, and is also bitter that his Triad brother prevents him from gaining a promotion. Ti Lung gives an outstanding performance as the tortured Ho, a far cry from the martial arts roles of his youth. Finally circumstances force Ho to dust off his guns once again, and he teams up with Mark and Kit for a blazing climax. Mark pays the ultimate price for his friend, and dies a true hero.

### A BETTER TOMORROW II (1987)

**DIRECTED BY:** John Woo

**STARRING:** Ti Lung, Chow Yun-fat, Dean Shek, Leslie Cheung, Kwan Shan

The runaway success of *A Better Tomorrow* all but ensured a sequel. When money and prestige are on the line though, people act funny. In this case, the conflict was between Tsui Hark (who had produced the first film) and John Woo. Hark wanted the story to feature Dean Shek strongly, while Woo had his own ideas. The resulting picture, which was rushed through production anyway, does not rise to the same heights as its predecessor. The film has merit, however.

Chow Yun-fat miraculously reappears, despite Mark's death at the end of part I. This time he plays Ken, Mark's identical twin brother (!) who lives in New York. Ken runs a restaurant, and the mafia is trying to squeeze protection money out of him. The ensuing scene, where Ken makes the Mafioso "eat the fucking rice" at gunpoint, is a classic.

The plot revolves around the machinations of Ko (Kwan Shan), a seemingly loyal lieutenant of Uncle Lung (Dean Shek). Ko kills Lung's daughter Peggy and drives him insane. The brothers Kit and Ho, now working together, try infiltrating Ko's organization. Meanwhile, Ken is recruited to find Uncle Lung and return him to sanity.

The final fifteen minutes (coincidentally, the only part of the film Woo does not disown) is an amazing gunfight at Ko's mansion. Ko finds that all his money cannot save him from the fury of the righteous. At one point, Ti Lung runs out of ammunition, grabs a katana off the wall, and eviscerates several gangsters on the stairway (you can see this scene in the film *True Romance* if you look closely). This bit not only goes back to Ti's roots, but also reinforces the idea that Woo's characters follow the same code of chivalry as the swordsmen of the wuxia genre.



## A BETTER TOMORROW III: LOVE AND DEATH IN SAIGON (1989)

**DIRECTED BY:** Tsui Hark

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Tony Leung Ka-fai,  
Anita Mui, Shek Kin, Saburo Tokito

After part II the conflict between Tsui Hark and John was such that Hark took over directorial duties for part III. He chose to make a prequel, set in Vietnam circa 1974. Tsui had grown up in Vietnam and he saw a parallel between HK's impending return to China and the fall of Saigon. He was also influenced by the Tianamen Square massacre of that year, as is clear from a man vs. tank scene late in the film.

Chow Yun-fat reprises his role as Mark. He travels to Vietnam to help his cousin Mun (Tony Leung) and uncle (Shek Kin) escape. Saigon is a city in turmoil, with soldiers, gangsters, and refugees all struggling to survive. Mark and Mun meet Chow Kit-ying (Anita Mui), an ex-saloon singer with contacts and guts. It is Kit who teaches Mark how to shoot, and establishes the trenchcoat and sunglasses look. Mark and Mun are both impressed with the tough Kit, and a love triangle develops. They all deny their own interest to spare the others' feelings, but Saigon is a lousy place to fall in love anyway. Ultimately, Kit gives her life to save Mark, who escapes to HK wiser in the ways of the (under)world.

## BLACK CAT (1993)

**DIRECTED BY:** Stephen Shin

**STARRING:** Jade Leung, Simon Yam

Black Cat is the Hong Kong remake of *La Femme Nikita* (the French movie, not the USA Network TV show). While *Nikita* is slicker and prettier, *Black Cat* packs more punch. Jade Leung ably plays the title character, an out-of-control woman turned secret government assassin. The story is familiar, but *Black Cat* delivers with Hong Kong flare. For instance, Shin restages *Nikita's* final test in the restaurant. Leung's handler (Simon Yam) drops her off at a wedding and coolly informs her that she must assassinate the new bride. Of course, this is a Jewish wedding, so all the guests have uzis! The bizarrely plotted sequel (in which *Black Cat* faces off with irradiated Russians of the "Anti-Yeltsin Organization") is best avoided.

## BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR (1993)

**DIRECTED BY:** Ronny Yu

**STARRING:** Brigitte Lin, Leslie Cheung, Elaine Lui,  
Francis Ng

A visual stunner from director Ronny Yu, *Bride With White Hair* is a great film from start to finish. Leslie Cheung plays Yi-hang, a swordsman and heir apparent of an alliance of eight martial arts clans. Yet, Yi-hang is weary of the martial life and longs for something else. While out brooding in the woods he meets "wolf woman" (Brigitte Lin). This fierce femme fatale was literally raised by wolves and tears people apart with her whip. Yi-hang is smitten and the two fall in love.

The world is against the new lovers though. Wolf woman is an assassin in the service of a cult leader. This paragon of evil is a back-to-back, brother and sister Siamese twin. The male half burns with unholy lust for wolf girl, while the female half mocks and ridicules her brother. Wolf woman tries to leave the service of the cult, but must walk over shards of glass while cultists beat her with clubs. She survives the ordeal, but the cult leader will not let her live in happiness. He/she slaughters the leaders of the martial arts clans, causing Yi-hang to believe his beloved is to blame. Mayhem ensues and Brigitte Lin's fury is something to behold.

A sequel, also made in 1993, picks up right where part I leaves off. Brigittie Lin's character is not as sympathetic, but she kicks ass and takes names just the same. Ronny Yu later made the jump to the US market, where he directed *Warriors of Virtue* and *Bride of Chuckie*.

## BULLET IN THE HEAD (1990)

**DIRECTED BY:** John Woo

**STARRING:** Tony Leung Chi-wai, Jacky Cheung,  
Waise Lee, Simon Yam, Fennie Yuen

Although not as popular as such John Woo films as *The Killer* and *Hardboiled*, *Bullet in the Head* may be his masterpiece. It brings all the classic Woo elements together in a dark and brooding story of friendship, treachery, and war. It is 1967 and the war drags on in

Vietnam. Ben (Tony Leung), Frank (Jacky Cheung), and Paul (Waise Lee) are three friends who head to Vietnam looking for a big score. They quickly discover they are out of their league. Luke (Simon Yam), a Chinese-French ex-CIA operative, however, befriends them and helps them rescue a torch singer named Sally (Fennie Yuen) from gangsters. Luke is the epitome of cool, and uses his trademark cigar-grenades to deadly effect.

The friends escape into the jungle, where they find a shipment of gold. They are also captured and tortured by Viet Cong, who accuse them of working for the CIA. Luke saves the day, bringing helicopters full of US soldiers to rescue his friends. When all hell breaks loose, Paul can think of nothing but the gold, but after Frank is wounded, Paul must choose between his friend and the gold. He puts a bullet in Frank's head and escapes with the loot.

Back in HK, Paul uses the gold to become a man of influence and power. Frank, amazingly, survives his ordeal, but the bullet lodged in his brain causes him such pain that he becomes a heroin addict. Worse yet, he accepts work as a hitman to earn money for his fixes. When Ben uncovers Frank's fate, he knows Paul must pay for breaking their vows of friendship. The showdown between Ben and Paul is a powerful conclusion to a powerful film.

## BURNING PARADISE (1994)

**DIRECTED BY:** Ringo Lam

**STARRING:** Willie Chi, Wong Kam-kong, Carman Lee

*Burning Paradise* is Ringo Lam's only period martial arts film and it is a stunning success. A radical remake of *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* (1928), Lam's film is dark and gritty (no surprise considering his resume). In the opening scenes, hundreds of Shaolin monks are killed or captured by Ming soldiers. The survivors are taken to the Red Lotus Temple and imprisoned. Their only hope is a familiar name: Fong Sai Yuk (Willie Chi). Fong braves the dangers of the temple, a veritable death trap lorded over by a twisted eunuch priest (Wong Kam-kong). The temple is sure to make any fantasy RPGer grin. It is loaded with pits, spring blades,

poison gas traps, and the like. To escape, Fong Sai Yuk and his allies must not only beat the temple, but also Wong's "Ultimate Stance." *Burning Paradise* is a must-see for any fan of martial arts action.

## A CHINESE GHOST STORY (1987)

**DIRECTED BY:** Ching Siu-tung

**STARRING:** Leslie Cheung, Joey Wang, Wu Ma

*A Chinese Ghost Story* is one of the all time great HK films. Based on the Ming Dynasty ghost stories of writer Pu Song-ling, and the 1958 feature *The Enchanting Shadow*, *A Chinese Ghost Story* marvellously succeeds in evoking an otherworld of restless spirits and hungry ghosts. Production by Tsui Hark also ensures a beautiful-looking film with first rate FX.

Leslie Cheung plays the new taxman in town. When no one offers him a place to stay, he bunks down in a dilapidated temple. No one bothers telling him that it is haunted. He has quite an eventful evening, meeting Taoist wizard named Swordsman Yen (Wu Ma) and a beautiful young woman. Unbeknownst to him, the woman (the lovely Joey Wang) is a ghost hunting yang energy for her master. Yet, she cannot bring herself to drain the young scholar. Worse still, the two are falling in love.

The ghost finally admits her true state, and that she is only serving the extremely foul tree demon because it possesses her remains. The scholar enlists the aid of Swordsman Yen and they fight the tree demon and its fifty-foot tongue. When the nasty thing cannot defeat them, it grabs the ghost and takes her to hell, literally. Swordsman Yen does not miss a beat. "Scholar!" he cries, "It seems we have to storm hell!" ... and off they go! After a terrific fight in the bowels of hell, they recover the ghost's remains, and she can at last reincarnate. Through love, she is finally set free.

*A Chinese Ghost Story* was a huge success. To date there have been two official sequels, one animated film of the same name, and a Category III cash-in series called *Erotic Ghost Story* (also with three instalments).

## CITY ON FIRE (1987)

**DIRECTED BY:** Ringo Lam

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Roy Cheung, Danny Lee, Carrie Ng

*City on Fire* quite deservedly won Best Picture and Best Actor (Chow Yun-fat) at the Hong Kong Film Awards, and established Ringo Lam as a major creative force. Chow Yun-fat plays an undercover cop sent to infiltrate a gang of criminals. He succeeds perhaps too well, and undergoes a moral crisis after establishing a genuine friendship with a gangster. He must then choose between loyalty to his job and loyalty to his friend. Lam's characters, unlike John Woo's, do not have easy answers to such questions.

A real gang of jewel thieves inspired the story, and Ringo Lam went so far as to watch their court appearances. *City on Fire* then did some inspiring of its own, with Quentin Tarantino borrowing the film's climax for his own *Reservoir Dogs*.

## CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON

**DIRECTED BY:** Ang Lee

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Michelle Yeoh, Zhang Ziyi, Chang Chen, Lung Sihung, Cheng Pei-pei

Ang Lee, the talented Taiwanese visionary responsible for the acclaimed *Sense and Sensibility* and *The Ice Storm*, reinvigorated Hong Kong's wuxia genre both in Asia and North America with the critically acclaimed *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. While the film's hallmarks are undeniably wuxia-style action and Ang Lee's unmistakable sense of visual composition, the themes of responsibility and duty are perhaps stronger influences here. Additionally, the stellar cast of actors, from veterans Chow Yun-fat, Cheng Pei-pei, and Michelle Yeoh to talented newcomer Zhang Ziyi, ensures a higher calibre of performance on par with a theatrical experience, especially given the film's use of soft-spoken and culturally refined Mandarin. Add to this formula the unmistakable choreography of Yuen Woo-ping, the mastermind behind the visually impressive fight scenes in *Iron Monkey*, *Drunken Master I & II*, and *The Matrix*, and the movie is pure dynamite on any level.

The movie opens with Li Mu Bai (Chow Yun-fat), master swordsman extraordinaire, confiding in Yu Shu Lien (Michelle Yeoh) his desire to retire from the fighting and killing. From the beginning, there is an undeniable tension between the two masters, who cannot admit their love for one another until much later; Yu was betrothed to Li's oath-brother, Meng Si Zhao, who saved Li but died as a result. Yu's and Li's obligation to Meng's memory keeps them distant. Also at the centre of attention is Green Destiny, a 400-year old blade that Li has used proficiently over the decades to slay his enemies. Unfortunately, one person has eluded Green Destiny's touch: the Jade Fox, murderer of Li's master. Li, however, is still intent on retiring and washing the blood from his hands, so he entrusts Yu to deliver Green Destiny to his old ally Sir Te (Lung Sihung).

Upon arriving in Beijing, Yu gives Green Destiny to Sir Te, who is entertaining the Governor and Madame Yu (Li Fazeng and Hai Yan), their soon-to-be-married daughter, Jen (Zhang Ziyi), and Jen's governess, who is none other than the Jade Fox (Cheng Pei-pei) in disguise. Jen and Yu immediately strike up a friendship, with the younger woman envying Yu's "freedom from responsibility" as a *Giang Hu* or wandering fighter. Yu advises caution, however, since she knows everyone is accountable to duty and integrity.

The movie's high-flying action kicks off with the daring night theft of Green Destiny. The nimble and petit thief (who is obviously Jen) evades a host of guards, scaling walls like a spider and clearing rooftops like she was jumping over puddles. On her trail is Yu, setting of a dynamic fight sequence over rooftops and across dusty courtyards. Over the movie's run, we discover that Jade Fox learned her martial prowess from the fighting manuals of fabled *Wudan* Mountain after killing Li's master for underestimating her. Jen became her student, helping her translate the text, but kept many secrets to herself, far surpassing her teacher. When Jade Fox learns this, she vows to teach Jen a lesson and departs. Meanwhile, Li reclaims the Green Destiny, and offers to teach the obviously talented Jen in the way of *Wudan* fighters, but Jen proves too wilful to heed any advice or surrender her independence. In fact, she even turns her back on her one



true love, a bandit named Dark Cloud (aka Lo, who is played by Chang Chen) whom she met in the desert (thanks to a lengthy 20-minute flashback scene). Jen, unable to face her responsibilities, eventually steals the Green Destiny again and sets out to become a *Giang Hu* fighter. Her irresponsibility sets a series of events in motion leading to the film's appropriately tragic finale.

The movie explores the themes of loyalty and devotion, with Yu aware of the thief's identity, but protecting it for the sake of Jen's family, Li's dedication to both Yu and the need to avenge his master's murder, the bandit Lo's love for Jen, etc. Despite the high melodrama quotient, however, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* contains many beautifully choreographed action sequences, particularly the fight at the inn and the match between Yu and Jen. It leaves the audience with little doubt as to the movie's artistic and action merit.

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## DRAGON INN (1992)

**DIRECTED BY:** Raymond Lee

**STARRING:** Brigitte Lin, Tony Leung Ka-fai, Maggie Cheung, Donnie Yen, Lawrence Ng, Elvis Tsui

*Dragon Inn* is a remake of King Hu's 1967 classic *Dragon Gate Inn*. With an all-star cast, great performances, and some truly impressive action scenes, *Dragon Inn* is a worthy successor.

Tony Leung plays a righteous government official, on the run from power-mad eunuch Donnie Yen. He is to meet his swordswoman lover (Brigitte Lin) in a remote inn in the desert. *Dragon Inn* is run by the manipulative Jade (Maggie Cheung). Jade lures men back to her room for sex, but kills them and takes their money instead. She then deposits the bodies in the basement, where her maniacal chef makes spicy meat buns out of them. Hello *Untold Story*.

Before the two lovers can escape the inn, the eunuch's followers descend on the place. None of these flunkies know what their quarry looks like, however, so they snoop around trying to figure it out. A sandstorm then traps everyone at the inn, and a vicious cat and

mouse game ensues. Jade promises to help one side then the other, and Maggie Cheung is simply delightful as the roguish inn owner.

Of course, it is simply a matter of time before the eunuch lord shows up to take care of business. Donnie Yen struts his stuff in a dazzling showdown in the desert, taking on three opponents at once and more than holding his own. It takes the intervention of the mad butcher to finally put him down in a fight to the finish you will not soon forget.

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## DREAM LOVERS (1986)

**DIRECTED BY:** Chen Ching Lo

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Brigitte Lin

Yes, that is right, it's a Chow Yun-fat art house movie. Brigitte Lin and he play Ching Dynasty lovers reincarnated in contemporary Hong Kong. Their modern selves meet by chance, and are irresistibly drawn to one another. Chow's modern girlfriend, who has been nothing but loyal and loving to her man, simply cannot understand what is happening and eventually kills herself. A moody film with atmospheric flashbacks, *Dream Lover* is not light fare.

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## DRUNKEN MASTER (1978)

**DIRECTED BY:** Yuen Woo-ping

**STARRING:** Jackie Chan, Yuen Siu-tien

This breakthrough film not only launched Jackie Chan to stardom, it also kicked off the reign of the kung fu comedy. Chan plays Wong Fei-hung during his rebellious teenage years. He proves so troublesome that his father sends him off to his uncle to learn kung fu the hard way. His uncle, played by Cantonese movie legend Yuen Siu-tien, puts Fei-hung through such harsh training that the youngster runs away. Wong's kung fu is no match for a bully he meets at an inn, and he is soundly drubbed. He returns to his uncle and takes his training more seriously this time. He learns drunken boxing, and masters it just in time to defeat a vicious martial arts master. *Drunken Master* is a triumph both for Chan and director Yuen Woo-ping.

## DRUNKEN MASTER 2 (1992)

**DIRECTED BY:** Lau Kar-leung

**STARRING:** Jackie Chan, Ti Lung, Anita Mui, Lau Kar-leung, Johnny Lo

Jackie Chan had not made a period martial arts movie since 1982's *Dragon Lord* when he teamed up with martial arts legend Lau Kar-leung to make a sequel to *Drunken Master*. The result is one of the best kung fu movies of them all, and the pinnacle performance of Chan's career.

Once again Chan plays Chinese folk hero Wong Fei-hung. The film opens with Fei-hung and his father (played by the great Ti Lung) returning home on the train with a variety of medicines. Fei-hung and his friend conspire to avoid paying duty on a large ginseng root, and their parcel is mixed up with another holding an ancient Chinese seal. Fei-hung chases a man he believes a thief, but turns out to be a nationalist general. Fei-hung and General Fu have a breathtaking spear fight beneath the train. Director Lau Kar-leung plays General Fu, showing that even at his age he still has the stuff.

Wong Fei-hung discovers that a group of British imperialists and Chinese turncoats are smuggling national treasures out of the country. They are also

exploiting the local steelworkers, keeping them in line with brutal tactics. Fei-hung beats up a gang of bad guys using his drunken boxing, but accidentally assaults his father when the brawl is over. Despite the pleas of his stepmother (Anita Mui, in a terrific comic performance), Fei-hung's father throws him out of the household. He drowns his sorrows with further booze, and is so soused that the baddies beat him up and hang him up Jesus style with a sign that reads "King of Drunken Boxing."

Wong Fei-hung survives, but General Fu takes an axe in the back when the two of them fight off the Hatchet Gang in another stunning set-piece battle. It is then off to the steel factory to stop the Brits from stealing China's treasures. Fei-hung's toughest foe is a Eurofied martial artist named Ah-jan (played by Chan's real life bodyguard Johnny Lo). Ah-Jan may dress like a gweilo, but he can kick like a demon. He beats up Wong but good, until Fei-hung spies the alcohol used to stoke the coals. With industrial strength hooch coursing through his veins, Wong Fei-hung emerges triumphant at last. Luckily, the brain damage is only temporary!

*Drunken Master 2* was given a theatrical release in North America under the title *Legend of the Drunken Master*.





