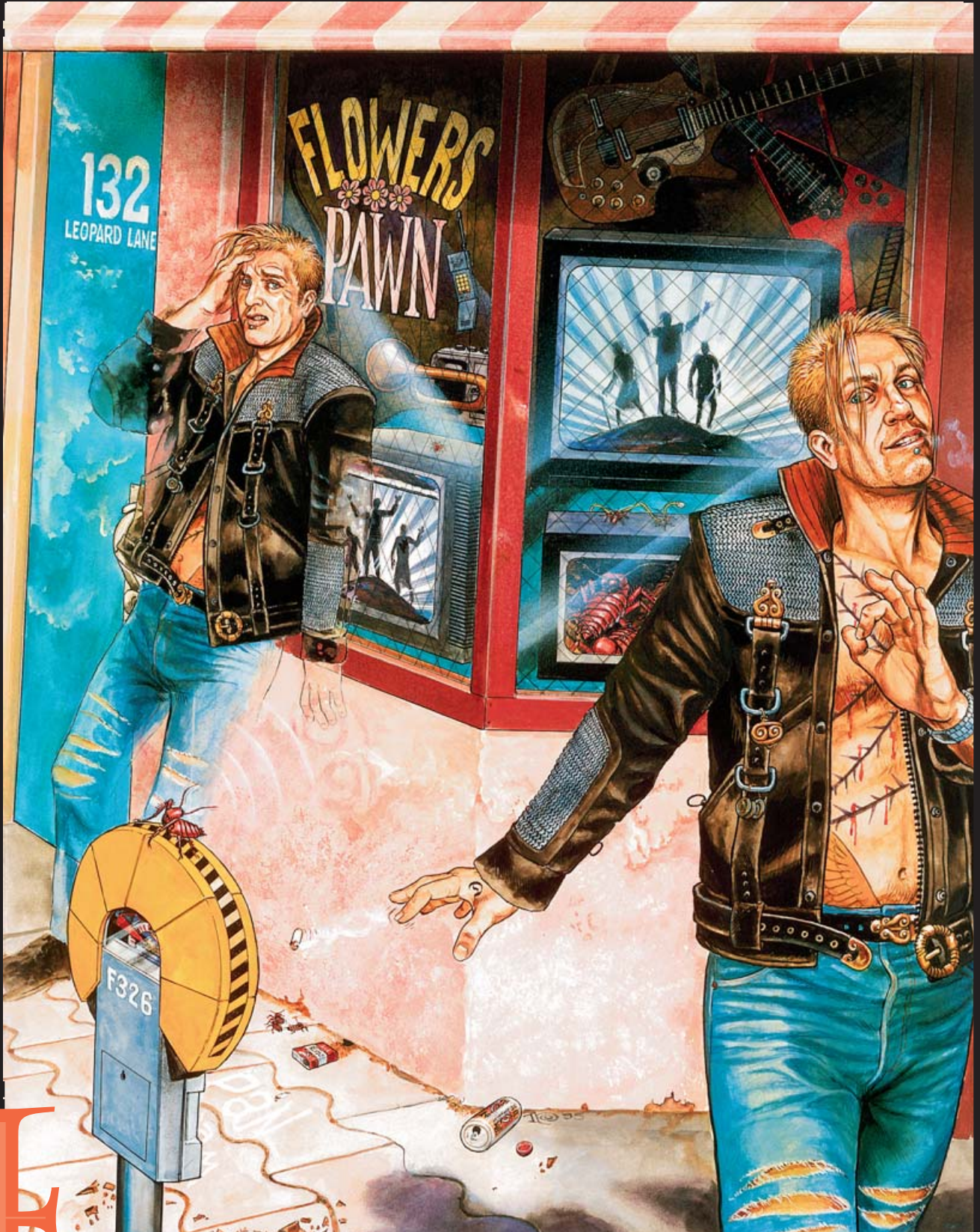


ATLAS GAMES

OVER THE
EDGE

THE

MYTH OF SELF



A

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As of this writing there is an Internet mailing list devoted to OTE; send "help" as the subject of a message to over-the-edge-request@gojira.monsta.com for more info. Plus, we have a support folder on America Online. Of course, you can also contact us by Snail Mail at the address below. Please do! We'd love to hear what you think or any other book of ours.

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CONTENTS

<i>The Bliss of Death</i>	4	<i>The Dopplegänger</i>	
Act One: The Setup	4	<i>Plague</i>	41
Dramatis Personae	5	Laying Pipe	41
The PCs Join the Action	8	The Columnist	41
The Ralsius Fissure	9	The Director	44
Preparation for the Trip	10	The Therapist	46
Act Two: The Journey	11	The Dopplegänger Plague	48
Dinner With the Devil	12	A PC is Doubled	48
The Mole Strikes — Maybe	14	The Symptoms Spread	51
Sneaking to the Fissure	14	The Laughter Incident	51
The Fissure At Last	14	Getting Sammy's Ear	52
Act Three: Aftermath	16	Involving Other PCs	52
The Limitations of Air Power	16	The Last Column?	52
The Divine Plaza of Flowers	17	What's Really Going On	52
Talking to the Vessels	17	Finding the Link	54
Denouement	18	Breaking the Guard	54
Intersections	18	Confronting Dr. Julien	55
Long-term Aftermath	19	Finding the Rehearsal Hall	55
The Statue	20	Marva Discovered	55
<i>The Hive</i>	21	Aftermath	57
Overview	21	Intersections	57
Timeline	21	<i>Deep Troubles</i>	58
Plot Hooks	24	Deep Background	59
Plot Development	25	Deep Subculture	59
The AI Amarjan Hiveroach	25	Deep Blue Sea	61
Hive Telepathy	26	The Splinters	62
Hive Telepathy and Defense Technology	26	Dr. Umayma Ahal	65
Hive Psychosis	27	Into the Deep	69
Stench Combat	28	Aiding the Innocent	69
GMCs and Factions	28	Other Hooks and Ideas	72
The Gold D Cabal	28	Deep GMCs	73
The Exterminator	32	Mover Cloaks	76
The Fistheads	33	Further Possibilities	77
The Peace Force	35	Where the Plot Might Lead	77
Loose Cannons	36	Changes in the Subculture	78
Plot Locations	37	Intersections	78
The Laboratories of Drs. Wheeler and Ross	37		
The Gold D Storefront Office	38		
Gomez Reynard's House	38		
Lifestylin' Taxidermy	39		
Chateau D'Or	40		

The Bliss of Death

It's an unusually quiet afternoon at Sad Mary's. Frank is rewiring the sound system for the club, so the usual wall of ear-punishing music has been replaced by silence — and the occasional startlingly original curse from Frank as he drops his wire cutters for the umpteenth time.

Most of the crowd has drifted off in search of louder environments. A few hardcore drinkers keep the bar stools warm, ignoring the low buzz of a battered old black-and-white TV set with a blown speaker. Only Thorvald Bladh, the slightly over-the-hill Aries Gangster on guard duty, watches it.

"There goes the neighborhood," Thorvald intones.

He's watching a report on AATV Midday News. Reporter Eden Verdicchio breathlessly announces an upcoming visit from none other than Mother Jehanne, the world-famous Catholic missionary. She'll be accompanying two other religious figures — a Protestant minister and an Islamic cleric — on some sort of pilgrimage to a little-known site on the southern slope of Mt. Ralsius. Before they head off to the volcano, Mother Jehanne and the minister — an American televangelist named Justin Joyce — will minister to the poor and sick of the Edge. The hastily-arranged visit will commence in one week's time.

"What the @\$% is Monique D'Aubainne doing letting somebody like that onto the island?" Thorvald complains, to no one in particular. "She'll wreck the whole tone of the place."

Little does he know it, but Thorvald Bladh, for once in his life, is having a prophetic moment.

Perhaps the PCs in your series don't hang out in Sad Mary's. Stage a variant of this opening scene

wherever they happen to be. The important thing is that they see the news piece on the arrival of the trio of pilgrims, and note the comically unenthusiastic response of the average Al Amarjan to it. Unless they're from Mars (which, in OTE, is perfectly possible) the PCs have heard of Mother Jehanne — she's a world figure. Anyone who's lived in North America for any length of time during the past three or four years also probably recognizes the name Justin Joyce — he's an up-and-coming TV preacher found on cable stations everywhere.

It's your job to ensure that the PCs find their lives intertwined with this mysterious pilgrimage by the time Jehanne and company arrive.

Act One: The Setup

Months ago, on separate continents, a minor geologic anomaly in the side of Al Amarja's Mt. Ralsius — a fissure in the rock, too small to qualify as a cave — suddenly became important to three very different people.

In his hot, dusty office at Cairo University, Professor Karim Husaini discovered an unfamiliar passage in a text he thought he knew well. At first, he shook his head in puzzlement. Then his pulse accelerated. The book, a history of the early days of Islamic civilization, hinted at the location of a vital set of documents. They were previously unknown writings of al-Bukhari (c. 810-870 CE), one of the central early scholars who codified the Hadiths, the traditions about the actions of Mohammed used as the basis of Islamic

BY ROBIN D. LAWS

ethics. Racing to the library, Husaini spent a feverish fortnight narrowing the book's tantalizing sentences into a probable location for the document stash: the Ralsius fissure.

At the same time Professor Husaini first found the passage in his book, the Reverend Justin Joyce was awakened by a knock on the door of his modestly upscale home in Possum Link, South Carolina. Against his better judgement, he opened the door himself. A small man with a bushy white beard firmly shook his hand and slipped past him, taking a seat at Joyce's dining room table. Speaking rapidly in a snappy Texas twang, the man unpacked a stack of maps and papers from a burlap bag. For hours he held Joyce spellbound with a remarkable tale: the man had found evidence that Noah's Ark had been found in the Middle Ages by knights on the Second Crusade; that it had been disassembled and taken to a small island in the Mediterranean. In fact, the man, after years of research, had pinpointed the exact spot it was stashed in: the Ralsius Fissure. Saying he had to get back to his wife at his hotel room, the man left the papers with Rev. Joyce and told him he'd call back in the morning. He stepped out the door without giving his name — and never returned. Although his head told him that this was all craziness, Justin Joyce had been taught by Jesus to act on what his heart told him. And it told him that there couldn't be any harm in heading to this El Emerga place — could there?

At the same moment, the revered Mother Jehanne tossed in her rickety mission cot in La Paz, Bolivia, in the throes of a vision. She saw herself entering a crack in the side of a mountain, and the luminous arms of God sweeping her into His bosom. Then God shifted the vision's time sense, showing her events in backwards order, to tell her how to reach her apotheosis. She was ministering to the poor in a blighted industrial city. Meeting with a tall blond American and an olive-skinned balding man in a conference room. Getting on a plane with her assistant and translator Micheline. When she awoke, she remembered it all, and set about fulfilling God's instructions for their rendezvous...

(In fact, others around the world heard the call of the Ralsius Fissure, but did not answer. A monk in Tibet, meditating, became possessed by the need to journey to the mountain — but was refused travel permission by the Communist authorities. A Hindu holy man in Northern India saw the mountain in a dream, but had a local emergency to deal with — another round of communal rioting. A Siberian shaman, swimming into the underworld to grasp a stolen soul, found himself at the Fissure — but had no

way of locating Mt. Ralsius when he returned to the surface world.)

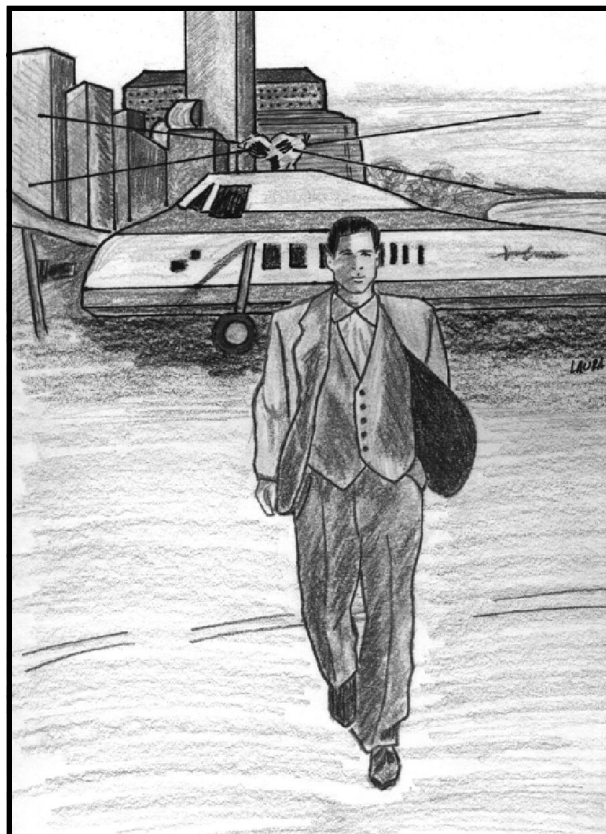
Mother Jehanne made plans to attend an ecumenical conference in Madrid, one she had always passed on before. There she saw the men from her vision. She gathered them together, and asked them about the mountain. Taken aback, each man told his story. The three of them then began to arrange an expedition to Al Amarja.

Dramatis Personae

Rev. Justin Joyce

Honest Televangelist

The Reverend Joyce, a young, vital man with prematurely graying hair, has risen to prominence in the American TV preacher market in the wake of the Bakker and Swaggart scandals. His gentle, welcoming style soft-pedals both the fire and brimstone and the hard-sell scramble for donations, making new inroads among folks from the baby boom generation looking for a cozy, pleasant spirituality. Despite increasing ratings, Joyce's operation doesn't rake in the bucks of



Art by Laura Cabral

his better-known colleagues; this has led some observers to think his real ambitions lie in the political realm.

In person, the Reverend (“please, call me Justin”) comes across as soft-spoken, humble, and surprisingly down to earth. He speaks more like a friendly high school guidance counsellor than the evangelist of popular stereotype — you won’t hear him quoting the Bible all the time, for example. Only his constant, mildly phony smile is a tip-off to his profession.

Joyce regards Mother Jehanne with the reverence she’s accustomed to; he doesn’t share the bedrock anti-Catholicism of some of his more conservative parishioners. He’s well aware that his association with her is a coup; it buys him credibility in mainstream religious circles. He’s making sure that his brother Jeremiah gets plenty of photos of the two of them together.

He’s discovered an unexpected soulmate in Karim Husaini, who he expected to be a fire-breathing fanatic. Joyce is beginning to develop the completely naïve hope of converting Husaini to Christianity; after all, he seems so reasonable... Joyce has already decided how to make use of Husaini on his show.

White US man, age 34, 210 cm, 80 kg. Blond hair going grey, largish aviator-frame glasses, expensive suits.

Languages: English.

Traits

Media Savvy, 4 dice — Knows how to look great and sound convincing on television. (Low, rich speaking voice.)

Theology 3 dice — Is repackaging Pentecostal Protestantism for a new wave of remote-control believers. (Projects air of calm and understanding.)

Networking 3 dice — Back home, the Reverend is quietly building a political organization. When he meets someone new, he immediately calculates his or her potential usefulness. (Greets even the merest acquaintance as an old and dear friend.)

Receptivity to Positive Energy, fringe flaw — His earnestness, drive and theological study have opened him up to the influence of Mt. Ralsius’ growing positive energy, creating a hypnogogic state during which he was “visited” by a “scholar” who told him the Noah’s Ark story. (Discusses potential Noah’s Ark find after a little prodding.)

Mother Jehanne Lefebure

Famous Missionary

Mother Jehanne is a worldwide media figure; her mission, which helps natives in Bolivia, has been profiled countless times as a paragon of Christian charity. Now very elderly, Mother Jehanne revels in her poverty and self-deprecation. She tends to speak in a condescending manner of her indigenous charges — though usually her translator carefully edits out her more cranky and intolerant comments during press interviews.

Jehanne’s sense of sacrifice and piety are fed by a flinty determination; she’s used to getting what she wants. There is no doubt in her mind that her vision is a final reward from God; she fully expects to be swept up into heaven by whatever waits for her in the Ralsius Fissure. Although she somewhat resents the presence of Joyce and Husaini — even though they’ve actually done all of the logistical work — she does nurture some untoward glee at the thought of the two of them watching, mouths agape, as the glowing hand of the Holy Ghost gently tugs her into the Kingdom of Eternity.

French woman, age 78, 140 cm, 48 kg. Small and stooped, with striking, craggy features; wears an ice-white, flowing white habit with blue trim.

Languages: French.

Traits

Beloved by All, 5 dice — Even more popular than the Pope, Mother Jehanne is so revered that her name has passed into idiom — as in, “Sure, he’s no Mother Jehanne, but...” She expects and gets total deference from most people — even atheists can’t help but be moved by her aura of piety. (Her humble presence dominates any gathering.)

Frail, 2 dice — Any physical activity is at a penalty. (Must have someone alongside to steady her when she walks.)

Receptivity to Positive Energy, fringe flaw — The focus of the world’s pious upon her has charged her aura with enough positive energy to set up a reaction with the Fissure, causing the dreams that have brought her here. (Aura is blindingly bright to sensitives.)

Karim Husaini

Urbane Islamic Scholar

At first glance, the Egyptian professor Karim Husaini seems thoroughly Westernized — wearing

European clothing, speaking in a faultless Oxbridge accent, fully versed in every topic of interest from the fate of Eastern Europe to the Milli Vanilli crisis. He has as many Western friends as Islamic colleagues. However, he is able to move with ease in the decadent thought-world of secular humanism because of his rock-hard certitude in the revelations of Mohammed. With his Western friends, he delights in baffling companions by constructing, for example, an elegantly rational defense of the Iranian *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie. With his Islamic brothers, he explains that the wise man knows his enemy more intimately than his friends.

Husaini doesn't expect to find anything miraculous in the Fissure; he's expecting nothing more incredible than some very important historical documents. He's looking forward with wry amusement to the disappointment of his companions. Which is not to say that he dislikes them. With typical split consciousness, he feels an affection for both. He admires the Reverend for his cheerful, naïve faith — even though it's of course completely misguided. And, although he tried to resist, he has been drawn in by Mother Jehanne's aura of spiritual purity.

Egyptian man, age 40, 171 cm, 68 kg. Receding hairline, favors light-colored suits, smokes very foul cigars.

Languages: Arabic, English.

Traits

Shari'a, 4 dice — Karim knows Islamic holy law and its development throughout history inside and out, and can cut to the quick in any discussion of it. (Speaks on the subject with terse authority.)

Debate, 3 dice — Delights in using the intellectual tools of the Enlightenment to expose its internal contradictions. (Smiles confidently when arguing.)

World culture, 3 dice — Knows a little about everything, from paleontology to Monty Python. (Has an opinion or quote for every occasion.)

Receptivity to Positive Energy, fringe flaw — His rigorous mental focus on the inexorable logic of Islam has sharpened his neural pathways to receive the call of the Fissure. When he found a spurious account of the location of al-Bukhari's texts, his unconscious mind, knowing more than his conscious mind, overrode his natural skepticism. (Acts like he knows something nobody else does.)

Micheline Ronet

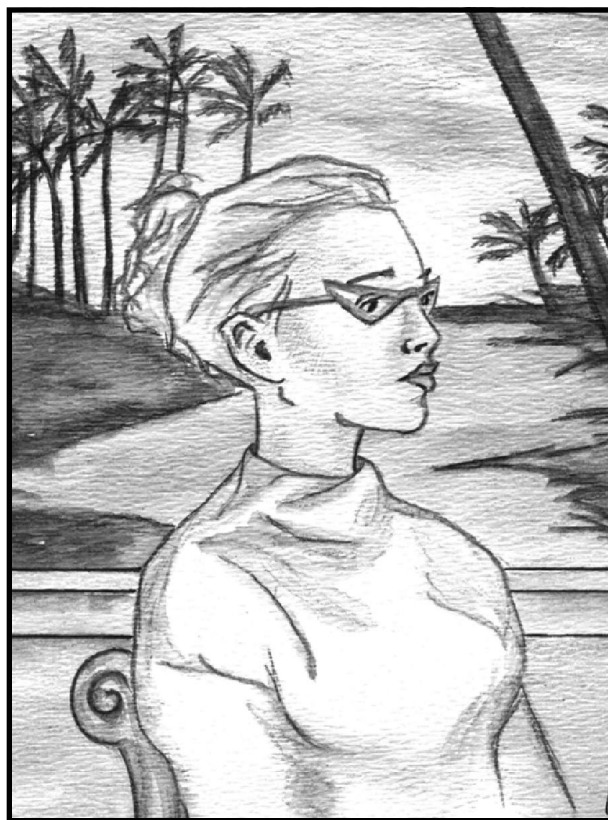
Mother Jehanne's Interpreter

Micheline first met Mother Jehanne when she was a young novitiate. She has worked as her interpreter — and chief PR person — for over a decade now. Several years ago she renounced her own vows, but stayed with Jehanne's mission as a lay person.

Micheline is very protective of Mother Jehanne, and would lay down her life for her. She also omits from her translations anything unsympathetic that the great woman says — which she finds herself doing with increasing frequency of late. She's also started refusing all interviews to French-speaking reporters, so no one can talk to Jehanne without going through Micheline.

Micheline is very apprehensive about this whole Ralsius Fissure situation. She's afraid that the strain may be too much for Mother Jehanne. Her assumption is that there's nothing in the Fissure; accordingly, she worries also that Mother Jehanne will be publicly humiliated.

Beyond her devotion to her employer, Micheline is a very lonely woman. She left her order because she wanted to get married — but she remains desperately single. This makes her very vulnerable to any man to



Art by Laura Cabral

show a romantic interest in her; her capacity for self-deception in this regard is just about limitless.

French woman, 37 years old, 180 cm, 60 kg. Dull brown hair tied up in a bun, cat's-eye glasses, dresses very conservatively.

Languages: French, English, Italian, some German.

Traits

Public Relations, 4 dice — Without Micheline's quiet work in the background, in terms of both organization and creative censorship, Mother Jehanne's image would not be so rosy. (Speaks for Jehanne without seeming presumptuous.)

Lonely— Micheline's growing fear of dying without a companion or family sets her up for manipulation by an unscrupulous marriage prospect. (Gazes wistfully at couples or families with young children.)

Jeremiah Joyce

Justin's Brother and Alter-Ego

Jeremiah Joyce is the behind-the-scenes fixer who makes the Justin Joyce empire run. When Justin needs to fire an employee or squeeze a supplier for a better deal, it's Jeremiah he calls. If asked, Jeremiah openly admits to being a resentful younger brother, pinning the blame on his father: "How'd you wanna grow up under the kind of man who'd give both his sons alliterative names?" Jeremiah always felt invisible while growing up: his brother soaked up the entire supply of paternal approval. He covers the resulting well of insecurity with bluster and a cutting wit.

Jeremiah has trouble sleeping at night, because — unlike his father and brother — he's always had trouble sustaining his faith. He tries to banish doubt from his mind whenever it surfaces, but denial never works for long. The trip to the Ralsius Fissure is about to bring his inner crisis to a head.

US man, age 32, 200 cm, 105 kg. Dark, curly hair, broad shoulders, owlish glasses.

Languages: English.

Traits

TV Producer, 4 dice — Knows the business very well; he's Justin's "pit bull." (Never goes further than 3m from his cell phone.)

Inner Turmoil — Religious doubt is going to make him do something very unwise in the course of this adventure. (Chews his lower lip pensively when faith is discussed.)

The PCs Join the Action

There are as many different ways to motivate PCs to insinuate their way into the expedition as there are different possible characters in an OTE campaign. You'll have to tailor the opening of the adventure to your particular group. Find something each PC wants, and dramatize scenes that show him that the way to get it is to join the group of clerics.

This is easy if the PC has already affiliated herself with a particular group or conspiracy; their patrons order them to go. Here are some sample reasons the major groups on the island have for wanting to infiltrate the Ralsius explorers:

Monique D'Aubainne/Peace Force/Democratic

Bureau of Investigation: It would be a great embarrassment if the most revered woman in the world even appeared to be threatened by any of the Edge's many scumbags. Such an incident would be major news, and Monique doesn't want her island to have too high a profile in the world media. She'll want to assign a security detail to protect Mother Jehanne — if the PCs are in her pocket, they'll get the nod.

Sir Arthur Compton: The Fissure is on his property (see below) and he's looking forward to being entertained by the disappointment of these noxious do-gooders. If a friend or ally was taken into their confidence, the first hand account might be deliciously amusing.

Cut-Ups: "Are Jehanne and company control addicts or true religious liberators, challenging established authority? Do mavericks circle the rendering plant of the air?" Enquiring Chaos Boys want to know, just for future reference.

Cheryl D'Aubainne: As chief spiritual figure of the island, she'll want a liaison officer with the expedition at all times. Either she or one of her colleagues might also have had recent visions about the fissure. (If a PC is a religious mystic, he'll definitely have had them.)

Constance D'Aubainne/The Mob/The Net:

Constance herself couldn't care less about these unproductive drains on the economy, but her ally Giuseppe Raimondi is a fervent admirer of Mother Jehanne, and worries about her safety. With his worsening health, he needs a miracle real soon, and would be happy to send a PC bodyguard if it might cut him some slack with the guy upstairs.

Earthlings: Dr. Paolo Montserrat is also concerned for the group's safety, for purely altruistic reasons.

Lydia Goodman/Sommerites: An obscure Karla Sommers B-side contains a lyric that's a bit unclear but seems to say "Watch the three/Who journey to the mountain/Drink the soda/It's from a high fountain." This is enough reason to keep an eye on the expedition, just in case this somehow relates to something important. (Some Sommerites claim that the lyric instead reads "Come with me/The pressure's mountin'/In love again/But hey, who's countin'," which has led to some impassioned theological debates within the group.)

Kergillians: Something has been screwing up the Kergillians' instruments all of a sudden, and the centre of the interference seems to be Mt. Ralsius. Maybe an expendable agent should investigate.

The Mr. LeThuys: "This hope and redemption business is a contemptible lie which steals from us many minds who would otherwise turn to nihilism; make sure these idiots find whatever they want and get off the island as quickly as possible."

The Movers: "You know, this kind of expedition is just the sort of thing those other Movers in the other group might cook up just to — just to — well, it's not immediately obvious what they're up to, which just goes to prove their fingerprints are all over it. Better put a watch on the scheming bastards..."

The Neutralizers: "The readings on the mystic energy indicators have been going off the scale ever since the expedition was announced. Just because it's not evil energy doesn't mean it won't be dangerous. Someone should go along to make sure things don't get out of hand — or figure out how to cover up the story if they do."

Otto's Men: "Mother Jehanne and the Reverend Joyce are just the kind of decent folks we need more of in this stinking town. Some of the boys would sure like to get their autographs for the kids, and keep an eye out for trouble."

Philosopher's Stone: Dr. Rambeau's sketchy far-out idea of the day is that religious ecstasy might be a trigger for paranormal abilities. If he sends a PC along, he'll get a bigger confirmation of his theory than he's bargained for...

Dr. Seversen: Her interest in the situation mirrors that of the Neutralizers, above.

Throckmorton operatives: "These people will bring moral control to the island. They must be pro-

TECTED. They must be persuaded to stay. They will become good Throckmortons. Everyone will become a good Throckmorton."

Not all of these groups actually sends agents along; these are presented as sample reasons to involve the PCs. Only Cheryl D'Aubainne and the Neutralizers definitely send GMCs if they have no PCs available. Depending on how many characters you want to juggle, they may remain entirely in the background. Top Neutralizer Islam Petri, for example, can unobtrusively observe the progress of the expedition in his role as reporter for *Al Amarja Today*. Cheryl's operative might get a job with the expedition as a driver and never appear in the storyline at all. If you find yourself needing either at a critical moment, they're there to intervene. Also, you may wish to include a mole from a conspiracy already hostile to one or more of the PCs, in order to add an extra conflict episode en route to the fissure.

The Ralsius Fissure

Your PCs might choose to look into the Ralsius Fissure on their own before joining with the main expedition. Here are some facts they might find from various sources. These are just guidelines for you to adapt to pre-existing sources your PCs might consult. For example, if they already know a mystic s— type, his or her powers don't necessarily like the one speaking in the description below. Don't read these out — use them as examples and alter them to fit.

Any acquaintance of Sir Arthur Compton's:

"Compton has a small summer villa on the side of Mt. Ralsius; his lands include the Fissure. Years back he became convinced that there was something magical about the site, and he wasted a whole summer doing various experiments and séances. Nothing came of it. It's just another hole in the wall, no more magical than my socks."

Contact within a particular conspiracy: A good source in any of the camps mentioned in the previous section can hint at its concerns regarding the Fissure or Mother Jehanne's visit.

Man on the street: "Fissure? Is that like *Fisher King*? That was a really good movie, wasn't it?"

Mystic s— type: "It's very strange. The world usually has a background radiation of magical energy — everything and everybody, from this table to your own body, has a mystic field, usually quite faint, around it. But lately the mountain

seems to have no mystic field at all — nothing readable by my mystic senses. Divinations in reference to the mountain reveal nothing — cards come up in an unreadable jumble, the ouija board won't move an inch, and the I Ching keeps telling us not to ask stupid questions. It's like there's something going on our powers won't let us touch.

“Compton is involved somehow? I advise you to have nothing to do with him. Stay away from him. He's bad juju. Very bad juju.”

Religious figure (without fringe powers): “It's the kind of cave that neolithic man would have used as a shrine in prehistoric times; Europe is just dotted with them. It's not really my field, but I shouldn't think there's much remarkable about this particular cave.”

Religious figure (with fringe powers): “Perhaps I shouldn't tell you this — though I'm not sure why I feel this reluctance, but — well, I've said too much now, haven't I, I can't exactly — it's just been figuring in my dreams quite a bit lately, which is odd because I haven't dreamt about it before — not that I can remember anyway — but I find myself in waking hours now, staring at the volcano, just daydreaming away. Very peculiar.”



Art by Laura Cabral

University library: The Fissure was excavated in 1839 by the archaeologist Lord Preston Compton (yes, an ancestor) who claimed it was a holy site of early tribal man. He reported the presence of cave paintings and apparently hauled away a pile of stone artifacts. No one knows what happened to his find. Lord Compton was subsequently regarded as a crank at best and a fraud at worst by the scientific community of the time.

Preparation for the Trip

Justin and Jeremiah Joyce are the first to arrive in the Edge; they give an interview to Eden Verdicchio of AATV News during which they indicate that they're looking to hire a few local folks as haulers and bodyguards during the short trip to the Fissure. Jeremiah asks potential hirees to leave a message for him at Cesar's Hotel, where the two are staying. He specifies that they're offering no more than an honorarium of \$100 per person for the entire visit, as Mother Jehanne expects folks to volunteer in the name of world harmony. Callers to the hotel will be told to gather in the hotel's Scipio Room (a conference hall) at 8 am the next morning. Jeremiah expects to be deluged with nut cases and Mother Jehanne groupies, and wishes he could just hire a few uninterested professionals. Accordingly, he dismisses anyone who seems too fervent, which is exactly contrary to Jehanne's desires. Almost all of the assembled group fails to meet his standards of calmness, except for any GMC moles you wish to plant in the expedition. PCs who impress him as competent and rational are also accepted.

Ministering to the Poor

The next day, Jehanne and Husaini arrive. Jehanne and the Rev. Joyce (accompanied by their respective assistants) make a public appearance in the sixth layer of the Garbage Men's domain. They are there to “minister to the poor” which essentially means a receiving line in which the meekest and most bedraggled of the Edge's inhabitants can, for a few moments, touch the hands of the two spiritual leaders and exchange a word or two.

Scrounge and Theologia Okton are present, as is a thoroughly-armed Peace Force squad. From the press, only Verdicchio and a few print reporters are present; Monique D'Aubainne has given orders to Customs and Immigration to hold up the sizeable world media contingent until Mother Jehanne is off the island. She

doesn't want her domain to get too high a profile, and figures that irritating hundreds of arrogant newsmen is an excellent road to obscurity.

If all the PCs have already gotten assigned to the group, this scene may pass without incident. It becomes simply an opportunity to introduce the main characters of the story (with the exception of Husaini, who has remains on the expedition's bus — which tells the players something about him as well).

