

The Court of the Dome, the Nung, the Court of Resentment

"If you want to beat the Huntsmen, you've got to get mad. You have to stand up and say 'I'm a human being, god-damnit, and nobody's going to take that away from me!'"

The Anglos and the Chinese weren't the only ones who came to California seeking riches and a better life during the Gold Rush. In 1849, tens of thousands of Mexican immigrants crossed the border established little more than a year earlier by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to seek their fortune and escape the many troubles afflicting their homeland. Among them was a young man, barely more than a boy, named Joaquin Murrieta.

The son of respectable parents in Hermosillo, Joaquin, along with his half-brother Carlos and his beautiful wife Rosita, established a small farm near Placerville, then called Hangtown on account of its citizens enthusiasm for "justice." The brothers were industrious, establishing and tending to their farm while also working a claim in the nearby hills, and soon both enterprises were flourishing. The local Anglos were jealous of their success, and and tried to drive them away with threats, but Joaquin and Carlos would not be intimidated.

One night a drunken mob from Hangtown descended on the Murrieta farm. They lynched Carlos from an oak tree and tied Joaquin to a stake while they raped and murdered his beloved Rosita before his very eyes. Afterward they beat him with a horse whip until he stopped struggling, and left the young man for dead. When a few sober Hangtown citizens came upon the scene the following day, Joaquin Murrieta was already gone.

Joaquin's revenge was the stuff of legends. Over the following months he hunted down and executed every one of the 31 men who had been part of the mob that night. His thirst for retribution still unquenched, he gathered a band of fellow Mexicans, each of them dispossessed and desperate, and became the foremost bandit in California. He and his gang stole hundreds of thousands of dollars in gold, and rendered travel in the goldfields nearly impossible.

Yet for all his ruthlessness, Joaquin was kind to his fellow Mexicans, and would never turn down a friend who was in need. He gave his riches liberally to the poor, and avenged those who were oppressed. In turn, they sheltered him from the law, and called blessings down upon him.

In the end, the recently-established government of California ordered the creation of a band of rangers, twenty strong, to put an end to Joaquin and his bandits. Led by a man named Captain Love, the rangers ambushed Joaquin and his men, and shot the Mexican bandit and his horse to death. The Captain decapitated the Mexican bandit and put his head into a jar filled with alcohol, which he paraded through the streets of San Francisco.

It's said that Murrieta's head was lost in the fires of 1906, but the Court of the Dome know better. More than a hundred years later they still have it, in it's original jar no less, and display it at official gatherings. It serves as a reminder of the savagery of a time that the other Courts prefer to romanticize, and as a warning of the price for following in the legendary outlaw's footsteps.

The Courtiers of the Dome are not afraid to pay that price. Rabble-rousers and vigilantes, they are driven by a deep-seated hatred of those who perpetrate injustice. They have been victimized, by their Keepers if not by any human institution, and now they turn that pain outward against victimizers of every stripe. Some see themselves as latter-day Robin Hoods, stealing from those who grow rich from the suffering of others and giving to those who have been ground under their heel. Others defend the poor and downtrodden more directly, unleashing their righteous fury against drug dealers, protection rackets, and crooked cops. Even the more subtle among them often wind up on the wrong side of the law, but they know in their hearts that they deliver truer justice than any corrupt mortal court.

The Court takes its name from the dome of San Francisco's City Hall. Many assume that this connection is purely ironic, considering the Court's general distrust for authority, but the connection goes deeper than mere satire. City Hall has been the site of protests and demonstrations since at least the Korean war, and sits on the edge of perhaps the most impoverished part of the city. The Courtiers of the Dome see it as a place where the world of the rich and powerful meets that of the poor and the powerless, and thus the perfect symbolic focal point of their righteous mission.

Nickname: Hoods

Approaches

Bull in a China Shop: Courtiers of the Dome are single-minded in their pursuit of justice, and have a habit of tearing down anyone and anything that gets in their way. Huntsmen gain a point of Yearning when they trick a Courtier into breaking his own possessions or harming his allies in the course of avenging some sleight.

Catching Flies with Vinegar: Courtiers of the Dome cannot tolerate those who prey upon the defenseless, and their righteous fury demands swift action. Huntsmen gain a point of Yearning when they lure a Courtier into a trap with reports of abuse visited on the poor or downtrodden.

I Fought the Law....: Many who swear allegiance to the Court of the Dome are criminals, and those who aren't usually distrust the Police on principal. Huntsmen gain a point of Yearning when they manipulate mortal law enforcement into hunting a Courtier of the Dome or her allies.

