

Beyond Otaku Dreams

By Ewen Cluney (©2013)

Alpha Version 001

Foreword

I first went to FanimeCon in the mid-90s, when it was a meet-up of three or four anime clubs at a college in Hayward. I've watched it grow into one of the larger anime conventions in the country, and today it's at the San Jose Convention Center and pulls in about 20,000 people. In 2012 I saw something that seared into my memory.

In San Jose we have a group of nutjob Christian protestor guys, the kind of give their faith a bad name. They show up whenever anyone is doing anything remotely fun, and Fanime is no exception. On that day they were out in full force, and I remember seeing one with a sign that said FEAR GOD in neon green and thinking that they do indeed worship a God of Fear. They were set up by the area in front of the convention center, which is full to the brim with cosplayers during the con, and the fans were there in droves. Some were yelling back, some had signs of their own, and one guy was playing Final Fantasy music on a saxophone. And there was an ambulance. In the middle of it all, the paramedics were loading a girl in full costume, in a powder-blue wig, into the ambulance on a stretcher.

The story of my FanimeCon 2012 was about how I visited the dealers room, hung out with my friend Jono, and ended up playing Jenga with some random people in the gaming area (including a girl dressed up as a human version of Fluttershy). But someone else had a story about how a friend who'd worked really hard on a costume had to leave the con in an ambulance. It was a powerful reminder that while people come to cons to have fun, that they come carrying hopes by the bucket-load, that this thing we do is still very human, with all the pain and cruelty and tragedy of everyday life. Over the years I've seen every hue in the spectrum of human emotion at FanimeCon, from raucous joy to deep anguish to sacred serenity. All of that, in the middle of a storm of color and sound, in a place that screams that you're supposed to be having fun. I had wanted to create something about anime fans for a long time, and I realized then and there that I finally had the emotional core I'd been struggling to find.

Beyond Otaku Dreams is a story game (or role-playing game) about anime fans going to an anime con that they will never forget. The game has fantasy elements about dreams encroaching on reality, but it's really about people and the things they carry with them and the things they take away when the con ends, when the time comes to take off your badge. It's about the incandescent collision of hope and despair, delusion and reality, about people having an experience that will change their lives.

Game Inspirations: Apocalypse World, Don't Rest Your Head, Fiasco, GxB, Hot Guys Making Out, In a Wicked Age, Maid RPG, Panty Explosion Perfect, Polaris, Primetime Adventures, Ribbon Drive

Narrative Inspirations: Akibaranger, Akihabara@DEEP, Aoi House, Bimbos of the Death Sun, Chuunibyout Demo Koi ga Shitai, DramaCon, Genshiken

Pre-Play

A lot of role-playing games have a Game Master, a central person who has authority over the game. This one does not, but it still helps for someone to take charge and help facilitate play. If you're reading the book, there's a good chance you're going to wind up being that facilitator.

People, a Place, a Time

To start with you'll need a total of 3-6 players. The game takes longer with more players, though adding more voices can make it more interesting too.

You'll need a place for everyone to gather, or at least a medium of communication so you can play online. Many gamers meet at a friend's house to play, but game stores and conventions offer play space, and there are plenty of other public spaces you can use, provided they won't be bothered by the noise that you're going to make playing this game.

This game is designed for playing single sessions. You can potentially revisit the characters from a game session later on, but the core of the game is one session lasting roughly one hour per player at the table, maybe a little more. You can split the game into multiple sessions if need be, but it's better to do it all at once if you can manage it, to keep things fresh in your memory going forward.

Materials

In order to play this game in person you will also need to have the following:

- **Pencils:** Each player is going to need a pencil to write with (and occasionally erase).
- **Paper:** Each player will need a piece of paper to write on, plus one more piece for the group to share. You can use printouts of the *Beyond Otaku Dreams* character sheet and buzz sheet, but blank paper is fine too.
- **Six-Sided Dice:** You will need some six-sided dice, the same kind you use in board games. You can get by with just two, but having more certainly wouldn't hurt.

To play online you'll need a way to save documents where everyone can share (Google Drive or similar), an online dice roller of some kind, and a medium of communication (IRC, Skype, Google Hangouts, a forum thread, etc.).

Learning

At least one of the players should read through this book and have a decent grasp of the rules and the setting. We've tried to make it easy to reference during play, but having at least one person who understands the basics before you begin will make the whole thing a lot smoother.

Take some time to talk about the setting and the expectations of this game. It's important for everyone to understand that this is a game about flawed human beings looking for some kind of redemption, and for everyone to have some idea of what an anime convention is like. If you've been to cons and some of your fellow players haven't, share some stories with them before you get started.

Atmosphere

The story you'll experience when you play this game takes place at an anime convention, so it helps to get a bit into that frame of mind.

- **Location:** The ultimate in anime con atmosphere is of course to simply play this game at an actual anime con, but most anywhere with a similar group energy can help.
- **Props:** There's a reason I made the printed version of this book look like an anime convention program guide. In general some props can help set the mood a bit, whether general anime stuff or things specific to your character. Playing in a room where you have some wall scrolls up might be nice, and coming to the game in costume would be pretty badass. One simple thing you can do is to get everyone badges and lanyards.
- **Sounds:** Assuming it doesn't get intrusive, you can use various kinds of sound recordings to help create the right atmosphere. A good mix of J-pop and/or anime music can do the trick (there are plenty of streaming radio stations for that sort of thing), or putting on a mix of anime episodes, AMVs, etc. in the background. Recordings of ambient sounds can potentially help a great deal too.*

Lines and Veils

This game invites you to explore the problems of fairly realistic characters. That means that it can potentially involve subject matter that people find distasteful if not outright disturbing. If you're playing with people you know well, you should be aware of what is and isn't within their comfort zone and respect that. If you're playing with people you don't know well, or you happen to stumble across something that's a problem for other players, be respectful of their limits as things come up.

