

PEL001

Based on the work of Jack Vance

# The Dying Earth

Roleplaying Game

Designed by

**ROBIN D. LAWS**

**JOHN SNEAD**

**PETER FREEMAN**



Pelgrane Press





# The River Isk, departing Lumarth,

wandered in wide curves across the Plain of Red Flowers, bearing generally south.

For six halcyon days Cugel sailed his skiff down the brimming river, stopping by night at one or another of the river-bank inns.

## At the village Troon,

the river emptied

into the Tsombol Marsh, and Cugel sold the skiff for ten terces.

To repair his fortunes he took employment with the town butcher, performing the more distasteful tasks attendant upon the trade. However, the pay was adequate and Cugel steeled himself to his undignified duties.

He worked to such good effect that he was called upon to prepare the feast served at an important religious festival.

Through oversight, or stress of circumstance, Cugel used two sacred beasts in the preparation of his special ragout.

Halfway through the banquet the mistake was discovered and once again Cugel left town under a cloud.

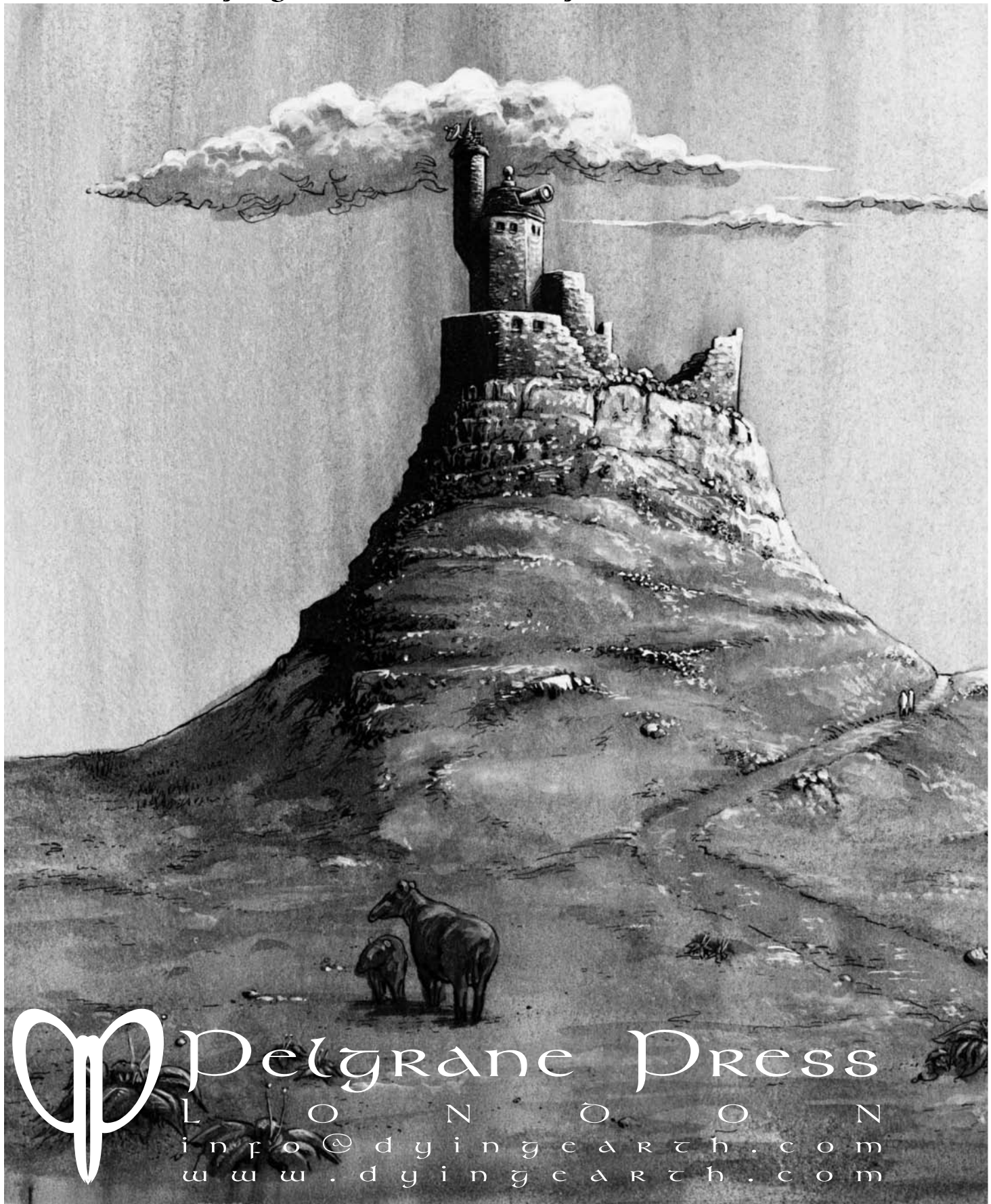
## After hiding all night behind the abattoir

to evade the hysterical mobs, Cugel set off at best speed across the Tsombol Marsh.

—Jack Vance, *Cugel's Saga*



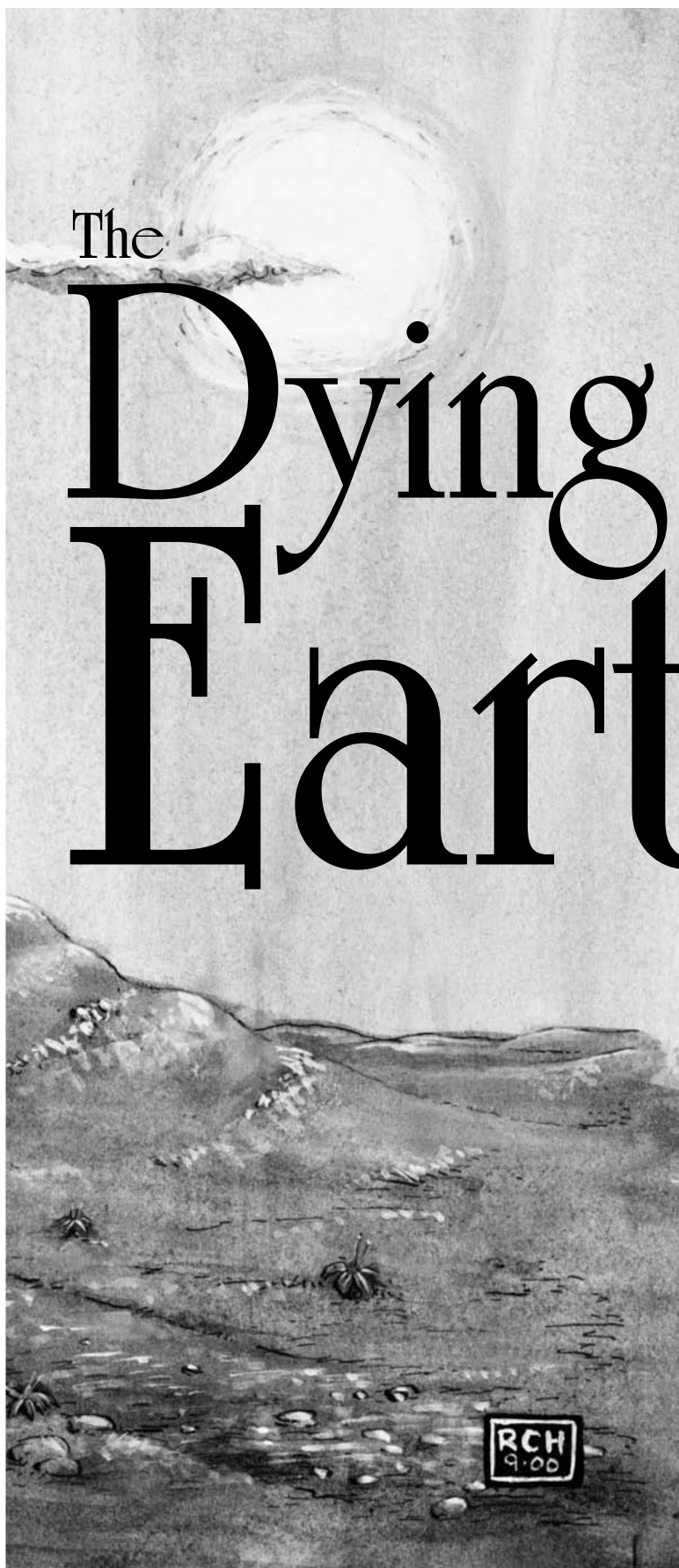
Based on the Dying Earth book series by JACK VANCE



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# The Dying Earth™

## Roleplaying Game

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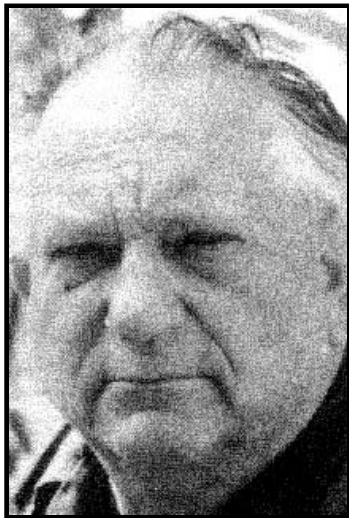
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E-mail questions and comments about this game to Pelgrane Press at [info@dyingearth.com](mailto:info@dyingearth.com), or write to **Pelgrane Press Ltd., 18-20 Bromell's Road, London SW4 0BG, UNITED KINGDOM**. No phone calls, please. Visit us on the World Wide Web: [www.dyingearth.com](http://www.dyingearth.com).

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## About JACK VANCE and *The Dying Earth*

**John Holbrook Vance** (born San Francisco, 1916) began writing professionally while serving in the Merchant Navy during World War II. In a prolific career spanning seven decades he has won many awards for his science fiction, fantasy, and mystery novels. Jack Vance's fiction has strongly influenced later writers and attracted devout fans worldwide.

Vance writes for intelligent readers. His fiction displays consummate style, wit, imagination, and an unmatched ability to conjure vivid, exotic, yet convincing societies. A Vance character seldom resorts to violence, preferring cunning or persuasion—or, in the *Dying Earth* stories, the occasional magic spell.

Vance's first published book, *The Dying Earth* (1950), takes place in Earth's unimaginably far future, when science has passed away and magic rules the world. He revisited the setting in *The Eyes of the Overworld* (1966), *Cugel's Saga* (1983), and *Rhialto the Marvellous* (1984). Some *Dying Earth* characters only dabble in magic, like the wily rogue Cugel the Clever; others struggle for mastery, like the rising young magician Turjan; an elite few are vain arch-magicians, such as Rhialto.

The Pelgrane Press *Dying Earth* roleplaying game, authorized and approved by Vance, lets you create your own magical stories with characters of any power level. Even if you haven't yet read the stories, or you've never played a roleplaying game, the simple rules conjure a Vancian atmosphere for Cugels, Turjans, and Rhialtos alike. All you need to play are this rulebook, a few ordinary six-sided dice, paper and pencils, two to six reasonably cooperative players, and lots of imagination.

## The Authors

Principal designer **Robin D. Laws** has inveigled such game publishers as Wizards of the Coast, Last Unicorn, Pinnacle, FASA, and Steve Jackson Games into compensating him for his efforts. His works include the roleplaying games *Feng Shui* (Atlas), *Glorantha: Hero Wars* (Issaries, Inc.), and *Pantheon* (Hogshead), and the novels *Pierced Heart* and *The Rough and the Smooth* (Atlas).

Magic rules designer **John Snead** has, to his astonishment, designed no fewer than six magic systems for roleplaying games. He has also written for the *Trinity*, *Aberrant*, and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* RPGs.

**Peter Freeman**, an established genre author, contributed the illustrative "Daybook of Geomalacus," "Journal of Xolon the Hide Merchant," and "Disavowal of Jhail" sidebar texts. He holds a degree in Ecological Genetics, which offers an interesting perspective on the creatures of the *Dying Earth*.





The quotations in the upper right corners of these pages come from Jack Vance's books *The Dying Earth*, *The Eyes of the Overworld*, *Cugel's Saga*, and *Rhialto the Marvellous*.

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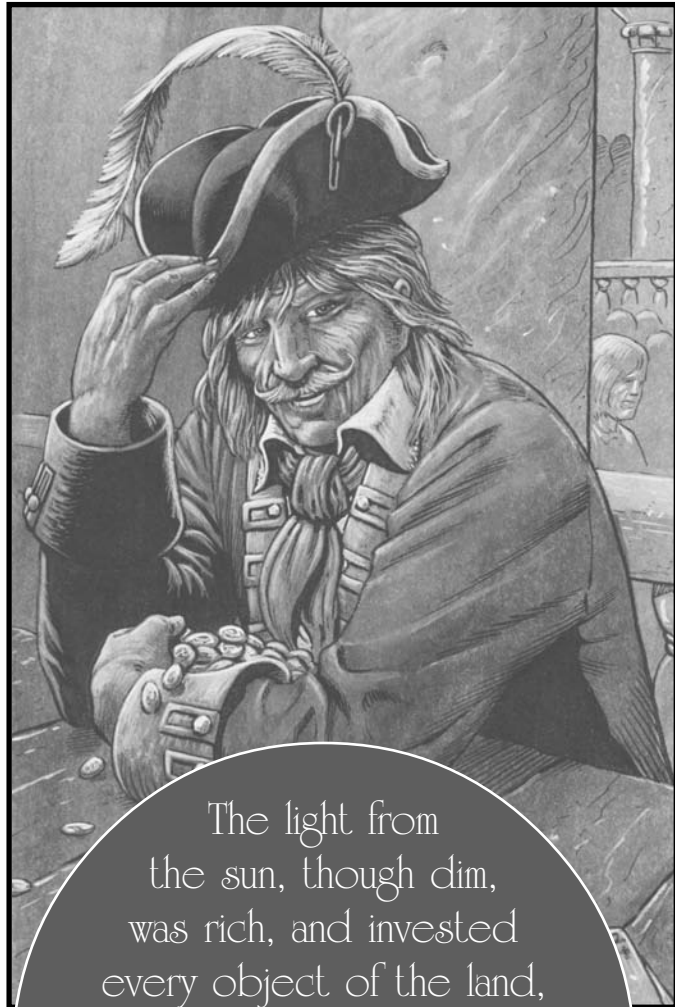
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The light from the sun, though dim, was rich, and invested every object of the land, the rocks, the trees, the quiet grasses and flowers, with a sense of lore and ancient recollection.

*The Dying Earth,*  
Chapter 3

## Chapter 1:

# Getting Started

A rules overview for novices and veterans alike. Essential for cogent discussion, yet perforce cursory and plagued by a rebarbative generality

**I**n a nameless inn, the only such establishment in the remote outpost of Purna, **Kurnio** sits at a table with three other unfortunate travelers. ☼ The strangling humidity of the day clutches at Kurnio's throat. It has wilted the usually impudent feather that perches atop his fuschia tricorn hat. Even his notoriously luxuriant blond locks hang lankly over his wide lace collar, itself now sadly limp. ☼ He studies his three companions. **Buthander** is corpulent, short-fingered, and greedy-eyed. The absurdly muscular **Uthral** has a violent aspect about him, perhaps suggested by his incessant habit of crushing hard-shelled shof nuts in his oversized fist. The man who calls himself **Phonoraj** looks as if his face was squeezed in a vice in his childhood. His ferret-like eyes dart disconcertingly about the table. ☼ These are not men whose company Kurnio would, under normal circumstances, seek out. But during an unfortunate encounter with bandits, Kurnio was recently separated from the contents of his purse. If he is to pay for his seat on the only carriage out of Purna this week, he must rectify his poverty. ☼ Luckily, he has a special deck of cards in his pack, along with a set of ingeniously-weighted dice.





Thus and so. If we are agreed, I will invest you with the knowledge.

## How It Works

You and your friends have gathered to play your first session of *The Dying Earth* roleplaying game. The others gathered with you tonight have played **roleplaying games** before, but this is your first time. You vaguely know that a roleplaying game is a strange hybrid of strategy game and interactive storytelling, but aren't clear on the details. You'll soon learn more.

*Note: Although this section is addressed to inexperienced roleplayers, old hands should give it a quick skim. It gives a precis of some of the game's unusual concepts.*

## The Game Moderator

One of your friends, Alex, seems to be in charge. He tells you that for this game he'll be the **game moderator**, abbreviated **GM**. His job is to act as a combination of narrator and referee. You and the others are **players**. Each of you takes control of a fictional character called, appropriately enough, a **player character**, or **PC**. You determine the choices your PC makes in the course of each story, which is called an **adventure**. Because this is your first game, Alex hands you a **character sheet** he has prepared in advance.

## Playing a Character

The other players have created their own characters using the rules in the next chapter.

### Kurnio

Persuade (Eloquent) 8, Rebuff (Contrary) 8, Attack (Finesse) 8, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 8, Health 6, Appraisal 2, Athletics 3, Concealment 3, Etiquette 2, Gambling 6, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 2, Perception 4, Quick Fingers 2, Scuttlebutt 1, Stealth 2

Possessions: Amulet of Virtuous Shielding 4, feathered tricorne hat 2, rapier 3, deck of cards (marked) 1, loaded dice 1

Temptations: Indolence 3, Rakishness 6, Gourmandism 2

You will play this character, Kurnio. Once you've figured out the basic concepts of roleplaying, the GM will allow you to change your character or create a new one.

The words and numbers on Kurnio's character sheet are the game

statistics you need to measure your PC's abilities against the obstacles he's likely to encounter in the adventure. The GM will explain what they mean as you go along. For now, all you need to know is that a **higher number is better than a lower one**.

## Format Notes

**Whenever you see a word or phrase highlighted in boldface print, like so**, it indicates an early appearance in the text of a vital concept. We highlight it to fix it firmly in your memory.

Words highlighted with an underline, like so refer to footnotes. The notes most often appear at the bottom of the page on which the underlined word is found.

Our unalloyed self-interest impels us to recognize that both men and women play (and buy) games. However, in order to avoid awkward sentence constructions, when we need to refer to a hypothetical player or GM who may be either male or female, we reserve the right to arbitrarily switch between the pronouns "he" and "she" as whim buffets us.

Because the other players are experienced with this sort of game, Alex has decided to focus on you and your character for the adventure's first few scenes. Your friends wait semi-patiently as Kurnio takes center stage.

Alex describes to you the scene on the facing page. Kurnio needs money to get out of the backwater trading post where he is stranded. He has decided to try to gamble his way out of trouble, and has selected three likely prospects for his scheme.

(For the sake of example, Alex has started the adventure having made a major decision for your character. Normally, the GM wouldn't just tell you that you'd decided to sit down at a table to gamble with a group of strangers. He'd let you decide what Kurnio wants to do.)

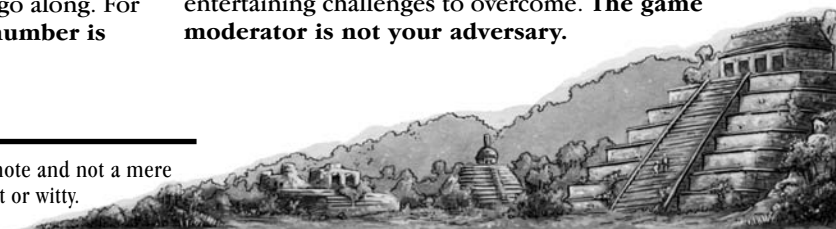
## Game Moderator Characters

Alex has described a number of characters who are not controlled by you or any other player. Buthander, Uthral and Phonoraj are all **GMCs**, which stands for **game moderator characters**. This means that the GM speaks their dialogue, makes choices for them, and rolls the dice on their behalf when they try to do things.

The GM uses GMCs to keep the story interesting. Although they might aid your character when the story calls for it, they're much more likely to act as obstacles to your character's success. Selfishness and greed are second nature to the people of the Dying Earth, who are perpetually trying to swindle and outmaneuver one another.

However, the GM is not out to get your character, or make you fail, so much as he is working to give you entertaining challenges to overcome. **The game moderator is not your adversary.**

**with an underline, like so:** Were this an actual footnote and not a mere example, this sentence would say something important or witty.





## Getting Started

### Life on the Dying Earth

#### The celebrated fantasy novels

by Jack Vance on which this game is based—*The Dying Earth*, *The Eyes of the Overworld*, *Cugel's*

*Saga*, and *Rhialto the Marvellous*—portray the exploits of characters ranging from vat-grown beauties to wandering scoundrels to vainglorious magicians, who eat, drink, gamble, explore, and cheat their way through what is widely presumed to be the final era of history. Above them, the sun has reddened and grown spotty with age; all assume that it will soon extinguish itself.

The cities of Dying Earth are places of exotic and decadent beauty. Strange foods and bizarre clothing are commonplace. The world is littered with forgotten ruins and plagued by dangerously effective predators. Only the foolhardy or powerful venture far from the safety of their communities. The latter group is intimately familiar with arcane secrets of magic, which, though wondrous and impressive, are mere shadows of the achievement of previous ages.

Alex now asks you what you want to do.

Not having done this before, you hesitate. What *should* you want to do?

### Thinking as Your Character

Think about the situation from your character's point of view. He needs money. He is sitting with three strangers who quite likely have some. How can Kurnio best separate them from it? You look to your character sheet for guidance.

The first section lists your character's **abilities**. These are the things Kurnio does well. You see that "Gambling" is one of his listed abilities.

"Can I use the Gambling ability to cheat them at a game of cards?" you ask.

"You surely can," Alex replies. If he wasn't sure what the ability could do, he'd check the definition given for the ability in Chapter 4. But games of chance are common occurrences in *Dying Earth* games, so Alex already knows the definition. (In answering your question, Alex is fulfilling another of the GM's roles, as interpreter of the rules. **The GM, not the rulebook, decides how his game runs.** If he doesn't like a rule, he can change it. However, he should warn you in advance that he's done

so, so that you're not making assumptions based on rules he's altered or eliminated.) "But first you'll have to convince them to play."

"All right then, I want Kurnio to propose a game of cards to them."

### Speaking as Your Character

Alex suggests that you speak in Kurnio's voice whenever possible, delivering his dialogue as an actor would. This makes the action of the story seem more vivid and immediate. Although you'll still speak out of character from time to time, the more you can talk as Kurnio, the more real he will seem. (Sometimes the GM may have to ask you whether you're speaking in character or as yourself. Although it gets a little confusing at first, switching between your own voice and that of your character will quickly become natural.)

You try again, this time as Kurnio: "How about a little game of cards, to pass the time?"

"The others think about it for a moment, then agree, in principle, to a game," says Alex. "Phonoraj withdraws a pack of cards from his bag." Alex now affects a slightly deeper voice, to show that he is speaking as Phonoraj: "I submit that we use my cards, which are beautiful examples of the printer's art dating from the 20th Aeon. Further, we should play the local game, funereal swirl, the rules to which I can elucidate in less than an hour."

You don't like the idea of the shifty-looking Phonoraj determining the terms of the game. You wish to determine his honesty. "Is there any way to tell," you ask Alex, "if those cards are really antiques, like he says?"

### Using Your Abilities

Alex explains. When you want Kurnio to do something, his success is by no means assured. Unless the action you want him to undertake is trivially simple, **you roll a die** to see if he did what you wanted. This game uses a garden-variety six-sided die. You need only one die. Your GM and the other players also need one die apiece.

Kurnio's Pedantry skill allows him to know obscure facts. You might be able to use it to identify an authentic set of antique cards. Alex tells you to roll. **Any result above 3 is a success. If you roll a 6, something especially good happens. If you roll a 1, however, something bad happens.**

You get a 3, which is not good enough. You look dejected. Your first attempt to do something, and it failed!

Never fear. In this game, you often get a second—or third, or even fourth—chance.

**the 20th Aeon:** that is, the distant past. *Dying Earth* adventures take place in the 21st Aeon. When the GM introduces a term you don't understand, just ask for a quick definition.







### Trying Again

The number listed after Pedantry on your character sheet is your **ability rating**. Your character starts his career with a **pool of ability points** equal to his rating. He can spend these points on many things. Chief among them is the **reroll**, a new attempt to use an ability.

In a normal situation like this, each reroll costs you 1 point. Kurnio's Pedantry rating is listed as 2, which means that you can reroll up to two times before your Pedantry pool runs out of points. You may or may not want to spend all of those points on one action.

You decide to spend a point to reroll, and get a 5. Your Pedantry pool goes from 2 to 1, but you've succeeded after all. Alex tells you that Phonoraj's so-called antique deck is an obvious forgery, of the sort sold for a pittance in the bazaar stalls of Almerly. Now that you know Phonoraj to be a liar, you're even less inclined to agree to his terms.

Should you confront him with his lie? It's up to you. **Trying to anticipate consequences and make the best choices is central to success** in a roleplaying game.

You think about it. If you cause an argument with Phonoraj, you might scare the others away from the table and lose the chance to win their money. You decide it's best to keep your knowledge under your fashionable hat, for the moment.

Picking up on Alex's use of elaborate language for Phonoraj (a staple of speech in the Dying Earth, even among the lowly), you say, "Surely we must use my battered deck of cards, for it would be a shame to accidentally dog-ear that fine set you have there, Phonoraj. And perhaps a simpler game would tax us less on this brutally humid day."

### Persuade and Rebuff

In this case Kurnio is trying to persuade Phonoraj to accept his terms. You look at Kurnio's game statistics and see that he has an ability called **Persuade**. In brackets it lists the word "Eloquent." Alex tells you to ignore this for the moment. Later he'll explain the words in brackets.

You roll the die and get a 5. "I've convinced him!" "Not so fast," Alex explains. "Phonoraj gets to defend himself against your persuasion attempt." The ability that **counters** Persuade is called **Rebuff**. In his notes Alex has Phonoraj's game statistics, which say that he has the needed ability. Because Phonoraj is a GMC, Alex rolls on his behalf. Alex also gets a 5, a success.

So Phonoraj is not so easily convinced. But all is not lost. You can cancel out Phonoraj's successful defense by rerolling your own die.

You decide it would be bad to let Phonoraj win the argument, so you spend 1 point to reroll. Your Persuade pool goes from 8 to 7. You roll a 6. This is an **Illustrious Success!** It puts Phonoraj at a disadvantage: He has to spend an extra 3 points from his Rebuff pool in order to keep going. The Illustrious Success also gives you a **boon**, an increase in your pool value. Your Persuade pool goes up by 2, from 7 to 9.

Alex decides that Phonoraj must conserve his remaining Rebuff pool in case you want to later convince him of something with even worse consequences. Speaking as Phonoraj, he says, "Hmph. I am forced to concede the merits of your argument."

### Taglines

Then Alex hands you three slips of paper, each with a line of dialogue written on it:

"Could this entire group, all keen observers, have witnessed the same hallucination?"

"You are just in time to belabor this wretch with your truncheon."

"The question is shrouded in technicality."

These are your **taglines** for the evening's session. (Most people play in **sessions** that last for an afternoon or evening—three to four hours at a time. It may take multiple sessions to play out a single adventure. Much more rarely, you might play several adventures in a single session.)

The tagline is a line of dialogue (often drawn from Jack Vance's works) that you are rewarded for delivering during play. The more appropriate your use of the line is to the situation at hand, and the more entertaining your use of the line, the more **improvement points** you'll get at the end of the game to improve your character.

*Dying Earth* stories differ from the typical fantasy narrative in that we're not always rooting unreservedly for the characters to succeed. The protagonists are often selfish or overconfident, and we're as happy to see them get their comeuppance as to thwart or humiliate supporting characters even worse than themselves. Unlike other roleplaying games, we do not reward the character for succeeding at his chosen goals, which here may or may not be admirable. Instead, **we reward you, the player, for making the game entertaining**, and for periodically reminding everyone of the style of dialogue to which they should aspire.

GMs usually give out two taglines at the beginning of each adventure, and ask you to choose one from a list given later in this book. For the sake of introduction, Alex waited until you'd mastered the basic idea of roleplaying before assigning your first taglines.





# Getting Started

## Familiar Terms

**Die:** A traditional six-sided die of the sort found in board games everywhere.

**Game statistics:** The words and numbers on a character sheet. These measure your character's abilities against obstacles encountered in an adventure.

**Game moderator (GM):** The person who guides the story, a combination of narrator and referee.

**Game moderator character (GMC):** A character played by the game moderator.

**Player character (PC):** The characters you and other players pretend to be in the story.

**Series:** An ongoing, connected set of *Dying Earth* adventures. A game series resembles a television series, with each game session roughly corresponding to an episode.

**Taglines:** Lines of dialogue players are rewarded for delivering during the story. The more appropriate and entertaining the line, the greater the reward.

## Interacting with Player Characters

As the game continues, you feel you're catching on to this roleplaying business. You prosper in your card match against Phonoraj, Uthral, and Buthander. (You are already thinking of Kurnio as your alter ego. When Alex says, "You look across the table at them," you know that he means Kurnio, your PC.) You win 20 terces, more than enough for your carriage fare. Yet your opponents seem resentful of your victory, especially Phonoraj. He follows you outside the inn and, with burly Uthral at his side, drags you into an alley. He accuses you of cheating.

"Your speculations are without foundation," you respond.

"I know what cards you were supposed to have, because we were cheating, too!" Phonoraj sputters. "Uthral, show him the penalty for cheating more skillfully than us."

Alex, seeing that you've figured out the basics of the game, tells the other players that their characters should now make their first appearances. Paul is playing the long-winded sorcerer Recondit the Precise. Mark's character is a treasure-minded fellow named Avanastran. They describe their characters' appearance to you. Both

Recondit and Avanastran happen to be strolling down the very alley in which Uthral intends to thrash you. Although neither Paul nor Mark is under any obligation to make his character cooperate with yours, Recondit and Avanastran are curious fellows who, coincidentally, also need fares for their passage out of Purna.

Mark speaks, as Avanastran. "Do we interrupt?"

Looking at your taglines, you realize that one of them is ideally suited for the current situation. "You are just in time to belabor this wretch with your truncheon," you say. All laugh. The GM makes a note of how many points you've scored towards the improvement of your character. At the end of the session, he'll tell you how many total points you've gained. You set aside the slip with that tagline; you can only earn the reward once.

Avanastran says that he may or may not have a truncheon, which might be employed on behalf of the highest bidder. You convince him that he ought to fight on your behalf. Alex decides that Phonoraj and Uthral are too cautious to fight a bold and unknown opponent. They skulk away. Alex knows you haven't seen the last of them; they'll try to get back at you when they can engineer more favorable circumstances.

## The Plot Thickens

Now obliged to pay Avanastran's fare, you head off to the carriage post. Recondit follows, hoping to argue that his silent presence contributed to the thug's decision to leave, and thus that he also deserves at least the price of a ticket.

But when the three of you arrive at your destination, you find that the carriage is gone. Its owner, a round-bottomed man with a handle-bar mustache and furry pantaloons, shakes his fist at the heavens. Hot tears stream down his face. You question him, and it seems as if his carriage has been stolen out of thin air. He turned his back for only a few moments, and then it was gone. There are no new track-marks in the dirt road. It is as if something lifted the carriage up into the sky.

The carriage man offers you free passage to the destination of your choice if you can solve this mystery for him and recover his vehicle. The three of you agree to this, promising to help.

Remaining in character, you, Mark, and Paul begin to work through the best course of action. How does one investigate the disappearance of a carriage? The evening's central mystery has presented itself. The direction of the rest of the adventure is up to you.

## On With the Game!

And that's roleplaying, along with some basic rules of the game, in a nutshell.

If you're going to be a player, all you need do now is go to the next chapter, which shows you, step-by-step, how to create a character of your own. (You can use

Kurnio's game statistics, if you like, as long as

you're the only player in your group to do so.

You don't want everyone playing the same







## Important Matters to Forget

### If you have played other fantasy roleplaying games, be aware that

*Dying Earth* characters and adventures differ in important ways from your past experience. You'll enjoy this game more if you forget the assumptions of most other fantasy settings. For instance:

1. **If you're in a fight, something has probably gone horribly wrong.** Many fantasy adventurers thrive on combat, but *Dying Earth* characters prefer to avoid violence. Far better to gain the upper hand through verbal verve, cunning, wit, and treachery. An attack upon your person can only mean your duplicity has been uncovered. The game's combat system makes it hard to win fights after an injury. Far better to flee, then return in the night to exact a cold, crafty revenge.

2. **Characters are more or less alike.** A great attraction of other roleplaying games is the deep exploration of the unique characters you create—their histories, backgrounds, motivations, speech patterns, and so on. Not here! Though Jack Vance conjures many complex characters in his other novels, the *Dying Earth* stories present lightly characterized, streamlined personalities. Everyone speaks in the same eloquent style; here at the end of Earth's life, few desire more than a comfortably decadent existence, preferably at the expense of their fellows. The *Dying Earth* character system gives all the detail required to suit the stories' atmosphere.

3. **Killing? How uncivilized.** Though countless small towns and villages follow their own idiosyncratic customs, most communities frown on open murder, even in self-defense. A human combatant who offers surrender means it, and will honor the surrender in letter if not spirit. (Deodands, erbs, and other monsters are a different matter.)

The *Dying Earth* combat system encourages non-lethal victories. The accepted way to defeat an enemy is through humiliation and impoverishment. Your character does not gain improvement points by winning battles; you earn these points yourself, by entertaining the other players.

4. **Your character will inevitably suffer reverses. Try to enjoy it.** In most roleplaying games you want your character to succeed all the time. But in *The Dying Earth* your PC's goals and actions may not always be admirable, and even if they are, indifferent fate will trip him up anyway. That's just the way the stories work.

As in Vance's stories, a *Dying Earth* character who fails to Rebuff another's Persuasion, or succumbs to Temptation, can get hoodwinked into the most dismal and ridiculous predicaments. Look at these as opportunities to be entertaining. Remember, your character's improvement doesn't depend on money, success, maintaining dignity, or looking good; improvement depends on your own creativity.

For more playing advice, see Chapter 8, "Player Tips."

character.) Your GM will have read the entire rulebook and can teach you detailed rules as needed. Like Alex in the example above, he'll do best by telling you what you need to know as you need it, as opposed to recapping the entire rules set at the beginning of the first session. He'll also point you to the list of taglines in Chapter 8; as you'll recall, you get to pick one out of three of your taglines at the beginning of each session. At your leisure, you can read the tips for players in that same chapter. But now you're ready to start playing.

## What This Book Contains

Interested players should read the rest of this book if they have the time and inclination. We wish to fill our purses, and therefore encourage you to buy your own copies of this volume! Experienced roleplayers in particular will want to study the rules and the detailed descriptions of their abilities. Avoid reading the sample adventure (Chapter 13) unless your GM tells you that he's not planning to use it.

GMs must read the entire book before starting a game. They need to know the rules well enough to explain them to players. They'll need to familiarize themselves thoroughly with the sample adventure, or create one of their own.

In the manner of the sages of old, we have arranged the chapters of this book in the order they are meant to be read. For those who wish to locate particular sections, we now outline the contents.

### Chapter 1: Getting Started

This is the section you are currently reading. We include it in the list for the satisfaction of pedants, and to allay confusion among the easily added.





# Getting Started

## Chapter 2: Characters

This chapter describes the quick, step-by-step procedure for creating a character. Among other things, you determine how well he persuades (and avoids persuasion), engages in combat, recovers from injury, wields magic, sneaks around, holds onto his possessions, and resists the manifold temptations that tend to vex notables of the Dying Earth.

## Chapter 3: Essential Rules

The basic rules presented here underlie the entire game. Learn the three types of success and the three categories of failure. Find out how to reroll unpleasant results. Also covered are means of recovering spent points, overwhelming vastly inferior opponents, navigating struggles between multiple opponents, and succeeding at tasks requiring a number of successful rolls.

## Chapter 4: Abilities In Practice

This chapter defines the abilities briefly described in the Characters chapter. It tells how to regain spent points for each ability. It also applies the elementary rules to the most common situations you'll face when you use your abilities. The chapter lists benefits of the various types of Persuade, Rebuff, Attack and Defense abilities. It shows how to resist injury and what happens when you fail to do so. (Included are special sorts of harm your character might conceivably suffer, from drowning to immolation to the effects of exotic toxins.) It contrasts the ins and outs of extreme wealth with the difficulty humbler characters have in holding onto their most basic possessions. It provides further information on the various peccadilloes to which Dying Earth characters are prone, and how to manage their siren-like calls to distracting action.

## Chapter 5: Magic

This chapter provides essential reading for players who choose to give their characters magical abilities. It lays out the differences among the three grades of magician: Dabbler, Magician, and Arch-Magician. It shows how to refresh magic and lists benefits of each of the six styles of magic. It expatiates on the four types of magic: cantraps, spells, enchanted items, and the effects of those extrawordly beings known as sandestins, who power the magic of the greatest Arch-Magicians. Learn how these entities might be bullied, cajoled, and commanded into

doing one's bidding. Then build your magician's manse, which contains his permanent collection of magical adjuncts, and learn the contents and advantages of a well-equipped work-room. If you wish to construct your own enchanted items, look here as well.

## Chapter 6: Grimoire

Even characters unschooled in the minutiae of magical practice may make profitable use of the formulae and items in this chapter. It details specific spells in the magician's arsenal, from Phandaal's Gyrator to Lugwiler's Dismal Itch. Some items have innate power; others are made in magicians' work-rooms. Certain items, like the coveted IOUN stones, are of use only to magicians. Others—like the wax of the ossip berry, which lets the user grant flotational properties to items large and small—will distinguish the pack of any roving adventurer.

## Chapter 7: Equipment

No well-stocked pack contains only magical items. This chapter describes (and provides prices for) the mundane apparatus, from rope to flint, that might mean the difference between your character's life and death.

## Chapter 8: Player Tips

This chapter shows the modern reader how to assume the exotic mindset of the Dying Earth. Under the rheumy eye of the ancient sun, the only ambition is petty ambition. Here lassitude is admirable, and the primary interaction between civilized humans is the attempted swindle. Still, in some ways your PC is more tightly bound to a code of expected conduct than in other fantasy roleplaying games. He'll win a poor reputation if he kills human enemies; instead, justice requires that conquered foes be creatively humiliated.

This chapter also shows you how to improve your character. It provides a list of sample taglines, from which you can pick at the beginning of each session. It gives you the simple ways to spend improvement points on new or increased abilities.

## Chapter 9: GM Tips

Here we find guidance for the game moderator. First we focus on adventure creation. A worksheet of common elements in Jack Vance's Dying Earth stories lets you emulate them in your own game. By using this handy

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**distinguish the pack of any roving adventurer:** And should it distinguish the pack of an adventurer other than yours, devising a stratagem to correct this situation should be the work of a moment.







Go, I exhort; go, I command; go, go, go!

checklist, you'll soon be filling your player's lives with strange vistas, crafty swindles, heated protests, exotic foods, foppish clothing, and the occasional eruption of casual cruelty.

Then we offer guidelines for dispensing improvement points for tagline use. We prepare you for the extreme unpredictability of plotlines in a Dying Earth series.

Also included are suggestions for changing the game's assumptions to suit the desires of your particular group. Some rules may be controversial in some quarters; here we show how to modify them to mollify the querulous.

Throughout the book, we'll assume that you want to evoke the wry, mordant humor of the last three books in the sequence. The first book, *The Dying Earth*, focuses more on wonder and bloodshed, and we present guidelines for modifying the game if this is the mood you're more interested in creating.

### Chapter 10: Places

This is the first of three chapters devoted to description of the Dying Earth. The first covers its geography, from the cosmopolitan decadence of the city of Kaiin to the haunted ruins of Ampridatvir. Although travel will be a constant for PCs, most of their fellows are rightly afraid of its many dangers, and stick close to home. This fact, in combination with the incuriosity of the age, means that little is known of the regions outside a small region of heavy settlement. Many villages develop in near-complete isolation from the rest of the world, and boast their own bizarre customs. Their inhabitants sometimes vary from the norm anatomically as well as culturally. Fortunately, everyone seems to speak the same language, to the point of universally favoring a distinctively formal and elaborate syntax.

Through the intervention of magic, PCs may regularly find themselves transported to distant worlds, alternate realities, or past aeons. Although not part of the Dying Earth proper, they also warrant discussion here.

### Chapter 11: Personages

If your character belongs to the most humble grade of adventurer, he may safely escape the notice of others. However, those of great accomplishment, especially those with magical prowess, cannot help becoming known. Although it is possible that similarly powerful individuals will seek you out as colleagues, you must also take precautions against those who automatically view you as either a rival or a tempting target. From the wolfish and

majestic Kandive the Golden, prince of Kaiin, to the fusty and bookish arch-magician Vermoulion, your potential friends and rivals are described here. Accompanying the descriptions of the mighty and celebrated are a few less renowned individuals we couldn't leave out—foremost among them a certain Cugel the Clever.

### Chapter 12: Creatures

Life—and, moreso, death—on the Dying Earth is profoundly shaped by the presence in its wildernesses of countless dangerous predators. Some creatures are well-known, including the slick-skinned, ogre-like deodand and the hungry, airborne pelgrane. Others are known, at least from the books, only by name and alarming reputation. This chapter describes both types of creature. To preserve the sense of mystery of the books, we provide GMs with the option of choosing among several alternate descriptions. It's up to you to decide if, in your version of the Dying Earth, a leucomorph is a teeth-clacking, large-footed humanoid, a quadrupedal insect, or something in between the two.

### Chapter 13: Adventure

This entire book offer examples that not only illustrate particular points, but show how a *Dying Earth* game ought to feel. That said, there's never a better example than a fully fleshed-out adventure. This adventure lets the characters seek various flavors of trouble in the festival town of Cuirnif, where a dandyish duke sponsors twin cooking and eating competitions. Under the looming shadows of the duke's punishment tubes, the PCs can enter either contest, match wits with gamblers, encounter a pathetic beast with a detachable head, and uncover the mystery of the Micathrobes.

### Index and Character Sheet

The book concludes, naturally, with an index exhaustive enough for the most demanding of scholars. Feel free to photocopy the character sheet at the back for your personal use.

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**Cugel the Clever:** The hero, if that is the word, of Vance's books *The Eyes of the Overworld* and *Cugel's Saga*. For details, see Chapter 11.





## Chapter 2:

# Characters

Now, with trifling effort,  
bring forth your adventurer!



“These talismans  
are not uniformly  
dependable,” said Cugel.  
“I will require further  
competences.”


“You have them,” said Lucounu,  
“in your sword, your crafty  
persuasiveness, and  
the agility of your feet.”

*The Eyes of the Overworld,*  
Chapter 1

### First, Reassurance: A Note on Vancian Language

**O**ur present era, though brighter and more energetic than the dying days of Earth, does have flaws. Today’s educational system has somehow induced in otherwise clever people a paralyzing fear of dictionaries. \* These rules occasionally use old or obscure words to evoke the Dying Earth’s convoluted whimsy. The rules text is meant to get you thinking in Vancian rhythms, to help you improvise suitable dialogue during play. You’ll enjoy this game more if you get into this spirit. \* If big words put you off, stay calm. When you meet one, breathe deeply and check the sentence again. **The meaning is always clear from context. Really.** If you’re still puzzled, you can always pull down that dictionary—or faster yet, check the fine online dictionaries on the Internet. \* Soon even the most bibliophobic among you will be tossing off six-syllable verbal monstrosities with the facility of the most long-winded Vancian scholar.





Cugel was a man of many capabilities, with a disposition at once flexible and pertinacious. He was long of leg, deft of hand, light of finger, soft of tongue.

Now it's time to create your *Dying Earth* character. Following the plain and limpid steps outlined in this chapter should be a matter of utter simplicity. Proceed quickly, so that you may complete your character before the sun dies and all goes dark.

## Step 1: Take a Character Sheet

To start creating your character, you need a **character sheet**, a record of your character's abilities. Either photocopy the sample at the end of this book, or download it [in electronic form](#) from [www.dyingearth.com](http://www.dyingearth.com).

On the sheet you see columns labelled *Pool*. During each game session you'll keep track of variable point totals in these columns. You may want to use a temporary character sheet during each session, then record permanent changes on your pristine version. Or use a sheet of scrap paper to track your pool expenditures.

## Step 2: What Can You Spend?

There are three types of *Dying Earth* campaign. Each is named for a character from Vance's *Dying Earth* stories, and each refers to a different level of personal power. *Dying Earth* characters can range in power from skillful and well-spoken adventurers (the low end) to beings almost godly in their accomplishments (the high end).

Ask your GM which level of series she intends to run:

- A **Cugel-level** series features characters who, though they might be quite competent in two or three areas, rely primarily on their wits and luck to prevail. Events in the game will resemble those in the books *The Eyes of the Overworld* and *Cugel's Saga*.
- In a **Turjan-level** series, the characters might be of considerable accomplishment, especially in the magical arts: They can wield five or six mighty spells, or even create life in a laboratory. They are on a par with the more powerful characters from the book *The Dying Earth*.
- Finally, **Rhialto-level** characters are among the world's most puissant magicians. They own mansions bursting with fabulous artifacts of ages past and can foster all sorts of magical effects with the aid of indentured sandestins.

Regardless of the series level, you build your character with **creation points**. You spend creation points to purchase the character's abilities, possessions, and even personality traits. **Abilities**, explained later, are skills and other gifts your character possesses that let him accomplish tasks. Abilities are quantified as numbers, called **ability ratings**, with higher ratings able to accomplish more than lower ones.

**in electronic form:** The character sheet is available in the popular .PDF (Portable Document Format) format. Pardon the redundancy.

Series Level	Creation Pts	Ability Cap
Cugel	60	10
Turjan	100	15
Rhialto	160	20

The level of your series determines the number of creation points you get to create your character, as shown in the table above.

The **ability cap** shows the highest "normal" rating any ability can have in a series of the given level. Ability ratings above these caps are rare and highly remarkable. It is possible to purchase ratings above the ability cap, but they cost excessive numbers of creation points, as explained below.

## Rating and Pool

When you buy an ability, mark its name on your character sheet (if it does not already appear there). In pencil, write the rating you've bought in both the **Rating** and **Pool** columns. The rating changes only infrequently, but the pool value fluctuates throughout the game.

**For most abilities, it costs 1 creation point to raise the rating by 1.** Raising your Magic rating by 1 costs 2 creation points.

Abilities with ratings higher than the ability cap are very expensive. The chart below shows how many points it costs characters to exceed their ability caps. Once you buy an ability up to your ability cap, you pay the "Additional Cost" amount for each additional rise in your rating (cumulative). **Buying your Magic ability above the ability cap costs double the listed amount.**

Example 1: *Cugel-level* characters have an ability cap of 10. At a cost of 1 creation point per 1 rating up to 10, it costs you 10 points to buy a *Persuade* rating of 10. To raise it to 13 costs you (2 + 4 + 8 =) 14 additional points, as shown in the chart, for a cost of 24 points in all.

### Rating (by series level)

Cugel	Turjan	Rhialto	Additional Cost
11	16	21	+2
12	17	22	+4
13	18	23	+8
14	19	24	+8 ... and so on



## Characters

### Obtaining Bonus Creation Points

#### You may obtain bonus creation points during character creation.

Usually you get bonuses for leaving choices in the hand of fate, as represented by a die roll. In the Dying Earth, those resigned to fate often better survive the inexorable pendulum swings of fortune and misfortune that harry all who strive through its dusty gloom.

In short, when presented with choices you must make to create a more distinctive character, you can choose the options you prefer, or you can let a random die roll make your decision for you. In the latter case, the game rewards you with a **bonus**, extra creation points.

Every time you elect a random choice, you get a number of extra creation points equal to your **bonus size**, listed in the next paragraph. You normally can spend these on anything you want; you aren't restricted to spending them on the ability on which you made the random roll. (There are exceptions to this. We will make exceptions known to you at unexpected and inconvenient intervals.)

The bonus size depends on the series level. **Cugel-level** characters have a bonus size of **6 points** at a time—that is, on each occasion you are told to take a bonus, you get 6 creation points. **Turjan-level** characters have a bonus size of **10 points**; **Rhialto-level**, **16 points**.

*Example:* You are creating a Cugel-level character. One of the first choices you make involves what style of persuasion your character will customarily employ (described below, under “Step 3: Are You Persuasive?”). You may choose any one of the six available options (Glib, Eloquent, etc.). But the rules also give you the option of letting fate make the decision for you—you may roll a die to determine which of the six your character will take. If you do this, you will receive a bonus. You elect to do this. Because you are creating a Cugel-level character, and the bonus size for a Cugel-level character is 6 points, this means that, instead of having 60 points with which to create your character, you will have 66.

*Example 2:* For a **Turjan-level** character, a *Magic rating* of 16 costs 34 points in all—30 creation points for a rating of 15, then another 4 to raise it to 16.

*Example 3:* A **Rhialto-level** character wants a *Magic rating* of 25. It costs 40 creation points to get a rating of 20, 4 to raise it to 21, 8 to reach 22, 16 to reach 23, 16 to reach 24, and 16 to reach 25, for a total cost of 100 points.

### Step 3: Are You Persuasive?

The most important ability in a *Dying Earth* series is not the ability to run your foe through with a rapier, or dodge his most fearsome attacks—though both talents are assuredly efficacious in certain unfortunate circumstances. Your most important ability is the one which allows you to hoodwink, inveigle, actuate, cajole, argue and otherwise **Persuade** your interlocutors into doing what you want. Thus you can convince them that you meant no harm breaking into their mansions, that you are inexperienced

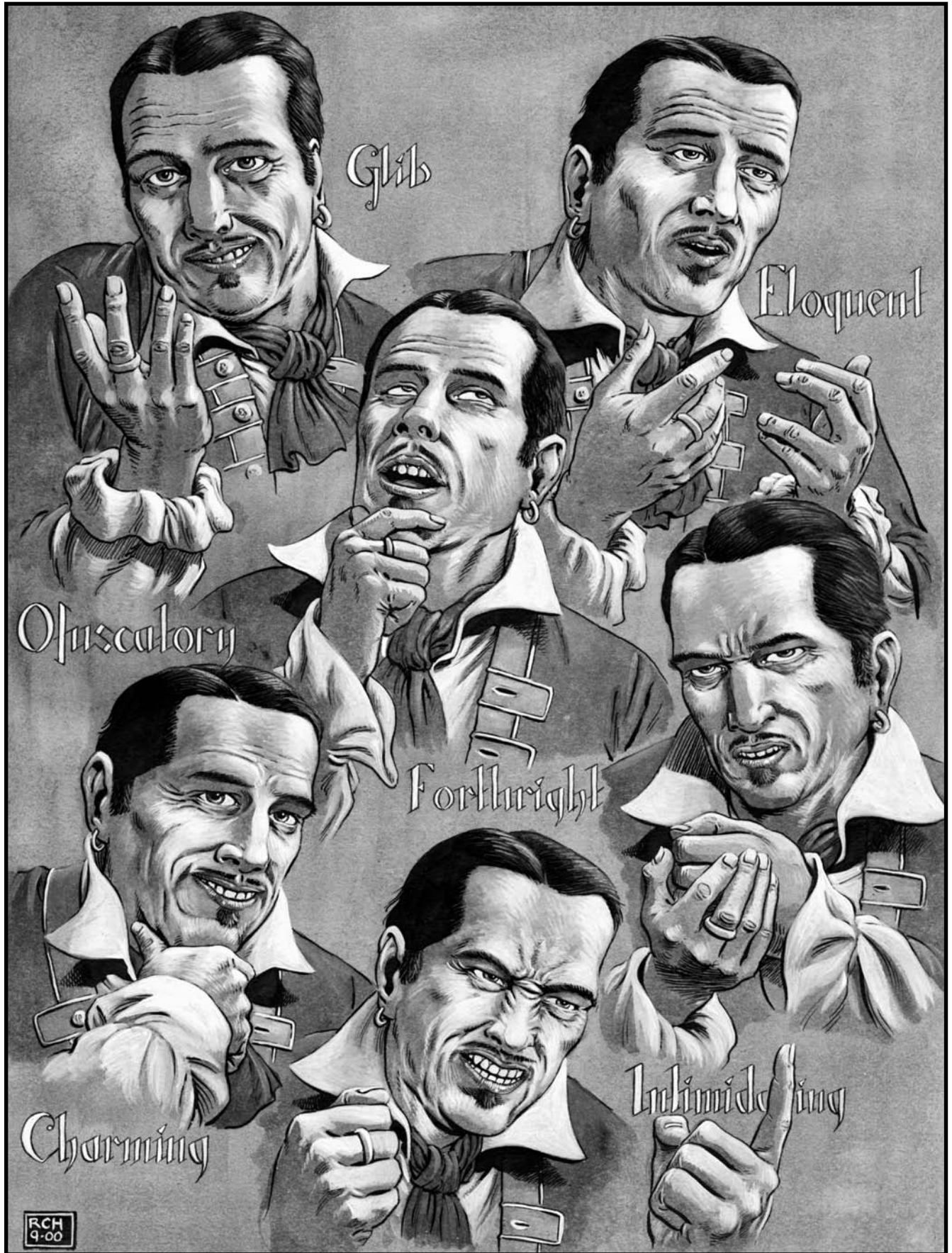
in the cardsharp's art, or that any deflowering of the ritual virgins was perfectly understandable, given the circumstances.

You may choose a primary style of persuasion from the following list of six, or you may gain a bonus (see the sidebar above) by leaving the choice to a die roll.

1. **Glib** — You speak so quickly and easily that listeners find it hard to penetrate your deception.
2. **Eloquent** — With high-flown word and lofty sentiment, you espouse your views in a manner so poetical that listeners cannot help being moved by your entreaties.
3. **Obfuscatory** — The style of your speech is so opaque, the twists and turns of your syntactical structure so labyrinthine, that your interlocutors can neither grasp what you are saying nor admit their bafflement, and therefore agree thoroughly with whatever you just said.
4. **Forthright** — You cut to the heart of the matter with unwavering directness.
5. **Charming** — You evince such blazing charisma that people can't help liking you and wishing to please you.
6. **Intimidating** — You project an aura of menace, either subtle or blatant, that induces others to obey your edicts in hopes of evading your surely violent wrath.

After determining your style, allot points to Persuasion. We recommend spending at least 8 points. **Never spend less than 1 point!** Persuasion is of particular importance for Rhialto-level Arch-Magicians, who must convince indolent sandestins to do their will. Such characters should allot at least 10 points to Persuade.









**Persuasion, Glib style:** *"It is transparently clear to the most witless observer that you are an individual of uncommon perspicacity. Hence, to point out this seemingly innocuous fishnet's intricate artisanship, its glittering filigrees, and its surpassingly fine weave, characteristic of powerful enchantment, is incontestably superfluous."*

## Secondary Styles

**If you are already an experienced player of this game, note that you can purchase secondary styles of the abilities Persuasion, Rebuff, Attack, and Defense. Because we don't want to confuse new players, we've put the rules for secondary styles in Chapter 8, "Players' Tips."**

If you're creating a character for the first time, you are undoubtedly growing more deeply confused with each line of this sidebar, so please pretend for now that you never saw it.

## Step 4: How Well Do You Resist Suasion?

What persuades the goose may also sway the gander. In a *Dying Earth* game, you, the player, may often look on in dismay as you see your character talked into something you know will lead to dire ruin. His sole defense against the enticements, seductions, and swindles of others is his ability to **Rebuff** unwanted Persuasion attempts.

As before, you may select a style from the list below, or gain a bonus by letting a die do it for you.

1. **Obtuse** — You don't always understand what others are saying to you. You've learned that this is not the impediment it might at first seem. The people who get hoodwinked are always the schemers who let others play on their greed. If you don't understand the complexities of a scheme, you can scarcely be swindled by it, can you?
2. **Wary** — You distrust even your own grandmother. And a good thing, too, because she was ready to sell you to a pack of erbs in exchange for a treasure map.
3. **Penetrating** — An innate sense for the motivations of others has always protected you from those who pretend to argue for your interests, but in fact advance merely their own.
4. **Lawyerly** — You use your unerring nose for mile-wide loopholes to spot the flaws in others' proposals.
5. **Contrary** — You just don't like following the advice of others. If someone tells you to look up, you look down. If everyone else wants to go right, you want to go left.
6. **Pure-Hearted** — You are so utterly guileless that, without even trying to do so, you expose the black-hearted villainy of those who hope to fool you.


You should spend at least 8 points on Rebuff. Never spend less than 1 point.

You'll learn how Persuade and Rebuff abilities work during play or, if you can't wait, in Chapter 3.

## Step 5: How Well Do You Hit?

Experienced adventurers of the *Dying Earth* know that violence can lead to a quick and painful demise. Weaker opponents may die with satisfying alacrity, but one's assumptions as to who is weak and who is strong may not bear out in practice. Still, there are times when the only solution at hand is a swift sword, and no character will want to enter a life of danger wholly unschooled in the life-taking arts.





He had known many vicissitudes,  
gaining therefrom a suppleness, a fine discretion,  
a mastery of both bravado and stealth.

Every fighter knows a reasonable range of techniques, but is distinguished by one particular aptitude. You may choose your style of **Attack**, or gain a bonus by leaving it up to a die roll.

1. **Strength** — Being big and extravagantly muscled has never been a drawback in the application of force.
2. **Speed** — Attackers who rely on speed hit faster than their opponents can react.
3. **Finesse** — Training in the most effective combat moves makes an attacker not only graceful while spilling blood, but allows him to anticipate and counter the likely maneuvers of his opponent.
4. **Cunning** — Knowing that every combat situation is unique, a cunning fighter adapts to the contingencies of the moment. He may throw sand in his foe's face, jump up on a table to secure a height advantage, or seize an object to use as an unexpected weapon.
5. **Ferocity** — Your heedless energy and snarling rage forces even the bravest opponent to fight on your terms.
6. **Caution** — You hang back, rarely exposing yourself to danger, while waiting for your opponent to exhaust himself. He then makes a fatal mistake, which you, with the speed of a striking snake, take ruthless advantage of.

Unless your character knows several devious ways to avoid violence, you should spend at least 8 on Attack. An Attack of 0 is a very bad thing indeed.

## Step 6: How Well Do You Avoid Being Hit?

The avoidance of death remains any self-respecting combatant's prime consideration. Despite their general versatility, most fighters learn to rely on a particular style of **Defense** in which they excel. As usual, you can pick your style, or get a bonus by rolling randomly.

1. **Dodge** — You're good at ducking blows.
2. **Parry** — You deflect incoming blows with your weapon, or other available objects.
3. **Sure-Footedness** — Swift movement and a well-honed sense of balance allows you to take blows in a way that diminishes their force.
4. **Intuition** — By watching his style and following his eyes, you can guess your foe's next move, and avoid it.
5. **Misdirection** — You move so much that your opponent strikes at you but hits your swirling cloak or flapping hat-feather.
6. **Vexation** — Your tongue is sharper than your enemy's rapier. With taunts and patter, you alternately enrage and demoralize him, provoking him so that he makes mistakes.

You probably want to spend 8 on Defense. Trust us, you do not want a Defense of 0.

## Step 7: When You Do Get Hit, How Quickly Do You Recover?

You may now spend any number of points on your **Health** rating, which determines the extent of your injuries when you do get hit. A high Health rating makes it less likely that your character will be wounded by a successful hit.

## Step 8: Do You Use a Weapon?

Given that the use of force cannot always be avoided, a well-chosen weapon is in some situations your best ally.

Skill in the use of a particular weapon costs 2 points. However, each attack style automatically makes you familiar with *two* weapons—one close combat weapon and one missile—which cost no points. (If you're using the advanced rules that allow additional attack styles, you get the free weapon familiarities only for your main attack.)

Style	Melee Weapon	Missile Weapon
Strength	Cudgel	Longbow
Speed	Rapier	Sling
Finesse	Rapier	Firestick
Cunning	A found object	Throwing knife
Ferocity	Axe	Rock
Caution	Rapier	Bow

You can use weapons you're not familiar with, but face a disadvantage when fighting an opponent familiar with his own weapon.

## Step 9: Do You Wield Magic?

Magic is the Dying Earth's most demanding skill. The **Magic ability** costs twice as much as any other ability, 2 creation points per rating point. For instance, buying a rating of 7 in Magic costs 14 creation points. Your character does not have to know magic. But a smattering of magic is a good idea, for you can use your Magic pool to resist magic as well as cast spells.



## Characters

There are three ranks of magician: **Dabbler**, **Magician** (capitalized), and **Arch-Magician**. The level of the series (Cugel, Turjan, or Rhialto) dictates the maximum proficiency available before the series begins. Cugel-level characters may only be Dabblers, and may only buy a Magic ability rating up to 7. Turjan-level adventurers may become Magicians, with ratings up to 19. Rhialto-level characters are **Arch-Magicians**. Because they control those difficult and spiteful entities called sandestins, Arch-Magicians need not worry as much as do lesser characters about Magic ratings. That said, they suffer no limit on their Magic rating save that set by the game moderator.

If you intend your character to be a magician, familiarize yourself with the Magic rules in Chapter 5, "Magic."

Choose your character's magical style. As always, you can pick your style or get a bonus by rolling randomly.

1. **Studious** — You see magic as an endless academic project. You study the ancient tomes of the past, reading antique grimoires and biographies to learn the magical arts.
2. **Insightful** — The world is so much more than non-magicians will ever know. Amid numerous dimensions and a splendour of worlds and creatures, you seek order and reason. Not content with dusty tomes, you use magic to uncover the nature of reality. In these late days there are very few others like you.
3. **Forceful** — Magic is the art of bending the world to your will. You dominate fractious magical spirits with your spells.
4. **Daring** — Magic should be flashy and impressive, and so should you. To you, magic is a great game. Through its study you can do anything and break all the normal rules. Above all else, magic is fun.
5. **Devious** — Magic lets you put one over on reality. You can fool people, beasts, and even gravity. You regularly use your magic to aid mundane thefts, con-jobs, and similar escapades.
6. **Curious** — The world is a lock, and magic is the key. You seek to cast the untried spell, test a newly uncovered enchanted item, or visit some new dimension. You can't resist a secret, and magic holds the greatest secrets of all.

Dabblers who wish to know spells when the game begins must pay creation points. It costs a Dabbler 2 creation points for each Straightforward spell he knows when he is first played, and 4 points for each Complex spell. He may buy a number of spells no greater than his Magic rating. Thus, a Dabbler with a Magic rating of 5 could choose to buy no spells or as many as five, but no more. Magicians and Arch-Magicians do not suffer this restriction. For more information, see Chapter 5.

## Step 10: What Else Can You Do?

You may allocate any number of points to any of the abilities listed below. Athletics and Perception are especially important. We recommend spending a minimum of 3-4 points in each. If you envision your character getting into many physical scrapes, make your Athletics even higher. Pedantry is very important for Magicians and Arch-Magicians. More complete descriptions appear in Chapter 4.

**Appraisal** — judging the value of goods

**Athletics** — performing physical feats like running, swimming, climbing, and diving for cover

**Concealment** — finding ideal hiding places for things small (a handful of coins) or large (yourself)

**Craftsmanship** — making and repairing useful objects

**Driving** — operating land or air vehicles like carts or flying boats (for seagoing vessels, use Seamanship)

**Engineering** — designing large structures and devices

**Etiquette** — mastery of the social conventions that make others accept you as one of their own, even the wary villagers in isolated hamlets that dot the landscape

**Gambling** — winning at games of chance, which are common on the Dying Earth

**Imposture** — posing as someone else

**Living Rough** — surviving in the wilderness

**Pedantry** — knowing academic facts

**Perception** — noticing subtle details

**Physician** — patching up the sick or injured

**Quick Fingers** — picking pockets, palming objects, opening locked doors

**Riding** — of beasts, not vehicles (see Driving)

**Scuttlebutt** — an acquaintance with the business of local personages

**Seamanship** — working aboard ship, like the yellow-booted wormingers who guide eel-driven outboard vessels on the languid ocean

**Seduction** — winning the sexual favors of desirable individuals

**Stealth** — moving without being noticed

**Stewardship** — the art of managing business enterprises and/or households

**Tracking** — follow trails left by man or beast

**Wealth** (not available to Cugel-level characters) — your financial resources (see next page)

**Wherewithal** — maintaining your determination in the face of certain pain or supernatural terror





Fianosther pointed to a man wearing garments of black. This man was small, yellow of skin, bald as a stone. His eyes resembled knots in a plank; his mouth was wide and curved in a grin of chronic mirth. "There stands Iucounu the Laughing Magician."

## Step 11: Whom Do You Know?

The famous sorcerers, kings, and adventurers of Alмеры and Ascolais know one another well—sometimes too well. If your series is set in this area, and is Turjan-level or above, you will be known to others of your stature—the various **personages** profiled in Chapter 11. Inasmuch as they know you anyway, perhaps you should spend some points to ensure that they don't want to kill you.

If you are playing in a Cugel-level series, you may still want to establish relationships with the mighty and famous. Be warned, though: Cugel-level characters wander many remote locations, and may never get close enough to Alмеры to take advantage of heavy investment in personages.

You can spend any number of points on your relationship with any famous personage. The greater the number of points, the more likely that person is to aid you when asked.

## Step 12: What Do You Own?

Where wealth is concerned, Cugel-level characters are buffeted on the winds of indifferent fate. They often stumble across caches of great wealth, but invariably find that the treasure slips through their fingers even more easily than it was acquired. Being captured and stripped of all fripperies and valuables is a matter of sad routine for them.

To counter this general trend, players may buy particular **possessions** with creation points. You can invest one or more points in each

possession. If your character encounters a situation where he's likely to lose these purchased possessions, you may roll dice to hold onto them. Although characters may be briefly separated from purchased possessions, they'll get a reasonable chance to recover them after overcoming their enemies of the moment.

We generously assign you **2 free possession points** to spend on items of clothing, inasmuch as involuntary serial nudity can become frustrating. Other than that, you begin the game with as many other possessions as you spend points on, and no more.

You do *not* begin the game with any money worth speaking of. In fact, nearly all Cugel-level characters begin their first adventure soon after having been robbed by bandits or otherwise separated from any possessions they didn't pay points for. No matter what their previous accomplishments, they are now vagabonds who must scrounge their next meals, perhaps by seeking gainful employment. Your GM may call upon you to explain how you managed to keep the possessions listed on your character sheet from the attentions of your robbers. (She has to help you with the explanation if you have trouble; this is not an excuse for him to take them away, too.)

Here are some possessions worth their purchase:

- ✿ A weapon, such as a rapier, axe, dagger, or club
- ✿ Good boots
- ✿ Warm cloak
- ✿ A fashionable hat
- ✿ Clothing indicating a person of station
- ✿ A length of rope
- ✿ A sack in which to carry other possessions
- ✿ A bedroll
- ✿ A tent

### Some People to Know

Here is a quick reference to the personages described in Chapter 11:

**Chun the Unavoidable** — inhuman predator who lurks in the ruined portions of the city of Kaiin; whatever he does for you, he'll expect payment in eyeballs

**Gilgad** — clammy-handed, gloomy Arch-Magician

**Hurtiancz** — irascible, burly Arch-Magician

**Ildefonse the Preceptor** — jovial but fussy Arch-Magician who chairs a conclave of his fellows

**Iucounu the Laughing Magician** — spectacularly ugly magician whose methods of vengeance express his mocking sense of humor

**Prince Kandive the Golden** — handsome, conceited ruler of Kaiin, known for his ostentatious wealth and magical accomplishment

**Liane the Wayfarer** — cruel and rakish freebooter

**Mazirian the Magician** — greedy, rapacious magician famous for his magical garden, and for making enemies of his colleagues

**Pandelume** — enigmatic individual who dwells in the eerily beautiful dimension of Embelyon; he never allows himself to be seen and is said to know every spell ever created

**Rhialto the Marvellous** — ingenious and resourceful Arch-Magician whose vanities sometimes annoy his colleagues in Ildefonse's conclave

**T'Sais** — beautiful woman (grown in a vat by Pandelume) who wields a magical rapier

**Turjan of Miir** — brave, inquisitive, and witty magician

**Ulan Dhor** — nephew to Prince Kandive and apprentice Magician; shows a sense of altruism unusual in the Dying Earth



## Characters

- A reference text, such as a treatise on edible plants of the wilderness, or a field guide allowing you to identify various wild creatures
  - A wizard's grimoire, useful if you are a Dabbler in magic
- Cugel-level characters may *not* begin the game with the following:
- pack beasts or riding animals
  - a cart, boat, or other conveyance
  - any items, such as jewels or antiquities, that might easily be sold for significant amounts of money
  - any custom-made enchanted item; other magical possessions listed in Chapter 6 are permitted at the GM's discretion.

Any points spent to buy enchanted items also count as possession points for those items.

Creation points can't guarantee a supply of food or drink. Drinks, meals, and accommodations must be paid for as you go, which will require money. Hence it behooves you to seek gainful employment.

### Wealth

Turjan- and Rhialto-level characters may buy a general **Wealth** ability. The Wealth ability lets you roll to see if your character happens to have a desired item among the many possessions in his manse or retreat. Each individual item is as prone to sudden loss as a Cugel-level character's mingiest possession, unless you paid points to hold onto that particular item. But your character can always look in his closets for something else just as useful.

## Step 13: Whom Do You Command?

In a Turjan- or Rhialto-level series, you may create **retainers**, GMCs in your employ who obey your instructions to one degree or another. You may create any number of retainers. For each, first select a name that feels right for the Dying Earth setting. (The Appendices offer suggestions for suitable names.) For each retainer, you then decide how obedient he is.

1. **Diligent** — Although he won't risk life or limb for you, and he expects regular pay, he does generally obey your

instructions to the best of his abilities. When he fails you, it is out of incapacity, not lack of motivation.

2. **Unctuous** — When in your presence, your retainer showers you with oily compliments and assurances of his loyalty. When he believes word will not get back to you, he is fully prepared to put his own interests above your own.
3. **Recalcitrant** — He clearly holds you in contempt and resents having to serve you. He continually demands greater compensation and easier assignments. When out of your direct control, he does his best to either ignore or directly subvert your intentions.

### Obedience vs. Competence

You may assign any number of your creation points to buy your retainer's abilities, except that no retainer may have more ability points to spend than your own character does, and retainers cannot be Magicians or Arch-Magicians. You can specify the retainer's abilities immediately, or you can dole them out to him as needed during play. (If she's eager to get the first session underway, your GM may urge you to leave the detailing of your retainers for later.) Retainers' abilities don't improve; what you assign to them at the beginning is all they get.

The points you may spend on a retainer are determined by his degree of obedience—the less obedient he is, the more ability he has. An unctuous retainer gets 2 points of ability for every creation point you assign. A recalcitrant retainer gets 4 ability points for every creation point. Diligent yet competent retainers are hard to find: They get 1 ability point for every 4 creation points you spend.

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*You spend 4 points on a retainer, whom you name Puiras. You decide that he will be a recalcitrant retainer, so that you can give him a total of 16 points of abilities over time. You want him to be the steward of your manse, so you give him 3 points of Stewardship and 3 in Rebuff (to ward off the entreaties of importunate peddlers and whingeing underlings). You have 10 points left, which you can assign to him later, as the needs of the story dictate.*

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**Puiras:** In an illustrative incident from Vance's *Rhialto the Marvellous*, the Arch-Magician Rhialto instructs his dour majordomo, Puiras:

"I go to visit Ildefonse. When I pass the outer gate impose the boundary curse; under no circumstances lift it until I signal." "Making no effort to interpret Puiras's grunt, Rhialto sauntered to the north portal. Barely had he passed the portal by, when Puiras activated the curse, prompting Rhialto to jump hastily forward."

Upon his return Rhialto finds his manse in disarray and Puiras drunk.

"Rhialto said, 'I have no place for an irresponsible and bibulous servant. You are hereby discharged.'" "No you don't!" cried Puiras in a coarse voice, and emphasized the statement with a belch. "They told me I'd have a good post if I stole no more than old Funk [his predecessor] and praised your noble airs. Well then! Tonight I stole only moderately, and from me the lack of insult is high praise."





Fianosther held wide his hands. "Who would dare steal from Lucounu the Laughing Magician?" "Precisely this thought deters me," Cugel replied. "I am a man of resource, but not insensate recklessness."

## Step 14: How Well Do You Resist Temptation?

The typical inhabitant of the Dying Earth speaks and behaves differently from characters in other fantasy series or people in real life. He is arrogant, greedy, indolent, and rakish. He loves fine food to excess and can't resist the urge to correct others on obscure points of fact. Your character will differ from the norm only if you spend creation points on **Resistance** ratings. A Resistance rating allows the character to disregard one of these universal temptations. Each of the six major temptations requires its own rating.

These descriptions depict the average individual—that is, what you are like if you *do not* have a Resistance rating. The greater your Resistance, the *less* you resemble the description.

1. **Resist Arrogance** — When you fail to resist arrogance, you hanker after perquisites and privileges. If installed in a position of authority, you immediately seek to abuse it. If given a low station, you complain and cavil until you gain promotion. You may take foolish risks to prove your worth to others, or because you over-estimate your own abilities. Affronts to your dignity arouse vindictive instincts which may cause you to seek immoderate vengeance against their authors.
2. **Resist Avarice** — When you fail to resist, you covet wealth and the social status that goes with it. Gems, gold, fine fabrics, rare spices, exquisite furniture, awe-inspiring antiquities—you love them all with equal fervor.
3. **Resist Gourmandism** — When you fail to resist this temptation, fine food and intoxicating beverages subject you to a siren's call. If you find an amphora of moldering liquor in a ancient ruin, you will do your best to immediately drain it. Drunkenness does not inspire you to curtail your consumption, but to accelerate it. When presented with delightful viands, you change your priorities so as to devour as much as your gullet will accommodate. When presented with inadequate drink or ill-tasting food, you can't resist proclaiming its inferiority to servers and cooks, no matter how tightly they clench their meat cleavers. Neither can you resist opportunities to expound on your connoisseurship in conversation.
4. **Resist Indolence** — Once firmly ensconced on your posterior you must resist Indolence, or find it difficult to dislodge yourself. Hard work is anathema to you, and no amount of ingenuity is wasted if it saves you from the indignity of labor.
5. **Resist Pettifoggery** — When resistance fails you, there is no quibble so small as to not be worth uttering. If educated, you are an incorrigible pedant. If rustic, you are a nitpicker nonpareil. Nothing pleases you more than to prove your mastery of an obscure fact, or to skewer an interlocutor by pointing out some meaningless flaw in his statement. When framing agreements, you do so in a lawyerly manner, adding as much gratuitous complexity as you can muster.
6. **Resist Rakishness** — When you fail to withstand rakishness, you can no more resist an alluring member of the desired sex than you can suspend your breathing. The slightest possibility of a romantic conquest inspires you to alter whatever other plans preceded it.



*On reflection, Dantomir admitted that his cantrap to turn away the wrath of the bellicose pelgrane had, after all, been efficacious. And yet, in all candour....*



## Characters

### GM Note: The Value of ~

#### When all players have

created their characters, quickly jot down their ratings in their various abilities. In a

spare moment, determine the average ability rating for the entire group in Persuade, Rebuff, Attack, Defense, Health, Magic, and Athletics. (Where PCs have both primary and secondary styles of a given ability, take the sum of all styles as the total rating.)

These averages let you scale the competences of creatures and personages who oppose the PCs, as explained further in Chapter 12. The system given there designates these averages with the tilde (~) symbol.

Keep your record of the starting abilities of the PCs handy, for the rare times when you need an average for an ability not listed above.

You must devote points to each separate temptation in order to resist its lure when it rears its head in the course of an adventure. You may allocate any number of points to any number of temptations.

You may randomly roll a single temptation to which you are *completely immune*. You never need to roll to resist it. This costs you nothing. (Mark this on your character sheet by placing an omega symbol after the name of the resistance, like so: Resist Pettifoggery  $\Omega$ .) Or you may apply half a bonus at no cost to a Resistance rating of your choice. You are not obligated to do either of these things.

### Dilatory Revision

#### Should you, after one or two

sessions of play, find the choices you made during character creation unsatisfactory,

you may slightly adjust your character, and continue play as if you'd made the desired selections in the first instance. You must seek your GM's approval for any such changes. Revising more than three ratings is generally considered gauche, and your GM may reject proposed alterations that utterly contradict what previous game sessions have already established about your character.

This is not an invitation to misuse bonuses gained for random selections. Your GM will cold-heartedly crush any such skullduggery.

If you choose to have no Resistances whatever, you gain a bonus to spend on any other step.

Characters with ratings of more than 15 in any ability always have a Resist Arrogance rating of 0. If you randomly roll Resist Arrogance as your  $\Omega$  resistance, ignore the result and reroll until you get something else instead.

## Step Last: So Who Does That Make You?

The choices you've made so far add up to create a quick portrait of your character, which you'll develop during play. In particular, the various styles of you've chosen or rolled for Persuade, Rebuff, Attack, Defense, and Rebuff tell you about your character's personality. Don't worry about developing a long, complicated past history for him or her. It's good to start simply, especially on the Dying Earth, where most characters share very similar speech patterns and motivations.

If you haven't already done so, create a suitably exotic-sounding, perhaps subtly humorous, name for your character. Sample names of characters from the books include: Khandive, Turjan, Lucounu, Mazirian, Mune, Etarr, T'Sais, Elai, Soldinck, Lankwiler, Ildefonse, and Rogol Domendonfors. If you give your character a mundane or anachronistic name, like Nigel or Sue, your GM should allow you to proceed through the entire creation process, only to have your character horribly slain in the opening scene of the first adventure. Do not say we failed to warn you.

We recommend, but do not insist, that you describe your character's physical appearance in a few sentences. Indicate his prominent facial features, the color and cut of his hair, and his build. Describe the details of his costume: fabric, cut, and accessories. Hats are always important.

## Now, Take the Stage!

You now have a character ready to play. The GM will explain how things work in the course of the first game. If you're interested, though, you can investigate the formulae used to determine success and failure (next chapter) and specific rules for the use of each ability (Chapter 4). Sooner or later, you should also read Chapter 8, which offers tips for successful play and acquaints you with the distinctive quirks of the Dying Earth.

**half a bonus:** That is, take your bonus figure and divide it in half. You can apply the halved amount to your chosen Resistance. The other half is lost (or more accurately, never existed in the first place).



[lucounu] peered into Cugel's sack and emitted a soft cry of dismay. "You have rifled my collection! I note certain of my most treasured valuables!" Cugel grimaced. "Naturally! But I am no thief; Fianosther sent me here to collect certain objects, and therefore—"

## An Example of Character Creation

### You are creating a *Dying Earth* character for a Cugel-level game,

so you start with 60 creation points. You could wait to name her, but you want a name in mind before getting started. (Perhaps you sense that you make our example read better by choosing a name at the beginning.) You dream up a suitably exotic-sounding appellation for your character: Ch'sainth.

**Persuade:** The next step is to pick your Persuade style and assign points to it. You look at the six styles of Persuade and decide that you'd like Ch'sainth to be Glib. You spend 8 points on Persuade, leaving 52 creation points remaining. Now, on to the other abilities:

**Rebuff:** You don't care which style of Rebuff she uses, and so decide to roll randomly. This gives you a bonus. For a Cugel-level character, a bonus equals 6 points, so your creation points increase to 58. You roll the die, getting a 4—Ch'sainth will be Lawyerly. You spend 8 points on Rebuff. Your creation point total is now 50.

**Attack:** Again, you have no preference as to style, and roll randomly, getting a bonus. Your creation points increase to 56. You roll a 4. Ch'sainth will be Cunning in battle. You decide to spend only 7 points on Attack. Your creation point total is now 49.

**Defense:** You roll randomly, gaining a bonus which increases your creation point total to 55. You roll a 6, which means that Ch'sainth will defend through Vexation. Preferring to avoid being hit whenever possible, you spend 9 points on Defense. You have 46 creation points left.

**Health:** You want a good chance of recovery if you do get hit, and so you spend 6 points, reducing your creation points to 40.

**Magic:** You don't see Ch'sainth as a serious user of sorcery, but it seldom hurts to dabble a bit. You want 1 point of Magic ability, just in case. You decide that Ch'sainth's nascent magic style will be Daring. 1 point of Magic rating costs 2 creation points. Your total goes down to 38.

These die rolls reveal Ch'sainth's personality. She's a risk-taker, but with a clever and cutting edge.

**Other abilities:** It would be good to know genuine treasures from fakes, so you invest 4 points in Appraisal. Athletics can be an important survival skill, so you spend 3. You want to be able to fleece the wealthy, and Etiquette will allow you to move among them; you buy a 3 rating. Gambling is a must when you need to raise some quick funds; you buy 4. Imposture might be useful from time to time; you spend 2 on that. Because you see Ch'sainth as a swindler, you know she might be run out of town on occasion; a 2 rating in Living Rough will help her survive between settlements. You know she's clever, and clever people are perceptive; ergo, 4 on Perception. Quick Fingers seems appropriate (3 points). A point in Riding seems a necessity in a low-technology world. Scuttlebutt will help you find marks for your schemes; you spend 3. You see Ch'sainth using her beauty and charm to overcome the objections of pliable males, and spend 3 on Seduction. Some rudimentary Stealth also seems essential; you spend 3. You finish choosing abilities with 4 creation points left.

**Personages:** You decide that Ch'sainth knows no one of note.

**Possessions:** You spend 1 for your rapier. You get 2 free points to spend on clothing: You'll use 1 for Ch'sainth's double-sided cloak, and 1 for her boots. Because the clothing is free, the 1 you spent on the rapier takes your creation point total to 3.

**Retainers:** As a Cugel-level character, Ch'sainth doesn't qualify for retainers.

**Resistances:** You could get absolute Resistance to a randomly-rolled temptation, but your conception of the character requires Ch'sainth to be susceptible to Rakishness, and you don't want to risk the die choosing it. So instead you allocate a free half-bonus (3 points) to a Resistance of your choice. You choose Resist Pettifoggery, inasmuch as your character is not much for books and learning. Gourmandism also seems unlikely to someone with so trim a figure. You devote your last 3 creation points to Resist Gourmandism.

Finally, describe your character in Vancian style:

"Ch'sainth wears her golden-blond hair long; it falls onto her shoulders like a waterfall shimmering in the starlight. Her frame is willowy; her legs, slender; and her hips boyish. She wears a red velvet tunic over horizontally striped, black-and-white leggings. Outdoors, she dons a double-sided cloak: one side is decorated in multicolored feathers, the other dark gray and equipped with a hood. Her boots turn up at the toes. Their cuffs can be fitted with bells when the occasion is festive."

*For an artist's conception of Ch'sainth, see the frontispiece to this chapter.*

### Ch'sainth

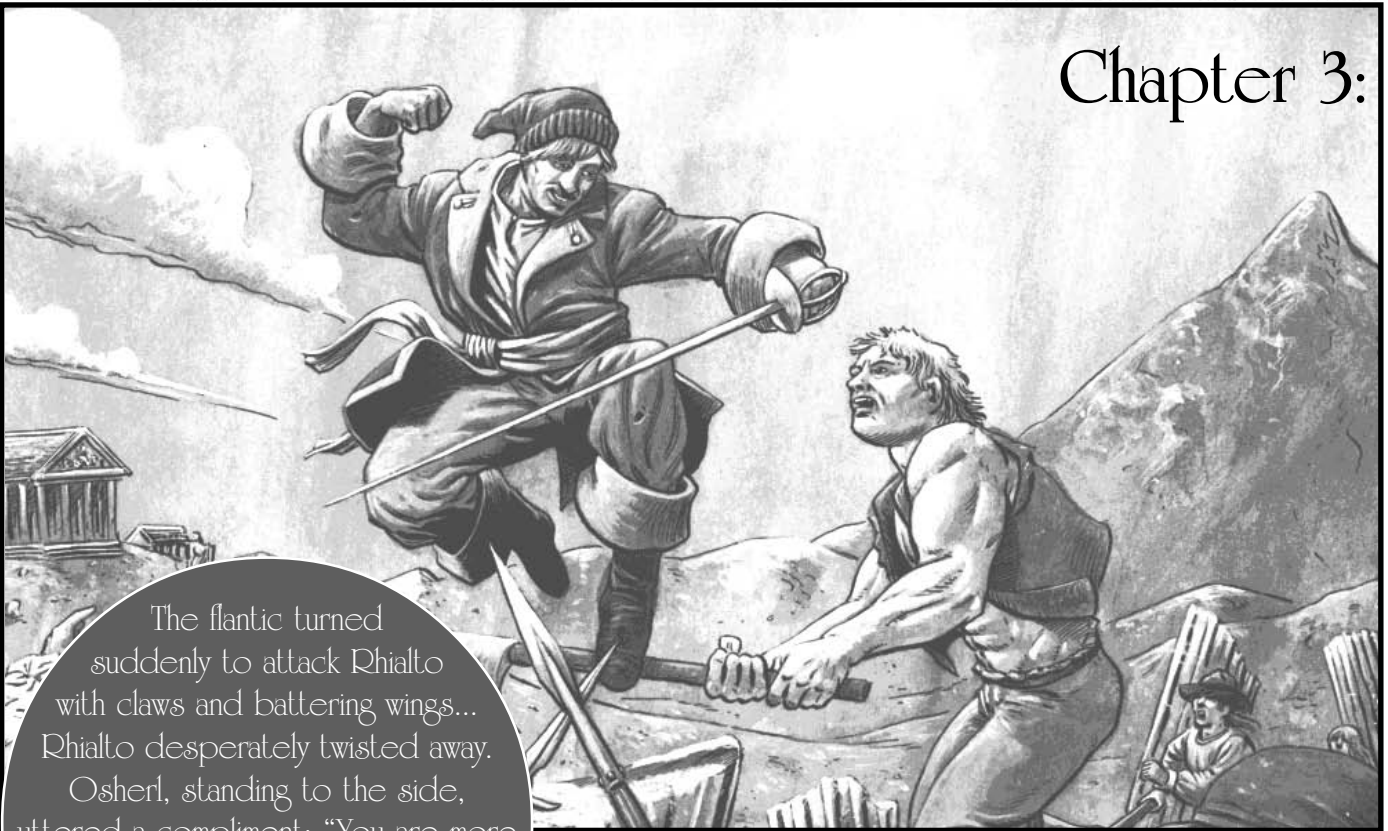
Persuade (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 8, Attack (Cunning) 7, Defense (Vexation) 9, Health 6, Magic (Daring) 1, Appraisal 4, Athletics 3, Etiquette 3, Gambling 4, Imposture 2, Living Rough 2, Perception 4, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 1, Scuttlebutt 3, Seduction 3, Stealth 3.

Possessions: rapier 1, boots 1, cloak 1.

Resistances: Gourmandism 3, Pettifoggery 3.



## Chapter 3:



The flantic turned suddenly to attack Rhialto with claws and battering wings... Rhialto desperately twisted away.

Osherl, standing to the side, uttered a compliment: "You are more agile than I expected. That was a deft contortion."

*Rhialto the Marvellous,*  
Chapter 2

# Essential Rules

Mastery of these concepts permits  
fundamental competence in all likely endeavors

## The Overarching Rule of Efficacious Blandishment

**T**he overarching rule of efficacious blandishment is the most important rule in the game. ☼ The overarching rule of efficacious blandishment states that a character who tries to do something outside the letter of the game's other rules may do so, *provided that* the player convinces the GM that this action falls within the spirit of the story. Thus the only true circumscriptions on your actions are maintained by the twin poles of your persuasiveness and your GM's gullibility. ☼ When arguing the merits of the *Dying Earth* roleplaying game, in person or on the Internet, respond to individuals who complain about certain rules with the standard reply, "Your argument is flawed. The overarching rule of efficacious blandishment lets you disregard the rule about which you complain so bitterly." ☼ Experienced roleplaying gamers may claim that the overarching rule of efficacious blandishment is scarcely original to the *Dying Earth* game. In fact, they might argue, in *all* roleplaying games players and GMs may mutually agree to disregard rules to better suit a given situation. ☼ However, gamers so often forget this that we feel secure in claiming it as our own sterling innovation.



"The offense is far too serious for flippant disclaimers. I have stated my abhorrence for plunderers and thieves, and now I must visit upon you justice in its most unmitigated rigor."

This chapter presents the basic rules used throughout the game system for any action whose outcome is in doubt. To learn how to use individual abilities, consult Chapter 4. We begin with some important terms:

## Ratings

Each number you assigned to an ability during character creation is that ability's **rating**. Ratings reflect your character's general degree of accomplishment—the higher the rating, the greater the accomplishment. They rarely change. (Chapter 8 tells how to increase your character's ratings.)

## Pools

Your rating in an ability gives you a **pool** of points you may spend when using that ability. The pool equals your rating. Thus, if you put 8 creation points into your character's Persuade ability, he has a Persuade rating of 8 and also has a pool of 8 Persuade points. (Note the separate columns for *Rating* and *Pool* on your character sheet.)

Points in an ability pool are different from creation points. When you spend points in a pool, they eventually come back. Creation points don't.

Ability pools work like a currency you can spend. You may expend points from an ability pool to reroll die results you don't like, or automatically defeat vastly inferior opponents. However, when you run out of points (your pool is empty), your chances of success decline sharply.

