

ÆONAUT

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THERE'S JUST YOU, AND ME, AND THIS VAST BURNING SEA
OF EVERYTHING WHICH EVER WAS AND IS EVER TO BE.
LET US JOURNEY TOGETHER IN OUR SEARCH FOR ITS GOLDEN LIGHT,
AND SHOULD WE DISCOVER UNKNOWN FRIENDS
OR SHOULD FEARED ENEMIES SHADOW OUR STEPS,
IN THE END WE SHALL ALL MEET ON ITS SHORES AT MIDNIGHT.

AEONAUT

a live-action roleplaying game of alternate reality
wrestling with the theme of “Immersion”,
hurriedly cooked up for Little Game Chef 2009
including the ingredients:
“burn”, “sea” and “midnight”.

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One moment there was nothing but the mist and clouds, engulfing the mountain like a colourless sea. Then, suddenly, a shadow of the church was in front of me, towering ghostly and pale in the haze, as if the cloud had just given birth to her blurred outline. One more step, and she was looming over me. I pushed on and, quick, I darted right into her heart.

Quietly, I walked a few more steps - whose sound echoed soft and cold - and dropped on a bench as in prayer. Marks left from the heartquake of a few years before were still visible, as cracks in the frescoes and portions missing from paintings, half-healed scars in the church's walls.

Calming my breath, I focused on the meaning of it all. I felt the touch of the One True Sea I was floating in - not freezing like the colourless winter mist, but burning warm instead with golden light - and got to know this particular gulf of it, the "soul" of the place as the unschooled mind would have it.

The violent contraptions of the earth through this ancient hilltop had been those of labour, hence a myriad stories were born: strands uncountable of history, most of them not yet triggered nor told, released into the vast burning sea to swim, free, and fend for themselves. Not an act of destruction, indeed, but a display of generative power as wild, as fierce as the thunderous mating of salmons in the cold crystal waters of river springs.

By Working the Rites within my mind, I harvested the Seed of Beginnings. What a treasure, precious as no mundane pearl could ever be: and I made myself the richest of all divers, indeed, by storing such a gem inside of me.

Thus, by tapping into the power of Beginnings, I shall now commence a labour myself: a labour of ink and words...

GAME OVERVIEW

ÆONAUT is a roleplaying game intended for 2 or more players. It could be described as a “live action” roleplaying activity, as it doesn’t take place in a single locale where all of the participants are sitting or standing together simultaneously, but rather requires each player to assume the role a character – or fictional persona – they are to portray full-body and full-mind, through every single gesture or thought, over an extended period of time. A full game is to go on for the length of two days plus the night inbetween, at a minimum, although an even longer duration can be agreed upon.

The fictional backdrop of the game ÆONAUT is a fantasy version of planet Earth in the present time, infused with mysticism and occult themes which are held as an undeniable truth by some or all characters in the game, but otherwise indistinguishable from “real life” in the “real world”.

This text assumes the reader will be portraying the titular “Aeonaut” in the game, and instructs him or her accordingly.

The character you will “create” in preparation of and play during a game of ÆONAUT closely resembles your real self, if not for a few choice differences. One key difference is that your character is a member of a secretive esoteric organization named “the Exploratory Order for the Navigation and Charting of the Aeons of the One True Sea”, with the rank of *Aeonaut Practicus* (also known as an Initiate of the Third Rank).

Invite one more player to participate in the game as your Traveling Companion. Choose a person you share a strong relationship with, such as an intimate friend or spouse. As your Companion, she will also “create” and play a character very much like herself, who has to your character the same kind of relationship she has to you in real life. There will be, though, at least one key difference between the player and her character: that your Traveling Companion has just learned of your character’s involvement with the Exploratory Order for the Navigation and Charting of the Aeons of the One True Sea.

As part of the game, you’re going to travel together to some place you’ve never been to, usually a city with a long and complex history. It’s a real, physical journey you’re going on: prepare accordingly.

Additional players can join you, with no limit to their total number, although all participants have to be arranged in pairs, each composed of one Aeonaut and one Traveling Companion. A participant mostly interacts with the other player they’re paired with. Little interaction, if any, will be had between different pairs during the actual game, although some of the preparatory steps can be undertaken communally, and all the players should get together for an informal debriefing session in the aftermath of the game.

In a game of ÆONAUT there is no need for an “organizer” figure who does not himself play a character; all of the participants are to portray a character, either an Aeonaut or the Traveling Companion to an Aeonaut.

THE FICTIONAL SETTING

THE BURNING SEA OF EVERYTHING WHICH EVER WAS AND IS EVER TO BE

The common man's view of the world is tainted with un-reality veiling the truth. Those who have understanding know we are at a time One with the Everything, but also unwittingly separated from it by our own ignorance of non-separatedness.