In the "indie" RPG scene people started talking in terms of "lines and veils." The concept is pretty simple. A "line" is something that for you just goes too far. It's entirely natural to be deeply uncomfortable with the entire topic of rape for example, and totally reasonable to ask that it not be a part of your game. A "veil" is something for which you don't want too much detail, but don't object to it being a part of the story. Two characters having drunken sex might potentially be an interesting plot development with repercussions later on, but it's usually best not to role-play the act. That's when you employ a veil, and depict the event in a "fade to black" kind of way.

* There's also an app called *Ambiance* (for iOS, Android, PC, and Mac) that lets you get a variety of environment sounds, including for a convention hall.

Cooperative Storytelling and Role-Playing

Beyond Otaku Dreams is a game that veers between role-playing and cooperative storytelling.

Tell a Good Story

It might sound trite to say that a role-playing game is a game where there are no winners or losers, but it's true, and for this game it's kind of important. The way this game is set up, your focus needs to be first and foremost on making the story interesting for everyone. The rules of the game don't actually address whether or not your character succeeds or fails at anything per se, and that works best when you take advantage of the freedom to have bad things happen to your character sometimes. If your character turns out all right in the end, he or she should still stumble a bit along the way, and sometimes a sad ending is just the right thing for the story.

The story you tell with your friends might not be something spectacular that other people will praise, but it will be yours, and no one else's. It will reflect who you are in the moment, and who you are together.

The Tone of the Game

You'll ultimately have to figure out the overall tone of the game for yourself, but here's what I intended.

The real world can be kind of crazy sometimes for how people behave, but it's also realistic. A *real* fight is a horrible thing that can bring down the police into the situation. Someone could end up leaving the con in an ambulance, or spending the rest of it in a cell. Things might get heated at times, but actual fights should be very rare. The real-world action should involve a lot more drama and dialogue than anything else, and whatever action might come up will most likely come from someone doing something stupid.

The dream world is a reflection of the obsessions of anime fans. It's a phantasmagoria of images culled from anime, and fights are easy to have, epic to behold, and largely devoid of long-term consequences.

On Being Awesome

This game will frequently call on you to be creative on the fly. When that happens, a lot of players feel pressure to come up with something awesome. If you have an idea you think is awesome, go with it! If you don't, that's actually okay. Go with your impulses, and do what comes easily. The game will flow better, and sometimes the things you think are merely acceptable will turn out to be awesome.

Key Points

- Respect fellow players. If something makes you uncomfortable, speak up.
- The goal is to tell a good story together. Use the fact that the game doesn't determine success or failure to let your character fail in interesting ways.
- In the game's "real" world violence has serious consequences and is best avoided. In the game's dream world epic battles are fun spectacles.

Other Worlds

This game delves into the heart of anime fandom. I'm going to try to convey some of the essence of that fandom, but I can only do so much. If you want authenticity, you need to experience it yourself.

The World of Fandom

Fans are above all else human, for good and for ill. There is not only uncouth, rude behavior and poor hygiene, but misogyny and racism. But there are also people whose boundless enthusiasm for anime drives their ambition, inspiring them to organize, to create, to do amazing things.

The Medium

Although a few animated series from Japan made their way to American cartoons lineups as early as the 1960s (with the likes of *Astro-Boy*), it wasn't until the 1990s that anime really began to arrive on American shores, in the form of a limited selection of overpriced VHS tapes, seldom available through rental stores, and fansubs available to those with the right connections. We've since seen anime and manga become downright ubiquitous, and then suffer a major downturn sales-wise and the demise of several publishers. Some of that is because of free fansubs (and scanlations of manga), which thanks to broadband internet have become very easy to obtain. While there are people who collect DVDs and Blu-rays, there are a lot of fans who get their anime through BitTorrent or internet streaming. Even Netflix has a fair selection of anime now.

There was been a definite shift in anime as an industry and a fandom around the turn of the millennium. It transitioned from being a relatively small and arcane fandom to something like the mainstream. Shows like *Pokémon*, *Dragon Ball Z* and *Sailor Moon* making their way onto syndicated television brought anime into the popular consciousness, and alongside the rise of DVDs more and more anime series were being published in the U.S. The internet also made it far easier for fans to exchange information about anime.

The Weeaboo Factor

There's a tendency in anime fandom to fetishize Japanese culture. It's entirely natural to want to know more about the culture that birthed a beloved form of entertainment, but some people do take it too far. There's a stereotype of "weeaboos" who will blithely go on about how everything Japanese is superior. In real life Japan is another postindustrial society with its own distinct culture, and by any reckoning a mix of good and bad. Even so, involvement in anime fandom often leads people to explore other aspects of Japanese culture, sometimes to the point of showing genuine talent, but often giving up before they get too far. (Having taken many Japanese language courses, I can tell you that anime fans tend not to make it too far, though that's partly because most people tend not to make it too far.)

Internet Fandom

American fandom began before the internet, with letter-writing and hand-stapled zines. It took a certain amount of effort just to put yourself in contact with your fandom of choice. Today fandom is one of the many things the internet has transformed. People can find communities for just about anything, and anime fans have fully embraced the internet. Practically every avenue of online communication has a

large body of anime fans. Forums, blogs, Twitter, chat, YouTube, eBay, social networking, and so on. Anime is part of the overall texture of the internet. Not everyone knows anime, but your browsing habits would have to be pretty limited to avoid seeing at least the occasional anime forum avatar.

The internet also serves as a medium of creative expression. People post their artwork on DeviantArt and Tumblr, their anime music videos on YouTube, their crafts on Etsy, and so on.

The World of the Convention

Once a year, on Memorial Day weekend, there is one of the biggest anime conventions in the U.S. Tens of thousands of people come, some from down the street, some from across the country, and a few from other countries entirely. For four days they will live and breathe the culture of anime fandom. For four days they will see, do, and buy things they can't back home. It's a time to shine, an inflection point in the year that provides fannish rituals.