## DR. WEI IN THE SCRIPTURE WITH NO WORDS (1996)

**DIRECTED BY:** Ching Siu Tung

**STARRING:** Jet Li, Rosamund Kwan, Takeshi Kaneshiro, Charlie Young

Jet Li plays a pulp fiction writer who is fresh out of ideas. With a deadline approaching, Li is in the grip of terrible writer's block that is largely the product of his deteriorating relationship with his wife (Rosamund Kwan). His two assistants try to help out by starting a new story featuring Dr. Wei, Li's adventurous alter ego. So begins the movie within the movie structure of *Dr. Wei and the Scripture with No Words*. The action cuts back and forth between the writer and his love trouble, and the slam bang 30s action adventure of Dr. Wei. Li and his assistants each take turns adding to the story, and seeing how their different personalities affect the tale is quite entertaining. Dr. Wei is reminiscent of Indiana Jones, with sadistic Japanese substituting nicely for Nazis. Since this is Jet Li we are talking about, Dr. Wei kicks a whole lot more butt than Dr. Jones. The adventure story is nearly non-stop action, and features a mesmerizing array of fights, wrecks, and explosions. Not to mention the flying sumo wrestlers! Recommended.

## EIGHT DIAGRAM POLE FIGHTER (1983)

**DIRECTED BY:** Lau Kar-leung

**STARRING:** Lau Kar-fai, Alexander Fu Sheng, Lilly Li, Lau Kar-leung

Lau Kar-leung's dark epic marked the end of an era. Not only was it his last film for Shaw Brothers, it was also the final performance of Alexander Fu Sheng, who died tragically in a car accident during production. The script was rewritten to prominently feature Lau Kar-fai more, and the movie finished despite a sombre mood.

The heart of the story is the Yang family. In the opening scene, General Yang and five of his sons die in an ambush. Their fur-clad Mongol opponents wield a new and deadly weapon that neutralizes the Yangs' famous spears. Only two of the general's sons escape. One (Fu Sheng) flees home, while the other (Lau Kar-fai) makes his way to a monastery.

At first, the monks refuse to accept Kar Fai into their temple. He is too headstrong, and only desires vengeance. The young Yang will not quit though, and proves his devotion by shaving his head with a dagger and then jamming incense sticks into his bloody scalp. The monks at last agree to train him and teach him their poling technique. Their practice dummies are wooden wolves, and there are some excellent training sequences with these beasts.

The monastery, of course, cannot hold Kar Fai's thirst for vengeance and he leaves to fight the Mongols. His friends and he are eventually trapped in an inn, however, and things look quite bleak. Like the cavalry in a John Wayne movie though, the pole-wielding monks arrive just in time. They then use their poles to tear the teeth right out of the Mongols' mouths! Take away the wolves' teeth, they assert, and they cannot harm you anymore. That, more than anything else, reflects the mood of Eight Diagram Pole Fighter.

## ENCOUNTERS OF THE SPOOKY KIND (1980)

**DIRECTED BY:** Sammo Hung

**STARRING:** Sammo Hung, Lam Ching-ying, Wu Ma

Sammo Hung directed and starred in this groundbreaking horror/comedy. He plays a bumbling everyman with a scheming wife. She and her lover plan to do away with poor Sammo, and they hire a black magician to do the job. Sammo, who has already had several brushes with the undead after spending a night in a temple on a dare, discovers his wife's duplicity and hires a wizard of his own. The showdown is an amazing magical duel, in which the wizards use flashy spells, undead minions, and possession in their bids for victory. Great stuff, amply aided by Sammo's athletic prowess. Nine years later the principals reunited for an unrelated sequel called *Spooky Encounters*.



## FIST OF LEGEND (1994)

**DIRECTED BY:** Gordon Chan

**STARRING:** Jet Li, Chin Siu-ho, Nakayama Shinbu, Shoji Kurata

No one wants to stand in Bruce Lee's shadow, so it is a brave man who agrees to remake one of the Little Dragon's films. Luckily for us, both director/screenwriter Gordon Chan and leading man Jet Li were willing to take the chance and update the classic *Fists of Fury*. Full credit must go to Chan for his excellent script, which replaces the virulent anti-Japanese sentiment of the original with a more nuanced treatment of race and nationality. As in *Fists of Fury*, a Chinese martial arts master dies at the hands of a Japanese rival, and his best student (Jet Li) returns to unravel the mystery of his death and take revenge for his school. The twist here is that Li attending school in Kyoto and has a Japanese girlfriend. He is no blind Chinese patriot, but a man of true righteousness.

Gordan Chan wisely hired Yuen Woo-ping to direct the action. The result is among the most amazing displays of martial arts prowess on film. Jet Li fights in a dazzling array of styles, even using Western boxing in one memorable fight. Perhaps the best scene is Li's duel with his girlfriend's uncle, played by real-life karate expert Shoji Kurata. The climax, a brutal showdown between Li and a Japanese general, is also noteworthy.

## FISTS OF FURY (1972)

**DIRECTED BY:** Lo Wei

**STARRING:** Bruce Lee, Nora Miao, Lo Wei, James Tien

Rather confusingly, the US knows this film as the *Chinese Connection* while Lee's previous film, *The Big Boss*, is known as *Fists of Fury*. Whatever it is called, this film is a Bruce Lee classic. Lee plays Chen, a Chinese martial arts student in Japanese-occupied Shanghai in 1938. When the movie opens, Chen's master has just died in a match with a Japanese martial artist. Chen immediately suspects treachery. The Japanese do nothing to allay these suspicions when they show up at Chen's school to deliver a sign that reads "sick man of Asia." Bruce Lee is simply manic throughout this film, and his

intensity is palpable when Chen goes to the Japanese dojo and beats up everyone there in a spectacular brawl.

Chen's fellow students urge him to stop. The Japanese have put pressure on the Chinese police to do something about Chen but he will not quit. He discovers there are two traitors in his school who poisoned the late master, and the next morning their bodies are hanging from lampposts. With ruthless efficiency, he uncovers the men behind the murder and takes them out one by one. Along the way, he fights a duel with a "Russian fighter" played by an ex-student of Lee's, Robert Baker. This would not be the last time Lee fights one of his real life students on film.

## FIVE DEADLY VENOMS (1978)

**DIRECTED BY:** Chang Cheh

**STARRING:** Chiang Sheng, Kuo Chui, Lo Meng, Sun Chien, Ku Feng, Wei Pai

Classic Shaw Brothers kung fu film, helmed by the legendary Chang Cheh. A terrific movie from start to finish, *Five Deadly Venoms* combines a great script with well-choreographed action. The story revolves around an old kung fu master, who has taught five students over the years. Each learned a different technique based on the five poisonous animals of Chinese folklore (Centipede, Lizard, Toad, Scorpion, and Snake). Now on his deathbed, the master tasks his sixth and final apprentice with tracking down the older students. He must uncover the righteous and take care of the rest. The plot has plenty of twists and turns, while the sixth apprentice tries discovering the identities of the other students. The Poison Clan kung fu styles are inventive, and the fight choreography is top notch. Director Chang Cheh once again proves why he is the master.

## FIVE FINGERS OF DEATH (1972)

**DIRECTED BY:** Cheng Chang-ho

**STARRING:** Lo Lieh, Wang Ping, Tian Fong

Originally titled *King Boxer*, *Five Fingers of Death* was retitled for its American release. Its success paved the way for Bruce Lee, though *Enter the Dragon* often overshadows it.

Lo Lieh stars as Chow Chi-hao, a martial arts student who wants to win an upcoming tourney so he can marry his master's daughter (Wang Ping). Meng, the master of a rival school, however, wants his son to win this tournament. Since his son is a letch with mediocre kung fu skills, Meng decides to kill the opposition to ensure his son's triumph. He hires a head-butting badass and a gang of Japanese martial artists for the job.

Chow Chi-hao goes to train with a friend of his master's. One of his fellow students becomes mad with jealousy when he overhears the master's plan to teach Chow the legendary Iron Palm. The student ambushes Chow and savagely breaks his hands to keep him from learning the secret technique. Things go no better for the turncoat student, who Meng blinds and turns out onto the street.

With a little help and much pushing of hands into burning sand, Chow learns the Iron Palm anyway. He sets off for the tourney and must fight off a Japanese ambush. The head-butter helps him out, because Meng is too evil for him to handle. The former villain sacrifices his life so Chow can make the tourney in time. He handily defeats Meng's son and wins the title.

Movie's over, right? Of course not! Meng spitefully murders Chow's master, the blinded dupe fools Meng into killing his own son before dying, and Meng finally kills himself when Chow confronts him. Even then, it still is not over until Chow defeats the Japanese martial artist! That's martial arts mayhem.

## FROM BEIJING WITH LOVE (1994)

**DIRECTED BY:** Steven Chiau

**STARRING:** Steven Chiau, Anita Yuen, Law Ka-ying, Pauline Chan

Steven Chiau wrote, directed, and stars in this hilarious send-up of the James Bond franchise. He plays a bumbling agent who has been "undercover" as a pork vendor in Shenzhen for the past ten years. When someone steals a dinosaur skull from the Chinese government, Chiau is set up as patsy by a scheming general. Before he leaves on his mission, an eccentric inventor (Law Ka-ying) gives him an array of useless gadgets. He then travels to HK and meets up with the

extremely cute Anita Yuen, who plays a double agent destined to fall for the big goof. Chiau is funny, the gags are good, and there is even a bit of action. This is definitely worth checking, especially for Bond fans.

## FULL CONTACT (1992)

**DIRECTED BY:** Ringo Lam

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Simon Yam, Bonnie Fu, Anthony Wong, Ann Bridgewater, Frankie Chin

Ringo Lam scores again with another stylish crime thriller. A box office failure in HK, *Full Contact* is still a hit with international audiences. Interestingly, Lam forgoes the usual suite of Canto-pop songs in favour of a more eclectic soundtrack. The blaring electric guitars certainly set the right tone for Chow Yun-fat's hog riding tough guy. His character Jeff is a bouncer at a strip club in Bangkok, where his girlfriend Mona (Ann Bridgewater) works as a dancer.

Jeff is a stand up dude. When his friend Sam (Anthony Wong, for once not playing a psychopath) is in trouble with a brutal loanshark, Jeff rides the rescue. Sam still needs money to pay off the debt, however, so Jeff and Sam team up with a criminal trio. Judge, Sam's cousin, leads this little gang. Played to the hilt by Simon Yam, Judge is flamboyantly gay and coolly deadly. His cohorts are the slutty Virgin (Bonnie Fu) and her beefcake boyfriend Deano (Frankie Chin).

The five criminals plan to hijack an arms shipment on a bridge. Jeff does not realize that the loanshark has paid Judge to double cross him. Sam betrays his friend by not only playing along, but also shooting Jeff in the chest. Jeff, of course, survives with the help of Thai monks who nurse him back to health. He returns to HK to find Sam shackled up with Mona. To Sam's credit though, he realizes that he owes Jeff a sizeable debt. When it comes time to even the score with Judge, Sam plays his part. The final shootout is classic Lam, and Judge does not go down easy.

Worth seeing for Simon Yam's scene stealing theatrics alone, *Full Contact* is high-octane action delivered with gusto by one of HK's best directors.

## GOD OF GAMBLERS (1989)

DIRECTED BY: Wong Jing

STARRING: Chow Yun-fat, Any Lau, Joey Wang

*God of Gamblers* is celluloid proof of Chow Yun-fat's star quality. He manages to take a weak and derivative script and turn it into a delightful action/comedy. His role this time is that of Chocolate, a legendary gambler with a penchant for the sweet stuff. The movie opens on a great gambling scene, with Chow in top form. Soon after Chocolate sustains a blow to the head and suffers from amnesia. That is when small-time hood and conniver Knife (Andy Lau), finds him. Knife and his girlfriend nurse Chocolate back to health and discover his almost Rain Man-like gift gambling. Wacky antics ensue, and eventually Chocolate regains his memory and reclaims his title as the God of Gamblers.

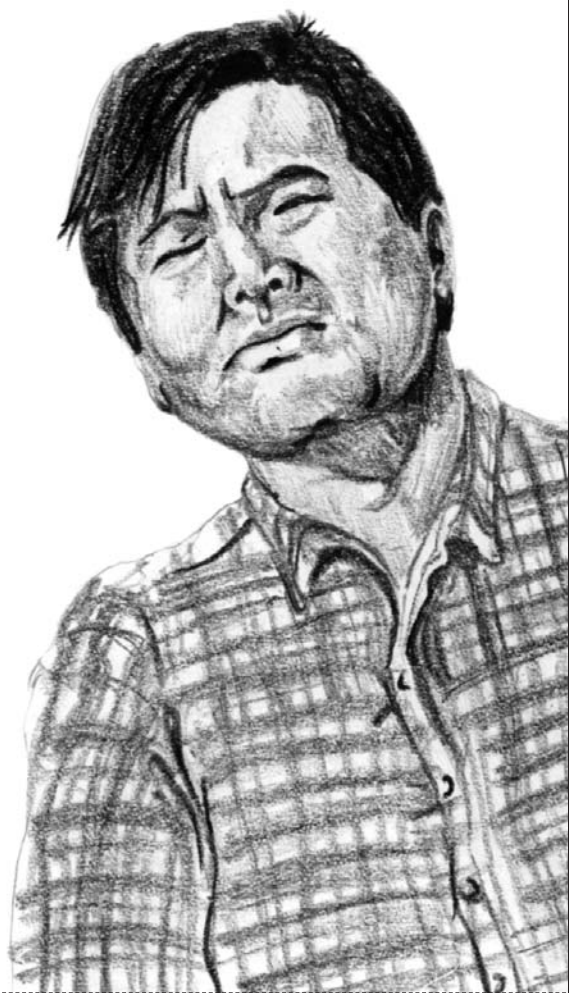


## GOD OF GAMBLERS RETURN (1994)

DIRECTED BY: Wong Jing

STARRING: Chow Yun-fat, Tony Leung Ka-Fai, Chingmy Yau, Charles Heung

Two sequels followed the enormously successful *God of Gamblers*, which had topped the HK box office that year. Unfortunately, neither movie featured Chow Yun-fat, who had established the character and set a very high bar indeed. In 1994, Chow returned to the role in the only real sequel to *God of Gamblers*. The action starts in gruesome fashion, when the Devil of Gamblers murders Chow's wife and unborn child. This leads the vengeful gambler on a round the world journey that ends in the casinos of Taiwan, where old friend, the God of Guns, and kung fu wunderkind Xie Miao (seen earlier in 1994 in the *New Legend of Shaolin*), come to his aide. The film is a little on the long side at 126 minutes, but *God of Gamblers Return* is a worthy sequel.





## HARDBOILED (1992)

**DIRECTED BY:** John Woo

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Anthony Wong, Teresa Mo, Kuo Chui

The literal translation of the Chinese title is *Hot-handed God of Cops* and that about sums up John Woo's intense *Hardboiled*. Chow Yun-fat is the law as Tequila, a jazz-loving cop with bullets to spare. In the opening scene, he and his partner stake out the famous Wyndham Teahouse, a dim sum joint in HK that encourages patrons to bring along their pet birds for ambience. Wily Tequila notices that gun-smugglers are using birdcages with false bottoms to move their goods. Cue frenetic gun fight, with screaming patrons, squawking birds, scalding tea, and plenty of flying lead. Tequila's partner dies, but Tequila takes quick vengeance on the perpetrator. The whole incident is big trouble for Tequila, whose antics are not appreciated by police brass.

Meanwhile, there is trouble brewing in the underworld. Mr. Hoi is the elder statesman of crime, and his protégé is stone-cold killer named Tony (Tony Leung). Mr. Hoi's rival, Johnny (Anthony Wong, in another over-the-top performance), decides it is time to knock off the competition. He sets up an ambush in a warehouse, where legions of motorcycle riding gunmen cut down Mr. Hoi's henchmen. The old man dies, but Johnny offers Tony fresh employment. He immediately proves his worth when the irrepressible Tequila rappels into the warehouse with both guns blazing. Tony and Tequila duel fiercely, but come up one bullet short.

Tequila, both frustrated and impressed with Tony, tries to uncover the identity of his mysterious nemesis. He eventually discovers the truth: Tony is also a cop, but deep under cover. The two cops slowly form a bond, and finally find Johnny's enormous stash of weapons. The demented smuggler has hidden it where no one would think to look, underneath a hospital.

The last half hour of *Hardboiled* is one extended action sequence. Tony and Tequila storm the hospital in a running gunfight that is both epic and beautiful. They face an army of goons, led by Johnny's right hand man, Mad Dog (Kuo Chui). Mad Dog, last seen executing Mr. Hoi's men in the warehouse, is quite the badass

himself, though unlike his boss he has a code of honour. Johnny, of course, is the ultimate bad guy, and thousands of rounds hit the floor before he earns his due.

Some critics call *Hardboiled* John Woo's postcard to Hollywood. It was not long after that the director made the jump to American movies, yet none of his post-HK films to date have equalled the bloody grandeur of *Hardboiled*.

## HER NAME IS CAT (1998)

**DIRECTED BY:** Clarence Fok

**STARRING:** Almen Wong, Michael Wong, Ben Lam

*Her Name Is Cat* is an odd film. It is as though the screenwriter saw *The Killer* and thought the movie would have been better if Chow Yun-fat and Danny Lee "got it on." In this film Almen Wong plays Cat, an assassin from northern China. In a series of flashbacks, we learn about her horrible life. A famine victim as a child, she watched her family starve to death. Later the love of her life, also a killer and father of her unborn child, cheats on her and then punches her so hard in the stomach she suffers a miscarriage.

Now Cat lives in HK and works for woman named Sister Shin. She hoards instant noodles in her apartment so she will never hunger again. On the orders of Sister Shin, Cat has been killing a series of Triad bosses. A cop named John Cannon (Michael Wong) investigates the case, and becomes obsessed with Cat. He follows her, but she notices and returns the favour. Before John knows it, Cat is breaking into his apartment, smoking his cigars, and fantasizing about her pursuer. John is in the midst of a messy divorce, and desperately lonely. It is only a matter of time before the cop and the killer consummate their forbidden love.

Sister Shin assigns Cat another hit, but she fails to fire when John and his daughter appear in her scope. At that moment her ex-lover and his assassin girlfriend reveal themselves and finish the job. Sister Shin orders Cat's ex to ice her. The police also join in on the act, capturing and torturing Cat, and making her think that John betrayed her. Cat confronts all the baddies in a Christian church, in a scene reminiscent (some might say ripped off from) *The Killer*.

*Her Name Is Cat* has the right elements, but simply falls flat. The action scenes are done competently, but fail to excite. Michael Wong, an American actor seen in the *Vanishing Son* series of TV movies, seems way out of place. He delivers most of his lines in English, and apparently no one has trouble understanding him. The film's direction is also spotty, like Clarence Fok could not quite decide on the kind of movie that he wanted to make.

## THE HEROIC TRIO (1992)

**Directed by:** Johnny To and Ching Siu-tung  
**STARRING:** Maggie Cheung, Anita Mui, Michelle Yeoh, Damian Lau, Anthony Wong

This superhero story bombed in Hong Kong, but has become a favourite of Western fans. Frankly, there is much to like about three of HK's top actresses kicking butt in sexy costumes. Anita Mui plays "Wonder Woman," a masked heroine who keeps her identity secret from her police captain husband. A rash of baby kidnappings, which are the handiwork of San (Michelle Yeoh) and her veil of invisibility, stymie Wonder Woman and the police. San works for an evil eunuch who has been alive since the Ming Dynasty. This piece of work is kidnapping babies as a part a master plan to create a new emperor of China.

The trio is complete when Chat (Maggie Cheung) arrives on the scene. Chat, a former disciple of the eunuch, is now a leather and chains biker mercenary. The heroines clash at first, but it is a foregone conclusion that they will team up in the end and give the eunuch his comeuppance. There is plenty of action along the way, and Maggie Cheung is particularly good as the worldly Chat.

A sequel, known as *The Executioners*, came out the following year. A much darker film than the original, *The Executioners* offers an apocalyptic vision of the future. After a (presumably) nuclear war, the remaining city dwellers struggle each day to find uncontaminated water. Naturally, the forces of evil exploit this weakness, and the Heroic Trio must reunite once again to save the day. A shocking ending ensured that there would be no more sequels.