You won't use the term "ability pool" often. Instead you refer to each pool by its specific type: "Attack pool," "Persuade pool," and so on.

## Boons and Levies

Sometimes an ability pool gains points during play. To do this is to get a **boon**. Conversely, sometimes you lose points from a pool. To do so is to suffer a **levy**.

Point totals don't go negative; they just hit zero and stop. So if a pool is reduced to 0 points, you can still attempt a task that imposes a levy.

## Bonuses and Penalties

If you are performing an exceptionally easy task, your GM may allow you to add 1 or more to the result of a die roll. This is called a **bonus**.

But if you attempt an unfamiliar or extremely difficult task, you may be forced to subtract 1 or 2 from the die roll. This is called a **penalty**.

## Refreshing

You can return a pool to full value by undertaking actions that **refresh** that ability. Many abilities refresh after an hour or night of relaxation. Others require more

unorthodox refreshment, such as a day of idle juggling or a bout of one-upmanship with a pedantic scholar. Chapter 4 gives the way to refresh each ability.

If, thanks to boons, your pool exceeds your rating, you keep the extra points even if you engage in activities (like sleeping) which would otherwise refresh your pool. Abilities refresh simultaneously.

Your GM may at times rule that suitable time has elapsed between scenes, or since the last game session, and that all PCs' pools have meanwhile refreshed. In this case, you do lose your boons.

### Refreshment: A Justification

#### At first, some players object

to the various and occasionally bizarre actions that refresh pool totals. (These are detailed in Chapter 4.) After playing for a while, though, most players accept and enjoy the various refreshments. They're intended to represent the whimsical *Dying Earth* characters, who differ wildly from typical fantasy roleplaying characters.

Although both standard and *Dying Earth* PCs tend to be selfish and calculating, the *Dying Earth* type is more concerned with immediate pleasures, more fatalistic, and less cold-bloodedly rational than his generic counterpart. Many aspects of the *Dying Earth* won't make much sense until you understand these crucial differences. The refreshment rules reinforce the differences by making characters frequently attend to their comforts and preoccupations.

For example, Arch-Magicians like Rhialto possess power enough to conquer the world many times over, but aren't the least bit interested. Instead, they painstakingly research obscure topics, argue petty points of order at meetings of their conclave, and compete for the attentions of comely maidens.

Remember, too, that refreshing doesn't come up as often as you might think. In most groups, characters might need to refresh just one or two abilities per session.

We recommend that you at least try the rules as written. If your group still finds them irksome after a suitable attempt, your GM should substitute the following **optional** rule: All abilities that involve knowledge or learning refresh after two hours' rest; those involving social interaction or the casting of cantraps, after four hours; and those involving strenuous physical exertion or spellcasting, after eight.



## Essential Rules

### Resolving Actions

When you want your character to do something, tell your GM which ability you intend to use. Then roll one six-sided die. **If you roll 4 or more, the character succeeds. If not, he fails.**

### Rerolls

If you don't like your result, you can spend 1 point from the relevant ability pool to nullify the result and **reroll** the die. You can keep spending points and rerolling until you get the result you want, give up, or empty your pool.

Your first try is usually free, so you may act even if you've run out of points.

A success gained through a reroll looks different to observers from one of the same magnitude gained through a good original roll. A character who rolls poorly has made a mistake or otherwise failed. When he rerolls and succeeds, he catches himself in time, corrects his mistake, and prevails.

---

*Using his indomitable Athletics ability, Chun the Unavoidable leaps through the ruins in pursuit of a victim, whose glorious eyeballs he wishes to sew into his cape. Jim, his player, rolls a die and gets a Quotidian Failure. He pays 1 from his Athletics pool to reroll, this time getting a Prosaic Success.*

*Jim could describe it as follows: "Chun scrambles up onto a pile of rubble. It falls beneath him, and Chun momentarily slips. Then he recovers, bounding through the air at his prey."*

---

### Degrees of Success and Failure

Sometimes the degree to which the character succeeds or fails makes a difference.

The six possible results:

**Dismal Failure** means you not only failed, but bumbled horribly. You got the worst possible result and may suffer especially unpleasant consequences. You suffer an automatic levy of 2 subtracted from the pool of the ability you used. Further, it costs 3 points to reroll a Dismal Failure, not 1. (If you face further levies on each roll, you must pay those, too.)

Failure (1-3)		Success (4-6)	
1	Dismal	4	Hair's-Breadth
2	Quotidian	5	Prosaic
3	Exasperating	6	Illustrious

By electing not to nullify your own Dismal Failure during a contest, you are withdrawing from it, allowing your opponent to win.

**Quotidian (ordinary) Failure** yields no unexpected results. You suffer no special embarrassment. The consequences of failure are neither increased nor decreased.

**Exasperating Failure** means that you almost succeeded, falling just short of your prize. You may find the consequences of your failure are somewhat less onerous than you'd otherwise expect.

**Hair's-Breadth Success** means that you won out by the skin of your teeth. You narrowly averted disaster, but may suffer some minor annoyance to mar your sense of victory. Still, a narrow win is a win nonetheless.

**Prosaic Success** means that you got what you wanted, no more and no less.

**Illustrious Success** is as good as it gets. You not only succeed, but do so in a devastatingly impressive manner. You may gain even more from your attempt than you'd hoped. Add a 2-point boon to the pool of ability you used.

If you are in a contest (explained below), your opponent may pay 3 points to nullify your Illustrious Success, forcing you to roll again. (For an optional rule, see "The Purist Option" sidebar on the next page.) You do not pay for a reroll forced on you in this manner. If your Illustrious Success is nullified, you don't get the 2-point boon. A rare exception: You may not nullify an opponent's Illustrious Success when there are many contestants fighting over one prize (see "Many Contestants, One Prize" at the end of this chapter).

By choosing not to nullify your Illustrious Success, your opponent in a contest is withdrawing, ceding victory to you.

### Making Sure Abilities Are Appropriate

When you try to do something, you must use an ability appropriate to the task. In many cases, your actions will perfectly suit one of the abilities described in the next chapter.

Sometimes, though, you'll want to do something without a clear governing ability. You must convince the GM that one of your abilities allows you to at least make the attempt. If convinced, she'll allow you to proceed. If not, see "Caught Without the Right Ability," below.

If you sort of maybe halfway convince her, and she decides that the ability you propose is partially relevant to the task, she'll allow the attempt, but with a levy reflecting the degree of variance between the ability's book definition and the action you're trying.

---

*Cugel has taken the only available passage to Lausicaa, accepting employment aboard the ship Galante. He has accepted a position as a worminger without troubling himself as to the post's precise nature. Once aboard, he learns that*



[Lucounu:] "I wonder if after all there is some small service which you can perform for me." — "The villain is as good as dead!" declared Cugel. "Now remove these abominable bonds!"



## The Purist Option

### In an earlier version of these

rules, neither Illustrious Successes and Dismal Failures could be nullified. On the

Dying Earth, even the mightiest characters are but twigs buffeted on the winds of fate, routinely falling victim to abrupt reversals ranging from the comic to the deadly.

However, many players—especially those used to vicariously enjoying the triumphs of their characters in other roleplaying games—objected to a system that made their high ability pools largely irrelevant. The current rules reflect a grudging compromise between supreme fidelity to the Vancian worldview and the probable expectations of your players.

We stubbornly retain this option to benefit groups eager for the purest possible expression of the Dying Earth. **If all agree, drop the rule allowing nullification of extreme results.**

*he is expected to tend closely to one of two pairs of gigantic eels that tow the vessel in their considerable wake. The eels need constant care, such as the scraping of gangue from their gills and ensuring proper application of their ear lotion. Cugel's player looks at his character sheet and sees that he has no such ability as "Worminger." What will he do?*

*He proposes to the GM that Stewardship ought to suffice. But the definition says nothing about the care of eels, phenomenally large or otherwise. He then proposes Seamanship, but the GM argues that this is scarcely a standard form of marine locomotion. Half desperate, the player argues for Riding; after all, one must tend well to one's riding beast if one is to have any success as a horseman. The GM grudgingly agrees that the two skills are in some small way analogous. She allows Cugel to make Worminger rolls with his Riding ability—but at a levy of 2.*

### Caught Without the Right Ability

If you have no ability relevant to the task at hand, you nonetheless may still attempt it, though at a penalty of 1 to your roll. If the GM deems the required ability to be esoteric or utterly beyond your experience, the penalty might be 2.

*While exploring a temple in the lost city of Ampridatvir, Ulan Dbor tries to start a fabulous vehicle of a type long lost: an air-car! The GM asks Simon, who is playing Ulan Dbor, if he has a Pilot Air-Car ability. As there is no such ability in the game, clearly she mocks him. She informs him that he'll face a penalty of 2 on his attempt.*

*"But wait!" says Simon. "Ulan Dbor has Driving. The description specifically refers to land vehicles, but surely there is at least some carryover to the piloting of air cars." The GM relents, allowing Simon instead to use his Driving ability at a levy of 2.*

## Adjusting a Task's Difficulty

No roll is ever required for a task so easy that anyone familiar with it should be able to complete it without effort. Each ability definition provides a few sample automatic successes to show GMs the sort of task that doesn't need a roll.

**Especially Easy Tasks:** A task may be easier than the norm, but not so easy that success is assured. In this case, the GM adjusts your chances of success by allowing you to treat Exasperating Failures as Hair's-Breadth Successes.

*Vermouliau the Dream-Walker wishes to find an entry in a catalogue of dreams. Inasmuch as he wrote the book (albeit several centuries ago), the GM rules that this is an Especially Easy Task.*

*Vermouliau's player, Mark, rolls an Exasperating Failure. Normally, he would have to reroll, but in this case he treats it as a Hair's-Breadth Success. He finds the entry he seeks without paying points—though not without some fumbling, which embarrasses him in front of his fellow Arch-Magicians.*

## Boons

Some tasks, though not trivial, are easy for even the most casual dilettante. You gain a boon every time you roll (or reroll) to accomplish them. If, for example, a task carries a boon of 1, you add 1 to your pool on your first roll. Your subsequent rolls are essentially free, as the 1 point reroll cost is balanced out by the 1 point boon. Boons do not reduce the cost of nullifying your Dismal Failures or your rival's Illustrious Successes.





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As he scans the tome in question, Rbialto notices one of Vermoulilian's sandestins, having taken the form of a blue-rimmed caryatid with iridescent wings, is hovering over his shoulder. Rbialto decides to convince the sandestin to agree to conceal his clandestine reading activities from Vermoulilian. The sandestin, whose name is Purblex, enjoys annoying his master. Any attempt to persuade him to do something contrary to Vermoulilian's interests, if not his express wishes, carries a boon of 1.

Rbialto's Persuade pool now stands at 14. Due to the boon, his first roll actually gains him a point, increasing his pool to 15. Rbialto rolls and gets an Exasperating Failure. So he rerolls, spending 1 for the reroll and gaining 1 for the boon, for a net change of 0. His pool is still at 15. He rolls a Dismal Failure, suffering a levy of 2. His pool is now at 12. He spends 3 points to nullify the Dismal Failure, taking his pool to 9. He rerolls, again suffering no net loss. He gets another Exasperating Failure, rerolls for another Dismal Failure, pays its levy of 2 and pays 3 to nullify it. Now he's at 5. He rolls yet another no-cost Exasperating Failure, switches to a luckier die, rerolls at no cost again, and finally gets a Hair's-Breadth Success.

The sandestin rolls his Rebuff and gets an Exasperating Failure. He declines to spend points to fend off such a pleasing temptation. Rbialto gets his way, and the sandestin remains silent. If Rbialto hadn't been given a boon, that last success would have cost him his last Persuade point. But with the boon, he still has 5 points left.

"Boon" can also refer to a situation in which you add points to your pool without having to roll. For example, a physician gives you a Health pool boon by successfully treating your injuries.

### Levies

Certain tasks are hard even for a seasoned practitioner. They force you to pay a levy each time you attempt a task. If, for example, a task has a levy of 1, you must pay 1 point to try it the first time, and a total of two for each reroll: one for the reroll and one for the levy. A task with a levy of 2 would cost 2 the first time and 3 for each reroll, and so on.

Later, Rbialto seeks to find the same entry in Vermoulilian's book, after his colleague has left the room. Vermoulilian

has placed a curse on the volume, making its index incomplete. Rbialto therefore suffers a levy of 1. He uses his Pedantry pool, which currently stands at 10.

His first attempt costs him the amount of the levy: 1 point, taking his Pedantry to 9. He gets a Quotidian Failure. To reroll, he must pay 1 for the levy and 1 for the reroll. That takes his Pedantry to 7. He scores another Quotidian Failure. Again he must pay a total of 2 to reroll, dropping his Pedantry to 5. Finally, he gets a Prosaic Success. His total cost to sneakily find the reference: 5 points. Without the levy, it would have cost him 2.

### Penalties

A very few tasks are so hard that they directly subtract from your die roll. To subtract from a die roll is to subject the character to a penalty. Penalties apply only to very rare situations where the character should face a significant chance of gruesome failure. The two most common instances or penalties occur when:

- a character tries to act, even though he's out of points in the relevant ability
- a character acts without any ability relevant to the task; for example, an ill-schooled individual tries to use a powerful spell

GMs should remember that every point of penalty increases the chance of Dismal Failure by about 16%. They are not to be imposed lightly. A levy is almost always a better choice.

Rbialto has run out of Pedantry points, but nonetheless seeks to recall the name of an ancient city. He rolls a 2, which would normally be a Quotidian Failure. Instead, he subtracts 1 from the roll, treating it as a Dismal Failure.

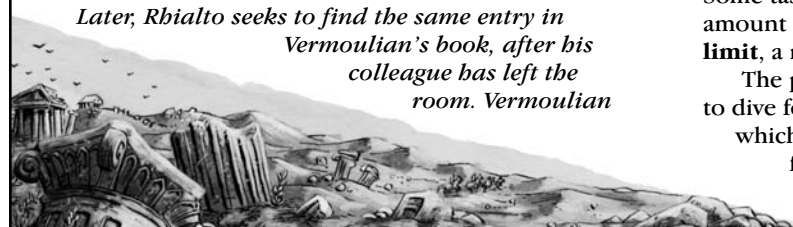
His colleagues laugh at him when he says the city is named Vitorall, which is actually the name of a dessert made from crushed ice, cocoa, and frutther berries.

If your GM assigns a penalty of 3 to a task, she is telling you it is impossible, and waiting to see if you are mathematically inept enough to waste points trying anyway.

### Limits

Some tasks are hard because you have only a limited amount of time in which to complete them. They have a **limit**, a maximum number of permissible rerolls.

The prime example of a roll with a limit is an attempt to dive for cover to avoid a spell using the Athletics ability, which has a limit of 1—you only get one chance to dive for cover.





[Lucounu:] "First I must ensure that, once at liberty, you conduct yourself with unremitting loyalty, zeal, and singleness of purpose." — "Have no fear," declared Cugel. "My word is my bond."

*Rbialto didn't know it, but the GM decided he had a limit of 3 in the last example, after which Vermoulain would reenter the room. Rbialto had only one attempt left before Vermoulain's return.*

It is entirely possible that a forbidding task might impose a levy, a penalty, and a limit.

## Contests

Many times your character's actions will be countered by those of another. Just as often, you'll try to counter the efforts of other characters. These situations are **contests**.

The countering character waits until the acting character succeeds at the task. Then he rolls, using an ability appropriate to the task of thwarting that action. If he succeeds, the acting character fails—unless he pays to reroll. If he scores another success, his opponent may then spend points to reroll his countering ability. This continues until:

- One character scores an Illustrious Success, and his opponent can't or won't pay the special levy of 3 to force a reroll.
- One contestant suffers a Dismal Failure and can't or won't pay the special levy of 3 to allow himself a reroll.

## Playing Cards with a Deodand: The Delectable Contest

### Rules Explanation

This contest pits your Gambling of 4 against the deodand's Gambling of 3. You go first. You roll a Hair's-Breadth Success. Your Gambling pool, increased by 1 due to the boon from your stratagem, is 5.

The GM rolls for the deodand GMC, getting a Prosaic Success. It is the character's first roll, so it costs nothing.

You must reroll. Your Gambling pool remains unchanged at 5, because your boon cancels the levy for the reroll. You roll a 5, Prosaic Success.

The deodand pays 1 to reroll, dropping his Gambling pool to 2. He rolls a 2, Quotidian Failure.

He rerolls, dropping his Gambling pool to 1. He scores a Dismal Failure. Unable to afford the 3 points to reroll a Dismal Failure, he withdraws from the contest, ceding victory to you.

### What's Happening

You wind the first hand, but only take one sea-shell from the deodand. It seems that your spicy aroma has yet to excite his palate.

The deodand wins the second hand, winning back his lost shell and more besides. Perhaps *you're* the one spending undue time thinking about how tasty you smell!

You see sweat start to appear on the deodand's brow. He begins to compulsively wet his lips with his blood-red tongue. His nostrils quiver. The third hand is a winner for you. You even the score.

The deodand is now clearly distracted. His hands quiver and can barely hold the cards. You hear his belly gurgling. He loses the next hand badly. You claim a big stake, leaving him with only three seashells.

He bets all he has on a desperate play, which you easily counter. You smile menacingly at the deodand. According to the wager, he must now do your bidding—and you have cruel plans for him. He begins to protest that the terms of the wager were unfair.

Remember that even before the reroll cost, the luckless player must pay the usual levy of 2 for the Dismal Failure!

- One of the characters runs out of points, in which case the other wins.
- One of the characters withdraws, ceding victory to the other.

## Boons and Levies in Contests

Not all contests are equal. If you enjoy an advantage over the character you contest with, this is reflected with a boon. Every time you roll against him, you gain a boon of 1 or more.

*You are playing a game of cards with a deodand. You each start with seven sea-shells to use as chips. The one to clean out his opponent wins. If you lose, you have agreed to let him clean you out more literally, starting with your viscera. In order to distract him, you have covertly rubbed your body in delicious herbs which grow in a nearby grove. This makes you smell so utterly delicious to the half-man that he finds it difficult to concentrate on his cards. Therefore you enjoy a boon of 1 in this contest. Follow the progress below:*



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Likewise, you might suffer a levy. Every time you roll, you lose a number of points equal to the levy.

*You vie for the hand of the so-called queen of an isolated village. Although she herself possesses all the beauty of a trash-barge, each of her several daughters is extremely well-favored. More important, you seek access to the queen's vault full of silver.*

*The village in question awards the role of*

*consort to the suitor able to construct the tallest ceremonial tower from trees he has personally felled. After successfully purloining timber belonging to a rival, you now have only one other suitor to beat.*

*However, as you begin to work, you realize that someone has loosed voracious wood-eating grubs on your timber during the night. Half the logs are unable to bear real weight.*

*Consequently, you suffer a levy of 1 against your Engineering ability as you labor to out-build your opponent, Gwizam. The sequence of actions:*

### Tower-Building: The Race for the Odious Queen!

#### Rules Explanation

This contest pits your Engineering of 4 against Gwizam's Engineering 5. You go first. You pay a levy of 1, reducing your Engineering to 3. You score a Prosaic Success.

Gwizam rolls a Quotidian Failure, rerolls for another Quotidian Failure, then rolls an Exasperating Failure. At last he rolls a Prosaic Success. After his first (free) roll, his three rerolls cost him 1 point each. His Engineering has gone from 5 to 2.

Gwizam's success forces you to reroll. Again you pay a levy of 1, plus the 1 you would normally pay to reroll. This takes your Engineering from 3 to 1. You then roll a Prosaic Success.

Gwizam pays 1 to reroll against you, taking his Engineering to 1. He rolls a Dismal Failure. Unable to pay 3 points to reroll his Dismal Failure, he withdraws from the contest.

#### What's Happening

Cleverly choosing the least damaged timbers, you create an elegant foundation for the ceremonial tower.

Gwizam's overly complex structure nearly topples a number of times, but he finally secures its support beams and is well-positioned to outbuild you.

You add an additional level to your tower, eclipsing Gwizam's.

Gwizam hurries to keep up with you, but his structure collapses utterly. You hear his piteous cry from the middle of his pile of fallen timber. You gulp as the queen looks in your direction, licking her frog-like lips.

### Trumping

Sometimes your ability will trump another. A character trying to use an ability against its trump suffers a levy of 1. Each style of the persuasion ability, for example, trumps one of the rebuff styles, but is itself trumped by another type of rebuff. The same holds for the styles of attack and defense.

The styles that trump one another are listed in the next chapter.

*Cugel attempts to persuade the truculent caravan-master Varmous that he has indeed seen rock goblins lurking in the desert. Cugel's Persuade style is Glib. Unfortunately, Varmous's Rebuff is Obtuse. Obtuse trumps Glib. Cugel suffers a levy of 1 each time he rolls to persuade Varmous. Cugel has a Persuade pool of 6; Varmous has 5.*

*Cugel's first roll, normally free, costs him 1 from his Persuade pool due to the trump levy, taking him down to 5. He gets a Prosaic Success. The GM, playing Varmous, counters with a Quotidian Failure (costing nothing, as it is his first roll) and rerolls twice (costing him another 2 points) before finally getting a Hair's-Breadth Success. Cugel's Persuasion is now 5; Varmous's, 3. It costs Cugel 2 points to reroll (1 for the usual reroll cost plus 1 for the trump levy), equalizing the two pools. Cugel scores an Illustrious Success! Varmous would have to pay 3 points to nullify an Illustrious Success, which would leave him with 0. He'd likely lose anyway, so Varmous conserves his points and reluctantly agrees to take a party out in search of the goblins.*

*In another instance, Cugel tries to persuade a carriage-driver to rent his vehicle outright, instead of simply hiring the man to drive him around. Moreover, he claims that someone else will pay the fee later. The carriage driver's Rebuff is Pure-Hearted, which is trumped by Cugel's Glib*





"Excellent!" cried Lucounu. "This knowledge represents a basic security which I do not in the least take lightly. The act now to be performed is doubtless supererogatory."

*persuasion ability. Cugel pays nothing for the first try, which grants him a Prosaic Success. The driver's Rebuff pool is 3. The driver grumbles that all fees must be paid in advance; this Rebuff costs him 1 point, taking him to 2. He gets a Quotidian Failure. He rerolls, costing him his last 2 points, but gets an Exasperating Failure. Now reduced to 0 pool, he loses. Cugel persuades him to rent the carriage for beer money and a false promise of future payment.*

## Wallops

Sometimes you may contest against a character whose relevant ability rating is much worse than your own. If your rating (not current pool!) exceeds his by 5 or more, you may spend 5 from your pool to immediately and devastatingly achieve whatever result you desire. This is called a **Wallop**. You needn't roll. Your opponent can prevent the Wallop only with an Illustrious Success on his first roll to counter you—other results do nothing and the

roll cannot under any circumstances be rerolled or nullified. You pay the Wallop cost even if he does get that Illustrious Success.

If you can observe your target for a few minutes as he uses the ability you wish to counter, a successful roll of your Perception ability tells whether he's sufficiently impuissant to suffer a Wallop.

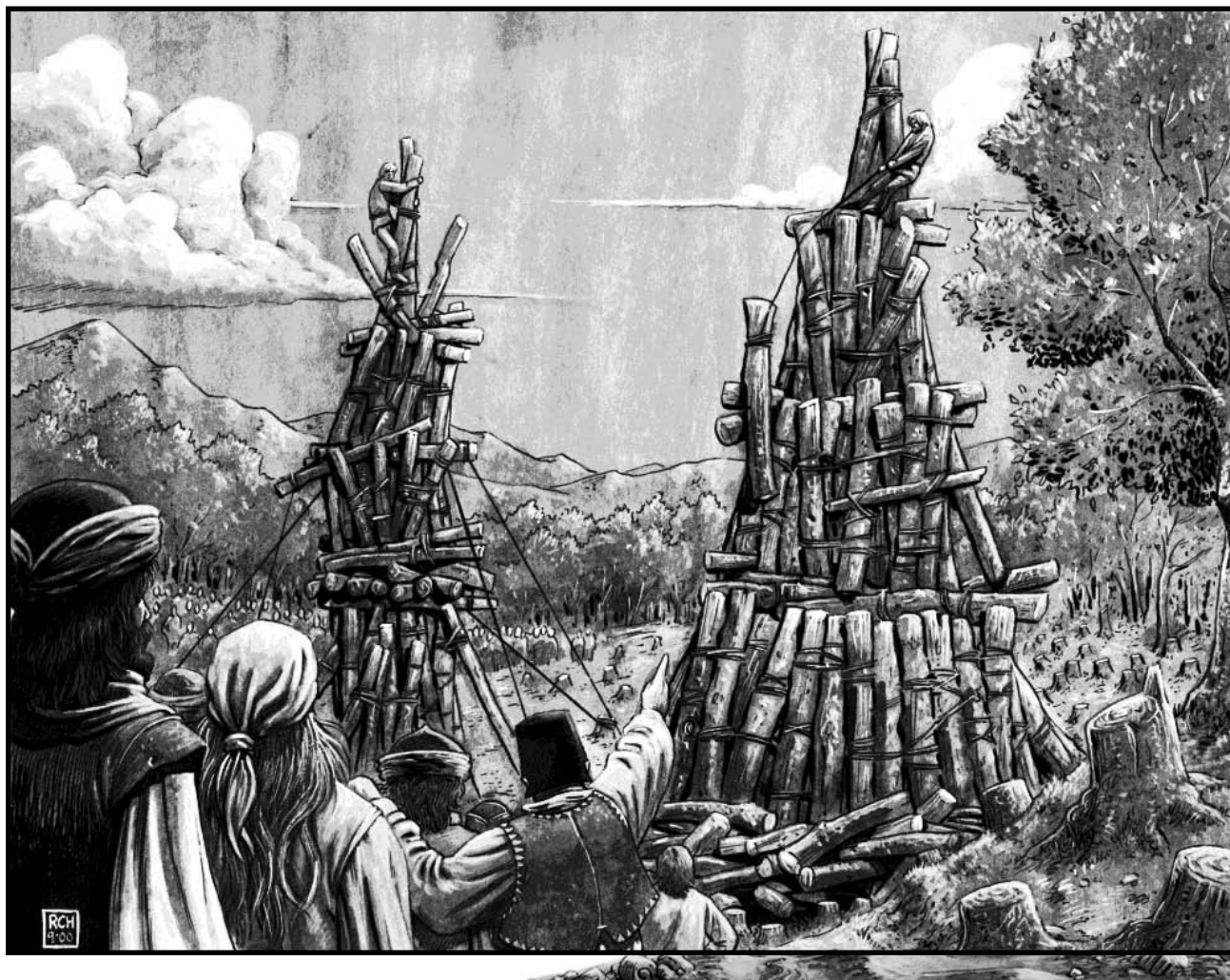
## Contests: Picayune Details

### Running Out of Points

When your pool in a given ability is empty, you cannot reroll uses of that ability. Worse, you suffer a penalty of 1 on any attempt to use that ability. If you attempt to use it in a situation that would normally require a levy, the penalty is 2. This leaves you very little chance to succeed.

### Initiative

Sometimes a number of characters all want to act at once, seizing the **initiative**. Characters act in the order of their pools in the abilities they intend to use, from highest to lowest. When competing characters have equivalent





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pools, each rolls a die. The best success wins; reroll ties. From the pool of the ability being used, you may pay 1 to reroll this tie-breaker die.

When it is your turn to act you may choose to **hold off**. Instead of acting, you wait. When any other character is set to act, you may interrupt him and act first. If you wait until everyone else has acted, you may then act, or pass on the opportunity to act altogether.

### Rounds

The interval required for all characters to act once is called a **round**. A round is a rules abstraction that does not correspond to any fixed duration. A round of combat may take a few seconds. A round of negotiation could take several minutes. If it matters, your GM decides how long it takes to resolve the contest at hand, using common sense.

### Moves

Each time a character attempts action in a round, he is making a **move**. An **active move** is one in which you are trying to do something. The two most common active moves are persuasion and attack. When your initiative comes up, you may make one active move. You are never obligated to actively move. If you have no plan to take an active move during a round, don't bother rolling.

When you need to defend yourself from someone else's active move, you're making a **reactive move**. You may make any number of reactive moves in a round; making multiple reactive moves does not impose a levy or penalty. You are never obligated to react, but may face unpleasant consequences if you don't.

### Exchanges

Together, an active move (including all of its rerolls) and a reactive move (including all of its rerolls) is referred to as an **exchange**.

### Additional Moves

When the round would otherwise end, the GM may extend the round for anyone who wants to make an additional active move. Any extra move suffers a levy equal to the number of extra moves that character has taken this round, including the one at hand. So your second active move suffers a levy of 1, the third costs 2, and so on.

If you didn't take your regular active move during the round, your actions during the extended round still suffers this additional-action levy.

If more than one character wishes to take an additional action, refigure initiative between the acting characters using their current pools in the abilities they propose to use.

When everyone who wished to take a second action has done so, the GM may then ask if anyone wishes to take a third action. At her option, the GM may extend the round until

every character passes on paying for an additional action. If there is anything to resolve at this point, a new round begins.

## Multiple Targets

In some situations you may wish to make an active move against more than one target. Explain to your GM why you can credibly take the action you propose. If she accepts your argument, she'll allow you to proceed. All defenders roll, and you are faced with their best result.

---

*The mobile IOUN stones escape again (see "A Sample Contest" on the facing page). Rbialto, alone in his parlor, attempts to scoop up all four at once. He makes his Athletics roll against all four of them. He scores a Prosaic Success. All four roll in response, scoring two Quotidian Failures, one Dismal Failure, and an Exasperating Failure. Only the Exasperating Failure counts. But because none of the stones managed to force Rbialto to reroll, he carries the day, and has scooped them all up.*

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To Wallop multiple targets, your total in the ability in question must exceed the combined totals of all defenders' abilities by 5 or more.

## Ganging Up

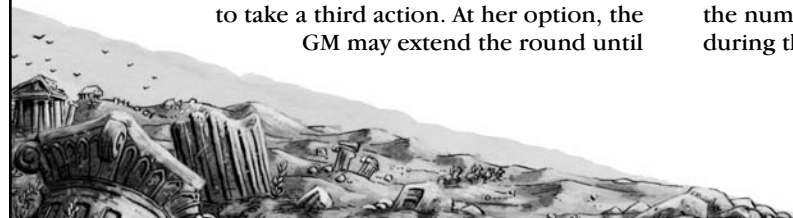
Sometimes you may wish to act in concert with others against a single target. First, explain to your GM why it helps to gang up. If she accepts your explanation, she'll allow it. Your GM will, however, remember this:

**Many tasks are confused, not aided, when several hands work to the same end.**

Ganging up on a Persuasion attempt doesn't work. When faced with multiple persuaders, people become defensive and ever more adhesive to their original position. The one exception occurs if every persuading character is using Intimidation: Ganging up enhances a physical threat, whether implied or explicit.

Up to a point, it helps to gang up in combat. Typically no more than three human-sized attackers can land serviceable blows against a human-sized target without interfering with one another. (Several individuals can restrain a victim, stopping him from defending at all, while several others beat him. The term "combat" does not precisely describe such a scenario.)

When ganging up does provide a benefit, the target suffers a levy of X on all reactive actions, where X equals the number of separate reactive moves he's already made during the current round.





[Iucounu showed] a small white creature, all claws, barbs, and hooks, now squirming angrily. "This is my friend Firx, from the star Achernar. He will assist you in the expeditious discharge of your duties."

## A Sample Contest (I)

### **Rhialto, Ildefonse, Mune, and Hurtiancz, butterfly nets in hand, are**

attempting to capture a collection of IOUN stones to which a rival mage has granted tiny legs and a concomitant ability to skitter mischievously across the carpeting of Rhialto's manse. According to the terms of a perhaps ill-advised wager, they may use only their natural athletic ability, not their magic, to scoop up the errant stones. Rhialto's Athletics ability is 7; the others have a paltry 3 points each in their Athletics pools. Rhialto goes first. Each stone starts with 4 points in Athletics. If the stones wanted to make active moves, they'd then roll against one another for initiative. But they're only going to react, so they don't. The three other mages must roll against one another to determine their order of initiative. Ildefonse gets a 3; Mune, a 1; and Hurtiancz, a 5. So the order of initiative is Rhialto, Hurtiancz, Ildefonse, and Mune.

Rhialto scores a Prosaic Success against one of the stones, which glows deep red. The GM rolls a reaction on behalf of the stone and also gets a Prosaic Success. So Rhialto pays to reroll, getting a Hair's-Breadth Success. The stone pays to counter and gets an Illustrious Success, getting a boon of 2 in the process. Its Athletics pool now has 5 points. It would cost Rhialto half of his Athletics pool to nullify that Illustrious Success, so, with some reluctance, he lets it slip from his grasp. It now dances provocatively on his bannister.

Hurtiancz makes his move against the stone closest to him, which is turquoise in color. He suffers a Dismal Failure, and declines to pay the 3 point reroll levy. He has fallen down the stairs and become entangled in his own net. When this is over, the irascible Hurtiancz will surely blame Rhialto for his humiliation. Hurtiancz suffers a levy of 2, reducing his Athletics pool to 1.

Pursuing an amber-colored stone, Ildefonse likewise suffers a Dismal Failure, tripping over a service cart. A plate of charna-nut stew nearly topples onto him. He suffers a levy of 2, making his Athletics 1. He can't afford to reroll, so his Dismal Failure stands.

Mune, eager to outshine his rivals, dives headlong at a colorless stone. He scores a Quotidian Failure and pays to reroll, taking his Athletics to 2. He gets an Exasperating Failure. He rerolls again, reducing his Athletics pool to 1, and nets an Illustrious Success—and thus, the stone, which cannot afford to nullify his result. He also gets a boon of 2. Mune now has an Athletics pool of 3 points.

All participants have now taken their main actions for the round. The GM asks if anyone wishes to take an additional action. Rhialto, not to be outshone by Mune, decides to do so, even though each of his rolls faces a levy of 1. Mune decides to stay in the race, too, hoping to repeat his luck. The others decline to suffer redoubled exertions and will instead pause to catch their breaths—that is, wait until the next round. Rhialto's current Athletics pool is 6 points, so he goes before Mune, whose total is 3.

Because he faces a levy of 1, Rhialto must pay 1 point for his first roll, dropping his total to 5. He gets an Illustrious Success. He gets a boon of 2, increasing his Athletics pool to 7 points. The ruby IOUN stone pays 3 to nullify his Illustrious Success, taking its Athletics to 2. Rhialto doesn't pay for a reroll forced by an opponent, and gets an Exasperating Failure for free. He pays 1 to reroll, taking his Athletics to 6. He gets a Dismal Failure, suffering a levy of 2. Now his Athletics is 4. He pays 3 to reroll, leaving him at 1. He gets a Prosaic Success. The stone pays 1 to counter, getting a Dismal Failure. That drops its Athletics to 0. It must withdraw from the contest, leaving itself in Rhialto's grasp.

Mune pays 1 to grab at the amber stone Ildefonse first pursued. He gets an Exasperating Failure. Thinking that he may wish Mune to use his Athletics later in the day, his player decides that the cost of additional actions is too great to pay. Mune withdraws, leaving the stone uncaptured. His total is now 2.

With the first series of additional actions resolved, the GM asks if anyone wishes to enter into a second. No one does.

A new round begins. Mune, with 2 Athletics, goes first. With 1 Athletics apiece, Rhialto, Ildefonse and Hurtiancz tie for third place, and must roll initiative to see which of them takes precedence over the other. Each rolls a 5. They reroll the tie. Rhialto gets a 5, and the others each get 2s. They reroll again. Ildefonse gets a 6; Hurtiancz, a 4. So the order is Mune, Rhialto, Ildefonse, and finally the sullen Hurtiancz.

Mune goes first. He rolls a Hair's-Breadth Success. The last stone, the amber, rolls to counter, getting a Prosaic Success. Mune pays 1 to reroll, taking his Athletics to 1. He gets another Hair's-Breadth Success. The stone pays 1 to counter (reducing its Athletics to 3) and gets an Exasperating Failure. It pays 1 to reroll (taking its Athletics to 2), getting an Illustrious Success. The boon of 2 takes its Athletics back to its original 4. Mune can't afford to nullify the Illustrious Success, so he is left cursing as the stone maneuvers him into a stack of Rhialto's books, causing him to skid across the well-polished parquet flooring.

*(Continued next page)*



## Essential Rules

### A Sample Contest (II)

*(Continued from previous page)*

Rhialto goes next, as the amber IOUN stone skitters wildly up the stairs. He scores a Dismal Failure. He suffers a levy of 2, taking his Athletics pool to 0. He can't afford the reroll, so his Dismal Failure stands. He's out of the contest.

Ildefonse is up. He dives for the stone as it skitters his way. He scores an Illustrious Success, trapping it beneath his chest. Due to the boon, his Athletics is now 3. The stone pays 3 to nullify his result, dropping its Athletics to 1. Ildefonse scores a Prosaic Success. The stone pays its last point to counter, getting an Exasperating Failure. Now that the stone's Athletics pool has been emptied, Ildefonse wins, taking possession of the stone.

Rhialto exults that he has won the wager, because he has more stones in hand than any other. The others argue that the victor would have to possess a majority of the stones to win, and that the outcome is therefore nullified. Rhialto commences to convince them that their argument is flawed. Another contest begins, one which will use other abilities....

### Withdrawing During a Free-For-All

Astute readers will note that, in this example, Mune withdraws without losing the contest. In contests with multiple participants, you may be able to withdraw from an exchange without being knocked out of the contest entirely. The GM decides this case by case, guided by the situation at hand. You should always be allowed to withdraw from unstructured fights and group arguments.

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*T'Sais is beset by three ruffians who attack her. Reacting against the first ruffian, she suffers no levy; against the second, she suffers a levy of 1; against the third, a levy of 2. Then the first ruffian makes an additional action; should T'Sais respond, this becomes her fourth reactive move (albeit against her first attacker), so the levy is 3.*

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they may spend a great many points to get Illustrious Successes, perhaps precipitating yet another round of tiebreaker rolls.

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*Cugel, Rhialto, Turjan, and T'sais (an unlikely quartet!) sit down for a band of cards. Their Gambling pools are as follows: 8, 8, 4, and 3. The pot for the band is 100 terces. Cugel gets a Prosaic Success, as do both Rhialto and Turjan. T'sais scores an Illustrious Success. The men had better reroll and get Illustrious Successes if they want to get their hands on those terces.*

*Cugel spends as necessary to reroll, getting a Hair's-Breadth Success, a Prosaic Success, another Prosaic Success, and finally an Illustrious Success. That costs 4 points, taking his pool to 4.*

*Rhialto pays 1 to reroll, immediately getting a Dismal Failure, which costs him a levy of 2, taking his Gambling pool to 5. He pays 3 to reroll, taking his Gambling to 2—and gets another Dismal Failure! Ouch! That drops his Gambling to 0, so the master magician is out of the game. He stomps off to upbraid his sandestin for failing to keep the wine precisely cooled.*

*Turjan pays 1 to reroll, taking his Gambling to 3. The levy he faces for that Dismal Failure drops his Gambling pool another 2 points, to 1. That makes the extra cost of rerolling a Dismal Failure too rich for his blood, and he is forced to drop out. This leaves only Cugel and T'sais as contenders. They're tied, each with Illustrious Successes.*

*But Cugel's pool of 4 still exceeds T'sais's score*

### Many Contestants, One Prize

Sometimes a number of contestants compete simultaneously, each hoping to outdo all others. Common examples include games of chance, races, and other competitions. In this case, each character rolls simultaneously, and the best result wins. You may wait until you see others' results before you decide whether to reroll. As usual, you may reroll your Dismal Failures by paying 3 points in addition to the standard reroll cost. However, characters can't nullify their rivals' Illustrious Successes.

Ties go to the character with the highest pool in the contested ability. If two tied contestants have equal pools, compare ratings. If they have equal ratings, each rolls again. The first tie-breaker roll costs no points, but players may pay to reroll results as usual. Dismal Failures can still be bought off, as usual. If two or more contestants are determined to win,





lucounu stepped close, deftly thrust the creature against Cugel's abdomen. It merged into his viscera and took up a vigilant post clasped around Cugel's liver.

of 3, so he wins the band. Cugel gloats, prompting each of the others to plot his comeuppance....

## Tallies

Sometimes your GM will need to know how well you've done at a series of related tasks that occur over time. You might be sorting through a pile of junk to find the few valuable pieces among the dross, spending an evening seeking to impress your social betters at a grand ball, or working several nights to fix the tattered rigging of a sailing vessel.

You make a number of rolls specified by the GM, adding each result to a running **Tally** that tracks your overall success. Each separate result adds to or subtracts from your Tally, as seen in the following chart.

Roll	Result	Effect on Tally
1	Dismal Failure	-5
2	Quotidian Failure	-2
3	Exasperating Failure	-1
4	Hair's-Breadth Success	1
5	Prosaic Success	2
6	Illustrious Success	5

You can reroll as usual when compiling a Tally. Also as usual, Dismal Failures may be rerolled only by paying an extra 3 points.

*A demon has exiled Palandro to a certain layer of the Underworld reserved for quibblers, pettifoggers, sophists, and cavers. Among thousands of other inmates, he is strapped to a chair and forced to listen to a coterie of imps conducting a legal argument. Not only do the imps make frequent errors of law, but they mispronounce almost any word in excess of three syllables! Palandro's fellow sufferers writhe and squirm, desperately struggling to restrain their urges to correct the imps. When one finally loses his composure, he cries out a correction. His chair then sinks further into the*

*earth. When he sinks beneath the level of his mouth, he is forever doomed to remain there.*

*The GM decides that for Palandro to free himself from this Quibblers' Hell, he must get a Tally of 5 in seven rolls of his Resist Pettifoggery ability. Each roll represents the effort of a single night. Palandro has a Pettifoggery pool of 6. Here in the Underworld he will have no opportunity to refresh it.*

*His first roll is a Prosaic Success. That gives him a Tally of 2. His second roll is a Quotidian Failure. He chooses to reroll that, reducing his Resist Pettifoggery pool to 5. Again he rolls a Quotidian Failure. Again he chooses to reroll, reducing his pool to 4. Another Quotidian Failure! Palandro's player accepts that roll as cursed and moves on. 2 plus -2 equals 0, which is his new Tally.*

*His third roll is a Prosaic Success. His Tally increases to 2. His fourth roll is a Dismal Failure, and the levy takes his Resist Pettifoggery from 4 to 2. He can't afford the extra cost of rerolling a Dismal Failure and must let that result stand. 2 plus -5 equals -3, his new Tally. Things are looking grim for poor Palandro. He begins to regret telling the demon that he'd ended a sentence with a preposition.*

*His fifth roll is a Hair's-Breadth Success. That increases his Tally by 1, to -2 points. His sixth roll is another Hair's-Breadth Success. That won't be enough to get him to 5, even if he scores an Illustrious Success on his seventh and final roll. So Palandro's player elects to reroll, reducing his Resist Pettifoggery pool to 3. He nets a Prosaic Success, which brings him up to 0.*

*His seventh roll is make or break: he needs an Illustrious Success to escape. His first roll is a Prosaic Success. Not good enough, so his player chooses to reroll, taking his Resist Pettifoggery pool to 2. He cheers as he gets an Illustrious Success! Palandro feels his bonds dissolving away from him, and awakens on the Dying Earth in the middle of a marsh. Unsalubrious circumstances to be sure, but better than an eternity of that torment! (The boon from that last Illustrious Success leaves him with a Resist Pettifoggery of 4.)*

**A demon:** Probably Med-Horred-Led, called "the Sanctimonious Justificator" (12-113 Red in Thrump's *Almanac*). Affecting a righteous and high-minded piety, Med-Horred-Led arrogates to himself the right to perceive, adjudicate, and punish violations of civility or etiquette, allegedly specified in the *Judicial Code and Corrigenda* of the demon realm La-Er. Inasmuch as Med-Horred-Led's victims from the surface world have never visited La-Er, neither the Code's existence nor the Justificator's authority can definitely be attested.



## Essential Rules

In cases when the consequences of failure are not dire, the number of rolls needed to acquire a certain Tally may be open-ended. This is most common when the character has only a limited amount of time in which to complete a task. He may keep at it until he gets the needed Tally or runs out of time, whichever comes first.

---

*Cugel, visiting a new town, means to establish himself as an incompetent card player. The sooner Cugel can make himself seem an easy mark, the sooner he can win a big stake and pay his fare back to Alмеры.*

*The GM tells his player that successfully establishing this reputation requires a Gambling tally of 4. The GM informs Cugel's player that each roll represents four hours spent finding a game with new players and then credibly losing a small stake. He can find, at best, two games per day.*

*When he finds his first game, Cugel's player rolls a Prosaic Success, giving him a Tally of 2. On his second, he makes the same roll. After a single evening, he's made himself out to be an utter simpleton at the local game. His chances of making tomorrow night's coach out of town seem promising.*

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In some cases, PCs may pool their efforts, all contributing to a single Tally. The GM decides if a task is suitable for group effort.

---

*Cugel and Palandro work together to comb through a stack of old documents in search of a clue to a lost treasure. Each may roll once for*

*every four hours spent searching. They need a Tally of 8 to piece together the separate references needed to pinpoint the location in question. They all use their Pedantry abilities. Palandro rolls an Exasperating Failure, then rerolls it to get a Dismal Failure. Palandro's player declines to pay 3 points for the reroll. The Tally is now -5. Palandro has clearly become convinced that the treasure's location is in an entirely different set of ruins than is actually the case.*

*Cugel rolls an Exasperating Failure, which he rerolls. He gets an Illustrious Success. 5 plus -5 is 0, which becomes the new Tally.*

*Meanwhile, the GM has decided that their innkeeper knows they've buried valuables nearby and intends to dig them up while their noses are stuck in books. Each time they roll, he gets a Perception roll. If he gets a Tally of 5 before they finish their task, he succeeds in locating their valuables, digging them up, and concealing them in his basement.*

---

PCs may even pool Tally results with different abilities, if the GM deems it appropriate.

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*Cugel once again finds himself in a new town, eager to create false rumors of his incompetence at cards. This time Palandro aims to assist him. While Cugel plays in one tavern, Palandro goes to another to regale its patrons with fictional tales of Cugel's past gambling losses. Cugel uses Gambling to contribute to the needed Tally, whereas Palandro employs Scuttlebutt.*



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**clue to a lost treasure:** In all likelihood Cugel and Palandro actually seek a plausible premise and corroborative detail for their own fabricated treasure map, which they plan to offer their innkeeper in lieu of payment for a truly astounding bill.





## Chapter 4:

# Abilities in Practice

The vivid panoply of adventurous activity found here will exhaust the most active curiosity

### The Journal of Xolon the Hide Merchant

**A**t the commencement of spring, with the sun hanging livid red over the trees of the Great Erm, a merchant came to Tugersbir. He was named Ghurantz, and he claimed to derive from the city of Kaiin, which I had supposed to be utterly imaginary. He insisted that this was not the case, although I suspected that his descriptions of its majesty were born more of a need to make a favorable comparison with old Tugersbir than of dedication to the truth. ☼ His ship was loaded primarily with wines and silks, neither of which may be made in our cool northern climate; also rare woods, exotic essences, and a selection of charms and periapts. These goods he sold in the market, barring only the last, which were simple lozenges of inscribed lead and of no demonstrable efficacy. ☼ In return he purchased a cargo of erb pelts, paying the first price I asked, to my comprehensive astonishment. Later it came to me that only a single reason could exist for this bizarre conduct. The price of erb pelts at Port Perdusz in the Land of the Falling Wall, whence he was bound, had to be so high as to make my own assessment of their value seem trivial. ☼ As I was the pre-eminent hide merchant of Tugersbir, it was incumbent upon me to benefit from this fact.

“I will not thank you,” said Pandelume. “But in order that a fitting symmetry be maintained, I perform a service for a service. I will not only guide your hands as you work among the vats, but also will I teach you other matters of value.”

*The Dying Earth,*  
Chapter 1



## Abilities in Practice

This chapter shows how to apply Chapter 3's essential rules to the abilities in the game. It shows how persuasion attempts work, what happens during combat, and why failed Health rolls are surpassingly unpleasant. Other abilities are defined, Relationships explicated, Wealth measured, and temptation Resistances explored.

We use the following format to describe abilities:

The description begins with a **definition**, and any special rules or explanatory material. The entry **Automatic Success** lists a task the possessor of this ability can undertake without rolling. **Refresh** lists the circumstances under which the character's ability pool refreshes (see Chapter 3). **Counters** lists other abilities you can contest by using this ability. **Is Countered By** warns you of any abilities that can be used to contest this ability.

## Persuade and Rebuff

Where most fantasy roleplaying game sessions depend heavily on scenes of gore-soaked, limb-hewing combat, a *Dying Earth* episode typically highlights scenes of elaborate and picayune negotiation. The two negotiation abilities—the active Persuade ability and the reactive Rebuff—are among the most important in the game.

As shown in the chart below, each style of Persuade trumps, and is trumped by, a style of Rebuff. (Rules for trumping, you'll recall, appear in Chapter 3.)

### Persuade

If you score an uncontested Persuade success against another character, or win a contest against him, he accepts your proposed course of action. Victory does not necessarily mean that your target likes you or is happy to do what you ask. His attitude toward you as he complies will vary with the situation, and with your style of persuasion.

### Persuade and Rebuff style trumping

	TRUMPS	Is TRUMPED By
<b>Glib</b>	Pure-Hearted	Obtuse
<b>Eloquent</b>	Contrary	Wary
<b>Obfuscatory</b>	Lawyerly	Penetrating
<b>Forthright</b>	Penetrating	Lawyerly
<b>Charming</b>	Wary	Contrary
<b>Intimidating</b>	Obtuse	Pure-Hearted
<b>Pure-Hearted</b>	Intimidating	Glib
<b>Contrary</b>	Charming	Eloquent
<b>Lawyerly</b>	Forthright	Obfuscatory
<b>Penetrating</b>	Obfuscatory	Forthright
<b>Wary</b>	Eloquent	Charming
<b>Obtuse</b>	Glib	Intimidating

**Automatic Success:** Get someone to do something he already believes to be in his best interest.

**Refresh:** Varies by style.

Style	Refreshes after:
<b>Glib</b>	a night's rest, a hot bath, and a change into clean clothes
<b>Eloquent</b>	1. a sound sleep and perusal of great literature; <i>or</i> 2. listening to the stirring words of a great orator with whose philosophy you agree
<b>Obfuscatory</b>	four or more hours spent developing a theory so complex as to be incomprehensible, which you then share with anyone foolish enough to listen
<b>Forthright</b>	successful intervention to right an injustice
<b>Charming</b>	1. an evening of fervent yet luxurious lovemaking; <i>or</i> 2. a night spent toasting others, purchasing drinks, and telling stories until your throat rasps
<b>Intimidating</b>	1. victory in combat; <i>or</i> 2. several hours of punishing combat training

### How Persuade Works

The GM determines the difficulty of persuasion according to the actual merit of your offer. If your offer is extremely beneficial to your negotiating opponent, treat Dismal Failures as Quotidian. If it favors him, but requires him to take great risks, roll normally. If your offer will leave him somewhat worse off than before, treat Hair's-Breadth Successes as Exasperating Failures. If the offer is a patent cheat, treat Quotidian Failures as Dismal.

Other factors may affect the difficulty. If, in this episode, your opponent has already rebuffed one or more attempts by others to convince him of the same thing, you suffer a levy of 2 for each character he rebuffed.

*Palandro and Lelag the Omnipresent are famished and wish to convince a farmer to slaughter one of his thwas-beasts in order that they might dine on steak tonight. Palandro makes the first attempt to persuade him, only to be rebuffed—the farmer claims that his religion forbids him to slaughter beasts during the month of Wassik.*

*Lelag then attempts to browbeat the farmer into obeying his command. Because Palandro has already tried and failed, Lelag suffers a levy of 2. Lelag fails.*

*He considers ordering his dogsbody, Dersev, to persuade the farmer, but Dersev would now suffer a levy of 4, for two failed attempts. So Lelag instead orders Dersev to steal the thwas-*



lucounu stood back, laughing [in] immoderate glee.... Cugel's eyes bulged from his head. He opened his mouth to utter an objurgation, but instead clenched his jaw and rolled up his eyes.



beast while he and Palandro keep the farmer distracted with a demonstration of the magical curiosities they carry on their persons.

If a Persuade attempt seems to be failing, you may take actions intended to reduce your levy, or even impose one on your target. These typically involve the provision of additional inducements to the resisting character, such as food, drink, money, goods, or promises of services. The GM decides your negotiating opponent's susceptibility to

your inducements, and accordingly metes out levies to him. You may add new inducements to the mix before any reroll.

*Rbialto, visiting a previous aeon, encounters three young women. He wants information on the local situation, which will aid him in finding an item he seeks. Unfortunately, they think he's some kind of vicious bandit: "He is a Pooner, or perhaps a Bobul, and we are as good as dead!" The GM decides that Rbialto suffers a levy of 2.*

*Rbialto's Persuade is 15; the girls (whom the GM treats as one entity, for simplicity's sake) have Rebuff 4. Rbialto makes his first Persuasion roll, paying 2 points for the privilege. His Persuade pool drops to 13.*

*"What foolish talk is this? I am only a traveller from a far land, neither Pooner nor Bobul, and I intend you no harm. Have you never seen a stranger before?" He gets a Prosaic Success.*

*The girls roll Rebuff, getting a Quotidian Failure. They reroll, taking their Rebuff to 3, and get a Prosaic Success. "Certainly, but never one so dour, meanwhile wearing so comical a hat."*

*Their success forces Rbialto to reroll. However, the reroll gives him the chance to add an inducement to change their attitude towards him. He asks the girls for advice on a more fashionable hat, and orders his sandestin to produce one matching their specifications. When the hat appears, the girls are more favorably disposed towards Rbialto, and he no longer suffers a levy. He now rerolls for the normal cost, 1 Persuasion point.*

Note that it is possible to offend the person you're attempting to persuade, and grant him a boon instead of a levy.

## Persuade Style Benefits

Each Persuade style confers extra benefits.



### Xolon's Journal (II)

**By the simple expedient of rendering Ghurantz drunk, I managed to** obtain a certain chart. This showed not only the northerly part of the Ocean of Sighs but lands and seas far to the south, along with those cities set on the Melantine Gulf. These included Kaiin, Cansapara, and Mell itself, all apparently still inhabited.

He had enlarged at length upon the dangers of the seas between, citing the possibility of becoming mired in weed, smashed by storms, murdered by pirates, and devoured by sea-monsters. All this was quite evidently hyperbole, designed to impress us with his bravery and terrify us from the benefits of trade not under his control. I myself fear neither man nor beast, yet the voice of classical logic suggested making for Port Perdusz rather than Kaiin itself, the voyage being known to our shipmasters.

Common mercantile sense also suggested arriving before Ghurantz and thus assuring the best price for our pelts. By good fortune Kloye, my brother-in-law, had recently added supplementary sponsons to his vessel, the *Cil Emperor*, equipping her for a full six-worm configuration.



## Abilities in Practice

### Glib

- ☛ If your persuasion attempt takes place under a limit, you gain a single boon equal to the limit.
- ☛ You gain a boon of 1 when using any magic that makes things seem more beautiful or pleasing than they really are.

### Eloquent

- ☛ You gain a boon of 1 when attempting to sway a crowd.
- ☛ You gain a boon of 1 when using magic that increases the intensity of emotions felt by your target.

### Obfuscatory

- ☛ You gain a boon of 1 when using magic to create illusions.
- ☛ The confusion you sow sometimes lingers in your targets' minds. If you score an Illustrious Success during a Persuasion attempt, you may spend X points to gain a boon of X on every subsequent Persuasion attempt against the same target. This benefit remains in force until the GMC scores an Illustrious Success on his rebuff. From that point on, you suffer a levy of X on persuasion attempts against that character.

### Forthright

- ☛ You gain a boon of 1 when using magic with instantaneous and obvious effects.
- ☛ If you score an Illustrious Success during a Persuasion attempt, you acquire a reputation for honesty in the community or neighborhood in which your target lives. You gain a boon of 1 on all subsequent persuasion attempts on characters likely to know of this reputation. It lasts until you suffer a Dismal Failure on an applicable persuasion attempt, or until you're caught out in an incontrovertible lie. This benefit is of little use when dealing with loners and wilderness dwellers.

### Charming

- ☛ When given a choice between you and non-Charming PCs, GMCs prefer to talk to you. You get dinner invitations, seductive advances, and other perks that the naturally charismatic take for granted.
- ☛ You gain a boon of 1 when using magic that bends the behavior of others to your will.

### Intimidating

- ☛ You can gang up with other Intimidating characters, enhancing your chance of persuading your target. See Chapter 3, "Ganging Up."

- ☛ Given a choice between you and unthreatening friends, hostile characters will always choose to attack them before you. That is, unless their primary style of persuasion is also Intimidating, in which case they'll go for you first, seeing you as a threat to their top-dog status.
- ☛ If your Attack style is Strength, you can spend Attack points on Persuade rolls.

## Rebuff

This ability lets you counter others' persuasion attempts.

**Automatic Success:** Counters an absurd proposition no one in his right mind could possibly agree to, or one that the persuading character has not made a credible attempt to justify. Examples of absurd propositions: "Your appearance is so offensive to me that you should kill yourself." "Surely you agree that up is down." "You can lighten your load by handing me your purse full of terces." "That deodand couldn't possibly hurt you."

**Refresh:** Varies by style.

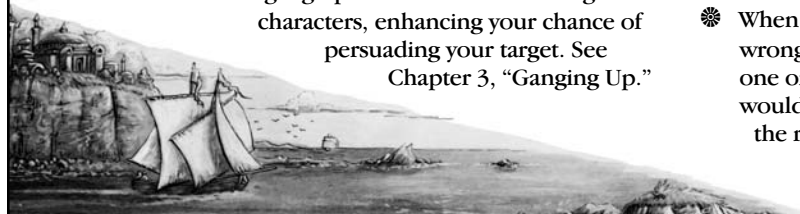
Style	Refreshes after you:
<b>Pure-Hearted</b>	see evidence that honesty and virtue triumph in the end
<b>Contrary</b>	see that your skepticism was justified
<b>Lawyerly</b>	spend a comfortable evening sipping a rare vintage or fine liqueur while studying the classic legal texts of aeons gone by
<b>Penetrating</b>	get a good night's sleep, unimpaired by debauchery or hardship
<b>Wary</b>	1. discover that you have succumbed to a swindle; <i>or</i> 2. expose a swindle when you have nothing to gain by intervening
<b>Obtuse</b>	1. suffer a restless night; <i>or</i> 2. spend an evening numbing the brain with mighty intoxicants

## Rebuff Style Benefits and Drawbacks

Each style of Rebuff gives you different benefits. Some hamper you in certain situations.

### Pure-Hearted

- ☛ When you tell the truth to other Pure-Hearted characters, they believe you.
- ☛ When you are vexed by evildoers or falsely accused of wrongdoing, roll Rebuff with a levy of 1. If successful, one or more Pure-Hearted GMCs come to your aid. If it would strain credibility to have such characters show up, the roll is impossible. Your GM should tell you ahead of time that aid isn't likely, so that you don't have to







Lucounu pointed to a cage. "This will be your conveyance. Inside." Cugel hesitated. "It might be preferable to dine well, to sleep and rest, to set forth tomorrow refreshed."

spend the point. This is not a conscious ability or even an unconscious supernatural power. It's a literary device representing the survival edge enjoyed by sympathetic characters. The player knows he's using the ability; the character does not.

### Contrary

- ☼ You gain a boon of 1 when attempting a Pedantry task, provided that the correct answer is contrary to conventional wisdom.
- ☼ Magicians suffer a levy of 1 when subjecting you to spells that dominate your mind, slacken your will, or otherwise alter your behavior.

### Lawyerly

- ☼ You gain a boon of 1 in contests of Pedantry; this manifests as your ability to drown listeners in obscure and tangentially relevant detail.
- ☼ On an Illustrious Success, the character who tried to persuade you suffers a levy of 1 on all subsequent Persuasion attempts. This continues until such time as you suffer a Dismal Failure against him. Levies from multiple persuasion attempts are cumulative.

### Penetrating

- ☼ You gain a boon of 1 when resisting illusions or the effects of other spells that confuse your sense of reality.
- ☼ On an Illustrious Success, you correctly guess one of the persuading character's most closely-guarded secrets. If he has more than one secret, you guess the one that most closely pertains to whatever he was trying to convince you to do. (You don't get the secret if your would-be persuader pays to nullify your Illustrious Success.)

- ☼ You may spend Perception points on Rebuff.

### Wary

- ☼ In situations where the GM rolls on your behalf to see if you notice something suspicious, you gain a boon of 1 in tests of Appraisal, Engineering, Gambling, Pedantry, Perception, or Scuttlebutt.
- ☼ The hairs on the back of your neck stand up whenever you become the target of unobtrusive magic.

### Obtuse

- ☼ Magicians suffer a levy of 1 when attempting spells to read your mind, steal your memories, or force you to provide information.
- ☼ On an Illustrious Success, you frustrate the persuading character into losing his composure. He curses your imbecility in a manner that invites others to snicker at him.
- ☼ Unfortunately, you must pay twice the usual number of improvement points to increase your Perception rating.

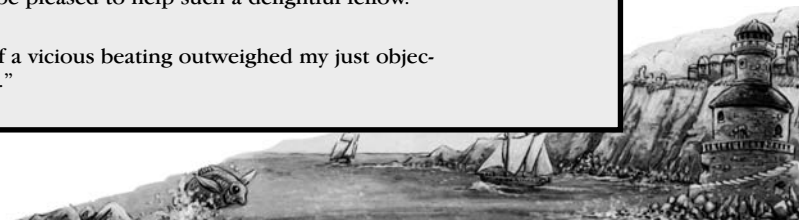
## On Being Persuaded

Successful persuaders convince their negotiating opponents to do what they want. However, the persuaded individual is perfectly free to resent the terms he's agreed to, distrust his persuader, and attempt to evade the spirit of the agreement by citing technicalities in its precise language.

The opinion of GMCs towards PC persuaders is often determined by the style of persuasion used on them, per the chart below.

Attitudes of the Persuaded

Your Persuade Style	What the Persuaded Character Might Think About You
<b>Glib</b>	"I cannot escape the feeling that his proposal was flawed, yet the nimbleness of his tongue prevented me from pinpointing his error."
<b>Eloquent</b>	"How could anyone avoid yielding to such eminently superior logic?"
<b>Obfuscatory</b>	"The course of thought by which he persuaded me now seems elusive."
<b>Forthright</b>	"He spoke so directly that any quibble would have seemed the utterance of a churl."
<b>Charming</b>	"Anyone would be pleased to help such a delightful fellow."
<b>Intimidating</b>	"The certainty of a vicious beating outweighed my just objections to his case."





## Abilities in Practice

### Example of Persuasion

***In Jack Vance's story "The Columns" in Cugel's Saga, a force of angry women confronts Cugel, sure that he has swindled them. He has fallen in with a stonemason named Nisbet, who builds high columns on which their husbands perch all day long. The status-hungry women gain glory by erecting columns higher than those of their rivals' husbands. Cugel has aided Nisbet's production by magically removing the lowest blocks in each column. He seeks to convince the formidable Dame Sequorce that nothing is awry.***

*His Persuade style is Glib; her style of Rebuff is Penetrating. Neither style trumps the other; this contest will be waged without levies against either participant. Cugel has a Persuade pool of 6; Sequorce has 5 in Rebuff. Cugel rolls. This is his first attempt and costs no points. He scores a Hair's-Breadth Success.*

"I will do my best," said Cugel. He went out to confront Dame Sequorce. "Your segments are not yet ready. You may return in a week."

*Sequorce rolls to counter. This is her first attempt, so it costs nothing. She gets a Prosaic Success, forcing Cugel to reroll or withdraw.*

Dame Sequorce seemed not to hear. She turned her pale blue eyes around the quarry. "Where is Nisbet?"

*Cugel spends 1 from his Persuade pool to reroll, taking him to 5. He gets a Prosaic Success.*

"Nisbet is indisposed. Our delivery time is once again a month or more, since we must quarry more white-stone. I am sorry, but we cannot oblige you any sooner."

*Unless Sequorce rerolls, she forfeits the contest. She pays to reroll, getting a Quotidian Failure, then an Exasperating Failure, and finally a Prosaic Success. All told, this costs her 3 points, reducing her Rebuff pool to 2.*

Dame Sequorce fixed her gaze full upon Cugel. "Where are the 'Ones' and 'Twos'? Why are they gone so that the 'Threes' rest on the ground?"

*Cugel pays 1 for a reroll, getting a Prosaic Success. His Persuade pool is now 4.*

Cugel feigned surprise. "Is this really the case? Very odd. Still, nothing is permanent, and the 'Ones' and 'Twos' may have crumbled into dust."

*Sequorce pays for a reroll and gets a Prosaic Success. Her Rebuff is 1.*

"There is no evidence of such dust around the base of the columns."

*Cugel gets a Prosaic Success. It costs him 1, making his Persuade pool 3.*

Cugel shrugged. "Since the columns remain at their relative elevations, no great damage has been done."

From the back of the quarry one of Dame Sequorce's sisters came running. "We have found a pile of segments hidden behind some rocks, and all are 'Twos'!"

*Sequorce pays her last point and is rewarded with an Illustrious Success. Its boon means that her Rebuff pool is now 2. The GM picks the most dramatic way to show this—one of Sequorce's allies has just found evidence of Cugel's chicanery. So much for his Persuasion attempt!*



"What!" spoke Iucounu in a voice like a horn. "You dare stand before me and state preferences? You, who came skulking into my house, pillaged my valuables, and left all in disarray!"

## Try to Enjoy It

In most good *Dying Earth* episodes worth the name, other characters may regularly persuade your character to take outlandish action, or to accept particular statements as true, though they are transparently false to the players.

**You must roleplay your character as if genuinely convinced.** If you refuse, your GM can take over your character until the matter has concluded.

Through a quirk of psychology, roleplayers passionately hate any loss of control over their characters. But though your enthusiasm in finding loopholes in an agreement may well exceed your GM's, it is bad strategy to push things this far. If forced to take over the character, an intemperate GM may be inclined to get him into worse trouble than you would.

More to the point, the wry humor of a *Dying Earth* adventure requires that your character occasionally get reluctantly inveigled into various schemes. Indignity is part of every character's lot. Rather than becoming irritated or downhearted when your character agrees to something patently disastrous, try to enjoy the humor of the moment. The wheel of fortune always turns, and you'll soon be swindling someone else—perhaps the very author of your character's woes—into actions even more absurd than whatever fiasco you must now undertake.



*Arch-Magician Ao of the Opals endures a perpetually disputatious relationship with his principal sandestin, Douradh.*



## Xolon Takes Action

**Despite our somewhat hasty departure, I had not failed to take those**

precautions sensible for a gentleman abroad. Most important of these was dress, a matter in which I can claim, without false modesty, to excel. Fashions vary, and for a merchant to arrive in a foreign town in garments not typical of the locals may invite ridicule, attack, or, worst of all, difficulty in selling one's goods. Even in neighboring Saskervoy, red is considered the only acceptable color for sashes, which are tied with a knot of vulgar simplicity.

In order to minimize the risk of committing a *gaucherie*, we packed a broad range of cloaks, sashes, shirts and pantaloons, and spare cloth of many colors. We also secured the services of Madame Anthrides to act as seamstress in the event of emergency. Thus equipped, we felt ready to walk the streets of Port Perdusz, Kaiin, or Jehane itself without attracting criticism.

My attire for the voyage was also selected with care: high boots of soft velvet, turned at the top; flared britches in cloth of gold, slashed to reveal the scarlet lining; a shirt of fine linen, loose at the collar and tight at the cuffs; a sash of emerald green satin; and a golden coat, set off with a rapier. I had also borrowed a most remarkable hat while Ghurantz was drunk, not merely double-tiered but triple-, and with the side-brim clipped up with an ornament of exotic feathers set in gold. I was certain to cause comment in the south.

Our voyage was both swift and placid, marred only by one single unsavory incident. Some distance off the island of Lausicaa, the *Cil Emperor* began to swing east in a great, slow curve. The worminger Guebillier, suspecting impaction in his off beast, went down to investigate. No sooner had he gained the worm in question than there appeared—greatly to his consternation—the reason for the worm's poor progress: a keak.

Alerted by the screams of the unfortunate worminger, we rushed to the rail, only to find the horrid hybrid of demon and deep-sea fanged eel already upon us. It leapt to the deck, a specimen as large as myself, slick black in color, with its barbed lateral fins whirling as it came. Twice I cut it with my rapier, to no sensible effect. I thought my life over when Crostuble, our cook, hurled a bucket of fresh water over the monster, which on the instant went into a series of agonized spasms and expired.

The incident sobered us all, for the keak, though perhaps no greater in strength than the average of our company, had shown its demonic inheritance in its indifference to injury, succumbing only due to the foreknowledge of Crostuble. Dinner that evening was a sad affair, as we toasted our lost comrade with Violet Mendolence served in crystal vessels. The keak we ate steamed, with a garnish of pepper-leaf.



## Combat



Combat—any attempt by one character to physically harm another—is a contest like any other. Characters act in the order of their initiative. Attack is an active move; defense is reactive. The only difference is that an exchange which ends in victory for the attacker forces the defender to roll his Health ability, or face injury.

Detailed consequences of failure are given under the entry for Health, in the next section of this chapter. For the moment, know that you can hurt, down, or kill an opponent. Additionally, you can always choose to knock out rather than seriously injure an opponent.

## Attacks

The chart below shows the trumping relationship between attack and defense styles.

When you win an Attack exchange, you are said to have scored a **hit**.

Each Attack style confers extra benefits, as follows. Unless otherwise noted, all boons gained are to your Attack pool.

### Attack style trumping

	TRUMPS	Is TRUMPED By
<b>Strength</b>	Parry	Vexation
<b>Speed</b>	Dodge	Misdirection
<b>Finesse</b>	Sure-Footedness	Intuition
<b>Cunning</b>	Intuition	Sure-Footedness
<b>Ferocity</b>	Misdirection	Dodge
<b>Caution</b>	Vexation	Parry

### Strength

- ✱ You may spend Attack points instead of Athletics points when attempting feats requiring muscle power, such as lifting weights, breaking down doors, climbing, or pushing people aside.
- ✱ If your persuasion style is Intimidating, you can spend Attack points on Persuade rolls.
- ✱ If using a longbow, improve the difficulty category by one row on the Missile Number table on page 51. You can't improve beyond the "4 or more" column, though.
- ✱ When placing a restraint (see "Unarmed Combat" below) on another character whose Attack style is not Strength, you may Wallop him regardless of the difference between your respective Attack and Defense ratings, provided you pay the usual 5 Attack points.

### Speed

- ✱ You may spend Attack points instead of Athletics points when attempting feats requiring you to outrace other characters or fast-moving objects.

✱ You earn a boon of 1 every time you take an additional action in Attack, Athletics, or Riding, provided you win the exchange.

✱ When determining Initiative, use your Speed rating, not your current pool.

### Finesse

✱ Whenever you win an Attack exchange, apply a boon of 1 to your Defense ability.

- ✱ You may spend Attack points when using Perception to judge a foe's vulnerability to an Attack Wallop.



Cugel said, "Since I am now committed to this enterprise, and unlikely to return, you may care to hear my appraisal of yourself and your character. In the first place—"

### Cunning

- ✿ Whenever you use a found object as a weapon, you may treat all Exasperating Failures as Hair's-Breadth Successes, provided this is your first such use of the object in question.
- ✿ If your Defense style is Parry, you may spend Attack points on Defense.

### Ferocity

- ✿ You get a boon of 2 whenever you down or kill an opponent.
- ✿ Any opponent who has seen you down or kill an opponent suffers a levy of 1 to his Defense against you—unless his Defense style is Dodge, which still trumps Ferocity.

### Caution

- ✿ You get a boon of 1 every time you act after holding off (see Chapter 3).
- ✿ You get a boon of 1 before making any Perception roll to spot hidden danger.

## Aimed Attacks

You can tailor your attack so as to garner a result other than the general injury of your opponent. If you win an exchange, you get the desired result. Sample aimed attacks are as follows:

**Contusion:** You harm a specific body part, impairing your opponent's ability to use it. For example, you might painfully wrench an opponent's wrist, preventing him from cheating during an upcoming card game. If you score a Hair's-Breadth Success, he suffers a levy of 1 on all attempts to use the part you've contused. On a Prosaic Success, the levy is 2; on an Illustrious Success, the levy is 3, and you may pay X Attack points to add X to that levy.

**Interference:** You can interrupt an action your opponent is in the midst of performing. You can try to prevent him from catching a thrown object, stop him from reaching an exit, or (if you have been holding off) can halt his attack against a comrade. On an Illustrious Success, you may knock him down or otherwise put him at a disadvantage on his next action, too. Treat his current ability total as 3 less than its actual value for the purpose of initiative determination.

**familiar with:** You will recall that you specified familiarity with one or more weapons during character creation (see Chapter 2).

**apprehend you:** Villages where lumberjacks or sawyers are held in high esteem are a rare exception, as are such villages.

## Wallops And Combat

**If you successfully Wallop an** opponent with an Attack ability, you may choose the condition he ends up in: hurt,

downed, or dead. By spending an additional 3 points, you can kill him in spectacularly visceral fashion. You can wait to see if he managed to avoid your Wallop before spending the extra 3 points.

If you Wallop an opponent using a Defense ability, he immediately disengages from the fight, certain that his attack is doomed to fail. A GM character won't return to fight again unless subjected to powerful exhortation of some kind—such as your attempt to attack or corner him. If the character rallies and attacks again, without provocation on your part—perhaps by succeeding in a Wherewithal roll—he suffers a levy of 2 on all attack attempts against you.

## Weapons

You gain a boon of 1 if you are **familiar with the weapon you wield** *and* your opponent is **not familiar with his weapon**.

Each weapon type has advantages and disadvantages.

### Axe

**Advantage:** Your opponent's Health rolls against axe hits suffer a levy of 1.

**Disadvantages:** You must have at least 4 Attack points to properly wield an axe. When you drop below that number, you cannot put the proper strength behind it. You suffer a levy of 1 on all Attack rolls, and no longer apply a levy to your opponent's Health rolls on successful hits. If your Attack style is Strength, you can wield the axe properly until you sink below 2 Attack points.

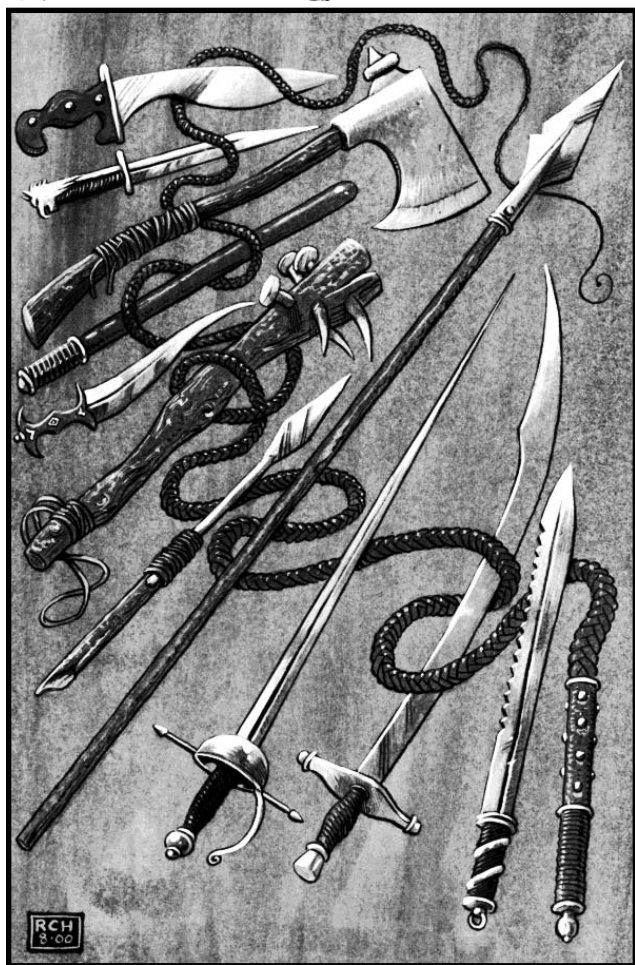
An axe worn in public signifies that you are a killer or dangerous lunatic bent on destruction. You will be treated as such. Ordinary folk will shun you; local authorities will attempt to **apprehend you**.

### Cudgel

**Advantages:** On an Illustrious Success, you may Wallop your opponent even if the difference between your Attack rating and his Defense rating would not normally allow it. You must still pay 5 Attack points. Your opponent is knocked out.



## Abilities in Practice



If you lose your cudgel, you can make a new one, assuming you can find a stout piece of wood. You need a hatchet and about 30 minutes.

**Disadvantage:** On a Dismal Failure, you lose your balance and suffer a levy of 2 to your Defense in addition to the normal levy against your Attack.

### Found Objects

The advantages and disadvantages of found objects are left up to GMs, depending on the type of object and the circumstance. GMs struck by indolence are well within their rights to give them neither advantage nor disadvantage, especially if deciding on such would slow down play.

### Knife

**Advantages:** Knives are small and easily hidden, so you may carry them into places where they are forbidden.

**Disadvantage:** If hit, your opponent treats Dismal Failures as Quotidian Failures.

### Net

**Advantage:** A net entangles an opponent, so that he may then be grappled into submission. When he gets hit, the degree of his failed Defense determines the extent of his entanglement. Hair's-Breadth Failure means slight entanglement; he suffers a levy of 1 against all further Attack or Defense attempts until he frees himself from the net. Quotidian Failure levies 2 against his Attack and Defense. In either case, he can free himself with a successful Defense roll, provided he devotes his next action to escaping. Dismal Failure means that he is completely entangled, unable to free himself without lengthy effort, and therefore easy to subdue. (See the next section for more on immobilizing opponents.)

**Disadvantage:** On a Dismal Failure, you risk becoming entangled in your own net. If you fail a Defense roll, you suffer the effects listed above.

### Rapier

**Advantages:** If your opponent is unarmed, or using a weapon with a shorter reach than yours (like an axe, cudgel, knife, or the typical found object) you gain a boon of 1 to your Defense for each hit you score.

Considered an elegant fashion accessory in most circles, a rapier can be worn almost anywhere without signalling violent intentions. You can wear one to a ball frequented by the worthiest grandees of Kaiin or Almery.

**Disadvantage:** On a Dismal Failure, the blade of your weapon becomes lodged in an inconvenient place, such as furnishings, the crook of a tree-branch, or the ground. To continue using the rapier, you must pay a levy of 2 from your Defense pool. This represents the extra effort it requires to avoid your enemy's blows while you work to dislodge it.

### Spear

**Advantage:** The spear's forte is its ability to use your momentum, as you charge into battle, against your target. Your first attack in a fight, should you hit, inflicts a levy of 1 against your opponent's Defense pool and a levy of 2 against his Health pool. (The GM may allow you to use this advantage again in the same fight if you are somehow able to back up for another charge—for example, if you enjoy a clear path to charge a new opponent.)

**Disadvantage:** The spear is unwieldy for prolonged combat at close quarters. For all attacks after the first, you suffer a levy of 1 on all Attack rolls.

### Whip

**Advantage:** Your whirling whip invites opponents to keep their distance. In order to get close enough to hit you with a close combat weapon, your opponent must take an automatic loss of 1 Health point, and make a successful

**left up to GMs:** That is, at least until we run out of ideas for suitable supplements, at which point you may expect to see *Ecnomander's Indispensable Compendium of Improvised Weapons* on shelves at a game store near you.  
**wear one to a ball:** Assuming you have an invitation, of course.



But Lucounu held up his hand. "I do not care to listen; obloquy injures my self-esteem and I am skeptical of praise. So now—be off!" He shouted that invocation known as Thasdrubal's Laganetic Transfer.



## Xolon's Journey (Continued)

**On reaching Port Perdusz I was disappointed to discover the operation** of a merchants' guild that would pay no more than half again what my pelts might fetch in Tugersbir. When I hinted at trade with unregistered buyers, guild constables promised to coat me liberally with meat paste and stake me on the visp-infested moors, thereby restricting my options.

Despite their unhelpful attitude, the guildsmen were keen to buy. I discovered the reason with a judicious payment to a certain Yadcomo, a caravan master.

The ideal market for erb pelts was not Port Perdusz, but Old Romarth, an ancient city some weeks' travel to the east. The inhabitants—wealthy savants, puissant magicians, and sagacious philostrators to a one—were too proud to haggle. Trade was conducted by the exchange of presents, and such terms as "money," "bargain," and "purchase" were considered inexcusably vulgar. Even the least among them bore a title of some sort, and to be involved with any form of mercantilism was thought undignified.

Taking the title of Baron, I left Port Perdusz with Yadcomo's caravan. My associates became my retainers, my mission travel and enlightenment. We would take the airs in Old Romarth by way of Kaspara Vitatus and Torqual, coincidentally carrying more fine erb pelts than we absolutely needed.

The journey itself repays some brief remark. Travelling for some time beside the Great Chaing estuary, we came at length to the village of Port Titus, and beyond it a mighty ravine, into which the river pours from a waterfall two full days' journey in length. I was assured by Ansulum, a fellow passenger, that this was the feature from which the Land of the Falling Wall took its name, but Yadcomo himself promptly disputed the story. He asserted that the name derived from that ancient and crumbling fortification originally built to defend the Qa'HR Empire from the bandits of the Karst. So vigorous was the ensuing altercation that it finally became necessary to expel Ansulum from the caravan.

Wherewithal roll. They face this requirement without effort on your part, as long as you can keep the whip hissing through the air.

**Disadvantage:** Despite peoples' reflexive aversion to it, the whip doesn't, in fact, inflict serious damage. Victims hit by it needn't roll Health and incur no risk of injury; instead, they simply lose a Health point automatically. An exception occurs when the victim's Health is already at 0, at which point a whip becomes as lethal as any other weapon.

## Unarmed Combat

An armed character gets a boon of 2 per exchange when attacking (or defending against) an unarmed opponent. If both combatants are unarmed, no boons or levies apply.

Characters whose Defense style is Parry may not roll Defense while unarmed.

### Punch

**Advantage:** Convenient. In rough company, the throwing of punches is not seen as serious assault, despite the fact that repeated fist blows can kill.

**Disadvantage:** On a Dismal Failure, you hurt your hand. You lose 1 Health point. On a second Dismal Failure in the same fight, you break your fingers. Barring magical healing, your hand remains broken for 2-7 weeks. You

can't hold a weapon, write, or perform many simple tasks until it heals.

A single punch is not as damaging as most other common attacks. When rolling Health, your opponent treats Prosaic Successes as Illustrious.

### Kick

**Advantage:** Like the fist, your leg is always by your side. If your opponent is lying on the ground, he suffers a levy of 2 against all Health rolls made to counter your kicks.

**Disadvantage:** Kicking a standing, prepared opponent in a vital place is fairly difficult. Treat all Illustrious Successes as Prosaic.

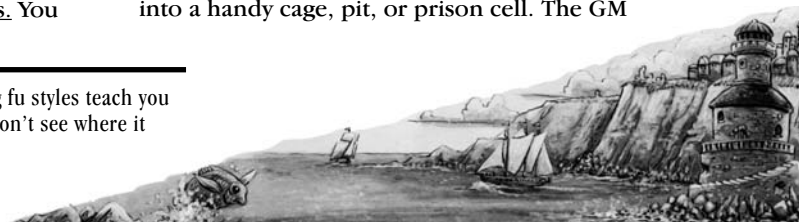
### Restraint

**Advantage:** Sometimes killing an opponent or knocking him out is not as useful as simply restraining him briefly. If you succeed with an attack, your opponent is unable to move, except to struggle against you, for the current round. You may increase the duration of his immobilization by spending 2 Defense points per round. He can break your hold only by Attacking you and scoring a hit.

If another character joins with you to keep the target restrained (either by Ganging Up with you, or by entering the situation after you've already placed a successful hold), you can then proceed to tie him up or toss him into a handy cage, pit, or prison cell. The GM

**unarmed:** Martial artists might point out that various kung fu styles teach you to parry weapons barehanded. As fond as we are of fu, we don't see where it appears in the Dying Earth books.

**2-7 weeks:** The GM rolls a die and adds 1 to the result.





## Abilities in Practice

decides how many rounds it will take to tie up or incarcerate the victim; if he fails to break free during that time, he is trapped. You release him, and his problem now becomes an escape from his bonds, cage, or whatever other mode of imprisonment to which you've subjected him.

**Disadvantage:** While you hold an opponent, you make yourself an easy target should he free an arm. If hit by a held opponent, you roll Health as usual, but treat Quotidian Failures as Dismal.

*Palandro has become quite drunk on numberwine, prompting him to toss missiles into the forest. His companions Lissoe and Thranite have it on good authority that there are deodands lurking in the woods. Accordingly they decide, for the safety of all concerned, to restrain Palandro until his reason returns.*

*Palandro's current Defense is 5. Lissoe's Attack is 5; Thranite's, 4. Palandro has no intention of attacking them; he just wants to evade them. Therefore he uses his Defense, not Attack, to*

*determine initiative. He goes first, but chooses to hold.*

*Lissoe goes next. He scores an Illustrious Success, which Palandro pays 3 to nullify. His Defense is now 2. Lissoe rolls again (without having to pay), gets an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll that, and gets a Hair's-Breadth Success. His Attack is now 4.*

*Palandro pays 1 to counter, gets an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll that, and gets another Exasperating Failure. As his Defense is now 0, he has lost the contest and is hit.*

*Because Lissoe is trying to restrain, and not harm, his target, Palandro doesn't make a Health roll. Lissoe holds him immobilized. Thranite was prepared to Gang Up on Palandro but no longer has to roll. He simply makes himself available to help. Now they need a means of restraining him. Lissoe tells Thranite of the rope in his pack.*

*The GM rules that it will take Thranite two rounds to root through Lissoe's bag, which is famously brimming with junk of every description. During each round, Lissoe must pay 2 Attack points and Palandro may attempt to escape.*

### Restraining Palandro: The Frenzied Battle

#### Rules Explanation

First round: Lissoe's Defense pool is 8. Lissoe pays 2, dropping it to 6.

Palandro's current Attack pool is 7. He gets a Hair's-Breadth Success.

Lissoe rolls to counter, gets an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll, and gets a Hair's-Breadth Success. His Defense is now 5.

Palandro pays 1 from his Attack pool and rolls another Hair's-Breadth Success. His Attack pool is now 6.

Lissoe pays 1 for a Quotidian Failure and another 1 for a Prosaic Success. His Defense pool is now 3.

Palandro pays 1 and rolls a Dismal Failure. Between the reroll cost and the levy for the Dismal Failure, his Attack is reduced to 3. He could pay that 3 to reroll, but that would reduce his Attack to 0 and he'd lose the contest anyway. Because he will get another attempt to break free next round, he accepts defeat for the moment, preserving his 3 points for the next try.

Round two: Lissoe pays his 2 points to keep Palandro restrained, dropping his Defense to 1. Palandro makes his first attack. He scores an Illustrious Success, increasing his Attack to 5. Lissoe can't afford the 3 points to nullify it, so Palandro triumphs.

#### What's Happening

Lissoe struggles to keep his arms clasped around Palandro.

Palandro tries to elbow Lissoe in the ribs.

Lissoe moves back to avoid the shot in the ribs, tightening his grip on Palandro. He calls to Thranite, "Hurry! When he drinks to excess, his strength is prodigious!"

Palandro stamps on Lissoe's foot. Thranite complains, "If you had not crammed your sack with every gewgaw known in the annals of pedants, the rope would be as good as found!"

Lissoe is not so distracted by Thranite's criticism as to fail to press his own foot atop Palandro's, preventing further stamps.

Palandro tries to wriggle free of Lissoe's grip, only to maneuver himself yet more securely into the firmest of headlocks. Thranite cries, "I have it!" and pulls the rope from the sack.

Palandro bites Lissoe's hand, startling him. Lissoe lets go of Palandro as Thranite appears with rope in hand. "I submit," Lissoe gasps, "that it is now your turn to bridle him." Meanwhile, a trio of deodands, attracted by the noise, creeps to the forest's edge....

**numberwine:** The unscrupulous vintner who sold this particular jeroboam to Palandro had watered this batch of wine with a tenth-part solution of algaroid kolorosene, a fluid used in full concentration as embalming fluid.







From high came a thud and a buffet, a muffled bellow of rage....  
The cage with Cugel crouching within was snatched aloft and  
hurled through the air.

## Attack refresh methods

<b>Strength</b>	a night's rest in austere conditions (hard surface to sleep on), then a hearty meal heavy on meat, grains, and raw eggs
<b>Speed</b>	a night's rest in comfortable conditions, then a light but delicious meal
<b>Finesse</b>	a night's rest in luxurious conditions, then a light, refreshing meal
<b>Cunning</b>	a night's rest in luxurious conditions, or several hours of erotic exercise with a new conquest
<b>Ferocity</b>	a reminder of the situation that most enrages you, followed by a restless night
<b>Caution</b>	a night's rest in comfortable conditions, followed by a well-balanced meal

## Missile Combat

Any character with the Attack ability can try to fire missiles at a target. The difficulty of hitting is determined both by the target's size and where it falls within the weapon's range. Each factor gives you a missile number. Add the two missile numbers together, then consult the missile difficulty chart to see how your roll is affected.

Cover may reduce the effective size of a target. For example, if a man hides behind a slit in a wall, the target's size is effectively that of the slit, not the man.

Missile combat is undramatic and the rules needed to simulate it are more complicated than most. Its role in the Dying Earth stories is minimal. Sensible GMs will arrange adventures so as to avoid missile combat whenever possible.

### Longbow

**Advantage:** Longbows enjoy longer ranges than other missile weapons.

**Disadvantage:** They are hard to make and repair. If your character loses his longbow, it may be a long time before he can locate another one. A longbow counts as a special item according to the Possessions rules given later in this chapter. It takes skill to make acceptable arrows. They aren't remotely concealable, and will mark you as a violent thug if you take them into a settlement. In order to maintain a longbow, you must have the Craftsmanship ability, specialized in bow-making. You must make a

successful Craftsmanship roll once per day, or your bow will break and require a day's worth of repair efforts. A Dismal Failure means that the longbow is beyond repair. Know also that powerful wizards dislike missile weapons and their manufacturers, and may deploy mighty magic to punish those who openly use or create them.

### Bow

**Advantage:** Bows aren't as difficult to make and repair as longbows. The Craftsmanship roll to maintain your bow is required only once a week. A bow is an ordinary item for purposes of the Possessions rules, not a special one.

**Disadvantage:** Like longbows, bows indicate violent intent, require arrow-making ability, and court the wrath of powerful wizards.

### Missile ranges (feet)

Weapon	Short	Medium	Long	Extreme
Sling	5-20	21-40	41-60	61-80
Bow	5-20	21-40	41-60	61-80
Longbow	5-25	26-50	51-75	76-100
Throwing				
knife	2-5	6-10	11-15	16-20
Rock	2-7	8-14	15-21	22-30

### Size and range numbers

Size	Size number
Coin	-3
Fist	-2
Breadbox	-1
Human	0
Riding beast	1
Carriage	2
Building	3

Range	Range number
Extreme	-3
Long	-1
Medium	0
Short	1

### Missile numbers

(Size number + range number = missile number)

Missile number	Effect on difficulty
-4 or less	Treat Quotidian Failures as Dismal
-1 to -3	Treat Hair's-Breadth Successes as Exasperating Failures
0-3	none
4 or more	Treat Exasperating Failures as Hair's-Breadth Successes





## Abilities in Practice

### Sling

**Advantage:** Slings are easy to hide on your person, and ammunition is always at hand in the form of rocks.

**Disadvantage:** Slings are inaccurate. After scoring an Illustrious Success, you must spend an additional Attack point, or it becomes a Prosaic Success.

### Rock

**Advantage:** Rocks are always at hand, even in a city.

**Disadvantage:** They don't go very far.

### Throwing Knife

**Advantage:** Throwing knives are easy to conceal. If you start a combat by throwing a knife, you automatically win initiative that round.

**Disadvantage:** Knives are difficult to replace if you are for some reason prevented from recovering them from your victim's breastbone.

## Defense

The chart below shows the trumping relationship between Defense and Attack styles.

### Defense style trumping

	TRUMPS	Is TRUMPED By
<b>Parry</b>	Caution	Strength
<b>Dodge</b>	Ferocity	Speed
<b>Sure-Footed</b>	Cunning	Finesse
<b>Intuition</b>	Finesse	Cunning
<b>Misdirection</b>	Speed	Ferocity
<b>Vexation</b>	Strength	Caution

## Defense Styles

Special rules govern each Defense style. Unless otherwise indicated, all boons apply to the Defense pool.

### Defense refresh methods

<b>Parry</b>	a day of peaceful inactivity
<b>Dodge</b>	a day of emotional calm
<b>Sure-Footedness</b>	a day of peaceful inactivity
<b>Intuition</b>	a day requiring no mental effort
<b>Misdirection</b>	a day spent idly juggling or practicing other feats that coordinate eye and body
<b>Vexation</b>	a day spent quietly observing the follies of others

### Parry

- On an Illustrious Success, you disarm your opponent. He must waste his next active move recovering his weapon. Or you can spend 2 Defense to specify that you've damaged his weapon, preventing him from using it until he arranges for its repair. You won't have to worry about it for the rest of the combat, at least.

- You face a levy of 1 when defending against incoming missile attacks.

- You must have a weapon, shield, or heavy object with which to parry. If you have none of these things, you can't counter attacks.

### Dodge

- You may spend Defense points instead of Athletics points when attempting to evade any incoming object, such as a rolling boulder, a rampaging riding beast, or an Instantaneous Electric Effect.

- If an attacker scores an Illustrious Success, you need only pay 2 Defense points (not the usual 3) to negate it.

### Sure-Footedness

- You may spend Defense points instead of Athletics points when attempting to maintain your balance.
- On an Illustrious Success, you cause your opponent to lose his balance. You may pay 2 Attack points to force him to make a Health roll. If you do so, you've taken a surprise, opportunistic shot at him.

### Intuition

- You can make a defensive Wallop against an opponent whose Attack rating is 3 less than your Defense rating.
- On an Illustrious Success, you gain a boon each time the same opponent attacks you, for the remainder of the combat.





Cease the bickering! I am indulging the exotic whims of a beautiful princess and must not be distracted.

### Misdirection

- ✿ You may spend Defense points on any attempt to create a physical diversion.
- ✿ On an Illustrious Success, your attacker accidentally attacks one of his comrades in the fight (assuming there are any). He does so immediately, hitting the closest qualifying target. He can pull the punch, so that he only knocks his comrade out. If he misses, he doesn't reroll.

### Vexation

- ✿ On an Illustrious Success, you provoke your opponent into charging headlong into a wall, tree, gorge, or other obstacle. At the very least, he must make a Health roll. Depending on the terrain, the GM may have more punishing consequences in store for him.
- ✿ You may spend Defense points on any attempt to annoy, pester, or frustrate another person.

### Running Away

Sometimes, especially if you're hurt, you'll want to run away from a fight in progress. First, you must break away from the battle. You do this in lieu of an attack. Instead, you roll your Defense, which your opponent may counter with his Attack. (For a round in which you intend to break away, your initiative is determined using your Defense instead of your attack.) If you win the exchange, you've shoved him out of the way, ducked past him, or otherwise gotten out of his clutches. If you fail, he hits you as you break away. If you Dismally Fail, he hits you, and you are still locked in combat.

Once you've broken away from him, you can run away. If he chases you, a new contest begins, pitting your Athletics against his. If you win, you manage to elude him. If he wins, he catches up to you and—unless he does something else, such as trying to persuade you to surrender—the fight continues.

Ignore normal initiative rolls for a chase; the pursued character goes first in each exchange. Additional actions are not possible during a chase.



### Xolon's Journey Goes Somewhat Amiss

**At Old Romarth Yadcomo introduced me with my full baronial title,** thus overcoming barriers towards the disposal of my stock. Sales, or rather "exchanges," were good, leaving me with no pelts and a large bag of antique gold coins in their place.

Paying Yadcomo for his augmentation of my natural salesmanship, I made my way to the manse of a powerful magician, one Nahourezzin. He had "accepted my gift" of several pelts, then invited me to dine. On couches spread with magnificent black erb furs we dined on a meal delectable beyond reproach. Nahourezzin extended his courtesy even to my retainers, who enjoyed his spacious barn and a sufficiency of cold bitter-bush gruel. After the meal we exchanged philosophies and shared several flagons of a rich red wine called Tanvilkat.

In the morning I found myself somewhat drowsy, and accepted the offer of Nahourezzin's palanquin to return me to the caravan. This was born by four sylphs, and of such smooth motion that I fell asleep on the way.

On waking, shortly before dusk, I discovered to my dismay that I was aboard not Yadcomo's caravan but a quite different one, travelling south and east towards the city of Symnathis. Not only that, but a large proportion of those coins given to me in Old Romarth had vanished, to be replaced by large specimens of the golden carapace scarab, or centum beetle.

Despite great exertion of my famed charm, I failed to convince the caravan master of the necessity of turning back. He, a fellow both surly and deliberately contrary, became more stubborn with my every entreaty until I was finally obliged to abandon the effort. Not wishing to attempt the crossing of an unknown waste alone, I was forced to continue to Symnathis.

This city at first seemed a pleasant locale, the climate mild, the citizens courteous and of good address. Feeling in need of spiritual restoration, I gave my best attention to Kiyrel, a young lady in service at the Deodand's Head, the apparently reputable inn at which I had taken lodging. After a night of the most fervent erotic congress, I awoke to discover the theft of my remaining gold coins, my jewelled rapier, and several of my other possessions.

Kiyrel was nowhere to be found, and both the innkeeper and the town authorities flatly refused to make good my loss. Faced with the necessity of repairing my fortunes, I naturally turned to my trade, and spent what I had secured under my hat clasp on the commission of a fine erb spear, twenty ells in length and set with an iron head and spiked counterweight of ten pounds apiece. This led to further difficulty, as the authorities, on seeing me with the spear, would believe nothing except that I intended murderous revenge on Kiyrel.





## Abilities in Practice

*Ulan Dhor fights an erb. Although he hasn't been hurt yet, he knows that there's little to gain in killing the thing, and that defeat will mean his death. His Attack is 8 and his Defense, 12. The erb's Attack is 11. If each were trying to attack the other, the erb would go first. But Ulan Dhor uses his Defense to determine initiative, and therefore gets to go first—12 is higher than 11. He rolls his Defense against the erb, getting a Hair's-Breadth Success. The erb rolls an Exasperating Failure, then rerolls to get a Prosaic Success. Its Attack is now 10. Ulan Dhor pays 1 to counter, getting an Illustrious Success. The erb pays 3 to nullify the Illustrious Success, reducing its Attack to 7.*

*Ulan Dhor rolls (at no charge) an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll, and gets a Prosaic Success. His Defense is now 10. The erb counters (bringing its Attack to 6), and gets a Prosaic Success. Ulan Dhor pays 1 to counter, gets an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll, gets another Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll that, and gets an Illustrious Success. His Defense is now 7. The erb again pays 3 to nullify it, taking its Attack to 3.*

*Ulan Dhor, taking his free reroll, gets a Prosaic Success. The erb pays 1 to counter, and gets an Illustrious Success. Ulan Dhor pays 3 to nullify it, reducing his Defense to 4. The erb's free reroll is a Dismal Failure. If he pays 3 Attack to nullify it, his Attack will be reduced to 0, and Ulan Dhor will win anyway. So the erb saves the points and withdraws. Ulan Dhor successfully breaks away from the fight.*

*But the erb isn't done with him. It wants to give chase. It and Ulan Dhor begin a contest of Athletics. As the pursued party, Ulan Dhor goes first. His Athletics is 6; the erb's, 5. He rolls a Quotidian Failure, rerolls, and gets a Hair's-Breadth Success. (His Athletics is now 5.) The erb counters with a Prosaic Success. Ulan Dhor rerolls, getting an Illustrious Success. He feels fear charge his body with unusual strength and endurance, increasing his sprinting speed to leave the creature far behind, booting and screaming.*

Chases need not follow an attempt to break away from combat. They might precede a combat, or not relate to a fight at all.

## Health and Hazards

When presenting a threat to your character's physical well-being, your GM will ask you to make a Health roll. Health represents your ability to resist physical harm. Whether confronted with sword blows, disease, poison, or encroaching madness, your Health ability keeps your character on his feet when lesser individuals would crumple to the ground. Health rolls can't be countered.

Each time you fail a Health roll, you suffer an **injury**.

A single injury means that you are **Hurt**. You can act normally, but suffer a levy of 2 when attempting any action.

If you suffer two injuries, you are **Down**. All you can do is lie prone, or perhaps writhe in pain. If you have no one else to defend you, you are at your enemy's mercy. It is a trivial matter for him to dispatch you. In game terms, he gets an automatic success on his Attack.

If you suffer three injuries, you are either **Dead** (if you have no health points left) or **Dying**. If you're dying, you have 15 minutes to live per remaining Health point.

### Unconsciousness

In some circumstances, the worst consequence you risk from a failed Health roll is unconsciousness. For example, in combat, an attacker can always opt to knock the victim out rather than risk dealing permanent harm. Magical effects or strange gases might also cause unconsciousness.

In such situations, two injuries mean that your character is **knocked out**, not **Down**. Every half hour of game time you may make a Health roll to see if your character wakes up. After half an hour, others may wake your character by shaking him, dousing him with cold water, or otherwise jolting him.

### The Injurious World

A life of risk offers your PC many opportunities to become injured outside of combat.

### Drowning and Similar Suffocations

Ordinary swimming poses no risk of drowning. Any character with the Athletics ability can enjoy a refreshing dip in a pond, river, lake, or ocean as an automatic success, unless conditions are especially hazardous.





Characters who find themselves suddenly below the surface of a body of water can swim with successful Athletics rolls. The GM specifies a Tally required to get to the nearest dry place, such as the shore, an island, or a raft. She bases the Tally on the distance to shore and the strength of the current against which the character must struggle. Assuming a weak current, the Tally is 1 for every 10 feet of distance the PC must swim. A moderate current doubles this number; a powerful current or undertow might triple it, or worse. The PC gets three rolls to make his Tally; he can add additional rolls by spending 3 Athletics points per roll. Failure to reach the Tally means that the character begins to drown.

If the character can swim nowhere safe—say, if stuck in a well—he can roll Athletics to tread water for three minutes per success, in hopes of rescue. In this case, Dismal Failure means he tires, drops beneath the surface, and begins to drown.

Any character can hold his breath for 30 seconds. Each additional 15 seconds requires an Athletics roll. The levy to the first roll (and any rerolls) is 1. For subsequent rolls (and their rerolls, if any), the levy doubles. If he is submerged, the first failed roll causes his lungs to fill. After 30 seconds, he suffers a succession of three injuries, each spaced 30 seconds apart. The second injury marks the point where his heart stops beating. He survives only if someone rescues him before he receives his final injury. The rescuer must then immediately make a Physician roll to clear the fluid from his lungs and windpipe. If he succeeds, the succession of injuries to the victim stops. If not, they continue.

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*Vlat has been tossed into a stagnant pool by a capricious pelgrane. The pool's nearest edge is fifty feet away. There is no current to speak of, so the Tally Vlat must get is 5—one for every 10 feet he must swim. His Athletics is 6.*

*Vlat's first roll is a Dismal Failure! He goes under, gulping a mouthful of water. Consulting the Tally chart in Chapter 3, he sees that this makes his Tally -5. He suffers a levy of 2, taking his Athletics to 4. His second roll is an Illustrious Success. That brings his Tally back to 0 and his Athletics back to 6. His third roll is a Prosaic Success, bringing his Tally to 2. That's all of his chances, and his Tally isn't high enough yet. He spends 3 Athletics for a fourth roll, getting another Prosaic Success. He's now at a Tally of 4, and Athletics 2. That's not enough to buy a fifth roll, so he begins to drown.*

*His mouth bursts open and water rushes into his lungs. A minute has passed. Thirty seconds*

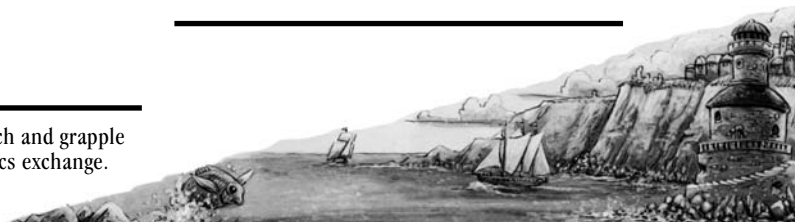


*later, Vlat suffers his first injury. Thirty seconds after that, he suffers his second, just as his master, Ecnomander, arrives on the scene. Ecnomander casts his Relocation spell to remove Vlat from the pool. Vaguely remembering the method for reviving the drowned, he flips Vlat onto his stomach and begins to push on his back.*

*Ecnomander's Physician pool is 4. He rolls an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll, gets another Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll again, and gets an Illustrious Success. Water rushes out of Vlat's lungs, and Ecnomander is spared the annoyance of creating a vat-bred copy of his manservant, to whose foibles he has become accustomed.*

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**the levy doubles:** During this time he may reflexively clutch and grapple with a rescuer, forcing the rescuer to best him in an Athletics exchange.





## Abilities in Practice

### Exposure

In ordinary cold conditions, make a Health roll once every six hours; if you fail, you suffer a levy of 1 on all actions due to the distraction of your shivering and teeth-clacking. If you have a warm, dry cloak, you needn't worry.

In extremely cold conditions, make a Health roll every half hour, suffering a levy of 2 if you lack a warm, dry cloak. If you fail, you suffer frostbite and become injured. You can avoid this by taking shelter and warming up.

### Falling

If you fall 20 feet or less, make an Athletics roll to avoid serious injury. If you fail, you are injured; if not, you are a little bruised, perhaps, but not truly harmed.

For every 10 feet you fall in excess of 20, you suffer one injury. You can prevent one injury for every success you score on an Athletics roll. You may make any number of Athletics rolls, each at a levy of 5. Your GM may reduce the number of possible injuries by 1 or more if there is something soft below on which to land. She may increase injuries from particularly hard landings.

*Munther is seized by a pelgrane, which, seeking to doom its prey in the usual manner, carries him high up into the air and over an expanse of jagged rocks. Despite Munther's efforts to clasp tightly to the creature's neck, it succeeds in dropping him. The GM declares that he will suffer an additional injury if he lands on those unforgiving rocks.*

*The pelgrane was at 50 feet when it dropped Munther. Munther, currently uninjured, will take four injuries if he chooses to do nothing:  $[(50 - 20)/10 = ]$  three injuries for the fall, plus one for the hard rocks. Fortunately for Munther, his player has invested heavily in Athletics.*

*His present pool is 20. Munther pays the levy of 5 to roll the first time, taking his pool to 15. He gets a Prosaic Success. He pays again for the second roll, taking his Athletics to 10. Another Prosaic Success! Munther now knows that he'll survive the fall—even if he fails both of his remaining rolls, he'll only be Down. He pays 5 for his third roll, taking his Athletics to 5. Oops: an Exasperating Failure.*

*Well, it was bound to happen. Munther's player chooses not to reroll, instead paying 5 for his fourth roll, which takes his Athletics to 0. This result is even worse than the last: a Dismal Failure. The GM rules that Munther not only lands*

*hard, but sees his possessions scatter all around him on impact. He suffers two injuries, and is Down. The pelgrane swoops in for another pass....*

### Fire

Flames are deadly, of course, but the degree of harm you suffer depends on just how much of you happens to be on fire. When exposed to fire, make a Health roll to see if you're injured. If an area of your body larger than your forearm is in direct contact with flame (or boiling oil, or acid, or anything else that oxidizes flesh), you suffer a levy corresponding to the size of the affected area, as per the chart below.

Once you are on fire, you must extinguish the flame, or you suffer continued damage that may instead extinguish you.

% of body exposed	Levy
20 % (entire arm or leg)	2
40 % (entire back or torso)	5
60 % (engulfed in flames from waist up)	10
80 to 100% (fully engulfed)	15

*Euphemio wakes up to find his fine rented chambers ablaze. He dashes for the window, only to see a certain malign imp, whom Euphemio thought he'd condemned to eternal perdition, hovering outside. Euphemio runs into the hallway and through the flames. The GM allows him an Athletics roll, which he Dismally Fails. His Athletics pool drops from 6 to 4 as he pays the Dismal levy. He has fallen into the fire, and the part of his robe covering his chest is now aflame.*

*The GM rules that about 20% of his body is at risk of being burned. Euphemio will suffer a levy of 2 on his Health. His current Health pool is 9.*

*He pays 2 for the first roll, which is a Quotidian Failure. He pays 3 (the levy plus the usual reroll fee) for a reroll. His Health is now 5. He gets a Dismal Failure; which drops his Health another 2, to 3. Euphemio could just afford the 3-point cost to reroll a Dismal Failure, were it not for the levies for being on fire. The rich dyes of Euphemio's fine night-clothes obviously rendered*

**something soft:** Adventure stories typically exaggerate the protective effects of soft materials in breaking falls, a tradition that this game proudly continues.

**injured:** In many situations the GM will allow you a Defense or Athletics roll to avoid exposure to fire in the first place. You should be able to duck that burning beam, dodge the flask of burning oil, or run quickly through the conflagration to safety.







She contrived to twist her body into first one luxurious position, then another.

*them especially flammable! Euphemio suffers an injury, and is now hurt. Because of his condition, he will suffer a levy of 2 on all further actions.*

*He must now try to douse the flame. He does so by retreating into the room, finding a section of floor which has yet to burn, and rolling around. He makes an Athletics roll, paying his levy of 2. He suffers a Dismal Failure. Together, the levies for*

*being injured and rolling the Dismal Failure take his Athletics to 0, so he can't pay the extra 3 points to nullify the Dismal Failure. He didn't douse the flame, and must again roll Health. He pays his levy of 2, dropping his Health to 1. He suffers an Exasperating Failure. He still has some points left, so he can reroll without taking a penalty. Alas, he*



### Xolon Demonstrates Attack Techniques

**Following this unseemly altercation I was forced to leave Symnathis in** the most undignified manner, via a large storm drain or possibly sewer. This led to a river that I understood to be the Isk, where I was forced to steal a scow. Waterborne, I proceeded south and west, unable to scull against the current.

Matters fared from bad to worse. At the town of Gundar I came across Ansulum, somewhat the worse for an extended trek across that dismal region of bone-colored hills known as the Pale Rugates. For some reason not immediately clear, he seemed to blame me for his misfortunes and assailed me without restraint. Once more I was forced to defend myself, using the erb spear for lack of an alternative. The folk of Gundar showed little sympathy, using the harshest of terms—"murderer," "assassin," and "disemboweler" were among the milder rebukes—despite my best efforts to explain myself. Once more I was forced to take to the water.

Worse was to come. As I drifted down the Isk I was first assailed by the insects of a great, stinking marsh, next pelted with refuse by tree-dwelling dwarves, shaken to a jelly by rapids, and at last attacked by a maddened demon. In the last case I was lucky to escape with my life, and came out into more civilized country with great relief. Feeling it unwise to attempt a return journey, I resolved to make for Kaiin and there hope to find a ship north.

Travelling across the Plain of Red Flowers without incident, I came to a region far less hospitable, the Chaim Purpure. Here, among groves of cypress and yew, stood many tombs, and at one of these I came across a remarkable circumstance. A girl, apparently of no great age, had climbed onto a tall sepulcher, the better to evade the attack of two great erbs. The ferocity and cunning of their attack she evaded by sheer agility, yet it was evident that the tactic could only prevail for so long.

Motivated by natural gallantry (and by the quality of the pelts that might thus become available), I called out a string of carefully judged insults. The larger erb, a magnificent blue-grey beast, lost its temper and charged, to be impaled upon my spear. No sooner had this occurred than the girl, shouting what I presumed to be a spell, pierced the second beast with ten thousand shards of varicolored light and completely ruining its pelt.

On my persuading her to come down from the sepulcher we exchanged introductions. Thus I learned her to be Talekei of Val Ombrio, a city far to the south.

"I surmise that you are a powerful witch?" I then inquired, feeling it a safe opening question in view of the circumstances.

"By no means," Talekei answered. "High magic has been forbidden to women since the time of Calanctus the Calm. In punishment witches are sent to Sadal Suud, a steaming quagmire infested by owls."

"Just so. Possibly you are acquainted with the route south?"

"Indeed. Beyond this horrid region is the Tsombol Marsh, where the Isk sinks beneath the Saponid Tundra in a labyrinth of caves. To fare south we must avoid both Saponids and mountains, crossing the Plain of Standing Stones, where there is an asm behind every rock, save only those that harbor erbs or deodands."

"Asm has little commercial value. Deodand hide is too oily for anything but weatherproof smocks. The erbs will help to replenish my stock."

"You intend to seek out these dire creatures? You are bold indeed."

"Less than it might seem, I confess. The erb attacks by cunning, seeking to make close approach to its victim before a final terrifying charge. He who flees, dies. The sure-footed opponent may hold his own, if suitably armed. They are also notably irascible, by reason of their discomfort in both two- and four-legged mode. Any erb infuriated by abusive rhetoric will charge without thought of consequence and may be speared at leisure."

"An interesting observation. Possibly we might travel together, for the further examination of such topics? More immediately, I would seem to be indebted to you. Will you demand recompense?"

"I will travel with you gladly. As to reward, I acted out of simple humanity and to demand such would be crass. This is doubly the case for my most immediate need. The skinning and evisceration of the erb is a task requiring exact technique, and you would only hinder me in my work."



## Abilities in Practice

*gets a Quotidian Failure. It looks like curtains for poor Euphemio... until the cackling imp offers him a deal in exchange for saving his life.*

### Poisoning and Disease

Poisons and diseases harm their victims in manners ranging from the annoying to the colorfully fatal. Drugs are poisons, too, although these rules do not address the effects of intoxicants such as alcohol. A poison or disease uses these game statistics:

**Potency:** This is the boon or levy attached to an initial Health roll to resist the poison or disease's effects.

Any success means that the character exposed to it suffers no serious or lasting harm.

Dismal Failure means that the victim immediately suffers its effect.

Other failures mean that the victim is temporarily sickened while his body attempts to fight off the poison or disease. The sickened character is weak and helpless, but conscious, as if incapacitated. He makes a series of Health rolls, in hopes of getting a Tally of 7. As soon as he reaches a Tally of 7, he recovers without facing the poison or disease's final effect. However, if he instead hits a Tally of -7, he immediately suffers the effect.

Another character may apply his Physician rolls to the character's Tally-making. He may do so once per interval

(see immediately below). If more than one Physician is at work, each suffers a levy equal to the number of would-be healers. The levy reflects the chance that each will interfere with the other's work.

**Interval:** This is the amount of time that passes for the character between his Tally rolls. An interval may be anything from a minute or so to a week. Fast-acting poisons and diseases have short intervals. Others may slowly linger.

**Effect:** This is what happens to the character if he finally succumbs to the poison or disease. He may suffer one to three injuries. He might permanently lose rating points in one or more abilities. Or he might fall prey to more exotic chronic symptoms.

*Palandro is attacked by an erb, or perhaps a visp, who injects (or perhaps osmotically transfers) creature toxin into him. (See sidebar, facing page.) Its potency is 0, so Palandro faces neither boon nor levy in making his initial Health roll to resist its effects. His Health is 6. He suffers an Exasperating Failure. He pays 1 to reroll, suffering a second Exasperating Failure. Fearing a Dismal Failure, his player decides to accept that loss and the need to collect a Tally. Palandro falls sick as he struggles to fight off the venom. The interval is an hour. So an hour later, he makes his first roll. He suffers Dismal Failure, placing his Tally at -5. The levy takes his Health to 3.*



### Xolon Disdains Imperial Ambition

#### **I travelled south, in the company of the learned and winsome Talekei.**

In time we arrived at the basin of the river Scaum, at the mouth of which I understood Kaiin to be located. Our partnership was proving prosperous, being ideal to the gathering and sale of erb pelts.

For example, when lodging at the Inn of Five Flags in Flath Foiry, on the Sune, we came across a certain Raquire. He claimed to be a Captain of Zahariots from the 14th Aeon, flung forward to the time of the sun's dying by the fury of a witch whose amatory advances he had rejected. This may have been true; at the least, his manner and style of dress were peculiar. Also present were the landlord, the Hypothesist Barbage, and several merchants and townsfolk.

Raquire, perhaps somewhat befuddled by drink, was urging the company to raise an army and sack Kaiin. His reasons were not clear, although in justice he may have explained himself before we joined the group.

"They are weak, listless!" he declared, striking his mug of allargong on the table to emphasize his point. "The guards, what few exist, are no more than bladders, resting on their halberds and discussing millinery and the plumage of birds!"

"Did they raise any points of interest?" Barbage inquired.

"Half the wall is collapsed to a crumble!" Raquire went on. "I can teach your smiths to make armour and engines of war, catapults, battle beams, arristae! We would triumph in days and rule both Almetry and Akolis!"

"Ascolais," Talakei corrected him quietly. "And your scheme, while no doubt feasible, lacks compulsion. Three reasons come immediately to mind. Firstly, indeed perhaps primarily, it is likely that the sun will expire before you have completed your preparations. Even this afternoon it was the color of ripe plum and seemed to falter at the horizon. Secondly, a number of magicians reside in the Scaum valley, and will resent the noise and upheaval inevitable in plans of this sort. They might also dispute your assumption of authority. I do not care to risk Forlorn Encystment at a depth of 45 miles, nor even the spell of the Macroid Toe. Thirdly, if you wish to impress me, you would do better to purchase one of Xolon's fine erb skins and escort me to my chamber."

"May I then suggest this fine blue-grey pelt?" I rejoined immediately. "It is available for a reasonable sum."



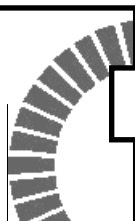


I become drunk as circumstances dictate.

His friend Ecnomander decides to use his Physician skills to ameliorate poor Palandro's condition. His Physician pool is 4. He rolls an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll and gets a

Hair's-Breadth Success. This increases Palandro's Tally to -4. (Ecnomander's Physician pool is now 3.)

An hour later, Palandro makes another Health roll. He gets a Prosaic Success, taking his Tally to -2. Ecnomander applies a poultice, and rolls his Physician ability. He gets an Illustrious Success,



## Sample Poisons and Diseases

### Crimson Shivers

This implacable ailment is carried by contaminated shellfish and certain mites known to inhabit ancient catacombs and lost cities.

**Potency:** Levy 2

**Interval:** 1 day. While sickened, the victim turns beet red and begins to quake uncontrollably. He must be tied down, lest he bang his head on a hard object or swallow his tongue.

**Effect:** The victim makes a Health roll, treating all Successes as Exasperating Failures. He suffers 1 injury in the event of an Exasperating Failure; 2 for a Quotidian Failure, and 3 for a Dismal Failure.

### Tasmonic Infection

This disease is caused by excessive reading of occult texts. Scholars have long speculated as to the exact combination of authors and subjects which bring about the dreaded Tasmonic Infection. Alas, those who come closest to the mystery's answer invariably fall prey to the illness before they can set down the much-feared sequence. Diagrams, most especially maps, are believed to contribute heavily to the syndrome's advance.

**Potency:** Boon 1

**Interval:** 12 hours

**Effect:** The victim makes a Health roll, the results of which determine the permanent mental condition the victim will thereafter suffer. *Illustrious Success:* an overfondness for fish, nuts, or kelp (GM's choice). *Prosaic Success:* Unshakable belief in a crackpot theory of the GM's choice. *Hair's-Breadth Success:* Unreasoning terror of the building in which he first began to suffer the illness. *Exasperating Failure:* Rebuff rating reduced by 1. *Quotidian Failure:* Unshakable refusal to venture outside in the daytime. *Dismal Failure:* Magic rating reduced by 20%; victim reacts with homicidal fury towards anyone uttering a common word of the GM's choice.

### Creature Venom

Various dangerous creatures inject their victims with immobilizing toxins. Scholars disagree on the exact list

of species capable of delivering the following poison. The victim may be exposed to it through a variety of methods, including fangs, spikes, stingers, pseudopods, vapor emissions, and the process of ethieaceous hemblification.

**Potency:** 0

**Interval:** 1 hour

**Effect:** The victim makes a Health roll, treating all Successes as Exasperating Failures. *Exasperating Failure:* victim suffers 1 injury, which can only be healed by magic. *Quotidian Failure:* victim becomes completely paralyzed, losing all control over voluntary bodily functions. Barring successful force-feeding, starvation is imminent. *Dismal Failure:* victim dies.

### Taint

A taint is a poisonous feter emitted by certain creatures. In Vance's story "The Caravan" (*Cugel's Saga*), Nissifer, the half-bazil, half-sime who joined Cugel's caravan through the Ildish Waste, kills several fellow travelers by means of this gas. Its potency is great, but varies according to one's proximity to it. If you are fortunate enough to suffer a taint outdoors and in extremely windy conditions, its potency is halved. It is not effective beyond 20 yards.

**Potency:** Levy 5 (source is less than a yard away); Levy 3 (source is 1-10 yards away), Levy 0 (source is more than 10 yards away)

**Interval:** 30 seconds

**Effect:** death

### The Kiss of Dijan

Named after its formulator—a woman of legendary beauty who, in an aeon past, fatally poisoned every one of a hundred guests at her son's wedding banquet—this odorless, tasteless, wine-colored liquid is easily slipped into a dinner-mate's goblet. Mere possession of its recipe is considered a crime in Kaiin and Ascolais. Heads of state tend to fear it inordinately and ruthlessly punish those suspected of using it.

**Potency:** Levy 5

**Interval:** 5 minutes

**Effect:** 3 injuries





## Abilities in Practice

*increasing Palandro's Tally to 3, and in the process getting a boon which takes his own Physician pool to 5.*

*Another hour later, Palandro gets another Prosaic Success on his Health roll, taking his Tally to 5. Ecnomander need only get a similar success to render him fully hale again. He gets an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll, and suffers a Dismal Failure. Ecnomander suffers a levy, taking his Physician points to 3. Palandro's Tally drops to 0 as boils break out on his chest from excessive exposure to Ecnomander's poultice.*

*Next time, Palandro gets an Illustrious Success, taking his Tally back to 5. Ecnomander gets an Exasperating Failure, rerolls, gets a Prosaic Success, rerolls, gets an Illustrious Success. Palandro's Tally of 10 is now greater than the needed 7. He comes out of his illness, and need not face the permanent effects of creature venom.*

For some sample poisons and diseases, see the sidebar on the previous page.

## Recovery and Refreshing

If dying, you can improve your condition to Down by getting a Health-point boon of 1 or more—usually through a healer's ministrations.

If Down, you can improve your condition to Hurt by refreshing your Health pool, or gaining a Health boon of 6 or more. A downed character refreshes after a number of weeks of bed rest equal to the difference between his Health pool and Health rating.

If Hurt, you can fully recover by refreshing your health pool, or gaining a Health boon of 3 or more. A Hurt character refreshes after a number of days of peaceful inactivity equal to the difference between his Health pool and Health rating.

If suffering from a contusion (see "Aimed Attacks," p. 47), you can fully recover by spending a number of days of peaceful inactivity equal to the levy your opponent applied to you when he contused you, or by gaining a Health boon equal to or greater than that number.

Uninjured characters refresh their Health pool by getting a good night's rest, spending a relaxing day of physical inactivity, and eating well.

## Xolon Encounters Poison

### **On reaching Kaiin, I discovered not only a general unwillingness to**

sail north, but pervasive lassitude and decadence. The folk live in palaces, yet many more of these remain untenanted and in various states of decay. Sybarism and sloth abound, and while neither Talekei nor myself could claim immunity to such pleasures, their availability far exceeded our requirements.

It became clear that we would be obliged to remain in Kaiin some time. Selecting a manse perhaps less thoroughly dilapidated than its fellows, we sought to render it habitable, but discovered an infestation of tasps. Stung and envenomed, I looked with horror on a future of partial paralysis and incontinence. Yet Talekei neatly drew the poison from the wound and applied a small charm carved in scarlet cinnabar, which I had always assumed to be merely decorative. This brought great relief, and to my mind entirely repaid my original rescue.

In the refurbishment of our manse we discovered that we had overlooked certain ordinances, which were taken with a seriousness I personally considered exaggerated.

Over a period of days notes were delivered variously from the Association of Ponders, the Victualler's Guild, and certain evil-smelling brutes we had hired to collect sand from the shore. Each note requested a signature on a contract for our own assassination. Death was offered by means of the Kiss of Dijan, the consumption of Grey Saponella, and the blows of assorted crude implements, respectively. The alternative was to pay over a sum in excess of the total we had gathered.

We first attempted to protest to the authorities, but met with complete indifference. Moments before a fourth and more headstrong contractor arrived, we elected to depart the manse (at speed, through a rear window). I located a skiff that looked, by any reasonable standard, unowned and unused. In hopes that Talekei's home town might prove more felicitous, we left Kaiin upriver, heading for Val Ombrio.







A doomed man needs no such elegant footwear.

## Other Abilities

### Appraisal

You can assess the resale price of valuable goods. You know enough history to examine an object and guess at its age. If it is signed by a famous artisan, you know when he lived and where he worked. (Some of this information might be incorrect, but it is the consensus among dealers in antiquities.) You know a valuable gem from a cloudy, worthless one, and can perform tests to identify precious metals and check their purity. You can spot forgeries—or, if you also have the applicable Craftsmanship ability, create them.

When creating a forgery, spend any number of Appraisal points. This becomes the levy other Appraisers will face when attempting to debunk it.

When haggling over the sale or purchase of a valuable item, you may spend Appraisal points as Persuasion or Rebuff points.

If you suffer a Dismal Failure, you can never successfully appraise the item in question.

**Automatic Success:** Recognizing a renowned masterpiece.

**Refresh:** A nap of an hour or more.

**Counters:** Imposture, when it concerns items of value.

**Is Countered By:** Appraisal, when you have used it to create forgeries.

### Athletics

This ability governs any large-scale physical action (like running, swimming, climbing, or jumping) not covered by another ability. (Riding a beast isn't an Athletics task, because there is already a separate Riding ability.) The Athletics may also allows you a chance to dive for cover when beset by a spellcaster (see the next chapter).

**Automatic Success:** Walking downstairs. Taking a dip in the local swimming hole. Performing daily exercises. Jumping a ditch.

**Refresh:** A night's rest, an hour's workout, an hour's relaxation, and a nourishing meal.

**Counters:** Other Athletics abilities used to thwart your aims—for example, arm-wrestling, a footrace, or any other athletic contest.

### Concealment

This ability lets you find ideal hiding places. Whether in the city or forest, or on a ship, you can find the best possible place to conceal the item or person at hand. You can't work miracles: The best place to hide a gigantic

beast in a temple basement may still be patently obvious to any half-aware onlooker.

If you are present while searchers look for the thing you have hidden, use Concealment reactively against their active Perception moves. If you hide something and then leave, you may spend any number of Concealment points on it—though the GM may impose a limit if the best available hiding place still leaves something to be desired. The points you spent become the levy against the investigator's Perception rolls.

**Automatic Success:** Hide a fish among many other fish. When confronted by a maiden's angry father, choose quickly between the closet and the space under the bed.

**Refresh:** A good night's sleep.

**Counters:** Perception.

**Is Countered By:** Perception.

### Craftsmanship

You can make and repair a specified sort of useful item. You might be a tanner, glassblower, chef, blacksmith, book binder, fletcher (maker of arrows), or a maker of fine swords. You might weave cloth, dye fabrics, sew garments, or produce dazzling hats. You could cut gems, sculpt stone, or create jewelry. In order to exercise this ability, you need access to a workshop well-stocked with the tools and materials required by the trade. Because Cugel-level characters often find themselves at loose ends with not a groat to their names, Craftsmanship can be a convenient way to find work when money runs low. More craftily, you might infiltrate a business establishment in order to swindle the owner or hide from local authorities.

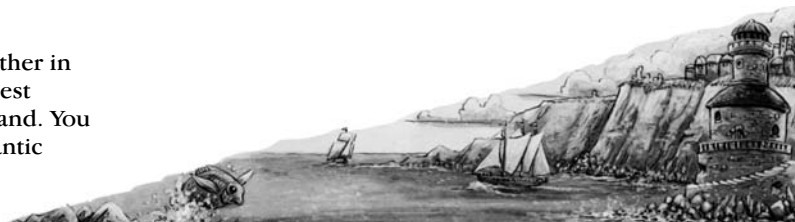
When seeking employment or haggling over the value of items in your category, you may spend Craftsmanship points on Persuasion or Rebuff.

**Automatic Success:** Make a simple repair to an object in your category.

**Refresh:** Spend an uninterrupted day puttering in a well-fitted workshop, without really producing anything.

**Counters:** The attempts of rival craftsmen to outshine your work.

**Is Countered By:** If used to create forgeries, Appraisal.





## Abilities in Practice

### Driving

You can steer land vehicles, assess the ability of other drivers, and make minor repairs. You can race the vehicle, judge its load capacity, and navigate it around obstacles. Some vehicles are pulled by beasts of burden; you can train and drive the beasts of burden that pull it. These beasts are invariably exotic and sometimes intelligent; they may need persuasion to pull your cart or carriage. Other vehicles are mechanical; you can figure out how to operate them—or sabotage them.

When haggling over the sale or rental of a vehicle or beast of burden, you may spend Driving points on Persuasion or Rebuff.

**Automatic Success:** Driving a vehicle along a well-established and easily-navigable road.

**Refresh:** An hour's break from driving.

**Counters:** If racing or competing for road space, the Driving abilities of others.

### Engineering

You can design large structures and mechanical devices. The most common engineering projects are buildings, bridges, and aqueducts. In days past, engineers made siege engines, conveyors, and other devices. Although it is very difficult to build these now, you can at least try to repair surviving devices when they break down.

You can tell roughly how old a building is and identify its style of architecture. You can tell which parts of a structure bear its weight, and which moving parts are crucial to a device's operation. You also know that it is always easier to knock something over than it is to build it in the first place.

If overseeing the building of one of your structures or devices, you may spend Engineering points on your Stewardship ability.

When haggling with suppliers, prospective employees, or clients, you may spend Engineering points on Persuasion or Rebuff.

**Automatic Success:** Repairing holes in a wall.

**Refresh:** An evening's rest, with thoughts occupied by something other than pillars and foundations.

**Counters:** Other engineers can destroy your creations if you don't build them well. After successfully rolling to complete your design for a structure, you may spend any number of Engineering points to increase your creation's sturdiness. You must make a successful Stewardship or Engineering roll while overseeing the actual construction, to prevent your workers and suppliers from cheating you, cutting corners to make it flimsier than your plans call for. If you do so, any would-be saboteurs face a levy (applied to the first roll only) equal to the extra points you spent on its sturdiness.

### Etiquette

You are well-versed in the standards of politeness as practiced among refined citizens in the lands of Ascolais and Alмеры. You know which topics are deemed unsuitable for dinner conversation, the correct manner in which to hold your cutlery, and precisely how outlandish a hat brim is permitted to become before it crosses the line between impudence and vulgarity.

This knowledge lets you enjoy the company of the well-heeled, who will treat you as an equal (if they know you to be rich and powerful) or an individual to be tolerated to the extent that he remains amusing (if they know you're neither).

All societies have their own practices of etiquette. You can use your knowledge of etiquette in Alмеры to make reasonable guesses as to the rules of behavior in other places. The more unlike Alмеры a society is, the greater the levy applied to your attempts.



*In the village of Slandish, each newly elected constable imposes an entirely fresh code of etiquette. Villagers and visitors must master the new code on pain of ostracism.*



Only the fact of my broken limbs prevents me from leaping at your throat.



### Xolon Transgresses Local Norms

**Navigating the Scaum at an elegant pace, we presently came to the** town of Taun Tassel. This proved a noted centre for millinery, and I exchanged Ghurantz's somewhat battered article for a fine new hat of three tiers, in a green of unusual richness. For this I paid ten terces and six groats, a price from which the milliner, one Promebaust, refused to deviate.

On enquiring the price of a four-tier hat in the same style, I was informed that it would be fourteen and a half terces, a seemingly disproportionate increase. The basic cost of my hat, it seemed, was five terces and a groat. A supplementary tier could be added for two terces and two groats, bringing the price to seven and three. The addition of the third tier then cost three terces and three groats, resulting in the ten and six I had paid.

Talekei, intent on an elegant item of the same basic price, asked if for 26 terces and a groat she might have it in the six-tiered version. To our surprise Promebaust became most offensive, declaring that such a hat might only be worn by the highest of mages, or possibly an emperor, and that he would sell Talekei not so much as a skull cap were she to offer a golden centum in exchange. In attempted defiance of his claim she counted out a hundred terces, but this only angered him the more and we were forced to depart the shop.

In xenophobic or authoritarian societies, breaches of etiquette may have consequences graver than one's elimination from guest lists. You could be killed as a heretic, imprisoned for indecency, or receive an invitation to dinner—as the main course.

In some company, you can use Etiquette to escape punishment for misdeeds: If caught cheating at cards, reaching under the wrong skirt, or taking too precise an interest in the security measures surrounding your host's treasury, a well-timed quip engenders surprising forgiveness. The host's obligation to prevent an unseemly scene outweighs his desire to expose you as a scoundrel.

Negotiations which take place during formal occasions in high society allow you to spend Etiquette points on Persuasion or Rebuff.

**Refresh:** Spend several quiet hours observing the social interactions of others.

**Is Countered By:** You may use Etiquette to counter the social climbing of others. If you lose a contest of etiquette, you make a grievous gaffe before your opponent does. Participants in such a contest typically goad one another into making unforgivable comments, or challenge them in the polite eating of exotic and complex viands.

## Gambling

You know how to win at games of chance. If you decide to follow the rules, you know the odds of various standard bets and gambits. If you wish to cheat, you are well acquainted with the best methods of palming cards, marking decks, and loading dice. You can spot the cheating of others. If confronted with an unfamiliar game, you can quickly learn its rules and begin to intuit its optimal strategies.

**perfectly permissible:** Only unusually puritanical places forbid gambling.

Much of the success of a gambler rests in his ability to disguise his talents until he moves in for the kill. You are adept at portraying yourself as a naïf barely familiar with the rudiments of the game at hand. You can figure out when to quit before angering your gambling companions, and when leaving the table without giving them a chance to recapture your winnings would itself occasion a fight.

When disputing the terms of a wager, refuting accusations of unsporting behavior, or providing evidence of the cheating of others, you may spend Gambling points on Persuasion or Rebuff rolls.

You may spend Gambling points on Perception when spotting cheaters or checking for players concealing their true skills.

**Automatic Success:** Identify the game being played. Find a gambling den in a community where games of chance are perfectly permissible.

**Refresh:** Take a relaxing day's break from gaming, avoiding intoxicants and heavy meals.

**Counters:** Most of the time you contest another character's Gambling ability. The sharp eyes of the gambler, alert for cheaters, can be used to counter Quick Fingers attempts.

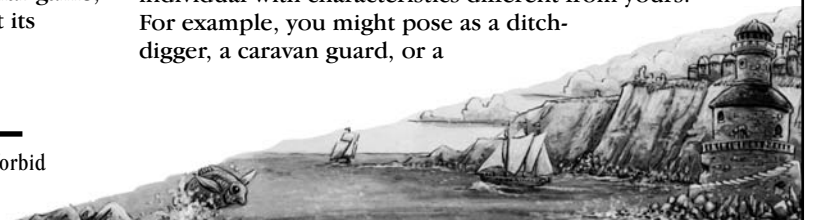
**Is Countered By:** Perception detects cheaters and ringers.

## Imposture

You can pose as someone else. You can mimic voices, adopt disguises, and think on your feet when questioned by your subject's nodding acquaintances.

You face no levy if impersonating a nonexistent individual with characteristics different from yours.

For example, you might pose as a ditch-digger, a caravan guard, or a





## Abilities in Practice

messenger. This assumes you enjoy access to the appropriate garb—perhaps by waylaying the genuine article and “borrowing” his clothing.

If impersonating a specific individual not personally known to the target you mean to fool, you face a levy of 1. If the victim has met the subject on one or a few occasions, the levy is 2. Victims who have dealt with the subject many times engender a levy of 4. Intimates of the subject cause you a levy of 8, and are nearly impossible to fool—unless you have magical assistance to lower that levy by precisely mimicking the subject.

If your imposture is intended to increase your chances in negotiation with the victim of your chicanery, you can spend Imposture points on Persuasion or Rebuff.

If you face a continuing levy against all negotiations with a particular individual, it is suspended for the duration of your successful imposture.

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*You wish to sell a counterfeit amulet to a dealer in occult items. He promised to wring your neck the last time you swindled him, so you face a hefty disadvantage if you approach him undisguised. You pose as a clam-digger, pretending to have discovered it buried in the beach sand. If your Imposture roll succeeds, the levies you would normally face when dealing with this man are eliminated.*

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**Automatic Success:** Convincing a blind man that it’s not you he speaks to, but your twin brother—provided he knows you really have a twin.

**Refresh:** A day’s relaxation in an environment where you need not worry about keeping secrets from anyone.

**Is Countered By:** Perception.

### Living Rough

You can survive in the wilderness. You know how to forage for food and find fresh water. When you need warmth, you can make a fire. The tricks to avoid frostbite in cold conditions and heatstroke in the desert are well-known to you. Your familiarity with the most common toxic plants and the tell-tale smells of polluted waterways protects you from poisoning. You know the habits of deodands, gids, hoons and the other voracious creatures that haunt the trackless forests and arid plains.

You may spend Living Rough points on Persuasion and Rebuff during negotiations with half-men and other wilderness creatures.

**Automatic Success:** Deciding to seek shade during a stunningly hot day.

**Refresh:** A day of civilized living in a human settlement.

### Pedantry

You have made at least a passing acquaintance with the great knowledge of the ages. You’ve studied it in books and listened to the learned discourse of hoar-bearded pedagogues. When faced with a question of fact, you can search your memory to see if you recall a relevant passage in one of the tomes you’ve read. Especially avid pedants commit entire volumes to memory.

Although you are passingly familiar with most major academic fields, you have specialized in a particular narrow field. You gain a boon of 1 when the question deals with that field. You can pick any field you wish. Sample fields include linguistics, history, art, mathematics, plants, animals, archaeology, music, poetics, geography, logic, semantics, mythology, and theology (that is, the mythology of your own culture).

On a Dismal Failure you come up with a completely wrong answer to the question at hand. You must honestly play your deluded ignorance, much as you must, when persuaded against your will, act as if the character wants to do things you, as player, know to be foolish. Other failures yield no information, and you know that you’ve failed. An Illustrious Success not only gives you the complete answer to the question at hand, but allows you to show off your erudition with a dazzling recitation of related facts.

You can spend Pedantry points on Persuasion or Rebuff when the point of dispute in a negotiation is a fact of academic interest.

You can spend Pedantry points on magical research.

**Automatic Success:** Provide the correct name for a common insect. Complete a simple equation. Know the forms of worship and basic beliefs of major religions.

**Refresh:** A quiet four hours reading, in good light, with refreshing food and beverages close at hand.

**Counters:** In a contest of Pedantry, the assembled precisians attempt to one-up one another with the recitation of ever-more arcane facts and theories. As no self-respecting pedant ever admits error, a victor can in most cases be named only if an outside observer agrees to judge each argument. In rules terms, the characters contest as usual; it’s just that the loser is under no obligation to admit that he’s lost. After the observer has made his judgment, it is not uncommon for arguments to erupt as to his true neutrality.

### Perception

Your senses are finely honed. You see clearly, even at night. Your sense of smell is acute. You are an eavesdropper of the first order, and your ability to pick out and identify distant sounds would put a night-flying predator to shame. No spice or flavor, no matter how subtle, can elude your highly-developed taste buds. More important, you’ve learned to keep on constant alert, so as to note when something is amiss. You hear ambushers creeping toward you, see the dull red flash of sunlight glinting from the helmets of distant snipers, and smell the





We prostrate ourselves before the fish-god Yob,  
who seems as efficacious as any.

## Perceiving With Other Abilities

### Sometimes other Abilities can

stand in for or replace Perception, and therefore require the GM to roll on the player's behalf, just like Perception. To notice strange characteristics of a wound, you could use Physician instead of Perception. Appraisal can spot forged items; Gambling, to winnow out cheaters. To realize that a village official's behavior is completely contrary to his reputation, you could use Scuttlebutt but not Perception—you need the knowledge of local rumors to have even a chance of succeeding.

musty stink of swamp-dwelling half-men before they can loose their nets. Your keen eyes spot tripwires, hidden levers, and concealed trapdoors.

If there is something to detect, but you fail your Perception roll, you notice nothing. Unless, that is, you score a Dismal Failure, in which case you perceive something directly contrary to the truth. (For example, if you scrutinize a man's features to see if he's lying to you, and you fail dismally, the GM will tell you that he's honest when in fact he intends to slit your throat.) Because knowing the result of your roll tips you off even if you fail, **your GM makes Perception rolls on your behalf.**

Whenever you wish to sense something, tell the GM how many Perception points you're willing to spend. She then rolls on your behalf, without showing you the result, rerolling up to the number of points you specified. Assuming that she can do so while remaining within the specified budget, she always pays to nullify the Dismal Failures she rolls on your behalf. She will continue until you gain a success or run out of points.

*Cugel believes that a crate of valuable demon scales has been buried nearby. His player asks for a Perception roll to find signs of recent digging. He tells his GM he's willing to spend up to 3 Perception on the attempt. The GM knows there is something to find. She rolls on the player's behalf, getting an Illustrious Success. "You find not only a place where a hole has obviously been dug up and then filled in again," she tells the player, "but also the shovel that was doubtless used to do the deed." She also informs the player that he didn't have to spend points on the task.*

When entering a situation where you want to remain alert to anything unusual or noteworthy over time, you may spend X number of Perception points. The GM then makes up to X rerolls on your behalf when making secret Perception rolls for you.

*Liane the Wayfarer enters a village whose inhabitants he once swindled out of a fabulous ancestral treasure. They greet him with elaborate politeness, assuring him that they are obligated by the tenets of their faith to let bygones be bygones. Liane's player is suspicious and expects to be waylaid at any moment. He tells the GM he wishes to spend 4 Perception points to remain highly alert to any and all skullduggery. Sure enough, the lovely maiden the villagers provide to Liane for his companionship is in fact a hungry leucomorph in human form. The GM rolls to see if Liane notices the subtly inhuman behavior of this pliant young woman. Because Liane has spent 4 points, the GM can make up to 4 rerolls on his behalf. She rolls a Quotidian Failure, then a Dismal one. She decides that Liane has not only failed to notice the woman's fangs, but has become utterly besotted with her.*

You can't remain on constant alert indefinitely. Sometimes the GM will decide that reasonable time has passed and you won't get any more rerolls, even though the points you spent haven't all paid off yet. The alert always ends when you stop to do something demanding your full attention. Any task requiring a roll fits this definition. Other activities also take your full attention, even if they don't require ability rolls; examples include eating a big meal, getting soused, or making love.

*Once Liane enters the leucomorph's embrace, he loses the chance to use the 3 Perception rerolls he would otherwise have available to him.*

**Automatic Success:** Seeing an object in plain sight. Noting something is amiss when a heavily-perspiring, shifty-eyed, trembling individual urges you to trust him.

**Refresh:** A night's sleep.

**Counters:** Concealment, Gambling (when used to cheat), Imposture, Quick Fingers, Scuttlebutt (when used to spread false rumors), Stealth.

## Physician

Provided with clean bandages and a few basic salves, you can patch up the wounded. You know the familiar folk remedies for the curing of diseases, the lifting of curses, and the restoration of lost sexual potency. You can identify medicines and curative herbs. You know how to reassure



## Abilities in Practice

your patients and encourage them to believe that they will soon recover. You can diagnose illnesses, estimate the chances of survival your patients enjoy, and guess at recovery times.

You can make a Physician roll to aid an injured character. On a Hair's-Breadth Success, the patient gets a boon of 1 Health point. Your Prosaic Success gains him 2 Health points. An Illustrious Success gets him a boon of 3 Health points; moreover, you can spend any number of Physician points; in return, the patient gains an equivalent Health point boon.

As you'll recall from "Recovery and Refreshing," earlier in this chapter, a boon of 3 Health points is enough to improve a patient's condition from Hurt to uninjured. It takes a 6-point boon to get him from Down to Hurt. A mere 1 point turns a Dying patient into one who is merely Down.

When arguing with patients over fees, convincing people that they need medical attention, or persuading them that their chances of survival are good, you can spend Physician points on Persuasion or Rebuff rolls.

**Refresh:** A night's sleep and two hours of restful activity without thinking about medicine.

### Quick Fingers

Your fingers adeptly follow your commands. Any task requiring manual dexterity comes easily to you. Sample tasks include picking locks, palming objects, and removing coins from the pockets of the unsuspecting. Your fast hands can dart into dangerous places and snatch out desired objects without getting harmed. You are a practiced juggler and can perform sleights of hand using cards, cups, and balls.

If cheating, you may spend Quick Fingers points on Gambling rolls.

**Automatic Success:** Riffing a deck of cards in an impressive manner.

**Refresh:** A night's sleep, followed by a day in which you make no Quick Fingers rolls.

**Is Countered By:** Attack (a Contusion attack aimed at your fingers), Gambling (if you are cheating at same), Perception.

### Riding

Reliable riding beasts are hard to find on the Dying Earth. Although fine steeds exist, don't expect your characters to encounter them on a regular basis. Instead, you're more likely to be offered weird, multi-legged hybrids from a long-dead sorcerer's experiments, or talkative beasts of burden with a taste for beer.

Riding ability lets you ride a willing creature. Many riding beasts are sapient and capable of speech. Often you must cajole them into letting you ride them, using your Persuasion ability.

When arguing with a riding beast, you may spend Riding points as Persuasion or Rebuff points. You may do the same when negotiating sale or purchase of a beast.

You can train the beasts to execute complex maneuvers, or to obey set instructions in certain conditions.

You can fight from the back of a beast. During mounted combat, you can spend Riding points as Attack or Defense points.

**Automatic Success:** Stay on a willing creature's back at moderate speeds, in normal terrain.

**Refresh:** A day of rest for the beast, and for your posterior muscles.

**Counters:** Other characters' Riding—for example, during a race.

**Is Countered By:** The beast can use its Attack value to throw you off.

### Scuttlebutt

You know all the juiciest rumors of your chosen community, especially those concerning the powerful and celebrated. If visiting another community other than your own, you can quickly gather similar rumors by spending a few hours in a public gathering place, especially one in which the wine flows freely. You can spread rumors, true or fanciful, in such a manner that they are not easily traced to their source. You can ferret out the authors of false rumors and identify the informants behind truthful ones. All these tasks require you to spend time at parties, festivals, and drinking bouts in the social stratum the rumor concerns. A rumor about a magician's peccadilloes can only be floated—or debunked—where his colleagues frolic. Likewise, rumors concerning grime-spattered miners are heard in mining camps, not in elegant ballrooms.

When seeking to convince someone of the truth or falsehood of a particular rumor, you can use Scuttlebutt points on Persuade or Rebuff attempts.

**Automatic Success:** Learn a few salient facts about the local authority figure.

**Refresh:** A night's rest and a quiet day.

**Is Countered By:** Perception (if floating an untrue and improbable rumor); Scuttlebutt (if attempting to squelch an existing rumor with a more interesting one of opposite import).

### Seamanship

Your past includes a stint as a seafarer. You know the laws and customs of mariners. You can repair and maintain rudders, masts, ropes, and hulls. You can steer the ship or plot its course using navigational instruments.

When swimming or climbing masts, you can spend Seamanship points on Athletics. When negotiating rates for cargo or passenger service, you can spend them







Bunderwal shows the drooping nostrils which indicate an infallible tendency toward sea-sickness.

on Persuasion or Rebuff. When resisting seasickness or malnutrition, you can spend them on Health rolls.

**Automatic Success:** Keep your balance on a gently rolling deck.

**Refresh:** A night's sleep (comfort not essential) followed by a breakfast of grog and hardtack.

## Seduction

You can make yourself sexually attractive to others. Seduction is the art of understanding your target and tailoring your approach to his or her desires. The accomplished seducer knows that each individual's loins are stirred by signals unique to him- or herself. Some may like a bold and confident approach, whereas others are stirred by subtle hints and insinuations. Still others may invite you to their couch out of pity, to prove dominance over you, or to inspire jealousy in a third party.

The art is generally more difficult for men seeking to seduce women than for the opposite configuration. Women making themselves passably comely find that most men respond favorably to certain simple actions, or to direct invitations. Still, the advanced practitioner of seduction can fever the brow of even the most determined celibate, using time-honored techniques such as the Dance of the Fourteen Silken Movements.

You may spend Seduction points on Perception when studying the romantic gamesmanship of others. For example, you can determine whether a young maiden is moved by a rival's advances.

When negotiating with someone who might imagine him- or herself couching with you, you may spend Seduction points on Persuasion. Rolls paid for with Seduction points are countered as if your Persuasion style is Charming. You may precede this attempt with a Seduction roll to determine if the target is sexually interested in you. If you go ahead without this certainty, and your target in fact does not find your presence stimulating, all results are treated as Dismal Failures which you cannot pay to reroll.

Once your target has been seduced, but before he or she joins you on the couch, he or she suffers a levy of 2 against any Persuasion attempts you might make.

Seduction does not work with the Ganging Up rules in Chapter 3.

**Automatic Success:** Win an invitation to couch with someone who has fond memories of your nocturnal gyrations and is in the mood for love.

**Refresh:** A day spent out of the presence of potential sexual partners.

**Is Countered By:** Rakishness or Rebuff.

## Stealth

You can move without being noticed. Your footsteps fall lightly on the ground. Even if you step on a twig, you are unlikely to break it. You dash quickly from alcove to alcove or shadow to shadow.



You can move so as to limit the chances of being followed. Make a successful Stealth roll and spend any number of points. Your pursuers face an equal levy against their Tracking rolls.

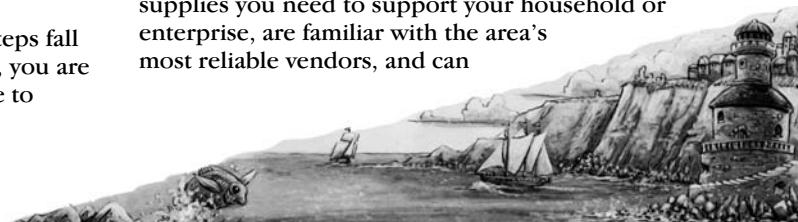
**Automatic Success:** Avoid the notice of observers by standing still, breath held, in a corner of a darkened room.

**Refresh:** A day's relaxation in a situation where you have nothing to hide.

**Is Countered By:** Perception.

## Stewardship

You can manage a household or business enterprise. The keeping of financial accounts is second nature to you. Cooking, cleaning, mending, and repair work come easily to you—especially if you're giving instructions, and lackeys are performing the actual labor. You know the supplies you need to support your household or enterprise, are familiar with the area's most reliable vendors, and can





## Abilities in Practice

tell the difference between fine and shoddy goods. With a single gaze into the eyes, you can size up the merits of a prospective employee or the honesty of a tradesman.

You may spend Stewardship on Persuasion or Rebuff when dealing with tradesmen, employees, and vendors.

You may spend Stewardship points on Perception rolls when checking to see if anything is awry within the confines of your shop or household.

**Automatic Success:** Smell alcohol on the breath of a drunken employee.

**Refresh:** A day off from your duties.

### Tracking

You know how to follow the trails left by men and beasts. You may be hampered by the sort of ground on which your quarry travelled. In thick mud, snow, or loose sand, you get a boon of 1. In a forest or grassland, you proceed without boon or levy. In places where the ground is hard or there is no medium in which a creature might leave its tracks, you face a levy of 1 or more. There is no point in trying to track through water, on cobblestoned roadways, or in buildings, unless the floors of said buildings are covered with thick dust.

**Automatic Success:** Follow a trail of bloody footprints across white marble flooring.

**Refresh:** Several hours' rest with eyes closed.

**Is Countered By:** Your quarry's Stealth can further confound your Tracking attempt. See above.

### Wherewithal

Under pressure, you remain steely and confident. You can ignore the powerful instincts that prevent ordinary folk from doing dangerous things. You can force yourself to suffer pain, endure deprivations, and ignore fear. When confronted by terrifying circumstances, you hold your ground.

Wherewithal can lessen the effect of certain magical items. See, for instance, Blue Concentrate in Chapter 6.

**Automatic Success:** Suppress the urge to cry out in pain when you step on a sharp object.

**Refresh:** A day spent in absolute safety.

### Relationships

For each relationship, you must specify why the personage in question is inclined to aid you. The GM must approve your reasons, keeping in mind the nature of the personage. For example, if your character is a powerful wizard, you may claim he created the personage in a vat. If the GM thinks this unlikely, given what has already been established about the personage, she'll ask you to think again.

You must maintain the relationship during play. If Khandive helps you because you own a compromising document he wrote, you must keep it in a safe place. If he gets his hands on it, he'll no longer have a reason to help you—in fact, he'll actively seek his long-delayed vengeance for your effrontery.

### Xolon Views Degraded Splendor

#### While travelling up the Scaum, we could not avoid noting the

extraordinary abundance of ruins. In Kaiin itself a great arena had once stood, supported 200 feet above the ground; now we saw only a tumble of supports, like broken teeth. Between Kaiin and Taun Tassel we counted the remains of some 40 bridges, many of imposing proportion, yet not one with span extant. Now, with the sun dying and no one prepared to turn a hand to great works, the

river may be crossed only by ferry.

Another sight worthy of mention is the Valley of Graven Tombs, a stretch of river above Kaiin, some miles in length. Along both banks stand multitudes of crumbling mausolaea, no one like another. On the northern bank, where the sun strikes until late into the evening, each tomb is covered with sprawling vines. Talekei claimed these are the source of the wine Tanvilkat, which may cost a thousand terces for a single bottle.

Higher, beneath the brooding grey-green shadow of Modavna Moor, we came to what Talekei claimed had once been the great city G'Vasan. Once, she told me, the city had boasted a hundred towers, each built of glass the color of bronze, and each taller than any building now extant. Now I could only detect a curious brazen sheen to the river sand and perhaps a degree of irregularity along the shore.

In addition to these wonders, I saw innumerable towers, keeps, manses, domae, temples, and lesser structures. Built of the pale stone of the area, they were in the main no more than forlorn ruins, home to the deodand and the gid. Viewing such evidence of past splendour, and comparing it with the sorry conditions of the day, I could not stave off a touch of melancholy.

—At least until Talekei sighted an enormous erb lurking among the tumbled blocks of an abandoned ermitary. Its coat was the purest silver grey, and the subsequent hunt entirely restored my normally sanguine outlook on life. The pelt we sold in Taun Tassel, to the local baron, for two gold centums.





In order to get help from a personage, you have to be in a position to petition him for it. Usually that means being in his home city. Powerful sorcerers, on the other hand, may have means to receive, and act on, messages sent from afar.

Your degree of success on a Relationship roll determines the amount of help your personage is willing to extend to you.

**Dismal Failure:** She not only refuses you, but enjoins you not to contact her again for X+1 weeks, where X is the difference between your rating and current pool in the specific relationship.

**Quotidian Failure:** She is unmoved by your entreaties and urges you to solve the problem yourself.

**Exasperating Failure:** She sincerely wishes she could help you but explains that present circumstances prevent her from doing so. If you care to listen, she enumerates her woeful situation in detail.

**Hair's-Breadth Success:** She grudgingly provides you the minimal help required.

**Quotidian Success:** She provides you with aid which makes your dilemma look significantly less daunting.

**Illustrious Success:** She provides an immediate solution to your problem. (However, the laws of storytelling dictate that this sudden reversal should carry unforeseen consequences. Most likely, you have exchanged one dilemma for another. Perhaps she sends you on a dangerous quest.)

## Refreshing Relationships

It isn't as easy to maintain a personage's sense of obligation to you as it is to get a good night's sleep or obtain a nourishing meal. To keep a personage interested in helping you, you must typically help her in return. If your relationship with the personage is one of mutual goodwill, you can refresh your pool by performing a deed of reciprocal value. It must help the personage roughly as much as she helped you, or represent as great a sacrifice on your part as she made on your behalf.

If your relationship is coercive—that is, if you extract favors from the personage by holding some kind of threat over her—you must remind her of the threat. The greater her last service for you, the more extreme your demonstration of the threat must be.

## Possessions

Whenever your character's continued ownership of a possession is in doubt, you may use a Possessions pool to see if you retain control of it. Or rather, your GM makes a secret roll on your behalf whenever you put yourself in such a situation. The GM assumes your willingness to keep rerolling Quotidian and Exasperating Failures until you run out of points. If the GM scores a success on your behalf, you retain the item.

---

*You have been bamboozled (try to enjoy it) into entering a crumbling old mine in order to find an antique vase. It is of great sentimental value to the mage to whom you have briefly indentured yourself.*

*You do not wish to take your finest outfit of clothing with you into the mine. Another of the mage's servants, Pulphin, has remarked on more than one occasion on the extreme fashionability of your garb, and how his son's chances of finding a suitable bride might be increased if he sported a similar outfit. It thus seems unsafe to simply leave the outfit in your closet. You wrap it in an airtight container taken from the mage's storeroom, cover that in oilcloth, and lower it into a well. You then go about your business in the mine.*

*Your Possessions rating for the fashionable togs is 2. The GM rolls on your behalf, scoring a Prosaic Success. The clothing is waiting for you when you get back.*

---

If the GM instead gets a failure, you lose the item. Quotidian or Exasperating Failures mean that the item has been taken from you, but in a manner which may let you recover it if you act quickly and cleverly when you discover its loss. It is easier to find your item again if you suffer an Exasperating Failure. Dismal Failure means that it is destroyed, or taken from you in a manner that leaves you no chance of recovery.

---

*Upon inspecting the vase, the mage remembers that it is actually his grandmother's spittoon to which he maintains a sentimental attachment. Again he enjoins you to enter the mine. Again you bide your togs from Pulphin, who has in the meantime pointed out that you and his son share the same clothing size.*

*The GM rolls an Exasperating Failure. He rerolls, spending 1 of the Possession points you've invested in the item, and gets a Quotidian Failure. He rerolls a second time, spending your last point, and gets an Exasperating Failure.*

*When you return from your mission, you haul up the rope, only to find it severed, as if by gnashing teeth. You see Pulphin lurking nearby. He informs you that the well is haunted by a ravening beast from the Overworld, once accidentally summoned by your employer. It materializes from time to time, but is confined by magic to the well. This is why the well is no longer used, Pulphin blandly comments.*





## Abilities in Practice

*Disbelieving Pulphin, you decide to trail him when he leaves the mage's compound to visit his son in town. Indeed, Pulphin carries a suspicious bundle under his arm. You leap from the bushes and confront him, threatening to belabor him with a truncheon. Although he protests his innocence, you snarl with sufficient zest to win him over to your point of view. He produces the outfit, but insists that it was a gift from the well creature, and that he kept it only to avoid the dread entity's wrath. The creature, he explains, is notoriously touchy about those who casually dispose of his presents. As you relieve him of his package, you observe that Pulphin's tale lacks credibility.*

*If the GM had scored a Dismal Failure, your clothing might actually have been eaten by a well creature.*

---

**Ordinary or special?:** If you permanently lose an item, or give up on recovering it, the GM determines whether it is *ordinary* or *special*. **Ordinary items** are common possessions available from peddlers and merchants throughout the civilized lands of the Dying Earth: clothing, rope, adornments, and most weapons fall into this category. **Special items** are rare and difficult to replace. These include enchanted items, riding animals or beasts of burden, conveyances, grimoires, longbows, notable works of art, and other unique possessions.

If the lost item is ordinary, the GM will allow your character to replace it at an early logical opportunity. To do so, you must pay its usual cost or take a risk of some kind. For example, you could gamble for it (risking the loss of another item) or try to pilfer it (risking capture by local authorities) instead of simply buying it. Your old rating now applies to the replacement item.

---

*Let's say that you indeed failed to recover your clothing from Pulphin. A suit of clothing, no matter how peacockish, is easily replaceable and therefore categorized by the GM as an ordinary item.*

*The mage whom you work for has no tailor's shop on his premises. You must go to the nearest town in search of a replacement outfit. Your purse is thin at the moment, so you inform the local tailor that you have come as a representative of a fearsome well-dwelling monster with a penchant for fine outfits. He wishes his herald—that is to say, you—to be stylishly appointed, and will refrain from entering the tailor's home and*

*devouring his children should you be provided with suitable attire. Although the tailor is, at first, skeptical of your claims, you manage to persuade him, and he promises that he will have a new outfit ready for you in three days.*

*Unfortunately, when you arrive to pick up the suit, the hierarch of the local temple and his burly co-priests are waiting for you at the tailor's shop. Apparently the locals look on the heralds of fearsome well monsters with some disfavor. Sweat appears on your brow as you attempt to formulate a soothing explanation for your activities. You have paid for the outfit not in terces, but in danger to your person.*

---

Special items can't be replaced. However, the points you spent on your item aren't wasted when you lose it. The GM will, within a session or three, introduce a plotline allowing you to gain a different item of more or less equal utility. (Make sure she remembers you're owed a replacement!) The acquisition of the item is no simple matter; you must overcome a number of difficult obstacles in order to obtain it. Although the item's ability to affect the storyline is on a rough par with the one it replaces, you have no control over its exact nature or capabilities. The GM decides what you get and what you must do to get it. If you fail to overcome the obstacles, the GM will wait for several sessions, then give you a chance to acquire another suitable replacement.

---

*A drunken sandestin sets fire to the inn in which you have stowed your gear. You manage, through good Possession rolls, to get most of your gear out of the room before it fills completely with choking smoke. Unfortunately, the Dismal Failure on your Possession roll for your Ossip Wax means that you can't recover it. When the fire has died down, you sift the rubble for it. You find its pot, blackened and cracked, but all of the wax has melted.*

*Later in the adventure, the GM sees to it that you have an opportunity to acquire another item of like usefulness, a Blanket of Obdurate Tactility. This is a bolt of damp-smelling gray cloth which, when wrapped around an individual, clamps tightly onto him and refuses to let go until a command word is given. The GM creates several obstacles between you and your acquisition of the item. First, it is currently owned by Bundifer, a truculent fellow-traveler on your current caravan trip to Kaiin. Second, you do not know the command word. Third, its previous owner, a murderous wefkin, has sworn to recover the item, and has disguised himself as yet another caravan passenger.*

---

**your purse is thin:** Why else would you be working for a ludicrously sentimental magician?







All is mutability, and thus your three hundred terces  
has fluctuated to three.

*If you succeed in liberating the item from Bundifer without subsequently falling into the wefkin's clutches, you may take your Possessions rating for the Ossip Wax and transfer it to the Blanket of Obdurate Tactility. If you fail to do so, your rating continues to go unused until your next chance to acquire an item, a session or more from now.*

Enchanted items have a Possession pool equal to the point value of the item.

The Possessions rules apply only to Cugel-level characters. Higher-level characters use the Wealth rules, immediately below.

## Refreshing

**When you lose any item, all your other Possession pools refresh.** This applies to temporary losses as well as permanent ones. There is no other way to refresh Possessions pools. The periodic loss of useful items is the Cugel-level character's lot in life.

## Your Purse (such as it is)

As you already know, Cugel-level characters start the game without money, and they never hold onto it long. Even after acquiring a terce or two, you cannot use the Improvement rules (see Chapter 8) to protect the contents of your purse from loss or pilferage. The GM *will* regularly part you from your money during or between adventures.

We encourage the GM to do this without giving you even a chance to protect your hard-gotten cash. Although she may permit you Perception rolls to spot sneak-thieves or Athletics rolls to snatch up your purse in time to evade pursuers, she is by no means obligated to do so. She's just as likely to simply tell you that, between the last session and the one about to commence, unnamed bandits accosted you and stripped you of your wealth. Or that your cache of gems was looted by twk-men. Or whatever other flimsy pretense comes to mind.

As the prospect of repeatedly losing your cash and negotiables is as inexorable as the dimming of the sun, you might as well get used to it. Don't pout! Spend lavishly when you're flush. Convert money into Possessions, which the rules *do* allow you to protect. Expect that every new town will bring with it the need to scrounge for peculiar and demeaning employment.

In short, resign yourself to your fate.

**return to your manse:** Although it is sometimes possible to have money conveyed to you over long distances by faithful retainers, the profusion of bandits and the scarcity of faithful retainers makes this chancy at best.

## Wealth

Turjan- and Rhialto-level characters need not concern themselves with petty scrounging for terces and groats. Instead of devoting points to separate Possessions, they may purchase a Wealth ability. This reflects their general chances of solving problems through creative spending.

## Drawing on Income

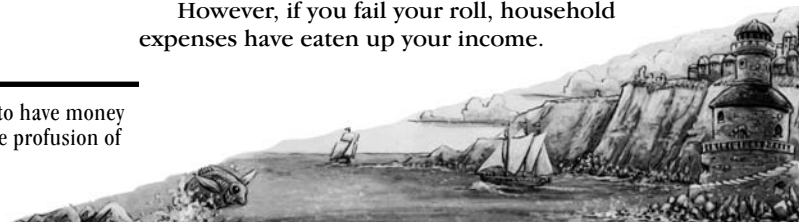
You have an income that accrues to you without effort. This may consist of rents, profits from a business, dividends from investments, or regular tribute paid by those who fear your wrath. Whenever you need money, you may attempt to draw upon this income. In order to do so, you must return to your manse. You gain a number of terces based on your Wealth pool (after taking any point losses from the current roll into account). The number varies according to your success type, as follows:

Success	Terces Gained
Hair's-Breadth	10 × Wealth pool
Prosaic	100 × Wealth pool
Illustrious	300 × Wealth pool

A levy of 5 times X is applied to the roll, where X is the number of times you've already drawn on your income during the current game session.

*Forbure the Munificent has a Wealth rating of 19 and a current pool of 16. His wealth derives from a winery he runs on his family estate, the grapes coddled by a flavor-enhancing cantrap of his own devising. He wishes to impress Imatbka, a beautiful maiden, by purchasing for her a fabulous damask shift, interwoven with spun diamond. It costs 4000 terces. He returns to his manse in Kaiin and asks his faithful factotum, Grindlo, to release the needed funds. He rolls, getting an Exasperating Failure. He rerolls, taking his Wealth pool to 15. He gets a Prosaic success, netting him 100 times his current Wealth pool of 15. He gets (100 × 15 =) 1500 terces. It looks like he will have to resort to other measures to find the remaining 2500 terces, or choose a less impressive gown. He takes his terces to the city's gambling dens, where he expects to quickly make up the shortfall.*

However, if you fail your roll, household expenses have eaten up your income.





## Abilities in Practice

You not only fail to secure the desired funds, but must wait a time before again attempting to draw on your income. That period is two weeks in the case of an Exasperating Failure, and a month in the case of a Quotidian Failure. Dismal Failure, on the other hand, means that some heretofore hidden circumstance prevents you from collecting your income. Your extortion victims may be in revolt, your businesses boycotted by angry customers, your accounts embezzled by faithless retainers, or your lands overrun by enemies. In this case, you may not again draw upon your income until you return home and rectify the situation. Such rectifications may become the focus for entire adventures.

*Forbure finds disappointment at the gaming tables, and returns to his factotum seeking additional funds. As he has already drawn on his income this session, he faces a levy of 5. His first roll drops his Wealth pool from 15 to 10. He rolls a Quotidian Failure. He rerolls, taking his pool from 10 to 5. He gets another Quotidian Failure, reducing his rating to 0. Grindlo assures him that the household budget can spare no easy cash. Perhaps in a month, Grindlo reckons, he may again draw upon his income.*

*Had Forbure gotten a Dismal Failure, it might have turned out that the winery has suffered an infestation of gno-pests, one requiring Forbure's direct intervention. The GM, seeing a story opportunity, might decide that the gno-pests have been sent by a rival mage eager to distract Forbure while he woos the lovely Imathka.*

## Raising Emergency Funds

You own a domicile appointed with luxury items in accordance with your means. In emergencies, you can sell these items to raise further cash. However, in doing so, you reduce your Wealth rating. The terces gained through this measure vary according to both your Wealth rating (not current pool) and your ability in hawking the items you're disposing of. Make a Stewardship roll, and compare results with the chart below.

In the event of a Dismal Failure, you not only get a pittance for your goods, but attract the attention of your

peers, who note that you've fallen on hard times and have been reduced to selling your effects at pitiful prices. You suffer a levy of 2 on all social interactions with local grandees until you somehow rectify this impression.

*Perhaps unwisely, Forbure's weeks spent combating gno-pests only steel his resolve. He will not allow his rival to steal Imathka from him! Lacking significant Stewardship expertise himself, he instructs his retainer, Grindlo, to sell the items for him. Grindlo's Stewardship pool is 4. Forbure's player decides to reduce his Wealth rating by 1. Grindlo scores an Illustrious Success. Forbure's rating, after the loss of 1, is 18. So he gets 54,000 terces to lavish on Imathka.*

You may not gain from the reduction of your Wealth rating if you've already spent improvement points to raise that rating during the current session. (Improvement points are explained in Chapter 8.)

## Refreshing Wealth

You may refresh your Wealth pool by devoting a week's efforts to your financial arrangements. You can only do this at home.

## Retainers

Although your retainers are expected to work for you and perform according to your instructions, your expectation may be grounded more in theory than reality. When giving any instruction to a retainer, use Persuasion or Stewardship. If you can't know whether the retainer will in fact obey your instructions (such ignorance is usually the case), your GM rolls secretly on your behalf, using the procedure given under "Perception," above: You spend X Persuasion/Stewardship points in advance, and the GM spends up to X points to try to win the exchange for you.

Your chances of success are modified by the type of retainer and the nature of your instructions.

Dealing with a Diligent retainer is an Especially Easy Task (see Chapter 3, "Adjusting a Task's Difficulty"). You suffer a levy of 1 when issuing instructions to a Recalcitrant one. With an Unctuous retainer, you gain a boon of 1 when he believes you can easily monitor him as he performs his duties, and a levy of 1 when you cannot.

You gain a boon of 1 when the task you assign is well within the bounds of the retainer's usual duties. You suffer a levy of 1 if it might cause him distress or embarrassment. If the task involves any danger whatever, the levy is 2. If injury or death is a likely outcome of your assignment, the levy is 3 or more.

The GM may ask other players to portray your retainer, so that he is more likely to value his interests over yours. You might always play a particular retainer belonging to other PCs, or the duty of

Result	Terces Gained
Dismal Failure	Wealth rating
Quotidian Failure	100 × Wealth rating
Exasperating Failure	250 × Wealth rating
Hair's-Breadth Success	500 × Wealth rating
Prosaic Success	1000 × Wealth rating
Illustrious Success	3000 × Wealth rating



Clissum recited six stanzas from an extended work entitled:  
*O Time, Be Thou The Sorry Dastard?*



## Xolon on Modern Scholarship

### Leaving the Scaum upstream of the town Azenomei, we fared

south on an ancient causeway built on arches above the swamp, across a range of low hills, and so to Val Ombrio. Here Talekei secluded herself in the Sapientiary, a library of sorts, leaving me in the care of an ancient relative, Abich, the curator.

With little else to do but eat the fine local seafood (lobster being a specialty), I took to the company of Abich, who proved a scholar of some worth. He knew lore of many Aeons, and made particular studies of the classification of Bang-Nosed Beetles, the heraldry of the old Khang Kingdom and styles of nasal adornment in early Grand Motholam—all worthy pursuits, no doubt, if of little obvious practical value.

Personally, it has always been my view that all avenues of scholarship have long been explored, and that in these last days the sound man need hold only that residue of knowledge remaining after all that is trivial or useless has been discarded.

Besides this, Abich, though a magician of some small ability, was clearly senile. He claimed to be the grandchild of Talekei, rather than the reverse.

portraying the retainer may go to various players at different times. The advantage of the first method is that each retainer gets a consistent portrayal. The second method gives each player an equal chance in the spotlight.

*because most Dying Earth characters speak and behave alike, she is just as likely to assign the role to whichever player most deserves the spotlight time.*

*Sasha hasn't had much chance to play tonight; his Arch-Magician character, Laleg the Omnipresent, was captured by imps after a regrettable lab accident. Every so often the GM calls on Sasha; each time Sasha tries a different method to extricate himself, but is bobbled by a series of Dismal Failures. On one level, this is funny, and all of the players are enjoying the helplessness of Laleg, who can at times be overbearing, to put it mildly. On another level, it isn't quite fair to Sasha, who is being a good sport but is clearly starting to feel like he's imprisoned along with his character.*

*Meanwhile, another PC, played by Troy, has spent the entire session hunting down his former majordomo, Vlat, who absconded from his manse on a cart laden with the contents of his wine cellar. The PC, Ecnomander, finally locates the fellow, now running a wine shop in Almary. He enters the shop and confronts his erstwhile servant.*

*TROY (as ECNOMANDER): See here, shameless Vlat! The contents of your establishment seem all too familiar to me!*

*The GM, instead of playing the ex-retainer herself, gives Sasha something to do, cueing him to play the role.*

*SASHA (as VLAT): If you mean to imply wrongdoing on my part, I insist that you withdraw the charge!*

*If Sasha does an especially good job of characterizing Vlat, the GM may call on him the next time the character appears. However,*

## Resistances

Expect your GM to litter your character's path with temptations. The degree to which a temptation interferes with your current goals depends on the result of your Resistance roll.

**Dismal Failure:** As a consequence of your behavior, you face a significant setback in the pursuit of your current goals. Your enemies have time to regroup, gather resources, and uncover your plans. Your friends disdain you and withdraw their aid.

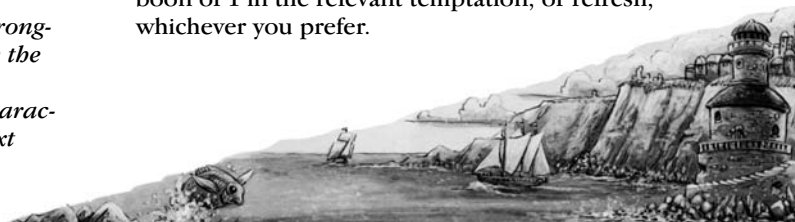
**Quotidian Failure:** You waste several hours in the pursuit of your pleasure, or lose an item of minor usefulness. Your companions have reason to mock you.

**Exasperating Failure:** You indulge momentarily, but remembering your true goals, soon recover your bearings. Your actions cause you to suffer a levy of 1 against an upcoming roll.

**Hair's-Breadth Success:** You nearly succumb, but pull back before embarrassing yourself. Onlookers know that you've been tested, but did not fall.

**Prosaic Success:** You may refuse the temptation gracefully, as if it were no temptation at all.

**Illustrious Success:** With the urgency of your goal uppermost in mind, you find a new resolve. You gain a boon of 1 in the relevant temptation, or refresh, whichever you prefer.





## Abilities in Practice

### Refreshing Resistances

You suffer no penalty for indulging your temptations in situations where they don't interfere with your goals. In fact, sometimes your goal might be to pursue a temptation. You might want to romantically conquer that beefy warrior who's been giving you the cold shoulder, partake of the ambrosial mead of aeons past, or annoy a business rival with your superior grasp of legal minutiae.

You can refresh a resistance by indulging the temptation in circumstances of your own choosing. (That is, without first attempting to resist and failing.) Indulgence in a temptation temporarily sates your appetite for it, rendering it easier to resist when it crops up at inopportune moments.

**Arrogance:** Spend an entire day in the company of servants, subjects, lackeys or other individuals willing to treat you with great obsequiousness. They must show their admiration for you at every opportunity. Whether they praise you extravagantly or, awestruck, shy from addressing you, is a matter of taste and does not affect your ability to sate your arrogance. If they fail to follow your orders, no matter how petty, or signal their contempt

for you in any way you cannot help noticing, the effect is deflated and cancelled.

**Avarice:** Acquire great wealth of some kind and hold onto it for at least a week. You cannot stray far from your newfound treasure, and must spend at least half an hour each day touching, contemplating, or otherwise enjoying it. Great wealth could refer to a bag full of terces, an impressive jewel, a rare antique, or an arcane artifact.

**Indolence:** Spend three or more days in absolute comfort, doing absolutely nothing of use to yourself or to others. Serious labor of any kind, even if you engage in it for only a moment, dispels your sense of satisfaction, forcing you to recommence your interlude of indolence.

**Gourmandism:** Spend an entire evening indulging in a gargantuan, belly-stretching feast of fine food and exquisite drink. This feast must be of significant magnitude to leave you essentially immobile for all the following day.

**Pettifoggery:** Correct the error of an expert discouraging in his chosen field, in front of others, so that they fully appreciate your mastery of minutiae.

**Rakishness:** Spend an evening of strenuous couching with a partner you find utterly desirable.



### The End of Xolon's Journey

**Completing her studies, Talekei declared that she had a method by which I might return to Tugersbir.** I greeted this news with glad heart, tempered by sadness at her inability to accompany me. Fortunately, the melancholy lasted only until I considered the probable reaction of my spouse.

We travelled north, back to the Scaum and then north by east, along the river Xzan, into a dark forest, softer than the Great Erm, but not without dangers. On two occasions I was forced to employ the erb spear. We reached the manse of the Arch-Magician Phaeton, which Talekei declared to be our goal. His power was evident, for around us I saw no spoor of wild beasts or half-men common elsewhere in the forest.

Talekei declared, albeit with some nervousness, that Phaeton was a noted philanthropist, who could doubtless be persuaded to return me to Tugersbir, and would require in turn no more than the customary exchange of gifts. This struck me as reasonable, and I could make nothing of Talekei's nervousness, or of her reluctance to accompany me. Reflecting that sometimes it is easier to understand the motives of erbs than of womenfolk, I climbed the track to Phaeton's manse.

Phaeton proved to be a man cordial if somewhat stern. However, before we had completed those small remarks essential upon polite introduction, a chime sounded within his manse. I remained in the vestibule, assuming some important matter of a wizardly nature. Thus I was greatly surprised when he returned with his face the shade of ripe mungberry and, with a single hand motion, welded my boots to the floor.

"Fool! Dupe!" he declared, which assessment I felt harsh on such short acquaintance. "Observe what you have done!"

Causing a ball of whirling light to form in his palm, he displayed an image. This showed Talekei, riding a winged sprite and clutching under one arm several purple bound librams, her beautiful face twisted into an expression of near demented mirth. "This," Phaeton roared, "is the witch Talekei, an ancient and avaricious hag born at the close of the 18th Aeon, antagonist to all that is male and now possessor of five of my choicest librams! In your lustful sloth you have aided her vile and larcenous designs!"

"I know nothing of this!" I retorted.

"No matter!" he yelled and evoked a spell of terrible potency. I stood helpless as the thud and buffet of great wings came from above and a colossal demon descended, grabbed me in its taloned feet, and whisked me away through the air, north, and so home to Tugersbir.





### Jack Vance on Magic

**M**agic is a practical science, or, more properly, a craft, since emphasis is placed primarily on utility, rather than basic understanding. This is only a general statement, since in a field of such profound scope, every practitioner will have his individual style.... ❁ A spell in essence corresponds to a code, or set of instructions, inserted into the sensorium of an entity which is able and not unwilling to alter the environment in accordance with the message conveyed by the spell. These entities are not necessarily 'intelligent,' nor even 'sentient,' and their conduct, from the tyro's point of view, is unpredictable, capricious, and dangerous. ❁ The most pliable and cooperative of these creatures range from the lowly and frail elementals, through the sandestins. More fractious entities are known by the Temuchin as 'daihak,' which include 'demons' and 'gods.' A magician's power derives from the abilities of the entities he is able to control. Every magician of consequence employs one or more sandestins. A few arch-magicians of Grand Motholam dared to employ the force of the lesser daihaks. To recite or even to list the names of these magicians is to evoke wonder and awe. ❁ *Rhialto the Marvellous* (Foreword)

## Chapter 5: Magic

Wherein practitioners of the  
arcane arts become enlightened as  
to finer points of methodology

The palace  
drifted through the  
stars, under and over  
clouds of flaming gas, across  
gulfs of deep black space.  
The magicians meditated in the  
pergolas, exchanged opinions in  
the salons over goblets of liquor,  
lounged upon the marble benches  
of the pavilion, leaned on the  
balustrade to look down at the  
galaxies passing below.

*Rhialto the Marvellous,*  
Chapter 3



This chapter describes magic and magicians in the Dying Earth. Any character with the Magic ability will find much of interest here. Furthermore, **even players with nonmagical characters have reason to look over this material.** Such characters can still use enchanted items, and can also cast blessings and curses. This chapter's "Cantraps" section offers details.

In 60-point **Cugel**-level campaigns, the only magical character allowed is a Dabbler. Would-be Dabblers should read about the Magic skill and Magic Resistance, and may purchase spells from "The Magician's Grimoire" in Chapter 6.

Players in 100-point **Turjan**-level campaigns may become either Dabblers or Magicians. Prospective Magicians should read "Magical Specializations," "Creating Enchanted Items," and "Magicians' Manses," and inspect the sample manses in the latter section.

In 160-point **Rhialto**-level campaigns, characters may be Dabblers, Magicians, or Arch-Magicians. Adventures at this level work best when all PCs are Arch-Magicians. (Note that Rhialto-level characters who do not command magic are likely to be the butt of other characters' humor—at least.) Those seeking to don the mantle of Arch-Magician should consult the section "Sandestins."

## Types of Magicians

The three types of magic-wielding characters in the Dying Earth are **Dabblers**, **Magicians**, and **Arch-Magicians**. This text refers to magic-wielding characters collectively as "magicians" (uncapitalized), as distinct from the capitalized "Magicians" (the Turjan-level character type).

### Dabblers

Most people of taste, breeding, or education have at least dabbled in the magical arts. Such amateurs can read the common magical languages, cast simple spells, and recognize famous magicians and items by name. Dabblers have learned only the bare rudiments of magic; with effort, they can encompass a routine spell or two; and they are occasionally foolish enough to attempt a difficult spell.

Because true magicians hate to waste their time in pedagogy, most Dabblers learn magic either through books or from other Dabblers. Learning enough to dabble takes roughly six months, and requires either a moderate favor to a would-be teacher or a reasonable sum spent on a few elementary grimoires.



## The Daybook of Geomalacus, Apprentice to the Arch-Magician Phaeton

**At Azenomei, on the junction of the rivers Scaum and Xzan, word had come that the Arch-Magician Phaeton was seeking an apprentice.** On my arrival the town was already full of bursting lights and all manner of reports, odors, and fluxions. Every jack-leg magician of the district attempted to display his skill, along with many lacking all reasonable pretension to command of the art. Phaeton himself was not present, and so I took myself to an arbor pleasantly shaded

beneath a single great pall-willow and sipped yellow wine. I watched in quiet amusement as the various tyros and dabblers argued among themselves, none showing more than a fleeting ability, yet each more vociferous than the last in his claims. All but the most cloddish and ill-refined citizens seemed intent on the contest, even those conversant with but a dozen phases of the Laganetic cycle or possessed of erotic amulets of dubious efficacy.

Eventually Phaeton arrived, a personage of stately height and demeanor, whose sagacity was evident in the length of his beard. As the crowd began to press on him with claims and counter-claims, he responded with increasing distaste, until finally he was forced to evoke the Omnipotent Sphere to protect himself.

He immediately began to dismiss those ill-bred and lacking adequate style or innate competence, along with singers of popular songs, lallators, groatmen, and those unable to deflect the Spell of Internal Effervescence. At length only a half-dozen remained, all minor mages of greater or lesser worth. At that point I drained the last of my wine, rose and walked to the group, addressing Phaeton with a sweeping bow and ignoring the others. Phaeton returned my greeting with a cool glance, at which I, with a carefully judged flourish, evoked the Liberation of Warp, thus simultaneously impressing him and causing great inconvenience to my competitors. With a second flourish I produced from the folds of my robe that libram I had secured from the tomb of Yasbane the Obviator. Phaeton's eyebrows, previously immobile, rose perhaps the half-breadth of a finger.

"You overcame the demon Orsadrán?"

I responded with a modest inclination of my head.

"Your name?"

"Geomalacus," I replied.

He gave a nod of acceptance, turned and began to stride from the square. I followed, keeping close behind him to avoid the malice of my disappointed rivals. As I had gained my goal, it seemed superfluous to comment on my agreement with Orsadrán.





Mischief moves somewhere near and I must  
blast it with my magic.

## Magicians

Magicians immerse themselves in their studies; for them, magic is life. Becoming a Magician is a long, difficult, and practically endless process—Magicians always seek more knowledge. Though tens of thousands of spells once existed, by the 21st Aeon barely more than a hundred are generally known. Despite this small number, few Magicians acquire a complete set of spells; rival Magicians guard their spells as a hungry deodand guards its kill. Free exchange of magical knowledge is a utopian fancy last practiced in a distant aeon. Few Magicians waste their valuable time copying one of their treasured books, and few copies of these rare volumes exist. If one Magician knows a particular rare spell, others often cannot learn this spell unless they can somehow gain the book that holds it. A wise Magician always guards his books.

In search of lost secrets, some Magicians explore primordial ruins. Less courageous (and less scrupulous) researchers limit their explorations to the manses of their rivals. Magicians tend to be inveterate packrats, hoarding every tome and enchanted item they find. Their manses burst with antique books, odd magical trinkets, partial manuscripts, and exotic menageries and greenhouses.

Some magical knowledge was lost only on Earth, and remains intact in remote locales. Therefore, adventurous Magicians travel to other stars and magical realms. Yet even in the most distant quarters of the universe, few freely give their magical knowledge to visitors, so these journeys involve both great risks and heavy fees.

Between such searches, Magicians also pursue arcane projects involving the production of new enchanted devices or unique life forms. Yet the Magician's life is not all study. In their elaborate manses they show off new acquisitions in competition for status and power. Their reward is the pleasing humiliation or disgrace of a rival. These status competitions become important partly because most Magicians arrest the aging process. After the second century of life, alleviating boredom becomes a problem.

### How Magicians Learn Magic

*"Rhialto asked: 'Are you strong enough to accept the sleight of magic? The ordinary man must study forty years even to become an apprentice.'"*

Fortunately, Rhialto's line from Vance's story "The Murthe" exaggerates the truth. Most aspirants apprentice themselves to an accomplished Magician for several years. In return for service as pot-boy and general dogsbody, and sometimes for undertaking dangerous missions, the apprentice is taught magic. Others find ancient tomes and learn through devoted and careful reading. A few encoun-

ter powerful magical beings who agree to instruct them. All three methods can produce highly accomplished Magicians, and each has its drawbacks and advantages.

Learning magic from books alone can require a decade of constant study, but the individual is beholden to no one else.

Instruction from a teacher is more rapid, but the student incurs a debt of loyalty that the teacher is entirely willing to call in. That said, many teachers offer additional instruction (for a price), so having a teacher can offer advantage in the future.

Formally trained students become recognized Magicians once their apprenticeship ends, and are introduced to other Magicians as equals. The self-taught must earn reputation by researching impressive spells or acquiring notable tomes or items.

## Arch-Magicians

Arch-Magicians command the fractious yet nearly omnipotent entities called *sandestins*. Though devious, uncooperative, and lazy, sandestins tremendously augment a Magician's power, for they can easily create almost any effect.

Arch-Magicians are extraordinary. With the ability to travel the universe and visit any era, they have personal knowledge of alien stars, long-vanished times, and bizarre planes of existence. They pursue magical research less ardently, because the ability to command sandestins overshadows any mere knowledge of spells. Most Arch-Magician occupy their time with hobbies or esoteric pursuits: creating creatures, enchanted items, and complex miniature worlds; categorizing dreams, collecting ancient artifacts, or pursuing other hobbies; and enjoying rare foods and intoxicants. These hobbies take on great importance, simply because Arch-Magicians are practically immortal. With a lifespan measured in aeons, keeping interested becomes a significant challenge.

Status competitions with other Arch-Magicians are supremely important. The members of this elite group typically know each other quite well. To avoid lethal and disruptive battles, they have bound themselves to covenants of non-aggression.

### How Arch-Magicians Learn Magic

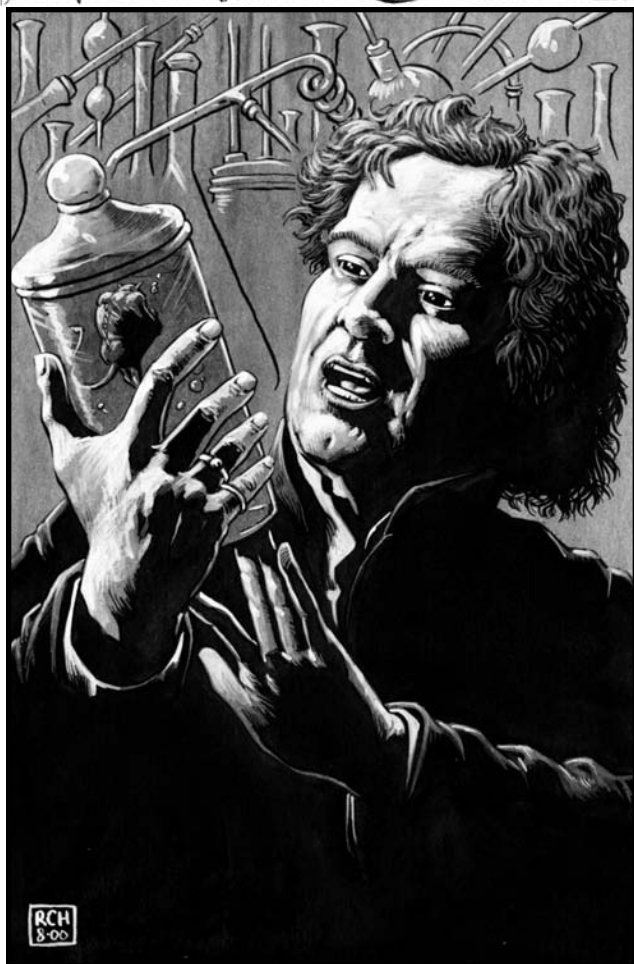
The transition from Magician to Arch-Magician is profound. Using a "lost" spell, unknown to ordinary Magicians, the aspiring Arch-Magician binds to his will the elusive entity called a **chug**. Chugs are a breed of sandestin noted for ill tempers, limited intellects, and the unique ability to control other sandestins though the infliction of great anguish.

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**devious, uncooperative, and lazy:** The Sage Grashpotel conjectures that sandestins are in fact created by the subconscious desires of magicians, rather than summoned from elsewhere. Sandestins' characters are therefore a reflection of their creators'. Grashpotel is not popular among Arch-Magicians.







Binding a chug involves a complex and difficult ritual. Some ordinary Magicians know the spell that summons sandestins, but they consider it useless; when they call a sandestin, it arrives but sees no reason to stay. If the Magician is lucky, it summarily departs without transforming the caster into noisome vermin. Those few practitioners able to master the ritual commonly seek tutelage from an Arch-Magician, a demon, or some alien intelligence. Over many decades of work, the Magician risks dismissal for a lack of aptitude, or may vainly sacrifice his life in the pursuit of knowledge and power. The skillful and lucky individual who escapes these fates finally masters a chug. Thereafter, when summoning a sandestin, the Magician has a bound chug at hand, ready to inflict dire torments. Confronted with the small horror, the sandestin becomes remarkably cooperative. Complex negotiations ensue; the sandestin is coerced into a binding indenture; and on the instant, more or less, the Magician becomes an Arch-Magician.

Not unduly onerous in principle, and yet.... Few Arch-Magicians waste their time training apprentices. As Turjan learned when he sought Pandelume's tutelage, prospective students must often perform at least one significant and dangerous service. Finding a grimoire that describes the chug ritual is equally difficult; most books of this sort reside in the libraries of Arch-Magicians, guarded with potent defenses. Learning from a magical creature is even harder. No sandestin would ever show a human how to control it or its kin, and any magical creature willing to teach this magic is either insane or has long-term plans for its "student." Due to the great difficulties involved, there are only a few hundred Arch-Magicians on the Dying Earth.

## The Rules of Magic

Magic is difficult and demanding, so the rules governing it differ from other abilities. To begin with, **magic costs twice as much as any other ability**. Buying a Magic rating of 10 costs 20 creation points; a 15 rating costs 30 points. Users of magic are distinguished by their Magic ratings. A character with a rating of 1 to 7 is a Dabbler; a rating of 8 to 19 indicates a Magician; and a rating of 20 or more is the mark of an Arch-Magician.

**Automatic Success:** Read all basic magical scripts; know the name and approximate nature of every common Straightforward spell and common enchanted items. Encompassing spells is also automatically successful as long as the magician has a Magic rating high enough to encompass the spell. The Magician must still roll to successfully cast an encompassed spell.

## Magical Styles

Some spellcasters are studious scholars who read every dusty libram on a topic, whereas others are impetuous rakes who rarely consider the consequences of their actions.

As Chapter 2 indicated, there are six primary styles of magic:

### Studious

You see magic as an unending academic project. You study antique grimoires and biographies of long-dead magicians to learn all about the arcane arts.

- You may spend Pedantry points on Magic tasks not related to combat.
- If you roll a Dismal Failure in your work-room, the GM rolls another die. If this roll scores a success, the Dismal Failure is counted as a Quotidian Failure.

### Daring

Magic should be flashy and impressive and so should you. To you, magic is a great game. Through its study you can do anything and break all the rules. Above all, magic is fun.





So now, be off! Or I inflict upon you the Spell of the Macroid Toe, whereupon the signalized member swells to the proportions of a house.

- You gain a bonus of 1 when performing minor physical cantraps.
- If you score an Illustrious Success when casting obvious visible magic, you favorably impress observers. The spell itself can perform minor cantrap-like effects related to its function. For instance, an Illustrious Success in casting The Excellent Prismatic Spray might also light every candle in the room.

### Insightful

The world is so much more than non-magicians will ever know. Amid demonic dimensions, subtle magical planes, and infinities of other worlds, you seek reason and pattern. You use magic to uncover true reality and to rediscover past greatness. In these late and decadent days there are very few like you.

- You gain a boon of 1 when inventing spells or creating new magical items.
- You can spend Magic points on Pedantry tasks.

### Forceful

Magic is the art of bending the world to your will. You dominate magical entities with your spells, and perhaps you also command sandestins.

- You gain a boon of 1 when using magic to control other living beings.
- You can spend Magic points on Persuasion tasks.

### Devious

Magic allows you to put one over on reality. You can fool people, beasts, and even gravity. You swindle natural law to help with mundane thefts and confidence jobs.

- You can spend from your Magic pool on any task involving trickery or deception.

### Refreshing magical styles

<b>Studious</b>	Spend several hours reading, in good light, with refreshing beverages close at hand
<b>Insightful</b>	1. Spend several hours discussing and debating magic or other intellectual topics with interesting companions 2. Spend several hours researching a magical topic or newfound item
<b>Forceful</b>	Spend a night drinking and boasting about your magic
<b>Daring</b>	Spend several hours performing flashy feats of magic in front of an audience. Spells, minor physical cantraps, and enchanted items can all be used in these performances.
<b>Devious</b>	Spend several hours using magic to attempt to trick or con others
<b>Curious</b>	Spend several hours performing magical experimentation

- You gain a boon of 1 when using magic to aid in theft.

### Curious

The world is locked and magic is the key. You are always casting untried spells, testing an enchanted item, or exploring other dimensions. You can't resist a secret, and magic poses the greatest secrets of all.

- You gain a boon of 1 when casting a spell to uncover hidden objects or information.
- On any Illustrious Success on a Pedantry roll involving magical studies, you discover some interesting fact, such as the purported location of a valuable item.

### Time Manipulation and Magic

Numerous spells and enchanted items let magicians adjust their personal time rate with respect to the rest of the world. At a hastened rate, for example, the caster can perform normal actions like walking, picking pockets, or carriage repair at a speed that to outside observers appears instantaneous. However, **the inherent laws of magic forbid magical actions in a temporally accelerated or slowed frame of reference.** In other words, effects such as enchanting items, encompassing spells, or summoning sandestins are impossible under the influence of spells like Temporal Stasis, the Spell of the Slow Hour, or similar temporal effects.

### The Law of No Free Refreshment

(Also known as Twango's Law.) Though magic can perform powerful feats, **no form of magic can refresh ability pools.** The methods of refreshing ability pools listed are the *only* way to refresh abilities. Magic can temporarily increase or decrease a pool, or influence an ability, but never refresh it. Also, **magic can never increase a character's Magic pool or rating** in any fashion, even temporarily.

**Twango:** The corpulent and parsimonious salvager in "Flutic" (*Cugel's Saga*). "At Flutic all is exact, and every jot balances against a corresponding tittle."





## The Primacy of Ancient Knowledge

No doubt players will attempt to use the immense power of magic to warp the game, fundamentally altering the workings of the Dying Earth. This law prohibits this. **If a character thinks of a technique that would beneficially change the entire world, the stratagem automatically fails.** The GM may assume that over the aeons, others have already conceived and tried this technique in vain. (See the sidebar below.)

## Series Levels and Magic

To represent Vance's Dying Earth stories effectively, the series type governs the level of Magic ability available to the characters.

In a **Cugel-level** (60-point) series, characters can only Dabble at magic. Therefore, characters can have a maximum Magic rating of 7, and must purchase the spells they

want to know when play begins. Cugel-level characters cannot purchase manses nor create enchanted items. However, they can own existing items, including those that confer resistance to magic.

In a **Turjan-level** (100-point) series, characters who use magic may be Magicians or Dabblers. Characters cannot have a Magic rating higher than 19. Characters of this power level have magical training.

In a **Rhialto-level** (160-point) series, characters can purchase any Magic rating. This type of series works best when all player characters are Arch-Magicians. Magicians face significant disadvantages. Dabblers and magically ignorant characters can be exceedingly challenging to play.

## Types of Magic

As the Vance quotation at the beginning of this chapter indicates, magic lies in manipulation and control of magical entities. These range in power from minor elementals, barely capable of igniting a candle, to lesser semi-sapient sandestins such as madlings, to sapient and generally querulous beings like full sandestins. Such control uses four methods: **cantraps**, **spells**, **enchanted items**, and **sandestins**.

## Cantraps

*"I live beside Lake Lelt in the land of Dai-Passant. On calm nights the surface of the water thickens to a film which reflects the stars as small globules of shine. By using a suitable cantrap, I am able to lift up impalpable threads composed of pure starlight and water-skein. I weave this thread into nets and then I go forth in search of dreams.... Always I am ready to net the dreams as they drift past. Each morning I carry these wonderful wisps to my laboratory, and there I sort them out and work my processes. In due course I achieve a crystal of a hundred dreams...."*

The **cantrap** is the least effective but by far the most widespread form of magic. Cantraps are merely emotionally charged blessings or curses backed by a few minor mystic hand signs or short phrases. In most cases cantraps are completely ineffective; no entity aids the caster. However, on occasion the call is answered and the target of the cantrap comes under the influence of some minor blessing or curse. In mundane terms, performing a cantrap is much like asking a passing stranger to perform a minor favor. Most often the request is ignored; if not, the help offered is less than extensive.

Usually the most a cantrap can do is inflict a short period of good or ill luck, lasting at most a few hours or (with an Illustrious Success) one day. This luck is never so extreme that the recipient risks being hit by meteors, say,

### Magician and Tyro: A Dialogue

#### "Why do you not instruct

your sandestins to fetch you IOUN stones in abundance, O devotee of knowledge?"

"A flawed concept! Do you not think that if I could acquire IOUN stones in this manner, I would have done so? If I dispatched Lorresh, he would be subverted by archvults before he even sighted the curtain of NOTHING! Instead, he would no doubt purloin my colleagues' collections, bringing upon me certain doom, or at least a scarcity of invitations."

"But master... why not instruct Tofaat to create loyal magical duplicates of yourself and set them researching the hundred spells?"

"I will not answer this directly. When you consider such questions ask yourself, 'If this were possible, would not Phandaal have attempted it? Would the records show Mazirian scouring the Earth for spells?' Every easy way to knowledge has been found to be flawed. These questions have been addressed a hundred thousand times, and greater minds than yours or mine have failed of solution. Twenty-one aeons have passed since the Larval Age. Are there really new techniques for you to discover, where Phandaal, Mazirian, or Rhialto have failed? To work, boy—the sun is lurching in the sky."







I lay a blessing along the trail, and danger will slide you by so long as you never wander from the trail.

or suddenly finding quantities of gold in her wardrobe. Instead, clever deceptions work more effectively, or are found out more readily; winnings or losses at gambling are somewhat more extensive; and journeys are more or less fraught with danger.

It is impossible to increase the power of a cantrap. However, Magicians and Arch-Magicians can cast cantraps that last for more than a day. Such **enduring cantraps** must have specific conditions attached. A blessing for a traveller might only work while he is on a path to his destination; it ends when the journey is complete. Similarly, a curse on a soldier going to war might only work while he wields the gold-hilted sword won in battle; the cantrap ends with the war.

Anyone from a society that commonly employs curses and blessing—which is to say, anyone with even the slightest civilization—can perform cantraps. Individuals formally trained in magic have a somewhat higher chance of success, and may perform a wider range of cantraps. Cantraps cast by magicians may have effects other than mere blessing and cursing; they can also perform minor but useful physical feats, including lighting or snuffing a candle, creating small but attractive effects of light and sound, or causing small objects such as coins or silverware to pirouette about a table. These effects never last more than a minute, they all must take place within a foot or two of the magician, and their force can barely swat a fly. Even cast by the greatest Arch-Magician, cantraps are inherently unreliable and of little power.

### Cantrap Rules

- ☛ **Anyone can cast blessings or curses:** But there are limits. Some non-magicians know specific blessings or curses. They get only one roll to attempt the cantrap, with no rerolls allowed. Any magician can use Magic points to reroll.
- ☛ **Levies and boons:** A successful curse inflicts a levy of 1 point on any rolls directly related to the curse. A successful blessing grants a single boon of 2 usable for any activity directly related to the blessing. The boon points are spent before any others. An Illustrious Success extends the duration of the blessing or curse, but does not increase the boon or levy. A Dismal Failure either reverses the intended levy or boon, or places the curse on the caster instead; the GM chooses the most amusing option.

---

*Nafarin, a Magician, blesses Cugel the Clever to succeed in his next battle against deodands. Nafarin rolls a single die which scores an Illustrious Success. For the next full day, Cugel receives a boon of 2 on the first Attack or Defense roll he*

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**minor but useful physical feats:** for example, solidifying starlight, as is made clear by the quotation at the start of this section (from Vance's story "The Bagful of Dreams," in *Cugel's Saga*).

*makes against deodands. Once he has used these points, the blessing ends. If Cugel is instead beset by erbs, he cannot use these points.*

- 
- ☛ **Successful blessings and curses never affect the caster:** All blessings and curses must be cast on someone else. A Dismal Failure for either type of cantrap can affect the unfortunate caster.
  - ☛ **The target must be visible:** Blessings and curses may only be cast on a single target whom the caster can clearly see.
  - ☛ **Cantraps require speech and gestures:** All cantraps to curse or bless must be initiated by a lengthy and emotionally charged verbal statement of the caster's wishes. If the caster is distracted, silenced, or slain before the statement is complete, the cantrap automatically fails. Also, blessings or curses must be cast with real emotional feeling, and will only affect targets the caster loves or loathes. Cantraps designed to produce minor physical effects only require a single flashy gesture and perhaps a word or two.
  - ☛ **Cantraps must be specific:** Curses and blessings cannot merely grant ill or good luck in all activities, but







## Geomalacus on the Magician's Lot

**In return for a promise of a soul each seventy-third day, I had been** taught secrets by the demon Orsadrán. So, by intelligence and bravado, I bypassed all the years of tedious study, earnest strivings, long frustrations, pangs of failure, dismay, and distrust that are the normal lot of magicians, and acquired the sleight of magic. Further, I became appointed to the post of apprentice to the Arch-Magician Phaeton, this by the gift of the *Register of Great Daibak* from the tomb of Yasbane the Obviator.

Under the tutelage and protection of Phaeton my knowledge grew swiftly, the undignified task of maintaining his manse easily outweighed by the opportunities for study. I quickly came to despise those lesser magicians whom once I had sought to emulate. Not for me the strenuous effort of forcing a mere four or five spells into my mind; not for me the terrifying hours in decaying crypts searching for ancient lore, nor the surreptitious plotting to gain another's knowledge. Rather, when requiring some magical effect, I needed only to converse with Phaeton's sandestin, Junule, and perhaps offer to attempt to intercede with our master in the matter of indenture points.

The sole disadvantage of my position was Phaeton's manner, his natural austerity depriving me of those perquisites normally attendant on those skilled in magic: great wines, the finest garments, the languid caresses of women. Fortunately Junule proved as ready to accept this drawback in Phaeton's character as any other.

must specify what the luck will involve. For example, you could curse a rival to fail to gain his heart's desire or lose money gambling, or bless your daughter to be lucky in love.

- ✱ **No multiple blessings:** No one can be simultaneously subject to multiple blessings. Any blessings after the first cast upon a target automatically fail. Unfortunately, suffering from multiple curses is quite possible.
- ✱ **Most cantraps last for one hour:** However, if the caster rolls an Illustrious Success, the blessing or curse lasts one full day. Enduring cantraps cast by Magicians and Arch-Magicians must also score an Illustrious Success to produce a long-term curse or blessing. These enduring cantraps must have specific conditions and a specified end-point, such as the end of a journey or the completion of a single task.
- ✱ **Death curses:** Death curses and blessings are the most potent cantraps known. A dying character who casts a cantrap may use either Magic or Persuade points to increase the chance of success. In addition, all levies from death curses are tripled. At the GM's option, a dying creature may utter an appropriate curse against its killer, if the killer's sympathy is low (see Chapter 9, "GM Tips")—for example, "You will lose your heart's desire." If the caster's vitality is restored, the blessing or curse instantly ends.
- ✱ **Enduring cantraps refresh:** If a blessing lasts longer than a day, then the boon it grants is regained when the blessed character refreshes her points. Extra dice gained through enduring blessings can only be used for the

activity specified by the blessing. All boons gained from blessings are lost when a blessing ends.

- ✱ **Minor physical cantraps:** Anyone with a Magic rating can use cantraps to create minor physical effects. These effects never last more than a minute, they all must take place within a foot or two of the magician, and they can produce only enough force to swat a fly or light a single large candle. Cantraps cannot create physical substance, such as water or diamonds.

These physical effects, such as dousing candles or causing coins to dance, are easier than curses or blessings. Magicians and Arch-Magicians treat Dismal Failures as Quotidian Failures. (You may be mortified that the show of tiny multi-colored lights you promised does not appear, but at least these lights will not set fire to your cloak.) Dabblers do not receive this benefit, and may not pay to cancel Dismal Failures.

## Spells

*"The tomes which held Turjan's sorcery lay on the long table of black skeel or were thrust belter-skelter into shelves. These were volumes compiled by many wizards of the past, untidy folios collected by the Sage, leather-bound librams setting forth the syllables of a hundred powerful spells, so cogent that Turjan's brain could know but four at a time."*

Cantraps are common, but **spells** are the most widespread *effective* magic. Unlike the random and unstructured cantrap, the spell is a specific, carefully defined set of instructions to a specific magical entity, exhorting it to perform a single clearly defined feat. A spell can light a candle, or slay an opponent with lines of fiery death, or transport the caster to a past aeon.





He stared down at the characters and they burned with an urgent power, pressing off the page as if frantic to leave the dark solitude of the book.



Crafting a spell requires months or years of unrelenting effort. In these last days, magicians use spells developed aeons ago and recorded in ancient tomes. The spell combines detailed instructions to the entity and mental exercises to impress the proper spellcasting focus on the caster's brain. This aspect is vital, for commanding a magical entity is an act of will.

Spells may be cast in two ways. The caster can read the spell aloud from the book, taking care to perform all necessary gesticulations and speak the pervulsions correctly. At the end of this casting, if all goes well, the entity does the caster's bidding. This **book casting** typically requires between 20 minutes and an hour, during which time the caster cannot be interrupted without possibly dire consequences.

Inasmuch as adventurous magicians rarely have time to open a book and chant carefully to deodands or raging hurricanes, they rely on another ancient method of spellcasting. Rather than casting the spell when it is read, the caster instead chants and gestures, then engages in a difficult act of will that magically imprints the proper focus—a process known as **encompassment**. Later, at any instant, the caster can summon up this mental state and cast the spell. Because magical entities are less concerned with time than mortals, the gap between reading and casting can be moments or months.

Encompassment has limits. Dabblers and apprentices can encompass no more than one or two spells at a time. Trained magicians encompass perhaps half a dozen spells. The focus is magical and, as such, ephemeral. Once the encompassed spell is cast, it is gone, until the caster again encompasses the proper words, gestures, and instructions. It is impossible to encompass more than one

version or copy of a spell at once. To cast The Excellent Prismatic Spray three times, you must re-encompass it after each casting.

Spellcasting can be hazardous. Though the correct magical focus is automatic, the phrases and gestures required can be complex. Careless or inexperienced magicians encounter drastically unexpected results if they transpose even one pair of pervulsions. An unfortunate aspect of spellcasting is that, given the proper focus and the arrival of an entity, *something* must happen. Miscast spells may affect unintended targets, or have a greatly reduced, increased, or completely reversed effect.

### Spell Rules

In general, spells can perform almost any feat, subject to these limits:

- **All spells have limited durations:** Though many spells have permanent or lasting effects, the spell itself normally cannot last longer than one full day, and rarely lasts longer than a few hours. A spell may permanently heal a wound or blast a rock into pebbles. But magical effects like illusions, spheres of magical force, or unnatural transformations that let the caster breathe water all have limited duration.
- **Spells are limited in extent:** Spells can only affect targets visible or otherwise directly perceptible to the caster. Moreover, a single spell can only affect a single location. Spells can be targeted at a single individual, a group of a few dozen targets who are all near each other, or a single location no more than an acre or two in extent. So, though a spell could turn a cavern inside out, it could not destroy an entire mountain, or affect random members of a crowd while leaving everyone else in the crowd untouched.



### Geomalacus Outlines the Habits of Arch-Magicians

**In the forest Da, close on the source of the River Xzan, Phaeton had established his manse, Bomvedro. Along with the other Arch-Magicians of Almery and neighbouring lands, Phaeton subscribed to that code of conduct known as the Blue Principles. Later I discovered that his inclusion among their ranks was largely in deference to his undoubted power, most other Arch-Magicians considering him over-severe, even a bore. In return he described them as lacking**

seriousness, citing the redoubtable Hurtiancz as a buffoon, the majestic Ao of the Opals as a dreaming mystic. Even the skills of Rhialto the Marvellous he scorned, pointing out that they were seldom employed for anything more taxing than the seduction of pubescent maidens.

Phaeton's reason for taking an apprentice, rather than a simple retainer, was to allow him to concentrate on his great project, the rejuvenation of our moribund sun. To this end he wished to apply close on the totality of his energy, leaving a magically competent and reliable servant to stand between him and the mundanity of the world. His undertaking, he declared, was an act of pure altruism, his sole reward being an undying reputation for philanthropy.

In one matter only did Phaeton allow himself indulgence. This was the collection of light skein from the eye-gleams of different species of copepod, the minute differences among which afforded him endless fascination. While happy to assist in this hobby, I confess to occasionally wishing I had secured my apprenticeship with another, perhaps Rhialto.





## Magic

- **Straightforward and Complex spells:** Spells fall into two categories, Complex and Straightforward. Characters attempting to cast a Complex spell suffer a penalty of 1 on their rolls. This means that Dabblers have a one-third chance of Dismal Failure; however, a roll of 6 still counts as an Illustrious Success. (Even the rankest amateur can sometimes produce an exceptional performance.)
  - **Encompassing spells:** Anyone who studies magic can also encompass spells. A spellcaster can encompass a number of points of spells equal to his Magic rating. A Magician must have 2 full points in Magic for every Straightforward spell he wishes to encompass, and 4 points in Magic for each Complex spell. At least half the spells a Dabbler or Magician encompasses must be Straightforward; Arch-Magicians do not suffer this restriction.
- 
- A Magician with a Magic rating of 17 has 17 points available for encompassing spells. This Magician could encompass eight Straightforward spells (a total of  $8 \times 2 = 16$  points), six Straightforward spells and one Complex spell ( $6 \times 2 = 12$  points + 4 = 16 points), or any similar combination of Straightforward and Complex spells (so long as at least half are Straightforward). Encompassing the spells does not reduce the number of Magic points in her pool—she still has 17 points available to cast spells or resist magic.*
- 
- **Roll a die when the spell is cast:** Dice are rolled and magic points spent when a spell is actually cast, not at encompassment. Encompassing a spell requires the same amount of time as casting from a grimoire (20 minutes for Straightforward spells, an hour for Complex spells).
  - **Cost of casting:** When your character attempts to cast a spell, you roll a die normally. If you have no magic points left, you can still attempt the spell using the “Running Out of Points” rule (see Chapter 3)—one roll with a penalty of 1.
  - **Dabblers cannot reroll Dismal Failures:** Only Magicians and Arch-Magicians can spend 3 magic points to reroll Dismal Failures.
  - **Bonuses for magicians and Arch-Magicians:** Magicians and Arch-Magicians receive a bonus of 1 to rolls to cast spells. Hence they never fail dismally when casting Straightforward spells, and suffer Dismal Failures when casting Complex spells only one sixth of the time.
  - **The price of Dismal Failure:** Ordinary failure when casting a spell merely means the spell does not work, but Dismal Failure results in the spell being **miscast**. Miscast spells are almost always reversed or altered in intent in some difficult or embarrassing way. Remember that magic is performed by entities summoned and directed by the spell. Such entities treat Dismal Failure as an opportunity to wreak havoc on the person attempting to command them. Though miscast spells are rarely fatal, their consequences can be annoying, embarrassing, or dangerous.



### Geomalacus on Magical Theory

#### Seventy-three days after the onset of my agreement with Orsadrán

I entrapped a deodand, using the Incantation of Paralysis for want of a more precise spell. I gave the half-man to the demon, only to find him profoundly ungrateful. He complained that my horrid creature not only lacked a full soul but had a disagreeable flavour of ash and caulking tar. It was made clear to me, in the most unpleasant terms, that I must improve my offerings.

Somewhat discomfited, I took myself to Phaeton's extensive library, intent on a full study of magic as it related to demons. Only then did I come to realize how disorganized, and how essentially human, was the subject. Few if any innovations had been made since the fall of Grand Motholam, aeons ago. Even great Phandaal, with his Gyrator and Mantle of Stealth, had clearly been more intent on improving his lot than gaining abstract knowledge. Other spells, such as Arnhoulth's Sequestrous Digitalia, seem appropriate for only the most base functions. Everywhere practicality was the rule, never theory, with no hint of system or classification. Certainly no means existed of banishing a demon of Orsadrán's power.

For a space I considered alternatives that might aid me in the disposal of Orsadrán. Junule would not assist me, pointing out that his own abilities were considerably less than those of the demon. Minor magic was useless. Curses would simply be absorbed into his fabric—he, like all demons, being essentially composed of malign human passion. Blessings would irritate him, no more—yet possibly a blessing of unprecedented beneficence, delivered by a congregation of thousands....

It quickly came to me that this line of thought was useless. Such minor magics were relatively commonplace, and if they were of the slightest use in great effects, then human ingenuity would long since have evolved the necessary techniques. That cantraps suitable for retaining an arrangement of hair or ensuring the growth of tulip bulbs could be used against a demon was laughable. I was forced to conclude that I would be obliged to present Orsadrán with a human victim, a task for which I had no great taste.





- ☛ **Voice and gestures:** Book casting requires reading the spell aloud and performing complex gestures. If the process is interrupted, a penalty of 2 applies to the roll. A serious interruption means automatic failure. Fortunately, casting an encompassed spell is an act of will, needing only a softly spoken phrase and perhaps a few small gestures. Though these actions require only a second or two, summoning the necessary concentration does require a few moments. Initiative for casting encompassed spells is treated normally. Magicians who are securely bound and gagged cannot cast encompassed spells. Note, though, that a thorough binding and gagging requires care.

### Starting Spells

The study of magic does not guarantee that a Dabbler begins the game knowing spells. Any Dabbler who wishes a rudimentary grimoire can spend creation points: 2 points per Straightforward spell, 4 per Complex spell. At least half the spells known must be Straightforward. **No Dabbler can learn more spells than his Magic rating.** Yes, a mere Dabbler with a Magic rating of 7 could begin the game knowing seven Straightforward spells, a doughty number—but this would cost  $7 \times 2 = 14$  points, in addition to 14 points for the Magic rating, and so this monomaniacal character could do little else.

**Magicians and Arch-Magicians:** In contrast to Dabblers' meager knowledge, Turjan- and Rhialto-level spellcasters begin play with a grimoire containing a **number of spells equal to their Magic rating.** These spells cost no points. For instance, a Magician with a Magic rating of 15 knows 15 spells. In addition, Arch-Magicians know spells for summoning sandestins and controlling chugs. Those who seek more spells may spend creation points. Each creation point buys access to one additional spell. Magicians and Arch-Magicians can purchase as many spells as they wish.

**At least half a Magician's spells must be Straightforward.** This applies to both the total spells available and those encompassed at any given time. Arch-Magicians do not suffer this restriction.

### Finding New Spells in Play

Characters who wish to acquire new spells during play cannot merely spend improvement points and add a new spell to their grimoire. Instead, characters must acquire new spells by finding or stealing them. No improvement points need be spent for such opportunities, but they are of course subject to the GM's whim.

Spell swapping between player characters is discouraged—it is not really in the spirit of the Dying Earth. **The GM may impose a cost of 1 improvement point for each spell that a character gives to another character.** An even swap of one spell would therefore cost each party 1 improvement point. The GM may also require a magician to successfully Resist Arrogance to request a spell from a peer.

## Enchanted Items

*"One day at idle whim Rhialto built a sand-castle on the beach. In order to amaze the local children he first made it proof against the assaults of wind and wave, then gave the structure a population of minuscules, accoutered as Zabariots of the 14th Aeon. Each day a force of knights and soldiers marched out to drill upon the beach, then for a period engaged in mock-combat amid shrill yells and cries. Foraging parties hunted crab, gathered sea-grapes and mussels from the rocks, and meanwhile the children watched in delighted wonder."*

Spells have important limits, most obviously duration. Though the effects of spells are permanent, spells themselves seldom last more than a single day, and most last no longer than an hour or two. Therefore many magicians enchant **items**, manipulating immaterial connections, wefts of force, and submaterial nexi in the manner of magical entities. But whereas a magical entity can perform an effect in less than a second, a magician requires weeks or months to enchant an item. Also, each item can perform only one effect, or at most a small number of closely related effects. A ring may make the wearer invisible, or a necklace may allow the wearer to breathe underwater or in thick smoke. However, a single item that lets the user walk on water, fly, *and* turn everything he touches bright blue defies possibility.

There are two types of enchanted items. **Permanent** items perform their function continuously until destroyed, and cannot be turned on or off. Thus they can only have effects that can be maintained continuously. A magician could create, as a permanent item, a wand that liquefies everything it touches, but not a wand that shoots a steady stream of fireballs, because each ball of flame is a separate effect.

Enchanted items that repeatedly produce effects like fireballs are **charged**. Each charge, a discrete knot of etheric force, works as a spell and is subject to a spell's limits. The user utters a command word, touches a specified portion of the item, or perhaps merely hops twice on one foot, and the effect instantly manifests. Unfortunately, such items have limited charges, usually a dozen or less. When an item's charges are exhausted, it must be recharged. A competent Magician in his workroom can recharge most items in a week or two with little difficulty. An Arch-Magician may need only a day.

In some cases charges have physical form. When making a powerful toxin such as blue concentrate, magicians create an amount sufficient for a dozen uses.





## Rules for Enchanted Items

- **Activation conditions:** All permanent items produce their effect continuously, but variable effects can be adjusted with specified words or gestures. A cloak that lets the wearer fly might be controlled by hand motions; a ring of invisibility might only function on a finger. Charged items activate under conditions specified when the item is created, usually simple voice commands.
- **Starting play with enchanted items:** Any starting character can purchase enchanted items with creation points. Every enchanted item listed in Chapter 6 has a point cost. Characters who pay the cost own one item of this type. To own multiple items of the same type, spend the listed cost multiple times. The item's cost becomes its Possession points, under the Possession rules in Chapter 3. If the owner loses it permanently, the character gets the points back to purchase items introduced in a later session. (A charged item that exhausts its charges does not count as lost, and the owner gets no Possession points back.)

Magicians and Arch-Magicians are assumed to have created their own enchanted items. Dabblers and non-magicians must have bought, stolen, or found the items with which they begin play.

- **Gaining enchanted items during play:** Once play has begun, Magicians and Arch-Magicians can create new enchanted items. Creating such items requires a magical work-room, sufficient time (see "Enchantment times" below), a successful Magic roll, and (to retain the item after the current adventure) improvement points equal to the creation-point cost of the item.
- Characters can also find, steal, or purchase items. This requires no Magic roll or improvement points. The availability of enchanted items is up to the GM.
- **Charges:** Unless of excellent make, all charged items have 12 charges. After the charges are expended, the item must be recharged. Any Magician or Arch-Magician can recharge an item.
  - **Enchantment times:** Magicians spend one week in their work-room for every roll they make to create or recharge an enchanted item; Arch-Magicians need only one day per roll. Because recharging enchanted items is relatively simple, a bonus of 1 applies. Failure on any Magic roll means that the character must work another week (or day) and roll again. Success means the character has created the item. An Illustrious Success indicates the character has done an exceptional job: This *excellent item* has 2 additional free points of magic that the GM may assign to generic modifiers like "twice normal

charges" or "exceptionally sturdy or attractive" (see "Creating Enchanted Items," later in this chapter).

An unrerolled Dismal Failure means the player must roll another die. On a roll of 4 to 6, the character cannot create the desired item without access to more books or better work-room equipment. A roll of 1 to 3 means the entire process goes so badly awry that—well, there is no catastrophe quite like a magical catastrophe. The worse the roll, the worse the damage. See "Creating Enchanted Items," later in this chapter.

- **Enchanted items and magic resistance:** Unless used on a target with magic resistance, all enchanted items automatically work on any target within range. No rolls are necessary. Against resistant targets, every item has a Magic pool of 5, refreshed with each use of the item. These points work only to let the item affect the resisting target. (See "Magic Resistance" later in this chapter.)

## Sandestins

*"At the sight of Rbialto and Osberl [a sandestin], certain of the men called out in pleasure, and taking up long-handled nets advanced upon the two with sinister purpose.... Rbialto made a sign to Osberl. The nets folded over backwards to enclose and clench into tight balls those who had thought to use them. Osberl jerked his thumb to whisk these balls away, into the northern sky, through the overcast and out of sight."*

**Sandestins** are immortal creatures of pure magic who produce any simple magical effect in an instant. Sandestins are fully sapient and aware of their powers. Though they may be summoned fairly easily, sandestins may only be coerced through use of a chug. Sandestins fear and loathe chugs, and they respect anyone who can control one. But summoning a sandestin without a chug present invites disaster, unless the sandestin already knows that the magician can command chugs.

Sandestins can easily duplicate any effect produced by any other magical entity. They can transport someone through time and space, slay any living being with a gesture, and shrink a person to the size of a gnat. However, they endure the same limits experienced by other magical entities. Sandestins cannot create enchanted items. Also, effects produced by sandestins are just as limited in range and duration as any spell. If a magician orders a sandestin to destroy a mountain, it must do so one outcropping at a time.

Sandestins are bound through elaborate obligations know as **indenture points**. A sandestin can earn its freedom by paying off a set number of indenture points. Each indenture point represents a specified amount of effort, generally equivalent to a single difficult, but not overwhelming, magical effect. Recovering a stolen magical





As restitution for my seventeen exquisite birdwomen, my ten-thousand-year-old way-post, I am supposed to be gratified with this packet of Stupefying Dust?



## Geomalacus on the Value of Enchanted Items

### Consulting Junule, I inquired as to who was the most evil man alive.

He professed ignorance, both of the answer and the concept, but referred me to a tome in Phaeton's library, *Antruil's Collected Atrocities and Sundry Oddments of These Last Times*. The late traveller's hysterical yet illuminating screed excoriated one Raigemuir, ruler of Cansaspara, the city of fallen pylons across the Melantine Gulf. I waited until Phaeton departed on one of his regular

trips to inspect the surface of the sun, then instructed Junule, using the careful language necessary with his type.

"Raigemuir," I stated, "is known to control four madlings of superior type. These you will dismiss, informing them that their indentures are cancelled and that they may return to Gray Dene. Bind Raigemuir with restraints of absolute efficacy, both motivatory and oral, then bring him here. Is this task within your competence?"

"Well within it," the sandestin replied smartly. "The madlings will gratefully accept so generous a gesture. Does the same largesse apply to myself?"

"As you know, your indenture is controlled by Phaeton and not myself, also the chug." (Junule, who was using the semblance of a female Qa'Hr exquisite, turned an unpleasant shade of mauve.) "Nevertheless," I continued, "I agree that he is occasionally over-rigorous in his distribution of indenture points. As his valued apprentice, I may in due course be in a position to make concessions."

"You may consider the task accomplished!" Junule declared.

After I introduced Raigemuir to Orsadrán and discreetly left them to a brief interaction, the demon heartily thanked me and permitted entry to a new chamber of Yasbane's tomb. In this I found all manner of enchanted artefacts, of a wealth rare indeed: blades heavy with the power of their inscribed runes; blare-horns to call sub-world artisans; jewels charmed to return to the owner's hand on command; also stimulators and serenators both erotic and neural, amulets, charms, and discharms, along with a portfolio describing their uses. These items I hastened to collect.

I had come into possession of what seemed likely to be Yasbane's entire stock, a collection that must have taken years to assemble and many months of hard work to properly enchant. Indeed, the total approached that in Phaeton's own collection, although largely of types perhaps more appropriate to the conditions of Yasbane's time than my own. The preponderance of the items displayed functions warlike and creative rather than gustatory or seductive.

Despite these minor drawbacks, I was delighted with my discoveries and disappointed only in the limited opportunities for the stupefaction of rivals. I did, however, permit myself one or two minor—I will not say petty—revenge.

item, constructing a moderately sized but elegant manse, or similar feats might be worth one indenture point; slaying a powerful archveult would be worth half a dozen or more, assuming the sandestin succeeds.

The number of indenture points is determined at the initial summoning by the bargaining skill of both parties, and by the relative power of the Arch-Magician. Powerful, highly experienced Arch-Magicians are inherently more threatening, and so secure more indenture points. Bargaining is such a fine art among sandestins that Arch-Magicians assume the creatures have some equivalent contract among themselves.

Sandestins are by nature lazy and deceitful. They are bound to follow direct orders, but often deliberately misinterpret them. Some sandestins, more captious or troublesome than the rest, continually pervert orders and find tricks to reduce their indenture points. However, such attempts can backfire, giving the master just grounds to increase the sandestin's indenture points.

Conversely, part of the bargain is that the Arch-Magician will bind and threaten the sandestin with only one specific chug. Attempts to use multiple chugs are regarded as crass and dishonorable; the sandestin will seek escape and eventual redress. Note, though, that current possession of the chug is not necessary for the sandestin's continued cooperation. Loss of this chug signifies the Arch-Magician's weakness, and provokes the sandestin's scheming disloyalty. However, the Arch-Magician continues to hold the sandestin's respect... usually.

Scholar wonder why magicians can bind chugs, but other sandestins cannot. The most likely explanation is the well-known Law of Equipoise. Because chugs can control all other sandestins, chugs themselves must inherently be vulnerable to coercion by others. Most magicians, being eminently practical, ignore such trivial conjectures.





## Sandestin Rules

There are no rules for sandestins performing magic, just as there are no rules governing human breathing. Magic is their innate natural activity. They perform any magical effect within their power instantly and without effort.

Convincing a sandestin to perform a specific task is another matter entirely. Normally, the creature will obey orders from an Arch-Magician to whom it owes

indenture points. However, if the sandestin's chug has been stolen; if another magician is attempting to convince that sandestin to betray its controller; or even if it merely faces opposition from another sandestin, then the Arch-Magician must make Persuasion rolls to convince the sandestin.

Sandestins should have Persuasion and Rebuff scores of 0.5~ and ~ respectively (the symbol ~ represents the PCs' average rating in the given ability; see Chapter 12 for further information). Sandestins are generally too indolent to actively persuade others, except to demand indenture points.

Your GM may choose to roll a sandestin's Rebuff rolls secretly, and will frequently let you believe your character has persuaded the sandestin when, in fact, he has failed.

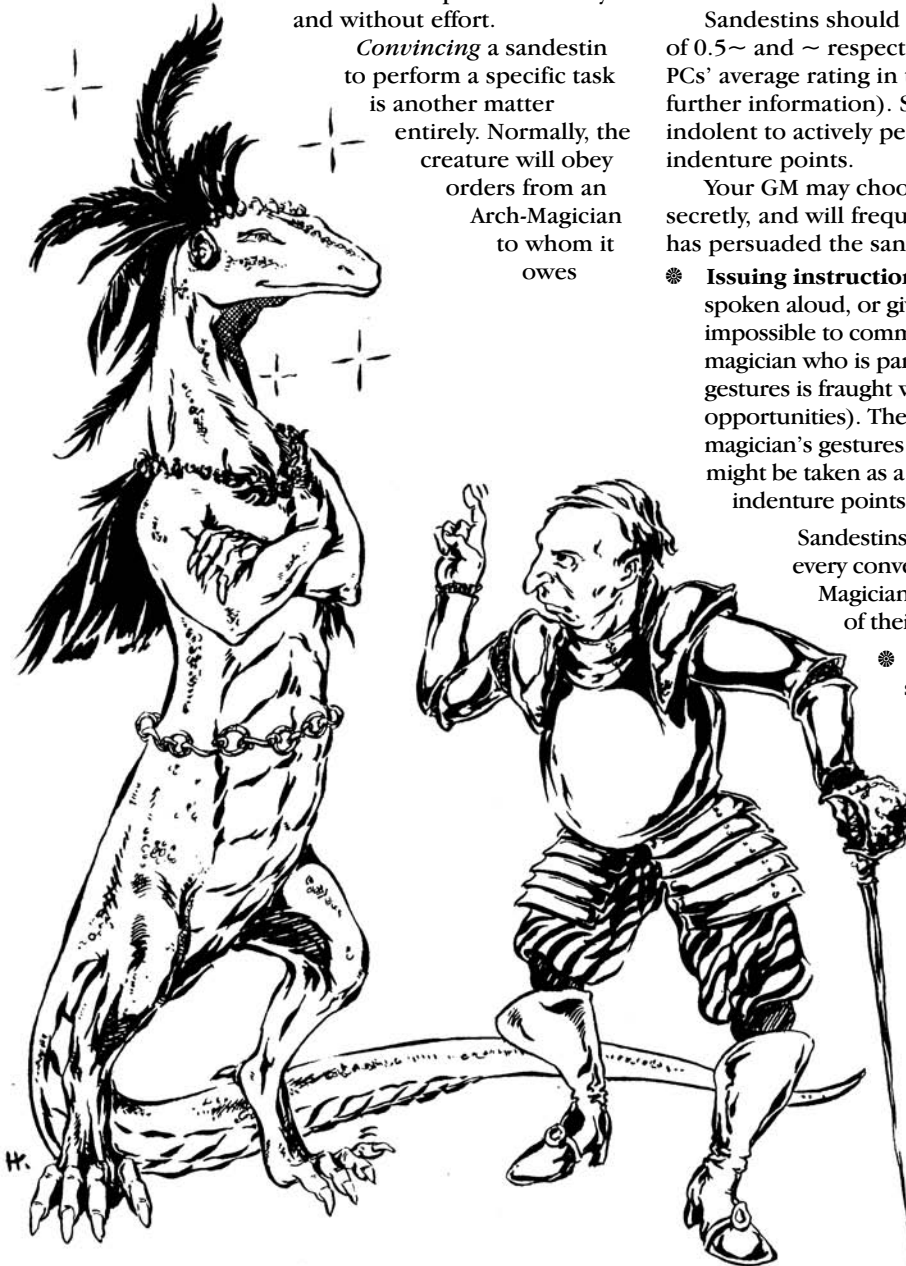
● **Issuing instructions:** Orders to sandestins must be spoken aloud, or given using pre-arranged gestures. It is impossible to command sandestins by thought. A magician who is paralyzed cannot give orders. The use of gestures is fraught with peril (and amusing roleplaying opportunities). The sandestin will always interpret the magician's gestures to its advantage. A wave of dismissal might be taken as a contemptuous cancellation of indenture points and a final parting of company.

Sandestins are notorious for literalism, and at every convenient opportunity will subvert Arch-Magicians' wishes by misinterpreting the spirit of their commands.

● **Refreshing sandestins' abilities:** A sandestin's Persuasion and Rebuff pools refresh when it has completed a task, or when the GM deems that the Arch-Magician has made an unreasonable demand. A sandestin's Magic pool refreshes after a magical contest.

● **Immunity to magic:** All sandestins are completely immune to spells, cantraps, and enchanted items created by humans. Arch-Magicians can only control sandestins by using chugs.

● **Using sandestins as proxies:** Sandestins are reasonably reliable in the vicinity of their chug-holder, but sending one off to a distant locale is problematic. The creature will perform the task in a slipshod, even perverse fashion, and may take a year or decade



*The Arch-Magician Nabourezzin (right), travelling the chronoplex to Old Romarth of the 19th Aeon on a research sojourn, has taken the guise of a Transpontine Redoubtable. Here he debates with his unruly sandestin Ourchas over excessively legalistic interpretations of his orders. Ourchas, on a whim, appears as a high-status Kalsb ambassador from the distant world Kalesbe.*





[Rhialto to Ildefonse:] "I have evolved a new technique.... I need only a pair of quampics and a red-eyed bifaulgulate sandestin."

unless given an explicit time limit. Though they can be ordered not to lie to direct questions, they are masters of incomplete or vague information. In general, if characters are sending their sandestins to gather complex information or perform tasks the characters should undertake personally, the GM should have the sandestins act unreliably.

Sandestins are utter cowards and never directly attack any being capable of harming them. However, sandestins will on command attack Magicians, Dabblers, ordinary humans, or half-men such as deodands, for they consider these harmless and unimportant. Usually, they

choose to drive away or irritate opponents rather than harm them permanently.

- **Using sandestins to acquire magic:** Sandestins are not a way to freely gain enchanted items. GMs can prohibit characters from ordering sandestins to collect powerful items like IOUN stones, grimoires, or long-lost enchanted items, on the principle that sandestins are exceedingly lazy, and all easily-acquired items were found aeons ago. Also, feel free to have the sandestin bring back defective items after days, weeks, or years. Alternately, GMs can permit sandestins to acquire such items, but the character must spend the item's cost in improvement points.



## Dealing With Sandestins

***In Jack Vance's story "Fader's Waft" in Rhialto the Marvellous, the eponymous Arch-Magician searches for the Perciplex, a device that will exonerate his damaged reputation. He employs two fractious, duplicitous, and evasive sandestins, Osherl and Sarsem. Here Rhialto has just discovered that the creatures, tempted by the prospect of freedom from indenture, have conspired with his enemy.***

"Osherl, the game is up! I here and now fine you three indenture points for faulty and faithless conduct."

Osherl uttered a wild cry of emotion. Rhialto raised his hand to induce quiet. "Further, I will now put to you a most earnest question, which you must answer with truth and any elaboration necessary to provide me a practical and accurate picture of the situation. Sarsem took from you the pleurmalion. Did he also take, touch, hide, move, alter, destroy, make temporal transfer of, or any other sort of transfer, or in any other way disturb or influence the condition of the Perciplex? [...] I dislike verbosity, but it must be used in dealing with you."

"No."

"'No'? No what? I myself have become confused."

*After summoning Sarsem, Rhialto instructs both sandestins:*

"I now order you and Osherl to search the forest and find the Perciplex, and then immediately bring it here to me."

"I cannot do so. I am working to other orders. Let Osherl search. He has been assigned to your service."

"Sarsem, listen carefully! Osherl, you must be my witness! I hesitate to call out that Great Name on such small affairs, but I am becoming ever more annoyed by your tricks. If you interfere once again in my recovery of the Perciplex, I will call upon—"

Both Osherl and Sarsem set up a fearful outcry. "Do not so much as mention the Name; he might hear!"

*Vance never explains the "Great Name" that terrifies the sandestins. Elsewhere Rhialto elicits disquiet when he tells Sarsem, "You will have the Wiib to deal with." A footnote defines the Wiib as "a mindless creature from the ninth dimension," but again, detail is lacking.*

*What is the Great Name? What is the nature of the Wiib's threat? It doesn't really matter. In the game as in the story, no details are required. Contests of Persuasion and Rebuff are assumed to encompass many devices of coercion. When their Arch-Magician characters attempt to persuade sandestins, players may invent Great Names and other unspecified terrors as they like, the better to justify Illustrious Successes. (Or Dismal Failures—perhaps the sandestin responds, "Hab! In our current circumstances the Wiib must naturally be reckoned ineffectual!")*



- **Summoning and binding sandestins:** The ritual can only be performed in a fully equipped magical work-room. For each full day of work, the Arch-Magician may make a Magic roll with a limit of 1. Illustrious Success produces an unusually cooperative sandestin (add 2 to the total indenture points). Dismal Failure brings an entity, not susceptible to a chug's influence, which takes a few moments from its busy schedule to attack the summoner. Roll another die: On an Illustrious Success, the entity merely insults the Arch-Magician and departs; lesser successes indicate the entity wrecked one prized piece of equipment. Failure indicates significant damage to the work-room, and Dismal Failure means the Arch-Magician crawls out of the blasted ruins with one injury.

## Rules For Indenture Points

- **Determining indenture points:** Once the Arch-Magician successfully summons a sandestin, the two then negotiate indenture points. The Arch-Magician uses Persuasion in a contest against the sandestin's Rebuff ability. If the sandestin wins, it still owes a single indenture point. If the Arch-Magician wins, the sandestins owes points equal to the Arch-Magician's Magic rating divided by 4 (fractions are rounded down).

Newly created Arch-Magician characters can purchase sandestins. Every creation point spent gives the sandestin one indenture point. During the series, players may buy additional indenture points for 1 improvement point apiece.

- **Limits on sandestins:** An Arch-Magician can control a number of sandestins equal to his Magic rating divided by 6 (round down).

## What Does One Indenture Point Buy?

- Six months of mundane light service (conjuring fancy hats and fine meals, cleaning the work-room, cataloguing libraries, and similar reasonably infrequent requests).
- One week of significant endeavor that requires no risk to the sandestin: transporting the magician to any place or time, building a large manse on undisputed land, defending the magician against all spells and mundane attacks, and similar tasks. The sandestin will not attack, infringe, or attempt any hostile action against another Arch-Magician, sandestin, archveult, demon, or other powerful magical creature.
- One single, relatively simple service, lasting no more than two hours, that does require risky interference with these powerful beings. Rhialto spent a point when he asked the sandestin Osherl to suppress several Pendants of Temporal Monitoring belonging to a group of Arch-Magicians, gather dirt from their boots, and then retrieve the sandestin Sarsem. The sandestin will not directly attack or annoy powerful beings.

- Acquiring a single powerful item like an IOUN stone or an ancient enchanted item (if the GM allows it). The item costs the usual number of improvement points.

## Magical Specializations

The study of magic is so complex that even the most long-lived magician invariably pursues one field of study above all others. Some explore the world of dreams; others breed strange life-forms or travel the demonic dimensions. Known specializations include: Dreams, Floral Motility, Vat Creatures, Magical Clockworks, 17th Aeon Languages, Pelgranes, Fear, Scents, specific breeds of demiurge or demon, or a particular plane of the over-world. Extremely extensive topics like Humans, any of the many varieties of sandestins, or The Human Mind cannot be encompassed within a specialization.

In his work-room the specialist magician learns how to rapidly create effects relevant to the specialization. In mere hours, a specialist in Erb Taxonomy could create a single dose of Insidious Toxicifying Powder that temporarily renders erbs witless and obedient. Similarly, in an afternoon one wise in the paths of Dream could send a specially crafted dream to a sleeping comrade. An authority on the obscure demon realm Hrand-Ur could rapidly locate someone in this plane and even open a temporary gateway. Perish the thought.

Outside the work-room a specialist can produce minor effects at will. An expert in magical clockworks might create amusing miniature clockwork toys out of gears and spare parts carried in her pockets.

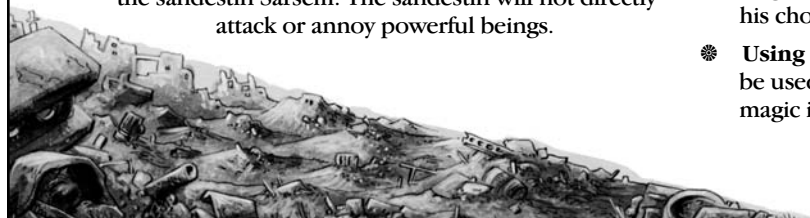
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*Vermouliau the Dream-walker specializes in Dream Topology. As well as gaining a bonus to any magic involving dreams, in his work-room he can enter a trance and send his consciousness into another's dreams. Outside the work-room he might view the dreams of any sleeping person he can see, but cannot affect these dreams.*

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## Magical Specialization Rules

- **Only one specialization:** No magician can have more than a single specialization. Specialization is not mandatory. Dabblers may not specialize.
- **Buying points in a specialization:** A specialization is bought like any ordinary ability (a rating of 1 per creation point spent). However, the specialization rating may not exceed the magician's Magic rating. A magician with a Magic rating of 16 could have no more than 16 points in his chosen specialization.
- **Using specialization points:** Points in this specialty can be used like Magic points when casting spells or creating magic items that deal with the magician's specialty.







Ildefonse brought forth an object of eccentric shape derived from a fulgurite. From the opening peered a small face with eyes as red as currants.

Both spells and items specifically designed to affect the specialty, and spells merely cast upon the object of this specialty, can be manipulated in this fashion.

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*Someone with a specialty in Deodand Husbandry could use specialty points to create an enchanted item to control deodands, or to cast a spell like Dingwall's Selective Predation on a deodand.*

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- ☛ **Use in the work-room:** In his work-room a magician can create brief effects directly related to his specialty. These effects can target no more than the contents of the work-room or a single specified target outside the work-room, and can last no more than one full day. Magicians require a full day of work for each roll. Arch-Magicians only require one hour per roll, and can create most desired effects in a single afternoon. Only specialization points, not Magic pool points, can be used in these rolls.

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*Using magical specializations on short-term projects: Vermoulian the Dream-walker sends his enemy a terrifying nightmare. A magician with a specialty in Floral Motility temporarily transforms a potted fern into a small but lethal animate plant to guard his porch. Jerumell the Pelgrane Watcher creates a potion that temporarily transmogrifies a pelgrane into a tame aerial mount.*

---

- ☛ **Use outside the work-room:** Characters may use their specializations to produce minor effects. Potentially useful effects, like a magician specialized in Magical Clockwork rapidly creating an amusing clockwork toy from a small pile of gears and trinkets, would require a successful Specialization roll; colorful but trivial effects require no roll, as when Teutch the Arch-Magician (who specializes in Modern Languages) speaks by flicking words from his fingertips, or Vermoulian the Dream-Walker chooses to have a wonderfully entertaining dream. All such effects have a range of two yards, and a duration of at most half an hour. These effects cannot cause death or significant injury. The most powerful effects might slay, say, a large rat.
- ☛ **Refreshing:** The specialization refreshes when the magician spends four hours quietly studying the object of his interest. This contemplation can involve direct observation, reading, or meditation.

## Magic Resistance and Protection

*"Llorio slowly approached. Ildefonse, stepping from the arbor, bravely directed a double spell of Internal Solitude against her; it bounced back and, striking Ildefonse, sent him sprawling."*

Most mundane beings cannot resist the effects of magic. But the study of magic also includes practice in resisting its effects. Unless he willingly allows it, **any character with the Magic ability automatically receives one free roll to resist any magical effect.** In addition, magicians may (unless asleep or unconscious) spend from their Magic pool to reroll; points spent are not recovered until the magician refreshes his Magic pool.

Rolls to resist magic are handled like any other contest. Successful resistance means the magic has no effect on the target.

Magicians have no resistance to spells they cast, and any magician may freely allow a specific spell to affect him.

---

*Two magicians, Turjan and Mazirian, are dueling. Mazirian has a Magic rating of 12 and a current pool of 10. Casting The Excellent Prismatic Spray at Turjan, Mazirian rolls, scoring an Ordinary Success. Turjan gets one free roll to resist this deadly spell and also scores an Ordinary Success. At this point, Mazirian must spend Magic points from his pool to continue to roll to affect Turjan. If Mazirian succeeds, Turjan must spend Magic points to continue to resist.*

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Most otherworldly magical creatures like demons, demiurges, and sandestins are highly resistant to magic. Sandestins in particular are immune to magical effects except those produced by chugs. Attempts to affect these creatures magically automatically fail.

## Alternate Methods of Resisting Magic

Certain enchanted items, such as bracelets engraved with Laccodel's Rune, protect against hostile magic. Usually no Magic points or rolls are required. If the item must be specially readied for use, the user must make a Defense roll against each effect that targets him.

IOUN stones absorb any spell or magical effect and so protect their users from harm. But each stone can only absorb a single spell, and few Arch-Magicians willingly carry their treasured collection around in their vest pockets.



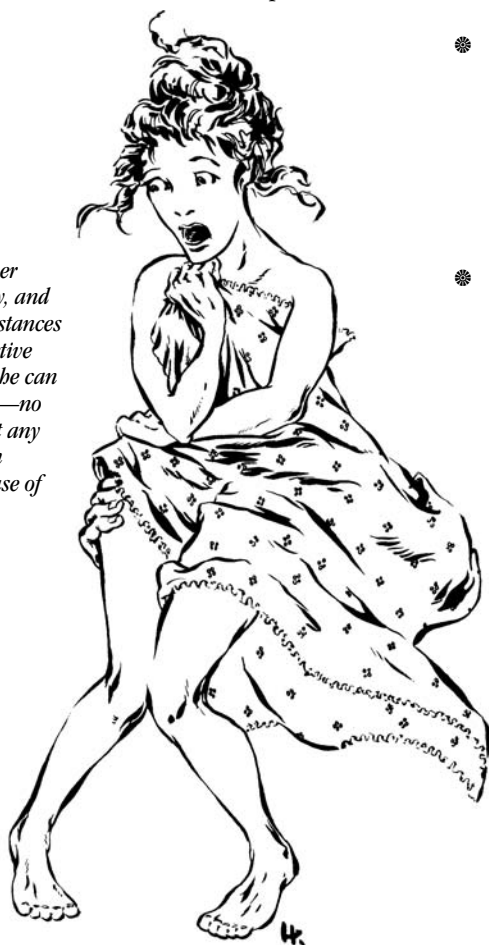


Some daring Arch-Magicians blithely order their sandestins to protect them from all magical harm. A week of protection from cantraps, spells, and attacks from enchanted items costs one indenture point. Protection against another sandestin's magic costs one indenture point per attack. The same Arch-Magicians command the sandestins to restore their vitality upon cessation of bodily function, again at the cost of one indenture point.

However, as the sandestin is well aware, if the Arch-Magician who holds its chug dies, the sandestin is freed. Therefore the creature has every reason to wilfully misinterpret the command. After all, if the magician dies from the misinterpretation, who will protest?

A character who lacks magical protection still has options. Even encompassed spells require a few moments to cast; most attack spells have a range of 10 yards; no spell can harm a target which the caster cannot directly perceive—ergo, a target can try to get under cover or out of range before the spell is cast. Failing that, a target may try to kill or disable the caster before the spell is cast.


*This unfortunate bather lacks the Magic ability, and in her current circumstances obviously lacks protective items as well. Sadly, she can present no resistance—no magical resistance, at any rate—to an unknown assailant's infantile use of the spell *Arnboult's Sequestrous Digitalia*.*



## Magic Resistance Rules

- ✱ **Non-magical beings without Magic ability lack all magic resistance.**
- ✱ **Diving for cover:** To dive behind a solid object or leave an area of effect, characters must have the initiative. To gain initiative, the diver's Athletics pool must be greater than the caster's Magic pool (if they are tied, roll randomly to see who has initiative). A successful Athletics roll is required to dive for cover or leap out of range. This attempt has a limit of one (no rerolls allowed). The only way to evade Sight-range spells is to hide behind cover. You cannot try to dive if you use your Magic pool to resist magic.
- ✱ **Downing the caster:** To prevent a spell from being cast, the attacker must reduce the magician to Down or Dying in a single exchange. To determine the initiative, compare the attacker's Attack pool with the caster's Magic pool. Any attacker with initiative higher than the caster may attack before the spell takes effect.
- ✱ **Spells with multiple targets:** Some spells have more than one target. Individuals resisting with Magic ability roll individually. The caster may then reroll against those that succeed, starting this second sequence with a levy of 1. Potential victims may again try to resist, also with a levy of 1. The process is then repeated, with the levy increasing by 1 each time, until all targets fail to resist or the caster gives up.
- ✱ **Wallops:** As with any other ability, Magic may perform a wallop. The caster's Magic rating must be 5 higher than the opponent's Magic rating. The victim may still try to dive out of the way, but only succeeds with an Illustrious Success.
- ✱ **Resisting sandestin and item magic:** Sandestins have a Magic pool of 10, which refreshes after each magical effect they create. Enchanted items normally have a Magic pool of 5, which refreshes after each use of the item. Rolls are made only if the target can resist the sandestin's magic.
- ✱ **Effects of resistance:** If a magician requires several rerolls to resist hostile magic, the attack causes minor effects appropriate to its nature: a bloody nose, mild scrapes, sunburn, bruises, or (for spells intended to affect the mind) temporary nervous tics or twitches. These effects cause no significant impairment but can be annoying and embarrassing.





"This is Osherl," said Ildefonse. "He is not altogether bifaulgulate, but he is clever and swift, if sometimes a trifle moody. His indenture runs to five points."

## In the Work-room

Magicians and Arch-Magicians work in spacious rooms crammed with beakers and alembics, exotic chemicals, fine brass astrolabes, complex clockworks, dozens of rare books, and specimens and trinkets from worlds and realms beyond easy imagining.

In his work-room a magician can undertake several kinds of tasks: **inventing new spells**, **simplifying existing spells**, and **enchanted or recharging items**. The following sections describe these tasks.

**The work regimen:** Magical projects require 8-12 hours of work each day and frequent attention. After a full day of work, only a few hours remains to relax over a delectable dinner. Once a week it is generally possible to take a full day off work. But if the magician ever spends more than one day a week away from his or her researches, the next die roll to accomplish the task at hand incurs a penalty of 1.

### Inventing New Spells

Almost every Arch-Magician assumes that every spell worth consideration was already invented aeons ago. But a few Arch-Magicians, regarded as eccentric mavericks, invent new spells. Though difficult and time-consuming, **spell invention** can be highly rewarding. An inventor who fends off theft can sometimes trade a copy for other spells, coveted items, or favors.

When an Arch-Magician tries to invent a spell, the GM decides whether it is Straightforward or Complex. In general, spells are Straightforward unless they affect more than a single target, produce profound changes like raising the dead, or can create, destroy, or move beings or objects larger than oxen. The Grimoire in the next chapter should aid such a determination.

In this late aeon, independent invention using principles of science and mathematics is unknown, so spell invention uses the magician's Pedantry ability. **All rolls are made by the GM, not the player, and have a limit of 1 (no rerolls).** A Straightforward spell requires one full month of work per roll; a Complex spell, three months. Success indicates the magician has created the spell; failure means the task requires another month (or three months) of effort. Dismal Failure means the spell is beyond the inventor's ability, or has a different and unintended effect.

An Illustrious Success means the spell performs beyond the inventor's expectations. The inventor can increase either the duration or the range by one level (see the start of the next chapter for descriptions). Alternately, the magician may reduce the spell's complexity from Complex to Straightforward.

A Dismal Failure indicates that the spell is either beyond the inventor's ability or has undesirable effects. To decide this, the GM should secretly roll again. A roll of 4-6 (success) means the magician simply cannot invent the spell with the tools at hand. A roll of 2 or 3 means the inventor has created a spell significantly different from the one desired. For example, a spell to create light instead summons small brightly-colored lizards (clearly, a mis-translation of the original 15th-Aeon scroll!); a spell of disguise causes those who see the target to fall in love with him (an unfortunate transposition of the spell's pervulsions). A Dismal Failure on the secret roll produces a spell exactly reversed in effect. An attack spell either damages the caster or heals the target; a spell to allow rapid movement might immobilizes the caster for an hour. The spell's defects are not apparent until it is cast.

### Simplifying Spells

Truly great magicians, who make the difficult seem easy, can create a version of a Complex spell so clear, concise, and obvious in its casting that it counts as Straightforward. Why are most spells bearing Phandaal's name Straightforward? Because he **simplified** them. Most Arch-Magicians do not bother with the arduous task of simplification, for they suffer little risk when casting Complex spells. Anyone who does simplify a spell can command high prices from lesser Magicians.

Only Arch-Magicians can simplify a spell. Each attempt requires three months of constant work. All rolls suffer a penalty of 1. A roll of 1 or 2, Dismal Failure, carries the same result as any Dismal Failure in spell creation.

### Creating Enchanted Items

Almost all Magicians and Arch-Magicians **enchant items**: amulets, talismans, work-rooms, manses.... The process is surprisingly quick, if the magician has a formula or example to hand. Old grimoires describe many tens of thousands of different items; with these guides, most items require only weeks or even days to create.

To begin, choose an enchanted item from the list in Chapter 6. Each item has a point cost. If you pay the cost in creation points before the series begins, your character has already created the item, and now owns it as a special Possession (see "Enchanted Items" earlier in this chapter); no creation roll is needed. To design a new item not on the list, see the next section.



If your character wants to create the item during the series, figure the cost of the device's properties and—if your GM approves—send your character into the work-room to physically create the item. The GM makes a creation roll using your character's Magic pool. Magicians roll at the end of every full week of work. Arch-Magicians require only a day's work for each roll. Success indicates that the device is complete, and the magician can use it as soon as you pay the improvement point cost. An Illustrious Success indicates an *excellent item*, which may (at the GM's option) perform better than expected. An excellent charged item might have twice the usual number of charges; boots that let the wearer walk on water might also protect against drenching during rainstorms. The GM may choose 2 points of additional powers from the creation charts, at no cost.

Failure indicates that the device is not yet finished. Dismal Failure means the GM secretly rolls again. If this second roll indicates success (a roll of 4-6), your character is incapable of creating the device, or the instructions are incomplete or wrong. Otherwise, some accident has occurred: A 3 indicates a minor disaster that ruins one expensive piece of equipment; 2 means significant damage to the work-room; and 1 means the magician crawls out of the blasted ruins with an injury.

**Recharging items:** A charged item initially possesses one dozen charges. Once these charges are gone, the item will not create magical effects until recharged. (It still works as a mundane item, as applicable. An enchanted cudgel, once it exhausts its 12 charges that rendered victims speechless, can still hit people.) The straightforward task of recharging works as item creation, except that a bonus of 1 applies to all rolls.

## Designing and Researching New Items

Only Arch-Magicians can design completely new enchanted items. They do so only rarely, for after all, why futilely strive to match the matchless Phandaal or Dibarcas Maior when the sun will soon expire? Yet there are always eccentrics, and so....

To design a new item, choose its properties from the lists on pages 96-97. Each property has a point cost. When you have figured the item's final cost, proceed as if purchasing an existing item from the list in Chapter 6, with one additional step: The Arch-Magician must first research how to create the item.

To research, the item's creator first requires a large library of antique librams and months of free time. For each full month of research, the GM makes a research roll using the creator's Pedantry ability. Success means the magician has researched a procedure. Now he must

actually create the item, using the rules in the previous section and below. An Illustrious Success in research bestows a bonus of 1 on all creation rolls.

Failure on the research roll indicates the quest is so far fruitless. Dismal Failure means the GM secretly rolls again. Success (a roll of 4-6) on this second roll means the library is inadequate to the task and the Arch-Magician must seek other books before attempting the project again. A roll of 2 or 3 means the magician has unknowingly devised a flawed procedure, and the item he creates will have unintended or reversed effects: Imagine a Periapt of Efficient Self-Immolation, or Foot-Devouring Leaden Boots! Another Dismal Failure means items created with this disastrous procedure will be dangerous to the user and those nearby.

## Example of Item Creation

During a series, Kandive the Golden desires an amulet that will enhance his powers of persuasion. He wishes the item to freeze anyone who hears him speak, until he leaves them or some event jars them from their daze. Because this ability-enhancing item boosts his Persuasion ability in one specific fashion, it costs (according to the lists on pages 96-97) 10 points.

Kandive wants the amulet to hang from his neck, so the item's size does not modify its cost. He wants it exceptionally beautiful, made of gold set with a perfect turquoise. This adds 1 to the cost. Kandive worries that this item could be easily destroyed by his active life. Therefore, he enchants it so it can only be destroyed by magic (+2). He decides the item will be charged, which halves the cost.  $(10 + 1 + 2 =) 13$  points, halved (round up), gives a final cost of 7 points.

Now Kandive must actually create the item. Because Kandive is an ordinary Magician, he spends one week in his work-room to make his first roll: 3, failure. Kandive decides to persevere. The second week's roll is a 5: Kandive has created the amulet. Because play has already started, Kandive's player must now spend the 7 improvement points to purchase the item. Kandive cannot use the amulet until these points are spent.

## Limiting Abusive Items

Because characters obtain details on enchanted items from ancient writings, GMs can prohibit items that would overpower their series by saying the characters cannot find relevant information. Devices that become problems after entering play should develop annoying quirks or flaws that restrict their utility. But don't get carried away—unless the item disrupts the story, let the players have fun with it.

## Example of an Abusive Item

**The Clockwork Automaton of Instantaneous Injury:** This humanoid clockwork fires small poisonous darts that injure the target. Because this item is built as a magic weapon, it must use charges.





"The count is far too high," said Osherl. "Somewhere a mistake has been made." — "I believe the count to be valid and just," said Ildefonse. "Still, in due course I will check my records."

## Magicians In Society

All but the most reclusive magicians desire social interaction—but their magic can greatly change the nature of such interactions.

### In Rural Areas

Superstitious rural folk distrust or fear magic. Local Dabblers who use cantraps cause no comment if otherwise tolerable, but travellers who practice powerful magic may find the inn mysteriously full, the tavern bereft of food and drink.

Magicians who desire solitary study, or simply hate everyone with an ardent passion, take advantage of this distaste by constructing rural manses. Unless greedy, foolish, or desperate, the locals ignore or actively avoid them. Yet even eremites and misanthropes wish to boast of their accomplishments to colleagues, so they typically have spells or devices that transport them easily to inhabited regions.

A few magicians, like Makke the Maugifer, set themselves up as local magician-lords, commanding legions of fearful peasants. And yet how ordinary—how *tedious*. Dispensing justice, guarding borders against deadly beasts, staging executions: All this rodomontade leaves little time for study. Worse, one's fellow magicians greet the exalted ruler with contemptuous sniffs, and never issue invitations. Soon one has no company but farmers and bumpkins. Is this the companionship one wants in the Earth's last days?

### In Towns and Cities

Most magicians, individuals of taste and breeding, prefer settled areas. Many, like Iucounu the Laughing Magician, pitch their manses near prosperous towns like Azenomei. Here they enjoy fine wines, good food, markets of antiquities, and the refined entertainments of the nobility.

If the town is delightful, why not rule it? Unlike magician-lords in the hinterlands, urban spellcasters who seek nobility must restrain themselves. Towns of important size host many magicians, who frown on some upstart's power grab. Urban residents, who dabble in magic themselves—you can meet dozens or hundreds of Dabblers in any large town—are not easily cowed by magical strength. In such circumstances, the magician's greatest weapon is legitimacy. Most magician-nobles, like Prince Kandive the Golden, are well-born rulers who also happen to study magic.

Arch-Magicians might sniff at such trifling obstacles to authority. But really, politics cannot for long match the attractions of distant stars and aeons. So long as the mundane world presents no imminent threat, the supreme ones live the lives of idle gentry. Prudently, they avoid displaying magic in polite society. They attend grand balls as splendidly arrayed courtiers, never using magic all evening. Why? Because magical mastery, in itself, impresses the nobility less than a distinguished pedigree or fashionable taste. The truculent Hurtiancz once arrived at Duke Tambasco's prestigious Seasonal Juxtaposition with a train of bat-like minions, still redolent with the exotic scents of his work-room. This brought Hurtiancz no great standing in society, no matter how he flashed his exquisite ruby teeth.

Base cost: 1.

No attack roll required: +2.

No Health roll possible: +2.

Has 24 charges: +2.

Can move by itself: cost is doubled.

Sapient, recalcitrant retainer: cost is halved.

The final cost of this deadly item is 7 points—exceptionally cheap for an item that can injure two dozen people. However, a clever GM can make the Automaton

great trouble for its owner. First, it's recalcitrant. A disobedient and willful servant, it attacks its owner's enemies, but requires bribes or coercion. Or suppose it slays everyone who annoys it? The owner belatedly discovers the trail of bodies, drawing attention from both the town guard and local magicians. Worst of all, because each killing uses a charge, the item may run out of charges when most needed.

**bribes:** Envision the scene between the Automaton and its frustrated owner. "Clockwork, you imbecile, the deodand is at my throat! Dispatch it!" The mechanism whirs and clicks, then says, "My apologies. My gears are grinding with lamentable sloth. I could perhaps spur them to greater effort, had I only the prospect of imminent treatment with a thirtyweight of erb-oil lubricant."



## Enchanted Item Property Lists

Use the following lists to design enchanted items. Start with any property that has a specified point cost (“1,” “10”), then, if you wish, adjust the cost with the modifiers that add or subtract points (for example, “+5”); **the cost cannot go below 1**. After you have adjusted the point cost, finally apply modifiers that multiply or divide the cost (“doubled,” “halved,” “x8”). Multipliers and dividers are cumulative: If one modifier doubles the point cost, and so does a second modifier, the point cost is quadrupled. Round all fractions up to the nearest whole point.

The result is the item’s final cost in points—creation points for beginning characters, improvement points once play has begun. The item is a special possession under the Possession rules: If the character ever loses it permanently, that character gets the points back to purchase items later.

If the entry lists specific instances of a general case, such as “environmental danger (heat, cold, vacuum),” these are examples intended to inspire your imagination, *not* the only legal choices.

Remember, **the GM must approve any enchanted item before it enters play!**

### Ability Boost

**Note:** No enchanted item can ever affect the user’s Magic rating or Magic pool.

Gain one free reroll per attempt for one specific type of action (examples: Athletics: only when lifting heavy objects; Defense rolls: only when defending against swords): **10**.

Boost one ability in a single specific way (Athletics: lift a ton, or run as fast as a galloping horse; Perception: see through all illusions and invisibility spells; Persuade: cause all who hear your words to stand amazed; Stealth: make no sound): **10**. All boosts require a successful roll in the ability.

Speed refresh time of a single ability by one category (one day or night becomes one hour, one week becomes one day): **15**.

### Attack

**Note:** All magical weapons *must* use charges.

A successful attack can either injure or knock out (choose each time you attack) for **1**.

No attack roll required: **+2**.

No Health roll possible: **+2**.

Works at sight range: cost is **doubled**.

Can damage any normal object (stone, metal): cost is **doubled**.

Affects up to eight targets at once: cost is **doubled**; *or*

Affects more than eight targets at once: cost is **quadrupled**.

### Defense

Immunity to effects of one **specific** environmental danger (examples: heat, cold, vacuum), or one poison (Kiss of Dijan), or one internal discomfort (Tasmonic Infection, hunger, thirst, age): **1**.

Immunity to damage from one **specific** spell, or one weapon type (bow, rapier, unarmed), or one variety of nonhuman creature (deodand, erb): **2**.

Immunity to a **general** danger (transportation spells, physically harmful spells, melee weapons, carnivores, poisons, environmental dangers, internal discomforts): point cost multiplied **x8**; *or*

to an **all-inclusive** category of dangers (magic, weapon attacks, half-men and animals, non-combat danger): cost multiplied **x16**.

Only functions when used in a specific fashion (when held in the direction of the attacker, when item is wet, while the user hops on one foot, while the user loudly chants a special formula): cost is **halved**. (By definition, the user cannot perform this action most of the time.)

Reflects attack back on the attacker: cost is **doubled**. (Only possible with items that protect against spells or damage. Attacker may resist as if item’s owner had cast the spell.)

Merely warns of a specified threat (either specific, general, or all-inclusive), rather than defending against the threat: **1**. (Typical range: 5 yards. Unlike items that defend, this cost is not affected by the multipliers above.)

**Note:** Items warn with noise or an obvious sign, visible or audible to the user and anyone nearby. The warning merely indicates a threat’s immediate presence, not its exact location. GMs should feel free to have items become quite annoying, especially if the item warns of common threats. For example, an amulet that warns of potential thieves or liars may constantly chatter in the presence of— well, almost any resident of the Dying Earth.

(continued next page)



[Rhialto:] "For a few trifling tasks we will mark you down a full point—" "What?" roared Ildefonse. "Rhialto, you distribute points among my sandestins with a lavish hand!"

## Enchanted Item Property Lists (continued)

### Healing

**Note:** These items heal injuries, but they do not actually refresh the patient's Health pool. Health can only be refreshed by getting a night's rest, spending a relaxing day of inactivity, and eating well. Items with healing properties *must* use charges.

Speeds healing by a factor of 3: **10**, *or*  
Speeds healing by a factor of 12: **30**, *or*  
Instantly heals the user of all injury: **45**.

### Transportation

**Note:** Transportation items do not use the generic size modifiers in the "Size" section below.

Horse-sized; carries one passenger, with possessions, as fast as a pelgrane (very fast): **5**; *or*

Stallion-sized; transports two passengers and possessions: **7**; *or*

Carriage-sized; carries seven passengers with one suitcase each: **12**; *or*

House-sized or larger: carries a dozen or more people (upper limit subject to GM's approval) and a house-full of possessions and furnishings: **27**.

Transport device is small and portable (size of a necklace or article of clothing): cost is **doubled**.

Can reach anywhere on Earth in hours or moments, or makes practical speed across interplanetary or interstellar distances: cost is **doubled**.

Instant transport across dimensions: cost is **doubled**.

Protects passengers from non-magical attacks: cost is **doubled**.

Protects passengers from environmental dangers and internal discomfort (suffocation, hunger, thirst, burning, freezing): cost is **doubled**.

### Utility

Somewhat improved over mundane equivalents (nearly unbreakable rope, carriage that cushions passengers from shocks on even the worst roads, pack that halves the weight of its contents): **1** per useful quality.

Extraordinarily improved (rope that can stretch to any desired length, carriage that rides over any land or water, pack that holds up to 10 times its obvious volume but weighs no more than a normal pack): **4** per extraordinary quality.

### Generic Modifiers

Unfortunate side effects or requirements (attracts thieves, user becomes hideously ugly, requires one human sacrifice daily): cost is **halved**. (The side effects

must pose significant hardship to the user. Multiple side effects do not reduce the cost further.)

Fails in certain very common circumstances (will not work in daylight, works only while user hops on one foot): cost is **halved**. (The limitation must render the item useless for more than half of each session. Multiple limitations do not reduce the cost further.)

Ownership is disputed by powerful, persistent GMCs: **-3**.

Has ability ratings: Purchase abilities as for a retainer (see Chapter 2).

#### Charges:

Item is not required to use charges, but does: cost is **halved**.

Charged item has 24 charges: **+2**. (No item can have more than 24 charges.)

Not rechargeable: cost is **halved** (after modifier for using charges).

#### Manufacture:

Covered in runes or obvious magical symbols: No modifier; *or*

Appears completely mundane, even to magical detection: **+2**.

Beautiful and well-made: **+1**.

Indestructible by non-magical means: **+2**.

#### Mobility:

Can move on its own (but cannot carry or transport others) and is at least the size of a large dog: cost is **doubled**; *or*

smaller than a large dog: cost is **tripled**; *or*

small as a sparrow or rat, or smaller: cost is

**quadrupled**.

#### Sapience:

Non-sapient, works automatically or with simple words or gestures: No modifier.

Sapient, talks and acts as recalcitrant retainer: cost is **doubled**; *or*

as unctuous retainer: cost is **tripled**; *or*

as diligent retainer: cost is **quadrupled**.

**Note:** Sapient items that move on their own are effectively retainers and can even learn magic. Calculate the retainer and item costs separately, then add them to get the item's final cost.

#### Size (does not apply to Transportation items):

Size of a necklace, bracelet, or small handled item like a table knife: No modifier.

Tiny (small rings, tiny pendants, earrings): cost is **doubled**.

Bulky (large suitcase, steamer trunk, large dog): cost is **halved**.

**Note:** Items that can move by themselves receive no cost reduction for large size.



# Magicians' Manses

On the Dying Earth, powerful magic requires numerous grimoires, enchanted items, magical workrooms, IOUN stones, and similar objects. Most magicians maintain a home base to protect their equipment and house their work-room. These **manses** are grand houses of idiosyncratic design.

A magician's manse represents his personality and attitude to the world. Here the magician eats, sleeps, and recovers from strenuous experimentation or adventures in distant lands. Some magicians guard their manses against all visitors. Others regularly entertain polite visitors and encourage all who enter to marvel at their wealth and sophistication. Ascetic workaholics forever locked in their workroom might have sparsely decorated rooms and utilitarian furniture, whereas epicureans like Rhialto the Marvellous fill their luxurious manses with every imaginable comfort.

Magicians usually care little for vulgar displays of raw power. Instead, the keys to popular acclaim and respect are mystery, elaborate splendor, and attention to tasteful detail. In magicians' status games, a cleverly designed manse brings higher regard than one merely overflowing with wealth.

Powerful magicians can easily visit both the past and distant planets, so any dwelling style ever used can be a model. Because all magicians are perforce antiquarians, many manses imitate lavish villas popular aeons ago. Comfortable rectangular buildings of stone or brick are common, but some magicians have adopted (for instance) the techniques of Altairan verditecture and live inside giant, specially grown living trees. Others look to Earth's distant past and create tall towers of gleaming steel and brightly colored composites.

Unless the magician is prepared to cook and clean, a manse requires servants. Their demeanor reflects the owner's nature: Some magicians prefer experienced and polite human servants; others of a more misanthropic bent employ automata or summoned entities. These servants are wholly responsible for the manse's upkeep and the treatment of visitors. Given incompetent or untrustworthy servants, a travelling magician may come home to a ruin, or an empty manse stripped of valuables. Magical safeguards can prevent theft or vandalism by both outsiders and servants. But if improperly designed, they can imprison or annihilate servants who merely try to dust a rare book.

## Manse Creation

Magicians and Arch-Magicians can purchase manses with creation or improvement points, as if buying an enchanted item. A manse is not a possession and is not vulnerable to loss under the Possession rules. The loss and recovery of a manse are story issues, not quantifiable in point costs.

Because manses are expensive to maintain, a Magician's manse can cost no more than three times his Wealth rating. Arch-Magicians are exempt from this limit; they simply employ sandestins to build and maintain their manses.

**The base cost of a manse is 5 points.** This buys spacious living quarters, routine furnishings, a work-room, up to four unctuous servants (majordomo or chamberlain, cook, maid or butler, groom or gardener), and sundry unctuous pot-boys and scullery maids. With the GM's approval, you may purchase additional features from the following lists. Adjust the base cost with the modifiers you desire. Modifiers that add or subtract points (for example, "+5 points") are applied first; **the point cost cannot go below 1.** Finally, apply modifiers that multiply or divide the cost. Round fractions up to the nearest point. The result is the manse's final cost in points—creation points for beginning characters, improvement points once play has begun. A character who builds or improves a manse during play must not only pay improvement points, but must also acquire the necessary funds or magic (as specified by the GM).

### Work-Room

Some work-rooms are better than others. The default work-room offers a few dozen volumes and adequate equipment; it serves well enough for routine tasks.

**Excellent work-rooms** contain an extensive library and a wide range of elaborate, well-crafted equipment; they halve the time needed to enchant items or invent spells. In contrast, a **poor work-room** has a scanty, ill-kept library and aged or damaged fittings; the time needed to enchant items or invent spells is doubled.

✿ Excellent work-room: **+5 points; or**

✿ Poor work-room: **-3 points**

### Servants and Conveniences

✿ Decaying, shoddy furnishings and recalcitrant servants: **-1 point; or**

✿ Excellent furnishings and diligent servants: **+1 point**

✿ Recalcitrant or unctuous magical servants (automata, animated corpses, enslaved humans) who have no will and require no food or rest: **+2 points; or**





Osherl said persuasively: "A single point is of no great account—" Rhialto turned to Ildefonse. "Osherl seems tired and languid. Let us use a more zestful sandestin." — "Perhaps I spoke in haste," said Osherl.



- ✱ Diligent magical servants (animate wefts of force, bound madlings, elementals): **+5 points**
- ✱ Large staff (any number the GM permits): **+3 points**
- ✱ A few useful magical conveniences (ever-lit candles, self-heating stoves, self-cleaning carpets): **+2 points; or**
- ✱ A multitude of magical conveniences (the above, plus ever-full flagons of wine, levitating food trays, rooms where the occupants can control the heat and light with a word or gesture, kitchens that instantly create any imaginable dish, etc.): **+5 points**

### Defenses

For the costs given below, defenses require no maintenance and never harm the owner, servants, or legitimate visitors, except as the GM may require for a particular adventure. For defenses that the residents must routinely and tediously circumvent with special devices, command words, and delicate measures, and that can accidentally harm careless residents, the defense cost is **halved**.

- ✱ Complex traps and defenses that repel almost any non-magical thief: **+15 points; or**
- ✱ Intricate, subtle magical defenses that repel almost any intruder (sandestins and other powerful entities can penetrate defenses only with difficulty, and leave traces of their presence): **+40 points**
- ✱ Defenses that kill or capture intruders: **+5 points**
- ✱ Defenses cannot be dispelled by ordinary anti-magical means: **+5 points**

### Exotic Features

The following features can only be purchased by Arch-Magicians, and **only with the GM's specific approval**:

- ✱ Defenses protect both manse and grounds, and can repel a mundane army: listed cost of defense is **doubled**
- ✱ Only the owner's magic works inside the manse (spells or enchanted items used by others do not function except as the owner wishes, and sandestins ordered by others work their magic at a cost of 1 indenture point per effect): **+30 points**
- ✱ Manse can fly safely through the air, underwater, and through space: **+20 points**
- ✱ Manse offers speedy, routine access to a single specified dimension or demon realm: **+20 points**
- ✱ As above, but to any desired dimension or realm: **+20 points**
- ✱ Manse freely accessible by residents of the specified place(s) without owner's permission: listed access cost is **halved**

### Sample Manses

**A practical starter home:** This ancient limestone manor has 16 rooms, four well-trained servants, and tastefully appointed chambers for the magician and up to five guests. The trellised garden blooms year-round, and the fastidiously clean lawn requires no trimming. Lit by bright luminators that quench on command, the manse offers self-heating ovens and furnishings that clean themselves daily. The perfect manse for the magician who is starting



### Geomalacus Inspects Pergolo

**As part of his project, Phaeton needed the central nexus of an over-world being.** Even he was reluctant to detach this scale-like object from an active owner; but by consultation with Junule he discovered that a certain Sadlark had become dissociated, and that his central nexus, the Pectoral Sky-break Spatterlight, was housed in a manse some few leagues from Bomvedro.

Having created a compendium of minor and harmless spells, at least from the viewpoint of our own powerful majesty, we set out for the manse, Pergolo. This was an eccentric structure of twisted glass turrets, precarious sky-walks, steep gables, and cupolas, the whole built within the ruins of an older structure—not atypical, in fact, of the manses of most lesser magicians.

The resident had previously been Iucounu, the notorious Laughing Magician, but was now one Cugel, who proved to be an unlettered fellow of some style but naturally deceitful appearance. Leaving Phaeton to negotiate with Cugel, I took the opportunity to inspect the interior of Pergolo. I found it much as I had expected.

The central hall was circular and of moderate proportions, perhaps 70 paces across. Here was ranged Cugel's, or more accurately Iucounu's, collection of artefacts: more quaint than efficacious, and including many items Phaeton and I would not have troubled to pick from the ground. The library was little better, containing few more than two hundred tomes, and the work-room was cluttered with evidence of Cugel's frustrated attempts to learn those arts I myself had come by so easily. All in all it seemed a disparate lot, impressive only to bucolics and lackwits. As I returned to the entrance hall I could not resist a private smile of condescension. Phaeton had concluded his bargain—although as we left he used an expression I had last heard in a brothel in Mahaze, which seemed quite out of character.



## Magic

his career or disdains ostentation. **Cost:** 5 (base cost) + 1 (diligent servants) + 2 (a few magical conveniences) = **8 points.**

**Cortaggio, an ideal destination for you, the prosperous magician:** With 25 rooms and accommodation for ten guests, the luxurious estate of Cortaggio boasts three dozen excellent servants. So well kept, you'll hardly recall its monumental age. After a peaceful day drifting on Blueflower Lake or wandering the rolling grounds, return to your gleaming marble castle and enjoy its lavish appurtenances. The ovens instantly produce tasty viands; each room furnishes light and warmth to the occupants' desires; and the entire manse magically cleans itself to a gleaming sheen nightly. Nervous? Don't be: A profusion of magical locks—and other defenses, better kept secret!—forestalls footpads unskilled in the arcane arts. **Cost:** 5 (base cost) + 1 (diligent servants) + 3 (large staff) + 5 (numerous magical conveniences) + 15 (defenses repel mundane thieves) = **29 points.**

**Viridia Major—for the Arch-Magician who places a high premium on status and comfort:** When you wish to announce yourself to all Almerey, nothing impresses like legendary, magnificent Viridia. Carved in the 19th Aeon from a trio of gargantuan emeralds, the 30-room palace follows the plan of the fabled 16th-Aeon domain of Arch-Mage Mael Lel Laio. What convenience does this opulent installation lack? Wander the always-changing hedge maze... debate abstruse issues with the ever-willing topiaries... look for the rumored hidden passageways. At long last, put servant troubles behind you: Fifty obedient and efficient clockwork automata toil ceaselessly to fulfill your every command. Locks, intricate enchanted traps, and insidious boundary curses capture or dispirit any non-magical thief. And what of troublesome rivals? Pay them no heed! Only the owner can alter or dispel Viridia's hallowed enchantments! **Cost:** 5 (base cost) + 5 (magical servants) + 3 (large staff) + 5 (numerous magical conveniences) + 15 (defenses repel mundane thieves) + 5 (defenses kill or capture) + 5 (owner's enchantments can't be dispelled) = **43 points.**

## Examples of Character Creation

### Loran, a Dabbler

This clever dilettante has minor knowledge of magic. You want this character to be able to memorize a single Complex spell, so you spend 8 creation points on Magic, giving her a Magic rating of 4. Ten more points buys a grimoire containing three Straightforward spells ( $3 \times 2 = 6$  points) and one Complex spell (4 points). Her Magic rating of 4 means Loran cannot begin play with more than 4 spells.

For Loran's protection you construct an amulet that deflects harmful magic: base cost 2 points, multiplied by 8 to protect against all harmful and damaging spells (16 points so far), with 24 charges (+2 points, making 18); the fact that the item uses charges halves the cost, so the item's final cost is 9. For the 27 points you've spent so far, Loran is a novice who knows a few spells and has decent protection against magic.

### Vetorios, an Arch-Magician

This young but powerful Arch-Magician commands two sandestins. From your 160 creation points you spend 40 points for a Magic rating of 20. Vetorios now knows 20 spells. An additional 5 points gives five more spells, for a total of 25. You decide that Vetorios's primary sandestin, Rhasha, should owe 5 indenture points—the

maximum possible, given Vetorios's Magic rating of 20 ( $20/4 = 5$ ). The other sandestin, Osla, owes 3 indenture points (cost: 3). Together the sandestins cost 8 points.

Vetorios, fascinated by mechanical automata, specializes in clockworks. Vetorios could spend up to 20 points (his Magic rating) on Clockwork Magic, but you frugally allocate just 10 points. Next, items. Because Vetorios is relatively young, he has not created many enchanted items. From the list in the next chapter you choose a Talisman Versus Magical Harm (16 points), a Talisman of Revealing the Hidden (1 point) to protect against unseen attackers, and two IOUN stones (4 points each, total 8). This collection costs 25 points.

Finally, Vetorios must have a manse. To conserve points for other abilities and to reflect his modest status, you spend 2 points for a small staff of magical clockwork servants he created. These servants require no food or rest. Two more points buy a few useful conveniences, including ever-burning lights and a spell to keep the manse clean. Being cautious, you allocate 15 points for clockwork traps on every window and door that protect against mundane thieves—and for 5 points more, you add razor-sharp claws and spines to let these relentless mechanisms kill or capture. With the base cost of 5, this modest but well-defended manse costs 29 points. You move on to Vetorios's other abilities, having spent 117 points on magic.

**Arch-Mage Mael Lel Laio:** Pedants may observe that Lel Laio's palace was carved not from emeralds but from a single moon-stone. Possibly by the 19th Aeon Earth's Moon was already gone, so that the only comparable building material was less-prestigious emerald.



[Rhialto to Osherl:] "Do not dally nor loiter along the way, as important consequences rest upon our findings." —"To a dung-beetle, a pile of brontotaubus droppings is a matter of prime significance," said Osherl.



## Magic Rules: A Review

The Magic ability costs twice as much as ordinary abilities, 2 creation points per rating point. Any character with the Magic ability can try to resist hostile magic; resistance works like any contest.

Characters without the Magic ability cannot resist, except by diving for cover or getting out of casting range. Diving for cover requires initiative (the diver's Athletics pool must be greater than the caster's Magic pool) and a successful Athletics roll. The roll has a limit of 1.

### Dabblers (Magic rating 1-7)

**Cantraps:** Dabbler PCs may learn cantraps during an adventure. They suffer a limit of 1 on cantrap roll. Failure means the PC may not re-use the cantrap until it refreshes. Cantraps are refreshed by witnessing a novel magical event. To retain a learned cantrap in later adventures, the player must spend 1 improvement point.

**Can't reroll Dismal Failures:** Dabblers cannot cancel Dismal Failures on their Magic rolls.

**Penalties for spellcasting:** Dabblers cast Straightforward spells normally but suffer a penalty of 1 when casting Complex spells.

**Purchasing spells:** Dabblers who merely purchase the Magic ability begin the game with no spells. Dabblers must spend 2 creation points to know a Straightforward spell, 4 points for a Complex spell. At least half the spells purchased, and half of them memorized at any given time, must be Straightforward. The total number of spells a Dabbler knows cannot exceed his Magic rating.

**No sandestins or item creation, but can own items:** Dabblers cannot create enchanted items, command sandestins, or summon chugs. Dabblers may begin play with found, stolen, or purchased enchanted items.

**No specialization:** Dabblers cannot learn a magical specialization.

### Magicians (Magic rating 8-19)

**Cantraps:** Magicians may cast any cantrap at will and may spend from their Magic pool to reroll failures. When performing minor physical cantraps, they treat Dismal Failures as Quotidian Failures. They receive no bonus or penalty when performing ordinary cantraps (such as blessings and curses).

**Bonuses for spellcasting:** Magicians receive a bonus of 1 when casting Straightforward spells. They cast Complex spells without bonus or penalty. They can cancel Dismal Failures by spending 3 from their Magic pool.

**Starting spells:** Magicians start play knowing a number of spells equal to their Magic rating. These spells are free. Additional spells cost 1 creation point each. Magicians can purchase any number of spells, but at least half the spells they have access to, and have memorized at any given time, must be Straightforward.

**Enchanting items (one roll per week):** Magicians can create any enchanted item. A magician can make one roll per full week of work creating or recharging an item.

**Specialization allowed:** Magicians can learn a magical specialization (1 creation point per rating point).

**No sandestins:** Magicians cannot control sandestins or summon chugs.

### Arch-Magicians (Magic rating 20+)

**Cantraps:** As for Magicians.

**Bonuses for spellcasting:** As for Magicians.

**Starting spells:** Arch-Magicians start play knowing a number of spells equal to their Magic rating, as well as spells for summoning sandestins and controlling chugs. All these spells are free. Additional spells cost 1 creation point each. Arch-Magicians can purchase any number of spells, either Straightforward or Complex. The spells they memorize may be Straightforward or Complex, without restriction.

**Enchanting items (one roll per day):** Arch-Magicians can create any enchanted item. An Arch-Magician can make one roll per full day of work creating or recharging an item.

**Specialization:** As for Magicians.

**Sandestins:** Arch-Magicians can command a number of sandestins equal to their Magic rating divided by 6, rounded down. Each sandestin can owe maximum indenture points equal to the Arch-Magician's Magic rating divided by 4, rounded down. If purchased before play begins, each indenture point costs 1 creation point. Sandestins gained during play cost 1 improvement point per indenture point.





## The End of Geomalacus's Daybook

**My acquisition of Yasbane's hoard saved me great trouble in the** enchantment of my own thaumaturgia, a tedious (not to say dangerous) task Phaeton had set me as part of my apprenticeship. I was now able to present to him completed exercises, excluding only those that were obvious antiquaries or designed for uses of which he disapproved.

Putting the time thus saved to good use, I took myself to Octorus for the purpose of experimentation with my devices. Seeking to obtain the awe and gratitude of the populace, I tasked myself with destroying a horrid hybrid of unusual hoon and leucomorph that had been terrorizing the city. Through oversight I accidentally took with it an important shrine. Obligated to retire from the hysterical rabble, I made for white-walled Kaiin, in the hope of eliciting a more civilized response.

Here I discovered that, with my naturally excellent address and only slightly altered physiology, my erotic stimulators were effectively redundant. This inspired me with mixed emotions. In much the same fashion, those bottles of single-vine Tanvilkat I created with a Ring of Agglomeration seemed to lack a degree of complexity when compared with the original.



With Phaeton absent on his final inspection of the sun's surface, I took what seemed an ideal opportunity to rid myself of my obligation to Orsadrán. The new chug had been summoned, configured, and enlivened, and now lay **huge** and quiescent in its annule. With great difficulty and after much consultation of the *Register*, I altered its matrices from those appropriate to Lah to new ones, suitable for Orsadrán.

Removing it from the housing with great care, I proceeded to the Chaim Purpure and the tomb of Yasbane. Junule accompanied me, in the guise of a gigantic erb—which, along with the chug, caused not inconsiderable consternation in the towns through which we passed. This amused me greatly; ever since I first encompassed the Spell of the Macroïd Toe, I have enjoyed treating the commonality with appropriate contempt. Yet before I had been obliged to show caution, trusting none and maintaining my few charms and spells with care. Now I could stride abroad with absolute confidence, taking whatever attitude appealed: perhaps benign condescension in the manner of Phaeton, or lofty tolerance, or magnificent indifference. Upon reflection, I made note to return to Octorus as convenient, to instruct the locals in matters of respect.

Junule showed remarkable aplomb in the company of the giant chug, possibly because it was of too great a size to fit through his ears. This was not the case with Orsadrán. No sooner did he demand to know what morsel I had brought him than I allowed the chug to enter the tomb. His reaction was instantaneous, spectacular, and final.



I spent possibly too long in ransacking Yasbane's tomb, and returned to Bomvedro only just in time to return the giant chug to its annule before Phaeton's return. Restoring it to its original state was out of the question. Junule kindly declined to mention this omission to Phaeton.

Having taken a light lunch of herbal pancakes washed down with an invigorating tea, Phaeton declared his intention of proceeding at once with the binding of Lah. Arguing in all humility that such an undertaking was not suitable for the eyes of a mere apprentice, I left. I took with me all the librams, portfolios, and artefacts I could conveniently carry, along with Junule and (unknown to him) his chug.

Climbing to a neighboring hill or, more properly, small mountain, I selected a comfortable glade in the lee of a rock or, more properly, crag, and settled down to read the opening chapter of Stafdyke's sadly misnamed *Comprehensive Survey of All the Aeons*.

Toward noon I was disturbed in my perusal by a commotion from the direction of Bomvedro. Waiting until the noise and effusion of many-colored lights had died down, I emerged from behind my rock.

Few signs remained of Bomvedro, Phæton, or indeed anything else. The manse's former position was indicated only by a small area of violet luminosity on a bare hilltop.

**huge:** In the interest of brevity Geomalacus omits discussion of the chug's multifarious appearances. Like other magical creatures of its ilk, the chug may take an infinite variety of forms as the controlling magician commands. It is usual to make the chug conveniently portable, but great size also has its uses, as Geomalacus subsequently indicates.







In ages gone [...] a thousand spells were known to sorcery, and the wizards effected their wills. Today, as Earth dies, a hundred spells remain to man's knowledge, and these have come to us through the ancient books.

*The Dying Earth,*  
Chapter 1

## Chapter 6:

# Grimoire

A puissant array of spells,  
talismans, and other magical  
paraphernalia

### Spell Descriptions

**T**he following spells are described in terms of *Duration*, *Range*, and *Difficulty*. \*  
**Duration** is how long the spell lasts.  
*Instant*: The spell lasts but a moment, although its effects can linger. Instant spells cannot normally be dispelled. Healing and attack spells are usually instant spells. *Concentration*: The spell lasts as long as the magician concentrates and performs no other demanding actions—usually no more than 10 to 20 minutes. As soon as the caster's concentration is broken, the spell ends. Casting a new spell immediately breaks concentration, as do combat, strenuous running, and complex activities like acrobatics or intense study. However, casual conversation, light reading, and brisk exercise do not break concentration. *Hours*: The spell lasts a few hours. *Feat*: This spell lasts for the time it takes the target to perform a single feat, such as fighting one battle or running a single race—an interval usually less than an hour and never more than a day. Any pause of more than a minute ends the spell. *Day*: The spell lasts for no more than one full day. Except for a few unusual effects such as the Charm of Forlorn Encystment and the Charm of Untiring Nourishment, spells never have a duration longer than Day. \*  
**Range** is how far away the caster can be from the



## Grimoire

spell's target. *Self*: The caster. *Touch*: Someone or something the caster is touching. The caster must make a successful hit to affect an unwilling target. *Near*: A visible target within 10 yards of the caster. *Sight*: Any target the caster can see clearly. If the target is partially concealed by cover or darkness, the caster must be able to identify its position with close accuracy. Spells with this range cannot target the completely hidden.

**Difficulty** indicates whether the spell is Straightforward or Complex. *Straightforward* spells require 20 minutes to cast from a grimoire; *Complex* spells require an hour. Cugel-level character buying spells pay 2 creation points per Straightforward spell, 4 points per Complex spell (see Chapter 2). As explained in Chapter 5, a Magician or Arch-Magician memorizing spells may memorize one Straightforward spell for each 2 full points in his Magic rating, or one Complex spell for each 4 points of Magic. For instance, a Magician with a Magic rating of 12 could at any given time encompass six Straightforward spells, or four Straightforward and one Complex spell, or two Straightforward and two Complex spells. At least half the spells a Magician or Dabbler has access to or has memorized must be Straightforward, but Arch-Magicians do not suffer this limitation.

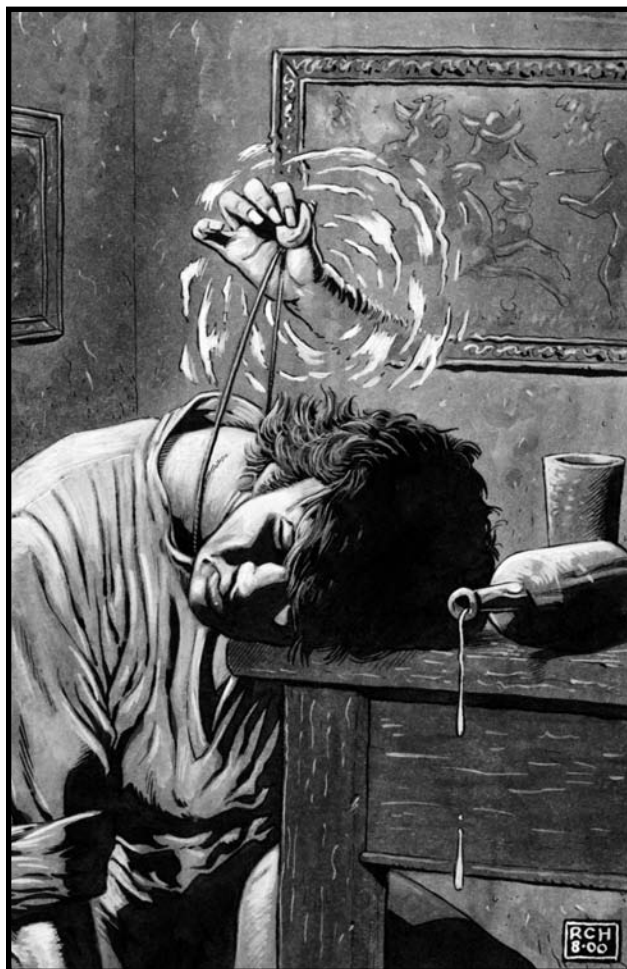
**Source**: Where appropriate, the entries quote from Jack Vance's Dying Earth tales. Spells not derived from the source material are marked "Original."

## Spell List

The following spells are the most commonly known on the Dying Earth. Though very few magicians know all of these, all know some of them.

### Straightforward Spells

When determining limits for either the number of spells that a magician can memorize (see Chapter 5) or the cost paid by a Cugel-level character buying spells, Straightforward spells cost 2 points each.



### Arnhoul't's Sequestrous Digitalia

**Range**: Near

**Duration**: Concentration

**Difficulty**: Straightforward

Favored by avaricious magicians, this spell creates a small warp in space through which the caster can thrust his hand. The warp can appear at any location within the spell's range. The caster's hand appears to vanish from the end of his arm and reappear some distance away. The



### The Disavowal of Jhail: The First Accusation

**I, Poroguire, High Stimator of the Triteuchal Court in Erze Damath,** exerting the full dignity and authority of my office, brought before my bench a certain Jhail: a woman of small stature, unruly appearance, and apparently vicious habit. Having completed the appropriate ceremonies and spent a period of silence to emphasis the solemnity of the proceedings and the gravity of her transgressions, I called the Pontificant Podertule and laid my initial

accusation thus—

"Jhail, it is accused that, on coming upon this gentleman during his reverential frenzy before the statue of Gilfig, you assaulted him with unreasoning fury, first striking him on the back, then on the chest and about the face. Finally, when he at last broke free from his state of shock, you forced a quantity of wine on him, thus breaking his vows of temperance, to which he had held for forty-three years."



[Rhialto to Osherl:] "Time is of the essence! For you, a second differs little from a century; we are more sensitive in this regard. Be quick!"



ensorcelled hand remains fully functional. The caster can move the warp anywhere within range.

The warp itself is approximately six inches in diameter, and the caster can pull anything through the warp that can be held in one hand and fits through the hole. Because the warp is invisible, Arnhoul's Sequestrous Digitalia permits subtle thefts.

By virtue of Arnhoul's careful design, if the magic is dispelled, the warp vanishes and the caster's hand remains unharmed on his wrist.

### The Astounding Oral Projection

**Range:** Sight

**Duration:** Concentration or Feat

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"...another caused a mouth to form on the landlord's forehead and revile the crowd, much to the landlord's discomfiture, since it was his own voice."* This spell produces a realistic mouth on any surface: a blank wall, the back of a rival's head, anywhere. The caster can speak through this mouth as if it were his own. If the caster has the Imposture ability, he may attempt to imitate another's voice. This mouth lasts as long as the caster concentrates. Alternately, the Projection can be cast so that the mouth remains closed and invisible until a single specified condition is fulfilled in its presence: a particular phrase is spoken, a specified object is destroyed, a person arrives. The mouth then delivers a prepared speech of up to a hundred words or so.

### Behemoth's Bounty

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

**Source:** Original

Beloved by gourmands and hungry travellers, Behemoth's Bounty creates an enormous feast. Complete with plates more than two feet across and bowls that hold almost a gallon, the feast created by this spell will easily feed more than a dozen hungry people. The quality of the food is good but not exceptional. Though the menu is different every time the spell is cast, the results usually consist of simple fare like plates of sliced roast meat, boiled grain, hearty roots or tubers, a prodigious quantity of soup, and gravy or sauce, as well as beer, watered wine, cider, or fruit juice. For unknown reasons this bounty always

appears piled high on platters fit for giants 10 feet tall. Some magicians speculate that this spell was originally created by an extinct subspecies of humanity that achieved gigantic proportions.

### Brassnose's Twelve-Fold Bounty

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Day

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

A favorite of paupers and confidence tricksters, this spell makes eleven copies of any item that can be held comfortably in one hand. Coins, vials of liquid, small exotic pets—the only limitation is that the Bounty cannot duplicate enchantments on items, only their appearance.

For the duration of the magic, the duplicates are substantial, solid, and durable. But when the spell wears off, all duplicates vanish. Hence the Bounty can create interesting and elaborate traps—a crucial piece of the trap simply vanishes once the spell ends.

This spell should not be confused with the very different Behemoth's Bounty (see above).

### Charm of Brachial Fortitude

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Feat

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"...the last permitting her to hold off Thrang and tumble the temple upon Mazirian."* The target temporarily gains 12 points usable only for a single task requiring strength, such as lifting a heavy boulder, demolishing a small building, pushing over a set of pillars, or fighting one battle. The points granted by this Charm cannot be refreshed normally, and all unused points vanish as soon as the spell ends.

### Charm of Untiring Legs

(Spell of Tireless Legs, Spell of Untiring Legs)

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Feat

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"Guards the legs from the fatigue of a long day's march... we use it mainly to encourage our wherlots."* As long as the target of the Charm continues to run, jump, jog, walk, or swim, he will do so without tiring. The target could theoretically run for days on end, given food and drink. The Charm ends as soon as the target stops moving, whereupon he grows as tired as if he had just sprinted a hundred yards.



### Jhail's First Response

**Jhail, purposefully ignoring protocol in refusing to address me by my correct title, replied thus—**

"I am a stranger to Erze Damath, and indeed to these lands in general. I know nothing of your customs. On observing an elderly man apparently in the final throes of a congestive fit, I sought to aid him, striking his back to free his breathing and his face to restore his consciousness. By chance

I was carrying a flask of wine, some of which I gave him to aid the repair of his health. Of this charge I am, in part and in sum, innocent."



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### The Charm of Untiring Nourishment

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Day/Special

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"...I could not die with the spell of Untiring Nourishment upon me..."* This spell provides for all the target's physical needs for at least the next full day. While under this spell the target will never hunger or thirst, nor even need to breathe—anyone subjected to this spell can exist in a vacuum, deep under the sea, in poisonous gas, or in other deadly environments. This spell also protects the caster from natural extremes of heat and cold, and from heat-stroke, sunburn, and frostbite. However, extremely hot or cold temperatures, such as those created by fires, magical attacks, or molten lava, still harm the target normally. Though users can survive in the vacuum of space, they would rapidly freeze solid in the far edges of the Solar System, and would roast near the Sun. Food or drink consumed while under this spell is utterly tasteless and unappetizing.

In *Rhialto the Marvellous*, a single casting of the Charm of Untiring Nourishment protects the Arch-Magician Morreion for centuries in deep space. To represent this, a purist GM may let the spell last until the target again eats, drinks, or breathes.

### Edan's Thaumaturgic Poultice

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

**Source:** Original

Unlike other healing spells, Edan's Thaumaturgic Poultice is both common and simple. It instantly heals damage and injury caused by wounds, poison, and disease, completely cures non-magical diseases, and even restores limbs lost to injury. This spell does not cancel fatigue, aging, magical poison and disease, or death, but it will heal anything from a deadly wound to a hangover.

Remember that this spell heals injuries, but does not actually refresh the patient's Health pool. Seriously injured patients treated with the Poultice are exhausted until after a night's rest.



### Enchantment of Another's Face

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Day

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

**Source:** Original

The target of this spell takes on the appearance and manner of any other person that the caster has seen clearly: male or female, fat or thin, young or old, human or humanoid. The target looks, sounds, smells, and even moves exactly like the copied individual. Even people or pets who know the individual well can be fooled. However, the target gains no knowledge or abilities of the imitated individual.

### The Excellent Prismatic Spray

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"[T]he valley was lit by streaming darts of fire, lashing in from all directions to split Thrang's blundering body in a thousand places."* Hundreds of many-colored threads of blazing fire pierce a single target's body, instantly killing any living being smaller than a whale. The spray, though less effective on non-living targets, still pierces armor like soft butter and maintains sufficient force to slay the wearer. As a rule of thumb, the Excellent Prismatic Spray can also destroy anything breakable by a fire-axe, such as a door of wood or thin metal. There are only two methods



### The Disavowal of Jhail: The Second Accusation

#### Calling the merchant Grosiwig, I placed my second accusation thus—

"Jhail, before you is Grosiwig, a reputable merchant of the Pholigus Valley townships. You may recall him from the Inn of the Green Lamp. He states, unequivocally, that upon mistaking your chamber for his own, he discovered you in sexual congress with a pelgrane. Furthermore, when challenged for your degenerate conduct, you referred to him as a 'censorious old bufoon' and struck him several blows about the head with a large and heavy china vessel, decorated, he remarks, with a ring of acanthus leaves and sketches of a rustic nature."



Ildefonse spoke in scathing tones: "Behold these two [sandestins]! They can roam the chronoplex as easily as you or I can walk around the table; yet neither has the wit to announce his presence upon arrival."



of avoiding instant death from this spell—being out of range and using magic resistance or anti-magical protection.

### Felojun's 2nd Hypnotic Spell

**Range:** Special

**Duration:** Concentration

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"So Mazirian chanted his last spell, the incantation of paralysis, and the vampire grass grew lax and slid limply to the earth."* This spell instantly paralyzes all living targets within five yards of the caster. They cannot move except to breathe. The caster can tie up, kill, carry off, or strip-search their bodies without spoiling his concentration, if he moves without undue haste.

### The Illusion of Vile Arthropods

**Range:** Sight

**Duration:** Concentration

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"Take care, a plague of tasps is upon us!"* This useful bit of magic lets the caster conjure a realistic illusion of up to three nonhuman monsters the size of oxen, a large group of creatures no larger than small dogs, or a large swarm of crawling or flying vermin: tasps, sphigales, minuscule bazils, and other such creatures. The creatures look, sound, and smell just like the real thing, but have no substance and cannot affect the physical world. Successful attacks pass harmlessly through them, instantly revealing their insubstantial nature. The caster controls the creatures' actions.

Though this spell cannot create believable humans, it is not limited to arthropods. Any creature liable to provoke disgust is permitted. The question "Why, then, the term 'arthropods'?" is nuncupatory.

### Interminable Interim

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Day

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

This pacifistic spell places the target in temporal stasis for the next full day. For the target, this day passes in an instant. While frozen, the target, his garments, and items carried cannot be damaged by any means.

### Javanne's Enervation of Will

**Range:** Special

**Duration:** Day

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"The witch has spoken a spell that leaves me without volition; therefore I cannot move or speak without command."* This "charm of wonderful brevity" completely removes the target's conscious volition. It affects a single target within easy speaking distance of the caster (generally 3-6 feet). The target will perform any action desired by the caster, fight and even die for the caster, and reveal secrets when asked; however, he still retains memory and desire. Though the target cannot act except in the manner ordered, he is free to interpret any unclear or ambiguous orders. If the caster orders the target to free her from a trap, the target is under no obligation to prevent harm to the caster while doing so. Hence, most casters command that the target must act to avoid harm to the caster. The Enervation ends instantly if the caster orders the target to think for himself.

### Khulip's Nasal Enhancement

**Range:** Self

**Duration:** Hours

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

The Nsal Enhancement adds 12 points to the caster's Perception pool that can be used only for smell-related tasks. These points cannot be refreshed, and all unused points vanish as soon as the spell ends. The caster can identify individuals by smell, track prey by scent, determine the contents of packages by sniffing them, and tell if someone has handled something recently by the traces of scent left on the object. Strongly odorous substances like ammonia or hot pepper can erase other smells and cause the caster discomfort.

### Liberation of Warp

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"Kandive uttered a powerful charm which loosened space free of all warp. So Turjan's spell was void and he became visible."* By a sudden etheric shock, the Warp instantly dispels all magic within 10 yards of the caster. Permanent



### Jhail's Second Response

#### Jhail, again displaying arrant contempt for formality, replied thus—

"The accusation is not only preposterous but offensive. Grosiwig I name a lecher, a liar also. Furthermore, he is stooped, grotesque of visage, and smells. In character he is yet more repulsive. All evening he had been importuning me with lewd suggestions, which I declined, not only in a spirit of maiden modesty but from outright disgust. Refusing to be chastened, he continued his advances, following me to my room and suggesting an act foul beyond anything of my experience. It was then that I struck him with the chamberpot."



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magical changes or other effects of past spells are unaffected, but any spell currently operating is permanently negated, as is any effect produced by a sandestin or charged enchanted item. Effects produced by a permanent enchanted item are negated for one full minute. After the spell has ended, new spells may be cast without penalty and the effects of permanent enchanted items return.

The only defenses against this spell are anti-magical charms like Laccodel's Rune. Any spells cast on targets wearing such protections are unaffected. However, spells that do not directly affect the protected person or object will still be dispelled.

### Lugwiler's Dismal Itch

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Day

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

This tormenting spell causes the target to itch fiercely all over his body. The target becomes a miserable wreck, completely unable to function. At best, victims of the Dismal Itch can ride or walk slowly, scratch frequently, and complain incessantly about their sad plight. An Illustrious Success on a Wherewithal roll permits concentration sufficient to cast one spell or carry on a brief but sensible conversation.

### The Omnipotent Sphere

**Range:** Self

**Duration:** Concentration

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"A film of force formed around his body, expanding to push aside all that resisted."* The ultimate in personal protection, the Sphere produces a skin-tight bubble of impenetrable force around the caster and all worn or carried possessions. Alternately, the caster can expand the bubble into a sphere up to four yards in diameter. The expanding sphere will push objects away from the caster or (in the case of immobile objects) vice versa. The Omnipotent Sphere protects the caster from all physical damage, spells, cantraps, enchanted items, and direct attacks by sandestins. The caster remains vulnerable to environmental effects and disease.

### Panguine's Loyal Porter

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Day

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

**Source:** Original

This spell summons an entity, visible only as a faint shimmer, which can carry any load up to one ton that can be stacked in a space no more than two yards on a side. The Loyal Porter follows the magician, keeping a specified distance (up to 100 yards) and altitude (up to 10 yards), over any terrain. At the end of the spell, or at the magician's orders, the porter gently lays down the load and vanishes.

### Phandaal's Critique of the Chill

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Day

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

Beloved by campers, the Critique makes an area up to 20 yards in diameter and five yards high comfortably warm and dry. This spell will block the effects of mundane blizzards, rainstorms, and the coldest weather. An equally common spell known as Phandaal's Critique of Warmth keeps the protected region comfortably cool in hot weather. Neither spell offers protection against magically created heat or cold, or any form of attack.

### Phandaal's Gyrator

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Concentration

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"...and Mazirian caused the creature to revolve at greater speed, faster and faster, until there was only a blur...the head shot like a bullet far down the glade; arms, legs, viscera flew in all directions."* Through the application of spinning warps of magical force, the Gyrator lifts a single target into the air and spins it rapidly around. As long as the caster concentrates on the target, he can cause it to spin at any rate ranging from a few slow revolutions a minute to a speed great enough to rip limb from limb. The caster can also move the target through the air anywhere within 100 yards. This spell will work on any living being or object up to the size of a draft horse. If the caster is distracted the spell ends, whereupon the target ceases spinning and falls to earth.

### Phandaal's Inside Out and Over

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Straightforward



## The Disavowal of Jhail: The Third Accusation

### Calling a selection of townsfolk, I placed my third accusation thus—

"Jhail, on arriving in this city, you, along with an elderly mendicant claiming to be a magician, set up a booth offering prognostication. This act was in direct contradiction of the ordinance demanding that such booths purchase a licence. You also failed to pay your fees and those gratuities normally rendered to public servants, myself included. The total reckoning, at this instant, is 837 terces and 11 groats, which you may now pay over in full. Furthermore, you are accused of false representation, in proxy for your colleague, who cannot be found."



"You demean our intellects," snapped Osherl. "I have learned never to act without explicit instructions. If I were to do otherwise, your complaints would rasp even more stridently upon my attention."



*"There came a great tearing sound, a convulsive lift and twist as the passage everted, spewing all through the forest."* Designed for relic-hunters and those trapped underground by cave-ins, this spell inverts tunnels, basements, caverns, buried rivers, and other hollows. Objects and beings in these tunnels are brought to the surface with the force of a firm shove.

To cast *Inside Out and Over*, the magician must be present in the subterranean space he desires to evert. The spell brings to the surface this space and all spaces directly connected to it, no matter how extensive or distant. Unconnected spaces are unaffected.

### Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Hours

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"So, uttering Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth, be faded from the sight of all men."* The target and all possessions worn or carried become completely invisible. Targets of the Mantle are still audible, and their smell is detectable by animals, but they cast no shadows and have no reflections. Targets can still see themselves and act normally. The Mantle can affect living targets up to the size of an elephant and single objects no larger than a large wardrobe.

Violent and vigorous actions like combat or shouting may give away the subject's position with fair accuracy, but such actions do not actually dispel the invisibility. Anyone fighting an invisible opponent suffers a levy of 2 and a penalty of 1 to all Attack and Defense rolls.

Against invisible opponents, well-trained animals and rooms filled with smoke are useful protections. If the character is fighting an invisible opponent in smoke, fog, mud, or any other environment that reveals the opponent's location, the penalty is reduced to a levy of 2.

### Rhialto's Green Turmoil

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Day

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

By creating a severe imbalance in the target's humors, the Turmoil produces an illness that always lasts at least three days and can linger for a week. The target, wracked by nausea, can only hobble about or lie in bed. Each day after the third, the target may make one Health roll. On day 4 the roll is unmodified; on day 5, the target receives a bonus of 1; on day 6 the bonus is 2; on day 7 success is automatic. Success means the target fully recovers.

### The Seventh Set's Web of Hiding

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Day

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"I will fling a web around the room that no-one knows our doing."* Unlike Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth and other spells that produce personal invisibility, the Web of Hiding conceals an area 20 yards in diameter—it hides everything within from external observation, including that by spell or sandestin. It can conceal a room's interior, a forest clearing, even a house.

In contrast to many invisibility spells, the Web affects the minds of observers. The protected region effectively ceases to exist for anyone outside. Anyone inside the area when the Web is cast is protected from this effect and experiences no difficulty in noticing the protected region, even if they walk outside of it. However, walking outside the hidden space instantly nullifies the invisibility. Anyone who enters the protected area can perceive the region normally once inside.

### Spell of Dissolution

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"Rhialto spoke a spell of dissolution; the dead thing collapsed into dust."* Corpses, unwieldy furniture, and other large objects can hinder a magician's peace of mind.



### Jhail's Third Response

**Glancing toward the window in a manner clearly signifying guilt, she replied thus—**

"Our endeavors were profitless, owing to the interference of your thief-takers, who confiscated what small sum we had made, although they will doubtless deny it. I offer what I have left, three terces and a groat, in full and comprehensive settlement of your extravagant demands.

"No misrepresentation has occurred. My colleague is indeed a magician, one Geomalacus, who is unable to reside in the affluence to which his status entitles him owing to the vengeful and persistent pursuit of the god Lah. Unable to perform magic for fear of discovery, he travels incognito."

Responding to Jhail's feeble rebuttals with a contemptuous sniff, I declared a recess. In the Old Dastric Empire Hostelry I treated myself to a light lunch: a salad of river leaves, Gelvar fish fresh from the Scamander, roasted quail stuffed with sweet mendolars, a cut from the rare end of a joint, with yam, polupar and scarlet rice, mungberry pie, and a platter of cheeses. For wine I took a half-carafe of Green Alitrope, one of Epyutine, two of red Parona from the edge of the desert, a half of sweet Harusac, a glass of high-slope Parona, and lastly a swallow of dyssac, for my digestion. Suitably refreshed from my labors, I then took my midday repose.



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This spell removes unliving obstacles (up to the size of a dead rhinoceros) by instantly transforming them into dust. The spell dissolves only a single discrete target, not a portion of a larger object—for example, a large boulder, but not a section of a rock wall. The spell can also dissolve a weapon in its wielder's hand.

### Spell of the Loyal Servitor

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Concentration

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

**Source:** Original

This spell summons a magical servant for heavy tasks. The appearance of this Servitor varies from a transparent shimmering humanoid to a hulking scaled reptilian monstrosity, depending on the version of the spell cast, but is always eight feet tall and can lift up to one ton. The Loyal Servitor can travel easily over any terrain, is immune to extremes of heat and cold, and can even walk on water. It can carry objects or people, including the magician. However, the Servitor can move no faster than a brisk walk and cannot fight—with one exception. If directed, it can try to drop a heavy object on an opponent. For such an attack, roll a die. Unless the object is lifted directly over the opponent and the target is immobilized or unaware, the clumsy attack only hits on an Illustrious Success. If the Servitor is attacked, it instantly departs.

### Spell of the Slow Hour

**Range:** Self

**Duration:** Feat

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

A simple warp of space and time alters the rate that time passes for the caster so that his thoughts and actions are three times faster than normal. In a sword fight, the caster can strike three blows for every one by an opponent; the opponent can only defend against one of these three attacks. The other two attacks cannot be opposed, and succeed automatically on any success result. Alternately, it is possible to use the Slow Hour to fight three opponents

at once with no penalties or reductions in skill. The caster could also use this spell to pick a single lock with great speed or win a footrace against almost any opponent. Once the spell ends the caster is as tired as if he had performed the completed action without magical aid.

As always, the immutable laws of magic prohibit magical action (memorizing spells, summoning sandestins, enchanting items, or the like) in a temporally accelerated or slowed frame of reference.

### Thasdrubal's Laganetic Transfer

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

*"...and the cage with Cugel crouching within was snatched aloft and hurled through the air."* Though safer and more comfortable magical transport exists, this spell is easy and widely known. The Laganetic Transfer summons a terrible demon with enormous wings and huge curved talons, the Agency of Far Dispatch. The caster instructs the demon as to the destination and passengers (up to eight people and all their equipment, or up to six in a lightweight palanquin fitted with every convenience). The demon then grasps the passengers in its talons and departs.

Though the Transfer is reliable, it is not instantaneous. The demon requires only an hour or two to transport passengers between adjacent regions, but journeys that cross oceans or continents can require a full day. Nothing can stay the demon from its destination save other demons, magicians, or sandestins.

Once at its destination the demon briefly awaits instructions. The caster, if present, can direct the demon to a soft and exact landing. In the caster's absence, the demon roughly deposits its charges from a height of two or three yards, then departs. To use this spell the caster must have either visited the destination, currently see it, possess some object from there, or have a detailed map of the route.



## The Disavowal of Jhail: The Fourth Accusation, with Jhail's Response

### Resuming my judgmental throne, I called the witch-chaser Keskides

and placed my fourth accusation to Jhail, thus—

"Keskides, a witch-chaser of over 50 years' experience, states that he observed you in conversation with a creature blue in color, some ten ells in height, with feathery epaulets and hair growing in round clusters the full length of its back, of a crimson colour. This he states to be an archveult, an evil being with which all congress is forbidden. Acquaintance with such an entity clearly reveals you as a witch."

Jhail shook her head, a mannerism again conveying guilt, and responded thus—

"Keskides is incompetent, his accusation false. Furthermore, I must question his morals in peering into my window, which, I will remark, was on the third floor. The creature was no archveult, but the sandestin Junule, an intimate of the magician Geomalacus and likewise fearful of the god Lah. At the time he was seeking to persuade me to use my influence to have what he calls 'indenture points' reduced in number—his principal topic of conversation. My inability to accede to such a request proves that I am no witch."



[Osherl:] "You sent me on a mission from the work-room; with mission accomplished I returned to the work-room. If you wished me to disturb you at your vulgar ingestions you should have made this clear."

## Complex Spells

When determining limits for either the number of spells that a magician can memorize (see Chapter 5) or the cost paid by a Cugel-level character buying spells (see Chapter 2), Complex spells cost 4 points.

### Call to the Violent Cloud

**Range:** Self

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Complex

*"At your disturbing power this instrument has come; whence will you go?"* The Call, the most powerful transport commonly known, summons a pillar of black smoke. The caster must then tell this Cloud his destination. The Cloud instantly transports the caster and associates safely to the desired destination. Unlike other common transport spells, the Cloud cannot transport someone else without the caster. The caster can bring along up to a dozen other people and a dozen riding beasts.

The caster need not have ever visited the desired destination. It is equally possible to use the Call to visit a nearby city, another planet, the distant world of Embelyon, or even some fell demon realm. All the caster needs is the name of the destination. Unfortunately, unless the exact location is specified, the caster will be dropped in a random location at the destination—atop a snow-capped mountain, perhaps, or on the roof of a heavily guarded treasury.

### Charm of Forlorn Encystment

**Range:** Sight

**Duration:** Special

**Difficulty:** Complex

*"...and previous victims from across the aeons were now erupted from a depth of 45 miles...all but the most dazed and rigid made tentative motions, feeling the air, groping at the sky and marveling at the sun."* The unfortunate victim of this dreaded Charm is placed in thaumaturgical stasis and instantly transported into a magically created hollow 45 miles beneath his present location. There, until released, the victim languishes through the ages. While his garments and possessions slowly decay, he remains ageless. This spell is quite rare in that it creates a magical effect lasting longer than a single day.

It is also possible to cast the Charm in reverse, so that all victims who were buried within clear sight of the caster (generally within a mile) are instantly returned to the surface. If the caster knows the name and approximate location of a victim, it is possible to cast this spell so that it only frees a particular unfortunate. Failure in casting the Charm may lead to this reversed version.

### Clambard's Rein of Long Nerves

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Day

**Difficulty:** Complex

Cast on a person, animal, or monstrous creatures, the feared Rein of Long Nerves places the caster's body in a

deep trance and actually moves his consciousness inside a living target. The caster can now use the target's body as if it were his own. Though the caster has access to none of the target's knowledge or memories, he can use the target's body normally. If the caster possesses a pelgrane, for instance, he can fly this body as well as the normal tenant can.

If the target body dies while possessed, the caster is immediately thrown back into his body, feeling temporarily tired and ill. If the target is not slain, the caster may return to his own body without discomfort as soon as the spell ends or at will.

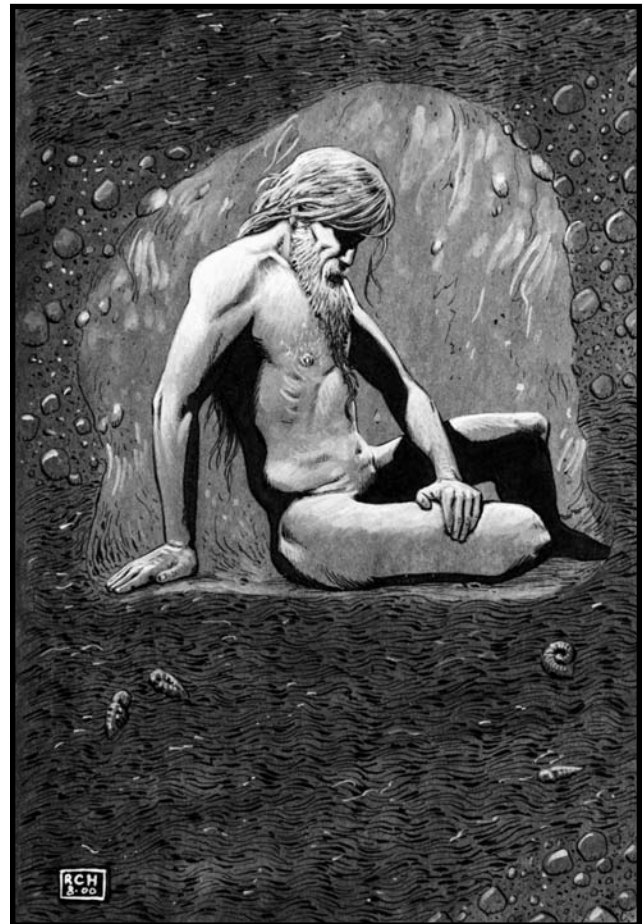
### Enchantment of Youth Renewed

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Complex

This useful but difficult ritual is the most widely known form of magical longevity. Because the secrets of life rank



*The fearsome reputation of the Charm of Forlorn Encystment is widespread. Given its difficulty, magicians of practical bent find it more useful for coercion than punishment. Its potential threat lurks obtrusively behind each casual remark. Why endure the nuisance of mastering the Charm's numerous pervulsions, when a mere mention often produces dramatic effect?*



among the most complex mysteries, this spell cannot actually create youthfulness. Instead, it transfers youth to the caster from a living being of mass equal to or greater than his own. This youthens the caster to an age of his choice, leaving the other creature a dead, withered husk. Though animals and half-men work well as donors, some amoral magicians use youths or even children. These magicians claim that human life grants zest as well as youth, whereas an excess of (say) deodand infusion leads to a mordant temperament.

Enchantment of Youth Renewed reverses existing age, but does not prevent future aging.

Mishaps in casting can be costly. Casters have found themselves suddenly transformed into infants or doddering ancients. More than one Dabbler has met an unpleasant end, or (as it were) beginning.

## Gilgad's Instantaneous Galvanic Thrust

**Range:** Sight

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Complex

*"...a tremendous many-pronged dazzle that not only shivered Xexamedes but destroyed Rbialto's Aviary."*

Though less deadly than the Excellent Prismatic Spray, the Thrust creates a mighty bolt of lightning that unerringly strikes any target the caster can see clearly. It electrifies and slays unprotected humans, half-men, and any other being smaller than an ox, and smashes magically unprotected objects to flinders.

## Relocalization

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Complex

Though less powerful than Thasdrubal's Laganetic Transfer, this spell is quicker and more comfortable. The caster can instantly transport herself or a single target smaller than a draft horse anywhere on Earth. Either caster or target must have actually visited the destination. The target vanishes in a pop of displaced air and appears at the destination in a flash of light. Those in transit must refrain from breathing or moving during the brief transfer, lest they suffer unfortunate rearrangement of their anatomy. Magicians usually memorize Relocalization to return home in an instant when threatened.

## The Second Retrotropic

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Complex

Anything made by magic can be undone. The Second Retrotropic reverses changes made by magic—not damage, but transformations, curses, and alterations. People or objects removed or harmed after the original spell was cast would not be affected. For instance, if the spell Inside Out and Over opened a treasure cave that was subsequently looted, the Second Retrotropic would return the cave under the earth, but it would remain looted.

Unlike The Liberation of Warp, the Retrotropic must be cast on a specific target, against one specified magical alteration or transformation. If someone had been transformed into a goat and then turned green by a separate spell, a single casting of the Retrotropic could remove either effect but not both. The Retrotropic will not heal magical damage nor reverse magical healing or longevity. However, a target who has ever been brought back to life by magic will die instantly if this spell is cast on him with intent to remove that effect.

## The Spell of Temporal Stasis

**Range:** Self

**Duration:** Concentration

**Difficulty:** Complex

*"The Spell of Temporal Stasis, affecting all save be who works the spell. All others are frozen into immotility. Magicians bitterly resent being placed in hiatus by other magicians; too many untoward events take place under these conditions, and many carry monitors to warn when a hiatus has occurred."* Temporal Stasis speeds up the caster sufficiently so that the universe seems static. Others are frozen like statues, and objects dropped as the spell was cast freeze in mid-air. Any non-living object that can be easily picked up or moved is immediately unfrozen as soon as the caster touches it. Therefore, it is possible to open doors or jewelry boxes and remove fine hats from their wearers' heads. Because the caster must concentrate, difficult or complex actions are impossible. However, if an Arch-Magician's sandestin produces the effect, the commanding magician can act freely.



## The Disavowal of Jhail: The Fifth Accusation

**Ignoring a momentary difficulty in following her logic, I placed my final accusation thus—**

"Jhail, in addition to the foregoing charges, you are accused variously of the following crimes relating to man-beasts: consorting with deodands on no fewer than six separate occasions, riding a gid the full width of the Plain of Obelisks, providing a team of mermelants with beer and encouraging them to damage and befoul the sanctum of Precursor Hulm. In each case witnesses exist who are unable to attend this hearing but whose rectitude is above question. Do you dare deny the evidence of their eyes?"



[Rhialto to Sarsem, a sandestin:] "Your conduct has been less than wise."  
 — "You need say nothing! In sheer disgust, discharge me from my indenture! The humiliation will be an overwhelming punishment."



Remember, the inherent laws of magic forbid magical actions (enchanting items, memorizing spells, summoning sandestins) while under temporal acceleration.

### Temporal Projection

**Range:** Near

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Complex

*"Among dazzling lights and distorted visions, Cugel was transported beyond his consciousness."* This rare spell lets the caster to transport himself or others between a millennium and 100,000,000 years into the past. (Times past may be referred to as "BC"—that is, "Before Cugel.") A single spell can transport up to a dozen individuals, provided they are all touching.

The nature of time imposes strict limits. The uncertainties of temporal travel, combined with the Law of Forbidden Duplication, prevent temporal travel of less than 1,000 years. Once in the past, Temporal Projection can be cast in reverse to return targets to the present or to another era, so long as this era is more than 1,000 years from the caster's current date or original departure date. However, this spell cannot be used to visit or send others to the caster's own future.

Time travellers cannot substantially affect the course of history. It has also proven impossible for magicians or Arch-Magicians to reach the legendary "Larval Age," when mechanical and electronic technologies were said to have been used instead of magic. All Aeons that can be reached fundamentally resemble the later days of the Dying Earth.

Some GMs find that time travel causes too many philosophical difficulties. These can induce migraines. If your GM refuses you access to this spell, don't argue—she is susceptible to headaches.

### Thandaval's Stolen Life

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Instant

**Difficulty:** Complex

**Source:** Original

Even the mysteries of death are no challenge for a skilled magician. Stolen Life instantly restores the dead to life by transferring the life from a living being or group whose total mass approximately equals the target's. When this

spell is cast the magician first touches the living beings and then the corpse. The spell then steals life from one (fatally) and gives it to the other. Revived targets have been healed sufficiently to restore life, but barely; a target needs magical healing or weeks of rest to recover completely. Though Stolen Life will restore those who died from old age, only life-prolonging magic can keep the target from dying of age again within a month.

The limit on Stolen Life is that it is impossible to use it on yourself. Arch-Magicians typically order their sandestins to restore them to life if they are killed, but ordinary Magicians must rely on comrades to use this spell. Though there is no evidence for this belief, some magicians hold that transferring a human life produces results superior to the life of a beast or half-man.

## Magical Materials and Enchanted Items

There are two types of magical items: natural materials with innate magical power, as well as items crafted from them; and talismans, amulets, and other thaumaturgical devices enchanted from mundane materials in the workrooms of Magicians or Arch-Magicians.

The point cost given in these listings is the number of creation or improvement points a character must pay to keep the item as a Possession (see Chapters 2 and 8). Enchanted items are always special Possessions. Charged items usually have 12 charges when created.

### The Innately Magical

The nature of magical material remains mysterious. Even the most skilled Arch-Magicians are at a loss to explain why one type of berry holds magical power when another merely makes pies and jams. One theory is that aeons ago, powerful magicians enchanted living materials in the same way magicians now enchant boots and trinkets. The enchantments bred true, and the magical plants and animals of today are descendants of such ancient experiments. Yet why, then, do some minerals also possess magical properties?

In these last times the issue arouses little interest. No less a commentator than Ildefonse the Preceptor saliently



### Jhail's Fifth Response

**Jhail, rising to her feet in a burst of sudden temper and thus proving her guilt for a certainty, replied thus—**

"These accusations are absurd, inane, bald rodomontade! How can one consort with deodands when they are unable to control their lust for human flesh? To ride a gid, when they leap, whirling, 20 feet at a bound? Why would I waste good terces buying beer for mermelants? The truth, as all know, is this, Stimator Poroguire: I have refused your advances, and thus you seek to persecute me. Is this not true? You are a debaucher, Poroguire, a senile old satyr! Did you not attempt to apply the ram's-head periapt of Emperor Dalmasius the Tender to my person? You have bribed the witnesses, paid others to fabricate evidence, suborned the thief-takers! Deny it if you are able!"



observed, "Of all questions, 'why?' is the least pertinent. [...] I now propound the basic verity: What is IS. Here you have heard the basic proposition of magic." Of course, he was drunk at the time on embalming fluid.

## Crystallized Dreams

### (1 point per bag)

Through arcane cantraps it is possible to capture and distill ordinary dreams so that they become small physical crystals. A bag typically holds several dozen dream crystals. Such dreams are much in demand as exotic entertainment. When applied to a sleeping user's eyes, ears, and nostrils, the crystals inspire many vivid, rapturous dreams. A wakeful user experiences the crystals as a strong hallucinogen.

Dream crystals normally have little practical use except as an intoxicant. (For many, such a use is more than sufficient.) However, because they are the distilled essence of dreams, detailed fragments of these dreams remain behind. Crystals collected in the vicinity of magicians or other powerful individuals may occasionally contain blackmail information or knowledge of a manse's defenses.

## Demiurge Scales

### [1 (Ordinary), 16 (Special), or 50 (Central) points]

Occasionally beings from the overworld descend to Earth and, due to misadventure, do not always return. Some are disrupted by contact with earthly matter, and their body parts lie scattered near the site of their demise. The life essence continues to exist within the scale, and could be restored by suitable magic.

The scales that make up a demiurge's outer skin are extremely valuable to collectors. "Ordinary" body-scales are small, attractively colored tiles that fetch up to 100 terces. "Special" scales from crucial junctures in the anatomy are much rarer and retain magical properties.

Because of their connection to the wefts of force that dominate the overworld, "special" scales disrupt all magic. When held between the user and spells targeted at him, these scales function as an Amulet of Puissant Shielding (see below). However, such scales are inimical to mortal flesh, such that handling them without gloves can be painful.

"Central" scales, like the demiurge Sadlark's "Pectoral Sky-break Spatterlight," are exceedingly rare, as each demiurge contains only one such scale. Acting as a focus

for the demiurge's web of forces, these scales have two important properties. If they are touched to the bare flesh of a living being, the being's body is immediately destroyed and its essence absorbed by the scale. In addition, the scale disrupts all magic cast on it or its holder, like Laccodel's Rune (see below). Central scales may fetch many thousands of terces from knowledgeable collectors, usually Magicians or Arch-Magicians.

## IOUN Stones

### (4 points per stone)

Found only at the heart of ancient stars at the edge of the universe, where these stars are gradually devoured by NOTHING (see Chapter 10), IOUN stones are brilliant jewel-like crystals in a dazzling rainbow of colors. They are the most prized commodity in the universe.

Most IOUN stones are closely guarded treasures of Arch-Magicians, archveults, and other powerful beings. Why do they want these items beyond all others? Because IOUN stones are natural receptacles for non-physical phenomena. For instance, they can store spells; each stone can hold one spell of any type, which may then be cast at will as though memorized. Similarly, empty IOUN stones serve as a magical defense. A spell cast at the stone's carrier is intercepted and absorbed. The magician can cast the absorbed spell as if he had memorized it.

A stone can hold time, in the form of aging. An Arch-Magician with such a stone never ages another minute. Instead, the stone collects and stores his accumulating years. Stones can also hold memories, which may then be accessed as easily by others as by their original owner. For Arch-Magicians, whose lives may last aeons, IOUN stones form a useful auxiliary against forgetfulness. However, if someone steals a stone holding your memories, the thief now has access to them and you do not.

An IOUN stone can also hold portions of the owner's personality. A kind-hearted sorceress who faces a stern task could store her kindness and mercy in a stone and hide it. Until she is again in the presence of this stone, she lacks all kindness and will not be distracted by impulses of mercy.

Note that these properties are only the most widely known abilities of IOUN stones! Certain knowledgeable Arch-Magicians, archveults, and similar worthies are said to have discovered additional powers. These are left to the GM's discretion.



## The Disavowal of Jhail: The Verdict

**Ignoring her preposterous counter-accusation and donning my purple scalp cap with due solemnity, I gave the following verdict—**

"Jhail, you are guilty beyond a shade of doubt. Your protestations carry no weight, set, as they are, against the testimonies of so many reputable citizens of this city. Therefore, it is my duty to pronounce you guilty on all counts, and to sentence you to be driven forth, naked and coated with honey, into Blanwalt Forest, where you may seek to expurgate your sins among the erbs, hoon, and leucomorphs that infest the place. Go in peace."



"I am not apt for magic," muttered Varmous. "Weirdness makes me  
eery."



### Inspiring IOUN Lust

In *Rbialo the Marvellous*, IOUN stones produce avarice beyond any other magical trinket. Because IOUN stones so notably augment influence and power, rumors of their whereabouts prompt the otherwise indolent Arch-Magicians to cross the universe to the barrier of NOTHING.

To simulate this effect in the game, the GM may optionally allow each IOUN stone to improve one of its owner's ability ratings, usually Magic, by 1—while it is attuned to the magician. The stone need not be physically present with the magician, merely in his control. The ability point is lost when the stone is lost. This power is in addition to powers gained when the stone is physically present.

An IOUN stone must be attuned to its user. This simple ritual may be learned from any Arch-Magician, and is also found in many ancient books. This ritual requires about half an hour and can only attune one stone at a time. This ritual can also be reversed to de-attune stones attuned to others. The caster must physically hold the stone for the duration of the ritual.

Once attuned, IOUN stones orbit their user as planets orbit a sun. However, few magicians carry their stones in this fashion, for orbiting IOUN stones are vulnerable to capture. Only the powerful or foolish would carry a stone on any but the most dire expedition.

If a stone is destroyed, anything it holds—spells, years, memories, aspects of personality—immediately dissipates. If a magician held his age in a stone that is destroyed, all the accumulated years vanish, and he again begins to age normally. Each stone can hold only one type of phenomenon—a stone used to store spells cannot simultaneously hold memories. For this reason, Arch-Magicians crave as many IOUN stones as they can acquire. No other item inspires such zealous cupidity.



### Jhail's Final Response

#### **On hearing my just pronouncement, Jhail failed to adopt a**

properly repentant attitude, but instead grew calm and raised her chin at a defiant angle. She spoke thus—

"I, Jhail, dispute your competence in the dispensation of justice, also your intellect, your probity, and your sobriety. These charges are false, or at worst trifling—save only one."

So saying, she pulled a curious object from the recesses of her garments and blew a piercing whistle. An instant later the great window burst asunder, admitting first a great rock and then a pelgrane of extraordinary wingspan. Each person present either dived for safety or stood numb with shock—save Jhail herself, who mounted the monster's back and so departed, making her farewell with an impudent smile and a complacent wave.

### Ossip Wax

#### **(4 points per pot)**

Wax boiled from the rare ossip berry makes the finest boot wax on the Dying Earth. In addition to keeping boot leather in excellent condition and preserving it from scuffs, stains, and wear, this wax also imparts an antigravitational quality to the boots. Though the boots themselves do not defy gravity, any non-living object they kick is temporarily rendered buoyant and floats easily in the air.

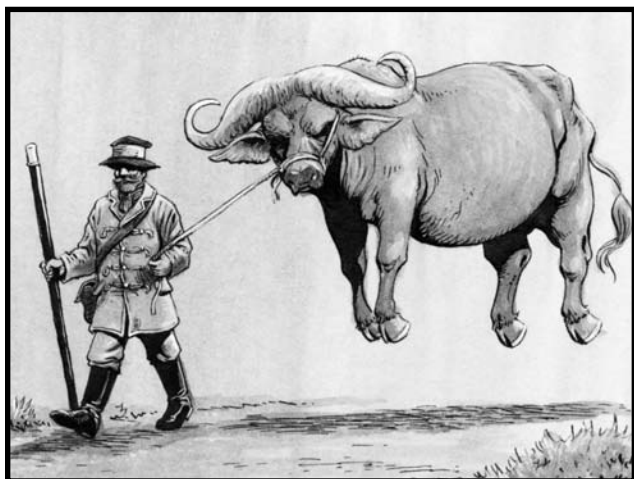
One kick can degravitize any single object up to the size of a small ship. The strength of the kick determines the duration of the effect. A gentle tap affects an object for no more than a minute, whereas a stout kick can cause an object to float for a full week. Effects wear off gradually, so that the object slowly settles to earth. With practice a skilled user can learn to induce various periods of buoyancy with fair accuracy. Though boots treated with ossip wax can only degravitize nonliving targets, if the target is large enough it can be used to carry passengers and cargo. A degravitized wagon can carry a load equivalent to what it could normally support on the ground. Items atop a degravitized object are still subject to gravity. Overloading causes the object to sink to the ground. Any object firmly rooted to the ground, or to any other object too large to be degravitized, cannot itself be degravitized.

A single treatment of ossip wax lasts for a week. A pot of ossip wax that will fit comfortably in two hands generally contains enough wax for a dozen treatments. Among the rare merchants who know its value, ossip wax commands an astoundingly high price, so it is frequently sold in quantities sufficient to treat a single pair of boots once or twice.

No knowledge of magic is required to make or use ossip wax. However, the formula for its creation is strict and is best learned from a practiced maker.

The wax's limitation is the extreme rarity of ossip berries. They are known to grow only near the abandoned manse of deceased wizard Makke the Maugifer, located in the Land of the Falling Wall by the banks of the Great Chaing river. Currently, few know of the wondrous properties of ossip wax. Cugel's garrulity may soon change this! If its nature becomes widely known, demand





for the wax could lead to either the widespread propagation of the ossip tree or the destruction of the single known tree from over-harvesting.

## Talismans, Amulets, and Devices

Here are just a few of the enchanted items that festoon the Dying Earth.

### Blue Concentrate Projector

**(10 points, Charged)**

This is a short metal tube the size of a large cigar. When used, it shoots a large cone of blue concentrate 30 feet long and 15 feet wide. Anyone struck experiences intense pain and terror for two hours. For each action they wish to undertake, victims must succeed in a Wherewithal roll; otherwise they can only writhe in pain and scream. Every attack uses one charge.

### Ever-Lengthening Rope

**(6 points, Permanent)**

This seemingly ordinary, slender rope 10 feet long can, on verbal command, lengthen up to 10 miles long. Another command instantly causes this rope to detach its far end and retract to convenient length. The rope is exceedingly durable and resilient, and can support up to one ton. If broken or cut (a difficult task, incurring a penalty of 1), the rope instantly reverts to its normal length. However, after the rope is cut, each piece retains its full magic (except, at the GM's discretion, the ability to be further subdivided).

### Glimmister of Sharpness

**(3 points, Charged)**

This fine, silvery dust hardens and sharpens whatever it touches. One charge of powder applied to a blade imparts a preternatural sharpness, which lets the blade hew flesh and wood like soft earth, and metal or stone like soft wood. The blade's wielder could not shatter a boulder with one blow, but could carve it into chunks in an hour. No armor can stand against such a blade, unless the armor

too is treated with the glimmister; a full suit of armor requires four charges of powder per treatment. Treated metal becomes supernally hard and immune to rust. Each treatment usually lasts for one week of heavy use or two weeks of light use. Blades treated by the glimmister leave a vivid trail of sparkling motes in the air with each swing.

If applied to living flesh, the glimmister permanently transforms it to silver, injuring or killing the target.

### Live Boots

**(5 points, Charged)**

These boots greatly boost the wearer's speed and endurance. He can run as fast as a galloping horse, jump a dozen feet in a single bound, and continue at full speed for up to an hour. At the end of an hour the wearer is no more fatigued than after a short jog. Unfortunately, like all living things, the boots can tire and even die. Using the boots for an hour drains one charge; the boots then slow down and require at least an hour of rest (no more than slow walking). If a second charge is used immediately, the boots die at the second hour's end.

The boots are recharged by immersion in a special broth of nutrients and boot wax. The recharge roll is made with a bonus of 2 instead of 1. Dead boots are useless and may not be recharged.

### Tablet of Sufficient Nutriment

**(2 points, Permanent)**

This square tablet can be comfortably worn as a pendant. Whenever it is touched to any organic matter, from leaves to shoe leather, it instantly renders the object edible and nutritious, if not tasty. If the item touched was previously too tough to chew, it is now (barely) tender enough to be eaten. In addition, the tablet chimes softly whenever it comes within one foot of poison.

### Whirlaway

**(11 points, Permanent)**

This elegant wheel-less carriage, fitted with silks and furs and decorated with the finest carvings and ornaments, perches on four beautifully carved legs. Possessed of the mind and personality of a polite carriage driver, the whirlaway flies up to six occupants and reasonable baggage to their destination in elegant comfort, at the speed of a swift pelgrane. This whirlaway can only be commanded by someone seated inside, and has no abilities other than transport. The whirlaway can reach any point on Earth in a day or two, but cannot move underwater or outside the atmosphere.

## Magical Protections

Unless noted, resistances conferred by a protective item encompass the user's physical body, clothing, and items carried. Protection usually extends to small living creatures the user carries, such as pets, but not to those larger than, say, a large dog. In emergencies a lenient GM may extend the protection to other characters being carried by





A finger's breadth from Turjan's skin the fire-darts dissolved into a thousand gray puffs of smoke. "Turn your back, Kandive," Turjan ordered. "Your magic is useless against Laccodel's Rune."

the protected character. Vance's stories do not, in general, depict much piggyback.

Note that magicians view with disfavor those protected from their magic. Indeed, mere ownership of these items can draw hostility the owners would otherwise never encounter. Victims may find this irony too subtle for full enjoyment.

#### **The Fortright Amulet of Puissant Shielding (16 points, Permanent)**

This amulet can be easily held in one hand or worn as a bracelet. Held between the user and a source of magic, it harmlessly dissipates all spells, cantraps, and effects of enchanted items, but not sandestin magic. Successful use protects the user and one other person who stands directly behind. Using this item completely occupies one of the wielder's hands. The amulet provides no protection if not presented directly towards the magician—if the user is attacked by surprise, when his hands are full, or from multiple directions, the amulet is useless.

When the user sees a magician about to cast a spell and must ready the item, determine who has initiative. The magician uses his Magic rating, and the amulet bearer uses Defense. If the target gains initiative, he readies the amulet in time. Once the amulet is out, the user need not check initiative again unless distracted.

Though of limited utility, these amulets are common. Buyers should beware frequent fakes.

#### **The Just Amulet of Virtuous Reflection (32 points, Permanent)**

This uncommon amulet functions identically to the Fortright Amulet of Puissant Shielding (above), except that it reflects the spell back at the attacker. The attacker may resist as if the amulet's owner had cast the spell; if the attacker resists, the spell vanishes without further reflection. If the attacker is also protected by an item that reflects spells, the attack is reflected in some random direction. In such cases, roll a die. A success result (4, 5, or 6) means the bounced attack may still work to the original caster's benefit, or at worst dissipates harmlessly. A failure result (1, 2, or 3) means the effect strikes allies or otherwise inconveniences the original caster.

#### **Khadl's Redoubtable Guardian Talisman Versus Magical Harm (16 points, Permanent)**

This small talisman protects the wearer and all worn or carried possessions against magic that directly kills or harms, such as The Excellent Prismatic Spray, Phandaal's Gyrator, Felojun's 2nd Hypnotic Spell, Lentair's Enspelled Obedience, and sandestin attacks. However, the wearer could still have his coinpurse picked with Arnhoult's Sequestrous Digitalia, could be magically lifted high in the air and dropped, and could even be transported to a far

dismal land by Thasdrubal's Laganetic Transfer. A harmless vibration in the talisman alerts the wearer to the vitiated attack.

Protective talismans of this kind are immune to Arnhoult's Sequestrous Digitalia, but remain vulnerable to mundane theft.

#### **Laccodel's Protective Rune (32 points, Permanent)**

This is the most powerful of the common magical protections. Usually worn as a bracelet or pendant, it protects the wearer and possessions worn or carried from all spells, cantraps, and effects produced by sandestins or enchanted items. Otherwise, it has the same limitations as Khadl's Redoubtable Guardian Talisman Versus Magical Harm (see above).

A wary owner can prevent theft of Laccodel's Rune by having it tattooed on his body. The tattoo protects only the wearer's physical body, not garments or carried items. A protected target struck by the Instantaneous Galvanic Thrust would have all his clothes forcefully blown off his uninjured body.

#### **Pendant of Temporal Monitoring (1 point, Permanent)**

This talisman instantly alerts the wearer to temporal interference. The tasteful pendant chimes and turns a garish orange one second (in the wearer's reference frame) after anyone under the Spell of Temporal Stasis comes within five yards of the wearer, and remains orange for 10 minutes after the temporal interference ends. Similarly, if someone casts the spell Interminable Interim on the wearer, this item notifies him the instant the spell ends.

The pendant in no way protects the wearer from temporal interference, nor does it reveal the comings and goings of time travellers. It need hardly be added that any temporal monitor may be subverted using a red-eyed bifaulgulate sandestin and a pair of quampics.

#### **Periapt of All-Seeing (10 points, Permanent)**

This item lets the wearer's gaze instantly pierce any magical invisibility or disguise. Anyone under a spell like Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth or The Enchantment of Another's Face is outlined to the wearer's eye in a crimson aura.

#### **Talisman to Reveal the Hidden (1 point, Permanent)**

This amulet emits a tone when anyone magically disguised or invisible comes within five yards of the wearer. The item does not make such individuals visible or let the wearer locate them.





The elder indicated a seat. "From your behavior I assumed you were not only deaf and dumb, but also guilty of mental retardation. It is now clear, at least, that you hear and speak."

"I profess rationality as well," said Cugel.

*The Eyes of the Overworld,*  
Chapter 4

## Chapter 7:

# Equipment

A succinct list of the clothing, tools, devices, and other adjuncts that compose the resourceful adventurer's equipage

### Common Possessions

**A**ny sensible adventurer should covet some or all of these items: ☼ A good warm **cloak** is essential when exposed to wind and cold.

See "Exposure" in Chapter 4. ☼ If forced to walk for more than an hour without strong, comfortable **boots** over normal terrain, or for ten minutes over hot sand, sharp rocks, or through thorny or sharp-edged vegetation, your feet become cut or blistered. You suffer a levy of 2 on all Athletics rolls requiring use of your feet, and a levy of 1 on all other rolls, due to distracting pain. ☼ Among the aristocratic classes, a man without a **fashionable hat** reveals himself as a bumpkin or boor. A hatless man suffers a levy of 1 on Persuade or Seduction attempts against aristocratic individuals. Fashions vary; a hat ludicrously out of step with the local style means a levy of 2. In some areas, women's headgear is as important as men's. In others, they are judged instead by their **gowns**. ☼ **Jewels** and gemstones make your wealth more portable. Where a purse containing more than 300 terces becomes burdensome and is easily spotted by thieves, a handful of gems of the same value is light and concealable. However, their value is open to dispute, and you may sell them at a loss if you are out-haggled.





I am a dignified citizen of the area, not a fox-faced vagabond in an over-fancy hat.

Ostentatious **jewelry** impresses merchants and the newly rich. When you make Persuade or Seduction attempts against this sort of person, merely wearing a valuable piece of jewelry (worth 200-400 terces) lets you treat them as Especially Easy Tasks (see “Adjusting a Task’s Difficulty,” Chapter 3). A fabulously valuable piece (400 terces and up) goes further, also letting you treat Prosaic Successes as Illustrious.

Without a **sack** or pack to carry things, you can’t carry more than two items any significant distance.

Lacking a good stout **rope**, you suffer a levy of 1 on climbing-related Athletics rolls. With a **grappling hook**, your rope lets you scale sheer walls or mountains—provided you make an Athletics roll to get it properly lodged.

In a world with little artificial luminance, nights are extremely dark. Only with a **torch** or **lantern** can you see. Lanterns let you cast focused light and are less a fire hazard.

Ruins dot the Dying Earth. The dedicated treasure hunter digs deep for quality finds. **Shovels** are awkward to carry but can serve as makeshift cudgels.

**Weapons** are described in Chapter 4’s Attack rules.

## Sample Prices

Prices vary widely from one place to another, depending on the availability of goods. Generally, any item will be more plentiful in a big city than in an isolated village. In Kaiin or Erze Damath, merchants must compete to offer the most attractive price. In a backwater hamlet, there might be only one merchant. He can charge you extortionate prices for an item you obviously need. The chart at right assigns typical prices according to the size of the market.

Prices are in terces unless followed by a “g” (groats). There are ten groats in a terce, and 100 terces in a centum. See Chapter 4’s sidebar “Xolon Transgresses Local Norms” (p. 63) for more about currency in the Dying Earth. “N/A” means that the item or service is probably Not Available in the given location.

The GM can always change these prices, depending on local conditions. Riding animals become more expensive during famines. Even appalling wine may become scarce in the wake of a month-long carnival. Above all, as Vance’s stories repeatedly demonstrate, no merchant balks at hoodwinking the gullible.

## Haggling

Prices are never set in stone. Using the previous chart as a guidepost, the GM secretly determines an average market price for the item in question. The PC uses his

## Item Price Chart

Item	City	Town	Village	Remote
Axe	10	15	20	20
Beer (by the flagon)	5g	5g	5g	5g
Blank, bound book	30	50	N/A	N/A
Boat—fishing vessel	1200	600	600	750
Boat—rowboat	50	75	100	125
Boots	20	30	50	100
Bow	50	75	30	30
Cart	30	30	30	40
Cloak	10	15	20	40
Covered wagon	500	750	1000	1500
Cudgel	5g	1	1	1
Deodand	1000	1000	750	500
(w/strong chains)				
Gown, fashionable	200	400	800	1200
Hat, fashionable	50	100	200	300
Knife	3	6	9	12
Lantern	3	6	15	30
Longbow	500	N/A	N/A	N/A
Net	20	30	30	40
Night’s lodging (w/meals)				
luxurious	10	20	N/A	N/A
modest	5	10	20	30
mingy	5g	1	5	10
Pack animal	200	400	600	800
Parchment or paper	5	10	15	N/A
Rapier	50	100	200	500
Riding animal	300	500	750	1000
Rope, 25 feet	1	2	3	4
Sack	5g	1	1	1
Shovel	5	10	15	20
Sling	5	7	10	12
Spear	20	30	40	50
Throwing knife	20	30	40	50
Whip	20	30	40	50
Wine, fine, bottle	100	200	N/A	N/A
Wine, average, bottle	5	10	15	20
Wine, appalling, jug	5g	1	2	5

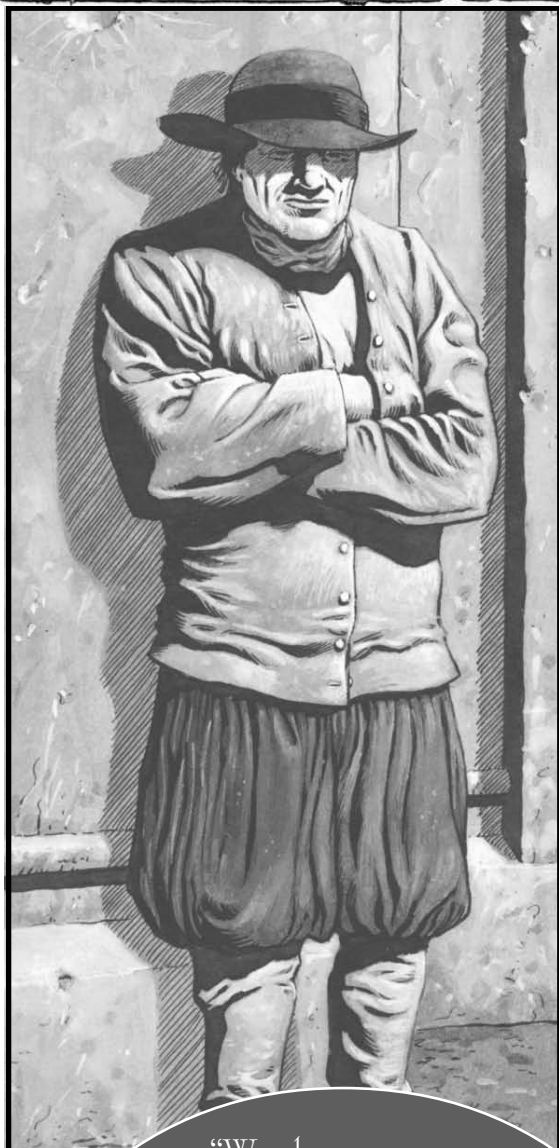
Persuade against his negotiating partner’s Rebuff whether he’s the buyer or seller. (Intimidating sellers suffer a levy of 2.) Use the chart below to determine the final price.

## Haggling Chart

Situation	Price change
Buyer wins, Illustrious Success	-50%
Buyer wins, Prosaic Success	-20%
Buyer wins, Hair’s-Breadth Success	-10%
Buyer loses by rolling Dismal Failure	+50%
Seller wins, Illustrious Success	+50%
Seller wins, Prosaic Success	+20%
Seller wins, Hair’s-Breadth Success	+10%
Seller loses by rolling Dismal Failure	-50%







“We have come under attack: do we retaliate? If so: how? Or even: why? The world is moribund.”

“But I am not! I am Rhialto, and such treatment offends me!”  
Ildefonse nodded thoughtfully. “That is an important point. I, with equal vehemence, am Ildefonse!”

*Rhialto the Marvellous,*  
Chapter 1

## Chapter 8:

# Player Tips

A compendium of advice to expedite survival, wit, impeccable behavior, and salubrious attitudes

### Your Life So Far

**D***ying Earth* stories don't dwell on the childhoods or past lives of their characters. Characters are presented to us simply, stripped down to a few essentials. They exist in the moment.

If you create elaborate past histories or complicated motivations for them, they'll seem out of place in the Vancian landscape. ✿ Especially avoid the angst-ridden portrayals some roleplayers consider a hallmark of sophistication. Although appropriate in other games, they'll seem leaden and incongruous here. The character creation process provides about all the characterization you need. Add the implied character traits that come with the styles of Persuasion, Rebuff, Defense, Attack, Defense, and Magic to those arising from your Temptations, and you've got a character fleshed out to the extent the source material requires. ✿ Remember that one of the basic themes of the *Dying Earth* is that with a few exceptions, people are all more or less the same, driven by selfishness and petty foibles.





Embelyon was lost, renounced.  
And T'sais wept.

Unless your character concept requires it, you should assume that you grew up somewhere in the comparatively civilized lands of Ascolais or Almetry. You may never need to decide whether you were raised in a city, town, or village. You learned from an early age that the sun is on the verge of dying, that the world is incredibly old, and that grand efforts are a waste of time. Few people around you worked towards any accomplishment greater than the attainment of comfort. Revelry, the more decadent the better, is what most people live for. Certainly, there are monks, ascetics, and other devout types who constrain their appetites for theological reasons—if anything, the onset of final darkness has made faith more fervent, and theological beliefs more absurd. But these people tend to separate themselves from ordinary folk, either retreating to cloisters or living in communities where everyone believes as they do.

## Your Attitude

Your character's career as magician, gadabout, or seeker of adventure is well-established before your first adventure. You are no dupe, fresh from the farm. You have spent years learning how to fight and honing persuasive skills to avoid being gulled—and possibly to gull others. Most adults are well-acquainted with the dishonesty of the world, and have learned to take part in it themselves. You are not surprised when others try to swindle you—though, if you are the average sort of person, you become hotly indignant when you nose out a cheat.

The exception to the above is the Pure-Hearted character. You might be a sheltered refugee from a cloistered religious community, as described above, or perhaps an exile from an isolated village on the borders of civilization. Even more likely, you are the product of an Arch-Magician's vat. Having been grown by magical means, you are only a few years old. You do not seem child-like, and react to situations as any mature person would. But your experience of connivers and charlatans is limited. It is also possible that your personality is more strongly tilted towards a single trait than would be the case for a person born and reared naturally. T'Sain, who appears in a couple of the stories in *The Dying Earth*, is extraordinarily open and altruistic, and eventually sacrifices her life to save her creator and lover, Turjan. (Luckily, he can revive her.) Her sister, T'Sais, suffers from a malformation of personality that makes her perceive all beauty as revoltingly corrupt.

Most players who haven't read the Dying Earth stories soon get used to the setting, adopting its distinctive conduct and speech patterns. But if you are at first put off by its unfamiliarity, it might be a good idea to play a vat-

grown character from another realm, like Embelyon (see Chapter 10, "Places"). That way, your character's acclimation to the setting can parallel your own. (You might hail from the past or from another dimension, but people there seem as irrational, vain, and greedy as those of the Dying Earth, even though they lack the excuse of the sun's imminent demise.)

## Good Behavior

No central authority governs the known lands of the Dying Earth. There is no universal code of law. Local rulers control cities or towns. They enforce whatever rules they deem appropriate, generally to their own benefit. However, certain unwritten rules of behavior apply in almost any settlement your characters find. If your characters break these rules, they can expect to be hunted down by guardsmen or subjected to the whims of a violent mob. Local rulers favor harsh and idiosyncratic punishments that are both permanent and painful. It is often necessary to flee the local lord's justice. But if you routinely violate the rules of civilized behavior wherever you go, you'll soon run out of cities in which to seek shelter. Furthermore, if you become well-known, people will think you crazy or dangerous, and you'll suffer a levy of 1 or more on all Persuade attempts against individuals who know who you are.

If you walk into a town decked out like a soldier or mercenary, expect to be closely watched. The accoutrements of war mark you as dangerous. Town officials may ask you to leave your heavy weapons out of sight. They might ask you to go back where you came from. Rapiers and daggers are considered acceptable everyday equipment in most cities. Axes, large clubs, and missile weapons are not.

The protagonists of Dying Earth stories aren't quite as bloodthirsty as the average hero of a contemporary action movie. When defending yourself against a human opponent, even if he attacked you first, you'll be expected to avoid killing him if at all possible. If you do kill him, you may not be charged as a murderer by local authorities, but you will gain a ruthless and cold-hearted reputation. You will be looked upon in an even worse light if you started a fight in which an opponent was killed. You can expect your human opponents to ask for mercy when they get hurt, and will be expected to grant it. Likewise, you can expect even a sinister human foe to spare you when you offer surrender.

It is, however, perfectly acceptable to devise a complex and humiliating punishment for a defeated enemy. You might erase his mind and make him a servant, coerce him

**levy of 1 or more:** The GM decides the exact levy, depending on the nature of your reputation and the situation at hand. Intimidating characters don't face a Persuade levy. Instead, people run away from them, or hire local toughs to run them out of town.

**punishment:** For these purposes, abandoning an enemy to a situation likely to kill him is still considered brutish. You can't tie him to a tree in a dead-and-infested forest and then claim you had no hand in his demise.





## Player Tips

into seeking a treasure for you, or require him to attend Prince Kandive's grand ball wearing nothing more than a single feather. Here again the converse is true: expect toil, danger, or mortification when you surrender to a foe.

It is perfectly acceptable to pummel an enemy into unconsciousness, rather than accept his surrender. Remember, you can always designate a non-lethal outcome for your attacks, if you so desire.

On the other hand, no one expects you to spare the lives of dangerous half-men, even though they may speak and reason as humans do. No normal person thinks this distinction in any way hypocritical.

Non-deadly assault may or may not attract the attention of authorities or harm your reputation, depending on circumstances. Pay heed to the status of your brawling partners. Punching a fellow tavern-crawler in the course of a general fracas is almost always acceptable. Striking a town official is almost always considered antisocial.

### Other Legalisms

People are highly protective of their property, and passionately hate thieves. Murder, extortion, arson, and vandalism get you in trouble wherever you go.

Slavery is commonplace. Although not every city or town encourages it, there is no widespread emancipation movement. In most places, concepts of democracy or universal human rights are curiosities of the ancient past.

Rape is a serious crime in any civilized place. Other than that, sexual mores vary from the permissive to the rigidly repressive. In decadent cities like Kaiin, prostitution and concubinage are beloved institutions. Theocracies, ruled by priests or other religious leaders, may rigidly punish prostitution, as well as adultery, possession of erotic poetry, or the wearing of revealing clothing. (Not all religions concern themselves with sexual

behavior; a few make it central to their beliefs. A pious town might venerate temple prostitutes and engage in orgiastic rites. However, travellers should know that the rules concerning holy sexual congress are almost invariably zealously enforced and enigmatic to the newcomer.)

Certain actions count against you not only in the game world, but in the rules. Your GM tracks a **sympathy rating** for your character, reflecting the general likeability of his behavior. When your sympathy rating is low, bad things happen to your character.

### Playing Out Persuasion Attempts

Novice players sometimes find it challenging to roleplay their Persuasion encounters. This is mostly because they worry that they should uphold some kind of standard. Instead, groups should do what works best for them.

The designer's game group tends to argue in character for a fair while before remembering that some dice perhaps ought to be rolled. Then they roll the dice, with a few further interjections of dialogue to match the die results.

Other groups might wish to speak a line or two of dialogue, then roll, go back to dialogue, roll again, and so forth.

If all you want to do is call out numbers and leave discussion to the imagination, that's fine, too.

Don't decide ahead of time which to use; see which choice comes naturally. Your GM will probably switch styles depending on circumstances and the players involved.

## Improving Your Character

Should your character survive the aforementioned hazards of the Dying Earth, he perhaps deserves a reward. We say "perhaps" because in most works of adventure fiction, including the Dying Earth books, you rarely see characters palpably improve over the course of their adventures. However, roleplaying gamers really like to increase the numbers on their character sheets, and our effort to separate you from your terces by inveigling you into purchasing additional *Dying Earth* products might be hampered were we to insist on over-fidelity to our source. So here are the

means by which you improve your character in the course of play.

### Improvement Points

In order to do so, you must earn **improvement points**.

The first improvement point you earn in any given game session is easy. You need merely show up and start playing.

---

**non-lethal outcome:** Yes, we know that in real life this is more easily said than done. This game does not reflect real life.







Mincing murder, extravagant debauchery,  
while Earth passes its last hour.

Further improvement points reward your willingness to entertain your GM and fellow players by evoking the distinctively Vancian dialogue of Dying Earth characters.

At the beginning of each session, your GM will assign you two **taglines**. A tagline is a line or two of dialogue. You may choose a third tagline from the list in this chapter. (See the next page.) During the session, you win improvement points by having your character speak that dialogue at an appropriate moment. Once you speak a line of dialogue, you can't use it again—you've had your chance.

The number of points you get depends on how effective your use of the particular snippet of dialogue is, as judged by your GM.

**If the content of the line bears no real relationship to the action, you get no points.**

---

*The session is drawing to a close. Your remaining tagline is, "First of all, know that I am a powerful wizard." Your PC is trapped, with the others, in a stone pit in the middle of nowhere. Eager to cash in your final tagline for its improvement points, you have your character tell an anecdote of the time you encountered two disguised asms in a waterfront tavern. During the rambling anecdote, you recount that you told them, "First of all, know that I am a powerful wizard." Well, you've used the line all right, but it was apropos of nothing. You clumsily inserted it where it doesn't belong, and have broken the illusion of fictional reality. The GM rightly tells you that you earn no points for it.*

---

**If the content of the line applies to the situation, but is no more noteworthy or entertaining than the spontaneously-created lines of dialogue around it, you get 1 point.**

---

*Let's return to the same situation. You and the other PCs are trapped in a pit. Instead of telling an anecdote designed to let you use the tagline, you hold off. Soon, a crabbed-backed old man arrives and peers down at you over the lip of the pit. "Perhaps," he says, "you might care to explain who you are, and what you are doing defiling my pit." You respond, "First of all, know that I am a powerful wizard." The GM awards you 1 point.*

---

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**the list in this chapter:** Some of the quotations at the upper right corners of this rulebook's pages, drawn from Jack Vance's Dying Earth books, can also serve as taglines. If you open at random *The Dying Earth*, *The Eyes of the Overworld*, *Cugel's Saga*, or *Rhialto the Marvellous*, it is somewhat unusual *not* to find a suitable tagline within the first half dozen lines of dialogue you read.

*Although your use of the tagline wasn't inappropriate, it didn't deliver much punch. It seems more like a throwaway line than the high point of a scene. The "first of all" part of the line doesn't seem exactly right; it isn't followed by a list of other points the old man should consider. Nor does your boast of magical powers precisely match his question.*

---

**If the line seems especially appropriate, you get 2 points.**

---

*Again, let's say you waited until the perfect time to respond. You allow another of the PCs to identify the group and plead for help. The old man then says, "Alas, I see no good reason why you should not be quartered and fed to our pack-beasts, as our custom demands." Now you can fit your line in with ease: "The reasons are twofold. First of all, know that I am a powerful wizard. Second, it would be most uncivilized to subject poor travellers to such a treatment." The tagline fits precisely with the meaning of the previous line and also with the Vancian dialogue style. The GM awards you 2 points.*

---

**If the line arouses emotion among the players and GM, you get 3 points.** Laughter is the most common response, and the easiest to elicit. Other emotions, like sadness or relief, can also score you maximum points.

---

*You consider making your second reason why you shouldn't be fed to the pack beasts something about uncivilized behavior. But then a funnier response comes to mind. Your reply is instead: "The reasons are twofold. First of all, know that I am a powerful wizard. Second, although the custom of my people demands that impudent old men should be fed to the demon I keep in this leather bag, I am willing to waive this requirement if shown sufficient humility." This response elicits applause and laughter from your GM and fellow players. The GM has no choice but to award you the full 3 points.*

---





## Player Tips

### All-Purpose Taglines

**Choose from this list of taglines (almost all drawn from Jack Vance's Dying Earth stories) at the beginning of each session. By the time you use all these, you should be amply qualified to devise new ones. More taglines will appear in future *Dying Earth* products.**

- "A variety of deaths by contrasting processes may well enter into your punishment."
- "Another goblet, if you please... and the decanter."
- "As a traveler from afar, ignorant of your customs, I thought it best to watch quietly a few moments, lest in error I commit a solecism."
- "Bah. The concept is jejune."
- "Boldness, now!"
- "By no means! Rather fear for your own sodden vitality, which goes on in even greater peril!"
- "Come, come, you make a flagrantly unreasonable request!"
- "Come, step out here, and we will examine the contents of your bag."
- "Correct! You are a man of discernment."
- "Do you care to precede me, or walk discreetly to the rear?"
- "Everywhere at this time of earth's dying exceptional circumstances are to be noted."
- "First, I must inquire, how profound is your knowledge?"
- "For me the causality is unconvincing."
- "His deeds have been meretricious."
- "Hold up proceedings!"
- "I am already an accomplished wizard; the increment of lore will merely enhance my craft."
- "I am first and last a gentleman of honor."
- "I am guilty only of merriment!"
- "I am rationality personified; it is unthinking to suggest otherwise!"
- "I can resolve your perplexity."
- "I can suffocate you with pearls, blind you with diamonds."
- "I detest this indecision."
- "I doubt if he is capable of such abnegation."
- "I feel a strange flavor."
- "I have taken counsel with myself and believe I can adequately fulfill the obligations of the job."
- "I insist upon a rigid separation of functions."
- "I surmise you to be a noted wizard, seething with spells."
- "I will place a taint."
- "In all candour, I have forgotten the question."
- "Let us drink beer, quart for quart, while we dance the double coppola!"
- "Let us drink wine and consider this matter dispassionately."
- "Malice is a quality to be deplored."
- "May I ask the source of your amusement?"
- "Must I really expatiate?"
- "My eye went to you like the nectar moth flits to the jacynth."
- "My honor has been assailed!"
- "My planning and my magic were decisive!"
- "My wants are simple: an alcove, a couch, a morsel of food for my supper."
- "No, no, you are out of order; regulation must be observed."
- "Our contract encompasses situations of this sort."
- "Some malignancy has bewitched your brain."
- "Somewhere there is a flaw in your concepts."
- "Such details are unknown."
- "Such is a fair description."
- "Such language is vulgar."
- "Such matters lie beyond my specific knowledge."
- "That aspect has no doubt been considered."
- "That is not regular procedure."
- "The air tingles at one's skin with characteristic zest."
- "The contingency is remote."
- "The entire episode is a mockery!"
- "The idea is essentially sound."
- "The position appears worthy of consideration."
- "The possibilities seem incompatible."
- "The question regarding hidden valuables again becomes relevant."
- "The tenets of your belief are demonstrably accurate."
- "There is no haste in the matter."
- "This is inhuman malice! I shall see to it that you receive your just desserts!"
- "This normally would be my impulse. But these people have stimulated me to quixotic folly."
- "To victims and unfortunates, we extend twenty profound solaces!"
- "Trust me to outwit this moon-calf!"
- "What causes such immediate sobriety?"
- "You are not uncomely."
- "You cite advantages of which I was unaware."
- "You have no inducement to offer?"
- "You must now see the futility of your trick."
- "You put me in an uncomfortable position."
- "You should have considered this before you maimed me."
- "Your admiration is understandable."
- "Your deckings are rich and of superb quality."
- "Your methods are incorrect."
- "Your proposal is flawed."
- "Your prudence is commendable."
- "Your request is unorthodox."





Propositions and corollaries to the side, I am not anxious to wear a charge of high explosive attached to my cap.

## Spending Improvement Points

You can spend improvement points at any time. Your character isn't miraculously gaining new abilities; he's just revealing an ability or skill we haven't yet seen.

With exceptions listed below, **it costs 3 improvement points to gain 1 rating point**, provided that your new rating will not exceed the ability cap for your series type. Otherwise, you must pay the number of improvement points listed in the table at right.

**Rating points in Magic cost twice those of any other ability:** 6 improvement points each below the cap, or, for ratings above the cap, double the amounts listed in the table.

You may not spend improvement points on Wealth during a session in which you've reduced your Wealth rating to raise funds, as per the rules at the end of Chapter 4.

You can spend 5 improvement points for 1 rating point in a **secondary style** for any of the following abilities: Persuasion, Rebuff, Attack, or Defense. For example, if your Persuasion style is Glib, you can spend 5 improvement points to acquire an Intimidating style of Persuasion as well (rating 1). Secondary styles do not give you the usual benefits associated with a style, but do allow you to avoid levies when facing someone whose ability trumps your primary style. Your secondary style can be

## Improvement Point Cost Table

Cugel	Turjan	Rhialto	Cost
11	16	21	6
12	17	22	12
13	18	23	24
14	19	24	24
15	20	25	24 ... and so on

rated no higher than 5 points less than your primary. You may have up to five secondary styles, assuming you have no better way to spend 25 improvement points.

*Ethora's Attack (Ferocity) is rated 10. You find that he spends much of his time fighting a cabal of arch-magicians, who are annoyingly prone to Dodge as a Defense style. Dodge is Ferocity's trump. You want 2 points in Attack (Speed). It costs 5 improvement points per rating point. Your primary Attack is rated 10, so you can raise Attack (Speed) as high as 5 before having to increase Attack (Ferocity).*

## Survival Tips

After investing thought, creativity, time, and improvement points in your character, you'll no doubt want to lessen his chances of getting killed. Follow the tips below to increase his life expectancy.

**Injuries can be hazardous to your health.** The game system affords some protection against getting hurt, especially if you've invested heavily in both Defense and Health. Mathematically, defenders in combat have a bit of an advantage. However, when you do get hurt, the levies you suffer cause your situation to deteriorate quickly. If you are in a fight, you should seriously consider running away or surrendering. If you are not in a fight, avoid all danger until you recover.

As mentioned under "Good Behavior" above, if you call for mercy, even a truly vicious human foe is more likely to creatively humiliate you than kill you. Half-men aren't so scrupulous; try to escape from them. If you can't run, you have no choice but to stand your ground.

**Flee pre-emptively.** If you're used to playing other fantasy roleplaying games, you may have habituated yourself to determinedly hacking down every foe that crosses your path, especially the monstrous ones. In other games, you're rewarded for this, with their equivalent of improvement points. In *The Dying Earth* game, **creature-killing, in and of itself, gets you precisely nothing.**

When you encounter a creature, ask yourself if killing it gets you closer to your story goals. It

might be guarding a gate you need to pass through, or holding one of your allies prisoner. In such cases, it might be smart to risk your life, draw your weapon, and wade into battle. Most times, though, you should just run away, and hope it doesn't catch you. Fighting it isn't worth the risk.

**Cultivate fatalism.** One of the fun things about roleplaying is investing your own emotions into your fictional character. You want to see him succeed even more than you do a fictional character in a book or movie, because he's your creation, and you direct



### Secondary Styles

**Experienced players can start** the game with secondary styles (described under "Spending Improvement Points").

During character creation, each rating point in a secondary style costs just 1 creation point. Your rating in a secondary style must always be at least 5 points less than that in your primary. Randomly rolling your secondary style confers no benefit, though you're free to do so if you like.



## Player Tips

his actions. However, the power of this connection can trip up some players—especially in *The Dying Earth*, where every PC is bound to suffer occasional humiliations, reversals, and unpleasant twists of fate. **If your character didn't suffer the occasional embarrassing setback, it wouldn't be a *Dying Earth* game.**

It is perfectly acceptable to seek vengeance when you get swindled or hurt; in the books, Cugel often seeks the comeuppance of those who've harmed or slighted him. But don't take it too far. If you're getting genuinely angry at GMCs, stop and take a deep breath. Don't let your desire for vengeance lead to greater trouble. If your PC needs to violate the unwritten rules of civilized conduct (see "Good Behavior"), you're probably taking it too far. Drop your campaign of reprisal until a better opportunity comes around.

## Evading Persuasion

To evoke the atmosphere of Jack Vance's stories, *The Dying Earth* breaks from a common convention of roleplaying games. When you lose a Persuasion contest, you temporarily lose control over your PC's decisions. Many games treat this as some kind of gross invasion of the player's rights—though they quite often allow you to convince GMCs that up is down, or that they really ought to go through that door, notwithstanding the demonic wails from the other side!

This contradiction arises because some players get very territorial about their characters' autonomy. It's okay if the character gets injured or loses money—but for a few players, control over decision-making is somehow different. They might know they're supposed to smile and accept the consequences of their misfortune, but they can't help feeling angry and frustrated.

We included this rule because we think it entertains the vast majority of players. Certainly one lesson of *The Dying Earth* is that we are all at the mercy of capricious fate, which dispenses triumph and comeuppance in equal measure. But if you recognize yourself in the above paragraph, we offer two ways you can evade the effects of persuasion. In all cases, you still lose any Rebuff points you expended during the contest.

**Servile elusion:** Your character may act unpersuaded if you, the player, perform a real-world service for your GM and fellow players. We suggest that you refresh their beverage glasses. If you happen to be playing at a snack bar or (should you all be of legal age) in an establishment serving alcoholic libations, you must buy the round. If it is your group's habit to send someone out for coffee or snacks, you must volunteer for the mission. Your fellow players may graciously accept your offer of an alternate service. If you surrender cash or

other valuables for the privilege of remaining unmoved by persuasion, please be aware that Pelgrane Press claims a 10% commission on all such transactions. Remit payment to the address at the beginning of this book.

**Barefaced subornment:** You must bribe the other players. Each may examine your character sheet and take one point of their choice from you. Each player adds the point to the same ability on his own character sheet.

You are clever enough to surmise that we mean by these rules to eventually convince you to unclench and accept the Persuasion system as good fun. But these sanctioned cheats are here, if you need them.

## Avoiding Temptation

You may be aghast at the Temptation system, which makes your character susceptible to all the frailties that plague the roguish, often self-defeating characters of Jack Vance's stories. To most denizens of the Dying Earth, the thought that people are in control of their destinies is laughable. People recognize that they are but corks bobbing on the turbulent seas of fate. They are governed by petty concerns and immediate desires, not grand ambitions or heroic impulses. Certainly, they struggle and scheme, knowing that it is better to be the swindler than the swindled. When things go awry, they may complain and cavil. But the ultimate defining attitude of the Dying Earth's people is resignation to the inevitability of doom. How can one claim to be a master of one's own fate when the sun is due to wink out any day now?

This, of course, is completely at odds with many of our own assumptions as Westerners at the dawn of the 21st century. We might find it hard, in certain situations, to consistently emulate this resignation. There are times when you won't want Temptation to take control of your character. This section offers options for use in those extreme situations.

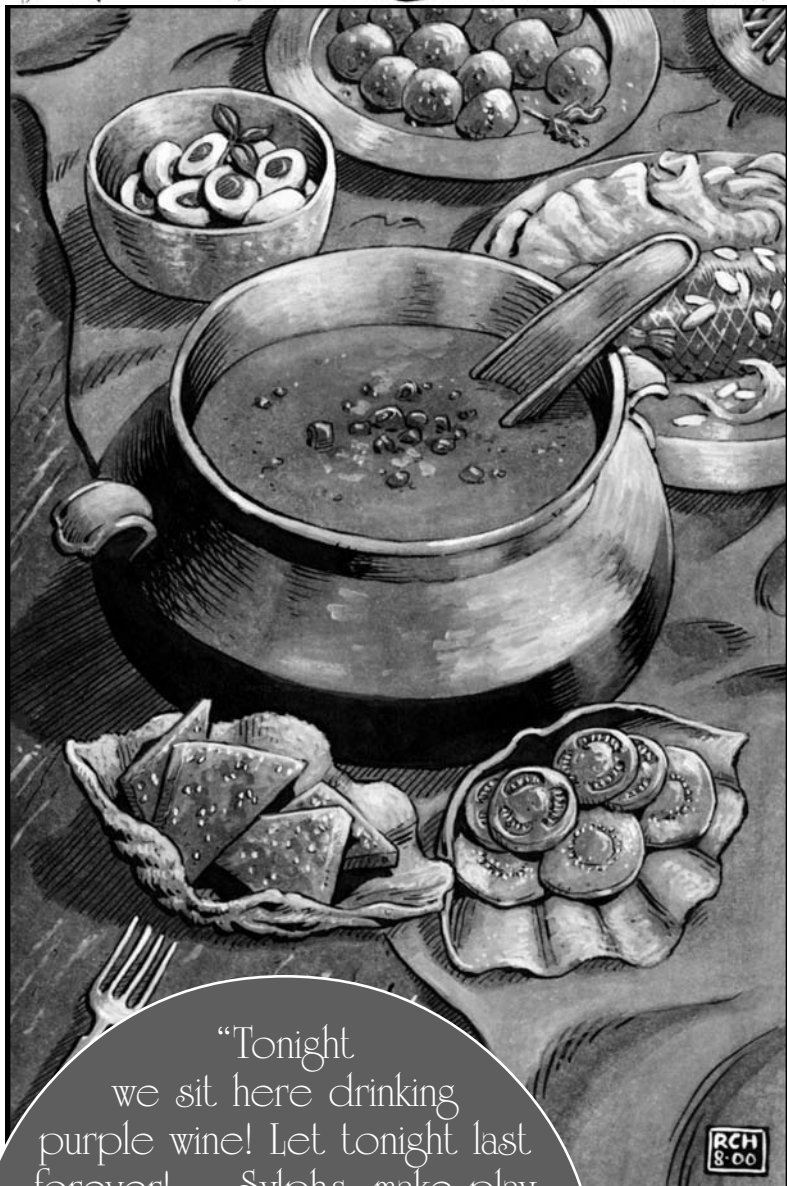
**Spend points:** You may spend 4 points from your relevant Temptation Resistance or from Rebuff (or any combination thereof) to ignore the effect of a lost Temptation roll.

**Suffer distraction:** You suffer a levy of 1 on all actions, which lasts until you next refresh the relevant Temptation Resistance. In a great eruption of self-discipline, your character has turned his back on temptation. But he can't stop thinking about it, so much so that he can't fully concentrate on any other activity. Your GM may suspend the levy in situations when the character knows that his very survival rests on his ability to concentrate. However, when the immediate threat has passed, he returns to his obsessive thoughts of opportunity lost.

**Defer indulgence:** You may avoid the present temptation, but suffer an automatic Dismal Failure the next time you encounter a similar one.







“Tonight  
we sit here drinking  
purple wine! Let tonight last  
forever! ... Sylphs, make play  
with the decanters! Once again  
to the goblets! Bazzard, have you  
tried this excellent cheese?  
Vasker: another anchovy?  
Let the feast proceed!”

*Cugel's Saga,*  
Chapter 6

## Chapter 9:

# GM Tips

This recipe of exemplary  
story ingredients inspires a  
rich menu of adventuring  
possibilities

### Your First Session

**T**his chapter begins with basic advice for novice GMs, especially those who haven't played a roleplaying game before. Experienced GMs can skip ahead to the next section, “Creating Adventures.”

✱ The art of game moderating is best learned through experience. You may be lucky enough to know people who already roleplay. Perhaps you've played other roleplaying games yourself, and simply aim to make *The Dying Earth* the first game you'll actually GM. But it is also possible that you picked up this game because you like Jack Vance's fiction, and want to use it as both your introduction to roleplaying and to game moderation. After all, everyone starts somewhere. ✱ Game moderating is better explained through example than through abstract description. So, before we get to general game moderation tips, look at a brief example of what roleplaying entails.



## Example of Play

You prepare for your first session by thoroughly reading the rules. You will be playing the introductory adventure in Chapter 13, “The Cooks of Cuirnif.” You read the adventure, jotting down a few brief notes to remind you of its contents. The appointed time for the game rolls around, and your players arrive. You chat for a while until everyone gathers. Then you walk them through character creation, answering any questions they have about the rules.

When everyone has finished character creation, you ask them to name and describe their characters. Write down a list of players and their character names, which you can refer to during play. The adventure tells you what the PCs are doing during its first scene. You describe this to the players. “You were traveling together in the wilderness of Almerly when bandits set upon you and robbed you of all of your money. Luckily, none of you were seriously hurt, and you managed to run off before they stripped you of your boots or weapons.” The adventure suggests that you ask the players to explain why their PCs might have been traveling together, which you do.

Paul asks you a question: “How dangerous are the woods around here?” (One of your jobs is to explain the world to the players.)

“Very dangerous. They’re infested with terrible predatory creatures. Few people travel alone if they can help it.”

“Well then,” Paul says, “We probably met at an inn frequented by travelers, and decided to band together for safety.”

“We weren’t safe from those bandits,” another player, Mark, grumbles.

“I beg to differ!” Paul says, dropping into character. “Were it not for the many fine spells I wield, those bandits would surely have taken our boots, too, and possibly sold us into slavery.”

(Note that the other players didn’t have to accept Paul’s suggestion as to why they’re traveling together. But by picking up on the cue and continuing with the story, they’ve obviously tacitly agreed with him.)

Troy, Alex, Rob, and Dan, your other players, also start speaking in character, each of them taking credit for having run off the bandits.

You sense a pause coming as they run out of witty things to say, so you describe the countryside to them: “You’re traveling south. You’ve left an area of rocky terrain with scrubby vegetation and have entered an area of well-tended farms.”

“Do any of us know the area?” Dan asks.

You don’t know whether his character does or doesn’t, so you decide to consult the rules. “Does your character have an ability that would allow him to know the area?”

Dan isn’t sure which ability might apply, so you must help him interpret the rules. You look at the list of abilities in Chapter 4 and figure that three skills might provide knowledge of local geography: Pedantry (book knowledge), Living Rough (familiarity with the wilderness), or Scuttlebutt (rumors and local news). You ask Dan if he has any of these abilities. His character has Living Rough, which you tell him to roll. He gets a Hair’s-Breadth Success. He chooses not to reroll, conserving his points for later in the session.

It’s up to you to decide exactly what a Hair’s-Breadth Success means in the context of his desire to know the local area. You figure that he knows the name of the next town (Cuirnif) and nothing else.

Mark then asks if he can try his Scuttlebutt. He gets a Dismal Failure. Again, you must decide exactly what this means. He should believe information which is not just wrong but disastrous if followed. So, having read the adventure and knowing that the Duke drops impertinent individuals into gigantic punishment tubes, you tell Mark that his character knows Cuirnif as a place where kindly Duke Orbal insists on being addressed informally and with maximum possible frankness.

No one else asks to do anything, so you advance the story, telling them that they’re arriving in town. You begin to describe the place to them.

And your first session continues...

## Advice For the Novice GM

So that’s how game moderation works. You answer questions, describe the world and its inhabitants, make rules decisions and, when the players run out of things to ask or do, continue narrating, moving the story along.

Now for the general advice we promised.

## Trust Your Creativity

If you’re feeling a sense of trepidation about your first session, our first and most important piece of advice is to relax. Let yourself **trust your imagination and your ability to think on your feet**. You may not know it, but your brain is already a catalogue of storytelling techniques just waiting to be tapped. We’re betting that you’ve read plenty of fiction, in and outside of the fantasy genre. If you’re a typical member of modern society, you’ve also spent countless hours absorbing television shows and movies. Though you probably weren’t consciously analyzing these stories for their pacing, characterization,

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**moving the story along:** Sometimes you will want to move the story forward even when the players still have things they want to do. This happens when they’re under time pressure and can’t attempt all the actions they’d like.







plot devices, and sense of atmosphere, they're all rolling around in your subconscious nonetheless, waiting for you to retrieve them during play.

## Fun Coordination

Your main job as game moderator is to present a basic situation to your players, ask them what they want their characters to do, and react accordingly. When the outcome of a given action is in doubt, use the appropriate die roll to find out what happens. When the players seem bored, introduce a new plot development to jump-start the pace. When they're having a grand old time interacting together in character, just sit back and watch. In short, another name for game moderator could be Fun Coordinator. **Your first duty is to make sure that everyone is having fun.** All your other duties as GM are in service to this goal. If everybody's having fun, you're doing a great job.

## Rules Interpretation

When a question comes up about the rules, you're the supreme court. You decide which interpretation holds. Depend on your common sense. Some players may try to treat this rulebook as some kind of inviolable law code, and try to convince you to allow actions which defy common sense or story logic by making overly literal interpretations of one rule or another. Gently mock them when they try this on you, and instead **make the choices that allow for the most entertaining story.**

Feel free to adjust the rules to streamline play. You might, for example, choose to represent a truculent crowd as one entity with a single Rebuff score, if it makes matters simpler for you. You don't need to write out full game statistics for GMCs until you need them. Provided that the results don't make things harder for the PCs (at least, not so they'd notice), the fun of the moment is more important than a literal-minded adherence to rules for their own sake.

## Spotlight Allocation

Some players are more naturally extroverted than others. One of your jobs is to **see that all players get a roughly equal chance to do things** in the course of a session. You may need to politely shush over-eager players, and actively ask the more quiet ones what they want to do. You can't achieve perfect balance. Over-eager sorts will find it hard to restrain their urge to interject. Some shy players are actually more comfortable taking a lesser role. They may be enjoying themselves immensely, despite their lack of any signal to that effect.

## Pacing Management

**Keep the game exciting by skipping past the boring bits.** When Cugel goes on a long journey, Jack Vance sometimes covers entire days in a line or two of text.



## Maintaining Tone

Another important game moderator job is **maintaining the atmosphere of setting and story.** An adventure set in the Dying

Earth should feel like the original Vance stories.

For example, the world of the 21st Aeon is unimaginably remote from our own time. Across the countless millennia, not the tiniest shreds of our own history or culture have survived. So basing an adventure directly on some current movie, or drawing taglines from the latest hit TV series, could detract from the setting's air of remoteness. Certainly it's your game, and you can draw inspiration from any source you like if you think the players will enjoy it. But by altering the tone of your game, you may threaten the distinctive qualities that make the setting uniquely interesting.

Again, though, you're in charge; the Pelgrane Press Roleplaying Police are specifically enjoined against interference with your plots. Always choose what you think would best entertain your group.

He describes only the interesting parts of Cugel's travels, not making us live through the arduous, uneventful journey in what seems like real time. You, too, should skip forward in time to the next interesting event, rather than asking the players to exhaustively describe their characters' activities during uneventful times. Of course, if a player wishes his character to do something specific during one of these time breaks, always let him.

Keep an eye on the clock. Know approximately when your session is about to end. Try to pace your session's events to allow for some kind of climactic event during the final hour or so. The climaxes of Vance's stories are rarely fights. They're more often humorous revelations, flights from justice, or eruptions of chaos.

## Supporting Cast

As GM, you **take on the roles of the various GMCs** the PCs interact with. This is a little easier in *The Dying Earth* than in other games, because almost all characters you portray will speak in the distinctive pettifogging lingo of the setting, and share the same basic, selfish motivations. Prepare for each session by reading a few passages of dialogue from one of the stories. Soon you'll be able to improvise Vancian dialogue as a matter of course.





## Adventure Checklist

- Odd Customs
- Crafty Swindles
- Heated Protests and Presumptuous Claims
- Casual Cruelty
- Weird Magic
- Strange Vistas
- Ruined Wonders
- Exotic Food
- Foppish Apparel

## Adventure Creator

Another of your major duties is to **create adventures**. The following advice is intended for experienced as well as neophyte GMs.

## Creating Adventures

Certain common themes, images, and plot elements recur throughout the Dying Earth stories. Use the [adventure checklist](#) above to ensure that your adventures contain these distinctive recurring elements. See to it that each adventure includes most, if not all, of these elements.

## Odd Customs

*The people of ruined Ampridatvir, divided into two groups, suffer under a curse. The gray-clad folk can't perceive the green-cloaked people, and vice versa; each group thinks that the others are demons or ghosts.*

*In "The Overworld," Cugel finds a village where the hideous inhabitants dwell in squalor; yet, wearing magical lenses that let them see into another reality of unparalleled splendor; believe themselves to be nobles living in absolute luxury.*

*In "Pharesm the Sorcerer," Cugel considers taking employment among a colony of sculptors, all of whom craft, to exacting specifications, a series of elaborate rock carvings. They are paid by the sorcerer Pharesm, who hopes that the sculptures' arcane angles will summon a creature which is the living incarnation of TOTALITY.*

Many Dying Earth stories revolve around a closed community, which may be either a small settlement or an isolated workplace. In its isolation, it has developed its own highly structured, sometimes legalistic, always peculiar rules. Without outside interference, and with the stout enforcement of its codes, the group has survived for a long time. When the protagonist arrives, the locals try to enforce these rules upon him, assimilating him into their bizarre system. Instead, the hero, acting out of selfishness, ignorance, or both, takes action which utterly disrupts the delicately-balanced harmony of the community. Although his attempts to take advantage of his hosts (or captors) rarely grants him any lasting satisfaction, he does manage to escape as the community, the basis of its rules destroyed, collapses.

When creating an adventure, dream up a bizarre rule or activity on which a community's existence depends. Figure out at least one way in which the PCs could wreak havoc on the community by disrupting the activity or subverting the rule.

Then create a reason for the PCs to do so. The best way to motivate PCs is by playing on their temptations. The possibility of easily-gotten wealth is always a reliable source of motivation, especially for those prone to avarice. The community's rules may have an item of wealth the PCs might covet. Pompous or forbidding community leaders may attempt to enforce their absurd rules on the PCs. They might subject them to swindles forcing them to act as scapegoats or martyrs to their codes' harsher strictures. Characters suffering from arrogance will find it hard to resist the chance to avenge these assaults on their dignity. A pretty face among the crowd might ensnare the rakish. The lure of a cushy position might draw in the indolent.

Finally, you need a force to oppose the PCs' efforts as they work, consciously or otherwise, to undermine the community's stability. The most obvious choice is a village headman or miserly employer. The more pompous and absurd he is, the greater the indignities he heaps on the PCs, the more intensely the players will enjoy the disintegration of all he has worked for and believes in.

**adventure worksheet:** You can also download the Adventure Checklist, ornamented with check boxes and similar fripperies, as a free file from [www.dyingearth.com](http://www.dyingearth.com).







Drunk! On three draughts of this pallid Tatterbliss!  
I have swallowed rain-water of greater force.

## Crafty Swindles

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*In "Guyal of Sfere," the hero encounters an old man in a cavern, attended by a young woman. She tries to coax Guyal into joining the her uncle's frenzied flute-playing. Although he refuses, it seems clear that, had he agreed, that Guyal would have been magically cursed into playing on it until he could swindle some other unfortunate into taking his place.*

*Later in the same tale, Guyal finds himself in the city of the Saponids. They welcome him, but warn him that he cannot break their sacred rule, and trespass on the grassy area between paths. After he agrees to this stipulation, they promptly arrange for a large and fearsome creature to startle him, so that he trespasses on the commons. They are then able to sentence him to undertake a dangerous journey on their behalf.*

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As you might have surmised from the prominence given to the Persuasion rules, the negotiation of arrangements and deals is central to *The Dying Earth* game. You can count on your PCs to use their abilities to sway the GMCs into various deals completely contrary to their interests. Naturally, it is only fair that the GMCs should try to do the same to the PCs.

Sometimes a swindle might form the heart of a story—or at least the motivation leading the PCs to engage in the central conflict. They might be fooled into hunting down a ferocious creature that threatens a town's survival. The PCs might be inveigled into presenting themselves as a sacrifice to a stray god or hungry demon. Other deceptions might send them on pilgrimages, cause them to submit to indentured labor, or dispatch them in search of non-existent treasures.

In this case, you need to figure out the nature of the swindle, the identity of the swindler, and the dangerous situation it will lead to. You'll also need to stack the deck, creating a situation where the swindler can believably wield a fat handful of boons when persuading the target PC. *Dying Earth* players should expect to be scammed, but they'll want you to display polite effort to make their misfortune plausible. Note also that any satisfying fraud story provides a means for the PCs to out-swindle their swindlers in the end. As you create the adventure, think of at least one way they can do this. Although you should make it possible for them to succeed by other means, doing so ensures they have at least one route to victory.

Swindles should occur even when they aren't central to the story. Always prepare two or three incidental swindles which the PCs might face in the course of the adventure. You need only jot down a line or two, noting

the name of the character, his Persuasion and Rebuff abilities (which imply his personality) and the nature of the scam he'll attempt. Potential swindlers include merchants, inn-keepers, street merchants, sages, oracles, even creatures.

## Heated Protests and Presumptuous Claims

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*In "The Overworld," Cugel poses as the next rightful recipient of the magical lenses mentioned above. This imposture provokes the outraged protests of the real recipient, and of the others who toil for years in anticipation of the day when they too will be able to perceive the Overworld. Their violent threats pose an obstacle to Cugel's desired exit from the village of Smolod.*

*In "Morreion," an archvult, a known enemy of the conclave of mages, is captured by one of their number. Yet he calmly asserts his desire to join their coterie, and pronounces the nooses that bind him to be humiliating.*

*In "The Murthe," the magician Zilifant, his voice croaking with anger, blames Rbialto for summoning floating plasms that destroyed his grove of wondrous trees.*

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Not every denizen of the Dying Earth the PCs encounter will be a born swindler. Even as the sun dims and the world is increasingly given over to scoundrels and self-seekers, there are people of unswerving probity who, for reasons religious or ethical, do not deign to lower themselves in such a fashion. However, there is virtually no one, honest or venal, who is above launching a heated protest to claim damages real, exaggerated, or imaginary. The PCs should frequently be confronted with such demands. Sometimes accusations against them will be entirely justified. Other times, they'll be the victims of mischievous third parties seeking to frame them. In yet a third category of confrontation, they'll face claims which are at best flimsy and presumptuous.

Scenes of heated protest rarely drive the plot. However, as motivators for individual scenes, they superbly capture the ethos of the Dying Earth. For each adventure, think up two or three circumstances in which the PCs are likely to face others' strongly-worded grievances. You can fully describe the likely confrontations, as they'd appear in a published adventure, or simply dash down a line or





two. Consider the nature of the claim, and determine the protesting character's Persuasion and Rebuff ratings. Envision the overweening price the complainant will exact from the PCs if he wins the Persuasion attempt.

## Casual Cruelty

*T'Sais, a vat-grown woman incapable of knowing beauty, comes to the Dying Earth. The first three men she meets are ruffians who savagely beat her. She is able to save herself from rape only when they fall to fighting among themselves, allowing her the opportunity to reach her magical rapier. ("T'Sais," in The Dying Earth.)*

*In "Cil," Cugel encounters a group of shell-dwelling mollusk creatures. One of them mocks him by giving him a shirt that turns to water. Cugel picks up the creature and dashes him on the rocks, shattering his shell and sealing his doom. Dying, the creature bemoans Cugel's disproportionate response, but Cugel shows no remorse.*

*Trapped in a cavern by rat creatures and forced to attract other victims in exchange for his freedom, Cugel lures in the daughter of Fabeln, a fellow prisoner. Although the girl's own father intends to use her in the same way, Cugel's actions are no less shocking. After ill-treatment by the rat-folk, the girl is left catatonic and bruised. Cugel finds her not uncomely and begins to snuggle next to her, only to be driven back by the smell. Cugel and a third prisoner, a wizard, escape at the end of the story. He moves towards the girl, who, still speechless, hides behind a rock. Cugel's actions are not those of a hero; nor is this the typical adventure ending, in which the endangered maiden swoons in the protagonist's arms, having escaped largely unscathed from the villain's clutches. ("The Cave in the Forest," in The Eyes of the Overworld.)*

Interwoven with the drollery and wonder of the Dying Earth stories is a black streak reflecting man's seemingly eternal inhumanity to man. As Jonathan Swift does in Gulliver's Travels, Jack Vance draws in the reader with an engaging adventure set in a fantastical world in order to draw our attention to satirical observations of deadly seriousness. The stories' scenes of swindles, arguments,

and pettifoggery represent the charming side of Vance's portrait of human selfishness, pomposity and cupidity. Yet every so often he confronts us head-on with the world's harsher realities. You can tell yourself Vance means that only his imaginary world is cruel, if you find the thought comforting. However, we know that writers of fantastic worlds almost invariably use indirection to portray our own.

The question of how emphatically you should strike this note in your own games is difficult. It is shocking enough to see the protagonist of a story behave in a cruel and callous manner. To have players vicariously engaging in similar behavior might strike too sour a note. Even in other roleplaying games that supposedly portray a cut-and-dried moral universe of golden heroes and irredeemable villains, players too often adopt the jarring amorality of a... well, a Dying Earth character. You may be tired of this sort of thing already, and not wish to play a game that seems to validate it.

Then again, it would be whitewashing the source material never to acknowledge its dark streak. The trick is always to keep in mind the higher intentions behind it. We, as readers, are meant to be shocked by its cynicism. If the players in your game treat the callousness of their characters as a joke, rather than as a reflection of unpleasant truths, it's time to haul out the rules of Underlying Justice, given later in this chapter.

If, however, your players react to the occasional dark moment with the appropriate queasiness, you can feel comfortable inserting such a scene every so often. As you control GMCs, not PCs, it is the actions of supporting characters you'll be portraying as callous and cruel. Perhaps the PCs will be motivated to a degree of altruism unusual on the Dying Earth, and seek to punish their excesses.

Scenes of cruelty are only shocking when sparingly deployed. Insert them perhaps once in every three or four episodes. In order to set up such a scene, you should establish the nature of the cruelty, and what means you'll use to make the players react emotionally to it. Although their characters, if played in the strict spirit of the setting, may not care much as to the fate of the people they meet, the players should still do so. We modern Westerners expect life to be fair, at least in our fiction. Play on this expectation. Suggest harrowing situations, rather than having them occur in full view of the characters, complete with exhaustive description. Allow the imaginations of the players to fill in the horrifying details. A successful scene of this sort will nag at them after the game, as they begin to think more fully on its implications.

## Weird Magic

*In "Mazirian the Magician," the title character owns a gong; each time he bangs on it, he lessens the lifespan of a rival magician.*





The creature displayed qualities reminiscent of both coelenterate and echinoderm. A terrene nudibranch? A mollusc deprived of its shell? More importantly, was the creature edible?



*Far outside Azenomei, Arbenabim the Thoughtful approaches an abandoned manse reputed to hold a copy of the Charm of Forlorn Encystment. Certain portents have convinced Arbenabim that the manse now harbors an infestation of lesser dementals from the demon-world La-Er—minor madlings listed as 122-16 Red in Thrump's Almanac. Such footling obstacles cannot stop an earnest student!*



*In "Liane the Wayfarer," a magician entertains fellow inn guests by laying out glittering dust on a silver tray, and using a whistle to make it rise into the air in time with the music.*

In the Dying Earth stories, magic is much more than just a source of cool powers for the characters to wield. Some of the most memorable passages describe magical items or effects that have no great bearing on the story. They're included for their own sake, to provide an atmosphere of otherworldly wonder. Magic should never seem mundane in your games. It is not a technology to be casually controlled as one would flick on a garage-door opener. To keep your players from getting jaded about magic, be sure to create your own evocative descriptions of magical devices and effects. You don't necessarily need to know exactly where in the story they'll pop up. Just jot down a few key phrases in your notes or on an index card. Then slip into the story at an appropriate moment, when one occurs. The characters should be perpetually encountering magicians ranging in power from Dabbler to Arch-Magician. Such individuals routinely evoke sublime effects simply to show off their skill. Many spells have no practical purpose other than as demonstrations of ability.

Here are a few sample images to get you started. Similar lists will appear in future *Dying Earth* products. Although all of us get stuck for inspiration from time to time, it is, of course, more fun to create your own.

- A crumbling stone cross stands by a ruined roadway. When approached from the east, it begins to whistle and shake.
- A crystal head rescued from an ancient temple to a now-forgotten god occasionally chants in an unknown tongue.
- A floating chariot seems to have been made from a giant's jawbone.
- A former freebooter suffers a curse. Whenever he becomes drunk, his soul visibly tries to leave his body. He then struggles to physically restrain it, forcing it back inside himself.
- The PCs are shown a magical bookshelf. If one places a hand in front of any book's spine, the book loudly recites its contents, in a loud voice utterly free of inflection or rhythm.
- A man wears a set of boots shaped like dragons, which he cannot remove. Occasionally the dragons' jaws, at the toes of each boot, snap open and hiss, much to the wearer's agony.





## GM Tips

- A mountebank shows off a miniature, translucent tree. When its roots are dangled into a libation, it drinks, taking on the beverage's coloration.
- A sorceress' unhappily married, pretty-faced husband is chaperoned by an ivory doll which follows him on his travels when he's out of her presence. When he is too attentive to other women, the doll opens its mouth to reveal a set of gnashing metal blades.
- The PCs find ancient coins made of unmeltable ice.
- A kitchen contains cursed pots and pans that clatter together if no one is looking.
- In a tavern, a magician animates a battalion of salt-shakers to wage war with a competing army of pepper-grinders.

Although these images usually provide only atmosphere, a magical manifestation can sometimes drive the plot. The pursuit of a magical item is a perennial plot hook, motivating the action in stories like "The Overworld," "Fader's Waft," and "Flutic." Give the PCs a greater reason to seek an item than the casual desire to possess it. They might be coerced to retrieve it, need it to prove their innocence, or seek it as a means of entry into an enemy's domain.

## Strange Vistas

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*Turjan of Miir, in the story that bears his name, visits Embelyon, a peculiar reality where the trees and horizon are blurry, and the sky is patterned in rippling light.*

*In "Pharesm the Sorcerer," Cugel is sent back in time to a place where robed Winged Beings with bug-like exoskeletons periodically swoop down on area inhabitants, taking them up into the sky, where they are never seen again. The locals view this not as predation, but the normal means by which the dying are removed to the next plane of existence.*

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Almost all Dying Earth stories concern explorations of unknown territory. In the Dying Earth, few people know much about the lands even a month's travel from their homes. Many communities have grown up in isolation from one another, rarely encountering strangers. Any journey outside the immediate area of Ascolais and Almerý is by definition a journey into the unknown.

Moreover, any Arch-Magician worthy of the name enjoys the ability to travel back in time or to other dimensions, and to send others in either direction. The PCs should often take trips to places far afield from the Dying Earth, where customs are more peculiar and the landscapes even bizarre. Keep in mind that none of the characters in the books go back to periods in time like our own. It would break the spell to have the PCs appear in modern New York, ancient Rome, or any place or time that references anything outside the world of Vance. Note also that human nature remains the same wherever and whenever the PCs go: people still speak with an elaborate formality which expresses their cunning and selfishness. However, the landscapes and creatures encountered can be as alien as you can imagine.

## Ruined Wonders

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*In the ancient city of Ampridatvir, Ulan Dbor discovers wondrous artifacts of forgotten technology, including an automated walkway and cars that fly through the air.*

*Guyal's journey takes him to a vast museum at the end of the earth, where a host of demons, once securely bound into an exhibit, threaten to break free.*

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The civilizations of the Dying Earth are faded shadows of their past counterparts. The crumbled, buried remnants of countless eras of human achievement dot its surface, of interest only to scholars, salvagers, and treasure-seekers. Their still-extant buildings may be inhabited by folk still making a primitive living in the area, indifferent to past glories. Just as likely, they're haunted by supernatural beings or patrolled by hungry half-men. Whether they're plumbing the depths of old ruins in search of wondrous artifacts, or merely passing by on their journeys through uncharted territories, you should see to it that PCs regularly find themselves visiting such ruins.

## Exotic Food

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*The eponymous anti-hero of "Liane the Wayfarer," at an inn far from his home, orders a supper of mushrooms, wine and oysters. He pays for it with bartered spice: "the ground buds of the spase-bush."*

*During a visit to a previous aeon, Rbialto dines on melon and fried dumplings in rose syrup.*

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An exactitude of consequence must prevail. It is an unthinkable discrepancy that fifty-four men should consume the food intended for fifty-three.

The stories frequently make reference to exotic foods consumed by the characters. Although it is hard to think of stories that revolve around food, you should periodically remind the players that they're in Vance territory by describing viands of an esoteric tang. As with the images of wondrous magical effects, you can simply jot these down in your notes or on index cards without pre-planning the exact scenes in which they'll appear. Simply keep the descriptions at hand and wait for an appropriate moment for the serving of an outlandish meal.

Here are a few descriptions to use when gourmet inspiration fails you.

- ✿ A cereal of nuts and grains, fermented in the stomach of a gree-bird.
- ✿ A glass of the finest Mendolence.
- ✿ Braised shank of the cloven-hoofed yerbo, smothered in white sauce and garnished with teb nuts.
- ✿ Dancing mushrooms, served lively, then doused in blue flame and cooked over the acrid twigs of the udar bush.
- ✿ Hag apples, swamp lemons, and sour-crust bread.
- ✿ Medallions of asm liver, wrapped in buttered lake-weed and marinated in the berries of the qualnip tree.
- ✿ Spiced sausage, leeks, wild rice, and a garnish of root sage, served with cold dwel-beer.
- ✿ Spiced tea-cake in a chambrerry coulis, with dried fruits and sugared nuts.

Alas, adventurers roughing it in the uncharted wilds of the Dying Earth will often eat meager, unappetizing, or indubitably unwholesome meals. Throughout *The Eyes of the Overworld*, Cugel is forced to use an amulet that makes any substance touched to it nutritious—without altering its flavor. Cugel consumes such insalubrious morsels as spurge, cullion, blackwort, oak twigs, galls, unspecified refuse, and the creature called TOTALITY. Other meals sure to torment gourmands in the PCs' ranks include:

- ✿ A bowl of unidentified viscera, cooked rare.
- ✿ An anthill-sized serving of rice, accompanied by a single, lonely leek.
- ✿ Braised oast.
- ✿ Bread crusts spackled with molds in a variety of greens and blues.
- ✿ Coarse bread with pickled acorns.
- ✿ Cold porridge, gleaming with dots of rancid fat.
- ✿ Salted fish heads garnished with boiled grass.

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**stories that revolve around food:** Although, come to think of it, the PCs could be sent off in search of a fabulous ingredient by a wealthy grandee or coercive Arch-Magician...

**braised oast:** Though undoubtedly appetizing to those unappreciative of the true nature of roast oast, those who know the creature to be a large, dim-witted, blue-skinned humanoid surely recoil from such a meal.

## Foppish Apparel

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*Attending a ball where he hopes to make romantic conquests, the magician Ildefonse chooses "to appear as a stalwart young bravo with golden curls falling past his ears, a fine golden moustache, and a manner both hearty and large." He wears "a suit of green velvet, a dark green and gold sash, and a dashing wide-brimmed hat with a white plume."*

*In "The Bagful of Dreams" Duke Orbal arrives to adjudicate a competition of wonders in which Cugel intends to compete. He wears "a splendid robe of magenta plush trimmed with white feathers, and a hat of pale blue velvet three feet in diameter, with silver tassels around the brim and a cockade of silver puff."*

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The PCs should frequently encounter village headmen, government officials, and proud merchants decked out in clothing of absurd fashionability. When attending social events or seeking to impress the objects of their romantic desire, they should wish to equip themselves with the most elaborate, up-to-date finery their purses will allow. Accordingly, you should prepare for any adventure by creating a few descriptions of outlandish apparel to use as the need arises.

Here are a few descriptions to get you started.

- ✿ A conical hat with three small parallel brims.
- ✿ A false moustache and goatee, made of platinum and bedecked with beads of red and blue glass, attached to the chin by means of a strap.
- ✿ A helmet made from the preserved head of a rock goblin, its features frozen into permanent rictus. To reduce the piece's alarming impact during merry occasions, the goblin's head is encircled with dried flowers.
- ✿ An ankle-length robe embroidered with designs of leaping fish, trimmed in gold and silver braid.
- ✿ A long-tailed coat striped in vermilion and puce, with feathered lapels.
- ✿ A reversible cape, with lush purple fur on one side and a tartan of bewildering aspect on the other.
- ✿ Boots with toes of translucent material, allowing admirers to view the elaborate miniature portraits on one's toenails, inscribed with paint and wax.
- ✿ Fishnet leggings, adorned with alternating bells and pompoms.



## An Example of Adventure Creation

**You decide to start your first adventure with an Odd Custom. A week**

ago, watching a historical documentary on the English monarchy, you learned the story of a king who had to hide in an oak tree from his enemies. The locals used a nut-hook to pass his victuals up to him.

This detail struck you as in some way Vancian. To convert it into the kernel of a *Dying Earth* adventure, you imagine an isolated village that, countless centuries ago, had its pivotal moment in history when it protected a king by hiding him in a tree. This legend spawned a curious custom. The village chooses its headman through an endurance contest, in which the contestant who stays longest in an oak tree gains the title, the village's richest lands, a fine herd of beasts, custody of fabulous treasures, and rights of summary justice over his fellow villagers.

You need a reason for the PCs to visit the village. You seize on the **Weird Magic** category. In the opening scenes, they will inadvertently cause great offense to a traveling Arch-Magician, who curses one of them with the terrible spell called the Deplorable Temporal Disharmonization. You decide that the spell slows down time for the victim, but not for those around him. He can only move, think, and speak at one one-thousandth normal speed. The speaking of a single paragraph can take him an entire day. (Luckily, you know that one of the players will be absent for the upcoming session, so you can freely use his character without dooming him to an evening of inactivity. Playing his character, you can easily arrange for him to offend the magician.) The magician agrees to lift the spell only if the other PCs retrieve an enchanted item for him: Glimspere's Fungible Choke-Pear, a torture device that cows unruly sandestins. When its victim transforms, it alters its size and shape to compensate.

To complete your plot hook, the magician will tell the PCs that Glimspere's Fungible Choke-Pear was last reported in the collection of Fimsol the Bare-headed, a scholar from the village of Onest. Onest is, naturally, the place with the custom of electing its leaders through prolonged tree-sitting. When the PCs get to Onest, they'll find that the only man who knows the whereabouts of the Choke-Pear is Fimsol's descendant, Solfim. Solfim is a contestant, and will only aid the PCs if they help him by undermining his rivals' efforts. They are just as likely, you realize, to seek Solfim's speedy exit from his tree, so that they can follow him to the Pear's hiding place, or coerce him into telling them where to look.

If they play honestly, the families of Solfim's rivals look askance on outsiders. When the PCs act to aid Solfim, the families will arrive to deliver **Heated Protests** and lodge **Presumptuous Claims** for compensation.

You need some **Crafty Swindles**, so you decide that locals without a stake in the contest will do their best to bilk the PCs, charging them outrageously for poor hospitality. This puts you in mind of **Exotic Food** and its wretched counterpart. The locals make a great show of filling the food-boxes sent up to the tree-sitters with sumptuous repasts indicative of wealth and status. You jot down some descriptive notes:

- The intoxicating aroma of pan-fried barge-eel, sizzled in tangy spices.
- Great flagons of ice-cold Mnutocaster, with the distinctive odor of slightly overripe fruit.
- Steaming pockets of marsh rice, folded into the fragrant petals of the monstrous twell-flower.

No matter what they order, however, the PCs receive meals of surpassing noxiousness:

- Wiry hunks of cold eel, festooned with gobbets of congealed fat.
- Tepid, diluted draughts of Mnutocaster.
- Pungent boar tripe intermixed with half-cooked rice, wrapped in ant-infested twell-petals.

Moving on to **Ruined Wonders**, you decide that Solfim has hidden his forebear's collection of wonders in some old ruins in the deep forest. The items are in a well. If you need to add some excitement at the end, you can have the well inhabited by a grue or other fearsome creature.

Not every story need contain absolutely every element. You decide to leave the **Casual Cruelty** for another time. Likewise, there is no room in your story for a **Strange Vista**, so you leave that box unchecked, too.

This leaves **Foppish Apparel**. Clearly the contestants in the trees must wear ceremonial apparel. You decide that they'll be forced to wear oversized masks approximating the features of the long-forgotten original tree-inhabiting monarch. They can neither see properly nor eat large morsels of food. They wear long robes of bright green silk, meant to simultaneously show off and maintain a semblance of camouflage. These trail down from the trees, and might be yanked by ill-wishers. Dour family members patrol the tree trunks to prevent indignities.

Now you have a basic problem for the PCs, obstacles for them to overcome, and memorable details to wrap them up in. You can write out a more codified set of notes on the plotline if you want. You should definitely establish game statistics for the major characters.

You're ready to play.



The merrymaking waxed apace, and after many toasts, Cugel became a trifle fuddled, and was carried up to his chamber.



## Creating Characters

In the Dying Earth books, Jack Vance slyly turns many of our preconceptions about good characterization on their heads. Any creative writing instructor will tell you that it is desirable to create characters who are markedly different from one another, and whose differences are seen in their speech patterns and behavior. But one of the hallmarks of the Dying Earth is that the vast majority of characters speak and act in the same way. Characters use dense, elaborately formal language as a smokescreen, which tries (often in vain) to disguise their greed, chicanery, and self-concern. This behavior is not a feature merely of the waning days of civilization: Characters act and talk the same way in the far past and in alternate realities. Nor is it confined to humanity; archvults, deodands and pelgranes differ from full humans only by degree of rapacity. This is not a work of literary criticism, so we'll stop short of analyzing what it is we think Vance is saying about humanity.

For your purposes, though, note that many of the assumptions of so-called sophisticated roleplaying should be gleefully discarded when creating Dying Earth characters. Do not write lengthy histories for the characters. Discard complex motivations. Angst-ridden characters scarred by past traumas, childhood or otherwise, have no place here.

On a more mathematical note, never bother to use the character creation system in Chapter 2 for GMCs. A game moderator character has whatever abilities you need him to have for story purposes. Just plunk down whatever game statistics suit you. If, in the course of play, it occurs to you that an ability is missing, go ahead and add it. Just don't let the players know you're playing fast and loose with the elements of their fictional reality.





## Improvising

Many experienced GMs, instead of preparing a fully-fleshed adventure as seen in Chapter 13, prefer to improvise, based on a few vague ideas. The advantages of improvisation are twofold. First, it's a time-saver. Instead of spending hours making notes, you can dream up a basic idea a few minutes before your players arrive. Second, an improvised adventure allows you to more fully incorporate the actions of the PCs into the storyline. You won't have to continually introduce plot contrivances to keep them from straying from the planned narrative. Instead, you find out what the PCs wish to do and then place obstacles in their path. The closer to the climax of the story, the more difficult those obstacles become. The resulting story might be more ragged than a predetermined plot, but it makes the players feel more like partners in its creation, countering any dissatisfaction they might feel about dropped plot threads or odd pacing.

The disadvantage of improvisation is that it requires a talent for quick thinking. We like to believe that everyone is secretly creative and can improvise well, if only they'll relax, show confidence, and trust themselves. However, we also recognize that this is more easily said than done for some GMs, who prefer the security of a predetermined structure to the uncertainty of improvisation.

Those who do choose to improvise can use the adventure checklist as a tool. In place of your full adventure notes, just jot down a phrase or two for each element.

The truly daring can start with nothing more than a premise. When taking this approach, you keep a blank checklist in front of you. When stuck for a plot development, glance at the worksheet to see which element you've so far neglected to introduce. Then let that serve as inspiration. By the time you've filled in the worksheet, you'll no doubt have the story rolling and need no input other than that offered by the PCs' actions.

Never let your players know the extent to which you're improvising. Curiously, some players find it harder to suspend disbelief if they think you're just making it up as you go along. The events of a story seem more real to them if they think you've written them down in advance. Likewise, if you are following a predetermined adventure, do your best to disguise that fact, too. Paraphrase passages instead of reading them verbatim. Glance at the prepared adventure as infrequently as possible. The less the players think about your methods, the more readily they'll suspend disbelief.

## Anticipating Unpredictability

Experienced GMs need to adjust to the quirks of *The Dying Earth* in one major way: They must learn to anticipate unpredictability. Three things make this game more unpredictable than others. *One*, the ability of PCs to persuade others of unusual things, and their vulnerability to being themselves persuaded, can at any moment send a story off in a completely surprising direction. *Two*, magic is very powerful and can, with ingenuity and good rolls, circumvent just about any plot device you care to install. *Three*, the resolution system is designed to waft the characters on the capricious winds of fate; high game statistics play a lesser role in determining outcomes than they do in other games.

Because of these three factors, you can never know in advance the outcome of any encounter. You can never introduce a storyline which requires the PCs to fail (or succeed) by your fiat. If your story depends on a particular GMC escaping an initial encounter with the PCs, a character uncovering a single fateful clue, or the PCs remaining confined to a single area, you need to rethink. Until you actually play them, *Dying Earth* adventures are less predetermined plotlines than lists of interesting possibilities that may or may not occur as planned. If we ever publish an adventure that states that any particular thing definitely happens in the course of play, please e-mail us ([info@dyingearth.com](mailto:info@dyingearth.com)) to reproach us for forgetting how to play our own game.

Define your success as a GM not by your ability to keep the PCs channeled to a particular end, but on providing challenging and entertaining roadblocks to their success, no matter which direction they choose to go. Know the locations of your adventure, study the personalities and motivations of the major characters, and have a number of possible entertaining endings in mind. Use these as a basis for improvisation. When the story goes off in a completely unexpected direction, you might find yourself momentarily at a loss. But you'll be surprised how rarely this happens if you just go ahead and play, rather than worrying about it. Trust yourself. When in doubt, ask: "If this was a *Dying Earth* story, what would happen next?" If you often find yourself getting stuck, go back and reread the stories to see [the kinds of obstacles](#) Jack Vance puts between his characters and their goals.

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**the kinds of obstacles:** Vance relies heavily on sanctimonious officials, duplicitous underlings, and swindling shopkeepers. In your own adventures, these characters' instruments would be Persuade and Temptation rolls. Vance often sends vengeful victims or howling mobs in pursuit of Cugel the Clever, forcing Cugel to drop valued objects so as to expedite a speedy escape. Remember, it is practically your duty as GM to periodically separate your PCs from possessions for which they did not pay points.





## Using Wallops

Although players will enjoy using Wallops against GMCs, they may not take to them so enthusiastically when their characters are on the receiving end. You should be especially sparing of them in fights, or other situations where the outcome for the PC is immediate death. Antagonists should, whenever credibility remotely allows, find a reason to merely incapacitate a PC. Perhaps they want to interrogate, ransom, gloat over, or sacrifice him. During the delay, the PC gets a chance to escape.

If the PCs have been well warned that a particular GMC is hideously puissant in combat, and they put themselves in a fight with him anyway, a more fatal outcome might be justified. Even so, you should be at least as prepared as an adventure author to cheat in favor of the main characters' survival.

## Taglines

Taglines serve as your best means of recreating the style of the Dying Earth stories. They provide examples of the books' distinctive dialogue. Players, knowing they must use taglines to earn improvement points, will say at least a couple of Vancian things each episode. Most of them, taking hold of their examples, will make at least some of their characters' other utterances match the desired style.

As GM, it is your job to create additional taglines tailored to each episode. If stumped, you can always use the examples given in the previous chapter, which are taken directly from the books. (A few are slightly paraphrased in order to stand free of their original context.) However, it's more fun to create your own. The elements of a good tagline are **elaborate formality** and **wry humor**. The humor should be subtle, droll, and rooted in understatement. Puns, exaggeration, and scatology are all to be avoided. So are gags that get their charge from a shattering of the fictional illusion: Stay away from pop culture allusions or in-jokes outside the characters' frame of reference. Gamers are especially fond of these last two forms of humor, but they're deadly to a *Dying Earth* game. Amend or rule out any player-suggested taglines along these lines. Be especially vigilant against Monty Python quotations.

Taglines can also prove extremely useful in hooking the PCs into an adventure. One of the perennial difficulties of GMing is that players are often reluctant to have their characters do the sorts of things that characterize the adventures of their fictional counterparts. Adventure heroes, even the roguish, selfish ones who populate most of the Dying Earth stories, are active. They dominate the

situations they enter. They do not wait for others to act for them. Players, however, are protective of their characters, and can sometimes be so risk-averse that they're reluctant to get into the sort of entertaining trouble that drives an adventure story.

In the Dying Earth stories, characters rarely seek trouble or danger for its own sake. They're as fiercely self-protective as any PC. Given the opportunity, both Cugel and Rhialto would lounge all day in a splendid mansion, eating delicious meals and occasionally seeking agreeable feminine companionship. Of course, Vance doesn't give them this chance—at least, not as the main action of a story. That would be incredibly dull! Instead, he subjects his heroes, especially Cugel, to terrible coercions that force him to do adventurous things. In *The Eyes of the Overworld*, Cugel is not only transported across half a continent at the sorcerous command of Iucounu the Laughing Magician; he's outfitted with a parasitic organism named Firx, which painfully jabs his innards whenever he seems to tarry from his mission. In *Cugel's Saga*, he must make the same trek all over again. Although this time he lacks a truculent alien parasite, circumstances time and again rob Cugel of whatever temporary advantage he secures for himself in the course of his journey. If he gains a bag of terces, you can bet he'll soon lose it. Places where he might comfortably linger become suddenly inhospitable when his swindles are exposed and his victims seek a righting of accounts.

The eponymous *Rhialto the Marvellous*, a mighty Arch-Magician, enjoys greater leisure; no unwelcome odyssey ties the stories in that book together. Still, events in each individual tale leave him little freedom of action. In the first, he must defend himself against the Murthe, who seeks to turn him, along with all his fellow Arch-Magicians, into her female minions. In "Fader's Waft," he is falsely accused of treachery against the other wizards and must retrieve a magical prism to prove that another of their number is the true schemer. Only in the last of the three stories does the adventure arise out of Rhialto's free choice: In "Morreion," the appearance of an old enemy, Xexamedes the archvult, prompts the company to seek a forgotten colleague, hoping to uncover the coveted secret of IOUN stones.

In roleplaying parlance, a GM who motivates PCs to embark on an adventure by giving them no other choice is said to be **railroading** the players. Many gamers, who play to enjoy a fantasy of personal power, chafe at situations in which their characters aren't in control. Most people feel they get enough railroading at school or in the workplace without having to face it in their gaming sessions. Yet Vance railroads his characters all the time. He has to, because he's created a setting in which people are ruled by greed and other petty preoccupations.

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**Monty Python:** Other toxic influences include cartoons, rock music lyrics, popular science fantasy films, and Hong Kong action flicks. We love all of these. We also love chocolate ice cream, blueberry pancakes, bubble gum, and pasta with Alfredo sauce, but we don't mush them all together.



## GM Tips

Taglines let you reward the players for accepting the fact that their characters are being railroaded. They turn the stick of coercion into the carrot of improvement points. They give the players a reason to seek risk and trouble for their characters. Now, any halfway devious player—and all players are at least halfway devious—will probably scheme to have his character utter the assigned tagline in an appropriate manner that avoids the bad situation it implies. This intriguing is to be encouraged! You and the players will attempt to outfox one another, just as the characters in the Dying Earth stories do. The chance of outwitting you lets the players enjoy a mechanism they might otherwise resent.

Accordingly, you should construct your taglines to give the players a fair chance to use them in a manner other than the obvious one that dovetails with your adventure notes. Although the taglines can strongly suggest a certain scenario, they must be usable in others as well.

*You're preparing an adventure that revolves around the Coruscating Spangle, a fabulous magical gem that is displayed once every hundred years in the Munificent Temple of the city of Dunt. You plan for one of the PCs, Pajandro, to be coerced by his arch-rival, Demobaster, into attempting to steal the spangle.*

*Your first thought for one of Pajandro's taglines is: "Alas, Demobaster, you have left me no choice but to attempt to steal the Coruscating Spangle."*

*This isn't an especially suitable tagline. First of all, it's not stylish; it's neither amusingly understated nor drolly prolix. You've expended so much effort on using it to move the plot in a particular direction that it lacks the necessary entertainment value. The player has no chance of getting a laugh with it, nor can he use it in a surprising manner. You've made it too specific, leaving the player no leeway whatsoever. It applies to only one possible situation, and, as such, won't make the player sanguine about being railroaded. In addition, it too obviously tips your hand. Your over-obvious choice has made your intentions for the story too clear. It gives away a major event in the story, interfering with your players' suspension of disbelief. Although you may create taglines with the hope of seeing them used in a particular way, you must allow the player to think he's spontaneously discovering an appropriate use for it. He must feel like a partner in the making of the story, not a creature being led on a leash to a predetermined outcome.*

*So you take another pass at it, in an attempt to make the line both more entertaining and applicable to a range of situations. You imagine a less specific response to the same situation: "Although you overestimate the distress your threat causes me, I shall take pity on you, and comply." As you intend Demobaster to suspend Pajandro over a pit of green fire, the aplomb of this potential response becomes amusing. But it*

**Unusual tagline use:** In "Faucelme" (Cugel's Saga), a wizard imprisons Cugel the Clever in a bedroom. Cugel escapes by using ossip wax (see Chapter 6) to negate the bed's gravity. On the bed he drifts high into the sky and, as night descends, falls into slumber. In the morning "a pelgrane of middle years" perches on the bedstead, regarding Cugel with both avidity and amusement. "Today I shall breakfast in bed," says the pelgrane. "Not often do I so indulge myself." Through the misfortune of not being a player character, the pelgrane misses out on a tagline reward inarguably worth 3 points.







The wine is Angelius from Quantique, and the biscuits are formed from the pollen of red clover blossoms.

*might also work in a completely different circumstance. You've removed Demobaster's name, so that the line could be spoken to another character. You've also made vague the nature of the plan the PC agrees to. Thus, though it can still be used in the manner you anticipate, it might just as well apply to another situation towards which the player might try to move the plot.*

This is not to say that you can't ever introduce a proper name or specific situation into a tagline. Sometimes a little heavy-handed foreshadowing can itself be amusing.

*Let's say that Pajandro believes his hated enemy, Demobaster, who took a starring role in many of your most entertaining sessions, to have been slain the last time he appeared. It's been several months since that session, and your series hasn't seemed quite the same without the old villain. Other antagonists you've introduced just haven't gotten the response Demobaster once commanded. So, without having so much as hinted at his possible return in prior episodes, you begin a game session by handing out the following tagline:*

*"Oh no! Not Demobaster!"*

*Although the line itself isn't wildly amusing, the groans of anticipation on the part of your players ought to be. During the story, you can drag out the suspense as they anticipate the dread return of their archenemy. Fill the story with dark alcoves and hidden nooks where Demobaster might be lurking. Make them see Demobaster behind every setback they face. After several false alarms, engineer his reappearance in a completely unexpected way—for instance, an eccentric noble commissions a PC to sculpt a bust commemorating "the late Demobaster." Although you're not in this case forcing the player to use maximum ingenuity in finding an appropriate spot for the tagline, the trick—if done right—should still elicit big laughs of relieved suspense.*

Keep in mind, though, that these unconventional uses for taglines only maintain their impact if they remain the exception to the rule. The great majority of taglines should allow the players maximum creative latitude.

## Taglines As Substitutes For Preparation

If you're improvising a story, you won't necessarily know which taglines might be most appropriate. Use this fact to your advantage. Make up a bunch of unrelated taglines. Distribute them at random to your players. Then let them

weave together a story as they take the actions required to appropriately utter the taglines. As they do so, nod knowingly as if this is the story you've planned all along.

If you're relying on the taglines to provide you with the backbone of your adventure, a question arises: What do you use as inspiration for the taglines? Try one or more of the following techniques for instant inspiration.

Take taglines from the previous chapter, or mine them directly from the *Dying Earth* books.

Filch taglines from movies, TV, or other works of fiction, but alter their style so that they seem like *Dying Earth* lines. (Make sure you sufficiently disguise the source; you'll incur player disbelief if they realize that their taglines are Vancian glosses on "Beam me up, Scotty," or "It's elementary, my dear Watson.")

Draw inspiration by randomly poking your finger onto passages from a reference book with a wide variety of entries. Encyclopedias, dictionaries, and thesauri are ideal for this purpose. We've also had good success with movie guides, and with the ultimate source of oddball references, *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*.

*Searching for tagline inspiration, you reach for your copy of Brewer's. Your random fingertip lands on the entry for Gath, which turns out to be a place name from an allegorical Dryden poem, referring to Brussels, Charles II's place of exile. Though neither Dryden, Charles II, nor Brussels have any place in a Dying Earth story, maybe the word "exile" can be inserted into a Vancian phrase. After a moment of cogitation, you write:*

*"By no means! You seek to exile me from this salubrious spot so that you might claim it as your own!"*

*As you have four players, you're one tagline down, seven to go. You open the book to another random page, and again your discerning fingertip searches out a passage on which to freely associate...*

## Alternate Tagline Rules

Although we think the tagline rules are fun and evocative, we also recognize that certain players or groups may be troubled by them. Some folks will find it hard to suspend disbelief if they can see an artificial mechanism driving characters to say certain things. Others will view the rule





as an intrusion into their right at all times to control their characters' thoughts and actions. If your group rebels at the tagline rule, ask them to at least give it a try. If they still dislike the rule after acceptable attempts, here are two alternatives.

## 1. Player-Created Taglines

Let players create all their own taglines. They must show them to you at the beginning of the session. If a tagline doesn't share the style of the examples given in the last chapter, suggest changes to bring it in line with that style. After approving the tagline, secretly assign a rating ranging from 0 to 3, depending on how difficult you think it will be to find an appropriate use for the tagline in play. A tagline that will be dead simple to use—because it is either broadly applicable to many situations, or fits an upcoming situation the player can easily anticipate—rates a 0. One that is fairly easy to use warrants a 1. Fairly hard taglines rate 2. Rate extremely specific taglines, which you think nearly impossible to work into the upcoming story, at 3. When the player actually uses the tagline in play, use the usual rules, as found in Chapter 8, to assign a point score based on relevance to the situation at hand. Then average this relevance rating with your already-determined relevance rating.

## 2. Surrender to the Demands of Conventionality

Alas, you can't force players to have fun, or argue them into changing their tastes. If your players strongly resist the tagline system, you can instead do what most roleplaying games do, and reward improvement points according to the following criteria.

**Attendance:** Players get 1 point just for showing up, as in the tagline system.

**Estimable Success:** At the beginning of each system, ask each player what his PC's goals are for the session. At the end, award the following points:

- 0 points if he does nothing to advance his goal, or if the stated goal is an absurdly easy one
- 1 point if he tries to achieve them but gets understandably sidetracked by events outside his control, or tries but fails thoroughly
- 2 points if he makes reasonable progress towards his goal
- 3 points if he succeeds completely

**Entertaining Failure:** At the end of each session, ask the player to name an instance of his character succumbing to Temptation. Award points based on your judgment of the specified scene.

- 0 points if he can't name an appropriate scene, or if he suffered no ill consequences from it

1 point if the worst he suffered from the episode was fleeting distraction or embarrassment

2 points if the episode prevented him from achieving his session goal

3 points if the episode led to a significant decline in his fortunes that will affect him in future adventures.

**Vancian Dialogue:** Assign players 1 point each time they deliver a line of dialogue that sounds suitably Vancian—that is, in the style of the taglines. The maximum score per player for each game session is 3.

## The Rule of Underlying Justice

Although Cugel never reflects on the consequences of his more callous actions, and often faces no overt punishment for them, his fortunes do ebb and flow in rough parallel to his behavior. His most serious comeuppances tend to follow his worst excesses. In *The Eyes of the Overworld*, his treatment of Fabeln's daughter is still fresh in our minds when Lucounu banishes him for a second time to Shanglestone Strand. Although still a scoundrel during his second trek home, Cugel restricts his swindles to the apparently deserving. When he confronts Lucounu a second time, his enemy's greed and lust for power seem greater than his. It is Lucounu's own hubris, more than anything Cugel does, that brings about his ultimate downfall.

Characters in roleplaying games are generally less sympathetic than their counterparts in books and movies. To involve us in the action, writers try to create a "rooting interest" in the lead characters. We like them and want them to succeed. Players in an RPG naturally identify with the PCs they control. They don't need to make them likeable to care what happens to them. However, the GM and other players look on the actions of any given PC with the same attitudes they'd take to a work of fiction. A jarringly sour mood can sometimes result, as utterly amoral characters advance themselves through gleeful theft and murder. Rhialto and Cugel might be self-serving, even callous at times, but we continue to enjoy their adventures, either because those around them are even more predatory than they are, or because they eventually face amusing comeuppances for their cupidity.

One of your subtlest but most important tasks as GM is to keep the tone of your series from souring, by ensuring that the worst excesses of the PCs are met with countervailing just desserts. This is tricky, because heavy-handed morality lessons are completely out of keeping with the source material. Vance narrates his anti-heroes' cruel actions without comment; later, he shows them facing the consequences of their behavior. Rarely is there a direct cause-and-effect relationship between their

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**the consequences of his more callous actions:** Or on much of anything, really; soul-searching internal monologue is not a feature of Dying Earth characters.







[Iucounu] tasted the wine. "Matchless!" He drank again.  
"Heady, tart, with a hint of arrogance."

offenses and the justice they face, except that their greed is inseparable from their folly. This is justice as a hidden cosmic principle, something both impersonal and unreliable.

Much of this will come naturally to you. Many players of other roleplaying games already play their characters as overreaching scoundrels without even having heard of Cugel, the spiritual forefather of countless PCs. Experienced GMs are already used to getting laughs from the group at large by logically confronting the most amorally rapacious character with the natural consequences of his actions. Cheats get caught. Burglars encounter armed shop-owners. Liars become entangled in their own deceptions. Murderers face vengeful relatives and well-armed justice officials. Precisely because it is overrun with swindlers and bandits, the people of the Dying Earth remain vigilant against their activities. Punishments are harsh, in a blackly comic sort of way. Miscreants are often tripped up by more devious rivals.

Although players who like to run their characters in this way are generally also the most likely to embark on ill-considered plans that suggest obvious dire consequences, you won't always be able to stop PCs from doing nasty things. Nor should you, all the time: You don't want to become predictable. Sometimes you must allow the PCs' actions to reflect the inherent cruelty of the Dying Earth.

However, this does not put them beyond the bounds of the more nebulous cosmic justice alluded to earlier. You can simulate this by secretly keeping track of **sympathy points** for each PC. These do not represent a

PC ability. The players never know what their characters' sympathy scores are. Nor can they manipulate them except through their PCs' behavior—for example, they can't buy sympathy with improvement points.

Sympathy points can be either positive or negative. Positive points record admirable behavior. The character with the highest positive sympathy score is the least likely to have random bad things happen to him. Negative points indicate a character courting cosmic justice. The character with the greatest negative score is most likely to take the brunt of apparently random misfortune.

Whenever a character does something notably admirable or cringe-inducingly unpleasant, adjust his sympathy point value. Only especially noteworthy actions should trigger a change in score. Only shockingly immoral or startlingly heroic actions warrant a change of more than 1 point. The chart below lists the sorts of actions worthy of sympathy point changes. Note that suffering direct punishments for misdeeds increases a character's sympathy value. Mundane justice renders its cosmic counterpart redundant.

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*Cugel encounters a group of strange beings attached to the sides of sea-swept rocks. These aquatic creatures are human-like from the waist up but dwell in oyster-like shells. One plays a trick on Cugel, giving him a garment that turns to water when he pulls it on. Drenched and enraged, he tears the prankster's shell from the rock and*

## Sympathy Points Table

Action	Change
Unjustifiably slaying an intelligent non-human	-2
Unjustifiably murdering a human being	-4
Unnecessarily killing a human being who meant you serious harm, or otherwise might seem deserving of vengeance	-1
Sexual assault	-2
Doing serious but non-physical harm to a sympathetic character—for example, stealing terces from a pure-hearted young woman who intends to give them to an orphanage	-1
Assaulting an undeserving victim	-1
Swindling, robbing, or humiliating a character who has demonstrated himself to be pompous, grasping, dishonest, or otherwise obnoxious	0
Altruistically postponing your own selfish plans to help a sympathetic character in need	+1
Risking your own safety to protect someone else, without hope of reward	+1
Suffering loss of property, embarrassment, or temporary loss of freedom as the consequences of a misdeed	+1
Suffering serious injury or prolonged degradation as the consequences of a misdeed	+2

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**a blackly comic sort of way:** For example, see the punishment tubes of Cuirnif, described in the sample adventure in Chapter 13.





crushes it. The creature reproves him for his cruelty as it dies. Utterly selfishly, Cugel defends himself: "And thereby you will be prevented from future pranks. Notice, you have drenched me to the skin!" His sympathy rating goes from 0 to -2. Figuring that this is too jarring an act to go unpunished, the GM has the creature, in its dying breath, subject Cugel to a curse. However, only if the curse causes genuine harm to Cugel will the rating go back up again.

At the beginning of each game session, review the sympathy ratings of each character. If a character has a sympathy rating of -3 or worse, you should see to it that he faces significant misfortune in the course of the evening's adventure. The misfortune should have a quality of poetic justice about it. Ideally, you should engineer the plot so that the character brings the misfortune upon himself. It should be enjoyable, even funny, to see him humbled.

As you begin your session, you see that Palandro's sympathy rating is -3. He's heading for a fall. You create a plotline to provide him with one. A pelgrane, which can take human form with the aid of an amulet, will develop an infatuation for Palandro. She'll covertly swoop down on anyone who seems to slight him, carrying them up into the sky to drop from a great height. Palandro will therefore become the chief suspect in their murders, as the last time each of them was seen, they were arguing with him.

Sometimes story demands require you to single out one of the PCs for an unfortunate fate. If one PC has a lower sympathy rating than the others, he becomes the target.

Your adventure for the evening involves a journey to a ruined castle. To get the PCs to the castle, you decide that an imp who dwells there will try to steal something from one of the PCs. Kandyre's sympathy rating, -1, is the lowest of anyone in the group, so it's his plumed bat the imp will attempt to purloin.

## Running A Series

Taken together, all the adventures you run featuring the same cast of *Dying Earth* characters comprise a **series**. The cast will probably rotate, as PCs die or are retired by their players, and as players join or drop out of your game, but as long as you maintain some continuity from the first episode to the last, you're running a series.

*Dying Earth* series tend to be somewhat episodic, as befits the books. *The Dying Earth* is a collection of short stories; although some of the stories have characters in common, no two share the same protagonist. *Rbialto the Marvellous* features the same characters in different adventures. *The Eyes of the Overworld* and *Cugel's Saga* show Cugel engaging in many episodic, self-contained exploits in the course of his pursuit of a larger goal. Both times, he is struggling to return to Pergolo to exact vengeance on Iucounu the Laughing Magician, after having been exiled to Shanglestone Strand.

If you rarely get the same configuration of players showing up from one session to the next, stick to an extremely episodic structure. Try to pace your adventures so that they all end when your session does. This, granted, is easier said than done, as player choices often have a big impact on how efficiently you can move a story along. Create your adventures using the worksheet, then figure out how to draw in the PCs whose players happen to show up. Temptations are always a good way to involve a random set of PCs into whatever bizarre situation you might concoct.

If your attendance is more stable, start with episodic adventures, but pay attention to elements that the players respond to. For example, one particularly enjoyable session in the lead designer's playtest series revolved around negotiations with enthusiastically destructive pack beasts that had a severe weakness for a particular intoxicating roadside weed. Having seen how well the players responded to them, I brought the creatures back at an early opportunity. This helped to create a sense of continuity between adventures—and added amusement to the session when players experienced with the creatures recapped their previous experiences for the benefit of one who'd missed the original session. As you slowly weave in these recurring elements, the separate adventures will begin to feel like part of a broader whole.

After players have gotten used to the idiosyncrasies of the *Dying Earth* attitude, and can formulate goals for their PCs that fit with its unique ethos, ask them what they want

**series:** Other roleplaying games often describe linked sets of adventures as *campaigns*. Because "campaign" connotes a grand undertaking, we prefer the term "series" in recognition of *The Dying Earth's* episodic, distinctly un-grand tone.







Cugel, in some respects you are dense and dull; your brain is luke-warm porridge, and I say this without heat.

their characters to do. Then use the adventure checklist to create episodes that bring them closer to their goals.

Appropriate *Dying Earth* goals might include:

- ✱ The winning of an elusive love interest.
- ✱ The completion of an exhaustive scholarly tome on an abstruse subject.
- ✱ The reconstruction of an ancient ruin.
- ✱ The comeuppance of an annoying villain in the vein of Lucounu.

Inappropriate goals include:

- ✱ Military conquest.
- ✱ A mighty war for good against an all-encroaching evil force that threatens to destroy the world.
- ✱ The systematic elimination of a particular species of dangerous creature.
- ✱ The world-wide abolition of slavery, or any other large-scale social change.

Note that both highly moral and aggressively immoral goals work poorly in the petty, self-concerned milieu of the Dying Earth. Grand, epic storylines are out of place here. Motivations are neither as altruistic nor as nakedly evil as such tales require. Vance's villains may pursue their goals in extremely nasty ways, but the goals themselves are as modest as the capture of a magical secret or the winning of a golden-haired maiden's favors.

The denizens of the 21st Aeon are world-weary and resistant to change. Great ambitions are seen as follies of the distant past. Any grand scheme has already been realized countless times and then vanished into history. Build a world-spanning empire to last ten thousand years? Every earlier Aeon saw hundreds of these empires come and go; how can the PCs improve on them?

Once players have chosen a fitting goal (or goals—each player might want something different), slowly dangle story elements to make them look forward to future sessions. Place many steps between the PCs and their ultimate goal. Create adventures in which they can gain things that bring them closer to the goal, and others in which their progress is threatened with setbacks if they don't take defensive action. Let supporting characters periodically note the inherent folly of any long-term goal in a world where the sun is apt at any moment to sputter out and surrender forever to the night.

**the 21st Aeon:** the nominal time of Vance's *Dying Earth* books. Nowhere does Vance specify the length of an aeon, but it is undoubtedly vast. History seems to reach back to at least the 14th Aeon, and Lucounu the Laughing Magician once refers to a long-past "Age of Glow"—possibly some world holocaust. Our own position in this chronology is never addressed, which is probably for the best. In these rules we call our own time "the Larval Age," but by the 21st Aeon not even dim awareness of this era remains.

## More Blood, Less Drollery

*The Dying Earth*, the first book in the sequence, is very different from those that follow it. It is more violent and less amusing than the others. In this, his first published book, Vance emphasizes wonder and a sometimes eerie beauty. Its plots more closely resemble the sword-and-sorcery tales of Robert E. Howard or Fritz Leiber. Only in its later chapters do we encounter the distinctive, pettifogging dialogue that marks the subsequent books. The motifs of swindling and absurd social customs likewise appear only in the last sections.

Jack Vance tells us that the later books better reflect his intentions for the series. But you might prefer the first book, or find that its focus on action-adventure translates more easily into a typical fantasy roleplaying experience. To make the game feel more like *The Dying Earth* and less like its sequels, make the following rules changes:

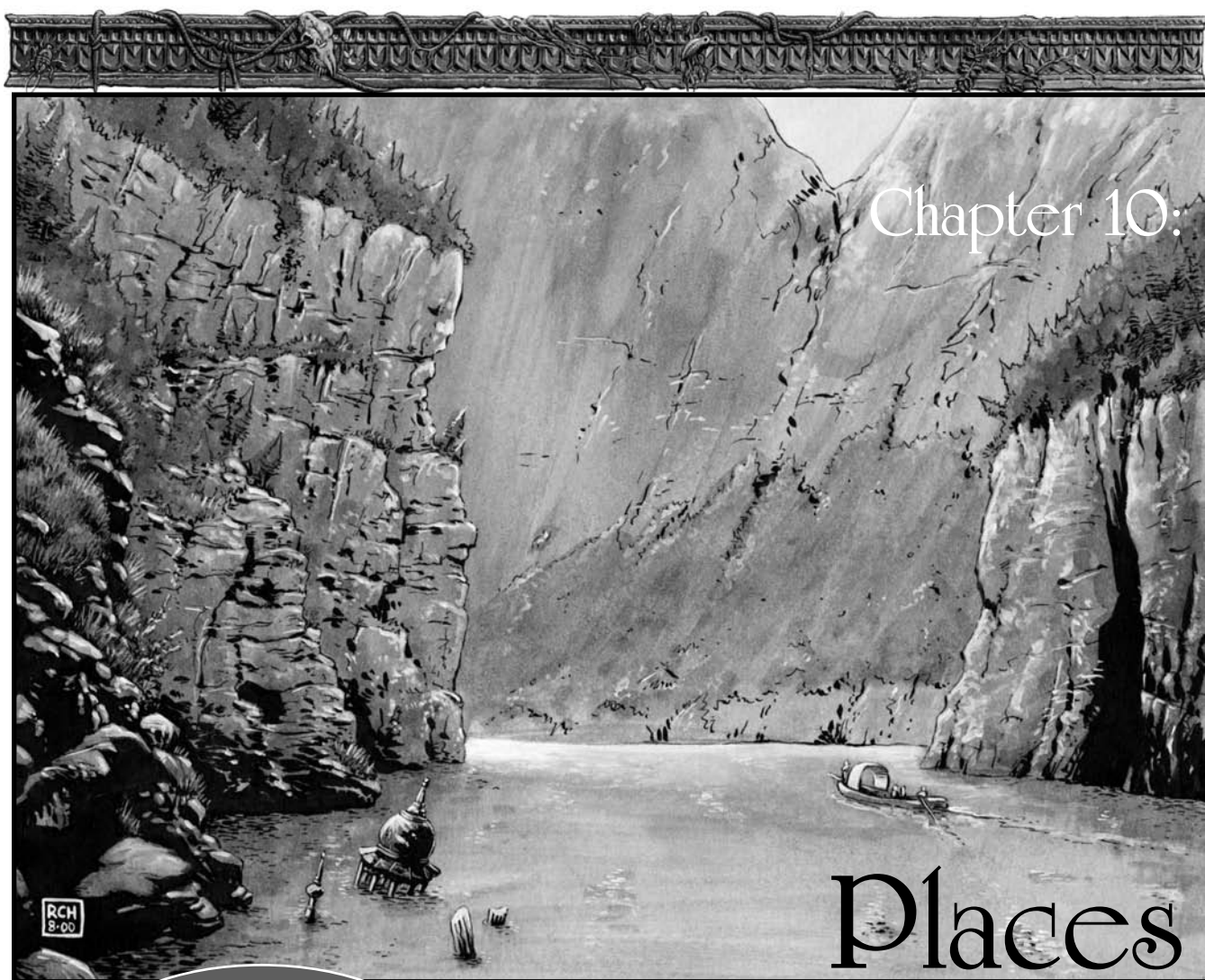
- ✱ PCs do not have Rebuff ratings; instead, they are simply immune from persuasion, whether by GMCs or other PCs. Decrease character creation points by 6.
- ✱ Declare any attempt to persuade a GMC of something humorous or absurd an automatic failure.
- ✱ Abandon the tagline rules in favor of the improvement point system given under "Surrender to the Demands of Conventionality," above.
- ✱ Restrict PCs to Cugel- or Turjan-level.
- ✱ Drop the following elements from your adventure checklist: Crafty Swindles, Heated Protests, Foppish Apparel. Add an item called "Opportunity for Bloodshed," which is, we trust, self-explanatory.



An asm.







“What great minds lie in the dust,” said Gual in a low voice. “What gorgeous souls have vanished into the buried ages, what marvelous creatures are lost past the remotest memory.... Now, in the last fleeting moments, humanity festers rich as rotten fruit.”

*The Dying Earth,*  
Chapter 6

Haunted wilderness, remote villages  
with surprising customs, decadent  
cities, and ruins beyond count

### Gazetteer of the Dying Earth

**T**his gazetteer describes many places mentioned in the Dying Earth books, but it does *not* provide an extensive map filling in all areas left unexplored in the stories. ☼ One essential element of the stories is the constant sense of discovery and surprise. Travelers can never be sure what’s around the next bend of the river. They approach isolated settlements not knowing whether to expect a friendly welcome. To preserve this sense of mystery, make your version of the Dying Earth differ from that of every other GM.





We are putting into Lausicaa, so that Madame Soldinck can dive into the Paphnissian waters and emerge a virgin.

Other than what we know from the books, there is no “official,” quasi-canonical, Pelgrane Press version of the Dying Earth. We want each GM to take the incomplete map given here and add her own details as the game progresses. In future publications, we may describe towns, ruins, and other geographical features—but we won’t tell you where you must put them. We might make suggestions, but we can’t know what parts of the map you’ve already filled.

## Almery

The settled and temperate region of Almery offers a haven of civilization and prosperity in a world of danger and chaos. Like neighboring Ascolais, it provides a suitable home base for your PCs.

To the south of Almery lie an expanse of rocky, barren hills barely inhabited by humankind. Instead, tribes of thick-hided lizardmen bask in the hot noonday sun and scan the horizon for caravans to plunder. Some of their chieftains are formidable magicians capable of drawing power from the demons of the overworld.

## Ampridatvir

The lost city of Ampridatvir is located on an island in the north Melantine Gulf (*q.v.*). Porrina the Ninth listed it as the last of the Olek’hnit cities. Their last known leader was the mighty Rogol Domendofors, who is oft-mentioned in arcane texts. Once it was a place of unparalleled wonder. Through Domendofor’s forgotten magics, people travelled about in gleaming metal cars, or on conveyors of black, lifelike material. Now its buildings stand empty and echoing. Two groups of people, each descended from a sect irrevocably opposed to the other, eke out a living in its ruins, as fishers and scavengers. Hungry gaunts patrol the city, looking for prey.

If you want to set your Ampridatvir stories before its appearance in *The Dying Earth*, the two populations of the city are unable to perceive one another. Both the Greens and the Grays (named after the colors they wear) perceive their counterparts only as ghosts. Each group recoils from the Raiders, who wear red.

During the events of *The Dying Earth*, the revenant of Rogol Domendofors, now a protoplasmic entity with countless pseudopods, is awakened and then destroyed. The curse preventing the two groups from perceiving one another is dispelled. At first, they attack one another with wild abandon. After a time, they continue the slaughter in a more cunning manner. When your PCs visit Ampridatvir, the Greens and Grays may still be at war, might have brokered a tentative truce, or might even have achieved genuine peace. (This last preposterous option is mentioned only for the sake of completeness.)

Ampridatvir’s ruins house countless items of profound interest to scholars, from the remnants of its ancient people-conveyor system to a fleet of air-cars, some of them still in good repair.

## Ascolais

Ascolais is a region of the Dying Earth once known as a center of civilization. Formerly an area of lush farmland, it has been largely abandoned to an ever-encroaching forest. The growth of the forest may or may not be the work of Ascolais’ forest wizards, many of whom have sinister intentions and are prone to demon worship. The foremost city of Ascolais is white-walled Kaiin.

## Azenomei

The town of Azenomei lies in Almery, beside the River Xzan, nestled amongst nondescript hills. It predates all written records but now shows little evidence of its past glories. Today it is notable only for its fair, at which one can patronize a variety of merchants, craftsmen, antiquities dealers, oracles, and charlatans.

## Blanwalt Forest

This wilderness, near Erze Damath, is home to a bizarre menagerie of lopsided, impossible creatures, descendants of hybrid beasts vat-formed by the wizard Follinense, at the behest of Mad King Kutt. These beasts, no two of them apparently alike, are sometimes captured for use as beast of burden. One stable in Erze Damath usually has some of the creatures for sale. They also cavort jaggedly across the adjacent Plain of Oparona.

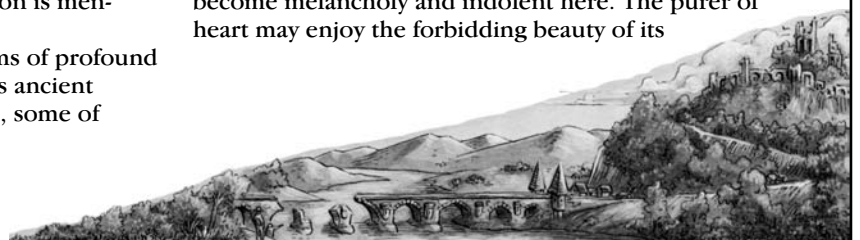
## Cansapara

Cansapara is a city of ruined pylons on the Melantine Gulf. Much of the city consists of ancient, crumbled structures which are no longer inhabited. Only a quarter of its surface is kept in repair. There, merchants, craftsmen, scholars and thieves huddle together in cramped quarters, hoping that the things which inhabit the ruins will not crawl out in the night to wheeze outside their doors. The city’s ruler, Prince Datul Omaet, garbs himself in splendid silks. His several pacts with a variety of infernal entities are widely credited with keeping the creatures of the ruins at bay.

Cansapara is also the name of one of the sky’s few surviving stars. Academic arguments rage as to whether the city was named after the star, or vice versa.

## The Cape of Sad Remembrance

This sandy, eroded headland juts out into the cold waters of Tenebrosa Bay. The place projects such an air of stinging nostalgia that even the greedy and rapacious become melancholy and indolent here. The purer of heart may enjoy the forbidding beauty of its





black mountains without significant deformation of character. White villas dot the surrounding hills, home to scholars, pedants, and others of independent means. A small colony of farmers, fishermen, and craftsmen have sprung up to serve these wealthy recluses.

The bay's waves constantly wash up a variety of strange relics from the sunken cities of aeons past. A blue-haired witch waits, teary-eyed, on the shores, gathering these items for her storehouse. Although given to the worship of demons, her general despondency mutes any desire she might have to capture and mutilate passersby—unless they interfere with her collecting activities.

## Cuirnif

Cuirnif is described in the adventure in Chapter 13, "The Cooks of Cuirnif."

## Cutz

The Land of Cutz is a sparsely-inhabited region far to the north of Almetry and Ascolais. It boasts many isolated towns and villages but no large cities. Although of a higher latitude than the ice-swept Land of the Falling Wall, its climate is temperate. Southerners think of it as a benighted hinterland fit neither for man nor dog, and would no sooner contemplate a journey there than they would set their own hair on fire.

## Derna River

The hard-charging Derna River (shown in the frontispiece to this chapter) travels swiftly through the region to the north of the major cities. It has cut a deep canyon into the hard rock of its shores. Thick forests of scraggly pine line the precipices on either side of it. A flint road once ran alongside it but is now broken in many places where the banks have fallen into the canyon. Foot travellers will need to occasionally leave the road, to face pant-tearing thorns and the off-putting whistling of the tube grass.

## Erze Damath

This large settlement sits on the banks of the roiling Scamander River. It is best known for its Black Obelisk, a structure of ritual significance to many competing religions. The obelisk is carved with the images of five deities. Unbeknownst to all but the supervising priests, these sculptures are hollow and can be manipulated to make it seem that a particular god is issuing commands to its worshippers. An annual pilgrimage to the obelisk brings penitents from all over. During the pilgrimage, accommodations are tested to the limit, and the

locals profit enormously by catering to the throng of visitors. The best inn is the famous Old Dastric Empire Hostelry, a restored palace which offers sumptuous viands and large, well-aired suites. The worst is the Inn of the Green Lamp, a decaying structure that squats on the outskirts of the city, periodically suffering sandy gusts from the nearby Silver Desert.

The city is even larger than those of Almetry and Ascolais, but much of it lies in ruins and is uninhabited. The locals are handsome and swarthy. Men wear only black, but women bedeck themselves in gowns of dazzling color.

## Fer Aquila Mountains

This high and craggy range of mountains serves as a barrier between the civilized lands of the south and the trackless ruins of the Land of the Falling Wall. The best means through it is the pass known as the Omona Gap. However, because no reasonable person visits the unknown lands to the north, there is little traffic through it, and no trail to aid the traveller. The villages of its southern foothills are likewise unwelcoming. At least one such village relies on a creature called the oast as both a beast of burden and a source of meat. The oast is a mute, hulking human with a waxy face and moist blue eyes.

The mountains themselves are inhospitably windy and cold. Would-be foragers find no plant life aside from the occasional piece of dry scrub.

## The Forlorn Land

This is a trackless forest of twisted, stunted trees, so dense in places that it takes a contortionist to traverse it. Its few clearings are fiercely fought over by the forest's inhabitants, who include human outcasts, cannibals, deodands, and white-bearded wizards attended by small, babbling succubi. Its friendliest inhabitants are the twk-men, who here ride not on the typical dragonfly but on fist-sized bumblebees capable of delivering a teeth-rattling electrical discharge from afar. The twk-men of the forlorn land are prone to drunkenness and sudden bouts of violent rage.

## Great Da Forest

The Great Da is the biggest and most feared wilderness area in the known lands. It is home to countless deodands, erbs, hoons, and the occasional leucomorph.

## Great Erm

This valley is infested with erbs and leucomorphs.

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**violent rage:** The fury of a twk-man is said to inspire awe. The infuriated humanoid may demolish an entire mushroom in seconds, and lay waste to whole tufts of grass before finally lapsing into discommodated slumber.





"I gave over the terces in jest, and now I want them back."  
The porter shook his head. "They are gone with the moons  
of ancient Earth."



## Kaiin

White-walled Kaiin is a large and cosmopolitan city located where the River Scaum meets its northern cousin, the River Derna. It is known for the gaiety of its people and the excess of its festivals. The redoubtable Prince Kandive the Golden (see the next chapter), who is both warrior and magician, presides over a class of nobles with a great appetite for pleasure. Of particular interest to travellers is Kaiin's annual regatta, which proceeds down the River Scaum. Kandive always takes care to sponsor its most opulent and treasure-laden barge. Kaiin also overlooks the shockingly blue Bay of Sanreale. Its markets are therefore flush with seafood, from thick slabs of whitefish meat to molluscs from the nearby slime banks.

The city center consists of a majestic arcade, which leads to an outdoor grand salon, used for revelry at festival time. Kandive's glossy-domed palace faces onto the arcade. Tremendous columns lie broken near Kaiin's marketplace, the last trace of an arena erected by Mad King Shin; it stood on marble stilts two hundred feet above the ground. People in Kaiin enjoy the spreading of news, especially that concerning crime or other scandal. It is not safe for a fugitive well-known by the Kaiinese to walk their city's streets.

In a small square connected by a cobblestoned street to the Pannone Wall, a ruin which bisects the city, one finds the Magician's Inn, where sorcerers of various degrees of accomplishment gather to trade rumors, show off their skills, and become intoxicated in the company of their colleagues.

Adjacent to Kaiin is the Old Town, a jumble of fallen pillars, wind-weathered sandstone blocks, smashed statuary, and moss-choked terraces. The Old Town serves as an excellent source of fresh corpses, though even the stoutest glue-makers of Kaiin are loath to venture there to collect them. In a particular spot known as the Place of Whispers lurks Chun the Unavoidable, a being of notorious menace (see the next chapter).

## Kaspara Vitatus

Also known as the City of Monuments, Kaspara Vitatus is found on the shore of shimmering Lake Zaol. From a distance its eight towers can be seen poking up out of a mantle of pinkish haze. Large avenues lead into the city from north and south, each marked by hundreds of monuments to forgotten heroes and long-dead politicians. Its best inn is the Kanbaw.

## Lake of Dreams

Also known as the Sanra Waters, this place, redolent with fey enchantment, lies near the manse of Mazirian the Magician (see the next chapter). Although it looks normal when one gazes upon its surface, if you go beneath the water, even at night, you see that it is suffused with green

light. Long lacy water plants undulate in rhythm, as large-eyed fish swim through them. Ruins, including a columned temple, lie strewn on its sandy bottom.

## Land of the Falling Wall

The evocatively-named Land of the Falling Wall is a lawless place offering shelter to vagabonds, brigands, hybrid creatures, and practitioners of baneful magic. Its uneven landscape is tumbled with ruins from a dozen or more extinct civilizations. Scorch marks on some of the archaeological finds suggest that a great catastrophe took place here, possibly repeating itself many times throughout history. Necrophages delve through its catacombs in search of mummies to devour. These magically puissant eaters of the dead do not insist that corpses be ancient to qualify for their dinner tables, so travellers should tread carefully here. Legend places the Museum of Man, a former repository of the world's knowledge, in this place. Most scholars assume that it now stands in ruins, like the rest of this land's old wonders. The fate of its supreme sage, the Curator, is likewise unknown but presumed dire.

Much of the land is wind-swept tundra. The foremost settlement of this icy expanse is Saponce (*q.v.*). Travellers should beware of Koolbaw the Walking Serpent, a predator of ferocious aspect.

## Lumarth

Five enormous domes, the remnants of temples once dedicated to various demons, characterize the old city of Lumarth. Many of its inhabitants are dabblers in magic, though the art is forbidden within city limits, by the orders of their Grand Thearch, Chaladet. Its people are known as "the Kind Folk," for their extreme altruism. So good-natured and generous are they that they may provide travellers with the opportunity to travel down a temple chute into the lair of an arch-demon, so that the dread infernal creature might be instructed in the principles of amity and fellowship.

## Melantine Gulf

The Melantine is a great body of water whose surface is often disquietingly placid. Although its surface is calm, its depths are turbid, as sediment and particles of decaying vegetation are frequently stirred up by the enormous, dull-witted fish and sea mammals which nose through its floor in search of food.





## Ocean of Sighs

This inland sea lies in southwestern Cutz. Saskervoy sits on its northern shore; near its center is the island of Lausicaa. The ships that traverse the Ocean of Sighs are often towed by gigantic seagoing eels, known colloquially as worms. Both the eels and the wormingers expert in their care are highly sought after.

## Pompodouros

Pompodouros is a small city occupying much of Lausicaa, an island on the Ocean of Sighs. Ships travelling the sea often stop here for supplies. Crews taking shore leave are instructed to exercise caution. The men of Pompodouros must adopt veils and hoods, to tamp down the overheated erotic enthusiasms of the local women. The women go to great lengths to lure men into their homes for extended couching sessions, catching *spralings*, which the men consider a great delicacy. They place large signs outside their homes to advertise their catch, drawing hungry men to satisfy them.

The city is also known for its Paphnissian Baths, a series of invigorating natural springs located in the hills that surround it. Opinions on the origins and efficacy of the waters are mixed.

## Port Perdusz

This trading settlement on the River Chaing (which flows out of the Ocean of Sighs) is best described as a scattering of decaying gray structures. One might find four to six ships docked on its extensive piers at any one time.

## Sanra Waters

See **Lake of Dreams**, above.

## Saponce

This city, improbably situated in the midst of an expanse of forbidding tundra, is home to the people known as the Saponids. The Saponids have a sinister reputation, though most who fear them would be hard pressed to lay out the specifics of their supposed evil. They greet travellers with politeness and interest. They kindly warn them of certain harsh rules that tradition bids them to follow. For example, none may walk on the sacred common. They may perhaps omit to warn the traveller of the fearsome creature who dwells in a thicket near the common, whose habit is to jump out and startle the unwary. Thus startled, the traveller may leap onto the common, making him a criminal who must perform three acts of

penance as punishment. The acts vary with the circumstances, with hideous self-mutilation being typical. However, capable-seeming travellers are more likely to be dragooned into performing dangerous services for the Saponids. In an adventure that takes place before, or in place of, the events of "Guyal of Sferé" (*The Dying Earth*), that service will likely be a trip to the Museum of Man. For centuries the Saponids have sent a young couple off to its gates, never to be seen again, at the command of a ghostly figure which periodically appears to them. Thirteen thousand individuals were thus sent to their deaths.

Saponce is ruled by a voyevode and administered by a man whose full title is Castellan and Sergeant-Reader of the Litany.

## Saskervoy

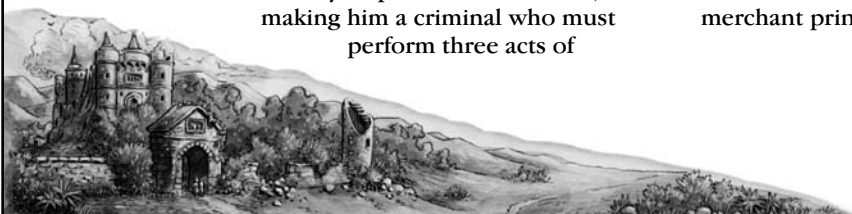
This town of Cutz offers the wanderer reasonable accommodations. Its Inn of Blue Lamps is both a waystation for travellers and a meeting place for the town's worthies, who come here to imbibe and gamble. Saskervoy serves as a trading post for the surrounding region. Ships travel from Saskervoy across the Ocean of Sighs and down the River Chaing to Port Perdusz, where they offload cargoes bound for Almery and Ascolais, and pick up goods from those places.

## The Serene Sea

Despite its name, this body of water offers no easy passage between Cutz (to its north) and Almery (to the south). A morass of sucking, hungry weeds serves as a barrier preventing northern ships from coming south, and vice versa. South of the weed barrier is the Gulf of Swirls, a hazard to navigation few ships survive. Below it lies the Serene Sea's Jhardine Coast, which is chockablock with pirates. Then comes the Seleune, a formation offering a "carnival of dangers." It can only be avoided by detouring around the Isles of Cloud. Even a crew surviving the journey would then face no better resupply post than the notorious pesthole of Mahaze. The ports of Almery lie many leagues to the south of that wellspring of cutthroats and infectious diseases.

## Scaum River

The Scaum, the major river which winds past Kaiin and through the civilized region of Almery and Ascolais, is a slow, wide river with meandering banks. Wildflowers, most notably purple horse-blossom, line and color its shores. Among the flowers nestle dozens of white-walled castles and manses, the majority of them crumbling. Residents of the few extant castles include magicians, merchant princes, and land-owning nobles.



**spralings:** The spraling is a small, delicate bedichtil.





When Death enters the room through the door,  
I leave by the window.

## Sfere

Sfere is a quiet, grassy-hilled land whose people live in relative safety and sensibly fear the rigors of travel to distant lands. It is near Kaiin and the River Scaum.

## The Silver Desert

No one traverses this great waste. On one side is the city of Erze Damath, but on the other there is only further bleakness: the treacherous Songan Sea and an area of barren wastes north of eastern Almery. The list of hazards offered by the Silver Desert includes dehydration, sandstorms, oversized scorpions, bandits, rockslides, noxious berries, poisonous water, unwelcoming lizard people, and hardship-induced madness.

## Smolod

In this tiny village in the land of Cutz, people live in fetid squalor. Although their bodies are obese, their yellow hair matted and tangled, their features lumpy and inchoate, they believe themselves surpassingly attractive nobles who live in a golden and splendid city. This delusion comes courtesy of the violet lenses they wear over their eyes. These magical treasures allow them to perceive another realm, the overworld, where their lives consist of unal-

loyed beauty and pleasure. Their material needs are taken care of by the people of the nearby village of Grodz. The Grodzites labor unceasingly for them, each hoping to inherit a pair of lenses from one of Smolod's worthies. They jealously guard their places on the waiting list, responding homicidally to interlopers who attempt to spirit lenses away.

## The Songan Sea

This marshy, shallow inland sea lies south of the Silver Desert and north of barren lands adjacent to eastern Almery. A ghostly city sometimes appears on its shores, and also a barge packed with ancient revelers. Fireworks lace colorfully through the sky. A ghostly parade of red-garbed musicians, capering harlequins, and maidens in iridescent gowns makes its way across a marble promenade. Human skeletons line the shore, the remains of travellers who stayed rooted to the spot, compelled to witness this intoxicating apparition night after night.

Other notable features of the Songan's shore include a village of fisherfolk whose bestial appearances belie their kindness. They invite visitors to join their most sacred rite, in which each participant must sever a finger with a cleaver, so that it might be added to the communal cookpot as a stew ingredient. Nearby lies another village whose people are beautiful but cruelly violent.

## Torqual

This city is known as a center of trade, and for its Festival of Ennoblements. It lies to the northeast of the Serene Sea.

## Tustvold

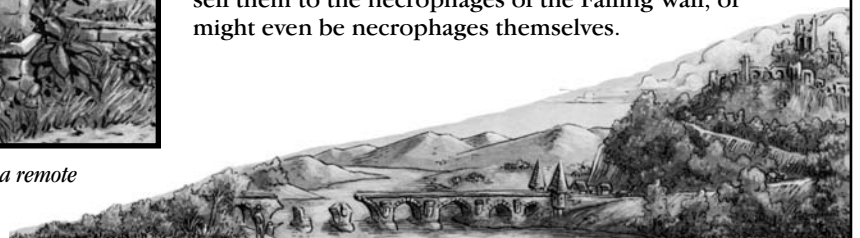
The Tustvold mud flats serve as the Ocean of Sighs' southern shore. It is all too easy to lose a boot, or become stuck, in the foul-smelling and viscid mud. Various odd creatures populate the mud flats, the most dangerous of which are slow-moving but ferocious pincer lizards.

The male inhabitants of the nearby village, also called Tustvold, mark their social supremacy by sitting atop high columns made of marble blocks salvaged from nearby ruins. The man with the highest column is afforded the greatest status. Their wives toil bitterly to pay for the erection of new blocks. Only with the help of ossip wax, harvested from a nearby ossip berry bush, can the blocks be lofted into the air.

Traders of the Maot people come here to buy preserved corpses of the QaHr civilization, which they claim to put to ceremonial use. Some might speculate that they sell them to the necrophages of the Falling Wall, or might even be necrophages themselves.



*Temple to a now-forgotten faith (early 21st Aeon?) in a remote region of the Scaum River Valley.*





## Other Worlds, Distant Times

With the appropriate magic, travel to far-flung worlds or past aeons is a simple, if intermittently dangerous, affair. A number of other dimensions append to that of the Dying Earth, and these too can be reached by sorcerous means.

### Achernar

Achernar is a distant star. Among its inhabitants are a race of truculent, spiny parasites capable of lodging themselves in a human's innards. These creatures communicate with their hosts by jabbing sharp spines into kidneys and other internal organs. They are social and do not like to be separated for long from their fellows. Magicians are capable of summoning them to Earth, which is presumably also true of Archernar's other bizarre life forms.

### Cutz, One Million Years Ago

Travellers to a million years in the past will note that the sun is orange-yellow in color, not red, and bathes the world in golden light. The sky is not indigo but a pleasing light blue. People in the past speak languages unfamiliar to denizens of the Dying Earth. In the region of Cutz (not then known by that name), at least three great cities can be seen from high up in the mountains. The air is filled with a strange and melancholy music, which emanates from mountain cliffs. White-robed winged creatures, their bodies covered in chitinous plates like those of beetles, swoop about outside the mouth of their cavernous lair. They periodically swoosh down from the skies to grab a human. They carry off their victims, ascending high into the mountains, and then drop them from a great height, to land on the jagged cliff rocks. Yet the area's human inhabitants are sanguine about this state of affairs, believing that the creatures are angels of death, and that their appearance marks the end of a person's natural lifespan. They labor under the impression that the creatures bear them to heaven's entrance. The people here are short; their skins are pumpkin-orange, their eyes and teeth deep black. Their faces, equipped with heavy jaws and pronounced cheekbones, are intricately muscled, allowing precise control of the movements of their noses and ears. Although they may at first seem tolerant—for example, they do not forbid an unwed

woman's sexual perambulations—they react violently to heretical behavior, such as sleeping without the obligatory ceremonial kerchief or devotional chin-salve.

### Embelyon

This world is much like the Dying Earth in appearance: its rocks, trees, and flowers are all familiar to a resident of Ascolais. But there is a curious vagueness to the place, as if created in haste by a force inattentive to detail. The horizon is blurry; sometimes it seems like a vast black curtain encircles Embelyon like a neglected stage set. The air refracts light, as water should. The sky is strangest of all, a lattice of interweaving colored wave that ripple together to create an ever-moving net of light.

The legendary magician Pandelume (see the next chapter), reputed to know every spell, is Embelyon's most famous resident.

### The End of the Universe

If you travel through space, billions of leagues from Earth, past countless galaxies, comet fields, and nebulae, through star streams and constellations, eventually you come to the End of the Universe. In fact, travel through space in any direction will take you to this place, as anyone familiar with the intrinsic conditions of physical reality will tell you. When you approach it, the stars and planets begin to thin out, until eventually there is virtually nothing to see but the blackness of space. At this place you will find the line between existence and NOTHING, an ever-encroaching void that devours the universe at a slow and deliberate pace. At the moment, a particular world dangles in space, waiting for NOTHING to wash over it, ceasing its existence. An array of abandoned buildings, from crypts to meeting halls to cloth factories, remain on one spot of its otherwise denuded surface. Although the casual observer might logically conclude that these are the remnants of the last civilization to exist on this dead world, they were in fact painstakingly recreated by the Arch-Magician Morreion during his extended stay here. (At the time, he had forgotten his identity, and with it the spells that could have conveyed him home.) Now they stand abandoned, about to be snuffed along with the rest of the world.

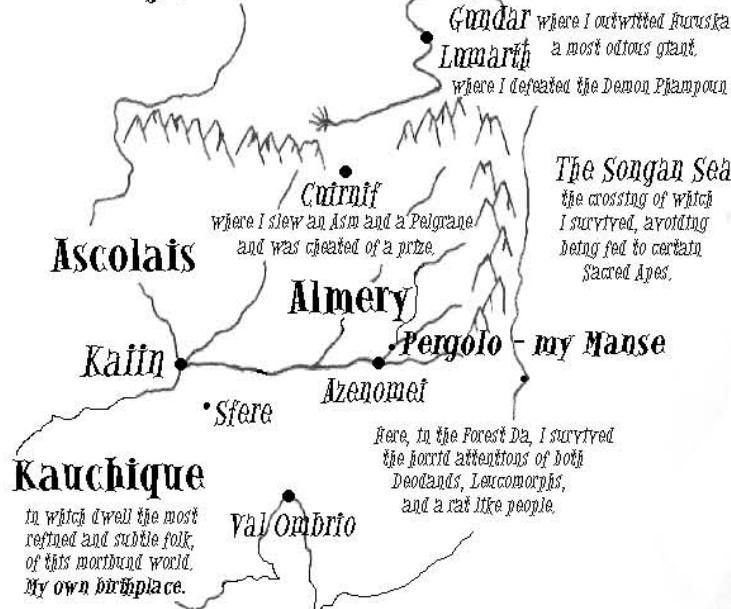


**travel through space:** One's means of conveyance might be, for example, an Arch-Magician's palace, rendered buoyant by means of a mighty spell.



**CHART** showing those Journeys  
made by **Cugel the Clever**  
in order to exact Justice and Revenge  
upon that insufferable person  
known as **Iucounu**, also  
**The Laughing Magician**  
a most detestable fellow  
dull yellow of hue,  
malignant as a wasp,  
uncouth, malodorous  
and with a boiled squash  
for a head.

## The Land of the Falling Wall



**Almery** and **Ascolais** although fine lands,  
are rife with wizardry. Thus, by the malice of **Iucounu**,  
I found myself carried to the far north by a demon, not once,  
but twice, under the influence of **Thasdrubal's** *Laganetic Transfer*.  
On both occasions I returned, overcoming innumerable dangers and inconveniences,  
to triumph, wrest the manse **Pergolo** from **Iucounu** and thus fulfil my vows of revenge.

**The Land of Cutz**  
to which I was twice flung  
from motives of pure malice

*Smolod  
& Grodz*

*Cil*

*Yul*

Here, in the Mountains of *Magnatz*,  
I slew a deadland, briefly loved  
a girl named *Marituka*, and  
confounded many enemies  
by reason of my cunning.

**Saskervoy**

near, and at, which I overcame a number  
of enemies and obstacles and obtained  
employment as a skilled worminger aboard  
the sea-going vessel *Galanke*.

**Manse of Pharesm**  
where, for an imagined slight,  
I was hurled into the far past  
testing my resource to the full.

**Rivers Asc &  
Scamander**

on which I sailed a raft  
and won some thousand  
terces in a game of chance.

**Unknown lands  
and Seas**

**Erze Damath**  
where, assisted by the Prophet *Gilfig*,  
I became leader of a band of pilgrims.

**Silver Desert**  
across which I led my band  
despite thirst, bandits,  
poisonous flora,  
ghosts and  
worse.

A shore of many dangers,  
including enchantment  
and lizard folk,  
all of which  
I won through.

**The Songan Sea**  
the crossing of which  
I survived, avoiding  
being fed to certain  
Sacred Apes.







Rhialto,  
you are a curious  
creature, one of  
an obstinate and  
enigmatic race.

*Rhialto the Marvellous,*  
Chapter 2



## Chapter 11:

# Personages

Rogues, Arch-Magicians,  
vat-grown beauties, and, of course,  
Chun the Unavoidable

### Notable Characters

**T**his chapter describes many notable characters of the Dying Earth. With some of these personages your PCs may have Relationships (which you'll recall from Chapter 2, "Characters"). Others may pop up in your adventures as rivals, temporary allies, or walk-ons. ❁ Though Jack Vance's Dying Earth stories are set in the 21st Aeon, we make no other specific assumption here about the timeframe in which you will set your adventures. You may choose to set your series before, after, or during the events in the books. The best choice might be to create your own parallel continuity. GMs who do this can adapt their own versions of the stories, with a gaggle of PCs taking the place of Cugel, Rhialto, or another protagonist. Therefore, some characters merit description here even though they die in a story.





I suggest that we trust our fortunes to Mandingo the three-eyed Goddess of Luck.

Some game statistics given here use the ~ placeholder, representing the average of all your player characters' ratings in a specified ability. For instance, "Defense (Misdirection) ~" means the character's Defense rating equals the average of all PCs' Defense ratings. "Attack (Cunning) 2~" means the character's Attack rating is twice the average of all PCs' Attack ratings. For more, see Chapter 12, "Creatures."

## Chun the Unavoidable

Kaiin's ruined Old Town is much feared due to the presence of this singular being, who terrifies even the wizards who drink in the fabled Magician's Inn. As few who encounter Chun live to describe him, notions of his appearance and behavior are fragmentary at best. Capable of swift forward bounds in a canine gait, he is clearly not altogether human. Chun wears a cape sewn of eyeballs threaded together. The collection of eyes for his cape provides his reason for living. His victims are always found with their eyes removed. His deadly reputation seems to serve as an attractant to legions of adventurers, each of whom arrogantly reckons that he'll be the one to slay the legendary monster. Some are driven by the assumption that such a beast must guard a cache of priceless treasures. Others go to his lair, the Place of Whispers, at the behest of Lith, a beautiful witch of the Thamber Meadow. Intoxicated by her loveliness, they attempt to retrieve a golden tapestry she claims Chun has stolen from her. But when he claims a victim she sent him, he goes to her hut to pay her with a thread or two from the tapestry she seeks.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Intimidating) ~, Rebuff (Wary) 15, Attack (Cunning) 2~, Defense (Misdirection) 2~, Health 20, Appraisal 4, Athletics 10, Concealment 10, Gambling 10, Living Rough 4, Perception 10, Scuttlebutt 4, Stealth 10, Tracking 10, Wealth 2, Wherewithal 8.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Indolence Ω, Gourmandism 4, Pettifoggery Ω, Rakishness Ω.

Chun knows the ruins of the Old Town well enough that he can surprise any interloper, automatically winning initiative when attacking, and gaining a free extra action. To his frightened victim, he may seem to be materializing out of thin air.

## Cugel the Clever

Cugel the Clever is the Dying Earth's prototypical wanderer. Although prosperity frequently eludes him, he at least survives the road's many dangers, which is more than most of his kind can say. Long-legged, quick-fingered, and graceful, he speaks in a pleasing voice. His long, lean face projects the attitude of an amiable, magnetic, and honest personality; only the last characteristic is



deceptive. His fine black hair falls fetchingly over his brow, and is cut short in the back. He loves fine clothes, and is especially concerned that he should always have a hat of the utmost fashionability. A redoubtable bluffer, he carries himself with an air of natural entitlement, in hopes that others will respond to him as to a man deserving of the very best. However, he is not above making a hasty exit when one of his swindles goes awry. Despite his success as a cheat, he is not immune to the tricks of others, and is outsmarted as often as he prevails. Cugel is unimpeded by altruism, and occasionally engages in acts of petty cruelty or blind selfishness. If his vanity is threatened, he may resort to violence—provided that the one who offends him shows no credible method of striking back at him. He is at his luckiest when working against rivals or enemies whose overconfidence and self-regard exceed his own. Conversely, he is at his most incautious when he finds himself in a situation of comfort and pleasure. In such instances, he is bound to overlook dangers.





## Personages

His worst enemy is Iucounu the Laughing Magician, who twice exiled him to the distant land of Cutz, forcing him to make arduous journeys back to Azenomei in search of vengeance. His final encounter with Iucounu led to his enemy's downfall, and we last saw him in possession of Iucounu's manse, his great wealth, and his collection of arcane marvels. It is hard to imagine that Cugel then settled down to a peaceful and uneventful life, wisely conserving his newfound riches.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 8, Attack (Finesse) 8, Defense (Intuition) 8, Health 6, Magic (Daring) 2, Appraisal 2, Athletics 3, Concealment 2, Driving 2, Etiquette 2, Gambling 4, Imposture 2, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 1, Perception 4, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 2, Seamanship 1, Seduction 4, Stealth 2, Stewardship 2.

**Possessions:** enchanted item of the GM's choice 2.

**Resistances:** Pettifoggery 4.

**Note:** Cugel is not an ideal character to choose for a Relationship; he's not especially famous, and is difficult to contact when engaged in vagabondage.

### Gilgad

The Arch-Magician Gilgad is small of stature. Large, glistening eyes stare from his round, gray-skinned face, their irises the color of dust. Gilgad always garbs himself in clothing of a rose-red hue. Everyone, including his fellows in the conclave of Arch-Magicians, avoids his touch, due to the chronic clamminess of his long-fingered hands. It is difficult to pierce his dour and mournful air, except by slighting him, at which point he will quickly leap to his feet to enumerate his legendary accomplishments, such as the ten spells he deployed against Keino the Sea-Demon. Largely friendless, he is inordinately fond of his pet simiode, Boodis.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Forthright) 8, Rebuff (Wary) 10, Attack (Ferocity) 6, Defense (Misdirection) 4, Health 6, Magic (Studious) 23, Specialization (Simiodes) 15, Appraisal 5, Athletics 1, Pedantry 12, Perception 4, Quick Fingers 2, Stealth 2, Stewardship 2, Wealth 12.

**Resistance:** Rakishness Ω.

### Hurtiancz

The Arch-Magician Hurtiancz is well-known to his fellow Arch-Magicians as a truculent fellow with a temper to match his florid features. Out of stubbornness, he clings to his original form, despite his ability to switch to a more pleasing appearance. His head is blocky, equipped with a bulbous nose, and lacks a visible neck. His teeth are made of rubies. Despite his eschewal of semblance-altering magic, Hurtiancz is a vain man. Mockery of his

sometimes questionable clothing choices is sure to earn him hoarse-

throated wrath. At conclave meetings, Hurtiancz is a frequent objector, rising often to his feet to insist on his prerogatives, or to challenge the Preceptor, Ildefonse (q.v.) on matters of procedure. His fondness for drink, though not unusual in the conclave, is nonetheless prodigious.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Intimidating) 9, Rebuff (Contrary) 15, Attack (Strength) 5, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 7, Health 8, Magic (Forceful) 21 (specialization: unknown), Appraisal 5, Athletics 2, Gambling 3, Pedantry 12, Perception 4, Stewardship 2, Wealth 16, Wherewithal 2.

**Resistances:** none.

### Ildefonse the Preceptor

*"He had been chosen Preceptor not only for his dedication to the Blue Principles, but also for his equable temperament, which at times seemed almost bland. His tolerance was proverbial... [T]he use of the word 'ingenuous,' when applied to Ildefonse, was probably incorrect."*

The fastidious, perhaps over-precise Ildefonse presides over the largest Arch-Magician organization of Ascolais and Almery. Its membership fluctuates, hovering around two dozen. He chairs this sometimes unruly association determined that proper forms of interaction be at all times maintained. Like his colleagues, he can change appearance on a whim, but usually manifests as a roundish, balding middle-aged fellow with thin blond whiskers and "a manner of jovial innocence."

Ildefonse is on friendly terms with Rhialto the Marvelous, but is not above competing with him for the favors of comely maidens or ruling against him at the Arch-Magicians' conclave. He keeps his curiosity well-honed, whether its object is a living fossil from the 18th Aeon or a flask of unknown tippie at the end of the universe. He takes pleasure in the status accorded him as Preceptor and expects that others treat him with the dignity to which he is accustomed.

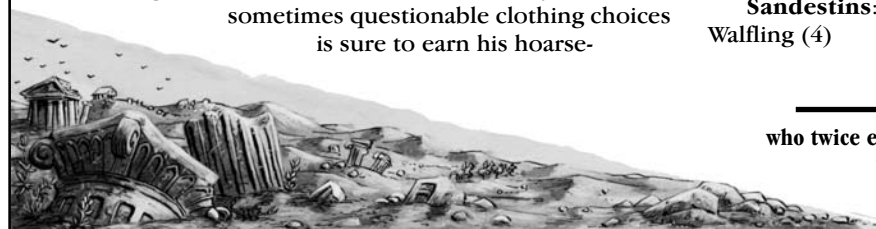
His chief sandestin, Osherl, is, like most of his kind, prone to hair-splitting and underhanded maneuvering. Ildefonse has learned to deal with him firmly, and with great attention to details of phrasing. When he loans out Osherl's services to other Arch-Magicians, he is sometimes remiss in pointing out the degree of pettifoggery required to extract due service.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Obfuscatory) 10, Rebuff (Obtuse) 10, Attack (Caution) 6, Defense (Dodge) 6, Health 12, Magic (Studious) 30 (specialization: unknown), Appraisal 10, Athletics 2, Etiquette 2, Gambling 2, Pedantry 20, Perception 4, Scuttlebutt 2, Stewardship 2, Wealth 10.

**Resistances:** none.

**Sandestins:** Osherl (12 indenture points), Ssisk (8), Walfling (4)

**who twice exiled him:** Were Iucounu here, he might well argue that the second exile was due entirely to Cugel's own overconfident misuse of a complicated incantation.





I suggest that Master Chernitz retract the term "moral leper" and Cugel his "tree-weasel," and there let the matter rest.



## Iucounu the Laughing Magician

*"Iucounu, himself devious, is not apt to be taken unawares. He would instantly learn who instigated the assault, and the relations of distant cordiality we have enjoyed would be at an end. ... At any instant the sun may go dark; I do not care to pass these last hours exchanging jests with Iucounu, whose humor is much more elaborate than my own."*

Iucounu is well-known, and not for his pleasing appearance. He is short and utterly hairless. The hue of his skin is a jaundiced yellow. Oblivious to good dress sense, he emphasizes his unhealthy complexion by wearing nothing but black. Enormous jowls dangle and jiggle from his jaw, lending his features a roundness that suggest a decomposing squash or pumpkin. Iucounu's fame derives from his accomplishments as a magician, and for his cruel and mocking demeanor. All of Almery knows of his vindictive streak, and few dare to cross him. They know that he lives to exact elaborate and demeaning vengeance on his enemies. For example, when he found Cugel in the midst of burgling his manse, Iucounu fitted him with an extraterrestrial parasite named Firx, demanded that he seek a particular mystic lens, and then used Thrasdrubal's Laganetic Transfer to dispatch him to far-distant Cutz. When he captures a foe who, unlike Cugel, does not seem like a useful potential

lackey, he subjects him to a program of torments. If pressed for time or bereft of inspiration, he subjects his victim to the Charm of Forlorn Encystment.

Iucounu meets his end at the conclusion of *Cugel's Saga*, when his identity is subsumed by the demon Sadlark, whose scales he has collected into a suit of armor. However, GMs are free to decide that his demise is merely apparent. Perhaps he transmigrated into a demon realm when Sadlark took over his form, and may sometime return to Earth to reclaim his manse and mock his foes.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Intimidating) 8, Rebuff (Penetrating) 14, Attack (Cunning) 6, Defense (Dodge) 8, Health 12, Magic (Devious) 18, Specialization (Demon Relics) 10, Appraisal 8, Athletics 1, Etiquette 2, Gambling 2, Pedantry 14, Perception 6, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 4, Wealth 15, Wherewithal 5.

**Resistances:** Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery 4, Rakishness 6.

## Prince Kandive the Golden

Prince Kandive the Golden rules the variegated, delight-addled city of Kaiin (see Chapter 10). At festival time, his palace echoes to the sounds of revelry, and its windows glow with dancing light. Do not assume that his love of fleshly pleasures renders Kandive an easy target. He is rightly feared as both a sturdy warrior and an effective, if unsubtle, magician. He maintains his earthly power through displays of wealth, sponsoring festival events and funding the biggest and most gilded barge at Kaiin's annual regatta. His handsome visage and golden curls have dazzled a great many women, a large proportion of whom have shared his bed. Though successful in the bedchamber, his luck against rival magicians is questionable. He was bilked of his secret of renewed youth by Mazirian the Magician. Turjan of Miir stole from him a magical amulet of mysterious provenance. When thwarted in this way, he is given to brooding, temporarily slaking his thirst for vengeance with wine. He often supports junior mages, such as his nephew Ulan Dhor, underwriting their exploratory efforts in search of arcane lore. He lends financial and magical aid to them, but does not personally leave the safety of his palace to poke about in distant ruins.

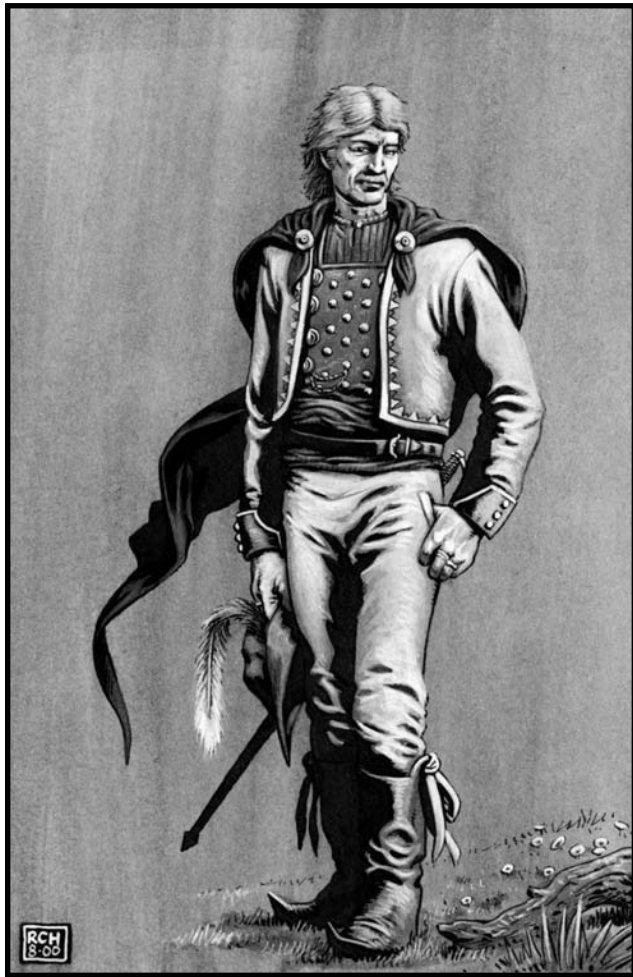
**Ratings:** Persuade (Obfuscatory) 16, Rebuff (Wary) 15, Attack (Finesse) 16, Defense (Intuition) 20, Health 12, Magic (Daring) 14, Appraisal 8, Athletics 8, Etiquette 8, Gambling 8, Pedantry 5, Perception 6, Riding 8, Scuttlebutt 4, Seduction 8, Wealth 30, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** Pettifoggery 4.





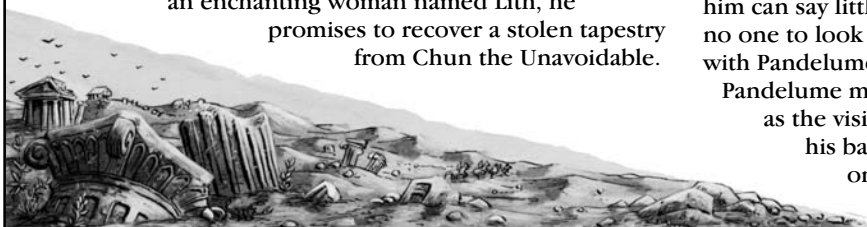
## Personages



### Liane the Wayfarer

Handsome yet cruel, Liane the Wayfarer is the sort of man who gives wandering adventurers their poor reputation. He makes his living waylaying travelers and searching out treasures to steal. When his purse is full, he pursues his appetite for fine food and sexual gratification. When its contents dwindle, he is more than willing to engage in fraud, ambush, or torture to fill it again. Fancying himself a skillful seducer, he cannot resist pressing himself on any attractive women who might be unlucky enough to catch his eye. His large, enticing hazel eyes are always in motion. His features are young and charming. He wears red, curled shoes, a suit of crimson and green, a cloak the color of pine needles, and a peaked, feathered cap.

His high opinion of his resourcefulness brings about his eventual demise, when, in order to prove himself to an enchanting woman named Lith, he promises to recover a stolen tapestry from Chun the Unavoidable.



**Ratings:** Persuade (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 12, Attack (Ferocity) ~, Defense (Misdirection) ~, Health 6, Appraisal 6, Athletics 5, Concealment 4, Etiquette 4, Gambling 4, Imposture 3, Living Rough 4, Perception 4, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 5, Seduction 2, Stealth 4, Tracking 2.

**Possessions:** Rapier 4, Dagger 1, feathered cap 2.

**Resistances:** Pettifoggery Ω.

### Mazirian the Magician

The obsessively possessive Mazirian dwells in the deep forest in a manse heavily fortified by magical traps. His eyes appear both young and old at the same time. His greatest pride is his fabulous three-terraced garden, which presents an unparalleled array of botanical wonders. Chief among these are hybrid plant/animals, such as the half-moth.

Mazirian's relations with other magicians are far from collegial. He stole the secret of magical vitality from Prince Kandive the Golden. He owns a gong that, when struck, shortens the life of a rival named Azvan the Astronomer. When Mazirian wants the esoteric knowledge of a fellow magician, he captures him and subjects him to peril and torment until the victim gives up the secret. For example, he might shrink you down and put you in a glass cage with a ferocious creature. When he sees a beautiful woman, his urge is to seize her, incarcerate her in a prison of green glass, force her to perform the Eighteen Motions of Allurement, and then use her as an experimental subject.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Intimidating) 10, Rebuff (Penetrating) 15, Attack (Ferocity) 6, Defense (Dodge) 8, Health 6, Magic (Forceful) 18, Specialization (Gardening) 10, Appraisal 4, Athletics 2, Concealment 2, Pedantry 16, Perception 6, Stewardship 2, Wealth 15.

**Resistances:** Indolence 4, Gourmandism 3, Pettifoggery 6, Rakishness 2.

**Enchanted items include:** Live Boots.

### Pandelume

*"The universe is methodized by symmetry and balance; in every aspect of existence is this equipoise observed. Consequently, even in the trivial scope of our dealings, this equivalence must be maintained, thus and thus. I agree to assist you; in return, you perform a service of equal value for me."*

Pandelume is a magician of legendary repute who dwells in the otherworld known as Embelyon (see Chapter 10). Even those who journey there and treat with him can say little for certain about him, because he allows no one to look upon him. A traveler gaining an audience with Pandelume hears only his disembodied voice. If

Pandelume must physically manifest in the same room as the visitor, he commands that the petitioner turn his back. What fate befalls the person who looks on Pandelume remains unknown.





Shall we hazard another goblet of this phenolic seepage? It is at least not deficient in authority.

Many sages say that Pandelume knows every spell which has ever been cast. Sometimes he reveals a small portion of this knowledge in exchange for a service. He covets the enchanted items of others; once he enjoined Turjan of Miir to steal an amulet from Prince Kandive the Golden. He also created the twins T'Sain and T'Sais.

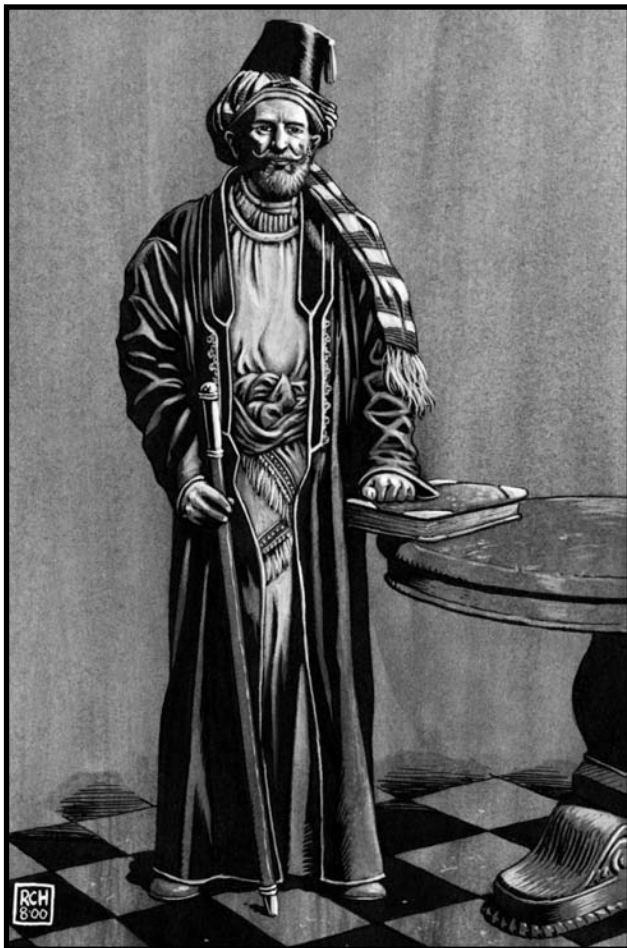
**Ratings:** Persuade (Obfuscatory) 15, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 20, Attack (Caution) 3, Defense (Misdirection) 12, Health 15, Magic (Insightful) 30 (specialization: unknown), Appraisal 8, Pedantry 30, Perception 6, Scuttlebutt 5, Stewardship 2, Wealth 30, Wherewithal 6.

**Resistances:** none

## Rhialto the Marvellous

*[Osberl, a sandestin:] "To deal with Rhialto the Marvellous, and here I allude to your host and the conservator of my indenture, you must fuel the fires of his bloated vanity. Excalibur upon his handsome countenance; feign awe at his wisdom; he will be putty in your hands."*

Urbane, pleasing to women of discernment, and always superbly dressed, Rhialto the Marvellous is perhaps the most socially adept of the Arch-Magicians' conclave chaired by Ildefonse the Preceptor. In his airy manse, Falu,



with its spacious grounds and immaculate gardens, he enjoys sophisticated meals, fine vintages, and arcane research, conducted in a measured and leisurely manner. Whether the conclave is threatened with mass gender conversion or omens concerning the fate of a long-forgotten colleague, it is Rhialto's judgment and determination that cuts through the inevitable morass of intra-wizard squabbling and sees to a solution—or so he stoutly maintains. Rhialto's fondness for pranks and his successes in the romantic arena sometimes earn the envy of his fellows. Their jealousy often hampers him when the Arch-Magicians quarrel over privilege or access to esoteric booty, which is to say very often indeed. Though others say he takes on airs and is prone to vanity, Rhialto knows that his good opinion of himself reflects, if anything, an understatement of his true qualities.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 8, Attack (Cunning) 12, Defense (Intuition) 14, Health 8, Magic (Daring) 23, Specialization (Enhancement of Personal Comfort) 13, Appraisal 5, Athletics 5, Concealment 2, Etiquette 5, Gambling 5, Imposture 2, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 10, Perception 4, Quick Fingers 2, Riding 1, Scuttlebutt 4, Seduction 7, Stealth 2, Stewardship 3, Wealth 20, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** none.

**Sandestins:** Topo (8 indenture points), Bellume (6). Osberl, the sandestin quoted above, actually serves Ildefonse the Preceptor (*q.v.*).

## T'Sais

T'Sais, an astonishingly beautiful woman with long black hair, was grown in a vat by Pandelume. An error in her manufacture twisted her perceptions so that she perceived all beauty as wretchedness. Convulsed with unquenchable fury at an existence she saw as irredeemably corrupt, she attacked all who crossed her path. Yet when she encountered T'Sain, a twin for her grown by Turjan of Miir under Pandelume's tutelage, her counterpart's pure-heartedness forced her to consider that her perceptions might be wrong. She left her birthplace, the otherworld of Embelyon for the Dying Earth, seeking an understanding of beauty. Pandelume gave her items to help her face the dangers of Earth: a magical rapier that would leap at her foes, an amulet to negate magic, and a bagful of gems. Eventually she encountered Etarr, a stout-hearted man whose visage had been stolen by a treacherous enchantress, and replaced with that of a demon. Together, the two sought out the enchantress, and through the intercession of an ancient god, saw justice wrought upon her. The god restored Etarr's face and righted T'Sais's perceptions. The two were last seen heading for Ascolais on the backs of freakish winged creatures.





## Personages

**Ratings:** Persuade (Forthright) 6, Rebuff (Wary) 15, Attack (Speed) 20, Defense (Parry) 15, Health 6, Athletics 6, Living Rough 2, Perception 4, Riding 4, Stealth 2, Wherewithal 6.

**Possessions:** magic rapier 4, Amulet of Puissant Reflection 4, bag of gems 1, yellow cape 1.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 4, Indolence 5, Gourmandism 5, Pettifoggery 5, Rakishness 5.

### Turjan of Miir

*Day and far into the opalescent Embelyon night be worked under Pandelume's unseen tutelage. He learned the secret of renewed youth, many spells of the ancients, and a strange abstract lore that Pandelume termed "Mathematics." ... "I find herein a wondrous beauty," he told Pandelume. "This is no science, this is art, where equations fall away to elements like resolving chords, and where always prevails a symmetry either explicit or multiplex, but always of a crystalline serenity."*

The magician Turjan dwells in his castle, Miir, which overlooks the River Derna near Ascolais. He is a dedicated quester into the secrets of life. His attempts to grow vat creatures failed until he sought the aid of the wizard Pandelume. Although willing to risk his life for the knowledge he seeks, he views any such need with rueful humor. Turjan is courageous enough to wage a magical duel against Prince Kandive the Golden, or attempt wit in the presence of Pandelume. The beautiful T'Sain, grown in one of Pandelume's vats, is his love and companion.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Charming) 8, Rebuff (Penetrating) 8, Attack (Speed) 8, Defense (Parry) 8, Health 6, Magic (Studious) 15 (specialization: Vat-Grown Creatures), Appraisal 2, Athletics 4, Concealment 2, Etiquette 2, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 10, Perception 4, Scuttlebutt 2, Stealth 2, Stewardship 2, Tracking 2, Wealth 12, Wherewithal 2.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 4, Avarice 4, Indolence 4, Gourmandism 4, Pettifoggery 4, Rakishness 4.

### Ulan Dhor

Ulan Dhor is an apprentice magician whose uncle happens to be Prince Kandive the Golden. He is proud of his accomplishments, such as his high ranking as a swordsman among the Eight Delphasians, and his knowledge of a single spell, Phandaal's Critique of Chill. Though possessed of sharp perceptions and capable of seeing through the vanities of others, he knows when to hold his tongue.

Ulan Dhor shows altruism unusual on the Dying Earth. When he sees a woman being carried off by a gaun, his impulse is to rush to her rescue, hacking at the beast with his sword. His boldness is matched by his resourcefulness; confronted with an ancient air car, he quickly figures out how to operate its controls. He was last seen enjoying the company of Elai, an agreeable woman he rescued from the madness of lost Ampridatvir.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Forthright) 8, Rebuff (Penetrating) 8, Attack (Finesse) 8, Defense (Parry) 8, Health 6, Magic (Curious) 3 (no specialization), Appraisal 2, Athletics 6, Driving 2, Etiquette 2, Gambling 1, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 4, Perception 6, Riding 1, Scuttlebutt 1, Seduction 1, Stealth 1, Stewardship 1, Wherewithal 2.

**Relationship:** Prince Kandive the Golden 3.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 1, Avarice 6, Indolence 4, Gourmandism 4, Pettifoggery 6, Rakishness 1.

### Vermouliau the Dream-Walker

*"Vermouliau the Dream-Walker, a person tall and thin as a wand, with a high crest of glossy black hair like the dorsal fin of a sail-fish, was not known for his loquacity. His prominent eyes tended to gaze unfocused past the bony jut of his nose, and were often obscured by a nictitating membrane which conceivably served a useful purpose during his dream-walking."*

The Arch-Magician Vermouliau moves with a slow, stately stride. His preoccupation is unique among the Arch-Magicians of Ildefonse's conclave: He travels through, observes, and catalogues the dreams of others. He categorizes them according to a system of his own creation, using such descriptive terms as "intractive" and "inoptative." Each dream he assigns its own code number (for example, Dream AXR-11 GG7, from Volume 7 of *Vermouliau's Index*), each of which he can easily call from his prodigious memory.

Vermouliau's interest in his subject is so intense he assumes that all around him must share it. At conclaves, he is notorious for injecting detailed dream descriptions into the general discourse. Colleagues sometimes refer to his speeches as "interminable." He takes quiet, sniffing offense at such suggestions, certain that any dream he cares to elucidate is patently germane to the topic at hand.

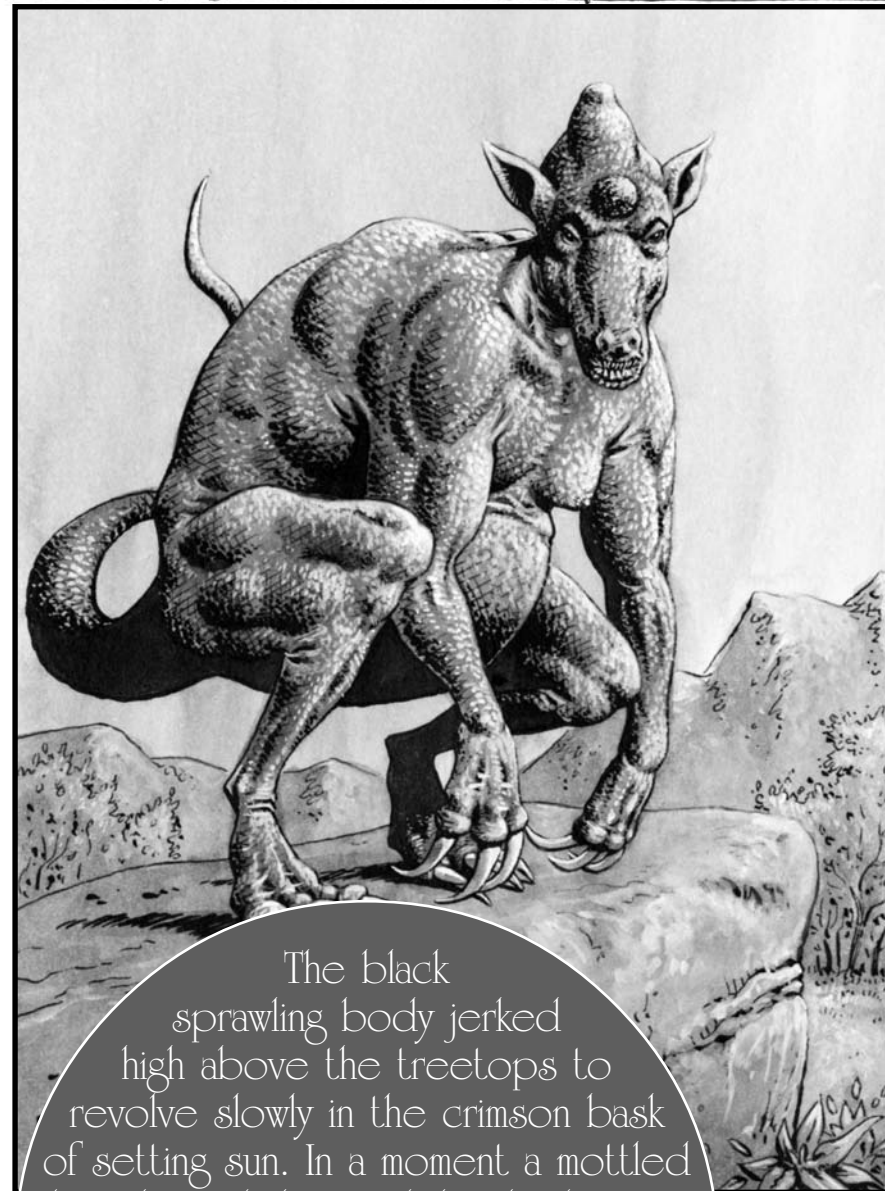
**Ratings:** Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 15, Attack (Caution) 4, Defense (Parry) 6, Health 6, Magic (Studious) 24, Specialization (Dreams) 23, Appraisal 2, Athletics 2, Pedantry 12, Perception 2, Stewardship 2, Wealth 14.

**Resistances:** Indolence 2, Gourmandism 2, Rakishness 6.

**Wary:** Or, if she has yet to be cured when she enters your story, Contrary.  
**Attack (Speed) 20:** Reduce Attack and Defense by 14 if she is separated from her sword.  
**Perception 4:** Reduce to 0 if she has yet to be cured.







The black sprawling body jerked high above the treetops to revolve slowly in the crimson bask of setting sun. In a moment a mottled bat-shaped thing with hooked snout swept close, and its beak tore the black leg before the crying deodand could kick it away. Another and another of the shapes flitted across the sun.

*The Dying Earth,*  
Chapter 2

## Chapter 12:

# Creatures

Fearsome, ubiquitous denizens of the wilderness, generally mysterious, yet (like the erb at left) predominantly guileful and voracious

### Stop! GMs Only!

**T**his chapter contains information for GMs. If you are a player new to *The Dying Earth* game, we suggest that you stop reading here, in order to preserve some fun surprises. Players who have already GMed a *Dying Earth* series will of course already be familiar with it—and will be correspondingly well-acquainted with its methods of making prior knowledge unreliable.



## They Stalk the Wilderness

Any area of the Dying Earth's landmass not settled by humans is almost certainly home to ravening beasts that dine enthusiastically on human flesh. These creatures are called "half-men," because they are intelligent, articulate, and as capable of deceit as any human. Some profess shame at their cannibalistic urges, claiming that unseemly hunger is intrinsic to their nature and, as such, beyond their control. Most pedants agree that many, if not all, breeds of half-man originated as the vat experiments of various Arch-Magicians. They hypothesize that the first deodands, for example, were bred by some mad magician desiring guardsmen of the greatest possible ferocity—though others deny this presumptuous speculation, averring instead that deodands were engendered by spontaneous generation during the Great Tumble.

The continued survival of these beasts attests to the availability of large quantities of prey, even in the Dying Earth's remotest regions. The precise nature and habits of these prey species remains a matter of debate in scholarly circles. First-hand information is difficult to come by, as naturalists who enter the wilderness can themselves be classified as prey.

Many dangerous creatures are distributed widely and well-known to scholars. Chief among these are the gid, deodand, pelgrane, and hoon. Other creatures may be singular in nature, having issued from a mage's vat eons ago. They may live extremely long lives without reproducing. Adventurers sometimes encounter hybrids of two or more well-known creature types. Nissifer, a mysterious (and hungry) passenger in a caravan guarded by Cugel, turned out to be a cross between a sime and a bazil. When dealing with half-men, it is unwise to assume that a given specimen is limited to the known characteristics ascribed to its species.

### Traveller's Advisory

The presence of ravening creatures throughout the wilderness exerts a strong effect on the thoughts and actions of ordinary people. Half-men render travel from one settlement to another grossly hazardous. Travellers who in other circumstances would never associate with one another are routinely induced to band together, seeking safety in numbers.

Wisely fearing vicious creatures, many people never travel at all. They spend their entire lives in one tiny settlement. This isolation in turn explains the unique and

idiosyncratic customs of many communities. Although everyone in the Dying Earth seems to speak the same language, and demonstrates a taste for formal expression and the swindling of strangers, cultures can vary widely from one village to the next. In especially remote settlements, people may even display unique physical characteristics, such as extreme hairiness, prominent incisors, or exaggerated facial features. Though some isolated humans appear quite bestial, they should not be confused with half-men.

Cugel-level characters should always fear these beasts. If PCs prove willing to camp out in the forest as dusk approaches, rather than seek the nearest settlement, the GM needs to beef up her creatures' game statistics to make them appropriately menacing. Higher-level characters may have spells or enchanted devices that erect barriers between campers and creatures. Disaster should ensue if the creatures circumvent them. Even an Arch-Magician, if unprepared, should fear a deodand or gid.

## The Migration of Creatures From Book to Game

Jack Vance's presentation of the creatures of the Dying Earth is difficult to duplicate in a roleplaying game. As he does with food items and flora, Vance often alludes to creatures without fully describing them. This delightfully wry technique helps contribute to the stories' illusion of reality. After all, if you tell a friend that you saw a squirrel in your backyard rooting through your trash cans, you wouldn't stop to define "squirrel." The squirrel's appearance and demeanor are facts of everyday existence. Similarly, Dying Earth characters speak of gids and grues without expatiating. Every reader, to an extent, forms his own impression.

Because players can always challenge the GM to provide additional information, you can't use this technique. If you say, "An unusual hoon approaches the magical barrier you've erected. It rises up on its haunches and bellows," your players will certainly ask what a hoon looks like. They may roll their Pedantry ability to dredge up obscure and useful facts on hoon behavior and physiology.

But if you do describe a hoon to a player who is also a Vance fan, he may have formed an entirely different image of it. Instead of enhancing his fictional illusion, you'll spoil it. Also, we don't want this game to ruin the experience for people who seek out the books after playing. The

**cannibalistic:** Pettifoggers may object that half-men are cannibalistic, technically speaking, only if they eat their own kind. However, we use the term to refer to the eating of human flesh, as this is the phenomenon most travellers concern themselves with.

**exaggerated facial features:** Differences in human physiognomy become even more pronounced when one travels back in time.

**without fully describing them:** Creatures that directly appear as part of the action are sometimes described in greater detail; because deodands appear in several stories, we have a reasonably complete vision of their appearance and basic habits.







By various portents Cugel came to understand  
that the tower was haunted.

offhand references would lose their mystique if you're remembering a detailed illustration and quasi-official description from this game.

Instead, we separate each creature description into known facts and scholarly conjecture. The first section provides information we know from direct description in the four books. This varies from reasonably complete to utterly wispy. "Scholarly Conjecture" merely suggests appearance and behavior, sometimes in competing versions. For each creature, choose the alternative that is correct in *your* Dying Earth. If you like a description that you do not use, you can always rename the creature and introduce that into your Dying Earth as well. Illustrations based on the conjectures are not to be taken as the only possible truth. Treat the drawings as by artists who've never seen the creatures in the flesh and are working from loose descriptions (which is, in fact, the case). Future publications may provide still more variations.

Remember that individual specimens vary widely in ability. These game statistics are only starting points. Modify them as necessary. Be especially quick to alter them if your players, when their characters encounter a creature, cockily recite its abilities.

## Creature Descriptions

The following are among the best-known, and most-feared, creatures of the wilds.

Under *Scholarly Conjecture*, information from differing sources is separated with text bullets (•). Supposed facts given in one bulleted section may directly contradict one another.

### The Value of ~

Some of the game statistics use a variable number, letting you adjust the power of creatures relative to that of your PCs. **The symbol ~ represents the party's average rating in the given ability** as of the end of character creation (you'll recall that you generated these averages in Chapter 2). Some creatures have abilities that are multiples or fractions of ~. Others add or subtract a number from ~. Remember, ability styles are ignored when arriving at the value of ~.

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*After character creation, you calculated the average Attack ability for your group of PCs. You started with four characters, who had Attack ratings of 12, 14, 22, and 8. When added together and divided by 4, they average 14. Your value for Attack ~ is 14.*

---

**rename the creature:** It is also possible that widely dissimilar creatures are known under the same name in different places. Around Almery, the term "gid" might be used to describe a lizard-like predator, while people far to the north use "gid" to refer to a mammalian beast.

**directly contradict one another:** However, there is nothing stopping the more devious among you from mixing and matching facts. This is a wise stratagem in dealing with players who know the game better than you do.

*A deodand's Attack (Strength) is listed as 2 ~, which in your case is 2 times 14. In your game, therefore, the standard specimen of deodand has an Attack of 28.*

*A twk-man's Attack (Finesse) is 0.5 ~, which in your case is half of 14. A twk-man's Attack is 7.*

*A gaun's Defense (Sure-Footedness) is ~+3. The average of your players' Defense ratings is 18. Therefore the Gaun's Defense is 21 (18 +3.)*

---

Some game statistics apply only if you accept certain of the scholarly conjectures. These appear in *italics*.

Creatures without Rebuff ratings are assumed to be only of animal intelligence, and thus are not subject to normal suasion.

Unless otherwise specified, **creatures face no levy for fighting unarmed**.

## Archveult

### Known Facts

Archveults are a race of unearthly humanoids of great magical accomplishment. They are supple of neck and perhaps characterized by other minor anatomical anomalies, but are otherwise similar in appearance to men. Notable foes of the Dying Earth's mightiest Arch-Magicians, their fortunes have declined during the past few aeons, and many are now dead or have simply retired. Still, meetings between archveults and magicians are apt to be tense, leading to the exchange of deadly and puissant spells.

Like Arch-Magicians, any self-respecting archveult is surely equipped with a dazzling panoply of enchanted items, and dwells in an isolated manse of imposing aspect. Archveults dwell in a reality of their own, but can travel from it to the Dying Earth. Only the threat of renewed war with powers such as Ildefonse and Rhialto prevents them from doing so.

It is well-known that Arch-Magicians may become archveults, and that this fate is considered dire, forcing the victim's exile. The exact nature of this process remains open to debate. Although archveults have been known to reclaim their former status as humans, such individuals are usually received coolly by true Arch-Magicians.

Archveults refer to humans as "land-apes." Whether this suggests that they forget their human heritage, or that not all of them share human origins, remains a matter for conjecture.





## Scholarly Conjecture

- ✱ The Arch-Magician must be constantly alert for signs that he is degrading into an archveult. It is beyond question that the source of the transformation is what I will refer to as moral slippage. Moral slippage begins when a mage becomes unduly concerned with momentary advantage over his peers, and forgets his sacred duty to pursue and share knowledge with all. It is particularly likely that an mage who has found the secret to, say, distilling certain salts from the vapor of the quelar plant, salts that the archmage knows to be essential to the researches of a peer who has done him repeated favors, who has toasted him at the prince's ball and stood aside as he pursued a certain comely maiden in a gown of emerald-colored satin—that magician, that paragon of greed and perfidy, who withholds the secret to that distillation, who is driven merely by a petty grudge arising from unfounded rumor—he is surely already feeling an untoward plasticity of the upper vertebrae, which we all know to be probative of archveultish tendencies. I submit that we must seize him and inspect his neck for the aforementioned symptoms, so that he might be forced to give up the formula, reversing his moral slippage, and preventing his headlong slide, which culminates in exile or possibly death. None of us, naturally, wish to see it go that far.
- ✱ Transformation into an archveult, though a loathsome fate for which only the naïve feel pity, cannot be attributed to any moral malformation, but is instead a side-effect of certain failures in the magical laboratory. I have identified four, if not five, types of energy which may be inadvertently released in the course of many popular (if poorly understood) fields of experimentation. Although one dose of these energies is seldom enough to provoke immediate transformation, repeated exposure will slowly but inexorably make the foolish experimenter an archveult.
- ✱ The list of known, surviving archveults includes the following: Xexamedes, who claims to be as scorned by the other archveults as he is abhorred by us. Djorin, who dwells in a pink pearl castle by an ocean's shore. Arvianid, of the lucent brow. Ishix, the forefather of crawling things. Herclamon, whose boundless realm is hidden among the turquoise sands of Balank.

## Game Statistics

Persuasion (Eloquent) 20, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 20, Attack (Cunning) 10, Defense (Vexation) 10, Health 20, Magic (Devious) 30, Appraisal 8, Athletics 6, Concealment 4, Engineering 8, Etiquette 2, Gambling 6, Imposture 10, Pedantry 15, Perception 8, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 2, Stealth 2, Wherewithal 15.

## Chug

### Known Facts

The chug is an otherworldly entity capable of striking absolute terror into whatever passes for the hearts of sandestins (*q.v.*). Arch-Magicians summon chugs in order to enforce on sandestins the terms of their indenture agreements. Released in the presence of a sandestin, a chug will immediately leap upon it and begin to suffocate it. The sandestin has but a few moments to yelp out its cries of acquiescence before the chug either annihilates it completely, or subjects it to torture, inducing agony that observers can only imagine.

Like the sandestins they terrorize, chugs are of mutable appearance. They may alter their forms to more efficiently torture a particular sandestin. So if the sandestin takes the form of a long, blue, legless lizard, the chug might become a monstrous, floating face with enormous nostrils. It would then use the nostrils to suck the sandestin up into it, where it can leech away its essence or prick it with a million sharp tendrils.

Chugs seem less intelligent, more single-minded, and dramatically more malign than sandestins. They do not seem to interact with the mortal world, or work great magics, except in furtherance of their efforts to prey upon sandestins.

### Scholarly Conjecture

- ✱ It is well known that the chug is a form of sandestin.
- ✱ The commonly-held belief that the chug is a type of sandestin is false. They are separate and totally inimical classes of being. A chug is a chug is a chug.
- ✱ Only a fool could not see that chugs are demons.
- ✱ The chug is the ancestral form of the sandestin, which explains the jealous malignity with which it perceives its more evolved cousin. They are the otherworldly equivalent of those rude play-yard bullies who mock a young fellow and pull his robes from him, taunting him and saying that a life of scholarship will make him less than a man. It would thus be a mockery for any civilized man to make use of chugs, were it not for the fact that an Arch-Magician's power depends on them.
- ✱ Although chugs are disinclined to enter into conversation with arch-magicians, I once spoke to one at length, which explains my constant twitching.

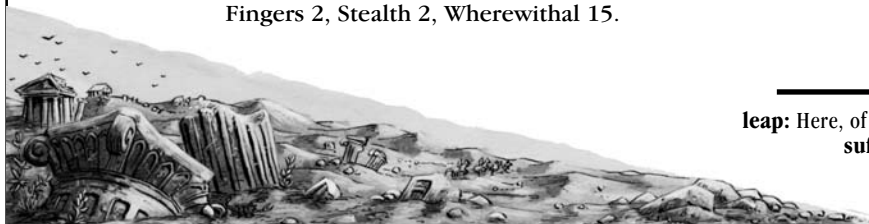
### Game Statistics

Rebuff (Contrary) 3 ~.

Chugs can automatically do anything they want to sandestins.

---

**leap:** Here, of course, we use "leap" in the astral sense of the term.  
**suffocate it:** "suffocate" is also used in its astral sense.





Their countenances suggested a peculiar hybridization of reptile, stalking bang-nose beetle, and miniature gid.

## Deodand

### Known Facts

The deodand is largely human in appearance. It stands seven feet tall and is extremely broad-shouldered. Its skin is pitch-black in color, offering a dramatic contrast with its large, dripping fangs, which may be yellowed or gleaming white. The surface of a deodand's skin is well-oiled, reflecting light and highlighting the extraordinary definition of its musculature. It might be considered quite beautiful, were it not for its cruelly bestial facial features and aforementioned incisors.

Deodands eat flesh, craving that of humans above all. They speak our language and are often skillful, if wheedling, negotiators. They may pretend that they devour humans only reluctantly, as if driven by uncontrollable instinct. They dwell in forests and jungles. Sometimes they are sighted singly, sometimes in small packs.

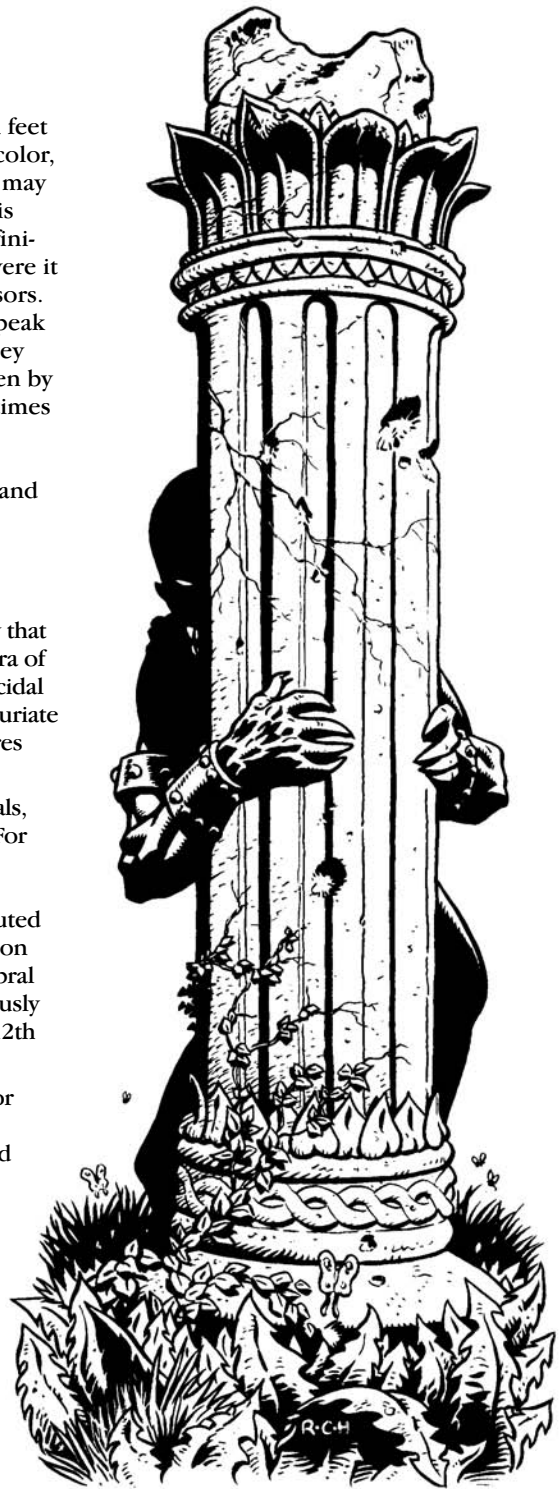
If faced with some impediment to the immediate dispatch of human prey, the deodand will plead, bargain, cajole, imprecate, and sweet-talk, seeking to persuade his interlocutor to remove the barriers between them.

### Scholarly Conjecture

- ✿ The deodands were the first of the half-men. We positively know that they were created by one of the Vapurials, during the glorious era of Grand Motholam. They bred these creatures as part of the fratricidal war through which they destroyed themselves. We may thus luxuriate in the comforting irony that the authors of these terrible creatures were among the first to be devoured by them.
- ✿ The common tale that the deodands were created by the Vapurials, and then destroyed them, is hugger-muggery of the first order. For the entire tale of the civil war between the Vapurials is a myth springing from a mistranslation of a single aside in Panguire's *Vagrant Thoughts*. The tenacity of this canard can only be attributed to our foolish but eternal desire to impose meaning and justice on the random writhings of fate. Any pedant still possessed of cerebral activity should know that the deodands generated autochthonously from the swamps of Sosjh during the changeover between the 12th and 13th Aeons.
- ✿ Although the deodands claim inability to restrain their hunger for human flesh, I met one in a monastery outside Edod, who had conquered his needs through a regimen of fasting, chanting, and rhythmic breathing. He had risen to a post of authority within the monastery, and his fellow monks looked upon him with a mixture of veneration and envy. Due to this fact, I submit that it is immoral to slay a deodand, for he is capable of achieving redemption as defined by the Eight Pandacles of Throa. Deodands, like any errant full man, should therefore be captured and subjected to an intercessory regimen of therapeutic inquiry and theological quotation, and their feet anointed with the oil of dath petals, until they achieve the level of enlightenment attained by the Monk of Edod.

### Game Statistics

Persuade (Glib) 0.75 ~, Rebuff (Penetrating) ~, Attack (Strength) 2 ~, Defense (Intuition) 2 ~, Health 2 ~, Athletics 2 ~, Living Rough 4, Perception 12, Stealth 16, Tracking 10, Wherewithal 10.





## Erb

### Known Facts (such as they are)

The erb is a terrible combination of man, beast, and demon. They are never comfortable, continually shifting their posture from two feet to four.

### Scholarly Conjecture

- Fifteen times did the clamor-ring clang as Fumous Vorden ran through the halls of Sarz, pursued by ravening erbs. They whispered to him as they bounded towards him on great gandy-feet, each toe tipped with a sharp claw like a serpent's tooth. They rhymed each time they cried to him, though their couplets did not always perfectly scan. Their tails lashed through the darkness, cutting it so that it seemed to spark and fill with light. Their boom-rocks they threw at him, and eventually one fell at his feet, and exploded, and sent him sprawling through the air and into an ancient cistern. The erbs surrounded him and clacked their teeth for several minutes, as if communicating to one another. It seemed to Fumous in his last moments that they worked to decide which of them deserved precedence, and should make the killing blow. A sixteenth time did the clamor-ring clang as they decided, and Fumous Vorden became erb-meat.
- The erb combines features of the man, the beast, and the demon, which is to say that he is a half-man, of sorcerous origin, born from the vats of some accursed, long-forgotten mage, and has now found prosperous life as a new species upon our dying world. The erb may stand in a bipedal or quadrupedal arrangement. Its small, cone-shaped head may be used as a battering ram, and contains sharp sluicing teeth that rotate around as if mounted on a wheel. Some erbs are scaled, some feathered, whereas still others boast a squamous tegument with large pores which periodically pucker open as if gulping in air. Some erbs are solitary; others travel in units that parody those of the human family. Pack erbs follow a strong young leader, who mates in a frenzied manner with the dominant female. An older male or female assists and advises the pack leader. The rest of an erb family is made up of the immature offspring of the dominant male and female. Erbs eat human flesh but are also impelled to kill for sport even when fully sated. Some erb lairs are lined with gold and jewels. It is unclear whether the erbs collect these items out of a sense of pleasure, or because they lure naïf freebooters to their lairs.
- The erb is a low-slung, quadrupedal mammal with certain insectoid qualities, such as a prehensile posterior stinger and a bulging compound eye in

the center of its forehead. It is also equipped with a pair of standard mammalian eyes, which give it excellent telescopic vision and the ability to read heat signatures in the dark. It is briefly capable of a bipedal stance, though its supposed discomfort in a four-legged configuration is exaggerated. Erbs speak, apparently sensibly, but have no understanding of the words they utter. They no doubt repeat things overheard by their ancestral progenitors as they simmered in wizards' vats. Their hair is long and coarse. Their markings vary regionally. The southwestern erb is striped along the back with a mottled belly, while its cousin to the east has a pelt which might be described as mottled or variegated.

### Game Statistics

*Persuade (Glib) ~, Rebuff (Penetrating) ~, Attack (Cunning) ~, Defense (Misdirection) ~, Health ~, Appraisal 2, Athletics ~, Concealment 2, Etiquette 2, Gambling 2, Imposture 4, Living Rough 8, Pedantry 2, Perception 6, Quick Fingers 2, Stealth 6, Tracking 10, Wherewithal 6.*

**Posterior stinger:** *After a successful bit with the stinger, the victim loses half his Health points. When bit, a victim with 1 Health or less suffers an injury.*

## Gaun

### Known Facts (unfortunate in their brevity)

A gaun's form is a monstrous parody of the human frame. Itsropy arms, nearly six feet in length, terminate in huge, clawed hands, covered in coarse gray fur. It uses these to grip its prey, which it carries off to kill and eat at its leisure. Its skin can best be described as "corpse-pale" or "fungus-white." Its protruding upper jaw is equipped with lengthy fangs.

### Scholarly Conjecture

- The gaun prefers to haunt ruins, where it can find shelter in abandoned buildings. Some accounts place populations in lost cities such as Ampridatvir. Gauns live in small communities of perhaps a dozen individuals. They lack any intelligence or cunning. They do not retreat, even when terribly maimed.
- I once conversed with a gaun, and briefly thought that I had converted it from its flesh-eating habits by exposure to the excellent doctrine of reductive nominalism. Alas, the creature—whose breath was sickly-sweet, and oddly intoxicating—merely meant to reduce my wariness, so that it could fall upon me and rend me for its cook-pot. It nearly persuaded me to sullenly cooperate with its plan to dismember me, so that I might undergo a relatively painless death. Only its acute salivation reminded me of the flaws in its proposal. I came to my senses and beat a hasty retreat.





To cover their gray-green pelts they wore flounced belly-guards of pale fiber, and caps with black ear-flaps, apparently fabricated from human skulls.



### Game Statistics

*Persuade (Intimidating)* 0.5 ~, *Rebuff (Wary)* 0.5 ~, *Attack (Ferocity)* ~, *Attack (Strength)* 0.5 ~, *Defense (Sure-Footedness)* ~ +3, *Health* ~ +3, *Athletics* ~, *Living Rough* 2, *Perception* 2, *Tracking* 10, *Wherewithal* 8.

## Ghoul

### Known Facts

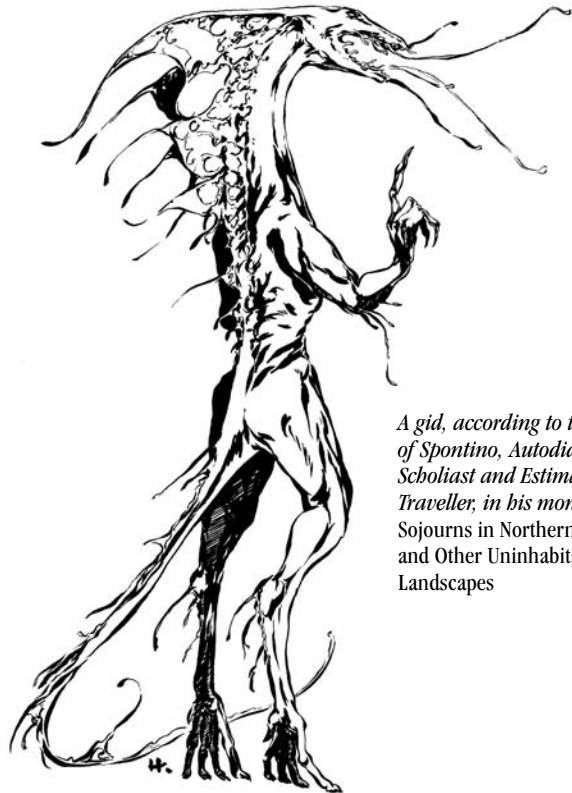
The ghoul is a bestial humanoid predator. Sometimes it wishes to eat its victims, but may also perform abominable acts upon women. Strong and heavy, it represents a formidable opponent. Ghouls tend to haunt human settlements, living on their fringes and waylaying the unwary. Unsubtle creatures, ghouls seem little disposed towards bargaining or the exercise of cunning.

### Scholarly Conjecture

- ☛ The ghoul is a cross between deodand and man. It is thus torn between the deodand's chief instinct (to eat human flesh) and the human's (to procreate). Although capable of speech, it chooses to remain mute, lest its human and deodand halves argue. Ghouls fear to reveal their divided natures, you see, and go to great lengths to seem motivated by a unitary consciousness. In some cases, it may be wise to taunt a ghoul on its confusion, but this is just as likely to enrage it.
- ☛ The ghoul's skin is typically mottled and corpse-colored, giving rise to the popular misconception that the ghoul is either an animated corpse or a predator which chooses to eat same. In fact, a ghoul is as alive as you or I. Although, like any wild meat-eater, it scavenges dead flesh when a carcass presents itself, such feasts must be deemed opportunistic and not an indication of the ghoul's sole diet. Ghouls are hairless, with powerful musculature. Their ears are sometimes pointed in configuration, but are just as likely to show cauliflower malformations or be missing altogether. Their teeth are small and sharp, like those of a pike or gar. Unlike a man's, or even a deodand's, their dentition is confined to this single tooth shape. Ghoul tongues are pointed; some terminate in a small, bony tip, the purposes of which remain obscure. Nature (or demonic intervention) has equipped their elongated fingers with claws of steel-like strength, ideally suited for the rending of flesh.
- ☛ A list of things ghouls are afraid of: A man who has severely injured him in the past. Fire. Quick movements. The visp's insinuating tootle. Pelgranes. Harsh sunlight. Unseasonable weather. Powdered stusa root. Chocolate.

### Game Statistics

*Persuade (Fortbright)* 0.75 ~, *Rebuff (Obtuse)* ~, *Attack (Strength)* 1.5 ~, *Defense (Intuition)* 2 ~, *Health* ~, *Athletics* 2~, *Living Rough* 4, *Perception* 4, *Stealth* 4, *Tracking* 4, *Wherewithal* 8.



*A gid, according to the claim of Spontino, Autodidact Scholiast and Estimable Traveller, in his monograph Sojourns in Northern Almerly and Other Uninhabitable Landscapes*

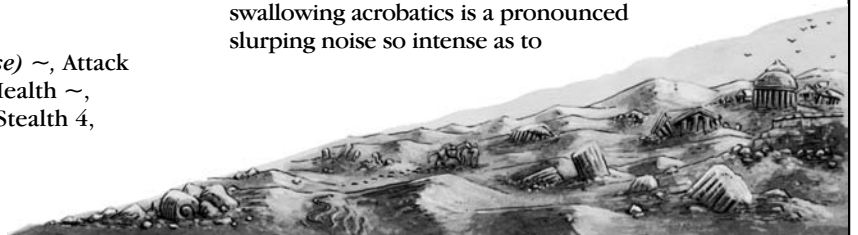
## Gid

### Known Facts (distressingly meager)

The gid is a frightening predatory beast known to infest certain wilderness areas. It is famed for the twenty-foot leaps it takes as its pounces on its victims.

### Scholarly Conjecture

- ☛ The gid is a mammalian scavenger and predator which lopes forward with surprising speed on four stout legs. Adult males are, on average, five feet long from the tip of the inflamed and reddened snout to the terminus of the truncated, bob-like tail. Females are perhaps four fifths their size. Their elongated jaws are lined with short, needle-like teeth made to rend flesh. A charging gid pounces on his prey with force sufficient to throw him off his feet and knock the wind out of him. It then slashes its prey's throat and then begins, at leisure, to tear off long strips of flesh, which it throws up into the air. The meat strips land in the mouth so as to slide easily down the creature's gullet. Accompanying these deft meat-swallowing acrobatics is a pronounced slurping noise so intense as to



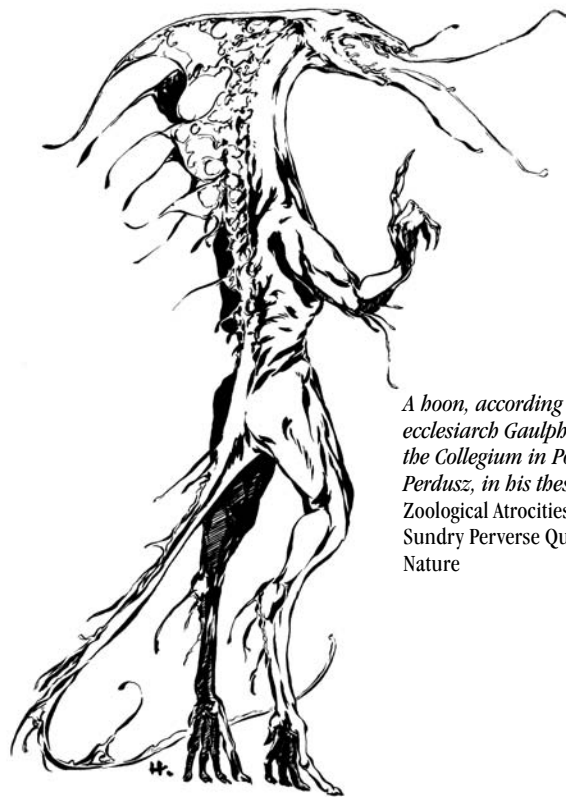


disturb the most dispassionate naturalist. Gid cubs have sometimes been observed in the wilds, in litters of four or more. Females are most protective of them, especially against other males, who seem to regard the young of their own species as great delicacies. Whether it is more dangerous to attract the attention of a female gid as a threat to its cubs or as potential food is a question deserving of further analysis. Gids are solitary hunters.

- Gids are pack hunters who use sophisticated group tactics to bring down their prey. These egg-laying mammals stalk woods, copses, jungles, and swamps. The pack leader is typically six feet long and four feet high at the front haunches. They have big teeth and glowing red eyes. They kill with enormous swipes of their razor-sharp claws. Their teeth are often coated with a slime rich in disease-bearing substances. Those who survive gid attacks frequently die from later infections of their wounds.
- It is a little-known fact that the gid is not a predator at all, but a strict vegetarian dining only on belch-wort, frafle leaves, and the root of the southern articulated bull-thorn. The gid does of course leap upon unsuspecting victims, gore them with its prodigiously sharp forehorn, and then rip great chunks of flesh from their bellies. One could excuse lesser minds for assuming that the gid, which typically bounds off into the swamp or forest with great mouthfuls of flesh in its jaws, intends to ingest them in private. But nothing could be further from the truth. The gid takes meat into its cave or burrow and piles it into a mound, which is then covered in varse needles and other forest underbrush. The female gid lays an egg, which the male then fertilizes. Both parents, in a tender ritual of bonding, together build an ingress into the mound, where they gently nose their single egg. They ferociously guard the meat mound as it decomposes, generating great heat and exuding several vapors nutritious to the fetal gid. It also proves a breeding ground for thumb-maggots, wart flies, and yeast beetles, which provide the only source of food to the parental gids as they wait for the young one to hatch. (It goes without saying that this is the only time the gid dines on non-plant matter. Of course the fresh-hatched gid also eats these insects to nourish itself after emergence.)

## Game Statistics:

Attack (Ferocity) ~, Defense (Intuition) ~, Health 1.5 ~, Athletics 2 ~, Perception 6, Stealth 6, Tracking 10, Wherewithal 6.



*A hoon, according to the ecclesiarch Gaulph Rabi of the Collegium in Port Perdusz, in his thesis Zoological Atrocities and Sundry Perverse Quiddities of Nature*

## Hoon

### Known Facts (an unhelpful array)

The hoon is a large, prodigiously muscled quadruped. It attacks and eats humans and their riding beasts whenever possible. Its great strength lets it push over trees or stone walls in pursuit of prey. It does so by leaning its massive shoulder against the obstacle and using massive legs to heave its great weight against it.

### Scholarly Conjecture

- No neck separates the hoon's gigantic head, which is primarily given over to a massive jaw capable of swallowing a man whole, from its roundish body. Its maw is lined with fist-sized, irregularly-spaced teeth, some for crushing, others for rending. Its legs are stout but massively columnar. Hoons typically hunt in groups of three to four. Their fights over downed prey are terrible to behold.
- The hoon's voice is deep and resonant. Though not as witty as the pelgrane, nor as determinedly insidious as the deodand, the hoon is capable of holding its own in conversation and is difficult to sway from its conception of self-interest. Some hoons are aficionados of the gambling table, but others view wagering dimly, so caution is best advised in broaching the subject.
- Sightings of the unusual hoon have increased in the vicinity of Saskervoy over recent months. A widow named Ermaltide reported it nosing





From a rusty black thorax depended the segmented abdomen of a wasp; down the back hung sheaths of black chitin-like wing-cases.

around her wash-line. She claims that it devoured several of her best-woven linens, ripping or fouling many others, before stamping away. Ermaltide described the unusual hoon as reddish in color and blurry around the edges. Several woodsmen saw it a week later, reporting that it emitted a soothing blue light which caused them no special alarm as it crushed the legs of one of their companions and then tossed the screaming victim down its gullet. A third encounter occurred on the Old Mill Road, where the unusual hoon was seen briefly by dozens of members of a funeral procession. It was hovering in the air, perhaps three feet above the ground. When it saw the mourners, it charged into their midst, throwing several of them high into the air. It headed directly for the coffin, which the pallbearers dropped with pronounced alacrity. It snouted its way into the pine box, flipped the lid open, and pulled out the corpse with its teeth. It then laid the corpse upon the ground and proceeded to roll in it, as a dog would with the decomposing body of a raccoon or sump-possum.

#### Game Statistics

Persuade (Intimidating) 0.5~, Rebuff (Penetrating) ~, Attack (Strength) 3~, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 2~, Health 2~, Athletics ~, Gambling 4 (certain individuals only), Perception 4, Tracking 5, Wherewithal 10.

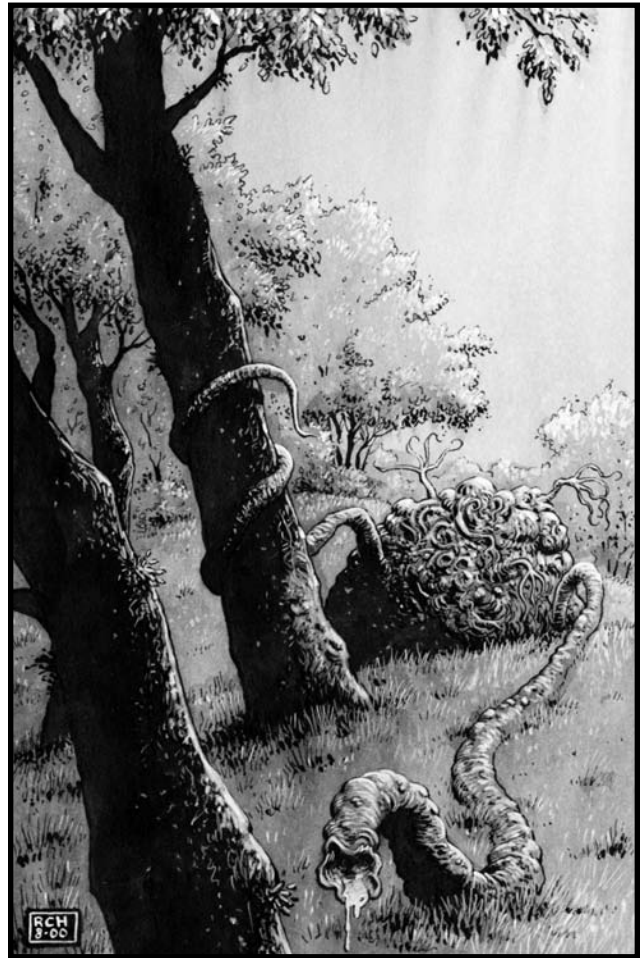
## Leucomorph

#### Known Facts (appallingly few)

Leucomorphs are encountered in wilderness areas, though seldom by choice.

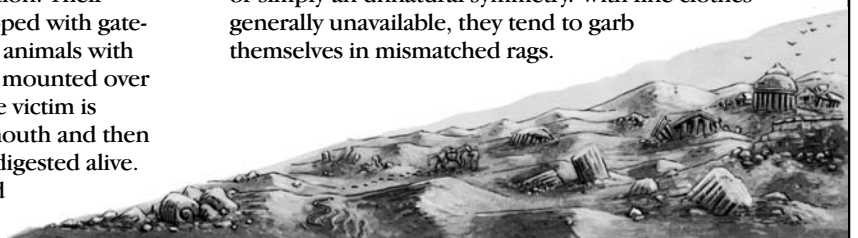
#### Scholarly Conjecture

- The leucomorph is a large ball of steaming, ropy flesh protected by a thick coating of sputtering bile. It rolls through forests and plains in search of food. When its formidable hidden olfactory apparatus detects the scent of prey, it disgorges one or more flexile pseudopods, which whip forward to drag the victim towards it. It draws prey inside it to digest at leisure. It is possible to hack a victim out of a leucomorph's body—though of course it will stoutly resist such efforts with its pseudopods, which can grow spikes or razor edges. One must act quickly, for the victim soon suffocates inside the leucomorph, after having been rendered insensate by noxious digestive fluids.
- Leucomorphs are gigantic lizards, standing up to 20 feet high and attaining lengths of up to 60 feet. They move rapidly through the forests, their thick hides well-camouflaged against the prevailing vegetation. Their enormous, foreshortened heads are equipped with gate-like mouths. They attack by battering prey animals with their heads, using thick, bony protrusions mounted over their eyes. Once stunned by this attack, the victim is scooped into the leucomorph's gigantic mouth and then slid down its capacious gullet, where it is digested alive. The process is a slow one, and the muffled



screams of half-devoured victims can sometimes be heard emanating from leucomorph stomachs. Their digestive tracts are protected by thick walls of muscle, rendering it extremely difficult to cut through even in the case of a dead specimen. Live leucomorphs angrily resist any efforts to slice them open.

- The leucomorph is a half-man capable of assuming various outlandish shapes. Reports by beguiled commentators of "enormous lizard-creatures" and "roving balls of flesh" describe forms which may have been adopted at one time or another by a leucomorph. However, they are much more likely to take rough human form in order to dupe travellers. Their attempts at human physiognomy often leave something to be desired, though the defects of their imposture range from gross to subtle. A leucomorph's false face might display an ill-shaped chin, precipitously dangling nose, or simply an unnatural symmetry. With fine clothes generally unavailable, they tend to garb themselves in mismatched rags.





Leucomorphs can be reliably identified via their allergy to copper and their inability to make the *th* sound, for which they substitute a *d*. Leucomorphs preserve their victims in lye after killing them, devouring them over a period of months after converting them to a gelatinous dish not unlike lutefisk.

## Game Statistics

(*Flesh ball*) Attack (Speed) ~, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 2 ~, Health 3 ~, Athletics ~, Perception 6, Tracking 4.

(*Gigantic lizard*) Attack (Strength) 3 ~, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 2 ~, Health 2 ~, Athletics 2, Perception 4, Tracking 3.

(*Humanoid shapechanger*) Persuade (Charming) 2 ~, Rebuff (Lawyerly) ~, Attack (Cunning) ~, Defense (Misdirection) ~, Health ~, Appraisal 4, Athletics ~, Concealment 4, Etiquette 6, Gambling 6, Imposture 6, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 2, Perception 2, Wherewithal 2.

## Mermelant

### Known Facts

The mermelant is a large, long-necked quadruped often used as a beast of burden. Their fur is long, thick, and musty. They are usually a sandy brown in color, save for the white of their bellies. Naturally amiable, mermelants work grudgingly for their masters, accepting food but yearning for their true joy, fresh and yeasty beer. Their vanity requires them to refer to their owners as “grooms” or “tenders.” If dissatisfied with their current complement of grooms, they may offer information to aid outsiders against them. This they may do in hopes of recruiting new grooms, or simply out of a sense of umbrage.

Though generally peaceful, mermelants may become belligerent when drunk, especially if their beer supply has run out. At such times, they rise on splayed hind legs to display their ribbed bellies, which can be taken as a sure sign of imminent destruction. During his rampages the mermelant’s great strength inflicts considerable damage.

There is little scholarly literature on the mermelant. This common domesticated creature clearly does not inspire the fascination of naturalists, who would sooner plunge into the forest to plumb the secrets of beasts disposed to eat them.

### Game Statistics

Persuade (Eloquent) 0.5 ~, Rebuff (Lawyerly) ~, Attack (Strength) 3 ~, Defense (Vexation) 0.5 ~, Health ~, Appraisal 4, Athletics ~, Etiquette 2, Gambling 4, Pedantry 2, Perception 2, Wherewithal 2.

**Drunken wit:** When intoxicated, add 1.5 ~ to Defense (Vexation).

## Pelgrane

### Known Facts

The pelgrane is a giant flying creature. Wingspans are generally on the order of 20 feet, though smaller and larger sub-types probably exist. Its head is two to four feet long, of carved black bone, in a shape resembling a stag-beetle’s horn. White fangs curl up and out of the snout. Its skin is black. A specimen’s age can be judged from the downy fur on its belly. Dark belly fur indicates a young individual; a mature pelgrane’s fur is gray, while an elderly specimen’s is white. Pelgranes are capable of speech, which they generally use to express a mordant wit. However, the extent of their humor is confined to the anticipation that they will imminently devour the listener. A pelgrane’s jokes are not, therefore, broadly suited for polite company.

Pelgranes are among the most commonly observed dangerous creatures, and little about them need be left to conjecture.

### Game Statistics

Persuade (Intimidating) 0.5 ~, Rebuff (Lawyerly) ~, Attack (Finesse) 2 ~, Defense (Misdirection) 0.5 ~, Health ~, Appraisal 4, Athletics ~, Etiquette 2, Gambling 4, Pedantry 2, Perception 2, Wherewithal 2.

**Flight:** The pelgrane swoops down to grab its victim, then carries him high up into the sky, killing him by dropping him from a great height. Typically, an earth-bound individual can strike at a pelgrane with a close combat weapon only by holding off until it swoops down.

## Sandestin

### Known Facts

Sandestins are phenomenally powerful otherworldly beings. They power the workings of magic. Spellcasters (sometimes unknowingly) draw on the power of sandestins and similar entities when they perform incantations. Each spell is a preset sequence of commands that binds the entity to execute a particular wonder. Greater magicians eventually learn to manipulate sandestins directly, by summoning and binding them to their will. [Or rather, to the threat of astral torture or demise, as brought about by chugs (*q.v.*), who are another class of extra-dimensional entity.] Thus the Arch-Magician may conjure any effect he can think of.

It is necessarily to phrase one’s commands to a sandestin with exacting precision, for they are expert pettifoggers and desire nothing more than to thwart their captors by fulfilling the letter of an instruction while at the same time utterly subverting its intent. Sandestins haggle with Arch-Magicians over indenture points, a supposedly

**When intoxicated:** That is, when the mermelant is intoxicated. The authors venture no instructions to GMs who might happen to be intoxicated.

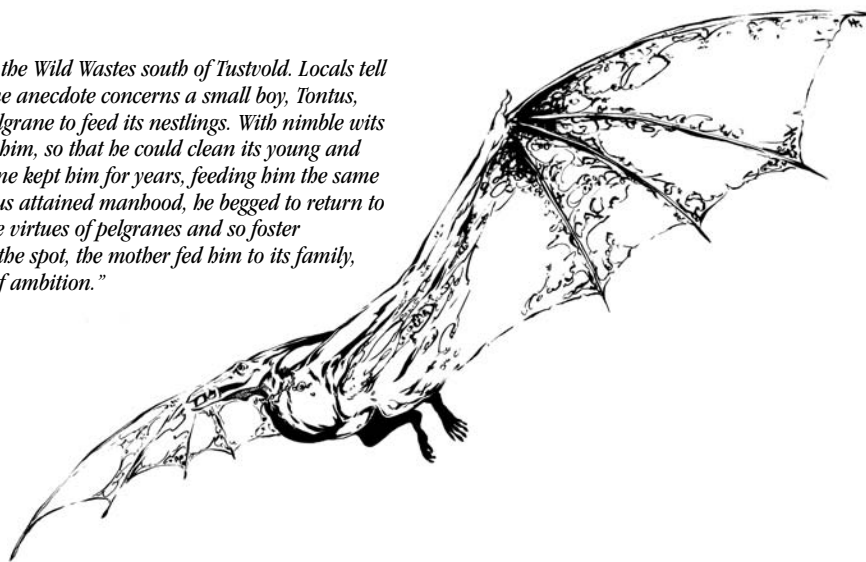






Nissifer stepped forward with clicking wing-cases.  
"Now, Cugel, you will learn the meaning of fetor."

***Pelgranes** are especially populous in the Wild Wastes south of Tustvold. Locals tell many stories of their depredations. One anecdote concerns a small boy, Tontus, who was carried away by a mother pelgrane to feed its nestlings. With nimble wits Tontus persuaded the mother to spare him, so that he could clean its young and maintain the sagging nest. The pelgrane kept him for years, feeding him the same foul stuff it gave its young. When Tontus attained manhood, he begged to return to Tustvold, so that he might proclaim the virtues of pelgranes and so foster understanding between the races. On the spot, the mother fed him to its family, saying, "They taste best with a touch of ambition."*



definable measure of the amount of labor the sandestin must perform for the magician before being released from his obligation. Sandestins frequently claim that their services warrant the removal of additional indenture points, and Arch-Magicians are equally prone to levy fines and penalties for breaches both great and nugatory.

A sandestin may look like anything it wants. Typically a sandestin maintains a feature or two from one manifestation to the next. If it has orange hair and blue skin when appearing as a fetching sprite that fits in a walnut shell, it will likely retain both hair and skin when it balloons to the size of an enraged leucomorph.

Sandestin names tend to consist of one or two syllables, favoring soft and mellifluous consonants. Examples include Osherl, Walfling, Ssisk, and Bellume.

A sandestin can do anything it wants. It can make the merest wish a reality with a flick of its hand, although some tasks seem to require considerable time expenditures. Why free sandestins do not make a greater effort—or, in fact, any apparent effort—to exterminate the entire lot of Arch-Magicians remains a matter for conjecture.

### Scholarly Conjecture

- Although able to do anything, the sandestin prefers by nature to do absolutely nothing. They could no doubt accomplish this by working in concert, yet sandestins are no more inclined to sustained effort or cooperation than red-flanged river eels show a desire to master the Squalinese cornet. In the unlikely event that a plan to

exterminate all Arch-Magicians would occur to them, they would dismiss it out of hand.

- Exterminate all Arch-Magicians? Pfah, I say! It is the lot of the sandestin to serve the Arch-Magician. It goes without saying, and deserves no sustained thought.
- Sandestins fear chugs even when free from magically indentured. Chugs depend on Arch-Magicians to break down mystical barriers the sandestins erect to keep them out. Were sandestins to leave the safety of these barriers in an effort to destroy all magicians, the chugs would swarm upon them and destroy them, knowing that the end of all human wonder-workers would mean the death of their chances to eat and torment sandestins.
- The above statement lacks evidentiary congruence. Sandestins are often observed travelling unbidden through our world without affliction by chugs.
- Though sandestins often claim it takes them a great deal of time to perform certain tasks, they are almost invariably promoting a self-serving fiction.

### Game Statistics

Persuade (Glib) 0.5 ~, Rebuff (Lawyerly) ~, Attack (any) 5 ~, Defense (any) 5 ~, Health 2 ~, Etiquette 4, Gambling 10, Imposture 6, Pedantry ~, Perception 12, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 12, Wherewithal 5.





Sandestins can magically perform any task, succeeding at it automatically, except in self-defense against chugs and certain summoning magic used by Arch-Magicians. Fortunately for those who wrong them, they seem more interested in embarrassing or frustrating their tormentors than in destroying them, for reasons contradictorily elucidated above.

## Twk-Man

### Known Facts

Twk-men are tiny humanoids with greenish skin. They are small enough to ride dragonflies. From these insectoid mounts, they flit through their forest territories in search of information that they might **barter** for materials precious to them, such as salt, filaments of fine fabric, or floral extracts. They carry lances, which, though tiny to the human way of thinking, are twice as long as their own bodies. Each dragonfly mount is equipped with a minuscule tack of unknown derivation, including a saddle and tiny pallets on the fly's underside that carry the substances for which the twk bargain. They wear gauzy one-piece smocks.

Twk-men names are long and flowing. One chieftain, for example, is called Dandanflores. They are known to double-deal; if one of your enemies has already reached a satisfactory arrangement with a twk-man, the information he provides you may be deceptive.

### Scholarly Conjecture

- The society of the twk-man (pronounced "took-man") is complex and displays surprising savagery. Chieftains battle challengers from the backs of their dragonfly mounts, jousting with envenomed lances. Their womenfolk fiercely cheer the champions as they work to pierce one another's breastplates, which are made from the shell of the theola nut. When the old chieftain dies, shrieking hideously on his opponent's lance, the twk-man queen embraces his murderer. Thereafter the champion behaves as if he had been chieftain all along, adopting his name and moving into the queen's chambers and bed. He even claims an unbroken royal bloodline, to the enthusiastic agreement of his subjects.

To remind the chieftain of his previous name and derivation is to challenge him to another deadly joust.

- Twk-men (pronounced "twik-men") are canny and cautious, ever-cognizant of their role as miniatures in a world of giants. They bargain shrewdly but avoid insult to their biggers. Each twk-man seems to have memorized the exact quantities of the various substances in the chieftain's stockpile. They mentally calculate the shelf-life of their goods, and will not bargain for anything in excess of their requirements. Though limited in some ways, their knowledge of human affairs is good enough to judge what travellers through their forests wish to know.
- Beware the tiny metal balls that the twk-men (pronounced, as I understand it, "tawkmin") use as weapons. They contain powerful magic. My companion, Fasurd, after japing amiably with one of the little creatures, was blinded. The ball stayed lodged in his head, where (based on my subsequent dissection) it seems to have migrated inwards to the brain. There it spread, spawning a fibrous growth that was surely responsible for the spasms of barking and hooting which plagued Fasurd in the last painful months of his existence. His fate seemed out of proportion to his offense against the twk-man, for he had merely caught the creature's head between his thumb and forefinger and gently twisted, in a laughing manner which should have made obvious his benign intent.

### Game Statistics

Persuade (Forthright) ~, Rebuff (Wary) 1.5 ~, Attack (Speed) 0.5 ~ / (Finesse) 0.5 ~, Defense (Dodge) ~, Health 3, Athletics ~, Living Rough 4, Perception 6, Wherewithal 2.

**Small Size:** Dodge value already reflects the additional difficulty of hitting a target as tiny as a twk-man.

**Dragonfly mount:** When the twk-man is mounted on a flying insect, add a secondary Attack style, (Speed) 0.5 ~, and 2 ~ to Defense (Dodge.)

**barter:** Though the twk-men need, and can carry, only the most trifling quantities of any material (never more than a thimbleful), the etiquette of negotiation calls for an earnest respect for their demands. The human who airily tosses away a pound of salt does not earn the twk-man's respect for generosity, but rather an offended sneer for what the small humanoid takes as contempt. Experienced humans learn to bargain earnestly, stopping just short of miserly hostility, over a half-dram of telanxis oil or a groatweight iron nail.

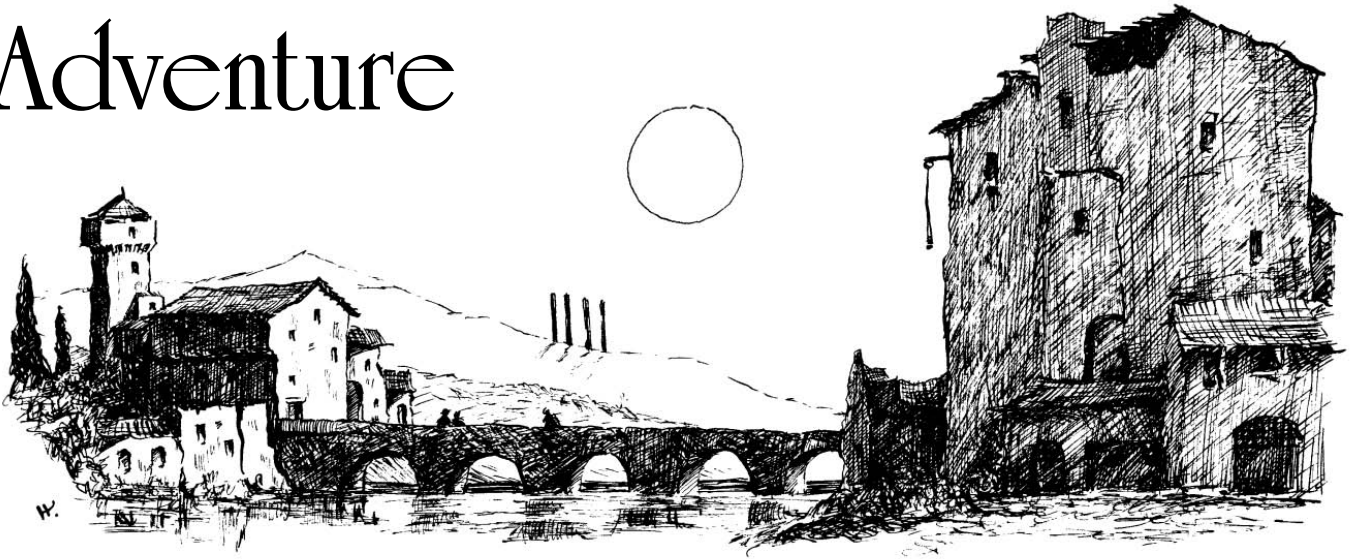






## Chapter 13:

# Adventure



### “The Cooks of Cuirnif”

**T**his chapter presents a sample adventure. As such, it is **for the GM’s eyes only**. Players who read it may think they’re gaining an advantage, and are thus acting in the proud tradition of clever Cugel. However, they must keep in mind the Law of Equipoise, which states, “Your GM will certainly discern that you have plumbed this chapter’s secrets and thereupon subject your character to a variety of interesting torments not described herein.”

(Admittedly, this is a liberal paraphrase of the Law of Equipoise.) ✱ Now that we are sure we address GMs only, we proceed. This sample adventure is, foremost, a model for adventures of your own creation. It is also an ideal introductory scenario for your series. It works best for two to four Cugel-level characters, but any number can play. ✱ The characters find themselves at loose ends and bereft of coin in the town of **Cuirnif**. The town is known for several outlandish festivals sponsored by its ruler, **Duke Orbal**. Cuirnif is now preparing feverishly for the extravagant Festival of Gourmanderie, which offers generous cash prizes to winners of the annual cooking and eating competitions. The event offers the PCs opportunity to fill their denuded purses.

“The folk [of Cuirnif] are peculiar in many ways,” said Erwig. “They preen themselves upon the gentility of their habits, yet they refuse to whitewash their hair, and they are slack in their religious observances. For instance, they make obeisance to Divine Wiulio with the right hand not on the buttock, but on the abdomen, which we here consider a slipshod practice.”

*Cugel’s Saga,*  
Chapter 5



## Adventure Checklist

**“The Cooks of Cuirnif” includes the following elements from the Adventure Checklist outlined in Chapter 9:**

**Odd Customs**

The Festival of Gourmanderie is a peculiar affair. Cooking competitions are not unusual, but the enthusiasm with which the Duke and his citizens follow the proceedings is intense. More extraordinary is the complementary eating competition, in which contestants are encouraged to risk gut-bursting death in pursuit of victory.

**Crafty Swindles**

Side betting is the order of the day at the Festival of Gourmanderie. The gambler and confidence-artist Doisos seeks to lure PCs into a number of injudicious wagers.

Dame Belevant, a redoubtable matron of Cuirnif, is accustomed to seeing her chosen contestant win the eating competition. However, the recent demise of her highly-trained champion leads her to seek a PC replacement. Her record of victories is due to the use of an enchanted item, the increasing unreliability of which she chooses not to share with prospective new employees.

**Heated Protests and Presumptuous Claims**

Any success a PC might score in the cooking competition arouses the ire of Eloplaster, the hot-tempered enforcer of Cuirnif’s ancient sumptuary laws. His furious interference with PC-chosen menus is surely attributable solely to his fervent belief in tradition. It would be libelous to point out that his nephew, Pusamus, is heavily favored to win the competition’s culinary phase.

**Weird Magic**

The cooks assembled for the competition employ a variety of esoteric cantraps to add exoticism to their dishes.

The featured ingredient of Pusamus’s crowning meal presentation is Spone, a sentient, pink-feathered half-man with a self-detachable head. Sensing the sympathy of one of the PCs, the head pleads for aid in escaping.

**Casual Cruelty**

This adventure guarantees no cruelty, but Spone’s fate may seem harsh if the PCs fail him.

**Strange Vistas**

An investigation into the waning magic of Dame Belevant’s Amulet of Gustatory Transgression, if it occurs, might take the PCs to another reality, where the inhabitants have taken action against the Dame’s continuing pollution of their realm.

**Ruined Wonders**

The adventure takes place in the town of Cuirnif, and involves no ruins or antiquities.

**Exotic Food**

This element is present in profusion!

**Foppish Apparel**

Orbal and many of the contestants are noted dandies. Descriptions of their outfits appear throughout this chapter.

## Structuring the Adventure

This adventure shares a basic narrative structure with many Dying Earth stories: The heroes enter a closed and complex system—in this case, the town of Cuirnif and its elaborate festival. Compelled by circumstance, they interfere until chaos ensues, then beat a hasty retreat.

Once you’ve described the town and made the PCs aware of the festival, the order of events is up to you. Here is the approximate progression we assume in this chapter:

**1. Compulsion of Circumstance**

We assume the gambler Doisos succeeds in early attempts to swindle one or more PCs, thereby giving the victims an irresistible incentive to enter the competitions. An outline of the attempts appears in the section “The Swindle,”

following the descriptions of Cuirnif and its Duke.

Even if this swindle goes amiss, the PCs begin the adventure penniless, and therefore have ample motivation to enter the competitions. If nothing else, the eating competition represents free meals, albeit of life-threatening dimensions.

**2. Competitions, Rounds 1-3**

Then we assume that the various PCs involve themselves with different sub-plots, which unfold in parallel. That is, one PC signs on with the matron Dame Belevant; others enter the cooking contest and fall afoul of the Registrar, Eloplaster; still others might wage an escalating war of cheats with Doisos, and so on.

The twin competitions take place simultaneously over three consecutive days, one round per day. For each day we outline the events of the cooking competition, then





the eating contest that immediately follows, and finally some suggested escapades for the evening.

Cut back and forth among the exploits of the various PCs, working to give each player roughly equal time in the spotlight. If you have many PCs, either double them up, so that two characters involve themselves in each sub-plot, or create additional sub-plots to complement those provided here.

### 3. Climactic Calamity

If you have woven the plotlines skillfully—which is to say, if the players’ actions have not excessively gummed up your plans—the final rounds of the competitions culminate in consecutive fiascos. As befits Cugel-level characters, the PCs exit at speed, penniless again, with a mob in hot pursuit. If, however, through brilliant play or good fortune, the PCs triumph over all opposition, it behooves you to wait until the next episode to bring them low.

## Laying the Table

Inform the players that their PCs have recently met, virtually groatless and stripped of any gear not covered by Possessions ratings. They are on the outskirts of Cuirnif, a town unknown to them. Ask them how they happened into this circumstance. (Why strain yourself to railroad the players, when they can supply the necessary effort themselves?)

### The Town

If Cuirnif sounds familiar to you, you’re not imagining things. It, and Duke Orbal, appear in “The Bagful of Dreams,” a story from *Cugel’s Saga*. You may want to review this story for inspiration before running “The Cooks of Cuirnif.” The sidebar on the next page offers one local gourmand’s impressions of the town.

Cuirnif is located in a farming district. Its few forests are as well-patrolled as any, and offer only a marginal threat of deodand or hoon attack.

The best and most expensive inn is the Five Owls. Rooms cost 10 terces a night, assuming a generous consumption of food and drink as part of the bargain.

The town’s riff-raff congregate in the yard of the Howling Dog tavern. The owner permits patrons to sleep in the yard overnight for a mere 2 groats. The yard is full during the competition, as many ne’er-do-wells have come to town in hopes of picking pockets or fleecing foolish gamblers.

On the crest of a hill overlooking the town stand four metal tubes, pointing up to the sky. They’re about 30 yards high and one yard in diameter. They exist for the punishment of malefactors. Those earning the Duke’s displeasure are dropped into the tubes and left there for an indeterminate time. They may be dropped atop previous offenders, and suffer as other reprobates are pushed into the tube on top of them.



### Taglines

#### Here are enough taglines for two sessions. (See the tagline rules in

Chapter 8.) Some are vaguer than others. This lets you assign the more specific taglines after you’ve found out which PCs are taking part in the various plotlines.

- “Although I see why you wish to avoid the subject, my interest in it remains undimmed.”
- “Although your plight moves me, I submit that my own misfortunes also warrant consideration.”
- “How conveniently you call these ancient regulations to mind.”
- “I could also make threats, were I not bound by the tenets of civilized discourse.”
- “I have no desire to squander what may be the last days before the sun’s extinction.”
- “In other circumstances, I might call the sensation pleasurable.”
- “I shall settle with you after collecting my contest winnings.”
- “Is there meaning in that eyebrow twitch, or do I over-interpret?”
- “Surely, in the midst of such festivities, the Duke would not distract himself with this minatory gabbling.”
- “The prospect remains unpromising.”
- “The question of locomotion becomes intriguing.”
- “The shadow cast by the punishment tubes grows longer as the day wears on.”
- “The words ‘intestinal’ and ‘overexertion’ are in themselves sufficiently unpleasant co-habitants of the same sentence, without adding ‘demise’ as well.”
- “We must call for an official ruling!”
- “Your distrust saddens me.”
- “Your proposal is so winning that I can only conclude I have yet to hear all of its terms.”



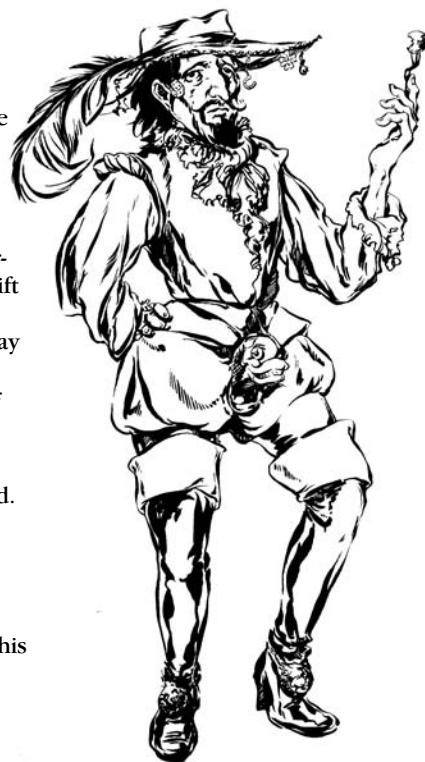
## The Duke

Duke Orbal is a man habituated to command. He is both the wealthiest man of Cuirnif and the head of its hereditary ruling family. The people of Cuirnif do not think to question his authority. Although occasionally moved to eloquent speech, he is generally peremptory when dealing with his inferiors. His apparent belief is that the world exists to amuse him. He becomes short-tempered when expected diversions do not materialize.

The people of Cuirnif could do much worse as far as leaders are concerned. His periodic festivals draw people from a considerable distance. They offer many opportunities for merchants, innkeepers, and farmers to enrich themselves at the makeshift markets.

Festival times inspire the Duke to new heights of sartorial lavishness. On each day the PCs encounter him, he wears a different outfit:

- High boots of glossy black leather, emblazoned with brass medallions. A codpiece of molded bronze, shaped like a grinning fish. A doublet of crimson velvet. A cravat of blue lace. A wide-brimmed felt hat, with 13 silver charms dangling from the brim.
- A green robe festooned with embroidered patterns of wind and flame, in gold thread. A conical hat of matching material, with a spume of white feathers rising from the point. Polychromatic cloth shoes, with pointed toes.
- An ice-blue tunic with padded shoulders. Loops of gold braid wrapped around the sleeves. Black leggings with diamond-shaped cut-outs. Fur-cuffed boots. A colorful bird sitting on his shoulder, a long filament of platinum chain attaching its ankle to his stiff shirt-collar.



### Hastabal, The Ombalique Gastronomer (extract)

**Within the Dukedom there is much to attract the cook, the gourmet, and the glutton,** a benefice arising primarily from the varied habitat of the region. First must be mentioned the cultivated land immediately surrounding Cuirnif itself. Here the soil is deep and well enriched by the annual spreading of Ilvothant dung (a ritual in itself worthy of note), providing abundant crops. In the many pools, leats, and languid rivers, water creatures abound, including magnificent carp and the justly renowned potamic oyster.

(A note of caution: The farmers, waterherds, and dungboys of Ombalique are not noted for their generosity, nor their forbearance of loss. Any visitor wishing to call at a holding should perform the correct rite of obeisance to Wiulio at the opening of the door, whereupon reasonable hospitality will be granted. After an exchange of pleasantries, delicacies may be negotiated. A thief is treated with less gentility, a stuffing with blister-bush being among the milder recriminations.)

To the south of Cuirnif, where the land falls towards Almerly, are meadows and orchards, a gentle, graceful region not entirely despoiled by an abundance of miniature gids. Wine is also made, reds of considerable power and whites that many authorities consider over-heavy. The east sees the rise of the forest with the first thrust of the Maurenron Mountains. Berries, roots, and fungi are plentiful. A noted delicacy is the rat-spider, the venom of which is enervating when taken in moderation, fatal otherwise. The hunting is nonpareil, with wild boar, deer, and more. Erb, leucomorph, and hoon are also seen, but hunting parties seldom lose more than two or three members.

Lastly, to the north and west are the Plain of Standing Stones and Lapek Moor respectively, which bleak and dangerous regions provide a surprising abundance of foodstuffs to those both bold and diligent. The bogs contain helminths, jellyworm, and sug truffle; a subtle and distinct spice may be won from the picking of liverwort spores. A risk exists from asms, which are essentially inedible, and pelgrane, the meat of which is fit only for rustics. Pelgrane eggs, however, are both rich and nutritious, and a great delicacy may be made of the brain, steamed and served with a black-butter of shallot vinegar.

Upon payment of a small gratuity I, Hastabal, lifelong resident of Ombalique, may be persuaded to grant visitors to Cuirnif the benefit of my gustatory knowledge, usually in the comfortable environs of the Five Owls.



## Duke Orbal

*"I accept the term 'idiosyncratic,' provided that all understand it signals a man of rare taste and sensitivity, eager to promulgate principles of pleasure and discernment."*

**Ratings:** Persuade (Forthright) 10 / (Eloquent) 2, Rebuff (Penetrating) 15, Attack (Finesse) 6, Defense (Dodge) 12, Health 4, Appraisal 4, Athletics 1, Etiquette 6, Gambling 2, Pedantry 2, Perception 6.

**Equipment includes:** Laccodel's Rune, plus other protections as the plot requires.

## Bodyguards

*"Halt! You have flouted Orbal's authority!"*

**Ratings:** Persuade (Intimidating) 3, Rebuff (Wary) 6, Attack (Strength) 8, Defense (Sure-footedness) 12, Health 6, Athletics 4, Perception 4, Scuttlebutt 2, Tracking 2.

- ✱ A silk-lined half cape, striped linen shirt, voluminous golden pantaloons, and a large straw hat resembling an upturned bowl.

The Duke fervently desires his festival to go off without incident, alleviating his boredom and publicizing his sagacity and generosity. He takes a dim view of those who disrupt his event, or disappoint his taste buds.

If sufficiently outraged, he may pronounce summary judgment on the malefactors. He summons a troop of burly bodyguards to manhandle the offender into the fatal punishment tubes.

## The Swindle

The better to drive one or more PCs into the competition, you may first drive them into deep debt. Many pickpockets, confidence artists, and layabouts have converged on Cuirnif for the festival, and all may have their schemes. A thief, trying to dispose of evidence ahead of capture, plants it on a PC; a visiting trickster snares another PC in a scheme to rob the local inn, then absconds with the loot while the PC gets caught and fined; an overconfident PC loses badly at cards, and the local gang gives him three days to pay his winnings. Almost any halfway plausible scheme can inveigle a PC whose Rebuff pool lacks refreshment.

Here is a sample swindle. It begins when a local bookmaker approaches the indigent PCs, most likely in the flea-ridden courtyard of the Howling Dog tavern.

## Doisos

**Doisos** is part-owner of the Howling Dog, a fact he does not advertise. He frequently finds enrichment at the Duke's various festivals, where he draws unsuspecting gamblers into rigged bets. Doisos knows that swindlers are among the most easily swindled, as they tend to overestimate their own cleverness and imagine themselves

immune from the fiddles of others. Accordingly, he seeks out an appropriate PC and does his best to portray himself as a self-important, blithering fool. He invites the PC to join several games of chance, which he does his best to lose. (This may become amusing if the PC is attempting to do the same. They contest against one another for the privilege of losing convincingly, using their Gambling abilities.)

**The hook:** Then Doisos offers to bet the PC whether a pack-beast (his own, though he omits mention of this) will move from its spot if it is untied from its post. He allows the PC to choose either option. He then attempts to persuade the PC to do the untying. If he fails, he blithely creeps up and unties the reins; the well-trained animal then moves or stays put, as Doisos requires to win the bet.





If the PC attempts to untie the beast, a burly man immediately exits from an adjacent tavern and threatens him for trying to steal his animal. This is **Rejemp**, a confederate of Doisos.

Rejemp demands payment, or he will call for the

## Doisos

*"Let us adjourn until tomorrow, when perhaps fortune will smile upon you in a less coquettish fashion."*

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Charming) 14, Rebuff (Wary) 10, Attack (Finesse) 5, Defense (Parry) 7, Health 4, Appraisal 2, Athletics 2, Concealment 4, Etiquette 2, Gambling 10, Imposture 2, Perception 4, Quick Fingers 4, Scuttlebutt 2, Stealth 3, Stewardship 3.

Duke's men. He points to the tubes on the hill and explains their purpose. The amount should be considerably more than the PC can afford. Doisos offers to loan the PC the payment.

If a PC calls this evident bluff, Rejemp does in fact entreat the Ducal Guard to have the Duke hear his case. By ill luck Duke Orbal himself is passing by, en route to a survey of the festival prepara-

tions. Orbal has little time for gamblers, and reacts poorly when approached about the legality of Doisos's behavior. While complaining about disturbances at festival time, he looks meaningfully toward the punishment tubes on the hill. If your setup requires it, he imposes on a PC a fine of 250 terces, to be paid by festival's end at the latest.

**The swindle begins:** Once Rejemp has gone on his way, Doisos offers to bet double-or-nothing on the debt. This begins what he hopes will be a sequence of four doubling wagers, all fixed so that the PC must lose.

**Wager 1, the wasp nest:** Doisos points out a wasp's nest near a busy thoroughfare. He proposes to bet on the gender of the first person to be stung by a wasp. He covertly signals to a confederate, who summons either a man or a woman (whichever the PC didn't choose) from the Howling Dog. This person walks by the nest and pretends to be stung.

**Wager 2, a white dog:** Doisos offers to double-or-nothing that the color of the next cur to stroll down an alleyway will be white. He does so knowing that Duke Orbal eccentrically allows only white dogs in town. Indeed, the first dog is white. (If the PC chooses white, Doisos has a confederate waiting to release an illegal brown dog.)

**Wager 3, a fight:** A fight breaks out between a tiny man and a big man emerging from the Howling Dog. Doisos offers another double-or-nothing. Both men are also paid accomplices and respond to an extremely subtle signal; the PC's champion loses the fight.

**Wager 4, a game of chance:** Doisos offers to play a game of chance of the PCs' choice, again as double-or-nothing. His confederates are prepared to assist Doisos in cheating at any game known in Cuirnif, with enchanted assistance if need be.

By this time, the PC should ideally be as much as a thousand terces in debt. If he professes inability to pay, Doisos says that he will therefore have to recover his losses by selling him into indentured labor. A caravan has stopped in town to find new laborers for a salt mine nearby. The PC should work off his debt in a decade or so, Doisos reckons. Doisos proceeds to sell the contract to a team of well-muscled mine owners.

Doisos collects his money and washes his hands of the matter. Proving that Doisos cheated does not invalidate the contract, argues the miner captain, a swarthy, scarred fellow named **Senz**. Throughout the adventure, the PC must elude Senz's efforts to chain him to a work-gang and haul him off for a decade of labor.

## Rejemp

*"Confess your thievery!"*

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Intimidating) 3, Rebuff (Contrary) 10, Attack (Strength) 12, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 8, Health 8, Driving 2, Gambling 3, Living Rough 2, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 2.

# The Recipe

As they face ruination, encourage the PCs to join the cooking and eating competitions. Registration is in progress as the PCs arrive in town; the first round (Day 1) begins tomorrow. They can easily learn the following:

- The cooking competition and the eating contest each carry a prize purse of 1,000 terces. The cooking prize is much more prestigious, of course.
- Each contest consists of three rounds, run simultaneously over three consecutive days, starting tomorrow. In each round the cooks create three dishes, judged by the Duke himself, taking into account taste, originality, aroma, and visual presentation. The eating contest follows, with contestants consuming the dishes just judged in the cooking contest.

## About the Cooking Competition

Scuttlebutt successes glean the following. You may require a separate success for each fact, or dispense information with lavish prodigality, as you prefer.

- Unlike the eating competition, no cook has ever won the culinary competition twice in a row.
- The City Registrar, **Eloplaster**, runs the contest for the Duke. A learned and litigious fellow, he ensures that the contest is carried out according to laws laid down in the ancient charter of Cuirnif.



- Cooks travel from near and far to participate. Favorites to win are **Gnar the Repeater** (who is never content to say something a single time; that is, he always restates the same point redundantly; in other words, he uses different words to express an idea in multiple ways); **Lifina** (a beauteous woman known for making fortuitous errors in her cooking); and **Erzal Droze**, whose religion requires him to carry heavy weights on his shoulders and legs. When possible, he sits.

- A local fellow, **Pusamus**, has entered the contest, no doubt at the insistence of his uncle, Elopaster. If he has any talent as a chef, it so far remains unrevealed. The poor lackwit will be humiliated.



*The cook with true talent recognizes the need for resource.*

## Cooking: Securing Supplies and Ingredients

Gourmet ingredients are scarce in Cuirnif now. Prices for what remains in local storehouses are exorbitant. Likewise, there is nary a cookpot, dish, or spatula to be had at less than extortionate prices.

PCs seeking ingredients may scavenge them out in the wilderness surrounding Cuirnif, using their Living Rough abilities. Each scrounging PC may roll once per hour, keeping a Tally. The Tally when they stop searching indicates the boon or levy you apply to the contestant's Stewardship rolls when he creates dishes for the competition. See the chart nearby. A boon suggests that the PCs have been so successful in gathering ingredients that they impress the Duke with their culinary ingenuity.

The PCs must also find a cook pot and other utensils. As none are available at prices they can afford, they have little choice but larceny. If a PC wishes to pilfer a piece here and there from a large number of contestants, he can work for a Tally of 8 or more with Quick Fingers. A good opportunity to filch a pan or ladle comes up only once per hour. Dismal Failure results in the PC being found out and surrounded by an angry mob of competitors. Only the cleverest use of Persuasion (at a levy of 2) saves him from

a thrashing. A caught contestant must make a separate Persuasion attempt to convince Elopaster not to disqualify him.

If the PC wishes to steal or swindle all of his equipment from a single target, play out the encounter in full.

If the PC is working with Vulcan (see the sidebar "Serving as a Proxy Cook," next page), the ambitious child has already secured the ingredients and implements necessary to his planned dishes. He uses the time to crash-train the PC in his methods. In game terms, the PC gains 6 Stewardship points per night of intensive training, even if his normal rating is nil. However, he so concentrates on memorizing the recipes that he faces a levy of 1 when attempting any other action. Both points and levy last for only the next day, so the training process must be repeated each night.

Tally	Modifier
0 or less	Levy: 3
1 - 6	Levy: 2
7 - 10	Levy: 1
11 - 15	None
16 or more	Boon: 1



## Serving as a Proxy Cook

**Stewardship, you'll recall, is the ability that encompasses cooking. If**

every PC has an appallingly low rating in it (which is, alas, entirely possible), you may need a GMC through whom the PCs can vicariously participate. He doesn't appear if a PC enters the competition.

The GMC is **Vulan**, a 12-year-old orphan. He lives on scraps given to him by the town's few stewards and innkeepers in exchange for errands he runs for them. Vulan presents himself as an eager young fellow with a dream. He wants nothing more than to become a great chef in Kaiin or Alмеры. "People say that our world is so old that all the great dishes have long since been cooked, eaten, and digested. But by no means do I accept their vapid theories." He spots the PCs and asks them to act as his proxies during the competition. The entry requirements have been rewritten to exclude him; Eloplaster saw to it that a new provision was added to bar underage contestants. Each night, he will train a PC to prepare his best dishes. Using his menus, the PC will win the contest for him. Vulan offers to split the winnings fifty-fifty.

Unsurprisingly, Vulan is not the starry-eyed dreamer he makes himself out to be. Living rough in and around Cuirnif has taught him to look out for his own interests. He plans to steal his proxy's share after the contest, and abscond to Alмеры.

**Vulan**

*"I am proof that ambition still thrives somewhere, even at this late date."*

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 8, Attack (Ferocity) 3, Defense (Vexation) 6, Health 4, Appraisal 2, Athletics 3, Concealment 5, Living Rough 6, Perception 4, Quick Fingers 6, Scuttlebutt 6, Stealth 6.

**Eloplaster**

As City Registrar, **Eloplaster** runs the registration process. He warns each contestant that Cuirnif's founding fathers instituted strict sumptuary laws. All cooks must abide by these as they make their meals. The laws are too long and tedious to recite, so Eloplaster will helpfully apprise contestants of their details as necessary, in the course of the contest.

Eloplaster is a hunched, arthritic man with an oversized head and prominent nose. He wears a dirt-colored cap, its crown haloed with bells that do not jingle. His ratty tunic and rough leggings match his cap. Eloplaster lives only to spoil the enjoyment of others. His position in town as Chief Lawkeeper is hereditary. The Duke finds him tiresome in the extreme, but does not wish his legitimacy to be questioned and therefore tolerates Eloplaster's reign of pettiness.

This year Eloplaster has promised his sister, whose wrath he fears, that he will use his influence to help her son, Pusamus, win the cooking competition. Pusamus is a dull-witted fellow with a slack jaw and a high, bulging forehead. His tunic is a crazy quilt of clashing colors; his leather boots are high and dyed a dull pink. He unquestioningly defers to his uncle.

**Eloplaster:** *"Against all civility, in the very teeth of accepted convention, you have unacceptably conjoined ripe ganions and boiled leeks! Have you no shame?"*



**sumptuary laws:** In Cuirnifian parlance, regulations restricting the consumption of certain goods to individuals of a certain social station.





## About the Eating Competition

The story of the complementary eating competition involves a prominent matron of the town and a certain enchantment she uses to assure her chosen PC of victory.

### Dame Belevant

The matronly **Dame Belevant** is formidable in both appearance and demeanor. A cascade of jowls falls from her face to obscure her neck. Perpetually pursed lips form an uninviting gateway to her large, wet mouth. Her prominent bosom juts out like the prow of a ship, or a shelf capable of bearing great weight. Belevant's posture is unwaveringly erect. She speaks in a deep, croaking voice.

Dame Belevant is the widow of the previous Duke. Although he has been dead over a decade, she still regards Orbal as a rank newcomer usurping her husband's privileges. In her ongoing effort to upstage Orbal, she has arranged, for six of seven years of the Festival of Gourmanderie, to sponsor the winner of the eating competition. She typically adopts the candidate into her household retinue so that he can spend his every waking moment increasing his gullet capacity. Even with the magical aid of her Amulet of Gustatory Transgression (see next section), the regimen is a strenuous one, and competitors rarely last for more than a few years. Belevant's most recent candidate, Fumlot, caused Belevant substantial consternation when, just last week, he expired as a result of intestinal overexertion.

She is therefore keenly alert for a substitute candidate. From the shade of her leather-padded palanquin, she watches the crowds assemble for the cooking pre-trials. She chooses, from among the PC entrants, either the one who looks the stoutest, the one who gazes most longingly

*Dame Belevant: "Ugnather, fetch me that strapping youth."*



at the foods being prepared, or simply the character you think will most entertainingly take part in this particular sub-plot.

Belevant's factotum, **Ugnather**, approaches the chosen one. He informs the prospective candidate that his mistress is prepared to make a lucrative offer.

She promises the PC a chance to win the eating contest. She assures him that she has special magic to help accomplish this. Belevant offers the entire 1,000-terce purse for the event, explaining that she wouldn't dirty her personal treasury with Orbal's crass coins. She merely wishes to sponsor the winning candidate, as she has done so many times in the past. Unless pressed by the PC, Belevant glosses over the fate of Fumlot.

Do your best to see that a PC agrees to Belevant's proposal. He might feel better about entering into her arrangement if he negotiates a bonus from the noblewoman's own ample funds, or a guaranteed payment should someone else win the contest. After securing his agreement, Belevant informs the PC of the appointed time for registration.

### Eloplaster

*"A violation is once more at hand!"*

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 12, Rebuff (Contrary) 12, Attack (Caution) 2, Defense (Dodge) 2, Health 2, Appraisal 2, Etiquette 2, Pedantry 10, Perception 4, Stewardship 5.

### Pusamus

*"Uncle has categorized your response among the sorts of indignity I must stoutly oppose."*

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Forthright) 1, Rebuff (Obtuse) 12, Attack (Strength) 4, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 6, Health 6, Athletics 2, Driving 3, Living Rough 2, Riding 2, Stewardship 4.

### Dame Belevant

*"Your suitability is evident. Come along."*

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Intimidating) 15, Rebuff (Penetrating) 10, Defense (Dodge) 2, Health 4, Appraisal 3, Etiquette 4, Pedantry 2, Perception 3.

### Ugnather

*"My mistress, whom you see yonder, wishes to enter into discourse with you."*

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Forthright) 3, Rebuff (Wary) 6, Attack (Caution) 3, Defense (Dodge) 3, Health 5, Etiquette 3, Living Rough 2, Physician 1, Stewardship 5.



## Eating: Registration

At the registration booth, the PC meets a variety of entrants apparently possessed of redoubtable ingestive capacities. There is big-bellied **Prongolan**, the towering **Krand**, and **Yeemus**, a rail-thin fellow who looks ferociously hungry. There are other contestants as well, but they give these three a wide berth, as they are the elite circle of favorites.

They size each other up and direct withering stares to any of the also-rans who dare approach them. However, when they see that the PC is accompanied by Belevant, who intends to pay his entry fee, they all step back as if slapped by chill wind.

**Llexamul**, the ducal functionary supervising the registration, starts to read to the PC a list of stipulations to which he must agree. Belevant impatiently swipes the form from his hand and completes the form herself. Llexamul seems too cowed by her to protest. If the PC wants to see what's on the form, a Perception success reveals the three most interesting stipulations.

- Entrant must not use magical spells of any kind.
- Entrant must aver that he is not a half-man or any other kind of inhuman creature.
- Entrant absolves the esteemed and cherished Duke Orbal of all liability should the contest injure said contestant in any way, specifically including sickness or death due to poisonous food or tainted ingredients.

Belevant wishes to hustle her chosen PC champion back to her estate immediately after registration. He may linger only by persuading her to let him stick around for a while. Any PC can use Scuttlebutt to confirm Belevant's motivation, and the fact that she does indeed pay her champions in full. Other contestants can't shine much light on the demise of the PC's predecessor; the subject obviously makes them queasy. The PC can also discover the exact nature of the contest, given below. Otherwise, he'll learn as he goes.

The PC must take care in broaching the matter of Belevant's magical augmentation of previous champions. Prongolan and Krand become demonstrably agitated, poking the PC and insisting that Belevant has long been suspected of cheating; any honorable individual would immediately turn over such evidence to the Duke. Should the PC do so, nothing comes of it; consultation with other hapless contestants reveals that city officials, intimidated by Belevant, have been reluctant to pursue the constant accusations of cheating.

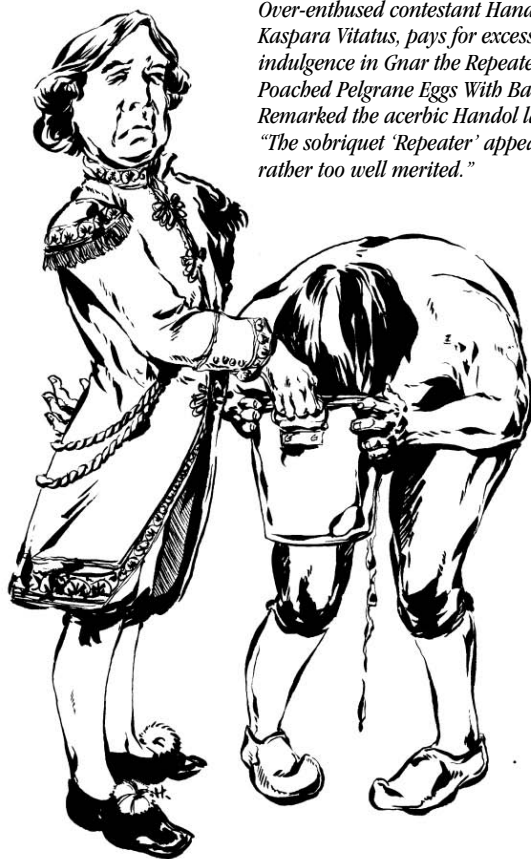
Should the PC protest to Belevant that her proposed use of magic contravenes the rules, she quotes the text of the entry form. It forbids "magical spells of any kind" but does not explicitly ban enchanted items such as amulets. Nonetheless, she insists that the PC conceal the amulet in his boot. She assures him the configuration has been proven to work perfectly.

## Eating Contest Rules

The contestant who eats the largest quantity of food over three rounds wins. The rounds occur over three days. Contestants eat the food created by the entrants in the cooking competition after the Duke has finished making his dainty tastes of each item.

Ducal functionaries weigh the food on a scale before dishing it out. Contestants must completely clean their plates before receiving additional servings. Although speed is a consideration, it is the total weight of food consumed each evening that determines the prize. Thus, a contestant given a difficult-to-handle meal, such as a plate of boiled crustaceans whose shells must be methodically cracked, loses some advantage but is not completely doomed. (Bones, shells, and other inedible remnants of a dish are weighed after the contestant has finished with them, and subtracted from the devoured food total.) A contestant feeling the urge to vomit must do so in the supplied silver-plated pail. Its contents are then weighed and subtracted from the total. Contestants disgorging elsewhere receive no score for the round.

Each contestant is allowed one attendant to lend moral support, supply drinking water, and wipe up spills. Ugnather (or another PC) can attend the PC contestants.



*Over-enthused contestant Handol, of Kaspara Vitatus, pays for excessive indulgence in Gnar the Repeater's Poached Pelgrane Eggs With Bacon Fat. Remarked the acerbic Handol later, "The sobriquet 'Repeater' appears rather too well merited."*





## Day 1: Entree

The day dawns with light that is dim but less than usually morbid. For a fact, the weather appears almost cheery, and remains so for the entire festival. The cooking competition begins in mid-morning (or later, as the convenience of your plot requires), and typically lasts a few hours. The eating contest commences immediately thereafter, probably in mid- to late afternoon. It ends by early evening, leaving the PCs plenty of time to act as they wish on the events of the day.

### Cooking: Round 1

Two dozen cooks compete in the first round. A crowd gathers on makeshift bleachers as the cooks compete cheek-by-jowl, preparing their foods from special carts. Contestants must step lively to avoid being splattered by their neighbor's hot grease. Cooks make mistakes, burning themselves or setting their sleeves alight. The crowd jeers spills and mishaps. As they don't get any food, their enjoyment comes only when things go awry.

The first round surprises everyone. The frontrunners face terrible misfortune, whereas Eloplaster's talentless nephew Pusamus enjoys a run of beginner's luck.

The PCs' placement relative to these contestants is determined by their Tallies. Each PC in the competition has a separate Tally, and gets a roll for each meal. If a PC's total draws too close to Pusamus, Eloplaster inspects his ingredients for an infraction of the sumptuary laws. The Registrar finds a spice forbidden to those who enjoy no noble sponsorship, knocking 3 points off the PC's Tally. (Improvise further violations for other winning PCs.) The Duke shrugs but accepts Eloplaster's judgment.

**Gnar the Repeater** creates a commendable dish: Poached Pelgrane Eggs With Bacon Fat and a Kumquat Reduction. But he accidentally puts psychotropic mushrooms in his Crab and Leek Croissant, and dares too much with his Live Rat-Spiders in Pastry Nest With Figs and Sharp Cheese. Duke Orbal is clearly disturbed by Gnar's dishes, though he avers that they will make the eating contest, which uses these meals, more interesting.

The Duke notes a touch of rancidity in **Erzal Droze's** Cream-Stuffed Ilvothant Steaks, and reserves only faint praise for her Risotto Laden With Parsnips and Sprinkled With the Eyeballs of a Fetal Gant, and her choice of a caramel drizzle to complement Fire-Hot Green Beans in Ruscamel Sauce.

**Lipfina** earns the Duke's praise for her Braised Oysters in Honey-Lemon Tartar Coulis, but he takes slightly less pleasure in her Red Rice With Roast Peppered

Gloom-Root. Her Eel Soufflé refuses to rise, and she does not deign to serve it to him.

On the other hand, **Pusamus** surprises the Duke's palate with Liqueur-Soaked Potato Pancakes and Smoked Bottomfish Soup. His Candied Peanuts on Sour Flatbread also amuse.

Other cooks place above the favorites, too, but not so much as Pusamus. Tallies at the end of the first round are Pusamus 12, Lipfina -2, Erzal Droze -3, and Gnar the Repeater -8.

**"The Ingredient":** At some point, a PC (who need not be the cooking contestant) hears Eloplaster and Pusamus secretly conferring about "the ingredient." It is obvious they are anxious about this unknown ingredient, and that they mean to keep it secret.

### Eating: Round 1

After a functionary reads the rules (see previous page), a dozen hearty contestants dig in. Belevant withholds the amulet for the time being; she wants to see how her champion eats without aid. Each dish he is served is richer and, when combined, more stomach-churning than the last. Doubtless you recall the meals:

- Fire-Hot Green Beans in Ruscamel Sauce, With a Caramel Drizzle
- Crab and Leek Croissant With Psychotropic Mushrooms
- Braised Oysters in Honey-Lemon Tartar Sauce
- Risotto Laden With Parsnips and Sprinkled With the Eyeballs of a Fetal Gant
- Cream-Stuffed Ilvothant Steaks, cooked well to disguise their rancidity
- Poached Pelgrane Eggs With Bacon Fat and Kumquat Reduction
- Live Rat-Spiders in a Pastry Nest, With Sharp Cheese and Figs

To down each dish after the first, the PC must make a Health roll. Each dish successfully downed gains him 1 point in the contest. A Dismal Failure means that he loses the contents of his stomach, and is docked 1 point. Other failures simply mean that he becomes full and can't continue. As soon as the PC starts to waver, Ugnather slips the amulet into his boot. Thereafter, the PC treats all eating-related failures as Hair's-Breadth Successes.

Although the PC contestant must concentrate on his own intake, other PCs cheering him on witness some surprising results. **Krand** suffers a serious setback,

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**Psychotropic Mushrooms:** These induce color hallucinations that make everything around seem vivid purple, sickly orange, or pulsating bright green. They also induce a swirling sensation.





becoming weak at the knees after gulping down a tray of Kaiinese Jumping Olives Doused in Eel Milt. He faints, and his sponsors carry him from the field.

Meanwhile, the stick-like **Yeemus** takes an astonishing early lead, dumping one meal after another down his apparently boundless esophagus. Should a PC other than the contestant wish to carefully observe Yeemus in action, make a Perception roll on his behalf. Success reveals that Yeemus has something strange in his mouth, perhaps a second tongue. An Illustrious Success allows an unobstructed view of the thing, which is a strange, elongated cross between a centipede and the tentacle of a sea anemone.

If confronted after the event, Yeemus becomes extremely anxious. If alone with an accuser he believes immune to suasion, he attacks. Otherwise, he begs and pleads for understanding. He offers the PCs half his winnings, should he emerge victorious. He'd rather negotiate than fight.

## Day 1, Evening

At least two discordant notes should prompt the PCs to investigate, either during the competitions or, more plausibly, in the evening of that day. First, the emaciated Yeemus's phenomenal food capacity must surely excite interest. The PCs may confront him anywhere; he is residing at the Five Owls Inn. The consequence appears below under "Yeemus's Secret."

Second, Eloplaster's hushed mention of "the ingredient" may draw the PCs to make inquiries. The Registrar lives in a rich manse on the better side of town. The results of that investigation are described under "Spone."

After all this, the PC wearing Dame Belevant's magical amulet faces an uneasy night. See "The Amulet of Gustatory Transgression," below.

### Yeemus

*"I deny any such obtrusion, regardless of orifice."*

**Ratings:** Persuade (Glib) 10, Rebuff (Wary) 8, Attack (Speed) 12, Attack (Caution) 6, Defense (Intuition) 8, Health 6, Athletics 4, Concealment 2, Imposture 3, Living Rough 2, Perception 2, Quick Fingers 2, Stealth 6.

**Weapon:** rapier.

### Yeemus's Secret

Yeemus has been taken over by an otherworldly parasite with an immense appetite. When he fights, the creature's digestive spike emerges from his mouth to attempt to pierce his opponent's flesh. Any hit from this thing forces the victim to make a Health roll or suffer immediate incapacitation. Yeemus flees without delivering a death-blow. Eggs from the parasitic organism then migrate into the victim's digestive tract. They incubate for three months and then begin to grow. An appendage hollows out the host's brain and then grows into a new cerebral organ.

If a PC reports Yeemus's unseemly parasitic advantage to the Duke's functionaries, Orbal's bodyguards corner Yeemus and subject him to a pummeling until the digestive spike flits out his mouth in an attempt to defend itself. One of the Duke's men is **paralyzed**, but the others succeed in dispatching both host and parasite.

Yeemus remains the front-runner until the final round, unless killed or disqualified.

### Spone

Eloplaster's manse is not hard to find. It is the third largest in Cuirnif, inferior only to those of Orbal and Belevant. On its grounds, beyond a high stone fence, is a cage covered by a cloth. Inside the cage is Spone, a tall, thin-boned humanoid covered in pink, downy feathers. Its large head, with flapping ears and a wide, mournful mouth, blinks unhappily at any PC who lifts the cloth. Spone, thinking the PC a servant of Eloplaster, begs for his freedom. "Am I not like you? Do I not have two arms, two legs, the capacity for thought and speech? If you cut away my pockets of meat, do I not bleed? Can you not see that it would be barbarous in the extreme to cook and devour my head?"

Spone is a rare kind of creature called a **cathonarit**. PCs can use Pedantry or Stewardship to identify him. Stewardship? Yes: The cathonarit is legendary for the

**Attack (Speed) 12, Attack (Caution) 6:** The first attack ability is that of the parasite's digestive spike; the second is for Yeemus's body. Each attacks once per round, as if they are two separate characters.

**paralyzed:** This bodyguard, once fully taken over by the parasite, might seek vengeance against the PC who betrayed its parent.





extreme delicacy of the pockets of meat on its head. Poached cathonarit head is a dish of rare mystique in culinary circles.

Spone says that Eloplaster, having bought him from a traveling menagerie, clearly means his nephew to prepare Spone's head as the climactic dish in the competition's third round. The creature begs for the PCs' help. However, before he can say more, six of Eloplaster's bodyguards, sensing a disturbance, emerge from the back of the manor. (Use the game statistics for Duke Orbal's bodyguards under "The Duke" above.)

If the PCs run off, Spone later seeks them out. His head is detachable; a quartet of tiny legs sprouts from the bottom of his neck. Tiny wings issue forth from his ears. Between these two methods of locomotion, he is able to haltingly make his way through the town. Using his keen sense of smell, Spone tracks the PC to his accommodations, evading the sight of others. Again he pleads for assistance in freeing his body. He can live for only a few days without it. Naturally, he wishes to keep his head out of Eloplaster's clutches—and Pusamus's roaster.

Altruism cannot always be assumed in *Dying Earth* PCs. A PC might wish to cook his head and serve it at the competition. To know the recipe, he must score an Illustrious Success at Pedantry or Stewardship. Should he get even an inkling that the PCs mean to add him to their menu, Spone's head flees as fast as its tiny wings can propel it. He moves surprisingly quickly, applying a levy of 1 to any attempt to catch him.

## The Amulet of Gustatory Transgression

Thanks to the amulet, the PC concludes the first round feeling only slightly bloated. Not long afterwards, he feels only lightly refreshed.

Dame Belevant insist that the PC stay in the guest house at her estate. Before retiring for the evening, he even feels a mite hungry. But he awakens in the middle of the night feeling not only bloated, but the subject of a profound anatomical disturbance. It's as if food, in large quantities, is appearing in his lower intestine and being forced back up into his stomach. The PC suffers acid reflux, as digestive fluids are pushed up into his mouth. He feels so bloated he can hardly move. But as the discomfort reaches a crescendo, the PC feels a great heaving within him, and suddenly the sensation leaves him. (Make a Perception roll on his behalf. If successful, he thinks he hears tiny, echoing screams at the moment of release.)

If confronted with this news, both Belevant and Ugnather are genuinely surprised. They've never known the amulet to have such odd side-effects. Belevant denies that this could possibly be related to the demise of Fumlot. Successful Persuasion forces her to accept this as a possibility. However, any attempts to convince her to release the PC from his obligations are made with a levy of 3.

## Day 2: Table Talk

### Cooking: Round 2

Showing fortitude conditioned by long effort, the experienced cooks now rally and Pusamus falters. Combined Tallies for the leading contenders are as follows: Gnar the Repeater 8, Lipfina 5, and Erzal Droze 1. All three of Pusamus' attempts go disastrously awry, leaving him with a Tally of -3.

Eloplaster accuses the leader—Gnar, unless the PC's Tally eclipses his—of breaking the sumptuary laws, and declares a severe scoring penalty (in game terms, -5 to the Tally). However (unless a PC intervenes) Gnar convinces the Duke to rule these objections out of order. If the PC leads, he faces the accusation and may try to Persuade the Duke to set aside Eloplaster's complaint.

Afterward, Eloplaster scolds Pusamus. If the PCs haven't picked up on it, they again overhear the Registrar whisper a hint that points to Spone, and to his location at Eloplaster's manse.

### Eating: Round 2

The amulet performs admirably during the second round. If Yeemus is still extant, he nearly manages to keep pace



with the PC. With the two rounds' scores combined, he still enjoys the narrowest of leads. Without Yeemus, the PC has no credible opposition whatever. Krand, valiantly rising from his sickbed to rejoin the fray, remains an underdog favorite of some onlookers.



## Day 2, Evening

The players may well initiate new inquiries in the evening; handle these as circumstances dictate, always contriving to draw the PCs ever deeper into the action. The more you can embroil them in devices that go awry on the competition's last day, the more plausible becomes the howling mob that ultimately drives them from Cuirnif.

Two story elements are scheduled for this second evening. First, Registrar Eloplaster attempts foul play against the cooking contest's current leader; see "The Assault" below. The second development once again involves Dame Belevant's chosen champion in the eating competition, wearer of the Amulet of Gustatory Transgression; see "Further Digestive Unpleasantness" below.

### The Assault

In a location where a PC can eavesdrop, Eloplaster consults furtively with three bodyguards. The guards stealthily shadow the Round 2 contest leader (Gnar or a PC). When circumstances look propitious, the bodyguards back the contestant into an alley alone, then pummel him vigorously.



Gnar is helpless in battle. But if the PC puts up a good fight or other PCs intervene, the bodyguards retreat as soon as one of them gets hurt. Can the PCs coerce them to implicate Eloplaster? Can they then persuade Duke Orbal to punish his trusted Registrar? Chance and fate rule all.

### Further Digestive Unpleasantness

That night the PC again feels something materializing in his digestive tract, but this time it is much smaller and more active. The thing crawls its way up out of his stomach. With surprising strength, it forces his jaws open, and pops out, covered in foul-smelling fluids. It jumps from his bed and attempts to run for the exit.

This is **Edro**, a small, naked, humanoid creature with blue skin and a disproportionately large head and feet. Edro does not wish to be captured by the PC, who is of no use to him in his dilemma.

Edro is a great hero of his people, who reside in another reality. Their survival rests in his undersized hands. He seeks aid in his quest—if allowed, he selects the PC who has taken the least interesting role in the story so far. However, he may be captured by the eating contestant and forced to tell his story.

Said tale follows. For generations his people have dwelt in a network of burrows. The walls close upon them; they cannot enlarge the burrow. Nor can they go elsewhere. It is a self-contained, sustaining environment where his people, the **Micathrobes**, are born, toil, live, laugh, and die. But for the past seven years, they have faced an increasing threat to their survival: the sudden, periodic appearance of large quantities of half-digested food matter in their imperial throne room. For years they've worked to shovel it out, but now there is too much of it. The Micathrobes have been pressed into a paltry few livable chambers. Formerly peaceful, they battle one another for space. Even these struggles seem pointless, as gases from the decomposing food now fill their burrows and slowly poison them all.

Last year, the greatest magicians of the Micathrobe people managed to force much of the avalanche back where it came from. (Thus Fumlot's death, when the

#### Edro

*"Surely you can summon the kindness to assist my people, if only momentarily."*

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Eloquent) 8, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 12, Attack (Speed) 4, Defense (Misdirection) 18, Health 2, Concealment 4, Quick Fingers 6, Stealth 12.





magicians force back into his stomach more food than it could hold.) Last night, they did the same. But tonight, they did something even riskier: They sent their greatest hero, Edro, through the cincture in space from which the food issued. He is charged with finding the cause of the disaster and bringing it to an end.

Edro assumes whoever is behind the catastrophe acts with purpose. Like any people, the Micathrobes see themselves as the center of existence and can't imagine they could be wiped out by unintended consequences of something so absurd as an eating contest. (If persuaded to see the truth of the situation, Edro first evinces incredulity, then wild dismay and embarrassment. Ultimately he showers abuse on all concerned, restraining himself to the

exact extent required to avoid endangering his mission.) He seeks an ally to destroy the holder of the amulet and everyone associated with him. However, Edro will settle for destruction of the amulet. To aid this mission, he has equipped himself with a belly-sack of rubies, common currency in his realm.

Edro does not expect to return easily to his realm; he knows he makes a great sacrifice for his people. He imagines that he might eventually find a wizard capable of returning him to his homeland.

If shown evidence of the Micathrobes' plight—even if shown Edro himself—Dame Belevant nonetheless refuses to believe such an idiotic yarn. She's too intent on winning to consider the rights of tiny humanoids.

## Day 3: Indigestion

### Cooking: Round 3

If Gnar was the leading contender, and no PC stopped the attack against him (see "The Assault" above), the PCs see him packing up his cart prior to the event. He leaves, bruised and battered.

If the PCs rescued Spone, the competition proceeds. Without PC intervention, the standings end as follows: Erzal Droze 12, Gnar (if present) 9, Lipfina -3, and Pusamus -4. Needless to say, PC chicanery could change the results considerably.

If the PCs have done nothing to rescue Spone, his head indeed shows up cooked as part of Pusamus's (or a PC's) ultimate dish. Spone's body, having overpowered a bodyguard and escaped its cage, appears at round's end and goes on a rampage, an axe in each hand. Mayhem ensues. Onlookers scream and run, trampling food carts. Some fall into open fires. Flour fills the air. The Duke flees to his carriage, surrounded by bodyguards.

Spone can't live for long with his head cooked, and collapses dead after hewing off a few spectators' limbs. As he falls, he plants an axe in Eloplaster's skull. (Things may turn out differently, of course, if a PC becomes involved in the fray. If a PC cooked Spone's head, Spone targets the PC, not Eloplaster.)

After the flour settles, the Duke emerges unharmed from his carriage and declares the cooking competition void. No prize will be awarded this year. "Meanwhile," he says, amid the moans and weeping of his stricken townspeople, "on with the festival! I will brook no further interference with the mood of joyous gaiety!"

### Eating: Round 3

Does the PC champion still use the Amulet of Gustatory Transgression? Without it, the PC has little chance of winning. Yeemus, if unexposed, wins easily. Otherwise **Krand** is likely to make a stunning come-from-behind rally to capture the trophy, an ornate silver spoon.

If the PC still has the amulet, disaster is assured. First, allow any PC assisting Edro to wreak whatever havoc their combined efforts can muster. If they don't capture the amulet, the Micathrobe mages attempt a desperate solution to their problem: mass exodus.

The PC is seized by sudden, agonizing pain as hundreds of Micathrobes materialize in his digestive system and roughly scramble for any available exit. They issue from both ends of his alimentary tract, leaping from his mouth and sliding down his legs. In this way several hundred creatures escape their doomed home, causing panic and chaos in Cuirnif. Other contestants, including Krand, are nauseated by the sight and begin to lose their own meals. Many onlookers flee screaming from the horde of blue humanoids, or are themselves paralyzed by nausea. A few try to capture the little beings to keep as pets or sell as curios. Others do their best to kill the Micathrobes, stamping on them or picking them up and dashing their little skulls against a hard surface.

(Should the cooking contest still be in progress, a few enterprising chefs pick up Micathrobes and slap them on grills to test their suitability as ingredients. They taste rather like chicken.)

#### **Krand**

*"I shall rest for a moment, then join you in your post-prandial amusements."*

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Intimidating) 6, Rebuff (Wary) 8, Attack (Strength) 12, Defense (Parry) 16, Health 6, Gambling 4, Living Rough 8, Riding 2, Stewardship 3, Tracking 4.



## Finale: Just Desserts

The Duke takes a dim view of these disruptions. Deciding that Belevant has finally gone too far, he orders her arrested. She and Ugnather, having read the writing on the wall, have already gotten a fair head start as they rush out of town. Any PCs too closely associated with her—most especially including the miscreant from whom the Micathrobes issued—must flee, too, or, as the price for reducing the Duke's festival to a vile indignity, face prolonged beatings.

*Spone: "Is this justice? Am I presumed to be my body's keeper? All reputable authorities recognize that a headless organism's actions are its own! Oh, what a woeful world!"*







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Character Name

Player

Series

Series level: ☐ Cugel☐ Turjan☐ Rhialto

Bonus size: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Dying Earth

## Character Sheet

Appearance

**General**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Facial features**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Hair** (color, cut)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Notable mannerisms**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Costume**

\_\_\_\_\_

Upper (tunic, shirt, doublet...)

Lower (pantaloon, leggings, skirt...)

Gloves, belt, sash

Shoes, boots, hose

Coat/cloak

Hat

Portrait

Abilities

	Style	Rating	Pool	Ability	Rating	Pool	
<b>Persuade</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
Secondary	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Rebuff</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
Secondary	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Attack</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
Secondary	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Defense</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
Secondary	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Health</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Hurt <input type="checkbox"/> Down/Unconc. <input type="checkbox"/> Dying/Dead			_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Weapons</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
Melee weapon	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
Missile weapon	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
Weapon	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
Weapon	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
Weapon	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Total pts, Abilities column 1</b>			_____	<b>Total, Abilities col 2</b>			_____

**Persuade**

Secondary

**Rebuff**

Secondary

**Attack**

Secondary

**Defense**

Secondary

**Health**☐ Hurt   ☐ Down/Unconc.   ☐ Dying/Dead**Weapons**

Melee weapon

Missile weapon

Weapon

Weapon

Weapon

**Total pts, Abilities column 1****Total, Abilities col 2**

Possessions

Points

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\* Indicate "special" possessions with an asterisk (\*) by the name.

**Total Possessions pts**

Resist.

	Rating	Pool		Rating	Pool
<b>Arrogance</b>	_____	_____	<b>Gourmandism</b>	_____	_____
<b>Avarice</b>	_____	_____	<b>Pettifoggery</b>	_____	_____
<b>Indolence</b>	_____	_____	<b>Rakishness</b>	_____	_____
<b>Total Resistance pts</b>			_____		

Arrogance

Avarice

Indolence

Gourmandism

Pettifoggery

Rakishness

**Total Resistance pts****Taglines Used This Session**#1 ☐ \_\_\_\_\_ #2 ☐ \_\_\_\_\_ #3 ☐ \_\_\_\_\_**Unspent Improvement Pts**

Points spent (total):

Abilities col 1 \_\_\_\_\_ + col 2 \_\_\_\_\_ + Resist \_\_\_\_\_ + Possess. \_\_\_\_\_ + Other side \_\_\_\_\_ = + Improvement points spent \_\_\_\_\_ = 

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## 2

Rules questions? [info@dyingeearth.com](mailto:info@dyingeearth.com). Find a free electronic version of this sheet on the World Wide Web at <http://www.dyingeearth.com>