

- In The Shadow Of The Wicked City - Strike Force Zero -

In The Shadow Of The Wicked City

A Strike Force Zero Scenario

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For Warpcon XX

Strike Force Zero / The Middle Kingdom

A Bit of Background

This scenario is set in the same version of the World of Darkness as Vampire the Masquerade and, more importantly, Kindred of the East. GMs familiar with the new or old world of darkness shouldn't have any significant problems running this as most of the new, Eastern supernatural powers will be used by NPCs and, therefore, will become tools for drama. Also, the Middle Kingdom (Asia) is pretty much separate from everything else so you don't even need to know anything about Western Vampires, Werewolves, Fairies etc. All you should need will be in the scenario.

In this game the players are all humans that work for a branch of the Japanese government called Strike Force Zero. Strike Force Zero was set up in 1989 using information uncovered after World War 2 and aims to uncover supernatural activity in Japan. Most of the higher ups of the government wish to shut down Strike Force Zero as they don't believe in ghosts and vampires, but the agency struggles on with its thankless task. Strike Force agents are split into teams of five called Zero Teams that are labelled A through J. These teams usually include agents with mixed skill types; one may be an occult researcher while another might be a weapons expert etc. The players are the agents that make up Zero Team B.

The Vampires of the Middle Kingdom are entirely different to their Western counterparts; these vampires are mainly called the Kuei-jin by Asians of modern nights. They come into being when a person's dies but the soul fights body fights its way back from hell to reanimate that body. The Kuei-jin believe that they cannot find true rest until they repay their Karmic debt, which is a goal some of them eternally seek to complete. The Kuei-jin cannot create their own life energy (chi) so they must gain it by drinking the blood of others, though some legends tell of them drinking breath in lieu of blood.

For some Kuei-jin earthly and material power are more important than quests for enlightenment, and so they make pacts with the Yama Kings that rule the hells from which their souls escaped. Yama Kings are demon emperors that each rule a territory in hell that has been fashioned by their own design. None can say how many Yama Kings exist, or for that matter how many hells. Kuei-jin that barter their souls to Yama Kings are called Akuma, and destroyed if encountered by regular Kuei-jin due to their unmistakable evil. Akuma are by no means the only servants of the Yama Kings in the Middle Kingdom, there are demons and demon worshipors of all descriptions, such as the Bakemono. None are so active as the Akuma though.

For this scenario the only Yama King of note will be Mikaboshi. He rules the Wicked City, a very modern hell that uses the depredations of urban lifestyle to great effect. The Wicked City doesn't just hold a dark mirror to modern Asian cities, it can become part of them. All the worst parts. A path to this hell can be found in the child brothels of Bangkok and the squatter neighbourhoods of Hong Kong and Jakarta. The hell itself is considerably more horrific than the areas listed, and is home to terrifying demons partly born of nightmares and partly forged of cold Yin metals.

Quick Info On The Player Characters

Youmi Kimura: Youmi Kimura is the occult expert for Team B. Has some experience with ghosts and so is adept with the use of the Kirlian Visor. Has grown close to Yamamoto over the years. She is 39 years old.

Yoshida Yamamoto: He is the technology and computer expert of the team. He is a perfectionist and takes his work very seriously. He has grown close to Kimura over the years. He is 38 years old.

Masamune Takahata: Takahata joined the group in 1998 having been transferred from the main intelligence branch of the government. He is fond of torture as an interrogation technique. Is also a martial arts specialist. He is 29 years old.

Takefumi Ozaki: Ozaki used to hold the rank of Major in the Japanese military until an unofficial mission he led in Korea went bad due to a Kuei-jin attack. He wasn't allowed back into the military because of what he'd seen, but was transferred to Strike Force Zero. Weapons and tactics advisor. He is 31 years old.

Motoko Takai: Having joined Strike Force Zero a year ago Takai is by far the newest member of the team and still has the most to prove. She is a forensics specialist and doubles as the Team's field medic if things get too rough. She is 27 years old.

A Note On The Equipment

All the agents are equipped with:

- Subdermal Armour (polymer implants under the agent's skin, gives agent a soak roll against lethal damage).
- Psi-Band Radios (radios plug into the ear and allow communication between players within a one mile radius).

Kimura, Takai, Yamamoto & Takahata are equipped with Striker Pistols (Dam 6, Rate 3, Clip 16).

Youmi Kimura and Motoko Takai are equipped with Kirlian Visors (Perception + Science roll difficulty 7 to detect presence of supernatural energy like Chi, Gnosis, Pathos, Quintessence etc.)