The convention takes place at a large convention center with a hotel attached. The people who can afford it (as well as the more important convention staff members) get rooms in the hotel for the duration of the con. The people who can't afford it go to cheaper hotels nearby, find random places to sleep, or push the limits of how many human beings can sleep in a hotel room. The whole place has a certain smell, perhaps from rug cleaner or something, that becomes downright nostalgic before long. The staff of the hotel and convention center are more accustomed to tech conferences, but by now they don't bat an eye at the sights the anime con brings them.

During the con the fans spill out into the area around the convention center as well, as they seek out food and other necessities. They keep up the tendency to let their freak flags fly, and even those without costumes tend to be very easy to identify as congoers.

The Guests

The convention has a dozen or so guests of honor. Among them are professionals from Japan, Western voice actors, writers, musicians, top-tier cosplayers, and more. A special department within the convention staff, Guest Relations, shepherds the guests around and generally tries to put them in a place of honor.

Cosplay

People in costume—cosplayers—are everywhere. At times you find yourself in a sea of brightly colored wigs. The people who don't come in costume wear their nerdiest T-shirts, anime or otherwise, and may don *Naruto* headbands or a pair of cat ears. The cosplayers turn the halls into a succession of impromptu photo ops, and some creeps turn cosplayers into victims of harassment.

Most cosplayers go for well-known anime characters, but some opt for more obscure characters, and there's a decent amount of crossover fandom as well. In recent years *Homestuck* cosplayers have become ubiquitous, and it's not at all unusual to see storm troopers or Jedi making an appearance.

Artist's Alley

Some artists set up tables in Artists Alley to sell things they've made. The supply of tables ran out months before the con began, less than a day after the con started taking reservations. Artists have come with prints, buttons, keychains, pixel art made from plastic beads, homemade plushies, and more. Some offer commissions, taking money to draw original artwork for people at the con, despite the tendency for vague or outright strange subject matter.

Con Staff

Behind the scenes, there is the convention staff. The regular staffers have been attending meetings for months, and the senior staffers have been effectively working a second job to help make the con happen. Some staff positions are easy—like swapping DVDs in a video room—while others are ill-suited to people who wish to have any kind of relationship with sleep over the weekend. Convention staff have their own spaces scattered around the convention center, meeting rooms set aside for important con functions. The nerve center of it all is Con Ops, the top of the pyramid and the sacred ground from which the most senior staffers fight to keep an unruly convention under control. At the bottom are the volunteers, who let the con dispatch them to lend a hand with every odd job imaginable in the hopes of earning a free badge.

Higher-ranking members of staff have radios that they use to keep in touch with each other and quickly deal with problems.

Con Events

The convention offers numerous events to attract fans.

One of the more civilized attractions at cons is panels, where experts give talks about various subjects. Some feature guests of honor, but many are simply from fans who submitted the panel idea to the con.

The con has both electronic and tabletop gaming, in one big, airy room.

The masquerade is one of the biggest events at the entire con. Fans wait in line for an interminably long time to get seats in an auditorium where they'll be treated to a succession of cosplay skits. These can range from wonderfully brilliant to terribly dull to outright unpleasant. They often drag on longer than they should, and there's so much energy in the room that it's very easy to put in the right key phrases to make the crowd scream their approval. Backstage things are intense. The staff are fighting hard to keep everything running smoothly, while cosplayers are facing down the pressure of giving a performance before hundreds. Away from the public eye cosplayers can be vicious to one another, and some will go so far as to sabotage their rivals.

The AMV contest is usually a close second in popularity. Anime Music Videos have anime footage set to music to evoke any number of moods, and most cons take submissions from most anywhere in the world, so that they easily have 2+ hours of AMVs to show even after massively culling the selection. Where you once could only see AMVs at the contests, there are now tons on YouTube, but the contest at the convention, with its giant screen and theatrical atmosphere still draws crowds.

The Drama Llama

For a variety of reasons, an anime con can be something of a pressure cooker for drama. Putting tens of thousands of people into a special space where they can drop some of their inhibitions, where they feel obliged to have fun, and that many have reached through an arduous road trip, will tend to do that.

Although members of convention staff are more likely to be locals, they are in no way immune to the drama llama's bite. Within their miniature hierarchical society there's entirely too much potential for politicking, cliquish behavior, and outright abuse of power.

The Longest Weekend

The con starts up in mid-morning on Friday, and from there runs constantly all the way through Monday afternoon.

Individuals may choose to go to bed at a reasonable time, but there's always someone up doing something. At 3 a.m. the convention center will be home to a bunch of guys in costumes shouting stuff, a video room where the video staff have to be alert for people sleeping, and hotel rooms where there are fans partying and boozing it up.

Monday is the con's bleary denouement. People with hotel rooms need to check out at 11 a.m., and the mass exodus makes it next to impossible to get into an elevator. The con has events going until 3 p.m. or so, plus a few things as late as 5 or 6, but attendance is anemic. In the dealers room and artists alley some people close up early.

Monday has that moment when you take off your badge and put on your normal life. Whether with relief or sadness, you must confront the fact that the con is over until next year, and normal life will resume.

The World of Dreams

Some people are Dreamers. They live their lives with one foot in the real world, and the other in a world of their own making. There are people with theories that religions and myths must've actually come from Dreamers. The starting character you play in this game have no inkling of this phenomenon of Dreamers, but over the course of the game they will experience these waking dreams, and the dreams could change the course of their lives.

A Dreamer sees the world as it is, but also sees a "dream layer" placed on top of reality. There could be anime characters walking around that you can interact with, or even whole structures made of dreamstuff. Dreamers can also manifest special abilities of their own in the dreamscape, letting them perform impossible feats, but only within this world of imagination. Dreamers who have similar enough obsessions will share the same dreamscape when put in close enough proximity, so Dreamers who are anime fans will see the dream manifestations of other anime Dreamers. To non-Dreamers, a Dreamer seems like a crazy person, or at best childishly interacting with things that aren't there or play-fighting with other crazy people.