## HIGH RISK (1995)

**DIRECTED BY:** Wong Jing  
**STARRING:** Jet Li, Jacky Cheung, Wu Ma, Chingmy Yau, Valerie Chow

*High Risk* could have been called *Wong Jing Strikes Back*. The director worked with Jackie Chan on *City Hunter* in 1993 and had a few problems with him. He responded with this vicious parody of Chan, which also happens to be a delightful film in its own right.

Jet Li stars as Kit, an ex-bomb squad member who quit the force after causing the death of his wife and a school bus full of children (including his own). Kit now works with "Frankie," Asia's #1 action star. Frankie (Jacky Cheung) is famous for doing all of his own stunts, but fame and money have turned him into a womanizing lush; now Kit does Frankie's stunts in secret. Chingmy Yau plays a no-nonsense journalist who suspects the truth.

Frankie and his father (played brilliantly by Wu Ma) are invited to a jewelry show at the top of a skyscraper. They attend, with Kit as bodyguard, but terrorists crash the party and hold everyone hostage while stealing the jewels. Kit begins a one-man war against the terrorists in *Die Hard* fashion, while Frankie must come to terms with his cowardice and reawaken his kung fu prowess. Naturally, it turns out that the man behind the terrorists is the same man that blew up Kit's wife and child, so he earns his chance for vengeance.

*High Risk* is an entertaining film. Corey Yuen, who is responsible for some of Jet Li's best work, choreographed the abundant action. The movie also benefited from a real budget, so great effects like the helicopter crashing into the penthouse are included. Only fervent Jackie Chan loyalists should consider staying away from this one.

## HONG KONG 1941 (1984)

**DIRECTED BY:** Leong Po-chih

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Alex Man, Cecilia Yip, Wu Ma

This drama follows the fortunes of three friends (Chow, Alex Man, and Cecilia Yip) before and after the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. Chow plays a fast-talking coolie who infiltrates the Japanese-controlled police to help the resistance. Although he dreams of escaping to America, he sacrifices everything to help his friends in a climactic encounter with a Japanese gunboat. Chow Yun-fat won the Golden Horse Award for Best Actor for his sympathetic portrayal of a Chinese patriot.

## IRON MONKEY (1993)

**DIRECTED BY:** Yuen Woo-ping

**STARRING:** Donnie Yen, Yu Rong Guang, Jean Wang

*The Iron Monkey* (Yu Rong Guang) is a masked vigilante who fights the corrupt Qing government in the dark of the night. His primary foe is an official known as the Monk. Despite his best effort, the Monk cannot ascertain the identity of the Iron Monkey, and this drives him to distraction. When martial arts master Wong Kei-ying (Boston's own Donnie Yen) shows up with his young son in tow, the Monk sees an opportunity. He kidnaps Wong's son (the not-yet-famous Wong Fei-hung, here played by a girl) and compels Kei-ying to hunt the elusive Iron Monkey. Wong Kei-ying discovers that the Iron Monkey is an herbal doctor by day. Of course, both are men of honour, and they eventually team up to defeat the Monk. Donnie Yen shines in an amazing fight atop a field of burning wooden poles.

## THE KILLER (1989)

**DIRECTED BY:** John Woo

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Danny Lee, Sally Yeh

*The Killer* is a remake of sorts, drawing heavy inspiration from Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samourai* (1967). Rumour has it that Alain Delon even gave his signature sunglasses to Chow Yun-fat for his starring

role. The always-charismatic Chow plays Jeff, an assassin par excellence. While taking out a mark, Jeff accidentally blinds a nightclub singer (Sally Yeh) with his discharging pistol. Overcome with guilt, Jeff befriends the singer and becomes her patron. He promises her that he will pay for her eye surgery, once he raises enough money.

That kind of surgery is expensive, so it is back to killing people to pay the bills. Jeff's next hit is at the dragon boat festival but complications arise. First, a tough policeman (Danny Lee) dogs Jeff in a speedboat. Then the henchmen of the crime boss who ordered the hit in the first place ambush him. It seems the gangster does not want to pay for services rendered. Jeff escapes, even after making time to rush a wounded girl to the hospital.

A killer with enough empathy to save a child while endangering himself intrigues Lee's inspector. Jeff and he cross paths several times, most memorably in the blind singer's apartment. The two pretend to be old friends for her sake, all the while pointing loaded guns at each other. In this and other scenes, a bond develops between killer and cop. Both men recognize certain nobility in the other, and eventually team up to take on the crime lord.

In a *Butch and Sundance*-style finale, Jeff and the inspector make a final stand in a Christian church. Hordes of gun-toting hoods assault the place, and the body count goes through the roof. It is another Woo showstopper, even if saddled with too much melodrama. *The Killer* remains one of the best introductions to Hong Kong action cinema.

## LEGENDARY WEAPONS OF KUNG FU (1982)

**DIRECTED BY:** Lau Kar-leung

**STARRING:** Lau Kar-leung, Lau Kar-fai, Lau Kar-yung, Alexander Fu Sheng, Hsiao Ho

After the success of the kung fu comedy, Lau Kar-leung had been forced to direct several in an attempt to compete with Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung. Not at all his forte, these films (like *My Young Auntie* and *Lady Is the Boss*) did not perform well and in 1982 Leung returned to his style of movie with *Legendary Weapons of Kung Fu* (sometimes known as *18 Legendary Weapons of China*).



The film is set in the years leading up to the Boxer Rebellion. At this time there were many martial arts sects that taught "spiritual kung fu." They believed that through training, prayer, and magic talismans, a fighter could become invulnerable to bullets and sword strokes. *Legendary Weapons of Kung Fu* opens with four students facing a group of riflemen. The gunners fire, and the students keep standing while a monk pastes parchment over the bullet holes. The assembled martial arts masters are impressed ... invulnerability at last! Then the poor slobbs fall down dead.

One of the masters, Lei Kung (Lau Kar-leung), decides he has had enough of spiritual kung fu. He disbands his school, and goes into seclusion. The other masters, not wanting the white devils to discover Lei's change of heart, send two assassins to kill him. The assassins think they find Lei Kung, but it is only a con man (Alexander Fu Sheng) under the hypnotic influence of Lei Kung's brother, Lei Yung (played by Lau Kar-leung's half-brother Lau Kar-yung no less). Yung is trying to flush out his brother so he can prove that his magic is better than Kung's martial arts. After many plot twists, the two brothers finally duel in a long showdown that uses eighteen different weapons. Ultimately, Yung's tricks are no match for Kung's potent martial arts. Spiritual kung fu cannot stand up to the real thing.

## MAGIC CRANE (1993)

**DIRECTED BY:** Benny Chan

**STARRING:** Anita Mui, Rosamund Kwan, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Damian Lau, Lawrence Ng

A by-the-book swordplay flick, *Magic Crane* was co-written and produced by Tsui Hark, but lacks his directorial style. Once again we see rival martial arts clans facing off. Anita Mui, who rides a giant white crane, tries to keep the peace, but Rosamund Kwan causes serious strife. It turns out that Kwan's family was murdered, and she blames Mui. This is not a bad film, but neither is it great. There are decent fight sequences if one can overlook the cheesy-looking giant crane.

## MAGNIFICENT BUTCHER (1980)

**DIRECTED BY:** Yuen Woo-ping

**STARRING:** Sammo Hung, Kwan Tak-hing, Lam Ching-ying, Yuen Biao

Thirty-one years after starring in *The True Story of Wong Fei-hung*, Kwan Tak-hing reprises the role that made him famous. Director Yuen Woo-ping's father, who also starred in the original Wong Fei-hung series, was also slated to appear in the film, but a fatal heart attack tragically prevented the reunion.

Sammo Hung shines as Butcher Wing, Wong Fei-hung's most famous student and *sifu* to many early martial arts actors. Wing has strong kung fu, but he is impetuous and always causing trouble for his master. Through a series of misunderstandings, Wing manages to utterly offend a rival martial arts master. This man, the leader of the Five Dragon sect, goes to see Wong Fei-hung, and Kwan Tak-hing shows that he's still got the stuff in an amazing duel with calligraphy pens. Later the Five Dragon sect kidnaps the wife of Butcher Wing's brother. This insult cannot stand, and it is up to Butcher Wing to defend both his family and his school.

## MR. VAMPIRE (1985)

**DIRECTED BY:** Ricky Lau

**STARRING:** Lam Ching-ying, Chin Siu-ho, Moon Lee, Ricky Hui, Pauline Wong

This movie can teach you everything you need to know about Chinese undead in an hour-and-a-half. Hopping vampires? Check. Ghosts? Check. Sutras and sticky rice? Check and check again. Like its predecessor *Encounters of the Spooky Kind*, however, *Mr. Vampire* mixes undead horror with broad comedy. This winning formula has been repeated in countless sequels and imitators.

Lam Ching-ying plays a Taoist ghostbuster, a role he would repeat ad infinitum in coming years. He and his two students (Chin Siu-ho and Ricky Hui) do a brisk business, and Mr. Yam comes to them because he wants to rebury his father properly. Wouldn't you know it, but dear old dad is a little upset that he was improperly buried

twenty years ago. He bursts out of his coffin and turns his son into a vampire. Yam the younger kills a few people and Lam earns the blame.

Meanwhile, the two students are landing in all sorts of trouble. A vampire has infected one and Lam must use every trick to save him. The other one falls under the spell of a ghost (Pauline Wong). When master again saves the day, she is so infuriated, she hurls her own head at poor Lam. After all these antics, the characters must still deal with Yam the elder. Some days it is tough being a Taoist wizard!

### NAKED KILLER (1992)

**DIRECTED BY:** Clarence Fok

**STARRING:** Chingmy Yau, Simon Yam, Carrie Ng, Kelly Yiu

*Naked Killer* is one of the most gloriously trashy flicks in the history of HK cinema. It tells the story of Kitty, an innocent young thing played by the lovely Chingmy Yau. Kitty takes bloody vengeance on her father's murderer, thus earning the attention of Sister Cindy (Kelly Yiu), a professional assassin. Sister Cindy takes Kitty under her wing, teaching her the ins and outs of killing for money. Meanwhile, Kitty is falling for a cop (Simon Yam) who vomits every time he tries to use his gun (performance anxiety perhaps?). As if this was not enough, Sister Cindy's former protégé, Princess, is hired to kill her old teacher. Princess, played to the hilt by Carry Ng, is both a killer and a lesbian, and she has designs on Kitty as well.

With that kind of set up, how can the film go wrong? Cue two hours of murder, sex, castrations, and gunfights. This is exploitation with a capital "E," but damn if it isn't a good time. The cast reunited for a sequel of sorts (same actors, different characters) called *Raped by an Angel*, which has spawned several sequels of its own.

### NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN (1994)

**DIRECTED BY:** Wong Jing

**STARRING:** Jet Li, Chingmy Yau, Xie Miao, Deanie Yip

This film is actually based on a very old legend, that of Hung Hei-kwuen, a Chinese patriot who fought to overthrow the Manchus. Director Wong Jing takes a cue from the Japanese *Lone Wolf and Cub* movies, and in the opening scene Hung Hei-kwuen (Jet Li) makes his infant son choose between a sword and a toy. His son chooses the sword, and so the grim Hung lets him live and trains him in kung fu.

Fast forward seven years. Hung, son in tow, is protecting a wealthy merchant. The merchant agrees to buy a naïve young girl, who is trying to raise money to bury her mother. In reality, the Notorious Mother and Daughter (delightfully played by Deanie Yip and Chingmy Yau respectively) are scamming the merchant. The mother is not actually dead; she is a master of breath control!

All this serves as a prelude to the real plot, which revolves around five young Shaolin monks. Each has a piece of a map tattooed on his head, and the completed map leads to missing Ming Dynasty treasure. Hung and son become involved, and fight together for China. Xie Miao steals the show as Hung's young son, and he and Li later reunited to make *My Father Is a Hero*.

### ONCE A THIEF (1991)

**DIRECTED BY:** John Woo

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Cherie Chung, Leslie Cheung, Kenneth Tsang

Apparently, John Woo needed a light-hearted project after the intense *Bullet in the Head*. *Once a Thief* is a charming film, with an excellent cast and an entertaining story. The three leads (Chow, Chung, and Cheung) are professional art thieves, trained since childhood by a master criminal. The film opens in France with a high-tech burglary. Things go badly wrong, however, and Chow is seemingly killed. Two years later he arrives unexpectedly in Hong Kong, alive and in a

wheelchair. The three thieves reunite to pull one more heist and revenge themselves on the man that crippled Chow. Although there is more humour, this is a John Woo movie, so there is a climactic gunfight as well. The film later served as the inspiration for a short-lived Canadian TV show.

## ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA (1991)

**DIRECTED BY:** Tsui Hark

**STARRING:** Jet Li, Yuen Biao, Rosamund Kwan, Kent Cheng, Jacky Cheung

Leave it to Tsui Hark to bring new life to an old story. Wong Fei-hung, a turn of the century Chinese folk hero and the subject of 99 post-WW2 films, returns to the big screen again. As played by Jet Li, Wong Fei-hung is doctor and martial artist, teacher and philosopher. He travels with an entourage, including Lueng (Yuen Biao), Buck Tooth So (Jacky Cheung), Porky Lin (Kent Cheng), and Aunt Yee (Rosamund Kwan). Early in the film, Wong and his fellows confront the Shaho gang, a group of Chinese criminals who extort protection money from merchants. Fei-hung tries to settle things peacefully, since he believes that Chinese should not fight Chinese while foreigners slice up the country. The Shaho gang are not easily dissuaded, and they recruit a renowned martial arts master named Iron Robe Yim to help them out. They then kidnap Aunt Yee and the scene is set for a showdown between Wong and Yim. What follows is one of the best martial arts duels ever caught on film, with two masters fighting on bamboo ladders in a granary. American and British soldiers also show up, graphically illustrating why the Chinese need to band together.

The first film was a huge hit that led to the resurgence of period martial arts films. To date Tsui Hark has made five sequels to *Once Upon a Time in China*, most of which he directed himself. Jet Li starred in the first three before leaving the series, but returned for part VI, *Once Upon a Time in China and America* (1997). Of the sequels, parts II and VI are the best. The latter takes Wong Fei-hung to the Old West, and was shot on location in Texas. Ably directed by Sammo Hung, *Once Upon a Time in China and America* presages Jackie Chan's *Shanghai Noon* by several years.

## ONE ARMED BOXER (1971)

**DIRECTED BY:** Jimmy Wang Yu

**STARRING:** Jimmy Wang Yu, Lung Fei, Tang Shin

After his successes with *One Armed Swordsman* and *Chinese Boxer*, Wang Yu decided to take the best of both worlds and make *One Armed Boxer*. He wrote, directed, and starred in this inventive tournament film. He plays Yu, an impetuous young boxer that lands his school in trouble with his unauthorized fighting. Yu embarrasses Shao, the head of a rival school, and in response Shao hires a whole retinue of exotic martial artists to ruin Yu's school. Yu and his school must face Tibetan Lamas, Thai Kickboxers, Okinowan Karate masters, a Taekwondo fighter, and even an Indian Yogi. Yu does well until he faces the fanged (yes, fanged) Karate master, who chops off Yu's arm with his bare hand.

Things look grim for Wang's school, until a herbalist offers to teach Yu the Iron Fist technique. Unfortunately, this requires poor Yu to kill all the nerves in his remaining arm. If even one remains, the old man warns, the technique will not work. In response, Yu repeatedly thrusts his arm in a cauldron of burning coals. Now that is dedication.

Yu returns to defeat the bad guys. He uses the "600 pressure points" to defeat the inflatable Lamas (the masters of breath control), and even outdoes the ridiculous Yogi. Finally, he uses the Iron Fist to defeat the fanged Karate master, thus preserving the reputation of his school. Considered by many to be Jimmy Wang Yu's last great film, *One Armed Boxer* features great fighting, a cornucopia of styles, and suitably bloody vengeance. Forget about Bloodsport, this is the real thing.





## ONE ARMED SWORDSMAN (1967)

**DIRECTED BY:** Chang Cheh

**STARRING:** Jimmy Wang Yu, Lau Kar-leung, Chiao Chiao

The martial arts explosion started with *One Armed Swordsman*, a box office gold mine for director Chang Cheh. Jimmy Wang Yu defined a new kind of hero, different from the traditional Chinese swordsman. In the film, he plays Feng Kang, the best student of the swordmaster Tien Fong. The teacher's other students are jealous of him, as is Tien's daughter. Feng Kang knows that if he stays there will be trouble with the other students, so he decides to leave. Tien's daughter and crew ambush Feng while he leaves. He easily defeats the other students, but drops his guard for his *sifu's* daughter who chops his arm off for his troubles.

A kindly country girl (Chiao Chiao) rescues Feng Kang and nurses him back to health. Without his right arm though, Feng finds he cannot defend himself or his new love. Seeing his pain, she gives Feng her father's swordfighting manual and he learns to be lethal with only one arm. Then it is payback time for all of Feng's tormentors.

*One Armed Swordsman* is not just a historically important film, but a genuinely great one as well.

## PEACE HOTEL (1995)

**DIRECTED BY:** Wai Ka-fai

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Cecilia Yip

Chow Yun-fat plays an ex-warlord who sets up a hotel where former killers and fugitives can build new lives and live in peace. This is complicated when Cecilia Yip shows up, followed by a bandit gang who want to kill her. Although she continually lies to and cheats the inhabitants of Peace Hotel, Chow Yun-fat protects her from the bandits and endangers the hotel by doing so. It is clear from the get-go that Chow will snap, go nuts, and kill many people. That is the big payoff for the audience, right? Well, when he finally does pick up his sword again, all the combat sequences are shot out of focus so the audience cannot see much of what is happening. Combine this with Yip's incessantly annoying character and this film does not have much going for it.

## PEDICAB DRIVER (1989)

**DIRECTED BY:** Sammo Hung

**STARRING:** Sammo Hung, Max Mok, Billy Chow, Liu Chia Liang

Considered by many aficionados to be Sammo Hung's best feature, *Pedicab Driver* was written, produced, and directed by the likeable lug who starred in the *Martial Law* TV show. The story centres on a group of pedicab drivers in post-WW2 Macao, including Hung and Max Mok. These working class stiffs endure a series of misadventures while trying to find a little love in their lives. The movie ranges widely from comedy to deadly serious drama, with continuity provided by a series of well-choreographed kung fu scenes. Max Mok's love for a prostitute eventually leads to disaster, and Sammo must seek revenge on the brothel owner responsible for his friend's death. The final fight sequence is a Sammo tour-de-force in which he displays incredible agility for a man his size. Despite some crude humour and an uneven tone, *Pedicab Driver* is still well worth seeing.

## PEKING OPERA BLUES (1986)

**DIRECTED BY:** Tsui Hark

**STARRING:** Brigitte Lin, Cherie Chung, Sally Yeh, Mark Cheng, K.K. Cheung

*Peking Opera Blues* is set in 1913, a politically turbulent time in the newly founded Republic of China. General Tun is typical of the warlords of the period. To pay off his gambling debts, he decides to stiff his troops of their wages. He is quickly ousted and replaced by General Tsao, who signs a secret pact with a powerful group of foreigners.

The film tells the stories of three strong women. The first is Wan (Brigitte Lin), the daughter of General Tsao and a staunch revolutionary. The second is Pat Neil (Sally Yeh), who works as a stagehand in her father's Peking Opera House. She longs to perform, but tradition keeps all women off the stage. The last woman is Sheung Hung, a servant of General Tun, now jobless and seeking a missing jewelry box. All three leads give great performances, but Brigitte Lin's is particularly fine.

Tsui Hark takes these three heroines and weaves their stories together masterfully. The movie proceeds at breakneck pace, mixing stunning action, slapstick comedy, and genuine drama into a winning combination. Thrown together at a turning point of history, the women must fight foreigners, corrupt officials, warlords, and gangsters to keep hope alive for the new republic.

