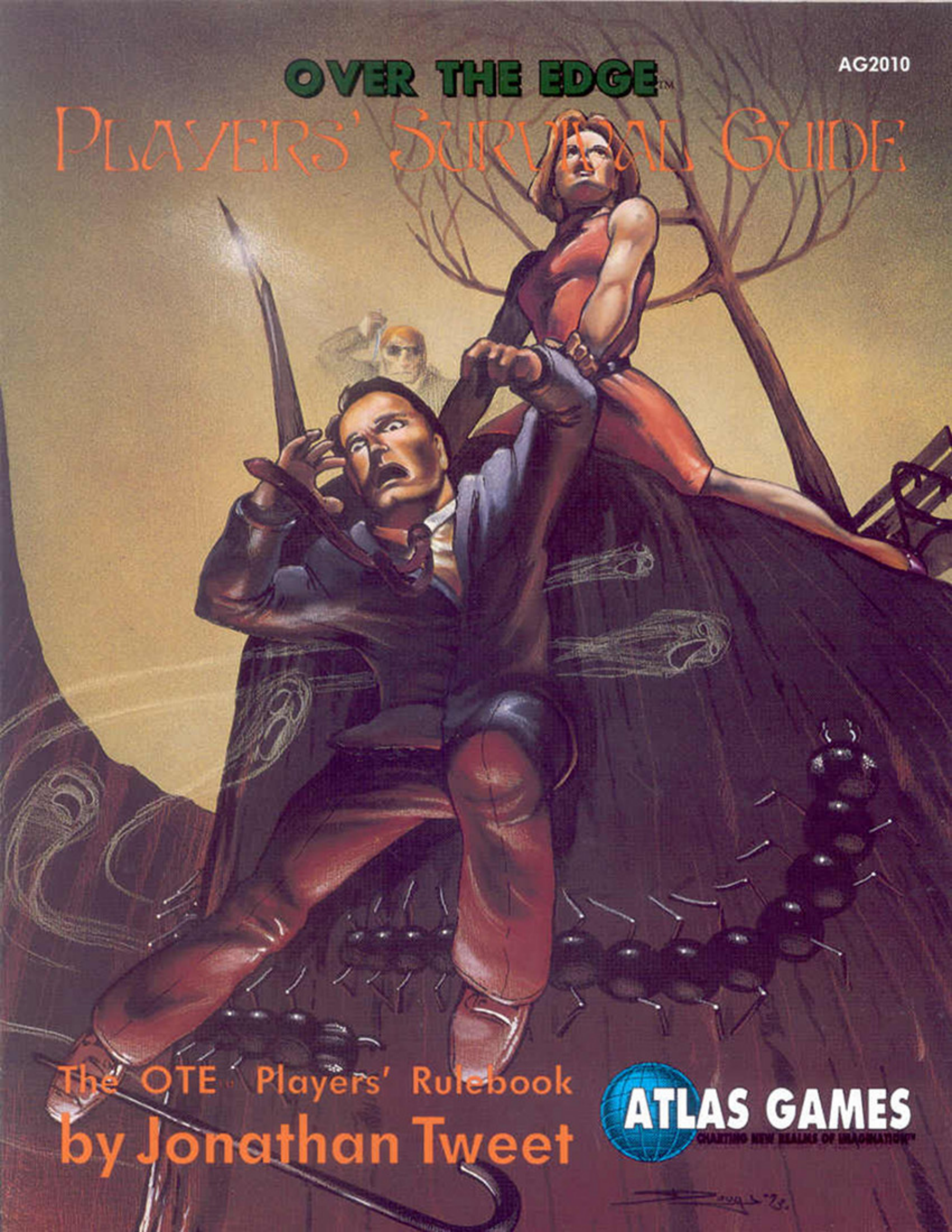


OVER THE EDGE™

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PLAYERS' SURVIVAL GUIDE



The OTE Players' Rulebook
by Jonathan Tweet

ATLAS GAMES
CHARTING NEW REALMS OF IMAGINATION™

Jonathan Tweet '10

Credits

Design: Jonathan Tweet

Player Advice Essays: Michael Halse, Robin D. Laws, Greg Stolze

Meeting the 'Martians: John Sullivan, Robin D. Laws, Jonathan Tweet

Inspirational Resources: Bruce Baugh, Allan Hise, Greg Porter, Greg Stolze, Jonathan Tweet

Editing: Mark Frein, John Nephew

Editorial Assistance: Lawrence "Smiley" Revard

Cover Art: Doug Shuler

Interior Art: Cheryl Mandus

Cartography: Jay Ferm

Character Sketches: Jonathan Tweet, Tracy Tweet

Layout and Cover Design: John Nephew

Foreign Name Consultants: Fumiko Inoue, Tony Lee

Advice & Help: Bryant Durrell, John Sullivan, Tracy Tweet

Playtesting: Roger Decker, Jr., Marty Dennis, Mike Halse, Chuck Sohlberg, Greg Stolze, Doomsday, John Nephew

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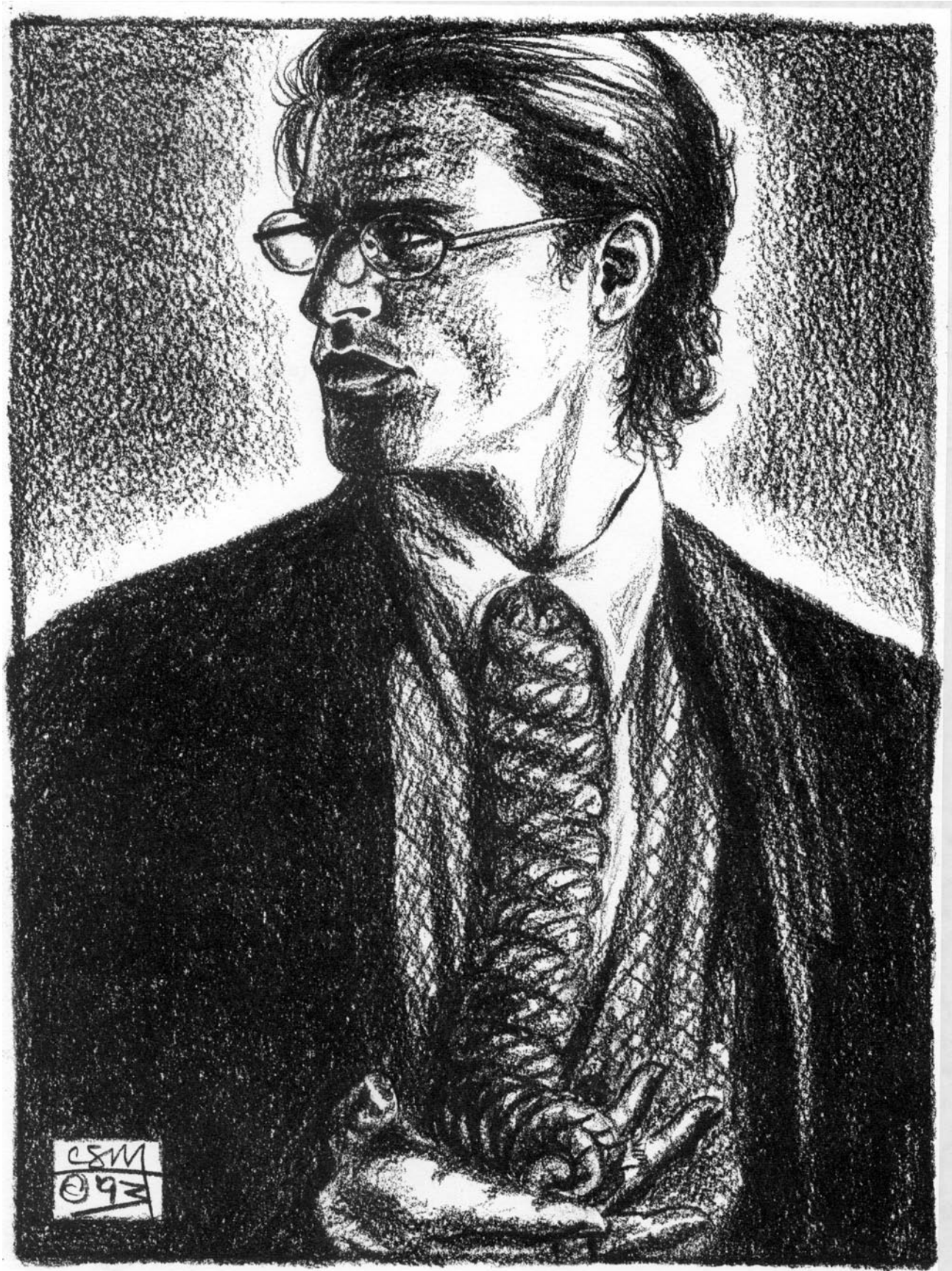
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CHAPTER ZERO

INTRODUCTION

Anything is Possible
Everything is Permitted
— William S. Burroughs

The heart of *Over the Edge*TM is the unknown. More than any other role-playing game, OTETM keeps the players guessing.

At least that's how it should be. The problem is that the carefully crafted secrets that I hid from my players during the early OTE games are now available in any game store, and players may be tempted to buy these secrets for their own edification. In order to help you resist that temptation, we decided to publish information open to players in a separate book. Now you can have your own copy of the rules (most of them, anyway) without facing the temptation to flip past page 43 and see what's *really* going down on Al Amarja.

The rules in this book offer more than you will find in OTE itself: more example concepts and traits, more advice, more ways to personalize your character, and so on. You'll also find a system for generating a character randomly, a device that some people may find useful for breaking out of ruts. And I included information for playing African PCs because too many US players are just too ignorant when it comes to that continent, and, with Al Amarja being so close, I thought I ought to rectify the situation in some small way.

My approach to the original rules was not to go into much detail about weird traits, fringe powers, and so on. My goal was to allow players' creativity free rein by giving them a blank slate. Then, during a convention game, a group of six players included a vampire, a werewolf, and a space alien with a disintegrator ray. The cliches were so thick you could cut them with a knife, so to speak. Shocked by that experience, I decided to go into a little more depth on weird traits in these rules, hoping to open players up to more possibilities. This effort will backfire, however, if you take the weird possibilities I mention as the only possibilities. Think for yourself.

Rather than hog the whole show, I invited some friends to share some gaming wisdom with you, specifically, how to approach OTE so as to enjoy it the most. I don't necessarily agree with everything they say; judge for yourself the value of this advice.

Finally there are some tidbits from Al Amarjan life: encounters your character might have on Al Amarja, a flier about the island that your character may find, and so on. (This spot is a good place to remind you that the opinions expressed by characters on Al Amarja do not necessarily represent those of the author; these are fictional characters, and if they say things that force you to question cherished beliefs, laugh it off.) Now, strictly speaking, you ought not be looking at these people and props until your GM tells you that your PC has run across them; but I don't think it's any big deal, do you?

So here it is: everything a player needs to know to enjoy a good game of OTE, and more. Open your mind, surprise yourself, and have a good time!

Your GM and This Book

Ideally, your GM should give you all the information you ever get about the game and the setting. If your GM is like me, however, she's human. This book gives your GM a break by showing you the rules, advising you on character design, and introducing you to the setting so that you can slip easily into play. Looked at this way: This book is your GM's servant, not the players'. That means it takes orders from her.

Your GM has the right to make house rules for her series. These rules take precedence over those found in this book, so be sure that you're clear on how she runs her game.

The GM may ask you not to read or refer to certain sections at first. If she wants the pleasure (and hassle) of introducing you to Al Amarja on her own, then reading some of the material in this book can spoil the fun both for you and for her.

The GM may change her Al Amarja so that some of the material herein is obsolete or even danger-

ously misleading. If so, she is under no obligation to tell her players about these changes until the PCs themselves find out.

Things That Will Come in Handy

Over the Edge uses only six-sided dice; you might want as many as six of them. Those dice with the skulls in place of the 1's are handy because if you roll all 1's when attempting to accomplish something, you screw up (an optional rule).

Paper and pencil are also necessary. As a player, you will want to write down names, clues, addresses, phone numbers, quotes, and other tidbits that will help you sort out the secrets of Al Amarja. Honestly, keep good records. I can't tell you how many important clues slipped through my players' fingers because they didn't write them down.

Photocopies of game material are also valuable, including character sheets, character logs, and facsimiles of material that the characters find when they travel to Al Amarja (Atlas Games permits you and your GM to make copies of such things for personal use only).

Inspirational text and video can stimulate the imagination of both the players and the GM. Depending on your bent, you might look into the writings of William S. Burroughs and Philip K. Dick, or some of the stranger movies that Hollywood has offered us, or you might prefer the offerings of supermarket tabloids.

Miniatures can aid in marking out where characters are in relation to each other, but their use is strictly a matter of taste. By the way, good luck finding modern miniatures without firearms.

Disclaimer

"All references to vices and to the supernatural contained in this game are for entertainment purposes only. *Over the Edge*™ does not promote satanism, belief in magic, drug use, violence, sexual deviation, body piercing, cynical attitudes toward the government, freedom of expression, or any other action or belief not condoned by the authorities."

Before every game of OTE™, you and all the players should strip naked and intone the above disclaimer while each holding a single white candle in a darkened room.

Glossary of Game Terms

Bonus Die — An extra die rolled with the normal dice for an attempted action when the character has some advantage. Drop out the lowest die before tallying the total for the roll.

Experience Pool — The number of dice that a character can use as bonus dice each game. They double as a measure of experience and can be "spent" to improve or develop traits.

Fringe Powers — Powers not readily recognized as possible by the mundane world, including abilities that could be classified as psychic or magical.

Game Moderator (GM) — The person who coordinates the series, referred to in the text as "she" to differentiate the GM from the players.

GMC — Game Moderator Character (= NPC, or non-player-character), a character run by the game moderator.

Hit Points — A measure of a character's ability to take damage and punishment. If reduced to 0 hit points, you're down and out of the fight. A character deep in the negatives is either dead or will die without medical care.

Round — In combat, or other intense encounters, a unit of time in which a character can generally take one action. Represents about 3 seconds of time in the game world.

Penalty Die — An extra die rolled with the normal dice when the character has some disadvantage. Drop out the highest die before totalling the roll.

PC — Player character, a character run by one of the players. Referred to as "he" to differentiate the PC from the GM.

Psychic Pool — Represents how many times per day a character can use psychic or fringe powers.

Series — A string of related game sessions, a "campaign."

Trait — A feature of a character, representing a skill, personal characteristic, fringe power, talent, or aspect of one's background. Traits are usually good, but some (called "flaws") are bad.

CHAPTER I

CHARACTER CREATION

In *Over the Edge*[™], you play a modern-day person in a strange environment. You have great freedom in determining what kind of person you will portray in the game. The more wisely you use this freedom, the more fun you will have. In creating a character for play, please keep in mind a few rules of thumb.

- 1) **Create a character that engages you**, someone you care about or identify with in some way.
- 2) **Create a character who is danger-worthy**. Your character is likely to be put into danger from time to time, and he should have the resources to cope with it.
- 3) **Use your imagination!** I've sometimes had to restrict players' creations to keep them reasonable, but mostly I've let them get away with more than they first thought possible. As you will see, the rules for character creation are loose and easy, so take advantage of that freedom. Don't take the lists in this chapter as definitive; they merely stimulate your own creativity.
- 4) **Follow the GM's lead**. Your GM's series may be zany, high-powered, mundane, or whatever else she wants it to be. If you develop a character that does not fit the series that the GM has in mind, change your concept to fit. If you don't, the GM will have a hard time fitting your PC easily into the series, and the PC may have a hard time surviving as a result.
- 5) **Be independent**. There are several ways you can mess yourself up by creating a character who is somehow dependent on other PCs or limited events in the game world. For instance, it might be interesting to run a PC who is tailing another PC and reporting back to "headquarters" on the other PC's actions, but what do you do when the player of that character doesn't show up for a game session, and you have nothing to do? Or what happens when the other PC gets killed and your mission is over?
- 6) **Be cooperative**. If you intend your character to interact regularly with other PCs, have a character who is open to working with others. If your reason for coming to the island is so secret that you'll never

allow others (other PCs) to help you, or you won't work with them, then you're in for a potentially boring game.

- 7) **Hook up**. A hook is a detail of your character that encourages him to get involved in the action. By providing a hook in your character, you can help the GM decide how to draw your character into the various plots of her series. The hook can relate to a trait, a secret, or motivation, or it can just be additional information about your PC. Hooks can include looking for someone (or something), hiding from someone (or something), or investigating someone (or something).
- 8) **Consider the group**. The PCs in your series may have a focus (see "The PC Group" on p. 25). If so, design your PC to fit.

Creating Your First Characters

Since your imagination and your GM's mercy are the only limits to the type of character you can create, it can be a challenge to fix on a concept for your first few characters. The GM, however, has three ready-to-play adventures that she can use to get your series rolling. Each of these adventures describes certain types of characters that would be most appropriate, which may make developing your first characters easier. Once you have experienced the world, the rules, and the process of creating a character, doing so with less guidance shouldn't be a problem.

Concept

First, get an idea of the character you will portray. It might help to look over the steps detailed below. Have a good idea of who you want to be before you start any details.

For ideas as to what type of character to play, look everywhere: modern-day movies, pseudo-cyber books, supermarket tabloids, childhood daydreams, other role-playing games, advertisement illustrations, New Age philosophy, and your own twisted imaginings. One player looked at the list of example concepts with his glasses off and saw “New Ape Dude” instead of “New Age Dupe.” That’s a stilted way of getting a new perspective on possible character types, but it worked for him.

Don’t be afraid to play wish-fulfillment. If you want a character who is rich, good-looking, confident, sexy, tough, competent, or whatever else you might not be, make it so.

Stuck for ideas? A lot of people come to Al Amarja to sell their services as bodyguards, mercenaries, and such. Play one of these thugs if nothing else comes to mind. This concept gives you fight-worthiness and a reason to get involved in various plots as you search for employment and ways to improve your skills. Now just ask yourself where you come from and what special skills you have to offer a potential employer, and your concept is ready to go.

With your GM’s permission, you can create a character who is a native of Al Amarja, but characters from off-island are better for players who are new to the game. When you as a player are unfamiliar with Al Amarja, it is easier to play a character who is likewise in the dark about what to expect.

Near the end of this chapter you can find the CUTUP system (a random PC generation system) and information on African PCs. These might help you approach your character in a new way.

Weirdness and Normality

Most players are tempted to create very weird PCs in OTE, and I’ve seen some doozies. (Thankfully, the giant interplanetary blob never made it into play, but there have been other exercises in the bizarre walking around Al Amarja.) Since the freedom of nearly unrestricted imagination is enough to entice most players to try something weird, let me balance the scales with some less obvious reasons why weirdness isn’t always your best option.

The most practical reason to avoid weirdness is that a weird PC attracts attention. The three-armed boxer in one of my games was fun to sketch, but he wasn’t much when it came to unobtrusively casing

an enemy’s apartment, or impersonating a foreign dignitary, or disappearing into a crowd, or buying a nice suit. Even less tangible oddities are likely to bring your PC to the attention of various forces, and the survival rate of PCs who “fit in” is much higher than that of those who stand out.

On a more esthetic level, weird characters usually are limited in play potential. The Dalai Lama incarnated into a woman’s body was an ego trip for the player, but she soon found out that the constraints of running an enlightened character kept her from having the PC mess around in all sorts of fun but “unenlightened” activities. The player just got sick of running the PC. Similarly, other weird characters tend to have behavior patterns that are strange and interesting, but ultimately narrow, and possibly shallow as well.

“Normal” characters, on the other hand, call upon more role-playing talent because they can’t fly on autopilot. Precisely because they require more thought to play, they usually become more interesting and are more satisfying for the player. Without strangeness to make a PC interesting, you may find yourself exploring romance, personal development, honor, internal contradictions, moral dilemmas, and so on.

Don’t think I’m saying you should never play weirdos. Especially for a change of pace or for a short run, real wackos can be a lot of fun. And nothing keeps weirdos from being as deep and interesting as normals. The most interesting weirdos I’ve seen, however, are those whose personal goals and actions are more intriguing than their powers. If you have weird powers, use them selectively and sparingly. Prudence may save the PC from attracting too much unwanted attention and may save you from using the power as a role-playing crutch.

Three characters in my original play-test series developed into major protagonists in interesting plots. For one, a weirdo, strangeness was central to the character. He died *twice* before all was said and done, to the disappointment of the player. The weirdest character kept his weirdness a secret, and he became one of the more “human” characters (although he wasn’t human at all), and he succeeded at his personal goal of finding his father. The third was a normal, and his career also ended in success. Let their lives be a lesson to you.

There is no right or wrong way to create a character. Just know what you are getting into.

Example Concepts

Former drug runner fleeing from former partners, who now want to kill him.

Incarnation of Atlantean high priest.

Zombi who is breaking free of voodoo control and seeks complete freedom with the help of a wizard rumored to live on the island.

Psycho-killer commando who escaped from CIA brain-washing program when the programming failed.

Creature of goodness from a higher plane trapped in a mortal body and trying to gain release.

Decadent dilettante seeking stimulation for jaded tastes.

Were-jaguar.

Addict of strange drug who has followed the supply line to the island, where the drug is plentiful.

Unsuspecting tourist.

Professor on sabbatical studying decadent social systems, strange medicines, weird science, unorthodox archeology, etc.

Beneficiary/victim of Hitler's secret Übermensch project.

Charlatan religious leader spreading the word on Al Amarja.

Demon-possessed punk rocker.

Photographer compiling a photo profile of strange lands.

Ex-Green Beret looking for work as a mercenary or assassin.

Playwright looking for inspiration from Al Amarja's avant-garde theater community.

New Age dupe told by "the cards" to seek his destiny on Al Amarja.

Master of New Age wisdom who has been guided to Al Amarja by a higher power.

Unfortunate mutant who has heard that the "genetically challenged" have an easier time of it on Al Amarja.

Tough biker-gal.

Doctor on a compulsory vacation after her "unorthodox" treatments were uncovered by hospital authorities.

Writer of experimental fiction.

Retired politician living it up on the winnings of several profitable decades as a corporate lapdog.

Ex-professional wrestler, now in obscurity and forced retirement after breaking an opponent's back rather than throwing a key fight.

Defense Department research scientist who's faked his own death after inventing a weapon too terrible for the human mind to accept.

Expatriate Russian scientist, a specialist in some secret scientific techniques.

Italian cabbie running from an unhappy love affair.

Quechuan mystic.

Socialite youth running away from home.

Avant-garde musician whose music has met with poor reception in less open-minded locales.

Libyan laborer looking for work.

Talking Irish cat.

The Twist

If your PC threatens to be a cliché, give it a twist. This is especially important if you think your character is interesting because it's not fully human. Vampires, werewolves, and psychics, for example, run a real risk of being clichéd because they've been done so many times in so many books and so many movies. Add a twist to make characters unique. You want to run a vampire? OK, but could it be a vampire that feeds off of neurotransmitters instead of blood? If so, does it get an endorphin high from feeding? Maybe it's only metaphorically a vampire, so it has a different

array of strengths and weaknesses from the traditional vampire. Similarly, if you want to play a werewolf but also want to avoid the clichés that usually come with it, could the character get the strength, agility, ferocity, and senses of a werewolf while retaining human form?

The same goes for individual traits you are going to invent. Is your first idea to have telekinesis? Hasn't that been done, and overdone? Instead, why not give your PC the ability to create a tiny simulacrum of himself that only he can see. (The simulacrum has no independent life, so the PC has to keep concentrating

on it and watching it to keep it active). This power is like telekinesis because the character can use the simulacrum to move things at a distance, but it's a fresh approach.

A twist even adds detail to a mundane trait. If your PC is strong, does he follow a finicky vitamin regimen? If your PC is perceptive, does this trait develop from an unhealthy degree of paranoia? If your PC is a smooth talker, does he rely on subliminal message tapes to keep "in form"?

Adding a twist to your PC helps you steer clear of the cliché-traps that have been the downfall of so many characters in so many games.

Traits

Here is a summary of the traits that will largely define your character.

Each character has **four traits**.

One trait is the character's **central trait**, usually defining who that character is.

Two traits are **side traits**, additional skills or characteristics.

Of the above three traits, one is chosen to be **superior**.

The last trait is a **flaw** or disadvantage.

Unknown Attributes

An interesting way to speed up character creation and bring some mystery to the process is to identify certain attributes as unknown to you and to the character. For example, your PC might be an escapee from an experimental mental illness treatment that has given him powers that he doesn't even know much about yet. In that case, tell your GM that you want to leave one or more traits for her to define and keep a secret from you. Or your PC's motivation for coming to the island might be to follow certain clues, the significance of which he does not yet fully understand. Your GM might well appreciate the freedom that this tactic gives her in manipulating your character into the plots that she will lay for him and other PCs.



Each of the four traits entails a **sign**, some visible or tangible aspect of that trait.

mini-maxing, but here are some ways to get powerful traits, if that is your goal.

Powerful Traits

With no numbers to manipulate and all traits subject to GM veto, how can you mini-max? How can you get the most powerful traits? I'm not condoning

Make It Interesting

Take some care in sculpting a unique and intriguing trait that the GM will genuinely want to see in play. Even if she thinks the trait might be too powerful, if

Example Central Traits

The phrases in parentheses are example signs that might be associated with the trait. (Of course, you should invent your own signs for your traits). The numbers at the end of the description indicate the number of dice that would be assigned to that trait normally (the first, lower number) and how many dice would be assigned if it is the character's **superior** trait (the second, larger number; see below for an explanation of superior traits). If the scores listed are "4/6," this represents higher than normal scores for "narrow" traits. See that optional rule later in this chapter (p. 16).

Aristocrat — Wealth, familiarity with valuables, knowing how to conduct oneself among the elite. (regal bearing, disdain for work) 3/4

Cat Burglar — Casing buildings, sneaking, overcoming security equipment, and finding fences for loot. (stealthy step, night owl) 3/4

Doctor — Includes ability to diagnose diseases, perform surgery, prescribe drugs, administer first aid, and charge outrageous fees with a straight face. Probably entails wealth, certainly education, though this education may be narrow. (terrible handwriting, clinical air) 1/2

Military Background — Includes fighting barehanded and with a variety of weapons, first aid, keeping cool under fire, and possibly one specialty field, such as mechanics or demolitions. (wears camo clothes, battle scars) 3/4

Musician — Includes the ability to sing and probably play a few instruments, possibly familiarity with illicit drugs, knowledge of how things really get done in the music scene, a personal style, and the ability to self-promote. May entail wealth or poverty, depending on talent, luck, and other factors. (flamboyant dress, uses slang constantly, self-satisfied demeanor) 4/6

Painter — Producing attractive paintings, though

the audience for this art may be limited if the painter is truly talented. (paint-stained clothes, grumbles about the limited tastes of the "bourgeoisie") 4/6

Photographer — Perceptive, familiar with a variety of photographic techniques, can develop own film, may have connections in the publishing industry. (carries a camera everywhere, delights in visual imagery) 3/4

Private Investigator — Surveillance, phone-tapping, subterfuge, and brawling. (keeps receipts out of habit, does Bogart impersonations). 3/4

Professor — Well-educated, including at least one specialty, academic contacts, possible recognition for work done in area of specialization, potential for grants to do special work, status among the intelligentsia. (Wears slightly out-of-fashion clothes, left-wing views) 3/4

Religious Charlatan — Good at conning people, appearing innocent, and convincing people to donate money to the cause. Also may be familiar with a specific religious or mystic tradition. (unnaturally dark and full hair for someone that age, sincere smile, quotes the Bible out of context) 3/4

Scientist — Familiar with science in general, with one field of science as a specialty. Depending on the specialty, may be able to analyze chemicals, construct useful devices, and figure out innovative scientific devices. (uses big words, often lost in thought) 3/4

Unusual — If you want to have an unusual character, perhaps the kind of thing that does not exist in the real world, you should probably take that trait as your central trait. Be sure to be clear to the GM what skills, abilities, and characteristics this trait covers.