Trappings of Nobility

The color most associated with the Court of the Dome is black. Black masks (domino, gas, ski, etc.) are traditional and commonly worn during Court rituals, as are black hooded garments. Black t-shirts, typically printed with inflammatory slogans, are popularly worn in more casual settings. When Courtiers wear gold, it's most often in the form of a gold chain around the neck or a piercing, though gold teeth are traditional among those changelings who happen to break or lose one. Other symbols of the Court include skulls and severed heads, cut ropes, broken chains or handcuffs, the Chinese characters 農 (*nung* "farmer; peasant") and 義 (*ji* "justice; righteousness"), and depictions of San Francisco's City Hall.

Rituals

Bonfire Night (July 25): This annual ritual commemorates the death of Joaquin Murrieta at the hands of Captain Harry Love in 1853. Courtiers assemble a larger-than-life "Love Doll," which is made in the likeness of the Captain but acts as a representation of the Huntsmen in general. The doll is dressed in the accoutrements of Huntsmen recently encountered by members of the court, both those who have already been defeated and those still at large, and lain on a pyre along with the representations or possessions of other enemies of the Court and its members. The head of Joaquin Murrieta is placed in a position of honor overlooking the proceedings, and the Champion gives a short speech before setting the pyre alight. The remainder of the night is one of raucous jubilation, including drinking, singing, fire-leaping, impromptu poetry slams and rap battles, and fights both planned and otherwise.

Catharsis: Courtiers of the Dome are passionate, but they aren't naive. They know that there are injustices that are beyond their ability to fight. Knowing that something is true isn't the same as accepting it, however, and nothing infuriates the Hoods like the sensation of powerlessness. The ritual of Catharsis provides an outlet for a Courtier's frustrations, allowing her to focus on areas where she can make a difference. The ritual takes place entirely within the dreams of the Changeling undertaking it, during which he seeks out sources of unproductive frustration and angst and vanquishes them in a manner appropriate to his abilities and beliefs.

The Duel: The Court of the Dome is made up of headstrong rebels driven by resentment and convinced of their own righteousness. Within such a group, conflicts are inevitable. In order to prevent their Court from collapsing under its own weight, the Courtiers of the Dome have developed a formalized tradition of "dueling" to settle disputes.

These duels begin with a challenge made in the presence of a Veteran of the Court, called the witness. The challenger states her grievance and demands satisfaction. The challenged then has the opportunity to make restitution immediately; otherwise he must accept the challenge.

The challenged may define the terms of the duel, subject to the approval of the witness. The duel need not be a literal fight - any contest of skill is acceptable, though there should be an element of risk involved for both duelists.

Once the duel has begun, it does not end until one side has unambiguously claimed victory or has surrendered to her opponent. The victor may claim appropriate restitution from the defeated, subject to the approval of the witness, and the duelists swear a Pledge not to revisit the matter for at least a year and a day.

Occasionally a member of another Court will agree to accept a challenge from a Courtier of the Dome, but this requires a certain amount of negotiation between the two courts, and usually a witness from each court will be present to oversee the affair.

Titles

Champion: Courtiers of the Dome are, on the whole, distrustful of authority figures in general, and hold a particular contempt for politicians. Their leader, called the Champion, therefore derives his authority solely from the respect he has earned from his fellow courtiers. His power is generally limited to rallying the Court against a particular enemy (usually a Huntsman or other agent of the Keepers) and censuring those whom he believes have betrayed the ideals of the court. Those censured by the Champion, or who believe him unfit to rule, may challenge him to a duel according to the traditions of the court, and may claim his title if victorious.

Veteran (Mantle 3+): Known among their peers by a variety of titles of respect, Veterans have proven their dedication to the ideals of the Court and their ability to contribute to the eternal struggle against injustice. Their primary role is to act as witnesses to duels between Courtiers, but they are often sought out for practical advice and serve as the leaders of motlies of less experienced Changelings.

Mantle of the Dome

- The mantle may manifest as an unnatural shadow falling across the Changeling's face, or the scent of gunpowder in the air

The character has nothing but contempt for bullies, and attempts to coerce her with threats suffer a -1 die penalty.

- Courtiers gain a dot of the Goblin Vow merit related to the court.

••• The Courtier's mantle may surround her with the shimmer of hot, rising air or mute the colors of her mien as if she were standing in shadow. Her anger may be presaged by the smell of gun smoke or a distant peal of thunder.

The Courtier's righteousness removes barriers and shatters the tools of oppression. She gains the Demolisher (••) merit.

•••• Courtiers gain a Personal Approach related to how they fulfill the ideals and story of the court. Huntsmen cannot gain Yearning from a Court Approach unless they fulfill the Personal Approach first.

••••• Becoming a paragon of her Court, the Changeling's eyes are lost behind a mask of darkness, and smoke trails from her as if her whole body were a smoldering coal. Those standing nearby can feel the heat coming off of her, and find themselves recalling past indignities with startling clarity.

The Courtier's smoldering resentment drives her onward even when it seems as though her body should fail. She gains a dot of Health.