

PYRAMID[®]

Issue 3/14 December '09



MARTIAL ARTS

HARDCORE by Stephen Dedman

**THE THREE BROTHERS
SCHOOLS OF MARTIAL ARTS**
by Alan Leddon

**THE GROOM OF
THE SPIDER PRINCESS**
by J. Edward Tremlett

FIGHT WHILE IN FLIGHT
by Kelly Pedersen

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

Stock #37-2614

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*Victory is always possible for the
person who refuses to stop fighting.*
– Napoleon Hill

Article Colors

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.)

Dark Blue: GURPS Features

Purple: Other Features

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IN THIS ISSUE

The righteous battle never ends – certainly not with this, the *Martial Arts* issue of *Pyramid*. With two new adventures, eight new styles for *GURPS Martial Arts*, and other dojo-powered delights, this issue is sure to have something to add punch to your two-fisted campaigns.

Heroes need to get *Hardcore* in a modern-day adventure centered on illegal (and immoral) underground fighting. Do the PCs have the guts and skill to break up this operation?

What started as a school of martial arts run by three brothers has splintered into *three* different schools – each with its own focus. Sadly, although the schools teach effective skills, they do not teach particularly honorable ones . . . Learn the secrets of this family business, plus three *GURPS Martial Arts* styles, in *The Three Brothers School of Martial Arts*.

Many martial-arts students have been criticized for having their heads in the clouds, but *Fight While in Flight* shows the other side of this admonition. These five *GURPS Martial Arts* styles are designed for fighters looking to make best use of their ability to fly, jump, or aeri ally maneuver.

The Groom of the Spider Princess mixes *wuxia* with Lovecraftian horror, in an epic tale that combines the grandeur of exploring a strange land with the horror of a seemingly impossible dilemma. Arachnophobes should most definitely *not* read this generic adventure.

Sure, martial artists have the power to cripple, maim, and kill at their fingertips, but what challenge arises when a campaign explores a nonviolent ethos? This question is answered – somewhat whimsically – by *Pyramid* editor Steven Marsh, in this month's *Random Thought Table*.

Have you ever needed to come up with the conditions of an interesting martial-arts event on the spot? Then just draw a couple of cards from those presented in *Instant Tournaments*, and you've got yourself a ready-to-go conflict.

Alternatively, you might consider looking at the fight complication presented in *The Crumbling Ground*, which helps codify a classic element of martial-arts movies and anime.

As usual, *Odds and Ends* offers an assortment of goodies, including *Murphy's Rules*, a few more nonlethal challenges, and a campaign focus where you always know where your next challenge is – and he knows where you are, too.

Rapid-fire entertainment awaits inside!

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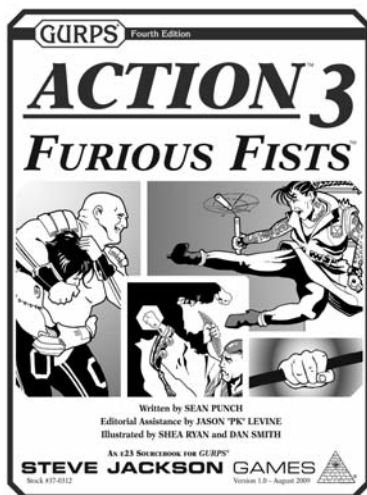
FROM THE EDITOR

HE'S MAKING A FIST, AND CHECKING IT TWICE . . .

I discovered something while putting this issue together: Martial arts isn't like magic. That is to say, from a gaming standpoint, you can't just say, "I'm running a magic game," and have that *mean* anything; it needs to be appended to something else, like, "I'm running a medieval magical game" or "This is an cyberpunk game where magic is real, too."

Martial arts *can* work the same way as magic; you can have a "cyberpunk game with martial arts," or a "medieval game with martial arts." But "martial arts" is enough of a genre unto itself that you can say, "I want to run a martial-arts campaign," and receive more than confused stares from gamers, even if the specifics of what a martial arts campaign entails are open to interpretation.

Saying, "I'm running a game that centers on magicians" doesn't have any focus. Are the magicians going out and attacking monsters?



Researching? Exploring strange realms? But if you say, "I'm running a game that centers on martial artists," that has a *specific* meaning: Your heroes are going to be butt-kicking fighters, and – no matter how philosophical they may be otherwise – adventures are almost certainly going to culminate in the heroes kicking butts or getting their butts kicked. Perhaps both.

Hopefully this diversity in what a "martial arts" adventure entails comes through in this issue. We've got a modern-day martial-arts adventure, a *wuxia* adventure set in a mythical China, an article about introducing martial arts to aerial artists, and another article containing martial-arts styles that could be used in practically any era. About the only thing we *don't* have is sci-fi-related martial arts – but long-time readers know we've touched on that in the past (that'd be *Fight the Future*, from *Pyramid* #3/9: *Space Opera*).

Hopefully the diversity of the martial-arts offerings in this issue will get your chi flowing sufficiently. We think it's a well-balanced issue – because balance is so important to martial artists, in more ways than one.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Have you got something to say to us? Yeah, we're talking to you! . . . Oh, right. Conversations in a magazine are one-directional. Anyway, let us know how we did! Send letters and comments to pyramid@sjgames.com, or post online on our forums at forums.sjgames.com.

. . . what I've read rocks. My subscription ends with this issue [#3/12], but I'll certainly resubscribe.

– Antoni Ten, on the Steve Jackson Games forums

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HARDCORE

BY STEPHEN DEDMAN

This adventure is designed for Heroic-level *GURPS Martial Arts* characters (100-200 points) in a modern-day generic medium-sized city, but it easily can be adapted to other settings. The GM will need *GURPS Martial Arts*; *GURPS High-Tech* will also be useful.

PART ONE: FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

The action begins once one or more of the heroes learn of the death of Joe “Tank” Turner. Turner was discovered in an alley behind a noodle bar where he often went Dumpster diving. His body shows signs of an assault, and an autopsy reveals he died of a stroke caused by a blow to the head. His body is also badly bruised and lacerated, and some of the cuts contain fragments of glass – some from bottles, some from fluorescent tubes.

In his younger days, Sergeant Turner was a moderately promising light heavyweight and an instructor in hand-to-hand combat for the Army – until his wife was killed in a car crash while he was driving. Though the other driver had gone through a red light, the courts made much of the fact that Turner’s blood-alcohol level was over the legal limit, and Turner was jailed. After being released, Turner soon began drinking even more heavily: At the time of his death, he was homeless, eating what he could scavenge and spending any money he found on booze. He was identified first by his dog tags, then by his fingerprints.

Enter the Dragons

How the PCs learn of Turner’s death depends on their jobs. Beat cops might have been summoned to collect his body. Detectives could be called to investigate his death. Those with a military background may have been trained by him or sparred with him, as might boxers who are old enough. Since his usual haunts were close to a dojo and a gym, almost all of the heroes could have seen him at least once, even if they hadn’t known his name or background.

As it’s a slow news day, Turner’s death is covered by a journalist who prints pictures of him as a boxer and a soldier, as well as a photo of his face taken at the morgue. The story goes on to say that his injuries suggest that there may be truth to the rumors of a group recruiting patients from mental institutions and homeless men for illegal and sometimes lethal “garbage wrestling” matches.

The police respond the next day, saying that while Turner’s injuries are consistent with garbage wrestling, there’s no proof that organized matches are happening in the city. Off the record, however, cops will tell anyone with police Contacts that they’re looking for proof, and would be delighted if someone could tell them where the bouts are being held.

The Scanty Information

Cop PCs will have access to the following information; PCs with police Contacts will be able to get some or all of it, depending on the questions they ask (see *Contacts*, p. B44). Street Contacts will also be able to provide some of this information, at -2 to effective skill. Finally, the heroes might attempt to visit neighborhoods to locate and question participants directly.

The few derelicts who claim to have fought in these matches say only that they were offered a chance to score some drugs or money; if they accepted, they were driven to an unknown location in the back of a van with no rear windows, with no idea where they were being taken. Their descriptions of the places and people they saw suggest that the venue changes frequently, though a few details remain consistent.

The recruiters always turn up after sunset, without warning, in places where the homeless gather; anyone who wants to fight has to go with them immediately. There are always at least two recruiters: one woman (who does all the talking), plus one or more very large men. Would-be fighters are sized up, and up to eight are taken. They’ll take women, usually young runaways, but only if they’re of average or better appearance.

Investigation shows that the fights are sometimes held in a gymnasium, sometimes in a hall, sometimes in a warehouse. An audience of 10 to 30 sit on bleachers or other improvised seating; all wear ski masks. Video cameras are trained on the ring. Fighters waiting their turn are kept in a razor-wire enclosure; those who cause trouble in there may be restrained with handcuffs or straitjackets before being thrown in with a tough opponent. For details of the fights, see *Part Three: Fight Night* (pp. 6-8).

The final bout of the night is a strip match between a member of the audience and a woman – the female recruiter (this is Contessa, although no one interviewed knows this). The man wins if he can strip off her T-shirt and bra; the woman wins if the man surrenders, is knocked out, or is thrown from the ring. None of the fighters the police have interviewed have ever seen the female recruiter lose one of these bouts.

*This adventure would work well in a slightly post-apocalyptic setting. See *Deathball* from *Pyramid* #3/3: *Venturing Into the Badlands: Post-Apocalypse* for other ideas of how to incorporate blood sports into a setting.*

Tank Turner's death and the publicity it attracts will motivate the police to try an undercover operation to find the recruiters. Soldiers and ex-soldiers trained by Turner will also want to avenge him by breaking the recruitment ring.

If the heroes need another motive to try to find the gang and close it down, go to *Raising the Stakes* (below).

Raising the Stakes

Three days after the story of Turner's death is published, the city's major criminal organizations also begin an investigation. Rod Murse, a criminal lawyer, approaches less law-abiding PCs and explains that Turner's death has caused the police to increase their patrols and make more arrests in the hope of finding someone who's willing to talk. Murse claims to represent an alliance of small (but legal) businesses who are willing to pay to have the garbage-wrestling club closed down. Murse adds that there's a widespread belief that the fights are organized by an out-of-town gambling syndicate trying to raise the money needed to fix all the martial-arts contests in the state.

Streetwise characters will know that Murse is primarily a bagman for the mob, collecting protection money from the businesses he claims to be representing. The rest of his story, however, is essentially true, at least as far as he knows.

If the martial artists who Murse approaches don't accept his offer (\$1,000 per PC in the party) immediately, they will soon find themselves victims of police harassment: The cops, having only vague descriptions of the recruiters, will be randomly stopping people they suspect of being martial artists and searching them for concealed weapons.

Finally, if more (or different) motivation is needed, one of the recruiters might phone a PC pro or semi-pro contender and warn him that he should either throw his next fight or prepare for a career in wheelchair fencing . . .

PART TWO: WAYS AND MEANS

There are two ways to infiltrate the fight clubs: as a paying ticket-holder in the audience, or as a fighter picked off the street.

Cruising for a Bruising

Becoming part of the audience requires finding someone who's been to an event and is willing to act as a sponsor. This calls for either Savoir-Faire and the ability to move in high-Status circles, or Contacts who can provide fresh gossip. If successful, the PCs learn that real-estate heir Richard Rank not only has a gambling problem, but is suspected of cheating on his fiancée, having stood her up twice because "something suddenly came up" but not explaining further.

How the investigators get information out of Rank – a paid-up member of the club – is up to them. Getting him to sponsor them may be more difficult. While Rank doesn't know the identity of any of the recruiters, and can only name one other ticket-holder (his own sponsor, George Price), he can provide the following information as well as many of the details of the matches.

Membership in the club costs \$10,000, cash up front. This pays for the background check, seats at the next three events, and a \$6,000 betting tab (\$500 ante). After that, ringside seats are \$1,000 per event. Members who can't attend a fight on a particular night have the option of watching the videos, which are briefly shown on a password-protected website. Every night has three to six fights, the last of which is the strip match against the female MC, known only as Contessa. This is the only bout in which audience members fight (the privilege is auctioned off, bids starting at \$1,000). The prize is supposed to be a night of "anything goes" with Contessa – though Rank has never seen Contessa lose, nor has he ever seen another woman fight there.

Ticket-holders receive a phone call or cell-phone text message the morning of a fight, telling them to meet at a particular bar that night. If they don't show up, they're sent the URL and password of the website via text message on the next morning. If they do attend, one of the (male) recruiters will arrive between 8:00 and 9:00 p.m. and ask for "the Donner party." Transportation to the venue is in a stretch limo with opaque windows; club members have to show ID and allow themselves to be frisked before being permitted into the car. Mobile phones, cameras, and any weapons are confiscated; they are not returned until the spectators are taken back to the bar after the event. Audience members provide their own ski masks, which they don as soon as they take their seats in the limo; anyone who doesn't have one is denied entry into the vehicle.

The organizers will accept any audience member with a known sponsor, a legal identity (see p. B39) with a Wealthy or better income, and without a Reputation (e.g., as an incorruptible crimefighter; see pp. B26-28) that would make Contessa suspicious. If a PC can pass muster and pays the \$10,000, he will get the call to an event in 1d+1 days.

Joining the audience is expensive; becoming a contender is cheap but harrowing.

The New Contender

Compared to becoming part of the audience, getting picked off the street is cheap but harrowing. The recruiters do a sweep every 1d+7 days, meaning that investigators trying to pass as homeless will actually have to live like derelicts for several days. This will require successful rolls on Disguise and Acting skills, as well as a daily roll on Urban Survival; Panhandling, Scrounging, Streetwise and Fast-Talk may also be useful. Those who sleep on the streets also risk being robbed and/or assaulted.

Heroes who endure the homeless life should roll 3d on the following encounter list at least once every day and night – or up to every hour if they actively seek out encounters.

For a supernatural combat challenge, consider a martial-artist enemy who's also invisible. It'll take cleverness to win!

- 3-4 – Traveling soup kitchen and first aid station: gives +2 to Urban Survival for the day.
- 5-9 – Citizens: opportunities for Panhandling (see p. B212) and similar activities.
- 10-12 – Homeless people with no useful information about the fight clubs; they may try to rob the PCs on a bad or worse reaction roll.
- 13 – Bad weather: -2 to Urban Survival roll for that day (the Temperature Tolerance advantage can help).
- 14 – Cops: make a reaction roll.
- 15 – Exposed to disease: 24-hour delay, HT-3, 1 point of toxic damage, 12-hour interval, six cycles.
- 16 – Animal encounter; roll 1d: 1-3 – swarm of rats; 4 – feral dog or cat; 5-6 – swarm of cockroaches; all encounters are harmless, but bad for those with Phobias.
- 17-18 – Fight-club survivor; see pp. 11-12.

Most of these encounters can be avoided with a Stealth roll (except for the weather and animals). A possible benefit of being attacked is that a homeless person with a reputation for being able to fight off attackers is more likely to attract the attention of the recruiters, who have informants among the homeless.

Being in the right place to be picked up by the recruiters, at the right time, requires a roll on Streetwise or Urban Survival at -10, with +1 for every day or night spent living on the streets and +5 for information from a fight-club survivor.

The recruitment process for the fight club is a simple reaction roll based on Contessa's rough assessment of the candidates' ST, DX, and HT (Neutral or better reaction needed, with +1 for every point over 10).

Calling for Help

If the PCs are working for either the police or Murse, they'll be given a wristwatch with a built-in personal cellular beacon (*GURPS High-Tech*, p. 210), preset to transmit their location to either a SWAT team or the mob equivalent. This team will come to their rescue in 2d+2 minutes. In theory, all the PC has to do is to press the right button once he's at the venue and stay alive until help arrives.

Unfortunately – assuming that the PC has managed to keep his watch while living on the street – recruiters search both the competitors and the spectators before letting them into the fight. Spectators get a pat-down (p. B219) before boarding their transport; they will be allowed to keep their watches, but there is a cell-phone jammer in the limo and under their seats in the auditorium. Getting out of the range of the jammers will require the hero with the beacon to leave the building before the fighting ends, which means getting past the recruiters.

Fighters are examined before boarding the van but not pat-downed. Men are given a pair of boxer shorts to wear and a large, cheap tote bag to hold their belongings; they are told to change into the shorts while in the van before it leaves. Women are given briefs, a bra, and a T-shirt as well as the bag; they are allowed to change in the van before the men do. The bags are taken away from the competitors before the van departs. The bags are carried to the venue in another car and returned when

the fighters are dumped in another part of town after the fight is over. Combatants may be able to persuade the recruiters to let them get something from their bags (Excellent reaction roll), but a recruiter will accompany the fighter and watch carefully as he takes anything from the bags.

PART THREE: FIGHT NIGHT

Fights at the club take place in an octagonal ring, nine foot on a side and three feet high. North, south, east, and west sides are composed of razorwire (*GURPS High-Tech*, p. 204); the diagonals are made up of dead fluorescent tubes joined by clips. Falling or being thrown onto either the razorwire or the clips turns damage from crushing to cutting. Smashing any of the fluorescent tubes instantly ends a fight. If a fighter lands completely outside the octagon, he can try to get in before the end of the round.