Example Side Traits

These are just examples, not a list from which to choose. If an unusual trait described here is to your liking, don't take it for your character as is. Instead, invent something similar. The phrases in parentheses are possible signs. The numbers at the end of the description indicate the number of dice the character receives for a normal and superior version of that trait, respectively. If the scores listed are "4/6," this represents higher than normal scores for "narrow" traits. See that optional rule later in this chapter. The phrase "special" means that you must carefully define this trait to the satisfaction of the GM and determine its score and its scope through negotiation with her, if she even allows the trait in the first place.

Acute Sense of Smell (literal) — Useful for identifying people by smell, detecting poisons in one's food, following a scent trail, etc. (gets headaches from perfumes and colognes) 4/6

Acute Sense of Smell (figurative) — Better than average chances of telling when something's fishy, smelling a rat, identifying BS, etc. (large nose) special

Beautiful — Improves reactions that others have toward you, although you may also attract unwanted attention. (perfect skin, fashionable wardrobe) 3/4

Brawling — Fighting with bare fists, broken bottles, chains, knives, and impromptu weapons. Use for both attack and defense rolls (see rules for combat below). (missing teeth, calloused knuckles) 3/4

Caffeine-Dependent Energy — Due to a rare form of allergy, caffeine gives the character unusual strength and speed, but too much caffeine in a single day can send the character into shock. (carries a cola bottle around) special

Casing — Looking over an area to find easy means of illicit access, suitable hiding places, useful escape routes, etc. (always aware of surroundings) 3/4

Cool — Remaining unfazed in dangerous or mind-blowing circumstances, attracting those of appropriate sexual orientation, impressing people. (self-assured demeanor, carefully chosen wardrobe) 3/4.

Do Two Things At Once — Reading while holding a conversation, committing faces to memory while playing an instrument, etc. (carries books everywhere) n/a

Double-Jointed — Slipping out of a pin, escaping from manacles, avoiding injury from a blow that would break the joints of others. (very limber, loose-fitting clothes) 4/6

Foiling Security Systems — Spotting and disarming alarms, picking locks, anticipating placement of security devices. (wears gloves, protects hands from possible harm [won't help change a tire, for example]) 3/4

Fringe Power — Any unusual type of power, usually called "magical" or "psychic." If you go this route, do yourself

a favor and invent a unique and interesting fringe power. Most likely you have a "psychic pool," representing the number of times per day you can use this power (see p. 18). (sign depends on the nature of the power) special, usually 1/2

Hypnotism — Calling up repressed memories, implanting post-hypnotic suggestions, getting another character to act like a chicken. Hypnosis cannot force someone to behave contrary to his nature. (penetrating eyes, calm manner) 1/2

Intelligent — Putting clues together to form a valid hypothesis, understanding meaning of obscure names and words, impressing similarly intelligent or erudite people. This trait represents a broad intelligence, whereas a trait like "scientist" includes intelligence highly focused on the specific area of knowledge. (does crosswords rapidly and in pen, uses big words) 3/4

Martial Arts — Use this score in combat, both attack and defense, when using bare hands or weapons appropriate to the martial art one has learned. (does origami, effects an ersatz Japanese style) 3/4

Ladies' Man — Impressing, charming, and seducing women. (has a "little black book," winning smile) 3/4

Mind Reading — I mention this trait only to warn you away from it. Not only is it clichéd, it's rude. It can reveal not only the GM's secret designs but also private information about the other players' PCs, spoiling the fun for others in the game. Get your GM's OK on this power (or anything like it) before you give it to your PC.

Good Negotiator — Settling differences, either personal ones or disagreements between others. A good negotiator is often a middle child. (frequently intervenes in arguments, rarely disparages others) 3/4

Personal Manipulator — Getting others to trust you or to do what you want them to do; usually involves convincing them that such actions are in their best interests. (air of self-confidence, has no long-term friends) 3/4

Quick — Can move and react quickly. Use this score for either attack or defense rolls, but not both in the same round. (good reflexes, lithe body) 3/4

Straight-facing — Lying, dissembling, and bluffing without showing emotion. (reserved demeanor) 3/4

Strong — For attacks in combat (but not defense rolls), breaking down doors, pinning a captive, etc. (big muscles, works out a lot) 3/4

Tells Good Jokes — Useful for putting people at ease, passing the time, or winning affection. (can improvise witty remarks, loves to hear others' jokes) 4/6

Tough — Resist poisons, pain, and fatigue. (big-boned) 3/4

it's interesting, she may let you keep it against her better judgment. Traits are especially hard for the GM to veto if they are tied intimately to your character concept. (Don't get carried away, though; she can edit a trait instead of vetoing it.) It is your job to make the problems created by a powerful trait worth the GM's trouble by making the trait so interesting that it adds to the game.

As a GM, one player once tried foisting a really powerful trait on me, something like "Zen Oneness," but when I noticed that it had no tangible impact on play other than giving the PC bonuses, I vetoed it. Now if the player had made the power interesting by giving it some play-worthy limits or working it into the character concept, I may have let it stand.

Give it a Drawback

Limiting a trait or tying a flaw to it can at least give the illusion that you are playing fair. A GM is more likely to allow a power that carries with it some vulnerability or another. (And since you need a flaw to complete your character anyway, tying that flaw to a powerful trait doesn't really set you back). A flaw tied to a positive trait also gives your PC an added element of unity. For instance, if you want a perfect memory and total recall, letting your character be haunted by hideous memories provides a flaw that makes sense and makes your mnemonic powers seem like less of a power trip.

If you want a really outrageous power, give it a side effect flaw in addition to your normal flaw, or take a really big flaw to balance the power.

Warning to Power Gamers

"The cinnamon tree is edible, so it is cut down. The lacquer tree is useful, so it is slashed. Everyone knows the usefulness of the useful, but no one knows the usefulness of the useless."

—Chuang Tzu, *Tr. by Gia-Fu Feng & Jane English*

You power gamers out there will no doubt notice that you can pretty easily create quite a powerful character. Believe me, I've seen players get away with incredible violations of game balance, and you can do the same. Just let me warn you that the more powerful you are, the deeper you get into trouble before you realize you are in serious danger. Consistently, the most powerful characters tend to be the shortest lived.

In addition, a powerful character is seen as a threat or a potential tool by the various power groups on Al Amarja. Those powerful enough to attract attention to themselves may find themselves the targets of assassination attempts or kidnaping and brainwashing.

If a powerful character is what you want, go for it. Just don't say I didn't warn you.

Central Trait

The first trait you invent is your PC's **central trait**, essentially his identity — who he is, what he does. This trait can take into account a variety of aptitudes, skills, or characteristics. When you, as a player, describe your character, you are likely to use this trait as the central concept. For example, "My character is a model," or "She's a former secret agent." If you want to play something weird, this trait generally covers that identity.

Look at the Example Central Traits for the kind of identities the central trait can cover. Keep in mind that this list is not something from which you must choose, but merely a series of examples to show you how to invent your own character's central trait.

Side Traits

Once you have your character's central, identifying trait chosen, chose two **side traits**. They may or may not be related to the central trait. Unlike the central traits, these side traits are very specific, representing discrete characteristics or skills.

Just because a trait is called a "side trait" does not mean it is insignificant to your character. For example, a professor with the side trait of "hack writing" might be on Al Amarja to pursue her writing career, and her attempts to gain inspiration for her fiction may be more important in play than her teaching career. Indeed, she may be better at writing than teaching.

Since your character will spend most of his time on Al Amarja, you should know that firearms are extremely illegal there. Talk to your GM before taking traits related to firearms. Psychic powers are also illegal, but they tend to be easier to conceal than guns. Still, a character like "Jeremiah the Fabulous, Psychic Consultant to Wall Street" might get into trouble (unless he's incognito).

Look at the Example Side Traits to see how these can work.

Defining Traits

The GM looks over your character's traits and may veto or edit any that she judges to be out of order. She'll probably allow traits like "Exceptionally tough," but might disallow "Completely impervious to all manner of attack, damage, threat to life, or heartache."

Take care in naming traits. Make each unique. If you want your character to be a beautiful woman, for example, is she a "bombshell," a "knock-out," a "natural beauty," a "model," or a "hot babe"? If you want your character to be a good fighter, is he a "street fighter," a "martial artist," a "barroom brawler," or a "vicious little beast of a fighter"? If your character is to have a way with words, is she "well-spoken," "manipulative," or "silver-tongued"? While the distinctions among these terms may be slight, they affect your perception of the character and can affect the character's abilities in special circumstances. (A jaded millionaire, for example, may have had his fill of models, with their careful hairstyles and fascination with primping; while a natural beauty may really catch his attention).

No two traits are exactly alike. For instance, let's look at a useful trait like "athletic." What does that mean? Below are three ways the trait "athletic" could be made part of a character.

Athletic — I'm a natural sportsman, and I love sports. I've excelled at college-level basketball, football, and hockey. Sign: An air of self-confidence.

Athletic — I'm pre-occupied with physical perfection, and to this end I spend large amounts of time working out, building strength, agility, and endurance. Sign: Well-shaped physique.

Athletic — Thanks to a strict regimen of spiritual, mental, and physical purity, I have exceptional physical prowess. Actually, my capabilities are what should be normal for the human body, but MSG, unfocused thought, and uncontrolled desires weaken most people. Sign: Strict diet.

Scores for Traits

Now you have your character's three positive traits: one central trait and two side traits. Next, you

must assign a score to each. The score represents how many dice you roll when using the trait. Two factors determine the score for a given trait: whether it is "superior," and whether it is the kind of trait that most people normally have. (See also the optional rule for "narrow" traits.)

First, you choose one of the three traits to be **superior**. Choose the one you like the most or think is most important to your character. Note that there is no relation between your "central" and your "superior" trait. The central trait is the trait that basically defines the character; the superior trait is that trait at which he excels the most.

Most traits are better or worse versions of traits the average person has. For instance, a strong character is stronger than average, but even the average person has some strength. Some traits, however, are unusual or technical, and the average person has no skill (0 dice) in that trait. If this is the case, a character with this trait has fewer dice than normal, to represent the fact that he would normally have no dice at all in that trait. Medicine, channeling, and quantum physics are examples of technical or unusual traits.

See the charts below for specifics. Below the label for the kind of trait are a few examples of traits that fall in that category. "Superior" indicates the score if this trait is your character's superior trait. "Good" indicates the score if you have chosen the trait, but not as the superior trait. "Average" means the score for someone who does not have that trait at all.

Of course, some traits cannot be given a score. A character in my group, for instance, was able to swallow and belch up gases voluntarily. How can you give that a score? If the trait is not related to a score, make sure you and your GM agree to what this trait means.

Standard Trait

Stealth, strength, straight-facing	
Superior	4 dice
Good	3 dice
Average	2 dice

Technical or Unusual Trait

Doctor, fringe powers	
Superior	2 dice
Good	1 die
Average	0 dice

Example Flaws

Acidic Sweat — Clothes wear out quickly, and the PC has a strange body odor. The acid is, of course, very weak. (showers frequently, has no nice clothes)

Believes in an Imaginary Friend — Believes in an imaginary being of some kind and often turns to it for advice. (talks to "self," repeats crazy information and refuses to reveal the source)

Bungling — Two left feet, clumsy, klutzy, whatever you want to call it. Receive a penalty die on all actions involving agility and coordination. (constantly knocks things off tables, food stains on tie)

Closed Mind — Unable to accept ideas that run counter to pre-established beliefs. (mocks any mention of that which his culture or faith does not accept or understand)

Disgusting Appearance — Penalty die on rolls to impress people favorably. (scraggly beard, unkempt hair, unwashed face)

Doppelgänger — Someone who looks just like the PC appears in his life from time to time, often causing trouble. (makes a habit of not showing his face)

Drunk — Addicted to alcohol. (always saying "I need a drink")

Enemies — Somebody is out to get him; he may not be sure who that is. (continually looking over your shoulder)

Fat — Penalty die on feats of endurance, inability to fit in tight places, need for custom-tailored clothes. (fat)

Hard of Hearing — Penalty die on eavesdropping, hearing people sneak up on him, or noticing the ticking sound coming from the package he's about to open. (pretends to follow conversations he can't hear)

Heavy Smoker — Penalty die on feats of endurance; addicted to nicotine. (bad breath, nicotine stains on fingers)

Hypochondriac — Always wasting time and worry over imaginary ailments; may suffer an actual ailment that friends ignore out of habit. (carries ready supply of medicines)

Illiterate — Can't read. (carries a newspaper around to hide inability to read)

Internal Nemesis — Character absorbed his twin in the womb (it happens) and the ghost of that twin

is "haunting" him, causing him to say the wrong thing at the wrong time, trip over expensive vases, and so on. (angry warnings to the twin sound like he's talking to himself)

Know-It-All — Thinks he can do anything, never asks for help, angered by people who disagree with him. (continually spouting facts that are only tangentially related to the conversation)

Nerd — Penalty die in social situations. (poor taste in clothes and hair styles, uncomfortable around members of the opposite sex, talks endlessly about his powerful characters in role-playing games)

New Age Dupe — Likely to trust untrustworthy people, books, remedies, and "psychic" tools. (fusses over crystals & proper foods, talks about "vibes" and means it)

One-Track Mind — Unable to keep track of two goals at once. (constantly forgetting things)

Paranoid — Believes that others are out to get him, may cry wolf once too often, unable to distinguish the people who are really out to get him from everyone else. (eyes always dart from side to side)

Prone to Reckless Violence — When frustrated, there is a one in six chance that he flies into a fit of uncontrollable rage. (sullen demeanor)

Racist — Irrationally and actively biased against people of other races. Underestimates, offends, ignores, and/or fears these people. (tells racial jokes)

Squeamish — Deeply disturbed by the sight of blood, violence, death, and other aspects of life that society tries to deny. (pales easily)

Strong Body Odor — Penalty die in many social situations. (strong body odor)

Sucker for a Pretty Face — Penalty die when resisting manipulation by an attractive person. (always talking about this or that good-looking man or woman)

Technophobe — Inability to deal with technology, such as computers, answering machines, and VCRs. (clothes too small because he can't get the hang of the drier settings, asks others to make phone calls for him)

Weak — Penalty die on attacks and feats of strength. (thin limbs, sunken chest)

Optional Rule: Narrow Traits

Some players may wish to invent PCs with traits that are important to characterization but are of marginal use in the dangerous world of Al Amarja. For example, a character may wish to be a painter. This trait is nowhere near as useful as “good fighter,” “tough,” and so forth, so the GM may award the PC with extra dice in that score, to compensate partially for the trait’s marginal usefulness. Traits such as “chess,” “folk-singer,” and “telling ghost stories” may be considered narrow. No fighting skill counts as “narrow.” For “narrow” traits, use the charts below to see how the scores work:

Narrow Trait

	Public speaking, cooking
Superior	6 dice
Good	4 dice
Average	2 dice

Narrow & Technical Trait

	Helicopter pilot, dentistry
Superior	4 dice
Good	2 dice
Average	0 dice

Flaws

Once you have determined your character’s first three traits (the central trait and two side traits), decided which of those three is your superior trait, and assigned scores appropriately, it is time to choose a **flaw**. A flaw is any disadvantage that your character will have in play. It must be important enough that it actually comes into play and makes a difference. (Being a bad cook just doesn’t cut it). Ideally, the flaw should be something directly related to the central trait or side traits, or to your character’s concept, rather than just a tack-on disadvantage. For example, if your character is a professor, long-windedness may be his flaw.

Often a flaw causes you to roll penalty dice. For example, someone with strong B.O. may get a penalty die when rolling to make a good first impression. Other flaws cause problems that the player simply must role-play.

Sometimes you can get away with a minor flaw, especially if it fits your character concept and the traits you’ve invented are more wimpy than normal. I let a PC have the flaw “poor driver” because she took “good cook” as a side trait. I figured it was an even trade-off, and maybe your GM would do the same.

Be careful not to invent a flaw that ruins the fun for other players. While it’s certain that being obnoxious would count as a flaw for your PC, it’s also quite likely that such a flaw would grate on the other players’ nerves. Other players are also going to count on your character to pull his own. A flaw like “Can’t Keep a Secret” may be good for comic relief, but it may also keep the other players from having the kind of game they look forward to. If your PC’s flaw (or any other part of your PC) is a pain in the butt, you take full responsibility for the trouble it causes to the other players. Saying that you are “playing in character” doesn’t absolve you of responsibility because you invented the character in the first place.

See the Example Flaws (p. 15) for ideas as to what your flaw might be like.

Signs

For each trait, including the flaw, describe one sign related to it that others can notice. Use these signs when describing your character. That way your character can tell others, “I’m a tall, slim man who walks with a confident gait and wears a strange gold medallion around his neck.” Isn’t that better than, “I’m agile; I come from a wealthy British family; and I dabble in magic”? Some signs are not always apparent. They might appear when you use the trait in question, or only occasionally. Each of the example traits above lists at least one possible sign that might go with it. Look at those for ideas.

Other Statistics

Hit Points

Your character’s “hit points” represent the amount of punishment, damage, and pain he can take and still keep going. The more hit points he has, the harder he is to take down.

Hit points are determined by any trait that is relevant to fighting, toughness, strength, mass, or other aspect of your character that indicates the ability to take damage. If this trait is ranked as 4 dice, hit points are 28. If ranked as 3 dice, hit points are 21. Lacking such a trait, a character's hit points are 14. (A character does not have fewer than 14 hit points for having a trait like "weak.")

The astute among you will realize that one gets 7 points per die, and that relationship makes it easy to roll hit points randomly, if you want. Simply roll double the number of appropriate dice (e.g. roll 6 dice for a trait ranked as 3 dice), and your total is the character's hit points.

If your character has more than one trait that could affect his hit points, roll for each trait separately and take the highest roll as hit points. For example, if a character is a 4 dice martial artist and also has 3 dice strength, you could roll eight dice and six dice, using whichever roll results in the higher figure.

Want to get complicated? Here we go. If a PC has two traits related to hit points, you can take one of them as "average." Don't roll for it at all; just take the hit points listed above. Then roll for the other, using the result only if you actually roll over the average

score for the first trait. The strong martial artist in the example above could take 28 points for his 4 dice of martial arts and then roll six dice for being strong, taking whichever result is higher. Or he could take 21 points for being strong and then roll eight dice for the martial arts, again taking the higher result. To be fair, you must decide whether you are rolling or taking the average hit points for any trait before you begin rolling for any others. The strong martial artist could not first roll the six dice for being strong and then decide whether to roll the eight dice for martial arts ability. You've got to decide ahead of time whether to hedge your bet, and how.

Once you've determined hit points, attach a descriptive word or phrase to them to represent what they mean for your character. For instance, a strong character might call his "Brawn," indicating that his resilience in the face of physical punishment comes from his well-developed musculature. Another character's hit points might be "guts," relating to sheer internal toughness and resolve, rather than to any purely physical trait. These personal descriptions can lead to colorful player banter, such as "I don't feel so brawny any more," or "The thing just splashed my guts all over the wall!"



Descriptions of hit points also give your character more personality. A character who can take a lot of punishment because he's determined is conceptually different from someone who keeps going because he's too big (or too stupid) to notice his wounds.

The GM can also use your description of your character's hit points to bend the rules to fit an unusual situation. For instance, imagine a weapon that stimulates pain nerves on contact. A big guy's hit points might not be too effective against the attack, since increased size might just mean he has more pain nerve endings; but someone whose hit points come from being determined might be able to shrug off the pain and keep going. (In this example, the GM can either penalize the big guy to keep his extra hit points from protecting him, or give a bonus to the determined character to represent his superior resistance to pain. Which option the GM picks probably depends on whether she's had a good day).

Players often have a lot of fun making their enemies lose hit points, but the characters usually lose some of their own in the process. See the section in the next chapter on combat for the gruesome details.

Experience Pool

A beginning character has one die in his experience pool. This means that once per game session you can use this die as a bonus on any roll you make, improving your character's chances for success. Once you use this die, you cannot use it again for the rest of the session.

The experience die represents the character's real-life experience or special circumstances. You must justify the use of the die in these terms. If the GM does not tell you what a roll is for, you cannot use an experience die to modify it because you cannot justify its use. (See "Using Your Experience Pool," below).

As the series progresses and the PC becomes more experienced, the GM awards him more dice for his experience pool to represent the experience gained. That means you can improve more of your rolls each session, but you cannot use more than one die on a single roll. Once a die is used, you may not use it again for the rest of the game session.

If you want to be most classy, get some distinctive dice to use as experience dice. Set them out on the table in front of you at the beginning of play. As you

use them, put them away because, once used, they are out of the game for the rest of the session.

As you gain more dice in your pool, you can "trade them in" for improved traits. See the rules for experience later in this chapter.

Using Your Experience Pool

Justify the use of your experience dice whenever you use them. Make up facts if necessary. Here are some examples of how you might justify using an bonus die when doing each of the following actions:

Intimidate someone: "Being on Al Amarja has toughened me and put a fiendish glint in my eye."

Block a knife thrust: "This has got to be the third knife-fight I've been in this week, and I'm getting used to it."

Break open a door: "I've learned that on Al Amarja people play for keeps, and I don't hold back like I used to do when I was managing a convenience store in Peoria."

Overcome pain: "These guys just gutted my friend, and I'm not letting them get away with it."

Wow a fab babe: "I knew a woman like her back in Tokyo, and I know just how to approach her."

Optional Rule: Multiple Experience Dice

The GM may allow you to use more than one experience die, but only if you can give one good justification for each die that you intend to use. You only use a bonus die for each justification that the GM accepts, and the GM may refuse to use this optional rule altogether.

Psychic Pool

If your character has a weird, unusual power, the GM may give him a "psychic pool," which represent how many times per day he can use that power. This pool may contain 3 shots (uses per day), or you can roll a die to see how many shots it contains. (If the PC has several fringe powers, you can roll the die once for each and take the highest roll).

Not every fringe power requires a psychic pool. The psychic pool is simply a device to keep a fringe

power from walking all over the GM's plots by limiting the number of times per day one can use it. If a fringe power doesn't threaten to dominate the game, the GM may let the PC use it as often as he wishes.

Alternately, you may develop a different limiting mechanism for the fringe power. For instance, imagine your character can flip himself through spatial dimensions not normally conceivable to the human mind, thus moving from one spot to another without covering the intervening space. The shock of doing so might cause a die of damage to his system each time. An arrangement like this limits the power in a more interesting way, so the character wouldn't need a psychic pool.

Personal Background

Motivation

Choose a motivation for your character. Why has he come to Al Amarja? What does he want out of life? What is he trying to accomplish? Remember, the character might not be fully aware of his own motivation. After all, how well do we really understand why we do what we do? A good motivation inspires your character to action so the GM can use it to involve you in events on the island. The GM might also use the motivation to bring your character into contact and cooperation with the other player-characters. Beware of motivations that will make your character hard to play.

Example Motivations

- To win power and glory
- To become wealthy
- To defeat Amaless, the Heartless Mage*
- To find one's long-lost daughter*
- To write the great American novel
- To escape the law
- To find employment in a rare vocation
- To make the world a better place

To live an exciting life

To penetrate mysteries and gain secret knowledge

To experience all that life has to offer

To find a mate*

*If this is an easy task, accomplishing it will leave your character without a goal, so be careful with a motivation like this one. Of course, your GM can see to it that this is no easy task.

Secret

Choose some secret, some hidden fact that few others, if any, know about your PC. Pick a dark secret, if you can, something he desperately wants to keep hidden from others. Of course, a secret doesn't have to be "dark" for a character to want to hide it. Closeted gays, for instance, don't want their sexual preference to become public knowledge. Like a motivation, this secret can help your character get involved in the plots and intrigues to be found on the island.

Secrets can be directly tied to certain traits, indirectly related to traits, or completely separate. For instance, if your PC is an extraterrestrial passing for human, that could be his secret. If his secret is that he is an agent for the CIA, then that will also need to be one of his traits. (No fair getting a bunch of espionage skills "for free"). Secrets can also generate what amount to extra flaws (as can be seen by some of the example secrets listed). GMs tend to be lenient when it comes to persecuting these "extra" flaws so as not to discourage players from inventing disadvantageous secrets. You may try to turn a secret into a bonus, but your GM may disallow it or turn it against you. For instance, if you want to say that your PC "is secretly the strongest man in the world," most GMs will veto that, except for those who have fiendish plans in store for such a character.

Some secrets are of dubious nature. For instance, the secret "talks to a friend that others can't see" could be good or bad. If the friend exists, it may turn in the PC's favor to have an invisible companion. If not, it probably won't help the PC out to suffer from this delusion. If you take "has an invisible companion" as a side trait, then obviously the companion exists and helps your character in some way; and if you take "believes in imaginary friend" as a flaw, then the friend does not exist; but if you take "talks to a friend that others can't see" as a secret, then you can leave it up to the GM to determine whether this

friend exists. Even if the friend does exist, the GM might turn it into a mixed blessing.

The actual nature of the secret is not as important as its subjective nature in the mind of the character. The secret should be something that worries the character to some degree. The list of example secrets, therefore, must be taken just as examples that work for some characters, but not for all. A wild and self-destructive character may have various obscene tattoos on his body and be proud of it, while a more reserved and proper character may have a single obscene tattoo (left over from a hell-raising youth, perhaps) and would be mortified if anyone were to find out about it. That tattoo makes a fine secret for the second character, but not for the first one. A secret for the first character may be an abiding devotion to the music of Air Supply. The point of a secret is to provide for dramatic tension by creating something that the PC is afraid others will find out about.

Example Secrets

Light-skinned black passing for white

Sleeps with a teddy bear

Votes Republican

Sports an obscene tattoo

Worked for the CIA (or still does)

Writes romance novels for a living because his serious fiction keeps getting rejected

Gay (and in the closet)

Donates to charities (if the character pretends to be hard-nosed)

Fleeing from law because he killed his family*

A cannibal*

Perverse tastes (specify what they are)*

A former criminal who only poses as a reporter*

* These secrets may or may not qualify as “flaws,” depending on how you define the situation.

Important Person

Choose one person who was important in the PC’s past, and decide how that person was important to the character. It could be someone the PC knows

personally, or merely someone he admires, even a fictional character.

The point of this detail is to provide your PC with more depth and to provide some connection, no matter how tenuous, with someone else in the world. PCs in role-playing games run the risk of being “orphans,” with no connections to anyone in their pasts, and this detail helps you avoid that tendency.

Example Important People

Attila the Hun, who inspired his thirst for power

Her grandmother, who taught her hexing

His father, who kicked him out of the house when he was sixteen so he could learn to fend for himself

Edgar Allen Poe, whose mystical symbolism he alone has deciphered

Timothy Leary, an old friend, now distant

The pet lizard she had as a child, who first told her of her true identity and destiny

His ex-wife, whose unique brand of mental cruelty has driven him to Al Amarja

A lost love

Drawing

Draw your character. All my players complained when I told them they had to draw their characters, but they all did it, and the characters are much richer for it. Give it a shot. I take this step very seriously indeed.

If you want to wimp out, claiming congenital failure of artistic ability, then draw something else: the PC’s car, his family coat of arms, a prized possession, etc.

This step is important because it carries the creation process beyond the verbal and establishes hyper-neural connections among centers of your brain that are not directly connected (especially motor control and vision centers).