Like normal dreams, the waking dreams of Dreamers are made of emotions and ideas, which means they are resilient against apparent physical damage, but susceptible to corruption on an emotional level. Many Dreamers have a sort of dream champion, a character who fights for them, and while such champions are never killed no matter how egregious their defeats, they can lose their emotional potency, or take odd turns depending on the mental state of the Dreamer. Unfortunately dream antagonists can also be similarly resilient.

Maybe it's the sheer concentration of dreams that does it, the way they permeate everything like radio waves, but it's common for Dreamers to realize their affliction at cons.

It may be possible for these dreams to penetrate into physical reality, or vice versa. There could be a door into the world of dreams.

The Buzz

An important part of the con experience is immersing yourself in a shared subculture, entering a special space where your arcane knowledge becomes common knowledge for one amazing weekend. To help create more of that feel, before you play you're going to create "the buzz," a set of anime series, convention events, and other things that are going to be prominent in the anime scene in your game's story.

Take a little time to talk about some of the particulars of the con your characters are going to. The best thing is to use a real-life con that you've all actually been to as a template. Failing that, find a con for which you can get access to a program guide with a map and schedule (either by downloading a PDF or just because you saved one from attending). It will make an amazing prop for when you play the game, and provide plenty of ideas as you go along.

Titles

Each player should contribute one entry to a list of "titles," which can be anime series or other works that are going to be very popular at the con. (Manga, video games, webcomics, etc. are all fine as long as they fit into the general zeitgeist.) These should be titles that most of the players are familiar with, or at least comfortable bullshitting about. You can even include made-up works* of some sort. While you don't have to limit yourself things on this list, try to emphasize these titles when you need to come up with references to specific anime and such when making your character and during play.

Convention Traits

Next you should establish a few details about the convention. You can use a real convention or a fictional one. Most anime cons are named with either something anime-related followed by "Con," or the word "Anime" paired with something relevant to the convention. Think about where and when it takes place, and how big it is.

From there, each player should contribute one entry to a list of "convention traits," things that are notable about the convention. These can include guests of honor, special events, uncommon hotel facilities, and so on. Choose convention traits based on what you want to be prominent in the story, and where appropriate they can dovetail from the list of titles. If you decide that a fictional series called *Kaiser Bunny Legend* is all the rage in the convention scene, it would be pretty natural for its creator to be a guest of honor, or for there to be a hotly anticipated exclusive screening of the KBL movie.

* Like if you had a particularly memorable pitch from playing *Channel A*.

People

Lastly, there's the matter of the people at the convention. You can save this step until after you create characters (see "Other Selves," below), but if you have an idea you can go ahead and put it in now. These will be non-player characters (NPCs) who will likely play an important role in the story. Unlike the kinds of people who show up as convention traits, these are more ordinary people, and they're likely to be people with personal connections to the players' characters. Exes, parents (difficult or just embarrassing), bullies, rivals, stalkers, etc. can all potentially make good additions to this list.

Weird

The convention has a single numerical stat: Weird. This is how strange things are getting at the con, a combination of the general energy of the crowd and the prevalence of waking dreams. Weird starts out at zero. The con hasn't actually begun yet, but things will be getting under way soon enough. When it gets high enough, things will get pretty, well, weird. See p. XX for details on Weird.

Other Selves

Each player needs to create a character, who will be the main persona they role-play over the course of the game. Your character will be an anime fan, and a person suspended between hope and despair, pulled up and down at the same time. Your character needs to be someone you can love, someone you want to succeed. You should get a lump in your throat when you picture them in pain. You're not here to mock them; you're here to try to help them realize their potential.* Also, although in playing the game there will be moments of laughter, your character is not a joke. It's totally fine to make a character that says and does silly things, but you should not make a character that *is* a silly thing.

Fans are diverse. They tend to be relatively young, but they reflect the demographics of the area. They are of every race, gender, orientation, etc. While they're not so disconnected from the wider world that things like race are never an issue, people do come together with the same love of anime.

Your characters will not necessarily know each other at the start of the game, but having them be a group of friends going to the con together is certainly a good approach.

Questions

Start by putting together a general image of what your character is going to be like. Hold that in your mind, and start answering these questions as your character.

What is your obsession?

What is the focus of your fandom and obsession, the thing that you just can't get enough of? It could be a genre, a specific series or character, a kind of merchandise, your own Original Character (OC), or any number of other things.

What do you hate about yourself?

Deep down there's something about you that you just loathe. Perhaps you have a tendency to say things you regret, or maybe you think there's something wrong with how you look, or maybe you feel like a failure at life.

What is good about you as a person?

There's something fundamentally good about you as a person. It might not show on the surface, you might not even be aware of it, but it's there.

What is your talent?

There's something you can do, and do well. It might not be at a professional level, but you have a spark of potential. It could be some kind of artistic pursuit like drawing or making videos, or a flair for performance like acting or singing, or simply a way of making people smile.

* If you want to play a game about terrible people, I high recommend Jason Morningstar's game *Fiasco*. I even made a playset for it called "The Big Anime Con." *The Fiasco Companion* also has a lot of advice that can help you with this game.

What is dragging you down?

There's something that pulls you down, something that dims the light of your potential. Maybe it's a problem internal to yourself, a simple lack of confidence or a psychological problem that needs proper treatment. It could be problems with the people around you, with family, a significant other, or schoolmates.

What are you hoping for at the con?

You came to the con to have fun of course, but there's something more, something you're hoping for, even if it's not a very realistic hope. Perhaps you just want to make some new friends, but maybe you want to find a girlfriend, or sell lots of your artwork, or meet and make a connection with one of the guests, or win a prize in the masquerade.

There are two additional questions specifically related to dreaming ("What is your dream power?" "What is your Nightmare?"), detailed on p. XX. You may want to think about them now, but you should wait until they come up in play to finalize them.

What is your dream power?

