Food and Water on the Starship Warden

By Richard Edwards

Metamorphosisa Alpha is a game where the emphasis obviously lies on survival. However, the rules themselves are mainly devoted to surviving such dangers as Bearoids, Cougaroids, Wolfoids (and possibly Haemerrhoids!?!). What seems to be lacking is reference to food or water.

Food

When characters are doing their daily rounds of the Starship in search of sustenance, the problem arises of what to look for, where to look for it, and, having found it , assessing its chance of being poisonous.

I found that in order for me as Starship Master (SM) to both predetermine and identify the food sources and also present them in a (fairly) realistic manner, it was necessary to produce a booklet and a set of cards. The booklet took the form of a *Guide To Botany* (which I will present in full later on). It lists 20 plants , trees and fungi which may, or may not, be edible. The choice of plants is entirely up to the individual SM but I will illustrate mine in order to give a more easily understood example of my methods.

First, there should be a set of rules that should be adhered to. In my case it is athat all poisonous fungi have blue gills whilst the edible ones have yellow gills. There are of course exceptions – we SMs have to have *some* fun!

Secondly, some of the poisons should take longer than 3 minutes to begin working. This is to prevent mutants who have got precognition from being safe from poisoning.

Also, like Manna, some foods should have a "shelf life" so that food that was safe yesterday could be a class 8 poison today.

Now having got the botany out of the way the SM should make up some cards and either draw, or if they don't trust their artwork, write the names of the various plants on the cards so that (as in my case) you have 20 cards. It is also necessary to make up some cards that say *No More Options*. I use three of these but more can be used if desired.

Method of Play

The spokesman/woman decides to search for food. In reply the SM deals out one card face up.

If they decide to eat it the result of this is looked up in the book. If, however the players decide to give it a miss another card is dealt to them. They may proceed in this manner until a *No More Options* card comes up. There are no more choices for them.

But what if the no option card turns up first? Tough. They will have to starve for a day and try again the next day.

So much for the background work, I now present my Guide to botany, it being a list of common plants and other flora to be found on all levels of my Starship:

PLANTS

Name	**Description**
Bluecoat:	About six inches high, it has two flowering stalks which have red heads. The maple-like leaves have a blue underside. It is harmless. The leaves taste like cabbage.

Toadweed:	About seven inches high, its single stalk divides into two, each division having a blue toad-shaped flower. It is harmless.
Salad Plant:	This remarkable feat of bioengineering comprises of a cabbage, a tomato plant and a carrot in the same plant. It is harmless.
Bladderweed:	An orange seaweed-like plant which lies close to the ground. Harmless. The leaves taste like eggs.

TREES AND SHRUBS

Name	**Description**
Apple Mangrove:	This tree is found in shallow water. It has a multiple formation, characteristic of this species. The fruit which resembles an apple is refreshing but harmless.
Perignease Pear:	This bush grows about four feet high and the fruit, which resembles a pineapple, grows from the centre and the flower grows out of the top of it. The bush part also has red berries. The fruit is edible, the leaves, when smoked, are addictive. The berries are a stimulant, and the perfume from the flower causes hallucinations.
Bowman's Strawberry:	This tree grows up to twenty feet high and its fruit resembles and ordinary strawberry. However, it is a class 11 poison which acts in 4 minutes.
Spiny Blueberry:	This shrub looks like the 'mushroom cloud' characteristic of a nuclear bomb. The head is a green bush which contains the blue berries. The trunk, which is also blue, is girdled halfway up by a ring of red leaves. The berries are class 18 poison and give off an hallucinogenic gas at night.

FUNGII

Name	**Description**
Green Button:	This fungus grows in clumps by the side of pathways. The stem is pale yellow and the green buttons are a cure for all poisons.
Tree Breadfruit:	This flat disc-shaped fungus lives on the trunks of dying trees. It is a orange/yellow colour. It has a spongy bread taste and is medicinal – hit points being regained at twice normal rate.
Phantom Lights:	These mushrooms are a very pale yellow with a blue sheen. They are harmless.
Greenstem:	This colourful mushroom has a black cap which has a green sheen. The gills are yellow fading to pink where they meet the stem, and the stem is green. The green colouration is due to the presence of chlorophyll and as a result of this, the plant is a high protein source. It is harmless.
Orangetop:	This mushroom is primarily yellow in colour with a pale orange top to the cap. It is harmless and very tasty.
Deadman's Hand:	This fungus resembles the hand of a decaying corpse. It is brown in colour and is spade-shaped. There are ridges running along it which give the impression of being fingers. Despite everything, it is perfectly harmless.
Redtop:	This poisonous mushroom looks very much like the harmless Orangetop, except that it has blue gills and the top is pale red. It is class 10 poison unless cooked.