Background & Possessions

Fill in all the details you want about your character’s background. What language(s) does he speak, and how well? List the possessions the character brings to

the island and have some idea of the financial resources he has. Choose items and finances appropriate to the character concept.

Your character might be a destitute wanderer who will live hand to mouth until finding an income on Al Amarja. Or maybe he's independently wealthy and doesn't have to worry about cash. Perhaps he's on the island through large loans and credit advances, which he intends never to repay. What do you think will be fun? (Personally, I find independent wealth to be a cop-out, but I'm entitled to my cop-outs, and you're entitled to yours.)

Example Character

Let's look at creation of a sample character to see how the whole process works. As our example, we'll take a look at Arthur Pendrick, an invention of mine.

Concept. I want someone intellectual, creative, and a little weird. How about a wandering, manipulative expert in mythology, someone who has begun to take his inquests into mythology a little too seriously?

Traits. For the central trait, I take "mythology." The GM wants to know what I intend to do with that. I decide that my knowledge covers all varieties of mythology, and may even include some ability to perform impromptu exorcisms and blessings. The sign I pick is a ring engraved with a Sanskrit prayer from the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

As my first side trait, I take "manipulating people," because I see this guy as a schemer. The sign will be his ingratiating smile. And I need something to keep him alive when blades flash, so I make him a "scrap fighter." I don't see him as physically impressive or well-trained, but he's got a killer instinct under this classy façade. The sign for this will be the leer that replaces his ingratiating smile when he realizes it's time for a fight.

Now for a flaw: he's beginning to lose his grip on reality. His studies of obscure mythological lore have infected his daily life, and he is beginning to see ghosts in every shadow. The sign for the flaw is the prayers from various religions he mutters when things get weird. The GM asks whether Arthur suspects he may be losing it, or whether he is slipping away without realizing it. I decide that he does suspect, but he cannot be sure.

Of the three positive traits, I select the central trait, mythology, for my superior trait, giving it 4 dice. Scrap fighting and manipulation get scores of 3 each.

Hit Points. Since he's a scrapper (3 dice), Arthur could have 21 hit points, or I could roll six dice. I decide to roll, and the dice come up 22. I describe his hit points simply as innate, animal toughness.

Experience Pool. Like everyone else, Arthur gets one die in his pool to start with.

Psychic Pool. He doesn't get one. Since I don't even know whether Arthur's "magical abilities" are legit or a delusion, it makes sense for him not to have a psychic pool. If the GM wants to let him have some pseudo-magical talent, she might keep track of my pool herself, or devise another way to limit the power. Either way, she doesn't let me know whether Arthur's abilities are real.

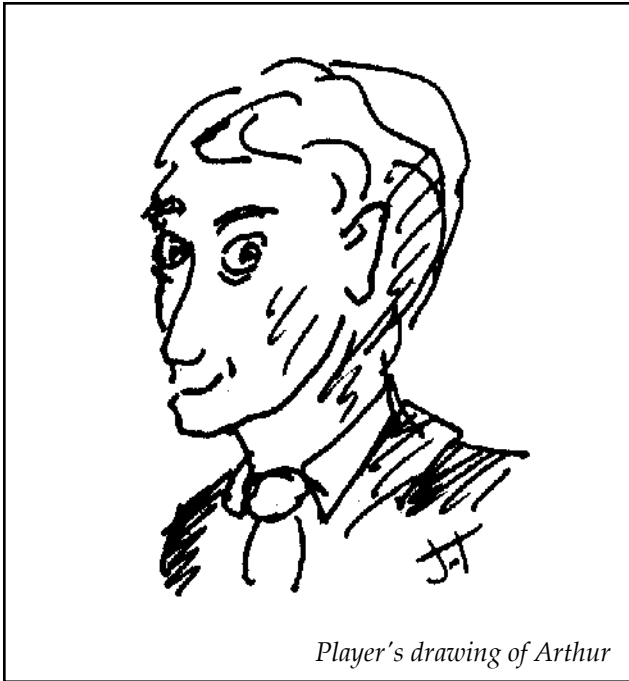
Motivation. Arthur's motivation is to understand mysteries, to figure things out, especially things arcane and hermetic. This motivation will make it easy for him to involve himself in the various adventure opportunities that will present themselves, and it fits his concept nicely. Why come to Al Amarja? His tarot cards told him it would be a good idea, but he does not know what to expect here.

Secret. A few years back, Arthur became an initiate of the Silver Order of Isis. In addition to witnessing and partaking in a few special rituals on which the authorities would not look kindly, he earned the wrath of the Order's leaders when he decided that their organization was a silly hoax and left it. Whether the Order is serious enough to act on its vows of vengeance remains unknown.

Important Person. Arthur never knew the man's name; he was a homeless person that hung around the park near Arthur's home. When Arthur was sixteen, the man approached him and said, "You do not understand anything you see." Arthur speculates that the man may have been psychotic, but those words caused something to gel in his mind. He began to question the fundamental knowledge of the world he had taken for granted and came to take interest in mythology. To this day, those words remind him not to take things as they first seem and let him feel at home in mystery.

Drawing: See above.

Background & Equipment: First, I need to figure out how Arthur makes a living. With his skills



Player's drawing of Arthur

at manipulating people, he could be in sales, or he could make money from his interest and ability in mythology. I settle on a combination: he has made quite a bundle by running pricey weekend seminars for wealthy but shallow yuppies who are willing to turn to mythology in search of some kind of meaning in their lives. With his knowledge of mythology and his ability to manipulate others, he can put on quite a show and convince his clients not only that they were fulfilled, but that they should come back and be fulfilled over and over again. Certain indiscretions with clients, however, have made it advisable for him to take an extended vacation. His tarot cards told him that Al Amarja would be just the place for him.

So he is a wealthy man ready for a long stay. He has plenty of clothes and traveler's checks, plus his very personal collection of mythic icons, statuettes, medallions, and other such items. He also has brochures from his seminars, in case Al Amarja turns out to be a good place to run his familiar scam. He does not, however, have weapons, false ID, and other items that some characters find useful.

For Further Characterization

The more thought and heart you put into designing your character, the more believable and interesting this persona becomes. These are some ways to add detail to your character's personal life. There are many ways to use these hints. If you have the time and inspiration, you can use them all before play begins, but often a player's conception of a character is rough and incomplete at first. A better idea might be to look these ideas over before or after a game, or perhaps between sessions, and add to your character bit by bit. As play continues, you will become more and more familiar with the character, and the character will become ever more life-like.

Using the following guidelines, or your own sense of characterization, you may find that the personal background of your character is more important to having a good time than is having an array of wacky traits, but that's ultimately a question of personal taste.

Fleshing Out Traits

All traits, and especially the more unusual ones, raise a lot of questions that players often fail to address. Look back over your character's traits and imagine that you were interviewing the character. What would you want to know? Sometimes the answers to these questions lead to other questions. You can follow the process as deeply as you wish.

Below are some questions that may come to mind in regard to certain traits.

Private Investigator — Why did you become a PI? What was your biggest case? What was your greatest professional failure?

Knife Fighting — Where did you learn these skills, and why? Have you ever killed? What is your attitude toward violence?

Prophetic Dreams — When did you first realize your dreams were prophetic? Are your dreams mostly realistic or mostly symbolic? Do you have any recurrent dreams whose meaning you may or may not understand?



Family

Who are the members of your family? What are they like? How close are you to them, and how often do you keep in touch? What do they think of your trip to Al Amarja? Do you write them letters to let them know how your “vacation” is going along? (Perhaps you’ll want to go to the beach and have your picture taken so you can send it to them and make them think everything’s fine. Be sure to hide your wounds from the camera). What’s the most important thing you learned from your father? From your mother? From other relatives?

Self-Image and Front

How do you see yourself? As a lucky incompetent who has achieved your status through coincidence? As a star whose success has been denied by unfortunate accidents? As a misunderstood genius?

A “front” is an image you try to project and get others to believe, which helps you believe it yourself. What “front” do you present to others? Do you want others to see you as trustworthy, intelligent, dangerous, sexy, successful, wise, helpless, fair, just, good-

natured, or ineffable? When you meet someone new, what do you do or say to get them to believe in this front? The concept of your front can be very helpful in rounding out your character because it determines what you do (in an attempt to make your front believable) and what really ticks you off (when people do or say things that call your front into question).

For example, if your front is the image of a powerful, invulnerable fighter, you will want to rise to any bully’s challenge rather than back down in front of your friends. And if you ever get beat up, you might get angry, sullen, resentful, or perhaps very vengeful. You might take quite some time explaining to your friends how the other guy didn’t fight fair, and you might not rest easy until you have squared off with the fellow again and beaten him up.

A front can be a weakness if someone else recognizes it and plays to it. If you present yourself as intelligent, others might be able to win you to their side by flattering you: asking for your advice or information, praising your intellect, or belittling someone else’s brains. They can also use reverse psychology, such as trying to get you to help with a puzzle or problem by describing it as very complex and difficult,

something that has stumped other people who have tried to help.

Buttons

We've all got buttons that others occasionally push. When a button gets pushed, the character reacts in an irrational, stereotypical way, like Pavlov's drooling dogs. A self-aware character knows at least some of his own buttons, but this knowledge doesn't give one the instant ability to control the response to a pushed button. On the other hand, circumstances and force of will can mitigate the button response. Don't play your character as devoid of free will.

What buttons does your PC have? A PC's buttons may be something like the following:

Hot button: People calling me stupid.

Fear button: Slime; wet things.

Lust button: Women who treat me like dirt.

Obey button: Authorities in uniform.

Love, Romance, and Passion

What are the traits of your "ideal" lover? How close have you come to this ideal? What traits have your actual lovers had? Is there a pattern in the people you fall in love with? Do you say you're attracted to one type of person but find yourself repeatedly involved with a different type? Are you romantically involved with anyone?

Instead of developing one ideal lover, you can go the C. S. Lewis route and develop two: an infernal ideal and a divine ideal. The infernal ideal pushes all your hottest buttons: lust, fire, sweat, passion. For the sake of someone who approaches your infernal ideal, you would lie, cheat, steal, and maybe kill. The divine ideal inspires generosity, compassion, and tenderness: walks in the park, holding hands, calling each other cute little names. For the sake of someone who closely matches your divine ideal, you would quit smoking, dress better, lose weight, and so on. (Decide for yourself which ideal you'd want to be stuck with for the rest of your life).

If you develop an ideal lover for your PC, then you need to decide whether to let the GM in on it. If you do, she may well make life interesting for you (and a game's not worth playing if it's not interesting, right?). If you don't, however, then it's up to you to role-play

your appropriate buttons being pushed when a "potential ideal lover" shows up. Doing so can be a lot of fun if the GM and the other players don't know why your PC is suddenly acting batty and using any excuse to hang around this certain GMC.

Questions

Answer these questions for your character and you will add a lot of detail to the character's identity.

What would you fight for? Kill for? Die for?

What scares you?

What trait do you like least in yourself? Most? What trait are you trying to improve?

How have you changed as you have matured? Have you learned any important lessons about life?

What are your religious beliefs? Do these beliefs lead you to behave in a certain way? How important is the social aspect of religion compared to the spiritual aspect? What do you think of people whose beliefs differ from yours?

What are your hobbies? What's your idea of a good party, a good book, a good movie?

What bad habits do you have?

Personal History

You can also answer questions related to the character's life experiences.

Have you ever been in a violent fight, rather than just a sport contest? If so, how seriously have you hurt someone? Have you ever killed anybody? How seriously have you been hurt?

Have you ever committed felonies? Ever been caught?

What's the strangest thing that's ever happened to you?

What's the best thing that's ever happened to you? The worst?

Where have you traveled, and why?

Relation to History

How was the character involved, emotionally or personally, in major events in recent history? Calculate how old he was for each event listed below and decide

if it was important to him in any way. If it involves a political issue, how did he stand on that issue? Was he involved in any way directly? Did it change the way he lives or thinks about the world?

Sample events: major relief efforts in Somalia (1992), "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992), dissolution of Soviet Union (1992), the Gulf War (1990 to 1991), the rise of democracy in Eastern Europe (1989 to present), the stock market crash of October 1987, Chernobyl disaster (1986), Iranian Hostage Crisis (1979 to 1981), Watergate (1972-1974), The Vietnam War (Sixties to early Seventies), years of activism (late Sixties & early Seventies), the hippie generation (mid-sixties to early seventies), manned flights to the moon and further space exploration (starting in 1969), the Civil Rights movement (especially 1950's to late 1960's), assassination of JFK (1963), the Bay of Pigs (1961), the Korean War (1950 to 1953), World War II (1939 to 1945).

Personal Philosophy

How do you answer the big questions? Where did the universe come from? What does it mean to be human? What is human destiny?

What are human beings? Children of God who have fallen from grace? Meaningless results of random evolution? Slaves of deterministic karma? Thoughts in the mind of God? Divine beings spending a fraction of eternity as human bodies in order to learn or grow or amuse themselves? Creatures of God that are capable of becoming God's equal? Figments of your omnipotent imagination? Self-created beings, properly the center of the universe?

What is the universe? A thoughtless mechanism slavishly following patterns of energy? A physical creation set in motion by Divine Will and left to follow its own course? A figment of the collective imagination created by a host of independent minds? A perfect, divine world that most people misunderstand? A game played out by unimaginably superior beings? The calculations of a mighty computer? A divine creation heading to a specific destiny? A divine creation that charts its own course, arriving at whatever destiny its inhabitants create for it?

Consider your character's ethics. First, what do you believe is right, and what is wrong? What do you do that others might find morally objectionable, and what would you yourself find morally objectionable? How

well does your personal morality coincide with that of the majority? Then consider the source of your ethics. Do you consider morals to be traditions that it's best not to question? The Law of God? High-sounding justification for personal taste? Tools of the powerful to manipulate and control the masses? Instinctual tendencies resulting from the process of human evolution? The path of developing and strengthening one's own humanity? A social contract?

Your personal vision of reality may be very different from the vision that society usually teaches people to have. After all, "reality" is merely an hypothesis that we dread to question.

Alternate Approaches

The PC Group

If the players wish, they may decide to give their adventures some focus by making the PCs part of a group of some sort. This option gives the PCs a good reason to know each other and work together. The GM may assign a focus to the group to fit with her evil schemes, or the players may form a group out of consensus. If you choose to have some sort of focus, do so carefully, as this focus limits the possibilities for PC concepts. Be sure to choose a focus that can get the PCs involved in many different sorts of plots. A rock band may be a limiting concept, but a rock band heavily into social or political change may find lots of adventure on Al Amarja. Also be careful to design PCs with interests and motivations outside the group; otherwise the PCs may not be readily suitable for many different types of plots.

Group-oriented play provides possibilities for play that are not available to an incoherent assemblage of individuals. A group allows PCs to pursue unusual interests without leaving out other PCs that are not involved in those pursuits. For instance, a party composed of rapper, a fringe scientist, a Zoroastrian evangelist, and a were-coyote would find little to do together. Each PC could pursue his individual goals, but that produces essentially four parallel series, rather than a single, integrated one.

The downside, however, is that group-oriented play limits that PCs as well. If you and the other players decide to form a group, don't be surprised if the group dissolves over time, or if you decide to re-start your series with another group, or with just a bunch of individuals. OTE has been designed to be simple enough to allow you to start fresh with a minimum of pain.

Example groups include:

- A band trying to make it big. PCs could include the wily manager, the toughs brought on for security, the musicians (of course), groupies, and perhaps someone with a fringe talent for electronics to give the band a special sound. The band has to compete with other bands, squeeze pay out of chintzy bar owners, buy protection from local gangs, and cope with internal ego struggles.
- A group of fringe scientists, including scientists of various persuasion, bodyguards, experimental subjects, and lab assistants. The group may struggle to find adequate equipment, to keep their research findings secret, and to keep their creations from falling into the wrong hands.
- Members, by blood and marriage, of an extended, international (and possibly bizarre) family. Family honor, skeletons in closets, personality conflicts would be part of the series. This family may be a power group in its own right, with covert operations, shady business interests, and so on. Alternately, the family members may have gathered for the first time in years for the reading of "crazy aunt Guiseppina's" will. The will could provide the PCs with wealth, a few hints as to some mysteries, and some information or devices that could be very valuable if only the PCs can figure out what it all means.
- Operatives for a conspiracy. To give the PCs independence, the conspiracy should give the PCs free rein to explore the island, with contact and guidance from the conspiracy coming on a limited basis. The PCs may think they know the conspiracy's goals, but the GM is final arbiter on what the conspiracy is really all about. The PCs could be "orphans," operatives whose contacts have been eliminated (perhaps with the entire conspiracy). The PCs are on Al Amarja to find out what happened to the group of which they used to be a part.
- A movie crew making an underground documentary about a cult author who wrote bizarre "fiction" while living on Al Amarja. The undisciplined crew is likely to encounter threats to sanity and reality before the documentary is finished, if it ever is.
- Neighborhood watch. The PCs deal with gangs trying to encroach on their territory, criminals who offer bribes in exchange for "political asylum," a Peace Force that is suspicious of people who refuse to depend on them for protection, mysterious crimes that occur in their neighborhood, and so on. Without doubt, the PCs will find themselves drawn into action on a much larger scale than keeping vandals at bay.
- Private investigation team, specializing in the unusual. In addition to the straightforward assignments, a successful team has to manipulate their public image, land big-paying corporate clients and keep them happy, handle potentially lethal run-ins with the Peace Force, and face dirty competition from other investigative groups.
- The Aesir deities, now feeble from lack of worship. They may be here to stage a come-back, or they may now be flunkies for a deity who beat them out centuries ago, or maybe they just want a sunny retirement spot.
- Outlaw psychics who use their powers to stay one step ahead of the law. They may be outlaws for acts of crime or acts of justice.
- The tragically and/or comically mis-cloned pseudo-duplicates of an eccentric millionaire, now dead.
- People drawn seemingly at random from across the globe, compelled to come to Al Amarja by a haunting and inexplicable vision. These PCs may start the game not having met yet, and only realize their connection through play. The GM may arrange to have each PC's vision be slightly different from that of the others. Alternately, each PC may have a different piece of the puzzle, and some GMC holds the remaining piece. Finding that GMC may be a central goal of the group, as would be defending themselves from those forces opposed to the culmination of the vision.

CUTUP Character Generation Step 1. Determine Catch-Words

Creativity is the process of filtering random, non-deterministic data through meaningful structure, as in the evolution of a species or the development of a novel. The CUTUP (Causally Unrelated Thoughts Under Pressure) system for player-characters gives you raw data that you then "make sense out of." Since the data are random, you face creative puzzles that you might not develop spontaneously out of your personal bio-computer; but since you have final say in what these data mean, you retain creative control. Enjoy.

Before getting into the nuts and bolts (i.e. your character's traits), roll three times on the chart below to determine catch-words that involve your character. You may use these catch-words any way you want, but they must somehow be a part of your character.

Once you have generated the catch-words, a character concept previously lurking in your sub-psyche may spring Athena-like from your head. If so, create your character the normal way (i.e., inventing traits). If no character concept fights its way to your consciousness, move to Step 2 and keep rolling.

You have a lot of leeway in making sense of these catch-words. For example, consider the following group of catch-words: **doubt, heart, training**. These words could inspire the following concepts for a new PC named Samantha:

Catch-Words

Roll a die three times for each catch-word. The first die determines which chart to use, and the 2nd and 3rd dice determine which word from that chart to use.

Chart One (use on a roll of 1, 2, or 3)

Second roll indicates column, third roll indicates row.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	addict	blood	coma	damage	drug	ghost
2	alien	brain	computer	death	fear	grind
3	ancient	broken	contraband	deep	fire	hand(s)
4	assassin	brother/sister	control	disease	flesh	heart
5	beast	cancer	cult	doubt	foreign	holy
6	book	car	current	dream	genetic	insane

Chart Two (use on a roll of 4, 5, or 6)

Second roll indicates column, third roll indicates row.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	insect	money	overload	random	side effect	UFO
2	lie	mother/father	pain	religion	snake	unconscious
3	light	movie	poem	reverse	space	virus
4	logic	music	poison	secret	subterranean	visitation
5	love	mystery	psychic	sex	theft	vision
6	mind	neural	radiation	sharp	training	warp

Samantha has received psychic training that should allow her to do marvelous things, but in her heart she still doubts that she can do anything.

Samantha is agnostic.

She used to play soccer, but now has to restrict herself to coaching because of a heart condition.

All her training as a psychologist proved worthless when her family was slaughtered by members of a perverse cult, and Samantha had to delve alone into the heart of self-doubt and face her fears in order to survive. Now that she has faced the worse that one can suffer, Samantha has an unshakeable confidence.

Step 2. Determine Traits

Roll two dice and consult the chart below to determine your character's central trait. The first word indicates the type of profession (or person) the character is. The next word or phrase says what specific type of person, if you don't want to think about it. If you do want to think about it, there follow several other possibilities from which to choose.

Your character may or may not still be in the indicated profession. For instance, if you roll "cat burglar," he may now be a reformed cat burglar who has sworn off criminal activity (at least for personal gain...).

Central Trait Chart

(roll two dice)

- 2 **Tourist.** Dilettante. Or, a vacationing specialist of some type.
- 3 **Artist.** Author. Or, painter, singer, dancer, poet, sculptor, etc.
- 4 **Professional.** Professor. Or doctor, business executive, investment broker, etc.
- 5 **Criminal.** Confidence expert. Or, cat burglar, thug, drug runner, etc.
- 6 **Paranormal.** Paranormal investigator. Or, fringe scientist, devotee of the occult, etc.
- 7 **Weird.** Mutant. Or, psychic, alien passing for human, artificial life form, etc.
- 8 **Operative.** Industrial spy (probably "retired"). Or, operative for a secret society, operative for a

government intelligence agency, operative for a non-profit organization, etc.

- 9 **Investigator.** Private investigator. Or, operative for a secret society, investigative reporter, etc.
- 10 **Scientist.** Experimental psychologist. Or, physicist, nutritionist, fringe electricity expert, etc.
- 11 **Fighter.** Bodyguard. Or, underworld thug, assassin, professional boxer, etc.
- 12 **Mystic.** "Monk" or "nun." Or cultist, "witch doctor," spiritual healer, etc.

Side Traits

If fighting is not part of the character's central trait, you may choose it as a side trait and roll for the other side trait. If fighting is part of the main trait, or if you are not concerned about martial ability, roll twice on the chart below. If you roll a side trait that is redundant because the central trait already covers it, re-roll.

Side Traits Chart

(roll two dice)

- 2 **Technical.** Electronics, computers, mechanics, etc.
- 3 **Stealthy.**
- 4 **Tough.** Resistant to damage, poisons, pain, etc.
- 5 **Education.** Could be doctor, professor, archaeologist, etc.
- 6 **Manipulation.** Lying, buffaloeing, intimidating, subterfuge, browbeating, bluffing, etc. Choose a style that fits you other traits.
- 7 **Fringe Power.** Invent a fringe power that fits your other traits.
- 8 **Strong-Willed.** Resistant to mundane and paranormal influence.
- 9 **Agile.** Good reflexes, fast, etc.
- 10 **Strong.**
- 11 **Performance.** Singing, dancing, acting, etc. Choose one.
- 12 **Specialist.** Specializing in some unusual field of knowledge or ability, such as Persian history, government cover-ups, etc.

Flaw

If a flaw presents itself based on the traits already determined, use it. Otherwise roll on the chart below:

Flaw Chart

(roll one die)

- 1 **Enemies** — Choose enemies that fit with your character's other traits. He may have a very good idea of who his enemies are, only a vague sense, or no idea that he even has enemies.
- 2 **Mental Flaw** — Could be a one-track mind, a compulsion to gamble, etc.
- 3 **Social Flaw** — Body odor, hideous features, outspoken and inflexible beliefs, etc.
- 4 **Achilles Heel** — A weakness that can really bring the character down, such as a bum leg or weakness for a pretty face.
- 5 **Physical Flaw** — Overweight, weak, clumsy, low stamina, etc.
- 6 **Delusion** — The character strongly believes something that is not so.

Pulling It All Together

After determining traits, make sense out of how they work together. For instance, the traits of investigator, education, agile, and mental flaw might make Samantha a scientific investigator, someone who seeks out the latest developments on the cutting edge of science (or fringe science). Her mental flaw is total devotion to a quack form of health care. This regimen includes stretching and aerobic exercises (making her agile) but keeps her from getting regular medical attention. It also marks her as a weirdo, thanks to the stretching exercises she habitually performs and the long lists of foods she must and must not eat.

The catch-words used above can make the following contributions:

Training. She is on a training regimen.

Doubt. She doubts the claims of other fringe scientists and seeks to discredit them.

Heart. She believes that a healthy heart is the secret of a healthy mind and body, and her specious training regimen supposedly makes her heart healthy.

Player's drawing of Samantha



Finally, you must choose which of your traits to be superior. In the example we're building, "fringe science investigation" is a strong possibility, although having an incredibly agile and limber character who performs disconcertingly extreme stretching exercises would be worth some comic relief.

African Backgrounds for Player-Characters

Most US players invent characters from the United States, since that is the country with which they are most familiar. Other industrialized nations are also common homelands for PCs, but Al Amarja is near Africa, and plenty of Africans come to the island as well. If you want to have an African player-character, below is some background to help in developing these characters. Since these few words can't do justice to Africa and its people, you may wish to do some original research yourself as well.

Cultural Geography

Northern Africa presents a mix of Arab and African blood and culture. The people speak Arabic and are mostly Muslim. They have light skin, dark hair, thin noses, and thin lips.



In the Sahara, nomadic Berbers and Arabs live side by side and are more distinct from each other than in the agricultural north.

In the west and in the Sudan, the people show the impact of European genes and culture. Here we find Liberia, colonized by former slaves from the US. Christianity is common here, as is the English language.

On the east coast, the mix of Arabs and Bantus has produced the Swahili culture.

South Africa boasts a Dutch-descended minority which is slowly losing power over the black majority. Christianity is the rule here, especially among the whites.

Central Africa is dominated by the basic African stock, especially by the Bantu people, who long ago pushed the less developed groups into the rain forest and deserts. Native religions are common among these people, but Christians and Muslims have also been at work converting them.

Religion

Three religious movements vie for the faith of Africans: native polytheism in a diversity of forms; Islam, brought by the Arabs, who also brought the sword and the written word to much of Africa; and Christianity, brought to Africa by the same people who had destroyed its civilizations through the slave trade.

Native religions have many general attributes in common. People acknowledge an aloof creator deity but mostly contact the numerous, less powerful deities that are easier to manipulate or placate. Sorcery is the source of undeserved good fortune (if one is a sorcerer) and undeserved ill fortune (if one is a sorcerer's enemy). In contrast to the two invader religions, the native religions emphasize earthly life rather than a fatalistic dependence on heavenly reward.

Islam holds incredible sway over northern Africa, and fundamentalism is on the rise. US fundamentalists might sometimes be a pain in the neck, but at least they don't assassinate presidents, as Egyptian fundamentalists did when they killed Anwar Sadat in 1981. In turn, governments that do not want to be controlled by Islam have responded with politi-

cal repression, banning Islamic political groups and imprisoning and torturing fundamentalist activists.

Christianity is more common south of the Sahara, where European missionaries have had a great impact. Inevitably, the natives have shaped Christianity to their own needs, often forming splinter sects. The Church of the Cherubim and Seraphim, for example, appeals to the native sensibilities, since supernatural spirits are important to native beliefs. In addition, their worship includes drumming and dancing (something the Christians opposed as "pagan" until competition forced them to include these elements in their services as well), and the church allows polygamy, stealing one of Islam's selling points.