A former member of the Exploratory Order for the Navigation and Charting of the Aeons of the One True Sea once summarised Truth as follows...

“The Oneness manifests through the Aeons, which are simultaneously both components to the One and emanations of it. Picture Aeons as perpetual flames, burning with golden light without consuming their own substance, but also flowing like water: huge marine currents big and strong enough to wash away worlds, made of smaller currents, and smaller, and the smallest of the currents are thinner than single drops. They flow from past to future and from future to past, so history itself, not just matter or thought, is encoded in their flow. Past, future, and present are but a matter of knowing how to navigate.

“Thus, everything is like a sea: a burning sea of the purest light. Such is the intimate shape of reality. And that is exactly what you see when you learn to look beyond the stained façade. Then you begin to understand you are a drop of its water too.”

THE EXPLORATORY ORDER FOR THE NAVIGATION AND CHARTING OF THE ÆONS OF THE ONE TRUE SEA

The Order was purportedly established in 1901 by one Alexander Emerald, regarded by his disciples as a peerless master of wisdom despite little being known about his life and deeds. “Alexander Emerald”, though, is widely believed even by faithful Initiates of the Order to be a *nom de plume*, and speculations about the true identity of the much-revered founder range from identifying him with a woman named Alice Emerald (who would have been just about 20 years old at the time) to claiming he was just another façade for the immortal and eternal *Comte de Saint-Germain*. According to the lore of the Order, “Alexander” didn't create the organization *ex novo*, but rather re-founded it as a revival of some unnamed and immensurably ancient circle of sages whom he claimed had a hand in caring for and nurturing human history since its very inception; the Order thus takes pride in tracing its own lineage to a mythical age “before Atlantis”.

The stated purpose of the Order is to achieve a greater understanding of Reality itself, symbolically described as Immersion in the One True Sea of Oneness. Achieving understanding, however, is said to be one with working the unseen gears of reality so as to direct history – of both mankind in particular and the universe as a whole – toward a greater good. One can maybe better grasp the meaning of such a statement by considering that “good” is defined, according to the doctrines of the Order, as *the one necessary course of action* as estimated by an omniscient mind of perfect intelligence. Those few critics of the Order who have learned of its existence but chosen (for whatever reason) not to undergo initiation nor to observe its secrecy, have variedly judged and described the ultimate goal of its members as “henosis”, “gnosis”, “self-deification” or – in one case – “the working of world-altering magic”.

Initiates in the Exploratory Order for the Navigation and Charting of the Aeons of the One True Sea, after completing a period of learning and training as *neophytes*, pride themselves of the title of *Aeonaut* – that is, “he who navigates between Aeons”. Their internal system of ranks is as follows, listed from lowest rank to highest:

- Æonaut Zelator (1#10), or Child of Earth.
- Æonaut Theoricus (2#9), or Breather of Air.
- Æonaut Practicus (3#8), or Traveler of Water.
- Æonaut Philosophus (4#7), or Master of Fire.

Higher ranking members exist: they are referred to by the generic epithet of *Adeptus* and said to command great power as well as greater-than-human levels of understanding. Very few people have ever reported meeting an *Adeptus*, though... Or maybe we meet them everyday, but can't tell them apart?

Initiates bearing the rank of *Aeonaut Practicus* form the bulk of the Order. They are usually scholarly people of unassuming appearance, whose deep understanding of the secret workings of reality does not easily show through, except in that they are driven by an unappeasable curiosity and capable of rare flashes of astounding insight. They travel the world, on occasion, looking for places where some special resonance between layers of meaning makes the veil of un-reality thinner: places where they can better gaze into the churning waves and fiery golden light of the Aeons so to burn deep into themselves a chart of the currents of the One Sea. It is also whispered that, as the capacity of a human brain is limited, this very act “spends” the Aeonaut in a way, somehow eroding his capability for learning more.

Philosophi act as mentors and overseers to the lower ranks, coordinating the activities of *Practici* and classifying the knowledge they collect. They are the primary vehicle of communication within the Order, as the secrecy is often so tight that the average *Practicus* knows no other member in person but the *Philosophus* he reports to. Voices are the “Masters of Fire” are all Aeonauts who “retired” before they got “spent”, but none in the world could confirm or disprove this who is not bound by Order policies to the strictest secrecy in such matters.

THE ENEMY

The Order has enemies. Reality itself has enemies, it is said. Whether it's former Aeonauts who got “spent” past a no-return point (they got *burnt*), or the manifestation of something more sinister yet, all it is understood is that the Enemy is a master of deception and stealth – for not even the insight of the Order can spot it and know it for what it is. The Aeonauts can trace detailed charts of the currents underlying reality itself, through the past and the future, and still the stain of the unknowable remains: some Enemy lurking unseen in a darkness which should not be.