Yamamoto has "Keypads", cyberware implanted into his right forearm, they're designed to give him access to secured systems. (+2 Computers or Security if there's an electronic lock).

Masamune Takahata is equipped with "Cyber Claws". These are eight inch long blades placed at his wrists and elbows. They can be retracted when not in use. Str +4 Damage.

Takefumi Ozaki has had his right arm replaced by a bionic arm (+2 Strength when using that arm). The arm incorporates a concealed Grenade Launcher that can fire either fragmentation or incendiary grenades. (Frag G: Dam 7, Rate 1, Clip 5) (Inc G: Dam 6 per turn, Rate 1, Clip 3). He also carries a compact submachine gun. (Dam 6, Rate 9, Clip 30).

The Scenario Begins Here

Part One The Briefing

The player characters (which make up Zero Team B) all arrive in the conference room of Strike Force Zero Headquarters (the H.Q. is a skyscraper in central Tokyo) where they have a briefing to attend. They are met by Geichin Okamoto, the head of the organisation. Okamoto is a thin man with short, black hair. He is in his seventies, though he doesn't look a day over fifty.

When the characters are all seated Okamoto explains that there have been a number of unusual deaths in recent nights. If one would take the matter at face value, it would appear that the number suicides in Tokyo city centre has risen sharply. This fact is disturbing enough in and of itself, but the condition of some of the remains have brought the situation to the notice of Strike Force Zero. While the majority of the bodies have died of mundane, if varied, means, a few are suspected to have died by supernatural causes.

Ichiro Shoten was a forty two year old successful executive in a computer hardware company (Macroware) that has it's head office in Tokyo. He, and his secretary (Hatsumi Morita) were both found dead this morning in his office. Naturally, the police are calling it a murder-suicide, but there's more to it than that. The body of Ichiro Shoten, it seems, is impossible to move from the crime scene.

Natsuki Kadono was a twenty two year old working for minimum wage in a fast food restaurant. Her body was found in the bathtub of her flat, with her wrists slit by a cut-throat razor that had later fallen from her hand. The forensic team used by the police noted some irregularities. The volume of blood mixed with the water in the tub was consistent with the size of the victim, but DNA tests confirmed that it came from numerous sources. The victim was almost completely drained of blood.

The victims described above were found in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo.

Okamoto instructs the characters to take over the investigations into the deaths of Ichiro Shoten and Natsuki Kadono. As suicide isn't a crime, the characters are issued warrants to search both locations above. Hopefully, they should determine and stop whatever is causing the wave of suicides in Tokyo.

At later stages of the mission, if it has been ascertained that there is a significant threat, the characters will be given access to the armoury.

Part Two

Suicide Is Painless

Natsuki Kadono

The flat is part of a small building. When the characters arrive a cop is waiting by the crime scene tape that's across the doorway. It's considered a crime scene for the time being, until foul play can be ruled out. As the cop was expecting agents to relieve him he's pleased to see the characters. After seeing some identification, he hands over the coroner's report to the forensic expert. He shows them to the bathroom of the very small and untidy flat, then leaves. The heating must be off in this place or something, because it's really cold.

Natsuki is still in the bath, as described earlier, except the emmersion in water has caused some more swelling. No distinctly vampiric puncture marks are found on the body, but that's not unusual considering the wounds on her arms. The coroner's report has the information provided during the briefing, but also the points on the body where he attempted to extract blood with a needle. If the body is examined using Perception + Medicine, and considerable successes are rolled, a small injection needle mark (not noted in the report) is found on the left leg. Examination of the flat using a Kirlian Visor may reveal very faint supernatural energies. Some successful mundane examination of the flat will reveal Natsuki's last wage slip on her bedside locker, her pay is clearly too meagre to afford accommodation, even in this place. Also, a compact C.C.T.V. camera is discovered on top of the wardrobe in the bedroom.

If the characters wish they can speak to the landlord, Katsutoshi Takagi, as he has an office on the ground floor. Takagi is a middle aged man that's slightly out of shape. He sits behind his desk examining his computer screen as the characters enter. He is abrupt with them as he wishes to have the room back soon so that he may rent it out. If confronted about the camera he says he knows nothing about it. A search of the video files on his computer (Intelligence + Computers) will prove that he was not only watching Natsuki, but his other tenants. Any amount of further scrutiny will show that Takagi was sleeping with Natsuki. Takagi will say that the sex was between two consenting adults, and that he wasn't holding the threat of eviction over her. If Takagi is viewed by a Kirlian Visor he's obviously a human. Having said that, there's a slight but familiar taint of something supernatural. If they think to examine the list of other tenants, the characters can find that Hatsumi Morita, Shoten's secretary, also lived in this complex. Takagi didn't know she was dead, but he's eager to clear out her things so he can rent her flat to a new tenant.