Magic, Witchcraft, and Sorcery

Magic is closely tied to native religions. Just like religious beliefs, magical beliefs vary from place to place, but some concepts are worth noting. Many African languages have one word for "magic" and "medicine."

Seers, diviners, and prophets are important in folk beliefs. Some of these are regular practitioners of the art of contacting the spirit world, while others are charismatic prophets.

In West Africa, witches can send their spirits from their bodies while they sleep, sometimes travelling invisibly and sometimes taking the form of an animal, especially a bird. While out of their bodies, witches gather in nighttime meetings or work misfortune on others.

Among the Yoruba and Igbo, each person has a spiritual double that either makes life easier or more difficult. It is possible to propitiate one's double (or that of a relative) through offerings. Among the Edo, each person has a similar spirit, but it is a companion, not a part of the self.

Politics

The last half century has been full of regained independence and turmoil in Africa. The colonial powers often erected parliamentary systems before turning control over to the natives, and these governments largely fell to one-party rule or to military coups. Alliances have shifted as the arbitrary borders imposed by the Europeans lost their force and Africans have begun to re-align themselves along lingual or tribal

lines, rather than according to nations (as defined by the conquerors).

The US and the USSR exacerbated conflicts in order to further their own ideological and material acquisitiveness. Now that the US can no longer use anti-Communism as an excuse to back despots, and the Soviet Union is no more, perhaps peace and prosperity are now more feasible.

A new force in the Muslim lands is Islamic fundamentalism, with many citizens calling for the establishment of Islamic states enforcing Islamic law.

AIDS

Called "slim" in some areas because of the wasting effect it has on its victims, AIDS is rampant as a heterosexual disease. Christian and Muslim fundamentalists alike call the disease a punishment for adultery, while those afflicted often turn to traditional medicine for a possible cure. AIDS is more common in Christian countries than in Muslim ones, probably because men and women are less segregated there.

Specific Characters

Below are some possible African backgrounds, which you can use directly, or just take as an example of the diversity to be found in that continent. For convenience's sake, assume all the characters below know English.

- A wealthy Copt from Cairo who has come to Al Amarja to escape the sharply progressive taxes in Egypt. The Christian Copts did not intermarry with the Arabs, so they are genetic descendents of Pharaonic Egyptians. *Languages*: Arabic, a smattering of Coptic (used in religious context), perhaps French.
- A tough from Algiers who has come to Al Amarja to escape the racism he suffered while working in France. As an Algerian, he represents a melting pot culture, composed mostly of Berber and Arab influence, with an overlay of French, the legacy of colonialism. *Languages*: Arabic, French, perhaps Berber. *Religion*: Muslim.
- A member of the Kimbanguist church from Kinshasa, Zaire. (Kinshasa, on the Congo, is the largest city in black Africa). The Kimbanguists revere the late Simon Kimbangu as a prophet. Kimbangu was

a Baptist who became the center of a new church after he healed the sick and raised the dead in 1921. (The Control Freaks of the world must have learned not to string up messiah-types because, instead of killing this one, they just threw him in jail for the rest of his life). Kimbanguists lead and preach a puritan lifestyle: no violence, drinking, smoking, dancing, magic, or polygamy. Perhaps this character has come to Al Amarja to spread the word, or to hunt down an enemy magician. *Languages*: French, Lingala.

- A marabout from Libya. The marabouts are descended from a group of holy men who claimed relation to Mohammed, and they are pledged to a holy lifestyle. The character may be devoted to this lifestyle, or may be escaping it by going to Al Amarja. Perhaps the character was one of the notorious assassins who were after President Reagan and has had to leave Libya for failing to perform that mission. *Languages*: Arabic, French.
- A practitioner of *buda* (a form of witchcraft) from Ethiopia. *Buda* involves demons and evil spirits that are a large part of the beliefs of both the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Christian) and Ethiopian Muslims. The character has come to pagan Al Amarja because the Ethiopians are too adept at calling on various saints for protection; the Al Amarjans promise to be easy marks. The evil spirits that the character manipulates can cause illness or even death. Alternately, the character may be able to “channel” or embody these spirits (serving as a willing subject of possession). *Languages*: Amharic, Arabic, other regional languages.
- A member of a secret society from Lagos, Nigeria. Secret societies are part of traditional culture on the Guinea Coast, and they have served as enforcers of law and order in times of weak rulers. The secret society to which the character belongs, of course, may be a front for a more sinister organization. The character may have been sent to Al Amarja on some mission for the society, or this may be essentially an exile, if the character broke the laws of the society and is now fleeing its unkind justice. The character may be a member of the dominant Christian population, the northern Muslims, or one of the home-grown religions. *Languages*: Hausa, Yoruba, and/or Igbo. (Hausa has become a *lingua franca* in the west, though it is not as widespread as Swahili in the east).

African Timeline

Just a few events that you may wish to keep in mind. Most of African history that has survived to the present was written by conquerors (Arabs and Europeans) or by their ideological descendents, so few unbiased accounts of pre-conquest Africa survive.

ca. 50,000 BCE: *Homo sapiens* appears.

3,000 BCE: Upper and Lower Egypt united, forming an empire that lasts almost 3,000 years.

2nd century: Roman Empire conquers North Africa.

5th to 11th century: Ghana, the first African empire of which records survive, controls trans-Saharan trade.

11th century: Arab Bedouin invasions bring Islam to North Africa.

16th century: Slave trade to the New World begins.

19th century: Slave trade to the Americas ends, after taking a total of 30 to 100 million slaves.

1822 Liberia founded, providing an African home for freed US blacks.

1912 African National Congress founded.

1914 Nigeria annexed as a British colony. Liberia and Ethiopia (called Abyssinia) are the only African nations not colonized by European powers.

1948 South Africa: National Party, whose central policy is apartheid, wins elections.

1950s & '60s: Decline of European influence accelerates, leading to independence for more and more former colonies.

1964 Nelson Mandela imprisoned.

1972 Zaire passes the Nationality Law, which forces all natives to take Zairian names. (Zaire, in the center of black Africa, used to have cities with names like “Leopoldville.”)

1974 Ethiopia: Emperor Haile Selassie deposed.

1977 Djibouti, the last remaining colony, granted independence.

1980-1985: Rapid economic decline for virtually every African nation.

1981 Egypt: Muslim fundamentalists assassinate President Sadat.

- Libya: US closes diplomatic mission because of Muammar Qaddafi's support for international terrorism.
- 1986** Libya: US bombs military targets in Tripoli and Benghazi, killing 100 people, including Qaddafi's daughter.
- 1990** South Africa: Nelson Mandela freed.
Liberia: President Samuel Doe deposed in civil war. Fighting continues.
- 1991** Egypt, with the third largest force among allies after US & Saudi Arabia, participates in liberation of Kuwait.
- 1992** International forces move into Somalia to quell fighting and bring food to the famine-stricken.

Nadya *Moist with dew*
Sarab *Mirage*

Male

Abd-Allah *Servant of God*
Abd-al Aziz *Servant of the Powerful (God)*
Abd-al Rahim *Servant of the Merciful (God)*
Ali *Sublime (cousin & son-in-law of the Prophet)*
Faruq *Sword, person capable of discerning right from wrong*
Husayn *Little beauty (grandson of the Prophet)*
Khalid *Undying (military leader)*
Muhammad *Praiseworthy (the Prophet)*
Mustafa *Chosen*
Tariq *Nocturnal visitor (Muslim general who conquered Spain)*
Zuhayr *Little flower*

Appendix: Foreign Names

Don't you hate making up an ersatz name for your PC? Below are some authentic names from various cultures that you can use for your PCs. These names often represent attitudes that we in the industrialized West consider strange or politically incorrect; keep in mind that I am reporting these names, not advocating (or criticizing) the underlying attitudes.

Arabic Names

Arabic names are usually common vocabulary words. Names associated with the Prophet are popular.

Female

Abla *Having a full, fine figure*
Ahlam *Dreams*
Aisha *Alive and well (Prophet's favorite wife)*
Dima *Rain without thunder*
Khadija *Premature child (the Prophet's first wife)*
Layla *Wine, or its intoxicating effect*
Lubna *Tree whose sap makes incense or perfume*
Maryam *Biblical Mary*

Chinese Names

Use one or two characters for a personal name. The first pronunciation is Taiwanese, the second is Mandarin. The family name comes before the personal name. Taiwanese names often begin with the component "Ah," as in "Ah-Leh."

Female

M'wi/M'wae *Plum*
Hu'wae/Hu'wah *Flower*
Ung/H'woong *Red*
M'ee/M'ay *Beauty, beautiful*
H'ah/Shi'ah *Rosy cloud*
Whuin/Wu'in *Cloud*
S'eh/Hsueh *Snow(y)*
Leh/Li *Elegant, beautiful*

Male

M'og/Moo *Wood*
G'en/Gien *Build, healthy*
G'og/G'woh *Nation*

T'woh/Tu *Earth, dirt, ground*
 H'og/Foo *Luck(y), fortune*
 L'ing/L'woe'n *Dragon*
 M'ung/Won *Abundance, plenty*
 Shue/Soe *Longevity*
 K'in/Chin *Celebrate*

Either

Ah/— *like "The," always first*
 Ming/Ming *Know, bright*
 T'een/Tien *Heaven(ly), sky*
 Ch'ing/Ch'ing *Clear, pure*

Igbo Names

Igbo predominates in eastern Nigeria. Patrilineal bias comes through in some names.

Female

Egejuruokuwo *Name for a deformed child*
 Iruka *The future is supreme*
 Nkechinyere *Whichever (sex) the gods give (I'll take)*
 Nneka *Mother is supreme*
 Ogoemgbalum *Let my relationship with my inlaws not kill me*

Male

Anyabunken *I am expectant*
 Emembolu *If you harm me, I'll seek revenge*
 Eziechila *Let my lineage not be lost*
 Maduabuchi *Men are not gods*
 Onwuzuruwa *Death is everywhere*

Either

Onwudiwe *Death is cruel*

Indian (Hindu) Names

Meanings are from Sanskrit. Muslim names are also common in India.

Female

Damayanti *Subduing (men by charm)*
 Devika *Little goddess*
 Durga *Unattainable*
 Kalpana *Fantasy (ideal female beauty)*
 Lalita *Playful, amorous*

Male

Ganesh *God of obstacles, propitiated at the start of literary works*
 Mani *Jewel*
 Om *A sacred syllable*
 Rama *Pleasing (6th, 7th, & 8th incarnations of Vishnu)*
 Sunder *Beautiful*

Japanese Names

Each name has several possible meanings, depending on which characters are used to fit the sound. The meanings given below are common ones. Some women's names can appear with or without the "ko" ending, which originally designated nobility. The family name comes first.

Female

Aki(ko) *Fall*
 Chizuru *Crane-like, graceful*
 Kumi(ko) *Perpetual beauty*
 Mari(ko) *Reasonable*
 Mutsuko *Friendly*
 Tomoko *Bright*
 Yuhko *Great*

Male

Akira *Light*
 Ichiro *First son*
 Ken(taro) *Smart*
 Masahiko *Honest, sincere*
 Saburo *Third son*
 Tsuyoshi *Strong*

Yasuo *Kind*

Swahili Names

Swahilized versions of names from Muslim or Christian tradition are also popular, such as Huseni (Husayn), Omari (Omar), Musa (Moses), and Daudi (David).

Female

Bahati *Luck*

Pasua *Born by c-section*

Ramla *Predictor of the future*

Raziya *Agreeable, sweet*

Zakiya *Intelligent*

Male

Badru *Born at full moon*

Jela *Father in prison at birth*

Machupa *Likes to drink*

Mbwana *Master*

Zuberi *Strong*

Yoruba Names

Yoruba predominates in western Nigeria.

Female

Abidemi *Born during father's absence*

Amonke *To know her is to pet her*

Folade *Honor arrives*

Monifa *I am lucky*

Olufunmilayo *God gives me joy*

Male

Ajamu *He who takes his prize after a fight*

Akinsanya *The hero avenges*

Bandele *Born away from home*

Okanlawon *Son born after several daughters*

Oluremi *God consoles*

Either

Kehinde *Name given to younger twin*

Taiwo *Name given to older twin*

Other African Names

Infiltration of other cultures has also made names from Islamic history, British royalty, and the Bible common in certain areas. In general, Africans traditionally have several names in no particular order, including the father's main name used as a surname.

Female

Katokwe *Happiness (Zaire)*

Deka *She who satisfies (Somalia)*

Mukamtagara *Born in the time of war (Rwanda)*

Nafuna *Delivered feet first (Uganda)*

Nontlupheko *Suffering (Ciskei, South Africa)*

Male

Matungulu *Onions (Zaire)*

Mayeza *Depends on drugs (Ciskei, South Africa)*

Ouma *Born by c-section (Uganda)*

Raghe *He who lives longest (Somalia)*

Sentwaki *Brave man (Rwanda)*

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CHAPTER 2

RULES OF PLAY

Once you have a character to play, the next step is to play him. This chapter covers rules for playing the character.

Your GM's brain contains many more data than these rules do, and is more sensitive to the needs of the story, including the need for verisimilitude, pacing, drama, and so forth. Let me therefore make it perfectly clear that the GM's common sense takes precedence over any rule in this book or in the main rule book. Telling the GM what she must or must not do based on "the rules" is invalid. (It also evinces a deep structural misfortune in your psyche. Don't feel bad; most of us have them.) When the GM makes a ruling on common sense, the ruling stands.

This reliance on common sense over game mechanics frees you to role-play with vigor. Instead of trying to learn these rules and to devise ways to manipulate them to your best advantage, forget the rules and run your character naturally. (If you get your kicks by manipulating rules to your own advantage, drop role-playing and go into business or law.)

Basic Mechanics

These are the rules for play, how to tell if you succeed or fail at the various tasks and effort you attempt. The special case of combat is covered in the next section.

General Actions

Whenever your character tries to do something, the GM responds in one of three ways, depending on the difficulty of the task. The task might be **automatic**, **chancy**, or **impossible**, as ruled by the GM. For example, consider Arthur attempting each of the following actions:

Automatic Action

Arthur: "I light a cigarette and take a few puffs."

GM: "OK" (That's an appropriate response for an automatic action.)

Chancy Action

Arthur: "I light a cigarette, take a few masculine puffs, and stare at the beautiful redhead in such a way that she thinks I'm desperately cool."

GM: "Roll three dice." (More on what this means below.)

Impossible Action

Arthur: "I light a cigarette and stare at the wall, melting it under the heat of my frustration."

GM: "OK." [to the other players] "You see Arthur looking intently at the wall. Nothing happens."

Chancy Actions

We all know what happens when you try something that's automatic or impossible. These rules let us find out what happens when you try something that's chancy. Basically, you roll some dice, add the numbers up, and the better you roll, the better the result. Specifically, your total is compared to some other number. Three results are possible.

1) *Your total beats the number.* You succeed at what you were attempting. The greater the difference between your roll and the number, the greater the success, as ruled by the GM.

2) *Your total equals the number.* Draw, stalemate, inconclusive results.

3) *Your total is less than the number.* You fail, and the greater the difference between the numbers, the more severe your failure, as ruled by the GM.

Simple, isn't it? But two questions remain. How many dice do you roll, and to what number do you compare your roll? Let's answer them one at a time.

How Many Dice Do You Roll?

Generally, you roll two, three, or four dice, depending on the action and your traits (see p. 14). If you are trying something that directly involves one of your traits, roll the number of dice equal to your score in that trait. If the action has nothing to do with any of your traits, you roll two dice. That means that the average person attempting the average task rolls two dice.

For example, Arthur is smoking his cigarette and trying to look cool. He is good at manipulating people (score of 3), so the GM tells him to roll three dice. The higher the number, the cooler he appears. A normal person would only get to roll two dice, and a nerd would roll two dice but suffer a penalty die (see below). If Arthur had chosen to have "manipulating people" as his "superior" trait, he would have gotten to roll four dice, but since he decided that mythology would be his superior trait, he only gets three dice when manipulating people.

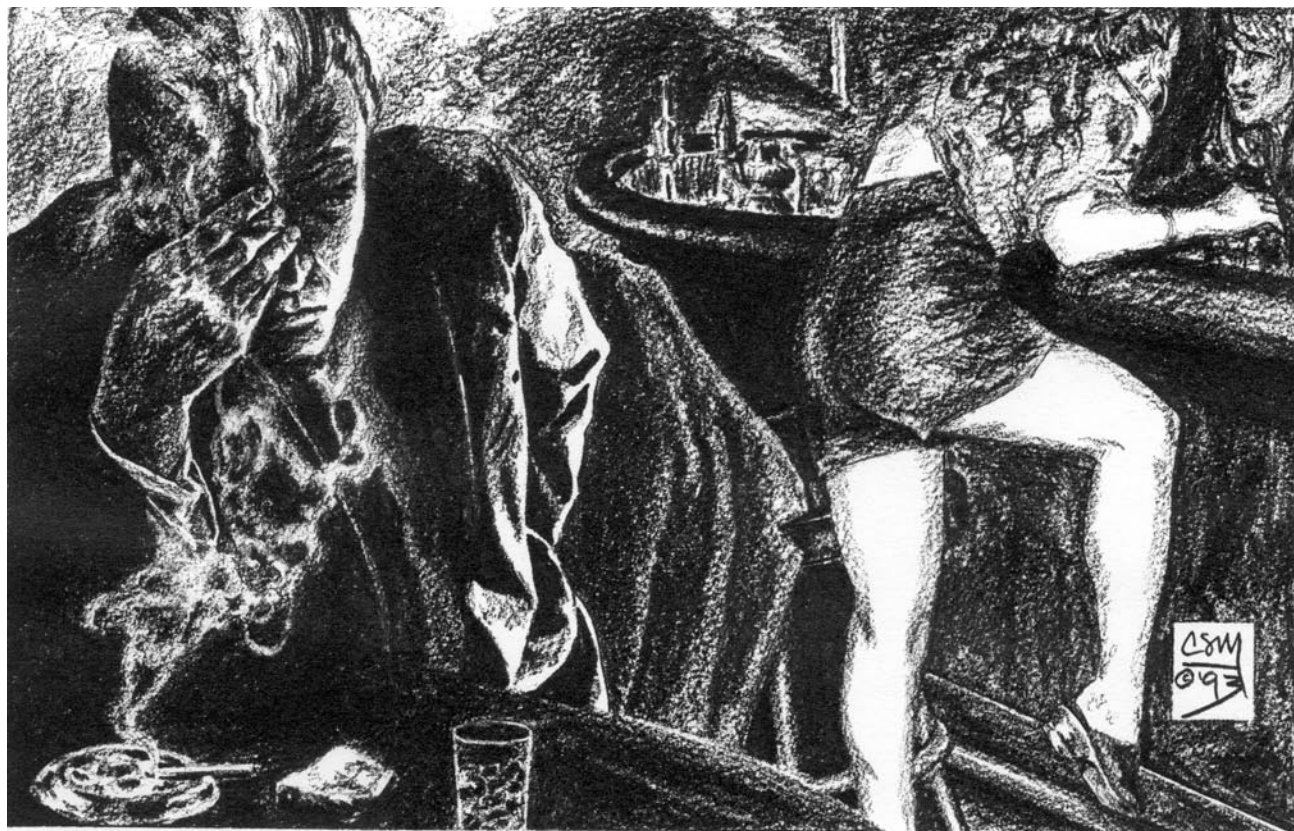
"It can't be that simple," you think. And you're right. Let me introduce you to bonus dice and penalty dice.

If you try something at which your character has some kind of edge or advantage, you get a bonus die. (These bonus dice are awarded by the GM; they do not come from your experience pool.) Roll it right along with your normal dice, but drop out the lowest die you roll. Your total is still composed of the same number of dice as normal, but they're likely to be higher rolling dice. That's how your advantage translates into game mechanics.

If you try something at which your character has some special disadvantage or hindrance, roll a penalty die along with your regular dice. Now drop out the highest rolling die and use the total of the remaining dice as your roll.

If you get a bonus and a penalty die for the same roll, they cancel each other, and you roll normally. You can use an experience die to cancel a penalty die.

The GM assigns bonus dice and penalty dice depending on her judgment of the situation. You can ask for a bonus die when you think you deserve one, but ask politely. Some GMs will doubtless find cause to assign multiple bonus or penalty dice, but I rarely do. If a situation is that far out of balance one



way or another, I can pretty well tell what's going to happen without the dice.

For example, if Arthur, before trying to impress this good-looking woman, had watched her for a few hours, noticing how she interacts with other men and trying to get an idea of what kind of guy she'd like, he would get a bonus die on his roll (roll four dice and take the best three). On the other hand, if Arthur, unknown to him, had a splotch of ketchup on his tie, he would have to roll a penalty die (four dice, take the worst three). If he had done his research and had ketchup in his hair, he would get neither bonus nor penalty, as they cancel each other out.

To What Number Do You Compare Your Roll?

There are two ways to answer this question.

When working against an inert force, the GM assigns a difficulty factor. That's the number to which you compare your roll, and the more difficult the task, the higher the difficulty factor. Alternately, the GM can roll dice for the strength of the inert force, introducing more chance into the equation. The harder the task, the more dice the GM rolls. An easy task would get one die, a moderate task (for the average person) would get two dice, a hard task would get three dice, a really difficult task would get four dice, and a "pack it in and go home" task might get five or six dice.

When working against an active opponent, the GM (or player) rolls a number of dice, just like you do, depending on the opponent's traits and bonus or penalty dice, if any. Generally, higher roll wins, though the GM may wish to complicate matters.

For example, Arthur is trying to impress the woman he's met at Sad Mary's. She notices this, and in turn tries to impress him and gain the upper hand. They chat calmly over drinks while in their brains, the gears are spinning. The woman, it so happens, is good at impressing men. The GM gets to roll three dice just like Arthur's player. Basically, they are dead even as to who will walk away most impressed with the other. Now if Arthur has been watching her carefully, he'll get a bonus die (and thus an advantage). If he has ketchup on his tie, he'll get a penalty die (a disadvantage). Arthur's player and the GM (running the woman) each roll the dice, and the GM interprets the results depending on who beat whom, and by how much.

Note that the GM need not tell you what she rolls for a GMC, or even how many dice she is rolling. The GM only needs to tell you the results of your character's action as your character perceives them. If Arthur and the good-looking redhead tie on their rolls, the GM may say, "You keep your cool, but you can't help but be impressed by this woman's self-control and inner strength. She, however, looks relatively unimpressed with you." In fact, the redhead is equally impressed with Arthur, but the GM doesn't reveal this fact because the roll for Arthur was not high enough that he could tell what the woman was feeling.

A Special Case: Technical Traits

With technical skills (such as "acupuncture"), even a score of 1 die indicates the character can do things that the average person would have practically no chance to do. (The average person has a score of 0 in acupuncture.) A 1 die acupuncturist might not be very skilled or experienced, but he is still able to do things that even a score of 3 or 4 in another skill would not permit. Assume that someone with such a skill can automatically perform any related action that an unskilled person could do but would have to roll for, as well as most normal functions related to that skill. Generally, a character only rolls for a technical trait in some unusual situation, such as diagnosing an unusual disease or piloting a helicopter through a storm.

The Hand of Fate

Sometimes a chancy situation develops in which no trait truly applies, but the outcome is uncertain. In this case, the GM may ask you to roll some dice, or she may roll them herself. Depending on the result, the GM can invent just about any appropriate outcome. Since you don't know what range the dice need to land in, or even whether you want the dice to roll high or low, you're pretty much at your GM's mercy, but I have faith that she will interpret the dice rolls with remarkable objectivity and fairness.

For example, Arthur is taking his date out on a picnic, and the weather has not yet been determined. The GM lets Arthur roll the dice, and he gets a 5, a low roll indicating a poor result. It's hard to have bad weather in the Mediterranean, so the GM rules that the 5 means an annoying wind that keeps blowing the picnickers' napkins away, but nothing serious.

A lower roll could have indicated rain, and a higher roll would have meant good weather.

Optional Rules

The use of these rules is up to the GM. The GM may use a given optional rule all the time, some of the time, or none of the time, according to her preference.

Botches

When you roll all 1's for a given action, you have botched. Not only have you automatically failed in your attempted action, but something really bad happens. (Of course, on Al Amarja, really bad things happen all the time, so this might be *really* bad.) The GM determines the outcome of the botch. I hope, for your sake, that she's merciful.

Note that a penalty die greatly increases your chances of botch, which is at it should be. Likewise, a bonus die greatly decreases botch frequency.

For example, Arthur is trying to break through a locked door. He throws his shoulder against it, hoping to break it open with brute force. He rolls two dice, and they come up snake-eyes. The GM rules that, not only did the door fail to budge, but Arthur has inadvertently broken the strange electronic device he is carrying in his pocket. (He stole it recently and hasn't figured out what it can do. Now maybe he'll never know.)

In another example, Arthur is conning a gullible fellow into trusting him (never a good idea). Unfortunately, Arthur is a bit tipsy at the moment, so he gets a penalty die. He rolls four dice, and they come up 5, 1, 1, 1. That comes to 3, total, and a botch. The gullible GMC rolls one die for resisting Arthur's schemes, and gets a 2. Even though this is lower than Arthur's 3, Arthur's roll was a botch, so he fails. The GM asks Arthur's player, "How could you have screwed this up?" The player says, "I'm a little drunk, and as I see the guy falling for my pathetic charade, I murmur 'gullible little twerp' under my breath." He hears it." The GM thinks this explanation works fine, and suddenly the "gullible little twerp" is pointing a big knife in Arthur's direction.

Blowing the Top Off

This optional rule eliminates the maximum from characters' rolls. If you roll all 6's on any given roll, you roll another die and add it to the total you've already rolled. If that die is also a 6, you roll it again and add it, and so on 'til Doomsday or you stop rolling 6's, whichever comes first. There is therefore no upper limit to what you can roll. If your GM doesn't like the idea of artificial limits to a character's possible roll, she'll probably use this system.

Keep in mind that if you're using this optional rule, penalty dice and bonus dice have a bigger impact than if you're not, just as is the case for the botch rule above.

The Unstoppable Six

If any of your dice come up six, you obtain some positive result, even if the roll results in a failure. Just what this "limited success" entails is up to your GM (of course). Also, the more 6's you get, the more powerful your "loser's revenge."

For example, Arthur and Samantha come face to face with the shrieking ghost of an Atlantean priest. While Samantha looks disconsolately at her useless scimitar, Arthur dredges his mind for charms, spells, or chants that could bind this ghost to his control. The GM goes along and says he does indeed remember such a spell, and has the player roll four dice. (Arthur is excellent at mythology, and he's happy to see it do some practical good.) He rolls a 13, against the priest's roll of 6, 3, 1, for a total of 10. Arthur wins and the GM says he can direct the spirit to inhabit a physical object. Thinking quickly, Arthur puts the thing into his walking cane. What he doesn't know is that the ghost rolled a 6, and that the GM decides that this result means that the ghost has kept itself from being completely controlled. Slowly, subtly, the ghost uses its powers to attempt a full possession of Arthur's body.

Multiple Actions

You may attempt more than one action in a round, but by doing so you take a penalty on each action. (Defending against attacks does not count as an action here; i.e., you can both attack and defend yourself in the same round without penalty.) If you attempt one extra action, you suffer a penalty die on all actions

(including defense rolls). If you attempt two extra actions, you roll one fewer die on all actions undertaken in that round. Three extra actions means two fewer dice than normal, four extra actions means three fewer dice, and so on.

Rolls that are passive rather than active, such as a defense roll against a thrown rock of which one is unaware or a roll to resist undetectable psychic influence, suffer no penalties.