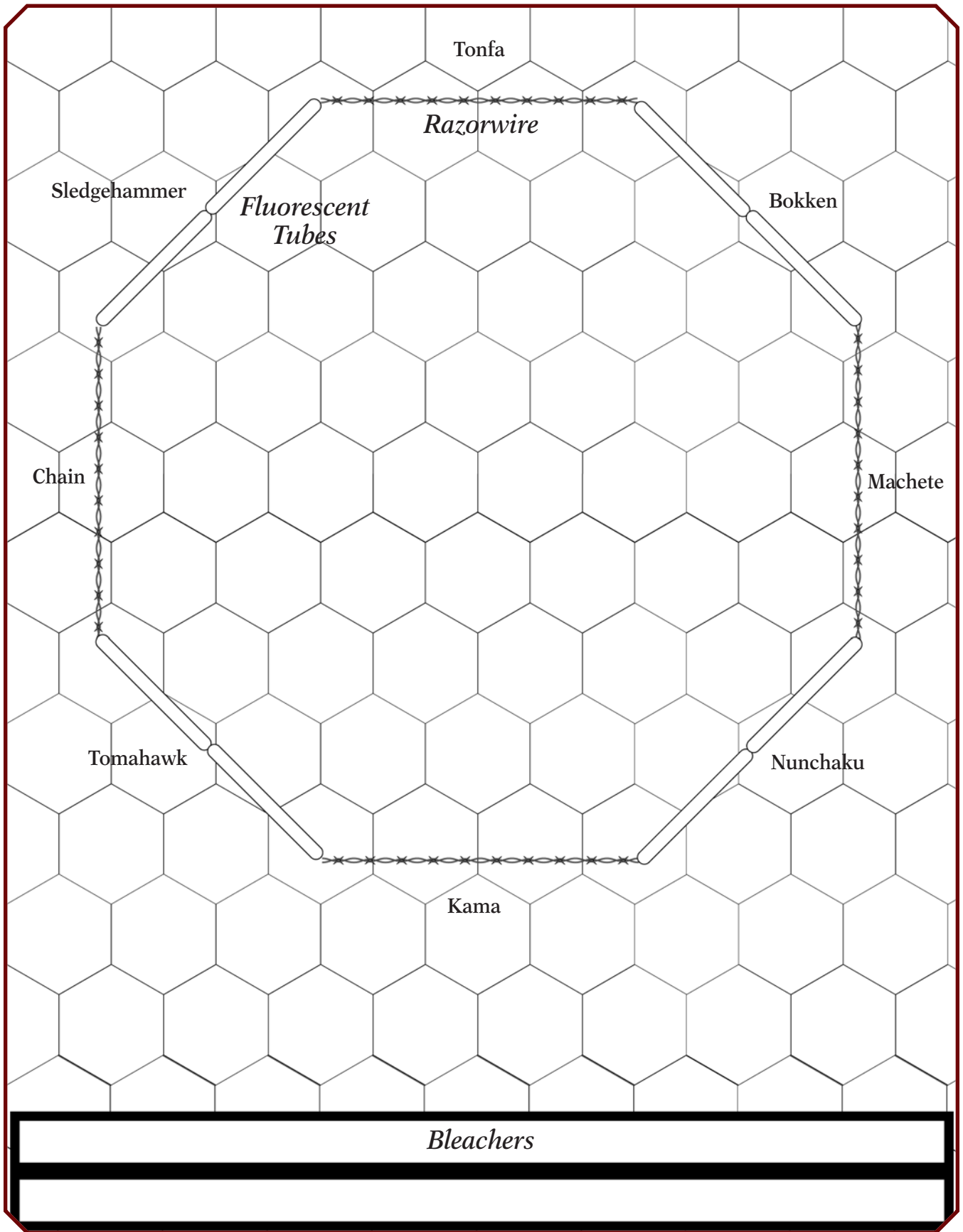
This night, the venue is an empty school gym. While the auditorium is only dimly lit (-5 to Vision), the ring is well illuminated (no penalty). There are 4d+6 spectators in the bleachers; the PCs and an equal number of NPC fighters in a nearby razorwire enclosure. Contessa acts as MC and referee; the eight recruiters serve as guards and stagehands.

The first two rounds of every fight (except the strip match) are fought with combatants wearing hand wraps spread with strong adhesive and encrusted with broken glass (treat as a myrmex, *Martial Arts*, p. 226). Apart from this, men wear only boxer shorts (see *Calling for Help*, above). Opponents and rules are determined by the spin of a roulette wheel. The only way to end most fights is for one combatant to be forced or thrown out of the ring and not return: Anyone leaving voluntarily will be grabbed by the recruiters and either thrown back in or beaten unconscious before being hauled back to the van. If PCs are fighting, use the *Detailed Method* (see *Roleplaying Tournaments*, *Martial Arts*, p. 134), with up to 1d "flurries" per combat.

The first round of each fight lasts up to three minutes, though if neither fighter has drawn blood in that time, Contessa (standing outside the ring) will lash out with her whip until the participants comply. Combatants who refuse to fight each other will be removed from the ring and beaten unconscious by the recruiters.

If a combat lasts two rounds with neither fighter being removed from the ring, weapons will be placed outside the ring, one for each side of the octagon: clockwise from the north, a tonfa (*Martial Arts*, p. 230), a bokken (*Martial Arts*, pp. 227 and 230), a machete (cheap falchion, *Martial Arts*, p. 229), a nunchaku, a kama (sickle, *Martial Arts*, p. 226), a tomahawk (hatchet with an added pick, *Martial Arts*, pp. 225 and 214), a 6' unweighted chain (*Improvised Weapons*, *Martial Arts*, p. 224), and a sledgehammer (maul, -2 to skill, *High-Tech*, p. 25). Reaching outside the ring to grab a weapon requires a DX roll and possibly turning your back on an opponent. A failed DX roll when leaning over the razorwire inflicts 1d-3 cutting damage. On a critical failure, the fighter may knock the weapon out of reach, or lose his balance – potentially becoming entangled in the razorwire, or breaking tubes and losing the bout.

With wandering heroes, personal moral codes, and personal action, post-apocalyptic gaming has a lot in common with martial arts.



Map of Contessa's Fighting Ring

Note: Weapons are introduced after a fight has begun; see p. 6 for details.

While most of the combatants are homeless men, a few are inmates from mental or psychiatric institutions (where some of the recruiters work as orderlies). Fighters are supposedly paired off randomly (using a roulette wheel), but the real decision as to who fights whom and when should be left up to the GM.

Spectators taking part in the strip match are stripped down to their shorts, but unlike the other fighters, are permitted mouth guards, an athletic cup, and glass-free hand wraps.

Taking Out the Trash

If the heroes succeed in calling for help, their rescuers should arrive in a timely manner (i.e., when the GM decides the fighting has gone on long enough). However, a security guard watching the school spots the cars and warns Contessa by switching the lights in the gym off for two seconds, then on for two, then off again and leaving them off. This is a pre-arranged signal to the Contessa to escape. As she grabs the cashbox and runs for the door, she will call out, "We're leaving now. Better run if you want a lift."

With the lights off, penalties to vision inside the gym are at -8 unless someone uses a flashlight, -6 outside. There are two vans and the stretch limo parked outside, six to 10 yards from the gym's main door; treat all as vans (p. B464) if a car chase seems likely. Contessa has the keys to one of the vans, and if she reaches it, she will drive away after 10 seconds or when all the recruiters are in vehicles, whichever comes first. She will not hesitate to leave spectators behind or to run over anyone standing in her way. If prevented from driving away, she will try climbing a nearby fence and escaping on foot, and may throw some banknotes to the wind as a diversion – but not very

many, and only as a last resort. If she realizes that her opponents aren't cops, she will try offering other bribes – drugs, her body, etc.

If the PCs want Contessa brought to justice, they will need to impede her escape until all the exits are cut off – approximately 10 seconds (crippling either of her legs, for example, would buy enough time). Though the recruiters have guns, they will be reluctant to use them because of the poor lighting and the noise; they will also try to get by without switching their flashlights on. While the spectators are unlikely to try tackling the heroes, all the recruiters (even those who have the keys to the other two vehicles) may try to help Contessa escape rather than face her afterward.

Even if Contessa and all the recruiters escape, the NPC fighters and some spectators will be left behind. As all of the spectators have some cash on them, they may try to bribe heroes to help them escape.

AFTERMATH

If Contessa and/or any of the recruiters are arrested (or captured by the mob), that will be the end of the fight clubs and of Contessa's attempts to fix any martial-arts events – in the PCs' home town, at least. If Contessa escapes, she may relocate to somewhere a safe distance away and start again.

Should Contessa and all the recruiters escape, that will still be the end of the fight clubs, but Contessa will still have enough money to try fixing the martial arts contests in town.

Apart from character points and possible financial incentives, fighters who succeed in foiling Contessa's plans should be rewarded with Favors (p. B55) from the police and/or the mob.

CAST

These are some of the more notable NPCs encountered in this adventure.

CONTESSA

218 points

The woman who calls herself Contessa Mina Countach has changed her name, rewritten her life story, and basically reinvented herself many times, but she was born Victoria Sands 32 years ago. Her mother was a part-time prostitute, and her father is unknown. Sands worked, hitchhiked, and stole her way west – performing in strip clubs, shoplifting, and occasionally working the streets – until she reached California and began auditioning for a career in porn. She changed her name, her appearance, and her biography frequently before settling on Contessa. She spent the next few years as a feature dancer and dominatrix, occasionally robbing her clients while they were tied up – until one reported her, and she spent two years in prison.

Sands/Contessa had dabbled in several martial arts before her arrest; prison taught her to be an even more effective fighter, as well as teaching her new scams. On regaining her freedom, she found a Kachin Bando trainer and began recruiting thugs to assist with various money-raising schemes.

Contessa likes fighting, but she really hates to lose. In her strip matches, she will toy with her opponent long enough to keep the audience interested, then usually send him into the fluoro tubes with a push kick. While she has a healthy respect for guns and will allow herself to be arrested rather than shot, no lesser threat will persuade her to quit.

Because of her distrust of banks, and her frequent need to leave town at short notice, Contessa tends to buy expensive items and carry as much of her wealth as she can on her person: \$4,000 cash in her money belt, \$2,000 in her pockets, and \$2,000 "elsewhere" (don't ask). Her watch, jewelry, and personal basics come from high-fashion designers, and can be used as bribes or pawned when she needs extra cash.

Campaign idea: The PCs can only learn a fixed number of styles in their lives (say, three). They start with none, although they may have other combat skills. Roaming the world, do they learn the first techniques they come across, or hold out for something better?

The cashbox for that night's events holds \$20,000 plus another \$2,000 worth of illegal drugs. If not killed, Contessa may well become a formidable Enemy.

Contessa is in her early 30s, with a pale complexion, short black hair, and dark brown eyes. She has a ripped muscular body and oversized breast implants. Bat wings are tattooed across her back. She usually wears a leather jacket, long blonde wig, tight jeans, firefighter's boots, and sap gloves.

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 13 [30].
Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 13 [2]; Will 12 [5]; Per 11 [0]; FP 14 [3].
Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 10*; Parry 11* (Karate).
5'11"; 130 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].

CF: Western [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0]; Spanish (Broken) [2].

Advantages

Appearance (Beautiful; Off-the-shelf good looks, -50%) [6]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Fit [5]; Flexibility [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 4 [4]; Rapid Healing [5]; Reputation +2 (As a sex worker; Hardcore porn enthusiasts; 10 or less) [2]; Voice [10]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Perks: Biting Mastery; Style Familiarity (Brazilian Jiu-jitsu; Capoeira; Kachin Bando; Lethwei; Professional Wrestling; Taijutsu); Temperature Tolerance 1. [8]

Disadvantages

Addiction (Stimulants) [-5]; Bad Sight (Farsighted; Mitigator: Contact Lenses, -60%) [-10]; Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Callous [-5]; Compulsive Spending (12) [-5]; Greed (9) [-22]; Impulsiveness (12) [-10]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Sadism (9) [-22]; Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5].

Quirks: Chauvinistic; Dislikes animals; Distrusts banks and carries or hides her cash and valuables; Only has sex when it profits her; Proud. [-5]

Skills

Acrobatics (H) DX [4]-12; Acting (A) IQ [2]-11; Artist (Body Art) (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Body Language (A) Per [2]-11; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-14; Climbing (A) DX+2 [1]-14†; Dancing (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Disguise/TL8 (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Driving/TL8 (Car) (A) DX [2]-12; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security Systems) (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Erotic Art (A) DX+4 [4]-16†; Escape (H) DX+2 [2]-14†; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+3 [4]-14‡; Filch (A) DX+1 [4]-13; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-11; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-12; Holdout (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Housekeeping (E) IQ [1]-11; Interrogation (A) IQ [2]-11; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-13; Jumping (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Karate (H) DX+3 [12]-15; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Knot-Tying (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Leatherworking (E) DX [1]-12; Mechanic (Gasoline Engine) (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Performance (A) IQ+2 [2]-13‡; Professional Skill (Sex Worker) (A) IQ+2 [2]-13‡;

Running (A) HT [2]-13; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-11; Sex Appeal (A) HT+3 [4]-16‡; Smuggling (A) IQ [2]-11; Stealth (A) DX [2]-12; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Swimming (E) HT [1]-13; Throwing (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Urban Survival (A) Per [2]-11; Whip (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Wrestling (A) DX+3 [8]-15.

Techniques: Aggressive Parry (Karate) (H) [2]-11; Eye Rake (Karate) (H) [2]-11; Ground Fighting (Wrestling) (H) [5]-15; Knee Strike (Karate) (A) [1]-15; Push Kick (Karate) (H) [2]-13.

* Includes +1 for Combat Reflexes.

† Includes +3 for Flexibility.

‡ Includes +2 for Voice.

Equipment

A 12' studded whip; small knife in boot; mini-flashlight with one-shot pepper spray (*GURPS High-Tech*, p. 180); sap gloves; leather jacket; firefighter's boots (*GURPS High-Tech*, p. 68); ballistic sunglasses (*GURPS High-Tech*, p. 71); money belt; handcuffs; duct tape; cell phone; personal basics (including fake IDs and credit cards).

That is the whole secret of successful fighting. Get your enemy at a disadvantage; and never, on any account, fight him on equal terms.

– George Bernard Shaw

RECRUITER

64 points

Contessa has chosen her allies for this scheme carefully: drivers with access to vehicles; security guards with access to suitable venues; orderlies from mental and psychiatric institutions; and forensic cleaners trained in removing evidence of crimes. Two of each join her for each fight night.

All of the men have other things in common: They are unattractive and hold low-status jobs, and were ready to do almost anything for a chance to be near one of their favorite porn stars. In addition, all were also bullies who enjoyed watching – and sometimes participating in – violent sports such as extreme wrestling. Contessa has also shared out the loot from the scheme – not quite fairly, but enough to increase their wealth level to average and ensure their loyalty. (This loyalty is not returned; Contessa will cheerfully pin the blame for her crimes on any of the recruiters if it will get her a shorter prison term.)

Martial artists should find a reliable – perhaps even supernatural – means of healing, if possible. Fighting is dangerous!

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 13 [6].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry Varies (see *Combat Styles, Skills, and Techniques*, below).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

*This is your life, and it's
ending one minute at a time.
— Fight Club (movie)*

Advantages

High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 2 [2].
Perks: Style Familiarity (See below). [1]

Disadvantages

Bad Temper (15) [-5]; Bully (12) [-10]; Greed (12) [-15]; Lecherousness (15) [-7]; Sense of Duty (Contessa) [-2]; Unattractive [-4].

Quirks: Pornography addict. [-1]

Skills

Area Knowledge (City) (E) IQ [1]-10; Body Language (A) Per [2]-10; Carousing (E) HT [1]-11; Current Affairs/TL8 (Sports) (E) IQ [1]-10; Driving/TL8 (Car) (A) DX [2]-10; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-10; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-10; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-11; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-11; Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-9; Running (A) HT-1 [1]-10; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-10; Search (A) Per [2]-10; Shortsword (A) DX [2]-10; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-10.

Gear

Large tactical flashlight (treat as baton); holdout pistol, .380; pepper spray; leather long coat (DR 1); sap gloves; athletic cup (*GURPS High-Tech*, p. 71); steel-toed boots; duct tape; pocket knife; personal basics.

Customization Notes

Choose one set of professional skills and one set of combat skills for each recruiter.

Professional Skills

Driver: Increase Area Knowledge to 12 [+3], Driving to 13 [+10]; add Mechanic/TL8 (Gasoline Engine) (A) IQ-1 [1]-9.

Forensic Cleaner: Increase Search to 12 [+6]; add Forensics/TL8 (H) IQ [4]-10 and Housekeeping (E) IQ+2 [4]-12.

Hospital Orderly: Increase Search to 12 [+6]; add Housekeeping (E) IQ+2 [4]-12 and Lifting (A) HT+1 [4]-12.

Security Guard: Increase Search to 12 [+6]; add Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security Systems) (A) IQ+2 [8]-12.

Combat Styles, Skills, and Techniques

Jujutsu: Arm Lock (Judo) (A) [1]-12; Disarming (Judo) (H) [3]-13; Judo (H) DX+1 [8]-11; Karate (H) DX+1 [8]-11. Parry 8.

MCMAP: Brawling (E) DX+3 [8]-13; Disarming (Judo) (H) [2]-12; Judo (H) DX+1 [8]-11; Stamp Kick (Brawling) (H) [2]-11. Parry 9.

Muay Thai: Games (Muay Thai) (E) IQ [1]-10; Elbow Strike (Karate) (A) [2]-13; Karate (H) DX+3 [16]-13; Knee Strike (Karate) (A) [1]-13. Parry 9.

Wing Chun: Arm Lock (Wrestling) (A) [3]-15; Karate (H) DX+1 [8]-11; Knee Strike (Karate) (A) [1]-11; Wrestling (A) DX+2 [8]-12. Parry 9.

ROD MURSE

144 points

Rod Murse is a criminal lawyer whose skill at defending cases brought him to the attention of the local mob. He now spends more of his time as a fixer than in court, but he still takes on a few clients who don't have mob connections and can be very useful to anyone to whom he owes a Favor.

Rod looks to be in his late 20s. He has a tanned complexion, red-brown hair, green eyes, and perfect teeth.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 10 [0].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 10 [-5]; Per 12 [5]; FP 10 [0].

Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (unarmed).
5'8"; 160 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].

CF: Western [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0]; Latin (Accented) [4]; Italian (Accented) [4]; Spanish (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Contact Group (Business people; Skill-15; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [10]; Contact Group (Police; Skill-15; 9 or less; Usually Reliable) [20]; Contact Group (Street people; Skill-18; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [15]; Eidetic Memory [5]; Smooth Operator 1 [15]; Voice [10]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages

Bad Sight (Nearsighted; Mitigator: Glasses, -60%) [-10]; Callous [-5]; Duty (To mob) [-5]; Greed (12) [-15]; Post-Combat Shakes [-5].

Quirk: Distrusts cops, especially honest ones. [-1]

This adventure is easily adapted to GURPS Action, especially using the Furious Fists expansion.

Skills

Administration (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Area Knowledge (City) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Carousing (E) HT+2 [2]-12*; Computer Operation/TL8 (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Criminology/TL8 (A) IQ [2]-11; Current Affairs/TL8 (Local) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-13*; Diplomacy (H) IQ+3 [4]-14*†; Driving/TL8 (Car) (A) DX [2]-10; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+4 [4]-15*†; Forensics/TL8 (H) IQ [4]-11; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-10; Interrogation (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; Law (Criminal, Local) (H) IQ+2 [12]-13; Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-11; Public Speaking (A) IQ+4 [4]-15*†; Research (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [1]-12*; Sex Appeal (A) HT+2 [1]-12*†; Streetwise (A) IQ+2 [4]-13*.

* Includes +1 for Smooth Operator.

† Includes +2 for Voice.

Gear

Holdout pistol, .380; custom concealed holster; smartphone; expensive suit.

RICHARD RANK

70 points

Richard Rank, the young heir to a business empire that includes a chain of health clubs, is fairly typical of the spectators at Contessa's fight nights – though wealthier than some, and in better physical shape than most. He's one of the few who can outrun the recruiters and keep up with Contessa. He may even come to the heroes' aid against the recruiters if he thinks it's to his advantage.