If any group members failed to impress Jeremiah, stage an incident here that gives them a chance to prove themselves directly to Mother Jehanne. You may be tempted to let this happen anyway, to provide a bit of action. Be warned — this is a volatile situation, and if the PCs mess up, a riot and Peace Force massacre could ensue. Don't run this bit gratuitously.

An argument breaks out between Theologia Okton and the ranking Peace Force officer; she insists that her guards have jurisdiction to be the security detail. The Peace Forcer attempts to assert his authority without causing a scene, but Theologia refuses to be reasonable. As a result, neither of the two competing security detachments is paying attention when a maniac suddenly bursts from the receiving line and bursts towards Mother Jehanne with a sharpened screwdriver. Fortunately, the unattached PCs find themselves between Jehanne and her assailant. If they take him out, she is sufficiently impressed to ask them to be her honor guards for the duration of her visit. If the PCs fail to handle him, he'll go down in a rain of Peace Force bullets before reaching Jehanne. However, half a dozen Garbage Men are wounded by stray gunfire. If the PCs manage to injure a Garbage Man while trying to take Moorhouse out, they react like hornets whose nests have been disturbed and charge mindlessly towards Jehanne and Joyce. The Peace Force opens fire, and half a dozen people are killed. In the case of a massacre, only mild reports of a slight disturbance surface the next day in the local media.

Apocalypse Moorhouse

Maniac

For years Mother Jehanne has been beaming messages from Jimi Hendrix into the fillings of Apocalypse's teeth. He came to Al Amarja to escape her, his mom, and the other CIA members, aliens and vampires who have a world conspiracy set up to ruin his life and prevent him from winning the true love of his spiritual twin, Kathie Lee Gifford. Or so he thinks.

Apocalypse suffers from schizophrenia. During a bout of relative sanity he made it past Customs and

Immigration; now he's a street person just trying to survive in a world of hostile conspiracies. Normally he's a pretty peaceful soul, but the physical presence of his nemesis right in his own backyard is too much for him — he sees his attack as self defense, pure and simple.

Scottish-American man, age 29, 170 cm, 65 kg, long matted hair, several layers of dirt, ratty beard, very unpleasant smell.

Languages: English

Attacks: 3 dice with penalty die, X2 damage (sharpened screwdriver)

Defense: 2 dice with penalty die

Hit Points: 22 (frenzied state), 14 (calm state)

Traits

Street Survival, 3 dice — Despite the fact that he lives in his own little alternate world, Apocalypse is functional enough to scrounge enough food to eat and to escape when violent types come after him. (Obviously a veteran street nomad.)

Schizophrenic, flaw — Apocalypse is ruled by fear of his mother — who wants to see him hospitalized and treated — and a variety of fantasized enemies who represent the mental health system. He may, at your discretion, be sensitive to real fringe events and ideas circulating in Al Amarja. For example, if questioned after the event, he may be able to voice a vague dread of the volcano and predict that Mother Jehanne is about to turn into a monster. As soon as he starts to make sense he lapses back into his private hell, accusing Regis Philbin of being a demon, or whatever. (Babbles paranoid nonsense.)

Act Two: The Journey

With the PCs on board, the pilgrimage to the Fissure is ready to begin. This is not a major trip; the site is only about 8 km from D'Aubainne International Airport. But Mother Jehanne has declared that it must be made on foot, because that's what she saw in her vision. The Reverend Joyce likes the idea, too: It makes for better footage to show on his television program. Husaini finds the situation amusing; since all they're going to find are documents for his research, he thinks the walk improves the joke.

Mother Jehanne can barely walk at all, stretching what would be a short car ride into a several-day event. Jeremiah has arranged stopovers where the group can camp; at the last minute Jehanne demands that worshippers be allowed to gather at each stopover for prayer assemblies. Again, this suits Justin just fine and bemuses Husaini.

It also gives you plenty of opportunity to set up encounters with the principals of the group, and any added GMC moles within the party. The insight they gain into the three clerics' characters are vital to successful completion of the scenario later on. Players should also get to know the devotion/resentment dynamic in Jeremiah's relationship with Justin.

Rather than set out a series of canned encounters, we recommend that you first give the players a chance to decide how their characters interact with the expedition members. However, if they take a passive approach, you may wish to get the ball rolling by setting up scenes like these:

- Husaini, bored, seeks to engage the PCs in a debate on the corrupt values of the West, as typified by Al Amarja.
- Micheline develops a crush on a male PC.
- A PC overhears Jeremiah muttering bitterly when Justin is getting praise and attention.
- A demanding Mother Jehanne orders the PCs around, diverging sharply from her public image of humility and servitude.
- Justin approaches a PC who might be politically useful to him in the future and gives him the schmooze treatment.
- The enemy mole, if any, attempts to draw the PCs into conversation to determine just how much they know. The mole, a low-level operative, is not clever enough to do so without arousing suspicion.

Try to be vague about just how long the trip is supposed to take and how many prayer stopovers are on the schedule. This way you can control the pacing of the story, adding as much time as necessary to fit in the required character interaction. Conversely, as soon as you run out of material, you can declare that the group has reached its penultimate destination: the Compton villa.

Your objectives for this section are to subtly plant information about the three lead characters the PCs need to successfully resolve the final scene. They need to know that Justin is a sincere and caring fellow who puts compassion at the forefront of his theology. That Husaini is a man of rigorous logic, who sees his religion

as the source of ultimate certainty, the final word on everything. And that Jehanne is a rather irritable person, unlike her public image, and not a profound thinker on religious issues in any sense.

Dinner With the Devil

In order to travel to the Ralsius Fissure, Jeremiah naturally had to secure the agreement of the property owner, Sir Arthur Compton. He politely agreed, on the condition that he be permitted to host the group at dinner upon their arrival. Jeremiah did little homework on Compton, assuming from his title that he was a nice old wealthy English gentleman.

Possibly the PCs have told the expedition members otherwise on their way to the site; they'll appreciate the advance warning. But there's no way to cancel the event: Compton's cooperation remains tied to his promise of hospitality. He has also expressed the desire that the group should stay at his villa for the evening.

If the PCs have been hired on as security for the expedition, they may wish to contact Compton's head of security in advance. Compton looks after these matters himself, but doesn't wish to meet with anyone in advance, so he assigns the butler who manages his villa to pose as security chief should any such meeting be requested. Fowler assures the group that the villa is heavily secured, but refuses to supply specifics. He feigns insult as a professional if they press him for details. If the expedition wants access to the Fissure, they'll have to go along with Compton's approach to security.

Fowler

Compton Bennie

Fowler has been known by this single name for so long that he can't remember his given name. He can't remember doing anything but serving Compton. Every so often he thinks maybe there's a connection to his curious lack of identity and Compton's mystic — no, that doesn't make sense, does it? Couldn't be. Just forget it. Fowler is Fowler, loyal servant, and that's all there is to it.

Al Amarjan male, age 38, 175 cm, 80 kg, pencil-thin moustache, hair greying at temples, wears butler uniform.

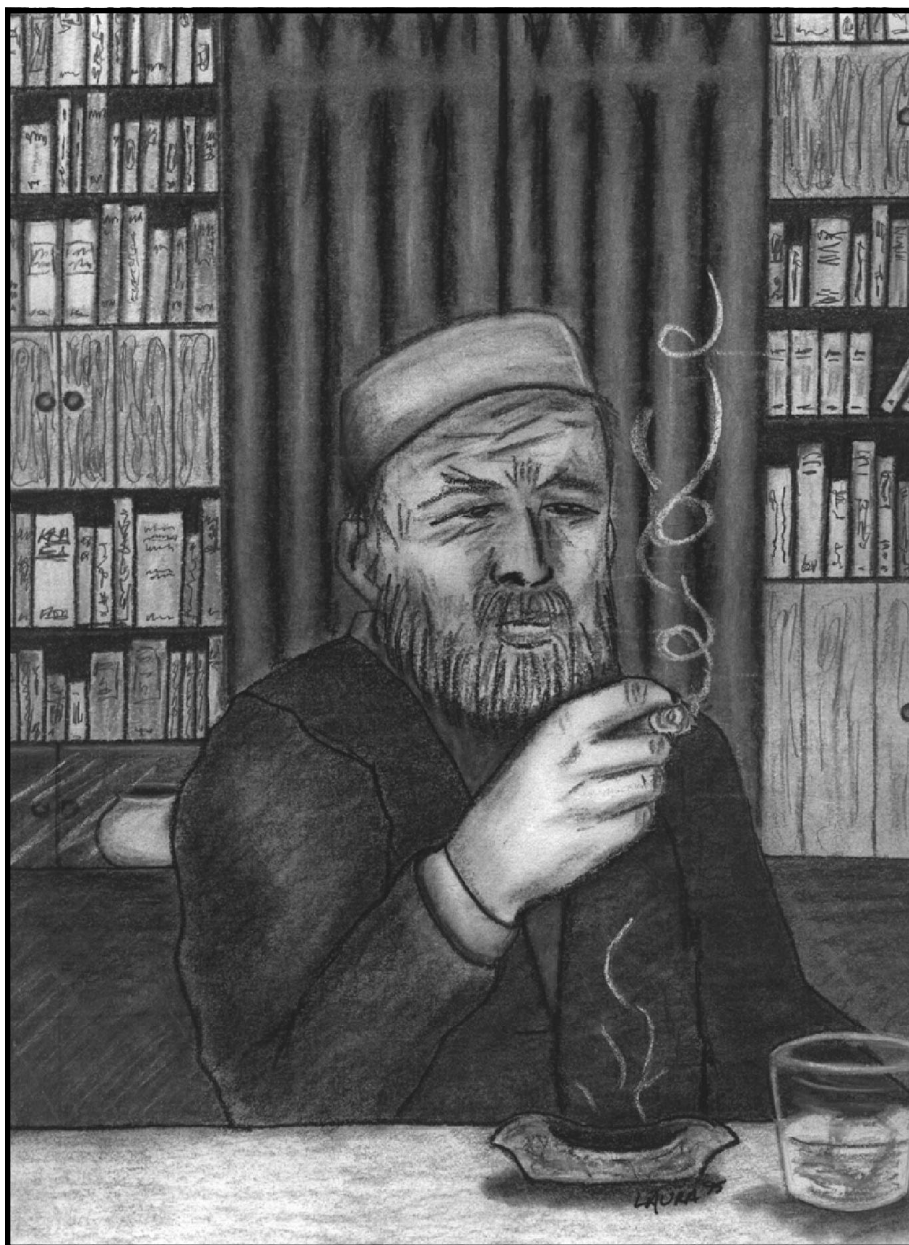
Traits

Butler, 4 dice — Knows Compton's tastes better than he knows his own; rarely disappoints his master. (Air of brisk efficiency.)

Guilt, flaw — He is loyal to Compton more out of inexplicable habit than anything else, and he worries that he's responsible for the evil things Compton does because he remains with the man. Still, he can't seem to break free, for some reason. (Sleeps poorly.)

By this point, the PCs might well have concluded that Compton is the villain of the piece. In fact, you should make sure they think he's very nasty and dangerous — don't let them get this far without hearing all sorts of dark rumors about him. Actually all Compton wants in this instance is to have an immense private joke at the expedition's expense. For years, suspecting that the Fissure held some sort of mystic power, he's scoured it with every variety of black divination magic known to man — and then some. Having found nothing, he's sure there's nothing to it. He's wrong; the Fissure is a vast battery of positive metaphysical energy which flares up every now and again. Since he's been trying to find its traces with utterly incompatible negative magic, he's come up with nothing.

His dinner is lavish — much too lavish for the tastes of his guests. He's ordered his chef to prepare the heaviest, richest dishes he can imagine. The spread is huge; everything is slathered in thick sauces and flavored with nasty liqueurs. Compton sits at the head of the table, devouring dish after dish with disgusting gusto. (He's the sort who can eat anything without gaining weight — maybe he diverts the extra calories into his magic pool.) Though he's capable of irreproachable table manners, he's tonight putting on a show of gross libertinism. Between slurps, face-



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wipings and belches, he baits his guests by proposing that Satan is really much more interesting than God. Even if you take the word of the Bible or Koran, he drools, the torment of eternal damnation sounds more tolerable than the unending, unthinking, unvarying bliss of heaven. What's the point of achieving salvation if it means surrendering your individuality to a glowing mass of unrelieved virtue?

Mother Jehanne seems rather nauseated by Compton's show of gluttony, but remains unfazed by his words. PCs who speak French discover why — Micheline is translating a completely different conversation! In Micheline's version, Compton is speaking

rather wittily about the antics of his maiden aunt's pet poodles. As neither Compton nor the other guests speak French, no one understands why Jehanne seems merely bored, not outraged, by his irreligion. When Compton asks Micheline for Jehanne's responses, she is noncommittal: "Mother Jehanne is not a theologian, and does not wish to entertain your question."

The Reverend Joyce is shocked to the core by Compton, and sputters his way through an attempt to defend virtue and salvation. The old pervert's arguments are so far from Joyce's frame of reference that he spends most of his time saying things like, "I just can't accept that," "No one can truly believe that argument," and so forth.

Encourage the players to get in on the action by having Compton direct questions to them, or have Joyce call on them for support. Although their relative success at rebutting Compton has no direct effect on the plot, this sequence does set up the theme for the overall adventure, so it would be best to make sure the PCs are more than bystanders. This scene should also reinforce the vital character traits of the three leads as described at the end of the previous section.

Husaini remains quiet during the early portions of the argument, but then smiles, lights up a cigar even more foul than the one Compton has begun to smoke, and enters into a razor-sharp dissection of his statements based on their historical accuracy. You don't have to play this out as dialogue; instead, describe it in summary: "Then the two of them dive into an incredibly technical argument that seems to be based on age estimates of certain Babylonian documents. Husaini seems to be winning." At the end of the discussion, Compton is left somewhat speechless. Husaini and Compton smile sharply at one another, like two old warriors admiring the skills of their blood foes.

The Mole Strikes — Maybe

If you have chosen to add the enemy mole subplot to this story, now is the time to spring it. The expedition members are assigned guest rooms — Compton's villa is comprised almost entirely of them, as it's mostly used for his notorious multi-day parties. With everyone else asleep, the mole makes his move.

Perhaps he is only contacting his headquarters for instructions with a secret radio set — the PCs can catch him in the act and expose him.

Or he can get violent, making a move either against an expedition member (if the group he serves is somehow threatened by the idea of the group reaching the Ralsius Fissure) or a PC. The latter is more interesting and more likely — chances are the conspiracy thinks that their old foes are trying to get some advantage to use against them.

If things are already moving along nicely, you may decide to leave this episode out. Even if you've already placed a mole in the camp, he might just watch the proceedings, report to base, and do nothing. Maybe he can pop up as a PC antagonist in a later adventure.

If the PCs themselves represent an evil conspiracy, they may try to get orders. They'll be told to keep watching and to avoid doing anything to stir the boat until more becomes clear — i.e. when the three reach the fissure.

If some PCs are in a conspiracy that's acting against the interests of other PCs, all bets are off. If your campaign is already this complicated, you're no doubt used to dealing with it by now.

Sneaking to the Fissure

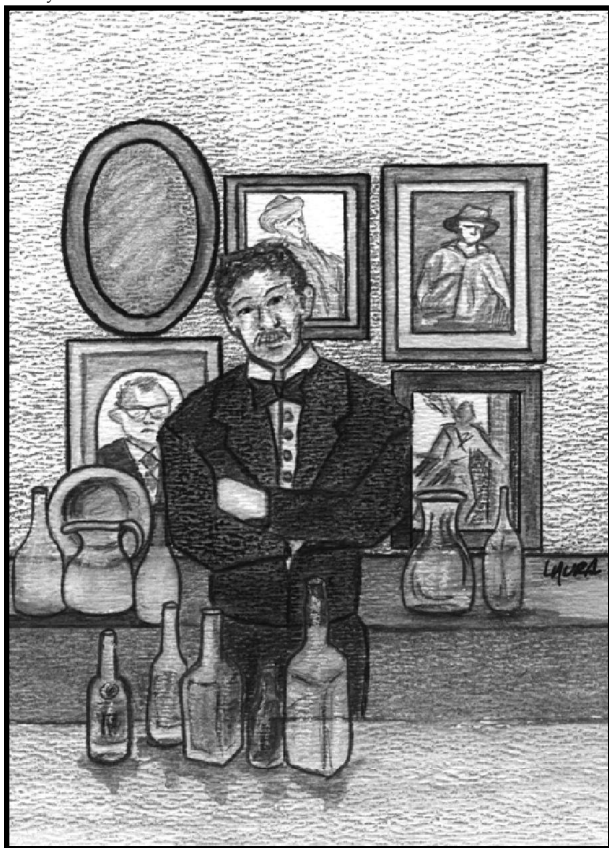
Some PCs may wish to visit the Fissure ahead of time. Since the build-up of positive energy won't occur until morning, all they find at the Fissure is an empty cave.

Compton has spy devices in each room — a camera with a tiny fibre-optic lens, microphones, and alarms on the barred windows. If he already has an antagonistic relationship with some of the PCs, he monitors their actions from his private security room. Whether he's watching or not, he doesn't care if the group makes a private foray to the Fissure and makes no move to stop them. The PCs don't know that, though, and may be unnerved by the security.

The Fissure At Last

In the morning, the group prepares to set out for the Fissure. Jeremiah supervises the camera crew's preparations, as well as the PCs' packing of gear. He makes it clear that the PCs are to let the three religious figures reach the Fissure first; anything else would be a grave show of disrespect for them. He seems quite agitated, perspiring heavily and muttering under his breath. If approached by a party member, he'll blurt out a comment about Compton's dinner talk the previous night:

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“He’s wrong, he’s wrong, everyone knows he’s wrong, you know I know he’s wrong, that-that-that’s the kind of doubt that we just can’t — you know I know, don’t you? That’s sick. That’s just so sick. We can’t allow it. You know I — you trust me, don’t you?”

Compton’s talk — and a bout of dramatic indigestion from the rich food — has reawakened Jeremiah’s deeply-rooted sense of doubt, and his guilt about that doubt.

It takes little time for the group to get ready. The fissure is at the end of a steep, but paved, walkway. (Compton had the path covered with asphalt several years ago at the height of his mania to unlock the fissure’s secret.) The Reverend Joyce and Karim Husaini each take one of Mother Jehanne’s arms as they take the lead along the pathway. Behind them is a small entourage — the PCs plus any other GMC moles or hangers-on, Compton and a couple of his bennies, Jeremiah and his camera crew, and Micheline.

When the three get within 40m of the Fissure, there is a loud pop. A beam of white light, as bright as burning magnesium, bursts from the crack in the rock. An involuntary gasp shudders through the entourage

as they shield their eyes. The TV crew’s equipment begins to short out, spewing out sparks and smoke.

Compton looks around in puzzlement: “What’s going on? What are you all looking at? I can’t see anything.”

The Fissure has reached its peak of positive metaphysical energy. Compton, attuned to dark energy for so many years, can’t even see it. But everyone else can — it’s positively blinding. The energy of the Fissure has attracted three highly spiritual beings to it; now it yearns for release, for dispersal.

Compton shakes one of his bennies, who is shielding his eyes from the brightness: “What is it, Fowler? What are you seeing, damn it?”

“It’s beautiful,” Fowler replies, “so beautiful. And music, I hear music — I can’t describe it — don’t you hear it?”

Jeremiah Joyce throws his head back and screams to the heavens: “No! Nooooo! I am worthy! I am just as worthy as Justin! I do not doubt!”

Jeremiah is standing near the PCs. Tell the players he looks like he’s about to bolt for the Fissure. If they tackle him and pin him to the ground, they’ll be saving his life.

If not, he sprints towards the three, claws past them, knocking Jehanne to the ground. As his brother and Husaini help her to her feet, Jeremiah hurls himself into the burning light of the Fissure. A few seconds later, he stumbles out again, screaming in agony.

“No — no — not ready, I’m not ready, I swear I don’t doubt, I swear — “

There is a thunderclap, and Jeremiah dematerializes. Only his left foot, inside its fine leather shoe, remains. (Though no one likely has a chance to look at this point, there is no blood or even a wound — the skin on the top of the foot is sealed over, as if cauterized.)

The three have regained their footing and continue towards the Fissure, transfixed by the light.

“What happened to the brother?” Compton screams, shaking his bennie by the lapels.

“He was eaten — eaten by the light,” Fowler intones, rapturously.

“What light?” his master howls.

If the PCs try to keep the three from entering the fissure, they’re out of luck. Even Mother Jehanne is

now possessed by the strength of ten men — she tosses aside anyone attempting to restrain her. (If the PCs don't try to stop her, Micheline does — and gets tossed into a nearby juniper bush for her troubles.)

The three enter the Fissure, vanishing from view. Moments later, there is a whooshing noise. The light disappears. The Fissure has found its vessels. Mother Jehanne, Karim Husaini and Justin Joyce emerge from the Fissure, looking subtly changed. There is a faint yellow nimbus surrounding each of them. Jehanne's stoop and weakened, tentative walk are gone — now she strides down the pathway like a strong young woman.

Fowler breaks from Compton's grasp and runs up the pathway, where he throws himself at Husaini's feet.

"Give me the Light," Fowler whimpers, "I dream of the Light."

"Then you shall have the Light," Husaini says, sounding not at all like his normal, sardonic self. He reaches forward and closes Fowler's eyelids with a light touch of his fingertips. Fowler falls backwards and lies on the asphalt, unmoving.

"The City," the Reverend speaks. "The City needs the Light."

"The City dreams of the Light," responds Jehanne, in an equally expressionless manner.

"The Light shall go to the City," chants Husaini.

The three point south, towards the Edge. Instantly they are transformed into comets of radiance, which rocket towards their destination.

Compton rushes to Fowler's side, turning him over. "Fowler! Fowler! What the hell is wrong with you?"

"The Light," Fowler replies. In fact, this is now all Fowler can say. He has a goofy, beatific smile on his face; every so often a bit of spittle dribbles down his chin. He has been granted permanent Heaven on earth by the Fissure's pure energy. He's happy in his own little world, but as far as anyone else is concerned he's now a vegetable.



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Act Three: Aftermath

Give the PCs a little while to theorize about what has happened. They ought to be able to figure out roughly what the Fissure energy is, and the fact that it's a threat to the city — if the three bliss out even a small proportion of the population as they have Fowler, the results will be disastrous.

If the PCs seem stumped, Compton figures it out:

"My sweet Satan, I've been a fool. Well, not a fool really, but factually mistaken in this one particular instance. I've been searching the Fissure all along for regular neutral or even black metaphysical energy — but this is pure holiness, which I couldn't see if it bit me on the leg.

"That energy has been building and building, seeking release — so it psychically summoned those three, the rare types spiritually pure enough to contain it without being blown to bits like that poor idiot brother of Joyce's. Now the energy is going to dissipate by spreading — those three are a contagious plague of mindless, drooling, destructive sanctity — and they're headed straight for the Edge! We've got to stop them! Good thing I've got my helicopter up at the villa!"

He looks at the PCs: "I don't know exactly who you are, but I don't think you're total idiots. Come with me!"

The Limitations of Air Power

Cut to: Compton and PCs in his private helicopter. The comet-like holy beings are still rocketing towards the Edge. Compton is on the radio, shouting at the Democratic Guard Air Command:

"Three mystic s— bogeys heading right towards — you're on it? Well, what are you waiting for, shoot the &@\$%#@#\$\$%\$#s down!"

As if on cue, two DGAC MiG fighter jets scream out of the sky towards the sacred comets. They fire air-to-air missiles, which simply vanish at the moment of impact. A beam of light flashes from the comets towards the jets. They're transformed into chariots of

rose petals, which peel off towards the sun. The pilots bail out, their parachutes drifting them to safety.

“Beelzebub’s buboes!” curses Compton. “Well, that’s it for conventional weaponry — if they shrug off missiles, bullets won’t do us much good. And if I went up against them with black magic they’d boil me alive. I don’t suppose you have any ideas?”

The Divine Plaza of Flowers

Compton pilots the copter to a landing on top of the Trumpet Cinema in the Plaza of Flowers. A huge smoking crater occupies the space formerly held by the abstract statue in the middle of the plaza. In the crater are three luminous humanoid figures, still vaguely recognizable as Husaini, Lefebure, and Joyce. Traffic has stopped dead in the circle. The odd jitney horn honks, but most people are out of their vehicles, staring at the incredible scene. The glowing beings are reassembling the statue their landing has just demolished. The new statue rises from the crater, growing like a plant in a time-lapse film. Where before it was twisted, rusting metal, now it is multi-coloured glass. It builds itself towards the heavens, sprouting towers, arches, buttresses, minarets. It begins to pulse, as its thousands of tiny panes of stained glass shift hue. The surface of the statue seems to dance.

A Peace Force squad ventures tentatively into the crater; the former Jehanne turns towards them, smiling and holding out arms of welcome. Most of the cops turn and run, but one of them pulls the trigger of his heavy assault rifle. Instead of firing bullets, his gun weeps. He turns and runs too.

A few more officers stumble forward and sink to their knees. The once-Joyce advances towards them, brushes their eyelids closed, and shuttles them into eternal earthly bliss. Husaini levitates from the crater and lands on the ATM machine. He beckons the nearby Martians to approach. A line of semi-dazed citizenry forms; they are ready to receive his permanent blessing. Jehanne and Joyce seem ready to “minister” to the crowd as well.

At this point, game time and real time should be roughly equivalent: the PCs are either conferring amongst themselves or talking to the three (see below). For every five minutes, unless interrupted, another ten citizens are blissed out. This is a little on the slow side, because both blesser and supplicant like to draw out the moment of ecstatic contact.

It’s difficult to impede the supplicants through physical restraint; if a PC grapples one, the next in line just steps around him and heads to be blessed. There is, however, plenty of tear gas in the abandoned Peace Force vehicles. If the PCs know or can figure out how to fire the tear gas grenades into the crowd of waiting penitents, they can disperse the lineups temporarily, and prevent more people from flooding into the square. Ultimately the desire to be blessed outweighs the need to avoid the gas in these citizens, though; whenever the players seem to be dithering or bogging down in their discussion of what to do, tell them that more supplicants are flooding towards Jehanne and company.

It should be clear that no physical force is going to stop these three; instead, the PCs have to talk them down.

Talking to the Vessels

At first, all of the three react the same way to being approached and called by name:

“I am no longer the one you name. I am now of the Godhead. Step forward and receive your bliss.”

But each of them still maintains a degree of personal consciousness beneath their divine veneers. PCs who keep at them can get them to admit their human identities. They can do this by asking questions like, “who are you now then?” or “who were you before you were of the Godhead?” or “what do you mean by Godhead?” The three actually have no idea what is happening to them; once they start to think the process of turning them human again has begun.

However, once they’ve admitted their true identities, convincing them to renounce the positive metaphysical energy requires a separate strategy for each. Examples follow; if the PCs come up with an unlisted approach that seems credible, allow it.

Husaini responds to intellectual argument. In order to persuade him back into humanity, the PCs must remind him that there’s no reference to anything like this in the Koran — and if Mohammed didn’t reveal it to the world as prophecy, it cannot truly be of Allah, and must therefore be an illusion. Husaini responds by evasion, quoting various obscure texts (feel free to make them up, unless you have any Islamic scholars in the room) to prove that what has happened to him was somehow foretold somewhere in the Moslem canon, and is therefore true and good and acceptable. But in his heart, he knows this is not so. When he finally runs out of argument, the positive

energy snaps out of him like ball lightning, whooshes across the plaza, and sets fire to *A Woman's Touch*.

One way to disarm Jehanne's holy energy would be to bait her; she may be transformed, but she's still cranky and demanding at heart. PCs who insult or tease her, or in any way compromise her sense of dignity, fall victim to righteous blasts of positive energy. (She projects energy blasts at 2 dice; they're not as dangerous as they look, as holy energy isn't meant to be used as a weapon.) Once she's fully aroused into bolt-tossing fury, another PC can remind her that this isn't exactly the sort of humble, self-effacing devotion to God her name is supposed to stand for. If the PCs thought to bring Micheline along with them in Compton's helicopter, she could be of help here. When Jehanne rejects the energy force, it turns into a glowing liquid, spilling out of the palms of her hands onto the pavement, where it leaks away into the sewer system and is eventually washed out to sea.

Sweet-tempered, nurturing Justin turns out to be the hardest to crack. He truly believes himself worthy of the mantle of celestial power that's been placed upon him. For the others, the instant, unearned gift of total happiness on earth is a distortion of their true beliefs. But this is what Justin has been selling to his TV congregation all along — the pursuit of personal happiness as the ultimate religious goal. One way to approach him would not be through his beliefs, but through his brother. Doesn't he remember that the person closest to him in all the world was just a few minutes ago reduced to atoms by the very same power he now wields? Justin initially resists this line of questioning. If pressed, he says something like "sadly, he was not worthy to bear this mantle." But eventually the contradiction between the impersonal destructiveness of the positive energy and the hazy softness of his favored approach to the Lord is his vulnerability if the PCs exploit it. When he returns to humanity, his energy is dissipated into TV waves; all across the world, regular broadcasts are interrupted by an image of Justin and Jeremiah as young boys, playing catch in their backyard.

Anyone who helps talk down the three from their divine state gets an extra die for their experience pool, above and beyond any other experience awards for session play.

Denouement

Once they shed their supernatural powers, the three are quickly hustled away by Democratic Bureau

of Investigation officers. They're quietly transported off the island.

If the PCs are seen to have saved the Edge from the threat of spiritual enlightenment, they are discreetly approached by an advisor to Monique D'Aubainne and asked what sort of rewards they'd be interested in. No reasonable request will be refused — though you of course get to define "reasonable." The clever will ask for future undefined favors, which will be useful in further adventures.

The energy in the Fissure is dissipated for now, but if you want to set up a sequel, you could have it come back surprisingly early — possibly because it was dispersed to too few bliss recipients.

Sir Arthur might be favorably disposed towards the group in the future, which is possibly a mixed blessing.

Justin Joyce feels he owes the group a favor, too; without Jeremiah he'll have his hands full keeping his TV empire going. But he'll be back someday... Karim Husaini might return up in a less dramatic situation; for example, if the group ever needs an expert on Islamic history, he'll be happy to help. Mother Jehanne wishes to forget the whole incident, and wants nothing to do with the party.

Blissed-out individuals remain that way until death, which might lead to a sequel. Wealthy foreigners hire a group member or two to track down their young son or daughter, who disappeared while on vacation on the island. It turns out not only that individual was blissed out, but has been kidnapped by organ bootleggers, who are removing bits and pieces of a number of victims who are too blissed out to mind. The PCs must then rescue what's left of their quarry from this vicious gang.

Intersections

- One or more members of the Roentgen Operatives team from *New Faces* might appear either as an expedition volunteer (if the PCs haven't met them before) or posing as members of the local media. They've been assigned by their shadowy corporation, whose mystic operatives have noticed the strange absence of usual magical energy around Mt. Ralsius and want it checked out. If the PCs know the Roentgen gang and blow their cover, the surprised operatives retreat, not having expected to run into them.

- If the PCs have befriended Kralepok from *Air-waves*, he finds the emanations from the volcano disturbing, as they disrupt his ability to remain in this dimension. He hires the PCs to join the expedition, offering to pay them out of the station's production budget.
- A sequel to both this adventure and *Unauthorized Broadcast* could consist of a nefarious plot to narcotize the minds of the populace — a LeThuy or misguided Sommerite slips some broadcast to a blissed-out victim, who then beams her waves of unadulterated spiritual joy within a wide radius, shutting down everybody in the area as they join in her transcendent state. The sabotage/carnage factor would be impressive, with drivers losing control of their cars as they slip into nirvana, and so forth.
- The psychiatric facility described in *Welcome to Sylvan Pines* is a likely destination for some of the blissed-out; it might even be home to the organ bootlegging plot mentioned above.
- Roderick Reis, from *Wildest Dreams* is another likely suspect for the head of an illegal organ ring. He might also kidnap a blissed-out person for an experiment with tulpas — what happens when a person who thinks they're seeing God imprints on a tulpa? Does the Dreamweb from a God-tulpa create more intense nightmare — or even a drug with a pleasurable, rather than dark, kick?
- The Cut-Ups from *The Weather the Cuckoo Likes* are appalled when they see the blissed-out; it looks like the final result of severe Control Addiction to them. The Really Quite Angry Kid sets about trying to construct a machine to bring them back to reality; unfortunately a crucial ingredient of the device is the pancreas of a sowlsa beast from the plane of Gnerust, from which she has been banished. The PCs are sent to face the hazards of this strange dimension in order to get the pancreas and save those who have fallen into the trap of premature nirvana.