All is known is that, despite the valiant efforts of the Order, horrible things still happen in the world which don't align to the greater good. All is known is that things happen which betray predictions, unnatural alterations in the currents of history no Initiate or *Adeptus* ever planned, nor planned *for*. All is known is that Aeonauts sometimes just disappear, unmade from both the past and future, and comrades searching the One Sea for signs of them can't find but the tiny scar of their non-being.

Hence the secrecy of the Exploratory Order: every Aeonaut knows his mission to be a dangerous one, the most dangerous one there could be.

PREPARING FOR A GAME

Besides asking one or more fellow players to join you, there are six more things you need to do before you're ready to play a game of *ÆONAUT*:

- define your character;
- play a Revelation Scene with your partner;
- research your destination;
- plan your travel;
- choose or set up an address you'll be reporting to;
- set up the Midnight Meeting.

The above steps need not to be taken in a particular order, except as follows: you and your partner are strictly required to first define both of your characters (*Aeonaut Practicus* and Traveling Companion) before you can play a Revelation Scene together. Also, setting up the Midnight Meeting is likely to be the last thing you take care of (but it doesn't need to be). Otherwise, the preparations can be undertaken in whatever order you like.

Note that completion of such necessary preparatory steps can be spread over as long a period of time as you wish.

DEFINING A CHARACTER

In *ÆONAUT*, you'll play a character who corresponds *almost* exactly 1:1 with you real self, *except* for a few elements which have to be established beforehand. This process is slightly different whether you are the *Aeonaut Practicus* or his Traveling Companion, but the general principles and guidelines are the same. In either case, to complete this step you'll need one standard **sheet of paper**, one **scrap of paper** or leaf from a pocket-sized notebook, and some writing tool.

NAMING YOUR CHARACTER

There are two approaches to how to choose a name for your character, each with distinct benefits and drawbacks: you can either **use your real full name** or **make up a fantasy name**. In the end, you have to decide for yourself what you think works best for you, but you should also keep your partner involved in your choice, as you'll be mostly interacting with each other when actually playing the game.

Making up a name for your character helps you focus on the character as a persona distinct from your own real self, both increasing the excitement and easing the burden of playing the game. There are, however, occasions when being called with your real name by some non-player is unavoidable, such as when signing in to a hotel: such circumstances may register as disturbances in the game, unless your character shares your name. Your partner may also risk making the mistake of calling you with your real name at times, which wouldn't be a mistake at all if your character too was called the same.

As an attempt to prevent some if not all of the problems outlined above, you can experiment with some mixing and matching between the two methods, such as using your real first name together with an imaginary surname, or else keeping your actual family name but picking a given name of your choice.

When making up a “fantasy” name, however, remember to keep it believable, so as not to feel weird to non-players or upset anybody during the game. Last, the most important thing: choose a name which carries some meaning for you.

Once you’ve decided on a name, write it at the top of the sheet of paper, then go on.

BEING THE AEONAUT

If you are to play the role of the Aeonaut in the game, then the first key difference between you – the player – and your character is established already. On the sheet of paper, just beneath the name you chose (which may well be your own), write:

“I am an Æonaut Practicus (3†8), an Initiate of the Third Rank, in the Exploratory Order for the Navigation and Charting of the Æons of the One True Sea.”

This is still not enough, however. You want to make your character feel more concretely distinct from your real self. To this effect, think of a significant element of your life – such as a very important event which happened in your past, a major trauma you suffered, or a person you met and somehow changed you. Write this element down on the separate scrap of paper (**not** on the sheet with your character’s name on it).

Your character is different from you in that the element you just wrote down is **not** a part of him. The stated event never happened in his life, or the important person was never met. To signify this, the scrap of paper will later be destroyed in the Ritual of the Burning.

Still, a replacement is needed for the part of your life you just tore away. Think of something which never actually happened to you, but which you deem would have been of great importance if it had – then add this fact to the larger sheet, beneath the name and the fact your character’s a member in the Order.

See? Your character is just like yourself, minus something important, but with something important added in as well. Spend some time considering the implications of this change: if “A” never happened to you, but you experienced “B” instead, in which ways would you be a different person today? In which ways would you be the same? In case anything especially unusual strikes you out of your own elucubrations, you can record such a thought in writing as well, if you wish.

You now have a “character sheet”: you should learn it by heart, as you won’t be able to reference it while playing. Tuck it away somewhere, together with the separate scrap of paper you’ll later burn, but feel free to go reread it as often as you like before the game actually starts. Also, remember to share the contents of it with your Traveling Companion: the aim of the character definition process is to develop a fictional persona, not to surprise your fellow player. Besides, the Traveling Companion and Aeonaut characters have, likely, been knowing each other long enough (as part of their respective fictional background) to know much about each other’s circumstances of life and personality.