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## PEOPLE'S HERO (1987)

**DIRECTED BY:** Derek Yee

**STARRING:** Ti Lung, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Tony Leung Kai-fai

Ti Lung is one of the few 70s chopsocky stars to successfully transition to the HK films of later years, and *People's Hero* shows why. Ti plays an experienced criminal who finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. A gang of young hoodlums tries to rob a bank, but things go drastically wrong. Soon enough the police surround the bank and a hostage situation ensues. Ti's character makes himself known and takes charge. It turns out that he is a wanted cop killer, and he must make the best of the crisis. The interplay between Ti Lung, the other hoods, the hostages, and the police is terrific, with Ti offering a great performance as the world-weary criminal. While *People's Hero* is not an action heavy film, it is an effective drama that shows what can be done in the Gunplay genre.

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## POLICE STORY (1985)

**DIRECTED BY:** Jackie Chan

**STARRING:** Jackie Chan, Brigitte Lin, Maggie Cheung, Bill Tung

After Jackie's first stab at penetrating the American market, he returned to HK and made *Police Story*. This landmark film is one of Chan's best. He plays a "supercop" intent on nailing a notorious crime boss. The gangster's girlfriend (Brigitte Lin, in a role with no flying or swordplay) is under Chan's protection. He must fight off thugs while convincing his girlfriend (Maggie Cheung) that he is not having an affair. The crime boss then turns the tables and frames Chan for murder. Fed up, Jackie finally uncorks, and in one amazing, fifteen-minute climax, completely demolishes a shopping mall while taking down

every hood in sight. If only life had imitated art, the 80s would have been a lot more fun.

*Police Story 2* (1988) is more of the same, and in the best way. The plot is a bit thin, but the stunts are top notch.

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## PRISON ON FIRE (1987)

**DIRECTED BY:** Ringo Lam

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Tony Leung (Ka-fai), Roy Cheung

Released only nine months after the hit *City on Fire*, *Prison on Fire* was written in seven days and shot in twenty. Ringo Lam once again teams up with Chow Yun-fat, whose charisma carries this clichéd prison drama. Tony Leung plays an average joe sent to Lantau Prison after accidentally committing manslaughter. He is in no way prepared to deal with sadistic prison guards and tough Triad members on the inside. Fortuitously, the worldly Mad Dog (Chow Yun-fat) befriends him, and helps him survive this purgatory. Lam plays up the brotherhood of the inmates struggling inside a rotten system, a theme he returned to in the sequel. *Prison on Fire 2* (1991) also stars Chow Yun-fat, but this time his character is so righteous it is hard believing he ended up in prison in the first place.

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## PROJECT S (1993)

**DIRECTED BY:** Stanley Tong

**STARRING:** Michelle Yeoh, Yu Rong Guang, Yukari Oshima, Fan Sui Wong

Sometimes known as *Supercop 2*, this sequel focuses on Michelle Yeoh's Mainland cop character rather than Jackie Chan. Jackie shows up briefly, in drag no less, but this is Michelle's picture all the way. Her superiors send her to HK once again, this time to assist the police in their fight against a Mainland gang of bank robbers. Unbeknownst to Yeoh, her former boyfriend (Ru Rong Guang) is the leader of the gang. As one would expect from director Tong and the talented Michelle Yeoh, the film features some great action scenes. The bank robbery is cleverly executed, and Ru Rong Guang is a suave villain. Although not as good as *Supercop*, *Project S* is still an action film of the first calibre.



## SAVIOR OF THE SOUL (1991)

**DIRECTED BY:** David Lai and Corey Yuen

**STARRING:** Andy Lau, Anita Mui, Aaron Kwok, Carina Lau

*Savior of the Soul* is a gorgeous-looking film that is ultimately dragged down by its own emptiness. Andy Lau and Anita Mui play superheroic characters who defeat a big bad guy early on. Naturally enough, the villain had a disciple (Aaron Kwok), himself quite the tough customer. The rest of movie follows Kwok's insane quest for vengeance, while Lau and Mui fall in love agonizingly slowly. The story is so threadbare that it is hard to care about any of the characters. While there is some excellent swordplay and dynamic action, those elements alone are not enough to carry *Savior of the Soul*.

## SEX AND ZEN (1991)

**DIRECTED BY:** Michael Mak

**STARRING:** Lawrence Ng, Amy Yip, Kent Chang, Isabella Chow

This absurdly amusing film is based on a 17th century novel called *The Carnal Prayer Mat*. Lawrence Ng plays a scholar who spurns Buddhism for pleasures of the flesh. After witnessing the local smith take his wife in what may be the most acrobatic sex scene ever captured on film, Ng decides that he must increase his own potency. He does what any man in his situation would do: pay a doctor to replace his penis with that of horse. Why it's elementary! Once suitably endowed, the scholar embarks on a series of sexual adventures, while his spurned wife (Amy Yip) falls into trouble of her own. A "square up" reel at the end tries to turn this into a morality play, but *Sex and Zen* is clearly out to titillate. This film has become something of a cult classic in North America, inspiring half of the book title *Sex and Zen and a Bullet in the Head*.

## THE STORM RIDERS (1998)

**DIRECTED BY:** Andrew Lau Wai-keung

**STARRING:** Aaron Kwok, Ekin Cheng, Sonny Chiba, Christie Yeung

*The Storm Riders* is one of the few bona fide HK blockbusters of the last few years. Made on \$6.4 million it is also among the most expensive. Its opening day ticket receipts set a new record, however, and not without reason. *The Storm Riders* is a visual treat, gorgeously photographed and dripping with cool FX. The martial artists at the centre of the story are more like superheroes, so it is no surprise *The Storm Riders* was based on *manga*.

The story revolves around a mean old blackguard named Lord Conquer. His prophet, the Mud Buddha, told him that he will rule unchallenged for ten years if he can harness the power of wind and cloud. It turns out Wind and Cloud are young boys, so Lord Conquer kills their families and raises them himself. They both become masterful martial artists, with funky elemental powers at their command. Meanwhile, Lord Conquer prepares for a duel versus his greatest living rival, the Sword Saint.

Lord Conquer wants to marry off his daughter to one of his protégés. He chooses Wind (Ekin Cheng), even though it is Cloud (Aaron Kwok) who is smitten with the girl. Cloud crashes the wedding and in a tragic showdown Conquer accidentally kills his own daughter. Conquer and Cloud clash over ownership of the corpse, and Cloud tears off his own arm and uses the gushing blood to power his martial arts! Hardcore indeed.

Wind meanwhile discovers the truth about his real father's death, eats a magic fruit, and finds a potent magic sword. Cloud refits himself with a superb magic arm, and the two finally reunite to take vengeance on Lord Conquer. Conquer has barely survived the appearance of the Sword Saint (this scene alone is worth the price of admission), but his power is now unmatched. The final showdown is a spectacle of epic proportions, and a fitting end to a great movie.

## THE STORY OF WOO VIET (1981)

**DIRECTED BY:** Ann Hui

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Cherie Chung, Lo Lieh

In this early Chow Yun-fat film, he plays an ethnically-Chinese Vietnamese ex-soldier who flees to Hong Kong after the war. He makes a deal to go the US, but lands in the Philippines after a scheming Triad boss sends his travelling companion, a Viet woman, to Manila to work as a prostitute. Chow ends up working for a crime boss in Manila's Chinatown, using his experience as a soldier to good effect. A thoroughly grim drama, this film shows a dirty world where death and disappointment are all you can expect. Not a feel good movie.....

## SUPERCOP (1992)

**DIRECTED BY:** Stanley Tong

**STARRING:** Jackie Chan, Michelle Yeoh, Yuen Wah, Maggie Cheung, Bill Tung

This is the third instalment of the *Police Story* series and the first one that Jackie did not direct himself. Tapping Stanley Tong proved an excellent choice. He rewrote the script, convinced Chan to film in Malaysia instead of HK, and, most importantly, brought Michelle Yeoh onboard as co-star. Yeoh had retired several years earlier due to her marriage, and this was her chance to reclaim her throne as the top female action star.

Chan's familiar character must infiltrate a heroin smuggling operation. He teams up with a straight-laced Mainland cop (Michelle Yeoh). The two help spring criminal Panther (Yuen Wah, another of the Seven Little Fortunes) from prison, and he promises to introduce them to the big boss. Unfortunately, May (Maggie Cheung) blows the cops' cover turning it into a fight to the finish. Michelle Yeoh is great, and Jackie seems to push himself that much harder in response. The result is a film distinct from the previous *Police Story* movies, and in most ways even better.

## SWORDSMAN 1, 2, AND 3 (1990, 1992, 1993)

**DIRECTED BY:** Ching Siu-tung, part 1 co-directed by Tsui Hark, King Hu, Raymond Lee, and Ann Hui

**STARRING:** Sam Hui, Cecilia Yip, Jacky Cheung, Wu Ma, Lam Ching-ying (all part 1), Brigitte Lin, Jet Li, Rosamund Kwan, Michelle Reis, Waise Lee, Fennie Yuen

In 1990, producer Tsui Hark made a bold bid to revive the swordplay film in Hong Kong. He recruited wuxia master King Hu to direct a movie based on a novel by Louis Cha. What seemed like a match made in martial arts heaven failed to gel during production. Hu left the project early on, and four more directors worked on the film before it was complete. While all these directors are talented, the mix and match team cannot quite bring it together. The story is muddled, but basically revolves around the quest for the Sacred Scroll, a book of martial arts secrets. *Swordsman* is worth seeing for its flashes of brilliance, but it is not the classic it could have been.

*Swordsman 2* is a film that demands repeated viewing. The first time through, the audience should just sit back and let the mayhem wash over them. The plot is difficult to follow (the large cast does not help), but the frenetic pace, abundant action, and sheer inventiveness of *Swordsman 2* create an appeal that is hard to deny. The film helped re-establish the wuxia genre in HK, and made Brigitte Lin into the new Cheng Pei-pei. *Swordsman 2* benefits from the single vision of *A Chinese Ghost Story* director Ching Siu-tung, and a completely new cast that includes Jet Li and Brigitte Lin.

Asia the Invincible, usurper of the Sun Moon Sect, has used the Sacred Scroll to achieve ultimate martial mastery. Such power comes at a heavy price: Asia's manhood. Over the film's progression, Asia (played by the beautiful and fierce Brigitte Lin) slowly turns into a woman. Hello gender bending! The heroes of the story are two young students from the Wah Mountain school, Ling (Je Li) and Kiddo (Michelle Reis). Their entire school is trying to retire from the world of martial arts, but Ling and Kiddo are sucked into the machinations of Asia the Invincible. Ling is smitten by Ying (Rosamund

Kwan), the daughter of the imprisoned leader of the Sun Moon Sect. The two try to meet up, but Japanese ninja slaughter Ying's attendants. Ling attacks Asia the Invincible's camp, not realizing that the beautiful woman he saw in a lake is actually the dreaded Asia. Captured and thrown in jail, Ling finds Wu, Ying's father, pierced with giant meat hooks to dampen his martial arts power. Ling and he manage to escape, and Wu unleashes the devastating Essence Absorbing Stance. Ling, Kiddo, Ying, and Wu finally face off against Asia in a truly cataclysmic battle. Asia seemingly falls to her death, and Wu makes it clear that he is little better than the deposed despot. There is just no peace in the martial world.

*Swordsman 3*, usually known as *The East Is Red*, is a showcase for Brigitte Lin, who returns as Asia the Invincible. Turns out old Asia did not die after all, and she has returned because a number of Asia-wannabes are impersonating her. *The East Is Red* is as manic as its predecessor, and even manages to turn it up a notch with flourishes like Spanish conquistadors and a Japanese ninja submarine. While the plot is fairly forgettable, the action scenes make it all worthwhile.

## TAI CHI MASTER (1993)

DIRECTED BY: Yuen Woo-ping

STARRING: Jet Li, Chin Siu-ho, Michelle Yeoh

Jet Li and Chin Siu-ho play two impetuous Shaolin monks booted out of the temple. Chin turns bitter and joins the forces of an evil eunuch. Jet Li retains his virtue and joins with a band of rebels led by Michelle Yeoh. After a disastrous encounter with his old friend, Jet goes insane. While his friends nurse him back to mental health, he apes the way animals move, thus inventing tai chi. With new martial arts skills, Jet confronts Chin in a battle of epic proportions. *Tai Chi Master* features some amazing fight scenes (like the Shaolin pole battle early in the film), and the direction by veteran Yuen Woo-ping is top notch. The only downside is Michelle Yeoh's relatively minor role, but otherwise *Tai Chi Master* is among the best modern martial movies on the market.

It recently enjoyed North American release as *Twin Warriors*.





## 36TH CHAMBER OF SHAOLIN (1978)

**DIRECTED BY:** Lau Kar-leung

**STARRING:** Lau Kar-fai, Jimmy Wang Yu, Lo Lieh

Simply put, *36th Chamber of Shaolin* is one of the best martial movies of all time. Known as *Master Killer* in North America, *36th Chamber* tells the story of San Te, a pivotal figure in the history of martial arts. Lau Kar-fai, the adopted brother of director Lau Kar-leung, shines in the role of San Te, and his shaved headed fighter is the definitive Shaolin monk of 70s kung fu films.

At the movie's start, San Te, the son of a tea merchant, is but a callow student. His school secretly harbours a group of rebels, however, and Manchu soldiers attack, killing many students and San Te's family. He travels to the Shaolin Temple so he can learn martial arts. The central section of the film is an amazing recreation of the 35 legendary training chambers of the temple. Through hard work and sheer willpower, San Te transforms himself into an exceedingly skilled martial artist. He then tells his master that he wants to go out into the world and teach martial skills to the people, thus creating a "36th chamber." His master agrees, but only if San Te can defeat the temple's champion. San Te develops a new weapon, the three section staff, and with it beats the butterfly swords of the other monk.

San Te then leaves the temple and returns to Canton to form a new rebel group. He challenges and defeats the Manchu general who killed his family (played by director Lo Lieh). San Te is then free to take his martial arts to the people and train a new generation of martial arts masters.

## TRAGIC HERO (1987)

**DIRECTED BY:** Taylor Wong

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Alex Man, Andy Lau

A sequel to *Rich and Famous*, this film is best described as Chow Yun-fat's *Godfather III*. He plays an aging gangster who is more interested in running restaurants and enjoying his family than pursuing a life of crime. Alex Man plays a former member of Chow's organization who now hates him and wants to push him

out. Man outwits Chow at every turn, ruins his life, and is so brutal that he blows up a dozen kids. After Man murders his family, Chow teams up with Man's brother (Andy Lau), and the two take on Man and his goons. The climax, the duo's assault on Man's mansion, makes the whole movie. In the incredibly violent climax, Chow and Lau off a good hundred hoods and give Alex Man a suitably gruesome end.

## TREASURE HUNT (1994)

**DIRECTED BY:** Ricky Lau

**STARRING:** Chow Yun-fat, Wu Chien-lien, Michael Wong

*Treasure Hunt* is reminiscent of *God of Gambler's Return*, in that it switches genres from scene to scene. It is part love story, part action movie, part spy thriller, and part broad comedy. Chow plays an American CIA agent sent to China to find some national treasures. He holes up in a Shaolin Monastery where he encounters Wu Chien-lien, a young woman with supernatural powers. First at odds with the monks, he wins them over with his Western ways and soon has them eating sushi and playing baseball (somehow he finds new uniforms for all the monks with the word "Shaolin" on the back ... no, really). Many complications follow and there is a good shootout at the end. Girls with magic powers are hard to resist.

## THE UNTOLD STORY (1993)

**DIRECTED BY:** Herman Yau

**STARRING:** Anthony Wong, Danny Lee, Shing Fui-on, Emily Kwan

Based on a true story of murder and cannibalism in Macau, *The Untold Story* is a foul movie from start to finish. Chinese audiences likely had a better idea of what to expect, since the movie's literal translation is *Eight Immortals Restaurant Human-Meat Roast Pork Buns*. Anthony Wong plays Wong Chi-heng, an unhinged individual who runs a local restaurant. Wong claims the previous owners gave him the establishment, but the police suspect that something more sinister may have occurred. A nosy waitress comes to the same conclusion and Wong brutally murders her, grinding her up to make the next day's pork buns. Delicious.

Perhaps a third of the way through the movie, the police arrest Wong. They know he is guilty and so do we. Nonetheless, they feel the need to force a confession from him, so the audience is "treated" to scene after scene of police torture. After the cops beat him, they place him in the same prison with one of his victim's relatives where he suffers more beatings. A helpful nurse injects water under his skin, making painful boils that prevent him from sitting back. Wong remains steadfastly silent and psychopathic throughout. At one point he drinks his own urine to help heal his internal injuries. That's one they don't teach you in medical school.

After over an hour of mind-numbing violence, Wong finally confesses to the murders of the restaurant's original owners. The film's final reel is a gruesome flashback of him slaughtering the family of nine, including many children. Amazingly, Anthony Wong won an award for his role. It's heartwarming to know that the world still loves a good psycho.

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## YES! MADAM (1985)

**DIRECTED BY:** Corey Yuen

**STARRING:** Michelle Yeoh, Cynthia Rothrock, Wu Ma, Tsui Hark, Richard Ng

This is the movie that put Michelle Yeoh on the action movie map. She plays an inspector who worked for Scotland Yard and is now back in HK. She teams up with American Cynthia Rothrock in typical cop buddy movie style. The two are looking for microfilm that could wreak havoc with a powerful gangster. *Yes! Madam* was produced by Sammo Hung, and includes a funny cameo by director Tsui Hark as a counterfeiter. Really though, the action is the centrepiece and Yeoh and Rothrock deliver. The climactic fight (in the villain's mansion, of course) is great, and Yeoh does a stunt better seen than explained.

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## YOUNG AND DANGEROUS (1996)

**DIRECTED BY:** Andrew Lau

**STARRING:** Ekin Cheng, Jordan Chan, Francis Ng, Simon Yam, Jason Chu, Michael Tse

Many critics take *Young and Dangerous* to task for its "glorification" of the Triad lifestyle. When villain

Ugly Kwan (Francis Ng) buries the family of his rival alive, it is hard to see how that would motivate anyone to join the Triads. Perhaps the presence of Canto-pop star Ekin Cheng and all three members of singing group Wind Fire Sea opened the film to criticism, or the fact that it is based on a popular comic book (*Rascals* aka *Teddy Boy*). Despite the opinions of the HK pundits, *Young and Dangerous* was so popular they made two sequels within a year. To date the series has four sequels, one prequel, and many imitators (like the *Sexy and Dangerous* series).

Ekin Cheng stars as Chan, leader of a group of young Triads in the Hung Hing Society. He and his cohorts (including Jordan Chan as Chicken) live a fast lifestyle, full of sex and violence. The film opens with a stylishly shot scene of the gang beating and gutting a rival. It all seems like fun, but the incident puts them in the bad books of Ugly Kwan, another Triad boss. The boys fall into an ambush and one of them dies. Chan is drugged and filmed having sex with Chicken's girlfriend. When Ugly Kwan ousts benevolent Triad boss Simon Yam, things turn from bad to worse. Chicken flees and the rest of the gang splinters. The Hung Hing bond is not so easily broken, however, and eventually the surviving members reunite to give Ugly Kwan his due.

