

死灰復燃

DEAD ASHES BURN AGAIN

Tom McGrenery

THE WITNESS

Colonel Song, senior detective in the Peking police. He is responding to a report that the mutilated body of a teenager has been found close to the old city walls. His personality is *methodical* and his strength is his *sense of duty*.

LOCATION AND ERA

Peking, in the freezing winter of 1937. The city is increasingly desperate and vicious: refugees stream in from the countryside to escape the advancing Imperial Japanese Army; Kuomintang death squads hunt spies; those who can afford to do so plan their escape to Shanghai, Hong Kong or further afield.

OTHER CHARACTERS

Chao Hsi-wei – an aging rickshaw puller originally from Fengtien province. He works the risky late-night shifts for the chance of the occasional generous tipper, dragging his creaking bones through the cold to feed his family.

Ma Yu-t'ing – an elegant widow who in her youth before the 1911 revolution was a servant at the Imperial court. A pleasant lady with a warm smile, she tutors wealthy children in foreign languages at her home.

Theodore Warner - a retired British diplomat with a history of violence, who has lived in China for more than forty years. An expert on the superstitions, myths and magic of the country.

Kseniya Dubrovina - a White Russian ballerina raised in Shanghai, now a dancer at the seedy "Peking Rose" cabaret. She has been saving her pay and tips, and is just days away from getting a ticket to somewhere happier, far away.

Louis Wentworth - a wealthy American dentist who resides in the Legation Quarter. A respected member of Peking's foreign community, he often goes hunting in the Western Hills, where he also recently established a nudist colony not far from the Great Wall.

Jack Brigman - narcotics king of the Badlands and a former US Marine. He owns the Olympia, a nightclub and gambling den that also functions as his dope-pushing headquarters. He has connections with senior figures in the Legation Quarter as well as paid-off Peking cops.

Helen Snow - American expatriate journalist, who publishes the leftist journal Democracy with her husband Edgar. Friendly with the Communist leadership presently hiding in the caves at Yan'an.

Lin Fu-hsiang – the gaunt and severe Peking chief of the Investigation and Statistics Bureau, the Nationalist government's secret police. Lin reports directly to the organisation's head, Tai Li, known as "the Himmler of China" and for whom he carries out espionage and liquidations.

CARDS: drawn randomly as usual.

OTHER LOCATIONS

- ❖ The Legation Quarter - a gated section of the city given over to Great Britain and other foreign powers, home to luxury hotels, consulates, fancy shops and exclusive clubs. Without special permission, it is off-limits to the Peking police.
- ❖ The Badlands - an unpoliced rookery of twisting alleyways to the east of the Legation Quarter, a haven of vice operated and frequented by foreigners: mainly White Russians, Americans and Koreans with Japanese backing. Dancehalls, dive bars, opium dens and brothels, with heroin, opium and flesh sold openly on the streets.
- ❖ The Fox Tower - an abandoned Ming-era guard tower on the old city wall, widely believed to be haunted by malicious fox spirits.
- ❖ No. 2, K'uei Chia Ch'ang Alley - a *siheyuan* courtyard home owned by a wealthy family. Cold, echoing rooms, dark wooden furniture, lacquered screens, art and artefacts on display from throughout China's recorded history.

CLUES

- ❖ A corpse, partially dismembered, largely bloodless and with internal organs removed.
- ❖ A haunting cry that sounds almost, but not quite, like a human baby.
- ❖ Repeated accounts of glimmering lights seen out of the corner of the eye.
- ❖ Verbal evidence that the eyewitness claims they told you on a previous occasion - but you remember an entirely different account.
- ❖ Gleaming eyes under the arc lights at the French consulate's ice rink.
- ❖ A hunk of bread dipped in the blood of an executed collaborator: said to have medicinal properties.
- ❖ An incoherent handwritten journal, describing the cannibal practices of the author's brother and perhaps others.
- ❖ Flickering, ghostly lights seen at night in an abandoned structure.
- ❖ Strange figures enacting a torchlit ritual in the shadow of an ancient wall.
- ❖ An ornamental garden, pristine and orderly, where all sound seems diminished to near-silence.

- ❖ Ancient, broken tortoise-shells carved with words of prophecy. Many of the words are missing.