If pressed hard enough, Takagi will admit that when he found Natsuki's dead body he had an uncontrollable urge to remove blood from her corpse. He bought pig's blood from a butcher to throw into the bath, hoping it would disguise his actions. When asked what he did with the blood he becomes agitated, because he honestly can't recall. An Intelligence + Occult roll will allow a character to recall that the Kuei-jin can play tricks with the minds of men.

Those at Natsuki's place of work barely knew her. Her manager cares about her loss only because he must hire a new person to flip burgers.

Ichiro Shoten

The characters enter the highrise office building that is the heart of this company's business empire. They are met near the elevator on the ground floor by a police officer. This cop escorts the characters to the floor where the bodies are. On the way to the scene the characters pass plenty of office workers, typing away at their computers. When they arrive at the corner office of the top floor, the name plate of Ichiro Shoten is being taken off the door. It's replaced by a plate with the name Daisuke Kiroshiwa on it. Kiroshiwa himself tries to confront the characters before they enter his new office, saying that they're not needed. Macroware has an adequate janitorial staff, they'll clean up the mess. There is no crime here, other than the murder of Hatsumi Morita, which Ichiro promptly punished himself for. The characters can flash a warrant or otherwise throw their weight around in order to gain access to the office.

Inside the office, Morita is slumped in a chair near to the door. She's been shot six times point blank in the chest, presumably by the revolver that now lies atop Ichiro's desk. Ichiro is suspended in the air with the weight of his body resting on his neck, as if hung by a noose. However, there's no rope. All attempts to move the corpse fail. There's a computer on the desk the characters could use. With a successful Intelligence + Computers roll a character can ascertain that Macroware had hired "Corporate Consulting" to objectively assess and streamline their business. The specialised audit recommended that most of the general personnel be removed, many of the less effective lower levels of management be demoted and that less leniency be shown to all underperforming employees. Also, by hacking into Ichiro's e-mail, the characters can tell that he was having an affair with his secretary.

As the characters investigate the room, the temperature falls dramatically until they can see their breath on the air. They notice that the world outside is getting darker, the lights in the nearby buildings start fading and turning off. Ichiro is now suspended by a visible rope, tied around his neck. He appears to be dead, but his eyes follow the characters' movements. They can cut him down, but they can't revive him. When they step out of the office they see Hatsumi typing at her desk. The rest of the workers on this floor carry on with their jobs. If the characters manage to pry the unwilling Hatsumi from her duties she'll become catatonic with fear. There's nothing on the computer worth checking. Almost as soon as they've pulled her from her work Mr. Kiroshiwa approaches and demands an explanation. Getting little other than gibberish from Hatsumi, he begins to beat her. His features look more angular than earlier, and his skin has lost some of its colour. The characters can attack Kiroshiwa, but they find him to be far more formidable than they might expect. During the fight none of the workers budge from their stations. When Kiroshiwa is defeated he seems to melt into a pool of liquid metal.

Kiroshiwa Quick Statistics

Attributes: All Physical	4	All Social	1	All Mental	5
Abilities: All Talents	3	All Skills	3	All Knowledges	1
Disciplines: Fortitude	4	Potence	2		

When the characters take the elevator back to the ground floor the world returns to normal. The lights are on in the surrounding buildings and the temperature is no longer harsh.