Richard is tanned, with golden blond hair and blue eyes. He is a muscular, slightly vacant-looking young man.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 9 [-5]; Per 10 [0]; FP 10 [0].

Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 6 [5]; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Karate).
6'1"; 170 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].

CF: Western [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Contact Group (Business people; Skill-18; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [15]; Fit [5]; Status 1 [0]*; Wealth (Wealthy) [20].

Perks: Style Familiarity (Hapkido). [1]

Disadvantages

Compulsive Gambling (12) [-5]; Greed (12) [-15]; Lecherousness (15) [-7]; Pacifism (Cannot Kill) [-15].

Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance; Congenial. [-2]

Skills

Administration (A) IQ [2]-10; Area Knowledge (City) (E) IQ [1]-10; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-13; Current Affairs/TL8 (Sport) (E) IQ+2 [4]-12; Driving/TL8 (Car) (A) DX+1 [4]-11; Judo (H) DX [4]-10; Jumping (E) DX+1 [2]-11; Karate (H) DX [4]-10; Karate Sport (H) DX [2]-9; Merchant (A) IQ [2]-10; Running (A) HT+1 [4]-13; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ+1 [2]-11; Savoir-Faire (Dojo) (E) IQ [1]-10; Sex Appeal (A) HT+1 [4]-13; Sport (Basketball) (A) DX [4]-11; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Swimming (E) HT+1 [2]-13; Throwing (A) DX [2]-10.

Technique: Breakfall (Judo) (A) [2]-12;

* One level free from Wealth.

OTHER SPECTATORS

Use these generic stats for members of the audience.

ST 10; **DX** 10; **IQ** 11; **HT** 10.

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10.

Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (unarmed).
5'5"-6'3"; 140-230 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Wealth (Comfortable or better).

Many will have Contacts (Business or Police) and/or Talents (Business Acumen or Smooth Operator). Most will have at least two of the following: Callous, Compulsive Gambling, Greed, Lecherousness, plus at least one other disadvantage that will keep them out of combat (or keep it short): Combat Paralysis, Cowardice, Low Pain Threshold, or Night Blindness.

Skills: Most do not have any significant combat skills. Likely skills include Administration, Carousing, Computer Programming/TL8, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Driving/TL8 (Car), Fast-Talk, Finance, Gambling, Law, Market Analysis, Merchant, Savoir-Faire, and Sex Appeal.

FIGHT SURVIVORS

While most of the fighters the heroes might face in the ring have little or no combat training, there are two who might pose a challenge. Jacques "The Shark" Petit, the man who killed Tank Turner, has fought at several events and always comes back for more when he runs out of money. Howie "Dumbo" Dunlop has severe mental handicaps but is an extremely strong man whose strength and toughness make up for his lack of skill.

Jacques "The Shark" Petit

11 points

A hard-drinking former sailor who's picked up a few martial-arts tricks while in foreign ports, Petit has been living on the street (with occasional short stays in jail for assault and vagrancy) for several years. While he prefers to avoid fair fights, he has a simple technique that has often proved effective: He takes the stance of a boxer, feints, and then tries a sweeping kick. If this works, he follows it up with savage stamp kicks or grabs a convenient weapon. If not, he will go on the defensive until he finds another convenient opening.

Dirty trick: giving techniques deceptive names. "Shin Lu's Fist of Iron Death? It turns out, it's a kick!"

Jacques is in his mid-60s, although he looks much worse for the wear. He has a weather-beaten complexion, unevenly cut greasy gray hair; and gray eyes. His nose has been broken repeatedly, and he has bad teeth. He is scrawny, and his body has numerous scars, plus an anchor tattooed on his right bicep.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 9 [-10].

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 13 [4]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [6].

Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 9 (Brawling).
5'8"; 130 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].

CF: Western [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Ambidexterity [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 2 [2]; Temperature Tolerance 2 [2].

Perks: Improvised Weapons (Brawling); Skill Adaptation (Sweep defaults to Brawling). [2]

Disadvantages

Alcoholism [-15]; Appearance (Unattractive) [-4]; Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Bully (15) [-5]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Paranoia [-10]; Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Skills

Area Knowledge (City) (E) IQ [1]-10; Boxing (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Current Affairs/TL8 (Sports) (E) IQ [1]-10; Fast-Talk (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Filch (A) DX [2]-11; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-11; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-11; Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-9; Running (A) HT [2]-9; Seamanship/TL7(E) IQ [1]-10; Scrounging (E) Per+2 [4]-12; Shortsword (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-10; Swimming (E) HT [1]-9; Two-Handed Axe/Mace (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Urban Survival (A) Per+1 [4]-11.

Techniques: Stamp Kick (Brawling) (H) [3]-12; Sweep (Brawling) (H) [3]-12.

Howie "Dumbo" Dunlop

-51 points

Howie Dunlop lives in a mental institution with a sheltered workshop and is normally a peaceful, though imposing-looking, individual – until one of Contessa's team, who worked as an orderly in his home, saw him fly into a rage when another inmate pushed him. After joining in the effort to restrain Howie, the orderly began watching him more closely, then recommended him to Contessa as a possible combatant in their "garbage wrestling" matches. Howie, easily led, was bribed with food, DVDs, and a colorful costume, and is brought along to the fight club on nights when the moon is full.

When not berserk, Howie usually remembers that the aim of the matches is to throw his opponent out of the ring – but if he snaps, he will lash out with his powerful fists and the occasional head butt until his opponent is on the floor, then try his elbow drop until the enemy stops making any attempt to fight back.

Howie has a round face, crewcut blond hair, and pale blue eyes. He is bulky, with large feet, hands, and ears.

ST 14 [40]; **DX** 9 [-20]; **IQ** 7 [-60]; **HT** 11 [10].

Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 16 [4]; Will 7 [0]; Per 7 [0]; FP 11 [0].

Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Brawling).
6'4"; 240 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].

CF: Western [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Hard to Subdue 2 [4]; Pitiable [5]; Rapid Healing [5].

Perks: Style Familiarity (Wrestling). [1]

Disadvantages

Berserk (6) [-20]; Gluttony (12) [-5]; Ham-Fisted 1 [-5]; Lunacy [-10]; Overweight [-1]; Wealth (Poor) [-15].

Quirks: Distractible; Humble; Likes superhero cartoons and TV wrestling. [-3]

Skills

Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-11; Housekeeping (E) IQ+1 [2]-8; Lifting (A) HT+1 [4]-12; Swimming (E) HT [1]-11; Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4]-10.

Technique: Elbow Drop (Brawling) (H) [3]-9; Hammer Fist (Brawling) (A) [1]-11.

Most "garbage wrestlers" have little or no combat training.

Other Combatants

ST 10; **DX** 10; **IQ** 8-10; **HT** 8-10.

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10.

Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Brawling).
5'8"-6'2"; 130-170 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Usually none, but possibilities include Fearlessness, Hard to Subdue, Night Vision, High Pain Threshold, and Pitiable.

Skills: Brawling-10.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen Dedman is the author of *GURPS Dinosaurs* and the novels *Shadowrun: A Fistful of Data*; *The Art of Arrow Cutting*; *Shadows Bite*; and *Foreign Bodies*. He has also written a number of *Pyramid* articles and other RPG material, plus more than 100 short stories published in an eclectic variety of magazines and anthologies.

He is co-owner of Fantastic Planet, a science fiction and fantasy bookshop in Perth, Australia, and is trying to save enough experience points to buy off the long-standing Wealth (Struggling) disadvantage. For more information, check out stephendedman.com.

THE THREE BROTHERS SCHOOLS OF MARTIAL ARTS

BY ALAN LEDDON

Near the end of the last century, a soldier named Fen Tsu had three sons, Den, Quo, and Sang. He raised them in an isolated and spiritually active land. A dutiful father, Fen Tsu taught his sons about life, and taught them the ways of a soldier so that they would grow to serve their nation. Tsu worked hard to teach his sons about honor, hoping that they would grow to be honorable men and dutiful soldiers.

Fen Tsu died a disappointed man.

The three brothers had other ideas regarding their father's teachings. The sons agreed that they would be more successful if they worked together, and agreed that they would gain greater wealth in a more spiritually bankrupt clime. As young adults, they sold the home of their childhood, bid farewell to their father's grave, and departed for the West.

In the West, they used the last of their money to open their Three Brothers School of Martial Arts, claiming to teach "the ancient and secret art taught to us by our father." During their first years, they attracted a reasonable number of students, who paid their monthly dues, took their classes, and were generally satisfied. The brothers made an average living, but they soon grew impatient with the slow accumulation of wealth. Thus, it came to be that Den selected a few students for private "extra classes."

His favored students were picked for what Den perceived as a hunger for "more." A better description is that he selected them for a lack of integrity. Den taught the skills that his father had learned as an infantryman, including stealth, tactics, traps, the use of firearms, and the steely calm of someone prepared to kill. Months later, a few specially chosen students robbed a local bank in broad daylight, killing a customer and two employees in an unnecessary hail of gunfire while two of the students entered the vault.

The robbery made evening and morning news, and, when Den handed them each a roll of cash, Quo and Sang realized immediately what had happened. The brothers argued into the night, and finally agreed to go their separate ways. Each took their cut of the robbery money and, later, the sale of their school; each went out and founded his own martial arts school.

*There could be no honor
in sure success, but much
might be wrested from a
sure defeat.*

– T. E. Lawrence

THE THREE SCHOOLS

The three schools possess enough similarities that they share a common Style Familiarity Perk; the brothers cannot undo a lifetime of first studying, then teaching, any more than a leopard can change its spots. In general, a fighter from any of the schools will strive to systematically reduce his opponent's capabilities: First disarm him, then injure him, then apply a hold, or simply knock him out . . . or kill him. Using guns is considered very effective at disabling a foe.

Martial-arts challenge: resolving a combat situation while carrying a child or other fragile bundle.

What Are the Brothers Like?

Despite their identical upbringings and similar ideas, the three Fen Brothers are very different.

Fen Den

Den is a criminal. He believes that the appearance of honor is useful, so he carefully cultivates a respectable image. He trains his best students to commit thefts, and he has moved on to planning a kidnapping for ransom. He cares little for the lives or welfare of his students and not at all for those of their victims. Den is careful to keep records of who took part in each crime; he plans to trade the evidence for immunity if he is ever caught. Den lives in a large, lavishly decorated home, wears expensive clothing, drives a new sports car each year, and eats in exclusive restaurants, all on the profit of his students' crimes.

Fen Quo

Quo is amoral but less so than his brothers. Quo has no stomach for killing, and he grew up hoping to avoid military life. He wants more money, but he feels that he can't risk the crimes of Den or the recklessness of Sang. He hopes that his school will generally improve the lives of his

students, believing that this will attract more students and thus greater income. He is concerned that his students have begun using sports equipment as weapons, mainly because he does not want to be sued. Quo lives in a large, inexpensive apartment; dresses in cheap but comfortable clothes; uses public transportation; and cooks his own meals of rice and vegetables.

Fen Sang

Sang is as cynical as he is amoral. He has never had any interest in hard (or any other) work, but he is very interested in wealth. When he hit upon the idea of providing training in whatever weapon the most recent silver screen hero was using, he was unsurprised that a lot of movie fans flocked to his school. Some of his students have found adventure and wealth in remote parts of the world, but most leaving the city in search of the exotic find only death. Sang is nonplussed: If you are dumb enough to try, you are dumb enough to die.

Sang charges exorbitant prices for upper-level classes. As a result, he eats expensive meals, wears expensive clothes, drives a nice car, and invests heavily in local businesses.

Den Jeng School

5 points

Fen Den opened his new school in the south of the city. All of his bank-robbing students, and several other students of the brothers, went with him. Den teaches gun play and stealth as part of his curriculum; advanced students assist in rehearsals of bank robberies (complete with resisting guards and heroic customers). "Privileged" students are sworn to secrecy and take part in the robberies, bringing in a few grand from each job and having to split the money with Den. Den isn't happy with his income, yet; his most trusted bank robbers are now rehearsing a kidnapping.

Den's students prefer to shoot threats. They use their unarmed training to take hostages, intimidate victims, and for times when a low profile is necessary.

Skills: Guns/TL (Pistol); Judo; Stealth; Traps/TL.

Techniques: Arm Lock (Judo); Choke Hold (Judo); Disarming (Judo); Sweep (Judo).

Perks: Armorer's Gift (Pistol); Pants-Positive Safety; Pistol Fist.

Optional Traits

Advantages: Wealth.

Disadvantages: Enemy (Past victims or Police); Obsession (Build Wealth); Secret (Murderer, or Thief, or both).

Skills: Boxing; Forced Entry; Knife; Tactics.

Perk: Teamwork.

Fen Quo School

5 points

Quo opened his new school in the northeast of the city. None of the students of the brothers went with him, so he rebuilt his business with seminars at local schools and colleges. Later, he took to offering classes to help with baseball, hockey, soccer, and even golf, showing his students that the discipline of a martial art can apply to sports as well. This has increased his number of paying customers and kept many paying students in his classes longer. Several of his students have gone to college on sports scholarships.

The other, unintended, effect is that his students have begun to pick up baseball bats, golf clubs, hockey sticks, and anything else handy for use as a weapon (treat the first two as small maces, and hockey sticks as a quarterstaff wielded with Two-Handed Sword; all are at -2 unless the appropriate Improvised Weapon perk is taken).

Skills: Boxing; Judo; Knife; Stealth.

Techniques: Arm Lock (Judo); Choke Hold (Judo); Disarming (Judo); Sweep (Judo).

Perks: Follow-Through (Boxing)*; Follow-Through (Judo)*; Follow-Through (Knife)*.

Optional Traits

Skills: Axe/Mace; Shortsword; Sports (Baseball, Golf, Hockey, or Soccer); Tactics.

Campaign idea: Each attack makes the enemy stronger or more protected. It's time to come up with a Plan B!

Perks: Follow-Through (any weapon skill)*; Improvised Weapons (Axe/Mace); Improvised Weapons (Two-Handed Sword); Improvised Weapons (Shortsword).

* *GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 15.

Fen Sang School

6 points

Sang opened his new school in the northwest of the city. San marketed his school to the bored and wealthy of the city, saying that his school was designed to prepare them for a career “as an international adventurer.” Sang keeps an eye on action movies, learning and teaching weapons and techniques used by the heroes of those movies. He teaches his students to carry a 6’ pole or staff (available from the school for \$80) when adventuring, to use it to probe holes, spring traps, reach items, and even to vault with. Sang has mounted a canoe on rockers in his school, using it to teach students to fight on a rocking boat. Many students even learn to fight in armor as a result of the popularity of recent movies featuring Spartan soldiers wearing armor to battle.

Skills: Boxing; Guns/TL (Pistol); Judo; Stealth; Traps/TL.

Techniques: Arm Lock (Judo); Counterattack (Boxing); Disarming (Judo); Sweep (Judo); Uppercut (Boxing).

Perks: Armor Familiarity (Judo); Naval Training.

Optional Traits

Disadvantages: Delusion (I am properly prepared for a life of adventure); Reputation.

Skills: Acrobatics; Bow; Broadsword; Jumping; Staff; Swimming; Whip.

Perks: Combat Vaulting*.

* *Power-Ups 2*, p. 5.

About the only time losing is more fun than winning is when you're fighting temptation.

– Tom Wilson

ADVENTURE SEEDS

Investigation: Fen Tsu died disappointed . . . and relatively young. Now, many years after his death, someone (the police, the CIA, members of Tsu’s army unit, the Mystic Order of Retrocognitive Monks, etc.) is investigating his death. Do any of the sons have anything to hide? How far will they go to hide it? One side or the other – or *both* sides – seeks to retain the services of the PCs as investigators, bodyguards – even assassins.

Kidnapped! Den has finally set his plan in motion. The victim is, naturally, connected to one or more of the heroes – or is one of the heroes! Although this seems like a common

Variants

The history and future of the Three Brothers can be dropped into any setting with minimal work.

For a low-TL version, the pistols are single-shot pieces, like wheel-locks. A student of Den will carry several of them in holsters sewn to a leather vest, with lanyards to keep from losing them. They won’t use matchlocks because of the risk of burning themselves on the match of a dangling pistol! They can just Fast-Draw, fire, and drop a pistol each round, alternating between the good hand and off-hand.

If most martial arts in the setting teach magic or psionics, the Brothers’ styles could offer advantages bought with the Moral modifier (-20%). A GM considering this option should consider the “morality” of the brothers. For example, Den takes what he wants and lies to the world, while Sang gains wealth by teaching people to recklessly get themselves killed.

Science fiction is easy, too: just swap out Guns/TL for Beam Weapons/TL. If Tsu was a space marine, add Vacc Suit and Freefall as optional skills for all three styles.

In any time and place, soldiers learn something about Survival. GMs should feel free to add any version of the Survival skill to the optional skills of all three styles if this would benefit his campaign. The version chosen should be the same for all three, as Tsu would have taught the skill to his sons. In play, any of the brothers might take students on expensive yearly camping trips.

scheme, Den’s students will employ military tactics to make it a fight to remember.

Unfortunate Death: During a robbery sanctioned by Den, a bank customer who is important to either Quo or Sang, or to a student of one of the two, is gunned down unnecessarily. Students loyal to the offended brother find a student of Den (or mistakenly target a student of the third, uninvolved brother) and beat or kill him. The chain of reprisals intensifies, threatening to become a “Triad” war. Someone – the mayor, one of the brothers, or citizens caught in the middle – asks the PCs to intervene.

Unsanctioned Robbery: Acting without permission of Den, several of his students undertake a robbery. One is identified, and his face and name are on the news. Then, the students involved do not show up for class. Den realizes that it is only a matter of time before the police question his students about their fugitive classmate. Worried that one will break down and talk about the rehearsals, he will offer the PCs cash or free training in exchange for bringing him the fugitive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan lives in Madison, Wisconsin with his awesome wife, Bekki, and various vermin, including his extremely bright daughter (Raven), in-laws, a cat, and a beagle/basset mix. Alan is a Navy veteran, a long-term SCA member, a student of Tae Kwon Do and Kenjutsu, and a licensed nurse. He loves to incorporate his experiences from all of these things into his games. Coming up on 40 years old, Alan is about to celebrate his 30th year of roleplaying. His next project is to teach *Car Wars* to Raven, right after her fifth birthday.

MARTIAL ARTS



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FIGHT WHILE IN FLIGHT

BY KELLY PEDERSEN

Human martial arts have developed based on certain basic rules: Combatants are limited by gravity, by momentum, by the need for stable footing from which to launch movement and attacks. These assumptions don't hold true in all settings, where supernatural powers, mysterious technology, or biological abilities expand the range of action available to characters. This article presents five martial arts designed to take the ability to fly – or at least to stay in the air for much longer than usual – into account.