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## ZU: WARRIORS FROM THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN (1983)

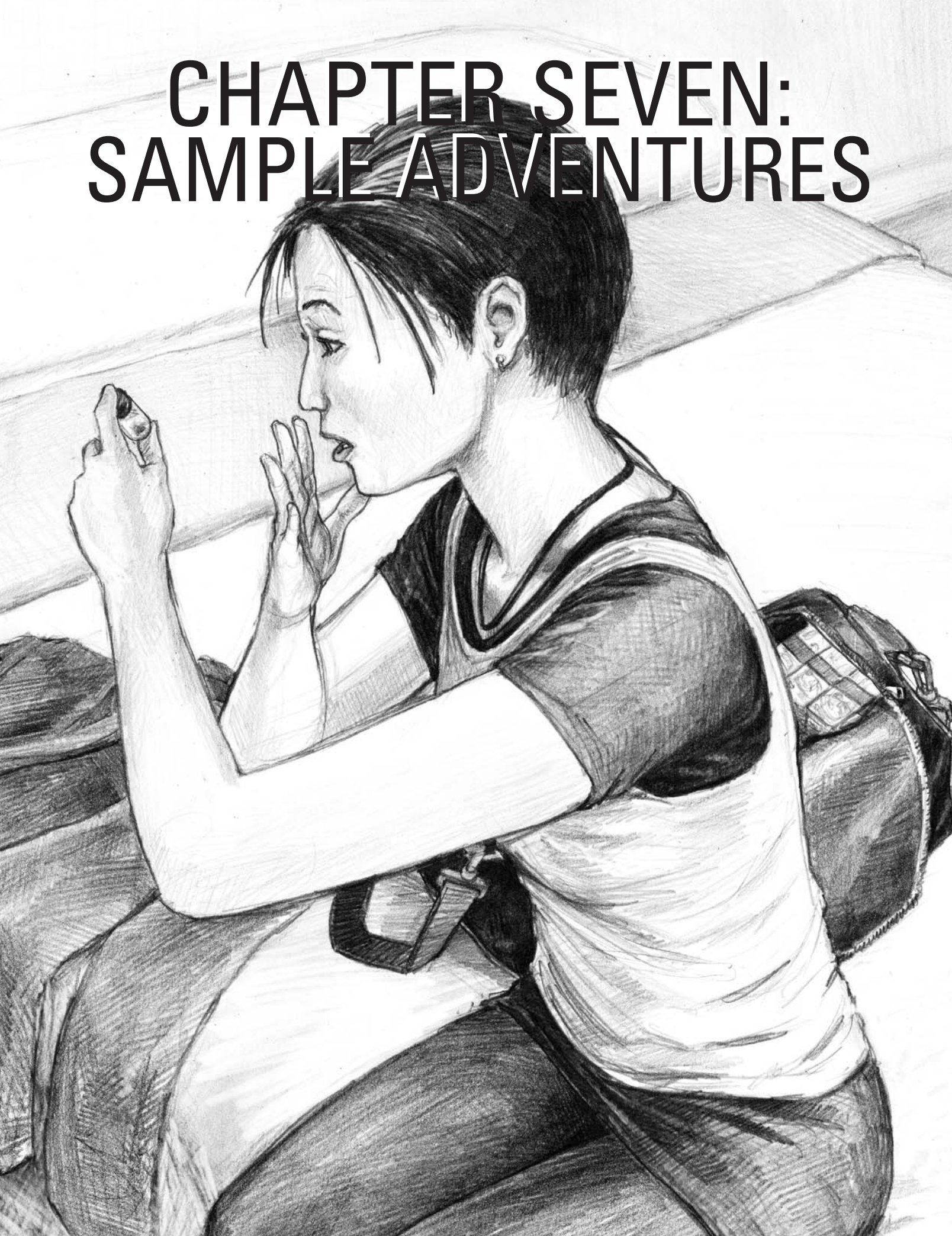
**DIRECTED BY:** Tsui Hark

**STARRING:** Yuen Biao, Sammo Hung, Moon Lee

Tsui Hark more or less created the HK FX industry while making this milestone film. A visual stunner, *Zu* tells the story of a disillusioned soldier (Yuen Biao) who leaves behind a vicious civil war and tries to find refuge on the Magic Mountain. Things do not go well for the poor guy, and he finds himself dodging ghosts and demons amidst a surreal landscape. He eventually meets an old priest (played wonderfully by Sammo Hung), who recruits him to help save the world from the terrible Blood Monster. This is a truly epic production, though the story stays firmly focused on the heroism of Yuen Biao's soldier. While some of the costumes scream "this was made in the 80s," *Zu* holds up remarkable well after almost twenty years.



# CHAPTER SEVEN: SAMPLE ADVENTURES





# TO KILL WITH A GLANCE

In this gunplay drama, a ballerina returning to Hong Kong with her troupe accidentally grabs the wrong bag, which, she discovers, contains a cache of drugs and cash bound for the local Triad lodge. Unbeknownst to her, the carrier for the illicit goods is also a member of the ballet troupe, and in love with the ballerina. When Triad *Dai Lo* ("older brother"), Eddie Yip, sends goons after the ballerina, however, the carrier vanishes underground with the love of his life. Yip then sends his men after the carrier and ballerina, but two of the Triad's chief enforcers are also best friends with the carrier, and could never hurt him. They hook up with the carrier to help him, making all four of them hunted.

With Triad killers on these fugitives' trail, the group realizes they will never earn their freedom unless they deal with Yip first. So they confront the *Dai Lo* in a final, explosive battle revolving around a performance of the classic ballet, *Swan Lake*.

## PLAYER ROLES

The following roles are available, though the Game Master can create or remove parts to suit the number of players. Additional roles might include a police detective dragged into the game's events, or an undercover cop working within the troupe to ferret out the carrier.

### THE CARRIER

**MINIMUM STAR POWER BID:** 7

**ROLE PACKAGE:** Art of Distraction Level 2, Extra Attacks Level 2, Gun Fu Level 3, Highly Skilled Level 1, Swift Reaction Level 3, Skeleton in the Closet (Triad Member) 2 BP, Forgery Level 2, Gun Combat Level 2, Kung Fu: Defense Level 1, Lock-Picking Level 2, Ranged Defense Level 2, Stealth Level 1, Urban Tracking Level 1

This character is the Triad's middleman for Eddie Yip's oversea transactions and a confidence artist of some talent. To keep his identity hidden, however, he travels as the make-up artist for the renowned Hong Kong Ballet

company, scheduling his meetings around their itinerary. Since the troupe represents the Chinese people, they enjoy relatively unhindered passage through various customs, allowing the carrier to smuggle contraband across the border. A recent layover in London allowed the carrier to negotiate with the local syndicate on behalf of Eddie Yip, securing a bag of drugs and cash as part of an exchange of services. Unfortunately, the carrier is also in love with the beautiful ballerina of the show, but unable to approach her because of his secret.

### THE BALLERINA

**MINIMUM STAR POWER BID:** 7

**ROLE PACKAGE:** Extra Attacks Level 1, Extra Defenses Level 1, Highly Skilled Level 1, Swift Reaction Level 2, Wire Fu: Attacks Level 2, Servitude (to Hong Kong Ballet) 1 BP, Acrobatics Level 4, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 2, Kung Fu: Defense Level 2

This prima ballerina for the Hong Kong Ballet is on her way to worldwide fame for her mix of Chinese Opera acrobatics and classical training. She always lived her life on the straight and narrow — focusing on success, and only success. Unfortunately, her dedication and discipline to dancing leaves her little opportunity for a personal life, a situation she silently regrets. She has noticed the troupe's make-up artist watching her, and suspects he likes her. She enjoys his easy-going and often cavalier manner, but has had little time to entertain notions of a relationship. She therefore keeps him at bay with an air of indifference, returning his glances only after he looks away.

### TRIAD ENFORCER #1

**MINIMUM STAR POWER BID:** 5

**ROLE PACKAGE:** Damn Healthy! Level 1, Extra Attacks Level 2, Gun Fu Level 3, Skeleton in the Closet (Triad Member) 2 BP, Gun Combat Level 2, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 2

Triad Enforcer #1 is a high-ranking member of the Red Eyebrow Society, a Hong Kong Triad run by Eddie Yip. He is also the carrier's best friend, though they only

see each other infrequently these days. Six months ago, he was a cold-blooded killer willing to execute any orders handed down from his *Dai Lo*. That was until he questioned his purpose in life after almost dying in a shootout, and realized he didn't like the answers facing him. Now he finds himself questioning Eddie's orders with increasing frequency, creating tension between the two men.

### TRIAD ENFORCER #2

MINIMUM STAR POWER BID: 5

ROLE PACKAGE: Damn Healthy! Level 1, Extra Attacks Level 2, Gun Fu Level 3, Skeleton in the Closet (Triad Member) 2 BP, Gun Combat Level 2, Kung Fu Attacks Level 2

Along with the carrier, the loyal partner is the enforcer's oldest friend. The three men joined the Triad together and struggled through its ranks; now two of them work as a knee-breaking, money-collecting, body-disposing team. Triad Enforcer #2 suspects his partner has undergone a change of heart and is hoping to retire from his life of crime. If he does, Eddie will force #2 to choose between his best friend, and the criminal empire that made him rich and gave him a family. While #2 is loyal to the Triad, he is even more loyal to the carrier and #1; he will not desert either of his friends.



## EXTRAS

The following are non-player character roles given their antagonism towards the principle roles of this drama.

### EDDIE YIP, TRIAD DAI LO

IMPORTANCE: Lead

Body 6                      Mind 7                      Soul 5  
Health Points 75 (55+20)      Energy Points 80 (60+20)  
Attack Combat Value 6      Defense Combat Value 4  
Star Power 18

#### ATTRIBUTES

Gun Fu (Cool Explosions, Woo Special) Level 2, Highly Skilled Level 1, Posedown Level 2, Swift Reaction Level 3, Wealth Level 4

#### DEFECTS

Owned by the Triads 1 BP, Skeleton in the Closet (Triad member) 2 BP

#### SKILLS

Gun Combat Level 3, Intimidation Level 3, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 3, Kung Fu: Defense Level 1, Linguistics (English) Level 1, Ranged Defense Level 3

Eddie spent eighteen years working his way to his current position. He became *Dai Lo*, or boss, of the Red Eyebrow Triad by stepping over or on anyone who opposed his rise to power. Thanks to his ruthlessness, Eddie runs one of the preeminent criminal factions in modern Hong Kong.

Recently, Eddie opened negotiations with a London-based syndicate trying to establish a drug pipeline with the Red Eyebrows. Eddie believes this will make his Triad stronger by expanding his power base into Europe. The syndicate, in turn, hopes to gain access to Golden Triangle's unrefined heroin through Eddie, hopefully circumventing the Russian, Turkish, and Sicilian Mafia stranglehold on Europe. The British syndicate puts together a case filled with cash and samples of refined heroin, which they pass to the carrier in London.

Eddie is loyal to nobody but himself, and kills anyone in his way. Although he is a smooth, educated man with a taste for high art and good food, his facade hides a soulless killer.

### MR. FONG AND MR. TONG, YIP'S HENCHMEN

IMPORTANCE: Supporting Character

Body 8                      Mind 4                      Soul 5  
Health Points 105 (95+10)      Energy Points 60 (50+10)  
Attack Combat Value 5      Defense Combat Value 3  
Star Power 17

#### ATTRIBUTES

Damn Healthy! Level 3, Extra Attacks Level 1, Gun Fu (Dead Eye, Portable Armoury, Quick Trigger Finger) Level 3, Posedown Level 2

#### DEFECTS

Owned by the Triads 2 BP, Skeleton in the Closet (Triad Member) 2 BP, Servitude (to Eddie Yip) 2 BP

#### SKILLS

Acrobatics Level 1, Gun Combat Level 2, Intimidation Level 3, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 1, Kung Fu: Defense Level 1, Ranged Defense Level 3

Fong and Tong are Eddie's personal bodyguards and most loyal employees. They never question Eddie's orders and they kill on command. The twins are hulking, stoic henchmen with consciences of wolverines. There is bad blood between them and the enforcer team going back years, but they could not act on it. They await any opportunity to attack the enforcers, and betrayal is as good a reason as any.

### GOONS

IMPORTANCE: Walk-On

Body 6                      Mind 4                      Soul 4  
Health Points 30 (50-20)      Energy Points 20 (40-20)  
Attack Combat Value 4      Defense Combat Value 2  
Star Power 14

#### ATTRIBUTES

None

#### DEFECTS

Owned by the Triads 2 BP, Skeleton in the Closet (Triad Member) 2 BP

#### SKILLS

Gun Combat Level 1, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 1

Game Masters can use these extras as Red Eyebrow killers or bodyguards. They are firefight fodder.



## KEY SEQUENCES

These sequences steer the scenario to the main plot points of the adventure, but Game Masters should feel free to alter them to suit the game or the tastes of his or her players.

### ACT I — THE DEAL

The film opens with a meeting between Eddie Yip and a representative from the London syndicate in the *Dai Lo's* lavish penthouse (replete with personal luxuries like a 62" HDTV and a powerful home computer). The player roles of Triad Enforcer #1 & 2, and the carrier are present since this takes place weeks before the story's current events.

Eddie and the syndicate mouthpiece, flanked by heavily armed guards, discuss a potential alliance to refine Golden Triangle heroin. The syndicate agrees to give the Triad carrier a satchel of cash and refined heroin in London to finalize the arrangement. The conversation is carefully "respectful," but there is an air of cloaked distrust and suspicion between the two crime syndicates.

### ACT II — THE BIG HIT

Following the meeting, Eddie sends his boys (the player roles and additional NPC goons) on assignment. Their mission is to attend a fundraising event for the arts and murder the host, a local politician who insulted the Red Eyebrow Triad during his speech against local criminals. Unfortunately, the politician is holding his party aboard a moving, elevated train, and is surrounded by bodyguards. Worse yet, the ballerina is attending this charity function as well.

Eddie wants his men to kill the politician at the party where it will grab the most attention. While he doesn't care about the body count too greatly, the chief target should be the politician. The enforcers, carrier, and goons can obviously wear masks when they commit the deed, but they must first attend the event as guests and locate the politician. This might be slow going given the entire train is hosting the social event. One car has gambling, another is the lounge, a third houses the dinner car, a fourth has an opera singer performing an aria, the fifth is a gallery serving champagne and *hors d'oeuvres*, while the last one has the politician entertaining guests in a private cab.

Only guests with invitations can board the high-speed train of the Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR) at its terminus in Hung Hom, after which it departs for Guangzhou and back during the four-hour party (with special permission from the Chinese government of course). Eddie, however, can provide the invitations for his men. Given the train is only in Hong Kong SAR for fifteen minutes before it hits the Mainland, Eddie suggests his men wait till the train is heading back to Hung Hom station (once back in the SAR) before attacking. They must then pull the emergency brake line and escape on foot. That only gives them a fifteen-minute window of opportunity at the tail end of the trip, which also means the Triad members must be on their best behavior for three-and-a-half hours. During this time, they can gamble, socialize, and in the case of the character roles, encounter the ballerina who is mystified to find the troupe's make-up artist at this high-class event. To provide additional flavor, one of the Triad goons might start misbehaving, either drinking too much or rudely hitting on women. If the players do not interfere, the Game Master can remind them of Eddie's warning to remain low-key.

If the Triad goons do this correctly and keep their faces hidden, they can assassinate the politician without jeopardizing their identities. Unfortunately, the bodyguards are everywhere, turning the train into a deadly shooting gallery between the Triad and security force. This means the ballerina must use her martial training to stay alive, though the Game Master can certainly establish a situation where the carrier must kill one of his own men who is about to shoot the ballerina.

If the carrier accidentally reveals his identity to the ballerina (or she recognizes one of the enforcers as the carrier's friend during the assassination), the Game Master can also kick-start the scenario from here. If Eddie learns about the girl uncovering his men's identities, he will order her execution; this should force the carrier into protecting her and dragging his friends along as well.

### ACT III — THE DEAD DROP

Assuming everything went well with the assassination, the story line advances a few months. The ballerina and carrier successfully tour London with the Hong Kong Ballet before returning. Additionally, the carrier procures the syndicate's drugs and money, successfully sneaking it past customs. Upon arriving at Hong Kong via the newly constructed Chek Lap Kok airport, the troupe boards a chartered bus heading for their studio. From there, they part company for home. At any point during this time, the ballerina grabs the wrong bag, taking the case meant for the carrier. The GM can have this occur at any time that is most convenient since the medium-sized case is too large to carry on the flight or bus. Airline attendants and bus drivers will take the case, and the more the carrier protests, the more suspicion he draws on himself. Regardless, the switch occurs on the luggage carousel or when the bus driver loads the ballerina's luggage into her waiting taxi (she called a taxi in advance).

At this point, the Game Master should play the carrier's scene out first. This allows the player to discover he now has the ballerina's suitcase after opening it. He should more than likely go after her (though the GM should not count on this turn of events). Thus, when the scene switches to the ballerina, and she discovers her suitcase contains £100,000 in cash and several vials of refined heroin, the carrier can arrive on the scene at any time most effective to dramatic effect.

### ACT IV — THE BETRAYAL

Eddie made his fortune betraying others, so he expects it from his own men. When the carrier returned from Hong Kong, the *Dai Lo* sent his men to keep track of the carrier's movements (since the syndicate did the same London-side to protect their investment, thus preventing the carrier from vanishing with the shipment there ... at least according to Eddie's beliefs). If the carrier is about to betray Eddie or runs off with the money, the goons have orders to kill him. Unfortunately, when the carrier goes after the ballerina (with or without case in tow), the goons think he is running, and follow.

While eating at a restaurant, enforcers #1 & 2 encounter Monk the Monkey, a chatty lieutenant affiliated with the Red Eyebrows Society. Amid his typical bantering and jabbering about this female conquest or that gunfight, he receives a cellular call. It is from the goons tracking the carrier. They are about to go after the carrier, and need more men to flank the building where he has "hidden." The lieutenant apprises the enforcers of the situation and asks for their help (not realizing their questionable loyalties). These events should come as a shock to them considering Eddie was smart enough not to tell them about the goons following their best friend, the carrier.

### ACT V — ON THE RUN

By this point, the carrier and ballerina should be together, arguing or debating over an open suitcase of drugs and money. The ballerina should now recognize the suitcase as belonging to the carrier, bringing to mind questions concerning his real occupation. When the scene is reaching a resolution or the carrier is about to leave, they hear a shriek of tires outside the apartment building. If either role looks outside, they see a host of Triad men (the carrier recognizes them) heading into the building's front entrance with weapons drawn. Logic dictates to escape via the back stairwell, if they run at all (though the GM should remind the carrier that the ballerina's life is now in danger). If they run, there is a firefight down the stairwell. A few goons should come in close enough (like popping through an adjacent stairwell door) for the ballerina to contribute to the melee during their escape using her martial prowess. If they stay, however, the goons hold them for questioning until Eddie arrives. "Someone will die," the goons boast, "at the very least the ballerina."

The cavalry, of course, arrives with the goons in the form of the Enforcers. Whether they help in the firefight down the stairwell, or rescue the carrier and ballerina as hostages depends on the situation. At the very least, the Enforcers and carrier are still friends, and they should help one another during the escape from the building. Because the other goons see the Enforcers helping the enemy, however (there are too many to simply kill), the Enforcers are now also hunted.

## ACT VI — THE BLOODBATH IN KOWLOON

The four characters are on the run, and Eddie is sparing no expense to kill them and recover his suitcase (if the heroes did not leave it behind). He searches and destroys the apartments of the roles, and he puts a bounty on their heads. Any scenes involving them finding a safe house (in this case an Indian Restaurant owned by a friend not affiliated with the Triads, and with a rear apartment) or dodging Eddie's men are also good moments for the roles to bond.

During this act, Eddie is one step ahead of the heroes. If they decide to contact Eddie and offer him the case in exchange for their safety, Eddie sets up an ambush using Mr. Fong and Tong. If the characters go after Eddie at home or his office, the twin assassins are waiting in either location. If the heroes are slow in acting someone sees them entering or leaving the restaurant and informs Eddie. In this case, the Indian Restaurant is a good

location for a fight; it is filled with patrons, waiters, improvised weapons,

and cooking gear. If the firefight runs into the kitchen, where hot cooking oil, spices, and meat cleavers await, as well as an explosive gas oven ... ka-boom!