A warning, by the way, is in order: as you choose what to erase from your life and what to add to it, be careful not to sever your relationship with your Traveling Companion in the process. The bond occurring between the two characters should, for the intents of this game, be roughly the same bond the two of you share in your real life.

BEING THE TRAVELING COMPANION

If you are to play the role of Traveling Companion, understand that you'll be portraying a fictional character who is connected to the character called the Aeonaut in the same general way as you are bound to your fellow player in your real life: friend, spouse, lover... Your character will also be like your real self in most other regards, but there are also going to be differences – differences of your own devising.

So far, you have a sheet in front of you, with a name on it but otherwise blank, and also a separate blank scrap of paper. Now, think of a significant element of your life – such as a very important event which happened in your past, a major trauma you suffered, or a person you met and somehow changed you. Write this element down on the smaller scrap of paper (the one with no name on it).

Your character is different from you in that the element you just wrote down is not a part of her. The stated event never happened in her life, or the important person was never met. To signify this, the scrap of paper will later be destroyed in the Ritual of the Burning. Be careful, however, not to write the other player out of your character's life this way: the two characters, as already stated, need to be in a relationship as the two of you share for real.

A replacement is needed for the part of your life you just tore away. Think of something which never actually happened to you, but which you deem would have been of great importance if it had – then add this fact to the larger sheet, just under the name you chose. Thus, your character is just like yourself, minus something important, but with something important added in as well. Spend some time considering the implications of this change (if “A” never happened to you, but you experienced “B” instead, in which ways would you be a different person today? In which ways would you be the same?) and in case anything especially unusual strikes you out of your own elucubrations, you can record such a thought in writing as well, if you wish.

With this, the character is *mostly* complete: show your “character sheet” to your partner, while in turn you have a look at his. Discuss the details of both characters as needed and try to get an idea of how their mutual relationship is different from your real one in its details because of how these fictional people differ from you; do not, however, nail anything down in this phase, but know that there will be times during the actual play of the game when you'll be surprised.

Remember that, in her fictional life, your character doesn't yet “know” of the other's membership in the Order: she will “learn” in the Revelation Scene.

Now, as a final act of making your character not yourself, decide on a Secret: something your partner the Aeonaut doesn't know about his Traveling Companion, and won't know unless told by you. Don't tell the other player your Secret, but write it down on your “character sheet” just before committing it to heart and hiding it away. You're still allowed to reference what you wrote anytime you like until the actual game begins, but not to change a word of it, nor can you show it to the other player anymore.

THE REVELATION SCENE

Having defined your respective characters, Aeonaut and Traveling Companion, you and the other player play a single scene together. To “play” means you each have to assume the identity of the character you created for yourself, behaving as you feel your character would behave and speaking what you believe your character would speak.

It is called the “Revelation Scene” because it represents the time when the Traveling Companion first learns the other character is an Aeonaut. This happens most likely because the Aeonaut tells her, probably out of trust. You can however prefer a different kind of Revelation Scene, such as the Companion getting hold of one of the Aeonaut’s letters to his mentor and reading it. Both characters have to be in the scene, anyway, and they should be alone (even if just “alone” in the middle of a faceless crowd). A brief brainstorming discussion is likely in order, but avoid scripting how the scene is going to develop – not even inside of your head.

The scene can be set wherever you can conceivably meet and talk alone: home, at your favourite pub, you name it... Don’t just “imagine” a location, however, but rather **go there** and play out your scene right there. You don’t need to be any louder than you’d be in a normal conversation, nor to say especially weird things, so it’s ok to play the scene in front of a crowd of strangers: ideally, they shouldn’t even notice.

In case you planned a long journey with multiple stages (see “Planning your travel”, below) you also have the option of doing the Revelation Scene at an intermediate stage while on the move.

With the Revelation Scene, some new facts are established in the fictional “lives” of the characters. Now the Companion knows of the Aeonaut’s affiliation and mission, and the Aeonaut is likely holding her as a candidate for initiation into the Order; he’ll have her follow him on the next trip he’s going on for the Order, either as an initiation rite of sort or for need of a trusted helper.

RESEARCHING YOUR DESTINATION

Members in the Exploratory Order for the Navigation and Charting of the Aeons of the One True Sea know all sort of strange bits of lore about places far away in the world or just behind the corner, and travel to such places to harvest occult energies. You should be similarly prepared.

Choose a destination for your journey – a place you’ll travel to and where you’ll play the game – and do some research on it. Actually, you can as well start researching some topic you’re interested in and discover a suitable destination in the process.

