

*Merchants' Reach*

# *Merchants' Reach*

*A supplement for 'Rivers and Lakes' by Ben Wright*

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# Welcome to the City

Not all wuxia stories take place in the mythical past. Some take place in mythologised history. Many find their drama in a contemporary setting, something akin to late nineteenth century Hong Kong. There are a few trappings of the modern world on show, and a wider awareness of the world beyond China, but the heroes and the villains are still there and showing off their martial arts prowess.

*Merchants' Reach* is a supplement for *Rivers and Lakes* designed to help support that kind of story. It's not intended to be a realistic depiction of any particular era or place, in the same way that a Jianghu isn't either, but a tool to help create a bustling Chinese port city where Westerners come to do business. For the same reason, complexities of history concerning government, trade and law are abandoned in favour of simple, clichéd versions that may be familiar from film.

This city is called Shangren Gang- literally 'Port of Merchants' but often called 'Merchants' Reach' by the Europeans. It is a fictitious place with obvious parallels to real historical cities that can be used as a vibrant and crowded setting for martial arts stories.

## Themes

This supplement is not intended to be any sort of social or political commentary. But an important theme of wuxia stories told in this sort of setting is the contrast between East and West- the large, venerable Chinese Empire and the vibrant, ambitious representatives of Europe. How this theme influences the story depends on how you, as a group, want to use it. There are several approaches you could take:

- 市 The Chinese Empire is as wise as it ever was, and these bossy newcomers are an annoyance, a transitory problem that will pass in time. Youxiá must lead by example and show that change is unwelcome and unnecessary.
- 市 The Westerners are an active canker threatening to eat away the heart of China. They need to be repulsed, lest they debase and befoul too much of the city. The youxiá must be at the forefront of that effort.
- 市 The old Empire is sick, and the Europeans are vultures waiting to feast on the carcass. The country must be renewed, lest it disappear from history forever. The sad duty of the youxiá is to hold the carrion-feeders at bay long enough that the renewal can happen.



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- 市 The English, the Dutch and the rest may bring discord, but they also bring a harsh reality- that the comfortable ossification China has entered cannot last forever, and it must embrace what the future holds to avoid becoming a historical footnote. Youxiá do not understand what is needed, and they can only ease the transition as best they can.
- 市 China faces a challenge in the Westeners- but one it can meet. It rested on its laurels at the height of its power and has been overtaken. The challenge is to find new strength in the modern world, casting aside the dusty relics of its glorious past that are holding it back, youxiá included.

Whatever you decide, it goes without saying that there are good people and bad people on either side of the cultural divide. Good people serving a bad cause is a staple of wuxia fiction.

## The Book

This supplement provides three main things:

- 市 Optional rules that can be handy for a city setting.
- 市 Suggestions for how to run the game in theme, and what sort of encounters the city might offer.
- 市 Specific places, people and organisations to help bring the city to life.

The chapters in the book are:

- 市 **The City:** providing an overview of the city and its people.
- 市 **The Merchant:** Giving rules for a type of player character distinct from a youxiá.
- 市 **The Weapon:** Rules for guns.
- 市 **The Quest:** Ideas and tips on creating quests set in the city.
- 市 **The People:** Off-the-shelf NPC statistics.



# The City

Most wuxia tales tell their stories in the wilderness, or in small communities far from the hubbub of a thriving city. Sometimes this is because the isolation reflects the emotional detachment of the protagonist; at least at the start of the story, or offers an aesthetically pleasing backdrop to stylised combat. Sometimes the plot demands that the full force of law and order cannot simply be summoned to put right what is wrong—because the local magistrate is corrupt, or there is no law to speak of in that area. Even when the story moves to a city or a palace, these are usually shown as empty as they can be— by using night scenes, draughty corridors or wide open spaces.



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A story set in a busy city has a different timbre entirely. There is always movement and noise. A quiet, introspective youxiá stands out purely by not joining in with the commotion. Perhaps he is overwhelmed by the commotion, or perhaps he is as stolid as ever and letting the bustle wash around him. Whatever his response, he will likely be roused to action more quickly and more frequently than when he is elsewhere. As there is no longer a stark contrast between inaction and action there is no longer much to be gained by over-emphasising the difference between the two. That said, those lonely places can still be found if the story needs them for a dramatic or emotional scene.

Shangren Gang is filled with Tension. Tension between the locals and the foreigners, tension between the newly-rich and the scions of old wealth and power, and tension between old ways and new ways. When one or more of those sources of tension leads to violence or betrayal the youxiá will be drawn to resolve it. The city would be a boring place if nothing was going wrong, and there are so many sources of problems that characters can't help but be drawn into so many of them.

Magic seems out of place in a more modern setting. Legendary artefacts and potent sorcery don't fit well with a city becoming a modern metropolis. When there is magic, it should be subtle, perhaps even easily mistaken for good fortune or the superstition of the credulous. It may still be spoken of and believed implicitly, but the more fantastic elements have been excised. Famous artefacts, such as weapons, are treated more like antiques than like weapons. A legendary sword may be very sharp, very strong and elaborately decorated, but only an expert will immediately recognise it for what it is.

## Living with Consequences

The wandering youxiá seldom has an opportunity to return to places he has passed through. If he has taken up arms to right an injustice in a village, convention dictates after he has succeeded there is no reason for him to stay there to make sure the problem does not recur. Unless returning to finish the job is an important part of the future plot, that chapter is closed. If such victories turned out hollow it would rob the character of his moral authority, or force him to retrace his steps more often than is interesting. Credibility might be stretched by the frequency with which he meets the same important characters over and over again in the wilderness, but he is always on the move.

*Rivers and Lakes* recommends that each quest nominally takes place in a different Jianghu setting, even if it uses the same player characters. That avoids problems caused by inconsistencies of setting, but for *Merchants' Reach* the additional complication of a persistent location is a deliberate addition.

In a single location, however, if a youxiá has to intervene several times in the same problem it does not derail the main story. She can enjoy the hospitality of those she has helped, but must also endure the enmity of people whose selfish or evil schemes she has



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foiled. Vignettes that hark back to her recent past exploits can be slipped into a scene seamlessly. She isn't a mysterious stranger- she is part of the community. Many of the city's residents will know her personally or by reputation.

Characters intended for play in Shangren Gang must have both their One Good Thing and One Bad Thing refer to events that happened in the city. This doesn't prevent characters created for a vanilla *Rivers and Lakes* game from being played.

## History

As with *Rivers and Lakes*, historical accuracy should not be a concern except when you can use it to add colour to the game. Shangren Gang, as described, has elements of Hong Kong, Canton and other ports that saw extensive contact with European traders. The period is deliberately imprecise, to avoid tripping over real historical events. The dissatisfaction with Western influence that led to the Boxer Rebellion in the early twentieth century had its roots in tensions that began with the earliest traders in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By having aspects of both in the same setting, Shangren Gang is a microcosm of the historical issue.

The city of Shangren Gang is an important trading hub, with more than one European power using it to gain access to commodities from China. Conversely, many Western goods are much sought after, none perhaps moreso than opium, however thoroughly the Chinese administration attempts to stamp out its trade. The city has grown rapidly in a short space of time and its layout reflects this growth in population and importance. Hastily-built houses sprawl up the river valley and occupy what were once open courtyards and gardens in the city proper. This haphazard expansion brings many problems, not least of which is that many roads are now barely large enough to handle the carts that need to be driven down them.

Some part of the city are outright slums, and the docks, which were never the most salubrious of places, are now considered the exclusive territory of criminal gangs at night. This is why the European contingents often rent and secure their own loading facilities, heavily guarded by armed men.

## Locales

Although the city is higgledy-piggledy, certain areas are recognised as having their own, distinct identities.

### Legations

A legation is similar to an embassy, but usually smaller. Although nominally a political institution, it often becomes the de facto centre of business for its nation. As trade grows, adjacent properties are bought (often using intimidation) and doors



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knocked through. The original building might have been constructed in grand European style, but the extensions are probably hastily redecorated more in keeping with their new owners' tastes. Eventually, a wall is built around the outside of the compound for security. There are five legations of varying size in the city- British, Portuguese, Dutch, French and Japanese, all located close to one another in one of the older parts of the city.

### *Docks*

The docks are the lifeblood of the city. Few, if any, fisherman operate out of Shangren Gang because all available dock space is taken up with loading docks for trade vessels. The docks are a dangerous place at night, and a popular haunt for criminals in particular, and it is not uncommon for a vessel putting ashore to be shaken down for 'taxes' by whatever group can make a credible threat. The docks fall into three main areas, on different sides of the city. The West and South docks are owned and operated by Chinese owners, the Central docks have been bought up by European companies.

### *Slums*

Although the centre of the city has managed to avoid becoming a slum, the hills either side of it and the valley between them have sprouted many shanty towns. Periodically a fire or a building collapse will clear some space, but new huts go up very quickly. Some farmers in the area have had to give up their work, as keeping their fields clear of slum-dwellers has become impossible. Many small criminal gangs have emerged in the slums, each with a modest but well-defined area of turf. The people of the slums are not wealthy enough for the larger criminal enterprises to have much interest in them, so the small gang can throw their weight around with impunity.

### *Markets*

There are two large market squares- one near the docks and one near the road out of the city. Competition for stall space at both is very fierce, and rigorously enforced by the watch. Because of the shortage of room, smaller markets have sprung up in any space that has not been hastily built on. It's only possible to get a good deal from a trader who knows you personally, unless the buyer is a very good negotiator. The European traders do all their business wholesale, behind closed doors. Local merchants who have managed to inveigle their way into the legations' good books can make a killing.