## ACT VII — THE OPUS

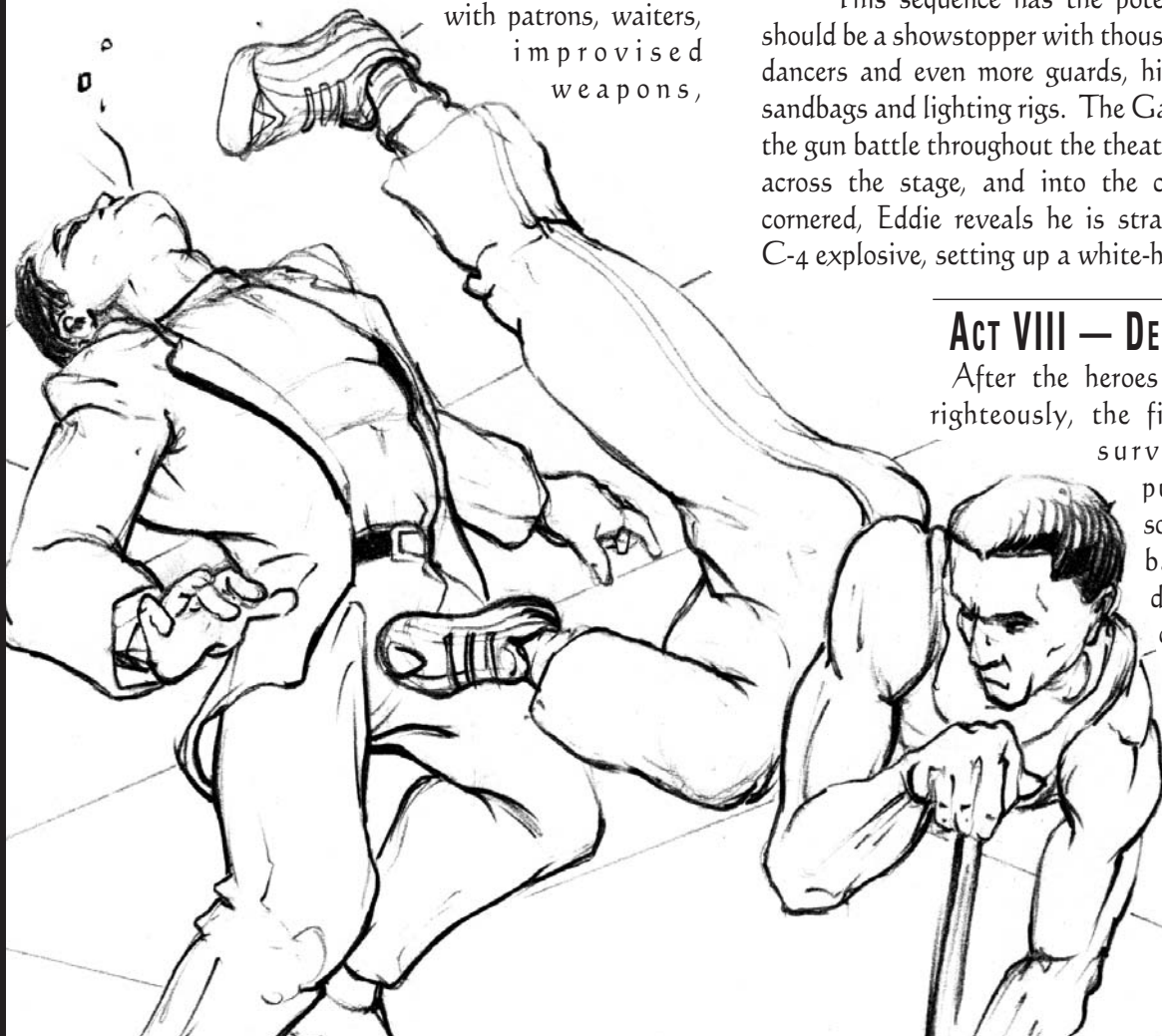
Just as the roles are about to kill off the last goon or one of the twin assassins from the last scene, he delivers a message from Eddie (his death scene moment). In a final attempt to draw the characters out, the *Dai Lo* kidnapped the Hong Kong Ballet troupe, and is holding them hostage in a theatre he owns. If the roles do not surrender, Eddie will kill them. The enforcers know the theatre, if they wish to help, but the ballerina and carrier know the victims personally and should not want them killed.

At the theater, Eddie sits in an upper box surrounded by bodyguards and watching the troupe act out a forced performance of *Swan Lake*. If Mr. Tong and Fong survived their encounter with the character roles and escaped, they will be here as well.

This sequence has the potential to be huge. It should be a showstopper with thousands of props, a dozen dancers and even more guards, high rise luxury boxes, sandbags and lighting rigs. The Game Master can direct the gun battle throughout the theater, through backstage, across the stage, and into the catwalks, etc. Once cornered, Eddie reveals he is strapped with pounds of C-4 explosive, setting up a white-hot finale.

## ACT VIII — DENOUEMENT

After the heroes deal out vengeance righteously, the film closes with the surviving characters pursuing what they sought after in life. The ballerina continues dancing to sell-out crowds, while her boyfriend, the carrier, acts as her manager. Enforcers #1 and 2 retire comfortably if they found the suitcase filled with money and drugs.





# SHAOLIN

*Shaolin* is a period martial arts film set in 1736. It depicts, in dramatized fashion, the fall of the Shaolin Temple. The players portray the students of San Te, the renowned creator of the 36th chamber of Shaolin, acting as young monks enduring the rigorous training required to master San Te's Kung Fu, as well as the discipline of Shaolin Buddhism.

When Emperor Yong Zhang's heralds visit the temple demanding the monks stop teaching Kung Fu, San Te balks, refusing to relinquish his Chinese heritage. When the Emperor's lap dogs return to their court bearing San Te's insolent response, Yong Zhang issues a new directive: lead the Royal Guard to the temple, and burn it to the ground.

From the shadows appears Pak Mei, another of Shaolin's masters, offering the services of both his loyal students and himself to the Emperor, on one condition: his life be spared.

The heroes find themselves caught in a fractionalized Shaolin Temple, between the students of Pak Mei, and the impending doom carried on the hoofs of Yong Zhang's Royal Guard.

## PLAYER ROLES

These are the major character roles players may assume in the film, though Game Masters can assign extra parts with other San Te monks.

### "IRON ARMS", SENIOR STUDENT OF SAN TE

**MINIMUM STAR POWER BID:** 7

**ROLE PACKAGE:** Damn Healthy! Level 2, Extra Attacks Level 1, Highly Skilled Level 1, Swift Reaction Level 2, Wire Fu: Attacks Level 2, Wire Fu: Movement Level 2, Moral Code 2 BP, Acrobatics Level 1, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 2, Kung Fu: Defense Level 2, Melee Attack Level 1, Melee Defense Level 1

He is the eldest of San Te's students; already enlightened in many of Shaolin's martial secrets, Iron

Arms enjoys the admiration and respect of his peers. In San Te's absence, he is in command. His nickname refers to his prodigious strength, and unbelievably hard punches. He stands behind *Sifu* San Te 100%, having always distrusted the actions of *Sifu* Pak Mei.

### THE REBEL

**MINIMUM STAR POWER BID:** 7

**ROLE PACKAGE:** Damn Healthy! Level 1, Extra Attacks Level 1, Extra Defense Level 1, Highly Skilled Level 1, Swift Reaction Level 2, Wire Fu: Attacks Level 2, Acrobatics Level 1, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 2, Kung Fu: Defense Level 1, Melee Attack Level 1, Melee Defense Level 2

A student of San Te's for almost a year, the rebel grows frustrated, and longs to equal Iron Arms, or even his master. He constantly practices, but cannot resist a chance to do something fun. This strict environment drives him insane, though he enjoys serving the Shaolin way of life.

### THE SCHOLAR

**MINIMUM STAR POWER BID:** 5

**ROLE PACKAGE:** Mind +2, Soul +2, Highly Skilled Level 2, Wire Fu: Attacks Level 1, Wire Fu: Movement Level 1, Meditation Level 1, Moral Code 2 BP, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 1, Kung Fu: Defense Level 1, Melee Defense Level 1, Ranged Defense Level 1, Cultural Arts Level 3, Medical Level 2, Way of the Taoist Level 1, Writing Level 1

Since his childhood, the scholar always had his nose in a book. His habits have not changed since his scholarship to the temple. After three years of rigorous study, he has come a long way, including his excellence in Kung Fu. Although he also studied under Pak Mei, he found the *sifu's* sneaky, quiet style too brutal for his tastes. As a student of San Te he would be honored to die for the good of the temple.

## THE ACROBAT

**MINIMUM STAR POWER BID:** 5

**ROLE PACKAGE:** Extra Defenses Level 2, Highly Skilled Level 2, Swift Reaction Level 2, Wire Fu: Attacks Level 1, Wire Fu: Movement Level 2, Servitude (to San Te) 2 BP, Acrobatics Level 3, Climbing Level 2, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 1, Kung Fu: Defense Level 3, Ranged Defense Level 1

Born in the Shaolin Temple, the acrobat's mother was a wandering pilgrim while his father died at the hands of Manchu soldiers who destroyed their village. When the acrobat's mother died in childbirth, the monks raised him. He is a natural athlete, gifted with near superhuman agility. He enjoys performing exciting, even deadly, stunts.

Raised with San Te, their relationship is one of brotherly closeness. The thought of Kung Fu becoming lost horrifies him, and he would do anything, including sacrifice his life, to preserve this heritage.

## EXTRAS

The following are non-player characters.

### PAK MEI, THE WHITE EYEBROW MONK

**IMPORTANCE:** Lead

Body 9                      Mind 7                      Soul 5  
Health Points 100 (80+20)    Energy Points 80 (60+20)  
Attack Combat Value 7      Defense Combat Value 5  
Star Power 21

#### ATTRIBUTES

Damn Healthy! Level 1, Extra Attacks Level 2, Extra Defenses Level 2, Swift Reaction Level 2, Wire Fu: Attacks Level 3

#### DEFECTS

Servitude (to the Emperor) 1 BP

#### SKILLS

Acrobatics Level 2, Cultural Arts Level 1, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 4, Kung Fu: Defense Level 3, Melee Attack Level 2, Melee Defense Level 2, Ranged Defense Level 2, Way of the Taoist Level 1

Pak Mei, the infamous White Eyebrow Monk, was responsible for the fall of Shaolin Temple. His deal with the Emperor effectively divides the monks with Pak Mei's students supporting their master. He is arrogant and cruel, masking his mercenary nature behind a kind and generous façade.

When Emperor Yong Zhang demands the monks stop teaching Kung Fu under penalty of death, Pak Mei makes a deal with the Imperial Court to aid the troops in finding and destroying the temple. When the attack arrives, his men and he will side with the dynasty, but until then, he displays a cunningly respectful façade.

The other Shaolin masters, San Te included, know nothing of Pak Mei's treachery. He is without nobility, doing whatever it takes to increase his power and war chest.

### SAN TE, MASTER OF THE 36TH CHAMBER

**IMPORTANCE:** Supporting Character

Body 5                      Mind 7                      Soul 9  
Health Points 80 (70+10)    Energy Points 90 (80+10)  
Attack Combat Value 7      Defense Combat Value 5  
Star Power 21

#### ATTRIBUTES

Extra Attacks Level 1, Extra Defenses Level 2, Focused Level 2, Meditation Level 2, Swift Reaction Level 2, Sword Fu (Judge Opponent) Level 1, Wire Fu: Attacks Level 2, Wire Fu: Movement (Cat's Balance, Cat's Reflexes) Level 2

#### DEFECTS

Obligation (to school/students) 2 BP, Moral Code (against harming innocents or killing anyone) 2 BP

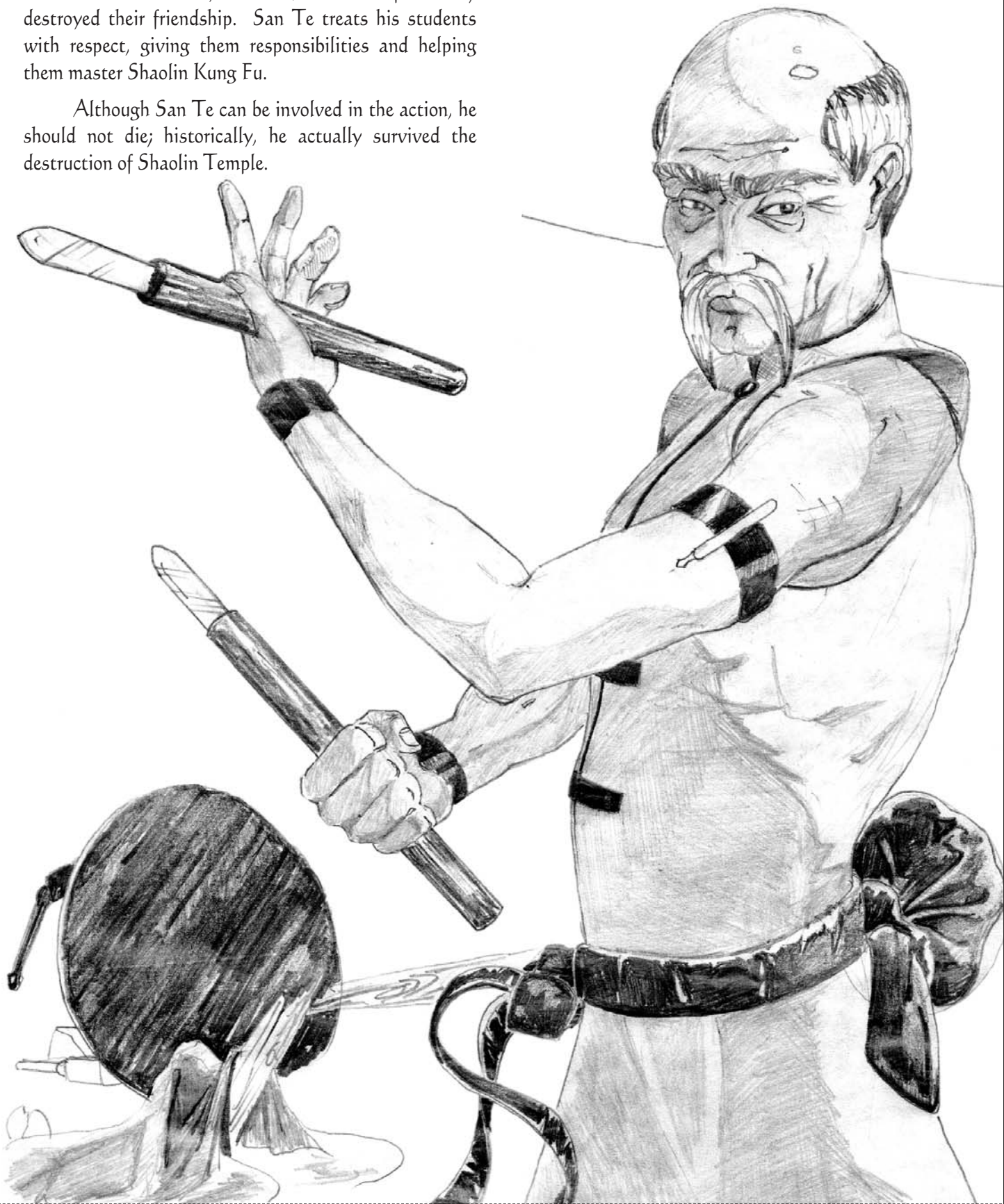
#### SKILLS

Acrobatics Level 2, Cultural Arts Level 4, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 3, Kung Fu: Defense Level 3, Medical Level 2, Melee Attack Level 1, Melee Defense Level 2, Ranged Defense Level 2, Way of the Taoist Level 3, Writing Level 2

San Te is the creator of the 36th Chamber of Shaolin, that is, teaching the masses about martial arts. He is noble, wise, and benevolent, but does not take

kindly to the Emperor's interference. Pak Mei and he were once like brothers, but Pak Mei's taste for cruelty destroyed their friendship. San Te treats his students with respect, giving them responsibilities and helping them master Shaolin Kung Fu.

Although San Te can be involved in the action, he should not die; historically, he actually survived the destruction of Shaolin Temple.





## GENERAL BAO, MINISTER OF DEFENSE

IMPORTANCE: Speaking Part

Body 8                      Mind 5                      Soul 4  
Health Points 50                      Energy Points 45  
Attack Combat Value 5                      Defense Combat Value 3  
Star Power 15

### ATTRIBUTES

Extra Attacks Level 1, Focused Damage (strikes)  
Level 2, Wealth Level 2

### DEFECTS

Not So Fast 1 BP, Obligation (to the Ching  
Dynasty) 2 BP

### SKILLS

Climbing Level 1, Interrogation Level 2,  
Intimidation Level 2, Kung Fu: Attacks Level 1, Kung Fu:  
Defense Level 1

General Bao is a giant Mongolian obsessively serving the Ching Dynasty. He lives to tread on the freedoms of the Chinese people, and carry out the ruthless commands of the Emperor. His troops reflect his ability to wreak carnage. He plans to attack the temple in huge numbers, swarming and overwhelming the monks so they cannot possibly win the battle.

## STUDENTS OF PAK MEI

IMPORTANCE: Speaking Part

Body 6                      Mind 4                      Soul 5  
Health Points 55                      Energy Points 45  
Attack Combat Value 5                      Defense Combat Value 3  
Star Power 15

### ATTRIBUTES

Extra Attacks Level 1, Swift Reaction Level 2,  
Wire Fu: Attacks Level 2

### DEFECTS

Servitude (to Pak Mei) 2 BP

### SKILLS

Kung Fu: Attacks Level 2, Kung Fu: Defense  
Level 1, Melee Attack Level 1, Way of the Taoist Level 1

Only these monks are privy to Pak Mei's heinous plan, and most are brainwashed enough to comply willingly. All expect the Emperor to spare them (not likely) when his troops raid the temple. All 50 students are tough, and trained in Pak Mei Kung Fu, the style their master created.

## THE IMPERIAL SOLDIERS OF EMPEROR YONG ZHANG

IMPORTANCE: Walk-On

Body 6                      Mind 4                      Soul 4  
Health Points 30 (50-20)                      Energy Points 20 (40-20)  
Attack Combat Value 4                      Defense Combat Value 2  
Star Power 14

### ATTRIBUTES

None

### DEFECTS

Servitude (to General Bao) 2 BP

### SKILLS

Kung Fu: Attacks Level 1, Kung Fu Defense Level 1

These soldiers follow the commands of General Bao. In their own way, they are as indoctrinated as the students of Pak Mei. The soldiers are heavily armed, bloodthirsty, and cowardly. Unfortunately, there are 3,000 of them in the final sequence.

## THE EMPEROR AND HIS PREFECTS

IMPORTANCE: N/A

These characters are purely for plot purposes, and have no Stats. The Emperor is too heavily guarded to attack, and never appears in any scenes with the monks. His prefects are expendable, however.

## KEY SEQUENCES

These sequences help guide the adventure, but the Game Master can freely alter them to suit his or her individual game or the tastes of the players.

## ACT I: THE MARKET

The story opens in Baan Ngaap village, a tiny hamlet a few miles from the temple. The players are

present, along with San Te, to beg for donations. Enter General Bao and some soldiers. They harass the vendors, and belittle the players, mocking them. Although the players may leave this insult unanswered, one of the soldiers attempts to assault the daughter of a grocer; all hell should break loose at this point.

This scene contains tons of improvised weapons: carts, tables, fruits, and even livestock and chickens. The players and Game Masters should use whatever works.

## ACT II: THE ROYAL COURT

This is an informational cut-scene, which the GM may play out for the players' benefit. Bao returns to his master, beaten and battered. He tells Yong Zhang of the monks, and their actions in the market. Zhang ponder this, then outlaws Kung Fu, sending his Prefects to Hunan Province to warn the Shaolin masters to stop teaching the martial disciplines.

## ACT III: THE COURTYARD

In this scene, the character roles work through a training sequence in the courtyard of the temple, doing forms, sparring, lifting weights, accomplishing incredible feats of acrobatics, etc. at the behest of San Te. After a few minutes of this, the GM should introduce Pak Mei and his students. Pak Mei suggests his form of Kung Fu is actually the finest style for "passive resistance." This is a great way to maneuver the players into sparring with Pak Mei's students, though the masters stop the fight before anyone is terribly injured.

## ACT IV: THE ULTIMATUM

Some time later, Yong Zhang's prefects arrive in pampered fashion on comfy, cushioned carts, acting haughty and superior. They meet with San Te, Pak Mei, and the other masters, before addressing the common monks: "By Decree of the Celestial Court, no more Kung Fu will be tolerated!"