Your destination will usually be a city, a town, or a readily identifiable area of comparable size. Research historical facts, basic geography, topography both natural and artificial (such as the local architectural landscape), as well as the social and cultural landscape of the area... Any bit of information you’re able to find will somehow contribute to the picture, although any specific information you may *lack* won’t carry any significance when playing the game, so there’s no need to strive for completeness.

Be especially interested in *odd* lore: legends and myths, shadowy or debated episodes in history, unidentified ruins or works of art, “haunted” locations, curious pieces in museums, any occult theories which may somehow be connected to the area (disposition of “ley lines”, *Feng shui*, unconfirmed prehistoric dwellings, numerological implications in the size and shape of older buildings, pentagrams or other shapes recognizable in the city layout itself... you name it). As soon as you stumble upon a whole trend of conspiracy theories referencing a Masonic or Rosicrucian group supposedly active in the chosen area just at the time the local church was built, you’ll know you’ve picked the best destination for your journey indeed.

The Internet, including such general use websites as search engines and Wikipedia, is typically the best starting point for your researches, also because of being a favourite avenue of conspiracy theorists and the occult fandom. Taking your time to read books on

the most striking topics, however, is often a worthwhile endeavor, especially once you've got a few pointers. Remember that unsuspecting pieces of writing, including literary classics and the canonical texts from major religions, are often ripe with "occult" content hidden in plain sight.

Some players may prefer spending weeks or months in research, holding it as an entertaining activity on its own regards, while others may satisfy themselves with just a quick glance at a source or three: there's no "right" or "wrong" way to do this, as long as you enjoy yourself. If you're coordinating with other pairs of players to run a game together, by journeying to the same destination, you can also do research together, as a communal activity; but you are under no obligation to do so.

While the Traveling Companion player can help if she likes, research falls mostly on the Aeonaut player, who will be the one exposing "secret" knowledge in the game. Fictionally speaking, any *Aeonaut Practicus* is likely to know more, and be privy to deepest truths, than real world occultists of any age – truths and secrets learned from immersion in the Burning Sea as well as resonance with other powerful Initiates of the Order, or revealed to them by their *Philosophus* overseers. Truth is, such a "secret knowledge" you just make up, and you don't need to make it up before you start playing (unless you want to) because when it comes down to it you'll be able to rely on improvisation; having a platform to build on, however, ought to make improvising easier, and that's what research is for.

PLANNING YOUR TRAVEL

Once you're set on an interesting destination, this step just consists of performing such mundane tasks as establishing dates, reserving hotel rooms, buying transportation tickets and so on. You should, however, plan according to the specific needs of the game *ÆONAUT* (as described in the next chapter); some suggestions follow.

When considering your destination, choose a place where you can move freely on your own: a city where you can simply walk around downtown on your own is great; a guarded archeological site thirty kilometres away from the nearest center and only open to visitors six hours a day, not so much. An archeological site you can't enter except by booking for a guided tour is not an appropriate destination for a game of *ÆONAUT*.

Set a duration for the game, no shorter than two days, including the day of your arrival and starting with it. You can decide on a longer game, as well as reserve one or more days to enjoy your destination as a "normal" tourist *after* the game is over (you can't do this *before* starting the game). Don't plan on arriving at a late hour, unless you compensate for it by making the game one day longer – as the time of your arrival is when the game truly begins, while it always ends with a Midnight Meeting.

Also, take care that enough time is left for a comfortable, relaxed debriefing. Scheduling it on the day departure is only appropriate if everything is set so that you are not in a rush to leave. Planning for it to happen during the return trip is only ok in case all the participants are travelling together and in a quiet, relaxed environment such as a train carriage with separate compartments – but it's not appropriate in case, for example, you're going by car and one of you has to drive.

As you're going to perform the Ritual of the Burning the night before you arrive on site, and then you'll spend the next hours – until arrival – in a Twilight phase, try to account for it. If your destination is just a few hours from where you live, you're able to perform the Ritual at home. When travelling to a far away place, however, you're best served by planning a multi-stage journey: book a room to stay for a night somewhere not far from

your actual destination, perform the Ritual of the Burning there, then cover the final length in the the morning and get the game started.

Aeonaut player and Traveling Companion are most likely to take the journey to their destination together, but it's also ok to travel alone and just meet as you get there: start the game with your meeting if this is the case.

When two or more pairs are taking part in a game, they should still get to their destination in pairs: because of this, the pairs likely have to travel separately even if all of the players are residents of the same area. In case the journey takes multiple stages, however, you can all travel together up to the place where you plan to undertake the Ritual of the Burning; past that point, you've got to part ways and journey alone or in pairs to your chosen destination.

