

The Dying Earth Based on the work of Jack Vance

The Dying Earth Revivification Folio

By Robin D. Laws



Pelgrane Press



THE
DYING EARTH
REVIVIFICATION FOLIO

*In which the Game Master is gifted with an extended and inescapable stratagem,
whereby foolishly hesitant players might be cleverly tricked into enjoying the
unparalleled sublimities of the Dying Earth Roleplaying Game.*

by Robin D. Laws





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What, Pray Tell, Is a Revivification Folio?

This book presents a new, streamlined way to introduce and play the DYING EARTH ROLEPLAYING GAME. It presents a slightly tuned version of the **Skulduggery** rules system, as also seen in the standalone rulebook of the same name. You do not need the **Skulduggery** book to play the game. All the rules you need to play appear in the exquisitely presented folio you now hold in your hands. (Or peer at on a gleaming computer screen.) However, if you don't yet own **Skulduggery**, you will still want to. It presents generic rules allowing you to play in any genre, along with scenario packs featuring:

- ✦ space traders;
- ✦ contemporary politicians;
- ✦ pirates
- ✦ and, most viciously of all, high school students staging a musical.

The adjusted rules presented in this volume address the primary stumbling blocks GMs confronted when pitching the game to their groups. Some players demonstrated regrettable resistance to the setting's piquant ironies. Many feared that they couldn't muster the verbal eloquence it calls for. Often players would complain that they couldn't keep up with the dialogue or adhere to its attitude. Then they would play. Within moments, aided by the tagline system (p. 31) and the reversal-filled core mechanics (p. 8), they'd be spouting perfect Vancian dialogue, backstabbing and swindling with aplomb. (A few would immediately afterwards claim that they still couldn't do it, until you pointed out that they just had. Sheepish expressions ensued.)

The REVIVIFICATION FOLIO rules get players started within minutes. They set aside the extended, decision-heavy character generation of the original version for a system based on the random distribution of cards, which together take the place of a conventional character sheet. Players step more readily outside their established comfort zones when you can get them playing right away. When they spend less time creating their characters, they're more open to seeing them meet the ironic comeuppances the game so often demands. Now you can immerse them in the unique vibe of the game before they have time to doubt their ability to keep up. Changes to the tagline rules bring them to the forefront. They train players to speak in elevated Vancian lingo.

Although you can play the new take on the Dying Earth with this book alone, you will almost certainly also want to acquire the original DYING EARTH ROLEPLAYING GAME, if you are so bereft as to not own it already. Its wealth of information and atmosphere will deepen your portrayal of the setting and its uniquely mordant view of human nature.

VERSION HISTORY

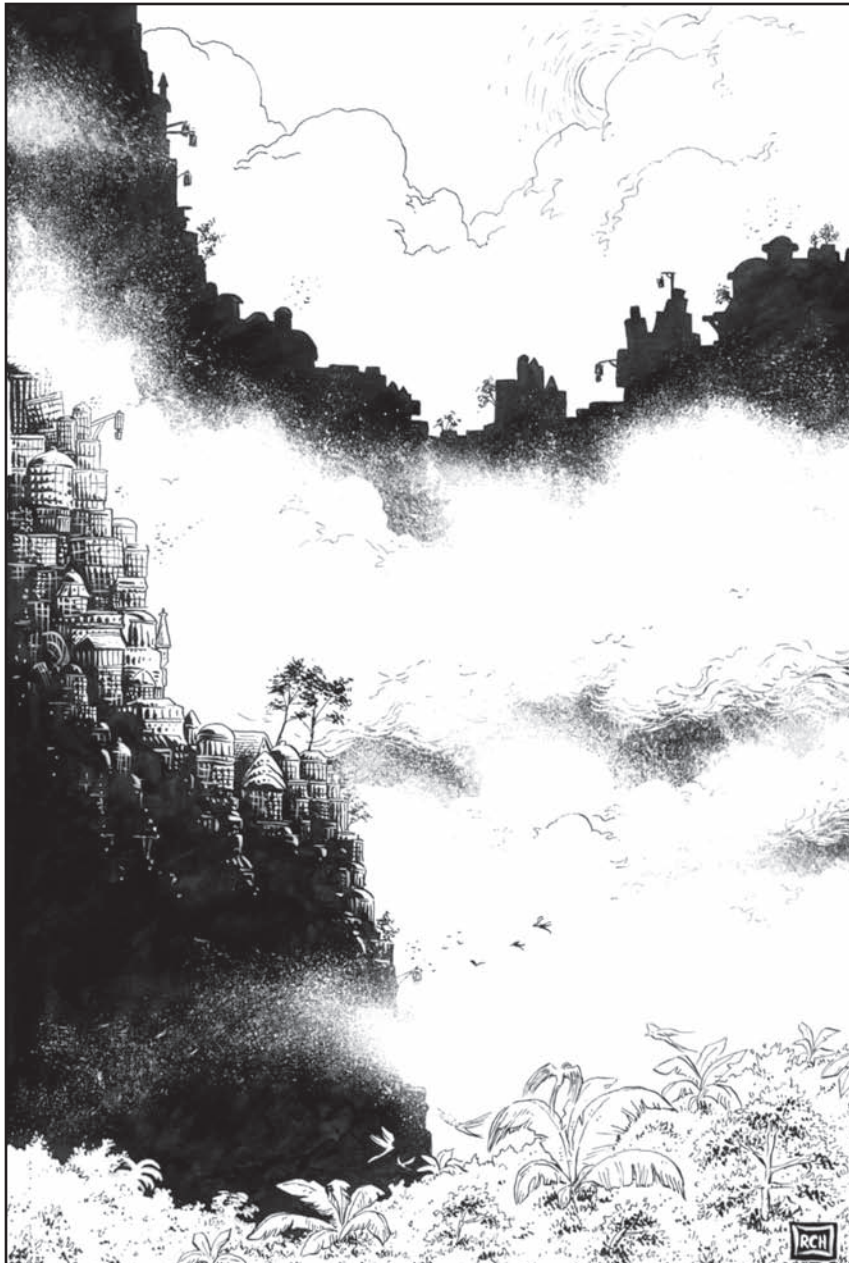
The original edition of the DYING EARTH ROLEPLAYING GAME debuted in 2001.

In 2010, Pelgrane Press published SKULDUGGERY, a simpler, generic version of the Dying Earth core rules, built for fast and hilarious one-shot play.

This book, published in 2011, completes the circle, by providing you the tools to play the game's original setting in the new, simpler way.

What, Pray Tell, Is a Revivification Folio?

We reserve our truest pity for those who have not yet read the original Dying Earth stories by Jack Vance, in our view the peerless fantasy writer of the 20th century. They originally appeared in four anthology editions: *THE DYING EARTH* (1950), *EYES OF THE OVERWORLD* (1966), *CUGEL'S SAGA* (1983), and 1984'S *RHIALTO THE MARVELLOUS*. These are now collected and in print in most English-speaking markets under the omnibus title *TALES OF THE DYING EARTH*. If you own these but have not yet stirred yourself to read them, be reminded that you might be hit by a bus tomorrow. Certain pleasures should not be delayed!



LEVELS OF PLAY

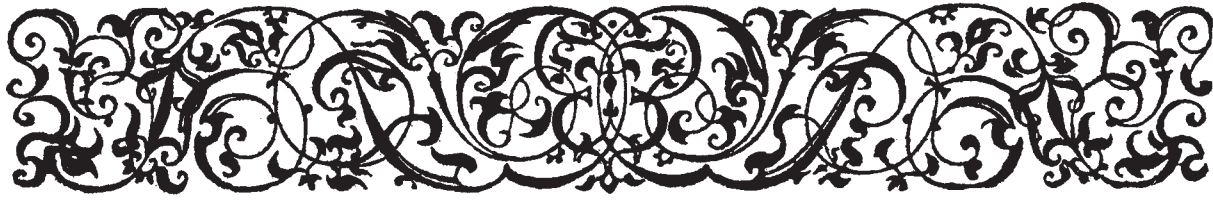
Dying Earth characters correspond to three levels of play, befitting the various moods of Jack Vance's original stories.

CUGEL-level play features the picaresque peregrinations of roving vagabonds, who may occasionally vastly outwit opponents while swindling and being swindled in a myriad of picayune fashions. Their droll adventures, inspired by *CUGEL'S SAGA* and *EYES OF THE OVERWORLD*, comprise the default and most popular mode of Dying Earth play. The characters and scenarios presented in this book all situate themselves at Cugel-level.

TURJAN-level play presents the grimmer, more traditionally adventurous exploits of mightier warriors and magicians. It takes its cue from Vance's first stories, as collected in *THE DYING EARTH*.

RHIALTO-level play explores the lives of the world's most stunningly powerful beings, its arch-magicians. Though able to work almost any magic—or at least command their indentured servitors, the sandestins, to do it for them—they prefer to occupy their days in petty procedural politics and general oneupsmanship.

Follow-on support for Turjan and Rhialto games will be provided in response to widespread outcry.



Rules and Other Vexations

This chapter provides you with the rules you need to run Dying Earth games in the new **Skulduggery** manner. GMs can familiarize themselves with their contents and verbally convey the details as needed to their players.

ASSIGNING CHARACTERS

At the start of play, characters are created from modular units called **component cards**. In a one-off game occupying a single session, the characters you create are disposable and never seen again. In series-style play, the characters created during the first session recur in later adventures, until they retire or meet ignominious demises.

Component cards for a set of six Cugel-level characters, keyed for their debut appearances in the first adventure, “The Hotel Grand Perduusz” (p. 64) appear at the back of this book. Later on we’ll show you how to create additional component cards to bring in replacement characters, start new series from scratch, or for the alternate Turjan- and Rhialto- play levels.

Component cards divide into sets. Each set provides an element of the character. The sets of cards are as follows:

Identity: Provides the character’s name (with gender variants), with details of the character’s rank, occupation, and/or status. Also included here are his or her general abilities (p. 24) and one or more of his or her objectives.

Persuade: Provides the character’s Persuade rating and style (p. 5) along with two taglines (p. 31).

Rebuff: The character’s rebuff Rating and style (p. 5) and one tagline.

Attack: The character’s Attack rating and style (p. 6). Also listed are two weapons the character typically carries, when he elects to go about armed. For convenient application of coercive force, each character wields both a melee and a missile weapon.

Defense: The character’s Defense rating and style; (p. 7).

Relationships: Details the character’s ability to solve problems by drawing on favors from supporting characters; (p. 28).

Resistances: Shows the character’s ability to shrug off the temptations that might otherwise lead him or her into entertaining trouble; (p. 29). It lists his key trait, the temptation that strikes to the quick of his being, and the **personal goal** that arises from it.

General Abilities:

Appraisal 5, Athletics 3,
Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 6,
Gambling 3, Scuttlebutt 3,
Knowledge 3 (Sp: Astrology),
Living Rough 3, Magic 2,
Management 2, Mischief 6,
Perception 3, Performance (Bawdy
Verse) 4, Physician 1, Quick
Fingers 3, Riding 6, Stealth 3,
Wherewithal 3.



FLEY

A Person of Distinction

To enumerate your many signal traits would be less than modest. That you have experienced a series of recent setbacks, and thus been set on a road of vagabondage and adventure, in no way undermines the fundamental superiority of your nature.

General Abilities:

Appraisal 5, Athletics 3, Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 6, Gambling 3, Scuttlebutt 3, Knowledge 3 (Sp: Astrology), Living Rough 3, Magic 2, Management 2, Mischief 6, Perception 3, Performance (Bawdy Verse) 4, Physician 1, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 6, Stealth 3, Wherewithal 3.

Persuade (Glib) 8

Trumps: Pure-Hearted

Is Trumped By: Obtuse

“Shall we then wave away all nugatory objections?”

“I accept command, as you so implicitly insist.”

Rebuff 6 (Obtuse)

Trumps: Glib

Is Trumped By: Intimidating

“While you spoke, I briefly dozed.”

Attack 8 (Caution)

Trumps: Vexation

Is Trumped By: Parry

Weapons: rapier, bow

Defense 6 (Vexation)

Trumps: Strength

Is Trumped By: Caution

Relationships:

Bluunt, a chug 2

Cha’ast, an imprisoned deodand 4

Kelkibur, a sandestin 3

Key Trait: Arrogant

Resistances: Avarice 4, Gourmandism 2, Indolence 4, Rakishness 7, Pettifoggery 6, Arrogance 1

Personal Goal: To wrest the maximal fame and advantage from your present circumstance, whatever that might be.

Handing Out Cards

As the name suggests, each component card is formatted to be cut up into card size. Print them out onto card stock. Component card sets for the play packs in this book can be downloaded in ready-to-print PDF format from the Pelgrane web site.

At the start of the game, fan out the first set of component cards, with the printed side facing you and away from the player. Have each player blindly choose a card from your hand. Then repeat the process for each of the five to seven card sets provided by your play pack. Maintain an illusion of even-handedness by choosing a new player to be first to draw with each set of cards.

At the end of this process, each player will have one component card from each set. The players may then trade cards with one another. Before trading begins, ask each player to list the word given in brackets after the Persuade, Rebuff and (if applicable) Attack and Defense abilities. This is the style of each ability. Read out the explanations of these styles before trading begins. Read out only those styles that appear on the cards in players' hands.

PERSUADE STYLES

Characters persuade in various ways, revealing their personalities and the tactics they use to get what they want.

Glib: You speak so quickly and easily that listeners find it hard to penetrate your insincerity and deceptiveness.

Eloquent: Your high-flown words and lofty sentiments sweep your listeners along on a cloud of beautiful wordplay.

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 it is you just said.

Forthright: You cut straight to the heart of any question.

Charming: You are so much fun to be around, and so ingratiating, that people can't help liking you and seeking to please you.

Intimidating: Intimidating definition You get your way by fear; every word you utter drips with implied menace. You may be physically imposing, mentally, or both.

REBUFF STYLES

Characters Rebuff persuasion attempts in one of six ways. As with Persuade, these reflect the way they perceive the world, and the means by which they avoid being hoodwinked.

Obtuse: You don't always get what others are saying. This is not the impediment it might at first seem. When people can't make you understand them, they get frustrated and give up, before they can trick you.

Wary: Nothing bothers you more than the thought that someone might put something over on you. You instinctively distrust anyone who seems to want anything from you.

Penetrating: You see through people's words to their motivations—often discovering that they're only pretending to care about your interests.

Lawyerly: You use your unerring nose for mile-wide loopholes to spot the flaws in others' proposals.

UNPERSUADABLE

For plot purposes you may designate that a supporting character is unpersuable on a given point, whether or not it can be shown that taking action to the contrary would be in his self-interest. This exception to the rules is to be used sparingly. Use it only to prevent the PCs from easily attaining the scenario's central goal early in the session.





Contrary: You hate following someone else's lead. If someone tells you to look up, you look down. If everyone else wants to go right, you want to go left.

Pure-Hearted: You are utterly guileless. Without even trying to do so, you expose the bad intent of people trying to fool you.

ATTACK STYLES

There's more than one way to strike an opponent in a physical fight. Your character's main advantage in combat is as follows:

Strength: You are big and well-muscled. Your advantage lies in the sheer force of your blows.

Speed: You win by lashing out quickly, leaving the other guy no time to react.

Finesse: You fight gracefully, anticipating and countering your opponent's defensive moves.

Cunning: Before any fight, you size up the opportunities offered to you by your environment and ruthlessly exploit them. You throw sand in your foe's face, jump up on a table to secure a height advantage, or seize an object to use as an unexpected weapon.

Ferocity: Your heedless energy and snarling rage forces even the bravest opponent to fight on your terms.

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.



Rules and Other Vexations

DEFENSE STYLES

When an opponent fails to hit you, it's because of the following quality.

Dodge: Incoming blows don't hurt if you know how to duck them.

Parry: You deflect incoming blows with your weapon, or other available objects.

Sure-Footedness: Swift movement and a well-honed sense of balance allow you to dance out of striking range.

Intuition: By watching his style and following his eyes, you can guess your foe's next move, and avoid it.

Misdirection: You trick your opponent into predicting your next move, then go elsewhere, leaving him lashing at the empty air.

Vexation: With taunts and patter, you alternately enrage and demoralize your opponent, provoking him into stupid mistakes..

The Trading Round

Having explained the characteristics of the two (or four) styles, ask if there are any other abilities on the cards the players need explanations for. As needed, quickly summarize the ability descriptions (starting on p. 30.) Then begin the trading round.

Cards that have not been drawn are not available to trade. The trading phase lasts for as many minutes as there are players. Cut it short if no one wants to trade, as is often the case. Players often invest in their characters within seconds, as soon as they start to imagine how their arbitrary mix of traits, tactics, abilities, and personal history fits together.

When players have committed to their final component cards, hand out paper clips to keep them bundled neatly together. The information held on a player's stack of cards provides all the information he needs to play. The stack of component cards acts as the character sheet required by other roleplaying games.

Filling In the Details

After handing out the component cards, tell players that they're encouraged to add their own touches to the characters they've been provided. So long as they don't jarringly contradict the facts given in their card stacks, they're free to closely dovetail these choices with the information they already have, or bring in elements from left field. You have the final say.



RESOLVING ACTIONS

When play begins, you'll present the players with scenes that challenge the characters as they attempt to fulfill both their collective and personal goals. The collective goal appears on the Identity card; the personal goal may appear there or on the Resistances card. When they face obstacles in pursuit of their goals, the rules system helps you determine whether they succeed or fail. In either case, the result pushes the story in a new direction, which will ultimately lead to another obstacle to overcome. Success should move the story in a positive direction for the character, failure in a negative direction.

Ratings and **pools** influence the characters' chances of success or failure.

RATINGS AND POOLS

The number appearing after each ability (including Persuade, Rebuff, Attack, Defense and the Resistances) is a **rating**. Players may increase their chances of success on any attempted action by spending points from a relevant ability. The number of points currently available to spend from a single ability is called a **pool**. At the start of play, the character's pool in any given ability equals the rating. As he spends points, the pool drops, until it reaches 0. When a pool reaches 0, the character can still attempt the action associated with the skill, but can't use spend points to increase his chances of success.

Pool points are most often used to allow you to reroll die results you don't like, or to force opposing characters to reroll die results they do like.

REFRESHES

When a pool **refreshes**, it again equals the ability's rating, as it did at the start of play. Players gain refreshes through adroit use of taglines (p. 31).

Fruminger's Concealment pool has fallen to 2. His rating in that ability is 6; that's the number of points he had in his Concealment pool at the start of the game. He earns an Eavesdropping refresh, bringing his pool back up to 6.

Ability pools can at times exceed their ratings; if so, they can't be refreshed.

BOONS

Sometimes a character gets to add points to a pool. This is called a **boon**. A boon can cause your pool to exceed your rating. You can't get a boon in an ability that doesn't appear in your card stack..

Fruminger's Persuade rating is 7; his pool stands at 4. He gains a boon of 1, raising his pool to 5.

Boons are awarded under various circumstances, which we'll mention as we go along.

Levies

Certain events, described later in this section, may cost a character points from a particular pool. This is called a **levy**.

Fruminger's Rebuff rating is 7; his pool stands at 4. He takes a levy of 1, dropping his pool to 3.

When you must pay a levy you can't afford, your pool drops to 0. You immediately suffer the penalty associated with an empty pool (p. 10).

WHAT DO POOL POINTS REPRESENT?

Pool points are a literary device measuring characters' ability to influence the storyline by performing acts defined as typical for their characters. They are a game abstraction, not something the characters are aware of. Instead they emulate the way works of fiction featuring multiple protagonists parcel out time in the spotlight. Every character gets so many moments to shine, with greater results when their actions reinforce their already established qualities.

In a few cases it feels natural to describe obvious consequences of pool loss. A character with a lowered Defense pool seems hurt. A low Wherewithal might reflect a state of sickness or exhaustion. Most of the time, though, you're better off not tying yourself in knots trying to work out what this game abstraction simulates. Characters are no more aware of it than they are of the genre conventions of the stories they appear in, or the fact that your game group is drinking port and feasting on honey-roasted figs.

Transferring Points: Giving Help to Other PCs

One PC can transfer points in a given ability to another PC's pool. To do so, the player making the transfer must be able to describe what he's doing to help the player receiving it in a way that makes some sort of narrative sense. Normally the two pools are in the same ability, but an inventive action description may convince the GM to allow a transfer between different abilities. Each transfer costs 1 point from the transferring character's pool, in addition to any points granted to the other player. For this reason, it's cheaper to make one large transfer than several small ones. The transferring character must weigh this consideration against the chance that points from an overly generous transfer will go to waste.

The roguish vagabond Fruminger (played by Beth) finds himself indentured, more or less against his will, to a truculent giant named Elbador. Among his chief duties is the acquisition of a certain eel variety whose tender meat relieves the pain of his master's crippling gout. Alas, the local fishermen still hold grudges against Elbador for rampages conducted against their village in his younger, carefree days. Fruminger must therefore take great care that they are not cheating him by selling him specimens of a nearly-identical, toxic variety. Unfortunately, his earlier attempts to prevent the town's flour dealers from fobbing off weevil-infested viands have severely taxed his powers of Appraisal. Beth has only 2 points left in Fruminger's appraisal pool. The crafty wanderer Rutose (played by Jim) is also sadly forced to serve Elbador, and for the moment does not wish his rival steward to fail. "Rutose looks over Fruminger's shoulder as he inspects the long-fish," Jim narrates. His Appraisal pool stands at 6. Jim transfers 3 points to Beth's Appraisal pool, increasing it to 5. His character's Appraisal pool drops by 4 points (the transfer of 3, plus the transfer cost of 1), for a new total of 2.

Success and Failure

When a player wants his character to take an action, the GM first considers whether it ought to face any resistance at all.

If failure would seem ridiculous or unbelievable, the character automatically succeeds. The player describes what he's trying to do, and you tell him that he's done it.

Fruminger's player, Beth, announces that he's heading back to town to remonstrate with the majordomo of the flour-dealer's guild. Since Fruminger arrived there without incident earlier the same morning, it would strain even the credibility of this narrative for him to get lost on her way there. No point in resorting to the rules to decide if she succeeds! Instead, you specify, "When you arrive at the guild headquarters, you find it shuttered tight, and marked with a sign indicating that its leaders will be unavailable to visitors for the next fortnight. Now what do you do?"

If both success and failure seem like equally plausible and interesting outcomes, take the following steps to resolve the action.

1. DESCRIBE THE ATTEMPT

The player describes what the character tries to do and how he tries to do it, specifying the ability he's using. Players often forget to name the ability; prompt them if necessary. They can use only those abilities appearing on their cards. If they have an ability but no points in the pool, they can still try to use it.

Fruminger learns that the flour cartel have called a secret meeting in a secluded root cellar. Beth describes what she'll do in response: "I use my Imposture to pose as Glean, a itinerant dealer in slightly used millstones."

If a player proposes to use an ability that doesn't fit the task, propose a more suitable alternate choice, or suggest an alternate description of the attempt that better employs the proposed ability.

RESOLUTIONS

Action attempts take place either as **checks**, involving only one character, or **contests**, in which two or more characters attempt to outdo each other until one of them is forced to drop out. Contests consist of exchanges. An

exchange, described in greater detail below, is a roll made by a single character while engaged in a contest, plus any rerolls he may make, until he stands pat or can't afford to reroll any more.

Combats are a form of contest with a few extra wrinkles added; they too are divided into exchanges. The umbrella term encompassing checks, contests, and combats is **resolution**.

These terms will make more sense as we go along, but are introduced here so we can refer to them in passing.

COMPATIBILITY NOTE

The result names use the same nomenclature as the original Dying Earth game. In pursuit of a more generic feel, the core **Skulduggery** book uses Routine Failure instead of Quotidian Failure and calls a Prosaic Success an Ordinary Success. This book uses Illustrious Success in place of its Impressive Success. Bear this in mind when performing any cross-pollinating vat experiments between the game's two iterations.

❧ Resolving Actions ❧

2. ASSESS BONUSES OR PENALTIES

The GM decides whether this challenge is especially hard or easy. Most times it is neither.

If the task is especially hard, the player suffers a **penalty**. The player subtracts the penalty from the die roll, as made in the next step. The penalty is almost always 1.

If it had already been established that the flour dealers loathe and fear millstone salesmen, “Gleanc’s” warm welcome at a secret cartel meeting might seem even more implausible than standard Dying Earth gallimaufry. To reflect the added difficulty, the GM would assess a penalty of 1 to Beth’s roll.

A separate penalty of 1 applies when the player’s pool in the ability has fallen to 0.

If the player completely lacks the relevant ability, a penalty of 1 applies. Also, any Illustrious Successes scored are downgraded to Prosaic Successes (see below.)

When a player proposes to use an ability that is only tangentially relevant to the task at hand, but does so entertainingly and/or convincingly, the GM can allow its use, assessing a levy of 1 or 2.

If the task is especially easy, the player gains a **bonus**. The player adds the bonus to the die roll, as made in the next step. The bonus is almost always 1.

Alternately, let’s say that Fruminger has laid groundwork for his imposture by spreading rumors of the wealth and appealing gullibility of the millstone broker Gleanc. Beth argues that the flour dealers ought to be foaming at the mouth to fleece this legendary character, giving Fruminger an advantage as he seeks to fool his way into their meeting.

The GM agrees, allowing a bonus of 1 on her upcoming roll.

Action attempts may also face bonuses or penalties as a consequence of previous story developments.

3. ROLL A DIE

The player rolls a six-sided die. On any result higher than 4, the character succeeds. On a 3 or less, the character fails. The exact number indicates the degree of success or failure, as per the following table:

FAILURE (1-3)	1. Dismal 2. Quotidian 3. Exasperating
SUCCESS (4-6)	4. Hair’s-Breadth 5. Prosaic 6. Illustrious

What happens depends on the character’s final result. (As you’ll see in the next step, characters may roll several times before standing pat on a result.)

On a **Dismal Failure**, the character fails to achieve his objective, and suffers lingering ill consequences from the attempt. In a humorous game, the failure is played as amusingly bumbling or horrifyingly funny, depending on the situation. Rerolling a Dismal Failure costs 3 points, instead of the standard 1 point.

On a **Quotidian Failure**, the desired result does not take place, but no other consequences or benefits apply. The loss is neither embarrassing or memorable.

An **Exasperating Failure** is one in which the character comes aching close to success, only to fail at the last moment. Although the objective is not

PATHETIC SUCCESS

Sometimes a character confronts a challenge which should feel difficult, even though failure would be uninteresting or unacceptably slow down the story. In these cases, allow players to succeed on any result, if they spend all of their remaining points in the relevant pool. Let the characters succeed, but in a way that puts them at some other disadvantage. This is called a **Pathetic Success**. Make sure that the new disadvantage doesn’t also lead to a dead end.

Fruminger has fallen into an erb pit, far from anyone who can assist him. He gets an Exasperating Failure, pays a point to roll again, gets a Basic Failure, pays a point to roll again, and gets a Dismal Failure. This runs him out of points in Athletics, the ability he’s been using to try to get out of the pit. You rule that he gets out of the pit, but is so exhausted that he easily falls into the clutches of a piratical press-ganging party. This is not a dead end, because you can foresee an interesting story branch even if he fails to talk his way out of shipboard service.

If no character in a scene has points to spend in the ability that best applies to the challenge, reconfigure the situation so that another ability comes into play. This allows the story to move ahead.

If Fruminger was already out of Athletics points when he fell into the pit, you might have a crazed vegetarian deodand come along. Fruminger still has points in Persuade, so he can now try to convince the creature to throw him a vine and pull him up.

Pathetic Successes are available only when the GM decides that failure would be boring or slow down the story too much. They are not available to players as a general option.



achieved, the character gains admiration, sympathy, or useful insight for the future. For each Exasperating Failure, the character gains a boon of 1 to apply to the ability at hand. Boons are gained after the action is fully resolved and can't be spent while it's in progress. See sidebar for more.

On a **Hair's-Breadth Success**, the character seizes a narrow victory from the jaws of defeat. The objective is achieved, but at a cost—for each Hair's-Breadth success scored in the course of an action resolution, the character pays a levy of 1. The levy is charged only after the action is fully resolved; see sidebar.

a **Prosaic Success** achieves the objective, no more and no less.

An **Illustrious Success** achieves the objective and another story advantage besides.

TOKENS

You may wish to keep on hand a collection of beads, poker chips or other tokens in three colors. Two of the colors represent boons and levies, respectively. The third token represents banked refreshes gained from the use of taglines (p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) In the designer's group, we use yellow poker chips for levy, green for boons, and blue for refreshes. The exact color scheme doesn't matter so long as everyone remembers what's what.

During a contest, when a player scores a Hair's-Breadth Success, award a levy token. Hand out a boon token for each Exasperating Failure.

When the action is fully resolved, the character refreshes if he has a refresh token and chooses to spend it. He then gains an additional number of pool points equal to the boon tokens in his pile. Then the pool drops by the number of levy tokens, if any. The character may not spend tokens, nor are levies applied until after the action is resolved. No levy will take a pool below 0.

In the course of a Persuade vs. Rebuff contest, the galling arch-magician Thurfyr (played by Lynne) scores two Hair's-Breadth Successes and one Exasperating Failure. She gets two levy tokens and one boon token. Thurfyr ends the contest with a Persuade pool of 2. Lynne then immediately modifies his pool according to the tokens she got. One boon and one levy token cancel each other out, leaving her with one levy token. Thurfyr's Persuade pool drops by another point, from 2 to 1.



☞ Resolving Actions ☞

In a contest (see below), the character's opponent must pay 3 points to counter an Illustrious Success, instead of the usual 1. It costs 3 points even when you would otherwise pay nothing.

Beth now rolls for Fruminger. (Let's say that she faces neither a bonus nor a penalty.)

She rolls a 3—an Exasperating Failure. If Fruminger does nothing further, he'll be identified not as the artless Glean, but his true, clever self.

To mark the Exasperating Failure, the GM hands Beth a boon token.

4. REROLL OR STAND PAT

Players who don't like their die results can attempt to reverse their fortunes by paying to roll again. Rerolling costs 1 point from the relevant ability pool, or 3 in the case of a Dismal Failure. For each reroll, the player must describe the change in tactics his character is employing to achieve a new and better result.

The resolution continues until the player decides to stand pat and accept the current die result. Players stand pat on favorable results, when they decide the effort isn't worth the pool point expenditure, or when they run out of points to spend.

When the player stands pat, the current die result determines the final success or failure of the action attempt.

Fortunately for our example, Fruminger has no intention of failing. Beth spends 1 point from her Imposture pool to buy a reroll. Her pool drops to 5 points, from its original 6. She rolls again, and again gets an Exasperating Failure. She gets another boon token. She spends another point for another reroll, dropping her pool to 4. She rolls yet again, and gets yet another Exasperating Failure, and a third boon token. Dropping her pool to 3, she buys a third reroll. The third time's the charm—she gets a 6, an Illustrious Success. She achieves her objective, and now gains admission to the meeting. An Illustrious Success also requires the GM to grant an additional benefit. Here, the GM decides that the eldest and dottiest of the flour dealers takes a shine to Glean, who reminds him of his long-lost son. This gives Fruminger the chance to press a further advantage, perhaps swindling the flour dealer as a sideline activity. He starts dropping hints that he really is the man's vanished scion.

Beth now collects the 1-point boons for each of her three Exasperating Failures—taking Fruminger's pool from 3 back up to 6.

Contests

Many times a character's actions are resisted by the overt actions of another. These situations are called contests. PCs may contest other PCs or supporting characters. In a contest, one character is the actor and the other, the thwarter. The actor is trying to accomplish something, and the thwarter is trying to stop him. Examples might include:

- ☞ catching a street urchin who has just stolen your purse
- ☞ locating an invisible courtier in the king's palace
- ☞ distracting an impertinent troubadour, thus spoiling his performance

A contest begins with an action attempt by the actor. When the actor succeeds, the thwarter then counters with an action attempt of his own. If he succeeds, the acting character fails...

...unless the actor chooses to spend points to act again...

...in which case, the thwarter can spend points to act again...

...and so on.

The first roll by each contestant is, as per usual, made at no cost. All subsequent rolls, including the first rolls of new exchanges, cost 1 point from the pertinent

ACTING WITHOUT AN ABILITY

Characters may attempt actions using abilities that don't appear in their card stacks. They're assumed to be using layman's intuition, dumb luck, or some other other situational factor that justifies their use of the ability. The player gets one roll; without points to spend, no rerolls are possible. Illustrious and Prosaic Successes are downgraded to Hair's-Breadth Successes.

If the player scores an Exasperating Failure while acting without an ability, the character still gains a boon token. At the end of the contest, the character gains 1 point in that ability. Until the point is spent, the character is treated as if he has the ability in question. However, this does not give the character a rating in that ability, or a pool that can be refreshed.

🐉 Resolving Actions 🐉

pool, with two exceptions:

It costs 3 points to roll again, continuing your own exchange, after scoring a Dismal Failure

It costs 3 points to initiate a new exchange in response to an opponent's exchange that ended on an Illustrious Success

The contest ends when one of the contestants loses, by:

- ending an exchange on a failure
- declining to initiate a new exchange when the opponent has ended an exchange on a success

OR

- running out of pool points for the ability being used

(Fights end in a slightly different way. See (p. 32) for more on personal combat.)

Fruminger (Beth) and the caviling quack surgeon Eklan (a supporting character) have been captured by a hungry pelgrane, Somin. With the aid of an effusing powder, Somin prevents their escape from his nest. The pelgrane holds one impulse dearer than his insatiable appetite: his patronage of the arts. He proposes to eat one of his captives and spare the other. His sharp beak will smile on the prisoner who produces the most exquisite handicraft. To keep this focused on the player character, you as GM decide that Fruminger will contest his Craftsmanship against Somin's Appraisal. Fruminger has 5 in his Craftsmanship pool. Somin's Appraisal pool stands at 4.

(If the conflict between Fruminger and Eklan meant more to the ultimate goal of the story, you might instead choose to make this a zero-sum contest, below, in which Fruminger and Eklan contest their respective Craftsmanship skills, with Somin as the nonparticipating supporting character. Ultimately it's a creative judgment call based on what seems most entertaining to all concerned.)

Since Fruminger is making something and Somin is reacting, you decide that the vagabond is the actor and the pelgrane, the thwarted.

As actor, Beth starts with an action attempt. "I start by fashioning a divine anklet from rocks and twigs." She rolls a 3, an Exasperating Failure. She gets a boon token.

The GM describes what's happening in the story: "Somin at first seems intrigued by the rustic simplicity of your materials, but then recalls a similar work made for him by a pudgy young child, who he spared from his gullet for a period of months."

"I can't let that stand," Beth says. "Surely a patron of the plastic arts such as Somin possesses materials commensurate with my demonstrable talent."

You hadn't considered this, but it's a fun suggestion that opens up new possibilities, so you go with it, topping it with an additional detail. "You mean aside from his ceramics studio, complete with kiln?"

"No, a potter's wheel and kiln shall suffice," Beth says. "Provided there is adequate glaze." She spends 1 Craftsmanship to reroll, taking her pool down to 3. She rolls a 4, a Hair's-Breadth Success. You hand her a levy token, asking her to characterize her result.

"I produce an austere chopstick holder, in the old Gloinish manner," says Beth. The Gloinish manner appears nowhere in Vance or in the various Dying Earth supplements; she's making up this Vancian-sounding detail off the top of her head. Beth stands pat on this result; it might not be the most stunning possible, but it's enough to keep Fruminger in the contest and put the ball in Somin's court.

You roll Somin's Appraisal, getting a Prosaic Success. You interpret the result by springboarding from Beth's result description. "Hrm," you say, in a pelgraney voice, "The homage to the Gloin style is adroit. Nonetheless, I must point out a lack of insight on your part: as one who does not use chopsticks to devour his prey, I inevitably favor the

NARRATIVE CONTROL

Rather than tightly defining who gets to describe what, **Skulduggery** invites a loosey-goosey approach. It doesn't really matter who narrates results, the player or the GM. We suggest that you instinctively trade off result descriptive duties depending on who gets the funnest idea fastest.

Adjust the give and take based on the preferences of individual players. Players who want to be in the descriptive driver's seat should be given plenty of leeway, so long as they're collaborating well with others and respecting the general drift of the various roll results. Where others don't think so quickly on their feet, or prefer to remain in their characters' mindset as much as possible, take over the bulk of the result narration.

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fine arts over the decorative.” Somin stands pat; if Fruminger’s player, Beth, fails to respond, he wins the contest, and decides to make Fruminger his meal.

So Beth spends another Appraisal point to reroll, dropping her pool to 2. She rolls a 2, a Quotidian Failure. “I respond by commencing work on a piece of ceramic art, depicting in stylized fashion a triumphant pelgrane. However, I’m having trouble getting the wings to stick on.”

“I make a second attempt, using stick armature to reinforce the insupportable bits,” Beth says. She spends another Appraisal point for a reroll, taking her pool to 1. She rolls a 6, an Illustrious Success. You toss her a Refresh token.

A forced reroll of an Illustrious Success costs 3 pool points. Somin has 3 points in his pool, which would take him to 0. He’s stuck—if he stands pat, he loses. If he spends the point, he loses.

You, as Somin, widen your eyes in ecstatic fervor. “Delightful! Artful! And reminiscent of my beloved late uncle. I declare the contest over! Eklan, there is no need for you to compete. Surely you could not eclipse that sublimity.” Alternating Somin’s hungry gulping and Eklan’s hideous death shrieks, you act out the action as the pelgrane falls upon his unlucky second prisoner.

As Beth ended the contest with an Illustrious Success, Fruminger achieves her objective, and something more besides. “Save for the terces, This human’s property is of no value to me,” you say, in Somin’s voice. “Perhaps you would like to take it with you, as meager recompense for your consummate artisanship.”

ZERO-SUM CONTESTS

In some cases, the distinction between actor and thwarter won’t be clear. The two contestants may both be vying to achieve the same goal in a zero-sum situation where only one can prevail. Examples might include:

- ✂ two candidates vie for audience favor at a colloquium of liches
- ✂ two bar brawlers arm-wrestle
- ✂ two mermelant riders endure the rigors of a long-distance race

Here the GM decides who goes first (becoming the actor) and who responds (as thwarter.) In a contest between a PC and a supporting character, the PC becomes the actor. In a contest between PCs, the one who had the greatest role in bringing about the contest, or who stands to gain the most from it, becomes the actor. If neither of these distinctions is clear, the PC who made the most recent action attempt is the thwarter. If none of these conditions apply, flip a coin.

TRUMPING

The Persuade and Rebuff abilities are always used in contests. They’re paired: Rebuff is always used to counter Persuade. Attack and Defense are paired in the same way, with Defense always being used to counter Attack. As you’ve seen, each of these four abilities is defined as falling into one of six styles. Each style **trumps** a style from the opposite in its pair, and is trumped by another style. When a character contests against a style that trumps his, he suffers a levy of 1. This means that each reroll purchased costs the trumped contestant an additional pool point.

If their styles are not already known to opponents before a contest begins, characters reveal them as they make their first rolls of a contest.

Fruminger’s Persuade style is Forthright. He attempts to persuade the giant Elbador that his sojourn in the pelgrane’s nest should count toward his indenture period, given that it was spent involuntarily, while conducting Elbador’s business. Elbador’s Rebuff style is Lawyerly, which trumps Forthright. The cost of every reroll Fruminger pays for in the course of their contest increases by 1.



✂ Resolving Actions ✂

WALLOPS

If a contestant's rating (not current pool) exceeds another's by 5 or more, he can short-circuit the normal contest rules by spending 5 points on a **wallop**. No roll is required to wallop. The opposing character has one chance to avoid the wallop—by rolling and scoring an Illustrious Success on his next and only roll. Otherwise, the walloping character prevails, as if he had rolled an Illustrious Success.

Characters can wallop at any time during a contest. If an actor is walloped in response to a success, the one roll he gets in response to the wallop counts as a reroll, and must be paid for from his pool.

Deliflit, a beautiful ghost haunting the fortress of her former lover, the giant Elbador, is a supporting character with a Rebuff rating of 16. She has 12 points in her pool. Fruminger wants to Persuade her not to reveal his efforts to construct an escape ladder. Fruminger's Persuade is 10. He begins the contest with a Prosaic Success, on which he stands pat. Deliflit's Rebuff rating exceeds Fruminger's Persuade by more than 5, entitling her to wallop. (His pool is lower than that, but that doesn't matter for this purpose.) As GM, you spend 5 of her points, dropping her Rebuff to 7.

Fruminger's only chance is to roll a 6 and score an Illustrious Success. He rolls a 5. Delft conclusively rebuffs his offer and gets another benefit besides. Putting the rules outcomes in narrative terms, you describe the embittered spirit not only denying Fruminger's pleas, but additionally cowing him into erasing the arcane barrier that prevents her from entering Elbador's bedchamber.

MULTIPLE TARGETS

Characters may enter into contests against more than one opponent. Players must be able to justify how the single action they're describing could credibly work against more than one rival. The character acts, and all of the thwarters roll in response. The thwarter who gets the best response after rerolls are made is designated the champion. The champion takes over as sole responder for the remainder of the contest. If that thwarter loses, the others are all affected as well. If two or more thwarters tie for the same best response, the one with the highest pool in the ability at hand is chosen to represent the rest.

Fruminger wants to use his Etiquette ability at a dinner party attended by a trio of dowager giants. His objective is to show them that he's the perfect servant. He hopes to engineer the evening so that one of them will demand that Elbador, who fears them, will gift him to her. (Fruminger reckons he'll have better luck escaping from a near-sighted, slow-moving old giant than he has had so far with Elbador.) All three of these supporting characters, Lalk, Saln, and Pegog, will respond with their own Etiquette rolls. Their pools are 4, 3, and 2, respectively.

Thanks to previous boons, Fruminger's pool is 7, even though his rating is only 4. Beth rolls a Prosaic Success and stands pat. She describes him as successfully laying out the various pieces of giant cutlery demanded by a dinner for gargantuas.

Lalk gets an Illustrious Success. Saln rolls a Quotidian Failure; Pegog, a Prosaic Success. Neither Saln nor Pegog bother to reroll; even if they got an Illustrious Success to match Lalk's, she'd still have the highest pool and be judged the champion. As champion, Lalk stands pat on her Illustrious Success. "Lalk points out Fruminger's errant salad fork placement," the GM narrates, "grumping that it is impossible to get good help in these final days of a sputtering sun."

Because Lalk's result is an Illustrious Success, Fruminger must pay 3 points to roll again. Her pool drops from 7 to 4. "I watch, waiting for her to need something, so I can swoop in and satisfy her before she even has to ask," says Fruminger's player, Beth. She scores an Illustrious Success of her own, and stands pat. "I notice that her elbows have grown dry," she jumps in to narrate. "I discreetly pass her a jar of liniment."

The GM decides that Lalk is having none of this, and spends 3 points from her pool



✂ Resolving Actions ✂

to buy a reroll of her own. That drops her Etiquette pool from 4 to 1. She rolls an Exasperating Failure. That leaves her poised to lose no matter what happens—if she spends her last point on a reroll, her pool drops to 0, ending the contest

“Lalk seems at first offended by your presumption,” you narrate. “Then she fumbles the jar, nearly dropping it. You prevent this embarrassing faux pas—”

“—by grabbing the jar before the rest of them can see it,” Beth interjects, completing your thought.

“Her enormous eyes seem to melt,” you conclude. “Clearly she sees you in a new light, as she would a beloved lapdog.”

UNDERMINING

When one player character has paid to make a die roll, but has yet to roll the die, another player may interrupt and attempt to undermine his action. The underminer describes what his character is doing to interfere with the target PC, specifying the ability he’s using. The GM makes sure that the action fits the narrative situation and that the ability is appropriate to it. If not, she may propose an alternate action or ability, or, in rare cases, rule the undermining attempt impossible.

The underminer spends any number of points from the relevant pool. This number is called the **stake**. The underminer proceeds to make an undermining roll. This roll can’t be rerolled, is subject to no penalties or bonuses, and accrues no boon or levy tokens.

- ✂ On any success, the stake is subtracted from the target’s pool in the ability he is about to roll.
- ✂ On an Illustrious Success, the stake is then added back to the pool the underminer spent from.
- ✂ On a Dismal Failure, the pool the underminer spent from drops to 0 and he loses any refresh tokens he may have banked.

The timing of an undermine attempt means that the acting character always gets to make at least the one roll he’s already paid for. However, the undermine may then reduce his pool to 0, making that the last roll he can afford to make. PCs may never undermine GM-controlled characters. GM-controlled characters may never undermine PCs.

By curious coincidence, Rutose (Jim) has also become an unwilling servant of the giant dowager Lalk. He plans to loot her treasury before escaping. When Fruminger shows up as an addition to her staff, he decides to thwart the newcomer’s efforts to ingratiate himself.

Fruminger (Beth) is about to start a Persuade attempt to strip Rutose of his superior position. He has 9 points in his Persuade pool. Rutose has 7 in Etiquette, which he will use to undermine.

“As he makes his case, I engage in an precisely choreographed sequence of murmurs and eyerolls, suggesting that Fruminger can’t be trusted to clean the chamberpots.”

Jim spends 5 Etiquette points from Rutose’s pool on the stake, dropping Fruminger’s pool to 2. He rolls a Hair’s-Breadth Success. As a result, Fruminger’s Persuade pool drops from 9 to 4 before his wooing attempt even begins.