Part Three Investigating Contacts and Leads

1. Takahata has developed a few contacts in the Yakuza over the years, but Hyabusa is generally the most useful, not to mention longest lived. As Hyabusa avoids speaking much about anything of importance over the phone, he will agree to meet Takahata in person. They meet at a teahouse owned by the Yakuza. Hyabusa knows about the Kuei-jin, in fact the head of his gumi is a vampire. Some of the performers at his club "Ghost Flame" are also hungry dead. The relationship between organised crime and the supernatural is a delicate one, so he sometimes slips information to Strike Force Zero, in case things go south. He'll tell Takahata that a rival of his gumi, known by the name Ryuichi Hachimoto, is involved with not only Corporate Consulting but a number of other business fronts. One of the businesses is a factory situated near the docks of Tokyo bay that employs a few hundred illegal immigrants. The factory doesn't produce anything so far as the Yakuza can tell.
2. Takefumi Ozaki knows a reliable police detective named Shirakawa. He can call this contact at any time to ask about Corporate Consulting. There's a link between the companies CC "helped" and the suicides, nothing legally actionable, but maybe Ozaki can do something about that. Also, not only has there been an inordinate amount of suicides in the Shinjuku district, but there's been increased violent crime.
3. Strike Force Zero has its own technical experts and investigators at their HQ that can look up information for the characters. There's very little to be found on Corporate Consulting other than it's legally owned by the Toda family, and Hachimoto has been employed there for the last four years. The Toda family do not live in Tokyo, so their business would largely be run by someone more local. Its address is in the west of the Shinjuku district. It has been funding a factory near the docks without any return on investment. The Toda family also owns a number of small apartment buildings near Shinjuku and Tokyo bay, including Netsuki's apartment. There was one large purchase by CC on the day that Hachimoto joined the company. The records are purposely vague on what that is, but it's suspected to be more real estate of some description.
4. If the characters visit the small apartment buildings owned by the Toda family they find that they are in very poor condition. Lack of heating and running water is a consistent problem. Ten people are living to a room in some of the buildings, and these people are regularly illegal immigrants. There's only residual supernatural energies in these establishments, it's reminiscent of the energies in Natsuki's apartment. The Toda's are absentee landlords, so Takagi is the only representative that can be spoken to.
5. If the characters investigate the other businesses that Corporate Consulting had dealings with they don't find anything especially supernatural. There's very low morale after the management followed the advice of CC and fired many employees.

6. The address given as the Corporate Consulting head office is a small, one storey building with no windows on the outside and one door. The door is unlocked, but the doorknob is frozen. The room beyond is like a walk in freezer. If a Kirlian Visor is used here it reveals a strange energy in the air, as if the party is within a large area of Chi. The characters see that there's no staff or even furniture inside, but there's a door leading to a back room. This door can be unlocked with a roll of Wits + Security (difficulty 8). Crossing over the threshold of this door brings the characters to the factory below. They don't see a return door of any description.
7. The factory can be reached by mundane means or by the doorway described above. If a Kirlian Visor is used in this area a familiar sense of all encompassing Chi, but its dark Chi, like it's defiled. It's anchored to this place by the suffering and two demons that reside here. The characters are faced with a vast open space filled with emaciated people doing menial factory work. Bizarre machines work alongside the humans to create ostensibly purposeless contraptions. Human Blood is included in the creation of these outlandish devices. The area is filled with the noises of welding and hammering, but no voices. When any of the workers flag, even slightly, one of the two tyrannical demons of metal and flesh will beat them cruelly. The Demons are three metres tall, clad in long dark coats that obscure the black armour and cybernetic weapons built into their skin. These weapons include assault rifles, flamethrowers, grenade launchers, blades, claws and frankly anything else the storyteller thinks is dramatic. The Demons of Iron and Violence will become aware of the agents before long, and attempt to eliminate them. The characters destroy the demons after a dramatic fight scene during which the workers don't budge an inch. At the destruction of the demons returning to Tokyo becomes possible, but only for a short time. The agents may only take a few of the unfortunate souls back to the land of the living with them. Some of the workers are living people trapped in this overlap. Some of the souls, however, will return to the Middle Kingdom as Kuei-jin. A Kirlian Visor can tell the difference between the living and the dead, even in hell.

Demon of Iron & Violence Quick Statistics

Attributes:	All Physical	4	All Social	1	All Mental	5
Abilities:	All Talents	4	All Skills	4	All Knowledges	1
Disciplines:	Fortitude	4	Potence	4	Protean	2
				Black Wind	3	

Part Four

Hell on Earth

The Subway

The characters are contacted by HQ to inform them that there has been an incident on a subway train that left Shinjuku Station fifteen minutes ago. The train never reached the first station on its route. The tunnel the train was travelling along passes directly underneath the Corporate Consulting HQ. When the subway technicians went to investigate, they sent a garbled radio message back to the station. The message was suddenly cut off and no further communication has been possible. Because of its location, this is presumed to be connected to the Team B investigation.

The characters must actually enter the tunnel and search for the missing train on foot. The journey is tense, as the underground of Tokyo is home to all manner of repulsive monsters. The agents keep their guard up, but note that the tunnel is blessedly quiet. That changes when they near what's left of the train. Its roof and walls have been torn open along its whole length. A highpitched clicking noise accompanied by low moans echo in the tunnel. The driver and the passengers have been removed, but there's no blood visible. When the agents approach the back of the last carriage they can make out a shape in the darkness. It makes clicking noises. Sometimes a glint of metal is seen.