Of course, San Te balks and refuses to surrender his life-long passion for the martial sciences. How the heroes react is up to them (the rebel in particular), but any violence will meet retribution at the hands of the Prefects' Royal Guard escort.

## ACT V: A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

That night, while performing chores around the temple, the four heroes spy Pak Mei and a handful of his top students sneaking into the stables. Here, the heroes can overhear Pak Mei discussing his plan to travel to the Royal Court, and bargain for the lives and well being of his school by betraying the temple. To add to the drama of this important scene, the players must roll to remain quiet and unseen. Remember, Pak Mei is a Shaolin Master; his senses are fine tuned and ready for trouble, not to mention he is also a paranoid bastard. Regardless what they roll, the players fail to hide from Pak Mei, who responds by sending 5 to 10 of his men to confront the spying heroes, which leads to a confrontation in the yard.

Any ruckus brings San Te running, and into action. When he sees Pak Mei, the two engage in their first true battle, pitting good versus evil, Kung Fu against Kung Fu. At some point in the fight, Pak Mei starts losing and reveals his true nature by sticking San Te with a poison dart before throwing salt in his eyes. Naturally, San Te's students rush to their *sifu's* aid, giving Pak Mei an opportunity to escape. If anyone attacks Pak Mei, one of his students intervenes, allowing the *sifu* to escape.

## ACT VI: THE CONTRACT WRITTEN IN BLOOD

After the battle, San Te calls upon the heroes to track and kill Pak Mei. This leads into the next sequence, with Pak Mei's arrival at the Celestial Court of Yong Zhang; the Shaolin *sifu* bargains for the life and prosperity of his Kung Fu school. In return, he promises to guide the Imperial Troops to the temple, point out its weaknesses, and aid the soldiers in their assault on Shaolin.

If the heroes tracked Pak Mei here, they can attack him, but the court is well-defended and the combination of troops and Pak Mei's students will easily overwhelm them if they do not escape. Besides, the Emperor has already decreed the destruction of the Shaolin Temple, leaving the heroes scant days to return home and warn the monks.





## ACT VII: THE SACKING OF SHAOLIN TEMPLE

This is the film's finale. After San Te's refusal to quit teaching martial arts, Yong Zhang sends in General Bao, and 3000 of his men to kill the monks of Shaolin and burn down the temple.

Building tension here is essential. Suggestions include:

1. Allow the roles to hear the gradual building thunder of the arriving army.
2. Watching San Te prepare for battle through his forms despite the poison rushing through his system.
3. A sudden burst of arrows over the temple walls.

When the army attacks, Pak Mei and his men join the soldiers in destroying the temple and killing their fellow monks. The entire Shaolin monastery is stage for this sequence filled with thousands of extras (think *Tai Chi Master* with Jet Li and Michelle Yeoh against the hordes of Imperial troops). The chances of survival are slim, but this is a tragedy.

The Game Master should keep the combat running through the massive, echoing confines of the temple, using all the "chambers" to his or her advantage. The "35 chambers" are each designed around a theme or test (challenging the monks' strength, soul, endurance, patience, etc.) with clever and devious devices built to hone each characteristic. For ideas, watch *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (a.k.a. *Master Killer*), *Shaolin Temple* starring Jet Li, or any of the *Once Upon a Time In China* series.

Suggestions for cool fight scenes inside the temple include:

1. A chamber filled with giant razor-sharp pendulum blades swinging from the ceiling.
2. A room with a wading pool for a floor, filled with boiling water, and only a set number of floating pads for players to balance on during battle.
3. A room where the huge floor pit 20 metres down is filled with sharpened spikes. Emerging from the pit are giant, narrow, balancing poles wide enough for one foot. Additionally, gymnastic rings hang from

the ceiling on chains, but if any weight is hung from them, the poles shorten, or drop completely into holes in the ground.

These are just suggestions to inspire GMs into creating their own chambers of the Shaolin Temple. He or she should feel free to alter, use, or ignore them completely.

To orchestrate a final confrontation between Pak Mei and the character roles, San Te collapses from the poison raging through his body, leaving him unable to fight. Pak Mei will not pass up the opportunity to attack a helpless San Te, leading to a final battle between the followers of Shaolin, and the traitorous faction of Pak Mei.

Although Pak Mei is defeated, the temple still falls meaning the surviving heroes must escape with their weakened *sifu*. If the heroes succeed, San Te returns to full health and wanders the land telling of the fall of the Shaolin Temple. Both he and the heroes are now the keepers of the Shaolin's 36th Chamber, a duty that requires them to continue teaching others.

## 必死殭屍 DIE ZOMBIE, DIE!

This gunplay/horror thriller is in the spirit of Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* trilogy, or a Hong Kong take on George Romero's *Living Dead* series.

The film opens on Cheung Chau, a rural island off the coast of modern Hong Kong. Every year, the locals hold a three-day festival to keep the dead at bay by preparing and leaving them buns. If they do not prepare the buns, the villagers fear the wrath of the walking dead.

In the hills of Cheung Chau, as it happens, Dr. Zhang Mok, a renowned scientist, hopes to find the *Gwai Ngaam* (Demon-Stone), a relic that, according to folklore, can give the dead a will of their own. Unfortunately, Dr. Zhang finds what he is looking for.

Elsewhere, two rival Triad families, the Red Sky and White Crane, are meeting at a remote, old cabin to discuss a truce. This is just miles from the dig site of Dr. Zhang Mok, and in the path of angry, vengeful dead and their unholy mastermind, Woo Geng, the embodiment of the undead's newfound intelligence.

## PLAYER ROLES

These are the major character roles available in the film, though the GM can create additional Triad members or an assistant to Dr. Mok who escapes the calamity as well.

### THE TRIAD NEGOTIATORS

**MINIMUM STAR POWER BID:** 7

**ROLE PACKAGE:** Art of Distraction Level 1, Extra Defenses Level 2, Swift Reaction Level 2, Interrogation Level 1, Gun Combat Level 1, Kung Fu Attacks Level 1, Kung Fu: Defense Level 1, 10 Bonus Character Points

There are two of these roles available, one for each Triad, and both are similar. Each role has shared and individual plot notes, as specified below.

#### SHARED NOTES

The Triads sent both negotiators to make peace with the other, their oldest rivals. Both sides respect the negotiators since these men are willing to talk instead of shoot and listen rather than threaten. The current war between the two families is killing business, and that must end.

#### RED SKY TRIAD NEGOTIATOR NOTES

This negotiator wishes to stop the bloodshed, but still believes in the righteousness of his faction. He wants peace as long as his family comes out on top of the proceedings. He works dangerous peace missions, trying to quell wars between his crime family and many others. As a subplot, he has no real desire for peace with the White Crane Triad. He lost too many friends to their guns and treachery, but has his orders. That does not mean he will make matters easy for his rivals. He accepts nothing less than a cash tribute and a share of the White Crane's opium fields in Vietnam — a hefty price for peace.

#### WHITE CRANE TRIAD NEGOTIATOR NOTES

This negotiator is older and wiser than his counterpart. Just recently, his wife of many years died and the endless violence of Triad wars is too much for him to bear. He believes the rivalry is old and stupid. He is ready for peace.

### RED SKY BODYGUARD

**MINIMUM STAR POWER BID:** 5

**ROLE PACKAGE:** Damn Healthy! Level 1, Extra Attacks Level 2, Gun Fu Level 3, Servitude (Red Sky Triad) 2 BP, Gun Combat Level 3, Kung Fu Attacks Level 1

The Red Sky Triad dispatched this bodyguard to protect their negotiator at all costs. He greatly dislikes the White Crane, but orders are orders. He hopes they conclude their dealing quickly so he can return to Hong Kong and his life of violent crime. All the White Crane need do is make one false move, and the bodyguard will disrupt the peace talks with a bullet, and end what they started.

### THE WHITE CRANE KILLER

**MINIMUM STAR POWER BID:** 5

**ROLE PACKAGE:** Extra Attacks Level 2, Gun Fu Level 3, Highly Skilled Level 1, Skeleton in the Closet (Triad Member) 2 BP, Gun Combat Level 2, Kung Fu Attacks Level 2, Lock-Picking Level 1, Stealth Level 2

The White Crane Killer is a born murderer, nearly without conscience. His role in the Triad is that of "cleaner," a hit man who kills everyone present at a hit. This killer joined his father, the White Crane Negotiator, to end the feud with the Red Sky Triad, one way or another.

Just a year ago, the killer considered retiring from the business and marrying, until his girlfriend died during a Red Sky hit. Instead, he became a mad dog killer, willing to murder Red Sky members for free.

## EXTRAS

The following are non-player characters.

### WOO GENG, LORD OF THE LIVING DEAD

IMPORTANCE: Lead

Body 6	Mind 7	Soul 9
Health Points 95 (75+20)	Energy Points 120 (100+20)	
Attack Combat Value 7	Defense Combat Value 5	
Star Power 22		

#### ATTRIBUTES

Energy Bonus Level 2, Extra Defenses Level 2,  
Focused Level 3, Posedown Level 4, Swift Reaction Level 1

#### DEFECTS

Marked 2 BP

#### SKILLS

Cultural Arts Level 5, Interrogation Level 3,  
Intimidation Level 4, Kung Fu: Defense Level 2,  
Linguistics Level 2, Medical Level 2, Ranged Defense  
Level 2, Way of the Taoist Level 6

Woo Geng is an ancient evil being and the embodiment of the willful dead. It seeks out the Demon Stone, in Dr. Zhang's possession, to build an army of the dead and destroy mankind. It knows it has only one night to accomplish this task.

For nearly a thousand years, the watchful people of Cheung Chau baked their buns, which they believe keeps the dead in a drugged state — without thought or will. When Dr. Zhang removed the Demon Stone, however, he awoke the enslaved dead and Woo Geng. By removing it, he gave them temporary free will, but that can only last for the night unless Woo Geng procures the stone for himself.

Woo Geng bears the appearance of a tall, gangly scarecrow, complete with rotting skin, filthy clothes, and a wide brimmed hat. It is merciless and single minded, seeking only the stone, at any cost. It will kill and create zombies from all who cross its path.

## WOO GENG'S EVIL POWERS

These are the otherworldly powers possessed by Woo Geng, and are exclusive to this adventure.

#### FEAR

Whenever Woo Geng spends 8 Energy Points, any mortals in his presence must make a Mind Stat check, at +2 difficulty. If they fail, the mortal screams in terror, faints, or runs away, forfeiting all actions for the round.

#### THE BREATH OF DEATH

Woo Geng can expectorate a filthy mess of pulsing living death, at the cost of 10 Energy Points per attempt. If Woo Geng hits the character, he/she must make a Body Stat check; failure means the character loses one Health Point per round. Once dead, he or she returns as a member of Woo Geng's undead army. This could make for a great subplot with the infected role seeking a cure as well as fighting off hordes of the living dead at the door.

Unfortunately, the only antidote are the buns baked by the villagers and blessed by the priests of Cheung Chau. The village is two kilometres from the cabin, and crawling with the living dead. If the victim of Woo Geng's Breath consumes just one bun, he or she is free of its effects. Dr. Zhang would know about this remedy through legend, though whether he remembers is up to the Game Master.

### WOO GENG'S ZOMBIE HORDES

IMPORTANCE: Walk-On

Body 8	Mind 2	Soul 2
Health Points 30 (50-20)	Energy Points 0 (20-20)	
Attack Combat Value 3	Defense Combat Value 1	
Star Power 12		

#### ATTRIBUTES

None

#### DEFECTS

Servitude (to Woo Geng) 2 BP

#### SKILLS

Kung Fu: Attacks Level 2, Kung Fu: Defense Level 2

These shambling, rotting, disintegrating beasts are Woo Geng's loyal servants and soldiers, existing only to eat the flesh of their hapless victims.



## DR. ZHANG MOK, RENOWNED SCIENTIST

IMPORTANCE: Speaking Part

Body 4                      Mind 6                      Soul 8  
Health Points 60                      Energy Points 70  
Attack Combat Value 6                      Defense Combat Value 4  
Star Power 14

### ATTRIBUTES

None

### DEFECTS

Easily Distracted (archeological finds) 1 BP

### SKILLS

Cultural Arts Level 4, Linguistics Level 2, Medical Level 1, Science Level 2, Way of the Taoist Level 4, Writing Level 1

Dr. Zhang is a world famous archaeologist and anthropologist. He made more discoveries than his peers, and authored many books on ancient cultures and world folklore. His current quest involves finding *Gwai Ngaam*, the fabled Demon Stone of Chinese mythology, an ancient rune-carved stone capable of giving the restless dead free will. Zhang, of course, does not believe in the supernatural aspects of the legend, but lusts for so prestigious an artifact.

At film's opening, Zhang is digging in the Sepulchre of Woo Geng, an old place of burial named for Cheung Chau's local God of Death. If only Zhang had heeded the old tales....

## THE PEOPLE OF CHEUNG CHAU

IMPORTANCE: NA

These people are the villagers of the island, included for plot purposes. Mostly, they exist to suffer horrible deaths.

## KEY SEQUENCES

These sequences help guide the adventure, but the Game Master can alter them to suit his or her production, or the players' tastes.

## ACT I: THE FESTIVAL/THE SUMMIT

The film opens with the villagers preparing for the colorful Cheung Chau Bun Festival, held as an annual tradition dating back centuries. No one, with exception of old timers, attaches any supernatural significance to the event; it is only an excuse to parade through Cheung Chau's car-less streets and party.

At an old forgotten cabin two kilometres away, a tense meeting between the Triads begins, with all four members arriving via helicopters (which promptly leave to avoid attracting undue attention and because the negotiations may take a while). The cabin is old and decrepit; a cold hearth is set against one wall, and a table and half-full liquor cabinet provide the only furnishings.

Elsewhere, Dr. Zhang Mok excavates the dreadful Sepulchre of Woo Geng, a dark, cold crypt in the hills a couple of kilometres from the village. As Zhang removes the Demon Stone from a large, sinister coffin, the island rumbles with unholy tremors. Zhang barely escapes the collapsing cave.

## ACT II: NO REST FOR THE WICKED

At the summit, neither side should be comfortable. There is palatable tension, so when the Red Sky Negotiator demands cash and stock in the White Crane drug trade, it might cause a showdown, with guns pulled and tempers enflamed. If the negotiations degrade and the players decide to shoot it out, the GM can step in and inform the roles they feel the ground shake, followed by an eerie howl that passes the cabin like the winter winds.

## ACT III: THE DEAD RISE

This in an informative sequence, which the Game Master should use to build plot. In the ruins of the sepulchre, a sinister coffin opens, and the rotting form of Woo Geng shambles out before heading for the light of the falling sun. Around it, the ancient burial grounds churn, and the living dead rise — their limbs falling off, rotting organs and black viscera flowing, following the wake of Woo Geng.

## ACT IV: THE DEAD MEN WALKING

If the character roles check their radios, they discover they cannot contact the helicopters. Fortunately, one of the pilots realizes the same thing and heads back to the island. The roles are stranded until then, unless they can reach the village and take a boat back to Hong Kong. If they leave, they encounter Dr. Zhang along the way. If they stay, Dr. Zhang, pursued by Woo Geng and his zombie hoards, rushes into the cabin seeking sanctuary.

Zhang explains what is happening and describes the fabled nature of the stone. Unfortunately, the village has already fallen to the zombie horde, which is spreading across the island. When the Game Master finds an appropriate lull in the scene, he or she can segue to the arrival of zombies. Dozens of the walking dead suddenly make their presence known, groaning and making obscene noises outside, slowly working their way toward the cabin, dragging the corpses of dead, half-eaten villagers behind them. It does not take them long to attack the hut.

This is a full-on, Hong Kong horror film, with gallons of blood, guts, and brains spilling out in every fire fight. The zombies do not bleed ... they burst, coating everything in sight in noxious liquid and disintegrating organs.

It might be more dramatically appropriate if ammo becomes an issue during this sequence. Guns empty on rolls of 9, 10, 11, or 12 during this action sequence, forcing the heroes to improvise weapons and work together to destroy the thirty-or-so zombies. Additionally, this firefight can occur anywhere on the island if the roles abandoned the cabin earlier.

## ACT V: SURVIVE THE NIGHT

Later, Woo Geng (his voice booming across the island) offers to trade the lives of the roles for Dr. Zhang and the Demon Stone. If some of the character roles decide to accept the offer, Dr. Zhang acts as the voice of reason, explaining Woo Geng will never uphold its end of the bargain. Additionally, if it possesses the Demon Stone by dawn, it can raise the dead up across the world, turning Earth into a new hell.

Once denied, Woo Geng sends a legion of the dead to light the cabin (or forest) on fire, creating a cool gunfight set against an inferno. Once the flames reach the liquor cabinet (if the roles did not use the bottles as Molotov cocktails already), the fire rages beyond control.

## ACT VI: THE DEAD MUST DIE!!

To send the living dead back to the Yama Kings, Dr. Zhang says he must return the Demon Stone to Woo Geng's coffin. Because this covers several kilometres of island swarming with flesh-eating fiends, he needs the roles' help. There are no cars on Cheung Chau (the island is too rocky), so a running battle across the hard terrain is likelier. Maybe a fight set over a chasm of razor-sharp rock or a rockslide might spice up the scene.

To reach the dig site, the roles must also travel through the ravaged village. Corpses and carnage are everywhere, and there does not appear to be any survivors. It is also a prime opportunity to find the antidote (the buns of Cheung Chau) for the Breath of Death if Dr. Zhang remembers the legend.

## ACT VII: THE EXTRACTION

If the characters are ever in a tight spot or unlikely to survive the next encounter, the White Crane helicopter arrives. It hovers over the characters and drops a rope ladder, offering safe passage from the madness of Cheung Chau. At this point, the characters might have to fend off undead clambering after them, or even betray their rivals by stranding them. Either way just as Dr. Zhang is about to climb into the helicopter, his grip slips and he falls into the clutches of the zombies. They tear through him, each taking bits of his body and clothing before heading back to the Sepulchre of Woo Geng. One of the dead has the Demon Stone now, but the characters do not know whom in the mass of a hundred.

At this point the roles must decide whether they will follow and confront Woo Geng directly or run away. If they do not, then come dawn, the dead rise up across the world, dooming the planet. Depending on the circumstances the Game Master may permit the characters to fly to Hong Kong and bring back reinforcements for the final showdown, uniting the two Triads behind a common cause. Otherwise, the Game

Master may decide that there is not enough time, forcing the roles into the confrontation alone. Regardless, the helicopter has extra weapons and clips the characters can use for the face-off against Woo Geng.

### ACT VIII: THE CRYPT

The Sepulchre of Woo Geng is a labyrinth of catacombs filled with zombies and devious traps. This might include a door leading to a pit of spikes disguised by an optical illusion, or a false crypt filled with tiny red spiders, whose combined bite is equal to the damage of a mid-calibre bullet. Additionally, there are pitfalls everywhere, blood slicks to rob the actors of their footing, and rolling stones of incredible size. To manoeuvre through this maze, the character roles must be careful, but fortunately, these booby traps also limit the number of undead present. At the end of this perilous journey, the surviving heroes must find and steal the Stone, battle Woo Geng, and escape while the sepulchre collapses around them. This is obviously not easy, requiring more guile and cunning than brute force and direct action.

### THE END . . . OR IS IT? (OPTIONAL)

The roles can escape by water (the boats docked in Cheung Chau), sailing off into the sunrise, differences forgotten, a ribald comment on their lips. Back on Cheung Chau, however, a rotting hand rises up from the ruins of the crypt, and a thick, clotted chuckle greets the morning....

If the Game Master intends to run a sequel, this is a prime launch point.

## HKAT! TO BESM EQUIVALENTS

As a Tri-Stat Compatible game, *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* SECOND EDITION bears many similarities to *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* SECOND EDITION, the parent game for the Tri-Stat system. Below is a chart indicating the names of Attributes, Abilities, Disabilities, or Defect from *HKAT!* and the equivalent from *BESM*.