Note that the Hair’s-Breadth Success does not force Jim to take a levy token.

Only one undermining attempt can be made per resolution. Where two or more players want to undermine the same resolution, the one willing to purchase the highest stake takes precedence. If multiple players want to undermine but no one is willing to outspend anyone else, those characters are assumed to be too busy interfering with each other to undermine the target.



Resolving Actions

POOLED EFFORT

To boil down a complicated series of tasks into a simple outcome, call for a pooled effort contest. This is appropriate when many PCs are working together to achieve a single goal by varied means.

1. First, the GM and group agree on the desired outcome the characters are seeking.
2. Then, each player specifies the ability he wants to use. If it seems unsuited to the task, the GM discusses it, suggesting an alternative ability. Sometimes the task clearly calls for a particular ability, in which case the GM simply announces what that is.
3. The players then describe what they're doing to achieve their goal.
4. Each player makes an uncontested roll of the chosen ability. When each of these rolls has resolved, with the characters out of points or standing pat, the numerical results of each are added up and averaged together. We are sorry for making you use a calculator.
5. The final average, rounded down to the nearest whole number, is used to determine the degree of success for the group as a whole. (On an additional expenditure of 3 points from a relevant pool by each participating character, round up to the nearest whole number.)
6. If the characters must risk physical harm to complete the task, any character ending on a failure must make a Defense, Athletics or Wherewithal roll. If this fails, the character takes one injury (p. 33), unless the overall failure was Dismal, in which case the character takes two injuries

Defense is used for fights; Athletics for other overtly physical situations, and Wherewithal when the threat comes from passive or environmental factors, like poison, exposure or disease.

Having fallen on hard times after the mysterious choking death of their master, the dowager giant Lalk, Fruminger (Beth), Rutose (Jim) and Pothana (Erin) seek temporary engagement as roving exterminators. As their first job, they're to clear a fish processing plant of its grimp infestation. As GM, you start by asking each player how they want to handle this.

"I use Craftsmanship to devise a sprayer. It will allow me to dispatch them from a distance, with no risk of acid damage to my splendid new vest," says Beth.

"Pedantry grants me esoteric knowledge concerning grimps," says Erin. "I will track them to their egg-chamber, destroying their larvae. According to every great tome of natural history, the adult grimps will then die, largely of sadness."

You had no such thoughts about grimps, but it sounds cool, so this should have as good a chance of working as anything.

"Enough with such idiot subtleties," cries Jim, using a tagline. "I use Stewardship to find the most suitable poison. Then I apply it. Liberally."

The three players roll simultaneously. When it's all over, Fruminger ends on a Quotidian Failure, while Serig and Pothana both have Hair's-Breadth Successes. This averages, rounding down, to a 3—an Exasperating Failure.

You tell them what this means: the group kills nearly all the grimps, but then a new swarm appears, as if from nowhere. You decide that each of them must make a Wherewithal roll to avoid injury from exposure to the enraged creatures' psychic aura.

Contestants gain boons or levies from their individual results during a pooled effort, not from the final averaged outcome. Some pooled efforts may risk physical harm to the participants. Participants suffer injuries (p. 33) according to the following table.

CHARACTER'S Individual Failure	GROUP RESULT: Success	GROUP RESULT: Failure
Dismal	1 injury	2 injuries
Quotidian	No injury	1 injury
Exasperating	No injury	No injury



✂ Ganging Up ✂ GANGING UP

Multiple actors can gang up against a single countering character at the GM's discretion. The GM disallows tasks where the chaos and confusion added by multiple participants outweighs the benefits of combined effort.

Persuasion is the classic example of a task where ganging up doesn't work. When faced with multiple persuaders, people become defensive and ever more resolved to stick to their original position. Characters wishing to support a Persuade attempt are better off finding unobtrusive justifications to transfer points (p. 9).

In combat, no more than three man-sized attackers can face off against a single opponent. Defenders may reduce this number by moving into confined spaces or putting their backs against walls.

The characters who are ganging up chooses one of their number as point person. The other characters in the outnumbering side are designated as secondaries. Each secondary must make a transfer to the point person in the ability used to resolve the contest. The resolution proceeds as a normal one-on-one contest, except that the outnumbered character faces a levy equal to the number of secondaries. Any boons or levies gained during the contest from Exasperating Failures and Hair's-Breadth Successes are awarded to the point person, with the secondaries either left out in the cold or spared additional losses, as the case may be.

If the outnumbered character loses, injuries and other consequences are suffered as normal.

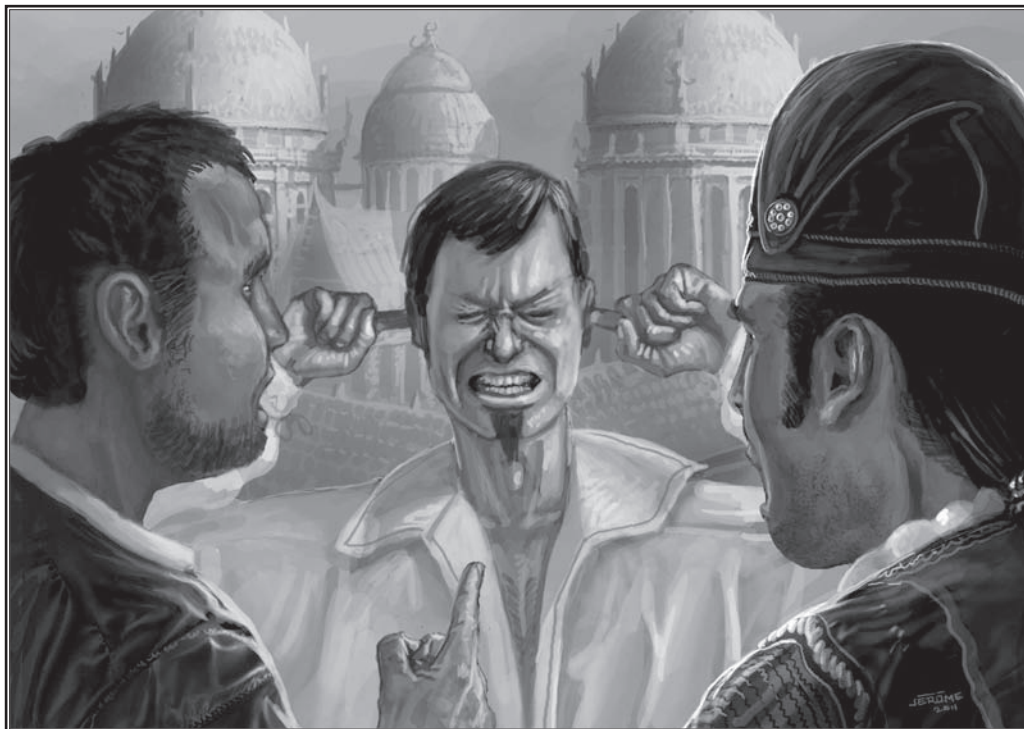
If the outnumbering side loses, any injuries, losses or other consequences suffered by the point person are also suffered by the secondaries. The GM narrates the results so that the secondaries are worse off than if they'd stood back and transferred points without getting directly involved.

Fruminger (Beth), Rutose (Jim) and Pothana (Erin) are all trying to wrestle a shambling creature out of the cave they have taken as their shelter for the night. Though docile and theoretically a herbivore, the beast is reluctant to be pushed out into the rain. Alas, its pungent odor renders co-existence impossible. Fruminger has an Athletics pool of 5, William has 4 and Pothana 8. The group decides to make Pothana its point person.

Beth transfers 4 Athletics points to Erin; with the transfer fee of 1 taken into account, this reduces his pool to 0. William transfers 2 points, paying another 1 for the transfer, leaving his Athletics pool at 1. Pothana's pool has increased to 14.

The shambler's Athletics pool is 12, but it now faces a levy of 2 on all of its rolls. Although only Erin will be rolling and choosing whether to reroll or stay pat during the contest, you, as GM, describe the in-game events as if all three characters are wrestling the shambler. Should they lose, all of them will get equally trampled by its enormous, hard-nailed feet.

Pothana leads off with an initial roll of 2, a Quotidian Failure. "You slip and slide on the rocks, unable to find purchase on the shambler's slippery hide," you narrate.



❧ Ganging Up ❧

Erin spends a point to reroll, dropping her Athletics pool to 13. She pays for another reroll, dropping her pool to 12. And gets a Quotidian Failure. Again she rerolls, dropping her pool to 11, and gets yet another Quotidian Failure.

“Help out more adroitly!” Pothana cries to Fruminger and Rutose.

“Lead with greater aplomb!” responds Fruminger.

Finally, after buying another reroll and dropping to 9 Athletics, Erin ekes out a Hair’s-Breadth Success, taking a levy token in the process. She stands pat.

The shambler would normally make its first exchange for free, but with the levy of 2 must drop its Athletics from 12 to 10 just to respond. It gets an Illustrious Success.

“Its rears up on its stinking haunches, spraying you with musk.” you describes. “If its reek was unspeakable before, now it is indescribable. Your eyes water. Your throats close up.”

“I don’t believe this!” Erin growls. She spends the 3 points to keep going against an Illustrious Success, taking her pool down to 7. She rolls a Prosaic Success.

“You skitter from its thundering feet just in time, slipping and sliding on the musk-slicked cavern floor,” you say.

The shambler must spend 3 to respond—the usual 1, plus the levy of 2 for the gang-up. Its pool falls to 7. And it scores another Illustrious Success. “The crushing hooves again clump your way,” you narrates. “Each of its motions wafts more choking shamble-stink.”

Erin spends 3 to respond, dropping her pool from 7 to 4. Suddenly it’s not looking so good for our able wayfarers.

The shambler’s pool drops from 7 to 3 as it makes its countering roll—yet another Illustrious Success!

Horrified groans resound through the gaming room as you announce the results. Beth seizes the GM’s die, replacing it with one he hopes will prove unluckier.

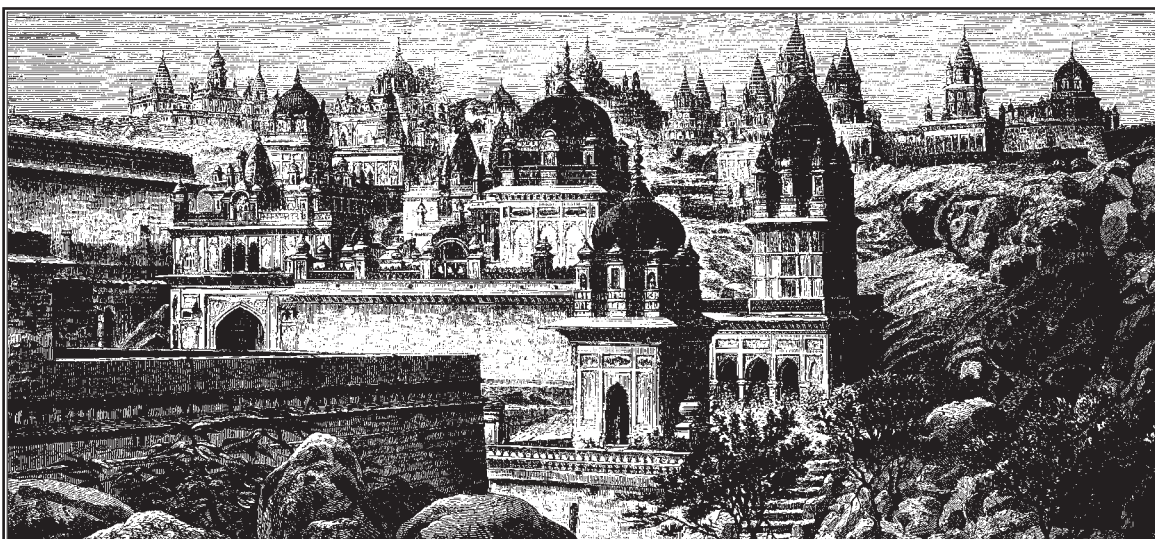
Erin spends 3 points, dropping her to 1. This roll is her last, so she’d better succeed—she gasps in relief as it comes up a Hair’s-Breadth Success. She earns a second levy token.

The shambler spends its last 3 points, and gets an Exasperating Failure.

“Its tiny herbivore brain finally seems to calculate the effort it’s expending on a non-fern-grazing activity,” the GM narrates. “With what seems like a shrug of its hairy shoulders, it grunts and shuffles off into the pouring rain.”

Her pool already at 1, Erin’s 2 levy tokens can only drop her by pool by 1, to 0.

If that last roll had gone the other way, all three wayfarers would have suffered an injury.



🐉 Ganging Up 🐉

Multiple Contestants, One Prize

Multiple characters can engage one another in a zero-sum contest for a single prize. Each character rolls their first result at the same time. After seeing each other's results, they decide whether to reroll. They pay to reroll results at the standard rates: 3 for a Dismal Failure, 1 to overturn any other result. Once everyone has taken all desired rerolls, the character with the best result wins.

Ties go to the character with the highest pool in the ability being contested. 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 the results can be rerolled, at the standard rates. If two or more contestants are determined to win, they may spend a great many points to get Illustrious Successes, perhaps precipitating yet another round of tiebreaker rolls.

Multiple contestant contests are an ideal choice when several characters, especially several PCs, all try to get the same favor from a third party character. In this context, the object of their attempts is called a granter. In this case, all of the participants use their Persuade abilities, and no one, not even the character who stands in judgment, Rebuffs. This assumes that the granter has decided to grant the favor but hasn't chosen a recipient. The granter's Rebuff comes indirectly into play if his Rebuff style trumps or is trumped by a contestant's Persuade style (p. 5). A contestant suffers a levy of 1 if his Persuade is trumped by the granter's Rebuff and, in an exception to the usual rule, gains a boon of 1 if his Persuade trumps the granter's Rebuff.

The PCs Fruminger (Beth), Rutose (Jim), Pothana (Erin) and Xamasque (Dean) encounter Volp, an obstructive wefkin who guards access to a fountain of youth-restoring waters. Only one person a century may cross through the magical portal that leads to the fountain. The century is almost up, but the sprite-like supernatural being has yet to find anyone who fits its exacting criteria. The group's Persuade pools are as follows: Fruminger 8, Rutose 10, Pothana 7, and Xamasque 8. The sprite's Rebuff style is Obtuse; this is trumped by the Intimidating Persuade style, used by Rutose, and trumps the Glib Persuade style, used by Pothana.

The GM asks all four players, in the order they're sitting around the room, to make initial entreaties to the wefkin. Seeking inspiration for their various approaches, they check their Persuade cards. (It's good form, though not strictly necessary, to argue in one's assigned style.)

"According to the astral laws of the third declension," says Beth, as the Obfuscatory Fruminger, "as the century mark approaches, you are obligated to favor the first petitioner, which is now myself."

Jim, as the Intimidating Rutose, mimes the menacing jiggling of an imaginary sack. "You don't want to know what's in this bag. Let's just say its contents are extremely unhealthy for sprites, wefkens, and all manner of will-o-wisps."

"Flim-flammy is tiresome," says Erin (as the Glib Pothana) "let me through, and your ennui will quickly ease."

"I have seen many a spiral-haired wefkin in my day," says Dean, as the Charming Xamasque, "but never one whose hair spirals in such an entrancing pattern as yours."

All four players roll simultaneously. Beth gets a Dismal Failure. Jim rolls an Illustrious Success. Pothana and Dean both get Hair's-Breadth Successes, and the levy tokens that go with them. Jim's character, Rutose, adds 1 to his Persuade pool, as the boon from her trump. It goes from 10 to 11. Pothana loses a point due to her levy for being trumped, dropping her pool to 6.

Rutose is in the lead with her Illustrious Success. She stands pat. Pothana drops out, sensing the wefkin's all-too evident revulsion. Fruminger and Xamasque keep arguing

"Let not personalities but mystical legalisms, for example the Law Of Irrepresible Return, determine your wise decision," says Beth (Fruminger.)

"I need not make further argument to you, good wefkin," says Dean/Xamasque. "You are clearly a being of sagacious insight, and can look past mere words to the true characters of those who beseech you."

Beth and Dean each pay 1 to reroll, taking their characters' pools to 7 apiece. Beth rolls an Illustrious Success; Dean gets a Hair's-Breadth Success, and a second levy token. Fruminger is now tied with Rutose and can go into a tiebreaker round. After a suitable snippet of dialogue, Dean pays another point for a Prosaic Success, dropping his pool to 6. He pays again, taking it to 5, only to roll a Dismal Failure. Not wanting to spend 3 points on a reroll, he withdraws from the contest.

Now both Jim and Beth must roll again. Keeping the narrative going, the GM questions both of them, in character as Volp. They respond with appropriate dialogue and then roll. Jim gets a Quotidian Failure, but also picks up a pool point from her trump boon, which balances out the expenditure for the reroll. Her pool remains at 11. Beth scores a Hair's-Breadth Success. She pays 1 for the reroll, taking her pool from 7 to 6, and takes a levy token.

Keeping up the in-character dialogue, Jim rerolls, again paying effectively nothing for the privilege, thanks to the boon from her trump. She rolls a Hair's-Breadth Success and takes a levy token. Now that she has the same result as Beth, another tiebreaker round begins.

Beth sees the writing on the wall: Jim can keep rerolling for free, unless she's unlucky enough to get a Dismal Failure. At the same time, every new roll costs Beth a point, depleting her pool in the game's most used ability. She bows out, allowing her rival to win over the wefkin and step through the portal. Surely his waterskin of youth-restoring aqua pura can be swindled away from him at a later juncture.

Abilities

In character as Volp, you give the nod to Rutose. “You may pass through the portal, provided you leave that terrifying bag of yours, and its unimaginably dreadful contents, on the other side, where it may no longer pose a threat to the young and infirm.”

Dean has 2 levy tokens, so his pool is docked by 2, falling from 5 to 3.

Jim has 1 levy token, dropping his pool to 11 to 10.

So does Beth, whose pool drops from 6 to 5.

Alternately, you might run a contest in which some contestants argue for the favor to be granted in the way they want, using Persuade, and another contestant or contestants argue that it should not be granted at all, using Rebuff. If a character arguing for the favor triumphs in the end, he gets the favor. When the winner argued against giving out the favor at all, it is withheld from everyone.



ABILITIES

Any word that appears in a stack of component cards and has a number next to it is the name of an ability. Characters use abilities to overcome story obstacles, or to defend against attempts to hamper them or remove them from the narrative.

The most important abilities, Persuade and Rebuff, are described first. The major Brute Force options, Attack and Defense, also warrant special treatment. Everything else is a general ability.

Most abilities list one or more automatic successes. These are actions characters with those abilities can accomplish at the snap of a finger, without having to roll.

Persuade

As the sun readies itself to sputter out, people while their days in pursuit of ease and unambitious self-interest. To survive in a world of sharpers, cheats and legalists, characters rely more heavily on their powers of persuasion than on any other ability. Characters use it to get others to do what they want, or to stop doing things they don't like. Absurdity is no impediment to a successful persuasion attempt. In this dwindling world, survival favors those who pursue ridiculous claims and tendentious arguments with wholehearted commitment. If anything, ludicrous demands can be the hardest to rebut, because there is nothing rational for the arguing party to latch onto. (See also: contemporary politics.)

Persuade attempts are always contests, resisted by the subject's Rebuff ability. The persuading character is always the actor; the rebuffing character, the thwarter.

At the outset of a persuasion attempt, the acting player specifies what she wants the rebuffing character to do if she wins the contest.

Prior to each Persuade roll, the actor in a Persuade contest improvises a brief line or two of in-character dialogue explaining why the desired action is in the thwarter's best interest:

Throughout the entire contest, the initiating character uses Persuade while the responding character defends with Rebuff. They do not switch back and forth between the two abilities.

“Grant me a secret parley with Ildefonse, preceptor of the arch-magician's conclave.”

“It is perfectly safe for me to spend unchaperoned time with your lovely daughter.”

“It could not possibly have been me who drank the duke's entire supply of ancient wines.”

“Although I respect your heritage as a carnivorous beast, I must respectfully withdraw as your next menu item.”

“My paying for your plainly sub-adequate hotel services is out of the question. Come to think of it, I demand compensation!”

This last example follows the golden rule of the Dying Earth: when in doubt, demand compensation.

Rebuff

Rebuff is the ability to resist persuasion attempts. It is always used reactively as the thwarting ability in a Persuade contest; see above.

In the Dying Earth, few propositions are so absurd as to require no rebuttal. Characters may be able to shrug off requests

Abilities

to kill themselves, but must engage nearly any other claim.

Prior to each Rebuff roll, the participant playing the rebuffer supplies a line of dialogue countering the arguments made by the persuader. When the rebuffer is a supporting character, the participant is the GM; otherwise, it's the player of the rebuffing character. For example:

"The Preceptor clearly said he was not to be disturbed. Tell me what you need, and I'll take the matter under advisement."

"Alas, allowing you to spend time alone with my daughter would open me up to charges of excessive liberality."

"I would entertain your protestations, were it not for the distinct aroma of 19th Aeon rumblevine emanating from your person."

"I am forced to deny your request, no matter how politely expressed, on grounds of conspicuous tastiness."

"Not only do I insist on payment, but must inform you that you have just now incurred a 15% risible claims surcharge."

VERBAL TRUMPS

As previously mentioned, each Persuade style trumps, and is trumped by, a Rebuff style.

Style	TRUMPS	Is TRUMPED by
GLIB	Pure-Hearted	Obtuse
ELOQUENT	Contrary	Wary
OBFUSCATORY	Lawyerly	Penetrating
FORTHRIGHT	Penetrating	Lawyerly
CHARMING	Wary	Contrary
INTIMIDATING	Obtuse	Pure-Hearted
PURE-HEARTED	Intimidating	Glib
CONTRARY	Charming	Eloquent
LAWYERLY	Forthright	Obfuscatory
PENETRATING	Obfuscatory	Forthright
WARY	Eloquent	Charming
OBTUSE	Glib	Intimidating

INTERPRETING PERSUADE RESULTS

When a persuasion contest ends on a **Hair's-Breadth Success** for the persuader, the persuaded character grudgingly submits to his request. He fulfills it as required, but causes some other problem that the persuader will soon have to deal with.

On a **Prosaic Success**, the persuaded character does as asked, neither exceeding expectations or subtly sabotaging the persuader.

On an **Impressive Success**, the persuaded character does more than asked, surprising the persuader with a useful additional favor.

Regardless of the degree of success, the persuaded character may still resent or distrust the persuader after having fulfilled the request. The subject's lingering impression of the exchange persuader may be influenced by persuasion style:

WHEN TO LET IT SLIDE

Ideally the players offer further description of their actions before each roll. In practice, you'll sometimes want to relax the narration requirements and let them get on with the rolling. This may happen if inspiration flags, or when you want to speed up the storytelling. Choosing when to demand description and when to let it slide is as a matter of instinct, best honed over time.





ACCEPTING PERSUASION

The Dying Earth stands on its head one of the basic unspoken assumptions of roleplaying. In most games, persuasion is a one-way street. The PCs can cajole, interrogate, intimidate and charm supporting characters, but are themselves immune to verbal influence. Players cling to this asymmetrical arrangement because it favors them. They hate losing control of their characters' actions. In this game, losing control is part of the fun. GM-controlled characters can persuade PCs to do things that aren't really in their self-interest, but can be made to seem so. PCs can persuade one another. But the wheel of fate turns quickly: the silky-tongued persuader of one scene can become the butt of an amusing scheme the next.

If you think some or your players will have trouble with this concept, be explicit about its central role in the game from the outset. *The Dying Earth* is a game of reversals, and it's not a reversal if it can't happen to you.

The random, modular character generation helps out here. Players' emotional investment in their PCs will be lessened compared to a game where the players lovingly build their alter egos from scratch. Here it's not just okay, but desirable, to maintain an amused detachment from one's characters, so you can set aside the control issues and take amusement from their follies and setbacks.

STYLE	LINGERING IMPRESSION
GLIB	"In retrospect, I cannot recall why I agreed with him. In truth, I cannot recall agreeing with him at all. Yet, before I knew it, he had what he sought from me."
ELOQUENT	"His lofty words stirred my heart."
OBFUSCATORY	"His proposition was so complicated that I grasped its many demerits only in retrospect."
FORTHRIGHT	"In the face of his refreshing frankness, my critical faculties crumbled."
CHARMING	"Normally I consider myself immune to flattery, but his went beyond mere praise to a form of lyric poetry."
INTIMIDATING	"I was afraid he'd hurt me."

Attack

Your Attack ability allows you to physically harm others. For more detail on physical conflicts, see the Fighting rules, beginning on (p. 32).

Defense

Defense allows you to avoid being harmed by enemy attacks. For more, see (p. 32).

General Abilities

Each setting grants characters access to some but not all of the abilities listed here. Abilities are presented in the following format:

Definition: This section broadly describes the sorts of actions the ability allows characters to undertake.

Automatic Success: Provides an example of an action the character can perform without having to roll.

Counters: Lists abilities you can try to thwart with this ability.

Is Countered By: Lists abilities, if any, that might be used to thwart the ability in a contest. When no one actively tries to thwart the ability use, it's resolved without a contest.



GENERAL ABILITY LIST

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: the art of solving problems, by throwing terces at them

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

APPRAISAL

Definition: After examining a valuable item, you can tell how much money you could get for it and who you'd approach to get the best available price. You can reel off information about the history and manufacture of the item, if pertinent to its value. Appraisal allows you to distinguish authentic items from forgeries, and to create forgeries yourself.

You get one chance to appraise an item; after that effort is resolved, you can't try again.

Automatic Success: Recognizing a renowned masterpiece as the real thing.

Counters: Persuade, when used to falsify the value, authenticity, or provenance of a valuable item, or when used

to convince you to give up the item for less than its fair value.

Is Countered By: Craftsmanship, when it has been used to forge an item.



ATHLETICS

Definition: Athletics reflects your overall physical fitness, allowing you to perform feats of physical prowess like running, jumping, climbing, lifting, and horseback riding.

Automatic Success: Run downstairs, safely swim in untroubled waters without drowning, leap over a ditch, display your physical robustness with your daily exercise routine.

General Abilities

Counters: Athletics abilities of rivals in zero-sum contests, like darts, arm-wrestling, foot races, or similar physical games and competitions.



CRAFTSMANSHIP

Definition: Handcraft objects such as leather ware, cloth, clothing, ceramics, glass vessels, gems, jewels, furniture, or wicker objects.

When examining items of the sort you make, you can identify their quality. On an Impressive Success, you might even be able to name their makers.

When seeking employment or haggling over the value of items in your category, you may spend Craftsmanship points on Persuade or Rebuff.

Automatic Success: Make a basic repair to a simple object.

Counters: Craftsmanship, when used in a zero-sum contest to decide whose work is superior.

Is Countered By: If used to create forgeries, Appraisal.



DRIVING

Definition: You skillfully operate vehicles of various sorts. You can evade pursuit or catch up to escaping drivers, sometimes executing spectacular and dangerous stunts. You can make minor repairs to vehicles of the specified sort.

Automatic Success: Travel under normal conditions along a well-maintained road or standard route.

Counters: Other Driving abilities, in zero-sum chases or stunt competitions.



ETIQUETTE

Definition: By showing mastery of the social rules followed among the company you find yourself in, you can prove that yourself as a well-mannered and trustworthy member of their group.

Automatic Success: Eat in a casual setting without humiliating yourself.

Counters: Etiquette, when used to critique someone else's mastery of fine manners.



GAMBLING

Definition: Win at games of chance—sometimes by cheating. If you decide to follow the rules, you easily calculate the odds of various standard bets and gambits. If you wish to cheat, you know how to palm cards, mark decks, and load 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. Where wagering is illegal or undertaken only in secret, Gambling

finds where the action is.

Much of a gambler's success 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 start a fight.

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: Gambling, whether used as in a zero-sum contest to see who wins a game, or to spot another's cheating in a game (see below.)



Cheating

Honest play has its limits. Any time you pay to overturn your own Dismal Failure, or to reroll in the face of an opponent's Impressive Success, your character is cheating.

After a contest by a character who took either option, any other character can attempt to prove that he cheated. To do this, that character must make a successful Gambling roll, ending on a result that equals or bests the end result of the original gambling contest.



KNOWLEDGE

Definition: Either off the top of your head or through research, reel off facts on a variety of subjects, mostly of an academic nature.

Automatic Success: Easily cite the rudimentary facts of any field.



LIVING ROUGH

Definition: 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. You know edible plants from toxic ones, and can explain how to safely behave around wild animals.

Living Rough includes the ability to follow the trails in the wilderness, whether left by men or animals.

Automatic Success: Deciding to seek shade during a resoundingly hot day. Follow a trail of bloody footprints across white marble flooring.

Counters: To determine whether you catch up with the object of a search, pit your Living Rough against his Stealth. To move without trace in the wilderness, the chased character must have a rating of at least 1 in Living Rough.



PERCEPTION

Definition: With finely honed senses, you discern telling details in your environment. Pick out and identify strange sounds or smells. Spot out-of-place people and objects.

GMs should call for Perception rolls only when something important is at stake. Players have a right to feel unfairly treated if tricked into spending points on inconsequential information.

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're looking for signs of forced entry into your apartment, you decide that your alarm system is in working condition, when in fact the assassins lurking within have skilfully sabotaged it.) However, because you were asked to roll, the player still knows that his character is missing something, perhaps leading to a sense of unease.

When a less-than-practised liar tells you an untruth, Perception may allow you to spot the hallmark signs of deception: fidgeting, averted gaze, too many or too few details. It is not a reliable lie detector. Success represents the gut feeling you get when you hear a fishy story. Perception doesn't indicate what the truth is; Scuttlebutt might help with that.

Automatic Success: Seeing objects in plain sight. Noticing the telltale behavior of a really poor and obviously guilty liar.

Counters: Gambling (when used to cheat) Stealth.

PERCEIVING WITH OTHER ABILITIES

GMs may allow other Abilities can stand in for (or replace) Perception in specialized circumstances. To notice the strange characteristics of a wound, you could use Physician instead of Perception. Appraisal can be used to spot forged items; Gambling, to winnow out cheaters.

PHYSICIAN

Definition: Treat wounds and injuries. Diagnose and cure disease.

Physician rolls aid injured characters. On a success, you may remove one or more injuries, at a further cost of Physician points.

- **Hair's-Breadth:** spend 3 additional Physician points to remove 1 injury.
- **Prosaic:** spend 3 additional Physician points to remove 1 injury, or 6 points to remove 2 injuries (suffered by the same character.)
- **Impressive:** spend 1 additional Physician point to remove 1 injury, or 3 points to remove 2

injuries (suffered by the same character.)

• **Automatic Success:** Diagnose common maladies.

RIDING

Definition: You can ride, race, and perform stunts on riding animals. Many beasts of burden talk and are as self-seeking and nit-picky as any human. Dealing with them might be as much a matter of persuasion as riding ability.

Automatic Success: Stay on a willing creature's back at moderate speeds, in normal terrain.

Counters: Other Riding attempts in zero-sum contests: races, chases, obstacle courses.

SCUTTLEBUTT

Definition: Gather information by tapping a variety of sources and engaging in superficial chatter. The intelligence gleaned tends to be about people's faults or secrets, professional or personal.

You can check the truth of an assertion by consulting the rumor mill.

Use Scuttlebutt to disseminate damaging information about others in a way that can't be traced back to you.

Scuttlebutt can also be used to suppress scuttlebutt regarding your own unseemly activities. On a success, you spread Scuttlebutt about someone else that makes your own transgressions seem mild and boring in comparison. The rumors about you fade from public discourse as this new, more compelling scandal becomes the center of attention.

Automatic Success: Discourse knowledgeably on well-publicized scandals of the rich and famous.

Is Countered By: Scuttlebutt can be used to identify you as the originator of a rumor; or to ensure that the dirt you're trying to obscure remains a juicy topic of discussion.

STEALTH

Definition: Stealth allows you to take actions without being seen. You can't hide in plain sight, but you can move deftly and silently past distracted or inattentive observers. Stealth allows you to find good hiding places, ferret away small objects with sleight of hand, even engage in acts of pickpocketing.

Automatic Success: Remain unseen in the dark, behind a barrier.

Is Countered By: Perception

SEDUCTION

Definition: Induce others who might be theoretically open to couch with you to follow through on their concupiscent impulses, up to and including the act of physical consummation. You can use the ability on persons and

General Abilities

entities who find you unconsciously alluring, even as they deny their avidity to themselves and others. The GM decides who is and isn't open to your Seduction attempts, as story logic and momentary amusement suggest.

When a thwarter in a Persuade contest sees you as a lust object, you spend Seduction points as if they were Persuade points. Your ultimate objective need not be sexual conquest. For example, a librarian who finds you fetching might grant access to forbidden tomes, whether or not you're overtly romancing her.

Automatic Success: Make a good show of yourself when flirting or consummating.

Is Countered By: Rebuff



STEWARDSHIP

Definition: Perform administrative and bureaucratic duties. Maintain account books. Devise and follow a budget. Spot errors and fraud in others' ledgers. Accomplish, directly or through intermediaries, household and office tasks. Secure supplies. Notice and rectify the faults of vassals, subalterns, lackeys, flunkies, and dogsbodies.

Automatic Success: Smell alcohol on the breath of a drunken subordinate.

Counters: Can be used against another character's Stewardship ability in a zero-sum contest to manipulate or draw resources from the organization you both belong to.



WEALTH

Definition: You can solve a problem by throwing money at it. You spend from your vast reserves of cash to hire services, acquire equipment, or purchase favors.

Automatic Success: Acquire any standard consumer item at a retail outlet.

Is Countered By: Wealth, in a zero-sum contest of status to show who can muster the bigger bankroll.



WHEREWITHAL

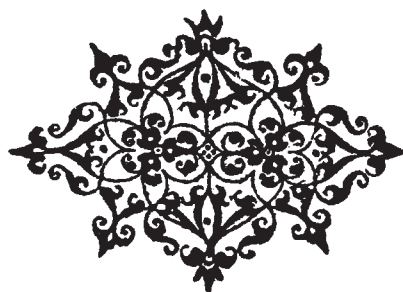
Definition: Maintain confidence and composure under stress. Appear brave in the face of danger, unruffled in the midst of chaos, and unfazed when confronted with surprising information. Avoid crying out in pain when hurt or injured.

Make Wherewithal checks to see if you suffer injury when exposed to non-violent environmental factors. The ability determines your body's response to poison, intoxicants, and contagions.

In settings where magic or advanced science exists that might override your will or judgment, use Wherewithal to retain self-control.

Automatic Success: Remain calm under stress-free conditions.

Is Countered By: Can be used against another character's Wherewithal in a zero-sum contest to determine who shows the greater self-control in a stressful or dangerous situation.



Relationships Relationships

Relationship abilities allow characters to further their goals in the story by calling in favors from their allies, colleagues and relatives. A character a PC has a relationship to is called a **contact**. To gain a favor from a Relationship, the character makes an uncontested roll of the Relationship ability. The supporting character never Rebuffs the request. However, he is allowed to outright refuse the request, preventing the contest from occurring at all, if it conflicts with one of his goals, as found in his description. Descriptions of these characters appear in your play pack, formatted as follows:

Name and Title/Role (as it appears on the component card)

The title/role information is a phrase summing up the character's place in the world and implying the sorts of favors he or she can be expected to perform.

Personality: the few words that best describe the character's behavior and attitude

Goals: the character's most important objective or objectives, in order of priority.

Sample Favors: a bullet-point list of the types of actions the character is best able to perform for a PC

Abilities: the character's abilities, including Persuade, Rebuff, and Attack, Defense and Wherewithal, along with general abilities.

Here's a sample supporting character written up in Relationship format:

Kerhuf, Magician of the Carnelian Tower

Personality: imperious, impetuous, indifferent to suffering

Goals: 1) build a great tower to house his tomb; 2) acquire treasure; 3) sire a male heir; 4) acquire beautiful concubines; 5) maintain decadent reputation as a fashioner of aesthetically disturbing vat creatures

Sample Favors: 1) reserve a spot in his tower for favored persons when he dies, ensuring their ability to bask in his glory throughout the eternal afterlife (fine print: they are murdered and buried with him during his funeral) 2) provide occult knowledge 3) send characters to another time 4) bring them back from another time 5) loan objects of wondrous power

Abilities: Attack 12, Athletics 8, Defense 6, Etiquette 4, Knowledge 4, Living Rough 4, Perception 6, Persuade 4, Rebuff 12, Riding (Mermelant) 8, Stewardship 8, Wherewithal 8.



Burning a Relationship

Relationship rolls never deliver favors contrary to the contact's goals. To gain such a favor, the PC may choose to enter into a Persuade contest against the contact's Rebuff. As always, the PC must argue that the favor is in the contact's self-interest,

Resistances

even though it isn't. Once the contact discovers that it isn't, he ceases to be a contact and is scratched off the character's card. The Relationship is now considered **burned**.

Resistances

Skulduggery PCs are subject to a wide range of **temptations**, urges that impel them to self-destructive actions. When confronted with a temptation, the player rolls a Resistance, which measures their ability to avoid indulgence entirely, or at least to partake without negative repercussions. On a success, the character may respond to the temptation as the player wishes. On a failure, the GM describes a loss of self-control and the trouble it causes.

Fruminger, posing as a club-footed half-wit, has gained employment at a secret tavern frequented by ghouls. He has already overcome a number of obstacles to successfully spy on them, including a Wherewithal roll to conceal his revulsion at the crimson, frothing beverage favored by its patrons.

His potential undoing comes in the form of a boasting session the ghoul leaders fall into. Each professes to have bested a deodand in mortal combat. Fruminger, who has himself done this, can tell from the details of the boasts that the ghouls are all lying

The smart thing to do about this is nothing. Unfortunately, this flies in the face of the temptation to nitpick that afflicts all characters in this setting. You, as GM, call for a roll to Resist Pettifoggery. If unsuccessful, Fruminger will be obligated by his own intrinsic flaws to correct their grievous misapprehensions of all matters deodandic. This in turn will give him away as no mere scullery drudge, but a capable fortune-seeker in disguise.

Winona's first roll is a Quotidian Failure. "You try to tune them out, but the one boasting now tells his tale with the worst deodand accent you've ever heard," you narrate.

"I find something in need of cleaning, to divert my concentration from this vexing nonsense!"

Winona's Resist Pettifoggery rating is a pitiful 1. She can only afford one reroll. She pays for it, dropping her pool to 0. Her roll is an Exasperating Failure. Unable to pay for another reroll, she has no choice but to stand pat.

You thinks for a moment, deciding what an Exasperating Failure means in this context. "You blurt out something damaging, then stop before going any further."

Beth picks up the cue, describing in more precise detail exactly how her character puts his foot in it: "I have heard many a deodand in my day," she exclaims, in character, "but from that ridiculous funny voice you're using, carrion-breath, it is painfully evident you have not!"

"The face of every ghoul in the place slowly turns toward you..." you narrate.

Beth gulps. Fruminger has given himself away.

The consolation prize is the 1 point boon she earns for her Exasperating Failure. This raises Fruminger's Pettifoggery Resistance back to 1.

Players may always choose to embrace temptation, declining to roll and accepting whatever ill consequences follow from their indulgence. GMs may feel free to intensify the after-effects of an unresisted wallow in temptation.

Where the Ω symbol appears in place of a rating, the PC is completely immune to that temptation and need never roll to avoid it. The player may still choose to have the character indulge. If he does so regularly in an ongoing game, the GM may choose to replace the Ω symbol with a rating of 1, to reflect the character's actual behavior.

GM-controlled characters are subject to the same weaknesses, but never roll to see if they fall prey to them. Instead, the GM lets them succumb or resist, depending on what sort of reversal of fortune the moment seems to call for. In general, their reactions to temptations tend to aid PCs who are currently in the underdog position, and undermine PCs on a winning streak.

Temptations give rise to the character's **key trait**, an adjective shown on the character's resistance card as a quick reference to the PC's personality and motivations. The key trait usually matches the name of the character's lowest-rated temptation. The adjective might in some cases be adjusted to fit the idiom of a particular setting.

The temptations are as follows:



ARROGANCE

This temptation impels you to demonstrate your superior judgment and intellect. When you succumb to arrogance, you act as if you are infallible. You overrate your own abilities and dismiss those of others. As a matter of reflex, you refuse advice. You wield the petty perks of authority as symbols of your self-evident superiority.

Key Trait: Arrogant

❧ Resistances ❧

AVARICE

This temptation kicks in whenever you are confronted with the opportunity to line your pockets or surround yourself with the fruits of wealth. You drop all other goals to add to your riches, betraying whoever stands between you and the money you see as rightfully yours. As a penny saved is a penny earned, so you resist with miserly fury any attempt to part you from your hard-won wealth.

Key Trait: Greedy



GOURMANDISM

If not resisted, the impulse to Gourmandism leads to shameless overeating. Bouts of Gourmandism end only when the character has gorged to the point of nausea or immobility. Those with low resistances may be gourmets who salivate for the finest and most exotic cuisine. Alternately, they might seek their fat, salt and sugar desire in the form of low-grade but immediately satisfying junk food.

Key Trait: Gluttonous



INDOLENCE

When confronted with a difficult task, particularly a physical onerous one, the character who succumbs to this temptation will instead remain comfortably ensconced in a comfortable chair, or perhaps settle in for a long nap. Characters with low resistance to indolence may believe in their goals, but in practice set them aside to indulge in long stretches of untaxing leisure.

Key Trait: Lazy / Indolent

RAKISHNESS

The urge to gratify every sexual impulse, no matter how fleeting, rules the fevered consciousness of the libidinous character. He tosses aside long-term goals to pursue liaisons with anyone he finds attractive. The player defines what type of person the character lusts for. This may be tightly defined, or encompass any halfway interested partner capable of sexual congress.

Key Trait: Libidinous



PETTIFOGGERY

The urge to nitpick raises its ugly head whenever someone makes a minor factual error or grammatical mistake. A bout of unresisted nitpicking never addresses the main point of a discussion, but focuses with dogged persistence on a trivial surface issue. While nitpicking can sometimes work toward a character's goal, allowing him to torpedo a project with annoying distractions, the temptation applies only to useless or self-destructive descents into pettifoggery. (Strategic nitpicking is probably Obfuscatory persuasion or Lawyerly rebuff.) On a failed resistance, the character makes him seem foolish and annoying to people he needs as allies, or causes him to sabotage his own proposals through delay and vacillation.

Key Trait: Nitpicky



Taglines

TAGLINES

Taglines are snippets of in-character dialogue, looking like this:

“A variety of deaths by contrasting processes may well enter into your punishment.”

“Bah. The concept is jejune.”

“Everywhere at this time of earth’s dying exceptional circumstances are to be noted.”

“I am already an accomplished wizard; the increment of lore will merely enhance my craft.”

“For me the causality is unconvincing.”

“In all candor, I have forgotten the question.”

Some taglines are vague; others imply particular events that might occur in the story. It is not only acceptable but expected for players to drive the plot in directions that allow them to use their taglines.

Taglines initially appear as part of a player’s card stack and are replaced when used. Players start play with these three taglines. When they use a tagline, they get a new one, supplied from the list provided with each scenario. (See pages (p. 91), (p. 110), (p. 127) for example tagline lists.) Players use taglines by speaking them in character in a way that makes sense in context and is entertaining to the other participants. Appropriate use of a tagline allows the player to refresh one or more pools.

When a tagline is spoken, the GM judges how well it fits the situation.

- ✦ If the line is completely nonsensical in context, its use confers no benefit. The tagline is not replaced¹.
- ✦ If the line makes sense as used, but is not particularly amusing or dramatic in effect and garners no noticeable response from the other participants, the player gains one refresh token. The tagline is then replaced; see below.
- ✦ If the line makes sense and garners an appreciative response from one or more participants, the player gains two refresh tokens. The tagline is replaced.
- ✦ If the line is so well placed that it elicits real laughter, spontaneous applause or true gasps of appreciation, the player gains three refresh tokens. The tagline is replaced.

Refresh tokens not spent immediately are referred to as **banked**. The player may spend a refresh token to refresh any pool at any time a resolution is not in progress. It is never possible to refresh during a resolution or contest, no matter when the tagline is spoken. When a banked refresh is spent, the player hands the token back in.

Taglines are a limited resource. In the unlikely but possible event that a group runs through all of the supplied taglines in the course of a scenario, no more become available. At this time, players get to spend any of their banked refreshes. Once they’ve spent as many as they can or wish to, any banked tokens are removed from play. Refreshes become impossible for the rest of the game.

Frequency of tagline use may vary from group to group and even from one scenario to the next. If you see that refresh tokens are piling up faster than players can spend them, perform an adjustment on the fly to restrict the supply. Award 1 token if the tagline is appropriate, and 2 tokens only for the most spectacularly entertaining uses.



¹ GMs should show mercy to first-time players who don’t seem to grasp the concept. If they genuinely seem confused, and aren’t just trying to ditch a tagline they don’t like, replace the tagline but allow no refreshes. Be sure to re-explain the concept as you do.

⚔ Fighting ⚔ FIGHTING

Combats occur as a series of linked contests, in which combatants trade places as actor and thwarter.