When the agents shine a light on the creature they find that it fills the tunnel ahead. Its eight gleaming silver eyes fixate on the characters and its gaping maw widens to reveal the rows of savage teeth. Its dozens of metal limbs have been preoccupied knitting the train passengers into the structure of the tunnel. The missing technicians have become a section of living track. The victims look at the characters mournfully and beg for a release from their torments. The creature lets out a loud hiss before some of its razor sharp limbs descend on the characters. There's no need for actual statistics here, just have the characters pummel the demonic creature until it expires. Once it foresees its doom, the creature will try to burrow upwards. It will tear at the victims in order to accomplish this, but most of the victims will have been shredded by the creature or accidentally shot by the characters during the fight anyway. The hole in the roof of the tunnel leads into Hachimoto's apartment. The twisted, twitching remains of the creature make a good ladder.

The Lair of Ryuichi Hachimoto

When the characters ascend through the opening above, they see that they're inside a large dilapidated building. In the lower levels of this edifice are devoid of windows or doors. As the characters explore their new surroundings they become aware of hundreds of squatters that inhabit this building. These people huddle together for warmth against the bitter cold. A smell of urine wafts out from many of the rooms. The characters pass chambers where drugs are being injected into shrivelled veins and sex slaves are openly being exploited. Many of the inhabitants of this building are prepared to defend their corner with extreme violence. The characters must step over the moaning injured as they travel these corridors. Any that look upon the agents do so with terror in their eyes.

As the characters reach the higher levels of this building they can see outside through broken windows and gaps in the walls. The sky is the colour of light pollution, acid rain falls and burns those below, and cybernetic creatures of nightmare clamber on the ruined

buildings of a city that stretches on forever. A number of lightning strikes illuminate this horror. In some areas of the upper floors the rain has eaten through the roof and pours into the building.

On the top floor there's an impressive office. It has black marble floors and is surrounded by impenetrable glass, affording anyone within an excellent view of The Wicked City. From here a towering skyscraper too tall to exist in the Middle Kingdom can be seen. Ryuichi Hachimoto stands on the far side of his ivory desk with his back to the characters, admiring fruits of his labour. He appears to be in his fifties and wears an impeccable business suit. In reality he is an Akuma, a Kuei-jin that sold his soul to the Yama King Mikaboshi. He turns towards the characters as they enter and welcomes them to their new home.

If the characters don't open fire immediately, and they might, Hachimoto will speak to them in a reasonable tone of voice. "I'm forced to admit that you've hindered my designs thus far, most disagreeable. However, you are now within a domain where I have a not inconsiderable amount of power. I implore you, for your own personal benefit, to offer your services to Mikaboshi, Lord of the Wicked City." Hachimoto glances momentarily towards the tower beyond his windows before continuing. "Speak not to me of your moral qualms, for of these I care not at all. I allow you a chance at nothing less than immortality. You're decision?"

As soon as the characters attack Hachimoto he flies into a controlled rage that allows him to access his Demon Shinto discipline. Hachimoto grows to nine feet tall, he sprouts two extra arms, in each of his arms a living Yin aspected blade screams into existence and horrendous faces grow out of his chest, back and arms. Hachimoto is tough, and shouldn't go down easy. The fight should provide satisfaction for the players, but don't cling to rules too dearly. Drama is paramount. Anyway, his stats are below, they've taken into account that he's using Demon Shintai.

Ryuichi Hachimoto Quick Statistics

Attributes:	All Physical 6	All Social 4	All Mental 5
Abilities:	All Talents 3	All Skills 3	All Knowledges 4
Disciplines:	Demon Shintai 4	Ghost Flame 2	Fortitude 3

When Hachimoto is vanquished the building destabilizes. It shifts between realms making the overlap conjoining Tokyo and the Wicked City more obvious. This allows the characters to escape, taking those they will with them (as in the factory). The link to the Wicked City isn't severed by Hachimoto's death, but with Strike Force Zero aware of the locations of this decrepit apartment building in Tokyo, the factory and the other effected areas, they can protect the innocent and begin to put things right.

If the characters don't attack Hachimoto his offer is genuine. Mikaboshi is willing to have loyal servants within Strike Force Zero. If they make agree to make the pact a baleful glow emanates from the tower until the characters can no longer see, and they fall into a strange unconscious state. When they wake they agree that they all had the same dream of a pair of cold talons reshaping them. They become what is known as Bakemono, though they retain their minds. They have greatly improved physical prowess and later learn powers that were meant only for Kuei-jin. They're free to travel to the Middle Kingdom. However, their souls are forever lost, and they must always obey both Mikaboshi and Hachimoto.