For example, if Arthur tried to strike two opponents in a single round, he'd get a penalty die on each roll. He'd also suffer a penalty die on any defense rolls he made that round. If he tried to strike three opponents, he'd only roll two dice for each attack, rather than his normal three die attack (as well as rolling only two dice for defense rolls). (Unless he massacring the residents of the Sunny Hills Convalescence Home, rolling two dice isn't going to get him very far.)

Tangential Traits

Sometimes your PC has a trait that does not exactly apply to the task at hand. In this case, the GM may allow a bonus die (if the trait is 3 dice) or an extra die (if the trait is 4 dice or better), instead of letting you roll at full value.

For example, if Arthur gets drafted into a play, his ability to manipulate people may make acting come more easily to him. While 3 dice in manipulating people is not as valuable in this instance as 3 dice in acting, the GM may let Arthur's player roll 2 dice plus a bonus die, the bonus die representing some spill-over from conning to acting.

Group Efforts

When working together, PC's can improve (or sometimes decrease) their chances of success. Depending on how well a given task can be accomplished by more than one person, the GM can call for one of the following resolution systems.

Simple Addition — In tasks that two people can easily do simultaneously without getting in each others' way, add the dice of both characters together.

For example, Arthur and Samantha are trying to lift a stone that's covering a chute to some underground passage. The stone is so heavy that the GM decides

that a roll of 13 is necessary to move it. (That means an average person wouldn't have a chance of moving it alone.) Arthur and Samantha each get two dice for brute strength, and they roll a 4 and a 10, for a total of 14. They move the stone and descend into the darkness.

Combining Dice — In tasks where two can work together effectively, but not perfectly, roll all the dice and take the highest, a number of dice equal to the number normally rolled by the best of the cooperating characters. (Effectively, the dice rolled by lesser characters become bonus dice for the best.)

For example, Arthur and Samantha find a cache of ancient Atlantean texts, partially translated into barely coherent English. Under time pressure, they rush through the texts looking for something that would give them a hint about the Atlantean powers they are up against. Since Arthur is the expert in mythology, Samantha decides to let him do the real work while she helps him out by skimming what she gets her hands on and handing him what looks most interesting. He rolls four dice, she rolls two, and they take the best four dice between them to see how much information they can glean before the sound of pursuit puts them to flight.

Their escape is cut short, however, when a gang of pubes under domination of a malignant spirit surrounds them and piles on them. Arthur's a scrapper, so this is the kind of fight he likes. He's up against five of the pubes, who roll two dice in combat. The GM rules that the pubes really don't fight in any kind of coordinated pattern, and that not all five can get to Arthur at once, so they only get "combining dice." He rolls three dice for 14, while the pubes roll ten dice and take the best two, a 5 and a 6. Arthur manages to beat off the adolescents, but (because of the unstoppable six), he suffers a nasty kick in the groin while doing so (5 hit points damage, ruled by GM fiat). Samantha, meanwhile, has used the sacrificial scimitar she's just found to good effect on the mob that had attacked her.

Note: This fight was an example of "gestalt" combat (p. 51).

Either/Or — Sometimes characters split up a task so that only one of them (determined randomly) has a chance for success. In this case, all the PC's might roll, but only the one with a real chance for success counts.

For example, Samantha and Arthur decide to search the bodies of the fallen pubes for anything of interest. One of them has a note from a significant villain tucked in her sock, and that's all there is of interest here. Each PC searches half of the pubes, so only one has a chance to find the note. The GM rolls and determines that Samantha is searching the pube with the note. Being perceptive (tied to being an investigator), she rolls three dice plus a penalty die for the darkness of the chamber; she gets an 8, good enough. Meanwhile, Arthur rolls a 4, and the GM tells him he found nothing. He doesn't know that there wasn't anything for him to find, anyway.

Now if these two PC's weren't running for their lives, they might have gone over each of the pubes together (using combining dice). As it was, they sacrificed thoroughness to save time and are once again fleeing for an exit from the cavern.

Worst Roller — When two or more characters attempt something that should really be left to one of them, the players all roll, and the worst roll is used to determine the result.

For example, Arthur and Samantha have finally found an exit from the caverns, a tunnel that opens onto the private grounds of a wealthy Al Amarjan. While sneaking through an elaborate garden and looking for a way out, they are discovered by a security team armed with tasers. Immediately Arthur pretends to be happy to see them and launches into a quick tale of how they had been chased here by traitorous fascists. Hoping to help, Samantha speaks up and adds some details about their imaginary pursuers. The GM tells each player to roll for the effectiveness of their stories, three dice for Arthur (who is good at manipulating people) and two dice for Samantha. Arthur, with his roll of 9, beats the guards' roll of 7, but Samantha rolls only a 6, and the guards become suspicious. Rather than take chances, the guards taser the two of them and drag them off to an interrogation room.

If Arthur and Samantha had taken time to invent and rehearse a story, they would have been able to use combining dice (best three out of their five dice), but since they didn't coordinate their subterfuge, the guards had a much easier time seeing through their ruse.

Combat

"Bodies are said to die, but That which possesses the body is eternal. It cannot be limited, or destroyed. Therefore you must fight."

— *Sri Krishna to Arjuna, Bhagavad-Gita* (tr. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood)

The rules above rely a lot on common sense, the GM's ability to adjudicate ambiguous results, and your good-natured acceptance of the GM's rulings. In combat, when things happen fast and your PC's life is on the line, you probably need more specific rules. Here they are.

Initiative

When the fight starts, each player rolls for initiative. Use whatever traits are appropriate. For example, traits such as "agile," "good reflexes," and "martial artist" count. Lacking any such trait, a character gets 2 dice. The GM can roll for all the GMCs with one roll for simplicity's sake. The GM or a helpful player writes down the characters from highest roll to lowest. This is the order in which they will act each round.

Or skip the formalities and have each of the players act in the order they are seated around the table, with the GM acting first or last, as she chooses.

Rounds

Each round is long enough for each character to do one thing. That way everyone stays involved all the time. Generally, a round equals 3 seconds of action in the game world. The GM, however, can alter the length of a round to match the speed of the action. If a combat represents a lightning fast exchange of blows between kung fu masters, each round might be a second, or even less. If the combat is a duel between two sophisticates who like to insult their opponents and hold a nasty dialogue while carving each other up, then a round might be ten seconds or more. Unless the GM rules otherwise, though, assume a round is about three seconds long.

The GM calls on each player in turn, in the order of their initiative rolls. When you are called, your PC gets to do one thing that he can do in a few seconds, such as try to hurt somebody, run away, use a fringe

power, scream for help, try desperately to patch a bleeding wound, or find that necessary implement in your backpack. If you try to do too much, the GM will only let the PC perform part of the intended action. The most common thing that PCs in my series do is try to take pieces out of their opponents, rules for which are below.

You may also wait to act until later in the round, in which case you just interrupt when you want to take your turn. (By waiting, you can coordinate a simultaneous action with another character.)

Movement in Combat

Sometimes you will want to know just how long it takes to get from one place to another. Assuming a 3 second round, you can move at the following speeds:

	Speed
Walking (3 km/h)	2.5 m/round
Hurrying (6 km/h)	5 m/round
Jogging (9 km/h)	7.5 m/round
Running, steady (12 km/h)	10 m/round
Running, fast (18 km/h)	15 m/round
Sprinting (24 km/h)	20 m/round

For reference, remember that a “4 minute mile” means running at 24 km/h for four minutes. Not many people can do it, though some can run that fast or faster for much shorter periods of time. Also remember that characters usually do not have light clothes, running shoes, generous warm-up, and a clear track on which to run. That 24 km/h figure is impossible for most PCs in most situations (such as a sedentary fellow carrying a lead pipe charging down a litter-strewn alley by moonlight while wearing dress shoes).

Do I Hit the Guy?

The first order of business is to find out whether your PC succeeds in hurting his opponent.

Hand-to-Hand Attacks

When it is your PC’s turn to attack, roll his relevant attack trait, such as “Strong,” “Martial Artist,”

or “Good with a Baseball Bat.” If you get a penalty die or bonus die, add it in.

The target of your attack gets a defense roll, using traits such as “Fast on My Feet,” “Good Brawler,” or “Slippery as an Eel.”

Note: You cannot use a non-combat trait for both attack and defense in a single round. If you are “Agile,” you must decide each round whether to use that trait for your attack or defense roll. A specifically combat-oriented trait, such as “Good Knife-Fighter” can be used for both attack and defense rolls. This rule preserves game balance. Since a trait like “agile” has non-combat applications that “good knife-fighter” does not have, it wouldn’t be fair to allow such a broad trait to equal a strictly combat-oriented trait in a fight, now would it?

On the other hand, someone who is “Strong as an Ox” and has “Good Reflexes” to boot could use “Strong as an Ox” for the attack roll and “Good Reflexes” for the defense roll. Got it?

So you’ve rolled your attack roll and the other guy has rolled defense. Compare the numbers. If your attack roll is less than or equal to the defense roll, you have failed to connect for significant damage. If your attack roll is higher than the target’s defense roll, you’ve scored a hit and will do damage. Subtract the defender’s (lower) roll from your (higher) roll. Multiply this result by the damage factor for the weapon you are using, and the total is the damage you have just dished out (more tasty details below).

Bear in mind that making an attack roll does not represent a single swing or lunge; it represents three seconds of trying to get the other guy. A high roll might mean that you have pounded your opponent in the head several times, not just once.

Ranged Attacks

For missile weapons like guns and crossbows, the system is a little different because it is harder to hit someone at a distance with a single shot than it is to stab somebody next to you during three seconds of your best effort. With missile weapons, the target receives a defense roll based on such factors as range, movement, cover, and so on. The GM assigns the defense roll based on the following factors.



Distance	
Point Blank	1
Short Range	2
Medium	3
Long Range	4
Very Long Range	5
Cover	1 or 2
Target Moving	1
Attacker Moving	1
Target Dodging	bonus*
Darkness, fog, etc.	1 or 2

* Defender gets bonus dice equal to number of dice normally rolled for "agility," "quick reflexes," etc. Someone with "fast, 4 dice," for example, would receive 4 bonus dice on the defense roll. A clumsy character receives only one bonus die for dodging, and an average character gets two bonus dice.

The target rolls the number of dice indicated from among the above factors as his defense roll.

The distance terms are highly subjective as they depend on the type of weapon being used. The chart below lists the range in meters at which the target receives various defense dice, based on the type of weapon used. If the distance in meters exceeds the number listed, use the next higher number of dice. For example, if a barroom brawler hurls a chair (thrown, awkward) at you while you are 5 meters away, you get 3 defense dice for range, in addition to dice for dodging, moving, cover, and so on.

Weapon Ranges

Weapon	Dice for Defense Roll				
	1	2	3	4	5
Thrown, balanced*	2	4	8	16	32
Thrown, awkward**	2	4	6	8	10
Crossbow	2	5	10	20	40
Taser	1	2	5	†	†

*Such as a ball or throwing knife.

**Such as a sword or blender.

†Those electric cords don't extend past 5m.

If the GM wishes, she can use "half-dice" when characters do not deserve full dice under the rules above. For instance, someone under very light cover might just get a bonus die instead of an extra die on defense, or someone standing 5m from a knife-thrower might get 2 dice plus a bonus die for range, rather than jumping straight from 2 dice to 3.

Some specific weapons may, at the GM's option, have ranges different from their general types, based on design. After all, some weapons are just better than others.

Predictable Attacks

If you ever make a predictable or boring attack on an opponent, the GM has the right to give you a penalty die on the attack. Here are some examples:

This gets a penalty die in my games: "I swing at it."

This doesn't: "I pull back for an all-out blow aimed at that thing's face."

Penalty die: "I try to hit it in the gut again." (After trying the same thing the round before.)

No penalty die: "Well, it's gut is pretty well protected; I'll drop to the ground and sweep its feet out from under it."

Get the idea? There are two reasons for this rule. First, if your PC tries the same attack repeatedly or attacks without planning (as evinced by phrases like "I swing"), then his opponents are going to have an easy time defending themselves. Second, I've heard the phrase, "I swing" about a million times over the last fifteen years of role-playing, and I don't want to put your GM through the same thing.

By the way, the GM has enough work already, so she does not have to think up an interesting attack for each GMC each round. The "predictable attacks" rule does not apply to GMCs.

Attacking from Advantage

Whenever your character has the edge over an opponent because of something besides his traits, you can ask the GM to give you a bonus die on your combat roll. Common advantages are:

Ganging Up — Someone can defend normally against one opponent for each die they have in fighting ability. (An average person, therefore, can defend normally against two attackers.) Each additional attacker receives a bonus die on attacks against that character. The defender gets to choose which attackers get the bonus die.

Attacking with Surprise — Before you get this bonus, the GM might require a roll to see how stealthy your PC is compared to how alert the target is. If your PC hits a guy when he's totally unaware, the GM might grant you more than just a bonus die.

Better Weaponry — If you have a club and your opponent is bare-handed, you've got an advantage (better reach, something to block with that doesn't bleed, and a psychological edge). The same goes if you have a sword against someone's switchblade. Remember that this bonus die depends not on how much damage you do, but on how handy the weapon is in combat. Imagine your PC has a quarterstaff and the enemy has an axe. The enemy does more damage, but in terms of reach and blocking ability his weapon is no better than your PC's, so he doesn't get a bonus die. If the enemy had some weird science vibrating knife that did horrendous damage, you'd get the attack bonus because the quarterstaff is longer and better for parrying. Of course, that knife is still going to do more damage than your staff.

Better Position — On top of them, above them, behind them, and so forth.

Psychological Advantage — Your PC has just convinced his opponent that his (the opponent's) chances of beating him are worse than Monique D'Aubainne's chances of winning the Nobel Peace Prize. The next round (only) you get a bonus die on your rolls. Using a nasty-looking weapon can also help a lot, even if it's no more effective than a regular one.

Or, if your PC's seven-year-old daughter is whimpering helpless in the closet behind him as he defends her from a maniac, you get a bonus die on your rolls for the duration of the combat as primitive parenting instincts wash your PC's body with glorious epinephrine.

How Much Do I Hurt the Guy?

If you've scored a hit, now you take the difference between your roll and the defender's, multiply it by a damage factor (see below), and the result is the number of points done in damage. Armor reduces the amount of damage from each attack; only the points in excess of the armor's roll can do damage. These points are deducted from the target's hit points (see below).

Damage Factors

Unarmed combat	X1
Throwing knife	X1
Knives, lead pipes, etc.	X2
Crossbow, throwing axe	X2
Swords, axes, etc.	X3
Taser	X5*

*All damage from a taser is temporary. Record it separately; it all comes back when the character recovers.

Tasers

Since firearms are illegal on Al Amarja, tasers are popular among private security forces. Tasers hit you with a massive amount of voltage, probably enough to knock you down and keep you down for a while, but they do no permanent physical damage (unless you have a weak heart...). They have a damage factor of X5.

Versus armor, tasers are an exception to the general rule because the damage comes from electric shock rather than kinetic energy or penetration. Roll the dice for armor as if for a normal attack. If the dice match or exceed the number by which the attack roll exceeded the defense roll, the armor has prevented the taser from penetrating, and the target takes no damage. If the roll is less than the number by which the attack roll exceeds the defense roll, the taser does full damage. In other words, either the armor stops the taser or it doesn't; there is no middle ground.

Messed Up

If the target is now at half or less his normal hit points, he suffers a penalty die on all actions until he recovers to more than half his normal hit points. The GM may assign more specific debilities to characters that have received specific wounds, such as decreased mobility from a knee shot, decreased vision from a blow to the eye, or a sudden desire to enter the priesthood from a blow to a certain vital spot.

Down for the Count

If the target is at 0 hit points or below, he is out of the fight. "Out of the fight" can mean a lot of things, depending on the type of weaponry used and the number of points below 0 that the target is at. When you have taken enough damage to be out of the fight, but not enough to kill you outright, you may find yourself in any or various states of disrepair.

Someone dropped to 0 by fists and kicks is likely hurt, unable to fight, demoralized, in great pain, and suffering some broken bones. Such injuries, however, are rarely lethal as most vital organs are well-protected by a body structure carefully shaped by millions of years of evolution. Such an injured character should be able to return to impaired function with time or the help of friends and eventually recover completely (i.e., regain hit points without serious medical attention).

Someone at 0 or below from application of clubs, cudgels, monkey wrenches, tire irons and the like may well have badly broken bones and internal bleeding, but he's likely to be in stable condition. He might be able to resume mobility after a while even without assistance. (A concussion, though, can really mess you up.)

Knives and other sharp, pointy things that get you down are likely to leave you incapacitated and bleeding. Untended, you could easily bleed to death (especially from a slashing weapon) or die from internal injuries (especially from punctures). Infection is also a danger if the wounds are not sterilized.

Guns, well, you really shouldn't get shot if you're a law-abiding tourist on Al Amarja, but guns and other heavy duty stuff are likely to leave you in shock, dying, bleeding, helpless, and hopeless. Emergency medical attention may well be required to save you. (May I personally recommend Ahmed's Kwik Klinik, as gunshot wounds are likely to reach the attention of

Sample Combat

Arthur is minding his own business, finding his way back to Bienvenidos Hotel after an evening or rumormongering in Four Points. Unfamiliar with the twisting streets, he turns down the wrong alley. There, in the dark, lurks a predatory street maggot named Zipper. Mistaking Arthur for helpless burger, Zipper pulls a big, rusty wrench out of his belt and tries to ambush our hero. Zipper is fast, but no other traits apply to his fighting ability. Arthur has not yet noticed Zipper.

Initiative — Zipper is fast, so the GM rolls three dice for his initiative; total = 12. Without explaining what's going on, the GM tells Arthur's player to roll initiative. Arthur's a good scrap fighter, so he rolls three dice; 10. Zipper wins initiative.

Round 1 — Zipper waits silently for Arthur to move close to him, then launches a rapid attack with his wrench. Since Zipper has no particular stealth skills, and Arthur no particular perception skills, both roll 2 dice. Zipper rolls 4 and Arthur rolls 7, so Arthur at least sees what's coming before it hits him. The GM tells Arthur's player that Arthur sees a figure lunge out of the shadows brandishing some sort of weapon. The player says that Arthur ducks and rolls out of the way, giving up his attack this round.

Zipper uses his "fast" trait for offense, and so gets three dice to see if his attack succeeds. In addition, he gets a bonus die for what amount of surprise he managed. Arthur, on the other hand, uses "good scrap fighter" for defense, and also gets a bonus die for giving up his attack and concentrating on getting out of the way. Zipper rolls 13, Arthur rolls 12. Zipper wins

by one point, doing 2 hit points of damage to Arthur. Arthur now has 20 hit points left.

Round 2 — Arthur avoided the incoming attack with only minor damage. Now he swings around to see who his attacker is. Zipper holds his wrench in the air menacingly and says, "Gimme your wallet and your watch, burger. Or maybe you want I should splash your brains all up and down this alley?" Arthur in turn says, "Try anything funny with that wrench, and I'll feed it to you."

The combatants are spending this round trying to intimidate each other. Zipper gets three dice because he's streetwise. Arthur gets three dice for his skill at manipulating people, and his player uses an experience die. The GM asks the player to justify the experience die, and he says, "I'm not only good at manipulating people, but I'm a good fighter, and that skill lends credence to my intimidating glare." Arthur wins the contest by 3, not enough, the GM rules, to scare Zipper into leaving. But Arthur does notice that his opponent looks a little more nervous than he did a second ago.

Round 3 — Arthur decides to kick Zipper in the groin. Zipper goes for a blow to the elbow or wrist, hoping to soften Arthur up for the kill. Zipper has initiative, and he will use his speed for offense, leaving him nothing special for defense. Arthur can use his fighting ability for both offense and defense.

Zipper's attack gets a bonus die because he is better armed than Arthur, and he gets lucky with a 15. Arthur's player gets a bonus die because Arthur has intimidated Zipper, but still only rolls an 11. That's a difference of 4, times 2 for

the wrench's damage factor equals 8 hit points. Arthur is at 12 hit points remaining. The GM rules that Zipper got a good blow to Arthur's left elbow and followed up with another strong blow to the shoulder.

Since Arthur's attack was a kick to the groin, the GM rules that the blows to the left arm have no detrimental effect. The player rolls three dice plus a bonus die for Arthur's having psyched out Zipper on the previous round; total is 12. Zipper only gets two dice; total is 5. That's 7 points of damage, less 1 for Zipper's heavy clothing, equals 6. Not good enough for an incapacitating groin shot, but a solid kick in the belly nonetheless. Zipper is down to 8 hit points.

Round 4 — The force of Arthur's kick put some distance between the combatants. Zipper decides to back move in and swing low at Arthur's gut. Arthur tries to grab Zipper's forearm and bite his wrist so hard that he has to drop the wrench.

Zipper's attack fails, and Arthur's succeeds, but only by 2 points. Arthur blocked Zipper's blow, grabbed his arm, and is chewing away at his wrist. Since this was a "special effect" shot, it only does half damage, or 1 point. The GM rules that Zipper's heavy outfit does not cover his wrist, so he takes that point of damage without benefit of armor, but he still holds onto the wrench. Zipper is now down to 7 hit points, half of his original 14, so he gets a penalty die on all further actions.

Round 5 — Zipper tries to pry himself loose from his rabid attacker, while Arthur tries to wrench Zipper's arm and force him to the ground. Rather than use attack and defense rolls, the GM simply calls for a straight compared roll. Zipper gets 3 dice for being fast, but a penalty die for being messed up (at half

hit points). Arthur gets 3 dice. Arthur wins the contest by 7 points, pins Zipper to the ground, and knocks his wrench free. Zipper takes 7 hit points, divided by 2 (for the special effect attack) equals 3 points. Again the GM rules that his thick leather clothes will not stop Zipper from getting his arm severely wrenched, so it does not stop any of the damage. He is now at 4 hit points and pinned.

Round 6 — From his advantageous position, Arthur decides to snatch the fallen wrench and pummel Zipper with it. Zipper is simply trying to wriggle free. Arthur gets a bonus die for advantage, and Zipper gets a penalty die for wounds. Arthur's roll beats Zipper's by 5 points, but one of Zipper's dice comes up 6. The GM rules that Arthur can beat Zipper senseless, but not before taking a knee to the side of the head for 2 hit points of damage. Arthur is now at 10 hit points, less than half his original 22, so he will suffer a penalty die on actions until he can recover.

Afterwards — Arthur rummages through Zipper's pockets and finds \$1.62 in change, a length of dirty string, and a piece of paper with a cryptic diagram scribbled on it. As Arthur is trying to revive his assailant to find out what the diagram signifies, a baboon patrol comes to the end of the alley. The human guard gets Arthur's version of the story, warns him against fighting in Four Points, and takes a \$25 fee for his trouble. (Wounded and outnumbered, Arthur is not ready to fight over \$25.)

After leaving the alley, Arthur stumbles to an all-night diner for some lightly jumped coffee. By the time he sets off again for his hotel, his hit points are back up to 16, half-way between his wounded state of 10 and his original 22. The other 6 hit points will only recover with days of rest.

the authorities if treated at the D'Aubainne Hospital, and since only the Peace Force has guns, well... you know the meaning of the term "prima facie evidence," right?)

Shaking Off This Mortal Coil

As a rule of thumb, a character dies when he has taken twice as many points of damage as he has hit points. If your character has 21 hit points and drops to -21 through wounds, he is either dead or checking out. In order to survive, he needs medical attention and a reason to live.

At that point, the character faces the decision of recovering or letting go. Attempting to recover means piecing his broken body back together, suffering prolonged pain, possibly facing permanent injury, and perhaps dying anyway after undergoing all that tribulation. Letting go is often the easier option, letting himself slip peacefully into the great white light. At the point of death, a character can only direct his will to recover if he has a good reason to live. Tell your PC's reason to live to the GM; if she agrees it is sufficient, your PC lives. Otherwise, he slips off into the great beyond. (Of course, the GM may wish to make a roll or two when deciding whether the character lives, so as not to bear the full burden of freedom.)

Armor

The rating for armor represents the number of dice rolled and deducted from each attack. The exception is very light armor (generally leather clothes and the like), which has a rating of "1 pt." It stops only one point of damage versus normal attacks.

Heavy armor can slow you down, causing you to take a penalty roll on every action that requires agility (including attack and defense rolls). The most common armor on Al Amarja that causes a penalty die is the Duro-Trench.

The protection offered by armor is cumulative, but "stacking" armor causes a penalty die for each extra layer of armor worn. For example, someone wearing thick leathers under his Duro-Trench would roll 2 dice and add 1 point for protection, but he would also suffer two penalty dice on agility-related actions (one for the Duro-Trench, the other for the extra layer of armor).

Armor gets exposed to some pretty rough treatment and may degrade after suffering significant punishment, but this circumstance is best left to role-playing rather than number-crunching.

Sample Armor

Type	Rating	Penalty?
Leathers	1 pt.	no
Armored Jacket	1	no
Duro-Trench*	2	yes

*See the good folks at Gun Metal to find out what this is.

Combat Summary

Initiative: Roll a combat, agility, or speed trait at the beginning of a combat. Actions proceed each round from highest roller to lowest.

Attack: Roll a combat, strength, agility, or similar trait. Compare it to the defender's roll. A non-combat trait can only be used for either attack or defense each round. You hit your opponent if you beat your opponent's defense roll.

Defense: Roll a combat, agility, or similar trait. A non-combat trait can only be used for either attack or defense each round. You get one defense roll for each attack made against you.

Damage: On a successful hit, subtract the defense roll from the attack roll. Multiply the result by the weapon's damage factor to calculate damage done.

Armor: The defender determines armor protection (usually 1 point for casual armor, or one or two dice for good armor). Subtract this protection value from damage done to get damage taken.

Lost Hit Points: Subtract the damage that exceeds armor from the target's hit points. If the target is at half hit points or below, he takes a penalty die on further actions. If at 0 hit points or below, the target is out of the fight. If at a level of hit points equal to the negative of his normal hit points (e.g. -21 for a character with 21 hit points), he is purchasing agricultural real estate.



Recovery

Think about it: in action movies, characters get shot, beaten, mauled, and knocked out of the fight. But rather than let the action end there, soon enough the characters are up and fighting again, until they are once more beaten down. But the action continues, and our hero (or the nasty villain) rebounds to fight again, albeit a bit weakened by the ordeal. Only after several such fights is the character comatose, indefinitely unconscious, or just plain dead.

Recovery rules simulate this cycle of action. For game purposes, assume that about half of the damage (in terms of hit points lost) comes from pain and shock. Only the other half is "permanent." Thus, after a fight is over and the characters have some time to rest, every character recovers half the lost hit points.

Hit Point Recovery Conventions:

1) The character recovers hit points when the GM sees such recovery as reasonable. Generally, after a character receives some rudimentary first aid and has a chance to regain spent strength, the hit points return. Alternately, the GM may allow recovery under

special circumstances, as when an impressive leader orders an incapacitated follower to get up and keep moving, or when dire need arises.

2) Hit point level after recovery is halfway between the wounded level and the last level after recovery. Do not use the starting (unwounded) level of hit points as a base unless the character started the fight unwounded. For example, Arthur takes 10 points of damage and drops from 22 to 12 hit points. He then recovers half the lost hit points and now has 17 hit points. Again he takes 10 points of damage, dropping to 7 hit points. He recovers to half-way between 7 and 17, not to half-way between 7 and his normal level of 22. He now has 12 hit points and will only get more through medical attention or prolonged rest.

3) Round hit points up, if half-way recovery results in a fraction. (This means that being wounded for 7 points twice will leave you 6 points down from normal, whereas being wounded for 14 points once will leave you a 7 points below normal. Multiple small wounds are slightly easier to recover from than a few large wounds.)

