

The City of Butterflies Gazetteer

The City of Butterflies, also called Hu Die Cheng, is the capital of the Jade Emperor's province. It is dominated by a giant palace that is built on magically strengthened pillars, hovering 9 feet above the ground. Many rich nobles and bureaucrats try to emulate this style and due to the many buildings, an undercity of sorts has developed. Everything is constructed of various metals, jade, or silk and indeed the city almost looks like the wing of a butterfly from afar. However, the name Hu Die Cheng comes from the common form of communication in the city - tiny butterfly-shaped constructs. Since they are all provided by the Jade Emperor himself, he is always able to keep track of conspiracies against him.

Hu Die Cheng offers many adventuring opportunities since it is rife with intrigue. Also, every 12th full moon, the city disappears into the shadow plane for a whole night, as part of a curse that has befallen its ruler. Nobody knows the nature of this curse but it is obvious that the ruler is somehow involved as the shadow creatures are drawn to him and yet he never leaves the city at the time of the shift. During the period of



extraplanar disruption every able hand is needed to defend the city and pay is good, even though one has to live with the korobokurus in the undercity. Since evil spirits often infiltrate the real world during this time or possess people, there is always something to do here.

History

Hu Die Cheng was a prosperous city of merchants during the time of the golden empire. Sitting at the hub of trade from the borders of the empire, trading houses decided to settle here and many of the old palaces still hint at that golden time.

The city reached its high about 50 years before the fall of the Empire, when princess Ling decided to build her winter palace here as she loved the butterflies which were at that time abundant in the city.

By the time of the great civil war, however, the city was already in decline. Vice had weakened its inhabitants and the great trading houses had lost their edge to crafty newcomers in the capital. When news of the Emperors death came to town, the citizens despaired and the marauding bands of shadow creatures met little resistance, sacking the city and stealing many of its great treasures.

When it became obvious that the Empire had fallen, the Blademaster, now ruler of

The Court of the Jade Emperor

Han Fei Guang, the Blue Hunter, slowly approached the golden palace gates of the pyramidal palace of the Jade Emperor. Carefully, he glanced at the silver statues that flanked the entry and whose eyes seemed to follow his movements. Awe filled him as he saw the priceless murals depicting the fall of the Empire and the rebirth of the City of Butterflies.

"Han Fei", a voice came from a shadowy alcove, "His Imperial Majesty eagerly awaits you. He has heard about your exploits in the North and he feels that your knowledge and tact with barbarians may be beneficial to his court." The Hunter closely looked at the gaunt and skeletal eunuch who had addressed him. A shudder passed over him as he saw the carefully hidden contempt behind the eyes of the courtier and not for the first or the last time he wondered whether accepting the position of secret associate to the court had been such a good idea after all.

his own province, came to loot the city, a mysterious being made completely of jade stepped forward and with its army of terracotta warriors and its powerful magic, it defeated the forces of the Blademaster. The thankful citizens accepted the newcomer as their leader and were only too willing to believe that his stone body housed the spirit of the Emperor. The 200 years of his rule have been a time of rebuilding and prosperity. However, those opposed to him have realised that his patience with his enemies is extremely limited and that his witch hunters are deadly and efficient. The butterflies which had been killed by the foul shadow creatures have been replaced with tiny constructs that are used to exchange messages.

Customs & Religion

Hu Die Cheng is a beautiful city and its citizens are very well dressed and see sloppy appearance as a disgrace. They are also very polite and it is difficult for outsiders to tell who is a friend and who a foe.

The bureaucrats at the court use fans to show their feelings about a situation. In order to understand this language, a high innuendo skill and some experience with this code is required. The meaning is conveyed mainly by the movements of the fan, however, the colour and pattern can also signify a certain intention with which somebody goes into a meeting.

The City of Butterflies is a safe place for its citizens due to the powerful magic of the jade lich that rules the city. At almost every corner one finds a terracotta warrior that will start to move as soon as somebody begins causing trouble.

Another force to be reckoned with are the witch hunters, who relentlessly stamp out anybody who would defy their master and especially those who are in league with dark spirits or otherworldly entities.



Some common proverbs are:

"Beware, he carries a red fan" - a red fan signifies anger at the behaviour of another person and is often seen as a prelude to a feud.

"Volatile as a butterfly" - if somebody is too proud of his achievements, he is reminded of the fate of the butterflies and how they were never replaced properly after their loss. To use this proverb in the presence of the Emperor, creator of the construct butterflies, is a grave insult.



Dress

Dress is a very important thing to the Hu Die Chengans and even the poorest free man will dress his best. Servants other than those employed in the house, are usually dirty and unkempt, especially if they are korobokurus.

The bureaucrats and nobles favour silk robes in green tones, embroidered with scenes of natural beauty. They often carry fans. Men wear their heads bald with only a single long braid hanging from the back of their skull. Women prefer to have the most impressive and artistic hairdos, often incorporating flowers, twigs, and even small fruit.