An "*" indicates a new technique, described on p. 17. A "†" indicates the technique is from *GURPS Supers*.

NEW STYLES

These five new styles are best suited for the special circumstances of aerial combatants.

Aerial Jujutsu

3 points

Aerial Jujutsu is a style designed for fighters with perfect control of their movement in the air. Its moves and teachings are for those who can hover in midair, travel any direction at will, and completely control their orientation. Practitioners should have some way of getting the Flight advantage, unmodified by limitations such as Winged, Gliding, etc. that hinder perfect mobility.

This style focuses on grace and finesse while in combat. Stylists prefer to be in control of a battle as much as possible, letting their opponent do most of the rushing around, and allowing their foe's momentum to work against them. Observers often compare watching a combatant using Aerial Jujutsu to "flying ballet," and some stylists have taken this to the next step, learning choreographed dance moves and performing before an audience. However, the style remains a real combat discipline, and practitioners of Aerial Jujutsu learn to attack first and foremost. The standard methods for students of Aerial Jujutsu when attacked are to wait for the enemy to rush towards them and then use the foe's speed against them, redirecting the force of their flight so that they collide with whatever obstacles are near them. Whenever possible, stylists prefer to fight in relatively

crowded airspace, where their superior maneuverability gives them an advantage over others who must deal with inconvenient facts such as turning radiuses and stall speeds.

In combat, Aerial Jujutsu stylists take a cautious tack. A student will take Evaluate, All-Out and Committed Defense, and Wait maneuvers, holding out until the opponent leaves himself open. These openings are sometimes *created*, thanks to a stylist's unpredictable flight path in an Aerobic Feint. While on the defensive, an aggressive, athletic course is preferred – Aerobic Dodges are a signature of this style. When a gap in the foe's defenses appears, the practitioner responds with a flying throw. In crowded airspace, the throw is aimed to slam the opponent into an obstacle. In more open areas, the Aerial Jujutsu stylist tries to follow the opponent and use superior position to his advantage, establishing a hold or lock to inflict damage directly.

This style has developed only a couple of stories of impossible feats – outside the ability to fly itself, of course! Nevertheless, a few tales circulate of Aerial Jujutsu masters capable of fighting in pitch blackness, applying precise force to nerve clusters to disable opponents, and perfectly predicting the enemy's moments. Some stylists also claim to be able to so perfectly judge a foe that they can parry a weapon by catching it between their palms, or defend against a blow by instinctively flying in the direction of the force, reducing its impact.

Skills: Aerobatics; Judo.

Techniques: Aerial Throw*; Aerial Trip*; Aerobic Recovery*; Arm Lock; Attack From Above; Choke Hold; Evade (Aerobatics); Feint (Aerobatics).

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Pressure Points; Sensitivity.

Cinematic Techniques: Hand-Clap Parry; Roll with Blow; Timed Defense.

Perks: Aerobic Feints; Sure-Footed (Windy).

Optional Traits

Secondary Characteristics: Increased Air Move (if stylist's flight is natural, rather than provided by technology).

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Enhanced Dodge.

Skills: Combat Art (Judo); Dancing; Group Performance (Choreography).

Subplot idea: Have a recurring NPC master ally/associate challenge the heroes one-on-one routinely. When a hero is able to defeat the master, he must retire as a PC.

Flying Brick

3 points

This is an intensely simple and direct style. It is practiced by those with the ability to fly as well as the power to absorb a great deal of damage. It has a small body of techniques, focused on offensive uses and designed to cause the most damage to targets.

In combat, this style is brutally direct. Students' favorite tactic is to fly at the opponent at top speed and simply collide with them, trusting to their own resistance to damage to protect them from the consequences of such a gambit. Another popular attack is to grapple the enemy and fly them into an obstacle, such as a building or the ground. Flying Brick stylists use extremely aggressive tactics; the standard combat maneuvers are All-Out or Committed Attacks, particularly Determined or Strong. As practitioners of this style typically have the ability to resist a great deal of damage, they tend to rely on that rather than active defenses.

Most Flying Brick stylists are already cinematic by default, what with the ability to fly and absorb inhuman levels of damage. However, a few legends have circulated about *truly* amazing specimens with this style. Such stories make claims that masters of this style can increase their already-superhuman strength even further, and mention feats such as catching enemy blows in one hand and subsequently breaking the weapon.

Skills: Karate; Wrestling.

Techniques: Elbow Drop; Human Missile (Karate)†; Knee Drop; Wrench Arm; Wrench Spine.

Cinematic Skills: Power Blow.

Cinematic Techniques: Hand Catch; Lethal Strike; Piledriver; Snap Weapon.

Perks: Power Grappling; Skill Adaptation (Human Missile defaults to Karate); Sure-Footed (Windy).

Optional Traits

Secondary Characteristics: Increased Air Move.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Damage Resistance; Enhanced Move (Air); Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction).

Jumping Combat

3 points

Jumping Combat is a very basic style, designed for fighters with the ability to leap great distances, whether through super-strength, technological assistance, or other means. It uses direct, no-frills methods to attack, relying on the stylist's ability to quickly cross the battlefield to deal with ground-bound foes.

The tactics of Jumping Combat are very simple. A stylist simply jumps as high as he can, then aims to crash down on their enemy. With sufficient height on the jump, this is often all that is needed, since the collision damage will be enough to incapacitate most normal opponents. However, students of this style do have a few more tricks up their sleeves, in case their initial strike doesn't immediately take care of their target. Practitioners of this style practice a variety of strikes, usually ones designed to be used against an opponent on the ground, which is the usual result of being struck by a jumping attack at full force. Jumping Combat stylists are very dirty fighters,

always looking to end a battle quickly. They are also skilled at using their superior movement abilities to place themselves in good ambush positions, ready to drop on unsuspecting foes at the opportune moment. Since jumping attacks often carries a risk of ending up flat on the ground if they miss, this style also teaches some techniques for fighting while prone, and for recovering your feet quickly.

When fighting a single target, students of Jumping Combat favor a strong offense, using All-Out and Committed Attacks to overwhelm their opponent and end a fight as quickly as possible. All-Out or Committed (Strong) is the most common choice, using the improved damage to quickly cripple. The Jumping Combat stylist's favorite attack technique, of course, is the Jump Kick, putting their massive leaping ability to good use.

Cinematic masters of Jumping Combat style are rumored, of course, to be able to increase their already prodigious jumping distance with a few moments of concentration. Tales also tell of practitioners' abilities with increasing the force of their blows, and emitting terrifying battle cries as they leap that paralyze their foes. Cinematic stylists also learn even more effective techniques to apply their jumping attacks, and can become skilled at leaping attacks at the *start* of a jump, rather than just the finish.

Skills: Brawling; Jumping.

Techniques: Acrobatic Stand; Attack from Above; Drop Kick; Elbow Drop; Ground Fighting; Jump Kick; Knee Drop; Stamp Kick.

Cinematic Skills: Flying Leap; Kiai; Power Blow.

Cinematic Techniques: Flying Jump Kick; Springing Attack.

Perks: Skill Adaptation (Jump Kick and Flying Jump Kick default to Brawling); Skill Adaptation (Acrobatic Stand defaults to Jumping).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Super Jump.

Skills: Acrobatics.



Winged Mount Combat

4 points

This style focuses on fighting while riding on the back of a flying mount: dragons, gryphons, pegasi, and the like. Its teachings focus on using weapons capable of striking other aerial combatants and their mounts, and staying on the stylist's mount when attacked – it's usually a long way to the ground!

Winged Mount Combat's tactics are focused on the hit-and-run model. Most flying mounts lack the perfect maneuverability required to stay in constant contact with a foe, so practitioners of this style concentrate on making their chances to attack count. Standard practice is to attempt to deal a single fight-ending blow on each pass. Against another aerial-mounted foe, students of this style either attempt to unseat the rider, sending them plummeting to the ground far below; or to damage the mount's means of flying, forcing it to land or simply sending both mount and rider crashing down. Against aerial combatants more maneuverable than they are, a Winged

GURPS Dragons contains information about dragon riders – and, of course, their mounts.

Mount Combat stylist will usually attempt to open the distance between them, then turn and make an attack pass.

Against other mounted aerial opponents, practitioners usually rely on the Committed Attack (Strong) option if they are on the offensive, trying to deliver the hoped-for fight-ending blow quickly. All-Out Attacks are not favored, however, because they leave the stylists too open to a counterattack that can knock them from the saddle. When an aerial opponent is obviously coming in for an attack of his own, the Wait maneuver is preferred, particularly the stop thrust option, since it allows a Winged Mount Combat stylist better odds of getting in an attack before the opponent moves past him. Practitioners of this style are rarely in a position to use the Evaluate maneuver, since they are usually too far from their opponent to do so, but in the rare cases where they are (a close chase, for example), attempting to Evaluate for the maximum possible bonus to ensure a solid hit is a common strategy.

Cinematic masters of Winged Mount Combat are said to be able to be able to increase the force of their blows beyond their normal limits. They have no real stories about strange combat techniques, however.

Skills: Lance; Riding (Appropriate Mount Specialty); Spear.
Techniques: Cavalry Training; Combat Riding; Hands-Free Riding; Staying Seated; Targeted Attack (Lance Thrust/Wings); Targeted Attack (Spear Thrust/Wings).

Cinematic Skills: Power Blow.

Perks: Form Mastery (Spear); Technique Mastery (Staying Seated).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Combat Reflexes.

Skills: Axe/Mace; Broadsword; Lasso; Shield.

Techniques: Mounted Shooting; Quick Mount.

Winged Victory

6 points

Winged Victory is a style designed for those who fly under their own power with wings, either large or small. The style teaches students to outfly the opponent, both in maneuverability and endurance, and to cripple the foe's ability to fly if possible. This is an unarmed style. It teaches various strikes for quick attacks and grapples for close fighting.

Winged Victory stylists prefer to take a balanced approach to battle, specializing neither in offense or defense. This style emphasizes the war of maneuver and endurance. A Winged Victory student is constantly maneuvering for an advantage; most are tactical experts, skilled in using the terrain, the opponent's weaknesses, and other factors whenever possible. When fighting another opponent with a similar level of maneuverability, practitioners take a hit-and-run approach, attempting to wear down the foe while avoiding any serious blows. If possible, the enemy's mechanism of flying is targeted, in an attempt to bring him crashing down. Against more maneuverable opponents, Winged Victory stylists prefer to turn the fight into an endurance contest – if they can't fly *better*, they'll at least fly *longer*. The enemy is goaded into chasing until exhaus-

tion reduces his combat effectiveness, whereupon the Winged Victory student turns on him and attacks.

However, when dealing with a foe who is both more maneuverable and faster, stylists prefer to go to ground, seeking a place to hide and ambush the opponent at the first opportunity. Finally, when fighting an enemy with poorer maneuverability, a Winged Victory practitioner opts to stay close in, trusting to his superior agility to enable him to attack while staying out of the effective arc of the enemy counterattack, and trying to force his adversary into tight situations where the maneuverability handicap is an ever greater disadvantage.

Students of the Winged Victory style really have no favored combat maneuver; they rely on whatever tactics work the best at the time. If at all possible, they try to take a turn or two at the start of combat to use their tactical skill to evaluate the opponent and the situation, and plan accordingly. When fighting against a less-agile enemy, All-Out and Committed Attacks take advantage of the foe's inability to easily respond. With a foe of equal facility in the air, simple Attacks are the tactic of choice, avoiding the sacrifice of either offense or defense. Opponents with better maneuverability encourage a Winged Victory student to use Defensive Attacks, Evaluates, and Waits, avoiding attacks while trying to land a decisive blow to destroy the foe or reduce his flying ability enough to put him in a different category. When fighting a winged foe, a practitioner of this style makes heavy use of the Aerial Sweep technique, trying to disrupt the enemy's movement and hopefully send him crashing into an obstacle or the ground.

Claims of cinematic feats by masters of this style abound. Tales include stylists using wing buffets to shove their opponents into the terrain, and applying their tactical mastery to anticipate the foe's movements – even when in pitch blackness or invisible. Their legendary ability to predict what the opponent is doing even extends to allowing them to parry normally unparryable attacks; it also permits them to always put themselves in the spot their enemy isn't looking, rendering the stylist invisible.

Skills: Aerobatics; Flying; Karate; Tactics; Wrestling.

Techniques: Aerial Sweep (Karate)*; Elbow Strike; Evade; Exotic Hand Strike; Targeted Attack (Karate Punch/Wing); Wing Buffet*; Wrench Wing.

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Invisibility Art; Precognitive Parry; Push.

Cinematic Techniques: Lethal Strike; Timed Defense (Karate).

Perks: Neck Control; Rapid Retraction (Punches); Sure-Footed (Windy).

Optional Traits

Attributes: Increased HT.

Secondary Characteristics: Increased Air Move; Increased FP.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes, Enhanced Move (Air).

Skills: Stealth.

NEW TECHNIQUES

Several standard techniques – specifically sweeps, trips, and throws – work differently or not at all in aerial combat. The ground-based versions all rely on controlling an enemy's

If you don't have the GURPS Martial Arts Techniques Cheat-Sheet, you need it! It's free from e23.sjgames.com.

balance on his *legs* – an issue that becomes rather moot in midair where the feet are not likely supporting anything at all. As a result, standard training in these techniques do not work when fighting a flying foe. The equivalent techniques depend on controlling the foe's momentum, and often rely on manipulating his wings (or whatever mechanism he uses to keep aloft).

The aerial versions of the sweep, trip, and throw – as well as some other useful techniques – are presented below.

Aerial Sweep

Hard

Default: Prerequisite skill-4.

Prerequisite: Appropriate Melee Weapon or unarmed combat skill; cannot exceed prerequisite skill.

An Aerial Sweep is designed to disrupt an enemy's flight pattern, hopefully sending him falling. An Aerial Sweep functions like the Sweep technique, with the following exception: Rather than the opponent landing prone if he fails to resist an Aerial Sweep, he immediately loses control of his flight and stops any forward movement. To recover control, he must roll against DX or Aerobatics each turn (see the Aerobic Recovery technique, below, for more details). If the opponent's method of flight is subject to maneuverability restrictions that would not permit staying aloft when stopped, then he begins to fall.

Aerial Throw

Hard

Default: Judo-1.

Prerequisite: Judo; cannot exceed Judo skill.

An Aerial Throw is the mid-air equivalent to the standard Judo Throw. It functions identically, with the following exception: Rather than landing prone, a successfully thrown opponent moves in *any* direction you choose (including vertically), for a number of yards equal to half the distance he moved in the turn before he was thrown (minimum one yard). In addition, the thrown opponent temporarily loses control of his flight, and he must roll against DX or Aerobatics on his next and each subsequent turn to recover (see the Aerobic Recovery technique, below, for more details). Every turn that a thrown enemy fails to recover to control, he continues to move the same distance in the direction originally thrown, unless he was thrown on a rising trajectory. Each turn after the first, halve the upward distance traveled while keeping the horizontal distance the same. For example, if you throw someone so that he moves two yards up and six yards along on the first turn, then, if he does not regain control, on the second turn they will move another one yard up and six yards along, in the same direction. If the victim's method of flight is subject to maneuverability restrictions that would not permit staying aloft under such conditions, he begins to fall instead.

Aerial Trip

Hard

Default: Prerequisite skill Parry-2.

Prerequisite: Judo or Wrestling; cannot exceed prerequisite Parry.

An Aerial Trip allows you to use a foe's own momentum against him, forcing him to continue on the same course but out of control, hopefully to crash into something before he can regain control. An Aerial Trip functions like the Trip technique, with the following exceptions. Rather than falling prone, an opponent who has been successfully Aerially Tripped simply loses control of his flight. To recover control, he must roll against DX or Aerobatics each turn (see the Aerobic Recovery technique, below, for more details). As long as he is uncontrolled, he continues to move in the same direction and speed as the last turn before he was tripped. The only exception to this rule is if he was climbing before losing control. Every uncontrolled turn after the first, halve the upward movement, while maintaining the same amount of horizontal movement. If the opponent's method of flight is subject to maneuverability restrictions that would not permit staying aloft when stopped, then he begins to fall.

Since an Aerial Trip does not depend on feet, you can Trip an enemy moving past you if you have a free hand; you do not need to use your foot.

Aerobic Recovery

Average

Default: Aerobatics+2.

Prerequisite: Aerobatics; cannot exceed Aerobatics+6.

Aerobic Recovery allows you to recover control of your flight after losing it. Normally when you need to recover control, you roll against DX-4 or Aerobatics+2. An attempt to regain control takes your full turn. If you succeed, you recover control at the end of your turn.

If you have points in this technique, you can roll against your Aerobic Recovery level instead of Aerobatics to regain control of your flight.

Wing Buffet

Hard

Defaults: Brawling or Karate-4.

Prerequisites: Brawling or Karate; cannot exceed prerequisite skill.

A Wing Buffet is a strike with one of your wings. Roll against Wing Buffet to hit. A successful strike does thr damage. However, using your wings in this manner while in flight is *dangerous* – you risk losing control. Roll against DX after you attempt a Wing Buffet attack, whether you succeed or fail. If the DX roll fails, you lose control of your flight. You will continue moving in the same direction and speed you were moving on the last turn before you lost control, until you can make an Aerobatics roll to regain control. See the Aerobic Recovery technique, above, for more details.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Pedersen lives and works in Saskatoon, Canada, where he continues to search for a job that will both pay for gaming books and allow him enough free time to participate in gaming sessions. He feels that writing for *Pyramid* is a good step toward fulfilling both of these goals. He enjoys a wide range of game systems and styles, but he remains committed

INSTANT TOURNAMENT

Martial-arts games often revolve around tournaments of various sorts. Unfortunately, many tournaments are different, and it's not always possible to come up with interesting ones at a moment's notice. That's where the *Instant Tournament* cards come in handy.

SETUP

Print out the cards on pp. 22-23, each page on its own sheet. For easier shuffling, either print out on cardstock or glue the paper sheets on cardboard before cutting them out. (For easier sorting, print out the two pages on different-colored paper or cardstock.)

You should end up with two decks, each with nine cards.

Terms cards (p. 22) define what the fight-ending conditions will be, such as "To Knockout" and "First Blood." If a result isn't desirable or doesn't make sense (for example, "Death" in what is supposed to be a friendly gathering of martial artists), redraw or remove the card before drawing in the first place. Unless the GM knows the format of the tournament ahead of time, at least one of these cards should be drawn – although two of the results require the drawing of *additional* cards.

Variables cards (p. 23) define what is different about the fighting experience. Each card contains two possibilities. The *Set-Up* option defines what the fighting area is like ahead of time; fighters can presumably plan accordingly and know what they're getting into. The *Complication* option defines a change in conditions that takes place during the fight.