When your potential as a Dreamer is unlocked, it comes with a special ability that only operates in the dream world. This is your "dream power," and it sits at the intersection of Hope and Delusion. Your dream power is locked at the start of the game, and won't play a role in the story until someone unlocks it.

- **Champion:** Your dream power manifests as a character who fights for you. This could be your interpretation of your favorite anime character, or perhaps it's your beloved OC come to life in the dream. Not all champions are warriors per se—some fight for their Dreamers in other ways—but they are always loyal. The only problem is that they tend to push you towards delusion and away from reality.
- **Impression:** In the dreamscape you take on the abilities of a specific character. You might have Nanoha's magic, Luffy's stretchiness, or Goku's ridiculous martial arts prowess.
- **Ability:** In the dreamscape you have a special power of your own, probably something stemming from your own talents.

What is your Nightmare?

A Dreamer's Nightmare is some kind of antagonist made of dream-stuff, spawned from the interaction of their fears with the dreamscape. Your Nightmare sits at the intersection of Trauma and Delusion. Your nightmare is locked at the start of the game, and won't play a role in the story until someone unlocks it.

- **Dark Mirror:** Your Nightmare is a corrupted version of either you or your Champion.
- **Nemesis:** The dreamscape manifests an enemy made of pure dream-stuff, a manifestation of your own problems and fears. A Nemesis doesn't have to be anthropomorphic; it could take the form of something like a dragon, or just darkness closing in.
- **Rival Dreamer:** There is another Dreamer who for whatever reason has decided to be your enemy.

Other Details

Name

Give your character a name, a real, human name. If you're having trouble thinking of a name you can use the name tables on p. 25, or look at any number of name-generating resources.

Age

Decide on your character's age. Pick something reasonable.

Look

Write down three notable details about your character's appearance. These can include things like what kind of T-shirt you're wearing, your hairstyle, your costume, your eyes, and so on. Just stick to things that are interesting and that say something about your character.

Introductions

Next everyone goes around the table introducing their characters. Don't just read off everything from your character sheet; give the other players an overview of what your character is like. If you haven't already, take a minute to talk about how the characters relate to one another.

The Convention Adventure

Acts

The game is divided into a series of four acts, followed by an epilogue. In each act, each player will have a scene centering around their character. Going around the table in one direction is easier to keep track of, but it doesn't really matter what order players do scenes in so long as everyone gets to do a scene in each act.

When you begin an act, roll one random event from the table on p. 17. This is something that will happen over the course of the Act. It may not impact your characters directly, but it will help contribute to the general chaotic atmosphere of the convention.

At the start of each Act (including Act 1) the convention's Weird stat also goes up by 1 point.

Breaks

Role-playing can take it out of you, even if it's only your voice. Take breaks as needed, preferably between acts or at least between scenes. I recommend making a point to take a break when you're around the halfway point, after act 2 or 3 ends.

Scenes

Establishing the Scene

In this game a scene starts with two questions, a Light question and a Dark question. The Light question is something that points to the character's growth or redemption ("Will Mr. Yamada take notice of Jenny's artwork?") while the Dark question should bring the character's flaws or problems to the fore ("Is Alex's anxiety going to keep him from talking to any artists to get commissions?") These questions should catapult the spotlight character into something difficult, and they can build on each other and create conflict.

When you're the spotlight player for the scene, you get to decide whether to do the Light or Dark question for your character, and have the rest of the group do the other question. If you're stumped you can have the group go first, and you can always just discuss what would be interesting.

From there you'll need to figure out a few other basic details of the scene. The questions should make it fairly obvious, but you'll need to pick a location for the scene (there's a table of random locations with descriptions on p. 23 if you're stumped), when it happens, and who's there. Scenes can include flashbacks if you like, or take place simultaneously with other scenes, or anything else you think would be interesting.

Playing Out the Scene

The meat of each scene is freeform role-playing.

Into Dreams

Over the course of the game you'll create and discover each character's dream power and nightmare.

Each character's dream power and nightmare are both "locked" at the start of the game. If you provided the Light question for a character's scene, you can unlock their dream power, and if provided the Dark question for a character's scene, you can unlock their nightmare. These also get unlocked when the convention's Weird rating reaches 4.

When a Nightmare becomes unlocked, pick a player to be in charge of it; they should note down some details about the Nightmare and role-play it when it comes up.

Resolving the Scene

At the end of the scene, the spotlight player picks whether they want to increase Hope or Delusion. Hope represents the perseverance and optimism to engage the real world. Delusion is the deliberate retreat into realms of fantasy.* Increase Hope if you feel the scene brought your character closer to realizing their potential as a person. Increase Delusion if you feel the scene led your character to go deeper into their fantasies.

Once you've decided, roll two six-sided dice.

On a 10 or higher the stat goes up by 2 and the convention's Weird goes up by 1.

On a 9 or less the stat goes up by 1.

On a 5 or less you do a confessional. Have your character briefly address the outside world—pretend you're writing a short social media post or doing a confessional scene in a reality show—and reveal something about your character's inner thoughts regarding what happened during the scene.

When your stat increases, make a single diagonal line through a new box on your character sheet.

* Here "delusion" is a translation of the Japanese word *mousou* (妄想), which otaku use to refer to a kind of deliberate and enthusiastic retreat from reality in favor of indulgent fantasies.

Weird

“Weird” is a stat the convention has that represents the general level of energy and dreams. It starts at zero and goes up at the start of each new Act as well as any time a player rolls a 10 or higher at the end of a scene. The effects of Weird going up are as follows:

Weird 1: The con is starting up, and beginning to hum with life.

Weird 2: The con is in full swing.

Weird 3: All player characters’ dream powers and nightmares become unlocked if they have not already.

Weird 6: Everyone at the con who carries a true obsession in their hearts becomes a Dreamer. Roll on the Dreamers Awakened random event table immediately, and roll on it instead of the Normal random event table at the start of each new act.

Weird 8: Dreams begin to break into reality. Roll on the Dreams Unleashed random event table once for every new scene.*

Random Events

Random events provide an extra bit of insanity to the proceedings. You will start off using the Normal random events table, and move on to the other two if the convention’s Weird rating gets high enough.

To use the tables you’ll need to make a “d66” roll. Get two six-sided dice, and designate one as the tens digit and the other as the ones digit. Roll them and put the results together to get one of 36 possible items numbered 11 through 66.

If a result turns up that already came up once before, you can either roll with it and have a repeat of the same event, perhaps with a different spin on it, or decide to roll again.

* You’ll notice that in a typical by-the-rules game of *Beyond Otaku Dreams* you’re unlikely to reach Weird 8. If you’d prefer for reaching Weird 8 to be a certainty in your game, simply increase Weird by 2 at the start of each act instead of 1.

Normal Random Events

d66	Event
11	Someone pulls a fire alarm, prompting a brief evacuation.
12	The convention center has a power outage. Everything grinds to a halt.
13	There is an incident of sexual harassment.
14	Someone bumps into a World War II veteran.
15	Someone receives a warning from con security.
16	There's an especially long line for something.
21	Someone pulls a prank.
22	Someone gets arrested.
23	Some spill or something creates a big mess.
24	Something very valuable gets stolen from the con.
25	Someone has an encounter with one of the guests of honor.
26	Jesus freaks harass congoers for their sinful nature.
31	There is an impromptu concert in the halls.
32	A streaker runs through the con naked.
33	Hooligans run around making noise and looking to cause trouble.
34	A room party gets totally crazy.
35	Someone gets foot poisoning.
36	Convention staff handles rearranging lines very badly and makes people mad.
41	A panel room is totally overflowing with people.
42	There is a public confession of love.
43	A guest of honor is walking around totally drunk.
44	Someone gets in trouble for their overly revealing costume.
45	A guest causes a stir by autographing body parts.
46	A group of people filming a documentary turn out to be annoying otaku-mockers.
51	A random conga line forms based around a specific cosplay theme.
52	Someone's elaborate costume gets damaged/malfunctions.
53	People pausing to be photographed/take photos bung up the hallway flow.
54	The audiovisual equipment doesn't work for a given anime viewing.
55	Two guys playing be-that-yaoi produce a fangirl meltdown.
56	A guest causes a kerfuffle by criticizing fanfic/fanart.
61	Someone's mother shows up at the con.
62	A packed panel starts going very, very badly.
63	A possibly auto-corrected text message creates strife.
64	A friend turns up drunk.
65	An untimely cell phone call.
66	A high-ranking convention staff member has a meltdown.

Dreamers Awakened Random Events (Weird 6)

d66	Event
11-12	A Japanese guest turns out to be a veteran Dreamer, and offers some advice.
13-14	An amorous imaginary catgirl throws herself at someone.
15-16	Newly awakened dreamers have a massive dream-brawl in the middle of the dealers room.
21-22	A dreamer uses their power to distort someone else's dream.
23-24	An imaginary giant robot strides through the convention center.
25-26	A cloud of internet memes zooms by.
31-32	The last person you'd expect turns out to be an anime fan and Dreamer.
33-34	A guest of honor suddenly becomes a Dreamer, and has trouble with their Nightmare.
35-36	A dreamer uses their power to empower someone else's Nightmare.
41-42	An imaginary maid latches onto someone.
43-44	Ridiculously powerful alien martial arts warriors crash-land in the middle of the con.
45-46	Two dream characters swap bodies!
51-52	A team of magical girls go around fighting what they think is evil.
53-54	A dream character gives someone a confession of love.
55-56	A katamari rolls through the convention, picking up dreamstuff in an ever-growing ball.
61-62	Someone receives a challenge to a dance battle!
63-64	A non-dreamer, seeing all this, abandons their job and goes to get a drink.
65-66	A character from a different fandom finds themselves in this dreamscape.

Dreams Unleashed Random Events (Weird 8)

d66	Event
11-12	A giant radioactive lizard attacks!
13-14	A massive space battleship hovers over the convention center.
15-16	An explosion makes shattered glass rain down dramatically.
21-22	There is a powerful dream-artifact, waiting for someone to claim it.
23-24	The police descend on the convention center to try to stop the chaos.
25-26	Some anime characters start harassing their creator.
31-32	A demon lord arises to conquer the convention and seek world domination.
33-34	The convention center transforms into a giant robot!
35-36	There is an unnatural storm just above the convention center.
41-42	A strange force field prevents anyone from getting in or out of the convention.
43-44	A Japanese guest says, "I've seen this before, at Comiket. We have to do something."
45-46	Someone discovers a mysterious amnesiac albino girl who sometimes glows.
51-52	Ninjas attack!
53-54	Anime characters climb out of video screens.
55-56	Background music starts playing in the air to match the mood of what's going on.
61-62	A bunch of merchandise suddenly comes to life.
63-64	Some cosplayers start transforming into their characters.
65-66	A cheering squad (ouendan) shows up to encourage someone.

The Final Battle

Once you finish the last of Act 4, it's time for the Final Battle, when your characters face some kind of major threat and use their dream powers to defeat it.

Creating the Enemy

To develop the Enemy, first pick someone to go first. I recommend going by who has the highest Delusion score, but do whatever works for you. If you have a great idea, speak up! When it's your turn, add an element to create the Enemy that your characters will fight. You could of course use a character's Nightmare, or even some kind of team or conglomeration of Nightmares, or use something else that came up in play. If you're careful with how you do it, you could even have a player's character become the Enemy or a portion thereof. Maybe their dream power goes out of control, or maybe they're just so upset that they get carried away.

Fighting the Enemy

Next it's time to actually fight the Enemy. Role-play how the Enemy makes themselves known, and then the players take turns doing parts of a blow-by-blow of the battle.