4) The GM can require rolls of any kind to determine whether a character recovers. For example, if very little

time has passed since a fight (normally not enough to allow any recovery), the GM may allow someone trained in first aid to make a roll, and only a success in the GM's eyes will allow hit point recovery.

5) The GM has the right to change the recovery from half-way to more or less than that. For example, it might be relatively easy to recover from being beaten with fists (two-thirds of the loss recovered), and relatively difficult to recover from serious gunshot wounds (one-third recovered). The GM has sole arbitrating power over this variation, so she can make the system as complex or as simple as she cares to.

Long-Term Healing

Once a character has recovered, he can start regaining the remaining lost hit points. Hit points are regained each day, with the points regained based on the activity undertaken that day. See the Long-Term Healing table to see how many hit points a character recovers each day.

Long-Term Healing

Activity	Mobile	Bed-Ridden	Critical
Active	0*	—	—
Rest	1	1 per 2 days*	0*
Medical Care	2	1	1 per 2 days

Terms:

Active means exerting oneself normally.

Rest means taking it easy and sleeping a lot.

Medical Care means being under the care of competent physicians.

Mobile means you have 1+ hit points (and can move around).

Bed-Ridden means you have 0 or fewer hit points.

Critical means you are severely wounded (GM's option).

* May lose hit points, at the GM's option.

Optional Rules for Combat

The GM decides when and whether to use these rules. The GM may use any given rule always, sometimes, or never.

Special Effect Attacks

When a character tries an attack that is intended to do more than just some damage, the attack roll is made normally, but only half the normal damage is done. The special effect succeeds only if the attack roll exceeds the defense roll by an amount the GM judges to be sufficient.

Special effect attacks include tackling, disarming, knocking an opponent's feet out from under him, immobilizing a limb, headlock, and so forth.

Desperate Defense

A character normally gets one defense roll per attacker and one attack roll each round, but if you give up your PC's attack, you may get a bonus die on each defense roll that round.

Alternate Damage

Some GMs do not like doing a lot of subtraction and multiplication, so here's an easier system for determining damage: If you score a hit, roll one die for each number in the damage factor for the weapon. If the attack roll is twice the defense roll, multiply the result by two.

For example, a knife does 2 dice of damage, or 2 dice times two if the attack roll is at least double the defense roll.

A character may not use experience dice for damage rolls, only for the attack rolls.

You may use this system when an "attack roll" is not called for, such as when an explosive goes off near an enemy, and you need to see how much damage it does.

(This system allows the GM to be more precise with damage ratings for weapons. It would be possible, for instance, to have a weapon between 2 dice and 3 dice by rolling 2 dice plus a bonus die.)

Serious Wounds

In addition to losing hit points, a character can suffer a "serious wound." Serious wounds do not always heal completely on their own. Without medical attention, these wounds may "mis-heal" (causing a permanent impairment) at best or lead inevitably to death at worst. Examples of serious wounds include compound fractures, internal bleeding, penetration of intestines (leading to peritonitis), damage to internal organs, severed tendons, and more.

A serious wound that mis-heals without medical attention, such as a severed tendon or compound fracture, heals at half the normal rate and leaves the character with a permanent disability, such as a penalty die on agility-related actions or the inability to manipulate certain joints.

A serious wound that leads to death, such as a severe infection or severe damage to the liver, causes the character to lose hit points every day until proper medical attention is applied. Hit points lost can be anywhere from 1 to 15 per day, depending on the wound. Such a character is usually bedridden while the doomed body shuts down motor capability and focuses all available energy on a futile last-ditch effort to save itself.

When is a wound a "serious wound"? One rule of thumb is when at least 20 points of damage are suffered in a single blow, but it is possible to take a serious wound from a relatively minor attack, such as a badly broken arm that doesn't lay you out but won't heal well on its own. Another possibility is that a botched defense roll leads to a serious wound. The GM, of course, may prefer to play serious wounds by ear.

(Hope that your GM is not familiar with human anatomy. If she is, the wounds your PC suffers may be unfortunately realistic.)

Gestalt Combat

Some GMs use the gestalt combat system when they want to speed through a fight, while others use it exclusively instead of the linear system, if the idea of blow-by-blow combat does not excite them.

In the gestalt system, you make one roll to determine the general outcome of the fight. The players total all their rolls, and the GM totals all the GMCs' combat rolls. Whichever side rolls higher is the winner, but keep the GM keeps her total a secret, so you

players don't know who will win. Then you simply talk through the fight with the GM adjudicating the actions based on the rolls she's already seen.

She can even simply declare the results of the fight with no play-by-play if she wants to keep things moving at a rapid pace.

The GM may also use the "Combining Dice" method (p. 40) for calculating the winning side in gestalt combat.

Experience

Through experience, a character can improve his skills or learn new ones. A character's experience is represented by his experience pool. At the end of every game session, the GM can award experience dice to the characters who partook in the action, and these dice are added to your experience pool, as previously explained. When you have enough dice in your character's experience pool, you can "spend" them to "buy" new skills or improve ones the PC already has. Each kind of improvement requires a certain number of dice (which are permanently lost from your pool) and some action in the game world. The GM must approve every trait improvement, and you can improve a trait any time immediately after meeting the requirement.

Developing a New Trait

It costs 5 dice from your pool plus game-world experience to develop a new trait. If the trait is casual, such as brawling or reading people, you can pick it up without any special training. If it is technical or specialized, such as tae kwon do or computer programming, you need some kind of training.

Once you have satisfied the need for training (if any) and spent the dice from your experience pool, you have one die better than normal in your new skill. If it is a technical or unusual skill, you have a score of 1 die with the trait. If the trait is standard, something most people can do, then you now have a score of 3 dice.

All such traits developed in this way are the equivalent of "side traits." In other words, they are quite specific, not the global traits possible to beginning characters as "central traits." You can learn to

foil security systems through this method, but you cannot become a “good burglar.”

Traits that are not subject to easy development might require more than a little training. For example, you cannot gain the trait “strong” just by mucking around in the Al Amarjan underworld for a while. If you want to develop a trait such as “strong,” you might need to undertake intense training over weeks, and a regular exercise regimen to maintain your strength once you have developed it. Use your common sense when deciding what it takes to develop a new trait.

Invent a sign for each trait your PC develops.

Improving a Current Trait

For a trait listed as 1 or 2 dice, you can increase the score by 1 for every 5 dice you spend from your PC’s experience pool. The character must also have direct experience or training to improve a trait.

To raise a trait to 4, a character definitely needs training. This training takes at least a year, if he is carrying on other activities at the same time, or six months, if he is training full time. In addition to the training, you must spend 10 dice from your PC’s experience pool.

Raising any trait to 5 requires highly specialized, nearly full-time training. Your PC might be able to undertake an adventure or two while training, but he will not have time to hold down a job. The training he needs costs at least \$1,000 per month, and even finding a qualified trainer will be difficult. He is more likely to find a trainer by having the right connections than by looking in the yellow pages. In addition to getting the training, you will need to spend 15 dice from your PC’s experience pool.

Raising a score to 6 is pretty much beyond the scope of the rules. It may not even be possible. Your

PC could shell out lots of money and spend a year working at it, and still see no significant progress. Getting such a high score is a matter of role-playing rather than rule-playing.

Of course, some skills lend themselves to gradual development over years of time. It is possible to develop a score of 6 in a skill just by applying yourself single-mindedly for years on end, but that’s out of the scope of the game, wouldn’t you say?

The above rules are for side traits or those you develop during play. For your central trait, double the time and dice required. This extra expense is required because the trait is so broad.

Increasing Hit Points

If a trait relates to hit points, your PC may earn more hit points by developing the trait or increasing his score in it.

If this trait is the only one on which the character’s hit points are based (or if he had no traits to improve his hit points), you may take +7 hit points or roll two dice and add the total.

If another trait besides this one had a hand in improving your PC’s hit points, then roll double the number of dice that the newly improved trait offers. If the result exceeds current hit points, then this number is the PC’s new hit point score. (You may not raise your PC’s hit points by more than 12 points by this method.)

For example, if Arthur works out and develops the trait “strong, 3 dice,” his player can roll 6 dice. If this total beats Arthur’s current hit points of 22, he gets the new roll as his hit points. If he manages to beat the odds and roll 35 or 36, however, he only gets to keep 34 hit points, 12 better than the previous score.

CHAPTER 3

HELPFUL HINTS

It's a fair bet that *Over the Edge*TM is a different game from what you're used to. This chapter includes some words of wisdom and other materials to help you get into the game easily. Some guest authors have added their personal insights as well. Remember that their advice springs from their experiences and, like all advice, is not universally valid.

Advice to Players

Play Your Character Well — Play up your unique traits, revealing and withholding secrets the way a good author does, so that the other players know enough to be curious but not so much that their curiosity is immediately sated.

Keep Notes — The events on Al Amarja are connected, and the guy who shines your shoes in October might be the source of a vital clue in January. Keep notes of what you think is important or you will miss a lot of vital information.

Think — Since the rules are loose, the tricks that you, as a player, invent, and the actions you have your character undertake are probably more important than your character's skills or rolls. Your character is simple, so you can pay attention to the world your character inhabits and guide your PC accordingly.

Pay Attention — My players missed some interesting mysteries that were right in front of their faces because they didn't pay attention. If something seems weird, even if the natives take it for granted, it might be worth looking into. Don't get jaded by the weirdness.

Make Contacts — Do you know what they call a friendless person on Al Amarja? "D.O.A." It pays to have someone sticking up for you, especially someone who knows the island.

Be Cautious — In some games, you can keep yourself out of trouble by staying out of the really dangerous areas. As long as you are on the King's Highway or in the shallowest levels of the

Underworld, you're not going to run into powerful enemies. On Al Amarja, however, the guy in the jitney in front of you could be the world's best assassin. Just because a GMC is in an adventure doesn't mean that the GM thinks you can take him on and win. Use your head.

Look Out For Each Other — If the PCs help each other out, they'll live longer and you'll have more fun. You can play out your PC's flaws with more gusto if you know the other PC's are watching out for him.

Enjoy Yourself — For all the hype and the murders and the perils to body and soul, Al Amarja is still a liveable place (as proved by the hundreds of thousands of people who live here). Don't be afraid to kick back, relax, and enjoy yourself.

Going Over the Edge

by Greg Stolze

I. The Tone of the Game

A man in a trenchcoat goes up to the counter in a hardware store. He buys 20cm of lead pipe and two claw hammers. He puts the hammers through his belt and closes his coat over them. He puts the pipe in a fold of a newspaper, tucks it under his arm and leaves.

A sixty-year-old man wearing an enormous battery pack on his back storms into a restaurant. He levels some sort of enormous flashlight at one of the patrons, bellowing "Hef a taste uf Gott's lightning, vile blutfiend!" He is extremely embarrassed when his device has no effect.

A Peace Force officer spontaneously goes crazy and begins shooting at buildings. A one-eyed man nearby also goes crazy, kneels in front of the officer,

Meeting the 'Martians

In your PC's first days on Al Amarja, he's likely to run into some colorful characters. Below are some encounters that someone may have while in the Edge. Even if your PC doesn't have exactly these encounters, they will give you a fair impression of what life on the island can be like.

In the airport an intoxicated fellow talks to you. He's in his forties, ragged, and smelly — but happy. He's with a crew of friends, bodyguards, and groupies. His speech is a little slurred, but he definitely has a US accent. He says:

"Just off the plane? Oh brother, do I envy you! I remember when I first got off that plane. No, I don't so much 'remember' as know it happened, and I imagine it was pretty cool. But you, you're in for a real good time. It's like Heaven and Hell all rolled up into one and sneezed out God's nose to the tune of the Star Spangled Banner. Yeah, but it's not for me no more. Me, I'm heading back to Betty Ford's. Yeah, got to recuperate so I can get my butt back here for the big bash at the end of the world. Take care, and overdo it, man!"

On the street an elderly, wrinkled woman with matted, patchy hair approaches you. She's wearing sandals, soiled shorts, and a baggy shirt. She says:

"Hey pal, look, I'm trying to get off the street and I've got this little business started up, and I thought maybe you'd want to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit." She pulls miscellaneous items from her pocket. "I got some buttons, some rubber bands, a pre-owned bandage, half a shoe lace, some string, paperclips — there's all sorts of stuff here. Look, as a grand opening promotion, I'll let you have any one of these things for a buck, or the whole handful for three bucks. What ya say, pal? Help an old lady, eh?"

Hanging out on a street corner is a native dressed in leather, rubber, chains, and sandpaper; of the opposite gender of your PC (perhaps). In a mocking voice, the native says:

"Here, burger, burger, burger. Hey baby, let's party til our heads blow up! I can tell you're looking for a wild time. Hey, don't turn away, I can tell you're in-

and shrieks, "Shoot me with your holy bullets!" The officer obliges.

A man walks into the D'Aubainne Hospital with several kilos of plastic explosives strapped all over his body. He says "I'd like t-t-to see Dr. Nusbaum. NOW."

An oddly dressed man in a multicolored hat gives a young woman a lock of hair. She holds it a second, croons a few words of a mellow song, then whips out a switchblade and attacks the man.

A man purchases a pill from a street-kid. He takes it and begins to moan in ecstasy. Then he screams himself hoarse and bangs his head against the sidewalk. Another man blinks, walks up to the girl, and says "I'll have what he's having."

If you're going to play *Over the Edge*, get used to frustration and disappointment. The above vignettes are actual scenes from *Over the Edge* games. They should show you that you're never going to figure out everything, so don't even try.

This doesn't mean it's not a fun game, or that it's not worth playing; on the contrary, it's the difficulty of the game that makes it worthwhile and rewarding — sort of like life itself.

Al Amarja is a very complicated and disorienting setting. Whereas many other games have one plotline, one goal, one end towards which you work, *Over the Edge* has literally *dozens*. You will run into a lot of stuff that, on the surface, does not make sense, and there will be many, many different causes for the weirdness you encounter. If you get on the trail of one mystery, you just might get to the bottom of it. If you expect to figure out everything, think again. You'll never have the big picture — sort of like life itself.

Another important thing to remember about OTE is that it has a different tone from many role-playing games. The characters are not as "heroic" as they are in many other games. Your PC's goals are less well defined. There is plenty of puzzling and scheming and straightforward clobbering, but an additional element of sleuthing is included. Most important, the idiom of Al Amarja is founded on moral ambiguity. There won't be many easy choices. Rather than fighting evil and defending good, your characters may well end up fighting evil on behalf of lesser evil, or having to choose between two opposing goods. Sort of like...

In other games, which are primarily combat-oriented, most of the fights are “fair.” A third-level character generally won’t even come into contact with a twelfth-level monster because the twelfth-level monsters are deep in dungeons or in distant wilderlands. Not so in the Edge, where the fellow at the bar may be an unspeakable horror from before time in disguise (or maybe just a guy having a beer). The best way to win a fight in Al Amarja is to hire, con, or blackmail someone else into winning it for you. (This is also the safest way to *lose* a fight.) If you swagger into town thinking you can fight your way out of every situation, you’re going to get in over your head *fast*.

This means that victory, in Al Amarja, is very likely to be less grand than in other games. An Al Amarjan victory is when you got a good clue about a conspiracy after suffering only minor injuries and gaining only two new enemies. Or it could be that you saved a friend from execution, not by dramatically proving his innocence, but by convincing the police that he’s not worth bothering with. Or by blackmailing a high-ranking cop.

Often, “victory” is simply survival.

II. Creating Your Character

Al Amarjan character generation is simple. Pick a central trait, two side traits, a failing, a secret, an important person, and a motivation (which should involve coming to the island). Seven variables. Easy, right?

The wonderful thing about this is that it gives you great scope to create. The terrible thing about this is that it gives you great scope to create. I’ll explain.

There are two ways to lose in *Over the Edge*. One is to be too good, the other to be not good enough. If you play an incredibly powerful character, you’ll go through the standard street samurai with ease, but you’ll attract the attention of forces you’re not ready for. On the other hand, if you’re just an average joe, the common thugs of Al Amarja (i.e., everyone) will tear you to pieces for your American blue jeans. The tallest stalk of corn gets reaped first, but the shortest gets no light to live on. Your best defense is camouflage; if you fade into the crowd, you’re less likely to attract unwanted attention.

So a balanced character is essential. To know what “balanced” means, you should anticipate what you’ll be doing on the island.

1. Fighting. Violence is more common on the island than cola. If your character isn’t a fighter, he should still be able to handle himself in a fight. This means have at least one attribute that gives you hit points and the ability to escape or defend yourself. “Strong,” or “athletic,” or “fast” are good examples.

2. Gathering information. This is the basic goal of the game, investigation. You’ll need to be above average at getting information that isn’t obvious. Here’s a good place for fringe powers, like a nose that is sensitive to emotions or the ability to make others think that you remind them of an old friend. Something more mundane, like computer hacking or disguise and infiltration, also serve well. Or simply observation, manipulating people, or lying.

3. Doing weird stuff and getting out of trouble. This is kind of a catch-all that includes breaking into apartments, sinking boats, convincing the cops not to shoot you, and dodging out of unwanted romantic attentions. You’re on your own with this one, but often being strong or fast on your feet helps.

4. Making money. This turned into a surprisingly big part of our campaign. Most of our characters had day jobs. Wealth won’t save you, but it will give you a much larger margin for error.

OK. A good character would be an excellent fighter (high hit points, the ability to dodge and deliver damage simultaneously) who’s perceptive and wealthy. Ready to go, right?

There are two problems with this character. One is that he’s boring, and worse — predictable. This can be fixed by spicing up his other choices. Perhaps his failing is that he’s psychotic and needs to kill someone every week. His important person is the martial arts teacher he murdered after learning his techniques. His secret is that he’s a homicidal freak, and his reason for coming to the island is to make snuff movies. Now he’s interesting and has a unique past, psychological elements, and a lot of plot hooks. Unfortunately, he’s also given the GM a lot of hammers to hit him with.

The other problem is that it won’t take long for other characters to surpass him. Good skills are pretty easy to pick up — a bargain at five experience dice. In order to get a new skill your character has to come into contact with that skill, either by studying

terested. What you like? Whips? Chains? Radishes? I got it all. Course, a beginner like yourself might not survive, but what a way to go!”

A frantic Spanish man with dark splotches on his Italian suit runs over to you, grabs your arm, and yells:

“¡Ayudame, ayudame! ¡Un gran cerro ha comido a mi esposa!” He makes incomprehensible pantomimes suggesting distress. “¿Que voy a hacer? ¿Habla Español? Dios mio, ¿quien habla Español?” Then he runs away in a panic.

You’re sitting next to a Peace Officer at the counter in a crowded diner. She’s taken her helmet off and is balancing it in her lap. She turns to you and says:

“Don’t let the perps, malcontents, and fascists fool you. The Peace Force is your friend. You have a problem, just call us up, and we’ll see to it that your visit to our island isn’t marred by ugly native barbarities. Of course, I’d highly recommend that you keep your nose clean, or I’ll chop it off and have it pickled.” She laughs and says, “That was a joke.”

A large-boned, serious bartender, who has already asked the introductory questions (where, when, what, etc.), says:

“Listen, I seen lots of folks show up on Al Amarja, and all they see is the wackos, the gangs, and the people who can’t get up in the morning without a mouthful of drugs. But there’s a lot more here. Me, I got a wife, three kids. Got a steady job with decent pay, though the tips could be better. So there’s plenty of normal stuff going on, too. Just regular people leading their regular lives. We’re the ones that keep everything going. So if you get just too weirded out by those wackos out there, just come back here for a drink and relax. Say, you want your beer deep or jumped?”

A scruffy, barefoot kid of indeterminate age, gender, and racial composition approaches you, smiling broadly.

“You from America? I love America! I want to learn all about America! It’s a great country, and I’m going to live there when I grow up. How long you staying? You want maybe guide? Just ask. I know where everything is! Hey, I got an idea. I can show you around and you can tell me about America. Everyone gets to have a gun in America, right? Big guns, bigger than the Peace Force’s guns, right? And if you’re the

or actually doing it. The skills you’ll use most often are fighting, observation, dealing with people, and making money. Therefore these are the easiest new skills to pick up. On the other hand, if you want to spend five dice to develop the fringe ability to make electronic devices run backwards, that’ll take quite a bit more doing.

New 4-dice skills, on the other hand, are very difficult to get, so when you’re inventing your superior trait, create one you’ll use a lot. Another consideration about superior traits is that they are of the center of your character’s life. You don’t get to be superior without a lot of effort, so you should get away with more with your superior trait.

So, you want your superior trait to be useful, but not so bizarre that you attract too much attention. “Unusual but subtle” is a good rule of thumb for just about everything on Al Amarja.

If you’re going to pick out a fringe power (psychic abilities, mystic training, talents of alien origin), it’s usually best to have it as a superior trait. Fringe powers are limited at the best of times, and if yours isn’t superior, it certainly won’t be reliable. The advantage of fringe powers is that they’re unexpected and thus difficult to defend against. The more you use them, the more likely your enemies are to learn of them.

Another important part of character generation is character concept. Your character should make sense. A superior athlete who is a good computer hacker and could project astrally would be useful, but doesn’t make a lot of sense. It would make more sense for a superior computer hacker to be an athlete on the side (since someone who was training to be an athlete probably wouldn’t have the time to fool with computers, but a computer programmer could easily have a sport hobby) and have some less bizarre third trait. Integrated characters have skills that fit well together.

When choosing your flaws and secrets, don’t get carried away. The key thing to remember here is that your GM already has conflicts in mind, and you don’t need to create major ones unless you really, really want to. For example, I ran a character whose flaw was that she instantly alienated some kinds of people. This caused problems, even when I rolled lucky.

Sadie, another one of my characters, was a bad driver. This was a handicap, but not a crippling

one. She got away with a wimpy flaw because she'd picked "Cooking" as one of her side traits, and the GM let her take a nearly meaningless flaw, since she'd taken a nearly meaningless trait. Don't try to dodge out and be bad at something you'll never use ("I'm really bad at playing checkers!") but on the other hand, don't choose a flaw that's going to greatly impair your ability to survive fights, gather information, or get out of trouble. The exception to this is, if you're faced with a choice between violating your character concept and taking a real stinker of a flaw. Take the stinker. Your GM will hopefully appreciate it, and it makes role-playing more fun.

Picking your secret is a little safer, since it can be harmless (one character was a closet inactive homosexual), distasteful (another was a cannibal) or, if you really want to play it, dangerous. For example, one player in my series was a vampire. What he didn't think of was all the relatives of his victims, one of whom turned out to be a well-connected drug pusher who hired a notorious vampire hunter to track him down. If you want to give your character a shady past, do it, but realize that the pigeons may come home to roost. The same applies to your important person. You create him, but the GM runs him, and this can be very disconcerting.

One sneaky trick is to build an advantage into your secret, and sneaky tricks are often a good idea on the island. Just remember that this too can rebound. If your secret is that you're an agent of a secret society, that society will stand behind you. They'll also send you on missions, and you'll be targeted by their enemies as well as your own personal ones. Another example was a character who'd had plastic surgery and was actually ten years younger than he appeared to be; a number of people he fought were unpleasantly surprised by this spry old man with the sword in his cane.

This leaves the final choice: the character's central motivation. Again, this should fit in with the other traits your character has. If your character's a Zen monk, he shouldn't have the attainment of worldly pleasure as his motive. Give this one a lot of thought, because all your character's actions flow out of it. If your character's values differ from yours, this is where that difference becomes apparent. The PC's motivation determines how the GM rewards him, and how GMCs entice him. Take care to pick something that you will enjoy playing.

As a tangent, it's often good, but not necessary, to have your PC's motivation connect with his reason



wrong color, they beat you up, right? Am I the right color? Will they beat me up if I live in America? Hey, let's go this way, down this alley. Don't worry, very safe, and a great short cut!"

A thin North African fellow wearing a kaftan, sandals, and a striped cap is standing on a broad sidewalk in a plaza. In front of him is a briefcase lying flat on a stand, with a tray on the case, and various bottles, cans, and cigarettes on top of the tray. On the ground beside him is a cooler, slowly leaking.

"Hey there," he says cheerily, "step right up, don't be shy. I got what you want. What are you in the mood for today? Cigs? Beer? Kif? Khat? Cola? Oh, maybe you want something stronger? I got some beauties that might enhance your enjoyment of your visit. Just look right here..." He picks the tray up, sets it on the cooler, and open his briefcase.

At a bar counter, a well-dressed man stumbles over to you, smelling of whiskey and smoking a cigarette. He sits next to you, possibly putting his arm around your shoulders in drunken camaraderie.

"Good day to you, friend. You're American, aren't you. I love Americans. Yeah, my job depends on you Americans. You got nice high prices for drugs, for hookers, for kiddie porn — and no legal competition! Oh, don't get me wrong! I'm no drug runner, no. I just work for one, a driver, but I live off his profits, you see. Say, maybe this is asking too much, but you think you Americans could see your way clear to making abortion and pornography illegal? We'd sure love the business."

Another well-dressed man walks up behind the first fellow and looks down disapprovingly; the first fellow looks a little nervous. "Ooh, uh, listen, how about doing me *this* favor instead — forget we ever met. I never said anything, all right?"

At an outdoor cafe, an Asian woman sits down at the table next to yours, and speaks to you in a strange accent. "They say we'll get rain before the week is out."

When you reply she looks at you blankly, and then looks at a group of men pushing their way through the crowd toward you. Hissing a few curses in an unrecognizable language, she bolts from her chair; and the group of men runs past you in pursuit. One man carries a dachshund in a harness on his back, with the dog peeking over his shoulder.

for coming to the island. The reason for being there doesn't have to be anything elaborate, but it's a good place to plant a "hook" to get you into the game. GMs appreciate characters who bring their own plotlines with them, as long as they're not too destructive to current plots.

A final consideration of character development; the characters determine the flavor of the game. If you have a party full of fighters, your GM will probably send a lot of violence your way. On the other hand, if all the PCs are sleuths or spies or burglars, it could make for a fascinating game of blackmail, intrigue, manipulation, and counter-manipulation, where violence is rarely seen but always threatened. It's up to you. If your characters are wacky, the game will become wacky. If your characters are all brooding and *noir*, that tone will infect the game as well. It's up to you. Of course, it's really something when you've got four different characters with four different idioms. That's when this game system really shines.

III. Playing the Game

You'll need to make friends with people on the island. Don't trust them. Even though you may have essentially the same goals, remember that their goal is *their* survival and benefit — and yours only to the extent that it benefits them. This is a very selfish game.

It's a good idea to have a patron, but not a master. This is a fine line to walk — but always balance the benefits you're receiving against what they're getting from you. Weigh the risks you take for them, and ask yourself if your gain is sufficient.

Another useful technique is projection; imagine yourself in the place of your patron. If it seems to you that your PC is getting more out of the patron than he should, be very suspicious. Patrons don't get to be powers on the island by giving more than they get. If you realize that you're more of a risk than a help to your patron — *run*.

If you're nice to the downtrodden, they may give you unexpected help. Or they might figure you for an easy sucker. If you're nasty to those weaker than you, they may prove to be more than they seem.

The fair fight is a pernicious myth. Don't get into a fight unless you're sure you can win. Blind-side your enemies, attack them when they're unarmed, gang up on them and kick them when they're down.

Keep your mouth shut whenever possible.

Deception is an inherent good, and does not need an end to justify it. The sin is not deceiving, but getting caught.

Just say no to strange drugs, until two smart people you semi-trust have told you they're OK — and then only if you really, really want to.

Get a job. You'll see a lot of stuff first hand, instead of having to get it from questionable sources. You'll meet people you otherwise wouldn't. You'll have a cover. You'll have the financial independence to turn down job offers.