It's up to the GM how he wants to use these cards. It's entirely possible that a tournament can happen without any Variables of any sort, or the GM might draw one before the start of the match. Alternatively, he might draw one to use as a Complication only if it seems like the fight is getting stale. Here is a possible table to determine how many cards to draw, although – again – the GM should use this as a guideline, not a straitjacket.

1d	Variables
1	No Set-Up, no Complications
2	No Set-Up, 1 Complication
3	No Set-Up, 2 Complications
4	1 Set-Up, no Complications
5	1 Set-Up, 1 Complication
6	1 Set-Up, 2 Complications

If using Complications, decide when they will occur – especially if using more than one. A good guideline is "whenever the fight is getting repetitive or there's a lull in the action."

If desired, multiple sets of cards can be printed out, allowing the GM to "stack the deck" with more likely results – for example, if death matches are much rarer than other kinds, he might make a deck consisting of only one copy of the Death card and four copies of each of the other eight cards on p. 22.

Obviously, if any results are determined that don't make sense, the GM should ignore it or draw another card. However, seemingly incongruous or unusual results might challenge the GM to think creatively . . .

EXAMPLE

The heroes are in a remote farming village when they come across a tournament. The GM rolls on the table above and gets "1 Set-Up, 1 Complication." He draws Knockout from the Terms deck, and Sand/Grit on Ground as a Set-Up. He decides the fight will be in a barn, repurposed for this event. The ground covering is loose, with a little straw combined with some dirt and sand; the GM decides it won't cause any problems for now, but one of the fighters might use it to his advantage later.

During the match, he draws Excessively Dark Venue. He decides that one of the lanterns used to light the event has burned out, plunging half the barn into shadow. The fighters get to figure out how they want to use any of these conditions.

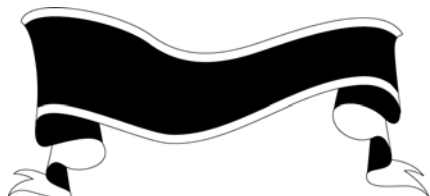


TERMS

Death

The fight continues until someone dies.

Anyone at full negative HP must make an immediate HT roll to avoid dying. Another HT roll is needed at -2×HP, -3×HP, and -4×HP. Death is automatic at -5×HP. See *Effects of Injury* (p. B380) and *Death* (p. B423).



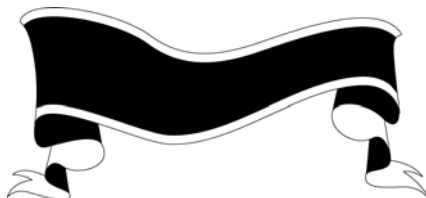
TERMS

Disarmament

The fight continues until someone is disarmed.

See *Striking at Weapons*, p. B400-401.

If no weapons are being used, treat as "To Knockout," or draw a different condition.



TERMS

First Blood

The fight continues until the victor draws blood on his opponent.

Injuries of at least 1 HP from cutting, impaling, or piercing attacks always bleed. To determine if other injuries draw blood, use *Bleeding* (p. B420): After each injury, the victim makes a HT roll, at -1 per 5 HP lost. On a failure, the victim is bleeding.

See also *Severe Bleeding* (*GURPS Martial Arts*, p. 138)

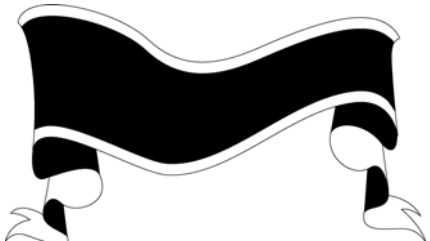


TERMS

First Fall

The first fighter to touch the floor with something other than his feet loses.

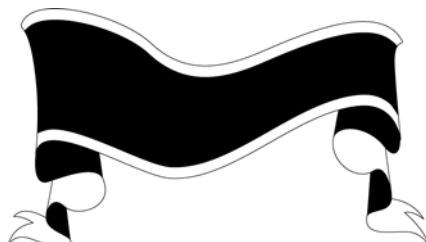
Rules for knockback are on p. B378; rules for knockdown are on p. B420.



TERMS

First Touch

The fight lasts until one person makes a successful attack (regardless of whether it does damage or not).

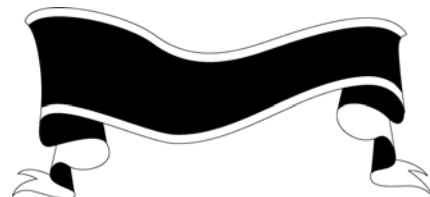


TERMS

Knockout

The fight continues until someone is knocked out.

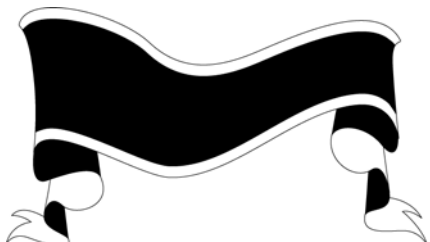
Someone with zero or fewer HP left must roll vs. HT each turn to avoid falling unconscious. See also *Knockdown and Stunning*, p. B420.



TERMS

Last in the Ring

Any fighter forced out of the fighting area is "out." The fight lasts until only one person remains.



TERMS

Teams (Draw Again)

Rather than a one-on-one match, fights are two-on-two (or perhaps more). Likely possibilities are either only one fighter at a time ("tagging" to swap out to a partner) or both fighters are permitted to work together.

Draw again to determine the victory condition, ignoring Full Brawl; determine if that condition applies to one fighter or all fighters - for example, does a Teams fight to "Knockout" mean until one person is knocked out, or one *team* is knocked out?

TERMS

Full Brawl (Draw Again)

A number of combatants are expected to fight each other at the same time, with no regard for "teams."

Draw again to determine the victory condition, ignoring Teams; that condition probably applies to all fighters (until everyone is knocked down or unconscious, for example), but it could apply to just one (say, until one combatant dies).



VARIABLES

Excessively Bright Venue

Set-Up: The fighting area is much brighter than normal light.

Complication: The fighting area has become much brighter, momentarily or for the duration.

Effect: For a sudden, unexpected flare, fighters roll HT (+5 for Protected Vision) to avoid blindness for seconds equal to the margin of failure. Fighting while facing a bright light incurs penalties of -5 to -9 (GM's option), reduced by 1 per second as eyes adjust; those with Protected Vision adjust instantly. Also see *Visibility* (p. B394).



VARIABLES

Excessively Dark Venue

Set-Up: The fighting area is darker than expected.

Complication: The fighting area becomes dimmer or even pitch-black!

Effect: The GM sets the new visibility penalty, from -5 to -10. At -10, everyone is effectively blind – see *Visibility* (p. B394) – otherwise, all vision and combat rolls are penalized, though Night Vision will help offset this.



VARIABLES

Extreme Temperature Change

Set-Up: The temperature is much colder or hotter than “normal” – battle in a snowstorm, among raging fires, etc. How much preparation the fighters have is up to the GM.

Complication: The temperature gets much colder or hotter than expected (roof is ripped off of arena during a storm, air conditioning breaks, etc.).

Effect: Rules for cold are on p. B430. Rules for flame are on p. B433-434. Rules for heat are on p. B434.

VARIABLES

Hard, Unstable Ground

Set-Up: The fighting area contains various pebbles, jagged rocks, loose glass, etc.

Complication: Rocks or glass are introduced to the area, or the fighters maneuver to an area where there are rocks or glass.

Effect: Fighters with bare feet are at -2 to attack and -1 to defend due to the need for careful footing; High Pain Threshold or DR 1 on the feet avoids this. Anyone thrown to the ground takes an extra point of damage.

VARIABLES

Sand/Grit on Ground

Set-Up: The fighting area contains sand or grit, which can reduce stability and provide dirty-fighting opportunities.

Complication: Sand or grit is introduced to the area, or the fighters maneuver to a portion where there is sand/grit.

Effect: Poor footing causes a -2 penalty to attack and -1 to defend. Also, see *GURPS Martial Arts*, p. 76, for rules on sand in the eyes.



VARIABLES

Slick or Icy Area

Set-Up: The fighting area is slippery, wet, or icy, making footing treacherous. (Whether or not this is known or noticeable is up to the GM.)

Complication: Something slick, slippery, or icy has been introduced to the venue (water, marbles, blood!, etc.)

Effect: Poor footing causes a -2 penalty to attack and -1 to defend; other actions may be similarly penalized (GM's option).



VARIABLES

Time Limit

Set-Up: The match must be concluded by a certain time (30 seconds, before midnight, etc.)

Complication: The match must be resolved in a certain time (match organizer is getting bored, authorities are approaching, etc.).

Effect: Remember that each turn equals one second; don't set a time limit of “five minutes” unless you mean “300 turns”!



VARIABLES

Weapon Available

Set-Up: A weapon is available but not immediately accessible inside the fighting area (atop a pillar, dangling from a rope, in the center of the ring, etc.). The weapon should not obviously favor one competitor over the other.

Complication: A weapon or weapon-like object becomes available (a sword-sized icicle breaks loose, a katana is tossed into the ring, etc.). A weapon might be given to the underdog (to make a more exciting fight) or to the favorite (to end a match quickly).

VARIABLES

Unstable Venue

Set-Up: The fighting area is unstable in some fashion (on a swaying bridge, a floating log, etc.).

Complication: The fighting area becomes unstable or smaller! (Supports beneath the floor are collapsing, fire reduces maneuverability, etc.)

Effect: When using battle maps, previously available areas might become closed off or hazardous.



THE GROOM OF THE SPIDER PRINCESS

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

They say that, in ancient times, long before the first Emperor received the Mandate of Heaven, there was a darkness upon the land that no fire could rout, and no one hero could stand against.

In the lands far to the north, in a vast and blasted plateau none now dare speak of, there resided the One Who Wears No Mask. From his Dread Monastery, he commanded an endless army of creatures to come and take what he required from the lands. And he required much, for he served the Demon King of All Spiders, who was always hungry.

So the people also went hungry, for they could not raise enough food to feed themselves. Thus the army went further and further in to acquire enough to feed their master. This went on for many generations, until nothing remained of the North but burned fields, filled with the unburied dead. And the burning came further south each and every year.

But one season, a small and humble group of men made their way to the Dread Monastery. To get there, they faced many dangers, many battles, and many challenges that no battle could solve. When they arrived, they sought audience with the One Who Wears No Mask, to plead for mercy on behalf of the people. Could he not demand tribute every three seasons, instead of every one? This would give them time to raise enough to feed themselves, and his master, without laying waste to the land and its people.

Indeed, it was a wise request, but the One Who Wears No Mask laughed at them, saying that they were fools to ask such a question of the likes of him. Who were they to challenge his authority? Who were they to expect mercy? He should feed them to his master for even daring such an outrage!

But as he laughed, he heard a distant rumbling, and watched with horror as the land itself was raised up against him. For Heaven had taken notice of the people's plight, and the men had come with righteousness on their side. The spirits of the land, weary of being laid waste to year after year, caused the flat ground to become a wide and tall range of mountains that no army could cross. And the Demon King of All Spiders howled in anger and rained punishment down upon his foolish servant, whose haughtiness had now cost him everything.

In the confusion, the men left the Dread Monastery and traveled home safely. Their names are lost, but their wisdom is still practiced every day, when a humble stranger intervenes on behalf of righteousness.

The mountains to the north are a reminder to all, even the Emperor, that the Mandate of Heaven is a sword with two edges. One must know both when to be as inflexible as iron, and when to bend like a reed in the wind.

This story has been told, father to son, through endless generations in the North of China. As it stands as both parable and warning, so too does the mountain range stand tall and impassable, even to the mighty and vast armies of the Emperor.

If the tale is true, none care to speculate on it for long. Indeed, to even write the word "Leng" is to invite the attention of unpleased spirits. There are some things man was not meant to know, some places he was not meant to see.

Unfortunately, it is true, after a fashion.

The dread Plateau of Leng is constantly in motion – shifting through the dark and unexplored parts of the cosmos like a disease. Once, long ago, it was "contracted" by the North of China, and the spider armies of the One Who Wears No Mask scuttled over the mountains, dragging food and victims back with them. This went on for many years, and then stopped as Leng moved away once again.

Those creatures left behind in the cosmic shift were stranded in time and space. They either settled in the mountains – carving vast and horrible cities deep within them – or wandered further inland, becoming a part of the mythology of the people. In those titanic, ancient cities in the mountains, degenerate things still perform abominable rites to the Demon King of All Spiders, bidding him to return when the stars are right once more.

That time is now.

The Groom of the Spider Princess gives a small group of somewhat-experienced *wuxia* fighters the chance to be witness to the horrible fury and hunger of the armies of the One Who Wears No Mask.

Campaign idea: Each PC has a pet companion! Build PCs as normal, then build animals for each character. GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 5: Allies might prove useful for cinematic animal companions.

Present when his creatures kidnap the groom from a politically important wedding, they are charged with pursuing his abductors and finding a way to stop these incursions from happening again.

Armed with ancient knowledge and their budding skills, the characters must trek through the dangerous valleys and forests to the northern mountains, before traveling through the perilous undercity of the Spider Men to reach the strange Plateau of Leng. Will they cross it and get to the Dread Monastery in time to stop the groom's forced wedding to the Spider Princess? How will they bargain with the Demon King of All Spiders, whom no mere mortal may destroy?

Can they carry out their mission once they realize they longer have the Mandate of Heaven on their side?

This campaign is intended for use with martial-arts games based in a *wuxia* setting. It could be used with **GURPS Martial Arts**, **Feng Shui**, **Qin: The Warring States**, **Weapons of the Gods**, among others. It's recommended that the heroes be either somewhat-experienced or created at mid-level, so they can grow in time with the escalating challenges of the campaign. More powerful characters can be accommodated by giving their adversaries more powers or magical weapons, and less powerful characters can be given objects of power by various NPCs to even the odds in their favor.

See *Considered Configurations* (p. 32) for general capabilities of key opponents.

BEAUTIFUL PASTURES, HAPPY OCCASIONS

The story starts in the large village of Urumqi, the northernmost farming village on the way to the massive northern mountain range. Perhaps the heroes are wandering through after their last adventure, or they have been asked by friends or family to help with the harvest, aid them in paying their annual taxes, or take some part in the marriage of the governor's son. They may also be paying respects to the nameless martial-arts teacher who resides in Urumqi – a venerable master of many forms who retired, long ago, to that village for reasons he does not wish to say . . . and no one dares to ask.

Urumqi – “beautiful pasture” in the language of the people who once lived here – is home to perhaps 500 people. It has a “governor,” but is truly overseen by the nearby small city of Xinjiang, five *li* (about 1.5 miles) away. The village consists of many small, thatched-roof houses overlooking farmers' fields and livestock pens. The governor lives in a stone mansion in the center, close to the largest shrine to the Buddha in the village, which he recently had enlarged and refurbished at no small cost.

There is a token wall around the village, but there's really nothing between the village and the Northern Mountains except ancient forests and deep ravines. Tales of a cursed city in the mountains – peopled by strange, half-human creatures – tend to keep the curious at home.

Wuxia Meets Lovecraft

Wuxia are tales of chivalrous Chinese martial artists who defend morality and goodness, seeking to maintain some sense of order in the world. At their best, they seek to uphold the Mandate of Heaven, from which all Earthly order descends, and in which all things have a role to play and a master to serve. Even evil and malicious gods must recognize the Mandate, and can be called to account by the righteous if they lose their way.

H.P. Lovecraft's writings, meanwhile, portray a bleak, uncaring universe overseen by titanic, often-mindless gods who care little for humanity. Our values and beliefs have no meaning outside what we choose to give them, and most of the universe's laws are not only incomprehensible to our minds, but stacked squarely against us.

The dichotomy between these two, opposite viewpoints is what fuels *The Groom of the Spider Princess*. What at first appears to be a rescue operation turns into a trip into physical and metaphysical darkness. The further the heroes go, the less they can be sure of, and the less their previous understanding matters.

Can they remain as they were after leaving the world as they knew it?

The harvest is a good one this year, and the people are in a happy mood, both because of it and because of the upcoming celebration. The only son of Urumqi's governor is to be married to the daughter of one of Xinjiang's minor ministers – a strategic marriage that will strengthen the ties between city and village, as well as increase the standing of the family of the governor of Urumqi. Many speak of the pairing as a true love match as well, but some say that the traditional auguries proved to be muddled, or else unfavorable for some uncertain reason. No one will say any more than that.

There are other signs of trouble on the horizon. The weather has been unpredictable lately, with strange and sudden waves of dark clouds and high winds from the north that bring no rain – just an unsettling, clammy coldness to the skin. Silent lightning has been observed in the Northern Mountains, late at night; when the wind shifts just so, one can almost hear a song, sung far and away. It seems to be made with deep, low hisses and the banging and clanging of metal on metal.

It is not a song that makes one feel at ease.

UNWANTED GUESTS, TERRIBLE BATTLE

In spite of the dire portents, the wedding goes according to schedule, with the governor of Xinjiang and many of his ministers visiting for the joyous occasion, along with a few policemen and the entire garrison of soldiers. The weather is beautiful, the people are happy, and no one starts any fights or quarrels – even when the drinking, dancing, and singing starts. Surely no one could have asked for a better day to put these two souls together in matrimony!

Knowledge of the PCs' styles, techniques, and unusual abilities is the first step in designing appropriate challenges. If possible, the GM might play out a test round using the PCs' stats and his major NPCs.

At some point during the height of the celebration, when just about everyone is swept up in joy, each of the heroes hears a voice whispered in his ear: “Be ready,” it says, “for the ancient darkness is coming.” Those who know the martial arts master recognize his voice, and those who do not still find it to be very compelling. This warning gives them a chance to prepare themselves or try and warn others.

Then the promised darkness comes. Clouds cover the late-day sky, and a horrible, swift, and cold wind comes. This time, however, a shadow moves along with the wind, swiftly approaching the village from the north and blocking the view of the sun, sky, and mountains. Along with the wind comes that horrible, clanging song, only half-heard before, but now getting louder and louder as it approaches.

It is a song sung in the language of the ancient people who once lived here: “*We’re coming down – we’re coming down for you.*”

At first, people think it’s raining. Those on the northern edge of the crowd feel their skin begin to crawl. They realize that the shadow was a massive cloud of tiny ballooning spiders, now slathering themselves upon villagers who didn’t think to get to cover. Those poor souls quickly fall, covered in crawling, dark purple cloudlets that swiftly envelop them in silken webs and bite them into a poisoned stupor.