When it's your turn, check off one of your points of either Hope or Delusion—make another slash in that box to form an X—and roll a die. Narrate a sentence of the action according to your stat and the number you rolled on the die. Keep a running total of your die rolls for each attribute; you'll use them in the Epilogue.* Once you've narrated your action, pick someone else to go next from among the players who haven't checked off all of their stat boxes.† This continues until everyone has used up all their points of Hope and Delusion.

The player who gets the very last turn gets a special bonus: their last die is wild, meaning instead of rolling they can pick what number comes up.

Roll	Hope	Delusion
1-3	Blocked an Attack	Took a Hit
4-5	Helped a Friend	Delivered an Attack
6	Counter-Attack	Power Move

The ultimate outcome of the battle is up to the players. You could have a decisive victory, a pyrrhic win, or even just outright lose. The point is to have something interesting happen.

Do You Need a Final Battle?

Not every game of *Beyond Otaku Dreams* will lend itself to having a big final battle. Sometimes it'll just feel wrong for where the story is going. If the group feels that a final battle isn't right for the game, each player instead rolls a number of dice equal to each stat and marks down the totals for the epilogue.

* If you have enough dice you can just keep the dice you rolled in front of you and total them up after the battle is over.

† To make it easier to tell who has points left, turn your character sheet face-down once you're out.

Epilogue

Once you've had as many acts as you're planning to have, you can move on to the epilogue, a denouement that gives us a look at what happens to the characters once all the craziness of the con starts to die down.

Look at the totals of your character's Hope and Delusion rolls from the Final Battle and find whichever one is the highest. (If there's a tie, pick whichever you prefer.) Then look at the tables below to determine the general flavor of your character's Epilogue. Play out a very short scene, no more than a minute or two, to wrap things up.

Hope Epilogue Chart

Hope	Result
1-5	You get some news that adds a sour note to the end of the con.
6-9	As the con comes to a close, the blue sky and singing birds remind you that things aren't so bad after all.
10-15	You made a new connection or discovery that bodes well for the future.
16-21	You deliver a decisive blow that will change things for the better.
22+	An unexpected piece of good news arrives as the con is wrapping up. Suddenly, your problems don't seem so bad anymore. Suddenly, everything is going to be okay.

Delusion Epilogue Chart

Delusion	Result
1-5	Your obsession takes a serious blow, and it's hard to look at it the same way.
6-9	Just before the con ends you do something impulsive and obsessive. It will cost you later on, but just now it makes you feel happy.
10-15	The fading dream gives you something, a message or insight, that will help you in the future.
16-21	The Dream stays with you, and no one can take it away. Whatever else happens, your delusions will accompany your waking hours, for better or for worse.
22+	A door opens, a door into the world of dreams. You could leave it all behind, but it would have to be <i>all</i> of it, not part. Maybe you could come back some day, but maybe not. If you choose not to go, the rest of your epilogue will be based on your Hope total.

Sequels

If you want to play through more stories about the same characters using this game, you can do a sequel. Give yourself some time to digest and think about what went on, and then do another *Beyond Otaku Dreams* session taking place at the con one year later. Instead of writing up an all-new character, take some time to rewrite the one you had to reflect what happened to them in the prior session and what new challenges life has presented them with since. Life keeps going, and it never stops having new mountains to climb. Their Hope and Delusion will reset to zero. Whether their power and Nightmare start off unlocked will depend on what kind of ending they had last time.

On the other hand, you could use *Beyond Otaku Dreams* as a launching point for a longer and more traditional RPG campaign using a game like *OVA*, *Fate Core*, or *Primetime Adventures*. Get someone to be the GM, recreate your characters according to the rules of the new game, and dive into new adventures!

Appendix

Random Location Table

d66	Location	Description
11	Artists Alley	A few dozen artists have tables set up to sell prints, commissions, buttons, keychains, handmade plushies, and other artwork they make themselves.
12	Autograph Session	Popular guests of honor have dozens or even hundreds of fans waiting in line for the chance to get an autograph.
13	Backstage	Behind the scenes at one of the con's big events everything is barely controlled chaos as people rush around trying to make sure things don't explode.
14	Bathroom (Men's)	Thousands of fans use the bathroom over the course of the con, and despite the staff's valiant efforts, it shows. Also, cosplayers sometimes change in here.
15	Bathroom (Women's)	A lot like the men's bathroom, minus the urinals.
16	Bento Booth	A local Japanese restaurant has set up a booth where they're selling bentos and other tasty Japanese food.
21	Café	The convention center (or the immediate area) features a pretty ordinary Starbucks or similar.
22	Con Ops	The nerve center of the con, where sleep-deprived senior staffers try to hold everything together and don't have time for your bullshit.
23	Concert	The con puts on a few concerts, either fandom-based musical acts or lesser-known Japanese artists.
24	Dance	At night the con hosts dances, with DJs playing loud dance music in a big, darkened room.
25	Dealers Room	Dozens of retailers have set up booths to hock all kinds of anime merchandise, and fans come in droves to buy.
26	Electronic Gaming	The sounds of dozens of TVs with video games—with an emphasis on fighting games and FPS games—blend together into a general haze.
31	Elevator	Depending on the time of day, the elevators in the hotel and convention center can range from totally empty to so consistently full as to be useless.
32	Garage	Gray, echoy, and smelling of car exhaust and tires, the garage is almost completely full, and you can see congoers coming and going. Some cars are obviously decorated by anime fans, but most are normal.
33	Hallway	The convention center and hotel have many hallways, ranging from massive ones that lead to panel rooms to the narrow corridors of the hotel rooms.
34	Hotel Back Room	Behind the scenes the hotel staff works, takes breaks, and generally does their jobs in plain, unremarkable rooms that patrons seldom see.
35	Hotel Bar	The hotel has a well-stocked bar intended to cater to visiting businessmen and such.
36	Hotel Lobby	The lobby is mainly for people checking in and out of hotel rooms. It tends to be fairly quiet through much of the con, though fans are still easy to spot.
41	Hotel Pool/Hot Tub	The hotel has a pool and a hot tub available for guests to use.
42	Hotel Restaurant	Yelp lists the price of this place as \$\$\$, but the food is quite good. Even so, it's expensive enough that there are relatively few congoers here.
43	Japantown	The local Japantown is relatively close to the convention center, and boasts several Japanese restaurants (plus a Korean place), and a Japanese supermarket.
44	Maid Café	The con runs a maid café where volunteers in full maid costumes serve food and beverages, and generally provide their best imitation of the experience of going to a maid café in Akihabara.