AN ADDRESS FOR THE AEONAUT TO REPORT TO

In the course of the game, the Aeonaut player is going to file reports to an authority figure, a fictional character of higher rank within the Order, such as an *Aeonaut Philosophus* (Initiate of the Fourth Rank) we assume to act as a mentor to the *Aeonaut Practicus*. Reports take the form of letters to be sent the *Philosophus*, at least once a day; you can write those on paper and post them by "snail" mail, send out e-mails if you are taking a laptop computer with you, or whatever mean of (written) communication you think is feasible and you find appealing.

You want to write and post such letters while staying "in character". It is therefore in your best interest, so as not to break your immersion, to think of the exact method in advance and set up an address you'll be writing to. This can be as simple as asking a friend permission to send the letters to his place (just pretend the name and address of your friend are either the name and address of your fictional mentor or a cover identity). Alternatively, you can set up a "fake" e-mail account through one of many free e-mail services, or devise some method of your own which, by simulating secrecy, feels more believable to you and adds some amusing detail to the fiction. An example: in some countries you can rent an anonymous mailbox at your local post office, only identified by a number. You may even want to write your letters in a cipher, or send encrypted e-mail messages! No need to overdo this, though: only include such a detail in the game if you personally enjoy it.

While writing your reports in ink on paper would indeed be fashionable and appropriate, I have a reason to favor e-mail: automatically having a copy of sent messages available to show everybody during the debriefing of a multiple pairs game.

ESTABLISHING THE MIDNIGHT MEETING

The game ends with an appointed meeting of all the participants, at midnight on the final day. *Fictionally*, the Aeonaut has a scheduled meeting with the *Philosophus* he's reporting to, or some other Order member, but the characters in a pair don't expect other pairs to show up. As the routine of the game as it, however, all of the players are going to attend the Midnight Meeting.

You should pick a meeting point in advance, as a part of planning your travel. The Meeting has to happen at midnight, so understand you need to choose some place which is accessible, and not dangerous, at nighttime. Tapping into what you know from your researches, try to pick an interesting location, a place of significance you're fascinated with, or a scenic spot sporting a nostalgic vista. If such a thing exists at all in the location of the

game, choose a meeting point either located on the shores of the sea or other large body of water, or enjoying a nice view of it.

Before the game begins, maybe just before the Ritual of the Burning or in the Twilight which follows, set some alarm device so that it signals the end of the game, about five minutes past midnight on the last scheduled night. For a game with more than two players, having one alarm device per pair is nice, but likely redundant; setting up only one together just before parting ways is better, and doing the latter plus having another one as a backup is best.

BEGINNING THE GAME

THE RITUAL OF THE BURNING

Light a candle, or some similarly small flame. Take the scrap of paper you put aside when defining your character, the one with an element of your real life written on it. And burn it. You burn it in the fire so that nothing is left but ashes, then scatter the ashes.

Such is the Ritual of the Burning. You have to perform it the night before you play the game, preferably at midnight (but this is not mandatory), and always as the conclusive act of your day: the last *meaningful* act you perform in the whole day.

If multiple players (typically you and your partner) are undertaking the Ritual together, they share a single candle. If players who are not part of the same pair all perform the Ritual together, however, they must immediately part ways afterwards, not saying a word.

The Ritual of the Burning symbolises being yourself no more: you are now becoming your character. This requires an intermediate stage of metamorphosis, called the Twilight. Through the Burning and the Twilight you ritually and symbolically “become” your character.

THE TWILIGHT

Let the Ritual of the Burning be the last meaningful act in your waking day and go have some rest as soon as possible. You are now experiencing Twilight, the ritual condition of not being fully yourself anymore while still not having fully become another.

If you are in the company of your fellow player at this time, be detached: neither of you is sure of your current identity, and your relationship too only exists now in the limbo where half-formed things reside. Talk to your partner as little as possible, and only about concrete, practical matters; interact with her as little as possible, or not at all.

Experiencing Twilight means being neither “A” nor “B”, and only existing as the casual intersection of the two. Exteriorly, only do what both player and character would do, and preferably what both would do without a thought: the dullest, most ordinary things in your daily routine. Even inside your mind, practice the following thought exercise: avoid any thought which would belong to your real self but not to your character (such as thinking about the game as a game), as well as any thought that would be appropriate to the latter but not to the former (such as thinking of the Burning Sea of Everything as a real thing).

Don’t be afraid to be an emptied out shell of yourself: that’s ok, since you’re currently a chrysalis on its way to a change.

Most of your waking Twilight time is going to be spent travelling anyway. The experience of travel is usually either tedious or stressful: either way it should help you with your thought exercise, dictate your actions in a way that is not dependant on deep and careful reflection, and provide excuses for diminished interaction with your partner.

Once you get to your destination, you ought to be detached enough from your usual self that you can start “being” your character at last.