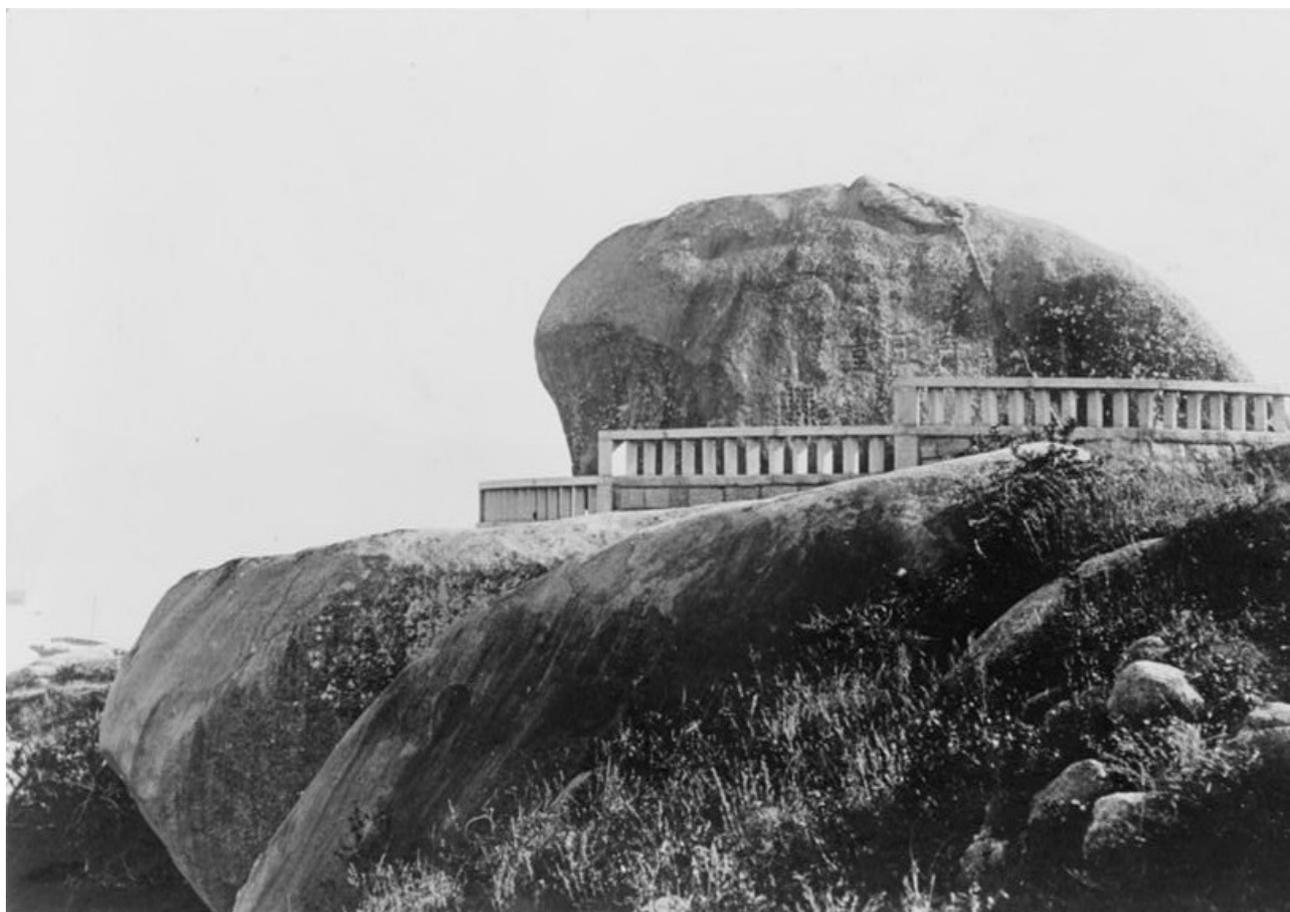
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### *The Palace*

The Governor's Palace was once too large and grand for the city, but now is in danger of being swamped by development on all sides. Its garden is the only large open space left in the city. Governor Long seldom leaves it confines, preferring to send guards to bring people he wants to see to him. Entering the palace without an invitation is something both Long's guards and the watch take very seriously. Merely getting an invitation to meet with one of the bureaucrats in the palace is not very hard, if you have the right connections.

### *Opium Dens*

The slums, being made up of temporary houses, are not ideal places to site opium dens. The cellars and attics of stone-built houses make better locations. Because even the wealthy and respected sometimes patronise opium dens, several are scattered throughout the city, generally behind a hidden door to ensure privacy. Most also operate as brothels, and as the prostitutes are given opium to keep them compliant there is much demand for less sleepy 'new blood'. This has led to an increase in kidnappings in the city, particularly from the vulnerable poor.



## Factions

There are many formal or loosely-knit groups in the city. While there are never such things as alliances, there are certainly vendettas. Each of these groups wants to expand its influence, but won't usually come into direct conflict with many of the others if it can be avoided. A noble youxiá will, of course, do what is just without thought to who he might annoy- but noble cause won't prevent him making powerful enemies.

As with all setting information in this book, these descriptions exist to fire your imagination and be there to fall back on when you need a name or organisation. The specifics should be free to change to your tastes in play.

### *Imperial Power*

The Chinese Empire may be in something of a decline, but it is still in firm control of itself. The actions of the Europeans might undermine its authority, but no-one denies that authority is still in place.

#### *Governor Long*

Long was appointed governor to the city when it was barely more than a town. He wanted to climb the political ladder, but his cunning was not equal to his ambition. Quite by accident, the city has become a very important trading post, and he is making the most of it. He is, first and foremost, a pragmatist. He won't countenance anything that threatens the stability of the city, and thus his position of influence, but he is fast learning that Imperial mandate and a body of troops is not enough to have full control of Shangren Gang.

#### *City Watch*

Although nominally under Governor Long's control, he seldom wishes to dabble in boring affairs of local crime. Captain Sheng, in charge of the watch, is slightly more of a straight arrow than Long would like, but he does such a good job of keeping overt criminal activity under control that Long is loathe to replace him. Sheng would like to crack down on the organised crime in the city, but lacks sufficient men brave enough to try. He's content to let Europeans handle their own affairs behind closed doors as long as that does not affect other residents.

#### *The Royal Navy*

Officially, the British have no military presence in the city. However, three ships are seconded to the Company, officially to protect the merchant vessels. Memories of recent wars with the Westerners are still fresh, and the presence of such a force in a critical area is a slap in the face to the sovereignty of China. However, there is no point in risking another war by forcing the issue. The Naval officers take a dim view of the locals, and have as little as possible to do with them.



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### ***Legations***

Foreign trade delegations have their own compounds, usually built in a European style. As they are technically embassies, local law does not apply within. However, more than once an angry mob has stormed the gates of a legation in the face of a perceived outrage.

#### *The Company*

So rich and powerful is the East India Company, with exclusive British rights to trade with Chinese ports, that referring to simply the 'Company' is sufficient. It has a complicated relationship with the British crown and the Royal Navy, and is sometimes difficult to separate from it; hence the naval presence. It has the largest legation, and many of the surrounding buildings are also owned by the Company and rented to servants and other employees.

#### *The Portuguese*

Portugal has had an interest in trade with China longer than any other European power currently doing so. Having successfully negotiated a number of agreements with the Empire, it has somewhat fallen under the shadow of the British Empire. Of the Europeans, its officers have made them most effort to understand their Chinese hosts.

#### *The Dutch*

Although the glory days of their trading empire are on the wane, the Dutch maintain a significant presence in the city. They no longer establish much new trade, but there are many long contracts left to run and they are content to collect on those. Running on a skeleton staff, the draughty corridors of their legation betray faded ambition and settling for second-best.

### ***Local Business***

In Confucian philosophy, merchants are ranked below farmers and just above slaves, because they work only to enrich themselves. The topsy-turvy world of the European traders is where the merchant is second only to the noble- or at least it seems that way from the way they behave. Successful trade requires two partners, and three major Chinese groups have taken up pre-eminent trading positions in Shangren Gang.

#### *White Tiger Trading*

This long-established trading partnership existed before the Westerners arrived, and has managed to survive where some of its peers did not by adapting quickly. Most of the group's agents have adopted European styles of dress, the better to impress potential trading partners, although this has led to some describing them as traitors and poseurs. They are happy to do business with anyone, operating on the principle that good business does not allow them the luxury of xenophobia.



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### *The House of Lin*

The Lin family has a long history in Shangren Gang. Many of its previous governors have been Lin family members. The house owes its wealth to a miserly attitude to expenditure and the occasional shrewd investment or embezzlement. Although important socially, it has only risen to significance in the mercantile world through the business of those who prefer not to deal with the White Tiger Trading group. While careful to avoid endorsing an anti-Western outlook, Lin has managed to make itself the natural choice of partner for those that do.

### *Smugglers*

There have always been independent smugglers operating in the area, and the complicated trade arrangements in the city mean there is more demand for them than ever before. Whether it's rich Europeans wanting to take art treasures out of the country without declaring them to any authority, or the Company pushing opium that neither the White Tigers nor the House of Lin will touch, business is good. There is no formal organisation, but business is sufficiently profitable that smugglers no longer have much reason to compete aggressively. It's true to say that so much passes through the smugglers that the city itself would suffer if those avenues were blocked. The occasional shipment is lost to Captain Sheng's guardsmen, but that's considered an acceptable risk.

## *Criminal Groups*

Organised crime has always been a part of life in Shangren Gang. While once there was one group, many are now operating within the city. Bloody conflict between them, and with the watch, is not uncommon. The smaller groups are of little consequence, being not much more than petty thugs with pretensions of grandeur, but there are three groups to watch out for in the city.

### *The Brothers*

The Brothers are the original criminal group of Shangren Gang, part of a much larger network that spans much of China. They have complicated rules of conduct and advancement, and often openly advertise their membership for the cachet it offers. They maintain a front of controlling all crime in the city, but they have never really controlled all the smugglers that operate and with the recent increase in the city's size struggle to even know all of the smaller groups that have established their turf in the new slums. Despite this, the leaders of the group are experienced, ruthless and known to nurse vendettas for generations. They try to avoid angering the Europeans, because there is always the chance that their warships will bombard the city in retribution.

### *Bay Pirates*

The increase in trade by sea has attracted pirates from a surprisingly large area. Even though the European and Chinese fleets can drive them away with ease, there are so many trading ports with rich pickings that they simply move to a different area.