Long-term Aftermath

As events get back to normal on Al Amarja, the various groups on the island try to fit these strange events into their belief systems. Many "true explanations" begin to circulate, as follows:

The Government: The major media carry the official party line the next day — the events in the Plaza of

Flowers were mass hysteria stimulated by the "agitation of fascist disinformation agents." Few people believe this — the government certainly doesn't — but it feels better to have an Official Lie in place anyway. Forensic metaphysicians from the Center for Paranormal Control are dispatched to the Fissure (with Compton's consent) to scour it for evidence of mystical disturbance. They have no more success than Compton, causing concerns in government circles about the Ralsius Incident's possible recurrence.

Sir Arthur Compton: Compton, thinking about it later, refuses to admit that there is a form of magical energy that isn't subject to the control of the dedicated black magician. He hits the arcane texts in order to find a key to the mastery of positive energy, determined not to be taken by surprise next time.

Cut-Ups: The Cut-Ups attribute the blissing effect to the addictive Control properties of organized religion. As indicated above, the Really Quite Angry Kid decides to try to create a machine to reverse the incident's effects on the blissed out.

Cheryl D'Aubainne: Cheryl is the most willing of Al Amarja's prominent figures to accept events at face value. She formulates a theory: Jehanne, Joyce and Husaini, in the course of attaining spiritual attunement, developed certain parts of their brains and bodies — much as an athlete develops superb muscle tone. This made them strong enough to hold the power, and also made them receptive to its paranormal call; they shared a harmonic frequency of some form. Jeremiah, on the other hand, was flatly inadequate in this regard, because he did not have a strong and enduring faith (i.e., the right and well-conditioned neural pathways), so he got fried. Although glad that her people didn't go through the stress of being called to the volcano, she is at the same time troubled that no one had the appropriate neural pathways developed. She begins a project to study Fissure events, and is willing to pay firsthand witnesses (such as the PCs) for their observations of the three affected religious figures before and after the positive energy eruption. This could serve merely as a bit of extra pocket money for the PCs, or as a lead-in to other assignments from Cheryl.

Earthlings: Dr. Paolo Montserrat, unable to deal with the idea that too much goodness can be dangerous, decides that the whole thing was some kind of weird Hermetic Mover plot to discredit world religion, and in particular sully the image of Mother Jehanne, the

personification of self-sacrificing compassion herself. He launches an investigation to expose the Mover role in the incident; his operatives may give the PCs a hard time as they probe into their doings in an effort to determine whether or not they have Hermetic connections.

Sommerites: The followers of Karla Sommers conclude that the three failed to contain their mystical energy because, although they were spiritually aware, they didn't know their Karla Sommers lyrics well enough, especially her 1989 single "Be Your Own Nirvana." The Sommerites set up an organization of devotees to meditate on the deep inner meaning of that song, and also try to buy the Fissure property from Compton in preparation for the next eruption. Compton refuses to sell but enters into lengthy negotiations just to tie up their resources.

Kergillians: The Kergillians wrongly conclude that the Ralsius Three were possessed by extradimensional entities belonging to the same race as Krlepok from *Airwaves*. They redouble their defenses against such beings, not suspecting that one of them is running the island's new TV station.

The Mr. Le Thuys: "Hmmm, everyone touched by these religious figures has become a mindless, drooling idiot, a complete vegetable. Maybe this hope and redemption business isn't so bad after all..."

The Movers: Most Mover cells become convinced that the Ralsius Incident is a Hermetic Mover plot, and move to rearrange their organizations to defend against the Hermetics' growing power. Except, of course, the Hermetics, who think the Earthlings are behind it and that the PCs must be Earthling operatives. Disinformation or possibly even mystic assassination plans might accordingly be made against the PCs.

The Neutralizers: The Neutralizers independently come to Cheryl D'Aubainne's conclusions about the incident, but publicly they foster the government's line denying that it's a paranormal event. Islam Petri is more than happy to print their nonsense — in fact, he punches it up to make it more credible. Neutralizer cloaks set about discrediting any accounts that attempt to describe it accurately, and may show up to harass PCs who speak about it in front of an audience.

Philosopher's Stone : Dr. Rambeau has several of the blissed-out kidnapped for study. He bombards them with a number of rays and chemicals in an attempt to turn their religious ecstasy into paranormal abilities.

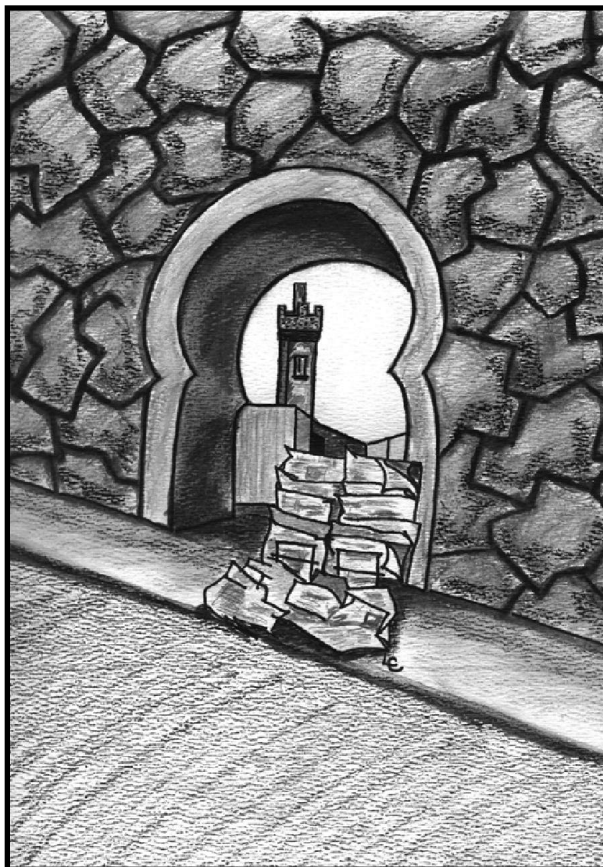
Ironically, a few do develop fringe powers, but don't use them, because they're busy experiencing nirvana. The others just get cancer.

Dr. Seversen: Surprised by the eruption of energy, Dr. Seversen begins a project to design a machine capable of identifying and distinguishing all types of unknown energy waves. This may prove an early means of detecting the Throckmorton device.

Throckmorton Operatives: "These people did not bring moral control and order to the island. They brought chaos and confusion. They must be destroyed. They must not return. They will become good Throckmortons. Everyone will become a good Throckmorton."

The Statue

The reformed version of the Flowers statue remains after the positive energies are dissipated. But within days almost all of its exquisite panes of stained glass have been shattered by vandals. The reworked metal begins to rust with the first heavy rainfall, and soon the thing looks as ugly and forlorn as the one that came before it.



Art by Laura Cabral

The Hive

Overview

The Al Amarjan hiveroach is in fact telepathic, with each roach partaking in a group pool of perception. Two men have entered a psychic rapport with the Hive group mind. One is an entomologist named Gil Wheeler, who quickly realized the potential of psychic roaches as spies. The other calls himself “the Exterminator” and is dedicated to the eradication of the Hive intelligence.

Wheeler has formed “Gold D Plumbers” as a cover for a racket of blackmail and information trade. With him is a neurosurgeon named Marian Ross, who has attuned two more people to the Hivemind.

A gang leader called Split Malcomb suspects that there’s a new and potentially powerful data cartel on the island. He wants to expand his gang, the Fistheads, into blackmail, in addition to their usual shakedowns, rackets and pushing.

Finally, the Peace Force has also developed some suspicions about the Exterminator’s activities, and has assigned Lieutenant Bob Anderson to investigate.

The characters get caught in the middle, as characters will.

Timeline

This is the course that events will take, if they aren’t altered by the PCs. This timeline commences when the PCs get their first clue about the Hive’s existence (unless, of course, it’s one of these events that alerts them).

This timeline is very flexible; any action by the PCs could be enough to derail it or direct it onto another track. For instance, if they either (1) kill or subvert Anderson or (2) prevent the Exterminator from being captured or interrogated, they Peace Force would never find out about the Hive, and it would never fall into the hands of a Throckmorton operative. Take care to think through the repercussions of PC actions on all the parties involved.

Day 1

Wheeler breaks up with his lover, Alison White. Over recent months he’s become more distant, more secretive, and sometimes strangely disoriented. The more White tried to find out what was bothering him, the more he pushed her away. He became more paranoid, suspicious and distraught, until today, when he told her, “Things have changed, and I just can’t be with you any more. It’s all different, and it’ll only get worse. I want to end it before we hate each other.” White is confused and goes to Sad Mary’s to begin a three-day bender.

Meanwhile, two women associated with the Fistheads have rented an apartment across the street from the Gold D offices. They begin monitoring the Gold D storefront to see who goes in and out.

Days 2-3

Nothing significant happens.



BY GREGG STOLZE

Day 4

The Exterminator locates the princess under Gomez Reynard's house in the 'Burbs. Along with any PCs he's befriended, he shows up and tells Reynard that there's a huge colony of roaches under the house. Reynard is suspicious at first, but the Exterminator tells him to look under his basement steps. When Reynard does, he immediately agrees to help destroy the nest. If any PCs are with him, the Exterminator will post them at the ends of the princess's escape tunnels, while he goes in the front. If it's just him and Reynard, he'll plug the holes and go in.

Regardless, Wheeler senses it when the Exterminator arrives at Reynard's house. While the Exterminator is persuading Reynard, Wheeler is dispatching Larry, Knuck and Crowbar — the so-called "Gold D Plumbers." The plumbers arrive just as the Exterminator enters the princess's chamber. They go straight into the house, where they fight with Reynard and, eventually, the Exterminator. Wheeler simultaneously engages the Exterminator in psychic combat. Reynard's wife calls the Peace Force.

The fray ends with the princess dead and the Exterminator suffering from multiple bruises and severe head trauma. Reynard has his leg broken. The plumbers escape before the Peace Force arrives, but Larry has a dislocated shoulder and a snapped collarbone, while Knuck has three cracked ribs. When the Peace Force arrives, the officers take in the Exterminator in "for questioning."

Day 5

The Exterminator has yet to awaken and is in critical condition.

The Gold D cabal redoubles its efforts to hire protection. Wheeler tries to hire thugs at Sad Mary's, but has a slight freakout from Hive Psychosis. He begins staring wildly at any blondes and backs out, looking rapidly to the right and left.

The Fistheads note that Larry and Knuck don't show up for work. They drop a few bribes at Ahmed's Kwik Klinik and learn that there was some sort of combat the night before.

The Fistheads send a member called Punky to Sad Mary's to solicit investigators. Wheeler backs into Punky as he's leaving, screams and runs away. Punky dismisses him as "another burger who can't hold his 'shock.'"

Day 6

The Exterminator wakes up, but refuses to tell the Peace Force anything except, "I located a nest of roaches and wanted to get rid of them."

Gold D psychics Smythe and De Fleur, working together, attune themselves to the Hive Queen. They were originally attuned only to the University princess, through the surgery of Dr. Marian Ross.

Day 7

The Fistheads finally track down Larry and Knuck. A squad of six gang members, including Split himself, pays them a visit. Using nothing but a roll of duct tape and a book of matches, they persuade Larry and Knuck to tell them everything.

They next visit Wheeler, who is even quicker to come to an agreement with them. The Gold D cabal and the Fistheads agree to work together and split all profits from the Hive evenly. The Gold D will provide surveillance and money, while the Fistheads provide muscle and protection. Both sides are pleased with what they're getting, though neither is particularly impressed with their new partners.

Day 8

Dr. Nusbaum finds the time to visit the Exterminator, who is soon telling those nice Peace Force men everything he knows about the Hive. Sadly, he does not survive the interrogation. Anderson makes his final report on the Exterminator investigation (now closed) to his superior, Captain Ali Mukabar. Mukabar finds the idea about the psychic roaches strangely compelling.

The Fistheads begin to gear up for a sewer expedition — purchasing hip waders, gas masks, lanterns and two way radios.

Day 9

Guided by Wheeler, four Fistheads and Crowbar slog through the sewers. They retrieve the princess under Lifestylin' Taxidermy.

Day 10

The Peace Force starts searching the college for Wheeler — trashing his office, intimidating his



Art by Grey Thornberry

colleagues, hauling White in for questioning and offering rewards for tips about him. Wheeler, roach-warned, barely escapes in time. He has to abandon the princess he was keeping at the University. He convinces Ross to come with him, but can't reach his partner Niehaus in time. Niehaus is taken in for questioning.

The Peace Force offers money for information about Ross. Their investigations lead them to suspect Smythe and De Fleur, who flee to the Fistheads and Wheeler.

Day 11

Wheeler personally leads an expedition to get the Queen. He hurriedly flees to Skylla with three coolers of roaches to start a new colony. Smythe and De Fleur remain to help Split run the Edge Hive. As Wheeler takes the Queen out of range, their princess begins to show Queen traits.

Ali Mukabar gives Clyde Throckmorton a large grant to kill every roach in the Plaza of Gold and the Plaza of Arms.

Days 12-18

Clyde Throckmorton hires a lot of helpers and buys a lot of chemicals. His business booms.

Peace Force technicians begin widening the frequency of government-owned Seversons and White Thought Generators.

Day 19

Wheeler and Ross are captured trying to leave the island with the Queen and 40 kg of roaches. They were headed for Africa. Wheeler succeeds in totally divorcing his consciousness from his body, and remains free in the Hivemind. His body falls into a coma.

Ross cuts a deal with the Peace Force; they'll drop all charges and hire her to attune their officers to the Hive. She also reveals the involvement of the Fistheads. A reward is now offered for information about Malcomb, and a major Fisthead roundup begins.

When the Queen is returned to the Edge, the princess held by De Fleur and Smythe psychically battles her for control over the Hivemind. Aided by

the attuned humans, the princess wins. The Peace Force Queen refuses to eat and starts to die.

Day 20

Split's bodyguard Bushi tries to get some Fistheads to help him betray Malcomb. Instead, they warn Malcomb, who orders Bushi slain. Bushi kills one Fisthead and loses an eye as he escapes, swearing revenge on his former gang.

Day 21-22

Smythe, De Fleur and Split are constantly on the move, fleeing the Peace Force, while other gang members are rounded up or ruthlessly cut down while fleeing.

Day 23 onward

Equilibrium is reached. The Fistheads are destroyed as a gang, but Split, Punky, Smythe and De Fleur have a secure hiding place (GM discretion where, how or with whom) from which to scan through the roaches. They also possess the new Roach Queen of Al Amarja.

Ali Mukabar tells Throckmorton not to kill any more roaches, and Throckmorton convinces him to explain the Hive. A beautiful friendship begins between Throckmorton and Mukabar. Mukabar gets a lucky break and remains in control of the Peace Force's budding "Hive" department.

The Hivemind is still dominated by the now disembodied Wheeler, but Ross has begun producing Hive psychics for the Peace Force (who still have the princess they captured from Wheeler at the University). In addition to her position with the Peace Force, she is now a respected psychic researcher. Angela Reyes begins talking with her, in a professional relationship that will (in four years) result in Ross introducing Reyes to Throckmorton (whom Ross will have met through Mukabar).

Plot Hooks

There are a number of ways the PCs can become involved on Day 1.

- Gold D is hiring thugs. They want to expand their operations, and the loss of Hobart (see below) has them edgy about safety. If characters are

mercenaries, they could answer an ad and get hired as "protection." If so hired, they will soon receive a visit from Bushi and some Fistheads, offering to either (1) enlist the characters as spies or (2) show them what the insides of their bodies look like. This could also lead to a confrontation with the Exterminator. The job will, at first, consist of following the other three along on pick ups. If the characters distinguish themselves, they'll be assigned to discretely guard Ross, Niehaus, Wheeler, De Fleur or Smythe, any one of whom could be attacked by the Exterminator (or the Fistheads, if their investigation leads that far) at any time. The might eventually pick up bribes on their own, or be sent in to recover another princess.

- Dr. Ross is hiring psychics. She needs experimental subjects. If characters apply, they'll be subjected to a brain scan for psychic activity (*note*: any characters with an already active psi power will score high) as well as odd perception tests to see how well they can interpret bizarre sense data. If hired, they'll receive a visit from Bob Anderson, who will break into their apartment, plant drugs, threaten them with firearms and generally strongarm them into "doing their patriotic duty" (i.e. squealing on their employers).
- If the characters are new on the island, they might be particularly attractive to Drs. Ross and Wheeler. Perhaps they have bugs at the Terminal watching for burger who are outside the loop of conspiracies of the island.
- The Fistheads need investigators. Negotiations will be in a darkened room with an unknown employer (Split or Punky, hidden in shadows) to investigate the Gold D.
- The Exterminator might randomly pay a visit to any character, especially redheads or habitual red wearers. His strange behavior might lead to an investigation.
- Any conspiracy the characters are already involved in may ask them to investigate on behalf of a member who is being mysteriously spied on (this could be the lawyers, the investors, or the college administrator).
- The victims of Gold D might hire investigators and/or thugs to try and put some hurt on their blackmailers.
- Chester Polk, in roach form (See below, page 36), tries to communicate with the characters in order to get help.

- They run into Alison White while she's drowning her sorrows at Sad Mary's (or some other watering hole) and she complains about the mysterious behavior of her ex-lover.
- While pursuing the subterranean Agaras (see *New Faces* and the OTE Rulebook, page 103) the PCs run into the Exterminator trying to find a princess, or Gil Wheeler (on the same mission).
- Throckmorton operatives turn out to be especially susceptible to tinkering by Hive Psychics. The characters follow a Throckmorton operative (or operatives) and see him pester the hirsute De Fleur. They also see De Fleur "mind blast" him with roach perception. Their hopes for a new weapon against the operatives are complicated by De Fleur's reluctance to help.
- Throckmorton operatives attune to the Hive easily (though Clyde himself does not). The characters see an attuned Throckmorton operative get murdered by the Exterminator, and investigate.

Plot Development

There are three basic tracks the characters can take.

- **The Semi-Idealistic Track**: The Hive is good and useful, worthy of study, and if ethically questionable methods are used to fund this study, well, you can't make an omelette with whole eggs. The characters join Gold D, helping to fight off the Exterminator and the Fistheads, as well as taking care of the threat of Lt. Anderson.
- **The Totally Paranoid Track**: The Hive is a menace to humanity and should be completely eradicated. The characters join the Exterminator in gunning after princesses and, eventually, the Queen. If Gold D finds out, they'll probably forge an alliance with the Fistheads. Anderson can go either way in this scenario.
- **The Exploitation Track**: The Hive is potentially very lucrative, and there's no reason for the characters not to get rich. They could join Gold D, the Fistheads, or try to eliminate both and keep the only ones attuned to the Hive for themselves. In any event they'll face animosity from the Exterminator.

Additionally, the Hive could be a potent weapon against any conspiracy (messages can be passed through it, in addition to its obvious infiltration and investigation uses). The Movers, the Kergillians or

(especially) the Throckmorton Operatives would love to gain control of the Hive, and would hate anyone who had it when they didn't.

The Al Amarjan Hiveroach

Also known as the "thumbroach," the hiveroach is about the size of a thumbnail, six legged, shiny and black. It makes a audible crack and a slight bad smell when stepped on. A strange freak of hiveroach anatomy is that their heads, rather than being on the front of their body facing forwards, face back over their bodies. (This has led to a tired joke that "On Al Amarja, even the roaches are bass-ackwards.") They have long antennae, they're slow, they don't sting and generally don't seem very well adapted to survival.

This is where telepathy comes in. If one roach in the bedroom gets stepped on, the ones in the kitchen know the house owner is awake and going for a midnight snack.

There is a hierarchy to hiveroach nests. There are clusters near most buildings, eating garbage and sunning themselves on warm siding or concrete. This is what most people see of hiveroaches. Occasionally a long line of them, three abreast, will be seen trundling slowly along with bits of food clutched between their front legs, taking an offering to a princess or the Queen.

There are three remaining roach princesses in the Edge. A roach princess serves as a node in the telepathic communication net, as well as something of a "district coordinator." The princesses are fertile, and can be impregnated by drones. They prefer to be underground, as do the drones.

A hive princess is about six inches long, with a four inch wide disk body, a two inch thorax and an inch long head folded back on top of the thorax. The drones are milky white, and about two inches long.

When hiveroaches are first hatched, they are given milk from the princess. This milk contains RNA patterned on the psychic center of her brain, and serves to "tune" them to her. Only the Queen can receive information from any roach within her range. The princesses can only receive from those they themselves have fed.

The Queen is about eight inches long, and has a glossy red stripe on her back. Otherwise, she re-

sembles a princess. Like the princesses, she creates her own roaches. She, and only she, can make new princesses.

Outside the radius of a Queen or a princess, a solitary roach can survive for a while, but not for long. It has some survival behaviors, but the advantage of telepathy has been the basis of their success.

The natural enemy of the thumbroach is the Al Amarjan yellowworm. The yellowworm is actually a sort of flying centipede with a proboscis and about a thousand legs. Two inches long and yellow, it has a stinger that will give a human being a mosquito-like itch. The yellowworm is fast, reproduces prodigiously, is very resistant to poison, and thinks the thumbroach is delicious. It's basically got all the advantages the thumbroach missed, but no telepathy.

In combat against humans, the hiveroach is clearly outclassed — unless there are millions of them. Unfortunately for characters, that's exactly what there are in hive nests. That mild bad smell becomes much worse when you crush a hundred with each footstep (see Stench Combat, page 28).

The roaches will launch mass suicide attacks to defend their Queen or princess. A roach mass will do one point of damage for every kilogram that drops on characters or crawls up their legs, to a maximum of ten per round. This damage is not physical, but represents their ability to annoy, disgust, and impede the actions of characters. All damage from this is halved if the character has some air supply that covers the eyes and mouth, since that's the major distraction. If a character has enough roaches on him to reach one hit point, it means he has been immobilized and pulled down. If not pulled free of the roach mass, he'll eventually be smothered by roaches crawling in his nose and mouth, or up under his face mask.

Characters who stand still and try to brush off the roaches roll their speed. The score indicates how many kilos of roach mass they brushed off. Half that number is immediately added to their effective hit points, representing their increased ability to move. If they try to move and brush off roaches at the same time, they take a penalty die both on moving and brushing. Characters who ignore the roaches dropping on them and concentrate on getting free of the ones crawling up their legs and clinging to their feet can move normally.

Hive Telepathy

Those who have this skill can see through the eyes and hear through the ears of the pervasive island roaches. There is some distortion, but on a roll of 2 or better it can be sorted out. With a 4 or better, the telepath can command roaches (as many as are within a 10 meters radius of each other) to perform any action they're capable of, up to and including their own deaths. With a 7 or better the telepath can project into a human mind, and send it a stunning flood of insect thoughts and perceptions and thoughts. This only requires a 5 or better if the target is already attuned to the hive. A hive telepath always knows where the nearest princess is, Queen is, and as the location of all roaches within a radius of 100 meters.

There are two ways to get Hive Telepathy. The natural method is to spend a lot of time around roaches and hope. Those naturally attuned will key in to the Queen frequency, and be able to read and influence all roaches. The artificial method is to have roach milk injected into the psychic area of the brain. The subject of such an operation will only be attuned to the frequency of the source of the milk, be it princess or Queen.

Hive Telepathy and Defense Technology

Brain Loopers : The thumbroach is much too far down on the cognitive scale to have much to feed back; brain loopers have no effect on roaches. Furthermore, since the roach is broadcasting to the human reader (or the princess, or the Queen) the human is unaffected if out of the looper's area. The human may run into interference, but can get around it if he scans the Queen or princess that the roach spy is attuned to, instead of the individual spying roach.

Crystal Traps : Since the individual is not trying to alter anything the trap does not apply.

White Thought Generators : This device will make it harder for the roaches to communicate, but is not as effective as it is against humans. Since the roaches operate on a different "frequency" than human telepathy, the generator is not perfectly adjusted to block them. They function at about half efficiency: a one die device will be ignored, a two die generator will slow a roach and knock out

one of the senses broadcast — either smell, sight, or hearing. A three die generator will so baffle nearby roaches that they'll just wander in circles or stop until they starve (or, more likely, are stepped on).

Psychovores: The roaches are psychic, not astral.

Empties: The roaches are not magic.

Seversons: Seversons are affected like White Thought Generators. Note that either could easily be tuned to full effect by a technician who was aware of what the roaches were doing.

ISO: Going from frying a mammal brain to an insect brain is like going from making cars to boats. Some of the principles are the same, but it's very difficult. Halve all rolls right off the bat. Furthermore, considering that there are millions of "minds" per cluster, getting the leader is difficult unless you know what you're looking for. Even if you can target the leader (which would probably require both ISO and Hive Telepathy), a princess rolls 3 dice to defend. A Queen rolls 6 and will have all the princesses defending her.

Telekinesis, Pyrokinesis, Magic, or other physical attacks with nonphysical sources : The roaches are as vulnerable as any other target.

Hive Psychosis

Hive psychosis comes from the strain of contact with alien data and perceptions. The symptoms of a mild case include; attraction and obedience to redheads or people in dark red clothes, distrust or dislike towards blondes or those dressed in yellow, a preference for reclining postures with the weight on the back, a tendency to rub the ankles together, a wide eyed stare, and an tolerance for spoiling food.

Those in the most advanced states will actually move about on their backs, shake their heads around violently (in an attempt to simulate multi-faceted vision), lose bowel control, and click their tongues quickly. The adoration of redheads or red things will become intensified, usually involving offerings of offal smeared or balanced on the ankles. The fear of blondes or yellow objects will cause flight (still crawling on the back) and defecation.

Art by Grey Thornberry



Stench Combat

For one reason or another, there are several odors in this adventure so vile that they can actually affect the physical well-being of characters. The Brew, the smell of a roach lair, or of the Al Amarjan refuse sewers (remember, this is a Mediterranean country with lots of spicy food and few health codes...) can all cause loss of concentration, willpower, and lunch.

A scent attack is rolled, just as a normal physical attack is. The number of dice represents the vileness of the odor. A low score indicates that air currents dispersed most of it, while a high score indicates that it's particularly fetid today.

The characters roll against stench with toughness, resolve, or whatever else applies. If they have no appropriate trait, they roll 2 dice. They roll a penalty die for every die above two of perceptiveness they have. So, if Sadie the PC has 4 dice of perception and no other protection, she rolls four dice and takes the worst two. This is because the two dice of perceptiveness, above and beyond normal people, are making her more susceptible to this attack. A PC with a 3 dice in endurance and perception would roll four dice and take the worst three. This is because their ability to ignore the stench is great, but their sensitivity enhances the need to endure.

If characters roll higher than the stench, they can continue their actions normally. If they're lower, they take a penalty die on all actions until they get to clear air. If the characters fail a stench defense by 5 points, or if the stench roll is double theirs, they are additionally unable to act for 13 rounds (either puking or, in the case of the Brew, blind). If they fail by 10 points or more, or if the stench roll is three times theirs, they pass out for fifteen minutes, or until they get to fresh air (or until they die, for that matter).

If characters, once penalized by stench, are confronted with another stench or a greater dose of the same stench, they roll to defend again — only this time, with the penalty die. This could happen if the Exterminator shoots someone with Brew twice, if someone has spent 3 rounds crushing thumbroaches, if the characters crush roaches after being in the sewer, or if the Exterminator starts firing in an atmosphere already thick with bug scent. If a player who's already got the penalty die fails again, but not by 5 points or half the attack, they do not take an *additional* penalty die — but they will lose one round to puking or blindness.

Breathing through a surgical mask, using nose plugs or putting scented ointment on the upper lip will give a bonus die. A good filter gas mask will give an additional die. If the character has a complete air tank, such as a SCUBA, he rolls two extra dice. If he gets a 2, there's a leak and some scent gets in — but he still rolls an extra die.

GMCs and Factions

The Gold D Cabal

The Gold D cabal is actually quite small. The roster includes Drs. Gil Wheeler and Marian Ross, Balthazar Niehaus, Lois Smythe, Shasta De Fleur and three guys called Larry, Knuck and Crowbar. Their functions will be described below. In addition, Dr. Ross is keeping a "patient" named Chester Polk (see "Loose Cannons," p. 36) at her D.A.U. lab.

The three enforcers of the Gold D cabal masquerade as plumbers in order to have a convenient excuse for visiting the victims of their blackmail business. The executive branch is also small; Ross, Niehaus and Wheeler. Smythe and De Fleur occupy a position somewhere between the obedience of the plumbers and the authority of the bosses.

Their first victim was the president of D.A.U., who has been committing adultery with one of the staff janitors. (This would be no big deal with his colleagues if it were a student or a faculty member, but this is someone without even a B.A.!) They have also been selling information about the business deals of a brokerage firm called Howe, Wakeman and N'Kubar. Finally, they've been spying on the legal strategy sessions of a lawyer who is prosecuting the son of a prominent family for "Fascist Activity."

Dr. Gil Wheeler

Fringe Entomologist

A rather ordinary man, Wheeler was fascinated with the backwards roaches, and was the first entomologist to find them worthy of serious study. He

began to suspect something when, after one roach had been taught to run a maze, every other roach he put in could do it perfectly. He sent some to a colleague in Italy, and when they arrived, none of them could run the maze or even remember it. It was then that he began to suspect telepathy. As the weeks and months wore on and his funding began to look shakier, he became more and more obsessed with the idea. Finally, one night he made a breakthrough. His subconscious contacted the hivemind.

Unfortunately, this experience was not kind to him (see *Hive Psychosis*, page 27) and he's become even more obsessed with the roaches.

Wheeler might defend the Hive thus: "This is our first real contact with an inhuman intelligence. Already we've learned so much about insect development and behavior through the study of these amazing creatures, and we've only scratched the surface! Imagine an army of obedient servants, cultivating farms, reseeding forests... assembling machinery! Harnessing the Hive could be as significant a breakthrough as fire, or language!"

European-American man, 167 cm, 47 kg, 30 years old, short, thin, has a large nose that frequently drips, and a myopic squint. However, he is a sharp dresser, who can make even his frumpiest tweeds drape well and set off a nifty tie. He has an engagingly enthusiastic smile and an offbeat sense of humor.

Languages: English, French, Latin (read only)

Psychic Pool: 6 shots

Traits

Hive Telepathy 2* dice — Wheeler can contact and command the Hivemind, as well as use it to psychically attack others. (See *Hive Telepathy*, page 26.) (Is comfortable around roaches)

Snappy Dresser 3 dice — Has a good sense of style, which shows off even drab and professorial garments. (Dresses snappy, of course)

Good at Conversation 3 dice — He's interesting and earnest, generally fun to be around when he's not on a hive psychosis bender. Can be very persuasive, when he wants. (Speaks earnestly)

Entomologist 3* dice — Knows all about insects, and possesses a respectable doctoral degree. (Talks about insects)

Hive Psychosis — Has some weird and disgusting habits. (See *Hive Psychosis*, page 27.) (Unaccountably attracted to redheads and rancid meat)

Dr. Marian Ross

Cunning Neurosurgeon

Ross was very pretty when she was growing up. Svelte and cute, she had a high, breathy voice — like Marilyn Monroe or Betty Boop. These facts almost completely obscured her fine mind. As she grew she was increasingly frustrated by widespread inability to see past her looks and hear past her voice. She vented her frustration by overeating, and was rewarded by increased acceptance as a mental presence. Nonetheless, she still has a sore spot about being taken seriously; nothing infuriates her like being condescended to.

She's grown into an excellent neurosurgeon. She specializes in the psychic centers of the brain. Before this, she'd had little success in awakening dormant psychics, and had therefore fallen into obscurity despite her skill. Dr. Wheeler came to her for help when he began to suspect telepathy in the roaches (Dr. Nusbaum was too busy). Since then she's been experimenting with injecting princess milk into the brains of human subjects, attempting to attune them to the roach net. She has had some limited success.

She's a pudgy woman with striking red hair. Under the influence of hive psychosis, Wheeler has become increasingly attracted to her (the hair resembles the red stripe of the Queen). She is not above using this to her own ends, though it annoys her to be treated like a sex object (again) and she does not find Wheeler particularly attractive (especially when he's squirming on his back towards her with rancid hamburger balanced on his feet).

British woman, 172 cm, 80 kg, 45 years old. Red hair and a white lab coat. High, breathy voice; no makeup.

Languages: English, Spanish, Latin (read only)

Traits

Excellent Neurosurgeon, 2 dice* — With the equipment in her lab she can gain great insight into an individual's mind, or influence it with various drugs and techniques. She's also a competent surgeon. (Wears a lab coat)

Balthazar Niehaus

Blackmail Technician

Niehaus is a C.P.A. with a law degree — and a criminal record a mile long. Wheeler heard about Niehaus when a drunken colleague confided that she'd

hired him to doctor her equipment requests. Niehaus likes money. He likes it almost to the exclusion of spending it; to him, money is an inherent good, worthy of any and all sacrifice. Recently he's been interpreting the specialized knowledge that the roaches gather from Wheeler. He's also been buying cars.

German man, 168 cm, 72 kg, 45 years old. Short, bald, heavyset, wears glasses.

Languages: English, German, Al Amarjan patois

Attack: 3 dice, X2 damage with cane or knife, X3 with sword

Defense: 3 dice.

Hit Points: 21 (tough)

Traits

Businessman, 4 dice — Understands business, quickly comprehends the ramifications of stolen data. (Wears stodge suits)

Lawyer, 3 dice — He's been to law school and understands what goes on in a courtroom. (Has law books in his office)

Escrima, 3 dice — Escrima is a Philippine martial art concentrating on fighting with sticks or knives of various lengths. He trains in secret with a private tutor, and has been doing so for years. (Carries a swordcane, has a machete hidden in his desk.)

Lois Smythe and Shasta De Fleur

Neophyte Hive Psychics

These two are the subjects that Dr. Ross has successfully attuned. Both are tuned to the princess in the University district.

De Fleur was the unplanned only child of a pair of French yuppies. While he was raised in great material comfort, he was what Americans call a "latch key kid." He pretty much had to raise himself, in a suburb without a lot of other children. He was terribly lonely, and shy almost to the point of reclusion. His main entertainment was television, so his social skills atrophied — he was most comfortable while passively watching.

Smythe grew up in a crowded apartment in the Flowers Barrio. The oldest of six children, she had to mind her younger siblings, and always wanted a retreat — somewhere she could go and be by herself. When she won a tuition waiver to D.A.U. (part of a project by the Department of Likelihood Studies) it seemed like a dream come true.

De Fleur scored very high on Ross' perception tests — since he frequently changed channels while watching TV, he had a great aptitude for simultaneous image processing. Smythe needed money, and being a test subject sounded more interesting than working Food Service.

One night while Smythe and De Fleur were exploring the Hive's perception pool, they saw Jennifer Jackson and Antoine Maribella (see OTE, p. 163) trysting in the wrestling room. As the two hive psychics became aroused, each reflected the excitement of the other, leading to an intense sexual feedback. Since that night they've been lovers, indulging in the intense experience of telepathic intercourse (with psychic voyeurism as a fringe benefit). Their minds are becoming more and more entwined, to the point that they sometimes refer to themselves in the plural when there's no need to. Furthermore, they can "trade" bodies, exchange memories, and lend skills to each other.

If a character being considered for attunement is attractive to either of them, they encourage Dr. Ross to try and the character to accept, hoping for a more intense ménage à trois. They will be more cautious than they were with Polk, however (see page 36).

French man, age 19, 180 cm, 70 kg, rangy, unkempt beard, bad breath.

Al Amarjan woman, age 22, 155 cm, 58 kg, black hair in a bob, cute features, terrible breath.

Languages: French, English, Al Amarjan patois, some Italian

Attack: 3 dice (De Fleur) or 3 dice + penalty (Smythe)

Defense: 3 dice (De Fleur) or 3 dice + penalty (Smythe)

Hit Points: 21 (wiry) for De Fleur or 14 (removed from pain) for Smythe.

Psychic Pool: 5 shots between the two of them.

Traits

Savate, 3 dice — De Fleur studied this French kickboxing style, and can lend his skill in it to Smythe. She takes a penalty die because her legs aren't as long or as flexible. (Both usually wear baggy pants)

Library Science, 3 dice — This was Smythe's major before she got into telepathy and blackmail. She can easily find information in a library. (Both can alphabetize rapidly)

Hive Telepathy 1* or 2* dice — If they combine their concentration, they roll 2 dice, but this pulls two

shots from their pool (instead of just one). (Refer to themselves in the plural)

Hive Psychosis— Minor cases so far, but as they spend more time in the Hivemind, they become more divorced from their humanity. (Eat rancid food)

Larry, Knuck and Crowbar

Slavic Thugs

They do what they're told. They're smelly guys with foreign accents who are reticent about their past — apparently they're brothers. Crowbar, the oldest, is the leader. Niehaus found them, and they take orders from him and Wheeler. They share an apartment in the Flowers Barrio, and seem to spend all their leisure time in an incomprehensible tarot card game called "Hangdevil."

There was a fourth brother, Hobart. He's currently in the hospital with a broken spine, courtesy of the Exterminator.

Slavic men, ages 28-36, all about 170 cm and 75 kg. Thick features, thick arms, thick accents, thick body odor.

Languages : Some rare Serbo-Croatian dialect, broken English

Attack: 3 dice (Larry and Knuck) or 4 dice (Crowbar), X2 damage with blunt object

Defense: 3 dice

Hit Points: 21 (tough)

Armor: 1 die.

Traits

Plumbing 3 dice — If necessary, they can unclog a sink. (Wear work clothes)

Brawling, 3 dice — If necessary, they can break a skull. (Wear armor under their work clothes)

Strong, 4 dice (Crowbar only) — As the oldest, Crowbar has grabbed the best food for himself for as long as the others can remember. He prides himself on his strength, which he uses to keep his younger brothers in line. (Gratuitously displays his strength — tearing phonebooks, picking people up, arm wrestling, etc.)

Art by Grey Thornberry



The Exterminator

The Exterminator's real name is Orville Reed. He grew up on the mean streets of Al Amarja, and has become moderately successful because of his thoroughness and dedication to killing insects. His recent contact with the Hive has made him even creepier than usual.

A loner, he used to spend most of his evenings at home watching *Rambo*, *Aliens* or *Batman* on pirated video. Now, however, he dresses up in an opaque motorcycle helmet, black clothes, black rubber boots and gloves, and a long cape. He then goes out to kill the roaches as the Exterminator. He's caused a bit of a stir, storming into diverse areas and spraying them with noxious gasses.

Stick has killed two princesses so far. He also took the Gold D plumbers by surprise one day and broke the spine of Hobart, their fourth brother.

His first excursion involved boating into the Brink, fighting off the dregs of Garbage Men, and killing the princess that was located there. No one much noticed, except the Garbage Men, and no one really cares what they think.

Next, he set out to "cleanse" Sad Mary's — a daunting task. He wisely chose to break in at 6:00 A.M., when business there is quietest. He took out a great mass of them that had been feeding on the copious backyard garbage pit, as well as hosing down much of the indoors before a hung over Aries patrol responded. He gassed two, beating one of them slightly, and fled.

His third extermination was in Glorious Lord territory — west Dump Street. The princess had been living in an abandoned factory, and he disturbed some homeless goners while going in. They in turn made a chance remark to three Glorious Lords, who went to see what was happening. He gassed one, but was out of Brew and had to fight his way free of the others. He badly injured one (hit him while cycle mounted) but was himself badly cut before he could reach his cycle. He's been laying low for two weeks, recovering.

In addition to these, he's exterminated a lot of roaches in the Justice Barrio as part of his day job. He lives there, in a small apartment on Offal Lane.



Orville "Stick" Reed

Obsessed Psychic Bugslayer

Orville owns his own insect removal service, and is his own sole employee. He makes a living at it, but in the course of his career he became attuned to the Hivemind. He's become obsessed with destroying them, and to this end has become the Exterminator.

He talks very tough, and firmly believes in the irresistibility of a mysterious adventurer. He often hits on women right after breaking into their rooms and nearly smothering them with noxious chemicals. In his best Clint Eastwood voice (not very good) he'll come up with a line like, "Yeah, it's a hard and lonely thing, being the only man standing between this world and chaotic destruction... Wanna go to bed?"

He cooks up his own private bug spray blend, which he simply calls "The Brew." He usually carries a backpack mounted, pressurized tank of it. Brew is instantly deadly to thumbroaches, and a human exposed to it rolls against a 3 die stench attack. (See Stench Combat, page 28.) His tank contains 100 shots. About 50 are needed to roach-proof a building, and the whole tank is needed to get through the numbers of roaches found around a princess or Queen. Brew smells like rotted cabbage. He also carries bug bombs of Brew mixed with another chemical. This mix doesn't kill insects instantly, but doesn't dissipate into the air as quickly as straight Brew does.

He generally carries a three foot dowel rod with steel sheeting on one end — the stick he's fought with since childhood (hence the nickname). His other equipment includes a rope and collapsible grappling hook, a good sized switchblade, duct tape, and two bungee cords that will support his weight. One is ten feet long, the other twenty. He uses them for jumping off of buildings, and is adept at disengaging at the lowest point of the bounce, or hooking up one while disengaging the other.

On the subject of the Hive, he is adamant: "The Hivemind is vile. It is the most pure, disgusting and destructive force the world has ever encountered. It has no concept of 'enough' — it's just endless, endless hunger. If it gets off this island, it won't stop until it's smothered the entire planet under breeding masses of squirming black death."

Al Amarjan man, 190 cm, 80 kg, 27 years old. Short, curly, black hair, well-defined veins and muscles. Usually wears black.

Attack: 3 dice, X2 damage with club (X3 if he's motorcycle mounted)

Defense: 3 dice

Hit Points: 21 (Fanatical)

Armor: 1 point from leathers, or 1 die from his motorcycle helmet

Psychic Pool: 6 shots

Traits

Stunts, 4 dice — Partly due to natural ability, and partly due to a firm belief that he can perform them, he is casually able to do such things as jump a bike over ten garbage cans, spin his bike completely around and stop, unharmed, from a start of 15 mph, or swing through a window on a rope. (Large, powerful motorcycle)

Fighting 3 dice — Self taught and nasty. (Carries a long club)

Exterminating 3 dice — See above. (Smells of roach poison)

Hive Telepathy 1* die. (Talks about roaches. A LOT)

Hive Psychosis— A mild case, since he only contacts the Hive when he has to. (Moves his head around frequently)

The Fistheads

The Fistheads are a small street gang, operating along D'Aubainne Avenue. They're noticeable in the Sunken Barrio, though they don't hang out in the Plaza much. There is some disputed territory between the Fistheads and Dog Face Patrol, as well as some tension with Otto's Men, but actual battles have so far been few and inconclusive. They are led by "Split" Malcomb. (Almost nobody knows his given first name; it's Beverly.) The Fistheads aren't a big gang, but they're respected. This is partly because they're good, disciplined fighters, and partly because Split has worked hard at maintaining bad blood between the Aries Gang and the Dog Faces. With the Dog Faces worried about Aries to the south, they don't have as much time to worry about expanding into Fisthead turf.

The Fistheads have an odd custom; whenever a member has an open wound, they put ink in it. When it scars up, the scar is artificially dark, like a tattoo. They also go in for some body piercing, but generally only for special occasions, since it just doesn't do to have a nose ring ripped out in a fight. The Fisthead hierarchy can generally be determined by the number of inked scars on face, chest, forearms and hands.

Their usual uniform is short cropped hair, black jeans, and a leather jacket or vest. They usually carry knives.

The rank and file gang members have two ranks, Knucklehead and Fisthead. A Knucklehead is a newcomer, usually with only two or three scars. They've usually got 3 dice of toughness, due to the frequent beatings administered as "kote-ate" (Japanese for "body toughening"). A full Fisthead has more scars, and will be a 3 dice fighter as well.

The gang members have been trained to fight together as a unit. When in a confrontation, they will concentrate on the biggest or most menacing target, fight him (or her) until he (or she) is disabled, then move on to the next.

The Fistheads have a sort of "women's auxiliary" consisting of the girlfriends of actives and women who just hang around for the "glamour" of scarred guys. The Fistheads consider a flawless, pale complexion to be the ultimate sign of beauty in a woman. The gang code requires absolute fidelity on the part of the woman, on pain of having her nose cut in half vertically, and being ejected from the gang. The women serve an important purpose; they raise funds by selling drugs to people who wouldn't buy from a guy with nasty looking scars. There is always at least one Fisthead around to protect a woman while she's pushing; in a congested area there will be several pushers and a patrol of four or five gangsters. The women carry loud whistles to alert their guardians.

Each gang member pledges loyalty to Split. His second in command is named Puncture, who was one of the original founders of the Fistheads. Split also has a bodyguard, a newcomer to the Fistheads called "Bushi." (It means "warrior" in Japanese.) Split saw Bushi fight at Sad Mary's and made him a better offer. They're a good match; Bushi appreciates that the Fistheads are on the way up, and Split respects Bushi's amazing martial abilities. Bushi isn't generally sent on missions (then he gets extra pay) but is held in reserve. Puncture and Bushi get along fine, though they are not close pals.

Split Malcomb

Ambitious Ganglord

Split was born Beverly Malcomb, and was raised by an alcoholic and abusive father named Root. When Beverly was 14, his mother got pregnant again. During an argument, Root knocked her down a flight of stairs. Beverly tried to defend her, but wound up being thrown down the stairs on top of her.

She died.

Beverly struck out on his own then. He started pumping iron and taking steroids. After six months, he went to see his father. He said he wanted to make amends, and had brought a bottle of fine whiskey to prove it. When he judged that Root was too drunk to defend himself, Beverly pulled out a carving knife and tried to kill his father. He'd misjudged Root. The ensuing fray ranged all through their house. By the end, Root had chopped Beverly in the face with a butcher knife, slammed his head in the refrigerator door, and smashed a bottle of ink on his forehead. Beverly had, in return, stabbed Root twice in the stomach, broken a beer bottle on his head, poked him in the eye, hit him in the crotch with the pointy end of a steam iron, and broken his neck with the edge of it.

This was the defining moment of Beverly's life. Fighting his father, he had touched on some utterly controlled, vicious and relentless part of himself that he had never before known. All pain, all doubt, vanished in that calm, icy brutality.

Once he had touched that iron resolve, everything became easy for him. Ethical dilemmas were as ethereal as physical pain. He was able to secure the loyalty of others because he was willing to go farther than they were — in *anything*. He is cunning, ruthless, and never rash.

The ink his father threw at him fell into the wound between his eyes, forming the split that became his namesake. The scar goes from his left temple, down between his eyes, and over across his right cheek. This scar has four holes in it for studs or rings, but he generally leaves them empty.

He wants the Fistheads to be a lasting power on the island. Examples of his ingenuity include: trying to discover some chemical that will scare the baboons (his most recent hope being imported lion urine) and trying to discredit Otto Finkelstein (figuring that he's the real key to Otto's Men, and that if assassinated, will become Otto the martyr). He also befriended Warren LaRue, a scion of an important island family. When Warren was arrested for "Fascist Activity," he was with Fistheads. Through the Fistheads on trial with Warren, Split has learned that Warren's family has some mysterious information source in the Gold D Plumbers. He's begun investigating them.

He usually carries a cane with a switchblade scythe blade. He likes to swing it and pretend to miss, then pull it across the backs of knees, necks or armpits. He also carries a dose of Slo-Mo in case of emergencies.

Al Amarjan man, age 29, 180 cm, 90 kg, short cropped black hair, usually dressed in black leather. He has frown lines and a broad, flat nose.

Attack: 3 dice, X3 damage with scythe cane

Defense: 3 dice

Hit Points: 30 points (Pain is an illusion)

Traits

Scrap fighting, 3 dice — He has no formal training, but when you have a dad like Root and grow up in the streets with a name like "Beverly," you learn quick. (Carries a cane with concealed blade)

Intimidation, 3 dice — One look into his cold eyes and you'll know; this is a man to who will blanch at nothing in pursuit of his goals. (Unpleasant smile)

Toughness and pain threshold, 4 dice. — He takes half damage from all attacks, but does not regain any hit points at the end of combat; basically, he doesn't take any shock damage. Furthermore, he won't stop fighting until unconscious, and can fight to that point without penalty. (Heavily scarred)

Bushi

Tightlipped Warrior

He has no scars, wears a topknot, and there is some unvoiced discontent in the Fistheads that he's an "outsider." (Some call him "Sushi" or "Bushi Burger" — but not to his face.) His weapon of choice is a pair of sai, which he can not only use as a knife, but also for restraining wrist locks or disarming techniques.

He is not entirely as he seems, however; he was born in Tijuana, Mexico as Luis Suarez. He later crossed the border, wound up in California, and learned Shotokan Karate from a first generation Japanese American. The Japanese act is completely fake; he has some knowledge of Japan's culture and language, but a native (or someone with a real background) wouldn't be fooled for long. His adherence to the "Bushido" code of honor and loyalty is equally false. He can readily be bought away from an employer. He's currently getting \$300 a day from Split, with a \$100 bonus for every fight. He'll need about \$5,000 (possibly with a promise of more) to leave the Fistheads. This price can rise or sink, depending on the Fistheads' situation.

Hispanic man, age 25, 153 cm, 63 kg. Unlined face which never changes expression, fluid movements, hair in a topknot.

Languages: Spanish, English, some Japanese

Attack: 4 dice, X2 damage with sai

Defense: 4 dice.

Hit Points: 28 (Total combative concentration)

Traits

Shotokan Karate, 4 dice — A fighting style with a heavy emphasis on attitude and long, low stances. (Never backs up in a fight)

Observation 3 dice — Bushi's training keeps him constantly alert, aware of what's around him. (Rarely blinks)

Passing Himself Off as Japanese, 3 dice — He picked up quite a bit from his karate instructor. He claims that his style is a family secret that has never been taught to "gaijin." (Says "hai!" a lot)

Puncture

Streetwise Gang Lieutenant

Also called "Punky" or "Punk," he's valued because he has no visible facial scars. Normally a Fisthead won't be respected without them, but Punky has three scars on his chest from puncture wounds that entered a lung, and is well known for valor. Since he can pass for "normal," he serves as the Fisthead's chief investigator.

Al Amarjan man, age 25, 176 cm, 75 kg. Straight blonde hair, slicked back. Warm eyes and a pleasant smile.

Attack: 3 dice X2 damage with knife.

Defense: 3 dice

Hit Points: 22 (Toughness)

Traits

Fighting 3 dice — Usually carries a fighting knife at the small of his back, and another in his boot. (Scars on forearms)

Street Psychology 3 dice — He can't tell the difference between a syndrome and a neurosis, but he knows what motivates people. (Wry grin)

The Peace Force

Lt. Bob Anderson

Cranky Cop

A stocky blonde man, he moved to the island ten years ago from the U.S. He's in his thirties now, and no one quite knows why he moved (the theory is love gone sour). He's not as corrupt as the average Peace Force officer, and seems to actually have some desire to Serve and Protect. He comes across an irritated and cynical cop, but he won't get distracted by a huge bribe — or at least not permanently.

He began investigating the Exterminator, a mysterious nuisance, and suspected something more when the Exterminator attacked his first human target. He checked out the Gold D and saw that they were being paid a great deal more than the average plumbers were. He's still very confused, but is pushing this investigation higher and higher on his priority list.

So far he's interviewed Dr. Ross, who's claimed to merely be an investor in a new business. Niehaus claims to be business manager, and the telepaths have yet to be associated with the Gold D.

American man, 35 years old, 178 cm, 90 kg, stocky, balding with blonde hair. He is invariably seen with a cigarette in one hand and a bottle of diet cola in the other.

Languages: English, Al Amarjan patois

Traits

Anderston has the standard Peace Force traits (See the OTE rulebook, page 146) and takes no penalty for fighting with cigarette and bottle in hand.

Captain Ali Mukabar

Nascent Throckmorton Peace Officer

Mukabar grew up raised by Peace Force parents, and naturally went into police work when he was old enough. His fanatical loyalty to the D'Aubainnes is beginning to be softened by strange dreams of a glorious figure, a radiant savior... a man named "Clyde."

Al Amarjan man, 50 years old, 170 cm, 71 kg, highly defined muscles, buzz cut hair, blue suit.

Languages: Al Amarjan patois, English, Arabic

Traits

Mukabar has the standard Peace Force traits (see OTE, p. 146). He is also beginning to develop Throckmorton intolerances (See OTE, p. 165). So far the effect is light, but it's been accelerating towards active domination.

Loose Cannons

Chester Polk

Psychic Casualty

Smythe (and therefore De Fleur) thought Polk was really cute, and persuaded him to take Ross's tests. She then doctored his results to make him look more promising than he actually was.

When Ross tried to attune Polk, something went horribly wrong; he's gotten lost and stranded in the Hivemind — his consciousness cannot find its way back to his original body. He's monitoring a roach in a D.A.U. dorm, but it took him almost an entire day to get acclimated enough to control that host and interpret its senses. He's afraid to switch roaches again for fear of having to once again battle for control.

In the meantime, his body has been claimed as another vessel for the Hivemind (something that's never happened to the other psychics).

For all practical purposes, he's switched bodies with a thumbroach.

Someone with active Hive Telepathy can use his body as if it were a roach — move it, see through its eyes, etc., but such movements will be stiff (since the signal gets bounced through a princess — as if this book got translated into Chinese, then back into English). A roll of 4 results in obedience and sense contact — but Polk still moves on his back as if a roach. A 6 means that Polk can be made to walk and talk, albeit stiffly. If commanded to fight, he does so to his limited ability — crawling on his back and kicking if in "roach" mindset, striking clumsily if being used as a puppet.

Note: If nothing is done to rescue him, the Peace Force kill Polk on Day 10 of the Timeline (above).

Al Amarjan man, age 20, 165 cm, 65 kg, long brown hair, unkempt and unshaven, abrasions from walking on hands.

Languages: English, Al Amarjan patois

Attack: 3 dice + bonus

Defense: Will not defend himself

Hit Points : 14 (distanced from pain)

Traits

Hive Puppet 3 dice — When being used by a human with Hive Telepathy, he fights as if he had 3 dice of strength because he does not feel stress or pain.

He gets a bonus die on attack for not defending himself. (Crawls around on his back)

Cute, 3 dice — This trait isn't really in effect right now, what with the ratty beard, staring eyes, and lack of bowel control. If he were to regain his proper body, he'd be able to restore himself to his former attractiveness. (Good cheekbones)

Gomez Reynard

Normie With No Luck

Gomez Reynard is on the bottom of the normie hierarchy, but desperately wants to move up. He's moved to the Burbs, but could only afford one of the cheapest houses in the area. The reason it's so cheap is that it's next door to the yard where people dump their trash for the garbagemen. The upper floors seem aggressively, almost desperately normal (except that there are a *lot* of air fresheners).

Gomez is a senior teller at the First Bank of Al Amarja. His secret is that he earned the down payment on his house by fighting as The Masked Malcontent at Sad Mary's. He was successful due to a combination of Slo-Mo, painkillers, and testosterone injections. All he wants is to be a normal guy, accepted by his neighbors, living a peaceful 'Burb life.

Unfortunately, a hive princess lives under his back yard.

Hispanic man, age 30, 175 cm, 79 kg, dark hair, neatly kept moustache, big veins on hands, crooked nose.

Attack: 3 dice

Defense: 3 dice

Hit Points: 21 (knotty resilience)

Traits

Fighting 3 dice — He did well in Sad Mary's arena, and can still hold his own without chemical assistance. (Nose has been broken)

Ex-Drug Abuser— He has a bad memory from Slo-Mo and a hairy back from testosterone injections. (Always making notes to himself)

Normie Fanatic— He hated living in the Edge, and is completely reactionary in regards to anything "weird." Any fighting penalties he might take from drying out are canceled by the ferocity with which he'll defend his home and lifestyle. (Wears brown suits at work, Bermuda shorts at home)

Plot Locations

The Laboratories of Drs. Wheeler and Ross

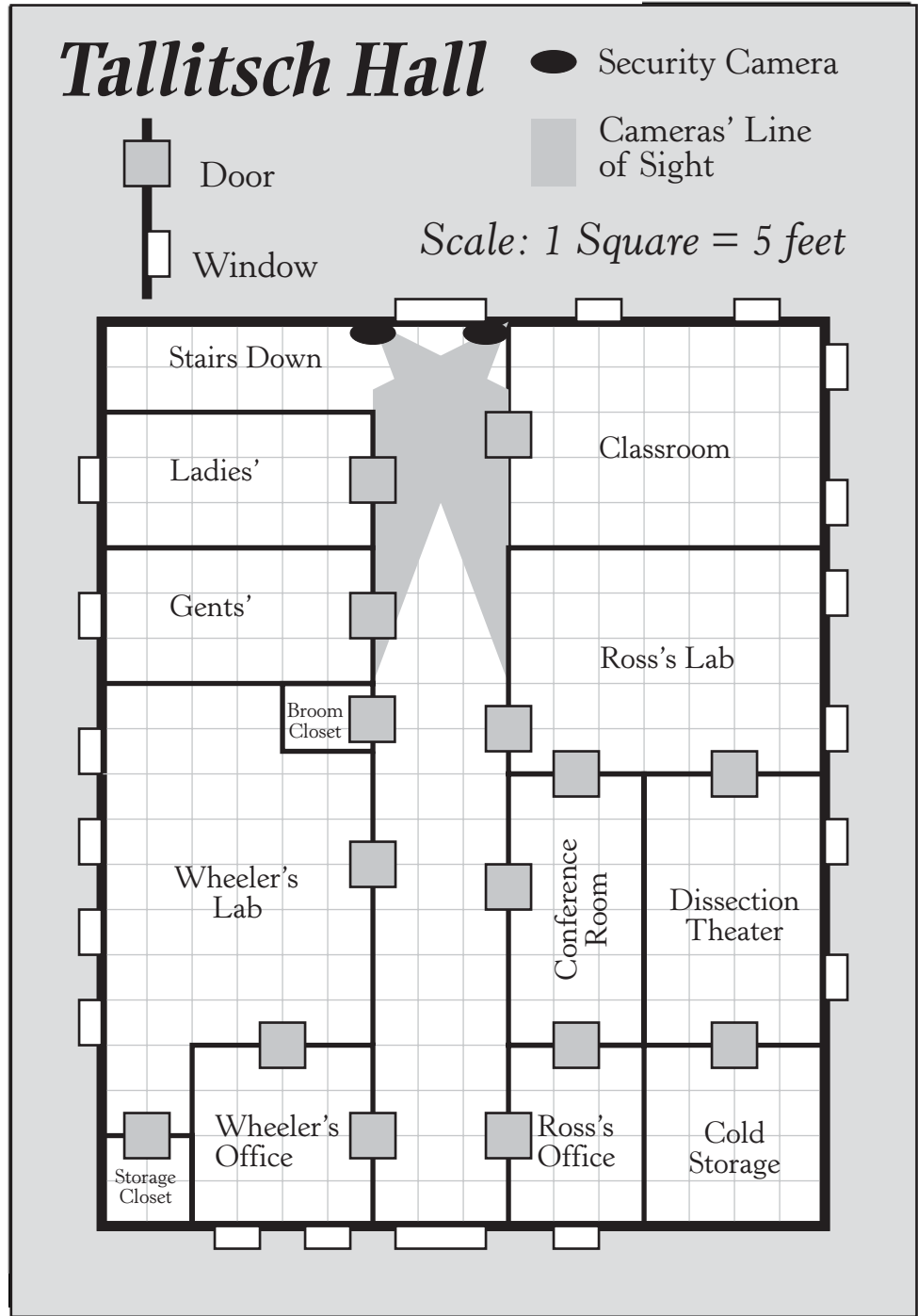
Tallitsch Hall is a small and obscure building on the D'Aubainne University campus. Ross and Wheeler have adjoining labs on the third floor. Tallitsch is full of "extra" science labs and classrooms, usually those considered too obscure, nonviolent or non-threatening to get into Briggs.

Tallitsch Hall has a Safe 'n' Sound guard pass by about every half hour. Wheeler and Ross have also arranged to have security cameras installed, with a watcher on them 24 hours a day. If there is an intruder in the labs, a group of four Safe 'n' Sound guards will be dispatched. There is chance that a quick, stealthy, and/or lucky burglar might cross the camera path when no one was watching. If there was a power outage in Tallitsch, the cameras would continue to operate on battery backup, as would emergency lights. Naturally, if there were to be a major distraction on

campus, an intruder in Tallitsch would have a much better chance of going unnoticed...

Ross's suite includes her office, a conference room, the lab proper, a "cold room," and a dissection chamber. Her office is tidy, cozy, and smells of gourmet coffee. The conference room has a table and some chairs. There's a cabinet full of psychological testing equipment and other paraphernalia. The lab

Cartography by John Nephew



itself is full of chemicals, machines, sinks, disembodied brains with wires in them, computers, etc. The cold room is where cadavers were kept when she was still experimenting on them. It's unused now. The dissection lab is where Chester Polk is usually locked up. (Since roaches don't talk, he doesn't vocalize.) The dissection lab also contains a modified operating table. A shield can be placed around the table, encasing it in a sterile atmosphere, while the unsterile surgeon stands outside, operating through a pair of rubber gloves that go through the glass. This allows Dr. Ross to do brain surgery in the privacy of her own office. It's not legal in other countries and not feasible for much other surgery, but it's clean enough for her.

Dr. Wheeler's office is considerably less well kept, and smells worse too (remember, he's developed a taste for the rancid). There are papers and books strewn about, stacked on chairs, and covering the entire surface of his large desk. The walls are decorated with posters of insects, along with glass cases full of the same. The closet is full of insect food, along with a few brooms and cleaning supplies. The lab itself mostly features many aquariums full of squirming roaches. He's trying to breed them for greater strength, speed, perceptiveness, etc., and has had some success. In one cabinet, underneath an aquarium, is a hidden aquarium containing his hive princess and her drones. If someone expresses interest he may pull her out, with roaches and milky drones still clinging to her, and beamingly display her to guests. He feeds her by hand.

The Gold D Storefront Office

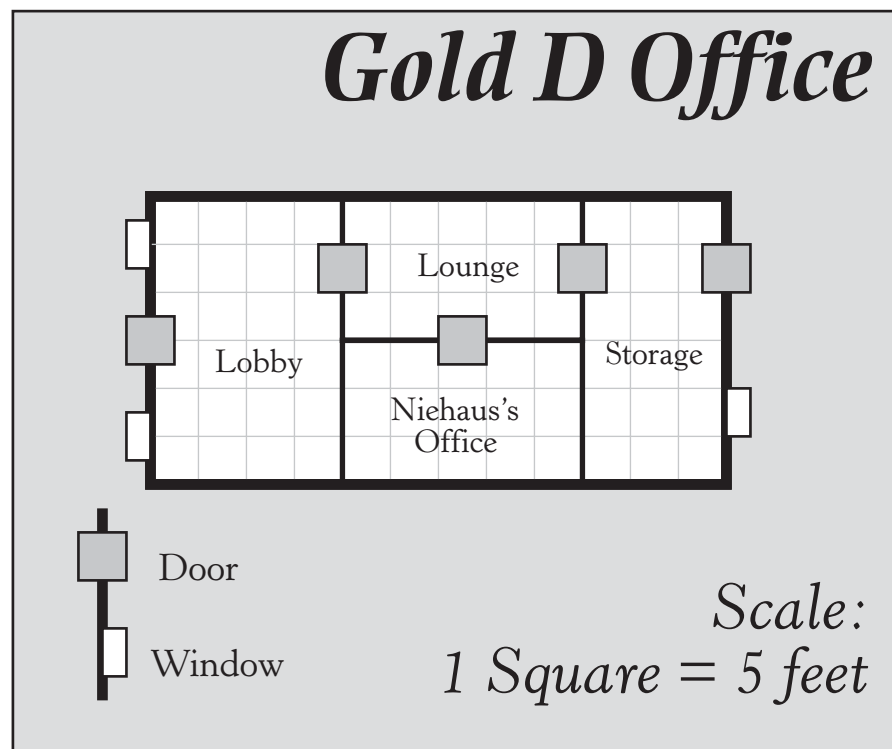
The Gold D Plumbers aren't listed in the phone book, their sign is small and dusty, and the door always carries a sign saying "Closed." The lobby is shabby, the receptionist's desk is always vacant, and close inspection will reveal that the phone on it doesn't operate. The three Baltic

thugs are usually to be found in the lounge, playing Hangdevil. The lounge itself has a few couches that reek of smoke, a rickety table, and a single naked bulb hanging from the ceiling. Mr. Niehaus' office is a bit nicer, but not fancy. It has a case full of account books and some framed Van Gogh posters on the wall. The back storage room is mostly plumbing supplies — dusty and unused. One toilet back there has an aquarium concealed in the tank. This is an emergency tank for Wheeler's princess, should she need to be moved from Tallitsch. This office is also protected by Safe 'n' Sound.

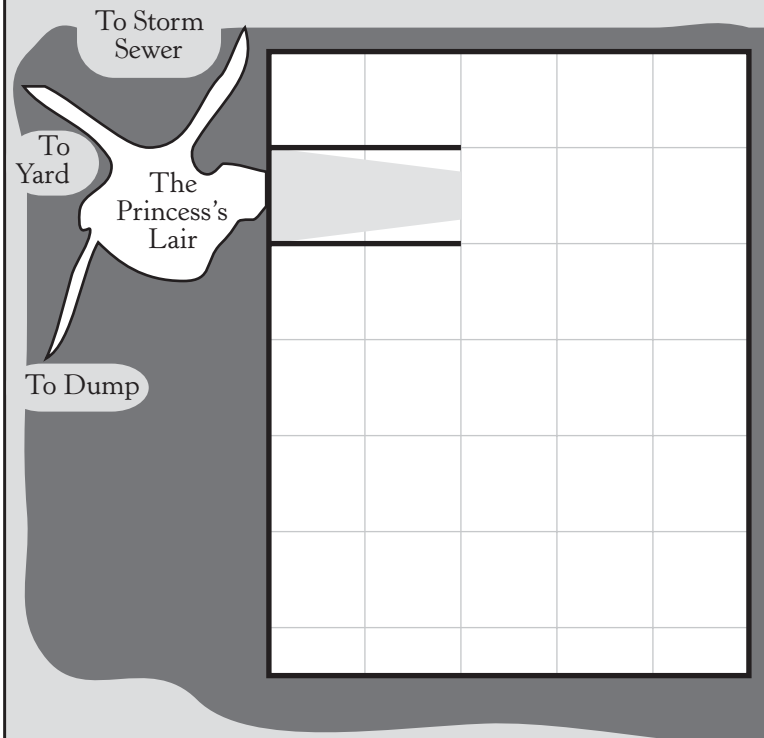
Gomez Reynard's House


Gomez' basement has a naked concrete floor with some carpet remnants on it. There's a pool table at one end, with several cues in a rack by it. The other end has a washer and dryer and there are some miscellaneous boxes of stuff in the corner. Under the steps is a disused closet, and it is here that the princess has settled. There are cracks in several of the cinder blocks, and the mortar has been cleaned out around several of them to allow more roach access. If these

Cartography by John Nephew



Gomez Reynard's Basement



Stairs Up  Scale: 1 Square = 5 ft.

blocks were pulled out and the dirt around them dug out a bit, there would be a 40 cm diameter hole leading to the princess' chamber.



The chamber is about 250 cm long and 160 wide — all full of roaches. There are three passages out of it, besides the one into Gomez' house. These passages are about eight inches across. One leads up and into the dump. Another branches out and comes out at three different places in his yard. The third leads to the storm sewer. If her nest is invaded, the princess flees down one of these.

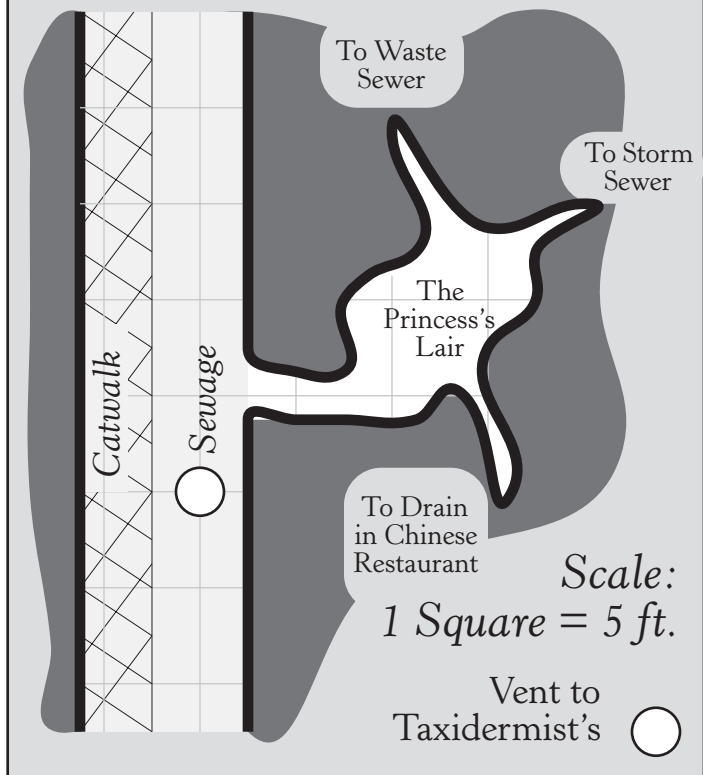
Lifestylin' Taxidermy

Alfonse D'Abnego runs this small but fairly prosperous taxidermist shop in the Sunken Barrio. Its motto is "We'll Stuff ANYTHING!" The princess' home is not actually in the store, but rather attached to the sewer beneath it. A major food source, however, is D'Abnego's garbage vent down into the sewer.

There's a manhole into the sewers about a block away, in the middle of the street. The drain from Lifestylin' could be enlarged, but it's concrete and about 2 m straight down. The chamber of the princess is off of the refuse sewer, not the storm sewer, so characters should immediately roll against a 2 dice aroma assault (see Stench Combat, page 28).

Cartography by John Nephew

Beneath Lifestylin' Taxidermy



Scale: 1 Square = 5 ft.

Vent to Taxidermist's 

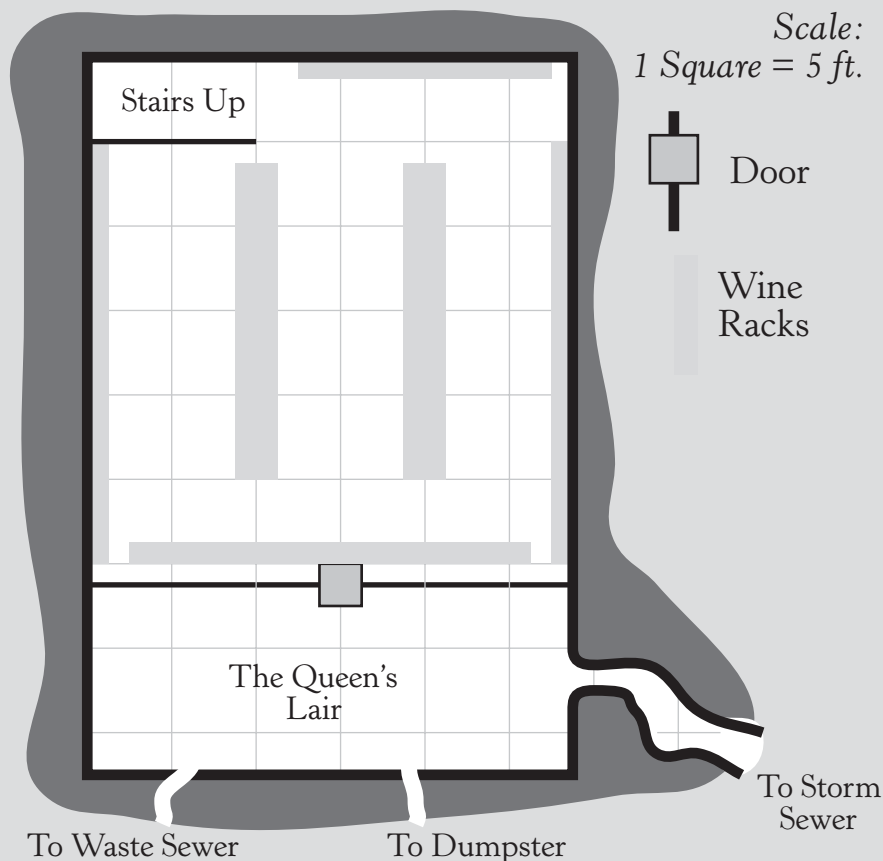
The chamber itself is about 1 m by 5 m, and about 130 cm high. It's accessed through a crack in the sewer pipe that's about a 30 cm across and 40 high. This is not hard to enlarge for a strong person with a pickaxe or hammer and chisel (the concrete is pretty brittle).

Three escape tunnels have been dug, as with Gomez' location. One leads to an alley behind a Chinese restaurant. Another leads to another crack in the refuse sewers about two blocks away. The third connects with the storm sewers.

Note: The characters may be defending the princess from the Exterminator, or may be fighting with him against the Gold D crew. Or, if they are attempting an independent extermination, they may just have to deal with chasing the princess through the tunnels. This could easily be spiced up by adding alligators, rabid rats, or mutant humans living in the storm sewers. (More ideas on the contents of the Edge's sewers can be found in the adventure, *It Waits...*)

Cartography by John Nephew

Chateau D'Or/The Queen's Lair



Chateau D'Or

The Chateau is in the Broken Wings Barrio, but only just. As a result, Peace Force response is rapid. Furthermore, there's the ubiquitous Dunkelberg Security offering its protection, as well as the Chateau's own bouncer.

Chateau D'Or used to be a pricey gourmet restaurant until 1967. Now it's more of a coffee house. Since they no longer serve dinner, they no longer need a complete wine cellar. The farthest room in the basement was cleared out and, when the management changed, forgotten. The door into it is behind a full wine rack (requiring a strength roll of 13 to tip, or 20 to move safely when it's full). In 1981, there was an earthquake on the island. Minor, but enough to damage the walls of a forgotten room in the Chateau. It was at this time that the Queen entered.

The Queen's chamber is much larger than those of the princesses, and it is full of roaches. There are, once

again, the ubiquitous escape tunnels, one to the refuse sewers, one to the storm sewers, and one up to the dumpster behind the building. These tunnels are larger, to accommodate the Queen's greater bulk. They're about 30 cm in diameter, except for the one to the storm sewer. It's wide enough for a grown man to squeeze through, but just barely. It twists and turns for about seven feet before narrowing. It's possible to tunnel your way through with bare hands, or squeeze through if you're thin, but in either event it will take about ten minutes. There is, however, a steady supply of fresh (albeit foul-smelling) air.



The Dopplegänger Plague

"I had a sense that it was art, but that it would be more fun to be in it than outside of it, which seemed to be to contradict at least one of the definitions of art."

— Brewster North in
Impossible Vacation by Spalding Gray

A series of strange incidents ripples almost unnoticed through the Edge. Residents of Al Amarja, notorious and otherwise, are experiencing something odd — reliable witness reports of their having done certain things in public. The things they're seen doing are innocuous enough — buying groceries, chatting at a café, selling hot dogs at a stand — but the people in question know they weren't anywhere near the area when the sightings took place. When this happens to one of the PCs, they may or may not investigate. But when Sammy Shei-Mei, a popular *Al Amarja Today* columnist who had been reporting on the "Dopplegänger Plague", is found dead of apparent suicide, things begin to take on a more sinister cast...

The PCs may succeed in tracking down the cause of the plague — performance artist Tidjane Soubiega, who is training his troupe of actors in a school he calls "Realism Banal" by having them pose — with devastating accuracy — as real people.

Or is the plague really caused by famed American psychologist Dr. Derrick Julien, who practices a new technique to treat extreme narcissists, by having them pose — with devastating accuracy — as real people? If either or both are true, what is that LeThuy doing in Soubiega/Julien's group? Is the death of Sammy Shei-Mei suicide, murder, or both?

When the Dopplegänger Plague strikes, you never know what your enemy will do next — because he might be you.

Laying Pipe

When writers of screenplays use an apparently inconsequential fact in an early scene to set up something that becomes important later, they call it "laying pipe." *The Dopplegänger Plague* is the kind of adventure that would benefit from some pipe laying on your part. It starts off with a series of subtle events that lead to a mystery. If you make them the focus of events in a session, these occurrences will take on too great a significance too quickly. However, if you start to plant clues while other adventures are in progress, they'll seem like just another element of the background weirdness of Al Amarja. There are four things to establish before things get rolling — the popularity of Sammy Shei-Mei, the strange work of the Realism Banal theater troupe, the reputation of Dr. Derrick Julien, and the first symptoms of the Dopplegänger Plague itself. Do this over the course of several different storylines, if you can; the further apart you can space these insertions, the better.

The Columnist

Sammy Shei-Mei

Muckraking Gossip Columnist

Sammy Shei-Mei has been a fixture on the Al Amarjan scene since the early seventies. Look for him

BY ROBIN D. LAWS



Art by Ovi Hondru

wherever the action is. In the morning, he'll be holding court over a hearty breakfast at the Bienvenidos Hotel restaurant. By lunch time, he'll be entertaining a source or two at the moment's trendiest sidewalk café. His afternoons are taken up with lengthy strolls throughout the city, punctuated by frequent stops to chat with shopkeepers and gang members. Early evening finds him at his always-reserved table at Sequins. The night takes him to the hottest and seediest spots; usually culminating with a heavy session of betting and elbow-bending at Sad Mary's. It is not clear where he finds the time to punch out his popular bi-weekly column, "Ear to the Rails," described below.

Though he has an inexhaustible appetite for food, drink, and cheap cigarettes, Sammy loves above all to talk. He's always anxious to meet new people, and is unabashed about pumping folks for information. "Got anything for me?" is his watchword. He makes obviousness a charm, and even the tightest lipped Al Amarjans can't resist throwing him material. To be pumped by Sammy Shei-Mei means you've made it in the Edge. Sammy loves his status as a local celebrity, and is proud of the incredible range of people he's met over the years. Even a couple of the D'Aubainnes — Cheryl and Constance — have given him leads on occasion. Though it's true that Sammy has no true friends, only sources, he doesn't seem to have noticed. He's having too much fun playing his role.

Chinese man, age 54, 162 cm, 130 kg, white hair, cherubic face, wears bright blue polyester suits with wild-colored bow ties.

Languages : Mandarin, English, Al Amarjan patois

Traits

Gossip Columnist 4 dice — Sammy has devoted decades to developing a network of everybody who's anybody in the Edge. He knows how to make blatant requests for information highly flattering, and how to ask that perfect question to elicit maximum gossip value. He knows much more about the underground power struggles of the city than he'd ever print: Sammy has an unerring sense of just how far things can be pushed, and which items should simply be left alone. His jaunty style has attracted a loyal readership; Sammy's latest column is always high on the conversational agenda of scenesters throughout town. (Immediately recognizable to anyone who reads *Al Amarja Today*, from the photo that runs with his column.)

Night Life 3 dice — Has instinctive feel for finding the best party at any given moment. Savvy

devotees of the party experience follow Sammy to find the action. (Occupancy of clubs drops noticeably when Sammy exits.)

Off Limits 3 dice — Because Sammy knows not to blow any of the really big secrets, and to code the items in his column so that those not otherwise in the know remain in the dark, none of the established conspiracies of the Edge view him as a threat. In fact, they all read Sammy's column and sift it carefully for information relevant to their plans. "Ear to the Rails" is sometimes a better source than an organization's own cloaks. Therefore, conspirators generally regard him as an untouchable — too important in the long run to rub out for any short term gain. Gang members, Peace Forcers and even common thugs find him immediately charming — he's never been mugged in all of his time here. (Still breathing after twenty years in the secrets business.)

*Targeted by LeThuy*flaw — What applies to established power groups, above, doesn't apply to the LeThuys. They seek to destabilize the current gridlock of contending conspiracies by destroying its every available manifestation. Tramh LeThuy spends hours at his newsstand dissecting Sammy's columns clause by clause, quivering with rage at the flip way he deals with matters of utmost seriousness. He feels Sammy is in the pocket(s) of the existing control structure(s) — in fact, the more he thinks about it, Sammy is a metaphorical representation of everything that must be destroyed! So he's assigned Marva LeThuy (p. 56) to the task. (Sammy is conspicuously avoided by pot-bellied people with bowl-cut hair and thick-lensed glasses.)

Ear to the Rails

The easiest way to introduce Sammy to your series is to place a clue for another adventure in his column. It appears daily in *Al Amarja Today* on page five. The column usually consists of five or so separate items referring to events in the Edge. Very few of them come right out and say what they mean — code words and sly references are Sammy's stock in trade. Not all of them relate to conspiracies — the regular tawdry behavior of prominent people is always popular.

Sammy might also feature the PCs in his column if they do something boneheaded or outrageous in public. This could provide an entertaining set of problems for them to deal with. They might also gain Sammy's attention by being very successful at something. Either way, the widely read "Ear to the Rails" can provide unwanted notoriety for the group.

An example of a Sammy column, containing a clue for this adventure, appears as a handout on p. 50. This gives you an idea of the style to imitate when coming up with "Ear to the Rails" items of your own, whether genuine clues or red herrings. If you use the column to provide a clue to PCs, be prepared for players to ask about other items appearing alongside it. Players being unpredictable, you should also be prepared for the PCs finding one of the dummy items more relevant than your actual clue and going off in pursuit of that. If you want to keep them on track, turn their faulty explanation for its relevance into the real explanation, making it into the vital clue.

You could also start an evening of improv GMing by having a mysterious source give the PCs a copy of an old Sammy column. Whichever item they follow up ends up having an adventure at the end of it.

Should you ever be need to come up with Sammy items on the spur of the moment, here are a few ideas you can flesh out into full Sammy prose:

- A certain well-known scientist has been having uncharacteristic fits of pique lately.
- A respected businessman, widely known as an abstainer, was accidentally given jumped coffee by an inexperienced waitress. He flipped out and started screaming about a "decisive blow against humanity."
- A English nobleman who had been claiming to have discovered the secret of eternal youth has checked into the Sylvan Pines facility. Creditors are referred to a local barrister.
- A mischievous someone has been circulating untrue rumors that Karla Sommers will be arrested by the Grammar Police if she sets foot on the island. Everyone knows that the Grammar Police were disbanded in the late 1950s.
- A new sect proclaiming that Abraham and Moses still live and are soon to reveal themselves to mankind has sprung up amongst the Garbage Men.
- A local physician is working on a vaccine to prevent Catholicism.
- Temple of the Divine Experience staff have found a catatonic Caucasian woman carrying papers identifying her as Francine Aaronson. Anyone knowing her, or how to contact her next of kin, is to contact the Democratic Bureau of Investigation.
- A new exhibit at the Museum of Modern Life is going to encourage visitors to fall asleep in an ultra-comfortable rest chamber.

- Congratulations to the members of the Senate Subcommittee on Public Health and Morality for success in their twelve-step program.
- A certain government economist has had significantly greater success in predicting GDP growth since she began picking her numbers entirely at random.
- The Party for D'Aubbainist Libertarian Renewal has had a split in its ranks because the treasurer has been running around with the vice-president, even though he's the longtime companion of the president.
- A consortium of local businessmen is attempting to arrange an NBA all-star exhibition game for Al Amarja next year.
- A local nightclub is planning an exclusive, invitation-only dinner in which the main course will be a Kentucky Derby winner of several years back.
- One of Latin America's most notorious terrorists was badly mauled by baboons during his stay in the Edge; he returned home immediately, much to the chagrin of local arms merchants.

Not all of Sammy's items are necessarily true — but there still might be an adventure in finding out why a particular chunk of disinformation was fed to him. Note that Sammy absolutely refuses to divulge sources.

The Director

Tidjane Soubiega

Eccentric Theater Artist

Tidjane Soubiega is a tall, imperious man, who cuts a dramatic swath as he stalks angrily through the Flowers Barrio, which he now calls home. Most people find him intimidating and avoid him as much as possible; he's quickly gained a reputation as a demanding troublemaker amongst area shopkeepers. For example, he insists on being referred to only as "Soubiega"; anyone calling him "Tidjane" or even "Mr. Soubiega" gets resoundingly snubbed. When dealing in mundane matters, he speaks only in grunts, if at all. But those who make the mistake of mentioning one of Soubiega's bugaboo topics in his presence get an earful of angry tirade denouncing the emptiness of modern existence. Bugaboo topics include art, reality, religion, politics, humor, food, leisure activities, the environment, science, and soccer.

Soubiega is the head of a local theater troupe known as "Realism Banal" — see below. The members of his troupe seem to follow him with a cultish fanaticism; he returns their limitless devotion with dictatorial harshness.

Burkina Fasan man, age 38, 185 cm, 100 kg, wears colorful African robes that flow behind him in impressive fashion, hexagonal-lensed sunglasses, small goatee, motorcycle boots.

Languages : English, French, German.

Traits

Emotional Control 4 dice — Can identify people who leave themselves open to manipulation by others and exploit those weaknesses to his own advantage, ensuring loyalty from his troupe members by giving them the harsh treatment they crave. (Studies new acquaintances with intense concentration.)

Performance 3 dice — Can get troupe members to perform to his idiosyncratic and exacting specifications; displays in himself the discipline he demands from others. (Grabs focus wherever he is.)

Public Image 3 dice — Has carefully fostered a reputation as a prickly, self-involved loudmouth. This gives him the upper hand in social situations and negotiations — people are intimidated by him before they even meet him. He gets great service at shops and restaurants from workers weary of being hassled by him. His eccentric persona also wins attention for his theater troupe, ensuring that his ideas are widely discussed, if only to be reviled. (Others wince as he approaches.)

Obsessive flaw — Is incapable of backing down in a confrontation or abandoning a grudge. Finds it hard to understand things that don't relate to his theories, and very hard to empathize with others. (Never apologizes or concedes a point.)

Mirror Upon Emptiness

Soubiega has published several contradictory manifestos for the Realism Banal company; as far as can be determined from these, its mission is to clear away centuries of decayed and ossified philosophy by enacting only the most dull and basic of human endeavors. The mission of Realism Banal is to encourage audiences to meditate on the real substance of their everyday lives, rather than on intangible mental concepts. Perhaps once all intangible thinking is abolished, new and better spiritual ideas will arise. If not, at least civilization will be rid of the old ones.

Realism Banal is a source of great controversy amongst the Edge's sizable artsy community. Soubiega himself is widely despised, which means his performances are well-attended. People flock to Realism Banal shows in order to denounce them. Catcalls and boos from the audience usually begin with ten minutes of any show. A good sixty percent of each audience usually walks out noisily after fifteen. Another twenty percent fail to return after intermission; the rest stick around to loudly criticize the performance.

The easiest way to pre-establish Realism Banal is to have a contact schedule a meeting with the PCs at one of their performances. This can be a social meeting — a first date, for example — or a rendezvous with someone who has information or wants to make a business deal of whatever kind. The contact tells the PCs to attend the latest Realism Banal show, entitled "Mirror Upon Emptiness," and then wait for a meeting in the lobby afterwards.

"Mirror Upon Emptiness" is staged in The Space, a converted warehouse on the Ramble in Flowers which is rented out by various fringe theater groups. 300 uncomfortable seats on an alarming rake face a small stage, which has been painted black. Tickets are \$10 apiece, but the PCs have been invited to closing night, and the show is sold out. However, scalpers outside are loudly selling tickets for \$30 apiece. Seats are not reserved. When the PCs enter the theater, they see that the seats at the back are filling up first.

The show begins with seven performers carrying chairs on-stage. Soubiega is not among them — his role in this piece is that of director only. The actors sit down on the chairs at curtain time, but the house lights remain up. Describe each blink, shifting, and sniffing of the performers in excruciating detail. Nothing else happens. At five minutes, the audience becomes restless. At ten minutes, some people walk out. At fifteen, the rustling of paper can be heard under some seats. The actors tense up, shifting nervously in their chairs. Then the objects start to come, hurled from the audience: rotten fruit and vegetables, eggs, decaying garbage, and worse. The actors just sit there taking it, getting hit over and over again. One of them, an overweight middle-aged woman, is hit in the head with a rock. She lies on the floor bleeding for a while but then gets back up on her chair. After about twenty-five minutes, the audience runs out of ammo. The act continues for another ten minutes of boredom — here you can describe the slow dripping of each bit of munge as it falls from the actors' faces — until the lady who got hit with the rock announces a fifteen-minute intermission.



Art by Ovi Hondru

During the intermission, there is a bit of an altercation at the doors of The Space; the front of house people won't allow audience members to leave and be re-admitted. Several attendees argue loudly — make it obvious that they want to go out for more things to throw — but are turned down.

At the beginning of the second act, the stage has been cleaned of rubbish. The actors come out to sit down again — but this time each of them carries a huge paper grocery bag bulging with stuff. Sure enough, as soon as the audience gets restless they begin to hurl things back into the audience. They do so until they run out of ammunition. The lady who got hit with the rock — still unbandaged — throws with particular passion. A few people head for the exit, but a surprising number stay. Ten minutes after they've run out of ammo, the actors bow and exit, to a tumultuous ovation.

After the show, the PCs' contact — who was not at the performance — greets them with respect. "I wasn't sure if you were serious or not," the contact says, "but your sitting through this proves your dedication. Let's go for coffee." As they exit, they hear several black-clad avant-gardists proclaiming this the best Banal show ever, and explaining to each other its transcendent significance.

Later, when the PCs are eavesdropping and you want to give them some dummy information, they can overhear that Soubiegea was appalled to have a show become a commercial success, and has since disowned it as a misguided avenue of development. However, he has sold the rights to "Mirror" to another group, who continue to play it to packed houses.

Even later, PCs can hear that the new company has started strip-searching audience members upon arrival, after a throwing star was thrown on-stage and nearly missed one of the performers.

And even later than that, they hear that the strip-search policy has led to an even greater demand for tickets, and that the new company is looking for a larger theater.

The Therapist

Dr. Derrick Julien

Paperback Shrink

Dr. Derrick Julien is a member of the small elite of celebrity psychologists — in demand as a speaker,

personal therapist, and TV expert. With his soft, fatherly voice and telegenic looks, he has turned the healing of minds into a lucrative enterprise. His words of humane advice can be found between primary-color covers in any airport newsstand — Julien's most famous work, *Where to Look For Yourself* still a steady seller. Unusually for a pop psych guru, his technical writings are well-respected by his peers — his most recent academic book is called *Possession, Hysteria, Dissociation: Maladies of Historical Placement*

Despite his great career success, Julien is an unhappy man. Like too many beginning Psych students, he originally went into the field to pursue his own problems. Specifically, he wanted to conquer his chronic feelings of inadequacy and guilt. Eventually he figured out that these were caused by his ambivalent relationship with his proud blue-collar dad, who wanted Derrick to succeed in a white-collar world he showed nothing but contempt for. Understanding brought little solace, and he has long felt himself a hollow man, a healer who cannot heal himself. His self-loathing has poisoned all of his relationships, most recently a four-year marriage to a TV anchor. Wanting to avoid seeing his ex-wife every night on the evening news, Derrick came to Al Amarja about a year and a half ago. He's found no shortage of well-heeled screwed up people in the Edge, and has established a busy practice. He's also started and discarded several stabs at a new book he wants to call *Seeming and Becoming*.

US black male, age 42, 180 cm, 86 kg, graying hair, bad posture, corduroy jackets, turtleneck sweaters, jeans, top-siders.

Languages : English, French, German.

Traits

Psychology 4 dice — Knows the field down pat, from Freud to Skinner and beyond. Very astute in diagnosis and treatment of patients. Finds it easy to understand others and to adjust his behavior and persona to accommodate their needs. (Reminds others of a favorite relative.)

Role-playing 3 dice — A crucial part of his therapy technique involves the acting out of roles to allow patients locked in their own dilemmas to see their behavior from the points of view of those around them. Usually the patients play their own loved ones, and Derrick plays them. This has made him adept at taking on the symptoms of the troubled, disturbed, and insane. (Catch phrase: "Let's look at this from the opposite perspective.")



Art by Ovi Hondru

Reputation, 3 dice — A wide variety of people, from watchers of afternoon talk shows to psychiatric professionals, know and respect Derrick's work. His books can be found in most stores. He can command a high fee and draw on an extensive network of contacts. (Face recognizable from dust jackets and TV appearances.)

Self-Doubt, 1 flaw — Derrick finds it difficult to believe in himself; even when he succeeds in helping someone it just makes him think about his own incurable heartache. He'd commit suicide, but he knows too many of his patients and readers would be set back in their otherwise successful treatments if he did. (Can't confide in others.)

Where to Look For Yourself

Try to introduce Dr. Julien in a different session than the one in which *Realism Banal* appears, even if *Soubiega* doesn't actually meet the PCs. If you lay too much pipe for this adventure all at once, you run the risk of having your players connect these pieces too soon, before the *Dopplegänger Plague* even begins. They might also conclude that pursuing the connections will resolve their current adventure.

The easiest way to have the PCs meet Julien is to have them stumble across a book signing. For example, the PCs might arrange to meet a new contact at *Swaps*. She tells them she'll be the one in a beige skirt, wearing glasses and a ponytail, in *Bill and Jim's*, the classy bookstore in *Swaps'* mall level. (The store's logo contains caricatures of Shakespeare and Joyce, hence the name.) When the PCs arrive, the store is packed with people, many of them women in beige skirts with glasses and ponytails, waiting in line to get Derrick to sign a book for them. It's obvious that he's a bit of a sex symbol with the repressed intellectual crowd. The contact finds the PCs (they stand out as the only other people not waiting for an autograph) and casually explains who Derrick is, if asked, before getting on to business.

Dr. Julien might also appear as a potential therapist to a PC or GMC. *Al Amarja* is an easy place to acquire personality disorders, but informed PCs probably want to avoid both the *D'Aubainne Asylum* and *Sylvan Pines*. Julien's offices are in a new medical building in *Gold*. His receptionist tells inquiring PCs that his schedule is very busy, and that an initial consultation is \$500. If they wish, they can book a session for sometime the following week. At first, they'll have to deal with Julien's ultra-efficient secretary, a Haitian woman named *Germaine Calixte*.

While Julien won't become anybody's permanent shrink (that would put the PCs too close to the action) they might still make his acquaintance through a preliminary consultation. Julien doesn't promise quick therapeutic fixes; he tells potential patients to expect treatment to last for years. Neither is he a specialist in curing post-traumatic stress disorder or paradigm shock, the psychological problems OTE PCs are most likely to come down with. He concentrates on problems of identity, specifically extreme introversion. Besides, his rates are \$750 an hour. Julien has briefly met the staff members of both Sylvan Pines and the D'Aubainne Asylum, and therefore recommends that those suffering seriously from disorders he isn't expert in seek treatment abroad.

Or you could arrange for the PCs to run into him socially, say at a reception held by someone like Lydia Goodman. In this situation, he'll be in the middle of a knot of psych groupies, who are breathlessly asking him to analyze everything from the foreign policy crisis of the day to the odd behavior of their house pets. You can have another GMC lean knowingly into the PCs' ears and explain who the poor surrounded sap is. If they do something to rescue him from the barrage of stupid questions, they'll earn his gratitude and get immediate access to him later.

The Doppelgänger Plague

The mystery begins with a series of incidents in which various Al Amarjans are skillfully impersonated by persons unknown, to no obvious purpose. The first examples of this happen strictly in the background, though the PCs might find out about them later. Then, in the midst of another adventure, the PCs are touched by the phenomenon.

Select a GMC peripherally involved in the adventure — a witness or red herring character rather than one of its main heroes or villains. Have the PCs run into him or her in some public place — in a shopping area or restaurant, for example. The GMC doesn't approach the PCs, but reacts to them if hailed. In fact, this isn't the person they know, but an imposter. The imposter keeps the conversation to generalities, and responds non-committally to questions that require the real person's knowledge. The doppelgänger makes a quick excuse about having to meet someone, and heads off. Don't play the imposter as suspicious or wooden;

these poseurs are all extremely good actors! Keep the encounter brief, so the lack of knowledge doesn't become obvious.

Later, have the PCs run into the real person — if they mention their earlier encounter, the genuine person denies having been there. No matter how puzzled they are by this, neither PCs or the victim of the imposture discover anything further about the incident, because there are no clues to follow up. Besides, if this is happening in the midst of another adventure, they should have more than enough immediate trouble on their hands to bother worrying about this odd triviality.

Between that adventure and this, you and your players will likely want a period of "down time" for PCs to wrap up loose threads and pursue their own private agendas. During this time, allow one of them to overhear the following conversation in some public place. The words are spoken by a hatchet-featured European man dressed in tennis gear. It's better to paraphrase or even summarize the following, rather than read it out — otherwise you'll be giving your players a clear signal that a clue has just been dangled. This should appear to be just another bit of background noise in the weird swirl of the Edge.

"And Viktor insists he saw me in the parkette, chatting with this — this — garbage individual. I told him I most assuredly do not spend my time in cordial conversation with the grimy and foul-smelling elements, but he thought I was kidding him. He was adamant that I had been there. The more I protested the more he insisted the whole thing was an attempt at humor on my part. Finally I managed to convince him I was mistaken — I mean, he was mistaken. See, he got me so confused I don't know what I'm saying...!"

Once you feel the PCs have spent enough time pursuing their own individual goals, and that it's time for another structured adventure, move on to the following encounter.

A PC is Doubled

Select the most suspicious, paranoid PC in your group. Wait until the PC arranges to meet with a well-established friendly GMC, one the PC trusts. Preferably the meeting should be called to exchange information vital to the PC's personal plans.

The PC shows up at the pre-arranged meeting site, but the GMC is not there, and does not show up if the PC waits. If the PC attempts to contact the GMC at

his/her home or office, the GMC is there and expresses surprise. Adapt the following dialogue to your GMC's usual speech patterns. Or change the details of the entire incident, if it suits you to do so:

"But I already gave you all of the information you wanted this morning, at the market. You said there was no reason to meet this afternoon." [PC probably says something like "Huh? What market?"]

"You know, the market at Four Points. This morning." [PC probably repeats a variation of "Huh? What?"]

"You been having blackouts lately? You should lay off the Blue Shock, someday you're gonna spontaneously combust. I ran you into this morning, at the market. You were buying strawberries, I was squeezing the limes. I gave you everything I had on [whatever the PC wants to know] in that manila envelope. You thanked me real nice and said there was no reason to meet later. You do have the envelope, don't you?"

The more important the envelope is, the better. It's best if the information is not only dangerous in the wrong hands, but threatens the GMC with exposure. The GMC becomes quite agitated, blaming the PC for losing the envelope. If you and I have done our jobs right, the PC should be hitting a maximum rating on the paranoia scale at this point.

If the PC heads to the produce market to ask questions of the grocers, several testify that they saw him/her talking to the GMC that morning. None of them remember what direction the "PC" headed off in afterwards — there was nothing terribly conspicuous about the PC and his friend, so they weren't paying much attention.

If the PC wants to pursue further leads, allow them to be followed up to whatever dead ends they butt up against. When the PC comes back to his/her home or apartment, the envelope awaits, having been slid under the door. Should the PC question building security guards or lobby personnel — assuming there are any — he/she is told that the guards saw him/her leave the building earlier at X o'clock, X being the time the real PC left to check out the market. A few minutes later, the witnesses saw the PC come back in, and leave again a few minutes later. The guards assumed that the PC had simply forgotten something and briefly returned for it.

Although the PC may consider the contents of the envelope to have been compromised by rival agents, it has, in fact, not been tampered with at all. The imposter is Rosamund Fong-Fong, a member of the Realism Banal theater company. Realism Banal's new

project is called "Acting in Realspace." It's a performance art project in which actors carefully study individuals unknown to them in order to develop absolutely convincing imitations of their subjects. The actors must prove their skill by fooling acquaintances of the subject. Soubiega has yet to publicize his project; he wants to freak people out and then explain. He's declared it a violation of the project's intent to do anything to permanently disrupt the lives of its subjects. So, for example, any gifts or other items the actors receive on behalf of others must be passed along to their rightful owners. In this case, Rosamund staked out the PC's home until the coast was clear and left the envelope under the door. According to Soubiega's strict guidelines, she did not look inside it.

Should the PC have the envelope examined for prints, a clear left thumbprint and a partial right index finger are discovered. Rosamund's prints appear nowhere in official records accessible by Al Amarjan officials.

Rosamund Fong-Fong

Realism Banal Performer

Rosamund Fong-Fong has completely dedicated herself to the rigorous art methods of Soubiega, to the point where she no longer recalls her own past. She knows only that Realism Banal's aims must succeed if the world is to undergo the radical restructuring of meaning needed for life to continue to survive on this beleaguered planet. She has gone beyond mere acting into a realm of mystical anticipation.

Hong Kong woman, age 28, 168 cm, 58 kg, hair tied up in a bun, gray sweat suit, sneakers, Ray-Ban sunglasses (when not posing as someone else).

Languages : Cantonese, English, Al Amarjan patois

Traits

Impersonation 4 dice — Having undergone Soubiega's intensive acting methods, Rosamund is able to impersonate other individuals, even those of another gender, race, or body type. In order to do this, she must observe the subject for a period of weeks if not months. Soubiega has taught her to emulate another's gestures, voice timbre, speech patterns, emotional projections, and posture. She can even unconsciously emit the same pheromones as the subject. While a still photo wouldn't show much of a resemblance to the subject at all, except for the costume, these other cues are astonishingly effective on a face-to-face basis. This is not a fringe power — she has no psychic link to the

subject, and knows nothing about him that she hasn't learned from painstaking study. This trait also includes the ability to make vague, evasive answers seem perfectly natural, so as to avoid blowing one's cover when confronted with acquaintances of the impersonated individual. (May look, sound, smell, feel and taste exactly like...you.)

Shadowing, 3 dice — Knows how to look inconspicuous while following a subject, and to avoid suspicion while inquiring after him. The secret of successful shadowing is to hide in plain sight — amateurs usually give themselves away by lurking in shadows and trying to avoid being seen by the subject. Rosamund's lack of a vivid identity of her own helps

EAR TO THE RAILS



By Sammy Shei-Mei

What's this Sammy hears about a certain hot young American actor, who isn't a lawyer, but plays one on television? A very reliable observer of events at our ever-puzzling airport reports that the fellow tossed a tantrum at his terminal guide and stalked off into corridors unknown. Which as we all know is never a good idea. Anyway, the upshot is that whatever he found there put him through some changes, as they'd say in California. To be exact, his previously indeterminate personal proclivities got unquestionably straightened, a conversion to Islam took place, and his face ended up looking like a road map of Rome! Serious plastic surgery was needed to iron out the new wrinkles, and the producers of his oh-so-steamy movie debut are deeply ballistic over his announced intention to campaign against the morality of his own film!

Well, there's strange, and then there's strange. The following bit

of unclassifiable gossip has been passed to me by its featured character — who has further begged me to use her real name, so as to help her to clear up the mystery in question. Joy Laughter, head of the local Sommerite contingent, reports that she was to meet her business manager at the yogurt hut opposite the Temple of Divine Experience on Tuesday. Running somewhat late, as usual, Joy arrived to find a carbon copy of herself chatting with said accountant! The phony Joy seemed nervous and anxious to leave the manager's company, and turned positively white when spotted by Joy. The doppelgänger dashed for a cab and was gone. Joy wants to know who she was and what the hell she thought she was doing.

Sammy wants to know, too — he's heard other stories, which he has yet to track down — of other citizens, prominent and obscure, being doppelganged up on like this. Stay tuned for more, and look for me at Sequin's if you have any clues.

A particular owner of a particular bar — and let's be perfectly frank here — got into an altercation with an employee and came out considerably the worse for wear! Check out the double shiner action next time you pop by his packed but sadly weeping night spot. Now, this wouldn't be so ironic when you consider that the barkeep routinely hires bruisers to fight it out on-stage. But this particular performer — and we use the term in several of its senses — was part of

the action that doesn't normally involve the wire-mesh cage! Remind me not to ask that *artiste* for the mango trick!

I must apologize to Faustus B., who seemed clearly insane when he insisted that some salamander's wool — look that one up, folks, I'm in a hurry — had been placed in his fridge by members of the Dark Equinox cell he was intent on exposing. Faustus might still be crazy, but his X-rays show definite signs of the big C on the old lungs. And I'm not talking Carnation. But does this make his wild Dark Equinox stories any more credible? You didn't go buy that asbestos yourself at Chiara's Mineral Supply House, did you, Faustus?

By last count there were four Al Amarjans claiming to be the reincarnation of Arthur, King of Britons. So let's be clear we're talking about a habituée of Frank Booth's, a fine if rough-hewn FCP café.

She's looking very Tom Wolfeish these days, dressed head to toe in white. Says she's in mourning for Anne Boleyn. I actually hefted an encyclopedia to decode that reference, which makes me wonder if she's switched to a less-occupied British king. And what will this mean to the Fatted Calf?

Private to Hotch-Pot: The dog at C&I isn't a *real* talking dog, but the one who asked you to buy the ice cream at Flowers is.

her become eminently forgettable. Sometimes she shadows one subject in the guise of another. (Perceptive.)

Theatrical Theory 3 dice — Can spout all sorts of Soubiega-style gibberish about the true nature of theater, backed up by an actual knowledge of the area from Aristotle on up. (Sample statement: “All avant garde works staged in a theater become a comment on theater; to comment on life, one must stage one’s performances in realspace.”)

Suggestible flaw — Due to her lack of personal identity, Rosamund suffers a penalty die on all actions requiring willpower. (Blank eyes.)

The Symptoms Spread

Should the PCs check out the current edition of *Al Amarja Today* they’ll find any interesting item in with the others in Sammy Shei-Mei’s column. See handout, opposite.

The Laughter Incident

Joy Laughter is described on p. 164 of OTE. A quick glance at *Al Amarja Today*’s entertainment listings reveals that she’s playing tonight at The Poisoned Snake, a pub on Offal Lane just north of the Plaza of Flowers. If the PCs phone the club, the barkeep tells them that Joy is due in at 3 PM for a sound check. He offers to take a message for them if they want to get in touch with her. He has no objection to folks coming down for the sound check.

Joy is very anxious to talk about the doppelgänger incident, but has little to add to the account that ran in Sammy’s column. She has her own private fears about the situation — she thinks the nightmare entities that haunt her might be taking on physical form — but is extremely reluctant to talk about them. If the doppelgänged PC shares his/her experience, Joy tries to figure out what they have in common. Depending on the PC, they may indeed have something in common — which gives you some entertaining red herring opportunities. If the PCs don’t explain why they’re interested, Joy begins to suspect that they’re part of the sinister plot and clams up. If they make a really bad impression on her, she assigns some streetwise Sommerites to shadow them. This is a group of four Karla fans with 3-dice combat abilities and 21 hit points each. Unless attacked, they observe but don’t



Art by Ovi Hondru

hinder the PCs. Their shadowing skill is only at a default level of 2 dice, so they may well be spotted.

If they impress her as competent and concerned, Joy refers the PCs to her business manager, Moon Hye-Jin. Her offices are on the second floor of a converted tenement in Flowers.

Moon is happy to talk to the PCs — she asks them if they already have accountants, and if so, if they're satisfied with their attention to detail and personal service. Sales pitch dispensed with, she'll describe the dopplegänger incident. She says she'd still swear she'd been talking to the real Joy if she hadn't seen the real one suddenly appear. The imposter had her way of talking, of standing, of gesturing, captured perfectly. Moon claims that she didn't get a feeling of danger or hostility from the imposter. She has no idea what anyone would stand to gain by impersonating Joy — or the PC, for that matter.

Getting Sammy's Ear

A phone call to Al Amarja Today, or a question directed to just about any bartender or maitre d' in town, will elicit Sammy's daily schedule of appearances. Sammy is willing to talk to anyone, especially about the Dopplegänger Plague. This means he wants them to give him information: He makes a strict policy of not releasing information that doesn't appear in his column. This discretion is what's kept him protected by opposing power groups all these years, after all. All the PCs can get from him is "watch my column tomorrow, it'll be a doozy." If they wish to tell him about their own experiences, he's more than happy to publicize them.

Involving Other PCs

It may be that your PCs don't work together, and one lone character is investigating. If so, this is where the others come in. Just about any organization in town, from the Government on down, wants to know who's behind this inexplicable rash of mistaken identities. Perhaps a prominent leader or cloak of a PC-connected group has been impersonated. Conspiracies that have PCs at their disposal assign them to investigate the plague. If a PC has no ties of this sort, you'll can dangle a custom-tailored motivation in front of them — a friend becomes the victim of an imposture, or a clue to one of their goals is mixed into the plot. Of course, there's no reason why some of your

PCs couldn't just continue to pursue their personal plot threads while others take part in this story, if that's what you prefer.

The Last Column?

Sammy's column the next day is entirely devoted to what he is now calling the "Dopplegänger Plague." If the PCs have shared their accounts, these appear in the column. Other victims include: a Mr. M.L. ("prominent in the emergency loan collection business"), a Mrs. C.R. ("board member of many charities"), a Mr. Z.B. ("important art dealer"), R.W. ("female pugilist"), Hawkins B. ("controversial theologian"), Khosro S. ("import/export specialist"), among others.

From these references, the individuals are hard to track down. If PCs do serious legwork, let them find the people named. All of them have stories to tell about having heard that they were supposedly places where they know they weren't. None have useful clues.

Let the PCs spend a day chasing down these leads, or ones they come up with on their own. Try to move quickly through the day's dead ends.

The next day's edition of Al Amarja Today is a shocker — see handout, page 53.

Explain to the players that the rest of the article is a lengthy eulogy of Shei-Mei, including testimonials to his kindness and sense of fun from various well-known citizens.

What's Really Going On

Several months ago, Tramh LeThuy announced to his various cloaks that he wanted Sammy Shei-Mei either turned to the cause or killed. Operative Marva LeThuy had already infiltrated the Realism Banal troupe, hoping to turn it into a nihilist propaganda front. However, her efforts were thwarted by Soubiega's absolute domination of the group. Deciding to make at least some use of her position, she volunteered for the Shei-Mei assignment, planning to somehow use Realism Banal against the columnist. When Shei-Mei interpreted the "Acting in Realspace" project as a weird conspiracy, she sprang into action. For weeks, she had been working on the weak-willed Rosamund Fong-Fong, infecting her with nihilist beliefs. She persuaded Fong-Fong to learn to imper-

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SHEI-MEI, BELOVED COLUMNIST, DEAD AT 56

By Islam Petri
Al Amarja Today

The Edge — Samuel Shei-Mei, popular writer of the long-running “Ear to the Rails” column for this newspaper, was found dead early this morning at the offices of psychologist Dr. Derrick Julien. Although an official coroner’s ruling has yet to be made, Peace Force sources indicate that Shei-Mei appears to have taken his own life. Why he did so is unclear. His colleagues, including this reporter, observed no recent change in Shei-Mei’s behavior that suggested depression or suicidal impulses. If anything, he seemed upbeat and engaged, hot on the trails of his “Doppelgänger Plague” story. But Shei-Mei, despite his jovial demeanor, was a difficult man to know. His reasons for this senseless waste may remain unknown. Shei-Mei’s stock in trade was secrets, but his own will follow him to his grave. A handgun, believed stolen from the Peace Force, was found at the scene. How Shei-Mei came into possession of it is unknown at this time.

Dr. Julien, contacted at his residence, expressed shock and surprise at the suicide. He denies that Shei-Mei was a patient or even acquaintance of his. He was unable to suggest why Shei-Mei chose his office for his final, tragic act. Julien said that he would request a full public inquiry into the incident.

Chief Coroner Judy Dibling announced in a phone interview that the results of Shei-Mei’s autopsy would not be available for five business days, due to a continuing backlog of cases. She used public interest in the case as an argument in favor of reversing government cutbacks to her department.

Shei-Mei had no known next of kin; funeral arrangements will be handled by *Al Amarja Today* executive editorial assistant Moira Unterschultz. Date and time of the memorial service is TBA, pending release of the remains by the Coroner’s Office.

Shei-Mei will be sorely missed by colleagues and readers alike. Born in Beijing in 1939,

(Continued on page 2)

Peace Force, who discovered “Shei-Mei’s” corpse and alerted the media.

Chief Coroner Dibling is a regular customer at Tramh LeThuy’s newsstand. Over the past few weeks, she has been complaining to him about cutbacks in her department. He has convinced her to protest these measures by significantly delaying investigations into the next few celebrity deaths. Accordingly, she has ordered that no one so much as glance at “Shei-Mei” for five business days, which is why no one has noticed that the victim is

sonate Shei-Mei, and prepared her to die for the LeThuy cause. Accompanying Fong-Fong on her surveillance of Shei-Mei, Marva followed the real Sammy to Julien’s office building, where he bribed the security guard to go out for a donut and turn off the video cameras. Once the guard was gone, Marva slipped into the building, followed Sammy, and got the drop on him with a crossbow. She led him out of the building through a back entrance, and met with Fong-Fong, now impersonating Shei-Mei. Marva gave her instructions and handed her a stolen Peace Force handgun. Fong-Fong headed up to Julien’s offices and shot herself in the head.

Marva led Shei-Mei to a waiting van, and drove off. The guard returned to the building, headed off to see if Shei-Mei was finished, and discovered “his” body, the head shattered by a gunshot. He then rushed down to his guard post, smashed the video console, and butted his head against the wall until he fell unconscious. Waking up several hours later, he called the

in fact a small woman wearing padding.

Marva is holding Shei-Mei prisoner in Realism Banal’s rehearsal space, an abandoned beer hall in Four Cardinal Points. The rehearsal hall isn’t used much these days, since the actors aren’t putting a show together.

She doesn’t know that, by leaving Fong-Fong in Julien’s office, she’s created a trail that leads to the rehearsal space. Shei-Mei had been investigating a tip linking Julien to the Doppelgänger incidents. If Shei-Mei had been given time to rifle through the doctor’s records, he would have found receipts proving that Julien has been funding Realism Banal from its inception a few months ago. This would have led him to the discovery that Julien and Soubiega are one and the same.

Julien established the Soubiega identity to treat patients who were resistant to normal psychotherapy and wary of shrinks. He suggested that they deal with

their extreme introversion by joining a theater troupe — one that he ran in disguise. Realism Banal was designed first of all to force its narcissistic patients to break out of their shells, by allowing them do outrageous things on-stage. In its second stage it would make them understand other points of view, by literally putting them in the shoes of others. Not wanting his patients to get together and compare notes, he allowed a few real actors to join the troupe — this is how Marva got in without having met Julien first. However, just because she's unaware of the link is no reason for the PCs not to use it to find her.

Finding the Link

It's hard to get through to the Al Amarja Today offices after the announcement of Sammy's death appears; the lines are clogged with mourners conveying their condolences. If the PCs go to the offices in person, they are unable to see Islam Petri — no one knows where he's gone. Actually, he's off in Skylla dealing with an emergency ghoulish infestation in his capacity as a top Neutralizer — see OTE, p. 142. If it weren't for the ghouls, he'd be investigating Sammy's suspicious death himself.

Phone calls to the morgue get an answering machine: "Due to staff shortages, all of our personnel are currently unavailable. Leave a message after the tone and someone will get back to you at the earliest opportunity." Security staff at the morgue refuse to let anyone through into the offices or examining rooms.

If the PCs head to Julien's office, they arrive in the midst of a heated argument between the doctor and two low-level Peace Force officers. He's demanding access to his office, which they have secured with yellow "Peace Line — Do Not Cross" tape. They lounge on his waiting room couches, smoking stinky cigars and eating submarine sandwiches. As Julien becomes increasingly upset, their responses get more cavalier and sarcastic. They insist that they must protect the integrity of the "crime scene." Julien argues that it's not a crime scene, since Shei-Mei's death has been ruled a suicide. The cops shrug and say "Well, you never know." They then hint that access to the office might be had for a price. Julien is outraged at this suggestion, and stalks off down the hallway.

The cops are more than happy to let the PCs into Julien's office. If asked the what the fee is, they use the standard crooked Peace Forcer

response — "How much are you offering?" Though they're hoping for more, they'll settle for \$50 a head. In fact, the cops aren't even on duty. This is a regular scam they pull — when they hear of a minor crime in a good neighborhood, they bring their yellow tape and barricade it until bribed to leave. Although hesitant to give them, their names are Alain Cabrel and Marion Torrence. If for some reason you need stats for them, use the same ones for Julian Blanc, OTE p. 146.

However, Cabrel and Torrence did go to the trouble of finding a little bit about the case from the officers assigned to it, just in case they're asked questions. The deal for information is similar — they start out at "How much are you offering?" but will settle for \$100. They know the name of the security guard (Joaquin Balletbo-Coll) and the company he works for (Strictly Business Security Inc., in Gold). They can repeat Balletbo-Coll's basic story — he was thumped on the back of the head by a big fat Chinese guy in a blue suit, came to about an hour later, and searched the building, where he found the body of the man who conked him.

The critical clue is found in a folder in the top drawer of a file cabinet in Julien's office. Labeled "RB Paid", it contains receipts dating back to almost a year ago for various bills connected with running a theater company, including rental of The Space. It also contains checking and savings bank books in the name of Tidjane Soubiega. Soubiega's signature is in the same hand as Julien's, many examples of which can be found throughout the office. Also tucked into the file is a paper napkin with notes written on it — see handout.

EXPLANATION for new RB
 "Theatricalism in Real-space
 (goal title?) Tell them it's revealed
 form, beyond theater into being
 beyond acting into becoming,
 focus on detail and ultrarealism
 evoking transformative religious
 movements by transforming yourself
 into the semblance of another, per-
 on pseudonymical identity, appeal
 to their narcissism in order to
 undermine it [Ethical concerns?
 guess over in papers? must come up
 w/ 2nd justification for Sweden Com...]

Breaking the Guard

A phone call or visit to the Strictly Business offices means talking to the receptionist, Pierre Bonitzer. Pierre knows that Joaquin is recovering at home; he's been instructed not to give out his address or phone number. But Pierre suspects Joaquin, who's the boss' nephew, and is amenable to being bribed for the information. He starts at "What are you offering?" and settles for \$100. If talking on the phone, he gives the PCs a bank account number to deposit to.

Joaquin lives in a basement apartment in Justice. If confronted, he initially retells his story — he was thumped on the back of the head by a big fat Chinese guy in a blue suit, *et cetera*. However, he's feeling pretty guilty and afraid over the whole business, and cracks pretty easily if he's a) given the intimidation treatment and b) asked how he can so precisely describe someone who whacked him from behind.

Stammering and hyperventilating, he spills his guts, describing the truth of his role in the affair. He offers the PCs \$500 not to tell the Peace Force or his employers.

Confronting Dr. Julien

Julien lives in an apartment building in Broken Wings — PCs know they'll need a pass to get in. However, his home number is on the autodialer of his office phones in case his receptionist needs to reach him there. By the time the PCs have found the clue, he'll be at home.

At first, he'll deny being Soubiega, but, confronted with the evidence, he'll grudgingly admit it. He'll explain that his false identity is part of a very important experiment in therapy, and tell PCs that they endanger the mental health of his patients if they reveal it to anyone. He vehemently denies any connection to the death of Shei-Mei, saying that even though he'd prefer the connection with Realism Banal to remain secret, he'd certainly never kill anyone over it. Then he hastily rings off.

Finding the Rehearsal Hall

There are two ways to get from this point to the Realism Banal rehearsal hall, where, unknown to both PCs and Julien, Marva LeThuy is holding Shei-Mei.

The first way is to ask around in Flowers — most people familiar with the arts community know where it is. Rigor Kwasek (OTE p. 120), Lydia Goodman (OTE p. 131) or any member of the Black Death Theater Troupe (*The Last Provincemagazine*, issue 2, pp. 27-33) are examples of people who can give directions to it.

The second, more dramatic way, is to tail Julien. From the abrupt way he broke off the conversation, PCs might figure that he's going somewhere. If they rush to his apartment building, assuming they're not stopped by Dunkelburg's forces, they see him striding out of the lobby towards Dump Street — as Soubiega. The whole Realism Banal exercise has had its most profound effect on its founder — the mild, insecure Julien has become increasingly attached to his new identity as the dynamic, self-absorbed Soubiega. Now threatened by events surrounding Shei-Mei's death, he feels the need to leap into his powerful persona and order his actors about for a while.

(If they've headed to his building without phoning him, the PCs may want to accost him at this point. The conversation goes as described in the above section, except that it's Soubiega who at first denies being Julien. As Soubiega concedes his true identity, he "deflates" down to Julien's height and weight — the difference was merely apparent, caused by Julien's convincing performance as Soubiega.)

Soubiega is easy to follow, as he's busy trying to figure out what's going on with Shei-Mei, and how to prevent his precious identity from being sucked back into the spineless swamp of Julien's personality. He's heading to the rehearsal hall as the first stop on a search for a troupe member to intimidate, to solidify his grip of the Soubiega side of himself. When he arrives at the rehearsal hall, he's in for a surprise.

Marva Discovered

At this point, someone bursts in on Marva LeThuy as she attempts to indoctrinate Sammy Shei-Mei to the path of nihilism. It's either the PCs, if they've chosen path one to the rehearsal hall, or Soubiega followed by the PCs, if they've chosen path two.

In the latter case, if they watch Soubiega enter the building, the PCs hear a shout of alarm almost immediately afterwards. Marva, startled, has wheeled and fired her crossbow at Soubiega. Her first shot at him misses, and he turns and runs back out of the building, calling for help. This being Four Cardinal Points, no one comes to his aid — except, probably, the PCs. It's up to them to subdue Marva and rescue her prisoner.



Art by Ovi Hondru

Marva LeThuy

FanaticalNihilist

Marva LeThuy was once Marva Hayes, an activist sympathetic to various extremist “direct action” groups. In Al Amarja to buy some weapons for a rainy day, she fell under the sway of Tramh LeThuy. She was one of his easier conquests, already possessed by an unconscious need to self-destruct and take a bunch of other people with her. Her lack of many normal impulses made her a natural fit with the damaged members of Realism Banal. Her aim now is to rise higher in Tramh’s esteem, but she’s always ready to die in a spectacular manner if need be.

US black woman, age 25, 163 cm, 72 kg, straight black bowl-cut hair, thick-lensed glasses, square jaw getting jowly, a few blotchy patches of lightened skin, developing pot belly, jeans and t-shirt.

Language s: English.

Attack s: 3 dice plus bonus die, damage X2 (cross-bow or knife)

Defens e: 3 dice with penalty die

Hit Points : 22 (shrugs off pain)

Traits

Infiltration, 3 dice — Adept at going undercover and insinuating herself into organizations in order to subvert them. (Invites herself into situations without seeming pushy.)

GuerrillaTraining 3 dice — Has practiced hand-to-hand combat and terrorism techniques with various organizations including the LeThuys. (Handles weaponry with confidence.)

Fanaticism — Completely committed to whatever cause she’s currently seized upon, to the point where attempts to lash out at others in its name are boosted with a bonus die. The downside of this is a heedlessness of consequences, which levies a penalty die against attempts at self-preservation. (Has no small talk, only rhetoric.)

Marva also has some hired goons with her. These aren’t LeThuy operatives, just rent-a-thugs paid for with Zorro revenues. There’s one less goon than there are PCs. Their motivation level is low; Marva is willing to fight to the death, but they’ll give up as soon as the fight turns against them. They prefer to run out the back way, but if that’s covered, they’ll just surrender. If needed, goon names include Blind Girl Krost, Adoption Case Leon, Maribeth Smotherer, Rock Soup, Big Stick Ortenburger, and Phonesex McCulloch.

Goons

Attack s: 3 dice with penalty die, damage X2 (knives)

Defens e: 3 dice with penalty die

Hit Points : 18 (unhealthy lifestyles)

If the goons are captured, they know very little. They occasionally do minor jobs for Marva, like guarding this prisoner. They don't know what her cause is — she tried to explain it, but it was too complicated.

Marva attempts to escape out the old beer hall's back doors if the goons defect. If capture seems imminent, she'll try to fight to the death. No form of torture is enough to get her to reveal anything about her organization — she rather enjoys the martyrdom.

If the PCs got to the hall before Soubiega, he comes in the middle of the fray, and immediately retreats. Once the skirmish is over, he and Sammy can compare notes and explain the situation to the PCs.

In the unlikely event that Marva and her goons defeat the PCs, Marva orders them lined up against the wall and prepares to execute them with her crossbow. The sound of Peace Force sirens erupts in the distance, and Marva decides to beat it out the back way, assuming that the cops have responded to Soubiega's cries for help. Once she's gone, the sirens pass right by — the squad cars are chasing a truck full of drug dealers who are behind on their payments.

Aftermath

Marva has been careful to leave no clues to lead to the LeThuy organization; however, Tramh LeThuy decides to put operations against Shei-Mei on the back burner for the time being to avoid unnecessary suspicions. The LeThuys are still too small a group to risk having their cover blown.

Shei-Mei goes back to being his old convivial self, and reminds the PCs to bring him gossip whenever they have it. Despite his gratitude, he still maintains his policy of not sharing information that doesn't appear in his column.

If the PCs expose Julien to the psychiatric community, he is disgraced. He loses his book contracts and client base, and has his license revoked. Ironically, they're doing him a favor — he becomes Soubiega full-time and is much happier as a cantankerous petty tyrant than as a dedicated healer. If the PCs don't expose him, he goes on much as before. Sammy writes a cryptic explanation of the Doppelgänger Plague, but nobody can prove a connection between Soubiega and Julien, so any

scandal promptly blows over. Julien is susceptible to blackmail from the PCs, willing to pay up to \$2000 a month to keep his secret under wraps. If they keep his secret without squeezing him, he becomes a grateful contact who can supply rumors from both the wealthy professional and starving artist communities of the Edge.

Chief Coroner Judy Dibling is relieved of her duties when Sammy's headline *DEATH EXAGGERATED, BUT THANKS FOR THE EULOGIES* appears on the front page of the next day's *Al Amarja Today*. Julien identifies the corpse as that of Rosamund Fong-Fong and contacts her family in Hong Kong. Ashamed of their "crazy" daughter, they don't bother to investigate the details. Dibling does not think to link her foolish political tactics to the convincing words of a certain newspaper seller... She might reappear later in the series as a shady doctor — imagine a PC's nervousness when, in the midst of an operation to remove a bullet wound he doesn't want reported, Dibling realizes that she's working on one of the people who exposed her and ruined her career.

Intersections

- If you're using *Airwaves*, you could introduce Sammy by giving him a weekly gossip program on AXTC.
- A member of Realism Banal could impersonate a Protean or Roentgen Operative from *New Faces*, introducing a dangerous sideline for the PCs to investigate. Either group might mistake clue-hungry PCs for hostiles. Similarly, an impersonation of Elwood Cardinal from *Weather the Cuckoo Likes* could have confusing to disastrous consequences.
- If the PCs still have a dose of Broadcast left over from *Unauthorize Broadcast* they could use it to successfully interrogate Marva, since she's so focused on her cause that she's unable to think of anything else. This could lead to a major operation of the LeThuys in which Tramh LeThuy finally has to go underground.
- *Welcome To Sylvan Pine* has been mentioned already in this adventure; if PCs are patients there, it would be a good place to introduce Julien, who visits the place as a consulting psychologist.
- Armivrek Kazandijan and his fellow Sandmen, or Roderick Reis and his Exalted Order, both from *Wildest Dream*, could get involved in the case. Each might think that the doppelgänger reports are due to a sudden tulpa infestation. Wanting to find them and corner the market on their dreamweb, either or both groups could be deadly rivals for the PCs in pursuit of clues.

Deep Troubles

Marlene wants to help the PCs and is sure she saw something they should know about, but Cylene would as soon kill them as look at them. Priscilla, however, is in charge, and even though she doesn't know what is going on, she's good at faking it. In fact, she can pull off excellent impersonation of Marlene. For that matter, so can Cylene. Maybe it wouldn't be too hard for the PCs to figure out who's on whose side, except that Marlene, Cylene, and Priscilla are all personalities within one body, along with another forty-three personalities. Multiply this confusion by the dozen or so "deeps" — people with multiple personalities — that the PCs may run across, and you've got "Deep Troubles."

"Deep Troubles" covers the small subculture of people on Al Amarja with multiple personalities. Since they want to be accepted as normal by society at large, the "deeps" keep their disorder secret, and few know that this subculture even exists in the Edge. The engine that drives the PCs' encounter with the deeps is a race between Mover and Throckmorton cloaks to get their hands on information that would be very damaging to the Movers. The PCs are caught up in this race themselves in one way or another, probably through a personal connection to someone they don't realize is a deep. The added wrinkle to this plot is that the information is in the hands of the deeps, so sorting friend from enemy is much more complicated than may at first appear.

BY JONATHAN TWEE T

Deep Background

This chapter covers the “deeps” on Al Amarja. First, it describes the subculture in general, and then it examines specific people or places of special interest. These special entries include:

- **The Deep Blue Sea** , a café with a very low profile, run by and for deeps.
- **The Splinters** , a gang of deeps who are as wild as the other deeps are reserved.
- **Dr. Umayma Ahal** , a psychiatrist specializing in multiple personality disorder, a central figure in the deep subculture.

Deep Subculture

For nearly two decades, a subculture has been developing in the Edge. Since the members of this subculture strive to fit in rather than stand out and pursue no goals outside the love, work, and play that most people seek, they have remained out of the public eye. These are the people with split personalities who come together in the Edge to share a community. They call themselves “deeps.”

Multiple Personality Disorder

To understand the deeps, one must understand something of the disorder they suffer from. Multiple personality, one of the least understood personality disorders, is a dissociative disorder. In response to abuse or neglect, a child may dissociate “unacceptable” feelings, such as anger. Taken to an extreme, complete dissociation involves the creation of separate personalities that can act out these forbidden feelings or protect the original child from suffering. These separate personalities usually remain cut off until adolescence, when they begin to assert themselves.

This disorder is not “schizophrenia,” as it is popularly, and mistakenly, called. Schizophrenia is characterized by profound thought disorder, hallucinations, dulled emotions, and withdrawal from the human community. The deeps, on the other hand, generally behave within the bounds of what is considered normal. Many lead active personal lives and successful professional careers and are considered perfectly normal by their friends.

Most people base their understanding on the movies *The Three Faces of Evand Sibyl*. While these movies depicted authentic cases, they were also atypical in that the various personalities were so markedly different that the women’s lives were disturbed. Most

Deep Terms

The deeps have developed several slang terms that they use among themselves, but not with outsiders.

Address — The nickname given to a body, called an “address” because it refers to the place where the various personalities live. An address often refers to a physical feature of the body. For instance, the nickname “Red” may be given to someone with red hair. The sentence “Red swung by here acting strange,” means that one of the personalities that occupies “Red” (Simon’s body) came by, but the speaker doesn’t necessarily know which personality was in charge. It’s easier to say “Red is sick” than to say “Simon, Ralph, Rotator, Delilah, Chris, and their co-personalities are sick.”

Captain — The “original” personality, which blacks out while other personalities are in control. The captain does not know what the crew is up to unless the crew (or someone else) fills him in.

Crew — The various personalities within a deep. Some deeps have over a hundred personalities in their crews.

Crew Member — One personality of a deep.

Deep — Someone with a split personality. From “DP,” the initials of “dissociated personalities.”

First Mate — The personality that oversees the others, typically a dependable personality that never blacks out when other personalities take over. Serves as an arbiter in inter-personality disputes.

Loner — Someone with only one personality, a “normal” person.

Passing — Convincing loners that one is a loner; some deeps see this term as derogatory because it implies that the “passer” does not belong in mainstream society.

The Wheel — Control, usually used in the phrase “at the wheel,” meaning in control of the body, or “taking the wheel,” meaning taking control.



Art by H.J. McKinney

deeps have alternate personalities that are smart enough to impersonate the original personalities. In other words, if a personality named Tonia takes charge of a body normally controlled by Lawanda, Tonia will pretend to be Lawanda. Tonia will have different mannerisms, desires, and quirks from the original Lawanda, but she doesn't want to cause trouble so she impersonates the original personality. While the original personalities (called "captains" by the deeps) experience black-outs over the periods in which an alternate personality is in charge, they rarely realize their own situations until a professional diagnoses them (which often occurs years after one seeks professional help).

While most deeps are functional, few are without their problems. Dissociation of the personality seems often to be the result of vicious abuse suffered as a child, and such abuse has other damaging effects on the psyche as well.

While the famous "Eve" had three distinct personalities, most deeps have more, and some have over a hundred. Often the personalities result from a child's reaction to abuse, in which case a new personality may develop with each incident of abuse. In such

cases, however, a few personalities are by far the most common, with the majority of them rarely coming to the surface. New personalities may surface over the years, but it is understood that these are personalities that were created in childhood but that simply didn't manifest themselves for years.

Successful therapy, for which hypnosis is very useful, involves integrating the personalities so they become parts of a single personality. The individual personalities do not want to be eliminated, but if they trust the therapist, they can accept becoming part of a larger whole.

Development of the Subculture

The work of one person, Dr. Umayma Ahal, is primarily responsible for the deep subculture in the Edge. First, her pioneering work in hypnotherapy has diagnosed many deeps from among the local population. In addition, Dr. Ahal is acknowledged internationally as an expert on the subject, and other psychiatrists around the world know that she is in touch with a subculture of sufferers of multiple personalities. Many people newly diagnosed with this disorder are referred

to Dr. Ahal via an intermediary in Geneva. Frequently, Dr. Ahal invites those who contact her to move to Al Amarja and join the community there. The intermediary allows Dr. Ahal to keep her location a secret, since the deeps in the Edge do not want it known where their community is located.

Since many deeps are from off-island, the deep subculture has a particularly cosmopolitan population. It also tends to be middle and upper class; deeps who can't afford psychotherapy generally go undiagnosed and never join the subculture. Since psychotherapy is more common in the First World, the deeps are predominantly from First World nations. Most deeps are women.

The deep community is growing as more people are diagnosed. Some leave the community when they take jobs off the island or integrate themselves so well that they no longer need the support of other deeps, but more people join the community than leave in a typical year.

The Nature of the Deeps

Deeps try hard to pass for normal and generally succeed. Since they are often troubled by personal problems, they turn to each other for support, while presenting a strong façade to the "loner" community.

Deeps are close-knit. In order to maintain the façade of a unified personality, they often have to lie to those around them. For instance, a deep in a monogamous relationship may have a reckless personality take over who is unfaithful to the deep's partner. The deep typically tries to hide this incident, if possible. It's an unwritten rule that deeps cover for each other, providing each other with alibis as needed.

Deeps go easy on drugs, caffeine and nicotine being the only drugs used casually (because they have limited mood-altering effects). While most deeps do drink or use other drugs, they are careful to do so in moderation. They are rightfully worried that an unpredictable personality might take over while the body is under the influence. A jovial personality that enjoys getting drunk could be usurped by a belligerent personality that goes on a drunken rampage. Rather than risk this, the deeps are very moderate in their drug use, and certainly steer clear of drugs such as LSD. Most deeps who are alcoholics are in recovery, and their fellows monitor them closely.

The exceptions to these generalities are the Splinters (p. 62).

Deeps and Fringe Powers

It would be a shame if PCs prematurely cracked the mystery of the deeps by mind scanning or aura reading. Luckily, this isn't likely. Fringe powers that read the mind or aura allow the user to have sensations that others don't have, but it's still up to the user to determine what those sensations mean. The sensations from a deep seem mostly normal at first because one personality is presenting itself and the others are suppressed. The sensations created by the suppressed personalities are easily dismissed as "noise" or "individual variation." (After all, no two brains work exactly alike or look exactly alike to a mind scanner.) Once a mind scanner or aura reader knows what to look for, identifying deeps becomes easier.

Deep Blue Sea

Type: Café

Rep: A haven for deeps, no rep among loners.

Brief: A small café that caters exclusively to the deep subculture.

Address: 132 Leopard Lane, Flowers Barrio

It's not hard to miss Deep Blue Sea. The front is narrow, battered, and dull. The door is metal, with no window, and the large window to its left is painted over on the inside. The address painted on the door is the only identification.

Once inside, the story is quite different. A narrow passageway leads to a much more generous room decorated after a sailing motif. The words "Deep Blue Sea" stand out over the bar, painted against a huge, stylized wave. Sitting at the bar, at tables, or in the booths are the clientele: people from all walks of life who are generally in little groups, talking or reading *Al Amarja Today*.

As should be obvious from the unwelcoming façade, the staff of Deep Blue Sea are not interested in attracting new patrons. When strangers enter for the first time, they receive poorly hidden stares from the clientele and staff. A bartender or waitress may ask the newcomers what they want, and then try to hurry them out of the café as quickly and quietly as feasible. Someone who just wants some coffee may be summarily served, while someone who wants a meal may be told that a "private meeting" is going to start soon,

so they've stopped serving meals. The staff tries not to be rude, but they see to it that newcomers leave. They will not, however, make an incredible fuss. If strangers insist on sitting around, they may notice that the patrons are notably taciturn.

If these newcomers, however, mention that Dr. Umayma Ahal sent them, the staff greets them warmly, and patrons leave their seats and meals to greet them and to introduce themselves. As gently and swiftly as possible, the people of Deep Blue Sea make these people part of the "family."

The reason for this strange behavior, of course, is that everyone at Deep Blue Sea is a "deep." The Sea is their private place to hang out, share stories of their lives and their difficulties, tell jokes that only they appreciate, and be with like-minded people. Any loners who stumble onto the place are certainly not welcome.

Services at the Deep Blue Sea

The Deep Blue Sea serves a little of everything, except for the hard stuff: no distilled liquors, no

jumped or deep drinks. They have juice, beer, wine, tobacco, soft drinks, sandwiches, and simple grilled items.

Board games are available for patrons to play, and patrons often leave their newspapers here so others can read them. Obviously, one is welcome to stay here as long as one likes, provided one is a deep.

There are three slot machines against one wall.

Clientele at the Deep Blue Sea

People from all walks of life come here, though there is a higher proportion of white faces present than on the street. Otherwise, they seem pretty normal.

Patrons are able to socialize almost indefinitely. Once one crew member has made the rounds talking to friends, another can take the wheel and do the same, a process that can be repeated many times. Even when a crew member takes the wheel a second time, there are likely to be plenty of new people to talk to, even if no one has entered the café.

The Splinters (see below) drop in from time to time and hassle people. The patrons cope with these unpleasant visits without calling the Aries Gang or Peace Force; they don't want to call attention to themselves.

The Splinters

Type: Deviant faction of deeps.

Rep: None among loners, seen as troublemakers by the deeps.

Brief: A bunch of risk-taking deeps that revel in switching personalities and in self-destructive lifestyles.

Allies: None.

Enemies: Regular deeps.

Their name suggests several images: they are a Splinter group off of the main deep community, they themselves are Splintered mentally, and they are a pain.

The Splinters are the malcontent, delinquent population within the deep subculture, mostly young adults who would be in gangs even if they were loners. The gang serves as a special community, one that encourages self-gratifying behavior and accepts the members as deeps. While the Splinters sometimes shoplift, steal, fight, and sell drugs, they do so largely for the thrills, not for income.

Playing the Slots

Gambling is legal, unregulated, and ubiquitous on Al Amarja. If a PC tries a slot machine, roll three dice. (Don't let the player see the dice roll.) The PC pays a quarter to play, and gets the following results:

Roll	Result
18	\$25
17	\$2.50
15-16	\$.75
12-14	"real close"
8-11	"pretty close"
3-7	nothing

The gambler's return is only 77%, but there are so many combinations that are "almost a win" that usually the results *look* close. You can use this chart for other slot machines on the island, should players decide they want to play regularly.

Slot machines that run on quarters are known as "lunch," as in "playing lunch," because beggars who get quarters play them in an attempt to win enough money to buy a meal.

The Splinter ethic runs directly counter to the mainstream deep ethic. Splinters revel in the unpredictable switches among personalities, abuse drugs, and seek random, powerful stimulus wherever they can get it. Some of them believe that having multiple personalities is not a disorder but the next step in human evolution. They consider the calm deep community to be unspeakably boring.

The deep community puts up with the Splinters rather than alerting the authorities because they do not want to call attention to their community.

You may wish to let the PCs encounter the Splinters long before running the plot detailed in the next chapter. They are plenty interesting on their own even if the PCs don't realize that they're deeps.

GMCs

Randolph Gritz, "Spotches"

Charismatic Splinter

Randolph Gritz, Captain: He is multiphobic and rarely asserts himself.

Terry, First Mate: Vocal, active, energetic, and free-wheeling. Though sometimes overpowering, he has a charm that wins friends and followers.

Billy: Schizophrenic, marked by bizarre and sometimes "mystic" vocalization; ritualized, repetitive actions; and extreme mood swings.

Thor: What Randolph fears, Thor attacks. Randomly violent, lusty, and ecstatic.

Others: Terry stopped counting after twenty-seven. New ones continually arise.

Spotches carries messages on his bike part-time and resorts to petty thievery rather too often. He has turned his back on his family, but Terry does have a few girlfriends that he visits from time to time. Various personalities also fool around with various other Splinters.

Al Amarjan man, age 29, 180 cm, 69 kg. Face mottled light and dark brown. Multi-colored hair, long (false) eyelashes, flashy clothes that combine many fabrics and wild colors. Gives the impression of being a crazy jester.

Languages: Al Amarja patois, a minor personality can read French.

Attack: 3 dice (Terry & Thor), generally X2 damage

GMC Stats

The GMC format for someone with multiple personalities bears a little explaining.

Each deep is listed with her legal name and her "address." If the PCs are introduced to the deep through other deeps, they'll learn the address. If they meet the GMC through outside channels, they'll more likely learn the legal name.

Not every personality nor every trait of every personality can be listed. Such a list would take up far too much space, mostly with irrelevant information. Instead, the GMC formats for "Deep Troubles" include the most prominent personalities and their traits, leaving the rest for you to ad lib. If the action calls for a personality of a given type or with a given skill, it certainly does not stretch believability to assume that a deep is thus equipped.

Different personalities can have different hit point scores. A wound that would take down one personality may leave another standing, and injuries capable of killing one may leave others in bad shape but still hanging on. Use your best judgment if a severely wounded deep switches personalities and winds up without enough hit points to live.

Defense: 3 dice (Terry & Thor)

Hit Points: 20 (Terry), 25 (Thor), or 18 (most others)

Traits

Fighting(Terry & Thor), 3 dice — Terry fights with gusto, while Thor fights with fury. Spotches is usually armed with a fighting knife, but Thor likes flashier weapons if he can get his hands on them. (Armed)

Thieving(Terry), 3 dice — Several personalities steal, mostly shoplifting. This trait covers casing, filching, and fleeing. (Lithe)

Leading(Terry), 3 dice — Terry's energy and enthusiasm are contagious. (Often followed by several other Splinters)

SueAnne Green, "Sandy"

Dangerous Splinter

SueAnne Green, Captain: A former grade school teacher from Arkansas.



Art by H.J. McKinney

Ode, First Mate : A Kenyan child, very playful.

Throg : A lion-like bestial warrior from an unknown place and time. When Throg gets behind the wheel, watch out! Throg is also a great lover of music. (It is possible that Throg is not a personality per se, but rather a spirit that one of Sandy's personalities channels.)

Others : An array of stereotypes, such as callous bitch, insecure girl, loose woman, earth mother, etc.

Sandy works in a day-care center where SueAnne usually keeps control. Other personalities sometimes take over, but they impersonate SueAnne to avoid scaring the kids.

US woman, white, age 36, 148 cm, 47 kg. Sandy blond hair, round face. Usually wears an athletic outfit. Has a large fighting knife strapped to her leg

Languages : US English, some Swahili (Ode), "Tordonian" (Throg; Tordonian sounds like gibberish)

Attacks : 4 dice (Throg), X2 or with best available weapon

Defense : 4 dice (Throg)

Hit Points : 24 (Throg), 15 (others)

Traits

Covering 3 dice — Protecting her secret has taught her discretion and subterfuge. (Rarely talks about herself)

Fighting (Throg), 4 dice — She fights with cat-like reflexes, surprising strength, and evident training (but of no known school or technique). She usually fights with a knife that has a strangely curved blade, custom-made at Gun Metal to Throg's specifications. (graceful)

Dealing with Kids(SueAnne), 3 dice — Most of her personalities are good at this, including Throg. (Gentle voice)

Marcellin Gallimard, "Harry"

Splinter with Throckmorton Personality

Marcellin Gallimard, Captain: Dull and grouchy, rarely present.

Godelieve, First Mate: A nice old lady who gives candy to children and old-fashioned advice to adults, too unassertive to take the wheel often.

Étienne : Boor and brawler, French jingoist and Catholic supremacist. Étienne, unfortunately, is the most prominent personality, though he's generous

enough to let other “fun-loving” personalities out to play.

Clyde : Throckmorton personality, recently come to the fore.

Harry has found a good construction job, though his frequent absences are threatening it. Harry is physically addicted to alcohol, so all his personalities are alcoholic. Étienne considers alcoholism a virtue because it allows him to drink more. Clyde considers it a weakness, and he abstains (though the stress of doing so may cause him to lose control to Étienne).

French man, age 35, 171 cm, 72 kg. Short, black hair; fleshy face; pudgy. Off the job, he dresses outrageously. Black hair covers his skin in an interrupted path from his crotch, up his belly, over his chest, up his neck, up the sides of his face, over his scalp, down his neck, and over his shoulder blades. Clyde may or may not have shaved Harry’s belly, chest, neck, cheeks, and back by the time the PCs meet him.

Languages : French, imperfect English.

Attack : 3 dice, X2 with club

Defense : 3 dice

Hit Points : 24 (Étienne & Clyde), 16 (Godelieve), 20 (others)

Traits

Deception 3 dice — Necessary for covering his disorder and useful for duping bosses and lovers. (Neglects obligations)

Brawling (Étienne, Clyde), 3 dice — Not sophisticated, but effective. (Tries to keep a weapon within reach)

Alcoholic— Depending on who’s at the wheel, this can mean either that he gets drunk a lot or that he has to expend a lot of energy resisting the temptation to drink. (Flabby from too much drink)

Slim, Hawk, Doe, Bouncy, Hell, Greenie, Knobs, Bushy

Other Splinters

Other Splinters are not as dramatic as Splotches, Sandy, and Harry. They sometimes hang around Splotches, but aren’t as close as members of a true street gang are. They share the Splinter ethic of excess and are likely to help each other when times get rough. If inspiration strikes, give these Splinters whatever strange and wonderful traits you can imagine. Otherwise treat them as bizarre hangers-on.

Almost half the Splinters are men.

Descriptions vary, but the Splinter faction has a higher proportion of native Al Amarjans than the deep community at large. They dress strangely and exuberantly, expressing the variety of personalities within by putting on a variety of colors, textures, and shapes without.

Languages : varies

Attacks : 3 dice

Defense : 3 dice

Hit Points : 20 (fighting personalities), 15 (others)

Traits

Fighting— In a pinch, a Splinter can usually call up a personality that can fight, especially because many Splinters have gotten into rumbles before. Feel free to vary individual Splinters from the 3 dice average.

Others— The Splinters have an array of skills and traits connected to their various personalities, some of them quite surprising.

Dr. Umayma Ahal

Dr. Ahal is a de facto leader of the deep community. The PCs may find cause to visit her peacefully or break into her office.

Dr. Ahal’s Office

The Aswan Building

Dr. Ahal’s office is #312 in the Aswan Building, a modern office building on Florin Avenue in Golden, near Sunken Barrio. Most renters here are professionals: lawyers, management consultants, brokers, architects, and so forth. Amenities include a security force armed with tasers; clean and shiny bathrooms with useful a coin-operated dispenser for personal needs; an answering and message service; and a discreet service that delivers coffee, donuts, drinks, drugs, and perhaps more personal services as well. Security consists of alarms against intrusion, but renters who want alarms within their offices need to install them on their own. Dr. Ahal has a manually-activated alarm to protect her from a threatening client but has no passive alarms. PCs who wish to break into her office need only deal with external alarms and night watchmen.

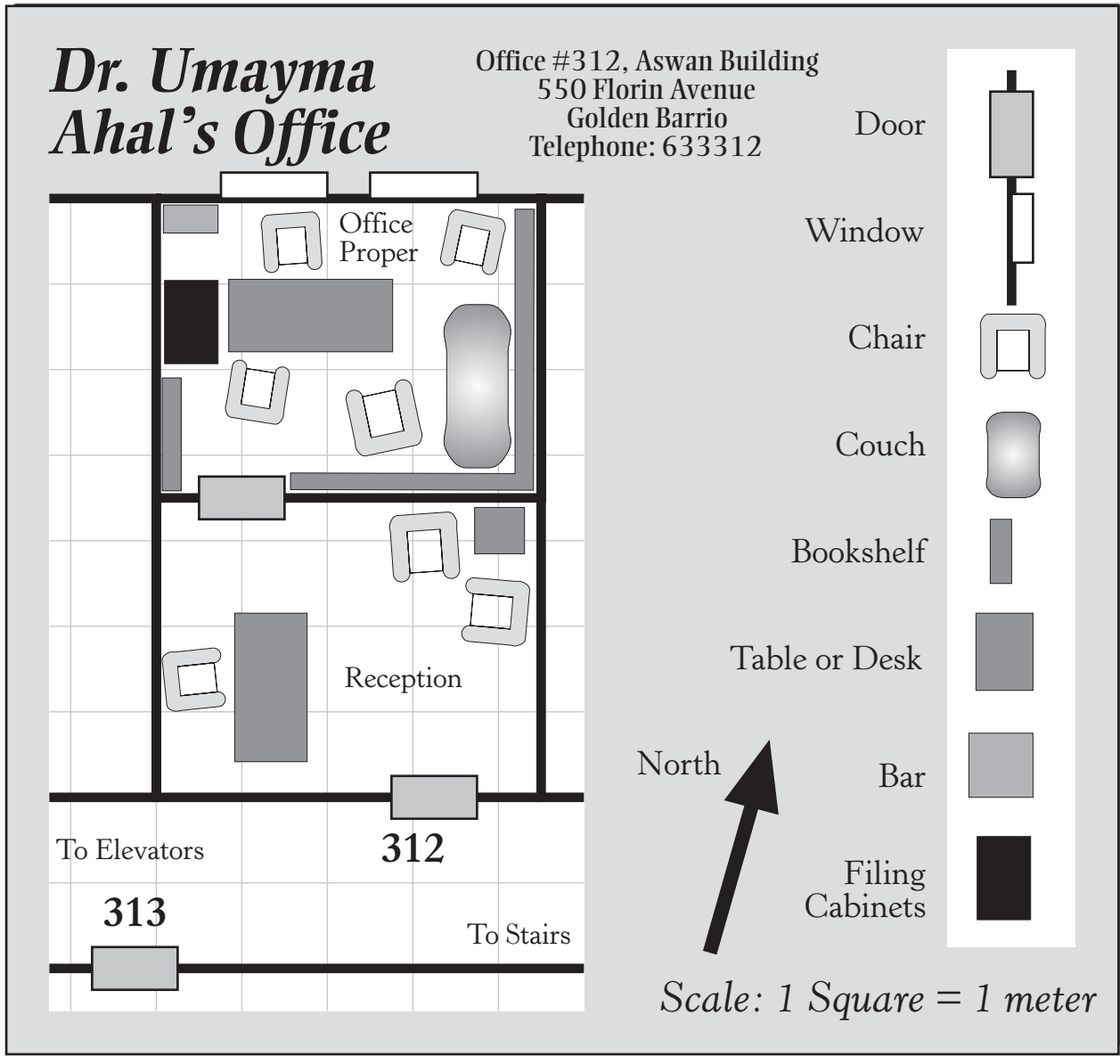
Reception

A nicely furnished room, heavy on calming pastels. General interest magazines in English, French, and Arabic sit in racks near comfortable chairs and couches. During working hours, Dr. Ahal's secretary, Oscar Wae, sits behind a neat desk, which boasts a telephone, a computer, a modem, a tape player for dictation, and a fax machine. Since Dr. Ahal keeps notes via tape recorder, Wae spends a good deal of time typing dictation into the computer. He greets those who enter with civility and patience.

Locked in his desk are secretarial things, such as paper clips, spare floppy disks, a telephone book, and so on. Taped to the underside of the desk, in the space where Wae's legs go, is a good luck charm made from

pipe cleaners, plastic beads, and a newspaper clipping about someone winning a huge lottery. In one of the locked drawers is a spiral of pipe cleaners twisted together and painted black. Stapled to the spiral is a yellowed article cut from *Al Amarja Today* with the headline "Burglar Falls To Death." The article reports how a burglar died after falling out a window in an apartment building in Flowers. The article has no relation to Wae or to Dr. Ahal; it is part of a curse-charm intended to harm anyone who breaks into the office via sympathetic magic. You may decide whether it has any effect, and if so what. Regardless, the effect ought to be explicable through coincidence (rather than, for instance, bolts of coruscating energy knocking burglars dead in their tracks). A curse-charm like this

Cartography by John Nephew



should leave the PCs wondering whether it has any effect or is just superstition.

To maintain security, there is no connection between Wae's computer and Dr. Ahal's. Wae types dictation onto a disk, and Dr. Ahal transfers the completed files onto her hard drive. No compromising evidence of any kind can be found anywhere in the reception area (unless one can get a tape or disk away from Wae while he's working on them).

Under the desk is a small plate with a cookie on it, left for the office spirits. The office spirits (picture tiny caricatures of janitors) might show up and defend Wae's desk, since he leaves treats for them, or they might be figments of Wae's imagination. If they do exist, they're the ones that keep office equipment in repair or wear it out, depending on their whims. They have all the powers of fairies in fairy tales (i.e., whatever magical abilities that are needed for the sake of the story).

Dr. Ahal's Office Proper

Another elegant room, with windows looking north toward the Sunken Plaza. It contains:

- *A large desk.* On top of it are a computer and a phone. Locked in the desk drawers are a tape recorder and several tapes (minis), a hand-held stun device (X3 damage, stun only), and perhaps certain items of a personal nature (see below). A button underneath the desk silently alerts security, should one of Ahal's patients become threatening.
- *A computer on the desk* It can only be accessed with the proper password (or rudimentary hacking skill and technology). In addition to financial information (which reveals Dr. Ahal to be quite well off), the hard drive contains files on current patients. With time, an intruder could learn just about anything about current clients. Juicy tidbits may reward the thorough researcher (see below).
- *A set of filing cabinets, locked.* These files include basic client information forms, professional articles, general correspondence, floppy disks with older patient files (current files are kept on hard drive), non-verbal patient information (such as drawings made during therapy), and perhaps some more interesting material (see below).
- *Escape chute.* A long, narrow tube made of strong, synthetic material, with metal hoops spaced along it. It's currently piled up under a window and bolted securely to the wall. Dr. Ahal can pop open the window, throw it out, and slide down it to the

sidewalk. She had this installed after SueAnne Green, as Throg, went wild in the reception area. It's to escape clients, not fires.

- *Bookshelves.* Lined with books and bound psychological journals.
- *Chairs and a couch for clients.*
- *A well-stocked bar.* In an elegant mahogany cabinet.

Things to be Found

Depending on where you want to take the plot, there are many things the PCs might find in Dr. Ahal's office, should they get a close look at it.

- *To allow PCs to infiltrate the deep subculture—* A fax from a Californian psychiatrist that tells Dr. Ahal that new deeps are coming to the island. It would not be hard to convince C&I (or a private group) to detain these two deeps so that the PCs can impersonate them and come to Dr. Ahal as if they were deeps. The notes identify the deeps as "Chris Kevlik and Robin Fields (lovers)." Since the note does not indicate gender, any two PCs can impersonate Chris and Robin.
- *To reveal a dark side to Dr. Ahal—* Evidence that Dr. Ahal herself isn't too sane. Depending on your needs and tastes, the PCs may find any or all of the following: a hand-written journal describing bizarre sexual fantasies involving patients (the psychiatric community would say that these journals are OK since they show that Dr. Ahal is able to keep her desires on the level of fantasy); deeply disturbed art, possibly finger paintings of incredible violence; prose or photographs that reveal an unhealthy fascination with fascism, cannibalism, mutilation, or what-have-you; a journal filled with intense introspection, mostly psychobabble, with riffs of frightening incoherence and psychotic imagery; notes written by her own split personalities, whom she refuses to acknowledge. Creating facsimiles to hand to the players would enhance this find.
- *To provide connections to other plots* Among the good doctor's notes may be found files on various interesting people, such as:
 - Sarah L'Orange, who came in for therapy obviously very troubled. She complained of being unbearably in love with Mariman Pentere, an Al Amarjan man who recently moved off-island. In fact, she describes what sound like withdrawal symptoms caused by his absence. She has tracked

down his family, but they refuse to speak with her. Further complicating matters, L'Orange is pregnant. Dr. Ahal asked L'Orange whether she had used any unusual drugs while seeing Pentere, but she says she did not. Dr. Ahal's comments include the hypothesis that some men are slipping an unknown drug to their girlfriends because she has heard of the "withdrawal symptoms of love" before. What Dr. Ahal doesn't know is that Pentere is a glug. (L'Orange did not return for a second therapy session.)

— Overbright, a 15 year old pube who cannot remember anything from before age 11. Under hypnosis, Overbright has described various atrocities associated with her life as the daughter of a Glorious Lord, including some details about the seklut centipedes. Dr. Ahal is still exploring this occluded past and has decided that it is not in Overbright's best interests to recall these events yet.

- *For comic relief*— Sight gags and such that mock psychotherapy, such as a box of cigars labelled "Just Cigars," a shrine to Freud, and an "English-Psychobabble/Psychobabble-English" dictionary.
- *If needed in the plot*— The "paperweight" that drives the plots with the cloaks (see below), given to Dr. Ahal by a client. The PCs may find it here, only to be captured by the building's security forces and relieved of it. When Dr. Ahal finds out that the PCs had stolen it, she takes interest in their motives, and might lock the paperweight away somewhere safe, such as in a bank safe deposit box.

Dr. Umayma Ahal

Shrink, Deep Expert

Ahal left Algeria in 1965 to escape the military dictatorship of Colonel Boumediène. She traveled to the US, studied there, and eventually received a doctorate in psychology. In 1979, after the death of Boumediène, she intended to return to Algeria. On her way, she visited a friend and colleague on Al Amarja and decided to stay there, "where so many people need professional help."

While she has never considered the possibility, and would oppose the idea vociferously, it's possible that Dr. Ahal creates as many deeps as she diagnoses. After all, she works primarily with people who have suffered traumatic abuse as children and whose personalities have integrated so poorly that they need

serious psychiatric intervention. Under hypnosis, she asks other personalities to come forth. It's fully within the realm of possibility that the "alternate personalities" that answer her call are newly created entities, produced as a wounded psyche's attempts to please a powerful and caring authority figure. Even if Ahal actually creates the multiple personalities in her client, the clients apparently benefit. The model of "split personalities" allows her clients to accept, understand, and organize personalities that are otherwise too wounded to integrate fully.

She works in office #312, Aswan Building, Florin Lane, Golden. She lives in the 'Burbs, but her address and phone number are unlisted. (Her clients have her number and can call her in emergencies.)

Her first name means "little mother" in Arabic.

Algerian woman, age 52, 156 cm, 56 kg. Curly black hair, usually wears a simple dress. Her speech and style indicate an education in the US.

Languages : Arabic, French, US English, reads & writes German

Traits

Psychiatry, 3 dice — Thoroughly familiar with psychological theory, psychopharmacology, and therapy techniques. Her specialty (4 dice) is in dealing with multiple personalities. (Wealthy)

Sedentary, penalty die — Penalty die on strenuous physical activity. (Flabby)

Oscar Wae

Secretary

Hired as a secretary and as something of a body-guard. Unknown to Dr. Ahal, he performs minor magic ceremonies at his desk.

Korean man, age 31, 170 cm, 61 kg. Carefully waved black hair, tanned skin, small eyes. Dresses professionally, usually with a silk noose. Polite and professional in his conduct.

Languages : Korean, English, some Japanese

Attack : 3 dice, X2 with club

Defense : 3 dice

Hit Points : 21

Traits

Martial Arts, 3 dice — He's no expert, but he can take care of himself. (Trim)



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Superstitious— Follows an eclectic and personal set of beliefs, usually involving the use of petty, improvised magic to improve his life. (Desk filled with paraphernalia)

Into the Deep

There are countless ways to use the deeps, even once you've narrowed the plot down to a single string of events. Since there are not only many characters in play, but most characters have many personalities, the possible combinations and permutations are too numerous to detail.

Below is a plot for you to use, either directly or as a model for a plot of your own invention. Included are several idea for how you can vary this plot. Chances are that player input and personal inspiration will lead the plot astray whatever its origin, but that's to be expected. Enjoy the chaos.

Aiding the Innocent

This plot shows how just about all the background material can come into use, and how the combination of split personalities and Throckmorton domination can really mess up people's plans.

Kicking It Off

A Gladstein Mover in the Edge, under Throckmorton influence, stole a key to a Gladstein code. He was mortally wounded as he tried to get the key to a compatriot, but he dropped the key somewhere along his path of travel, and the Gladsteins were at first unable to locate it. If the Throckmortons can get the key, which is itself encoded, they will publish it in *Little Scratches*. Other, unrelated Throckmortons who currently have encoded Gladstein data will intuitively understand that the key is intended for them, break the code on the data, and gain important information for use against the Gladsteins.

The Key

Imagine a polished stone with a flat surface, a stone that would fit in the palm of your hand. That's what the Throckmortons and the Gladstein Movers are after. It looks for all the world like a paperweight. The stone is a rosy granite with nice sparkly bits in soothing

black splotches in it, a pretty but unexceptional item. Carved in tiny script on the flat bottom, however, is a string of numbers too tiny to read without a magnifying glass (though a sharp eye or sensitive fingertip can detect them). When magnified, these symbols appear legible but meaningless. That's because they *are* meaningless. The real message is "157," the volume of the stone in milliliters. If the Throckmortonians had that number, they would be able to crack the codes protecting data on disks that they have stolen from Gladstein Movers.

What the data on the disks are remains up to you (and is out of the scope of this adventure), but possibilities include: a list of Movers who have been "acting out of character" (because they are under Throckmorton influence), progress on a weird science device that detects Throckmorton influence, identities of various Mover informers in the Edge, or compromising data on a member of the DBI who is now looking the other way when the Gladsteins ask her to.

The Hook

Meanwhile, at least one PC has gotten to know Amanda Gruenfeldt, a deep with a new, almost latent Throckmorton personality. Make the meeting between the PCs and Amanda as natural as possible. (In fact, if the PCs have already gotten to know a suitable GMC, have *that* GMC be a deep who can fulfill the role that Amanda would play, dropping Amanda altogether.)

Among other things, Amanda is an ideal foil for romantic competition and confusion. She may like one PC when one crew member is at the wheel, but favor another PC when a different personality is present. By making her interesting in her own right, you can involve her in several light-hearted scenes, assuring that the PCs will want to aid her when she needs their help.

And she will need their help because she found the "paperweight" behind the restaurant where she works. Her Throckmorton crew member stepped briefly to the fore to pick it up and put it in her purse, and she took it home.

The Gladsteins, meanwhile, ascertain that the key was dropped behind the restaurant, and they have no reason to suspect that anyone would think it was anything more than a paperweight, so they try to retrieve it politely. They call the restaurant to ask if anyone's found it. Amanda says she has indeed found it, but when she looks for it in her apartment, it's gone.

Tariq Ad-Deena has taken it. Tariq, also a deep, is an ex-lover of Amanda's, and he snatched the key surreptitiously when his Throckmorton-dominated crew member popped up. Amanda knows he took it because he was the only one who'd visited her, but when she calls him, he denies it. Actually, he has no knowledge of the key because the Throckmorton crew member took it. Amanda thinks he's playing mind games with her as petty vengeance against an ex-lover.

So the next time the "polite tourists" call the restaurant, Amanda tells them she's lost it. That's when the trouble begins. The Gladstein cloaks call her at home and threaten her, hoping they can force her to tell more. They give her three days to find it or to tell them all she knows; otherwise they threaten to cut up her pretty face. And they say that they'll be watching, so she had better not go to the Peace Force.

Now she's in trouble. She doesn't want to call in the Peace Force because she doesn't want publicity for the deeps, because Tariq has been known to be involved in illicit businesses, and because she believes the Gladsteins' threats. She asks her friends, the PCs, to help. If possible, the PCs may witness her getting this final, threatening call. They may even insist that they be allowed to help, rather than needing to be asked.

But Amanda doesn't play them straight. She wants to hide the fact that she and Tariq are deeps, so she tells them that he took it from her place, but she doesn't explain that the relationship between her and Tariq is actually a relationship between multiple personalities on both sides, not all of whom know what the others are up to.

If the PCs don't know about the phone call, she'll even tell them that she just wants the paperweight back because it's a sentimental gift from her father.

In any event, she says Tariq's holding a party at his place, and she's invited, and she'd like the PCs to come along. The party promises to be a fun time in its own right, so PCs who have no interest in helping Amanda may want to come along just for its social value. In addition, however, Amanda would like some PCs to see if they can snoop around and find the stone while they're there. The party is in two nights.

Visiting the Deep Blue Sea

Before the party, draw a PC or two to the Deep Blue Sea. If the PCs decide to check into Tariq, they may hear on the streets that he hangs out somewhere on the 100 block of Leopard Lane, in Flowers. PCs

who search there may at first be stymied since there are no obvious hang-outs on that out-of-the-way block, but anyone determined enough to open the Deep Blue Sea's forbidding door is rewarded. If the PCs don't check out Tariq, you can lure the PCs to the Sea by having a deep who's infatuated with Amanda stalk her. The PCs notice him and follow him back to the Sea. The stalker proves harmless (though he could show up again later to serve other roles in the plot).

In the Sea, the PCs are treated coolly; the deeps don't like outsiders intruding. The Splinters may show up to make noise and goof off. If so, they may give away a little information, mistaking the PCs for new members of the community. PCs should leave the Sea with the idea that something weird is going on, but without cracking the mystery.

Tariq's Party

The party is at the apartment that Tariq and Tiger share. Both deeps and loners are there. One room is "deeps only"; they give the cold shoulder to outsiders who come in. But deeps and loners mingle freely elsewhere in the apartment. Tariq is not around, but then his business interests often make him late, so no one's really worried. Tiger (Smiley) is busy seeing to guests' needs.

This party is an excellent opportunity for light-hearted role-playing, flirting, bragging, and goofing around. At the party they meet Bangles and Atlanta. If they haven't met Goldilocks yet (Amanda's roommate), they meet her now. They may notice an interesting detail, that some people (deeps) call Amanda "Raven."

If Amanda has not told the PCs about the threats, they think that they're doing a little personal snooping, but that they're not involved with anything dangerous. When the PCs find Tariq, they see how wrong that assumption is. In looking for the paperweight, the PCs may come near the closet in Tariq's bedroom. Through the door, they can hear whimpering. If they look inside, they find Tariq in the corner of the closet, in a fetal position, whimpering. (If the PCs don't find Tariq, someone else at the party does.)

The cloaks have already gotten to Tariq. Somehow, by bugging Amanda's apartment, perhaps, or by getting "Goldilocks" to talk, they determined that Tariq had the stone. They captured him and tortured him for information, but he didn't know where the stone was. His Throckmorton-dominated personality had already handed it off to a Splinter, and the person-

ality being interrogated knew nothing about it. The torture, akin to the abuse he suffered as a child, made Mobo, his least functional and most child-like personality, come to the fore. That's the crying, fetal-position person found in the closet. He's been here since before Smiley came home from work.

Strange clue: Tariq seems to have isolated, triangular chemical burns on his body. These are d'ngium burns, caused by the ends of the cloaks' knives (see below). They used their knives to torture Tariq.

The PCs doubtless want to get information from Tariq, but as long as Mobo has control, Tariq can't tell them anything. At this point, the PCs may be able to figure out that Tariq has split personalities, or they may be able to badger the admission out of Amanda. They may, however, have to wait until the next scene for this information.

Dr. Ahal's Office

Worried about Tariq, Amanda calls Dr. Ahal's home number ("for emergencies only") and requests an immediate meeting. Dr. Ahal agrees to meet Amanda, Tariq, and "some friends" (the PCs) at her office. Amanda explains that Dr. Ahal is Tariq's shrink, but she'll avoid explaining his disorder, if possible.

The problem is that the Gladstein cloaks took Dr. Ahal's business card from Tariq's wallet, and they've gone there to see what they can find out about him and his associates. They're skilled enough that they've been able to get past security, but as luck would have it, the PCs arrive when the cloaks are there. (Perhaps it's not luck. Dr. Ahal's secretary has a magic charm to thwart burglars; maybe it is what causes the cloaks' burgling to run into trouble.)

The cloaks, currently in Dr. Ahal's office proper, hear the PCs enter the reception area, so they have a little time to plan an escape. They can duck out the escape chute if need be. Once at the bottom, they can either tie the end in a quick knot or place a garbage can underneath the end. If several PCs come down one right after the other, either option can lead to some slapstick humor and possibly suffocation.

The cloaks can also fight their way out of the office, probably trying to take a hostage and then backing out. Since Dr. Ahal is likely to open the door to her office, she's a prime candidate for hostagehood. The cloaks also have flip-flop (see p. 77 for its description) to help their escape.

If any kind of fight breaks out, building security is likely to call the Golden Knights, who respond immediately, and the Peace Force, who show up a bit later to gather information. Though the PCs haven't done anything wrong, if they've encountered the law before, this incident may earn them another entry in their official, confidential files. Golden Knights and Peace Force officers may be Gladstein Movers, who stifle the investigation; operatives for other groups, who want to gain information for their superiors; or cloaks for groups friendly to certain PCs, who may pass along information to them.

The Gladstein cloaks who rifled through Dr. Ahal's office have made a mess of the place, scattering files everywhere in their search for clues. Tariq's file is spread out on the desk, though the name on the file is "Jean-Claude Aurasse," Tariq's all but absent captain. The PCs may see other interesting information, such as Amanda's file, or data that lead to other weird events on the island.

Once the threat is over and the Peace Force and Golden Knights have their reports, if applicable, Dr. Ahal is able to use hypnosis to get Tariq to come to the fore. She'll do this in private, so the PCs might *still* not know what's going on. Dr. Ahal may refuse to divulge even the most basic information about her clients without their permission. Chances are, though, the PCs will have seen enough personalities switching that they'll be able to figure it out by now, especially if they can press Amanda for information.

Dr. Ahal manages to contact Clyde, "Shiny's" Throckmortonian personality, and find out that he gave the "paperweight" to "Harry," a Splinter. Tariq, Dr. Ahal, and Amanda all know that the Splinters hang out around Shifter's, an abandoned strip mall in Four Points.

Shifter's

In a back room in Shifter's is "Harry" (see description on p. 64), with Clyde firmly in place behind the wheel. He has a magnifying glass, notebooks, paper, and other primitive devices for use in his attempt to determine what the paperweight is for. He has found the writing on the bottom and copied it, and he's tried to crack that "code," but there isn't any.

Hanging around "Harry" are the other Splinters. They're ready for a rumble with anyone who encroaches on their territory. Good-hearted PCs will have to cope with fighting with multiple personalities. If they smash up Throg, for example, SueAnne may

take the wheel and suffer innocently. Hard-hearted PCs won't care, but then they'll have their own karma to face some time later. This final confrontation with the Splinters in abandoned buildings at night should be creepy.

If you want to drop hints about the Throckmorton Device, the PCs can find them in "Harry's" room. He may, for instance, have written "ClydeClydeClyde..." all over the walls or scribbled Throckmortonian rants into his notebook.

Settling Accounts

Tough PCs should be able to get the paperweight from Harry. Now what? They can give it back. The cloaks will take it and leave Amanda alone after that. If they destroy the "paperweight," the cloaks are satisfied, once it's proved that it's destroyed. If they try to use it as bait, they'll have a good fight on their hands. The cloaks, if they have to, will call in reinforcements, though the PCs could eventually make attacks on them so costly that the cell gives up rather than lose more men and equipment trying to get the key back.

Other Hooks and Ideas

Below are other premises and plot ideas you can use, either directly, or as inspiration for your own sordid plans.

Mercs

Dionysus Movers have gotten wind of the Gladsteins' loss of their key, and they want it for themselves. They may be able to sell it back to the Gladsteins, or use it for their own espionage against their fellow Movers. Through a front, they hire the PCs to get the key.

The PCs can pretend to come to Amanda's rescue in order to gain her confidence, or use fringe powers or weird science to learn more about the key's location and beat the Gladsteins to it.

If the superiors hear about the d'ngium daggers, they offer the PCs bonuses for capturing them.

Conspiracy Connection

If PCs are on to the Throckmortons or Movers, GMCs that they have under surveillance may be after

the key. PCs with initiative will find out what their subjects are after and get it themselves.

PC's Possession

It's not the Gladstein key that everyone's after, it's some vital possession belonging to a PC, such as a fringe invention or a magic charm. It should be something that the Throckmortons want, either to use, or to keep it from being used against them. A Throckmorton-dominated deep, possibly a friend, snatches it, and the PCs go after it, with the Mover cloaks trying to get it for their own ends at the same time. The GMC who steals it in the first place may be a good friend of the PC who owns it.

PC Deep

A PC, unknown to her or her player, is a deep, and the PC gets stuck in Amanda's position. This makes the threats a bit more personal. You had better know your player well before you spring something like this on a PC.

Deep GMCs

Below are deep GMCs that may be involved in the plot. They may also serve as local color, entering the series before or after this scenario plays out.

Amanda Gruenfeldt, "Raven"

Sympathetic Deep

Amanda Gruenfeldt, Captain: She is reasonably happy and functional, though she can get dispirited when things turn against her.

Sarah, First Mate: Pragmatic and emotionally distant, except with her closest friends.

Myra: Happy-go-lucky, reckless.

Claudia: Lightly dominated by the Throckmorton Device. She has not presented herself to the other crew members yet. As of yet, she is not very assertive.

Gruenfeldt works as a waitress and shares an apartment with Goldilocks (Priscilla Kent). She pretty much has it together.

Gruenfeldt makes an ideal hook for chivalric or macho PCs who want to come to her assistance. If you want to use such a hook, you can alter her description



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to make her fit the PCs. For instance, if you want her to hook a PC who works out at Myron's Gym, change her from a waitress to an athletic trainer who works there.

Al Amarjan woman, age 24, 165 cm, 56 kg. Long, slightly curly, black hair, deeply tanned skin, small nose and mouth, thin eyebrows. She dresses nicely, favoring skirts and bare arms. Sometimes (as Myra), she dresses quite provocatively.

Languages : Al Amarja patois, some Arabic

Traits

Covering 3 dice — Though her crew members aren't bizarre, she has still had to learn to deceive, dissemble, and fabricate alibis. All crew members have this trait. (Has an excuse for everything)

Style (Amanda and Myra), 3 dice — Since physical appearance is part of the façade that convinces people she is a loner, she monitors her appearance closely. This attention helps her dress well, use make-up tastefully, use the right body language when talking, and so on. Since people place more importance on appearance than they like to admit, she generally comes across as likeable, attractive, and intelligent. (Dresses well)

Priscilla Kent, "Goldilocks"

Amanda's Roommate

Priscilla Kent, Captain : Taciturn, reserved, but comfortable and open with people she knows. Cold toward religious people.

Marlene, First Mate : Giddy, light-hearted, and something of a tease.

Cylene : Lesbian-separatist, man-hater with castration fantasies. Atheist and positivist.

Catherine : Throckmorton-dominated. Hates Cylene, and may assert herself when Cylene is involved in "repulsive" behavior. The other crew members have not met Catherine yet.

Your pick : The conscious and reincarnated soul of someone who did not have the spiritual wherewithal to make it back into an independent body. Choose a person who fits the story or the PCs, maybe someone who knew a PC in a past life, or someone bringing the PC an urgent message from the Other Side. If no one presents himself, use Van Gogh. (That ought to mess up Kent's career as a buyer, or boost it.)

Priscilla Kent works as a buyer for Jara's, a fashionable store in Broken Wings. She shares an apartment with Raven (Amanda Gruenfeldt).

The captain has done an admirable job of constructing a coherent personality after suffering incredible abuses at the hands of her priest as a child. All of her personalities, however, retain a distaste for organized religion.

British woman, age 33, 165 cm, 59 kg. Long, light brown hair; long, thin face; perfect teeth. Dresses very fashionably.

Traits

Subterfuge, 3 dice — Inventing alibis, parrying curious questions, and impersonating Priscilla. (Laughs off contradictions in what she says)

Eye for Fashion(Priscilla), 4 dice. (Well-dressed)

Banter (Marlene), 3 dice. (Talkative at parties)

Rad-Fem Politics(Cylene), 4 dice — Knowledge of and devotion to radical feminist politics, as well as the ability to interpret every situation as evidence for the rad-fem world view. (No sense of humor)

Tariq Ad-Deena, "Shiny"

Amanda's Ex

Jean-Claude Aurasse, Captain : A timid Swiss man, torn with self-doubt, rarely expressing himself any more.

Hector, First Mate : A stern Spanish patriarch; super-ego and self-appointed judge of the other crew members. Rarely presents himself.

Tariq Ad-Deena : The dominant personality, a successful, energetic North African.

Mobo : A helpless, frightened child, barely able to talk.

Clyde : A new personality, dominated by the Throckmorton Device.

"Shiny" has legally changed his name to Tariq Ad-Deena, and he dresses and acts as if he were North African, albeit a rather irreverent and Westernized one. He deals some drugs, fences stolen goods, runs short cons, and also holds legit jobs from time to time. As a Muslim, he never drinks, but he smokes tobacco and "kif" (marijuana).

He shares an apartment with Smiley (Tiger Tasanawinyou).

Swiss man, age 34, 175 cm, 78 kg. Short, blond hair; naturally pale skin painstakingly tanned to a deep bronze; heavy-set. He usually wears a djellabah.

Languages : French, German, decent English, colloquial Arabic

Traits

Role-Playing 3 dice — He plays fictitious roles and portrays false emotions with ease. He uses this trait to cover for strange things that may happen when he shifts personalities. (Always finds a way to fit in)

Street-Dealing (Tariq), 3 dice — He can buy it and he can sell it, but the really hot stuff (like Slo-Mo, firearms, or state secrets) he won't touch. (Keeps odd hours)

Tiger Tasanawinyou, “Smiley”

Meek Throckmortonian

Tiger Tasanawinyou, Captain : Meek, smiley, likes checkers. Usually at the wheel.

Leon, First Mate : An energetic and caring lover who always holds the woman all night after making love.

Fahd : A gay party animal. (The name means “panther” in Arabic.)

An unfortunately suggestible fellow who had never developed much of his own personality when a psychiatrist convinced him (under hypnosis) that he had split personalities, Tiger has since come to Al Amarja, settled here, and taken the inappropriate name “Tiger,” all because authority figures around here wanted him to do so (or at least thought *he* wanted to do so).

He shares an apartment with Shiny (Tariq Ad-Deena), and he works as a street vendor.

Thai man, age 47, 166 cm, 60 kg. Small and slim, round face, short, black hair. Dresses modestly and smiles a lot.

Languages : Thai, imperfect English

Traits

Reading Desires 5 dice — With little to no personality to motivate him, he learned to anticipate and understand the desires of those around him. He can sense the feelings of friends as accurately as most people can feel their own. Note that he never uses this ability to his advantage, but conforms his own actions to fit the desires of those around him. Also note that a score of 5 dice is only possible for an exceptional person; in this case, Tiger is exceptional because of his weak personality. (People like him)

Developing New Selves— With a weak self to begin with, Tiger has an easy time allowing what should be a facet of his personality to develop a “life” of its own. He often spontaneously develops new selves to match the needs of those around him (though these newcomers act as if they've been hanging around for years, just watching). (Creates selves to please others)

Throckmorton Domination— It feels like coming home. Most of Tiger's selves are heavily into following Throckmorton's needs. The conflict within Tiger comes from his lifelong need to acquiesce to those around him; he can't follow Throckmorton and please everyone else at the same time. Currently Tiger serves as a “latent” Throckmorton, willing to give up everything for the cause at a moment's notice when he is needed. He may or may not have shaved his eyebrows; if so, he claims a prankster personality did it on a lark. (Has a newfound glow)

Stefania Piarni, “Bangles”

Dr. Jekyll and Ms. Hyde

Stefania Piarni, Captain : Sullen, prone to spending long hours painting when there is work to do.

Maria-Grazia, First Mate : Timid and easy to bully.

Maria-Alba : Pretends to be timid and easy to bully, then whips out a knife. Up till now, just a mutilator and humiliater, but the capacity for killing is within her.

Clyde : Under Throckmorton domination. Other crew members have not yet met her.

Plot Potential: The helpful Maria-Grazia turns unannounced into Maria-Alba and gives the PCs a scare. The PCs have, by now, realized that some of these deeps are after the “paperweight,” and think that Maria-Alba is involved, but she's clueless. Clyde, however, is watching, and waiting for an opportune time to act.

Italian woman, age 29, 162 cm, 55 kg. Short, tightly curled, brown hair; dark, brooding eyes. Her clothes are usually in casual disarray, and she wears lots of bracelets and anklets.

Languages : Italian, fair English, some German

Traits

Painting (Stefania), 3 dice — Mostly moody water colors. (Apartment bedecked with water colors)

Timid (Maria-Grazia), penalty die — Bad at resisting bullying, fighting, asserting herself, speaking in public, and so on. (Looks at the ground a lot)

Violent (Maria-Alba), 3 dice — Use for attack rolls, but not defense rolls. (Grins when others are scared)

Lawanda Chardonnay Jackson-Damar, “Atlanta”

US Deep

Lawanda Chardonnay Jackson-Damar, Captain: Vaguely dissatisfied.

Kaneesha, First Mate: Energetic, carefree, and unfaithful.

Tonia: Terrified, incoherent, shell-shocked. Tonia, a martyr, has taken onto herself the terrible memories of childhood to spare her crewmates. She doesn't show up much.

Jennifer: Throckmorton-dominated. Her crewmates have not met her yet.

Lawanda, from Atlanta, Georgia, works as a legal secretary in Golden. She has married Pietro Damar, a “loner” from Italy. He does not know that Lawanda has other personalities. While he is sometimes baffled by a sudden switch between Lawanda and Kaneesha, Lawanda doesn't seem much different from the women he dated before getting married.

Plot Potential: The PCs may assume that Pietro is a deep himself and talk about Lawanda's separate personalities. This news comes as quite a shock to him, and the PCs could inadvertently have a hand in ruining a marriage. On the other hand, Jennifer may decide that marriage to a white man is heinous and kill Pietro in his sleep one night. A murder, and the ensuing investigation, could get the PCs to fall under Peace Force suspicion. “The neighbors say you were here yesterday, and that a verbal altercation with the deceased ensued.”

US black woman, age 19, 168 cm, 56 kg. Hair in corn row braids; gentle, rounded features. Usually wearing cheap imitations of Italian fashion.

Languages: US English

Traits

Secretary (Lawanda), 3 dice.

Dancing (Kaneesha), 4 dice — She can really move. (Lithe)

Mover Cloaks

These are the Gladstein cloaks who have come to retrieve the key. They are from off-island because the local Gladsteins do not want to risk blowing their covers in this operation. Local Gladstein cloaks, however, are providing these cloaks with some information to help them navigate around the Edge.

Gladstein Cloaks

Asian Operatives

Cover: Japanese businessmen considering opening an electronics plant on Al Amarja. They may adopt other covers to deal with new situations.

They can provide precious little information about the local Movers. They were called in by the local Gladsteins for this mission and are not familiar with Mover operations on Al Amarja. If it can be forced out of them, they can provide information about the Gladstein cell in East Asia.

Asian men, about age 30. They wear special suits: steel-reinforced shoes, armored suit coat, and secret pockets. Their special equipment includes d'ngium knives (one each), flip-flop (one capsule each), and crystal traps (three among the six of them).

Languages: Among them they speak most major Asian languages (so they can pose as Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, or whatever), and all speak English (or they wouldn't be assigned to Al Amarja)

Attack: 3 dice, X2 (tripled) with d'ngium blade

Defense: 3 dice

Hit Points: 21 (conditioned toughness)

Armor: Reinforced jacket, 1 die

Traits

Fighting 3 dice

Covert Ops 3 dice

Moving 4 dice

Bibliography

Watkins, J. G., “Multiple Personality.” *Encyclopedia of Psychology* New York: John Wiley & Sons. 1984

The Cloaks' Weird Science

D'ngium

D'ng G'en-G'og, a Gladstein oppenheimer in Taiwan, has discovered a way to "translate" material from another dimension. So far, the only useful material to come through is a blue-black metal, which D'ng named after himself — "d'ngium." When in contact with any living substance from this dimension, d'ngium "translates" that substance into what D'ng believes is the life-ordering structure of its native dimension. Unfortunately, this structure doesn't work in this dimension, and the net effect is molecular warping. To the naked eye, the living material seems to have been burned by acid. The surface of the d'ngium itself dissolves as well when in contact with living tissue.

When made into a blade or point, d'ngium does nasty damage. (It is, however, more malleable than steel.) A blade slowly disintegrates from repeated contact with flesh, but it remains useful for about two dozen fights.

In addition to its usefulness as a weapon, d'ngium no doubt has many potential uses on the fringes of science, and the Gladstein oppenheimers are trying to develop new uses for it.

(Since d'ngium distinguishes between living and non-living matter, D'ng has concluded that there is a "spark of life" and is using d'ngium and other translated materials in his search for it.)

A d'ngium blade does triple damage, but only points that penetrate armor are tripled. For example, if a cloak does 12 points of damage with a d'ngium knife, less 3

points for the target's reinforced jacket, the remaining damage of 9 is tripled, for 27 points. Note that even when a d'ngium weapon does not cause any hit points of damage, it might (at your discretion) contact skin and cause a slight burn. For example, a light scratch from a blade is not significant enough to do a point of damage, but it will burn and possibly give the recipient a clue as to what he's up against.

Flip-Flop

A gaseous by-product of translating materials between dimensions. The most common effect of flip-flop is to cause people to confuse right and left. (Up-down, back-front, and future-past are wired pretty hard into the human body, but left and right are tenuous enough that flip-flop can confuse them. Nevertheless, confusions of other polarities are also possible.) Flip-flop's most common use is to frustrate pursuit. Those who contact the invisible, odorless gas begin to confuse left and right, and as long as the operatives keep making turns, they can throw their pursuers off. The effects last up to fifteen minutes, wearing off gradually. The gas itself dissipates, but can cause isolated confusions nearby as long as a week later.

The gas takes effect by simple contact, so holding one's breath cannot protect one from it. Chemical examination of the gas reveals it to be a mix of nitrogen and oxygen (like air). The flip-flopping effect results from quantum-level information, so routine analysis cannot distinguish flip-flop from normal gas.

Further Possibilities

Where the Plot Might Lead

If you and your players like the plot so far, they could continue it by finding and neutralizing the Throckmortonians who have stolen the Gladstein disks.

Having proved themselves to the deeps, the PCs may find themselves called upon when they need help

in the future. Likewise, the deeps are grateful to the PCs, provided the characters conducted themselves with discretion. As allies, the deeps could benefit the PCs greatly. Practicing deception as a way of life, they would easily be able to provide the PCs with alibis, bear false witness on their behalf, hide them from enemies, and so on. The deep subculture is a ready-made underground network for passing information and conducting other covert operations.

Similarly, Dr. Ahal may need the PCs' help in the future, and she may be able to provide them with important information, even if doing so stretches the bounds of ethical conduct.

The PCs may also come to the Gladsteins' attention as competent potential cloaks. Through one front or another, the Gladsteins may try to recruit the PCs. Imagine the players' surprise when they put

some clues together and realize that the guys with the burning knives they fought are on the same side as their new employers and superiors.

Changes in the Subculture

You may have a different vision for the deeps: more psychotic, more expressive of their personalities, more public, rowdier. The deeps' privacy serves the needs of this plot, but once the plot is resolved, the deeps can change into whatever you need. After all, new people come into the community all the time, and it is by no means static.

Multiple personality disorder may become a fad. The media discover the subculture and depict the Splinters as typical deeps. Soon, young people start adopting the "deep lifestyle" in large numbers. An openheimer might even invent a way to induce dissociation so that loners can become deeps, not just poseurs.

Intersections

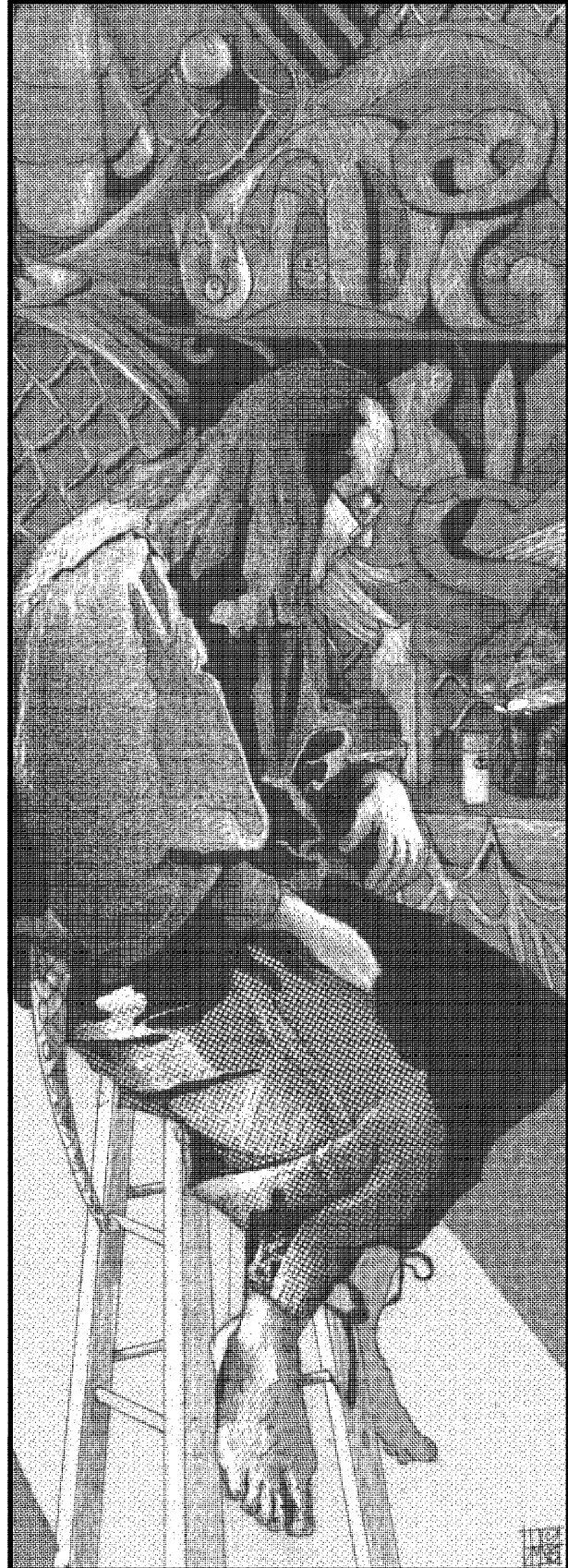
Airwaves: A reporter from AXTC is onto the deeps and wants a scoop. The PCs can help the reporter get the goods or help the deeps persuade the reporter to give up on the story. If the reporter succeeds in getting the story, split personalities may become a fad.

"Black Death Theater Troupe" (in *The Last Province* magazine, issue #2): A cast member is a deep who allows different crew members to take control to portray a variety of roles. This GMC may be the PCs' introduction to the troupe.

House Call: The Rangers are able to speak through Tiger's particularly weak psyche, but only intermittently because his psyche is constantly changing to adapt to the needs of those around him. (This serves as an alternate hook to *House Call*)

Welcome to Sylvan Pines: Dr. Aha arranges to have hostile PCs committed to Sylvan Pines. Or she pays the PCs to check into Sylvan Pines and investigate possible wrongdoing. Or she pays the PC's to locate and bring her these secret plans for the Ison neural device.

With a Long Spoon: Sensitive to child abuse because so many of them were victims themselves, the deeps notice something strange at the First Steps Crèche. They provide the PCs with the initial information that gets them interested in finding out more.



Art by H.J. McKinney