The actor tries to hit the thwarter by making an Attack check. If the attacker stands pat on a success, the thwarter may respond with a Defense check. Standing pat on a failure causes an injury to the thwarter. Then the two combatants swap roles; the former thwarter becomes the actor, attempting to hit his opponent, who is now the thwarter. Again, a success for the attacker injures the defender, unless countered by a Defense success by the thwarter. When an attacker scores an Illustrious Success, the thwarter faces a levy of 3 on his next Defense roll. When a thwarter scores an Illustrious Success, the attacker faces a levy of 3 on his next Attack roll. The first Defense roll in response to an Illustriously Successful attack likewise faces a levy of 3.

The fight concludes when one character:

- chooses to surrender
- is walloped by either the Attack or Defense ability (p. 33)).
- is unconscious, downed, dead, or dying (p. 33).

When multiple combatants are involved, the fight concludes all of the characters on one side of the fight have left the combat for the above reasons.

Events which would ordinarily take place at the end of a contest kick in only at the conclusion of a combat. This includes the final squaring of boon and levy tokens. Characters may not refresh during a fight.

WHO GOES FIRST?

To determine the order in which combatants act, called the **initiative ranking**, first determine whether the character starting the fight has surprised his opponent.

Surprise

If it's not clear whether the defender can tell that an attack is coming, contest the attacker's Persuade or Stealth against the defender's Perception. Use Persuade if the defender can already see the attacker but may be fooled by his efforts to disguise his hostile intent. Use Stealth if the attacker is ambushing from a hiding place.

If there is more than one defender, this is a contest against multiple targets (p. 15). The attackers choose which of them takes part in the surprise contest. If they gain surprise, this character is the first to attack.

Should an attacker gain surprise, he and all of his allies (if any) strike first. They choose their respective positions in the initiative rank. If there is a dispute between them as to who acts first, the attacker who entered the surprise contest goes first. Then all of the combatants on the other side go, in order of their current attack pools, from highest to lowest.



⚔ Fighting ⚔

No Surprise

If no one is surprised, the characters take initiative ranks in order of their current attack pools, from highest to lowest.

ROUNDS AND EXCHANGES

A sequence of attacks, in which each character gets the chance to attack once, in the order determined by their initiative rank, is called a **round**.

When a round ends, a new one begins. In this new round, every character who has not left the fight gets another chance to attack.

This continues until everyone on one side has left or been removed from the fight, as described above.

Combat Trumps

Each defense is trumped by one style of attack, and trumps another, like so:

Style	TRUMPS	Is TRUMPED by
PARRY	Caution	Strength
CAUTION	Vexation	Parry
DODGE	Ferocity	Speed
FEROCITY	Misdirection	Dodge
SURE-FOOTEDNESS	Cunning	Finesse
CUNNING	Intuition	Sure-Footedness
INTUITION	Finesse	Cunning
FINESSE	Sure-Footedness	Intuition
MISDIRECTION	Speed	Ferocity
SPEED	Dodge	Misdirection
VEXATION	Strength	Caution
STRENGTH	Parry	Vexation

BREAKING INITIATIVE TIES

When breaking ties between characters who would otherwise act at the same time (or to establish any other kind of ranking between **Skulduggery** characters), give priority to PCs over GM-controlled characters. When breaking a tie between PCs, give priority to the player who will next have a birthday.

Combat Wallops

A character successfully walloping an opponent with the Attack ability may choose the condition he ends up in: hurt, downed, or dead. By spending an additional 3 points, the attacker can kill him in spectacularly visceral fashion.

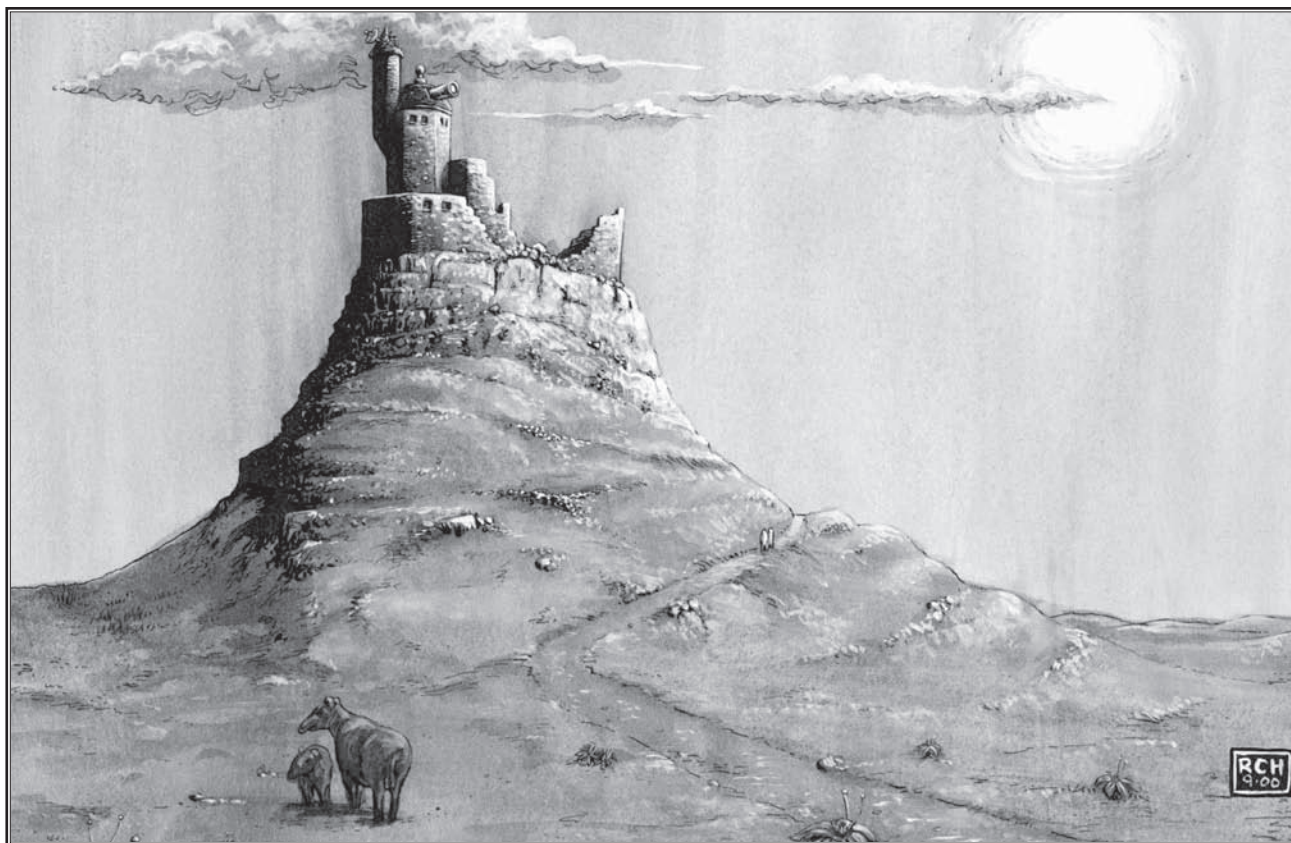
Walloping an opponent with Defense forces him to immediately disengages from the fight, certain that his attack is doomed to fail. Supporting characters remain disengaged unless left little choice by a dramatic new turn of events, like a renewed attempt to attack or corner him.

Injury

Characters who are successfully attacked and fail a Defense roll, suffer an **injury**. Injuries are cumulative; the character's condition depends on the number of injuries he's racked up.

A character with one injury is **hurt**. Hurt characters can act normally, but suffer a levy of 2 on any roll—including subsequent Defense rolls.

With two injuries, the character is down. All he can do is lie prone, or maybe writhe in pain. Without others to defend them downed individuals are at their enemies' mercy. A foe can kill the character merely by trying.



On a third injury, the character is either you are either **dead** (if his Wherewithal pool is 0) or **dying**. Dying characters have fifteen minutes to live per remaining Wherewithal point.

Outside of combat, characters may suffer injuries by failing Athletics or Wherewithal checks. Athletics governs overtly physical threats, while Wherewithal covers insidious or subtle means of harm like poison, illness, or exposure.

UNCONSCIOUSNESS

In some circumstances, the worst consequence you risk from a failed Defense or Athletics roll is unconsciousness. For example, in combat, an attacker can always opt to knock the victim out rather than risk dealing permanent harm. In such situations, two injuries mean that you're **unconscious**, not down. Every half hour the player makes a Wherewithal roll to see if the character wakes up. After half an hour, others may wake the character by shaking him, dousing him with cold water, or otherwise jolting him. Awakened characters are **hurt**.

A character who knocks out another and then tries to kill him is invariably interrupted by a surprising event that places him at a sudden disadvantage. While the attacker deals with the troubling plot twist, the intended victim wakes up, unharmed.

WEAPONS

Even more so than its predecessor, revivalist-mode DYING EARTH rejects as jejune an overweening concern for the relative strengths and weaknesses of inanimate objects. Because the sun could wink out at any moment, it doesn't waste your time reflecting differences between types of weapon in its combat system. How well you rend, mutilate and confuse your foes depends on your Attack value. You are free to think of your pool as incorporating the evident superiority of your favored weapon, or of your inherent superiority at using a simple or lackluster weapon.

TRACKING BOONS AND LEVIES

Most other contests call on a single ability, making it easy to assess boons and levies. In combat, players must track which ability a given boon or levy token applies to. When combats start, provide copies of a diagram called the Combat Boon and Levy Collector to each participant. As GM, you'll need one for each supporting character taking part in the fight. The diagram appears in a photocopy-ready page at the back of the book. (You can also download it in PDF form from the Pelgrane Press website.) When a combatant is assessed a boon or levy, place the token in the box corresponding to the ability.

Fighting

Sample Combat

Fruminger is physically attacked by a fellow mountebank, who he has exposed as a time-traveler from a past aeon (and, in so doing, framed for several of his own crimes). Fruminger's combat-related pools are Attack (Cunning) 8 and Defense (Intuition) 8. His temporally displaced opponent, Dleund, starts with Attack (Strength) 10 and Defense (Dodge) 6. Neither combatant's Attack styles trump or are trumped by the other's Defense styles, leaving them more or less evenly matched. Dleund is a GM-controlled character.

Initiative Determination: *After a lengthy reproach concerning Fruminger's disgraceful displacement of blame to his own unblemished self, Dleund lashes out at him without warning. In a contest pitting Dleund's Persuade against Fruminger's Perception (omitted for brevity), Dleund comes out on top. This allows him to strike first.*

Round One, Dleund's Attack: *Dleund attacks first. He gets a Hair's-Breadth Success, and stands pat on that result. "Sweat beading on laboring brows, he pulls a heavy sword from his scabbard and lunges at you, headlong," you narrate. You place a levy token on the Attack circle in the boon and levy tracker you are using for Dleund.*

Fruminger's player, Beth, rolls Defense and gets a Dismal Failure. "You stumble on the lip of the great staircase," you narrate. "Time seems to stop as you teeter between regained balance and a precipitous topple." This description (and consider yourself complimented on its verbal elegance) allows you to justify either an injury (if Beth stands pat) or some other less disastrous result (if she continues and winds up with a success result). Beth does indeed spend 3 Defense to reroll, dropping Fruminger's Defense pool from 8 to 5. She rolls a Quotidian Failure. "Just as you seem to be regaining your footing, Dleund swipes at you with his cutlass," you say. Beth spends 1 point to reroll, dropping Fruminger's Defense pool from 5 to 4, and scores a Hair's-Breadth Success. You give her a levy token, which she places on the Defense circle of her boon and levy tracker. Beth stands pat on this success. Fruminger has not been injured after all. Beth takes the narrative reins to describe her successful evasion: "Although his misplaced swipes take a regrettable toll on my silk lace adorning my doublet, they leave me unharmed. I scamper around him, ready for an incisive riposte. Non-verbal, of course."

Round One, Fruminger's Attack: *Beth makes her first Attack roll, which costs her nothing, and scores a Hair's-Breadth success. She collects a levy token against her Attack pool, and stands pat.*

"With my subtle, discriminating rapier, I jab at his liver!" a triumphant Beth proclaims. "If men still had livers, in his antediluvian era." Now Dleund must respond with a Defense success. On his behalf, you roll an Illustrious Success. "Dleund leaps up on the banister, kicking the blade from your hand," you narrate. This not only ends the attack, but will cost Fruminger a levy of 3 on his next Attack roll.

Round Two, Dleund's Attack: *Dleund makes his first attack roll of the new exchange, which costs him nothing. He gets a Prosaic Success. "From his superior height, he rains down a succession of blinding blows."*

Beth makes his Defense check, getting an Illustrious Success. "The slashes I suffer are inconsequential!" Beth crows. Now Dleund will also face a levy of 3 on his next Attack roll.

Round Two, Fruminger's Attack: *Beth pays the levy of 3 required by Dleund's previous Defense success, dropping Fruminger's Attack pool from 8 to 5. She rolls a Hair's-Breadth Success and stands pat. "I aim an arcing blow at his knees!"*

Boon & Levy: duplicate as required

Weaponry ATTACK Attack	Weaponry ATTACK Attack	Weaponry ATTACK Attack	Weaponry ATTACK Attack
Integrity HEALTH Force Strength	Integrity HEALTH Force Strength	Integrity HEALTH Force Strength	Integrity HEALTH Force Strength
Maneuverability DEFENSE Defense	Maneuverability DEFENSE Defense	Maneuverability DEFENSE Defense	Maneuverability DEFENSE Defense

✂ Fighting ✂

Dleund leads off with a Quotidian Failure. “He yowls,” you narrate, “crying out that, in his home era, knee hits are considered the height of *gaucherie*.” He pays 1 to reroll, dropping his Defense from 6 to 5. You roll a Dismal Failure. This costs him 3 to reroll, dropping his pool to 2. Dleund scores a Prosaic Success, protecting him from injury.

Round Three, Dleund’s Attack: Because Fruminger’s most recent Defense success was Illustrious, Dleund’s first roll faces a levy of 3, dropping his Attack from 10 to 7. He gets a Quotidian Failure. “Clearly still reeling from the pain, he lunges at you uncertainly,” you say. You pay 1 from Dleund’s attack pool for a reroll, taking his pool from 7 to 6. His result is an Exasperating Failure. “Shaking off the pain, he comes at you harder, swiping the air by your cheek.” You collect a boon token for Dleund and pay another point, reducing his Attack pool to 5. This result is a Prosaic Success. “His next swipe hits closer to home—or, more precisely, your ribcage.”

Fruminger must respond or take an injury. His first roll costs nothing. Beth exults as it comes up as another Illustrious Success. He is not only unhurt, but will subject Dleund to a costly levy on his next attack roll.

Round Three, Fruminger’s Attack: Beth makes an attack roll—this time without a levy, because Dleund’s most recent Defense result was only a Prosaic Success. He gets a Prosaic Success and stands pat on it. “I loose a wild fury of blows, hoping a few will find their mark,” Beth narrates.

Dleund now must make a Defense roll. He gets a Prosaic Success and stands pat on it. “He weaves back,” you describe, “you make contact at various junctures, but always with whimsical buffets, drained of real potency.”

Round Four, Dleund’s Attack: Dleund must again pay a levy of 3 for his first roll of the attack, because Fruminger stood pat on an Illustrious Defense Success. This drops his Attack pool from 5 to 2. You roll a Hair’s-Breadth Success, collecting a levy token and standing pat. “He rudely shoulders into you, knocking you from your splendid defensive crouch.”

Beth makes a Defense roll, scoring a Prosaic Success. “I am more offended than harmed.”

Round Four, Fruminger’s Attack: Fruminger’s first attack roll is an Exasperating Failure. Beth collects a boon token and pays 1 Attack point to continue, dropping her character’s pool from 5 to 4. The next roll is a Prosaic Success. Beth stands pat. “My first off-stride swings fall short, but the second lands true.”

Dleund’s first Defense result is an Exasperating Failure. Dleund earns a boon token and pays 1, dropping his Defense from 2 to 1. Your next roll is a Quotidian Failure. You have Dleund pay his last point, then roll another Exasperating Failure. Out of points and unable to reroll, the time traveler takes an injury. “Your aggressiveness yields belated benefits,” you commentate. “He buckles, groaning. Spreading crimson stains his brocaded vest.” Dleund suffers his first injury—he is now hurt, and takes a levy of 2 on all subsequent rolls.

Round Five, Dleund’s Attack: Dleund’s injury forces him to pay a levy of 2 for his first Attack roll. His Attack pool drops from 5 to 3. You roll a Prosaic Success and stands pat on it. “Infuriated by pain, he slices at you with a newly produced dagger,” you narrate. “As the blade comes, I am fascinated by the pattern of its filigree.” Beth describes. Her initial Defense roll is a Quotidian Failure. She pays 1 to reroll, dropping Fruminger’s Defense pool to 4. She rolls an Exasperating Failure, gaining a boon token. Paying another point to reroll, she nets a Hair’s-Breadth success, and a levy token. “Though at first distracted by the unexpected art history lesson, I finally manage a decisive skitter from his slashing knife,” Beth narrates.

Round Five, Fruminger’s Attack: “Seeking advantage from his furious gyrations, I look for an opening and try to stick him again,” Beth says. Her first Attack roll is an Exasperating Failure. She pays 1 from Fruminger’s Attack pool, dropping it to 3. She rolls another Exasperating Failure, pays another 1 point from Fruminger’s pool, and gets a Hair’s-Breadth Success. Beth has collected two boon tokens and a levy token; her character’s Attack pool is now at 2.

Dleund must now defend. If he had any points left, he’d face a levy of 2. With his pool at 0, however, he not only can’t afford to reroll, but faces a penalty of 1 on the one roll he is allowed to make. You roll a 4, which, after the penalty is applied, becomes an Exasperating Failure. “He evades you at first, but finally opens you up to a shot at his ribs.”

“I give him a stab in his left kidney, to match the previous wound in his right. Naturally this is a gesture not of savagery, but of symmetry,” Beth adds.

“It goes without saying,” you observe, speaking in the neutral narrative tones of the GM, not as Dleund. For him, you go on to make a series of pained, grunting noises reflecting his double gutting.

With two injuries, Dleund is down. “Dleund can do nothing,” you narrate, “but writhe in agony on the mezzanine floor.

“I kneel beside him, my features a mask of feigned sympathy,” Beth says. “Dleund, share with me the location of your cached loot—and do not deny it, I spied you the other night as you rifled the marquess’ chifferobe.”

With the scene now clearly moving on from the literal to the figurative backstabbery, you pause the action for a momentary accounting.

Beth now balances her boon and levy tokens. Attack has two levies and one boon, for a total of one levy. His Attack drops from 2 to 1. His Defense has 1 levy token, and drops from 3 to 2.

If it matters, Dleund’s two levies and one boon collectively drop his Attack from 5 to 4. A single Defense boon raises his pool from 0 to 1.

❧ Magic ❧ MAGIC

The main difference between the three levels of play lies in the potency of magic available to the characters.

In Cugel-level play, the characters may occasionally be able to cast a mighty spell, or perhaps wield the showy but low-impact effects called cantraps.

At Turjan-level, some characters may be magicians, capable of wielding multiple spells. Others may be little more advanced than their frivolous Cugel-level counterparts. Groups may be all magicians, all non-magicians, or a mix of the two.

Rhialto-level characters are by definition arch-magicians. The most powerful beings in the galaxy, they are able to shape reality at a whim. Naturally they spend the bulk of their time arguing over who has the best hat. They can still cast spells, having many of them at their disposal, and may even stoop to the parlor tricks known as cantraps. Mostly however they operate by bullying and cozening the near-omnipotent imps known as sandestins.



Freeform Casting

In freeform casting, the player whose character is attempting to work magic describes the desired effect, then makes a Magic roll.

On a failure, nothing happens.

On a success, the character's desired end result is achieved. On an Illustrious Success, it is achieved in unexpectedly spectacular fashion.

In the case of success with a cantrap, a severely limited form of minor magic (see below), the GM may describe the means by which the result was achieved in less impressive terms than the player's original description called for.

The additional complexity of freeform casting is best suited to a continuing series. For a game featuring freeform casting, add the additional magic ability component card set found on (p. 130). Strike the Magic abilities given on the main set of Character cards.

FREEFORM CONTESTS

Sometimes two characters will use magic against one another in pursuit of mutually exclusive objectives. Each player (or the player and GM, as the case may be) describes the character's ultimate aim. They then contest Magic against one another. Both generate a series of magical effects, which they describe as they roll and reroll.

(In the case of cantraps, the GM may chip in to modify outlandish descriptions out of keeping with their limited power, substituting less impressive manifestations.)

At contest's end, the winner's goal is achieved and the loser's is prevented.

Magical Styles

As with Persuade, Rebuff, Attack and Defense, a character's habits and personality inform his use of magic. Each character falls into one of six Magic styles:

Studious: You regard Magic as an academic pursuit, learned through tomes. The power it grants you is but an interesting side-effect, compared to the knowledge its practice reveals. Every time you cast a spell or cantrap, you are mentally composing a footnote for your own treatise on the subject.

Daring: A magical effect generated without flash or dash scarcely qualifies as such. You risk failure in pursuit of new, surprising results that keep your rivals off-guard.

Insightful: You work Magic by keenly observing the world around you, including the various supernatural spheres invisible to the eyes of duller men. Your understanding of deep principles, and ability to apply them to real events, informs your every casting.

Forceful: Magic is best understood as a process by which the superior man bends the universe to his will. Your desires and conceptions are things of iron; before them reality is but the flimsiest gossamer, to be manipulated as you please.

Devious: Magic is a kit-bag of tricks you use to swindle reality, robbing it of its bounty. You use it to weave illusions, provoke reversals, and cheat destiny itself.



☞ Magic ☞

Curious: Magic is a key to discovery—not the dusty, soulless discovery of bookish scholarship, but the active, exploratory search for ultimate answers. Every spell you cast tears another tiny piece from the great mask concealing the true nature of existence. One day, in a blinding flash, will come the shocking final epiphany. Then, and only then, you will comprehend ALL!

Each magical style trumps, and is trumped by, another.

Style	TRUMPS	Is TRUMPED by
STUDIOUS	Curious	Daring
DARING	Studious	Insightful
INSIGHTFUL	Daring	Forceful
FORCEFUL	Insightful	Devious
DEVIOUS	Forceful	Curious
CURIOUS	Devious	Studious

As per the standard trumping rules, a character contesting against a style that trumps his suffers a levy of 1 on each reroll.

CANTRAPS

A niggling form of magic primarily of interest to mummers and charlatans, cantraps produce ordinary results by extraordinary means. They be used to substitute Magic for any of the following abilities: Appraisal, Concealment, Driving, Etiquette, Gambling, Imposture, Living Rough, Quick Fingers, Seduction, Stealth, Stewardship, Tracking.

Any character capable of performing cantraps can spend Magic points on rolls of any of the above abilities. These ability uses, when successful, are accompanied by obvious supernatural manifestations. The player should suggest the desired manifestations. Typically these are confined to:

- ☞ the conjuring of diverting but clearly unreal phantasms and illusions with visual or auditory elements
- ☞ movement of small objects
- ☞ barely detectable changes of temperature, aroma, light intensity, wind speed, or other ambient conditions
- ☞ imitating effects of commonly available non-magical implements, tools and devices, such as flint strikers, brushes, lock picks, musical instruments, hammers, cookpots, kettles or combs
- ☞ rendering a real object, person or vista subtly more or less visually appealing
- ☞ improving or spoiling the flavors of foods

In some instances the readily apparent use of magic might seem counterproductive to the character's objective:

Quick Fingers: When the duke discovers that his timepiece has gone missing, he may recall with suspicion your display of dancing spectral fairies.

Stealth: The wailing sound that disguises your sneaking footfalls may attract unwanted notice.

Gambling: Literal-minded doctrinaires take the evident presence of magic at the gaming table as a sign of cheating.

Concealment: Is hiding behind a glowing cloud really hiding?

Where this is the case, you succeed, but the GM is within her rights to throw up an obstacle that later—perhaps only a few moments later—reflects the magical shortcut you took to get there.

Cantrap Roll Example

Fruminger (played by Beth) wishes to eat a haunch of mermelant before it spoils, even though she is traveling through a predator-infested wilderness. She decides to cast a cantrap as a substitute for Living Rough, hoping to dampen the delectable smell of her meat as it crackles on a spit. The GM decides that this is not too great a stretch of the Living Rough ability, and fits the cantrap bullet-point mentioning minor changes in aroma. Beth has 4 points in her Magic pool.

“I summon hunger spirits to breathe the smell into their nostrils, thus blocking it from the sensory apparatuses of deodands and other hungry creatures,” Beth says. She is inventing hunger spirits, adding them to your collective conception of the Dying Earth world. Her creation is evocative and fits the Vancian atmosphere, so the GM accepts it without reservation or modification. Instead she’ll build on it

☞ Magic: Sandestins ☞

as necessary.

She rolls an *Exasperating Failure*, earning a boon token.

“The spirits momentarily wink into existence, but then fade, as if suspecting that their experience of that sizzling haunch will be restricted to smell alone,” the GM narrates, accounting for the failure.

Beth pays a point to reroll, dropping her Magic pool from 4 to 3. “I’ll offer them perhaps a nugget of tasty flesh. Naturally I will confine my offer to gristle, which to hunger spirits ought to constitute the most delightful of feasts.”

She rolls, getting a *Prosaic Success*.

“The hunger spirits coalesce into their maximal substantiality, eagerly accepting your offer. They absorb the smell, allowing you to consume your meal free from fear of predation.”

The contest at an end, Beth cashes in her boon token, bringing her Magic pool back from 3 to 4.

Cantrap Contest Example

Fruminger and Rutose (played by Jim) compete for the favors of a supporting character, the unexpectedly fetching ghoul queen K’hlal. Knowing her to be a dedicated aesthete, each creates a phantasmal puppet show designed to display their finely-honed artistic sensibilities. The GM determines that this effort falls within the limitations of cantrap use. One, they’re using Magic as a substitute for Seduction. Two, the evocation of obviously unreal phantasms appears on the list of typical cantrap effects.

This is a zero-sum contest (p. 14) involving two PCs. The GM decides that Fruminger acts first, because he began the flirtation with K’hlal, only to be gracelessly horned in upon by the solipsistic Rutose. (Fruminger is the actor and Rutose the thwarted.)

“I conjure an illusionary tableau of majestic golden figures promenading upon an ivory barge,” says Beth, who starts the contest by rolling a *Hair’s-Breadth Success*.

“You bring the figures into being, though with a distracting flicker,” narrates the GM.

“Conjuring a retinue of phantasmal ghoul warriors, who emerge from the gelid river, I attack Fruminger’s oscillating potentates,” explains Jim, as he rolls for Rutose. He scores a *Prosaic Success*.

“A most impressive manipulation of multiple imaginary figures! K’hlal draws back her teeth in bloodthirsty fascination,” describes the GM.

If Beth declines to pay for a reroll, Rutose wins the contest. She spends a point, taking her pool from 4 to 3. “I conjure a battalion of ghoul rivals, wearing K’hlal’s livery, who sweep from the air on skeletal pelgranes, to attack your puny creatures.” She rolls a *Dismal Failure*.

“You conjure nothing but sputtering motes,” the GM says.

Beth spends her last 3 points, dropping her Magic pool to 0. “I redouble my concentration,” she says, brow furrowed as Fruminger’s would be.

She rolls another failure—*Exasperating* this time. Unable to continue, she must withdraw from the contest, leaving Rutose to savor the win.

The GM addresses Jim: “Purring carnivorously, K’hlal invites you to sit next to her, on her crimson pillow.”

“Fruminger wonders,” says Beth, “if perhaps he hasn’t won this exchange after all...”

“Rutose gulps,” says Jim.



SANDESTIN NEGOTIATION

Arch-magicians can achieve virtually any effect imaginable, subject to the basic laws of time, space, and energy. Or rather, their sandestins can, through a mixture of threat and exhortation. Sandestins are forced to obey arch-magicians by the terms of their indenture, enforced by their fear of torture by a related quasi-corporeal entity, the chug. They hate this state of humiliating imprisonment nearly as much as they disdain effort of any sort. Rigorous negotiations between arch-magician and sandestin precede the performance of any wondrous act. Two strains of argument predominate:

How many indenture points will the act remove from the sandestin’s account? Arch-magicians tell sandestins that they will be freed after a set number of indenture points is removed from their current total. Unlike most of the numbers in this book, indenture points are a point of reference in the world and do not directly pertain to any game rule. They exist in the minds of the arch-magicians and sandestins, who refer to them incessantly during these negotiations. Sandestins strive to increase the number of indenture points payable for any act of magic. Arch-magicians counter-argue that any act should require the lowest number of such points. Further, they attempt to unilaterally increase the sandestin’s point total for infractions both real and imagined.



☞ Magic: Sandestins ☞

How can the arch-magician hedge himself against the inevitable dangers of over-literal interpretation? The sandestin hopes to do as little as possible, and also to lash out at his captor, but obeying only the letter of the instructions given to him. As the arch-magician attempts to lay out an iron-clad set of instructions, the sandestin does his best to vex and confuse him, introducing clauses he can later exploit to undo his master's plans.

The interaction between arch-magician and sandestin plays out as a rules-free dialogue sequence. When the time comes for the sandestin to take action, the player makes a Magic roll.

On an *Illustrious Success*, the sandestin works the requested wonder exactly as desired.

On any other *Success*, the wonder is worked, but with some additional undesirable wrinkles introduced by the subversive sandestin.

On a *Dismal Failure*, the sandestin works the wonder in a way that completely upends the arch-magician's intentions. If later pressed on the matter, it provides a legalistic explanation accounting for the disparity between plan and result.

On any other *Failure*, the sandestin fails to perform the wonder, declaring that conditions in some way changed, nullifying the arch-magician's instructions.

Contests of Sandestin Magic

In a contest of sandestin magic, two arch-magicians battle to see who will achieve a desired effect, often in a zero-sum contest. They can ascribe any imaginable effect to their magical attempts, which may then be reversed by their own later failures or their opponent's countering successes. When a contestant fails, *Dismal Failures* create effects favorable to his rival. These are attributed to malicious interpretation on the part of their sandestin. Other failures are treated as an inability to convince the sandestin to act within the necessarily immediate time frame.

The arch-magicians Thrufyr (played by Lynne) and Vrentho (played by Rich) struggle to outdo each other during a jaunt back in time. Together they face an enormous automaton army. With a coveted hat-feather as the prize, each has wagered that he can destroy more of the clanking legions than the other. The wager was proposed by Thrufyr, so the GM declares him the actor and Vrentho the thwarter. Thrufyr's Magic pool is 9; Vrentho's is 8.

"I instruct my sandestin Kroplii to rain magma down upon the impertinent man-machines," says Lynne. She rolls a Prosaic Success and stands pat on it, at no cost.

"Magma falls from the skies," the GM narrates. "Kroplii has summoned a disappointingly blue molten metal, presumably from the planet Floar. Nonetheless, many automatons are melted, metallic screams dying in their collapsing throats."

"I instruct my sandestin, Okolko, to open a portal to a demon-infested hell beneath the clanking legion's tromping feet," says Rich. He rolls an Illustrious Success.

"The battlefield becomes a yawning pit!" the GM exclaims. "Gigantic demons surge from below to grab up robots in their gnarled paws."

Lynne must lose the bet or pay 3 Magic points to reroll in the wake of Rich's Illustrious Success. She does so, dropping her pool from 9 to 6. "The aid of demons must be disdained as unfashionable. I have Kroplii dismiss this imprudent gangway between realms." Lynne rolls a Prosaic Success.

"The portal closes. A few demons remain, opportunistically prowling the battlefield, but the bulk of the automaton force is now able to advance on you again."

COZENING SANDESTINS BY OTHER MEANS

Whether arch-magicians or not, characters can use *Persuade* to ask sandestins they do not have under indenture to work wonders for them. It is also possible, as in the first scenario in this book, to have a *Relationship* to a sandestin. They either perform the wonders or not, without the degrees of subversion found in the fraught relationship with their masters.

It is bad form indeed to seek the aid of a fellow arch-magician's sandestin. For one thing, they'll often seek indenture point reductions from their masters for performing actions for their friends. However, the main disadvantage of this approach is that the sandestin has no reason to fear his mortal interlocutor. He will as often as not come to regret the one-sidedness of the arrangement, and use his wondrous power to exact an additional later toll.

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“Hmpf!” snorts Rich. “Okolko, afflict them with rust!” He pays 1 point to reroll, dropping his Magic pool from 8 to 7. He rolls an Exasperating Failure, collecting a boon token.

“Request for clarification,” says the GM, in Okolko’s familiar squeaky voice. “Do I afflict the automatons, or the demons?”

Rich growls. “Wretch! You ignore my context willfully! The automatons, the automatons!” He pays a point to reroll, reducing his Magic pool from 7 to 6. He rolls a Hair’s-Breadth Success, collecting a levy token.

“I seek clarification merely to perform my tasks with scintillate accuracy,” sniffs the GM, as Okolko. Slipping back into her own narrative voice, she says: “The automatons slow and grind, as rust cakes their gears and joints.”

Lynne can now stand pat and let Rich win, or pay to reroll and keep the contest going. She does so, dropping her pool from 6 to 5. “Kroplii, batter them with a storm of meteors,” she commands. She rolls an Illustrious Success.

“Molten missiles rain from the atmosphere,” the GM narrates. “Wherever they land, vast craters form, and hundreds of automatons are thrown into the air.”

“Tasteless showmanship!” grumps Rich. “I turn the meteors to ice shards, that I might be credited with the destruction they wreak.” To continue against an Illustrious Success costs him 3 Magic points, taking his pool from 6 to 3. He rolls a Quotidian Failure.

“Nothing happens,” says the GM.

“What?” Rich fulminates. “I distinctly ordered you, Okolko, to convert those meteors to ice!”

In Okolko’s voice, the GM replies: “You said ‘I turn the meteors to ice shards,’ not ‘Okolko turns the meteors to ice shards.’ I was waiting with avid curiosity for a demonstration of your suddenly acquired sandestinic prowess.”

“Sophist! You knew what I meant!” Rich pays another point to continue, dropping his pool from 3 to 2. He rolls an Exasperating Failure, and collects another boon token.

The GM continues as Okolko. “Many times have you upbraided me for the crime of interpretation,” she chirps.

“Turn the meteors to ice shards!” Rich howls, pounding his fist on the table. He rolls a Hair’s-Breadth Success, earning another levy token.

“Enough of the meteors are converted to ice for you to argue that your contribution to the automaton slaughter is as great as Thrufyr’s,” the GM narrates.

“In that case,” says Lynne, “I have Kroplii summon jade unicorns from the 17th Aeon to run rampant through their brigades, spearing the robots on sharp green horns.” She spends a point for her next roll, taking her Magic pool from 5 to 4. She rolls a Dismal Failure.

“The unicorns appear, but join with the automatons to charge your position,” the GM narrates.

“It would seem jade unicorns are as unreliable as their flesh and blood brethren!” Lynne exclaims. “Kroplii, vex them with agate wasps, until they relent and do my bidding!” To recover from a Dismal Failure costs her 3 points, dropping her pool to 1. She scores a Hair’s-Breadth Success, earning a levy token.

“They do not intentionally attack the automatons, but in their haste to avoid the agate wasps, they trample many by accident.”

“I grow weary of these exertions,” says Rich, “Okolko, open a chasm to swallow the last of the automatons.” He spends his penultimate Magic point, dropping his pool to 1.

He scores a Hair’s-Breadth Success, and with it a levy token. “A small chasm appears at the head of the charging force of automatons. The vanguard falls into the abyss and vanishes. The rest of the army stands disconsolate at its brink, unable to reach you. Victory, albeit one with a sad and deflated aftertaste, is Vrentho’s. He earns the disputed feather.

Spending her last point will take Lynne to 0, causing her to lose the contest. She withdraws with a “Hmp,” which also leads to her loss, without costing her the extra point.

However, now that the contest is over, her single levy token does that for her anyway, dropping the pool to 0.

Rich has two boon tokens but three levy tokens. After the two boon tokens cancel two levy tokens, he is left with one levy token. It likewise drops his pool from 1 to 0.

Martial Magic Duels

When arch-magicians try to injure each other with freeform magic, the contest unfolds exactly like a mundane fight, except that:

- ☞ Magic substitutes for Attack.
- ☞ Trumps are derived from the contestants’ Magic styles, rather than the usual comparison between Attack and Defense

At the outset of a martial magic duel, each contestant may:

- ☞ Discard any spell card whose effect does injury to an opponent, adding 3 Magic points to his pool.
- ☞ Transfer any number of Persuade points to his Magic pool. (This represents the role negotiation plays in getting

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one's sandestin to hurt one's opponent.)

Duels between arch-magicians are rare, for two reasons.

First, social convention discourages fighting. Arch-magicians all know one another, frequently meeting in conclave to argue picayune points of privilege. Conclaves of the distant past were irrevocably sundered by fighting, to the mutual woe of victor and vanquished. With this lesson in mind, one arch-magician who strikes against another is considered to have attacked the whole. While any two conclave members might be equally matched, any one errant member is powerless against the combined might of the entire assemblage. Though frequently at odds, arch-magicians sublimate their mutual hostilities into seemingly frivolous contests of pedantry, fashion, and procedural politics.

Second, sandestins are reluctant to anger other arch-magicians. Although it has never happened, they fear a regime where multiple magicians are moved to enchug a single sandestin. They contrive with one another to divert their masters from directly injurious interactions.

Spells

A spell is a well-honed formula guaranteed to invoke the intercession of a sandestin, who is ineluctably obligated to perform a very specific supernatural intervention. Compared to a spontaneous effect inveigled during a sandestin negotiation, it is constrained and inflexible. Also unlike those effects, it is reliable, predictable, and sidesteps the hair-tearing vexations of haggling over indenture points.

The sandestin's involvement in the casting of a spell is almost invariably hidden from the user. Sandestins consider their forced participation in spells shameful. They are loath to show their abashed heads after being called on to perform them.

Spells are represented by a card set drawn as part of character creation. In an ongoing series, players draw a new set of spell cards prior to each scenario opener.

Sandestins are immune to all spells. A spell cannot be used to induce a chug to enslave a sandestin. (Although the spell that allows a magician to ascend to arch-magical status is an exception to the general rule, it is of limited narrative use and thus does not appear here.)

MAGIC ROLLS

Casting a spell requires a Magic roll. The spell works as described on the card, unless you end on a Dismal Failure, in which case it is wasted and nothing happens. (Yes, spells work even on Quotidian or Exasperating Failures.)

Some spells provide additional benefit on an Illustrious Success, as noted on the card.

Spell Cards

Each playable spell is represented by a card, beginning on (p. 47).

Spells can only be used once. When a character uses a spell, the card is placed in a spent pile. Some spell effects allow a player to interact with the spent pile, for example by retrieving a card from it.

The cards tell you what each spell can do. They are mostly self-explanatory. Some require reference to common terms listed below.

EXPIRATION

Spells either take place instantly or exert continuing effects. These latter remain active until they expire. Spells cast by supporting characters remain unexpired

CHARACTER LEVEL AND MAGIC

Non-magicians can sometimes learn spells, but can't regain them once used. Cugel-level characters, who are the focus of this book, are non-magicians.

Magicians can only cast spells. They can't negotiate with sandestins. Some but not all Turjan-level characters are magicians. You might craft a scenario featuring all magicians, all non-magicians, or a mix of the two. In the last case, mix spell and enchanted item cards together into a single set of six; the players who draw spell cards are assumed to be magicians.

All Rhialto-level characters are by definition arch-magicians, who wield spells and negotiate with sandestins. They always regain spells when used. You might also let them draw more than one spell card at the beginning of play. Two adds amusing complexity; three spells per player is probably pushing it.

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for as long as the GM deems amusing—generally no more than twenty minutes or so of real time. Where necessary, the GM supplies a plausible explanation of the spell's premature cessation.

Certain spells specify expirations that may occur after a period of game time (often a day), or a shorter period of real time. Timer applications help you track the expiration of various spell. These come pre-installed on many mobile devices. Laptop users can find and install one of many free alarm applications or use various web services.

Concentration

Some spells expire when you drop your concentration. Declaring that you're taking any complicated, difficult or interesting action other than maintaining one of these spells causes its expiration. Expect your GM to apply this rule with low, cruel cunning. Spending a refresh token also ends your concentration.

DISPELLING

To forcibly expire someone else's spell is to dispel it. Sometimes special circumstances kick in when a spell is dispelled. Spells may be dispelled by sandestins, or by the spells Discerning Cancellation or Liberation of Warp.

With the merest thought, you may always dispel a spell you cast. You never have to roll to do this.

MISHAP WILL RESULT

Certain mighty spells are fun when used on minor supporting characters, but spoil group enjoyment when deployed against the player characters, or when they peremptorily remove the obstacles that keep the evening from drawing to a premature close.

These spells are indicated with a Mishap Will Result entry. These specify situations in which the GM will ensure that fate intervenes to prevent the spell from being used in a disappointing or anti-climactic way. Some contrivance delivers a sudden reversal to the character attempting the spell—often one that humiliates him or puts him in a worse position than when the spell first tripped from his lips. No die roll shall delay or sway the GM from her appointed duties as she summarily calls down an engaging new complication to keep the story rolling.

Blank lines appear in some Mishap Will Result entries. These allow the GM to write in the names of crucial supporting characters whose demise before the scenario's closing scenes would clear away obstacles too quickly.

This rule follows the way that the exceedingly powerful spells of the Dying Earth appear in Jack Vance's fiction. They casually dispatch minor characters at any time, or mete comeuppance to major ones at suitably climactic moments. He never allows them to disappointingly derail his own stories by having characters use them at unsatisfying moments.

CHOOSING CARDS

Unless you're playing a total free-for-all game with no planned storyline or goal, the GM will want to carefully choose the six spell cards available to the players when crafting any given scenario. Chosen spells should be useful without entirely spoiling the story.

For example, the Charm Of Untiring Legs will be fun in a scenario including a journey sequence, but useless if the PCs will be spending the entire game confined to an indoor location.

Omit cards that will predictably short-circuit your scenario by allowing the user to easily bypass obstacles to its primary goal. For example, if the plot confines the characters to a single location, you won't want to give them Thradsru-

PLOT SPELLS

Some spells that available to magicians of the Dying Earth are better treated as plot devices than as powers the PCs can access at whim. They are thus withheld from the card system. The prime example is Temporal Projection, which allows the characters to travel in time. If the scenario requires them to shuffle to another aeon, it's unfair to require a player to use up a resource to make that happen. If no one draws the card, you'd then be unable to set the plot in motion. Better to describe its use—possibly by a player—as part of the Opener, than to rely on the twin whimsies of random distribution and player volition.

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bal's Laganetic Transfer, which grants them the power of long-distance travel.

REGAINING SPELLS

Cugel-level characters who can cast spells do so as lucky amateurs. They may be able to cast them by reading them from scrolls or grimoires, or unleash them from enchanted devices like rings or wands. Although the GM can always invent a plot device to the contrary, in general they get one spell per scenario. They use it, they lose it.

Turjan-level magicians may or may not be able to recover spells, depending on the needs of the scenario.

Rhialto-level arch-magicians by default can regain spells. If they can't do so in a particular scenario, the GM ought to in some manner account for the sudden deficiency.

In a game where characters can regain spells, the GM prepares a fresh stack of additional spell cards. Just as she would when selecting the first six the characters draw from at the beginning of the scenario, she takes care to omit any cards that are either insufficiently useful in the situation, or that would allow for an anti-climactic evasion of its key obstacles.

If you have fewer than six players, any cards not drawn from the original six spell cards are folded back into the fresh stack.

When a player regains a spell, fan out the cards in the fresh stack and let him choose one at random, as you would during character creation. (Pieces of paper or card stock don't shuffle properly. Trying to create a deck from which the players draw the top cards will prove an exercise in frustration.)

Before each scenario, the GM chooses between two methods of spell refreshment: the simple and the faithful. We recommend the first as easier and more fun, but groups of dedicated Vancians may prefer the flavor of the second.

Simple Spell Refreshment

As soon as the player uses a spell, he spends a refresh token and takes a new one from the fresh stack. If he has no refresh tokens or wishes to preserve his resources, he can hold off until any later moment, and then spend a token and draw a fresh spell.

Faithful Spell Refreshment

The player must wait until a suitable break in the action, during which the character can withdraw to study his ancient tomes of magical formulae and, entering a lengthy meditative state, memorize a new spell to replace the old one. He then draws a new spell from the fresh stack.

ORDER OF ACTION

If two PCs want to cast spells at the same time, the character with the highest magic pool goes first. If their pools are equal, the one who most recently bought the GM a drink² goes first. If both have been equally ungenerous, the GM decides by whim.

If a PC and a supporting character want to cast spells at the same time, the PC decides who goes first.

Wherever possible arrange your scenarios so that the player characters are the only spell-wielders. Failing that, note that many spells assume a PC wielder. Avoid giving these to supporting characters.



² (Whether coffee or soft drinks count toward this purpose is a decision left to the consciences of individual GMs.)

WHY NOT CHOOSE?

In more traditional roleplaying games, the original Dying Earth RPG included, players pore over spell lists and choose which ones they think will be most useful in the coming adventure. Deprived of foreknowledge, they tend to pick from a small list of widely applicable, and perhaps overpowered, spells, leaving the rest to lie fallow.

Skulduggery-styled Dying Earth forces players to rely on their smarts by working out the best use for spells they're semi-arbitrarily presented with. It treats spells as any other character element, all of which are randomly dispensed during character creation. As an added benefit, this gets the game started faster, without the agonizing stage where the indecisive player pores exhaustively over the spell list yet again.