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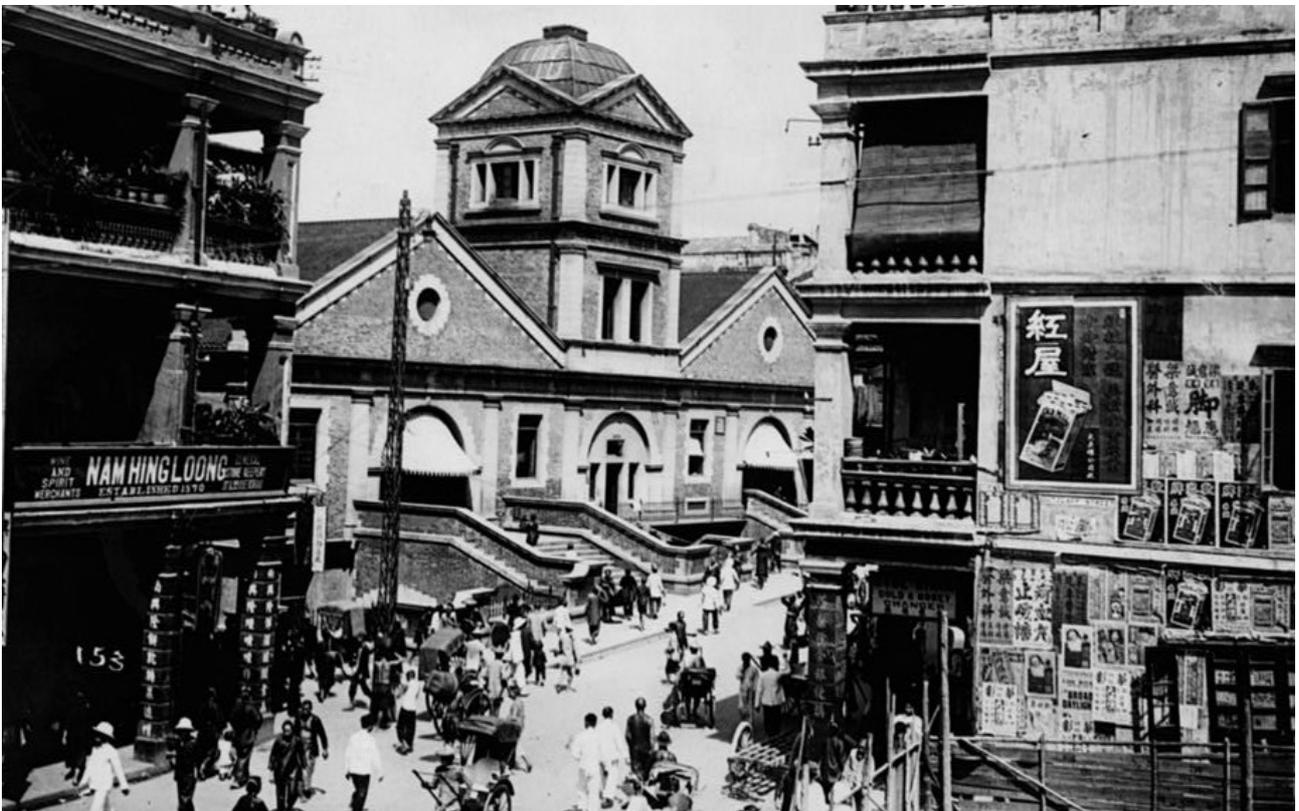
Shangren Gang is probably the best-protected port on the coast, but the Royal Navy can only protect vessels close to the city. Pirates often come ashore to sell their plunder, masquerading as ordinary traders.

### *Righteous Harmony Society*

Increasing discontent with Western interference in Chinese matters, the trade in opium and the arrogance of the European powers created fertile ground for the formation of a political group dedicated to driving the interlopers out. The Righteous Harmony Society is technically a criminal group, as the Chinese Empire cannot afford a war with the foreigners, but officialdom turns a blind eye where it can. It is strongest deep in the mainland, where fewer people's livelihoods depend on the Europeans, but many young and idealistic men in the city have joined it. Because it is driven by ideology, few other groups are willing to deal with it on anything other than the most short-term basis. Groups with vested interests in the status quo watch it with wariness.

## *The Rest*

Most of the citizens of Shangren Gang belong to none of these groups- they are simply dock workers, clerks, cooks, servants and stallholders. When any faction makes a move against another, it is usually these people who suffer first. A noble youxiá, seeing their plight, will be moved to intervene, if only to steer the misfortune away from these unintended targets.



## The Merchant

An alternative to playing a youxiá is to take on the role of a Westerner in the city. Such characters are called Merchants. They might not themselves be part of the trading organisations doing business but they are part of that commercial world as servants, bodyguards or assistants. As player characters in a *Rivers and Lakes* game they are expected to be pillars of righteousness. Unlike youxiá, they have ties of loyalty to people who might not be so righteous as they. In this respect, they are more akin to sympathetic NPCs in the Jianghu setting, but available for play here. Like their compatriots, they can easily become fish out of water in this strange and foreign country.

A Merchant character is something of an oddity- by genre convention they are just as powerful in combat as youxiá, and might even use techniques that are all but indistinguishable from the formal schools of the Orient. Historically, techniques of the East have absorbed formal methods of pugilism and wrestling from Europe, so the commonality is not as strange as it might first appear. In play, a Merchant might come across as more modern or more materialistic than a youxiá, but that could just be because the Merchant is aware of how the world is changing. Not every person is in a position to be able to eschew worldly matters without consequences, and many of those that do are sacrificing opportunities to help their fellow men.

It is entirely possible for the entire player group to be Merchants instead of youxiá. In this case, the campaign will probably centre on their own personal journeys as they learn about China and have to question their loyalties to the greedy and cruel. Mitigating the worst of the traders' excesses might take up a large amount of their time.

## Wealth

Being outsiders, Merchant characters do not have Honour in the same way as youxiá. As foreigners, they are assumed to have little to no Honour (a prejudice unhappily reinforced by the behaviour of their superiors). On the other hand, the wealth and influence they command as agents of trading interests opens many doors. Instead of an Honour stat, they have a Wealth one.

In the city of Shangren Gang, that has trade as its lifeblood, the two are almost interchangeable. Instead of losing Honour as a result of poor behaviour or taking injury in a non-Strength-based test, the character loses Wealth. This could be because he has lost good favour with his superiors, has cheapened their names slightly or become known on the streets as a 'bad risk'. Similarly, increasing Wealth might represent receiving a bonus for good work or saving the company some money by improving its image.



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However, NPCs that detest foreigners will respond only to Honour. Characters with Wealth are considered to have an Honour of 0 in this case. Other NPCs, including the 'great and good' of the trading empires, will respond only to Wealth. Characters with Honour are considered to have Wealth 0. This means that when dealing with either type of NPC, a group of characters with a mix of Honour and Wealth will suffer potentially many penalties for a 0 score.

A Wealth score makes it easier to acquire and maintain firearms.

### *Exchanging Wealth and Honour*

A character whose Honour or Wealth has declined to 0 has the worst of both worlds. However, from that position he can gain either Honour or Wealth through conduct during the game or at the conclusion of a successful quest. Whenever he would gain Honour from this position, he can opt to gain Wealth instead, embracing the Occidental way of doing things.

At the conclusion of a quest any character can, if his behaviour during the quest warrants it, turn Honour into the same amount of Wealth or vice-versa. This represents a change in attitude to life, between the philosophical path of the youxiá and the material ambition of a merchant character.

## **Skills**

The skills of a Merchant are used identically to the skills of a youxiá. However, they are named after the Western zodiac, and the skills are found in different groups to reflect the differences between the two zodiacs.

### *Aries*

Exert - Engineering - Intimidate

### *Taurus*

Survive - Artistry - Show Etiquette

### *Gemini*

Tumble - Craftsmanship - Perform

### *Cancer*

Endure - Medicine - Impersonate

### *Leo*

Resist Pain - Tactics - Inspire

### *Virgo*

Jump - Investigate - Glean



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### *Libra*

Ride - Languages - Apologise

### *Scorpio*

Prestidigitate - Stealth - Imbibe

### *Sagittarius*

Run - Riddle - Seduce

### *Capricorn*

Climb - Forge - Cajole

### *Aquarius*

Intrude - Natural Lore - Barter

### *Pisces*

Swim - Navigate - Dissemble

The only new skill is 'medicine', which replaces alchemy. Medicine consists of the western medical approaches appropriate to the time. They are at least as effective as their traditional Chinese equivalents, although the scope of medicine is somewhat narrower.

## Characterisation

There are many trading nations desperate to do business with the mysterious East. Each has managed to negotiate a privileged position in Shangren Gang, so they look on the Chinese as suppliers and a market for their goods. Trading opium is very profitable. However, the merchant empires look on one another as their biggest rivals, particularly when their respective nations have a history of conflict on their own continent. For their agents, who might deal with these rivals on a daily basis, these disagreements are less significant.



## The Weapon

Although gunpowder and weapons using it were found in Mediaeval China and the colonial period *Merchant's Reach* is nominally set in, it fits the themes of 'Occident versus Orient' and 'corruption of a noble heritage' better if they are primarily used by Westerners and those who've thrown their lot in with them. Strictly speaking firearms of the period are very slow to reload, but if youxiá are allowed to mock realism, it makes sense that users of firearms are as well. Native Chinese who have adopted some Western ways might use guns, as will the enforcers and lackeys of the merchant interests in Shangren Gang.

As the historical accuracy of politics and martial arts is not a major concern in the Jianghu setting, so is accurate depiction of firearms.

What is common is that firearms are a great leveller in that they allow the weak to compete on something approaching equal terms with the strong. Whether that is a good thing or a bad thing depends on your point of view.

- 市 Guns give people the ability to fight with little practice and so they make a mockery of the parts of martial training that teach restraint, respect and honour. Using a gun is always and everywhere a dishonourable act (except, perhaps, if a peasant is conscripted). Youxiá who use such a weapon immediately suffer a loss of Honour- they are emblematic of how the colonial powers are corrupting China.
- 市 Guns give people the ability to fight with little practice and so they erode the old follies of aristocracy and privilege. Those who have traditionally been at the mercy of the strong and powerful, such as women, the young and the poor, finally have a means to defend themselves. Youxiá may disapprove of them and avoid using them, but they recognise that honour comes from how you use a weapon, not what the weapon is.
- 市 Guns are the future, and are as uncertain as the future itself. Like the Western merchants, they shake up the old, comfortable order and no-one is quite sure what the outcome will be. Youxiá might experiment with them or acknowledge that they have their uses, but are never completely at home with them.