HKAT NAME	BESM NAME
Director's Friend	Divine Relationship
Gun Fu	Gun Bunny
Woo Special	Two Gun
Sword Fu	Kensei
Ambidextrous	Two Weapons
Silken Robes	Katanaspace
Wire Fu: Attacks	Special Attack
Blinding Flare	Flare
Foot of the Dragon	Quake
Nerve Strike	Incapacitating
Precise Strike	Accurate
Pyrotechnics	Area Effect
Tracking Camera	Homing
Enthusiastic Performance	Uses Energy
Out of Focus	Inaccurate
Producer's Limitation	Limited Shots
Slow Motion	Stoppable
Wild Fighter	Backblast
Wire Fu: Movement	Special Movement
Cat's Balance	Balance
Cat's Reflexes	Catlike
Spider-Climbing	Wall-Walking
Leaping	Jumping
Speed of the Cobra	Speed
Owned by the Triads	Owned by a Megacorp
Young	Ageism
Moral Code	Attack Restriction
Ill Fortune	Cursed

Not all Attributes/Defects are direct translations — in some cases, modifications have been made in order to better suit the Hong Kong Action Theatre genre.



## PERSONAL WEAPONS

Weapon	Damage	Abilities	Disabilities	Skill
<b>MELEE WEAPONS</b>				
Axe	8	none	Inaccurate Melee	Melee (Axe)
Bo, Staff or Pipe	4*	none	Melee	Melee (Polearm)
Brass Knuckles	2	Concealable	Melee	Kung Fu: Attacks (Strikes)
Broadsword	10	none	Melee	Melee (Sword)
Chair, Ladder, etc.	4*	none	Melee	Melee (Club)
Club, Baseball Bat	4	none	Melee	Melee (Club)
Knife or Dagger	3	Concealable	Melee	Melee (Knife)
Long Sword	10*	none	Melee	Melee (Sword)
Naginata (bladed staff)	10*	none	Melee	Melee (Polearm)
Nunchuku or Chain	4	Flexible	Melee	Melee (Whips/Chains)
Short Sword	6	Concealable	Melee	Melee (Sword)
Spear	8	none	Melee	Melee (Polearm)
Whip, Rope, or Belt	1	Concealable Flexible	Low Penetration Melee	Melee (Whips)
<b>BOWS</b>				
Crossbow	10	none	Slow, Static	Archery (Crossbow)
Long Bow	8	none	none	Archery (Bow)
<b>GUNS</b>				
Assault Rifle	14	Spreading	Limited Shots (6)	Gun Combat (Autofire)
Light Pistol	6	Concealable	Low Penetration Short Range	Gun Combat (Pistol)
Heavy Pistol	10	Concealable	Short Range	Gun Combat (Pistol)
Hunting Rifle	12	none	none	Gun Combat (Rifle)
Machine Pistol	8	Concealable Spreading	Inaccurate Limited Shots (6) Short Range	Gun Combat (Autofire)
Medium Pistol	8	Concealable	Short Range	Gun Combat (Pistol)
Shotgun	16**	Spreading	Limited Shots (6) Low Penetration Short Range	Gun Combat (Rifle)
Sniper Rifle	18	Accurate	Limited Shots (6)	Gun Combat (Rifle)
Submachine Gun	10	Spreading	Limited Shots (6) Short Range	Gun Combat (Autofire)
<b>HEAVY WEAPONS</b>				
Machine Gun	20	Spreading	Static	Heavy Weapons (Machine Gun)
Rocket Launcher	40	Area-Effect Penetrating	Inaccurate Limited Shots (1) Slow Static	Heavy Weapons (Launcher)
<b>THROWN WEAPONS</b>				
Grenade	20	Area Effect Concealable	Limited Shots (1) Short Range	Thrown Weapons (Grenades)
Thrown Knife	3	Concealable	Limited Shots (1) Short Range	Thrown Weapons (Blades)

### STAT VALUE DESCRIPTIONS

#### Stat Value Description

0	Completely and utterly useless.
1	Inept.
2	Significantly below adult human average.
3	Below adult human average.
4	Adult human average.
5	Above adult human average.
6	Significantly above human average.
7	Highly capable.
8	Extremely capable.
9	Best in the land.
10	World-class ability.

### STAT COSTS

Stat Level	Cost
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	6
6	8
7	10
8	13
9	16
10	20

### SKILL LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS

#### Skill Level Descriptions

- Skill Level 1 Trained.** The character has had some training and practice within the Skill.
- Skill Level 2 Well-Trained.** The character has had moderate training and practice within the Skill.
- Skill Level 3 Expert.** The character has had significant training and practice within the Skill.
- Skill Level 4 Veteran.** The character has had extensive training and practice within the Skill.
- Skill Level 5 Master.** The character has had exhaustive training and practice within the Skill.
- Skill Level 6 Grand Master.** The character has unparalleled ability and knowledge within the Skill.

### NPC SKILL POINTS

Importance	Suggested Skill Points
Walk-On	5-10
Speaking Part	10-20
Supporting Character	20-40
Lead Role	40-80

### ROLE HEALTH/ENERGY POINTS MODIFIER

Importance	Health & Energy Points Modifier
Walk-On	-20 (or less)
Speaking Part	No Modifier
Supporting Character	+10
Lead Role	+20

### ATTRIBUTES

ATTRIBUTE	TYPE	COST	PAGE	ATTRIBUTE	TYPE	COST	PAGE
Appearance	Actor Only	1/Level	15	International Appeal	Actor Only	2/Level	20
Art of Distraction	Open	1/Level	15	Meditation	Role Only	2/Level	41
Damn Healthy!	Open	1/Level	15	Posedown	Role Only	2/Level	41
Director's Friend	Actor Only	1/Level	16	Scene Stealer	Actor Only	2/Level	20
Energy Bonus	Open	1/Level	16	Signature Move	Actor Only	1/Level	21
Extra Attacks	Open	3/Level	16	Swift Reaction	Open	1/Level	22
Extra Defenses	Open	1/Level	17	Sword Fu	Open	1/Level	22
Focused	Role Only	1/Level	41	Theatrical Star	Actor Only	2/Level	23
Focused Damage	Open	3/Level	18	Wealth	Role Only	1/Level	42
Gun Fu	Open	1/Level	18	Wire Fu: Attacks	Open	4/Level	23
Highly Skilled	Open	1/Level	20	Wire Fu: Movement	Open	1/Level	27

## DEFECTS

DEFECT	TYPE	PAGE	DEFECT	TYPE	PAGE
Awkward	Open	29	Prima Donna	Actor Only	30
Easily Distracted	Role Only	42	Recurring Nightmares	Role Only	43
Ill Fortune	Role Only	43	Servitude/Obligation	Role Only	43
Inept Combat	Open	29	Sensory Impairment	Role Only	43
Marked	Open	29	Shy	Role Only	44
Moral Code	Role Only	43	Significant Other	Role Only	44
Not So Fast	Open	29	Skeleton in the Closet	Role Only	44
Not So Strong	Open	29	Unique Defect	Open	30
Not So Tough	Open	29	Unknown Actor	Actor Only	31
Owned by the Triads	Open	30	Unskilled	Open	31
Phobia	Open	30	Young	Open	31
Physically Unappealing	Open	30	Wanted	Role Only	44
Pigeonholed	Actor Only	30			

## SKILLS

SKILL	TYPE	COST	PAGE	SKILL	TYPE	COST	PAGE
Acrobatics	Open	3/Level	32	Mechanic	Role Only	1/Level	46
Archery	Open	4/Level	32	Medical	Role Only	2/Level	46
Artisan	Role Only	1/Level	44	Melee Attack	Open	5/Level	34
Boating	Open	1/Level	33	Melee Defense	Open	4/Level	34
Business Management	Role Only	1/Level	44	Performing Arts	Open	1/Level	35
Climbing	Open	3/Level	33	Piloting	Open	2/Level	35
Computers	Role Only	2/Level	45	Police Sciences	Role Only	2/Level	47
Cooking	Role Only	1/Level	45	Ranged Defense	Open	3/Level	35
Cultural Arts	Role Only	1/Level	45	Riding	Open	2/Level	35
Demolitions	Role Only	2/Level	45	Science	Role Only	1/Level	47
Disguise	Role Only	1/Level	46	Seduction	Role Only	2/Level	47
Driving	Open	2/Level	33	Sleight of Hand	Open	1/Level	35
Forgery	Role Only	2/Level	46	Stealth	Open	4/Level	35
Gambling	Role Only	1/Level	46	Sports	Open	1/Level	35
Gun Combat	Open	5/Level	33	Swimming	Open	1/Level	35
Heavy Weapons	Open	4/Level	33	Thrown Weapons	Open	4/Level	36
Interrogation	Role Only	2/Level	46	Urban Tracking	Role Only	2/Level	47
Intimidation	Open	2/Level	34	Visual Arts	Role Only	1/Level	47
Kung Fu: Attacks	Open	5/Level	34	Way of the Taoist	Role Only	1/Level	47
Kung Fu: Defense	Open	4/Level	34	Wilderness Survival	Role Only	2/Level	47
Law	Role Only	2/Level	46	Wilderness Tracking	Role Only	2/Level	47
Linguistics	Open	1/Level	34	Writing	Role Only	1/Level	48
Lock-Picking	Role Only	2/Level	46				



### DEGREES OF SUCCESS

Margin of Failure of 8+	Overwhelming Failure
Margin of Failure of 6 to 7	Extreme Failure
Margin of Failure of 4 to 5	Major Failure
Margin of Failure of 2 to 3	Minor Failure
Margin of Failure of 1	Marginal Failure
Margin of Success of 0 to 1	Marginal Success
Margin of Success of 2 to 3	Minor Success
Margin of Success of 4 to 5	Major Success
Margin of Success of 6 to 7	Extreme Success
Margin of Success of 8+	Overwhelming Success

### DICE ROLL MODIFICATIONS

Dice Roll Modifier	Action Difficulty
-4	Trivial. Why roll dice?
-3	Nearly Trivial
-2	Extremely Easy
-1	Easy
0	Average Difficulty
+1	Slightly Difficult
+2	Difficult
+3	Quite Difficult
+4	Extremely Difficult
+5	Outrageously Difficult
+6	Practically Impossible

### SKILL LEVEL EFFECTS

- Skill Level 1** A character receives a -1 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -2 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.
- Skill Level 2** A character receives a -2 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -3 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.
- Skill Level 3** A character receives a -3 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -4 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.
- Skill Level 4** A character receives a -4 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -5 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.
- Skill Level 5** A character receives a -5 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -6 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.
- Skill Level 6** A character receives a -6 bonus on the Skill check dice roll if he or she does not possess a relevant specialty or a -7 bonus if the character does possess the relevant specialty.

### FALLING

Falling Distance	Damage Delivered
3 to 5 meters	20
5 metres to 10 metres	30
10 metres to 30 metres	40
30 metres to 60 metres	50
60 metres to 150 metres	60
150 metres to 500 metres	70
500 metres (or greater)	80

### DEFENSE ROLL MARGIN OF FAILURE

Defense Roll Margin of Success	Result
Defense Roll is a Failure	Full damage from attack
Defense Roll is Successful but less than attacker's Margin of Success	Half damage from attack
Defense Roll is Successful and equal to or greater than attacker's Margin of Success	No damage from the attack



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Nicole Lindroos got her start in the game business with Lion Rampant, the original publisher of *Ars Magica*. Throwing caution to the wind, this Minnesota girl moved to Georgia on the spur of the moment to become one of the founders of White Wolf. She later worked for Atlas Games, *Adventures Unlimited Magazine*, and Cheapass Games. She is currently a partner in Sphinx Group, a sales and marketing company for the entertainment industry, and a board member of the Game Manufacturer's Association.

---

### CHRIS PRAMAS

Chris Pramas is not an expert in Shaolin boxing or Wudang sword; his game fu is pretty good though. In his eight years as a game industry professional, he has been a freelance writer, a line developer, a publisher, a staff designer, a creative director, and a publisher again. He designed the *Dragon Fist RPG* for *Wizards of the Coast*, and wrote the *Blood of the Valiant* sourcebook for the *Feng Shui RPG*, both of which prepared him for the task of encapsulating 100 years of HK film history. At the moment he's the Creative Director of Miniatures Games for *Wizards of the Coast* by day and the owner of Green Ronin Publishing by night. He has authored such books as *Death in Freeport* and *Legions of Hell* for the d20 System, and *Guide to Hell* and *Slavers* (with Sean Reynolds) for *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*.

---

### ANDREW BAKER

Andrew Baker recently graduated with ridiculous honors from the prestigious Montserrat College of Art with a degree in fine art. He was offered a graduate position at Yale, and has received certain assurances from key players in the international art scene. He passed all this up to pursue a career illustrating role playing games. He calculates that he'll have to draw the rat crawling on the skull 4,615 more times to pay off his student loans. He can be reached at [d\\_b\\_i@hotmail.com](mailto:d_b_i@hotmail.com).

---

### GRANT HARRIS

Grant is 24 years old, single, enjoys long walks on the beach and cozy nights by the fire ... oh wait that's something different. Grant currently reside in Oakville, Ontario attending his final year of Classical Animation at Sheridan College. His background also extends into illustration and fine art. This is Grant's first work for GUARDIANS OF ORDER.

---

### RAVEN MIMURA

You'll find Raven working late into the night in his cramped but well-stocked studio (amidst tech, toys, bones, weapons and various armor pieces~most of his own manufacture). Raven earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Rhode Island School of Design, after which he immediately began pursuing a career in freelance illustration.

His extensive credits include work for WotC's *Alternity: Gamma World*, *Alternity: Dark Matter* book *Xeniforms* (the creature manual), AEG's *L5R* (ccg and rpg second edition rulebook), *7th Sea* (ccg and rpg), as well as artwork in XID Creative's entire *Providence* game line. He has also done work for a slew of other games, with a tendency towards the dark, gritty, and occasionally macabre.

---

### DARREN SPARLING

Born in 1973, Darren has lived on both coasts of Canada and everywhere in between. Darren has studied Fine Arts, worked in the restaurant industry and returned to school in 1999 to study Classical Animation at Sheridan College. He lives in Oakville, Ontario with his wife.



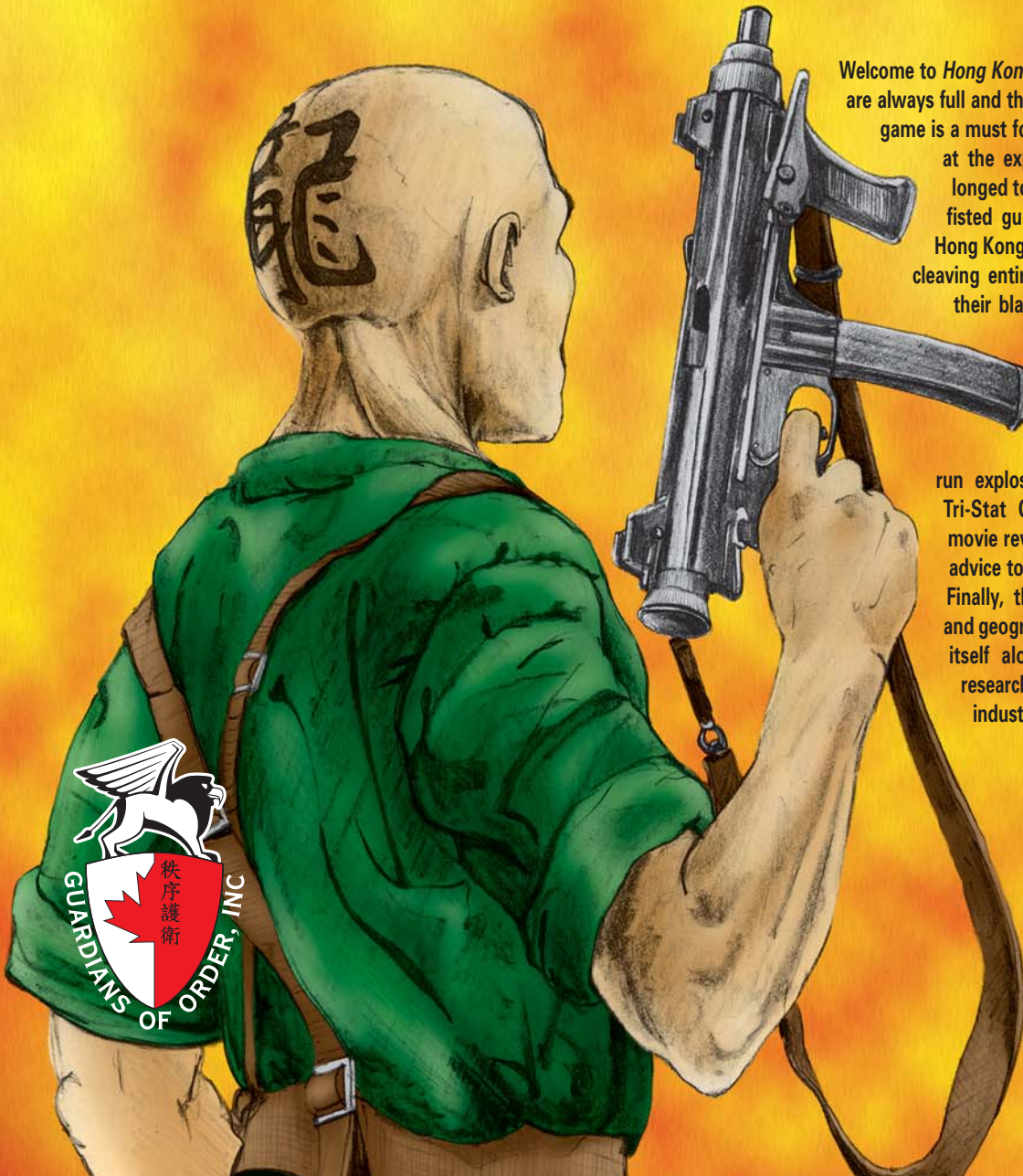


• A CINEMATIC ACTION ROLE-PLAYING GAME •

# HONG KONG ACTION THEATRE! 2

HONG KONG ACTION THEATRE! 2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION

**T-MINUS 8 MINUTES AND COUNTING....** Power flickered out across Hong Kong, reducing the city to millions of headlights and bringing traffic to a snarling stop. The terrorist's bullet-riddled car ahead of Michelle swerved, blocking her motorcycle from escaping into traffic. Michelle, however, didn't flinch — she slammed into the side of the terrorist's car and allowed the momentum to send her rolling over the hood. She came up on the other side of the car, her MP5 blazing. She caught the lead motorcycle following her in the fuel tank, turning it into a blossom of orange fire; the other two bikes were flanking Michelle, trying to pin her down with Uzi fire. That was the least of Michelle's worries though. The burning wreckage of the terrorist's motorcycle was skidding straight for Michelle's wrecked and fuel-leaking bike. She turned and ran through traffic. The flaming bike slammed into Michelle's motorcycle, detonating the exposed fuel and taking the surrounding vehicles with it. Chain reaction. The cars behind Michelle exploded in succession like a tidal wave of fire while the terrorists did their best to fill her with holes ... and Michelle still had to disarm the nuclear bomb the terrorists were using to hold Hong Kong hostage. **T-MINUS 7 MINUTES AND COUNTING....**



Welcome to *Hong Kong Action Theatre!*, where the guns are always full and the action furious. This role-playing game is a must for anyone who has ever marvelled at the exploits of Hong Kong movies and longed to partake in the action. From two-fisted gunslingers in the modern West of Hong Kong's mean streets to martial masters cleaving entire forests with a single stroke of their blades, no role is too daring for the modern heroes of cinema. *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* provides Game Masters and players with a fast-and-easy rule system to create characters and run explosive action sequences using the Tri-Stat Compatible system, as well as movie reviews, adventure seeds, and game advice to create entirely unique story lines. Finally, this book also contains historical and geographical information on Hong Kong itself along with the detailed and fully researched history of Hong Kong's film industry and its unique pioneers.