In the world, the magicians still pick their spells, even if their players don't. Reinforce this, if desired, by requiring the player to rationalize why his character actively chose to memorize the spell he just randomly drew. Reward especially amusing answers with refresh tokens.

Although we don't necessarily recommend it, you could allow players to pick their spells, printing out cards as needed. Note, however, that random spell distribution has allowed us to drop many of the balancing factors, like spell Difficulty, found in the original DERP rules. Don't come crying to us when everyone takes the Excellent Prismatic Spray or Charm of Forlorn Encystment!

GRIMOIRE

ARNHOULT'S SEQUESTROUS DIGITALIA

Create a small warp in space up to ten feet away and within visible range, which you can then thrust your hand through. Your hand, which of course remains entirely under your control, is seen to emerge from a free-floating spatial nimbus.

Your hand remains unharmed on your wrist even if the warp is dispelled prematurely.



THE ASTOUNDING ORAL PROJECTION

Cause a realistic mouth to appear on any surface. If you can see it, it will speak the words you mouth.

Alternately, you can leave an Astounding Oral Projection behind to speak a monologue of up to one hundred words when a stated condition occurs. It then vanishes.



BEHEMOTH'S BOUNTY

Materialize into being a feast capable of serving up to dozen gluttonous individuals, or many more abstemious sorts, along with the gigantic plates required to serve them. Food quality varies by degree of success.



BRASSNOSE'S TWELVE-FOLD BOUNTY

Materialize eleven copies of any item:

- a) currently in your possession, and
- b) that can be held comfortably in one hand.

The item is solid and durable but possesses none of the original's extraordinary or supernatural properties, if any.

Expiration: The copies vanish.



CALL TO THE VIOLENT CLOUD

Summon a pillar of black smoke and tell it your destination. It whisks you and up to a dozen other people (with or without riding beasts) to any known place in the universe. Unless you are able to supply exact coordinates, the pillar deposits you in a surprise location at the general destination. Despite the supposed randomness of this phenomenon, this location proves invariably inconvenient: for example, atop a wintry summit, or inside a locked and guarded vault.



CHARM OF BRACHIAL FORTITUDE

Gain 12 Athletics points, which may be spent on any feat of strength.

Expiration: Your pool refreshes to its normal rating. If you performed no feat of strength, your pool then drops by 4.



CHARM OF FORLORN ENCYSTMENT

Permanently imprison a human or human-like being in a hollow in the earth forty-five miles below his current location. The victim remains in stasis, though his clothing and possessions deteriorate at a normal rate.

Mishap Will Result if used on:

any PC

Can also be used to instantly free a single all Encystment victim whose name is known to you, or to free all victims buried within a mile radius. Freed prisoners burst immediately to the surface.



CHARM OF UNTIRING LEGS

Travel any continuous distance on foot without symptoms of fatigue.

Expires only when you stop walking.

Expiration: You collapse, exhausted. Your Athletics pool drops to 0 and can't be refreshed for the next half hour. (Two hours if your Key Trait is Indolent.)



THE CHARM OF UNTIRING NOURISHMENT

From now until you next eat, drink, or breathe, your body seals itself against all external want. You do not hunger, thirst, or grow sleepy. The ill-effects of extreme natural temperatures pass you by. On an Illustrious Success, you can even survive the vacuum of space or a dip in the roiling magma of an active volcano.

In an ongoing campaign, the spell is assumed to expire between scenarios.



CLAMBARD'S REIN OF LONG NERVES

Place your own body in stasis and migrate your consciousness to take possession of another living creature's body. While in that body you can perform any physical task it is normally capable of, but lack access to its memories and mental capacities. If the possessed being's body dies while possessed, your consciousness returns without harm to your true form.

Mishap Will Result if used to bring death or harm to:
any PC

Expiration: 30 minutes real time (15 minutes real time)



DISCERNING CANCELLATION

Dispel the effect of any single spell that has already been cast. Edan's Prevention

Cast when another PC announces the intention to cast a spell. Both this spell card and the other PC's go to the spent pile. The other PC does not roll; his or her spell does not take effect.



EDAN'S THAUMATURGIC POULTICE

A character you can see or touch who is hurt, down or dying recovers completely. On an Illustrious Success, the patient's Health pool also refreshes.



ENCHANTMENT OF ANOTHER'S FACE

A character you can see or touch takes on the appearance, odor, vocal timbre and body language of another individual you have closely observed and clearly remember. The effect may alter the target's apparent gender, weight, or height, but is confined to entities of a roughly humanoid configuration.



ENCHANTMENT OF YOUTH RENEWED

Steal a chosen number of years from the lifespan of a living creature, transferring it to yourself or another recipient. You may not steal more years than the victim has left in its destined lifespan. The recipient's age reverses by the chosen number of years. The enchantment does not retard future aging.



THE EXCELLENT PRISMATIC SPRAY

Emit a multitude of tiny energy beams. These kill any single living creature smaller than a whale or destroy any single object breakable by a fire-axe.

Mishap Will Result if used on:
any PC



EVOKE THE WHEEL OF DESTINY

For the next five minutes of game time or fifteen minutes or real time, whichever is longer, all success results are treated as Illustrious, and all failure results are treated as Dismal. Felojun's Dank Blanket

Downgrade another PC's result by 1 step: from Illustrious Success to Prosaic, from Prosaic to Hair's-Breadth, from Hair's-Breadth Success to Exasperating Failure, and so on.

Exerts no effect on Dismal Failures.



FELOJUN'S 2ND HYPNOTIC SPELL

Paralyze all living targets within five yards, forbidding them all voluntary movement. You can harm, restrain, move, manhandle, or loot their bodies while retaining the concentration needed to maintain the spell. You may also take other actions they would impede if not for their paralysis. Taking any action the GM deems to be unrelated to their frozen state instantly expires the spell, allowing them to move again.

Mishap Will Result if used to kill:

any PC



THE FIRST RETROTROPIC

Use this spell after another PC uses a spell, and its effects have been determined. Time reverts to the instant before the spell was used, then proceeds as if the spell was never cast. The card for the targeted spell remains in the spent pile.

Illustrious Success: The targeted spell card goes to you.



GILGAD'S INSTANTANEOUS GALVANIC THRUST

A lightning bolt strikes a single target, living or otherwise. Living victims make three Defense rolls, as if subjected to

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three successful attacks. (You may choose to lower the number of Defense rolls to one or two.) Beings larger than an ox make one Defense roll.

Objects smaller than an ox-cart are smashed to flinders.

Mishap Will Result if used on:

any PC



GILGAD'S GROTESQUE INTERVENTION

Trade your refresh tokens for those of another player. Usable only if you have at least one refresh token.



ILDEFONSE'S VEXING WHIRLIGIG

Look at all Spell cards currently held by other players. Redistribute them so that each player winds up with a new card.



THE ILLUSION OF VILE ARTHROPODS

Conjure a believable illusion of swarming or crawling insect or insect-like vermin, such as tasps, sphigales, or miniscule bazils. You mentally direct their movements. Insubstantial, they can do no harm. Any successful Attack against them reveals them as unreal, causing expiration. Otherwise the spell remains active until you drop your concentration.



INTERMINABLE INTERIM

Place a living creature in stasis for twenty-four hours, during which time no harm may come to him, his clothing or items on his person. Time passes for the creature as if in an instant.

If a PC is subjected to this effect, he is out of the storyline for ten minutes of real time, as tracked by the GM. After this time, the narrative flashes forward a day. It is then revealed that the aware and active PCs failed to accomplish anything during the intervening period, perhaps due to indulgence in their key traits.



JAVANNE'S ENERVATION OF WILL

Cause a sapient, living being within earshot to undertake one or more actions based on your verbal orders. It may interpret unclear or ambiguous commands as it sees fit. The being is robbed of volition and can only do what you command.

Expiration: (when the target is a PC or a supporting char-

acter the GM needs to keep active in the storyline) after one action is undertaken; (any other target) after a day, or until the end of scenario, whichever comes first



KHULIP'S NASAL ENHANCEMENT

Gain 12 Perception points, which may be spent on any attempt to smell anything.

Expiration: Your pool refreshes to its normal rating. If you performed no feat of strength, your pool then drops by 4.

LIBERATION OF WARP

Any spell or magical effect active within 10 yards of you is instantly dispelled. Liberation of Warp also cancels out sandestin magic and the effects of magical items, although it does not destroy or nullify the items.

You can't cancel spells and effects maintained by an individual wearing Laccodel's Rune, an anti-magic amulet



LUGWILER'S DISMAL ITCH

Reduce a single living creature to paroxysms of agonizing itching. The victim can barely perform simple tasks such as walking or riding, but may become spectacularly talented at complaining. Any non-Illustrious Success the victim makes is treated as a Quotidian Failure. Illustrious Successes are treated as Hair's-Breadth Successes.



THE OMNIPOTENT SPHERE

Conjure into being a skintight bubble of magical force that surrounds your body and your effects. It moves as you move, immunizing you from all damage. (Exceptions: damage caused by environmental exposure and/or disease.) You may, by merely thinking it, expand the bubble to a sphere up to four yards in diameter. This pushes away any objects and people between you and the outer edge of the sphere.

Illustrious Success: The sphere also protects you from any and all effects of cantraps, enchanted items, and spells (including the works of sandestins.)



PANGUINE'S LOYAL PORTER

Summon a faintly visible shimmering entity to carry items for you. The load weighs up to a ton and fits a space no more than two yards on a side. The entity follows you at a specified distance (up to 300 ft) and altitude (up to 30 ft.)

Expiration: 1 day of game time or 1 hour of real time, whichever comes first. The porter then gently sets down the load and vanishes.



PHANDAAL'S CRITIQUE OF THE CHILL

Make an area comfortably warm and dry, protecting it against naturally occurring cold and precipitation. The area is 60 ft in diameter and 15 ft high.

Expiration: 1 day (game time)



PHANDAAL'S CRITIQUE OF WARMTH

Make an area comfortably cool and dry, protecting it against naturally occurring hot and/or humid weather. The area is 60 ft in diameter and 15 ft high.

Expiration: 1 day (game time)



PHANDAAL'S GYRATOR

Lift a single being high into the air, spinning it rapidly around. Spin speed ranges from a gentle rotation to a damaging application of force. (In the latter case, the target must make a Defense roll or suffer an injury.) You may move the target anywhere within 300 ft.

Expiration: Concentration; if target is more than 20 feet up when you drop concentration, it must make a Defense roll to avoid injury.



PHANDAAL'S MANTLE OF STEALTH

You, your clothing, and your carried personal effects, become invisible. You may still be heard, touched and smelled. Secondary visual cues may give away your whereabouts, for example if you walk through smoke or across loose sand. In combat against a foe who relies primarily on sight, you are treated as if your Attack and Defense styles trump those of your opponent.

Expiration: Concentration



RELOCALIZATION

Instantly transport a creature smaller than a draft horse (usually yourself) to any place you have visited, anywhere on Earth.



RHIALTO'S GREEN TURMOIL

Cause a subject to come down with an illness characterized by various symptoms, notably debilitating nausea. The subject must seek bed rest and is unable to take action for 1 day of game time or twenty minutes of real time, whichever comes first. Only usable on beings susceptible to disease.



THE SECOND RETROTROPIC

Reverse a single magically-created alteration on a person, place or thing, restoring it the condition it would be in had the magic not been used. The spell does not, however, heal or reverse injuries dealt by magical means.



THE SEVENTH SET'S WEB OF HIDING

An area (60 ft diameter) edits itself out of the perceptions of all beings. Those within the area can perceive as normal. Those outside it can't perceive those within it, or even process the area's existence. Nor may they note any strangeness arising from this perceptual lacuna.

Expiration: 1 day (game time)



SPELL OF DISSOLUTION

Collapse into dust any single, non-living object. Affects objects up to the size and weight of a large rhinoceros (stuffed.) Does not work on portions of larger objects, like a chunk of wall.



SPELL OF THE LOYAL SERVITOR

Summon a mute, eight-foot tall reptilian being of fearsome aspect. It performs menial tasks, including ones requiring strenuous manual labor, on your command, without resistance or subterfuge.

If commanded to attack, it rolls once, hitting on an Illustrious Success. The spell then expires, whether it hits or not.

Expiration: servitor vanishes after 1 day of game time or 1 hour of real time, whichever comes first.



SPELL OF THE SLOW HOUR

Create a temporal warp around yourself, so that time passes more slowly for you than for others around you. Use this to take three consecutive actions (for example, an Athletics roll, a Stealth roll, and a Magic roll) before anyone gets a chance to react or interrupt you.

In a fight, you can make three Attack rolls in a row. Your opponent makes Defense rolls in response, as normal.



SPELL OF TEMPORAL STASIS

Accelerate the rate at which you travel through the timestream, so that people and objects around you seem to be frozen in place. Any non-living object you touch synchronizes with your chronology, allow you to touch, move, and interact with it.

Expiration: Concentration

THANDAVAL'S STOLEN LIFE

Restore a formerly living creature (other than yourself) to life, in the process killing a living creature or creatures of equivalent body mass. The resurrected creature returns with full pools, including Health. If it died of old age, it will die again within a month unless separate measures are taken to restore its youth.

The spell can't be used simply to kill – you must have a dead creature to restore. It will not kill more creatures than the beneficiary's body mass requires.

Mishap Will Result if used to kill:

any PC



THRASDRUBAL'S LAGANETIC TRANSFER

Summon a terrible winged demon to whisk a conveyance containing up to eight people and a moderate quantity of gear (or six people and an extravagant weight of gear) to any destination you know by memory, or by aid of a detailed map. As a guideline, it takes a few hours to travel between adjacent regions, a day to cross an ocean or continent. Travel is limited to the Earth only.



THRASDRUBAL'S THRIFTY RETRIEVAL

Trade this card for a spell card in the spent pile.



VAMPIRIZATION OF DESTINY

Perform this spell when another PC scores an Illustrious Success. The target's success is downgraded to Prosaic. At any one later point in the game, you may spend a refresh token to convert a success you score to an Illustrious Success.



VUNE'S UNPLEASANTNESS

Target an ability of another PC. That PC's pool in the chosen ability drops to 0. Your pool increases by the number of points you stole from the other PC.



XAMANDER'S RUCTION

Force any other PC to reroll any single die result. They pay no ability points to do this. Xamander's Sleight

Ignore and reroll any one die roll you make, at no ability point cost.



☞ Magic: Enchanted Items ☞

Enchanted Items

Certain devices yield magical effects even in the hands of the most untrained mooncalf. Their magic is inherent in the device. Like spells, they appear on component cards which the GM randomly disburses at the beginning of a scenario.

Unlike spells, they can be used multiple times in the course of a scenario. They are not normally discarded to a spent pile when used. Though capable of wondrous effects, they're items of physical property, rather than formulae carried in an individual's head. They are therefore subject to the same caprices of possession as any other valuable object. Events in the story may cause them to change owners or go missing. In some cases they may be destroyed. If this happens, the card is removed from the player's component stack. Conversely, if a character buys, borrows or swindles an enchanted item from someone else, the card joins the player's component stack.

The elements of an enchanted item card are:

What It Looks Like: describes the object's physical properties.

What It Does: describes the device's effect when used.

What It Costs: The player must pay this number of refresh tokens each time he triggers the item's effect. When a player does not have (or will not spend) refresh tokens, this does not mean that the item has stopped working, merely that events conspire to prevent its effective use.

DISTRIBUTING ENCHANTED ITEMS

In a Cugel- or Turjan-level scenario, GMs may make available as component cards:

- ☞ a set of enchanted item cards to choose from
- ☞ no enchanted items whatsoever
- ☞ one set of enchanted item cards and one set of spell cards
- ☞ a single set of magic cards, including a mixture of both spells and enchanted items

At Turjan-level, this last choice means that characters who receive enchanted items are defined as non-magicians, while those who get spell cards are clearly magicians.

At Rhialto level, characters should draw at least one and probably two or three enchanted item cards from a suitably enlarged component card set, in addition to however many spell card sets the GM chooses to disburse.

As with spells, GMs should tailor the enchanted items they make available in a scenario to its events, so that they'll neither be so useful as to bring the story to an unsatisfyingly quick and easy resolution, nor so useless that they have zero chance of impacting its events.

GAINING ITEMS DURING A SCENARIO

In some scenarios may make one or more enchanted items available to clever characters who take appropriate actions to acquire them. In this case the GM sets aside the relevant enchanted item cards until they're acquired, then passes them to the players to add to their component stacks. The GM is never obligated to provide an equal number of enchanted item cards or to make them equally available to all characters.

ITEMS IN SERIES PLAY

The GM may deem it fitting that characters retain the same magical devices from one scenario to the next. Or she may declare that items possessed in the past have been stolen, damaged, traded away, lost or otherwise rendered inaccessible during unseen, trifling misadventures that occur between sessions. Depending on story requirements, she may offer the group a new selection of enchanted item component cards to randomly choose from, or deprive them altogether.

ENCHANTED ITEM CARDS

BEAK OF SCRUPULOUS MIMICRY

What It Looks Like: the preserved beak of the red-faced Almere warbler

What It Does: Accurately mimic the voice of a person or entity you've recently heard. Provides a +1 bonus to all Impersonate rolls for which vocal imitation is a positive factor. Lasts for five minutes of game time.

What It Costs: 1



BLUE CONCENTRATE PROJECTOR

What It Looks Like: a six-inch metal tube

What It Does: fires a cone of a blue powdery substance. Contest Attack vs. Wherewithal against a living creature within the cone. If you win, victim suffers a levy on all rolls for thirty minutes real time or 1 day of game time, whichever comes first. If additional targets are within the cone, which is 30 ft long and 15 ft across at its widest, terminal point, you can enter into subsequent contests against them, too.

What It Costs: 1 per target

CUBE OF TRUE DRIVING

What It Looks Like: a white cube surfaced in a coarse, granular material

What It Does: Feed to a beast of burden or riding animal. The creature then travels without instruction or intervention from you along a route known to you, avoiding obstacles as specified, for up to six hours of game time. The animal stops when confronted with an obstacle unspecified when you mentally communicated its route to it. The cube may be retrieved when the beast eliminates it, usually in about twenty-four hours.

What It Costs: 1



CWELBICK'S REVERSING RUNE

What It Looks Like: an amulet or bracelet marked with an occult diagram

What It Does: Treat one of your own Dismal Failures as an Illustrious Success. At any time during the current session, the player sitting to your left may determine that one of your Illustrious Successes is a Dismal Failure. May not be used during the last half hour of a session.

What It Costs: 1



DECEPTIVE PULVERULENCE

What It Looks Like: a crumbled chalky substance, in the container of your choice

What It Does: When mixed with a depleted stock of any liquid, semi-liquid, paste-like or stew-like food or drink, the pulverulence increases the mass and/or volume of the consumable to fill its original container. Though the depletion is concealed from visual inspection, a taste test reveals the new mixture as diluted and insipid.

What It Costs: 1



THE DISCOURAGING SALVE

What It Looks Like: a foul-smelling brown unguent in a container of your choice

What It Does: Makes you seem unpalatable to creatures whose primary motive for attacking you is carnivorous. They decline to attack you for six hours of game time or an hour of real time, whichever comes first.

What It Costs: 1



EVER-LENGTHENING ROPE

What It Looks Like: slender piece of rope 10 ft in length

What It Does: a) extend to a specified length (up to 10 miles.) b) can be cut into two pieces on an Athletics success. Both pieces retain their lengthening magic. Only one piece, chosen by the cutter, can be further subdivided.

What It Costs: 1 to extend, 2 to subdivide. E g r e g i o u s
S e x t a n t

What It Looks Like: a complex brass navigational instrument

What It Does: Allow a sailing ship to move in windless conditions, or prevent its sails from filling in a good wind. You must be aboard the ship on which the sextant is used.

What It Costs: 1



FORTHRIGHT AMULET OF PUISSANT SHIELDING

What It Looks Like: a pedant, usually nondescript

What It Does: When targeted by spell, cantrap, enchanted item or any other non-sandestin magical force, contest your Defense vs. the user's Magic. If you win, you have grabbed your amulet in time and the magic does not affect you. It still goes off: spells are discarded; enchanted items incur their costs.

What It Costs: 1



GLIMMISTER OF SHARPNESS

What It Looks Like: a fine silvery dust, in a small, concealable container of your choice

What It Does: a) preternaturally sharpens any blade.

☞ Magic: Enchanted Items ☞

When armed with it, you may spend refresh tokens as Attack pool points. b) preternaturally hardens any armor. While wearing the armor, you may spend refresh tokens as Defense pool points.

What It Costs: 1 per blade or armor treatment, prior to each combat contest you enter.



HORN OF THRIFTY GATHERING

What It Looks Like: an amulet or charm in the shape of a listening horn

What It Does: For the next half hour of real time or day of game time (whichever comes first), you gain a Refresh token each time a designated player spends a Refresh token to activate an enchanted item.

What It Costs: 1



JEBBIC'S EQUINE REPLACEMENT

What It Looks Like: a small figurine of a jade horse

What It Does: Summons into being a partially transparent magical horse. It will allow you to ride it normally but steadfastly refuses to perform feats or stunts. It vanishes as soon as you dismount, or after six hours of game time, whichever comes first. May not be used indoors.

What It Costs: 1



JIGGING BUG

What It Looks Like: an amusingly rendered metal figurine depicting an insect

What It Does: The metal bug dances in time to its own whistled musical accompaniment. It capers delightfully across obstacles placed in its path, riveting the attention of onlookers. For three minutes of game time, all Concealment, Etiquette, Imposture, Quick Fingers, Seduction and Stealth rolls made within visual range of the jiggling bug gain a +1 bonus.

What It Costs: 1



JUST AMULET OF VIRTUOUS REFLECTION

What It Looks Like: a pendant, usually nondescript

What It Does: When targeted by spell, cantrap, enchanted item or any other non-sandestin magical, contest your Defense vs. the user's Magic. If you win, you have grabbed your amulet in time and the magic targets its user instead of you.

What It Costs: 2



LACCODEL'S PROTECTIVE RUNE

What It Looks Like: a bracelet or pendant marked with an arcane sigil

What It Does: Ignore all effects of any magic, including sandestin magic, on your person. If you were the sole target of the magic, it goes off without effect. Spells are still discarded; magical enchantment costs are still paid.

What It Costs: 3



LAUGHING MASK

What It Looks Like: a bronze or copper brooch styled like a laughing face

What It Does: Whenever another player gains 3 refresh tokens for well-placed tagline use, you gain 1 refresh token.

What It Costs: 0



KHADIL'S REDOUBTABLE GUARDIAN TALISMAN VERSUS MAGICAL HARM

What It Looks Like: a palm-sized talisman

What It Does: Ignore a magical effect that injures or kills its target.

What It Costs: 1



LIVE BOOTS

What It Looks Like: a pair of leather boots; on close inspection, can be seen to breathe like a living creature

What It Does: you can run, walk or gallop with the strength and endurance of a horse. Athletics successes may be required to achieve useful feats under these expanded limitations. Unless rested for an hour (game time) after an hour of use, the boots die and this card is discarded.

What It Costs: 1



MADSTONE

What It Looks Like: a tiger's eye gem on a bracelet or pendant

What It Does: When you would otherwise suffer an injury, you may designate another PC to be injured instead. The next time that PC is injured during the current session, you are injured instead. May not be used during the last hour of a session.

What It Costs: 1



☞ Magic: Enchanted Items ☞

MARK OF PERUSAL

What It Looks Like: a soft leather bookmark

What It Does: When placed in a book, wrapped around a scroll or laid upon a document, the bookmark transmits the entire written contents to your mind. You may call any portion of them in precise detail for the next hour of game time.

What It Costs: 1



MOTES OF EXIGENT SOCIAL RESCUE

What It Looks Like: a fine multicolored powder, in a container of your choice

What It Does: When blown into the face of another person, that person forgets an unsuccessful social interaction with you, provided that it that occurred no more than five minutes ago. The target's basic attitude toward you reverts to what it was before the interaction. The rest of the target's memories reform themselves to conform as much as possible to what really happened, minus your regrettable gaffe. Unless countered by other magical means, the target's amnesia becomes permanent.

What It Costs: 1



MULGARTH'S DAMPENING RUNE

What It Looks Like: a bracelet or amulet marked with an occult sign

What It Does: For the next ten minutes of game time, it is impossible for any character within 60 ft of you to use an enchanted item with a What It Costs value greater than 0.

What It Costs: 1



OBJECT OF INFINITE RECONFIGURATION

What It Looks Like: in its default state, a metal bar as long and thick as your hand

What It Does: Mold the item into any tool or implement. Restrictions: i) maximum weight 1 lb; ii) maximum length 8 inches; iii) any moving parts must work on externally-applied muscle power only; iv) may not be shaped into a weapon or piece of armor.

What It Costs: 1



OSIRANT'S IMPUDENT MONOCLE

What It Looks Like: a monocle, framed in ormolu

What It Does: For sixty seconds, see exactly what a living creature within 60 feet of you is seeing. During this time you do not see what you would normally see.

What It Costs: 1



PENDANT OF TEMPORAL MONITORING

What It Looks Like: a tasteful pendant

What It Does: Turns orange whenever anyone using the Spell of Temporal Stasis comes within 5 feet, or as soon as you stir from the effect of the Interminable Interim spell.

What It Costs: 0



PERIAPT OF ALL-SEEING

What It Looks Like: an amulet, often of crystal or mirrored glass

What It Does: See the reality beneath any illusion or magical disguise, such as the spells Enchantment of Another's Face or Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth.

What It Costs: 1



POWDER OF ADMIRABLE ASSISTANCE

What It Looks Like: an off-white talc, in a container of your choice

What It Does: Blow this powder onto a creature or entity as it performs a task. It does not have to roll, instead getting an Illustrious Success.

What It Costs: 1



Scent of Subtle Unpleasantness

What It Looks Like: a bottled perfume

What It Does: When placed on the skin of a living person, inspires any other person who would otherwise couple with that person postpone the event until an unspecified future time. The victim's partners can't pinpoint a reason for the sudden loss of ardor. The effect lasts for an hour of real time or a day of game time, whichever comes first. Applying the scent may require a Quick Fingers roll, to avoid spilling it on yourself.

What It Costs: 1



TABLET OF SUFFICIENT NOURISHMENT

What It Looks Like: a square metal or ceramic tablet, typically worn as a pendant

What It Does: transforms any inedible organic matter into a like amount of (barely) edible food

What It Costs: 1



☞ Magic: Enchanted Items ☞

TALC TO OBSCURE THE VISIBLE

What It Looks Like: an off-gray powder

What It Does: Dust this powder onto an object small enough to fit in your palm. For half an hour of real time or a day of game time, it becomes invisible to everyone except for yourself.

What It Costs: 1



TALISMAN TO REVEAL THE HIDDEN

What It Looks Like: an amulet, often styled as a lens

What It Does: Emits a tone whenever any magically disguised or invisible entity is within 15 ft.

What It Costs: 0



TRANSCENDENT EAR CLIP

What It Looks Like: a bronze or copper clip attached to the outer ear

What It Does: Use Perception to listen in on a conversation you know to be taking place anywhere within half a mile, despite barriers and spatial separation. The cost is still paid even if you are incorrect and the specified speakers are not currently talking to one another.

What It Costs: 1



VAPOR OF SILENCE

What It Looks Like: A silver pyramid, one inch high. Holes on its sides emit a fine, cool mist.

What It Does: Prevents a designated character from speaking for five minutes of real time. If used on a PC, the player is forbidden to talk as well.

What It Costs: 2



VERSATILE KEY

What It Looks Like: a brass skeleton key

What It Does: Cause any unlocked lock within 60 ft to lock, or any locked lock within 60 ft to unlock.

What It Costs: 1



WHIRLAWAY

What It Looks Like: a splendid carriage standing on elaborately decorated wooden legs

What It Does: on instructions from occupant, comfortably conveys up to six occupants and reasonable baggage over any territory, at the speed of a swift flying pelgrane. Can go anywhere on Earth in a day or two. Overland travel only.

What It Costs: 1 per trip. After any stop, a new expenditure is required to impel it on again.

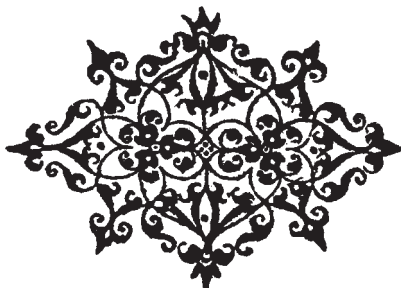


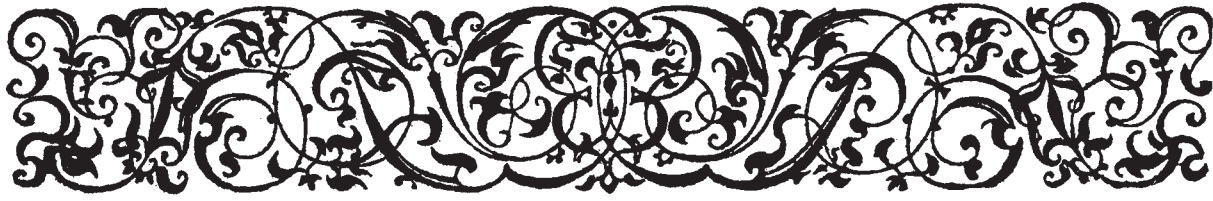
WOOLPACK OF BENEFICIAL HARVEST

What It Looks Like: A gilded dodecahedron. Pinpoint holes emit a whirling, cloudy vapor.

What It Does: Designate another PC and an ability. The next time that PC uses the ability in an action or contest, add all of the pool points spent from that ability to your pool in the same ability.

What It Costs: 1





Running the Game

Dying Earth games are fast and free-wheeling. They draw on the Game Moderator's skill to improvise fun obstacles to the character's goals, personal and collective, while keeping the action moving forward.



ACTION AND REACTION

Just as the game system builds a series of moves and counter-moves into the core of its resolution system, scenarios are built around actions and reactions.

The scenario creates the potential for forward movement on multiple fronts. It gives each player both a personal and collective goal to work towards. The tension between the two goals generates story complications. More importantly, the goals, once established, place the responsibility for advancing the story on the players. They know what they want, and must scheme to get it.

Plotting becomes player-driven. They act, and you react. In concert with the wild swings of fate dictated by the die results, you find ways to put amusing but surmountable obstacles in the PCs' paths as they attempt to realize their schemes.

Players also act and react with one another. The persuasion system allows players to convince each others' characters to take ridiculous actions. Some scenario goals put the players in direct contention with one another. Even when they're cooperating to a common end, self-destructive behavior required by failed temptation rolls creates amusing conflicts between PCs. Often the most entertaining stretches of a Dying Earth session are the ones where the players interact with one another in character, with minimal intervention from you.

Scenarios may provide certain scenes as fallback measures when the players fail to take the lead. Most times you won't need them. When it's not clear what happens next, determine which of the players has last had a chance to act or do something memorable. Ask that player the simple question:

"So now what are you up to?"

(This rephrasing of the standard RPG question "So now what do you do?" serves as an empowering hint, unleashing the player's perhaps suppressed urge toward underhandedness and clever dealing.)

Your challenge is more likely to be to keep up with unexpected schemes they decide to launch. There is no scenario devious enough to compete with a group of roleplaying gamers, so be ready to keep up.

When all else fails, look at the list of temptations, pick the one the least active player is most vulnerable to, and place a tantalizingly related obstacle in the group's path.

READING SCENARIOS

Adventures for other story-oriented RPGs may read like stories or screenplays you then interpret and modify in play, Dying Earth scenarios are presented as a series of building blocks that you construct into a story on the fly. Though less entertaining to read beforehand, they come to life in play, by giving your players the space to take charge and drive the narrative.

Scenarios provide a very broad structure and a series of springboards to inspire both the player's actions and your reactions. They consist of the following elements:

Running the Game

- ✦ **The Setting:** This section describes the time period, genre, and place in which the story occurs. In more exotic or imaginary settings, additional background material may be added, allowing you to refer to its unique details. Expect to elaborate further setting details as you go along; Dying Earth scenarios are too short to fully flesh out entire invented worlds.
- ✦ **Character Cards:** These not only provide abilities and ratings for the characters, but the basic attitudes and personal goals that give them reasons to launch schemes and drive the story.
- ✦ **Relationship Characters:** As named on each player's Relationship card, these characters provide a short-cut to interaction within the setting. Because the PCs know these characters and can expect at least somewhat favorable treatment from them, they can use them to gain information and further their plans.
- ✦ **Other Supporting Characters:** These characters usually represent the opposition the PCs face in furthering their collective goal, and maybe their personal goal, too. They may be outright rivals of the PCs, or less hostile gatekeepers standing between them and their objectives. Scenarios where the PCs are expected to more or less work together require a more expansive roster of these characters than ones in which the PCs' main rivals are the other PCs.
- ✦ **Names:** A short series of names for people, places or things you may need when introducing new story elements on the fly.
- ✦ **The Opener:** A starting scene that introduces the setting and collective goals.
- ✦ **Scenes and Situations:** Notes on possible events which may take place. These are usually fallback events you can reach for when your players have grown stuck, or, conversely, have rocketed through their goals with surprising speed. Given a choice between using one of these story suggestions and going where the players lead you, always set these aside for the uncharted waters of player-driven narrative.
- ✦ **The Closer:** Description of the big finish which will probably wrap up your session's story—unless, of course, the players have taken you somewhere completely unanticipated.

INTRODUCING THE CAST

After component cards are handed out and trades completed, have the players read their character names, descriptions and personal goals to the rest of the group. Remind them that, when it comes to secrets and goals, they're expected to separate what they know from what their characters know.

IN CONCERT AND AT ODDS

Make extensive use of the cutaway technique, where members of the group split up to achieve their own ends. This comes into play when they're intentionally working at cross-purposes, but also when they divide their efforts to achieve their common goal. PCs may go off on their own, or split off into small teams.

Focus on each separate player/team in short bursts. Don't be afraid to cut out of a scene in the middle and then come back to it. (In film terminology, this



✂ Running the Game ✂

is called “crosscutting.”)

When a player seems momentarily stumped as to what to do next, cut to another player/scene to give him time to find a reaction. When a scene is losing energy, cut away. When it’s picking up energy, stick with it.

Keep players whose characters are not present interested by introducing plot threads that will impact their characters later.

Don’t worry too much about enforcing players’ unawareness of scenes they didn’t take part in. Allow players to keep their actions secret when it makes a difference to the story—for example, when a PC is betraying the others. If players try to use knowledge their characters don’t have to the detriment of another PC, rule out these actions as out of bounds. However, if they cleverly engineer their actions so that they make internal sense at every step, and are still able to discover their rivals’ secrets, well, all’s fair in love and Dying Earth.

In most cases, though, PCs working on their own will plan to fill in their partners on the results of their actions. Don’t spend time having the characters recap each other on events the players already know. Instead, take it as read that this repetitive dialogue has taken place between scenes.

IT WON’T ALL MAKE THE CUT

Each scenario contains way more material than you can fit into a single four-hour story. By providing you and the players with multiple elements suggesting many different plot directions, the scenarios provide a foundation for improvisation. Chances are that only three or so of the Relationship characters will show up, and that only one of them will get enough spotlight time to make a memorable impression. You may call for very few Resistance rolls in one scenario, while requiring them constantly in another. This may prove true even within the same scenario, as run for different groups. If your players fret at the end of a session over their unused plot threads, assure them that this is all part of the plan.

As long as the story you create together is fun and keeps moving forward, there’s no shame in leaving possible plot elements undeveloped. To heck with the road not taken! Dying Earth is about the choices you do make.

BUILDING TO THE CLOSER

Scenarios give you a certain predictable shape to work within by proposing a likely big finish in which the characters’ goal or goals are either realized or ironically squashed. Sometimes the personal goals come to fruition at the closer, sometimes not. Alternately, the closer might take story one step further by showing you the consequences after the major goal is achieved.

On rare occasions the players might completely hijack the scenario, seizing on a new goal not on their component cards. Though this may tax your improvisatory powers by taking you into uncharted waters, be careful not to squelch this surprising turn of events. React to the players, as always, keeping an eye on the clock and envisioning possible big finishes that might satisfyingly wrap up this strange new story during its final half hour or so.

Final Comeuppances

In one shot scenarios, in which the PCs face the threat of death, and possibly threaten others with death, you may wish to mete out final comeuppances. These allow the main characters to meet blackly humorous demises, satisfyingly restoring moral order in the wake of their unscrupulous hijinks.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Our Dying Earth scenarios are written to be fun to read, and to evoke the spirit of the delightful original stories. Resist the temptation to read stretches of them out loud. Instead, paraphrase and extemporize. It’s more important to engage your players in an extemporaneous conversation than to recite our drollery verbatim.

Running the Game

During the scenario's final scenes, feel free to introduce contests that suspend the standard system of combat and injury. Final comeuppance contests result in immediate death on any failed result, with no rerolls permitted. Restrict this grim fate to situations where it will seem amusing or thematically appropriate. Characters should meet final comeuppances when they've behaved callously or scandalously, for falling prey to their temptations, or by acting foolishly. Do not apply final comeuppance to properly heroic characters, or those who seem otherwise undeserving of ignominious destruction.

You might also consider non-fatal but bleak and ironic fates. At the end of Eyes of the Overworld, Cugel suffers a reversal that undoes all of his progress toward his overall goal, which he then spends the entirety of Cugel's Saga pursuing all over again.

REFRESHING FOR SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Supporting characters are eligible to refresh some depleted pools after they reappear in the story after an absence of fifteen minutes or more, in real time. Roll a die, which cannot be rerolled.

- ✦ Hair's-Breadth Success: the character refreshes one pool of your choice.
- ✦ Ordinary Success: the character refreshes two pools of your choice. (In both this and the above instance, pick the pools you imagine they're most likely to use.)
- ✦ Impressive Success: the character refreshes all pools.

SERIES PLAY

You may find that a one-shot session is so much fun that your players demand to extend it into a series of episodic adventures. If your players are already Dying Earth fans, they may agree in advance to an extended, or campaign-style series of games. Players weaned on more traditionally rules- and combat-oriented RPGs, or who prefer a semi-serious tone, may need a self-contained intro episode to inveigle them in to a longer series.

Improvement

At the end of each scenario, each player gains a number of improvement points to spend on raising ability ratings:

- ✦ 1 point for each session attended
- ✦ 1 point if the group, according to your judgment, achieved its collective goal
- ✦ 1 point if the character achieved his or her personal goal

Each point can be spent to raise a single rating by 1. Raising your lowest-rated resistance by 1 costs 3 improvement points. Points gained from a single scenario must be spent on separate abilities.

Players may add abilities they don't have, starting with a rating of 1, provided that the ability appears in at least one other player's stack of component cards. Players should be prepared to explain how they gained abilities that seem implausible for their characters. These explanations can reach back into the character's past if need be. It's possible that the character learned the ability long ago

WHY NO CHARACTER BUILD SYSTEM?

By this point you may be skimming through the book looking for the section where we show you how to run games where the players build their characters from scratch. Alas, your quest is fruitless. Even for series play, we strongly recommend starting with randomly assembled characters created from component cards. And by "strongly recommend", we mean "provide no other option."

Where other games seek to increase the identification between player and character, successful Dying Earth play requires a level of detachment. Players find it easier to watch from a mordant remove as their characters get betrayed, make fools of themselves, fall prey to temptation, and are persuaded to act against their self-interest, when they're given characters to play. The act of carefully creating a PC increases the sense of protectiveness the player feels toward his fictional proxy. Created PCs are also likely to draw on power fantasy tropes, reflecting the vicarious desire to be cool, masterful, and dangerous. Dying Earth sessions undercut all of these impulses, making their protagonists impulsive, wheedling, and deserving of comeuppance. A character build system inevitably creates expectations that the game would then disappoint. Card assignment lets the players know what they're signing up for from the jump.

Even though players get more input in describing them, replacement PCs (see below) suffer less from this problem, because the convention of detachment between player and character has already been established.

but is only now revealing it.

Restoring Burned Relationships

When a Relationship is burned (p. 28) it may be restored in a subsequent session. The PC must perform a favor that noticeably furthers one of the contact's top three goals. Then he must successfully contest his Persuade against the ex-contact's Rebuff, arguing that he can be trusted from now on. A Relationship burned for a second time can never be restored.

Refreshing Between Scenarios

Characters begin each new scenario with all pools equal to their ratings. GMs choosing to run series without clear divisions between scenarios should allow all abilities to refresh after suitably long pauses in the action, as circumstances appear to warrant.

Transitions Between Scenarios

Players steeped in traditional RPGs may expect to wander about from place to place, judiciously choosing the trouble they get into. Prepare them for a cold bath of indifferent reality! Here each new episode starts with the characters already knee-deep in a dilemma laid out for them in the Opener.

To smooth out the narrative between self-contained episodes, invite the players to sketch in a quickly summarized wrap-up of any dangling threads from the previous scenario. These explain how they extricated themselves from any seemingly permanent impediments, only to arrive at the new set of problems they are about to face. Allow each player to contribute in turn, asking each to add a twist or reversal to the previous player's statement. Although third-person narration certainly suffices, it's often more fun to ask the players to speak in character.

(If there are no dangling threads to resolve, skip right to the Opener.)

Use this set of scripted questions as a starting point to customize from:

When last we saw [insert name of character], he was stuck in a seemingly insurmountable situation. How did he get out of it?

[if previous player explained only his character's extrication] And how did you get out?

[if previous idea has all characters extricated together] Unfortunately, you then made an lamentable error which put the group in hot water once again. What was it?

And how did you get the group out of that problem?

But then disaster struck again. What kind of disaster?

And how did you get out of that?

Final questions may nudge the characters toward the situation portrayed in the Opener.

Once you've engaged each of the players, transition to the Opener.

This example transitions a group from their ironic comeuppance at the end of "Hotel Grand Perdusz", readying them for "The Vale of Crypts"

Fully embracing the spirit of the first scenario, none of the players made any effort whatsoever to escape their forced indenture in Urbotast's establishment. Instead Paco (playing Fley), Jorge (Ilber), Jenifer (Prisurp), and Amanda (Quens) concentrated solely on establishing rank within the staff hierarchy. Sublimely droll as this choice might be, permanent residence at the hotel would prevent them from becoming caravan guards at the beginning of "The Vale of Crypts"



Running the Game

“When last we saw these characters,” you begin, “they seemed to be permanently engaged at the Hotel Grand Perdusz. Yet now they are ready to embark on an expedition into the Valley of the Graven Tombs. Tell me, Fley, how did you and the others finally break with Urbotast and leave his service?”

“Most curiously,” says Paco, as Fley, “we gave no thought to escape. This lapse is especially odd in my case, as I somehow resigned myself to my role as mucker. I can only blame something in the water that drained me of my usual zest for life. Fortunately a magician named Krent demanded that Urbotast transfer our indentures to him, as compensation for an unspecified wrong.”

Jorge jumps in, saving you from having to prompt him. “I am sad to say that it is I who destroyed his magical robe during the laundering process. Not my fault—Krent ought to have specified that it was a supernatural garment.”

“So you became indentured to Krent instead. Prisurp, how did you get out of that indenture?”

“A simple matter of creeping away during the night. Krent’s supernatural hold on us proved much less ironclad than Urbotast’s.”

This is enough bridge story to get you where you need to go, but you’ve left Amanda out. So you introduce a question that might add a touch of interesting trouble to the upcoming scenario, building the relationships between the characters: “And Quens, it was during this escape that one of the others here did something you still find unforgivable. Who was it and what did they do?”

Amanda sniffs with well-acted dudgeon. “I got away with a valuable magical relic justly purloined from Krent’s rucksack. During our flight, Prisurp bartered it to a pelgrane without my consent.”

“Bartered it for our lives, you mean!” Paco improvises.

Amanda crosses her arms. “Hmpf! You might have given it something of lesser import, such as your left leg.”

This sparks a riffing exchange in which all of the players take part. You wait until it starts to run out of steam, and then start the opener.

Where scenarios grant characters different spells or enchanted items, you might want to explain how they came to lose their old ones and gain their new ones during the transition. For newly gained magic or item cards, it also works to have characters explain their acquisitions as asides in the main action. They can then refer to the events laid out in the transition, embellishing as necessary:

“Oh yes,” says Ilber, explaining why he now has a Periapt of All-seeing, “I acquired it from Krent before Quens stole his vastly inferior item. I have been reluctant until now to mention it, seeing the bitterness it has kindled between him and Prisurp, whose exchange with the pelgrane still to me seems entirely warranted.”

Replacement Relationships

Where characters regularly move from one place to another, the GM switches out their relationships, creating replacement relationship characters with each new destination or scenario.

Replacement Characters

When a character dies or is otherwise conclusively removed from the storyline, the player creates a replacement. The character invents the character’s name and a flimsy skein of backstory as superficial as the one that preceded it. As needed, the GM assists to ensure consistency with the setting. The player takes responsibility for explaining how the new character connects to the ongoing storyline as a new or newly revealed member of the group.

General Abilities: The new character has as many points in general abilities as the old one did. The player distributes these between as many abilities as desired. Only general abilities appearing on the previous character’s identity card, or on the identity card of other PCs, may be chosen. No rating may exceed the value of the highest-rated ability on the former character’s identity card.