## Gunfights

Guns ignore the Strength of the wielder. Instead, they add a number of eight-sided dice to the pool.

- 市 Poor-quality, mass-produced guns add 3 dice.
- 市 Guns that are cheap but well-maintained or of above-average quality add 4 dice.
- 市 Custom-made, high-quality firearms add 5 dice.

When rolling these eight-sided dice, any die that shows an 8 is removed immediately. This means that the average score for them is the same as for a six-sided dice. They can get higher numbers than normal, but might not count at all. The rest of the dice, based on skill and risk, are unchanged.

Guns are slightly more unpredictable than fighting normally. Youxiá with a Strength of 5 or more see no real benefit from them. A character Strength of 3 or 4 can benefit from the better firearms, but they may turn out to be more trouble than they are worth. Characters with a Strength of only 1 or 2 will find guns an attractive option, despite the fact that it is slightly more difficult to gather the dice needed for stunts with them.

The description of attacks and defences using eight-sided dice should ideally incorporate the firearm somehow, although it is not essential.



## ***Antagonists and Cheap Foes***

The GM can turn 3-5 dice of Threat into eight-sided dice, under the same terms as for characters, whenever appropriate. Mobs of cheap foes can also be equipped with guns, with no limit on how many dice that might be. Dice that are removed because they rolled an 8 are treated as though they have been spent by the Cheap Foes, rather than if they have been lost due to attacks where the foes took the blow.

## ***Optional Rule: City Walls***

Fortifications do not feature heavily in stories set in a Jianghu. Effective use of them requires an army and a stronghold, which is usually the sole purview of the Emperor or his chosen agents and youxiá rarely find themselves in open opposition to him. On the other hand, the foreigners have their own compounds in Shangren Gang, and battles fought with one side using arrows and guns from behind the safety of walls are far more likely to occur.

Even youxiá who fight with bows and arrows need to pick their shots when their enemies have cover. For those who fight primarily up close, dealing with a fortification wall presents an unusual challenge. Only stunts can attack targets that are taking advantage of protective walls. A character may, however, attempt to scale the walls using a stunt side action. The difficulty of the side action is determined by the GM based on how high, sheer and well-defended the wall is, ranging from 3 to 5. A simple walled compound would need 3, a well-kept fortress would need 5. Once the wall is scaled, the walls provide no more bonus to the defenders.

Of course, the smart thing to do might be to run away. If a character spends a side action fleeing the vicinity of the walls, enemies behind the walls can't continue to attack him without coming out from behind their safety. If they do not do so, the fight ends.

## ***Optional Rule: Dice Management***

If the sometimes prodigious quantities of six-sided dice required for *Rivers and Lakes* is a problem, you can make the Strength dice for characters be eight-sided dice, as for guns. The GM can turn Threat dice into eight-sided dice at his discretion.

## ***Night of the Sevens***

The special abilities of skills, as described in the supplement *Night of the Sevens*, cannot be used in conjunction with eight-sided dice.



## Acquisition

As soon as a character tangles with a merchant's bodyguards, it is likely that a firearm will be available for the taking in the aftermath of the fight. Any character can carry a couple of pistols or a rifle around, but ethnic Chinese carrying them openly might have to endure investigation by the authorities unless they can demonstrate they have them in an official capacity. Westerners are assumed to be 'official', in this sense, purely because the trading organisations take exception to their agents being detained.

When it comes to purchasing guns or having your own firearm at the outset, the deciding factor is the Wealth of the character. A merchant character can own a firearm with a number of dice not exceeding his own Wealth score. This means youxiá cannot acquire guns this way, as they lack a Wealth score. If a merchant character wants to own multiple guns (for instance, to arm less affluent allies), then he can acquire a handful of extra weapons with a quality one less than his main weapon.

## Maintenance

Guns require specialised maintenance that youxiá typically do not learn to perform. After any combat, a character's gun reduces in quality by one category until proper maintenance is performed on it. This is a Wisdom + Engineering roll, of moderate difficulty. If injury is risked on the roll, the injury takes the form of reducing the quality of the gun by another step. Paying a gunsmith to do the job requires a Wealth + Barter roll, also of moderate difficulty. If injury is risked on that roll, the injury takes the form of the usual loss of Wealth, but the gun is still returned to proper use.

Improving a gun past its initial quality, or undoing the damage of poor maintenance, is done under similar terms, but with a Difficult roll



## The Quest

Constructing a quest centring around a location is a different matter to constructing a quest based around a journey. A journey lends itself to episodic construction, with encounters at particular locations with obvious divides between them. Even if these events form some part of a larger continuous plot-line, it is easy to see the gap between them. Usually this gap takes the form of time spent travelling that is uneventful. In a city, it is harder to do this, because there is no significant travel time to get from place to place, and because all the people the characters are likely to meet are likely to be residents of the city, capable of appearing again later.

That last aspect is something the GM can use to his advantage. Wherever possible, re-use the same faces- building up a history for an NPC helps bring the setting to life. Even if all he does is thank a character in passing for his previous help, it creates the impression of continuity and place. If the youxiá ever need assistance from someone with skills or contacts they lack, these NPCs are a resource they can draw on. Naturally, how willing the NPC is to help depends on what the youxiá achieved before.

Where a character had incurred the wrath of an organised group or powerful individual, he can't simply move on and forget about it- the antagonism is likely to be a day-to-day feature of his life, inescapable until he does something final about it. Sometimes, that won't even be possible without making even more problems for himself.

Plots in the city are likely to be more complicated and their conclusions more ambiguous than a regular *Rivers and Lakes* story. It will be difficult to fulfil the quest without compromising on principles at some stage. Problems unrelated to the quest might drag the characters away from it for quite some time.

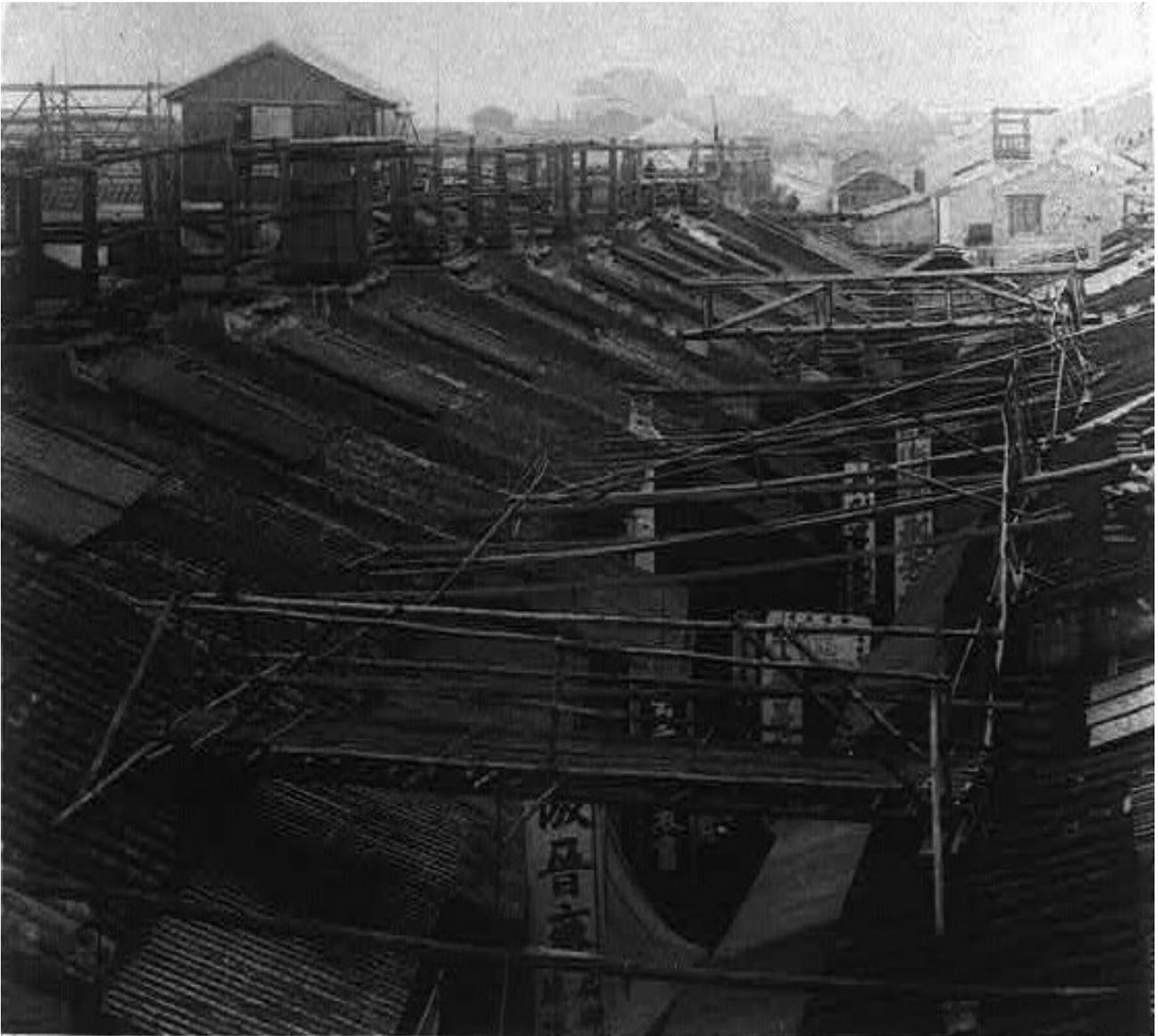
## Fighting in the City

Youxiá are unlikely to receive the same natural respect in the city that they do elsewhere; the cosmopolitan citizens are less impressed by an authoritative manner and martial prowess. Furthermore, starting a fight is frowned upon by the watch and the soldiery of the legations. Even if no lethal force is used, a character will need to have an excellent excuse for getting involved in a brawl, particularly if it was a clearly uneven fight. When attacked, it might be more sensible to simply evade the attackers after delivering a few warning strikes. Of course, this then leaves the assailants with chips on their shoulders and something to prove.