IT BEGINS WITH AN ARRIVAL OR A MEETING

The transition from Twilight to character immersion and playing the game ought to be a smooth gradient, not an abrupt change. As you are finally approaching your destination, experiment thinking what your character should: think of yourself as an Aeonaut, anticipate your immersion in this new gulf of the Burning Sea, wonder whether you're going to face enemies in this place. Still, we want to set a clear turning point, a milestone marking it has begun "for real" and there's no turning back.

If you're moving together with your Traveling Companion, that time is the time of your arrival. The moment you get off whatever mean of transportation carried you, the moment you set foot *for real* on the soil of the city or land you chose to explore, know that it's an *Aeonaut Practicus* of the Order who's setting foot there. From now onward, every simple task such as eating a humble breakfast at the station's café, riding the subway to your hotel and checking in, is part and parcel of the game: keep an eye open for signs of the enemy, who may perhaps already know you're here!

If you've got to destination separately, I still suggest you immerse in the right mindset since your arrival on place, but the "real" milestone and starting point it when you meet your partner. Greet as Aeonaut and Traveling Companion, not as your usual selves: while this may *look* exactly the same to a casual observer, it isn't.

PLAYING THE GAME

IMMERSING IN YOUR CHARACTER

Playing your character in this full-immersion game is almost the same as living your everyday life. All of the differences are kept within your mind. You walk around the city, visiting historical sites and architectural wonders, talk with your fellow player, and interact with non-players who don't have a clue you're playing a game. It should feel *almost* real, because most of it is real indeed, and what isn't is designed so to minimize whatever obstacle could get in the way.

From the start of the game to the ending, anything and everything you do is part of the game; you never have to "break out" of character. Sleeping and eating, taking care of personal hygiene... your character, being as human as you, and almost identical to you, would do exactly the same. Therefore, when you eat and when you sleep it is also part of the game, as anything is.

You interact with non-players as they were part of the game "world" as well and anything was real. Which means that, since secrecy is of great importance to the Order, you should never behave so as to upset anybody. Be as nice to people as you'd be were you not playing a game, and everybody will be fine.

You only have to break character for emergency reasons, or if you want to do so because the whole thing has become not fun. Those are both extreme cases which require no further analysis, as you'll easily know them when you see them.

PLAYING THE AEONAUT

As an Initiate of the Order on a mission, your main concern should be achieving metaphysical Immersion in the One True Sea and burn charts of its currents and gulfs into yourself, in form of *meaning* and *feeling*. Your researches should provide you a jumping point for localizing some places and objects, either natural or made by human hands, which strongly resonate with ideas in such patterns as to pierce the veil of un-reality. Visit such places and objects, and work your magic: being an *Aeonaut Practicus*, you should easily know how.

Actually, the resonance of ontological patterns is at times so strong that even the untrained mind can at times perceive glimpses of it, through various signs (or, occasionally, through the lack of discernable sign). Just focus on your thoughts and feelings in the most natural way: this is the simplest form of magic there is.

Beware of the Enemy, though: you should never let your guard down. Suspicious looking people (as well as suspiciously *inconspicuous*-looking people!) who happen to constantly pop-up wherever you go may well be agents of unreality stalking you. Remember: no magic known to the Order can affect the Enemy! Keep a low profile all the time.

You've also got a duty to file reports to your mentor, which you should attend daily, at a minimum. These reports can be in the style you prefer – telegraphing an "ok, no enemies spotted" is also fine – but most Aeonauts prefer detailed accounts of the places they visited,

the gulfs of the Burning Sea they gazed into, and the meaning of the Aeons they charted. Due to the nature of his trade, an Aeonaut's writing can get overly symbolical at times, but a *Philosophus* in the Order should indeed be able to understand metaphoræ.

This one mission, however, is unusual in that you're not travelling alone. Whatever the reason you took a Traveling Companion with you, you're now responsible for her. If you're planning for her initiation into the Order, maybe you should start teaching her right now: teach her how to cast her gaze into Reality. Or maybe you think she doesn't fully believe, yet... What should you do, then? Believer or not, you've got to keep her safe from the Enemy! That, too, is fully your responsibility.

PLAYING THE TRAVELING COMPANION

As the Traveling Companion, you mostly follow the Aeonaut around. You know little of the "truth" he exposes you, and maybe you're fascinated with it, or maybe you don't believe it at all.

You are a human being with a relationship with another human being, and this relationship is being changed by discovering he's not what you knew him to be. But you, in turn, are keeping a secret from him – revealing it or not is entirely your call, depending on what you come to think of your companion in the course of the game.

Either way, the relationship you experience in the game is subtly different from the bond the two of you share in your real life: behave accordingly.