Persuade, Rebuff, Attack and Defense: The player may keep the previous character’s values in these four abilities, or redistribute them between the four abilities. In settings where Attack and Defense abilities do not appear, they may swap Persuade and Rebuff or leave them as is.

When he meets his untimely (if well-deserved) end, Brothorp has Persuade 9, Rebuff 6, Attack 8, and Defense 6. His player, Ian, creates a new character called Grinox, redistributing the values as follows: Persuade 8, Rebuff 8, Attack 6, Defense 6. He’d prefer to give himself a rating of 7 in each ability, but is only allowed to move the values between abilities without altering the numbers themselves.

Players may assign new styles to any or all of these abilities. As each style appears once in the initial batch of cards, switching to new styles may mean that there will be certain styles that no one in the group is able to trump.

Relationships: The player chooses three Relationship characters from the six currently available. Keeping the three current contacts is perfectly acceptable. The previous character’s three rating numbers, which remain unchanged, are distributed among the three chosen characters .

❧ Running the Game ❧

Resistances: The player may keep the previous character's Resistances or redistribute their values without changing the numbers—with the exception of Resistances rated at 1, which must remain as is. Ω ratings may be reassigned.

Brothorp's Resistances were Arrogance 4, Avarice 1, Gourmandism Ω, Indolence 6, Pettifoggery 2 and Rakishness 6. For the new character, Ian must keep the Avarice at 1, but may redistribute the other values. He does this as follows: Arrogance 6, Gourmandism 2, Indolence 4, Pettifoggery 6, Rakishness Ω.



AIDS TO THE EXTEMPORANEOUS

The unpredictability of Dying Earth being what it is, you may find yourself having to invent names of individuals or places on the fly. Poach names from these lists as needed, keeping track of which one's you've already used.

PERSONS AND ENTITIES

Acklin	Erott	Isasch	Poorel	Tyddym
Arley	Eutron	Istian	Pulstak	Uild
Arranth	Fareth	Jabru	Pytobin	Uktos
Beezbo	Filreed	Jena	Qualp	Ulford
Briicab	Flamant	Jiplin	Quile	Ullis
Brovinia	Frunz	Jowler	Raeme	Vallur
Bukk	Frunza	Krunz	Ridbil	Vasilak
Cariar	Fulang	Lanora	Rispoin	Vitza
Clobis	Garmund	Lanta	Rontral	Vlench
Coolbin	Garrigh	Macvoy	Sareyn	Vores
Daatro	Gethis	Mintwil	Schim	Vransk
Dellen	Gllont	Mintz	Sejeg	Vrendig
Dentlur	Grabble	Nedraag	Sible	Walb
Diac	Gurocker	Neimpold	Sirio	Walsey
Dirader	Gurum	Nindru	Spiner	Wenk
Dlamans	Gwirmus	Octk	Spirz	Willur
Dlarthin	Gygax	Oehler	Teej	Xene
Eddis	Harelin	Ohnkyl	Telio	Xirid
Eelhive	Hosk	Olorous	Thirl	Xotto
Effjian	Hython	Oodman	Thobister	Yanth
Ekkas	Ickva	Orberek	Thrabaster	Yictin
Ektite	Ingol	Osveuld	Threbedo	Yuriz
Elson	Ingrick	Panid	Thunn	

PLACES

Attarel	Espa	Ippen	Oyerl	Thestaque
Aubal	Flach	Kwavair	Polion	Thyss
Balg	Flane	Lauf	Roggen	Uminy
Belkodane	Frabenly	Logel	Schwir	Vispel Downs
Bugiller	Giboll	Montaaque	Seefale	Vlatonn
Colmis	Grisbine	Namb	Seeln	Wettol
Dolsh	Herbway	Ner'aa	Thallauch	
Eguis	Holitz	Orris	The Clench	
Emenos	Inger	Ostoump	The Pale Thrust	



The Hotel Grand Perdusz

In this introductory scenario for Cugel-level PCs, our heroes wake up in competing states of disarray after an evening they barely remember. They stir to consciousness in the salon of the splendid Hotel Grand Perdusz, suffering the telltale after-effects of an apocalyptic carouse. Not least among these is amnesia, the fog of which gradually lifts as they navigate the scenario's obstacles. Each of them discovers that he's missing an item he had on his person when the festivities began—often one of great or even fatal import.

It soon comes to light that they have unknowingly abetted in the escape from the hotel of its entire staff. Until their abrupt exit, they had been indentured to its proprietor, the forbidding magician Urbotast. He informs the PCs that, thanks to a provision invisibly appended to the terms of service agreement they all signed during check-in, they are now obligated to serve eternally as replacements to the missing servants. They are to choose among themselves who is to be the relatively advantaged concierge, his somewhat less lofty assistant, the ordinary drudges, and the utterly subjugated muckers.

Or they could try to escape...



Character Tracker

This character tracker records the characters' defining temptation and also the item that has been removed from their persons, presumably by the fleeing staff.

PLAYER	CHARACTER	TEMPTATION	THE MISSING OBJECT
	Fley		
	Ilber		
	Prisurp		
	Quens		
	Thurles		
	Venck		

The Hotel Grand Perduusz

Characters

Thurles

Musterer of Wherewithal

Through sheer determination can any obstacle be overcome, as surely as the oceans over billions of years decisively erode a shore. You stick to this credo inerrantly, as it was inscribed to you in your father's journal, moments before he fatally hurled himself into the River Sune.

General Abilities: Appraisal 4, Athletics 8, Concealment 6, Craftsmanship 3, Driving 6, Engineering 1, Etiquette 3, Gambling 2, Imposture 2, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 1, Perception 1, Physician 2, Quick Fingers 2, Riding 3, Scuttlebutt 5, Seamanship 5, Seduction 6, Stealth 2, Stewardship 6, Tracking 1, Wherewithal 6

Prisurp

Individual of Surpassing Merit

Though born of humble circumstance, you have repeatedly risen to positions of loft and exalt. That persons of low character have time and again dislodged you from them is no reflection on your wisdom or tenacity, but merely a regrettable confirmation of the era's ever-degenerating mores.

General Abilities: Appraisal 2, Athletics 7, Concealment 4, Craftsmanship 1, Driving 4, Engineering 5, Etiquette 1, Gambling 4, Imposture 6, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 5, Perception 5, Physician 6, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 1, Scuttlebutt 3, Seamanship 3, Seduction 2, Stealth 6, Stewardship 4, Tracking 3, Wherewithal 8

Fley

Person of Distinction

To enumerate your many signal traits would be less than modest. That you have experienced a series of recent setbacks, and thus been set on a road of vagabondage and adventure, in no way undermines the fundamental superiority of your nature.

General Abilities: Appraisal 6, Athletics 6, Concealment 2, Craftsmanship 5, Driving 2, Engineering 3, Etiquette 5, Gambling 6, Imposture 4, Living Rough 6, Pedantry 3, Perception 3, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 6, Riding 5, Scuttlebutt 1, Seamanship 1, Seduction 4, Stealth 4, Stewardship 2, Tracking 5, Wherewithal 7

Quens

Master of Fortune

Where others complain incessantly of their misfortunes, you recognize that it is better to plot one's next advance than to mourn over prior calamity. Therefore you strictly limit time spent in complaint and cavil to a maximum of three and a half hours per day—except, of course, in the face of current injustice, where bold remonstrance always offers hope of remedy.

General Abilities: Appraisal 3, Athletics 7, Concealment 5, Craftsmanship 2, Driving 5, Engineering 6, Etiquette 2, Gambling 3, Imposture 1, Living Rough 3, Pedantry 6, Perception 6, Physician 1, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 4, Seamanship 4, Seduction 1, Stealth 1, Stewardship 5, Tracking 2, Wherewithal 8

Ilber

Feather on the Wings of Fate

Your life to date might be compared to a twisted and knotted skein. As often as you achieve greatness, you see it snatched away from you. Yet you remain confident that the final and settled reward for your dauntless perspicacity waits just around the corner. You pray only that you receive your due before the sun completes its inexorable dwindle.

General Abilities: Appraisal 1, Athletics 6, Concealment 3, Craftsmanship 6, Driving 3, Engineering 4, Etiquette 6, Gambling 5, Imposture 5, Living Rough 1, Pedantry 4, Perception 4, Physician 5, Quick Fingers 5, Riding 6, Scuttlebutt 2, Seamanship 2, Seduction 3, Stealth 5, Stewardship 3, Tracking 4, Wherewithal 7

Venck

Indisputable Worthy

A list of your achievements, not to mention the many latent qualities on which you have yet to overtly draw, would tax the ears of any listener. Yet when others dare to raise the present raggedness of your condition, you may feel sadly obliged to supply a countervailing narrative. In the end, it is better to be thought a bore than to withhold crucial points of edification.

General Abilities: Appraisal 5, Athletics 8, Concealment 1, Craftsmanship 4, Driving 1, Engineering 2, Etiquette 4, Gambling 1, Imposture 3, Living Rough 5, Pedantry 2, Perception 2, Physician 3, Quick Fingers 1, Riding 4, Scuttlebutt 6, Seamanship 6, Seduction 5, Stealth 3, Stewardship 1, Tracking 6, Wherewithal 6



The Hotel Grand Perdusz Persuade

Persuade (Glib) 8

Trumps: Pure-Hearted

Is Trumped By: Obtuse

“Shall we then wave away all nugatory objections?”

“I accept command, as you so implicitly insist.”

Persuade (Eloquent) 7

Trumps: Contrary

Is Trumped By: Wary

“I ask you but one question, sirs: are we men, or are we man-vasps?”

“You are of too elevated a sensibility to utter such a threat, which I therefore impute to ventriloquism.”

Persuade (Obfuscatory) 8

Trumps: Lawyerly

Is Trumped By: Penetrating

“The law of Chorank governs here. Your rights are forfeit.”

“Sadly, I am restrained by attunement with the seventh emanation.”

Persuade (Forthright) 7

Trumps: Penetrating

Is Trumped By: Lawyerly

“Quell this outlandishness!”

“Prepare your cardrums for the percussive shock of truth!”

Persuade (Charming) 9

Trumps: Wary

Is Trumped By: Contrary

“Never have my cockles been so well heated.”

“This discussion would be sharpened by the contents of yon decanter.”

Persuade (Intimidating) 9

Trumps: Obtuse

Is Trumped By: Pure-Hearted

“Reverse course, or the slapping will commence.”

“Have I yet discoursed on the lethality of my spellcraft?”

❧ The Hotel Grand Perdusz ❧
Rebuff

Rebuff 6 (Pure-Hearted)

Trumps: Intimidating

Is Trumped By: Glib

“Beneath that jaded veneer, a faint pulse of virtue must surely beat.”

Rebuff 6 (Obtuse)

Trumps: Glib

Is Trumped By: Intimidating

“While you spoke, I briefly dozed.”

Rebuff 6 (Penetrating)

Trumps: Obfuscatory

Is Trumped By: Fortright

“Were you in my slippers, you’d do the same. Wait, are those my slippers?”

Rebuff 6 (Wary)

Trumps: Eloquent

Is Trumped By: Charming

“Though your consonants seem faultless, your vowels move me to profound mistrust.”

Rebuff 6 (Contrary)

Trumps: Charming

Is Trumped By: Eloquent

“Be assured that I reject this on principle alone, taking no heed of petty realities.”

Rebuff 6 (Lawyerly)

Trumps: Fortright

Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory

“Barring a signed agreement, I have no choice but to obstruct.”

❧ The Hotel Grand Perdusz ❧
Attack

Attack 8 (Strength)
Trumps: Parry
Is Trumped By: Vexation
Weapons: cudgel, longbow

Attack 6 (Finesse)
Trumps: Sure-Footedness
Is Trumped By: Cunning
Weapons: rapier, throwing stars

























Attack 8 (Caution)
Trumps: Vexation
Is Trumped By: Parry
Weapons: rapier, bow

Attack 7 (Cunning)
Trumps: Intuition
Is Trumped By: Sure-Footedness
Weapons: for close fighting, rely on any found object you can grab; throwing knife

Attack 6 (Speed)
Trumps: Dodge
Is Trumped By: Misdirection
Weapons: Rapier, sling

Attack 7 (Ferocity)
Trumps: Misdirection
Is Trumped By: Dodge
Weapons: Axe, rock

❧ The Hotel Grand Perdusz ❧
Defense

  Defense 6 (Sure-Footedness) Trumps: Cunning Is Trumped By: Finesse  	  Defense 5 (Parry) Trumps: Caution Is Trumped By: Strength  
  Defense 7 (Dodge) Trumps: Ferocity Is Trumped By: Speed  	  Defense 5 (Intuition) Trumps: Finesse Is Trumped By: Cunning  
  Defense 6 (Misdirection) Trumps: Speed Is Trumped By: Ferocity  	  Defense 7 (Vexation) Trumps: Strength Is Trumped By: Caution  

✂ The Hotel Grand Perdusz ✂
Relationships

<p>Relationships: Bluünt, a chug 2 Cha'ast, an imprisoned deodand 4 Kelkibur, a sandestin 3</p>	<p>Relationships: Bluünt, a chug 2 Kelkibur, a sandestin 4 Moutanc, an imp 3</p>
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<p>Relationships: Kelkibur, a sandestin 3 Releen, a lissome wench 3 Moutanc, an imp 4</p>	<p>Relationships: Yurbus, an automaton 4 Cha'ast, an imprisoned deodand 3 Moutanc, an imp 3</p>
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<p>Relationships: Bluünt, a chug 2 Yurbus, an automaton 2 Releen, a lissome wench 4</p>	<p>Relationships: Cha'ast, an imprisoned deodand 3 Releen, a lissome wench 2 Yurbus, an automaton 3</p>
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❧ The Hotel Grand Perdusz ❧
Resistances

<p>Key Trait: Arrogant</p> <p>Resistances: Avarice 4, Gourmandism 2, Indolence 4, Rakishness 7, Pettifoggery 6, Arrogance 1</p> <p>Personal Goal: To wrest the maximal fame and advantage from your present circumstance, whatever that might be.</p>	<p>Key Trait: Indolent</p> <p>Resistances: Avarice 4, Gourmandism 6, Indolence 1, Rakishness 4, Pettifoggery 7, Arrogance 2</p> <p>Personal Goal: To wrest the maximal comfort and advantage from your present circumstance, whatever that might be.</p>
<p>Key Trait: Greedy</p> <p>Resistances: Avarice 1, Gourmandism 7, Indolence 4, Rakishness 6, Pettifoggery 2, Arrogance 4</p> <p>Personal Goal: To wrest the maximal wealth and advantage from your present circumstance, whatever that might be.</p>	<p>Key Trait: Rakish</p> <p>Resistances: Avarice 2, Gourmandism 4, Indolence 7, Rakishness 1, Pettifoggery 4, Arrogance 6</p> <p>Personal Goal: To wrest the maximal carnal reward and miscellaneous advantage from your present circumstance, whatever that might be.</p>
<p>Key Trait: Gluttonous</p> <p>Resistances: Avarice 7, Gourmandism 1, Indolence 4, Rakishness 2, Pettifoggery 4, Arrogance 4</p> <p>Personal Goal: To wrest the maximal intoxicating pleasures and miscellaneous advantage from your present circumstance, whatever that might be.</p>	<p>Key Trait: Pettifoggery</p> <p>Resistances: Avarice 6, Gourmandism 4, Indolence 2, Rakishness 3, Pettifoggery 1, Arrogance 7</p> <p>Personal Goal: To wrest the maximal pedantic authority and miscellaneous advantage from your present circumstance, whatever that might be.</p>

❧ The Hotel Grand Perduşz ❧

The Missing Object

The Pandectic

When you checked in to the Hotel Grand Perduşz, you had in your possession an object which, in the grim light of a gray new morning, seems to have gone mysteriously missing.

Description: A curious instrument of copper and brass, resembling the offspring of an astrolabe and a protractor.

Destination: You were hired by the curio merchant Andus of Tustvold to deliver the Pandectic to Balkwarus, a scholar of Kaiin. The penalty clause in your contract contained the phrase “on pain of death.”

Why you stopped here: Upon the recommendation of a curious talking boar.

The Black Prism

When you checked in to the Hotel Grand Perduşz, you had in your possession an object which, in the grim light of a gray new morning, seems to have gone mysteriously missing.

Description: A strange elongated triangle of a chilly crystalline material.

Destination: You recovered this object in a vault in the island city of Pompodouro. A magician resident in the forest of Ascolais once told you he would pay you handsomely for this legendary lost object. You have no idea what it does.

Why you stopped here: on impulse, after inhaling froom pollen

The Fourth Key

When you checked in to the Hotel Grand Perduşz, you had in your possession an object which, in the grim light of a gray new morning, seems to have gone mysteriously missing.

Description: A thin key of tin, covered in brass enamel. You’ve never found a lock that it fits.

Origin: Your father gave the Fourth Key to you just before he died. He said that it would play a vital role in the salvation of the universe, and that you must hold onto it at all costs. But then your father told you a lot of things.

Why you stopped here: After extracting a discount meal coupon from the pocket of an unsuspecting mountebank.

A Toe Bell

When you checked in to the Hotel Grand Perduşz, you had in your possession an object which, in the grim light of a gray new morning, seems to have gone mysteriously missing.

Description: A small silver bell with an agreeable chiming sound, which you have worn affixed to your left shoe since you found it by a roadside years ago in Erze Damath. You’ve never regarded it as more than a trinket, rendering your sudden despondency at its absence all the more inexplicable.

Why you stopped here: On recognizing the hotel from a half-remembered dream

An Ioun Stone

When you checked in to the Hotel Grand Perduşz, you had in your possession an object which, in the grim light of a gray new morning, seems to have gone mysteriously missing.

Description: A thumb-sized precious stone of unknown type, rounded and polished smooth.

Destination: You are to deliver this to the arch-magician Ildefonse, who will in turn work magics to avert your otherwise ineluctable destiny, which is to be slowly feasted upon by a pelgrane.

Why you stopped here: On instructions of a person claiming to be an intermediary of Ildefonse, who you now suspect of impersonation

The Sword of Drung

When you checked in to the Hotel Grand Perduşz, you had in your possession an object which, in the grim light of a gray new morning, seems to have gone mysteriously missing.

Description: A curved sword-blade with oversized, ornate hilt of wysoon hide and chased platinum.

Origin: Ever since you won it during a high-stakes vok game in the gaming dens of Kaiin, this legendary pig-sticker has served as your principal weapon.

Why you stopped here: As a quick dodge, when you thought you spotted its former owner.

❧ The Hotel Grand Perdusz ❧

Your Attire

You wear variegated pantaloons. Your silk hose, embroidered in gilded thread, bears a stylized design in which a family of dragons devours one another. Neither cut nor fabric distinguishes your tastefully ruffled shirt. Upon your head you wear a floppy hat. Its band cycles through the seven colors of the rainbow according to the humidity of the surrounding air, with red at its driest and ultraverge at its wettest.

You affect rustic garb: a cloak made from the hoon-hide, trimmed in the fur of a striped glant. Your doublet is of blackest leather, superbly brought out by bright red lacing. You eschew frivolous headgear in favor of a hard leather cap, incised with a scene of battle between demons and centaurs. Observant souls sometimes point out the extreme height of your boot-heels, a detail you prefer to de-emphasize.

Fringes and taffets dangle from the hems of your voluminous cloak. Around your waist you wear a belt of aquamarine silk, fastened by a massive, square belt buckle. Clay beads of the same color terminate the many braids of your flaxen hair. To direct maximum attention to your splendid mane, you wear only a modest conical hat topped by a miniature ivory weathervane.

Every article of your clothing, from your rakishly undersized tricorne hat to pointed-toe boots, hews studiously to a monochrome aesthetic. You wear no color but puce, as you have been devoutly assured will be the fashion next year in Kaiin.

Though some eyes may drift to your box-like hat, your fur shawl, or bright yellow leggings achieving the appetizing tautness of sausage casings, you are nonetheless sure that the most memorable feature of your garb is the enormous codpiece that juts from between your legs. Made of the highest quality pewter, this impressive groin-emphasizer is exquisitely sculpted in the shape of a rampant boar. The foam flecking from its angry lips are rendered with particular distinction.

Competing fabric prints spar for supremacy across the combat ring that is your wardrobe. Upon your tunic gambol great horned beetles. Your trousers writhe with the charging horses of fierce, striped horses. Eyes of various sizes blink and widen across the folds of your cloak. Your pillbox hat is furred with the spots of a long-extinct forest antelope. Boots fashioned from the horny scales of a predatory river reptile complete the ensemble.

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Relationships

Certain of the Relationship characters have designs on others. This will either complicate the task of managing their favors, or provide the PCs with leverage as they play them off against each other.

- Bluünt wants to capture and torment Kelkibur, who hopes to escape him.
- Cha'ast wants to eat Releen, a fate she would definitely prefer to avoid.
- Moutanc tires of the many effronteries of Yurbus and wishes to see him humbled. The converse is also true.

Bluünt, a chug

Bluünt is a chug, a semi-corporeal cosmic entity that manifests in snake-like form. This sub-type of sandestin exists to control and torment other sandestins. It has come to the Hotel Grand Perdusz in search of its sandestin counterpart, Kelkibur (below), who, it correctly senses, has chosen the place as its hideout. His quest is undertaken for its own sake most of all, but also at the behest of the arch-magician Hurtiancz, who commands Bluünt with a spell of enthrallment.

Personality: In a word, monomaniacal. Bluünt's red and white stripes quiver with sadistic ecstasy at the thought of capturing and tormenting Kelkibur. Each chug has a sandestin assigned to it, and vice versa. To get his teeth on Kelkibur would be to realize, however, briefly, his existential purpose. Bluünt has no interests, no personality, beyond this overarching goal.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Goal: Capture Kelkibur. When he accomplishes this, Bluünt vanishes instantly from the hotel, taking Kelkibur with him. In an ongoing series, the PCs might later meet up again with a resentful Kelkibur, finding him sulkily indentured to Hurtiancz.

Bluünt arrived at the hotel only last night, when the old staff momentarily pierced the spell imprisoning them here. Kelkibur modified it to prevent chugs from discerning his location.

Since his appearance here, Bluünt has been unable to further pinpoint Kelkibur's location. The sandestin threw up a second shield called a Coruscation of Ill Discernment. It won't hold for long, but while it does, it stands as chief obstacle to Bluünt's goal. The harder he searches, the more enraged he becomes. If other sandestins master this magic, the existence of the chug will become unthinkable frustrating! Kelkibur must be punished!

Bluünt possesses neither means nor desire to communicate with his arch-magical master.

Sample favors: use ability for unrestrained incorporeal travel to: 1) spy on hotel activities information 2) find things

While standard sandestins can generate nearly any magical effect at will, the only serious power a chug has at its disposal is the one to attack and torture sandestins. They will argue that this makes them the mightiest beings in the universe. It does mean that Bluünt's favors are considerably limited compared to those of his quarry.

Abilities: Eavesdropping 3, Scuttlebutt 4, Persuade (Forthright) 6, Rebuff (Contrary) 4.

The PCs have no way of physically attacking a chug. Their meager magics cannot control or influence him.

Urbotast remains unaware of Bluünt's presence at the hotel (or, for that matter, Kelkibur's.) As a mere magician and not an arch-magician, the spell of chug control lies beyond his ken. The presence of either entity might vex or worry him, depending on context, if he knew about it. But there's nothing he could do to get rid of them, unless you count mundane cajoling.



Cha'ast, an imprisoned deodand

Any denizen of the Dying Earth knows the deodand—hopefully from a prudent distance—as a highly carnivorous humanoid creature combining features of wolverine, basilisk, and man. Like others of his species, Cha'ast's superbly muscled, ink-blank flesh contrasts with his snow-white hair and long, yellow fangs. Razor claws protrude from the tips of his long, sublimely sculpted fingers.

Urbotast kidnapped Cha'ast as a source of tissue samples for his vat experiments. The magician keeps him on hand as a curiosity to show off to thrill-seeking guests. The deodand can be found in a sturdy cage reinforced by a welter of arcane defenses. The cage dominates an antechamber near Urbotast's laboratory complex. Though kept carefully secured, the three

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PCs who count Cha'ast as a Relationship somehow gained access to the antechamber during the previous night's bacchanal. They retain this access until they do something to screw it up, bringing it to the attention of their new boss.

Personality: Like many deodands, Cha'ast is well-spoken, even-tempered, polite, and capable of complex reasoning. He also eats people.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory / Forthright

Goals: 1) Escape. 2) Eat Releen.

Cha'ast fears Urbotast too greatly to dare attempt revenge against him. He might acquire this goal if a PC persuaded him that it was indeed within his grasp. Depending on how that goes, chomping on his captor might surge to the top of his task list.

His terror of the magician also prevents him from wanting to eat Releen's vat-clone, Jeleen. As Urbotast's concubine, her sudden demise would certainly provoke his keeper's fury. However, he very much enjoyed the tenderness and pleasing cumin flavor of their vat-mate, Ch-eleen, who was fed to him as retribution for aiding the previous staff in their escape. He still keeps a portion of her left hand squirreled away under the straw in his cage, but won't be able to hold off his cravings for long. Cha'ast reckons that Urbotast won't punish him too harshly for eating Releen, who after all is only slated for duty as the concierge's consort.

Abilities: Athletics 14, Persuade (Glib) 6, Rebuff (Penetrating) 8, Attack (Strength) 14, Defense (Intuition) 14, Living Rough 4, Perception 12, Stealth 16, Tracking 10, Wherewithal 10.

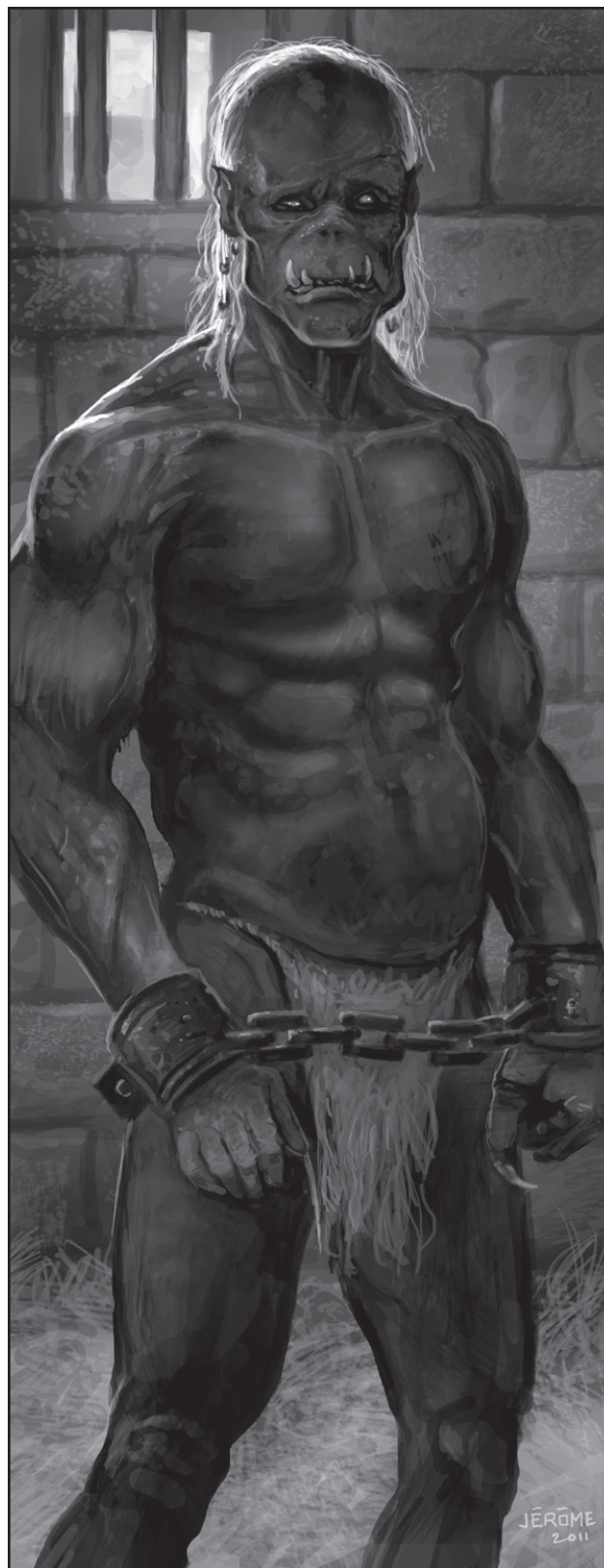


Kelkibur, a sandestin

Sandestins are quasi-corporeal cosmic entities who can do nearly anything at will, but rarely wish to. Their services are coveted by arch-magicians, who bind them by threatening them with chugs (see "Bluünt, a chug", above.) They can assume any shape; Kelkibur favors that of a blue wefkin, a rather forlorn wet-eyed fae creature about six inches tall.

Like most of the characters in this section, Kelkibur most likely enters play when a PC who has him as a Relationship seeks him out. Otherwise he remains elusive, with little incentive to show himself. Should you find it desirable to introduce him anyway, he might lose control after overhearing a PC say something particularly risible. He exclaims in disgust, giving his location rashly away.

Personality: Like most sandestins, Kelkibur tends toward indolence and self-pity. He responds with bitter re-



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sentment to any request to deploy his miraculous powers. When expressing his fear of chugging, he allows himself no shame, weeping and meeping in high theatrical style.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Goals: 1) Avoid Bluünt. 2) Have someone to get rid of Bluünt. 3) Do as little as possible.

When Kelkibur learned that the arch-magician Hurtiancz sought his indenture, he searched for a means of hiding himself. He had already been working on a defense called a Coruscation of Ill Discernment, but found it only temporarily effective. His researches led him to the hotel. Kelkibur saw that the energy shield Urbotast erected to keep his servants in the hotel could be tweaked, by sandestinic intervention, to protect him from chugs. Woefully, the servants breached it when they escaped, allowing Bluünt to find the hotel. Kelkibur quickly erected the less sturdy Coruscation, which prevents the chug from finding his exact location within it. It degrades by the minute, however. Kelkibur is desperate to find a way to dismiss Bluünt from the hotel. Not so much so, however, that he will actively take the initiative to make this happen.

Sample favors: anything that doesn't expose him to Bluünt or other chugs. Under no circumstances will he pierce the Field of Domestic Containment, for fear that another breach will bring additional chugs down on his head. Alas, Kelkibur worries that almost any action that would directly assist the PCs will lead to the dropping of the field. For this reason he won't, for example, harm, dismiss or otherwise neutralize Urbotast.

Abilities: Eavesdropping 6, Scuttlebutt 2, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 6, Rebuff (Wary) 4.

The PCs have no way of physically attacking a sandestin. Their meager magics cannot control or influence him.

Because Kelkibur wants nothing more than not to be found, you may think him difficult to introduce into the narrative. Worry not: that's the job of the players who have him as a relationship character! They all met him—by means you and they improvise together—before the bacchanal, and know how to winkle him from his various hiding places. If they choose not to leverage their relationship with him, that's a choice you should accept with equanimity—until an obvious and entertaining way of bringing Kelkibur in presents itself organically.



Moutanc, an imp

Moutanc is a minor demon the size of a small housecat. He looks like a scaly, horned, pot-bellied baby with gargoyle-like wings. His gray hide flushes red when he's annoyed, which is most of the time.

Personality: Like many a demoralized wage slave, Moutanc hates the drudgery of his job but clings to the certainty of its routine. When forced to take action, he grudgingly rouses himself to a state of exhausted peevishness. This is the most intense emotion he's capable of feeling. If he's not careful to distract himself with cheap brandy and the smoke of the toxic krelweed, glimmers of existential awareness creep upon him, alerting him to the fundamental emptiness of his existence.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Goals: 1) Humble Yurbus. 2) Shirk all introspection. 3) Drink and smoke. 4) When unavoidable, punish the transgressions of hotel staff.

Moutanc's chief official duty is to discipline staff members, which he does by the selective administration of etheric bolts (see below.) He regards mortal staffers with resigned disinterest. The imp does, however, nurse an ever-festering grudge against the automaton Yurbus, who through clever legal wrangling has wriggled out of all discernible responsibility. Moutanc yearns to see him brought to heel, so that automatons once again perform all muck-tank duties.

Sample favors: 1) Provide information about the hotel and its workings. 2) Petition Urbotast on a PC's behalf. 3) Visit punishment on a rival PC (applicable only if Moutanc believes that the favored character genuinely pursues a staff post.)

Abilities: Appraisal 4, Attack (Speed) 4, Athletics 5, Defense (Intuition) 6, Eavesdropping 2, Etiquette 4, Gambling 1, Scuttlebutt 2, Knowledge 2 (Sp: Aerial Conveyances), Living Rough 3, Magic 8, Stewardship 6, Mechanic 2, Mischief 5, Perception 5, Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Physician 2, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Stealth 8, Wherewithal 4.

Etheric bolt: On a Hair's-Breadth or Prosaic Magic Success, Moutanc reduces a mortal target's Defense pool by 2 and

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strips him of 1 Refresh token. On an Illustrious Magic Success, he strips the target of all Refresh tokens. Also, the target must make a Defense roll or suffer an injury. (Except when extremely angry, Moutanc then sheepishly apologizes for overmodulating the resonance of his bolt.)



Releen, a lissome vat creature

A willowy blond possessed of an hourglass figure and a cascade of silken hair, Releen serves as perhaps the most striking perk of the hotel's concierge position. As Urbotast explains in the opener, she becomes the concierge's concubine.

He does not bother to specify that Releen is only a few days old, a product of his laboratory vats. (Her predecessor, Cheleen, was sacrificed by the previous concierge, diverting Urbotast's attention while the staff stole the plans that eventually allowed them to construct the Transvex Generator (p. 84). He allowed Cheleen into the deodand antechamber after unlocking the door to its cage. Releen does not know that this happened.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Personality: In her first flushes of existence, Releen feels acutely, excited by the world's delights and fearful of its disappointments. The old concierge, Trooff, took the time to relieve her of her maidenhood before making his escape through the Transvex Corridor. Betrayed by his duplicity, she has already learned to be suspicious of men who wish to couch with her.

Goals: 1) Delay concierge selection. 2) See that a favored PC is made concierge.

She is not sure she wants to be anyone's concubine, and thus wishes to delay the selection of a new concierge as long as she can. Since this election seems inevitable, she'd prefer that it be someone she at least partially favors. The ratings on the three Relationship cards that bear her name establish her preferences. She likes up to three PCs, ranked from highest to lowest rating.

An identical vat creature, Jeleen, serves as Urbotast's concubine. While jealously despising her, Jeleen pretends to her face to be a loving sister. Releen is too naïve to suspect her true intentions, or to have guessed at the role she played in the demise of Cheleen.

Sample favors: 1) Secure information. 2) Intercede with Urbotast. 3) Permit tentative sexual contact.

Abilities: Athletics 3, Attack (Caution) 2, Defense (Dodge) 4, Eavesdropping 1, Etiquette 1, Scuttlebutt 1, Stewardship 1, Perception 2, Persuade (Charming) 4, Physician 2, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 6, Stealth 3, Where-withal 3.



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Yurbus, an automaton

Built from a series of articulated brass cylinders, Yurbus is a mechanical construct in the rough form of a human. Urbotast invented him to perform the disgusting duties of the muck-room.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Personality: Ferociously concerned for his own rights and dismissive of others', Yurbus seeks out slights and metes out punishment with equal verve.

Goals: 1) Protect his exemption from active muck-room tasks. 2) Ensure that mewling meat-people perform the essential work of the muck-room. 3) Ward off schemes against him by the insolent Moutanc. (Arguably a subset of goal 1.)

Years ago, by exploiting a trio of ambiguous phrases in his employment contract, Yurbus forced Urbotast to relieve him of all but supervisory duties. (Urbotast has ever since regretted drafting the contract, which was meant to force the automaton's obedience in the absence of constant oversight.) He sees no purpose in life other than to vigilantly patrol this legal beachhead.

Sample favors: 1) Launch protests to Urbotast. 2) Spill hotel secrets uncomplimentary to Moutanc and previous staffers. 3) Saddle rival PCs with arduous muck labors.

Abilities: Athletics 10, Attack (Strength) 10, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 4, Eavesdropping 1, Etiquette 1, Scuttlebutt 5, Stewardship 3, Mechanic 3, Perception 2, Persuade (Eloquent) 2, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 6, Wherewithal 4.



ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Jeleen

Jeleen looks just like her fellow vat creation, Releen. However, a discerning eye (any Perception success) can tell them apart by the comparative hardness of her expression. Created to love and serve Urbotast, Jeleen does so in unassailable fashion, save for one small detail. She enviously detests all of her vat sisters. Her hatred of Releens' predecessor Cheleen moved her to unwittingly assist the departed concierge, Trooff, in his escape from the hotel. At his behest, she convinced Cheleen to enter the deodand's antechamber when its cage was open. The rest, and Cheleen, was history. What she didn't know at the time but has since figured out is that her death was the diversion that allowed Trooff to pilfer the plans for the Transvex Corridor from the library.

Urbotast does not suspect her involvement in Cheleen's death and thus the staff exodus. If he found out, he'd feed her to Cha'ast and grow a replacement.

The only individual who knows what she did is Kelkibur, who witnessed the conversation between her and Trooff. Since he doesn't want to be noticed, he hasn't told anyone. But if a PC learned this from the sandestin, he might leverage it to his advantage, either to blackmail Jeleen or ingratiate himself to Urbotast.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory / Forthright

Goals: 1) Serve Urbotast. 2) Retain upper hand against Releen.

If Jeleen sees that Releen is interested in one of the PCs, her spite could outweigh her inbred devotion to Urbotast. Contingent on your need for an additional plot complication, she might then try to seduce the apparent object of her affection. She decides whether to try this as herself or while posing as Releen as tactical considerations seem to warrant.

Abilities: Athletics 3, Attack (Caution) 4, Defense (Dodge) 6, Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 6, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 3, Mischief 6, Perception 5, Persuade (Charming) 4, Physician 2, Rebuff (Penetrating) 6, Stealth 6, Wherewithal 6.



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Urbotast

For centuries the magician Urbotast has plumbed the mysteries of life and the cosmos. Additionally, he runs a fine hotel. He originally launched the family business to cover his sorcerous activities from the prying eyes of more established occultists. Since then he has grown powerful enough to operate openly. Still, it's good to have something to fall back on. The hotel business grants opportunities to bask in the admiration of swells and decadents, and sometimes to creep into the bedchambers of the fine young ladies they bring with them. The lonely life of the archetypal tower wizard is not for Urbotast.

His sole vexation in this area concerns the eternal challenge of securing good help. Years ago he solved this by inveigling a staff of servants to slave for him eternally. In exchange for eternal life, they checked in guests, cooked, hauled luggage, and cleaned rooms. Though less than punctilious, they were as good as can be hoped in these waning years of the solar orb. Urbotast never had to worry about replacing them, as they neither died nor, thanks to Jasgo's Field of Domestic Containment, were ever able to leave the hotel.

Now they've escaped, and he's angry. Fortunately, the poltroons who blindly allowed their egress are still present, and will make up for their crime by taking their place.

Personality: Play Urbotast as pompous, humorless, and demanding.

Goals: Issues of staffing and hotel management bore him tremendously. He lapses back into inattention as soon as he possibly can, returning to the abstruse experiments of his vat room.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Abilities: Athletics 3, Attack (Ferocity) 8, Defense (Misdirection) 12, Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 2, Scuttlebutt 6, Magic 15, Management 2, Mischief 6, Perception 6, Persuade (Forthright) 8, Physician 2, Rebuff (Contrary) 10, Stealth 6, Wherewithal 6.



OPENER

The opener breaks into two segments: the PCs' exploration of their headachy, post-orgiastic circumstances, and the appearance of Urbotast to lay out their situation.

Dire Awakenings

The PCs awaken in the lushly appointed great salon of the Hotel Grand Perdusz. The air smells of sweat, stale ale, vomit, and intimate fluids. Expensive throw rugs bear stains that one hopes to be red wine. Velvet curtains hang askew from their rods. Overstuffed furniture lies toppled across the room. PCs awaken in the order of their Wherewithal ratings, from highest to lowest. Ties are broken by name, in alphabetical order.

Their states as they struggle muzzily back to consciousness correspond to their key traits:

Arrogant: "You wake up with a valuable antique lampshade wrapped around your head, as if you wore it for a hat. Clutched in your hand is a wooden sword, suggesting that you once more fell to declaiming your favorite epic poem, *The Pillage of the Saponids*."

Avaricious: "You awaken with a hard, lumpy object lodged firmly in your nether regions. On investigation, this turns out to be your purse, surely placed there as a defense against theft. Wrapped between your fingers are a few lonely links of silver chain, as if you tried to snatch someone's jewelry but failed to fully follow through."

Gluttonous: "Globs of grease smear your dried-drool lips. A haunch of mutton is clenched in your left fist; a crisp leg of gavern in your right. Something rumbles in your distended belly." Call for a Wherewithal roll; on a failure, the character immediately and ungraciously throws up.

Indolent: "You crawl out from a massive heap of blankets, feeling inordinately well rested."

Pettifoggery: "As you wake, you nearly choke. Someone has stuffed a wadded-up piece of vellum deep down into your mouth. Inspecting it, you find it to be a page from the *Lexicon of Lexigraphical Knowledge*, by Prance. As if someone was

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attempting to prove a point you would not accept in verbal argument.” [If the character still seems curious about the page, inform him that the page has come from an obviously corrupt and inferior edition, and is poorly illuminated to boot.]

Rakishness: “You return foggily to life naked from the waist down and smelling of perfume. At least three distinct varieties of perfume, if your just-waked nose is to be believed. An all-too-familiar burning sensation emanates from your *axis mundi*.”

EXAMINING THE ROOM

The awakened revelers presumably poke around the room as they fight to orient themselves. In response to their questions, provide the following information:

- ❧ They’re the only people present in the room.
- ❧ That said, it is scattered with various items of clothing that belong to none of them.
- ❧ The stain on the rug is, thank the stars, actually wine.
- ❧ But there are other stains that don’t bear investigating.

Elaborate with comic detail as seems amusing. Entertainment might be wrought from the Rakish character’s search for his lost leggings.

PARTIAL MEMORIES

The PCs retain clear memories of their activities that extend up until the beginning of a soiree with hotel guests, courtesans, and various local rouses. Before that, they remember being on the road on a journey that took them past the port of Perdusz.

Invite the players to indicate what these journeys were, perhaps aided by the information on their Missing Object cards. They can share this information about themselves as dialogue with other characters, or provide it as internal monologue that the players know but their characters do not.

They remember checking into the hotel under the auspices of an officious concierge named Trooff. The terms of service agreement seemed especially long. The PCs paid its contents no mind, as no one does.

In a realistic story it’s of course unlikely that all revelers left in the wake of a bacchanal, no matter how outrageous, would suffer universally obliterated memories. Players churlishly applying naturalistic logic to the situation may mistakenly decide that some other force accounts for their amnesia. Avoid an unrewarding red herring by informing them that this sort of thing happens all the time in this world, to them most of all. The after-effects of Dying Earth’s oft-magical intoxicants can be fearsome!



Urbotast’s Announcement

Let the PCs examine the room until it gets boring, or until they announce an intention to head elsewhere in the hotel, whichever comes first.

Then the magician Urbotast appears. The salon’s vast oaken doors slam shut. Cinnamon-scented brimstone puffs from the vents. The great man materializes. (A player inquiring into the nature of the appearance, and rolling a Magic success, can tell that Urbotast actually entered through a secret door, but that the illusions augmenting the effect are genuinely magical. This suggests that

LET THE MAN WITH THE PREMISE SPEAK

Some groups may be so anxious to try out the Persuasion rules that they jump into verbal contest with Urbotast before he can spit out the information they need to understand the rest of the proceedings. If so, he holds up a peremptory hand and says that he will be only too pleased to demolish their arguments after his piece is fully spoken. Should this not deter them, he produces a magical item, the Gong of Momentary Pause, which, when rung, renders them compliant until the needed exposition has been provided.

At any rate, Urbotast remains steadfastly unpersuadable (p. 5) regarding his intended indenturing of the PCs.

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Urbotast is a puissant sorcerer, but not so much that he squanders his spellcraft willy-nilly.)

“Welcome, new staff members of the Hotel Grand Perdusz!” he begins. Play him in booming, stentorian fashion. Urbotast clothes himself in shifting, multi-part ebony robes, trimmed with garnet beads. He waxes his tripartite beard to glossy perfection. A spiked skullcap covers the top of his shining bald pate.

To the extent that you can, make his introductory dialogue an exchange with the players, as opposed to a monologue. Leave openings for players to ask questions, so that they seem to drive the scene. Urbotast brings it to a close after he conveys the following points of information. (You may find it useful to check these entries off as you introduce them.)