Another complication is that there will usually be innocent by-standers that might get hurt, shops that might have their merchandise damaged, and possibly an angry crowd to jostle the fighters.



## *Merchants' Reach*



### ***Optional Rule: By-Standers***

When fighting in a crowded place, any attacks made with a 6 or 7 have a chance of inflicting an injury on a non-combatant. If the attack is taken, the target is hurt as usual and no-one else suffers. If a defence or reverse with a total only 1 higher than the attack is made, then a by-stander is hurt, perhaps even killed. If the attack is reversed with a total 2 or more higher (enough for an interception) then there is no injury to the innocent party. Interceptions, as you might expect, also keep the by-standers safe.



## **Optional Rule: Hostile Crowds**

If a character or NPC is fighting in a crowd hostile to her, getting in her way and tripping her up at inconvenient moments, then it is harder for her fight effectively. At the start of each round, any Is rolled are removed from her set of dice. The crowd can be hostile to both sides in a fight or just one of them.

If the crowd is not just hostile, but actively violent, then the Is removed are given to the character as damage.

In either case, changing the location of the fight between scenes - perhaps by taking to the rooftops - can remove the problem.

## **Quest Seeds**

When creating a quest in Shangren Gang, consider introducing at least two factions with definite agendas. They might not be at loggerheads, but the level of complication that two distinct story-lines produce provides ample complication. If you plan to run a longer game, then consider adding more factions, some perhaps to only be revealed part way through the quest. This section lists three possible story seeds for each faction- one paints the faction in a good light, one in a bad light, and one in a relatively neutral light. The following section lists a number of random events the characters might find in the city, to help add depth and make sure the GM is never floundering for an idea for the next scene.

### **Governor Long**

The Governor seeks help from the youxiá to unmask a spy taking refuge in one of the legations. He has no authority there, and the spy is on the brink of instigating a riot against the foreigners for obtuse reasons.

When passing sentence, Long imposes a very harsh sentence on a commoner because the commoner's infant daughter laughed at his robes of office. Something must be done about this cruelty, as the commoner's family risks destitution.

Governor Long's son took some valuable items from the Dutch legation. Long wants someone to find his son, take the items, and return them to their rightful place without causing a scandal.

### **The Watch**

Captain Sheng is struggling to track down a serial killer at large in the city. Not wanting to lose any more of his men, he has enlisted the aid of the youxiá, who can fight with the killer on equal terms.



## *Merchants' Reach*

A washerwoman in the British legation was molested by a British noble. Captain Sheng refuses to investigate, calling it outside his jurisdiction, even though the attack happened outside the legation.

Some of the watchmen have started taking frequent bribes from criminals. Captain Sheng is turning a blind eye to avoid destroying the morale of the watch.

### *The Royal Navy*

A particularly persistent pirate ship has been plaguing shipping in the area. The Royal Navy has resolved to track it down, but lacks the necessary local knowledge and connections to do so.

A young Chinese houseboy who talked back to an officer is to be publicly flogged in a week's time if his family do not find a way of paying off the officer in question.

The plenipotentiary is using the navy ships as his personal property, without regard to their true purpose. The Navy officer in charge wants to have him removed from office, at any cost, to stop the misuse of his men.

### *The Company*

The Company has imported a quantity of medicine to combat a virulent fever in the city. After making sure its own staff are safe, it wants to pass it out to the general population free of charge, but the citizens are suspicious of the Company's motives and are refusing it. The Company requests help in convincing people to take the potentially life-saving medicine.

A number of valuable items have gone missing from local temples, turning up in possession of the Company backed up by seemingly legitimate bills of sale. Honour demands that these shady dealings be brought to a halt.

Someone has been cutting the opium the Company is importing, reducing its quality and pocketing a handsome profit. The company seeks aid in finding out who that is.

### *Portuguese Legation*

The son of a servant at the Portuguese legation has gone missing. The plenipotentiary has thrown his full weight behind the search for the child, offering a reward for his safe return.

Wishing to expand, the Portuguese legation is trying to intimidate the occupants of an adjacent house by hiring a group of thugs to menace them.



## *Merchants' Reach*

A recently arrived official from Portugal is acting as a new broom, causing consternation amongst the legation. He is very harsh on the Chinese servants, but can't be removed from office easily.

### *Dutch Legation*

One of the oldest officials in the legation is in failing health. He wants to know what happened to a Chinese woman he fell in love with decades ago, but never had the courage to approach, so he can die content.

A number of traders are being approached by the Dutch contingent, which has papers purporting to show they owe the legation money from a deal made many years ago. The traders claim they are forgeries, but cannot prove it.

During an audit, it is discovered that the Dutch legation owns a number of properties near to their compound that Chinese families are living in. The Dutch want their property, but the residents don't want to leave their homes.

### *White Tiger Trading*

Two well-respected traders are finalising a large deal to construct a new set of docks in a cove over the hill from Shangren Gang. This will create many jobs and help relieve pressure on the crowded city, but a mysterious assassin has already tried to kill them twice.

Foreigners visiting a White Tiger Trading affiliated opium den have been going missing, their possessions turning up on the black market some time later.

The group has found a legal loophole that will allow them to trade opium openly, cutting into the smugglers' market and making the product less likely to be adulterated, but they need protection from angry smugglers until it is put in place.

### *House of Lin*

The House's extensive contacts have led to it coming into the possession of an exquisite antique vase. It came with instructions on how to find its rightful owner, but they are old and out of date. Much honour will go to whoever can find the owner.

The House of Lin has been supplying anti-European rebels in the mountains, who are becoming increasingly violent. Unless proof can be found of this action, nothing can stop the House from continuing to do so.

The House of Lin was expecting an important shipment overland, and had made a big song and dance about it while remaining secretive as to what it was and why it was so important. When it did not arrive, they refused to discuss the matter further. Something fishy is going on.



## *Merchants' Reach*



### *Smugglers*

A family victimised by a criminal gang are trying to flee the city aided by a smuggler, but someone needs to distract the gang somehow so they don't follow the family as they leave.

A local farmer unwisely did business with some smugglers. When they raised their price and he refused to pay, they took his daughter to a secret location as collateral until he acquiesces.

Rumours abound amongst the smugglers of a very valuable cargo being passed from boat to boat- they also says it has a curse upon it.

### *The Brothers*

A wannabe rival gang has been leaning on residents of an area under the protection of the Brothers. Despite doing their best to protect their charges, the Brothers are stumped by the new gang's very strong hired muscle.

A shopkeeper offended a high-ranking member of the Brothers, and he and most of his family were slain for his insolence. Their young daughter escaped the carnage, but still has a sentence of death on her head.

## *Merchants' Reach*

An argument between two branches of the Brothers threatens to start a gang war. Cooler heads in the organisation want peace, but cannot intervene themselves without making the situation worse.

### ***Bay Pirates***

Tired of the buccaneer's life, a wily pirate captain plans to rob a Company ship, captained by a legendarily cruel officer, as his final act of piracy- and he plans to do it without bloodshed. All he needs is the youxiá's help.

Pirates infiltrate the Royal Navy arsenal and cause a massive explosion, crippling the warships stationed there. Shipping is now vulnerable to any pirate in the area, unless someone finds a way to contain the pirates another way.

A young man has run away from home to join a pirate crew, and finds his older brother has joined an Imperial warship crew to become his greatest enemy.

### ***Righteous Harmony Society***

The Society has enlisted the aid of a group of put-upon servants to turn the tables on their hated employers in a grand act of humiliation and defiance- they just need some additional expertise to pull it off.

The Society has taken to targeting the children of Europeans, killing them in the street with no warning. Someone has to stop them.

A young and idealistic member of the Society finds himself falling in love with the daughter of a Dutch trader, and needs advice on how to deal with his conflicting emotions.

## **Random Events**

- 市 A cart has become wedged between two houses, blocking an important street in both directions.
- 市 A funeral procession appears.
- 市 A commoner accuses a trader of giving short weight, a scuffle threatens to interest the watch.
- 市 A group of watchmen pursue a thief.
- 市 An unexpected explosion rocks nearby houses- was it an accident or a deliberate act?
- 市 A coach heading to a legation ball knocks down a local. An angry mob surrounds it, perhaps overturning it.



## *Merchants' Reach*

- 市 A cocky martial artist loudly proclaims in a market square that he will beat any challenger in a fair fight.
- 市 A Westerner who speaks no Chinese is lost in a seedy part of the city.
- 市 A fire breaks out in a slum.
- 市 A mysterious figure claims to be able to tell people's fortunes. Strangely, he predicts only calamity to anyone with red hair.
- 市 Is that a lost child, or a sneak thief?
- 市 An old man suddenly falls ill.
- 市 A European accuses a local man of attempting to rob him.
- 市 A governor's messenger dashes by, knocking a few people down in his haste.
- 市 Representatives of the Brothers are doing the rounds, collecting money they are owed from those under their protection.
- 市 A White Tiger Trading agent is accosted by some anti-Western peasants.
- 市 An animal is loose and causing problems.
- 市 A strong and virtuous warrior is travelling with an urchin for some reason.
- 市 A mysterious figure carrying a large halberd is resting in a small tea-house.
- 市 The House of Lin closes a street so their senior members can travel to the palace without being bothered by peasants.
- 市 Three farmers are trying to pay warriors to fight for them with rice.
- 市 Unexpected fireworks.
- 市 A rainstorm sweeps through the city. Everything carries on as normal.
- 市 Palace guards lock a water pump because it is believed to be tainted.
- 市 A neighbourhood is in turmoil because of a confirmed case of plague in one house.
- 市 A group of ne'er-do-wells is harassing the serving girl at an inn.
- 市 A Taoist monk delivers a strange and ominous prophecy.

## **Retirement**

When a character retires from a campaign set in Shangren Gang, then the retirement takes her out of the city. The city is where the campaign takes place, and to leave it permanently is to give up on adventure. The character might continue to pursue quests once she has left, but the chapter of her life spent in the Port of Merchants has ended.