45	Masquerade	The masquerade is one of the biggest events at the con, a series of cosplay skits that can go on for three or four hours. The skits range from awful to stunning.
46	Nearby Restaurant	The downtown area offers a wide variety of restaurant options, from fast food to fine dining, though few are without signs of congoers.
51	Outside the Convention Center	In front of the convention center is a public area with a fountain. It's crowded with cosplayers, plus some Christian nutjob protesters.
52	Panel Room (Empty)	This panel room is empty just now. There is a table for panelists to sit at with live microphones, a projector, and seats for the audience.
53	Panel Room (Packed)	There's a particularly popular panel going on, so the room is totally packed, with every seat taken and some people standing along the back.
54	Party Room	Some people get hotel rooms just to have a place to crash. Others get hotel rooms to have a place to party, and they'll let random people come in to share food, watch anime, and get up to weird antics.
55	Registration	Anyone who doesn't have a special in with the con has to get their badge from registration. The reg line can get insanely long, especially on the first day, and even more so if something goes wrong.
56	Stairwell	The hotel's stairwells are made of gray concrete. They're sparsely populated, echoey, and smell funny.
61	Stranger's Room	Somehow or other you might end up in a hotel room belonging to a total stranger.
62	Tabletop Gaming	Congoers with a tabletop gaming inclination come here to play D&D, Magic, and a huge variety of other board/card games and RPGs.
63	The Green Room	This is where Guest Relations staff members hang out and where guest of honor come to hang out, prepare for panels, and eat free food provided by the con.
64	Video Room	The con features several video rooms, darkened rooms with videos playing on a projector screen. Most show anime, but there's also some Asian cinema and J-dramas.
65	Volunteers Room	Volunteers are the lowest grunts on the convention staff, sent to do odd jobs when other departments need someone. This room is where they hang out and hope to get enough shifts to earn a free badge.
66	Your Hotel Room	Your hotel room is your home away from home during the con. The beds are reasonably nice, and there's a bathroom and a TV, but not much else in the way of amenities.

Random Character Name Table

d66	First Name (Female)	d66	First Name (Male)	d66	Last Name
11	Alexis	11	Aaron	11	Allis
12	Ami	12	Adam	12	Chang
13	Angela	13	Alex	13	Chen
14	Audra	14	Andy	14	Chou
15	Brittney	15	Ben	15	Colucci
16	Caitlin	16	Blake	16	Cooper
21	Candace	21	Cedric	21	Ellis
22	Carly	22	Chris	22	Fisher
23	Chiaki	23	Clay	23	Furuichi
24	Christine	24	Dave	24	Gardner
25	Danielle	25	Dennis	25	Hicks
26	Dawn	26	Dylan	26	Hirai
31	Deanna	31	Guy	31	Hodge
32	Debbie	32	Jake	32	Lee
33	Donna	33	Jason	33	Marlow
34	Dora	34	Jon	34	Meltzer
35	Ellen	35	Josh	35	Montgomery
36	Emily	36	Keith	36	Morton
41	Ginger	41	Kentaro	41	Nakamura
42	Jenny	42	Kyle	42	Nix
43	Jessica	43	Lucas	43	Peterson
44	Julia	44	Matt	44	Price
45	June	45	Mike	45	Renneker
46	Margaret	46	Nick	46	Richmond
51	Maria	51	Patrick	51	Rigney
52	Megan	52	Paul	52	Rodriguez
53	Melissa	53	Peter	53	Sanchez
54	Michelle	54	Rob	54	Savage
55	Naomi	55	Ryan	55	Simons
56	Nicole	56	Simon	56	Smith
61	Rachel	61	Steve	61	Thompson
62	Rebecca	62	Ted	62	Thorsen
63	Sue	63	Theo	63	Wilson
64	Sylvia	64	Tim	64	Wong
65	Tina	65	Todd	65	Xia
66	Wendy	66	Tomoaki	66	Zircher

Beyond Otaku Dreams Character Sheet

Name:

Age:

Look:

What is your obsession?

What do you hate about yourself?

What is good about you as a person?

What is your talent?

What is dragging you down?

What are you hoping for at the con?

What is your dream power? Unlocked

What is your Nightmare? Unlocked

Scene Resolution Roll (2d6)

On a 10 or higher the stat goes up by 2 and the convention's Weird goes up by 1.

On a 9 or less the stat goes up by 1.

On a 5 or less you do a confessional. Have your character briefly address the outside world—pretend you're writing a short social media post or doing a confessional scene in a reality show—and reveal something about your character's inner thoughts regarding what happened during the scene.

Final Battle Rolls

Roll	Hope	Delusion
1-3	Blocked an Attack	Took a Hit
4-5	Helped a Friend	Delivered an Attack
6	Counter-Attack	Power Move

Delusion:

Total:

Hope:

Total:

Beyond Otaku Dreams: The Buzz

Convention Name:

Location:

Attendance:

Titles

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Convention Traits

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

People

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Weird



Weird 1: The con is starting up, and beginning to hum with life.

Weird 2: The con is in full swing.

Weird 3: All player characters' dream powers and nightmares become unlocked if they have not already.

Weird 6: Everyone at the con who carries a true obsession in their hearts becomes a Dreamer. Roll on the Dreamers Awakened random event table immediately, and roll on it instead of the Normal random event table at the start of each new act.

Weird 8: Dreams begin to break into reality. Roll on the Dreams Unleashed random event table once for every new scene.