ENDING THE GAME

THE MIDNIGHT MEETING

You have a meeting set for midnight the last day. As a character you know this: you're going to meet with your *Philosophus* mentor (or some other member in the Order, if you prefer and that makes sense to you). And, you're going to take your Traveling Companion with you. The reasons why you're doing this are up to you – maybe you want to introduce her to your mentor to be initiated in the Order? – and whether the other member is expecting her or not is also up to you. In fact, those elements can only come up during play as themes of conversation between you and your Companion.

You don't *have* to drag you Traveling Companion to the meeting in case she doesn't want to, or if this runs contrary to the direction things have been developing toward in the game. Not attending the Midnight Meeting may rob your fellow player of a climatic ending of sort, though, and of a ritually sanctioned sense of accomplishment – so, think twice.

You'd rather get to the meeting point somewhat early. The Order member you're waiting for won't show up, naturally, but there's no need to get overly dramatic over this: being five or ten minutes late doesn't have to imply she's in trouble. But if you feel you have reason enough to worry, or simply wish to do so, please do.

Thus, the most likely “ending” to a two-players game of *ÆONAUT* is a picture of the two of you talking and waiting for the *Philosophus*, either anticipating her coming or wondering why she's late. Cut.

In a game involving more than just two players, on the other hand, somebody else is bound to show up at the Midnight Meeting. It's time for a little bit of suspense: are these people enemies? Maybe you noticed them already, poking suspiciously around the city... Don't let your guard down! In the end, somebody's likely to volunteer he's an Aeonaut – but can those words be trusted? Remember the Order is secretive and shy, and the Enemy's a master of deception.

Then, as tensions are not yet resolved, you'll hear an alarm thrill: the game is over.

You are now in Twilight, again. Part ways without telling a word.

TWILIGHT, AGAIN

The Twilight you experienced just before beginning the game was chiefly an exercise, preparing you to feel one with your character. The Twilight you experience now, after the game is over, as you transition back from being a character to being your old usual self, is a time of quite reflection. You don't abruptly “snap” back to reality; don't suddenly laugh or clap hands or pat your friends on the back (save those things for the next day, if you wish). Instead, you take your time to acquaint yourself with yourself again and meditate alone on the implications of the experience you just lived through.

Part from your fellow players quietly, have a slow walk to the place you're staying at, and get some sleep. All the while, try to repeat the thought exercise of twilight – being neither “A” nor “B” but just existing at the dullest and less meaningful intersection of the two – but

if a bout of meaning suddenly occurs to you just ride with it, as long as it's somewhat grounded in retrospection on the game you just played. Let yourself be carried away.

This final Twilight phase officially ends when you wake up the next morning. Now the game is *really* over.

DEBRIEFING

Debriefing is an integral part of the ÆONAUT experience and is not optional. Preferably the day just after the game is over, get together with all of the other participants and have a good time. Having debriefing over breakfast or lunch is fine, and when there are only two players it is maybe the best time. Don't hurry it: be sure you have all the time you need to take it easy, so that you can talk things over and over again.

It's going to be an informal, relaxed debriefing session: you just tell each other how your last few days were, in no particular order. Swap travel stories, impressions about things you've seen, and the kind of things friends would talk about just after visiting a new place, as you actually did.

Talk about your experience with the game and critique the game itself. Recall and recap the imaginary events which occurred. If anything was left unsaid between character and character, say it now. Do this in front of everybody, unless you feel it's really a private thing, in which case wait to be alone with your partner (but be sure to tell her, don't forget!). Traveling Companions should reveal their secrets, at last, if they didn't already while playing. It would be nice to carry your "character sheet" with you and show everyone. Aeonauts who kept copies of the letters they wrote are invited to pass them around or read them aloud.

FINIS TERRÆ

I come here tonight fighting this cold breeze which is the one and only hint of the sea. So deep is the darkness, pitch black and not a star or mote of Moon, that nowhere - north or south or west - can I draw a line between the water and the sky. While I well know of lands beyond the sea, and further again, had I no lore and no greater sight I could not tell just by the eyes of a man that this rock is not the last reach of Earth, the end of it all.

The church and castle on top of the cliff, barely visible as faint outlines, could easily be of the stuff of dreams, balanced precariously on rocks which have no roots, floating loose in the lightless void. Temples vowed to more maternal beings have been built and burnt and built and burnt again, until the last stones left of them became the seat of this newer church - which is now itself not new, nor faring well.

As I cling to a pillar and lean onto the black, a vast expanse of black whose feel still suffocates me, I cast my gaze into the one Sea which is real, burning alight even at midnight: and the ghostly cold's now mixed with womb-like warmth, and I finally hear the wailing of the waves.

Far away rings the echo of a bell, while already has my journey come to an end.