# The People

Although it is often nice to have the players endow NPCs with physical descriptions, histories and agendas, it's also useful for the GM to have a list of characters to draw on when inspiration runs low. This chapter has such descriptions, sorted by locations in the city that the characters might be found in. If you need a character, just pick one from the relevant list or use an entry as a starting point for a similar character. Faction affiliations are given under the names.

The details here are meant to serve as a quick summary, and a template for the GM to modify as she sees fit. Nothing is cast in stone. Where large Threat scores are given, feel free to make the character a Tough Opponent by breaking the threat up however you choose.

## *Conflict Styles*

To help express how these characters use their dice, think in terms of these strategies:

- 市 **Aggressive:** Starts with big dice first, and keeps the initiative as long as possible.
- 市 **Cautious:** Lets the enemy use all of his dice first, doing the minimum required to avoid defeat.
- 市 **Cowardly:** Lets any allies do as much work as possible, stepping in only when its unavoidable.
- 市 **Defensive:** Keeps dice in reserve to defend against the enemy at all costs.
- 市 **Efficient:** Chooses dice that are hard to defend against, forcing the enemy to waste spots.
- 市 **Incompetent:** Spends dice any old how.
- 市 **Measured:** Starts with small dice first, building up to more powerful attacks later on.
- 市 **Showy:** Uses stunts whenever they can't be stopped, otherwise goes for big attacks.



## *Merchants' Reach*



### ***Optional Rule - Bodyguards and Catspaws***

The usual assumption behind a Threat value for an NPC is that he has that same level of ability in debate and in combat. Sometimes, the GM might prefer to differentiate between characters that are equally proficient in all areas and those that have to rely on others. One way to do this is to turn the character's Threat into Threat for a bodyguard, chamberlain or other support character. Unlike a completely new character, this one has no agenda of his own, and is always on stand-by for the principal character.

The Threat can be devolved entirely or only partially to the support character, or even be used to create Cheap Foes.

For example- Governor Long has a total Threat of 25. He might be as formidable a fighter as he is a politician. If not, he might have a Threat of 5 in combat, with a bodyguard who has a Threat of 20. Perhaps, instead, he has a weaker bodyguard with a Threat of 10, and Threat 10 Cheap Foes in the form of the Palace Guard.

## The Palace

The Governor's Palace, as it is called, is the hub of political life in the city. However, most of it takes place out of sight of the governor himself, in the offices and audience rooms of his bureaucracy.

### *Governor Long*

Threat 25

*"That is an interesting assertion. But it begs the question- if that is true, how do you know?"*

Long's hair is prematurely white, and although he is starting to feel the affects of age his mind is undulled. He hasn't always been this influential, and is determined to avoid losing his position. He has many robes of office, but all of them carry his family's symbol, a green Huang phoenix. He never interrupts people who are speaking, and is fond of letting them continue until they make a critical mistake.

Conflict Style: Cautious.

### *Jiang Huang*

Faction: Governor Long

Threat 15 - Senior bureaucrat

*"Whatever you say now, the terms of the contract were very precise when you signed it."*

Talented advocates and negotiators can easily find employment for the governor, providing of course that they are not too talented. They keep the city running day-to-day, reporting back to the Governor himself at the end of each day. Some of them are on the take- even fewer have managed to keep that fact from the Governor. As long as they serve his purposes, they are allowed to remain in their position. Jiang Huang is typical of these officials, if perhaps the wiliest of them.

Conflict Style: Efficient.



## Merchants' Reach

### Jia Ma

Faction: Governor Long

Threat **I4** - Guard captain

*"Secure the private chambers. I will see what this disturbance is myself."*

Jia Ma, built like a bear, is loyal to the post of Governor. Keeping the position safe and the palace itself secure are his top priorities. The governor would dearly like to replace him with someone with greater personal loyalty to Long, but as the appointment came direct from the Emperor the governor lacks the authority. Despite their personal differences, they work well together. Jia Ma is past his prime, but still a very wily opponent.

Combat Style: Cowardly; Pig and Ox techniques; guan dao.

### Long Li

Faction: Governor Long

Threat **IO** - Governor's wife

*"See to it that the delivery of flowers is delayed. I want to see how their rivalry intensifies when the banquet does not go as planned."*

Long Li is some years younger than her husband. She takes an active interest in the politics of the city, although Long takes care to avoid letting her interfere in important affairs. She is not as astute as her husband or many of his bureaucrats, but is still an asset to the household. She has long hair, which she cultivates as a deliberate attempt to disguise her true age.

Conflict Style: Measured.

### Fen Lin

Faction: Governor Long

Threat **9** - Governor's mistress

*"I did not ask for your advice. I did not ask for your presence. Neither is welcome."*

Fen Lin has been the governor's mistress for a little under a year now. Highly-placed members of the household are fully aware of the arrangement, although they are careful to keep it from his wife. Fen Lin has a fiery temperament belied by her waifish looks. She had hoped to replace his wife and is growing increasingly frustrated that she has not done so. Of late, she has been trying to make the governor jealous by sleeping with some of his bureaucrats, and even with guests to the palace. So far, all this has done is humiliate her further in the eyes of the senior officials.

Combat Style: Aggressive; Tiger techniques; butterfly swords.



## Merchants' Reach

### Palace Guards

Faction: Governor Long  
Cheap Foes

The green uniform of the Palace Guards is easy to spot from a distance. The guards take little interest in crime, as such, as their remit is only to keep the palace and the governor safe from harm. Unlike the watch, which have to deal with violent incidents on a regular basis, the Palace Guard seldom see much action and are poorly-disciplined. However, the walls of the palace complex and their sheer numbers mean they can live up to their responsibilities.

Combat Style: Measured; guan dao or bow.

### Watch House

There is a single main watch house in Shangren Gang, and the watch is struggling to cope with the recent rapid growth of the city. As any criminal needs to be brought to the watch house for questioning or imprisonment, it is always exceptionally busy.

### Captain Sheng

Faction: Watch  
Threat 18

*"Send six men to the end of the street. Surround the suspects as they leave the area. I will apprehend their leader personally."*

The captain of the watch is in his early thirties, dark-skinned and over-worked. Although there exists a suitably grand uniform and set of armour for the position, they were designed for looks rather than practicality. He wears the same clothes and armour as the rank and file watchmen. Administrative duties keep him at the watch house nearly twenty-four hours a day, and he only leaves to deal with particularly serious incidents.

Combat Style: Defensive; Horse, Cockerel and Snake techniques; jian and shield.



## Merchants' Reach

### Big Lo

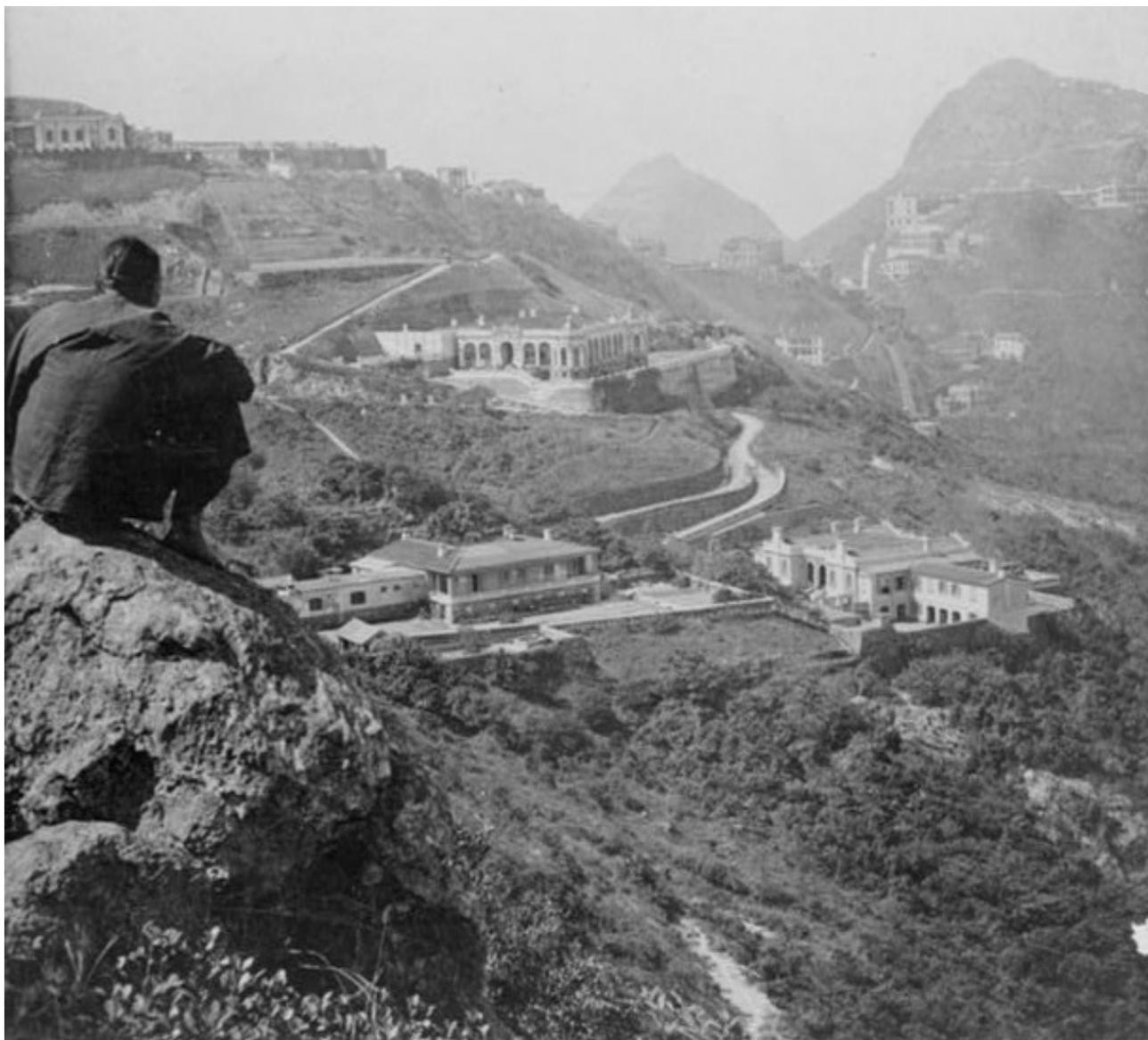
Faction: None

Threat 8 - Criminal

*"Look, I didn't know what was in the box. I was just told to deliver it. I can't tell you who sent me; they'll kill me!"*

The big fish of Shangren Gang's criminal society take care to insulate themselves from the attentions of the watch, but other members of their networks and independent operators are at risk. If they reach the Watch house, a trip to receive the governor's justice is assured. Big Lo is a small-time crook who likes to rub shoulders with bigger names, but were it not for his size and strength he'd not have got anywhere.