They are the lucky ones. Some of those who yet stand have no time to scream or run before being set upon by the following swarm of hideously large and swift spiders – the size of large dogs – that quickly bite such poor souls before wrapping them in webs.

Following that is a horde of perhaps 20 mounted soldiers the likes of which no sane eyes have seen for ages. Mounted on swift-moving, giant, bloated, dark-purple spiders are men who seem the worst parts of man and arachnid: black- and purple-scabbed faces boiling with asymmetrical arrangements of black eyes, uneven numbers of multiple arms swinging cruel swords and brandishing small shields, interlinking plates of armor that grow right out of their diseased skin, and large and distended backsides that spew webbing behind them.

Any who stand in the way of these Spider Men are cut down and trampled under. The soldiers and policemen do their best to counterattack and protect the governor, but it is soon clear that this enemy has them outnumbered and overwhelmed. Retreat is the only sane option, and the captain soon calls it, ordering his men to fall back to the governor’s mansion.

This battle may seem hopeless, but the GM should take care not to seriously injure or kill any heroes at this point. Let NPCs the heroes know or have befriended die instead, taking the serious wounds on their behalf. Alternatively, one or more heroes might be knocked down or dazed by hurried opponents, instead of killed.

How many adversaries they get to fight depends on what they choose to do. They will have twice the amount of enemies to fend off if they seek to protect the wedding party – especially the groom – than if they try to protect ordinary people, or if they just throw themselves into the fight to seek out the boss. (Oddly, no one seems to be in charge.)

It soon becomes obvious that the spiders are staying clear of the many fires that burn, and indeed wilt and flee when threatened with fire or any technique or power that generates or mimics fire. None of the enemy is approaching the shrine of the Buddha, which makes it the only truly safe place to herd survivors into. Unfortunately, the priest who maintains it will allow no one within it to attack those outside: Even in the face of a slaughter this is still a place of peace.

The governor’s mansion isn’t much of a barrier to the horde, which leaps through the windows and smashes its way from room to room. Any heroes there are hard-pressed to keep on top of the situation when the walls and ceiling are so easily broken through by mounted assailants.

At the worst moment of the battle the martial-arts master appears from nowhere. He begins to whittle the odds down, one seemingly effortless strike at a time. Not long after, the Spider Men turn about and head back the way they came, trailing the web-wrapped bodies of villagers behind them as they go.

A clutch of enemies brings up the rear, holding one body in particular aloft in victory. It is the son of the Governor of Urumqi – screaming for help as he’s wrapped in silk, and spirited away faster than the eye can track.

As soon as the last spider-rider vanishes, the clouds part, the wind dies down, and the sun comes back again – if only to shine upon the dying, the wounded, and the grieving.

WISE WORDS, GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

Of course, any surviving authority figures are outraged and demand answers. In reply, the master will grab a stick and, with bold, unafraid strokes, write the word “Leng” in the dust at his feet. None dare put a hand on him for sacrilege, though, for he begins to tell the story of the One Who Wears No Mask, the horror they released in the name of the Demon King of All Spiders, and the small group of humble men that brought the judgment of Heaven upon him. (This is a good time to share the introductory story with the players.)

When he concludes the tale with, “One must know both when to be as inflexible as iron, and when to bend like a reed in the wind,” it is as though he is speaking directly to all the heroes, no matter where they may be standing.

“I tell you now that the ancient darkness has returned,” he continues, pointing to the Northern Mountains, still crackling with silent lightning: “It is time, once again, to remind these spirits that the Mandate of Heaven weighs heavily upon them. The wheel of ages has not turned around to the time when they are allowed to return, and so they have clearly lost their way. Someone must teach them humility.”

He then points to each adventurer in turn: “The spirits have chosen you for this task. It is why you were brought here, today. It is why I have waited here all these seasons. I do not envy you this path, but take heart in the fact that you are not the first to have walked it. Nor will you be the last.”

Campaign idea: The heroes are enchanted as defenders of the land – each person saved directly by the heroes bestows another temporary Hit Point. This lets them take unreal levels of damage . . . but only so long as they keep protecting people.

Stations Along the Way: Mountains

The atmosphere of the first leg of the journey is one of a steadily slowing march into the heart of unknown darkness. The closer they get to the Northern Mountains, the deadlier and stranger the landscape becomes. The PCs are going “off the map” here, and the GM should stress how much the incursion of Leng’s armies has warped the landscape.

Enemies along the way to the mountains include wild animals, bandits and murderers, strange creatures and dark monsters stirred out of their holes by the resurgence of Leng, rival martial artists, and unkind spirits who are

pleased at the current state of things. Unkind spirits, if treated properly, may leave the characters alone – or not.

Possible allies include soldiers, police, other wandering martial artists, and bandits who feel threatened by the new evil. They may also encounter kind spirits upset by the incursion of the plateau. Kind spirits treated properly usually offer advice, healing, or a small gift before vanishing. Those treated improperly may leave in a huff or impart some magical humiliation upon the rude that last until they make amends.

“But you must hurry. The Demon King of All Spiders favors the dark of the moon for his rituals. The groom of this wedding was taken for a reason, and no doubt it will be put into motion on that night, perhaps twenty days from now. There is truly no time to lose.”

What must we do?

“You must go to the plateau beyond those mountains, where the spirits of the earth confined it long, long ago. You must seek an audience with the One Who Wears No Mask, and call him to rightness once more. Failing that, you must convince the Demon King of All Spiders, who no mortal man may fight and survive.”

Rightness?

“He has lost his way. This is not the time for him to return. Nor is this the action of a being in balance with the Mandate of Heaven. This is the action of an insane monster, or perhaps a creature of duty whose master has abandoned rightness, but cannot disobey. You must discover which he is.”

What can we do against *that*?

“What does the rain do against the mighty stone, but wear it away slowly, one drop at a time? What does the Buddha do against the world, but call it to rightness, one word at a time? You will find the answer as you seek the answer, but only if you follow the right path.”

Can the master come with us?

“My place is here, now. If they attacked once, they may attack again, and I must see to it that they go no further than this place. It is my path to remain here. It is yours to go forward.”

What might happen to the groom?

“With luck, and the mercy of the Buddha, we will never know.”

How can we be victorious against a demon king?

“Consider the spider. Consider it well.”

The characters have only this night to prepare, and will receive whatever they need. Blessings from the priests of the

shrine are also available, unless the adventurers fought within it during the battle. Any authority figures yet remaining begrudgingly give them whatever weapons they may ask for.

If the heroes seek additional answers from the master about their quest, he may yet give them, though they will be in the form of riddles and counter-questions. The only direct advice he will give is “Consider the spider. Consider it well.”

If the characters need to be fortified with special weapons or magical items, they can be given them now, possibly by the master. But if the GM wants to make the quest a little more involved – or make the players feel like their characters have *earned* something – the master can instead give them instructions on where to find the special items. Perhaps they lie in a ruined, long-lost temple between Urumqi and the mountains? Or maybe a spirit holds them in safekeeping, and must be persuaded to let them go?

NORTH TO THE MOUNTAINS

The first leg of the journey should take the PCs 10 days total, but the way gets harder as they go further in. They can ride horses for five days before the path becomes impassable to hoofed creatures; they wouldn’t be able to take their horses through the mountain peaks, anyway.

For three of those five days on horseback, the heroes can travel on the well-trod paths the soldiers of Xinjiang follow through the scrub and rolling hills, with the occasional small forest to go through or around. There seem to be a lot of spiderwebs in these forests – large webs cover entire trees, with unsettlingly large black-and-purple spiders scuttling to and fro. They may encounter gangs of bandits or an escaped villain at this point, along with a storm or two of ballooning spiderlings, swarms of mid-sized spiders, and small groups of Spider Men left behind to throw off pursuers. See also *Stations Along the Way: Mountains*, above.

Tracking the army isn’t difficult, as they leave a gruesome mess behind. Drained bodies wrapped in webs are left by the side of road – sometimes rudely webbed to rocks or trees, sometimes tossed aside like trash. Care must be taken while burying or cremating these bodies, as they are loaded with eggs on the verge of hatching.

When in doubt, add a fruit cart.

On the third day, the horse-trod path goes into the deep, ancient forest that borders the mountains. It's clear the spider army went back this way, judging not only from tracks and bodies left at the forest's edge but also the jungle of active webs that covers entire trees along their route. There are no bird calls or animal sounds in the forest – only the quiet, hurried scuttling of large, unseen spiders.

The way becomes darker and more uncertain from there. At times, the clear way through threatens to be engulfed by waves of webs, and every so often, another huge cloud of ballooning spiderlings rushes toward them. Small groups of Spider Men and medium-sized swarms of mid-sized spiders lurk here, along with the occasional, truly gigantic specimen of spiderhood the size of a fully grown elephant.

On the fifth day, the forest gives way to deep, rocky ravines crawling with massive spiders and their victim-strewn webs, thin walkways overlooking sheer drops, and dark chasms that must be leaped, bridged over, or navigated around. Tying the horses here would be a death sentence for the poor animals, but they're spooked enough to run back the way they came. Given the high amount of spidery detritus that litters this area, tracking the army becomes more difficult, but not impossible.

Encounters from here include large swarms of mid-sized spiders, larger groups of Spider Men, and three or more gigantic spiders – which may choose to fight one another over the right to eat the heroes!

Every so often, the adventurers will get the feeling that their progress is being watched by something worse than anything they've yet encountered. However, no amount of waiting will produce the villain. (This is the One Who Wears No Mask, observing their progress from afar and laughing silently.)

THE CITY OF THE SPIDER MEN

After 10 days following the trail of the spider army, its destination becomes horribly clear.

A long, deep canyon leads up to the mountains. Its bottom and sides are completely covered by generations of spiderwebs. At the end of that canyon squats a massive carving of a horrific, corpulent spider, with many gaping caves and terraces above it.

Those who know their legends may recognize this as the entrance to the cursed city of the mountains, but getting through it may be a problem. The spider's many eyes are guard posts, with a considerable number of Spider Men posted at all times. If attacked, they raise the alarm and bring scores more

What the Spider Men Said

The bas-relief tunnel carvings of the Spider Men are in series of eights: eight pictures line the walls, with eight lines of script below each telling what is happening in the pictures. The script is untranslatable to humans, but fortunately the Spider Men of old believed in illustrations.

The first picture is of a craggy mountain range, with ancient men in primitive houses on the left side of it and nothing on the right. The second picture is of the same mountains, houses, and men, but now – on the right of the mountains – a creepy, ziggurat-like structure has appeared. The building has armored Spider Men, large spiders, and strange, somewhat bent men around it. A very large, ugly looking spider-thing squats atop the structure.

The third has the Spider Men and large spiders over on the left side, killing the men and taking what may be food and victims back over the mountains. The fourth has the Spider Men and large spiders continuing in this activity, and the spider-thing is producing an egg from which rises an androgynous human figure surrounded by a spidery outline. More large spiders rise from the feet and hands of the figure. The fifth has the devastation continuing on the left, with a man coupling with the androgynous human figure, producing more Spider Men to join in the invasion.

In the sixth picture, something has happened: a bolt of lightning comes from the sky on the right side of the picture, breaking the ground between the creepy structure and the mountains. Spider Men are trapped on the left side, and raise their hands in what appears to be panic and lamentation. In the seventh, nothing is on the right side, the primitive men are rebuilding their houses on the left, and the Spider Men are now in the mountain range, building a city within it. In the eighth, final picture, the Spider Men are mating with humans inside their city, producing somewhat bent Spider Men.

The PCs should see the obvious parallel between the village's ancient story and the Spider Men's history, though the details are in dispute. The extra details are mysteries they will have to ponder, for now.

enemies into the fray – waves of mid-sized spider swarms, charges of mounted Spider Men, and fusillades of well-placed arrows. If the heroes get through that, there's still the entirety of the city behind the spiders to consider!

While it might seem a satisfying thing to attack an entire army after days of picking off small groups at a time, wisdom and prudence suggest a different approach. Careful observation reveals that the canyon's spiderwebs cover more caves in the sides, which may lead to ways around the enemy. The adventurers could slip into the edges of the lower city without being seen by the Spider Men guards up top.

The tunnels beneath the city proper are ancient, crumbling things that loosely mirror the spiderweb-like shape of the busy city above. This is where the large spiders are bred and boarded, which means that the heroes will have to move carefully to avoid being swamped by a horde of large, hungry creatures. Fortunately, they seem to be more concentrated toward the entrance and the center, which means once the party gets past the front – and if they stick to the edges – they should avoid making too much of a ruckus sneaking through. Even if they do, the battle might not be heard by any but the occasional patrol, who investigate the strange noise instead of raising an immediate alarm.

A dimmer switch can be a good way to set the mood as this adventure progresses. The darkness is coming . . .

Stations along the Way: Leng

The narrative now, after fighting through the forest and the undercity, is one of dreamy, exotic danger hampered by time running out.

The Plateau of Leng is crawling with peril – often quite literally – but it's also rife with strangely beautiful things, however decayed. The seemingly endless landscape is littered with crumbling, lost civilizations and surreal sights (horizontal rockslides, gigantic skeletons turned into cities, statues that speak riddles in the wind). The adventurers should get the sense that there are countless ancient mysteries to unravel, here.

However, the moon wanes more and more each night, and the heroes feel a definite sense that if they aren't fast enough, they may not reach their destination in time. That said, time isn't always a meaningful thing in Leng: No matter how fast they go, or how slow they think they're going, or what disasters befall them, the characters *will* arrive at the Dread Monastery on the day before the dark of the

moon, giving them a full day to deal with the One Who Wears No Mask and his dread master. That will be enough time to either win or lose.

Enemies along the way to the Dread Monastery include giant spiders, patrols of true Spider Men, Leng Men, wild animals, savage tribes of human nomads, and bandits and murderers.

The only allies they will find are humans who live in partially hidden settlements, and they won't leave them. They will provide food, water, directions, and advice to those who aid them, but that's as far as their charity extends.

The nature spirits the PCs may have dealt with in the past are not to be found here. Indeed, there is a horrid and grey spiritual sterility to this land, as if its power and personality had been sucked out of it aeons ago, leaving only dust, wind, and stone. This also means that characters who rely on meditation or communion with the land to regain power may have difficulty here.

The wide and tall thoroughfares of the tunnels meet others in large junction chambers, and are dimly lit by strange, phosphorescent gems set in the ceiling. Each junction chamber is filled with crumbling carvings, all in the strange language of the Spider Men of Leng: a feathery, cursive hand with words like webs. There is no way for the characters to have any hope of translating the carvings, but the intact pictures above them tell an interesting story (see *What the Spider Man Said*, p. 28).

If the characters move quickly and carefully, they should get through the undercity within a day. They are most likely to encounter: giant spiders in their lairs; small groups of slightly smaller spiders; small groups of Spider Men herding even smaller spiders; and the occasional undercity patrol.

As they get closer to the other side of the mountains, the adventurers become aware of three things: The air that rushes through the undercity is becoming steadily drier, spiced with odd and unfamiliar smells. There is a strange, otherworldly feel to their surroundings, as if they were leaving behind the world they knew for another, much less understandable location. The weird feeling of being watched they had before has increased at least two-fold.

THE PLATEAU OF LENG

Leaving the city of the Spider Men is a lot easier than getting into it. The main entrances on the other side are not guarded by hordes of Spider Men, and the bottom entrances are hardly watched at all. The heroes can probably slip out of the tunnels from the undercity with only a token encounter with a large spider or two.

If they take the time to examine the creatures' webbed lairs, they discover that the skeletal structures of some of their more recent victims are *wrong*. These short humans have larger skulls

with smaller eye-sockets and small horns above the hairline, a permanent stoop to the spine, and longer fingers and toes. Some of the fresher ones are still semi-clothed, and they wear light, shiny fabrics with large turbans, all of which are rather dusty.

The world on this side of the mountains is a flat, dry tableland that stretches on until a brown, dusty haze obscures the view. Off in the distance, they can just make out the shapes of ancient, crumbling ruins and possibly something even larger, and more threatening further away, turned into vague, unwholesome suggestion by the dust.

The back side of the mountain has yet another giant spider carved into it, but much more fancy and grandiose. Numerous impressive onyx statues of Spider Men lining the way into the city, but these Spider Men are not the scraggling, malformed things the characters have encountered thus far. They are well-formed beings, with a symmetrical arrangement of multiple eyes; six arms and two legs; large, spidery backsides; and proud, whole armor growing from their skin. They carry strange swords and shields, the likes of which the characters have never seen before.

The path of the spider army is still clear: The PCs must leave the vale of onyx statues and begin their trek to the Dread Monastery. By day they will walk in the sweltering heat and dust of the plateau, yet see no sun in the sky. At night their path is lit by the ever-waning light of a moon that seems much larger than it should be. Every so often at night, they may think they see sailing ships flying from the earth to the moon.

The plateau is a harsh and unforgiving land. Giant spiders are everywhere – scuttling behind wind-smoothed boulders and jagged outcroppings of onyx, lurking in webbed pits, and hidden in the ruins. Slithering, wet monsters jealously guard some of the rare oases and leave the noxious remains of their prey in piles by the water.

Wandering warrior-monks might be called upon to settle disputes in foreign towns when the local magistrate needs assistance. With discipline comes wisdom . . .

There are also deadly dust storms – thankfully infrequent – that seem to have a mind of their own, quickly stripping the skin off an unprotected victim in minutes.

Human habitations are dusty but colorful tent cities clustered around crumbling, ancient ruins, most of which were built around oases. Their inhabitants – whose speech is understandable to the characters – won't let anyone enter unless they can prove they're not Leng Men (see *The Men of Leng*, boxed text). They won't let outsiders stay for more than a day unless they have something to buy or sell in their sparse, pathetic markets.

These nameless people are moral and unbroken, but illiterate and ignorant of their history. They do not speak of the past and have destroyed all carved records of it from the broken cities they cluster around. Likewise, they know many gods but worship none of them for fear of attracting their attention; they have gone so far as to wrap their statues up, or bury them, so that none may look upon them.

Ever in the distance, growing slightly closer and slightly more distinct with each new day's journey, is the Dread Monastery, just beyond the cloud on the horizon. The humans' call it "Sarkosa" and will not speak more of it, except to say that even Leng Men are afraid to go there. As they see it, the Spider Men come from Sarkosa, as does their evil, faceless master and his god, and that is all they need to know.

And as they get closer, the feeling of being watched increases.

There are three things that will happen to the PCs before they reach the Dread Monastery. While their order should remain sequential, the days that pass between them are up to the GM.

The Wrecked Ship

A few days out from the city of the Spider Men, the heroes come across the broken wreck of a sailing ship, its sails fluttering in the dusty wind. How it could have gotten here is unknown, but the sight of a number of Leng Men creeping away from it – chortling evilly and lugging plundered treasures – may give them cause to investigate. Inside the splintered wreck are treasure chests filled with strange coins, bolts of iridescent cloth, and exotic hand weapons, along with some food and water.