Write down everything.

As with character creation, moderation is a virtue in play. One way to be ineffective is to be paralyzed by indecision. Another is to lunge forward without enough preparation and forethought. Once you've committed to a plan, go for it all the way, but always have an escape route. Don't be afraid to screw over other PC's, but be subtle about it, and don't do it unless you really have to (or really, really want to). Pass lots of notes to the GM. Don't let other players know the full range of your character's abilities. Secret conferences and covert alliances are part of the game.

Don't take anything for granted. Trust nothing. Remember that every other character has a secret, and many of them are unpleasant. Watch out for betrayal everywhere. Don't trust your mentor, your roommate, or your fellow players. Never tell anyone everything. Always have a backup plan. Always have a bolt-hole. Always have a spare identity, a hidden ally, an ace up your sleeve, and a knife in your boot. On Al Amarja, paranoia is simply sanity.

And, oh yeah... have fun.

Getting into the OTE Mindset

by Michael Halse

Nicolai Tassaroff — Seven feet tall, built like Schwartznegger, the hairiest person you've seen since sasquatch, rather large incisors, and a strange webbed pattern on his hand. Nic usually wore a muscle shirt

and sweats, and carried a large duffel bag. His father was from the planet Q35, and extraterrestrial genes gave Nic retractable fangs, mathematical genius, the ability to "reverse-teleport" things to him, and the physique of a bodybuilder.

Nic was the first character I ever invented, and, I must say, truly amazing. He never had to go to a gym to maintain his physique, and the other characters didn't seem to notice. Perhaps his attire was convincing enough for them. On Al Amarja, Nic lived in a hotel, and his door was always unlocked (preventing repair bills from break-ins). I suspect that a few characters had checked out Nic's room, but Nic always destroyed any shred of evidence of anything he had discovered or hid it elsewhere. He always tried to stay one step ahead of the other players.

Nic was an extremely powerful character and had a bad temper, but he didn't overuse his fringe abilities or reveal them unnecessarily.

Character Creation

Create characters that you can identify with or ones that you really want to play. Think of your characters' backgrounds and acquaintances before they left for the Edge. Design characters so interesting that you can't wait to run them.

Make your characters real — or, if not real, internally consistent. If your traits don't mesh, rethink them. A combination martial artist, diplomat, and telekineticist might be more of a mini-maxing exercise than a real person, but if you can weave seemingly distant traits together into a cohesive concept, then go for it! (See Nicolai, above.)

After you have your traits, come up with a secret. It could tie into your traits or be something completely different, but always keep one of those traits secret. Your secret ability doesn't have to be a fringe power but could be something that might be handy in a pinch. Nic's reverse-teleportation ability came in handy, and never drew attention to itself because I played it cool.

When introducing my character, I'd always show the next victim (er...player) a good character drawing and explain it fully. Nic let the other characters know about his strength and mathematical abilities but everything else was secret. The Edge has so many secrets that you'll feel a little comfort in having a few of your own.

A young woman in jeans and a loose blouse is dancing on the sidewalk. At her feet, a boom box plays soothing music. On her left cheek are three tattoo tears, and on her right a heart. As you walk by, she says, “Have you heard the good tunes?”

You turn a corner on a street to see a building blocked off by the Peace Force. Dozens of officers in blue jump suits and riot helmets are leading a line of businesspeople, hands on their heads, out of an electronics store. One by one, the suspects are loaded into a blue-black van. A grungy fellow beside you shakes his head and says, “Drug raid.” The smoke from his hand-rolled cigarette smells funny.

Good-looking, well-dressed people are spilling out into the street, apparently being kicked out of a ritzy night club. As the grumbling crowd disperses, several limousines pull up. Despite the human wall of bodyguards and bouncers, you think you spot the familiar face of a Hollywood star entering the club with a sizeable entourage.

A team of thugs, supervised by a woman in a suit, are working their way down a street, pulling unconscious drunks into alleys and out of sight, paying streetwalkers to move to different streets, and scaring dirty kids indoors. The thugs clear out, the woman speaks into a walkie-talkie, and soon several sedans pull up. Japanese businessmen, as well as natives in suits, get out of the cars and point to the buildings, as if discussing a deal.

A terrible screeching sound comes from above you, like someone ripping sheet metal in half. On the third floor of an apartment building, a window facing an alley opens, and you can tell the sound is coming from that room. A woman climbs out onto the fire escape and races to the ground. As she does so, a pulsing blue light flashes repeatedly out of the window. Then the light stops, a thin trail of black smoke drifts out. When the woman reaches the ground, she catches her breath and then notices that you’re watching her. “Don’t ask,” she says.

You pass a sandwich board-type advertising stand-up outside a grimy back-alley. The sign reads:

Next, think of compelling reasons to go to Al Amarja. If your characters are just sightseeing, you might wonder why they would stay after bad things happen to them. Private motivations tie your characters to the Edge and give meaning to their stay. Nicolai Tassaroff was on Al Amarja looking for his father. When asked for a description of his dad, Nic couldn’t answer. Not only had Nic’s pa decided to skip out when Nic was a bouncing baby furball so that Nic couldn’t give a description, but he did not want to reveal that his father was most likely a big, hairy bloodsucking alien. Nic had received a note from his “father” and a plane ticket to the hellhole known lovingly as the Edge. Since Nic had just finished a bodybuilding competition and was in the off season, he decided to find out who sent the note.

Each character has his own agenda (public or private). You never know when another’s hidden agenda will help you with your own.

Caution Is a Virtue

Don’t look for trouble. Trouble will have no problem finding you, and in OTE you’ll find more than you can handle.

Don’t get into combat if you can avoid it. Nic was often calm and collected but did have a couple of violent incidents, like the time he took out four guys in a matter of seconds, right in front of another, more pacifistic character. The other character was shocked at the event but was so strung up that he didn’t or couldn’t second guess Nic’s actions — nor did he have the power to stop him.

If you get into a lot of quarrels in the Edge, you’ll likely attract the unwanted attention of the Peace Force, the local peace-keeping organization and the only legally gun-toting citizens on the island. If you smuggle a gun onto the island, beware! Flashing a gun around is the equivalent of signing your own death warrant.

After few fights you’ll find yourself racking up bed-rest at Ahmed’s Kwik Klinik or Doc Nusbaum’s hospital. And if you find yourself flat on your back at an Al Amarjan physician’s mercy, consider buying medical insurance; it may be just what you need. Who knows what really happens when you are under the knife of an Edge doctor? Perhaps you are being implanted with something or bugged or pumped full of strange new chemicals...

Burger in a Strange Land

Stay with a group (safety in numbers). Besides, you are all “burger” in a strange land. It was a long time before Nic found his pa, so in the meanwhile, he tagged along with the other characters. Nic hoped the other “burger” would lead him to his father. They didn't mind the helping hand of a seven-foot behemoth that could always “find” a lead pipe or other blunt instrument to use in a fight.

Keep a good diary of events in the Edge because they may be more linked than random. A good diary helps you remember details, and may provide valuable clues and/or solutions.

Between or during sessions, take the time to develop the family, friends, and events that shaped your character. Someone will ask you about events in your character's past. Rather than answering these questions off the cuff, anticipate them.

Come up with something for your character to do in private when you can't attend a scheduled game session. Your GM will not be happy to have to think up something to excuse your absence. The old “Well, he's there but isn't doing anything” line gets old. After a few sessions, there should be things that have piqued your interest but that you didn't investigate.

Getting Into It

How do you get into the mindset of *Over the Edge*? Creativity, attention to details, and a willingness to do things differently. Nic survived and thrived in the madness of the Edge and always kept the other character's guessing “what's the deal with Nic?”

Secrets of Survival

by Robin D. Laws

Your GM has announced a new OTE series, and for your next PC you're trying to invent the ultimate survival machine. Your last one went down in a hail of Peace Force gunfire before you left the airport. His predecessor took a highly poisonous blue-ringed octopus upside the head during the C&I interview. Determined to at least make it as far as Sad Mary's this time, you've been choosing and discarding various options. Descriptions of your

character's fighting ability which make him a threat no matter what the situation. A fringe power with a trick definition so broad it'll cover everything from laser-beam eyes to omniscience. Contacts extending from the CIA to the Rolling Stones. Instant memory access to every word in the New York Public Library. The combined annual income of the Fortune 500. A character flaw constructed so cleverly that it becomes advantageous.

You might surprise yourself by summoning up the persuasive powers necessary to convince your GM to approve this *übermensch*. But beware — your GM is unconcerned, because she knows your character will self-destruct on impact with Al Amarja, like an Alka-Seltzer tablet in water. You've put everything into your new character — except the elements that give the GM a stake in the character's continued well-being.

Here's a well-kept secret: GMs hate to kill off characters. Sudden PC death tosses a major monkey-wrench into the progression of any plot — stops it dead while the other characters regroup and change their plans. It compels the GM to do narrative backflips in order to squeeze your next PC into the ongoing storyline. If the survival of your characters is an issue for you, it's probably because you're forcing your GM to kill them off. With the flexible rules structure of OTE, it's not hard for a GM to protect PCs from accidental catastrophe. Of course, if she's doing her job well, she has the characters fearing disaster every minute of the way. Don't confuse the creation of suspense with adversarial GMing. Only if you back her into a corner, where plausibility and dramatic balance demand it, will she dispatch your new character to your ever-expanding “dead” file.

Even given a GM who doesn't mind knocking off a PC now and then, there are character design choices you can make to provide your new creation with a longer life expectancy. None of them involve exotic powers or an esoteric equipment list.

Sympathy

Instead of asking “what can my character do?” decide who he is. A vividly-drawn character with recognizably human traits is far more likely to emotionally engage a GM than will a passel of cool powers. You're not just a spectator in the GM's grand scheme — you're a fellow author. Together with the other players, the two of you are creating a story. And players

MRS. DAVERSA**Channeller**

**Ask questions of prominent
spirits who have passed beyond:
including Anton MESMER, Leon
TROTSKY, ODIN, Humphrey BOGART,
Jimmy CARTER.**

Reasonable Rates.

The only door in the alleyway is a big metal one, mostly covered in flaking red paint.

Tired, you stop to rest for a moment on the high marble steps outside a government office. A piece of neon green paper blows along the sidewalk and flaps up against your foot. You unfold it. It reads:

There are answers. God has all of them. And he might be willing to share them – with you. Proof – that on an irregular cycle, God selects a new prophet to impact his refined message onto awaiting world. Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Joseph Smith – the next one is overdue and could be you. Werner Drizis' new IPA system – Inner Prophet Awareness – is not a system, not a gimmick, but the best perpetration for the coming millennium. For more information –

The rest of the brochure has been carefully torn out.

An elderly African-American man in a beat-up blue suit and straw fedora tears a rumbling boogie beat from a cheap guitar and tiny, ancient amplifier. He sings in a gloriously cracked voice:

*Baby went to Al Amarja, baby went down to the Edge.
Baby went to Al Amarja, baby went down to the Edge.
Gave up lookin' for my baby, now I'm lookin' for a ledge.*

Man sellin' somethin' mess you up, sellin' somethin' called Relapse

control the most vital element of all: the portrayal of the central characters. Thinking about your character in the way an author thinks of his will enrich him, which will in turn spark the GM's creativity.

The single most important thing you can do in this regard is make your new creation sympathetic. Note that "sympathetic" doesn't always mean always mean "virtuous" — he needn't be a flawless Pollyanna, dripping with sensitivity and kindness. A cardboard do-gooder is just as unsympathetic as an irredeemable villain or a mere clotheshorse for fringe powers.

To sympathize with someone doesn't necessarily mean that you agree with them or find them admirable. It simply means that you relate to them on some level. If the GM and other players understand your character and recognize facets of him in themselves, you've made him sympathetic. Macbeth, for example, is by no means a conventionally likeable figure — you wouldn't want to meet him in a dark alley, especially if you were King of Scotland — but Shakespeare makes him painfully human even as he commits his darkest crimes.

To make your character recognizably human — yes, even if he's a demon prince in exile or a brain-damaged cyborg from the future — try to get inside his head. How does he perceive the world? What is his most typical mood? What's his greatest regret? His proudest moment? The test of truth is often in the details: what's his favorite flavor of ice cream? What would he buy first if he won a million dollars? What type of music does he listen to?

Do an imagination exercise to draw him into the real world. How would he react to you if the two of you were trapped together in an elevator for a couple of hours? Play out the resulting dialogue in your head. How would he react to your GM? Your mom? The process of exploring questions like these will lend him an emotional reality.

Redeeming Qualities

One warning for those of you planning to play a rotten individual, even a psychologically nuanced one: you may succeed too well and make your character so real, so intense, and so hateful that the rest of the group hungers for the release brought about by his destruction. To avoid this, add some kind of core value that makes your blackguard bearable.

Perhaps he has a deep-rooted code of honor, albeit a twisted one, that mitigates his behavior. Or a sense of humor, an unswerving loyalty to his associates, or a humanizing love of art or literature.

As a GM, the type of character I personally have the least qualms about liquidating is the conniving, lying, little power-grubber who seeks nothing but his own temporary advantage. Unfortunately, these types aren't exactly uncommon in rolegaming. They're not evil so much as terminally selfish — they're contemptible weasels rather than grand villains. Often a race begins between the GM and other players, who usually end up on the receiving end of the weasel's schemes, to see who gets to snuff him out first. Could the character you're working on be remotely construed as fitting this profile? If so, a rethink might be in order if you want him to live long enough to see his next birthday.

Originality

One of the problems with the weasel archetype is that it's been done to death. Even a conniving, lying little power-grubber with a long-range goal would be a relief. If you manage to come up with a character concept the GM has never seen before, she's far more likely to cut him some slack than if he's just another cookie-cutter combat machine or scam artist. If you prefer to typecast yourself and are therefore devoted to a particular sort of PC, at least come up with a twist to differentiate your current model from the previous ones. Otherwise, since your creations are interchangeable, your GM will treat them as such, and feel free to point the bony finger of the Reaper at your guy when the dramatic structure calls for a shock character death. Why should she, after all, waste a perfectly good GMC when you can be expected to whip up a carbon copy of the deceased in a few minutes?

To come up with unconventional characters, go to unconventional sources. Newspapers and magazines are full of profiles of remarkable people who might serve as inspiration for OTE characters, as are history and travel books. A single issue of *National Geographic* can supply you with enough characters to last a lifetime. Mainstream writing is essentially about character, so if you want to see how to vividly portray real-seeming people, you should venture beyond the boundaries of pulp and genre literature. Stage writing is ideal for this purpose, since it has to reveal character through action. The plays of David Mamet, Sam Shepard and Harold Pinter are



Man sellin' somethin' mess you up, sellin' somethin' called Relapse

He say, Brownsville, are you buyin' — I say mmm-mm-mm — perhaps...

You are awakened in the middle of the night. For a moment, you experience the feeling of disorientation that always comes to you when you wake up in a strange hotel room. Then you hear the reason for the abrupt interruption of your sleep: noises from the room above.

First is a whirring and clanking, like that made by heavy industrial equipment. Then a sound like violin strings snapping. A low growl. A nasty, organic sound, like hide being torn off a side of beef. Then the tinkle of a glockenspiel hit several times, tunelessly.

The sounds stop. You pull the covers over your head and are soon asleep again.

The next morning, you mention the noises to the concierge. He is perplexed: your room is on the top floor.

You're sitting on a park bench on a sunny afternoon, just watching the world go by. A ragged middle-aged man walks past, a paper bag with a liquor bottle clutched in one hand. Tagging along at his heels is a large tabby cat. Just as they are leaving earshot, the man mutters something you don't quite catch.

"Of course I'm not real," says a strange, high voice. "Get serious. You don't think a real honest-to-God talking cat couldn't find something better to do with its time than hang around in the park with you?"

You've just arrived in the airport terminal, ready for your interview with Customs and Immigration. A team of workers in blue overalls surrounds a portion of gleaming white wall. From the size of the work detail, and their sense of urgency, you at first assume they're tackling a major emergency. But it turns out they're just cleaning some spray-painted graffiti off the wall. It reads:

[obscured by cleaning] IS NO GOOD - BAD -

BAD - UNNATURAL - IS A DEMON, A DEVIL

Then you tense in surprise. The name of the graffitist's enemy appears a second, readable time. Although this is your first visit to Al Amarja, the name is your own.

populated by folks who might feel right at home in the Edge. The best source, though, is real life: take a few hours to sit on a public bench and watch people pass by. Extrapolate about them based on their dress and style of movement. What would they be doing if they lived in Al Amarja? Any assumptions you make about them will no doubt be completely wrong, which is exactly the point. You're looking for new ways to kick-start your own imagination.

To lift a character wholesale from an existing source, no matter how surprising he might be in a roleplaying context, can't exactly be called originality. However, you can create a whole new persona by mixing and matching traits. Take the life experience of a Louise Erdrich or Margaret Atwood character, graft on a weird fringe power plucked at random from a William S. Burroughs or Philip K. Dick novel, and give him a job described in the Careers section of your Sunday paper. Throw a dart at a page from the TV listings, and picture your character as played by the actor nearest to the point it hits. The process of assimilating all of these random elements will lead you down unexpected avenues of thought. You'll end up discarding many of the initial random elements as you continue to refine your character, and will end up with an alter ego who owes more to your own creative process than to any of your sources.

Motivation

GMs are easily bribed. One question sucks more of their brain power than any other: "How do I get all of these PCs involved in my plot?" If you can design plot hooks into your character that make it easier for your GM to answer this question, she'll have a vested interest in keeping that character around.

A staple line in actor jokes is "What's my motivation?" This is something you should ask about your character in all seriousness. You won't be able to show off all of the newfound depth you've built into your character if he doesn't care to do anything. In rolegaming, as in any form of drama, character is revealed through action. And in order to take actions, the character must want something, and must have a strategy for getting what he wants. Equip your new guy with these two things — a motivation and a plan — and you'll gladden your GM's heart. She can adjust her plot plans to give your character a stake in the action, and reward him with progress towards his goal if he succeeds in the scenario. As

an added bonus, you get to feel like the master of the character's destiny, instead of another marionette on the GM's stage. She won't need to sucker you into her latest story hook; you'll be eager to go.

Your character's overall goal will quickly get threaded into the ongoing tapestry of the series. As the GM makes her own long-range plans, she'll soon find that the character's motivation is one of the underlying assumptions of her plans. He'll be integral to the existing plot — the bottom ace in her house of cards. Like an employee working to make himself indispensable, your PC should burrow his way into the heart of the series, so that his departure would be too horrible to contemplate.

Pacing

Your survival strategy doesn't end when you submit your character sheet for approval. There are also many things you can do as play progresses to make your character the GM's best friend.

Now that she's got the PCs positioned to take part in her scenario, the GM has one overriding concern as play begins: to keep the game moving forward. This is tough to do, since the players usually determine the pacing of events in non-action sequences. Fiction has been called life with the boring bits left out. The storytelling of a rolegame is harder to edit this way. The players may end up generating plenty of boredom for themselves by getting bogged down in arguments, decision gridlock, or the dogged pursuit of narrative tangents. Extensive out-of-character digressions are another culprit here, but they're beyond the purview of this essay.

The GM, not wishing to intrude on the players' territory, has few options when the players begin to sink into one of these three quagmires. She'll likely be stuck on the sidelines, reduced to attempts to guide the discussion — "Okay, so now you've discarded the environmental theory" — and general teeth-grinding. But your character is in a position to help without violating the principles of GM non-intervention, thereby earning valuable gratitude.

Make your character a facilitator of discussion and planning when the PCs are operating together as a group. Just as you have his personal goal and its accompanying strategy in mind, have him articulate an immediate group goal to the others. Keep the in-character interaction on track — if the group

hasn't agreed to a goal yet, don't let other PCs drift off into strategy talk. Once a goal has been agreed upon, keep the focus from backing up to rehash it. Jot down strategy ideas, and cross them off as they're rejected. The process of elimination is a powerful organizing method.

Other PCs, played in character, may not be as cooperative as yours. Ideally, they have their own goals, which may not coincide with the direction of the rest of the group. If you can identify their goals, it's much easier to persuade them to drop their objections and pick up the pace.

You may be frustrated when dealing with PCs with no positive motivation. Their players will be more likely to see the negatives and risks in any given situation and block discussion by shooting every proposal down, dragging the story to a halt. To these PCs, inaction is success. Your task here is difficult: your character must persuade the do-nothings to develop a motivation compatible with the rest of the group.

If you fail to persuade these perch-sitters, the GM will be tempted to take them out when they finally do expose themselves to danger. Which brings up the converse of this point: if you're playing an obstructive or inactive character, you can expect a shorter life-span for him. Players typically defend obstructive play with the defense of character integrity: "My character wouldn't do that." This is fine and laudable in many situations; no player should be expected to sacrifice the core of his character for the momentary convenience of the others. But if "my character wouldn't do that" becomes a familiar refrain, the answer, unfortunately, is, "Well, then you didn't build him right in the first place." When designing your own character, consider how he'll perform in play. Will he be an active mover of the plot, a passive dead weight, or an outright obstruction? Obviously the first type is preferred by GMs, and will be given the crucial breaks when needed.

Active players move the plot in action sequences as well as in character-interaction scenes. If the other PCs are paralyzed by the prospect of opening a door, have your fellow reach for the handle. Walk up to that GMC and engage him in conversation. Volunteer to gulp down the mysterious capsule that seems to be an integral clue.

A balance must be struck here. This is not a plea for recklessness. Don't let your character open the door or swallow the pill before the options have been

A lady with silver hair is surreptitiously pointing an odd device at passers-by on the street. From what you can see of it, it looks like an old adding machine with a tuning fork mounted on top. She notices you watching, slips the machine into her purse, and ducks nonchalantly into a shoe store.

A tall, bald woman, whose ears have been surgically removed — a professional job, hardly any scar tissue — stands on a portable street-corner stage and recites in an aggressive singsong from a sheaf of computer paper:

*Star chunks. Wet and wild action.
Downtown is clown town, no how.
The siblings are dribbling, melting
down the coliseum wall like Dalí
watches. Available counterfeit now,
cheaper but just as goey. Katya
has never had a birthday cake -
guess we'll have to eat her.
The jaws of life are coming
For You
Hope you can dig
The Positivity
Metal is the petal of the rose
I gave to you
Mailed priority speed
From my forty-five caliber Smith & Wesson
Love gun.*

Another passenger boards the jitney you're riding on: a goateed fellow wearing a beret and a leather bomber jacket. He waves to the man in front of you, a bespectacled Malay gent in a navy blue suit. The suited man speaks:

"Hey, Rick, how's it goin'?"

Rick sits down beside him.

"I'm in spiritual crisis, man."

"Really?"

"I dropped some C last night and talked to Hecate."

"That so?"

"Yeah, and you know what she said? She said I should stop shopping for new religions all the time, that I was raised a Christian and should find some way to come to terms with that tradition. And that anyway there wasn't a real continuance of pagan worship past the Dark Ages, and that we were all pursuing a consumerised dream of phony wishful thinking and should just leave her alone and let her sleep."

"Wow. What a bummer."

thoroughly discussed. PCs who heedlessly throw themselves into certain danger are as much on the endangered species list as perch-sitters (see "Credibility," below). But don't be afraid to construct a character willing to take reasonable risks. If on occasion you underestimate the risk your PC is taking, your GM will be more forgiving if the miscalculation is part of a pattern that has helped her pacing in the past.

Interaction

The above considerations might not apply if your GM uses the cutaway editing style (described on p. 185 of OTE). This approach allows the GM to exert more control over pacing by running each PC in a separate concurrent storyline. Concerns about group decisions are eliminated, which means that you can't use them to your survival advantage. In a cutaway series, however, there are other means at your disposal.

Beneath the separate threads of a cutaway series, the GM will typically be weaving a unifying base of events. For example, one particular conspiracy might be behind not only the weird science device your character is investigating, but the doppelgänger who follows a second PC, the burglars who rifled the apartment of a third, and so on. Even if no such connections exist, you can give the plot a greater unity by seeking out opportunities to pool resources with other PCs. If you create the kind of character who's always alert for chances to form new alliances and seek out extra information, you can make him the nexus of a game series. As the plot continues, the GM will assume that these connections will be maintained. If your character needs to be around to keep them active, his own survival chances go up.

Even if your networking doesn't become important to the plot, it still can pay off for the GM, which rebounds to your benefit. Be a foil for the other PCs, allowing them opportunities for fun characterization bits through contrast with your own. Accentuate comic or dramatic differences between PCs. Think of entertaining situations for other players' characters, and try to set them up. This doesn't mean that you should go to war with other PCs; the sorts of conflicts that work best in this regard are more subtle ones. Minor differences between heroes are a great source of humor and pathos, as you'll note when you look at the relationships between a classic TV starship crew or fantastic superhero group. They also serve

to define each individual member of a team. When I think back to my favorite RP moments as a GM, a few of them relate to big pre-planned plot events. But many more of them are the spontaneous scenes that developed between PCs.

Credibility

Many players can benefit by seeking a degree of authorial detachment from their characters, as this essay has recommended. Don't swing too far in this direction, though. If you forget to look through your character's eyes at the many dangers of the Edge, you'll be out of the frying pan and into the fire. No matter how interesting and motivated a character is, no matter how much the GM values his presence during play, the time might come when GM must suppress his benevolent instincts and let a treasured figure-head meet his doom. These are times when the GM has the choice between letting a PC die, or forsaking all believability. If she's set up, say, a particular poison as immediately deadly and without an antidote, there's not much she can do if you choose to have your character swallow it. If her notes tell her how deadly it is, but none of the players know, she has room to fudge, and change her background. But anyone who walks knowingly into disaster must get his head handed to him, or the battles fought by the other PCs become meaningless.

No player should take this advice as a recipe for invulnerability. If a series is to maintain its integrity, a knowingly reckless action must have serious, possibly permanent consequences. This is yet another reason to construct quirky, modestly powered PCs instead of all-powerful champions. The latter character is much more likely to die of overconfidence than the former. Always read the cues your GM provides; she'll post plenty of warning signs around any irrevocably fatal trap in a scenario. But you must be willing to look for them. Characters who are too cautious rightfully earn the GM's annoyance, but it's just as easy to derail the plot by rushing too quickly into a situation which requires investigation and thought. The GM will not only be forced to obliterate your latest character sheet, but will have to pick up the plot pieces afterwards.

One day, however, you'll find your beloved alter ego on the brink of a situation that's guaranteed to shuffle his mortal coil straight to Buffalo. But, because of his history, his personality, and the way you've played him all along, it's a situation he can't shirk.

The integrity of the setting demands his doom if he bursts through that warehouse window, and you know it. But the integrity of your character demands that he head on in regardless. Don't shrink from this — destiny has given him a chance to make a great and memorable exit. This is the stuff tragedies are made of. He'll die meaningfully, the way he lived his life. His grand finale will stand as the capping achievement of an artistic creation you and your friends will remember for a long time. Character survival, after all, isn't everything.

Inspirational Material

The following sources may enrich your OTE series. My highest recommendations are marked with an asterisk.

Periodicals

* *Alarums & Excursions*. Atlas Games, Robin Laws, and I make our presence known in this apa. A&E is a monthly discussion forum for gamers and game designers around the world. For a sample copy, send \$2.00 plus Book Rate postage (\$1.05 as of spring '93) to Lee Gold, 3965 Alla Road, Los Angeles, CA 90066.

Arkham Asylum, Grant Morrison and Dave McKean.

Eightball, by Dan Clowes, esp. "Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron."

Heavy Metal. Not for kids. Get old back issues, if you can.

* *The Sun*. Supermarket tabloid.