Combat Style: Aggressive; Dog techniques; unarmed.



## Merchants' Reach

### Jiang Lam

Faction: Watch

Threat 7 - Informant

*"Well, if you insist then I shall stand aside. But tell the Captain that what we both feared has come to pass."*

Jiang Lam was a loyal member of the Brothers until the Righteous Harmony Society blackmailed him into passing them information when they discovered he had been skimming money. Realising he was likely to be killed for treachery sooner rather than later, he made the decision to approach Captain Sheng with a view to receiving some protection in exchange for providing information on both groups. So far, his gambit has worked. Sheng has occasionally leaked disinformation that pulled suspicion away from Jiang Lam, to keep the informant active.

Conflict Style: Measured.

### Zan Lu

Faction: Watch

Threat 5 - Senior watch member

*"Stand down."*

Captain Sheng maintains a cadre of talented watchmen as his personal retinue, called 'Sheng's Hands'. Not out of any sense of self-aggrandisement, you understand, but as his back-up when he is called out of the watch-house to deal with serious trouble. They are a cut above most members of the watch, but still struggle to deal with well-trained adversaries when they don't have the advantage of numbers. Zan Lu is one such Hand, trained in an unusual weapon.

Combat Style: Showy; chain whip.



## Legations

The Legations of the Europeans are distinct, but the social circle goes to events at all of them. It is quite likely that one of the gentry will be found at any given Legation, and thus their support staff too. A youxiá attending a formal dance at a Legation will truly be a fish out of water.

### *King*

Faction: The Brothers

Threat: I3 - Servant and mole

*"Yes, sir."*

'King' is the name given to one of the senior servants of the Dutch legation, as a joke. He bears scorn and injustice stoically, his bald head forever bobbing in obsequious capitulation. Little do his employers know that he has been a member in good standing of the Brothers since he was a boy. He acts as an interpreter when asked, which is often, and passes any interesting information to his network. In his capacity as a servant he also is told or overhears many other useful secrets. Although in advanced in years, he still has most of the strength of his prime. Should he be exposed or challenged, he will prove to be a deadly opponent.

Combat Style: Showy; Rat and Monkey techniques; daggers.

### *Viscount Stanton*

Faction: Company

Threat: I2 - Plenipotentiary

*"This man's babble is most annoying. Have him thrown out."*

The Viscount is a hard-nosed man who rose to prominence in the Company by noticing if ship-board rations were cut back by 10%, the saving would more than make up for the additional margin of ships lost due to mutinies and starvation following contrary conditions. His philosophy is a simple one- those born to privilege should not be afraid to use it as they will, the lower orders being fit only for the work they can do. He is considered heartless even by other Company men, but good enough in his position that there is no pressure to have him removed.

Conflict Style: Aggressive.



## Merchants' Reach

### Jean-Baptiste LeCourt

Faction: French Legation

Threat: **II** - Plenipotentiary

*"I like your style, Chinaman. Join me for a drink, why don't you?"*

LeCourt was a brash man, who fought many duels and had a youthful ambition to recover the influence and wealth of his forbears. After he put a foot wrong in political machinations in France, he found himself sent to China as a dead-end posting. Reflecting on this surprising new direction in his life, he decided that whole-hearted pursuit of success was a fool's errand, and decided to spend more time simply enjoying himself. As long as you are not an obstacle to his goals he is engaging company, but he can turn in an instant.

Combat Style: Efficient; finely-crafted pistol.

### Jia Hou

Faction: Righteous Harmony Society

Threat: **8** - Servant and agitator

*"If you raise no hand to stop the arrival of the opium you are as bad as they are."*

It's not easy, being an inexperienced agent. Jia Hou's plan was to work as a maid in the French legation long enough to get a reference for a more senior position in its English counterpart, but so far has been unable to make the swap. The work is hard and tiring, and she is struggling to find time and energy for the Society's work. To ease the frustration, she's taken to participating in direct action when she can, which then leaves her sleepy the next day, reducing her chances of getting a better job further. Her zeal is undiminished, however.

Combat Style: Cautious; Ram techniques; staff.

### Lady Stanton

Faction: Company

Threat: **4** - Company lady

*"The impermanence of this man! Can anything be done to him?"*

Lady Stanton is high-born, rich, and as dense as lead. The beauty of her youth was achieved by the skilful work of a battalion of maids, and as no maid will abide being in her service for more than a few months these days she has to attend to her appearance herself. She is as poor at that as she is at anything else, leading to a bizarre appearance no-one dares to pass comment on. She is prone to malapropisms in speech, and has a haughty to attitude to anyone who isn't part of the English nobility. She hates being in Shangren Gang, surrounded by 'barbarousness'.

Conflict Style: Incompetent.



## Street

The streets of Shangren Gang are crowded any time of day, and most of them remain busy all through the night. The city grew to no real design, so some of the most direct routes are narrow streets rather than broad thoroughfares. Competition for prime stall space by the major junctions is fierce.



## Merchants' Reach

### Sergeant Lee

Faction: Watch

Threat: I3 - Watch sergeant

*"Your excuses can wait until the governor is available to listen to them."*

Sergeant Lee is a watchman of the old school. That is to say, he will arrest anyone and everyone he thinks might be involved, and leave the complicated business of working out what has happened and who has committed a crime to someone else. Recently, he has taken to frequenting opium dens on his nights off- not for the opium itself, he's quick to tell the proprietor, but for the company of some of the women. What began as doing a favour for an old friend has now become taking kick-backs from anyone who has learned his silence can be bought. Captain Sheng is, as yet, unaware of either compromising detail.

Conflict Style: Defensive; Rabbit and Pig techniques; ji.

### Zhou Ma

Faction: Governor Long

Threat: 4 - Messenger

*"Make way! Governor's business!"*

The off-white garb of Governor Long's messengers is a frequent sight in the city. Zhou Ma is typical of them, little more than a boy looking to make some money where he can. Although the messengers travel unarmed, they generally go unmolested as attracting the governor's ire is a bad strategic move. Written messages are generally sent in a sealed envelope, but more usually a short message such as 'your presence is required at the palace' is communicated verbally. Some messengers are also in the pay of another faction, but as they are assigned to tasks randomly little information can be gained from them systematically.

Conflict Style: Aggressive.

### Watchmen

Faction: Watch

Cheap Foes

The rank and file of the watch are just ordinary people doing a job with pay that matches the occasional dangerous situation. Few, apart from the sergeants and the captain, have much skill beyond basic training with a spear. They rely on their authority and their numbers to bring suspects in.

Combat Style: Cowardly; qiang.



## Merchants' Reach

### Lantern-man

Faction: Watch  
Cheap Foe

With the watch as stretched as it is, Captain Sheng has been finding savings wherever he can. Usually, one watchman per group patrolling at night carries a lantern on a long pole. Sheng has taken to hiring peasants to do that instead, leaving an extra watchman able to fight. Of course, these lantern-men have a tendency to drop the lantern and run away as soon as any fight starts, or get caught in the middle of a dangerous fight with no avenue of escape, so they are not the most reliable of allies.

### Docks

The three docks areas tend to be either very busy, such as when a ship is unloading, or dead quiet. Large warehouses litter the area. When quiet, such as at night, out of the way places are used for shady deals.

### Jack Roberts

Faction: Royal Navy  
Threat: I2 - Quartermaster

*"To hear the cap'n tell it, you lot are all just as bad as each other. But I thinks there's good 'uns and bad 'uns all over, and I ain't never done wrong by a good 'un if I could help it."*

The quartermaster of the HMS Madras has seen action in many places, and at many times. He affects an air of having seen it all, commenting cynically on his orders and the state of affairs in Shangren Gang. Despite his gruff exterior, he has a soft spot for children and anyone who sticks to their principles in a pinch. Having met a great many people from a great many countries, he doesn't subscribe to the same beliefs in European superiority as his superiors. He can generally be found procuring supplies for the Navy ships at port during the day, where he enjoys preferential rates from the locals he's made friends of.

Combat Style: Defensive; sailor's knife and pistols.



## Merchants' Reach

### Ah Bai

Faction: Smuggler

Threat: II - Captain

*"Best not to enquire about people's business too closely, in case you find out what it is."*

Ah Bai has survived as a smuggler working in the Shangren Gang area for many years, mostly by only ever taking low-risk cargoes and paying close attention to where officialdom is attempting to crack down on his trade. He's sly, but not exactly untrustworthy. If someone deals with him honestly, he'll not turn on them without good reason. On the other hand, he has a talent for dropping people into big trouble with a careless word in the right ear at the right time if they cross him. Unbeknownst to him, he's attracted the attention of the House of Lin for the wrong reasons. The Lin group hasn't decided what to do about him yet, but will act soon.

Combat Style: Showy; Monkey technique; old pistol and dao.

### Chun Xu

Faction: The Brothers

Threat: 9 - Riverboat proprietress

*"Stay a while, have a drink free of charge. There is no need to stand on formality."*

Chun Xu's family has been influential in the Brothers for generations, running a wallowing riverboat as a drinking and gambling establishment. When her father met a sticky end in a territorial dispute within the group, with no son to take his place, several cousins of his tried to lay a claim to it. What they had not expected, however, was that his only daughter was cunning enough to make her own claim stick. She has run the 'Jade Junk' successfully ever since. Although somewhat advanced in years, she has lost none of her cleverness, and is rumoured to have seduced many important officials in her time. Although taking control of the business might be seen as a coup for equality, she never managed to acquire the same influence in the wider organisation that her father had. She looks back wistfully and wonders if she should have forced the issue more, and might go out of her way to assist other confident women who impress her.