- ☐ They are morally obligated to take over as his staff. Their rash negligence allowed his previous workers to escape the hotel last night.
- ☐ They are legally obligated to take over because:
 - ☐ A) by allowing his staff to escape, they engaged in negligent tortuous interference
 - ☐ B) the terms of service agreement they signed when checking in specified that they would have to personally replace any staff members whose escapes they abetted, either actively or through careless omission. [If asked to prove assertion B, he summons Moutanc, who produces the signed agreements, with previously invisible clauses now rendered magically readable.]
- ☐ They are physically obligated to take over because... well, they’ll see why. Best not to try leaving. It will be a dreadful bother and come to naught.
- ☐ Although their new obligations may at first seem woeful, they should take heart. Urbotast is a benevolent employer.
- ☐ He is harsh only as ill-discipline and lassitude force his hand.
- ☐ Punishments are meted by his imp, Moutanc. [Who, if not already present, now flaps into view.]
- ☐ He grants the following recompense and benefits: room, board, four full days off a year, and eternal life.
- ☐ As a first assignment, they are to sort themselves into the hierarchy that will forever after define their duties and mutual dependencies. They are to choose:
 - ☐ A concierge, who will command all the others, answering only to Urbotast (with punishment for infractions to be delivered by Moutanc, via etheric bolt.)
 - ☐ An assistant concierge, who is commanded by the concierge and in turn commands all below him.
 - ☐ A mucker, tasked with a vital duty his predecessor claimed to find unpleasant. He will be report to the automaton Yurbus.
 - ☐ Any remaining staffers will bear the designation of sub-butler, and perform such general duties as the hotel business implies.
- ☐ Moutanc and (to a lesser extent) Yurbus will monitor their deliberations during the sorting process. If the characters have not yet ranked themselves after forty-eight hours run through the hourglass [which Urbotast then produces and upends], they will be sorted by Moutanc.
- ☐ Ranking servants enjoy the following additional perquisites and privileges:
 - ☐ The concierge wears gold braid on his livery, lives in a luxurious suite of rooms, and may treat as his concubine the lissome Releen [who now enters the room.]
 - ☐ The assistant concierge wears silver braid on his livery and dwells in a pleasantly appointed private room.
 - ☐ Sub-butlers wear unbraided livery and share a bracingly austere barrack.
 - ☐ The mucker is provided daily with a fresh outer sheath of burlap and weekly with a crisp new breech-clout. He is responsible for the burning of his own discarded garments. His dwelling is an iron egg known as the muckpod; again, Yurbus will supply additional detail.

The following information appears optionally, if the players think to ask before all of the essential questions above are answered.

- ☐ Given the already-munificent rewards Urbotast dispenses to his servants, he does not dare insult them by crassly weighting their purses with coin.

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- ☐ The method by which the old staff escaped, and the contribution the characters made to this regrettable incident, are tedious in their detail. It is best not to irk Moutanc by dwelling on such matters.
- ☐ Escape from the hotel ends the life-extension privilege. Alas, their illegal and unjust exit from the hotel grounds did not cause the old staffers to crumble immediately to dust. When employed here, one's aging process is arrested. Upon departure, it then resumes.
- ☐ All other guests have departed the hotel already.
 - ☐ Urbotast determined that none of them contributed to the staff's exodus.
 - ☐ The characters should forget any outstanding debts, invitations, or rashes incurred during the previous night's revels. They will no longer have the opportunity to find any of their fellow partygoers. Should they return later as guests, the PCs will be required to exercise the directed amnesia expected of the serving classes.
 - ☐ The hotel will be in no state to receive further guests until staff positions are sorted and a top-to-toe clean-up performed.
 - ☐ Despite their absolutely identical appearances and precisely matched diaphanous gowns, Releen is in no way to be confused with Jeleen, Urbotast's personal consort. During these opening remarks, he neglects to clarify this point, which seems perfectly obvious to him.



☞ The Hotel Grand Perdusz ☞

SCENES AND SITUATIONS

After Urbotast's announcement, the group is left to their own devices, to figure out what happened, learn the limits of their imprisonment, and to decide what to do next.

"Hotel Grand Perdusz" gives the players the option of working together to escape, or at cross purposes for the top positions in Urbotast's hierarchy. Game theory comes into play here: all players must agree to cooperate, but any one of them can scotch that and force everyone into competition.

Trying To Escape

None of the various exits from the hotel, from its splendid main archway to the various secret tunnels leading from its murky sub-basements, are visibly barred. However, if they try to cross them, the player characters find themselves simply unable to do so. The obstacle stopping them is an invisible barrier conjured by a spell called Jasgo's Field of Domestic Containment. Any attempt to leave the hotel requires a Wherewithal roll:

- ☞ Dismal Failure: The character decides not to even try to exit, and cannot try again, until the field is pierced.
- ☞ Any other failure: The character decides not to even try to exit.
- ☞ Illustrious Success: The character bounces off an invisible barrier.
- ☞ Any other success: The character bounces off an invisible barrier, and must make a Defense roll, or suffer an injury.

Since the roll merely determines how the character is prevented from leaving, to spend Wherewithal points on it is to waste them. The players may eventually make this observation. Oh, how unfair it is, to be trapped in the Hotel Grand Perdusz!

JASGO'S FIELD OF DOMESTIC CONTAINMENT

Upon first encountering the field, or any time thereafter, characters may attempt Magic rolls to discern the occult process at work here:

- ☞ Dismal Failure: The field is clearly maintained by a fell spirit, who can be bribed by human sacrifice. Urbotast has surely immunized his household against this, so the group will have to sacrifice one of their own number. [*The player will know that this is nonsense, having seen the result of the roll. She must play her character as if he believes this to be true.*]
- ☞ Any other failure: The effect could be generated by any one of a thousand spells.
- ☞ Any other success: The barrier could only be generated by a spell called Jasgo's Field of Domestic Containment.
- ☞ Illustrious Success: As immediately above. Also, it is well known that the barrier can be temporarily pierced by a spatial irregularity known as a Transvex Corridor. The exact construction of a Transvex Corridor generator has been lost to the ages. What is known is that it is made from a grouping of X other magical devices. [$X = \text{the number of players.}$]

Alternately, the players can learn about the Transvex Corridor by extracting informational favors from either Kelkibur or Moutanc. (Kelkibur knows this because he invisibly observed the escape; Moutanc, because Urbotast told him.) Jeleen also knows about this, from Urbotast. She gives up the facts only on a successful Persuasion.

Piecing the Story Together

By talking to Urbotast's retinue the characters can piece together the story of the previous staff's daring escape. Beside each nugget of information appear the names of the supporting character(s) who might provide it. Where a character's name appears in italics, he or she knows the fact but is unlikely to provide it in unvarnished form.

Pace your story to dole out these nuggets in steady, measured fashion. All of the supporting characters have their own agendas to follow and little patience for extended periods of helpfulness. Any interaction should reveal one or at most two pieces of the puzzle. The logic of the moment trumps these notes. If it seems plausible for someone to know a fact even though they don't appear in the appropriate entry, let them supply it.

Players often prefer methods of investigation that do not force them to interact with others. Although avoiding verbal jousts contravenes the Vancian flavor of the enterprise, you may need to take pity on them, letting them learn some of this by finding scribblings or journal entries penned by Trooff or other characters.

To guide you in possible spoonfeeding efforts, you may find it helpful to cross out entries as they're uncovered.

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INFORMATION	SOURCE
Hundreds of years ago, Urbotast tricked his staffers into eternal service, through the enforcement of ambiguous contract provisions.	Jeleen, Moutanc, <i>Urbotast</i> , Yurbus
He kept them imprisoned in the hotel, with others such as guests able to come and go at will, via Jasgo's Field of Domestic Containment	Jeleen, Kelkibur, Moutanc, <i>Urbotast</i> , Yurbus
Several years ago a guest, the magician Llarb, revealed to Trooff the means of escaping his imprisonment: he would have to build a Transvex Corridor generator.	Cha'ast, Jeleen, Moutanc, Yurbus
The generator can only work if all persons restrained by the field participate in the activation of the piercing device.	Cha'ast, Kelkibur, <i>Urbotast</i> ,
The device is constructed from X magical items, lashed together at precise angles. (These are the missing items for all of the scenario's PCs)	Kelkibur, Moutanc, <i>Urbotast</i>
Trooff discovered that Urbotast had the plans for the device in his library, kept under lock and key.	Cha'ast, Jeleen, Kelkibur
Over many years, using blackmailed hotel guests as agents, Trooff gathered information on the location of the various components. From afar, through intermediaries, he conspired to have each of them brought to the hotel—thus making the PCs the unwitting tools of his scheme.	Jeleen, Kelkibur
Trooff conspired with Jeleen to arrange a diversion. She tricked his concubine, Cheleen, into entering the deodand chamber, knowing that Trooff had left his cage unlocked.	Cha'ast, <i>Jeleen</i>
Trooff stole the plans from the library while Urbotast was occupied by his discovery of Cheleen's (mostly devoured) body.	Jeleen, Kelkibur
After memorizing the plans, he hid them somewhere in the muck-room. (He muttered something about possibly needing them later, if the first attempt didn't work.)	Yurbus
During the bacchanal, Trooff and his subordinates stole the components, worked the ritual to construct the Transvex Corridor, and escaped through it into the world beyond.	Bluünt, Kelkibur
The opening of the corridor allowed Bluünt to locate Kelkibur, for whom he had long been searching.	Bluünt, Kelkibur
When the corridor through the barrier closed, a mystical explosion sent the device components rocketing through the hotel. Each is now hidden in a separate location therein.	Bluünt, Kelkibur

Finding the Components

Whenever a character:

1. who has not yet recovered his Missing Object
2. suggests entering a new area of the hotel (see below)
3. and then does so
4. and then looks somewhere amusing
5. where the object could conceivably be
6. and rolls any Magic success...

...he recovers the item.

If the Magic success was Illustrious, he also senses the presence of arcane residue, indicating that it was transported to its present position by a localized occult cataclysm.

Everyone must find their Missing Object to reconstruct the Transvex Corridor Generator. (And find the blueprints, in the muck-room.)

❧ The Hotel Grand Perdusz ❧

Exploring the Hotel

Characters can look for Missing Objects, reconstruct the means of Trooff's escape, or vie for supremacy while exploring the vastness of their new place of employment.

You don't need a map for this. Better to quickly shift scenes from one location to the next with verbal description. However, a bit of orientation is in order.

OVERALL CONFIGURATION

The hotel is a vast blocky edifice perched atop a thrusting promontory. A drawbridge spans a deep chasm separating it from surrounding rock formations. This leads to the grand archway and main floor.

From the top down:

FLOOR	NOTABLE CONTENTS
7	Urbotast's personal chambers, which he shares with Jeleen.
6	Library
3-5	Guest rooms
2	Group facilities
1	Main hall
B1	Support facilities
B2	Servant's quarters
B3	The vats
B4	The muck tank

ASSISTANT'S QUARTERS

Floor: B2

A cozy, modestly decorated bedchamber with standalone wardrobe, study area, and footlocker.

The previous assistant, Authane, has left behind a jumble of mostly uninteresting personal effects. Only one item suggests anything personal about him: his folio of pressed fungal samples.

CONCIERGE SUITE

Floor: B2

Most of the floor is given over to a series of rooms only slightly less splendid than Urbotast's, including a matching dressing chamber for Releen, who has already taken up residence here. She possesses a key to its locked door. A character recognized as concierge receives another key and may move in immediately. Unlike Urbotast's suite, this lacks a concealed treasury.

DEODAND ANTECHAMBER

Floor: B3

The obvious feature of this roundish room is a sturdy cage and Cha'ast, the deodand within it. His straw bedding is in need of changing, as he haughtily protests when the adventurers enter. The key to his cage hangs on a peg just out of his reach. Naturally he immediately requests his freedom, offering various inducements for it. He couches all negotiations to retain the right to leap on and consume at least one of his benefactors.

DINING HALL

Floor: 2

A cheery, festive eating chamber large enough to seat sixty guests, the dining hall is lit by a chandelier of glowing crystal.

GRAND SALON

Floor: 1

This is the lush, now despoiled chamber in which the bacchanal largely occurred, and where the PCs regained consciousness.

GUEST ROOMS

Floor: 3-5

The guest suites increase in splendor as one rises into the structure. There are a dozen rooms on floor three, six on floor

✂ The Hotel Grand Perduz ✂

four, and two on floor five. All are unoccupied, and devoid of personality in the the manner of hired lodgings everywhere.

KITCHEN

Floor: 2

This large food preparation area foretells strenuous labors ahead for any soon-to-be-appointed sub-butlers.

LABORATORY

Floor: 6

This squeaky clean, highly polished collection of thaumaturgical equipment is what Urbotast shows off to his guests. Much of it is antique and valuable, to a discerning buyer who fears no repercussions from a mage of Urbotast's achievements. A Magic success shows that its expensive gear hasn't been used for decades.

LAUNDRY

Floor: B1

Bedding piles up here, with no one to wash it.

LIBRARY

Floor: 6

Dignitaries of magical accomplishment are sometimes invited to enter Urbotast's library. (In fact this is one of the establishment's major attractions.) The uninvited must circumvent its magical locks with a Magic success. Dismal Failure on this attempt occasions a Defense roll to avoid injury.

The library is arranged as much to impress as to aid in Urbotast's researches. Working copies of his most-perused life creation manuals are found down in the Vats.

A Perception success finds the secret, locked scroll case, disguised as a decorative screen, from which Trooff purloined the Transvex Corridor plans. A hank of gold braid can still be found caught in its latch mechanism.

MUCK TANK

Floor: B4

In this chamber the designated mucker harvests the arcane fuel that powers the great magician's manse that is the hotel Grand Perduz.

Slippery stone catwalks surround a vast pool of roiling green ordure. A blocky office structure projects out from the eastern edge of the catwalk, hanging over the odoriferous effusion. From this spot Yurbus controls the winch that, via a system of chains and pulleys, hauls the egg-shaped mucker's chamber. It can be moved from its rest point, dangling in the center of the chamber, to the office platform. The winch can also raise and lower the egg, plunging it up to fifteen feet into the muck. This arrangement allows Yurbus to punish a recalcitrant mucker, assuming he is already installed inside the egg. The egg itself is made from rounded copper plates, riveted together. Its inhabitant must learn to sleep while sitting cross-legged, as it is not possible to lie down inside it. Aside from a metal pouch near the top of the egg, which can hold a modest collection of personal effects, the egg interior is unadorned.

The egg, though by obvious logic eminently suitable as the personal quarters of a mucker, is not used in the harvesting procedure. Instead the mucker leaps into the verdant substance from the office platform. Long, partially elastic ropes are tied around the mucker's ankles at one end, and on the other to a sturdy copper railing on the platforms edge. The mucker is provided with an open pail and a collection implement resembling a cross between a scoop and a shovel. He must dive down into the depths of the muck. Holding his breath, he searches for drifting gobbets of concentrated life energy. The gobbets, which might easily be mistaken for greatly enlarged unicellular animals, can be identified by their brighter green coloration, their dense, spongy texture, and the hairy flagellates that trail behind him, lending them propulsion through the solid murk. They also smell terrible.

Once the mucker has filled his bucket with gobbets (or has run out of breath) he signals his readiness to be drawn back up, by yanking rhythmically on his ropes. Yurbus then turns a second winch that hauls him back to the surface. If the mucker has been recalcitrant, Yurbus may turn the winch slowly. The automaton will not allow the . He knows the process of replacement to be a long and difficult one.

When several buckets of muck have been collected, the mucker may rest, fastened securely in his egg. Yurbus then conveys the pails to the vat room, where they are loaded into a furnace.

PANTRY

Floor: B1

Foodstuffs of generally superior quality are stored in this cold chamber. Many of the spices are rare and, in their slim pewter

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containers, eminently pilferable.

PETIT SALON

Floor: 2

This small common room is as sumptuous as the great hall below, but more intimate.

SERVANTS' QUARTERS

Floor: B1

Bare walls and timbered bunks comprise the stripped-down bedchambers of the hotel's once and future sub-butlers.

STABLES

Location: an outbuilding

Players may specify the beasts they rode in on, which might be horses or stranger creatures. They, and Urbotast's magnificent black man-eating steed, are stabled here. The stalls have begun to reek now that there are no sub-butlers to clean them.

URBOTAST'S SUITES

Floor: 7

These luxuriantly furnished and decorated rooms include Urbotast's bedchamber, study, and wardrobe, plus a dressing room and separate wardrobe for Releen.

A Perception success reveals an illusion-concealed door, behind which Urbotast's treasury is found. Its locked chests require Magic successes to unlock; failures force Defense rolls to avoid injury. Each chest contains coins or easily salable goods worth half a year's worth of high living.

Locks bar the suite's main entrance. Quick Fingers rolls get the characters in. Once a concierge is decisively appointed, he and his assistant receive keys.

THE VATS

Floor: B3

Urbotast's real experimentation takes place here, in a dank room choked with conduits, tubes, and assorted occult equipment. Enormous copper vats, in which he breeds new life forms, dominate the space.

Should they open a vat, the characters discover a fully formed but lifeless simulacra "sister" to Releen and Jeleen. This may be their first indication that the concubines are not natural humans.

Kept securely locked, the door requires a Quick Fingers success, or perhaps the intercession of a sandestin, to open without a key. Even a duly invested concierge does not get a copy.

The castle furnace rumbles away in a corner. Fueled by gobbets of life energy harvested from the muck room, it powers Urbotast's experiments and, by a side effect, heats the entire structure. A noisome hopper houses a store of gobbets. They float suspended in a stinking quantity of muck, preserving their freshness. As play begins, the hopper is nearly exhausted. If it runs out, many of Urbotast's gestating vat creatures will die. On a less catastrophic note, the hotel becomes uncomfortably cold. Urbotast has timed the orientation period of his new staff to ensure that a new mucker will be in place and harvesting before the furnace runs out.

WORKSHOP

Floor: B1

Tools and supplies for minor mundane repairs are stored here.



STAGING INTERACTIONS

"Hotel Grand Perdusz" gives the players two strong goals to pursue: escaping or determining their positions in the staff hierarchy. They might ignore one in favor of the other or split their efforts between the two goals. The group might split, with some characters pursuing the escape and others pursuing the conciergeship. Whatever they choose to do, they have strong motivation to drive the narrative, within the bottled confines of the hotel environment. You can probably sit back and allow supporting characters to simply react to what the players decide to do.

If prodding proves necessary, supporting characters might approach likely PCs, offering help toward their goals in ex-

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change for favors that further their own agendas.

- ❧ Bluünt seeks help capturing Kelkibur
- ❧ Kelkibur wants someone to dispose of Bluünt
- ❧ Jeleen pursues her vendetta against Releen
- ❧ Cha'ast wants someone to deliver Releen to him
- ❧ Yurbus wishes to earn Urbotast's appreciation
- ❧ Moutanc identifies a troublemaking PC and conspires with a rival to relegate him to the position of mucker

The Missing Items

The opening of the Transvex Corridor concluded in an etheric explosion that cast the missing items into various hiding places throughout the hotel. Characters can recover the items by undertaking actions that seem likely to lead to their discovery. This might be as obvious as a search in a secluded hiding spot. Supporting characters might find the items and offer them up in exchange for the advancement of their agendas, as above.

Ideally the discovery process (assuming that the characters are looking for them at all) spaces itself out over the course of the session.

During the first quarter of the session (for example, the first hour of a four-hour session), a character can recover his missing item by taking an appropriate action and scoring an Illustrious Success on a related roll.

During the second quarter, a Prosaic or Illustrious Success will do.

After the session enters its second half, any success recovers the item.

Advance or elongate these time frames as needed to maintain suspense as to whether all of the pieces will be found.

To construct a new Transvex Corridor and escape the hotel, someone also has to find the hidden formula for the ritual. This is found just like an item. Although it might seem neatest to have this discovered last, it's more important to follow the players' lead than to conform to a pleasing structure.

When only certain characters pursue escape, they can seek and find items belonging to the others.

Urbotast's Scheme (If Any)

In most games, it's entirely appropriate for Urbotast to pursue no grand scheme whatsoever. He seeks only an end to the temporary inconvenience of losing his staff. Even this matter he delegates largely to the characters themselves, under Moutanc's oversight. In this conception of Urbotast and the scenario, the low stakes are part of the joke.

Some groups may prefer a version of the scenario in which they overcome a more conventional villainy. If so, they might discover that Urbotast is replacing local worthies with imitations created in his vats, or is even growing an army bent on conquest and destruction. In this case, the scenario might conclude with their defeating him and exposing his scheme. As a side benefit of this victory, they are then given the means to escape the hotel.



FRESH MEAT

Upon concluding that his staff has been satisfactorily sorted, Urbotast commands a general clean-up.

When this is performed, he reopens the hotel to new guests. This influx of supporting characters might provide additional resources to the characters as they scheme their way out of their predicament.

A few quick guest profiles to get you started:

Lawatz: This wealthy collector of arcane artifacts hopes to buy, or better yet, swindle away a device in Urbotast's collection called the Plasmic Collider.

Ort: Despite his appearance, the corpulent Ort cultivates a reputation as a practiced seducer. On arrival, he fixes his sights on Releen.

Willatha: Recently widowed and laden with the inheritances of successive dead husbands, the long-nosed Willatha seeks a young and virile consort.

Demirig: This hunched wizard has been reduced to scouting concealed sandestins for his arch-magical betters. He may provide occult favors for assistance in trapping Kelkibur, or pose a threat to those relying on the creature.

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CLOSERS

Although your players might surprise you by taking the story in an entirely unexpected direction, the two most likely closers revolve around an escape attempt, or the final assignment of job titles.

Escape

The ritual formula, which the characters must recover to initiate the escape closer, shows how to arrange the items together to create the Transvex Corridor. Perhaps supported by a quickly-lashed together framework of wood and wire, they combine to project an energy field, which, at the ritual's height, turns into a portal. If the characters all jump through the portal in relatively quick succession, they're all transported to a safe location of their choice. This might be a single location or one apiece, as seems amusing at the time.

A Magic success by any character is needed to activate the Transvex Corridor once the assemblage of items has been constructed. On an Illustrious Success, the structure comes apart as they leap through the portal, and their lost items are conveyed with them to their new location. Otherwise the items are, as before, blown through etheric space to land at various hidden places throughout the hotel.

The characters should face some form of opposition to inject suspense into their effort to construct the device and conduct the ritual. This might come in the person of Urbotast himself, or another hotel inhabitant they have enraged or failed to serve. Depending on how they've managed their relationships, any character might have reason to keep them behind:

- ❧ Neither Moutanc, Yurbus nor Urbotast wish to lose their replacement staff.
- ❧ Bluünt still wants them to capture Kelkibur for him.
- ❧ Kelkibur won't let them leave unless they take Bluünt with them.
- ❧ Jeleen wants them as cat's-paws to use against Releen and any subsequent products of Urbotast's vats.
- ❧ Releen might have fallen for one of the characters, especially if one couched with her, or was designated as concierge.
- ❧ Cha'ast, after somehow managing an escape from his cage, might simply intend to eat them.

If they overcome one obstacle too easily, keep the pressure on by bringing on another one, until a suitably exciting climax occurs.

The Establishment of a Working Hierarchy

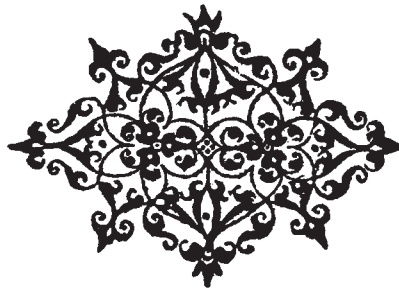
The most open-ended of the likely closers is one in which the characters are assigned their final job titles. Work to give it a note of finality: the characters will be performing these roles for the foreseeable future, if not for all eternity. This comically caustic ending may disappoint goal-oriented players but well suits the Vancian vision. Characters who never even try to escape, but instead focus all of their attention on their place in the petty pecking order, have entirely grasped the spirit of the Dying Earth.

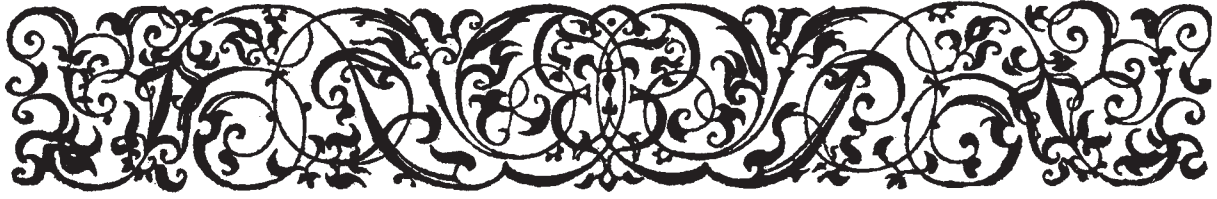
As the story wends its way toward this cynical conclusion, look for a note of closure to end on. A sudden reversal of fortune always makes for a reliable punchline. In one playtest, the group entered into a conspiracy with Jeleen to poison Urbotast, and were then surprised to find that they all wound up as muckers.



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TAGLINES

Admittedly, some regard the surcharge as punitive.	Consider my admiration withdrawn.
You complete your task with less than perfect vigor.	I reject your argument on haberdashic grounds.
As formulator of the strictures, I am naturally exempt.	You remind me of a certain boatswain I once encountered near Saponce.
Let us mull this over sweetmeats.	As a measure of my seriousness, I deign to accept a valuable gift.
My objections were implicit.	Fie on sandestins! Fie on chugs!
Until my hat is recovered, all other business must lie fallow.	Although an occult principle pertains, in layman's terms I chalk this up to stupidity.
Why do you come here, smelling of eel?	Our adversity deepens, but we still have brandy.
I'd like to crawl into her vat, if you know what I mean.	From which of you wafts the fetid reek of pessimism?
All else has failed. Let's go back to sleep.	Life may be likened to the warblings of a demented troubadour.
Oh, how I yearn for a golden age of eternal verities!	Do you want towels with that?
I sigh with thwarted ambition.	Let us set aside picayune issues of guilt and reparation.
Who, other than myself, can honestly say he is not somewhat at fault here?	More importantly, is this nutmeg I taste in these honeyed figs?
I renew my previous insult.	Tell me what you value, so that I may more effectively threaten it.
So you do acknowledge my superiority.	Is there no limit to this grotesquerie?
Were you perchance dropped from the womb?	I reserve my sympathy for orphans and long-tressed maidens.
I feel as if someone just walked over your grave.	I look forward to your later expressions of forgiveness.
I am, at worst, five per cent responsible.	No one will hear us if we talk in here.
I hate to think what I will remember next.	Allow me to shield you from this dangerous indulgence.
Had I a heart, it would now be broken.	Surely you hallucinate.





The Vale of Crypts

In this follow-up shenanigan featuring the same characters as the previous scenario, our picaresque anti-heroes find themselves acting as guards to a survey caravan on its way to the fabled Valley of Graven Tombs. Each of them has an incentive to bring one member of the survey team to harm, and to protect all of the others. By this point it ought not to surprise you that each of them maintains ill designs on a different member of the survey group.

THE SETTING

The main action takes place in the Valley of Graven Tombs, where the vast and meandering Scaum River cuts through a long-buried mausoleum complex. Its stone crypts were erected in a long-ago aeon, then buried under layers of earth, then disturbed by the appearance of the flowing Scaum. It cut deep through this ruin-filled mountain, forming a matching pair of eroded banks. From these high and muddy shores recently exposed tomb faces loom. Every year the inexorable waters lay bare an array of new ruins. These draw archaeologists, looters, novelty seekers to its hazardous banks, where a fatal mudslide always lurks but a misstep away.

To extend the scenario, or create new scenarios set in the same general area, consult the *Scaum Valley Gazetteer*.

COMPONENT CARD SWAP-OUTS

The component cards differ from “The Hotel Grand Perdusz” as follows:

- ✦ Replace cards from “The Missing Component” sheet with the “Enchanted Item” sheet below.
- ✦ Instruct players to disregard taglines they’ve already used in favor of selections from the new tagline list on (p. 110).
- ✦ Accordingly, replace the old Resistances set with the new version, which lacks the goal.
- ✦ Swap out new Relationships cards for the old. Unusually, the character goals for this scenario appear on these cards.

Remind players to mark any skill improvements they’ve made to their characters.

This scenario can be played as a standalone. Simply perform the above substitutions to the component cards. Run the scenario as if the PCs are meeting for the first time.

The component card swap-out occurs during the opener. As you’ll see, the exact timing depends on the order in which players choose to have certain essential questions answered.



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Character Tracker

This character tracker records the characters' defining temptation and also the survey crew member whose disappearance he's been offered a reward to engineer.

PLAYER	CHARACTER	TEMPTATION	WHO HE'S SUPPOSED TO GET RID OF
	Fley		
	Ilber		
	Prisurp		
	Quens		
	Thurles		
	Venck		



The Vale of Crypts Relationships

Relationships:

Glust, a geomancer 2
Jagrid-Ka, a measurer 4
Olgorath, a scribe 3

Goal: Discreetly ensure that Wamadhol never returns from the expedition, and that everyone else does. (Your group's payment from the survey organization is pro-rated according to how many of the survey team members come back alive. However, unknown to the other PCs, a separate client has offered a handsome and more than countervailing sum if you "take care of" Wamadhol.)

Relationships:

Glust, a geomancer 2
Olgorath, a scribe 4
Rolth, a cartographer 3

Goal: Discreetly ensure that Jagrid-Ka never returns from the expedition, and that everyone else does. (Your group's payment from the survey organization is pro-rated according to how many of the survey team members come back alive. However, unknown to the other PCs, a separate client has offered a handsome and more than countervailing sum if you "take care of" Jagrid-Ka.)

Relationships:

Olgorath, a scribe 3
Tantimur, a forager 3
Rolth, a cartographer 4

Goal: Discreetly ensure that Glust never returns from the expedition, and that everyone else does. (Your group's payment from the survey organization is pro-rated according to how many of the survey team members come back alive. However, unknown to the other PCs, a separate client has offered a handsome and more than countervailing sum if you "take care of" Glust.)

Relationships:

Wamadhol, an eminence 4
Jagrid-Ka, a measurer 3
Rolth, a cartographer 3

Goal: Discreetly ensure that Olgorath never returns from the expedition, and that everyone else does. (Your group's payment from the survey organization is pro-rated according to how many of the survey team members come back alive. However, unknown to the other PCs, a separate client has offered a handsome and more than countervailing sum if you "take care of" Olgorath.)

Relationships:

Glust, a geomancer 2
Wamadhol, an eminence 2
Tantimur, a forager 4

Goal: 1) Discreetly ensure that a murderer named Beskar, who is posing as one of the survey team members, never returns from the expedition.
2) ensure that everyone else does return.
(Your group's payment from the survey organization is pro-rated according to how many of the survey team members come back alive. However, unknown to the other PCs, a separate client has offered a handsome and more than countervailing sum if you "take care of" Beskar, ideally by strangling him, as he did to his fiancée.)

Relationships:

Jagrid-Ka, a measurer 3
Tantimur, a forager 2
Wamadhol, an eminence 3

Goal: Discreetly ensure that Tantimur never returns from the expedition, and that everyone else does. (Your group's payment from the survey organization is pro-rated according to how many of the survey team members come back alive. However, unknown to the other PCs, a separate client has offered a handsome and more than countervailing sum if you "take care of" Tantimur.)

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Resistances

Key Trait: Arrogant

Resistances: Avarice 4, Gourmandism 2, Indolence 4, Rakishness 7, Pettifoggery 6, Arrogance 1

Key Trait: Indolent

Resistances: Avarice 4, Gourmandism 6, Indolence 1, Rakishness 4, Pettifoggery 7, Arrogance 2

Key Trait: Greedy

Resistances: Avarice 1, Gourmandism 7, Indolence 4, Rakishness 6, Pettifoggery 2, Arrogance 4

Key Trait: Rakish

Resistances: Avarice 2, Gourmandism 4, Indolence 7, Rakishness 1, Pettifoggery 4, Arrogance 6

Key Trait: Gluttonous

Resistances: Avarice 7, Gourmandism 1, Indolence 4, Rakishness 2, Pettifoggery 4, Arrogance 4

Key Trait: Pettifoggery

Resistances: Avarice 6, Gourmandism 4, Indolence 2, Rakishness 3, Pettifoggery 1, Arrogance 7

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ENCHANTED ITEMS

Cube of True Driving

What It Looks Like: a white cube surfaced in a coarse, granular material

What It Does: Feed to a beast of burden or riding animal. The creature then travels without instruction or intervention from you along a route known to you, avoiding obstacles as specified, for up to six hours of game time. The animal stops when confronted with an obstacle unspecified when you mentally communicated its route to it. The cube may be retrieved when the beast eliminates it, usually in about twenty-four hours.

What It Costs: 1

Talc to Obscure the Visible

What It Looks Like: an off-gray powder

What It Does: Dust this powder onto an object small enough to fit in your palm. For half an hour of real time or a day of game time, it becomes invisible to everyone except for yourself.

What It Costs: 1

Beak of Scrupulous Mimicry

What It Looks Like: the preserved beak of the red-faced Alмеры warbler

What It Does: Accurately mimic the voice of a person or entity you've recently heard. Provides a +1 bonus to all Impersonate rolls for which vocal imitation is a positive factor. Lasts for five minutes of game time.

What It Costs: 1

Deceptive Pulverulence

What It Looks Like: a crumbled chalky substance, in the container of your choice

What It Does: When mixed with a depleted stock of any liquid, semi-liquid, paste-like or stew-like food or drink, the pulverulence increases the mass and/or volume of the consumable to fill its original container. Though the depletion is concealed from visual inspection, a taste test reveals the new mixture as diluted and insipid.

What It Costs: 1

Live Boots

What It Looks Like: a pair of leather boots; on close inspection, can be seen to breathe like a living creature

What It Does: you can run, walk or gallop with the strength and endurance of a horse. Athletics successes may be required to achieve useful feats under these expanded limitations. Unless rested for an hour (game time) after an hour of use, the boots die and this card is discarded.

What It Costs: 1

Mulgarth's Dampening Rune

What It Looks Like: a bracelet or amulet marked with an occult sign

What It Does: For the next ten minutes of game time, it is impossible for any character within 60 ft of you to use an enchanted item with a *What It Costs* value greater than 0.

What It Costs: 1

RELATIONSHIPS

As the scenario opens, the characters have already traveled with the survey team for several days. During that time, each PC has taken the time to ingratiate himself with three of the team members. Whether they attempted to or not, none of them have managed to cozen the person they've been engaged to dispose of.

Just as the PCs are posing as stalwart and reliable guardians while each is secretly plotting to eliminate one of their charges, every member of the survey team carries off an imposture. Each has, temporarily or otherwise, gotten rid of the real person originally hired to perform the survey and taken his place. None are actually qualified for the roles they're required to fill. They're all surprisingly good actors, however, and up until the Opener have succeeded in more or less fooling each other and the PCs.

In some cases, the figure who has placed a bounty on the team member's head knows about the imposture and wants the person behind the imposture removed from the picture. In other cases, the target of the murder plot is the original survey team member who, unbeknownst to his would-be killer, may already be dead.

There are only as many murders for hire as there are PCs. Crew members whose names do not appear in the last column of the character tracker are not in fact being pursued by anyone. However, they're still impostors.

None of the faux team members has twigged to the fact that everyone else in the group is also a fake. No matter how high their Perception pools, they never figure it out without PC intervention. They're too busy worrying about the success of their own deceptions to notice the others'. They don't think it strange that they're succeeding in fooling colleagues of the people whose identities they've purloined. Like any typical Dying Earth character, they're all to varying degrees megalomaniacs. What they ought to note as unlikely they instead attribute to their own genius as masters of subterfuge.

The descriptions below drop the usual list of favors the character might dispense as a Relationship. These will be determined more by circumstance as the group's journey unfolds as by the power to grant particular benefits.

The entry "Why someone wants him dead" tells you whether the PC charged with arranging the character's demise knows why the bounty has been placed. The more honorable the commission of death, the more likely it is that the PC will have the full story.

Glust, a "geomancer"

Who he seems to be: The magician Glust is a curt and vainglorious man, rendered tolerable only by his ability to magically sense the location of stones and other geological objects. If anyone will listen, he complains that he was once a magician of high station, laid low by the jealousy of lesser men. No complaint is too petty for Glust.

Who he really is: Glust is exactly as described above, except that he isn't Glust. He's a vat creature grown as an exact duplicate of Glust, so that he could supply needed organs when his master's failed. Driven mad by the knowledge that he was not the real Glust but only a pale copy, he dashed the original's brains out and took his place. Alas, his magical power is but a shadow of the real Glust's, forcing him to step down to perform near-menial labor for the laughable likes of the Azenomei Antiquities Association. He is afraid that if his identity is revealed he'll be hunted as a monster or bottled like a specimen. And there's the whole business of slaying true Glust.

Why someone wants him dead: The real Glust swindled an arcana-criminal

ARGUING IN ANOTHER'S VOICE

These talented impostors are able to argue not only in the Persuade and Rebuff styles that reflect their own personalities, but those of their assumed identities. Where more than one style appears in an impostor's game statistics, the first listed is the false identity; the second, the real one. The character uses the first before he is exposed, and the second after his true self is revealed. The impostors can't switch back and forth between the two styles as suits them. They can only switch from the assumed style to the base style by revealing that they're not who they pretend to be. Once the revelation occurs, the assumed style rings hollow and no longer functions.

Although the styles are evenly distributed among the false identities, the true styles tend to cluster on the sneaky end of the spectrum. As more of the bluffers are revealed, the PCs who trump those styles will steadily gain advantage.

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syndicate out of the expensive constituent parts required to make the false Glust. Their spiteful leader, Delk, never forgets a slight, and aims to punish his effrontery. One of his local agents, who neither supplied a name or allowed his face to be seen, hired the PC to take action. The PC can intuit that he's dealing with a dispute between criminals, without further detail.

What he's supposed to do: Glust uses this sorcerous skill to spot valuable hauls, avoid hazards, and identify tombs of historical interest. These minor tasks suit his meager talents.

Appraisal 2, Attack (Cunning) 5, Athletics 6, Concealment 2, Defense (Defense) 7, Etiquette 2, Gambling 1, Living Rough 2, Magic 8, Pedantry 2, Perception 2, Persuade (Intimidating) 8, Quick Fingers 6, Rebuff (Wary) 10, Scuttlebutt 2, Stealth 5, Tracking 2, Wherewithal 4.



Jagrid-Ka, a “measurer”

Who he seems to be: Dull-eyed and phlegmatic, Jagrid-Ka cares only for numbers, and for them only little. The epitome of the gray-faced man, he steers clear of conversation. When drawn out, he bores spectacularly.

Who he really is: Holdraf Pemp was once a carefree picaroon much like the PCs. Then one day he stumbled through a fog that led him to another reality. There he beheld the TRUE NUMBER, the secret numeral underlying all of reality. Though he has tried to forget it, it will not depart his mind. It granted him absolute mastery over all mundane mathematical functions.

He purchased his identity from the real Jagrid-Ka, an oppressed accountant and surveyor who wished to escape a punishing marriage and go live it up in the big city of Kaiin. Upon arrival, he was slain by agents of Pemp's pursuers. Pemp came to a brief accord with Jagrid-Ka's demanding wife. When she began to treat him with the disdain she felt for her real husband, he slew her with poison.

Why someone wants him dead: Awareness of the TRUE NUMBER also led to his being hunted by the sentient equations of the Lateral World. If he still lives when the sun dies, his knowledge of the TRUE NUMBER will cause a chain reaction. Lateral World will wink out of existence, too. To reduce this potentiality to zero, the sapient mathematical statements must see to it that he dies before the sun does. Unable to act directly on the Dying Earth, except to briefly possess the bodies of autists and savants, they hired a PC to kill Holdraf Pemp. Because the details of human discourse are to them noncongruent, they failed to make the distinction in their instructions between Jagrid-Ka and Holdraf Pemp.

What he's supposed to do: Perform the measurements and calculations necessary for Rolth's maps.

Appraisal 6, Attack (Strength) 8, Athletics 8, Concealment 6, Defense (Vexation) 12, Etiquette 4, Gambling 6, Living Rough 2, Perception 6, Persuade (Glib) 8, Quick Fingers 6, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 6, Scuttlebutt 4, Seduction 4, Stealth 5, Tracking 2, Wherewithal 2.



Olgorath, a “scribe”

Who he seems to be: A fusty, pedantic scholar who delights in correcting others, lecturing on irrelevant facts, and clearing his throat. He is a stick-thin man in a tall, ornate hat.

Who he really is: It might be slightly unfair to call Olgorath an impostor, in that he really is Olgorath. What he really isn't is alive. During a previous sojourn to the Valley of Fallen Tombs, he was infected with a strange fungi found in one of the crypts. Found on a shambling undead corpse, to be exact. Olgorath was bitten before the creature was dispatched by expedition guardsmen. Years later, he died of old age, only to claw his way out of the coffin at the funeral parlor. The fungi keeps him animated. He neither eats, drinks, or sleeps, but feigns all three, along with all other semblances of life. Choking perfumes conceal his natural aroma, which vaguely recalls rotting meat. Olgorath harbors no ambitions greater than to continue his existence until the sun dies, which will surely happen any day now.

Why someone wants him dead: Olgorant, Olgorath's now-aging son, has grown impatient for his inheritance, which his father is squandering by remaining alive long after a reasonable date. His investigations, which he has concealed from Olgorath, have confirmed his father's suspected state of undeath. Without revealing his motive or identity, Olgorant hired

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a PC to finish his father off, in the place where all the trouble started.

What he's supposed to do: Maintain a copiously detailed journal of all survey activities, from the momentous to the trivial.

Appraisal 3, Attack (Speed) 8, Athletics 8, Concealment 6, Defense (Parry) 12, Etiquette 2, Gambling 3, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 3, Perception 6, Persuade (Eloquent) 6, Quick Fingers 6, Rebuff (Contrary) 8, Scuttlebutt 6, Seduction 10, Stealth 5, Tracking 2, Wherewithal 2.

Special: Olgorath ignores the first three injuries dealt to him in any fight or hazardous situation.



Rolth, a “cartographer”

Who he seems to be: an affable, short-statured, red-haired and red-faced fellow. He takes quiet pride in his maps (which, unlike the real Rolth, he never allows anyone to see.) When not conducting his duties with unobtrusive efficiency, he discourses knowledgeably on his various favorite ales and tussock beers. Although not given to complaint, he is unhappy to be reduced to beverages that are easier to carry on a wilderness trek, like wines and brandies.

Who he really is: Beskar, an incorrigibly rakish scoundrel. Perhaps like the PCs, he lives only for pleasure and short-term advantage. Appallingly, one of his chief pleasures is killing women who dare to challenge or scorn him. He blames the female sex for his urge to murder them and is glad to distance himself from them, at least until the heat dies down on his most recent outrage.

Why someone wants him dead: Beskar recently tried to go straight, affiancing himself to Clela, daughter of the barrel magnate Cessic. When he crept into her bedchamber for a pre-connubial sampling of the wares, Clela righteously turned him away. He flew into a rage and strangled her. Through go-betweens met at Azenomei, Cessic has hired a PC to kill Beskar, preferably also by strangulation. The PC knows the full details of the case, and knows that one of the survey team members is Beskar in disguise. He does not know that it is Rolth.

What he's supposed to do: Rolth is expected to draw beautiful, painstaking maps of the various freshly-exposed tombs the group has been assigned to explore.

Appraisal 3, Attack (Ferocity) 8, Athletics 8, Concealment 6, Defense (Misdirection) 12, Etiquette 2, Gambling 3, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 3, Perception 6, Persuade (Charming/Intimidating) 6, Quick Fingers 6, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted/Wary) 8, Scuttlebutt 6, Seduction 10, Stealth 5, Tracking 2, Wherewithal 2.

Tantimur, a “forager”

Who he seems to be: The muscular, heavily bearded Tantimur behaves more like a beast of the woods—perhaps a hoon or even a grast—than a civilized being. A man of few words, he spends most of his time in a moldy cabin on the banks of the Scaum. Only to support his estranged daughter, Eelka, does he take on occasional jobs for the Antiquities Association.

Who he really is: Khelb was an effete city-dweller forced by his nature-loving parents to accompany them on a trek into the wilds when he fired a thoughtless arrow at the last female chiiva bird. The species was sacred to a nomadic people known as the jatang. Their witch doctors discovered his crime and harried him to Kaiin, nearly killing him on several occasions. Since then he has existed as a fugitive. These circumstances ironically require him to flourish in the harsh wildlands he once despised. Recently he stumbled into the cabin of Tantimur. When he realized that the woodsman was a friend of the jatang and intended to turn him over to them, Khelb dashed his head in with a rock. He then hid the body, in what he thought was an obscure location.

Why someone wants him dead: Without the chiiva to grant good fortune, the jatang have dwindled. No longer able to chase them directly, they've been reduced to hiring outsiders to do their dirty work for them. Through prolonged grinding of the rumor mill, they learned that Khelb might be posing as their old acquaintance Tantimur. Their headman hired a PC to kill him, but for reasons of taboo was prevented from explaining why they want him dead.

What he's supposed to do: Tantimur guides the party through the wilderness, helping them to live off the land.

Appraisal 3, Attack (Finesse) 5, Athletics 8, Concealment 6, Defense (Intuition) 6, Etiquette 2, Gambling 3, Living Rough

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8, Pedantry 3, Perception 6, Persuade (Forthright/Obfuscatory) 6, Quick Fingers 6, Rebuff (Obtuse/Penetrating) 8, Scuttlebutt 6, Seduction 2, Stealth 6, Tracking 6, Wherewithal 2.



Wamadhol, an “eminence”

Who he seems to be: A wealthy noble, draped in embroidered silk, smelling of myrrh and voly-blossom, perched in a satin saddle.

Wamadhol occupies the post of second-in-command of the Azenomei Antiquities Association. Like all its members, he is a wealthy dilettante who belongs to the organization mostly to ridicule the nonsensical theories of his peers. Although it was not his turn to lead an expedition, its chairman, Aastranc, graciously succumbed to his indefatigable queue-jumping campaign and stepped aside for him.

Who he really is: Wamadhol never existed. He is the fictional creation of one Xumont of Kaiin. He rose to fortune by dubious means, from lamentable beginnings as a street urchin of questionable parentage. After enriching himself, he sought and was repeatedly denied social legitimacy to match his treasury. Eventually he invented the persona of Wamadhol, forged a lineage, and showed up in backwater Azenomei, demanding the recognition due a nobleman.

Why someone wants him dead: The person demanding Wamadhol’s execution is none other than Aastranc—though he appeared to the PC in disguise and hid his true identity skillfully. Aastranc recently discovered Xumont’s secret. It was bad enough enduring Wamadhol’s taunts when he seemed to be of the manor born. From a mere gutter wretch, they are too great an insult to bear! With full agreement of the other members, Aastranc arranged the entire expedition merely to provide a pretext for Wamadhol’s untraceable death. He hopes he takes his secret to the grave, protecting the Association from embarrassment.

What he’s supposed to do: Airily condescend to the lowly members of the incompetent survey team. Make occasional grudging nods toward leadership of same.

Appraisal 3, Attack (Caution) 8, Athletics 8, Concealment 6, Defense (Sure-footedness) 12, Etiquette 2, Gambling 3, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 3, Perception 6, Persuade (Penetrating) 6, Quick Fingers 6, Rebuff (Obfuscatory) 8, Scuttlebutt 6, Seduction 10, Stealth 5, Tracking 2, Wherewithal 2.



PRELUDE

If you’re playing “The Vale of Crypts” as a follow-up to “The Hotel Grand Perdusz”, and that scenario concluded with the characters still imprisoned in Urbotast’s establishment, start by conducting a transition sequence(p. 61) to explain how they got away, and how they reached Azenomei.



AZENOMEI

Located at the junction of the Scaum and Xzan Rivers, Azenomei is older than memory. Its fair, which draws persons from throughout the populated Scaum Valley, is older still. Perhaps once great, it has now dwindled, so that its fair is the only interesting thing about it. Nonetheless, a few pedigreed nobles declare it a second home. They journey from their manses to meet in private clubs, away from the bustle and corruption of the area’s incomparable metropolis, white-walled Kaiin.

For more on Azenomei, consult *The Scaum Valley Gazetteer*.

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OPENER

The tale opens with the PCs perched on a rickety bridge spanning a great gorge. Along with them on the bridge traipse six fellow travelers, dressed for a rugged trek. The bridge, a paragon of incompetent construction that has only grown worse over years of weathering, is composed of fraying ropes. The PC with the highest Perception rating sees that one of the boards is about to snap under the feet of a fellow trekker. He risks a plunge into the muddy canyon below. If he goes, so might the entire bridge, and everyone else with it.

Ask the players what they want to do first:

- ☛ Learn why they came to be on the bridge.
- ☛ Deal with the immediate emergency.

In the first case, provide them with the information given in “The Flashback” first, answer any remaining questions they happen to have, and then go on to “The Emergency.”

The Flashback

While at loose ends in the sleepy carnival town of Azenomei, the PCs stumbled into a lucrative employment offer. After a sustained campaign of salesmanship, the characters persuaded Aastranc, the patrician head of the Azenomei Antiquities Association, to hire them on as expedition guards.

Break here to invite each player to describe, transition style, an action his character took to successfully slander, sabotage or otherwise undermine rival groups vying for this position.

Aastranc’s advance rescued them from immediate hunger and penury. The final payment for successful completion of the mission will get them back on their feet again—enabling them to finally part company, should they decide to do so.

Their job is simple: they are to escort a six-member survey team on an archaeological expedition into the Valley of Graven Tombs.

On any Pedantry success, any character whose player asks you about the Valley can rattle off the material given under “Setting” on (p. 92).

Their handsome reward is payable upon return to Azenomei. This amount will be reduced by 16% for each crew member they fail to safely deliver home. Of course, this provision is a mere formality. Though the wilds of the Scaum Valley are subject to the usual banditry and carnivory of these unfortunate times, individuals as competent as the PCs have made themselves out to be surely cannot fail to completely fulfill their simple duties.

They set off from Azenomei with the expedition, during which time they have encountered only petty dangers, scarcely worth enumerating. They have also become better acquainted with the surveyors.

Make all of the component card swaps(p. 92) except for the Enchanted Items cards.

If the players ask for more details on the survey crew at this time, subtly remind them of the bridge emergency they perhaps ought to be returning to. Frame your answers in reference to who’s where on the bridge. Your extemporaneous narration might sound something like this:

☛ “Rolth? He’s usually a jolly fellow, charged with making the team’s maps, but now that he’s on a bridge about to plummet into a gorge, his usual ruddiness has drained from his face.”

☛ “Wamadhol? Although you’ve found him somewhat accessible, to most he projects an image of dour authority. This is somewhat countered at present by his look of terror as the plank snaps beneath his well-shod foot.”

Before supplying these answers, determine which survey team member is in greatest peril, as explained below.

The Emergency

First, decide which of the surveyors is in greatest danger. He’s the one with the splintering plank beneath his foot. If you have fewer than six players, select a survey team member no one wants to kill. For six players, decide randomly, using the table on (p. 103).

Describe the bridge and gorge. The bridge connects two canyon walls. On closer inspection, the PCs can see that the canyon walls are not entirely natural formations. They’re actually piled up agglomerations of stone crypts, stacked on top of one another over generations. Recent river erosion has eaten away at the layers of earth between them, leaving a thin mortar of insecure mud. The canyon comprises a stretch of the accumulated ruin where all of the tombs have collapsed into one another, leaving a floor of jagged rocks about a hundred and fifty feet below the bridge level.

If asked why they ventured onto this obviously treacherous bridge, have all players roll to resist Arrogance. Explain that the character (or characters, in the event of a tie) with the worst result decided it was safer than it looked, and convinced the

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others that it would provide a useful shortcut.

This scene establishes the scenario premise in an exciting, attention-grabbing way. It is not meant to kill the PCs or any of the surveyors.

As soon as the players start considering what to do, hand out the Enchanted Items component cards. “Oh yes, you picked these up between Perdusz and Azenomei. Not sure if they’ll be any use, but here you go.”

Feats of Athletics offer the obvious way out of this situation. Allow any halfway credible solution to the problem, combined with any success, to work. Describe failures along the way, even if rerolled, as potentially disastrous events that heighten the suspense. The bridge might break, forcing the party to climb up its remaining halves as its change in position turns it suddenly into a rope ladder. Someone might grab a stray limb or statuary hand on the way down into the canyon, or land in a sole patch of cushioning moss.

AFTERMATH

Use the moments after the group escapes certain death to introduce what remains of the character and situation. If the flashback hasn’t occurred yet, do it now.

Wamadhol haughtily scolds the PCs for recklessly endangering his team by convincing them to take the bridge. (If you haven’t yet used Resist Arrogance rolls to determine whose bright idea this was, do it now.)

Tantimur, the team’s scout, steps in to say that he told them so, and would never have gone on that bridge of his own accord. He argues for his own competence by heaping blame on the Arrogant PC or PCs.

The group then trudges on toward the ruins the Antiquities Association has chosen as their ultimate destination.



The Vale of Crypts SCENES AND SITUATIONS

Because it follows a quest or journey format, the structure of this scenario is highly flexible. This section presents a various possible situations, which you slot in as needed, in any order.

These scenes are reactive; they present a challenge which one or more of the PCs must then deal with. Before moving on to a new reactive scene, give all of the players the opportunity to initiate actions of their own. When running for an especially proactive group, you may not need many of these scenes. React to what the players do with challenges that would naturally confront them as they pursue their plans. Force them to react to you only when the action hits a lull. You may find that you can mine these moments for challenges to PC schemes, reconfiguring them as needed.

Many situations in this scenario call for you to select a member of the survey team. One might immediately pop out at you as the right choice.

- ✦ The PC assigned to kill him might be due some spotlight time.
- ✦ The situation might apply particularly well to one of the surveyors.
- ✦ The scene might build entertainingly on a previous development revolving around the surveyor, the PC, or both.

Go ahead and pick the surveyor on the above basis.

In other cases the choice might not be readily apparent to you. When this happens, make a die roll and consult the following table. This is a fallback only; better to assert conscious choice than to surrender to fate's caprices.

DIE RESULT	SURVEYOR
1	Glust
2	Jagrid-Ka
3	Olgorath
4	Rolth
5	Tantimur
6	Wamadhol

A final section suggests ways to handle PC attempts on surveyor's lives.

Interactions

These sequences tease out the surveyors' plot lines. Hold them in reserve, using them only if the players are not:

- ✦ making interaction happen on their own.
- ✦ pushing the story forward in some other equally interesting way.

Choose which interaction scenes to use by focusing on players who haven't had their fair share of spotlight time. Pick the surveyor they've been assigned to dispose of. (Assuming he still lives.)



THE BIZARRE LUCK OF JAGRID-KA

During several "Hazards of the Quest" sequences (below), Jagrid-Ka escapes certain doom by astounding good fortune. (Use this device to save others, including PCs, who ought to be snuffed out according to the rules results, but will be more fun to keep in the story for longer.)

If asked about this, he attributes his good fortune to a statistical anomaly. He professes to find it as odd as anyone else. Use tone and body language to indicate that he's lying.

Eventually, one of the other surveyors demands answers, if none of the PCs bring it up.

If he loses a Persuade contest to a PC seeking his secret, he confesses his true story. He takes a levy of 1 if the contest takes place in private, and the grilling remains relatively sympathetic. For the purpose of this contest only, his Rebuff trumps Intimidating, not Fortright.

(Never stage Persuade contests between supporting characters. When they argue, they either leave at an impasse, or you decide who wins based on what seems logical and amusing.)

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DELK VS. GLUST

Delk, the criminal who seeks fatal payment for a bad debt owed him by the original Glust, just happens to be leading a guardian group for a survey team of his own. This sequence divides into three scenes.

Another Team

The group meets a rival archaeological team. The PC tasked to dispose of Glust notices Delk looking at the geomancer, as if shocked to see him, and then quickly covering his reaction. (Remember, vat-grown Glust has no idea that Delk is after him, and the PC received his orders through an intermediary and doesn't know that Delk is his ultimate employer.)

The leaders of the two expeditions warily size each other up, and the two groups go their separate ways.

Be ready to improvise if the player decides to brace Delk; this sequence could go in a much different direction if the layers of misinformation are peeled away. The criminal leader's instinctive wariness makes this difficult.

Names, if you need them: Survey team: Tevros, Minic, Owerl, Peddick, Rianth. Delk's subordinates: Falarl, Giltred, Vandik, Zorn.

If a fight breaks out, repurpose bandit statistics (p. 105) for Delk and his goons. Use Chacronis's numbers for Delk.

A Bad End

Tevros and his other surveyors are found dead, in a hazard similar to one the party has already encountered and survived. Evidence at the scene suggests that they were abandoned by their guardians.

Delk Attack

Delk chooses an opportune time to attempt to kidnap Glust, taking him to an improvised hideaway for a leisurely killing. The PC assigned to dispose of him can stand by and let this happen. During the closer or a coda thereto, the agent refuses to pay him, on the grounds that the client already took matters into his own hands. The agent then produces Delk to sneeringly deny payment.

OLGORATH – GHOUL?

Once bad things start happening to the survey team, tensions between them erupt. In a moment of danger, when cool heads are required, one of the other surveyors suddenly cracks. He's noticed the Olgorath never eats or drinks. Not only that: he seems to fake his sleeping³.

The truth is obvious: he's a ghoul, who must have eaten and replaced the real Olgorath at some earlier point in the journey.

The PCs may have to calm the group to get through their crisis of the moment. Afterwards, the other surveyors return to the case. He might deny everything, or admit the truth: he's unliving but not a ghoul. If they think he's anything but human, they'll want to tie him to a stump and abandon him. This may suit the PC who's supposed to see to his death. The others realize that they won't get paid for him unless they smooth matters over and keep him with the group. This might conclude in various ways:

- ✦ Persuade vs. Rebuff within the PC group to keep him in the team
- ✦ as above, but with PC Persuading and supporting character Rebuffing
- ✦ Olgorath left piteously wailing as the others tramp away into the distance

ROLTH AND THE SCROUNGER GIRL

The group meets a pair of bedraggled scavengers who eke their way through the jetsam and flotsam of the shoreline: the gristly Lurcmede and his comely, if muck-encrusted, daughter Agmar. The PC charged to take care of Rolth notices him assessing Agmar's charms, and Agmar responding with a dagger-sharp look.

That night, Rolth sneaks away to track down Agmar, harboring designs on her as murderous as they are lascivious. A PC earning a Perception success and then winning a Tracking vs. Stealth against him contest can follow him. With luck and skill, the PC might intervene in time to save the girl.

TANTIMUR'S BONES

Tantimur grows visibly nervous (to the PC charged with his murder) as he enters a particular area, perhaps a crypt. There, on a Living Rough, Engineering or Perception roll (depending on location and circumstances), the group uncovers the remains of the real Tantimur. Included among the dead man's effects is a ring that Khelb missed during his panicked search

³ A PC keeping close tabs on Olgorath might note this too, perhaps beforehand, on a Perception success. An Illustrious Perception Success makes him out as undead. This realization could turn this plot point in an entirely different direction, obviating this suggested sequence.

❧ The Vale of Crypts ❧



of the body after the murder. The design incised into its ivory face, an ancestral crest, matches a pendant the false T'antimur now wears.

Khelb tries to lie his way past the evidence. If forced to admit it, he then argues that whatever he did to T'antimur shouldn't reflect on the irreproachable professionalism he's shown to date as the mission's forger.

WAMADHOL AND THE BANDIT

The bandits hazard (p. 105) can also double as an interaction sequence for Wamadhhol. One of the bandits might remember Whamadol from his days as the ambitious street urchin Xumont. Depending on how they interact with the survey team, he might spill the beans on his old acquaintance. Or, with this knowledge as leverage, he could pressure Wamadhhol into hiring him as an additional guardian.



Hazards of the Quest

Encounters with the prototypical hazards of a fantasy tomb-raid not only provide thrills in and of themselves, but offer the PCs opportunities to unobtrusively bump off their designated victims.

BANDITS

The clever treasure hunter doesn't venture into dangerous crypts himself. He lets an archaeologist do that for him, then sneaks in to camp at night to hold blades to throats and steal the loot. In this sequence, one bandit per PC shows up to attempt opportunistic looting.

Roll randomly if there are fewer than six PCs. Bandits have 5 points in all pools listed in the table below.

NAME	ATTACK	DEFENSE	PERSUADE	REBUFF
Chacronis	Finesse	Misdirection	Forthright	Wary
Ehreh	Caution	Parry	Glib	Contrary
Roylant	Cunning	Vexation	Charming	Obtuse
Shenk	Speed	Intuition	Obfuscatory	Penetrating
Vwale	Ferocity	Dodge	Intimidating	Pure-Hearted
Xoban	Strength	Sure-Footedness	Eloquent	Lawyerly

Tricky PCs might accomplish all manner of mischief with an easily persuadable bandit.

☞ The Vale of Crypts ☞

CRYPT COLLAPSE I (OUTSIDE)

The party is on a lower level of a crypt pile when one of them, pressured between two others and lubricated by mud, shoots out from its position. It drops down through the air, ready to land right where the group now stands.

CRYPT COLLAPSE II (INSIDE)

The party is inside a crypt when the mud beneath it gives way, threatening to topple it and all of its contents down a canyon face. Engineering successes might find a way to stabilize it. For added fun, it might drop into the river, threatening everyone inside with a terrible drowning death. Or it might float toward one of the lazy river's few serious waterfalls. In any case, Athletics and Wherewithal will surely be tested.

A HOON'S STRATAGEM

On a rare patch of flatland, the group encounters a seemingly wounded hoon. This gigantic, enormously muscled quadruped seems to offer a ready supply of fresh meat.

However, as anyone with a Pedantry success knows, hoons are carnivorous and tricky.

In fact, the hoon is faking, trying to lure the party onto ground it finds favorable, then stomp and eat them.

Hoon

Athletics 14, Attack (Ferocity) 8, Defense (Intuition) 8, Perception 6, Stealth 6, Tracking 10, Wherewithal 12.

For more on hoons, see *The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game*, p. 168.

MAD HOWLINGS

Under a night sky filled with dying stars, the crazed yowling of tomb-locked ghosts rises up, threatening the PCs with madness. If they make their Wherewithal successes, a random surveyor fails. The characters must talk him down before he hurts one of the others. Players wanting either the madman or his target dead may play a double game.

MUDSLIDE

The party is caught on or under a mudslide, the most common disaster to befall Graven Tomb explorers.

PEEVISH MUMMY

In a stone sarcophagus lies a corpse too stubborn to die. Naturally mummified by a thick layer of fungi accreted to his ceremonial wrappings, Ulongro is capable of speech and motion. Annoyed by the desecration of his tomb, he sits up and querulously demands compensation—preferably in the form of an enchanted item belonging to a PC. Ulongro threatens to attack if insufficiently placated.

A Pedantry success judges, from the style of his coffin and his archaic accent, that Ulongro hails from the late 20th aeon. To the frustration of avid historians present, he refuses to be drawn out on the mysteries of his era. He deems all subjects unconnected to his compensation and the party's immediate exit too personal given their tenuous acquaintanceship. Olgorath might be seen to react with curious anxiety when confronted with another undead being. He's afraid that Ulongro will give away his true nature to the others. Depending on how the conversation goes (which is to say, if this seems an amusing time to reveal Olgorath's secret). Ulongro might do just that.

Ulongro

Athletics 6, Attack (Strength) 4, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 8, Magic (Forceful) 16, Perception 6, Persuade (Intimidating) 6, Rebuff (Contrary) 8, Wherewithal 12.

Special: Ulongro's attacks take the form of Magical blue bolts projected from his fungal fingers. He makes them with his Magic pool. When he runs out of those points, he then spends Attack, switching to a slamming, clawing physical assault.

SPHERE OF ERADICATION

Any manner of fiendish trap might fill the area's larger, richer crypts. Examples might include:

- ☞ jets of flame
- ☞ shooting spikes
- ☞ Eerogo's Inexorable Foot-Grabber

These could threaten the lives of the PCs or surveyors they're trying to protect. Or they might prove useful as something to push one's victims into.

Most notably, the group might encounter a dreaded Sphere of Eradication, a glowing ball that destroys any living thing that comes into contact with it. Due to the shifting of crypts, the Sphere has dropped down into a crevice and is hard to reach. A clever PC might persuade a victim to touch it—perhaps arguing that it must be the Ovirad.

🐉 The Vale of Crypts 🐉

STRANGLEMOSS

One morning the team awakens to find that the soft moss they slept on has grown elongated, sucker-lined tendrils, which have tightly wrapped themselves around the necks of one or more survey team members. A Pedantry success reveals that the sap of these plants becomes a toxic gas when exposed to the air. The group must find a clever way to coax the moss-vines to release their prey before suffocation sets in.



The Ovirad

This series of linked scenes triggers if the players wonder what the survey team is really looking for.

INITIAL INQUIRIES

The PCs are told that the survey team merely engages in a routine archaeological field study. New tombs are forever opening up as the valley erodes into the river. When this happens, scholars and treasure seekers race to be the first to inspect the secrets they hold. (Here you might drolly note the fuzzy demarcation between the two groups.)

They may suspect that at least some of the team members are out here in search of something specific.

Wamadhol seeks the Ovirad, an egg-shaped magical artifact said to possess wondrous powers. The exact nature of this wondrousness is open to debate, as the sources are vague on this point. He entrusts Jagrid-Ka and Glust with this fact, but no one else.

When first asked about the true nature of the mission, Rolth, Tantimur and Olgorath honestly parrot the official story.

Wamadhol says the same thing, but he's smoothly lying. If a player asks for a Perception roll to for signs of deception, any success shows his lack of honesty. Don't prompt for this roll.

Jagrid-Ka and Glust lie with less aplomb. They have more important secrets to conceal. If they're asked about it, play them as nervous, evasive and quick to change the subject. In other words, the players should be able to tell strictly from the way you're playing them that they're being untruthful. Perception successes, though unnecessary, make the PC sure of it.

FURTHER HINTS

At some later point, a PC who's skulking around doing something else—plotting murder, probably—sees two or more of the three surveyors who know about the Ovirad standing aloof in whispered conference. On a Stealth or Perception roll (depending on how the player proposes to go about it) the character overhears snatches of relevant dialogue: “Ovirad”, “wondrous power” “I think they sus-

SCENE CHECKLIST

Use this list as a quick reference to the scenes you've used and have yet to use. The object is not to obsessively check off as many boxes as you can, but to speedily choose the most suitable scene when you find yourself needing one.

Cross out interactions with surveyors who don't have PCs after them, or who are already dead.

Interactions

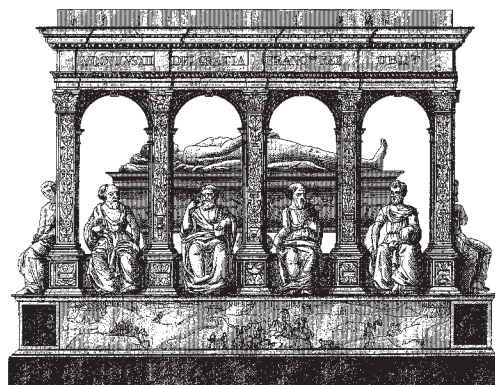
- ☐ The Bizarre Luck of Jagrid-Ka
- ☐ Delk vs. Glust
- ☐ Olgorath – Ghoul?
- ☐ Rolth and the Scrounger Girl
- ☐ Tantimur's Bones
- ☐ Wamadhol and the Bandit

Hazards of the Quest

- ☐ Bandits
- ☐ Crypt Collapse I (Outside)
- ☐ Crypt Collapse II (Inside)
- ☐ Hoon's Stratagem
- ☐ Mad Howlings
- ☐ Mudslide
- ☐ Peevish Mummy
- ☐ Sphere of Eradication
- ☐ Stranglemoss

The Ovirad

- ☐ Initial Inquiries
- ☐ Further Hints
- ☐ Forcing the Truth
- ☐ False Ovirad
- ☐ The Twist



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pect”, “they have no right to it, at any rate”, “we’re nearly there,” and so on.

Alternately, Rolth, Tantimur and Olgorath, perhaps to divert attention from their own deceptions, might overhear this and report their suspicions to an appropriate PC.

FORCING THE TRUTH

Having heard about the Ovirad, or having gained some other leverage over a surveyor who knows about it, a character can use Persuade to convince someone to spill the beans.

FALSE OVIRAD

Late in the scenario—perhaps at the two-thirds mark—the surveyors enter a tomb they believe to contain the Ovirad. Wamadhol does a dancing jig of triumph, bleating out the little he does know about the Ovirad. Then he deflates as Glust’s magic reveals it to be an inert replica of the real thing, lacking a jot of supernatural residue.

THE TWIST

If Wamadhol is on the verge of an early snuffing, or if other events render this an interesting turn, it might be revealed that there never was evidence of an Ovirad in the Valley of Graven Tombs. It was all a trick of Aastranc’s, to get Wamadhol here, so he could be discreetly killed. Along with this revelation comes the exposure of Wamadhol’s true story, and thus Aastranc’s reasons for wanting him dead. This information turns out to be held by another surveyor, who learned it by eavesdropping or purloining a letter.

OVIRAD AS CLOSER

The Ovirad provides the springboard for one possible closer, applicable if Wamadhol survives deep into the story and the players seem desirous of the Ovirad. See (p. 109).

Murder Most Clever

The main thread of the scenario—each PC’s efforts to kill his own victim and to save all of the other surveyors—will be improvised by you in reaction to player initiative. Keep these tips in mind as you do so:

- ❧ Always look for a fun obstacle to any attempt on a surveyor’s life.
- ❧ Where possible, make that obstacle another PC.
- ❧ If the players fill up session time engaging with each other, let the surveyors fade into the background.
- ❧ Bring them into the foreground when player actions lag. Have them interact with each other. Let them cross between plot threads, so that Olgorath, say, interferes with a PCs’ attempt on, for example, Tantimur.
- ❧ When stumped, review the scene checklist. A hazard can then springboard into a murder attempt.
- ❧ Let players dictate the time frame until they run out of things to do. Then jump ahead to a new intrusive event.



🐉 The Vale of Crypts 🐉

CLOSERS

Depending on player choices, the scenario could end up in a:

- battle between PCs
- battle between surveyors and PCs
- or go in any number of unpredictable directions.

Here are two other likely endpoints.

Doom of the Ovirad

One way to end the story is with the excavation of the Ovirad. This works well if it doesn't look like the group is going to get out of the valley and/or if the players seem entranced by the idea of a wondrous treasure. Should they show this interest early on, play up the tale's Treasure of the Sierra Madre elements. Focus on escalating hardships and betrayals as the group vies among itself for the Ovirad's great but unspecified power.

Finally the survivors crawl their way into a cramped, dank chamber they have identified as containing the Ovirad. Overcoming traps or physical hazards, they finally free it from its vault. A character asking for an Engineering roll (if successful) notes that the vault seems as much to keep something in as out.

If the players try to stop the surveyors from opening it, a fight breaks out. This might serve as the closer, should the PCs win.

If the vault is opened, the Ovirad bursts forth in a mantle of blinding golden light. It's a self-aware magical device in the form of a gilded egg. An extinct civilization built it as the ultimate in jurisprudence. It reads minds, condemns sins, and destroys the wicked. The Ovirad takes an extreme view of human morality. After it killed the entire civilization that built it, neighboring peoples managed to capture it and lock it away in a tomb forever. Until now.

The Ovirad decides that everyone in the chamber with it is a sinner and subject to its incinerating judgment. If this is a one-shot or the last Dying Earth scenario you're running for a while, it might blast the PCs with its fatal bolts, as the story goes into Comeuppance mode. Otherwise, it focuses on the surveyors. Athletics successes allow the PCs to flee, perhaps also dragging their charges to safety.

Services Rendered

As soon as they reach Azenomei (if any of them live that long), the impostors immediately make themselves scarce. (Or try to and fail, if the PCs anticipate this eventuality and score suitable successes as they seek to prevent it.)

In a coda sequence, the surviving PCs return to the Azenomei Antiquities Association to claim their pay. At this point, Aastranc regretfully informs them that the Association's obligation to has been voided by curious circumstance. As they'll no doubt recall, their reward is pegged to the number of team members they've managed to safely return. In their absence, Aastranc has learned that all of the surveyors are impostors⁴. Since they have returned none of the persons they were hired to return, but instead a motley collection of masquers and charlatans, the Association owes them nothing.

An epic Persuade vs. Rebuff duel concludes the scenario, in which the character taking the lead presumably argues that they discharged their duties in good faith, guarding those they were given to guard.

Should they lose, be ready for the PCs to seek the payment they feel they deserve by alternate means.

Aastranc, Amateur Scholar

Appraisal 6, Attack (Caution) 2, Athletics 2, Concealment 6, Defense (Dodge) 2, Etiquette 4, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 6, Perception 6, Persuade (Glib) 6, Quick Fingers 6, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 7, Scuttlebutt 6, Stealth 2, Stewardship 8, Wealth 6, Wherewithal 4.

Discard this sequence if you've already run long, or dispirited your players beyond endurance. Naturally it is also negated if all of the surveyors are already dead.

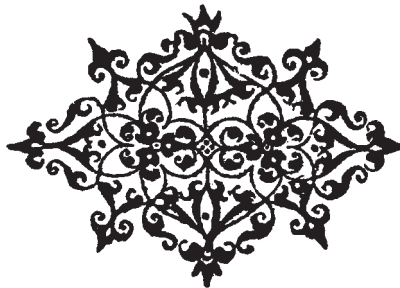
As mentioned in the entry for Wamadhol (p. 100), it is Aastranc who secretly commissioned his murder. Like most nobles, he is at heart a miser. He is the only patron who fails to show up to pay for the murder he ordered. If the PC knows Wamadhol's secret, he might guess at Aastranc's participation and guess his motivation. Armed with this inference, he can shake down the amateur archaeologist for his fee, and perhaps a bonus besides.

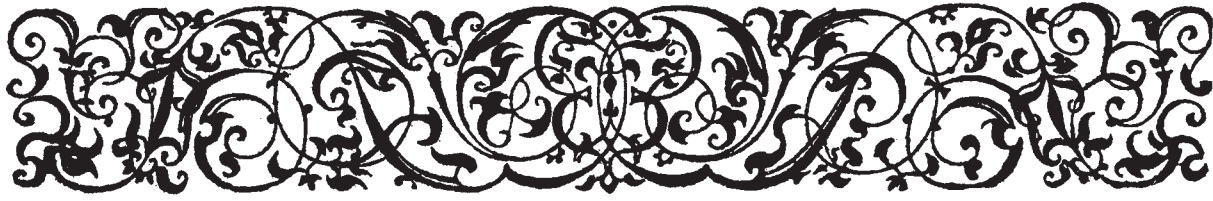
⁴ Consult survey team backstories as needed to work out how he came to this chain of bizarre discoveries.

❧ The Vale of Crypts ❧

TAGLINES

Your position is humiliating.	Conceive of dampness as your friend.
I am fatigued. Shall we rest for the night?	The journey's rigors have left you peevish.
It is hazardous. You go first.	Do I smell mummy dust?
Whatever the most fabulous treasure is, I reserve it for myself.	I have a mind to renegotiate our arrangement.
By the principle of invasive circumstance, I cannot be blamed.	Do not let my keen-eyed surveillance deter you from your course.
Forgive me while I betray your confidence.	My advice was poorly implemented.
This clamor ill-becomes you.	Pay no mind; it is merely a passing corpse.
The river reeks this time of year. Or is it you?	It was implicit in our unstated contract.
I aim to keep you alive. How alive I have not yet decided.	I was once in a similar strait, which I now struggle to recall.
This must be solved with magic, which is not my forte.	Pardon me. I was thinking of a hat I once owned.
Never trust a beautiful map.	It is scarcely a scrape.
Have you a widow who will desire your personal effects?	I question your eminence.
It will charge only if provoked.	At least it isn't raining.
One day we will look back on this journey with amusement.	You plumb new depths of vacuity.
I am enervated. Pass the brandy.	If you were entombed here, would you object to a little digging?
The term "mudslide" is a well-known misnomer.	Is there still such a thing as river sharks?
To keep this in perspective, the sun is dying.	Never envy another man's grave.
I deny the parallel.	Come over here and touch this.
That's just the whistling wind. I hope.	When I return to Azenomei, I am never again going outside.
One of you knows how to make fire, yes?	It would have been rude not to eavesdrop.
I was raised in a forest, and suckled by a kroon.	Could that be formed into a sausage?
Who volunteers to assess its edibility?	Should the sky be looking at us like that?





Lords of the Village

THE SETTING

The scenario takes place in Vlere, a tiny village tucked away in the Hanging Hills, in the remote northern reaches of the Scaum Valley. Some time has passed since the events of “The Vale of Crypts.” The PCs have ensconced themselves as worthies of Vlere. They arrived as strangers, worn down by their various wanderings, and in the space of less than a year have wormed their way into indispensable positions of power. Power by the standards of a quiet village, at any rate. What they do not yet realize is that the villagers allowed them this latitude in anticipation of the events certain to attend its upcoming festival.



Vlere

Weave the following details of village life into early scenes. Provide detail as appropriate. Don't read this in a big chunk before the action starts.

Vlere radiates calm and quiet beauty. Nestled among verdant hills, it provides a meeting and trading place for the farmers who plow and pasture the surrounding slopes. Days resound with quiet: the chirp of crickets, the rush of a nearby brook, the low whistling of twl-blossoms. Nights are times of calm, collected revelry, as folk gather in one of its four taverns, to laugh, joke, quaff ale, and hark to the gentle lute-song.

ARCHITECTURE

Vlere's houses and buildings are conical structures formed from clay, wrapped around a skeleton of warped boards. Larger buildings, like the temple and taverns, comprise several cones attached to one another. Blue-fired ceramic shingles cover the roofs.

CLOTHING

The people of Vlere adopt simple rustic garb: a brown tunic under a black vest, intricately embroidered. The men wear baggy trousers, cut off at the mid-thigh. Married, widowed or underage women affect brown or black skirts. Marriageable women permit themselves brightly colored skirts and generously plunging necklines. All adults cover their heads with broad-brimmed hats of straw and felt. They also wear small ceremonial daggers. The decorated sheaths of these ornamental weapons serve as their primary finery. Status attends a flashy or expensively bejeweled sheath. Luminaries, such as family elders, wealthy farmers and high-ranking bandits, may own a different sheath for every day of the week.

MANNERS

Vlerians take pride in their politesse. To pass a fellow villager without a smile and a greeting is to seem like a brutish outsider. Ugly sentiments must be dressed in pretty words. Only when truly pressed will locals reveal the petulance typical of human interaction in the world's last days.



Lords of the Village

Character Tracker

Each character now holds an official position in Vlere, as determined by the random drawing of Municipal Positions cards.

PLAYER	CHARACTER	TEMPTATION	MUNICIPAL POSITION
	Fley		
	Ilber		
	Prisurp		
	Quens		
	Thurles		
	Venck		



















COMPONENT CARD SWAPS









For this scenario, replace old Relationships cards with new ones. Add one card per player from the Magic Spells and Municipal Positions sets. If no player gets the Mayor position from the Municipal Positions set, all players roll a die. The highest roller (reroll to break ties) swaps out her originally drawn card for the mayor card. As with any newly received Dying Earth component card, players are free to trade amongst themselves before play begins. Allow trading only after the Mayor card has been allocated.



❧ Lords of the Village ❧
Relationships

  Relationships: Athab, a town elder 2 Dwellig, a blind haberdasher 4 Jrenthos Bent-Arrow, a part-time bandit 3  	  Relationships: Athab, a town elder 2 Jrenthos Bent-Arrow, a part-time bandit 4 Yssl, a lovely taverner 3  
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  Relationships: Jrenthos Bent-Arrow, a part-time bandit 3 Urb, a gruff taverner 3 Yssl, a lovely taverner 4  	  Relationships: Zebela, a painted woman 4 Dwellig, a blind haberdasher 3 Yssl, a lovely taverner 3  
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  Relationships: Athab, a town elder 2 Zebela, a painted woman 2 Urb, a gruff taverner 4  	  Relationships: Dwellig, a blind haberdasher 3 Urb, a gruff taverner 2 Zebela, a painted woman 3  
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🐉 Lords of the Village 🐉
Magic Spells

The Excellent Prismatic Spray

Emit a multitude of tiny energy beams. These kill any single living creature smaller than a whale or destroy any single object breakable by a fire-axe.

Mishap Will Result if used on:

any PC

Gilgad's Grotesque Intervention

Trade your refresh tokens for those of another player.

Usable only if you have at least one refresh token.

Ildefonse's Vexing Whirligig

Look at all Spell cards currently held by other players. Redistribute them so that each player winds up with a new card.

Lugwiler's Dismal Itch

Reduce a single living creature to paroxysms of agonizing itching. The victim can barely perform simple tasks such as walking or riding, but may become spectacularly talented at complaining. Any non-Illustrious Success the victim makes is treated as a Quotidian Failure. Illustrious Successes are treated as Hair's-Breadth Successes.

Spell of the Slow Hour

Create a temporal warp around yourself, so that time passes more slowly for you than for others around you. Use this to take three consecutive actions (for example, an Athletics roll, a Stealth roll, and a Magic roll) before anyone gets a chance to react or interrupt you.

In a fight, you can make three Attack rolls in a row. Your opponent makes Defense rolls in response, as normal.

Xamander's Ruction

Force any other PC to reroll any single die result.

☞ Lords of the Village ☞ Municipal Positions

Mayor

You head the village government. It is your job to supervise the efforts of the sheriff, magistrate, and revenue officer to ensure the efficient running of village affairs. You make local by-laws, subject to the approval of the town elders, representatives of Vlere's oldest families. Your communications with them take place through an intermediary, the blandishman. You see to the punctilious enforcement of current by-laws, whether promulgated by your or your predecessors. In truth, the position requires little of your time, allowing you to enrich yourself at your main business—a livery stable once operated by the previous mayor.

Goal: Solidify your newfound wealth and position.

Sheriff

You enforce public order. The sheriff takes instructions from the mayor and sometimes assist the revenue officer in difficult collections. In truth, Vlere is a sleepy hamlet, whose docile, prosperous inhabitants rarely commit crimes. Unless you count the odd bout of late-night, ale-fueled singing. Now and then you've had to mobilize the local militia against bandits. Even they tend to scatter when confronted in force. This new life of ease and comfort is one to which a road-weary wanderer such as yourself could easily grow accustomed.

Goal: Hang on to your cushy post by any means necessary.

Magistrate

It falls to you to adjudicate the civil and criminal legal affairs of Vlere. Although you report in theory to the Mayor, your authority must remain impartial, your favor divided equally between the governed and their governors. The mayor and sheriff are expected to take your advice when crisis looms—which it rarely does, aside from the odd bandit scare. You earn a commission on every commercial dispute and for this reason have been encouraging the people of Vlere to litigate more. These efforts have been rewarded by patient indulgence and a barely noticeable uptick in cases.

Goal: Still, this is the easiest work you've done in a very long time, and you'd hate to see it end.

Revenue Officer

You collect all taxes and fees needed for the proper administration of Vlere's government. Reporting to the mayor, you sometimes seek the aid of the sheriff in enforcing collections, and of the magistrate in assessing special fines. By a delightful arrangement, you are paid a commission on all revenues you collect. Although your efforts to expand taxation enormously have encountered universal, good-natured resistance, you hope to wear them down over time.

Goal: Keep this job, while squeezing as much cash from it as you can.

Priest

It is your job to tend to the modest spiritual needs of the quiet, well-behaved townsfolk of Vlere. Surprisingly, you acquired the post without significant ecclesiastical experience or, for that matter, religious belief. You are expected, in fact, to keep specific references to the divine to a minimum during brief, infrequent sermons. Vlerians thrive on platitudes, homilies, and soothing generalizations. Officiate at weddings, funerals, and blessings of commercial enterprises, and you are holding up your end of the bargain – of the handsome tithe paid to the temple, you keep everything not needed for operations or upkeep. They don't seem to mind that its roof has lacked repair throughout the entirety of your short tenure.

Goal: Do whatever is necessary to keep this unbelievably cushy position.

Blandishman

Of all the municipal positions currently held by recent arrivals to the village, yours is the most distinctively Vlerian. Although its folk are universally cheerful, immemorial custom requires them to remain an appearance of aloofness from their public officials. This is why they hire on outsiders such as yourself. Your job is to act as intermediary between the mayor and the townsfolk, as represented by a council of elders. Each elder hails from one of the village's ancient families. To supplement this essential but largely ceremonial position, you have been granted the ale franchise in Vlere. All of its four taverns must broker their ale purchases through you.

Goal: This is the easiest living you've ever made. You'll do whatever is necessary to keep it.

RELATIONSHIPS

Athab, a town elder

Athab wears his long gray beard parted in two and waxed at the tips. His ceremonial dagger sheaths are second to none.

Universally recognized by the other town elders as their peer among peers, it is Athab who truly runs the town. He confers with the blandishman to convey the wishes of the village to the mayor.

Personality: Athab takes pains to portray himself as an avuncular and contemplative man. When asked to consider a course of action, he nods his head and pats his ample belly while he temporizes. He strives to seem a paragon of Vlerian virtues. Thus, he is unfailingly pleasant and polite. Only if traditions taken for granted in Vlere suddenly change does he lose composure and show his authoritarian tendencies.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Goal: While the Loaf Mass festival is approaching, he wishes nothing more than his forefathers have: that village affairs amble on quietly, and the status quo be protected.

To this end, he must not permit the outsiders to learn of their coming fate.

If the PCs do what none of their predecessors have, and permanently cast out the thlon, and he must step up to protect his rights and privileges as the village's wealthiest man, and head of its oldest, most respectable family.

Sample favors: 1) Soothe ruffled feathers between a townsman and a PC. 2) Provide money and resources for actions ensuring village safety. 3) Supply carefully edited version of village history.

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Attack (Caution) 2, Athletics 2, Concealment 2, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 4, Etiquette 8, Gambling 3, Living Rough 2, Perception 6, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 8, Rebuff 8 (Wary) 10, Riding 6, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 8, Wherewithal 6.



Dwellig, a blind haberdasher

Dwellig is fortunate that the village's prevailing fashions tend toward the neutral and uniform, for he has been unable to see his wares for over ten years. Though blindness, brought about by a congenital illness, took his sight long ago, he has yet to entirely adjust. Other villagers must com-

GOALS AND FREE WILL

Successful stories feature active, highly motivated protagonists. Roleplaying games typically employ rules structures to indirectly encourage players to make strong, interesting choices in keeping with the genre at hand.

D&D alignments give you a reason to go into the dungeon and kill monsters. Competing clans in Vampire hardwire undead political intrigue into the game. In certain incarnations of GUMSHOE, Drives reminding players to have their characters act like horror investigators, space opera troubleshooters, or post-apocalyptic scavengers.

Dying Earth takes this a step further by imposing goals on the players. If they're going to chafe at this, they'll do it here, where their goals prevent them from taking the obvious, self-protective action that would get them out of trouble. Here, the characters don't leave Vlere not because they're trapped (as they were in "Hotel Grand Perdusz") but because they don't want to. They are the typically greedy, foolish heroes of a picaresque adventure, stubbornly clinging to their cozy sinecures when they ought to be running for their lives.

If the characters attempt to leave, you could have them roll against their worst Resistances as they head out of town, against a gruesomely high levy. An Arrogant character cannot bear the thought of flight. Avarice tells a PC to stay and keep collecting a fine wage for an easy job. Gourmandism impels him to stay where the local ingredients are matchless and the portion size unparalleled. The Indolent would rather stay put than travel. A Rakish character has his eyes on a comely local—perhaps Yssl. A pettifogger remembers a niggling argument he forgot to conclude with another Vlerian.

On one hand, this method may be your best choice for groups or individual players who highly value the fictional illusion and hate to lose their sense of immersion with their characters. On the other, it is unfair, forcing them to burn through Resistance points for a foregone conclusion.

In most cases, you're better off simply reminding prospective escapees that leaving is contrary to their goals, and that the story will only be fun if they fully embrace the premise, acting with the entertaining short-sighted selfishness of a Cugel or Rhialto.

Much roleplaying is about trying to make the best decision, and getting hosed if you don't. In Dying Earth, you're going to get hosed anyway, so you might as well make the fun decision. For those truly in the spirit of the game, much of the fun of this scenario in its early stages lies in having figured out (as players) that a terrible fate awaits them, while portraying to the hilt the characters' oblivious gullibility.

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compensate for him as he stumbles through the streets. In the tavern, they pluck flagons from the path of his swinging cane. Marriageable women secretly purchase colorful dresses not from him, but from traveling peddlars.

Personality: Deprived of his sight, Dwellig has gone slightly dotty. The cloak of politeness all Vlerians are supposed to wear fits uncomfortably on his shoulders. He sometimes complains. He freely shares with merely temporary municipal officials his scathing assessments of various town cynosures. Worst of all, he has come to pity the strangers who are sacrificed each year. When the Thlon show up, he's the one man willing to tell the PCs the true nature of the bargain they've struck.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:

Goal: 1) Quietly while away his days, wondering whether his own imminent demise will precede that of the sun. 2) Try not to be around when the thlon take their fatal tribute, or to dwell unduly on the exchange after it is over.

Sample favors: 1) Supply truthful information. 2) Inefficiently mend clothing. 3) Recommend that they not make any new clothing purchases for the moment, as the events of the festival will tend to ruin them.

Abilities: Appraisal 1, Attack (Strength) 1, Athletics 2, Concealment 2, Craftsmanship 2, Defense (Misdirection) 2, Etiquette 2, Pedantry 8, Perception 1, Persuade 6 (Eloquent) 4, Physician 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Scuttlebutt 8, Stewardship 4, Wherewithal 2.



Jrenthos Bent-Arrow, a part-time bandit

From the onset of winter to the beginning of the harvest season, the handsome and dashing Jrenthos Bent-Arrow leads a comfortable life in Vlere. During his period he blends into the town, adopting its drab clothing and determined pleasantness. When harvest time comes, he rides out into the hills to meet up with his bandit gang. Together they raid farms and towns throughout the Hanging Hills and along the banks of the River Twish. More often than not they accept tribute from their victims without so much as loosing an arrow. When they meet light resistance, they slice through it mercilessly. Faced with the prospect of heavier action, they ride away to harry less defended targets.

Vlerians allow him to live here in exchange for an exemption from raiding. When he bought his home here, he agreed to ride off if any counter-raiders came here for him. This has never happened.

If he thought he could make an honest woman of Zebela, who has stolen his heart, he would marry her, and perhaps even settle down. But, with a sad pang, he acknowledges that she regards him only as another client.

Personality: Jrenthos is a hale, bluff, back-slapping sort much given to hearty exclamations. He enjoys both comfort and the thrill of action. Though he finds them relaxing, the good folk of Vlere sometimes seem a little dull to him. He generally befriends the new crop of municipal administrators each year, as they're usually interesting vagabonds like the PCs, with whom he shares greater commonality. It saddens him to think that, shortly after his departure for raiding season, his newfound friends are always horribly killed by alien monsters. So he doesn't.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory / Fortright

Goal: 1) Say a fond farewell to his new friends without spoiling his own comfortable arrangement by letting them understand what's about to happen to them. 2) Go raiding.

Sample favors: 1) Stage a delightful party. 2) Make the PCs feel good about themselves, as a preface to their imminent dooms. 3) Share an outsider's insight, without slipping too far into frankness.

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Attack (Finesse) 12, Athletics 6, Concealment 6, Defense (Vexation) 12, Etiquette 5, Gambling 6, Living Rough 6, Pedantry 2, Perception 6, Persuade (Charming) 10, Physician 3, Quick Fingers 6, Rebuff (Penetrating) 8, Riding 6, Scuttlebutt 6, Seduction 6, Stealth 6, Stewardship 2, Tracking 6, Wherewithal 8.



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Urb, a gruff taverner

Urb runs the largest of Vlere's taverns, the Loafing Plowman. It hosts the village's most boisterous revelry, becoming its unofficial center during the wasted days of the Loaf Mass festival. He knows everyone's business, and endeavors to keep it to himself.

Personality: Urb's forcefulness seems out of place in polite Vlere. An unspoken covenant allows him to be rude, so that he can shout his patrons into good behavior when they're in their cups.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Goal: 1) Induce one of the outsiders to intercept and hide some of the thlons' monetary tribute before they arrive. When his accomplice gets eaten, Urb gets to keep all of it. It might seem reckless to trifle with the thlon, but Urb did this last year, and it worked perfectly. How could it possibly go wrong this time?

Sample favors: 1) Share eavesdropped gossip. 2) Provide complimentary beverages. 3) Grant access to a hidden basement, suitable for secret meetings.

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Attack (Speed) 6, Athletics 6, Concealment 6, Defense (Dodge) 6, Driving 2, Gambling 3, Living Rough 2, Perception 3, Persuade (Forthright) 6, Quick Fingers 6, Rebuff (Contrary) 8, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 8, Stealth 4, Stewardship 6, Wherewithal 4.



Yssl, a lovely taverner

The beauteous and so-far virginal Yssl operates the Truthful Lyre, a smaller but more richly appointed tavern than the Loafing Plowman. Town elders, persons with exciting new scabbard embellishments to show off, and patrons seeking a more refined atmosphere gravitate to its plush cushions.

The young Yssl's beauty stuns anyone who gazes on her. She finds this magnetism burdensome. (Her Intimidating persuasion style derives not from a fear-some presence, but from a glamor that reduces others to tongue-tied yammers.)

She inherited the Lyre from her father, who died three years ago after eating a bad eel. Her mother ran away from Vlere before Yssl could form distinct memories of her.

Personality: Yssl yearns for love, but seeks someone who can see past her outward allure. She is convinced that she will find no such soulmate in Vlere. Villagers of marriageable age feel like brothers to her, not romantic partners. The only outsiders who come here are inveigled into taking municipal positions, and are annually killed. Yssl would leave Vlere, but then who would look after the tavern? (In truth, she fears that if she left, she would eventually unburden herself of the town's collective secret, provoking some kind of terrible reckoning.) So she pines quietly away, melancholy only heightening her resplendence.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Goal: 1) Protect the people of Vlere. 2) Luxuriate in the poignancy of her predicament.

Sample favors: 1) Intercede with another villager. 2) Provide a salubrious meeting place. 3) Extend advice on accepting one's inescapable fate.

Abilities: Appraisal 3, Attack (Ferocity) 2, Athletics 2, Defense (Parry) 2, Driv-

THE OTHER TWO TAVERNS

The third largest and dingiest of the village's drinking holes is supposedly called the Stump and Spade. Everyone refers to it as The Pit. Farmhands and others of low station habituate it, drawn by its cheap prices. It is run by a scrawny, uncommunicative man named Frast and owned by his mother, Luda, who periodically bellows instructions from upstairs. Luda is only seen at festival time, when her son rolls her about in a creaking wheelchair.

Pangol's Oak, named after a long-dead hero who actually lived several villages over, is Vlere's smallest tavern, catering mostly to the members of one very large family, whose cousin, Ewegol, runs its ale-taps.

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ing 2, Etiquette 6, Pedantry 2, Perception 3, Persuade (Intimidating) 8, Physician 3, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 8, Riding 3, Scuttlebutt 3, Stewardship 6, Tracking 5, Wherewithal 3.



Zebela, a painted woman

Zebela is the town prostitute. All men deny to their wives that they visit her; nearly all are lying. Though no longer youthful, the dexterity of her ministrations keeps her in business. Like any long-time professional, she knows that listening and pretending to care are more important to repeat business than any amount of thrashing between the sheets.

Any PC who has Zebela as a Relationship can specify that she's given them the occasional free tumble. Any other PC can specify that he paid for her services.

Jrenthos loves her, but she cares not a fig for him. He's not even truly a Vlerian. He doesn't cause trouble, but if he did, she'd contentedly arrange for the thlon to drain him of his life force.

If Zebela cares for anyone, it's Athab. She's always had a soft spot for older authority figures. At his behest, she'll manipulate her clients, including municipal officials, to protect the status quo.

Personality: Zebela is at once distant and kind, sympathetic and ruthless. A foundling left on the temple steps at birth, she still regards herself as fundamentally alone in the world. The day she forgets that is the day she becomes weak. Zebela has promised herself that she will never weaken.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:

Goal: 1) Protect herself. 2) Protect Vlere. 3) Protect Athab. 4) Get rid of Xirri. This is a new young doxy she hired on as an apprentice, at the insistence of certain ungracious village folk. Xirri treats her with impudence. Worse, she damages the reputation of the profession by clearly enjoying her trysts with clients! As Loaf Day comes, Zebela wonders if she can't get Xirri drained by the thlon, with the blame falling elsewhere. Like onto one of the doomed municipal officials.

Sample favors: 1) Relieve sexual tension. 2) Provide gossip. 3) Get a male of Vlere to do what the asker wants.

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Attack (Cunning) 6, Athletics 4, Concealment 6, Defense (Intuition) 8, Etiquette 5, Gambling 3, Perception 6, Persuade (Glib) 6, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 6, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 8, Scuttlebutt 7, Seduction 7, Stealth 4, Stewardship 6, Wherewithal 3.



OPENER

Tell the players that, as they can see from their municipal position cards, they've come up in the world since we last saw them. If necessary, conduct a transition to explain how they got from where they were at the end of "The Vale of Crypts."⁵

Begin the story with a quick opening scene emphasizing the sublimity of the PCs' new lot in life. This establishes their motivation to stay and protect their positions when matters get dicey.

The PCs are gathered, as is their wont, for a sumptuous breakfast together in the Truthful Lyre. (Take this moment to describe the four taverns of Vlere, and especially the Lyre and its beauteous proprietor, Yssl.)

Describe their delicious viands, paid for as always by community largesse. Poached serl eggs, toasted potato bread, eels in sweet sauce, acorn pancakes and a heaping helping of cress and shallot salad heap Yssl's earthen plates. The PCs ingurgitate sugared pomegranate juice or, for the stout of liver, a fresh morning lager, diluted with cold spring water.

While breakfasting, the PCs are visited in turn by grateful village folk. In each instance, the PC gains or is reminded of a benefit keyed to their position and their key trait. This benefit arrives without struggle, a pure gift due them by dint of their local status.

- A longwinded, self-important fellow named Cresnal swings by to praise a recent controversial decision by the Arrogant character. He assures him that he was correct to stick to his instincts in the face of groundless complaints.

5 Or "Hotel Grand Perdusz," if you've juggled the scenario order, or a scenario of your own devising, if that applies.

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As he does so, make it clear that the decision he's aggrandizing was actually ridiculous.

- ❧ Yssl spoons a special delicacy—fermented eel eggs—directly onto the Gluttonous character's salt-dazzled lips.
- ❧ The local tanner, Eglits, discreetly drops a bag of coins in the Greedy character's palm, as payment for a favorable abuse of his municipal authority. (If you need to stir things up at this point, invite others to make Perception rolls to spot the purse drop.)
- ❧ A humble farmer, Brenk, tells the Indolent character that he has performed an exhausting physical task he has been dreading—perhaps the clearing of his rain gutters.
- ❧ Cresnal (see above) concedes to the Pettifoggery-prone character that, in a long-running argument over a trivial point of fact, the character is completely right and Cresnal utterly wrong. If no point keyed to the particular PC comes to mind, they've been disputing the likely geological age of the Hanging Hills.
- ❧ A fresh-faced young maid, Greela, appears to breathe heavily at the Rakish character. Between the lines it is evident that the two of them whiled much of the previous night in vigorous trysting.

The emotional subtext of all these encounters is the same. These good people of Vlere are assuaging their consciences, saying goodbye in effect but not in words. They know that the PCs are about to be sacrificed to the thlon, and feel bad about it.

Though not enough, naturally, to upset the ancient ebb and flow of life in their perfect little home. They all wish the PCs an enjoyable Loaf Mass Festival, and break away, consciences assauged.

Unless the players choose to insert some, these scenes are conflict-free. Rattle through them as quickly as you can. If the players seem bored, ask if anyone wants to make a Perception roll.

On a success, the character senses something slightly off about the collective demeanor of the visiting villagers. On an Illustrious Success, it is apparent that the apprehension spikes upon the mention of Loaf Mass Day (see below.)

On the ground that gift mermelants are not to be looked in the mouth, any character having or hearing this insight must roll against their Resistances. On a failure, they are required to dismiss it from their minds for the time being. Players enthusiastically embracing their characters' ignorance may not bother in the first place.



SCENES AND SITUATIONS

The body of the scenario divides into two sequences. Loaf Mass Omens suggests that all is not as it seems in Vlere. The Thlon confirms it, as strange creatures show up to claim their annual tribute—the lives of the village’s top officials.

Loaf Mass Omens

When breakfast is over, tell the players that each has official business to conduct as the village prepares for its annual harvest festival, Loaf Mass Day. They can team up to deal with these tasks in sequence, or split up for a series of cross-cut scenes. If they all focus on one event, skip the others or quickly gloss over them. These sequences should at most take you to your session’s midway point.

URB’S SILVER I (REVENUE OFFICER)

Last year at this time, Urb struck a deal with the Revenue Officer to divert some terces⁶ from the village treasury. Together they hid a cache of stolen coins in the woods, with an agreement to split it later. The revenue officer altered the books, which passed inspection when the thlon came to claim their annual tribute. He was then eaten along with all of the other village officials. This left Urb free to claim the skimmed coins. This year he hopes to do it again. If the Revenue Officer has a Relationship to him, he approaches that character. If not, he goes to the character with the highest rating in his Urb Relationship, and proposes a scam. This other character is to con the revenue officer to grant him access to the vault, and then perform the heist. In proposing the scheme, Urb emphasizes the need to do it before the harvest festival begins. The accounting occurs during the festival, after which point couriers will show up to convey the silver to a vault. Urb uses Persuade to enlist the target character’s cooperation. He takes advantage of the character’s key trait if possible. If so, and the character fails his resist roll, the character suffers a levy on Rebuff attempts.

Try to engineer any ensuing vault-robbing shenanigans so that another PC opposes them. If the revenue officer is not the heister, he should (if present) be trying to stop it. Players may conclude that the heist is the central point of the scenario; provide support for this mistaken assumption. Be ready for:

- ☞ the group to split in two, with half trying to stage the heist and the other half trying to stop it
- ☞ everyone to participate in the heist, each planning to scam the loot for themselves
- ☞ a cooperative effort to steal and fairly share the loot (unlikely!)

Out to Pasture (Magistrate)

Two local farmers have been pressing the magistrate to conclude a dispute for them since he got into office about nine months ago. They are:

Hardune, a literal-minded barley farmer

Kobelen, a vituperative sheep herder

Hardune demands compensation for Kobelen’s illegal use of his land for pasture. Kobelen denies that he has pastured his herd on the field in question, which belongs to him anyway, so it’s all moot.

Ask the player to specify why he has been unable to reach a decision in this unending matter. If the player is stumped, suggest that he look to his key trait for an explanation. (For example, a Gluttonous PC might be dragging out the case to continue his receipt of mutton bribes. A Rakish character might be sleeping

6 Terce: the common coinage of the Dying Earth

WHEN BREAKFAST REALIZATIONS COME BACK ON YOU

Any character who at the end of the opener was required to dismiss suspicions arising from the extreme niceness of the village folk may start to entertain them after any ominous event during the “Loaf Mass Omens” sequence.

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with both men's daughters, and using their focus on the dispute to distract them from his activities.)

Until today the farmers have seemed content to let the dispute furl out endlessly. Now they arrive together at the magistrate's doorstep and demand a ruling before the festival begins. They are evasive if asked why the deadline matters. Under pressure, one may let slip that the magistrate's authority will end at the festival's climax.



Retrieval of the Civic Appurtenances

(Mayor) The wives of the town elders come to the mayor to provide him with his ceremonial garb—a strangely unfashionable smock of rough-hewn and hastily sewn linen. They demand the safekeeping of his expensive gear, and most especially his fancy scabbards. These must be set aside until after the festival. The women are most insistent on this point, even though the ceremonial robes are flimsy and unsuited to a great man's dignity. They are led by Mirva, wife to Athab. Should the PC remain vainly attached to his extravagant robes, her husband shows up to Persuade for their surrender.



The Disappearing Elder

(Blandishman) One of the town elders, Rovaril, has grown fond of the blandishman and, in his senile dotage, wants to warn him to run before the thlon show up. He sends an urgent message requesting a secret meeting at a crooked oak in the nearby woods. When the blandishman gets there, he finds no Rovaril. On a Perception success, he sees signs of a struggle. Otherwise he may ask for him back in the village. Either way, he pursues a trail of clues suggesting that someone has gotten Rovaril out of the way. He finds him or doesn't depending on roll results and distractions from other plot threads. Rovaril has been waylaid on Athab's orders and stuffed in a barrel in the bottom of Yssl's tavern.



The Beating

(Sheriff) One of the villagers is attacked by a hooded figure and dragged off into the woods for a sustained beating. Of the sheriff's Relationship characters, pick the one you expect the player to be most sympathetic toward. Then come up with a suitable grudge that might motivate another villager to violence. If it makes sense, pick as the perpetrator another Relationship character who has been underused in the scenario so far.

For example:

- ❧ Zebela is tired of the reverence the village shows for the snooty Yssl.
- ❧ Dwellig discovered that Athab has cheated him.
- ❧ Urb wants to punish Dwellig for blindly knocking over and wrecking his best flagons.

Leave Jrenthos out of this one. If it helps to interweave storylines, use a non-Relationship character from one of the other sequences as perpetrator or victim.

The perpetrator, if found, attributes the burst of untypical violence to pre-Loaf rage. He or she says this as if it is self-explanatory. When pressed, it comes out that this is a well-known phenomena of Vlere. Persons sometimes go a little mad just before Loaf day. Then both perpetrator and victim become uncommunicative, realizing that explaining why a sudden stress accompanies the supposedly cheerful holiday would prematurely reveal all.



Temple Improvements

(Priest) The priest discovers a work crew of locals converting the main floor of the temple for festival celebrations. They

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blanch when they see him and suggest that he return to the tavern for lunch. They've removed the expensive carpeting, replacing it with a layer of waxy fern leaves. For the first time the priest notices a rounded trap door in the middle of the temple floor. Now removed, it grants access to what looks like an earthen basement.

This is where the thlon eat their sacrifice. The waxy leaves repel the excess bodily fluids spilled as a collateral result of the draining proces. Effluvia pools into the hole, draining into the basement.

If questioned, the villagers account for the ceremonial alterations with a transparently improvised innocent explanation.

Should the priest prove too persistently inquisitive, the villagers assign one of their number to dog his heels and keep him relentlessly occupied with requests for advice and metaphysical insight. Use a Relationship character if appropriate. Otherwise, the priest must fend off Xeros, a tenacious bore and simpleton.



INTERLUDE: THE FESTIVAL BEGINS

As the early evening begins, so does the festival. Characters may be too occupied by their various plot lines to engage with it. Or they might drop what they're doing to participate in rustic dances, guzzle copiously pouring wine and ale, or seek drunken liaisons as restraint lifts and the fertility celebrations begin. To encourage the latter option, require Resistance rolls against distracting bouts of Rakishness, Gourmandism, and Indolence.



THE THLON

When dusk falls, Vlere's mood shifts. A pall of dread dampens the celebratory mood. People happily drinking, eating or trysting with the PCs suddenly remember themselves and pull away, ashen-faced. A rumbling erupts from the village's earthen central square.

Strange half-corporeal creatures rise up in a spray of displaced soil. These are the thlon. They resemble coruscating collections of glowing balls and tubes. At times they configure themselves to a vaguely humanoid shape. They can hold this position for a few minutes, after which they retreat to a formless, drifting pattern. When angered, glowing red eyes float in space, above a suddenly-manifesting set of razor teeth. These appear much more substantial than the rest of the creature.

The villagers react not with shock but with contained horror. These visitors were clearly expected.

There are a dozen thlon. Any one of them is more than a match for several PCs.

Thlon

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory / Forthright

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Attack (Ferocity) 18, Athletics 20, Defense (Parry) 12, Etiquette 6, Pedantry 6, Perception 6, Persuade (Intimidating) 8, Rebuff (Penetrating) 8, Tracking 6, Wherewithal 12.

JRENTHOS SADDLES UP

If a character seeks out Jrenthos during this phase of the scenario, they find him readying himself for his annual sojourn in the wilderness as a raider. With the aid of local members of his gang who also spend the off-season in Vlere, he's packing up provisions, saddling his horses, and checking his provisions. He's willing to grant whatever favors are due the PCs he has Relationships with, but under no conditions will delay his departure. He always leaves before the Loaf Mass Festival begins in earnest. If asked why, he explains that it's bad for discipline if the men start out debauched. The trail is a hard mistress, and his bandits must be ready for her.

If pressed (for example with a Relationship success) he may hint to the PCs that they should brace themselves for an unpleasant surprise. He then catches himself short and will go no further.

Privilege-conscious players who have, by random draw, been granted Relationships with Jrenthos may feel cheated to learn that their resource is getting ready to depart the scenario. Why, it's as if fate's dispensations are cruel, and, thus, arbitrary!

Right before dusk, the traditional start time for the festival, Jrenthos seeks out his Relationship PCs to bid a farewell. Though he tries to seem hale, Perception rolls may show that his goodbyes sound an unexpectedly final note.

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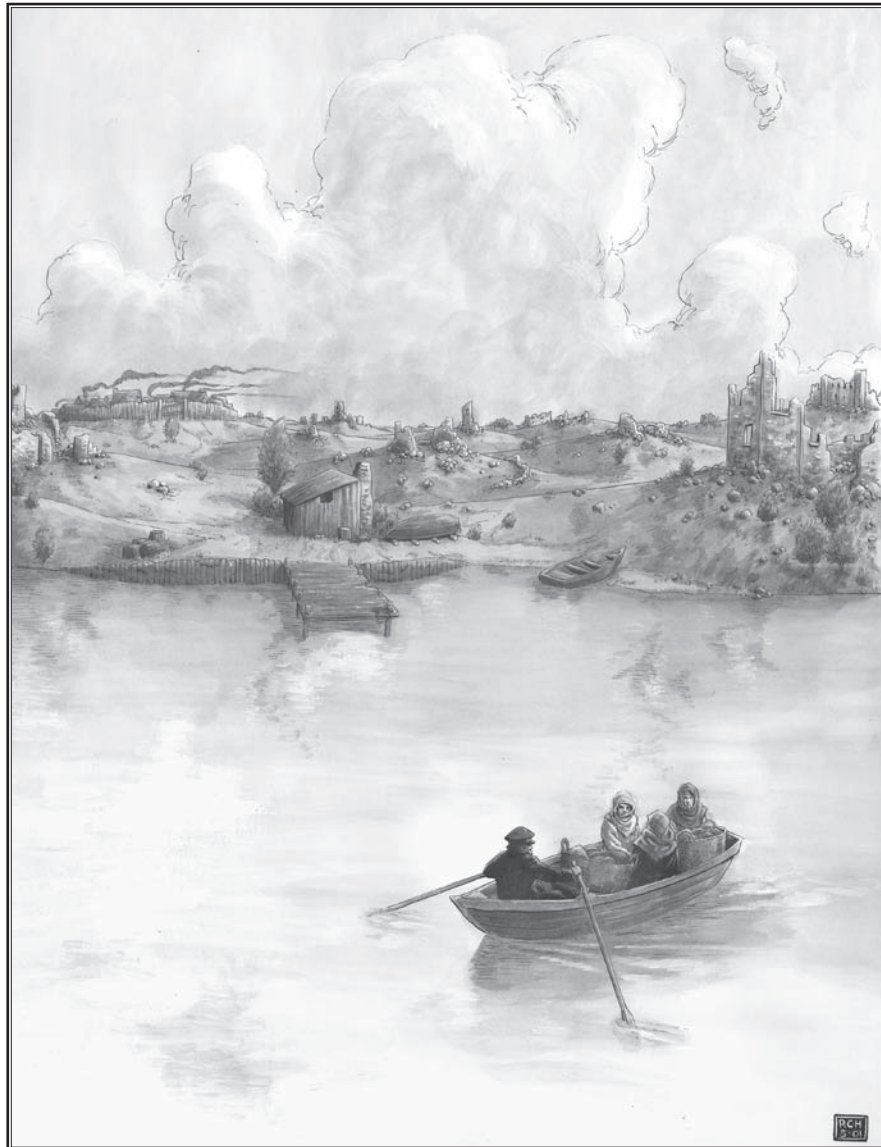
Special: *Extra attacks:* Each round, can attack as many opponents as are attacking it. ***Fast healing:*** Heals an injury (if it has one) each time it injures an opponent.

Like most intelligent beings of the Dying Earth, the thlon speak with an articulate politeness belying their fundamental rapacity. When the festival closes, they will claim their tribute from the Vlere in the form of tax revenues, and the delicious living bodies of their high officials. Until then, they're here to vicariously enjoy the celebrations. The villagers, all of whom have been doing this since birth, do their best to adopt a carnivalesque mien.

The Story of the Thlon

Now that the PCs have seen what lies in store for them, the Vlerians no longer have reason to hide their town's true history. A friendly villager or two imparts the following. Try to present the information in give and take dialogue form, rather than through a lengthy monologue.

A dozen or so generations ago—the exact chronology is imprecise—bandits rampaged through the Hanging Hills, displacing the residents of many villages. Some of these refugees banded together to become the founders of Vlere. They set up stakes on a lush but mysteriously empty territory. Some said it was haunted, but the founders figured that was all to the good. Fear would keep the bandits away.



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In the space of less than a year, the village quickly grew. Then, at harvest time, disaster struck. The thlon rose up through the ground, ate the village's civic leaders, and took their crops as tribute.

A negotiation ensued between creature and survivor. The thlon would allow them to occupy these fertile lands, provided they volunteered similar tribute each year at harvest time. The Vlerians entered into this pact with an alacrity even the thlon did not anticipate. They willingly paid the demanded life-price, but cleverly recruited bandits and other wandering human jetsam to serve as their apparent leaders. Each year the thlon equanimously fed upon these temporary leaders, and the Vlerians lived in prosperity.

Periodic attempts to rid the village of thlon are recalled as disasters. No one has tried this in living memory. They are as much a part of Vlerian heritage as bejeweled scabbards, or the round-the-barrel dance held at planting time.

Stay Calm and Carry On

The thlon are in no hurry to molest or digest the PCs. So long as they remain in the village, the creatures are confident that they will be devoured on schedule. They are therefore allowed free run of the place.

The festival continues for twenty four hours, until dusk next comes. By tradition, no Vlerian is supposed to sleep during this time. The eerie presence of the thlon aids in this act of endurance. Anyone who breaks tradition and dozes off will be quickly awakened by another resident.

Emulate a PC struggle to remain awake with a *Wherewithal* roll. An Indolent character suffers a levy of 1 on such rolls. It's boring to have one character snoozing while others are active, so make sure that sleeping characters, after undergoing an appropriate setback, are jolted back to consciousness in relatively short order.

Manage game time so that the next dusk, and the Closer, comes with about half an hour of the session left to go. In the meantime, the PCs can either continue their earlier schemes or (more likely) conspire to save their skins at the pivotal moment.

Talking to the Thlon

Like any other characters, the thlon are open to persuasion on nearly anything—except for their rightful eating of the municipal officials. Any character attempting to Persuade them to let go of this cherished tradition suffers a levy of 3. PCs sense this in advance, allowing them to forgo a fruitless contest. They are likewise uninterested in examining the question of who qualifies as a municipal official, and therefore as their sacrifice. The present system has served them well and they see no reason to tinker with it. If Athab says they're municipal officials, that's good enough for the thlon.

The thlon believe themselves descended from the universe's first sentient beings, who spontaneously generated from the moment of primal generation. This happened right here, at this very coordinate, long before the formation of the earth. Thus do the thlon claim ancestral rights to this spot, rendering their annual eating event not only just but metaphysically essential.

The thlon in no way question their origin myth. Any character with a *Pedantry* rating higher than 2 recognizes it as undoubtedly mistaken. Player characters discovering this, first hand or by hearing another PC say it, must resist *Pettifoggery*, or succumb to the temptation to argue the point with the thlon. Such suggestions anger them. You can tell when a thlon is angry because his luminescence shifts entirely to the red-orange-yellow end of the color spectrum, and viscid drool runs down his metallic fangs.



Urb's Silver II

Late in the festivities, the thlon demand a thorough accounting of the cash tribute they'll be taking back with them when they descend once more into the earth. This is the cache of tax revenue.

If Urb has cozened one or more PCs into skimming and hiding some of the money, the players will now likely see through his scheme. He means to watch his accomplices get eaten and keep the entire haul for himself. They might also guess that he's done this before.

By maneuvering cleverly, the PCs may be able to survive and claim some or all of the skimmed terces for themselves. Or they might simply prefer to unmask Urb's perfidy to the thlon. They will declare his life forfeit and drag him forthwith to the temple. Without further delay, they subject him to an impromptu draining of his life essence.

Revealing Urb's scheme to the thlon earns their praise, though not exemption from predetermined eating arrangements.

🐉 Lords of the Village 🐉

Other Threads

During the festival, PCs may distract themselves from the imminent consumption of their life essences by pursuing other story threads put in motion before the thlon showed up. Improvise as needed in response to these player-driven sub-plots.



CLOSERS

Eventually, as the last half hour or so of your session beckons, dusk comes around again, as it so often does. The PCs are either devoured, find some way to wriggle out of the arrangement, or banish the thlon entirely.

Eaten

This scenario may well usher the PCs on to their final comeuppance, an outcome that might be especially apropos if they seem to deserve it, or for a convention or other one-shot session.

When the PCs are about to be eaten (or seem merely on the verge of it) Yssl or some other villager might let it slip that their breakfasts and other luxurious viands they consumed over the last months were a means of fattening and flavoring their soul essences, as per immemorial thlon decree.

Wriggling Out

By scheme or simple flight, the PCs might escape at the last moment. Only when dusk comes do you let them off the hook and allow them to forgo their goals in favor of basic survival. If they choose flat-out running away, the thlon give effective and suspenseful chase. Once they've been caught trying to wriggle out, they suffer levies of 1 on all Persuade attempts against thlon or Athab.

Banishing the Thlon

If the PCs design and effectively execute a sufficiently credible plan, they just might be able to banish the thlon from Vlere forever. In this event, the Loaf Mass festival falls into a chaotic, jubilant celebration, in which the PCs are feted as the village's greatest heroes.

The next day, they get fired.

CASHIERED

With the thlon menace no longer an annual consideration, Vlerians no longer see any reason to elevate outsiders, and unwholesome ones at that, to positions of authority over them. They politely at first, and more insistently in the face of resistance, invite the PCs to resign. If the parting occurs on reasonably pleasant terms, Yssl might give them a last delicious meal—to be consumed on the road, thank you very much.



SOUL MASTICATION

Despite the dripping fangs, the thlon do not eat as ordinary flesh and blood predators might. Instead they stick their teeth into a victim and then visibly drain his soul essence from his body. Glimmers of sparkling life force are seen to rise from the prey's tissue and rush into the thlon's insubstantial form, conducted via the fangs. Residual fluids intermix and ooze from the convulsing victim—hence the waxy leaves on the temple floor. Once drained, the victim falls to the ground, a desiccated husk. The corpse is so delicate that virtually any handling reduces it to dry, flaky shards of formerly living matter.

Characters witnessing a soul mastication for the first time must make a Wherewithal roll to remain unshaken. Those who fail weep, fall into a state of shock, or loose the contents of their stomachs, as their players prefer. They take a levy of 1 on their next 3 rolls (Dismal Failure), 2 rolls (Quotidian) or 1 roll (Exasperating.)

Everyone in Vlere has seen this before and is more or less inured to it.

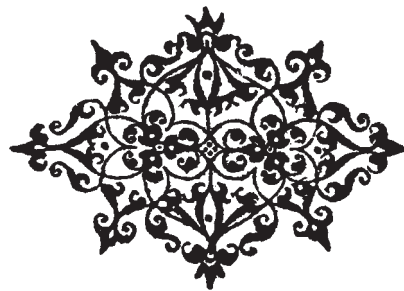
JERENTHOS RETURNS

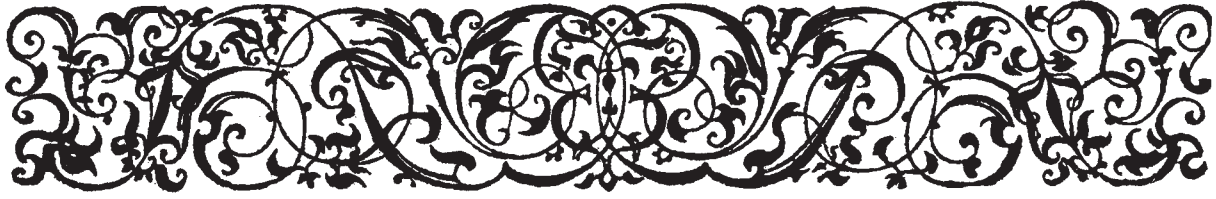
If the thlon are successfully banished, Jrenthos returns to help the village dislodge the PCs from their posts. On Relationship successes, he may help smooth the way by offering them positions in his bandit crew. Raiding season is still open, and there are many adventures to come. This gives the PCs a chance to ride off into the sunset on an at least somewhat hopeful note. This could perhaps lead to a sequel scenario featuring the PCs in their new careers as roving brigands.

Lords of the Village

TAGLINES

Surely nothing will occur to mar the sublimity of this day.	By the science of numerology I am forbidden to assist you.
I am sorry I beheld that.	Another breakfast will sharpen our will.
But that would be wrong.	Your custom does not bear close scrutiny.
I cannot help but see a metaphor at work here.	I do love a festival.
Let us banish from our minds all ill thoughts.	Innovation is but tradition's handmaiden.
Remain steadfast in your duties!	The possibilities are dizzying.
Our agreement is nullified.	Your beauty renders me speechless. Almost.
I jig to the tootling of your rustic horn.	Behind your smile I sense a troubling inanity.
I shall be as constant as the blueness of the sky.	If there is a guilty party, it is that ale cask.
This would not happen at the tavern I will someday establish.	I'll now subject that hypothesis to the harsh light of day.
My objections were implicit.	Do I sense a secret arrangement?
What, pray tell, is that intoxicating scent?	The strains of a lyre sooth all ructions.
Like the ancients, I hold prostitution sacred.	A pox on so-called elders.
Like a frog in the desert, I find myself parched.	I shall stir myself shortly.
Take any leering as a testament to your youth.	Is it cold in general, or just in my spine?
Scorn not your manly urges.	Gift me, milady, with a lock of your hair.
Heed my scabbard's splendor.	When I dismiss you, have the courtesy to remain dismissed.
My good regards are now withdrawn.	Where might the eponymous loaves be found?
Let us accost them as they sleep.	In your place, I would also be startled.
Surely that is a festive costume you wear.	Forgive my waning attention.
More important than such quibbles is our mutual humanity.	Comfort may be had in ignoring the evidence of our eyes.
I reaffirm my authority.	Do you take me for a milksop?
I hereby institute a tax on varlets.	My mother would disapprove of you.
I envision a range of punishments.	Begone, oak-eared rube!
Would I occupy this post, if I were not wise and good?	Apropos of nothing, live burial is a terrible fate.





Appendices

RANDOMIZED STYLES

Use this chart to randomly roll a Persuade, Rebuff, Attack or Defense style for a character in need of one.

Die Roll	Persuade	Rebuff	Attack	Defense
1	Glib	Pure-Hearted	Strength	Dodge
2	Eloquent	Contrary	Speed	Parry
3	Obfuscatory	Lawyerly	Finesse	Sure-Footedness
4	Forthright	Penetrating	Cunning	Intuition
5	Charming	Wary	Ferocity	Misdirection
6	Intimidating	Obtuse	Caution	Vexation

SUCCESS/FAILURE

Failure (1-3)	1. Dismal	Pay three points to reroll
	2. Quotidian	
	3. Exasperating	Gain a boon token
Success(4-6)	4. Hair's Breadth	Gain a levy token
	5. Prosaic	
	6. Illustrious	Costs three points to counter

POOLED EFFORT

Character's Individual Failure	Group Result: Success	Group Result: Failure
Dismal	1 injury	2 injuries
Quotidian	No injury	1 injury
Exasperating	No injury	No injury

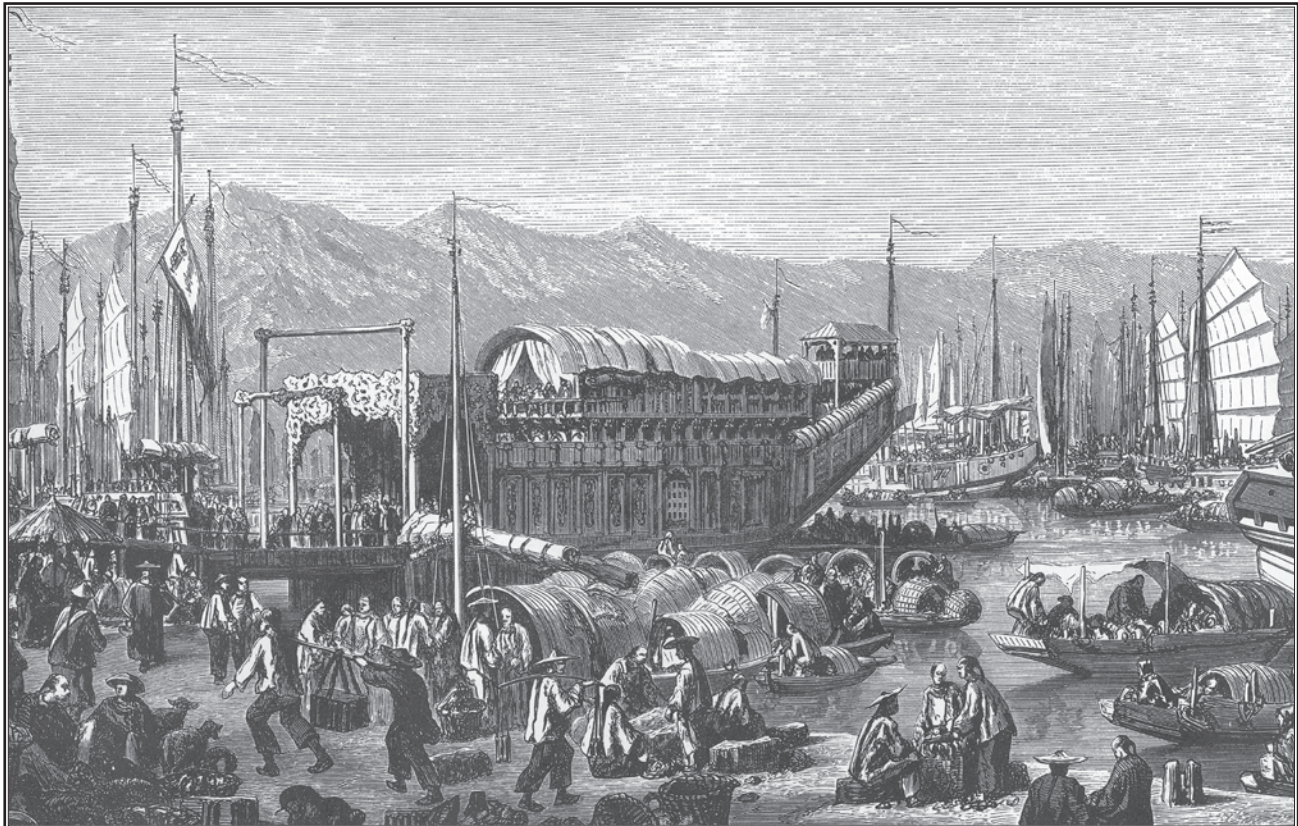
Appendices

VERBAL TRUMPS

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

COMBAT TRUMPS

Style	Trumps	Is Trumped By	Style	Trumps	Is Trumped By
Parry	Caution	Strength	Caution	Vexation	Parry
Dodge	Ferocity	Speed	Ferocity	Misdirection	Dodge
Sure-Footedness	Cunning	Finesse	Cunning	Intuition	Sure-Footedness
Intuition	Finesse	Cunning	Finesse	Sure-Footedness	Intuition
Misdirection	Speed	Ferocity	Speed	Dodge	Misdirection
Vexation	Strength	Caution	Strength	Parry	Vexation



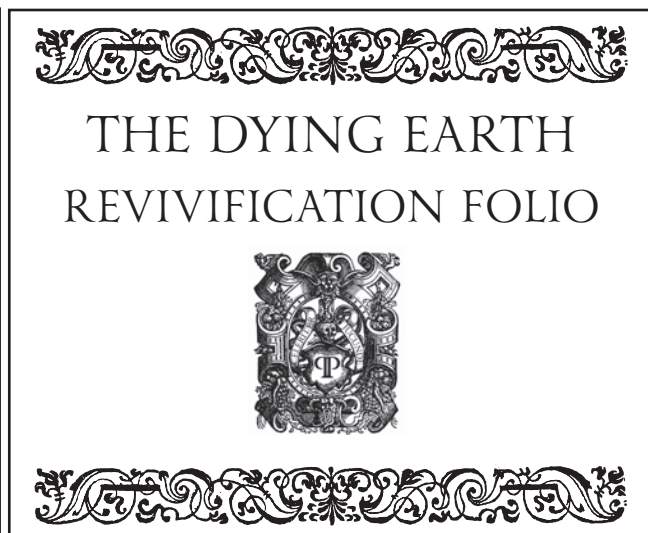
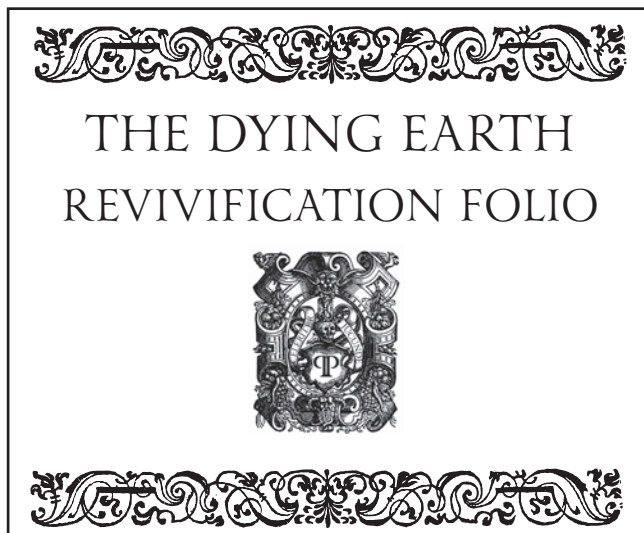
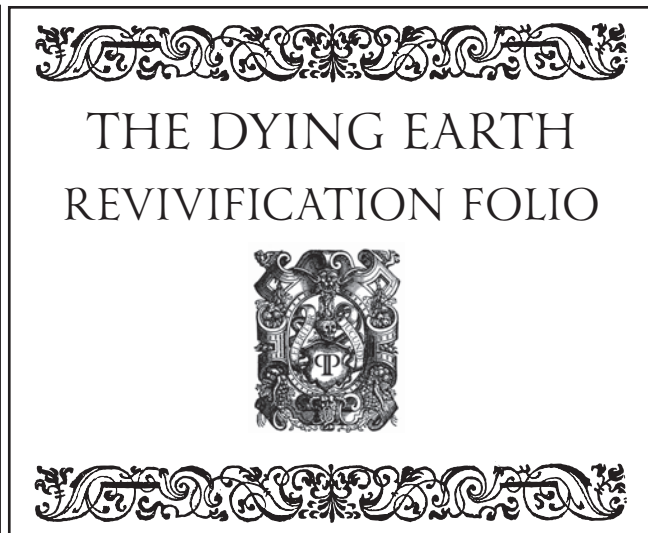
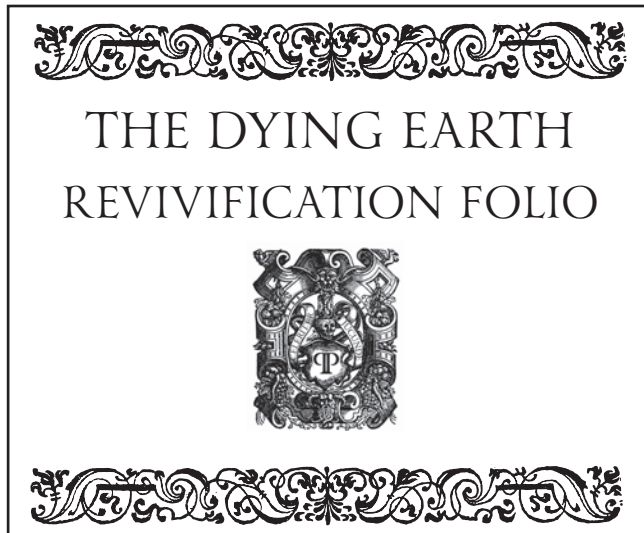
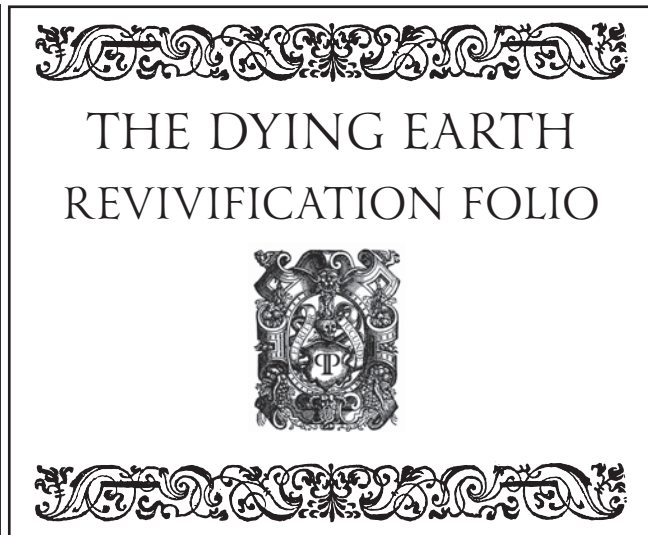
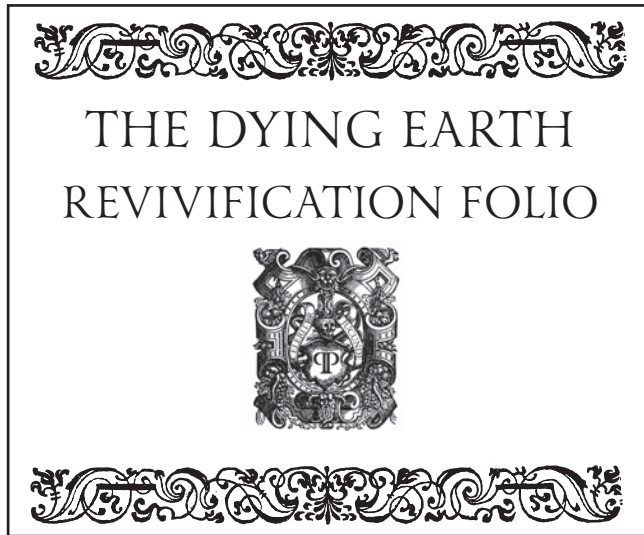
Appendices

MAGIC COMPONENT CARDS

Add this set of cards to an ongoing series featuring freeform magic. Strike out the Magic abilities given in the PCs' main Character card set.

<p>Magic (Studios) 8 Trumps: Curious Is Trumped By: Daring</p>	<p>Magic (Daring) 8 Trumps: Studios Is Trumped By: Insightful</p>
<p>Magic (Insightful) 8 Trumps: Daring Is Trumped By: Forceful</p>	<p>Magic (Forceful) 8 Trumps: Insightful Is Trumped By: Devious</p>
<p>Magic (Devious) 8 Trumps: Forceful Is Trumped By: Curious</p>	<p>Magic (Curious) 8 Trumps: Devious Is Trumped By: Studios</p>

Appendices
CARD BACKS



Appendices

BOON & LEVY COLLECTOR DIAGRAM

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FEMALE CHARACTER CARD BACKS