They also find the remains of the crew – cruelly butchered and gruesomely, if artfully, displayed about the ship. Those who appear to have died in the wreck were left alone; those who survived were tortured, killed, and used as toys. The PCs may wish to chase the Leng Men and punish them for their wanton cruelty, but they will be long gone by the time that they do.

They will have to take the recovered treasure as consolation; it will be useful in trading with the less sadistic natives of this land.

The Buffet

On a day when the heroes are nearly out of food and water, they hike over a small rising to find a table filled with what appears to be appetizing food and drink. At the table, sitting in

The Men of Leng

The horned and bent men of the plateau are a weird hybrid of human and strange, otherworldly entities, thankfully long gone. They are curve-spined and small-eyed, with small horns, serrated teeth, and patches of curly hair all over their bodies. They also have very long fingers, which have purple-red, jagged fingernails they take pride in making as hideous as possible. They wear turbans to hide the horns from the unwary, but their eyes, fetid breath, and fingernails often give them away.

These twisted beings have no welcome anywhere, given their penchant for sadistic cruelty, slavery, and anthropophagy. They serve things even more hideous than they, both to have opportunities to slake their unnatural desires and to have someone to hide behind when vengeance comes to call. That said, they are careful in their dealings with the One Who Wears No Mask, as his favors often come at a dangerous price.

The heroes could encounter these creatures on many occasions as they travel to the Dread Monastery. They usually want to try and sell them strange objects or mewling, weak slaves, and offer the goods for creepy prices, like "your unborn child, before he is named"; "your liver, when no longer you need it"; and "the face of the lover you no longer wish to see." They may also be out searching for slaves and try to take the adventurers, or those near them, with weird bladed weapons and dark, painful magic.

chairs, are a number of disguised Leng Men, who regard the characters as one might regard a long-awaited customer. They indicate that they will allow the characters to eat and drink to their heart's content, but only after they agree to their creepy, preordained prices.

Then the heroes realize what the food is made out of . . .

As soon as the PCs make it clear they won't pay, or threaten violence for this affront, the Leng Men whisk away the table and chairs as though they were a single tablecloth, fold them up, and try to walk away, chortling. They could still be attacked and killed, of course, but no amount of trying on the heroes' part will get the tablecloth to work. If they attack and defeat the Leng Men, they do find interesting and useful things on their persons: copper necklaces with carved-onyx spider pendants. Holding these aloft causes anything less than a truly giant spider to back away, and makes the true Spider Men go from trying to kill them on sight to offering to take them to the Dread Monastery.

The Raid of the Spider Men

When the adventurers are staying over at one of the human habitations, the city comes under attack by a raiding party of 30 true Spider Men astride large spiders. The party hears their battle song ("*We're coming down – we're coming down for you.*"), only now they can actually understand it. Then a wave of smaller, dog-size spiders runs ahead to disorient the city's defenders and cause panic. Hopefully, the PCs will recognize the tactic from the attack on Urumqi, and brace themselves for what comes after.

Any campaign with a martial-arts master who trains people needs to resolve one question: Why isn't the master out having adventures of his own?

Your Hosts for the Evening

The heroes meet these beings at the Dread Monastery.

The One Who Wears No Mask

The creepy master of the Dread Monastery is tall and imposing, almost-entirely wrapped in long, dusty yellow robes that drag some distance behind him when he walks. His namesake is his smooth, white face, which does not move when he speaks, and does not change its expression from one of sardonic bemusement. His eyes are dark, laughing things one does not wish to stare into for long.

To fight him is pure folly, for not only is The One Who Wears No Mask a deadly fighter and formidable sorcerer, but he *is* Sarkosa, itself. He can walk on its walls and ceilings, hear – though, interestingly, not *see* – all that goes on within its walls, and appear anywhere within it, even in several places at once. He cannot be killed so long as the Dread Monastery still stands; beaten down and destroyed, he walks out of a nearby wall, fully ready to fight anew.

Fortunately, for all his power, he cannot leave the confines of himself. He can only observe – and not directly affect – what takes place outside Sarkosa's onyx walls. This is why he serves the Demon King of All Spiders, so as to have a mobile army of Spider Men to do his bidding.



She Who Clicks Her Fangs and Feet Together

The child of the Demon King of All Spiders is short, squat, pale, and androgynous – but for her long black hair and feminine robes of white silk, she could almost be mistaken for a male dwarf. Her fat face is devoid of expression, except when she's dotting on her helpless groom; the look on it then is truly hideous.

She is a demigod, with all that entails. Hers is the dominion of spiders: She can weave thick, entangling webs from any spot of bare skin, change back and forth from her human form to that of a spider – tiny or gigantic – and generate hundreds of spiderlings, creating a cloud of them equal to the one that ravaged Urumqi.

Although she is powerful, she is still young and naive. She can be fooled – distracted with tales of far-away places that will one day be hers, or shiny trinkets she will one day own in abundance. She could also be knocked unconscious with a powerful blow while distracted. Killing her would bring angry attentions, though.

The Monks

The chained, music-making creatures that surround the throne are ghosts in filthy robes. They do not speak, and if they are fought or manhandled, they collapse into rags for a time, until their master revives them. He likes the music they make.

The heroes should have advanced enough by this point that the GM doesn't have to pull punches or throw NPCs in front of them. They may succeed in beating the Spider Men down, or back. They may also use the copper-and-onyx necklaces they got from the Leng Men and win a cessation of hostilities as well as a guided tour to the Dread Monastery. Failure at this point should be costly but would also underscore the need to confront their true enemy and complete their mission.

THE DREAD MONASTERY

At last, the focus of the journey is in sight. A final dust cloud lifts, and beetling across the landscape is a massive, step pyramid seemingly carved from living onyx. It has many windows and doors on its terraces, and they all shine with a bilious, sickly green light. Hideous and unfamiliar music wafts on the winds, accompanied by what may be cries of pleasure or pleas for mercy – perhaps both.

The feeling of being watched is now at its strongest, as if the ziggurat was a massive, alien eye. Those who look in the air above it have the feeling there is something else there, too: something large and unseen, hanging in space, waiting.

However, the heroes get to the Dread Monastery, two things are definite: They arrive the day before the dark of the moon, and they are allowed to enter freely and without hindrance from the masses of Spider Man guards and their accompanying giant spiders. The guards quickly part to let them pass at their approach, and do not answer any violent acts with violence. Their calm passivity in the face of the heroes' rage and threats would be downright unnerving.

The main entrance leads to a short but wide hallway, which leads in turn to the massive central chamber, which stretches all the way to the roof. In the center, surrounded by tall braziers burning with evil green fires, is a jagged onyx throne. Around the throne are chained, faceless "monks" dressed in filthy robes. They shake crotala and play strange, twisted horns whose notes sound like pleading or moaning human voices.

On that throne, draped in massive layers of dusty, yellow robes, is the One Who Wears No Mask.

He bids the adventurers welcome, by name, and congratulates them on their long journey. He also informs them that they have been expected; their arrival was foretold by his master, The Demon King of All Spiders, who looks forward to meeting with them tomorrow morning, before the ceremony.

A master might choose not to adventure because of a physical ailment (blindness, lame limb, etc.). Alternatively, he might decide to protect the area he resides in – that town is a safe haven!

Considered Configurations

This adventure has been presented in generic terms in order to provide maximum flexibility for GMs. Some notes on the special adversaries, unique to this campaign, and their general capabilities are provided below, in order of their appearance.

Spiderling Cloud

A cubic yard of ballooning spiderlings can wrap up a human-sized victim in a few seconds and can bite the average human into a poisoned stupor so he can't flee or fight back. They aren't easy to damage directly, but they are highly susceptible to fire: A torch lights the mass up in seconds.

Large Spiders

The dog-sized spiders run twice as fast as a human over short distances and pounce high. Their bite will put the average human into a poisoned stupor, whereupon they wrap him up to drag off, suck dry, and lay eggs in. Their exoskeleton provides light armor. They are highly susceptible to fire.

Degenerate Spider Men

They have a varying number of advantages: 1d+2 eyes and 1d+2 functional arms, along with 1.5 times the damage capacity of a normal human. They can project webs that are only half as strong as a large spider's. Their poisonous bite is only half as strong as a large spider's, too. Their carapace has the equivalent of medium armor without the encumbrance penalties. They are moderately susceptible to fire. They're of low intelligence, given their inbreeding, and have no skill with magic.

Huge Spiders

The horse-sized spiders the Spider Men ride into battle can run slightly faster than a horse, trot for considerable distances, and pounce very high. Their bite will kill the average human, whereupon they wrap him up to drag off, suck dry, and lay eggs in. Their exoskeleton provides medium armor. They are moderately susceptible to fire.

Gigantic Spiders

Elephant-sized spiders can rush forward in short, quick bursts, but they are too large to outrun a human. Their webbing is as strong as steel, and their poison will liquefy the insides of the average human with one bite. Their exoskeleton provides heavy armor, though with encumbrance penalties. They are no more susceptible to fire than the average being.

Leng Men

Slightly weaker than the average human, these entities make up for this with a propensity for bladed sneak attacks and dark, painful magic. Once they have someone helpless they know several ways to keep them in horrible agony, well after they should be dead.

True Spider Men

These well-bred children of humans and the children of the Demon King of All Spiders have eight eyes, six arms, and twice the damage capacity of the average human. They have the ability to generate strong spiderwebs, and a very poisonous bite. They also have the equivalent of heavy armor with no encumbrance penalties. They are of average intelligence, but as they are as inept at magic as their degenerate cousins. They aren't worried about fire at all.

The One Who Wears No Mask, and She Who Clicks Her Fangs and Feet Together

They are described on p. 31, and stats for either aren't really important. The master of Sarkosa can be defeated, but not killed, and while he can make short work of anyone who fights him, he can be distracted by several opponents at once. Although the princess is mortal, her toughness is dependent on how difficult the GM wants to make a fight with her.

So long as they are gracious enough to accept his hospitality they are to be treated as honored guests, as they know the groom from his previous life.

The groom? Oh yes, he is still to be married. But he has been promised to the daughter of the Demon King of All Spiders – She Who Clicks Her Fangs and Feet Together. Even now they are enjoying each other's company, elsewhere in the Monastery. The PCs should drop by their chamber and pay their respects, when they get a chance.

Food, drink, and a room for the night is theirs for the asking, and the adventurers are invited to explore the Dread Monastery

to their hearts' content. Black stairs lead to the many different levels, which are labyrinthine, but it's difficult to get lost in them – every eight turns returns them either to a balcony overlooking the central chamber, or to the ground floor of the central chamber itself, even if they were on a different floor.

The polished, smooth onyx walls of the central chamber are filled with carved octets like what the heroes encountered back in the undercity of the Spider Men. But unlike before, where it took eight whole panels to explain what took place, there are only two needed: one to tell the story of when Leng took hold of someplace, and one when it left to wander once again.

Campaign idea: The heroes each have been born with the "soul of a cat" – they can each die nine times before leaving the mortal coil. How does this affect their outlook or adventuring?

The One Who Wears No Mask is happy to direct the characters to the pair that speak of Earth, and also pleased to point that no thunderbolt marks Leng's departure. The separation was not an act of furious and insulted gods, as told in the story. It was the simple moving of cosmic forces far beyond the heroes' understanding.

The PCs can no longer threaten that they have the Mandate of Heaven on their side – that clearly means nothing on this side of the Northern Mountains.

If the heroes find the groom, they discover he is being held in the well-lit but somber bridal chamber of the Princess, who is dotting upon her "beloved." The poor fellow is insensate with shock – wrapped up in a web next to the one his intended reclines in as she feeds him spoonful after spoonful of squirming spiderlings from her long, black hair. Neither of them is in the mood for long conversation with others.

The walls of the bridal chamber are carved with illustrations of the many ways that a spidery demigod and its human mate might become more intimate with one another. None of them seem to end well for the human, but they make it clear that the true Spider Men are the result of such a union. This, then, is how the marauding armies are generated.

The One Who Wears No Mask is a rather gregarious host. Over dinner, he's happy to hear the heroes talk about his place in the larger, moral scheme of things, and then explain to them that their rules and laws have no meaning here in Leng. He only answers to those gods he has pledged fealty to, which is the Demon King of All Spiders, at this time; their "Mandate of Heaven" doesn't factor into it.

He's also happy to explain why the groom has been brought here, beyond any issues of army building. Leng was once a thriving, if harsh, land – one filled with life and strange beauty. But long stretches away from "suitable" worlds left the Spider Men with nothing to devour but what they found here, and so they devoured too much.

Now that they are back to Earth, which provided some of their best hunting grounds, they do not wish to leave it again. This is true reason the One Who Wears No Mask has arranged for this marriage between a man of Earth and the daughter of the Demon King of All Spiders. The spell to be worked at the ceremony tomorrow will marry not only the two people, but also the two lands.

They shall be conjoined forever more, giving the One Who Wears No Mask an eternal gateway to Earth.

Outside of obviously suicidal maneuvers, such as trying to kill the One Who Wears No Mask, the characters have a few choices open to them.

Escape

The PCs may decide they're in over their heads – the groom is doomed, and their moral authority evaporated as soon as they entered Leng. They could return home and warn those they left behind of the dangers they now face, and create some kind of deterrent against the Spider Man hordes and their god. They would lose face for the loss of the groom, but perhaps it cannot be helped. Perhaps fleeing is what the ancient story meant by knowing "when to bend like a reed in the wind"?

Rescue the Groom

If the adventurers can somehow distract the Princess, they could sneak the groom away; they might just get outside the Dread Monastery before their trickery's discovered. They could also attack and subdue the princess – no mean feat, but possible if they strike swift and well. However, if they kill the princess, her horrid, dying shriek brings the One Who Wears No Mask and all Spider Men to her chambers instantly. The resulting battle will not go well for the PCs.

Kill the Groom

This is a harsh decision, but it will stop the ceremony from going forward, and thereby stop the melding of Leng and Earth. Unless one of the heroes was to be married, none of them can take the groom's place in the spell, leaving their hosts unable to improvise. There will be little the evil beings can do except kill the adventurers for this "ungrateful" act.

Deal With the Demon King

The more honorable course is still open to them. Hopefully everything they've seen, experienced, and considered in the long, deadly trek from Urumqi to here have taught them something, and that's to learn to bend like the reed. At any rate, a decent meal, the gathering of intelligence, and a good night's sleep could do them wonders with their morning audience.

IN THE WEB OF THE DEMON KING

Unless the heroes choose another option, they are roused in the morning, given breakfast, and then led the twisting, turning way to a great, black hole in the wall that none of their wanderings would have led them to before now. The One Who Wears No Mask indicates that this is where they need to go, and wishes them prudence, eloquence, and luck. But something about his tone indicates that he does not want nor expect them to return.

In the space beyond the hole is a sheer cliff that stretches on forever; lying under a green sky dotted with black, poisonous stars. Beyond the cliff's edge is a web that stretches unto infinity. It is littered with the delicately arranged bodies of thousands of creatures: some clearly human, some strange and inhuman, and some so abstract and unearthly that pondering what bizarre world could have spawned them can only cause insanity.

Stepping onto the web is clearly a bad idea, but finding a way to set one of its thick strands vibrating attracts the attentions of the Demon King, who very quickly scuttles over to the heroes. He appears as many things at once: a truly gigantic spider created from black, lacquered iron and violet glass; an Emperor in ancient, hoary garments, whose flowing beard is a web filled with dead flies, and who has eight pointed feet showing under the hem of his robe; a purple-black, massive cloud of spiderlings that burns with eight huge, black eyes; the feeling of being stuck in place as something truly horrible comes closer – unable to even move your mouth to scream.

*For a different-flavored campaign, check out **Martial Arts: Gladiators**. Scrub the Romans; keep the fighting!*

Survival at this point – if not success – is entirely based on what the PCs say, offer, or promise. No roll of the dice or mega-power is going to get them victory. If they even try to fight, they will be pounced on and devoured before they realize they're dead.

“Consider the spider,” the master advised, and hopefully the heroes have. The Demon King of All Spiders *is* a spider: a cosmic predator, patient and still, who makes careful trap, waits for prey to enter it, and then pounces on it with swift and certain hunger. The creation of the trap, the waiting for its fulfillment, the devouring that follows, and the artful arrangement of the victims' remains are all rituals to be followed, and they are his source of purpose and strength. These are qualities that could be used against him.

Plus, the heroes may have realized that just because the Mandate of Heaven means nothing in Leng does not make it meaningless on Earth. In fact, it may be their best weapon.

A Spider Is Patient

They may be able to convince the Demon King that the wheel of ages has not turned enough for him to have returned, and that he will face great resistance on their side of the mountains. He can come back later, of course. And what is time to such as he?

A Spider Is Careful

If the group can convince the Demon King that his servant has overstepped his bounds with this plan, and that the powers that be on their side will be unhappy at this dark sorcery, he may agree to not let the marriage go forth. He may even withdraw Leng from the Earth. However, he might not agree to let the groom go, or even give the heroes time to escape.

A Spider Will Take the Most for the Least Effort

The heroes can offer something “better” than the groom, such as a treasure they may have found, or a secret that will help the Demon King. They may also be able to offer up one of their own as an exchange for the groom, but that may not dislodge Leng from the Earth unless the would-be replacement directly stipulates it.

The Outcome

No matter what agreement the adventurers and the Demon King of All Spiders come to, it must be carefully phrased and fully agreed upon. The PCs may be able to trick the Demon King, but he will see any loophole and exploit it ruthlessly. Also, if they don't stipulate they he must let them leave his domain alive, he'll pounce right on at least one of them as soon as the agreement's done.

With the deal struck, the PCs may leave and claim what they can. Hopefully they can just take the groom and go, preferably with all due haste. But whether the One Who Wears No Mask lets them pass without incident, or they have to fight their way through his entire army, depends on what they agreed with his master, and how angry their now-cheated host is. (It also depends on whether the GM thinks they got out of the web too easily, or the players seem a little let down by a lack of confrontation.)

That said, coming back from the Plateau of Leng should be a much easier thing than the trip there. If they acquired the onyx spider pendants, they can force the true Spider Men to give the heroes a very wide berth and send the degenerate ones running for cover.

However easily they get back, the result will be the same. As soon as they enter the city of the Spider Men, they hear a strange whistling noise behind them, as if something large was flying away in the wind. When they turn to look back where they came from, they see only the lands on the other side of the Northern Mountains – canyons and ravines, and beyond it beautiful, old forests.

The feeling of being observed by the One Who Wears No Mask is totally gone.