"Twitch City," from early *Love and Rockets*, the Hernandez Brothers.

Weekly World News. Supermarket tabloid.

Books and Stories

Douglas Adams' novels, especially *Dirk Gently*.

* D.S. Ashwander. *Selected Letters*. A first-hand account of a schizophrenic world view. (small press)

William Blake. *Songs of Experience*.

Jorge Luis Borges. Weird short stories.

“But the thing is, Starchild did C last night too, and she says Hecate was nothing but positive with her! And her dad’s a Methodist minister! I feel like crying, y’know?”

A burly man with a wizened, vestigial third eye in his left temple tells a story to a three-foot man who has a lobster claw instead of a right hand.

“So I says to the guy, hey, take it outside, no mystic s— in my place’a business. And he goes, whaddaya mean, mystic s—, ya friggin’ mutant? And, okay, so now the guy’s really set me off, so I says, I don’t care how many mojos ya got on ya, yer still gonna eat fist if you don’t rotate one-eighty and keep walkin’, bud. So he goes: mojos? What you talkin’, mojos? So I goes—”

A Kuwaiti in full-flowing Gulf sheik regalia approaches you outside a night club in the airport terminal. Meekly following him is an Indian man wearing a three-piece suit. He cowers behind the Kuwaiti as if held on an invisible leash. The Kuwaiti speaks with a hint of a British accent:

“Pardon my intrusion. I was wondering if you would be interested in a commercial transaction. This gentleman is my slave. Would you perhaps wish to purchase him? All perfectly legal, I assure you — but I’ve just been posted to our embassy in Belgium, where it might cause unwanted fuss. Aparna is superior merchandise: he used to be a policeman, and is proficient in WordPerfect and Lotus 1-2-3. His manners are — “

The man’s sales pitch is interrupted by a tall Caucasian fellow dressed like a backwoodsman. He takes the diplomat aside and they begin to dicker on a price for Aparna.

An Irish woman in her early twenties is dressed in black — t-shirt, jeans, high leather boots — with a pale complexion and a big rat’s nest of a hairdo. A well-thumbed softcover Anne Rice omnibus juts out from her rucksack.

“I always knew they were real. When I looked at her, I just knew. I’ve never felt this way about a woman before, but — her eyes. She’s real. I’ve got to find her again.”

Ray Bradbury. *Fahrenheit 451*, *Dandelion Wine*, and *Dying is a Lonely Business*.

* William S. Burroughs. *Naked Lunch*, *Cities of the Red Night*, and other novels. Not for younger or more sensitive readers. Seminal to *Over the Edge*.

Carlos Castaneda. *The Teachings of Don Juan*. (Read it as fiction. It is.)

* Phillip K. Dick. *Through a Scanner Darkly*, *Radio Free Albemuth*, and other novels.

Harlan Ellison. Lots of weird stuff, mostly short stories.

William Gibson. *The Gernsback Continuum*.

Matt Groening. *Life in Hell* comics.

Julian Jaynes. *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*.

Franz Kafka. *The Trial*, *The Penal Colony*, “The Metamorphosis,” etc. Good for mood and for surreal elements.

H. P. Lovecraft. Weird short stories and a few novels.

George Orwell. *1984*.

Daniel Manus Pinkwater. Various.

William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*.

Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson. *Illuminatus! Trilogy*.

Lucius Shepard. “Skull City.”

Chuck Shepherd. *News of the Weird*.

Neal Stephenson. *The Big U*.

Hunter S. Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. *Cat’s Cradle*, *Slaughterhouse Five*, and other novels.

Pseudo-Science. Don’t blow your money on these, but there are a lot of “non-fiction” books about UFO’s, pyramid energy, psychic powers, etc. Even scanning a catalog of this stuff can give you good ideas for *Over the Edge*.

Movies

The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension

Barton Fink

Blade Runner

The Boys from Brazil
Brazil
Casablanca
Dark Passage
Dark Star
 * *Divia* (French)
Eraserhead
Experiment IV (Kate Bush rock video)
 * *La Femme Nikita* (French)
The Fisher King
From Beyond
Jacob's Ladder
The Killer (not the old b/w, the recent Hong Kong shoot-em-up)
 * *Liquid Sky*
Marathon Man
 * *Naked Lunch*
The Ninth Configuration
Reanimator
 * *Repo Man*
A Taxing Woman (Japanese)
 * *They Live*
Toxic Avenger
Vertigo

Music

Big Black, *The Hammer Party*, *Atomizer*
 Butthole Surfers, *Locust Abortion Technician*, *Hairway to Steven*
 David Byrne and Brian Eno, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*
 Cop Shoot Cop, *Consumer Revolt*
 The Cure, *Pornography*
 Fudge Tunnel, *Hate Songs in E Minor*
 Hüsker Dü, *Zen Arcade*

Jane's Addiction, *Nothing's Shocking*
 Joy Division, *Unknown Pleasures*
 King Crimson, *Discipline*
 Lard, *The Last Temptation of Reid*
 Møl Triffid, *Touch the Monkey*
 Queensryche, *Operation Mindcrime*
 Scratch Acid, *Scratch Acid*
 Skinny Puppy, *Mind: The Perpetual Intercourse*
 Sonic Youth, *Daydream Nation*
 Test Department, *The Unacceptable Face of Freedom*
 They Might Be Giants, *Miscellaneous T*
 Throbbing Gristle, *CD1*

Television

Get Smart
 MTV (the 1% worth watching)
 * *Outer Limits*
The Prisoner
Twilight Zone
Twin Peaks

Catalog

Amok. Strange books and videos. Even if you don't buy anything, it's worth a read.

Usenet Newsgroups

* alt.alien.visitors
 alt.conspiracy
 alt.conspiracy.jfk
 alt.paranormal
 * rec.games.frp.misc
 soc.culture."insert country of choice"
 soc.rights.human

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROPS

The following pages are props for your enjoyment. Keep in mind that the fliers have been designed as they would be written by people in the Edge. If you find any of this information to be misleading, look up the people responsible in the Edge and have it out with them, but don't blame the game designer.

You are permitted to make copies of these items for your own use.

Props included are:

- **OTE Rules Brief** — a useful item to photocopy and keep on hand during play.
- **Welcome to the Edge** — This sheet, which tells you a little about the island of Al Amarja, is available to tourists at the airport, hotels, or from Total Taxi.
- **Map of Al Amarja** — The standard geographical survey of the island, displayed on the walls of the Tourist and Visitor Service of Al Amarja.
- **Map of the Edge** — Another map found in the Tourist & Visitor Service offices, and available from your Total Taxi driver. It doesn't list every street, but does provide a general guide to the barrios and main thoroughfares of the Edge.
- **The Burgerguide** — This flyer is sponsored by several businesses that would like *your* character's patronage. It contains highlights of life and locations in the Edge.
- **Character Sheet** — A handy sheet with spaces for all the vital information on your new player character.
- **Character Log** — Copy as many of these as you need, and use them for taking notes on the events in your character's life. A little record-keeping will help you keep track of clues (and things that don't at first appear to be clues, but turn out to be important later), and will help everyone maintain continuity in the series.



Over the Edge™ Rules Brief

Character Checklist

Your character includes:

Concept — who or what the character is.

Traits & Signs — One *central* trait, two *side* traits; of those, one is *superior*; one *flaw*; one *sign* for each of the four traits.

Other Statistics — Hit points, 1 die in the experience pool, determine shots in psychic pool (if appropriate).

Personal Background — Motivation, why you do what you do. Secret, something you don't want others to find out. Important Person in Your Past, someone who affected your life. Drawing, at least a rough sketch. Background, Equipment, Finances, Etc.

Mechanics

When you use a trait, you roll a number of dice equal to its score (usually three dice, or four dice for a superior trait).

If you get a **bonus die** (by having some advantage), you roll an extra die along with your normal dice and then drop the lowest die out of the bunch. If you have to roll a **penalty die** (because of some disadvantage), roll an extra die along with your normal ones, but drop out the highest one.

You compare your roll vs. that made by the GM, usually representing a GMC's traits. You succeed if you beat the GM's roll.

Your Experience Pool

You can use the die in your experience pool to improve one roll per game session. Once you use the die from your pool, you cannot use it again in that session. The die from your experience pool counts as a bonus die. As you play, you can acquire more dice for your pool.

Combat

Initiative — Every combatant rolls initiative at the beginning of the fight. These rolls determine order of action throughout the battle.

Attack Rolls — Any trait that can be used offensively: good knife-fighter, strong, excellent brawler, etc.

Defense Rolls — Any trait that can be used defensively: agile, good karate fighter, quick reflexes, etc.

If your attack roll exceeds your target's defense roll, you hit.

Note that only pure fighting skills be used for both an attack and a defense roll in any one round. "Dextrous" could be used either for attack or defense, but not for both. "Excellent with a Baseball Bat" can be used both offensively and defensively in one round.

Damage — If you hit, subtract the defense roll from your attack roll and multiply the result by your weapon's damage factor. The total is damage you do. Armor subtracts from this damage. Any points left after armor are subtracted from the target's hit points.

Recovery — After a chance to rest and recuperate (maybe half an hour), your character recovers half the hit points he lost. After that, you recover only by rest or medical care.

Damage Factors

Unarmed combat	X1
Throwing knife	X1
Knives, lead pipes, throwing axe, etc.	X2
Swords, axes, etc.	X3
Taser	X5*

*All damage from a taser is temporary. Record it separately; it all comes back when the character recovers.

WELCOME TO THE EDGE

Welcome you tourists, sight-seers, entrepreneurs, seekers, sybarites, and you terminally misguided; welcome to the Edge. May your stay be pleasant or eventful, whichever you wish.

To make your stay in Al Amarja more enjoyable, kindly keep in mind the following facts about our fine island.

Firearms — Firearms of all kinds are outlawed since there is no wild game to hunt. Only the Peace Force may carry firearms. If you have smuggled firearms onto the island and are caught with them, you will face severe punishments.

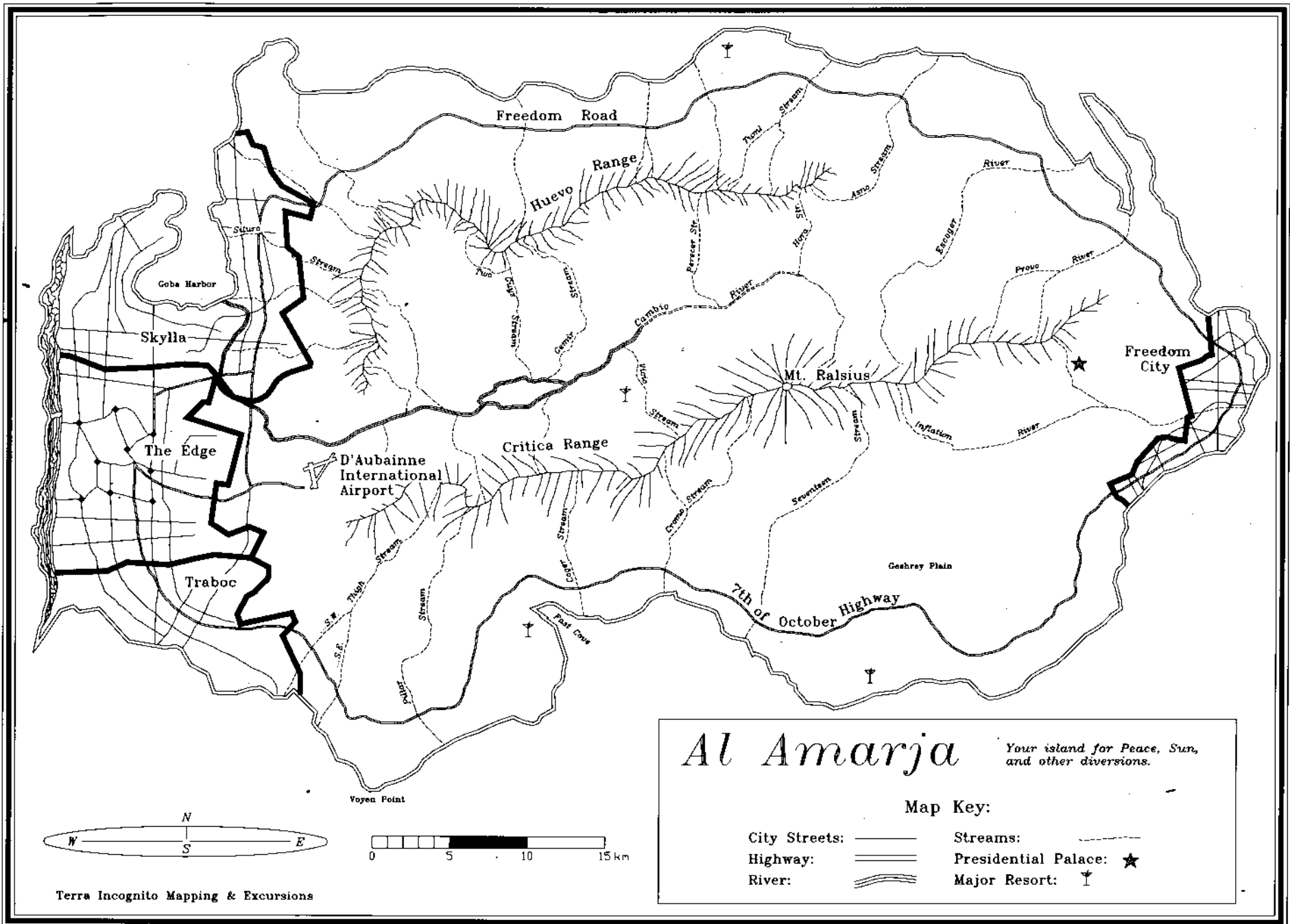
Controlled Substances — All intoxicants generally illegal in the civilized world are illegal on Al Amarja. Do not be deceived by appearances.

The Temple — Social and spiritual needs may be met at the Temple of the Divine Experience on D'Aubainne Avenue. Celebrants of all faiths and sects (except Satanists) are welcome at the services. Please note that the high priestess of the Temple is Cheryl D'Aubainne, daughter of Her Exaltedness Monique D'Aubainne, Historic Liberator and Current Shepherdess of Al Amarja. Utmost respect is therefore due to the Temple, its celebrants, and its creeds.

Currency — Al Amarja uses the US dollar as its currency. Exchanges of other currencies, as well as valuable substances in general, may be made at Swaps, on the Plaza of Gold. Please note that Swaps is run by Constance D'Aubainne, the daughter of Her Exaltedness Monique D'Aubainne, Historic Liberator and Current Shepherdess of Al Amarja. Utmost respect is therefore due to Swaps, its employees, and its policies.

Medical Services — Should you find yourself in need of medical services during your stay (and may the gods forbid such a calamity), you may seek medical attention at the D'Aubainne Clinic, on D'Aubainne Avenue. Dr. Nusbaum and his staff are eager to ease your suffering. Special programs are available for those who are unable to pay for the services they require.

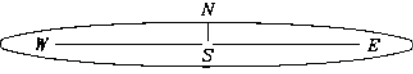
History — Al Amarja was liberated from the Italian fascists on October 7, 1940, by Her Exaltedness Monique D'Aubainne. Since that time, she has brought stability, excitement, peace, security, and prosperity to Al Amarja. It was she who saw the wisdom of adopting the language and currency of the ascendent nation and thus put us in our enviable position among Mediterranean islands. Al Amarjans continue to enjoy a healthy mix of cultures and languages, while relying on our connection to the USA for unity and stability. And we freely offer the delights of these cultures to visitors. Welcome, and enjoy.



Al Amarja *Your island for Peace, Sun, and other diversions.*

Map Key:

City Streets:	Streams:
Highway:	Presidential Palace: ★
River:	Major Resort: †




Terra Incognito Mapping & Excursions

The Edge

- Island of Al Amarja

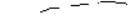
Her Exaltedness Monique D'Aubainne, Historic Liberator and Current Shepherdess of Al Amarja, welcomes you to The Edge, cultural center of our fine island. Enjoy yourselves and come again.

Map Key

City Streets: 

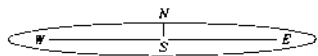
Highway: 

River: 

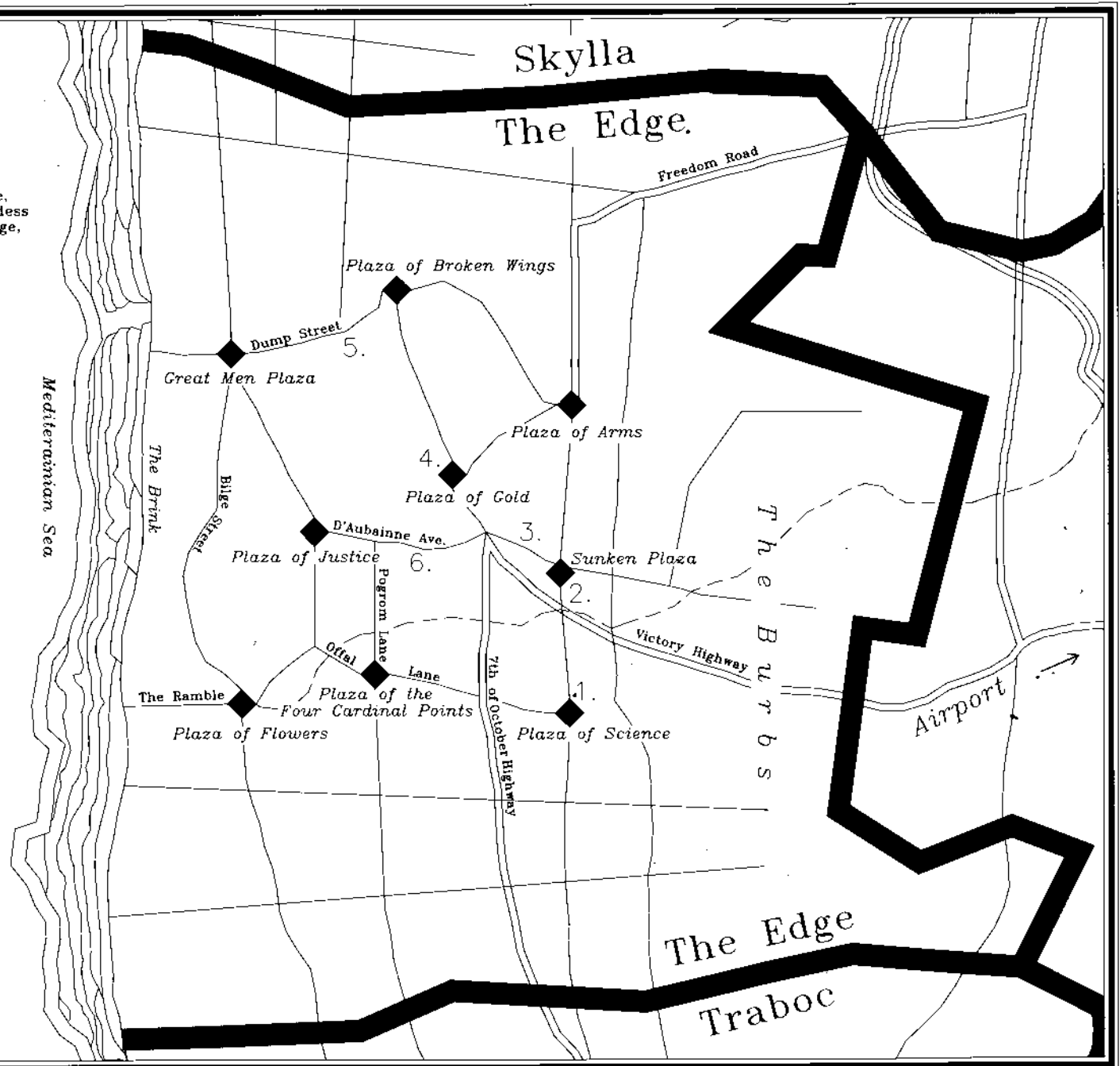
Dry Riverbed: 

Points of Interest:

1. D'Aubainne University
2. Cesar's Hotel
3. Temple of Divine Experience
4. Swaps
5. D'Aubainne Museum of Modern Life
6. D'Aubainne Hospital & Trauma Center



Terra Incognito Mapping & Excursions



The Nature of Al Amarja

Under the wise guidance of Her Exaltedness Monique D'Aubainne, Historic Liberator and Current Shepherdess of Al Amarja, this nation has progressed into the next stage of human social evolution. The urban environment may shock some of you who are new to the island, just as a city shocks a nomad and a factory shocks a peasant and a computer shocks a machinist; but open your mind to the experience, and you will soon agree that Al Amarja represents the future of humanity. And we owe it all to the far-sightedness of our duly elected President.

The Noose

Many tourists are curious about the noose and why we wear it. The only way to understand is to get yourself a good noose and wear it yourself. Wearing a noose affirms acceptance of inevitable personal obliteration, a concept frantically quashed by popular culture. Personal power results from accepting and incorporating that which others deny. That's why we wear nooses, and you should too. It's a mind-altering experience.

Protect Yourself

Our friends from the United States will be relieved to learn that the far-sighted government of Al Amarja has banned firearms from the island, so your chances of getting mowed down by a wired crackhead or disgruntled postal worker are slim. In addition, killing tourists is highly discouraged by the Peace Force. A few simple rules will help you protect what is at risk: your health, wealth, and dignity.

Travel in groups. A lone foreigner presents a tempting target to those few malcontents on Al Amarja who refuse to do an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. If you don't know native Al Amarjans and you are on your own, perhaps you can find other foreigners who would appreciate your company.

Make friends. If you're intending to stay any length of time in the Edge, get to know some natives. The criminal element won't hesitate to prey on someone without a friend on the island, and native friends make one a less vulnerable target. Of course, the friends you try to make may very well be the criminal element in the first place.

Easy on the chemicals. It would be criminal to condone their use, and hypocritical to condemn it. Just take it easy.

Respect authorities. The Peace Force is there to protect you (especially if you are a wealthy tourist), but they are not in the habit of taking guff. Fascist agitators have been known to attempt infiltration of our democracy by posing as tourists, so your status as visitor does not exempt you from suspicion. Other authorities to respect include just about any armed and organized group, including the Golden Knights, Dunkelburg's Security officers, the Aries Gang, the Dog-Faces, Otto's Men, Sigma Om, and the Glorious Lords (maybe, and only on their turf).

Arm yourself. A good weapons shop, such as Gun Metal, can provide you with the protective devices you need to keep yourself safe.

*What you ought to know about our lovely land,
brought to you by friends who want your stay to be safe.*

(c) 1992 Meteor Sarab

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Good lodgings. A good hotel in a quiet area can reduce the risk of crime. Cesar's Hotel has an excellent reputation as a secure hotel in a safe neighborhood.

Getting Around

The best way to get from place to place in the Edge is Total Taxi, which provides not only quick, confidential transportation, but also valuable information and other goods and services, all at rates well below the value provided. For a prolonged stay, you may wish to rent a car.

Warning to our US friends: Al Amarjan streets are narrow and frenetic, not what one is used to in a wide-open country.

Renting a scooter or moped may be more practical for people traveling alone. Jitneys are an excellent alternative to cabs for those who are less concerned with comfort and speed.

Keeping the Peace Force Happy

No guns. The Peace Force is serious about this one.

No fascism. Ditto.

No psychics. The Al Amarjan government heroically confronts this danger to society, a danger that other governments deny, most likely because they are under mental domination of powerful psychic criminal masterminds.

Low profile. Her Exaltedness Monique D'Aubainne, Historic Liberator and Current Shepherdess of Al Amarja, wisely wishes to spare Al Amarja from the trampling suffered by other island paradises around the world, so she frowns on reporters, film-makers, and photographers who threaten to bring attention to this land. Isn't it better to keep Al Amarja a beautiful refuge for a fortunate few, rather than an over-developed vacation spot for the masses?

FIGHTS


DRINKS

Sad Mary's

DANCING

BAR & GIRL

You haven't visited Al Amarja if you haven't come to Sad Mary's!



Conveniently Located in the Plaza of Flowers



GIRLS

Our knowledgeable staff is eager to help you find the tools that are right for you.

GUN METAL

For your personal protection needs

596 Pogrom Lane • Phone 458299

Where the Action Is

The hottest spot in the Edge is Sad Mary's Bar & Girl (see ad), which features food, drinks, fights, professional dancing, and companionship at rea-

sonable rates. Located on the unforgettable Plaza of Flowers, this spot is a must.

The D'Aubainne International Airport has some killer spots as well, with the added bonus of an international crowd. Your experience coming through the terminal may not have been pleasant, but it's a hopping place.

The Temple of the Divine Experience rocks every Saturday night. (Attendees on other evenings of the week, however, can be on the weird side.) Definitely worth checking out, even if your personal church-going habits have not been regular.

Flowers in general offers the most entertainment spots and shopping areas. Sunken caters to more mundane tastes, which many tourists have. Science, thanks to the student population, also offers plenty of cinemas, plays, poetry slams, concerts, and so forth. Just be careful if you try to pick up the uni chicks.

TOTAL TAXI

For Your Total Taxi Needs

Telephone 222444

*Special services are available;
please ask your driver for details.*

Places to Avoid

Four Points is a pretty dangerous place at night. Since most of the crime there is economic in motivation, dressing wealthy is not the thing to do there. If you look like artistic, leftist, or gay, be careful in Justice. Otto's Men are remarkably protective of their kids' morals. Great Men isn't too bad, as long as you can avoid the Satanists. Most of the other inhabitants are too derelict to pose any kind of threat.

Stay out of Arms. The Peace Force is centered here, and prefers to go about its business without the hassle of observers.



- Pool
- Night Club
- Satellite TV
- Restaurant
- Efficient Security Teams

Located in Sunken Plaza
Phone 875365

Al Amarjan Slang

baksheesh — a tip, a bribe; very important whenever someone serves or helps you directly (from Arabic)

barrio — one of the quarters or sectors of the Edge, taking the name of the plaza around which the quarter is located. E.g., the Sunken Barrio encircles the Sunken Plaza. Barrios often simply referred to by the name of the plaza, as in "Sad Mary's is in Flowers."

black — firearm(s), esp. in the phrase "to carry black" (to go armed)

blue (or **blueshirt**) — a Peace Officer. Her Exaltedness liberated Al Amarja with the aid of heroic volunteers known as "blueshirts," and the Peace Force evolved from this group. Also: "the blues" can mean trouble with the law, as in "I've got the blues."

burger — newcomers to Al Amarja, grammatically uncountable ("a bunch of gullible burger")

deep — spiked with depressants, as in "deep coffee"

jumped — spiked with stimulants, as in "jumped coffee"

lucy — a satanist, from "Lucifer." Don't call them this to their faces.

maalesh — no sweat, don't worry, take it easy, relax, chill out, etc. (from Arabic)

'Martian — Al Amarjan (shortened & corrupted form)

pube — an adolescent who has legally acquired the status of an adult

scarab — newcomer to Al Amarja, "burger"; because the scarab beetle eats dung

sook — an open-air market, especially lower class; rhymes with "kook" (from Arabic)

starver — an artist, especially an independent one

ugly — someone deformed by genetic misfortune

willie — slave; all slaves on Al Amarja are voluntary slaves

zero — a worthless, hopeless person

Courtesy of Total Taxi
For your total taxi needs, call 222444

OVER THE EDGE™

CHARACTER SHEET

Player Name

Character Name

Traits & Signs

Include description of each trait, number of dice rolled, and sign.

Weapons & Damage Factors

Finances & Other Possessions

Sketch

Hit Points

Psychic Pool

Wounds

Experience Pool

DESCRIPTION

Motivation:

Secret:

Important Person:

Appearance and Other

Background / Description:

