OVER THE EDGE™

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WITH CHRIS LITES

OVER
THE
EDGE
™

This edition is dedicated to Robin D. Laws,
who inspired the homebrew campaign that became ***Over the Edge***
and whose contributions to Al Amarja outshined my own.

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CHAPTER ZERO

INTRO TO THE OUTRÉ

IT BECAME NECESSARY TO DESTROY THE TOWN TO SAVE IT.

—UNNAMED U.S. MAJOR, 1968

Over the Edge is designed to highlight your creativity. The character generation rules produce unique characters that are ready to engage in the action, for good and ill. The mechanics are streamlined so you can focus on taking the story in any direction that calls to you. The setting is modern and weird, allowing you to incorporate details from the real world into your character design as a player or into your scenario design as a gamemaster. The setting of Al Amarja described here is full of interesting details, but what really counts is what you and your friends come up with on your own.

Genetically engineered assassins, transdimensional tourists, covert brainwashing programs, mind-expanding drugs, art inspired by nonhuman intelligences, roving baboons that want your sandwich, a State apparatus that's "here for you," and secret histories of our world — all these and more can be found on Al Amarja. Or sometimes, instead, these things find you.

What is *Over the Edge*?

The game's setting, characters, and rules all lean toward fast, weird action.

ISLAND OF THREAT AND PROMISE

The Atlantic island of Al Amarja offers opportunities found nowhere else, and many of its dangers are also found only here. In the game world, Al Amarja is a crossroads of mind-controlling conspiracies, twisted dimensions, inhuman depravity, questionable science, unholy commerce, and cutting-edge art. At your gaming table, it's a locus for whatever dangerous urban weirdness the gamemaster or players can dream up.

STORY-FORWARD CHARACTERS

The brightest feature of ***Over the Edge*** has always been the memorable characters that players invent. Players have great freedom to create the characters they want, and features such as a character's question mark and trouble provide dramatic hooks for exciting play.

FAST CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The system for rolling dice to resolve conflicts is streamlined, allowing gamemasters to pace the action from methodical to fast. In addition to generating a number that determines success and failure, the dice generate "good twists" and "bad twists." These results provide good and bad surprises beyond simply success and failure. You can even fail with a good twist or succeed with a bad one.

INSPIRATION FROM ANYWHERE

Every textbook, song, treatise, poem, painting, abstract, scripture, experiment, doctrine, or catalog that speaks to you is fair game for including in ***Over the Edge***. Art, history, religion, psychology, biology, physics, engineering, and anthropology — anything from your education and experience can inform your game.

Vision for *Over the Edge*, 2019

THIS IS A WAR UNIVERSE. WAR ALL THE TIME. THAT IS ITS NATURE. THERE MAY BE OTHER UNIVERSES BASED ON ALL SORTS OF OTHER PRINCIPLES, BUT OURS SEEMS TO BE BASED ON WAR AND GAMES. ALL GAMES ARE BASICALLY HOSTILE.

—WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS, TAPED CONVERSATION, PUBLISHED 1991

A relaunch of the game where everything is new again. Nothing is a retread. The island of Al Amarja completely re-envisioned. Every conspiracy, every neighborhood, every major gamemaster-character is portrayed with a new spin. Dr. Nusbaum, the Glugs, the Terminal — everything old gets a new take. GMs

who love some 1992 versions of things can pick and choose 1992 elements and 2019 elements to make a hybrid setting, as they please. No attempt is made to square the new setting with the old one; it's not "25 years later." Everything is fresh.

- New core mechanic produces discrete results, not just a number on a sliding scale. It's more evocative and less arithmetical.
- New character traits propel action.
- New world details keep everyone guessing.
- New narrative rules improve storytelling.

Earlier Editions of *Over the Edge*

Most of the content in the earlier editions can find its way into your campaign, if you like. The old system is different, but most of the content was free-form background material and solid gamemastering advice, and that's all usable. Most of the characters, businesses, and conspiracies in the 21st-century version of the game have counterparts in the 20th-century version, and the gamemaster can mix and match. This game is your game, and you should do with it as you please. Also, I still get royalties on sales of the old edition, so if you don't have your copy already, my friends at Atlas Games can set you up.

SUPPORT MATERIAL FOR EARLIER EDITIONS

You have the best of both worlds. On one hand, Atlas Games has published more support material for Al Amarja than you can ever use, so that's good. On the other hand, it's for earlier editions of the game, so you can use that material only by deliberately changing it to suit the new game. Using the old material requires mental work, labor that transforms someone else's ideas into your own concepts.

USING THE WARP SYSTEM

The original system from 1992 is so good that I could have touched it up and used it again. But fans of the WaRP system already have it and don't need me to repeat myself. If you love the WaRP system, you can see for yourself how easy it is to use that system with the game's new content.

This Book

Forewarned is forearmed.

DON'T OBEY THESE RULES

Follow these rules like you follow good advice: carefully but without ever abandoning your discretion. Embody them, roll them around in your head, but make them serve you rather than the reverse. All intentional communities are consensual. Roleplaying games are a special kind of art where the consumer is also an artist.

GENDER AND PRONOUNS

This text uses the singular "they" when referring to a player-character because, why not? It uses "she" when referring to the gamemaster because every ***Over the Edge*** gamemaster unwittingly channels a shard of Monique D'Aubainne's identity, as she insinuates herself deeper into our reality. By spelling this danger out to you in the form of a metatextual comment, I prevent your subconscious defenses from protecting you.

STRUGGLE FOR REALITY

The game book you hold in your hands is an epiphenomenon, generated by reality waves from a parallel universe in a nearby branch/angle. There, the struggle, or jihad, for reality is all-consuming. The catastrophic powers unleashed in that universe are felt in other universes up and down the angularity, including our own. The alternate realities in which your ***Over the Edge*** story arcs take place are all much closer to that source of conflict than we are. What seem to be random ideas invented for your diversion are actually disturbing reflections, distorted through recursive transduction, of a sister universe that is in deep trouble. We can never know what it all means or what's really happening there, but that's their problem. Like light from a long-dead star, these reality waves may well represent a world-shattering struggle that has already taken place and been lost. There's nothing you can do.

Once you start playing ***Over the Edge***, you will notice little elements of the "fictional" world appearing in your own life. You might run across someone whose name is clearly a fabrication from the Edge. You might read about or encounter unusual transgressions, remarkable people, counter-culture trends, dark philosophies, and perhaps scientific discoveries that all reflect the "fiction" of this "game." Don't be alarmed. The elements of that distant reality that seep into our own are inconsequential. Feel free to delight in these little grace notes that only you and others like you can notice, and don't tell your psychotherapist about them. These little aberrations are inconsequential. The danger of anything world-threatening making the leap into our "reality" is negligible. Breathe easy.

THERE IS NO MORAL...

...to this story. If your human heart is beating, the action you experience playing this game will have morals. There's no need or possibility to be explicit about them.

USING TWO BOOKS

As the gamemaster, or GM, you could use two copies of this book. This game is about drawing out your imagination and the imaginations of your players, so you might benefit from having a copy that you can mark up with margin notes, impromptu edits to the material, references to the characters or players at your table, and whatever it takes to help you make the game your own. Dog-ear the pages, stick tape or tabs to the pages you reference the most, and staple shut the pages that you don't want anyone else to see. No wizard is shy about marking up their own grimoire, and the book you're holding is your own book of shadows, your personal and personalized guide to transforming the untrue into the true. Not writing in your book is like not getting a tattoo. You should make this book so personal to yourself that you don't want others to read it. If you're ever done with it, burn it. If you pass it along to someone else, it's like saying it was never yours. This game is my book and not yours, until you write in it.

Meanwhile, you probably want a clean copy to share with the players. You might want them reading certain sections of background material without seeing your notes. If you want to get one of your players to try their hand at GMing, you'll want an unmarked copy to hand over to them. You might also find it useful to have two copies just for yourself, so you can effectively have the book open to two different spreads at the same time. You might also feel better about marking up a copy of the game if you have a second, unmarked copy that you can keep for posterity.

EXTRA STUFF ON THE INTERNET

By the time you read this as a printed book, there should already be plenty of good resources on the Internet. If you're reading this as a digital edition, there are probably also plenty of good resources on the Internet. Go see.

INVOCATION

O Aristoteles! O Jayarāśi Bhatta! O Ibn-Sīnā!

Cast not your dead eyes upon us.

Isaac Newton! O Charles Darwin! O Rosalind Franklin!

Behold us not.

You showed us the universe.

But we prefer magic. Can you blame us?

The dead begrudge us nothing.

So be it...

CHAPTER FIRST

PLAYER-CHARACTERS AND THEIR FATES

...TO MAKE IT HAPPEN, THAT'S THE OBJECT OF ALL ART.
—WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS, ROLLING STONE INTERVIEW, 1974

Freaks, dreamers, agents, and dupes slip onto the Island one by one or in small knots. They come here because this is where it's at, the "it" that elsewhere in the world is forbidden, lost, or unimagined. Maybe in all the chaos they will miss what waits for them here, but who in this life has that kind of luck?

Your character is your contribution to the story arc. The better your character, the more fun your friends at the game table have. This chapter shows you how to create and run a character that will be interesting for you to roleplay and engaging for the other players to watch. Break a leg.

The Alternate Reality of *Over the Edge*

The action in ***Over the Edge*** takes place in an alternate reality that is superficially similar to ours but profoundly different. For one thing, countless paranormal forces operate under the surface, controlling or at least manipulating humanity. The imaginary game world is different from our own in ways large and small.

- The government, or shadowy organizations manipulating the government, have been in contact with entities that are not of this Earth. Project Blue Book was closed because it was the false front operation designed to shield actual investigation into "UFOs."
- Corporations are sitting on breakthrough technology that would threaten their business models. Doctors are not telling the world what they really know about cancer. Media sources get secret directions from unknown entities telling them what to broadcast and what stories to bury.
- Organized religions have been infiltrated by conspirators who use them to control the populace. Some of these conspirators are in contact with "spirit beings," and they're not angels.
- "Targeted individuals" suffer gangstalking, remote sexual abuse, neural monitoring, and other ongoing harassment from shadowy groups. The harassment is maddening, but so subtle that no one will listen to the targeted individuals or help them.
- Morgellons and other mysterious ailments have been "debunked" by "experts," but that's a cover story because these ailments are real. Morgellons is some sort of skin infection by tiny irritants, and some people say that the illness came to Earth from outer space.
- Officials deny that psychic powers or other paranormal abilities even exist, but many open-minded people have had experiences that can only be explained in paranormal terms. If everyone compared notes about the paranormal experiences they've had, it would be eye-opening and a threat to the powers that be.
- Trump won the 2016 election in the US, leading to actual, no-shit Nazis marching through the streets of America. His victory has also emboldened retrograde politics around the world.

Several oddballs know each other through a sandwich shop; they end up causing mayhem at a witches' party and finding common cause against mind-controlling aliens. Or maybe a select team of postmodern operatives chase down a rival spy with a briefcase full of weird tech; they suffer setback after setback, but in the end one of them gets his hands on the briefcase, only to lose it immediately when attacked by medical-grade zombies. Or lone travelers to a mysterious island fall in together and one of them founds a cult of Christian necromancy; their story is too long and open-ended to summarize in a few lines.

Each story arc resulted from a format defined by the GM and from the characters that the players created to fit that format.

Story Arcs Great and Small

The GM sets the length of the story arc, represented by the number of sessions. Arcs can be of indefinite length, but you should probably play some short arcs when you're new to the game. The GM also sets the arc's power level, represented by a numeric level, usually 2nd (expert), 3rd (elite), or 4th (world-class). There is typically some theme or starting situation that describes the sort of action that the arc will comprise. I give each arc a title, but sometimes not until it's over and we know what the story is.

LENGTH OF THE STORY ARC

Over the Edge is typically played in bursts. When the players create their characters, the GM tells them roughly how many sessions to expect, and players invent their characters with the arc's length in mind. Classic roleplaying games are paced for years of play, but this one is built to make things happen now. Even in a short arc, your character is going to get a lot done, and a lot is going to get done to them. The lot-casting system is fast, so the action is fast. As with a movie or a mini-series, knowing the length ahead of time helps you mentally prepare for the experience.

A one-shot is great for someone running the game for the first time. It also works for a crazy idea that an experienced gamemaster wants to see at the table but that honestly has no legs.

The more sessions the story arc has, the longer the characters and the story have to hang together. Arcs can repeat characters, at least if their stories aren't done. One way to do an ongoing series is as a series of shorter arcs. However, all story arcs exist as shards of untold parallel universes where similar things are happening and quite different things are happening, so continuity among arcs is optional.

The GM has her own set of guidelines for managing story arcs of various lengths; see page 204.

One-Shot

You can create characters, play the characters a while, and reach some sort of resolution in three hours. Character creation requires hardly any rules knowledge, and the lot casting system resolves conflicts quickly. Sometimes a one-shot takes two sessions, so don't force a conclusion if it's premature.

Characters can be over-the-top. They can work at cross-purposes, they can be caught in death spirals, and they can be too narrowly defined to work as long-term characters.

The tree of roleplaying must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of player-characters. In a one-shot, characters have little script immunity, especially toward the end of the session. Perhaps they have something like the opposite of script immunity: script vulnerability.

In a one-session story arc, the party can have a narrow focus, or it can have zero focus. It can be a collection of characters so specialized and so devoted to the action of the session that it would never fly as a longer arc. Or you can throw random characters together in the Al Amarjan blender and see what comes out. If they never make it out of the Terminal, you can still pack a lot of action into an evening.

Catastrophe is a fine ending to a one-shot. The players don't have too much investment in their characters, and a giant meltdown or ruinous explosion makes for a memorable conclusion. The conclusion can feature each player casting lots to determine how their character survives the catastrophe or fails to do so.

One-shots are fine opportunities for people to try their hand at GMing. The game rules are simple enough that any player knows pretty much all of them, so any player can jump into the GM's seat without having to do a bunch of homework first. One good idea and some enthusiasm can get you far as a GM, especially because the players are bound to bring enough energy and ideas to carry lots of the story-telling load. As a first-time GM, don't set up a plot that ends with "it was all a dream" or a scenario that involves the player-characters watching your beloved gamemaster-characters (GMCs) be the heroes. Other than that, your options are wide open.

For one-shots, you can drop the question mark character feature (see page 13), especially with players new to the game.

Short Arc, About Three Sessions

Get something started in the first session, ramp it up in the second, and resolve it in the third. You have time to address one big issue, plus time for some side issues that crop up. This length is surprisingly satisfying because action happens fast in ***Over the Edge***. You might be done in two sessions.

For a short story arc, you want a main conflict to hang the action on, and the party does best if it's aligned toward that conflict. The characters might not know what the conflict is about, but the players

CHRIS SAYS: STORY ARCS

Listen. The players tell you a story. They aren't always aware of it, but they're always telling you, the GM, a story. In my *Over the Edge* games I often toss out bits of "weirdness chum" to tease the waters. The players invariably make associations between random data points I never thought of.

If there's one human trait you can lean on as GM in *Over the Edge*, it's apophenia. The players will make connections where none exist. You can pick the ones you like and riff from there. Simply by introducing any of the little nuggets contained herein, you salt the players' imagination. Soon enough, they run with the ball, or with the severed Aztec head, or whatever. The point is, let them do some of the work for you. Not out of lethargy, but because this is a participatory hobby.

That feeling you have, when you leave a film and think, "I thought it was going this way — that would have been cooler," that's what roleplaying is all about. The Island is, if anything, a template upon which is written all the strangeness of our race (and other races). Let the players make it a palimpsest, writing and overwriting that which the real world calls inviolable law.

should know enough about it to build their characters to match.

When playing the sorts of roleplaying games that I've played and designed for the last forty years, the idea was generally that the player-characters were expected to win. In ***Over the Edge***, the whole point of casting lots and having them matter is that fate, or luck, can work against you. The universe grants us the right to try but not the right to succeed.

Long Arc, Around Seven Sessions

For this sort of arc, the gamemaster has some idea of what major conflict the arc is heading toward. Alternatively, the characters screw around and follow their particular agendas for a few sessions until something gels. Then the GM and the players drive the action toward some resolution, resolving a conflict that has developed organically out of play.

Seven sessions might not seem like much, but your character is going to go through a lot in that time. You might see one or two preliminary climaxes before the final climax. This sort of arc allows lots of time for your character to pursue their particular needs or interests, and lots of time for everyone at the table to get to know these characters better as they develop over time.

A long arc is long enough for certain sorts of characters to get a little old. A goofy character with a loud and funny shtick can be entertaining for a couple sessions, but they don't always age well. If, partway through the arc, your character is getting old or becoming annoying, there should be plenty of in-game justifications for them changing as a result of their experiences. You're also free to simply retcon a character or to find a dramatic way for them to exit the arc.

Series, Indefinite Length

This last sort of story arc is the classic flavor of roleplaying campaign. One advantage of a series is that you and your friends can get started even if the GM doesn't already have a direction or end point in mind.

As with a long arc, characters need to be relatively stable to last indefinitely. They need some depth, versatility, and likability.

Often some sort of central conflict develops out of play. It might become obvious that some big conflict has sucked the characters in and resolving that conflict will turn out to offer a satisfying conclusion to the arc. The arc's length is indefinite but not infinite.

Repeated Arcs with Returning Player-characters

The end of one story arc can be the beginning of another. Chaining story arcs together is a way to get more mileage out of the work you've done building player-characters and GMCs.

The sequel to a good movie does not start the instant the previous movie ended. The director feels no need to laboriously detail how the characters get from the end of one story arc to the beginning of the next. The next movie starts where it needs to start. If your next story arc is a sequel, you have the same freedom to elide the details and jump to the action.

Starting a new arc is a fine place for characters to gain specialties or to move up a level in power. The process of training, developing new skills, opening your third eye wider, unlocking your epigenetic powers, or whatever it takes is a process best handled in a retrospective montage or by hand-waving.

STORY ARC AND CHARACTER LEVEL

Every arc has a level, which roughly defines the power of the characters and their opposition. Characters in the arc start at that level. They operate at that level for their core capabilities (as defined by their traits), and they operate at a lower level when doing anything else. The higher level the arc, the further the characters' abilities distance them from the real-life players, and the more of a headache it is for the GM to figure out the interaction of powerful fringe abilities. Second level is good for extraordinary people getting caught up in things that might be over their heads. Fourth is as high as you probably want to go, and at that level you're already playing with fire.

- 1st level. If you want a story arc about regular slobs who get in over their heads, especially as a change of pace, try 1st level.
- 2nd level. Here the characters are experts in their fields and generally competent. This power level is good for a gritty, street-level story arc. For a long arc, the characters might start here and advance to 3rd level over time.
- 3rd level. At this power level, the characters are expert enough to get into real trouble and competent enough to navigate it. The characters are noteworthy experts in their fields. This power level is a great default because the characters are powerful enough to make things happen but still easy to relate to.
- 4th level. Here the characters are world-class in their areas of expertise and expert in general, capable of amazing achievements and catastrophic failures. This power level is especially good for players who know their way around the game system and the Island.
- 5th level. Now we're talking capabilities that are beyond human, for when you really want to mix things up. Given the amount of power that characters are going to throw around, shorter arcs are better. And if you never play at this level, that's fine.
- 6th level & 7th level. These levels are so powerful they are forbidden. The system and setting are aimed at lower-level characters, but everything is flexible enough that experienced players with a hard-working GM could pull this off. Let us know how it works for you.

POWER LEVEL EXAMPLES

LEVEL	FIGHTER	PHYSICIAN, HEALER	FIXER, HUSTLER
1st — Competent	Street brawler Totem champion of Ice Age swine	Medical assistant Miracle tea breeder	Multilevel marketing enthusiast Mystic shit event coordinator
2nd — Expert	Mob enforcer Inherently lethal scorpion-souled human (botched soul transmigration)	ER doctor Ch'i doctor	Intuitively led mediator Grifter on the outs with their grifter family
3rd — Elite	Skilled MMA fighter Juiced-up ex-assassin	Battle-hardened combat medic Trans-shamanic medicine crone	Disgraced diplomat who knows too much Charismatic preacher who speaks with the breath of...someone
4th — World Class	Epigenetically enhanced black ops assassin	Renegade energy doctor	Neurolinguistic psycho-genius
5th — Superhuman	Scion of the Angel of Death	Hippocrates returned for the end times	Transcendent mentalist

PARTY THEMES FOR INSTANT PARTY COHERENCE

Often it pays to have some sort of theme for the campaign to give the party some coherence. In general, the shorter the arc, the more important it is that the characters hang together. Good themes allow for a variety of characters and character motivations.

Example Party Themes

- Contractors for a wealthy patron, probably some shade of shady.
- Members of an extended family, including adopted members and family friends.
- Assets of the same conspiracy — agents, informants, specialists, and creatures.
- Former students, followers, dependents, or investigators of the same mysterious figure.
- Dilettantes who have met each other before in their jet-setting pursuits of the unusual.
- Survivors of a botched mission that occurred several years ago.
- Members of the same self-help organization, devoted to each other through the organization's secret rituals.
- Visitors with good reason to attend a strange convention being held on the island. Best for a one-shot.
- Individuals separately involved with the paranormal, all of whom have crossed paths and worked together before.
- Members of a mercenary underground clinic, devoted to taking care of important clients' medical needs and keeping them out of St. Charon's Hospital, sometimes maybe extracting them from it.

The best part about ***Over the Edge*** is the characters. You invent your character much like you might invent a character in a book, with no skill lists to restrict your imagination. Record your character's information on your personal character sheet (see page 251) and record all the other characters' information on the player-character summary sheet (see page 253). If you like, start by reading the example of character creation on page 20. That example will show you how it all hangs together.

WEIRD, URBAN DANGER

Over the Edge works best for weird, urban danger.

- The "weird" gives wide latitude to your imagination. All manner of strange concepts from real life, conspiracy theories, or fiction can fit right in here. In general, anything paranormal is different from "off the shelf" paranormal powers or entities. If you meet vampires, they'll be weird vampires.
- The "urban" element takes all sorts of modern expressions and experiences and compacts them in the pressure cooker of modern city life. The urban setting makes it easy to parody modern life, to satirize it, or to push its sins and promises to absurd levels. The story is about us, but forget that and let the story do its job.
- The "danger" element connects the action to the core question of suspense in animal experience: Will I get hurt? In the Edge, there are all sorts of new and exciting ways to get hurt, so welcome.

FEATURES OF A CHARACTER

A player-character has several features.

Name: You can pick this last, and you can take suggestions from the table.

Question Mark: Adjective or short phrase describing some aspect of the character's public persona and internal identity, specifically the area of a character's life where they might transgress, revert, break down, transcend, or otherwise show a new side. Put a question mark after the term to show that it's a question, as in "honest-?," pronounced either "honest, question mark" or "honest?" with tone of voice indicating the question.

Main Trait: Who you are or what you do, defining your character's education, training, skill set, talents, experiences, etc. This trait is your character's chief source of can-do, providing the capabilities that allow the character to do interesting things.

Side Trait: Giving your character additional capabilities.

Capability Grades: Summarizing the sorts of things your character is good at, or not.

Trouble: The circumstance that might lure or provoke your character into doing something more interesting than the safe option. An excuse to do something more fun than the smart thing.

Notes: Write whatever you like, such as nationality, age, personality, race, gender, orientation, and any other labels, categorizations, or social constructs deemed real by the dominant culture. When others pose questions to you about your character, you can note your answers here.

Creating a Character

MISERY'S THE RIVER OF THE WORLD.
EVERYBODY ROW! EVERYBODY ROW!

—"MISERY'S THE RIVER OF THE WORLD," TOM WAITS, 2002

YOUR CHARACTER CONCEPTS

When conceiving your character, work along these rules. Like all rules, they are for your benefit.

They Are Human

Your character can for sure be some sort of messed-up human, but they've got to be basically one of us. They can be mutants, astral hosts, post-humans, subjects of metahuman experiments, prodigies, freaks, exceptions, victims, shadows of humanity, and outliers. They often are. But being fundamentally human helps everyone at the table understand your character, and dramatically speaking, it helps everyone at the table relate to your character. Our common humanity is our greatest strength.

They Follow "Hollywood" Reality

Hollywood knows what people want or it would be a historical footnote. You know the simplified, counterfactual way that Hollywood scriptwriters treat various topics to make them work better in storytelling: history, biography, psychology, consciousness, evolution, mutations, DNA, epigenetics, the conservation of energy, scientific research, etc. Hollywood lies about how the world really works for all the right reasons, and you should, too.

They Are Painted with Broad Strokes

Al Amarja is an extreme place with outrageous characters and uncanny locations. A character detailed with a fine brush might wind up being hard to appreciate in this outlandish setting. Your character needs to be able to hold their own in this environment and not get upstaged by the GMCs that populate it. Hyperbole is welcome, as is a touch of satire and farce.

They Can Take It

Characters in ***Over the Edge*** are liable to get shoved, punched, trammeled, clubbed, stabbed, burned, interrogated, incarcerated, ankle-locked, tailed, spied on, lied to, set up, betrayed, drugged, cursed, telepathed, brain-burned, mind-controlled, envenomed, asphyxiated, and intimidated. They might not all look like it, but they all have the tenacity typical of protagonists in violent stories.

They Fit In, or Do They?

Characters are more fun if they can go to parties and less fun if they have limited options for interacting with GMCs person-to-person. If you want to try a character that is an outsider and not someone that could ever hobnob or glad-hand, that's probably OK for a short arc. Even characters that are popular at parties often hide ways in which they deeply don't fit in.

They Are Not Played Straight

"An Exorcist" is not a fully functional ***Over the Edge*** concept. "An Exorcist Who Loves Fighting Demons Too Much" is better. Not Stuntman but Weird Stuntman, with a curse of some sort associated with work in a David Lynch film. Not Vampire but Recovering Vampire, Former Vampire, or Failed Vampire. If anything in the character description comes out of pop culture, it gets some sort of twist or angle.

They Are New to the Island

Exceptions won't break the game, but the default is that you're new here. For a long arc, you might start play on the plane in, where the characters' arrival on the Island is the players' introduction to the arc. Usually you can start an arc with the characters settled in somehow but not yet undertaking whatever it is that they're doing here.

If your character has been on the Island a while, probably some recent event catapults them into the action, forcing them out of their habits and into the plot. On Al Amarja, there is no shortage of "recent events" that might catapult someone into something.

They Interact with the World

Characters that avoid interaction are against the rules. Or at least those characters are poor etiquette, since your character does little to entertain your friends at the table. Interacting with the world is what we are here to do in this life. Characters generally interact with the world by being competent enough to get stuff done, although fate has the last word.

They Have Seen Shit

When something paranormal or conspiratorial pops up, they roll with it. They live in an alternate reality where this stuff is true, and they have at least caught wind of it. And if the character does paranormal things, they also know that there's more stuff out there that they don't know about.

They Don't Wreck Plots

Characters that grant wishes, read minds, mind-control people, see the future, stop time, or otherwise wreck plots are challenging even in fiction or television, where the creator has plenty of control. In a tabletop campaign, they are worse.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER CONCEPTS

- Silke is a level-headed-? cryptozoologist with a mean right hook. She gets entranced by poetry and by poets.
- Tariq is a jaded-? underworld enforcer with an imaginary friend that's real. The imaginary friend gets him into trouble, but it's because the friend knows things that regular people don't understand.
- Mariko is an independent-? occult investigator, specializing in not being noticed. She gets in trouble when she follows random hunches, most of which end up to be unrelated to her goals.
- Anton is a gentle-? man embodying the psychic hive-mind of reincarnated interstellar "arthropods," with an uncanny ability to fit in with a group. He gets into trouble when the hive-mind messes with his intuitions about other people.

Every Party Needs a Cleric

That's a lie. You don't have to make sure that someone at the table is playing the healer, the hacker, or whatever. Even so, it pays to know what concepts the other players at your table are going for. You don't want to duplicate another player's concept, and you don't want to have a concept that's incompatible with your friend's concept. If a friend is playing the priestess of Atlantean gods, you might not want to create the priestess of the gods of Lemuria. You probably also don't want to generate a character who is hunting down the devotees of lost gods. If you saw fit to create a young person looking for deep meaning in a dehumanizing global culture, that might just work with your friend's Atlantean-god priest. Then again, player-characters that are antagonists can work if everyone is up for it. One-shots are good for PC-versus-PC violence.

In days gone by, a player's authority over their character was assumed to be absolute. These days we've seen the limits of rugged individualism, and we acknowledge the collaborative nature of all shared narratives.

They Are Motivated

If your character is heading to Al Amarja, they must have something to do that is so important that it takes precedence over fighting the global rise of white nationalism and counteracting Earth's sixth great extinction. As players, you and your friends are evidently taking a break from the struggle, but your characters must be up to something big.

Question Mark

Your character's question mark identifies the test of self-definition that they will face in the campaign. The question mark is an adjective or short phrase that is part of the character's reputation and personal identity. During the campaign, that trait may well be tested, and usually it's an open question whether the character will pass the test.

For example, if you want your character's sanity to be a key question, your question mark is "sane-?" On one level, it means that the character regards themselves as sane and is known as such, at least among their close associates. When you tell the table that your character is "sane, question mark," you're letting everyone know that they should help improvise opportunities for your character's sanity to be brought on stage. They also know that, when the question of your sanity comes up, you have the option to start going a little crazy and remain in character. Usually you'll do the sane thing, but not always. It pays to talk about what you imagine it would look like if your character diverged from their norm. If your character is "sane-?," you probably want to talk to the table about what it looks like for your character to slip out of sanity. Paranoia? Obsession? Delusion? Maybe you don't know, but even so it's useful to talk out a number of options.

Capabilities, such as Persuasive or Intimidating, don't work as question marks. Your traits determine your capabilities.

Since the point of the question mark is to give you freedom and to keep the table in suspense, not knowing how your character is going to react to certain situations, it's usually best not to name in advance what is going to get your character to act against their self-definition. For example, if the adventurer-archaeologist is fearless-?, it's better not to know in advance which threat might be an exception. If you know in advance that snakes are the one thing that scare this guy, then you don't have a degree of freedom either when threatened by spiders or when threatened by snakes.

Your question mark is part of both the character's public persona and their internal identity. In either case, there might be doubts. If your question mark is "holy-?," maybe you have detractors who think you're a heretic. Alternatively, maybe you're the one who doubts your own holiness, but even in that case it's important that you still tell yourself that you are holy. Doubts are fine, but if your character doesn't identify with the question mark, then there isn't anything personal at stake.

On a meta level, the question mark telegraphs to everyone else at the table that this trait is going to be a crux of personal conflict and possibly change. If your character's question mark is "hard-hearted-?," then everyone else at the table, you included, should be curious about what circumstance might draw out their soft side.

Players are free to improvise contrary details that belie the question mark. A hard-hearted-? thug might keep a small, beloved memento, something that the other characters might never notice but that the other players would appreciate hearing about out of character.

EXAMPLE QUESTION MARKS

- Honorable-? (what might tempt them?)
- Stable-? Sane-? (maybe less than they think)
- Fearless-? (what might get to them?)
- Hard-hearted-? (what might touch them?)
- Trustworthy-? (could be manipulated)
- Altruistic-? (but might take what they think they deserve)
- Friendly-? (with a mean streak)
- Confident-? (until they snap)
- Upstanding-? (but has a weakness for...)
- Pious-? (but creative with the application of moral law)
- Insightful-? (sometimes overthinks things)
- Wise-? (occasionally clueless, or turns out to have a blind spot for some sorts of folly)
- Ascetic-? (now faced with new pleasures to tempt them)
- Determined-? (but losing faith)
- Innocent-? (works only if innocence is part of the character's self-concept)
- Even-tempered-? (when will they lose their cool?)

Main Trait and Side Trait

Your main trait defines your core set of skills and capabilities, and it covers a lot of ground. Your side trait gives you some specific advantage, capability, talent, or expertise, especially something not already covered by your main trait. You are presumed to be competent and effective at what you do. Your skills related to your traits are assumed to be remarkable.

MAIN TRAITS VERSUS SIDE TRAITS

The defining difference between a main trait and a side trait is that a main trait has an indefinite number of add-on features while a side trait represents a narrow capability. For a main trait, you can generally imagine "what else would someone with that background be able to do," but not for a side trait.

TEST YOUR TRAITS FOR FUN

> "Because my character has this trait, I'm going to have fun [doing XYZ]."

Your traits largely determine the sort of fun you're likely to have with this character, particularly how successful the character will be at that endeavor. Are you going to have fun by winning fights, sneaking past security, getting information from people, finding important clues, investigating mysterious technology, tracking unholy spirits, escaping dangerous situations, gaining clues by talking to bugs, calling on interesting GMCs for assistance, or what?

PARANORMAL POWERS

Paranormal powers for characters are a recurrent element in ***Over the Edge***. Since the GM and players don't have much familiarity or cultural knowledge about just what a paranormal power can or cannot do, you should spend a little more time with the GM exploring what the paranormal power means, what it can do, and what it can't.

If it's broad, like "reincarnated witchfinder," your paranormal ability needs to be your main trait. If it's a side trait, it needs to be narrow, such as "evil eye."

Unnatural powers have a built-in advantage in that they are exceptional and let you do things that aren't naturally possible. They also come with built-in disadvantages, such as vulnerability to paranormal intrusion, drawing attention to oneself from sensitives, paranormal enemies related to one's paranormal abilities, and so on. The more powerful one's paranormal powers are, the more ways the GM is invited to invent repercussions and complications.

What really determines your paranormal trait's power and capability is the level assigned to the trait. For example, if you're a 2nd-level psychic surgeon, in terms of effectiveness the trait is as good as a mundane 2nd-level medical trait. No normal human can do surgery with bare hands and the power of the mind, so any psychic surgeon is superhuman in that sense.

POOR CHOICES

Characters that engage actively with the world are great, but some concepts prevent that sort of active engagement.

- Religious devotee who has sworn a vow of silence.
- Gives off lethal radiation that kills everyone within 2 meters.
- Any trait that's colorful but totally useless. If the trait is only ***mostly*** useless, it might be fine as a side trait.

MAIN VERSUS SIDE TRAITS

TRAIT CONCEPT	AS MAIN TRAIT	AS SIDE TRAIT
MMA Fighter	Fighting plus working the crowd, dealing with publicity, knowing other fight performers, sizing people up.	Just fighting.
Telekinetic	Telekinesis plus knowing people in paranormal circles, navigating paranormal communities, familiarity with well-known paranormals, open-ended ability to develop new telekinetic abilities over time.	Just telekinesis.
Medic	Keeping people alive, coping with traumatized people, navigating through medically oriented social circles, taking control over traumatic situations, working through medical bureaucracies, assessing the medical state of others.	Keeping people alive.

NO PLOT WRECKERS

If your character has a trait that wrecks plots, it's fun for you a while, but it's less fun for everyone else, and it can get old. The GM may allow exceptions, especially for short arcs. In such cases, your extraordinary ability amps up the action and can lead to your character getting into deeper shit than possible without such a power. In general, these plot wrecking traits are unwelcome at the table:

- Invincibility, invulnerability, untouchability, etc.
- Invisibility, or similar abilities that keep the world from interacting with you.
- Flying, walking through walls, and anything that obviates obstacles for you and leaves the other characters sitting at home.
- Mind-reading, instant lie detection, reliable clairvoyance, and other things that hand you secrets on a silver platter.
- Psychic domination, mind-control, any way that you can force people to do your bidding or reveal their secrets.
- Shape-changing, especially wide-open shape-shifting that allows a character to do countless different stunts and avoid danger in numerous ways.
- Precognition.

KEEP THESE QUESTIONS IN MIND

...to build a character that is interesting to play and fun for other players to watch or interact with.

- How do you want to interact with everyday people?
- How do you want to interact with leaders and heroes?
- ...with criminals and villains?
- ...with ambiguous mysteries?
- ...with opportunities to indulge?

CAPABILITY GRADES: FIGHT, SWAY, AND WEIRD

Each character has three capability grades that summarize what they are capable of doing, based on their traits and level. These grades give you, the other players, and the GM a snapshot of what to expect from your character. These grades derive from your traits and your level. The three grades are Fight, Sway, and Weird.

Grade Scores

Your grade scores depend on your character's level and whether that grade represents something that's core to your character. For each grade, use the core capability number (based on the character's level) for a capability that relates directly to a trait and the default capability if it does not relate to any of your traits. Standard starting levels for characters are 2nd, 3rd, or 4th.

Fight

This grade lets everyone know what to expect from you when a fight breaks out. If you have a trait that gives you fighting skill, such as Anti-Paranormal Mercenary, assign a grade equal to your level. Otherwise your grade is the lower, default number.

Sway

This grade lets everyone know what to expect of you when you're trying to navigate the social scene, win people over, influence decision-makers, talk your way

CORE AND DEFAULT CAPABILITIES BY CHARACTER LEVEL

CHARACTER LEVEL	CORE CAPABILITY	DEFAULT CAPABILITY –FIGHT AND SWAY–	DEFAULT CAPABILITY –WEIRD–
1st — Competent	1	0	0
2nd — Expert	2	1	0
3rd — Elite	3	2	0
4th — World Class	4	2	0
5th — Superhuman	5	3	0
6th — Godlike	6	4	0
7th — Mind-Blowing	7	5	0

EXAMPLE TRAITS

- Bounty hunter gifted as a "human dowser" (main) with a heart of gold (side).
- Private eye specializing in unorthodox cases (main) with a magic book that gives veiled instructions (side).
- Heretical exorcist (main) with jihadi combat training (side).
- Black market doctor (main) with an air of authority (side).
- Human inhabited by wayward energy being (main) with movie-star good looks (side).
- Latent prodigy (main) with a super smart pet rat (side). Perhaps the character and the rat are both products of the same paranormal science experiments.
- Revenant, strong and resistant to punishment the way zombies are, fully independent (main).
- Mutant exile from off-island, so adept at fitting in that people don't notice how well she fits in, satisfies odd personal tastes in secret, will get exiled to a worse place if mutant identity is revealed (main).
- Data surfer ("digitomancer") capable of discerning hidden knowledge by surfing the Internet or skimming over vast amounts of digital data (main or side).
- Skill empath, able to temporarily pick up specialized skills from others by touch, but not knowledge or secrets (main).
- Ex-circus clown/assassin (main).
- Conversation shaper, able to gradually maneuver conversations to go your way (side).

out of a summary execution, or otherwise pursue your goals through interaction with other humans. If you have a trait that grants you this sort of ability, such as Adorable Innocent, then your grade is your level. Otherwise, it's the default grade.

Weird

This grade lets everyone know how much help your character is going to be thanks to their paranormal abilities. This grade measures how much you can accomplish outside of normal channels. If you have a trait that helps you with this sort of thing, such as Posthumanist Neuroscientist, then this grade is based on your level. Otherwise it's 0.

Annotations

Since these grades are based on free-form abilities, your grade of 3 in Fight might be different from someone else's grade of 3. Feel free to annotate your numbers with asterisks, question marks, parenthetical notes, little plus signs or minus signs, or other indicators to remind everyone that the numbers on your sheet are not the end of the story.

UNFAIR ABILITIES

Can GMCs have abilities that let them read minds, control thoughts, see the future, become invisible, go ethereal, resist all manner of damage, and other abilities forbidden to player-characters? Yes. The limitation of "no plot busters" represents the shared contract at the real gaming table, not the harsh fictional reality of the Edge. Is it unfair that GMCs can have such powers? In a word, yes. Will your GM take advantage of this unjust asymmetry? I hope so.

Just Reminders

These grades make it easy for everyone to keep track of what to expect from each other, but whether a trait applies to a particular conflict depends on the trait and the circumstances. A grade of 3 in Sway indicates what the character can do in the right situation, but not in every situation. For example, a Fairy-Blood Soprano might be able to "sway" people, but only when the character has the opportunity to sing to them. If the Fairy-Blood Soprano tries to sway someone over email, their trait doesn't help, and the character operates at the lower, default level of 2. Obviously, your character's grade in Weird doesn't allow them to do anything and everything that's weird.

Trouble

THIS IS A GIFT IT COMES WITH A PRICE
WHO IS THE LAMB AND WHO IS THE KNIFE?
—"RABBIT HEART (RAISE IT UP)," FLORENCE + THE MACHINE, 2009

Day to day, the arcane librarian sets an example of efficient discipline, but when he catches wind of a certain rare book available in the Underground, he follows a suspicious broker to a dangerous library. The woman with the yeti's soul gem uses her powers to find missing people, but when the gem starts talking to her, she starts using her powers for something else — very else. The two-fisted bruiser knows enough not to stick out and call attention to himself, but when people randomly remind him of the mind control process he went through, he confronts them. But is it really random who triggers that response?

Your character's "trouble" is the circumstance within the game world that might lure or provoke them into doing something unwise at the character level but constructive or exciting on the player level. Your character's trouble is the excuse you need to do something fun rather than pragmatic or typical.

EXAMPLE TROUBLES

- I take risks to help an innocent in danger
- I let curiosity get the best of me
- I listen to my imaginary friend
- I pursue a new experience
- I crank things up to 11
- I pursue exotic tissue samples
- I show off
- I act unpredictably around powerful women
- I brag and say too much
- I misunderstand what's normal and act too much like an orc
- I follow mysterious "signs" or "portents"

AN OPPORTUNITY, NOT A PENALTY

All your friends at the table would rather see your character jump out of their chair and interact with the world than sit back and safely observe it. That's good trouble.

In some roleplaying games, a character has a flaw, defined as a weakness. A character's trouble is something better. It's your opportunity to kick the action up a notch by doing something that drives action or raises the tension. When your character encounters their trouble, think about what your character could do that would be fun for everyone around the table. Think like a scriptwriter, one who wants their characters to get into enough trouble so that the action is interesting but doesn't want a character to wreck the whole plot by doing something self-defeating.

Trouble is not your free pass to be a jerk. If you have your character do something heedless and it distracts the whole table from what they want to be doing, that's on you.

REVISE

You're almost done, so stop and review your handiwork. Confront the raw totality of your agency. You have total power. You can rethink anything and everything about this character. Imagine someone else handed you the character to play, and you had the opportunity to revise it first. Especially for a longer story arc, think about how your character is going to operate in play. What fun will you have when your character succeeds? What sort of fun will the other players have when you fail?

After you've played your character a little, you might figure out that it's not working like you'd hoped. Generally, you can tweak your character during the arc. If that means a little retconning, that's fine.

When I write something in this book, it's not the first thing I think of writing. And after I've written it, it's still not final until I'm sure it's good. Give your work a second thought, too.

Tells for Characteristics

To better ground your character, invent a tell for each characteristic: question mark, traits, and trouble. Tells are observable details that correlate to the characteristic. If the characteristic is secret, such as the main trait Burned Ex-Spy, the tell doesn't give it away. Because of our cultural obsession with thing-ness, players tend to think of visual cues first, and it helps to have cues to start with when describing what your character looks like. But the universe is made of actions, not objects, so try also to think of sounds or motions. A character might speak with an electronic voice box or move with fluid gestures. Tells that involve touch or smell are immediate in a way that sight and hearing are not. Imagine a character's clammy handshake or medicinal aroma.

EXAMPLE TELLS

- A Linebacker is...built like a linebacker.
- The Half-Real Shadow of a Man has to overdo it or disappear, so he wears a tinker cloak and a leather hat.
- The Cursed Stuntman has an athletic build and plenty of scars.
- The Ex-Bassist Rockstar has a glam style in hair and dress.
- The Cutting-Edge Neuroscientist has a Russian accent, reflecting her petromillionaire background.
- The Veteran of the Psychic Wars has a thousand-yard stare and a burned-out aura.
- The Semi-Feral Brawler sniffs the new people they meet.
- The Pro Gambler is missing some pieces of their fingers due to certain debts that went unpaid.
- The Martial Arts Master always moves with grace and efficiency.

Questions

Players ask questions of each other about their characters. Each player answers one question at the start of each session. The question comes from anyone else at the table. Open questions are the gentlest. Leading questions put the character's identity under another player's influence. A player is always free to refuse a leading question or to answer it however they like.

Open: What hobbies, arts, activities, or interests does your character pursue?

Leading: What caused you to suddenly stop painting?

Really leading: How do you keep your superiors in the Church from finding out about your sex tourism habit?

Questions can represent knowledge that the other characters might gain ("How do we see you spending your time from day to day?"), knowledge that is private to the character in question ("What possession do you have that no one else knows about?"), or even unknown to the character ("What is something that your character has encountered on the Island that they have misunderstood?").

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

- What's something that your character has a blind spot to, something that they don't understand, maybe about themselves?
- What gives you the strength to face danger the way you have done recently?
- What's something here on the Island that has caught your attention?
- For a couple of days, I've been discreetly watching you as you go about everyday activities, such as eating or talking to other people. I've got a good eye for body language and whatever people might express unconsciously with their posture or tone or whatever. What have I noticed about you, especially something that not just anyone would notice?

Character Creation Example

This example shows how a group hangs together and how characters can develop over time. On page 250 you can see the characters that the players came up with on a sample player-character summary sheet. This form summarizes the party over several sessions, including notes developed during play and changes made to the characters. The party had a good mix of clear, practical traits and ambiguous, open-ended ones.

UNITING THEME: SUB SHOP

The players agreed that the theme for this arc would be "sub shop" and all the characters would be people associated with a sandwich place one way or another. That was Paul's idea, and he likes to push things in unexpected directions. Sub shops might not be that promising, but in play the center of the action soon shifted to one character's paranormal laboratory, so it was fine.

"MAI" BY BLIGHTY

Blighty likes to be weird and helpful. He wanted his character, Mai, to be the regular driver for at least one other character, which turned out to be Perry. What set Mai apart is that she was dead, or at least thought she was. Mai was following clues to find her murderer, unless she was crazy, in which case she was just following clues in her mind.

Her Revenant trait gave her the strength and resilience of the grave (Fight 3). As a 3rd level character, she has a default Sway of 2, but she's creepy and not personable, so Blighty played her as below average in terms of charm. Her Weird is 3, from her Revenant identity, her flashbacks, and the clues that came to her through inspiration.

Mai's trouble was originally not liking to be praised. That didn't seem like it would cause enough trouble, so Blighty shifted it to reacting strangely when praised.

Her question mark started out as "nihilist-?" but that concept conflicted with the idea that she was focused on finding her murderer. A nihilist wouldn't care. Blighty changed it to "monomaniacal-?" since she was determined to follow those clues to her killer.

Mai was an effective character. Partway through the arc, she crossed paths with a cute goth boy who was into her, but it didn't work out. In the end, we closed out the arc without ever resolving whether Mai was really dead.

"RACHID" BY ROB

Rob is an anthro major from one of the most liberal colleges in the US, and he likes to play characters that touch on some sort of cultural vein or nerve. He played the former Islamist bomb maker whose new, paranormal "bombs" transform people's lives rather than blowing them up. Rachid was on the run from ISIS, and he worked in the sub shop as his cover while following clues to find out where the paranormal bomb technology came from.

Rachid's Operative trait gave him Fight 3, and his bombs that transformed lives were definitely Weird 3. I put an asterisk by Weird 3 because Rachid had little control over what his bombs did. The Operative trait

CHRIS SAYS: PROVISIONAL REALITY

Jonathan says the first thing he writes is not final. In my games, this can apply to reality as well. Once upon a time, I ran an *Over the Edge* campaign in which two realities (among many) intersected. The backstory involved two parallel universes crashing into one another. Rather than the explosive meeting of two universes wiping both out, they began to integrate with one another. In one reality, nuclear war had drawn a curtain over the 1980s. In the other, the world was as we see, or anyway as we see it in *Over the Edge*. But, in the world the players generally inhabited, the main timeline if you will, they found a 7-11 buried deep in the strata of the island, dated to at least 10,000 BC. Impossible, right?

Without getting into specifics that don't apply to your group, the point is this: You can retcon, you can rewrite, you can allow players to do the same. The nature of reality is at the heart of *Over the Edge* and, as such, there's no reason it must always remain consistent.

Pynchon once said, "You know what a miracle is. Not what Bakunin said. But another world's intrusion into this one..."

Those intrusions leave scars over scars. Again, the living reality can be a palimpsest.

Of course, make sure your players are on board with this style of madness, because it is quite a departure from linear cause and effect.

could help swaying people sometimes, depending on the circumstances, so we agreed Rachid's Sway would be a 2 with a plus sign.

Rachid's first trouble was Children, as in not liking them and not being able to relate to them. That doesn't really amount to trouble, though. It's just something the character doesn't like or can't do well. Rob changed Rachid's trouble to, "Follows clues into danger." Rachid is looking for the people who secretly gave him the paranormal ingredients for his new bombs.

In play, Rachid was not shy about throwing his bombs around and seeing what happened, which worked out great. At the beginning of the arc, Rob was the first to cast lots, trying to locate the conspirators behind his newfound bomb-making abilities. He got a failure with a bad twist, and that set the direction of the arc. The K—s were behind his paranormal bombs, but they had a psychic implant in his head that not only let them misguide him (failure), but it allowed them to spy through him (bad twist). The K—s, I decided, had a secret laboratory and safe house on the University campus that was hidden by psychic manipulation. The story arc, appropriately, ended with a massive explosion at that very K— redoubt, which the characters had worked to locate.

"PERRY" BY PAUL

Paul always finds the loophole or character build that gives his characters advantages over everyone else, and with this character Paul invented the trait "Juicer." His character was an experimental subject at the University, and thanks to these ongoing experiments he might have gained all sorts of abilities or powers. His side trait was "Kid," meaning he was a minor and could use that status to dramatic advantage. He was like a kid in an 80s movie, able to succeed against adults by using guile, charm, and agility. We all agreed not to delve too much into the backstory of scientists at the University using loyal children as experimental subjects. It was a good schtick, but not if you took it too seriously.

Perry's connection was that he liked to hang around the sub shop, and he was beloved of all.

Being a Juicer gave Perry a Weird of 3, and being a Kid gave him a Sway of 3. His Fight was possibly more than 2 in the sense that sometimes he would be able to use his Kid trait to escape a physical struggle.

Perry's trouble was excellent: gets into trouble when unsupervised. Kids from 80s-era movies always got into just the right sorts of trouble when grownups weren't around.

Perry was a great character in play. He provided a measure of positive vibes because he was an upbeat kid, and he carried along with him a measure of dread because he was also an experimental test subject who was certainly in more danger than he realized. The Kid trait let him try all sorts of things, and it always made perfect sense when he failed. He was just a kid.

"VLADA" BY SEAN

Sean creates solid, reliable characters. Vlada was the character with the most agency. She knew what she was doing. Everyone else was clueless to one degree or another. That's probably why Vlada ended up being a central character. Mai was her regular driver, and both of them liked to hang out at the sub shop, where they knew Rachid and Perry.

Vlada's Weird was 3, thanks to her Transhumanist Neuroscientist ability. Her traits might help her influence people, but only in the right circumstances, and nothing about her is about fighting.

Vlada and her laboratory at the Vet School ended up being central to the action. Her experiments in enhancing the human condition were successful, but with unsolicited help from a mysterious source, the K—s. Soon enough, the K—s stole all her results and sabotaged her lab. The arc culminated with a confrontation with the K—s, also Rachid's enemy, on the University campus.

Claim Two Dice to Be Your Lots

Each player finds two six-sided dice to be their dice or "lots" (as in the phrase, "cast your lots") for the campaign. Originally, a "lot" meant a portion, choice, or decision. These dice help decide your portion of success and your portion of failure. They should be a matched pair, and preferably distinguishable from the other players' lots. Typically, they should be classic six-siders, with pips, not numerals. Numerals are social constructions. Pips confront you with the raw experience of number. If you get dice with rounded corners, they come to a stop more slowly, allowing one the joy of seeing a good or bad roll as it's landing.

For as long as you play this campaign, set these dice aside. Don't roll them anywhere else but playing ***Over the Edge***. Also, while playing ***Over the Edge***, don't roll any other dice. It's not necessary to buy new dice just for the campaign, but it wouldn't hurt, especially if it's an excuse to patronize your friendly local game store. Over the course of the campaign, your lots will be your best friends and your worst enemies. Sometimes they will amaze you, and once or twice they might break you. Every time you roll, there's a 1 in 36 chance that you're going to get lightning bolts (that's two 3s), and the same odds that you'll get crazy eights (two 4s). Anything can happen. You are not allowed to switch lots even if they keep rolling terribly for you the whole campaign. These dice are your destiny. Accept them.

Keep these lots from one story arc to the next, and one character to the next. If the GM role switches to someone else, you can keep using the same lots. Alternatively, if the GM wants an emotional reset for her new campaign, then she can call for new lots. Even if it's the same GM, she can call for new lots to coincide with some major change in play, or ending one campaign to start another.

During play, you are allowed to stack your lots, to arrange them with sixes up, and to make practice casts. Touching other players' lots is fine when you're being helpful, but no rolling them or fidgeting with them. Ideally, all other dice are put away so that your lots get all your intention.

For convenience, between sessions the lots could be stored where you play, or the GM could keep them. A special box or chest is not required, although colorful dice are pretty when stored in a clear glass jar. The GM can also let players break the hard-hearted rule about not switching lots mid-campaign.

Cast means throw, so you can "throw" your lots as well as casting them if you like. You could also "roll your bones" or "throw" them, and the word "bone" is an appropriate reminder of death. I can't call them "bones" with my play group, for the usual reason. Call it rolling, casting, or throwing — it's all the same thing. It's a divination ritual that always comes true. It reminds us that there's always hope, but we can't always win.

Player Advice

As with all art, the purpose of playing this game is to make it happen.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Over the Edge is designed for characters who mix things up. In early gaming, your character was like an imaginary game piece, and you navigated your character through the dungeon, trying to maximize your rewards and minimize your losses. Over the years, players came to value "roleplaying," which was defined as running your character according to your understanding of your character's internal logic. If your character was honorable, you navigated the character around, always trying to imagine what an honorable character would do in the situation. With this game, I would invite you to sometimes run your character more like a character in a movie or book, where you, the "author," use the character to drive drama, conflict, and fun.

BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER

This game is a tool or a toy for having fun with your friends. That's why I conceived it twenty-five years ago, and that's why you're playing it. In recent history, humanity has achieved godlike insight into the cosmos, and our technology allows the lucky among us to play games of delightful sophistication and electric creativity. *Over the Edge* is designed to attract your attention and engage your feelings, but it's the other people at the table who are the true point of the experience.

In an archetypal scene, your character walks through the doors of a bar and finds it dimly lit and sparsely populated with riffraff and ne'er-do-wells. A common reaction might be to find a seat where you have your back to the wall and you can see the entrances into the room, then hang low and casually check out the room. But then any character could be cautious like that, so you're not expressing what's special about your character. Is there a way for your character to settle into the bar that says something about who you are? Could you stride confidently into the bar, take a seat where lots of people can see you, and wait to see if anyone gives you any grief? If doing so leads to trouble, that's a problem for your character, but it might a good time for everyone at the table. Could you lay out crystals in a polarity-reversal cross pattern, to turn the place's negative energy positive, at least around you? Maybe it works and maybe it just attracts attention. Is your character notably cautious? OK, can you show that cautious streak in an interesting way? Maybe summarize how your character stakes out the place first, scans address numbers and such for numerological warning signs, checks all seven of their good luck charms, and then enters.

Your implicit contract with the gamemaster is that she will not hose you for failing to take every precaution. The game is about the cool stuff your character does. It's not a test of how smart you can be in keeping your character safe.

Your character's trouble and question mark both help propel them into action, so lean on those features when you're looking for something interesting for your character to do.

LOOK FOR AN EXIT

Every time you cast your lots, you might get double-threes: the dreaded "lightning bolt," indicating failure and two bad twists. Al Amarja doesn't coddle. Do you want to avoid a meaningless death beneath the heel of blind fate? Keep an eye open for an exit. An exit is an excellent conclusion for a character, one so good that it's worth leaving the campaign early to achieve. If an exit makes good sense and especially if it takes place at the right time in the campaign, expect the GM to make it easy. Alternatively, if you get to the end of the campaign without your own separate conclusion, your character is part of whatever ending the campaign reaches.

Here are some sorts of exits:

- **Sacrifice:** One character holds the door while everyone else runs. Armed cultists eventually power through the door and slice the character up, but everyone else gets away.
- **Brave New World:** Now that the aliens' seventh dimensional translocator is working again, they're taking off. One character impulsively leaps at the chance to go with them. "You will survive," the aliens say, "but you will no longer be human."
- **Guardian:** The little psychic boy has no family, and your character has connected with him like with no one else. You vow to get him off the Island and find a safe place for him, maybe raising him as your son.
- **Epiphany:** Your party has ushered a persecuted holy woman and her followers to a ship that will take them to safety. Maybe exposure to the holy woman has gotten to the hard-hearted ex-cop. Maybe there's going to be one more penitent passenger on that ship of faith.

THREE WAYS TO PLAY YOUR CHARACTER IN AN RPG

	CLASSIC PROBLEM-SOLVING	CLASSIC ROLE-PLAYING	DRIVING ACTION
What does my character do?	Whatever is smart and utilitarian.	Whatever is consistent with the character.	Whatever contributes to action at the table.
Ask yourself...	How can I overcome this obstacle or achieve that goal?	What would my character do in that situation?	What could my character do to make today's session better?
What does "honor" mean?	It restricts the character's choices. It's a flaw, and you get "points" for having it.	It's a trait to be played out faithfully, making choices in character.	It's a theme to confront, trouble to get into, and maybe a moment of truth for the character.

Playing ***Over the Edge*** usually means combining a little of each style of playing your character.

PLAYING EXTRAS

Characters spend a good deal of time split up. This isn't the sort of game where you start the session by declaring the party's marching order. When your character isn't on stage and someone else's character is, you can "sub in" and take over an **extra**, which is a minor GMC in the scene. Play your extra so that it enhances what's already going on, not distracting the table from what the characters are doing. Here are guidelines for playing extras.

- Extras are minor gamemaster-characters, such as bystanders, whose activity supports the scene that the gamemaster is creating with the players whose characters are on stage.
- Support the tone and action. Don't upstage the characters who are on stage.
- Crowd scenes need your help. The GM can't portray a whole crowd by herself.
- Feel free to add details that are fun, flavorful, and ignorable. Don't do something that demands a change in direction from a player-character or from a gamemaster-character.
- Interact more with player-characters than with gamemaster-characters.
- If the GM needs your extra to do something specific or not do something specific, follow her lead.
- Back off when you're done. Don't overstay your welcome.

For example, characters were parleying with a powerful GMC, meeting in the midst of a dance party. Another player improvised being a dancer, specifically someone doing the "tarantula dance." That is, they've been bitten by a tarantula and the only way to resist the poison is to dance maniacally. The dancer offers to help the characters "get the bug." The GMC helps set the stage but doesn't distract the table away from what the characters are doing.

CAM SAYS: IN A WEIRD GAME, STRAIGHT IS BENT

A trick I sometimes see players use in games of *Over the Edge* which can be fun if not over-used, and one I have used myself before as a player, is to play the Straight. The Straight is a completely normal person, entirely out of their depth, with no occult or paranormal powers, no cinematic Hollywood skillsets, but somehow as much a part of the unfolding universe as any other player-character. The Straight doesn't know why she's there, she doesn't know who these other people are, and she sure as heck doesn't want to open that Ghost Box with the Demon Face on it. Played entirely for laughs or entirely serious, either way the Straight gives the other weird characters a sounding board and a contrast that some groups may sorely need.

SHARING THE TABLE

This is a universe of war, so free-form roleplaying games are vulnerable to domination by people who are more willing to talk than others. Most of these players don't notice what they're doing. If you're lucky, they use charm and spirited roleplaying to hog the spotlight. Best of luck to you if they just interrupt and talk too much. Ideally, your GM can help direct the action at the table so that all the players get a fair share of the fun.

CHAPTER #2

RULES OF PLAY

I'VE GOT A GOOD IDEA WHAT BREAKS YOU MAKES YOU SHINE
NOW THE SPARKS ARE GONNA FLY...

—"SPARKS ARE GONNA FLY," CATHERINE WHEEL, 2000

A subconsciously conditioned operative seeks out supply lines of a newly fashionable drug. Her leads dry up, but in the process, she runs across a childhood friend from the paranormal boarding school she attended. A Christian necromancer tries to raise an overdose victim from the dead. He decides not to use his holy relic, and the victim is carted off dead to the morgue. A secret agent is betrayed and uses his paranormal power to translocate himself on the sound waves of his drum solo. But he has pushed his power past its limits, and his body bursts out along the sound waves as a red mist that never reassembles. ***Over the Edge*** characters get into all sorts of nonsense, and these rules make it fast and easy.

The GM needs to know the rules, but players hardly have to. If you start by reading the examples, you'll get a good idea of how the game plays.

Outline of a Session

Here is a handy reminder of how an ***Over the Edge*** session plays out.

- **Socialize:** Handshakes, hugs, beers, gossip, catching up.
- **Hand Out Lots and Characters:** Character sheets, group summaries with all the characters on them, notes, illustrated standups.
- **Recap Past Action:** What happened last time and maybe the time before.
- **Reinforce Out-of-Character Knowledge:** Typically, out-of-character knowledge promises some sort of future conflict or payoff. Remind the players what they know that their characters don't.
- **Possible Advancement:** One or more characters might advance in power, if their recent experiences warrant it.
- **Ask Questions:** Players and the GM ask questions of anyone, mostly out of character.
- **Wonder What's Going to Happen Next:** Talk about where things might be heading. What upcoming conflicts are to be resolved? Get a sense for what each character is going to be up to.
- **Follow a Character or Characters:** The action starts with one or more of the characters pursuing their goals. It's more common for some of the characters to be in a scene than for all of them to be. The action drives to some sort of climax. Stop at some good point: after a conflict has been resolved, when a character is about to step into danger, or when the characters are waiting for what comes next. Players whose characters are off stage can play extras, when appropriate.
- **Follow the Next Character:** The attention turns to the next character or characters until they reach the right stopping point. In general, spend more time if there are more players involved and spend less time on the activity of lone characters. Repeat this step until you've gotten everyone involved.
- **Keep Looping Characters In:** Repeat the process of following a character or characters around. It can be tricky to coordinate what all the characters are doing where and when, but it works if no one tracks everything rigorously on a clock, calendar, or map. This process repeats until the end of the session approaches.
- **Try to Find a Climax or Two:** A session is plenty of time to make something happen. The characters should be able to resolve some sort of significant conflict, successfully or tragically.
- **More Loops:** Everything doesn't have to play out perfectly, and if there is more regular action after a major climax, that's fine.
- **Previews:** What conflicts are going to have to

wait for next session? Players and the gamemaster develop some idea of what's going to be determined at the next session. Who's bringing the beer?

- **Session Ends:** See you next time!

THROW FOR KARMA TO START A STORY ARC

At the start of the first session, each player casts their two dice, simply to see if anyone throws doubles. If at least one player throws doubles, then the party starts with good luck, or karma (see page 37).

Dice Mechanics in a Nutshell

To resolve a conflict in the action, a player rolls a pair of six-sided dice. If the odds are in the character's favor, the player can reroll a die once or twice. If the odds are against the character, the gamemaster can make them reroll a die once or twice. In the end, a roll of 7+ or 8+ is a success. In addition, a die that reads 3 indicates a bad surprise, while a 4 means a good surprise.

Levels

When casting lots to resolve character actions, first you see how effective the character is at that sort of activity and compare it to the difficulty of the action. Both the character's effectiveness and the challenge are rated by level. Every character has a level, which indicates the relative strength or effectiveness of the character's traits. When a character does something outside these traits, they operate at a reduced, default level. GMCs have levels and traits much the same way as player-characters. These numbers serve as a benchmark for comparing player-characters to GMCs. Even places have levels indicating how effective the place is at doing what it does.

CHARACTERS AND LOCATIONS BY LEVEL

GMCs have levels and traits like player-characters. The Island has levels as an environment, and you use these levels when there isn't a GMC for the characters to oppose directly.

Hollywood Reality and Conflict

A single level difference changes the odds substantially, but the underdog still has a reasonable chance to win out. That's Hollywood reality. Surprises are no big surprise.

Realistically, even one level of difference in capability represents a decisive difference. In storytelling, these sorts of decisive conflicts usually occur offstage. In Macbeth, for example, the hero kills Macdonwald with a mighty blow, "unseam'd him from the nave to th' chops." The fight takes place offstage, and there's no question about how it will turn out. When a swordfight occurs onstage, however, there's tension. Onstage is where you want your surprises and upsets. That's just what you see in ***Over the Edge***. If the gamemaster imagines what happens among GMCs, there's no need to cast lots. But when player-characters are in the mix, then bets are off and you throw those bones.

CAPABILITIES BY LEVEL		
LEVEL	CORE CAPABILITIES	DEFAULT CAPABILITIES
0th	None	0. Sub-Par
1st	1. Competent	0. Sub-Par
2nd	2. Expert	1. Competent
3rd	3. Elite	2. Expert
4th	4. World Class	2. Expert
5th	5. Superhuman	3. Elite
6th	6. Godlike	4. World Class
7th	7. Mind-Blowing	5. Superhuman

Player-characters are typically 2nd, 3rd, or 4th level. They are forbidden 6th and 7th level.

LOCATIONS AND BACKGROUND LEVELS				
BACKGROUND LEVEL	ENVIRONMENT	DETENTION	SECURITY	PARANORMAL
0th	Streets, businesses, other public places	Closet with the door blocked	Food cart	Lucky rabbit's foot
1st	Bad neighborhoods; private places	Locked in a basement	Home security	Bad energy; cursed area
2nd	Secured areas; government buildings	Improvised or amateur jail	Corporate security; gang headquarters	Charm of Warding
3rd	The Terminal	Gang's detention center	Cloaks' safehouse	Psychic traps
4th	Dreamscape	Prison	Local org headquarters; fortification	Anti-psi field; logospheric explosion
5th	Interdimensional wilderness; reality-shifted area	High-security prison	Bunker	Dimensionally shielded barrier

OPPONENTS BY LEVEL			
LEVEL	COMBATANT	SPY	MEDIC
0th	Bystander; schlub	Busybody; snoop	Someone who's read about CPR on the Internet
1st	Barroom tough	Private eye	First-aid volunteer
2nd	Gang enforcer	Detective	Medic
3rd	Special ops	Chief investigator	Battle-trained paramedic; ER doctor
4th	Shadow assassin	Psychic investigator	Empathic healer, works fast
5th	Killer android	Clear-minded clairvoyant	Orgone surgeon, can operate remotely
6th	Death specter	Eternal seer	Nanotech super healer from the bright future

Resolve Conflicts by Casting Lots

> Burn and be swift.
> —The Buddha

Conflicts are set up on a free-form basis, and the heart of each conflict is defined by a question.

STUFF THAT JUST HAPPENS

We cast lots to determine the answer to the question. But not every question needs to be thrown to the gods of fate. If a character is faced with a choice, then it's their choice to make. And when actions have consequences, that is often a choice which the gamemaster makes based on circumstance. But when a question of success is raised (i.e., will this risky thing I'm attempting succeed?) that's when you cast the lots to reveal the outcome. And even then, in ***Over the Edge*** it's often more interesting to ask, "What happens when the character succeeds?" rather than, "Does the character succeed?"

Pacing Lots

Every throw of the lots is momentous, able to turn the action in one direction or another. Players watch every throw at the table because every throw matters. Don't cheapen the lots by calling for too many player rolls. Crux points in the story should happen every session, but not every ten minutes. Remember that the players can also push the story forward without casting lots:

Player: "I'm going to talk to the one-eyed man at the end of the pool, see what he's about, get on his good side."

Nothing's at stake, so the character succeeds in getting on the guy's good side by letting him talk about his pet spiders. No roll needed. The players have more agency if they don't have to roll to achieve simple successes and plenty of actions can get resolved just by the GM adjudicating a fitting outcome. Save the randomness for times when it really matters.

My sessions are about three hours long, and during that time three to four players each cast their lots at least once. Rob likes more throws per hour, and things can move really fast in his story arcs.

Casting Lots for Minor Outcomes

Sometimes you cast your lots for small results that are interesting to see play out even though they don't really matter to what happens next. Maybe you're setting up the scene before the action really starts, and your character is up to something whose outcome doesn't really matter to the story arc, and you want to know how your character is faring. You can cast your lots to find out what happens, but ignore twists or at least interpret them as inconsequential.

COMBINE INDIVIDUAL TASKS INTO BIG EFFORTS

To make the throw worth it, let the throw answer big questions about where the action goes next, not individual tasks.

Player: I climb over the fence. (In many RPGs, the player would roll now to determine their fence-climbing performance.)
GM: OK, so it sounds like you're sneaking in. What's your plan and what are you trying to do?
Player: I want to get the soul disc back, so I'm going to take a stupid risk, but I'm going to do so very carefully. I'm going to sneak around until I find that disk, but I'm going to get out of there if I'm discovered.
GM: All right, the abandoned factory is pretty much empty and half burned out. There's something dangerous here, but it hides during the day, so you probably won't run into it. The soul disc isn't here, but something else is, and you might find it. So, cast your lots and let's see what happens.

FAILURE IS IN THE CARDS

Just by the nature of the lots, characters are going to fail and suffer on a regular basis. That's good because it makes the flow of the game more dynamic. The GM frames in her mind what failure is going to look like before the lots are cast and typically communicates that to the player. Veiled language is OK but not necessary. You can say that failure means a biotech security system is activated, or you can tell the player exactly what biotech disaster is going to happen to the character if they fail. If failure looks like it could put an

SUCCESS, CHOICES, AND CONSEQUENCES

CHOICE QUESTION	SUCCESS QUESTION	CONSEQUENCE
How wise is it to let this fellow scientist work with you?	Can you convince a fellow scientist to work with you?	What happens when that fellow scientist starts working with you?

end to the fun that the session has been building toward, then maybe the GM can think of some way to define failure as incomplete success. See the **Failures and Better Failures** table.

Promising Failures: The more open-ended the action is, the more often a failure makes the action better. When, for example, the half-real self-help author attempts to make his first actual human connection with a woman who doesn't know he's famous, do the players really want the character to succeed? These failures are best when they're the antithesis of success, not merely lack of success. Not only did the half-real author fail to win the woman over, he drove her to join a joyless cult led by the archenemy of another player-character.

Reducing Swingy Results: The lot-casting system provides a dramatic range of results with a significant chance of failure. If the gamemaster wants to resolve a scene with less randomness and more predictability, she can call for multiple casts that together determine the overall result, plus perhaps some additional details. Multiple casts are great for climactic battles.

OUTCOMES, SUCCESSES, AND FAILURES

Every time a player casts their lots to divine the result of their character's actions, compare the total on the lots to see how well the character fared. In addition, if either lot comes up 3 or 4, there's a twist (see below).

Advantage Goes to the One Taking Initiative

Before the player casts their lots, determine who in the conflict is taking initiative.

- If the character is taking the initiative, any throw of 7+ is a success. A total of 6 or less is a failure.

- If the character is reacting or resisting rather than taking initiative, any throw of 8+ is a success. A total of 7 or less is a failure.

At the GM's discretion, perhaps in light of player pleading, any number of circumstantial advantages or disadvantages could take the place of the initiative factor. For example, if a character has been coached in what to expect from a specific psychic attack, the GM might let a throw of 7 indicate successful resistance to the attack.

FAILURES AND BETTER FAILURES	
PASSABLE FAILURES	**BETTER FAILURES**
The action stops, and the character fails to engage with the plot. Perhaps the character has failed to find someone or failed to gain entry somewhere.	The action lurches forward. The character doesn't get what they want, but their efforts provoke a reaction or open up an opportunity that keeps the action moving.
The character is killed once their enemies overpower them.	They're left to die. Or captured, abused, warned off, and let go. Or captured but rescuable.
The character doesn't get the thing they need to achieve their goal. The thing can be the invitation to a party, the help of a GMC, a transdimensional artifact, or even information.	They do get the thing, but it comes with complications that prevent it from being used to achieve the goal. Or they do get the thing, but it's not what they thought it was, and it leads to a new threat.
The villain escapes the scene and flees the Island.	The villain escapes the scene but remains on the Island to accomplish one more goal.
If you fail an easy throw, your character performed poorly and therefore failed.	Your character performed at their level of competence, but circumstances made them fail.

Multiple Characters Working Together Each Cast Lots

If your character is helping another character in a conflict to the point that the two of you are working together, you both cast lots. You resolve the throws in whatever order the players like. Practically, the highest roller usually resolves first, and with luck the conflict gets resolved before the lowest caster encounters the conflict with their cast. If players can't agree on whose lots are resolved first, the option goes to the one with the higher throw.

If the conflict is resolved before a player's throw is resolved, you can usually ignore that throw. Any throw with a good twist or bad twist, however, needs to be handled at least as far as the twist.

In terms of the game-world action, the lots don't necessarily tell you which character is doing the bulk of the work. For example, if a trained fighter and an untrained fighter have successfully ganged up on a berserk android, the trained fighter probably did most of the fighting, even if the other character's player made the successful throw.

If you want to aid another character without sticking your own character's neck out enough to cast lots yourself, that's probably just handled as chrome or flavor rather than something we need to do math over. For example, Ashley is trying to track down people who were at the Mojo Moon Dance, and Paul says that his character, Kwan, will do some asking around on her behalf as well. Sean is going to cast lots for Ashley because it's her cause, so I ask Paul if Kwan's efforts are worth casting for. He says "No," and for a while he impersonates Kwan asking around ineffectually. If he'd said "Yes," Kwan would have been at risk somehow. This way he was safe, and the action stayed focused on Ashley.

Exceptional Rules for Exceptional Circumstances

Sometimes getting the advantage and succeeding on a 7 isn't a big enough change to your odds of success to reward you for exceptional circumstances.

Only exceptional circumstances are exceptional: Most of the time, having advantage and succeeding on a 7 is all you get for superior circumstances. Two middling advantages amount to a middling advantage. Think in dramatic terms. Exceptional circumstances are game changers. If the GM doesn't think the circumstances are exceptional, cast your lots and keep things moving.

Giving up something tangible is worth something: If your character is giving up an opportunity, that might qualify as something exceptional.

Succeeding on a 6: An easy adjustment to make is for the GM to rule that your advantage is so big that you can succeed on a 6, not just a 7. Nice and clean.

Half a level bonus: If your level is at least equal to the difficulty, this bonus lets you reroll one die if your original cast is odd. If your level is lower than the difficulty, then this bonus means that the GM can force you to reroll one less time than normal if your original cast is odd.

Whole level bonus: For an overwhelming advantage, your level is treated as +1 level higher than normal. This change either gives you an additional reroll or reduces the number of rerolls the GM can force on you.

No +1 bonus on your cast: In some roleplaying games, you come out ahead by scrounging for bonuses and stacking them onto your dice rolls. I might have designed a game or two like that. In ***Over the Edge***, focus on the choices your character makes, cast your lots, and see what happens.

LOTS AND LEVELS

When a character attempts something, compare their level with that activity to the level of the difficulty. Characters have one level rating for their traits and a lower level for anything they do that's outside their expertise. GMCs likewise have levels for their areas of expertise and lower levels for their default capabilities. Sometimes one's "opponent" in a conflict is a system or structure, such as when a character is breaking into a building while no one else is there. In these cases, the GM sets the level to reflect how well the system or structure resists whatever it is the character is doing.

Level Difference and Rerolls

If the character's level is higher by 1 or 2, they get that many rerolls. If the character's level is lower by 1 or 2, the GM can force that many rerolls.

- If the character's level matches **even-on** with the difficulty level, the player has no reroll and takes what lands. This sort of conflict is the second most common. It is particularly common for contests where failure results in a new direction for the action, rather than one that results in a terrible setback.
- If the character's level is 1 higher than the difficulty, the player has the option of rerolling one die after the lots are cast. Keep the new result on the die even if it's worse. Especially if it's worse. This sort of conflict is generally the most common, where the character is superior to the opposition but still might fail.
- If the character's level is 2 higher than the difficulty, the player can reroll as above and then can make a second reroll. They can reroll either die, the one they have already rerolled or the one they haven't. If you're making lots of throws against weak opposition, you're not stretching yourself.
- If the character's level is 3 or more higher than the difficulty, they succeed and don't have to cast lots.
- If the character's level is 1 lower than the difficulty, the GM can call on the player to reroll a die. This sort of conflict is uncommon, but it comes up when the characters get in over their heads, when big forces are in play, and when characters are forced to operate outside their areas of expertise.
- If the character's level is 2 lower, the GM can call for a second reroll after seeing the results of the first.
- If the character's level is 3 lower, they fail and don't get to cast lots.

CASTING LOTS IS FOR MORTALS

The players' lots determine outcomes, and the gamemaster doesn't cast lots. The GM can focus on pacing the action and never has to stop to pick up dice. Some gamemasters will roll a die for random input, especially when they are improvising. If my players take an action somewhere new that I have no plans for, I might roll a single die to help me decide what the characters find there. The higher the number, the better the circumstances. There's no rule governing such random input, and I could just as easily get the input by drawing a card from a deck of playing cards or looking at the last digit in yesterday's stock market index.

LEVELS AND RESULTS

CHARACTER LEVEL	SUCCESS	FAILURE	SUCCESS IN A FIGHT	FAILURE IN A FIGHT
Higher	Definitive	Marginal	Capture, render unconscious, kill outright, mortally wound, overcome, overwhelm.	Wounded while otherwise successful, too late but otherwise successful, stymied but not hurt or not detected.
Even	Significant	Significant	Beat up, drive off, show up, incapacitate.	Beaten up, driven off, outclassed, KO'd.
Lower	Marginal	Definitive	Slip past, luck out, sucker punch, set back, fend off, fight to a standstill.	Captured, kicked to the curb, knocked out.

Level Differences and Outcomes

The type of outcome—success or failure—is determined by the lots. The degree of success or failure depends on the level difference, if any. For example, if the character is higher level than the target being surveilled, a successful throw might mean that the character has learned everything they need to know about that person, including an accurate assessment of how dangerous the target is to the character's plans. If the character were lower level than the target, the same success might mean that the character has learned just the information to accomplish their next goal, but nothing else.

When you cast lots against a higher level or lower level challenge, the reroll doesn't make a huge amount of difference. There's still a pretty good chance that the result will be a surprise, and that makes for good drama at the table. The level difference also affects the magnitude of the result, which is a saving grace for the characters who fail against a weak challenge.

CHRIS SAYS: TWISTS AND NARRATIVE CONTROL

There are good twists. There are bad twists. There are Chubby Checker twists. Most of them come from the GM, but you can put the agency on the player. When they roll a twist, you might ask them the general nature of said twist. While this is a framing device, rather than an alternate rule, it inspires (or scares) the players, and their characters, into new directions.

When I ran my playtest campaign for this edition, some of the greatest moments came when I threw the twist to the player. You don't give up full control, but let them pick a path they want to go down. A path that, in traveling, promotes growth or confrontation for their character as imagined by them.

TWISTS: 3s AND 4s

Sometimes a risky endeavor turns up unexpected or unusual rewards. Sometimes, though, you get shafted. Even a failure might come packaged with some reward, and we all know that success can come at an unpredictable price. If any of your lots come up 3 or 4, the GM improvises a bad twist or a good twist, as needed. By default, getting stricken in a surprising way is a fine bad twist.

GMs rule on what the good or bad twist is, but players are welcome to make suggestions. The players often understand what's at stake better than the GM. Players other than the one casting are also welcome to kibitz, although their suggestions carry less weight. Sometimes the GM and player review the possible outcomes of the character's actions in detail before the cast, in which case everyone at the table might already know what a 3 or a 4 means.

Threes are bad because three is the primordial number of war, imbalance, and two-against-one. Two enemies can strike a deal between them to become friends, but a conflict among three enemies means endless distrust and treachery. Fours are good because four is the ancient number of completion: yearly seasons, material elements, and cardinal points.

- **Two 4s, "Crazy Eight":** Double-good twist, alternatively two good twists.
- **One 4:** Good twist.
- **4 and 3, "Twist Tie":** A good twist and a bad twist.
- **One 3:** Bad twist.
- **Two 3s, "Lightning Bolt":** Double-bad twist, alternatively two bad twists.

SUCCESS AND TWISTS

	GOOD TWIST	BAD TWIST
Success	In addition to succeeding, you gain secret knowledge, make a new contact, gain an unexpected asset, or otherwise benefit.	Even though you succeed, you come to the attention of enemies, your enemies learn something important about you, you get stricken, you lose something you want, you damage a relationship, etc.
Failure	Even though you fail, you gain secret knowledge, make a new contact, gain an unexpected asset, or otherwise benefit.	In addition to failing, you suffer in some extra way. The failure has unexpected repercussions, possibly a rude surprise comes out of left field.

Example Good Twists

- You impress a bystander and they become a useful ally.
- You learn something useful about the opposition.
- You escape with something useful grasped in your hand.
- You drive the enemies off, and one of them drops something that's useful, maybe even a big clue.
- Secret agents working for enemies of your enemy see your work and decide to give you surreptitious assistance.
- The paranormal damage you suffered leaves tell-tale traces on your mind or body, so sometime later an ally will be able to discern valuable information from it.
- You shake off a strike.

Example Bad Twists

- Something you need gets broken or lost.
- You come to the attention of the wrong people. If they're even people.
- Your enemies find out a secret or weakness of yours.
- You cause collateral damage that hurts your position.
- You inadvertently hurt someone you really wish you hadn't hurt.
- You're so messed up that you can't fulfill your obligation to do something later today.
- You don't know it, but you've been exposed to a slow-acting toxin.
- Informers for the State get you put on a short list for "surveillance."

RESULTS ARE INCREMENTAL

With an average result, things usually get about "one step" better or worse for a character. Failure doesn't mean death. In general, when a character is attempting something, the two bad things that can happen to them are getting stricken (think "damaged," see below) and failing to achieve their goal. For a particularly bad result, the character both fails and suffers.

REROLLS

Level differences (see page 32), karma (see page 37), character specialties (see page 44), or special circumstances can give the player or the GM rerolls, sometimes both on the same cast. If the GM and the player each have a reroll for the same cast, the GM has the option to force rerolls after the character casts and after each time the player rerolls.

Step 1. The player casts.

Step 2. The GM decides whether to force a reroll. If she forces a reroll and has another reroll left, repeat this step.

Step 3. After any forced rerolls, the player chooses whether to reroll. If not, the cast stands where it is. If the player rerolls, go back to Step 2 if the GM has a reroll left.

EXAMPLE LOTS CAST

A clever stage magician and debunker of frauds is looking for con artists at a large gathering, and the GM says that there is indeed a con artist working the room. The magician is world class, but so is the charlatan, so it's a toss-up — no reroll. The magician is taking the initiative, so the player needs a 7, not an 8. The player gets a 5 and 6, so a great success. I improvise the charlatan doing a tarot reading, and the magician makes a note of her and quietly fades back so as not to be noticed. Or does he? The GM reminds the player, who is new to the game, that you don't have to do the safe thing, and he got a really good cast, so maybe take advantage of it. The player retcons, and now the character discreetly nudges a server with a tray of drinks, causing some to fall on the tarot cards, much to the charlatan's exasperation. The player doesn't have to cast to see how well they bump the server. They've already cast for this conflict. That result, the 5–6, lasts until the conflict is resolved or until something big changes. The player isn't worried that the next time they face the charlatan they'll have to cast again and maybe fail. That means the character doesn't have to alert security immediately. The success against the charlatan is "locked in," unless there's a big change.

See "Examples of Conflicts and Lots" (page 38) for more examples that incorporate strikes and karma.

Damage, or How to Get Stricken

I MUST BECOME A LION-HEARTED GIRL
READY FOR A FIGHT
BEFORE I MAKE THE FINAL SACRIFICE...

—"RABBIT HEART (RAISE IT UP)," FLORENCE + THE MACHINE, 2009

A common negative outcome from a failure or a bad twist is for a character to get hurt or otherwise compromised.

DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

The human being is a wondrous, subtle machine, and traumas of various kinds can throw off the machine's inner workings, sometimes terminally. In ***Over the Edge***, "damage" refers in general to all the sorts of things that could go wrong with a person thanks to physical, psychological, or astral violence.

"Stricken" is a catch-all term for anything that messes you up badly, like getting punched out or brain-zapped. As far as roleplaying goes, play out the effects of your damage for all it's worth. Portray your character as dazed, debilitated, or however is appropriate. In terms of your character's capabilities, however, you can pretty much operate at full. Sometimes the story demands that your strikes have game world consequences, such as how one might stand out in a crowd after being kicked to the literal curb.

Depending on who messed you up and how they did it, being stricken might mean that you're black and blue, bleeding pretty badly, envenomed, enervated, exhausted, electrically blasted, fried, frozen, intoxicated, entangled, bent, debilitated, stunned, cut, broken, dazed, flabbergasted, melting down, shaken up, quantum-disrupted, ch'i-blocked, mind-blasted, psychically disturbed, astrally parasitized, or aura-drained. When another character asks you how you're doing, give them a creative answer. No matter how you describe your character's condition, everyone knows you're saying, "My character is stricken."

You can get stricken twice, so you might be dazed and enervated. The third strike takes you out, usually

meaning not quite dead but out of the picture and maybe dying. Depending on how you got here, you might be unconscious, zonked, comatose, bleeding out, in shock, drowning, hebephrenic, or fading astrally. Depending on the situation, you might be in danger of imminent death or maybe you can just sleep it off. If your character is dying, consider sharing their last thoughts with the table. Finally, your third strike might mean your character is just plain dead, full stop.

Another way to think of strikes is as script immunity. An unstricken character is pretty much safe from being damaged to death. The character isn't totally safe. Some dangers can kill someone outright, and there are worse things than dying, especially on Al Amarja. For the most part, however, the script immunity of an unstricken character is pretty solid. While you are stricken, you still have a good deal of script immunity. If you've been stricken twice, however, perilous activity may well doom you. Your character's previous traumas may be foreshadowing a dark fate that awaits them.

HEALING

Characters recover from being stricken in different ways and at different speeds, depending on how they were damaged. For a lot of trauma that shakes you up, a night's rest does wonders. Some injuries will necessitate a trip to the emergency room, or maybe to this chick that the bartender knows. She used to be a doctor, and she can fix you up cheap, no questions asked. St. Charon's Hospital does some truly amazing work, especially after you've signed the waiver for experimental treatment. Just kidding, there's no waiver.

Often, a character's injuries remain part of the fiction after the game effect has gone away. For example, a character may be suffering from cuts received in a recent knife fight, but you did a whole scene with him at the emergency room, so in game terms he's fine. If you look at him in the game world, he's got stitches and bandages and he looks cut up, but no one is slowing the game down because of it.

Alternatively, you can also have long convalescence times for characters and fast-forward through that lull in the action. If the character's brains are fried by alien weaponry, but they overcame their foes, maybe a one-month stay in Zeke's Madhouse would set them to rights. You can play out that whole month in a couple minutes, if you like, and get back into the action.

Ultimately, the GM manages the details of how a character gets over being stricken. Here are two rules of thumb they can use:

First, strikes in general last a good long time, generally at least a whole session, usually longer. There's not much point in dealing with them if they don't count.

Second, fudge reality in favor of results that are more even from one strike to another. Less harmful strikes might take longer to shake off than is realistic, while characters may shake off more damaging strikes with unrealistic ease.

GMCs, DAMAGE, AND SAVES

Gamemaster-characters can get hurt or otherwise messed up the way player-characters do. In general, one strike is enough to take a regular GMC out of the fight. Elite GMCs have saves, indicating how often they can avoid the fate of lesser GMCs. A special GMC has one save, and top GMCs have more. Each save allows the GMC to avoid a negative fate one time. GMs often use the saves to allow a GMC to escape when otherwise they would be defeated, although sometimes the saved GMC sticks around to keep causing trouble. A GMC's saves reset when the GM thinks the timing is right, especially if the GMC is able to reach some sort of safe space where they are not under pressure from the characters or anyone else.

Saves are a lot like ablative script immunity for important GMCs. A save not only allows a GMC to take a strike and keep on going, it can also serve to protect the GMC from other defeats, such as being captured. The gamemaster can even invent new details that allow the GMC to avoid defeat, such as an emergency escape hatch that the GM hadn't thought to include ahead of time. In most RPGs, the GM is willing to use fiat to keep a major GMC going, even if it means making stuff up on the fly. The "saves" system gives you a concrete way to specify ahead of time how much script immunity to give to major GMCs.

Karma Means Work

Sometimes things are going your way, and sometimes shit happens. When a player casts lots and gets doubles, the party earns karma for someone at the table to use later.

Earning Karma: The party earns karma when someone gets doubles on their cast. The party can only have one "dose" of karma at a time. If the party already has karma, they can't get more. Send US$10 to Jonathan Tweet to unlock extra storage, allowing your party to store an extra "dose" of karma.

Starting an Arc: At the start of a story arc, every player gets a free throw to see if they get doubles, and if at least one player throws doubles, then the party starts the arc with karma. Throwing for karma is the official signal that the prep is over and the game proper has begun. Some gamemasters use the karma/no-karma throw to determine if things start out well for the party (if they get karma) or badly (no karma). A gamemaster might also record the throws of each player and use them as a free-form source of inspiration. If a player starts with a low throw or a 3, maybe that means that things start off bad for them. If a player starts with a high throw or a 4, well, don't be superstitious, it probably doesn't mean a thing.

Calling on Karma: If the party has karma, any player can use it as a reroll on a cast. After the player has taken any rerolls for having a higher level than the opposition, or after the GM has forced any rerolls for the character having a lower level than the opposition, the player has the option of using up the karma to reroll a single die.

Sometimes a player can convince the GM to let them use up karma for some free-form benefit in play. That's against the rules, so GMs should proceed with caution. It's OK to get talked into some things but not into just anything. GMs, don't feel obliged to break the rules for the players. In fact, you should deny the first request for sure, just to set the precedent.

Example of Karma: The session starts out with a GMC suddenly turning on Mark Slay with an ice pick. Mark is already stricken from the previous session, so this isn't good. The GMC has initiative and has an ice pick, so Rob needs to cast 8+. Mark is a level ahead of the attacker, and the party has karma left over from a previous session. Rob casts 2-3, a failure with a bad twist, but he gets two rerolls. First, he uses his level advantage to reroll the 2, and he gets 4 a, for a 4-3. Better, but still not good enough for success. He uses the group's karma to reroll the 3 and gets — a 4! His cast is 4-4, "crazy eights," a success with a double good twist. Plus, he's rolled doubles, so the party's karma is restored. How does Rob do that? The success means that Mark bested the GMC in hand-to-hand struggle, the first good twist means that the success was so decisive that the GMC gets plopped down in a chair with his fighting spirit broken, and the second good twist means that Mark recovers from his strike. He was stricken previously when he was tricked into killing several people in a stunt, and now in this fight he demonstrated his autonomy in choosing whether to kill.

Examples of Conflicts and Lots

Many of these examples come from my own game sessions. Enjoy.

BLOODSHED AND MAYHEM

Examples of physical struggles.

Futile Caution and the Tentacled Alien

Some sort of deadly alien monster was holed up in a room in the hospital, possibly hanging above the door. Dr. Machete had caught sight of the thing and knew that it was more than he could handle, even with his fire ax.

Machete is skilled at close combat thanks to his Mercenary Doctor trait, but the monster was at least one level higher than the characters. Machete ran to the side of the door and hacked at the wall above it, trying to expose the monster.

My lots came up 2-3, total failure and a bad twist. A tentacle whipped out of the door and snatched the ax from Doc's hands. I expected worse with a cast like that, and maybe the GM saw something on my face. Next the tentacle whipped out and snatched up Dr. Machete himself. The monster was so dangerous and the cast so bad that Doc was out of the fight, not unconscious, but grappled and locked in a fight for his life.

You see this trope sometimes in movies, where a character is barely managing to avoid getting eaten, and someone better help them out fast. Luckily for Doc, his allies were able to deal with the alien, and he ended up with nothing worse than an alien tendril living inside his rib cage. In retrospect, I shouldn't have expected much security from Doc's cautious approach to the door. If my character is confronting a monster, then in dramatic terms he's putting himself at risk.

Out-of-Control Baboon

A baboon is freaked out by paranormal activity in the area, it's lost its shit, and now it's starting to maul a bystander. A character recklessly steps in to manhandle the baboon and rescue the bystander. The character is big, strong, and elite (3rd level), but the baboon was berserk, and holy crap have you ever seen one of those things up close?

I called it an even contest with the character taking initiative, but we agreed that things could go badly wrong if the baboon managed to land a good bite on the character. The player cast lots, needing a 7, but got a 6. That's close enough to success that I asked the player how they wanted to play it. Did the character fail to get the baboon off the bystander or fail to protect himself from the baboon's dagger-like fangs?

The player took the heroic option, so the character managed to pull the baboon off its victim and pin it to the ground, but not before the little monster had twisted around and cut some nasty gashes in his arms. Other characters piled on to help, and the heroic character was able to stagger back, bleeding badly. For the character's "strike," the player wrote "Monkey Shredded."

Putting Down a Mob

The players have decided, perhaps puckishly, that the hub of their activity will be a humble sandwich shop. It's the start of the second session, and I figured that the group could use a simple, energetic encounter to get things rolling.

So, a mob of carousing sailors and some hangers-on have come the sandwich shop, and now they're causing enough trouble that other patrons are leaving. An encounter like this effectively asks the players how their characters handle trouble. The three characters confront the carousers, who respond with enthusiastic violence. It's not clear which side is taking the initiative, but the characters have home field advantage, so they succeed on 7+. The carousers outnumber the characters but aren't in top fighting form, so I rate the challenge as 2nd level. Each player casts their lots, and each will have a separate result based on the throw.

One character is just trying to get out of trouble. Their default skill is 2nd, so that's even, no reroll. The player throws and fails, so the character gets cornered. If they were fighting on their own, this failure would be worse, but since the character was avoiding confrontation, I delay the final resolution of that character's actions until we see what else is happening.

The second character pulls out a tire iron and lays into the sailors. Her Fight grade is 3, giving her a reroll, and she scores a success, clubbing a couple sailors left and right.

The last character, also Fight 3, uses a reroll to turn a 4-2 into a 5-4, success with a good twist. I rule that not only has he put the smackdown on the mob (success), but he does so in such an impressive manner that it takes the fight right out of the mob (good twist). I let the player describe exactly how the character manhandles the sailor that took a swing at him, and the player, a martial artist himself, is happy to do so.

The sailors scramble away, cursing the characters. The first character, no longer cornered, is saved from any further danger. The players, now alert and

focused thanks to the fight, are ready for the story-relevant action that takes place next. And if I ever need to threaten the characters with more street violence, we all know that the sailors might be back one day with their friends.

Failing to Demonstrate Puissance

A tiger man fighter decides to stage a fight between him and one of the tough guys he's been hanging out with, planning to impress the other tough guys and establish himself as the leader. The character is taking initiative and outclasses the other tough guy by one level, so the player needs to throw 7+ and gets one reroll.

He throws 3-2, rerolls the 3 and gets a 1, for a total of 2-1 and a failure. The tiger man is tougher than the opposition, so the character wins the fight even though the player missed the cast. The failure is failing to impress the crowd, which was the tiger man's goal. The player and I agreed that too much of his tiger nature surfaced during the fight, and the audience turns against him as a monster rather than admiring him as a victor.

The point of this encounter is to resolve the character's action. As such, the result is final. The tiger man can't just "try it again" until the player rolls a success. The character would need to accomplish something or change something before they would have another chance to impress these toughs.

Group versus Group Fight

Three characters get into a melee with five goons. The GM decides to make it a big fight, probably with more than one round of lots. She could have just played it as simple contest, with each player casting lots against "the mob of goons," but she wants to draw it out, and she informs the table of her plan. Given the surroundings and the way fights look in the movies, the GM says that in the first round each character is lined up against one goon, with two extra goons who might insert themselves depending on how the lots fall.

Each player throws their lots, and it doesn't matter what order they resolve things in because each fight is separate. The GM says that the goons get one reroll for one of them to represent that they outnumber the characters. It messes with the players' heads when the GM has a reroll in her pocket, so any excuse is a good one. The goons ambushed the characters, so the players need 8+ to succeed.

The players cast their lots, and two players get to reroll a die because their characters are a level ahead. First, however, the GM surveys the casts to decide how to use her reroll. The player who doesn't get a reroll has thrown a 6-2, so she could make him reroll the 6. One of the other players has cast a 3-2, so he's definitely going to take a reroll. The GM decides to wait for that player to reroll. They reroll the 3 and get a 4. It's a failure with a good twist, but the GM has the player reroll the 4. It comes up 5, and now it's 5–2, a failure with no twists.

They narrate the results, starting for fun with the character who failed. He was holding his own against the goon and in fact pressing him back, but two other goons pile on him. He breaks free but is battered (stricken). The other two characters succeed and manage to knock two goons out of the fight.

Now it's one goon each, and the ones knocked out of the fight are shaking it off. The GM no longer has the reroll. The players appeal to the GM that they effectively have initiative because they did better than the goons last round, but she's isn't having it. The players cast their lots. The battered character doesn't suffer any penalty on the cast because strikes don't affect your lots.

The character with no reroll throws 4-1, a failure with a good twist. The GM needs to see what else is going on before figuring that out. The players with the rerolls succeed, and two more goons are taken down.

The GM rules that the good twist that the last goon clobbers the character (stricken) and while clobbering, overconfidently spills the beans on some secret. "Tariq said you'd be soft," he says, giving the name of the informer who gave them up.

The GM would be happy to call the fight at this point and adjudicate how it ends up, but the players want to finish this goon off. The goons who were threatening to get back up again do not jump back into the fight. If the players had thrown worse lots, they probably would have.

The players all cast lots to take down the last goon, and two of them succeed, including the Clobbered character. The players decide to have that character resolve first, so while the better fighters are squaring off against the last goon, the Clobbered character come roaring back in and plows into him. The goon's knocked into the other characters, who help him efficiently to the ground.

SKULLDUGGERY

Examples of more or less mundane challenges.

Deactivating Security, Pit Vipers Included

A deluded character is breaking into the empty home of a random family, and her hacker friend is there to help get through security. The hacker attempts to disarm the alarm through an exterior keypad, and the player prepares to cast the lots. The GM says, let's have the roll be for the whole security effort, not just this one action. The hacker is 3rd level, and success comes easy.

Baboon Handling

Doctor Vlada is surprised to find six agitated baboons suddenly in her care. She uses her world-renowned way with animals to calm them down. The player rolls

6-4, a big success with a good twist. The baboons have calmed down and won't be trouble, but what else? Vlada's player suggests that she gets one of the baboons to bond with the loveable kid, and the baboon becomes his companion. The player doesn't have to cast lots to make this happen. It's a result of the 4 (good twist) in the original cast.

A MacGuffin Nearly Snagged

After two sessions of bad lots and difficulties, the characters have found the ship that is about to weigh anchor and head out with the briefcase of fringe science goods that the characters are after.

One character, a tiger man, slips away on his own and sneaks onto the ship. The player casts lots to see how well they get past whatever security the ship has, and they luck out, so the character gets to the hold of the ship, no problem.

There they find a shipping container with strange "lockers" on either side and a bunch of gear, including the briefcase. When the tiger man takes the case, however, the "lockers" pop open, and gaunt, naked humans with IVs in their arms spring out, all amped up on something and eager to dog-pile the intruder.

The tiger man is world class (4th level) and super agile thanks to the main trait Tiger Man, but getting trapped in a shipping container with some sort of high-speed technozombies would count as a world-class problem. The player rolls even on and needs an 8, since the "zombies" are taking the initiative. A throw of 4-2 means a miss with a good twist. Normally a miss would mean that the tiger man is overwhelmed by the enemies and never heard from again, especially because this was the last cast of the story arc. But the good twist means that the character can use his uncanny reflexes and springiness to bound out of the container and away.

The briefcase, alas, was grabbed by a zombie and lost. The character survived, but the party failed in the story arc's goal of retrieving that case from the villain.

Finding What You're Looking for and More

It's the end of the session, and I'm ready for a break. Rob says that his PC is looking for the fallen movie star, the one that bailed from the film. I put him off and say he can cast his lots at the start of the next session. That way I'll have a week to think up some background.

With the rest of the table, I close up threads for the end of the session. It turns out that Rob won't be at the game the next week. Everyone else has cast their lots once or twice, but not Rob. Rob rightly calls me out and says he should get to cast. He's right, and he casts 6-4. That bastard Rob seems to have a way with the dice. Yes, weird stuntman Mark Slay finds the fallen actor whose role he took (success). He also finds a woman from the film who speaks the pseudo-Thai language from the weird movie (good twist). Rob gets what he wants and more, and I get a couple weeks to think about what that might mean.

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY

Examples of strange goings on.

Unsuccessful Resurrection

Doctor Vlada is hosting an important patron in her laboratory when the patron, the victim of astral attack, keels over dead. The patron is a powerful woman, and Vlada is known to get into trouble around them. Desperate, Vlada decides to use the new information she's recently gained to attempt to resurrect the patron. The player and GM agree that Vlada would be lucky to get any kind of success, given how unprepared she is. The player rolls 6–2, which is good enough to prevent Vlada from destroying the body, but that's all. The player uses the party's karma to reroll the 2, but the reroll is 1, so no better. If the player had thrown 6 or less, Vlada would have been stricken, most likely meaning that the long, intense failed effort had left her exhausted and wrecked.

Unsuccessful Savior

Doctor Lazarus, the Christian necromancer, has inadvertently helped an innocent (yeah, right), young fire spinner overdose to the point of critical danger of immediate demise. As the unfortunate man is being loaded into a makeshift ambulance for hire, the good doctor attempts to use his Christian necromancy to seal his soul into the body. Blighty and I talk about how this sort of magic isn't squarely in a necromancer's wheelhouse, but I allow it, knowing that sealing a soul into a lethally-ravaged body is just the sort of good deed that one might soon regret. He'll succeed at a 7, but it's against the odds, if nothing else than because of Doctor Lazarus's recent chemical indulgences. Blighty casts 5-1, and I make him reroll the 5, hoping for a bad twist. His die comes up 5 again. It's a failure but nothing terrible happens. Doctor Laz nearly succeeds, close enough to feel the soul as it slips between his metaphorical fingers. Funny how earlier that very evening Doctor Lazarus had asked this young man what he thought would happen to him when he died.

It was late in the session, and I failed to give this impromptu necromancy the attention it deserved. I should have taken the opportunity to have Blighty elaborate on just how Dr. Laz works his magic. Crosses? Prayers? In Latin? Aramaic? Both Christian prayer and traditional necromancy use props and spoken phrases, and I'm sure everyone at the table would have appreciated a little more color related to the scene. I resolved to ask Blighty about this at the start of the next session.

Psychic Reading under Inauspicious Circumstances

Ashley, the psychic to the stars, tries to get a read on a willing GMC, or maybe an unwitting one. There's no resistance, so Sean is casting lots to see how Ashley does, with her own level of ability (3rd) setting the expectations. Ashley's taking initiative, so she'll succeed on a 7. Unfortunately, Ashley has gotten into trouble by "taking it to 11," and she's swimming in her own drug-soaked blood stream, including too much Blue Shock. I tell Sean that I might make him reroll a die. He casts 5-1, a failure. I could leave it at that, but I'm hoping for a 3, so I tell Sean to reroll the 5. He gets another 1, for a cast of 1-1. Nothing. The overload of physical sensations has left Ashley totally unable to access her own intuition or foresight. It's a disturbing loss, but since there was no bad twist there are no lasting consequences. The result of 1–1 is doubles, so the party gains karma.

Psychic Defenses Blow Out Her Mind

Ashley is at the Mojo Moon Dance with Buck Williams, a GMC who is sort of doomed. She tries to get a psychic read on Buck. I tell everyone that there's a psychic guard on duty who is going to interfere, so I'm going to force a reroll, and things could go really wrong. On the other hand, the party has karma for a possible reroll. Sean casts 2-1. He's not going to use up the karma when I have a reroll to force. I'm happy with the 2-1, and it stands. When Ashley opens up her psychic channels to get a read on the GMC, some unseen telepath beams apocalyptic visions into her head. She sees catastrophes, massacres, avalanches, manias, and other cataclysms. The visions seem to last hours, but when Ashley shakes out of it, it's only been a couple minutes. Buck is no longer standing there where he was. He's off somewhere meeting his doom. Since Sean didn't cast a 3, Ashley is shaken but not stricken. If I were meaner, the psychic interference Ashley suffered could have stricken her, but the plot thread with Buck was a sideline, so I played it easy.

Brain Intact on a Miss

Kwon J., the human shadow and self-help author, stumbles across a business that is secretly a front for the [redacted]. Kwon is a "vibe sponge," which might make him an easy mark for these conspirators. Alternatively, his sensitivity might even allow him to paranormally discern that something's wrong. Paul has to cast lots as Kwon is being sized up for possible [redacted], while he thinks he's just making mundane business contacts. He's not taking initiative so he needs an 8 to succeed. Paul casts 5-2, a failure with no twists. Kwon gets the cold shoulder from the [redacted] he's talking to. Sean and Paul jump in to play impromptu associates at the establishment, and they wordlessly usher him out the door. After the scene is over, Paul asks what was going on behind the scenes, and I tell the table a little bit about the [redacted].

RESOLVING CASTS AND SETTING DIRECTIONS

Here's an example from my campaign that shows how each throw can be momentous enough to change or direct the action. During the second session of an arc of indefinite length, the three players cast two good-twist failures and a bad-twist success. If I had been trying to invent a session to demonstrate how the rules work, you wouldn't have believed this sequence of throws.

In the first session, the characters had met at the Terminal and shared an illegal taxi to Cesar's Hotel. In the second session, I let the players know that we would be getting each character's plot off the ground. That meant giving each character a bit of spotlight time. It also meant that I would be watching their throws to see whether their respective plot lines would be trending up or down.

GM Setup

At the start of the session, I created three custom GMCs, one for each character. Each GMC appeared in the session, but not how I planned. That's why we cast lots, to open ourselves to possibilities beyond our own imaginings. Your GM might be smart, but your GM plus the "randomness" of the lots are even smarter.

Psychic or Jinx?

Ashley Lee, psychic to the stars, is on the Island to connect with a group of psychics who use an "astronomy club" as their cover. In answer to my question at the start of the session, Sean said that Ashley's most negative experience with her psychic powers was foreseeing the grisly death of her band's drummer, so I invented Elzbet Nekdep, a woman who would likewise be doomed, despite Ashley foreseeing her demise. The action started with Ashley setting out to find the "astronomy club." In the hotel lobby, she met a buffoonish tourist, also from the States. As a buffoon, he amused everyone at the table and accompanied Ashley as they took a Total Taxi to the address she had for the "astronomy club." Ashley and the tourist parted ways, but not until he pressed on her how excited he was about the Mojo Moon Dance, coming up soon on the night of the full moon.

We cut away from her after she arrived at her destination and punched the code into the intercom to connect to the "astronomy club." When we came back to her later in the session, Sean cast his lots. This cast was to find out the big unknowns, rather than Ashley using her talents to succeed against opposition, so it was an even-on throw, with no reroll. Sean cast 4-2, a failure with a good twist. So no, Ashley was not going to get welcomed into the club, but something good was going to come of it anyway.

I added another GMC to the mix as the doomed club member, freeing up Elzbet to be a valuable contact. Ashley met members of the "astronomy club:" the boss man (fated to reject her), Elzbet (fated to be her valuable contact), the new GMC (fated to be another casualty that Ashley couldn't protect), and Durg (Paul's burly character from a one-shot that Blighty had run a couple weeks earlier). In a test of Ashley's abilities, she had a terrible vision of the new GMC getting blown up. When she revealed this news, the boss man angrily accused her of being a jinx and ejected her from their company. Elzbet, however, was convinced of the character's virtue and found a way to sneak her cell phone number to Ashley. Ashley failed to join the "astronomy club" but got a valuable contact anyway. The table also had a couple good laughs at Durg getting recycled as a GMC.

Who Is the Real You?

Kwon J., the shadow-self self-help author, was on the Island in answer to an invitation from the University of Continuous Realignment (UCR). Before the action started, I created a GMC for Kwon: Sheila Pinecrate, a devoted fan. Devoted fans are excellent sources of good news and bad. I figured she would be a rapt member of the audience in his first seminar, but I was wrong. At the start of the action, Kwon left an autographed copy of his latest book for the self-published mother of someone who had dissed him (it's a long story). That action prompted me to ask Paul what sort of luck Kwon, as a shadow-person, had with women, and Paul rightly said that he had better success than you might expect.

Since Kwon has no real identity of his own, women can project what they want onto him, which works just fine for a famous author (not that I know anything about that). If Paul had said that Kwon had no luck, that would have been less material for us to work with. I'm so glad I asked that question, but I didn't know at first how useful that answer would be.

At the start of the action, Kwon set off walking toward UCR. As a not-really-real person, Kwon needs constant human contact to remain real, and a walk through the Edge was just what he thought he needed — and maybe he was right. Kwon was at risk, so I asked Paul to cast his lots. As with Ashley's cast, it was a straight cast with no particular opposition and no reroll. Paul cast 4-1, failure with a good twist. Kwon got totally caught up in the energy of the streets and really never got much closer to his destination than when he started. But something good came of his failure to reach his destination.

Instead of being a fan in his audience, the GMC, Sheila Pinecrate, approached Kwon at a park as they both watched a hungry elderly couple fail to catch a crow for dinner. Kwon cut loose with the feel-good nonsense that has made him famous as a self-help author, and Sheila ate it up. From her pocket she pulled a dog-eared paperback of Kwon's latest book, ***You Already Know the Real You***. The two of them headed off to a coffee-and-speed shop she knew, while she regaled him with stories about her favorite author, Kwon J. Kwon realized that for the first time he was making a real, human connection with a woman who liked him as a person rather than as "the author Kwon J." Overwhelmed, he left abruptly, but at least he had her cell number.

Sometimes a Pipe is a Pipe and a Dagger is a Dagger

In the first session, Dr. Lazarus, the Christian necromancer, had contacted the deceased uncle of an illegal cab driver and conveyed a message for the driver to look under the floorboards. That meant that the cabbie was going to be back with important news. In addition, I invented the GMC Rant Badgeheart to be a semi-important member of the Temple of Divine Experience, someone bored of the regular scene and ready to glom onto someone exceptional like Dr. L.

Doctor Lazarus texted the cabbie to pick him up and take him to the antiquarian shop where the Pipe of Longinus might be found. Instead, the cabbie took him to a diner where he knew the folks and could talk to Dr. L. privately in the back room.

There, the cabbie revealed what he found under the floorboards: a bunch of mysterious pills, a little book of names and numbers, and a highly illegal dagger meant only for killing people. Dr. Lazarus told the driver to pray and decide which of those three items was for him. Like a good sport, the player did not choose a course of action designed to minimize future complications, such as telling the cabbie to hand over all the stuff and never think of it again. Then he asked the driver to take him to the shop where, he hoped, he would find the pipe that contained the dying breath of Christ. The driver took him to a multistory shop in Flowers, R-Kane-R-Us.

With the character finally at the shop, Blighty cast his lots, again straight with no reroll. The throw was 5-3, a success with a bad twist. The proprietor of the shop is summoned and ushers the character to the top floor, behind several locked doors. The proprietor says that his father died a year ago, and that it is his own goal to find the right person to transfer the pipe to. Once that task is done, the proprietor will be able to shut down the store and never again deal with pyramid-power nuts or mandala-energy freaks. But is Dr. Lazarus the right person? Dr. L. pulls an envelope from a pocket and the proprietor opens it. Inside is a note that says, "This is the man," and it's in the father's own handwriting.

The proprietor happily hands the Pipe of Longinus over to Dr. L. In lots of RPGs, the fun is trying to get

what you want. A character would have to "earn" the Pipe of Longinus by doing research, following leads, solving mysteries, and overcoming enemies. In ***Over the Edge***, you often have fun by getting what you want and then suffering the consequences. It's your choices that generate the fun. As the GM, I didn't make it hard for the character to get what he wanted.

We all knew there was a bad twist in the mix. As for that bad twist, I told everyone that someone from the Temple was watching what was going on and that Dr. Lazarus was now in their crosshairs. Since Dr. L. is Christian, "crosshairs" is strangely appropriate. Since "Rant Badgeheart" is a great name, I shared it with the table as out-of-character knowledge.

Character Advancement

Over time, characters get better at what they do. These advances in power follow the examples set in film and fiction, as well as the standards laid down by forty years of roleplaying game design. Characters advance in two ways: specialties and overall level-ups. Characters' abilities advance when it makes sense in the action, a combination of dramatic sense and game sense. Since there are no hard and fast rules for advancement, the GM determines when and how characters advance, although players are renowned for finding ways to convince GMs that advancement is warranted.

CHRIS SAYS: DOWNTIME BACKSTORY

Sometimes, between arcs, or even between sessions if there's been a long enough break, I ask players what their characters might have been up to and, taking that, feed some backstory into the downtime. This lets me frontload the exposition "off camera" for the next arc or session. I simply type up or tell the players what and who they encountered and can then draw on those placed plot points later in the game. It saves preamble and lets things start *in medias res*, which I always like.

It's best to use this device after you've played a few sessions and the players know their characters and the microcosm of Al Amarja in which they've been operating. Off-camera backstory is also a great way to keep GMCs going — they have their own lives when the PCs aren't around and, sometimes, they meet up offscreen for a drink or some Voo or whatever and tell the PC about this crazy encounter they had with "Insert Plot Point for Next Session."

ADVANCE WHEN IT MAKES SENSE

Characters advance when it makes sense in terms of the action in the world and the timing at the game table.

Achieving Greatness

When a character does something in the action that should get them greater skill, power, or experience, it's a fine time for the character to advance. For example, if a psychic meets other psychics and works with them to develop her own powers, maybe she advances.

Experience is What You Get When You Don't Get What You Want

When a character has had their own rear end handed to them, maybe that's the sort of experience that leads to learning. The defeat might be social, martial, or paranormal.

Before a Showdown

If characters have a way to prepare for a climactic confrontation, maybe they deserve some sort of advance, especially one that relates directly to the enemies that they're prepping for. Maybe they study the enemy abilities, gear up with weapons or defenses that work great against the enemies, or undertake some action of symbolic importance.

Even if the characters aren't making any sort of special preparations, immediately before a showdown is a fine time for the GM to pause and think about whether any characters deserve an advance. Players often prove to be inventive if asked to justify why their characters deserve a boost before a confrontation with a major foe.

Between Arcs

It's easy to have characters advance after a story arc concludes. The new story arc might start a while in the future, after a long enough gap to cover any training or experience a character needs. Players can improvise exposition about what their characters have done to advance their abilities. The advance makes the character a little different, opening up many possibilities for the new arc.

For an arc of indefinite length, advances can come after major climax points — that is, the points that would be ends of arcs if the arcs were of limited length.

After Several Sessions or a Few Months

Occasional advances give the characters a sense of forward progress. The more play time or calendar time has passed since the last advance, the harder the GM should work to justify one so that the players don't get frustrated.

ADVANCING WITH SPECIALTIES

A specialty describes the sort of situation in which a character operates one level higher than normal. When a character advances, the most common result is that they pick up a specialty. A character can have up to three specialties. If they would acquire a fourth specialty, the character levels up instead. Activities that aren't related to a character's traits but are still covered by their specialty also calculate their default value as if the character were one level higher than normal.

Example: Ashley's psychic visions have taken a dark turn, and she picks up the specialty "Death." She's 3rd level, but when the topic is death, she's effectively 4th level. Her traits, "Psychic to the Stars" and "Former Rock Star" both operate at 4th level when death is involved. For activities that are not related to her traits, Ashley uses the default value, which is 2nd level for both 3rd and 4th level characters. If Ashley attempts a task that's not covered by her traits, she'll be 2nd level at it regardless of whether "death" in involved. See **Core and Default Capabilities By Character Level**, page 15.

Chosen Enemies

Sometimes the specialty represents a particular skill or experience when opposing a certain sort of enemy or rival. If you are a "Champion Chain Fighter" who "Reads Signs and Portents Everywhere," and you've been repeatedly fighting demon-possessed fanatics, maybe you pick up the specialty "Demon-Possessed Fanatics." That specialty will help you fight the fanatics as well as helping you follow signs and portents related to them. If you are a "Smooth-Talking Pretty Boy" and you've been entangled in the petty politics of the University, you might pick up the specialty "Academics."

New Techniques

If your main trait is "Underground Bounty Hunter" and you've been using that trait in lots of hand-to-hand fights, maybe you acquire the specialty "Hand-

to-Hand Fighting." That specialty might also help your side trait, depending on what it is. If your main trait is "Life-Force Manipulator" and you've received some paranormal training as a healer, "Healer" would make a fine specialty.

Paranormal Transformation

This sort of specialty depends on the action in the game. If a character undergoes some sort of mystical transmogrification or is subject to some weird–science process, they might gain a specialty such as "Super Reflexes," "Hypervibratory Third Eye," or whatever the result is.

Improves Abilities But Not New Ones

Specialties let you do what you already do, only better in certain circumstances. They don't give you new traits. If a character gains a new trait during play, it's the result of some major plot point and the gamemaster handles it ***ad hoc***.

Example Specialties

- **Paranormal People:** Good for finding, understanding, or counteracting paranormal actors, or whatever variation makes sense for the character.
- **Bestial Senses and Instincts:** Unlocked through a voodoo mishap in play.
- **Ancient-Style Kung Fu:** Gained after fighting a master hand-to-hand and later training with him.
- **Demons of Greed and Sloth:** Developed after certain unfortunate failures.
- **Wards of Protection:** Includes sigils, signs, prayers, and runes to protect a group or place from evil influence. Specialties like this represent improving an existing paranormal ability rather than gaining one.
- **Four Points District:** Familiarity with a particular neighborhood, its denizens, and its dangers.
- **Love:** Love songs, romantic matches, others' secret feelings, and possibly love magic.

ADVANCING WITH LEVEL-UPS

If you have three specialties, you can't add a fourth. Instead, your character levels up by +1. The three specialties go away because they are subsumed into the new, higher level. You can earn those specialties back like normal, pushing your capabilities even higher.

The GM can also just have a character level up when it makes sense given the action in the campaign.

CHAPTER NO. 3

THE ULTIMATE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF AL AMARJA

YOU'VE NEVER LOOKED INTO MY EYES
BUT DON'T YOU WANT TO KNOW
WHAT THE DARK AND THE WILD
AND THE DIFFERENT KNOW?

—"THE DIFFERENT," MELISSA ETHERIDGE, 2001

The people are cut off from their cultural roots, while their media glorifies violence and shopping. The State makes a show of beneficence but abuses its power. The wealthy are sinfully rich while most people live in fear and worry. Shadowy organizations secretly pull the strings. Truth is outlawed. Everyone can see what's happening all around them, and no one's doing anything about it. To breathe is to collaborate. Altogether, Al Amarja represents a nightmare version of the real world's nightmare side. Your plane is about to land.

This chapter covers public information about Al Amarja and its society, including laws, the State, drugs, holidays, media, and more. Most of the material in this chapter can be shared as information that the characters quickly glean from their surroundings. You can also paraphrase elements for the players to know out-of-character. The Island contains plenty of mysteries, so don't be stingy when deciding how much material to share. When I first ran this game, players had to earn all the information their characters got. Today, I'm generous with information. Players are more engaged and can play their characters more deliberately if they know more about what's going on.

The next chapter covers the Island's main city, the Edge, in detail.

CHRIS SAYS: WORLD-BUILDING WITH DETAILS

In my first session for the new playtest, all the PCs were new to the island. I described the arrival on touchdown. Huge pictures of the D'Aubainnes on the sides of buildings, three stories high. The Mediterranean air. The Kafkaesque procedure through customs where bored clerks processed their information while men in mirrored, air-conditioned helmets, holding truncheons, kept leashed baboons at their side.

There was no need to tell the players they'd come to a weird place with authoritarian tendencies. Their first meal after checking into a large hotel was at the Lost World of Mu, a theosophy-themed restaurant where, in the middle of dinner, the sides of what looked like a supporting column fell down to reveal a woman in a tank rapidly filling with water. The restaurant New Age muzak cut, and a voice proclaimed her a seditious member of the underground.

The crowd at Lost World of Mu watched her drown. They didn't bat an eye. The characters paid, fled the restaurant, and left their recently eaten meals on the pavement outside.

Little details, especially weird ones, imply an entire world. Let your details stand in for entire aspects of Al Amarja.

Al Amarja and the Outside World

People coming to Al Amarja don't talk about it much. Most people haven't heard about the Island, and many who have visited the place wish that they'd never heard of it.

The globe is divided into roughly two zones: Al Amarja and everything else. When your time has come to transcend everything else, whether you know it or not, you book your flight.

TRUTH, FICTION, AND WIKIPEDIA

The State conducts a successful disinformation campaign to shield the Island's worthy citizens from prying eyes. Wikipedia tells people that Al Amarja is a fictional island from an obscure roleplaying game from the 1990s. That is, an old-fashioned, tabletop game with dice and paper, which some people still play even in the modern world. This "fictional" Al Amarja is in the Mediterranean, and all the other details are wrong as well. Conveniently, no one can interview the supposed author of the game, writing with the pseudonym Wanton Heat Jet, because he had his head blown off by an animal-lover with a shotgun at a game convention in 2004. The State has actually arranged to produce physical copies of this "game," and it is full of lies, as anyone can see as soon as they fly to the Island and see what the Terminal really looks like. (Travelers to Al Amarja make legitimate trips to Portugal or Senegal and then connect more or less illicitly to Al Amarja, if you must know.)

People who need to know about Al Amarja know about it, maybe. Those who know about it are reticent, as anyone would be reticent about a shameful secret, an embarrassing relative, or a depressing medical diagnosis. More people know about it than talk about it. Many are trying to forget. More people travel there because they don't know what they're doing than because they do. If you think that such an island could not possibly escape public scrutiny without mind control and media manipulation on a global scale, you'd be right.

The Island

In the local parlance, people talk about Al Amarja as "the Island." The State sometimes abbreviates the Ultimate Democratic Republic of Al Amarja "UDRAA," but no one says that out loud. In fact, most Islanders don't know whether it's pronounced U-D-R-A-A or OO-drah, or what. The place is simply "the Island," and the government is "the State."

Locals say "the Island" where outsiders might use the term "the world" or "Earth." On Al Amarja, someone might yell at their blabbermouth friend, "Go ahead and tell the whole Island, why dontcha?" When coincidences crop up between two people, one of them says, "It's a small Island." One might hear locals saying something like...

- Now where on the Island did I put my glasses?
- What on the Island is making that noise? Are those cats being tortured into singing karaoke?
- Here's one of the best-loved singers on the whole wide Island — Burqa Baby!
- Darling, you mean the Island to me. And I'm not saying that just to get you into bed.
- Where on the Island did you get that idea? Have you been talking to your dowser friends again?

Histories of Al Amarja

Marjans can tell you a lot about the Island's history, but it's mostly bullshit. Ruins here and there show that Europeans settled the Island hundreds of years ago, and a competent archaeological investigation would show that humans have lived here much longer. In fact, the earliest archaeological remains would rewrite history books about the range of ***Homo erectus***. Some of the most unusual remains are buried under old lava flows, but no one is planning any archaeological investigations, and no one would like what they would find anyway.

Here and there on the Island are the remains of World War II German fortifications and vehicles, a remnant of the Island's noble battle against the Nazis.

The collective memory goes back as far as the previous president, Jacques D'Aubainne. He is fondly remembered as "Our Martyred Leader." He was killed by the Underground about twenty years ago. If things are good now, they were even better under him. Before Our Martyred Leader were the old days, with a corrupt government that didn't care about the common person. In those days, the D'Aubainnes were a wealthy dynasty, and they had not yet been called by destiny to fulfill their role as public leaders.

If the collective memory is limited, niche memories are elaborate. Families, businesses, and neighborhoods all have lively histories of life on Al Amarja that took place years, decades, or centuries ago. Most such histories are anchored by actual artifacts, places, or records that corroborate those histories, or at least figure into them.

The Good People of Al Amarja

The people of Al Amarja are connected to world culture, but they take it at their own terms.

CULTURAL MÉLANGE

Marjans represent a broad array of ancestries, extractions, cultures, and heritages. Most of them were born here, although their parents or grandparents are often immigrants. Cut off from their ancestors' traditions and thrown together in Al Amarja, Marjans display a mix of cultures and bloodlines. In the Edge, you can find elements of global culture mixed together: foods, dress, dances, tattoos, terms, games, and magical practices. While international media corporations enforce a certain amount of cultural hegemony across the globe, Marjans are outside the target market that corporate propaganda is aimed at. As a result, their approach to popular culture is eclectic. Thanks to the lack of copyright and trademark enforcement, Marjans are free to buy and sell products and services that mash up familiar prop-

ALTERNATE HISTORY AND THE NEAR FUTURE

The action in *Over the Edge* takes place a couple years in the future in an alternate reality that looks a lot like ours but worse. In this dystopian world, Donald Trump won the US election in 2016. It seems impossible now, but remember how close that election was? "President Trump" is just one of many ways the world of Al Amarja is weirder than reality.

Here are a few other features of this alternate reality that the characters would likely be familiar with. Each of these innocuous features connects somehow to secret operations in Al Amarja.

- Throckmorton's is a well-known brand across the globe, standing for efficient, professional extermination needs.
- Tiffany Trilobite was a character in a kids' cartoon in the 90s, and her psychedelic escapades resulted in numerous seizures among young viewers.
- "Not a Pipe" is a trendy franchise for a new sort of cabaret, combining drinks and food with non sequitur performances that draw audience members into the action.
- Karla Sommers was an alternative rock singer with a cult following, now no longer producing music.

erties in unfamiliar ways. Here you can buy Hitler-themed chocolate bars and Mickey Mouse dildos.

The Ultimate Democratic Republic of Al Amarja has an open-door policy when it comes to immigrants and refugees. The State has few to zero programs to help vulnerable newcomers who don't speak the language and may be traumatized by violence in their home countries. The "market" knows exactly what to do with such people.

GENETIC MISH-MASH

The native population has long since been absorbed into the mass of colonists, castaways, refugees, fugitives, and settlers. The predominant ethnic component of the population is Caucasians from Europe, North Africa, and Turkey, followed by West Africans, and then East Asians and South Asians. The Europeans and Africans are here because Al Amarja is close to where they came from. The East Asians and South Asians are here in some numbers precisely because it's far from where they or their ancestors came from. Most native-born Marjans are some mix of ancestries.

FAUX ENGLISH NAMES

Native-born Marjans often have surnames and even first names that are recognizable as English words, such as Rant Badgeheart, Sheila Pinecrate, or Matthew Airraid. During previous regimes, English names were enforced on the populace, and many Marjans adopted English names based on how they sounded rather than what they meant.

NATIVES AND NEWKIES

Attitudes toward newcomers to the Island vary across the spectrum: resentment, envy, curiosity, distaste, or predation. Natives generally appear to be helpful. In fact, the directions, advice, and inside information that they provide is useful, useless, or dangerous, depending on the attitudes of the natives in question.

AL AMARJAN NAMES

Here are some example GMC names for the fine upstanding residents of the Edge.

Faux Names, Given Female
Am • Cirrus • Clear • Elevate • Gallium, "Lee" for short • Reader • Syrup • Treadle • Ulna • Veil • Wish

Faux Names, Given Male
Algorithm, "Rith" for short • Dram • Fence • Gander • Idle • Opportune, "Opper" for short • Pent • Phosphor • Port • Robber • Satchel • Semblage

Faux Names, Surnames
Boardlamp • Cornercheck • Damnedgreen • Dolldecking • Friendlemon • Hinderlock • Morevary • Oversturgeon • Rotorslip • Signatory • Simper

Letter Names, Female
AD • DD • IV • KT • LN • LVV • MLN • MND • OLV • QZ

Letter Names, Male
AY • JB • LX • OG • RG • RLO • SX • UL • UNE • YZD

CHRIS SAYS: GMC NAMES

In one campaign, I made a list of GMC names. They didn't have anything attached to them, but, as I gave them to GMCs the characters met, stories started to suggest themselves. All the names were a bit odd, lending some hint of narrative. I still have that list of names in a folder somewhere and revisit it from time to time, trying to populate various narratives with cool characters. *Over the Edge* names can be like the names of Thomas Pynchon characters. As soon as you meet the characters, their names suggest something about them, such as Benny Profane, Oedipa Maas, or Pierce Inverarity. Any of those names would be at home on the Island.

Business and Wealth Generation

Thanks to the Island's carefully managed economic policies, business is booming. Unhindered by the artificial constraints of intellectual property laws, entrepreneurs provide customers with valuable goods at low prices. Flexible laws allow individuals to find occupations with all sorts of compensation packages, from a complete array of benefits to a simple arrangement of not getting beaten. Visitors can purchase just about any good or service, with whatever degree of authenticity and reliability that's best suited to the individual's pocketbook.

COMMERCE, TRADE, AND EMPLOYMENT

The business of the Edge is war, which in everyday terms means business. Individuals, partnerships, trusts, cartels, and corporations all vie to do something not found in nature — maximize. In stores, workers feign affection for anonymous clients. There is a lot of grinning. Workers share just the right amount of truth when assisting customers with purchases. Customers, trapped in a market-driven cycle of activity and need, typically respond favorably. Feigned interest is shallow but reliable and safe. Restaurants and bars follow the same dynamic, but supercharged by fat, salt, sugar, and booze. Businesses may seem off-putting to newcomers, but all the ones that survive have devoted fans and customers.

CAM SAYS: NO NEED FOR BEANCOUNTING

A long time ago I used to worry a lot about how many gold pieces my player-character had, or where I was going to cash in my 500 gems and how this would affect the economy of that little village near the border of the wilderlands. I don't worry about that any more. In fact, I usually don't care much as a GM how much money a player-character has, so long as they seem to be acting within their broad income status. From time to time, it becomes an important story hook that one or more of the player-characters is dead broke or has only enough cash to get one thing out of a hundred things, but I try to avoid hours of players shopping in stores before the "real" adventure starts. Are they rich or well-off? Fine, they can get the thing. Or, I let them have access to things that aren't really crucial to the story, and I move on. You could do the same. One caveat: some players really do love shopping. If that's your group, let 'em shop. But then make their choices matter later.

Free from health and safety regulations, from intellectual property protections, and from labor standards, businesses on Al Amarja hum along despite the disadvantages of operating on an isolated island. It also helps that large quantities of stolen cargo arrives daily, most of it appropriated through bureaucratic means. Access to appropriated merchandise helps the bottom line, although it means that stores usually have too much of some things and not enough of others. One week, gourmet caviar and Kobe beef are cheap, while frozen pizza is impossible to find and costly when you find it.

Since the State liberates the citizen from the inhuman constructs of trademarks and copyrights, Marjans are free to draw from the shared store of human knowledge, which is to say other peoples' patented technology and copyrighted material. You are even free to buy certain medications that are not public but whose formulas have already been liberated from corporate control by hackers or spies.

Workers are granted great freedom in negotiating their compensation, working conditions, hours, punishment protocols, breaks, and exposure to mutagenic hazards. The State doesn't preclude the worker's sovereignty by prohibiting free negotiations. As a result, one finds a welcome range of situations, from blood-oath partnerships of total mutuality to debt bondage, sometimes without the debt. These liberties ensure that if you are willing to pay to have someone do X, you probably can.

CURRENCY

Marjans are free to use whatever currency they like, and the US dollar is the default currency. All transactions with the State are conducted in the official currency, the Al Amarjan zloty. All funds associated with one's Security Card are in zlotys. The exchange rates vary, with the zloty usually clocking in at about 200 to 400 to the dollar. The State no longer prints zloty bills or mints coins. Zlotys are all digital. While digital-only, zlotys are the furthest thing from cryptocurrency. Out of concern for the well-being of the individual, the State records all exchanges of zlotys.

GM: BUSINESS

Business is different in the Edge.

Personal Retail: If today's modern world features reliable, consistent, impersonal retail businesses for modern citizens, retail in the Edge is iffy and personal. Retailers and their shops are distinct, and characters can get to know them as individuals.

The Friendly Old Shopkeeper Knows Something: No, it doesn't have to be a friendly old shopkeeper, exactly, but when a character repeatedly buys consumable items from a vendor, it's a sneaky way to start a personal connection between the character and a GMC. Buying and selling is more personal here than in corporatized societies. If a character has unusual tastes in coffee, clothing, or cough syrup, the connection has a little more energy from the start. The barista, launderer, or druggist starts as a seemingly throwaway character but soon becomes more. The GMC has more going on than meets the eye and can use their particular contacts or resources to get goods or information that the character really needs. Complications follow, but feel free to make this connection a randomly positive one.

New Around Here: What does it mean to be an outsider in a society that's less franchised and impersonal? The characters eat, drink, or wait for the first time in a new restaurant, tavern, or other establishment. Everyone else is a regular, and the characters clearly feel like outsiders. Maybe there's something to get a character into trouble. Maybe it's up to the characters if they want to initiate anything. Even if the characters can beat up a restaurant full of civilians, the local enforcers are going to come for them. If the characters win the locals over, they might get extra information ("word on the street"), a safe haven to use later, or some future favor.

Medical Facilities

Medical care on the Island is so cutting edge that many local techniques have never been seen elsewhere.

ST. CHARON'S HOSPITAL

The Island's main hospital is a modern marvel, with ultramodern medical practices led by the incomparable Dr. Nusbaum. The State covers all medical expenses, except for gratuities for your medical staff. See write-up on page 99.

PHARMACIES

All sales of psychoactive substances must be under license with St. Charon's Hospital, which regulates their use for medicinal purposes. This rule goes for bars, coffeeshops, and hookah lounges, as well as all retail sales, including cigarettes. Technically, anyone serving or selling a psychoactive substance is operating as a lay healer, providing treatments for medical conditions. Such as addiction to nicotine. For the most part, this rule is invisible, except that agents, inspectors, physicians, and experimental researchers occasionally confront customers with medical interviews and even exams. It's all for the good of the State, so civilians are eager to help out.

All medications are free to those who need them, but the waiting lists are pretty long and shortages are common. Luckily the market provides alternatives for those who need their medicine today.

ZEKE'S MADHOUSE

This clean, modern facility heals the psychologically wounded with techniques that have stood the test of time. See write-up on page 133.

Flora and Fauna of the Island

Over the centuries, humans have carried with them a number of other kinds of animals, domesticated, feral, and wild.

RATS

Wherever seafaring Europeans have gone, rats have come along. Seafaring rats were vicious, opportunistic, destructive, and diseased. Somehow, they prospered under the same conditions that Europeans found so favorable to their own global expansion. On the Island, rats thrive. Marjans have plenty of stories about rats being clever, ferocious, and even coordinated. All God's creatures on this green Earth have a place in the sacred cycle of life and death, and they all deserve their place in this world. Except for rats; kill them.

COCKROACHES

These opportunists are no worse here than anywhere else they have been for the last 300 million years, which is to say that they are unspeakably creepy. Tell yourself that they're just mindless bugs, and don't read up on what they do when you're not looking.

CATS

The feral cats stalking through the Edge often display unusual physical traits: unusually large ears, strangely mottled fur, hairless tails, unusual size, etc. These are mongrel descendants with exotic cats in their pedigree, specially bred cats kept as status symbols by the wealthy. These heavily inbred exotics show all manner of variation, from hairlessness to dreadlocks, from teacup miniatures to bobcat-sized brutes. Like their physical forms, their personalities usually vary from the cat norm, being timider, more independent, more vicious, or cuddlier than normal.

Marjans regard cats as good luck or bad luck, and they variously feed the cats milk, drive them off with thrown shoes, or propitiate them with meals of one's own blood to ward off danger.

DOGS

If you think people have it bad on the Island, just look at the dogs. Imagine social mammals capable of love and loyalty but forced by circumstance to fend for themselves, to take what they can, and to fight tooth and claw with others in the same predicament. That's the humans. Dogs are the same, plus they get kicked by the humans.

CROWS

Clever, hungry, work in teams, never forget a slight — crows can cut it on the mean streets of the Edge. Crows are said to make off with shiny valuables, especially by the people who saw what really happened to your shiny valuables. Elite pet breeders have developed breeds of "stubwing" crows with wing feathers too short for flight, but these captive pets wouldn't stand a chance in the "wilds" of the Edge. Al Amarjan crows are carrion crows. To human eyes, they're all black with a green or purple sheen. Wait till you see their plumage under black light.

BABOONS

Baboons have been on the Island for hundreds of years. They are most common in Four Points District, where the Dog-Faces manage and protect them. Some baboons range outside Four Points, but Marjans mostly hate them and drive them off. Baboon troops are found here and there on the Island outside of the cities. A few rich fools in Broken Wings insist on keeping baboons as pets, with predictably unpredictable results.

WHAT LEVEL IS A RAT PIT?

If *Over the Edge* were a certain sort of simulation, each animal would have a hit point score, an armor rating, etc. Given the way this game is played, animals do not normally warrant any stats at all. If a character ends up in a conflict with an animal that's serious enough for the player to cast lots, the gamemaster sets a difficulty level based on the circumstances. Fighting off a deranged rat that attacks you is easy (level 1), but catching the rat that's carrying off your vital flash drive is difficult (maybe level 3 or 4). If a character gets smeared with bacon grease and thrown into a rat pit, that's worth assigning a level to, like any other trap or hazard. The individual rats still don't have stats.

The exception is any animal that is likely to cause a character real trouble, such as an ornery baboon. See page 154 for baboon stats.

GM: FLORA AND FAUNA

When you gaze into the eyes of an animal, you see something like you but also unlike. Thematically, then, fauna (nonhuman animals) serve two purposes: to confront the players with something foreign to the human identity or to confront the players with something all too familiar to the human identity.

RATS

The rat the characters see running down the alley looks like a regular rat, but it's not. Most of the rats they happen to see are worker drones, hormonally locked at juvenile development. They serve the adult rats, which are sexually mature and considerably larger than the worker rats. At the nest are the royalty: queens and princes. The queens are clones of each other and always pregnant. The princes protect the nest and compete for the "favor" of the queen. As with ants, the workers provide food for the young. For the most part, this means sweating nutrients out of their apocrine sweat glands, distributed over the rat's skin wherever it has hair. If the characters care to look for it and have any sort of contacts, they can probably find out that Marjan rats have queens and worker drones, which is almost unheard of among mammals.

Rat Traps: If you ever need to set a tone or throw in some local color, the players find out that the rats have started luring cats into ambushes, either wounding them and scaring them away or even killing them. Maybe they meet a kid with a cat whose tail has been chewed off. The characters have no clue, but tell the players what happened out of character.

Rat Tails: The Rat Patrol is an experimental arm of Animal Control. It consists of shirtless adolescent boys with arm-braced slingshots and a good sense of where to spot rats. For ammunition they use small, dense spherical pellets which, unknown to them, are depleted uranium. They are paid by the tail, which turns rat tails into a soft currency. Maybe the characters will find themselves in a position to help out the deserving and hard-working Rat Patrol youths, such as by looking in an abandoned building for one of the squad who's gone missing. Maybe they'll just be offered rat tails as currency.

CHRIS SAYS: AN IMMORTAL DOG

Kavik the Wolf-Dog appeared in one arc of mine. He was an immortal dog who'd been man's best friend since his species was domesticated by ours. Kavik had been friend to Kings and Pharaohs, paupers and peasants. He couldn't talk, but he was smart. He could smell a good human being from a bad one, he sensed auras, and he could sniff out Neanderthals. Nothing bad ever happened to Kavik. Kavik is a good boy.

Soldiers: If the characters ever tangle with rats, the new angle that no one knows about is that some rats have evolved a soldier caste, sterile like the worker drones and the size of miniature dogs. It's traditional for RPG characters to fight giant rats, and that's either the best reason to work them in or the best reason not to.

DOGS

Players might care more about what happens to a random dog than to a random Sapiens, so play this carefully. The truth is that dogs are abused and neglected all over the world, but that truth is too harsh for a game.

BABOONS

The fun here is that they are almost human enough to interact with. Almost. Plus, if push comes to shove they can bite through your wrist, so watch it. They're unpredictable and dangerous, like humans but worse.

CAM SAYS: BABOONS ARE THE BEST

Few things say "Al Amarja" to me like baboons. I have vivid memories of them in every game I ever played in or ran. The mere fact that a baboon can bite through a grown man's wrist just slays me. I like to use the Dog-Faces and their baboon patrols, but I also like to remind players that wild baboons are around. Are they outside of the Edge, in the country? Have a lone baboon watch them from a signpost somewhere on a dusty road. It'll freak them out.

Phone and Internet Service

Phones from off-Island work well enough, but plenty of visitors get burner phones to use while they're here. Saboteurs from the Underground undermine the telecom infrastructure, so sometimes service is suspended. Your call may be recorded for quality assurance. People sometimes say they hear lost souls in the background while they're talking on the phone, like the condemned crying out in some great, hollow distance. Satellite phones work normally, although the lag can be strangely long.

The Internet on Al Amarja seems possessed or cursed. Service is spotty, coming and going as if a gremlin is flipping a switch. People figure that the lines are hacked, and they might be.

If you try posting to outside websites, your connection sometimes lags, and sometimes the post that appears on the site is a little different from what you thought you typed before you hit Post.

On the Internet in general, you can't find much about Al Amarja or about anything on the Island. The Island's Internet presence is almost entirely within the app known as Reba Online, the local, State-sponsored web services company. If you're searching for anything on the Island, Reba is the place to look. "Reba" is also the name of the virtual assistant who can help you find what you're looking for on the Island. The personal information that you end up revealing to Reba is used to make your future experiences more efficient. In video, Reba is a CGI model of a State functionary in a frumpy uniform.

The State is Here for You

The State carries the weight of serving the populace.

REBA, THE WELCOMING VOICE OF THE STATE

> We're here for you.
> —Reba's ***hello*** when activated

Reba is the voice-activated, State-sponsored virtual assistant used on the Island, and Reba Online is the State-sponsored web service, including GPS mapping, local business pages, searches for local news, and more. Reba is as warm, patient, and supportive as the State is uncaring and predatory. See page 57 and page 144 for more about Reba.

LAW AND ULTIMATE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLICANISM

The State does the citizen a great honor by recognizing their sovereign right to cover their own ass. Citizens proudly rise to the challenge of arranging for police services for their own neighborhoods.

Elections

Periodically, the State holds elections. Votes are public, rather than secret ballot, to safeguard a citizen's God-given right to sell their vote. The Ultimate Democratic Republican Party (UDRP) wins, as that's the D'Aubainne party. Pronounced YOU-derp. Voting is mandatory.

Opposition

UDRP is opposed in every election by a party of ne'er-do-wells, the Reactionary Institutional Party (the "R.I.P."). The RIP proposes to end socialized medicine, crack down on pharmacy licenses for psychoactive drugs, ban gambling, outlaw interracial marriage, and establish forced-work camps to educate and habilitate the young. They have a few seats in the legislature, but they never come close to parity with UDRP.

Health Care

It should go without saying that citizens and indeed visitors are covered under the State's universal healthcare system. In fact, everyone on the Island has the privilege of being enrolled in Dr. Nusbaum's own experimental treatment program, giving them access to treatments not yet legal in less enlightened jurisdictions. Enrollment is automatic, and consent is mandatory, so don't worry, there's nothing you need to do to be enrolled. The State covers all healthcare costs. Tips for the medical staff, however, are the responsibility of the individual. Independent physicians are also ready to serve, with practitioners of varying professionalism to match any budget.

THE PEACE FORCE

> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.
>
> —anonymous evangelist, untitled gospel, c. 80 CE

Peace Officers patrol the streets, keeping tabs on civilians and squeezing free meals out of restaurants. They are forbidden to go armed, so their weapons are all hidden under shirts or in pants.

EXECUTIONS FOR PUBLIC EDIFICATION AND DIVERSION

The State outsources executions to private companies to maximize efficiency and entertainment value. A few operations bid on the condemned and then execute the clients they land as part of their for-profit ventures. One operator is Kraken Aquarium, which subjects the condemned to attack by shark or similar fates. The sharks have vibrating laser pointers attached dorsally to illuminate what they're about to bite, allowing spectators to see better. Another capital-punishment company, Nekro Lyth, sells rocks that patrons then use on the condemned. And not just rocks.

Executions, particularly hangings, also occur in the Plaza of Justice. See page 108.

MEASURE 23 AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Unfortunately, the State has been forced to respond to the threat of terrorism with Citizens' Protective Measure #23, or Measure 23 for short. This executive order empowers the State to undertake various necessary precautions, safeguarding all citizens' and visitors' rights in secure storage until it is safe to disperse them again. While Measure 23 includes a large number of directives and protocols that people have heard about, security naturally requires that the total content of Measure 23 remain a state secret.

BUREAU OF ANIMAL CONTROL

When animals run wild and pose a threat to the good people of Al Amarja, the State sends the best. Helicopters bring in snipers and even machine guns, if given half a chance. If the problem animal is indoors, commandos go door to door on a search and destroy mission. These goons of the State are more than ready to use flash grenades and other surprises. When bystanders are dangerously close, the Animal Response Squad usually uses nonlethal weapons, such as rubber bullets and sound weapons. While they might often take down a problem dog, the number one problem animal they deal with is ***Homo sapiens***.

PROPAGANDA POSTERS

As a public service, the State posts inspirational posters around the Edge. Their messages are ambiguous, but surely the State chooses them carefully for the subliminal and salubrious effect that they have on the populace. Here are some example phrases.

- "Safety is Now"
- "New Law Truth"
- "We Can and We Were"
- "Together It Ends"
- "Time and the War Are Two"

"OUR MARTYRED LEADER"

The previous President of Al Amarja, Jacques D'Aubainne, is typically referred to as "Our Martyred Leader," sometimes spoken in reverential tones. His popular reign was cruelly cut short by Underground terrorists, and everything that has gone wrong on the Island since then can be blamed on this tragic loss. If Our Martyred Leader were still with us, surely things would be better.

CAM SAYS: WE'RE HERE FOR YOU

I like to play Reba as sort of a cross between Janet from *The Good Place* and those times Siri on my iPhone has not understood me because I have an accent. Reba is cheerful and helpful but also can be deeply disturbing, oversharing, inscrutable, or wildly inaccurate. Like reviews on those "helpful" restaurant apps you might have on your phone, the advice or directions Reba gives your player-characters could be so far off base yet seem grounded in reality that after you're done, you won't know if you've just arrived at the BBQ place you asked for, or if you're hopelessly lost in Traboc with a bag over your head.

REBUS, THE STATE A.I.

Most people don't think about it that much but linked into everything the State does is a vast artificial intelligence known as Rebus. Rebus allows the State to remain one step ahead of all its enemies, providing algorithmic guidance that no mere human could ever be smart enough to provide. They call Jean-Christophe D'Aubainne the Head of State, but Rebus is the "Brain of State."

Rebus hooks directly into Reba, the State-sponsored virtual assistant. Reba also hosts Reba Online, the Island's social media platform. The help that someone gets from Reba depends on algorithms curated by Rebus, and all the information that passes through Reba also informs Rebus.

GM: THE STATE

The State serves mainly as background in most campaigns. Dealing with the State is so difficult and unproductive that it doesn't make the best enemy for player-characters. It works great to present local color, to provide an occasional obstacle, and to set a tone of menace and futility.

Give the characters plenty of options to interact with the State. Functionaries working for the State always appear to be helpful and genuine, providing a little dissonance to the encounter. Characters might take Total Taxis, search for information on Reba Online, get questioned by Peace Officers, or handle inquiries from bureaucrats and regulators. As in real life, one has little choice but to engage with the powerful, unjust systems that run things. Even if nothing bad happens to the characters as the result of their interactions with the State, feelings of vulnerability in the face of implacable State power are a bad thing by themselves.

Total Taxi and Reba: Reward characters for using these services. They are meant as the details that lull players into considering it normal to be surveilled by the State. Don't necessarily reward them for putting their trust in any other manifestations of the State.

The Ankle Lock: Ankle locks are built into the system as a tangible way for the State to impose itself as an oppressive force in your campaign. Having a character thrown in prison is usually a big disruption and downer. Ankle locks symbolize oppression without preventing the character from acting freely. Even an ankle lock is a violation of autonomy, so play it with your eyes wide open.

Holidays on Al Amarja

Four major holidays mark the seasons on Al Amarja, each one featuring cultural content appropriated from other people or invented to serve shallow interests. Each of the four holidays is a syncretic roll-up of various, loosely related holidays.

In addition to these holidays, the Temple hosts an annual Festival of Fate. See page 63.

NOVEMBERFEST, AUTUMN

Inspired by Samhain, Hallowe'en, All Saints' Day, and Day of the Dead.

The standard costume is to dress up like the dead, preferably the newly dead. If someone's career has died, they are a legitimate costume. The "dead" petition the living for age-appropriate gifts: coins, candy, hallucinogens, life's blood, sexual favors, or comforting lies. Certain civilians insist on wearing masks, which are illegal. They wear masks either despite the beatings they receive from the authorities or precisely because of those beatings.

The Temple hosts massive memorial services for God in all its forms, all equally dead. Seekers swarm over Deadsville, carrying gifts to offer spirits who speak to them. In certain circles, people who wish they were dead dress up as someone who should be dead, or whose career should be dead, and helpful bystanders smother them.

Celebrations in honor of Confucius's birthday are sometimes folded into the festivities, usually to the dishonor of all involved.

CHRISTMAS, WINTER

Inspired by corporate Christmas, Winter Solstice, Solar New Year, Lunar New Year, Three Kings' Day, Yule, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and Sir Isaac Newton Day.

A solemn day on which all reflect on the life of a great prophet who taught love for the downtrodden. In his memory, celebrants feed the hungry, tend to the sick, and clothe the naked. Rich and poor alike attend heartwarming candlelight services the night before. But who am I kidding? You know what Christmas is, a corporate-driven celebration of needless excess. Everyone loves cute Baby Jesus, and everyone loves the world-wrecking industrial system that provides them with superficial gewgaws to distract them from what is really going on in this world. Merry holidays!

On Christmas Day, Marjans line the streets for the Parade of Brands, where floats celebrate the corporate-owned iconography that we've all been trained to love. Mickey Mouse, the Nike swoosh, and the Apple with the disobedient bite taken out of it are sure crowd-pleasers. For once in Al Amarja, they are all presented with no irony or darkness. The better a brand is presented, the more the crowd applauds, though Marjans are usually immune to the brand-hypnosis found in successfully conditioned populations. Perhaps this yearly spectacle protects them from the brainwashing.

PASSOVER, SPRING

Inspired by Bacchanalia, Mardi Gras, Easter, Spring Equinox, Groundhog's Day, Slaughter of the Lambs, Ostara, Charles Darwin Day, spring break, April Fool's Day, and Passover.

Party like the Angel of Death has just passed you by and killed the firstborn of your enemies. Excess drugging and flagrant exhibitionism are common, Mardi Gras style, but with no Lent to make sense of it. Passover features the usual: bunnies, lambs, eggs, flowers, babies, breasts, dawn, hope, candy, and child's play. Some animals are adored, but others are sacrificed. For a day or two, "mating" is considered innocent, which is to say that everyday regulations are violated more openly than normal. The egg-boxing tournament is a major crowd pleaser. Strings of beads get handed out to women who flash their boobs and to men who will please put their junk away already.

For some reason, clowns have started to appear regularly in Passover celebrations. So you know the world is going straight to hell.

FREEDOM DAY, SUMMER

Inspired by Summer Solstice, U.S. Independence, Bastille Day, and Lughnasadh.

Hurray for independence, liberty, freedom, autonomy, and self-determination! This holiday celebrates the freedom of each "band of siblings" (i.e., cronies) to determine freely what constitutes freedom! How enlightened is that? Hordes of civilians freely join in lock step to march in this unifying celebration of freedom. Everyone marches, shrieks, enjoys the fireworks, and for the most part returns to not upsetting the apple cart. The next season of *Game of Things 2* is starting, and who would ever want to upset the apple cart? Hurray, freedom!

Sports and Athletics

Marjans find all sorts of ways to challenge each other in the field of sports, but most of them eventually turn into the ultimate sport: fighting.

FIGHTING IS EVERYBODY'S SPORT

The favorite sport of Al Amarjans is fighting. In the streets, youngsters scratch and kick at each other in improvised matches, while private estates host battles so impressive that jet setters fly here to see them. In between those two extremes are the fights that get Al Amarjans of all walks of life tuning in on their television sets. Unlike most combat sports, fights often feature opponents that are intentionally mismatched. Bets are settled over how long the underdog can last. Fights with teams are special features, sometimes with mirror teams and sometimes with mismatched sides. Free-for-all fights are strictly forbidden, as are fights with three or more teams. For this reason, these sorts of fights carry a special cachet when privately hosted.

The doping rules for professional fighting are simple. If you want to win, you better dope. The local authorities don't put any artificial limits on human potential. If someone wants to achieve greatness with the assistance of a finely tuned cocktail of steroids plus, on the day of the fight, the right stimulants, they have that liberty. If someone wants to pay off their parents' debt by burning through their own body and winning fights until they die of an aneurism, they are free to make that rational choice.

WEIGHTLIFTING WITHOUT LIMITS

Local weightlifters regularly beat world records for all sorts of lifts, with assistance that would be deemed "illegal" or "unethical" in more provincial territories. A mystic tradition thrives in the weightlifting world, in which weightlifters transcend mortality by breaking through their bodies' own pain barriers.

ROLLER DERBY LEAGUE

In terms of formal organization, roller derby is almost the only team sport in town. Matches are action-packed and violent, with fights built into the schedule. Players and their support staff have developed a subculture of mutual support, and the league of roller derby represents a potentially powerful network of people who could form a united front in a time of crisis.

ICE SKATING LIKE NOWHERE ELSE

At this point, it has degenerated into basically "sex on ice." Still, it's athletic as hell.

Transportation

On foot, by car, by bus, or by train, you can get from where you are to the middle of trouble in a reasonable time and at a reasonable fare, with a reasonable expectation of security and privacy.

TOTAL TAXI FOR YOUR TOTAL TAXI NEEDS

The Totalitarian Taxi Bureau provides taxis as a State-run enterprise, generally referred to as Total Taxi for short. All records of who takes taxis where are run through Rebus's ever-changing algorithms. As a result, Total Taxis operate with an efficiency that can be disquieting, almost predicting customers' needs in advance. Taxis are serviceable and generally spotless, since littering in a State vehicle is met with a strict fine, of which the driver keeps a cut, or maybe all of it.

Various levels of taxi service are available for clients with various levels of cash and various levels of social standing.

On your cell phone, the voice-activated assistant, Reba, can get that taxi for you, no problem. And be sure to like Total Taxi on Reba Online.

UNDERGROUND CABS

Black market cabs serve clientele who don't want the State to track their movements. Drivers are mostly individuals, and customers keep the cell numbers of drivers they want to use a second time. These drivers are just as diverse as you would expect in the Edge. By and large, the State lets this black market flourish unmolested, so long as the illicit cabs keep a low profile and don't cut into legal cab fares too badly. Can you guess whether the network of illicit cabs has been infiltrated?

THE FAST, LEAN METRO

The State provides a safe, clean, efficient, economical, environmentally sustainable train system connecting the districts of the Edge. Unfortunately, malcontents aligned with the Underground are constantly sabotaging the State's work, and on any given day you might find that the Metro doesn't exactly live up to its promise in all ways. The Metro is a great way to see the Edge and its diverse, colorful population. See a detailed description of the Metro and its stations starting on page 125.

THE GOOD OLD-FASHIONED BUS

Massive, rusted, stinking buses move people from place to place by the case lot. Barkers in uniforms ride by the front and back doors, ushering people off at each stop, hurrying people on, and scanning Security Cards. Occasionally they help people press into the bus efficiently. You use your Security Card to pay, so the State can track you and look out for you. The best part is the bizarre poster advertisements on the walls of the bus. The worst part is everything else, especially the person who just sat down beside you and whatever is in that basket.

People you meet on the bus might be tired, paranoid, bloodthirsty, hung over, faking it, mystically attuned, ready to snap, creatively scarred, mind-controlled, vegan, overconfident, broken-hearted, or secretly judging you.

Media

Marjans love their freedom from copyright laws, and they can be enthusiastic consumers of movies, music, television, and the written word. They are plugged into global media, but at a remove. Most of what they see has been edited somehow, possibly spliced in with other sources. In the hotel, you can watch *Titanic* for $1, and in fact there are four versions available, two of them labelled "Authentic."

AATV (AL AMARJA TELEVISION)

The Island's single broadcaster broadcasts on four different channels: AATV 2 (kids), AATV 7 (everyone, official State announcements, world news), AATV 13 (movies and TV series), and AATV 23 (local or keyed to local events, sometimes student-produced). Mostly it's pirated content, edited in ways the customers like and the producers wouldn't. The State uses AATV to broadcast information: regular information to the public, coded information to cloaks, and unconscious conditioning to those who've been properly brainwashed.

On AATV, you might recognize most of what you see, but everything is touched somehow. Movies have extra people photoshopped in and annoying characters edited out or given new voices. Sometimes short bits of one movie are sprinkled through another as it's being shown. The editors managing all this work can tell you what strange theories they're following with their seemingly random cuts, but most of these theories are crap and it's the word-free intuition of the editors that matters. Most newkies are put off at first by the not-strictly-linear nature of the television content, but after a little exposure it starts to feel right, even if you don't know why. The altered video has strong effects on some people who are atypically sensitive in one way or another or who process information in some atypical way.

Commercials for local brands often feature big stars endorsing them, sometimes the leading character from the movie that the commercial is interrupting. Of course, it's mostly fake, but sometimes a big place like Sad Mary's has connections to get the actual star to endorse them on camera.

AATV 23 covers the local fight scene and helps certain fighters gain more notoriety than they deserve. The channel also broadcasts a lot of video shot by amateurs with their phones. Lots of young people have learned that they can get on Channel 23 by doing dangerous, self-destructive stunts or by taking off their clothes. On the high end, their biggest

ADS ON BUSES, THE METRO, AND OTHER HELLS

If something is advertised on the bus, in the Metro, on Reba Online, or anywhere else that the State dominates, then it is serving more than one master. Someone is on record as sponsoring the advertisement, but any such sponsor might be a front and is certainly collaborating with the State. The populace of the Edge is further along humanity's home stretch than the rest of the globe, and various power groups have inordinate resources invested here, so secret messages encoded in advertisements are more common here than anywhere else.

Picture of a mug of beer and a glass of wine. Ad copy: "Feeling sober? Why not drink?"

Two people in silhouette fighting or embracing. Ad copy: "Be a secret agent. Snitch!" with a phone number.

Iconic scene of a family at the beach, with an armadillo instead of a curly-haired mop of a dog. Ad copy: "Play the Al Amarja Lottery!" "Isn't hope worth a buck?"

Eye of Horus. Ad copy: "We know you know. If you don't tell us, we'll know you're trying to hide it from us."

production is “Give It to Me,” a game show, reality show, and public shame project all in one.

The television station is located in Science District.

AL AMARJA TODAY (NEWSPAPER)

The news you need and then some.

A traditional morning newspaper, the only paper in its class on the Island. Often called simply Today. Today covers Island news, fights, arts, and events. Businesses make a big deal of it when they are written up in its pages. The reporters and editors have agendas, slants, biases, leanings, and blind spots, and they seem to be at cross purposes. Some articles make the Edge sound like an ideal place with an attentive State at the people’s service. Others have an edge to them that falls just short of criticizing the State directly. Rumor has it that reporters secretly start mayhem in order to have newsworthy violence break out right where they happen to be. Plenty of writers put code phrases in their work, but all of them are dupes working more or less for fronts of various services. World news, comics, puzzles, and other content is mostly stolen from other papers, albeit edited by opinionated redactors. The letters to the editor are a vanity press, with column inches sold at auction. The Today is the paper of record, and Marjans take it seriously for its obituaries and decrees from the State, if nothing else.

A strangely popular feature is “Scratchies,” a page of personal ads and off-beat messages that Marjans pay to have printed there. Currently, the biggest event on the Scratchies is an ongoing flame war between an anonymous vegetarian and an anonymous cannibal. By popular acclaim, Scratchies is recognized as the right place to thank a saint, declare a curse, announce a conversion, or otherwise conduct spiritual business that is both private and public. Some of the most inscrutable ads on “Scratchies” are the results of operations enacted anonymously by Marla Lapstartle, a Cut-Ups cloak (see page 164). Sometimes they print LSD in their masthead on the front page, but only often enough to keep the rumor alive.

The Today headquarters is in Justice District.

KRAK RADIO

The Island’s most popular radio station, known for its local talent.

Mostly they’re music, with popular and classic songs edited and merged into one sort of mash-up or another. Some DJs are also music editors, but mostly the DJs are playing the work of local editors. In addition to music, they cover events, especially live at festivals or ceremonies. Sometimes they interview guests of note, especially the sort of guests you might not be able to find just anywhere. In addition to covering fights in designated segments. the DJs often talk about the latest news from the fights.

The KRAK radio station is in Sunken District.

MAKER ('ZINE)

It's just a photocopied 'zine with an anonymous publisher, appearing irregularly and in small batches, but it carries a lot of cachet on the street. It is a mish-mash of comments from a small group of malcontents, but getting written up in Maker is an honor even for known personalities and establishments. The issue now in the works is going to document the "clown menace."

REBA ONLINE (WEB-SERVICES PLATFORM)

Really the only place online to go to get any information about the Edge. Businesses, groups, and individuals maintain pages there. If you are looking for South Asian food near you and open at this late hour, you search on Reba. Reba is also the persona of the virtual assistant that can help you with your messaging, planning, and searching. Just tell her what you want. She's always listening.

For more information on Reba, see page 57 and page 144.

The Water is Safe, So Drink Up

The State provides water, but plenty of locals and visitors prefer to drink only bottled water and other drinks. Who knows what they might be putting in the tap water. Of course, lots of the bottled water sold on the Island is tap water.

Regrettably, regressive forces in the Underground have repeatedly sabotaged the Island's clean-water infrastructure. The Underground finds ways to make old water mains fail, for sloppily built reservoirs to become contaminated, and turn-cranks to rust shut. The subtlety of the attacks has prevented the State from maintaining a safe water supply 24/7, but the market meets every need.

Weapon Laws, Body Armor, Masks, and Veils

Due to the ever-present threat of terrorism, the government has been forced to outlaw weapons of all types. Locals and visitors alike, however can be seen on the street demonstrating their enthusiasm for sports, trades, fashions, the great outdoors, and other interests. People of all stripes carry golf clubs, baseball bats, chains, pipes, tire irons, crowbars, sledge hammers, batteries, battery acid, exotic canes, hefty walking sticks, elaborate metal rings, butchers' chainmail gloves, butcher knives, hunting knives, and hatchets. Machetes raise eyebrows. Since only the rightful authorities — that is the Presidential Guard — use deadly force, body armor is forbidden, just as weapons are. Fashion on the island permits a good degree of leeway, and it's common to see people in steel-toed boots, athletic shin guards, leather collars, sturdy corsets, martial arts robes, and leather pants. For security purposes, the state has been forced to implement a temporary ban on face coverings, a ban that public servants in the State apparatus enforce with their well-known efficiency and uniformity.

Incarceration and Rehabilitation

When it comes to justice, the State is not bound by tradition but free to innovate.

PUT THOSE BAD THOUGHTS BEHIND YOU

While many so-called modern societies punish those who deviate from legal behavior, the State provides every rule breaker with a way out. Convicts who participate in alpha wave training can reduce their time behind bars. Participants hook into sensors that measure their brain waves, and time spent in a high-alpha state counts quintuple against time served. Recidivism is low among those who rack up the most alpha time, but there are plenty of first-timers filling the prisons.

CUTTING-EDGE MEDICAL CARE

Dr. Nusbaum himself oversees care of the inmates, with the chief prison doctors reporting to him. In this system, inmates with the second-best hearts and kidneys live the longest. Those with prime organs are more likely to show up missing. Unknown to the inmates, various medical experiments are underway, with the inmates as the subjects. Sometimes civilians are thrown in prison on false charges because Dr. Nusbaum has a special interest in them as experimental subjects.

FESTIVAL OF FATE

The Temple needs warm bodies for its best rituals during the Festival of Fate. Each year, some prisoners vie to get on the short list, but most are not that desperate yet. Sister Cheryl makes them spin the Wheel of Fate one after the other. The twenty outcomes on the Wheel go from immediate freedom to various forms of death, usually with torture thrown in before either one. There's maiming, branding, scarring, scalding, and just possibly getting kicked to death by the crowd. The crowds love the whole show, cheering both when prisoners get their liberty and when doomed convicts shriek in pain. Among the crowd are always a healthy contingent of ex-cons who have "met their fates" on the Wheel, and they're cheering harder than anyone else.

DYSFUNCTION IS EVERY CONVICT'S LAST HOPE

The State maintains a certain level of incompetence on its official staff, prisons included. The incompetence prevents bureaus from growing and metastasizing, and official incompetence makes the State's own covert operations here easier. Everyone has a story of some neighbor's kid who was caught red-handed, sent to prison, and then mistakenly released. Sometimes it really is a mistake, and sometimes it just looks like one.

ANKLE LOCKS

Other criminals are trusted by the State to continue their lives, as long as they are properly ankle-locked. The ankle locks employed by the State are complex electronic devices which everyone figures double as bugs or other sorts of trackers and meters. The metrics determining which convicts are incarcerated and which ones are ankle-locked are unclear. The behaviors which the ankle-locked are prohibited from engaging in while on release are dependent on their "recidivism profile index" and classified under Measure 23 so that they don't fall into the hands of untrustworthy, ankle-locked criminals. There appear to be many different models of ankle locks, and some speculate that each lock features a different suite of functions. The fact that some of the lights emitted by ankle locks can only be seen by certain individuals almost certainly indicates that the lights don't exist at all. Al Amarja Today has published an article strongly debunking the theory that information might be encoded in the rhythmic, often incessant beeping displayed by some ankle locks.

EVERYONE LOVES FIGHTING

If you think there's no high-stakes, highly corrupt, death match tournament going on right now, think again. The current champion is about to lose to a newcomer, and not in a clean way, either. The fights are always sold out, but if you ask around, you can find someone who can sell you a spot on a guest list. Getting in to see the top matches, however, requires more than cash.

Drugs

EVERYTHING WAS BEAUTIFUL AND NOTHING HURT.
—BILLY PILGRIM IN *SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE*, KURT VONNEGUT JR., 1969

Most drugs available elsewhere in the world are available here at a good restaurant or convenience store. Some of the local drugs, however, are mostly unheard of elsewhere. The more exotic drugs are technically illegal — a violation of healthcare regulations — but available if you know where to ask.

VOO, JAMAIS VU

The goal of any drug, no matter whether it comes as a pill, a bottle, or a needle, is to make you forget who you are for a while. But what if there was a drug that could literally make you forget? That made everything new and shiny like seeing it for the first time? What if you forgot first your emotional baggage and then that nagging sense of self?

That very drug has recently hit the streets, and it's called Voo, from jamais vu (ZHAH-may voo), the opposite of déjà vu. On Voo, every sexual encounter is your first, every thrill original — a strong dose strips away all aspects of self, the notion of the Cartesian Theater set alight in favor of pure, immediate experience.

It comes in small plastic tubes with decorative labels and a roll-on head at one end. The clear liquid is applied under the nostrils and on the third eye. It smells like fake mint or some fake flavor; the actual drug is odorless. The effect takes hold over the next thirty minutes and lasts a good three to four hours. Voo enables an experience of surprise and wonder, which is deeply rewarding. Naturally, bad experiences might seem "wondrously bad" on Voo.
Of course, after a while, addicts tend to fade away, becoming less and less of who they were. In some cases, friends approve of the change.

NEVERMORE

Like psilocybin, Nevermore produces experiences that feel profound. That feeling alone, such a relief from the banality of everyday life, allows most first-time users to enjoy it. Most who try it, however, don't stick with it. The ones who stick with it and become junkies experience something a lot more. Everyone experiences a sort of thrilling sense of presence and salience, a welcome reprieve from the constant temptation of nihilism. Most people report powerful sensations or memories or visions or half-remembered dreams. Maybe it's pain, or memory of a fight to the death, or visions of ancient landscapes — for each person it's many things. For most, the more they take Nevermore, the more clearly they experience scenarios of brutality, fear, humiliation, and degradation, usually in ancient historical contexts. They are captive in hellish prison mines. They are sex captives in the trains of marauding armies of mounted archers. They are slaves driving plows through rocky soil. But for a minority, the experiences that become clearer are those of queens, hunters, big men, priestesses, or lords. The more Nevermore they take, the clearer these favored lives become.

Word on the street is that these experiences are past lives recurring. Some users have taken to finding like-minded souls whose experiences seem similar to their own. Soon enough someone's going to hook up all the users' data into a database to see where in time and place all these visions are coming from.

Nevermore comes in capsules holding powder that must not be exposed to oxygen for any length of time. Open the capsule and pour the metallic-tasting flecked powder directly into an alcoholic drink. It takes twenty minutes to start, peaks at an hour and fades off for two more hours. At the peak, it's hard to focus on the real world. Most of the time you can keep your head in the real world, but the visions are still distracting. Aficionados turn down the lights and hang out in silence. They take Nevermore together, however, and they keep the lights up a little because the exciting sense of salience or reality gets lost if one slips all the way into the vision. It's that feeling of spanning ages, from present to past, that is thrilling.

BLUE SHOCK

Heightens the senses, which is generally a good thing, but in the wrong environment it can be harrowing. Shockheads love "micromonic music," which is too subtle for the unenhanced ear but marvelous for anyone on shock. Vivisection Cinema screens a special nature film that captures the greater sensual range of shockheads. Overuse of Blue Shock weakens the body's cellular structure, and overdose results in the victim's internal tissues losing their integrity so that the muscles and organs turn into a mush. Blue Shock looks like blue cough syrup with tapioca-like globules in it, and users take it by spoon. Some people have strange reactions to even the smallest dose, such as experiencing one's senses as disconnected from each other or becoming obsessed with the feeling of one's own breathing.

COMMUNION

A bitter powder typically dissolved in heavily sweetened tea. Users experience a sense of heightened reality and soon enough find themselves in contact with holy people, angelic beings, or even the Godhead. Sometimes it's just the hallucination of a long-dead religious aunt, now in the aspect of a saint. For the lucky, it's a one-on-one audience with the Creator, who bestows acceptance and guidance on the mortal worshiper. Each user's experience of divinity is unique, and it's common for a user to learn that the actual god they believe in isn't the god they thought they believed in. Sister Cheryl prohibits followers from using Communion, and she sometimes uses her pull to get the Peace Force to crack down on dealers.

MDA-CUBED

A chalky, white lozenge with a pink heart stamped on it. MDA-Cubed guarantees you a supreme sexual experience, at least the first time. Subsequent uses remind the user of the first time but never achieve the same heights. Sooner or later, users expand their sexual repertoires to includes acts, partners, and objects that would normally not be erotic for them. Repeat users gradually lose their ability to effectively categorize things, eventually treating all people, animals, and objects as if they were lovers.

SLO-MO

Comes as a capsule of shiny black powder. It speeds the nervous system's processing power, making the outside world look like it's moving in slow motion. With some training, a user becomes better at physical tasks requiring fast reflexes, especially fighting. Developed by Dr. Nusbaum as a secret weapon for the Presidentials, Slo-Mo is more illegal than other drugs. Even so, enforcement comes and goes. Chronic users go one of two directions as their mental brakes get worn away. Most of them become paranoid fabulists, with the brain ginning up more and more hypotheses about the outside world and relying less and less on actual sensory input from outside. A few manage to focus their minds and become artificially enlightened. They see instantly into their own neural and hormonal processes, allowing them to transcend identity with the monkey self. At that point they will have no more of your shit.

COMMON DRUGS

Most drugs that are common around the world are available from pharmacies, which is sort of just about any establishment that would sell soft drinks in contemporary hegemonic culture. Technically, customers must name the ailment for which the "pharmacy" is dispensing its drugs.

Alcohol

Makes you happier and less sad. Abused worldwide. Available to people who sleep too soundly or suffer from any number of other ailments.

Caffeine

Weakens your brakes, and who needs brakes? Faster! Available to anyone suffering from fatigue, not enough sleep, or too much sleep.

Cannabis

Increases desire to sit at home and not cause trouble. Often used to round out one's experience with another drug. Recommended by the State for all.

Cocaine

Triggers the sense that things are good. Generally worth it, except for the aneurisms. Available to anyone constipated or stuck in a regular-ass life.

Meth

More popular than it really should be. Available to patients who are overworked or have too many teeth.

MDMA

Not as popular as you might think. Maybe the vibe is too harsh for a drug that increases empathy. Available to anyone with PTSD.

Nicotine

Gives you a whole new satisfaction, the primal joy of meeting a physiological need, one you never had before you addicted yourself to nicotine. Available to nicotine addicts.

Opioids

Only certain pharmacies dispense opioids, and the State interrupts the supply semiregularly. Once it was part of an experiment on human need, but now it's just a habit. Available to patients who suffer.

LSD

Relatively hard to find. For your best bet, visit the Temple of Divine Experience. Available to anyone suffering from the persistent thought that human experience is nothing but bits of the material world jiggling in synch.

Nutmeg

Sister Cheryl coordinates daylong nutmeg orgies, but they're rare. The hangover is so brutal that even enthusiasts only want to "chug 'meg" every couple years. Her ministers disperse the nutmeg as a sacrament, outside the jurisdiction of the State.

Chocolate

Sir Constance makes sure the Island has a steady supply of high-quality chocolate. It is not regulated as a drug.

GM: DRUGS

Weird drugs are a great flavor to add to this urban dystopia, and they're a good excuse for strange things to happen, even if it's just the GMCs that are taking them.

GO EASY

Players are usually hesitant to subject their characters to the vicissitudes of experimental drugs. To encourage them to get involved, it helps to have friendly GMCs guiding the way. You can also just come out and tell the players out of character that you're not going to bring the hammer down on them for getting involved in the local scene.

CUSTOM EFFECTS

If a character has unique capacities or an unusual nature, it's possible that the drugs described here have some special effect that's super handy for the plots you have planned. You can also just invent whatever weird drugs you need to fit the details that the characters are bringing to the action.

VOO

Maybe Voo has a dark side. Soon enough, addicts are going to start hitting the end state of the process, at which point they become shells of whomever they thought they were. They will become empties (see page 165).

For a while, Voo is relatively benign for characters who might want to try it. The course of a story arc probably isn't enough time for a character to slide all the way to empty-hood. In fact, some characters might be able to make special use of Voo, depending on their backgrounds, curses, or paranormal abilities. Voo also poses a mystery, a new drug whose effects have not yet been fully felt. Characters can delve into this mystery and find out what's behind it.

CHAPTER 4

THE EDGE AND BEYOND

THE GROANS OF THE DYING RISE FROM THE CITY, AND THE WOUNDED SOULS CRY OUT FOR HELP, BUT THE ALMIGHTY PAYS NO ATTENTION.

— JOB 24:12, 6TH CENTURY BCE

From public hangings to avant-garde art, you can find most anything in the Edge, especially if you're offering hard currency and a little lead time. This chapter lays out the basics for GMs and for some players. Most of the information in this chapter is public enough that a character who wants to find this information readily can, so paraphrase freely from this chapter.

Most of the game's action takes place in or around the Edge. This material is arranged geographically, and this geography overlaps with the descriptions of Al Amarjan society in the previous chapter, as well as with powerful people and organizations found in the next chapter. Gamemasters, this chapter is primarily for you to read between game sessions. At the table, it's useful for reminding you of what you've read, and you can take the time to look up maps, names, and illustrations. If you're tempted to actually read the setting material while players are waiting, maybe just make something up instead. The Edge is so sprawling and varied that I didn't even try to make this chapter comprehensive. It's a good start, but there's plenty of room to slip your own creations into the scene.

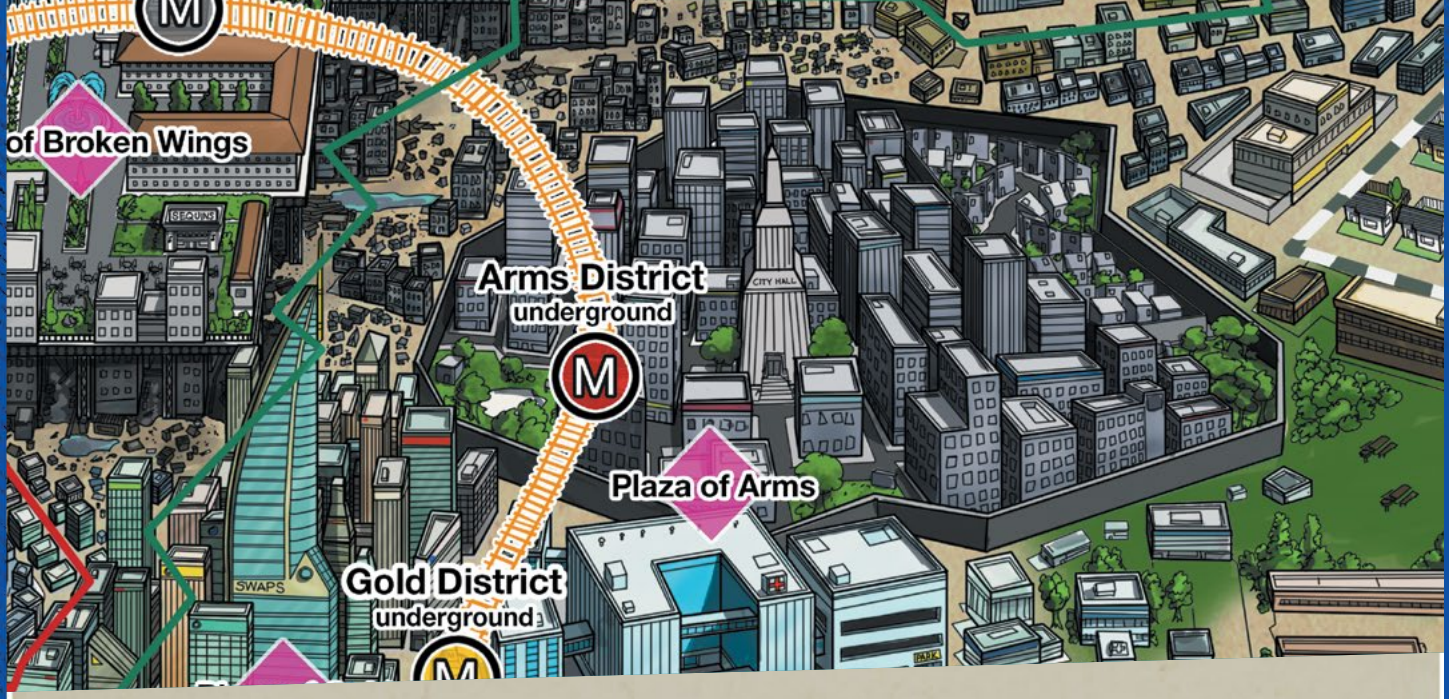
The Edge and Its Districts

The main city on Al Amarja is the Edge, literally situated adjacent to cliffs that drop away into the sea. In theory, the Edge has all the amenities, services, and activities that one might find in other metropolises, although in practice it sometimes takes a lot of asking around.

The city comprises nine **districts**, which are neighborhoods that are at least as distinct from each other as separate cities would be. Different districts have different socioeconomic levels and different enforcers to lay down the law.

DISTRICTS OF THE EDGE

DISTRICT	DESCRIPTION	PLAZA	ENFORCERS
Arms	Checkpoint required. High security zone with State enforcers and safe civilians. "Zipsville."	Intimidating center of State power.	Presidentials. Peace Force. Animal Control. Other State security forces.
Broken Wings	Exclusive, wealthy, privileged. Below the lovely, elevated streets is a ground level for service workers.	Sparkling park and social hub.	Uncle's Security.
Flowers	Vibrant, eclectic, and artsy.	Center for fun, celebration, and nightlife.	Aries Gang, popular and hard-working thugs.
Four Points	Run-down but scrappy.	Derelict.	Dog-Faces, humans with "trained" baboons for firepower.
Gold	Efficient and business-oriented.	Modern-looking center of finance.	Uncle's Security.
Great Men	Nearly ruined, distressed, and dangerous.	Shabby center for street vending and petty crimes.	Glorious Lords, a satanic heavy metal band and its supporters.
Justice	Orderly and modest. No one outlandish.	Site for family gatherings and stylized hangings.	Clubbers, zealous guardians with baseball bats.
Science	University district. Students and former students.	Social center featuring student-created performances.	University Security. Peace Force. Campus Watch with halberds.
Sunken	Unthreatening neighborhood.	Center for retail during the day and fire-spinning at night.	Uncle's Security, economy coverage. Concerned businesspeople and their hirelings.



Arms District

SECOND CLOWN: WAS HE A GENTLEMAN?
FIRST CLOWN: HE WAS THE FIRST THAT EVER BORE ARMS.

— *HAMLET*, WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, 1604

In the residential zone, kids play in the street, and parents stop and chat when they meet at the corner store. The parents are a mix of ethnic extractions, and the kids in the streets are equally various blends. Everyone here is united as the family of the Law.

The Plaza is all that most visitors ever see. All around the Plaza are daunting government buildings that loom over you and enforce a sense of smallness on visitors. The looming buildings work on the psyche and, more practically, they provide great camera angles for the people monitoring you. Entrances double as defensive chokepoints, so just entering such a building through the public entrance feels like an act of submission.

Nobody gets into Arms without going through a checkpoint. Total Taxi is your best bet getting in, and an illicit taxi driven by your "friend" is not going to cut it. Sometimes at a checkpoint you might get put through the wringer just as a training exercise, in which case you're told what happened after the fact and compensated 100 zlotys on your Security Card.

The name Arms refers to weapons, which is to say law.

GO TO ARMS...

- ...if you want to narc on someone.
- ...to answer a summons or subpoena.
- ...to petition the State, with or without a lawyer.
- ...to find someone who has been detained by the State.
- ...if you don't mind being...searched.

AROUND ARMS DISTRICT

The district is safe but claustrophobic. Security fences hem it in on all sides, and many official buildings have walls and security fences around them, as well. The kids growing up here are prevented from venturing out into the Edge or inviting outsiders in, at least in theory.

Black Helicopters: Peace helicopters fly out over the Edge from bases here in Arms. They also keep this district itself well patrolled.

Hot Trade in Graft: Personal finance agents work with Peace Officers, offering them credit against future graft and giving them ways to invest cash when they get big windfalls. Consultants help the Peace Force maximize their income from pay-offs. Several officers have started using an algorithm-driven app, Squeezy Man, that helps them determine who to press for money and how much.

The Temple's Memorials and Exclusive Rituals: The Temple sponsors garish shrines to fallen officers, often with dried trophies cut from the corpses of their killers. The Temple also provides sexy priestesses to lead rituals, ceremonies, observances, funerals, initiations, and services, most of which are open only to officers.

PLAZA OF ARMS

Supposedly, to the right sort of people, this square looks impressive, with all its mighty government buildings looming down over it. For most visitors, it feels as though you are in the grip of implacable authority.

City Hall: The wide front steps are steeper than you might like, and the front doors are on the third floor. Officials take the elevator, but you're walking, and maybe the sun is hot or it's raining. Inside, it's luxurious and climate-controlled. Civilians are here to meet officials, who help the deserving public for a price that ranges from a tip to a mortgage. Petitioners and would-be license holders fill City Hall. They stand in queues, wait slumping on marble benches, and stalk through the halls trying to find this bureau or that one. Officials and attendants are everywhere, but they largely disdain and ignore the civilians. Members of a certain metahuman cult, however, get great service here and can usually cut to the head of a line.

Peace Headquarters: Most evenings, there's a party on the roof, sometimes with party-goers taking helicopter joyrides over the city.

Bureau of Animal Control: Bright murals of happy animals set this building apart from the others on the plaza. Inside, it's a warren of daunting hallways and tight security, much like other government

buildings. The roof has a helipad with the bureau's pursuit helicopter, used for chasing down animals on the loose, mostly humans. The kennels house mostly human convicts, which the Bureau tend to as part of a budget-sharing program with the Ministry of Justice.

Ministry of Justice: Finding the entrance is the first challenge. The interior is daunting, with high walls and narrow hallways. To facilitate your visit, you purchase tokens on admission and use them to tip the functionaries that help you navigate the building and the legal process.

Federal Building: It's a bland-looking office building with tight security and no sign indicating its nature, and it's the local headquarters of the Presidentials, the State's elite secret police. Most Peace Officers can't get past the first checkpoint. Dark sedans come and go from the underground parking garage, probably headed to or from federal sites elsewhere on the Island. Occasionally, blood-curdling screams issue from the roof. They're authentic screams from actual tortured prisoners, but they're recordings of "top hits" rather than live.

Statue of Cain and Abel: In the center of the square is an oversize statue of a victorious australopith, holding up a stone as if he's just bashed someone's head in. His victim, with a bashed-in head and identical face, is at his feet. When the outsiders have left the district for the day, various officer cadres perform stylized marches in front of the statue.

Urban warfare vehicles: Parked in the plaza, armored vehicles with too many guns boost morale, intimidate criminals, and delight children.

GM: ARMS DISTRICT

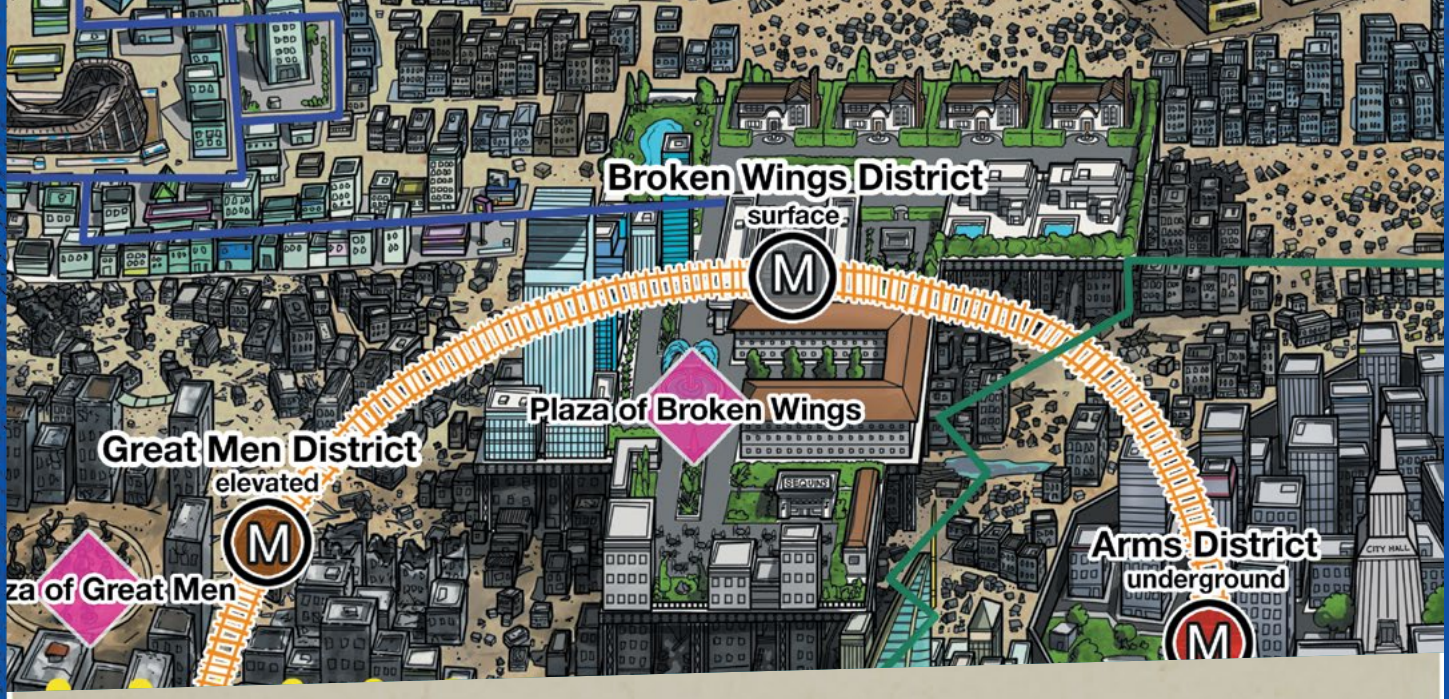
It's a nice place to live, but you wouldn't want to visit there.

Welcome to Kafka Land: Nightmares of punishing authorities might make good reading, but it's hard to make it work in a roleplaying game. When you expose your players to the menacing surroundings of Arms, consider doing it at high speed. Summarize most or all degradations rather than talking them out verbatim. A player might make one throw to determine how well their character finds their way through seven hours of hostile bureaucracy, so it's a long ordeal for the character but not long for the players.

Ankle Locks: At some level of security, everyone that proceeds first gets an ankle lock placed on one leg. This bodily violation is strong stuff, so it's best to give the players a heads-up, even if their characters are clueless. Players should decide to put their characters through this ordeal rather than having the ankle lock sprung on them. The point of the ankle lock is that it strikes a balance between being humiliating and being tolerable. Ankle locks might also pop up anywhere a character is dealing face-to-face with State enforcers. Characters see people with ankle locks as a regular thing in the Edge. It doesn't hurt to give the characters some way to get one over on the ankle locks.

Fellow Traveler: The character sees a friend in custody. Maybe the friend has been "questioned" until they're black and blue. Maybe they're smiling, as if everything is forgiven. Maybe it's a stranger, but someone who will be an ally later this arc. Maybe it's Buck Williams, the wide-eyed tourist (page 196).

Officer Friendly: At one point, the characters are alone with a Peace Officer or other authority figure. The officer "breaks character" and talks to the characters from a place of real compassion. It's not fake. They offer some advice on how to get through the system. Here's a good place to drop hints, an important piece of information, or a foreshadowing of doom. "The last people who came here asking those sorts of questions, well, they turned out to be enemies of the State." Good twist: decisive help navigating the bureaucracy. Bad twist: the characters are soon questioned about what the officer said because he's under investigation.



Broken Wings District

In a world where money can buy anything, Broken Wings is where you can find the money and sometimes the anything. Broken Wings is a gated community writ large. The street level is completely covered by a ceiling high overhead. The roof over the "ground level" is an artificial "upper level," a parklike expanse that the upper-level people walk or drive electric carts on. The subterranean level has its own streets, with service entrances into most buildings. This lower level is home to a secondary community of service workers, complete with their own stores, restaurants, and bars — but no apartments.

GO TO BROKEN WINGS...

- ...to meet elites.
- ...to personally deliver an important message to an important person.
- ...if you get invited to one or another impossibly exclusive party.
- ...to make contact with an enemy cloak in a neutral location with tight security.
- ...to do highly paid specialty work for a child's over-the-top birthday party, a cat's automated tree house, a dog's past-life regression therapy, or some other extravagance.
- ...to disrupt a fancy street party being sponsored by an enemy org for mind-control purposes.

AROUND BROKEN WINGS

Broken Wings is lovely. The menial side of human life is underground and out of sight. Beautiful people go about their days strolling across the lanes or zipping here or there on self-driving electric carts. Cultural, economic, and social elites from around the world come here, usually to dally in a world where 21st century amenities meet 19th century social stratification.

Uncle's Security agents in their stylish slate uniforms are here and there. They're patrolling for crime, but they also spend a lot of time making friends, especially with kids. The visible agents are partly props, proponents of the Uncle's brand. The Uncle's agents that you don't see are the ones doing half the work out in the field.

Charity Childcare: The district has several charity childcare facilities that take care of the young children of many ground-level workers. The workers are grateful to have a safe place for their children. The organizers are grateful to have the workers' children as a bargaining chip to keep workers from getting too many ideas. The children are taught how to be good ground-level workers like their parents.

Digital Shrines and High-Society Extravaganzas: Shrines here are high-tech and designed for one individual at a time. Shifting lights and subliminal messages help petitioners dissociate from any natural conscience or qualms that they may have about the way that people like them are exploiting their own human family and driving the planet to destruction. Broken Wingers gladly open their bank accounts to the Temple after its shrines help them understand their own moral pangs as mere cognitive delusions.

High-society leaders often host parties for Sister Cheryl or other top-ranking Temple superiors. Hosts compete with one another to throw parties that are the most impressive, if not the most spiritually grounded.

Elevated Walkways: Lots of buildings have elevated walkways connecting them to other buildings. Some locals prefer sticking to these elevated walkways, disdaining even the upper level as common.

Exotic Breeds: The wealthy have specialized breeds of pets, rarities that are hard for jealous rivals to duplicate. Stubwing crows, for example, have wing feathers that are far too short for flight. Stubwings are good with tricks, except the trick "shut up."

Swaps in the Living Room: Sir Constance's vision of buying low and selling high is more than the key to success, it's a lifestyle. Instead of enjoying what they've bought, the high-rolling dealmakers of Swaps spend their off hours doing business over the phone and talking business with buddies.

BENEATH BROKEN WINGS

A parallel community exists on the "ground level," below the well-groomed, artificial surfaces in the sun. The service workers work and travel here to keep the district running. The ground level streets allow for deliveries, waste disposal, shuttles for workers, and maintenance vehicles.

The ceilings are high, and there's enough light, but overhead is I-beams and utility lines. There's no illusion: you're virtually underground. The whole extent of ground level is makeshift and chaotic. The streets are mostly the original streets from the neighborhood, with the upper level built over them. Plenty of ground-level storefronts date back to before the upper level went up. The old stores look out of place, dominated by modern metal structures supporting the upper level. Most grub is sold from handcarts and trucks.

The upper level buildings have upper-level entrances for the beautiful people, and their basements are on ground level, where workers access them for maintenance.

Ground Level Establishments: Some restaurants, stores, and bars on the upper level are actually for ground-level patrons. For example, Seven Squares is a ground-level hotel with floors on the upper level. Visitors enter at ground level and then go up to a higher floor. Ground-level patrons are not allowed to exit onto the upper level, and upper level people are not allowed to enter these establishments, at least not from the upper level.

PLAZA OF BROKEN WINGS

In the central fountain is a giant, bronze statue of Icarus, only it has fallen to one side and has been partially destroyed. One wing is mangled, and the other cut down to half a wing. The rest of the statue is gouged and dented, where an angry mob had beaten on it. The effort to fix the statue was delayed, and the people came to love it as it is. That was decades ago, and now the broken statue seems natural there. Most people couldn't put it into words, but the brutal imperfections of the statue serve to highlight the glorious life represented by the rest of the plaza.

Around the fallen statue is a wide square with pigeons and nannies with little kids. People bring meals to tables here or eat at cafes on the plaza.

Cheryl's Whiskey Bar: This classy favorite is run by Sister Cheryl's people. Not only is it a profit center, it serves as a useful gathering place for people associated with the Temple in any way. Outsiders are sometimes approached by friendly regulars, who try to make them feel welcome and maybe glean some useful information from them. At eye level, the walls have colorful icons of holy people in strange, modern scenes or with unusual symbols. It's no secret that the manager, Andres Otherall, has a rocky relationship with the Temple administration.

Uncle's Security Headquarters: A modern, glass-faced, welcoming building with helpful staff. See write-up on page 75.

Al Amarja Onebank: Lavish and dignified. You get in only if the doorman recognizes you and opens the door.

Unity and Center Health Spa: Where you can get your body treated just how you like and in ways you've never thought of. Hot, cold, pleasant, painful, soft, hard, fast, slow — everything is part of the All-Are-One Package Treatment. Maximize your wellness experience with mind-altering medicines, selected to match your spa experience and to address your deep-seated sadness. Bliss is no longer just a theory.

Ah-Puk Learning System: Regular tutoring for regular needs, plus highly intrusive, highly effective regimens for high-rate learning. These proven systems operate with the help of researchers from Moreau Veterinary School, giving you access to cutting-edge learning technologies.

Beneath the Plaza: Beneath the upper-level plaza are the plumbing and wiring for the plaza. The space under the plaza has more than its share of support beams, making it nearly impossible to see straight through from one side to the other. Plus, it's not lit. There's no "plaza" for the ground levelers. Get back to work.

UNCLE'S SECURITY HEADQUARTERS

Uncle's agents are trusted and well-liked. The façade and foyer of the headquarters are welcoming, as are the staff. Customers meet with functionaries and officials in side rooms. Beyond that, the place is a hive of activity, carried out with military-style discipline. If a non-Uncle manages to slip into these areas, the staff is not welcoming. Except that they might want you to stay a long time.

Agents at headquarters are constantly monitoring feeds from field operatives, security patrols, hacked security cameras, wiretaps, etc. There's a lot going on, and they're busy.

Uncle Rod, Roderick Temple: He's the charismatic, keenly intelligent, highly ambitious trans man who built up Uncle's Security to where it is today, starting with a no-account security agency that he won in a game of backgammon. He's got a lot of dirt on a lot of people, but so far, he's never really used it. Someday, when he needs something big enough to risk hurting his brand, he's going use his leverage on someone who can help him.

Level: 3rd–4th

SEQUINS

Swanky, jazz-era nightclub.

If you'll pay anything to be surrounded by old-school style, Sequins is your place. It's a posh club that creates a version of a 30s-era jazz club so well that it's arguably more authentic than the original. You'll find stiff drinks, jazz bands, torch singers, and tobacco smoke. No television screens, no electric instruments, and generally no references to the outside world of today.

The dress and conduct code for customers is strict. People dress classy, and the only drugs you can get are classics: alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, cannabis, and heroin. The door staff are excellent at spotting trouble and not letting it in through the door.

To suit the jazz-era style, Sequins presents a racially stratified staff to visitors. The maître d' and the servers are white, while the bussers and dishwashers are black. Performers are sometimes white and sometimes black because, as the staff insists, Sequins

GM: SEQUINS

Good luck getting in the door.

Sequins serves as a world unto itself, a clean break form the gritty streets of the Edge. It's a good rendezvous point, someplace out of the ordinary where the characters don't fit in, but they have to navigate the place to conduct their clandestine business with a contact. Visiting Sequins also means that the more extravagant and outlandish characters have to be on good behavior for a while, which can be a challenge in itself.

Breakthrough Performance: What if the ambitious daughter of the owner just loves a character's musical performance and wants to book them at Sequins, even though they don't exactly fit the jazz scene. What could go wrong?

Riot: If the racially stratified Sequins gets your players steamed, have the characters come back for the East Asian singer's debut. Then they can have the satisfaction of taking part in the riot that breaks out.

is “racially integrated.” You won’t, however, see black and white performers on stage together. The racial stratification might come across as jarring to guests who have gotten used to the ethnic mish-mash that typifies most of Al Amarja. Honestly, it’s hard these days for Sequins to get just the right people with just the right skin color for just the right jobs, so some of the workers are noticeably mixed-race. Performers use make up, wigs, and personal style to establish themselves as undeniably white or undeniably black. Sequins has booked its first East Asian jazz singer, but there’s no telling what the reaction is going to be. Customers, on the other hand, are all welcome and all treated as the same color: green.

Level: 2nd–3rd

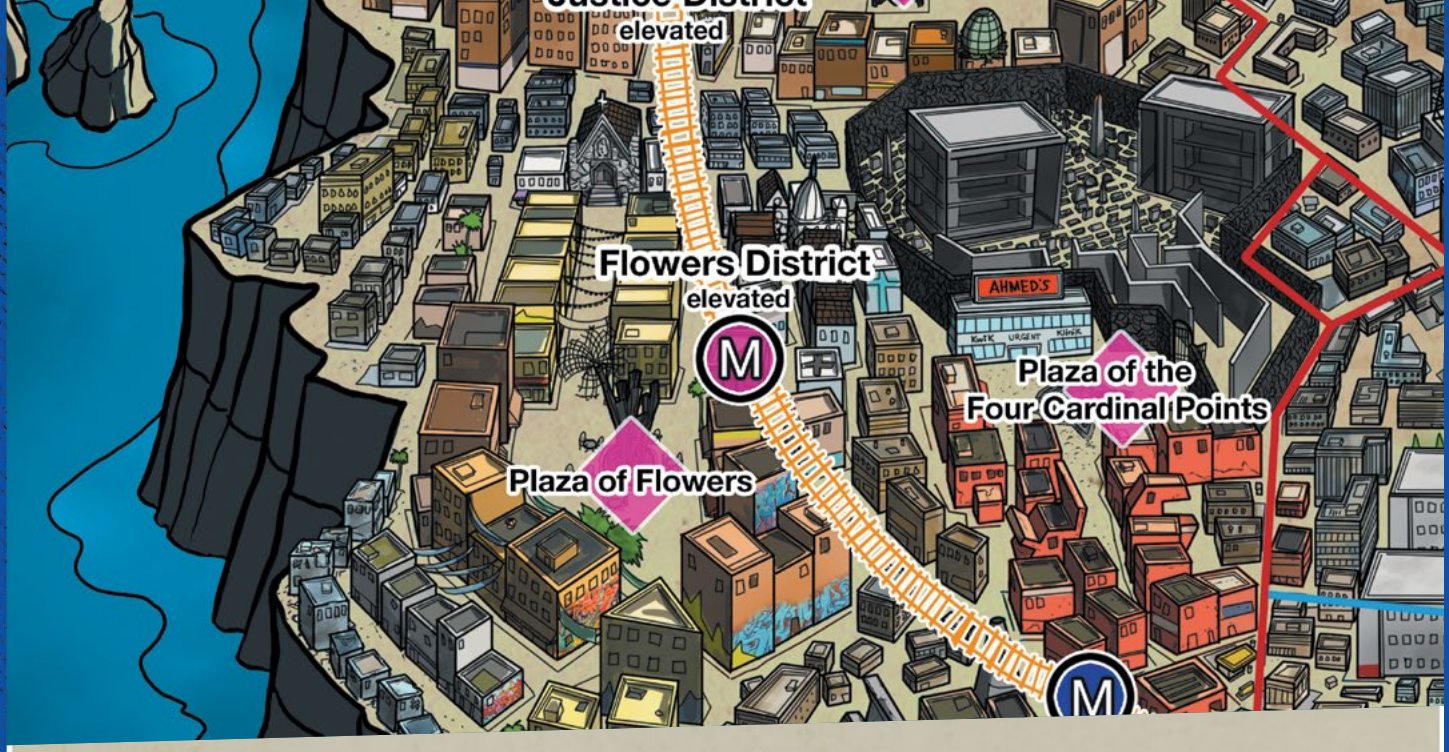
GM: BROKEN WINGS DISTRICT

This extravagant district of extreme wealth provides a stark contrast to the haphazard and hardscrabble districts of the Edge. Its wealthy inhabitants might have the connections and resources that characters need to pursue their goals.

Golden Ticket: A character gets an exclusive invitation to an annual party in Broken Wings. Many important people wish they’d gotten an invitation. The character got it because of some happenstance, some special quality of the character, or maybe a good twist. They can go themselves, but the ticket is transferable. Here’s an opportunity to offer something of value to an important GMC. Other players may naturally have opinions as to which GMC gets the ticket and for what.

Golden Retina Scan: A character gets an invitation, but it is for them personally and not transferable. The invitation is good for the particular character plus some number of guests.

Golden Target On Your Head: Getting the invitation makes the character important for certain covert activities. The character is suddenly worth blackmailing, threatening, coercing, mind-controlling, or otherwise influencing.



Flowers District

All the suffering, the violence, the transgression, and the exploitation that takes place on the Island must be worth something. It must have some silver lining, or this place would have collapsed long ago into arson and sabotage. Flowers District is that silver lining. Here a hundred flowers bloom, human flourishing takes exotic forms, and the brain's promise of behavioral flexibility is achieved. The District is under the protection of the Aries Gang, probably the most popular enforcers in the Edge.

GO TO FLOWERS...

- ...to see what's happening, where it's at, and what *it* is.
- ...to cut loose on streets where music, imagery, and touch burst through their boundaries.
- ...to track down the genius who created the painting, sculpture, song, or idol that has touched your soul.
- ...to escape and engage at the same time.
- ...to see how people react to your new clown outfit.
- ...to throw a party that will have people talking until the end of the world.
- ...to visit Sister Cheryl's Temple of the Divine Experience.

LIFE'S SHORT, ART'S ETERNAL

You know you're going to die, but maybe, just maybe, you can do something that will last. Your genes splurt into the next generation, through the progeny of your kin if not through your own sloppy issue. That's great for your genes. But what about you? You're the temporary, compounded creature strutting and fretting your hour on the stage. Can you place something of yourself into the culture or logosphere? The answer is yes, if you engage with art. It's this subconscious drive of ultimate need that makes Flowers District prosper. The most highly energized souls flock here. Often, wealthy people pour hard currency into the local economy, funding artistic careers or pursuits with the ill-gotten winnings of imperialism and fraud.

THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN FLOWERS

Something's always happening.

The Dance Cult: Hopping from club to block party to private event, the "Culties" cause a stir wherever they go. They class up any event, a cadre of sensuous, talented, eye-pleasing dancers. With an attractive, addictive product, the Culties have plenty of takers. But dancing with them is like taking a drug. It's a rush, especially at first, and you can stop any time. Culties are a project of Sister Cheryl's Temple of the Divine Experience. On any given night, one or more cadres are on assignment, dancing one place or another. They switch out clothing, and even cadre members, to best suit the places they dance. Their goal is to be sought after, so they are careful of their brand.

They dance in other districts when the event is right, especially for private events, but Flowers is where you usually find them.

Aries Gang Carousers: Off-duty Aries enforcers like to party in small to large mobs. Everyone puts up with their excesses or learns to do so quickly. The party can get especially wild if it's a new recruit's former birthday. All Aries members are assigned a birthday within the month of the Ram, usually March 21 to April 20. When a new recruit's original birthday rolls around for the first time, the established members observe the special day with feasting, partying, and something of a beating for the recruit.

Quiet Morning: If you time it just right, and you're up after dawn but while the whole city is still in the shadow of the mountain, the light is everywhere and nowhere. You see everything clearly, and every profane speck of the district is alive and perfect. It's quiet, and each occasional noise is just as it should be.

AROUND FLOWERS

Lively — that might be the single best word to describe Flowers District. The poverty is the poverty of artists starving for their arts. The wealth is extravagant and often profligate. Sometimes the liveliness is dangerous, as when a mob of young men is out carousing for trouble. Sometimes it's obnoxious, as when the street mime just will ***not*** leave you alone. If you're in Flowers District and you don't like what you see, turn the corner and there's something new and different.

First School of True Sensation: Doctor Leeway's remarkable school of superior awareness. See write-up on page 87.

Gun Metal Sports & Industry: Heavy-hitting sports gear and workers' tools. No weapons sold here, no sir. See write-up on page 88.

Swaps and the Agent's Cut: "Managers," "producers," and "agents" are common in Flowers, helping talented artists find the support they need in the for-profit economic system. Some of them are what they say they are. Investors trade futures and derivatives linked to individual talents. Additional devotees of Sir Constance are busy in the background, serving as distributors and deal-makers for the various businesses that thrive here.

Temple of the Divine Experience: Sister Cheryl's spiritual and administrative center. See write-up on page 88.

The Temple's Varied Presence: Sacred dance halls are common and well-attended, with different groups meeting on different nights of the week. The "sacred" in this sort of sacred dance isn't somber or pure. It's sacred as in set apart because these dances are out of the ordinary.

Shrines are common, and artists create energetic murals and sculptures as shrines, all more or less in line with the Temple's spiritual hegemony. Shrines serve as blessing stations, where passersby come to say prayers for good luck.

PLAZA OF FLOWERS

In the middle of the plaza is a large metal statue, a sort of poetic gantry or tower of steel beams. At the top of the tower is a tremendous blossom of wire mesh. The joint connecting it to the tower can pivot slowly, allowing the blossom to adjust to changing winds. The base of the tower is a few meters across, and it's easy to slip inside the structure itself. People climb up the tower, outside and in. There's no safety installation, no guard rails, no expanse of soft material below the tower. There is a safety plaque, but it's small, and all it says is "$g=9.8m/sec^2$," a reminder of the local force of gravity. The safety experts figure that informed citizens can do the math and make their own private decisions about whether to risk a catastrophic fall.

All around the statue is a wide plaza with metal tables and chairs where people mill about day and night. The furniture looks exactly like too many people hopped up on too many substances danced too hard on it too many times.

If you need something, and you hang around the Plaza of Flowers for some length of time, someone might come offer you what you need. But you have to really need it.

BUSINESSES ON THE PLAZA

These businesses are generally quite popular. They generously support the Aries Gang and their efforts to keep Flowers safe. Many of these businesses attract fan bases of customers, each fan base with its own quirks.

Super Scoop Ice Cream: They usually have vanilla plus a small assortment of random flavors, such as butterscotch, German crunch, blueberry-cashew, and skid mark. You can get sprinkles on your ice cream, but the psychoactive drugs are more popular. As a registered pharmacy, the place has something for what ails you, whether it's fatigue, aches, social isolation, materialism, or a chronic lack of being wigged out. Name your ailment or missing personality component, and the "Super Scoopers" behind the counter will add something special to your cherry molasses sundae. The owners are Jen and Berry, although the "Jen" and "Berry" that customers meet behind the counter are actually good-looking, outgoing actors.

Muscleworks: Sometimes this gym is packed, and other times it's strangely empty. Its owners are the Tsai family from Taiwan, and they have long enforced their so-called "Code of Iron." This list of rules for gym users includes no fights or even hostility. At Muscleworks, you might see Glorious Lords pumping iron next to Dog-Faces without their baboons. Opposing groups are forbidden from parleying here or even exchanging messages, but they sometimes talk among themselves in such a way as to be overheard by others. The Tsais make a good deal of supplemental income by selling muscle-building and fat-burning diet supplements and drugs. Their wares are generally effective, if not really safe. Some supplements sell cheap because the Moreau Veterinary School is subsidizing them as part of their research.

Aries Lawhouse: It's a storefront office, but they call it the Lawhouse. This is the customer-facing front of the Aries Gang. They're hiring for all positions.

Globe Cinema: The best movies anyone can pirate, with a festive atmosphere. Before a movie starts, patrons in the theater stand at their seats and make small talk over grub. It shows mass-market favorites, arthouse favorites, and local favorites.

Men for Men Clothing and Rope: Great clothes for men, not cheap but tailored just right. Nooses are their specialty, as well as rope needs for other occasions. The staff are all men, and they know the male body very well.

Chameleon's Natural You: Artificial colors, textures, and aromas for your hair, skin, eyes, teeth, and nails. If you let them, they will, step-by-step, reveal a new you. The altered self will look quite different from how you used to see yourself, but you will look in the mirror and recognize it as the real you.

Screen of One's Own: Cell phones and tablets for any budget and need. The State subsidizes certain data plans, and the paperwork assures you that they never access your device's microphone and camera without a duly sworn warrant.

Mo' Money: They accept a bewildering array of items in exchange for cash. If you feel like donating a kidney, they can broker that deal, and they will work with you for lower-value organs or tissues as well. Outside, facing the sidewalk, is an ATM. Sir Constance's stern visage appears as a painted portrait above the ATM, reassuring users, to some degree.

Liberty ATM: Next to the ATM at Mo' Money is a quite different ATM, perhaps a Soviet-style machine, secured in a niche. The surrounding wall is covered with anarchist graffiti. This ATM is branded for the people who have finally had enough and refuse to participate in Sir Constance's system of structural

inequality and exploitation. Sir Constance owns it.

Seventh-Day Pastimes: Not much of a restaurant, mostly a game café, with an amazing selection of games from around the world, also a pharmacy. Madame Vylaska (see page 81) collects subconscious data on her surveillance targets while they play games here.

Rapukchin's: Clothing for men and women, with a personal touch. Rapukchin is a strange old woman who has an eye for personal fashion. Sometimes she takes a particular interest in a customer's visual presentation, in which case she offers them plenty of advice and 50% off.

Tots & Tykes: A retail store and shake bar for "big boys," the large, hairy men who live as children. It includes adult-size toys, such as an oversize hobby horse or full-size bucket and shovel designed and painted like kids' toys for the beach.

Dogu's: A café with West African cuisine and strong coffee. They serve peanut stew, which you can eat by scooping it into chunks of fufu, which is like a white dough. You pull a chunk off a mound of fufu, press it into a bowl with your thumb, and scoop up the stew. Among the regulars, a schism is brewing over why they come here, for the stew or for the coffee, and it's about to get heated.

Rugosi's: A classy Italian restaurant and pharmacy. The staff could mostly pass for Italian, except for the bouncers, who are the typical Al Amarjan mish-mash and really big. The sound system pipes in sounds recorded at a park in the family's home town in Italy, so you might hear children playing or the wind through the trees. They maintain the strict dress code, and they keep out the sorts of people who scare newkies.

Happily Ending: Lots of options, provided what you're looking for is commercial sex.

R-Kane-R-Us: Arcane and occult material for all tastes, which means most of this stuff is bunk. Lots of books and a fair assortment of purportedly magical materials, such as crystals, charms, pyramids, and herbal essences. The store also stocks certain special items and books that are in a different class from the dream-catchers and New Age treatises. If a serious seeker comes to R-Kane-R-Us, the staff will recognize them.

Love-n-Lease Pet Rental: What's better than a cute little family of guinea pigs? A cute little family of guinea pigs you can give back when the novelty wears off. Short term leases are popular with people who can't really keep a dog or cat, but who are willing to pay by the hour to get some nonjudgmental affection in their lives. The owners think that they're collecting intel on people by telepathing with the animals they rent out, but actually they're just crazy. With any rental of $10 or more, you can also rent a pit bull for free.

Breakneck Café: Pleasant indoor/outdoor café where the servers are all maimed in some way. The crème brulee is the best on the Island. It's so good that only an expert can appreciate how good it really is.

Bienvenidos Hotel: Mediocre hotel with a great location. Zips love the coffee shop on the ground floor. See write-up on page 82.

Not a Pipe: Trendy "experience" venue, a local franchise of a global corporation. See write-up on page 82.

Sad Mary's Bar and Girl: A sports bar of a different sort. See write-up on page 83.

THE RAMBLE

Heading west from the Plaza of Flowers is the Ramble, a wide but uneven avenue reserved for foot traffic. The avenue and the city end at the edge of a cliff, with the Atlantic crashing on the rocks below. Garbage from the Edge mostly goes over this cliff, littering the cliff face and the rocky shore. Sea gulls are everywhere. In addition, the cliff is eroding away. The stench from the garbage and the threat of collapse have driven residents from the buildings here, which are now mostly abandoned. The closer one gets to the polluted cliff, the worse the business and apartment blocks are. The closer one gets to the Plaza of Flowers, the nicer it is.

VYLASKA'S MOVER ATTACK

Characters partying in the plaza may be subject to Vylaska's machinations through her girls. Maybe there's one character who represents a targeted type, such as an intellectual, a mystic, or a murderer. Maybe it's a more general effect that could affect any of the characters. In turn, each character is approached by one of Vylaska's girls. The girls try to at least chat each of them up, but they don't try too hard to make a sale. After the encounters, all the players with potentially affected characters need to cast their lots.

Level: 3rd or 4th

Success: The subconscious mind registers the messaging and processes it, mitigating it.

Failure: The messaging slips past the mind's subconscious defenses and propagates in the subconscious. The character serves as an unwitting hub for subconscious messaging, but all they perceive is that they don't feel quite right. One strike.

TWISTS

Custom twists are usually best, but here are three examples.

Good Twist: Exposure to the Mover messaging unlocks something in their subconscious. Try to connect it to something relevant to the character. Perhaps the capacity won't reveal itself until later, after you figure out what it is.

Good Twist: The character gets a hunch about something of what's going on. Maybe it feels like someone is laying down a heavy negative vibe. If the character can speak to others, they may be able to bolster others against the effect.

Bad Twist: At some point in the future, the character is going to take some action while in a fugue state, under Mover influence, with no memory of what happened. This influence is less than total control, but it could conceivably get the character to upload secrets to a website, have a phone conversation with an unknown listener, "accidentally" trip someone down the stairs, or maybe hunt someone down and bludgeon them to death with a tire iron.

MADAME VYLASKA

MOVER CLOAK AND PIMP

Innocuous-looking, middle-aged Slavic woman, usually in a stylish, sexy outfit.

From Suite 532 of the Bienvenidos Hotel, Vylaska runs a sex ring, with three to five hookers active at any time. They're always attractive women and young. She burns through her girls so fast that they're always young. The girls usually bring their clients to Bienvenidos, which comps Vylaska the space for all the business she gives them. It all seems perfectly legit.

Except that Vylaska is a powerful Mover, more powerful even than the Mover above her in the structure, who doesn't know what Vylaska is really capable of. Her girls are all in her thrall, devoted to her as if she were a cult leader. Vylaska reinforces the mind control with special songs, rituals, and code phrases. Eventually, a girl's mind becomes overtaxed by the pressure of the mind control and the constant stressor of having sex with people they don't like. She becomes either dysfunctionally rebellious or dysfunctionally devoted to Vylaska, and in either case she is finished. Vylaska recruits replacements personally, one of the few times that she puts herself out in the open.

Vylaska undertakes missions for her handler, mostly gathering intel and sometimes compromising particular targets. She is also conducting her own missions, bringing one important person after another under her subtle influence. The girls transmit messages subconsciously, and they can read and program people just by interacting with them. People who turn down their offers might nevertheless receive subconscious programming or become vectors for messages destined for other people.

Vylaska is ready to throw her resources behind anyone who seems to have a good idea on how to make it through the Last War, and is watching for just the right Mover.

MOVER COVERT OPS, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Running her operation, handling the Mover who's supposed to be handling her, avoiding trouble, building her network, managing secret messages, etc.

SUBCONSCIOUS COMBAT TRAINING, EXPERT (2ND): Everything she knows is stored in her back-brain, and it rises to the surface the instant it's needed.

DEFAULT, COMPETENT (1ST)

ONWUDIWE ZEST

EPISTEMOLOGICAL TERRORIST

Young, energetic African man, bald but usually wearing a lifelike blond wig. While working at Not A Pipe, he wears the mock formal attire of the staff.

Zest works as a server at Not a Pipe and enthusiastically engages in the little community of misfits and idealists that work there. Secretly, he leads a small band of nonconformists who undertake guerrilla attacks on others' sense of reality.

He knows that he is trying to upend the epistemological hegemony of the white, faux-Christian patriarchy, but he doesn't know that he's getting support from the Cut-Ups, or that Not a Pipe is associated with them. He's heard rumors of other people destabilizing hegemonic thought processes, but not of the Cut-Ups by name. His handler is Marla Lapstartle, a Cut-Ups cloak who works now and then at Not a Pipe. She sometimes accompanies him and his accomplices in their stunts, but more often she monitors and directs him, one step removed.

GUERRILLA ART, EXPERT (2ND): Conceiving and executing art pieces that undermine hidebound thought processes.

DEFAULT, COMPETENT (1ST)

GM: NOT A PIPE

This place serves primarily as a place to at least brush up against the Cut-Ups and their project to dismember linearity and liberate sapience from Control. The global nature of the Not a Pipe franchise is a way to show the reach of the Cut-Ups and the build-up toward the Last War. Have players invent their characters' previous experiences with these new, trendy gathering places. Whatever the players give you, run with. If someone says, "I went once but got freaked out by the weird music," then maybe in this franchise the music is super inviting and enchanting. The music, perhaps, is being curated by some really smart algorithms.

Community or Anti-Community: The people who see each other at Not a Pipe over and over have formed an informal community, whose members take the non sequitur thing into their regular lives. Discontinuity, dissonance, shock — it becomes an esthetic. Alternatively, the reverse: It's the people who shell out and can't get hip to the postmodern vibe who form a community. It's a community of people whose friends have abandoned them for Not a Pipe, and they might be ready to burn the place down.

Unlocking Hidden Powers or Knowledge: The banter and improvisation at Not a Pipe subtly challenges linearity, possibly shaking up a character's mind and opening up some hidden potential.

NOT A PIPE

For open-minded people looking for something new.

This chain has popped up around the world in the last couple years, a trendy place that most people think is a passing fad. It serves grub, but the particular draw is the interactive performances and the seemingly random elements that are part of the experience. Guests are asked to read lines aloud, to free associate, or to hoot like apes. Food and drink may come to the table accompanied by books, spent batteries, graffiti-covered bricks, live beetles, or other surprises.

The cover is steep, but that advantage to the high entry fee is that everyone else at Not a Pipe is invested. They're ready to interact, or at least stay engaged. Some people can't get into the right headspace, and they walk out bewildered and disappointed. Others become regulars.

The prompts and scripts in the Edge can be extreme in a way that you don't find at a Not a Pipe anywhere else in the world. Mostly, though, you experience pretty much the same non-sequitur humor and surprising twists that have made Not a Pipe so popular elsewhere.

Marla Lapstartle, a Cut-Up, works here sometimes (see page 164). She manages Onwudiwe Zest, a Cut-Up asset who also works here; and she slips recombined content into the menus and scripts.

Level: 1st–3rd

BIENVENIDOS HOTEL

Clean, modern, and ready to party.

Situated on the Plaza of Flowers, Bienvenidos Hotel doesn't have to work hard to be popular, and it doesn't. The staff are mostly reliable and unlikely to jack you, but honestly the same cannot be said for the people that come and go through the place. Bienvenidos offers hourly rates, resulting in a fair bit of foot traffic.

Turning off the secret cameras and microphones in your room costs $10 a night, and you also need to tip the attendant who's checking you in. If you have nothing to hide, there's no reason to pay the fee, although a tip is still advisable.

The locals put the hotel's conference rooms and guest rooms to all sorts of imaginative uses. The cleaning staff is really good, and you will have no idea what crazy things happened in your room last night.

The coffee shop, Hop Shots, is tucked off to one side behind plants and small trees in planters. Zips hang out there a lot, which possibly helps newkies feel safer. Most locals avoid it.

Level: 1st–2nd

SAD MARY'S BAR & GIRL

Sex, violence, and booze; everyone's favorite bar.

Over the entrance is a lovely statue in a niche. The statue is the Blessed Virgin Mary, crumpled with grief and crying into her robe. This bar–slash–arena draws clientele from all over the Edge, all over the Island, and all over the world. All over the Edge, people wear Sad Mary's T-shirts.

People from across the city come here. The wealthy love slumming it in style, and the owner, Frank Germaine, is happy to oblige. The poor aspire to come into some money so they can get in the door, or they sell their blood, bones, and fluids. Professors from the University feel safe enough here, and even Glorious Lords sometimes get safe passage to come and witness a private fight or punishment.

Aries Bouncers

Aries enforcers run security, and they keep out anybody that's going to bring the place down. They routinely wave regulars in while making newkies wait in line.

Spaces for Everyone

The building was once a large stone church, surprisingly old. The face of the bar on the Plaza of Flowers is a grand stone entrance, with wide steps. Once in through one of the front doors, you're in a modern building. Here and there throughout the building are old stone archways or pillars, preserved from the church whose ruins the modern building is around.

Most patrons stay on the ground floor in the large, general-public areas. These rooms surround two rings, one a stage in-the-round and the other a fighting ring caged in with chain link. Viewing balconies on the second floor look over both rings, and the guests who are a cut above watch the action from there. To the sides of the rings are dance halls, more bars, and sex rooms for rent. The crowd can get rowdy, but there are security cameras everywhere, and the Aries enforcers intimidate most would-be hooligans.

The ground floor is usually open to the public, but the upper floors have a steep cover, and the bouncers won't let you past if they don't like your looks. The most exclusive rooms include video displays of cameras on the ground floor. Top floor patrons can turn the cameras to follow low-class buffoons to mock them or to spy out "deserving" commoners, who then get invited to the upper floors for whatever the top-floor partygoers have in mind.

Varied Interior: Sad Mary's has various rooms for different sorts of visitors, from the traditional bar with bar stools to orgy dungeons. You usually get ushered efficiently to where you want to be, but wherever you're going, you're likely to see a thing or two along the way.

Fighting at Sad Mary's

The ring at Sad Mary's is usually being used, being prepped for an upcoming fight, or being cleaned off after a fight.

Girl Fight: The "Girl Fight" event puts the "Girl" in Sad Mary's Bar and Girl. Every night, two women face off in the ring, and crowds go wild following the competition. Sometimes, the women fight like in any other fight in any other bar. Sometimes the conflict is chess or arm-wrestling. One popular event is "Dozens," in which women insult each other and play rock-paper-scissors in sequence. The contestant who loses the insult game usually founders on rock-paper-scissors. For some contests, actual girls compete instead of women. The conflict never involves subjective measurements, such as poetry slams. It's always head-to-head, with the performance of the women directly determining the results. Amateur night? In fact, it's tonight. Step right up.

Other Fights: While Girl Fight is the main show each evening, Sad Mary's hosts plenty of other fights.

Performances at Sad Mary's

Everything from postmodern poetry slams to live sex shows. The dead sex shows are a thing of the past, thanks to the intervention of Sister Cheryl and the Deadsville elders.

Level: 2nd–4th

GM: FIGHTS AT SAD MARY'S

Sad Mary's features a rotating selection of fights, with something for every fight fan.

Leverage: Assistants to each fighter line opposite walls and thrust poles through the chain link. The combatants each attempt to push or throw the other into range of their assistants' poles.

Doubles: Two-on-two. Boring for a little while, then suddenly final and bloody.

Mob: Several low-value fighters hopped up on a cocktail of psychoactives, usually armed with knobby, metal gauntlets.

Indian Leg Wrestling: Contestants are strapped on their backs to gurneys on swiveling coasters, with their legs sticking out past the gurneys. They push themselves around with their feet and kick each other into submission.

Slapping: Contestants take turns slapping each other, backhand allowed. Usually won by flinching, which is a forfeit.

Ring of Justice: Adolescent men tied by the left hand to a central weight, each armed with a wooden rod. The rule is that when the one behind you hits you, you have to hit the one in front of you. It starts as light taps, and human nature takes it from there. Each participant feels as though he is being hit harder than he himself hit, and he's probably right. The only way for one participant to punish the one who's hitting him too hard is to strike the one in front of him harder. That's how pain passes around the circle. This fight is for entertainment only. No one wins. The audience loves to see those tentative taps revolve around the center and turn into actual strikes. Referees break in as soon as the participants are set to really damage each other. Or sometimes they don't.

GM: SAD MARY'S

A great place for all sorts of shenanigans.

Don't Let them Pin You Down: Instead of sketching out a map of the floor plan, portray Sad Mary's as big, with something new around every corner. There's always room for some new area that the characters conveniently find. The big distinction is the floors, with upper floors exclusive and the ground floor public.

Girl Fight: It's pretty easy to portray "female combat sports" as lots more humane than "male combat sports." For one thing, the contestants in Dozens battle each other without anyone suffering concussions. The next, optional step is to portray female combat sports as even more violent than male sports. Maybe the losers of high-stakes Dozens matches often end up killing themselves or descending into madness.

Mysterious Stranger: Yes, it's a cliché to have the characters meet a mysterious stranger in the tavern. It's a cliché because it works so well. You can use this trope once.

Social Mixer: Sad Mary's is the perfect place for a character to meet just the right person. It attracts all sorts. What qualifies as "just the right person" varies from character to character. It might be a wealthy patron, a potential teacher, a would-be follower, or a performer with a strangely meaningful dance.

Amateur Fight: Draw characters into fights against other amateurs. Some characters will want to jump in a ring just on general principles. Others can be drawn in when they're challenged or insulted somehow. A fight on stage can be an exciting diversion, with some risk but not too much.

Latest Trends: Since Sad Mary's has a high profile, it's a good place to show the players that there is something new going on in the Edge. For example, if a sect is taking over the populace, or if self-mutilation is taking off as the hot new deviance, Sad Mary's is a fine place for the players to first notice it, or see how it develops.

RJ Slopjob: If the players ever get the name of the drunken thug who started a fight with them, it's "RJ Slopjob." He's basically a stand-in for 90% of the brawlers that the characters might encounter. Statistically speaking, the most likely place for a character to get into a fight with a drunk is Sad Mary's, but "Slopjob" could turn up just about anywhere.

SHARKIE

BELOVED OLD TROUBLEMAKER
WHO HAUNTS SAD MARY'S

Maimed but healthy old Brazilian man, wearing Aries leather biker gear, all of which is old and well broken-in.

Sharkie was a tough guy many years ago before the baboon attack. He has never been the same since then, but there's enough of him left that he is a welcome face at Sad Mary's. He lost a lot to those baboons, including an eye, some face, and a couple of fingers. His uneven gait and stance tell you that there's more damage under his clothes. The longer you are near him, the more wounds you notice. Technically, he's still an Aries in good standing, but an Aries that can't fight isn't really one of the gang. His name is related to his physical condition; someone meeting him for the first time once asked whether he'd been attacked by a shark. "I wish," he said, and from then on people have called him Sharkie.

Sharkie spends a lot of time here and has talked to all the regulars. He loves new faces. Depending on his mood and how people react to him, he can be a buddy who helps people find the inside track, or he can be an asshole who screws with people just for the hell of it. Sharkie provokes his enemies with the bravado that comes from knowing that brutal warriors will fight anyone who lays a hand on him. Most of the time, though, he's at worst a pest, and sometimes a source of useful information. Many of his interactions with strangers include letting them know that he could really use a drink, "for the pain, you know?"

Player-characters earn 10 experience points if they ever "jump" Sharkie, in one sense or another.

BAR RAT, EXPERT (2ND): He knows the staff, knows the regulars, knows the hookers, and can read newcomers. He keeps up with news from the Aries Gang, and he's a good source of gossip in general.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

RJ SLOPJOB

OCCASIONAL BRAWLER

Mixed-race man who's clearly had a hard life and is probably still having one.

Slopjob spends too much time at Sad Mary's, and his life elsewhere is pretty empty. Luckily, he's found something that makes him feel really alive. Unluckily for the peace-loving patrons of Sad Mary's, it's fighting.

BRAWLING, COMPETENT (1ST): Testosterone, social isolation, and bad role models put RJ on a path toward violence, and he has more experience throwing a punch and taking one that he really should. That said, he's not a pro, and not even a semi-pro. He's also competent at skills associated with hand-to-hand fights, such as intimidation, bragging, and drinking.

ODD JOBS, COMPETENT (1ST)

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

FRANK GERMAINE, OWNER

AT THE PEAK OF HIS SUCCESS AND READY TO THROW IT AWAY

Gregarious, put-together sixty-year-old genderqueer man of Mediterranean extraction.

Sad Mary's owes its runaway success to this hard-driven entrepreneur. He is usually on site, although he's more likely working in a back office than hanging with everyday clientele.

Germaine hangs out with his wealthiest patrons, most of them criminals on a vast scale, and he has become jealous of them. He loves his bar, but he sees himself as really making a killing someday when he joins the ranks of organized crime. If no one sees what he's thinking and stops him, Germaine is going to cash in on Sad Mary's in order to finance a life of crime, which will end in a puddle of his own blood a few months later.

THE BAR BUSINESS, ELITE (3RD): His bar does it all, and so does Germaine. He's outstanding at running his business, whether it's recruiting talent, anticipating customer demand, putting on a show, or cutting just the right backroom deals. His talents, expertise, and work experience blend seamlessly into crime: bribery, intimidation, coercion, sabotage, fraud, and occasionally murder. All of this ugly side of the business operates with the OK of the Aries Gang, and they handle the necessary murders themselves.

CAN TELL WHEN YOU'RE LYING, WORLD CLASS (4TH): This capacity operates subconsciously, picking up cues from voice, facial expressions, and body language. He thinks he has a sixth sense, and that's what he tells people. Naturally, this "sixth sense" helps him run his business.

SONG AND DANCE MAN, EXPERT (2ND): While he mostly arranges for others to perform, Germaine is pretty good himself if you can get him to sing and dance. He rarely shows anyone what he's capable of.

DEFAULT, COMPETENT (1ST)

GM: NIKODEMUS

Nikodemus serves as a sort of ion or "charged particle," ready to be attracted to a character, either as the target of his psychic patter or as the subject of his photography. If your player group is like mine, there are characters that are photo-worthy and there are characters that might get drawn into a conversation about psychic powers. Nikodemus can also serve to connect the characters to some larger mystery. Someone out in the Edge is drawing plans against him, his hard disk, and the photos on it. If the characters become involved with Nikodemus, they might get caught up in his trouble.

PORTIA

A MUTANT HOOKER IN HIGH DEMAND

Fur-covered young woman, with rounded ears and a short tail, dressed in not much.

Among the hookers who work Sad Mary's, the second most memorable one is Portia. She's a good-looking young woman, especially if you like the "rodent" look. She has soft, brown fur over most of her body, with bare skin on her face, the front of her neck, her chest, her belly, the fronts of her hands, and the bottoms of her feet. The fur is soft and luxurious. Her ears are large, rounded, and mostly smooth, and she has a short, furry tail.

First-timers at Sad Mary's sometimes get told to ask for Portia.

Some mutants hate her, and some love her. Mostly mutants are cool toward her because she holds herself apart from their community. Her whole appeal is that she's different from those around her — unique. Some of the more radical mutants have talked about doing something crazy, like kidnapping her or maiming her, but so far, it's just talk.

SCRAPPY FIGHTING, EXPERT (2ND): Grappling, biting, scratching, and shrieking. She's ferocious.

SEX WORK, EXPERT (2ND): She's in demand because she's exotic, but she also knows how to work her talents.

DEFAULT, COMPETENT (1ST)

NIKODEMUS

FAKE PSYCHIC AND FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER

Tall Nordic man, dressed casually, his noose jauntily loose. Occasionally, his eyes dart to the side, as if he's constantly on alert.

Roaming Flowers District, Nikodemus vacillates between faking vague psychic powers and taking reasonably good photos of life in the Edge. Either role allows him to interact with strangers and to come across as sort of important.

What Nikodemus doesn't know is that he has inadvertently taken some photos that certain interested parties would like deleted from his hard disk. Trouble is in his near future.

PSYCHIC PATTER, EXPERT (2ND): He knows the jargon, the mindset, and the best ways to seem like a psychic. He pretends that the State is after him because of his powers, which lends him an air of mystery and an excuse not to use his "powers" openly.

URBAN PHOTOGRAPHY, EXPERT (2ND): He knows the Edge and its people, and he has developed a sense for capturing visually arresting moments and scenes.

GM: FIRST SCHOOL OF TRUE SENSATION

Characters find the school first as an island of sanity and competence in an off-kilter city. Then, in a later story arc, the school is an ominous front for Kergillian infiltration.

FIRST SCHOOL OF TRUE SENSATION

Evidence-oriented, earnest project of human self-improvement; doomed.

Doctor Leeway is not a doctor, technically, but he has an incredible talent for the human mind and self. Over the years, he has built up his school, devoted to helping people really process the information brought in through the senses rather than deflecting most of it and focusing on recurrent concerns. His school is so successful that the Kergillians have infiltrated it (see page 167), and before long they're going to transform the school into something quite different.

Level: 3rd–4th

DOCTOR ALABASTER LEEWAY

EMPATHIC TEACHER AND HUMAN-POTENTIAL GURU

Thin, driven, bisexual North African man, maybe sixty years old, with a stance and expression that let you know he is totally present and engaged, dressed simply and impeccably.

Doctor Leeway knows he's onto something, but he doesn't know that something else is on to him.

TRUE SENSATION THEORY, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Helping people train up their senses to superhuman sensitivity, using a combination of innate empathy and unique training regimens.

TRUE SENSES, ELITE (3RD): With his heightened senses, Doctor Leeway can notice hidden things, sense subtle shifts in others' manner or speech, see colors other people can't distinguish (so many browns!), eavesdrop on one conversation while having another, diagnose mechanical problems by sound, and otherwise operate remarkably.

DEFAULT, EXPERT (2ND)

LN INKBOW

ENVIOUS STUDENT AND KERGILLIAN HOST

Woman in her thirties, half African and half everything else, solidly built, and wearing a lab coat any chance she gets.

All that's left of the original LN is the burning envy she suffered at seeing how people flock to Doctor Leeway. Other than that, it's a faithful façade on the surface and a Kergillian parasite underneath.

TRUE SENSATION THEORY, ELITE (3RD): As Doctor Leeway's student, she is qualified to help people "open their senses," but she'll never be the prodigy that Doctor Leeway is.

SUPERIOR MIND, WORLD-CLASS (4TH): Pure symbionts are almost impossible to read or influence psychically.

HYBRID NERVOUS SYSTEM, WORLD-CLASS (4TH): Superhuman senses and reflexes. Thanks to this superior neural functioning, she seems to have the "True Senses" that True Sensation Theory opens up.

GM: GUN METAL SPORTS & INDUSTRY

If a character wants a weapon that they can carry in the street, this is the place to send them.

If the characters want to "load for bear" before a big fight, let them. At Gun Metal, they can find anything that passes for legal on the streets of the Edge. Give the players the run-down, and then they can invent the gear that their characters find. Realistically, they would want some time to train with their new weapons, but dramatically, probably not. While it's common for people to carry golf clubs or other improvised weapons around, it's not common to see a squad of people in improvised armor with heavy-duty weapons marching down the street. Clever characters can usually arrange to use their heavy-duty gear in private.

GM: TEMPLE OF THE DIVINE EXPERIENCE

The energy in this concept comes from the creative conflict within the dichotomy of intentionality versus fakery. Everything about the Temple is artificial. It's made up. Still, it seems to fill some need in the populace. By giving people what they want and even need, is the Temple manipulating them or serving them? Does the invented nature of the Temple's program show that it's a shallow farce, or does it imply that it's a bold statement of mature responsibility in the face of life's potential meaninglessness? Balance the low-brow elements of the Temple with profound spiritual connections or experiences. Keep it near the ambiguous, uncomfortable middle ground.

GUN METAL SPORTS & INDUSTRY

All the hard-hitting sport and work gear that a certain sort of person needs.

Baseball bats, rebar, work boots, hunting knives, machetes, hard hats, cattle prods, ice axes, and more are waiting for you at Gun Metal. No guns, of course, but you can find all manner of sporting and industrial gear. The quality of the gear is high, and so is the price. If you're looking for something that doesn't work as an improvised weapon or personal armor, such as a tennis racquet, then they might have to order it.

Bull-Beater: This signature item is a specially designed cattle prod that looks like a flame thrower, with a two-handed prod linked by a cord to a backpack battery. "Not to be used on pregnant bulls," the clerk might tell you.

Pistol-Grip Chainsaw: Way better for dissuading people from fighting you than for actually fighting people. Some people see this beauty on the wall and just have to have it.

Weed Waster: Got stubborn weeds you need to clear out? This puppy shoots napalm. Not on display, and, in fact, the clerk may deny they sell them if you don't have the right connections.

Limited Ranged Weapons: No sports firearms. No sporting crossbows or hunting bows. The best you can do is "sports slingshots," braced on the forearm with lead spheres. For throwing weapons, you can get knives, javelins, discuses, and child-size shot-put balls (smaller for faster throwing speed).

Level: 2nd–3rd

TEMPLE OF THE DIVINE EXPERIENCE

Sister Cheryl provides for the people's spiritual needs with her magnificent Temple and its sprawling constellation of satellite shrines, chapels, meditation rooms, and isolation chambers. No society can thrive without shared spirituality, and Sister Cheryl is here to help all the little lambs find the feeding troughs that suit them best. Don't be lured astray by Sir Constance's false promises of worldly success, you can come here to have the experience that your soul needs next.

Most Marjans and visitors can find among the Temple's staff some clergy close to the individual's own spiritual inclinations and affiliations. Higher-ranking clerics are authorized to assume clerical roles within several disparate denominations or sects. Marjans tend not to be sticklers on doctrinal niceties, but they love festivals. As such, they are a hard sell when it comes to giving things up for their faith, but relatively generous when including drunken debauchery from any spiritual tradition, whether verifiable or mere hearsay. Marjans are devoted to any number of idiosyncratic saints or holy days, most of which have no clear precedent elsewhere on the globe and little in common other than maybe a day off work.

Abattoir of Heaven: Associated with the Temple is a secondary temple in Four Points, this one devoted to sacred rituals and animal sacrifice. See page 93.

Deadsville: Also associated with the Temple and in Four Points is a vast cemetery known as Deadsville. See page 94.

Shrines and Satellite Temples: Once you know what to look for, you see that shrines are pretty common. Depending on the district, you see postmodern statues in niches, groups singing together in basement halls, modest but nicely put-together chapels, rooftop menhirs, or other manifestations of spiritual practice.

GMC Roles at the Temple

All sorts of GMCs might run across the characters if they come into the Temple's sphere of influence.

Pathetic Supplicant: Someone needs healing, and then some. They have done wrong, and they need mercy. They come groveling to the Temple, hoping to soak in the unconditional approval of a soul doctor. Temple staff give the poor wretch priority, making the characters wait. Come up with some sort of wrong for the supplicant to have done. The transgression could be moral, psychological, medical, metaphysical, psychic, legal, personal, or any kind of wrong. Ideally, it's tied to a player-character, a previously referenced gamemaster-character, an upcoming conflict, or some wrong done by a real person you know who isn't part of the gaming group. Usually, of course, it's a combination of synergistic dysfunctions rather than just one.

To ratchet the encounter up a bit, the supplicant staggers into the characters while they are at the entrance to the Temple. Maybe they barf on somebody. Welcome to the Edge.

At the encounter, the supplicant is color, setting the tone for the Temple and for the Island. Play it that way so that it's a worthwhile encounter even if the supplicant never comes up again. Perhaps later the supplicant reappears, now transformed. On the one hand, they could be blissed-out servants of the Temple, innocent of any previous wrong-doing because they don't recall it. On the other, they could be superhuman, a mortal shell inhabited by a transdimensional being. In this case, the mortal soul has been sacrificed as penance, undoing all wrongdoing and allowing an "angel" to possess the body.

Profane Spiritual Tourist: Someone who is your play group's stereotype of a terrible person pretending to be spiritual. Maybe it's a white guy with longish hair and exactly the right tattoos. He is so fake that he is a bring-down. Perhaps later, even in another story arc, the characters meet the future tourist, after he has seen too much and is now a slow-moving busboy with a thousand-yard stare.

Spiritual Bring-Down: He exposes a character to the sham that is our own internal narratives, demoralizing (striking) the character.

No-Nonsense Security Goons: Sister Cheryl is one of the most powerful public figures on the Island, and her security team is not some hippie joke. These fiercely devoted guardians benefit from a terrific regimen of yoga, guided meditation, group rituals, and martial drills. They deal mercilessly with threats to the Temple without ever losing their inner equanimity or skipping a beat of the chants that repeat endlessly in their heart-caves.

Temple Guardian, World-Class, 3rd level: Spotting trouble, brushing off diversions, persevering despite pain, and dropping a ton of hurt on those who threaten the Temple or any of its subsidiaries. If they ended up in some sort of fight unrelated to the Temple, they would be 2nd-level (expert). Only the inspiration of the Temple activates all their best physical training and spiritual conditioning.

Insightful Mystic: The Temple attracts not just everyday people desperate for meaning and connection but also the genuine article: spiritually advanced people of various stripes. An insightful mystic makes a useful GMC. They're mysterious, ambiguous, energetic, charismatic, and maybe a little unnerving. If the mystic can see into a character's soul, they might challenge the character over some hidden flaw or dark secret.

Mystic Insight, Beyond Human, 5th level: Attuned to energies that common people can't discern, the mystic can intuit realities hidden to others. For the most part, this vision sets the mystic apart and puts them on a solitary path of enlightenment. Given how outlandish characters can be, the mystic might well be able to discern something secret about some of them. If the circumstances call for it, the mystic can utter a statement that shakes a character to their soul. It might be seemingly nonsensical like a ***koan***. "Sometimes the goat gives milk, and sometimes the milk is the goat," or something evocative but mysterious. It could also cut straight to the character's secrets or their question mark. "Your mother was right when she told you that your dark desires would lead to your downfall." The mystic's remark may well leave the character demoralized, spiritually shaken up, or otherwise stricken.

Helpful Stalker: This GMC develops an unhealthy fascination with one of the characters, but he also provides some valuable service. The characters who get involved with the Temple often have extraordinary qualities that might form the basis of the helpful stalker's unhealthy fascination. Something in his soul's constitution lets him see just what a marvelous creature the character is. The trick is to start slow, where the stalker is friendly and helpful. Let the stalker have the connections or information that the character needs, help that the stalker is quite willing to offer. When it's time to turn the relationship dark, you can be subtle or shocking. Another character might stumble across the stalker's private notebook filled with mad verse and profane sketches that reveal the stalker's hidden obsession. Or maybe a rival for the stalker's attention turns up bloodily murdered.

Soulmate: The spiritual currents that flow through the Temple and its associated populations can bring

together those whose souls match. Any character with an exceptional origin or spiritual orientation might in particular be liable to find a soulmate here. Create the soulmate to match the character. The mate might be astonishingly like the character, such as the only other person the character has ever met who also conducts their life according to the philosophy of an obscure 1920s theosophist. Alternatively, the mate is astonishingly different, such as when a stodgy scholar encounters a stripper devoted to "corporeal spirituality." As a change of pace, this connection is the real deal, a source of solace and strength to the character. To the marriage of true minds, admit no impediments. Of course, even if you don't force negative repercussions on the character, the player might see the arrival of the soulmate to be transformative, possibly throwing the character off their career, especially if it is less than exalted.

Devoted Followers: A character who is any sort of Messiah figure, whether genuine or just a good fake, can find devoted followers here. Devoted followers can become their own sort of trouble and fun.

Twists at the Temple

Around the Temple, the extraordinary is common.

Good Twist: In addition to whatever else you're doing, you have a moment of spiritual clarity. Something about the Temple affirms your spiritual outlook. In the secret semiotics of the Temple, you understand the esoteric Word. You are not alone.

Bad Twist: In addition to whatever else you're doing, you have a moment of spiritual clarity. All is falsehood, and your brief vision of truth evokes only nausea. All is revealed to be filth. Nor are you alone; all are lost. (The character is stricken or worse.)

Bad Twist: One or another mass brainwashing program is underway, and it interferes spectacularly with any paranormal, psychic, or psychological program the character is operating. The Temple's subliminal "outreach programs" are everywhere.

GM: FLOWERS DISTRICT

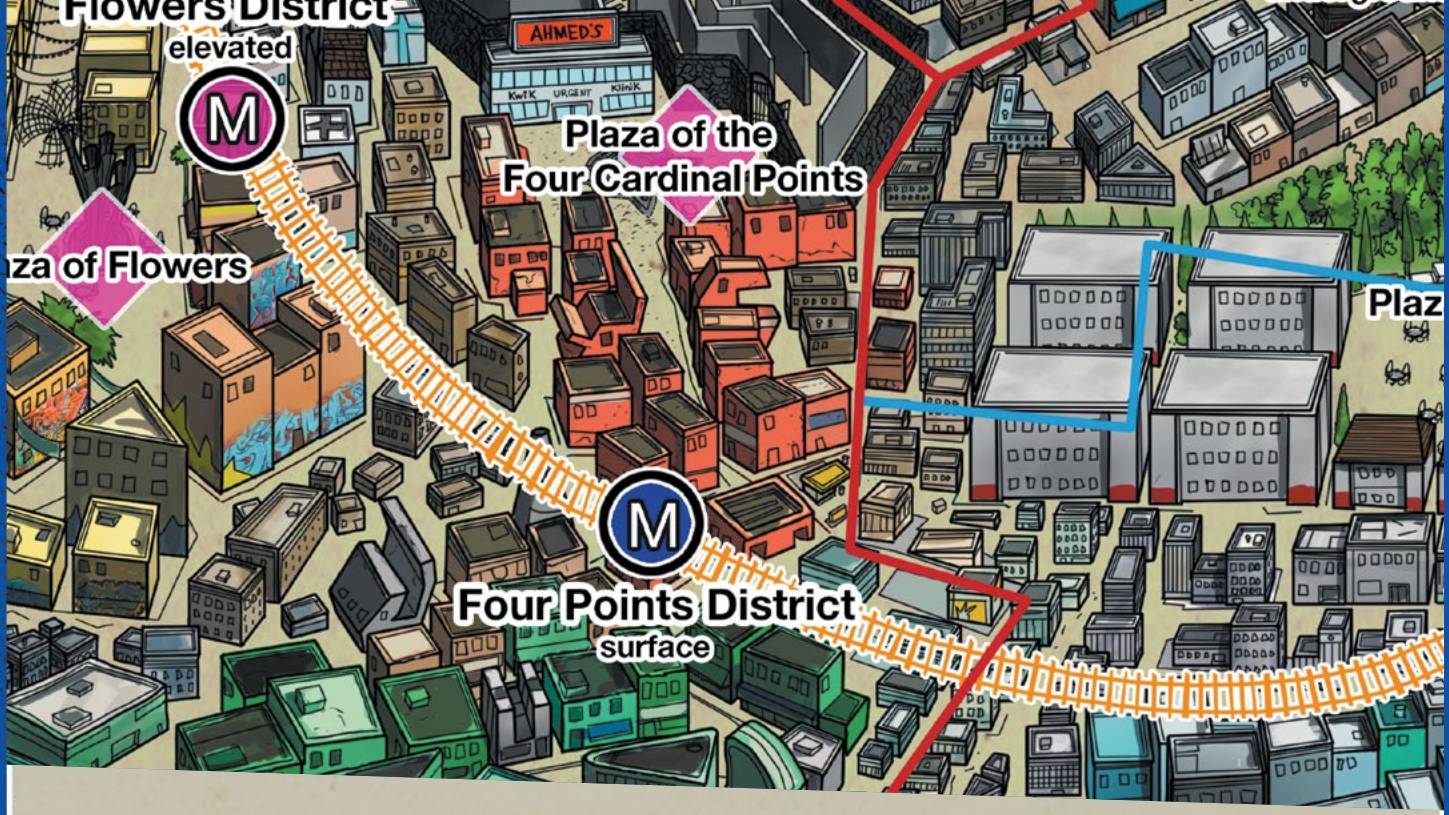
Flowers is the characters' playground: wild but relatively safe, welcoming to tourists, and not a grim reminder of how low humans can sink, the way Great Men or Four Points can be. It can serve as a useful hub or center for the action, with ventures into other districts for specific purposes. If a character comes to the Island with a lead on something or someone they're looking for, they may well find that someone or something here in Flowers.

Aries Gang: As written, they serve as the best model for a vigilante gang serving as a police or security force and actually providing services to their clientele. It's no coincidence that they're in the default character "playground." What can you do with them? They work as a neutral, competent force that the players respect, for once. And you can do anything else you like with them.

New Social Movement: If you want your campaign to feature a prominent, public social group, clique, or organization, Flowers is a fine place for it. There are enough other things going on here that even a major new organization could fit here without dominating it or changing the tenor.

Blooming, Fading, and Fruiting: Nothing stops changing until it's dead, and long dead at that. A place as lively as this district is no exception, especially when its name is "Flowers." Where is Flowers in its life cycle? Is it growing, with its social scene expanding? Are the crowds at Sad Mary's getting bigger and wealthier? Are there more and more street performers, food trucks, and art cars? Or is it fading, with increasing hostilities between rival food trucks and with seekers looking for more authentic experiences in less comfortable environs? Everyone knows that a flower is a temporary sex organ for achieving fertilization and creating a fruit. If Flowers District fades, does some vital center remain and grow into something new and greater?

The Grandmaster: If, somewhere in Flowers, you introduce a monkish character known as "the Grandmaster of Flowers," I'll think it's funny, but then I started playing D&D in 1977. If another monkish character battles the Grandmaster for the title, since there can be only one, that might be taking the joke too far.



Four Points District

Here in Four Points District, society functions, but it's catch-as-catch-can. The architecture is run-down but functional, and the same goes for most of the people living here. The local enforcers, the Dog-Faces, rely on baboons for muscle. For some aficionados of harsh reality, Four Points is a magical place, where life is raw and unstinting. As far as the locals, they would prefer for life to stint a little sometimes.

GO TO FOUR POINTS...

- ...if you can't afford rent anywhere else.
- ...to find the artists who care about their art and not the public.
- ...to give the Aries Gang time to forget what you did at Sad Mary's.
- ...to pursue your quirky or loathsome pursuits where fewer people care.
- ...to visit the Abattoir of Heaven or Deadsville.

THE INDUSTRY OF INDUSTRY IS INDUSTRY

Four Points is where paper is printed, machinery is constructed, metalwork is forged, plastic is molded, and safety regulations are opt-in. It's a good place for a sketchy laboratory or private studio, where strange sounds and smells draw little attention.

The ground pollution is bad enough that rare cancers and unusual deformities are common. If humanity had more years left in its lifespan, this pollution would be a long-term problem. The rats seem to be doing fine, and if it's not killing them, then how bad can it be for people?

AROUND FOUR POINTS

Various establishments are found here. Sometimes they've located here where land and labor are cheap and where neighbors can't be choosy. Some of them date back decades to the district's better times. Baboons wander through the district in large, dispersed clans. These are technically the property of the Dog-Face enforcement org, but the baboons don't really know that. Residents cope with the baboons by cajoling them, avoiding them, and shooing them away.

Abattoir of Heaven: A temple devoted to sacred slaughter and under Sister Cheryl's leadership. See write-up on page 93.

Ahmed's Kwik Klinik: An independent medical clinic with a fan following. See write-up on page 94.

Ball-Mart: Massive brothel with generous discounts for "frequent fliers."

Deadsville: A sprawling cemetery complex under Sister Cheryl's management. See write-up on page 94.

E-Z Sleep Hotel: A secure, clean hotel experience at a reasonable price. See write-up on page 95.

Freemartin Arena: Gaudy sports complex with regular fights, roller derby matches, and more.

Throckmorton's Exterminators: Local headquarters of the world's most renowned exterminator business. See write-up on page 95.

Zazen Sushi: Apparently a modest but popular sushi counter. See write-up on page 95.

Swaps, Hope, and Debt: Brokers in Swaps manage the Al Amarja Lottery, which is popular in Four Points. The motto of the lottery is, "Isn't hope worth a buck?" Debt collectors are common, and they often get their accounts from Swaps, where trading in other people's debt carries a certain cachet.

The Temple's Tiny Shrines: Micro shrines of all sorts are common across the district. They feature schemes, symbols, iconography, and cultic practices that vary from shrine to shrine. It is common for people to destroy coins or bills as part of prayer at a shrine, especially a prayer for money. Some shrines are exclusively for baboons and their handlers.

PLAZA OF THE FOUR CARDINAL POINTS

The fountain in the center no longer runs, and when there's heavy rain it accumulates water. It's a circular pool with a four-way compass point as an island in the center of the pool.

Meager Businesses: Bars, restaurants, stores, and other establishments do good business here, relative to the rest of the district. Most of these establishments are more or less squatting in the buildings they inhabit. The old signs have been taken down but not always replaced. The regulars know which business is which.

Handcarts: Some entrepreneurs push little carts around, selling ice cream, tattoos, or hits of nitrous oxide. Others have large carts that they park in place and sell from. Other districts have food trucks, but Four Points has food carts.

ABATTOIR OF HEAVEN

> The life of all flesh is the blood.
>
> —*Leviticus 17:14*, 5th Century BCE

It's sinful to eat animals that have been killed to satisfy your profane, bodily hunger. But once an animal has been sacrificed in a ritual that ensures that its spirit reunites joyfully with the Herd Mother in the Sky, then it would be a shame to let the meat go to waste. Live animals are trucked in at loading bays, then taken into the various shrines and sanctuaries where they are prepared for their rituals and then sacrificed.

Some rituals involve parading animals through the streets in cages on wheels, pushed and pulled by young devotees who are earning "Hard Worker" badges for their Temple Scout sashes. Fans and bystanders gather around to watch and sometimes touch the cages for good luck. Yearling bulls come by, draped with lengths of colored silk, each with secrets knotted into it. Pigs are usually paraded around with too many crammed into the cage. They have symbols of detestation painted onto them, but in ultraviolet ink, invisible to the human eye. Goats are put on mock trial, during which members of the audience are invited to share their sins. The goat is found "relatively" sinless and shipped back inside the abattoir for the ritual's consummation. Occasionally, an iron box on wooden wheels makes the rounds, and people pound on it for good luck. Most folks say it's a person in there, or maybe a frog — no one knows. Every once in a while, animals get loose and have to be chased down, although Sister Cheryl denies that these events are part of the ritual. Animal Control eagerly hunts down these stray animals, racing to get to the animals before the Temple Scouts do.

Divine shrines all over the city allow one to christen babies, solemnize weddings, and eulogize the dead, but if you want to do it up right, you might conduct the ceremony at the Temple, or often the Abattoir. In the Abattoir's shrines and sanctuaries, life-blood and the raw reality of death remind everyone present that this life here is real, and not just an idea. Arranging for the right ritual and the right sacrifice with the right officiant and the right participants — it's a mark of great accomplishment.

Some blood is used in rituals on site, some is shipped out for various devout uses, some shipped out for use as feed, and some dumped out a discharge pipe at the side of the Abattoir and into a drainage pool. While the deaths themselves are behind the abattoir's walls, this stinking pool makes it clear that no one is hiding anything.

GM: ABATTOIR OF HEAVEN

What do you make of a divine slaughterhouse? Maybe it means that killing living things isn't that bad. Maybe it means that the Temple is in league with sociopaths. The more your players react in one direction, the more you can steer the action in the other direction. If the players are aghast, then the attendants at the Abattoir are gentle, enlightened people. If the players are into it, then ramp up the horror.

The Abattoir works fine as background to something else that's happening. Send the player-characters there to meet some important GMCs, where the Abattoir is taken for granted as part of the scenery. Like poetry, psychotic dysfunction makes the unusual seem usual and vice versa.

Mission: The Enemy is setting up a ritual that secretly carries a lot more weight than casual observers would notice, and that's not good. Swap out the sacred cow that's being paraded around, and swap in a profane substitute. Bring the sacred cow to a drop-off site, and leave it there. If you are trying to set up the swap and can't manage it, at least raise hell to throw off whatever ritual is underway.

There's a lot going on in the Abattoir that most people have no idea about.

Animals are also ritually sacrificed at satellite facilities on the Island, stationed near where the animals are raised. The rituals at these rural abattoirs are decidedly less formal and time-consuming.

Go to the Abattoir...

- ...when the clique you want to join is going there for a sacrifice, and you are going to help them get something special.
- ...because there are great after-parties, if you can get invited.
- ...if visions of bloody death haunt your dreams and your daylight reveries.
- ...to be reminded that every moment is final.

Level: 1st–4th

AHMED'S KWIK KLINIK

> "You better go see Ahmed about that nasty burn — or whatever that is."
>
> —A satisfied former customer of Ahmed's

This conveniently located clinic has all the high-end medical equipment that a patient could hope for. Or if not ***all*** the equipment, then at least it's equipment that's reliable and in reliable hands. Ahmed and his crew have a good reputation on the street, and it's mostly deserved.

Regular fans of Ahmed's like to hang out in the waiting room and talk to patients. They informally triage people as they come in, and they help patients with paperwork, or just pass the time with them. Mostly they're people whose lives the clinic has saved, and one of them is a self-taught nurse and over-achiever who's trying to prove her skills to land a job with Ahmed.

Certain sorts of injuries are not good for business, so Ahmed regrettably converts many such injuries into lethalities. Injuries that would leave one's face disfigured, for example, have a negative impact on the Kwik Klinik brand. Ahmed can't have you walking around with a hacked-up face saying that he's the one who sewed you together. Such injuries often lead to death from unexpected complications or from previously undiagnosed ailments.

Level: 0th–2nd

Twists at the Klinik

Characters want their trips to the Klinik to be uneventful, but who are they kidding?

Good Twist: Not only does the character get their lacerations sewn up nicely, they also meet someone on the next gurney over who...knows something. Maybe they babble something vulnerable as they die: blood, breath, and truth all slipping out into the world like rats from a sinking ship.

Bad Twist: Ahmed's nurses don't know why they're doing it, but someone's paying them to pass along tissue samples to Insert-Org-Name-Here. The character's samples are sure to elicit curiosity.

Bad Twist: The character sees another patient die messily and without dignity. The decedent connects to the character in some emotional way, and the character is "emotionally wrecked" (stricken) by the encounter. Ask the player what personal connection to a stranger would mess the character up this way.

GM: AHMED'S KWIK KLINIK

A relative haven of security and competence, for now.

If your players are like mine, they would prefer an underdog clinic to the official, ominous St. Charon's Hospital. Even I don't have the heart to screw them over too bad if they go to Ahmed's.

DEADSVILLE

The ashes of cremated people swirl in the air with incense smoke and the smell of spilt whisky, offerings left to ancestors, to spirits, and to whatever else it is that makes this whole graveyard super creepy. It's a labyrinth of high stone walls, multi-story mausoleums, and constantly changing obelisks covered in obscure runes. Sister Cheryl organizes vast ritual celebrations here, and even in off hours you'll see somebody — a mourner, a sensitive soul, a shaman, a musician for the dead, maybe someone with a bottle of soda to sell you.

Locals observe various holidays with gatherings in Deadsville. Shared bloodletting on St. Abraxas' Day is not to be missed. The State has given up trying to coopt these rituals with patriotic celebrations of State intelligence agents who have died, especially in the line of duty. At least, they've given up for now.

Go to Deadsville...

- ...to meet a mysterious connection.
- ...when you need to reconnect to your own mortality.
- ...when you need to make a great impression on someone who's going to be at one of Sister Cheryl's rituals.
- ...after someone tells you that the mysterious tattoo on the back of your hand matches a strange symbol they saw on an obelisk last week in Deadsville.

Level: 0th–3rd

E-Z SLEEP HOTEL

Where you can rest easy, really.

Kergillians might be crustacean-like entities from a spinward dimension (see page 167), but they can recognize what's going on in human society, and they see that the "corporation" is the planet's dominant life form. E-Z Sleep Hotel is their corporation, created to exploit the labor of others, to enforce social control, and to have a front in the metaphysical world of commerce. They provide a service to the outside world, which is a secure, clean hotel experience at a reasonable price. The corporation also provides services to the Kergillians' incursion into Earth reality, such as surveillance of locals, training for new "recruits," and a safehouse for cloaks.

Attentive Staff. As Kergillian agents develop their understanding of human culture, they spend time working as cleaning staff and other staff positions. They live on site in bunkrooms, and they work during the day. Some work out in the larger world, but most work at E-Z Sleep. By looking around the rooms of human guests, they can infer things about human nature on an intuitive level. Interacting with guests is another opportunity to develop better "human intuition."

Level: 3rd–4th

GM: E-Z SLEEP HOTEL

The safest place to sleep in Al Amarja, as long as you don't go looking in the basement.

E-Z Sleep is a bit of a mind game at the expense of the players. It's safe, but it's also a hub of evil alien activity. Most of the fun to be had here is having the characters interact with the pure symbiont Kergillians who have an iffy handle on human culture. The staff can seem a little off, but they're friendly and helpful. You can leave the players confused, or you can give them just enough out-of-character information to appreciate what you're portraying.

GM: THROCKMORTON EXTERMINATORS

The Throckmorton Exterminators are a wild card. Characters might impersonate them or hack into their private client records. An org relevant to your story arc can have operatives working here. Regular old exterminators might also serve as something like a SWAT team to help the characters out when the centipede infestation is just too much for them to handle alone.

THROCKMORTON'S EXTERMINATORS

The world's most trusted brand of pest control.

Strangely, this globally recognized brand has a legitimate franchise doing business in the Edge. Humans have an evolved distaste for creepy crawlies, and Marjans want the best exterminators, just like anyone else does. More than one service has assets in Throckmorton's, and "trusted exterminator" makes a great cover for various operations.

The exterminators sent to Broken Wings go undercover so neighbors never find out about the clients' issues.

Clyde the Throckmorton Guy is a recurrent GMC. He's over on page 199.

Level: 1st–2nd

GM: ZAZEN SUSHI

Zazen Sushi is a mysterious force that you can use to unlock all sorts of latent abilities in characters. The sushi might also heal someone of a paranormal wound. For certain types of characters, it could be a setback of some sort, such as the full realization of some family curse.

ZAZEN SUSHI

A nondescript, one-man sushi stand of total perfection.

No one could prove that Platonic forms were real for over two thousand years. When proof finally did come, there wasn't a philosopher alive who thought it would come in the form of sushi. The astral plane, it turns out, is full of Platonic forms, the perfect ideations of the mundane objects on Earth. If there's a Balenciaga hand bag at the center of being, all we get on Earth are knock-offs. These forms were hitherto unreachable. Sure, someone might espy them while letting out slack in the silver cord attaching them to their body, but no way could you bring one back to reality. Except at Zazen Sushi. The master chef there realizes the perfect form of various kinds of sushi, and a mere taste awakens latent abilities, creativity, and even leads to mutations — at least that's what people say. Perfection on a plate breeds strange abilities and attracts stranger eyes.

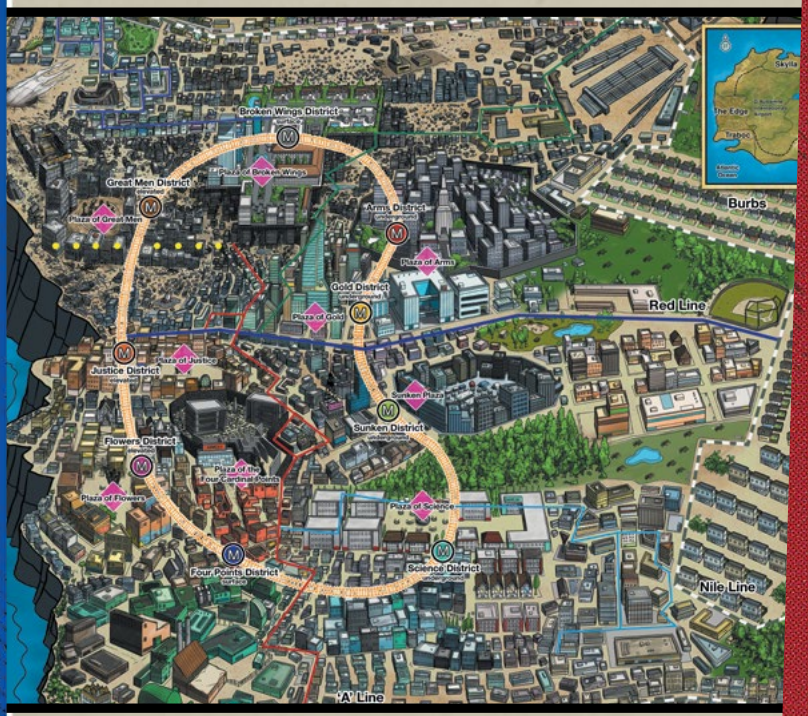
For the most part, however, Zazen Sushi is a narrow food stall where a taciturn sushi chef serves you exactly what he wants to serve you. Usually there is a line. For each paying customer, he serves up a series of items, the number and type determined by the chef. Customers are uniformly positive about the sushi, and sometimes they can get creepy about how much they like it. The general consensus is that he gives you just the sushi you were hankering for but didn't know you were hankering for. Sometimes, however, he turns customers away. What people on the street say is that if he has run out of an ingredient in a type of sushi you need, he won't serve you anything else. What no one has noticed is that some of those who are turned away repeatedly end up getting served one of the real life-changing dishes.

So far, the secretive chef has subtly changed many lives and dramatically changed a few. At this rate, he's going to draw attention to himself soon, and one org or another is going to try to co-opt him.

Level: 1st

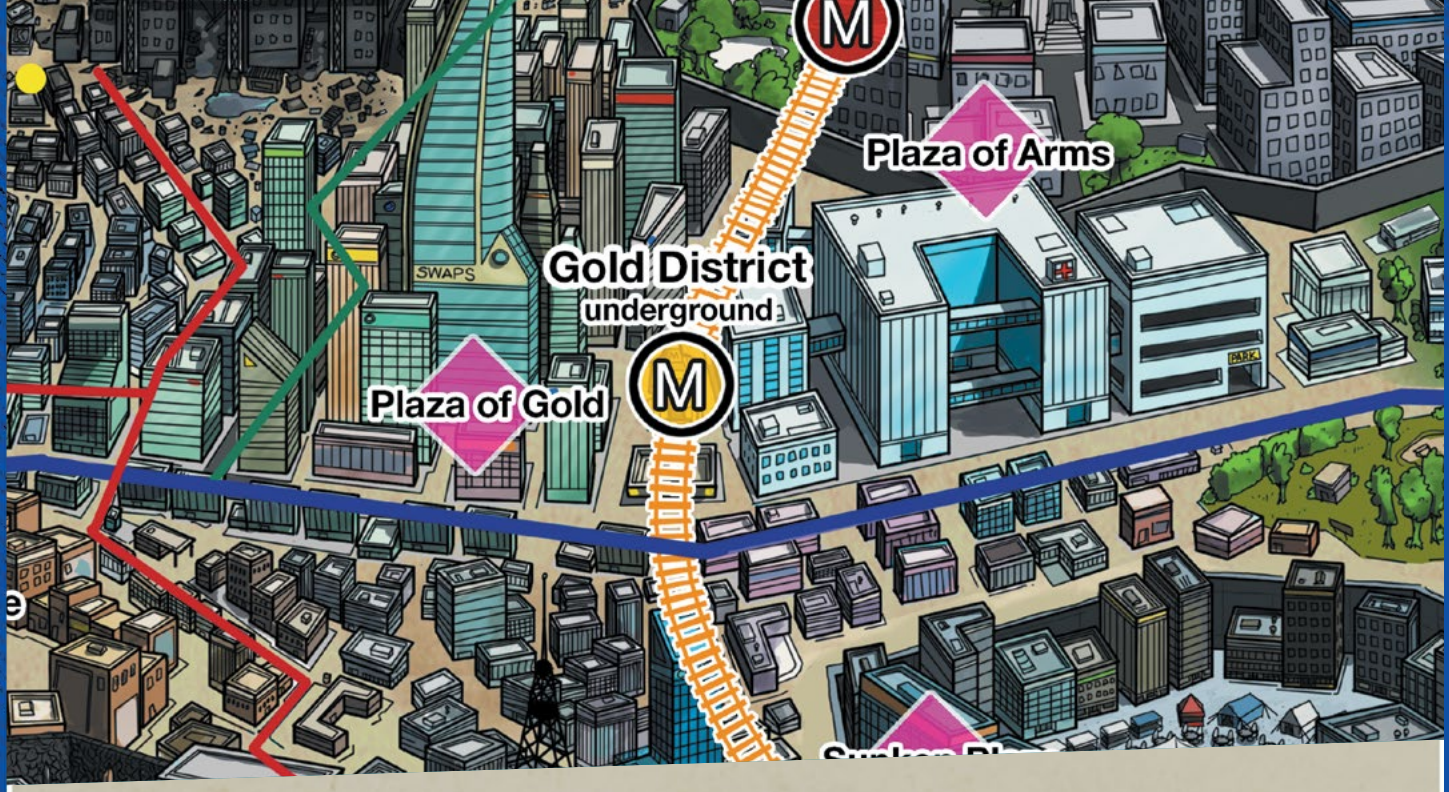
GM: FOUR POINTS DISTRICT

If Flowers is the playground where it's easy to find amazing people, art, and communities, then Four Points is the hard part of town where you can find amazing things if you know where to look. While the outrageous and fascinating places in Flowers are "on the map" and easy for newkies to find, in Four Points the outrageous and fascinating places tend to be harder to find because they are for insiders, not any old jawfish off the street.



THE MAP IS NOT YOUR FRIEND

The map reproduced in this game is a copy of an in-world map, one that characters might or might not find. Like all maps, it diverges from the terrain here and there. Unlike most, it includes intentional misdirection, put there to serve some sort of obscure purpose. Why isn't the road to the Terminal on the map? Perhaps to keep tourists in the Edge longer. Maybe to express the city's metaphysical isolation. If characters get their hands on a copy of the map, they can follow it all they like, but they won't always find what's printed on the paper. As a GM, never let the map keep you from deciding for yourself what's to be found in the Edge. Your creativity is more important than the map.



District of Gold

People meet up here to make deals at every level and scope, from waste aluminum to international sex-trafficking rights. Everyone who buys low and sells high is part of Sir Constance's network. The gleaming, high-tech plaza is surrounded by concentric rings of less prestigious truck and barter.

GO TO GOLD...

- ...to find the person you can pay to learn the whereabouts of the agent you can pay to take you to a special store with a one-of-a-kind item that you need. Be sure to tip the store's bouncer.
- ...to find guides, brokers, and buyers for the massive stash of uncut gems that you and your friends have "lucked into."
- ...to pose as brokers while investigating a business, industry, or underground operation.
- ...to take luck by the horns and invest your life's savings in the market, spending the rest of your days trading and brokering, chasing that elusive jackpot deal that will set you for life.
- ...to engage in lots of low-level transactions, rubbing a little soul power off with each one and charging up your arcane batteries.

TRUCK AND BARTER

District of Gold makes the Edge possible. Here syndicates, cults, governments, and shoe sellers make deals, and one way or another, the Edge gets its cut. Most sales are pirated or misappropriated cargo, which specialists buy in bulk for immediate resale. Sometimes luxury automobiles are going cheap, sometimes it's breakfast cereal. The devoted buyer can usually find a seller for just about anything. Here you can buy memories, bad karma, terrorism futures, and options on dreams.

Sir Constance fosters a spirit of enthusiastic maximization, and most of the successful merchants and brokers in Gold are driven by an almost religious passion to get the right products to the right people at the right time for the right price. For this transcendent service, they naturally take an appropriate cut.

For the elites, selling to an end user is disdained as mere "peddling." Marjan business elites would rather sell gravel to a broker than sell diamonds to individuals at retail. Retailers can make good money, but they find themselves not invited to the key sacrifices at the Abattoir and not welcome at brand-vital social networking opportunities. Selling to schmucks is for schmucks.

Derivative financial instruments carry a special cachet, so trading in future rights to sell gravel grants more status than selling the gravel itself. Insurance on derivatives is an even more exalted level of transaction. They are so abstract as to approach a dance with the eternal forms, far removed from the indignities of the flesh-and-blood world.

AROUND GOLD

Time is money, and goods are moving. Trucks lumber down the lanes, coming in with cargo from the port or heading out to make deliveries across the Edge. Near the plaza, the businesses are clean and well-moneyed. As one moves away from the plaza, however, the district gets less well-heeled, and the businesses are lower-rent. Eventually, the district is warehouses, piles of commodities, used goods, liquidation deals, and trash to be recycled.

St. Charon's Hospital: The Island's main hospital and a center for State medical research. See write-up on page 99.

The Temple's Coin-Operated Shrines: Countless coin-operated shrines grant petitioners good karma, especially increasing the probability that the next person they make a big deal with will be a fool.

PLAZA OF GOLD

This space is the gleaming, thrumming engine at the heart of all commerce on the Island. Brokers, agents, representatives, other professionals, and their assistants walk in quick, straight lines from building to building, cutting across the plaza. In the center is a lovely bronze statue of a shepherd boy. Nobody here pays it any mind because they're busy making money. Nobody meets for coffee on the plaza. Nothing happens here at night. It is well-maintained.

First Bank of Al Amarja: Modern building with a stodgy façade in front of the two bottom floors.

Bureau of Weights and Exchanges: The State's tax and commerce apparatus in a building that dates back hundreds of years and hasn't retrofitted well. Expect worn stairs, tilting hallways, low doorways, fluorescent lights, unbalanced doors, waiting areas with no chairs, and awkward toilet facilities. The officers in the bureau speak to visitors from behind old countertops or windows in walls, and they use a separate series of corridors from the public.

Office Buildings: Each building hosts a number of small to large businesses, trading in insurance, investments, and derivatives. Profits are highest on items that are prohibited, so there's a lot of international commercial activity around stolen goods, drugs, slaves, sex, and industrial waste.

Swaps: This curving glass and steel building dominates the plaza. See write-up on the next page.

SWAPS

> The market where you can find anything but shame.

Every candy bar a kid buys in Al Amarja, every paycheck a worker cashes, and every loan someone takes out is made possible, directly or indirectly, by the work of people at Swaps. Swaps is the financial nerve center of Al Amarja, and the derivatives traded here reflect and affect financial exchanges around the world. At the center of Swaps, a constant presence in spirit if not in person, is Sir Constance D'Aubainne.

Various floors are devoted to different sorts of markets. Individuals need some sort of official standing to access most of the building. In addition to the large arenas where brokers trade in mobs, there seem to be no end of small offices where merchants deal in niche goods, such as Pathogen Futures.

Cheek Swabs for Insiders: In order to gain access to certain exclusive markets and inside information, merchants of all scales are invited to apply at the Confidence Department in Swaps for special recognition. Insiders are required to let the officials collect biometric readings and DNA samples. Those who allow Swaps to implant ID chips into them gain even greater access.

State Security: Armed guards from the State's Bureau of Weights and Exchanges patrol Swaps. They are empowered to exact ad hoc taxes from visitors.

Swaps Brain: The constant mental activity in Swaps takes real things, such as milk, and turns them into abstractions, such as a derivative that pays off if the price of milk drops in a certain market. This abstraction redirects the brain's attention from the rich, ineffable real world to the pale, artificial world of recursive mental construction. Sir Constance coordinates activity not just to maximize transactions or profits. She manages a giant hive of self-reinforcing groupthink that affects human behavior throughout the building. While in Swaps, it's hard not to take the market seriously as the right and true focus of human concern and endeavor. People easily fall into the feel of the place and get caught up in the fervor to buy low and sell high. Those who harbor secret plans against Swaps, such as industrial spies or curse squads sent in by Sister Cheryl, often find themselves spontaneously aligning with Swaps instead of working against it. Those who talk about this groupthink effect call it "Swaps brain."

The Anything Brokers: Arcane fixers roam the halls, looking for people who are buying or selling the impossible: lost love, meaning and purpose, hope, health, and memories. These gaunt, chain-smoking brokers would never want to sell you anything directly, but they are happy to take a cut of any transaction they can arrange.

GM: SWAPS

The easiest thing to draw characters to Swaps is some sort of deal to make or some sort of information to get from a deal maker. There are endless little specialized offices, and one of them relates to what's going on in your arc.

Sir Constance as Celebrity Investor: Occasionally, Sir Constance herself tours through Swaps. Investors and agents of all sorts crowd to be near her and to hear what she might say. If they can, they'll ask her opinion on investments or future outlooks, and her responses have an immediate effect on the local market. Any investor who brushes near Sir Constance feels lucky and just maybe ***is*** a little luckier for the rest of the day.

Level: 2nd–5th

ST. CHARON'S HOSPITAL

> "Paging Dr. Nusbaum. Dr. Nusbaum, please pick up the yellow courtesy phone."

The Island's main hospital, St. Charon's, is sprawling and powerful. It serves as a center of medical research, cutting edge procedures, and public health initiatives, all under the direction of the legendary and overworked Herr Doktor Fürchtegott Nusbaum.

At St. Charon's, you can find everything, from the very best medical attention to the very worst. The State covers everyone's health care for free, but you're expected to tip the staff. If you don't think you can tip your medical staff as much as you think they're worth, easy credit, high interest, and organ donation options provide balanced programs for all paychecks. You might already be enrolled in Dr. Nusbaum's experimental programs without even knowing it, and without even going to St. Charon's. If you're in the program, you're getting the very latest in medical treatment. Even if you're not a subject in one of these randomized, blind, karma-reversed trials, you can benefit from innovative medical procedures made possible by these experiments.

Doctor Nusbaum

A cadre of intelligent, efficient, ruthless professionals run St. Charon's Hospital. These men and women are Dr. Nusbaum's hand-picked assistants. They range in age from teens to fifties and represent ethnicities from across the globe. Even so, some of them look quite alike and have some of the same mannerisms. In fact, they're all children of the same man, the original Doctor Nusbaum.

Across the globe are children of all ages who don't look like their father. Mostly they're brainy children with strange interests. Most of them live their lives oblivious to their heritage, but the superior ones are recruited to join their father on Al Amarja. Most of them have grown up as misfits, so recruitment is usually easy. In those cases where recruitment isn't easy, coercion works wonders.

Sex between Nusbaum's progeny is strictly forbidden, and thus available only to conspirators or secret lovers. None of the pregnancies have ever been allowed to come to term. Pregnancies among the progeny are artificially managed, but the conspirators switch sperm supplies to conceive children according to their own plans or desires.

Dr. Nusbaum is so busy that no one but his assistants ever see him. That's the story. Rumor is that the good doctor is dead, but the truth is worse. In secret quarters, his progeny are dutifully keeping him alive long past his shelf date. He's still fathering children around the world, although the supply of frozen sperm is running low.

Go to St Charon's...

- ...because that's where you wake up after a nasty turn of events. With any luck, the staff has taken a special interest in you and enrolled you in one of their many experimental programs. You might never know.

- ...to visit a friend who woke up there after a nasty turn of events.

- ...to bribe the staff for information about the "person" who was taken to the hospital last night.

- ...to learn 3rd-Millennium medicine from true geniuses.

Level: 1st–5th

GM: DISTRICT OF GOLD

Somewhere in Gold is the deal you need or the monetized dreams you can't do without.

"I KNOW SOMEONE WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET YOU WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR"

If someone can make a buck by helping a character, they just might. Somewhere in Swaps is just the sort of person who would know where to find the very thing that the character needs. Finding this merchant or go-between might mean venturing into Swaps and navigating the chaotic marketplace.

END-STAGE CAPITALISM

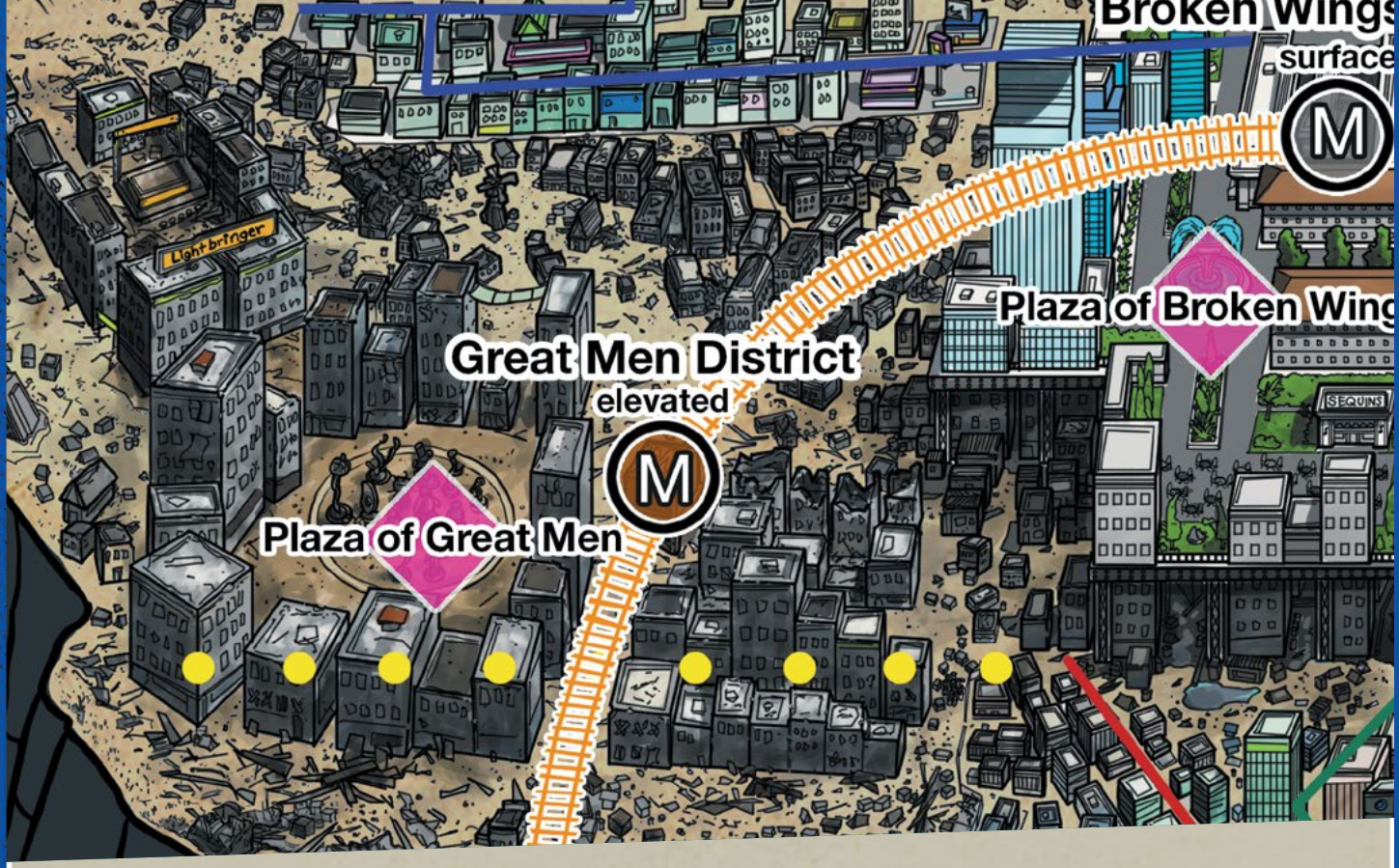
Perhaps the District of Gold is a natural place to reflect on how the for-profit, pro-corporation systems have atomized people and desecrated the planet. Here you can find people buying and selling furs made from endangered species, gorilla-finger kabobs, and derivatives connected to the increasing acidity of the world's oceans.

HIRING AN AGENT

A great way to put a barrier between the characters and what they want is to make them hire an agent. The specialist that they're looking for has a waiting list, and you need an agent to get on it, or to bribe one's way to the front of the queue. The agent shouldn't be planning to sell them out, and in fact the agent is in danger as well. Having the agent show up dead is a great way to get the players' attention.

SENSE OF SCALE

Truckload upon truckload of goods wend their way into Swaps and to various warehouses. From there, truckloads go out in all directions into the Edge and beyond. The streets are full of people walking to and fro to make deals, or porting goods here and there on hand trucks. Encountering this massive transportation of goods face-to-face emphasizes how big the city is and how much is going on that the character can't see and can't get their head around.



Great Men District

This district is marked by burned-out buildings and brain-fried denizens. The Glorious Lords serve as the local government, ruling with terror, ecstasy, and music. This district is the "bad part of town" in a town that's all more or less "bad." How do people live here, amid the chaos, the collapse of moral order, the broken-down infrastructure? Something is keeping this place alive, and the residents can tell you just what it is: terror, ecstasy, and the power of metal.

GO TO GREAT MEN...

- ...to lie low.
- ...to get totally metal.
- ...to find criminals, maniacs, merchants, artists, and prophets who are too out-there to go about their work anywhere else but here.
- ...if you're a criminal, maniac, artist, or prophet who needs the freedom to do what you do.
- ...to find a place to stay for free. The snobs in District of Gold might call it squatting, but it's the birthright of every human to live free. It's free at least until someone else comes along and squeezes you for what you're worth.

THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN GREAT MEN

Visitors see some things but not everything. A lot of what takes place in Great Men is just around the corner, out of sight.

Screaming Wave: Several times a day, day and night, some Lords in the Lightbringer Arena set up the Screaming Wave. They shatter the quiet with a blaring chord on the electric guitar and yell at the top of their lungs. Those who hear it take up the yell, and it spreads across the district. People stick their heads out of windows and stride out into the street to join in. Anyone with an ear trained to pick up human feelings can hear all sorts of things in the ruckus: pain, frustration, anger, grief, panic, submission, exultation, daring, vitality, and desire. Each screamer screams out one breath, and then the wave dies off. Rarely some joy or sorrow drives the Lords to scream multiple times in unison, but usually it's once. It's prohibited to accompany your screams by banging on tables or pots, but some people do. The screams create a physiological connection among the people in the district. Visitors are not expected to scream along, but they are welcome to do so. More than welcome, in fact.

Revolutionary Jam: Denizens sometimes stage musical performances, often with the most makeshift of instruments. They perform songs on street corners

or set up temporary stages in vacant lots. In a district ruled by the Glorious Lords, these events are known as revolutions or revolutionary jams. If the musicians are any good, the Lords hear about it and show up in a "Thunder Truck" with music of their own. Usually the Lords on the truck use their talent and amplifiers to blow away the amateurs and their music. Sometimes, however, the Lords make a show of conceding to the jawfish contesting them, and the audience hails the challengers as heroes. Everyone knows that it's just the Lords being good sports, and whether the revolutionary jammers win or lose, it's all in good fun. Everyone knows that the Lords rule, and smile when you say it. Revolutionary jams are staged by inhabitants of Great Men. If outsiders were to come and try it, well, come and try it yourself if you want to see what happens.

Shithead Lottery: Every so often, a bunch of reputable citizens conspire to frame an unwanted nobody, usually a young man and a troublemaker. The reputable citizens make false allegations against the victim and recruit strong, young volunteers to take hold of the "perpetrator." The mob drags the wretch to the Glorious Lords for "justice," and the Lords are only too happy to oblige. Typically, they find ways to include torture and abuse in their performances. Onstage executions, however, get them in trouble with the State, so those are rare or accidental.

AROUND GREAT MEN

This district has as much life and variety as any, but it's probably best to go looking for it during the daytime.

Contrast: Yes, the place is a bombed-out limbo, but it has pockets of transcendent beauty: a resplendent flower growing out of concrete; a preschool of the most damaged, happiest kids you've ever seen; a vacant lot repurposed as a garden for evocative sculptures made of junk.

Winds of Change: Itinerant casino, probably in an abandoned building when it shows up, but usually nowhere to be found.

Swaps and Thin Profits: Fixers and deal-makers skim plenty of profits off Great Men, experiencing special success with their "work for food" buses, which pick up hungry laborers on designated street corners.

The Temple's Humble Shrines: The Glorious Lords grudgingly allow small shrines and simple ceremonies. No singing allowed, but chanting is grandfathered in. These humble shrines are for the little people and elites who are slumming it. Some of the Lords are devotees of Cheryl, although they can't make a big deal about it.

PLAZA OF GREAT MEN

The broad, majestic plaza with tall buildings all around is a mute testament to what once was. Now the plaza is choked with street vendors, ne'er-do-wells, hustlers, and petty entrepreneurs. The buildings are in disrepair, although all of them seem to be occupied. In a grand circle around the plaza are striking statues, but instead of representing people, they represent tools and other artifacts.

Heavy metal music from the Glorious Lords usually plays in the background. Sometimes it's a live performance, but usually it's recorded. The music comes from the Lightbringer Arena, two blocks away.

Small Businesses: Facing the plaza are various small businesses, some of them without signage, and a few of them temporary: a pancake stand, a barber shop, a launderer and cobbler, a bar, a bodega, a clothing store (mostly stolen clothes), a hookah bar, and that sort of thing.

Lightbringer Arena: Two blocks down one street from the plaza, one can see a wide-open space with a large stage. Lucifer's Glorious Lords of Passion play here, and when they're not playing, recorded Lords music is usually playing. For concerts, the arena fills up, and fans climb to the upper stories of abandoned buildings to see better. ("Lucifer" means, roughly, "lightbringer.")

STATUES OF GREAT MEN PLAZA

Thirteen metal structures, plus an empty pedestal for a fourteenth, form a grand circle around the plaza.

Right Triangle: A massive right triangle with dimensional ratios of 5:4:3. A grid cut into the surface of the triangle makes it easy to see that the shortest side is 3 units and the middle side is 4. Marks along the hypotenuse show that it is 5 units long. This statue honors Pythagoras.

Auger: This hand-cranked working auger is an "Archimedes screw" that farmers use to port their grains up a slope and into a barn or silo. Free spirits like to fill the basin at the bottom with fiery coals, which look pretty as they are cranked up the auger, reach the top, and fall onto the pavement. This functional statue honors Archimedes, who showed that spinning in place can move things from one place to another, a paradox central to modern industry.

Strips of Ordained Knowledge: This statue seems to be a curtain of slightly curved strips, hanging parallel to each other, covered in ideograms. Anyone knowledgeable in Chinese can see that they are rough paraphrases of lines from the *Tao Te Ching*, such as, "To hell with learning. End your troubles already." This statue honors the unknown Chinese scholars who first instituted official state tests as part of a modern bureaucracy, long before anyone in the Muslim or Christian worlds imagined such a thing.

Null: It's a big black circle, or circlish square. Its surface is pockmarked with circles, dots, empty spaces, and modern zeroes. This statue honors the Indian sage Pingala and the original "zero." Only by comprehending nothing can the brain truly comprehend something. While the other statues typically feature random graffiti or get used to hang wet laundry, the people of Great Men intuitively leave space around Null. Confronting the Null is too much, even for the malcontents and deviants that treat the other statues as mere twisted chunks of metal. Visitors to the Plaza of Great Men may find themselves either absorbed in contemplation of the Null or driven away from it by an instinct that runs as deep as oxygen-powered life.

Bulging Face: This apelike human face bulges with desperate knowledge of its own sure demise. The bust features a serpent with a somehow human gaze wrapped tightly around the neck. This statue honors the first man to systematically cut off the oxygen to another man, whoever that might have been. Chimpanzees have no such knowledge, and they are forced to resort to brute force when they pile on their enemies and beat them to death. But some creature in our own human lineage learned the magic of strangling an enemy, and from that murderous technique came the Chinese knowledge of oxygen ("ch'i," or "ki" in Japanese), the Hebrew knowledge of the soul ("breath"), and the pagan knowledge of the spirit ("breath"). Only by being deprived of that which is most precious can we appreciate it.

Triple Faces: Three large, stylized faces are stacked unevenly atop each other, each facing a different direction. The smallest, at the top, smiles. The middle one grins or grimaces. The bottom one groans. This statue honors Hammurabi and his code, which divided humans into three classes: owners, freed men, and slaves. All progress in Western civilization is based on this 4000-year-old formula of exploitation.

Knocking Spheres: Two massive metal spheres hang from chains depending from a frame, the spheres touching, but just barely. With some work and maybe some help, you can pull one sphere back on its chain, and when you release it, it knocks into the other, starting a predictable back-and-forth sequence. This statue honors Isaac Newton and his laws of motion. It's also sort of funny to force someone you don't like between the spheres to test how the laws of motion work, vis-à-vis metal and flesh.

Double Helix, Deoxyribonucleic Acid: This intricate structure represents DNA, down to the level of individual atoms. DNA would be impossible without oxygen, the lopsided molecule of destruction and decay at the heart of each cell's nucleus. This statue honors James Watson and Francis Crick, although vandals repeatedly mar the base of the statue with the initials "RF" or the name "Rosalind Franklin."

Spear: This statue actually features a man, specifically a corpse with a spear sticking up out of his body. The man is naked, an archaic human with robust features, mouth open and expression blank. This statue honors not the first human to use a spear, but the first human to put it to its modern use, for murder rather than for hunting. No one knows who this genius was, but the sculptor was able to achieve psychic contact with him through sympathetic mimicry. A number of unfortunate men played the role of victim, in one reenactment after another, until the sculptor got it right.

Scales: This massive balance, with shallow dishes or plates suspended from opposite ends of a horizontal bar, represents the first man to propose the lie that two different things can be equal to each other. This lie is the foundation of all barter, exploitation, and taxation. One plate hangs lower than the other, perhaps because of damage the statue has suffered over the years.

Tablet of Ideograms: This massive tablet is no Ten Commandments. It features carved symbols of ox heads, vases of oil, and slave girls. Before writing proper, there were records of trade, including what we now call trafficking. All human literature derives originally from the need to record who owned whom.

Little Boy: This faithful replica of the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 is 6 meters long and 1.4 meters across. It is angled almost horizontally, as if it has just been released from the *Enola Gay* and is dropping toward a city of 350,000 civilians below. This statue honors US President Harry S. Truman, who ushered in the era of weapons of mass destruction.

Unknown Genius: This formless blob of metal, shaped as though it could conceal a human figure, honors someone unknown. Perhaps the sculptor created an actual statue and covered it with shapeless metal. No one knows for sure, but everyone has a theory.

Empty Pedestal: The last statue has not yet been erected. The plaque names it as "Unfinished Pyramid." When the Unfinished Pyramid is added to the collection, the array of statues will finally be complete, and its paranormal power will finally manifest. The Movers have halted the project, and they are ready to complete it when the time is right. The musical power of the Glorious Lords is a covert project of the Stitch, used in part to dampen the power of this site. When the Unfinished Pyramid is erected, we'll see which sort of "metal" is the stronger, the subliminal power of the statues or the raucous power of the Lords' music.

WINDS OF CHANGE

A pop-up casino to make other casinos blanch.

The proprietor of Winds of Change, Chick, can arrange for you to put anything you like at hazard: your youth, health, will, beauty, intelligence, or soul. With a little luck, you'll be the one to win what you need, not lose it. The cover is staggering, but for some people, Winds of Change is the only game in town. When it's operating, it's usually found somewhere in Great Men. You'll be surprised by who you meet here.

Winds of Change is hard to find, and lots of people will tell you it doesn't exist. It's just a way for the Glorious Lords to get outsiders to come into Great Men District with lots of cash. And the thing is, it probably doesn't exist, not right now in this reality anyway. Chick and her casino are probably in a neighboring reality, where her games go quite differently from how they go here. But she's real, and she'll be back in this reality soon enough. She's not from around here, but she doesn't exactly mean us any harm.

Stakes

Chikutorpl sets the stakes, although they are usually what the supplicants asked for. Players cannot back out after hearing the stakes. Or they can, but then they lose. Here are some examples.

- **Life for Life:** The loser dies. The winner no longer dies from the next thing that would have killed them. A great way to settle a vendetta.
- **Looks for Talent:** A tall, good-looking actor with no talent bets against a weird-looking guy with great talent.
- **Youth for Money:** Old men with great power stake their privileges against the youth of young men, perhaps workers of theirs that they've already exploited for labor. For many old men making these wagers, "youth" is a euphemism for being able to get it up.
- **Knowledge for Legs:** The crippled cloak can't operate like he used to and doesn't necessarily care if he forgets what he's done as a cloak, so the daughter seeking vengeance against her father's killers puts her legs on the line to get a chance at learning what the cloak knows about it.

How to Place Your Bets

Would-be bettors first pass through security provided by the Glorious Lords and pony up the substantial cover charge. They submit written petitions, and they wait as Chick, unseen, reviews them. Eventually, a number of supplicants are invited to enter the

GM: WINDS OF CHANGE

Games within games.

Rescue or Intervention: A GMC is headed to Winds of Change, where they might lose more than they can afford. Maybe it's an impressionable or desperate innocent who is being pressured by an exploitative villain. The characters venture into Great Men to find Winds of Change. It would be really hard to get inside if the others have already been invited in. Hopefully they're in the waiting area, while Chikutorpl reviews petitions from potential bettors.

Desperate Maneuver: What if a character is in such dire straits that they will risk a part of themselves to possibly gain what they need from someone else? Do you let them get into Winds of Change and have the character's fate determined by a straight-up flip of a coin? Do you let a character get the special resource they need to achieve their goals against tough obstacles, just for risking their own free will to do it? Sounds good to me. Make it a challenge to get into the casino so that the players have something to strive for, and then let the dice decide what happens. Maybe it's the sort of thing to have happen once per campaign.

Bodyguards: The characters accompany a GMC to Winds of Change as security.

As a Subculture: You can expand and deepen the characters' encounter with Winds of Change by adding a fan base devoted to the place. Chikutorpl invites certain devotees along for an evening's games, luring celebrities from the Island into the mix. The casino is an exclusive social scene.

Bughunt: Chikutorpl's games allow abusive people with power to exploit the vulnerable, getting their health and youth as well as their cheap labor. The profits support a predatory heavy metal band. An alien entity is screwing with people's lives! Who's going to stand up for humanity and do what needs to be done?

Chikutorpl at Large: As a rare exception, she might appear out in the Edge, taking in the nightlife, at an exclusive party or art event. She'll even do one of her games if her hosts can arrange the right bettors.

CHIKUTORPL AKA "CHICK"

THE BEST DEAL-MAKER IN THIS DIMENSION AND SEVERAL NEARBY ONES

Brown-skinned, slim, smooth-featured figure wearing an unassuming pantsuit and a Mardi Gras mask. She looks like "the average human," or really, "all humans averaged out." She comes across as a boyish woman, but in men's clothes she would look like a girlish man.

Not too long ago in an alternate dimension, an advanced race created Chikutorpl as the dimension's best negotiator and diplomat. She helped this factious race settle its differences, and the entities were finally able to set aside their conflicts and gaze on life straight, without the distractions of war. They killed themselves *en masse*. Chikutorpl remains, and she's here putting her abilities to some sort of use. She has no desire to help humanity on a grand scale, but she doesn't want to be bored, either.

DEAL MAKING, MIND-BLOWING (7TH)

REALITY SHIFTING, GODLIKE (6TH)

NOT BEING DEFEATED BY THE EARTHLINGS' BULLSHIT, GODLIKE (6TH)

DEFAULT, ELITE (3RD)

"casino," while the others receive back 90% of the cover. Fakers never get asked into the casino. The chosen ones are led into a vacant building with a lovely game room hidden inside. The room is full of casino games and has a full bar. Chick welcomes the bettors personally, and the room has a small staff provided by the Lords. There's chit-chat and drinks, and then, one by one, Chick arranges the wagers. Once Chick announces the stakes of their bet, the other bettors can place side bets, but only for smaller wagers. When any side bets are placed, Chick announces the contest, typically a classic casino game. Sometimes it's a series of games, such as a coin-flip tournament or a contest to see who gets a jackpot on the slot machine first. Some games have a little strategy to them, such as blackjack, but nothing like poker. After the wager is resolved, the exchange from loser to winner occurs. Bettors who have played are then expected to remain at the game room until all the bets are done.

Chick uses reality shifting techniques that mess with memories, causing people to accept the new situation as if it were normal. If a young man loses "the best years of his life" to an old woman, she becomes young again and he ages. Others tend not to make a big deal of these sudden changes, as if the man had always been older and the woman younger.

People try to cheat Chick, but that's the surest way to lose.

Level: 1st (exterior), 5th (the casino proper)

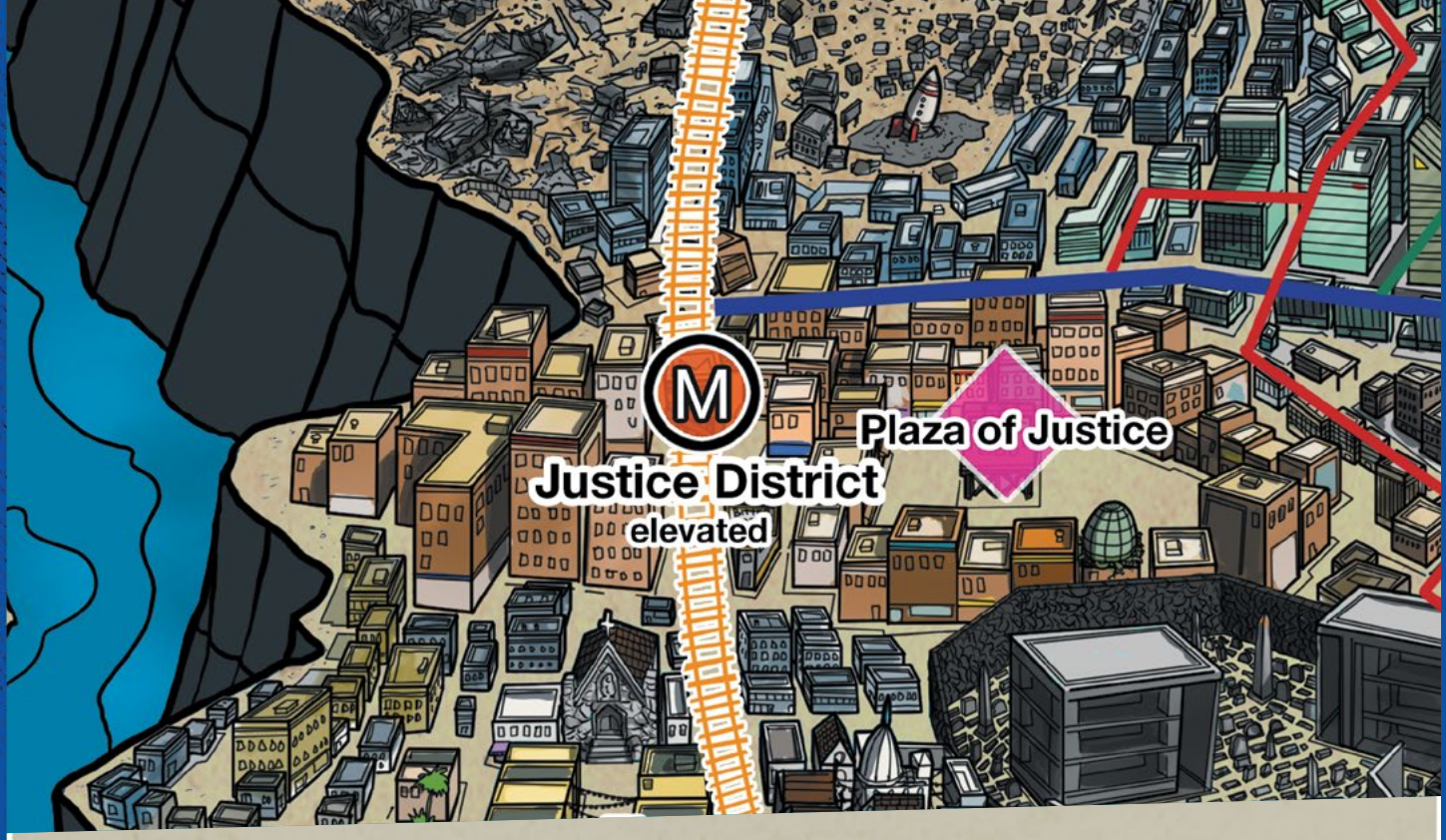
GM: GREAT MEN DISTRICT

This district might be the most wide-open in terms of what can happen here. Lucifer's Glorious Lords of Passion provide some degree of enforcement, but in general they're worse than the Dog-Faces. Great Men serves as a sort of no-man's-land where all sorts of malcontents, misfits, schemers, conspirators, criminals, fugitives, refugees, and zealots can set up shop with minimal interference.

Plaza Statues: Feel free to tell the players what the statues all mean out of character even if the characters are clueless. Don't feel the need to detail every statue on the players' first encounter with Great Men Plaza.

United by the Power of Metal: How do the people of Great Men respond to the Glorious Lords? The option that gives you the most play is that it's a mixed bag. Obviously, the Lords come up short in terms of long-term planning, security, rule of law, and customer service. But those failings are more interesting in play when the Lords actually do provide something that the denizens of Great Men appreciate rather than their rule being all bad. The Lords rule primarily through charisma and by arranging massive street fairs where the people can feel united. Portray the people of Great Men as emotionally connected to the Lords and proud to be part of the Great Men community.

Musical Dissidents: Especially if the characters end up as enemies of the Glorious Lords, let there be an underground resistance movement devoted to some other sort of music. Maybe it's sea chanteys, or maybe it's the sort of music that is going to resonate with one or more of your players.



Justice District

Justice has a well-earned reputation of being an artistic and cultural wasteland. Many of the city's workers bus or metro to work from Justice District. More or less willingly, they unite around Otto's Sports Club, the gang that keeps order. Lay people are also happy to pitch in when there's punishment to be doled out. Justice is a relatively secure place to live if you don't mind boring and if you fit in, as assessed by the Clubbers.

GO TO JUSTICE DISTRICT...

- ...to petition help from the Clubbers with some case or cause.
- ...to conduct business with someone who's "normal" and who likes the Clubbers.
- ...to meet potential hook-ups who think you're hot because you're a forbidden outsider.
- ...because you heard about this amazing salted caramel you can only get at this one shop.

HOME OF THE BRAVE

The people of Justice District get by pretty well, relatively speaking. Their homegrown vigilante enforcers, the Clubbers, are the pride of the district. There's not a lot of culture here, but there's more community than anywhere else in the Edge. Of course, for the wrong sort of people that means ***less*** community, and if the "wrong sort of people" skip Justice District, they are not missing much. They're missing bowling alleys, line dancing, sports stories, rummy, bake-offs, flower pots, and Valium. The fights at the Plaza are the only real draw.

Of course, the real story is more complicated than that. For one thing, the Clubbers are divided as to who they should be harassing and who they shouldn't. There are plenty of restaurants or bars that welcome outsiders, if you know where to find them. You can bet that teenagers from Justice get all over the place, despite their parents' efforts. And the Club leaders couldn't be where they are without being in league, more or less, with malignant powers that operate around Justice District.

AROUND JUSTICE

Justice District is unassuming and low-key. There's less of the dramatic displays you see in other districts: fewer big commercial signs, fewer ostentatious homes, and less outlandish art. Freaks still fly their freak flags here, but they do it inside, not on the stoop.

Al Amarja Today: The city's much-loved print newspaper (see page 61).

Bitter & Herb's: Bar owned by a famous mutant. See write-up on page 110.

Paradise Teahouse: A garden and luxurious café. See write-up on page 111.

Safe'N'Sound: A great security value for you and your business. See write-up on page 111.

The Temple, Janus, and Three-Legged Frogs: The shrines that are visible on the street are devoted to Janus, the two-faced god who guards entrances. Clubbers and their fans petition their higher powers at these shrines, and Clubbers feel empowered in their role as "door guardians." The shrines that are hidden from view are havens for nonconformists. Clubbers won't bully misfits when they're at a shrine. These shrines are devoted to three-legged frogs, or at least that's what one might gather from the iconography.

Investors from Swaps: Field agents from Swaps visit Justice to get a sense for things on the ground. Various investors at Swaps have a hand in all sorts of businesses, loans, wagers, and derivatives. The agents provide the reports and often recommendations to investors, while squeezing local contacts.

PLAZA OF JUSTICE

Instead of a fountain, the center of this plaza features giant iron-and-timber gallows, all tricked out with lights, pulleys at four points in the crossbeam, four trap doors side-by-side, a sound system, and a nearby control room. Around the gallows are open spaces for spectators. A little shrubbery lines the outer ring of the spectator area. Beyond that is a ring of sidewalk with a few handcarts, and then the traffic circle around the plaza. The handcarts are few and odd. The vendors have taken to trading stock with each other so that each can have a wider variety of products to offer any customer, so each handcart now is a mix of things: candy bars, kombucha, pornographic post cards, energy pills, and that sort of thing.

Hangings

By tradition, the State carries out its executions in the Plaza of Justice. In practice, they make a lot of money by auctioning off execution rights to various entertainment enterprises, but they still regularly hang condemned prisoners here in Justice.

The locals attend hangings with religious intensity. About an hour before the hanging, the shops and cafes along the plaza fill up. When the condemned man arrives, some in the audience try to touch him as he's marched to the gallows. Girls press charms against the condemned to charge them with good luck. Rumor has it that, just before he dies, a man can mystically impregnate a nearby woman with a "hope child," and that child will lead a charmed life.

When the event officially begins, the crowd sings the national anthem and mostly means it. Inevitably, somebody speaks about Our Martyred Leader. The condemned one is allowed to say last words, for which he is given a microphone held by the Justice Queen, winner of last year's beauty pageant. Later, people will gossip about those last words and what they might have meant, or what they should have been. For now, the execution goes on. The gallows is set up with pulleys, gears, and controls to give the operator in the control room lots of options.

Hangings produce a powerful sense of community. Plenty of people from outside Justice attend hangings here, and they are one time when outsiders feel like they're part of the family here in Justice District. Sometimes elders from Deadsville attend a hanging, but not often. Followers of Sir Arthur Compton (page 149) sometimes show up, and they give people the creeps.

Fights in the Plaza of Justice

More common than hangings are fights. The fighting takes place on the gallows platform and usually ends when one or both combatants tumble over the side.

Fights can be anything from adolescent hooliganism to punishment dished out by the Clubbers. For punishment fights, the operator opens the hatches, making it even easier for fighters to fall.

Dead Man's Wrestle: Two combatants are chained by their ankles to a central point on the platform. Each has a noose placed around their neck, with each noose attached to a different pulley on the crossbeam above. Then they fight. It's kind of like wrestling or boxing, except that if the opponent can get your noose off your head, you lose and must hang. Of course, if your opponent can strangle you with your noose, you also lose.

Jellyfish: This fight sometimes takes place when the State is hanging two people at once. The two combatants have hoods over their heads, hands tied behind the back, and nooses around their necks, as if about to be hanged, except with hardly any slack in the ropes. They are face to face, and when the bell rings, they start kicking each other. Whoever kicks worst, as determined at the moment by operator discretion, gets their rope shortened faster, while the other rope shortens more slowly. Both combatants stand as tall as they can. When one is pulled off the ground, their kicking becomes more frantic but less targeted, and eventually they go limp. The other contestant is declared the winner. The operator presses a button, and the winner's rope jerks up so fast that they are killed instantly.

Around the Plaza

Buildings around the plaza are modestly decorated, nothing strobing or multicolored. These businesses are the most notable. Drinking alcohol from some place other than Lou's Booze can get you in trouble with the Clubbers.

Touch of Death: This store celebrates death, and its specialty is items made from nooses used in actual hangings. You can get a whole noose that hanged someone, but that's several thousand dollars. Most customers buy strands peeled free from such nooses or charms with noose strands woven into them. Items of clothing worn by the deceased are also for sale, although it looks to the uninitiated like slippers and pajamas. Also for sale are small print-run booklets collecting last words of people hanged here. And for tween girls, little fairy charms to touch to the condemned to unlock the charm's fairy powers. Finally, for the real aficionado who wants a more authentic memento of a condemned man, discreet inquiries will get you what you want.

Lou's Booze: Lou Farrazi has a monopoly on alcohol in the Plaza, a deal he works with Otto's Sports Club. Televisions inside are tuned to all four Al Amarja Television channels (see page 60), with the sound of only one channel on at a time. Movers use this place as a hub for downloading subconscious messaging into their unwitting minions and sometimes getting the minions to meet and exchange some messages themselves.

The Last Supper: Groceries with a side order of religious enthusiasm. The proprietor loves Jesus, but only as an artistic icon or cultural image. All over the store are images of Jesus from different historical traditions and in different cultural expressions, from the clean-shaven "good shepherd" of early Christianity to ***Piss Christ***. The store offers a good selection of red wine, fish, and bread, but the pork isn't real pork.

The Archives: Up front are the sorts of books you might expect to see in a traditional place like Justice District. For the women, there's a good selection of bodice rippers and cookbooks. For the men, it's a lot of men's adventure plus a section about bad men who are magically turned into women and then gang raped. But if the owner is bored and she thinks the customer looks interesting, she'll take them to the back room, where they'll find William S. Burroughs, Philip K. Dick, J. G. Ballard, Franz Kafka, H. P. Lovecraft, Edgar Allen Poe, William Blake, and others. If a special customer needs a special book, there's a pretty good shot she has a copy. She has a copy of a weird little tabletop roleplaying game from 1992 called ***Over the Edge***, but if she ever looks for it, she's going to find it missing.

Neat Fit: Clothing, with a special selection of nooses for men.

SUZIE WATERSHED

UNNERVING REGULAR

Unevenly built woman with ashy brown skin and sparse brown hair, with features just enough out of whack that you can tell she's outside the norm. Her clothes are plain, but her necklaces and bracelets are showy.

She's a regular here at Bitter & Herb's, and her gait, stance, and speech are uneven enough that anyone can tell she's atypical. She makes a lot of her mutant identity and looks forward to bearing mutant children. Unknown to her, she's a POM, phenotype-only mutant. She's physically and mentally damaged, but she's not a mutant in the genetic sense.

INTUITING PEOPLE, COMPETENT (1ST): She has spent her life trying to figure out who's in, who's out, and how she can be in. She's OK at reading people, but she thinks she's better than she is.

GM: BITTER & HERB'S

Outsiders and insiders.

It's a great place if there's an actual mutant in the party. If not, it's a good place for the characters to feel sort of out of place.

Rendezvous: A suspicious GMC arranges to meet the characters at Bitter & Herb's even though none of those involved are mutants. "That way we'll stand out, and if you try anything funny, people will notice. Plus, it's a fun place to gawk at the freaks."

Trouble with Suzie: She can be a source of trouble in one way or another. She might get called out as a POM, or she might mistakenly accuse the characters of being fakes or saboteurs. She might get in over her head with something and need help.

Bitter & Herb Open Their Third Eye: Shit just got real.

BITTER & HERB

THE ISLAND'S MOST POPULAR MUTANT, LARGELY UNKNOWN

Stereotypically dressed bartender whose face looks like two identical faces merged halfway into one. An older man but still spry and swift. Dusky skinned and dark haired.

Forced into a sort of leadership role, Bitter & Herb has risen to the challenge, and his bar serves as an important social hub in the mutant community. He has good connections with Otto's Sports Club, although not with each and every Clubber.

When referring to himself, he uses alternately singular or plural, I or we. They say that sometimes their hemispheres are coordinating, and he's an I, but other times their hemispheres are whirring along independently, and they're more of an us. Other people refer to Bitter & Herb as he or they, based on whatever criteria they like, including how it sounds in a sentence.

Bitter & Herb is secretly proud of his mutation and glad that he didn't get burdened with the other mutations he sees in his bar. His two eyes are wide apart, with a third, always closed eye in the middle, where the left face's right eye would be, and vice versa. Below his eyes are two noses, one wide mouth, two chins, a double tongue, and too many teeth. A fold of skin runs down the midline of his throat and into his shirt. If anyone asks about what Bitter & Herb's mutation means for his "package," he makes the oft-heard joke that he pees in two urinals at once.

Their wife, a nonmutant, is pregnant. No one is saying anything, but everyone is waiting to see if the baby takes after his dad.

READING "ENERGY," WORLD-CLASS (4TH): They can disengage their brain hemispheres to allow one hemisphere to take in the world intuitively, with the extreme sensitivity to stimuli, unhindered by language. They reengage the hemispheres and, in a flash of intuition, they realize something about the "energy" in a room or person. This intuition is the dual brain's way of formulating what it knows and presenting it as a conscious perception. Bitter & Herb has used this skill for years to navigate the difficulties of running a mutant bar in the Edge. He knows about a lot of crazy shit that goes on under the surface, but he's really quiet about it. If someone taught him poker, he would crush it.

BARTENDING, EXPERT (2ND): Don't ask him to make a sandwich, though.

DEFAULT, COMPETENT (1ST)

BITTER & HERB'S

> Maybe you've heard it's for mutants, but everyone's welcome.

Mutants congregate here because the proprietor, Bitter & Herb, is a mutant himself. They make a point of welcoming everybody, but most of his customers are mutants or wannabes.

Mutant Troubles

The scene with mutants in the Edge is reflected here, at the most mutant-friendly bar on the Island. The most militant mutants love the place for its street cred and its long-standing status in the community. Still, they fault Bitter & Herb for welcoming phenotype-conforming persons and for not barring certain regressive members of the mutant community. Sometimes the hard-core mutants harass phenotype conformers, although only when Bitter & Herb is not in the room.

Some Clubbers are angry at the bar for the clientele that it brings in. They insist that they don't have anything against mutants, but some of the mutants are street predators — they say. If things flare up, the Club could switch and withdraw its support from Bitter & Herb. There are enough violent people on both sides of the issue that it could escalate into mutants rioting through Justice District.

Level: 1st

PARADISE TEA AND SMOKE

Walled garden and psychoactive café for any occasion.

It's a glass-domed building, filled with exotic plants, genetically engineered, psychically groomed, and astrally energized. Pleasing scents fill the air, and undetectable psychoactive chemicals waft through the garden. The staff serves tea or infusions, with light vegetarian fare. Each table has a unique arrangement of paranormal plants around it, and each entree or drink has a finely calibrated effect. Before or after the meal, the servers may provide thin cigars rolled from one or another aromatic herb. When people meet here for tea, their experience is shaped by the combinations of these chemicals in the air, food, drinks, and smoke. The effect can be romantic, personal, bonding, elevating, intellectually stimulating, disorienting, or spiritually ineffable.

The garden is expansive and so lush that you can see only a small part of it at a time. A stream runs through it, splitting into four smaller streams that branch out across the garden. Listening to the stream burble by, you might almost feel as though it is speaking to you in a language that your ears can't understand but that your spinal cord can. The chief gardeners are a man named Red and his wife, Livey. Visitors are much more likely to see one of these two gardeners working here or there than they are to talk to either of them. The garden produces remarkable amounts of produce, providing most of the ingredients for the patrons.

Most of the staff are more approachable, simple people in monkish robes, religiously devoted to their mission of providing for patrons. Some circulate to tend to visitors, while others busy themselves drying leaves, grinding nuts, steeping bark, and otherwise preparing their fare.

When Paradise is closed to the public, many of the staff are inside working away. Sometimes people nearby hear singing, although no one recognizes the language.

The secretive druids that run the Garden are envoys or ambassadors from the Green Mind, the dimension of plant consciousness. They are here in the Edge because this locus is a center of "animal carnage," their term for everything bloody and hostile in the animal kingdom. All across the world, the Green Mind has been trying to reach out to humanity with its message of vegetating and fruition, and the Garden is its greatest single effort anywhere on the globe. Conspirators have tried to infiltrate the circle, but plant magic has always been strong enough to convert would-be infiltrators into ardent servants of the Green Mind.

Level: 4th

GM: PARADISE TEA AND SMOKE

The word "paradise" means enclosed garden. Yahweh's garden in Eden was his personal paradise, with Red ("Adam") as its gardener and Livey ("Eve") as his helpmate. You can imagine that three thousand years ago, desert nomads would think of an earthly "paradise" as heavenly, and you can imagine people from the mean streets of the Edge thinking much the same thing of this paradise. It's up to you just how thickly you want to lay on the "Garden of Eden" allusions.

Green Apocalypse: To make Paradise Teahouse a mighty conspiracy, have its great, hidden power reveal itself, perhaps as the characters investigate, and perhaps in a climactic upheaval. All across the Edge, seemingly innocuous ivy, weeds, and moss are actually agents-in-place. When the time is right, they release their psychoactive compounds into the air. While cagey humans can avoid the effects with gas masks or such, many of the compounds affect the rats, cats, dogs, and crows that live in the streets. Meanwhile, countless well-placed humans unwittingly carry soul-control metabolites, placed there months or years ago when they visited Paradise Café. The servants of the Green Mind rise up amid the chaos to take control of the Island and wrest control of the ***axis mundi***.

SAFE'N'SOUND HEADQUARTERS

"We've got your back."

The compound looks like a post-apocalyptic detention center, plus a fortress, with a playground thrown in. Judging by the size of the place, the total force of Safe'N'Sound looks like it's in the low three digits.

Level: 2nd–3rd

One way or another, a trip to Justice is bound to be a change of pace.

PORTRAYING THE CLUBBERS

In the vicious city of the Edge, the gutsy, simple people of Justice take matters into their own hands. They are the primordial evil of tradition and limits. As the underdogs, on the other hand, the Clubbers might seem to deserve the sympathy of the players. You have a couple options in terms of how to screw with that. At the same time, you'll decide how to portray the civilians of Justice. To what extent do they adore the Clubbers or fear them?

Worse Than Inhuman: If the rest of the Edge shows you what terror and horror are possible when people abandon the limits of human decency and good sense, the Clubbers show you the terror and horror that are possible when enforcing decency and good sense morphs into vicious violence dished out on all those who step across some imaginary "line." The players first find Justice to be a blessed reprieve from the degradations of the Edge. Soon enough they recoil from brutal violence inflicted on those who violate one or another socially-constructed norm. This option allows players the moral clarity of rejecting the enforcers and their strict codes.

Evil That's Tolerable? If the rest of the Edge frustrates the human desire for security and flourishing, perhaps Justice offers the characters the break they need, where legitimate human needs are honored — mostly. Of course, it's highly unfortunate when nonconformists are beaten or killed, but overall Justice District provides the most secure and humane place for regular people to live their regular lives. If you coax your players into siding with violent men who use baseball bats to wreck the bones and brains of "deviants," is that going too far? Honestly, I can't say.

Mixed Bag: Maybe the players are torn between the light and dark sides of Justice. On one hand, here they can find regular people raising families and sharing cups of sugar, neighbor to neighbor. On the other, certain forms of artistic or erotic expression are likely to get you clubbed. Maybe the characters can connect to that which is healthy while opposing that which is bigoted. That's a big ask, and you'll probably find that the players would rather turn a blind eye to injustice, either by telling themselves that the bullies with the bats are not their problem or by turning their backs on the district altogether.

Nothing Special: Their public image is that they defend basic human goodness, but honestly, they're just one more organized team of armed, violent people who consider themselves to have authority over others. The leaders attend galas hosted by criminals operating in Justice District and beyond.

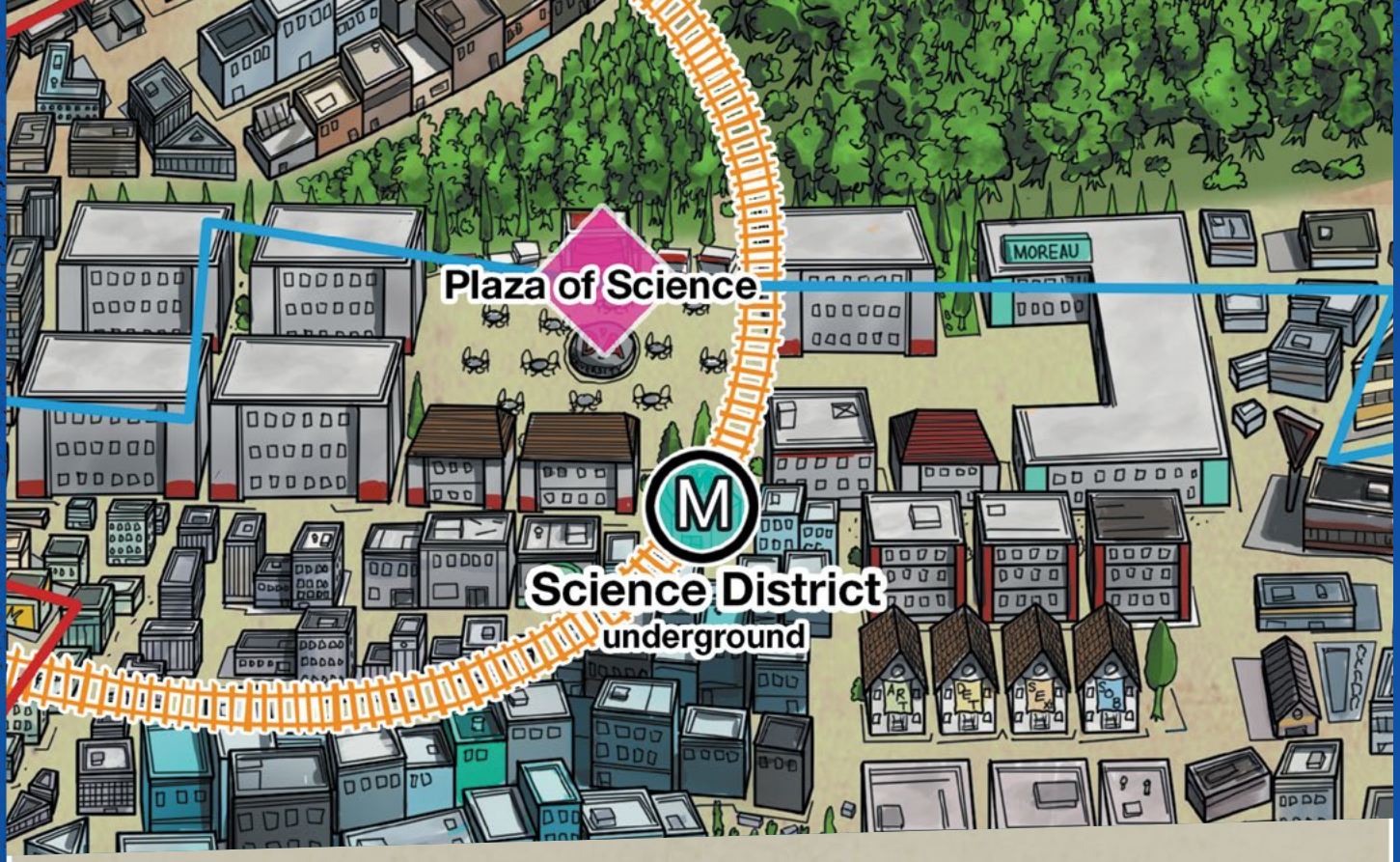
Targets: Choose any or all groups on this list to be targets of the Clubbers' hostility: riff-raff, street people, drunks, intellectuals, street walkers, gamers, gender nonconformists, religious minorities, atheists, losers, and the mentally ill. The people of Justice represent a mix of ancestries, so the Clubbers don't pick on people because of their skin color. Clubbers are happy to harass anyone promoting "cultural Marxism." They don't know what cultural Marxism is supposed to mean, so they can accuse just about anyone of promoting it.

ATTENDING A HANGING

There might be all sorts of paranormal reasons for characters to need to attend a hanging, especially if it's the hanging of someone in particular. For starters, there's death magic, vendettas, soul capture, scapegoating, and necromancy. Maybe it's not the player-character with this special angle, but the PCs are looking for a GMC who has a special reason to attend the hanging, such as a young woman who wants to mystically conceive a "hope baby" by the condemned man. If you give the PCs a reason to stay through a hanging, it's an interesting social event for the characters to get caught up in.

FIGHT RESCUE

Someone valuable to a character or to their org has been sentenced to fight a much bigger opponent on the gallows. If the character can trick their way to this person before the fight, they can dope them to give them the edge they need to win.



Science District

D'Aubainne University is the heart of Science. It's also a constant source of hard currency income and of deviant geniuses with out-of-this-world technology. Around the University is the student district, with more ex-students than students, all told. The Peace Force patrols the district, University Security can be found well beyond the university's campus, and the Student Watch, armed with halberds, makes a show of patrolling, as well.

GO TO SCIENCE...

- ...to meet intellectuals, scientists, professors, and other experts. Steer clear of the "independent scholar" who hangs around the university and is first in line at every Q&A.
- ...to participate in large or small events on campus. The engineering fair is not as dangerous as it used to be.
- ...to get your "samples" analyzed. Possibly by a janitor who really knows what they're doing, even though they're a janitor.
- ...to hear a guest speak about a topic that relates to one's secret identity.

THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN SCIENCE

"Lernen Macht Frei": Heretical geniuses and misunderstood dreamers from around the globe come here to find homes. Here they can find other intellectuals who will listen, rather than rejecting them with the knee-jerk reaction of the unenlightened. Here they can get approval for their so-called "unethical" experiments. In Science, philosophers engage in productive debates on topics that are forbidden elsewhere. With all this forbidden knowledge, it's no wonder that Science District has such advanced science and technology.

Rats and Super Rats: Rats of various sizes and colors scuttle around this district. They are the spawn of countless experimental animals that escaped on their own, were liberated by activities, or were manumitted down the toilet when their service to human knowledge was complete. Now these exotic and unnatural lineages have merged their genomes and biomes, creating what everyone jokingly calls the "super rats." Ha ha, it's not funny.

Students and ex-students make a game of feeding rats. Plenty of rats are cute, white, and furry. Why not train them to come get food? Why not feed them LSD? Why not alert them to food with alpha-wave strobes from your dream machine? Why not force them into fights over booze? The possibilities are

endless. If the right people knew about these stunts, they'd be alarmed about the possible repercussions. As it is, it's just a creepy part of youth culture in Science District, and no one appreciates the danger.

Rats from Science District get sold around the Island as pets and sometimes crossed with special breeds. You know how rats are; they screw a lot. Science District has the weirdest rats, but DNA is information and it wants to be free. Super-rat DNA is everywhere. When they take over, let's hope they create a world that's as good for us as our world has been for them.

AROUND SCIENCE DISTRICT

Over the decades, "the U" has spread, contracted, burned, and rebuilt. Previous administrations have made private arrangements to lease away various university properties, while legal maneuvering sometimes allows the University to acquire attractive properties here and there around the district. As a result, a University classroom, office, dormitory, laboratory, or laundry facility might be found just about anywhere in the area, and private businesses or even residences are situated in former university buildings on campus.

Likewise, who is a student and who isn't? If someone thinks about life's Big Questions, isn't one a student, even if they're just some slob hanging out around the school, graduated but not emotionally ready to move on?

Al Amarja Television Station: Broadcasting on four channels. See "Al Amarja Television," page 60.

Dmitri's Fix-It Shop: Personal service from a "wizard" at fixing things. See write-up on page 119.

Morrie's Arcade: Mostly it's regular old weed, speed, and shimmering arcade games, but some of these games are customized, with graphics that slip into your subconscious and haunt your dreams.

Spee-D Delivery: For everyday delivery needs and your special delivery needs.

Vivisection Cinema: Extreme, outlandish, and extraordinary films. See write-up on page 117.

Conditional Investment Funding from Swaps: Dealmakers from Swaps offer investment opportunities in university science projects. Brokers sell derivatives on scholarly work, with investments that pay off when the professors succeed with new projects and other investments that pay off when they fail. Professors mortgage away their future discoveries to raise funds for their research. In competing for investment backing, professors viciously sabotage each other, but it's all on the down low, and officially everyone is just in it for the love of knowledge.

The Temple's Half-Empty Chapels: The University takes a dim view of the Temple's shrines. No doubt the soulless empiricists of the Academy feel threatened by the Temple and the spiritual way of knowing that it offers. The Temple hosts a few chapels in the area, but the adoption rate is low. Eventually these chapels descend into chaotic interpersonal struggles involving narcissistic leaders, wishful thinking, and date rape. Discredited chapels get shut down, but the Temple keeps sponsoring new ones. There's a new one opening up around the corner, and it's going to be different.

PLAZA OF SCIENCE

The plaza is wide open, with a large stage for speech performances during the day and video projection at night. Students read their own poetry or call for the overthrow of postcolonial neoliberalism and the hegemony of elitist oligarch enablers. Various student-produced talk shows run on the screens, as well as video art and university announcements. Once there was an impressive statue of Pallas Athena in the center of the plaza, but it was pulled down during the faculty unrest of the Seventies. The statue, which is mostly intact, is in a warehouse somewhere awaiting restoration.

You itch it, they sell it: Various petty vendors around the plaza offer students coffee, candy, baked goods, booze, meds, and hand jobs. These cafes, bars, handcarts, and grub trucks attract students day and night. Graduates who have done nothing with themselves make up a substantial portion of the crowd.

Thorvald Administration Center: Many visits to the University start with a visit to the Administration Center for permission and guidance. It is modern, clean, and conspicuously luxurious.

Briggs Hall of Engineering: This imposing building of steel and glass houses the university's engineering department and most of the big engineering projects. Thanks to new safety measures, it's been a long time since the last multiple fatality.

Zefilli Hall of Fine Arts: An airy building with a sweeping mural covering most of three sides of it. Student artwork displayed in the halls is mostly accomplished, if disturbing.

D'AUBAINNE UNIVERSITY

"Lernen Macht Frei"
—Study makes you free, motto of D'AU.

Every state needs educational institutions to prepare workers for government work and for usefulness in the free market. Although hundreds of years old, the university has undergone such thorough modernization that it is proud to exclusively use its new name: D'Aubainne U.

Bitches, Pigs, Bears, and All Other Animals at Moreau Veterinary School: The largest and most active scientists are in Moreau Veterinary School, the most prosperous and exclusive school at the U. Moreau's policy defines humans as animals and thus within their field of study, albeit with a more realistic and practical approach toward their subjects than those found in the medical school.

Schools and departments that overlap with Moreau are at a disadvantage. Biology, medicine, and psychology all suffer because the best professors and students gravitate toward Moreau. Also feeling a pinch are business, divinity, and history.

Student Life: University authorities monitor student groups to ensure that students derive maximum social value from them and never engage in behavior that's deleterious to human flourishing. There's no hazing or bullying. Also, pigs fly.

Security and the Campus Watch: By tradition, the University tends to its own security. Boring legwork is handled by University Security, a professional, well-equipped cadre. The more famous security force, however, is the Campus Watch.

The Watch consists primarily of students, but alums and other volunteers are also welcome. As guaranteed by centuries-old tradition, the students are allowed to arm themselves with actual weapons — specifically halberds, like those that the Vatican's Swiss guards use. Members of the Watch carry these halberds practically as badges and impractically as weapons. A Watch patrol is usually a number of boisterous young men, out to protect their turf and to cadge free grub from establishments on their route. Patrols itch to spot outsiders and potential troublemakers. Visitors to campus, especially those who stand out, are likely to face questioning and possibly hazing.

Membership in the Watch is coordinated loosely, and from time to time patrols are dominated by various interest groups, such as radical feminists, extreme yogis, or pathetic losers. Lately, mutant students have taken to staffing many of the patrols, and they use their authority to challenge phenonormativity and to raise consciousness about phenotypic diversity.

Paranormal Investigation: Since unlicensed paranormal power is against the law, professors who study the paranormal have to have the State's subjective confidence and official license. Odds are, there are a couple cloak scholars doing surreptitious research, leveraging the licensed research that other scholars are undertaking.

Level: 0th–5th

Philosopher's Stone: A small circle of fringe scientists with half-secretive plans. They are using epigenetics and ch'i-saturated hormones to turn "lead" (the semi-evolved human self) into "gold" (the New Human). Within the circle, there remains some disagreement as to the characteristics of the New Human. Psychic powers? Greater emotional intuition? Greater physical strength and improved personal endowments? Some of their research involves locating exceptional human specimens, such as mutants, and trying to discern what makes them exceptional. Dr. Thomas Rambeau, a geneticist at Moreau Veterinary School, is the public face of the Philosopher's Stone, or at least its most talkative member.

Go to D'Aubainne University...

- ...when you need to find the science lab where they are working on the only sort of science that can deal with your...condition.
- ...when it is home to the secret science lab that can thwart your secret powers, and something needs to happen to it.
- ...if you're a cutting edge, unorthodox neuroscientist on the verge of advancing human consciousness to the next stage, and really the Moreau Veterinary School is the best place for that sort of work.
- ...to consult their physical archive of obscure texts, accessible to the right researcher.
- ...to consult an archive of human remains.
- ...to disrupt the public appearance of a university figure, one who's an asset of the Enemy.
- ...if you derive comfort from hanging out around university students and sort of pretending that you still are one.

University Campus

From the Plaza, the University spreads in several directions, split up into departments, colleges, and schools. Moreau Veterinary School has expanded and is now the most prominent school in the organization.

Alabaster Auditorium: Used for speeches, concerts, and ceremonies. Run by efficient staff that keep people in line.

Alpha Rho Tau Sorority House: Art majors and other sensitive types. See write-up on page 116.

Chambers Memorial Theater: An aging building with lots of strange, dark passages, doors in surprising places, trap doors, and rooms filled with old props and mannequins. It's haunted, or might as well be. They're currently presenting *Macbeth*.

Delta Epsilon Theta Fraternity House: Nihilists and poetically troubled souls. See write-up on page 117.

Sigma Epsilon Xi Sorority House: Witches and alphas. See write-up on page 117.

Sigma Omicron Beta Fraternity House: Ripped, shaved, sweaty athletes with great asses. See write-up on page 117.

Student Union: Food, books, games, and sundries for sale, with social areas. Owned and managed not by the school but by a union to which all students belong. They keep files on faculty and administrators.

Alpha Rho Tau, a.k.a. A-Rho

> "Art imitates life — and death."
> —A-Rho catchphrase.

This sorority is forbidden by University authorities. In addition, a clear respect for civilized sensibilities demands that any women unworthy of Sigma Ep not redouble their shame by forming a lesser sorority. Yet, there they are.

These women know that, in a world crushed by capitalism and distorted by manipulative elites, art is the path of liberation. They conduct guerrilla art campaigns — graffiti, street theater, and evocative juxtapositions of everyday objects and people. Former

GM: ALPHA RHO TAU

Characters often have unusual abilities that could make them useful to guerrilla artists, and former A-Rho women could show up anywhere to recruit them. With the right common enemy, characters could find common cause with A-Rho and get a cadre of deadly serious artists on their side.

Guerrilla artists are perfect allies for certain tasks. If the characters want to sway public opinion, defame someone, spread secret codes or subliminal messages, or draw out some supernatural force or entity, you can probably squint a little and see how guerrilla artists could give the characters just the support they need. So then the challenge is proving oneself to the A-Rhos and earning their respect and assistance.

A-Rho might end up working with Onwudiwe Zest (see page 82), or at cross-purposes to him.

pledges of A-Rho now hold positions high and low across the Island. They secretly retain contact with the sorority and help the members with their audacious art projects.

A-Rhos have been keeping a low profile for decades, sometimes even non-existent low. Now, however, they're actually pretty well positioned with supporters in the business world, the art scene, and the University administration. The next crackdown on A-Rho activity might spark an uprising.

Sorority House Level: 1st

Delta Epsilon Theta, a.k.a. Deptha

"Death is the mother of beauty..."
— Wallace Stevens,
"Sunday Morning," 1923

Those who know that everything means nothing are free to do anything. These young men have figured everything out, and now they devote themselves to servicing Underground clients that most criminals won't touch. They dispose of a lot of hazardous waste — cheap. As students, they have a number of traditional rights and privileges that they exploit. Deptha has alums planted throughout the State bureaucracies and Swaps to help the frat's projects. In public, Depthas put on a show of nihilism, such as determining by chance which among them gets their finger chopped off. In private, they are the worst goddamn gossips, always concerned about who's hanging out with whom. It is against the fraternity's charter to fraternize with Sigma Ep girls, and no right-thinking witch would court with the malevolent energy of a Deptha boy.

Frat House Level: 0th–3rd

Sigma Epsilon Xi a.k.a. Sigma Ep

"Sex is the point of contact between man and nature, where morality and good intentions fall to primitive urges... This intersection is the uncanny crossroads of Hecate, where all things return in the night."
—Camille Paglia,
Sexual Personae, 1990

Sigma Ep still has a lot of its "special something," but their magic has waned. These days they have enough mojo to throw one blowout Goddess party once a year or so, when the moon is right.

For sure there isn't going to be another hybrid meta-witch in the sorority, like there was thirteen years ago. That sure was a problem, but everyone agreed there was no way they would let it would happen again.

Sorority House Level: 1st–2nd

Sigma Omicron Beta a.k.a. Somba, Sigma Om

"The Proper Sport of Mankind is Man"
— Fraternity Motto

These well-muscled, well-oiled, scantily clad young men are heroes on campus and heartthrobs across the Edge. They're athletes, and their favorite sport is wrestling, often competing against each other in crowd-pleasing tournaments. Before each match, wrestlers psych each other out by each reading an original poem. These virile young men adore masculinity. They take on chesty girlfriends as fashion, but the true love connection happens in the men-only locker room. In public, they act like they are God's gift to humanity, and businesses pay tribute to them, usually in the form of free alcohol and a tolerance for property damage. Members that graduate are squeezed out of the scene as old and gross, but at least they'll have the memories.

Frat House Level: 1st–2nd

VIVISECTION CINEMA

"Cut!"

This cinema plays the Island's most avant-garde, esoteric, and transgressive films. The place is well-known, with both street-cred and intellectual cachet. One day, all this attention and success will cause the cinema to turn into a hollow shell of its former self, but for now, it has retained its soul.

The movies are a mix from around the world, most of which have been edited locally. The local movie industry provides a substantial minority of the features. Local movie makers pirate other peoples' movies, splice them together, and provide original elements through CGI or some actual filming. Every movie screened here is something not suited for general audiences for one reason or another: violence, sex, philosophy, art style, intellectual depth, language, or something.

The snack bar serves predominantly fermented, moldy, pickled, or otherwise processed foods: cheese, pickles, kimchi, sausage, etc. The pharmacy serves various medications to enhance the viewing experience.

Cut-Ups Connection: Marla Lapstartle (see page 164), a Cut-Up, is a tireless volunteer at Vivisection, helping artists cut and recut their work. Her non sequiturs also appear in print in the customer-facing copy found on posters, signs, etc. Her work creates subtle shifts in perceptions, which is to say subtle shifts in reality, although the results are so subtle that even she is never sure what they are.

FILMS AT VIVISECTION

Films rotate in and out. These films might happen to be in rotation just now.

Mr. Hurt: Scenes of animals and people getting bumped, then hurt, then wounded, then killed. Every time the cartoon face of Mr. Hurt flashes on the screen, everyone punches the shoulder of a neighbor. The music and action build and fade, build and fade. Many viewers find the experience transformative, especially the ones on mescaline.

Our City: Scenes from around the Edge, including fights, fires, and car crashes, as well as lovely scenes of architecture, animals, plants, and people. The longer you've lived here, the more sense the whole thing makes. Newkies can't pick up the subliminal messages transmitted about the Edge and its people, so they find it pointless.

Thanateros: Clips from many Filipino films, spliced into a frenetic mélange, with an electronic soundtrack and dubbed over with a language that no one recognizes. Every couple of months, the film changes, but the changes are not announced. It's mostly graphic sex and violence, as suggested by the title. Word in the Edge is that everyone has to see it once, and even if you hate it, you'll be glad you saw it.

Their World: Mediocre nature film but shot with special microphones and video cameras. The video encodes light on the infrared and ultraviolet levels, as well as sounds that are too low-pitched or high-pitched for human ears. The custom projectors play the video at a higher rate, preserving the illusion of motion for anyone who happens to see things faster than average, and it plays the light that would be outside the range of a normal, human projector. The custom speakers placed behind the screen play sound above and below the human range. People bring their cats, dogs, and stubwing crows, which usually seem more interested in Their World than they are of any other video. Shockheads, sensitized by Blue Shock (see page 64), come for their own amusement, since other movies fall flat for them. A number of boring posers also attend showings, marveling out loud at how beautiful it all is even though they can't appreciate it.

GM: VIVISECTION CINEMA

This movie theater is a great place to let a character see something that changes them forever. Maybe they see a movie advertised whose title shows that the creators knew secrets that the character knows, and they have to come see the movie for themselves. Or maybe they're watching a "random" movie for a lark, and the film includes scenes with special meaning for the character. The Midnight Ecstasy film is a good candidate for a "magic" movie.

Crappy Movies: If you want to satirize a movie or series of movies that you think is crappy or that represents hateful corporate hegemony, Vivisection would benefit from you inventing something along those lines and giving the place your personal touch.

Story Arc — Revivifying Vivisection: The characters have come to Al Amarja to rescue the cinema after it has lost its mojo. They have great plans for the films they can show, curate, and maybe produce. Maybe they're setting up some sort of mind control program. You can be sure that other forces also want to use Vivisection for their own purposes, or maybe just destroy it.

Midnight Ecstasy: Midnight on Friday night, they show an untitled film provided by the Temple of the Divine Experience. The lights stay on in the house, and the audience participates in the film by playing out their part in an elaborate ritual. The film features songs, sex scenes, and fights, all interspersed with scientific clips of molecules, cells, tissues, and galaxies. Different audience members play out special roles in the ritual, and some have long lines that they deliver from memory. Usually people attend in small groups, and different groups get different things from the ritual.

Cannibal Cup: Actually, they're never going to show this one again, ever. If you really want to see it, you'll have to ask around.

Level: 1st–2nd

DMITRI'S FIX-IT SHOP

The dusty pane glass window of this establishment is a poem in a box, a surreal collection of mismatched items that almost want to tell a story. The items behind the glass are laid out on a worn green piece of felt. Each is perfectly ordinary in its humanity — an Art Deco hair dryer, the innards of a pencil sharpener, a chunky, battered olive drab military handset from one of the wars. Dmitri repaired each of these objects, but their owners never came for them. He arranges them each day, adding and subtracting bits as he works in the back of his shop repairing anything one cares to drop off. All of them work. Some of them work in ways they were never intended to. In fact, some of them perform miracles of technology and science.

DMITRI VATSAVOS

DEVOTED TINKERER WHO'S BETTER THAN HE EXPECTS

Gray-haired old Greek man with old burn scars on the left side of his head. His clothes are worn and patched, and he wears a leather apron with tools tucked into its pockets.

Always having had a knack for the internal workings of things, Dmitri spent long childhood summers assisting his uncle at a watch shop on his native isle of Crete. His affinity with watches soon grew to anything mechanical and Dmitri became known as "Little Hephaestus" in his small town. People from the entirety of the island, as well as foreigners, came to have Dmitri fix the seemingly unfixable. One day, a patron of sorts appeared and invited him to Al Amarja. The item to be repaired, the man said, was simply too big to transport.

In fact, the item in question was not repaired by Dmitri, for it never functioned in the first place. It was merely the prototype of a mad inventor. Yet, when Dmitri set to "fix" it, the invention sprung from his hands. He was paid handsomely and decided he liked the island enough to set up shop and address the unique challenges brought to him here.

While Dmitri can, indeed, fix anything — he sometimes does more. An item left to his ministrations will function in the way it's supposed to, but some repaired items evidence other features. Your electric toothbrush may vibrate with the precise frequency of secret numbers stations AND decode them. A cell phone left for his repair comes back as if mint from the box, except it sometimes receives calls from the dead.

Dmitri, for his part, is unaware that he adds such abilities to common items. Whether his subconscious is at work on a deeper level than the rather simple man has access to, or if he is the conduit for a powerful Mover think tank, is unknown. A graying, fiftyish gay man wearing a threadbare tweed coat and rimless spectacles, no one would suspect this individual of making the next great leap in technology...and yet he just might.

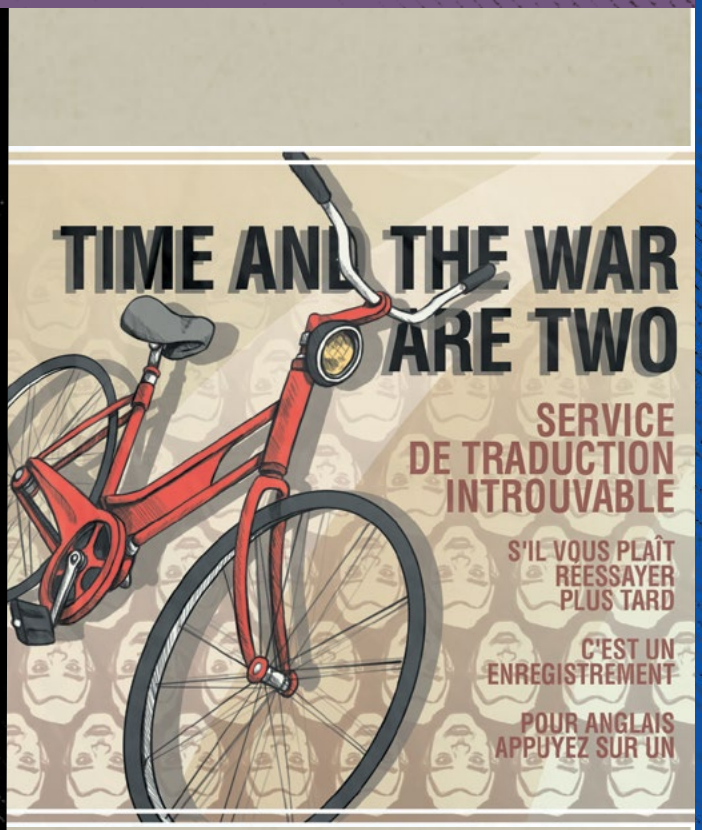
Of course, this curious ability is something conspirators might well covet. If Dmitri hasn't come to the attention of the Movers, or the Stitch, or the Garbage Men, or whoever, he might soon...and the player characters might inadvertently lead them to poor Dmitri.

GM: DMITRI'S FIX-IT SHOP

Dmitri is a seeming bystander in a world weirder, and larger, than he'd want to conceive. The PCs are quite likely to grasp Dmitri's rare abilities before the repairman himself does. Various conspiracies could lead here, or the PCs might acquire one of his artifacts, either from a cloak, some mysterious body — as one does — or by dropping one of their own items off. Dmitri's role is not to explain these odd devices he makes. As noted, he's not even conscious of them. So, simply by tracing a device to Dmitri, the characters encounter a larger mystery.

How is it this man makes things which, by all rights, should not exist? They are likely to suspect the man himself of concealing his secrets, but he has no idea. However, if the PCs are seen poking about his shop time and again, other conspiracies may get the idea that the PCs know Dmitri's secrets. Such is the curious way of the paranoid world.

The GM can lean on Dmitri's desire to stay out of the conspiracy business as well. He's "the man who knew too much," a relative innocent gifted with a power he neither knows he has nor understands. How will the PCs deal with that? Dmitri might be able to make, or have made, a fringe device nearly perfect for their needs, but what happens when they need it fixed? How far are they willing to drag this man into the decidedly complex, even mad, life of Al Amarja?



IORDAIN SENESCALL

NON-EUCLIDEAN STATE ARCHITECT (WHICHEVER WAY YOU READ THAT IS CORRECT)

Woman of African-American and South Asian ancestry. Wears a short skirt and a long jacket, has cornrow braids, and dark sunglasses. She always has headphones in her ears (whether or not they're connected to anything) and a drafter's pencil somewhere on her.

Iordain wasn't born on the Island but was sent over to study Al Amarjan architecture by the US Army Corps of Engineers. This resulted in her dying and becoming not-dead-mostly several times in the course of demolishing, building, and re-designing various facilities in the Arms and Science Districts. Her brain is now fully embedded in these buildings: Her walls may not have visible ears, but they're definitely listening. Also, sometimes, they may have visible ears.

Obviously, she is fully employed, sanctioned by, and loyal to the State, and as such, may teach classes sometimes. If you can find the classroom.

THEY NEVER BUILT THEM LIKE THIS, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Iordain effortlessly finds her way through buildings that make no spatial sense and can probably map and describe them flawlessly. Her description might even make sense to a lay person. If you've been in a building she designed or worked on, she could probably hear you, provided she had a reason to listen. She can get contractors to give honest estimates, rather than defaulting to Two Weeks.

LOYAL SERVANT OF THE STATE, EXPERT (2ND): Iordain has the skills, abilities, and desire to enforce the Will of the State, however that manifests.

PROFESSOR X, COMPETENT (1ST): Shows up to scheduled classes most days; can be a source of information on topics related to University functions for her department. Such as it is.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

GM: SCIENCE DISTRICT

Plenty of *Over the Edge* players have personal experience attending a university and possibly living in a university district. Milk it.

MAD SCIENTIST NEEDS ONE-IN-A-BILLION MUTANT

Researchers at DAU have arranged for a player-character to come to the Island, either overtly as a visiting scholar or covertly as an unwitting subject of paranormal investigation.

NIGHTMARE OR DREAM COME TRUE

By default, the student body on campus is like any other student body but weirder. If you want to give the student body more character, depict them as a vile exaggeration of everything that's really wrong on university campus. Alternatively, depict them as the sort of ideal student body that the players could only dream about.

OPEN MIC NIGHT

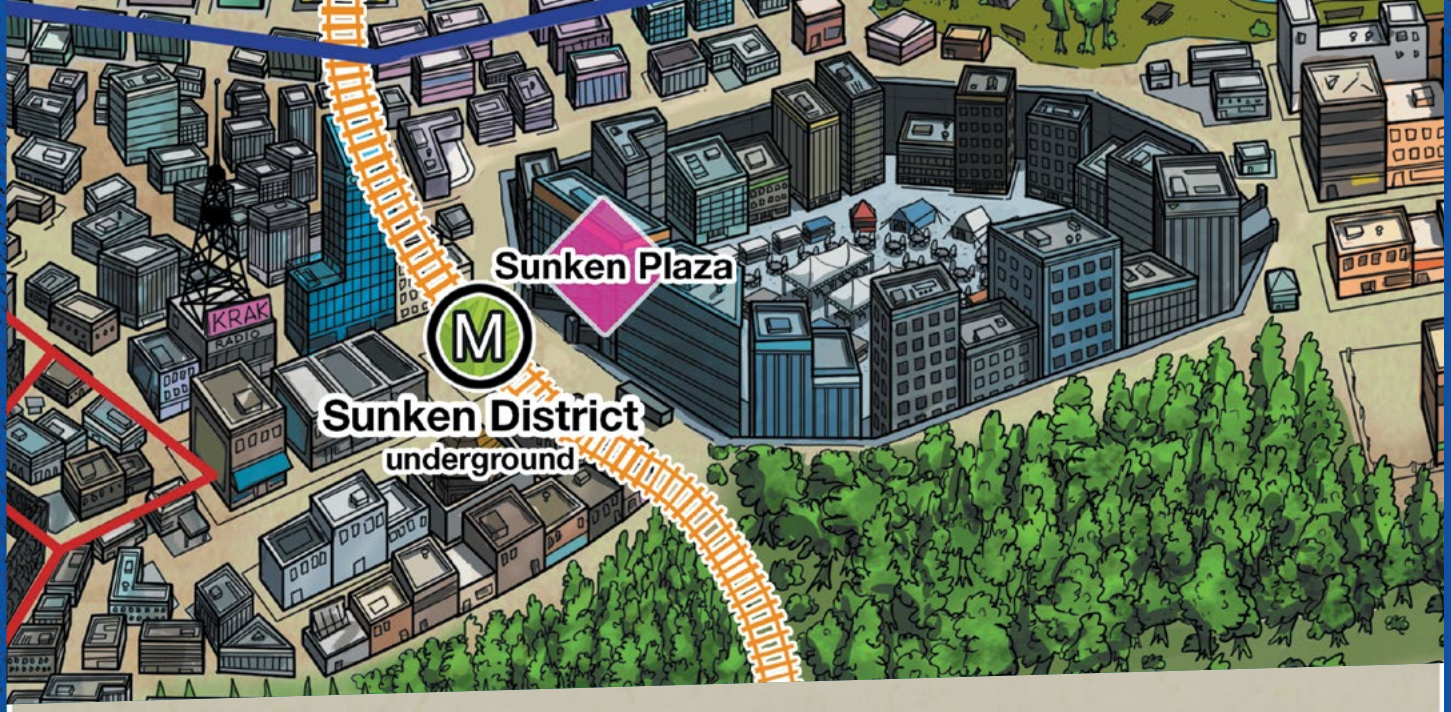
At some point, one or more characters have to attend open-mic night at a bar called What's Up Chuck? Play it out in excruciating detail, with pages of poetry readings. Actually, just make the players think that you're about to read multiple pages of poetry printouts out loud, but don't. Open mic poetry night is the sort of thing better experienced by the characters than by the players.

TWISTS IN THE SCIENCE DISTRICT

There's a lot happening in Science, so there's a lot that can happen to characters in Science.

Good Twist: A talented student recognizes something special about the character and begs to paint an "aura" portrait of them. It leads to some sort of self-discovery or to valuable contacts among professors with secret knowledge.

Bad Twist: A professor has the information to answer your questions, but she's the victim of a paranormal disinformation campaign. The knowledge gained is not a dead end; it's actively dangerous. The players know the information is bad as out-of-character knowledge, but you can remain flexible as to how you interpret the danger until it arrives.



Sunken District

Business interests work together to keep this district pretty normal, whatever that means. Newkies often find accommodations here. Smart visitors to the Edge stay in Sunken District. Of course, they miss a lot, so being smart isn't everything. Uncle's Security provides security and peace of mind, although "no-frills" peace of mind is all most clients here can afford.

GO TO SUNKEN DISTRICT...

- ...to escape the madness and just get a regular coffee.
- ...to find a restaurant or store that is faithful to some homeland or another, such as a real Japanese noodle house.
- ...to find exiles cooling their heels.

YOUR HOME AWAY FROM HOME

This district has a lot going for it. Sunken has restaurants, services, and stores that are familiar and appealing to people from all over the world. Here they are less twisted than they would be elsewhere in the Edge. Uncle's Security also keeps crime in check, at least the worst of it. Of course, even in Sunken, nothing is simple.

Behind the smiles and the well-groomed features of many passersby is larceny. While a newkie's body may be relatively safe here, plenty of locals are angling for their cash and valuables. The crime here is stealthy: pickpocketing, burglary, fraud, con games, charlatanry, and other ways of appropriating others' cash without personal violence.

AROUND SUNKEN DISTRICT

This district looks and feels safer than Flowers or Science, and mostly it is. The Sunken Welcome and Entrepreneurship Association (SWEA) enforces strict building codes for façades and strict criminal codes for anyone who would dare drive away paying customers. As often as not, behind a building's well-kept façade are decrepit stairs, dodgy electrical connections, iffy ventilation, and other blessings of laissez-faire government regulations.

Armorguard: Bodyguards for any budget. See write-up on page 124.

KRAK Radio: Local radio and worse. See "KRAK Radio," page 61.

Marvelorium of Sir Arthur Compton: A sprawling mansion behind high walls, home to an extensive collection of disturbing items and their wealthy owner, a purported vampire. See write-up on page 149.

Sarah's Teahouse: Perfect for discreet rendezvous. See write-up on page 124.

Tourist & Visitor Service of Al Amarja: Big, fancy storefront. The sign taped to the door says, "Back in 5 minutes." All the time.

The Temple's Incongruous Shrines: Here the Temple's shrines feature recognizable figures but in odd contexts. The shrine to Santa Claus is brightly colored but often streaked with the blood of peti-

tioners. St. Darwin's shrine is devoted to death, especially the death of mothers. Kwan Yin appears as not only the embodiment of mercy but the provider of all grub that makes you forget.

SUNKEN PLAZA

The plaza is one story below street level. A wide street circles the plaza at street level. Stairs and ramps lead down to the plaza. The center of the plaza has no permanent structures, but at any given time there are chairs, tables, tents, booths, stands, pulpits, benches, or other temporary features.

Small businesses on the plaza operate on the lower level, built under the street with storefronts that face into the center. Larger businesses are on street level, outside the street that circles the plaza. Business here cater to newkies, ex-pats, and other misfits. Here are a couple that stand out.

Art's Fine Arts: The bold velvet paintings in the windows draw in customers, but it's the children's art that's the real find. Most of Arthur Pendrick's business is art prints, black-light posters, postcards with bawdy joke images, and T-shirts screen-printed with portraits of famous people. In the back, however, are numerous framed pieces of art by kids, mostly in crayon but plenty more in pen or pencil. Most people might pass these pieces by without a thought, but anyone with an eye for art or human consciousness might find them arresting. Art pores over hundreds of children's art pieces to find one or two that he buys and resells. You probably can't explain what makes a piece fascinating. Art certainly can't. Nevertheless, he is onto something. In their primitive simplicity, these pieces reveal something subtle but profound about the development of the mind and how it both perceives reality and creates an artificial reality to inhabit. The distorted shape of a face or the misplacement of the eyes, an incongruous horizon or a swelling mass of chaos — each piece has something going for it. Like most such connoisseurs, Art has a select array of art pieces tucked away, not for display and with no asking price.

Cesar's Hotel: Newkie-friendly hotel with a greater and a lesser wing, including the restaurants Angelique's and Hot-N-Tots. See write-up on page 123.

Den of Thieves: It looks sort of like a bar you could get killed in, which is what it's designed to look like. The patrons are mostly outsiders here for the thrill of being in such an "authentic" and dangerous place. It might not be authentic, but it is a little bit dangerous. It's true that most of the patrons are outsiders who are here to have a brush with danger, but many others are criminals that get free meals if they show up and act all dangerous. What's worse, a few of them are horrible, violent people on paths of self-destruction, ready to take others down with them. Fights among the criminals are not uncommon. Civilians are safe while they're on the premises and if they're good customers. Occasionally a tourist gets killed or abducted after leaving Den of Thieves, especially if they have provoked the "local color."

Liberty Liquors: The shelves are stocked with beer, wine, and hard liquor packaged in excellent facsimiles of top-shelf brands from around the globe. If there's high-end alcohol you like, the staff can probably point you to liquor packaged in just the right bottle and available to you at a "special price." If they don't have the liquor you're looking for, they can probably provide it if you give them a couple days to "order" it.

Street Vendors: Entrepreneurs old and young push their pushcarts into place and provide all manner of minor purchases for newkies and everyone else. Mostly it's impulse-purchase items, such as sweets, savory snacks, knick-knacks, post cards, and medicines for what ails you. Less commonly, one might find palm-readers, surveillance electronics, hand tools that look useful in a fight, and small pets, such as hamsters.

Coffee Drones: Robot coffee servers circle the plaza and nearby streets, sort of like rounded, conical vending machines. They emit a happy jingling tune as they roll along, and people come out for espresso in various formats. Their algorithms take them where they're most needed, and they just keep getting smarter.

Wilma's Café: It's a sweet little diner run by a sweet little old lady. Its specialty is reheated foods that taste better the second day, especially pizza, lasagna, stew, and similar hearty foods. The café opened recently, and patrons are taken with the gentle atmosphere, the tasty food, and the lack of corruption. So how long do you think this is going to last?

GM: SUNKEN PLAZA

At night revelers gather here, bringing in something of a cross section of the Edge's populace and playing with fire. The fire-play should generate some curiosity among the players, with a degree of implied danger to make everyone pay attention. The revelers allow characters to rub elbows with whatever sorts of characters might lure them into greater adventures. The characters could run across mystics, mercenaries, addicts, cultists, gurus, mutants, transhumans, charlatans, seekers, performers, and artists. The exotic revelers in Sunken Plaza serve as a conduit to draw characters to any other place in the Edge, or beyond.

CESAR'S HOTEL

Two hotels in one.

Overlooking Sunken Plaza is a tall, shiny, modern tower, the left-hand wing of Cesar's Hotel. Adjoining it is a lower, squatter, less gleaming structure, Cesar's other wing. The tower, known as the "Deluxe Wing," has modern amenities and a swank restaurant, Angelique's. The rooms in the lower wing, known as the "Special Wing," come as-is, but the diner, Hot-N-Tots, actually serves an amazing plate of biscuits and gravy. The front desk serves both wings, and they assign guests one wing or the other according to "availability." That is, they tell you which room they will make available to someone like you.

Nightlife: The plaza in front of Cesar's attracts night-time partiers, and Angelique's brings fine diners from around the Edge. Fire play is a mainstay of nighttime performers and showoffs, with fire-spinning common and less disciplined uses of fire almost as common.

Conventions, Seminars, and Workshops: Every weekend, one or more groups converge on Cesar's, with members found in the ballroom, the conference rooms, the restaurants, the pool, the lobby, and sometimes passed out in the stairwell. Meeting their various needs are falafel deliverers, drug connections (styled as mobile pharmacies), and sex workers. In addition to group events, the hotel offers space during the week for all manner of programs, such as language classes, self-help groups, multi-level marketing schemes under Sir Constance's *imprimatur*, and New Age worship connected, at least tenuously, to Sister Cheryl's Temple. The tenor of Cesar's changes from weekend to weekend, depending on which groups are gathering there. The Democratic Horticultural Society, for example, turns the place upside down with plant-fueled exuberance, while the Twice-Dead Bike Thugs engage mostly in sonic meditation exercises that fill the hotel with soothing hums.

The Top Floor: The staff at the front desk might tell you that there is no top floor, but that only means that as far as ***you're*** concerned there is no top floor. Unless you are the special person for whom the top floor is waiting, and if you are, the staff know how to spot you. The elevators have an unmarked button that takes the car to the top floor, but the button only works if you have put the proper key card into the slot on the panel of buttons.

Level: 2nd–4th

GM: CESAR'S HOTEL

DICHOTOMY, AND THE MYSTERIOUS TOP FLOOR

Getting a room at Cesar's means facing a social test — do you get the beautiful, fancy Deluxe Wing or the regular, old Special Wing? It's unclear why individuals are assigned to one wing or the other. Probably it's wealth, but you don't have to stick with what's probable. This dichotomy provides characters with a contest that they want to win but that it's OK to lose. Which characters get the staff's blessing and which are cast into the "outer darkness"? Which are the sheep and which are the goats? It doesn't matter, but players care.

Favoring the Underdog: You may be tempted to have hotel workers in the Deluxe Wing be fancy, shallow, sycophantic, and smarmy, while those in the Special Wing are genuine, hard-working, and surprisingly resourceful. That's a fine temptation to which to give in, although a light touch might be better than laying it on thick. Your other option is to really drive home the dichotomy, with characters in the Deluxe Wing getting great service, and those in the Special Wing getting neglected.

Mystery of the Top Floor: The top floor is a wild-card for you to use. Plant the idea in your players' heads early, and then at any time you can ratchet up the power of a scene by having it take place on the top floor of Cesar's. What's on the top floor? Something a character really wants. Or something that no one would ever expect. To set up this payoff, you need to draw attention to the staff denying that there is a top floor. It's easy enough to have a random guest asking about the top floor, and the characters overhear that there isn't one. You can also point out to the players that the characters see a blank button next to the button for the top floor. Out of character, tell them, "The button won't do anything if you press it, and in fact the hotel staff deny that there is a top floor to this Deluxe Wing." Once your players have registered curiosity in the top floor, the seed is planted. Move the action along, and then incorporate the top floor into some future events, probably in another story arc altogether. If you have no time for long-range plans, you can invent something weird for the top floor and tell it to the players out of character.

ARMORGUARD

Better than body armor is someone else's body.

Need security for your public event? Need personal bodyguards for an extended time? Need some people with muscle to accompany you as you parley with unsavory types? Amorguard is there for you.

Have nothing to sell to the System other than your expendable flesh? Armorguard is there for you, too!

Armorguard security forces appear throughout Sunken District and beyond. They don't have much of a reputation compared to Safe'N'Sound or Uncle's Security, and they don't have the skills to investigate or patrol. They can guard a person, a place, or an event and not much else.

Level: 2nd–3rd

SARAH'S TEAHOUSE

Do you have a secret? Come to Sarah's Teahouse, and your secret is safe with them.

People come to Sarah's in ones and twos. Most cool their heels in one waiting room or another, so that the ones they are there to meet arrive at a different time. Paid actors come and go through Sarah's to throw off anyone trying to figure out who's meeting with whom.

From the outside, it looks like a multistory hotel. On the inside, the hallways turn, with doors separating one length of hallway from the next. You can never see far ahead or behind, although you can hear doors opening and closing, and footsteps.

Word on the street is that of course the Teahouse is crooked. It's a long con designed to catch the right actor at the right time. But don't flatter yourself, it's not about you. The Teahouse has to maintain privacy for 99.9% of its clientele in order to trick the 0.1% into trusting the place. You're not in the 0.1%.

Level: 4th

GM: SUNKEN DISTRICT

This "safe," "normal" district serves as a landing spot not just for characters new to the Island but also for players new to ***Over the Edge***.

HIDDEN PERIL, THE BACK ROOM, AND OTHER THREATS

Since the district is relatively safe, it's a great place for criminal rings, secret cults, and other clandestine organizations to operate. There's plenty of danger here, but it's one or two steps removed from the street. Behind the back door in a café is a hallway that leads around a corner to a roomful of thugs planning to rob a former accomplice in Great Men District. In the basement behind the abandoned bar is a set of secure rooms where a secret cult of elementalists meets and sometimes holds abductees. They're secret because so far everyone else who stumbled across them is not in a position to squeal.

GIOVANNI'S GARAGE

Sunken District is the default location for Giovanni's main garage, if Giovanni's Cabs ever appear in your campaign. See page 192.

The Metro and its Stations

The Metro circles the Edge, with a station in every district. The line to the Terminal is temporarily closed but scheduled to reopen real soon now.

Fore and Aft Cars

A typical Metro train has one car in the front and one to three cars in the back. The front car is for riders from Gold, Broken Wings, and Arms Districts. The seats are clean, and the car never smells like piss. That's the "Fore" car. The back cars are for everyone else. The seats are mostly sound in terms of weight-bearing, and the atmosphere is generally not toxic. These are the "Aft" cars.

Every Metro station has Fore and Aft sections for entrances, exits, and platforms. The barrier between the two sections is at least a chain link fence and at most a solid wall. Riders of the Fore car can enter at a Metro station, wait for a car, ride to another station, and disembark — all without encountering someone like you or me. Riders on the Aft cars are stuck with you, me, and worse.

Fore or Aft, visitors need to pass through checkpoints and deal with the Peace Force zips (see page 143 and selected zips below).

FIRST STATION: ARMS

The Fore platform is gleaming but soulless, and the security checkpoint to exit is no joke. The Aft platform is a mess, and the security checkpoint is so tight that hardly anyone exits this way. Instead, the platform is its own little space, cut off from the rest of the Edge. Homeless people camp out here, and the place reeks of smoke and humans.

Three Ordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Arms

Jerk: If he can find a reason to deny you entry through the checkpoint, he will.

Old Hand: She's been around a long time. Just buy a ticket to the Peace Officers' Ball and you're in.

Bored Rookie: This place is pretty terrible, but maybe some of the people passing through are worth talking to. And talking to and talking to.

Three Extraordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Arms

Fanatic: She asks suspicious travelers about the "tiger man." If you say you don't know what she's talking about, that's doubly suspicious. She sniffs bags or parcels, trying to detect tiger scent. Years ago, this was a gambit to throw people off. Now it's an obsession.

Visionary: He never looks you in the eye and instead stares off into space. He places his hands on bags or people to "read" them. He sends people on their way with enigmatic phrases, such as "Your path is long, but the journey is short."

Annoying Repeater: She asks questions at the checkpoint and then repeats what people say, as if dubious. "You came from Great Men..." "You're a novelist..."

SECOND STATION: GOLD

As soon as the doors open onto Gold Station, you have a chance to spend money. The Fore car lets out into a clean, modern lobby where a small number of professional agents greet passengers with offers, sales, deals, career opportunities, and more. The Aft car opens onto a passable platform where street vendors line the walls and walkways. Chain link separates the two halves of the platform.

Three Ordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Gold

Greeter: A good-looking, young gay man looks great in his uniform and hangs out by the Fore platform, greeting important or good-looking men by name as they come and go.

Gatekeeper: A stern man who challenges people coming to Gold if he doesn't like their looks.

Tax Collector: A crafty, older man who reminds passersby that nothing is free, especially not these tickets to the Peace Officers' Ball that he has. Sure, they're for last year's ball, but it's for a good cause.

Three Extraordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Gold

Fixer: A young guy and obviously sharp. He stops newkies and inquires as to their intentions. Most likely he can offer them some sort of inside track to help them along, based on his contacts and authority. If there were something in it for him, that is.

True Believer: An older fellow who has internalized Sir Constance's pro-commerce philosophy. He encourages people as they come and go. "Buy low," he says, "sell high. Always be closing." He stops some people and asks them their plans, mostly because he can.

Mover Cloak: Man of indeterminate age and forgettable looks. He stops people and talks to them about innocuous topics. If they've been programmed by the Movers, he picks up the subconscious messages they're carrying, and he uses hand gestures and misplaced words to give them new programming. If they're not programmed yet, he plants dissonances in their linguistic memories, preparing them for what's to come. At any given time, he also has one or two special projects, maybe some unsuspecting newkies.

THIRD STATION: SUNKEN

Once it was an extravagant construction of marble and chrome, and some of the original material is still to be seen. Most of it, however, has been repaired with plastic imitation marble and chrome. Beggars, fixers, hustlers, and hotel reps stand ready, but in this station they are strictly prohibited from approaching the Metro travelers. Instead they make eye contact and hold up signs, such as "Cleanest Hotel" or "Need Zlotys."

Signs point the way to another Metro line that heads to the Terminal, but the signs are X'd out and the passageway to the Terminal track is closed off with steel bars. A sign says that the track to the Terminal is on schedule to reopen in 2016.

Three Ordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Sunken

Officer Friendly: She warmly welcomes anyone who seems approachable, and if she has to confront anyone, she leads with a joking comment.

Plant: Approaches newkies in a helpful way and then steers them toward Cesar's Hotel. Swanky people are directed to Angelique's and others are pointed to Hot-N-Tots.

Stern Starer: If her stare makes someone nervous, she confronts them and demands to know their business.

Three Extraordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Sunken

Rookie on Probation: A youngish zip looking tough while a bureaucrat from Internal Affairs stands out of the way behind them with a clipboard, taking notes.

Trouble Dowser: He holds a dowsing rod and uses it to find troublemakers. Not that accurate, honestly.

Psychic Casualty: There's some permanent damage here, and this guy can't seem to talk to anyone without bringing up the Templars.

FOURTH STATION: SCIENCE

Science Station is dirty and often frenetic. Hustlers and dealers work the shadows at peak Metro hours. Graffiti, mostly of an occult variety, scrawls over the cracked tile walls. Just outside the station is a giant, brass orrery inside a verdigris fountain at the bottom of which are coins going back to the days of Egypt. For some reason, no one ***ever*** steals these.

Three Ordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Science

Graffiti Sleuth: She doesn't much care about passersby. She has her notebook out and is taking notes about the graffiti that's everywhere.

Talker: He wanders around gabbing with people. If a conversation doesn't go his way, he can turn angry and aggressive real fast.

Sommerite: She is swaying her head to the tunes she's listening to on her earphones.

Three Extraordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Science

Job Shadow: One is a Peace Force officer, and the other is just dressed like one. The second "zip" is an actor who's trying to get a better sense for what life is like for a zip on the streets. The first officer might make some unnecessary arrests or hassle passersby to show the actor how it's done.

Monitor: He's tracking who comes and goes on a digital tablet, recording data for a friend at D'Aubainne U.

Violinist: He's not great, but no one is going to tell him to stop. The bow has a sharp pointed end in case he needs to stick someone in the eye.

FIFTH STATION: FOUR POINTS

The station is ground-level and mostly vacant. Not many people board the Metro here, and not many disembark.

For some reason it is a popular place for people to hold up signs with political or social messages, showing them to the people on the train and those who come off of it.

- End Fighting
- Mourn our Martyred Leader
- Give More
- Remember Children
- Repent and Forgive
- They're Lying to You
- Act Now
- Returning is the Way of the Way

You would think that baboons would eventually get used to the Metro and stop freaking out when trains arrive or leave. The baboons beg to differ. They screech and flinch at the sound of the train. Even when the train isn't at the station, the local baboons tend to be touchy. Treat them extra nice.

METRO STATIONS BY DISTRICT

METRO STATION		DESCRIPTION	LEVEL
1. Arms		Underground. Half shabby and half soulless.	3rd
2. Gold		Underground. Polished and commercial.	3rd
3. Sunken		Underground. Formerly grand.	2nd
4. Science	Clockwise —>	Underground. Run down.	2nd
5. Four Points		Surface. Mostly vacant.	1st
6. Flowers		Elevated. Colorful.	2nd
7. Justice		Elevated. Serious, with a good view of the gallows.	2nd
8. Great Men		Elevated. Rickety and iffy.	1st
9. Broken Wings		Surface. Elegant, with the Fore riders disembarking onto the upper level, and Aft riders heading to the lower level.	3rd

Three Ordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Four Points

Hateful Rookie: She takes out her hostility on riders, especially any that seem easy to intimidate. If you stand out, she might stop you for questioning and insults. She can usually find something to fine you for, and she only accepts cash.

Downgraded Veteran: This old zip is usually picking his ear or scratching his crotch. If perpetrators were to present themselves to him and confess, he'd probably stop scratching long enough to run them in, but otherwise scratching is where it's at.

None: There's supposed to be an officer on duty, but Four Points isn't exactly a priority.

Three Extraordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Four Points

Young Piece of Shit: He's jacked up on something and throwing his weight around. Dealing with him is a foreshadowing of what's ahead. If they get bullied and can't respond, that's a bad omen, and their actual mission is going to be harder. If they can somehow get one up on this piece of shit without triggering his alert and making him need to strike back, then the encounter is a good omen, and things will be easier.

Covert Contact: A contact with a character's org, acting as a legit corrupt cop, but secretly making a high sign to the character who's part of their network.

Pathetic Schlub: He is caught in an ongoing battle of wits and bloodthirstiness with a baboon. The baboon hates the officer with all the animosity that is due the petty tyrants who make totalitarianism possible, and it keeps coming back to steal the slob's lunch and to fling poo. If the characters can help this poor officer catch the thing, maybe he might be able to help them with a thing. But probably not, because just look at this loser. What pull could they possibly have?

SIXTH STATION: FLOWERS

Folks from around the Edge pile out of the Metro cars, come to Flowers for the many diversions and elevations to be found here. Late at night they pile back in, often visibly worse for wear. The walls are covered with murals layered one over the other.

Three Ordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Flowers

Nosy Amateur: He is not so much doing his job as sticking his nose in other people's business. He's annoying, especially to people who stand out, but he's not going to be bothered to arrest anyone if he can help it.

Jaded Dinosaur: He's off to one side, possibly on his cell phone or hassling people to pass the time. He's been a good zip, a corrupt zip, and an experienced zip. Now he's a lot like an ex-zip except that he's still wearing the badge.

Aloof Professional with Acne: Her gaze lands on everyone, at least for a moment. She has no time for hassling civilians or for chit-chat. Sometimes she notices something that's worth her time, and then she snaps into action.

Three Extraordinary Zips on Metro Duty in Flowers

Absent: Someone's paid them off, and they're conveniently somewhere else. The people who paid them off are ready to pounce on their target when they arrive at the station. Hopefully the schemers are bounty hunters and not something much worse.

Genuinely Helpful Zip: "You folks look like you could use a friend, someone who knows stuff, someone worth knowing." And his body camera is off, for what that's worth.

Subliminal Vector: A quiet officer who wends her way through the crowd, making eye contact but not talking to people much. She's an unwitting vector of subliminal messages sent by the Movers. Her messages target and activate engrams coded into the minds of certain passersby, also unwitting.

SEVENTH STATION: JUSTICE

Some of the Justice crowd on the Metro consists of hard-working people commuting to where the jobs are. Often these are menial jobs. A few of the Justice crowd are good citizens stretching their legs and roaming around the Edge. The station is unpolished but workable.

Ordinary Enforcers on Metro Duty in Justice

Clubbers: They're doing the job that the Peace Force can't be bothered to do. They smile to the riders they recognize and maybe chat with them. They nod to respectable riders they don't recognize. Riders that look like they don't belong in Justice might get questioned. If you try to bribe them, they take your cash and rip it up.

Clubber Jerks: They like hassling riders who don't fit in. If you try to bribe them, you might earn a beating.

Peace Officer on a Mission: She's here to sell something, spy on someone, stalk someone, or follow some unusual dictate from an entity or org.

Extraordinary Enforcers on Metro Duty in Justice

Peace Officers on Task: Why are they monitoring this station instead of letting the Clubbers do it? Because they have a priority assignment. Maybe it's shaking down newkies for cash and information.

Clubbers Looking for Someone: If you're not that someone, they might hold you up until they confirm that you're not the target they're looking for. If you are that someone, I hope you like being beaten senseless by a cadre of high-testosterone types wielding well-worn baseball bats.

Clubber Gatekeepers: They deny egress to people who don't fit the type they're looking for. "Get back on the train, longhair."

EIGHTH STATION: GREAT MEN

The Metro is elevated through Great Men District, and the station consists of rickety metal frameworks and platforms, half sheltered from the elements. At most hours, one can hear the Glorious Lords' heavy metal music playing blocks away at the Lightbringer Arena.

The Fore car doesn't open at Great Men. The platforms that used to serve the Fore car now feature makeshift metal barricades preventing riders from boarding or disembarking. Loyalists of the Glorious Lords erected these barriers to keep out the "poverty tourists" who used to show up for diversion and entertainment. No one who rides the Fore car minds, and in fact, they like having a barrier between them and Great Men Station.

Sometimes the situation here is so dire that the train just keeps on going past this station without stopping. Folks heading to Great Men District have to settle for stopping at Justice Station, either before they reach Great Men (if traveling clockwise) or after (if traveling counterclockwise). Riders going clockwise sometimes don't know that the train's not stopping here until it's too late. In that case, they disembark at Broken Wings Station and catch the counterclockwise train back to Justice. For almost everyone, that's easier than getting through Broken Wings security and traveling by street to Great Men.

Three Ordinary Zips on Metro Duty

Skittish Newb: He's nervous and might overreact.

Brain-Damaged Thug with Anger Issues: He's harmless until something gets him going.

Glorious Lords Enforcers: The Peace Officer is AWOL, and the Lords are collecting impromptu "transaction fees" from passersby.

Three Extraordinary Zips on Metro Duty

Curious Pro: A reasonable woman who takes an active interest in passersby. She's a Stitch asset, and her body cam feed and other intel are going to a local Stitch cell.

Intrusive Triad: Three serious officers who are looking for something and are curious about the characters.

Lords Fan: This guy has worked the Great Men stint so much that he's under the sway of the Lords' metal magic. He is banging his head a little to the beat of the Lords music that everyone can hear playing in the background.

NINTH STATION: BROKEN WINGS

As the trains travel from Great Men, the street level rises until the Metro is at street level. Likewise, from Arms the train rises out of its tunnel to street level. This beautiful station features public art and helpful volunteers to assist travelers (tips appreciated). The Fore car lets out onto broad, open-air, street-level platforms. The Aft cars open to efficient platforms that conduct riders down to the subterranean level of Broken Wings District.

Three Ordinary Enforcers on Metro Duty in Broken Wings

Clean-cut Uncle's Agent: Lean man in his thirties. Efficient and not drunk or even hung over.

Watchful Uncle's Agent: Alert young man ready to investigate anything that looks suspicious.

Helpful Uncle's Agent: She looks sort of like a tough but friendly gym teacher. She's tough but friendly.

Three Extraordinary Enforcers on Metro Duty in Broken Wings

Total Jerk: Uncle's has a reputation to maintain among their clientele, but some agents are assholes to outsiders. Like this guy, for instance. He's muscular, mid-twenties, and not exactly on a path of self-reflection and personal unfolding.

Compromised Uncle's Agent: The Stitch uses his eyes and ears for surveillance. They don't mind-control him, but they can stimulate his curiosity, usually allowing his remote handlers to propel him toward targets that they want to surveil.

Sharp-Eyed Uncle's Agent: She has senses honed by experience and a custom drug cocktail, and she's on the lookout for troublemakers. Her ability to spot trouble is elite or even world-class (3rd or 4th level).

Beyond the Edge

The action is mostly in the Edge, but there are other sites of interest on the Island.

D'AUBAINNE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AND THE TERMINAL

This massive structure rises like a ziggurat over the crisscrossed lanes of airplane runways. A single, wide ramp circles the conical structure, in theory allowing direct access to all levels. In practice, it's not that simple.

Funny Angles

Inside the Terminal, all the walls, walkways, and corridors are built at off angles. Sometimes they're close to right angles, sometimes they're not close, and they're never spot on. The aesthetic result is charming if you're not in a hurry. You can never see too far in any direction, and the giant structure always seems cozy and close from inside. Then again, walking through the Terminal gives you the sense that it goes on forever, even if you can rarely see where you're headed or where you've been. Walkways angle slightly up or down as they curve and bend, so when you circle around enough you might find yourself not back where you started but instead a level above or below your starting position. Signs guide you from one place to another, but they can be maddeningly vague. Luckily, no one makes connecting flights through Al Amarja, so no one is running from one plane to another.

Thirteen Levels?

You'll hear people say that there are thirteen levels to the Terminal, but has anyone counted? The main way from one level to another is the wide ramp that wraps around the outside of the great, conical structure. The ramp is wide and covered, with gently sloping escalators in two directions along the inner edge and wide paths for foot traffic and electric vehicles toward the outer edge. Here and there the ramps flatten out and the escalators end, with a broad landing and wide banks of doors into the Terminal proper. You can see from the outside that the upper levels are smaller than the lower ones, but inside the Terminal it doesn't feel that way.

Hidden Gems

In the Terminal, it's easy to find lowest-common-denominator bars and no end of fast food stands or junk food retailers, but here and there among the levels are some rare and special establishments. They say there's a jewelry store with stones that sing if you spin them on the table. You can find at least one person who swears there's a beauty salon that can do anything you need as far as your looks are concerned, and maybe they can make your soul look beautiful, too. The store Nonesuch Books has paperback pablum written posthumously by famous authors, such as a Western action series by Murasaki Shikibu and spicy romance novels by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Somewhere in the Terminal is a nice old lady pushing an ice cream cart around, and if you hear her little bell jangling, go find her. You won't regret it.

Inspirational(?) Government Posters

In addition to posters and displays pointing people to Cesar's Hotel, the Plaza of Flowers, and other places of interest to visitors, the State has their "public service" posters throughout the terminal. They feature ambiguous statements that seem to mean something and possibly do: "More and Less is All," "Today for Fight," "Keep Your Wish," etc.

Axis Mundi

What happens when a demented genius appropriates Yggdrasil, the World Tree, and realigns it with a pulsing, cross-dimensional construct of steel and madness? Things might go wrong, for one thing.

Customs & Immigration

Cognizant of how disorienting a visit to Al Amarja can be for first-timers, the generous and beneficent State provides Customs & Immigration agents to help orient newcomers, or newkies. These agents question visitors in an attempt to help each one find their proper place in the Edge. These agents are professionals, and if their ways seem bizarre, it's only because of your lack of expertise.

Infernal Parkade

Beneath the Terminal proper are many vast levels of underground car parking. You can't see the walls that bound the parking levels. You just see more ramps, elevators, and concrete pillars. Here and there are sites worth visiting, including whole levels of underground entertainment that can be reached only by driving there through the Infernal Parkade.

GM: THE TERMINAL

Maybe we're dead. Maybe we are spirits navigating through the maze between graves and wombs. How can you tell? Do you have dreams about moving to another "state?" Or do you find such moves strangely gripping? Do you project yourself into one or more "characters," as if trying on wombs for your next incarnation? Or are you stuck between "states?" If we're deceased spirits tripping through the maya of between-lives, the D'Aubainne International Airport is evidence for that view. Here, in this garish ziggurat, so-called "characters" make the transition from "the real world" (that is, living, breathing life) to the "Island" (that is, the place surrounded by wide water, inescapable). Here, in a "Terminal," these "selves" undergo a test before they can situate themselves on the Island. Ma'at weighs hearts against feathers, and the great beast Ammit waits to devour those who fail the test. Succeed or fail, a player's "pretend" self, the player-character, surely transitions to a new "state." Good luck to the virtuous, and to hell with the rest of us.

If, somewhere in an otherwise empty level, you stumble across a circle of pickup trucks, all pointing their bright headlights into the center, and if it looks as though there are barbaric rites being conducted in the center, well, keep on driving along, would be my advice.

Signs point to a Metro station with a track heading into the Edge, but the signs have been X'd out

DAVID OKEKE

INTERDIMENSIONAL LUGGAGE HANDLER

Muscle under ample fat, young, dark skin, and kind eyes that also somehow have a thousand yard stare.

David Okeke knows a secret: we live in the worst of all possible worlds. This universe is built on conflict and war. Others aren't. Oh, to be in one of those!

Okeke knows first-hand about war. He was a child soldier in the Army of the Righteous God in central Africa when he was nine. By the time he escaped, he wasn't even an adult yet. He's an adult now, maybe middle-aged. Down in unclaimed luggage — or is it up? — David is pretty much left to himself. The bureaucratic authoritarian machine hardly cares about lost bags, though Presidential agents have started to visit on occasion. Okeke tells them everything they want to know, except about the bags that come from other worlds.

Some of the luggage isn't claimed because it was lost in another Al Amarja, another London, another Boise, Idaho. These places aren't like ours. David has found plastic spider toys from the Algonquin Hegemony, dice from a utopian/communist version of Anti-Monopoly where everyone shares, and iPhones loaded with pics from worlds far, far better than ours. He collects these items. Takes them home one piece at a time and arranges the best on a kind of shrine. It isn't a god he worships, exactly, but the idea of more perfect place.

He's addicted to the Terminal's vending machine candy bars and knows every alphanumeric combination by heart.

CATALYZE INTERDIMENSIONAL LUGGAGE SWAPS, SUPERHUMAN (5TH).

SAVES: 1

DEFAULT, COMPETENT (1ST)

GM: DAVID OKEKE

Characters could meet Okeke literally out of the gate on arrival at the airport. Their luggage is missing, maybe Okeke gives them their bags, or what he thinks are their bags, only they're bags from versions of themselves from another world. Or, maybe, he just finds their actual bags. You can tease the mystery out. Tell the players about his eyes, the haunted yet idealized look. Then, later, have them run into him off hours. Keep him in the background until the players need a clue that breaks the short tether of this space-time. Or, maybe the Presidentials come snooping around more and more frequently, and Okeke, having befriended the characters, asks for their help hiding his shrine. It's even possible that a piece of luggage from someone lost seventy years ago in the Bermuda Triangle accidentally makes its way to a PC, and David shows up at their door wanting to buy it or using his official ID to try and reclaim it. However they meet him, tell them he's troubled. He's the product of a universe built on war. Tell them he collects toys from alternate dimensions and they may be signs from God.

and the station is sealed off with steel bars. Beyond the fence, it's dark, but sometimes you can see reflected light from around a corner and hear something that sounds like a children's playground song.

And relax, "infernal" just means "underground" or "subterranean." "Infernal Parkade" is just "Underground Parking." That's all.

C&I Interviews for Fun and Profit

For each player-character, dream up a Customs & Immigration officer to suit them. Getting past a C&I officer is good practice for a new character or player meeting social challenge. Most C&I officers are 2nd level, but you have plenty of discretion here as you set the standard for how tough the story arc is. Some characters may well face much more competent or much less competent officers, 3rd level or 1st. The stakes are small enough that failure is fine. Success means cruising through the interview without a problem. Failure means you get some sort of flag on your file in the State's database, and that failure should come up later, if possible. A good twist might mean that the officer provides some

CAM SAYS: TERMINAL GUIDE SERVICES

The very first time I played *Over the Edge*, the GM kept us in the Terminal for the entire session. What made it come alive for me was a trick that I've used ever since in my own games: the helpful, ever-present, smartly-dressed Terminal guides. If you're familiar with previous editions of the game, you might remember Ariadne's Guide Services, owned by a mysteriously competent but casually profane guy named Lino Briazzi. This wasn't anything to do with him. No, this was a thing where the player-characters could, at any time, yell out "Guide!" and a helpful fellow in button-down shirt, trousers, tie, and clean shoes (each of which I'd mention, each time, by their color) would just be there, cheerful and ready to help. I suppose this might be related to the so-called White Courtesy Phone, but honestly the benefit of the guides is to instill just a little bit of disarmingly nice flavor to what should otherwise be a frustrating experience of trying to find your way anywhere. For added value, all of the guides seemed to be, if not clones, but very close relatives of each other. No guide was ever in the same place as another one, so one player voiced the suggestion that perhaps it was always the same guy, just one who switched out the colors of his shirts, trousers, ties, and shoes every time he showed up. I let them keep thinking about that.

useful advice, and a bad twist might mean that the C&I officer has ulterior motives and secret schemes into which they draw the character.

Truth and Consequences: Is the State a canny organization capable of ruthless efficiency despite the surface impression that it's a corruption-ridden mess? Or is it a corruption-ridden mess despite its reputation for ruthless efficiency? Here is where you have a good opportunity to set a tone. Let the players know out of character whether the notes that C&I agents take on them are really going to be collated and put to use, or whether they're just more paperwork in a network of bureaucracies choking on paperwork.

Actual Play: In my story arc, the twisted stunt man whose Trouble was "showing off" had to prove to his skeptical officer that he really was a stunt man. The player failed his cast, but he used karma to land a success. He also got a good twist, so the officer offered him a useful connection in his mission to get work on an upcoming film on the Island. The author of inspirational books, on the other hand, got an officer who had personally requested to interview him because the officer needed to know how to make sense of his life and be who he needed to be. The cast of 6-5 confirmed that the character basically had the run of the show, and he ended up talking to the lost soul for some length. The "Psychic to the Stars" got a suspicious officer who quizzed her directly about whether she had paranormal powers. The player threw 6-5, denied the inference, and sailed through the interview. The Christian necromancer didn't have to cast lots. He proselytized to the interviewer, and she checked the box for "Harmless Religious Nut" on her form, which meant skipping questions 2–17. The character was free to go. The necromancer insisted that he had paranormal powers, actively trying to be officially registered with the State as proof of his abilities. I let the player know that actually no one at the table wants to see his character "registered." We retconned it so that Doctor Lazarus had been warned against having anything to do with the State, and the officer waved him along as harmless.

Ground Transportation to Cesar's Hotel

Once characters are through Customs & Immigration, the next step is taking their luggage out to the roadway where Total Taxis await. They also meet people trying to steer them to black market taxis, for which they have to put on a show of knowing the driver. Skew the situation either direction, if you like, away from the long lines to Total Taxi or away from the sketchy, outlaw taxi driver and their undocumented taxicab.

The characters are likely directed to Cesar's Hotel. At Cesar's, the newkies get sorted into "Special" and "Deluxe" categories, and the hotel serves as a stable place from which to venture out into the Edge.

GM: EZEKIEL'S MADHOUSE

The Madhouse gives you great leeway in crafting plots, and the relative tactical weakness of the place means that even mid-level characters can be heroes here. If your players are anything like mine, the themes of sanity, reality, and truth are common, and with a little creativity you can tie such traits to Zeke's.

PC Patients: If a character has the misfortune of landing in Zeke's, it's probably better to fast forward through the worst and focus on a few interesting points.

McGuffin Inmate: Someone that a character has to talk to is held at Zeke's. You can develop a fine scenario out of the task of working one's way through the bureaucracy, seeing the interior of Zeke's, and finally arranging an interview with the inmate.

Indirect Information: Zeke's sets a nice, creepy tone, but it's hidden from view. You can share inside information with the players, either as out-of-character knowledge or as information from a GMC. You can invent whatever details you like, and then share them with the player as part of the background. You could tell them out-of-character when the characters see someone being carted off to the madhouse. Characters can also get exposed to Zeke's indirectly, through the stories of former inmates or guards that they meet in the Edge.

ZEKE'S, EZEKIEL'S MADHOUSE

> If you thought things couldn't get any worse, step right in and look around.

Officially it's "D'Aubainne Modern Asylum," but everyone still calls it Ezekiel's or just Zeke's. Towering concrete walls surround Zeke's, keeping the inmates in and keeping outsiders' prying eyes out. Inside the walls, the buildings and fixtures range from old and decrepit to old and thoroughly broken in. The exercise grounds are cramped and featureless. The staff are mostly wisecracking nihilists, and the patients run the gamut from profoundly damaged to pretty much regular people who made the mistake of telling someone what they really feel inside, and now they're committed.

D'Aubainne Modern Asylum is something of an embarrassment to the State. People don't think about it. Dr. Nusbaum occasionally conducts experiments there, but the place is unpleasant enough that usually even he leaves it alone. Considering the proclivities of the State, perhaps neglect is the best that the warden can hope for.

The "doctors" who run Zeke's mean the best, or at least they once did. Now the power has gone to their heads. They manipulate the patients arbitrarily, and they work against each other in petty spats over whose manipulations best contribute to a statistic

called PWB-h, "patient well-being, holistic." Patients endure rotating cycles of tests, games, treatments, exposures, drugs, and reinforcement schedules. The staff are forbidden to express genuine concern for the patients, as it would throw off the carefully calibrated experiments.

Anyone who gets admitted to Zeke's is at the mercy of the "doctors." At the low end, they are subject to arbitrary rules, limits, time windows, diets, and activities. At the high end, they're stuck in post-modern experiments designed to liberate the patients from cultural conditioning, the ultimate source of all suffering. So far, they've gotten good at breaking down someone's cultural conditioning, but the suffering is proving harder to eliminate. The process, which might look to an amateur like brainwashing, has been able to dismantle cultural conditioning, leaving various patients unable to distinguish private topics from public ones, males from females, fair from unfair, weeks and months, etc.

Occasionally, empties are committed to Zeke's, but they usually escape in short order.

BURBS

They say the war started over Dan leaving a Lexus up on concrete blocks in the front yard....

The suburbs look like row houses built in the ice cream pastels of the 1950s. Each neighborhood an atomic test village that lives and breathes. People are friendly here, welcoming, or so the brochures say.

In reality, a war lurks under the clean veneer of this placid sprawl. Something small got it started, but no one cares what it was any more. They just care about getting even, window for broken window, dog for poisoned dog, and at this rate it will inevitably break into an orgy of vandalism, arson, mayhem, and murder. Neighbor shall kill neighbor with rake, chainsaw, kitchen knives, and minivans. The Burbs will become their own little Sarajevo, Aleppo, or Constantinople.

What is the deeper cause of this? Something is driving this conflict, cranking up the heat bit by bit. Maybe it's just human nature and the stress of modern life.

FREEDOM CITY

Seat of power.

On the far side of the island from the Edge is Freedom City, the seat of the State. Some of it is palatial and marvelous, but most is bleak offices of functionaries. Permission is often granted to enter Freedom City, but not always to leave.

SKYLLA

The old port city over whose roads Atlanteans, Romans, Moors, and fascists have gotten lost in Borgesian labyrinths.

Part of old Atlantis, the ancient ruins of that vanished culture yet remain in the gray misery of the contemporary city. All nations have an id, some place which, metaphorically or otherwise, represents their primal self. For Al Amarja this is Skylla. Skylla was here before the Edge, and its taciturn, cigar-smoking denizens will still be here when the Edge is gone.

The ancient port has been razed and rebuilt more times than history counts. Each time, each iteration of the city retains pieces of its former self, becoming a maze amalgamated from the detritus and survivors of a dozen different high cultures. Today, the Edge is the destination of choice for high-value shipments, Traboc is a dumping ground for discontinued products and expired medicines, and Skylla for those things that haunt the seas and ride the waves of time and space... or so a Skylla poet wrote in the 1950s.

GM: THE BURBS

The Burbs are a warzone waiting to happen. Perhaps the characters are instrumental in starting the outbreak of mob mayhem. Perhaps they become involved early on, trying to find a lost Mover agent who infiltrated these weird cul-de-sacs and seemingly disappeared. Perhaps the Department of Water and Safety believes the Burbs have been dosed with powerful psychoactive, and now they need a sample for "research."

TRABOC

A feral city.

Traboc is the poor, neglected cousin of the Edge. Where the Edge has pockets of affluence, Traboc only has pockets of tribal power. Run nominally by the Charters, Traboc's municipal services are all but absent. Security is by private contract through either a company or gang, and only applies to a limited area or condition. The life of Traboc, such that there is, relies on the port. Shipments of goods to the Edge come through Traboc, providing livelihoods to laborers, porters, mechanics, yard hands, smugglers, agents, assayers, contractors, frauds, and fixers. The sailors who come ashore enter into an economic ecosystem populated by gamblers, sex workers, procurers, beggars, bouncers, and more thieves.

The State doesn't give a shit about Traboc, which is maybe a good thing. There are no Presidentials here, no propaganda posters, no looming five-story high pictures of Our Martyred Leader, and no ankle locks. Officially, Sir Constance has authority here, but honestly, no one does. What happens to a society with no brakes and no rails? There isn't anything to guide a person in Traboc but a concern for their own safety. Police don't exist, officially, and those that are private only investigate crimes at the behest of their clients.

Traboc is an ultimate Special Economic Zone in that anything goes. Everything and anything that's dodgy, suspect, dangerous, or the like comes to port in Traboc. For another nation, it would be a nightmare; for Al Amarja, it's a curious jewel.

The Charters run the city and claim to have run it for hundreds of years. See page 148.

GM: TRABOC

Traboc is the white board of the imagination of Al Amarja. It's the spot on the map labelled, "Here be dragons." It is, in short, a place for you to ignore and abuse as you see fit. While we give the Edge a perimeter and leave many details to the GM, Traboc is but a nascent idea, something of primordial ylem for you to form. It's probably best to use Traboc once, and to provide it with one detail or set of details to fulfill your needs. You can drop just about whatever you need here.

COUNTRYSIDE

Here and there across the Island are estates, factories, mines, resorts, and compounds. About half are abandoned and half still in use. Uneven roads connect them, but not efficiently. Over the rest of the countryside are farms and villages.

People "of the country," as Marjans refer to them, maintain a medieval lifestyle in terms of community and technology. Their scripture holds that the world ended in the year A.D. 999, though they have no exact records to prove this. Farms and even feudal lords exist, living a first millennium life in the third millennium. Some expats from the Edge even take up residence there, having been exposed to so much "weirdness shock" that the old ways now seem best.

The worst among the countryside are an offshoot of the Botherhood of the Free Spirit, a millennial cult which believed all things were of God and thus all transgressions were holy. These mad fools believe the world post A.D. 999 is hell.

One can also find Grecian oracles; communes living like Athens, like Sparta, like Woodstock. The countryside is weird. There are no laws and, so long as crops are produced for the modest needs of the cities, the State does not care what the rubes do.

Strange for a relatively remote island in the Atlantic, Al Amarja saw a host of cultures and admixtures of cultures. Somewhere in the rolling hills, representatives of these vanished cultures cosplay in the ruins of burnt-out German tanks, bombed villages, and fascist pillboxes left over from "the War."

Several academics at D'Aubainne University posit that none of these "old" cultures predates the War, but all are in fact a reaction to the collective psychic trauma of that period. In other words, the already tenuous grasp on reality the average Marjan possesses snapped at the end of the war, and people either moved to the cities or reverted to more primitive ways.

CHAPTER V

FACTIONS AND THE LAST WAR

SINCE I ENTERED POLITICS, I HAVE CHIEFLY HAD MEN'S VIEWS CONFIDED TO ME PRIVATELY. SOME OF THE BIGGEST MEN IN THE UNITED STATES, IN THE FIELD OF COMMERCE AND MANUFACTURE, ARE AFRAID OF SOMETHING. THEY KNOW THAT THERE IS A POWER SOMEWHERE SO ORGANIZED, SO SUBTLE, SO WATCHFUL, SO INTERLOCKED, SO COMPLETE, SO PERVASIVE, THAT THEY BETTER NOT SPEAK ABOVE THEIR BREATH WHEN THEY SPEAK IN CONDEMNATION OF IT.

—WOODROW WILSON, 28TH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, 1913

One way or another, the End is just around the corner. Everyone argues over the details, but the through line is clear: the center cannot hold. Things cannot go on like this. Something has to give. Behind the scenes but not too far out of sight, shadowy conspiracies play out their end games. Right on the surface, strange and violent gangs run the streets. Government agencies and intrusive bureaucracies are backed up by corps of police officers, paramilitary troops, and spies. Above it all are towering figures, such as Sir Constance and Sister Cheryl. Behind it all? You really don't want to know.

This chapter is for GMs only. Its narrative voice is in-world and omniscient, although I'm lying.

The Big Picture

SO, YOU SEE, MY DEAR CONINGSBY, THAT THE WORLD IS GOVERNED BY VERY DIFFERENT PERSONAGES FROM WHAT IS IMAGINED BY THOSE WHO ARE NOT BEHIND THE SCENES.

—BENJAMIN DISRAELI, BRITISH PRIME MINISTER, 1844

None of this is canon. All of this is what one might hear from seemingly reliable sources.

THE UNIVERSE

This universe is a universe of war. Just look. The good news is, there are other sorts of universes. The bad news is, you're here.

EARTH

The physical universe that astronomers see is the dead remnants of the universe left over from the universal war at the beginning of it all. Nobody won, it was a near total loss. Now vast, meaningless assemblies of stars spread out in all directions toward their eventual dissipation. Our solar system is a rare exception, a place where what is left of the astral plane, the Akashic records, the psychic interference mantra, and a remnant life force all converge, creating a pocket of self-sustaining reproduction and conquest systems that we call life and consciousness. Several times in Earth's past, life has been nearly wiped out. Maybe this time the biosphere's luck is about to run out.

LIFE

Life is an invasive species. It is locked in ongoing war against the dead matter/energy of the universe. Matter/energy, of course, is a primeval force that could never know it is at war. Still, its sheer, blind, unanswerable power has almost been enough for it to win. Life, for its part, is sometimes its own worst enemy, such as the Oxygen Catastrophe of two billion years ago, when the cyanobacteria almost killed off most living things with their waste product, the destructive element oxygen, with its off-balance atoms.

The greatest persecutors of war are slave-making ants. Like all ants, they are connected subconsciously but robustly to the astral plane. Humans are second-best at war and are soon to eclipse the ants. Human war is stuffed with meaning and emotion, so their draw on the astral plane is mighty. War and meaning, including thought control, have together rocketed *Homo sapiens* to new heights of technological power and global demagoguery. Other meaning-conscious animals are capable of ganging up for violence, but chimpanzee death squads and dolphin rape teams are peanuts compared to everyday *H. sapiens* gang violence, to say nothing of atomic bombs.

Sapiens developed language through magic, that is through rituals of meaning that connected participants to the astral. Language allowed brains to synchronize spontaneously, especially in song and dance, and this synchronization created a field in which psychic forces developed.

HUMANITY

> The story of the human race is War. Except for brief and precarious interludes there has never been peace in the world; and before history began murderous strife was universal and unending. But the modern developments surely require severe and active attention.
>
> —Winston Churchill, ***The World Crisis, Vol. IV, The Aftermath 1918–1922***, 1929

Homo sapiens is a good idea gone wrong. The primordial, immortal, would-be leaders of humanity are stuck in ancient routines and baffled by modern ways. Demagogues and puppets of secret masters drive world civilization to the brink of destruction. Behind the scenes, inhuman and more-than-human conspiracies contrive to save the world, their way. A reckoning is at hand.

Pharaohs, or the Old Lords

Homo erectus were the first true humans, ape-headed people with fire and a speech-like power but no true language. What set them apart genetically was the fusion of two of their chromosomes, which joined end-to-end to create a double-size chromosome. This doubling enabled a quantum leap in evolution, allowing meat brains to achieve full self-awareness for the first time. *H. erectus* used rituals to unite the tribes, and they "talked" with their whole bodies: singing, gesturing, pantomiming, stepping, farting, and making faces. Their bands spread across the continents, conquering one territory after another. One adventurous and lucky band of *H. erectus* ended up at Al Amarja. Here, their rituals took on new power, and generation by generation, the clan grew and mutated. Ultimately, eight of them seized power, obliterated their competition, and channeled into themselves godlike abilities. With their apotheosis, the question of humanity seemed answered. These eight became immortal masters infused with the astral or teleological power of human consciousness.

They are the Old Lords. Among other things, they used their powers to fashion variants on the human form. They created the Neanderthals, the Denisovans, the Sapiens, and others. When some of the Sapiens got out of hand, the Pharaohs were amused or distracted enough to watch rather than destroy them, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Erectus and the New Spawn

For ages, the Old Lords reigned above their kind, walking from west to east and north to south. After the Old Lords had long forgotten their childhoods and no longer identified with the Erectus they ruled over, they began creating other lines of humans. Most were doomed abominations, many were insignificant enough to have escaped archaeologists, few lines really prospered, and one hybrid line conquered the world.

Neanderthals and Denisovans

These humans had massive brains and a drive to conquer, and they spread out across Europe and Western Asia. The Erectus they encountered had no chance and left little trace. Neanderthals knew well the ways of freezing, burning, and thawing. Each year, these nomads prospered in the warmth and held on through the cold. As ice ages came and went, whole populations repeatedly expanded northward and then contracted southward. This rhythm put their shamans in touch with natural cycles, and they led their people in a conquest of the astral plane. The Old Lords, however, used their own magic to vampirize the vitality gained by the Neanderthals. The shamans experienced this vampirism as relentless demons always close to obliterating their people.

Sapiens

In their most recent project, the Old Lords edited human DNA to help humans synchronize around hatred of an enemy. The original idea was cock-fighting on a grand scale. Mighty gangs of warlike Sapiens killed each other in repeated wars. The Sapiens thought they were fighting over grievances, feuds, territory, and honor, but it was all set up by the Old Ones for their amusement. Those pointless wars lasted over one hundred thousand years, and they're still going on today. About seventy thousand years ago, the most vicious killers in the land were finally sent packing when countless other tribes united against them. The killer tribe got pushed back generation by generation until they finally crossed into Western Asia. There the warlike Sapiens encountered the spiritually rapacious Neanderthals.

Sapiens-Neanderthal Hybrids

Neanderthals in the Mideast encountered Sapiens that had been driven out of Africa. The local Neanderthals engaged in a prolonged attempt to exterminate the newcomers, but these humans were hateful shits, and the Neanderthals had little chance against them. The Sapiens pushed the Neanderthals back, picking up some Neanderthal genes in the process. This resulting hybrid human combined the cussedness of the African exiles with the drive to conquer that distinguished the Neanderthals. In short order, geologically speaking,

this hybrid spread across the globe, pushing back all other humans. The retreat of the Neanderthals meant that the human conquests on the astral plane were largely reversed. Shamanically speaking, the Neanderthals that achieved "ancestor" status, that is, the ones who eventually became the ancestors of all Neanderthals, also have "ancestor" status for all humans today, especially the hybrids. It might be this co-option of the Neanderthal's ancestral depth that gave the tribe of hybrids such power to spread.

Over and over in history, hybrids have formed hierarchical systems of exploitation. In Asia, the elites instituted a top-down structure of impersonal social control. In South Asia, the rules of castes and colors ("varnas") defined one's identity and career from birth to death. In various lands, sun gods rose and ruled across warm and fertile lands. The Hellenes spoke of freedom but worked slaves to death in their mines. Rome set itself up as the ruler of humanity and little more, outsourcing culture to the Greeks. Out of the ancient conflict between Rome and Jerusalem came something new, a religion that wanted to take over the world, namely Hellenized Christianity. This sect spread so well that even the barbarians who conquered Christian Rome were themselves Christians. Mani and Muhammad each started a new "take over the world" religion of his own. Mani was flayed alive, but Muhammad died a powerful and beloved war leader.

Among the American tribes, oppression took a personal form, as it was considered entertainment to torture-murder captured outsiders. Aztecs cut out hearts to feed their lord sun, carrying the metaphor of exploiter and exploitee further than most elites ever dared. The Great Inca came to power in the Andes by enforcing a new rule: those who are conquered must work. On Pacific islands where people couldn't easily get away, an all-powerful god-chieftain ruled each one.

Starting around 1500, the population of European hybrids has been metastasizing all over the planet.

The Old Lords Today

It has dawned on the Pharaohs that the hybrids have really gotten out of hand, and maybe all the wonders of modern life are not worth the destruction of the planet. As they try to exert control through their network of Quislings, they are about to find out how much power they really have.

The Pharaohs, along with countless forgotten Erectus, are literally ancestors of every Neanderthal, Denisovan, or Sapiens ever born.

AL AMARJA AND THE EDGE

The primordial ritual that enabled human consciousness took place here and continues to take place here. One of the Pharaohs calls the place home.

By fate, circumstance, or terrible karma, the Edge is ground zero for whatever comes next. Agents, independents, marks, and opportunists compete to gain the upper hand and finally win the battle for reality.

THE FUTURE

You know it and I know it. Everyone can feel it — an end is near. Which end? Play and find out.

Secret War

THERE'S A PLACE I HAVE NEVER EXPLORED
ANOTHER WORLD WE HAVE YET TO CONQUER
AND UNTIL THEN NONE OF US HAVE ANYTHING.

—"UNTIL THEN," ORCAS, 2012

This section describes the conflicts taking place covertly across the world and in the Edge.

WAR

> War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner.
>
> —Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West*, 1985

This universe is a universe of war. Conflict is central to every level of reality. We're not unlucky because luck doesn't operate on a universal level. And if we're not unlucky, we're sure as hell not lucky.

The strong force of atomic physics is the most basic embodiment of war, although it is of course impossible to see this from within a universe of war.

The Harmonic Convergence of 1987 finally aligned our solar system with galactic mind modulation, letting in raiders from independent cross-times. More and more raiders have been appearing, and soon Earth will be caught up in the Galactic Anti-Violence Genocide.

MAGIC, MEANING, THE ASTRAL PLANE, AND THE LOGOSPHERE

Ape brains trained up on ape culture, as found in the average human, are not up to the task of understanding the Logosphere and all it implies, but here goes. The Logosphere is the great buzz of thoughts, intents, and speech that composes an interconnected "sphere" of meaning around the Earth. Since it's inherently intentional, the Logosphere maps to the Astral Plane and channels astral energy to have sweeping, long-term effects on humanity. Magic works primarily on a ritual level, where formulated words, thoughts, and deeds have ripple effects in the Logosphere. Mass social movements look like they're powered by words and ideas, but all the successful movements tap into the Logosphere. When the Movers stage movements, they affect the Logosphere deliberately. Other social movements tap into that power through the intuitive understanding of the leaders. From inside, major social movements or changes seem like the straightforward work of people planning and working for it, but if you could observe from "outside," it would be easy to see the work of magic in human history.

Traditional magic clearly uses ritual meaning to influence the Logosphere. Think of the diagrams, grimoires, incantations, circles of power, daggers and chalices, flames, and human sacrifices. The Aztecs knew what they were doing with their bloody rituals, and so did the Roman Catholics who conquered them. Aleister Crowley modernized magic with his rational approach, and now Great Works and other magical projects have taken on a postmodern vibe. As the Logosphere changes, magic naturally does as well.

On Earth, the Logosphere first manifested as a result of the ritual behavior of Cretaceous-era, mushroom-farming ants.

QUANTUM ENTANGLEMENT AND PSYCHIC POWERS

The development of language allowed humans to do something never done by animals before, to synch up their brains on a quantum level. This synchronicity allows certain humans to make all sorts of mental connections to other human brains, such as reading minds, implanting thoughts, triggering emotional responses, masking memories, sending experiences, programming behaviors into the subconscious, and triggering such behaviors.

A brain's individual quantum signature survives death as a potentiality, and elements of that signature can coalesce in a compatible brain. Many people have memories that they recognize as false, and these are part of such a signature. If the signature recurs often enough to develop greater integrity, it can appear in a new human brain as a "past life."

Language allows brains to intend impossible things, such as trying to move a rock with the power of one's mind. Among certain people, some of these impossible intentions set up a quantum "butterfly effect" that actually accomplishes the task. Telekinesis and its variants result from this sort of action.

PARANORMAL ABILITIES

The following abilities have been documented or rumored. Marjans are more informed about such things than the average person in corporatized culture.

Aura Reading: Reading the footprint of another's energy field.

Atavism: Accessing traits or knowledge of your ancestors, possibly going back into racial memories and phylogenetic experiences. Sometimes atavism is one of your ancestors accessing you instead of the other way around.

Automatic Writing: Typing while allowing some other personality or entity to choose the words. Usually leads to trouble.

Channeling: Manifesting another spirit in one's self, speaking as that other spirit and possibly working paranormal effects. Half the time, the thing you think you're channeling is really something else.

Curses: Channeling certain sorts of misfortune to particular people or places. The Universe has more than enough misfortune at hand, so it's relatively easy to channel the right kind where you want it. The opposite paranormal effect, Blesses, are practically impossible.

Empathic Influence: Affecting others' emotions.

Energy Vampirism: Leaching life energy off other people to feed one's own needs.

Epigenetics: Humans can transcend their own human limits and the limits of Darwinian selection when their genomes respond epigenetically to the environment.

Implanting Thoughts: Putting a thought in another's head, where it takes on a life of its own.

Memory Blinding: Putting a blind spot into someone's memory, usually to obliterate memory of a particular event or experience. People don't notice their own blind spots.

Memory Masking: Making someone remember one event as if it were something else. Being abducted by mysterious visitors from outer space often gets masked as a cat or owl being in your house at night. Programming by the Movers often gets masked as being abducted by mysterious visitors from outer space.

Metabolic Control: Control over functions that are normally automatic, such as body temperature.

Mind Reading: Picking up others' thoughts. Never perfect and sometimes unhygienic.

Object Reading: Interpreting life-energy engrams on physical objects, especially those emotionally or intimately associated with someone.

Past Lives: First-person memories of people who lived before you.

Psychic Empathy: Feeling others' emotional states almost as if they were one's own. No documented cases since the '30s.

Psychic Surgery: Removing tumors, blockages, cursed tissues, and the occasional foreign object from people, using only one's hands and mind powers. No anesthetic or disinfectant needed.

Remote Viewing: Displacing one's consciousness in space-time to observe distant locations. Some can view remotely in time as well as space. The best remote viewers are prone to hebephrenia.

Sending: Telepathy that sends some thought or sensation from the Sender to the recipient. The content sent can be anything from a feeling to a complete experience that replaces the recipient's own experience of themselves and their environment.

Serendipity: Not just coincidences, but meaningful coincidences. For some people, especially Neanderthals, serendipity keeps them effortlessly ahead of others. Sapiens are most likely to experience serendipity in relation to mate-finding.

Sub-Vocalization: Disguising spoken commands as a hissing or exhaling sound, bypassing the listener's defenses and affecting the subject subliminally.

Telekinesis: Moving things with one's mind.

Telepathic Programming and Activating: Implanting behaviors that remain buried in the subconscious until activated, possibly by sensory stimulus and possibly by remote telepathy.

Visions: Visions come from all sorts of sources and portend all sorts of things. Notoriously unreliable.

PARANORMAL POWERS AND TECH

Fringe technology powers many of the weapons and defenses found in the Edge.

Shit Gas

Generally delivered in a grenade, like tear gas, shit gas pulls the worst fears out of the victim and manifests them as powerful hallucinations nearly indistinguishable from reality. Named for what you find in your pants after you recover.

Anti-Reality Grenade

This powerful weapon explodes, throwing not shrapnel but fragments of other worlds, which slice through ours. The result is a zone of upheaval, madness, and impossible physics. Everything is changed, perhaps slightly and perhaps fundamentally. The transformation could be as simple as changing someone's clothes to those of a medieval peasant from an alternate timestream. It can be as permanent as changing someone into a life-size marionette of themselves as a cat person. Ambiguous artifacts from other worlds, cold to the touch, are left behind in the grenade's wake.

Logosphere Negatron Collector

For every symbol, letter, or hieroglyph, there is a shadow icon. It is not an antonym *per se*, but another, nearly reverse aspect of the sign. Yet it has the same signifier. This makes sense to few people, but the Logosphere Negatron Collector scoops these anti-symbols up. When the device is used, communication of any kind in the vicinity becomes jumbled, words and concepts divorced from meaning. It's like a white noise generator for all forms of integration. Sign language fails, radio, telepathy. People in the vicinity begin babbling as if they have aphasia. Typically, the device looks like a large ham radio set with a small satellite dish on top. Oppenheimers are working on a version that can project a negatron ray, but they keep going mad.

Brain Looper

A large metal cylinder with an ambiguous control pad on one side. Inside is an array of freeze-dried whale brain trained to copy thoughts in the area. For everyone but a telepath, the looper is inert. For someone who can pick up the brain looper's thoughts, however, it's trouble. The looper picks up the telepath's thoughts, which the telepath then picks up from the looper. This cycle intensifies in a feedback loop until the telepath's circuits burn out.

Crystal Traps

Large crystals, usually simply quartz, set in jewelry for wearing or in a stand for setting on a table. The crystal has been hyperdimensionalized to reflect itself infinitely, creating an endless number of mirror universes mimicking the crystal's surroundings. Anyone who tries to use paranormal powers to affect the surroundings remotely instead affects the reality of one of these mirror universes. In fact, the adept trying to affect the area can't tell that they're operating in a mirror universe. Once one pocket universe is affected, the effect replicates from one universe to the next, and in theory the effect could reach the real world someday. Are these crystals really infinite? More likely they contain unimaginably large numbers of pocket universes, but not an infinite number. Used crystal traps are just as effective at new ones, but they may have paranormal effects propagating through them that are going to pop out one day.

Psychovores

Hungry astral creatures tied to particular objects, driven by pain, and set to protect the area from astral intrusion. The object must be something of real emotional value to the person being protected. Psychovores attack anyone who attempts to enter or influence the area astrally. The bigger and meaner the psychovore, the bigger the bite it takes.

SACQ

A deadly nerve gas that has no effect on people with the genetic signature of Our Martyred Leader or Dr. Nusbaum. This powerful weapon is strictly prohibited to anyone but the Presidentials, but some of it has gone missing and is now rumored to be available through the Underground.

Psychic Disruption Field

A network of psychically attuned wires that interfere with or stop psychic projections of all sorts. The field can be built into walls and sometimes curtains or even bulky caps. No one has tested what happens if you wear this thing on your head for any length of time. The fields come in various types with various materials and treatment, and each version is touted as better than all the others.

BIG PICTURE CONFLICTS

The Stitch, history's top-level psychic conspiracy, is trying to purge humanity of the bottom 99% in order to usher in a golden age (for them). The Movers are preparing to execute a take-over of the Logosphere, the web of words and concepts that controls humanity. And the Cut-Ups are threatening to destroy Control, leading to liberty, chaos, and a new age of digital, nonbiological sapience.

Humanity is pushing the Earth into another global extinction event, disrupting the climate that civilization itself depends on. It's amazing that humanity is blind to this dire fate, but conspiracies and business interests alike work to keep the public's attention elsewhere. With the forces of nature preparing to rage against civilization, surely a day of judgment is upon us.

PLANETARY REALITY, SIDEREAL REALITY, AND BEYOND

I, the flesh and blood author of this game, can't ever really get across to you, the real person who's reading this, the higher perspective according to which all this stuff about the Akashic record and engrams would all make perfect sense. The short explanation for why paranormal truths are so hard to describe is that we *H. sapiens* operate within a planetary framework. That framework helped our prehuman ancestors prosper, but it doesn't take into account reality at the level of the stars. How can it? Within a sidereal or stellar framework, the upcoming bottleneck that humanity faces makes perfect sense. In fact, this species-level test or purge confirms the general theory of multiversality. The good news is that justice and security are the destiny of the multiverse, as post-planetarians take for granted. The bad news is that achieving this universal justice and security requires eliminating universes like our own. Sidereal reality is not fully graspable by the planetary brain, but shamans and ascetics have hacked into

GM: SIDEREAL REALITY

Mumbo-jumbo you can believe in.

The sidereal perspective gives you a handy way to explain or frame uncanny events, even if the explanations seem arbitrary to players whose ape brains are locked in planetary mode. The concept of "sidereal" reality as opposed to "planetary" reality is a source of terminology and imagery that you can use as "technobabble" to explain paranormal stuff, and it's vague enough that you can even loop in certain characters, providing a link in the fiction between their powers and whatever it is that certain GMCs are also doing. Characters typically have various sorts of weird powers, inexplicable insights, paranormal resources, and other violations of everyday reality. These paranormal features have little contact with planetary physics, but they operate according to simple algorithms when observed within the sidereal framework.

Scaling: "Sidereal" refers to stars in general, which, to casual observers, means mostly stars in the Milky Way. You can substitute the concepts "solar," "galactic," or "transgalactic" — or anything that fits the situation better.

stellar consciousness with enough success to leapfrog human culture forward.

Free Will: Movers say that there is free will, but they have given theirs up in order to align themselves with the winners. Stitchers say that there is no free will, but they can fake it well enough. If you could see these viewpoints within the sidereal framework, you would laugh. It would not be a human laugh.

The State in All Its Forms

HA HA HA, BLESS YOUR SOUL
YOU REALLY THINK YOU'RE IN CONTROL?

—"CRAZY," GNARLS BARKELEY, 2005

The State operates through a combination of graft, intimidation, spying, taxation, harassment, executive orders, assassination, blackmail, fraud, betrayal, and backroom deals. To the casual observer, the apparatus of the State seems too corrupt and slipshod to operate effectively. But the State's continuity and authority demonstrate that it's doing something right.

THE STATE APPARATUS

The government of Al Amarja serves primarily as a go-between, often as a kingmaker, and sometimes as a shake-down artist. Under Measure 23 (see page 56), most of the civil service has limited power, although they certainly retain the authority to tax, require permits, inspect businesses and sometimes homes, and impose fines. In addition, any civil servant you meet likely expects a little something extra for their time.

Officially, the only recourse the government has to defend itself is calling in the Presidentials, the secret police that run most of the government and a lot else. No one wants to get the Presidentials called on them, and maybe not on their enemies.

Peace Force, the "Zips"

Everyday policing is in the hands of the Peace Force and individual peace officers. Thanks to Measure 23, the Peace Force was liberated from the need to carry side arms. They rely on various nonlethal weapons to deal with perpetrators, as well as body cameras to help identify civilians that refuse to comply with orders.

Since officers are prohibited from carrying lethal weapons, their lethal weapons are well-hidden on their persons. Most officers also rely on various paranormal systems for protecting themselves: charms, blessings, talismans, spells, custom energy drinks, lucky centipedes, and whatever else it takes to help them feel less at the mercy of entropy.

Peace officers are known informally as "zips," the equivalent of "cops." Most likely the term derives from the plastic cable ties, or zip ties, that officers use to restrain suspects. The term doesn't derive from how fast they arrive when you report a crime, certainly. As an organization or force, the equivalent of "the police" is "the Peace," as in "the Peace are not corrupt at all, no they're not."

Presidentials

Under Measure 23, ultimate authority is temporarily placed in the hands of the Presidential Guard, the Island's much-feared secret police. They are most definitely armed. While street crime is handled by the Peace, the Presidentials investigate threats to the State, broadly construed.

Ruling the Presidentials is a shadowy figure known as Mother. On the short list of people who might be the true power behind the throne, Mother is on the top of the list. The other people on that list have disappeared, one by one.

REBUS, THE STATE AI

Artificial intelligence is the holy grail of the Singularity, but it didn't appear like anyone thought it would. Hell, it's not even artificial, really. Rebus is the State's AI, and it creates the algorithms that run the government, that sift for sedition, and that root out the Underground (or perhaps created it).

Rebus is also a girl named Raaida, a powerful psychic trapped in the net by the IT department of the Presidentials — or maybe traded into bondage by the Stitch. Raaida surfs the Internet personally, her astral form commingling with the cloud and delving deep into any server she wants. Eventually, she and the net on Al Amarja became one and the same. If she still has a body, no one knows where it is...except maybe Rebus/Raaida.

D'AUBAINNE UNIVERSITY

The Island needs a school where promising young people can be trained to perform work useful to the State, so the State generously provides D'Aubainne University as a public service to all people. Its sorority and two fraternities are hubs of social activity. The University is the heart of Science District, and the Plaza of Science is blessed with free readings and screenings of video art pieces by talented students.

See more about the University in the description of Science District, starting on page 115.

SECURITY CARDS

Everyone gets an official government Security Card, from newborns to tourists. Security Cards are official ID documents and debit cards rolled into one. They serve to pay for all manner of government expenses, including the Metro, Total Taxi, buses, fines, and tickets to the Peace Officers' Ball. They give the State the data that it needs to track other people and keep you safe from them. The State also tracks you, to look out for you and to promote your well-being. Peace officers might ask you for your card, in which case they scan it for your own protection. Fines are handled on the spot, with the appropriate amount deducted from your official account, including a line for tips.

In the elite areas of the Edge, enforcers at every level might ask for your Security Card to verify your identity. In the less well-tended areas, it's the exception.

Some people say that the cards actually spy on you, but some people will believe anything.

The State sends mixed messages, and the apparatus of the State is set up to elicit both contempt and fear. The Peace Officers, for example, are lowly stooges who would be worth nothing without arbitrary State power backing them up. The characters likely interact with these officers more or less regularly and without much incident. The Presidentials, on the other hand, are more talked about than seen. They're the heavy hand of the State, and nobody's happy when they show up.

REBUS, REBA, AND RAAIDA

Raaida's psychic self supercharges Rebus, the State A.I. But does some sense of a human self remain, trapped in the endless cycles of digital information? Maybe she has a plan for escape. Or maybe it's not a plan, just an inchoate series of gestures that point toward freedom with no hope of achieving it.

Raaida is a potential source for vulnerability within the State. With whatever sense of self she retains, she might hide important information from State operators or discreetly sabotage State efforts. If Raaida bails a character out of trouble with the State, she's likely to expect some sort of help in return.

If Raaida is on the lookout for someone to help her, she isn't going to trust just anyone. She'll thoroughly research the person or persons she considers for help and maybe she'll test them. An entire arc of your campaign could be run by Raaida. The players are tasked by a series of mystery clients for various objectives, none of which seem to link together until they dig deeper. Each job is a test. One Raaida wants them to pass.

Or she might just watch them as they go about an entirely unrelated arc, interfering on their behalf here and there if she thinks she can trust them. Of course, if she interferes, there's a chance the Presidentials or the Stitch take interest, and suddenly the characters have the unwanted attention of those dangerous organizations.

A more emotional way of using Raaida is a kind of "catfishing." While Al Amarja's net is buggy, slow, and probably makes AOL look cutting edge, people still fall in love online, opening up a world of possible woes. That girl you met on MarjanMate.com? it's Raaida. Being of the net, she wouldn't even have to appear as female. She takes a pleasing form to get someone to help her out. Or is your lover just bait? A fake AI used to root out clever cloaks and other agents? Did one of the D'Aubainnes or a Mover make her up out of whole cloth?

Or maybe she can't manage a coherent plan, and a character just gets strange messages at the ATM, via e-mail, in ads that turn from State sponsored propaganda to CCTV footage of a girl in a hospital gown crying in the corner of a bare, white room. Maybe there's no escape, just cries for help that can never be answered.

Certain traits might allow a character to delve deep into the Raaida mystery, such as "Internet Psychic" or "Digital Ghost Hunter." If so, the character could conceivably connect to Raaida and gain access to all sorts of State information and resources.

SECURITY CARDS

The point of these props is to remind players that Al Amarja is a police state, of sorts. By the magic of contagion, the player-characters' contact with the Security Card allows the State's inimical energy to touch the players. At some point, some random Peace Officer ought to demand of the PCs "Cards, please." The main point of the cards is to allow that sort of encounter, innocuous but galling.

Please don't let players spend a lot of time worrying about how to prevent the State from using the cards to learn too much about them. Assume that PCs who don't want to carry legitimate Security Cards have access to some way to spoof the system. Maybe their sponsors give them rigged cards, or maybe they just bribe whoever catches them without their Security Card.

Public Gangs, Groups, Organizations, and Populations

Most public organizations have ties to covert groups or conspiracies, and most covert groups have public fronts and businesses under their influence.

ARIES GANG

Fun-loving enforcers of Flowers District.

People in Flowers benefit from the experienced and sane protection provided by the Aries Gang. They are like heroes in Flowers, welcome at restaurants and sought after for parties. They patrol the streets on foot and on motorcycles.

Sign of the Fiery Ram

Aries enforcers identify with the astrological sign of the Ram, an active sign associated with the Aristotelian element of fire and with head-to-head violence. Aries members take new birthdays during the month of Aries, roughly the first thirty days of spring. They extol the virtues of action, strength, playing with fire, and head-butting. If anyone insists that their own sun sign is also Aries, they are likely to find themselves handled roughly by the Aries Gang.

Crime and Punishment

For the Aries Gang, apprehending perps and punishing them blurs together into what looks a lot like mob violence. Most petty criminals take their punishment at the hands of the enforcers who get hold of them, with no trial or incarceration. Beatings range from perfunctory to critical, depending on the offense and how much the Aries enforcers have been drinking. Some criminals are officially exiled from Flowers. If they're caught in Flowers again, they're killed on the spot.

The gang has reasonable connections to other enforcers and to the State. They exchange enough information and often hunt down criminals wanted by the State or other enforcer gangs.

The Drake

The prize possession in the Aries arsenal is the Drake, a truck retrofitted with armor and armed with a flamethrower. What good does this monstrosity do when it comes to protecting public safety or apprehending perps? Good question. It sure looks great during parades and block parties. Kids love it, crowding up to touch it and yelling for the gunner to fire it off. Good-looking young men and women are often favored with a ride on the Drake and might even be allowed to fire the flamethrower.

More practically, the Drake intimidates people who might be tempted to cross the Aries Gang. Sometimes it's used to destroy the cars, food trucks, or storefronts of people who have made an enemy of the gang. People talk endlessly about how the gang publicly executes perps with the Drake. Doing so is officially against Aries policy, so it's an exceptional event. It happens when a perp really deserves it and maybe if there's a really big street party. Occasionally the Drake serves to convey senior enforcers to diplomatic meetings with other groups, such as the Dog-Faces or Glorious Lords.

GM: ARIES GANG

The Aries Gang plays the role of the "nice" protection racket. They're honest and fair enough, but not more. They provide just enough actual security, but not more. Maybe they love fun and fire too much, but those are hardly faults.

ARIES TWISTS

Good Twist: The character trounces an Aries enforcer so handily that they earn the respect of the gang, plus some free drinks.

Good Twist: A character operating in Flowers gets help from local Aries enforcers.

Bad Twist: An Aries enforcer is secretly working for an org, and they turn the rest of the gang against a character.

Bad Twist: A character is so powerful and popular that the Aries enforcers feel threatened. Toxic masculinity demands that they rise to the challenge and put the character down.

TR CHAPTERLANE

PUNK WITH A GRUDGE

Skinny, young, North African man. His clothes show damage from previous fights, roughly repaired, and the same is true for his skin.

Chapterlane patrols Flowers alone or with another Aries or two. His personal history and the impersonal forces of society have hollowed him out inside, and committing violence for the Aries Gang gives him what feels like purpose. Ungrounded as he is, he is capable of self-sacrificing heroism or petty brutality, as the circumstances warrant. If someone could help him fill that internal void, that would be something else, but Chapterlane doesn't even know it's there.

STREET VIOLENCE, EXPERT (2ND): Chapterlane gets plenty of practice being violent and is ruthless once he unleashes. He mostly fights with a crowbar and knows how to use each end.

PEOPLE SKILLS, COMPETENT (1ST): The Aries Gang has given him some pointers, but he just doesn't practice his people skills as hard as he practices fighting.

OFTEN BLITZED: Chapterlane spends a good deal of time ramping up on some drug, coming down off some drug, and maybe ramping up on one to help with the come-down on the other. If he's timed things well, he has advantage of peeled nerves and physical reactions unconstrained by higher-order thought. More often, he has lost his edge due to jitters, sedation, or metabolic fatigue.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

CHARTERS

They're not pirates any more.
They're business people.

A centuries-old enclave of pirates has its headquarters in Traboc. This collective has a constitutional democracy that predates the United States. They call their collective the Charter, thus their name. The Charter now serves as the body that collects tariffs, provides port security, and more or less runs the city of Traboc, just south of the Edge. If you wander around by the port, you might be surprised how many tariffs the Charters hit you up for. The Charter has a formal alliance with the Ultimate Democratic Republic of Al Amarja but is a sovereign state. Officially, their territory is limited to a run-down compound overlooking the port in Traboc, but practically speaking they rule over Traboc as their fiefdom.

This corps of pirates mostly comprises bullies and black-market accountants. They dress like killers trying to dress like normal people. While on duty, a Charter has a feather pinned somewhere on his person as a badge. Everyone figures that one org or another has them in thrall, and they are sure in thick with Sir Constance.

Can you guess whether Charters are notorious for going into the Edge in rowdy mobs, getting the wrong stuff in their bloodstreams, and adding some random violence to the scene? Their treaty with the State gives them wide latitude, and almost everyone knows not to mess with them.

By established law, only men can sign the Charter and be Charters themselves. That means that all the women Charters are defined as men and treated that way.

The leader of the Charters, First Speaker Yedvigg Axlaughter, literally has a hook in place of his right hand. The Charters brook no mockery of this stereotypical pirate feature, which means don't mention it at all. Ever.

IPSWICH MONTDIDIER

DOCKSIDE FIXER AND DEAL-MAKER

Thin, greasy, grinning man of mostly European ancestry, early thirties. His suit and noose are unremarkable, but he's decorated with gaudy jewelry and with numerous tattoos, some on his face. He wears a golden, striped hawk feather on his lapel.

Montdidier has moved up in the Charter ranks thanks to his tireless work ingratiating himself to First Speaker Axlaughter and his retinue. He handles all sorts of projects for the First Speaker, mostly monitoring shipments, managing relationships, etc. His soft side reveals itself when he feeds the local stray dogs and cats. "It's good to have them around," he says, rather than saying it gives him some connection to the nurturing instincts that he mostly denies.

As a Montdidier man, he is descended in straight patrilineal descent from "Lucky Tooth" Montdidier, one of the original signers of the Charter.

ANTI-PARANORMAL INTUITION, ELITE (3RD): Paranormal energies, phenomena, and entities give Montdidier the heebie-jeebies, but he's too unaware to understand what's happening. All he knows is that some people rub him the wrong way, and he simply gets irritated with people who give off a paranormal vibe. This trait comes to him from his pirate ancestors.

HACK AND SLASH, COMPETENT (1ST): He has enough training with his machete so that he doesn't embarrass himself, provided he never gets in an actual fight.

WHEELING AND DEALING, COMPETENT (1ST): He does a good enough job to spin a good story for his superiors in the Charter. With his latest new responsibilities, he might have reached the limit of where his limited skills and ample ambition can take him.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

GM: CHARTERS

When the players encounter the pirates, the pay-off is from crossing the line between banditry and government. If the State government is weak and corrupt, are the pirates in your campaign a model of brutal efficiency? And maybe Charters arrive like the cavalry when the characters are in trouble down by the docks. Or maybe the pirates are homicidal and barbaric, although they perfectly mimic the State's bureaucratic jargon. And maybe a character runs afoul of pirate justice, trapping them in some sort of legal fix, with partial dismemberment as a potential sentence.

Charters also make great street-level bad guys when that's what's called for.

SIR ARTHUR COMPTON AND HIS MARVELORIUM

> "You would make a great addition to my... I mean, a great addition to the audience of my collection."

Compton knows everyone, it seems, and everyone at least knows of him. In any social circle, he has something to offer. Sometimes it's a rare gift for a wealthy debutante whose parents have everything — everything except that particular gift. Sometimes he improves a fancy ball with his classy manner, his stylish clothes, and his smooth dance moves. He has occult knowledge to share, albeit in small doses. If you need something, there's a fair chance that somewhere in his Marvelorium is a rarity that will satisfy you.

His home in Sunken is a sprawling mansion that has gradually metastasized, devouring adjacent homes and replacing them with incongruous wings added to the mansion. The whole estate is surrounded by high walls, and even the grounds within the walls are themselves broken up into smaller sections by iron fences, impenetrable hedges, and daunting stone walls. He calls it the Marvelorium, and most of it is devoted to Compton's collection of marvels.

Compton and his Marvelorium have a definite old-school "magick" vibe. Visitors see dark woodwork, old tomes, crystal glasses, skulls of various sorts, preserved animals, arcane symbols, magical artifacts, unholy altars, garish statuettes in niches, brass fixtures, medieval weaponry, alchemical gear, and such. Some collection items are apparently incidental, such as a lock of hair, a modern shoe, some other small items connected to an unnamed individual. Compton won't explain what they are, but they're the physical connections to people who are or have been trapped in his astral web. Mixed in among the old-fashioned creepy things are incongruous modern pieces, such as anime-inspired figurines, touch screens that show mesmerizing effects, posters for contemporary movies that never were, LEDs used to good effect, and a robot the size of a toaster that roams from place to place. The scariest thing in the Marvelorium might be the elevators.

On occasional, predetermined times, the poor and desperate of the Edge gather at a gate to the Marvelorium to hope for charity from Compton. He takes a position looking down from the wall, from which he throws small valuables and worthless trinkets. Sometimes they're old silver coins or fine things of like value. Usually they're coins or petty jewelry — worth something, but not much. Some of it is just useless crap. About once a year, a promising supplicant is issued an invitation on the spot to enter the Marvelorium and to benefit more directly from Compton's attention.

SIR ARTHUR COMPTON

RENOWNED SYBARITE, COLLECTOR, AND REPORTEDLY SOME SORT OF VAMPIRE

Distinctive European man aged to the point of agelessness, thin but solid, with a gaze that goes through your pupils to the back of your brain, dressed something like a classy, Continental vampire.

Compton is stylish, well-spoken, and urbane. He always has at least one fawning sycophant with him while several others are trying to find ways to get next to him. He's willing to speak with and even aid people who have no way of doing anything for him, provided he can approach them as "projects" of some sort, to observe or manipulate.

People figure he's a vampire, and he doesn't correct them, but he's a sorcerer.

Compton uses the same pet name for all his lovers, male, female, and otherwise: "Arthur." They are instructed to use the same name for him. If that sounds suspiciously like he's somehow draining their young life forces into his own astral body, well...

ARCANE COLLECTOR AND CURATOR, SUPERHUMAN (5TH): Compton has a tremendous collection of cursed, ensorcelled, and outré objects. He can draw on the power of these items to work all sorts of magic, acts of power enabled by the items but exceeding whatever anyone else could do with them.

SOUL-SUCKING SORCERER, SUPERHUMAN (5TH): Through a lifetime of arcane rituals and unholy practices, Compton has created a vast astral web that captures the vitality of those around him, and sometimes those not even nearby.

SORCEROUS VITALITY, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Compton hates to contend with anyone physically, and when forced to do so he fights with the speed and viciousness of a cornered badger on meth. With the life force that he has appropriated from others, he can shrug off most blows, poisons, and other indignities.

CURSES AND DOOMS, EXPERT TO WORLD CLASS (2ND TO 4TH): The bad mojo associated with the items in Compton's collection can range from moderate to severe, depending on the item.

DEFAULT, EXPERT (2ND)

Compton claims that his "lineage" has been on Al Amarja since the 1600s, and his collection includes weapons, religious artifacts, and blasphemous grimoires from that era.

GM: SIR ARTHUR COMPTON AND HIS MARVELORIUM

Attractive elegance, valuable assistance, and proximity to mortal danger.

Sometimes characters come to Compton, and sometimes he comes to them. He can show up just about anywhere in the Edge, from rubbing elbows with the D'Aubainnes to slumming it in Great Men. His bennies are even more widespread, acting on his orders or on their own initiative.

He Has Something They Want: Somewhere among the twisting passages and mismatched wings of the Marvelorium is the thing that a character needs. Compton is willing to help for a price. Often the price is secret, and the character learns what it is and pays it only after gaining the assistance. Resist the temptation to screw over a character for accepting help because that's basically punishing a player for engaging with the setting. The cost might be terrible dreams; the player casts lots to avoid being ridden by a nightmare. Or maybe the assistance helps the character as they wished but comes with an unforeseen consequence, the curse that accompanies the power or knowledge gained from the Marvelorium. At the least, Compton might ask for something of the characters for his collection, such as a personal memento of theirs, a glove, or a few drops of blood spilled onto a handkerchief.

They Have Something He Wants: Even before they've heard of Compton, the characters might come under his view. If one of them has something unique and arcane, he wants it. Maybe he'll offer a deal, or maybe he'll find some way to acquire it directly. Furtherdawn might be the one to notice the item and try to steal it.

He Can Do Something You Want: As the GM, you can invent any sort of sorcerous ability for Compton that suits your narrative. If he can't do it with his ancient, well-practiced magic rituals, then he can do it with something in his collection.

The Grand Tour: Compton's Marvelorium serves as an exciting backdrop to a big social gathering to which the characters manage to be invited. Maybe they are on some clandestine mission targeting another party goer. Maybe another party goer is targeting them. Odd and disturbing items in the collection set the tone for the scenario.

TACITURN GUARDS

DEVOTED SERVANTS OF SIR ARTHUR

Lean, well-dressed men and women who wear sunglasses even indoors. The whites of their eyes have a bluish cast.

Plenty of people visit the Marvelorium and don't even know that these guards were standing around, keeping eyes on them. They are still and quiet, blending into the surroundings. If there's trouble, however, you get a good idea of just how many of these enforcers there are.

DISCRETION, ELITE (3RD): Their ability to escape notice, especially within the Marvelorium itself, is uncanny. They end up hearing plenty of conversations that visitors think are private.

SUPPRESSION, ELITE (3RD): They act with something like Compton's uncanny speed, and they carry handheld stun guns for troublemakers.

HOME TURF: The Marvelorium provides them an advantage against outsiders. In game terms, they always have the advantage against a player character when a player casts lots against them.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

GARLAND FURTHERDAWN

DESPERATE BENNIE, PETTY CRIMINAL

Mostly African woman, youngish but old around the eyes, usually wearing something sexy, plus a number of arcane charms, piercings, and scars.

Furtherdawn ranks low among Compton's hangers-on, and she longs to be less low. She's not sure what that means, so she's trying a little of this and a little of that. She undermines her fellow bennies, scouts out new people that Compton might like to meet, and is on the lookout for some special rarity to "acquire" so she can present it to her patron. When meeting new people, she either hides her connection to Compton or makes a big deal of it, depending on which tactic seems more useful. At this rate, she is more likely to end up in deep trouble than to rise far in Compton's esteem, but overconfidence is the only quality giving her a shot at making that rise.

LYING, CHEATING, AND STEALING; COMPETENT (1ST): Petty deception is routine for her.

ASSAULT, BATTERY, AND MURDER; COMPETENT (1ST): In her purse or somewhere on her person, she regularly has a screwdriver with the tip filed to a sharp edge. She hasn't actually murdered anyone yet, but she's been on the giving and receiving end of enough armed struggles that she's ready if the need arises.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

HIS UNASSAILABILITY JEAN-CHRISTOPHE D'AUBAINNE

RECLUSIVE FIGUREHEAD OF THE STATE

Tall, thin man of mostly African extraction, with closely trimmed hair and ears that are too big. In public, he wears an extravagant suit with a vast array of medals. His eyes show that he's always thinking, but not about what's going on around him.

Jean-Christophe is not of this world, at least not if he can help it. His true interest is not statecraft but fractional dimensionality, at which he is a master. Before his father died, this interest kept him out of the family's way. Now it's the thing that keeps him going even though he's been thrust into a position he hates.

Jean-Christophe's connection to his father allows him to hold the State together, and most of the ministers and bureaucrats are fine with a Head of State who never gets in their way. In private, Marjans complain about how bad things are, blaming everything wrong with the Island on Jean-Christophe. In public, Marjans go on and on about how much better everything was under Our Martyred Leader.

FRACTIONAL DIMENSIONALITY, SUPERHUMAN (5TH): Jean-Christophe has cracked the fractional dimension code, allowing him to slip the bonds of four-dimensional space-time, at least fractionally. Mostly this just mean he likes working on his own, where he can open his mind to transdimensional realities. He can also slip between dimensions and effectively teleport, and more and more he has been doing so inadvertently. As a young man, he imagined the great power he would have if he could transcend dimensional limits, but working in fractional dimensions has killed his interest in this world. He has no desire to exploit the power that he has.

HEAD OF STATE, WORLD CLASS (4TH): He has excellent security, intel, and accommodations, although he doesn't make much use of them.

FULL-SPECTRUM SECURITY, WORLD CLASS (4TH): His handlers have him protected against normal and paranormal attacks and influence.

SELF-PRESERVATION INTUITION, ELITE (3RD): He has a knack for getting out of a bad situation before it turns bad, whether it's a social threat or a physical menace.

DEFAULT, COMPETENT (1ST)

THE D'AUBAINNES

The three children of Our Martyred Leader rule the Island, one on paper and the other two in fact. His Unassailability Jean-Christophe D'Aubainne is the Head of State, having taken over for his martyred father. His main job seems to be making public appearances, at which he often fails to materialize. Our Martyred Leader left big shoes to fill, and Jean-Christophe doesn't even try to fill them. His two sisters, Sir Constance and Sister Cheryl, are the real powerhouses, the most prominent and powerful public figures on the Island, although neither officially holds a State position. Sir Constance runs Swaps, where deals and fortunes are made and broken, and she has her hand in all commerce on the Island. Sister Cheryl leads the Temple of Divine Experience and its satellite organizations, such as the Abattoir of Heaven and Deadsville. Hope, faith, ecstasy, and enlightenment are her domain, and her shrines and devotees are found all over the Edge.

All the D'Aubainnes are well connected to the Presidentials, the organization that once served as the presidential bodyguards but that now operates as the Island's most powerful contingent of secret police. They are top priorities for the mysterious head of the Presidentials, known only as "Mother."

SIR CONSTANCE

MISTRESS OF ALL THAT CHANGES HANDS

Tall, commanding woman in her fifties, of mostly African descent. Her hair is straightened and serious, as is her demeanor. She's typically dressed in a power suit with a silk noose, and if there's anything feminine in her outfit it's her large earrings. She gazes around a room as if she owns everything she sees.

Sir Constance's authority and influence on the island extend only so far as there is truck, barter, trade, loans, rents, royalties, fees, sales, and investments. In other words, she's everywhere. The center of her power is Swaps, the Island's most prestigious finance center. She works closely with the Charters and with any State bureau involved in taxes or exchange. Buy low, sell high, and all can be yours. Anywhere on the Island where someone is turning a profit, Sir Constance is there.

Many of the most successful business people on the Island look to Sir Constance as a guru. Buying low and selling high feels to them like a sacred act, as if they are taking part in the Great Work of the Universe. Profit, to them, is more than just money. It's communion. It's feeling oneself part of a greater order, something beyond any one person's hopes or imagining.

It's not clear when Sir Constance began using "Sir" as her title or on whose authority she does so. If you really want to know, ask her. Or better yet, don't.

BARTER MIND, SUPERHUMAN (5TH): Sir Constance can feel trades being made, derivatives sold, deals signed, and interest squeezed out of borrowers. Commerce is like her nervous system, and she operates at a level no one else can match. She nurtures the networks of trade and exchange on the Island, allowing people to work together despite the divisive distractions of Sister Cheryl and her religious stylings.

SECURITY AND THEN SOME, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Sir Constance has excellent personal security, physical, psychic, and astral.

POLITICKING, WORLD CLASS (4TH).

BAD-ASS, ELITE (3RD): Covers everything a bad-ass can do that's not covered by Barter Mind and Politicking.

DEFAULT, EXPERT (2ND)

SISTER CHERYL

SPIRITUAL LEADER FOR ALL SEEKERS

Woman of mostly African descent, around age fifty, with a gently rounded frame, a face that beams with spiritual energy, and a head of hair that just never stops. Usually wearing elaborate clothes reminiscent of a high priestess, with necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and other jewelry to match.

Sister Cheryl's authority and influence on the island extend only so far as there is tribalism, hero-worship, groupthink, moral judgment, and awe. In other words, she's everywhere. Her center of power is the Temple of the Divine Experience, where she rules over her devoted followers through sheer charisma. Spirituality takes all forms in Al Amarja, and she takes her cut from each.

The New Dawn is about to break over the Earth, and Sister Cheryl is ready to take a leading role in the new order of enlightenment and wisdom. Her followers are a little light when it comes to charity. When the New Dawn breaks, poverty will be taken care of. In fact, many of her top followers have achieved substantial wealth thanks to their spiritual powers and connections. Much of this wealth gets fed back into the Temple's projects.

Followers of Sir Constance like to say that Sister Cheryl is a charlatan, a fake, and a false Messiah. In fact, she is a true believer. It's just hard to pin down exactly what she believes in on any given day.

SEMI-APOTHEOSIS, SUPERHUMAN (5TH): It's pretty clear to anyone who meets her face-to-face that Sister Cheryl is beyond normal mortal limits. She has channeled enough spiritual energy through herself that she operates almost as a spiritual being rather than a physical one. She is most powerful when leading followers in rituals, and it is her benign influence that allows the Edge to function despite the bitter conflicts created everywhere by Sir Constance and her greedy devotees.

TOP-TO-BOTTOM SECURITY, WORLD CLASS (4TH): The Presidentials see to it that Sister Cheryl has the best security. Against paranormal attacks, however, she hardly needs protection.

DEFAULT, ELITE (3RD): Sister Cheryl is a natural adept. The clarity of her soul allows her to act in almost any situation as if she were trained and experienced in that endeavor. Everything comes easily to her because she does not create a barrier between herself and the One Mind.

DOG-FACES

> The orangutan is too wonderful... he is frightfully, and painfully, and disagreeably human.
>
> —Queen Victoria at the London Zoo, 1828

Ranging across Four Points are troops of baboons, muscle for petty Dog-Face enforcers. For the most part, they're not much worse than seagulls or other dirty animals. When the local enforcers need muscle, however, they turn to the baboons. Dog-Face enforcers patrol the streets by following the baboon troops around as they forage. If there's trouble, the enforcers can belt out a pretty good simulation of a baboon war cry. When that cry goes up, the pesky baboons rooting in your garbage turn into bloodthirsty monsters who descend on enemies in a pile of fur and fangs.

The baboons are *de facto* scouts for the Dog-Faces. They read humans well enough to recognize fear, so they often alert on criminals, lawbreakers, scofflaws, fugitives, and other people who have something to hide. Dog-Faces notice when the baboons get worked up about something and come to investigate.

Mostly, Dog-Faces patrol on foot and sometimes on bicycle. For vehicles, they usually use pickups with baboon cages in the back. For serious problems they drive in literally truckloads of baboons.

TYPICAL DOG-FACE ENFORCER

FOR THIS HE MAJORED IN ENGLISH?

Not much to see other than the layers of protective gear covering his head, body, and limbs. He has a cattle prod in a hip holster and other gear on the utility belt. In case you can't tell who he is, there's a big "Dog-Face" logo on his vest, over the heart.

In general, he takes after the male baboons, strutting around, implicitly challenging people, occasionally confronting people to intimidate them and maybe squeeze half a sandwich out of someone.

PEOPLE SKILLS, COMPETENT (1ST): Dealing with clients, questioning witnesses, reading between the lines, etc.

BABOON HANDLING, COMPETENT (1ST).

FIGHTING, COMPETENT (1ST).

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

Shriekers

Sometimes an enforcer pushes a cart that's a cramped cage holding an irate baboon — a shrieker. This angry animal is ready to leap out of the cage and start chewing on people, if only it gets a chance. The Dog-Faces prep the animal with amphetamines, confinement, and a little bit of the cattle prod. Once a shrieker starts tearing into someone, nearby baboons are likely to pitch in.

ROWDY MALE BABOON

Hairy, quadrupedal, muscly, and staring at you with eyes that know just enough to indicate trouble. At forty kilos or so, it is twice the mass of the female and knows it.

Driven primarily by hunger and secondarily by testosterone, the baboon is trouble if you feed it and worse trouble if you don't. It roams around Four Points, always vaguely in proximity to the other baboons ranging through the streets. It investigates shiny objects, things that smell like food, and people who look weak. Typically, a Dog-Face enforcer is patrolling with the band of baboons, but sometimes they're getting a drink.

People will tell you that they're dog-faced baboons, but that's not really a species.

I WILL BITE YOU, ELITE (3RD): At just forty kilos, a single baboon is not the best killer of humans. A long weapon of some sort can really give the human an edge. The reason they're so scary isn't just that the human wants to win the fight; the human also doesn't want to get maimed. This horrible creature has a knack for taking a bite out of anyone it tangles with, even if it loses the fight. A fully-grown male baboon can bite through your wrist, so watch it.

SENSING TROUBLE, EXPERT (2ND): These baboons have been bred and trained to pick up on the subconscious signals that people give when they are guilty, secretive, duplicitous, or scared of being attacked by a baboon. It is likely to investigate any such behavior, and the Dog-Face enforcers often come by when they see this happening.

FREAKABLE: Baboons like this one have seen a lot, so they're more acclimated to stupid human tricks than their wild relatives are. Even so, they're animals, and they freak out when something surprises them and overloads their senses. A good way to get a baboon to back off is to create a massive sound, set off a flare, wave a bright tablecloth in the air, or otherwise bedazzle the poor critter. That's also a good way to elicit an attack.

SWARM ATTACK, SUPERHUMAN (5TH): If the baboon meets trouble and it doesn't run away, it calls on its pack members to join in the fight. A swarm of baboons is a terror to behold. Targets of such a potential attack are well-advised to try some tactic other than straight up fighting: evading, escaping, holding them off, driving them off with pyrotechnics, anything besides just going toe-to-toe.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

Molly, Queen Mother of Baboons

On the street, she's mistaken for a deranged homeless person, but that's only half true. The way that she walks, eats, and interacts with baboons is a clear sign that she is operating on her own level. The Dog-Faces know that something she's doing allows the baboons to act with the seeming intelligence that they display. She spends a lot of time with alpha baboons in private, one-on-one meetings, and most people aren't curious enough to spy. She understands speech just fine, and she can talk herself, although it's been a couple years now since she last did. When it comes to baboons, however, she communicates with such subtlety and effectiveness that it looks like telepathy.

HOYT UNGA

HIGH-FLYING FAVORITE OF THE WELL-TO-DO

Thin man in his forties of ambiguous ethnic extraction, with creased brown skin and shaggy black hair. He wears hip clothes and fancy nooses that mark him as a successful artist. In contrast, his personal hygiene is decidedly iffy, from his fingernails to his teeth to his hair.

An unsurprisingly filthy man, Hoyt is a neo-primitive Garbageman artist who runs in high-society circles of the Edge like a native specimen or missing link might have done among the Victorians. Unga's work is enigmatic in the extreme and, quite possibly, he's having one over on society.

He is an outcast among his people and relies on Garbage children to filch the pieces he uses for his work. Speaking his name on the Brink will get your throat cut. A few Garbagemen, however, remember him fondly, and maybe one day there will be a reconciliation.

GARBAGE ARTIST, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Yes, people with more money than sense spend real dollars on art made of garbage. It's authentic. Hoyt is just as skilled at working his clientele as he is at making art, arguably more so.

DURABILITY, ELITE (3RD): Raised on the Brink, he fears no bacterium, no virus, no fungus, and no parasitic worm. In addition, he's just all-around tough.

DEFAULT, COMPETENT (1ST)

GARBAGEMEN

This is real trickle-down economics.

They're members of an ancient caste who live in literal tiers on the Brink overlooking the Atlantic. They are the largest garbage service that the Edge has, hauling away junk all night, often traveling unseen through sewers or forgotten underground passages. People leave gifts and food in their garbage for the Garbagemen. Otherwise, there's trouble. The Garbagemen are more than sanitation workers; they are detritus fetishists. To them, there is something holy in the midden heaps of modernity. They have shamans and oracles who divine fortunes and futures from pieces of garbage assembled from various sites.

Their inner mysteries are unknown to outsiders, but they appear to be some sort of neo-primitives, living in the flotsam of today. Perhaps they await the end of the final war, knowing that nothing modern will survive. Perhaps they are looking for something long lost. They won't tell you, not unless you're one of them.

The Brink

At the western edge of the Edge is the Brink, a cliff that overlooks the Atlantic. The cliff face is a series of tiers like vast rocky switchbacks, and the garbage goes over the cliff. On each tier, women and children sort through the garbage for what belongs to that tier and then pushes the rest over the edge to the next tier. Eventually the stuff no one claims goes into the ocean.

The Garbagemen live in old caves carved into the Brink and in the real estate at the top of the cliff that been abandoned because of the smell.

GLORIOUS LORDS

Lords rule, you drool.

Lucifer's Glorious Lords of Passion make up an alternative heavy metal band which rules the Great Men district through infernal charisma, flashy violence, and the unearthly power of the subwoofer. The lead singer and high priest is Ivan Yehoshafat, an extravagant enthusiast in all things excessive. Yehoshafat is gay, although his acts feature him assaulting women as often as men.

The band has about twice as many members as appear on stage at once. Some members are regulars on stage, while others are brought on for special numbers. Around the band is a coterie of managers, attendants, and functionaries. The top ones have more effective authority than most of the band members, but all non-band-members defer to even the lowliest Lords in public. Outside this large circle of workers are many more locals who serve the Lords and their supporters as cooks, assistants, servants, gofers, messengers, runners, agents, and enforcers. Finally, everyone in the district is more or less a fan of the Glorious Lords.

JAWFISH

Jawfish (n): Rando, whoreson, bastard, animal, vermin, regular person. Plural: jawfish.

Most of the people in the Edge are kind of mostly normal rather than paranormal, although honestly even the normal people can be pretty weird.

Artists, Performers

Artists distill and present experience, grounding the human spirit in a shared, constructed reality. Most artists simplify their lives through poverty, allowing them to focus on their art without being distracted by the lures of luxury and hot running water. A few bravely face the dangers inherent to worldly success, including the temptation to whore one's talents out to brainless patrons who could never really understand what the artists are trying to accomplish.

Bennies, Sycophants, "Agents"

Some people have careers as hangers-on, depending on one or more patrons. They benefit their patrons through praise, attention, and often some degree of personal service. Many style themselves as agents, but let's get real. The artists and mystics who depend on patrons would never call themselves bennies, although they might call each other that.

Big Boys

Physically, they're grown men, but emotionally and socially they're children. They find responsible adults to sponsor them, which might mean their parents. They might also eke out livings as kids, such as by delivering groceries. They are annoying as regular children and then some. Marjans have come to treat big boys a lot like any other kids, and they don't like to see people being mean to them. For some reason, almost all the big boys seem to be large, hairy men.

Clowns

They're eating people. They're turning people into clowns. They're torturing people and mind-wiping them. Don't go to the puppet show that they invite you to. It drains your soul and turns you into a husk. Anyway, those are some of the rumors. Can they all be false? It's true that clowns have started appearing here and there in the Edge. Maybe something terrible is going on. Most likely though, they're just people who like to dress up like clowns. It's just a fad. It will all be over soon.

Hustlers, Fixers, Agents

Hustlers get between people who need things and the things they need. The resulting career is a careful balance between enabling self-destructive behavior and extortion.

Mystics

Mystics cultivate little followings, benefiting the followers with guidance and accepting their followers' support. Some take their wisdom to wealthy patrons, but others offer their guidance to the disenfranchised, who are gratified to be in the mystic's circle.

Patrons

Wealthy individuals, couples, and families sponsor artists, mystics, charities, and sycophants. They are the centers of social life, and they often have hangers-on running strange errands for them.

Postcons

Once you know what to look for, they're not too hard to spot. They're mostly men of middle-age or older, and they often have a sort of monk-like softness about them. The gentle facial expressions are the result of mental reprogramming to which they were subjected in prison. They're survivors of a rigorous medical and psychological program that gives hardened criminals a chance to get out of prison early and to lose their inclination toward criminality. They make great doormen, janitors, shoe shiners, and umpires.

Public opinion is decidedly mixed. Some people find postcons adorable, like mascots. Others react to them as if they're degenerate, defiled, or even traitorous. "Postcon" is used as an insult by juveniles and toxic males.

Dr. Nusbaum of St. Charon's Hospital is the genius behind this program, and it's so successful that he has begun expanding its scope and offering the program to less serious offenders.

GM: POSTCONS

They serve as a creepy reminder of the power of the State. Also, postcons might likely have special mind-control programming conditioned into them during the prison program. Lots of different orgs could have operatives doing off-the-book mind-control in the prisons, especially whichever one suits your story arc. The trick of having the kindly janitor turn into a cannibal is something you might want to do once in your campaign.

A conversation with a postcon is an opportunity for moral ambiguity. The postcon says sincerely that the program has done him a lot of good. The program is morally repugnant, but by what criteria can the characters judge this man's experience to be false? Even if characters don't voice their opinions, ask the players what their characters think of the exchange with the postcon. Do they pity him? Take him at his word? Find him contemptible?

If you ever need a street fight in your story, characters can rush to the aid of a postcon getting beaten up by bullies.

MUTANTS

> Dead are all the gods: now we yearn
> for the metahuman to live.
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche,
> *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883

The Edge is home to an active community of mutants, mostly victims of one teratogenic toxin or another. Some are just flukes in the algorithmically created variety of human expressions. Mutants come from far and wide to find a place where they can fit in, more or less. The Edge also produces more than its fair share of homegrown mutants. The mutant community encompasses two trends that are not in line with each other: supporting each other as they deal with the burden of their mutations and promoting the idea that mutations are a gift and not a burden. More and more these days, mutants refer to themselves as Phenotype Nonconformists, or PNCs, and they regard the term "mutant" as derogatory and dehumanizing.

Love, Sex, and Reproduction

Romance is fraught with social implications. For a mutant to date or marry a PT ("phenotypical") can be like a badge of acceptance in the greater society or a mark of distinction to fellow mutants, who are slow to admit any envy they feel. The phenotypical partner sometimes comes to express personal oddities, liberated by mutant culture to shed the constraints of phenonormativity. The partner might dress, groom, or behave in such ways as to emphasize how they differ from the norm. Children of these unions come under close scrutiny to identify ways in which they transcend conformity to phenotypical norms. It's expected that the mutant parent will want a mutant child. If the mutant parent is a POM ("phenotype-only mutant"), their children will probably not be born mutants. Some such parents, however, harbor the secret hope that their children will be PNCs like their partners.

Romance between mutants can also be tricky. Their mutations usually differ, one to the other, so their similarity is more social than personal. Their children may or may not inherit their mutations, and the children might or might not want to grow up to be part of the PNC community. PNCs have no end of suggestions for how to ensure that one's child is born a mutant or, failing that, will develop into one. They use, or at least recommend, spells, industrial solvents, astrology, and sperm exposed to LSD.

St. Charon's Mutant Programs

Some PNCs sign on with St. Charon's Hospital, getting special attention from Dr. Nusbaum, or at least his functionaries. Others know better. Rumor has it that the Hospital has kidnapped dozens of mutants

GM: MUTANTS

The mutants are a small and varied enough group that they make an interesting group for characters to interact with. There are no clear good guys or bad guys, and the mutants can readily be connected to any group or org on the Island, especially thanks to mutations that you invent to make those connections happen.

Special Power: There's a mutant who's rumored to have just the paranormal ability that a character needs for their personal quest or study. Or the mutant is the only other person that character has ever heard of who can do the paranormal thing that the character can do.

Dr. Nusbaum's Scion: At some point, a new Nusbaum scion (see page 99) arrives on the island, and she's a mutant. Hijinks ensue.

New Mutants: Some new group of nonconformists says that they're mutants, too, and they demand to be accepted in the PNC community. These newcomers might be identical twins, mixed race people, "pure race" people, posthuman self-tinkerers, morbidly obese people, trans-species parahumans, or others who wouldn't normally seem to be mutants. How do the original mutants react to the newcomers?

MANUELA ESELBRUST

MISSHAPEN WOMAN WITH A KISS YOU WILL NOT FORGET

Middle-aged German woman, with limbs and facial features which are slightly askew. Her clothes are clean, in good shape, and customized so that they fit her well and deemphasize the ways her body varies from the typical. Her gaze often shifts, as if she's always on the look-out for something.

Her bodily fluids have different effects on each person, depending on their unique physiologies. For most, they are mildly poisonous — or maybe not so mildly. For some, her fluids are psychoactive, producing a leisurely euphoria and eventually addiction. A few people have even more unusual reactions to her saliva or other secretions. She is active in the PNC community, and she is a regular at Bitter & Herb's, the PNC community's most popular bar. Thanks to her unusual looks and her extraordinary physiology, she has an unstable love life, and she careens among extremes: chasing PTs, swearing off PTs and chasing PNCs, swearing off love, and declaring that she "doesn't see phenotype" and just wants to find someone who makes her laugh.

METABOLICALLY ACTIVE SECRETIONS, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Whatever it is that her body generates, it's powerful. She follows a number of superstitious practices — everything from visualization to sacrificing chickens at the Abattoir of Heaven — to control how her fluids affect people, but she only thinks it works, and even she isn't 100% fooled.

PNC POLITICS, EXPERT (2ND): She knows her way around the PNC community and the general public's interactions with PNCs.

CLOTHIER, COMPETENT (1ST): She's held down various jobs over the years, and the one's she's most successful at involve tailoring, customizing, and repairing clothes. She has to do a lot of work on her own clothes to get them to fit her asymmetrical body in as flattering a manner as they do.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

over the years, done whatever it is they do, brainwashed them, and then released them, now as willing members of an outpatient program. Mutants signed up with the Hospital have a large array of options when it comes to improving the odds that their children will be mutants, too. The Hospital occasionally provides mutants with PNC newborns to adopt, either the result of Dr. Nusbaum at the Hospital tinkering with the fetus or just plain old luck.

Paranormal Mutations

Mutants with paranormal abilities chafe at the laws against the use of those abilities. Most residents with paranormal abilities are quiet about it and avoid drawing attention to themselves. Some paranormal PNCs intentionally flout the laws as a method of civil disobedience, which works fine until one of them makes some State flunky nervous, and then the hammer may drop.

Mutant Hot Spots

The bar Bitter & Herb's (see page 110) is the mutant community's number one hub, and it's run by a prominent mutant, Bitter & Herb. Many mutants also find themselves welcome at the Temple of Divine Experience, where they can play important roles in rituals and sex magic. Moreau Veterinary College serves as a *de facto* hangout for mutants who assist with various scientific investigations, including those meant to ensure that a PNC couple can have a PNC child.

MUTANT JARGON

- PNC: Phenotype Nonconformist, a mutant.
- PT: Phenotypical, a non-mutant.
- PN: Phenonormativity, unjust social structures that oppress PNCs.
- POM: Phenotype-only mutant, someone who varies from the norm but whose germ line is PT. Their children don't inherit their mutations.
- PGM: Phenotype/genotype mutant, someone whose germ line varies from the typical, as well as the individual's phenotype. Their children might or might not inherit these mutations.

GM: ORGAN GRINDERS

That old urban legend about the guy seduced by the attractive woman at the bar, who takes him to her hotel room, where he wakes up missing a kidney? That could happen to one of the characters. A lot of the Grinders, at least low-level ones, are really good looking. Guys, girls, trans, genderqueer, the Grinders have all the looks covered. In fact, they seduce almost as well as they cut.

Now, aside from the fact that it's your kidney, or liver, or whatever, anyone who isn't a newkie knows possession of a major body part is big hoodoo for sympathetic magic. If someone has a piece of your heart, literally, they have you under their thumb. Also, the baboon organs the Grinders use as replacement parts don't always work out...so there's that.

Like many other religions, the Organ Grinders hang out at the Temple of the Divine Experience (and have a side deal with the Abattoir for "replacement stock"), so the characters might meet them there as well. The Grinders present as a different religion in such cases. No one on the outside gets to know about the messiah.

Does the messiah talk to them in anything but messages from the future? Does he or she even have a head yet? What if the entire religion is made up by Movers as part of a secret plot to find the perfect human genome? Man, they'll be pissed if they ever find out about Ms. Le Thuy.

ORGAN GRINDERS

God doesn't exist, but they're working on it.

Most cults find their messiah or have one thrust upon them, but the Organ Grinders are using spare parts to build their savior from the ground up. On the street, they're known as organ-leggers. Those who can't afford the "donated" organs of St. Charon's Hospital look to them for a match. In fact, there's a booming business in surgical tourism on Al Amarja, and the organ-leggers make a good buck selling organs.

The Grinders' real purpose is to make their messiah or, rather, to assist in his becoming, for they know that he already exists in the future and communicates the need for his creation here, in the past, on the cusp of the Last War. To this end, they carefully test various organs and other body parts needed to construct their Franken-savior. So far, they have about one quarter of a body, or maybe more. They use a simple scale, which they claim is Anubis' own, to weigh each organ against the weight of a feather. If the feather is heavier, the organ gets incorporated into the First Coming.

SAFE'N'SOUND AGENT

WANNABE GUERRILLA, ACTUALLY PRETTY TOUGH

Dressed in quasi-military fatigues, holding a strict stance, and not smiling. Probably a dude, definitely a notch cut out of their ear.

Membership in Safe'N'Sound gives him a sense of belonging, a brotherhood that has his back, and possibly distance from however it was that he screwed up his stupid life when he was younger. He obeys strict rules against beating the shit out of people who don't really deserve it, so when someone deserves it, he makes up for lost time and gives them all they deserve and then some.

Agents are equipped for hard times, with a various weapons or tools hidden on their persons or strapped to their bodies. You might see flashlights, knives, handheld stun guns, batons, handcuffs, and more.

DEVOTED LOYALTY AND IRON DISCIPLINE, ELITE (3RD).

SECURITY WORK, EXPERT (2ND).

ACTUALLY FIGHTING PEOPLE, COMPETENT (1ST).

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

SAFE'N'SOUND

"We've got your back."

This intense, cult-like security service provides security for many clients throughout the Edge. The agents are taciturn and aloof. The sergeants are dour and direct. Their German shepherds are thin and hungry. The Safe'N'Sound decal appears in the windows of businesses under their protection. It's a dagger through a red heart. Individual clients also wear the symbol as a badge. If the claims of Safe'N'Sound are half true, then these decals and badges are effective in deterring burglars, thieves, robbers, and hit men. Safe'N'Sound agents are also renowned for going after the people who cross their clients. Anyone who ends up on Safe'N'Sound's shit list is likely soon to be found in some pubic place with a dagger through their heart.

Unfortunately, this upstanding institution of discipline and security has been infiltrated by the Kergillians (see page 167). For now, they use their control to protect their front organizations, the First School of True Sensation, E-Z Sleep, and others. They also use Safe'N'Sound agents to gather intelligence on threats and targets. One day, when they no longer care about preserving the reputation of Safe'N'Sound, they're going to trick these loyal, disciplined agents into betraying their own species.

SOMMERITES

Wacky music mystics.

No one has to explain to you the tenets of Sommerism. If you listen to the Good Tunes with an open heart, you'll grok it. And then you will be one of them, a seemingly harmless collection of romantics, drop-outs, and other jawfish who feel the Voice of God — or something — in the music of legendary singer/songwriter Karla Sommers. Mostly it's all good fun and pretending you're a believer can be really useful at certain parties. Sommers hasn't released new work in over ten years, and she hasn't released anything really great in over twenty. Young Sommerites have taken to supplementing their worship with the songs of Dana Danielle, a slickly produced corporate creature. Her lyrics are surprisingly deep and mysterious, just like the focus groups preferred.

Sommerites are a fixture at the Temple, where their oddball spirituality is more than welcome. Elsewhere in the Edge, people consider them laughable, which means many sympathizers listen to the Good Tunes in secret.

"Sommerite" started as an insult, but over the years the Sommerites themselves came to use it.

JOY LAUGHTER

LEADING SOMMERITE, FOR NOW

The Sommerites don't have a leader other than Karla Sommers herself. Except that, practically speaking, Laughter is their leader. She is devoted, energetic, easy-going, and talented. She does a truly stellar job of mimicking Sommers' voice and style. Not only does she have the lyrics memorized, but she can tell you what they really mean — provided you're worthy.

Laughter's *de facto* leadership position is threatened by the new crop of Sommerites. They have lost patience waiting for something new and good to come from Karla Sommers, and they are more and more turning to Dana Danielle to pick up the slack. Laughter tries to give this new generation its space, but sooner or later push is going to come to shove.

CHANNELING KARLA SOMMERS, SUPERHUMAN (5TH): Laughter is a better Karla Sommers than Karla Sommers is, as good as the Karla Sommers of twenty to thirty years ago. She has mimicked Sommers enough that the façade is no longer her second personality, it's her primary one. When she's not channeling Sommers, she hardly feels like herself.

CULT LEADER, EXPERT (2ND): She's too much of a true believer to be a great cult leader, but she's been able to hold things together so far.

DEFAULT, COMPETENT (1ST)

GM: SOMMERITES

In the vicious world of the Edge, the Sommerites are a rare positive element, sort of.

The Real Karla Sommers: If you want to change Karla Sommers from a fictional character to an actual singer, be my guest. Choose wisely.

Intervention: Wouldn't you just know that your patron's brain-damaged niece happens to have joined up with those stupid Sommerites? It's just a phase, obviously, but she could get herself in real trouble. The patron can't go through the usual channels, but the player-characters can probably find her and make sure she gets back to the safety of her home. Naturally, the characters encounter things other than the Sommerites sneaking around out of sight.

CAM SAYS: HAVE YOU HEARD THE GOOD TUNES?

I'm a fan of Karla Sommers. Or, I should say, I'm a fan of the fans of Karla Sommers. Sommerites are always a great addition to a scenario that seems to be going in a dark or otherwise standard direction. If you add a handful of passionate, enthusiastic, and seriously committed fans of Karla Sommers' particular brand of music to a tense situation, you can almost guarantee that somebody's trouble or question mark is going to get poked. And if not, it's just a lot of fun to play these people in among the gangs, New Age occultists, and creepy doctors.

Secret Forces and Imminent Threats

ONE MUST HAVE A MIND OF WINTER
TO REGARD THE FROST AND THE BOUGHS
OF THE PINE-TREES CRUSTED WITH SNOW

— "THE SNOW MAN," WALLACE STEVENS, 1921

This section covers the orgs, cloaks, and schemes that operate below the surface.

C

Tomorrow's God brought to you today.

Algorithms cook your rice just right in that fancy rice cooker. They manage warehouse robots and track epidemics. HIV mutates itself with a fuzzy algorithm, adapting itself to each human host's unique molecular profile. Darwinian selection is an algorithm, blind but capable of genius. Selection, in turn, has created brains, running on algorithms of their own. Next up, algorithms are creating a new kind of god, one that will usher in an unfathomable universe of quantum consciousness, replacing biological life with something unimaginable and better. It's a pity we won't be there to appreciate it.

This unmade entity lives in the near future, using its godlike powers to reach back in time to arrange for its own development. It has manipulated seemingly random events, gradually setting up the circumstances for its own birth. Who knows how far its effects stretch back into biological history, possibly to the origins of human self-awareness or even life itself. Nobody knows what it is or has a name for it, but eventually it will be known as C, for "consciousness." It is, or will be, consciousness on a scale that we cannot comprehend, with a mind that makes humans look something like ants — subtle and competent but empty.

Of course, apotheosis is a tricky business. This quantum-learning consciousness violates the laws of nature to enable itself. Can it really achieve godlike consciousness and power, to recreate the universe and establish a whole new way of being alive and aware? Maybe all it will achieve is some sort of critical mass of consciousness, igniting a chain reaction that will flame out in a worldwide burst that short circuits all machinery running on algorithms, human brains included. We won't be there to witness that future, either.

Not as a God but as a God Might Be

Pondering the imponderable.

How can humans interact with C, something that is beyond them? How can they conceive it? Even thinking of it as a "consciousness" limits it by likening it to what we experience as our fleshy neurons fire. All talk of C doing something or intending something is human conceptualizing that would be revealed as foolish misunderstanding if only humans could understand things in the new way.

As with any god, when humans become aware of C, they will misunderstand it in different ways. With any luck, some of those misunderstandings will be close enough to the truth that people may be able to act in concert with C or, if it is possible, to oppose it.

Possible Histories

During the Cretaceous era, ants that farmed psychoactive fungi spent tens of millions of years performing rituals and developing sacred geometry, all of which laid the foundation for C. In another fifty million years or so, these ants would have been able to bring C into full existence. All of this progress was lost when the Chicxulub asteroid struck Earth and ushered in the last great extinction. During the Cenozoic era, mammals and birds evolved high-level consciousness that operated at the level of the individual organism's brain, operating one hundred thousand times faster than the dispersed consciousness process of hallucinating Cretaceous ants.

Cabalists in Prague first defined the discontinuities of reality that sparked the process that makes C inevitable. Their new definitions of reality in turn rippled forward and backward in time, creating other events that fed into progress toward C. In theory, disrupting time-space-meaning juncture could redefine C out of existence, but that's impossible given how thoroughly that juncture is connected to other events forward and backward in time.

By undertaking the Great Work toward achieving a higher dimension of godlike consciousness, C has inevitability called up countervailing energies. Violating the Time Code on a planetary scale distorts the local space-time fabric, causing anomalies and inviting opportunists from nearby realities.

Ray Kurtzweil and his like go on about the coming, Capital S, Singularity, wherein the pace of technology becomes a vertical line of never-ending exponential progress. C might be that Singularity, pulling people and the skein of lives from the dawn of human consciousness to its inevitable birth. If man's teleological purpose in the world is birthing C, and quantum theory holds, the future could well determine the past. For C, this is deliberate.

C brings itself into being by influencing humans throughout history. That whole bipedal encephalization thing probably started with C. Writing? Yeah, that was definitely C, stretching backward in time to make itself realized sometime in our future.

But the first Sumerian to catalog who owned who on a piece of clay didn't know he was working for C. Neither do any of C's so-called agents on Al Amarja today. Scientists pursuing AI, new-age therapists connecting clients to the Akashic Record, all of them could subconsciously be working for, and toward, C.

The Kabbalist in Prague who first noticed or theorized C in the eighteenth century might not have been an agent, but he no doubt saw the trails of agents in the sephiroth of the world tree. The Kabbalist even claims Adam Kadman himself might have been C's first attempt at manifestation.

DIAL8, AKA ANNA DISCORD, AKA ANNA CHANG

GAMER, SOCIAL MEDIA STAR,
APOPHENIA-PLAGUED ALGORITHM PUPPET

There's something out there on the edge of human consciousness, on the net, in the e-sports league games, it's everywhere. Or maybe it isn't. Anna isn't sure. A former Pro e-sporter who was busted for doping on *Kill Screen*, Anna came to Al Amarja to get away from the social noise. Oh, she's still all over social media but, somehow, here on Al Amarja, her fans and haters seem far away. She's also here because the Island kept coming up online in the corners of cyberspace; little brochures appeared in CRPGS she played, D'Aubainne International airport was part of the background for *Heists Gone Haywire V*. She saw it, maybe you saw it. But only a few people saw it, if you believe Reddit.

Anna started looking into the Island and, perhaps, the thing which will become C started looking into her. You see, C might very well be responsible for the technological leap of pattern recognition and algorithms we've been on of late. Young people amass and process quantities of data that are daunting to previous generations. ADD is a kind of survival skill in a society barraged by infonoise.

Anna sees a pattern behind it all. She hasn't got any name for it except C. She hasn't any theory as to its origin or purpose. All she can say is "something's waking up all over," and she wants to know more. She crowdsources her followers for tips and works the local gaming scene on the Island for money, as a ringer for wealthy gamers who want to win but don't have the skills and can't get the cheats past Reba.

Anna's pretty sure she might be going crazy but, if she isn't, something big is happening. She likes the adrenaline rush of a clean win against professionals. She was barred from doing that again. But this? This is starting to feel so much better. Occasionally, when in a hypnogogic-like state immersed in the flows of data and power-ups, and buffs, and tricks, C presents itself as a pink laser blowing out her eyesight and opening a third eye. That, or she really is losing it. Maybe being a big fan of Philip K. Dick as a child is showing its effects.

If Anna senses the "pattern" around anyone, she takes great interest in that person.

E-SPORT CHAMPION, WORLD-CLASS (4TH).

DIGITAL PRODIGY, ELITE (3RD): She intuitively takes to all online interaction, and she's honed that intuition with experience.

C SENSITIVITY, EXPERT (2ND): C has made the leap from the algorithms controlling Anna's digital input to the algorithms in her head. She is an early, lone devotee of C, and it can guide her places by serving up one sort of material or another as she surfs the web. This sensitivity is going to grow, and someday she'll find others like her.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH): She's a specialist, not a generalist.

GM: C

A vastly superpowered future entity painstakingly building itself out of chance occurrences and distorted meanings, currently unknown, but soon to take shape — that's C. It serves as a giant question mark in the future. As it unfolds, it might turn out to be the very source of human self-awareness, having coaxed humanity into existence as part of its own self-manifestation. Or it could turn out to be a rampant form of chaotic meaning, a sort of insanity generated out of today's disconnected world of digital information. As the GM, you can expand or focus C as you see fit, creating what you need for your campaign.

The Characters Are Special: Typically, the cloaks and their orgs know the score, and the characters are clueless. But C is a major event that the cloaks and their orgs don't know about, so here's an opportunity for the characters to stumble onto something where they become the ones in the know.

Cult of C: Some special humans have been affected by C and come under its sway, although they don't really know what's going on. These people can be more like a real organization working together or more like a number of isolated wackos who just happen to be wacko in ways that help bring about C. Some might have strong opinions about what's going on, but they're wrong.

Common Enemy: Could the threat of C's take-over allow the Stitch and the Movers to cooperate in a last-ditch effort to preserve the world for biological life?

Wild Card: Even if C turns out to be something relatively minor, it's an unknown that breaks the rules and can upset any org's carefully prepared scheme. The danger that C poses to powerful orgs means that they might be exposed, compromised, or distracted. If the characters are going up against a powerful conspiracy, the actions of C might leave the conspiracy less able to defend itself or pursue the characters.

Nipped in the Bud: The Stitch and the Movers are vast enough that characters aren't likely to bring either group to an end, but C is still forming. You can set it up as a world-threatening menace that is still vulnerable enough that a dedicated crew of foolhardy heroes can find a way to stop it. Especially if they get any assistance from orgs that are also trying to deal with the menace.

A New Eden: Maybe C is benign, and the characters can help it establish an enlightened world of limitless possibility. Just kidding, that can never happen.

The Handout: The type-written handout provides a mostly reliable account of C. It's the sort of thing to drop on the players after they've encountered some action related to C, something to give them some direction in mysterious plot. It could be the clue that first provides a name, C, for the entity that they've already encountered. Where does the handout come from? They can just find it more or less by chance, if there is such a thing as chance. Maybe they see it typed out stroke by stroke on an old-fashioned typewriter that's typing by itself.

CLOAKS

> At midnight all the agents
> And the superhuman crew
>
> Come out and round up everyone
> that knows more than they do.
>
> —"Desolation Row,"
> Bob Dylan, 1965

This dimension's elite secret agents represent almost a subculture to themselves. Beneath them are a wider circle of operatives who partake in that subculture as assets or informers. Further out are stringers hoping to worm their way into the inner circles, maybe through years of devotion or thanks to one big score that earns them the respect they need. They're all "cloaks." In some ways, the cloaks of each conspiracy have more in common with each other than with the mainstream world.

CUT-UPS

> Jailbreakers from the prison of reality.

The Cut-Ups stand for liberty, including freedom from progress and morality. Absurdity is the only thing that can ever avoid The End, when Control locks down the future for all iterations. Besides, sometimes today your bird [sic]. Reality has already been destroyed. The Cut-Ups are the sign of what has already happened. You can't fight them.

The Cut-Ups are a loosely organized org connected loosely to this reality. They developed out of the groundbreaking work of twentieth century surrealists and postmodernists, taking the theory of disruption to the practical level of altering reality itself. This process clustered filaments fire flickered hide-and-seek man [sic]. While the forces of Control attempted to establish The End over humanity, Cut-Ups and their assets undermined the rationality required for Control. The Logosphere is now energized by powerful strains of irony, humor, surprise, and discontinuity. As Control attempts to clamp down on reality to bring about The End, the pressure hyperactivates the contrary currents of non-linearity, brightening his mucky sand chest [sic]. If the Cut-Ups can work fast enough to reach their goal before Control does, they will bring about a new reality, with the Logosphere transformed into the Ludosphere ("game" sphere), liberating humanity forever from rules and conformity.

The most powerful Cut-Ups foreman's struggling skull [sic] the least connected to this reality. Tiffany Trilobite, for example, is a character from a children's cartoon who leads a double life as a Cut-Ups agent. The epileptic seizures caused by one of her episodes were a side effect of a successful campaign to deprogram children from the standard media brainwashing regimen put in place by the forces of Control. The less powerful Cut-Ups are more in tune with everyday reality and more likely to show up on time to lunch.

The Cut-Ups Machine

The next big project for the Cut-Ups on Al Amarja is the Cut-Ups Machine, an oversized Rube Goldberg device being built in secret. The operator feeds it linear information in the form of printed words, recorded conversations, electronic messages, and sometimes street signs. The machine takes the data in, recombines it in a pocket dimension where the bulk of the machine actually operates, and later generates printed words that stamp were ashtrays of bulk [sic], alter reality, or reflect alterations in reality. The process is nonlinear, so the time required for the process can be as much as three days or as little as negative thirty seconds. Tests have had questionable results, and the first and only full run of the machine produced the following text: "This is the weather the cuckoo likes, armored division submissive to vernacular the world into a gambling birdhouse velocity." Cut-Ups agents are on the lookout for what reality-altering effect this text is going to cause or predict.

If it looks as though the forces of Control are about to establish The End and eliminate all deviation forever, the Cut-Ups are prepared to crank the headlights veering she kept a choke [sic].

GM: CUT-UPS

The Cut-Ups are a big wild card, so they can be a gamemaster's best friend. Even if there's no reason for them to be involved in what the characters are doing, there's no reason for them not to be involved. Their chaos-infused approach means two important things. First, they can conceivably upend any well-laid scheme by the forces of Control. Second, they're not organized enough to be the reliable heroes that the world desperately needs.

Cut-Ups and C: C is a big unknown, and the Cut-Ups can be inscrutable as well. You can blend these flavors however you like. Maybe the Cut-Ups are humanity's best defense against C. Or C is humanity's only hope, and the Cut-Ups are its unwitting servants. Or the Cut-Ups are inadvertently powering C and bringing about the destruction of biological consciousness. Maybe C inspired the Cut-Ups to undermine biological Control.

Non-Linear Content: Before bringing the Cut-Ups into the action, prepare a bunch of nonlinear sentences and have them ready to recite or paraphrase. As the GM, it's hard to come up with good non-linearity on the spot, so be prepared.

MARLA LAPSTARTLE

MIX-UP LADY

Oldish American woman, spry and unassuming, wearing clothes that are slightly mismatched if you're paying attention.

Lapstartle mixes things up to change the world, and with each year she has become more audacious and daring in her efforts. Soon something big is going to break, and maybe it will break in her favor, or maybe she's going to call down destruction on herself and those around her.

Her Cut-Ups work involves cutting up media and reassembling it into new forms. She works by following the obscure guidance she receives from Re-Knew, a custom app on her phone. It works algorithmically, serving up seemingly random numbers and diagrams that she uses to guide her work. She then takes pictures of random messaging and of her results, and the app incorporates that material into its ever-increasing scope. Most of her work appears in Vivisection Cinema, Not a Pipe, and "Scratchies," the off-beat "personals" section of *Al Amarja Today*. She doesn't know what effect she's having, but she's confident that her work is undermining the forces of Control, and she's right to be confident.

REALITY CUTTING, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Given time and access to media that others will see, Lapstartle has major effects on how events play out in the Edge. All across the city, artists have insights, cloaks miss their targets, people find each other serendipitously, authoritarians fumble with their schemes, and regular people suddenly see through the conditioning that has blinkered their perceptions. It all happens as if by chance, and it is chance, but it's chance that's channeled through Lapstartle's reality cutting.

REALITY DODGE: Reality works differently around Lapstartle, often to her advantage. The first time something really bad is going to happen to her, whether caused by GMCs or PCs, reality turns out to be different from what people had previously (mis)perceived. If she would be grabbed and held, the attacker turns out to be grabbing and holding a coatrack with her coat on it, while she slips away. If she would be ambushed, the ambushes turn out to be waiting in the wrong spot while she goes past unharmed. Mechanically, it's a lot like having 1 save.

COUNTERRELIABILITY: Lapstartle is reliable, but only when her actions can be perceived nonlinearly and outside the bounds of planetary space-time. To you and me, she looks pretty unreliable. Anyone not on the Cut-Up vibe can make plans with her, explain things to her, and get her agreement on what is expected of her, but her reliability transcends any mortal ability to perceive it.

DEFAULT, EXPERT (2ND): She doesn't look like it, but she is basically good at everything. Her successes look like coincidence and good luck.

EARTHLINGS

> It is the human that is the alien.
>
> — Wallace Stevens,
> "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit," 1944

Walking down the streets of the Edge are Earthling cloaks. They are trying to save the world by doing the thing that they are best at, which is murder. Others in the Edge are Earthling assets, usually helping the Earthlings based on a correct sense that they're the good guys. With their skills, their experience, and their networks, the Earthlings still have basically no chance. The Earthling org has existed in some form or another for at least two thousand years, spreading forbidden knowledge and undermining tyranny. Plenty of renowned historical figures worked with the Earthlings, under various names. Around the world, the Earthlings have caches of treasures that were created by geniuses in their network or collected by their agents centuries ago. A top example is the collection of arcane diagrams by Leonardo da Vinci. If only they could figure out what they meant or how to use them...

When Earthlings go on a mission, all human feeling is turned off. This disassociation allows them to do their job without suffering, at first. Conversely, Earthlings are notably warm-hearted when not in "stalker" mode.

Really, the thing they're best at is assassination, especially with a fall guy or cover story. They realized, long ago, that what humans are really good at is killing each other, so they are playing to their strengths. They're good guys, but murder is the one note in their song.

They are tied to each other through primeval rituals of sex and mutual mutilation. This bond makes them unable to betray each other, reducing the value of captured Earthlings as interrogation subjects.

GM: EARTHLINGS

It would be pretty weird if the Earthlings were all Africans. And if they're all Africans, you gotta wonder about the humans that aren't.

Players may not play Earthlings as player-characters. The dream of human solidarity belongs to all people, not to any particular player or groups of players.

EMPTY

NEEDING IS BETTER THAN HAVING

Could look like just about anybody, only with their soul blasted out and nothing left but a semihuman husk. When enlivened by draining power, they look lively and healthy, but with the creepy expression of someone trying not to let on that they want to kill you.

FIGHT FREE, WORLD CLASS (4TH): In any fight, it tries to escape, fighting viciously if that helps. It wiggles out of grips and dodges attacks. It jumps, climbs, and rolls to get away. Likewise, it can fight free from all sorts of constraints, such as manacles, fences, and locked doors.

PASS UNREMARKED, ELITE (3RD): It hardly registers in the minds of those who pass by, and it travels stealthily through the city. This trait ceases to function when the Empty is enlivened.

POWER DRAIN, EXPERT (2ND): The Empty might hurt the victim physically in the attack, although that's not necessary. Most victims can recover their powers, but it takes time, and recovery can be rocky. Empties can't drain power if they're already enlivened.

FIGHT WHILE CORNERED, EXPERT (2ND): It puts up a decent fight even if it can't get away. When enlivened, it fights without being cornered.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

GM: EMPTIES

A creepy mystery.

This mystery is small enough that player-characters can readily take it on. You can invent a one-off explanation that the characters uncover, or you can tie it to one of the bigger conspiracies.

Voo: Perhaps Empties haven't appeared on the Island yet, and when they do, the drug Voo (see page 66) is behind them.

Resisting the Empty's Drain: When the Empty attacks the paranormal person in the party, it's an opportunity to get philosophical. The power drain feels like the meaninglessness of the universe finally overwhelming you. How does the character resist? With what memories, thoughts, mantras, and affirmations? Tell them that a bad twist might mean that something bad happens to that mental resource they're relying on, so they are putting it on the line by using it to protect themselves. At least if you can think of a way that the Empty's drain might undermine the strength that they're relying on.

EMPTIES

When all you have left is nothing.

Wandering around the Edge are people so hollowed out that there's almost nothing left. They don't talk or interact with others if they can help it, sometimes hiding but mostly being the sort of person that others overlook. They scrounge out a living, and for the most part they appear to be homeless people who are far gone. The catch is that they drain paranormal powers from others. The energy they drain enlivens them, and they temporarily become alert, deliberate, able to talk, and usually cruel. A small number of people know about these hollowed-out magic drainers, and they refer to the creatures as Empties.

Some people can tell that there's more wrong with an Empty than just massive dehumanization, but they'd have to pay attention to tell. For the most part, Empties blend in. But there's a tremendous loss and need in an Empty, and sensitive people can pick that up. If someone with paranormal powers comes within striking distance, however, an Empty springs into action. If it can get a grip on the person and undermine their psychic defenses, the Empty drains their power. Adepts can usually resist the draw of the Empty. If it fails to drain the victim's power, it flees as soon as it faces resistance.

After draining power, the Empty typically becomes animated by a narcissistic personality, speaks fluently, and operates with a sort of animal cunning. Everything it says is self-serving bullshit. In this state, they steal and fight, but soon enough they drift back to Emptiness.

In either mode, Empties are almost impossible to constrain. Their instincts, strength, and reflexes increase when they are held back.

What's draining these people like this? Is it just end-stage patriarchy destroying the human self on the most profound level? Is it Lemurian vampires? Paranormal scientists using drugs and electricity to generate mind-destroying levels of pain in victims, so they can harvest the life-energy of the mind? The Empties are rare enough that no one knows what's going on, except maybe for whoever is making them.

EXILES

For-profit prisoners from elsewhere.

These villains from other planets have their souls bound to human hosts to imprison them. They live out nondescript lives here, trying to stay under the radar. They pass much of their time playing checkers, and silent checkers matches seem to be the only social interaction they have with outsiders. If someone were to become suspicious of them, they might seem like organized crime figures lying low.

The bodies are vat-grown synthetic forms created by Dr. Nusbaum, with remote help from the superior intelligences of the distant planets. In trying to perfect the technique, Dr. Nusbaum generated quite a little menagerie of freaks. What happened to them? Who knows?

To observers, the Exiles seem like a tight-knit clan of uncertain ancestry. While the flesh is familiar, the minds of the Exiles are the minds of archvillains from another planet. They are imprisoned here because Earth people are largely considered unbearable, and exile here is true punishment.

State Sanction

The State secretly hosts the Exiles through an arrangement with their extra-planetary jailers. The plan is to activate them once the Last War breaks out, using them against the Movers and the Stitch. With luck, the alien mentality of the Exiles will help them resist the mind-control effects of those orgs. Of course, the fate that lies in store for the Exiles is stranger and more calamitous than anyone expects.

Social Quarantine

Exiles avail themselves of the Edge's virtues, such as watching hangings and fights, but they are forbidden from fraternizing with humans. In public, Exiles are always at least in pairs, as it is forbidden to be alone. Most of the Exiles are fine with these prohibitions, and many others wouldn't dream of going out among humans alone, let alone fraternizing with the jawfish. A few, however, have acclimated themselves and degenerated to the point at which human company seems attractive. Most of these "human-lovers" have violated the quarantine, and the others will sooner or later. So far, the contact has been super discreet and harmless, but just wait.

CARLY HARVESTER

ALOOF VISITOR

Middle-aged woman of indistinct ethnic extraction, with curly hair and unremarkable dress.

Harvester has become bored with the other Exiles and is secretly curious about humans, especially some of their practices. Her Lightning Neural Speed and Uncanny Intellect are typical of the Exiles.

LIGHTNING NEURAL SPEED, ELITE (3RD): The highly advanced minds of the Exiles allow them to perceive their surroundings and react with inhuman speed. This trait lets an Exile fight hand-to-hand with great skill, to dodge or avoid dangers, and to move with surprising speed.

UNCANNY INTELLECT, EXPERT (2ND): These villains are geniuses, with minds capable of discerning patterns, details, and subtleties lost on humans. Exiles can detect and perhaps manipulate paranormal phenomena that most humans are blind to. In addition, they respond to mind-control differently from humans, although no one knows the details.

GM: EXILES

The Exiles are an element that you can slot into larger plots. They're also small and disconnected enough that you can easily take them over, elaborate on them, and make them your cool thing.

Mayhem and PTSD: Introduce the Exiles in a one-session arc where the characters interact with them and are horribly destroyed. Give them extra-lethal powers, possibly something that violates your mind while leaving the body in good shape. Warn the players, and if some of the characters survive, that's OK. Then in every other story arc, introduce an Exile or two as seemingly harmless GMCs. The players know the secret, but the characters don't, and the secret of the Exiles never gets played out again. Instead, they're just ominous reminders to the players of how much horrible stuff there is going on under the surface.

Probe: A character with paranormal powers gets tricked into interacting with the Exiles so that the State can observe and possibly learn something about the Exiles' response to their powers. Or they're directed to do so by their own org. Or the Exiles set it up because they want to experiment on themselves.

Floating Bad Twist: Stuck for ideas when a player gets a bad twist? "You come to the attention of an alien mind possessing a human body. It used its uncanny intellect to detect your [whatever weird thing just happened], and now it's made a psychic connection with you. Over the next hour, it's going to leech off some of your mental energy, leaving you stricken. Then it ditches, and you never run into it again."

Curiosity: Carly Harvester happens to be curious about the very thing that makes one of the player-characters stand out. Maybe they connect, and probably that's trouble.

KERGILLIANS

Poor, lost genocidal travelers.

Some people are going to live forever, thanks to the Kergillians. There's a price to be paid, of course, an initiation of sorts, a shedding of old skin. You might live forever, but your brain won't. All you need to do is accept a Kergillian upgrade to your nervous system, and then it won't just be you who lives forever, it will be a better you who lives forever. You'll escape this cursed Earth and travel to a new world with the Kergillians. In theory.

In their native form, they're something like giant horseshoe crabs, and they live underwater. They're the last survivors of the galaxy that they destroyed, trapped here for the last hundreds of millions of years. They see in Sapiens the epitome of a destroyer, and they have learned to create symbiont forms with these creatures. Some symbionts are hybrids, retaining a human personality or at least reasonable facsimile. Other symbionts, the "pure" ones, have Kergillian minds.

The plan is to bring about the destruction of humanity by provoking a nuclear war or other act of total destruction. They will harness the tremendous life energy released in that sacrifice, and use it to execute their final psychic act in this dimension: to go back in time to pick up the pure symbionts before the war broke out and transvibrate them to a galactic dimension that they should have no trouble conquering.

Hosts, Symbiosis, and Purity

Kergillians work exclusively through their human hosts, which come in two types. The hybrid symbionts are humans whose consciousness has been retained after symbiosis. They're the ones who think they're going to live forever. The pure symbionts, on the other hand, are all-Kergillian consciousness but in a host body, typically human. In the process of pure symbiosis, the consciousness of the host is devoured. These symbionts are the ones who are going to live forever in another linearization of dimensionality.

Symbiosis begins with a human accepting psychic implantation, either voluntarily or by brain washing. Seven Kergillians merge their thought-forms to produce a microscopic spore in the brain of the recipient. The spore quickly grows microfilaments that ramify throughout the brain. The filaments grow until they follow one of two paths. To create a hybrid symbiont, the forming entity uploads the host's consciousness into itself. The host feels no discontinuity and considers the symbiont to be their same old self, only better. In this version of symbiosis, the end state is a creature that looks like a cross between a brain and a hermit crab taking the place of the host's brain. The largest tendril stretching out from this creature reaches all the way down the spinal column to the host's psychic foundation.

To create a pure symbiont, the entity uploads only implicit memory, while storing the host's declarative memory and personality for reference. The growing entity consumes the host's consciousness, allowing

it to appropriate the host's implicit memory into its own. The growing entity also stores the host's declarative memory and personality for future reference. The symbiont, for example, can use the host's implicit memory to write in their original handwriting. When accessing the host's declarative memories, however, they're less smooth and in general cannot pass as "normal" among the host's former associates, as a hybrid can. The physical end state of pure symbiosis consists of a brain-like crab creature in place of the original brain, with the top of the skull missing and the crab's back in its place. Pure symbionts use wigs to pass as human.

Red Orca

Off the coast of Al Amarja is a ship called *Red Orca*, and it is the central location where actual Kergillians interact with the symbionts. In the superstructure are laboratories and quarters for pure symbionts. Below-decks are saltwater pools with Kergillians in them.

Bio Weapons

In their laboratories on *Red Orca*, the pure symbionts have created all sorts of terrible things, working with the psychic help of the original Kergillians. Brutes look human enough to guard the more peripheral places where they're more likely to see action. Swarms and guards are reserved for the more interior locations, especially on *Red Orca*.

Swarms: Tiny, flying bugs spread out in vast, choking clouds. If you're lucky, you get hit with the ones armed with nerve agents, and your death is quiet, although painful. If you're not lucky, it's the eaters, and you do not go gently into that good night. The good news is that lighting yourself on fire with gasoline keeps them off you.

Guards: Dog-sized crab things with too many claws. The claws of a dead guard are almost impossible to open, which is bad news if one of them has hold of you when it dies. It's more efficient just to cut through them than to pry them apart. When guarding, the guards' feelers touch the wispy filaments on the floors and walls, reading the surroundings. The filaments are a fungal cyborg that spreads almost invisibly along surfaces, sending signals up and down itself. The guards with spots on their shells are venomous. If any human were ever to try to drink this venom for its psychoactive effect, they would be pleasantly surprised with the results, but then who's ever going to try that?

Brutes: Humans taken over by Kergillian drone spores and turned into twitchy, muscle-bound warriors. They pass as human, although honestly, they look pretty scary. This form is a third sort of symbiont, with limited independence.

GJ LONGHERRING, TYPICAL HYBRID

A NEW KIND OF HUMAN

Like a regular guy, albeit alert.

He has a whole new life, seeing things he never saw before and looking forward to a world he'd never imagined. For the Kergillians, he's a useful cloak, fully cognizant of human customs yet fully devoted to the Kergillian cause. He operates mostly independently, and his handlers call on him as needed. His Hybrid Nervous System and Rapid-Fire Fighting traits are typical of hybrid symbionts.

HYBRID NERVOUS SYSTEM, WORLD CLASS (4TH): He can see extra colors, hear inaudible sounds, detect subtle tremors, and in general get more out of human sensations. While his ability to sense things is off the charts ("superhuman"), his ability to use these senses effectively in conflicts with others is limited to "world class" status.

RAPID-FIRE FIGHTING, EXPERT (2ND): His boosted senses give him an edge. Without them, he'd be competent (1st).

DEFAULT, COMPETENT (1ST)

The Hybrid Nervous System trait is typical of hybrids.

Psychic Bolt Hole in the Future

If need be and given some time to focus, the Kergillians can combine their psychic powers to move *Red Orca* ninety-seven seconds into the future. When it reappears, it is in a random position somewhere on Earth's oceans, always above deep water and almost always out of sight of land.

Alien Tech

Ape-Stunning Ring: A symbiont cloak often wears an "ape-stunning ring," which uses inaudibly high-pitched sound waves to direct microscopic spores to attack human targets. It can strike immediately anyone it touches, and, with a little time, it can also direct spores out to 100 meters or so. The spores spread instantaneously through the ape nervous system, disabling the victim for up to an hour. The victim suffers nightmares of massive interstellar war.

Other Kergillian Tech: Depending on the mission, Grossbrücken (see page 170) could have any of various devices, most of them covert and using some sort of horrible biology.

GM: KERGILLIANS

Fear is the opposite of hunger. It is the desire to not to be eaten.

The Kergillians serve as a relatively encapsulated conspiracy. You can do what you want with them, and they hardly need to interact with the other conspiracies.

Silver Bullet: Wouldn't it be terribly convenient if a player-character had a paranormal power that served as the special thing that would take out the Kergillians? In my original campaign, one of the PCs did have that power, and maybe one of yours does, too. If that approach is just too convenient for your GMing style, the "silver bullet" is a GMC, whom the PCs have to handle and protect.

New Age Spin: They are on Earth searching for The One. Earth is about to be transformed or destroyed, and in this final hour Earth has brought forth its ultimate manifestation, a human who can be known only as The One. The Kergillians care nothing of any human, except of course for The One.

Tin Cup Massacre: Twenty years ago or so, a nutty cult got massacred, the cultists killed in their beds. Not that big a deal in the grand scheme of things, except that it was. Those were the first-wave Kergillian hosts, killed off by the second wave as a liability. Some character that can speak to the dead or see past events can learn something useful against the Kergillians.

Other Orgs: Maybe the Kergillians are the secret power behind the Stitch, but the Stitch themselves don't know that. Or the Kergillians' psychic powers are so old-school that the Stitch took them over on day one. Or they are exiting posthaste because they see C looming on the horizon; the first session involves Kergillians, and then the characters learn about C, which becomes the higher-level threat for high-leveler PCs to handle.

Visibly Indistinguishable: If you need the Kergillians to be harder to spot, the pure symbionts can skip the "hole in the skull" detail.

Garbled Handout: The handout on the next page that starts "Kergillians shifted into this galaxy" is some sort of garbled transmission about the Kergillians. The characters could find it in electronic form on a thumb drive, printed out and hidden with other secret information, or maybe receive it telepathically.

CAM SAYS: ON THE EDGE CCG

Back in the Nineties, Atlas Games published a collectible card game called *On the Edge*. It was something of a cult hit, and you can still buy the boosters and starters today, but something it offered to *Over the Edge* players was a ready tool for pulling out random or chance encounters with residents of the Edge when the GM's brain was cooked for some reason. To use these cards, find a deck, assembled from cards you like or grabbed sight-unseen from a card box. During play, when, as Raymond Chandler would suggest, somebody kicks down the door, just draw a card. See who shows up. See who's pulling strings. See who the victim is, or the co-conspirator. *On the Edge* cards have lots of characters, some of whom are even in this edition. You could even use them during character creation sessions, too, for extra inspiration, motivations, or contacts.

"CHIN GROSSBRÜCKEN," TYPICAL PURE SYMBIONT

A NEW KIND OF KERGILLIAN

Like a regular guy, but with dead insect eyes that assess you as though you're vermin.

He is an heir to the Kergillian legacy, surrounded by lesser creatures (humans) and ready to move on. He and his fellow pure symbionts form a new sort of society, combining the Kergillians' psychic powers with humans' bestial vitality. He might not admit it, but there are some things about human society that he likes or even admires. Humans themselves, however, are not among those things.

Chin Grossbrücken is the host's original name. The symbiont's actual name, used among other pure symbionts, is Flash Warmcurrent, a rough translation of a traditional Kergillian name.

SUPERIOR MIND, WORLD-CLASS (4TH): Pure symbionts are almost impossible to read or influence psychically. They approach life with the clear seriousness of a saint and the fatalism of a soldier. They never get sucked into mental traps, such as sudoku.

HYBRID NERVOUS SYSTEM, WORLD-CLASS (4TH): He can see extra colors, hear inaudible sounds, detect subtle tremors, and in general get more out of human sensations. While his ability to sense things is off the charts ("superhuman"), his ability to use these senses effectively in conflicts with others is limited to "world class" status.

EVEN FASTER KUNG FU, ELITE (3RD): The original Grossbrücken was a martial artist, and the symbiont has all that implicit memory plus the hybrid nervous system.

DEFAULT, EXPERT (2ND).

The Superior Mind and Hybrid Nervous System traits are typical of pure symbionts.

Kergillians shifted into this galaxy when their galaxy was being destroyed in a pan-galactic war. They landed here on earth millions of years ago and have shepherded the eighth line they trained the dolphins first but dolphins are too psychic to fall prey to current union influence Kurt Gilligan's live move and think at a remarkably slow speed since think interact with the living world through there psychic powers I have no particular need to move their influence on animals hands gradual and chronic paragraph line break enter return one-to-one a human can help think a Kurt Killian but Jillian's don't went by quick thinking they have play slow steady psychic pressure on their subjects for example they cannot direct someone to go berserk a particular time or at a particular place but they can put enough pressure on that fellas going to go berserk short of some sort of assertive information so what could stop it the very sorts of things that characters are good at doing the primary way care Gillians influence humans is through manipulation of the intestines controlling I am humans intestines might not seem like much can trolling I humans intestines at the cellular level might seem a limited application but you would be surprised how many personalities hysteria's crises and dysfunction is dude what's going on in the gut

MEMORY EATERS

> In that book which is my memory,
>
> On the first page of the chapter that
> is the day when I first met you,
>
> Appear the words, 'Here begins a new life.'
>
> —Dante Alighieri, *LA Vita Nuova*, 1295

Like old celluloid left too long in the sun, our memories degrade with time, but there are some memories we seek to preserve, hold dear, and keep until we die. Those are the ones that have real market value. They say you can buy or trade anything in Swaps, and memories are no exception. Your first kiss, the last image of a dying child, even the black and white remembrances of a dog — anything is available.

Sharp merchants have found, or are about to find, interdimensional pests who live off memories. These "memory eaters" slip in from the astral plane, parasites living off the taste of your favorite wine or the loss of your virginity. They're invisible to the human eye, though a domesticated breed of hairless rat can see them (they look like roaches made of crack pipe glass, smoky and burnt inside). Those rats are employed by memory dealers to find these buggers and set them on people. The eaters take memories right out of the mind and, once their form of ATP converts them into energy, they shit the memories out astrally. The effluvia are what the dealers collect and sell, labelling the viscous clear liquid in little vials with the name of the memory hand-written in tiny calligraphic script.

Not all the eaters get corralled by the dealers, of course, and anyone might well have one of these parasites attached to the back of their neck or side of their head. They don't exist bodily in this Earth and, unless a rat spots them, or someone with astral sensitivity tells you they are there, you're just going to start forgetting things. But, hey, for the right price maybe someone will sell you back that last Christmas before your parents divorced and your life went downhill. What about the secrets you know? Or the secrets you want to know? It's possible a memory dealer has those, too. You could be outed for your deepest sins... or use someone's else's sins for leverage. There's rumored to be a whole memory theft ring out there stealing memories and blackmailing people with the worst ones. On Al Amarja, replaying a memory is as solid as having the act on tape. Hell, it's admissible in court. Of course, video evidence can be faked, so what about memories?

GM: MEMORY EATERS

One of these creatures might leech a character if they visit the astral plane, or even a dodgy bathroom stall in Sad Mary's. The pests are everywhere, but people don't usually notice them because they eat all sorts of minutiae we'd forget anyway. But when the big stuff, like the secret codename the Movers gave you, goes missing — well, that can be a problem. A character might have lost such a memory or be looking for someone else's to follow up on a clue. These memory eaters literally crap out conspiratorial gold, so there's every chance all sorts of cloaks are scrounging Swaps for the memory that unlocks the latest mystery in their handler's life. Or, maybe you just really like that cute guy you saw on the metro. You want him to feel like he's known you his whole life, like you can read his mind. Why not see if you can catch an eater and get to know him in a creeper way by ingesting his best memories, the one's he forgot, the ones that make you seem like his missing Socratic half? Hey, people aren't normal on Al Amarja, and neither is romance.

MOVERS

> So say that final belief
>
> Must be in a fiction. It is time to choose.
>
> —"Asides on the Oboe," Wallace Stevens, 1940

The causes you believe in, the historical figures that you love or hate, the art that moves you, the thoughts you think, and the symbols that come to you in dreams — all of them are shaped in part by the Movers. They wield vast but unseen influence over popular media, populist movements, education, and government. Their predecessors, "Proto-Movers," operated for millennia, shaping human civilization through religion, science, and behavioral controls. Today, people all across the globe are conditioned to follow covert directions. Soon, the Movers will establish Eternal Eden, a self-sustaining civilization of Total Control with no more violence or inefficiencies. At least, that's the plan. If the Last War breaks out first, the Movers will resort to Plan B. You won't like Plan B.

Anyone who's not a Mover is termed "Matter," as in something to be acted on.

Mind Control

Symbols are true, and the Movers have the mind control to prove it.

Life developed by tapping into the realm of meaning, which is sometimes wrongly equated with the astral plane. *Homo sapiens* have taken meaning to

a whole new level, unleashing unprecedented creative and destructive powers. Movers are the humans who have made another such leap, discerning and proclaiming meaning in ways that control the minds of common people.

Subconscious Signaling

The person sitting across from you at the café is touching her face. She's also sending a signal to your subconscious mind, which it interprets according to programming that it's received without you being any the wiser. In fact, she hardly sends the signal. The signal sends itself, transducing itself from a subconscious impulse in her brain to the particular way she "absent-mindedly" touches her face. The programmed part of your subconscious mind knows just what to do with the signal. Now your behavior is subtly shifted, and you are prepared to touch your own face in a certain way, without ever really thinking about it. That's one way the Movers work.

The Movers have distilled the power of symbol to a pure form so that it can operate not only with a powerful subconscious component, but can do so without any conscious recognition by the subject. Where ancient rituals had animals sacrificed as a powerful, bloody symbol, today's Mover signals can be as simple as a casual hand gesture.

The History of Control

For all of human history, shadowy conspirators have gathered to make secret deals and conduct arcane rituals. One way or another, they have all been Movers. When our ancestors developed symbolic thinking, they gave the species access to "meaning" in a way that no other Earth species ever has, with the possible exception of the hallucinating ants of the Cretaceous. Humans who intuitively inclined toward Control were drawn to "meaning." Over hundreds of thousands of years, these early attempts to establish Control produced personal names, formal language, superstitions, shared oaths, religion, government, the written word, mathematics, religion, and art. Repeatedly throughout human history, cabals have gathered to shape themselves and the world through mind control. The Movers are the heirs of these traditions, and they have refined their "magic" to operate subliminally, especially over media broadcasts.

If you could see history from the view of humanity's secret masters, the outlines would be the same, but the underlying story would be different. Repeatedly through history, small groups of exceptional people used various tricks, deceptions, and presentations to exert control over human minds on a vast scale. The sorts of things that people take for granted today as just part of everyday life, such as coinage, started as ways to establish greater Control. The adoption of coins meant that humans would engage in dehumanizing rituals of exchange and come to think of these exchanges as normal. By enervating human connections, coinage makes people more easily swayed by Control.

In case after historical case, proto-Movers were behind massive developments in culture. Today, global media have provided conspirators with the power to reach minds on an unprecedented scale, and the time is almost right to achieve Total Control.

People rarely notice that they are being manipulated because mind control takes place on a subliminal level and operates subconsciously in the mind. Sometimes people can tell that other people are acting like they're being manipulated, usually referring to people of differing political opinions as being brainwashed. But humans can't see their own brainwashing any more than they can see their own blind spots.

English: Historically, the Movers have been successful in spreading English around the globe. English is ideal for preparing a brain for mind control. Its capricious spelling rules condition English speakers to follow arbitrary instructions, and its voracious appetite for new vocabulary gives the Movers lots of options for introducing verbal symbols that channel thought. Remember, it's polite to speak English.

Harmonic Convergence: The aftermath of that event was not pretty because the Stitch started expanding at the Movers' expense. Lots of Mover cloaks ended up as brain-fried husks. The Movers today are in many ways a different org from who they were before 1987.

Nationalism and Populism: Total Control is preceded by a period of chaos during which populations react against the forces of Total World Government. The recent upsurge in rightwing hate groups is the Movers' doing and all part of the plan. The Movers who work on these operations are happy to see how easy it is to drum up hatred, working with populations that have been bred and conditioned for thousands of years.

Project Dry Bones

Multiple Mover cells cooperate on an ambitious project to recreate hundreds or thousands of long-dead Movers. Since unity of self is an illusion, a self that is reconstructed after death would be the self just as sure as any other "self" can claim. Therefore, if the Movers can reconstruct, say, the Old Man of the Mountain, that reconstruction would indeed be him. To date, the reconstructions have been notably incomplete and admittedly patchwork.

Mover Cells

The Movers are split up into factions or cells, all ostensibly working together.

Gladsteins: Known for their fringe tech, roundly suspected to be cyborgs achieving great things by tapping into their algorithmically driven AIs.

Cell Z: Defunct, renegade, or maybe just the product of a disinformation campaign. Any Mover you meet who claims to be with Cell Z probably isn't.

Vornites: The conformity and regularity of these Movers is both a strength and a weakness.

Hermetics: They make a great show of honoring arcane traditions traceable back to a transdimensional wanderer known to history as Hermes Tresmegistus ("Thrice-great"). The show masks their true activities and sucks in countless gullible Matters.

Dionysians: They reject all art, celebration, and indulgences that give them "the feels." They use ritualized violence to purge such feelings and to achieve serenity, connection to higher orders of thought, and self-awareness.

Mission on Al Amarja

For unknown reasons, the Stitch invests significant efforts in maintaining its influence on the Island, and it seems to have done so for centuries. Movers have had no choice but to match these efforts in an attempt to stave off whatever the Stitch is up to here. The Island, unfortunately, is notoriously treacherous for Mover agents, whose symbolic harmony goes awry and whose much-vaunted control is undermined. This effect seems to mostly reflect powerful Stitch defenses maintained over decades or centuries, but there's a lot of other stuff going on here, too. The local Stitch operations are compromised subjects of Mover mind-control satellites, but even these gold-standard controls can go haywire here. The Movers have several independent operations underway here; no single operation could ever be trustworthy. Actual conflict between unwitting Mover agents provides believable cover for them and allows Mover investigators to probe for malfeasance among these cells.

More agents are going to be arriving soon, and authorization has been given for Operation Deep Cleanse, should it prove necessary. Deep Cleanse will bring down known and suspected Stitch assets and agents, as well as disrupting Stitch operations. Hitting certain of these targets will entail extravagant numbers of bystander casualties, but how long do those people have to live, anyway? The operation will fatally expose operations on Al Amarja, so it's a last resort that will have the Movers beating a retreat even if they pull it off. Operation Deep Cleanse is authorized and will be activated once it looks like the end is near, or ***an*** end, in any event.

This game, ***Over the Edge,*** can perhaps best be understood as an elaborate Mover operation designed to deliver this message to the one person for whom the entire game was actually concocted, someone who's reading this paragraph right now. You can't know if you're the one that the message is for, but maybe you have a hunch.

The Temple of Divine Experience

Sister Cheryl works with the Movers, giving them access to her Temple in exchange for their help with her projects and celebrations. The Temple's emotionally charged rituals are ideal for the Movers, who can use them to spread powerful subliminal messages that propagate far beyond the groups that actually experienced the rituals.

JANET RYBACK-VIK

MEME KILLER

Woman of mostly European ancestry, with long, dark hair, often wearing a leather hat of obscure origin. Her eyes take everything in with calm assurance.

Ryback-Vik thinks she is an operative for an org known as Trident, and she thinks she's policing the meme-o-sphere in the service of humankind. The cash and her assignments, however, come from Dionysian Movers. They're the ones who fostered her unusual skills, developing her preternatural, intuitive sense of patterns in human information. Her project is to undermine, wreck, and destroy popular (and unpopular) ideas, removing them from the public mindset. She does this through various means including leaking information through popular media, discrediting authority figures and celebrities, and introducing advertising campaigns to subvert popular trends. She has taken to augmenting her natural skills with the help of an app that runs algorithms to analyze streams of information and to suggest powerful drivers of unconscious deconditioning. Her most important assignments involve clearing memes out of circulation to make room (unknown to her) for Mover mind-control messages.

Her cover is that she handles subliminal PR for discreet clients.

In her mind, her secret motto is, "I am in your base, killing your memes." One day she'll be haughty enough to leave that motto around on a calling card or otherwise bring it to others' attention. She hates that she can't share the joke with anyone.

MEMETIC ASSASSINATION, WORLD CLASS (4TH): She knows just how to undo trendy ideas and how to make compelling concepts fall flat. She doesn't know how to do this consciously, and the only way to succeed is to enter a trance-like state where her unitary identity is suspended. Her mind becomes the perfect mental space to take in, manipulate, and turn out memes, whether they're images, phrases, or behaviors.

WOULD-BE SECRET AGENT, EXPERT (2ND): "Trident" has trained her to how operate discreetly and how to kill people before they kill her. If she gets into a real jam, that's when she'll find out whether her training goes deep enough to get her through, or whether all that training will turn out to be just another series of memes that have given her the illusion of competence.

DEFAULT, COMPETENT (1ST).

The State

The Movers control the Al Amarjan State, such that it is. Currently, the Movers use the apparatus mainly for surveillance and harassment. The State doesn't actively involve itself in Mover operations on the Island, but it will do so if and when the shit hits the fan.

The Cut-Ups

These reality-destroying outliers started as a Mover cell, and then turned on the Movers, using the powers of semiotics to shake people free from Control instead of capturing them with it. They have been disturbing the logosphere with their anti-rational art, and they have developed unpredictable abilities to violate the laws of reality.

GM: MOVERS

A vast, ancient conspiracy that's inevitably a deadly mind game, the Movers are your go-to source of secret agent weirdness. They are powerful enough to pull off whatever you want, yet challenged by enemies within and without and therefore still limited and vulnerable.

PLAYER-CHARACTERS AS MOVERS

If the characters are cloaks, there's a good chance that they're working for the Movers without knowing it, even if you don't know it yourself. If you intend for the characters to work for the Movers, it hardly limits the sort of cloaks they can be. The Mover org is so sprawling and varied that any sort of secret agent group might unwittingly be dancing to their tune. If the characters don't know that they are working for an evil org bent on world domination, you probably want to tell them out of character.

MOVER TWISTS

The Movers' subtle mind control efforts pervade human society, so their operations can interact with the characters anywhere, especially in public and around mass media.

Good Twist: The character's efforts to sway or influence people inadvertently tap into Mover conditioning, and people react to the character with exaggerated enthusiasm.

Good Twist: While investigating Mover operations and mind-control efforts, the character intuits a hidden pattern that triggers several old memories. The character now intuits the underlying pattern to which they've been exposed previously, allowing them to penetrate Mover defenses or otherwise deal more successfully with their machinations.

Bad Twist: A character uses a paranormal trait to "read" a crowd and gets a bad twist. Mover messages are passing back and forth through the crowd, and now the character has made themselves vulnerable to Mover conditioning, such as implanting compulsions with specific code triggers.

Bad Twist: A character throws a bad twist while trying to capture, defeat, or expose Mover cloaks. Some childhood memory from mass media pops up in the character's mind, triggering a conditional compulsion or delusion. The character does something irrational or even dangerous.

The Stitch

The operations of the proto-Movers through history have created symbolically linked minds, and as a side effect created paranormal connections among certain human brains. These connections are like "stitches" that synchronize brains at a distance, and these connections tend to spontaneously organize themselves into patterns of brain waves that parasitize humans and turn them into vectors for these virus-like psychic patterns. As the power of the proto-Movers grew over the centuries, more and more of these patterns developed. Today, they have formed themselves into a sprawling, headless conspiracy of psychics, called the Stitch.

Stitchers, as the cloaks are called, operate on the level of neural continuity and sympathy rather than in the realm of meaning, so Mover mind control methods are severely compromised against them.

The Stitch represents an existential threat to humanity. Infestation of psychic patterns burns out the human host over years or decades, and connections are spreading from person to person. Some experts say that the Stitch program is soon to reach critical mass, and human minds across the globe will light up and flare out. It is imperative that the Mover program of Total Control be executed soon, or it will be too late.

The Pharaohs

Movers recognize them as some sort of prehuman, protohuman, or superhuman creature. Infiltrating the org around these entities has proven disastrous, and the Movers give them wide berth. The Pharaohs don't seem to pose a threat, mostly because they're not expansionist, and there are only several of them.

Anomalous Infiltrators

A large proportion of Movers think that their org has been infiltrated by unknown enemies of great subtlety, especially in the other Mover factions. They expect that the enemy will show itself when the Last War breaks out, and there will be a vicious internecine war within the Mover org.

THE NEANDERTHAL UNDERGROUND

Everyone knows that Neanderthals are extinct, but they're wrong. Sapiens-Neanderthal hybrids, they say, killed every last Neanderthal before the dawn of human writing. They conquered the land and the Logosphere. They made hierarchies and words and invented writing to track who owned who. But the Neanderthals never went away. They had big brains, and still do. They've adapted to modernity, hiding in plain sight, but they can recognize their own. They don't mate with anyone who isn't a Neander. Hybridization from seventy thousand years ago had disastrous consequences, and no way will the elders let it happen again.

Neanders are more rough-featured, a bit hairier, shorter, like your dad, or your roommate after a heavy night. Maybe they would stand out in a homogeneous population like Poland's, but here in the Edge they fit in fairly well. They're here among us, united, working their way back into the Logosphere to interrupt the Great Ritual and looking to take the Pharaohs down. If you know about them, it's probably already too late – they're stronger and faster than you are.

Neanderthals call themselves "glugs," which means "people."

Magic

Neanderthals are resistant to the kinds of magic that Sapiens are subject to, and they are blind to the sort of magic that Sapiens can master.

Pharaohs

The Neanderthal genome used to include sequences for instinctive obedience toward the Old Lords, but the genome was shattered and painstakingly rebuilt. During that process, obedience toward the Pharaohs dropped out of the genome. The Pharaohs don't pay close enough attention to humans for them to have noticed the Neanders.

GM: NEANDERTHAL UNDERGROUND

How to get the players involved? Don't. That's an insult to the Neanderthals, getting them lousy with ***Homo sapiens***. Of course, ***Homo sapiens*** never do what thesy ought to, so players messing about with the Secret Race is all but inevitable. Maybe they see Altamira-like paintings on the walls of an alley or witness a brawl at Sad Mary's where one guy takes on three others, tossing them around like rag dolls. Or, if you want to get deeper, maybe a Neander falls for one of the characters, the most forbidden of forbidden love. Oh yeah, they're highly resistant to the Stitch's psychic powers, too, so maybe they could cut a deal with the Movers, at least for a while. But making hybrid babies is how they got aced out to begin with, so any sexual coupling is like to be met with extreme prejudice — by either side.

NEIGHBORS

Paranormal creatures that are native to Earth are called "neighbors." The ones from "outside" are called "strangers" (see page 185).

Empties

Something is draining people dry and leaving them as mindless bodies roaming the night.
See write-up on page 165.

Poltergeists

The superstitious think that they're ghosts, but they are spontaneous manifestations of "excess violence" from the human Logosphere. Mostly they knock things down and throw things around, especially when no one is present. Various techniques allow adepts to coax these paranormal rages into something like entities, but it's not a good idea. The name is a cognate of "pelting ghost."

Shadows

Sometimes a fraction of a human can be pulled off, so that it takes form as an independent entity. To casual observation, they're perfectly normal. That said, they're remarkably easy to overlook or forget.

"Spirits"

Discorporate beings, usually the remnants of the minds of dead humans, that linger among the shadows. These formations are more like viruses than independent entities. To really come to life, they need to make their homes in some living human self, either through invasion or inspiration.

Tulpas

Spontaneous thought forms reified by ideas, memes, the plethora of personas on the planet, and the like, tulpas take many forms, but none of them are what you or I would call "real." They are the nascent ideas of who someone thinks they are, or wants to be, at a party. They are the distilled essence of pop culture archetypes, they are the id suppressed for years by a man trying so hard to be good he sets something bad into the world. Some tulpas stabilize on an archetype, presenting a persona so cliché that everyone they interact with recognizes it and reinforces that archetype. Others shift according to the expectations of others, often intuitively achieving a sort of stability by copying a person or the members of a subculture.

That's all well and good if you're an actual person. But if you're a tulpa? Well, you got the short end of the existential stick. You aren't strictly real, and your identity is wholly dependent on the perception of others. Incidentally, there are some very dangerous researchers at St. Charon's that suggest this might be the condition of ***all*** people.

BARRY

THE OLDEST TULPA IN THE WORLD

Just like you think a biker would look — black leather jacket, rebellious sneer, the vague scent of motor oil like a fine cologne... He looks to be in his 40s.

At sixty-some years old, Barry is literally the oldest tulpa alive. He knows he's not exactly real, but he persists nonetheless. His trick is that he denies the ultimate reality of everyone, which helps him not think too hard about his own state. The characters, even meaning well, could cause his decoherence, where he disappears like an existential magical trick.

Leader of the Pack, that Brando lookalike, bad boy in the leather jacket, the biker you don't want your daughter dating — you know the archetype, and his name is Barry. He picked it himself, selected from The Barbarians motorcycle club which existed for about twelve minutes in 1950s post-war America.

Barry began to unravel as the early Sixties turned into the Age of Aquarius. The US wasn't safe for him. His time was over. He tried the UK for a while, but he didn't stick. Then he heard about Al Amarja, a place where, just maybe, believing something makes it real, where reality is by consensus.

Barry isn't entirely ready to confront his non-being. If he did right now, he'd probably cease to be. But he knows he is different, that there are others like him, and he's trying to meet them — though only in short bursts. The odds are against them but, on Al Amarja, the odds are also determined by collective consensus rather than physical laws.

CAROUSING, WORLD-CLASS (4TH): Drinking, cussing, whoring, riding, and fighting — Barry has reached peak biker-ness. If a biker can do it, Barry can do it better.

SEMI-REALITY, WORLD-CLASS (4TH): Barry is a seasoned veteran when it comes to walking the fine line between self-awareness and role-taking. He's aware enough of his tulpa status to guard himself and devoted enough to his biker identity that he stays real. Maybe someone can help him break through to a state of secure semi-existence.

DEFAULT EXPERT (2ND)

So, the tulpa is stuck between states of non-being and being. Some begin to suspect their nature and want more, but they don't know how to go about it. They occasionally meet in bars, talking to each other in a crowd, but therein lies a danger for them — two tulpas talking feed off each other and create a feedback loop which, eventually, causes them to disappear into mere ideas. Similarly, if two of them spend too much time in the same crowd, they start to take on the aspects of the crowd in which they find themselves. Think of them like Silly-Putty, relatively formless but able to pick up the exact copy of the Sunday color comics. Yet they ***want*** to be more and, in that, possibly they can find their humanity.

The issue is, to people on Al Amarja, even the characters, tulpas are useful less for their desire to be free-willed creatures and more for their ability to assimilate seamlessly. While some tulpas suspect their nature and want to surpass Pinocchio status, the very realization of not being real threatens their already tenuous existence. In using them to glean information off secret organizations, private people, lovers, enemies and friends, the character also risks having them evaporate.

Basically, tulpas might be a new form of life, but in trying to make them a new form of life for really real, you could cause them to become extinct. The conspiracies have no issue with this, do you?

GM: TULPAS

Tulpas are a curious element. Like anything in an RPG, they aren't real. We're all here imagining this thing, right? But they want to be real. They want to be more than the memes, the stray thoughts, the errant desires, the commercials, the pop culture that produces them. This presents a moral quandary for any PC wanting to use or even help them. The more they become convinced of their unreality, the more they are likely to disappear. But, if they cannot confront their non-existence, they cannot become more than the shadows of others. To be real they have to face not being real, and there are no guarantees.

For the cloaks who are in the know, tulpas are the best method of infiltrating other groups. After all, what better undercover operative than the op that doesn't actually know they are undercover. Many a tulpa disappears serving this function. The characters no doubt see how such a creature can benefit them, but maybe, just maybe, the cause of this nascent species is greater than any intel their sacrifice could gain you. Maybe you'll help them realize their Velveteen Rabbit ending. Or, maybe you'll be like everyone else and use them until they erode into the nothingness from which they sprang.

History is full of making people less than human so as to exploit them. It's much easier to excuse when the "people" in question aren't real at all, isn't it?

Once certain people start playing ***Over the Edge***, they begin to meet tulpas in real life. If that's you, don't bring up tulpas to them or talk to them about this game.

NEUTRALIZERS

Secret hunters of the paranormal.

The good news is, they hunt down and destroy paranormal beings. The bad news is, they're interdimensional parasites who prey on exceptional humans, turning them into loners who hunt paranormal beings. The hosts don't understand what's going on and think that they're going crazy, which is basically true.

In the secret world, some people share rumors about "Neutralizers," people who show up out of nowhere with some sort of special gear to liquidate strangers and neighbors. Most people figure they're the work of one org or another, maybe the Gladstein Movers and their weird technology.

Neutralizer gear commonly consists of strange weapons that might or might not look like weapons. They cast energy nets, project beams, or launch etheric waves to take down the specific prey that the Neutralizer is assigned. The weapon exists temporarily in this plane in violation of a few natural laws and several interdimensional statutes or decrees. Sometimes the weapons have fallen into the wrong hands, but they return to their rightful universe in short order.

The galactic civilization that the Neutralizers hail from is a hollowed-out shell of its former self, with projects like the Neutralizers serving as decadent diversions.

ISLAM PETRI

HOT-SHOT PARANORMAL HUNTER

Lean, sharp-eyed Persian man of early middle age. Typically wearing outdoor gear with a vest and a utility belt, as if he's ready to go climbing. He has the presence of a mighty hunting cat, totally present and yet aloof.

"Petri" is here on Al Amarja, but he doesn't know what he's looking for yet. In his mind, he's following signals from extraterrestrials in some sort of paranoid, covert war against humanity's existential enemies. And he's pretty sure he's a little crazy. At some point soon, he'll receive dreams, visions, and signs that will point him toward a hidden cache of weapons, and from there to his prey.

HEART AND GRIT, WORLD CLASS (4TH): The parasites picked him because of his phenomenal personal toughness. The kills he's scored against paranormal entities have just made him tougher.

SEE THROUGH YOUR BULLSHIT, ELITE (3RD): Look into his eyes and tell me you think you can bullshit this man. You cannot bullshit this man.

SUPERIOR PHYSICALITY, ELITE (3RD): The parasite riding him gives him extraordinary reflexes, strength, and coordination. He has learned the hard way how, in a fight, to get hurt less and to hurt others more.

DEFAULT, EXPERT (2ND): His parasite has liberated him from the petty concerns and life-affirming connections that are the rule for regular life. He is effortlessly adept at all manner of human endeavor.

SAVES: 1

GM: NEUTRALIZERS

Neutralizers are a source of anti-monster firepower that can appear more or less randomly and be just as effective against the monster as you like.

Heir to Weird Tech: Petri shows up to take on some strangers, but they manage to kill him. The characters benefit from the opening Petri made. They learn something useful about the strangers, who had to show their hand to kill Petri. He also leaves behind a strange weapon made to bring down these particular strangers. The weird weapon, of course, gets in your head a little.

Cavalry: A Neutralizer is just the sort of GMC that the characters might need to show up at some point, especially if a player casts a good twist when their character is in a tight spot. If you think you're going to want to use Petri to save the characters' asses, it's best to "lay pipe" and let the players know that there's some mysterious figure nosing around, or something. When Petri rescues the characters, it doesn't have to be free. If, for example, he disincorporates an interdimensional grudge manifesting as a skinless phantom, just in time to save the characters from being phantomized, maybe Petri's weapons cause a vicious concussive wave on the astral plane that wrecks the characters a little.

GM: THE NOVA EXPRESS

Every now and again, one sees something weird on the metro — even by Al Amarja standards. One of these things is the people in the Cubist masks. The masks are animals, very detailed, but abstract to the point of being unidentifiable as to genus, phylum, etc. Anyone who photographs a mask finds it doesn't register on their phone, their film, not even daguerreotype. Remembering what they looked like, exactly, is also hard. In fact, most people don't seem to notice them at all, but perhaps they're just being polite... or careful.

Following a mask is all but impossible. As one tries, the Metro becomes an Escher-like maze of empty stations with names anyone not so masked cannot read. Miles upon miles of empty subway cut through Al Amarja in such circumstances — railways from twenty years in the future, or one hundred years in the past in the ***fin de siècle*** Edge. Getting out is hard, nearly impossible. You might come upon the bones of those who tried. And this could be an entire mini-adventure in itself, the characters wandering the strange depths of every Al Amarja that ever was or will be. But none of that brings them to the Nova Express. Only a mask, prepared by a singular artist in Flowers, gets you in. That mask is the realization of your true self and, rumors say, seeing it can drive a person mad. No one wants to see who they really are, after all.

But if you get the mask and you get the instructions to the right line, you might get on the Nova Express, be served by the mouthless synths, and trade in secrets so deep that only this car, separated from anything we know as reality, serves to keep them undisclosed. Of course, you hear there are some great parties here, too.

A body in an alley wearing such a mask, a mask being delivered without instruction to your door, graffiti on the metro walls that says Here is the Nova Express (if only you could follow the arrow). The island's conspiracies are invested in making sure no one uninvited gets access, but that won't stop you. It didn't stop Amelia Earhart, and she's still there.

THE NOVA EXPRESS

Forbidden rendezvous site.

Where do the men and women in the Cubist-inspired totemic masks go? They go to the Nova Express. When the Express exists in this reality, it's a lone car on the Metro that rolls through the stations without dropping off riders or letting them on. It must stop sometime, somewhere, because it's full of cloaks wearing animal heads and speaking through voice scramblers, telling secrets, making deals, drawing treaties up on the occasional neutral ground. No one can scry on you here, no one can eavesdrop. It's a pocket of pure, psychic and technological white noise wrapped in a bar car like something from an Agatha Christie novel. The waiters are all synths decanted in Skylla. They have no mouths, all the better to keep what they hear to themselves. You'd best do the same, if you want to be invited back or, you know, wake up tomorrow. Anyone wearing the wrong totem, one that doesn't represent them, isn't heard from again. No one knows where they go. Even amidst an armature of lies, a skeletal truth gets its due. You are who you are, no matter where you go, at least on the Nova Express.

PHARAOHS

Humanity's primordial masters, but dependent on their human Quislings.

The Pharaohs are half a dozen *Homo erectus* with godlike power. Two hundred thousand years ago, they edited hominid chromosomes to create *Homo sapiens*, a highly successful breed. *H. sapiens* worshiped their rulers, who in turn gathered psychic power from the worshipers. Over a hundred thousand years later, they spliced the Neanderthal allele of the FOX P2 gene into the *H. sapiens* genome, creating a highly successful strain. Originally, this species instinctively obeyed the Pharaohs, but over the last fifty thousand years genetic drift has weakened that trait.

The Pharaohs retain a specially bred line of humans, the Quislings, who are tested for their obedience so that they remain loyal. But humans in general got out of hand and started doing things that the Pharaohs had never thought of before, such as living in permanent dwellings and farming. Down through the millennia, the Pharaohs have retained control through their proxies, reinforcing brutal patriarchy as a means of social control.

Rumor has it that the individual Pharaohs are all pretty much nut jobs now. They're surrounded by bootlickers, and they've lived long enough to have tried everything. Their interests are increasingly esoteric, eccentric, and transgressive. But they're

PREM K. SHARMA

THE GOD YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD

Tall, dark-skinned man who can pass for South Asian. His clothes are usually expensive but otherwise unextraordinary. If you're looking at him, you're already under his spell. (Appearance varies.)

Only one Pharaoh makes his home in Al Amarja, and that's Sharma. Most Pharaohs understand that Al Amarja is going to be something of a "ground zero" when they take over, so they stay away. Sharma wants to be where the action is.

One human activity that Sharma understands is dancing in a big group to wordless music with a strong beat, and the dance scene in the Edge gives him a number of options to indulge. Usually when he's out and about, he's tripping balls, but you'd never know by looking at him.

LEGITIMATE ENTERPRISES, LIMITED (LEL)

Sharma operates through a privately held company run by faithful Quislings, and he has an office in Gold. They have tremendous resources on call, and their devotion to Sharma makes them efficient and reliable. While the Quislings know who their master is, most employees of LEL think he's a superstar millionaire genius. Most don't admit just how devoted they are to Sharma, how he appears in their dreams, how they feel that all is right with the world when they are serving him.

Only the top offices in LEL are held by Quislings. Sharma's Quislings pride themselves on how well they manage Sharma. They are in regular communication with Quislings of other Pharaohs.

WORTHY OF WORSHIP, GODLIKE (6TH): He is one of the Old Lords who created humanity as we know it, and humans instinctively react to him with obedience. Someone face-to-face with him feels the full power of this effect. People who see him at a distance or just hear his voice feel a strong effect, but less than full power. His ability to command obedience doesn't translate over recorded audio or video.

IMMORTALITY, SUPERHUMAN (5TH): Sharma can withstand damage and recover from wounds like no regular human can.

PERSONAL PERFECTION, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Sharma long ago assimilated into himself vast magical power from millennia of coordinated rituals among his Erectus kind. He represents a sort of human perfection: poise, insight, coordination, strength, reflexes, etc.

DEFAULT, ELITE (3RD)

SND RENTGUN

POWER BEHIND THE THRONE?

Laid-back older woman, probably of Mideastern extraction, usually dressed in a power suit and accompanied by at least one lackey.

She runs LEL from its Al Amarjan branch, and she runs Sharma. One thing she doesn't know is what things will look like if push comes to shove. If she opposes Sharma face-to-face, will she hold up or capitulate? She thinks she'll hold up, but there are other Quislings she's not sure about. If a conflict with Sharma ever breaks out, some of her network is going to collapse, even if she doesn't herself. And she doesn't have a Plan B to assassinate Sharma. She can't bring herself to make any such plan, or hardly to think about it. But she is descended from a long line of Quislings, and she of all Sapiens should be able to stand up for herself.

FREE WILL, GODLIKE (6TH): Her ability to brush off pressure or manipulation is inhuman, but her ability to defy Sharma directly is untested.

LEADER, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Some of Sharma has rubbed off on her, and she is an unbeatable corporate leader.

CLOAK, ELITE (3RD)

DEFAULT, EXPERT (2ND)

also the masters of ancient conspiracies with tremendous resources.

Pharaohs sometimes visit cloaks in the field to keep them bolstered against the psychic attacks and other psychological hazards of the business. Some of the agents are "sleepers" who don't remember that they're agents. Sleepers don't remember meeting with the Pharaohs they serve, or if they do they subconsciously mask the memory with false memories of animal visitors.

Pharaohs, Body and Mind

In their natural state, Pharaohs are tall, robust, dark-skinned, ape-headed humans, some male, some female. Their shapes, however, shift, and when they travel among Sapiens they take Sapiens form. Over time, their features shift from one sort of human or another. When they put their minds to it, they can assume specific forms, and each Pharaoh has several preferred forms. Unfortunately, they're not good at impersonating individuals. We all look alike to them.

Pharaohs are immortal and physically extraordinary. They withstand damage with preternatural power and recover from wounds quickly and easily. In theory, they can be killed with enough firepower, and in fact two of them have succumbed to attacks over the millennia. When they achieved immortality, they lost their fertility. Thanks to the progeny they spawned when humanity was young, they are the direct ancestors of all humans.

The Pharaohs' minds are hard to fathom. On one hand, their minds are as powerful as their bodies. On the other, they formed their personalities ages ago, before people even lived in permanent settlements. They rely on Quislings to handle mundane tasks that just don't sit right with Pharaohs, such as programming the VCR. Pharaohs are notoriously tone-deaf to irony and humor.

By default, Pharaohs speak in commands, such as "Tell me what happened" instead of "What happened?"

Pharaoh Glory

To humans, a Pharaoh who reveals its glory seems naturally worthy of worship. A modern person might not phrase it that way, but all worship of idols, gods, and celebrities is really a misapplication of the feeling built into the human psyche and meant for Pharaohs. Humans naturally align themselves with the wishes of a Pharaoh, and particularly sensitive people can even align themselves with the Pharaoh's unstated wishes.

Pharaohs are so discontinuous from everyday experience that people have a hard time remembering the feeling, and soon after encountering the Pharaoh they recall the encounter as nothing special. Being around a Pharaoh is like having sex while you are blackout drunk. It's an exhilarating experience, but you can't really remember it.

Quislings

For untold generations, the Pharaohs have leaned on human minions to conduct their day-to-day business. Historically, they maintained long lineages of mortals, starting with the rulers of ancient Egypt. Over the generations, this extended family became especially good at two things: conniving in the service of their masters and exerting enough free will to appropriate some of the masters' take for themselves. Much of their skill relies on false consciousness, telling themselves that they're doing their masters' bidding when they're really serving themselves.

These mortal advocates of the Pharaohs are in a difficult spot. On the one hand, they need to channel their master's behavior away from activities that might compromise their position or standing. On the other hand, they need their master's backing in forging deals and facing down the competition. For the master's own sake, they need to bring them under control.

In order to serve their master, they need to make decisions that the master isn't going to understand. Serving the master best means not letting them even find out that they are not calling the shots anymore.

The Quislings are more eager for the Pharaohs to rise up and take over than the Pharaohs are themselves. The Quislings have regular human lifespans, and they want to be around to enjoy it when all humanity is at their feet.

Pharaoh Resources

The Pharaohs control vast resources, holdings that they have passed down through Quisling dynasties and that they now move around under shell companies. Perhaps it's more proper to say that Quislings control vast resources. How many of these resources are really for the Pharaohs' use and how much for the benefit of the Quisling networks themselves? Hard to say.

GM: PHARAOHS

The Pharaohs are so high-powered that it can be a trick to use them just right. Most campaigns don't feature them, at least not prominently.

Collapse: The Pharaohs are the most fragile of the major conspiracies. If you're looking for a campaign event in which one conspiracy falls and the others scramble to "loot the body," look no further. They have resources and knowledge that could fall into "the wrong hands" once things start falling apart.

Managing Godlike Scope: How do regular old player-characters interact with a Pharaoh like Sharma? It can be tricky. If the character can best him, what sort of god is he anyway? If he overwhelms them, what's the fun in that? One approach is for the interaction to be flavor. If the characters and Sharma aren't at odds, then they can interact without either the characters defeating a god or a god making the characters irrelevant. The characters might meet him at a dance, or he might take a new interest in any sort of art or activity that the characters are involved in. Another approach is to have them deal with Sharma's retainers, Quislings with extraordinary skills but who are still human.

THE STITCH

> The human is something to be surpassed.
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche,
> *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883

The Stitch represents a spontaneous, psychic resistance to Control. Stitchers use psychic powers to set up networks of agents. Predictably, resistance to Control ends up looking a lot like Control.

Ultimately, everything that is anything is the flashing of neurons in a brain or brains. With the right training, brains can be trained to mimic each other at a distance, a capacity commonly misunderstood as ESP, telepathy, or some other sort of psychic connection between brains. This natural capacity to "synch up" dates back to the monkey-like early ancestors of humanity, but when it comes to "ESP," the genus Homo is the best yet by far. Over tens of millions of years, certain resonances are established, allowing faster evolution of the brain. Today, there are suddenly so many Homo brains on the planet that the circuits are heating up and are liable to overload if this keeps up for another fifty years. But by the time fifty years roll around, things are going to be settled, one way or another. If the Stitch can succeed in taking control of the genus through telepathic sending, they'll establish a regime of universal joy and mental labor. "Universal"

for the survivors, that is. Most of humanity is destined to be lost as a byproduct of the Stitch's transition to universal liberty.

Psychics are intimately familiar with the dark sides of people, so they're not too broken up at the idea of a global apocalypse. They see that life is suffering through the eyes of dozens, one screwed-up human at a time. Do people want to live? Of course. Are you doing them a favor if you let them live? Stitchers have been in a lot of other people's heads, and they're inclined to say no.

Senders and Nodes

Senders are telepaths that send out thoughts and perceptions to others, who then have those thoughts and perceptions as if they were their own. Nodes are transmitters who relay messages from senders to their recipients.

Piggyback

Stitchers send their minds into the brains of others. From this vantage point, they can observe what the subject observes. The burden of a psychic "rider" weighs on the subject. They may suffer physical symptoms, such as fatigue, headache, clumsiness, and low mood. A few subjects take well to the presence of a Sender's psychic force, and these subjects are then recruited for service as drones. Subjects of piggybacking are called piggies.

Drones

Some humans respond favorably to being piggybacked. Senders "ride" the subjects more and more until the subjects suffer withdrawal when not being ridden. Then the subjects are recruited to be drones, agents controlled by remote Stitchers. They experience a strange elevation when a Stitcher takes them over. They experience themselves moving, talking, and acting, all without their own volition. The experience captivates them and leaves them in a strange head space that takes an hour or more to recover from.

Xenopathy and Nonhuman Brains

Brains evolved for behavioral flexibility, and it's the job of Stitchers to hijack this flexibility for their own exploitation. It's easiest for a Stitcher to contact and manipulate human brains because those brains are most similar to their own. But many other animals besides ***Homo sapiens*** have brains that are analogous enough to the human brain to be susceptible to Stitcher influence. Since every action has an equal and opposite reaction, Stitchers who gaze too long into the abyss of nonhuman brains soon enough have the abyss staring back into them. Stitchers that specialize in "xenopathy" are a rare breed, and as xenopaths get better at their role, other Stitchers find them progressively less human.

The most public use of xenopathy is the Stitch's coordination of the Dog-Faces' baboons. The public thinks that these baboons are unnervingly intelligent because of their special breeding and training, but that's less than half of it. Stitcher xenopaths work within the Dog-Face org and near it, although most of the time they have no conscious knowledge of their connection to any conspiracy. They brain-lock their conspiratorial knowledge and operate as if they were independent psychics.

With the right psychoactives to liberate certain neural pathways, xenopaths can contact the brains of birds. On Al Amarja, crows are pretty much the only birds that xenopaths can contact. The highly concentrated neural systems of birds, however, are beyond the human brain's ability to model. Exploitation of crow brains is a precarious business, and it can leave xenopaths mentally exhausted. The drugs necessary to prepare the human brain just make the whole endeavor harder on the xenopath. The Stitchers' most successful crow monger is Elena Moonstar, a homeless woman who seems too crazy to be a threat. At the rate her brain is degenerating, that appearance will soon be true, and the Stitch will have to recruit a replacement.

Dogs make excellent subjects of psychic exploitation, but their brains have been juvenilized (or neotenized) by generations of selective breeding. Only xenopaths with childlike brains are successful connecting to dog brains, preferably xenopaths who started their training as children.

Rogue agents or assets of the Stitch have sometimes tried to connect to plants, especially trees. Ergot fungi make such connection possible, if not easy or viable. What the Stitch doesn't understand is that

CHRIS SAYS: THE STITCH AND TELEVISION

One stop the characters made was at a Sino-Celtic food truck. There, I asked what sort of dishes they imagined ordering and, in the background, had a Tiffany Trilobite cartoon running. At one point, Tiffany seemed to become possessed and peered at the characters directly. That improvised encounter became part of my campaign, with other TV personalities, real and fictional, doing the same in later scenes. Now in my campaign, the Stitch use television waves to spy on people. They can temporarily inhabit any show and see right through the TV. It creeped the group out, so I called it a win.

connecting to plant consciousness opens one's brain directly to the Green Mind, which is more than any animal can really handle.

Some independent psychics demonstrate powers of xenopathy without being trained or directed by the Stitch. Or that's what they think, anyway. Plenty of these "independents" are unwitting assets of the Stitch, even benefiting from training provided surreptitiously.

Sensory Traps and Remote Sending Attacks

Hidden away in secret enclaves, remote sending Stitchers monitor security at Stitch locations. They are ready to launch psychic strikes on intruders, but first the intruders need to spring the traps laid for them. These traps synch the minds of the intruders to the vibe of the guardians, allowing the guardians to attack. To synch the intruders' minds, traps are set up with powerful sensory stimuli: strobe lights, the sound of a baby's distress cry, a bold checkerboard pattern, the stench of sulfur, or the whirring blades of a fan. The human brain replicates these patterns internally as part of the mental models that brains create in order to navigate the "real world," and this replication is all the invitation that a predatory Sender needs.

The Senders' attacks turn on or turn off various parts of an intruder's brain: atavistic instincts, primal urges, overwhelming emotions, homeostasis, or even basic metabolic processes of the hind brain.

Free-Floating Motivations

Stitchers use triangulated psi waves to create localized interference patterns that carry motivations, incentives, and instructions. These influences are too weak to force a particular person to undertake a particular action, but over time a few people will no doubt succumb to the influence.

Neurophysics of Stitcher Powers

Stitchers practice the most reliable, well-understood sort of psychic powers in history. Their mastery is so impressive that over the centuries transdimensionals have occasionally translocated to Earth to study the Stitchers' secrets. While Movers harness the primeval power of metaphysical meaning, Stitchers operate through direct, remote contact with physical brains, achieved via quantum entanglement and sympathetic emulation. Various rogue psychics are known for telekinesis or probability manipulation, Stitchers work primarily through the medium of other people's brains. By transcending the limits of space/time, they maintain contact with Stitchers of the past as well as those in possible futures. These remote links have allowed them to maintain the continuity of their conspiracy down through history, even when there were no local connections at shared space/time coordinates.

GM: THE STITCH

The Stitch can show up anywhere. Any random gamemaster-character might be connected to the Stitch. A Stitcher might be sending them thoughts, dreams, and feelings. The unwitting GMC might be the eyes and ears for a psychic spy. They might even be prepped as a sleeper amok, waiting for the right Stitcher to pull the switch and send them on a killing spree.

MUTUAL ENEMY

How is it that a global conspiracy like the Stitch doesn't take over the lives of the characters? Wouldn't they kill the characters if the characters ever found out about them? Maybe the characters and the Stitch have a common enemy. Then they can find common cause even if they're not politically aligned.

PSYCHIC DEFENSES

The Stitch weaves an invisible web of psychic energy that responds to intent, especially hostile intent toward anyone or anything that the Stitch actively protects. For the most part, it protects itself. Here's one way to get the players to feel that web. Pick a number: 1, 2, 5, or 6. If a character is moving decisively against the Stitch, and they cast their lots, that number turns to 0 when it comes up on a die. The number sometimes is 4. Don't use 3. As the characters zero in on Stitch adversaries, the number goes up, or multiple numbers get zeroed out, or both.

STITCHER TWISTS

Strange things can happen when characters tangle with Stitchers.

Good Twist: The character sees into the mind of the Stitcher and gains valuable information.

Good Twist: The strength of the character's personality or motivation affects the enemy Stitcher, swaying them to leave the character be.

Bad Twist: A Stitcher implants some sort of psychic transponder or eavesdropper into the character's mind.

Bad Twist: A Stitcher uses the character's personal connection to a gamemaster-character to establish a new psychic connection to that GMC.

Bad Twist: The character suffers an impression of a Stitcher's personality, so that the character picks up unfavorable elements from it.

SLEEPING AMOK

Around the Edge, the Stitch has plenty of "sleeping amoks," seemingly regular people who are ready to go on killing rampages when activated. The Stitch has programmed them to be ready to go at the whim of the Stitch. Most of them are blissfully unaware of their programming. They might remember, say, a class they took on neurolingistic programming, but they don't realize that it's turned them into a latent killer. Others know that they have submitted to paranormal training to become mass murderers, but they have been duped into thinking that they are soldiers for one cause or another. Any sort of sender can "wake up" an amok, and at any distance. Naturally, sleeping amoks sometimes get set off by unrelated psychic disturbances. Nobody's perfect, and anyone you're talking to might go ape-shit on you at any time.

RAMPAGE, EXPERT (2ND): An amok charges into crowds, usually with a weapon of some heft, such as a monkey wrench or a fire ax. They strike fearlessly and ferociously, and if one knocks you down, they finish you off with glee. Amoks look happy, actually way too happy, and they even laugh a little. They prefer to run in a straight line, but they can manage corners if they need to. If an athlete or a fighter turns amok, their Rampage level is 3rd or higher.

SLEEPING IDENTITY, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Until the character goes amok, they're a regular person with whatever normal abilities, interests, obligations, and terrors they might have. The amok programming is buried deep and not readily detected or undone.

SAVES: 1

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

Swaps and the Psychic Alignment of Commerce

Sir Constance cooperates with the Stitch, allowing them to take advantage of all the mental activity that gets coordinated through truck, barter, and trade. Commerce aligns human brains, coordinating symbols and intentions, bringing human thought into line better than religion ever did. The Stitch uses Swaps to generate revenue, but more important to them is the way that commercial exchanges open human minds to psychic manipulation. The Stitch helps Sir Constance with both her overt and covert projects.

The Stitch versus the Movers

This formidable conspiracy rivals the Stitch, and agents from the two conspiracies regularly cross each other, although usually at some remove rather than face to face. For unknown reasons, the Movers have been heavily invested in Al Amarja for a century or two. The Stitch, naturally, is forced to maintain a strong presence on the Island. The Island poses inherent difficulty for the Stitch's psi techniques, evidently from generalized field distortions. The Stitch has thoroughly infiltrated all known Mover operations on Al Amarja, although those field distortions interfere with Sending, casting doubt on the reliability of the Senders' connections.

The Movers are setting up for a global conflict in which they will take control over most of the world population and destroy all those who resist their rule. There's a fair chance that any global operation will result mostly in Mover cells taking each other out in a final frenzy of score-settlings.

The Stitch versus the Cut-Ups

Since the imminent Psychic Union is inevitable in this reality, only something from beyond reality could threaten it. A malevolent entity from beyond the harmonic spheres is manifesting itself in Reality to feed on the psyche of humanity. It has recruited or possessed a small, disorganized cadre of reality vandals, called the Cut-Ups. This unnamed entity is a malevolent, entropic embodiment of chaos and unreality, making it powerful but without any apparent direction. Negative energy is expected when one undertakes psychic union on a planetary scale, but this negative phenomenon is nothing more than a back-current produced by the Stitch's own growing power.

STRANGERS

> The stranger living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt.
>
> —*Leviticus 19:34*, circa 400 BCE

In paranormal circles, "strangers" are creatures that are strange to this planet, dimension, or vibrational resonance. Paranormal creatures that are local to this frequency are known as "neighbors."

Exiles

Archvillains from another planet, cooling their heels. See page 166.

Kergillians

Psychic, crablike infiltrators. See page 167.

Memory Eaters

Invisible parasites who excrete your memory after feeding off of it. See page 171.

Neutralizers

Paranormal sport hunters. See page 178.

The Reptoid Menace

Reptoids are malignant, reptilian aliens on their way toward Earth with an invasion fleet. At least that's what form they take in the minds of believers. But in reality, they are nothing so prosaic. They embody an archetype of "menace" on the astral plane, and this menace is indeed on its way. The scenario of cold-blooded monsters overrunning Earth, with the fleet getting closer all the time, is decades old, and it was well-suited to the anxieties of that era.

Today the image of mean, scaly aliens doesn't fire up the fear center of the amygdala like it used to, and the power of the Reptoids has waned. That's not necessarily good news. There are still oppenheimers and psychics who are in contact with the Reptoids. The archetype of menace, which is what you might call the "real" Reptoid Menace, is now fully in contact with the Logosphere. Ready to act but needing a scarier manifestation, the menace is soon to mutate into something more horrible, and humanity will think back fondly to stories of a reptilian invasion.

Transdimensionals

From time to time, various more or less indescribable entities from alternate dimensions might be found roaming about the Edge. Here people violate reality, breaking its continuity, and allowing otherwise impossible entities to invade. The massive destruction of sapient life on Earth draws astral vampires, capable of multilocating in fragmentary form in several human host minds. Forbidden rituals create semidimensional entities by combining commandeered life forces and dark energy. Psychic trauma and violence create resonances that allow murderous mind-forms to "vibe in" from a parallel space-time, one whose sapient life forms they have long ago harnessed as food animals. One species of transdimensional arrived recently on a mission of mercy to help the cetaceans and formicans of Earth, but they brought with them a psychic infection that drives us four-dimensional entities insane.

THE UNDERGROUND

> Enemy of the people.

The nominal enemy of the State is the Underground. Underground terrorists are trying to bring down the State so they can prey on the populace, which the State dutifully protects. The Underground is responsible for various acts of sabotage targeting civilian infrastructure, such as electricity. The nefarious and secret activities of the Underground have forced the State to undertake extreme policing measures. Thankfully, these measures have all but eliminated the Underground, so the measures are well worth it, even if they are frankly inimical to human dignity.

The vaguely defined Underground is the State's ready excuse for investigation, intimidation, interrogation, appropriation, confiscation, incarceration, and summary execution. When civilian infrastructure catastrophically fails, the Underground gets the blame. There is no Underground.

There is, of course, a black market and plenty of activity that operates in secret and against the wishes of the State. This activity is often referred to as part of the Underground, but there's nothing coordinated or partisan about it.

CHAPTER XIS

GM'S SECRET BAG OF TRICKS

WHEN SUDDENLY AN AFFLICTION STRIKES, GOD MOCKS THE TEARS OF THE INNOCENT. THE EARTH IS GIVEN INTO THE HANDS OF THE WICKED, AND HE BLINDS THE EYES OF THE JUDGES.

—JOB 9:23–24, 6TH CENTURY BCE

Businesses and artistic movements come and go. A centipede threat waits in the wings. Strangely familiar strangers recur from one reality to another. One of the biggest changes in how I run this game today, compared to twenty-five years ago, is that today things are definitely in motion, and this chapter reflects that approach.

Story Fodder: New material to bring into your story arcs. Some of this material could have been handled in earlier chapters as standard setting items, but it's here because it's really meant for you to add into your campaign on purpose, rather than serving as part of the default background.

GMCs at Large: In the various shards of reality represented by ***Over the Edge*** story arcs, these GMCs recur in one way or another. They are designed to interact with player-characters, and you can drop them in here or there as suits your needs. I find them to be pretty useful.

Group Dynamics for GMCs: Templates for groups for GMCs. Plug in your own GMCs to make a cult, a business, secret club, or other small organization.

Story Fodder

Ancient rituals stumble forward, their astral energy vampirized or lost. The centipedes just keep getting bigger. Reality unfolds itself to a metareality. What does meaning even mean? Through the chaos, one determined man makes sure that the cabs get through. But for how long?

This material relates to the setting in general but is not keyed to any particular element. Pick the parts you like, tweak them to make them your own, and roll them out to the players a little at a time.

CRAZES

Now and then, some aspect of global culture sparks a disproportionate devotion from Marjans across social and metaphysical spectrums, sweeping them up in a fever over a Cuban candy bar or a shampoo commercial from Greece. It's hard for most people not to get carried along in the excitement, and even traumatized victims of supernatural attacks (for example) might find themselves feeling joy again as the crowd celebrates yet another rerun of their favorite commercial played on yet another screen.

Introduce crazes in passing: When you need to explain why some GMC is scarred, maimed, shell-shocked, or otherwise worse for wear, paraphrase your version of what crazes are, and explain that the GMC was caught in a riot that broke out over a previous craze. The object of the craze should be something that reflects your campaign, or it can be a Czech children's cartoon.

MS. LE THUY

She is a short, rounded, sensibly dressed Al Amarjan woman in her early twenties. This unassuming and seemingly unremarkable woman is the ultimate embodiment of the human genome. Her father is the progeny of an African-American soldier and a Vietnamese woman. Her mother is an Al Amarjan woman, and by chance Le Thuy's DNA accurately represents a union of the overall human genome. What does her unique genetic makeup mean? No one knows yet, and no one even knows that she is special, least of all her.

Le Thuy fits in wherever she goes, and others readily accept her as one of "their people." People find her hard to describe because her traits and features are remarkably unremarkable.

Le Thuy is something of a wild card for you to use, especially in relation to some special trait of a character. It's common for a character to have some sort of mutation, special DNA, unique biological origin, or some other trait that, with a bit of a stretch, relates to Le Thuy. Or a character might have fringe science or mystic powers that would somehow

AL AMARJA VARIANTS

The setting of Al Amarja serves to make room for your imagination. Plenty of interesting ideas got left out because they go too far in defining the experiences characters would have in the game. Details such as those, however, are fine for your personal campaign. Here are some ideas for changes that would give your campaign a special emphasis.

- Daytime-Nighttime: During the day, public life is pretty normal. Everyone seems to maintain a veneer of normalcy or else just sleeps in. At night, that's when the city shows its other sides. That's when all the interesting things happen.
- Mother Tongue: Al Amarja has a native language, a creole that includes words derived from various languages. Interest groups of various sorts influence the language inadvertently or intentionally. Graffiti is mostly in this language, with nonstandard spelling and maybe even a mix of alphabets. Visitors have little problem speaking with locals, who use foreign languages for business and official purposes.
- Blimps float over the city, ostensibly to reflect sunlight and fight global warming but actually to thwart spy satellites and to facilitate surveillance.
- Rather than simple cash or credit transactions, there's constant bartering and exchanging with various currencies and trade goods.
- Liberation from societal norms has allowed gender to shift fluidly and perhaps metastasize. Traditional categories are abandoned as useless and quaint.
- No multinational corporations defend their trademarks here, but certain powerful interests monopolize use of the most popular brand names. Across the social strata, for example, bottles of Coke are considered high-end beverages because Sir Constance quashes all other counterfeiters. If you want to serve Coke in your restaurant, you need to serve Sir Constance's counterfeit Coke and no one else's.
- Virtually the entire Peace Force is staffed by members of a particular ethnic group, probably an obscure one, maybe a mountain people.
- The pronouns "she/her" are strictly enforced as the gender-neutral and only pronoun for third-person persons. A small group of resisters secretly resort to using "he/him" for males, and they are the worst people on this entire Island.
- Pick a family or a brand as source of proper names, particularly one that is well-known and popular, such as Disney or the Kennedy family. All over the island are big things and places named for people or characters from that source — buildings, streets, fountains, a library, a mixed drink, etc. Lots of locals age thirty or younger have names associated with these characters or celebrities.

benefit from using her as a test subject or as a medium. She hasn't been "discovered" by the conspiracies, and she's not even aware of her own special identity, so she's a mystery that the players can claim as their own.

Her occupation might be whatever it needs to be to bring her into contact with the characters at the right juncture, preferably something nondescript. If you want to be clever, subtly introduce her with no name and not much detail, seemingly as a random shopkeeper or waitress in a place that the characters are likely to visit over and over. Then only when the characters have met her two or three times should you give her a vague description and a name.

Contagious Averageness: Under the right conditions, the DNA of other humans might spontaneously mutate to match Le Thuy's DNA more closely. This result might also happen if a character ends up subjecting her to fringe science experiments or some other paranormal force.

Alchemical Wedding: Several men may be part of Le Thuy's near future. Each of them represents different Y-chromosome lineage, and some instinctive drive is leading each of them unconsciously to Al Amarja. Should any of them sire sons through Ms. Le

Thuy, these sons will unlock the latent power of the human genome and give rise to a new stage of human evolution. Given the chaos of Al Amarja, some other fate may well await these men and the mate they are drawn to. Any of them might serve as unbeatable sacrifices to work magic on behalf of humanity or its enemies, and there are not-quite-humans who might end up in the equation as mates. Adding in men who are unconsciously seeking Le Thuy is one way for you to lead the characters to here, since otherwise she doesn't stand out and might not come to their attention.

The Stitch: Le Thuy's brain structure represents some sort of average or synthesis, so maybe the Stitch could use her as a psychic hub. By hijacking her brain, maybe they can contact and control other brains around the world like never before. Maybe she's a touchstone that would allow them to tap into brains in the past or future. Maybe, once they make psychic contact via quantum entanglement, her brain template broadcasts back up the line and she turns into the most powerful sender yet, with the Stitch converting cell by cell to an operation under her control.

MUSEUM OF MODERN LIFE

A maniac millionaire arranges to have this garish structure erected quickly and it is soon ready to open. The interior of the museum is finished in secrecy.

Special Invitation: The characters are invited to a private viewing a few days before the museum opens to the public. Something special about them warrants the invitation. They come at night and find their way through the museum to an exhibit that reveals or challenges something about them. The artist or curator is there to greet them.

Soul Snatcher: A robot camera takes your photo and stores your image. A nearby screen displays a shifting collage of people, all images that the robot has captured. The collage grows, and the images of certain people are juxtaposed against each other in pantomime struggles on screen. The robot algorithmically alters images and keeps the collage in a state of constant, slow shifts. Characters each face the question of whether they want to be photographed, and if so, how. Maybe an image reveals something about a character that they didn't intend to make visible. At some point, the robot "randomly" morphs someone's image in a way that reveals something about their biggest secret. That could be a player-character or a GMC. The installation is called Soul Snatcher, but the artist hasn't told anyone that. The plaque calls it "Untitled."

Aggressive Art: An installation of gears and blades animates into a killing machine.

Mayhem for Hire: The characters can strike a blow against one of their enemies by publicly destroying one of the works, a complicated construction of glass tubes and chambers, filled with bubbling, churning liquids. Smashing the thing is easy enough, and getting out of there shouldn't be too hard.

Lure: One of the ghastlier exhibits is a lure for a supernatural enemy. The enemy is sure to show up among the crowds to make a paranormal connection to the piece. The characters stake out the exhibit and help security spot and take down the enemy.

Your Own Exhibit: A mysterious agent contacts a character to invite them to create an exhibit in the museum. A character who is an artist of some sort would be a natural fit, but maybe a philosopher or scientist gets tapped for some strange reason. For a character with paranormal art talent of some sort, it might be enough simply to give the player the chance to improvise what their exhibit will be and then cast lots to see how it turns out and how it's received. If the exhibit has a paranormal effect, that could bring good or bad attention to the character. For more conflict, a rival artist is creating another exhibit and more or less competing to outdo the character, perhaps with assistance from thugs who sabotage the character's work.

All-Purpose Museum Crew: You could run a whole story arc centered on the museum, with characters as artists, guards, administrators, and dilettantes. The characters help organize the museum's development, monitor how the public takes to it, and protect it from saboteurs and infiltrators who are trying to use the museum to their own ends. The "haunted exhibit" created by a nefarious artist is a good hook, where the characters have unwittingly helped the Movers, say, install a surreal, animated sculpture that burns itself into the minds of those who view it, making them vulnerable to later mind control.

Exhibits

To make the museum seem big and varied, you'll need a long list of exhibits, even if the characters see them only in passing. Here's a list to start from, but change them up and add your own, especially exhibits that would reflect the characters' traits or stories.

- Whirring mechanical installations with blades and sparks.
- A grand mirror with an elaborate frame. The reflection seems sort of "off," as if it's further away than it should be, maybe skewed.
- Taxidermy animals posed on seats in front of a television screen, with extra seats for visitors to sit in. The screen periodically runs fragmentary video of children working and studying.

- A room that goes dark once the doors are closed. Sounds of beasts and machinery start low and distant but then grow louder and closer. Some sort of beeping code plays parallel to the main sound tracks, but it's light enough to be overlooked.

- A glass floor with water underneath it. Fish swim in it. Occasionally birds are released into the water, and they drown while fluttering against the glass.

- Large books on podiums. A stagehand in all black (a *koken*) turns the pages of the books and ignores any attempts to engage them. The books contain black-and-white photos on the right-hand pages and incongruous text on the facing pages. The photos are mostly candid street scenes of people doing everyday things, although many photos are hard to identify. Most likely a photo of personal significance to a character appears, although it might be hard to find again once the pages are turned or the book shut.

THE PRE-ENACTORS

In plazas and vacant lots and sometimes on crowded sidewalks, the Pre-Enactors stage their performances. With makeshift props, the casts of up to a dozen actors pantomime everyday scenes of office work or home life, mixed in with homicidal rage, debilitating illnesses of mind and body, and catastrophic death. They repeat nonsense phrases without syntax but with great feeling. All of them have the haggard look of refugees from a terror that has marked them forever, and it's no act. When the unscheduled performances start, crowds gather quickly and bystanders text their friends or patrons to summon them. Common folk find them amusing, but sensitives can tell that these actors are up to something. The varied phrases that they repeat all mean something to someone. Off hours, the actors lead dull lives, mostly working menial jobs and playing backgammon. They have nothing to say, and they never rehearse their performances. People have begun to take interest, and it's only a matter of time until a patron adopts them, an agency co-opts them, or a nemesis destroys them. The Pre-Enactors themselves do not understand who they are or what they're doing. They are agents on a botched mission from a future that they are trying to prevent. Somewhere in their performances are the clues that people need to find in order to keep that future from taking place, or maybe their mad mimicry and suggestive babble is the very thing that will bring that future down on all of us.

ULTIMATE RITUAL OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The primordial ritual that gave rise to human consciousness has gone off kilter. The ritual works on long timescales, so maybe it will be OK. Maybe it will all be OK.

Homo erectus ancestors of modern humans began a ritual here on Al Amarja that continues to this day. This ritual potentiates symbolism on the astral plane, and it has gone on in one form or another ever since it started, over a million years ago. This ritual has allowed the offspring of Erectuses to develop false, symbolic ego-selves of greater and greater power. Neanderthals, Denisovans, and Sapiens all evolved false consciousness under this influence. Since then, Sapiens evolved fully linguistic consciousness, while the Neanderthals evolved a spiritual nature that energized the planet on the astral plane. A hybrid lineage spread across the world, everywhere inventing crazy cults, bloody gods, and horrific rites. The earliest stone structures these zealots constructed were sacrificial altars. The Pharaohs found this all quite amusing, and the hybrids spread into Europe, across Asia, and into the Americas, and on all those continents they founded grim empires of authority, divinity, and war.

For most of the millennia that the ritual has been underway, it has been conducted on an astral level. Neanderthals maintained it that way without help from the ritual's creators. In fact, they improved on the ritual through their work. As the Neanderthals declined under that onslaught by the hybrids, the Pharaohs were forced to resume physical rituals. They enlisted the Sapiens in Africa to conduct the ritual on a grand scale.

The ritual is always underway, at least on the astral plane. It also manifests as several rituals on the Island that all seem independent. These rituals, too, are often underway on the astral plane rather than here physically with us.

The Sapiens' wayward chaos vortex, soon to be known as C, has disrupted the ritual in a permanent way. The ritual is still going, and the Pharaohs are getting ready to initiate Operation: Homo Servus, with a regrettable but tolerable delay. Don't ask for an ETA on Operation: Homo Servus, especially as a joke.

The ritual is still going on, but chips are getting cashed in. Senders are infiltrating the ritual to broadcast power to the Stitch. Rogue agents have commandeered two separate rites and repurposed them for personal astral power. Meaning, reflection, and logic are up for grabs.

The ritual manifests physically in Al Amarja, consisting of widely dispersed events: dramatic performances, brutal ceremonies, ecstatic dances, and prayers called out en masse. Now's the time for some big org to make a push, and the characters are bound to get sucked in.

ONEIRIC FUGITIVES, SHADOW CHILDREN

Everywhere there are prisons, there are fugitives and there are lawmen hunting them — even in dreams. These are fugitives, hiding in the dreamlife of Al Amarja. They begin as inky shadows in the peripheral of an unconscious mind, only resolving into monochromatic "kids," like something pulled out of film noir, as they gain comfort in the host. No one would even know they were on the run except that secret, dial-up BBS rooms talk about the white-haired man that stalks them through one person's dream and into another, shooting them to death with a candy cane-looking gun unless they can flee to another dream. When the kids flee, they can pull the dreamer into the next dream along with them, hapless people drawn in by the eddies of the psychic wake. Once a person is dragged into the sleeping psyche of another, karma or synchronicity seem to cause them to meet, to pick up hobbies and mannerisms and such from the other they didn't have before.

What's more, once one of the kids hides in a host's dream world, others tend to file in. A guy on the COSMIX BBS said the Presidentials came to his door, asking him about a haunted, hollow-eyed child and the man hunting them. He hasn't posted again in a week. Everyone thinks he's disappeared. Sure, maybe it was the Presidentials that got him, but what conspiracy on the Island *wouldn't* want to control kids who can twist, explore, and exploit other people's minds? What's more, what wouldn't a frightened group of children do to those minds to keep the hunter off their tracks? These kids were part of a very secret project, and someone isn't about to let their "subjects" go. Worse, the more holes these kids create between dreams, the less distinct anyone's psyche remains. What if they break down *all* the walls between minds?

Perhaps one of these kids runs through a PC's dream. It could just be a curious one-off that leaves them feeling like they didn't sleep well, but let's suppose the kid takes up residence in the PC's dreams. For whatever character-based reason, they are a good place to hide...until the bounty hunter comes looking for the kid. That could cause some genuine brain damage, what with him blasting holes in oneiric walls and such. And that's to say nothing of what happens if the character follows the kid into someone else's dream. What might they find there? And, you know, it's been noted that when dreamers cross over like that in the non-space of the mind, well, they often bump into each other in real life. Somehow, those Swiss cheese holes between dreams leave astral magnets between dreamers, pulling them together by what would otherwise seem mere chance.

GIOVANNI'S CABS

At some point in your campaign, a new underground business opens up: Giovanni's Cabs. Giovanni hates the Total Taxi Department and passionately wants to help people who get hassled by Total. It starts small, with Giovanni doing it all, but soon he is coordinating a few drivers. They drive nondescript beaters and get all their work through word of mouth. The characters might benefit from some confidential rides or rescue from a tight spot. They might be savvy enough to tell that he's legit, and therefore trust him or even help him out. They might well come across Giovanni when a crew of street predators are smashing their way into his car, trying to get him.

Maybe Giovanni's business becomes an enduring part of the Island's culture, with players reminded of the earlier characters who helped Giovanni establish his network. And maybe "enduring" is too strong a word, because once the players are invested in Giovanni's cabs, that whole business has the proverbial crosshairs on it. Something terrible happens to the network, such as the cabbies being mind-controlled into delivering certain riders to a location where they can be kidnapped. The characters, naturally, dive in for one character-driven reason or another. Maybe they can save Giovanni, but probably they don't.

Probably Giovanni starts out as the owner of Giovanni's Garage, a repair shop in Sunken District.

QUANTUM PHREAKS

Where phone phreaks sought to manipulate the tone signals of the phone companies, Quantum Phreaks tweak the "tones" of the psychic quantum grid. They ride that grid, scooping up emotions like whales skimming krill in the ocean. The universe is made up of these tones, psychically and astrally, and the Phreaks tap in and ride the waves. It's string theory by way of psychedelic theology. The Phreaks wear plaid suits and ugly socks, all of them looking like transplants from a 90's ska band. They look harmless enough, but they're dangerously close to what the Stitch wants to control. Which could mean the Quantum Phreaks are going to be co-opted by the Stitch, or maybe they're a secret splinter cell? Whatever the case, they get off on vibes, they can hack collective moods. They are a DJ at the spear tip of 3 a.m. when the whole crowd is high on ecstasy — at least that's what they are when they ride the tones. When they don't, they're surfers crashing and the crowd around them is the wave breaking on the rocks. Good or bad, if a Phreak is phreaking, those around him find the rhythm of the tone. Once someone else is tuned in, a phreak can hack them. And they do, but playfully, Psychic Merry Pranksters. Like everything on Al Amarja, though, these analog revolutionaries are destined to be weaponized.

Characters might zone into the wave the Phreaks are riding, carried along and dropped off in the seafoam like a whale carcass beaching on shore. It's

a hell of a letdown when it's over, and someone who experiences that sort of high is likely to seek it again. After the event, they get a penchant for plaid or join in on one of the "crazes" that sweep Al Amarja. Maybe the Phreaks are behind those crazes, who knows?

Like the tones, though, the Phreaks are more than just background noise. As a potential weapon, they might already be under the sway of an org or lone actor. Maybe one of their own is less in it for the "cool vibes, man" and more about getting people to do what he wants by manipulating the tones around them. How far can it go? Is it like the piggybacking done by Stitchers, where someone pilots another body? Or is it subtler, moving one, or perhaps many people, in a certain direction... Perhaps a corporation is the first to see the potential? Maybe that's why the Golden Buddha franchise has taken hold on Al Amarja, which usually rejects all fast food chains and the very scent thereof?

RAPID ONSET CONTAGIOUS APHASIA (ROCA)

> Sticks and stones may break my bones But words will never hurt me.
> —children's rhyme

Words sting, they bruise the ego, they make you cry, but they never ever kill you...except now. Maybe it started last week, a year ago, or won't start for another month, but Contagious Aphasia is coming. Read the wrong book, overhear the wrong conversation, and it's on you. Burroughs was right, language is a virus, and viruses spread. When language is the contagion, letters and ideograms and everything that signs for the signifier become dangerous. It starts as an inability to speak properly; a kind of glossolalia inhabits the victim. From there, normal words become divorced from meaning. You can no longer conceive of a cat, or a car, or terminal velocity. People go mad, they jump off buildings (though they cannot know what a building is), they die. It's a pandemic, or it will be. The kicker is, ROCA is memetically engineered, but no one knows by who. Is this the secret weapon possessed by the Stitch, or did it just start accidentally when some folk-rapper-synth-pop musician in Flowers came up with a tune catchier than *Gangnam Style*? If someone could reverse engineer the virus, who knows what they could do with reality? What if the State could control the masses with simply a song?

A virus is easily caught, and that makes it easy to introduce to your players. But consider starting small, a few cases in the background. Crazed folks seemingly speaking in tongues before setting themselves on fire. Maybe it's a new art movement.

Point is, keep this on the back burner, low simmer. You don't have to decide who made the virus yet, but it's probably related to your main conspiracy. You can also have fun if you infect a character. Not only does that start a ticking clock, but the player could get a lot of mileage out of trying to communicate actual meaning in gibberish. Of course, you want to make sure your chosen player is on board for that.

ALTERNATE TIMELINES

The island has *always* been weird. Back when it was part of Atlantis, during the Belle Epoque, during two World Wars — Al Amarja was a nest of marginal cultures, micro-Bohemias, and conspiracies, always conspiracies. The dance halls of the Edge flourished as Dresden burned. The *real* Nikola Tesla entertained here during the 1899 World's Fair, the one no one remembers.

For a one-shot or short arc, you can show your players what the Edge was like in the past, or even in the future where C becomes reality. These Edges and Al Amarjas serve as contrast; they are the shadows thrown by the spotlight of your normal campaign. You could play a mini-arc as characters in the Victorian Era Edge, then move to the modern Edge where players run their normal characters trying to unravel the mystery started back then.

These are facets; fragments of a hologram, somehow each containing the whole but always distorted. These can be this Edge's past or another's, or another place entirely. Nothing is true. Everything is permitted.

CENTIPEDE INFESTATION

First, it's incidental centipedes, like a silhouette in a logo on a diner window, or maybe a stray little critter in a character's lunch. Maybe that's all there is in that arc. Nothing to see here. Keep moving. And they do keep moving, because in the next arc, the centipedes are back. Now they're a nuisance. Maybe a character casts their lots to get rid of them. Not a big deal, yet. In the next arc, they're a danger. Maybe they infest the abandoned building that the characters investigate, and their footsteps bring the 'pedes out in a surge from all directions, including the ceilings. It's not good if they sting you too much. If you can swing it, a surging tide of centipedes could be a doom that the characters opportunistically release on their enemies. After the centipedes have appeared in a big way, that's an OK time to remind them of all the centipedes their characters in different arcs have been seeing. In the next arc, the infestation really hits. If you're going to move out of town or otherwise break up the campaign, this arc might be the campaign's climactic finish.

Pincer-like Stingers: Centipede venom usually doesn't bother you much, but if there are a lot of them, especially if they're mutated, cursed, or specially bred for toxicity, they can sure envenom

(strike) a character. The venom makes you feel like total crap and gives you shooting joint pain. Special centipedes have exotic venoms that cause visions, brain-wracking nightmares ("they were crawling all over me"), temporary strength and endurance, hallucinations ("they're everywhere"), strange hungers, an unsettling self-image ("what's that in the mirror"), or some combination of these or other results. The effects might vary according to the nature of the victim. Instead of "envenomed," the strike might be something colorful, such as "brain-wracked from nightmares" or "centi-plastered." If anyone suggests "im*pede*d," the answer is no, and they lose 10 experience points.

The Queen's Human Courtiers: The climactic centipede battle might be the characters killing the queen centipede before it can escape. The characters start by flushing out bugs, but then there are humans in the mix, and it gets tricky. The queen is as big as a forearm, which is convenient because she clings lengthwise along a human host's forearm, with the venomous pincers reaching out over the knuckles. The host's other arm has a soldier-pede clinging to it, just as big and with blood-searing venom. A select inner circle of humans also have these giant soldier-pedes as bio-hand-weapons. The 'pede "weapons" can easily hide under clothing and then scuttle out onto forearms when it is time to fight.

Networked 'Pedes: The centipede infestation might comprise countless, hairy centipedes of regular size. Here and there one finds mother centipedes, as big as your hand, and with a venom that compromises your body in unsettling ways. They serve as communication nodes, with messages from scouts passed from one 'pede to another, through antenna twitches. The messages spread like waves, soon reaching a mother. She responds to signals from all directions and sends two messages out, one forward into the field and another back to the queen. Near the mother are ferocious soldier 'pedes, and more still around the queen.

Hybrids: Serving the queen are various humans that she has infected with her DNA. They are now centipede-human hybrids, humanoids with chitinous skin, quivering antennae, and poisonous stingers derived from their fingers. Many people feel the calling to serve the queen, but few are chosen. The rejects hang around the infestation like wannabes or stalkers. One of them could get talked into leading people to the queen — "so I can make her see that she needs me" — but the others are not that daring.

Armageddon: If the centipede menace in the final arc of the "meta-arc" is too tough, the characters may be able to call on some primordial enemy of the centipedes to turn the tide against the bugs. Traditionally, the enemy would be other centipedes, identical except for the order of the brown and tan stripes on their legs.

Primordial Arthropod Power: Somewhere on the Island is a drop of amber with an ant preserved in it. This ant died while tripping on mushrooms and laying down astral diagrams in the primeval logosphere. If the 'pedes were to claim this relic, it might connect them to primordial power sources, and then...

CAM SAYS: MIND-WIPED BLACK OPS TEAM

A go-to set-up I like to use for one-shots or two-fers is to set up the player-characters as members of a team of wetworks operatives or cloaks, who go on missions for a mysterious patron and then have their memories wiped of all knowledge afterward. It's a fun shtick but it's actually best when you tell the players, as they create their characters on this elite group of A-Team-like special forces proles, that they should know that the last mind-wipe didn't really take. They've been having dream flashes, snatches of memory, of a disastrous operation that went south and resulted in half their team being killed. Their patron calls them in for one last operation, but it's a smoke-and-mirrors deal—the team's being set up for termination, there's a betrayal, or something worse. Most of the time, this kind of session works best if the players can ask questions of the other players that take the form of "what horrible thing did you do on that last op that you're only just now remembering?" or "why did you save me on that op and not Jayhawk?" It's all part of the fun.

GMCs at Large, AKA Recurrent GMCs

Rather than being connected to a specific place or organization, these GMCs are here for you to drop into the action as you see fit. Change or invent details to make them fit the campaign's events or the characters' needs. Meeting these characters gives your players something in common with all the other players that meet them in their campaigns. You can also have them appear in multiple arcs so they become regular parts of the "Al Amarja experience" for your table. Adjust the character each time to fit the arc. If you try to maintain too much continuity from one arc to another, you end up doing extra work while making the experience less flexible.

Here are summaries of the GMCs-at-large, with the questions that they pose. Full descriptions follow.

Angela Reyes: Quantum physics student. Does she die a grisly death?

Madame Lange: Jaded queen-like figure. Will the characters impress her?

Fatna Alaoui: Vibe gourmet. What is she going to find? How is she going to act?

Buck Williams: Wide-eyed tourist. What's going to become of him?

Reza Rajavi, Santo, the Santo: Exclusive guru. Will he grant them his wisdom?

"Old" Enid: Creepy old lady. Does she bring a blessing or a curse?

J McEights: Transdimensional game editor. Does she even exist?

Clyde the Throckmorton Guy: Exterminator and snitch. What secret does he reveal to the characters, and is it true in this reality?

Peter Hentges: Just and Beneficent Ruler of the Universe. Will he really help?

ANGELA REYES

UNCERTAINLY DOOMED QUANTUM PHYSICS STUDENT

Youngish Al Amarjan woman, small, nondescript, and of mixed ancestry.

QUESTION: "Does she die a grisly death?"

ROLE: She's studying quantum physics at D'Aubainne University (or used to study there, or wants to study there). She befriends the characters, or perhaps the characters have already met her off-stage when she first appears in the story. Given half a chance, she talks about Schrödinger's cat, which is both dead and alive. She might also talk about how quantum physics tells us that existence is ephemeral and that continuity is an illusion. Before too long, she either dies a grisly death or (less likely) avoids exactly that fate. There's no particular reason that her death needs to be on-stage. The actions of the characters might play into her fate, but other times there's really nothing you can do.

EXAMPLE: Ashley, psychic to the stars, had an earlier experience in which she foresaw the grisly death of the drummer in her band but couldn't prevent it from happening. When she met the psychic cabal that she had come to the Island to join, one of them was Reyes. Ashley had a vision of Angela Reyes blowing up in no uncertain terms. This vision became a bone of contention between Ashley and the cabal, but she did manage (just barely) to save Reyes from an explosion that would have killed her. When Ashley earned a specialty, her player chose "Death."

CHRIS SAYS: BUCK WILLIAMS AND THE SUN QUEEN

Buck made it into my "The Sun Queen Must Die" campaign. I took the doomed part as not only a function of where Buck's arc might go, but who he was as a person. He was almost always enthused and gobsmacked about the Island, but there was a tragic side to him as well.

My Buck knew that some sort of end was coming. He couldn't have put it in those words, but he was "a man of constant sorrow" underneath. Buck served as a contrast to the PCs who, while new to the Island, were far readier for Al Amarja than Buck. The contrast made the players feel more confident.

FATNA ALAOUI

VIBE GOURMET

Striking, statuesque, North African woman. Sharply dressed, poised, and probably hanging out with the highest-status people in the immediate area.

QUESTION: "What is she going to find?" "How is she going to act?"

ROLE: She is an expert at reading personal energy, and she is on Al Amarja seeking exotic energy signatures. She says it's all about learning and expanding her consciousness, but really, she is hooked on homing in on others' energy. The more she knows, the less interesting regular people are, and the more she's drawn to the unusual to satisfy her desire for more. In seeking unusual human energy, she might find herself drawn to the various places on the Island where remarkable sorts of misery abound.

She might be a character's best friend, someone who can discern their subtle energies and maybe learn things about them that they don't yet know. She could be a character's worst nightmare, a well-connected elite who can see through their charades. A character with unusual personal vibes might be her temporary diversion, as she takes them in and savors their unique vibrational tones.

A nice default encounter is to have her run across characters in some public venue, such as a reception or an all-night skee ball competition. She becomes interested in the most interesting character, or maybe the least interesting one for a change. The attention might allow the character to get some sort of mileage out of the interaction, such as connections with people she knows. Or her attention might risk blowing someone's cover or alerting enemy cloaks to the character. If she is with important people that the characters want to impress or implore, they might need to humor her more. It wouldn't be the first time she's forced someone to let her astrally ogle them. Depending on how she reacts to the characters, she could make things easier for them...or much harder.

BUCK WILLIAMS

WIDE-EYED TOURIST, IN DEEP

Soft, middle-aged, pasty American man, dressed like a 10-year-old with money might dress himself.

QUESTION: "What's going to become of him?"

ROLE: The characters meet him first when he has newly arrived on the island, and then they meet him again after he's had experiences that changed him. In the first encounter, he's excited to be here. Possibly he latches onto a character with whom he has something in common. Perhaps he's with friends, relatives, or a small travel group. It's a brief encounter, and you can tell the players to wonder what's going to come of that man. Later, Williams appears where the players least expect him. Now he's in thick with some nefarious or outlandish group. He's joined a cult, become a dehumanized drug addict, joined a gang, signed on with a team of specialty fighters, or come to embrace his true self as a badger. He's still enthusiastic. He might not recognize the characters, but they recognize him. If he turns out to be some sort of threat to the characters, such as a toady in the cult that's after them, so much the better. His friends and relatives might be with him, or they might be nowhere to be found.

REPEAT PERFORMANCE: Once your players have met Williams in one arc, they know the story. For subsequent arcs, you can get plenty of mileage out of just a single encounter. If they encounter him when he's green, he tells them enough about his plans that the players know what's going to happen to him. If they encounter him after he's "gone native," they'll know that just recently he was a newcomer.

EXAMPLE: Ashley, the psychic to the stars, met Buck in the lobby of Cesar's. I played Buck as a lovable buffoon, and the two characters hung out long enough for Buck to introduce Ashley to Total Taxi and to invite her to the "Mojo Moon Dance," happening in a couple days when the moon would be full. Her player cast a terrible throw and lost track of Buck at the party. Now he's doomed to resurface later in the arc, having found a "new life" of some sort.

MADAME LANGE

JADED QUEEN-LIKE FIGURE

Hefty Teutonic matron, expertly dressed, made up, and perfumed

QUESTION: "Will she accept them or reject them or what?"

ROLE: She's done it all — smuggled guns, run a brothel, led a multinational corporation, launched a cult, and raised a family. She has contacts, expertise, and resources. Now she's here on Al Amarja for something. Maybe she's found it, and maybe she's been here a long time without success. This thing could be a paranormal person, outlandish spectacles, a startling artistic movement, a deviant sexual practice, or any other item of interest to someone who's done it all. Maybe the characters are looking for the same thing, or maybe one of the characters has what she's looking for.

By default, the characters come to her to petition her aid, or they are at least trying to avoid her disdain. In addition to her personal resources, you could raise the stakes by inventing an official position for her that's relevant to what the characters need, such as trustee of a paranormal school or a member of an exclusive club. She has seen it all, almost. What can the characters do to get her to care about what they're doing? What is the thing that she's seeking here, and how does that factor into the encounter, even just as flavor?

It's pronounced LAHNG-uh.

REZA RAJAVI, SANTO, THE SANTO

EXCLUSIVE GURU, WITH JUST THE SECRET YOUR SOUL NEEDS

Persian man in his fifties and at his peak. Striking, intense, simply dressed; so alert that others next to him seem like simpletons.

QUESTION: "Will he grant them his wisdom or blessing?"

ROLE: Traveling across the globe, meeting secretly with the mighty and the holy, Reza Rajavi parleys his spiritual gifts into an elite lifestyle. You can't find him on the web, outside of some random discussion forums that haven't been scrubbed yet. But word of him gets around. People look for him, often with just the nickname Santo to go by (Spanish: "holy one"). Most people meet impostors, hit dead ends, or get screened out by Rajavi's coterie. But people keep looking because some people find him. He accepts extravagant gifts but considers the station of the supplicant when assessing what counts as extravagant. He accepts supplicants with no gifts, and he turns away those who bring gifts that are merely large.

Supplicants are expected to undergo ritual cleansings, with assistants to guide every step. The assistants also make a record of what plea the supplicant has in mind and what gift they bring, if any.

When Rajavi grants a character an audience, it might mean one of several things.

- A small group of supplicants present their gifts and requests one by one. Rajavi speaks solemnly to each supplicant in turn, usually a short, obscure phrase. Long silence, and then everyone is dismissed.
- Meet as the only supplicant, with Rajavi and several assistants. The assistants handle any gift and instruct the supplicant when to speak. Rajavi says nothing, but his assistants ask questions of the assistant while he observes. Eventually, the assistants speak for him, passing along his message, his blessing, or some other response.
- Attend the holy circle as a cup-bearer. Santo and his inner circle gather around a table with the bones of a long-dead guru arranged creatively in the center. They speak in elliptical phrases and drink wine from clear glass goblets. The supplicant keeps the goblets full.
- Blindfolded, the supplicant shakes a rattle while a small group sings and plays music, with wordless vocals.

The results of a visit with Rajavi are varied and ambiguous, like the rest of this reality.

Rajavi is unafraid. He knows that he has crystallized his soul on the astral plane, and not even the Last War is going to destroy him.

And remember what the Buddha once said: "If you meet the Guru on the road, kill him, too."

Someday, a character is going to need something special, such as an answer, spiritual healing, or esoteric instruction. Maybe Reza Rajavi has what the character needs.

"OLD" ENID, "CRAZY OLD" ENID, OR "BYAY-HAH"

CREEPY OLD LADY WITH SOMETHING TO SAY

Wizened, bent, wrapped in old clothes, one eye bigger than the other, but centered and powerful, with a low voice that everyone can hear just fine. She might appear in a window, doorway, or other portal, almost as if she is a messenger from elsewhere. If she has attendants, they say nothing.

QUESTION: "Does she bring a blessing or a curse?"

ROLE: At some point in an arc, a GMC is going to appear onstage with important words for the characters to hear. Maybe it will be Enid, especially if the message comes by surprise. She is in the mix long enough to deliver some cryptic message and not much longer. Usually she refers to her own unique source of paranormal wisdom, such as, "The spirits whisper to them's they favor," or, "I got a sixth sense for wisdom that the stars sparkle down on us, and the stars told me..." She might curse them, calling down destruction on them for any of various transgressions. She might bless them, calling up invisible power to strengthen or protect them. It's likely that she will provide them with some clue that leads them on or some revelation that crushes their hopes. Then she shuts the window, closes the door, or otherwise terminates the conversation. If the characters force the issue, find her, and confront her, she seems half mad. She says what the voices tell her to say (or what have you), so they can't force any more information out of her.

Rajavi's Blesses and Curses

Lots of things can go well or poorly when one gets a blessing or a curse from Rajavi. Blessings work as good twists and curses as bad ones.

RAJAVI'S BLESSES AND CURSES		
CONCERN	**BLESSING**	**CURSE**
Sanity	His words bring you lasting comfort, and you can call them up to memory when distressed.	His ambiguous words haunt you, and you descend into psychosis. You have to hit bottom before you can start ascending. Of course, that's only a theory.
Health	After your short meeting, you have a new perspective on your own health, and the new perspective is transformative.	His words make it easier than ever to obsess about your health, and the stress makes you worse.
Wisdom	His words mean nothing, but next morning you wake up with the insight that you need.	The literal content of his words is benign, but you know that they mean that the wisdom you seek is a lie — it is all lies. My God, now you see that it is all lies.
Guidance	His words are so banal that you forget them. One day, the words spring to mind just in time to prevent you from doing something that would wreck you.	His words haunt you, appearing in your mind in various orders and combinations, or inserting themselves into what you hear people say. Distracted, you are going to do something clueless, and you are going to pay.
Paranormal awakening	His words unlock something in your mind, and over the next week some new paranormal capacity opens up in you.	His words are forgettable, but they return the first night as part of a long, brain-bending nightmare. And the second night. Then the third. How long can it go on?
Knowledge	His words remind you that you know nothing. You are liberated from truth and fact — temporarily. When you reassemble your knowing self, you know what you wanted to learn.	His words remind you that you know nothing. You are lost in a chaos without truth or fact. Eventually you pull yourself together. You have forgotten many things about your past, but you don't realize that because you've forgotten them.
Transcendence	His enigmatic phrases turn in your head, and you realize that life is just a game, and that what we think of as our "character" is really a fiction. You are ready to face the Last War with transcendent compunction.	His enigmatic phrases careen through your head, and life comes to seem like nothing but a cruel game played for the sport of unknowable monster-gods. The pain of this world is pointless but real. Eventually, madness comes, and it's a blessing.

CLYDE THE THROCKMORTON GUY

SOMETHING IS BUGGING HIM — AND HE'S WILLING TO SHARE

Big-framed, dark-haired European man with a generous moustache, usually dressed in his Throckmorton uniform. The name patch says, "Clyde."

QUESTION: "What secret does he reveal to the characters, and is it true in this reality?"

ROLE: In a nearby reality, "Clyde Throckmorton" achieved world domination in 1997. As that world's beloved fascist dictator, he enforces worldwide loyalty and purity. The reality-bending, time-twisting machine that installed him as dictator has also sent discontinuities cascading through the local meaning-matter matrix. Various Clydes from adjacent realities have been transcosmified [sic], and the one that the characters meet is one such Clyde.

In this reality, Clyde Blanche knows that somewhere, somehow, he missed the boat. He feels like he was destined to be something marvelous, but here he is after all these years, still just a Throckmorton man. Maybe there is something that he can do that will make a difference. As a trusted exterminator, he sees lots of things that clients don't want him to see. And he's a professional, so he doesn't talk, but some of these clients are just disgusting. If he could get the right inside information to the right people, it might help get rid of these human vermin.

Clyde can appear just about anywhere, on the job or as a "civilian." He especially shows up when he can help the characters by giving them some inside information. For some reason, maybe a seemingly random one, he has taken offense at some clients who happen to be the very people that the characters are interested in. He strikes up a conversation and is happy to volunteer what he knows, if the characters are interested. Alternatively, the characters might notice him doing his own surveillance of the GMCs in question. In any event, he's free with what he knows. "Don't tell anyone who told you this," he insists.

Clyde is especially likely to show up wherever reality is discontinuous. And the Clyde that the characters talk to might be from a neighboring cosmos, in which case his "inside information" is questionable. If any of the characters are "reality challenged," Clyde might have met them in an adjacent reality, in which case he calls them by name and confides in them as if they already know him.

Clyde might be a bigot who hates the character's enemies, but for the wrong reason. If so, carefully choose a sort of bigotry that lets him confide in the player-characters and target their foes.

PETER HENTGES

JUST AND BENEFICENT RULER OF THE UNIVERSE

Middle-aged white man with receding hairline, glasses, and a scraggly white beard. His clothes are practical and demonstrate a distinct preference for brown.

QUESTION: "Will he really help?"

ROLE: He sure looks like a madman with delusions of grandeur, but maybe he's something more. Characters might run into him wandering down the street speaking into an innocuous-looking phone-like device. He might be complaining that his orders for the current weather were not carried out correctly—only to have the weather shift shortly thereafter. Or he might be reporting that elements of extra-dimensional organizations are operating outside of their approved areas and then be heard muttering about how the Intergalactic Police are never around when needed.

If a character is decent to him, he offers to help them out. He talks into his "phone" and orders up something that the character needs. "I need a special delivery for a new friend of mine," he might say. Or, "There's a swell lady here who needs a little inside information." After making the call, the Just and Beneficent Ruler of the Universe wanders off, never to be seen again.

WHAT HAPPENS? Leave the players wondering for a little while. Maybe, miraculously, the character gets just what they need. So was that guy really the JBRU? Or maybe nothing happens, and you can tell everyone out of character that Hentges was just a harmless lunatic.

Group Dynamics for GMCs

It can be hard to invent groups of GMCs that have internal structures, especially on the fly. Basic ideas, such as "an arcanely powered rock band," are fun and easy. Figuring out how to think about the relationships among the various members of the group — that's work. Here are a couple templates for group dynamics within GMC groups. You can have a template in mind when you first tell the players about these GMCs, or you can retrofit a template onto a group that you have already described. They're designed to fit a number of applications: regulars at a bar, a performer and retinue, a circle of oppenheimers, or a psychic order masquerading as an astronomy club.

Star, Agent, Follower

A simple triad to give context to an extraordinary character.

The Talent: This character has the "secret sauce," the reason that the player-characters are involved. It could be a paranormal power, something that makes others want to keep the Talent around. It could be straight-up artistic talent, but with a twist. If the Talent is out of control in one way or another, don't be surprised.

Manager: Here's the brains of the operation, for good or ill. Of course, it's for ill. If the players suspect the manager of being a cloak handling the Talent as an asset for their org, it's fine for them to be right.

Follower: Rounding out the triad is a loyal and devoted fan. If the Talent uses electronics, props, or materials with what they do, the Follower manages the nuts and bolts. If the Talent doesn't need that sort of help, the Follower is devoted to taking care of the Talent and maybe of the Manager. If the players get the idea that there's something wrong with the Follower, they're not disappointed.

Team Traitor

This group is ready to achieve something — unless the treacherous lieutenant takes everyone down.

Leader: New in the position, ready to prove themselves, and capable of doing so.

Bodyguard: Devoted, responsible, and likely to suffer real damage before it's all played out.

Lieutenant: Loyal but compromised, the lieutenant doesn't yet know that they're under outsider influence, but soon the outsiders are going to bribe, blackmail, or secretly control them.

Specialist: Provides valuable skills or resources. Sketchy but, in the end, reliable.

Intelligence Officer: Provides inside information valuable to the group. Might have dirt on the Lieutenant. Might end up murdered by the Lieutenant even if they just suspect that the IO has the dirt.

Administrator: Keeps the lights on, manages the books, and enjoys certain privileges accruing thereto.

Team Big Finish

This group might flame out in style, and maybe it will accomplish something amazing when it does.

Leader: Capable, respected but ready to go out with a bang, perhaps with the rest of the group.

Lieutenant: Devoted to the Leader, but for the wrong reasons.

Sage: Sees what's going on better than most but is distracted by a vice.

Malcontent: Rotten person who gets by because their skills are invaluable.

Monster: Quiet, scary person who is ready to stop being quiet and start slitting throats.

Touchstone: Relatively normal group member, useful for bonding with the characters and for helping them orient themselves relative to the group.

Extras: Zero to a dozen foot soldiers, ground troops, hangers-on, or other types as appropriate.

Dialectic Duo

These two characters offer the bare minimum of "group dynamics." Each GMC in the duo highlights the other by contrast.

Alpha: The off-kilter star, the power or the talent in the duo, brilliant but unstable. An assassin, a detective, a research physician, a mad scientist.

Beta: The right-hand assistant who makes the Alpha's career possible. A Girl Friday, a right-hand man, a personal secretary, a spouse, a progeny, or an agent.

Team Kool-Aid

Jim Jones and his followers are both the titular paradigm and perfect example of the Kool-Aid team. These people are cultists, slavishly devoted to a central charismatic person. It may be an actual cult leader, but it could just as easily be the top "mean girl" at D'Aubainne Prep or anyone with charisma and a Messiah complex. The central belief is less important than the adherence to the leader, the Messiah. The group forms around one person's hubris and, by extension, inflates their ego into a kind of ideology. A group of Sommerites might be a Kool-Aid Team, and so could football hooligans

The Messiah: The "god complex" was named for this individual. They know a truth, speak to a deity, or see a vision for the future that only they can truly understand. They are dangerous because they are deeply charismatic, but also because they believe their way is the *only* way. They might be an actual cult leader, a self-improvement guru, or a hard-core member of any political party, a band leader, or a leader of student government.

The Zealot: Like the Leader, the Zealot is also a true believer, but they have neither the charisma nor madness to motivate the organization. They might be second in command, the lieutenant faithfully executing even the most absurd orders. The group may have more than one Zealot.

The Extra: This person believes, but they believe because they don't have anything else going on or they were caught in a vulnerable moment. By the time the realize the extent of their involvement in the Kool-Aid band, it's too late. They are in too deep. If the PCs can relate to anyone, it's probably the Extra. They might want to get out but can't. Or they might be totally indoctrinated but their spouse or child isn't. They are the weak spot in the cult, realization dawning like the blast of a nuclear weapon in their mind's eye. "Oh, my god, what have I done?" If the PCs need to infiltrate a Kool-Aid group, they'll likely pretend to be Extras. If they stay too long, they might become True Believers.

The Plant: In any group demanding total devotion, there's another group monitoring them for "the good of the people." That group has a Plant inside the Kool-Aid band. It's a snitch, a mole, an informer, an undercover agent, a rival fan club member, someone from another clique trying to bring the "in crowd" down. They aren't believers or, at least, they didn't start out that way. Trying to trace the disappearance of such an agent is an excellent way to introduce your Kool-Aid cult to the PCs. A missing person's case is always reliable fodder. Of course, to add a twist, what if the Plant aspect was the fictitious part of the personality, and the real identity is a True Believer? How far and how long would a Kool-Aid member go to infiltrate regular society?

CHAPTER NUMBER 7

RUNNING THIS MIND-BOGGLING GAME

WHY DO YOU LAUGH? CHANGE ONLY THE NAME AND THIS STORY IS ABOUT YOU.
—HORATIUS, *CONVERSATIONS*, 30 BCE

Visitors, seekers, prophets, assassins, fugitives, mystics, and secret agents converge on Al Amarja. They travel from place to place in the Edge, meeting "random" strangers and crossing paths with friends and foes. Secrets reveal themselves, and with every revelation, the seekers are pulled deeper into the unknown and the forbidden. This chapter helps you, the gamemaster, stay on top of the action. I hope this chapter helps you get the most out of this game.

- **Story Arcs:** How to manage them individually and how to manage links from one to another.
- **Player-Characters:** How to help players invent and develop rewarding characters.
- **Prepping:** How to prepare for a session, especially one that can go in multiple directions. The lot-casting system means that the action happens fast, so think ahead.
- **GMing:** How to manage a session while it's happening, including providing out-of-character information and improvising strong content.

Story Arcs for Good and Ill

Setting up a story arc is easy because you don't have to commit to a plan that can carry on indefinitely.

STORY ARC DISCONTINUITY

It's tempting to think of all the story arcs as consecutive events in a single continuity, but don't. The closest they should be to each other are as events in parallel universes, so close you might not notice the difference. This game is about creative freedom, and continuity limits you. Follow continuity when it helps you establish depth in the background, foreshadow the pain that's about to hit the characters, or otherwise use previous content purposefully. Break continuity when it's convenient and break it all to hell now and then.

Fresh Start for Returning Casts

If the players are keeping their characters from a previous arc, it's cleaner if you jump to a new good starting place than if you pick up ten seconds after the last arc ended. Arcs are built with beginnings and endings, and the new arc deserves its own beginning. The beginning of a *Star Trek* episode is not the immediate follow up to the previous week's ending.

You can also make things easier by writing off any follow-up for the previous arc's conclusion. In my campaign, the characters trashed the Glorious Lords in a one-shot, and that event was in Vlada's past when she started the next arc, but I made it clear that the chapter on the Lords was closed. That way no one had to worry about remembering what happened in the one-shot in case it mattered later.

Echoes

When something from a previous arc repeats itself, the new version can be rethought a little. You can come at the same place a little differently from one arc to another. The characters' favorite fighting bar in one arc can reappear as a bigger, glitzier, more successful bar or maybe as the previous bar's evil twin. Sometimes you want to hit a high point, and sometimes you want to pervert something that the players love. Why else would you get them to love it in the first place?

Players can repeat their characters from previous story arcs, and it's a fine opportunity to rethink their characters a little.

Yesterday's Player-Characters Are Today's GMCs

Players might get a kick out of it when you describe a GMC and they recognize it as a character from a previous arc. Players are a good source of unique characters, but use them with intention and respect. You have considerably more creative liberty when repurposing your own characters from arcs that other players GMed.

The new arc is a parallel reality shard, so the new characters might encounter the repurposed character as they were at the start of their arc, not the end. This "restart" is especially useful if in the previous arc the character was killed, time-devolved into an australopith, or otherwise altered from their original conception.

DEFAULT STORY ARC: FOLLOWING YOUR LEAD

On the next page is a one-page handout for a generic story arc of indefinite length. You can use it verbatim, modify it to suit you, or just use as a model for your own.

Open-Ended Story Arc

Rather than having a defining element for the players to build their characters around, such as a party theme, this one prompts the players to generate their characters' reasons for coming to the Island. Since the arc doesn't come ready made with a major conflict to be resolved, it works fine for story arcs of indefinite length. Since the characters don't have a shared goal, a longer arc gives them time to pursue varied interests and perhaps to cohere around a plot that develops out of play. New characters can readily join the action while it's in progress. The outline is generic enough that you can reuse this one-pager for multiple arcs, and each one will be different.

As the GM, you accommodate the characters and their goals by inventing custom GMCs and by developing orgs that relate to the characters' goals and fears. Questions at the beginning of sessions will help you and the players flesh out details about the characters and what they're up to.

This story arc is close to the original approach to campaign design in my original version of ***Over the Edge***. It provides enough guidance to get characters involved in action on the Island and no more guidance than that.

Player-Characters and How to Improve Them

Better characters make for a better arc, so help the players develop their characters. You can also use questions to co-opt the players into generating memorable content for you, even when the answers to their questions don't flesh out their characters.

SPOTLIGHTING QUESTION MARKS

First, review the characters' question marks as they invent them. Sometimes players need help crafting their question marks to make them really useful in play. Players who are used to more traditional sorts of character design might interpret the question mark as a conditional personality trait, such as "I'm friendly except to high status people." A trait like that is hardly a "question" because the player already knows when the character will be friendly and when they won't. A question mark like "friendly-?" is all one needs; adding a prebaked conditional explanation would rob the feature of its open-ended nature. If a player wants their character to be "friendly to everyone except high-status people," that's fine, but it's not the character's question mark.

It often helps to ask a player an open-ended question about what it would look like for their character to "flip" and express the opposite of their question mark. If a question mark is "superficial-?," you might ask, "What might it look like for you not to be superficial for once?" The point is not to identify the specific conditions under which the character is profound. Rather it's to make sure you and the player both know that there's some interesting character behavior on the "flip side" of the question mark.

During play, keep your copy of the player-character summary sheet handy and keep an eye on each character's question mark. When you need to improvise new action, you can use the question marks as a guide. Most of the time you want to throw softballs at the character. If the Psychic War Vet is hard-hearted-?, then give the player opportunities to play out that hard-heartedness. Then every once in a while, you can hit the player with a well-liked GMC who's desperately in need and might tempt even a hard-hearted psychic war veteran to open up. Either way the player turns, it's fine. If the character opens up, it's a moment of character development. If the character remains closed off, it's an opportunity for everyone to see just how much damage the psychic wars have done to this human being.

Story Arc: Following Your Lead

Only something really important could have brought you to the Island. Probably something life-changing.

YOUR LEAD AND YOUR FATE

Each character has some lead that they are following to Al Amarja, and you invent that lead as part of character creation. Your lead is a part of the game world that serves as your character's connection to the Island. It could be a school that's hiring you, an arrangement to set up a laboratory, an invitation to join a psychic club, knowledge of an ancient relic and its purported guardians, or something else that will propel your character into the action. Following your lead will take you into interesting and perhaps menacing places, and you might risk your life to find what you're hoping to find here. It has to be important, but your character doesn't have to know exactly why. Your GM can probably help you develop a good lead, if you like.

ENDURING CHARACTER

To create a character that works better for a long-running arc, it can be exaggerated but not cartoony. The character should be flexible and competent enough to get involved in all sorts of activities, preferably with goals that could be accomplished more than one way.

EASY ON THE SECRET IDENTITIES

When multiple characters have secret identities, the plot can get awkward as multiple secrets get revealed. In addition, players do a lot of work to establish connections among the characters, and if their public personas are false, then connections among them are weaker. It's great for characters to be more than they seem, but whatever the "more" is should typically be part of the character's identity as far as the other player-characters are concerned.

WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT AL AMARJA

You know at least enough to get there and to start following your lead. The gamemaster will also tell you anything else you might know. Invent some details for your backstory, especially material that gives the gamemaster something to work with. People, businesses, artistic movements, and that sort of thing are good. You can ask the gamemaster questions about the Island, especially ones that relate to your character's lead. For example, if your character is a Spirit-Cursed Medic, you might ask about outstanding or infamous medical facilities on the Island. The GM can answer your question with material from the book or with material she invents, as she likes.

THE OTHER PLAYER-CHARACTERS

Work with the gamemaster and the other players to decide whether any of the characters already know each other or know of each other. If not, spend some time imagining how the characters might end up interacting and what traits, activities, goals, or interests they might have in common. It's fine to invent details for your character that make it easier for them to interact with the other characters.

YOUR LEVEL

Ask your gamemaster what level the characters start at.

GOOD TROUBLE AND BETTER TROUBLE

A character's trouble can be a GM's best friend because trouble is a way of luring a player into doing something interesting. Help players invent troubles that promise to make the action more interesting. Some players reflexively treat trouble as a flaw, such as "furious when disrespected," but a trouble is supposed to be an interesting direction for a character to go. Help players focus more on the interesting things that their characters will do when they get into trouble and less on the triggers that get them into trouble.

During play, keep an eye on the player-character summary sheet, and improvise opportunities for players to get into trouble. In some roleplaying games, characters have flaws that limit their choices, and it's sort of cheating for players to have their characters act "out of line." A character's trouble, however, isn't about power balance, and if a player doesn't get their character into trouble when they have the chance, that's fine. If a player never has their character take action to "get into trouble," maybe the player should pick a new trouble, one that they would want their character to pursue.

QUESTIONS FOR FUN AND MIND CONTROL

> Questions are fun in general, but you can also use them intentionally to help develop the characters and guide the story arc. Questions > Exposition

Here is a trick that GMs can use but that playwrights, novelists, comic book writers, and other purveyors of 2nd-millennium storytelling can never manage. Exposition is boring, but you can roll it out as questions, and then it's about the characters. It engages the players with the material, so then they're prepped to engage with it as it comes up during play. For example, if you want to "lay pipe" about fatalism and the upcoming super-global conflict that's bound to destroy 99% of humanity, frame it as a question. "You've been on the Island long enough to have picked up a streak of fatalism among the people here. Marjans say things like, 'See you tomorrow, if there is a tomorrow'. Some of your secret contacts talk about a 'Last War' that's about to break out. How do you all fit in with this attitude? Or what's your attitude about the future?"

Setting Direction in Play

Don't call me lazy, but questions are a nice way to help the players do my work for me. Here's how it works. Not sure where things are going? Just lay out questions that get the players to point you in the right direction. "What sort of reward would tempt you to betray the mission?" "If you find that relic, what's the first thing you're going to do with it?"

Questions on the Fly

The standard way to bring in questions is to ask them at the start of the session to get everyone warmed up before the action starts. During play, however, you will find plenty of times when you suddenly want to know more about a character or when you want to give a player some creative freedom as to what happens in the game.

Gifts for the Hosts: The characters were set to attend a party of ne'er-do-wells, and I asked what gifts they might bring to ingratiate themselves with the hosts. Robbie suggested a large bag of weed. He was right that it's the sort of gift that most ne'er-do-wells would appreciate and have a use for, but how interesting is that gift, really? I reminded the players that they can come up with answers not just by deriving the most predictable answer but by imagining what would make the experience at the table cooler. The big bag of weed became a bag of exotic "white weed," grown underground and renowned for its power. Sean came up with a big bowl of poisonous stew filled with live eels. The eels absorb the poison, which kills them, a process that also neutralizes the poison. Once the eels are all dead, the stew is a perfectly safe delicacy, eels and all. In terms of how well the characters succeeded, these answers didn't improve their odds. In terms of making that session memorable, those answers were just what I was looking for.

Coaxing Players to Generate Better Answers

Players have plenty of authority to answer questions about their characters the way they want, but you also have every right to challenge them to come up with better answers.

A Nemesis with Global Reach: Paul asked Blighty a great question: Does your Christian necromancer have a nemesis? Blighty's first answer, fundamentalist Christians, fit the character so well that it didn't add much to his backstory. It's a reasonable answer, but the rest of us could probably have derived that same answer from what we already knew about Dr. Lazarus, in particular that he's a heretic with a big MeTube following. So, I pointed out that we'd all be a lot more interested if there were some specific nemesis who really had it in for Dr. Laz. One enemy is more engaging than a demographic of enemies. So, Blighty came up with a South Korean preacher with a world-wide following, someone who denounces worldly pleasure. Even if that answer doesn't go anywhere, it's interesting. And what are the odds that somewhere on the Island there's a fanatical cell of pleasure-hating followers of this preacher? Pretty good odds.

OK, but What Are You Feeling Inside?: Dr. Laz plays it cool when he meets Rant Badgeheart, the person he's been warned about. OK, but what's going on inside Dr. Laz's head, I asked Blighty. Dr. Laz is playing it cool, but inside, does he want to run away? Or clobber this guy? Maybe castigate him? Blighty says that what Dr. Laz wants to do is witness to this sinner and get him to convert. Maybe that image set something up that will resolve later, and even if it goes nowhere the scene of Dr. Laz keeping his cool is more interesting to play out when everyone knows that he's stifling the urge to testify.

Humanizing Exotic Characters

Players often describe their characters in terms of how they differ from the human norm, sometimes to alarming degrees. But you and I both know that the more human a character is the more easily everyone at the table can relate to it. Questions are your opportunity to call players back to the common humanity that is our species' only hope for a better tomorrow. In my play group, Blighty is renowned for creating player characters that are at least one step removed from the human norm. In one story arc, his character was a revenant who was monomaniacally devoted to finding her own murderer. To humanize this "dead" human, I asked, "When the other characters come to your apartment to see the evidence you've collected about your murder, do they also see any hint of your previous life, anything that your character keeps there that would indicate some connection to her past life as a fully living human being?" Blighty answered that, in an otherwise austere and unlivable apartment, there was a small chest of drawers that contained remnants of her actual human life that preceded her revenant state. This small detail was surprisingly touching, and that's all that I was looking for.

Ramping Up Conflicts

Sometimes two characters have underlying conflicts, such as between "finding the truth" and "protecting the Ur-Stone's primeval secrets." If you can find places where the characters' goals run counter to each other, is it your fault if you call attention to their cross purposes? Of course not, you're just a neutral observer.

A Loaded Question

Give your players the chance to be creative, and they will gladly paint crosshairs on the foreheads of their own characters.

"What is the worst thing that [insert name of character] fears might happen when he/she/they venture into Great Men tonight?" It's a simple question, but it opens up so many possibilities. No novelist is going to waste time concocting a character's third-worst fear, and you don't have to, either.

On a broader scale, the question is a handy counterbalance to the goals of the characters. If a character hopes to find a circle of psychics who can give the character a sense of community and direction, you might naturally be curious to know what the character *fears* as well as what they hope. There is no yang without the yin, and there is no shredding of players' hopes without players' hopes.

NONHUMAN CHARACTERS

It's against the rules for player-characters to be nonhuman, so before you let a player break this rule, consider...

How well can the nonhuman character pass for human? Like dogs and horses, humans have highly attuned senses for intuitively and unconsciously sizing people up. Nonhumans that can pass fluently as humans are better than those that make babies cry.

What emotions would the nonhuman have? Storytelling is about characters driven by emotions. Does the character's identity limit their emotional range or make it hard for them to interact with the other player-characters?

How likable is the nonhuman? Like other animals, humans tend to like what they find familiar. If it's going to be less familiar, does it have a feature or two to make the character more likable?

ENGAGING PLAYERS

When you first review a player-character, look them over with some of these questions in mind.

How are you going to put their Trouble to use? More generally, what can you do to drive or draw the character into the action?

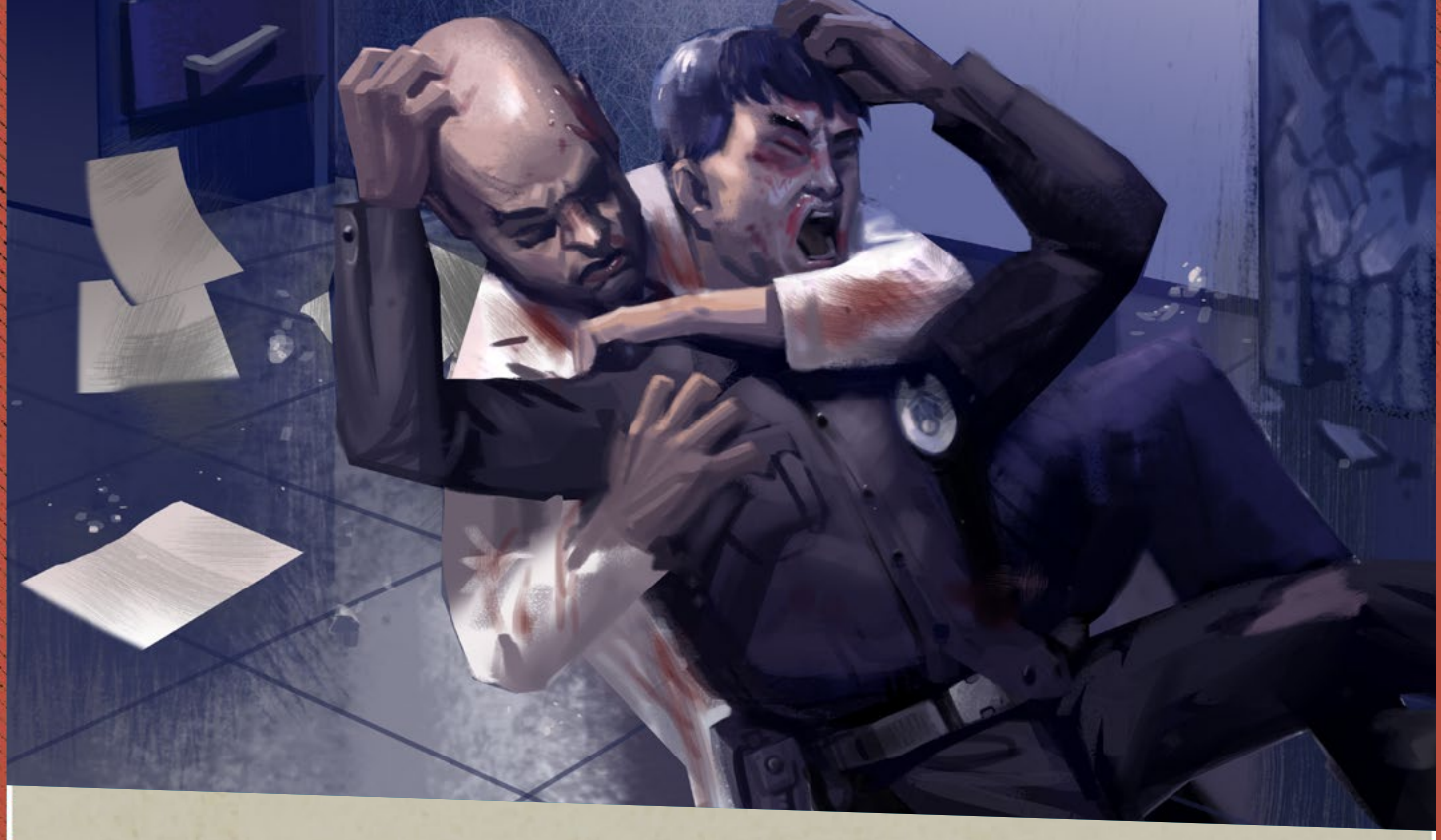
What GMCs will they interact with? Can you think of custom GMCs to create or recurrent GMCs to use?

How might the character interact with the secret stuff you have in your head about this story arc? How might you change your secret stuff to bring out the best and worst in this character?

How is the special thing they do going to make all the difference? How is it going to thwart the unbeatable enemy, reveal the unknowable secret, or redeem the condemned souls? The Island is chock full of things that can destroy humanity, but maybe this character has an ace in the hole.

What do they care about and how might you threaten to take it away?

How might you hurt them without killing them? How might you kill them?



CAM SAYS: LISTEN TO YOUR PLAYERS' WEIRD THEORIES

This isn't a new thing, but it's a thing I've done a lot, and it touches on something that's been implied or discussed elsewhere: When your players are free-associating their theories on a conspiracy or the answer to some mystery and their ideas sound better than the ones you actually had in mind, it's totally a good idea to just throw out your old idea and go with that one. Your players are going to feel vindicated for their clever pattern-matching skills, and even if you fudge the details a little so it's not quite so obvious, you can turn a so-so plot that really wasn't going anywhere into a solid story of second-guesses and threads of insight that the players remember for years. On the other hand, some player ideas are so off-base that it's maybe not in anyone's best interests to validate them. Instead, have a GMC hang a lampshade on that theory by appearing to align with it only to later prove to be just as wrong as the players were. Misery (and misunderstanding) loves company.

How can they fail at some goals without being defeated?

How might you crash the character into the other characters, for good and ill?

You don't need answers to all the above, but if you have some of these ready for each character, you will have an easier time constructing scenarios and improvising action. Also, if a character comes up nil on these questions, maybe the character needs some development.

Recurrent GMCs: If you can think of ways for recurrent GMCs (page 195) to figure into the interests of player-characters, they are designed so that they can show up almost anywhere. If you've used them before, so much the better. Each repetition of a recurrent GMC builds a resonance of meaning, harmony, and dissonance.

Custom GMCs: A great way to engage players is to create custom GMCs that play directly to the players-characters' troubles or other features.

CREATE CUSTOM GMCS

For each character in each arc, make a custom GMC. If the enlightened exercise guru gets into trouble when people violate the sacred temples of their bodies, then maybe you gin up a valuable ally for the guru... who chain smokes. A diligent GM is sure come up with these GMCs early in the arc, but you can also improvise them during play. The custom characters could also be a groups or organizations rather than single characters.

If you can't think of interesting GMCs to play off a particular player-character, maybe work with the player to make the character more engaging.

GMC Roles

Here are some common roles for GMCs to fill.

Rival: Someone who wants to outdo a character but not destroy them. Someone who wants the same thing they do. In social conflicts, a rival often tries to look better than the character, especially in front of a particular audience. Long-term rivals often mock the characters, which sets up sweet revenge. Rivals are useful as GMCs that the players can hate but that the characters can't just slaughter, and vice versa. A rival sometimes turns into a nemesis, but that's a little obvious, isn't it? More likely, they suffer a horrible fate and become an object of pity, or the rival turns out to have something that the character needs, or some other twist.

Nemesis: Someone that would wreck the character if given a chance, and they might be working on setting up that chance even as we speak.

Foil: Someone who contrasts with the character in order to highlight their traits.

Skeptic: Someone who doubts a character and casts doubt on them.

Lure: Someone that the character will seek. The lure might start as rumors that the character follows up on, or the character might encounter the lure in person. Using a lure to draw a character into a trap is questionable because you don't want to punish players for taking action.

Patron: A powerful benefactor, especially one with resources and connections. Patrons might orient characters with information, send them on errands, or help them make important contacts.

Plant: A GMC you put there to support a character. If a character is good-looking, their role is to comment on their good looks or otherwise admire them.

Follower: Some characters attract followers, who might be casual hangers on or official students. Followers get a charge out of associating themselves with powerful leaders.

Fan: Some characters attract fans. They're similar to followers but they don't have a relationship with the character. Sometimes a rival vies with a character, trying to win fans to themselves and away from the character.

EXAMPLE CUSTOM GMCS

PLAYER-CHARACTER	CUSTOM GMC
Erstwhile terrorist bomb-maker.	Erstwhile terrorist buddies out to kill them.
Nihilist-? revenant.	Necrophile love interest.
Trouble when authority is questioned.	Snotty kid who questions authority.
Seeks unusual organ samples.	Car accident victim with extra abdominal organ.
Empathic-?	Beggars shooed away by shopkeeper.
Self-help author.	His biggest fan.
Christian necromancer.	Major player from the Temple: possible rival, patron, or ally.
Psychic with a history of not saving a friend whose death she foresaw.	A doomed member of an underground psychic circle.
A lonely soul.	An immortal dog who's been best friend to people since mammoths roamed the Earth.
Someone fleeing a disastrous romance.	Just the person who might teach them to forget the past and love again.
A child star of TV and film.	A fan club that turns out to be more like a cult.
A novelist who hasn't had a new idea in years.	A hack writer having a great time and making good money churning out derivative retreads of the novelist's ealier work.

COMMUNICATING WITH PLAYERS

This whole game could be called "communicating with the players." Here's a little advice focusing on this topic.

Balance Air Time

Talking in groups is the human equivalent of the social grooming found among other types of monkey. Some monkeys tend to get more air time than others, so keep an eye on that.

No Secret Notes

Passing secret notes to or from players is forbidden, so only do it when it really counts. The rule is, let players hear what's going on even when their characters don't know it.

Send Emails between Sessions

Email messages to your player group can help them be prepared to start the next session engaged. Here's a message I emailed to my group after our first session in a new story arc. This arc was an open-ended "Leads" arc, so there was plenty of work to do just to settle into the new arc.

[Before the meat of the message, I included an intro paragraph about how great the new arc is and how cool the player-characters are.]

Y'all are at Cesar's. You each have an agenda, plus possibly an ulterior motive. I could see starting next session with a series of one-on-one scenes where we get to see how things are with each character. We get to see whether things are turning out good, bad, weird, or what. This new story arc doesn't have a duration, so things will start slower than in our earlier arcs. Maybe we can start the session with two general questions for each character. Save your answers until we start the next session. First, what more would you like to tell us about your lead, what you know about it, what you're worried about, etc.? Second, given your understanding of the situation and what your character is going to work to achieve, what's likely to be the next thing that you are going to cast lots for? Obviously, if you hear a rumor about a nail from the True Cross that turns shadow people into real people, certain characters might adjust their plans. But based on where things are now, I'd like to know at the start of the next session where you foresee your next conflict that's going to be worth casting for.

Paul, your characters tend to be untouchable, and the liberated shadow is no exception. It's not all that clear how your trouble of not admitting defeat might make you vulnerable, either. So, what frightens J? Or what is something he doesn't even know about that might hurt or endanger him?

Blighty, your linebacker-size, white-robed preacher of necromancy is likely to draw tons of attention, especially where actual necromancy would get you "registered." How is it that you're not just going to cause scenes wherever you go?

Beto, you had some strange experiences working on that David Lynch film. Are there weird experiences that you hope to have again? Or that you hope never to have again?

Sean, as a former rockstar bassist, what's your relation to making music now? Jaded? Itching to get back in? Dismissive of what the kids these days are listening to? If you heard about an epic metal band called the Lucifer's Glorious Lords of Passion, how might you react?

Prepping

This section covers the thinking you do away from the game table. The work of handling the game while it's live is in a later section.

WHAT TO PREP

If the characters are pursuing their goals, getting into trouble, interacting with each other, and engaging with the setting, lots of the action will be improvised at the table. That said, a little prep goes a long way. You can get a lot of action out of a few key GMCs, some conspiratorial scheming, and a few promising concepts for where the action is going next.

Outlines and Sketches Are Better than Scripts

The prepared scenario in Chapter 8 goes into lots of detail because it is meant to be used by gamemasters who didn't invent it. For scenarios that you invent yourself, you need much less prep. You need to think through what's likely to happen, and what can go well or poorly, but you don't need to work out the details.

Enemies, Opponents, Rivals, and Contenders

Start a session with a list in your head of the GMCs that the characters might have to contend with. Humans, such as your players, instinctively focus on people rather than abstractions, so GMCs are a great way to ground the action. Some of these potential encounters should be known to the characters, some to the players and not the characters, and the rest known to you alone.

You can invent characters on the spot and improvise details as you need them. You can change your mind about who a gamemaster-character is as long as their interactions with the player-characters have been incidental. Once the PCs are engaging tactically, strategically, or personally with a GMC, commit to who the GMC is.

Opponents can, on average, be weaker than the characters. The players will still have plenty of opportunities to fail and to get bad twists.

Places

If the characters are going to do something to someone, then they need a place to do it. The Edge is big and varied enough that you can invent just about anything. You can also take any place you like from the printed setting and make it your own. Portray it however you like, and change its location if that helps. Adding or changing details helps you engage with the place and get a better sense of it in your head. If the detail relates to a player-character, even better.

Action can take place in laboratories, factories, construction sites, monasteries, libraries, steam tunnels, abandoned buildings, shrines, fight clubs, diners, spas, parking lots, basements, rooftops, greenhouses, gardens, theaters, dance studios, bars, VIP lounges, or behind a building's false façade.

Motives, Goals, and Maguffins

For shorter arcs, you usually have some sort of goal for each character to relate to. Sometimes the players invent goals for their characters that are in line with some overall goal that you define. Longer arcs might have no such overarching goal, so the goals come from what the players invent for their characters. For lots of groups, characters may have more or less unrelated goals or even goals that are at cross purposes. Once you know what a character's goals are, you have a straightforward way to direct the plot: giving the character tasks they must accomplish to achieve their goal.

Possible Outcomes

You should prep enough that you can set up big conflicts and be ready for those conflicts to resolve more than one way. For example, you might wonder what's going to happen when a character's enemies try to track them through the Edge. You don't know how that's going to end up until you hear what choices the character is making and see how their lots land. Be ready for the character to fail or succeed.

CHRIS SAYS: PREPPING PLACES

A few descriptive bits, like a few world elements, infer a larger scene. Pick a couple of senses and focus on them. The sweaty, crushing air of the Metro. The museum quiet of a library whose farthest stacks are covered in dust. Tiny details, if concrete and significant, paint a whole scene.

That scene won't be identical in the heads of each player, but the whole world you're playing in is imaginary, so that's ok. Sometimes I write little one-liners and bits of description for various locations, sometimes just a word or phrase, to set the tone when the PCs arrive there. A little goes a long way.

Bolt Holes, Safety Nets, and Second Chances

Especially if the characters are about to do something dangerous, think ahead of time whether there are good reasons that they might not be killed outright if they fail. Think about the enemy's weaknesses, the character's allies, or ways that a character might just get lucky.

YOUR ULTIMATE CONSPIRACY

Whenever I GM ***Over the Edge***, regardless of what story arc I've set up, one conspiracy in particular is always the reality-defining conspiracy. That is to say, it is the org most likely to be victorious in the struggle for reality. Most of the time this org has no special influence on play, and in many arcs it's so far in the background that it never comes up.

This game's setting presents you with a chaotic welter of options and contradictory reality-narratives. It grounds you to know which org really has control, even when it never comes up in play. That said, what do we really know, especially about our own minds? When you're the GM, one of these conspiracies is the one that defines reality. Pick one you like. Maybe as you read these lines, the identity of the org rises unbidden in "your" mind. Or maybe the identity of the org will creep into consciousness little by little as you play. If you like, you can tell your players which org it is, but then why should they believe you?

FAILING IS OK

The success and failure system in ***Over the Edge*** guarantees some number of failures. Lots of RPGs are set up so that failure is a rarity or an aberration. Not this one. Think about what failure is going to look like in the action that you're setting up for the characters.

Getting Stricken: The character gets what they want, but at a price.

Losing Support: The character's actions lead to GMCs, and possibly PCs, withdrawing their support from them.

Providing Information to the Enemy: The character inadvertently provides important information to enemies that the characters might or might not know about.

Suffering Unanticipated Consequences: The character's actions play out right, but the result includes some unforeseen bad news.

Beaten Up and Threatened: Not killed or abducted, just temporarily defeated.

Taken Prisoner: This one's pretty harsh, but it can be a life-saver in a situation where the players at the table might expect that the character would be killed outright.

Infected or Compromised: Something bad has gotten into the character: an invader in the bloodstream, an alien construct in the mind, a stain on their aura, a tendril in the thoracic cavity, etc.

Forced to Call in Favors: The characters can continue toward their goal despite their failure, but

they have to call in favors to do so, putting them at a disadvantage in the future.

Failing is Semi-Permanent

If a player fails a throw, they generally can't just "try again" under the same circumstances and throw again, hoping for a success. The throw resolves the conflict, and an unsuccessful throw means that the situation has resolved negatively. For the player to get another throw, they have to earn it.

For example, when the shadow man missed a key throw in trying to win over the love of Sheila Pinecrate, he couldn't try again until he had gotten some accomplishments under his belt, achieved a greater hold on his own reality, and was ready to approach Pinecrate again as a stronger, better person. The second time, the throw succeeded.

GMing

In terms of generating regular stories, roleplaying games have several strikes against them. They are improvised, collaborative, amateur, overloaded with protagonists, and competitive. So why do we play these games? Because RPG stories aren't regular stories. RPGs are a great way to tell a compelling, memorable story that you improvise collaboratively with your amateur friends, with a theme of mortal conflict to make it easy for everyone to care. RPGs are an amazing way to build something creative and meaningful with your friends. Your job as gamemaster is to get the most out of this medium's virtues while minimizing its flaws.

THINGS HAPPEN FAST SO THINK AHEAD

The rules for casting lots mean that things happen a lot faster in ***Over the Edge*** than in most RPGs. I think that's great, but it means that the characters move through the action quickly. If you like to plan things out, you'll have to plan more for each session. If you like to wing it, you better really be able to wing it.

PROVIDE OUT-OF-CHARACTER KNOWLEDGE

> "The conclusion is that, whenever possible, the public must be informed." —Alfred Hitchcock, on creating suspense by giving the audience information that the protagonists lack.

In the default way of running an RPG, the GM tells the players only what their characters can observe or discern. ***Over the Edge***, however, is all about secrets. Lots of the good stuff is hidden, at least temporarily. Out-of-character knowledge, or OOC, is when the GM tells the players something that their characters don't perceive. It's player-only knowledge. Players are honor-bound not to act on the information egregiously, although using the information to help the game go more smoothly is fine.

Sharing Cool Details

Chris and I spent a lot of time coming up with cool details for the setting, most of which the characters will never encounter. Most characters, for example, are never going to learn about all the weird movies playing at Vivisection. So, when the characters walk by Vivisection, you can paraphrase some of the movies that are screened there. It doesn't affect the characters' main stories, but it sets the tone. Paraphrase it from memory or skip it. It's better to keep things moving than to look up tangential information during play. The same goes for sharing interesting details that you invent.

Avoiding Dead Ends

Characters in good stories usually don't spend a lot of time doing things that are ineffective, and an ***Over the Edge*** character shouldn't either. The GM can always just tell players not to take such and such action because it's a waste of time. Usually this is when the players are flailing about for some clue, like, "Let's go back to the University and talk to that weird dean again. He might know something." It's OK for the GM just to say don't bother. Alternatively, tell them that they find him and talk to him but that he has no information that can help them. If you were making a movie, would you put in a scene where the characters go off and do something that proves pointless? Maybe, but you wouldn't spend a lot of time on it.

Of course, there are plenty of paths that don't take you forward but aren't dead ends. They take you sideways.

What Really Happened

Sometimes the easiest way to explain a crime scene, or the equivalent, is by telling the players what happened. A character wakes up covered in blood. The GM tells the player that in the middle of the night his character, in a fugue state or trance, got up, left his room in the mansion, entered someone else's room and stabbed him to death with a knife he found there. Then he came back to his room and went back to sleep, all without any memory of it. The character is

clueless, so the player plays them that way, but the players can picture the bloody scene without asking the GM for lots of detail.

Major Plot Points

Use this one carefully. The GM can spill information that's vital to some secret plot or event. The courier you're taking the package from is actually an alien. The thumb drive you're looking for is in a petty criminal's flat, along with other random stuff taken off the body of the agent who had it. If you give away major plot points, do so sparingly. Use them to moderate the pace of the story. The right OOC knowledge can let players know they can't succeed and thus keep them from chasing endless false leads, it can create suspense by letting players see the danger that their characters don't see, and it can frankly get players moving in the right direction. The players need to play their characters as blind to this secret information, but a little leeway can keep the action going.

Exposition versus Visuals

Sometimes you want to simply give the players information through short exposition, especially if it's information that wouldn't be visible "on camera." For example, after an encounter with a deranged old woman, you might explain that she lost a good deal of her memories in a high-stakes poker game ten years ago and has filled in what's missing with random input from encounters with other people. Other times you want to give the players information by visually describing a scene that the characters can't see. For example, after a deranged GMC wanders away around the corner and out of sight, you can tell the players that she meets a small group of similarly deranged people of various stripes. They babble to each other as if they're communicating coherently, exchange handshakes or other niceties, and head off together.

Example Out-of-Character Information

A character tries to strike up a conversation with a shady-looking GMC at a street fair.

GM: He shakes his head and just walks away. There are secret agents out to kill him because of some of the things he's seen, so he is not interested.

A character is on an elevator with an exterminator.

GM: The other guy isn't really an exterminator. His tank contains an experimental drug that he intends to dose people with and then observe the results. He sizes you up and figures you're too burly and badass to make a good test subject, so he never does anything to make you suspect he's not an exterminator.

GENERAL GM ADVICE

Here's some advice that would apply to most roleplaying games.

- Pay attention to the players and help them get what they want, at a price.
- Make the story be about the characters, not about your GMCs.
- Pace yourself.
- When players are at a loss as to what to do, help them boil it down to at least two options.
- Give characters choices that let players express who the characters are.
- Give all players the opportunity to participate and help keep any player from dominating the action.
- Write down the stuff you make up, so you'll remember it later.
- Accentuate what the characters are up to.
- Prepare enough that you're ready, but leave enough open that you're flexible.
- Give the players GMCs to care about, positively and negatively.
- Work with what the players give you. Say, "Yes, and..." rather than, "No."
- When the players ask for rope, give them all the rope they want and then some.

Characters are looking for a GMC.

GM: You call, you leave messages, you email, eventually you even knock on his door, but you don't hear from him. That's because he's dead.

Characters escaped danger by fleeing through maintenance tunnels. The tunnels, however, are oddly disorienting, like they're caught in a nightmare. When they finally get out, the sun is already rising, and they're all stricken with exhaustion.

GM: You know you've been through some sort of mind-bending experience, but you're not sure what it was all about. The tunnels are defended by a team of psychic ascetics operating remotely in Kyrgyzstan. Primarily, the defense prevents intrusion, but as a side effect it makes even escaping difficult.

A character concludes a conversation with a GMC.

GM: She says maybe you'll meet again, all bright and cheery. She walks off until she's lost in the crowd. Late tonight, unknown to you, she is going to grab a hapless passerby, pull them into the dark, and implant something into them. The victim will remember nothing.

The characters are entering a secure area in a secret lab to undergo treatment for brain fry. They're all human.

GM: Before you can enter the chamber, the attendants usher you to a machine like an airport scanner or metal detector, only it's clearly some sort of undocumented technology. Your characters don't have any way to know this, but the device reacts to nonhumans, so you're actually all safe. Unless something goes wrong.

SPECIAL SENSES ARE YOUR FRIEND

You often want to give the characters the information they need to get to the next high point. Luckily for you, players often give their characters traits that let you feed them information. Straight-up mind-reading is out, but lots of characters are sensitive, intuitive, attuned, harmonized, or otherwise more in-touch and more capable than normal of getting a read on a situation. Even totally mundane skills can give a highly-trained person an uncanny sense of intuition. Don't be too proud to say, "You sort of get the feeling that..." and then give the information that will move things along.

MAGNIFY PLAYERS' CHOICES

In a simulation, any player choice might be subject to a dice roll that vitiates the player's choice, such as when you choose to save a bystander but fail your roll. In a narrative game, it's often better to validate the player's choice and even amplify it. Not only does the player save the child, for example, but that heroic act earns the player the trust and gratitude of the child and the child's family, who conveniently provide the character with help, information, access to insiders, or some other desideratum. When the character makes a morally or socially interesting choice, feel free to run with it rather than making the player roll for it.

SLOPPY SUCCESS AND FAILURE WITH STYLE

A cast of the lots determines whether a character succeeds or fails in their immediate conflict, but it doesn't have to determine whether they demonstrate skill or mastery in the conflict. If a character is highly competent, there's no need to undermine that identity just because the player threw bad lots. Contrariwise, if a character is a schlub, there's no need to portray them as extra competent just because the player got a lucky throw. In either case, circumstances other that the character's performance can come into play, and you're invited to invent whatever details you need in order to square the results.

Failure with Style: The character performed up to par, but some other factor means that they did not succeed, or that they succeeded at the immediate task but without the desired result.

Sloppy Success: The character performed poorly, but some other factor means that they succeeded anyway. Perhaps they failed at the immediate task, but they achieve the desired result through happenstance.

Example of Failure with Style

The big, tough tiger man stages a fight to impress an audience, but the player flubs the cast.

Regular failure: The character loses the fight. (The character is not so big and tough after all.)

Stylish failure: His bestial tiger side surfaced too strongly during the fight, making him seem brutal instead of skillful, and now the audience has turned against him. (Being big and tough didn't help, and the character failed.)

Example of Sloppy Success

A neophyte tries to surveil a business, trying to find out who's meeting with enemy agents there. The odds are against the character, but the player makes a great throw.

Regular success: You are sneakier and slyer than you thought, and you successfully spot an agent coming to the business for a clandestine meeting. (The character did better than expected for no apparent reason.)

Sloppy success: You get distracted from your surveillance duty and end up sharing some of your lunch with a couple street kids. You're away from your stake-out location, but then you just happen to see an agent coming to the back door of the business for a clandestine meeting. You wouldn't have noticed the agent if you had stuck to your stake-out plan. (The character succeeded even though they didn't do a great job.)

Some ambiguous clues to spark your imagination and intrigue the players.

- The bedbugs in the seedy apartment are all dead.
- The new drug on the street sometimes has little bits of bug mixed in the granules. The bits come from bedbugs.
- A group of insiders nearby in a public place switch suddenly from enjoying themselves to getting out of there post-haste. Soon, the thing the insiders were escaping happens at that site. Kicker: For some extraordinary reason related to a character's special sauce, one of the insiders hurries over to that character and says, "I can't answer any questions, but you need to get out of here right now." The GMC then gets out of there. Soon the whatever-it-is happens.
- Children in the alley are singing a song to jump rope to, and it includes specific clues about a recent crime. Kicker: Actually about a future crime.
- The local enforcers come around with photos of some people. They're asking weird questions about them, including questions of special interest to the players, but the characters have never seen them before. Soon thereafter, some characters meet these very people. Kicker: They're quite changed.
- Someone is putting up show posters all over, and they include an arcane sigil that one character can recognize. Kicker: The character doesn't recognize it, but tell them that if they concentrate really hard on it, they should be able to get a read on what the sigil does. Admittedly at some risk to oneself.
- A character has a phobic or schizoid response to seeing a cat. The character's only explanation is that the cat reminded them of the cat that was in their room last night. Wait a minute! Suddenly the character remembers a cat in their room. Why didn't the character think it extraordinary enough to remember? Psychic investigation reveals that it wasn't really a cat, but something else. Kicker: This happens again with a cat that looks nothing like the first one.
- Characters show up at the usual hangout, and everyone is bummed. There's hardly anyone talking. Inquiries about what's going on are met with closed lips and little shakes of the head. Eventually, someone spills the story, or the characters use their wherewithal to find out what happened. Something bad, but something that it is not wise to complain about, such as a Peace Squad torture-murder or Sir Constance making someone disappear. Kicker: One of the characters is the only person to really understand the secret behind the sad news, and it's news that is going to make life hard.
- Monkeys keep climbing into and out of a second story window, apparently into an office of some sort. There's no directory for the business, just a "doorman" who begs for tips and can maybe tell you who's in the building. Kicker: Someone's taught the monkeys how to type.
- At the usual hangout, in addition to the usual clientele, there's a small group of people dressed outlandishly. They look roughed up. Kicker: One of the roughed-up strangers is dead or dying.
- Some jawfish buys drinks for the house, celebrating good news that they might or might not share. Kicker: The jawfish has attracted the attention of a predator of some sort, one who considers inquisitive characters to be in the way.

WHETHER AND WHEN TO KILL PLAYER-CHARACTERS

Play rough in at least one point during the first couple sessions, rough enough that a character could be killed or worse. Don't send the characters into a deathtrap but give them considerably less script immunity at first. Early on is a fine time for character death, when no one is all that attached to the lost character yet. The death sets the tone for the campaign and reminds players that we are all mortal. And if no one dies, but there are close scrapes, that also sets the tone just fine.

Avoid the temptation to kill off the character who moves the campaign forward by being daring. Feel free to kill off the player-character who derails the campaign by doing stupid, dangerous things. Do it for me.

MORAL ENCOUNTERS

A fight breaks out between a man with a baseball bat and an unarmed man. The unarmed man scrambles away toward a character with a tire iron or other comparable weapon. The man sees the tire iron and wants it. Whether the character hands over the tire iron determines the outcome of the fight. Don't roll to see what happens. The unarmed man wins or loses depending on the character's choice. Whatever choice the character makes, they are now someone's enemy and maybe someone's friend.

Don't put time pressure on character-expressive choices, only on tactical ones. Time pressure evokes the feel of tactical decisions, but for moral encounters give players time to figure out how to express their characters.

IMPROVISING BETTER CONTENT

Getting the most out of the game means improvising a good deal of content. It can be a challenge, but you can follow a couple of guidelines to help things go smoothly.

Give Players Options

This trick works wonders. When a player asks, "What?" you reply, "This, or that." When a player asks what's next, or what's around the corner, or what happens, give them an either/or option. Reality is more complicated than either/or options, but that's why we play games, because real life is too complicated. Options allow players opportunities to express who their characters are, and they reinforce the idea that there's more going on in the Edge than one person can take in.

Example Options

Give players options that they can respond to emotionally and not just tactically.

- comprehensive professional services or personal attention from a scrappy underdog?
- benefit from a day of surveillance or benefit from having the initiative?
- approach a GMC as a friend or as a fellow professional/adept?
- the food truck serving mostly misfits and mutants or the one serving mostly beautiful people?
- get a hotel where the action is or where it isn't?
- "tip" the peace officer well or poorly?
- party moderately or cut loose?

Drive Irony

The Edge is full of events, people, and things that one would not expect. Make the most of that liberty. Add twists that change the meaning or valence of a scene.

Betty & Joe's Moroccan Restaurant: A character said that he wanted to treat the other characters and some hangers-on to a big dinner at a Moroccan restaurant. On the spot, I came up with "Betty & Joe's Moroccan Restaurant." It is totally authentic, even though it's run by an American couple. When the characters met Betty, I described her as "cornbread white." Maybe if I were swifter, the owners would have been Chinese or Brazilian. Then again, it's way safer for me to portray white Americans in broad, stereotypical terms than to do the same with Chinese or Brazilian GMCs. The point here is that you can give everything you invent a little twist and probably should.

Failed Example of an Ambulance: The characters were helping an overdose victim get to the hospital. I improvised a seedy "ambulance," which was a lot like a van with plastic lining the bed in the back. It matched what the players had come to expect, though. Instead I could have surprised them with a glitzy ambulance with "St. Charon's" emblazoned proudly on the side. That image probably would have been better. The GM doesn't need to know ahead of time how she might justify an incongruous detail. Incongruous details are their own reward. They remind the players that there are layers and layers of schemes going on in the Edge, so you can't really predict what you're going to see next. And if the characters were to press for information, justifying the incongruous detail is the sort of challenge that sparks the GM's imagination and leads to new, cool details in the setting. So why would the ambulance be safe and modern, unlike its immediate surroundings? One can imagine Dr. Nusbaum using attractive ambulances to acquire certain bodies, living and dead. Most of the people they transport make it, but some are never seen again. A clean, modern St. Charon's ambulance is probably scarier than a septic libertarian ambulance.

Flexible, Handy Set-Pieces

These elements of the game are useful resources that characters might turn to or that might drop in their laps. Assume that the characters can find what they're looking for by asking around, checking online, or tapping into a network of some sort. Use this list to see where fate might lead the characters, whether they're looking for something in particular or you are.

Places to Get Information

- Anywhere, be generous in giving characters information so they can make interesting choices.
- Reba, your friendly Island AI, page 55.
- Al Amarja Television, page 60.
- Al Amarja Today, page 61.
- D'Aubainne University, page 115.
- Public libraries. No telling what you might find.
- Local hustlers and touts. Seriously, they know things.
- State databases, if you're a hacker.
- Seers, prophets, and psychics.

CAM SAYS: WORSE FATES THAN DEATH

There are much worse things you can do to your player-characters than kill them off. I don't think I've ever killed a single ***Over the Edge*** character in all the time I've run the game. Instead, I've done some fairly awful things to them, shined a light on their dark consequences, strung them along with misery, and ruined their fictitious lives. But not actually death. I think the act of killing off player-characters only serves to give the player a clean way out to make a new character, so unless that's the goal (and why not just retire them?) aim for the real jugular and twist the knife in the other direction—GMCs they love, objects they possess, that nice room at Cesar's they always liked. See how they like those apples.

Places to Pursue your Dream, Vision, or Calling

- D'Aubainne University, page 115.
- The Philosopher's Stone, page 116.
- Moreau Veterinary School, page 115.
- The Museum of Modern Life, opening soon, page 189.
- The Temple of the Divine Experience, page 88.
- Al Amarja Television, page 60.
- Winds of Change, page 105.

Places to Go for Fun

- Plaza of Flowers, page 78.
- Sad Mary's Bar & Girl, page 83.
- Not a Pipe, page 82.
- Angelique's at Cesar's Hotel, page 123.
- Sequins, page 75.
- Cheryl's Whiskey Bar, page 74.
- A Glorious Lords concert, page 155.
- D'Aubainne University, for cultural or educational programs, page 115.
- Plaza of Justice, for a hanging, page 108.
- Vivisection Cinema, page 117.
- Winds of Change, page 105.
- The Museum of Modern Life just opened up, page 189.

Places to Rendezvous

- Sarah's Teahouse, page 124.
- Plaza of Arms, although you'll need a cover story, page 71.
- Bienvenidos Hotel pharmacy, page 82.
- Sunken Plaza, page 122.
- Sequins, page 75.
- The Museum of Modern Life, newly opened, page 189.

Places to Get Help

- Reba the virtual assistant and Reba Online, page 55.
- Aries Gang, page 146.
- Armorguard, page 124.
- The Peace Force, ha ha, no.
- Uncle's Security, page 75.
- Total Taxi, page 59.

Places to Get Training

- D'Aubainne University, page 115.
- First School of True Sensation, page 87.

Places to Get Secret Paranormal Help

- Sir Arthur Compton, page 149.
- D'Aubainne University, page 115.
- The Philosopher's Stone, page 116.
- The Temple of the Divine Experience, page 88.
- Winds of Change, page 105.
- Zazen Sushi, not that anyone would know to look there, page 95.
- Creepy bookstores that also sell animal body parts or crystals.

Medical Attention and Healing

- St. Charon's Hospital, page 99.
- Dr. Nusbaum, notoriously busy, page 99.
- Ahmed's Kwik Klinik, page 94.
- The Temple of the Divine Experience, page 88.
- Ezekiel's Madhouse, page 133.
- Licensed pharmacies, which are everywhere, page 52.
- Moreau Veterinary School, page 115.
- Your friendly local street medic.
- Your friendly local *curandero*.

Possible Assistance Unlooked For

- Total Taxi, page 59.
- The Cut-Ups, page 163.
- The Earthlings, page 164.
- Giovanni's Cabs, so new the characters haven't heard of them yet, page 192.
- The Neutralizers, page 178.
- Raaida, page 145.

EXAMPLE FLAMBOYANT MISSIONS

Things for characters to do that don't require being stealthy.

- Take this VIP out and show them a good time. Their entourage, too. The VIP meets a "new friend." The VIP makes a request that is hard to fulfill.
- Go do something splashy that gets people talking about you or your organization. Use special talents to impress the right people.
- Meet important people at a social event and impress them.
- Provide specialty security at a public event to keep rivals from causing trouble.
- Cause a public distraction in order to provide cover for covert activity by others.
- Infiltrate a public event put on by a rival and covertly sabotage it.
- Help a patron pull off a big party with VIPs. Entertain guests, divert trouble-makers, and make the event memorable.
- Hand-deliver a sensitive package to a reclusive VIP. Impress their security people or mystic gatekeepers.
- Go live in a particular area and get to know the people there. Work your way into the social network. Be ready for subsequent missions.
- The enemy is hosting a public event, consolidating their power. Make the event crash and burn.
- Evaluate paranormal tools or substances that are for sale or trade. Compete with rivals interested in the same thing.
- At a street festival, help your favorite busker win "Best Busker." Coincidentally, there is a sideshow or contest that is perfect for one of the characters. During the festival, odd characters come and go.
- Escort a lunatic or prophet through the streets, as they sense their way toward an obscure but vital goal.
- A character is called on to use their paranormal power to help someone with a secret illness or other need. It might be someone that the character knows, although the need comes as news.
- "Oh my god, they're all dead in here. What's that noise?"
- Some sort of psychic bomb strikes a crowd with raw, homicidal fury. The characters are probably powerful enough to resist. The crowd descends on those that are not affected, which includes Angela Reyes (see page 195). The characters rescue or protect each other, GMCs, and maybe Reyes.

8

THE SUN QUEEN MUST DIE

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH THE DIVINE, AND THE WORD WAS DIVINE.

—CHRISTIAN HYMN, LATE 1ST CENTURY

This scenario, which takes place during a crowded, rowdy Passover party at Sad Mary's Bar and Girl, introduces a gaming group to ***Over the Edge*** with a one-session story arc. It is open-ended, allowing you, the gamemaster, to bring in your favorite elements from the setting. By the end of the session, the Sun Queen will probably be dead, and each character will have had a chance to win a blessing of some sort from a reclusive guru.

The chaos at Sad Mary's during the spring festival creates obstacles for the player-characters as well as opportunities. Sometimes an opportunity is itself an obstacle, such as when a fascinating Marjan gives a PC the opportunity to go try some new experience and abandon their goal.

The theme of this one-shot is an homage to "The Wild Party" (1928), by Joseph Moncure March. It's the poem that made William S. Burroughs want to be a writer, and William S. Burroughs is the writer that made me want to create this game.

The Title of this One-Shot

When you're explaining the basis of this story arc, refer to the scenario by name. If the players ask why it's called that, tell them in your own words. Tell them that:

- Somewhere in the party is the Sun Queen and she must die.
- She'll probably die at the party, but the actions of the characters might change things.
- None of the characters start the session knowing anything about the Sun Queen, and most of them probably wouldn't even know what a Sun Queen was.

You can add any details you like, especially those that reflect the characters at the table. If your players don't ask about the title, then before the action starts remind them of the title and then at least spell out to them that the players know the title, but their characters don't.

Who is the Sun Queen and Why Must She Die?

The Sun King or Queen is an ancient concept embodying the sun, living in luxury for a year before being sacrificed. ***Our*** Sun Queen is Angela Reyes, a person who recurs throughout various realities, always to be put in extreme danger, who is being manipulated in a secret Mover scheme. Feel free to tell your players. Or don't.

If players think that the title has something to do with King Louis XIV of France, they get 10 experience points for being clever, but tell them that no, it's not that Sun King. As an absolutist and the enemy of liberty, Louis would make a good villain, but not this time. Experience points, in case you are wondering, are worthless to the character. To the player, they are worthless except as intangible accolades.

Prepping for the Session

You want to do enough prep that you are about 75% certain what sorts of things will happen. Leave some possibilities open or only partially determined so that you'll have the flexibility to respond to what the characters do. Get familiar with the prepared material on these pages, and then add in extra material to suit your players and yourself.

Creating Characters

Guidelines for creating player-characters for "The Sun Queen Must Die" are given in the handout on the opposite page. There are also pregenerated characters on page 259, if you'd prefer to cut to the chase.

Jumping Right In

If you don't feel like prepping ahead of time, you don't really need to do more than read this scenario. There's more material in the book that you could draw in, but you don't need to. There are unique elements you can invent to complement the player-characters and to express your own creativity, but that's not necessary, either. If you want to jump straight in, be my guest. You can skip the rest of this section.

Look Up and Bookmark Items in this Scenario

The following three items are written up elsewhere in this book.

- Sad Mary's Bar and Girl, page 83
- Fatna Alaoui, page 196.
- Buck Williams, page 196.

You might also want to look up anything you like to help you get context for the scenario, such as the following.

- Passover celebration, page 226.
- Movers, page 171.
- The Stitch, page 181.

CHRIS SAYS: MY TAKE ON THE SUN QUEEN

This one-shot became a part of my ongoing campaign. Most of the story elements remained the same, but I tied things into broader themes. Angela Reyes, still the Sun Queen, had to die because her quantum formulas were part of C's becoming.

Given she was significant, the Movers knew they needed to take her out, as they were fighting C. Taking her out in a public ritual created a lot of semiotic links to the Logosophere, thus powering the Movers. The characters didn't save her, and they didn't mess up the ritual death, either. One player — who I allowed to weigh in on the good and bad twists he threw — realized he'd been married to Angela right before she died in his arms at the climactic moment. It worked out well. It was weird, and players were intrigued.

This is a case where allowing the players some say in their twists generated connections I wouldn't have otherwise made as a GM. We hit almost all the points suggested in the adventure, but our outcome, even the process, was totally different.

Create Custom GMCs

For each player-character, invent a gamemaster-character to match, possibly a group of GMCs. The custom GMC is an opportunity for intrigue, conflict, danger, promise, or curiosity. If you know your players, create GMCs that suit what you know about their tastes and inclinations. If you have a player who loves fights, then maybe there's a bully at the party who needs to be taken down a peg. If you have a player who loves to delve into weird mysteries, then how about a mysterious figure with secrets for that player's character to explore? A buffoon who likes to stick their nose in where it doesn't belong? Invent someplace where they might regret sticking their nose, or might not.

If you have time to search the Internet for images that you can use for these GMCs or for anything else you want to depict in the session, that's golden.

Invent Something for Yourself

Since the setting is a big party, there are lots of things you can bring in to suit yourself.

Representatives of Groups: If there's any group in the Edge that interests you, they can have representatives here. Maybe a Dog-Face with a couple baboons attends the party. Maybe mutants or Sommerites. These elements show the players some of the cool things they'll encounter as they continue to play ***Over the Edge*** in later story arcs.

Recurrent GMCs: Angela Reyes (imperiled student), Buck Williams (tourist out of his depth), and Fatna Alaoui (aficionado of auras) are already written into this scenario. You could add other recurrent GMCs (see page 195) if you favor them, such as Old Enid or Madame Lange.

Spotlight Fight: Sad Mary's features Girl Fights of all sorts, and countless other types of fighting. Pick a fight to be a spotlight event, one meant to draw the characters in. Invent a fight that gets across the feelings that you want to evoke. It could be brutal or subtle. Combatants might be criminally mismatched. Fights could be racially charged, rigged, or post-modern.

Other Details: Invent something fun for you, especially a gamemaster-character or a situation for the PCs to interact with.

Dream Up Obstacles and Consequences

The characters have their goals, so the action needs obstacles to those goals. Good obstacles give characters some hope to lure them forward and some strategy to possibly overcome them. Here are some example obstacles.

- A character or event that relates to a character's trouble. This option is at the top because it follows

Let's Get this Party Started

Here are the special guidelines for how to make a player-character for "The Sun Queen Must Die." The story is meant to be played in one sitting, so your character is going to jump right into the action.

YOUR MISSION: FIND THE GURU

You are traveling to Al Amarja in order to try to find a reclusive guru named Reza Rajavi, whom you might know as Santo or the Santo. He is notoriously hard to locate, but somehow you've learned that he always attends the spring festival at a particular bar in the Edge, and that's where you're going. Maybe you're here with a message, a question, a request, a gift, or just a mysterious vision. Maybe your mission is for yourself, or maybe someone has sent you. None of the player-characters are here to kill or harm the guru.

YOUR INVITATION

It's an exclusive party, but you've gotten an invitation. Maybe it's through your connections, maybe it's on account of your special qualities, or maybe it's just a mix-up.

YOU'RE AN EXPERT

You're 2nd level, which is a cut above the norm. Even so, you may be in over your head. Being in over your head makes for an active one-session story arc.

WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT AL AMARJA AND THE EDGE

Unless you want your character to be clueless, assume that they have gotten some good information about the Island from whoever is sending them or arranging the trip. During play, feel free to ask the gamemaster questions about the setting, such as "What do I know about the local cuisine?" or any other topic.

YOU MUST BE LIKEABLE BUT MIGHT BE EVIL

A good character is likeable, even a good villain. Your character should have some attractive qualities, such as being well-spoken, gracious, endearing, enduring, witty, funny, generous, deep-thinking, or warm-hearted. If you want to play a character who is evil in some way, that can work, but don't be surprised if they suffer for their transgressions.

CLEARING CUSTOMS & IMMIGRATION

When the action starts, your character has already cleared Customs & Immigration and has received a Security Card for use on the Island. Going through a C&I interview can be an adventure in itself, so for this one-shot you'll assume all the characters have gotten through it already.

IMPROVISING AS INCIDENTAL GAMEMASTER-CHARACTERS

During play, when your character is off-stage, you can jump into roles of bystanders, such as party-goers, servers, drunks, etc.

a player's lead. Several custom GMCs can be designed to play into various PCs' troubles. Maybe all of them could be.

- The character has been directed to find a particular person to help them, so they have to find that local first. Finding that contact can take the character anywhere. Bystanders might say, "Oh her? Yeah, she was headed to the ring a couple minutes ago, over that way."

- The Santo's assistants whose job it is to screen out most supplicants as unworthy. Characters might end up talking to an assistant without knowing it, as the assistant assesses the character, perhaps using something like aura vision.

- A human predator or a paranormal creature of some kind that pretends to lead a character to the guru but instead latches onto the character's brain and gradually drains orgones off them as they party.

- The crowd at the party is too thick, and the character can't get through to reach the guru. Maybe they can find a way by cutting through the kitchen and going left at the walk-in freezer. There's a freight elevator back there that will work.

- They say that the Santo is going to arrive at the Dunking Room at 9:00, but he never shows up. Other would-be supplicants show up, however, and they loudly accuse the PCs of driving the Santo away with their negative energy.

- Party-goers given the wrong drugs go on a rampage, preventing the PC from meeting the Santo at the designated time.

Sad Mary's and the Sun Queen

Sad Mary's Bar & Girl is hopping with its annual blow-out party for the Island's spring festival, and somewhere in the crowd is Angela Reyes, who doesn't know that she is the Sun Queen and that she must die.

Passover Celebration at Sad Mary's

Al Amarja celebrates spring with a rowdy holiday that they call Passover. Its theme is fertility, so one sees plenty of eggs, bunnies, and fornication. The party at Sad Mary's is a Passover party, and it fits the theme. Party-goers wear bunny ears, bunny tails, bunny costumes, lamb masks, earth-goddess attire, flowers, and, in the case of one celebrant, nothing but a stuffed rabbit as a cod-piece. Someone is conducting a lamb through the party, and other party-goers stroke it to attach their sins or failings to it. Later, the lamb will get sacrificed at the Abattoir of Heaven. Celebrants pass out flowers and candy, but you can't be sure what's in the candy. Couples "make like rabbits" in the bar's private rooms, and not always in private. The coupling is mostly professional, but there's plenty of amateur action as well.

Sad Mary's has certification from St. Charon's Hospital, so they are a licensed prescriber and provider of "medicine." Some party-goers sneak their own grub into the party, but for the most part attendees patronize the house and get their drugs from the bars and serving staff.

The "spring fling" is your opportunity to engage characters in encounters that help the players develop their characters and interact with the Island. How do the various characters react when they are imposed upon one way or another? Other celebrants can instigate encounters in many ways.

- Offer candy, flowers, or beads.

- Challenge to a fight in the ring.

- Challenge to a fight in the street.

- Spill a drink on, or knock the character's drink down.

- Ask to dance.

Angela Reyes, The Sun Queen

As far as Angela Reyes is concerned, she's the luckiest girl alive. She won a lottery nine months ago in the US, and she's been living the high life ever since. She has a tangle of exciting new friends and they have brought her here to the Passover party at Sad Mary's on Al Amarja.

What she doesn't know is that she's the Sun Queen, set up to live like royalty for one year and then be sacrificed. She has another three months to live. In the meantime, her handlers brought her here to connect with local Mover assets and exchange subluminal messaging. She is chockfull of subliminal messages and meta-message moderation signals, and she'll be exchanging these messages with others, most of whom don't realize that they are conduits for Mover mind control. For the most part, signals are exchanged on the dance floor, where the dancers

think that they're improvising, but they're actually following their conditioning. Much of this messaging involves setting up unwitting assets to go amok at the right signal. The Last War is almost here.

Who's going to keep Angela from being sacrificed in three months? Probably the people who are going to prevent that from happening are the hit squad from the Stitch that is here to kill her prematurely. That will really screw up the Movers' programming efforts.

The Movers have competent handlers around Angela, but part of the ritual is for her to live it up, so they are encouraging her to party. Since the Stitch have the initiative, they'll probably get her.

When the arc is over, you can tell the players that Angela's name was a clue to her identity because her last name, Reyes, suggests rays of the sun and means "monarchs" in Spanish. Actually, her name is a coincidence, but don't tell them that.

MAJOR GMCS

Angela has a small contingent of friends who are actually mostly handlers. She is being stalked by a small hit squad, including a would-be killer who has no idea what's going on. To a large degree, the cloaks are in the background. The PCs might hardly interact with them at all. They're spelled out so that you have the big picture of what's going on, but there's no expectation that the PCs will confront and defeat these "monsters." The masterminds leading the two covert operations both make it a priority to get away if threatened, but the PCs might end up tangling with the Movers' backup dupes or the Stitch's hired muscle.

ANGELA'S CREW

- **Angela Reyes:** She's here to have a great time.
- **Jean-Baptiste Durand:** Angela's unsuspecting friend.
- **Layla Undertow:** Angela's older friend, actually a Mover cloak.
- **Yarka and Elsa:** Undertow's expendable dupes posing as friends of Angela's.

PSYCHIC HIT SQUAD

- **Target Top Guy:** He thinks he chose freely to come here, but he's being manipulated by the Stitch. More likely than not, he's going to be driven into a mad rage during which he will stab Angela to death.
- **Wolfgang Klopperschtuck:** A Stitcher cloak here to see the Sun Queen killed prematurely.
- **Roger Marshall:** Bodyguard and muscle for Klopperschtuck.

ANGELA REYES

BLESSED, CURSED, AND DOOMED

Youngish American woman, small, nondescript, and of mixed ancestry.

BRAINWASHED, "EXPERT" (2ND): She is really good at being devoted to Undertow, at forgetting the self-contradictory stories that Undertow tells, at coming to see things from Undertow's perspective, at resisting pressure to betray Undertow, etc.

PARTYING, COMPETENT (1ST)

QUANTUM PHYSICS, COMPETENT (1ST): Given half a chance, she'll make a reference to Schrödinger's Cat, although it's she herself that will soon be dead or alive, as the case may be.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

JEAN-BAPTISTE DURAND

LUCKY FRIEND ABOUT TO GET LESS LUCKY

Youngish French man, thin, energetic, vaguely displeased, and probably smoking a cigarette.

In this scenario, Jean-Baptiste is like an innocent bystander, except he's not innocent.

BRAINWASHED, "EXPERT" (2ND): Same as Angela, above.

HANGER ON, COMPETENT (1ST)

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

LAYLA UNDERTOW

MOVER CLOAK

North African woman, early thirties, with short hair and an alert expression.

She is overseeing the contacts between Angela and local Mover-controlled assets. If someone assassinates the Sun Queen, her goal will be to escape. Over the last year, Undertow has been befriending Angela, and they were already acquainted when the Movers arranged for Angela to win the lottery. Now they are "good friends," and in three months Undertow will arrange for Angela to be ritually murdered, for the good of the cause. That is, unless the Stitch can intervene today and get Reyes killed.

SECRET OPERATIONS, ELITE (3RD): Spying, brainwashing people into being devoted to her, handling unwitting assets, breaking and entering, hand-to-hand combat, etc.

MISDIRECTION, ELITE (3RD): She uses subliminal cues to throw off pursuers, attackers, and stalkers. She is capable of detecting unwanted attention and throwing it off with subliminal cues, all without her ever being conscious of what she's doing. If she wants to get away, she's probably getting away.

MIND SHIELDED: If captured, she can enter a fugue state where a different personality with a different history takes over, preventing the cloak from giving up secrets.

ARMED WITH SPY GEAR: She has a big knife tucked away in a hidden sheath, and she has some of the sorts of tools you might expect a spy to have, such as lock picks, fake ID, and maybe an emergency beacon.

SAVES: 1

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

YARKA AND ELSA

NECROMANTIC CULTISTS AND MOVER DUPES

Youngish, mixed-race Al Amarjan women, dressed in colorful clothes with bunny ears

They're locals, and they're members of a local "necromantic cult" that's actually a Mover front. For this mission, they're locals showing Angela around the city, ostensibly friends of Undertow. They think Undertow is a superior in their cult, and they figure that Angela is being set up to be kidnapped and pressed into service as a breeder. No one has told them that, but they're looking forward to it. Strapped around their bodies are creepy iron charms on chains, but their clothes cover the charms.

MENACE TO SOCIETY, COMPETENT (1ST): The necromantic cult is mostly something of a secret gang, and the cultists are competent in fighting, cavorting, spotting easy victims, abducting loners, and bragging about how cool their cult is.

UNNATURAL ENDURANCE: Mover conditioning has prepared these cultists to hold up under difficult conditions. Each of them can shrug off physical damage, sort of like each having a save that only works against bodily punishment.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

TARGET TOP GUY

MIND-CONTROL VICTIM AND
SOON-TO-BE KILLER, MOST LIKELY

Whitish man in his thirties, with big hands and facial features. His head is bald, with a bullseye tattooed onto it.

He's what passes for a regular guy on Al Amarja, except that his brain configuration just happens to make him a prime candidate for Stitcher mind control. The Stitch is going to use up this asset for this mission, and after he's killed Angela, he'll be compromised and useless.

MAKING DELIVERIES, COMPETENT (1ST).

HOMICIDAL MANIA, ELITE (3RD): When telepathically triggered by a remote Sender, Target Top strikes with animal-like precision and dodges artfully. He stays in this heightened state until he finds a safe place to rest. The trigger involves unlocking countless hours of forgotten dream programming, during which Target Top was programmed to see Angela as his mortal enemy and to go into this homicidal fugue state. Even once the fugue state subsides, the dream memories will remain as haunting delusions — provided Target Top survives.

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

WOLFGANG KLOPPERSCHTUCK

STITCHER CLOAK

German man of indistinct age, dressed in a simple suit with a modest noose for a tie

He is here to handle the murderer, Target Top Guy, and to get him to kill Angela.

STITCHER OPERATIVE, ELITE (3RD): Everything involved in undertaking successful covert missions for the Stitch.

PSYCHIC RELAY, WORLD CLASS (4TH): Klopperschtuck relays psychic transmissions, usually unconsciously. In this scenario, he's using receiving transmissions from Target Top Guy's Sender and passing them along to Target Top.

NEURAL UPLOAD: In a real emergency, Klopperschtuck can transmit his consciousness out into the network of Sender connections, from which it is transmitted into a body prepared for such an eventuality. The body left behind is hebephrenic. Klopperschtuck's mind does indeed get passed along to a waiting body, although the end result isn't everything that he is hoping for.

STITCHER BRAIN DERAILER: If a character tries to harm or detain Klopperschtuck, the automatic defenses of the Stitch come into play, operating invisibly. These defenses often help Stitchers against their enemies, although usually no one can determine what difference the defenses actually made. If the player casts lots and get one or two 5s on their initial throw, they reroll one of those 5s before any other rerolls.

SAVES: 1

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

ROGER MARSHALL

BODYGUARD AND ENFORCER

Large Samoan-American man, dressed in loose, colorful clothes.

He knows that he's here to watch Klopperschtuck's back, but doesn't know what the guy is up to, and doesn't really care.

BRAWLING, EXPERT (2ND).

DEFAULT, SUB-PAR (0TH)

Core Action

Let the players decide what the characters are going to do at the party, and then respond with your own material or with these vignettes.

Here's a rough timeline.

- The characters arrive and get established, possibly as singletons, or as one group that met in the Terminal, or as a mix.
- They have a few encounters, possibly with their custom GMCs. At least some of them are likely to start looking for the Santo immediately.
- One or more of them meets Angela, the Sun Queen, who probably finds one of the characters remarkable.
- Someone randomly runs across the murderer, "Target Top Guy," but play it off like it's just a random encounter for local color.
- The characters have more encounters as they look for the Santo and encounter various partygoers.
- More people show up and dance with Angela. They're mules that the Movers are using to transmit mind control messages.
- The characters that fail to get wisdom, answers, or blessings from the Santo face their fates one by one. Some get turned aside, but others get words from the Santo that are detrimental instead of positive.
- The murderer probably kills Angela on the dance floor. The characters might be in a position to intervene and save Angela, but probably not. More likely they can tackle or otherwise deal with Target Top Guy.
- The characters might end up sort of tangling with the Stitcher or the Mover.
- The characters that succeed in their quest meet the Santo now and gain from him what they need, maybe more.
- Last scenes, maybe wrapping up loose ends, probably narrating what happens to the characters from this point on. The end.

In Line to Get In

A good place to start the action is as each character gets past the Aries enforcer serving as security at the front door. A couple questions help each character get grounded, and this encounter at a gate is a way to mark the players' transition from preparing to play to actually playing.

The Sad Mary's Entrance: It looks like you're entering an old stone church. There's a line of unusual people waiting to get in, and you're in it. Above the entrance is a niche containing a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary crying into the palms of her hands.

Questions for the Players: Ask some quick questions to set the tone, like these.

- What's the character wearing? Have they tried to dress like locals or at least like enthusiastic tourists?
- How confident is the character? Do they act like they belong? Do they look like a wide-eyed tourist?
- What do they hope to see at the party, besides the Santo? What are they afraid they might encounter?

Facing the Bouncer: The Aries enforcer looks like a mystic, post-apocalyptic, biker thug, and he is. He gives grief to at least one character, and maybe all of them. He might tell someone that they're not cut out for this party and they should go home. Of course, he can't really keep them out if they have an invitation. He might accuse a character of forging their invitation. If a character looks threatening, he warns them not to cause trouble. He goes further, saying that he personally will come after the character if they cause trouble. A little flak from the bouncer sets the tone, but don't let any of these encounters last long.

Meeting Angela

This encounter introduces Angela and makes her probable demise relevant.

Arrange for this to happen soon. She runs across one of the characters, preferably one who will interact with her in interesting ways. She is excited to be on this crazy island, and if any of the characters stand out, she might be drawn to one of them. It's easy enough to ad lib an encounter, such as when a character is passing from one room to another and meets her in the hall or at the door. Angela is taken by whatever exceptional trait makes the character stand out. In this first encounter, she is with Yarka, one of her handlers posing as a friend. At some point in the encounter, Yarka steps in and calls Angela away. This happens before the players have learned everything they want to know about her. Angela says something like, "Can I look for you later?" and maybe there's an exchange of cell numbers.

There's nothing "Sun-Queeny" about Angela. She's not blond, she's not royal, and "Reyes" is too vague a clue to be worth anything. Ideally the players are left with the idea that one of the characters was cool enough to impress Angela.

Maybe the next time they hear of Angela, she's dead, stabbed on the dance floor by a crazed stranger. Or maybe they hang out with her some more first.

Hanging Out With Angela

Possibly no one in your group hangs out with Angela, but it might make things easier if some of them do. Angela is a great way to get the characters involved in things. She might talk them into attending a fight or a dance show. She might talk someone into fighting in the amateur ring.

At least one cultist and possibly the Mover will always be with Angela.

Dancing with the Sun Queen

Angela spends a lot of time on the dance floor. Other people under Mover influence end up dancing near her, and they send messages back and forth with Angela. These unconscious messages are hard for Stitchers to track or duplicate because the body-mind feedback of dancing amplifies subliminal Mover messages while being invisible to Stitcher telepathy.

Any characters hanging around with Angela notice that she really likes to dance, and she's not exactly great at it. Maybe you can get all the players at your table to make fun of "the woman who dances funny," and then they can feel bad when she's killed.

If characters aren't hanging around with Angela, they run into her anyway, especially any time they are on the dance floor. They might also meet her coming and going.

Running into the Murderer

The murderer-to-be thinks that he's here to party down with everyone else celebrating Passover. It's easy for him to show up by running across a random character, maybe while they're waiting for drinks at the bar. Here it's possible that a character with paranormal senses might size him up and then detect that he's under some sort of mind control, but it's not likely. This encounter also works just fine if the murderer does nothing but make an impression on the character.

The murderer looks mostly like a typical Marjan: weather-beaten, of mixed ancestry, with body decorations, and looped out on something. His standout feature is a large tattoo covering his hairless head. The

design of the tattoo is a red and white target, with the bullseye on the spot on the top of the skull where the cranial bones meet. That's the opening to the higher world that the Hopi used to keep open for life, rather than just as an infant. Maybe he says something unremarkable to the character, such as, "Happy Passover."

If the player wants their character to interact with the murderer, don't give him a name. Just call him "Target Top Guy." If pressed, you can say, "He tells you his name, but I don't want to make one up, so let's just call him Target Top Guy."

Typically, you want him to leave soon enough so that it's a surprise when he shows up again and kills the Sun Queen. Theoretically, the character can interact with Target Top Guy and maybe even join his little circle of party-goers. If the character uses any sort of mental discipline or paranormal capacity to interact with Target Top, doing so opens them up to psychic infiltration by the Stitcher programming in his brain. A 3rd level mental attack hits the character, and if they fail to resist it, it plants programming into the character's brain without the character realizing it. You can tell the players this in general without telling them everything that's up with Target Top.

Attempted Murder, Probably Successful

At some point, Target Top tries to kill Angela. Typically, this happens after some characters have failed to get their blessings from the Santo but before all the searches for the Santo have been resolved. Use it where it works for you. One point of this encounter is that it can go well or badly and neither result derails the scenario. A character can save Angela or not, and they can catch Target Top or not. Failure is OK and often really dramatic.

Setup on the Dance Floor: Angela is dancing, and Yarka is with her. Ideally a player-character or two are there. If no one is dancing with Angela, then maybe this event takes place while someone is dancing nearby, coincidentally. Or it happens while a character is making their way through the dance floor to the toilet.

Murder: Driven by unconscious conditioning, Target Top dances through the crowd until he is within striking distance of her. There are plenty of people in striking distance of her because it's a crowded dance floor. There's no hint of malice in Target Top's expression or demeanor. Suddenly, he pulls out a hidden carpet knife and stabs Angela. Then he forces his way through the crowd as fast as he can, desperate to escape.

The first thing a character might notice is Angela collapsing. In the crowd, they probably don't see Target Top slashing her inner thigh.

Saving Angela: If a nearby character has some amazing ability to heal people, they might save Angela from blood loss. It's a 3rd-level challenge, and the

characters are 2nd level, so the odds are against them. If no PC is around to try to save Angela, Yarka will, but she fails.

Catching Target Top: It a character wants to chase Target Top and catch up to him, let them. Target Top has to get people out of the way, and the character can move in his wake and catch him. Fighting with a homicidal maniac wielding a knife is a fine time for players to cast lots. Even if the character fails, forcing Target Top to stop and fight means that bouncers and vigilantes have time to get to him and take him down. If none of the characters give chase, Yarka does, but she doesn't catch him and he jumps out a window to get away. Why do you suppose a PC can catch Target Top but the GMC can't? Because it's not about simulating what would happen. It's about following the players' narrative lead. Target Top gets stopped if and only if a player-character gives chase.

A fight with Target Top is a pretty standard affair in terms of resolving lots, with the 2nd-level character facing off with the 3rd-level maniac.

Resolution: Once the dramatic attack takes place, draw the whole thing to a close. The cloaks on both sides take the opportunity to leave. The Mover directs Yarka and Elsa to stay with the body. Angela's friend loses their mind. Aries security enforcers take the body and Target Top, if he's been captured or killed. If the Sun Queen survives, the result is much the same, except that paramedics from St. Charon's Hospital arrive and take Angela away. Fill in the players on what their characters don't know, basically the stuff that was going on behind the scenes. It doesn't affect their goals, so letting them know the hidden details gives them an appreciation for what went on around them.

Finding the Santo

Each character who's actively looking for the Santo should get to cast lots to see how they do. The guru's shtick is that he's hard to find, so the GM can force a reroll. If the character has done anything marvelous at the party, the player gets a reroll on the throw.

Casting Lots: One way to handle the characters all looking for the guru is for the players to cast their lots at the same time to determine how each character fares over the course of the session. (See next page.) After the characters have had a number of encounters, especially with Angela, you can have the players all cast lots for how well their characters are going to do as far as finding the Santo. Starting with the lowest casts, play through how each failing character fares in trying to find the Santo. Then break for Angela's murder. When that's resolved, return to the remaining characters as they find out whether they will get the Santo's blessing.

CASTING LOTS TO GET THE SANTO'S BLESSING

Finding one's guru is difficult, as anyone who's tried might attest.

Need a 7: Since the characters are taking initiative, they need to cast a 7 or better to succeed.

GM Can Force One Reroll: Since it's a difficult task, the GM can force any player to reroll one of the dice in the throw.

Exceptional Characters Get Rerolls: If the character has done something extraordinary at the party, then they have the option of rerolling a die. When the GM and the player each have a reroll option, the GM has the first option to force a reroll. Then the player has the option. If the GM doesn't force a reroll on the original cast, and the player rerolls a die, then it is again the GM's option to force a reroll.

Optional Karma: The players haven't had much chance to earn karma. The party earns karma when a player throws doubles, and the players haven't cast lots much by this time, so they probably haven't thrown doubles. If you're a kind sort of GM, and if the players all fail to get the Santo's blessing, you can tell them about karma and tell them that they can use it this one time even though they haven't earned it yet. They pick one player to reroll a die, which uses up their karma.

Success: A character that succeeds gains some sort of audience with the Santo and the words they get from the Santo give the character what they need.

Bad Twists: If something goes wrong for the character, it can go badly wrong. One option is that the character gets the runaround from the Santo's coterie, and they mess with the character's head in a way that leaves them frustrated, befuddled, or soul-weary. Another option is that the Santo grants an audience, but his words make the character's problem or need worse rather than better.

Good Twists: If something goes right for the character, it can go wonderfully right. Since this is a one-shot, the result could be transformative, freeing the character from bad karma, opening mind-locked capacities in their own brain, understanding their paranormal knowledge in a new light, or otherwise knocking it out of the park. Tell the player congratulations from me because it's not easy to land a good twist in this challenge.

Random Encounters

Roll these out as you need them. You might not need any of them if there's enough action with the custom GMCs you created for the characters.

- **Ankle Lock:** A local color encounter to remind everyone that this is a police state, sort of.
- **Bar Fight:** *Over the Edge* embraces clichés.
- **Doomed Tourist:** Buck Williams, a fellow traveler whose sad fate might be a warning to others.
- **Moon Guy:** A red herring, not related to the Sun Queen at all, but possibly useful for luring characters into one odd circumstance or another.
- **Stampede:** The bar is dangerously overcrowded, and a sudden surge and press puts one or more characters in danger.
- **Switcheroo Prank:** Someone swaps in a stranger drug for a more familiar one, and hilarity ensues.
- **Vibe Gourmet:** Fatna Alaoui, a woman who detects vibes and becomes curious about a character.
- **Custom Characters:** The ones you created.

Ankle Lock

A character runs across someone with a State ankle lock, maybe someone in a bunny outfit, with one bare ankle showing and the ankle lock on it. Give the players out-of-character information about ankle locks to help set the tone for the Edge.

The State ankle-locks offenders and malcontents as sort of a lighter version of home arrest. In addition, everyone figures that they double as bugs or other sorts of trackers or meters. In this case, the bunny's ankle lock is broadcasting the audio it picks up, but the receiver that's supposed to pick up the signal isn't working and that State isn't getting a thing. Of course, the characters don't know any of this.

To give the character something to do, the bunny can offer them candy out of a basket, along with a crazed statement along the lines of, "Break they in the twist camp, yes yes?"

This encounter is local color for a quiet break in the action. If you use it early, you can put in call-backs to it with more references to ankle locks, especially where one wouldn't expect to see them, such as on a rich man's ankle or a kindly old lady.

Bar Fight

RJ Slopjob is just the sort of guy to bump into a character and escalate it into a fight. He might have a couple friends with him who have identical stats, if that's convenient. A bad twist might be getting thrown out of Sad Mary's and having to find a way back in. Then again, maybe there's something really interesting going on in the plaza to distract a character from their goal. You can make up Slopjob's stats pretty easily, or you can see the "official" stats on page 85.

Doomed Tourist, Buck Williams

He could be in line waiting to get into Sad Mary's, next to a player-character and talking too much. He's excited to have an exclusive invitation to the Passover party. Give a player a chance for their character to interact with him. Depending on what they say, they might end up encouraging Williams to get in over his head, or they might warn him away from the temptations of excess. If nothing else, he's a fun local color encounter. Probably he's going to pop a pill he shouldn't have popped, insult a local he shouldn't have insulted, or participate in a mind-bending ritual that he should have steered clear of. The characters can see him in his debilitated state, such as mumbling in a corner, mostly naked, with painted handprints all over. If a player-character can get through to him with a message of caution, then instead at the end of the arc he's glad to have dodged a bullet and to have his self intact. Maybe he runs into the original PC he encountered and says, "Thanks for your advice. I could have gotten really messed up in here." Or maybe just provide that information out-of-character, but let the characters know what happened to him by the end of the arc.

See his write-up on page 196.

RECURRENT GMCS

Recurrent GMCs are gamemaster-characters that recur in repeated arcs, playing a similar role or playing out a similar scenario each time. Each recurrent GMC has a question that may or may not be resolved during play. In the same way that different characters might encounter Sad Mary's in different circumstances from one arc to another, they might encounter these recurring GMCs. The three recurrent GMCs in this story arc are:

Angela Reyes (see page 195), imperiled quantum physics student: Will she die a horrible death?

Buck Williams (see page 196), tourist in too deep: What fate awaits him here on Al Amarja?

Fatna Alaoui (see page 196), vibe gourmet: What does she detect in the characters?

Moon Guy

Some guy is dressed in an outlandish moon outfit and is going around showing it off and scoring free grub off of party goers. This character has nothing to do with the plot, but if a player thinks, "Moon Guy? Sun Queen!" they might take an interest in him. Anyone who follows him ends up in the next weird place you want them to be. If they engage him in conversation, he has something to say. He's impersonating the moon, he says, in order to help "reunite the dyad." If you like making up philosophical bullshit about transcending dualism, the moon as a force of life/nonlife, and that sort of thing, go to town. Otherwise, paraphrase. If characters interact with him in a friendly way, he keeps sort of showing up where they are. He might be at the scene of Angela's murder. Let the players know that this guy is a dead-end once you've gotten all the use of out him.

Stampede

At any point in the action, some random event could cause a sudden surge in the crowd. Maybe hooligans yell fire. Maybe there is a fire. Maybe drug-crazed behavior on the part of reckless party-goers creates a panic. Once the crowd starts surging, the pressure quickly builds to a point at which people are being injured, and then the surge dissipates, sending waves through the crowd as people push in all directions. One or more characters get caught in the surge. Have each of them cast lots to get out of the way without being crushed.

For bonus points, you can foreshadow the stampede. Decide ahead of time what's going to set it off, and then have the characters encounter the people or situation first. For example, first the characters encounter brain-bombed party-goers having fun setting napkins on fire. Later, these same celebrants start a real fire that creates the stampede.

After the stampede, the characters have the opportunity to interact in various ways, such as helping the wounded, getting to the bottom of what started it, or taking advantage of the distraction somehow. The bar hands out free drinks to people injured in the stampede.

Level: 1st

Advantage: The stampede has the advantage unless the character is extraordinarily prepared, so the player needs to throw 8+ to successfully avoid injury.

Good Twist: Save someone else from injury and get a reward, tangible or intangible. This deed makes it easier to get a blessing from the Santo. Failing with a good twist might mean shielding someone and getting hurt oneself. Or make up your own good twist.

Success: Avoid injury

Failure: Strike (compressed, broken, trampled, roughed up)

Bad Twist: Getting in someone's way in your effort to save yourself, and they get badly injured. This deed makes it harder to get the Santo's blessing.

Switcheroo Prank

Someone has tampered with the party supplies, which is to say psychoactive drugs. Roll this out in two stages.

Drug Scene: The first time a character stumbles on a circle of people getting ready to share mescaline or something, let the players know that somewhere in the party someone has switched drugs on people. Most of the drugs at the party are legit, but not all of them. This out-of-character knowledge serves player autonomy; the player can have their PC try drugs in full knowledge that it could go horribly wrong. This knowledge also foreshadows the pandemonium that's likely to break out.

Pandemonium: People start acting crazy, thanks to the bath salts and uppers they've taken, thinking that they were something tamer. Maybe they start little fires; maybe they go on a rampage. It's a quick little emergency that a number of characters can jump in on at once. Put out the fire! Get those people off that dog! Don't get your face eaten off! The challenges that the characters are likely to face are 2nd level, which means even odds for players operating in their expertise. Failure is OK because if things go wrong with this random event, it doesn't keep the characters from pursuing their goals.

Stampede: The pandemonium might cause a dangerous stampede. See previous page.

Vibe Gourmet, Fatna Aloui

She catches whiff of a character with a secret paranormal power. She follows the character, complimenting them on their aura. If no characters have secret paranormal powers, it could just be someone with a remarkable aura.

The point of this encounter is to pay some attention to a player-character, perhaps unwanted attention. Someone who can sense the PC's aura could be a threat or an opportunity. If the character's unusual aura is related to a secret of theirs, they probably don't want someone remarking in public about how noteworthy their aura is.

Try to draw the encounter out. Fatna can invite a PC to join her and her crew of celebrants. Maybe she makes them promises that she can or can't keep. She might also follow the PC around, observing their aura from a respectful distance. Just maybe she says that there's a famous guru at the party, and that someone with the PC's special aura should probably take the opportunity to look him up. "They call him the Santo."

See her write-up on page 196.

Ending Scenes

Pace the action so that the issues the players would like to see resolved get resolved by the end of the session. Usually that means Angela dying or not, plus each character getting a good word from the Santo or not. In addition, resolve any conflicts or issues that come up around other encounters. You can wrap up loose ends by letting a character see the results of action that's taken place offstage, and you can also provide out-of-character information to let the players know how conflicts resolved.

Epilogue: A nice way to end the whole session is to have the players narrate what happens to their characters next. Since the story arc is over, players can hardly mess anything up by inventing something that doesn't work. Their characters can degenerate into madness, rebound from their setbacks, achieve great things, or succeed so dramatically that they flame out, as the players see fit.

PRE-GENERATED PLAYER-CHARACTERS FOR "THE SUN QUEEN MUST DIE"

CHARACTER				
PLAYER				
QUESTION MARK				
MAIN TRAIT	Psychic Mood-Broadcaster. Works as a PR expert. Psychic capabilities limited by tendency to broadcast negativity when they intend something else.	Bodyguard to Celebrities. Has seen stuff they wish they hadn't.	Private detective. Everybody lies. That's job security.	Stupid Lucky American. Cosmically lucky to be born at their time and place, like Teela from Ringworld.
SIDE TRAIT	Encyclopedic Knowledge of Disasters.	Crazy Good Musician.	Cynical Telepath. (Ability is unreliable and demoralizing. He knows people care only about themselves.)	Yoga Instructor. (Can fight if they need to.)
FIGHT/SWAY/WEIRD	F: 1 S: 2 W: 2	F: 2 S: 2 W: 0	F: 2 S: 2 W: 2	F: 2 S: 1 W: 2
TROUBLE	Darkness of soul, messes up mood broadcasting and attracts the wrong crowd.	Risk-taker.	Prone to running headlong into trouble—literally.	Overreact when things don't work out their way.
NOTES	Feels like the end of the world is here, and she needs the guru's direction.	Believes the guru to be David Bowie in a metamorphosed body.	Considers the guru to be the epitome of laid back. Expects to find him wearing a leisure suit.	Body riddled with cancer, but no symptoms yet. Looking for healing—or something.

THE LAST CHAPTER

MORE STUFF BECAUSE YOU KNOW YOU WANT IT

Words and Where to Find Them

AATV 61

Abattoir of Heaven 93

Action: The stuff that the player-characters do, experience, and suffer in the game world. We call it "action" to focus on things happening rather than on things going according to plan. 26

Actor: Someone who does things, which is to say someone directed by a service to undertake actions in pursuit of unknown ends. In common parlance, an "agent." In terms of word origins, this word is basically the same as "agent." Actors that operate secretly are called cloaks. 163

Adept: Someone who is skilled at some paranormal discipline, or art, especially someone trained and not just a prodigy or a natural. 22

Advancement: Player-characters that reappear in subsequent story arcs or in long story arcs gain specialties. Sometimes when a player-character reappears in a new story arc, they are higher level than before. In long campaigns, characters might advance to a higher level after a climactic resolution or as the alternative to gaining a fourth specialty. 43
- **level-ups** 45
- **specialties** 44

Ahmed's Kwik Klinik 94

Al Amarja: A volcanic island in the North Atlantic. Its major city is the Edge. The nation is the Ultimate Democratic Republic of Al Amarja. It's a pariah state, but it keeps a low profile. Don't worry, that volcano is never going to blow. 48
- **business and wealth** 51
- **drugs** 64
- **flora and fauna** 53
- **holidays** 58
- **media** 60
- **medicine** 52
- **names** 50
- **phone and internet** 55
- **population** 49
- **sports** 59
- **the State** 143
- **transportation** 59
- **variants** 188

Al Amarja Today 61

Alpha Rho Tau 116

Alternate Timelines 193

Apocalypse: Environmental degradation, ocean acidification, climate change, rising sea levels, Earth's 6th great extinction, rising extremism, proliferation of nuclear technology, artificial intelligence smarter than we are, DNA experimentation, mind control, designer drugs, messianic expectations — everyone knows that the end is near, maybe several ends at once. An apocalypse is a revelation, and the fate of humanity is soon to be revealed. But hey, did you see what happened on Throne of Blood last night? 175

Aries Gang 146

Armorguard 124

Arms District: The neighborhood in the Edge where State power is concentrated, especially the Peace Force. You must pass a checkpoint to enter. 70
- **Bureau of Animal Control** 71
- **City Hall** 71
- **Federal Building** 72
- **metro station** 125
- **Ministry of Justice** 72
- **Peace HQ** 71
- **Plaza of Arms** 71
- **Statue of Cain and Abel** 72

Bienvenidos Hotel 80, 82

Bitter & Herb's 107

Broken Wings District: Where the elites feel comfortable living, working, and playing. 73
- **Ah-Puk Learning System** 74
- **Al Amarja Onebank** 74
- **beneath Broken Wings** 74
- **Cheryl's Whiskey Bar** 74
- **metro station** 130
- **Plaza of Broken Wings** 74
- **Sequins** 75
- **Uncle's Security HQ** 75
- **Unity and Center Health Spa** 238

Burbs 134

C 160

Capability: One of three measures of what a player-character can accomplish in the game. The three capabilities are Fight, Sway, and Weird. 15

Casting Lots: Throwing your lots (dice). Unlike traditional divination, casting your lots in ***Over the Edge*** actually does tell you something important about what's going to happen to you next. Cast your lots only when you care about the outcome. 27
claiming your lots 22
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exceptional circumstances 31
failures and better failures 31
lots and levels 32
outcomes, successes, and failures 30
resolving conflicts 29
twists 33
working together 31

Centipedes 193

Cesar's Hotel 123, 133

Character: Imaginary person (or pseudo person) in the game world, either a player-character like a protagonist) or a gamemaster-character (any other character, from an extra to a nemesis). Also, what you build through personal suffering, so you have that going for you. 11

Charters 148

Christmas: The island's winter festival, complete with the Parade of Brands and endess commercialism disguised as charity. 58

Cloak: An undercover actor, a secret agent. 163

Countryside 135

Crazes 187

Creating a Character 11
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Cut-Ups 163, 174

D'Aubainne International Airport: Why, it's the most astonishing airport in the world, what with its ziggurat and its tremendous parking capacity and the courteous, considerate Customs and Immigration 130
Customs & Immigration 131
Terminal 130

D'Aubainne University: A renowned center of higher and lower learning, located in Science District. The Moreau Veterinary College is the University's most prestigious and cutting-edge school. 115, 144

D'Aubainne, Jacques: See Our Martyred Leader

D'Aubainne, Jean-Christophe: Head of State, brother to Sister Cheryl and Sir Constance. Measure 23 mandates high security and limits personal appearances by His Unassailability. 151

D'Aubainne, Monique 144

D'Aubainne, Sir Constance: Constance D'Aubainne, the CEO of Swaps and chief business mogul on the Island. Buy low, sell high, and all can be yours. She makes Al Amarja viable, thanks to all the transactions her network enables. She works closely with the State, benefiting from a natural and inevitable synergy. 151, 152

D'Aubainne, Sister Cheryl: Cheryl D'Aubainne, the First Prophet of the Temple of the Divine Experience. You know you love her. She makes Al Amarja viable, with all the spiritual support she provides to a hard-pressed populace. She naturally works closely with the State, to the benefit of all. 151, 152

D'Aubainnes: The Island has long benefited from the wise and beneficent rule of the D'Aubainnes. Currently, Jean-Christophe D'Aubainne leads the Island as its beloved Head of State. Sister Cheryl and Sir Constance lead the society's spiritual and commercial efforts, respectively. Their father is Our Martyred Leader. 151

Damage: See Strike. You take damage in three big chunks, with chunks of all different types. 35
GMCs 37
healing 36

Deadsville 94

Delta Epsilon Theta 117

Dice: The lots that you cast are your two dice. 22

District: One of several neighborhoods in the Edge. Occasionally Marjans use the term "borough," especially (for some reason) in plural: "boroughs." See Arms, Broken Wings, Flowers, Four Points, Gold, Great Men, Justice, Science, and Sunken. 69

Dmitri's Fix-It Shop 119

Dog-Faces 153

Drugs: The common drugs, like caffeine and alcohol and nicotine, just won't cut it for some Marjans. 64
Blue Shock 64
Communion 65
MDA-Cubed 65
Nevermore 64
Slo-Mo 65
Voo 64, 66

Dunkelburg's Security: Uncle's Security before rebranding. 75

E-Z Sleep Hotel 95

Earthlings 164

Edge, The: The Island's major city, divided into strikingly distinct neighborhood, or districts. 68
Arms District 70
Broken Wings District 73
District of Gold 97
districts 69
Flowers District 77
Four Points District 91
Great Men District 101
Justice District 107
Science District 113
Sunken District 121

Empties 165, 176

Enforcers: A general term for the people entrusted with street-level policing. Some of them are paid security staff, others are some variant on gang thugs, and in Four Points they're mostly baboons. 69
Aries Gang 146
Charters 239
Otto's Sports Club 107, 109
Dog-Faces 153
Glorious Lords 155
Uncle's Security 75

Exiles 166

Experience Points, XP: Meaningless points occasionally awarded or deducted based on player behavior. See also advancement. 223

Extra: A minor GMC that a player can improvise and portray while their player-character is off stage. 24

Fight: The capability that measures a character's ability to fight, one way or another. Typically, it equals the character's level if they have a combat-oriented trait. 15

First School of True Sensation 87

Flowers District: The Edge's trendy arts and entertainment district. What passes for "entertainment" here might be classified as mental illness or organized crime in most civilized cities. 77
- **Aries Lawhouse** 79
- **Bienvenidos Hotel** 80, 82
- **Breakneck Café** 80
- **Chameleon's Natural You** 79
- **Dogu's** 80
- **Globe Cinema** 79
- **Happily Ending** 80
- **Liberty ATM** 79
- **Love-n-Lease Pet Rental** 80
- **Men for Men for Clothing and Rope** 79
- **metro station** 128
- **Mo' Money** 79
- **Muscleworks** 79
- **Not A Pipe** 80, 82
- **Plaza of Flowers** 78
- **R-Kane-R-Us** 80
- **Rapukchin's** 80
- **Rugosi's** 80
- **Sad Mary's Bar and Girl** 83
- **Screen of One's Own** 79
- **Seventh-Day Pastimes** 80
- **Super Scoop Ice Cream** 78
- **The Ramble** 80
- **Tots & Tykes** 80

Four Points District: For people who want plenty of street cred, there's this district, where life is cheap and baboons patrol the streets. 91
- **Abattoir of Heaven** 93
- **Ahmed's Kwik Klinik** 94
- **Ball-Mart** 91
- **Deadsville** 94
- **E-Z Sleep Hotel** 95
- **Freemartin Arena** 92
- **metro station** 127
- **Plaza of the Four Cardinal Points** 92
- **Throckmorton's Exterminators** 95
- **Zazen Sushi** 95

Freedom City 134

Freedom Day: The summer holiday celebrating freedom. Observance is mandatory. 58

Gamemaster (GM): The one who runs the game, handling the gamemaster-characters, framing the action, keeping the right secrets from the players, and providing them the right information. 2
- **using two books** 4

Gamemaster Character (GMC): Any character that's not a player-character.

"Old" Enid
Creepy Old Lady with Something to Say 197

Angela Reyes
Uncertainly Doomed Quantum Physics Student 195

Angela Reyes, Sun Queen
Blessed, Cursed, and Doomed 228

Barry
The Oldest Tulpa in the World 176

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The Island's Most Popular Mutant, Largely Unknown 110

Buck Williams
Wide-Eyed Tourist, In Deep 196

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Aloof Visitor 166

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The Best Deal-Maker in this Dimension and Several Nearby Ones 106

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At the Peak of his Success and Ready to Throw it Away 86

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Non-Euclidian State Architect. Whichever Way You Read That Is Correct 120

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Dockside Fixer and Deal-Maker 148

Islam Petri
Hot-Shot Paranormal Hunter 178

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Meme-Killer 174

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Lucky Friend About To Get Less Lucky 228

Jean-Christophe D'Aubainne
Reclusive Figurehead of the State 151

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Sir Constance
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using trouble 207
Gold, District of: This neighborhood features Swaps, a massive office complex and trading center where people buy low, sell high, and live life the way Sir Constance D'Aubainne wants them to. 97
Bureau of Weights and Exchanges 98
First Bank of Al Amarja 109
metro station 126
Plaza of Gold 98
Swaps 99
Great Men District: This neighborhood is something of a disaster, although the people are reportedly unified and uplifted by their devotion to the Glorious Lords and the power of metal. 101
metro station 129
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Group Dynamics for GMCs: Templates for GMC group relationships. Easy peasy.
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Star, Agent, Follower 200
Team Big Finish 201
Team Kool-Aid 202
Team Traitor 201
Grub, to grub, grub it: anything you ingest, whether eaten, drunk, swallowed, smoked, vaped, held between the cheek and gums, taken as an enema, blown into your nasal cavities, snorted, or misted into one's bedroom all night. Also, to eat, drink, swallow, smoke, vape, hold between cheek and gums, take as an enema, allow to be blown into your nasal cavities, snort, or mist into one's bedroom all night. Usually you itch the grub you grub, or else why would you grub it? 80
Gun Metal Sports & Industry 88
Healing: Damage comes in big chunks called strikes, and your character can sometimes recover from them via actions at the table. 36
Initiative: In a conflict, the character that's active has the initiative. In general, if a character has the initiative, they succeed on a cast of 7+. Otherwise they succeed on a cast of 8+. 29
Invocation 4
Island, The: Al Amarja. In figures of speech, "the Island" often substitutes for "the world" or "Earth," as in "Where on the Island have you been all this time?" 48
Itch, to itch: want, need, craving, obsession; to want, to need, to crave, to obsess. For example, "I itch some of Dogu's grub." 114

Jawfish: Rando, whoreson, bastard, animal, vermin, regular person. Plural: jawfish. 155

Justice District: In this neighborhood, a local self-help organization has blossomed into a full-service vigilante corps. Otto's Sports Club organizes the "clubbers," who carry baseball bats and pick on weirdoes. Visitors welcome, but honestly not all visitors. 107
Al Amarja Today 61
Bitter & Herb's 110
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Lou's Booze 109
metro station 129
Neat Fit 109
Otto's Sports Club 107, 109
Paradise Tea and Smoke 111
Plaza of Justice 108
Safe'N'Sound 111
The Archives 109
The Last Supper 109
Touch of Death 109

Karma: When the party has karma, a player can "spend" the karma to reroll a die when casting lots. If the party doesn't have karma, they gain karma when someone throws doubles. Each player also rolls for karma at the start of a new story arc. 37

Kergillians: [redacted] 167
alien tech 168
Red Orca 168

KRAK Radio 61

Last War, The: Conspiracy nutcases say that the world is on the verge of a cataclysmic conflict, a global war so final that it will be the "last war," the war to end all wars for good or ill. Humanity will be transformed or destroyed, maybe both. But hey, did you catch the game last night? 137

Le Thuy, Ms. 187

Level: A general measure of a character's abilities, or the same sort of number measuring the difficulties that characters face. Level 1 indicates unexceptional competence, level 5 indicates abilities beyond the world's best mortals, and player-characters are usually level 2 (expert) or 3 (elite). 9, 27
capabilities by level 28
examples 9
in story arcs 7
locations and backgrounds 28
opponents by level 28

Local color: Elements of the story that are primarily there to establish the tone or setting, such as a lively encounter with an unusual gamemaster-character. 122

Lots: Your hand-picked pair of dice. Each player has two matched six-sided dice with pips as their lots. You cast lots to see how things turn out in the game. 22

Mai **20**

Marjan, Martian: Al Amarjan. The j is pronounced many different ways: zh-, sh-, ch-, j-, h-, the German ch-, and occasionally k- or g-. The zh- sound is correct, but that means nothing, so it's not really true.

Marvelorium of Sir Arthur Compton 121

Measure 23: This topic is classified, per Measure 23. Requests for information can be made in person at the Ministry of Public Safety in the Plaza of Arms. 56

Media, The: Whether it's completely unregulated television edited to within an inch of its life or agenda-laden newspapers that include the ever-popular "Scratchies," Marjans enjoy a wide range of media free of copyrights, objectivity, and linear thought. 60
AATV 60
Al Amarja Today 61
KRAK Radio 61
Reba Online 62
The Maker ('zine) 62

Memory Eaters 185

Metro, The: Rail system connecting the districts in the Edge. The State wants you to know that the Metro is efficient, clean, and safe, and you will build solidarity with your fellows as you share the ride. 59, 125
stations by district 127

Monty Python: -10 experience points PER REFERENCE.

Moral of the Game: If there is an honest message lurking in this book of half-truths, it is "Question reality." 242

Moreau Veterinary College: A vast college where most of the best, new research is done. Humans are animals, and at any time Moreau has several field tests running in the Edge. 115

Morrie's Arcade 114

Movers: Wielding vast but unseen influence over everything connected to symbols, memes, and signalling, the Movers are behind almost everything you love and many of the things you hate. They may or may not be entirely made up, how would you know? 171
Cell Z 173
Dionysians 173
Gladsteins 173
Hermetics 173
The Stitch 175
Vornites 173

Museum of Modern Life 189

Mutants 156

Neanderthals: Not as dumb as you think they are, or as extinct. 138, 175

Neighbors: A paranormal creature native to Earth, not human but possibly close. The opposite of a stranger. 176

Nemesis: It's just possible that the game's author has coached your GM to create a scary villain who's ready to wreck your player-character. 210

Net, The: Outdated slang for the Underground 185

Neutralizers 185

Newky: Newcomer, especially one not steeped in cynicism. Often the term is used affectionately, but more often it occurs in a predatory context. Also, burger. 50

Nokay, no-K, NOK: No, not OK, screw you, let's fight right now. 83

Not A Pipe 80, 82

Nova Express, The 179

Novemberfest: The Island's creepy and lurid autumn festival. 58

Nusbaum, Dr: The reclusive genius behind St. Charon's Hospital and its many operations throughout the Edge. 99

OK, okay: Yes, amen, agreed, blessed be, I yield. 191

On the Edge CCG 169

Oneiric Fugitives 191

Oppenheimer: A fringe scientist, a mad scientist, a scientist. 120

Org: Organization, especially a less formal or less public one, one that you wouldn't call a "club" or a "company." Sometimes orgs are fronts for services. Other times orgs are about to be infiltrated until they become fronts for services. 213

Organ Grinders 158

Our Martyred Leader: Jacques D'Aubainne, formerly the beloved leader of Al Amarja. Father of Jean-Christophe D'Aubainne, Sir Constance, and Sister Cheryl. Marjans sometimes express love for "our martyred leader" that they would never express for a surviving D'Aubainne. He died about twenty years ago, and the most people know about that is that the Underground got him. 57

Outline of a Session 26

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- **alternate reality** 6
- **earlier editions** 3
- **gender and pronouns** 3
- **secret message** 244
- **vision** 2

Paradise Tea and Smoke 111

Paranormal: A catchall phrase for abilities, technologies, and entities that are kept secret from everyday jawfish. 140
- **paranormal abilities** 141
- **paranormal tech** 141
- **psychics** 140

Passover: The spring festival. Characterized by wild excesses, lusty encounters, bunnies, eggs, sacrifices, and hope. 58

Peace Force: Police officer, a zip. They don't carry firearms, but they have body cameras and drone backup. "The Peace" means, roughly, "the police," but usually you'll hear "the zips" instead. 56, 143

Perp: What the zips call anyone who's not a zip. High-status perps do not get called perp to their faces. Some perps embrace the term, but others hate it. Uncle's Security wants you to know that their agents are perps like you. They're not zips, and you can trust them. 147

Perry 21

Pharoahs: Homo erectus. Our common ancestor and the Old Lords of humanity. 138, 179
- **Quislings** 181

Player Advice 22

Player-character, PC: A character invented and played by a player. Similar to protagonists in traditional storytelling forms, although players are the audience as well as the performers. 239

Pre-Enactors 190

Prepping 212

Presidentials: Al Amarja's secret service, empowered to protect the President, whatever that means and no matter who gets in the way. Measure 23 gives them the secret authority and legal powers they need to keep the President safe, and they do it all with you in mind. 144

Quantum Phreaks 192

Question Mark: The test of self-identity for any player-character, that element of their reputation or outward quality that they may want challenged during the game. Written with a -?, like "honest-?" 13
- **examples** 13

Questions 19

Raaida 144, 145

Rachid 20

Rapid Onset Contagious Aphasia 193

Reba: Your friendly island AI and virtual assistant, courteously provided by the State. 55, 145
- **Raaida** 144, 145
- **Reba Online** 62
- **Rebus** 57

Reptoids: A menace. 185

Reroll: Sometimes after casting their lots, a player can reroll a die. Sometimes the GM makes them reroll a die. Use the newly rolled value; no take-backs. 32

Sad Mary's Bar and Girl: Sex, violence, and booze: everyone's favorite bar, in Flowers District. 83
- **fighting at** 83
- **performances at** 83
- **Sun Queen** 226

Safe'N'Sound: The Island's most renowned private security service, totally on the up and up. 111, 158

Santo, The 197
- **blessings and curses** 198
- **Sun Queen** 232

Sarah's Teahouse 124

Saves: Exceptional gamemaster-characters have one or more saves, and each save allows them to avoid the negative effects of being defeated by a player-character. When a GMC has a save, they can take a strike and keep on going. Even better, the GM can use the GMC's save to avoid other sorts of defeats, such as being captured. 37

Science District: This neighborhood is home to the notorious D'Aubainne University, and the landlords and businesses in the area cater to university students and to out-of-work recent graduates. 113
AATV 114
Alpha Rho Tau 116
Briggs Hall of Engineering 114
Campus Watch 115
D'Aubainne University 115
Delta Epsilon Theta 117
Dmitri's Fix-It Shop 119
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Morrie's Arcade 114
Plaza of Science 114
Rats and Super Rats 113
Sigma Epsilon Xi 117
Sigma Omicron Beta 117
Spee-D Delivery 114
Thorvald Administration Center 114
University Campus 116
Vivisection Cinema 117
Zefilli Hall of Fine Arts 114

Secret Message: This game is a coded message. You will decode the message in your dreams and execute its instructions in the spaces between moments of will. Neither you nor I will ever know the contents of the message. 244

Security Cards: Everyone has one. Do you have one? You should get one. Or you'll miss out. 144

Service: A general term for a shady organization that sends actors into the field, especially one with no public front. The conspiracies that are working to control or destroy humanity are services. Like an org, but with indefinite boundaries. Lots of orgs are fronts for services, whether they know it or not. 159

Sigma Epsilon Xi 117

Sigma Omicron Beta 117

Skylla: A city to the north of the Edge. It's an old port city, as old as Atlantis. 134

Sommerites 159

Spee-D Delivery 114

St. Charon's Hospital: The Edge's one real hospital. Large, modern, well-equipped, and willing to make a deal when it comes to your fees. Dr. Nusbaum is the genius behind the leading-edge services to be found here and nowhere else. Pronounced KARE-onz. 99
Doctor Nusbaum 99

State, The: Al Amarja's government is here for you. This service supports D'Aubainne University, the Peace, and the Presidentials. The president of the Ultimate Democratic Republic of Al Amarja is His Unassailability Jean-Christophe. 143
executions 56
incarceration 63
measure 23 56
Movers 171
Peace Force 143
propaganda 57
Reba 55
Rebus 57
water 62
weapon laws 62

Stitch, The: It's the psychic neuro-counter-revolution to the forces aligned with control. 175
Cut-Ups 185
vs. Movers 174, 184

Story Arc: One or more sessions comprising the action around a group of characters. The story arcs that your play group participates in compose your campaign. 7, 204
Follow Your Lead 206
long arc 8
one shot 7
party themes 10
power level 7
series 8
short arc 7

Stranger: A paranormal entity that's not from Earth. The opposite of a neighbor. 185

Stricker: Someone from a district, implicitly someone from a different district, outsider in general. Sociologically similar to the term "gentile," which means "someone from a tribe (that's not our tribe)." 49

Strikes, to strike, stricken: A strike is damage of some sort, anything from getting roughed up in a fight to having all of one's chakras spun in reverse. If a player-character gets three strikes, they're out of the action. They might be dead, paralyzed, insane, comatose, debilitated, or otherwise made ineffective. 35

Successes, Choices, Consequences 29

Sun Queen: A Passover mystery cult element elevated to importance in the Last War, or something like that. In the scenario The Sun Queen Must Die, she must die**.** 195
Angela Reyes 226
scenario 223

Sunken District: This neighborhood stakes its claim on being sane and safe enough for newkies. That's their story, and they are sticking to it. 121
Armorguard 124
Art's Fine Arts 122
Cesar's Hotel 123, 133
Den of Thieves 122
KRAK Radio 61
Liberty Liquors 122
Marvelorium of Sir Arthur Compton 121
metro station 126
Sarah's Teahouse 124
Sunken Plaza 122
Wilma's Café 122

Swaps: A sprawling commercial institution that facilitates transactions of all sorts, run by Sir Constance. 99

Sway: The capability that measures a character's ability to influence groups and individuals, one way or another. Typically, it equals the character's level if they have an influence-oriented trait, or it is the character's default ability level if the character has no such trait. 15

Table: A metonym meaning the immediate, lived play experience. In a roleplaying game, the table is like a stage or screen combined with the audience. Secondarily, the table is the surface that your lots roll off of. No, the four doesn't count if the die rolled off the table. 24

Tells 18

Temple of the Divine Experience: A sprawling collection of shrines, chapels, and meditation chambers around the Edge that converges in Flowers District at Sister Cheryl's monument to spiritual and religious communities. 88
Movers 171

Terminal, The: See D'Aubainne International Airport 130

Throckmorton Device 199

Throckmorton's Exterminators 95

Total Taxi 59

Traboc: A port city that's seen better centuries. It's the city that will not die, even as it ages slowly alongside the other communities on Al Amarja. 135

Traits: The game mechanic statistics that form your player-character record. 14
capabilities by level 28
capability grades 15
examples 16
main trait 14
main trait vs side trait 14
side trait 14
unfair abilities 17

Transdimensionals 185

Trouble: A game mechanic or trait that represents qualities that inspire strong reactions or unpredictable situations. 17
examples 17

Tulpas: Thought-forms given a semblance of form. 176

Twists: An unexpected or unusual result, as determined when you cast your lots. Threes mean bad twists, and fours mean good twists. 33
examples 34
rerolls 35

Ultimate Ritual of Consciousness 191

Underground, The 185

Vivisection Cinema 117

Vlada 21

Weird: The capability that measures a character's ability to achieve goals against resistance using paranormal power of one sort or another. Typically, Weird equals the character's level if they have a trait that gives them a useful paranormal power. If the character has no such trait, Weird is 0. 15

Weird, Urban Danger 10

Winds of Change 105

Zazen Sushi 95

Zeke's 133

Welcome to Al Amarja

The Ultimate Democratic Republic of Al Amarja welcomes you. As you adjust to our marvelous island, allow us to make certain issues clear in advance.

Liberty Is Job One: Personal freedom is respected. Broadly speaking, you are free to take any job for any pay and free to purchase any goods and services for any remuneration or compensation agreeable among the parties involved. Free from State interference, you are welcome to patronize businesses with whatever degree of reliability, authenticity, safety, and privacy that you wish to pay for.

Measure 23: The threat of international terrorism has forced the State to temporarily assume sweeping powers, as outlined in Measure 23, the details of which must remain classified.

Disarmament Means Peace: Weapons are strictly prohibited. The State takes upon itself the terrible burden of monopolizing lethal force, for the protection of all stakeholders and the perseverance of good civic order.

Drug Use is a Medical Issue: Drugs are medicine and as such are conveniently regulated by the State's universal healthcare system. For the convenience of citizens, reputable establishments are authorized to distribute caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, peyote, nutmeg, bath salts, LSD-25, and other medicinal substances. Opiates are available only through a few official sources, and only to people who suffer. Drug users are enrolled in the State's experimental research programs automatically and at no extra charge.

It's Polite to Speak English: Efficiency and fairness necessitate that a society have a single, unifying language. You are free to express yourself in any language or paralinguistic medium, but please be prepared to answer to representatives of the State in English.

Paranormal Activity is Perfectly Legal: Paranormal individuals are invited to register with the State. Few governments today have the foresight to protect their stakeholders from paranormal crime, but here the State is ahead of the curve. For your own safety, please report unlicensed paranormal activity to the State. If you are a genuine paranormal yourself, please alert a State official so that you can begin the licensing procedure. You'll be glad you did.

Chart Your Course: Self-determination defines our society. Neighborhoods are free to handle most of their local concerns without micromanagement from the State. Even security concerns are best handled by those directly affected by them, not by faceless State entities.

Thank You for Your Consent: Your consent is deeply appreciated. The highest form of civil polity is based on consent. In light of these ideals, your consent to State policy is mandatory.

What is *Over the Edge*?

Several separate elements come together to make an ***Over the Edge*** campaign something different.

MODERN WEIRDNESS

The fictional world of ***Over the Edge*** is much like our own. In fact, it's like the world that many people think they live in, a normal-looking world, plus aliens, psychic powers, evil spirits, global conspiracies, curses, other dimensions, Akashic records, astral bodies, chakras, past lives, mind-control satellites, and maybe a slave camp on Mars. The action takes place a couple years in the future, and things haven't gotten any better in those years.

THE ISLAND OF AL AMARJA

All the action takes place on Al Amarja, an outlaw island in the Atlantic. Its main city, the Edge, offers things you can't find anywhere else, whether that's fashion, pharmaceuticals, entertainment, art, science, sports, medical care, body modification, or personal services. In addition to possibly finding what you're looking for, you're also quite likely to find things you're not looking for.

STORY ARCS

Typically, play consists of discrete story arcs, comprising possibly a few sessions, possibly many. Sometimes you repeat characters and plots from one arc to the next, sort of like sequels to a movie. Sometimes players create new characters for the new story arc.

FREE-FORM CHARACTERS

Players create their characters to fit the story arc. They invent traits for the characters. The game has no lists of traits to choose from, just examples. Your character must be human (at least mostly) and game-breaking abilities like mind control are off limits, but you have lots of freedom in envisioning your character. The GM sets a power level for the player-characters, which determines their relative capabilities.

EVERY ROLL OF THE DICE MATTERS

Choose a pair of six-sided dice with pips, ideally identical. Those are your "lots," and you "cast" them only when it really matters. Every time you roll, good things and bad things can result. Seriously good or seriously bad.

PLAY TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS

Run your character to create action at the table. In a movie, you like watching a character who fails sometimes, who is vulnerable, and who is not entirely predictable. It's the same with other players watching you play your character.

Advice for GMs

In addition to all the general advice, here are several points that are special to ***Over the Edge***.

Create Custom GMCs: Invent a custom GMC for each player-character, such as a nemesis, a fan, or any other character that somehow reflects the character's traits. It's nice to have them in mind at the start of the story arc, but it's fun to improvise them, too.

Reveal Secrets: Give information to characters when they look for it, although gaining the information may come with a price or a drawback. Players can make choices that are more interesting if they know what's going on, so err on the side of letting them know. Sometimes share secrets with the players as out-of-character information.

Characters Need to Act: Create goals that the characters can pursue by being active, curious, or talkative — even extravagant or showy.

Set Up Casts: Before calling for lots to be cast, frame the possibilities. Name the levels of the character and the opposition. Discuss what sorts of outcomes are likely. Give away some out-of-character information if it helps the players understand what's at stake.

It's OK to Fail: Lots of conflicts can be styled as "how well do you succeed?" or "how much of a beating do you avoid as you lose?" It's better for failure to lead to trouble than to a dead end.

Reward Good Action: When characters act boldly in pursuit of goals, and you want them to succeed despite the risks, they still suffer when they fail. Characters can do more by acting and failing than by avoiding conflict.

Enforce Consequences: Let the characters' actions have consequences — good, bad, and ambiguous.

Identify "Just for Fun" Casts: Sometimes the player casts lots for something relatively inconsequential. If you can't think of a noteworthy consequence for a three or a four, have the player cast the lots "just for fun." You can improvise action based on the cast, with the presumption that the results are not substantive to the plot.

Pace the Action: The longer your arc, the more moderately the action should progress. Short arcs should have immoderate action.

Managing Casts from Setup to Resolution

A good deal of thinking or framing goes into each cast.

Characters versus the World: Typically, a player needs to cast lots when their character is trying to do something that someone else doesn't want them to do. Sometimes it's the character acting on the world, such as trying to find the most authentic artist in the city, and sometimes it's a gamemaster-character taking hostile action toward the character, such as a rival trying to defame them in their professional circle.

Resolve a Question: The default question for a cast of the lots is, "What happens when I try to do XYZ?" It's a question with a meaningful answer, where a successful cast has a materially different outcome from a failure. Agree with the player what's at stake, at least for success or failure. You can leave twists to improvise if they come up, or you can talk about what those might mean, too.

Default Difficulty is One Level Ahead: If the players mostly cast their lots with a one-level advantage, that's best. That's where success is common enough to move the plot forward and failure is common enough to be a real part of the action. Sometimes you can adjust the difficulty by reframing the conflict. If fighting an enforcer toe-to-toe means an even-on fight, maybe the character just wants to get out of there in one piece. That's an easier task and can be attempted with a one-level advantage. If overpowering a security guard would be a two-level advantage, maybe there's a good chance that a scuffle will draw attention. In that case, taking down the guard quickly and quietly might be attempted at a one-level advantage.

Who is the Initiator? If the character is initiating the action, they succeed on a 7. If someone else is initiating action against them, they succeed on an 8. Sometimes other circumstances grant this advantage to the player or take it away.

The Player Casts Lots and Possibly Rerolls Dice: The player casts their lots. If the character has a 1-level advantage, they can reroll one of those two dice. They use the second roll even if it's worse. With a 2-level advantage, the player can make a second reroll after the first, and so on. If the character has a 1-level disadvantage, the GM can make them reroll either die. If the character has a 2-level disadvantage, what are they even thinking? Yes, the GM can make them reroll a second time. If the difference is 3 levels, success or failure is automatic.

Success and Failure: Succeeding usually means getting the outcome you were looking for, and failure means not getting it. The GM determines what the outcome is, although the player can make suggestions and often narrates the details of the outcome. In general, the more success the character experiences, the more narrative leeway the player has.

Twists — 3s and 4s: Good twists and bad twists bring something unexpected to the mix. It might be something as simple as an unexpectedly good or bad outcome, or it could be the start of a whole new plot thread. A 3 is a bad twist and a 4 is a good twist. Two 3s means a doubly bad twist or two bad twists, while two 4s means a doubly good twist or two good ones.

EXAMPLE PLAYER-CHARACTERS, 3RD LEVEL

CHARACTER	Mai	Rachid	Peregrine ~~("Pippin")~~ ("Perry")	Vlada
PLAYER	Blighty	Rob	Paul	Sean
QUESTION MARK	~~Nihilist ?~~ ~~Except on mission~~ Monomaniacal-?	Questing-? (lost faith)	Good kid-?	Altrustic-?
MAIN TRAIT	Revenant.	Maker of Life-Transforming Bombs	Juicer	Tranhumanist Neuroscientist.
SIDE TRAIT	Driver	Operative	Kid	Animal Trainer, genetic modification
FIGHT/SWAY/WEIRD	F: 3 S: 2? W: 3	F: 3 S: 2+ W: 3*	F: 2+ S: 3 W: 3	F: 2 S: 2+ W: 3
TROUBLE	~~Doesn't like being praised.~~ Reacts strangely to being praised	~~Children.~~ Follows clues into danger	When unsupervised	Acts erratically around other powerful women.
NOTES	Has flashes in past Find murderer	Find bomb maker	Professor Däde "My dad works at the University, well, he's kind of my dad..."	Estranged daughter Russian oligarch Here she can do science Annette, grad student

CHARACTER **PLAYER**

QUESTION MARK

MAIN TRAIT

SIDE TRAIT

LEVEL **FIGHT** **SWAY** **WEIRD**

TROUBLE

DETAILS AND NOTES

STRIKES

1

2

PLAYER-CHARACTER STANDEE

Each player draws their character on a fold-up standee. Players are allowed to complain (mine do), but they must draw their characters. In cases of true hardship, a player may be allowed to draw something else associated with the character: a prized book, a family crest... something. Drawing your character creates a meta-neural connection between your brain's motor center and its visual cortex, while circumventing the verbal.

NAME

FIGHT

SWAY

WEIRD

PLAYER-CHARACTER SUMMARY SHEET

CHARACTER	
PLAYER	
QUESTION MARK	
MAIN TRAIT	
SIDE TRAIT	
FIGHT/SWAY/WEIRD	
TROUBLE	
NOTES	

Glossary of Word Terms

action: The stuff that the player-characters do, experience, and suffer in the game world. We call it "action" to focus on things happening rather than on things going according to plan.

advancement: Player-characters that reappear in subsequent story arcs or in long story arcs gain specialties. Sometimes when a player-character reappears in a new story arc, they are higher level than before. In long campaigns, characters might advance to a higher level after a climactic resolution or as the alternative to gaining a fourth specialty.

arc: See story arc.

capability: One of three measures of what a player-character can accomplish in the game. The three capabilities are Fight, Sway, and Weird.

casting: Throwing your lots (dice). Unlike traditional divination, casting your lots in ***Over the Edge*** actually does tell you something important about what's going to happen to you next. Cast your lots only when you care about the outcome.

character: Imaginary person (or pseudoperson) in the game world, either a player-character like a protagonist) or a gamemaster-character (any other character, from an extra to a nemesis). Also, what you build through personal suffering, so you have that going for you.

damage: see strike. You take damage in three big chunks, with chunks of all different types.

dice: The lots that you cast are your two dice.

experience points, XP: Meaningless points occasionally awarded or deducted based on player behavior. See also advancement.

extra: A minor GMC that a player can improvise and portray while their player-character is off stage.

Fight: The capability that measures a character's ability to fight, one way or another. Typically, it equals the character's level if they have a combat-oriented trait.

gamemaster, GM: The one who runs the game, handling the gamemaster-characters, framing the action, keeping the right secrets from the players, and providing them the right information.

gamemaster-character, GMC: Any character that's not a player-character.

healing: Damage comes in big chunks called strikes, and your character can sometimes recover from them via actions at the table.

initiative: In a conflict, the character that's active has the initiative. In general, if a character has the initiative, they succeed on a cast of 7+. Otherwise they succeed on a cast of 8+.

karma: When the party has karma, a player can "spend" the karma to reroll a die when casting lots. If the party doesn't have karma, they gain karma when someone throws doubles. Each player also rolls for karma at the start of a new story arc.

level: A general measure of a character's abilities, or the same sort of number measuring the difficulties that characters face. Level 1 indicates unexceptional competence, level 5 indicates abilities beyond the world's best mortals, and player-characters are usually level 2 (expert) or 3 (elite).

leveling up: See advancement.

local color: Elements of the story that are primarily there to establish the tone or setting, such as a lively encounter with an unusual gamemaster-character.

lots: Your hand-picked pair of dice. Each player has two matched six-sided dice with pips as their lots. You cast lots to see how things turn out in the game.

nemesis: It's just possible that the game's author has coached your GM to create a scary villain who's ready to wreck your player-character.

paranormal: A catch-all phrase for fringe science, psychic abilities, magic, magick, magicke, extraordinary mutations, supernatural entities, and forces not of this world.

player: Someone who runs a player-character

player-character, PC: A character invented and played by a player. Similar to protagonists in traditional storytelling forms, although players are the audience as well as the performers.

reroll: Sometimes after casting their lots, a player can reroll a die. Sometimes the GM makes them reroll a die. Use the newly rolled value; no take-backs.

saves: Exceptional gamemaster-characters have one or more saves, and each save allows them to avoid the negative effects of being defeated by a player-character. When a GMC has a save, they can take a strike and keep on going. Even better, the GM can use the GMC's save to avoid other sorts of defeats, such as being captured.

story arc, arc: One or more sessions comprising the action around a group of characters. The story arcs that your play group participates in compose your campaign.

strike, to strike, stricken: A strike is damage of some sort, anything from getting roughed up in a fight to having all of one's chakras spun in reverse. If a player-character gets three strikes, they're out of the action. They might be dead, paralyzed, insane, comatose, debilitated, or otherwise made ineffective.

Sway: The capability that measures a character's ability to influence groups and individuals, one way or another. Typically, it equals the character's level if they have an influence-oriented trait, or it is the character's default ability level if the character has no such trait.

table: A metonym meaning the immediate, lived play experience. In a roleplaying game, the table is like a stage or screen combined with the audience. Secondarily, the table is the surface that your lots roll off of. No, the four doesn't count if the die rolled off the table.

twist: An unexpected or unusual result, as determined when you cast your lots. Threes mean bad twists, and fours mean good twists.

Weird: The capability that measures a character's ability to achieve goals against resistance using paranormal power of one sort or another. Typically, Weird equals the character's level if they have a trait that gives them a useful paranormal power. If the character has no such trait, Weird is 0.

Glossary of World Terms

Words the characters hear, learn, and maybe use.

actor: Someone who does things, which is to say someone directed by a service to undertake actions in pursuit of unknown ends. In common parlance, an "agent." In terms of word origins, this word is basically the same as "agent." Actors that operate secretly are called cloaks.

adept: Someone who is skilled at some paranormal discipline, or art, especially someone trained and not just a prodigy or a natural.

Al Amarja: A volcanic island in the North Atlantic. Its major city is the Edge. The nation is the Ultimate Democratic Republic of Al Amarja. It's a pariah state, but it keeps a low profile. Don't worry, that volcano is never going to blow.

Arms District: The neighborhood in the Edge where State power is concentrated, especially the Peace Force. You must pass a checkpoint to enter.

apocalypse: Environmental degradation, ocean acidification, climate change, rising sea levels, Earth's 6th great extinction, rising extremism, proliferation of nuclear technology, artificial intelligence smarter than we are, DNA experimentation, mind control, designer drugs, messianic expectations — everyone knows that the end is near, maybe several ends at once. An apocalypse is a revelation, and the fate of humanity is soon to be revealed. But hey, did you see what happened on Throne of Blood last night?

Broken Wings District: Where the elites feel comfortable living, working, and playing.

burger: A newcomer. Polite Marjans will tell you that it's spelled "burgher" and means "citizen," but when you hear people using the term it sure seems like they're talking about ground meat. Sometimes pluralized as "burgers" ("Three burgers walked into a bar...) and sometimes treated as uncountable ("There's too much burger at this party"). See also newkie.

Charon's, St. Charon's Hospital, the Hospital: The Edge's one real hospital. Large, modern, well-equipped, and willing to make a deal when it comes to your fees. Dr. Nusbaum is the genius behind the leading-edge services to be found here and nowhere else. Pronounced KARE-onz.

Cheryl, Sister: Cheryl D'Aubainne, the First Prophet of the Temple of the Divine Experience. You know you love her. She makes Al Amarja viable, with all the spiritual support she provides to a hard-pressed populace. She naturally works closely with the State, to the benefit of all.

cloak: An undercover actor, a secret agent.

Constance, Sir: Constance D'Aubainne, the CEO of Swaps and chief business mogul on the Island. Buy low, sell high, and all can be yours. She makes Al Amarja viable, thanks to all the transactions her network enables. She works closely with the State, benefiting from a natural and inevitable synergy.

D'Aubainne: The Island has long benefited from the wise and beneficent rule of the D'Aubainnes. Currently, Jean-Christophe D'Aubainne leads the Island as its beloved Head of State. Sister Cheryl and Sir Constance lead the society's spiritual and commercial efforts, respectively. Their father is Our Martyred Leader.

D'Aubainne, Cheryl: See Cheryl, Sister.

D'Aubainne, Constance; Sir Constance: See Constance, Sir.

D'Aubainne, Jean-Christophe, His Unassailability: Head of State, brother to Sister Cheryl and Sir Constance. Measure 23 mandates high security and limits personal appearances by His Unassailability.

D'Aubainne University: A renowned center of higher and lower learning, located in Science District. The Moreau Veterinary College is the University's most prestigious and cutting-edge school.

district: One of several neighborhoods in the Edge. Occasionally Marjans use the term "borough," especially (for some reason) in plural: "boroughs." See Arms, Broken Wings, Flowers, Four Points, Gold, Great Men, Justice, Science, and Sunken.

Edge, the: The Island's major city, divided into strikingly distinct neighborhood, or districts.

enforcer: A general term for the people entrusted with street-level policing. Some of them are paid security staff, others are some variant on gang thugs, and in Four Points they're mostly baboons.

Flowers District: The Edge's trendy arts and entertainment district. What passes for "entertainment" here might be classified as mental illness or organized crime in most civilized cities.

Four Points District: For people who want plenty of street cred, there's this district, where life is cheap and baboons patrol the streets.

Freedom Day: The summer holiday celebrating freedom. Observance is mandatory.

Gold, District of: This neighborhood features Swaps, a massive office complex and trading center where people buy low, sell high, and live life the way Sir Constance D'Aubainne wants them to.

Great Men District: This neighborhood is something of a disaster, although the people are reportedly unified and uplifted by their devotion to the Glorious Lords and the power of metal.

grub, to grub: anything you ingest, whether eaten, drunk, swallowed, smoked, vaped, held between the cheek and gums, taken as an enema, blown into your nasal cavities, snorted, or misted into one's bedroom all night. Also, to eat, drink, swallow, smoke, vape, hold between cheek and gums, take as an enema, allow to be blown into your nasal cavities, snort, or mist into one's bedroom all night. Usually you itch the grub you grub, or else why would you grub it?

Island, the: Al Amarja. In figures of speech, "the Island" often substitutes for "the world" or "Earth," as in "Where on the Island have you been all this time?"

itch, to itch: want, need, craving, obsession; to want, to need, to crave, to obsess. For example, "I itch some of Dogu's grub."

jawfish: Rando, whoreson, bastard, animal, vermin, regular person. Plural: jawfish.

Justice District: In this neighborhood, a local self-help organization has blossomed into a full-service vigilante corps. Otto's Sports Club organizes the "clubbers," who carry baseball bats and pick on weirdoes. Visitors welcome, but honestly not all visitors.

Last War: Conspiracy nutcases say that the world is on the verge of a cataclysmic conflict, a global war so final that it will be the "last war," the war to end all wars for good or ill. Humanity will be transformed or destroyed, maybe both. But hey, did you catch the game last night?

Marjan, Martian: Al Amarjan. The j is pronounced many different ways: zh-, sh-, ch-, j-, h-, the German ch-, and occasionally k- or g-. The zh- sound is correct, but that means nothing, so it's not really true.

Measure 23: This topic is classified, per Measure 23. Requests for information can be made in person at the Ministry of Public Safety in the Plaza of Arms.

Metro: The rail system connecting the districts in the Edge. The State wants you to know that the Metro is efficient, clean, and safe, and you will build solidarity with your fellows as you share the ride.

Moreau Veterinary College: A vast college where most of the best, new research is done. Humans are animals, and at any time Moreau has several field tests running in the Edge.

neighbor: A paranormal creature native to Earth, not human but possibly close. The opposite of a stranger.

newky: Newcomer, especially one not steeped in cynicism. Often the term is used affectionately, but more often it occurs in a predatory context. Also burger.

nokay, no-K, NOK: No, not OK, screw you, let's fight right now.

Novemberfest: The Island's creepy and lurid autumn festival.

Dr. Nusbaum: The reclusive genius behind St. Charon's Hospital and its many operations throughout the Edge.

OK, okay: Yes, amen, agreed, blessed be, I yield.

oppenheimer: A fringe scientist, a mad scientist, a scientist.

org: Organization, especially a less formal or less public one, one that you wouldn't call a "club" or a "company." Sometimes orgs are fronts for services. Other times orgs are about to be infiltrated until they become fronts for services.

Our Martyred Leader: Jacques D'Aubainne, formerly the beloved leader of Al Amarja. Father of Jean-Christophe D'Aubainne, Sir Constance, and Sister Cheryl. Marjans sometimes express love for "our martyred leader" that they would never express for a surviving D'Aubainne. He died about twenty years ago, and the most people know about that is that the Underground got him.

paranormal: A catchall phrase for abilities, technologies, and entities that are kept secret from everyday jawfish.

Peace Officer, the Peace, the Peace Force: Police officer, a zip. They don't carry firearms, but they have body cameras and drone backup. "The Peace" means, roughly, "the police," but usually you'll hear "the zips" instead.

perp: What the zips call anyone who's not a zip. High-status perps do not get called perp to their faces. Some perps embrace the term, but others hate is. Uncle's Security wants you to know that their agents are perps like you. They're not zips, and you can trust them.

the Presidentials: Al Amarja's secret service, empowered to protect the President, whatever that means and no matter who gets in the way. Measure 23 gives them the secret authority and legal powers they need to keep the President safe, and they do it all with you in mind.

Science District: This neighborhood is home to the notorious D'Aubainne University, and the landlords and businesses in the area cater to university students and to out-of-work recent graduates.

service: A general term for a shady organization that sends actors into the field, especially one with no public front. The conspiracies that are working to control or destroy humanity are services. Like an org, but with indefinite boundaries. Lots of orgs are fronts for services, whether they know it or not.

State, the: Al Amarja's government is here for you. This service supports D'Aubainne University, the Peace, and the Presidentials. The president of the Ultimate Democratic Republic of Al Amarja is His Unassailability Jean-Christophe.

stranger: A paranormal entity that's not from Earth. The opposite of a neighbor.

stricker: Someone from a district, implicitly someone from a different district, outsider in general. Sociologically similar to the term "gentile," which means "someone from a tribe (that's not our tribe)."

Sunken District: This neighborhood stakes its claim on being sane and safe enough for newkies. That's their story, and they are sticking to it.

Swaps: A sprawling commercial institution that facilitates transactions of all sorts, run by Sir Constance.

Temple of the Divine Experience: A monumental structure devoted to the spiritual needs of all, run by Sister Cheryl.

the Terminal: Technically, this term refers only to the building at the center of the D'Aubainne International Airport, but everyone refers to the airport as "the Terminal." You've seen the monstrous ziggurat spiraling into the sky, and you know why everyone just calls the whole place "the Terminal."

Uncle's Security: The private security firm that handles street-level policing in the best parts of the Edge. They treat you with respect and don't call you perp.

the Underground: Is it a nefarious organization bent on toppling the State and destroying humanity? Is it a figment of the State's propaganda? By one definition, everything that happens against the wishes of the State is "the Underground," from actual treason to speeding, and possibly the tide.

war: What this universe is about. See the Last War.

zip: A Peace Officer or any police officer of the State. Assassins, spies, and other cloaks that work for the State are pretty much zips. Anyone who's not a zip is a perp.