Combat Style: Showy; Tiger techniques; iron fan.



## Merchants' Reach

### Yi Lim

Faction: White Tiger Trading

Threat: 7 - Dockhand

*"I've no time for your talk. Junks need loading, junks need unloading."*

Yi Lim is typical of the dockhands who work all the hours of daylight at the docks. He's young, strong and not too concerned about matters outside his daily life. He avoids contact with people he knows have thrown their lot in with one of the criminal organisations, as much as possible, on the basis that he doesn't need the trouble. By the same token, he'll keep his distance from anyone who looks like they're causing trouble for the same groups. He's not blind to injustice, just practical about where his next meal is coming from.

Combat Style: Cautious; boat hook.



## *Merchants' Reach*

### ***Celso Franco***

Faction: Portuguese Legation

Threat: 5 - Nervous guard

*"St-stand down! I mean it!"*

Some legation warehouses house goods considered too valuable to be trusted to the usual locally-hired guards, or the ability of the watch to keep thieves away. Seamen or European staff with no other assignment are sometimes posted as guards, with rifles, against their protestations. Celso Franco is usually a junior cook at the Portuguese Legation, but has been repeatedly posted as a guard to Portuguese-owned warehouses recently. He lives in fear that some of the dangerous-looking Chinese gangs that roam the docks area at night will take an interest in the building he is guarding. Given that he's armed, scared and alone it's probably only a matter of time before there is a shooting. If he hurts anyone Chinese when that happens, he'll be lucky to escape with his life if no-one shields him from the angry mob bent on revenge.

Combat Style: Incompetent; rifle.

### ***Dockyard Thugs***

Faction: The Brothers

Cheap Foes

In some places, being associated with the Brothers carries serious cachet. Any relationship, however tangential, gives bragging rights. Plenty of dockhands boast of membership, and many of them are actually telling the truth. This means that the Brothers have no shortage of tough men they can ask to rough someone up. It also means there are plenty of tough men on the docks looking to impress their friends by picking fights with strangers.

Combat Style: Aggressive.



## Marketplace

The legion marketplaces of the city attract people from all walks of life. Everyone needs to eat, and everyone goes to the markets to see what bargains they can find. Very nearly anyone else in this chapter could be found at a market at some point.

### Monk Chao

Faction: Righteous Harmony Society

Threat: **I3** - Accepting donations

*"Give only as much as you can spare, for the good of the poor and the needy."*

Monk Chao is a familiar sight in the markets, all hours of the day. He collects for his Taoist temple, which uses the money to help feed the poor and tend to the sick. The wealthy make ostentatious offerings at the temple itself, but Chao engages people in the market and tempts them to drop a few coins into his box. The merchants don't like to see money leave the pockets of prospective customers, but it would be very bad for business if they were seen harassing a holy man. However, only a fraction of the money Chao collects ends up at the temple. He gives as much as he can to his contacts in the Righteous Harmony Society, for their cause.

Combat Style: Efficient; Horse and Dragon techniques; bare hands.

### Zhi Xun

Faction: Brothers

Threat: **I0** - Pick-pocket

*"Sorry, didn't see you there."*

To make a living as a pick-pocket in the busiest markets and not end up dead in an alleyway, you need to be part of the Brothers. Of course, Zhi Xun considers herself to have no ties to them other than business, and she even manages to conceal her full take from them. There is no loyalty there, only practicality. She fancies herself as being at the pinnacle of her craft, and sets herself challenges to pick the most difficult and/or dangerous pockets she can find. An experienced youxiá, known in the city as a mighty warrior, is a tempting target indeed. The drive behind her thrill-seeking behaviour is restlessness with her current life. It's not unthinkable that she might be brought to wisdom by the patience of a teacher.

Combat Style: Measured; Tiger techniques; sanjiegun.



## Merchants' Reach

### Tu Kuang

Faction: None

Threat: 7 - Information broker

*"Well, I hear a lot of things. Can't say that I remember any of them, really. But would you like some peaches? They are very juicy."*

Tu Kuang's unassuming fruit stall occupies a prime position in the largest market square. While his fruit is generally of high quality, how he really makes his money is in selling information. He's very egalitarian in his approach- he will tell any secret to anyone who has the right amount of money. If he ever names a price for an ordinary purchase that seems way over the odds, that's his way of telling you he has information you should be interested in. If you pay, he'll tell you what you need to know. He has an extensive network that feeds him the information he sells, paid for out of his own pocket, but he will accept juicy information as barter from his customers. So far, he's avoided making any real enemies in Shangren Gang, mostly because he's been of use to most factions at one point or another. Captain Sheng has a profound dislike for him, but as nothing he does is technically illegal the watch can't touch him.

Conflict Style: Cautious.

### Old Man Chang

Faction: None

Threat: 6 - Beggar

*"Spare some food for an old man, and he will tell you a story or two."*

Chang was a soldier, once. He was gravely injured in a battle with some bandits, and was left in Shangren Gang with nothing to his name. He has been a beggar for nearly twenty years, surviving on such scarce food that he's a shadow of his former self. He will take up any dropped food in an instant, and tries to engage strangers in conversation, the idea being to tell stories of his military career in exchange for a little money or a share of their food. Most of his stories are pure fiction, or ones he heard from other people and stole to tell himself. One or two might even be recognisable as events in the lives of the very youxiá talking to him. The locals leave him be, unless he gets too close to their stall for comfort, but they don't listen to his blather. Despite his emaciated state, he is still surprisingly strong and skilful.

Combat Style: Defensive; crutch.



## Merchants' Reach

### Ning Wong

Faction: None

Threat: 4 - Rogue trader

*"What? It must have been improperly stored. Look, I can't take it back, but I can offer you a special rate on what I have in stock today..."*

It's hard to make a habit of cheating customers, because they seldom come back. Ning Wong has worked out that the city sees enough new faces day to day that he will never run out of suckers to sell his wares to. He buys anything that's been reduced in price due to poor quality or being on the brink of rotting, uses his tricks of the trade to freshen it all up a bit, then sells it at slightly above the odds with a good line of patter. Selling high means that locals avoid him which conveniently means he avoids having a poor reputation.

Conflict Style: Aggressive.

### Opium Den

There are fewer dedicated opium dens in the city than you might expect- despite the roaring trade in the drug, use within the city is a relatively recent development. Many users are affluent enough to procure their own supply and enjoy it in the comfort of their own homes. However, the opium dens that exist are very busy. Most of their customers are Chinese, but the occasional Westerner takes his courage in both hands to travel to one to enjoy its hospitality.

### Tai Liu

Faction: The Brothers

Threat: 18 - Madame

*"Silence, girl. You'll do as I say or I'll find worse customers for you than you can imagine."*

Tai Liu diligently served the Brothers for five years as a general enforcer and hired muscle. After she had killed the proprietor of one of the organisation's opium dens for betraying a Brother, she was rewarded by being put in charge of it instead. She is fanatically loyal to the group. When she was its deadliest heavy, this loyalty manifested itself as brutality and efficiency. Now, it manifests itself as dedication to turning a profit. Tai Liu runs the den with an iron fist, insisting on absolute obedience from the prostitutes and other staff at all times. Perhaps her only positive aspect is her zero-tolerance policy for customers hurting the girls- the last time this happened she killed an Imperial Bureaucrat with her bare hands, right in front of the rest of the customers.

Combat Style: Measured; Rabbit, Monkey and Cockerel techniques; butterfly swords.



## Merchants' Reach

### Chun Zao

Faction: House of Lin

Threat: IO - Doorman

*"You are not invited. Leave. Now."*

Only the staff of the Golden Fortune Inn know that it's owned and operated by representative from the House of Lin. The attic area is an invitation-only opium den, run exclusively for the benefit of high-ranking officials and merchants in the city who can't afford to be seen partaking in more common areas. As the doorman of the Golden Fortune, Chun Zao knows its clientèle by sight. The desired level of privacy means that he has to be very harsh with strangers. He is stony-faced and impassive on duty. He tried opium himself, once, but decided he did not care for it. He's jokingly referred to as a monk by regular patrons of the establishment, for his habitual silence. What his taciturn demeanour hides, however, is a tendency for explosive violence. He enjoys that part of his work, and is prepared to wait for opportunities to indulge himself.

Combat Style: Aggressive; Ox techniques; chui.

### Mei

Faction: None

Threat: 3 - Reluctant prostitute

*"Please, not another night's work..."*

Mei's father, a farmer up the valley from Shangren Gang, got into debt with the Brothers. To pay off what he owed, he gave Mei to them. Her first visit to the city was when she was taken to Tai Liu's brothel, that night she was presented to a customer. She has nowhere to run to, no money of her own, and a growing sense of despair. To keep her compliant, she has been heavily dosed with opium. At the end of the first month of her captivity, she is barely recognisable. Liberating her from her dreadful situation would entail having to assume responsibility for her afterwards, for good or ill.

### Ru Wong

Faction: None

Cheap Foe - Addict

*"Look- I've got the money tonight. So there's no problem, right?"*

Ru Wong is a typical example of an opium addict in Shangren Gang. What started as an occasional habit he indulged in after being paid has become an almost daily routine. Only lack of money keeps him away. He turns up late to work, struggles to cope with demanding physical labour, and is on the brink of being fired. It might only take the right word at the right time, and perhaps someone to support him and believe in his worth, to lift him out of the downward spiral he's in.



## ***Optional Rule - Cheaper Foes***

Having a large pool of dice for Cheap Foes can be something of an annoyance. One method is to keep a record of how many Cheap Foes remain and how many have yet to act (perhaps using twelve- or twenty-sided dice). When the Cheap Foes attack, reduce 'yet to act' by 1 and roll a single six-sided dice to see how strong the attack is. When the Cheap Foes are attacked, roll a dice. If the defence is good enough, reduce 'yet to act' by 1, otherwise reduce 'remaining' by 1. If an attack can't be defended against, you can simply skip the roll.

It's up to you whether you also reduce 'yet to act' if it ever exceeds 'remaining'.