Purple Fountain: This strange poisonous mushroom looks like a champaigne fountain with mushrooms stacked on top of another. The caps and stems are purple but the gills are yellow. It is a class 18 poison.

Bluespot: This phallus-shaped mushroom has an orange cap with blue spots. The stem is a pale blue. It is harmless when fresh but after 24 hours it becomes a class 8 poison.

Bluetop: This poisonous mushroom is similar to both the red and orange tops. The cap is purple with an orange top and the stem is a blue colour and so are the gills. It is class 6 poison.

Black Button: This fungus resembles the Green Button in every way but colouring. These buttons are black and the stem is pale blue. It is class 10 poison and acts in 4 minutes.

Puffball: This pale blue puffball is about 10 inches in diameter and is found on grassland usually. It is a class 7 poison and it acts in 7 minutes.

Well, that's it. Of the 20 plants listed 9 were harmless, 2 were medicinal, 2 were safe for part of the time and poisonous another 6 were always poisonous and one, the Perignease Pear was a mixed blessing.

You'll notice that the odds are definitely in favor of one finding edible food. Not one plant (as opposed to the shrubs and fungi) was dangerous. Bad planning? Well not really. The list is not complete. It never can be; you see the players will gradually learn which plants to eat and which to avoid. If their favourite food doesn't show up when they look for it they may decide to go without for a day and hope that it will be available then. Of course if it doesn't show soon they may be forced to risk a try at another plant and hope.

The only solution is to constantly add new plants and remove old ones. Inserting a poisonous version of the Bluecoat (call it Redcoat) will catch out an unwary player. But be fair, keep the balance in favour of the players, otherwise they may think you're getting at them.

My list does not include the risk of being poisoned by eating a radioactive plant. I assume that individual SMs will decide whether or not is in a radioactive area by studying the floor plans which should include such details. In this way even medicinal food can poison, and instead of hindering the players a SM can actually be helpful by having radioactive plants. The players may not have noticed that they had entered a dangerous zone and by killing, or at least harming one of them with a known beneficial plant you will be giving them a godd clue. (You have to be cruel to be kind!)

So that it can be judged when a player has starved to death I include a table which shows the effect that lack of food will have on them.

FOOD DEPRIVATION TABLE

	Number of Days Without Food						
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7+**
Hit Points Lost (Temporary)	1	0	1	2	1	1	1
Constitution Points Lost (Permanent)	1	1	1	1	2	2	2

So it may be seen that the penalties of fasting are great. Hit points may be regained but Constitution points cannot, thus making a player more susceptible to the effects of poison. After a week of fasting the average player with between 9 and 12 Constitution points has little or no hope of withstanding any level of poison.

Water

It seems reasonable to me that water can be treated in a similar way to food, i.e. there is a possibility that it may be contaminated. Obviously a known safe water source will contine to be safe unless contaminated by some accident, i.e. explosing with resulting chemical leakage into the water. Therefore, a village or community may be set up near a safe water source with no problems. However, a group of nomadic humans and/or mutants will have to search for new watering places should they decide to travel far thus being unable to return to their own safe water source.

I rule that both humans and mutants cannot carry more than two days' supply of water with them and so, thereafter, they have to find a fresh supply or suffer the consequences, i.e. reduced movement, weaker constitution and possible eventural death. On finding water, I rule that there is a 20% chance of it being contaminated and, if so, consult the *Poison Chart* on page 11 of the rulebook to determine the effect, having thrown 3d6 for strength of poison.

Should the characters elect to go without water for a day or days rather than risk possible contaminated water, then the table below is used to reduce movement:

WATER DEPRIVATION TABLE

		Spaces Moved Per Melee Round				
Human/Humanoid	**(Normal)**	**Number of Days Without Water**				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
No armour	(6)	5	4	3	1	D
Furs, shield or leather	(6)	4	3	2	1	D
Leather and shiled	(5)	4	2	1	1	D
Plate armour	(4)	3	2	1	D	D
Duralloy armour	(4)	3	2	1	D	D

D equals death, and so after 5 days all classes are dead unless they take a drink. Also, those characters clad in heavy armour will have to shed it if they wish to stay alive whilst continuing to refuse the water encountered for fear of it being contaminated.

So there we are. I hope that the above will be of use to some SMs and that other people will contribute, if the editor will allow it, to *The Guide to Botany*.