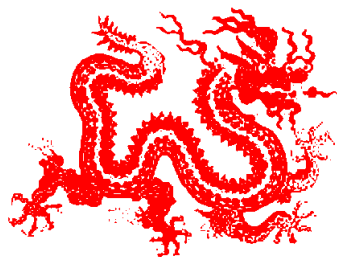
The witch hunters, an integral part of society, are easily recognisable by their unique uniform. Members of this secretive organisation wear short hair and hide their faces behind white porcelain masks which shaped to permanently wear a frown. Only in private will they take these off, even though some independent-minded witch hunters make a point by not wearing their masks at all.

Food

The food of Hu Die Cheng is bland by the standards of most people, however, it offers a variety of textures and beautiful shapes. Preparing food is considered an art form and cooks have high knowledge in arts. In fact, many are painters or sculptors and use these skills while preparing food.

Inhabitants of the City

Most inhabitants of the City of Butterflies are human. Still there is a substantial minority of korobokuru who live in the undercity. Hengeyokai are rare outside the court of the Jade Emperor who for some reason seems to value these shapechangers as advisors and special agents. The average subject however, sees these creatures with fear and superstition. The emperor has granted his loyal hengeyokai special privileges such as exemption from taxes but forbids them to live among the human subjects. Thus all shapechangers live in a special part of town shunned by most others. Some of the noble families have some spirit blood, indeed some are even spirit folk but they form a negligible but influential minority.



Creature and Monsters

While most would expect a city such as this one to be free from monsters, this is far from the truth. Of course none of the easily recognisable threats roam the streets but those evils able to hide their true form prosper in the capital of the

Jade Emperor. There are several vampires and related creatures who dwell in the undercity, ruling the powerful korobokuru gangs. Shadow creatures use the day of the shifting to enter the city and hide in less frequented spots, coming out at night to hunt. Indeed for those who do not live the comfort of the noble palaces, death can be a swift occurrence at night.

Another 'monster type' is abundant, even if not considered monstrous by the locals. Constructs of all kinds serve the Lich; terracotta warriors, silver warriors, all kinds of golems, and of course the ubiquitous message butterflies.

Important Sites

The Undercity

Beneath the many floating buildings as well as in the many tunnels carved by its inhabitants lies the legendary undercity of Hu Die Cheng. It is home to the numerous korobokuru servants of the rich bureaucrats.

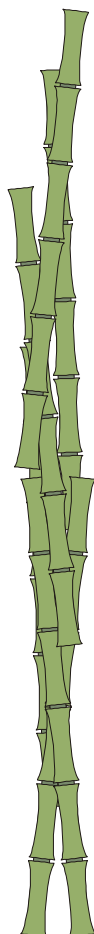
This part of town is dirty and dark, humans seldom go here. First of all the undercity is a crowded mess of burrows and tiny huts, some even suspended from the ceiling, making most passages too small for them anyway. Second, a lone human can easily fall prey to the local crime gangs, which sport flashy bandanas to show their affiliation. No bureaucrat wants to admit that they have lost control over the undercity a long time ago.

Ling Palace

The dragonfly palace was the city dwelling of a princess long ago but is now home to the Grand Master of the Witch Hunters.

The Jade Palace

This gigantic building made of green stone dominates the city. It covers about



half of its surface and is higher than any other building, shaped like a pyramid, yet with many windows, terraces, and balconies. Only nobles or important guests are admitted to the palace and no one save the emperor or his construct servants may enter the secret library at the tip.

The Jade Emperor is an autocratic ruler, yet, even he has advisors and ministers. While most of them are loyal to their ruler, there is always intrigue among them. A day at the court is very similar to a game of chess which, along with the secret language of the fan, makes it hard for newcomers to overcome the obstacles imposed against them.

Zheng Yu Springs

The Zheng Yu springs are beautiful pavillions built around a small magical spring that produces hot water that is supposed to have healing effects. Since it is accessible only to the highest bureaucrats and nobles it is also a place where many informal arrangements are made.

The Imperial Menagerie

During his living days, the Jade Lich was a frequent traveller to foreign lands and an avid collector of exotic creatures. This beautiful park contains creatures from all over the world, including a valuable collection of trolls used for show fights. The empire does not know these creatures and most visitors are impressed by their regenerative abilities.

The Temple of Pure Thought

The headquarter of the witch hunters is a huge building, yet dwarfed by the neighbouring Jade Palace. The temple is a collection of gold-and-white pagodas in a landscape of beautiful moss gardens surrounded by a huge wall and protected by horrible magic. The temple is off limits to anybody not a member of the witch hunters and rumours both

aggrandising and ghastly abound about its interior.

Stained Glass Palace

This small palace is made entirely of stained glass, giving it the look of a multi-coloured gem. This fantastic building is home to No Qiu, the minister of justice.

The Rose Petal House

This small palace near the periphery to the city is the former villa of one of the trading houses. It used to be lavishly decorated with protective wooden statues but many of the former glory is gone. Yet, its rose gardens are famous throughout the city, being magically tended by Hua Wen, its owner.

Mian Palace

Mian Weng, the minister of rites, owns this beautiful sandstone palace which is covered with erotic carvings created by a famous Hynd artist for the former owner, a wealthy merchant.

The Starlight Palace

This modest palace is enchanted to sparkle with starlight in the night. General Zhen, the current owner, spends little time here, preferring to stay in the barracks, watching over the terracotta army.