AN ENDING . . . AND A BEGINNING

If they return with the groom alive and well, the rewards and praise are nearly endless. If they return without the groom, they will be castigated for failure by the authorities, but the master will understand. Whether they return with the groom or without him, they will have earned his respect for all time, and he will gladly teach them whatever secrets he has left to impart so long as they promise to behave honorably. Displeasing him in this regard would be very foolish indeed.

Following up this campaign may be difficult. Now the characters have stood down a Demon King, what else could be a challenge, except for other Demon Kings? Perhaps they can become masters themselves, training students in their ways. Or perhaps they can use their increased power to right truly titanic wrongs, or rout entire armies or enemy nations.

They must be even more careful than before, though. Now that they have been where they have been, and done what they have done, the Mandate of Heaven will weigh down upon their shoulders, heavier than ever. A lapse of judgment or a poor decision will have truly epic consequences, now, and they will have to consider their actions with extreme care.

Then there is a further complication: Now that they have traveled beyond the realm of the Mandate of Heaven, and seen a world where it does not apply, how will this affect them? Will they wake in the night, caught in nightmares of the horrible but strangely beautiful lands they have visited? Will they hear the call of the One Who Wears No Mask, searching for them to exact his revenge? Will he call to them to join his evil cause?

Can they ever be happy and secure again, knowing that the nightmare realm of Leng is still out there, waiting to come back?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He's been the editor of *The Wraith Project* and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu*. He's also part of the *Echoes of Terror* anthology. Currently, he writes for Op-Ed News, and lives in Lansing, Michigan, with his wife and three cats.

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

NO BLOOD, NO GUTS, NO PROBLEM!

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

My son has a fascination with dressing up as Batman, Spider-Man, or Superman. Fortunately he's three years old, so this sort of thing is permissible; if my column 20 years from now begins with the same opening sentence, I may have problems.

Like every parent in the modern age, I turn to the old electronic babysitter to help raise my kid. We're one of those households that doesn't bother with cable or satellite television, but I'm able to use DVDs to inflict – err, *recreate* my childhood for my youngling. One of the 1970s kidvid experiences I'm able to share with him is the old *SuperFriends* show, featuring Superman, Batman-and-Robin (always treated as a unit), Wonder Woman, Aquaman, and the Wonder Twins, Zan and Jayna, with their space monkey, Gleek. This entire roll call is recited before each episode. It's also short enough to be memorized by a three-year-old, who can recite it whenever he wants. Over and over and over. And over.

AHEM . . . BACK ON TOPIC?

Where was I? Oh, right. *SuperFriends*. One quirk of this series – which I'd heard about but hadn't watched with the eyes of an adult – is that you have some of the strongest, most powerful superheroes in the world (and Aquaman), but none of them actually *fight* anyone. In the comics, Superman's usual means of defeating adversaries is by beating them up; the guy shoots *laser beams* from his eyes. In the comics, Batman attempts to inflict as much pain as possible without killing his enemies. Aquaman – heck, I'm sure he's tough, too.

But on the *SuperFriends*, the heroes Never. Hit. *Anyone*. Giant monster? Wrap it up in metal sheets. Energy creature? Destroy the device powering him. Escaped Kryptonian villains? Nets. On *SuperFriends*, there was no threat that couldn't be solved by cap-

turing, entangling, tricking, convincing, or otherwise outsmarting the bad guys. Similarly, smashing windows or lifting heavy objects offer the only viable demonstrations of strength; feats of fear or intimidation are demonstrated by having bad guys give up before a punch is thrown; and so on.

Obviously, this was some sort of conceptual edict that came from who-knows-where: "We don't want this show to be too violent, so let's make sure our unspeakably strong hero doesn't actually hitting anyone." But the upshot – besides making a three-year-old who's significantly less violent than when he watches the 1966 *Batman* movie – is a television show that is quite different than more modern counterparts.

Mulling over the *SuperFriends*, I couldn't help but think of another beloved visual treat – one that, fortunately, holds up better than 1970s kidvid. The Indiana Jones films are much more two-fisted than *SuperFriends* (they actually show people hitting and getting hit and stuff), but they're not violent, per se. They're relatively blood-free, in a way that more modern martial-arts films are not; heroes (and villains) are capable of martial-art-style maneuvers, but they don't result in broken bones protruding through flesh, loose teeth flying at the audience, and so on.

THE RPG CONNECTION

One trend in RPGs in recent years has been to encourage the players (and GM) to try to be more descriptive in their depictions of what their heroes and the baddies are actually doing. Thus instead of the GM saying, "The goon makes his Karate roll by 2; he hits you," he might say, "The goon leaps across the table and boots you in the head, sending a shower of blood flying out of your mouth and onto the outfits of your surprised friends."

Curiously, many martial-arts adventures revolve around the question of, "Whose butt do I kick?" GURPS Mysteries is invaluable for devising tales where the focus is on figuring out what's going on.

There are tables and charts to show exactly how much pain and injury you inflict with a successful attack – or how you can target people for specific damage. Eye gouges? Groin kicks? Ear biting? There's a modifier for that.

As a challenge, though, what if you tone it back? What if the goal for players (and their heroes) is to inflict as little damage as possible – or at least to de-emphasize the damage as much as possible? (In such a game, the villains may well return the favor.)

To rephrase, how can you make a character as interesting in their actions, without resorting to depictions of their damage-inflicting prowess?

The Varied World

For groups who like to keep their options open, consider making a setting where various realms allow for different levels of violence. For example, maybe the world consists of:

- The “real world,” where rules are as normal.
- The “hyper-real world,” where martial-arts acts of violence result in showers of blood, akin to the *Berserk* anime series.
- The “dream world,” where bloody violence is discouraged (or perhaps even impossible); this would give the GM – and players – a chance to tinker with some of the other rules and options here.

THE REALISTIC OPTION

As an intellectual challenge, here are a couple of examples to introduce this idea (temporarily) into a more-violent ongoing campaign.

- The heroes' mentor, master, or other respected elder believes the heroes have gotten too violent; he challenges them to live for one week (or day or month) without drawing blood. Unfortunately, this time frame coincides with a mission where they need to become involved! Can they use their abilities to knock foes unconscious, incapacitate them, or otherwise resolve the situation, without breaking their oath?

- The adventurers learn of a particularly virulent pathogen that bestows equal parts psychosis and preternatural physical prowess. If the heroes fight hard enough to draw blood, they'll likely become infected – and start fighting their former allies! The PCs better treat their adversaries gingerly, or else they'll become part of the problem!

THE NOT-SO-REALISTIC OPTION

For gamers who might want to make a more full-fledged go at trying to keep the action but lose the violence, here are some more ideas.

System-wide

- *Make unconsciousness easier.* In the real world, it's actually really difficult to knock someone out without the potential

for serious brain injury. In low-violence television and movies, though, it's usually trivially easy for heroes to get knocked out – often by an adversary lurking in the shadows. (This invariably results in the bad guys simply *leaving*, or else tying up the heroes in an “I'll be back to clean up the remains after lunch” deathtrap.) Similarly, for heroes with a martial bent, disabling mooks is much easier; one karate sweep can knock out as many foes as your foot can reach.

- *No bleeding!* If there are any bleeding rules, don't use them. No one bleeds, silly!

- *Intimidation works!* If someone makes a successful attack against something (other than a person) as a demonstration of power, it's more often than not going to cause people to surrender. In general, most attempts at intimidation work much better in the low-violence worlds.

Setting-wide

- *Reward pacifism.* As the GM, you can reward (or at least not punish) actions that serve to preserve a low-violence philosophy. If the hero gives a dramatic “you'd better surrender – or else!” speech, then the baddies better not use those seconds to pop off a few shots at him.

- *Avoid escalation at all costs.* There can be a temptation for GMs to “turn up the heat” by introducing deadlier, more violent threats. Resist this urge. Instead, figure out new ways to challenge the heroes that don't involve making more dangerous threats. For example, maybe the heroes find themselves surrounded by “foes” (similar to *Batman Begins* training sequence), but only one of them is the real mastermind – the rest are all brainwashed or blackmailed patsies forced to attack the heroes. This example is definitely more challenging than a one-on-one confrontation, but it doesn't involve raising the body count on either side.

- *The expedient is seldom heroic.* To go further, reward heroes who avoid escalating things themselves. For example, Mayfair's old *DC Heroes* game required heroes to consciously decide to enter “killing combat”; if they didn't, damage was assumed to be (mostly) nonlethal. If the heroes enter killing combat when their enemies hadn't, they lost their experience award for that adventure. If the bad guys enter killing combat but the heroes refrain from doing so, they got an *extra* experience bonus at the end. While it may be expedient to kill your enemies so they won't make a third-act reappearance, it's generally not heroic. Since many martial-arts settings revolve around ideas of honor and balance, excessive violence can be shown in the campaign as a path to corruption and evil.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over nine years; during that time he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son Sam!, who is a little force of nature entirely worthy of his exclamation mark.

ODDS AND ENDS

THE MARK OF THE MASTER

This campaign premise can provide a structured framework to get the heroes into the action – or bring the action closer to them. This premise assumes that everyone who has a certain level of martial arts (say, more than 25 points in styles and related techniques) can detect others who had achieved a similar level of mastery – they have acquired the “Mark of the Master.”

This ability is inversely proportional to the distance between the two fighters; the farther away they are, the better each is able to get a sense of where the other is. The direction of this detection is exact, but not the distance, nor the precise person. It is also *much* stronger if the martial artist is opposed in philosophy, morality, or action; an evil warrior 10 miles away who commits an atrocity will trigger the sense more than

someone 100 miles away who’s just cackling evilly but not doing anything.

From a gaming standpoint, the Mark of the Master provides an idea of “where to go next,” without giving them a direct detection device. It’s enough to get the PCs to the right area without obviating the need to do investigative work once they get there.

Although the broad idea can be used without needing dice rolls (“You sense you should meet someone to the north”), here is a system that lets you do so.

Make a Perception check, modified as follows:

More than 100 miles	No roll*
50-100 miles	-0
25-50 miles	-2
12.5-25 miles	-4
6-12.5 miles	-6
3-6 miles	-8
1.5-3 miles	-10
0.5-1.5 miles	-12
Less than 0.5 miles	-14
Thought opposed by detector	+5†
Minor deed opposed by detector	+10†
Major deed opposed by detector	+15†

* At more than 100 miles away, the master is aware that there are powerful beings everywhere; should he wish to pick a direction and start wandering, he may.

† Only one of these apply.

Remember that detection is a two-way street; it’s entirely likely that enemies who oppose the PCs ideals or actions may track *them* down with this!

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



Got a *Murphy's Rule* of your own? Send it to murphy@sjgames.com

Campaign Ideas

Random Thought Table (pp. 35-36) discusses the idea of “high action, low violence.” Here are two possibilities for incorporating that ethos into a game.

- *I can get us through this wall!* In low-violence shows, characters often get the chance to use powers in ways that don’t involve actually attacking anyone. For example, a martial artist might exhibit his lightning-fast reflexes by catching arrows fired at him, or use his diamond-hard fingertips to climb the walls of a building to the top floor and save someone in distress.

- *Release the inorganics!* In low-violence shows, opportunities frequently arise to show off those with martial prowess that don’t involve people beating up other *people*. One of the most common methods is to utilize (say) bunches of robots, golems, skeletons, or other entities that don’t bleed. These mooks are often ideal to unleash as many fists of rage as the heroes have handy.

APPENDIX Z

THE CRUMBLING GROUND

Need an interesting battle? Then test your mettle at the Crumbling Ground, a combat situation that provides unusual challenges and opportunities – especially for martial artists with jumping or other extraordinary movement techniques (and perhaps jumping-related *styles*; see p. 17).

Martial-arts tales abound where the fighting surface is disappearing while the combatants carry on. This scenario can represent crumbling boards in an old warehouse, an ice floe that's breaking apart, etc.

PREMISE

The Crumbling Ground is a venue that is defined in some “standard” way. It doesn't work well on a limitless fighting area (such as a wide-open sports field), since it's too easy to avoid the confines that make this interesting. Examples of such defined areas include a combat arena, the top of a small office building, a floating platform on a lake, etc.

However this area is designated, it is *unstable*: The act of jumping around and even walking on it is causing it to fall apart. Thus fighters need to constantly move to “fresher” parts of the venue; if they don't, they'll fall through the floor – presumably to a bad fate!

THE MECHANICS

A vinyl dry-erase hex “battle mat” is ideal for this encounter.

Define the physical boundaries on the map, including the starting positions of the fighters. Each time anyone moves to a different hex, place a visible dot on that hex. What happens next depends on which option the GM chooses.

Option 1: Once a hex has a predetermined number of dots, it falls to the depths below on the next turn. Good numbers include three or four dots (in other words, each hex can only be safely stood on two or three times, respectively).

Option 2: Each time a dot is added to a hex, roll 1d to see if that hex goes away; if you roll less than the number of dots, it falls into the abyss on the next turn!

The GM should decide ahead of time if standing on a hex causes it to have dots placed on it each turn. If it doesn't, then fighters can “catch their breaths” as they consider their positions. If it does, then they'll need to scramble each turn to safer ground. Each option has precedent in martial-arts tales.

Keep track of hexes that fighters are thrown through (where the combatant skids across the ground). Counted these as having been occupied. Those that are avoided entirely (by being jumped or thrown over) should not be marked.

Note that these needn't be actually hex-shaped in the game world, and in fact probably shouldn't be (unless the venue is an artificial one designed for this purpose).

Obviously, these numbers can be tweaked depending on the needs of the encounter. Keep in mind that the fewer times a hex can be stood on, the more a bout becomes a battle to scramble to better position. Conversely, the more a hex can be used, the less likely the complications it causes will actually matter in a battle.

It's generally obvious to the martial artist that the hex he's on will be falling away very quickly, but GMs who like to keep some mystery – especially with the second option – may require a roll against Perception to see if he notices. (He might also allow Perception checks at a penalty to see if he can tell which *other* hexes are about to fall away – like the one an opponent is standing on!)

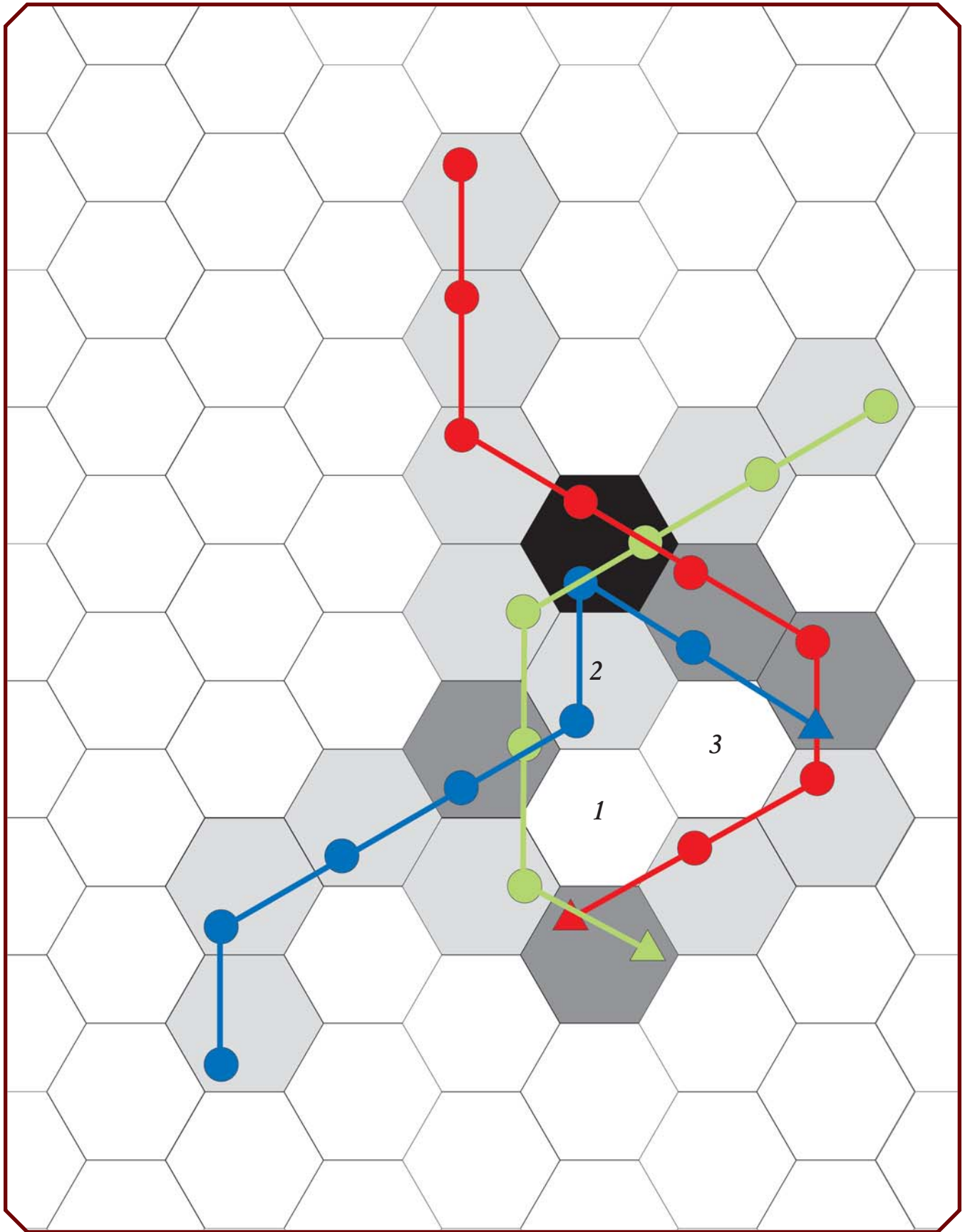
Penalty for Falling

For this scenario to work, the penalty for falling “off the board” needs to be suitably significant to keep one side or the other from just letting their hex fall and hopping down to a lower level. (If it's the top of a burning building, maybe the lower floors are already so damaged that going below is a death trap.) Similarly, the fighting probably needs to be finite in area and in some fashion constrained, to keep one or more of the fighters from just walking off the edge of the map.

EXAMPLE

In the example on p. 39, there are three combatants. The GM has determined that hexes fall into the abyss after they are occupied three times. The light gray hexes all have one dot; they have all been occupied once. The dark gray hexes all have two dots; if they are entered one more time, they will fall away. The one black hex in the center has fallen away.

Note that the hexes marked 1, 2, and 3 are all in (currently, slight) danger of falling into the abyss; their surrounding hexes have all been tagged at least once. It's up to the GM how many attached hexes are required to keep a hex from falling into the abyss even if it hasn't been occupied enough to warrant it.



Crumbling Ground Example

ABOUT *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: info@sjgames.com. Resources include:

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